

March 1999

COMPUTER GAMING

The #1 PC Game Magazine

WORLD

ACTION SHOOTOUT

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ALIENS VS. PREDATOR

SPEED FREAKS

HOT 3D CARDS RATED

SLAVE ZERO

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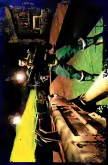




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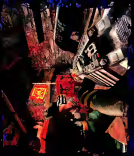
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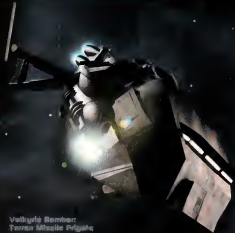
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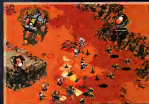
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Slave Zero

Giant robots are cool. We know that, you know that—heck, even your mom probably knows that. That's why we set our sights this month on Accolade's upcoming **SLAVE ZERO**, a thrilling, action-packed giant robot game unlike any you've seen before. *CGW* takes a hands-on exclusive first look at what promises to be one of the most memorable action games of 1999.

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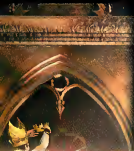
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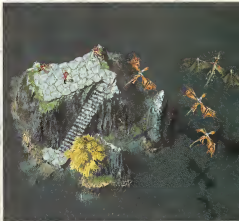
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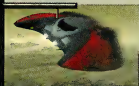
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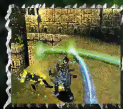
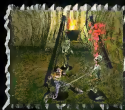


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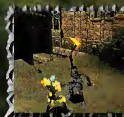
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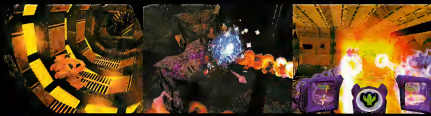
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Let's Get Physical

Reality Versus Fun: The Debate Continues

What could possibly be more satisfying than performing that perfect Immeldmann and shooting down an expert enemy pilot who had just been sneaking in on your tail for the kill? Well, for many gamers, it would be knowing that they had stretched the endurance of their plane to the max, performing a difficult, barely possible maneuver within the limits of real life. What could be sweeter than cruising past the finish line in the Monaco Grand Prix? For some of us, it's knowing that our superior attention to detail in tire compounds and aerodynamic set-up had made our win possible. What could be more exciting than fanning your opponent for the last out of a hard-fought World Series? To many gamers, it's knowing that they had read the split-statistics correctly and smartly gone against the standard percentage call.

Let's face it. In many genres, it is more satisfying to win if you've been able to use logic and knowledge gleaned from your experience in the real world to gain the winning edge. It feels better to win when it looks right, feels right, and acts right from a real-world perspective. We want to feel like our prowess on the computerized fields of battle is reflective of our cleverness, our experience, or our

inventiveness in real life. There should be enough verisimilitude in a game that everything seems real, but not so real that it gets in the way of enjoyment.

Before you cry, "fool!" or something less printable, I will admit that verisimilitude doesn't always add to gaming enjoyment. In a



It's not going to be fun if the action seems viewed through a strobe light.

game such as GRIM FANDANGO, we don't care that directional signs don't really spin like weather vanes in order to help us out of a forest maze. We fully expect strange experiences in an imaginary land of the dead (no letters from those of you who have undergone near-death experiences, please). In most first-person shooters, we don't want realistic weapons. Sure, you can put a .357 Magnum with a perfect ballistics model in the

game, but we're probably not going to care unless the special effects are impressive enough and the gun is as effective or more than the other weapons at our disposal. Reality definitely takes a back seat to inventiveness, freshness, and enjoyment of the fictional game-world in such cases.

Yet, there are times when we expect the game mechanics to perform analogous to real experience, even though the game may be set on a nonexistent planet or an alternate universe. We recently saw a magnificent tech demo that modeled cloth rippling on a character's coat and wind blowing fog through a misty street. Will most gamers even notice? Some will, but more

calculate the exact speed and arc of a chandelier for your hero to swing from, but if the calculations for the physical model of the chandelier hit the CPU like an unchivalrous kick to your hero's groin, you'll never win the design duel.

Frankly, I love it when a game adds new elements of realism to the mix. I loved the rippling cloth demo (okay, so I have a low threshold of excitement). However, I feel I have to say, on behalf of gamers everywhere, that there needs to be a corrective. Game designers and publishers shouldn't get so excited about physics that they forget about gameplay. If you're going to invest so much effort in creating a physical world, make sure it's

important to all of us will be the scenario design and opponent AI.

Adding physics to a game is great, but physical properties alone will not make a good game. You can perfectly model the materials, weight, and density for the beer stein that your hero is about to throw at the Cardinal's guard, but it's no fun if the action seems as if it's viewed through a strobe light after he launches the stein from his hand. You can systematically

accessible, interesting, and balanced once we enter that world. Get some real play-testers to check out that world and shake it down. See how your abstractions work against real gamers' assumptions if you're aiming at reality. Invest more time in getting feedback from real gamers. Let's hope the move toward more physics and realism doesn't circumvent the age-old quest for playability. The game is still the thing. **GGW**

TRESPASSER



The game would be great if you could get under these crates and move them, just the way Roger Gonzalez showed us on his Web site (<http://idatapalt.com/browse/?folder=/rj/games/trespasser>). Unfortunately, the physics don't hold up. Here, we try to crouch below one of the crates and lift it up. Oops! No luck! Rather than thinking outside the box, we're existing inside: We are one with the box.

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A decade ago, EA Sports jump-started the 16-bit console market with its tremendous sports line. This is not legend, but fact: Just ask anyone who remained addicted for years to the easily playable, frantically paced, and incredibly fun **MADDEN FOOTBALL** for the SEGA Genesis. EA followed this success with domination of the PlayStation sports market, and after a few early setbacks, it looks as if it could do the same in the PC market (if you don't believe me, check out the Premier finalists for Sports: Game of the Year in this issue's **READ ME**).

For all of you who are whining about the relative lack of balance and variety in the PC sports market, here's a free membership to the Michael Jordan's Dominance is Bad for the NBA club (redeemable only at the joint whim of His Aleness and commissioner David Stern—not valid in Hawaii and Montana; some restrictions may apply). Face it: Fans love an unstoppable force—with the exception of tennis' Pete Sampras—and EA is as close as we have to the Denver Broncos in all of PC sports.

Coach of the Year?

Because EA is so good at piling up winning seasons in franchises such as **NBA LIVE** and **FIFA**, the company doesn't get credit for all of the obscure sports for which it produces games. Of course, some of these, like **RUGBY**, are so remarkably ill-conceived and poorly executed that it's little wonder EA Sports conveniently fails to market them worldwide. On the other hand, EA's **CRICKET 97** is one of those surprisingly charming experiences that can bring a smile to

even the most jaded of computer-gaming journalists.

So, now that I've bragged on EA for several paragraphs—no doubt, executives will be checking underneath my desk at CGW for the alien pod—it's time to assume my other sports persona. Like any spoiled fan who expects his team to win the Super Bowl every year by three touchdowns, it is my sacred duty (especially since I dished the NBA earlier in this



article) to make unreasonable demands of EA Sports.

Yes, I know that Ric Neal and his team are a lock to win the Comeback of the Year Award for the best **MADDEN FOOTBALL** in years. And, yes, I'll admit that **FIFA '99** is the best PC sports game I've played since Sierra's **FRONT PAGE FOOTBALL PRO** was in its prime (somewhere around the time that the Miami Dolphins went undefeated). But, doggone it, I—and other PC sports fans—have a right to expect even more from folks as talented as those at EA. Surely, one of the three soccer games that EA Sports released in a 10-month period could have given way to a groundbreaking tennis game. If Andre Agassi is too busy emulating Jackson Pollock, throwing paint around in all those camera commercials, surely Jimmy Connors,

John McEnroe, and Bjorn Borg still have enough marketing life left to hit a few cyber-smashes. Hell, you could toss in Rod Laver, John Newcombe, and the ghost of Big Bill Tilden for a lot less money than it takes to license the NBA or NFL. Earlier this year, the industry was all abuzz about **GAME, NET AND MATCH**—a title which nearly matched the gameplay of 1991's **PRO TENNIS TOUR** on the Amiga. Stop the fun. Please.

Wishful Thinking

I'm sure that pro basketball fans are consoling themselves during the real-world lockout by running endless seasons of **NBA LIVE 99**. But that's no excuse for not giving us a good college hoops game, EA, especially since you've had the best one for years on consoles. How much longer am I supposed

How much longer am I supposed to keep Haffner's Courtside College Basketball on my laptop?



IS THIS ALL THERE IS? If EA Sports can make even FIFA a game to die for, what could they do with tennis or lacrosse or even (heaven forbid) curling?

to keep Lance Haffner's **COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL**—a text-based sim that had its last major upgrade (to color) in 1994—on my laptop? Then again, this would give me a reason to keep that old 486 I'm currently using as a doorstop....

Don't get me wrong, guys. I can't wait for **KNOCKOUT KINGS**, or **FOES OF ALL**, or **THRILLA IN MANILA II**, or whatever it's called this month. I just hope that **NBA LIVE 2001** and **Rocky VII** don't beat it to the punch. **CGW**

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CGW Is Bigger

Congratulations on making this magazine the best in the United States today. I have been reading your magazine for years and it has changed a lot. First it has grown in size. I mean look at these previews and reviews sections. They're huge! You beat PC Gamer in a contest in size. Second, you now look at the late-breaking news, not just past news and future news but now in the far beyond. You also have good strategies in "Gamer's Edge." Anyway, your magazine is the greatest, and I have just renewed my subscription again for the fourth time. I will continue my subscription forever or till you are gone in some lawsuit or something.

Wayne Yee
Via the Internet

Sound Off

If there was ever an award for best soundtrack in a computer game, it should go to Hau-Lee. I had FlexCD installed and the music plays from the CD-ROM after the computer rebooted. I think the music is the best that was ever composed in a computer game, echoing its dark, sinister, and terrifying background.

Mickey Yong
Singapore

Who cares what you think? Just kidding. Actually, we often give a special award for music in our annual Game of the Year awards, and the honor may indeed go to your

favorite game. Tune in next month for our annual Best and Worst Awards issue.

Bogus System Requirements

I recently purchased Sierra's GRAND PRIX LEGENDS, after reading your review and on my previous experiences with their software (BURN CAR RACING, NASCAR RACING, etc.). Now I admit that my PC is not the "state of the art," it is merely a Pentium Pro II 233 with 32MB RAM and a Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 Pro with 4MB. However, the review and the package state that a Pentium 166 is the minimum system.

I wonder what "minimum" means? With all the details in the software turned off, the

Jurassic Barf

I just wanted to say that it shows again why you're #1 in my book. Ever since the first previews I had TRASPASSE: JURASSIC PARK on my "must have" list. When I finally saw it released last week, I turned the box for probably five minutes and what I saw didn't feel read right. Luckily in the same store I spotted RAILROAD TYCOON II and decided one "must have" is enough for one day.

Yesterday I got your January 1999 issue with the 1-star rating of the final T.I.P. version. Thanks for saving my butt (again) and showing continued integrity!

Life's too short to play crappy games.
Martin Mathis
Phoenix, AZ



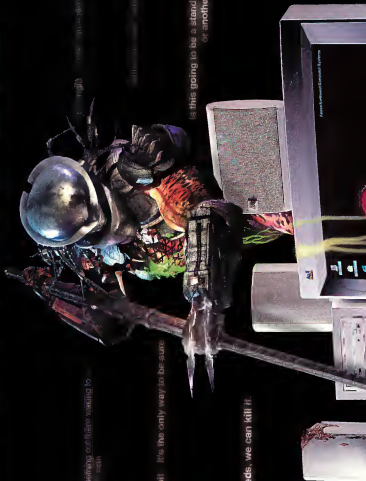
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Rage 3D Rage

In your February article ("Stranger, Faster, Better") on building "The Power Rig" and "The Lean Machine," you suggested using a Diamond MX300 and a ThrustMaster Rage3D controller on the Power Rig. When I upgraded my system with the MX300 sound card I found my Rage3D incompatible. Were you just picking parts out of a catalog or did you actually build this and test it? If you did build this system how did you get it to work?

Scott Conway
Via the Internet

best frame-rate I could muster was 12fps! The manual states that I should shoot for 35fps. What kind of machine is needed for that?

If Sierra wants to produce games which require major horsepower for them to function as designed, that's their business. But someone should warn the buyers that the "minimum" simply means you can load the program to see what you are missing, and that you can not possibly play the game with it. Sierra should warn potential buyers on the box (when I called Sierra they were very apologetic and admitted the same, offered to take it back and acknowledged that most machines can not run the game properly).

But most of all your review should strongly point out that the minimum requirements are nowhere near able to run the simulation, and that most gamers are not going to have the machines to run it. We depend on your reviews to inform us of software requirements to enjoy games at their best. If someone buys this game assuming that it will function correctly based your review and on their experience with the other Sierra driving simulations they will be sorely disappointed.

Douglas Peck
Via the Internet

Lloyd Case replies: After much waiting and gnashing of teeth, I did finally get the Rage 3D gamepad working. I had to delete the gameport device several times, reinstall the drivers and perform a few hacks. Even then, the system sometimes refuses to recognize the pad and only a reboot fixes it. To be honest, I'm not sure I could replicate the steps to make it work. Oddly, the Attack Throttle, which also uses ThrustMaster's DirectConnect technology, seems to work fine.

So for the new Power Rig, I'm using the Microsoft Freestyle Pro, which works quite well. But if you really like the Rage 3D, ThrustMaster has just started shipping the USB model, which should work great in any Windows 98 system with USB ports.

Better Simming

Buavo to Denny Atkin for his column, "Campaign Promises" (February, 1999). As an avid flight sim pilot, I can not agree more with all of his comments and suggestions for creating more enjoyable campaigns. The best part? All of his suggestions are do-able now. No fancy, brand-new technology needed, just a new breed of programmers and campaign designers who are not so hell-bent on physics realism and 3D effects. I couldn't care less whether I can see the reflection of my knee in the canopy, if only something unexpected would happen in the mission!

Campaign missions seem to be designed by ex-Dungeon & Dragons players. Having to find the one-and-only way to "beat the level" is for Nintendo games, not flight sims. Allow the pilot to fly the mission, and either succeed, or fail and suffer the consequences, and move on.

Bob "Hedgehog" Sebaste
Hammerheads Squadron
Via the Internet

Your lament is unfortunately a familiar one. GPL is merely the latest game to under-report system requirements. We apologize for not warning you, but we don't have the resources necessary to test each game's requirements, and different people have different levels of tolerance anyway.

We can offer some advice. Part of the reason for the slow frame-rate on your system is that your video card is not supported by most 3D games. (Just because a video card has the word "3D" in it doesn't mean it's a true 3D card.) GPL would run faster and look better on your system if you had a 3D card supported by the game. The game supports 3Dfx (Voodoo) or Rendition-based (Venti) 3D accelerators. In this case we don't recommend a Voodoo2 card because it is supported by more games than Rendition and has more RAM to speed things along.



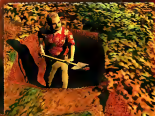
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ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: MARINE DEMO		
First-person shooter	lvpp/ocsetup.exe	Play as a Marine against the Aliens.
DESCENT 3		
First-person action game	ldescent3/ descent3 demo.exe	Play through a massive level in the newest Descent game.
GAMEGUIDE		
Sample documents	lgameguide	A few sample guides from GameSpot's GameGuides.com
RETURN TO KRONDOR		
Fantasy role-playing	vrk/ocsetup.exe	Exclusive demo lets you play the first chapter of this epic RPG.
ROGUE SQUADRON		
Vehicular Arcade Shooter	lvogue/squadron/ roguedemo.exe	Play the first level (Tatooine) of this Shadows of the Empire-style arcade game.
SLAVE ZERO		
Third-person action shooter	slavzero/slavzero.avi	An AVI video preview to complement the cover story. Look for a full playable demo next month.
TEN		
Online multiplayer gaming service	ten/ocsetup.exe	Front-end for TEN, where you can play a variety of multiplayer games.
TEST DRIVE: OFF-ROAD 2		
Off-road racing	tdor2/tdor23/dodemo.exe	Race down Santa Cruz in a Hummer.
THE AXE		
Music-making software	theaxe/install.exe	With three instruments, make your own little tunes and ditties.
THUNDER BRIGADE		
Vehicular action-arcade	thunderbrigade/ocsetup.exe	Play three scenarios and some Instant Action from this hover-tank action game.
TOMB RAIDER III		
Third-person action game	tombraider3/3inda	Run and jump through a portion of India in Lara's newest game.



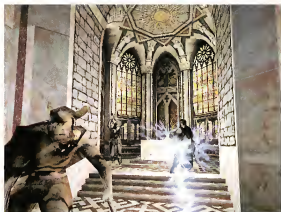
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Games of the Year

Announcing the 1999 CGW Premier Award Nominees

At the turn of the new year, CGW's editors gather in our secret star chamber to declare the best games of the previous year. As you'd expect from a group of seasoned, contemplative gaming professionals, the experience is a smooth one. Game merits are discussed, names are called, tastes are criticized, looks are made fun of, lists are exchanged, pizza files, and Wargames Editor Terry Coleman pile-drives the first editor to make a joke about first-person Civil War shooters.

This year featured one of the more impressive lists of games in recent history, which made the process smoother—nobody was hospitalized, and Managing Editor Joe Vallina should have his back brace removed any day now. (Ed. Note—You should see the other guy.)

The nominees for each major category follow. The winners will be announced in the April CGW, but ZDTV viewers will be able to see coverage from the official awards ceremony on GameSpot TV. (First showing on Saturday, March 6, 1999 at 7:30 a.m. EST. See your cable guide for other airings.)

Action

Battlezone Activision
Half-Life Sierra Studios
Hercules 2 Activision
Rainbow Six Red Storm
Thief: The Dark
Project Looking Glass/EDDS

Adventure

Blackstone Chronicles
Legend/Red Orb
Grim Fandango LucasArts
King's Quest VIII Sierra
Redguard Bethesda
Santarium
Dreamforge/ASC Games

Role-Playing Game

Baldur's Gate Interplay
Fallout 2 Interplay
Final Fantasy VII SquareSoft/EDDS
Night & Magic VI NewWorld/3DO
Return to Krondor Sierra

Simulation

Combat Flight Simulator Microsoft
European Air War MicroProse
F-15 Jane's Combat Simulations
F22 Total Air War Infogames
Falcon 4.0 MicroProse
WW2 Fighters Jane's
Combat Simulations

Space Simulation

Descent. Freespace Interplay
Independence War Infogames

Sports

FIFA 99 EA Sports
Front Office Football
Selecronic Software

Links LS '99 Access
Madden 99 EA Sports
NHL 99 EA Sports

Driving

F1 Racing Simulation Ubisoft
Grand Prix Legends Polybus/Siem
Motorcross Madness Microsoft
Moto Racer 2 EA
Need for Speed 3 EA

Strategy

Populous: The Beginning Bullhog/EA
Railroad Tycoon II Poplog/G.D.D.
Starcraft Blizzard
Warhammer 40,000:
Chaos GateSSI

Wargames

Aide De Camp 2 HPS Simulations
Great Battles of Julius Caesar
Endless Interactive Magic

Operational Art of War TiberSoft
West Front TiberSoft

Hardware

Monster Sound MX300 Diamond
Mouseman+ Mouse Logitech
Sidewinder Force Feedback
Steering Wheel Microsoft
Xterminator Gamepad Gvms
YST-M2Bs Speakers Yamaha

Add-on

Age of Empires: Rise of Rome
Ensemble/Microsoft
Diablo: Hellfire Sierra
StarCraft: Brood War Blizzard
Total Annihilation: Core
Contingency Corelog

Be sure to see next month's CGW for the Premier Award winners! The April issue goes on sale March 2.

Hot Tunes from Rio

Okay, you can't play games on it, unless you're a huge fan of "Name that Tune." But Diamond's Rio is by far one of the coolest pieces of entertainment hardware to come down the pike since the invention of the joystick. The Rio PMP300 (for Portable Music Player) is a pager-sized gadget which plays back MP3 (MPEG Layer 3) music files. MP3 is a digital format that compresses songs to a fraction of the size of their original CD or .WAV formats, with very little loss of quality. Its sound is a little less crisp than that of a Sony CD Discman, but dramatically better than that of a cassette Walkman. And because the Rio has no moving parts (other than its control buttons), it's perfect for heavy activities where a CD player might skip.

Its 32MB of RAM can hold about half an hour of music, and you can add additional 16MB or 32MB cards. A pass-through cable attaches to your PC's parallel port and lets you send the Rio MP3 files from the Internet or your CDs. The one downside to this otherwise superb \$199 device is that it includes shareware CD ripper software which must be registered after you've converted 50 songs, so plan on spending another \$30.

Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of Rio, though, is that it's likely to pass off the Recording Industry Association of America, which unsuccessfully attempted to keep the device from store shelves. **OPEN ARMS**



Activision Sinks Its Teeth Into *Vampire: The Masquerade*

Activision is working on a game of gothic bloodlust based on the popular *Vampire* role-playing games from White Wolf Publishing. *VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* will be an action/role-playing game based on an original script chronicling 800 years in the life of a medieval vampire. CGW got an exclusive early look at the game, which looks so amazingly cool we've decided to bring you a full in-depth preview next month.

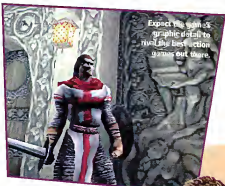
The game tells the story of Christof Romuald, a knight in 12th Century Prague who is embraced into the Brujah Clan of vampires. You'll follow Christof's assimilation into the World of Darkness starting in Prague and Vienna, and advancing to scenes in modern London and New York. In addition to controlling Christof, players will be able to control a party of up to four vampire characters who join him during the game.

From what we know of the story, Christof and his allies are caught up in the wars between different clans and must stop an evil Vampire Lord who intends to dominate the world. Players will defend themselves using a variety of weapons, including swords and shields in medieval times and automatic weapons in modern times. Players will also get to experiment with vampiric disciplines, which will give them spell-like effects.

The game boasts a new engine, called the Nod Engine, which was created by Nihilistic. The Nod Engine is fully 3D, and will support D3D, Glide, and Open GL. Level design is done with existing QUAKE Level design tools. Activision claims the engine is the most advanced engine ever used to build an RPG. It supports 3D soft-skinned skeletal models, specular lighting and volumetric fog to enhance the atmosphere, and exquisite graphic detail in both 3D models and 2D textures.

Vampire is the first title from Nihilistic Software, a development company headed by Ray Gresko, Robert Huebner and Steve Tietze. The team's combined credits include *DARK FORCES*, *DARK FORCES II: JEDI KNIGHT*, *DESCENT*, *DESCENT II*, and *QUAKE MISSION PACK #2*.

For a deeper foray into the dark side, be sure to see our exclusive sneak preview in next month's issue, along with several other gothic/horror games scheduled for release later this year.



Playing Lately

CGW Survey Here's what our readers are blowing the most time on

	Last Month	Months on Chart
1. StarCraft (Blizzard/Heves)	1	7
2. Night and Magic VI (300/New World)	2	7
3. Fallout II (Interplay)	-	1
4. Half-Life (Sierra/Heves)	-	1
5. Heroes II Price of Loyalty (300/New World)	-	8
6. Curse of Monkey Island (LucasArts)	-	1
7. Need for Speed III (Electronic Arts)	-	1
8. People's General (SSI/Mittal)	-	1
9. Rainbow 6 (Red Storm)	10	2
10. Final Fantasy VII (SquareSoft/Eidos)	8	4

Based on a monthly survey mailed to CGW subscribers.

This differs from the readers' overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100

PC Data Best-sellers*

	Last Month	Average Price
1. Berbie Riding Club (Mittal)	1	\$30
2. Deer Hunter II (GT Interactive)	-	\$18
3. Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft)	-	\$34
4. Berbie Photo Designer w/ Digital Camera (Mittal)	-	\$62
5. Berbie Nail Designer (Mittal)	2	\$16
6. Half-Life (Sierra/Heves)	-	\$28
7. Lego Island (Learning Company/Mittal)	-	\$18
8. Wheel of Fortune (Hasbro)	-	\$25
9. Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator (Microsoft)	4	\$40
10. Frogger (Hasbro)	-	\$25

*The top-selling PC games as of December, calculated by PC Data (Reston, VA).

I want to suck
your blood!



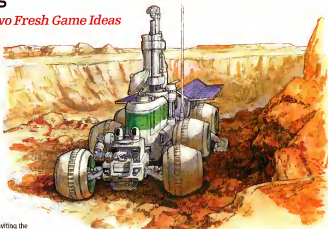
Mars Reacts

Maxis Readies Two Fresh Game Ideas

Will Wright doesn't build games the old-fashioned way. It's not about winning or losing, violence or destruction. Wright's software toys, such as *SIMCITY*, have been unconventional, but his games have nonetheless sold over seven million copies.

Wright looks to turn interactive entertainment on its ear once again with his new game, *THE SIMS*. *THE SIMS* can be an interactive situation comedy, soap opera, or wide-open experiment in artificial life. Everything depends on whether you want to play open-ended or complete scenarios, which range from bringing couples together, acquiring possessions, or inviting the neighbors over to see your lampshade stunt. *THE SIMS* offers several pre-coded families or lets you build a simulation of your own family. Play is handled by monitoring the way emotional and physical needs are met in the course of the life of the artificial neighborhood.

Another new title in development at Maxis, *SIMMARS*, will at once be familiar and fresh to *SIMCITY* fans. The goal is to build a Mars colony with reduced- or nondependency upon Earth. Working closely with NASA to ascertain the realistic probabilities concerning space colonization, Maxis hopes to give *SIMMARS* more depth and accuracy than even the much-heralded *SIMCITY* series. The company has hired the talents of former Industrial Light & Magic artist Ron Cobb to create the concept art for the buildings and vehicles. Cobb was the conceptual designer for



DRILLING DEEP Ron Cobb's conceptual art gives the vehicles and buildings in *SIMMARS* an interesting and functional look.

Alien and *The Abyss*, as well as conceptual artist for *Total Recall*, laser-technology specialist for *Real Genius*, time travel consultant on the DeLorean for *Back to the Future*, and director of *The Last Starfighter*. He is renowned for conceptual vehicles and buildings where every aspect of the drawing has a realistic functionality. Cobb's artistry adds a marvelous credibility to the look of the game and ensures that gamers will not experience another empty science-fiction experience like *OUTPOST*. *SIMMARS* seems clearly marked to be the best game to come out of Maxis since *SIMCITY*. JONNYWELSON.COM



Will Wright's *The Sims* will allow gamers to set up their own Sim Soap Operas or Sim-Disasters.

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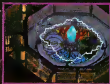
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Tales of the
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Dying To Play Online

What's Going On With Online Gaming

If the Internet is the primordial soup of start-up ventures, online game companies are some of the first organisms that crawled onto the beach. Some of these creatures were too weak to survive, while others evolved trying to better their chances. It's still a young market and a bit early to declare winners, but we thought it was time to check up on the players.

One cautionary note: Subscriber numbers can only be obtained from their respective companies, and some of these companies were unwilling to release them. We were not able to independently verify usage numbers. Incidentally, the term "subscriber" is used rather liberally in the industry; for the purposes of this article, we'll refer to gamers who play the free stuff as "users" and call "subscribers" those who pay to play.

DWANGO Goes Down

DWANGO pioneered the concept of multiplayer pay-to-play. In 1994 DWANGO (Dial-Up Wide Area Network Game Operation) set up country-wide DOOM servers long before people had even heard of the word "cyberspace" much less make it the buzzword du jour. DWANGO allowed people to dial into their network and play the latest multiplayer games for a nominal monthly fee. But it wasn't

long before gamers figured out how to play on the Internet for free, despite having to tolerate higher latency.

Even with a monthly charge of as low as \$7.95 and a recent deal with Microsoft, DWANGO had to shut its doors late last year. Founder and CEO Robert "DWANGO Bob" summed it up

simply by saying, "We built it, and they didn't come."

Engage too, while not officially "dead," is not the Engage we knew two years ago. "We got out of the Destination Site business," notes Scott Hartsman, VP at Engage, "and got into the Content Distribution business, which is a hell of a lot more lucrative."

Fighting For Life

The Total Entertainment Network (T.E.N.) could be the next casualty. In the last two years the company has failed to attract more than 35,000 paying customers at any given time. While T.E.N. claims that the total number of subscribers is in "the hundreds of thousands," many of those



Top Online Gaming Sites

Company	Total # of Users	Total # of Active Users	Peak Simultaneous Users	# of Games	Web Address
The Zone	3+ million	N/A	22,716	50	www.zone.com
Battle.net	3.5 million	1.2 million (last 90 days)	22,000	2	www.battle.net
Ultima Online	200,000 units sold	100,000 paying	19,700	1	www.uo.com
AOL	14 million	3 million visitors a month	12,000	36	www.aol.com
TEN	100's of thousands	30,000 paying	5,100	25	www.ten.net
Mpath	2 million	N/A	N/A	105	www.mpath.com
Sony Station	2 million	N/A	N/A	11	www.station.sony.com
HEAT.NET	600,000	17,000	1,000	80	www.heat.net

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Top Online Games

Game	Game Site	Simultaneous Users
StarCraft	Battle.net	22,000
Ultima Online	www.wo.com	20,000
Diablo	Battle.net	14,000
Spades	The Zone	4,100
Age of Empires	The Zone	2,800

players visit the site to play free games, such as spades. Despite being an early, aggressive player, and absorbing more than \$30 million in venture capital, T.E.N. has been on the selling block for more than six months, according to industry sources.

Both T.E.N. and Mplayer have changed their business plans drastically since they began. Both have created a large, free component to their lineup, including such mainstream titles as spades, which, also happens to be both company's most popular titles. Mplayer has been successful in selling advertising, which now accounts for about one-third of the company's total revenue.

Notes Mplayer founder Brian Apper: "While I think pay-to-play works, I think an advertising-supported model works the best with retail, shareware, and mass-market classic games." But even with an advertising-based model, T.E.N. and Mplayer have failed to generate the dollars or even the number of players that they'd hoped. Mplayer recently received an infusion of offshore venture capital, which along with the income generated from their technology licenses through the Mpath Foundation, should keep them afloat for a while longer.

The older and slightly more successful Kesmai's GameStorm takes a different tack. They focus on the "massively multiplayer" niche, and have seen the occasional profitable quarter for their efforts. Still, GameStorm's CEO Chris Holden thinks that the full potential of online gaming is years away. "I think it's very, very early in the building of this market," he says. "I think it'll be another three to

five years before we really begin talking about mass-market numbers here." Holden also thinks that the optimistic predictions floated to the industry should be taken with a grain of salt. "You see projections right now where online gaming is going to be a billion dollars plus by 2001, and I just think that's a little aggressive."

Free of Fees

Considering that the online gaming services cater to a culture that expects free information via the Web, it's not surprising that the most popular services are those that don't charge anything to play. The free communities on TEN, Mplayer, Battle.net and Microsoft's Gaming Zone are by far the most popular. In fact, Blizzard brags that it's the only online gaming operation that is profitable, relying strictly on banner advertising revenue. AOL, too, while not usually considered a haven for gamers, is a major player, drawing three million users to its Games Channel a month.

While still not profitable, Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone has managed to register well over three million users to their site (where their most popular title is, surprise, spades). Numbers for their pay-to-play component, however, aren't nearly as good. And while they may technically have the advantage, far be it for Microsoft to sit on their competitive edge and wait for the others to catch up. They recently overhauled the site, which now offers gaming news, reviews and tips, as well as the option to purchase the latest games.

"We wanted to provide more for our users," noted Product Unit Manager, Adam Wazales. "Kind of a one-stop shopping sort of environment."

While not getting nearly as much press as TEN, Mplayer or The Zone, HEAT.NET has managed to accumulate over 600,000 users, and freely admits that 90 percent of those who visit stay within the free area. However, HEAT.NET spokesman Greg Chiemingo is quick to point out that "both TEN and Mplayer had a year head-start on us and have rummaged through a number of business models while we have remained dedicated to our core beliefs," namely a model based on advertising and e-commerce. "We are committed to offering our users fast free online gaming on the best action and

strategy multi-player titles and are counting on advertising and sponsorship as our main revenue stream."

Money To Be Made

This is not to say that there isn't money to be made by actually charging players to play within an online gaming community, as the success of ULTIMA ONLINE has proven. With 200,000 copies sold (about 150,000 more than EA originally predicted) and 100,000 active, paying subscribers (at \$9.95 a month), obviously Origin is doing something right. As GameStorm's CEO notes: "You are joining a large, persistent universe community that goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with or without you. It's something that you can charge for and historically, people have shown a willingness to pay for this kind of experience."

It's this same belief that drives the pay-to-play portion of The Zone, which is attempting to offer massively multiplayer, online-only games as well, though they say that it's too early to expect profitability.

New Contestants

Meanwhile, new combatants have recently joined the fray: Sony has launched The Station at Sony.com, which now boasts over 2 million users, and Cavedog has introduced a Battle.net-style service called Boneyards (see our January story in Read.Me). Clearly, the promise of gold in online gaming hasn't lost its luster.

So who will be left standing when the dust settles? It's still too early to tell, but obviously you should never bet against Microsoft. And Blizzard and UO have also proven that you can make money by offering premium games you can't play anywhere else.

One day the survivors of this battle will reap big rewards, but the biggest winner will probably be the one who, as EA's Bing Gordon predicted, is "the first to lose a billion dollars." PHOTO: MURPHY

“It'll be another three to five years before we begin talking about mass-market numbers [in online gaming].”

—Chris Holden, GameStorm

Heart-stomping, hair-



GORE

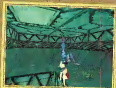


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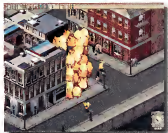
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Interstate '82

New Wave Hot Wheels With Guns

by Robert Coffey

For every gamer whose road-rage-levered brain has just about popped, Scanners-style, after some inbred half-wit in a battered pickup with Playboy mud flaps and wheel wells slimed with road-kill splash has swooped through the breakdown lane to cut them off, take a deep breath and repeat after me: INTERSTATE '82, INTERSTATE '82, INTERSTATE '82 ... Slated for a late 1999 release, Activision's sequel to INTERSTATE '76 might provide just enough fast-paced vehicular combat to prevent you from flooring the accelerator and plowing through that rusty heap until you punch out that yaho's gap-toothed grin with the sparkling chrome of your front grille.

This Year's Model

The first thing you should know is that the design team has totally overhauled the game, retaining the vehicular focus of gameplay

while drastically changing it. This is apparent the second you get behind the wheel: Gone is the instrumentation tracking the condition of your ride's various systems. In its place is a health bar reflecting the status of your total hit points, a health bar that is similarly displayed over targeted enemies. For gamers who loved I-'76's challenge of coping with failing weapons or handling an increasingly damaged and unresponsive car, I-'82 may not be the ride they're hoping for.

As disappointing as this may be to fans of the first game, the designers feel strongly that moving to more stripped-down, fundamental action is the road to wider success. To that end, they've also simplified mission goals, paring down the action to fewer, less

complex objectives. This isn't to say that missions have degenerated to little more than "kill 'em all" free-for-alls. On the contrary, you'll still have plenty to do. For example, one early mission has you seriously outnumbered. To have any hope of success, you must create a distraction to draw the bad guys out of their cars, where they're easily picked off. After that, you must follow a fleeing enemy to his hideout while fending off reinforcements. This mission also spotlights one of I-'82's other major additions—pedestrianism.

Foot Traffic

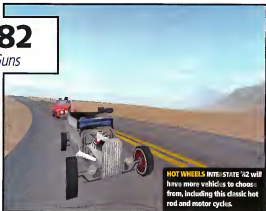
The ability of both you and your enemies to abandon your cars and hit the ground running impacts gameplay tremendously. I-'82 will measure mission success by whether you've killed the driver, not his

car. As long as your enemies live they're a threat, even if their car is a heap of smoldering slag. You'll have to eliminate them to move on.

Luckily, it's a two-way street. If you see your car's health meter getting perilously low, you can hop out before it explodes and take on the bad guys with nothing but a pistol and your good looks. Fortunately, once on foot you have the option of commandeering other vehicles. For instance, in that same simple mission, I successfully created the distraction but failed to take out my opponents quickly enough. I left my sports car just before it blew up and jumped into one of the vehicles I'd lured my enemies out of, then successfully completed the mission. The addition of gun-toting pedestrians should also significantly alter the multiplayer game, with combatants getting fewer kills as their adversaries flee near-dead cars for the fresh vehicles dotting the landscape.

Under the Hood

INTERSTATE '82's game engine will require 3D hardware, but the



RUN FOR COVER With both you and your enemies able to abandon damaged vehicles, you can expect lots of nice hit-and-run opportunities like this.



Interstate '82

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q3 '99
DEVELOPER: Activision
PUBLISHER: Activision

Super-Duty Chop Shop

payoff will be improved, shimmering graphics and more varied missions. By handling the game environments as huge 3D objects, the designers can create landscapes much more complicated than I-76's flat wastelands. Missions will take place in cities and inside buildings, and will even delve into underground caverns where narrow land bridges provide your only route over rivers of steaming magma.

Usually, I-82 should be a treat. While all the effects weren't implemented in the early build I played, the reflections of lights and objects on the car were impressive. The final version will include texture maps to reflect damage, light maps for headlights, ricocheting bullets, and the addition of water



FLY TUMBLE FOR YA Flipped on his back, his health meter dangerously low, this enemy is about to join that big creep pool in the sky.



DOMINO EFFECT Scripted events such as these tumbling power-line towers will liven up many of INTERSTATE '82's missions.

and weather. For games with some serious horsepower and lots of disposable income, I-82 will also allow you to set up multiple monitors to create a "virtual driver's seat" of sorts.

In addition to multiplayer-specific maps, all of the mission maps will be available for multiplayer contests. Deathmatching in I-82 should be significantly different from the first game since the full 3D world will add a new vertical element, with drivers battling in tiered parking lots, hiding in tunnels, and exploiting moving terrain elements such as elevators and drawbridges.

Used Parts

So what has carried over from I-76? More than you'd think. If anything, the story is even more front-and-center, with close to 30 minutes of rendered cut-scenes featuring the returning Skaver, Groove Champion, and Ianus (your player character). New characters include Groove's little sister Sky, and John Hinkley—yes, that John Hinkley—in a government conspiracy plot worthy of a particularly over-the-top X-Files.

You'll still be able to customize your car, purchasing weapons, armor, and special items, though you'll have more choices. The most interesting new weapon has got to be LARS, an SDI-type device that players can seize control of. In the interest of game balance,

all the weapons will have countermeasures—for instance, chrome shielding will reflect and negate energy weapons.

Finally, while I-76's funk-filled soundtrack would be out of place in the skinny-tie 1980s, I-82 will still feature a very cool, tongue-in-cheek collection of tunes. This time around the music will mimic New Wave acts like Soft Cell, Killing Joke, and The Cars. Even better, three recently discovered, unreleased Devo songs have been remastered and prominently included on the soundtrack.

With a muscular game engine capable of delivering state-of-the-art graphics and frame-rates, INTERSTATE '82 seems certain to deliver a more varied and prettier experience than its predecessor. The real question is whether its simpler, more action-oriented gameplay will be able to draw new fans while satisfying those who enjoyed INTERSTATE '76. Until it rolls out of the garage later this year, we'll just have to wait and see. **CGW**

Robert Coffey has killed 28 fat, greasy slugs while temporarily living in a dark basement. Life is as sweet as licking nectar off a supermodel on a brilliant spring day.



CRASH DUMMIES No airbag in existence can save these guys as their cars are ripped apart. Not... the reflection of the fireball on the very uncool but deadly station wagon.

