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WARCRAFT III — EXCLUSIVE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

THE #1 PC GAME MAGAZINE

Age of Empires II

World Exclusive
REVIEW

Winning
STRATEGIES

REVEALED!
Microsoft's Top Secret
Video Game System

DECEMBER 1999 • ISSUE 185
$4.95 USA, $6.95 Canada

10 Ultimate Gaming PCs INSIDE

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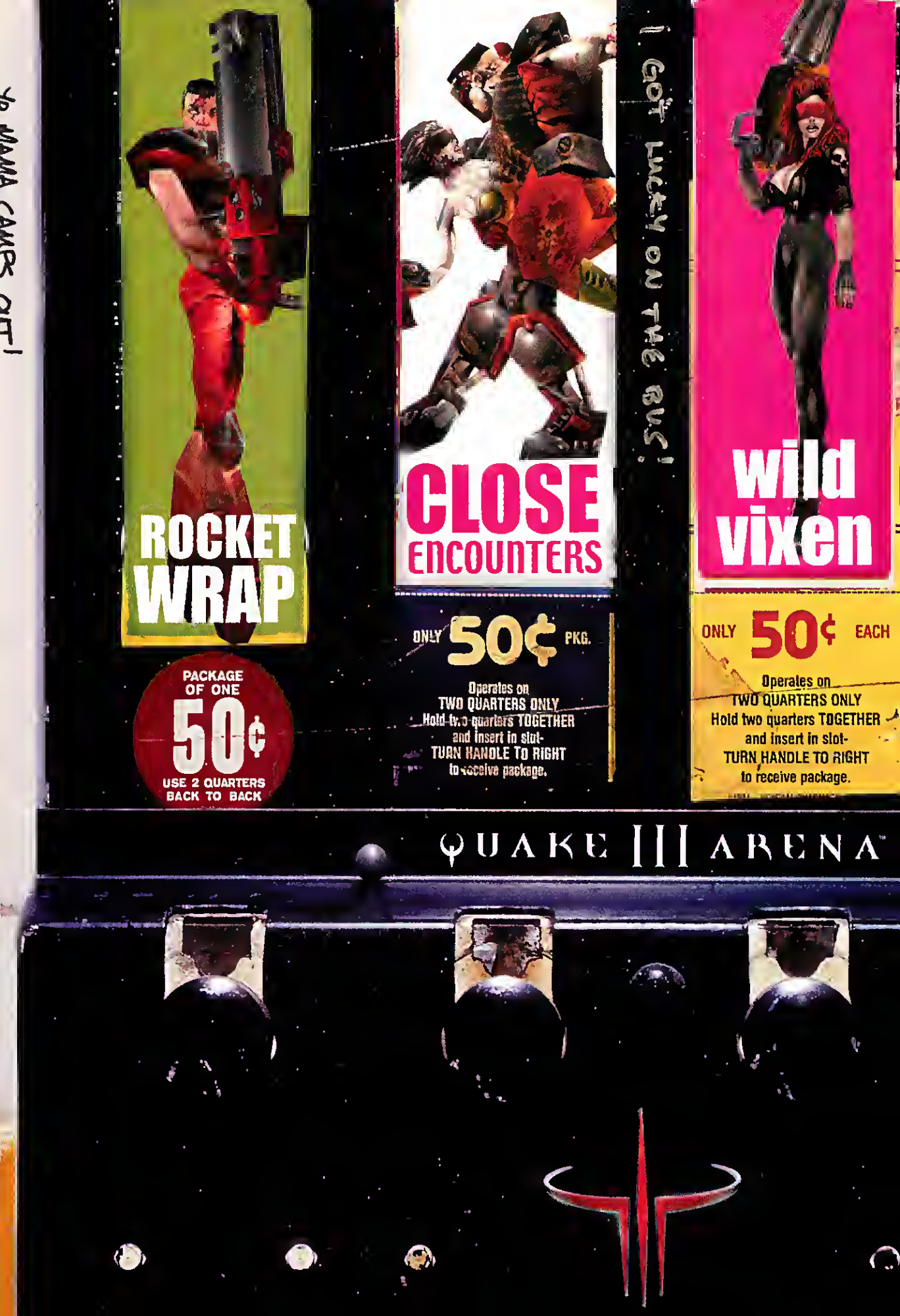

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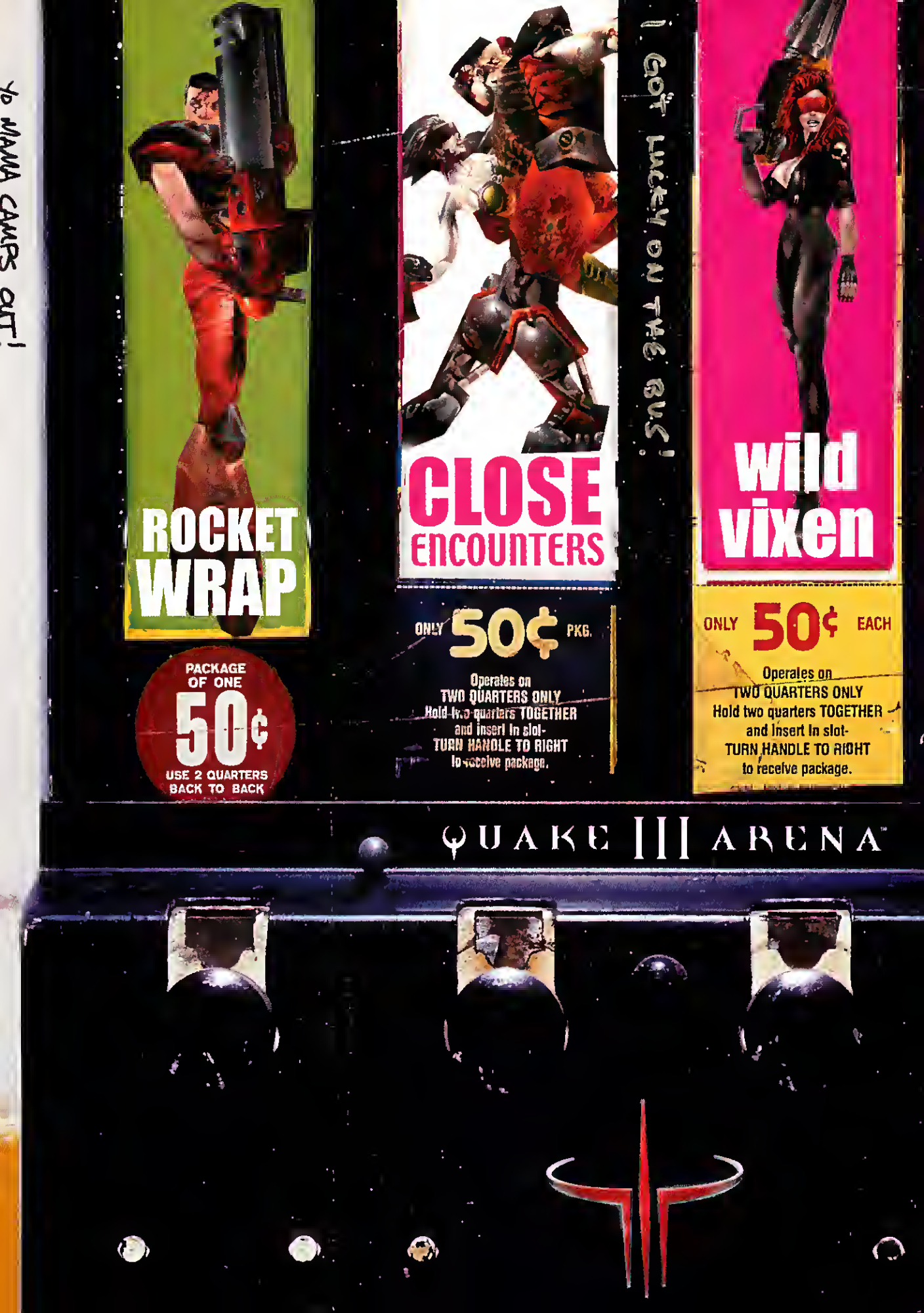

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A DEVICE DESIGNED
TO PROLONG MALE
CLIMAX WHILE STIMU-
LATING HER IN THE
RIGHT PLACE!

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I DID IT
AT QUAKE CON

IF YOU WANT TO
SPANK A STRANGER,
FIRST LEARN TO
PLAY WITH YOURSELF.

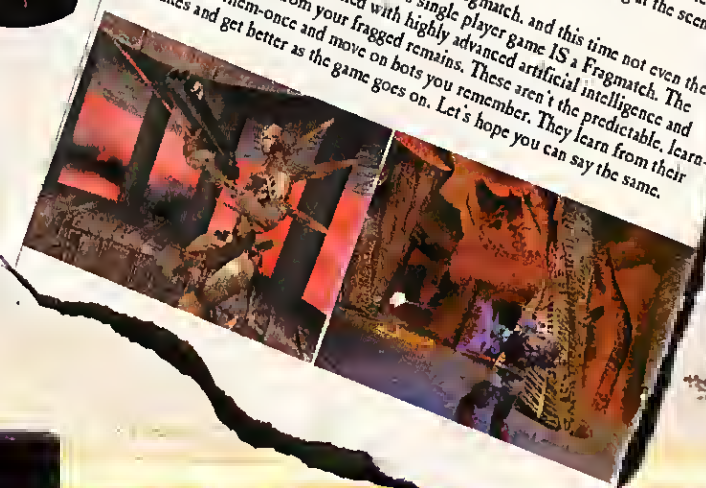
PACK THIS
CAMPER!

REVIEWS

QUAKE III ARENA

Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensely realistic, organic look of the Arena. But don't get caught staring at the scenery, or you'll end up as part of it.

Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player gamers are safe. Q3A's single player game IS a Fragmatch. The computer opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and whatever they steal from your fragged remains. These aren't the predictable, learn-how-to-kill-them-once and move on bots you remember. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let's hope you can say the same.



BE GENTLE,
I'M A NEWBIE.

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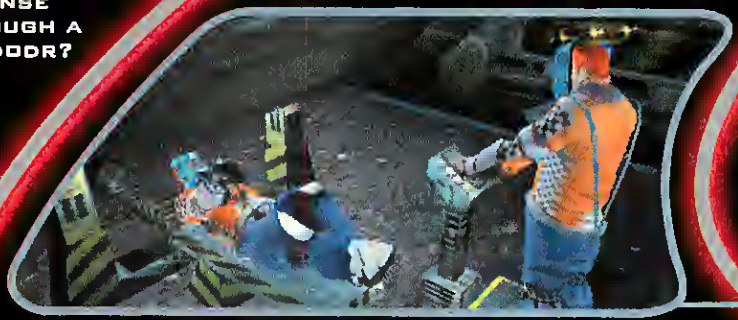
How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper for defense gain access through a locked security door?

1.

SOLUTION:

Possess a host... Hmm, the worker can't leave the area either.

But he can lower a 5 ton tank on a nearby worker and cause a big commotion.



2.

Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, who does have security access.

3.

4.

PROBLEM SOLVED.

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END OF THE WORLD PROMOTION

The end of the millennium is upon us. The two thousandth year after Christ. Who better to celebrate it with than "Bob", God's favorite cherub?

Where is the biggest new years celebration every year? New York City, Times Square. Shiny, Interplay and Messiah want to send one lucky winner, and friend, to the biggest party on Earth. Witness, first hand, the apocalypse. If it is the end, you might as well be partying when it happens!

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- CORE MAGAZINE

MESSIAH

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OF CIRCUMSTANCE

I HAVE NOT WINCED
NOR CRIED ALOUD,

UNDER THE
BLUDGEONINGS
OF CHANCE

MY HEAD IS BLOODY,
BUT UNBOWED.

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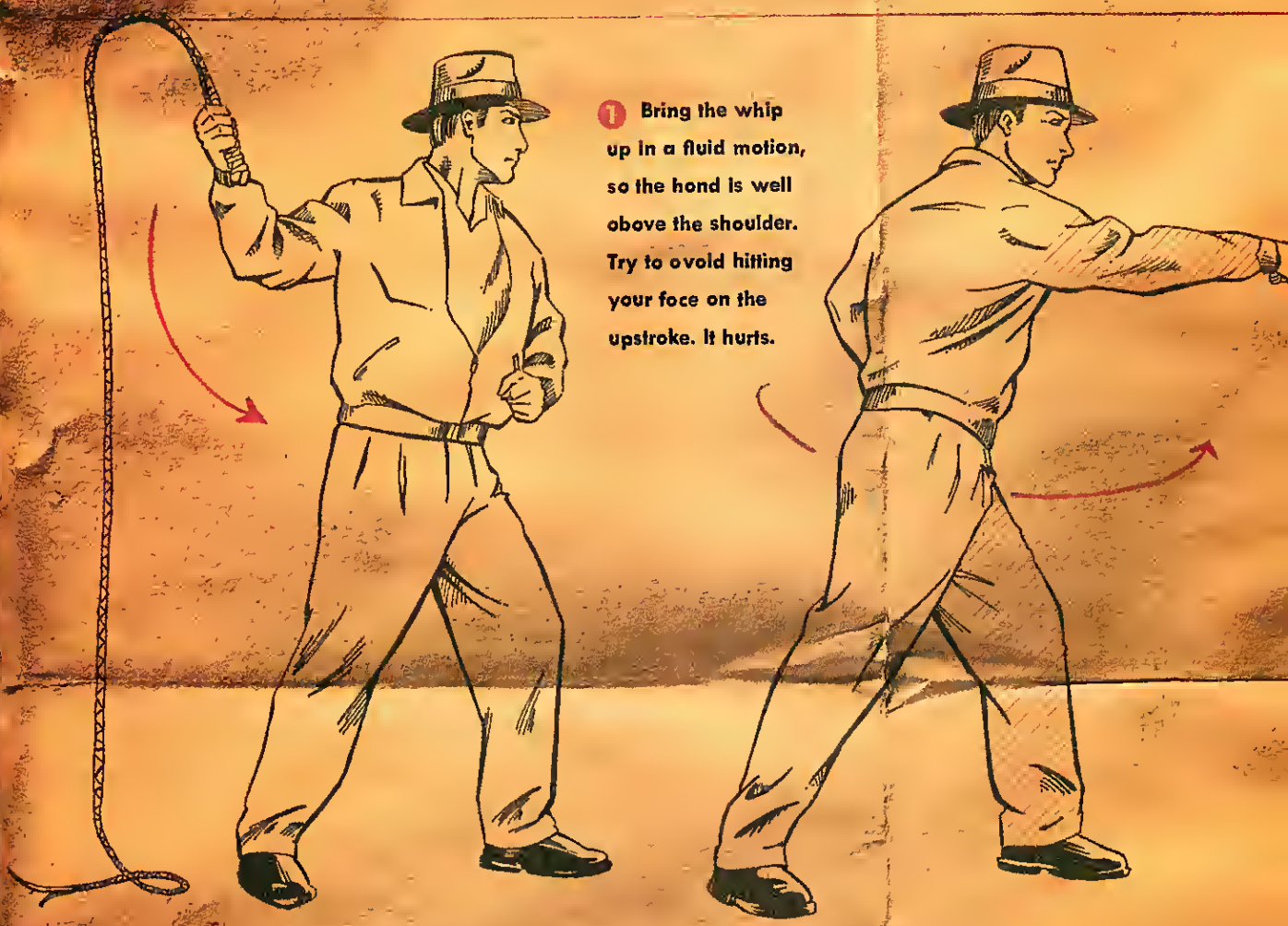

1. Bring the whip up in a fluid motion, so the hand is well above the shoulder. Try to avoid hitting your face on the upstroke. It hurts.

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES:

5. Full-contact snake charming.

6. Emergency levitation.

7. Arthropod management.

He takes on snakes, traps, demons and commies. With

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LUCAS Arts

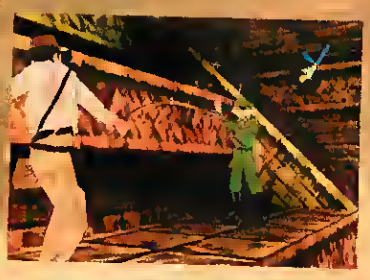
2 For optimum lashing, shift your weight from the right foot to the left. Focus on whatever you're trying to hit, grab or teach respect to.

3 Keep the wrist and hand at 12 o'clock.

4 To get a crisp gypsy crack, break your wrist and snap the hand up. Then stand back and survey the damage.

8 Relic snatching.

9 Commie weapons extraction.



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the fate of the world on the line, the whip gets one wicked workout. Indy's back.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

DECEMBER 1999 • ISSUE 185

COVER STORY

Age of Empires II: Age of Kings

What a difference an age makes...Ensemble Studio's AGE OF EMPIRES II is set in the Dark Ages, but looks and plays like the Renaissance. Stunning graphics and a finely-honed play balance put this one at the top of our strategy game list. Co-designer Bruce Shelley adds some strategic punch to our feature review.

92

FEATURES

***CGW* Hall of Fame** **104**

Time to build a new wing onto the hallowed halls of *CGW*'s Gaming Hall of Fame. We add four new games to the list, plus our first-ever human inductee.

CGW 1999 HALL OF FAME

104

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You knew it was coming. But you didn't know just how different it would be. Blizzard is making some bold new moves with their WARCRAFT franchise – check it out **58**

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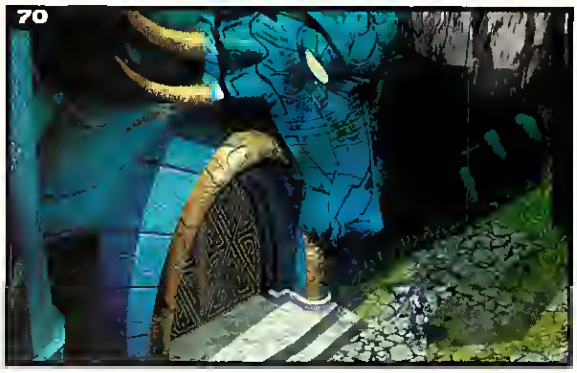
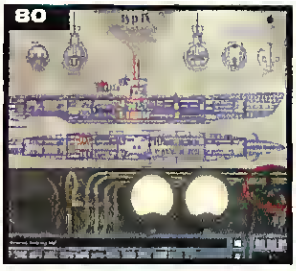
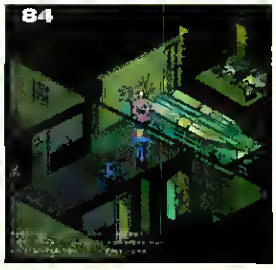






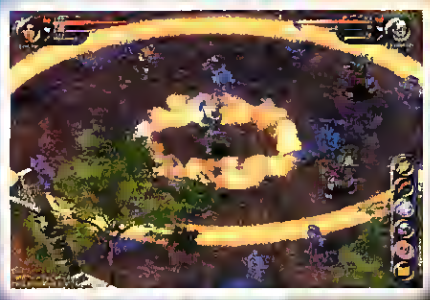
The Experts on 3D speak...

"My adventures are best seen on a geforce256."

Abomination™

Urban Chaos™

Omikron: The Nomad Soul



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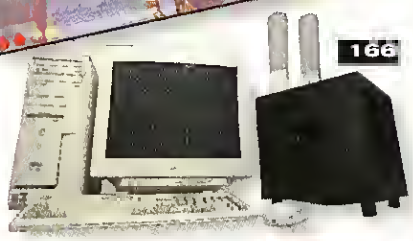

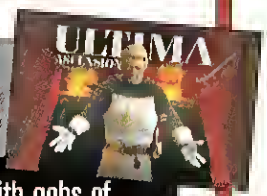

ON THE 2 CDS

Two CDs packed with gobs of gaming for your playing pleasure!

Ultima IX: Ascension

Prince of Persia 3D

Homeworld

Delta Force 2

Mob Rule

Battlezone 2

Expert Pool

READ.ME 30

- **Microsoft's hush-hush gaming console, Sierra's boo-hoo "restructuring," and those Jocko Homos of Devo.**

Plus News; The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly; and Mr. Sneaky strikes again.

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The Ultimate Game Machine: Ten machines enter the ring, only one walks away. In our annual quest for the ultimate in gaming hardware, we put ten pixel-pushing powerhouses into the ring. And the survivor is....?

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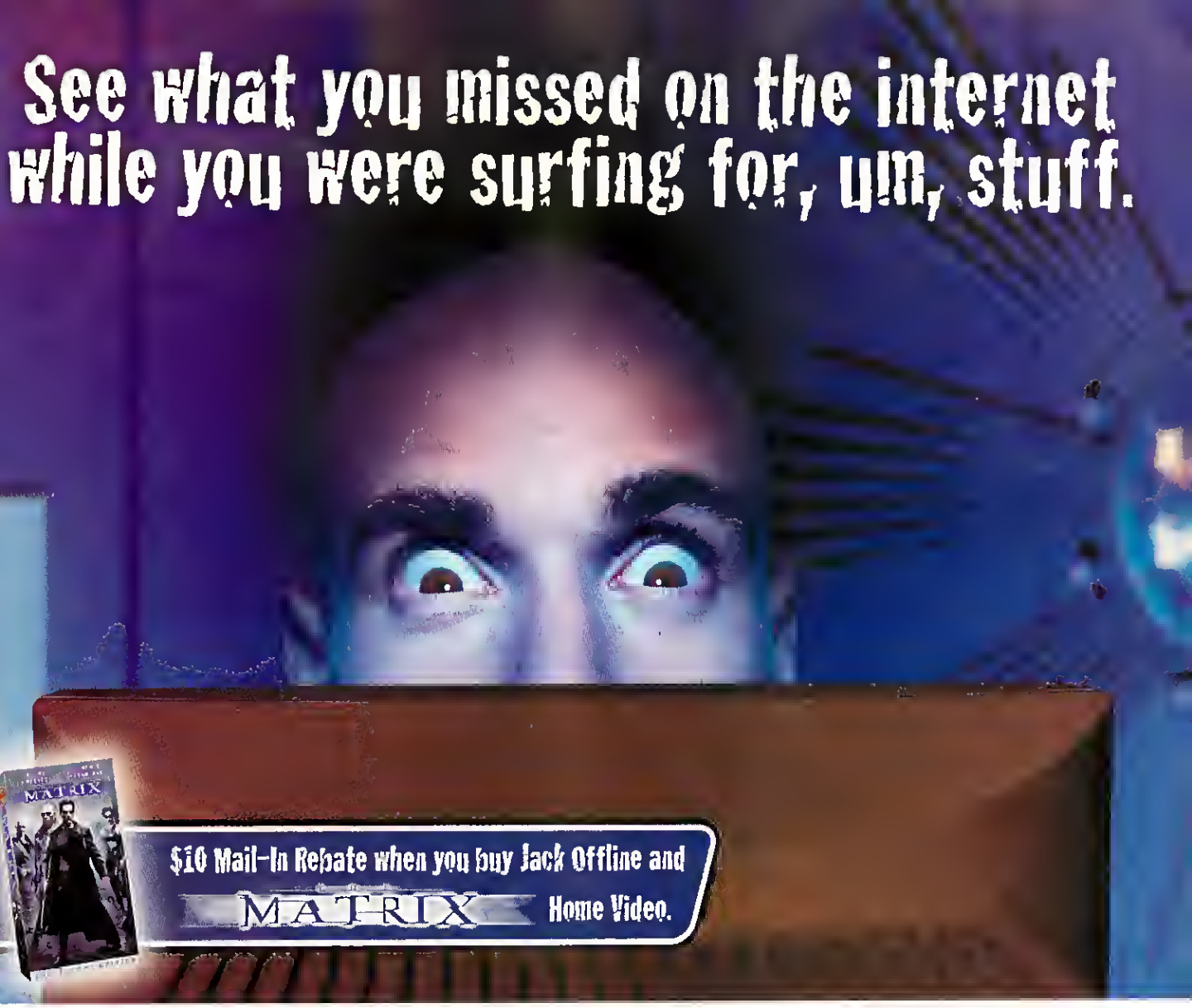
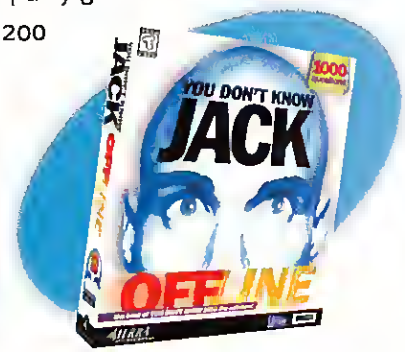
See what you missed on the internet while you were surfing for, um, stuff.