Along with letting you customize your vehicle components, INTERSTATE '82 will allow you to create custom paint jobs. By selecting the "Repaint" button on the Vehicle Customization screen, you can select from three different default paint jobs or pick the "Custom" option to open a screen guiding you through the customization process. First, you'll need to open the .TGA file that corresponds to your vehicle in a graphic editor (such as Photoshop). Next, you can modify the paint job to your heart's content before saving the .TGA in the proper directory. Then, once back at the Vehicle Customization screen, simply type in the name of the new .TGA file and presto! you've got a brand-new car.



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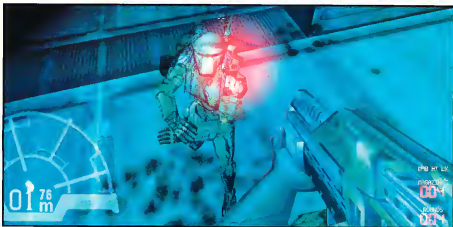
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Aliens vs. Predator

Three Intense Characters in One Scary-ass Game



by Greg Fortune

All of the *Alien* and *Predator* movies had one thing in common: Extraterrestrial killing machines that you just couldn't help wanting to see more of. Now, who hasn't thought

Aliens vs. Predator

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q1 '99
DEVELOPER: Rebellion Developments Ltd.
PUBLISHER: Fox Interactive

about pitting the two races against each other to see just who's the best? Well, that's precisely what you get to do in *ALIENS VS. PREDATOR*. The concept of bringing the *Alien* and *Predator* races together for a little Celebrity deathmatch is not a new one. There's a very cool comic book series based on the subject, and if you look closely at the wall of the last set in *Predator 2*, you'll see an alien skull mounted in the Predators' trophy room. There was even talk of a movie featuring both races, but apparently nobody was willing to loosen their grip on the licenses long enough to do it.

So, if you ever wanted to jump into one of these movies and show them how to do it, here's your chance.

In *ALIENS VS. PREDATOR* (AVP), you get the chance to play one of three races—the *Aliens*, the *Predators*, or the *Colonial Marines*. Single-player and deathmatch levels are provided for all three types, although the beta I'm playing right now has only some of the levels and a partial weapons list for each character. The single-player missions

I've gone through are tough—really tough. None of your opponents is going to give you a second chance if you make a mistake.



BAD EGGS Stumbling across *Alien* eggs never bodes well, unless you're looking for a nice kiss o' death from a face-hugger.



OLD FRIENDS This gigantic, alien husk is just one of the many things taken directly from the *Alien* and *Predator* movies and placed in the frightening game world.

I've Got a Bad Feeling About This...

The first thing I noticed about the level design in *AvP* is that everything is really dark. Remember in *Alien* how it

seemed as if anything could be hiding anywhere in the corridors of the *Nostromo*? Well, thanks to the minimalist fighting, creative use of textures, and the use of ambient noises, *AvP* is positively

creepy. Some of our favorite movie locations are here, including the derelict ship from *Alien* and the penal colony from *Alien3*. There are military installations for the *Predator* to hunt in, and some standard "Let's get the hell out of here" levels for the Marines. The deathmatch levels also show promise with lots of places for crossfire, stalking, and hiding.

Stop Your Grinnin' and Drop Your Linen!

The most striking feature in this game is the extreme power of all the combatants. It's almost redundant to talk about how lethal any of the three are. What it boils down to is that you'll get no second chances here. Aliens descend on you with blinding speed, and the *Predators'* shoulder cannon will blow a hole in you so big



that you'll need a manhole cover to plug it. Just so you don't think that the Marines are fodder in this one, remember Vasquez's smart gun? You know, the big cannon mounted on a swing arm? That baby will cut through an alien like a samurai sword through cottage cheese. Just be sure none of that acid splatters on you!

Despite the very different abilities and extreme power of each of them, the three races seem oddly balanced here. In my play-testing, none of them seemed to have any huge advantage over the others. The deathmatch potential alone makes this a game to keep on your motion tracker.

Let's Meet Our Contestants

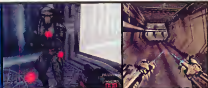
ALIEN

Unlike the *Predators* and the Marines, the Aliens don't have weapons and don't need power-ups. They can crawl along ceilings and walls, drop down behind you, and tear you to pieces in a second. Their attacks are incredibly fast, and their very appearance can send a squad of Marines into a panic. Playing as the Alien race is a dream come true, and playing against them is



PREDATOR

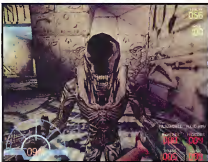
Do the *Predators* in *AvP* have that cool cloaking field we all saw in the movies? You bet. In the limited beta we have, they also have their wrist blades, a spear gun, the shoulder cannon that tracks with head movement, and a medical rig. Also present is the glowing green blood that marks where the *Predator* was injured, both on the walls and on the



MARINE

The Colonial Marine personifies overt firepower. Everything about the Marine screams destruction. From the pulse rifle with attached over/under grenade launcher to the smart gun, which tracks your target and makes it damn hard to miss, arsenal is the operative word here. We've got grenade launchers, flame throwers, miniguns, and rocket launchers. We've also got one of the key tools of the Colonial





UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL If you plan on getting this close a look at an Alien, make sure you've told your loved ones what you want done with your body, uh, your remains.



BAD BLOOD Cornered by an Alien, this Predator had better kill the bugger before that acidic green blood or those vicious claws turn him into something even a mop won't pick up.

Let's Dust Off and Nuke the Site From Orbit...

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR shows a lot of promise, even at this stage of its development. With a little spit and polish and a gamma

contrast to fix some of the locales (a few are way too dark), this game could be one of our all-time favorites.

Don't take my word for it—play the exclusive **ALIENS VS.**

PREDATOR Marine demo on this month's CG-ROM! I'm sure you'll agree that, barring any major mistakes as the game is finished, this is going to be a must-have title for a lot of us. **CGW**

Greg Fortune gets a warm sensation every time he sits down for a session of AVP. (Although he only stopped playing HALF-LIFE for long enough to write this preview.)

ALIEN

a nightmare. You even have to be careful how you kill them, since they spray acid blood during their death throes and can kill you by bleeding on you. Of course, the main disadvantage of the Alien species is their lack of a ranged attack. But what they lack in long-range fire, they more than make up for

in speed and ferocity. Add to that the Aliens' uncanny ability to spot either of the other races—cloaked or not—by the fiery blue halo around them and you have one nasty killing machine. If you like sneaking up on people and scaring the hell out of them, this is the race for you.



PREDATOR

Predator. The Predator has another useful tool in his grappling hook, which allows him to gain easy access to high places. From there, his cloaking and ranged weapons give the Predator excellent hunting opportunities. The "medicomp" is also well done, which offers the Predator unlimited healing as long as it has energy. When used, the medicomp

provides the Predator with a pair of barbed syringes, which he can jab into his stomach. This, of course, is painful and causes the Predator to scream, giving away his location to interested parties everywhere. The Predator's use of stealth combined with his cool high-tech weaponry make him the favorite of those who prefer to hunt their prey for sport.



MARINE

Marines: the motion tracker. Sensing motion in a 180-degree arc in front of you, this baby tells you direction and range. So while... you won't be able to conceal yourself on the roof like an Alien or cloak like a Predator, just let one of those suckers move and we'll see some fireworks. To help them gain access to higher ground and break long falls, the

Marines are equipped with a jetpack that gives basic vertical functionality. Don't expect to be flying around the levels wasting enemies, however. Your boots will still be your main source of transportation. If you like walking into a room knowing that you're packing the biggest gun around, we've got a job for you in the Marines.



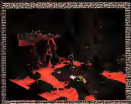
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Revenant

Eidos Brings Some Fighting Moves to the Fantasy RPG

by Jeff Green

As much as it must annoy Eidos to have its upcoming fantasy RPG, REVENANT, compared to DIABLO, the fact is you can't look at Eidos' game without thinking of Blizzard's hack-and-slash phenom. And there are far worse fates than being compared to one of the best-selling games of the decade. If we said REVENANT was a NAM clone, well, you'd probably stop reading right here.

That said, REVENANT, developed by Cinematix and due for release in mid-1999, looks like more than just a DIABLO clone and has enough differences to justify its existence. Yes, it is a

real-time hack-and-slash with an isometric perspective, but the comparisons end there, sort of.

In My Time of Dying

First of all, REVENANT promises to be more story-oriented than DIABLO, in that it actually has a story (DIABLO's plot was outstanding, but 90 percent of it was just in the manual). You play the role of Locke D'Avemar, a "revenant" (one who has returned from the dead), who has been summoned, with no memory of your former life, to do the bloody bidding of Tendrik, a warlord on the island of Ahiolun.

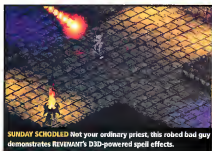
Tendrik's daughter has been kidnapped by an evil cult of priests, and it's your job to rescue her. Along the way you'll encounter tons of enemies, and a more complex plotline than you first realized, as you learn about your past and the crucial role

you play in the fate of Ahiolun.

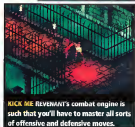
In the game, you'll explore multiple environments in a nonlinear fashion, including forests, catacombs, towns, castles, wastelands, and dungeons.

The hand-painted backgrounds, developed with the help of Don Bouvaais, an acclaimed fantasy-fil artist, are evocative and colorful, and the Direct-3D enhanced spell and lighting effects are appropriately vivid. Unlike DIABLO's sprites, REVENANT's characters are 3D polygons, which greatly affect the nature of the combat engine, which, when all is said and done, is the heart of the game.

PICK ME UP Don't get to close to the Ogrok. He'll pick you up and toss you like the girly-man you are.



SUNDAY SCHOEDLED Not your ordinary priest, this robed bad guy demonstrates REVENANT's 3D-powered spell effects.



KICK ME REVENANT's combat engine is such that you'll have to master all sorts of offensive and defensive moves.

Over the Hills and Far Away

REVENANT also promises to be more action-oriented than DIABLO. If you're looking for a dialogue-heavy RPG of yore, look elsewhere. In fact, combat plays such a huge role that you're better off playing with a gamepad than mouse or keyboard.

The combat resembles that of a console-style fighting game more than a hack-and-slash click-fest. To manipulate Locke against myriad creatures, you'll need to learn but combinations to launch attacks and defenses. As you gain in experience, you'll learn more spells and forms of attacks, which you're going to need to fight the game's rogues' gallery of goons and demons. An early beta revealed a depth to the combat that was quite fun, and quite different from DIABLO. Learning how to attack and retreat, block and parry and more, adds

another level of action skills not usually seen in this type of game.

The game's monsters aren't really anything we haven't seen before, but there are a lot of them, from the stealthy, quick-striking Lurkers to the combat-savvy Monks to the gigantic Ogroks. More than 25 weapons and 20 spells will be at your disposal, and as you progress through the game you'll learn combinations for creating deadly spells such as the Chain Fireball.

Ramble On


In addition to single-player REVENANT will feature multiplayer mode, letting you play characters other than Locke. Plans are to include deathmatch, dungeon hunt (a DIABLO-like search), and a storyline mode in which up to four players will follow REVENANT's single-player storyline. But plans change, so don't take this as gospel.

Eidos has a promising-looking action-RPG on its hands, graced with cool artwork, a deep storyline, and a complex but fun combat engine. It won't stop anyone from wanting DIABLO II, but it might carve out its own territory. **CGW**

When not getting his butt kicked in multiplayer HALF-LIFE, Jeff Green is knee-deep in THIEF: THE DARK CROWN, QUEST FOR GLOOM V, and KING'S QUEST VII. Life is tough.

Revenant

GENRE: Role-playing Game
RELEASE DATE: Q2 '99
DEVELOPER: Cinematix
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive



TAKE THE HILL. THE EARTH TREMBLING. BLACK WITH BLOOD.
HEAVY FOOTSTEPS DISSOLVE INTO A STEADY RHYTHM OF
THUNDEROUS BLASTS. MINDS AND LEGS NUMB. GET TO THE
HILL. FIERY ARROWS RAINING FROM ABOVE, BLACK WAKES
WEAVING A SUFFOCATING BLANKET OF FEAR. MY MEN
CHOKING THEIR FINAL BREATHS. JUST MAKE IT TO THE
HILL. SCREAMS FROM BEHIND? ARE WE FLANKED? SHADOWS
ADVANCING LIKE A DEATH SHROUD. THE HILL.
GET TO THE HILL.

6 December
The Beachhead at Tyr

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Descent 3

An Old Dog with Radical New Tricks

by Chase Dahl

The original DESCENT destroyed precedents set by other first-person shooters of its time. It plunged the player into a fully 3D world of twisting mines and mysterious caverns instead of the 2.5D worlds of DOOM and its clones. Never before had players experienced the vertigo of the game's six degrees of freedom; nor had their computerized opponents shown such intelligence in ensuring their destruction.

That was four years ago, however, and DESCENT has grown somewhat long in the tooth. Its sequel added new weapons and opponents, but little else. Last year's FORSAKEN, while faithfully cloning DESCENT's gameplay, raised the ante with gorgeous, pyrotechnic graphics and mission structures beyond DESCENT's repetitive "blow up the main reactor, then get out" scenario.

But it was an updated DESCENT that fans really wanted, not just a console port with a picture of a nude woman on the box...and this spring Outrage seems set to deliver just that.

Descent: Confined Space

Gamers put off by the use of the DESCENT name in the space-shooter DESCENT: FREESPACE can rest assured that DESCENT 3 is the real goods. Once again, we're plunged into the corridors of underground chambers and hallways, with relentless robots tracking our every move.

Descent 3

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q2 '99
DEVELOPER: Outrage
PUBLISHER: Outrage Entertainment



THE GREAT OUTDOORS Descent 3 lets you "take the fight outside," a first for the series.

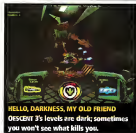
Outrage has obviously acknowledged FORSAKEN with DESCENT 3. Players must now accomplish varied goals beyond "find the key and exit." Along with its new mission structure, DESCENT 3 has been updated with a graphics engine (dubbed "Fusion") that puts all of its predecessors to shame. DESCENT 3's levels are rich with dynamic lighting and environmental effects (like smoke and rain) that run smoothly on even midline machines. It also supports action outside of the mines, although only a sample of this was in the build I played. This new power has its costs, though—DESCENT 3 requires 3D hardware acceleration. What DESCENT 3 has not taken from FORSAKEN is the latter's insane difficulty, color-saturated environments, and sluggish multiplayer.

Dramamine Cubed

The build I played provided just a taste of the full game, but it's enough to see that the vertigo-inducing action has changed very little. The player still pilots a small



MOVE IT OR LOSE IT Multiplayer games like this are easy to set up and relatively lag-free thanks to Outrage's PXO server.



HELLO, DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND DESCENT 3's levels are dark; sometimes you won't see what kills you.

craft that has complete freedom of movement to explore the levels. DESCENT fans will be right at home with the controls, but newer players will definitely experience a learning curve steeper than that of other first-person shooters. Fortunately, DESCENT 3 has an admirable key-configuration utility

that, along with a little practice, will have newbies zipping through the levels in no time.

Along with your craft—one of several that will be included in the full game—you're provided with a variety of death-dealing devices, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Naturally, the ammo and energy required is also scattered about, or left behind by destroyed opponents. Your old friend, the GuideBot, will also make an encore.

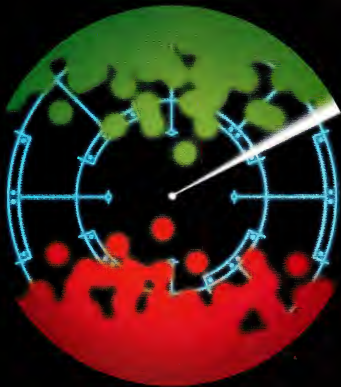
Multiplayer brings DESCENT 3 to an entirely new level. Internet play is provided through Outrage's

Parallax Online (PXO) server. Skeptics of DESCENT: FREESPACE's lackluster Internet performance will be pleasantly surprised with DESCENT 3. Even with mediocre pings on 28.8 modems, DESCENT 3 played smoothly, with a minimum of warping and lag. Games are extremely easy to set up and play, allowing

dynamic joining and exiting. Multiplayer gameplay, whether it be a capture-the-flag match or straight Anarchy, is incredibly fast and furious. DESCENT 3 also takes the extra step of providing continual stats on each player beyond simple frag counts.

DESCENT 3, while adding little more to its genre than FORSAKEN, does everything with a panache and polish not seen in the games before it. The wait should be worth it, and soon we'll be able to descend on software shops for this promising title. **GGV**

Chase Dahl has been playing computer games since 1980, when he broke an Apple II playing the Star Wars adventure. He's been playing games, and breaking computers, ever since.



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Dear Mrs. Johnson,

The melted remains I sent in my last letter were not those of your son. Our condolences. Your son, Joe, is attached above in this little baggie. Please return the previously sent melted Private at your earliest convenience.

Deepest regrets,

Sarge
Sarge

P.S. Although there will never be another Joe, you'll be glad to know we're already molding others in his likeness.



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*Based on a survey of 1000 gamers by HEATnet or MobyGames.com. *Player is solely responsible for all applicable laws/enforced laws and charges.

IN THE ACTION
 Jackson - Dirac Q2 '09
 Developer: Ageulab
 Publisher: Ageulab

ZERO

BY ROBERT COFFEY

Imagine that you get a giant, 'mech-like robot for your birthday. Do your

- A. Carefully read the manual before safely practicing complicated precision maneuvers in a parking lot?
- B. Leisuredly stroll down to your local 7-Eleven for a refreshing cherry Slurpee?
- C. Show your friends the cool gauges and instruments that monitor every aspect of your giant robot's performance?
- D. Burn the manual, crush every car in sight, obliterate the 7-Eleven, and show your friends how disruptive a missile-spitting death machine can be at the Ice Capades?





CG-ROM

See the demo
preview on this
month's CD and be
the first to play **SLAVE
ZERO** on next month's
CG-ROM.

Time's up. If you answered A, B, or C, you probably think that all that messy combat gets in the way of the really cool heat management, waypoint setting, and customization features in most giant robot games. But for all of you right-thinking,

blood-lusting, rampage-hungry disciples of destruction who picked D,

Accolade has come up with the game you've been waiting for.

It's called **SLAVE ZERO**, a no-holds-barred celebration of the annihilative capability that only a 60-foot biomechanical beast armed with guns as large as grain silos can possess.

Finally, a game that lets you play hacky-sack with pedestrians.

With all the subtlety of a fuel tanker smashing into a skyscraper, Accolade's **SLAVE ZERO** stands ready to give third-person action gaming a thunderous makeover.

H O U J U R R

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON PREVIEW

Freedom Fighter

While the story behind *SLAVE ZERO* isn't likely to hit the *New York Times* bestseller list anytime soon, it sets up the action nicely. In a bleak future world, the city S-19 is ruled by the evil, Big Brother-ish SovKhan. In order to secure his absolute rule, SovKhan has created the Slaves, enormous biomechanical beings that keep the populace of S-19 suitably oppressed. Inevitably the people chafe under this heavy hand and a rebellion breaks out; you, as a particularly introverted rebel, take control of a Slave to start the dirty work of freedom fighting, eventually taking

the battle directly to the palace of SovKhan himself.

While the Slaves are 60-foot, armored behemoths of destruction, they differ significantly from the giant robots of other games insofar as they aren't made so much as grown. No one pilots a Slave; instead they become one. Through an elaborate process, men are bonded to their Slaves, abandoning their humanity and evolving into something not quite human, not quite machine. Aside from giving the Slaves an anthropomorphized look and feel that is utterly unique, this bit of fiction actually affects gameplay. Bonded to your Slave,

but. By eliminating the similar aspects of other *MECHWARRIOR*-type giant robot games and emphasizing this "kill or be killed" mindset, *SLAVE ZERO* focuses its gameplay squarely on action.

Doom With a View

SLAVE ZERO's third-person perspective moves the game even further away from the classic robot-sim model. While a first-person perspective is generally the default choice for a shooter, the design team felt strongly that an exterior camera would best serve this game. I was skeptical at first, but I quickly came around to their way



NEW KID IN TOWN He's big, he's bad, and he's got a huge gun. With plenty of attitude and anime feet, *SLAVE ZERO* is definitely not your father's giant robot game.

SLAVE ZERO • ZERO HOUR



you're not just fighting oppression, you're literally fighting for your life: There's no eject button, no salvaging spare parts, no repair bays, no commandeering another Slave to save you

of thinking after playing an early build of the game. If nothing else, a first-person perspective would rob the gamer of the wonderful Slave animation, which best displays the man/machine dichotomy. Moving with a brutish grace, the Slave resembles nothing so much as an enormous, metallic ape as he leaps

DUCK AND COVER The Titan is one of the first minibosses you will encounter. He'll crouch and tuck his head so that his heavy body armor can protect his vulnerable midsection.

over bridges, hoists himself atop skyscrapers with a pull from one massive arm, or snatches ammo power-ups with his long, beautifully articulated fingers. All of this rich detail would be lost in a standard, *QUAKE*-like perspective.

A standard first-person view would also muddy the game's overwhelming sense of scale. The swirling mayhem that typically surrounds your avatar would be reduced to just so many darting targets in a typical FPS view. But by

HAPPINESS IS A WARM (20-FOOT) GUN

I takes a bit of firepower to tear down a city; fortunately, your Slave will have plenty of ordinance at his disposal. Weaponry is divided into three categories: ball-speeking slug cannons, wildcat energy weapons, and shoulder-mounted missiles. Here's what you can look forward to.



AVR-9 "Avenger" Light Slug Cannon: Your first handheld weapon is a light cannon best suited for quick strikes against lightly armored opponents.



IR-4000 "Iron Bear" Assault Cannon: This rifle packs 100mm shells at a very high rate of fire. It's not the most destructive member of your arsenal, but you'll love its reliability and solid performance.



CR-40 Cyclone Saturation Cannon: The massive Cyclone belches a hailstorm of bullets, but it eats a ton of ammo.



SGG-2a Sluge Cannon: This baby fires 400mm explosive shells from debris on impact. It's a massive explosion. It's the perfect way to say, "Die, scum."

Plasma 200 Cannon: Your first energy gun fires pulses of fitch-headed omnium Plasma in excess of 7500 degrees down a linear accelerator and damages its target both by extreme temperature and by secondary fish effects.



Plasma Burst Cannon: Great for taking on groups of enemies, this gun fires six plasma balls in a spreading circular pattern, each ball causing damage upon impact.



SHOWDOWN With less room to roam, squaring off against another Slave will be a real challenge in the Middle City levels. Notice the light sourcing and lens flare on the enemy Slave.

yourself on a highway overpass, weathering an attack from multiple Slaves atop flanking buildings, human soldiers and tanks firing from the road beneath you, as attack aircraft buzz your head. Throw in sweeping searchlights and screaming pedestrians running for their lives, and you've got more action in one moment than you'll find in entire levels of other games.

Better still, you can interact with all this life beyond merely shooting it. Running low on missiles? Grab that

levels as you literally climb higher in the city. You'll move from the gritty, sulfuric Lower City, through the towering Middle City, until you finally reach Sovkhan's cloud-sheathed palace. Gameplay will grow increasingly vertical deeper into the game, but you'll be eased into it. You'll fight on one horizontal plane in the early levels, with plenty of room to maneuver as you face smaller, ground-based bipedal units. As you progress through the sewers (known as the Suck) and into Middle City you'll fight multi-legged and flying enemies who carry multiple weapons. Fighting them will require you to employ



CAGED DEATHMATCH The battle with Argilus, the first boss you face, is typical of SLAVE ZERO's boss philosophy: You find yourself in a limited space, facing down a massive creature that's wielding incredibly firepower.

ZERO HOUR • SLAVE ZERO

allowing the gamer to see the Slave straddling a freeway that cuts through a city of soaring buildings and blasting away at enemy behemoths, as tiny cars desperately try to avoid the battling giants, the enormity of the Slaves and S-19 is driven resoundingly home.

The gameworld is one of SLAVE ZERO's most notable accomplishments, and it is easily one of the most vivid gaming environments I've seen. The city absolutely teems with life. It's not uncommon to find

passing bus and show that enemy Slave what throwing hard heat is all about. Spot a personnel carrier approaching to unload ground troops? Drop one of those tanks that's pestering you on it. Feeling artistic? Make your own Jackson Pollock masterpiece by hurling pedestrians at a wall. This is what being a giant robot is all about.

Moving On Up

SLAVE ZERO takes place across 16 increasingly large and complex

more involved mechanics to succeed, including jumping, strafing, holstering, and torso twisting. By the time you reach the last levels, you'll be miles above the city and will have to skillfully jump, hang, and hoist yourself across the precipices of the Upper City as you face attacks from every conceivable angle. Other elements in the game follow this same incremental approach, with new enemies and weapons being introduced at the rate of about one per level.

Every level has its own set of mission objectives. In one mission you'll have to destroy three separate generators, while another may ask you to escort refugees through S-19's enormous sewer system. Several missions will have secondary objectives that, while they won't need to be completed in order to succeed, will reward the gamer with more power-ups, weaponry, and challenge.

Of course, Sovkhan will be doing everything he can to stop you, and

Plasma Rail Cannon: Taking about two seconds to charge, this cannon shoots up negative particles before firing a ray of devastating energy.



Plasma 400 Shotgun Ejector: The big brother to the Plasma 200, this gun fires superheated ceramic plasma down a linear accelerator, causing extreme heat damage over a large area as well as a concussion wave.

S01-80 "Smilekay" Rocket Launchers: Your first missile launcher, this baby fires a single, nonlocking missile.



Valtulla Class Rocket Launcher: This upgrade fires an angled missile that splits up into several smaller munitions, allowing an impact zone with warheads.



Slava Ring Guided Missile System: This dog does hunt, firing homing missiles that automatically track targets, damaging them with explosive heat from their hydrogen plasma warheads.

Zulu Miss Engagement Missile System: The Zulu's on-board sensor and sophisticated AI can automatically lock on to up to eight targets, tracking each individually when a salvo is fired.

In addition, SLAVE ZERO has at least one special weapon, a Dark Matter Rifle that fires packets of hyperdense nuclearium. The weapon's extreme surface gravity literally collapses atomic structures, fractures subatomic bonds, and sets through anything, including armor. It requires extreme amounts of power and fires in a straight, inflexible line from its launch, gouging out trenches in walls and floors.

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that means you'll be facing enemy Slaves. A lot of them. You'll square off against speedy Piranhas, who'll attack you head-on; yellow Regulators, who fire missiles and roll to avoid your counterattacks; airborne packs of harassing Firefly enemies, who'll attack with "Ripper" machine guns. Damage taken by enemy Slaves is graphically represented by having the specific body parts flash with each hit. Designers

for SLAVE ZERO haven't yet decided whether or not arms and legs that take sustained fire will actually get blown off. We're hoping they do. In any event, the Slave death animations are very cool, with the fallen enemies crumbling to the ground before they dissolve inside a cocoon of crackling electricity.

While enemies will be positioned throughout the city, several will arrive suddenly via the Sentinel

Delivery System, a sort of gargantuan pneumatic-tube system. Many of these tubes will be one-way, capable only of delivering enemy reinforcements; however, some tubes will be available to you, allowing you to take the fight to the enemy or to escape a battle that's going badly.

Breaking up the parade of enemies will be unique minibosses on perhaps half the levels. The first

hasn't quite finished gestating in Sovkhan's labs. After an opportunity to stock up on weapons, you'll come upon Argilus trapped in his gestation vat, whereupon he'll attack with a titanic, sweeping energy beam. Later bosses include an enormous, mechanical wolf splicer that explodes into several smaller spiders, and a sewer boss you'll have to fight while dealing with steadily rising water.

SLAVE ZERO • ZERO HOUR



INCOMING You'll have to weather attacks from manned flying units such as these if you expect to make it through the game's levels to reach Sovkhan's palace.

you'll face is Titan, a unit with heavy armor on his limbs and head. When attacked, he tucks himself into a ball, protecting his vulnerable midsection. Not all minibosses will be Slaves, either. The third level forces you to take down an enormous battle cruiser that keeps releasing flying Jammer troops until you destroy it.

Of course the biggest battles will come against SLAVE ZERO's five bosses. Accolade has gone for a more traditional, console feel with the bosses, making them unique arena-type levels in which you're trapped with the boss until one of you dies. The first boss you'll meet is Argilus (see the "Evil-ution" sidebar), a Slave who

Sound and Vision

Visually, SLAVE ZERO is stunning. Accolade spent the first several months of the development cycle creating the Ecstasy game engine. SLAVE ZERO presented the designers with a complicated set of problems; most troublesome was How do you create a huge, open city, crawling with life, without absolutely tanking the frame-rate?

The end results are impressive, with virtually anything in the game capable of animating. Slave Zero himself is the best example of this. Like all the game's creatures, Slave Zero has body parts that are capable of individual animation, allowing your alter ego to move and act in an organic, less-scripted way. In

Evil-ution



As the first boss you face in the game, Argilus typifies Accolade's approach to designing the bosses in SLAVE ZERO. Each boss possesses unique attributes to challenge the gamer in a different way and, to some extent, to prepare him for subsequent levels in the game. In the case of Argilus, designers decided that he would be basically stationary, forcing the gamer to utilize more strafing and dodging than the game had required up to that

point. With that far-reaching idea in mind, concept sketches were then drawn and refined. The first sketch was too human, while another concept looked too much like Slave Zero himself, and was not in keeping with the overall game design. After deciding on the second sketch, the designers made a wire-frame model,

rendered it with flat, shaded textures, then completed it with the final textures. From there, designers began the difficult process of taming the boss for gameplay.

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KILL BUGS DEAD Mechanical wolf spiders will pose the greatest threat to your escort mission through S-19's enormous sewer system.

practice this means that you can run and leap, firing a gun with one hand as the other hand reads one of your other weapons. It's pretty cool stuff compared to the stiff,

every-time-the-same animations in most shooters. Cut-scenes between missions are rendered using the game engine, as well.

Since SLAVE ZERO will require 3D hardware, it should come as no surprise that the game supports all sorts of full-color lighting effects. In addition to precalculated lighting for smooth, realistic shadows, the real-time lighting support allows for rockets, spotlights, and spectacular explosions to illuminate surrounding buildings and characters. The support for lighting effects extends to the enemies themselves, some of whom will have light sources on

design. As HALF-LIFE has shown, great audio can greatly enhance the gaming experience; to that end, SLAVE ZERO will support A3D technology, allowing the game to build suspense through sound effects. For example, you can expect to hear the ominous clicking feet of a horde of spiders long before you face them.

Even without positional audio, the sound in SLAVE ZERO is suitably epic, with shattering explosions, monstrous gunfire, and the earth-shaking footsteps of the Slaves themselves. This is one game that truly cries out for a subwoofer.



POWER OUTAGE His body crackling with electricity, an enemy Sentinel dies after taking one rocket too many to the head.

deathmatch game that will remove all the weapons from play, forcing gamers to hurl buses, cars, trucks, and the odd schoolteacher at each other. This idea seems like such a

SLAVE ZERO • ZERO HOUR



ROBO-ROADBLOCK Out of missiles, low on bullets? It's a good thing there are lots of cars around to throw at that meddling Slave at the end of the bridge.

their bodies that will shine at you during a fight. Finally, the real-time lighting lets the designers incorporate the effects to affect gameplay—expect at least one dimly lit level that will require you to pick up a vehicle and use its headlights as an impromptu flashlight.

While Accolade is working with all the leading 3D hardware vendors (3Dfx, ATI, nVidia, and so on) to incorporate support for their features into the game, the company hasn't overlooked quality sound

But hands down, the coolest sound effect is Slave Zero's deafening roar—a skyscraper-rattling bellow of rage that spikes the Richter scale. Unfortunately, while Accolade's designers have



SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE Human soldiers are more of an annoyance than a real menace in the early levels of the game.

decided to leave the roar in as a gamer-tingered action, they've vacillated on whether it should have any effect (such as causing a tremendous shock wave) or simply be nothing more than a dramatic taunt in multiplayer games. We're hoping for the shock wave.

Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots

SLAVE ZERO will definitely support multiplayer options, though precisely what will be available to gamers was still being hammered out at press time. Obviously, there will be deathmatching, but everything else—cooperative play, capture the flag, and other variations—is still pretty much up in the air. There are tentative plans for a

natural, but it's hard to imagine it not being implemented.

While the build I played still needed some polish in terms of AI and was sorely in need of a better targeting reticule, it was hard not to be impressed by it. With its incredibly agile and fluidly animated protagonist, booming action, and one of the most detailed, living game environments I've ever seen, SLAVE ZERO promises to burst upon the action gaming scene with all the subtlety and nuance of a hydrogen bomb. **CGW**

Robert Coffey is currently struggling to leave the Edge of the World in GRIM FANDANGO when he isn't getting swept in the World Series in BASEBALL MAGNUS 99.



DARK LIGHTS, BIG CITY A dwarfed Slave Zero showcases the towering heights of the city. Eventually, you'll work your way from the grim depths of S-19 to lofty points well above the top of the skyscraper in the background.



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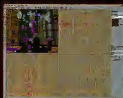


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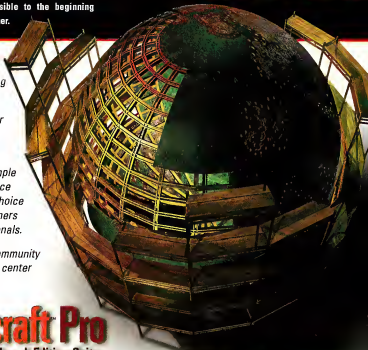
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3 D C A R D R O U N D U P

BY LOYD CASE

Strap in and hold on—CGW puts the latest 3D contenders to the test.

It's been a few months since we checked out the graphics-card scene. Back in December, we reviewed more than a dozen new 3D accelerators. Since then, some fresh players have arrived, and several cards that weren't quite ready then are now on your local store shelves. So it's time to strap in, hold on, and put another set of contenders to the test.

Two clear leaders have emerged in the past couple of months. The RIVA TNT from cycle-time king nVidia and the Banshee chip from 3Dfx grace many a gamer's system. A number of card-makers have jumped on the bandwagon, supporting either TNT or Banshee, or both. But over that same period, a new horse has entered the race: ATI's Rage 128. We'll put them all through their paces and see if we can reach some conclusions as to which card is best for you.

One other trend has emerged: The number of games that support only 3Dfx's Glide API is diminishing. We've seen quite a few titles that had been Glide-only games pick up support for either Direct3D or OpenGL—or both. This is welcome news for games who resisted having more than one card in their system, due to cost constraints or slot limitations. OpenGL is getting more attention now as well. ATI will showcase its OpenGL driver in its upcoming Rage Fury and Rage Magnum cards, which use the new Rage 128 chip. Still, most games that support OpenGL either are still based on one of the QUAKE engines or support more than one API (for example, Direct3D).

Now, without further ado, let's dive into the card reviews.

Hercules Dynamite TNT

★★★★★



We've struggled with Hercules products in the past. Whenever we'd get a driver release from the company, it would cause more problems than it solved. I'm happy to report that Hercules hasn't strayed too far from nVidia's reference drivers, and stability on our 400MHz Pentium II test-bed was rock solid.

And the news gets better: Hercules' performance was right up there with the competition. It edged out all the other boards to take top honors, with a 3D GameGauge score of 452.6. The 3D WinBench score was a decent 473, also up there with the other cards.

The Dynamite TNT is a no-fills board without a software bundle. The card is very compact and has a fan attached to the nVidia RIVA TNT chip to keep it cool. There's no TV out, and the control panel is a bit limited. I've seen the card for under \$150, though. Given the performance of this board, we give it a big thumbs up.

Dynamite TNT. \$147 (street). Hercules, (510) 623-6030. www.hercules.com

PROS: Relatively inexpensive for a TNT board; stable.

CONS: Mediocre 3D GameGauge score for a TNT board.



AOpen Navigator PA70

★★★★★

There's finally another Savage3D board available in the United States, from Taiwanese component-maker AOpen. The PA70 is pretty much a generic, SDRAM-based board with TV-out and very generic drivers.

There's very little you can do in the way of tweaking in the AOpen's control panel. In fact, there was no discernible way to disable V-sync, so we set the refresh rate to 100Hz and hoped for the best.

The board's 3D GameGauge performance was mediocre. Part of the problem may have been that flip-on V-sync was still on. But I also suspect the generic nature of the drivers came into play. For example, the card barely edged out B1 Business WinMarks—by far the lowest 2D score we've seen in recent testing. **MOORHEAD** at 1280x1024 was also painful to watch, and its 3D GameGauge score was very underwhelming.

The bottom line? If you're desperate for an AGP 2x board and can't afford anything else, the PA70 may be a good fit. But if I've only got \$90 to spend, I'd rather go out and get a Banshee board.

Navigator PA70. \$90 (street). AOpen, (888) 852-6736. www.aopen.com

PROS: It's cheap.

CONS: It's generic; it's slow; it's not a good deal.



Diamond Monster Fusion AGP

★★★★★

The Monster Fusion is one of the few boards now shipping that uses SGRAM. It also comes with a fan—the Banshee runs a bit warm, especially since Diamond clocks its board higher than does the competition. Be warned also that its 2D WinMark score is deceptive. Diamond supports only 24-bit color for the normal Windows desktop. But we tested all the other boards at 32-bit color, so the Diamond's higher score is partly attributable to the lesser color depth.

The SGRAM and higher clock rate show up in the 3D GameGauge tests. The Fusion pumped out the higher score of the two Banshee-based boards we tested. The Voodoo Banshee chip is 3Dfx's low-cost, 2DGD part. Unlike Voodoo² (or the upcoming Voodoo³), the Banshee lacks a second texture-mapping unit (TMU), meaning that games such as **QUAKE II** and other multi-texture games will run slower than they would with Voodoo².

Still, the Fusion AGP can be found for around \$120, and as of this writing there was a \$30 rebate offer on retail versions.

It also has a software bundle: the full **MOTOCROSS MADNESS** and a limited, 11-level version of **UNREAL**. All in all, not too shabby for less than a hundred bucks.



The Monster Fusion is just about the fastest Banshee board you can get. It doesn't quite rank up there with Voodoo² or TNT, but neither does its price.

Monster Fusion. \$120 (street) for 16MB. Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468-5846. www.diamondmm.com

PROS: Polished utilities; good performance. **CONS:** Control panel not that useful.

Wicked 3D Vengeance

★★★★

Despite having a product name that could have been inspired by the limber Lara Croft, the Vengeance proved somewhat cranky to get running. Earlier driver releases ran pretty well, but the latest driver release, coupled with a new BIOS, crashed our 3D WinBench 99

control panel and set it for 1024x640. But be prepared for the fact that games may look a little odd at settings different than their native aspect ratio.

The Vengeance isn't quite as speedy a board as the Monster Fusion, though, and there's no software bundle. However, the drivers do support stereoscopic shutter glasses, and Wicked3D

will sell you a set if you're interested.

You can buy the card direct from Wicked3D or from Electronics Boutique. If you're really hankering for

3D glasses or oddball resolutions, the Vengeance may be a good choice. But you can find cheaper, faster boards out there.

Wicked3D Vengeance.

\$179. Wicked3D, (510) 494-4700. www.wicked3d.com

PROS: Flexible control panel; 3D glasses support.

CONS: Performance is only average; slightly more expensive than other Banshee boards.



several times before it finally ran. We also saw some odd image shimmering in QUAKE II, although the card ran without a hitch on our Direct3D test titles.

The coolest thing about this board is its control panel. You can set any combination of horizontal and vertical resolution. Want a 16:10 aspect ratio? Go into the

Number Nine Revolution IV

★

There's not a lot you can say about a card that claims to have full OpenGL compatibility but won't run QUAKE or QUAKE II in OpenGL mode. That's the main reason for the Revolution IV's abysmal 3D GameGauge score. To add insult to injury, this card simply would not run 3D WinBench 99 on our Pentium II test-bed.

Not long ago, the Revolution series ranked as about the best 2D card around, but even that's no longer true. The 2D WinBench scores are pretty low compared to the competition's, and the competition has caught up in terms of 2D image quality.