The best of the Net Show and a whole bunch more.

While you were in some dark corner of the internet, you missed a really good time. YOU DON'T KNOW JACK®– The Net Show is the award-winning online version of the irreverent quiz show party game. We've taken 800 of the best questions from the Net Show and combined them with 200 more to create YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Offline™. It features the same nuclear-powered attitude as always, but with new gags, new graphics and a whole new category of question—the Pissed About A Question Question. JACK fans tell us how we screwed up, and we use their letters to ridicule them in classic JACK style. As usual, nothing is sacred. So the next time you're looking for fun, forget the rubber gloves. Get YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Offline.



SIERRA attractions

BERKELEY SYSTEMS

Jellyvision

TEEN

Comic Mischief, Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
For information on this product's rating, please call 1-800-771-3772

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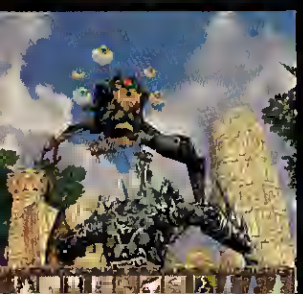

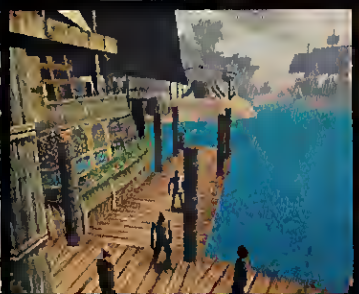

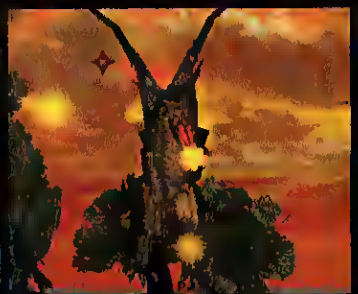

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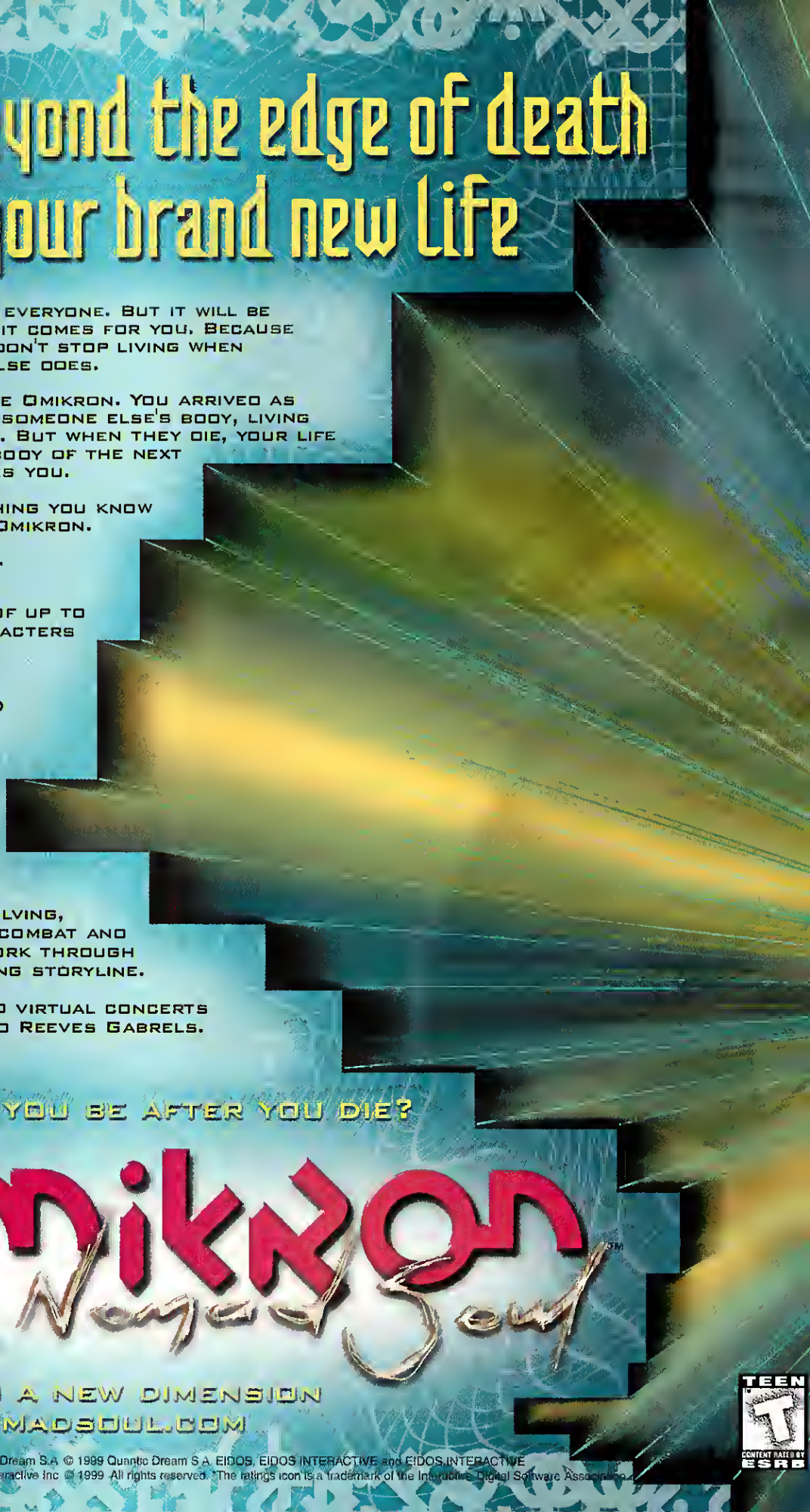

Death comes for everyone. But it will be different when it comes for you. Because in this world, you don't stop living when you die—someone else does.

They call this place Omikron. You arrived as nomad soul. Using someone else's body, living someone else's life. But when they die, your life continues—in the body of the next person who touches you.

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What's Going On?

No one ever sang more beautifully or with more passion about the world going to hell than Marvin Gaye. If you've heard *What's Going On* (Motown, 1971), you know what I mean. In fact, I may have just lost you to the daydreaming, introspective state of mind that album can put you in. Marvin's passion regarding the inner city, war, and even the environment creates not just a good listen, but a transcendent experience. Why? Because he *meant* every word he sang. Few albums are capable of making you feel as much as this beautiful, haunting epic did.

Four or five times a year, computer games are capable of the same sort of transcendence. And without fail, the games that glue us to our monitors for hours at a time have one thing in common with *What's Going On*: They have creators who truly believed in what they were doing.

It's so tangible an aspect of a great game that you can literally feel it, and in far more obvious ways than music. When HALF-LIFE made you

"The games that glue us to our monitors have one thing in common – creators who truly believed in what they were doing."

jump out of your seat in fear. When CIVILIZATION kept you in front of your computer for 14 hours straight. When you beat DIABLO and couldn't stop bragging about it for days. And then there's the even more obvious proof: tired mornings, bleary eyes, weary backs, and angry spouses.

But here's the problem. You can go out and buy any of Marvin Gaye's music on compact disc right now. You can buy several different best-of compilations. Or his box set.

But you cannot buy and play classic games like M.U.L.E., and unless things are different in ten years, you won't be able to buy and play HALF-LIFE. You can read all about *Computer Gaming World*'s latest inductees into the only existent gaming Hall of Fame. But it requires a Herculean effort to actually experience these legendary games.

We need to figure this one out—with every year that goes by, we're losing more of our history. Like my man Marvin would say, "Mercy, mercy me."

George Jones

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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LETTERS

Don't Hate Them Because They're Beautiful

LOYO CASE = YODA CELS

Hey---what's up with Loyd Case's photo in the Under the Hood column? I mean, I know the guy's a genius and all but why the hell does he look so smug? Every time I look at his picture I have an overwhelming urge to bend, fold, or mutilate someone or something. I am usually a very calm guy, but Case's photo definitely puts me into a *Manchurian Candidate* rage...please help.

Anonymous via the Internet

Let appearances fool you not. What you call "smug" is actually the deep spiritual repose that comes from being connected to all silicon beings in the universe, great and small. Your anger is a sign of your own imbalance and lack of technical savvy. Master your anger or it will master you.

Separated at Birth?

I've been reading Greenspeak for a long time now and I just noticed that Mr. Jeff Green looks a whole lot like the late Phil Hartman. I was wondering, does he look this way in real life or is it just that picture?

Ryan Telles
Via Internet

It's definitely just the picture. In real life, he looks more like this:

When Readers Attack

One of the regular articles in your magazine that I enjoy reading is the Pipeline. I am always curious about what is coming up soon for purchase, and find it helpful. But it's frustrating that most games seem to be released about the same time. Why must all game companies release their products around Christmas?

In an effort to express this frustration I have a better way for you to list the Pipeline release dates than Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4.

Q1 = We just missed Christmas, Dang!
Q2 = Boy, did we miss Christmas!
Q3 = What we really mean IS Christmas!
Q4 = I hope we can release by Christmas!

Wouldn't you agree that these sayings are more descriptive of what the software industry release dates are really like?

Chuck Watson
Visalia, California

I Want My Top 100!

I would first like to say that your magazine is great, and I have enjoyed it for years now. I would like to ask what happened to the top 100 games list where you could see what other readers played and liked most. I would commonly use your reviews of the game and the top 100 for deciding my purchases. Thanks, and keep up the good work

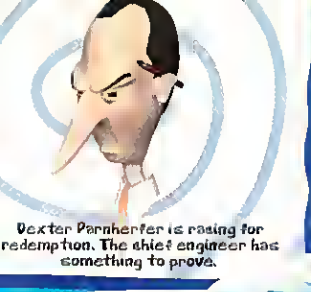
Charlie Reed

We received numerous letters regarding the absence of the Top 100 in the last two issues. You'll be happy to know that starting this month, it's back, in a brand new format and a new location, the READ.ME news section.

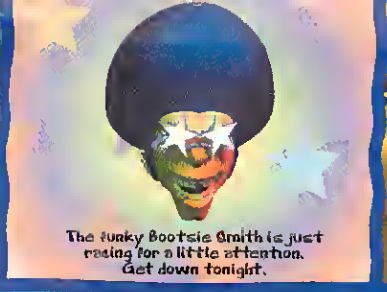
We also received lots of letters regarding the CGW Hall of Fame. We didn't kill it, either. Instead, we decided to give it a bit more special treatment. We will now be inducting games (and game designers!) into the Hall of Fame twice a year, in an extravagant celebration marked by fireworks and interpretive dance routines performed exclusively for you by the CGW editors. This month marks our first set of inductees—check it out on page 104

Which 3D Card Should I Buy?

I'm building a new computer. I have everything picked out except the video card, and I can't make up my mind. I love all games from NASCAR Revolution to Descent 3. What card should I go with? My boss has the exact same system and a Voodoo 3 AGP and it looks awesome. But from what I've read the TNT 2 seems to be the



Dexter Pannherfer is racing for redemption. The chief engineer has something to prove.



The funky Bootsie Smith is just racing for a little attention. Get down tonight.

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Chase Rainbow is racing to put peace, love and happiness back into the mainstream.

Major General Jessip Engertain is racing to be "top dog" and take command once again.

way to go. So what should I get? Any insight would be much appreciated.

Jason Love

You're in luck, Jason—every issue, in our Hardware section, we address this question. Check out our answer on page 189.

Thanks for the Memories

I highly enjoyed your article about the 10 games that need to be remade (October, '99). Your article truly took me back to the glorious days of the Commodore 64, Spectrum ZX 81, Amstrad, and Atari computers. Thank you very much for making such an effort and bringing those beautiful memories back. I do wish, however, that you had mentioned the following games as well *[Eleven games deleted for space! –Ed.]*:

Elite: Being the first, most detailed simulation/trade style game, this opened up a path for countless other games to follow.

Bruce Lee: One of the classic early arcade platform games, and one of the first games ever to present the concept of multiplayer gameplay on a single screen. Calling it awesome would be unfair, because it is way beyond that.

Spy vs Spy: Very simple graphics, very simple gameplay, but Spy vs. Spy created tons of sleepless nights for me and my friends. This one was one of the first great multiplayer action/strategy games.

Impossible Mission: I can't recall how many times I've been all the way through this game, solving those damn rectangles by collecting the puzzle pieces and running away from robots. I've played many successful games on the PC and other platforms which have similar concepts, but none have come close to the excellence of Impossible Mission.

Gunhan Kaytaz

Department of Corrections

In last month's cover story, we incorrectly identified the ship date for Microsoft's FREELANCER. The game's official release date is late 2000, not 2001.

In our October review of WEST FRONT BATTLE PACK 1, we listed the publisher as 0.0.0. In fact, the publisher is TalonSoft.

And finally, in our October READ.ME section, we mentioned WIZARDRY 8 as a game that had fallen victim to the CGW Cover Curse, implying that the game had been cancelled. Sir-tech Canada rang us up to inform us that the game is only very, very late, but development continues. They even sent us a screenshot as proof:

The Star Treatment

When I received my October issue of *Computer Gaming World*, I went right to the cover story to get the low-down on COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN. I assumed I was going to get a review of the game—especially after seeing the cover, which stated "Is TIBERIAN SUN Worth The Wait? We'll Tell You." But after reading the entire article, I asked myself "So how many stars did it get?"

That was a review I just read, wasn't it? Look at the article—you stated that you locked yourselves into a room for days "to play the hell out of TIBERIAN SUN." You said that after playing the game, you felt it would live up to the hype. You went through all the new features. You even went into concerns about play balance. That sounds like a review to me—so where are the stars?

Of course there is a technicality here—you have stated that it is your policy not to review games that are not finished yet. For all purposes though, this game was finished, based on the fact that you were playing a version that was just days away from being finished. Maybe that is why there are no stars here. But you DID review this game, so why did you essentially break your own policy AND the trust of your subscribers?

Bill Richardson

The October cover story on TIBERIAN SUN was not a review, although we originally intended it to be. At press time, however, the game still hadn't gone "gold" and was in the very late beta development stages. Since, as you correctly stated, we only review finished products, editors Robert Coffey and Tom Price weren't able to officially evaluate the game. We still feel like we still answered the fundamental question, however: Is it worth your money?

In the future, we'll be more diligent about explaining what's going on in cases like this. And for the official word on TIBERIAN SUN, turn to page 120.

In the October issue you guys did an article on TIBERIAN SUN. In it, I noticed that you said that the game didn't have rally points. I recently got the game and I found that there is a way to rally units. When you have the Barracks or Factory selected, press CTRL and ALT, then point to a spot and there you have your rally point. You can also group rally points by selecting multiple buildings.

Tom Swift

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www.starwars.com

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Read.Me

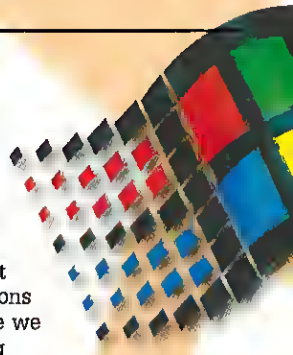
The Latest News From All Around The Computer Gaming World

X marks the Box

Microsoft Secretly Developing a PC Gaming Console

The push is on, and the battleground is your living room. The combatants? Sony, Sega, Nintendo, and now, Microsoft. Several attempts at the "Living Room PC" have been made, but the units' hefty price tags—coupled with their not being very game-friendly—has kept the PC in the study for the most part. But with Sony touting its PlayStation 2 (PSX2) as a "computer entertainment system," a lot of people in the PC industry, including Microsoft, are feeling very threatened. The response? Microsoft has been developing "X-Box," the code name for their PC in the shape of a game console.

Microsoft has flatly denied even the existence of X-Box, despite reports of game developers being briefed in the UK about it. Apparently, the iron curtain of secrecy has descended with strict orders not to talk, as evidenced during a recent trip to Redmond, where Microsoft officials could be seen rising in their chairs as their butt-cheeks stressfully clenched when they denied the "rumors" of X-Box's development. But we still got the goods on X-Box from anonymous industry sources close to the project.



Ramming Speed

The PC and the home entertainment system have been on a collision course for some years now. Even though X-Box seems like a logical extension of the PC, it still opens up a huge can of questions about the future of PC gaming. Are we all going to be gaming in our living rooms next holiday season? What about upgradability? What about poor graphics quality because the TV is used as a monitor? All good questions, but the answers aren't clear at this point.

To some degree, the line between PC gamers and console gamers has always been a little blurry, with *CGW* editors and readers alike dabbling in the world of console

Playstation 2 Announced

While Microsoft Heats Up the Console Wars, Sony Announces Its Next Box

In 1995, few in the gaming industry thought that consumer electronics giant Sony would have much success with their entry into the 32-bit videogame console market. The PlayStation went on to be one of the most successful gaming platforms ever, selling over 60 million units worldwide. With Sony's official announcement of the Playstation2's Japanese launch on March 4, 2000, and North American and European launches in the fall of 2000, few in the gaming industry are doubting that the PS2 will be anything less than blockbuster.

Built around the 128-bit "Emotion Engine" CPU co-developed with Toshiba, the PS2 will be able to produce 66 million polygons-per-second at peak performance. Those numbers are ludicrously high and reflect a level of performance not seen even in the most powerful PCs currently available. The PS2 demo of GRAN TURISMO 2000 gameplay at E3 this year looked amazing, almost like pre-rendered cut scenes.

The Pleystation2 will be much more then a powerful next-generation videogaming machine, however. The new 24X CD-ROM drive will not only be capable of playing PS2 and original PSX discs (backwards competibility ie e feature that Playstation fans with huge game libraries begged for), but will also be capable of playing DVD-ROM and DVD movie discs. So for about $350 (MSRP for the launch in Japan; may be lower for American launch) you can have a set-top box that plays your old PSX games, amazing-looking new PS2 games, and DVD movies. It's hard to say at this point what kind of effect that's going to have on the video game industry – much less the consumer electronics industry overall – but it could be huge.

Of course, most gamers want to know about the games, and GRAN TURISMO 2000 is the only officially-announced launch title so far; but quite a few are already in development, including ARMORED CORE 2, TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT, and ODDWORLD: MUNCH'S ODDYSEE.

Even though it's a year away, and the Sega Dreamcast is here now, many gamers are waiting for the PS2's arrival before investing in a next-generation console. The DVD capabilities and beckwards compatibility are pretty attractive features, but the PS2 will still have to compete against the Dreamcast, which should have a full head of steam by then, and the new Nintendo and Microsoft boxes, both of which are shrouded in secrecy.

Still, the wild success of the original Playstation should give Sony a serious boost at launch time.

games. But with the arrival of X-Box in the 2000 holiday season, the line will get even fuzzier, since you'll be able to play just about any new PC game in your living room.

And what about that hefty PC price tag? Try about $300 on for size.

By now you've heard the "PlayStation 2 will blow the PC away" rants, and the PSX2 is certainly a tiger, on paper anyway. But it's more than a year out, and a year in this industry is a mighty long time. X-Box will be equipped with an AMD Athlon CPU and nVidia's new GeForce 256 graphics chip, and should move 3D games along pretty handily. Couple that with a version of Windows 9X (not CE as has been rumored elsewhere) that's supposed to boot in under 10 seconds, DVD movie playback, and Web browsing abilities, and X-Box starts looking like a contender.

INSIDE THE X-BOX

- AMD Athlon CPU
- 64MB RAM
- nVidia GeForce 256 graphics chip
- DVD-ROM
- 56K modem
- 6GB hard drive
- Front-mounted USB ports

So, Are We Really Living Room Bound?

This question is less about hardware and more about people and their gaming habits. The simple follow-up question is this: Do you want to play your PC games in your living room? X-Box won't ship with a keyboard and mouse out of the box, though you'll be able to connect them via a USB port.

But if you want to have an inexpensive living room "computing appliance" that will be able to play PC games and DVD movies, then X-box will make that possible. PC makers are constantly looking to drive prices down into the range of home AV components, and X-Box—on paper anyway—appears to be one of the better attempts to do just that.

But, does X-Box make the PC go away as we know it? Well that, fellow gamers (and rabid technology consumers), is up to you. *–Dave Salvator*

Sega Dreamcast Launched

Sega Rolls Out New Console Machine—Should PC Gamers Care?

Sega launched the opening salvo in the next generation console wars on 9/9/99 with the release of the Dreamcast, the first 128-bit video gaming machine. By doing so, they beat competitors Sony and Nintendo in getting a next-generation console to market by over a year, and have Christmas all to themselves. So far, the Dreamcast has outperformed the expectations of most industry analysts by selling over 500,000 units in the first two weeks, and earning $95 million dollars on the first day alone. By comparison, the Sony Playstation took four months to reach the 500,000 mark when it was initially released in 1995, and the Nintendo 64 hit that mark two months after its release in 1996.

ON THE RUN Sega Sports' NFL 2000 is currently the best football game on the market, regardless of platform.

Nicely priced at $199 (that includes the unit and one controller), the Dreamcast has a lot to offer in the way of gaming muscle. Under the hood lies the Hitachi SH-4 CPU, coupled with a PowerVR graphics chip capable of producing three million polygons in

Continued on page 34

Bleem! Is Here

PSX Games on the PC? Too Good To Be True? Maybe.

Bleem! is a PlayStation emulator for the PC that allows you to pop your favorite PSX discs into the CD drive of your computer, and enjoy your games in 3D-accelerated glory. What does this mean for computer gamers? Will the lines between PSX and PC be blurred? Don't expect too many miracles out of Bleem!. It may be a great concept, but the software code it's built on needs a bit more development. The business model that Bleem LLC has developed to distribute Bleem! is quite ingenious, allowing for constant improvement and updating of the code. You download the software itself over the Internet for free, but then buy a CD key to unlock the program at $29.95 a pop. This allows the company to continually tweak the software to work better with more games.

And tweaking is definitely needed. Bleem! does work, for the most part, but it doesn't provide the most satisfying gaming. Using D3D drivers, GRAN TURISMO looks great, but sound quality and muddy interfaces keep it from being the sublime title it is on the PSX. Still, the opportunity to introduce your PC friends to METAL GEAR SOLID or PARAPPA THE RAPPER might make the compromises worth it. *—Tom Price*

For the latest news on the next generation of videogame consoles and the games that are currently in development, visit our friends over at www.videogames.com.

TOP 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

Yes, folks, it's back, and it's here to stay. Our ever-popular poll of your current favorite games has returned, all spruced up for the end of the millennium. The most notable change is that our polling now takes place online through our Web site, which will give us more immediate feedback. See below for information on how to vote.

1 Half-Life Havas Interactive — 5 stars

2	**Starcraft** Havas Interactive	5
3	**Starcraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
4	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
5	**C&C: Tiberian Sun** EA	4
6	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
7	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
8	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
9	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
10	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
11	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
12	**Unreal** GT Interactive	4
13	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
14	**FIFA 99** EA Sports	4.5
15	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
16	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
17	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
18	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
19	**Need for Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
20	**Freespace: Silent Threat** Interplay	3
21	**EverQuest** Sony	4
22	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
23	**Worms 2** Microprose	4
24	**Rainbow Six: Eagle Watch** Red Storm	4.5
25	**Battlezone** Activision	5
26	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
27	**Caesar III** Havas Interactive	4.5
28	**Heavy Gear II** Activision	4.5
29	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
30	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
31	**Aliens vs. Predator** Fox Interactive	3
32	**Myth II** Bungie	4.5
33	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
34	**Star Wars Episode 1: Racer** LucasArts	4
35	**Might and Magic VI** 3DO	4.5
36	**Railroad Tycoon II** Gathering Of Developers	4.5
37	**Might and Magic VII** 3DO	4.5
38	**Starsiege: Tribes** Dynamix	4
39	**Kingpin** Interplay	4
40	**Shogo: Mobile Armor Division** Monolith	3.5

Game/ Publisher — CGW Rating

	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
Top Action Games		
1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
3	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
4	**Unreal** GT Interactive	4
5	**Rainbow Six: Eagle Watch** Red Storm	4.5
Top Adventure/Role-Playing Games		
1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
3	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
4	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
5	**EverQuest** Sony	4
Top Simulation Games		
1	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
2	**Freespace: Silent Threat** Interplay	3
3	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
4	**Heavy Gear II** Activision	4.5
5	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
Top Sports/Racing Games		
1	**FIFA 99** EA Sports	4.5
2	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
3	**NHL 99** EA Sports	5
4	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4
5	**High Heat 2000** 3DO	4.5
Top Strategy/War Games		
1	**Starcraft** Havas Interactive	5
2	**Starcraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
3	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
4	**Heroes Of Might And Magic III** 3DO	4.5
5	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5

How To Vote

Want to be heard? Think this list sucks? Do something about it by logging on to www.gamespot.com **and registering your vote or link to the poll from our CD. Remember, only YOU can get BEATDOWN on this list.**

vote at www.gamespot.com

More **Trouble** at **Sierra**

Dynamix Closed, Games Cancelled as Company Reorganizes Again

The press release arrived quietly and without warning in late September, and if you were a novice at reading marketing doublespeak, you might not think there was any bad news at all. But Sierra On-Line's announcement of a "reorganization and enhanced focus on market success" was nothing less than a devastating piece of news for many gamers.