There's no TV-out and no other expansion options. While some 3D games (F22ADF) ran fine, others ran poorly (FORSAKEN) or not at all (MOTORHEAD). The only upside to all this is that you can get one loaded up with 32MB of RAM and you can find the card for under \$170 (under \$120 for 16MB).

Steer clear of this card if you're a gamer. It doesn't even make a good companion for Voodoo2.

Revolution IV. \$120 for 16MB; \$170 for 32MB. Number Nine Visual Computing, (781) 674-0009. www.nine.com

PROS: Supports 32MB of RAM. **CONS:** Medocre 2D; spotty Direct3D support; no OpenGL game support.



The Distant Future Is Nine Months Away

We'll see the next generation of 3D accelerator chips by October 1999. Most of the companies are keeping mum, but it's likely that products from Rendition, 3DFX, nVidia, Matrox, and others will hit the streets. But will there be games to use all that horsepower? The 3D chip-makers are adding features like mad and increasing the transistor count along the way. But if there are no games out there that use some advanced feature, then it's not of much value to gamers.

Rendition has shelved the V3300 (Redline) and is busy working on its next-generation part. The company has vowed to make it schedules this time. Not much is known about the detailed specs of the 4400, but it may have up to 16MB of embedded memory.

The next-generation part from nVidia may well support rendering methods other than triangles. This means that nVidia will have come full circle since its original, ill-fated NV1, which used quad patches for rendering. The world may finally be catching up with them.

With Voodoo² behind it, 3DFX will be playing catch-up in the features game. The company cannot afford to miss the boat on 32-bit rendering, stencil buffers, and other features. If 3DFX loses the affection of high-end users, its cachet will vanish, and it will be just another chipmaker. It's a tough position to be in.

There are also signs that Matrox is hard at work on something. It fell just a bit short with the G200, but it's certainly not as far behind as the original Mystique was. Maybe Matrox can pull even with the rest of the pack in its next-generation part.



Actual Game Screen



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```

```
if (gunCanShoot(ship, gun))
```

```
switch (gunstatic->guntype)
```

```
case GUN_MissileLauncher:
```

```
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
```

```
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading, ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
```

```
vecDotProduct(*trajectory, shipheading);
```

```
shotguns = TRUE; ALL GAME
```

```
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
```

```
missileShoot(ship, gun, target);
```

```
case GUN_MineLauncher:
```

```
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
```

```
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading, ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
```

```
vecDotProduct(*trajectory, shipheading);
```

```
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
```

```
missileShoot(ship, gun, target);
```

respasser • need for speed III • dark veng
alien resurrection • deus-ex • slave zero •
starsiege • moto racer 2 • black & white
ultima: ascension • x-com: alliance • future
homeworld • unreal • beneath
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ASUS AGP-V3400TNT



The V3400TNT differentiates itself by offering TV-in as well as TV-out.

However, while you can perform video capture with the TV-input, the capture rate will be limited since there's no hardware compression. You can capture still frames as well.

The 3D GameGauge performance of the V3400TNT lags slightly behind the top TNT performers, but it's certainly not bad. The 2D and 3D WebBench scores are pretty typical for a TNT product. The card ships with Rage Software's INCOMING and a set of video capture and playback tools. The only odd behavior I noticed was in F2ZADF's opening splash

screen, which showed some image corruption. There were no other apparent image-quality issues with the card. The most recent drivers seem very stable, and the control panel is a somewhat cleaner variant of the RIVA TNT reference panel.

ASUS has done a good job of offering driver updates on its past graphics products, which gives us a greater level of confidence than in the past. While you can use the nVidia reference drivers, they would disable the TV functions of the card. Given the feature set and price, the V3400TNT is a good deal.

V3400TNT. \$149 (street). ASUS Computers, (510) 739-3777.

www.asus.com

PROS: TV-input and -output; good price. **CONS:** A tad slower than other TNT boards.



Skywell Magic3D TNT



This little gem landed on my desk at the last possible moment. I had very low expectations, since it had all the trappings of a generic OEM part. Even the drivers were just the nVidia 0.37 reference drivers. You can imagine my surprise when it essentially tied the Velocity 4400 we tested in December with a stellar 451 on 3D GameGauge.

The other numbers ranked with the big boys, too. The only decisive difference came in the high-res MOTORHEAD torture test: The Skywell scored a solid 30fps, but the STB topped it by 10 percent.

Magic3D TNT has no game bundle, but it does sport a software DVD player. More interesting is that Skywell ships a version of Powerstrip, the Swiss Army knife of graphics-card tweaking tools. It lets you do some very useful things, like setting a universal refresh rate. It also allows you to get into big trouble by altering the clock rate of the graphics memory and chip. Nonetheless, it is a very useful diagnostic tool, all wrapped up in a single, oversized tool bar.

The only way to get the board currently is to order from Skywell's U.S. direct-marketing arm, Aries Marketing. But this is one fast little resal and may be the thing to grace your AGP slot.

Magic3D TNT. \$139. Aries Marketing, (909) 468-5535, www.aries-marketing.com

PROS: It's fast and it's not too expensive.

CONS: Direct-order purchase only; no TV-out or game bundle.

The 3D API War: News From the Front

There have been a number of casualties in the 3D API skirmish, and as the dust settles three combatants remain standing: Glide, OpenGL, and Direct3D.

OpenGL made its way into the gaming space thanks in large part to the fact that John Carmack and the crew at id decided to use it for QUAKE and QUAKE II. Most chip-makers have developed OpenGL ICDs (installable client drivers), but we have not heard of any current games planning to ship that are OpenGL-only. Some titles, like Joe's WWI FIGHTERS, run on OpenGL, but also on Direct3D and Glide. Still, OpenGL will be around, and since OpenGL drivers have arrived from most major chip- and board-makers, OpenGL-only titles may yet materialize. OpenGL and Direct3D will begin to merge in Microsoft's future releases, which should arrive with DirectX8 sometime in 2000.

Glide has been 3Dfx's way of allowing game developers to get the most out of the different Voodoo chipsets, and it still finds favor with developers. Now that 3Dfx has entered the 2D/3D chip market with its Banshee and its upcoming Voodoo3, 3Dfx may sustain Glide as a viable alternative to Direct3D. But we've seen fewer Glide-only titles of late; it's more likely that games support Glide in addition to Direct3D.

Meanwhile, Microsoft has poured tremendous resources into improving Direct3D, and to the company's credit, Direct3D has come a long way indeed. We've seen games of all genres run well on it.

Microsoft is now working on Direct3D, due out probably about the middle of this year. New features will include extensions, a longtime feature of OpenGL. This will allow a chip-maker with a new killer rendering effect to expose that feature to games via Direct3D. This lack of extensibility has been a sore spot for chip-makers; in the past they had to wait for Microsoft to revise Direct3D in order to get their features implemented. In addition, Direct3D will have transform-and-lighting (T/L) acceleration. In other words, if a chip-maker wants to take T/L work off the host to make it go faster, that will be possible. Another cool effect due to Direct3D is environment mapping, whereby a game can take an entire scene and turn it into a texture to be used for reflections in, say, flight-sim cockpit canopies.

Even though the 3D API field has narrowed to three, you still need to read those system requirements on the box. Most cards support Direct3D and OpenGL, which covers the majority of games currently shipping, but some titles are still Glide-only. —Dave Shtawar

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- Computer Gaming World (1999)

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Almost There

The following cards aren't quite ready as we want to press, but they will definitely warrant consideration when they ship. And when those cards are primed to hit the market, you can bet we'll be the first to put their feet to the fire.

ATI Rage Fury

ATI's new Rage Fury falls into the category of "missed it by that much." The Rage Fury is based on ATI's Rage 128 accelerator, which is not just a warmed-over Rage Pro but has been redesigned from the ground up. It has dual texture-mapping engines and will ship with Direct3D and OpenGL drivers. The Fury will support most of the 3D features that its competition does, including stencil-buffering, bump-mapping, and 16-, 24-, or 32-bit z-buffers. About the only thing it lacks is anisotropic filtering, which isn't commonly used today.

I'd hoped the card would be ready for review in this roundup, but it wasn't quite there. Still, what I saw looked very promising. Even with beta drivers, the card installed without a hitch, and it posted just about the fastest 2D performance we've seen. In fact, many of these cards score so high on the Business WinBench that we're fast approaching the limits of the benchmark, and the Rage Fury cranks out Business WinMarks like there's no tomorrow.

The 3D WinBench 99 score was also the highest we've ever seen, but its game performance trails a bit. The curious thing I noticed was that 32-bit benchmarks ran only marginally slower than 16-bit game tests. Either ATI has really tweaked the 32-bit performance or the drivers need more tuning—maybe both. At any rate, until we see more 32-bit source textures and multitexture games, 32-bit rendering won't be prevalent in games. But MOTORHEAD looked beautiful in true-color mode. Unfortunately we couldn't get

MOTORHEAD running at 1280x1024 due to driver problems. I suspect there's a lot of horsepower unused by the current state of the drivers.

The Rage 128 also supports DVD acceleration, including motion compensation and fast MPEG2 decoding. Overall, the card looks extremely promising, and we'll bring it out thoroughly once we get final drivers. We're already seeing prices for 32MB Rage Fury cards well under \$180 on the Internet, so it's not far off.

If ATI can work out its driver issues, the Rage Fury may well be the fastest performer in games as well as synthetic benchmarks.

3Dfx Voodoo³

At last November's Comdex, 3Dfx announced its Voodoo³, which is essentially Banshee with a second TMU, running at up to 183MHz (depending on the model). Because of the tight, single-chip integration and high clock rate, Voodoo³ can achieve Voodoo² SLI speeds in 3D graphics but can run at higher resolutions than can Voodoo² SLI. Its 2D speed should be as fast or faster than Banshee.

What Voodoo³ promises is raw speed, but it gives up some features in the process. Some of the signature features of the competition are missing, such as anisotropic filtering, bump-mapping, and stencil buffers. Voodoo³ supports only 16MB of onboard RAM. Although it supports AGP 2x speeds for moving data over the bus, it does not texture out of system memory—it still needs to copy whole textures over the bus. Also missing is 32-bit 3D rendering output. The marketing spin from 3Dfx

is that users don't need it, most games don't support it, and it would slow things down anyway. Voodoo³ smells like a stopgap product; other offerings give users a choice of rendering at 16-bit color or true color. If nothing else, this relegates the card to consumers only, since 3D modeling users on a budget will want the true color output of an ATI or TNT board.

From the gamer's perspective, though, Voodoo³ is interesting. AGP 2x transfers of vertex (polygon) data will help keep the chip from being idle. By the time it ships, we may see the first Katmai systems. For users who have been slot limited, Voodoo³ promises high performance while taking up only a single AGP slot.

nVidia RIVA Vanta and TNT2

The Vanta is essentially a TNT with a 64-bit memory interface instead of 128-bits. It will probably run games slower than the standard TNT, despite being a 0.25-micron part.

The TNT2 (or whatever its final name may be) is more interesting. It's essentially the TNT taken down to a 0.25-micron semiconductor process. By itself this has a couple of benefits—the chip can run at a

higher clock rate, but also run cooler at that higher rate. If the yield is good, it can also be cheaper, since the chip is physically smaller.

The TNT2 will not add additional 3D features, but it will support 32MB of RAM, AGP 4x, and digital flat-panel displays. In fact, at the higher clock rate made possible made by the 0.25-micron chip density, the TNT may once again take the performance leadership. Until we have products in hand, though, it's too difficult to say.

3DLabs Permedia 3

The Permedia 3 is 3DLabs' first chip designed around DirectX (DirectX is in this case). At the same time, the company hasn't forgotten its OpenGL roots. One of the most interesting features of the card is that it can predict what texture data it will need next and retrieve it before it's needed. This can reduce delays while texture data is fetched from system memory. It also supports the usual DirectX6 feature set, such as stencil buffers and bump-mapping. Like most of the new chips out on the market, it has two rendering pipelines. Look for Permedia 3 cards to hit the streets about the time you read this. **CGW**

Making the Right Choice

Looking at the cards in this roundup, my personal favorite of the shipping cards is the Magic TNT. It's simple and unpretentious—and damned fast. Of the rest, the ASUS TNT board offers the best value in a TNT card, while the Monster Fusion is the best of the Banshee boards.

As you read this, the ATI Rage Fury is shipping. I wanted to like this card a lot, but can't really pass judgment because of the beta drivers. I suspect it will be a strong contender, though.

Of all the cards we've reviewed in the past four months, the ones to beat remain the STB Velocity 4400 and the Canyon Spectra 2500. The Spectra is more expensible, but the price. The Velocity 4400 remains a solid performer and a great value. Recent price drops have resulted in Velocity 4400s at less than \$100 in the street. Of course, for the ideal setup, you should consider adding a Voodoo² card to the mix—but with fewer Glide-only games coming out, that may not be as necessary as it once was.

Benchmark Tests

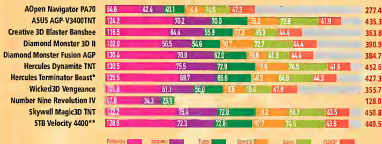
WinBench 99 Business Graphics
WinMark (1024x768x32)

3D WinBench 99
(1024x768x16)

MOTORHEAD (1280x1024x32)



3D GameGauge



*The slowest board from our last graphics roundup

**The fastest board from our last graphics roundup

N/A = Can't run this test

DNR = Failed to run this test

How We Tested

All the testing took place on COW's 400MHz Pentium II reference system, which has an Intel SE440X motherboard and 128MB of SDRAM. A Turtle Beach Montage handled audio chores. We tested each card with a clean Windows 98 installation and with only DirectX6, 2D benchmarks, and test games installed.

Our test suite consisted of 3D WinBench 99, WinBench 99 Business WinMark, our own 3D GameGauge, and Moonhead 2.2. 3D GameGauge 1.0 consists of six game tests: QUAKE, QUAKE II, F22ADE INCOMING, TUROK, and FORSAKEN. The average frame rates are calculated by the game, and the 3D GameGauge score is the sum of the averages.

We ran the games at 800x600x16, except MOTORHEAD, which we ran at

1280x1024x16. Interestingly, despite having 16MB of RAM, the Banshee boards could not run with trilinear filtering enabled on MOTORHEAD at 1280x1024, reporting an "insufficient memory" error, so all the MOTORHEAD tests were run with trilinear filtering off. The Business Graphics WinMark tests were at 1024x768x32-bit color unless the board supported only 24-bit color. We ran 3D WinBench 99 at 1024x768x16-bit, triple-buffered. With the exception of the Number Nine board, all the shipping cards could run all the tests.

Because we used a different test bed and current versions of MOTORHEAD and the 2D benchmarks, it's tough to go back and compare to previous roundups. To make it a bit easier, we retested the Velocity 4400 and the Hercules Terminator Beast. These were the top and bottom performers in our last roundup, and should give a frame of reference. We also tested the Monster 3D II in 3D GameGauge as a reference point.

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Trevor Chan is the creator of advanced strategy games like *Capitalism*, *Seven Kingdoms*, and *Seven Kingdoms Ancient Adventures*. Although only 23, Chan operates his own game design studio, overseeing all aspects of production at Hong Kong-based *Light Software* (www.aslight.com).



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IN SEARCH OF THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

3Dfx Jilts Diamond, Creative

There's never a dull moment in the graphics business. 3Dfx recently announced its acquisition of board-maker STB Systems. For 3Dfx, the deal creates an entrée into the lucrative system-maker (system OEM) graphics market, which represents the lion's share of the PC graphics business. 3Dfx has had some success in this area, with both Voodoo² and Banshee, but it's looking to expand its prospects. Taking a cue from the industry's volume leaders, 3Dfx is looking to join the ranks of ATI and Matrox, both of which are integrated chipboard-makers. Future 3Dfx products will carry 3Dfx branding, and the chip-maker will tightly integrate its chip production with STB's board production facilities to achieve faster time to market.

Not everyone is jumping for joy over the deal, however, since it means that 3Dfx will no longer supply chips to other board manufacturers. Diamond, Creative, Hercules, and others have been successful selling 3Dfx-based cards. As to how 3Dfx smoothed over this abrupt change, one 3Dfx official said, "Have you ever broken up with a girlfriend?"

Chip-maker nVidia can't be pleased with the deal,

either, since STB has been the No. 1 mover of nVidia chips, including the RIVA 12B, the RIVA 12Bz, and, most recently, the RIVA TNT. While STB will continue to sell TNT boards, it's highly unlikely that any future STB boards will use nVidia chips. The 3Dfx/STB deal still needs to be approved by both companies' stockholders and by regulatory bodies, including the Federal Trade Commission.

The mood at nVidia in the wake of the announcement was actually very upbeat. A spokesman there said that the deal leaves nVidia in a stronger position because it will now be the top contender in the chip-maker business. Further, it's probable that companies like Diamond and Creative—all bracing for life without 3Dfx—will be keen to shore up their relationship with nVidia.

We gamers have yet to feel the full implications of the 3Dfx deal, but one advantage of the former arrangement for consumers has been that board-makers using the same 3Dfx chipset have had to compete with one another on price. While 3Dfx will still have to compete against other boards using other chipsets, the self-generated price pressure factor will disappear. Stay tuned to 3D Interactive for more about this acquisition and details about Voodoo³. —Dave Salvatore



Intel: Headin' Back to Socketville

Sometimes things in the tech business have a way of coming full circle. Intel took its Pentium II processors over to the Slot 1 single-edge connector (SEC) design to

accommodate its Level 2 (L2) cache design. But with plans for most of its future processors to have onboard L2 caches, which obviates the need for the slot design, Intel will be returning to a socket form factor, currently dubbed Socket 370.

Intel went to the Slot 1 design in order to run the Pentium II's L2 cache at half the internal clock speed of the CPU and to give the L2 cache its own bus so it wouldn't have to share bandwidth with system memory. Both steps helped improve overall performance. But because Intel is planning to move its

production to 0.18 micron process, it will have room to put the L2 cache on the chip itself and run the cache at the CPU's full clock speed, which should further improve performance while reducing overall chip cost.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, AMD will be bringing out its Slot A design just as Intel begins moving many of its chips to the Socket 370 form factor. But Slot 1 motherboard owners can breathe a sigh of relief, since most new Pentium II offerings, including Katmai, will be introduced in both slot and socket form factors. What's more, this transition back to sockets won't be completed until sometime next year. —Dave Salvatore

TechWatch

Rendition R10000 Multimedia Accelerator

This product was originally slated for arrival sometime in Q1 '99, but Rendition has scrapped it. Instead, they're going back to the drawing board to design an entirely new part, whose name will most likely be V4000. Not much is known about the V4000 as of yet, but it appears that it will have embedded video memory, which may provide a performance advantage. ETA: Unknown

AMD K6-3 AMD's next CPU, the K6-3, will retain AMD's 3DNow! for accelerating transforms and lighting for 3D rendering. K6-3's biggest improvement will be its onboard 256KB Level 2 (L2) cache, which will run at the CPU's core clock speed. Initial clock speed will mostly likely be 400MHz, and with its onboard L2, K6-3 will be even more competitive than a Pentium II. ETA: Q1 '99

AMD K7 AMD's revamped high-performance CPU K7 will feature a 128KB Level 1 (L1) cache, and a 512K-1MB backside Level 2 (L2) cache, and also will support main memory speeds up to 200MHz. K7 has a revamped floating-point unit that features three supercache execution units, and is fully pipelined. 3DNow! support is still present, and will help move Direct3D games along if they use D3D's Transform and Lighting engine. Initial speed grades are slated to be 500MHz. ETA: Q2 '99

Intel Katmai Intel's next round of CPUs is expected to offer clock speeds of 450-500MHz. They will feature new instruction-set extensions dubbed "Katmai New Instructions." Read MMIO. ETA: Q1 '99

Intel IA-64 Intel's next generation of processors after Katmai will be a substantial departure from the traditional X86 CISC-based architecture. The new 64-bit CPU will use a new set of VLIW (very long instruction word) instructions and a technology termed EPIC (explicitly parallel instruction computing) to execute instructions in parallel. ETA: 2000

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Why NOT RACING SIM?

With Jeff Gordon on board, we had one decision, Racing Sim or not? Fortunately, everyone agreed – the world didn't need another Racing Sim.



First of all, if you've seen Jeff on the racetrack, you already know that he's all about action and excitement. So it came as no surprise to hear that the game he wanted to make was action and excitement times 10. It's not that he didn't have an interest in doing a racing simulation, but even the average gamer knows that simulations never really capture the full, real life experience - whether it be racing, flying, or battle games. Well, if this is the case, imagine how much less a racing simulation mimicked the actual racing experience to a professional race car driver who also happens to be a three-time Winston Cup Champion.

Also, keep in mind that simulations don't always equal fun. For example, the few racing simulations that came the closest to being "realistic" were loaded with the small details such as tweaking a car's performance to shave a fraction of a second off lap times. While this helps to create a more realistic experience, it doesn't necessarily make a game fun.

So, if it were possible to capture the excitement of professional stock car racing in a video game, then we would have gone that route and created the best racing sim ever. However, since it's almost impossible to simulate the experience that Jeff feels behind the wheel of his own race car, we decided to

create a game that makes up for it in other ways by providing a whole new racing experience.

For us, it was about being a smart driver and thinking on your toes at 300 MPH.

You see, Jeff always felt that racing simulations never really captured the speed, the competition, and the pulse-pounding exhilaration of jockeying for position while flying by another car at over 200 miles an hour. We totally agreed.

In the end, that's what it came down to: Racing Sim vs. Fun Arcade Racer. So, the direction we decided to take was to keep it somewhat grounded in reality with a physics model that players could actually feel, while giving them a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, but at the same time, making the game easily accessible.

To accomplish this and get the level of competition we all wanted, it quickly became clear we must heighten the experience. Oval tracks and straight-aways are exciting when you've got a screaming engine over your shoulder and howling wind rattling both windows, but on a computer screen - that just won't cut it.



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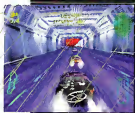
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This is when we realized that we were on the right track. Ironically, creating an exaggerated idea of what racing might be helped to capture the mad adrenaline rush that everyone who's ever driven a real race car feels in their bones, in a way that more serious and detailed sims just couldn't.

“The more outrageous we made the tracks, the more fun - not to mention fast - the game became.”



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UPPER THE HOOK

The 100,000-Mile Mark

Does That Pentium 166MHz Still Have Another Season Left in It?

Let's talk about living within your means. I drive a 1992 Ford Explorer with 83,000 miles on it. I say this not to brand myself as some kind of aging yuppie—though I probably am—but to point out that this vehicle is now seven years old. Seven years ago, we were barely into the 486 era in personal computing, and most of the people reading this are probably not using a computer that's seven years old.

Still, I've beaten on the issue of fast-moving technology many times. I'm confessing to driving a seven-year-old car to point out that I have a budget for cars. As much as Detroit or Japan might like it, I can't buy a car every two years. Luckily, cars are a relatively mature technology, and I can happily continue cruising well past 100,000 miles.

Lately, I've been getting a flurry of emails like the one below, so this month I'm going to try to collectively answer all of your tweaking/upgrading questions.

Dear Mr. Case:

I own a lovely Pentium 166 (no MMX) and would like to know if UNREAL will run with all the options? Thanks very much.

Horsepower-Challenger

Dear Horse,

First off, not even my daughter's friends call me "Mr. Case," but I do feel your pain. Will UNREAL run on your Pentium 166 with all the goodies turned up? Well, in a word, no. But with some trade-offs and system tweaks, it will run with an acceptable frame-rate. Here are some things for you to try.

Cheers,
Lloyd

Since computers are a big part of how I make my living, upgrading fairly often makes sense for me. But like anyone, I have a budget for computers; mine just happens to be bigger (the wonders of business tax deductions help). Most of us don't have big budgets, though, and many of us have to live with hand-me-downs or used computers. Or it could be a matter of choice—spending a



LOYD CASE

few grand a year on computer gear simply may not be a high priority, even if you do enjoy computer games.

Now, here's think of your computer as having its own budget—the performance budget. You have a Pentium 166 or a Cxix-based system or even, if you're lucky, a 200MHz Pentium MMX. Given the demands of today's latest game titles, how can you best use that limited resource?

Maximizing the Budget

First, take a look at your system and make sure you're getting the best possible use out of it. If you don't have the money to spend on expensive upgrades, consider at least moving to 64MB of RAM. It's surprising how a little added

memory can work wonders in Windows games. Memory, at least, is fairly cheap now. In most Pentium systems, though, more than 64MB doesn't do you any good, and may even slow down your system. So don't get more than 64MB.

Beyond dropping more dollars, you can spend some time tuning the performance of your system. All the usual tricks work well.

To begin, create a fixed-size swap file. Assuming your disk budget is as tight as your dollar budget, make it a relatively small number, such as 64MB. You do this in the Windows system control panel, under the Performance tab. The virtual memory button will take you to your virtual memory settings.

Next, make sure you're not loading unnecessary programs on startup. This eats into both

(MSCONFIG.EXE) to manage your AutoStart programs. With MSCONFIG you can also manage the stuff in your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files.

Better than DOOM

DOOM, that breakthrough shooter from id Software, ran pretty well on a 66MHz 486. So it stands to reason that a CPU that's 100MHz faster and has other optimizations should do far better. One thing you need to ask yourself is "How much better can I afford?" Frame-rate is life in an action game or flight sim, so eye candy becomes a fairly low priority in your budget.

What's useful is to use a game like DOOM or DUKE NUKEM 3D (which looks a little better) as a point of reference. Let's assume you get decent performance out of DUKE NUKEM 3D. Let that be

Think about how to maximize tomorrow's purchases when you're making one today.

memory and valuable system resources. Also, some memory resident software can either eat CPU cycles or create a frenzy of disk activity. If you don't have Windows 98, take the time to download one of the Ziff-Davis benchmarks—but be aware that any of them is a big download—or spend \$5 and buy a WinBench 99 CD, which also comes with Audio WinBench and 3D WinBench. While the benchmarks can help you determine how your system's performance changes as you tweak it, the real gem is the Startup Manager. Startup Manager can turn off the autoloading of those pesky applications that are set to AutoStart in the system registry.

If you have Windows 98, use the System Configuration Utility

your budget standard for graphical eye candy. When you run a newer game, like UNREAL, think about how you can tweak the settings so it doesn't look worse than DUKE 3D. That way, you can manage your expectations. While UNREAL may look gorgeous on a fast Pentium II with a new 3D accelerator, you probably won't be able to achieve that glossy sheen on your system.

Of course, you may have to adjust the resolution as well. Face it: You won't be able to run QUAKE II at 800x600—that's a fact of life. But you shouldn't let that detract from your enjoyment of a title. Some games, like QUAKE II, won't let you easily tweak many of the graphics enhancements, but QUAKE II does support many

Tech Tips

Here are a couple of frequent email questions I've been getting.

I just got a system with a PCI modem in it, but the ping times are much slower than with my old 28.8 modem. What gives?

It is a sad truth that PCI modems are slower than their ISA counterparts. There's only one PCI modem chipset out there, and it is a "Winmodem," meaning that the CPU does most of the actual work. The PCI modem simply provides the connection and translation to the phone line. My advice is, don't get a PCI modem. If your system comes with one, get an ISA modem or better yet, an external modem. Better still, get a cable modem or DSL.

I've heard that AGP 2x boards (like the RIVA TNT) don't work well with K6-2. Is that correct?

The problem wasn't the K6-2, but the so-called "Super 7" motherboards. The latest AGP drivers seemed to have fixed most of the problems, though you may have to actually get a new version of the motherboard itself. Check also with your graphics card vendor for recent drivers. In most cases, the new motherboard AGP drivers and graphics card drivers have fixed the problem. (ALI can be found at www.acerlabs.com. VIA is at www.via.com.tw. SIS is at www.sis.com.tw.)

different resolutions. So start at 320x240 and work your way up until your frame-rate starts to tank. Remember, 320x240 was good enough for DOOM.

Don't forget to tweak your game's audio as well. You may get a surprising frame-rate boost by going to four audio streams rather than eight, assuming you can dial that down in the game. The loss in ear candy is often less noticeable than reduced graphics goodies.

RTFB

One way to avoid the frustration of games running deathly slow on your rig is to read the system requirements on the game's box before you buy it. I know it sounds dopey, but it can save you much pain and suffering. Some turn-based strategy games might run fine, despite the difference in system performance between what's recommended and what you have. You may just have to wait longer between turns while the AI moves. But if it's a real-time strategy game or an action game, it's best to get something else. Part of budgeting is setting priorities, and an important priority is to avoid things that won't work. I may be able to put 15-inch-wide slicks on my Explorers, but it won't make driving in snow any easier.

When You Do Buy

When you buy an add-on, buy with an eye to the future. We tend to get seduced

by new technology. If a reader asks me if he or she should get a RIVA TNT board for their Pentium 200, I tend to steer them to a Voodoo² card instead. The RIVA TNT is a great chip, but if you're upgrading in the future, your new system will almost certainly have a fast AGP card (maybe even a TNT-based board). But the reliable Voodoo² will come over to a new system just fine. So think about how to maximize tomorrow's purchases when you're making one today.

That rule applies for any component purchase. Buying a new hard drive? Get one that supports UltraDMA/33. Looking at a new monitor? Get a big one—a 17-inch or 19-inch monitor. Need a sound card? Get a good PCI sound card if you have a free PCI slot. To save in the long run, get a component upgrade that will play well with a future upgrade.

The Performance Dilemma

Living within a performance budget is sometimes frustrating. Think of it as a learning process. As you tweak your system, you may learn more about configurations, Windows, and the Device Manager than you ever wanted. But knowledge is a good thing. So when a hot new title comes out that screams for huge system requirements, don't despair. If you're willing to make a few sacrifices in eye candy, audio fidelity, and resolution, you may find that game playable. **EW**

Mach 2 is faster than a .22 caliber bullet.

F16
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Cache	512KB Internal L2 cache	512KB Internal L2 cache	512KB Internal L2 cache	512KB Internal L2 cache	512KB Internal L2 cache
RAM	64MB 100MHz SDRAM	64MB 100MHz SDRAM	64MB 100MHz SDRAM	64MB 100MHz SDRAM	64MB 100MHz SDRAM
Hard Drive	6.4GB Ultra ATA hard drive*	6.4GB Ultra ATA hard drive*	8GB Ultra ATA hard drive*	15.5GB Ultra ATA hard drive**	15.5GB Ultra ATA hard drive**
Monitor	17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)	17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)	17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)	17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)	17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)
CD/DVD-ROM	32X max speed CD-ROM drive	32X max speed CD-ROM drive	32X max speed CD-ROM drive	32X max speed CD-ROM drive	32X max speed CD-ROM drive
Modem	3Com U.S. Robotics 56K Modem**	3Com U.S. Robotics 56K Modem**	3Com U.S. Robotics 56K Modem**	3Com U.S. Robotics 56K Modem**	3Com U.S. Robotics 56K Modem**
Graphics	nVidia Riva 128, 8MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics	nVidia Riva 128, 8MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics	nVidia Riva 128, 8MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics	nVidia Riva 128, 8MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics	nVidia Riva 128, 8MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics
Sound System	PC 12-speaker Bluetooth sound	PC 12-speaker Bluetooth sound	PC 12-speaker Bluetooth sound	PC 12-speaker Bluetooth sound	PC 12-speaker Bluetooth sound
Speakers	Microsoft® 5.1-speaker system	Microsoft® 5.1-speaker system	Microsoft® 5.1-speaker system	Microsoft® 5.1-speaker system	Microsoft® 5.1-speaker system
Warranty	3-year/3-year Micron U online* limited warranty	3-year/3-year Micron U online* limited warranty	3-year/3-year Micron U online* limited warranty	3-year/3-year Micron U online* limited warranty	3-year/3-year Micron U online* limited warranty
Software	1-year free* tuition to Micron U online	1-year free* tuition to Micron U online	1-year free* tuition to Micron U online	1-year free* tuition to Micron U online	1-year free* tuition to Micron U online
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Motherboard	ASUS P2B IS	\$295	And it's cheaper than a standard Ultra2 SCSI card.
CPU	Pentium III/450	\$164	It's the top of the heap, for now.
Memory	256MB of Conair PC100 SDRAM	\$28	Just drink, a quarter-gigabyte.
Disk Controller	Built-in Ultra2 SCSI	\$0	68MB/sec.
Primary Graphics	Cinepak Spectra 2560	\$175	Be intense just-through weeks, not to mention great 3D and 2D.
Secondary Graphics	Quantum3D Graphics KH1	\$199	The ultimate, single slot (booked) card.
DVD Decoder	Decentral Converter	\$129	For the DVD zowie ball!
Floppy Drive	Fic	\$26	You still have to have one.
Hard Drive	Seagate Chestnut III	\$1,280	It's big, it's fast, it's slow... one out of three ain't bad!
Backup	Imaging Jet Z	\$250	2GB of backup.
CD-ROM/DVD	Power2 SCSI DVD	\$179	Taking the DVD plunge.
Monitor	Sony SDRF5	\$1,180	Sharp, crisp, bright and flat.
Primary Audio	Diamond Monitorsound M3000	\$99	For four speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX.
Speakers	LPT 11	\$500	Beautiful imaging, close sound.
Rear channel Speakers	Altec Lansing ACS-43	\$46	Just for the rear channels.
Modem	3Com Impact II	\$200	Faster than 56K... Now if I could only get DSL.
Newswriting	Built-in Intel I4300 ethernet chip	\$0	For keeping my toes hot.
Case	In Win Q500 full tower ATX	\$85	How improved model!
Power Supply	TurboCool 300	\$109	More power, scooby!
Keyboard	Logitech NewTouch	\$45	In with the NewTouch, out with the Natural.
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech Cordless Wheel Mouse	\$56	No tether!
Action Game Controller	Microsoft SideWinder Evolve	\$35	Yip.
Flight Joystick	ThrustMaster T22 Pro	\$129	It got lots right.
Thruster	ThrustMaster TQS	\$195	More control than anyone needs.
Rudder Pedals	ThrustMaster Side RCS	\$79	Nearly perfect foot placement.
Driving Controls	ECC1 CD3 A080	\$1,129	For the serious sim driver.

TOTAL: **\$7,436**

LEAN & MEAN



COMPONENT	PRODUCT	PRICE	THE SKINNY
Motherboard	IBM R16	\$95	Five PCI slots, Software, AMR—ready for Katalin.
CPU	Pentium III/450 + fan	\$225	Not for fans the CPU.
Memory	SABE PC100 SDRAM	\$25	The only thing better would be 128MB.
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA33	\$130	
Primary Graphics	Graphics Master TMI	\$99	It's fast, it's convertible, and it's under \$150.
Secondary Graphics	Galileo Mustang2	\$20	Modest for those Ultra games.
Floppy Drive	Fic	\$26	You still gotta have it.
Hard Drive	Seagate Mediasat Pro 6530	\$159	Fast and now even affordable.
CD-ROM/DVD	Power2 SCSI DVD	\$99	Yes, and it's cheap to boot.
Monitor	Optique V75	\$158	Amazingly cheap for under \$200.
Primary Audio	Phonetic Sonic Impact 990	\$36	A3D and direct audio for under a C-note.
Secondary Audio	NA	\$0	
Speakers	Easton Acoustics E-M25	\$99	The best speakers for under \$100. Period.
Modem	Diamond Supralapex external	\$106	Solid performance, good price.
Newswriting	NA	\$0	
Case	Ben Win 710 AT	\$90	The case for upgraders.
Power Supply	Radwin, 275W	\$3	
Keyboard	Logitech NewTouch	\$45	In with the new, out with the Natural.
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech PS2 Wheel Mouse	\$18	Also comes per second???
Joystick	C4 Gamepad 1D	\$35	Still the best balanced Rightstick around.

TOTAL: **\$1,930**

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 press time, we have kept our current top choice so that we represented only finished products we have tested. Lists compiled by Dave Soltner and Lloyd Katz.

You're Making Me Hot



Heat can kill PC components. As the temperature rises above acceptable levels (over 110 degrees Fahrenheit), it begins to cook semiconductor components. In the short term, you may just experience occasional lockups. In the long term, electromigration may occur, whereby actual molecular elements within the chip move, creating unwanted gaps or unwanted merging of the ultrafine lines that move electrons within a chip. This can permanently damage the microscopic traces inside of CPUs, memory chips, and other semiconductor chips.

Needless to say, it's important to manage heat, and there are two ways to do it: locally and globally (no, this isn't about the ozone layer).

On the local level, you can cool components that get hot. Most people are aware of CPU fans, but we're now seeing cooling fans on graphics cards. If you have a high-performance hard drive (7,200RPM or higher), you can find hard-drive cooling

kits that move hot air away from this critical component.

But where do you want all that hot air to go? Most ATX power supplies have a fan that sucks air out of the case. That's a good step, but adding a little muffin fan (one of those cheap black fans) to the front of your PC case definitely helps. These cost only a few dollars. Orient the fan so it exhausts air out of the case (if there are nearby holes).

One last tip: Don't run your rig with the case open, unless you have a big fan blowing directly on the motherboard. Even then, it's not a good idea. Systems are designed to cool most efficiently with the case closed. Running with your case open can actually create local hotspots. Also, make sure all your I/O device shelves have either cards or blanks inserted for the same reason. With the addition of these few low-cost items (are you listening all you overclockers out there?) you can beat the heat and keep your rig lockup-free. —Lloyd Case

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GEN X series

Rumble from Redmond

by Loyd Case

Slowly but surely Microsoft is expanding its hardware reaches, entering markets that will push technologies it wants enhanced. The DSS 80s are a good example. As with all Microsoft products, the company adds its own twist to the

idea of computer speakers, and they are superbly executed. But it comes at a cost that may be too high for many folks.

The satellites look vaguely like black versions of the tentacle creatures from LucasArts' *DAY OF THE TENTACLE* adventure game. The bass unit, which contains the amplifier, looks very much like a car battery. However, that "car battery" hides a 75-watt amplifier—44 watts for the bass unit and 16 watts per channel for the satellites. Bass is provided by a 5-1/2-inch bass driver and a 5-1/2-inch passive radiator.

The DSS 80s are fully digital, meaning you can run them without a sound card—provided you've got a working USB connection and Windows 98. In fact, it was a pleasure to install them, as Windows 98 auto-configures the speakers. The right satellite has buttons along the top to control the main volume, bass volume, and a mute switch. The speakers have an auto-power

mode, meaning they sleep when there is no audio playing, but lock a head-phone jack.

The overall tonal balance is pretty good, but with the equalizer bypassed, they show a definite tendency to sound bright on musical material. They can get loud, but at really high volumes you can sense that they're straining. The software equalizer, which works with or without a sound card, can hide a multitude of sins with careful adjustment. The stereo imaging was quite good; instrument placement was very easy to pick out. Also, when pumping out sound from a Diamond Monster Sound MX300, these speakers had very clear A3D audio imaging.

If you do use digital audio mode (i.e., play audio through the USB port to be rendered by the speakers), expect to take a huge performance hit in DirectSound3D in



Audio WinBench with 16 audio streams at 22kHz, 8-bit resolution, the DirectSound3D test produced CPU usage of 19.6 percent—higher than most PC sound cards. But the "3D audio" is laughable, and it was often impossible to get a sense of anything beyond frontleft or frontright.

The DSS 80s sound pretty good, but cost a bundle. They're in the same category as the Cambridge Soundworks Microworks, but take up less room. But at that price, they're in heady territory, and that may be too big a bite for most users. **CGW**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Game's wanting heavily tweakable, solid audio.

PROS: Good sound quality, software equalizer.

CONS: USB digital audio without a sound card eats CPU cycles, noisy.

REQUIREMENTS: OS: \$ 0 for sound card—only support; Pentium 166 or better with USB and Windows 98.