First of all, it meant the cancellation of a number of titles, including the highly-anticipated (and almost completed) BABYLON 5; two flight sims in development at Dynamix—DESERT FIGHTERS and PRO PILOT PARADISE, and Berkeley Systems' Tolkien game, ORCS: REVENGE OF THE ANCIENT. Also on ice, apparently, is MIDDLE EARTH, the massively multiplayer Tolkien RPG announced with great fanfare and enthusiasm just one year ago.

CRASH LANDING BABYLON 5 is one of the casualties of Sierra's latest "reorganization."

Sierra's reorganization involves splitting its products up into three business units: Core Games, Casual Entertainment, and Home/Productivity. Core Games will include the popular studios who survived the cut—including Valve (HALF-LIFE), Impressions Games (CAESAR III), Papyrus (NASCAR), Relic (HOMEWORLD), Trolka Games (led by Tim Cain, designer of Interplay's FALLOUT), and Massive Entertainment (GROUND CONTROL).

Not on this list, most significantly, is Dynamix—the Eugene, Oregon-based company that was essentially the heart and soul of Sierra in its heyday. Most employees will lose their jobs, and Dynamix will cease to exist as a separate entity. Dynamix's TRIBES team will continue on as part of Sierra's Core Games group. It's a sad end to a studio which at one time made some of the best games ever, including three *CGW* Hall of Fame games: BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO, and RED BARON.

As an interesting epilogue to this story, Pat Cook, the sports designer extraordinaire responsible for FPS FOOTBALL, recently signed up with Microsoft to head their sports division. During a recent visit to Microsoft, the *CGW* editors were going to meet with Cook, only to be told that he was in Eugene, Oregon—looking for job recruits. —*Jeff Green*

Reality Check

While opinions varied on quite a few games, we evil media minions all questioned the point behind SKYDIVE! while simultaneously praising the uber-sequel SYSTEM SHOCK 2. Here's our roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system. • ***Red indicates an editors' choice game.***

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CGM (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Civilization II: Test of Time	4	65%	3	5	4.2	6
Darkstone	3.5	90%	4	6	8.6	8
Kingpin	4	53%	2.5	7	7.3	8
Outcast	4.5	90%	3	7	8.6	9
PGA Champ. Golf 1999	3	90%	3.5	7	8.4	7
Re*Volt	4	88%	4	*	6.5	9
Rites of War	4	75%	2.5	*	5.9	8
Shadowman	3	74%	4.5	8	5.0	8
SkyDive!	2	5%	*	1	1.8	2
System Shock 2	4.5	95%	5	9	8.5	9

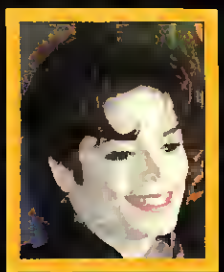
The GOOD...

HOMEWORLD SHIPS It was a long time in coming, but it's finally here—and it delivers the kick in the pants the RTS genre needed. Our review is coming next month, but here's an early kudos to designer Alex Garden, one of the hardest-working guys in the business and well-deserving of a hit. Fear not, Alex—you delivered a good one.

the BAD...

REDNECK RAMPAGE MOVIE Interplay's announcement that there will be a REDNECK RAMPAGE movie inspired no hoots and hollers over at the CGW office. Look, the game itself was basically one joke that stopped being funny after half an hour. Now we have to sit through a two-hour movie? The fact that the director of *The Brady Bunch Movie* and *Dr. Doolittle* is helming this project doesn't make it any more appealing to us. Y'all don't come back now, y'hear?

and the UGLY...



SIERRA DUMPS DYNAMIX The bottom continues to drop out of Sierra On-Line. The cancellation of BABYLON 5, their flight sims, and their Tolkien games is bad enough, but the dismantling of Dynamix—one of the titans of computer gaming's early years—hits hard. Here's hoping all those fine people who were laid off land on their feet. As for Sierra, thank goodness they still have HALF-LIFE, HOMEWORLD, and TRIBES propping up their reputation—because there's not gonna be a Hall Of Fame spot reserved for PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER.

Continued from Page 31

24-bit color at peak performance. Many games, like Sega Sports' NFL 2K and NBA 2K run at a super-smooth 60 frames-per-second. The 12X CD-ROM drive runs discs capable of holding up to one gigabyte of data, so expect a depth of gameplay and graphics unheard of on consoles.

The cherry on top of this big triple sundae is an upgradable 56K modem. When Sega launches their online gaming network early next year, thousands of console-only gamers will be introduced to the brave new world of multiplayer competition over the net. Until then, Dreamcast users can use the unit to browse the net, *a la* WebTV.

One big question remains: What about the games? We've only played a few, but so far we like what we see. Sega Sport's football title NFL 2000, is the best football game available right now, on PC or console, period. The smooth, motion-captured graphics are the closest thing we've ever seen to watching a real football game on TV, plus the underlying gameplay (including the elegant drafting system) is quite deep for a console game.

Sega has always been known as a great platform for fighting games, and two of our favorite arcade titles, VIRTUA FIGHTER 3 and SOUL CALIBER are perfectly ported to the DC; SOUL CALIBER is actually improved upon. We're really looking forward to some of the PC crossovers to the DC, including RAINBOW SIX, SLAVE ZERO, and MDK 2. In our view, there's no denying that the Dreamcast is definitely going to change some attitudes about console gaming.

Origin Announces Ultima Online 2

New Massively Multiplayer World To Be 3D

As we went to press, Origin Systems announced that it wes currently developing ULTIMA ONLINE 2, a sequel to their extremely popular massively-multiplayer RPG, to arrive in stores late next year. While the original ULTIMA ONLINE—still as strong as ever—will go on as is, UO2 will be a brand new game, a separate world, that will not overlap with the UO1 world. Characters will not be transferable from the original game.

As Jeff Anderson, UO2's executive producer, said in an interview, "I have a great deal of respect for the UO community and how much work they put into their characters, but if you allow people to transfer those characters, you instantly populate the new world with too much stuff. It's our objective in UO2 to broaden the audience for this kind of game."

As part of that effort, ULTIMA ONLINE 2 will feature a brand-new 3D engine (it will not feature the *Ultima Ascension* engine, as we had reported last month). Anderson said that they had not yet nailed down whether the game would use a first- or third-person perspective, or both. (Also misreported by our own gossip maven Mr. Sneaky was the possibility of gamers being able to engage in online sex within UO2. This is not true, and Mr. Sneaky was spanked—not in the good way—as a result.)

While it's still far too early for Origin to divulge any real details about the game, they did announce one intriguing feature: the involvement of Todd McFarlane, zillionaire creator of *Spawn*, who will help conceptualize monsters and characters and help develop action figures based on the game.

When asked if there was room for another multiplayer RPG in the face of ULTIMA ONLINE, EVEROUEST, and ASHERON'S CALL, Anderson remained extremely confident.

"I think we've just scretched the surface of this audience," he said. "A lot of the gamers are still waiting for an experience that is more accessible and fun. There's still enormous potential to grow this marketplace. With ULTIMA ONLINE 2, we're driving towards a higher-quality, more immersive community experience, which incorporates everything we learned from the first game."

Look in these pages soon for more on what's likely to be the RPG event of the coming year. —*Jeff Green*

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

Nov./Dec.1984

Ill-conceived and poorly executed attempts to capitalize on fads have a long and glorious tradition among game publishers. Today's "extreme sports" games were yesterday's BREAKDANCE, an atrocious arcade game based on the 80s street-dance craze. The only thing worse than the game was the *CGW* editor's lame attempt to be funny and hip by using the lingo of the day in his review – another hella nasty practice with a long tradition.

10

December 1989

And if you think the wave of deer hunting and bass fishing games—aka "Bubba games"—is a new phenomenon, have a look at CGW in 1989. Among the games reviewed were AUSSIE GAMES, an arcade game featuring such events as belly whacking, bottle shooting, and merlin fishing. Then there was APBA PRO BOWLING, a text-only bowling game, if you can imagine. And finally, there was BAR GAMES, which boasted such high-culture affairs as Pick-up Artist, Beer Sliding, and yes, of course, the Wet T-shirt contest.

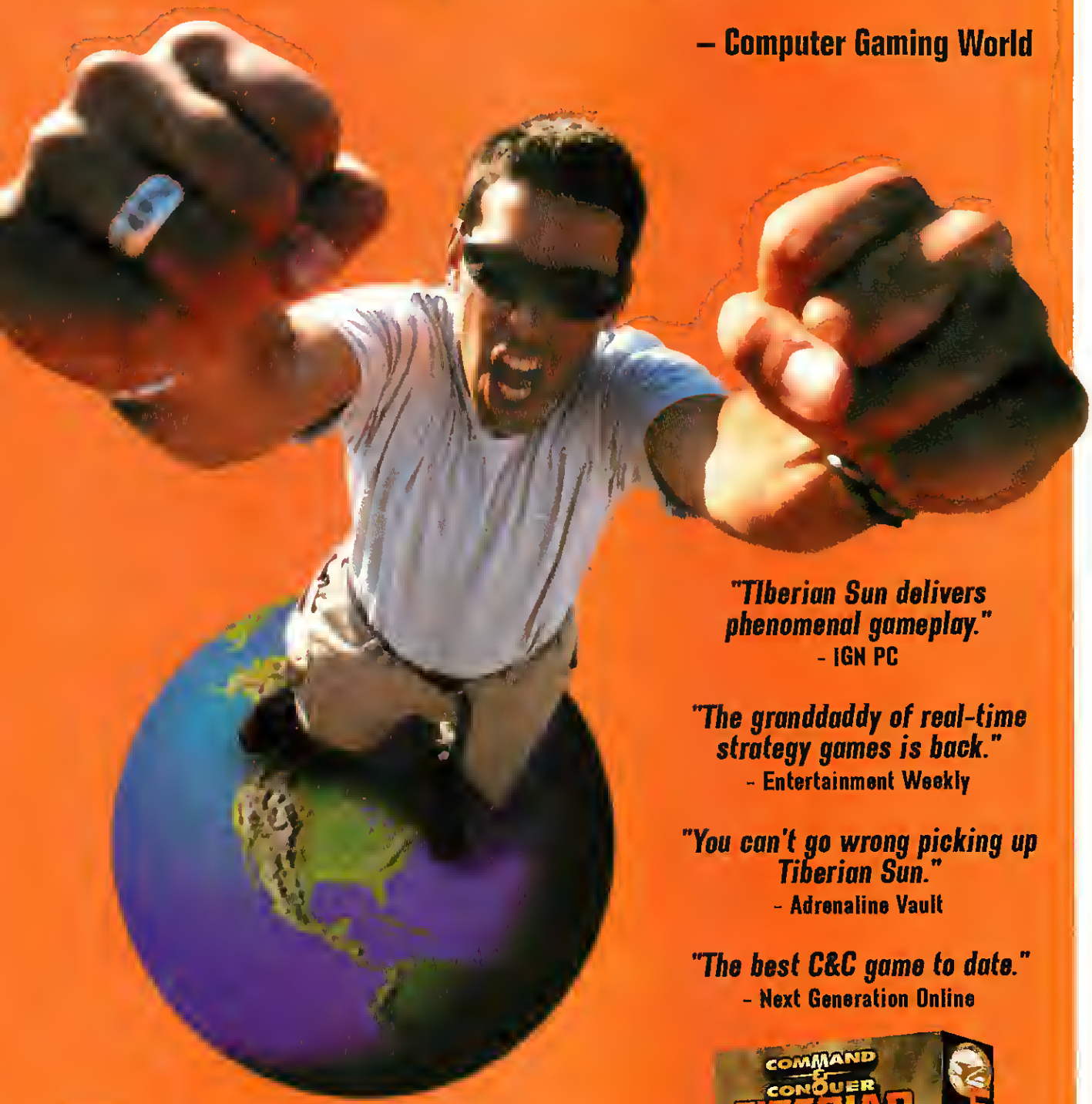
5

December 1994

We just couldn't say the word enough, "Pentium." Pentium, Pentium, Pentium. Intel's new chip was the centerpiece of our very first Ultimate Game Machine article. Our winning system that year: the Falcon Northwest VP, sporting a 90 MHz Pentium, 16 megs of RAM, a 4x CD drive, a Diamond Stealth graphics card with 2 megs of video RAM, and a one gig hard drive. Price: $3,600.

"THE CHAMPION IS BACK"

– Computer Gaming World



"Tiberian Sun delivers phenomenal gameplay."
- IGN PC

"The granddaddy of real-time strategy games is back."
- Entertainment Weekly

"You can't go wrong picking up Tiberian Sun."
- Adrenaline Vault

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And though there may be the whole island of Ahkuilon to explore, and more than 40 monsters to destroy, there's only one Locke D'Averam. And however you choose to live as Locke, we think you'll agree: Life is better the second time around.

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- Enjoy explosive spell casting effects unparalleled in any other CRPG game
- Extensive NPC interaction enables you to discover who you once were
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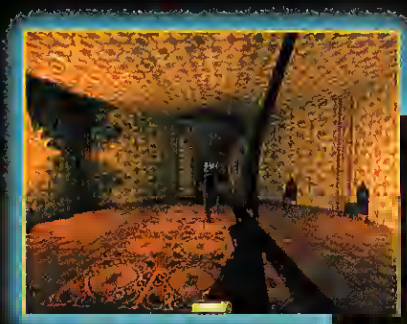

▲ *Beware stepping into the light of the Sun Room.*

Sneak through the gambling den in the Thieves Guild. ▼

◄ *A stealthy entrance is necessary to prevent alerting the guards.*

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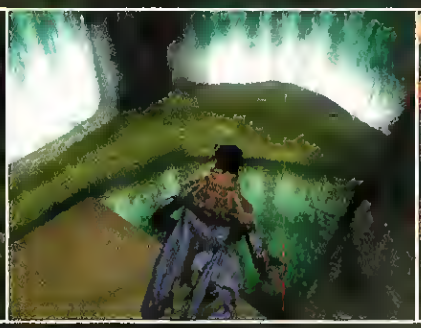

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- Gaming-Age.com

"98%"
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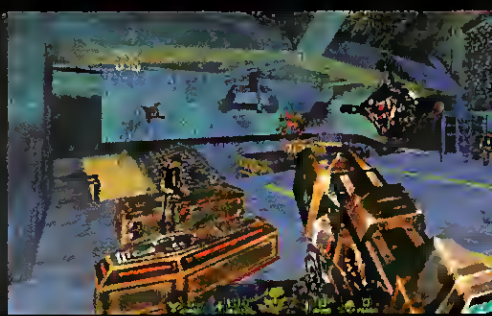

yOu know it's coming...

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Good cop or ex-cop? The choice is yours as either the youthful, hand-to-hand combat super-sleuth, Officer D'Arci, or disgruntled, street-smart weapons expert, Roper McIntyre.

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Mucky Foot

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Are **We** not **Vigilantes?**

Activision's INTERSTATE '82 Features Unreleased Devo Tunes

Activision's INTERSTATE '76, one of the best games of 1997, achieved over-the-top greatness for one specific reason: its fantastic '70s-oriented funk soundtrack. Now, Activision hopes do it again in INTERSTATE '82, enlisting none other than Devo, the quintessential '80s new-wave band, to provide music for the sequel's soundtrack.

Most notably, the soundtrack will feature three previously unreleased Devo songs actually recorded in 1982 (around the time of the *New Traditionalists* album): "Modern Life," "One Dumb Thing," and "Faster and Faster." I recently had the privilege of being the first game journalist to sample these songs, though (no kidding) I had to listen to them over the telephone. Given the less-than-stellar audio environment, I can still confidently testify—as a longtime Devo groupie—that the songs are, in fact, totally Devo, and will be must-haves for any Devo completist.

Along with the three unreleased songs, the rest of the soundtrack was scored by Devo co-founder Mark Mothersbaugh's Mutato Muzika. Mothersbaugh, as some fans may know, has been doing soundtrack work for years, including the recent films *Mystery Men* and *Rugrats: The Movie*. The INTERSTATE '82 soundtrack will include "homages" to popular '80s artists that those old-enough-to-remember will be pleased to hear again.

During a phone interview with the band (which got off to a bad start when they called me "Greg" and I called them "The Cars"), Mothersbaugh and co-founder Gerry Casale talked to this unabashed fanboy longer than necessary about all things Devo, including the release next year of a multi-disc compilation set by Rhino Records, as well as Casale's possible interest in designing a Devo 3D computer game sometime down the line.

Casale and Mothersbaugh said the band is constantly recording new material, and couldn't rule out the possibility of a future Devo album. "Sometimes you're driving the big rig truck," said Mothersbaugh, "and sometimes you're sitting in the rocking chair on the porch." Hey, you figure it out.

When asked if they would go back to the '80s—their heyday—if they could, the answer was a resounding yes. Said Mothersbaugh, "In the '80s, girls would run up to Gerry begging him to have sex with them. Now, they come up to him and say, 'I'd bet you'd like to have sex with me, wouldn't you?'"

Some game journalists know exactly how you feel, Gerry.

—Jeff Green

CGW PROFILE

Brian McCann

This month CGW talks with Brian McCann, comedy writer for the Conan O'Brian show and creative force behind Simon and Schuster Interactive's DEER AVENGER 1 and 2.

Does the world really need a DEER AVENGER 2?
Quite honestly, yes. DEER AVENGER 2 puts money in my pocket, and the world needs that. I'm single-handedly responsible for so much beer consumption that I believe most breweries would quickly go into default if I weren't supporting their efforts. What's a world without breweries, you ask? A sad one. An angry one. A world without laughter. A world without cheer. Sadly, the only way to avoid this disaster is to flood the already crowded computer gaming market with another "deer gets rifle, heads to suburbs, shoots at people" type of game.

What are your favorite computer games?
I've always been a fan of "Guess your buddy's pin number." It's a time consuming game that isn't all that fun, yet it can really pay off big if you win. Try it, it's fun.

What's the weirdest thing about working on the Conan show?
Not too many people know this, but Conan insists that every single person that works for him gets a tattoo on their ass that reads, "Conan is my pappy!" He puts the tattoos on himself by carving them in with old coat hangers.

How many women have you slept with?
Hey, let's keep this about the game, ok? 274.

How come everyone in Hollywood says that you're the greatest comedy writer of all time?
Look, it's kind of embarrassing to be singled out like that. Can we just remain focused on DEER AVENGER 2 and how wonderful it is?

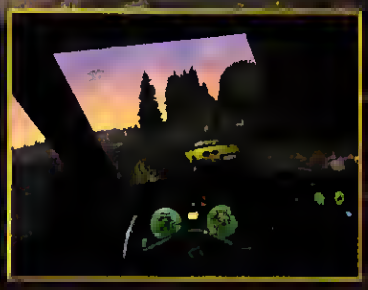
Rumor has it that you've had a three-way with Yasmin Bleeth and Morgenne.
No comment. Let's get back to the slick and funny DEER AVENGER 2, please.

What does it feel like to know that every single 24-year-old babe in Italy wants to sleep with you?
I know that's what the Poles say, but seriously, that has nothing to do with this game. Now, I'm only gonna take one more question, and please make it about the game!

Bob Dylan claims you've made more of an impact on world culture than he ever did. Do you agree?
Sure, I remember when Bob made those statements, and it seems every single time I sit down for an interview some smart-ass reporter has to dredge that up. Well, I'm not going to give you the satisfaction of answering it. Thank you for your time. Goodbye.

–Interview by Mark Asher

you'll have to scrape the bugs off your monitor.



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Crimson Skies

FASA, Microsoft Team Up for Alternate-World Air Combat Game

Set in an alternate history that does not include a nuclear holocaust, evil corporations, or machines that have inexplicably gained sentience and a strong dislike for mankind, CRIMSON SKIES is one of the freshest game ideas we've seen in some time. Get this—it takes place in *the past*.

While the game is centered on 1930's-era aircraft, this is no propeller-driven flight sim.

The CRIMSON SKIES team (a little outfit called the FASA Corporation, responsible for the whole MECHWARRIOR and BATTLETECH series) is building the game with an emphasis on daredevil fun. Think Evil Knievel meets Waldo Pepper.

The gameworld is based upon a 1930's America fractured by an economic holocaust that has created approximately a dozen new countries, including the Nation of Hollywood, Free Colorado, Appalachia, and the Republic of Texas.

Each of the invented countries has its own tongue-in-cheek indigenous air militia; for example, Hollywood has squadrons sponsored by movie studios (like MGM's Metro Marauders) and piloted by movie stars.

The fiction behind the game permeates every aspect of gameplay, and should be integral to what FASA hopes will be a giddy sense of fun.

Whether stealing Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose or gunning down zeppelins with your fancifully designed aircraft, CRIMSON SKIES may be the shot in the arm the wheezing sim genre needs—a light crossover hit that appeals to flight wonks and the broader gaming audience alike.

Look for more on CRIMSON SKIES in our exclusive preview next month. —*Robert Coffey*

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

Age of Wonders	GOD	Q4 99	Nox	Westwood	Q1 00
Allegiance	Microsoft	Q2 00	Oni	Bungie	Q1 00
Anachronox	Ion Storm/Eidos	Q1 00	Panzer General 3D Assault	SSI	Q4 99
Antistarn!	Pirahna Games	Q4 99	Pharaoh	Sierra/Impressions/Sierra Studios	Q4 99
Asheron's Call	Microsoft	Q4 99	Planescape: Torment	Interplay	Q4 99
Axis & Allies Expansion	Hasbro Interactive	Q4 99	Pool of Radiance II	SSI	Q4 00
Black & White	EA	Q2 00	Quake III Arena	id Software	Q4 99
Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge	Atomic/SSI	Q4 99	Reach for the Stars	SSG/SSI	Q4 99
Comanche 4	Novalogic	Q4 99	Revenant	Eidos	Q4 99
Comanche/Rekum	Empire	Q2 00	Risk II	Hasbro	Q4 99
Conquest: Frontier Wars	Digital Anvil/Microsoft	Q2 00	Rock	GT Interactive	Q3 00
Creatures 4	Mindscape	Q4 99	Sanity	Monolith	Q4 99
Creatures Adventures	Mindscape	Q4 99	Shadowpact	Blue Byte	Q4 99
Dark Reign II	Activision	Q4 99	Shadow Watch	Red Storm Entertainment	Q1 00
Deus Ex	Ion Storm	Q2 00	Shogun: Total War	EA	Q1 00
Diablo II	Blizzard	Q4 99	Sid Meier's Civilization III	Firaxis/MicroProse	Q4 00
Driver	GT Interactive	Q4 99	Silent Hunter II	SSI	Q4 99
Duke Nukem Forever	3D Realms	Q2 00	SimMars	Maxis	Q3 00
F/A-18E Superhornet	Interplay	Q4 99	Sim Theme Park	EA	Q4 99
Felony Pursuit	THQ	Q2 00	Soldier of Fortune	Raven/Activision	Q4 99
Final Fantasy VIII	SquareEA	Q4 99	Sovereign	Verant/Sony Online	Q4 00
Flight Simulator 2000	Microsoft	Q4 99	Spec Ops II: Green Berets	Ripcord Games	Q4 99
Force Commander	LucasArts	Q4 99	Starlancer Digital	Anvil/Microsoft	Q4 99
Freelancer Digital	Anvil/Microsoft	Q4 00	Star Trek: Armada	Activision	Q4 99
Giants: Citizen	Kabuto Interplay	Q4 99	Star Trek: The Hidden Evil	Activision	Q4 99
Good & Evil	Cavedog/GT	Q3 00	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	Activision	Q1 00
Grand Theft Auto 2	Rockstar Games	Q4 99	SWAT 3: Close Quarters	Sierra Studios	Q4 99
Ground Control	Sierra Studios	Q1 00	Tachyon: The Fringe	Novalogic	Q4 99
Half-Life: Opposing Force	Sierra Studios	Q4 99	Team Fortress 2	Valve/Sierra	Q4 99
Halo	Bungie	Q4 00	The Sims	Maxis	Q1 00
Harpoon 4	SSI	Q2 00	Thief 2: The Metal Age	Looking Glass/Eidos	Q2 00
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2	GOD	Q2 00	Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation	Core/Eidos	Q4 99
Indiana Jones/Infernal Machine	LucasArts	Q4 99	Tribes 2	Sierra Studios	Q2 00
Interstate '82	Activision	Q4 99	Ultima Ascension	Origin/EA	Q4 99
Jane's F/A-18	Jane's/EA	Q4 99	USAF	Jane's/EA	Q4 99
Joint Strike Fighter	Novalogic	Q4 99	Vampire: The Masquerade	Nihilistic/Activision	Q4 99
Loose Cannon	Microsoft	Q2 00	WarCraft III	Blizzard	Q4 00
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	Q1 00	Warlords: Battlecry	SSG/SSI	Q1 00
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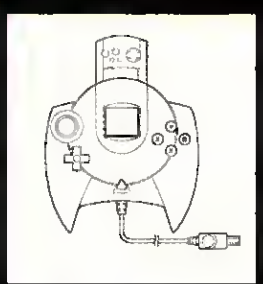
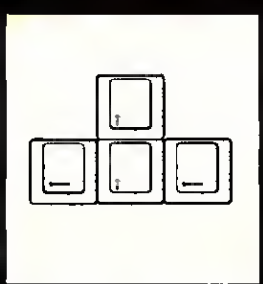
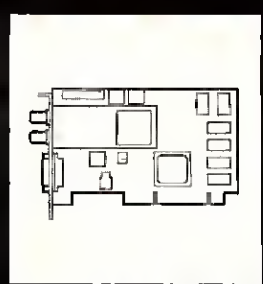

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stealthmode

The Latest Hoaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

By Señor Sneaky

While everyone at *CGW* was playing AGE OF KINGS, His Royal Sneakiness was playing the much more difficult Age of Rumors. You want the inside? Let's start with the hottest selling game right now, COMMAND AND CONQUER 2: TIBERIAN SUN. Rumor is that **Westwood** is working on an add-on, but reports of James Earl Jones filming scenes are false – for now. Westwood is also considering a worldwide C&C 2 tournament.

One of the surefire hits of this holiday season will be a surefire hit next year instead. With testing for DIABLO 2 slipping until late October, **Blizzard** is already conceding internally that the game won't be done until February 2000. By the way, what happened to that 3D sci-fi action game they were working on? Is it dead, Jim?

We may never know for sure, but BABYLON 5 may have been only a month or two from completion and might have been spared the axe *if* the BABYLON team hadn't been pulled off the project for nearly six months to work on RED BARON 2. What were they doing? Adding in the multiplayer component that **Dynamix** (R.I.P) never included.

Lots of X-COM stuff. First, the unannounced X-COM GENESIS looks like it will be a real-time game now. Next, **Hasbro** is really looking to pump life into the series as a multigenre, multimedia product. Expect an "interesting launch" in the near future as I was told that "Fans of the series may have reason to rejoice." Hasbro is also looking at doing computer game conversions of some of the hallowed Avalon-Hill boardgames. ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER and PANZER BLITZ will be two of the first.

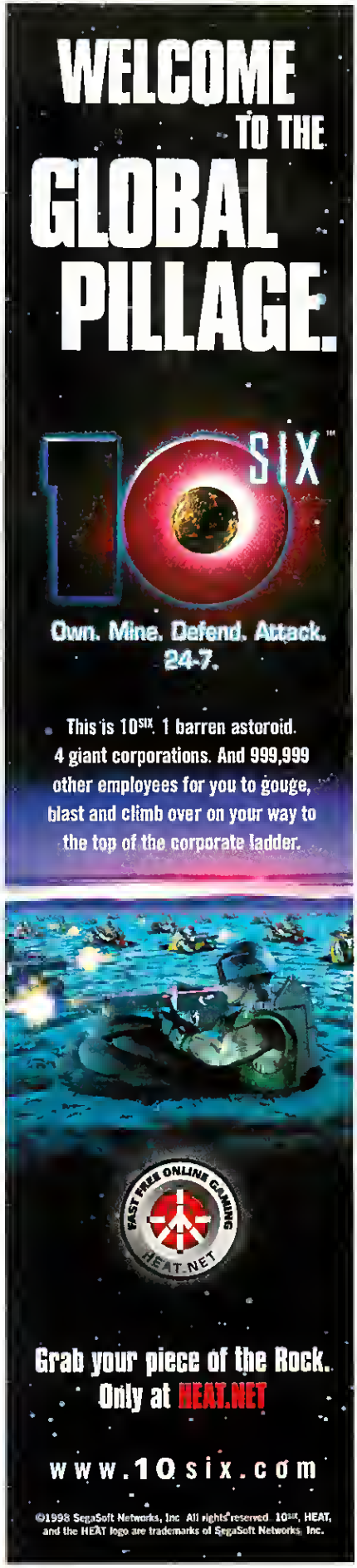
GT Interactive has some problems. They've been sued for allegedly pirating a bowling game of all things, and now they're staring at an ugly 7-10 split as **id, 3D Realms,** and **Epic** are all interested in auditing GTI. What are they looking for? Any "missing" royalties they are due. Id threatened to audit six months ago and GTI coughed up $1.5 million in royalties that had been "lost in the system."

Latest **Eidos** rumor is that **Havas** is looking at buying them. Hey, at this point, the French could install Jerry Lewis as CEO of **Ion Storm** – he couldn't do any worse. I do want to squelch one rumor – there is absolutely no truth to the story that John Romero is writing *The Complete Dummies Guide to Game Development.* Sheesh, I hate rumormongers!

Verant Interactive, the hot development company behind EVERQUEST, is in serious discussions with a publisher to do a FPS team-oriented game set in a persistent online world. And why was Verant in Austin visiting **Origin** just before UO2 was announced? Even Mr. Sneaky doesn't know the answer to that one.

Got a hot tip to share? Tell it to Mr. Sneaky at sneaky@zd.com. He's always there for you.

Is Eidos going French?



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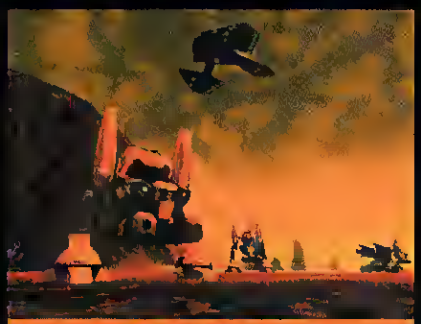

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WarCraft III

Blizzard Unveils the Answer to Gamers' Prayers

by Elliott Chin

GENRE: Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 2000
PUBLISHER: Havas Interactive
DEVELOPER: Blizzard
CONTACT: www.blizzard.com

CGW has a secret to tell. Two years ago, we saw sketches for WARCRAFT III. And a year ago, we knew Blizzard was working on a powerful 3D engine for the game. We were sworn to secrecy then; but today, we can happily reveal to you the game that Blizzard itself has been dying to unveil. Yes, WARCRAFT III is under development—and has been for over six months.

At this year's ECTS trade show in London, we sat down at a hands-on demo and really got to see what kind of a game WARCRAFT III will be. What we saw proved that Blizzard isn't settling for a tried-and-true sequel. Instead, they're hoping to create something new that will infuse an increasingly staid genre with creativity and personality. WARCRAFT III is not a real-time strategy game in the traditional sense. It's not a mission-based game where you start each scenario gathering resources, erecting buildings, and cranking out hordes of units. No, WARCRAFT III is narrowing its focus, injecting many role-playing elements, and is being touted by Blizzard as a "3D role-playing strategy game."

What's a 3D RPS?

Blizzard defines the 3D RPS as "a strategy game set heavily within a role-playing environment. WARCRAFT III will combine the focused combat and dynamics of a RPG and apply them in a competitive, strategic environment." It's a definite departure from WARCRAFT II, with six races instead of two, a 3D engine, a more

THE MEN WHO FELL TO EARTH Meteor showers are more than just fireworks to catch the eye of this battling orc and human—the infernal unit from the demonic Burning Legion plummet to earth in these heavenly fireballs.

organic storyline, and numerous role-playing elements.

The new 3D engine looks very good, with incredibly fluid and lifelike animation. Both the terrain and the units will be 3D, and the units will be rendered with a skeletal and skinning animation. Unit animation is so exaggerated and full of character that no one should worry that this game will lack the personality of its predecessor. In fact, Rob Pardo, producer on WARCRAFT III, says Blizzard will be able to do an even better job due to the move to 3D.

Despite concerns, WARCRAFT III won't be a MYTH clone. For one, there will be unit recruitment, town management, and the many RPG elements. Secondly, the camera won't be freeform; you won't have to deal with it at all. Blizzard says the camera will be fixed and lower to the ground, showing more of the horizon and giving you a wider view of what's ahead. Although you will be able to move the camera slightly, it will only be within a very limited range; basically, Blizzard doesn't think you should ever have to fiddle with it, since it would only distract you.

Campaigns and Interactive Worlds

The campaign will play like an RPG-style storyline. Instead of mission briefings, you'll begin the game at your keep with your one hero; from there, you'll probably never leave gameplay again. NPCs will give you missions, moving the campaign along seamlessly. For example, when you leave your town to explore the map, you might suddenly meet a troll hunter loitering by the gate. When you greet him, he tells you that a human camp is nearby and you should attack it. He'll join you and suddenly, you have your first mission.

While Blizzard hasn't said how many campaigns there will be, they did say you will get to play all six races in the open-ended campaign—

Six-Way Race

With four raw races, the total of sides in WARCRAFT III jumps to six. So far, Blizzard has announced three of them—humans, orcs, and demons.

The humans are the same as they were in WARCRAFT II, comprised of humans, elves, and dwarves. However, they are no longer the noble and good defenders of Azeroth. Instead, they have fallen to infighting, and only the arrival of the evil demons has rallied them together. Units on the human side include the dwarven rifleman, the human knight, and the human footman.

The orcs have returned to their shamanistic roots, carving out a new life for themselves on Azeroth as they still fight the humans for respect. However, now that the demons have come to Azeroth, the orcs have no choice but to fight their former masters to save their new homeland. The orc side is composed of orcs, trolls, and minotaurs. The goblins and ogres – such endearing members of the Horde in WARCRAFT II – have switched allegiances.

The last race we know of are the demons of the Burning Legion. The only unit currently revealed is the Infernal, a being composed entirely of flame and barely held in place by plates of armor. Infernals fall from the sky in comets, rising from the craters like creatures from hell. The Burning Legion once ruled the hearts of Orcish, but now that the orcs have overthrown the Burning Legion's demonic influence, the Burning Legion has seen fit to conquer Azeroth on its own.

DARK TIMES AHEAD This is the spider temple, where the orcs must battle spiders and skeletons to save a blademaster hero.

BATTLE ROYALE This conflict between an ambushing orc party and some encamped humans really shows off the 3D models and lighting effects.

SORCERESS

WARLOCK

The Sorceress, Warlock, and Shaman will be the spell-casting units for the Humans, Demons, and Orcs respectively.

SHAMAN

which is still focused on the story of the orcs and humans.

Another big change is a more interactive general world with lots of neutral locations and wandering monsters and mercenaries. You'll find towns to explore and temples and ruins guarded by hostile monsters. Inside each will be treasures and information. You might find townspeople to talk to, heroes to recruit, or mercenaries to hire in the town, while the ruins and temples might yield gold or imprisoned heroes. In the ECTS demo, we stumbled upon a human camp, a destroyed bridge, a spider temple populated by skeletons and spiders, a sage's mountain retreat, and a valley protected by a great dragon statue.

Details will make the world even more alive. In the human camp, you'll see them sitting around a campfire and joking loudly when one might say, "Shh...do you hear something?" just before you attack. Additionally, music will be much more integral to the game and will change to suit onscreen action: quiet and soft during conversations, loud and fast during combat.

Still a Strategy Game

Despite the heavy role-playing influence, though, WARCRAFT III will indeed be a strategy game. Rob Pardo takes pains to emphasize that there will still be lots of tactical combat, a tech tree, troop recruiting and upgrading, and even the building of structures. However, he says that in real-time strategy games, "you spend about 70% of your time doing town management and about 30% actually out in the environment [in] tactical combat. We're looking to reverse that trend, so you'll spend 30% of your time [on town management and] 70% of the time you'll be dealing with tactical combat, questing, and interacting with the environment."

In WARCRAFT III, you'll start in a keep, where you'll have all your basic unit-producing buildings and your hero. Says Pardo, "The home keep for a player will operate in a very similar manner to a WARCRAFT II town. There will be unit-producing buildings, a tech-tree [to research], and some base defenses. The only real difference is that we want to make it easier to manage, by taking out the need to build a huge sprawling base. Instead of building 30 structures to enable the tech-tree, the player will only need to upgrade his/her existing structures."

So, strategy fans of the CRAFT series will still have to decide which troops to upgrade and when, and when and how to upgrade buildings to enable better troops. While you'll still research new troops, spells, and skills, these options will be open earlier and may also be dependent on more map exploration and questing. You'll still manage multiple squads, exploring the map and fighting the enemy.

As for resources, the one confirmed resource is gold that will buy troops, upgrades, and building upgrades. You'll have just enough to create a small party in the beginning of the game, gaining more as you adventure and kill neutral monsters. Later, you'll be able to build special structures—like farms, lumber mills, and towers—that will produce continuous, additional gold for you.

One key feature of Blizzard strategy games has been supply limit. In WARCRAFT II you had to build farms to support troops; in STARCRAFT it was pylons, overlords, and supply depots.

Since the game is hero-based, you'll have to attach units to heroes to

DIE, PUNY HUMANS
Our orcs ambush another human camp with surprise, thanks to a troll hunter's information.

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command them, with a hero's leadership rating determining how many troops you can field in battle (a rating of 2 gets you two troops to command, etc.). Since the maximum number of heroes you'll be able to command will probably be around six, battles will be more tactical and rely on fewer—but more effective—units. Fewer units means you'll be able to spend more time on them during combat, and you'll want to—because each will have a special ability. Orc grunts, for example, can go berserk, while wolf riders can throw nets.

1) MAKE NEW FRIENDS... This Dwarven Rifleman is one of the new units in the series.

2) BUT KEEP THE OLD... While this Orc Wolfrider makes a triumphant return from the first WARCRAFT.

Pardo has little comment on the multiplayer support, saying only that Blizzard will support more players per game than WARCRAFT II's eight. Team play and questing will be supported, but there won't be persistent characters in multiplayer games. Blizzard feels it's important that the winner of the game be the most skilled player, not the person with the highest-level hero.

At its core, WARCRAFT III is a deep strategy game, with upgrades, tech trees, and unit recruitment. But Blizzard is charting a new path for RTS titles by injecting role-playing elements, shifting focus more to tactical action rather than to strategic building, while centering gameplay around heroes and quests. Every indication is that this newest chapter in the WARCRAFT saga will sustain the immersive gameplay of the original, while giving us a fresh look at the world of WARCRAFT itself. CGW

MUCH BIGGER THAN LIFE WARCRAFT III should continue the series' over-the-top sensibility – just check out this steroid-loaded

5 THINGS

Five Orcs That Will Give Any Human Pause

1. Orc Grunt
The basic orc unit wields an axe in combat. The grunt's special ability is to go berserk.

2. Troll Hunter
The Horde's only ranged unit hurls spears at opponents. Its special ability allows it to see heat signatures on the ground for tracking other creatures.

3. Orc Wolf Rider
Back from WARCRAFT I, this very fast unit is best at hit-and-run tactics, as it is weak in melee. Its special ability is to ensnare and slow opponents with nets.

4. Minotaur
This punishing melee attacker carries a large ball and chain. Its special ability is the opponent-stunning bull rush.

5. Orc Shaman
The shaman can call on the forces of nature to fight its enemies, hurling balls of lightning and summoning lightning storms that ravage all creatures in the area.

Heroes of Myth and Magic

More important and rarer than normal units, heroes will have special skills, gain levels, and use magic items. Most importantly, you won't be able to control any units unless you attach them to a hero, so heroes become the central building blocks of tactical combat, much as in the turn-based HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC series. However, these heroes can fight, and they'll learn vital new skills as they advance that could include better leadership ratings, combat skills, or skills that enhance the performance of troops under them. You'll acquire heroes throughout the game, recruiting them at forts, gaining them through quests, or hiring them at neutral buildings.

So far, we know of five heroes that will be in the game: the orc warlord, orc blademaster, human archmage, human paladin, and dwarf giantslayer. There will definitely be many more. Each of the game's six sides will have about six heroes to command, although not all will be unique. You might, for instance, be able to control two blade masters at once.

With the game so heavily focused on heroes, Blizzard has decided not to penalize you too much should you lose one. Instead of holding your heroes back for fear of losing them forever (as in STARCRAFT), you can throw them into battle knowing that they'll be resurrected in your keep should they die. The only drawback is that your troops will be left alone, and in WARCRAFT III, that means they're as good as dead.

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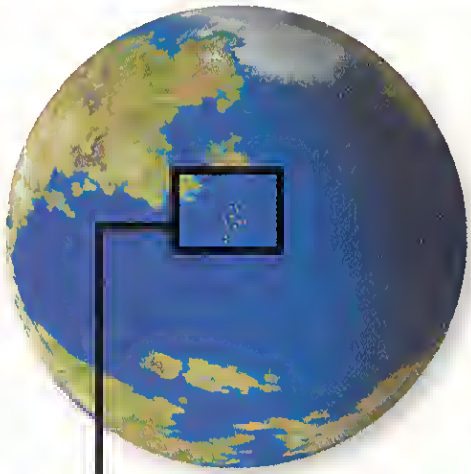
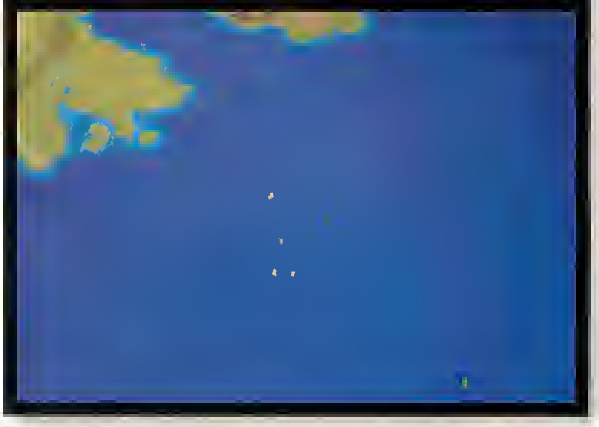
Everybody Wants to Rule the World

by Mark Asher

Sovereign



BIG BLUE MARBLE A fully-rotating globe of the world is the SOVEREIGN playing ground. You can use it to scout out potential sites for new cities or to keep tabs on deployed naval fleets like these.



John Smedley, CEO of Verant Interactive, wants me to understand. "This is an RTS game," he says, gesturing with both hands as if he's holding tight to an idea about to wriggle free. "It just takes RTS gaming to the next level."

Smedley is understandably concerned with labels when describing the massively multiplayer game SOVEREIGN. Verant's follow up to their huge online hit EVERQUEST is both a game played in real-time, and a game that promises the kind of depth we see in turn-based games like CIVILIZATION and IMPERIALISM. Toss in the X-factor of multiplayer games with anywhere from 4 to 500 players in size, and we've never seen a game quite like this.

SOVEREIGN
GENRE: Multiplayer Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 2000
PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Verant Interactive
www.station.sony.com/sovereign

Size Does Matter

SOVEREIGN is, first and foremost, big. Big in scale and big in ambition, the game is set in a world much like our own and employs current military technology. Just about any military unit you can think of is included—AWACs, subs with cruise missiles, VTOL transports, tanks—you name it, it's there. At the start of each game, the gorgeous 3D world is randomly generated and scaled in size to the number of players.

SOVEREIGN is an empire builder at heart. At the outset, each player gets to place a city which can generate two of the eight to ten resources in the game. One resource will always be money. The second resource is based on the terrain you build upon.

To get additional resources players build new cities, trade with one another, or buy them in the game's world market.

Players can win by several different methods. For example, a game might have as a victory condition amassing a certain amount of money, or controlling a certain number of cities (either by conquering them or through alliances), or by cornering the market and controlling a certain percentage of two or more resources.

Games with 500 players might take as long as a month to play. Such long games require interesting options, and Verant is building in a host of sophisticated rules normally seen in turn-based games only, such as morale for armies and citizens, tanks and planes that run out of fuel and need to be resupplied, complex research trees, and more.

And yes, the battles are fought in real-time, but the sheer scale of the game, the realistic movement rates, and the cost of mounting and sustaining an attack will go a long way toward reducing the chances that SOVEREIGN will become a clickfest. To further discourage rushing,

troops and military units garrisoned in a city have their defensive and offensive capabilities doubled.

SOVEREIGN'S strong role-playing element will let players develop characters that will accrue experience and gain new skills that carry over from game to game.

Each of the six character classes comes with advantages; for example, Economists can borrow from the world market, Diplomats get a bonus in all treaties with other players, Scientists get a research bonus, and Theologians convert citizens into soldiers to send on crusades.

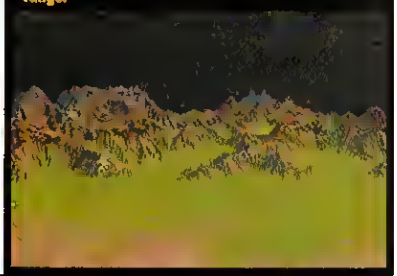
As players develop their characters, they can customize them by picking from a vast number of available skills. To rise in levels, players get experience from successfully performing a variety of activities, including attacking and defending, spying, and building cities.

Players can also lose experience, but it will be common to lose a game and still gain experience points.

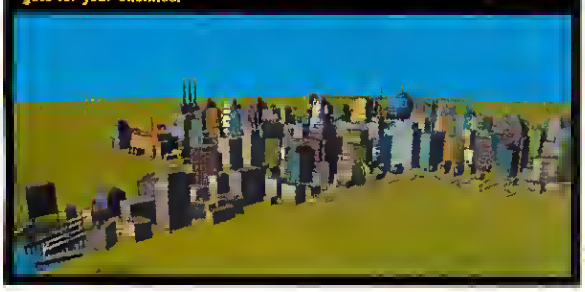
There's an abundance of diplomatic and espionage tactics available with players able to declare war, sue for peace, spy on enemies, engage in terrorism, and more. Players establish land, air, and sea trade, and other players can prey upon these routes as well.

There's even a dash of card collecting in SOVEREIGN with its digital trading cards (DTC). A DTC might raise the morale of your cities, or be a "blackout" card that blanks a region of the map from spy satellites. Verant will distribute new cards to players every week. Players will be able to trade DTCs in the game lobby.

THIS LAND IS MY LAND But it's not your land. Players can expect to battle over prime patches of real estate, since they'll determine what resources a city generates and can provide natural defenses, like this mountain range.



SKYLINE Cities like this are the foundation for your budding empire. They produce your units, generate resources, and make pretty appealing targets for your enemies.



SUPPORT SYSTEM Among SOVEREIGN's innovative command options is the ability to put units on "support" duty. Instead of burning fuel by escorting these tanks, the aircraft will standby at their base, scrambling only when the unit they're supporting comes under attack.

The big question is, how will a player's cities survive when the player is logged off? "We're giving players three options," says Smedley. "Players can lock down their cities, and all friendly units will automatically head to the nearest city and garrison themselves. Players can just log off, and units with orders [guard, etc.] will continue to move while the rest will head back to cities. Finally, players can let another player run all or part of their empire."

SOVEREIGN is an extremely ambitious game. Unlike EVERQUEST, which is essentially non-competitive, SOVEREIGN is a cutthroat game that will pit players against one another, with backstabbing encouraged. There really hasn't been a game like this before, and if Verant can deliver, particularly in balancing the game properly, it promises to be one fascinating experience. CGW

5 THINGS

5 Cool Things To Do in SOVEREIGN

1. Torture captured spies to find out what they've discovered about you before sending them back with misinformation.
2. Use your spy as a terrorist to blow up enemy structures.
3. Have your spy assassinate a rival city leader to lower morale.
4. Invite a player into a secure chat room to discuss tactics, and allow another player to eavesdrop. Chat can also be encrypted and you can hand out keys to allow other players to break the code.
5. Have SOVEREIGN email or even page you when your cities are attacked and you aren't currently playing.