Price: \$259
Manufacturer: Microsoft
Redmond WA 98073-8350
www.microsoft.com/redmond

MICHAEL MALONEY

REVIEW • GAMESTICK 3D USB

Stick It

by Loyd Case

Sticks like the Gamestick 3D are inevitably a compromise, but the CH spin on the 3D joystick is better than most. And what's more, CH is now shipping a

USB version, which makes installation a bit easier, though at the cost of DDS compatibility.

Installation was a snap, though the stick wasn't detected automatically on bootup like other USB devices I've tested. When I would plug it in while the system was running, though, the device was detected. The drivers installed cleanly and calibration was a snap. There are "only" four usable buttons, and no programming tool. The Gamestick 3D is a symmetric stick, meaning it should be equally comfortable for either left-handed or right-handed folks. Being a USB device, it doesn't work in DDS. In fact, it wouldn't even work with REDGUARD, a recent, Windows-friendly DDS



release, when run in a DDS box under Windows 98. I tested the Gamestick on a system with a USB keyboard and mouse, and all three devices played together nicely. In addition, the Gamestick 3D USB ships with CH's utility set, including a spiffy Windows-based calibration tool.

I took the Gamestick for a tour through EUROPEAN AIR WAR, FORSAKEN, and QUAKE II. EAW worked great, though the throttle slider seemed too short for delicate adjustments. What's worse is that throttle placement is very awkward, and the throttle slider seemed hard to reach for my stubby fingers. The rotational axis, used for the rudder, didn't offer really

fine control for lining up shots. It also suffers from the "walking-and-chewing gum" effect. Sometimes you'd inadvertently shift the rudder or the yank the stick left or right when you really only wanted to adjust one parameter.

QUAKE II lets you configure the stick, and it was handy using the "throttle" for sliding left and right. But the best game I found for the stick are six-degree-of-freedom games like FORSAKEN, where after some experimentation, I was able to set up the Gamestick 3D to work very intuitively. This may be just the thing for the upcoming release of DESCENT 3.

If you're willing to work within the stick's limitations, then it may serve you well. But with other low-cost offerings on the market from Logitech, ThrustMaster, and Microsoft, you might do better to shop around. **CGW**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: The Gamestick is a balanced, ambidextrous stick for action games and light flight sims.

PROS: Good for left- or right-handed users, twist handle.

CONS: Some people don't like the twist handle, throttle placement is awkward.

REQUIREMENTS: Windows 98 and a USB-equipped system.

Price: \$46
Manufacturer: CH Products
Vista, CA 94038-596-2511
www.chproducts.com

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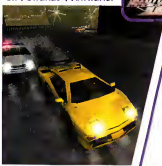
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DVD—Straight, No Chaser

by Loyd Case

Anyone who has ever shopped for a DVD drive knows that they've been much slower than the fastest CD-ROM drives... until now. The third-generation DVD drives are

now shipping, and most sport up to 5x DVD performance and 32x CD-ROM performance. Among these new entries is Toshiba's third-generation drive, the SD-M1202.

The 1202 wasn't entirely unfamiliar to me. I'd just completed testing a host of off-the-shelf PCs, and almost all the rigs that came with DVD drives came with this one. There's a good reason: It's fast, stable, and well-mannered.

The 1202 is an ATAPI device that connects to the standard EIDE port on most motherboards. Although it supports mode 2 DMA transfers, it's not an UltraDMA device. However, since it can handle DMA transfers of data, the CPU usage is pretty low.

It does suffer from one problem common to most high-speed CD-ROM drives: It spins down after a few minutes and has a spin-up delay that can be annoying in some games (although the delay

doesn't seem as severe as in other IDE drives).

We ran the WinBench 98 CD tests on our 400MHz Pentium II test rig. The CD WinMark came in at 1,590, right about on par for a 32x CD-ROM drive. The data transfer rate at the outer tracks measured at 4,870KB/sec, or 33x speed. Access time was 115ms—slightly slower than the best CD-ROM drives, but certainly respectable. CPU usage came in at 4.29 percent.

Toshiba is offering a kit with a Reemagic hardware DVD decoder board, but you won't find it under the Toshiba name. Look for it under names like Hi-Val or Pacific Digital. The full kit will probably run a bit



more than \$225 on the street, but you should be able to get the bare drive for as little as \$135 if you purchase from a mail-order outfit.

The Sigma Designs Reemagic decoder is a competent performer, and the image quality in action scenes on DVD movies reproduced without noticeable artifacts.

At these prices, there's almost no reason not to make the move to DVD. Its performance is nearly as fast as the fastest CD-ROM drives, it works well, and it isn't terribly expensive. That's a tough combination to beat. **CGW**

MICHAEL FALCHER

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Anyone looking for a DVD drive that doesn't compromise on speed

PROS: Fast DVD and CD-ROM performance, good DVD playback

CONS: Not an UltraDMA device; a bit more expensive than a 32x CD-ROM drive

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90 with free EIDE connection

Price: \$135 (mail)
Manufacturer: Toshiba
Item: CA 0428 453-0771

www.toshiba.com/us/cspd/

REVIEW • DIAMOND MONSTER SOUND MX300

Diamond's Flexible Flyer

by Loyd Case

I like it. I like it a lot. Diamond's follow-up to its successful MX200 is a hit. The MX300 uses Aureal's new Vortex 2 chip, which is quite a bit more powerful than its predecessor, the Vortex 1 (used to power numerous sound cards). Vortex 2

offers full hardware support for A3D 2.0 (Aureal's latest version of its positional 3D audio technology) and DirectSound3D. It currently supports Creative Labs' EAX to DirectSound in software, but Diamond claims it will be moving EAX support into hardware with a later driver release.

The MIDI auto is much improved over that of the Vortex 1, though not up to the standards set by the MX200. Still, it sounds good. The MX300 supports 64 hardware MIDI voices and an additional 64 in software. Best of all, there's a connector for a waveable daughtercard, and I wasted no time connecting a Roland SCD-15 Sound Canvas daughtercard.

The MX300 also supports four-speaker DirectSound3D, if you want the fullest possible positional 3D imaging, and its A3D imaging sounds even better than that of the Vortex 1. Aureal's A3D 2.0 supports

four speakers, though the rear speakers just fill in the rear information; the front speakers still handle the bulk of the 3D audio imaging. While playing HALF-LIFE, I spent a lot of time spinning in circles to hear the positional 3D effects, and they were quite good. (Remember, of course, that different ears will localize 3D audio with varying ability.) Overall, digital audio sounds very clean, and no hissing at high gain was apparent. There's even a terrific 10-band graphic equalizer for maximum tonal control.

In Audio WinBench testing, CPU usage was a bit higher than we'd like. Audio WinBench reported that the MX300 ate 7.1 percent of a Pentium II 400MHz CPU with 16 voices (22KHz, 8-bit resolution) streaming through DirectSound3D. For comparison, Sound Blaster Live

used 3.4 percent on the same test. Still, the DirectSound imaging is very good through two speakers, and it's possible this will decrease with subsequent drivers—we saw a 30-percent drop from Diamond's beta 2 drivers to the shipping version. One other downer: The ThrustMaster Rage 3D gamepad won't work, but just about every other controller works fine.

The bottom line: The MX300 is a great buy, offering superb sound quality, solid 3D audio performance and compatibility, and impressive expandability. Now, where's my checkbook? **CGW**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Those looking for the ultimate in flexibility in a sound card.

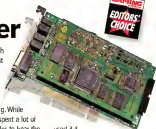
PROS: Clean digital audio, A3D support, good MIXE, highly expandable.

CONS: CPU utilization could be better.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90 or better, 16MB RAM, 15MB hard-disk space.

Price: 199
Manufacturer: Diamond Multimedia
San Jose, CA 95093 408-5345

www.diamond.com



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Force Feed-Lack

by Dave Salvatore

It seems the computer hardware industry moves in swarms. A technology gets hot, and suddenly a pack of companies are building products around it. Force feedback is just such an animal, and the swarm

has converged on force-feedback wheels, with products coming from Microsoft, Logitech, ThrustMaster, SC&T, ACT Labs, and Saitek just to name a few. Well, enter yet another offering, this time from Guillemot International. Dubbed the Race Leader Retour de Force (where it's returning from I have no idea), this wheel developed by Guillemot unfortunately looks a lot better than it actually works.

The initial warning sign is the flimsy clamping system, which doesn't do a very good job of actually holding the wheel in place. Four suction cups on the bottom of the unit do an adequate job of holding the wheel, but they don't combine well with the clamps: the result is that the wheel wiggles around at the most inopportune moments, which often leads to spectacular wrecks. The unit also arrives with the abominable wall-wart power



supply, which eats most of an AC socket. The driver installation is pretty straightforward, although it requires two reboots for the wheel to be ready.

As for the game performance, the news doesn't get much better. Taking the Retour through NEED FOR SPEED III and VIPER RACING, both force-feedback driving titles, the wheel's force rendering was barely discernible, and what forces could be felt were very weak. The wheel's all-plastic construction felt very flimsy, and its unswivel pedals made quick braking and returning to the accelerator more difficult than it should be. One cool thing the unit does have is a view-hat

that can be very handy in titles like INTERSTATE '76, in which you have to worry about where opponents are and may want to quickly look behind or to the side. In addition to working with DirectInput titles, the Retour also supports Immersion's I-Force standard, so force-feedback gaming titles that have been written using I-Force will work with it.

In a crowded field of products, the Retour fails to deliver the goods its price-point might make it appealing compared to the Microsoft force-feedback wheel, but the money you save isn't worth the performance you lose. **CGW**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Gamers who are looking for a futuristic-looking wheel.

PROS: Good-looking design.

CONS: Very weak force rendering; very flimsy clamping system; club-footed pedals; redundant buttons.

Price: \$129.99

Manufacturer: Guillemot International
 Montreal, Canada
 (514) 391-8811 (toll-free)

www.guillemot.com/usa2/retour2.html

REVIEW • YAMAHA YST-MS28

Back in Black

by Dave Salvatore

Yamaha is no stranger to the audio world, and has been in the PC speaker market for several years, delivering competent, although not outstanding speakers. With the arrival of the

YST-MS28s, that has changed. Here's a pair of solid speakers for about \$60 that deliver more volume than Cambridge SoundWorks' venerable PC Works low-cost units, and have audio quality on par with Boston Acoustics' BA-635s. That they come in black is gravy.

Setting the 28s is a snap, and because the power transformer is built into the woofer unit, there's no wall-wart to supply the unit power. The 28s use the now-conventional small satellites (each has a 2-inch driver rated at 5 watts per side) and woofer unit, which has a single 5-inch driver that gets 15 watts. The bass unit has two line-level inputs, and both satellites also plug into the bass unit. The only downsider here was Yamaha's decision to put the 1/8-inch headphone jack downstairs on the bass unit rather than on one of the satellites.

The 28s are yet another pair of small speakers that seem almost to



defy the laws of physics by producing a lot of volume from a very small package. Frequency response is good across the board, with punchy bass and clean mid-range and high-end response. Music CDs sounded excellent, with my only complaint being that on some recordings the stereo imaging felt a bit narrow. But with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, a band infamous for making speakers beg for mercy, the 28s held their own. Gaming audio sounded equally impressive. A spin through NEED FOR SPEED III and HALF-LIFE produced very good sounds throughout, and neither explosions nor weapon fire ever sent the speakers into distortion. In

fact, the 28s develop very good volume level before going into audible distortion, and while they may not get you an eviction notice, they'll still do an adequate job of annoying your neighbors in the next apartment.

I tested the 28s on a Dell Dimension R450 that has a Vortex2-based Turtle Beach Montego II, and the 28s produced good 3D imaging in HALF-LIFE, which supports the A3D positional audio standard. I also ran them through Audio WinBench, and again the 28s produced good 3D imaging in DirectSound3D tests.

If you want to spruce up your sonic setup—and want a great bargain—Yamaha's YST-MS28s are a serious contender. **CGW**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Gamers looking to perk up their existing audio setup.

PROS: Great price, solid sound, very good volume output, top-mounted volume and power controls.

CONS: Stereo imaging is somewhat narrow, headphone jack mounted on the woofer unit.

Price: \$60 (street)
 Manufacturer: Yamaha
 Copart, CA
 (714) 763-7320
www.yamaha.com

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In the Flat

by Dave Salvatore

The trend in PC speakers has been headed in two directions: smaller and cheaper. But Gallant Computer has a different approach: Use flat-panel technology and couple it with a Dolby ProLogic

converter to try to entice would-be home entertainment buffs and gamers. A different approach it is, and it works pretty well, but for games it seems like trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

Setting up the MT7s is pretty straightforward, although the fact that the center channel and bass-unit speaker are permanently attached means you wind up either screwing the sonic imaging or having to place a bass unit on top of your monitor. We opted for the latter configuration and, to the unit's credit, didn't see any interference on our test monitor's image.

The MT7s include a "universal audio adapter" (UAD), which converts two-channel stereo input to 4.1 Dolby ProLogic output. One problem with any multispeaker array setup is cable clutter, that is, having to trip over the cables used

to feed the rear-channel speakers. The other downer is a dummy UI found on the UAD, which controls individual channel volumes, balance, and imaging mode. The MT7s also have a "Surround" imaging mode and can add different reverb settings. But most audio we ran wound up having a "skip-back" echo effect that sounded awful. Staying in ProLogic mode got rid of this effect.

The sound quality isn't bad overall, but it isn't great either. The MT7s don't produce good top-end volume, and when they go into distortion it really isn't pretty. Frequency response for both music and gaming audio is mixed, with weak low-end response, but both mids and highs are pretty well defined. As for 3D audio, the units

produce good imaging, although there was something of a phase-shifter effect when running in ProLogic or Surround modes.

Gallant has produced a pretty good offering in the MT7 F/X, but for gamers, these speakers probably aren't the ideal choice, mainly because of their home-theater design bias. If you watch DVD movies on your PC and play some games, these might be worthwhile speakers, but there are better pure gaming speakers to be had for less money; this makes the MT7s a less than optimal choice. **CGW**



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers looking for a flat-panel ProLogic speaker setup.

PROS: Good positional 3D audio imaging; decent overall sound quality.

CONS: Speakers lack overall volume, no headphone jack; wall-mount power supply.

Price: \$110
 Manufacturer: Gallant Computer
 Fremont, CA 94501 408-5887
www.gal.com.com

REVIEW • AIWA SC-C78U SPEAKERS

Bass Hit

by Dave Salvatore

By now most of us have a "subwoofer" at our feet when we sit at our PC. Of course, these units aren't true subwoofers, but rather are bass speakers that handle low-end frequency chores for our audio. A small satellite/woofer

on-the-floor config has become de rigueur among low-cost speaker offerings. But if space is at a premium, you may not want a woofer on the floor. Aiwa, Sony's premium home-audio subsidiary, may have what you're looking for in its new SC-C78U speakers. These units feature a built-in bass speaker in the left channel, and they sound great. But there are a few gotchas to consider.

Setting up the units is stupid simple, and, because the power transformer is built in to the left-channel speaker, there's no wall wart to wrestle with. The 78s also feature a QSound "specializer" that widens the perceived stereo

field and a headphone jack that mutes the speakers when used. These speakers feature a four-inch bass driver that gets 14 watts, and each satellite channel gets 7 watts.

Aiwa brings a solid reputation from the home-audio world into the PC speaker market, and for pure sound quality these speakers don't disappoint. In fact, with some minor adjustments to tone down the bass volume, these units didn't clip even while playing punchy audio CD music tracks at full volume. And they sound very solid across the spectrum, from low-end frequencies to high and everything in between. Gaming audio sounded equally impressive.

But there are two flies in the ointment—one minor, the other not so minor. At higher volume settings, the units do give off some audible hiss when sitting idle. A bit more troubling is that the speakers' magnetic shielding doesn't prevent the their bass driver from causing some distortion of the monitor's image. This is one of the perils of bringing the bass driver upstairs. This wasn't a problem at lower volume levels, however.

If you're an apartment dweller not looking to rattle the rafters that often, Aiwa's latest offering might be just the ticket with their solid sound and readily accessible headphone jack. These guys will also kick out higher volume levels without a complaint, though your monitor may not be so happy. Still, this distortion occurs only at very high volume levels; the units are stellar performers otherwise. **CGW**



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers who want to upgrade their audio setup but don't want a bass speaker on the floor.

PROS: Very well sound, good bass response, no wall wart; headphone jack.

CONS: Some audible hiss when idle, some magnetic interference with monitor at higher volume levels.

Price: \$75 (street)
 Manufacturer: Aiwa America
 Mahwah, NJ 07032 973-328-3680
www.aiwa.com

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CHECK OUT THIS MEGADOSE OF REVIEWS!



Pleasant Surprises This Month

Tomb Raider III



You know you can't resist

West Front



Save that Ryan guy again

Deer Hunter II



A hunting game that gets it right

This Month CGW Editors' Choice Games Are Indicated in Yellow

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The Game Genres

Action Games that emphasize fast gameplay over story or strategy.

Adventure Games that require you to solve puzzles to move through a story line.

Classical/Puzzle Classics, or old standbys such as Chess and Minesweeper. Puzzle games emphasize problem solving without requiring players to follow a story.

Role-Playing A subset of adventure

games, these stress character development through attributes. The genre will tend to be large, the plot less linear.

Simulation Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective, including flight sims and sports simulations.

Sports/Racing A board game, means parsing action sports games, such as NBA LIVE, strategy sports games, such as FIFA FOOTBALL, and driving games,

such as NASCAR RACING.

Strategy Problem-solving and planning are the keys here. These games emphasize resource and risk management, include conflict-based so-far 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—no betas, no patches.



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.



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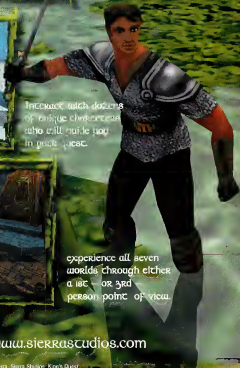
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	SPORTS	Burnout Bethesda Softworks	February 224	☆☆☆☆☆	NCAA Football 99 EA Sports	January 350
Front Office Football Seismic Software		January 345	☆☆☆☆☆	Need for Speed III Electronic Arts	January 342	☆☆☆☆☆
Golden Tee Golf Incredible Technologies		December 494	☆☆☆☆☆	NFL GameDay 99 980 Studios/Sony	December 165	☆☆☆☆☆
Grand Prix Legends Sierra Sports		January 340	☆☆☆☆☆	NHL 99 EA Sports	February 220	☆☆☆☆☆
Madden '99 EA Sports		January 346	☆☆☆☆☆	RealTime Racer Ltd Soft	December 194	☆☆☆☆☆
Metacross Madness Microsoft		December 385	☆☆☆☆☆	Tiger Woods 99 EA Sports	December 296	☆☆☆☆☆
NBA Live 99 EA Sports		February 210	☆☆☆☆☆	VR Baseball 2000 Interplay	February 222	☆☆☆☆☆
EXPLORATION/ADVENTURE	101st Airborne Empire Interactive	February 226	☆☆☆☆☆	Entrepreneur: Expedition Starlock Systems	January 380	☆☆☆☆☆
	Age of Empires: Rise of Rome Microsoft	January 354	☆☆☆☆☆	KEND 2 GT Affiliates	February 225	☆☆☆☆☆
	Aes & Alives Hudson Interactive	January 355	☆☆☆☆☆	Knights & Merchants Interactive Magic	January 316	☆☆☆☆☆
	Cesar II Sierra	January 352	☆☆☆☆☆	Lords of Magic Special Ed. Sierra Studios	February 240	☆☆☆☆☆
	Commandos Eidos Interactive	December 406	☆☆☆☆☆	People's General 551	December 414	☆☆☆☆☆
	Dune 2000 Westwood Studios	December 408	☆☆☆☆☆	TAC: Battle Tactics Casdog	December 409	☆☆☆☆☆
	Emergency Fighters for Life WordWorks	December 429	☆☆☆☆☆	War Along the Mohawk Empire Interactive	January 382	☆☆☆☆☆
	Energy Infestation Apogee	February 236	☆☆☆☆☆	Warlords III: Darklords Rising 195 Red Orb	December 412	☆☆☆☆☆

It Takes a Thief

THIEF Slips Into the Shadows for One of the Freshest Experiences in Gaming

by Lance A. Larka

When I was growing up I had a very active imagination that sometimes got me into trouble. But it also led me to read some very good books that delved into, oh, shall we say, darker aspects of society. Among my favorite book series of the time were the adventures of Gord the Rogue in the city of Grayhawk. Gord was a thief, an exceptional thief, and I yearned to be like him. But since my fear of incarceration was stronger than my fantasies, I abandoned any plans of being a superthief...until I found a package on my doorstep emblazoned with the title **THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT**.

In **THIEF** you play the part of Garrett, an established thief of no small skill, Garrett is one of those rare individuals who has the ability



SUICIDE 101 This is how *not* to succeed in **THIEF**—stepping from the shadows and leaving dead bodies in plain sight. One guard may be down, but the one rushing to the scene is certain to kill you.

to remain utterly unnoticed in a crowd. This raw talent was honed to mastery by the Keepers, a shadowy organization dedicated to keeping society balanced between the opposing sides of the righteous, quasi-religious Hammerites and the sinister forces of the Trickster. After taking advantage of their training, Garrett turned his skills toward the noble pursuit of lining his pockets with the valuables of the wealthy. Formerly wealthy, that is.

thief isn't to kill things, it's to liberate other people's property—preferably without them ever knowing that you were there. Running around killing people and making lots of noise isn't conducive to that goal. Actually, this sort of behavior would more than likely lead to your ending up a corpse, since you aren't a heavily armed marine equipped to fight off hordes of alerted enemies.

Obviously, stealth is your most valuable asset, so slinking along walls and lurking in the shadows is absolutely essential. It's easy to determine how well-hidden you are thanks to a jewel that visibly darkens according to your degree of concealment. Still, should you find the need to eliminate a set of eyes, knocking them unconscious with your black-jack or a well-placed arrow to the neck from the shadows is always an option.

The world you prey upon is dark and fore-

boding, a tantalizing mixture of magic and 19th-century technology. The charcoal-drawing cut-scenes that go with the mission briefings and the surprisingly well-done voice-overs set the mood for the evolving storyline perfectly. The maps are realistically vague, sometimes even nonexistent. The in-game 3D graphics are seamless, and the audio is simply amazing. With directional noises and hunt-

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD



APPEAL: First-person shooter fans tired of endless gaming and up for a challenge.



PROS: Novel approach to first-person games; engaging sounds; nice approach to changing difficulty settings.

CONS: Very difficult missions; gamma correction needs to be tweaked.

DIFFICULTY: Advanced.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, Windows 95/98, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard-drive space, 4MB SVGA video card, 4x CD-ROM drive, sound card.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price: \$49.95
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
San Francisco, CA
650.547.1300

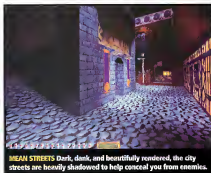
www.eidosinteractive.com

Night Stalker

Let's be clear on one thing: This is a first-person perspective game. It is not a shooter. Your goal as a



EYE ON THE PRIZE Successful slinking inside you to treasures like this booty-filled chest.



MEAN STREETS Dark, dank, and beautifully rendered, the city streets are heavily shadowed to help conceal you from enemies.



WHICH WAY IS UP? The rudimentary maps you carry can be helpful, but become pretty much useless in the face of Escher-like room design such as this.

ing "background" effects you are plunged into Garret's shadowy world and left with a pounding heart and twitchy nerves.

What Do You See When You Look My Way?

The game's missions range from liberating mansions of their riches and taking revenge for a failed assassination attempt, to bizarre missions bordering on the supernatural. Each is distinctly different and requires a variety of tactics to deal with your foes, from the mundane human guards and undead zombies to the mutant ratmen and exploding frogs. Yes, frogs. Even the dead pose a threat, as the corpses you leave behind will lead guards to sound an alarm if they're discovered. Fortunately, you can pick up and dump the bodies in dark corners or nearby sewers, washing up the telltale blood with a handy water arrow. A nice collec-

tion of other items (see sidebar) is also at your disposal.

Each type of enemy has a different AI routine. Poorly paid human guards won't investigate a sound too closely, while zombies will follow you till you're in your own grave. There are traps, puzzles, mazes, underwater tunnels to

swim, and much, much more. You won't get bored playing this game to the end.

Something that really impressed me was the variable difficulty levels. Instead of just piling on more enemies to fight through as you go up in difficulty, your mission objectives become harder. At the normal level you might have to steal a magic sword and 1000 gold, but at the expert level you might have to steal the sword and 2000 gold AND do it without killing anyone. No mean feat, let me tell you.

Sounding an Alarm

I have a few complaints about the game that mar its otherwise gleaming surface. Play balancing is a definite issue. The missions are big and tough! It makes for a steep learning curve to climb. And while the dark environment is quite well suited to the nature of the game, sometimes it's just too

dark to the point where some critical areas are pitch-black with no way to light them. At times I had to max out the gamma correction and set my monitor to its brightest setting just to see the barest details. Adding a shuttered lantern to see by would have been a definite plus.

THEEF is one of those games that excites me because it isn't just kill, maim, and destroy. You've got to scout your objective, be sneaky and

instantly deadly and generally be, well, a thief. If you're tired of DOOM clones and hungry for challenge, give this fresh perspective game a try. I was pleasantly surprised. **CGW**

Lance A. Larka is thinking that he hasn't seen the sun enough and is contemplating turning off his computer and going for a walk...if his atrophied legs will carry him.

Tools of the Trade



Sword Styled after the Roman Gladius, this is the defensive weapon of choice. Use it to block attacks while you try to get away or to slice through the critter blocking your path. Also works as a door opener when your lockpicks fail and you don't have the key.



Bludgeon This weighted club is the best way to remove a guard silently. Crush his skull from behind, then hide the body, and no one will even realize you're around.



Bow Your best weapon...and tool. Use the aiming sight as a primitive set of binoculars.



Broadhead Arrow A killing tool. With good aim one of these babies can slip through armor and kill with one shot.



Water Arrow Used to douse torches and fires and wash away bloodstains. When filled with Holy Water, your best weapon against the undead...the ones you can kill, that is.



Fire Arrow The medieval equivalent of the rifle grenade, it's another weapon that will hurt the undead. Can also be used to light torches.



Moss Arrow Used to spread a carpet of moss over noisy terrain to let you sneak past half-alert guards.



Gas Arrow Contains a powerful knockout gas to incapacitate guards.



Rope Arrow Sometimes there are no stairs where you want to go. Use this baby to string a rope up to that ledge. It's reusable if you can recover the arrow itself.



Noise Arrow Sometimes you just need to get a guard to look the wrong way. Fire one off and scoot by while he's distracted.



Flash Bomb If that guard refuses to look the other way, blind him for a few seconds with this little gem. In a pinch, these can be used instead of Fire Arrows against the undead.



Explosive Mine Drop these behind you to remove pursuers from your trail...and the limbs from their torso, too.



Gas Mine Similar to the Explosive Mine, but nonlethal.



TEMPLE OF DOOM! Survive long enough and eventually you'll make your way to the Maw of Chaos itself.

"So Skip¹ picks



up this Jaker

us he's a pebble picker⁵ with a



all over him. But in the first

drills a cushion shot¹⁰ for a



for a tweener.¹³ Last AB,¹⁴ he faces their

radio ball¹⁶ to a gopher!



gives it the one flap down.¹⁹ The

Don't pull a Merkle²¹ Hit our website:
www.highheat.com

(1) short for Skipper - the manager. (2) a player who fakes illness or injury to avoid playing. (3) New York.
(4) the ball club's advance scouts. (5) an error-prone infielder - always groping for an excuse - "a pebble made
the ball go through my legs." (6) an injured throwing arm. (7) bench jockeys - noted for a steady flow of
insults. (8) inning. (9) wild young pitcher. (10) line drive off the outfield wall. (11) a base hit. (12) a sharp low
hit. (13) a ball hit between players - usually in the gaps between outfielders. (14) at bat. (15) best pitcher on
the staff. (16) a fastball that you can hear but can't see. (17) home run ball. (18) a solid bat with black wood.
(19) home run trot with one arm stiff at the side. (20) an infallible player. (21) a bone head play.



from the Zoo.³ The Bird Dogs⁴



told

lame soup bone,⁶ right? The barbers⁷ are

stanza⁸ he faces some Lowdermilk,⁹ and

bingle.¹¹ Then he hits



a blue dart¹²



meal ticket¹⁵ and transforms a

He drops Black Betsy¹⁸ and



dude's a legit



Bill Klem!"²⁰

(Sure you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?)



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Skeptics No More

Raven Reinvents Third-person Action/Adventure, Leaving Lara in the Dust

by Scott A. May

Having been a big fan of Raven Software since 1993's *SHADOWCASTER*, I'll admit to being predisposed to liking anything brothers Brian and Steve Raloff dare to conjure. Yet nothing could have prepared me for the dizzying highs, terrifying lows, and outrageous fun of *HERETIC II*. This game is a blast.

A conceptual follow-up to Raven's original *HEXEN* and *HERETIC* titles, this is one of the few games of its kind to actually enjoy genuine plot history. Once again, you play Corvus, the tall Elfin hero in nifty leatherskin tights, who was exiled to the Outer Worlds after winning his battle with the evil D'Spand. Seemingly doomed to wander in endless



RING AROUND THE DEAD GUYS Not only are the spell effects more than a little easy on the eyes, they're quite effective at mowing down hideous freaks.

desolation, Corvus has miraculously found a way back. But things don't look the same.

Your journey begins in the walled city of Silverspring, dubbed the City of the Damned. The entire land is beset with a plague of dark, magical origins. In Silverspring, your brethren, horribly mutated and insane with bloodlust, stalk the eerily deserted streets and buildings. From here you'll run, jump, swim, climb, and creep your way through myriad locations, solving puzzles and invoking magic while fending off cursed inhabitants, all in your quest to cleanse the land.

This Is No Tomb Raider

HERETIC II is rendered in third-person perspective, à la the *TOMB RAIDER* series, but that's where the comparison ends. Lara Croft wouldn't last a day in this nightmare. Not only does Corvus have cooler weapons, he also has access to a variety of dazzling magic spells that ignite the screen with some stunning special effects.

More importantly, Corvus blows Lara away in the areas of character animation and player controls, both of which are far above

average. Optional auto-targeting takes the guesswork out of dispatching ghosts, while the fully customizable keyboard, joystick, and/or mouse controls make commanding Corvus seem like second nature. With the exception of inventory

management and weapons/spell selection, you can easily handle all sighting, movement, and attack commands with the mouse.

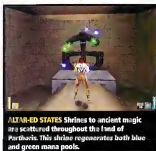
Just as Raven's *HEXEN II* in its day utilized the original *QUAKE* engine, *HERETIC II* uses a modified version of the far superior *QUAKE II* engine. Fantasy artist Brom lends his considerable talents to the game's level designs, which are gloriously complex and fantasy-rich, though realistically rendered, and enhanced by thoroughly creepy ambient sounds. The game doesn't require 3D hardware, but you'll need it to experience the game at its fullest. Running the

game on a Pentium 233 MMX machine with Diamond Monster 3D II card, I found the 3D effects and frame-rates extremely smooth.

Other cool features in the game include a drop camera, stationary look-a-bouts via MouseView, a formidable enemy AI, and breathtaking in-game cinematics. Raven also includes the level editor used to create the game, which runs as a stand-alone Windows app. Alas, neither the publishers nor the designers offer any support for this potentially fun accessory.

Solo Mio

The game's only weak link is its multiplayer deathmatches. Third-



ALTAR-ED STATES Shrines to ancient magic are scattered throughout the land of Parthica. This shrine regenerates both blue and green mana pools.

person perspective is a bit confusing in a room packed with characters. Deathmatches are also brutally fast, with most players lucky to use a fraction of their characters' abilities before losing consciousness. Your best bet is to limit the number of players involved.

But if you're sick of assembly-line, first-person sci-fi shooters, the deep, forbidding world of *HERETIC II* will seem like a breath of fresh air. Tinged with green, poisonous vapors, of course. **CGW**

Scott A. May currently finds himself blasting the non-3D past with *PERFECT GENERAL II*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★★

APPEAL: Fans of third-person 3D action.

PROS: Excellent use of *QUAKE II* engine; huge, immersive game-world; fantasy theme a welcome relief; outstanding player controls; level editor.

CONS: Deathmatches can be confusing; limited spell-casting tactics.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

REQUIREMENTS: P-166, Windows 95/98/NT 4.0, 32MB RAM, 260MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM, 2MB SVGA DirectX-compatible video card

3D SUPPORT: DSD, 3DFX, nVidia, 3D Now!

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet or LAN (2-32 players).

Price: \$49.95
 Publisher: Adventure
 Santa Monica, CA
 (310) 255-2404

www.raven.com

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"No other
game has the
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quality
of this one!"



"No lag, easy connects,
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in your ear is
INCREDIBLE!"



SkierX>> This game is **BA**
Pyromancer>> **BA?**
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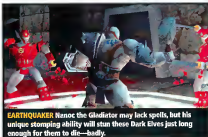


Fantasy by Reality

DARK VENGEANCE Casts a Worthy SWORD AND SORCERY Shooter

by Raphael Liberatore

DARK VENGEANCE deviates from the typical kill-or-be-killed shooter by combining the best elements of a fantasy RPG with lock-and-slash adventuring. Using 3rd person perspectives and true 3D environments, DV spins its unique action by offering three unique characters, each with a distinctive background, combat style, and special mana induced skills. This game rocks, but my biggest disappointment with DV is how quickly the game can be played to its conclusion...it's more on par



EARTHQUAKER Nanoc the Gladiator may lack spells, but his unique stomping ability will stun these Dark Elves just long enough for them to die—badly.

with the speed of an interactive comic book than that of a fantasy action game.

Gladiators, Tricksters, and Warlocks Galore

One of DARK VENGEANCE's highlights is the ability to choose one of three very different characters. If you crave gratuitous violence, Nanoc the Gladiator is your man. The easiest of the three to play, Nanoc possesses the best strength, weapons, and defenses for straight-forward combat. For an indirect, sneaky approach, Kite the Trickster possesses the necessary agility and stealth for deliberate, quick strikes. If casting spells from a distance gets your blood a-tinging, then Jetrel the Warlock should be your choice. He's the weakest and most difficult to play, but if kept a safe distance from an attacking monster he's devastating.

Adopting to a character's unique combat style is the more challenging part of DV. Hacking and slashing is easy with Nanoc, but doing the same with Kite or Jetrel will have you restarting the game often. Mastering a character's special abilities is equally crucial. Nanoc can stomp undead or use his berserker's rage against ferocious Fire Drakes; Kite can set traps, go invisible, or blind demons; and Jetrel can create explosive infernos or protective shields to aid him against legions

tastic lighting and coloring effects created by Reality Bytes' own RIVET engine, but some of DV's environments lack the richness and depth of 3D games like UNREAL. DV also suffers from the clipping problems associated with several 3D engines.

DV's biggest disappointment lies in the limited number of missions for each character. If you play all three characters however, DV plays like a complete game. Another of DV's faults is the

default keyboard interface that follows a nonintuitive "chording" system.

Attacking requires multiple key combinations that are inextricably linked to your movement keys, and jumping requires hitting both the Z and I keys in unison. No amount of remapping the keys ever feels right, and on a gamepad (the obvious control choice for this type of game) it feels even worse.

Multiplayer is one of DV's strongest features. Hacking and slashing other Warlocks and Tricksters in deathmatch and capture the flag modes is loads of fun. Finding weapons in multiplayer is part of the chaos since the weapons are character-specific.

Despite minor glitches and short character missions, DARK VENGEANCE plays smoothly, making this a game well worth playing in either single or multiplayer. Replay value is high, so grab your Thunder Hammer, Aedk Brew, or Lightning Rod and seek revenge against the Dark Elves of Rankus. It may be you who saves the day as Amagar's Chosen One. **CGW**



WE DON'T NEED NO WATER DARK VENGEANCE's rich graphics and lighting effects are really spotlighted in the attacks.

of Dark Elves. Thirty very cool character-specific weapons make the game even more of a hoot.

Each DARK VENGEANCE scenario is modified according to the character you choose. Since revenge is the name of the game, Nanoc, Kite, and Jetrel possess different motives for adventuring in the underworld of Amagar. For added gameplay, the High Council, a group of mages once feared dead, intervenes on your behalf, guiding you along your quests. Short FMVs describing encounters with the High Council add to DV's already intriguing storyline. Like most action games, DV's missions are linear, but a hint of progression surfaces when a particular goal or secret item is uncovered.

Nice Torture Chamber You Got Here

DV supports both 3Dfx and 3D sound. Visually, the game has ten-

Raphael Liberatore is a former U.S. Army Special Forces soldier who is currently enjoying an equally challenging stint as "Mr. Mom."

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



AFFAIR: Fantasy hack and slash fans who enjoy a mix of combat styles.

PROS: Fluid gameplay; rock-solid engine; three unique characters with distinct styles of play; cool weapons; superb 3D lighting effects and color; great multiplayer fun.

CONS: Limited amount of missions; hard to manage "chording" system; clipping problems; limited keyboard reconfiguration.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98; Pentium 166; 16MB RAM; 50MB hard-disk space; DirectX compatible PCI or AGP video card; DirectX-based compatible sound card; gamepads and joysticks supported.

MAC: Power Macintosh 150MHz 603c or 120MHz G4; Mac OS 7.6.3 (or higher); 24MB RAM; 50MB hard-disk space.

3D SUPPORT: DirectX9

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN; Internet (2-32 players, up to 64 in Voyager Mode)

Price: \$29.99
Publisher: GT Interactive
New York, NY
(800) 610-6810

www.gtinfo.com



"The game has robbed me totally of a social life and I am beginning to deeply resent anything that takes me away from playing it."

9 out of 10

- Games Mania

"Don't be surprised if you dream of stimpacks and frantically searching for ammo for your submachine gun."

8.5 out of 10

- Online Gaming Review

"Fallout 2 is undeniably entertaining. In fact, it's addictive."

★★★★☆

- Computer Games Online

"With a great depth of gameplay, lots of clever additions, and some really worthwhile plotlines, Fallout 2 is a terrific sequel."

- Next Generation Online

"It has been quite some time since I have played a game that I am so enthusiastic about. Check this one out—you'll love it."

- Happy Puppy

Fallout

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She Got Game

TOMB RAIDER III Is a True Sequel, Not a Glorified Expansion Pack

by Jesse Hiatt

The quandary that faced the developers at Core after the phenomenal success of *TOMB RAIDER* was similar to that of a rock band after a chart-busting first record: Should they give the public more of the same and face charges that they're a one-trick pony? Or should they follow their hearts, put out something fresh and different, lose all but the most die-hard fans, and languish in obscurity? Tough choice. Much to their publisher's delight but many gamers' dismay, Core stuck to the winning formula in *TOMB RAIDER II*. However, Core has really come through with *TOMB RAIDER III* (*TR3*), a true sequel and one that improves on every aspect without corrupting the spirit of the original.

The Whole Wide World

One of the most immediately recognizable improvements in this third-person action/adventure is the scale. What was once an entire level would now only qualify as an antechamber. Some of the outdoor levels are as stunning as they are gigantic. The selections of locales (London, the South Pacific, Nevada, and a jungle) provide your inner explorer with something new at every turn. The traditional switch, door, boulder, and spiked-pit routine is well represented. (Did the ancient cultures all around the world shop at the same tomb supply outlet?)

But there are plenty of new additions. Laser-activated machine-gun turrets, piranha-filled rivers, subway trains, and electrified fences all add to the depth of the levels, keeping them interesting all the way through. Puzzles are more frequently integrated seamlessly into the levels, with switches that radically alter entire rooms instead of simply opening a door.

The dynamics of the power-ups and secret areas have evolved as well. They now provide a sort of

fluid in-game difficulty setting: Many areas can be extremely challenging to those searching for a secret, but easily passed by for someone who'd rather move on. Overall, the game is much more nonlinear with the player free to make use of some great vehicles and to take radically different routes to complete an area.