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Pool of Radiance

SSI Returns to the Pool to Launch Another Edition of D&D

By P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki

When TSR launched the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons'* Second Edition rules, SSI released the very first computer game adaptation of *AD&D*, POOL OF RADIANCE, and began the popular "gold box" series. After releasing nine similar *AD&D* gold box games (and a few spin-offs) with diminishing success, SSI forfeited the *AD&D* license to Interplay Productions, much to the chagrin of role-playing game fans.

POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR
GENRE: Role Playing • RELEASE DATE: Q4 2000
PUBLISHER: SSI
DEVELOPER: Stormfront Studios

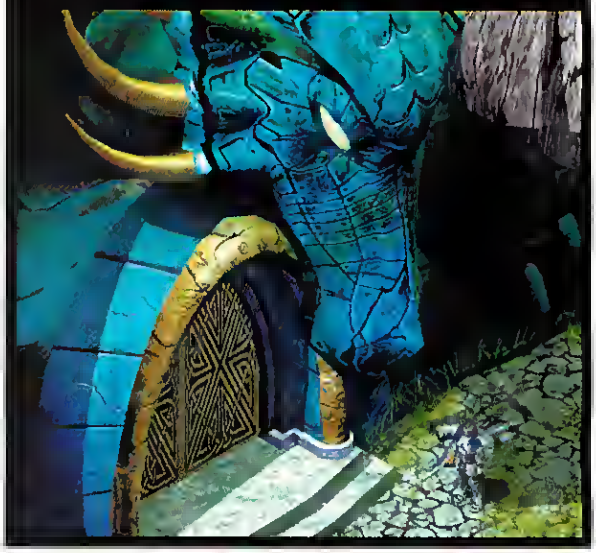
SSI has now regained the right to produce at least one more *Dungeons & Dragons* game and aptly commissioned Stormfront Studios—the developer of the original POOL OF RADIANCE—to create a sequel to that classic title. POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR is scheduled, appropriately, to be released around the same time as the Third Edition *D&D* rules.

BALDUR'S Influence

The commercial and critical success of BioWare Corp.'s BALDUR'S GATE brought *D&D* back to forefront of the RPG genre, so it's not surprising that RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR is similar in a number of ways to BioWare's game. Both games are party-based RPGs that use an isometric perspective and individually crafted pre-rendered backgrounds. But unlike BioWare's title, RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR uses 3D polygonal models to sharply depict its characters and monsters.

Backgrounds won't be flat, since a 3D-texture map will provide depth rendering so that characters appear at different heights. Characters won't be able to levitate or climb walls, but will scale furniture and other objects to gain a tactical height advantage in combat. The development team is promising to make interactive environments to allow your party to, for example, push tables around to block doors and bar advancing enemies. Only select objects will be interactive, so don't expect a comprehensive world-sim like ULTIMA VII; but

GOLD BOX FACE LIFT This long-overdue sequel to the quaint old "gold box" RPGs is being updated in glorious 3D. Yes, you'll need a 3D card this time around.



PUSH FOR EXCELLENCE RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR's 3D environment will include a number of interactive items. Here, a character pushes a table just because he can.

70 TONS of MAYHEM

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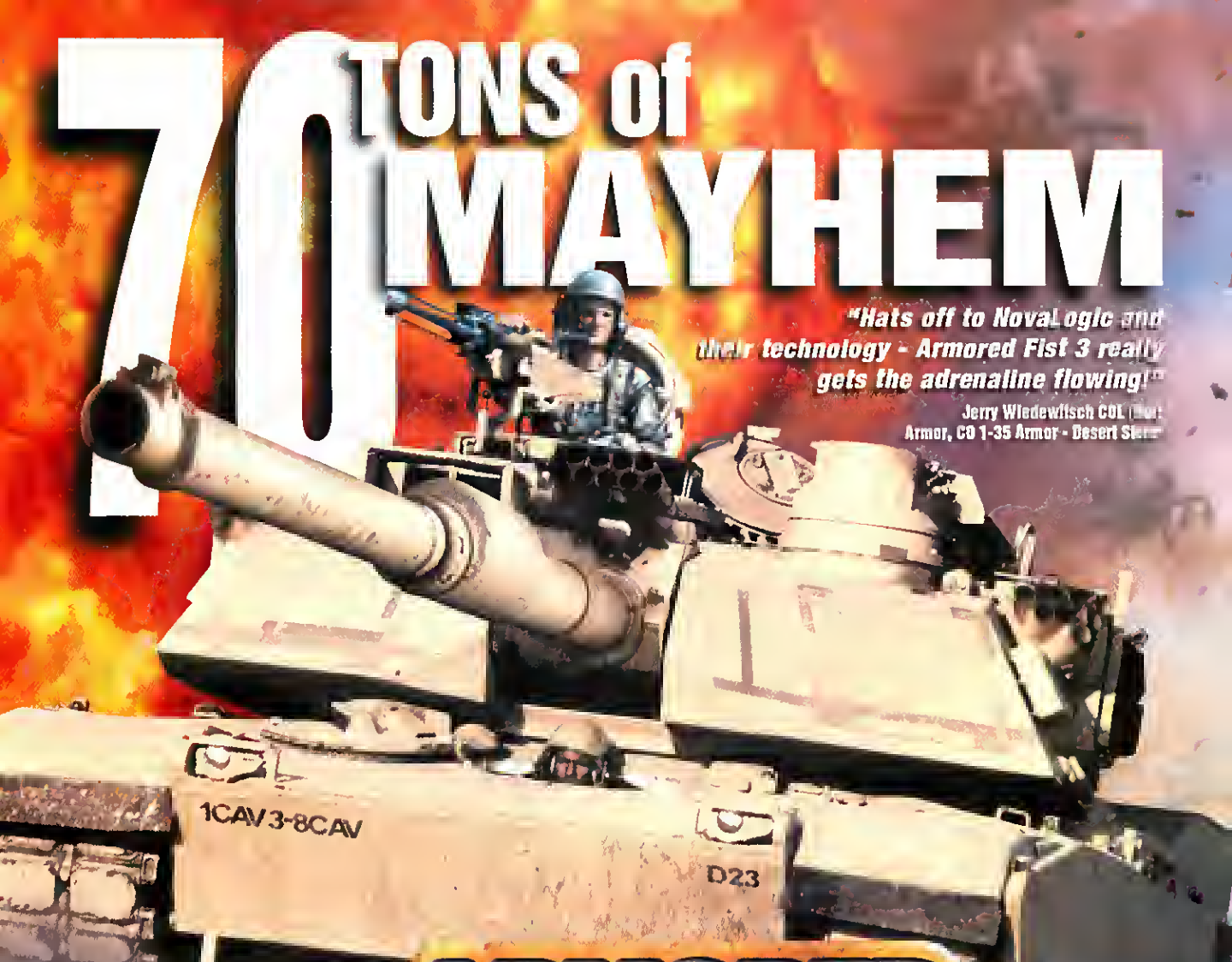
Armor, CO 1-35 Armor - Desert Storm



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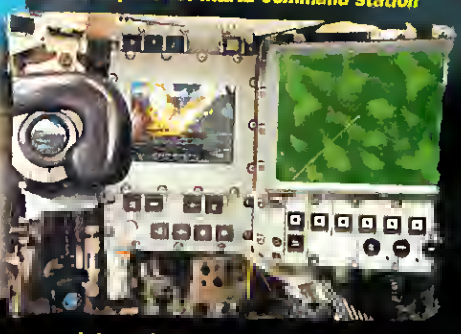
Actual photo of M1A2 command station



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the availability of even a few interactive items will add an interesting dimension lacking in the static gaming worlds of BALDUR'S GATE and DIABLO.

RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR's plot ties into the original POOL OF RADIANCE and its three sequels. The story starts out in the Forgotten Realms city of New Phlan, where the mystical Pool of Radiance was originally unearthed. Legendary mage Elminster recruits your neophyte party and a more seasoned group of edventurers to investigate e new Pool that bas appeared near tbe mythical elven city of Myth Drannor.

When the veteran party meets an untimely fete, your party is mandated to acquire the skills to complete Elminster's task and avoid succumbing to the unknown forces that dispatched your allied group of heroes. Tabletop D&D hes meticulously detailed Myth Drannor and its surrounding area, and the development team intends to incorporate existing maps and other source material—which should please tabletop D&D veterans.

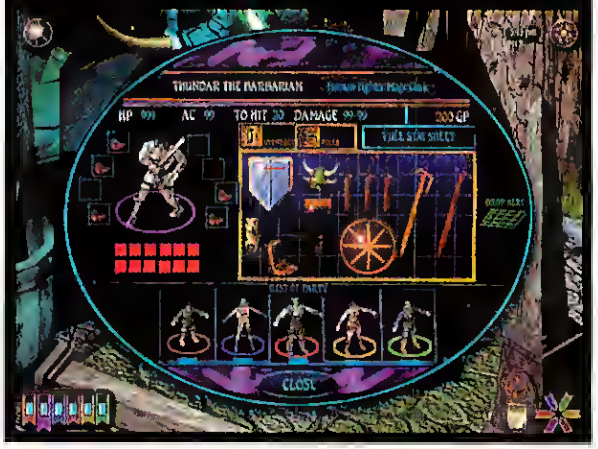
It's My Party

You'll create four inexperienced characters and be able to round out your party by asking two non-player characters to join your group. You'll retain complete control over party member NPCs and be able to direct their ections in combat and determine when they leave your party. Priests, sorcerers, fighters, rangers, rogues (the Third Edition name for thieves), and barbarians will all be available character classes. Excluded are paladins, traditional and specialty mages, druids, and monks, which is somewhat surprising since they all—except perhaps those tree-hugging druids—are relatively popular classes.

You'll also be able to create a multiclassed character in accordance with the Third Edition rules. Humans, elves, half-elves, dwarves, halflings and half-orcs are all available character reces. Characters will be able to edvance up to experience level 13 and access over 100 spells, including 6th level priest and sorcerer spells.

POOL PARTY RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR will let you tote around a party of six, over which you'll have complete control. Combat will be "phased" timed turns.

THIRD TIME AROUND The game's release is going to incorporate the just-announced D&D Third Edition rules, including all the changes in character classes.



D&D has alweys placed an emphasis on combat, and the developers of RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR hope to deliver in that department by implementing a phased combat system—essentially a turned-based system that limits the amount of time available to each character. Console RPG fans will be familiar with phased combat systems, which seek both the excitement of a real-time system and the tectical nature of turn-based combat.

Some monsters will tower over your characters, enveloping a good third of the screen with their gigantic mass, and the early 3D models demonstrated to us featured impressive animated effects. The game will require a 3D video card at least as powerful as a 12MB Voodoo 2 card, which will also be used to create some spiffy colored lighting and particle effects for spells. Multiplayer support will be provided for six players, and a matching service like battle net is being considered, as is support for voice communication between players over standard modems.

Dungeon Heaven

The developers of POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR seem to be aiming to improve upon every aspect of BALDUR'S GATE, in eddition to bringing back aspects of the popular gold box series. Interestingly, the game may well arrive on retail shelves around the same time as the inevitable sequel to BALDUR'S GATE, which should make late-2000 a pretty exciting time for RPG fans. CGW

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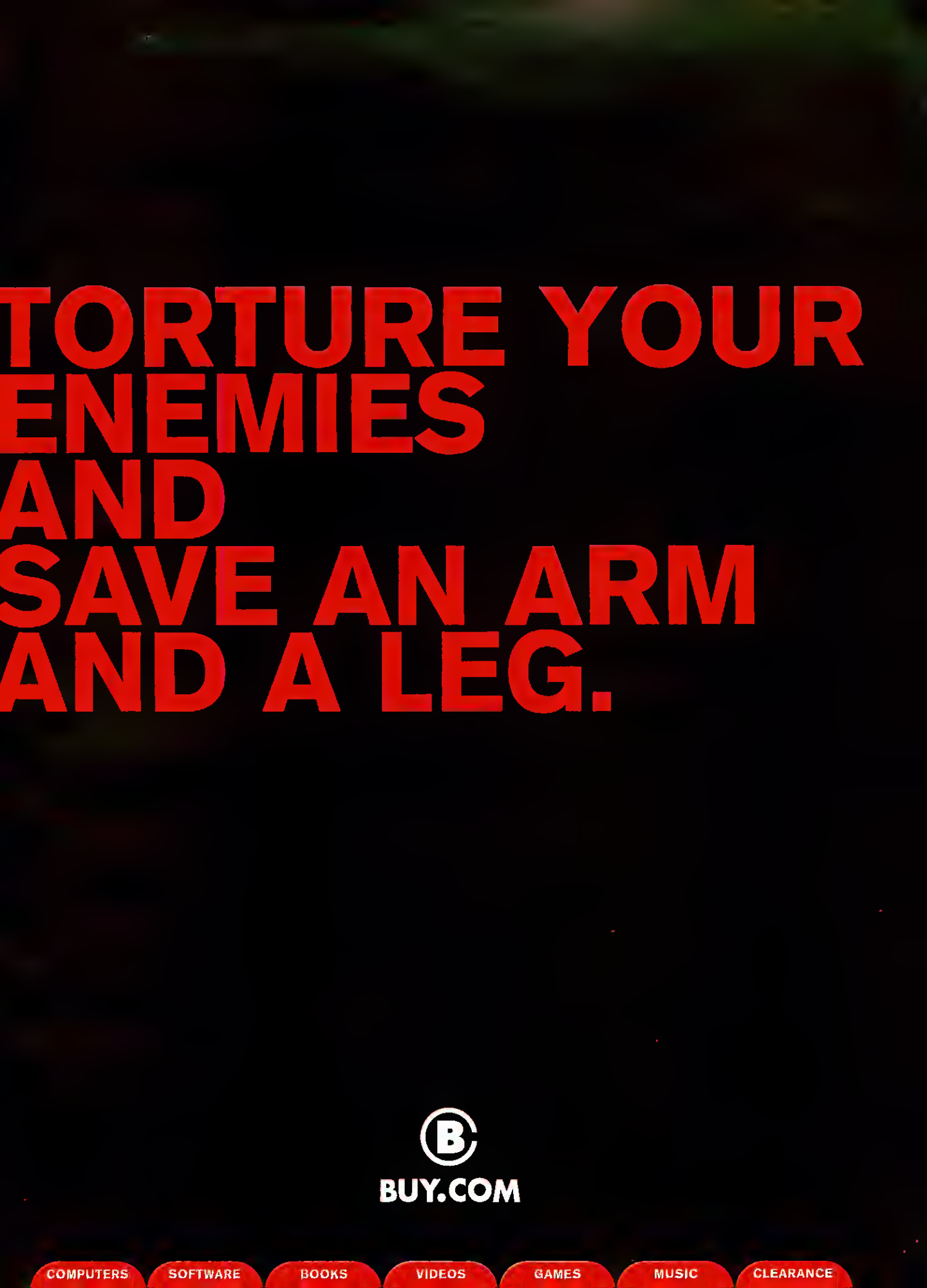
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Ground Control

RTS Multiplayer Action That Hits the Ground Running

by Robert Coffey

Tell me this hasn't happened to you: You're sitting at your desk, dutifully slogging through some brain-numbing spreadsheet, all because The Man told you to and if you don't, The Man won't pay you and you'll have to start sleeping behind the Wal-Mart again. And your ears start twitching, your scalp starts burning, and like a volcano of proletarian rage you're seized with the need to exert a little online authority over some helpless schmuck, but you don't have time to gather resources and build an army, because The Man will be back from his company-paid lunch in 20 minutes. Well, my friend—keep it together a little longer and you'll have GROUND CONTROL as a suitable venting option.

GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q1 2000
PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios
DEVELOPER: Massive Entertainment
CONTACT: www.sierrastudios.com

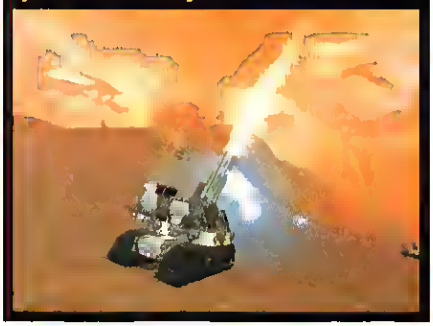
BIG BANG GAME THEORY Use your units to blow up everyone else's units. Got it?

Everyone in the Pool

GROUND CONTROL dispenses with all that time-consuming resource gathering and base building to throw gamers directly into the action. Units are divided up into easy-to-manage platoons of infantry, air units, assault vehicles, and escort vehicles like artillery and anti-aircraft guns. Your forces will be dropped at an insertion point of your choosing, and then it will be up to you to guide them to your mission goal.

Free-moving camera, waypoints, beautiful 3D graphics, unit facing, a variety of terrain including jungles and swamps, 15 single-player missions for each side—odds are you've heard all this stuff before about other games. But here's what you haven't heard, and this is what promises to break GROUND CONTROL out of the RTS pack—you'll be able to join multiplayer games in progress. Yep, just like your favorite online shooter, you'll be able to locate a server and jump right into the action. The game will assess the current game situation and supply you with forces on par with the combatants already slugging it out. By combining fast, brutal action with a ready availability generally not seen in multiplayer strategy games, GROUND CONTROL promises to bring the simple visceral thrills of the shooter to a more strategy-centric audience.

BARRAGE Heavy artillery like this will help soften up enemy targets, but you'll want to stop them before you send in your infantry, lest you obliterate your forces with friendly fire.



GROUND CONTROL's scripting system allows the designers to go beyond run-of-the-mill game types like Deathmatch and Capture the Flag (though they'll certainly be part of the package). Instead, map designers can script additional victory conditions into a "drop-in" game; for example, a game could end once a specific building is destroyed, or if a player seizes control of a predetermined number of zones. With the map editor's ability to combine game types or to invent new ones, Sierra is hoping to establish a diehard GROUND CONTROL community by making the editor available to gamers, either on the game CD or the Web.

The trap here is developing a game that quickly degenerates into little more than throwing hordes of troops at each other over and over, ad *nauseam*. To keep that from happening, the game will have friendly fire damage in the hope that if your troops are as susceptible to your own distant artillery barrage, then you'll be less inclined to rush. Cloaking fields, and deployable structures like sentry guns and radar arrays, will be available to liven up the action. Finally, each of the four basic unit types will be able to upgrade to an enhanced unit that can use a special weapon (marines will get mortars to use against tanks, for instance), albeit with a very limited supply of ammo.

GROUND CONTROL's eventual success is directly tied to its ambitious multiplayer plans—as snazzy as the solo game is, it's not so terribly different from about a gazillion other titles. CGW

PICK AND CHOOSE Prior to starting a mission, you'll get to set up your dropships with the troops you want to use and the weaponry they'll deploy.

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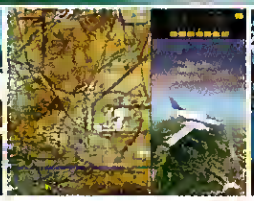

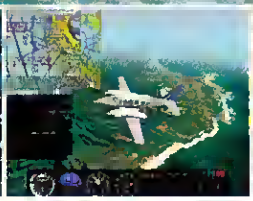

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Silent Hunter II

Here Comes That Sinking Feeling Again

by Marc Dultz

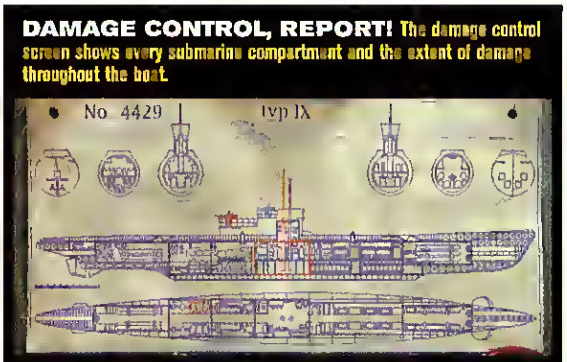
Tired of sinking helpless Japanese merchantmen at the drop of a hat? Ever wonder what it would be like to lay in wait for a cargo-laden convoy bound for England in the frigid North Atlantic waters? Well, mein kapitan, it looks like you'll get your chance. SILENT HUNTER II is preparing to set sail from the SSI sub pen.

Like its predecessor, SILENT HUNTER II incorporates a stunning array of visual effects and cinematic soundtracks to dramatize each type of submarine engagement. Every ship and aircraft type will be fully modeled and accurately portrayed in many types of maritime conditions, ranging from fog and overcast skies to calm and heavy seas. Likewise, all of the important stations on the submarine will be modeled in exquisite detail, from the sonar room and bridge to the deck gun and periscope.

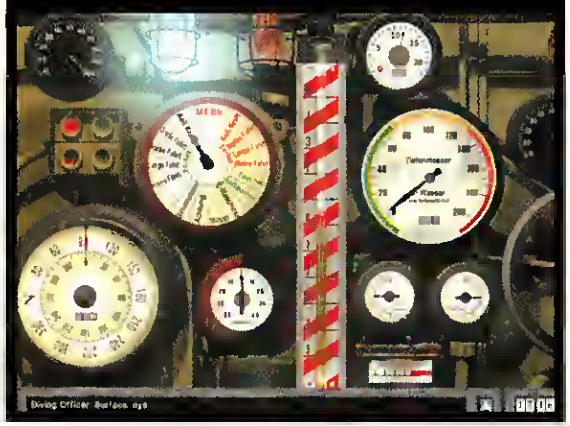
The game will contain an interactive tour of a submarine, which not only will explain all of the important aspects of a standard U-Boat, but will also describe how each type of boat was used in combat. It includes a full-featured mission recorder, which lets you record, save, and replay any of your missions at a later date. In addition, the game will include a dynamic campaign generator for more varied encounters, and an advanced scenario and patrol editor to let you create your own missions anywhere in the North Atlantic.

SILENT HUNTER II
GENRE: Strategy/Wargame • RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: SSI
DEVELOPER: Aeon Electronic Entertainment

When Silent Hunter was first being developed, SSI went to great lengths to ensure that the game accurately depicted life aboard a US submarine in the vast Pacific Theatre of Operations during WWII. For SILENT HUNTER II, SSI tracked down Erich Topp, former U-Boat commander and Admiral of the German Navy's post-war Bundesmarine. Topp not only serves as the technical advisor on the sequel, but also relates some of his chilling experiences in *Der Unterseebootwaffe*, including the sinking of several Allied ships. His experiences are sure to help SILENT HUNTER II track down and nail its target. CGW



DAMAGE CONTROL, REPORT! The damage control screen shows every submarine compartment and the extent of damage throughout the boat.



PERISCOPE DEPTH, AYE, SIR All of the gauges, dials, and switches on the sub are fully active, so you can give orders with a few simple mouse clicks.

DIVE, DIVE! The Uzo view lets you do long-range recon with a pair of binoculars, but you can only use them on the surface.

5 THINGS You Should Know About SILENT HUNTER II

1. The Battle of the North Atlantic was the longest campaign of World War II.
2. Several different German U-Boats are modeled in the game, from the early-war Type VII boat to the larger and more capable XXI.
3. Players will be able to conduct rudeltaktik or "wolf pack tactics" with other U-Boats operating within the area.
4. The term "U-Boat" stands for unterseeboot, the German word for submarine.
5. Erich Topp, former U-Boat commander and Admiral in the post-war Bundesmarine, serves as technical advisor for SILENT HUNTER II and provides valuable insight into the perils of submarine warfare.

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DARK REIGN™ 2

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE FUTURE

Will a Comic Book Feel and Stripped-Down Gameplay Make This the New X-COM? by Robert Coffey

Shadow Watch

If every game designer who felt inspired by X-COM would just send Bruce Willis a nickel, then Planet Hollywood wouldn't be filing for bankruptcy. It's a testament to how great that game was that so many developers want to snatch its tactical squad combat crown for themselves. Now, you can add Red Storm to that list. The company that set the standard for first-person squad combat with RAINBOW SIX is looking to nab new fans with a game that stresses realism less and action and character development more. And this time it's turn-based.

EXCLUSIVE!

A Friendlier Kill Zone

SHADOW WATCH is designed to be much more accessible than Red Storm's signature franchise; indeed, it should be more accessible than other games in this genre, games like JAGGED ALLIANCE 2. The muted color palette and art style are done in a very deliberate, comic book way and somehow work, evoking a brooding, noir environment without trivializing it.

While the graphic novel art style should help ease the entry of players who might be intimidated by a more realistic approach, the chief design simplification is found in the squaddies that make up your elite strike force. There's only six of them, they carry only one type of weapon, and they have unlimited ammo. To X-COM vets, it almost smacks of heresy.

NEED THE INFO In between missions, you'll get briefings from a variety of characters, including this sleazy bar owner.

MAD SCIENTIST The Russian Museum of Science is the HQ for a band of evil renegade scientists.

THE KILLER ELITE You'll put together your mission teams on this screen. With eight different types of mission goals, you'll need to make sure you take the right number and mix of operatives to succeed.

SHADOW WATCH
GENRE: Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** Q1 2000
PUBLISHER: Red Storm Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
CONTACT: www.redstorm.com

SHADOW WATCH does retain some of the pre-mission strategizing found in most tactical games. A wide variety of mission types and different specialized skills for each of the six characters require that you to pick and choose the right commandos for the job.

Odds are, you'll take the stealthy martial artist and sniper on bug-planting missions, saving the bruising demolitions expert and shotgun-toting strongman for the tasks requiring less delicacy. Each character totes one, ability-appropriate weapon: The sniper packs a rifle while the demolitions guy carries only grenades.

While you won't have to worry about how to equip your squad, you will provision them with new skills as they gain experience. This skill system lets players jack up their squad's effectiveness as each member gains new abilities specific to him or her. For example, Archer, the group's leader, can gain new recon skills and morale bonuses that impact the rest of the group. Each character has nine skill upgrades, but will only be able to earn seven of those in a game; further, no character will be able to gain that precious seventh level until all his comrades have reached level six.

The hope is that the trade-offs in skill selection players make in the course of a campaign will encourage them to replay the game using different approaches. Also adding to SHADOW WATCH's longevity will be a campaign that branches out based on gamers' decisions; while every campaign will end with a similar showdown, the chief villain will change and the pathway to the ending will be different almost every time through.

It all sounds pretty good, but there are a couple of things Red Storm should be taking a long hard look at. For one thing, even though there are three enemy types for each of the six enemy factions, except for the unique third-level villain for each faction, the lower-level enemies are interchangeable. Fighting the same grunts in different costumes could get boring fast. And whether the game designers like it or not, a big part of X-COM's appeal was the larger strategy game, especially the research. The combat certainly looks fun, but whether an X-COM clone that emphasizes combat above all else can thrive remains to be seen. CGW

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AMBUSH The action is still up-close and personal, as your forces try to deal with advancing panzers and German commandos.

The Battle of the Bulge Never Looked This Good

by Marc Dultz

Close Combat IV

Although Microsoft and Atomic Games have gone their separate ways, that doesn't seem to be putting a damper on the CLOSE COMBAT wargame series. In fact, now that they're working with the folks over at SSI, Atomic may be getting ready to unleash their best effort yet.

NEW VIEW With the new strategic view, players can monitor the progress of the entire battle.

CLOSE COMBAT IV

GENRE: Wargame
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: SSI
DEVELOPER: Atomic Games
CONTACT: www.closecombat.com

CLOSE COMBAT IV: THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE is based on the Germans' desperate attempt to smash the Allied armies in the west during the winter of 1944. Players will take command of either German or American forces arrayed along the supposedly "quiet" Ardennes sector in central Belgium. In addition to the usual complement of infantry and armored units, German forces will include spies as well as "Operation Grief" commandos, whose mission will be to disrupt American communications and wreak as much havoc as possible behind enemy lines.

The biggest change to the system will be an added strategic layer. At the start of a campaign, players will deploy their forces in sectors located along the front. As the battle wears on, players must monitor the campaign, going so far as to redirect units where they're needed the most. Look for CLOSE COMBAT IV to storm through the Ardennes sometime this November. CGW

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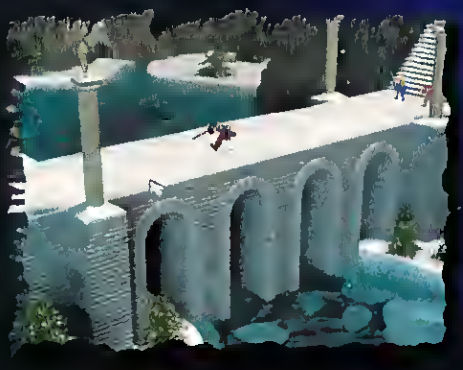

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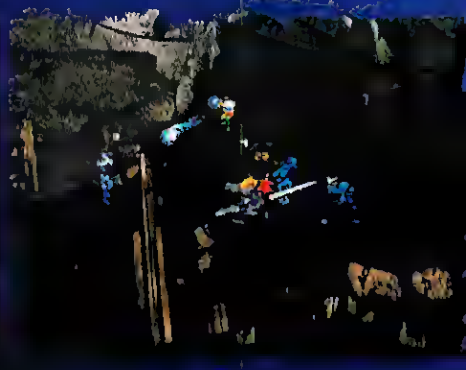

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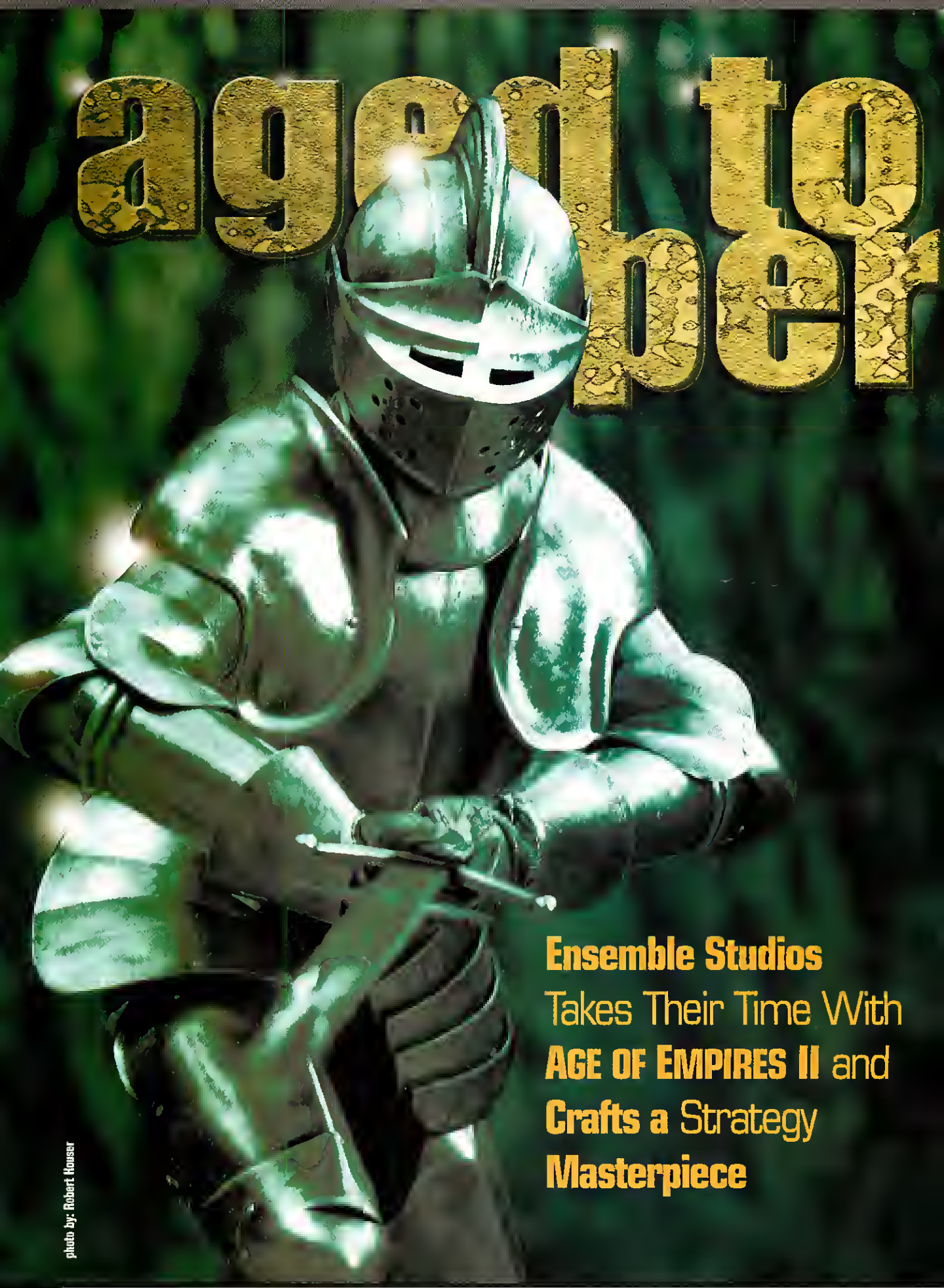


Ensemble Studios Takes Their Time With **AGE OF EMPIRES II** and **Crafts a** Strategy **Masterpiece**

photo by: Robert Houser

CGW EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

ection

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Darius, the Persian warlord and king, climbed a hill to watch his men cross the Hellespont on their way to a disastrous encounter with the Greeks. History has it that Darius, looking down on his ant-sized men, was overcome with the thought of how brief and cruel was the human life, and he wept. Having played AGE OF EMPIRES II and watched from my bird's-eye view thousands upon thousands of my men fall before the vicious computer opponents, I think I understand ol' Darius. For AGE OF EMPIRES II is as difficult as it is beautiful.

reviewed by Chris Lombardi

AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS (AGE II) is the sequel to the popular AGE OF EMPIRES, a base-building and conquest strategy game that, thanks to a strong design, a historically-inspired setting, and the almighty Microsoft label, sold and sold and sold – to the final tune of about two million copies. AGE II comes almost three years after the first game, and a year after its originally scheduled release. Developers Ensemble Studios decided to delay the AGE II release in order to create the RISE OF ROME expansion pack, and to take their sweet time with the sequel and get it right. And did they ever.

CGW RATED ★★★★★

PROS

Meticulously crafted graphics, sound, and interface; near-perfect play balance; challenging and charming single-player campaigns; varied multiplayer games and win conditions; loads of extras, including campaign/scenario editor and historical guide.

CONS

Minor annoyances with peasant behavior; typical RTS oddities in computer opponent tactics; extremely difficult on anything but the easiest levels.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE AN AGE MAKES

Fundamentally, AGE 2 is the same game as the original. Your task is still to gather resources in order to build a base, develop technologies, and outfit an army capable of defeating your enemies. The game's challenge is still to strike the difficult balance between economic development and warfare. You can still win through conquest in battle, wonder-building, or the hoarding of artifacts (now called "relics," which can only be transported by monks). And, again, there are 13 different civilizations to choose from – although since we've gone from the "Age of Empires" to the "Age of Kings," the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Yamato have evolved into Persians, Byzantines, and Japanese, and the technologies have advanced a few hundred years. So, at a gross level, we've got the same game; but at the level of fine details – and AGE II is all about fine details – we've got a vastly improved experience.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32 MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** None. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to eight players via Internet or LAN

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Ensembles Studios • **$45** • **www.microsoft.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence

THE WAR MACHINE'S ON HIGH A computer opponent assembles a ferocious combined-arms siege force. Notice how units behind structures are outlined so that they don't get lost within the lush graphics.

> "The list of improvements to the Age interface is as long as the laundry list for the Chinese army."

AGE II comes just prior to the first wave of 3D real-time games scheduled for this holiday season, and so its 2D-graphics engine narrowly avoids being officially behind the times. There are no advanced lighting and shadowing effects here, no deformable terrain or line-of-sight system. But in AGE II, Ensemble demonstrates the lesson that LucasArts has been teaching for years – masterful artistry will beat technical gee-whizardry any day of the week. The Ensemble artists have heaped lavish volumes of detail onto the graphics and the sound, lending the game the sensory impact of a big-budget Hollywood period-piece. Every civilization in AGE II has a distinctive visual and audio style, and the level of detail here is astonishing. Even after dozens of hours of play, I'm still finding graphic flourishes that I'm forced to pause and admire: the Asian motif in a wrought iron gate; the animation of a dying battle elephant crashing majestically to the ground; the way water dances around the hooves of horses as they ford a river. And the trebuchet, oh the trebuchet...

BURNING BARRAGE Carnage piles before the Briton's walls. Longbowmen, the Briton's unique unit, have tremendous range and fearsome power in large groups.

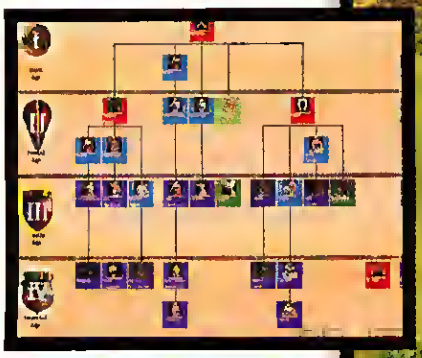
THE MOUSE IS ONCE AGAIN YOUR FRIEND

The list of improvements to the AGE interface is as long as the laundry list for the Chinese army. All of the interface conveniences we've seen in the latest round of real-time games have been added, plus a few extras. My favorites include a command that will identify idle peasants; jumping to the last sound cue with the third mouse button; selecting all units of a type by double-clicking on one unit of that type; and a simple, right-click waypoint system.

You can assign four battle formations to groups of units. Range units will automatically take rear positions behind melee units, and troops can be assigned to surround and protect fragile siege engines. It works beautifully. You can also assign combat stances – Aggressive, Defensive, Stand Ground, and No Attack. The Defensive stance is a huge boon to command and control, as the units will only fight within a certain radius of their position, and then return to their original position when the fighting is over. And the No Attack stance is crucial for catapults, which invariably do more damage to friendlies than to foes if left to their own devices.

Add to these improvements an online technology tree that tracks your advancements, vastly

WONDERS AS I WANDER The army of Saladin assembles before a couple Egyptian brick piles before making an assault on Cairo. History (and geography) is used loosely as a flavoring additive throughout the five single-player campaigns.



GOOD TREE, GOOD FRUIT The complete technology tree is a click away. The tree tracks your development, so you always know what your next research step should be.

ORDER OF BATTLE The new combat formations at work: cavalry in front, men-at-arms behind, archer in the third row, and priests and siege units in tow.

improved unit path-finding intelligence, a mini-map that displays both economic and military information, a great tutorial campaign, advanced information displays that show your peasants' activities and your army composition – and on and on and on I could go – and it's quite evident that the developers have made every effort for the game to be as easy to play as possible.

Okay, maybe not *every* effort. I have a few peeves that I wish had been addressed. Managing your farms is still a major headache. Off you go on a raid, only to return to find all of your farms lying fallow and your peasants whistling Dixie. Farm management was neither fun nor interesting in the first game, and it still isn't – probably never will be. In a similar vein, I wish the peasants, after building a mining camp right next to a pile of gold, would actually start mining rather than staring at their navels. Combat units also have quirks; if given a choice as to which enemy building to attack, they'll always pick the least important target. They have a strange obsession with mining camps, and will attack them with extreme prejudice, even when more important targets lie nearby.

THE MIDDLE AGES' GREATEST HITS

The original AGE OF EMPIRES emphasized multiplayer games and random single-player scenarios over elaborate campaigns. AGE II retains this emphasis, but the developers have put a great deal more effort into five campaigns, each of which follows the career of a medieval military legend. The stories of William Wallace, Joan of Arc, Genghis Khan, Frederick Barbarossa, and Saladin are told with simple but beautiful pencil and charcoal sketches and quality voice-overs. Initially underwhelmed by the subdued production values and a few early scenarios involving "foozle" hunts, I was eventually charmed. The designers use the game engine to re-create ancient geography and form mini, quasi-historical pageants. Units will march up to your little Joan of Arc character and swear their allegiance. Saladin's troops will pass pyramids on the road to Cairo. You'll wander through the streets of a recreated Jerusalem in order to destroy a battlement next to the Dome of the Rock. The Mongols will capture Chinese siege engines to actually take on the Great Wall. As a whole, the campaigns are varied and cleverly designed, drawing on the entire range of strategic possibilities: land and sea battles, multi-front wars, siege warfare, religious warfare, economic challenges ..

In addition to the campaigns, there are two head-to-head game styles against the computer, the standard open-ended competition and a new Regicide game, which starts each player with a castle and a king who must be protected at all costs. The opponent AI is extraordinarily good. Like most self-respecting gamers, I usually won't play a game on any level below "moderate" difficulty, but AGE 2 forced me to swallow my pride and play on the easier settings; unless you're some kind of RTS *ubermensch*, or you *like* to reload saved games over and over, you will too.

AGE II seems to greatly improve upon the computer's ability to assemble combined arms attacks, and alter its unit production to counter your production patterns. Computer opponents also make capable allies now. When allied, the computer will ask you for resources it needs, give you resources you request (using a set of prerecorded multiplayer taunts and messages – very cool), and tell you when it's about to launch an attack against another player. Yes, the computer will still do things that make sense only to its own strange silicon logic, and at times it has trouble coordinating its attacks for maximum effectiveness. But you know, that's the state of real-time AI, and that's okay; the computer is damn good at production, and the volume of its unit output can well make up for its minor tactical weaknesses.

Ode to the Trebuchet

Edward I of England refused the surrender of Stirling Castle in Scotland just so he could watch his newly acquired trebuchet, a powerful slinging catapult, destroy the castle walls. A cruel and gratuitous act, to be sure. But if his trebuchet was anything like the beautiful, graceful, and deadly machine in AGE OF EMPIRES II, then you've got to cut Ed some slack.

> "Age II seems to greatly improve upon the computer's ability to assemble combined arms attacks... to counter your production patterns."

THE RACES ARE ALIGNING.

THE ARMIES ARE GATHERING.

THE APOCALYPSE IS APPROACHING.

AND PEACE IS CURLED UP IN THE FETAL POSITION, WHIMPERING.

"IT LOOKS LIKE TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAMING IS ABOUT TO GET A SHOT IN THE ARM...IT WILL HELP SOLIDIFY AND STRENGTHEN THE GENRE." - IGNPC.COM

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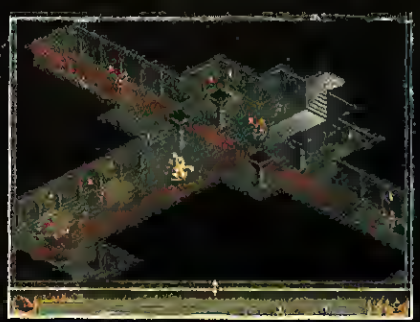

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RAIDING PARTY! A throng of elite Mongol Mongudai (mounted archers) thunders through an enemy lumber camp, making quick work of the defenseless peasants. The Mongudai are a nearly unstoppable hit-and-run force, great for disrupting an opponent's production.

CULTURE CLASH

The original AGE earned a special CGW ewerd for its multiplayer game, and has only gotten better in the sequel. As in the original, each Civ has a unique technology tree along with production bonuses. These differences have been enhanced, making the decision as to which Civ to play in which circumstance a very interesting one. Also, each Civ has e unique special unit that can be produced by its Castles, and there are some sweet units in the mix. The English longbowmen are a favorite, with their incredible range and power in large numbers. The Mongol Mongudei, e fast and fierce horse archer, are a devastating hit-and-run force. The variations in the Civs, as well as among the individual units, are finely balanced; there are no Civs that are clearly supreme in all circumstances, and there is no unit for which there isn't an effective counter.

The wonder-building dynamic in multiplay is still delicious. Do you start building a wonder first and become the target of all other players? Or do you wait and build second, counting on the others to destroy the first? Or do you go all-out on the offensive and count on your eggression to crush all the wonder-wussies? There's nothing similar to this chess-like dynamic in any other RTS game.

A THOUSAND YEAR REIGN?

When all of the improvements and additions in AGE II ere computed to a final sum, AGE II stands out as one of the high points in gaming this year. The word "craftsmanship" is e word rarely seen in discussions of software, but it's totally appropriate for the level of excellence achieved by the AGE II team. The multitude of artistic and design details, and the remarkable rock-scissors-paper balance of the military units, testify to the devotion the designers have heaped upon this game. I, end I suspect many other gamers, will be playing this one for a long, long time to come – perhaps even as long as the next age. CGW

> "There's nothing similar to this chess-like dynamic in any other RTS game."

The King's Advisor

AGE OF EM

BY CO-DESIGNER BRUCE SHELLEY

The following strategy tips have been excerpted from the *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings Player's Guide* by Bruce Shelley. The complete *Player's Guide* will be available through e special offer at Electronics Boutique stores, and will be printed in full in our strategy booklet, available on newsstands December 7th.

THE FIRST 15 MINUTES

Goals for the first 15 minutes are to build up a robust economy, explore the map, and advance to the Feudal Age (second age). You begin with three Villagers and a Scout Cavalry unit. When the game starts, immediately spend any food you have to build new Villagers. Then begin construction of one to three houses so that new people can be produced. Scout the map near your Town Center (using waypoints) to find Sheep, forage bushes, wild game, gold, stone, shore fishing sites, relics, coastlines, choke points, etc. Put one Villager on cutting a tree close to your Town Center. Put new Villagers on food (either Sheep, shore fishing, Wild Boars, or forage bushes). Harvesting one tree completely adds enough wood to the 200 pieces that you start with to allow you to build three houses, a Mill, and a Lumber Camp. Place the Mill next to forage bushes end the Lumber Camp next to the woods.

After you have six Villagers on food, put the next six on wood. Put six more on food, and then put some on stone and gold. If fish are nearby, put more people on wood and build three to five Fishing Boats. Set gathering points on trees, gold, stone, fishing grounds, etc., to send new Villagers and Fishing Boats directly to a resource gathering site. Expand the map search with your Scout and get into the corners of the map to find enemies. Hit the period key occasionally to locate any idle Villagers, and put them to work.

After 15 minutes you should have built at least one Mill, one Lumber Camp, a Barracks, a Mining Camp gathering stone, a Mining Camp gathering gold, and possibly a Dock supporting Fishing Boats. The best Ensemble Studio players have 25 to 35 Villegers/Fishing Boats at this point. Their economy is gathering resources quickly. When the nearby fast food sources are exhausted (Sheep, shore fishing, Wild Boars, forage bushes), players turn to hunting deer or building Farms. Note that you can build Farms in the Dark Age, but wood is usually at a premium. When you convert over to Farms for producing food, build 10 to 15 of them adjacent to Mills and Town Centers.

PIRES II STRATEGIES

ADVANCING THROUGH THE AGES

If your economy has gotten off to a good start, you should be able to advance quickly through the Feudal Age and into the Castle Age. Food will be available when you need it. When you enter the Castle Age, you want to have 650 stones available to build a Castle. Gold will be needed for many technology upgrades, and for building better fighting units. It may be useful to overload stone mining until you have the stone you need for a Castle, and then switch some of your miners to gold. Some players use Castles offensively, building one near an enemy.

You must build at least two of the following buildings to move past the Feudal Age: Blacksmith, Market, Archery Range, or Stable. The first two are musts. The Blacksmith is where you upgrade the armor and fighting ability of your military units. Research Cartography at the Market to share line-of-sight with allies. At the Market, buy and sell commodities as needed to raise gold or get needed resources. The best players at Ensemble Studios don't wait for the extra few hundred stone or gold they need to be mined; they buy or sell resources to advance quickly. From the Market, you can also build Trade Carts that can be useful for bringing in gold from trade in a multi-player game. Archers are particularly useful on defense when placed inside Towers. Stable units are primarily offensive units but can be useful for defending against foot units attacking the town.

To move past the Castle Age, you need a Castle or two of these: University, Monastery, or Siege Workshop. Castles produce your unique unit and the Trebuchet. Castles are also strong buildings with fighting power. At the University, you can research technology upgrades important for defense, plus technologies that improve your missile weapons. Chemistry allows Gunpowder units. Some players skip the Monastery. Monks built at the Monastery can quickly heal units that are within range and without orders. Monks can also pick up Relics and garrison them inside a Monastery, creating a modest flow of gold into your treasury. You can win the standard game by collecting and holding all relics in the game.

One interesting economic decision is when to upgrade woodcutting, mining, Villager productivity, and Farm productivity. These upgrades improve production of commodities in the long run, but may temporarily delay progress through the Ages. Whether to upgrade early (Feudal Age) depends on what is most important. If you need extra wood because of fishing and other boat building, the wood cutting upgrade is particularly desirable. The stone-mining upgrade might be needed because you plan to build multiple Castles. If little fishing food is coming and you have converted to Farms early, consider the Farm upgrade.

Players in a particularly safe map position may attempt to "boom." They build 30 to 40 Villagers and progress through the ages quickly. Boomers may feed resources to others who are taking the fight to the enemy or who are acting as a shield.