LONDON BY MIDNIGHT Lara talks to the rooftops of her hometown in an episode that really shows off the game's enhanced 3D graphics.



ALL-TERRAIN HEROINE This ATV is just one of the new vehicles that lets Lara romp through the huge outdoor environments.

run over them on the quad bike with glee. Human opponent AI has been beefed up as well, with guards now sneaking up behind you and using cover. Unfortunately, some of the critters and bad guys (even some early bosses) occasionally get stuck in corners or on walls and thereby provide no challenge whatsoever. Any glitch-free opponent that is causing serious trouble can be dispatched quickly with the MP5 or the Desert Eagle. For this reason it's recommended that you complete the desert episode first, where Lara will pick up these weapons.

The bottom line is that if you liked *TOMB RAIDER*, you'll love *TOMB RAIDER III*. Core has done a great job of making the TR universe a visually compelling place to explore, with cinematic, situational music plus diabolical traps and bad guys thrown in for excitement. For those who can dig it, *TOMB RAIDER III* is by far the biggest and baddest of the series. **C+ [37]**

When Jesse Hiatt isn't shooting down Messerschmitts in *WWII FIGHTERS*, he's spray-painting a big blue skull and crossbones on his multiplayer victims in *HALFLIFE*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: *TOMB RAIDER* fans flexing for a bigger, better game.

PROS: Larger and prettier than the first two games; improved AI for enemies; good puzzle integration; a variety of usable vehicles.

CONS: Occasional collision detection problems; gameplay hasn't changed in any substantial way.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166MHz, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 2MB hard-disk space, 4MB SVGA video card, 4x CD-ROM drive, sound card.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price \$49.95
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
San Francisco, CA
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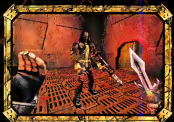
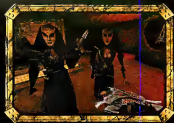
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Splatter Fest

BLOOD II Delivers Plenty of Gore, Less Innovation

by Jim Lynch

Monolith Productions is on a roll. First it released **SHOGG: MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION**, and now it has struck again with **BLOOD II: THE CHOSEN**, the sequel to the original **BLOOD**. Picking up where the previous game left off, **BLOOD II** features the antihero Caleb as he continues to wreak bloody vengeance on the Cabal. Players may play as Caleb or one of the other "Chosen." The game lets you waste everything in sight, and gives you the standard action fare of finding the right switch or key to progress to the next level.

Plenty of Ways to Kill...

BLOOD II offers a wide variety of weapons including a sawed-off shotgun, a Howitzer cannon, and a

oodoo doll. All provide a satisfying array of effects, with body parts being blown all over the place and blood spurting copiously.

One of my favorite weapons was the flare gun—there's just nothing like setting your enemies on fire and hearing them scream "It burns! It burns!" In addition to the usual weapons mayhem, you can also play soccer with the heads of freshly killed opponents.

You can carry only 10 weapons at a time, so you'll need to make careful choices. Deciding can be tough, though—I kept wishing I could build a weapons stash somewhere in the game, just in case



EVERYLL TO EVERYLL Looks like it's time to get down to some serious business with the Ancient One. It's your job to change his title to the Dead One.



MAYTAG MAYHEM This innocent bystander claims she doesn't know how this guy ended up as a mixed-color load in the washing machine...

...And People Who Need Killing

Innocent bystanders can be killed throughout the game (they can replenish your life force), and there will be times when you'll definitely want to thin their ranks—especially when you run into the woman with the nasal voice that keeps bleating, "Please, spare my life." It took me only about a half-second to designate her "Most Annoying Bystander" and blow her to smithereens.

Not all the bystanders are so innocent, though; I'm still wondering which one of them nailed the guy in the washing machine.

Unlike the first game, **BLOOD II** is a fully 3D shooter, using Monolith's

hot new LittleTech engine. The graphics are gorgeous, with lush textures and spectacular lighting effects throughout the game. Monsters are creepy and well detailed, particularly the bosses. The people look good and have a fully fleshed-out feel to them. The levels themselves alternate from dark and gloomy to well lit. The twin standouts of the level design are the airship and the cathedral.

Sound is great, with the music suiting the atmosphere of each level (especially if you've got a Surround Sound setup). The sound effects are top-notch, with each weapon making an appropriate and satisfying sound as you waste anything that moves.

It's Not All Blood and Roses

Unfortunately, **BLOOD II** has a few problems. The AI is very erratic at times, with enemies sometimes simply standing there while you shoot them. At other times, your enemies will freeze the second you leave their line of sight, making it easy to pick them off.

Multiplayer support wasn't highly functional in the initial release. No doubt Monolith will be releasing a patch to improve performance, but it wasn't a pleasant experience over a modem connection to the Internet. However, once performance improves, **BLOOD II** should be a deathmatch romp thanks to well-designed multiplayer levels and weapons that spill lots of blood.

BLOOD II also has a bit of an identity problem. The original had a much darker, horror-oriented slant. The sequel has moved that toward a more traditional corridor-shooter environment (with humorous elements). This isn't a fatal problem by any means, but it does make it harder for **BLOOD II** to distinguish itself from other action games.

BLOOD II is still a genuinely fun game, however. Shooter fans will want to give it the once-over just to see the graphics, gore, and weapons. Don't expect anything new or earth-shattering in terms of gameplay, and you won't be disappointed. **CGW**

Jim Lynch has written about software and games for PC Magazine, PC Week, Brainplay.com, and MSN.



APPEAL: Action fans interested in hot 3D graphics, cool weapons, and exploding body parts.

PROS: Beautiful 3D graphics, good selection of weapons.

CONS: AI problems significantly affect gameplay; too many "same old, same old" corridor levels.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, Windows 95/98, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, sound card.

3D SUPPORT: DX3, 3Dfx

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem (2 players), LAN/Internet (2-16 players).

Price: \$49.99

Publisher: GT Interactive
New York, NY
800.618.6547

www.gt-chaos.com



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with each other and duplicate functionality has been eliminated. Moving from one utility to another — say, from Norton AntiVirus to Norton Utilities — 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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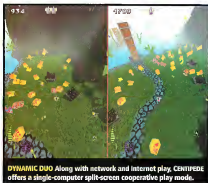
A Bug's Death

This Arcade Tribute Gets It Half Right

by Dawn Jepsen

For those waxing nostalgic for the '80s, it's been a pretty good year. Software companies have cashed in on the ever-profitable market of recapturing lost youth with re-releases and new adaptations of classic arcade games. While *ASTERIX* is essentially a color copy of the original, Hasbro Interactive, creators of *BATTLEZONE*, altered the original *CENTIPEDE* into a completely different (and greatly underappreciated) new game. *CENTIPEDE 3D* attempts to bring gamers the best of both worlds by offering a new take on the arcade game as well as a completely new "adventure" mode.

Aside from the annoyingly angled 3D screen, the Arcade mode is unremarkably true to the original. While true *CENTIPEDE* devotees may find the remake initially amusing, the experience is undiminished



DYNAMIC DUO Along with network and Internet play, *CENTIPEDE* offers a single-computer split-screen cooperative play mode.

when tilting and smoothness of play is hampered by slow response times and the need to lift the mouse just to move all the way across the game screen. So, the arcade experience is, unfortunately not duplicated. Players reminiscing over the days of blaring Joan Jett and pockets full of game tokens will, no doubt, be happier with the much more authentic version found in Microsoft's *ARCADE*.

A New View

What redeems *CENTIPEDE* is its addictive and challenging, if misnamed, Adventure mode. Really more a level-based action game, it has you act as reluctant defender of your people in a stylized, 3D world cleverly based on the mon-

sters and mushrooms of the arcade game. Your enemy, in addition to some new and nasty bugs, remains the deadly centipede.

Play begins in Weedorn, where the centipede weaves its way through a small village and blows up anything it touches. Aside from destroying the centipede, the gamer must defend the houses of the town and rescue its wee people. After you kill a few centipedes, a bridge to the next level will open up. Complete six levels, and it's off to a new land—the Ica, Iava, and sea worlds are especially challenging. Things are kept interesting through the introduction of new insects, with various destructive

properties, as well as special power-ups (the flame-thrower is a personal favorite). The levels aren't just shooting—there are puzzle elements and some rather annoying platform-jumping sequences. With 3D-odd levels, the Adventure mode offers plenty of play.

There are a number of ways to view the action. The most useful is an overhead, angled view but other views put you behind, or even in the cockpit of, the centipede-killing vehicle. *CENTIPEDE*'s 3D support is limited to 3Dfx Glide. With a non-3Dfx card, you're likely to find the graphics a bit blocky. Without 3D acceleration, the game was sluggish even at 512x384 on a Pentium II-300. At 320x200 on the minimum recommended Pentium 133, it was too jerky to be fun.

Team Destruction

CENTIPEDE's Adventure mode can be played with two players, either split-screen or via a LAN or Internet. Gameplay is cooperative: You can't shoot each other, but you can compete for best score.

While *CENTIPEDE*'s Arcade mode will likely cause you to turn off the computer in frustration and head to a real arcade, quarters in hand, the Adventure mode is worth a look. Its fast, original, challenging play and is a worthy tribute to the arcade classic. **CGW**



ARCADE ARCADE The arcade mode features updated 3D graphics, but sluggish control ruins the experience.



INFERNAL INFERNIUM In the challenging, lava-filled Infernum world, you must jump from plank to plank while being fire-bombed by dragonflies.

Making the only serious dent to Dawn Jepsen's arcade *MILLIPEDE* marathon is the opportunity to destroy her loved ones in *YOU DON'T KNOW JACK: THE RIDE*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Fans of original arcade *CENTIPEDE* action games.

PROS: Challenging game play in "Adventure" mode; numerous, colorful, challenging levels.

CONS: Disappointing arcade version is unchallenging, predictable, and offers poor control.

DIFFICULTY: Int. med./hard.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 60MB hard-disk space, 4X CD-ROM.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dfx Glide.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Split Screen, LAN, Internet (2 players); 1 CD per player.

Price: \$29.95

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive

Beverly, MA

800-486-1352

www.hasbro.com/cgworld.com



Speed Kills...Go Faster

DETHKARZ Takes the Road Rage Exit Into Heavy Traffic

by Pete Scisco

The title of this speed-demon blastfest suggests a radical combat mix of *Mad Max* (publisher Melbourne House is from down under; after all) and West Coast gangsta rap. But in reality this action racer is a 3D grown-up version of MARIO KART 64 with a nod to the classic WIPEDOUT.

DETHKARZ players climb behind the wheels of futuristic rocket sleds on wheels, then race to the finish line, along the way they grab power-ups and weapons to help beat the clock, wreck their opponents, and take the checkered flag.

There's plenty of "pop" to this game, but that doesn't make this some "Coca-Cola 600." You won't spend any of your time in the garage adjusting spoilers, brakes, or any of that other fancy stuff.

Who needs to change gear ratios or aerodynamics when you can eliminate your opponent's competitive edge with a pulse cannon?

Get Your Motor Running

Instead of customizing your car for weather, track conditions, or other variables, you start out by picking a car that suits your racing style (or your level of road rage). You don't need the fastest car to win, nor do you absolutely need the most heavily armored. What



CATCHING SOME SERIOUS AIR DETHKARZ' incredible speed and looping tracks will lead to many high-flying jumps like this.



FREE-FALLING The imaginatively designed racetracks are great to look at, but if you fall off too frequently, you'll be bringing up the rear of the pack in no time.

you do need are control, nerves, and good aim.

If you sustain damage because of missile fire or collisions, you can drive through pit row to boost your car's energy level (don't stop—you don't even have to slow down). Alternatively, you can pick up a repair booster for an instant fix.

The 12 cars featured in this game fall into four classes, each designed along a different strategy with its strength balanced against a weakness. For example, the fastest-accelerating car can career out of control in the corners. Likewise, driving a heavy "killer car" that can take a lot of punishment is like steering a lumber truck through a Grand Prix road track.

After you pick a car, you can choose a quick race in arcade mode or practice laps in a time trial—each is a great way to try out new wheels. The actual racing season takes place over four courses, each of which has three different lengths. You start with short races and unlock the longer tracks if you finish on top in the season standings.

Head Out on the Highway

Tracks vary in difficulty. The Pole track is probably the easiest. The fact that you're racing on ice doesn't seem to affect your traction (nor does it eliminate the squeal of tires). The Red Planet

track is the most difficult, with a wicked jump and a hard-to-read track that makes it tough for you to anticipate curves.

Through it all, DETHKARZ sticks to its arcade action like your grandfather sticks to the seat of his Olds. Careening off the track won't kill you, instead, you're reconstituted back in place with only a small loss of time.

Speed and handling are essential to winning, but a lot of the real fun comes from putting a torpedo missile up the tailpipe of a competitor. When you see your opponent disappear in a beautiful iridescent blue mushroom of an explosion, you feel like a winner no matter what place you're currently holding.

The sound effects, the 3D video-accelerated graphics—all are designed to totally immerse you in the experience and make DETHKARZ irresistibly addictive. Whether you win or lose, you'll find yourself back at the starting line, eager to improve your standing and earn hidden cars and unlock other tracks. Go ahead. Take your best shot. **CGI!**

Pete Scisco's wallet and insurance agent have conspired to keep him off the go-kart circuit—but you ought to see his Hot Wheels track.



APPEAL: Speed freaks with guns.
PROS: Quick starts and lots of arcade action, shimmering graphics, good sound.
CONS: No way to customize your car.
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space, 3x CD-ROM, 4MB DirectX-compatible accelerator, sound card, supports force-feedback joysticks and steering wheels.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D, 3DFx.
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem, serial connection (2 players), LAN (2-8 players), 1 CD per player.

Price: \$29.99
 Publisher: Melbourne House, Melbourne, Australia
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(O)bvious (D)oppelgänger (T)itle

Try as It Might, O.D.T. Can't Escape Being a Weak TOMB RAIDER Clone

by Kenneth Johnson

What hath Lara Croft wrought? Store shelves crowded with wheezing TOMB RAIDER aspirants, hoping to capture the minds and wallets of gamers, that's what. Into this jumble you can toss O.D.T., another action/adventure, third-person, platform-jumping game. O.D.T. does distinguish itself by providing multiple characters and by incorporating character experience and skill development systems.

Special Delivery

The game's atmosphere borrows heavily from Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The opening FMV depicts the flight of the dirigible Nautilus as it struggles



DON'T PUSH Some limited character interaction will fill you in on objectives and not you a power-up or two, but the same characters can get in your way and force you off a platform.

through a storm over uncharted territory. In its hold, in a glass container, the Nautilus carries a magical, glowing green pearl that may hold the cure to an epidemic. But magnetic interference makes the pearl go wacky, causing the airship to crash into a towerlike structure. The tower teems with mutants who kidnap the captain, steal the pearl, and shatter its container. It is up to you to find the pearl, restore the container, and collect 30 bottles of gas to power the airship's escape.

The moody atmosphere around the mysterious tower is effective, but there are gaps in continuity. For example, the storm rages fiercely on the rooftop levels, but if you descend a bit into the structure you can look out from a ledge into a clear, moonlit sky.



SEEN IT BEFORE O.D.T. gives the requisite nod to all those 3D buzzwords, but the stilted, uninspired effects, textures, and environments make you wonder if the third D is Dull.

There are four crew characters to choose from, each with different ratings in armor, weapon control, and magic skills. As you progress, you gain experience that you distribute among the skills. In addition to affecting your performance, skill levels determine when you can use certain power-ups that increase the strength of your weapons or give you access to magical spells. Once you learn a spell you will need to find mana power-ups to cast it. Other power-ups include



BIG AND STUPID O.D.T.'s monsters are adequately big and threatening, but their AI is so poor they're easily dispatched.

ammo for your weapons, weapon and armor upgrades, and energy.

As in TOMB RAIDER, your character is best controlled with a gamepad. Jumping from platform to platform isn't hard. Although I died many times due to a fall, I could not blame it on poor character control—sometimes I was forced off a platform by crew members who wouldn't get out of my way. You'll have to be careful if you expect to get through all eight levels to restore the pearl.

For a game aspiring to be TOMB RAIDER, O.D.T. suffers from less fluid character animation, uninspired visuals, and technical glitches like visible seaming. At times, the camera view will be blocked if your character is too close to a wall. Several times I missed a jump or fell due to the view being blocked in this way. Save points are few and far between, leading to repeating sections of a level ad nauseum.

Enemy AI is lacking as well. Monsters will stand still until you fire upon them. Their reactive attacks can be nasty—until you step over an invisible "triggering" line. After that they'll leave you alone until your next onslaught.

O.D.T. will much likely appeal

mostly to hard-core fans of third-person platformers. It is way better looking than *SPACE BUNNIES MUST DIE* but beyond the character development and spell casting features, O.D.T. is otherwise distinctly tired. **GCW**

Kenneth Johnson was made into a vampire in the late

14th century. When he's not searching for his family underneath the cemeteries of Paris he's playing *TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSIN*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers who love third-person action but have already played TOMB RAIDER II and HERRICK II.

PROS: Good character control, innovative character experience and skill system.

CONS: Nothing new as far as gamepads, monster AI is rather weak, back-story is somewhat contrived, no in-game save, pales next to similar games.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 151MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM, DirectSound compatible sound card.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D, 3Dx.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price: \$44.99
Publisher: Progress
Irvine, CA
(951) 262-4100
www.pjgrrink.com

"I NOTICED STARSIEGE RUNNING AND
WENT IN FOR A CLOSER LOOK. OH MY GOD...
WHAT I SAW WAS BREATHTAKING."

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H.E.D.Z.

★★★★★

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: \$29.95
www.hasbro.com

Although H.E.D.Z. is a third-person over-the-shoulder shooter, I hesitate to even invoke the names of other well-known games that use this vantage point because they don't belong on the same page as a discussion of this game. H.E.D.Z. has a long list of things that are not very good. It seems that Hasbro believes that you



and I will buy just about anything, and this turkey fits in perfectly with that strategy.

The nausea begins the instant you open the manual. Page two details a tortured, head-thieving premise so incredibly cheeseball that anyone pitching the idea to even a grade Z Hollywood executive would have been escorted to the city limits in a hearse. It goes downhill from there.

"Gameplay" consists of running around shooting aliens in the "Head Extreme Destruction Zone," trying to grab their "heads" as they pop off. The environments (even with a 3Dfx card) look cheesy, the characters look cheesy, and even my four-year-old son, who will play just about anything and really likes cheese, turned his nose up at this one.

In fact, I'll summarize with a quote from the boy—"Daddy, that game is dumb."

Son, you got that right. —Greg Fortune

Limb from Limb

★★★★★

Publisher: Interplay
Price: \$19.95
www.interplay.com

DIE BY THE SWORD was an intriguing action game marred by a short single-player quest and an interface, dubbed VSM, that was both flexible and aggravating. Now, with the release of the LIMB FROM LIMB expansion pack, games can engage in more hacking mayhem.

Playing as Maya, you'll go on another short (six-level) quest to vanquish the Black Widow. The main additions to the game come in letting you play as different people. Also, Maya herself has a choice of what weapons she wants to use in her quest, whether they be a mace and shield or a pair of daggers. You get two new enemies to fight in the single-player quest, but you can replay the quest as any of the enemies from the original game, which provides for some variety. Of course, the quest doesn't make as much sense, and you lose a lot of the somewhat amusing commentary, but it's kind of fun to try to get through the game as either a lowly lebboid or a giant mantis.

Also, for multiplayer, the expansion gives a set of new enemies to fight in, in addition to two new modes: King of the Hill and Ogre Hockey. Internet play is still a bit laggy though, so it's best to use a LAN for these matches.

Ultimately, the expansion is for diehards. The quest is still extremely short, the same quirks with the interface are still present, and the same textures are used throughout the levels. If you liked hacking people to bits in the original, then spend the 20 bucks for this. But if



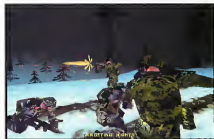
you weren't into this game very much in the first place, this expansion won't make you a fan. —Thierry Nguyen

Spec Ops:Ranger Team Bravo

★★★★★

Publisher: Ripcord Games
Price: \$19.95
www.ripcordgames.com

The thing I dislike most about single-player first-person shooter is that I have to do all the work myself and constantly having to look over my shoulder is just too much trouble. SPEC OPS: RANGER TEAM BRAVO pulls the pin on this heavy burden by adding the much missed multiplayer component to the original SPEC OPS: RANGERS LEAD THE WAY (though you'll need the original game to play the add-on).



The pack expands your arsenal of playability options with the standard free-for-all deathmatch, team-on-team deathmatch, cooperative single player mis-

sions, and team vs. team single player missions, in which one side gets to assist the "enemy" AI in preventing the Rangers from completing their mission.

New tours of duty include Bosnia, Iraq, and Vietnam '68. It's too bad you can only play these campaigns while connected to the Internet, even in single-player mode. And when you play as "enemy" in multiplayer mode you look and dress just like them—but you're carrying U.S. equipment.

The in-house player lobby works great for setting up games. Finding opponents and communicating during the game is a breeze. I was coordinating attacks like I had IM on my desktop. However, some annoying bugs persist, such as sticking your head through objects, and weapon fire frequently fails to track high threat targets when it locks onto faraway enemies — Lance A. Larka *CGW*

Bang Bang, Shoot Shoot

Action Gaming With None of That Messy Thinking to Get in Your Way

Future Cop: L.A.P.D.

★★★★★

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Price: \$19.99
www.ea.com

FUTURE COP: L.A.P.D. is for all you gamers who liked the menacing ED-209 robot from the *Robocop* movies.

A fast-paced, arcade-style third-person shooter, *FUTURE COP* lets you control the heavily armed XG-1 Alpha Walker throughout various locales in future L.A. Don't scoff because this is a PlayStation port; it's actually successful and even better than its console counterpart thanks to Direct3D graphics and more multiplayer maps.

You can play this game in either *Crime War* or in *Precinct Assault* mode. *Crime War* is the straightforward action segment where you play through various missions, fighting criminal scum. *Precinct Assault* is the action/strategy hybrid where you and one opponent each control a base, vying to capture neutral factories and turrets while making units to invade each other's bases. This multiplayer mode is actually a lot of fun, as you frantically run around the field creating allies and warding off your opponent's forces. This makes *FUTURE COP* feel like two separate games for the price of one.

The main drawback is that the game is too short: *Crime War* only consists of eight missions, and there are about as many *Precinct Assault* maps. A competent action gamer can blast through this game pretty fast. Also, since this is a console port, there are no in-mission saves. All in all, this is a fun little action blast, and for \$20, you could do worse. —Thierry Nguyen

Montezuma's Return

★★★★★

Publisher: WizardWorks
Price: \$19.99

www.wizardworks.com

If you're as old as I am (wheeze) you might recall a game called *MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE*. Well, *Montezuma's* back in 3D, with improved graphics and sound and a less unfortunate name: *MONTEZUMA'S RETURN*.



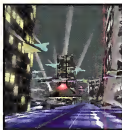
A first-person, 3D platform game, *MONTEZUMA'S RETURN* challenges you to run, jump, and climb your way through a faux Mayan temple populated by witch doctors, bouncing skulls, and leopard people... just like the first game. Winning a level is mostly a matter of logic and well-timed leaps, but you must sometimes whack a baddie. You can kick and punch—you even see your goofy-looking arms and legs flailing around—but that's the closest you'll ever get to a weapon. Nevertheless, you must defeat each level's boss, either by a judicious combination of kicking and running away or by methods more devious, such as chucking his fireballs back at him.

Rooms are stark, though good-looking, with plenty of colored lighting effects and fine, up-close texturing, at least in 3Dfx mode.

Control was surprisingly squirrely—it felt more like wheeling around on a unicycle than running and walking—and the miserly save games you repeat more of a level than you should when you slip into some lava. Still, *MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE* delivers good, old-fashioned fun in a shiny 3D package. —Mark Clarkson

constant action, unrealistic flight models, and the relentless pressure of an expiring timer.

Missions take place on five worlds, ranging from desert canyons to the glass canyons of future Chicago, and have you zipping over mountains, through



tunnels, and underwater. Objects are simple but convincing, with clean textures and, in some cases, animation—well, at least on a Voodoo².

Thanks to plentiful power-ups, you'll take out the endless procession of baddies with cannons, lasers, plasma beams...even pocket nukes. Everything, including trees, explodes with a satisfying crash and fireball. Shoot a building in Chicago and you'll hear glass shattering and see shards flying. Destroy a civilian village and an old man emerges to shake his cane at you.

BARRAGE runs great on Voodoo and Voodoo² boards, but my Voodoo Rush seemed to have some personal issues with the game engine.

Missions are plenty difficult—even on Easy it's a struggle to complete them before the clock runs out. Unfortunately, there just aren't enough missions. Luckily, *BARRAGE* expands its replayability by going head-to-head, if only in deathmatch mode. —Mark Clarkson.



Barrage

★★★★★

Publisher: Activision
Price: \$26.95
www.activision.com

BARRAGE captures the look and feel of an arcade first-person shooter thanks to terrific-looking 3D environments,

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Big Race USA



Publisher: Empire Interactive
Price: \$34.95

www.empire-us.com

Empire Interactive has now firmly established its place as the Bally of PC pinball games. PBD PINBALL: BIG RACE USA, isn't just a pinball game. It's more a pinball machine simulator.

BIG RACE USA simulates only a single table, but it does so with exacting precision. Ball physics—already nearly indistinguishable from the real thing in previous PBD PINBALL games—have been fine-tuned even more. The ball no longer occasionally rockets across the table at unbelievable speed. Flipper action is superb. You can alter the slope of the table, and even adjust the friction to simulate a new, old-but-well-maintained, or neglected machine.

While this isn't a recreation of a real table, you'd be hard-pressed to prove it. The 3D-rendered table is viewable in up to 24-bit color at resolutions up to 1600x1200 (stay at 1024x768 or below, though, or multiball play will crawl). The design is excellent, with 44 distinct table elements including pop-up plastic cars, Magna-loops, ramps, loops, and four flippers. Hit the proper combo and you even play a simple video game on the dot-

matrix score display.

If you've ever wanted to own a real pinball machine, you'll marvel at the machine's operator's menu, which lets you micromanage everything from bonus times to difficulty levels. If you usually play pinball purely by keeping

the ball in motion, you'll appreciate the tour mode, which will guide you through the various bonuses and play modes. There's even free Internet multiplayer play.

Downsides? The music sounds like it should be backing up a live scene in *Emmanuelle VII*, and the table features an electronic plunger, rather than manual—not much to complain about. If you buy only one pinball game this year, buy BIG RACE USA. —Denny Atkin

Microsoft Pinball Arcade



Publisher: Microsoft
Price: \$34.95

www.microsoft.com

You might look at Microsoft's PINBALL ARCADE and think it's a much better deal than BIG RACE USA. After all, you get



seven tables on one CD. However, what this collection adds in breadth, it lacks in depth.

If you're a serious pinball fanatic, you'll probably dig the chance to experience tables such as the 1931 flipperless *Baffle Ball*, 1947 *Humpty Dumpty*, which features

rows of flippers along each side of the table; and 1950 *Knockout*, with its ball-activated mechanical boxing ring. If you're not a pinball fanatic, however, you'll probably find these tables mere curiosities that grow boring after a few plays.

The other four tables fare better. The 1963 *Slick Chick* table and Bicentennial-themed 1976 *Spirit of 76* are recreations of the simple mechanical tables we 30-somethings enjoyed in the dark days before *SPACE INVADERS*. The best tables in the game are the 1982 *Haunted House*, the first three-level, six-flipper table; and the 1992 *Cue Ball Wizard*, which features an actual pool cue ball and 8-ball on the table.

Physics are good for the most part, although occasionally the ball takes off at seemingly ludicrous speed. Resolution is adjustable up to 1024x768, although ball movement can get jerky at highest detail even on a fast machine. Although the functionality of each machine is replicated well, you can't access any of their setup modes.

PINBALL ARCADE includes a few entertaining tables and a few of purely historical value. It's not a bad collection, but as I said before, if you buy only one pinball game this year, buy BIG RACE USA. —Denny Atkin



Unlike *CENTPEDE* and Activision's own *BATTLEZONE*, this remake adds little but flashy visuals to the original design.

ASTERIODS' plot mirrors the original, with your ship spinning around the screen blasting big rocks into little, while fighting the occasional enemy ship. You fire, thrust, and, when in trouble, activate your shields or hyperspace and risk reappearing inside a rock.

While gameplay is essentially unchanged, there are new features. You can snag power-ups for additional lives or secondary weapons, like homing missiles, mines, or a ramming shield. And the classic saucer is part of a fleet of enemies that includes 11 other ships, each with unique attacks. There's also variety in the asteroids themselves, such as crystal asteroids that can regenerate. There are 75 levels in all, broken into five zones. Each zone has unique obstacles, such as a black hole or solar-flare explosions, but the levels within the zones are all similar. *ASTERIODS* is very fast-paced, and even at the easiest of the three skill levels it's challenging. Two players can compete on the same PC, but there's no network or modem play.

The 3D graphics, music, and sound are well done, although more variety in backgrounds would have been nice. However, the minor additions to the game aren't enough to make anyone but a die-hard fan of the original want to sit through 75 levels of spin-and-fire. —Dawn Jepsen

Asteroids



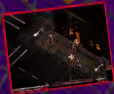
Publisher: Activision
Price: \$39.95

www.activision.com

It may have 3D graphics, but Activision's updated version of *ASTERIODS* still has gameplay that's strictly two-dimensional.

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Not Just a Pretty Face

Jane's WWII Sim Offers More Than Dazzling Visuals



by John Nolan

Does it if you will, but first impressions are usually based on looks. And looks are the first thing you'll notice about Jane's WWII FIGHTERS, which sets a new standard in visual excellence. The aircraft exteriors are exquisitely beautiful; the instrument panels are accurate and legible; sky, sun, and cloud effects are superb; explosions, flames, and flak are awesome. Those a bandit and pieces fly as holes appear in his airframe. Crashes are spectacular. Nobody does it better.

Of course, dazzling looks don't make for a great game, and WWII FIGHTERS isn't perfect. Its missions have a bit of a canned feel, and even the graphics aren't perfect. Cockpit frameworks don't live up to the very high standards of the

instrument panels and exteriors. The terrain is really quite plain, with lots of snow-covered turf and brown pebbly forest texture with a few polygonal trees sticking up. And while the game is a visual feast, you'll need plenty of CPU horsepower and a 3D card to get a ticket to the show.

Better Than You Think

There are seven flyable fighters—the P-51, P-38, P-47, Spitfire Mk IX, Bf-109G6, FW-190A8, and the ME-262A—that await your steady hand. In addition, seven computer-controlled multiengine planes flesh out the missions: the B-17, B-24, B-26, C-47, Arado-234, HE-111, and the JU-88.

The adjustable flight modeling spars the range from rookie to pro. The Easy model will continue a slow vertical climb with full power even at 60 knots—welcome to Arcade City. However, the Hard setting is more demanding, with better drag, some torque effect, a bit of inertia, and simple stall/tip characteristics. Here, the aircraft require a gentle hand and begin to show some characteristic distinctions between types. The models are detailed enough to provide challenging play and should satisfy all but the most hard-core purists. Jane's needs to add an input scaling routine for the controls, however, since some joysticks don't allow full control deflection.

The weapons tilt a bit strong in terms of killing power. A 15-round burst from the twin 13mm guns on a Focke-Wulf will tear the wing off of a B-17. Still, kills don't come all that easy and diving into a multi-plane furball often sends you hunting for the Revive key.

The cockpits are stunning, but the frames seem overly wide and block quite a bit of your view of the action. There are numerous visual aids for tracking targets,



FLAK TRAP When those puffs start blooming, change altitude quickly and head for clear skies. Flak gunners are quite competent, as evidenced by the destruction of this P-51.

including a pedlock, a mouse-controlled fully virtual cockpit, and snap-view keys. The joystick view hat inexplicably pans the view—useless in combat—instead of snapping it, but that's supposed to be addressed in a patch that should be available now.

Sheep and Wolves

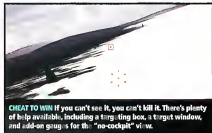
There are four AI skill levels, from Rookie to Ace. At all levels, Lieutenant Intel flies his plane smoothly, maximizing performance and rarely stalling. In fact, the AI pilot control stick skills are nearly flawless, and you'll be hard-

pressed to match its golden hands. The AI also seems to accelerate like a banshee no matter which plane it flies, so learn to use lead turns.

The main difference between AI levels seems to be in tactics and



TARGET FIXATION It's easy to misjudge altitude when you're not in the full-cockpit view. Use the Y key to add an altimeter in the corner of the screen.



CHEAT TO WIN If you can't see it, you can't kill it. There's plenty of help available, including a targeting box, a target window, and add-on goggles for the "no-cockpit" view.



APPEAL: World War II air combat fans—beginner and experienced.

PROS: Superb aircraft graphics and 3D effects; good flight model with variable enemy AI; easy fun multiplayer connections.

CONS: Weak documentation; campaigns lack immersion; graphics.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, Win 95/98, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space, 6x CD-ROM, 3D accelerator.

3D SUPPORT: Direct 3D, OpenGL, 3Dfx G4GL.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2-8 players), 1 CD per player.

Price: \$49.95

Publisher: Jane's Combat Simulations
Redwood City, CA
8550 428-1900

www.janes.com





GROUND POWDER A German tank falls victim to an Allied bomb during one of the many ground-attack missions you can fly in Jane's WWII FIGHTERS.



JUST MY SIZE This B-17 shows lots of detail and color at 500 feet. They at times have been upped a bit so that you can make target identifications at realistic distances.

aggressive attitude. The lower levels of AI make tactical mistakes that you can capitalize on; sometimes, they even auge in when doing low-altitude maneuvers. Rookies seem timid and may even try to run from a fight. The Aces generally use smart tactics—these guys are “fangs out,” with a spot for your name waiting on their canopy rail.

Enemy AI isn't selectable in the campaigns, but you'll know a rookie from an ace in the first minute of combat. In user-designed and Quick Missions, you can choose the AI level for each plane.

Into the Fire

Gameplay modes range from instant action to an extended campaign. The Fly Now mode throws you into a gourmet-type mission in a P-51, with continuing waves of enemies. It's fun once or twice, but you'll soon want to graduate to the Quick Mission mode. Here, you pick aircraft, loadouts, and flight conditions for up to eight flights of four aircraft. This opens a doorway to dozens of different combat situations. The 35 Single Missions include training and operational

flights. These help you build experience to qualify for the full campaign.

Campaign mode features air operations during the Battle of the Bulge, spanning about two weeks in December 1944. Both Axis and Allied sides are playable, with about 25 missions in either campaign. Sorties are scripted, although you can edit plane types and a few other details in the Mission Builder before launch. The campaigns are very impersonal; since there's no way to create a “hero” persona, there's no scoring, and no medals are awarded. Missions are simply Pass/Fail.

While you'll fly with wingmen, you can only listen to them—there are no wingman commands. It's every man for himself, and you'll wish you could at least scream for help when the Focke-Wulf flight decides to dine on your lonely carac. Overall, the game has a detached atmosphere, dearly lacking the immersion that characterizes EUROPEAN AIR WAR.

If you tire of the scripted missions, the comprehensive Mission



FLYING BLIND Damage modeling is sophisticated. Flak trashed this instrument panel and your view out the windshield, but cheaters can turn off the cockpit and get a clear view.

Builder will let you create your own. It gives you access to all the ground vehicles, aircraft, and victory conditions that the Jane's designers used for the built-in missions, so some interesting sorties should appear on the Net soon.

In fact, because ground units fight it out under AI control, history buffs can choose from the actual units available during the battle and re-create scenarios to their heart's content. Flying the mission on autopilot lets you watch the battle unfold; the computer will do all the heavy lifting while you enjoy the visuals.

The Jane's Treatment

WWII FIGHTERS throws in some great historical background info. Video interviews with six aces, a hangar full of interactive briefings on the planes (complete with in-flight videos), a battle history, ground force descriptions, and more are available on the sim's two discs. Wonderful WWII-era

Deep Multiplayer

If you want to up the immersion factor, you can play WWII FIGHTERS with—and against—humans. Although free-for-all furballs are available, you can actually fly any Quick Mission, Single Mission, or custom mission created in the Mission Builder. This lets you re-create actual historical missions, such as bomber escorts, and fly them from takeoff to touchdown—a welcome change from mindless deathmatch combat.

Jane's thoughtfully provides an organized Web site matchmaking service at www.janescombat.net. With a few mouse clicks, up to eight players can quickly get airborne, as enemies, squadron mates, or a mix. Best of all, there's no charge, and the system works well. It's a great place to meet other fanatics and exchange tips and tricks. You can also bypass the Jane's site and play over the Internet or on a LAN.

background music is the icing on the cake. The paper documentation tends to be a bit skimpy, though, giving just the bare bones of how things work. Expect to spend a little time stumbling around figuring out the game's workings.

WWII FIGHTERS has technology legs to carry it into the future—screen size options run up to 1600x1200 in 32-bit color, and the sim supports D3D, Glide, and OpenGL. There's plenty of room for the sim to grow into luster PCs as they become available. Given the visual artistry, flight modeling, and AI, only the thin documentation and the lack of immersion in the campaigns emerge as significant gripes against this otherwise top-notch simulation. **CWW**

John Nolan firmly believes that “jets are for kids” and that “for two” should mean “she has a girlfriend.” EUROPEAN AIR WAR and WWII FIGHTERS are about to cause his first divorce.



Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robot Pods

You Can Teach an Old Pod New Tricks, But Can It Learn to Play Alone?

by Chase Dahl

The recipe for fighting-robot games seems to follow the same time-tested formula: Start with big, anthropomorphic machines. Next, provide a cornucopia of weapons and equipment. Finally, toss in the standard torso-twist controls, and let the best robot win. But if you add in a splash of battlefield logistics and supply management, you end up with something a little special.

CYBERSTRIKE 2 is an updated version of CYBERSTRIKE, a venerable, online-only, Mecha-combat game. While CYBERSTRIKE 2 has essentially the same mechanics as its ancestor, it has a new look with enhanced, hardware-accelerated graphics. Solo play is now possible, with two single-player campaigns of 25 missions each. Finally,

improvements have been made to the game's multiplayer features.

Guns and Butter

On the surface, CYBERSTRIKE 2's gameplay mirrors other Mecha games, but there are significant differences. The game's vehicles, called Pods, are relatively small but quick and able to effortlessly bound across battlefields. This mobility, combined with rapid weapon rates-of-fire and projectile speeds, results in frantic, fire-and-move combats that rarely degenerate into the clichéd MECHANICRIM circle-and-shoot matches.

These nimble furies have their limitations. A Pod's main weapon and shields rely on stored power that is quickly depleted in combat. And, thanks to its small size, a Pod cannot carry many secondary weapons. As a result, even short battles lead to Pods that are drained and vulnerable.

Fortunately, resupply is available from ships hovering above the battlefield. They can be called in to drop energy towers as well as equipment. In the single-player game, you can only call on resources that you have in stock before the battle. In multiplayer, you must purchase resupply using credits earned through combat.

Having additional equipment on call is useful, but it's the energy tower management that is vital to CYBERSTRIKE 2's strategy. Towers provide an infinite amount of power to nearby friendly Pods, but they are defenseless, and cannot be moved once placed. Most multiplayer combats focus around contested energy towers, giving tactics a tight, territorial flavor as opposed to aimless deathmatching.



SCRATCH ONE TIN CAN CYBERSTRIKE 2's visuals have definitely improved over its previous version.



TAKE IT OUTSIDE Battles take place inside, outside, and around detailed structures.

Bring a Friend...and Money

The single-player game is solid, but nothing special. It revolves around several warring factions on an isolated, resource-poor planet. The missions are nicely presented, with animated cut scenes and briefings, but tend toward straightforward slugging matches that de-emphasize the game's rich variety of equipment and tactics. During all of this, the player is tasked to manage his squad's resources in the style of MECHANICRIM 2: MERCENARIES.

Multiplayer is the heart of CYBERSTRIKE 2. Adding human players—up to 32 in an arena—turns CYBERSTRIKE 2 into a far

more interesting game that requires teamwork and planning. Multiplayer games are easy to set up, can be entered and exited at will, and are fairly lag-free even with a 28.8 modem connection.

Unfortunately, multiplayer is also where CYBERSTRIKE 2 stumbles slightly. To play with other people, you have to use Simtronics' server. In addition, if you want full access to all of CYBERSTRIKE's online features, you have to sign up with Simtronics at a cost of \$9.95 a month. Otherwise, you're limited to just a few arenas and 10 Pod modules.

I, CyberPod

Even with its new accelerated graphics, CYBERSTRIKE 2's bland, single-player feel will definitely keep it behind next-generation heavyweights like HEAVY GEAR 2 and STARSIEGE. However, its clever multiplayer action provides enough variety and challenge to keep even jaded gamers interested—provided they're willing to pay. **C&G**

Chase Dahl has fallen victim to the same HALF-LIFE game-lock that nearly resulted in half this issue's pages being left blank.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Giant robot fans looking for faster action with a twist.

PROS: Strong, polished multiplayer mode that has a lot of variety; excellent graphics.

CONS: Single-player game doesn't show all the game's depth; nonsubscribers get heavy multiplayer limitations.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, Windows 95/98, 32 MB RAM, 70 MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3D card.

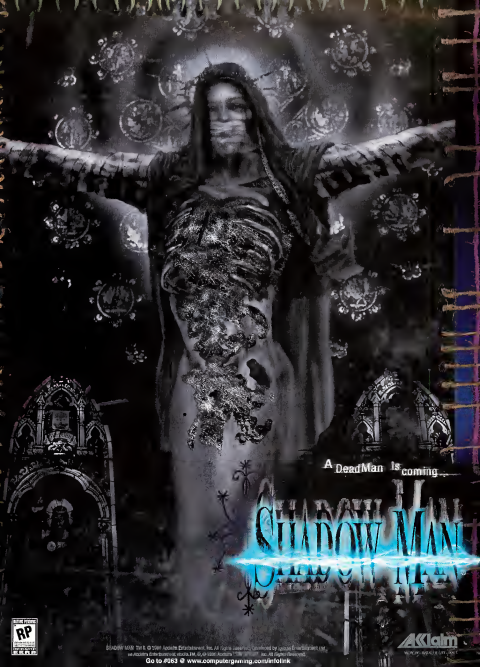
3D SUPPORT: DirectX3, 3Dfx Glide.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet through Simtronics servers.

Price: \$34.99
 Publisher: 502 Studios and Simtronics
 Reason: CIG, CA
 (800) 438-3702

www.502studios.com





A Dead Man is coming.

SOUL REAVER II SHADOW MAN



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Prince of Daggerfall

REDGUARD Is an Intelligent, Swashbuckling Action/Adventure

by Thierry Nguyen

Every month, the CGW editors puzzle over where to put the increasing number of cross-genre games. When a new copy of **HEROES OF UNREAL TOMB RAIDING JEDI MECHS** comes in, we're left arguing about how it's a sim, adventure, action, and strategy game all at once. Such is the case with Bethesda's **REDGUARD**. Instead of making its usual massive RPG, Bethesda has dared to blur the line between action and adventure this time around. Though it is ultimately a very cool adventure game, there is enough action that it will undoubtedly turn off those adventure gamers with less-than-stellar reflexes.

Back to Basics

The setting for **REDGUARD** is Stros M'kai, an island in the Hammerfell province in the world of Tamriel. You're playing Cyrus, a Redguard mercenary and the "prodigal son" of Hammerfell. You fled Stros M'kai because you killed your sister's husband in a drunken rage, and you've been wandering the world ever since. Now, a friend of yours writes a letter telling you that your estranged sister, Izara, has been missing for the past three months. Hence you sail back to Stros M'kai to investigate her disappearance.

Since **REDGUARD** takes place in Tamriel, the design team had the bonus of a fleshed-out fantasy world to use for the background. The plot starts simply enough, but there's a heavy dose of political intrigue that makes it a lot deeper than it initially appears; overall it's a good break from the hackneyed "evil-demons-sweep-the-land" fantasy plot. Also, more kudos should go to the writers, because they've written some great and intelligent fantasy-style dialogue for **REDGUARD**. There's a lot of dialogue, too; at times equalling or even surpassing the amount found in the original **GABRIEL KNIGHT**.

A True Mix and Match

If **REDGUARD** were a movie, it would undoubtedly star Errol Flynn. Essentially, it's a semi-traditional adventure game and



LOOKING GOOD With 3D acceleration, the gameworld looks much more vibrant and detailed than the earlier Xingne games.

a heavy dose of swashbuckling action, with the atmosphere of such films as the Zorro series or *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. It features adventure gaming elements (lots of dialogue and puzzles) mixed in with action elements found in third-person games (jumping and fencing).

Like any good adventure game, **REDGUARD** is packed with puzzles. There's the requisite "let's trade items!" dialogs and **MYST**-style logic puzzles, along with more original ideas, such as the Gremlin Speech

puzzle. Heck, there's even a treasure map puzzle for pirate aficionados. Also, the game is quite nonlinear. Certain triggers move the story forward, but you can basically tackle the game in any order you choose.

But adventure fans need to know that **REDGUARD** isn't a game with "a few action elements." It's a true hybrid of both genres. It will help greatly if you have played through the **TOMB RAIDER** series, as

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL:

Adventure gamers who like action too; action gamers looking for a deeper story; fans of Errol Flynn movies.



PLOTS:

Good plot; good use of Errol Flynn's voice; well-written dialogue; large variety of puzzles; nonlinear gameplay; decent voice acting.

CONS: Way too much jumping; DOS-based Xingne leads to bugs and various quirks; Cyrus' animation isn't very smooth; some of the voice-acting is truly abysmal.

DIFFICULTY:

Intimidating to newcomers; **REQUIREMENTS:** Pentium 166, Windows 95, 25MB RAM, 350MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM, Windows 95-compatible sound and video cards.

3D SUPPORT:

3Dix Glide

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT:

None

Price: \$49.95

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks

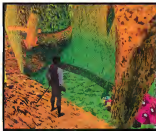
Rockville, MD

(800) 677-8730

www.bethsoft.com



CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE? Don't write this off as an action game; there's more dialogue here than you can shake a crystal at.



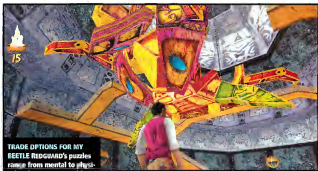
LEAP OF FAITH Be sure your jumping skills are up to snuff, because they form a major element in **REDGUARD**'s gameplay.

there are a lot of jumps to be made. Some are no sweat, like jumping a broken bridge; others, like the Goblin Caverns, will test even *TOMB RAIDER* veterans. Even the memorable Dwarven Scarab puzzle requires a lot of jumping to complete.

On top of that, there's the swashbuckling combat. Cyrus is a warrior, so there's a lot of sword-play throughout the game. Thankfully, combat isn't that tough, and is usually avoidable. With the exception of a few set encounters, you can just run away from most fights. In the fights you do have to play, there's usually an extra puzzle element in contrast to just more hacking and slashing. The interface is very straightforward, and to help poorly reflexed adventures there's an auto-defend option that makes parrying a lot easier.

Act Like You Like It

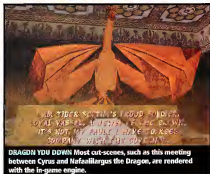
Amidst all this coolness, however, there are a few quirks that bring the game down. While this game is very clean and bug free compared to previous Bethesda products, some nasty bugs still creep up. For one thing, REDGUARD uses the Xengine, which is DOS-based. This means that your acceleration options are limited to either 3Dfx Glide or ugly software rendering. Also, the game is really finicky for gamers with fancy PCI-based A3D cards; I had no problems with mine, but there have been many tales of woe concerning SB Lives



TRADE OPTIONS FOR MY BEETLE REDGUARD's puzzles range from mental to physical tasks, or are a combination of both, such as the beetle puzzle shown here.

and similar cards on Usenet. Finally, the game occasionally threw me back to the desktop for no apparent reason.

Cyrus' animation is a bit stiff, and not quite in sync with the background; it looks more as if he's floating rather than walking. While combat is pretty good, sometimes Cyrus becomes a bit hard to control in other activities. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what the problem is, but controlling Cyrus isn't quite as fluid as controlling Lara, or even the Prince of Persia. Also, if there's a lot of activity on the screen, the movement of both the camera and Cyrus slows down noticeably (this is on a PIII400 with 128MB of RAM and a Voodoo2 card). There were also a few technical glitches, such as



DRAGON YOU DOWN Most cut-scenes, such as this meeting between Cyrus and Mafafalargus the Dragon, are rendered with the in-game engine.

clipping problems (guards' swords sticking through walls), and some NPCs were either stupidly trying to walk through a wall or magically levitated in the air.

Also, while it's great that the game is generally nonlinear, it's advised that you *not* return the amulet to Richton too soon. This is a quest that is offered to you the moment you start the game, but if you see this quest through, it will cause every guard to want to fight you. I suggest you try to do as many quests as you can, and then save Richton's amulet for last, otherwise you'll have guards hacking at you throughout the game.

Finally, the voice acting is very uneven. At times, it's perfect (I loved Governor Richton, J'Fer, and Mafafalargus the dragon) or at least very solid (Cyrus and the pirates of the Restless League).

Other times, well, let's say that the Inca games have some competition for horrendous voice acting. Anyone who didn't turn their volume off when listening to Lakera, Erasmu, Fovis, and Mariah has a stronger constitution for bad acting than do I. Some of these characters rained the immersion for me.

REDGUARD is a thrilling game, one of Bethesda's best releases in a while. Check it out if you're looking for a swashbuckling adventure with a good plot. Just be ready for the technical issues and jumps that would make Lara quake in her short shorts. Also, keep hand on the volume knob when talking to certain people. **GGT**

Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen has also played PRINCE OF PERSIA, TOMB RAIDER I and II, and is now playing HALF-LIFE.



HAVE AT YOU! Combat has that fast-paced swashbuckling feel, with you and your opponent trading barbs and quips.

Ho, Hum, No Bottle of Rum

THQ's Latest Is All Jacked Up With Nowhere to Go

by Scorpia

With a little swash and a little backling, **REDJACK** aspires to be a pirate game, but it's a far cry from **SID MEIER'S PIRATES** or any of the **MONKEY ISLAND** games. Our hero, **Nick Dove**, lives on the small island of **Lizard Point**. He has a slightly obnoxious older brother and a slightly more obnoxious girlfriend. The girlfriend holds the mortgage on Nick's farm, which she may have to sell to pay her father's debts.

Little surprise, then, that Nick decides to board a buccanier vessel that just happens to be docked in the harbor. Being a landlubber, Nick of course has to do a few things to prove he's pirate material. That accomplished, he's taken on board, though not all of



KISS OFF What Nick sees in this wench, we'll never know. Why does she hold our mortgage?

the crew is thrilled to have him. Nick may not have picked the best ship, either. It's captained by one of the few remaining members of the **Brethren**, a group of pirates originally gathered under the notorious **Redjack**, who's long dead through someone's treachery.

Worse, Nick doesn't do much in the way of real pirating—no captured prizes, no boarding or desperate fighting on deck, no real blazing sea battles. Most of what you do as Nick is either escape from someone or rush to rescue someone else.

Aye, It Be The Ninjas

The **Brethren** are being hunted down by a group of ninjalike assassins with quasimagical powers, to whom the captain falls victim. Since Nick is nearby, he gets the blame, and the story is terribly predictable from this point on: There's the jailbreak, the daughter of **Redjack** disguised as a crew member, the cursed treasure, the ancient temple ruins, the mysterious secret enemy in the background...you get the idea.

There are some one-on-one encounters when you get to use a sword, but the **DOOM**-like view proves very restricting, making it difficult to manipulate your sword via a mouse. You can attack or parry, but there is no movement to speak of in any direction. At times, it's possible to go forward a bit, forcing your opponent to take a step or two back.

Fights are mostly won by trickery, not swordsmanship. This is deliberate, though you may not realize that until the game has

been restored a few times. So, while fighting, you also have to look at the scenery and move your cursor around to find whatever it is that just might help you defeat your opponent.

REDJACK descends into the absurd on occasion. A fantasy pirate romp is one thing. But when a flying ship appears, complete with balloons instead of sails, or Nick fights off a small army of assassins with a primitive machine-gun while riding a sort of roller coaster, one has to draw the line.

Seeing Red

Most puzzles aren't particularly difficult, the only challenging one is opening the temple doors. In that respect, the game is (ahem) pretty clear sailing. For what it's worth, **REDJACK** sports a simple interface, and saving and restoring is very quick. If the game is running slowly, you can switch between 16-bit and 32-bit modes without any real loss in graphic display.

In the end, even though **REDJACK** tries to combine action and adventure elements, it fails to satisfy—especially given its banal storyline and occasional absurdities. If you were looking for a real, rousing pirate experience, you won't find it here. **CGW**

For more adventure fare, check out Scorpia's hints for **GRIM FANDANGO** in the **Game's Edge** section in this issue.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★★

APPEAL: for pirates with lots of patience.

PROS: Technically it runs well in either 16-bit or 32-bit graphics mode; nice interface.

CONS: Bland at best; more often boring and indulgent.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 70MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM, Direct Draw-compatible graphics. Minimum System: 7.1, 24MB RAM, 70MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price: \$29.99
 Publisher: THQ
 Columbia, GA
 (800) 599-1210

www.thq.com



Dungeons and Danger

Some scenes work well enough, as in this rocky wooden staircase (left). Others, like our shark fin (right), are better left for soup.

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Shot on Goal

EA Doesn't Go Much Further With FIFA 99, but It Doesn't Have To

by Joe Vellina

The Major League Soccer season had just wound down and the European leagues were just starting up when the new FIFA game hit my desk. I'm a big fan of the series, and I couldn't wait to see how the EA Sports team had improved upon an almost perfect formula. Well, FIFA 99 does have some great additions, but it also has a few unexpected problems. However, fear not, fellow soccer fiends; it's still head and shoulders above any other soccer game on the market.

The first time I saw FIFA 98 on a big monitor, I thought the guy playing it was watching a game on TV. FIFA 99 looks just as good. The player animations are incredibly

detailed and realistic, the uniforms are accurate, and the dead-ball animations are at times hilarious. Also, some of the nonaction animations have been removed to make the games flow without as many interruptions (I'm thinking of the now-absent throw-in animations).

There are a couple of glitches in the graphics, though. At times it seems as if the

goalie can jump about 30 feet in one lunge when he's gathering up a loose ball (Super Goalie to the rescue!), and the ball sometimes moves unrealistically fast when passed from player to player. But these are the only examples of bad graphics I could find. The player animations are much more fluid this time around, and tackles look so real as to be comical at times. (Have one of your guys put a snotty Manchester United forward on his ass and you'll get my drift.)

Details, Details

The player details are dead-on, as per the norm in the series. French goalkeeper Fabian Barthez is as bald as a cue ball, for example, and all of the teams' uniforms have been updated. And, in keeping with the FIFA tradition, there are plenty of teams from which to choose—200, to be exact. All have updated rosters for the new season (late trades excepted, of course).

You can still include yourself on the roster of any team (or teams)

you choose, and now, with the more detailed player attributes, your likeness will be even better displayed. Sorry ladies, still no girls allowed.

The focus of FIFA 99 is on club play, whereas FIFA 98 was focused on the World Cup (duh). Hence, in FIFA 99 club teams are included from the USA (sady, it's still not the MLS), Spain, England, Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Brazil. Notably absent (still) are Mexican clubs or other South American clubs. It's high time the folks at EA acknowledged that the Americas have great teams, too. Of course, there are plenty of downloads available on the Net (see "What About Poland?" sidebar), but you would think that FIFA 99 would sell like



RAINY DAY GOAL Kiko gives Spain's FC Barcelona the equalizer in a UEFA Cup match against Italy's Parma.



MOVIN' ON UP The players with the white circles under them are moving into a new IGM formation. The white circles show you which players are affected.

gangbusters in Latin America if it included Latin American club teams. (An insider at EA told me that the company is indeed working on licensing for MLS and possibly Mexican leagues, so keep your fingers crossed for FIFA 2000.)

For years, serious soccer fans have been clamoring for the European Super League. While at press time it's still not clear whether or not it will happen in the real world, in FIFA 99 you do get a superleague consisting of AC

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★★

APPEAL: Any soccer fan who dreams of playing for his favorite team.

PROS: Great graphics; unbelievable number of clubs from which to choose; fully customizable; best soccer game to date.

CONS: Some unrealistic animations; difficulty in a few key spots; when's the MLS? When's Brazil?

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 20MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM, DirectX, 2MB PCI or AGP video card w/Direct Drive-compatible driver.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dfx, PowerVR, D3D.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN modem, Direct Connect, Internet (2-8 players), 1 CD per player.

Price: \$39.99
 Publisher: EA Sports
 Developer: EA G.O.
 EA GAMES 71771
www.easports.com

Milan, Arsenal, FC Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Benfica, Inter Milan (sans Ronaldo, ough. Shupit licensing!), Real Madrid, and 13 other European powers.

A Manager's Dream Come True

One great new addition to FIFA 99 bears special mention, the IGM (In-Game Management) option. This much-needed tool lets you choose three different formations (and aggression levels for each) that you can toggle through on the fly during a game in progress. Thus, you no longer need to stop play to go to the team management screen and alter your lineup. This option works very well. There were several times when I saw an opportunity for a fast break and was able to capitalize on it using the IGM.



WINDUP IT UP The celebration animations are better than ever. Kiko sure looks happy, doesn't he?



CGW CUP FIFA 99 focuses on club play, so Cups are all important. You can create your own with tons o' options.

Another addition, which is less useful, is the IGT (In-Game Tactics) option. This consists of four preprogrammed moves (off-side trap, attacking press, through-ball run, and wing-back

run) that you can also use during the game by hitting a certain key combination. These moves are not available if you use only a two- or four-button controller, but I could never get them to work

that well anyway (the offside trap worked once out of about 10 times I tried it).

Of course, there are still gallons of skill moves you can perform using different button combinations. One new addition, which actually works quite well, is the sliding kick. Or you can go with a rainbow kick or 360-degree spin move to be more flamboyant. You can even take a dive to try and draw the card, if you're feeling really dramatic.

Tough Cookie

The AI has been improved in FIFA 99. In previous incarnations of the game, if the AI opponent was down a goal or two near the end of a match, you could count on a "miracle" shot or free kick to equalize or win the match. (I've

lost more FIFA 98 matches to last-second corner kicks/headed-on-goal than I care to remember.) That doesn't happen in FIFA 99.

However, the three difficulty levels are still too far apart. Amateur is too easy, and professional is too difficult (world-class is for gods or masochists only; thank you very much). But, to be fair, the professional level has been toned down from FIFA 98. Now, you can beat it, it's just frickin' hard to do. (Which can be a good thing.)

Also, regarding goalie control, in FIFA 99 you can actually control the goalkeeper at times, although it's normally better to just let the AI do it—unless your keeper is deaf, dumb, and blind (which some are).

The Final Whistle

All in all, FIFA 99 is still the best soccer game out there—by far. Go buy it right now. There are improvements to be made, no doubt, but it still looks incredible, is superfun, and—the icing on the cake—you can still play for all your favorite teams. It's worth your time and cash. **CGW**

Joe Valina is an avid soccer fan, and his next team, Bay United FC, can be found at www.homestead.com/bayunitedfc.

What About Poland?

So what do you do if you're a Warsaw-born-and-bred soccer fanatic and you would kill to play on your hometown club? Well, go to www.fifa99.net and download to your heart's content. At press time, on the FIFA99.net league download page there are updated rosters and uniforms for England, France, Scotland, Greece, the Spanish second division, Croatia, Israel, Poland, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, and Malaysia. Keep in mind that all of these hacks are just that...homemade mods, so back up any saved games before you try them. Other goodies available for download are kits and a patch to add Ronaldo to FIFA 99. You can also get a FSH Flash Editor on the site that will let you add your own teams to the game and even change the ball, turf, logos/flags, and the like. Good luck!



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Time to Die, Bambi: Part II

In a Big Improvement, Our Furred Friends Eat It Like Never Before

by Joe Vallina

When the first DEER HUNTER came out, everyone laughed. Especially the folks at Wizard Works... all the way to the bank, that is. But for all the money it made, DEER HUNTER was still a big step below almost every other game out there in terms of gameplay and technology. You couldn't even walk around, for Pete's sake. I mean, you could do that in DOOM back in 1993. And don't get me started on the crappy map screen. Still, DEER HUNTER only cost \$20, so what the hell.

Well, in DEER HUNTER II, you can walk around, the horrible map screen has been replaced by a cool GPS device, and the game looks a lot better, albeit not to the quality of most 3D shooters.

Me; 1; Bambi: 0

One new addition to DEER HUNTER II is the Hunter Screen, where you create a hunting identity that keeps track of your hit ratio and other stats. You can create several different hunters (which will keep little Johnny from screwing up your hit ratio while you're at work).

There are 12 new places to hunt, and you can choose from nine weapons, including a cross-bow, a muzzleloader, and a long-bow. All of the weapons are pretty good, but I still prefer the standard bolt-action rifle. The game's inventory list has expanded to include a deer decoy, a fleece jacket, and the GPS positioning device (which displays your longitude/latitude, shows a localized map of the area, and gives the time of day and elevation). You can also use cover scent, two types of attractant scents, and several other gadgets.

The game does a great job of showing tracks, scrapes, nubs, and droppings. When you do hit and injure a deer, you can follow bloodstains on the ground to round up your quarry. This is one of the best features of the game, and realistically mimics real life.



GOTCHA! This dead buck got a little too close to the king of death—me.

The game's graphic details are somewhat mediocre, even with the new facelift. Terrain is still pretty blocky, and trees stand out in the middle of nowhere rather than being formed into convincing forests. The deer animations, on the other hand, can be quite realistic, especially when seen from a distance.

Ahma Goin' Huntin'!

DEER HUNTER II is much more realistic than the first game. You must sight in your weapons

before going on the hunt, which is completely realistic. If your gun's sights are off, you won't hit the broad side of a barn, much less a deer. However, this higher level of realism comes back to bite the game when it comes to waiting around for a deer to show up. I had several hunts that seemed as though they would never end, and, in fact, after waiting 15 minutes or more for a deer to show (and yes, I did use the calls and attractants), I had to quit the hunt and start another. This has happened to me on real hunts, too, but when I'm playing a computer game, by golly, I want to kill something.

Overall, though, DEER HUNTER II is a solid, fun game, and is definitely an improvement over its predecessor. Another plus is that, despite all of the enhancements, the game still costs \$20. DEER HUNTER II is a game that, while it won't appeal to the non-hunting, hard-core gaming crowd, is just right for real-life hunters or anyone who wants a fun diversion between work assignments. **CGW**



ALMOST LIKE HALF-LIFE, HUN? These bloodstains and tracks are very realistic when you need to find a wounded animal.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Real-life hunters with a PC, anyone who wants cheap, killing fun

PROS: Lots of weapons, very realistic tracking, good gadgets.

CONS: Tension still not quite up to snuff, limited replay ability

DIFFICULTY: Easy

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 9x/98, 16MB RAM, 40MB free disk space, 8x CD-ROM drive, DirectX-compatible sound and video cards, mouse.

3D SUPPORT: DirectX-compatible 3D cards.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price: \$19.99
Publisher: WizardWorks
Plymouth, NH
(800) 228-2714

www.wizardworks.com



3D Glitch Hunter

This Buggy, Unrealistic Game Is a Real Letdown



EAT IT Someone tell Bambi it looks like Papa's not coming home for dinner tonight.

by Joe Vallina

I really, really wanted to like TNN OUTDOORS PRO HUNTER. It's a hunting game based on the UNREAL engine, for God's sake! When I got the initial press release on it, I squealed with delight. Well, now I'm squealing with disgust. It's slow, boring, buggy, unrealistic, and silent. And guess what, folks? That adds up to a mountain of suck. The game has options galore.

You can hunt deer, you can hunt rabbits, you can hunt squirrels, you can hunt birds, you can even hunt with other real, live humans via the multiplayer option (and over HEAT.net). You can hunt with two breeds of dogs, which is a cool idea. You can use tons of different weapons.

But the game's biggest selling point is that you can roam around in a beautiful UNREAL-powered gameworld. And you can...one frame at a time on a Pentium 11400MHz machine. This game

crawls, y'all. And there is not too much that's less fun than a game that makes your \$2,000-plus toy run like a pig in molasses.

Ironically, the very thing that makes this game potentially appealing—the UNREAL engine—is the thing that screws it up. The load times are interminable for a simple one-hunter hunt. To give you an example of just how slow they are, I was able to go to another computer, boot up, choose teams, and play an entire four-coach half in FIFA 99 while waiting for a hunt to load. Other times, TNN PRO HUNTER would just crash before the hunt loaded. I also kept getting fatal errors (on two different computers) and had to reinstall several times. To make matters worse, I never could get the sound to work, which makes it a little difficult to listen for a sneaky whitetail.

Locked and Loaded...Finally

If you do get a hunt to work, the game is not very realistic. Rabbits sit out in the middle of an open field (why not just put them in herds while you're at it?). The deer do the same. Now, it's true that deer sometimes venture into the open to forage, but they don't do it all the time, and they definitely don't do it in the middle of the day. (A few thousand years of being hunted has taught them that brush is a little safer when the sun is out.)

The game doesn't look half bad, I'll give it that. The animations for terrain and animals are both pretty good. (The UNREAL engine comes

in handy for once, I guess.) But let's face it, it's so difficult simply to get this game to run that pretty graphics don't come close to making it worth playing. Don't waste your money. **CGW**



WHAT A LOAD Get used to this screen. You'll be seeing it a lot while waiting to play the game.

Unlike most hunting-game reviewers, CGW's Managing Editor Joe Vallina has actually killed a real deer (but he don't drink the blood).



GOBBLE GOBBLE You can hunt much more than deer in this game, but you'll have to figure out a way to get the game to run first.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★☆☆☆☆

APPEAL: Suckers who buy into what the game box says

PROS: Looks pretty.

CONS: Buggy; long load times; unrealistic animal AI.

DIFFICULTY: Easy

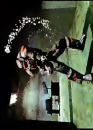
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 185MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM, sound card.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dx.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet (via HEAT.net), LAN (2-3 players).

Price: \$29.99
 Publisher: ASC Games
 Danvers, CT
 (800) 855-1166
www.ascgames.com

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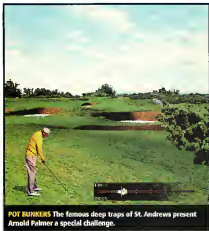
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POT BUNKERS The famous deep traps of St. Andrews present Arnold Palmer a special challenge.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Golf nuts, especially those who want to experience British courses.

PROS: Less wading between shots; more choices of game; true realism.

CONS: Internet play not completely reliable; warts; chat interface awkward.

DIFFICULTY: Moderate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 150, Windows 95/98 or ME, 4x CD-ROM drive, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard-disk space, 1MB video card capable of 800x600 resolution in 24K colors, 8-bit sound (16K, optional).

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem, Internet, or LAN (2 players), 1 CD per player.

Price: \$49.95 (full version), \$29.95 (upgrade only)
 Publisher: Access Software Inc.
 548 Lake Cog, CT
 06450-0386
www.accesssoftware.com



by Denny Atkin, Sr.

Last year, LINKS LS 1998 propelled the leading PC golf title from the realm of being a nice computer game into that of a realistic golf simulation. It also addressed the slow screen redraws that plagued earlier versions. So what was left to improve? More than it seemed, apparently. The new LINKS LS 1999 sports 25 new features, more than a few of which are significant enough to make even jaded computer golfers want to swing this new set of virtual clubs.

Two new swing options headline the changes. Previous versions of LINKS offered only a two-click golf swing. Now you can choose a three-click swing or the new PowerStroke swing. The three-click is very similar to the old two-click, but it offers you finer control. You click once to start the swing, click at the top of your swing, and click again when your swing reaches

the bottom. Pretty simple, but it requires very precise timing.

In an effort to more closely recreate the action of a real swing, Access has also added the PowerStroke, which uses horizontal mouse movement rather than just clicks. At first this option excited me, since it seemed to emulate a real swing, but I found the movement difficult to master. LINKS offered an unsolicited adjustment to me along the way, almost as if the software sensed my frustration. Happily it helped. More feedback is available from the postswing analyzer, which measures club-head speed and the angle of the club as it strikes the ball. Despite the advice of the program's virtual caddy, I found the PowerStroke awkward and chose the three-click.

As a left-handed golfer, I must say I was jazzed to see a "left-handed PowerStroke swing" offered, but I was then dismayed to see the animated visual of the golfer still hitting right-handed. If the game is going to offer a left-handed option, the player should appear that way onscreen.

Tour de Force

It's no longer just you and your buddies out on the course. LINKS LS

now sports a tournament environment, with galleries of hundreds of spectators lining every fairway waiting to cheer a great shot. Crowds react to each shot; additionally, noises coming from other areas of the course, press cameramen and camera towers, vehicles, officials, ropes, and grandstands add to the "you are there" feeling. All of this, combined with event banners, tents, and leaderboards (not to mention the Goodyear blimp drifting across the sky), give the game a different feel. You're not just a player on a course, but a pro in the midst of a tour event.

Atmosphere is great, but what about gameplay? One of the most significant enhancements is the new Mode of Play (MOP) Game Designer, which lets you develop play styles and share them with friends. The designer includes 30 new MOPs to get you started, including such games as Skins, Match Play, Bingo-Bango-Bongo, and Stableford. It's easy to use, so that anyone can add that variation of golf they developed with their drinking buddies.

You'll find many more 3D objects on or around the course, as I discovered when an errant shot caromed off a stone wall.



BEAUTIFUL, YET CHALLENGING Bay Hill's par 3 17th hole requires great timing and precise aim.



UTAH'S RED SANDSTONE CLIFFS At times, the game's difficulties get lost in the sightseeing, just as in real-life golf.

The famed deep-pot bunkers of St. Andrews demanded notable improvements to the LINKS LS engine. The ability to feel the depth of a 10-foot bunker brings the 1999 edition to a new level of realistic play. These 3D effects come into play not only with bunkers, but with fences, buildings, and many other objects. Note that LINKS LS still doesn't support 3D graphics cards, but since the scenery is generally static, 3D support would likely have meant a loss of detail.

Turf Wars

To a nongolfer this might sound really trivial, but one of the neatest effects of this game occurs each time the player hits the ball. A chunk of turf actually flies forward, and the divot hole left behind makes a devoted golfer want to take time out to repair it.

There are two new players available, plus Arnold Palmer and the five original golfer animations. Palmer is still featured at his beloved Latrobe Country Club, but you can now play while enjoying western Pennsylvania's beautiful fall colors. New to this version is the birthplace of golf itself, Scotland's St. Andrews Links Old Course. The rugged links of St. Andrews have been tested for almost 500 years, making it the mecca serious golfers would love to visit.

Also new for 1999 is Entrada at Snow Canyon, in the red sandstone cliffs of Utah. After playing it and marveling at the beautiful scenery in this game, I'm heading there for real someday soon. Arnie's own Bay Hill Club and Lodge, in Orlando, Florida, rounds out the new course choices.

The 1999 edition also supports all previous LINKS 386 courses as well as more than 25 expansion courses, sold separately. The next add-on courses, due out sometime in the first quarter of 1999, will be the Phoenix Country Club and Japan's Seagala Resort.

Since my golfing vacation to Scotland remains only a distant dream, I really enjoyed the multimedia tour of the town and the courses at St. Andrews. I also delighted in the vistas of Entrada

at Snow Canyon, but, frankly, the tour of the Bay Hill Club came across like an infomercial. As in the previous version, the game offers a virtual tour in 3D of Arnold Palmer's office and workshop.

LINKS LS 1999 supports screen resolutions up to 1800x1440 and 16.7 million colors. Position-dependent 3D stereo sound enhances the great visual sensations. The expanded sound script editor lets you change crowd noises and even add your own comments (as WAV files).

Fast rendering was the biggest improvement in the 1998 upgrade. Playing that version last year on a Pentium 133, I was thrilled with the seemingly short five-second delays. In LINKS LS 1999, the rendering is just as quick, and on my new Celeron 333 the wait is almost nonexistent. Now the game moves from shot to shot with only the slightest delay.

Top of the Leaderboard

If you already own either LINKS LS 1997 or '98, Access offers the 1999 version as a reduced-price upgrade for only \$29.99. But even at full price, and with more competition than ever, this game proves itself once again to be at the very top of its class. Here's the bottom line: If you enjoy golf, LINKS LS 1999 is a must-have addition to your game collection. **GGTV**

Denny Adkin, Sr. is an avid life-long golfer with a 14 handicap at Tualatin Country Club in Tualatin, Oregon. LINKS LS and FROGGER occupy his time during Oregon's wet winters.

Audio Difficulties

LINKS LS 1999 offers both casual and tournament play over the Internet, and it now sports real-time voice chat. Free match-making is available through Mplayer, or you can connect directly to another player if you know his or her IP number. If you are a masochist, Internet spectators and hecklers can watch you in action, give advice, and needle you! For real competition, you can log on to Access's free Internet tournament site.

Had the Internet play with real-time chat worked perfectly, I would have rated LINKS LS 1999 as a five-star game. I managed to pull my son away from flight sims long enough to try an Internet game between our homes in Oregon and California. We gave it a solid try but gave up in frustration. We were able to play golf and type comments back and forth successfully, but when we tried to introduce real-time voice chat, we experienced numerous lockups.

A patch is available to clear up many of the multiplayer problems, but it should have been solid out of the box, especially considering that for a number of golfers LINKS is their introduction to computer gaming.

SWING CHOICES

You can now choose from the two-click swing, the three-click swing, or the realistic mouse-driven PowerStroke swing.



Blood Bowl

NFL BLITZ Starts Strong but Fades a Bit in the Second Half

by Brett Todd

Football without rules? It's a great concept, and one that may finally have found its place in the sun now that the National Football League has put shaved monkeys in the striped shirts ("Um, that was tails, right?") and Midway has released NFL BLITZ for the PC.

If you've entered an arcade, pub, or pool hall anytime in the past few years, you undoubtedly know the game already. Like its close relative NBA JAM, NFL BLITZ removes both rules and reality from the authentic sport, leaving behind nothing but pure mayhem. The coin-op edition proved to be a huge hit, earning tons of cash for Midway and giving barflies something to do after they've been cut off. Unfortunately, what works so

well when you're out on the town doesn't succeed quite as well on your desktop at home.

Keep It Simple, Stupid

The basic concept is simple: seven-on-seven football with nothing approximating strategy to interfere with crippling your opponents. Each NFL team's roster is complete with the best and brightest on offense and defense. There are no injuries or substitutions, so you'd better get used to seeing an awful lot of folks like John Elway, Deion Sanders, and Ryan "I Love Reporters" Leaf. All the clubs share the same basic playbook, which features generic calls for both sides of the scrimmage line.

Downs and points are all you have to worry about as far as rules go. The scoring system follows that of the actual NFL, but your offense needs to get 30 yards for a first down here (don't worry, that's not as hard to pick up as it sounds).

Once the ball is snapped, anything goes. Holding and hitting are the best ways to cover opposing receivers, since pass interference seems to be a foreign concept here. As you might expect, picks



THE NAME OF THE GAME IS... NFL BLITZ lives up to its name on defense. Get into the backfield quick enough and you'll pile up the sacks quicker than you can say "compound fracture."

and fumbles occur fairly frequently because of this.

Visual and audio presentation pumps all this up. The 3D-accelerated graphics (a 3Dfx or recent D3D card is required) are bright, blocky, and cartoony, making it clear from first glance that this is not a sim. Everything is overblown in NFL BLITZ, from the "hip-hop by way of NFL films" music through the "Vince

McMahon School of Broadcasting" commentary ("To Rice!").

Hits are always larger than life, due to the dynamic animations and crunches that'll shake your subwoofer. Once you get out on the field, expect to do things that would make Bill Romanowski blush. Instead of just wrapping Michael Irvin up in a nice, legal tackle, you'll grab him by one arm, spin him around a couple of times, and then drive him and his ego into the turf of Texas Stadium. Rather than merely push Terrell Davis out of bounds like a nice little linebacker, you'll hit him with a flying forearm that leaves him saluting a fearful of dirt.

The mayhem doesn't stop when the play does. Is your opponent helpless? Good. Then I guess it's time to show him that spending all those nights watching WWF RAW wasn't a waste of time: Go ahead and repeatedly body slam and DDT his tackled ass. The game encourages this with hilarious play-by-play lines like "That was totally uncalled for—but a lot of fun to watch!" and "He's going postal!"

There's no learning curve to speak of. Like the arcade title, the PC game is designed so that people will pick things up immediately,

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Action fans, anyone sick of supporting Midway a quarter of a time.

PROS: Fast gameplay, lots of fun to play against a friend.

CONS: Not much in the way of depth or replay value, no multiplayer options.

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166 (with 3Dfx card) or Pentium II-233 (with other 3D cards), Windows 95/98, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster or compatible sound card.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dfx, second-generation DirectX3D-compatible cards (all major clients).

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Hosted only (2 players).

Price: \$39.99
 Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
 Cary, CA, TX
 (714) 674-5233

www.midway.com

HE'S FOAMIN' AT THE MOUTH!



Here are just two of the after-the-whistle ways you can toss around the opposition. Ahhh, there's no more soothing way to beat stress than to bitch-slap some of the NFL's highest-potential talent.

You use just three buttons on the gamepad, for pass, jump, and turbo functions. When you pass, you have to point the D-pad in the direction of your receiver. This method is often very inaccurate, though, and it will take you a while before you can get the ball to the intended receiver a majority of the time. Oh, and the gamepad is the *only* way to navigate menu screens; there's no mouse support. I've said it before, I'll say it again: Is it really that big a deal to add mouse support to these console conversions?

This bare-bones philosophy extends into gameplay options. There are no difficulty settings, and you can choose only exhibition games or matches that will count under your user name. The idea behind "name" games is that you'll work your way up a ladder in an attempt to defeat every team in the NFL. Complaints caused Midway to add league play to a recent patch. This adds to the product's shelf life, but you've really got to wonder why the company left it out of the boxed game. The same questions could be asked

about Internet multiplayer support. If any game cries out for a multiplayer option, it's this one. Head-to-head action is great if you've always got a friend on hand, but since most of us don't, we're stuck with repetitive solo play.

After the Half

All of this is fun, but it doesn't last. While NFL BLITZ proves to be enjoyable as a momentary distraction—and I dare you to find a PC game that offers an experience comparable to the satisfaction of beating the hell out of Neon Deion—it falls miserably in the longevity department. Once the initial outrageousness of being able to casually break spines fades, you'll likely find yourself longing for the depth and complexity of a real football title once again.

Repetition is the biggest culprit here. As exciting as contests are at first, there just isn't enough variation in the special effects to hold the interest of most gamers. It's neat to stir up dust clouds with a few body-slams after the whistle, but it doesn't take long before you realize that that's all you can do. Extracurricular facial rearrangement is nice, but once you've heard "is that legal?" for the hundredth time, you find yourself wanting to get on to the next play as quickly as possible.

At this point you're left with just the football game, and—as interesting as seven-on-seven action can be at times—the lack of depth won't keep you around for long. Gameplay almost never varies. All I bother to call when I'm running my offense are long pass routes. Every

TOUCHDOWN!

3RD QUARTER 0:32

SAN FRANCISCO 20
ATLANTA 17

ALL HE WANTS TO DO IS DANCE The energetic action of NFL BLITZ even gets to straitlaced types like the Niners' Garrison Hearst. He doesn't really have much to celebrate, however, since late loads such as this one generally vanish as soon as the computer gets its hands on the ball.

play, I simply drop back, run around until one of my receivers finds a little daylight, then hit him for a big gain. I've even found a couple of money plays. Both "Da Bomb" and "Hail Mary" exploit the defense for 15 to 20 yards every time I call them, since the AI just can't seem to handle cuts across the middle.