In the middle and late stages of a game, delete Villagers and Fishing Boats that are no longer needed. Once you have progressed to the Imperial Age, fielding a larger army is more important than keeping the economy humming. During prolonged fighting, resources may build up to unusable quantities. Be the first to sell these commodities at the market for the best price.

TIP

GROUP FOR FINE CONTROL For better control in messy battles, group like units together so they can be accessed using the number keys. Grouping is especially useful with range units, who are very effective when their fire is directed at a single foe.

TIP

WALL OUT Walling off and fortifying your base is an essential defense against the inevitable early rush by multiple computer opponents. And don't forget a gate, like I did here. The best defense against those battering rams is a cavalry rush, but the cav need a way out!

QUICK TIPS

- Use CNTRL # groups to help control battles. Make one group of fast units for killing Monks. Another group might be infantry for killing buildings. Another might be ranged units that you can target quickly to take out a particular enemy unit.
- Food is gathered most quickly from Sheep, shore fishing, and Wild Boars. Boars fight back, however. Hunt them with five or more Villagers to avoid having a Villager killed during the hunt.
- If an incomplete building is going to be destroyed, delete it yourself to get back at least some of the resources invested. Select the building, and press the DELETE key. This is especially true for Castles.
- If you plan to send Villagers into no-man's land, send multiple Villagers or upgrade their hit points with Loom technology to better withstand attack by wolves. Your Scout or other military units can also support Villagers.
- If an enemy is using Monks against you, or you are fighting with expensive high-quality units such as Persian War Elephants, consider researching Faith at the Monastery to make it harder for enemy Monks to convert your units.
- If your Scout discovers Sheep far from home, it is unlikely they will walk to your town on their own without being captured by another player. One tactic is to select the Sheep together with your Scout and send the group home. The Scout will prevent the Sheep from being stolen without a fight, although the group will move at the speed of the Sheep.
- Rollover text can be activated or turned off as you wish. It provides information on every unit, building, and technology in the game.

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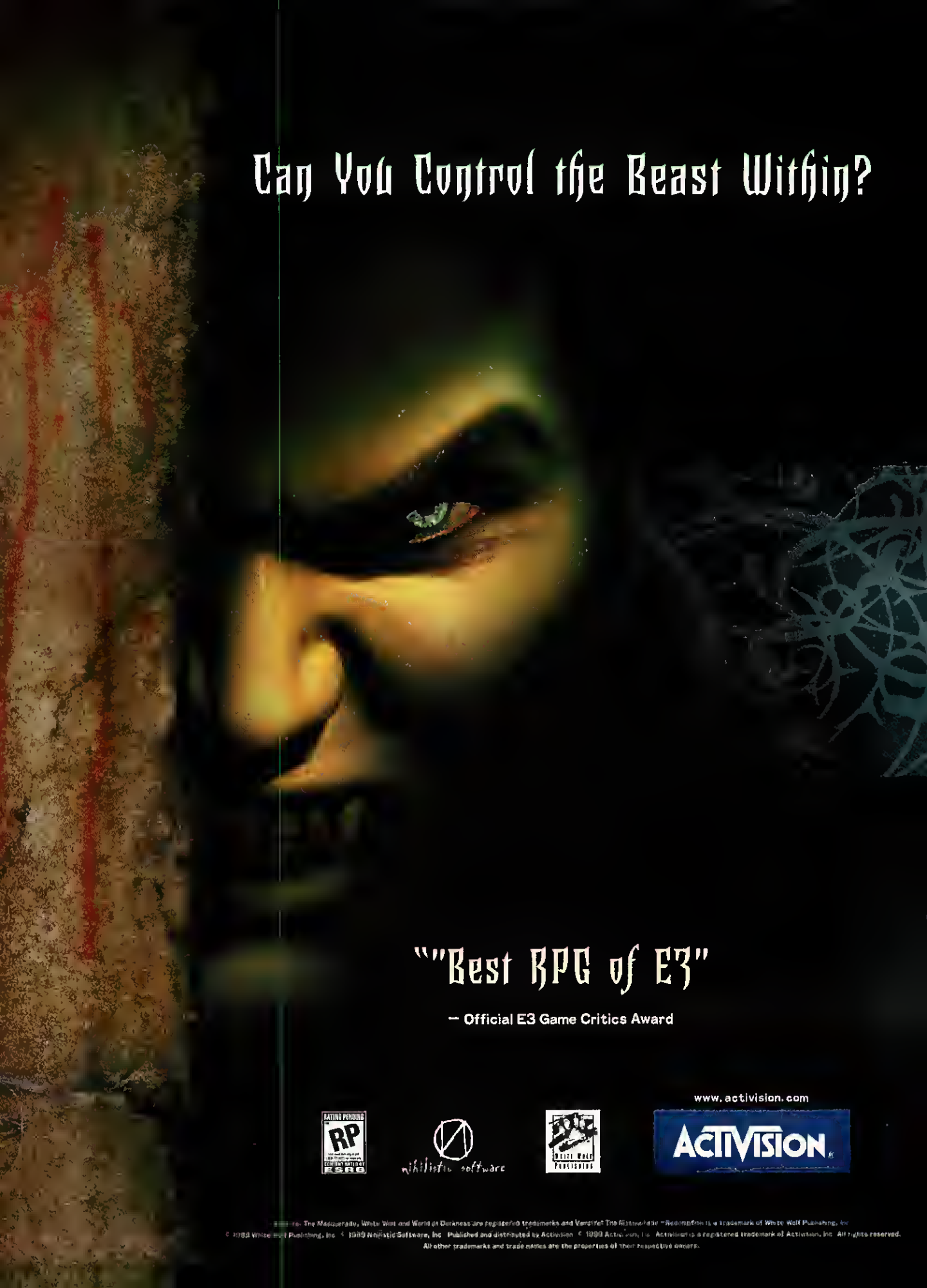

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CGW 1999

HALL OF FAME

INDUCTIONS

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games

- Crusader: No Remorse
- Diablo
- Heroes Of Might and Magic II
- Myth
- Sid Meier Game Designer

The phrase "Here today, gone tomorrow" may apply to Corvette Stingrays, anything acid-washed, and Ricky Martin. But not to computer games. Not if we can help it. For more than 10 years now, the *CGW* editors have haggled, argued, and stabbed each other (repeatedly, in some instances) over the hallowed list of games you see before you. This last-of-the-millenium induction features two changes to the Hall of Fame: a semi-annual format, and the addition of live, flesh-and-blood people.

CRUSADER: NO REMORSE

Origin, 1995

Never has a world of pain hurt so good. Released in late 1995, CRUSADER: NO REMORSE bucked the trend of DOOM-alikes with an isometric, third-person perspective that let you watch your onscreen avatar wreak the game's spectacular and original brand of mayhem. Clad in crimson combat armor, the Crusader—looking for all the world like a man-sized bullet dipped in blood—strode through the evil corporate offices, warehouses, and military complexes of the evil WEC conglomerate. The brutal action offered more than the "run and gun" shooters of the day, forcing you to creep, duck-walk, and tumble as you took out security cameras, automated defense turrets, and waves of soldiers. And laying waste

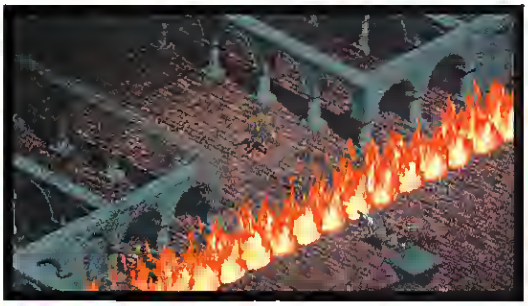
The Complete CGW Hall of Fame

- Alone in the Dark (I-Motion, 1992)
- The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)
- Battle Chess (Interplay, 1988)
- Battleground series (Talonsoft, 1995–present)
- Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix, 1993)
- Chessmaster (Software Toolworks, 1986)
- Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)
- Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995)
- Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993)
- DOOM (id Software, 1993)
- Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
- Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1986)
- Empire (Interstel, 1978)
- F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
- Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- Front Page Sports Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993)
- Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
- Gunship (MicroProse, 1986)

was never more satisfying—torch an enemy with a flamethrower and you'd be treated to the spectacle of a shrieking, burning man running in circles before crumbling into a pile of ash. Use a microwave gun on a victim, and you'd see their flesh goo and dribble away from their frame.

While CRUSADER laid the foundation for later isometric standouts like DIABLO, it was the richness and interactivity of the gameworld that made it so incredibly addicting. Groundbreaking SVGA graphics created realistic futuristic environments where the glass bricks dividing office cubicles could be blasted to shards. Railings, walls, desks, chairs, and more were fully destructible, allowing you to leave a wholly unholy path of carnage in your wake. Further, objects in the world could be manipulated to allow you to seize control of turrets or surprise your enemies with lethal jets of scalding steam. It's a level of interactivity that we've come to demand in our action games.

For that, and a giddily violent sense of fun, CRUSADER: NO REMORSE is a most deserving Hall of Fame title. ■



DIABLO

Blizzard, 1997

"Role-playing games are dead." That was the conventional wisdom in the gaming community in 1996. The great computer RPG troika—ULTIMA, MIGHT & MAGIC, and WIZARDRY—were played out. Everything else was just feeble, third-rate swords-and-sorcery knockoffs, woefully out-of-date compared to the hot strategy and action titles of the day.

And then came DIABLO.

Blizzard Entertainment, riding high on the massive success of WARCRAFT II, decided to cavalierly ignore conventional wisdom for its next title, in a bold, conscious effort to bring the RPG back from the dead. And not only did they succeed better than anyone could have possibly dreamed, but, in the process, they made a computer gaming classic.

DIABLO boiled the role-playing game down to its simplest, most visceral elements: hack-and-slash combat in an increasingly difficult series of dungeons. At first, some people complained that it was-

SPECIAL INDUCTION

Sid Meier
GAME DESIGNER

"I keep the fun stuff and throw away the rest." This was the response of game designer Sid Meier when once asked about the secret to his design success. A coy remark, and, as we've come to learn, an outright lie. We now know the truth:

Sid Meier is a virus from outer space.

With this bit of info, it all makes sense: the endless stream of best-selling games, the heroin-like addictive nature of his designs – all a ploy to weaken the human race before "the harvest." Look carefully into the eyes of the picture on this page and you're sure to see the cold, alien evil that lies underneath that quiet, unassuming, Tickle-Me-Elmo visage.

We mean no disrespect to Sid and his race. We have been bested, and must admit defeat. When they come to take us away to our deaths, we will go with the memories of all the enraptured hours spent privateering on the Spanish Main, laying railroads across continents, and conquering worlds, ours and others. Yes, we will go with a smile. We will go with Sid.

So it is with the humblest of bows that we induct Sid Meier, game design master and alien stooge, into the *CGW* Hall of Fame, the first "human" to receive this honor. Thanks, Sid. We'll be your happy meal any day.

Sid Meier's Gameography

Just look at this list! 15 years, 25 games, five Hall of Fame titles, and an incredible range of topics and gameplay styles.

1984	SOLO FLIGHT
1984	HELLCAT ACE
1984	FLOYD OF THE JUNGLE
1985	SILENT SERVICE
1985	NATO DIVISION COMMANDER
1985	CONFLICT IN VIETNAM
1985	CONFLICT IN EUROPE
1985	CRUSADE IN EUROPE
1985	DECISION IN THE DESERT
1988	SILENT SERVICE II
1986	F-15 STRIKE EAGLE
1987	PIRATES!
1987	RED STORM RISING
1988	F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER
1989	GUNSHIP
1989	F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II
1990	RAILROAD TYCOON
1991	CIVILIZATION
1991	COVERT ACTION
1993	CPU BACH
1994	Sid Meier's COLONIZATION
1995	Sid Meier's CIVNET
1996	Sid Meier's CIVILIZATION II
1997	Sid Meier's GETTYSBURG!
1999	Sid Meier's ALPHA CENTAURI

- **Harpoon** (360 Pacific, 1989)
- **Kampfgruppe** (SSI, 1985)
- **King's Quest V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **Lemmings** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **Links 386 Pro** (Access Software, 1992)
- **M-1 Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **Master of Magic** (MicroProse, 1994)
- **Master of Orion** (MicroProse, 1993)
- **Mech Brigade** (SSI, 1985)
- **MechWarrior 2** (Activision, 1995)
- **Might & Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (EA, 1983)
- **Panzer General** (SSI, 1994)
- **Pirates!** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **Quake** (id, 1996)
- **Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **Red Baron** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **The Secret of Monkey Island** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)
- **Starflight** (EA, 1986)
- **Tetris** (Spectrum Holobyte, 1988)

n't an RPG at all. It was too action-oriented, and the storyline, dialog, and character development were minimal. But to regard DIABLO this way was to completely miss the point of the game. By stripping the genre bare, what Blizzard accomplished—brilliantly—was to restore the one ingredient missing from RPGs for years: addictive, fun gameplay.

Once you got into it, this was an impossible game to stop playing. Combat was fast, furious, and often, scary as hell Every single element—the interface, sounds, graphics, weaponry, spellcasting, music—was calculated to create a tense, moody atmosphere that gripped you from the moment you launched the game. The game was accessible to newbies—introducing them to RPG concepts like leveling up and point distribution—yet kept hardcore gamers riveted for months.

DIABLO revived a genre, was one of the scariest and most addictive games ever, and helped launch the online revolution. For all of these reasons, it easily earns a prominent place in *CGW*'s Hall Of Fame. ■

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II

New World Computing, 1997

The definitive "just one more turn" strategy game, HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II was so incredibly addictive you practically needed a methadone program to stop playing. At its core, it seemed like so many other turn-based strategy titles, asking players to collect resources, build units, and obliterate enemies. The genius of the game was in the execution, in the heart of the game's design, which forever dangled carrots in front of the slack-jawed faces of mesmerized gamers. There was always another mine, another new unit, another spell, another enemy castle to storm—and they were all always just one more tantalizing turn away.

HEROES II's embrace of its role-playing roots (in the MIGHT AND MAGIC RPG universe) added a layer of strategy missing in other titles: developing characters. The heroes leading your armies gained experience with each battle won, forcing you to choose between new or improved abilities with each level they gained. The decisions were simple either/or situations—do you increase your magic or defense skill, upgrade your movement or attack ability—but they gave gamers new strategic elements to consider, letting them shape their alter egos to suit their strategy.

HEROES II proves that fantasy has a place on the strategy gaming battlefield, and it certainly deserves a spot in the Hall of Fame. ■

MYTH

Bungie, 1997

While the rest of the industry was focused on how to milk the Real-Time Strategy (RTS) genre, Bungie went ahead and did something new: They added another dimension. This third dimension wasn't just for eye-candy, though; either you remembered how important hills are in a battle, or you died horribly Some of the other RTS games may have had elements of 3D terrain, but none were quite so visceral or effective as the 3D-accelerated landscape in MYTH. Moments such as marching your archers in a rainy swamp, or blanketing a mob of zombies with dwarven explosives, fulfilled the visual-titilation requirement that gamers want nowadays.

MYTH didn't just rely on one gimmick, though. Wrapped around the beautiful 3D-engine was an intensely gritty campaign that echoed the other famous phrase: "War is hell." Not only was the campaign well-written, it also required tactical thinking uncommon in other RTSs. With limited numbers of men and no resource gathering/building, you had to learn to intelligently use formations and the terrain in order to win. This wasn't a campaign you could blaze through, either; every difficulty level provided a good measure of challenge, and in fact, different difficulties created situations that required entirely new tactics. Add to that bungie net support for the wide variety of multiplayer modes (King Of The Hill, Capture The Flag, etc.), and you had a game that would last a long time on the hard drive.

All in all, MYTH was the closest gamers came to experiencing the brutality and beauty of medieval warfare scenes of the ilk found in *Braveheart* It also proved that the strategy genre can greatly benefit from the 3D-acceleration craze. And so Bungie's visionary game deserves a place in the Hall Of Fame. CGW

- Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989)
- TIE Fighter (LucasArts, 1994)
- Tomb Raider (Eidos, 1996)
- Ultime III (Origin Systems, 1983)
- Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
- Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
- Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)
- War in Russia (SSI, 1984)
- WerCraft II (Blizzard, 1996)
- Wasteland (Interplay, 1986)
- Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1990)
- Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)
- Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)
- Wizardry (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- Wolfenstein 3-D (id Software, 1992)
- X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)
- You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
- Zork (Infocom, 1981)

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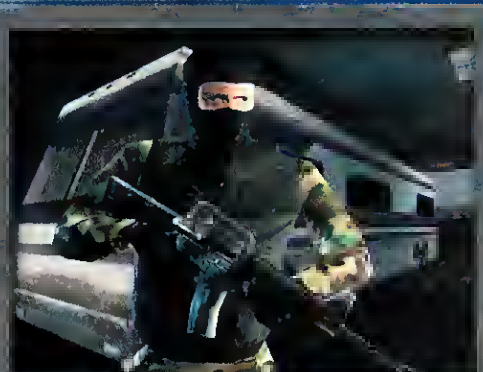

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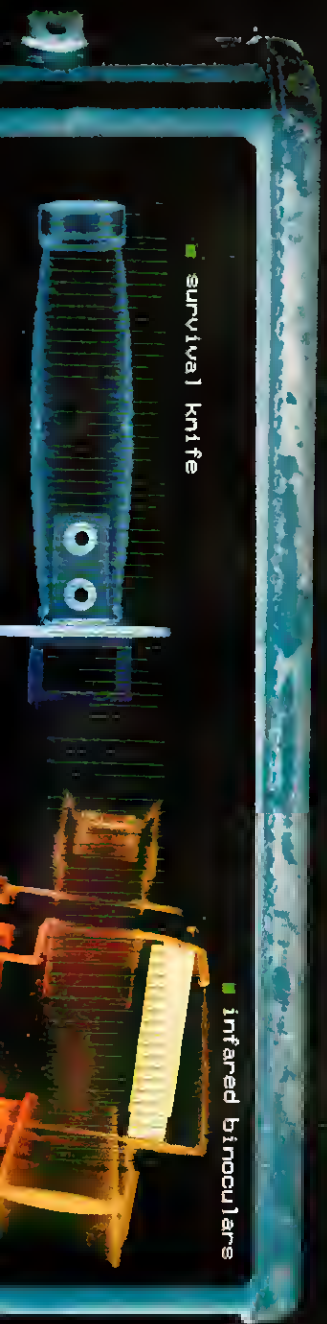
Siberian Military Base

New York Subway



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DECEMBER REVIEWS

This month's Reviews section features some highly anticipated sequels, a perennial favorite, and a few brash newcomers. Also, our first-ever review of a Palm Pilot game makes it into this issue, a platform we would like to see more quality titles for. How about MADDEN for Palm Pilot? Or QUAKE III? Of course, someone would have to develop the world's tiniest 3D accelerator.

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

GAME	RATING	PAGE
Braveheart	2	130
C&C: Tiberian Sun	4	120
Civilization II: Test of Time	4	161
Corsairs	2	158
Darkstone	3.5	135
Disciples: Sacred Lands	1.5	158
Fly!	3.5	152
Independence War Deluxe	5	158
Madden 2000	4	138
Mob Rule	2	161
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Prince of Persia 3D	3.5	124
Rogue Spear	4.5	117
Sinistar	3.5	148
Skydive	2	158
Tiger Woods (Palm Pilot)	4	161

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I know Diablo. Diablo is a friend of mine. You, sir, are no Diablo."

Greg Fortune, reviewing DARKSTONE.

Helmet to Helmet
MADDEN 2K vs. NFL FEVER 2K

HOW DO WE RATE?

We Review Only Finished Games—No Betas, No Patches.

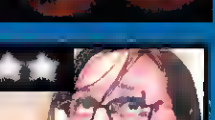
★★★★★ **Outstanding** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★½ **Very Good** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★½ **Average** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★½ **Weak** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★½ **Abysmal** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.



Does Not Rate

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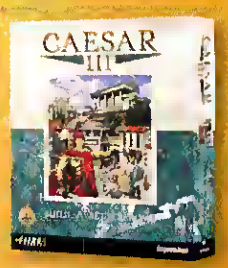

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Red Storm Delivers Another High-Caliber Tactical Simulation

King Rogue

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

ROGUE SPEAR

reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Whether it's freeing hostages from the diabolical clutches of terrorists, dropping bad guys like flies, or blowing a nuclear facility off the face of the planet, ROGUE SPEAR will give you the same gut wrenching butterflies you'd feel performing an actual real world op, live. ROGUE SPEAR completely rebuilds its predecessor, RAINBOW SIX, from the ground up with a new graphics engine, streamlined interface, sharper AI, better ballistic models, improved stability, additional weapons, and features like sniper support, watch mode, and replay. It all adds up to a game that thrusts you into a secret world of gritty, heart pounding commando operations where every nuance of planning and execution affects your success. If only every sequel were as strong as this.

CAMERA SHY ROGUE SPEAR's really cool sniper-support feature is extremely useful for missions like this one, where the life or death of a hostage depends on taking out the bad guy with surgical precision.

Putting on the Blitz

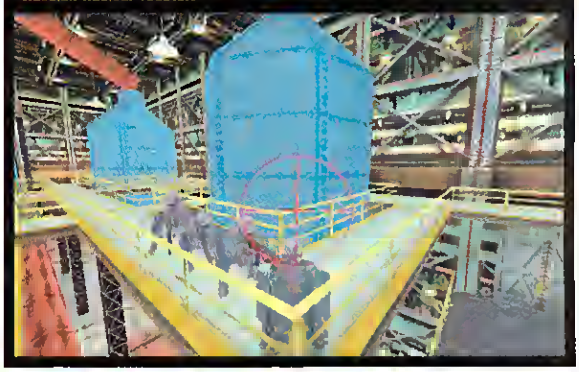
ROGUE SPEAR is two games in one. First, it's a highly-detailed strategy game where planning the perfect operation for mission success is your primary directive. Second, it's a very realistic action game where you execute your plan as a member of your commando team. One slip up in either phase of the game, and you'll discover how quickly hostages get waxed and operatives blown away.

The blood and guts of ROGUE SPEAR rest in a meticulous planning phase that has been modified for user friendliness. The Briefing and Intel screens are improved from RAINBOW SIX, detailing your overall mission objectives while providing more visual information so that you can actually see what the area of operation looks like. After you're debriefed on the situation, you form and equip your team in the Roster, Kits, and Team screens. This year's model has more operatives and equipment at your disposal, including sniper specialists and sniper rifles like the PSG-1 and Barrett Model – they're a perfect fit for the new sniper features. If you find yourself wanting to outfit your entire team with specific weapons, equipment, or uniforms repeatedly, a nifty save kit feature makes this an easier process, as does a variety of basic default setups.

The Planning Screen is the heart of your preparation. Here, you'll map out your teams' every move by using waypoints, rules of engagement, special actions, and Go Codes. ROGUE SPEAR provides a 3D-map overlay of the area where you plan every detail from breaching doors to disarming bombs. It's a tricky and time-consuming operation, but this time around Red Storm has provided very good default plans on every mission for gamers too intimidated or impatient to make their own.

If you're more interested in planning a good operation without actually controlling your operatives, the Watch Mode feature allows you to test your plans. Here, you can observe your entire mission unfold in cinematic style. In addition, a very useful replay feature lets you watch missions over and over again to discover flaws or highlight successes.

All of your planning is performed in a revamped interface that



HIGH VOLTAGE With 18 single-player missions, ROGUE SPEAR offers some very memorable moments, including this mission deep inside a Russian nuclear reactor.

CGW RATED

PROS

Intense action; improved interface; challenging AI; cool weapons and ballistic effects; addictive multiplayer features.

CONS

Some ballistic anomalies; planning mode can be overwhelming; sluggish graphics at times.

Requirements: Pentium-266MHz, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-266MHz, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, 4MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Glide and Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN (2-16 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • **Developer:** Red Storm Entertainment • **$50** • **www.redstorm.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.

GUN CLUB ROGUE SPEAR has added some really cool weapons, like the Steyr Aug and L85A1, for operational diversity. Ballistics become a factor in certain missions so make sure you choose the right weapon for the right job.

I'LL HAVE THE WHITE RUSSIAN The Briefing and Intel screens are easier to navigate and offer a wealth of intelligence and background info to digest.

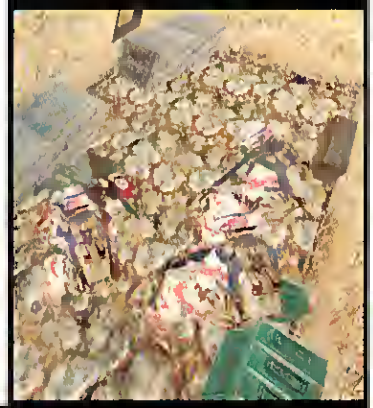
streamlines the screens for more manageable planning than in the first game. Not only are the planning screens more concise, but the addition of easily-accessible game menus during the action phase provides – for example – a venue for remapping keys or enabling a joystick.