Running the ball makes almost no sense at all. While you can usually pick up 7 to 10 yards with ease, there's always the chance you'll get stopped at the line. And since you need 30 yards for that first down, why risk it? A quarterback sneak after sending your receiver deep works best if you're really committed to the ground game, though.

Playing defense will also see you repeating yourself ad nauseam. I get the best results by trying to hurry the opposing pivot, so every call is blitz, blitz, blitz. Sure, "BLITZ" is the name of the game, but I doubt that this is what the boys at Midway had in mind. It's worth the risk since sacks are plentiful, and even if my opponent does manage to complete a pass, I can



usually catch up to the ball carrier before too much damage is done.

Save Your Quarters

In a nutshell, the repetitive gameplay and one-note humor that make NFL BLITZ a worthwhile alternative to Eight Ball at your neighborhood saloon turn it into a long-term loser on your desktop. Adding league play in the patch helps some, but this title needs multiplayer options (or you need an always-available buddy) to make it truly worth buying. If you luck into a sale, this is a game worth considering, but there's not enough gaming here to justify paying top dollar. **CGW**

When he's not attending the Charlatan Heston School of Fine Acting, Brett Todd can be found playing *LINKS LS 1999* and *GREAT BATTLES OF CAESAR*.



NICE POM-POMS

In case you didn't get the message from Kordell Stewart's Thor impersonation on the box, NFL BLITZ isn't intended for the armchair Vince Lombardi. The, um, nice scenery displayed on the tips screen between quarters also gives you a pretty good idea of the market this game is going for. Not that there's anything wrong with that...

The Gods Must Be Lazy

Deities Take Some Time Off and Send In the Shamans in This God Game Sequel

by Denny Atkin

Playing god with the world around you can be quite satisfying. That was proven around the turn of the last decade by POPULOUS and POPULOUS II. Both games not only made your delusions of godhood somewhat real by giving you divine providence over a simulated ancient world, but also were the precursors of the modern real-time strategy game.

Bullfrog originally planned to do a 3D sequel in the mid-'90s, but the limitations of the PCs of the day led the company to use the engine for MAGIC CARPET instead. Now that computer hardware is ready for simulated divinity, the sequel—or, rather, the prequel—to those classics has finally appeared.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Real-time strategy game; nostalgic POPULOUS fans who don't let a charge...



PROS: Top-notch 3D terrain engine; innovative unit control; great spell effects.

CONS: Gameplay style diverges from (and/or POPULOUS gaming; no mission builders or scenario mode; only missions are repetitive.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98, Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 110MB hard-disk space, sound card.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem, LAN, Internet (2-4 players, 1 CD per player).

Price: \$49.95
 Publisher: Bullfrog
 Redwood City, CA
 (800) 418-8822

www.populous.net



RED SKIES AT NIGHT An Angel of Death breathes fire on an enemy tower as a shaman creates a swarm of bugs to scatter the enemy.

A skillfully executed tribute to the original series, it provides a welcome break from today's me-too real-time strategy games.

Shaman on You

In POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING, you're a shaman who must guide your people to victory over the enemy—followers of rival shamans. You accomplish this both through casting spells and building up armies of followers.

In the earlier games, you could directly manipulate the lands of your people, but you could only influence the actions of your followers. (See the sidebar opposite

page, for more POPULOUS-culture trivia.) Here, you can directly command your followers to build and attack, but the landscape can be altered only through the use of expensive spells.

You start most games with only a shaman and perhaps a few followers. From there, you command your followers to begin construction on various buildings and set about expanding your tribe. You gain followers either by using spells to convert wildmen (do this early, as wildmen are amazingly adept at getting themselves killed) or by building huts and filling them with followers who eventually

reproduce (odd, considering that the shaman is the only female character in the game).

As your tribe grows, you'll want to build more huts, which not only generate new followers but also increase production of the valuable mana necessary for your shaman's spellcasting. Other early buildings that will come in handy are warrior and priest training huts, as well as guard towers, which not only alert you to enemy attacks but

also give your shaman a high vantage point from which to blast the enemy. As you advance in the game, more sophisticated buildings, such as bathhouses, spy training huts, and balloon huts become available to you.

Many of these buildings transform your fairly weak villagers into more powerful units. Firewarriors, for instance, shoot deadly fireballs, while priests can charm enemy troops into following your shaman. You'll need to keep some regular villagers around, though, as they're the only ones who can build.

The Followers Panel is a pop-up control designed to let you quickly



ERUPTION Casting a Volcano spell on an enemy town in POPULOUS can wreak massive destruction, but you'll need tons of mana to charge the spell.



HOME SWEET HUT Filling huts with followers generates large amounts of mana for your shaman to use.



DIVINE INSPIRATION The game's documentation is extremely skimpy, but an online encyclopedia fills in the information gaps.

select and manage large groups. It certainly makes selection easier than scrolling around the world manually grouping followers, but it's not overly intuitive—especially with the “Stay Selected” feature active. More than once I accidentally pulled all my firewarriors out

varying rates depending on how many villagers and huts you have. There's no tech tree *per se*, but mana does a good job of taking the place of it. One shaman may spend her mana charging the Angel of Death (a wonderfully vicious dragon that carries enemies



THAT SINKING FEELING A billion-borne shaman casts an Erode spell, sending portions of an enemy city crashing into the sea.

which is replaced at

tion, attackers climb hills very slowly. Often, changing the terrain is the key to victory—building a land bridge that lets you bypass enemy attackers, or eroding the land below a hilltop settlement.

Destructivus 1:25

POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING features 25 missions. Many of these

even a mission you're forced to accomplish using only the shaman—you'll be saving often here. Some later missions add nods to the original game, such as a cameo appearance by the Armageddon spell, which calls all the world's armies to a single location to fight to the death.

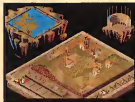
Unfortunately, there's no random map/skirmish mode or mission builder, so there's little single-player replay value. There is a multiplayer skirmish mode, however. This works well on a LAN, but when we tried connecting over the free Populous.net matchmaking service, it wasn't unusual to find that one or two players couldn't connect to a game.

Overall, POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING is a mixed bag. The gameplay is unique and a nice change from most RTS fare. Some

You've Been Demoted

When POPULOUS II was released seven years ago on the late, lamented Amiga, a game that let you take the role of a god was considered somewhat controversial. In today's world of 3D shooters starring murdering angels, that may seem a bit naive. Still, POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING bypasses the issue completely by making you not a god, but rather just a slightly-better-than-mere-mortals shaman.

In a significant departure from the conventions of the original games, you now have direct control over the actions of your followers. In the original games, you could only influence your people's behavior by leading them into



The Classic While we miss POPULOUS II's innovative gameplay, we'll take the new version's graphics any day.

enemy territory with your Papal Magari, or causing their general mood to be one of settling, gathering together, or fighting. You could directly alter the landscape, building lands for your people, pulling the ground out from under unbelievers and casting them into the sea, and stealing destruction or them through tidal waves, volcanoes, tornadoes, and other unnatural disasters. Now these sorts of things are done through your shaman.

By giving you direct control over individual members of your population, POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING gains a play style more familiar to games weaned on COMMAND & CONQUER and STARCHART, at the expense of play that sometimes borders on micromanagement. To the game's credit, however, your followers often do take some initiative when idle.

of their guard towers, leaving my town's perimeter undefended.

Stay a Spell

In addition to armies of followers, your shaman boasts some powerful magic. In early games, you may start with only Blast, Lightning, and Convert spells, but eventually you'll find obelisks, stone heads, and torii that will give you access to additional spells and buildings. In fact, these various spell sites are usually the key to successfully completing missions.

Each spell you cast uses up some of your valuable mana,

into the skies and spits them out) spell, another may decide to save up for a deadly volcano to unleash in the enemy's town center, while a third might continuously use the low-mana Lightning spell to cause smaller, harassing damage.

Many of the spells, such as the Volcano, Rain of Fire, and Tornado, are destructive weapons reminiscent of your powers in the earlier POPULOUS games. Others alter the terrain—building land bridges to enemy islands, or sending coastal settlements crashing into the seas.

The terrain deserves special note. It not only looks really good,

are of the typical “build your armies and kill, kill, kill” nature. In fact, other than the occasional annoying time-limited mission, the first nine missions have a repetitive feel, with the monotony getting broken up only by the too-frequent introduction of a new spell or new unit.

Stick it out, though, and you'll find the later missions have plenty of twists—one starts with the enemy shaman sinking your people into the sea within the first minute of the game, while another begins with your shaman imprisoned and powerless. Toward the end, there's

missions, however, are overly puzzle-oriented, perhaps to make up for the computer players' AI, which at times seems a bit dense. Still, it's a fresh entry into a stagnating genre, and even with its limited replay value it's worth a look for fans of the original POPULOUS and newcomers alike. **CGW**

Denny Aikin was addicted to the original POPUL, but wasn't a fan of the bastard-child POWERMONGER. Lately he's been playing POPULOUS II on the Win/Amiga Amiga emulator, as well as HALF-LIFE, WWN FIGHTERS, and EUROPEAN AIR WAR.



All Aboard!

Hop This Locomotive for Addictive, Cutthroat, Robber-Baron Capitalism

by Bob Proctor

The original RAILROAD TYCOON was one of the first computer strategy games based on building instead of fighting. But unlike SIMCITY, it had a high degree of competitiveness. It's good to see this favorite return in RAILROAD TYCOON II (RT2). The sequel has more of what the original had—more commodities, more locomotives, more maps—but nothing that radically alters the concept. I would have preferred to see more new features (see sidebar) but I still think it's a great game.

The first thing you'll notice is that the graphics have been beautifully upgraded. It's a thrill to

zoom in from a view of an entire continent to see towns, farms, and factories (with smokestacks puffing). And once the trains get rolling, it's a busy, bustling world. To satisfy the train watcher in all of us, the designers have made sure there's a wide variety of authentic railroad equipment from all time periods: About 60 different locomotives are available, from George Stephenson's Rocket to the TGV and trains that will levitate magnetically in the 21st century.

I've Been Working on the Stock Market

RT2 is a strategy game that uses elements from railroad construction



ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE The interface lists railroad companies at bottom center, with the jump map bottom left. Right clicking any object in the main window gets you more details on it.



VIRGIN TERRITORY North America awaits. No matter in what year you start a game, there will be no other railroads sulling the landscape.

is "completely authentic," knowing how real railroads operate will actually be a handicap. The first concept you must learn is that whenever a train stops at a station, all carsloads are sold whether or not they are in demand there. Choose your consist (list of hauled cars) and routes accordingly.

Here's another example: The first time I started laying track, I was horrified to see grades of 12 percent. This is impossibly steep for real railroads, where 4 percent is considered extraordinary. I tried to improve things and spent way too much—a big mistake. Locomotives

and operations, business economics, and the stock market. The goal of the game is usually to maximize your personal wealth, the value of your company or both. Because the game allows all the nasty tricks that 19th-century robber barons used, you make 90 percent of your money on the stock market rather than running your railroad. To play RT2 competitively, you must master the market. You can neglect your railroad; you can even run it into the ground to drive the stock price down and make money by selling the stock short. If you find that sort of behavior distasteful, you can

tone down the game by selecting from three levels of complexity for both the financial and industrial models. You can't turn off the stock market completely without also turning off the industrial model (an oversight), but you can turn both off. This is called "Sandbox mode," and it lets you build to your heart's content without worrying about running out of money or being bought out by Jay Gould.

In spite of the claims printed on the box that RT2

SURVEYING: Because railroads are so expensive, they must be carefully planned before construction starts. RT2 should at least allow you to undo the last section of track as you build. Even better would be a survey mode in which an entire line could be laid out so that grade and cost could be determined before you make the decision to build it.

What's Missing in RT2?

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★★

APPEAL: Anyone who enjoyed the original or who likes feature games and building games.

PROS: Strong visual appeal, lots of decision-making opportunities, multiple play modes, excellent replay value.

CONS: Bare minimum manual (no undo command; heavy emphasis on finance if you play competitively could be a plus for some); real railroad knowledge can be a hindrance.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Win 95/98/NT4, 16MB RAM, 130MB hard disk space, 4x CD-ROM, video card and monitor capable of 1024x768 resolution with 16 million colors.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem or serial cable (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-4 players).

Price: \$49.95
 Publisher: GIGAWATT of Developers
 Dallas, TX
 (877) GIGAGAMES
 www.gigawatt.com

in RT2 can handle a 12 percent grade, albeit slowly and with only a car or two.

Where Do You Want to Go Today?

RT2 presents you with many interesting decisions. The maps stay the same but the distribution of resources is random, making every game different. You start by finding a demand for a resource and a source for it. Then you lay track on a favorable route and place your stations optimally. The interface for placing things on the map is tricky and there is no Undo command. Placing is a

skill that must be learned: Pause the game and rotate the map to view from different angles before committing to anything. Use the Sandbox mode to practice.

Once you have built your railroad line, it's time to choose a locomotive. This is an art in itself. Some are better for steep hills, others for flat land. (These generally

are faster.) The various models of locomotives differ in cost, acceleration, reliability, and fuel consumption. None of these factors is crucial, but paying attention to each of them will make your railroad that much more efficient. Lastly,

you have to select a consist and a routing for each train (this must be reviewed periodically as conditions change).

There are a lot of maps to play on. The 12 scenarios included in RT2 mostly represent parts of the United States and Europe, but China and South America are also depicted. The campaign game has 18 different missions, and it includes many maps that are not used by the scenarios, including India, Australia, Japan, and Africa; however, these maps cannot be used for generating scenarios or for multiplayer games.

While victory conditions in the scenarios usually have to do with wealth, the campaigns often have you connecting specific cities or countries. If you get bored with all of this, the game includes a map editor so

BURNING DAYLIGHT

A Southern Pacific Daylight, class GS-4, rolls north along the California coast. RAILROAD TYCOON II exaggerates train size so that a six-car train will be 50 to 150 miles long. Compressed time means a train between L.A. and San Francisco may make only one round-trip per year.



that you can create new maps or modify the ones provided.

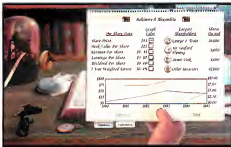
Here Comes the Caboose!

RT2 is a nice effort with very high replay value. The game never crashed, the AI plays a pretty tough game (I suspect it cheats to get a fast start, since it always seems to get more loads than I do), and multiplayer mode is a host and as vicious as any STARCRIFT game. With so many ways to play RAILROAD TYCOON II, you're bound to find one that will pull you in and keep you enthralled. **CGW**

Bob Proctor has it on good authority—his mother—that he learned to say “choo-choo” before “mama.” She finally forgave him earlier this year.



EXTRA, EXTRA Periodic newspaper reports keep you abreast of current events and new technology that may affect your strategy.



TAKING STOCK The trading screen lets you see who owns stock and how many shares. Other useful data are here too, including earnings per share, book value, and a five-year weighted return on investment.

ENGINEERING: The classic trade-off in railroad construction is between the cost to build and the cost to operate. You can keep the grade on almost any railroad to 1 or 2 percent if you are willing to spend money tunneling, bridging, and looping to change elevation.

If you don't pay up front, you end up paying later with higher fuel and maintenance costs and slower, less reliable trains. RAILROAD TYCOON II should give you the option of buying lower grades on any section of track.

HELPER ENGINES: The economic model in RAILROAD TYCOON II pays big bonuses for longer trips, but this makes it more difficult to choose the right locomotive. You might have mostly easy grades with one or two places where steep grades are unavoidable.

Real railroads cope with this by adding a “helper engine” at the bottom of the hill. RAILROAD TYCOON II should replicate real life by letting you assign locomotives to helper service to boost train speeds uphill.

SEASONS: My trains get stopped by bandits all the time, but they never suffer from something far more common in the real world—snow. Lines through the Alps, the Sierra, or the Rockies spend lots of money to operate during winter months. RAILROAD TYCOON II could have modeled this and allowed you to overcome it in two ways. You could buy an upgrade to a section of track (representing snowsheds, avalanche protection, and snow removal equipment) or use a special car, the Snowplow, which you could put on trains the same way you attach a caboose.

Second Front

WEST FRONT Takes the Conflict Farther Than Its Eastern Counterpart

by Jim Cobb

TalorSoft's game systems are a lot like wine: They improve over time, and gamers are advised not to reject them even if the first sip proves a bit disappointing. WEST FRONT is a fine example of this maturation process. Its sister game EAST FRONT, debuted to mostly tepid reviews and has been patched seven times with increasingly successful changes. WEST FRONT not only incorporates these changes, it moves beyond them and is superior to its predecessor in almost every respect.

My Kingdom for an Action Point

WEST FRONT is a tactical, turn-based, simulation of combat in the

WWII western front during 1940–1945. The scale is 250 meters per hex, 6 minutes per turn, and focuses on platoon/battery-sized units. Combatants include not only the typical forces of Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, but also Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia, and two kinds of Italian and French troops each. The basics of play are similar to EAST FRONT, with units being rated on strength, morale, fire and movement costs, and assault and defense capabilities. Unit capabilities are restricted by a set number of action points. Actions can be ordered from a menu, toolbar, or keyboard. Function keys bring up screens that explain unit capabilities in historic as well as game terms. These screens fit into the luxurious graphics for units and five different levels of maps. Everything necessary for play is clearly visible and accessible through many options.

Gameplay is also similar to the older game in that units can move and fire one by one to their action point limits. Combat results include reduction in strength, retreat, and disruption—a state that limits combat and movement until troops are rallied by a friendly leader. Players can save action points by setting limits to movement so that



DARBY'S RANGERS This amphibious assault of Gela shows the improved graphics, from the miniatures-style soldiers to the new contour lines of the terrain.

points can be saved for firing and loading/unloading. Close assault is handled as a function of movement—a nice touch—while fire can be ordered either in your turn or saved for opportunity fire in the opponent's turn. Off-and-onboard indirect fire arrives the turn after ordered and is subject to drift, meaning that you have to plan ahead and anticipate your opponent's movement.

If you're saying that we've seen most of this before—well, you've

right. However, WEST FRONT has enough innovations to keep the action sequences hopping. The graphics are upgraded to better show terrain contours. Research into vehicle data explodes myths about some early Allied tanks and shows the evolution of anti-tank weapons during the war from useless to devastating. You can now set opportunity fire defaults, so that units don't waste their fire on sacrificial junk vehicles only to be overwhelmed later on by the real attackers. Air units, used in WEST FRONT like indirect fire, are "smart." If their original target is gone when the planes arrive, they'll look for other targets. The much-maligned line-of-sight system from EAST FRONT has been rewritten to clearly incorporate unit size and concealment value of terrain, making the fog-of-war and extreme fog-of-war options exciting yet understandable. Movement to contact is made easier with two types of organizational group moves at company level. New units and functions include landing craft, gliders, and parachutes. Drifts and possible landing damage will affect your paradrops.

I'm Off to France, Dear

The crown jewels in WEST FRONT's new features are the two types of campaigns. Six linked campaigns (LCCs) start with historical

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Anyone involved in World War II combat.

PROS: Incredible historical detail, lush graphics, fine graphics, fine graphics, and more... and superb campaign games.

CONS: Computer opponent is surprisingly lacking, limited morale effects, not quite up to the excellence of TalorSoft's THE OFFICIAL ART OF WAR.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Platform 333, Windows 35/38, 16MB RAM, 100MB hard-drive space, 16-bit VGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, supports DirectX-compatible sound.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: PREM, TCP/IP, LAN, G-16 players, 1 CD per player. Also null modem or headset (2 players).

Price: \$54.95
 Publisher: TalorSoft
 Foster Hill, MD
 (301) 211-6504

www.talorsoft.com



OPEN MARKET While it's not as fast-paced as CLOSE COMBAT, TalorSoft's WEST FRONT does a good job of showing the desperate stand of the British 1st Airborne holding the north end of Arnhem bridge.



FALLSCHIRMJAEGER! The high point of the German glider and paratroop operations are well depicted in WEST FRONT, from the early landings on Crete (above) to the chaotic situation that develops later as the British counterattack (below).



units and follow the actual course of wartime events. However, replayability is assured because the player faces different engagements based upon his performance. WEST FRONT hits its stride with the dynamic campaigns (DCGs). Here, a player becomes part of the unit mix as either a tank or infantry leader. Although the campaigns start and end on the historic dates, what happens between is wildly variable. The gamer begins commanding a battalion and can place units before the battle. Good results in missions increase both the commander's and his command's experience points, leading to more favorable combat results.

The number of missions per campaign varies, with the percentage chance for a mission changing weekly. Too many missions can be hard on an outfit since losses to the player's core units are carried over. Replacements dribble in unpredictably so the only way a player can increase his core force is to be promoted to regimental or divisional command. In fact, you may be stuck playing a number of missions with dwindling numbers of troops, unless you get a "million-dollar" wound and end up on leave until the campaign ends.

During the campaign, equipment may be upgraded automatically. There are seven DCGs but, because the tank and infantry modes are completely different, WEST FRONT actually has twice that number. Fifty-two single scenarios provide an opportunity for quick play.

WEST FRONT has a scenario editor with detailed terrain and unit libraries, so that you can re-create virtually any engagement. For the busy player, there's a scenario generator that creates a battle after the player sets parameters of month, year, region, command size, nationality, and engagement type.

TalonSoft took a drubbing with the skimpy initial documentation of EAST FRONT. The company has not made the same mistake twice. WEST FRONT has a 250-page, well-illustrated manual that explains every aspect and option in



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Morale Problem

For all of its fine points, *WEST FRONT* suffers from three rough edges that will irritate serious gamers.

First, the infantry is too strong in the early battles. During this period, most infantry was unprepared to deal with armored attacks and tended to withdraw when the tanks came on. In *WEST FRONT*, infantry stands in the open like a rock against tanks, and swarms of infantry platoons are the most efficient tank killers. As the war progressed, infantry became proficient against armor, but not in 1939-41. Second, and more important, morale effects are too limited. While the morale routine for units being attacked works well, nothing affects adjacent units. Consider two scenarios: Three units are in the same 250-meter hex; two either die or retreat. In *WEST FRONT*, the third always stays put. The same applies to three units in a three-hex line: The middle one will hold regardless of its flanks. This system precludes routs, which are really what lose most battles. Limiting morale effects to single units is unrealistic and makes battles too long and bloody.

Finally, the AI is conservative and predictable. On the two lower levels, it doesn't press home advantages, especially when close assaults would work. It becomes more aggressive at the two harder levels, when it has larger forces and receives boosts in supply and combat resolution, but doesn't become cleverer tactically. The AI misses indirect fire by always targeting where mobile units are instead of where they should be next turn, and it makes its own units vulnerable by clustering them at obvious aiming points.

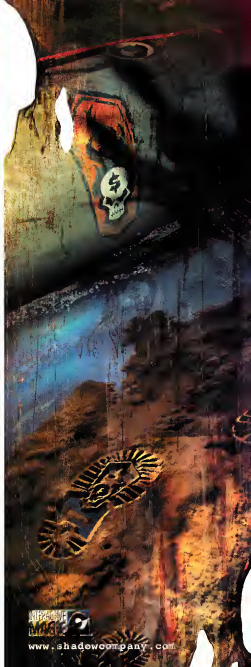


SUPER GRUNTS This many British Matilda tanks should be able to send the German infantry running in 1940, but they don't in *WEST FRONT*.

fine detail. Extensive data tables and bibliographies will help scenario designers, while questions are covered in a five-page FAQ. The manual includes a tutorial for experienced gamers, while the README file contains a boot camp for beginners.

WEST FRONT is a worthy entrant into a genre that still appeals to serious gamers, despite a few rough edges (see sidebar, above). One wishes TalonSoft, having polished the detail work on WWII tactical combat, would take a closer look at the large-scale factors and relationships of battle in this era. *WEST FRONT* is a fine platform for this and is the most entertaining, informative, and accessible product on the subject. **GGW**

While he enjoys World War II campaigning, Jim Cobb is still waiting for the definitive American Civil War simulation.



Order Triumphant

CHAOS GATE Heralds the Return of Turn-based Squad-level Gaming

by Tim Carter

XCOMmies rejoice. After long and oh-so-barely years of bad knockoffs and paltry imitations, at last we turn-based aficionados have a game we can sink our teeth into. CHAOS GATE,SSI's latest venture into the WARHAMMER universe, delivers a solid turn-based, squad-level game engine. Finally, CHAOS GATE puts you in command of large and small groups of space marines on a quest to defeat, basically, an army of other space marines.

While CHAOS GATE owes some inspiration to the now venerable X-COM, the combat system, game story, and tactical battles have a distinctive feel that is more loyal to the WARHAMMER universe than anything else. For instance, the equipment and types of troops

available to you in CHAOS GATE are dictated by the fiction underpinning all WARHAMMER games. This, in turn, has a considerable effect on your tactics and long-term strategy.

I must confess, however, that I found myself gravitating away from many of the "true" WARHAMMER solutions to tactical problems in favor of what I thought worked best. For instance, hand-to-hand fighting would appear to be an important component of space marine training and combat. A special assault squad, moreover, comes equipped with mostly short-range weapons. Yet, even when the scenario called for the use of these troops, I found myself leaving them in favor of more conventional long-range-equipped soldiers. The reason? At long range it's entirely possible to destroy the enemy piecemeal with little or no risk. Up close, the fighting is a lot more even. Since CHAOS GATE does not allow you much room for losses, fighting hand-to-hand is a bad idea.

Impressive Tactics

At the heart of CHAOS GATE is an impressive tactical combat system. You control each soldier individually, giving him orders to walk, run, shoot, throw grenades, and so



EYE SEE YOU A good defense will use overwatch fire to keep the bad guys off. Troops with an eye over them have time reserved for firing during the enemy's turn.

on. Unlike many of its competitors, however, CHAOS GATE actually works—and works well. All of the commands are intuitive, and most may be executed with a minimum number of keystrokes or mouse clicks. When aiming at an enemy target you are provided with a considerable amount of useful data displayed in a nice mock HUD.

Before each mission you select and equip a preset number of squads from your force pool. You have a limited number of men and weapons, so you must choose well and guard your forces carefully while in combat. A key to long-term success in

less balanced when the bigger battles come along.

All of the usual line-of-sight, hidden movement, and terrain effects have been modeled into the game and significantly impact tactics. Smart marine commanders will have troopers darting from behind cover, firing, and then ducking back into protected areas before the evil Chaos forces can shoot back (or shoot back much, as opportunity or "overwatch" fire also plays a role both on the offense and defense).

Actually I rather wish that the CHAOS troops took a more progressive attitude toward opportunity fire, as in many scenarios, particularly the randomly generated ones, they don't put up nearly as strong a fight as they might. The problem (along with their reluctance to leave movement points for opportunity fire) seems to be that each type of soldier acts according to his official "task" as determined by his type and armament. Therefore, assault troops will try to close with you and engage in hand-to-hand combat, while marines with say rocket launchers hang back and look for a long-range shot. It's fine in theory, but is usually pretty easy

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPEAL: Turn-based fans looking for an X-COM fix.

PROS: Great game system, very close, distinct WARHAMMER universe.

CONS: Somewhat repetitive; lacks a larger strategic game.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, Windows 95/98, 32MB RAM, 1.5GB hard-drive space, SVGA video card with 2MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN and Internet (2-4 players).

Price: \$49.95
Publisher: SSI
Novato, CA
(917) 761-2322

www.ssiandssi.com



SUITING UP Proper equipment is a key to success, although unit type and designation constrain the equipment that each marine can use.



VITAL STATISTICS The handy targeting HUD shows that this targeted Chaos marine is not long for this world.

to handle during actual battles. Hang back and wait for any and all assaulting enemy troops to leave their covered positions and attack, then kill them using directed and over-watch fire. Then, isolate and destroy the defenses that remain at their posts one at a time.

I often found that as a group the CHAOS forces simply didn't work together enough to get the most out of their troops. The game is set up so that most troops (on both sides) are pretty durable, making full-blown firefights quite interesting, as you have to decide where and how to concentrate your fire to have a measurable effect. In many instances, however, the dysfunctional tactics of the AI

Combating Chaos

Given the somewhat dysfunctional proclivities of the AI in CHAOS GATE, aspiring marine heroes may want to take a "piecemeal" approach to dissecting the enemy. As the enemy's armor is as good as yours, you can't reasonably assume that enemy troops will die following the first or even second accurate shot (assuming your soldiers have the skills to hit what they're aiming at). Instead, try to isolate individual defenders and gang up on them with three or more attacking marines. If you have time and favorable terrain, sneak one or more marines close enough to use grenades to soften up heavily armored enemy troops or armored vehicles (especially vehicles). Don't be afraid to sit back at long range and pick apart Chaos defenses—no one said that winning had to be pretty. Use heavy bolters and Krak missiles to do your dirty work for you, and move in only when you have to.

Remember: Ammunition shortages become a problem only if you forget to forage. A clever marine commander will know what he is likely to run short of later (like grenades and heavy bolter clips) and pick it up whenever possible.



www.shadowcompany.com

00 10 1173 © www.dawnofwar2.com/WarMk



TRAIL OF TEARS The AI often charges headlong at your defenses, as this trail of bodies shows.

squandered its troops' strengths. Mind you, this flaw in the computer opponent isn't so severe that it ruins the game. You're left with a sense not so much of disappointment as of missed opportunity.

A Thickening Plot

Another opportunity missing from CHAOS GATE is the sense of

strategic control. One of the most attractive elements of X-COM was the ability to control the pace and flow of the game's central story. In CHAOS GATE, you're presented side missions, but the path to victory is, ultimately, straightforward and linear.

Not that the scenarios themselves are bad; in fact, they offer



TANKS FOR THE SUPPORT Later in the game you'll be able to use massive tanks during your excursions against the Chaos forces.

a pretty wide range of situations and demonstrate that considerable thought and effort has gone into creating a background against which your tactical battles are fought. It's a good thing, because without a plot tactical games, even with varied maps and objectives, can become repetitive very quickly. (I found this with X-COM as well.)

The scenarios also offer up an

interesting selection of nuggets and special events to keep you on your toes. I had troops captured by the enemy, I foraged for needed weapons and ammunition, and I felt genuinely pleased when my C.O. blessed my troops with armored support.

All in all, CHAOS GATE is a fine game. The somewhat weak AI, linear plot, and a few other minor problems (scav-

enging for weapons and ammo can be time consuming and annoying) keep it from getting a perfect score, but even with these flaws the game is head and shoulders above anything else in the genre. **CCTV**

Tim Carter holds a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies and is now playing TOT ARBORNE as well as THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR.

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Corporate Wars

RUTHLESS.COM Unveils the Seamy Underside of Business

by Terry Coleman

All of a sudden, strategy games that revolve around how to run a business are popping up everywhere. A conspiracy theorist could probably trace this trend to subversive elements in the National Teachers Association, Al Gore's election campaign, or some leftover agenda from the Contract with America—the rest of us can just enjoy having something other than orcs and spaceships to fiddle with for a while.

But even in the narrow subset of business games, RUTHLESS.COM stands as a different breed of empire building. Dark and moody, it can be viewed as a biting satire on the state of the computer industry or enjoyed as a challenging game with more than a few welcome twists.



APPEAL: Anyone who reads (or) sees *Tech's Rise and Fall* is a business book.

PROS: Good game design; computer opponents really are ruthless sometimes; topic has not yet been beaten to death.

CONS: Annoying interface; primitive production values; painfully slow at times.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 120, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 13MB hard-drive space, 800x600 high-color graphics, 4x CD-ROM, supports DirectSound audio

3D SUPPORT: None

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN or TCP/IP (2-6 players), 1 CD per player

Price: \$29.95
 Publisher: Red Storm/Softdisk
 Copyright ©
 2000 (714) 611-5150

www.redstorm.com



SPREADSHEET WARS Here we recap the orders issued for the turn, with our blossoming post-pictorial corporation in the background. It's enough to make you long for those 16-color graphics of GENIUS KUN II. Ugh.

Twists and Turns

The game is turn-based, which seems more appropriate than the real-time action of *ENTREPRENEUR*. In the course of each turn your CEO can give up to two orders, which may include building new marketing, R&D, computer, or legal facilities; releasing new products; hiring and firing executives; and restructuring the company. Meanwhile, the other CEOs (AI or human) do the same, and the game system executes all the orders simultaneously resolving any conflicts. Ho, hum, you say. And if this were all there were to the game, you'd be right.

But RUTHLESS.COM also lets you see the pants off your competitors and engage in hostile takeovers. If traditional methods don't get you the desired results, you can get

really down and dirty. During one game, a competitor broke off a crucial deal with me; I retaliated by screwing with his patents, luring away one of his top executives with an obscene amount of

money and introducing a virus into his main center of operations. In another game, I cut to the chase and kidnapped the enemy CEO. By the time his company had found a suitable replacement, I was well

on my way to dominating the market in a more ethical fashion.

Hacker's Lament

The scenarios are mostly well thought-out: The option to try again with a CEO who has different special traits—shady, stalwart, whatever—makes them very replayable. Among the memorable scenarios are one in which you try to take down the monolithic "EviSoft" corporation and, my favorite, *Armageddon*, in which the decline of the personal computer market means a shrinking pie for all players to frantically divide—a must for cartoonists everywhere.

The game design features a number of other nice touches. If your programmers get bored, they will launch a computer attack (a data

raid, a virus, or the like) at some random company. If your security forces get out of hand, they risk bringing the Mafia full-bore into the game. And the richer you get, the more vulnerable your top executives become to potential scandal.

All of which makes me wonder why the game is so clunky (too many clicks and no right-mouse-button functionality) and why it doesn't look and sound better. Some of the art is fine, but for the most part this game reminds me visually of an early Amiga or late Commodore 64 game. The sounds are tepid and repetitive; if you're going to use a CD, folks, at least put some Redbook audio on it.

RUTHLESS.COM really could have used better audio and visual feedback because, while it's certainly interesting, it's also as painfully dry as a badly mixed martini. No question you'll like the kick, but you'll also likely have trouble getting your friends to join you in a libation. That's a real shame, since this game deserves to be played. Maybe with RUTHLESS.COM II Red Storm will have a budget somewhere near what CEO Tom Clancy gets for one of his novels. **CGW**

Responding to the distinguished senator, Terry Coleman cannot recall at this point in time ever engaging in any unethical activity.



Lawuits and hostile takeovers (left) are a way of life in RUTHLESS.COM. But if you evade it, the Justice Department (above) pays a visit to everyone in the industry.

Darwinian Loser

Despite an Interesting Twist, This Species Should Go the Way of the Dodo

by Lance A. Larka

In **DOMINANT SPECIES**, the situation is reversed from the usual human-dominated exploitation RTS game; instead, you play the abused and hounded natives just trying to eke out a living by tapping the life-giving anima springs that are unique to the planet. What hasn't evolved is the standard cycle of collect, build, and destroy seen in most RTS games.

Only the Fittest Survive

The linear campaign casts you as a HiveMind initiate being tested to determine your progress toward becoming a full member when the strange humans are discovered. To be specific, a human mining company. The problem is, the humans want to extract the same anima that makes Hive life possible, and,



ROAD TO OBLIVION The overhead map is much more useful than the view screen, but it still comes up short in letting you load effectively.



A NEW DIMENSION IN MEDIOCRITY Even 3D acceleration can't save **DOMINANT SPECIES** from the scourge of lackluster graphics, as in these bland explosions.

being greedy humans, they aren't willing to share. It's an engaging plot, and the story would be right at home in a space opera from the '60s. That is the end of the enjoyment, unfortunately.

Over countless generations the psychic Mindloids have directed their clanlike Hives against each other in shifting coalitions to seek out and control territory and the anima stored in the ground. This competitive nature has had the expected results of producing some very capable warriors to fight and defend against each other. Unfortunately, the imaginatively designed creatures are so often that their appearance really doesn't suggest their abilities or usefulness. Further, many of the creatures are distinguished by only minor cosmetic

differences; this leads to some real confusion during the heat of battle. Is that a Firespitter? An Acid-spitter? A Lightspitter? Maybe it's just a spittoon with teeth. The game's funky interface bar with its foreign icons doesn't make commanding any easier.

You! Out of the Gene Pool!

The interface is really trying to be MYTH—but it fails. There are two map screens available that you can use, and you have to use both to be effective. But this eliminates half of the view screen and makes it even less useful than it was—which wasn't very much. The view screen shows a wedge of the battlefield, but the controls are so cumbersome and the

elevation changes so extreme that by the time you get oriented in the right direction, the battle is over. I found that by using only the overhead map to control my forces I had a much better chance at success. This really invalidated the vaunted 3D environment and turned **DOMINANT SPECIES** into a giant board game.

The map has problems, too. Elevation is extremely important to the inherent tactical considerations, but it isn't displayed at all well on the map. Nor are certain items critical to play displayed, even after being "discovered" by your critters.

The AI has some mutations as well. Pathfinding is pitiful. For example, units guarding a building won't even move around to the other side to attack enemy forces pounding away at the structure. And all units attempt to fire through intervening terrain, if they bother to engage at all.

DOMINANT SPECIES is a game with a nice concept and an interesting twist, but its poorly implemented interface, useless maps, and run-of-the-mill gameplay mark this as one species doomed to quick extinction. **CGI**

Lance A. Larka is fondly remembering what it was like to spend only \$10 on a good toy.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers who like to play the underdog.

PROS: Good story and plot.

CONS: Bad interface that hampers gameplay; buggy AI units are confusingly similar; some old real-time strat grind.

DIFFICULTY: Advanced.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166 with hardware acceleration; Pentium 233MHz without hardware acceleration; Windows 95/98; 16MB RAM; 100MB hard-disk space; An CD-ROM; 16-bit video card with 4MB RAM; 23.8 resolution for monitor play; sound card.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN and Internet (2-4 players).

Price: \$9.95
 Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment
 Marietta, GA
 (516) 482-1736

www.redstorm.com



IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS? This line of Firespitters and Lightspitters baffles the human scouts fixated on moving past them—and the gamers tasked with commanding them.

Wheels and Slings, No Arrows

More Quick Reviews for the Classically Inclined



Wheel of Fortune

★★★★★

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: \$29.95
www.hasbro.com

Quick, buy a vowel! **WHEEL OF FORTUNE** is back, and with the exception of some quality announcing by Charlie O'Donnell, Vanna White gets this one all to herself in full-motion video. Otherwise in full-motion video. Other than authentic sounds and music right down to changing camera angles. If you don't want to watch Vanna and see the videos of the virtual prizes ("It's his-and-hers sunboards!"), you can turn them off, but why else would you buy this?

Solo gameplay is okay, but you're limited to three human contestants for multiplayer; if there are only two, the game injects an AI player to round things out. It's pretty boring when you go bankrupt and are forced to sit back and watch the computer spin the wheel, guess letters, buy vowels, and ultimately solve the puzzle.

When it's your turn to solve the puzzle, remember: Unlike the game on television, spelling counts; if you're off by even a single letter, you lose (Quick, spell "Arnold

_____ as the Terminator.")

Even more annoying is the game's unseem time. Hesitate too long, and play unceremoniously (and unapologetically) moves on to the next player. With three people crowded around a PC, it's too easy to get bumed by this "feature." Overall, this game is better than the last PC **WHEEL**, but you're better off with **JEPARDY** or almost any of the **YOU DON'T KNOW JACK** games. —Mark Clarkson

Slingo

★★★★★

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Price: \$19.95
www.hasbro.com

For any gamer who has ever wanted to play solo **Bingo**, **SLINGO** should be a welcome treat. For the rest of us, it's about as welcome as **Sominex** in your morning coffee. **SLINGO** purports to be a cross between **Bingo** and a



slot machine, but when you get right down to it, it's just **Bingo**. Sure, the random numbers are displayed five at a time when you pull a slot machine handle rather than one at a time by a greeter plucking balls out of a cage, but that doesn't affect the underlying gameplay. Your task is still to complete horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines by matching numbers on a five-by-five card. Instead of winning as soon as you complete one line, you try to complete as many as possible (or fill your entire card) within 20 pulls of the handle.

In other words, the game goes like this: You pull the handle; you check off any matches (couldn't the computer do this for you?); you pull the handle again; you check off any new matches; and so on, 18 more times. In real **Bingo**, you at least have the fun of racing against other players to be the first to complete a line (and win a prize). At least your neighborhood church doesn't have to lose any sleep over the competition. —Charles Ards

The Robot Club

★★★★★

Publisher: Southpeak Interactive
Price: \$29.95
www.southpeak.com

Novel approaches to logic games are always welcome, and while **THE ROBOT CLUB** is obviously aimed at teenagers, it's clever enough to keep anyone's attention for a time. The game presents a series of puzzling tasks, which you must accomplish by dint of logic and robot design.

First comes the hardware. By dragging and dropping parts from a catalog, you equip your "bot" with treads, wheels, boosters, lasers,



banana guns, and sensors that detect metal, high-tech machinery, or just the color blue, depending on the demands of the task at hand. The construction window is more of a schematic than a model; very few designs could possibly perambulate at all, as shown.

Next comes the software. Assembling programs is straightforward, if a little clumsy. Programs consist of color-coded tasks, containing one or more instructions. Instructions have two halves: a condition (for example, touching an obstacle) and an action (say, making a U-turn). Programming is drag-and-drop: To make the robot go, for instance, you need to drag its treads into the action half of the instruction and select Go from the pop-up options.

Using the combined capabilities of a robot's sensors, weapons, locomotors, and the rest, you can construct fairly complex programs: "if sensors detect high-technology (such as another robot) nearby, aim weapons, fire, then turn and sikedaddle."

You'll design robots to perform a variety of increasingly complex good deeds. Or, if your interests run more toward head-to-head competition, you can pit your design and programming skills against those of the game's designers, and your friends, by letting any two robots duke it out in the dueling arena. **THE ROBOT CLUB** is overly chatty and a bit clunky, but budding engineers and logicians could do a lot worse. —Mark Clarkson **GVW**

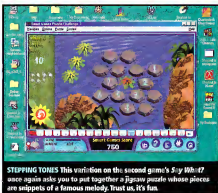
Still Smart, Still Game

SMART GAMES 3 Adds New Material in the Old Style

by Charles Ardai

Almost three years after they set the puzzle game standard, the folks at Smart Games are still the only ones doing it right. PUZZLE CHALLENGE 3 includes lots of great puzzles, all presented in the famous SMART GAMES style: first, a few seductively easy levels to get you started, then progressively tougher ones until your skull starts to ache. There are 20 different puzzles here, with hundreds of levels, as usual ranging thematically from verbal to spatial to general knowledge. The graphics are simple but charming, the music jaunty.

There is only one problem: Having used up most of the familiar basic puzzle types in the first two volumes, the designers have had to dig deeper into their bag of



STEPPING STONES This variation on the second game's *Sky Wheel* once again asks you to put together a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are snippets of a famous melody. Trust us, it's fun.

tricks this time, choosing between offering increasingly subtle variations on old favorites and introducing genuinely novel puzzles that are a little too arcane to "get" at first glance. They've done a little of each, and the latter especially takes some getting used to.

A Puzzling Development

You really have to read the rules this time out if you want to understand just how some of these puzzles work, and that's a shame. Deciphering how to play *Gumball* or *Shopping Cart* becomes something of a puzzle itself: You have to familiarize yourself with each

puzzle's unique set of controls and rules, and the handful of explanatory sentences the game provides is not always as helpful as it is meant to be.

That said, once you get the hang of a given puzzle, it's generally worth it: All but two or three are excellent, and a couple are simply brilliant. *Meteor Mayhem* is one of the best, a tricky little number in which you control one or more robot spaceships that have to clear a grid of asteroids in a limited number of moves and/or firings of the ship's laser cannons. It's hard enough when you have to find a

out three asteroids with just two shots, harder still when you start coming across satellites that fire back. *Word Loops* requires you to fill a grid with words, each differing from its neighbors by exactly one letter. (This is easy enough in a small grid whose first word is "big," but utterly including in a large grid whose first word is "range.")

There is some repetition—for instance, both *Butterflies* and *Balloon Kaboom* ask you to clear a grid of its contents by moving shapes around until similar ones are side-by-side, and both *Gumball* and *Take A Seat* ask you to fill receptacles according to esoteric rules. Even the more straightforward games, such as *Paper*, *Scissors*, *Rock*, have enough special rules to make them quite enjoyable.

Unlike most series, which tend to start running out of steam by their third installment, SMART GAMES' PUZZLE CHALLENGE still has all of its original spirit and most of its creative spark. It's showing its age a little, but no puzzle lover will leave disappointed. **CGW**

In addition to terrorizing software companies with his reviews, Charles Ardai is a member of the *Horror Writer's Association*.



BALLOON KABOOM Put some hot air to good use in this clever variation on the sliding-tile puzzle.



TUMBLIN' DICE Like a Keith Richards guitar riff, there's more to this simple game than you think.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



APPRAISAL: Puzzle lovers eager for some challenging brain-busters.

PROS: Some excellent new puzzles presented in the famously addictive SMART GAMES style.

CONS: Now that they've used up all the familiar puzzle types, what's left is sometimes esoteric and hard to get the hang of.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: 486SX, Windows 95/98, 1MB RAM, 5MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, supports Windows-compatible sound cards.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None.

Price: \$29.99

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Framingham, MA

(508) 901-3700

www.hasbro.com

Grim Fandango

Having a Bad Day of the Dead? Scorpio's Here to Help

by Scorpio

GRIM FANDANGO is an extensive adventure, with far too much to cover exhaustively in a single article. Here we'll take a look at some of the puzzles most likely to give you trouble.

At the Office



A First-class Client: You have to get in ahead of Domino to really start the game moving, especially after picking up the low-class poisoning victim. Gumming up the works can do wonders. But you'll need an ace in the hole (or vice versa), and you should insert it in the message center tube downstairs to read Mercedes Colomar's card.

Puerto Something

Demasiado Tardo: Too bad that message from Salvador came in too late to save the ship's crew. Now you have to save yourself and Glottis. In this case, half a loaf (or ship) is better than one. If you hear "Anchors Aweigh" in your head, that's a hint. Just be sure you get off to the right start.

Edge of the World

Vault: If you're having trouble with the tumbler, keep in mind that the four flat sides have to be facing and aligned with the right side of the door. It's best to work from the top down here. When they're set properly, think sharp to keep them from moving when you open the door.

Petrified Forest

Weird Marrow Tree: Okay, Manny, it's time to really rock and roll. You do the rolling, and the tree will rock. It's easiest to accomplish in the center, but timing is definitely essential. And you'll be needing some help from Glottis at the end; just don't wait too long. Sometimes you have to be naughty to be nice.



Demon Beavers:

Blasting from the front just doesn't do the trick. Maybe you found that out already. However, in the right place, with the right bait and the right timing, you can cool these hot little critters in practically no time. First, throw a bone into the pit, then hose each beaver with the fire extinguisher as it jumps in for the bone.

See the Review

FEBRUARY ISSUE • 4.5 STARS

Rubacava

ots to do, plenty of running around, and many puzzles to solve here. Take your time and scope out the whole area, so you know where all the places are (it was a long time before I discovered that the elevator by the Blue Casket brings you back up to the Calavera Cafe!). The three main goals in this section can be accomplished in almost any order, not just the one given here.

Naranja: No, you don't have to kill him to join the crew, but it's better all around if someone thought he was, um, "dead." Technically, of course, he's dead already. But in the world of GRIM FANDANGO, there's dead and there's dead, as in pushin' up

posies, mari-golds, whatever. Naranja's getting tattooed, which makes things slightly easier. After he's been basted (good for what ails him, and a little distraction helps), you'll have half of what you need.

Carla can supply the other half, provided you're flaky enough and fast enough to be detected.

Joining the Union: Chowchilla Charlie is willing to deal: a union card for a suitcase. Sounds easy enough, eh? Maybe. First, you'll have to shut up the waiter and have barrels of fun. Then, as Yogi said, "When you come to the fork in the road, take it." Take it right into the elevator. You can probably figure out what to do after that, but be quick about it.

Seabee Tools: ¡Viva la Revolución! Strike while the iron is hot, or at least the Seabees should. Bet you could write a book

about that, but someone else already did, and that's the start. Unfortunately, you now need a lawyer, and, even more unfortunately, he doesn't want to help you. Well, a little

blackmail in a good cause never hurts. A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when it comes to evidence.

Get Carla on the case, and the way will be lighted for you. Check out with Lupe, and then you're ready for some tricky tickle work. After that, Nick should be very willing to help get your pal out of the slammer.



Surviving the Crane The 12-Step Plan

*** If you don't want to know—look away now!**

1. Set the conveyor belt to move downward, then climb up out of the water.
2. Get in the crane and drive it to the other side of the city.
3. Push the down arrow key to lower the crane claw, and exit the crane. Use the Bust-All on the claw.
4. Get back in the crane.
5. Lower the chain. It should be between the rollers; if not, move the crane slightly and try again.
6. Raise the chain.
7. Go back to the other side of the city.
8. Lower the chain onto the conveyor belt.
9. Get out and go down the belt.
10. Set the belt to go upward and then downward.
11. Climb back up the belt, get in the crane, and raise the chain again.
- 12.

Rubacava Again

Bonewagons: If you're having trouble with the gelatin setting, check out Iolo's place.

Back Home Again

Disguise: Hot stuff! Too hot to handle. Speaking of which, it's too bad Manny doesn't have a third hand. Maybe he can get one. Think flowery thoughts.

Seeing Hector: When you talk to the couple, go against your better instincts. A con job now will be better in the long run.



Note the race photo showing #6.



Listen to the clerk, who mentions "Tuesday."

The Cat Trick



If you're having trouble finding the second betting window at the track, don't feel bad—you can't see this when you come up the stairs. So walk to the left to find the window.



Read the plaque by the stuffed cat, showing "second week." Putting it all together, it means you use Charlie's machine to fake a stub for Week 2, Tuesday, Race #6. Then take it to the other window and show it there. The photo the clerk shows you is the blackmail shot; you switch it for the race pic.

How to Reach Scorpia

Internet: Scorpia's Domain at www.scorpia.com • Email: scorpia@scorpia.com
U.S. Mail (include a self-addressed, stamped envelope)
Scorpia, P.O. Box 338, Grace Station, New York NY 10028

Half-Life

Sound Advice for Killing Your Friends

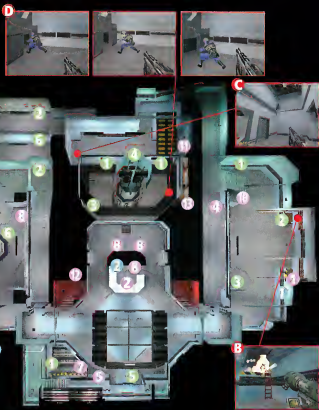
by Jesse Hiatt

If you're fortunate enough to have access to a LAN and some speedy rigs (Pentium 300+), the following maps and strategies will help you to master the

Datacore and Stalkyard levels. These are both close-quarter maps in which the action is fast and furious. So saddle up, lock and load, and get ready for carnage.

Datacore

This is a great level for honing your skills on the MP5 and its handy grenade launcher. Note the three places where grenades are available, including the one hidden in the shadows at point **A**. If you're fond of the crossbow, resist the temptation to lurk under the stairs or at point **B**—both positions are vulnerable. If you set up shop at point **C** you won't have as much coverage, but by scooting around the ledge you can maintain the element of surprise. And if you just gotta have 'em, crawl through the duct at point **D** and jump to a handful of snarks.



See the Review

FEBRUARY ISSUE + 5 STARS



Stalkyard

The main room of this level is filled with weapons and power-ups and is the center of the carnage in most battles. There is a jump assist and a secret door at point **E** (look for the red glow). This item will make gun shopping amidst all the boxes much easier. A sliding door at point **F** will grant you access to three satchel charges, and the Stalkyard is rife with opportunities to use them. For you sniping fans, by far the best place to hide is at point **G**. There's great coverage from this point, no one can see you in the shadows, and there are two health power-ups that you can grab if you get routed. There is a hole in the floor at point **H** that you can use to drop satchel charges on passers-by in the passage below. An air duct at point **I** leads to the adjacent passageway and gets you energy weapon ammo.

HALF-LIFE KEY

WEAPONS

1. Rocket Launcher
2. .357 Magnum
3. Satchel Charges
4. Shotgun
5. MPS
6. Satchel
7. Gauss Gun
8. Laser Trip Mines
9. Heavy-Mounted Machine Gun
10. Crossbow
11. Grenades
12. Hive Hand
13. Snarks

POWER-UPS

1. Rocket
2. Energy
3. Medipacks
4. Power Assist
5. Armor
6. MPS Grenades

STATIONS

1. Armor Station
2. Health Station

Warlords III: Darklords Rising

Our Favorite Units, From Assassins to Wraiths by Samuel Baker II

Bats

PROS Cheap and fast, good scouts; they give flight to heroes from the start

CONS Can't fight their way out of a wet paper bag

USE In your first or fifth army slot

Dark Pegasus

PROS 2-turn production, 2-hit unit, +2 fear, and they fly

CONS Upkeep of 10 is painful early in the game

USE A good choice for one of the four basic army slots

Blue Dragon

PROS High strength, flight, lightning attack—the second-best unit in the game

CONS Steep cost, upkeep, time to produce

USE In your last production slot

Assassins



PROS +5 assassin ability (50 percent chance to kill anything outright), great for city defense, cool laugh

CONS Everything else, especially their 25 upkeep

USE In a mercenary slot or as your first ally pick

See the Review

DECEMBER ISSUE • 4.5 STARS

Black Dragon

PROS High strength, acid attacks, flight—the best combat unit in the game

CONS Steep cost, upkeep, time to produce

USE In your last production slot



Catapults

PROS +2 siege, 2-turn production, +2 attacking cities

CONS Weak on attack and defense, quite slow

USE Produce only what you need to take cities

Green Dragon

PROS All the benefits of dragonhood with the best fear bonus

CONS Same as other dragons' cost and upkeep

USE In an ally slot, as you need only one of them per stack



Red Dragon

PROS High strength, flight, and the highest chaos bonus allowed

CONS Cost and upkeep

USE In an ally slot, as you need only one of them per stack



Dwarf Infantry

PROS +3 strength, 3-hit unit, only 1 turn to produce

CONS Terribly slow (14 movement)

USE Cheap city defense and early hero escort

Elven Archers

PROS Great missile attack, cheap upkeep

CONS Fragile, missile ability negated when facing units with 4 hits

USE Great for the "sack stack"



Elephants

PROS Strong, 3-hit unit, +1 trample bonus

CONS Slow speed and slow to produce

USE Hero backup or city stiffener

Fire Elemental

PROS Cheapest flying unit, decent strength, chaos ability, high movement rate

CONS A 4-turn unit that's only +2 chaos

USE In your second ally or merc slot

Gnoll Crossbows

PROS +2 assassin

CONS Slow, only average strength for a 2-turn unit

USE In cities, but only if you can't afford Gnoll cavalry

Giants

PROS +2 chaos, 3-hit unit

CONS Slow speed, slow to produce

USE As a first- or second-slot ally or mercenary



Gnoll Cavalry

PROS +4 assassin, 24 movement, good strength
CONS Takes three turns to produce
USE In the third or fourth army slot, so you can build them in your capital from the start



Gnoll Infantry

PROS Cheap, low upkeep, 2 hits, +1 assassin
CONS Weak attack, slow
USE Get what you pay for, but still good for sacking



Clay Golem

PROS +1 against cities, fastest unit with trample ability to produce
CONS Slow, trample affects ground units only
USE Conjure for city defense or casualty replacement

Iron Golem

PROS +1 against cities, +3 trample
CONS Weak for a 4-turn unit, trample affects ground units only
USE In one of your basic eight army slots as grunts



Stone Golem

PROS +1 against cities, +2 trample
CONS Weak for a 3-turn unit
USE Against majority of enemy ground units



Halfings

PROS Good missile attack, 2-hit unit, cheaper than elf archers
CONS Weak attack, slow, missile attack negated by units with four hits
USE In the first army slot



Nightmares

PROS +4 banding ability, fast, low upkeep
CONS Good only if you build lots of them
USE As a rapid response force to protect threatened cities



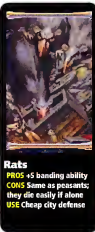
Peasants

PROS Effective strength of 4; if your city falls the enemy will get only 1 gold for pillage
CONS They die easily in small numbers
USE Cheap units for static city defense



Siege Engines

PROS +4 siege ability makes them city-crackers without peer
CONS 3-turn production, slow
USE Build only as many as you need until you have a leader with a high siege rating



Rats

PROS +5 banding ability
CONS Same as peasants; they die easily if alone
USE Cheap city defense

Skeletons

PROS +2 warding
CONS None, given the price
USE To lessen the danger of those nasty Blue/Black Dragon stacks

Wargs
PROS +4 warding, fast to produce, fast movement
CONS Weak strength for a 2-turn unit
USE In a flying hero's stack



Plague Carriers

PROS Great strength, fast to produce for its strength, low upkeep
CONS Low hits, quite slow
USE Good unit to produce early to take and defend cities



Slayer Knights

PROS +4 chaos, good strength and hits
CONS 4-turn unit
USE Good for city defense, useful if you have trouble procuring Red Dragons



Wolfriders

PROS +3 warding, fast, cheap
CONS Even weaker than Wargs
USE Same as Wargs

Wraiths

PROS +3 fear, fast
CONS Slow to produce, weak strength for a 3-turn unit
USE Something to put in your hero stacks until you get Green Dragons **CGM**

When he's not out riding Wargs, Samuel Baker II can be found playing RAILROAD TYCOON II.

Adventure

Fallout 2



FALLOUT 2 is big and while we're wrapping up our in-depth guide, we thought it would be nice to provide some quick tips to tide you over. In the original FALLOUT, the average finishing level was usually between 12 and 14 (unless you worked on having a lot of combats). Here, you will certainly go above Level 20, especially if you take time to do all the town quests. That means you should be careful about the **Skilled** and **Gifted** traits.

If you take **Skilled**, you'll lose out on at least two perks, since they will come every four levels instead of every three. If you take **Gifted**, you'll lose about 100 skill points over

the course of the game, since you won't get the +5 bonus per level. Players would do well to avoid these traits the first time around. **Speech** is a good tag skill to have, even if your character isn't particularly diplomatic. There are situations in which good talking (or bluffing) ability can get you further than a half of lead. Even with just average (5) charisma, good **Speech** skill can do a lot for you, especially combined with Intelligence of 6 or better.

The **Bonus AP**'s perk is another good choice. It can prove to be very helpful in many circumstances, particularly if you're running away from random encounters in the wastelands. Those extra two steps can literally be lifesavers.

Unless you really like difficult fights, set the combat mode to **Wimpy**. Opponents

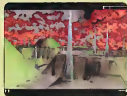
are much harder to kill than they were in the original game. Even with good weapons, you won't be doing a lot of damage.

You can also make life a bit more tolerable by setting the game mode to **Easy**. This gives you +20 percent to all skills from First Aid to Outdoorsman. You can change the mode any time during play to obtain this bonus; it doesn't have to be done at the start. Conversely, setting the mode to **Difficult** will reduce all skills by 10 percent from their initial starting values. Not a good idea! —Scorpio



Classics/Puzzles

Sentinel Returns



Sometimes you just can't see the forest for the whiskers. But what you can do is absorb these "trees" to gain energy.



The leaning tower of victory: A quick teleport to the robot atop that stack of "boulders" (center) and you can take the place of the evil Sentinel (left).



What the hell is that? Well, once this fetal little feller gets jabbed in the head, you'll be on your way to another level (thank goodness!). —Mark Clarkon



Driving/Racing

Need for Speed III

Type the following cheats at any game menu for a different driving experience:

- allcas** Enable all cars including pursuit vehicles
- elimo** Race with the El Niño car
- empire** Race on the Empire City track
- gofast** Make your car go superfast in Single Race mode
- jag** Race with a Jaguar XJR-15
- merc** Race with the Mercedes CLK GTR
- rushhour** Race with lots of traffic on the road

Motocross Madness



Always look down the trail. Riders should look about 20 feet down the trail to the path they next want to take. If you look down that smooth line along the left side of those whoops, that's where you'll go. Look at that big rock in the trail and you'll be pulling your helmet out of a tree. The point is that you need to plan which line you are going to take through the next section of the course. It's a universal rule in all sims, but sometimes it's easy to forget when you're catching air and hoping to come down intact. —Greg Fortune

Action

Thief: The Dark Project



- Block doors with crates to ensure some privacy.
- Grab all the gold you can before completing your last objective. You'll need every bit for your next mission.
- Buricks are slow, deaf, and dumb. If you're quick enough you can scoot past them and get far enough away so they forget to follow you.
- Guards like to talk when they're on duty. If you listen you can pick up valuable information to help you on your mission.
- Carpets absorb blood. You should wait until the guard is standing on carpet before threading his jugular with your arrow. —Lance Larke

Simulation/Space Sim

WWII Fighters

Here's an Easter egg for Jane's WWII FIGHTERS. Actually, it's more the bird that laid the egg...

1. Set up a quick mission with one Spitfire and no enemy planes.
2. Arm the Spitfire with two 250-pound and one 500-pound bombs.
3. Start the mission. Drop the two 250-pound bombs and fire your guns until your remaining ammo is nine rounds or less.
4. Hit F10 to go to an outside view.
5. Press E to turn off your engine.
6. While holding down both Ctrl and Alt keys, press T.
7. Don't use any weapons or you'll lose the effect. Note that even the fight model changes.



Occasionally, you'll see 3D deer bounding across the landscape, and hunting deer with Spitfires can be quite challenging. If you want to increase the number of potential wildlife targets, edit the wml.be file in the game directory to read **NUMDEER=20**.



Strategy

West Front



Take your time! All serious gamers will use at least some of the command and fog-of-war options. These features set a premium on organized movement, so don't charge ahead like a herd of kamikaze turtles. Instead, turn on the "Show Organization," "Save Points for Firing," and "Save Points for Unloading" toggles. Have one unit take the point on advance, then follow up with an organized, massed fire or close assault next turn. All missions have enough turns for a planned, thoughtful approach.

Use the big guns. Artillery is always an ace in the hole if you hit something. Check if your target is immobile or in cover. If so, target its present hex. If not, consider if the target will advance toward cover, toward one of your weaker units, or toward a victory hex; then target the anticipated move. The AI has a habit of stopping in a victory hex instead of moving through it. You can take advantage of this by pulling back from a victory hex and then pounding it in anticipation of a counterattack. Likewise, keep your units moving so the computer's artillery hits empty air.

Leapfrog your staff officers. Handling battalion headquarters (HQs) is the most important command decision in the game. They are the essential lost link to the "sharp end" but have the shortest range: eight hexes. Fortunately, they come in pairs, so you can leave one stationary while you move the other forward. This leapfrogging is essential to coordinated attacks and to keeping your HQs safe from indirect fire. —Jim Cobb

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157	Stargate Software	Stargate Software	216
211	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	Fighting Steel	27
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218	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	Imperialism II	106-107
*	Strategy First	Clan	71
*	Strategy First	Master of War 2	132
*	Symantec	Norton System Works	153-156
242	Talonsoft	West Front	22
275	Total Entertainment Network	PGL	36
252	Westwood Studios	C&C: Tiberian Sun	16-17
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TOP 100

CGW'S MONTHLY READERS' POLL

Each month, 2,000 CGW subscribers are selected at random to rate 150 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your feedback.



TOP ACTION GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Stego: Mobile Armor Division LucasArts	8.51	3.5
2	Quake II Activision	8.47	4.5
3	Jack Knight: Dark Forces II LucasArts	8.15	4.5
4	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution of Software/Repub	8.04	5
4	Quake Pack 1: Archaon of Software/Repub	8.04	4.5
6	Quake II Pack 2: Ground Zero Activision	8.37	3.5
7	Jack Knight: Mysteries of the Sith LucasArts	8.32	4
8	Unreal GT Interactive	8.29	4
9	Rainbow 6 2nd Storm	8.16	3.5
10	Quake II Pack: The Reckoning of Software/Activision	8.01	3.5



TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Curse of Monkey Island LucasArts	8.20	5
2	Saritarium ASC Games	7.80	4.5
3	Tolkien's Odyssey Rowden	7.66	5
4	Zork: Grand Inquisitor Activision	7.61	NR
5	Black Runner Virgin/Warwood	7.60	4.5
6	Realms of the Haunting Interplay	7.47	4.5
7	Last Express Red Orb	7.43	4.5
8	Tex Murphy: Overseer Acorn Software	7.35	3
9	Black Dahlia Interplay	7.11	3
10	Broken Sword Origin	7.10	3.5



TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	You Don't Know Jack 2 Berkeley Systems	8.18	4.5
2	You Don't Know Jack Movies Berkeley Systems	7.92	4.5
2	You Don't Know Jack 3 Berkeley Systems	7.90	4
4	Smart Games Challenge 2 Smart Games Inc	7.19	5
5	Warms 2 Microphase	7.19	4
6	You Don't Know Jack TV Berkeley Systems	7.19	2.5
7	You Don't Know Jack Sports Berkeley Systems	7.43	4.5
8	Shanghai Dynasty Activision	7.26	3
9	Lost Your Marbles Legend	6.62	4.5
10	Star Wars Monopoly LucasArts	6.60	4



TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Longbow 2 EA	8.41	5
2	Wing Commander: Prophecy Origin	8.33	4.5
3	F-15 Strike Eagle	8.34	4.5
4	F-22 ADF 010	7.71	4.5
5	Independence War Redigitals	7.70	5
6	Fighters Anthology EA	7.68	3.5
7	MedievalWar 2: Mercenaries Activision	7.58	4.5
8	Descent: Freespace Interplay	7.56	4
9	Fight Unlimited 2 Looking Glass	7.55	4.5
10	Combat Flight Simulator Microsoft	7.49	3.5



TOP SPORTS/RACING GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	NHL 98 EA Sports	8.01	4
2	World Cup 98 EA Sports	8.04	4.5
3	FIFA Road to World Cup 98 EA Sports	8.01	4.5
3	NBA Live 98 EA Sports	8.01	4.5
5	Need for Speed III EA	8.00	5
6	Motorcross Madness Microsoft	8.13	4.5
7	Jack Nicklaus 5 Acclaim	8.04	5
8	Nation NFL 99 EA Sports	7.94	4.5
9	NBA Live 97 EA Sports	7.72	4.5
10	Diamond Mind Baseball 7.0 Diamond Mind	7.64	3.5



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Heroes II: Price of Loyalty 3DO/New World	8.95	5
2	StarCraft Blizzard	8.82	5
3	Total Annihilation: Core Contingency Corelity	8.73	4.5
4	Total Annihilation: CT Interactive	8.25	4.5
5	Red Alert: Counterstrike Virgin/Warwood	8.13	4
6	Total Annihilation: Battle Tactics Corelity	8.07	3.5
7	StarCraft: Insurrection Blizzard	8.06	3.5
8	Age of Empires: Rise of Rome Microsoft	8.09	4
9	Age of Empires Microsoft	7.89	4.5
10	Civilization II Scenarios Microphase	7.65	4



TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Might and Magic VI: The Hidden World	8.85	4.5
2	Fallout Interplay	8.34	4.5
3	Final Fantasy VII SquareSoft	8.26	4
4	HotFire Sens	7.83	4
5	Shadow's Diver Bha Softex	8.80	NR
6	Age of Mages Interplay	8.13	3
7	Land of Lore II Microphase	8.05	NR
8	Meridian 59 3DO	8.41	3.5
9	Ultima Online Origin	8.42	1.5
10	Battlepire Bethesda	4.53	3



TOP WARGAMES

RANK	GAME/PUBLISHER	SCORE	RATING
1	Steel Panthers II Camp Disk 3D	8.29	4.5
2	Panzer General III 3D	8.24	5
3	The Operational Art of War Interleaf	8.15	4.5
4	Sid Meier's Gettysburg Fozzax	7.98	4.5
5	Steel Panthers II 3D	7.95	4.5
6	BattleGround: Napoleon in Russia Interleaf	7.81	4.5
7	BattleGround: Bull Run Interleaf	7.78	4
8	People's General 3D	7.67	3
9	Great Battles of Julius Caesar Interactive Magic	7.43	4
10	Steel Panthers III 3D	7.43	3

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 re-rated after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

YR	LAST	GENRE	DEV	SCORE	REV	YR	LAST	GENRE	DEV	SCORE	REV			
MO	MO					MO	MO							
★	1	Hercules III: Price of Loyalty	New World Computing	ST	8.95	5	51	49	Beetlejuice: Bull Run	Talorsoft	WG	7.18	4	
★	2	Wight and Magic VI 300	New World	RP	8.86	4.5	52	49	NBA Live 97 EA Sports		SP	7.72	4.5	
	3	StarCraft: Brood		ST	8.82	5	53	52	Moto Racer EA		AC	7.71	4	
	4	Total Annihilation: Core Contingency	Corelog	ST	8.73	4.5	—	48	F22 ADF	Frontlogic	SI	7.71	4.5	
	5	NHL 98 EA Sports		SP	8.61	4	55	—	Cesar II	Sims	ST	7.70	4.5	
★	6	— Shogo: Mobile Armor Division	Moresoft	AC	8.51	3.5	—	—	Independence War	Infogrames	SI	7.70	5	
	7	8 Quake II Activision		AC	8.47	4.5	—	55	You Don't Know Jack TV	Bentley Systems	CP	7.70	2.5	
	8	10 Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	AC	8.45	4.5	58	53	Tomb Raider III	Edios	AC	7.69	4	
	9	12 Quake Pack 2: Dissolution	id Software/Rogue	AC	8.44	5	59	57	Fighters Anthology	EA	SI	7.69	3.5	
★	9	Longbow 2 EA/Gale's		SI	8.44	5	60	—	People's General	SSI	WG	7.67	3	
	14	Quake Pack 1: Annihilation	id Software/Infiniti	AC	8.44	4.5	61	55	TwinSien's Odyssey	Activision	AD	7.66	5	
	12	World Cup 98 EA Sports		SP	8.44	4.5	62	60	Diamond Mind Baseball 7.0	Sheward Mind	SP	7.64	3.5	
	13	— Quake II Pack 2: Ground Zero	Activision	AC	8.37	3.5	63	64	Zark: Grand Inquisitor	Activision	AD	7.61	6.5	
	14	19 Fallout	Interplay	RP	8.34	4.5	64	56	Blade Runner	Visceral/Vision	AD	7.60	4.5	
	15	16 Wing Commander: Prophecy	Origin	SI	8.33	4.5	65	64	TriplePlay 99 EA Sports		SP	7.59	2.5	
	17	17 Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith	LucasArts	AC	8.32	4	66	62	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	SI	7.58	4.5	
	16	21 FIFA Road to the World Cup 98	EA Sports	SP	8.31	4.5	67	67	Descent: FreeSpace - The Great War	Interplay	SI	7.56	4	
	19	NBA Live 98 EA Sports		SP	8.31	4.5	68	—	NFL Gameday 99	989 Studios/Sony	SP	7.55	3	
★	19	— Need for Speed III	EA	SP	8.30	5	—	61	Battlezone	Activision	AC	7.55	5	
	20	17 Steel Panthers II: Campaign	Disk SSI	WG	8.29	4.5	—	62	Flight Unlimited 2	Looking Glass	SI	7.55	4.5	
	15	Unreal GT	Interactive	AC	8.26	4	71	67	MechCommander	MicroProse	ST	7.53	4	
	22	21 Final Fantasy VII	Edios	RP	8.26	4	—	66	Dungeon Keeper	Expansion	id Software	ST	7.53	4.5
	23	24 Panzer General II	SSI	WG	8.21	5	73	58	Great Battles of Julius Caesar	Interactive Magic	WG	7.47	4	
	24	25 Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	ST	8.23	4.5	—	73	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	AD	7.47	4.5	
	25	26 Curse of Monkey Island	LucasArts	AD	8.20	5	75	69	Myth	Bunge	ST	7.46	4.5	
	26	27 You Don't Know Jack 2	Bentley Systems	CP	8.18	4.5	76	70	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Bentley Systems	CP	7.43	4.5	
	27	31 Rainbow 6	Red Storm	AC	8.16	3.5	77	72	Triple Play 98 EA Sports		SP	7.42	3	
	28	21 The Operational Art of War	MicroProse	WG	8.15	4.5	—	79	F1 Racing	Simulation	Infiniti	SP	7.42	5
	29	28 F-15 Eagle	SI	8.14	4.5	—	71	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accolade	SP	7.42	5		
	30	28 Red Alert: Counterstrike	Westwood	ST	8.13	4	80	75	Last Express	Red Orb	AD	7.40	4.5	
	—	— Motocross Madness	Moresoft	SP	8.13	4.5	—	—	Combat Flight Simulator	Moresoft	SI	7.40	4	
	32	— Total Annihilation: Battle Tactics	Corelog	ST	8.07	3.5	82	81	Virtual Pool 2	Interplay	SP	7.39	4.5	
	33	33 Jack Nicklaus 5	Accolade	SP	8.04	5	83	74	Interstate 76	Activision	AC	7.38	4.5	
	34	43 StarCraft: Insurrection	Burbide	ST	8.01	3.5	84	91	Baseball Mogul	Infiniti/Monkey	SP	7.37	4	
	—	36 Quake II Pack: The Reckoning	id Software/Mediaset	AC	8.01	3.5	85	76	Dungeon Keeper	EA/Burbide	ST	7.36	4.5	
	36	— Age of Empires: Rise of Rome	Moresoft	ST	8.00	4	86	82	Flight Simulator 98	Moresoft	SI	7.31	3.5	
	32	32 Sid Meier's Gettysburg	EA/Parsons	WG	7.98	4.5	87	84	M1 Tank Platoon II	MicroProse	SI	7.29	3.5	
	38	33 Age of Empires	Moresoft	ST	7.97	4.5	88	87	Steel Panthers III	SSI	WG	7.26	3	
	39	30 Steel Panthers II	SSI	WG	7.95	4.5	—	85	Shanghai	Dynasty	Activision	CP	7.26	3
	40	— Madden NFL 99	EA Sports	SP	7.94	4.5	90	89	PGA Tour Pro	EA Sports	SP	7.23	3.5	
	41	38 You Don't Know Jack Movies	Bentley Systems	CP	7.92	4.5	—	89	Age of Rifles	Campaign	Disk SSI	WG	7.21	4
	—	37 You Don't Know Jack 3	Bentley Systems	CP	7.92	4	92	88	Acthruigi	Spitfire	Avion	AD	7.21	5
	43	38 Civilization II: Scenarios	MicroProse	ST	7.85	4	93	93	Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far	MicroProse/Parsons	WG	7.21	4.5	
	44	42 Civilization II: Fantastic Worlds	MicroProse	ST	7.84	4	94	95	Uprising	300	AC	7.20	4	
	45	40 Hellfire	Sierra	RP	7.83	4	95	86	Tex Murphy: Overseer	Access Software	AD	7.18	3	
	46	45 Battlefield: Napoleon in Russia	Talorsoft	WG	7.81	4.5	96	92	X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	ST	7.15	4	
	47	44 Serbiterium	ASC Games	AD	7.80	4.5	97	94	Commandos	Edios	ST	7.13	2.5	
	48	77 Warriors III: Darklords Rising	Red Orb/SSI	SI	7.79	4.5	—	96	MDK	Plymouth	AC	7.13	4.5	
	—	43 Smart Games Challenge 2	Smart Games Inc	CP	7.79	5	99	96	X-Wing vs. The Fighter	LucasArts	SI	7.12	3.5	
	—	47 Warus 2	MicroProse	CP	7.79	4	100	99	Black Dehlie	Interplay	AD	7.11	3	

GREENSPEAK

Insert Clever Headline Here

Or, Sorry This Column's Not Done, but the Patch Is Coming Soon

I've been called a lot of things in my life—Green Bean, Dark Brain, Donkey Breath, The Love Doctor—but one thing I've never been called is naive. I am, in fact, a rather worldly sort. For example, I can speak French. Check this out: "Bonjour, Yves! Est-ce que tu voudrais une baguette?" This translates roughly into: "Hello, Yves! Boy, it sure sucks to be French, doesn't it?"

I bring up my worldliness because I want to talk about a rather old topic, and I want it clear from the beginning that I was not, in fact, born yesterday. The topic at hand is bugs. As in, bugs in computer games. As in, giant bugs in computer games that should never, never have been shipped because they were so pathetically buggy. It's a topic that's been done to death, I know, but unfortunately, another thing I've never been called is "original." So bite me!

Anyway, why shouldn't I harp on bugs? It's the biggest scandal in this industry. I should write about it every month, listing every single bug-hidden piece of junk by name until the gaming companies start making it a priority to actually finish their products before selling them to the consumers.

Buggy games have become such a part of life that we now consider it amazing, and worthy of praise, if a game actually ships that isn't buggy. This is like praising food at a restaurant for not having the chef's urinal in it. Yeah,

I'm happy about it, but why should I even have to mention it?

Like I said, I'm not naive. I know this is an inexact science. I know it's ridiculous and unrealistic to expect perfection out of a software product, given the millions of variables involved. I can live with this. I can live with the fact that a company might have to issue a patch because they found a

IV, V, and VI combined.

Now, a game can't possibly be that buggy without someone in the chain of command knowing that it wasn't done yet. But someone went ahead and released it anyway with a big fat \$49.95 price tag on the front, to an unsuspecting public. I don't know how to overstate how despicable an act this is. It's greedy, it's cynical, and it shows nothing but utter contempt for the consumer. Hey kids, buy our cool new game! We couldn't get it to work, but—whatever! Thanks for the money!

■ ■ ■

I don't know any of the details. Maybe someone on the team spent too much time deathmarching. Maybe the publisher's deadlines were unre-



JEFF GREEN

Article not done. Please don't ship this page yet! Thanks — Jeff

glick on the 20th level of an action game when played on a certain computer with a certain video card.

What I can't tolerate—and neither should you—are games that are all but unplayable right out of the box, games that the company knew were riddled with bugs but released anyway. Take, for example, the case of *SNK*, a game that was so buggy upon release that it required a 19MB patch just to get it into a playable state—19MB. To put this in perspective, that's about 9MB more than *ULTIMA I, II, III,*

alistic and unfair. Maybe they were understaffed. Maybe they panicked over *HAU-UH!*, and decided to shove it out there before Valve's title hit the shelves.

But, you know what? I don't care. I don't care what the excuse is. I don't want to hear about it. Someone has to take some responsibility in this industry, do the right thing, and stop these godding things from being released, even if it means taking a huge financial hit in the short run. Because if you're keeping releasing buggy crap, you're going to release

out of business eventually anyway. And you'll deserve it.

The alternative, I suppose, is that the rest of us could adopt our work habits to the standards of the gaming industry. It sure would make it easier to make these annoying CGW deadlines.

Rather than delivering my usual sharp, clever ending to this column, for example, I could simply let it kind of, I don't know, keep going until it just sort of peters out on its own in a long-winded run-on sentence and hope that some editor will fix it for me later. Or maybe I could just turn it in unfinished and then email a better ending to people

who complain. Or maybe blah blah blah. Need a third idea here. Something funny to tie this together. **CGW**

[Note to copy desk: Article not done. Please don't ship this page yet! Thanks!—JEFF]

[Note from managing editor: Sorry, it's got to go now for us to beat the competition to the newstand. Don't worry, we'll just print a correction next issue.]

What Jeff doesn't realize is that his wife, who is French, is at home right now giving the guffone. Say au revoir to Jeff at jfgreen@zdnet.com.

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