Elite Forces

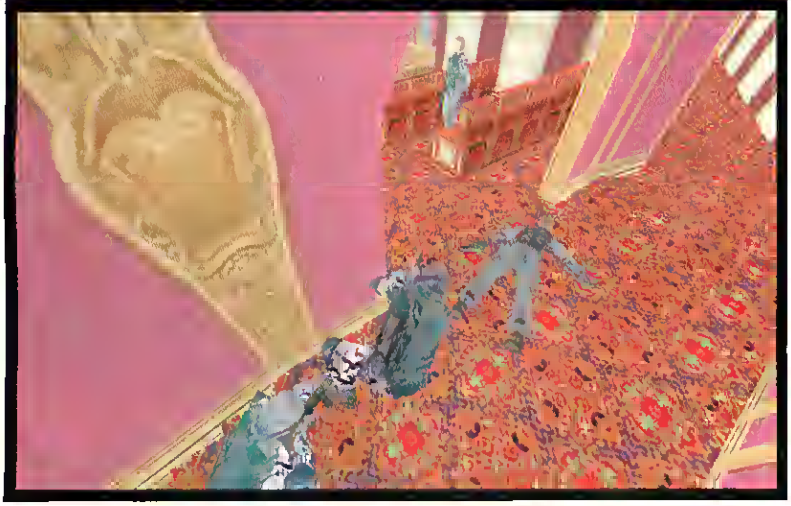
When the planning's done, it's time to execute your mission in one of 18 areas of operations. ROGUE SPEAR now sports a vastly improved action bar that is placed at the bottom of your cinema screen for easier team control. Need to recon the hallway before continuing toward your objective? Command your team to hold, and they'll form a defensive position until you signal for their assistance. Team fire and movement is more realistic, so your Red team, for instance, escorts hostages out of the building while your Blue team continues exterminating tangos. And when your direct supervision is required elsewhere, switching between teams and team members is easier to do.

Unlike RAINBOW SIX, where you could complete most missions with a single operative, ROGUE SPEAR's improved AI means you'll need *every* operative. No more dumb terrorists blindly walking past their fallen comrades; terrorists are smarter, quickly reacting to noises and open doors, and ducking for cover when fired upon.

WELL-DRESSED MAN How important is wearing the right camouflage? When your team's life depends on hiding in plain sight – plenty.



THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM Team coordination is now even more crucial to successfully accomplishing mission objectives. Thankfully, an improved interface makes it easier than before.



Staying Alive 101

1. Study map layout; specifically insertion points, team waypoints, and locations of objects and terrorists. Note possible ambush points for terrorists.

2. Get familiar with the GO codes and practice using them in the tutorial or Terrorist Hunt modes. If the situation demands a dynamic response, you can always change a team's ROE code. In order to escort hostages safely out of the area, don't forget to change the ROE code of your team to Escort.

3. Maintain timing from team to team. For instance, if you blitz two teams down two separate corridors before they meet at the entrance of the Opera House (where terrorists are holding hostages), it's very important that both teams are in sync so that their attack on the theater is numerically superior to the enemy.

4. Try to use the heartbeat sensor when not engaged. It will help in not getting your operatives killed by well-hidden terrorists waiting to ambush you.

5. Don't expose your entire body. Slice the pie by leaning down corridors or around doors to shoot when just a portion of the terrorist is in view.

6. Always know how many rounds remain in your magazine. If you get below ten rounds, it's time to reload, ideally in a spot where you're not exposed.

7. Remember that moving while firing effects your accuracy, so try not to blitz when firing at longer ranges. Full auto can be more of a burden than a help, so utilize three round bursts in weapons using this rate of fire. It'll help conserve ammo.

The higher IQ extends to your team as well – commandos no longer block your line of fire or get stuck in corners. Team operatives are more proactive, sometimes reacting to situations so quickly they dispatch terrorists before you even see them. To add to the realism, Red Storm added crouching and leaning movements so that you can look down corridors without exposing your character. Operatives can also climb on objects and walls, and jump off ledges. An auto-targeting feature assists target acquisition if you're having problems locking on tangos, but it's only available on easier game settings.

The Deadliest Game

Two of the most exciting additions are the Lone Wolf and Terrorist Hunt games. You get these options after completing a single-player map; your goal is to exterminate 30 randomly placed terrorists with either a single operative in Lone Wolf or an entire team in Terrorist Hunt. Not only is this a great way to hone your tactical skills, but it's a great way of gaining proficiency in commanding your teams. Think of it as a more nerve-wracking extension to ROGUE SPEAR's excellent tutorial.

Graphically, ROGUE SPEAR is just great. The environments are more detailed and evocative of real world locations. You really feel as if you're in Siberia disarming nuclear weapons, freeing hostages at the Prague Opera House, or taking out tangos at an ancient castle in Azerbaijan. The weather effects are awesome, with rain, snow, and wind adding to an already astounding mix of realistic environments. 3D sounds are marvelous as well, making ROGUE SPEAR a completely immersive experience – travel along a sewer and hear the water rush underneath your boots.

With all this visual splendor, it's a shame frame-rates sometime drop (especially when moving through wide-open terrain) even on fast PCs with TNT2 cards. Some model clipping can still block your view, especially in tight corridors, then again, I've yet to find a 3D game where some clipping does not exist.

The ballistics model is more realistic then before, so picking the right weapons for the right job is important. Snipers should utilize sniper rifles like the M-14 or Walther WA2000 for better long range accuracy, while close combat is better served utilizing COB weapons like the MP510SD or UMP45. You'll also have your choice of rounds. Shots are body-specific, so you'll need to place your fire so that you kill your enemies, if you don't, you can track them down thanks to the new wound effects that make everyone in the game bleed, leaving the telltale blood trails wherever they go. Maybe twice in multiplayer games did I notice a rare ballistics bug – an operative can shoot terrorists at point-blank range with the mighty Barrett, but the bullet passes through without damage. Talk about your magic bullet.

The Killing Zone

With a slew of multiplayer options to choose from, ROGUE SPEAR should last on the hard drive for a long, long time. Improved features and options cover about a dozen game types for either co-op or adversarial play. Of them all, Double Bluff in adversarial mode is probably the most challenging team game – you've got to escort a coterie of witless hostages while the opposing team does the same. One false turn and your hostages become the proverbial ducks in a barrel. It's incredibly tense and fun. Unfortunately, LAN games can be tricky at times, with the game perfectly simulating an alternate- dimension mystery spot, where team members remain in the same game but can't see each other.

Server options have been beefed up for multiplayer game customization. Now you can completely modify games by including enemies, auto-targeting, varied insertion points, kit restrictions, and other features. Arm patches have been added to player uniforms so that you can easily determine friend or foe. Still, it would be nice if the game shipped with a mission editor for modifying maps and games.

In the final analysis, a host of revisions and improvements leave ROGUE SPEAR a big improvement on the original. Added realism, a greater accessibility, and even more inventively devious missions make this game the new benchmark of tactical simulations. CGW

HEAD CALL ROGUE SPEAR's realistic environments are great and character models that pant steam in the cold air only heighten the realism. This Kosovo mission is extremely dangerous, with plenty of sniper hiding places in the war-torn buildings.

Cool Links

www.specialoparations.com
The Mecca of all things portaining to real SpecOps. This site also has a great variety of SpecOps discussion forums.

forums.redstorm.com
The Rainbow Six Lina is the most active ROGUE SPEAR discussion board on the web.

rainbow6.3dretreat.com
A good ROGUE SPEAR gaming resource.

PEEKABOO Crouching and leaning lets you jump Tangos before they round the corner and find you.

KNEELING OVATION Securing hostages is only half the objective. You must escort them to safety in order to achieve mission success.

C&C: TIBERIAN SUN Shines, but not Brilliantly

Partial Eclipse

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

I hope Westwood Studios won't take it the wrong way when I say that TIBERIAN SUN, their long-awaited sequel to COMMAND & CONQUER, makes me think of a big juicy cheeseburger. Like that dietary staple, TIBERIAN SUN is familiar and filling, easy to digest, and smells more than faintly of cheese. It's comfort food for the real-time strategy gamer. What it isn't is groundbreaking or innovative.

Ham & Cheese

From the moment TIBERIAN SUN's install program announces "Welcome Back Commander" in faux low-res lettering, it's clear that Westwood is pandering to the nostalgic impulses of long-time C&C fans. The latest installment opens in a dystopic 2030, where the side effects of the alien "wonder mineral" Tiberium have left much of the earth uninhabitable, and have transformed a significant percentage of humanity into fleshy-headed mutants. The nasty Brotherhood of Nod has fragmented into various factions following their leader Kane's death in the original game, but they're quick to reunite once the bald baddie makes a less-than-surprising comeback, despite his ion-cannon immolation thirty years ago. James Earl Jones headlines the cinematics as General Solomon, head honcho of the Global Defense Initiative, and faster than a deep baritone voice can recite "This... is C&C," GDI and Nod are once again locked in metal-shredding combat.

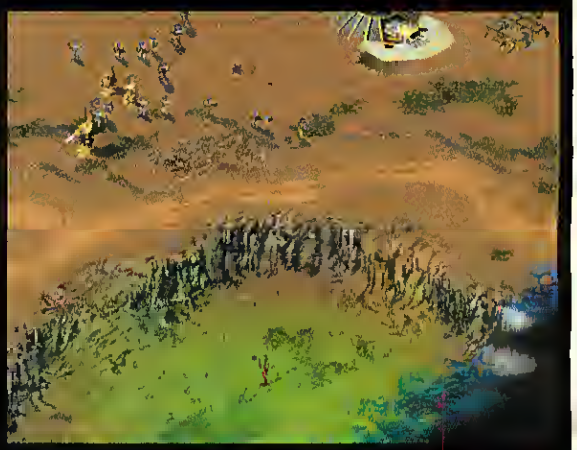
The in-game movies, as in the previous games, combine high-class computer graphics with video schlock. TIBERIAN SUN may not represent the low point of Michael Biehn's 15-year post-*Terminator* career slump, but his jaw-flexing performance as the Commander McNeil isn't going to move him to Hollywood's A-list anytime soon. The best that can be said about Jones' performance is that you rarely catch him checking his watch. The villains fare somewhat better, with Joe Kucan a vigorously hammy Kane and B-movie vet Frank Zagarino appropriately zealous as second-banana Slavik. The plot sure ain't Shakespeare – heck, it's not even WING COMMANDER – but it certainly has enough cheesy zest to keep you awake. It's bad, all right – but in a good way.

Trial by Error

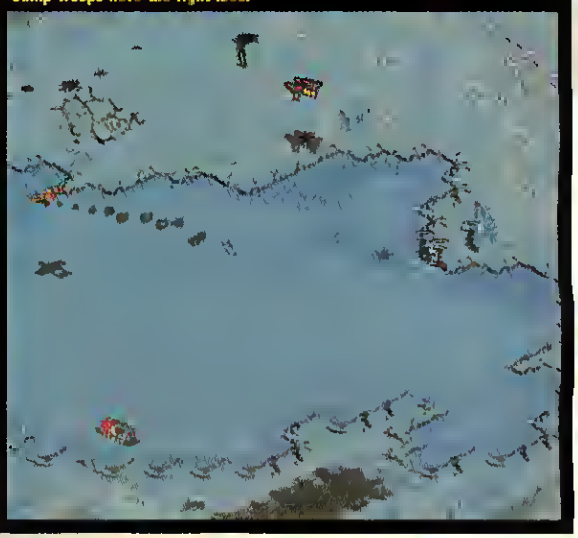
The two single-player campaigns (one for each side) are long and brutal, alternating harvest/build/destroy scenarios and commando missions in which you're given only a handful of units and no way to recruit more. The latter variety features a lot of "puzzles" with lockstep solutions. For instance, you might need to infiltrate the back route to an enemy base with a

CLASSIC CONFRONTATION This is what it's all about– a force of GDI Mechs, er, Titans, marches on a Nod base.

UNHEALTHY GLOW Glowing fields of deadly but precious tiberium show off the new engine's dynamic lighting effects.



THIN ICE A harvester is about to find out the hard way that multi-ton vehicles and three inches of ice don't mesh well. The hovering GDI Jump Troops have the right idea.



CGW RATED

PROS

Nice multiplayer suite; solid AI; excellent random map generator; the classic COMMAND & CONQUER "feel."

CONS

Some tedious single-player missions; potentially unbalanced units in multiplayer; that terrible waypoint system.

Requirements: Pentium-166MHz, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-233MHz or better.

3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** Modem (2 players), LAN or Internet (2-8 players); one CD per player, 2 CDs included per game box.

Publisher: Westwood Studios • Developer: Westwood Studios • $45 • www.westwood.com

ESRB Rating: Teen; mild language, realistic blood and violence.

BOOMLET A hunter-seeker warhead, one of the game's less inspired superweapons, blows the crap out of a random GDI building.

TOO-CLOSE ENCOUNTER In one of the game's non-base-building scenarios, GDI forces struggle to keep Nod assault teams from destroying a recovered alien derelict.

pathetically small force. But *whoops!* The entrance is guarded by a laser obelisk. To get past it, you need to cut its power by finding the secret plateau where the generators are. But before you attack the generators, you need to destroy a nearby bridge, or reinforcements will arrive in time to kill you. And before you can take out the bridge, well...you get the idea.

Some players will find these missions an interesting change from the usual heavy-metal thunder, while others will find them teeth-shivering exercises in save-die-reload frustration.

The graphics engine that drives the mayhem is an all-new, three-quarters isometric beast, capable of resolutions up to 800x600; with colored lighting effects, deformable terrain, and 3D voxel-based vehicle units (infantry are still itsy-bitsy sprites). It's a definite step up from the RED ALERT graphics, but not quite the quantum leap many were expecting. The lighting and terrain effects sound impressive in theory, but are used for little more than occasional special effects, and while most of the voxel units look decent, some – such as the Fiery Shoebox of Death (*aka* the Nod Devil's Tongue Flame Tank) – are downright embarrassing.

Speaking of units, I'm sure it will come as no surprise to hear that GDI has heavy armor (now with legs in a tip of the hat to MECHWARRIOR) and airpower, while Nod forces emphasize speed and stealth. Engineers return to their original C&C effectiveness, the Obelisk of Light gets beefed up, Nod cycles get toned down, and Tanya the commando from RED ALERT gets a paint job (or is that e sex change?) and returns as the mutant Ghostalker.

BUT WOULD YOU TAKE HER HOME TO MOTHER? Michael Biehn as GDI Commander McNeil notices what big brown eyes mutant chief Umagon has.

GAPPING THE BRIDGE Cutting the supply lines the hard way in one of TIBERIAN SUN's many flashy CGI sequences.

The new unit types are mostly stolen, whole cloth, from other recent real-time strategy titles: The underground APC from DARK REIGN resurfaces here; STARCRAFT's siege tanks serve as the model for Nod's nasty artillery; and even DUNE 2000's Sonic Tank, serial numbers filed off, makes a reappearance. There are, however, a couple genuinely inventive new gadgets, such as the stealth generator that can cloak entire bases, and the neat anti-tank-rush EMP generator that paralyzes mechanical units temporarily.

Command & Clunky

The interface and controls will pose no problem for anyone who's ever played C&C, since they're basically the same, though Westwood has begrudgingly made a few concessions to the last four years of RTS design. You can now queue up to five infantry or vehicles for production, and an awkward ctrl-alt key combo lets you set rally points for factories. The waypoint system is the one major innovation: On entering this mode, you place a series of small flags to designate a route, which you later assign one or more groups to follow. On paper this must have sounded good, but in practice it's a total wipeout: slow, unwieldy, confusing, and ultimately useless.

Interface caveats aside, multiplayer is where the C&C series has always shone, and TIBERIAN SUN is no exception. With an exceptional suite of options, including excellent AI skirmish players, a powerful random map generator, and easy access to the Westwood Chat game-matching service, you can easily get your money's worth out of the game without ever delving into the campaigns.

And in multiplayer games, whether versus the computer or another human, you at last see the benefits of Westwood's conservative design philosophy. Unlike recent titles that have succeeded in innovating while failing to entertain (such as TA: KINGDOMS and FORCE 21), TIBERIAN SUN is the furthest thing from original, but it's still – inexplicably – as much a blast to play now as C&C was four years ago.

Some doubts linger about the unit balance (Nod seems to have a considerable edge, with cloaked bases, deadly artillery, subterranean APCs, and three different long-range superweapons), but it doesn't change the fact that the game is simply a lot of fun. There's still nothing quite like distracting your foe with an armored assault while your engineer-laden APC sneaks in the back to take over his construction yard, or following up an ion-cannon strike with waves of napalm-hurling bombers.

But alas, times have changed since C&C ruled the real-time strategy world, and for many fans of the genre today, there's only one bottom-line question that needs answering. Is it as good as STARCRAFT? Frankly, no. Blizzard's reigning RTS champ still edges out TIBERIAN SUN in both single and multiplayer modes. Sadly, the comforting cheeseburger familiarity that makes TIBERIAN SUN surprisingly fun is, in the end, the same thing that prevents it from graduating to sirloin steak. CGW

Cool Links

www.tiberiansun.com
Westwood's official site

www.tiberiumsun.com
Yep, the spelling is correct. A slick and well-maintained fan site with lots of news and updates.

www.ww-underground.com
The Westwood Underground, featuring lots of info on TIBERIAN SUN and other Westwood games past, present, and future.

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The Prince Is Back in Red Orb's Prince of Persia 3D

Third Person Singular

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D

reviewed by Charles Ardai

One mark of a good game is that you keep wanting to play it even after the "wow factor" has worn off. The dazzling graphics, the stunning animation, the lush virtual environment – all the things that made you drool in the store – get less exciting as they become familiar. A good game is one in which the actual gameplay keeps you coming back for more.

The difference between a good game and a great game is this: Not only does the gameplay keep you coming back, but the "wow factor" never wears off.

I think it's safe to say that PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D almost passes this test. As of this writing, I have been playing it for the last six days and the hairs on the back of my neck are still standing straight up. But part of that is frustration.

The game's appeal is not just that it's great to look at – though God knows that's true –but that PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D offers as rich and satisfying a total experience as any classic adventure movie – *The Thief of Baghdad*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, take your pick.

This is adventure on the grand scale, with scimitars and alleyways and potions and death-defying leaps; with imperiled princesses, impassioned rescues, and impossible trials somehow survived. This is grand, romantic, swashbuckling fare; and it's truly irresistible, the sort of thing you'll sneak out to the computer room to play in the middle of the night.

Unfortunately, aggravation with the controls may lead to midnight shouts that awaken the rest of the house.

Formerly Known as Prince

It all starts with travel to a foreign land. Together with your wife and her father, the Sultan, you go to visit the Sultan's brother – an oily potentate who purrs instructions to his guards and smokes a hookah. Little do you know that the fellow wants to marry his son to your wife, making her a widow first to facilitate the transaction. But you find out soon enough: all three of you are taken captive as the game opens, and while your wife is imprisoned in a perfumed badchamber and the Sultan remains with his brother, you are summarily thrown into the kingdom's deepest dungeon.

TRIPLE TRAP Blades to the left, blades underneath, and once you climb the wall, it starts to move – pushing you toward the floor blades.

HANG TIME How much danger do you need? The Prince lives in a perilous world where he's forever swinging from dangling ropes or clinging to safety by his fingertips.

Needless to say, you are first disarmed. So your first task is to escape from a cell and then from a guarded cell block without so much as a stick or a stone to defend yourself with. What you do have are your wits and the superhuman agility you honed in the first two PRINCE OF PERSIA games. Standing leaps six feet into the air are nothing to this prince, nor does he shrink from jumping across a chasm strewn with spikes, even if the only way he can make it is to catch hold of the far wall with his fingertips.

You can crouch to crawl under deadly blades; you can hold your breath to swim underwater; you can push and drag crates from one place to another; you can swing on ropes and climb chains; and you can manipulate devices or talk to friendly characters on the rare occasions you come across any.

What you can't do is fight, not until you find a sword, and you don't for quite some time. This is wonderful game design – by forcing you to play through the opening of the game without a weapon, the designers not only heighten the tension and tax the player's imagination, they also instantly distinguish PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D from all the first-person bloodfests and third-person Croft-alikes.

Even when you do manage to get yourself a sword (by sneaking

CGW RATED

PROS
Gorgeous graphics; lifelike animation; good combat; fiendish puzzles.

CONS
Sluggish controls; you'll have to save often due to occasional crashes.

GRATE ADVENTURE While you'll need to manipulate objects like this sewer grate and solve puzzles to progress in the game, it's testament to the game's brilliant design that you'll always have a clear idea of where you should be going, if not how to get there.

Requirements: Pentium-266MHz, 64MB RAM, 395MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-300MHz

3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment • **Developer:** Red Orb Entertainment • **$50** • www.redorb.com

ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and gore, animated violence.

Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
ROGUE SPEAR™
www.redstorm.com
MISSED ME?
Team Rainbow is back in full force. Rogue Spear, the sequal to PC Gamar'a 1998 Action Gama of tha Yaar, immaraaa you avan daaper in tha axplosiva action of an alita multinational atrika forca.
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CATCHING A BREATHER Breaks in the game action are great opportunities to drink in the brilliant hues and imaginative design of the gameworld.

up behind a guard and crushing him under a crate) and the element of combat enters the game, dispatching enemies remains only one of several things you have to do in the game. Each of the game's dozen or so levels has a handful of vicious duels for you to fight, but you still spend the bulk of your time exploring, dodging traps, and advancing inexorably toward your goal.

It's the traps that give the game its special flavor. At one point, you find yourself on a ledge with spinning blades next to you and more blades on the floor below. That's bad enough. But then the wall behind you begins to move, pushing you off the ledge, and the only way out – you realize at the last possible instant – is to jump over the blades onto a narrow ledge across the way. It's frightening, challenging, exhilarating.... Spielberg himself couldn't do better.

DANCE OF DEATH Combat in PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D is less about blindly whacking away than about tactically executing maneuvers to overcome unique opponents. It sure beats mashing away on a "fire" button.

Dead Again

With death lurking around every corner, it's a good thing the game offers a solid system for saving your game. If you save often, you will also dodge one of the game's less attractive features. From time to time, my PC just froze, requiring me to reboot and reload.

That won't spare you from the game's most aggravating problem – the horrid controls. Sluggish in the extreme, the controls can slow the game to a crawl and often reduce the simplest tasks to fun-killing chores.

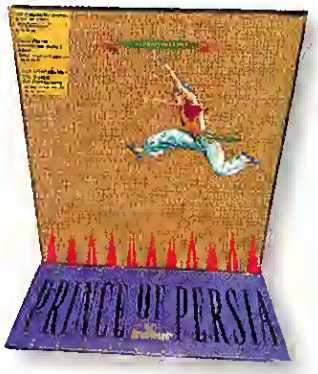
There are other small things wrong as well: The voice acting for the prince and his wife is dreadful (though the Sultan and his son are delicious to listen to), and the story lacks the sort of brilliant dark twists that made the second installment so good. But how little all that matters when you're swinging across an abyss with spikes behind you and a portcullis descending in front of you. It's a game full of potential great moments, weakened by poor control response. CGW

QuickTime Fix

PRINCE 3D players be warned! If the controls in the game are exceptionally sluggish, you probably have an older version of QuickTime installed on your machine. PRINCE 3D requires the very latest version to run properly, and the QuickTime included on the PRINCE 3D CD is **not** the latest – a bone-headed move by Red Orb. Visit www.quicktime.com to get the software you need to alleviate (but not eliminate) some of the control problems.

The More Things Change...

...the more they change. Here's what Charles Ardai had to say about the first two PRINCE OF PERSIA games:



11 Years Ago In CGW

"Playing PRINCE OF PERSIA will simply spoil you for any game whose designers couldn't be bothered to put this much effort into their product. People too often forget...how difficult it is to be "merely" entertaining and just how much fun "light entertainment" can be. *Star Wars* was light entertainment, after all, and PRINCE OF PERSIA is the *Star Wars* of its field."

6 Years Ago In CGW

"The game [has] a depth and a resonance that its predecessor did not possess...I would say that PRINCE OF PERSIA 2 not only is in every dimension better than PRINCE OF PERSIA, but that it is the cruelest, most infuriating, least merciful – in short, the best – game of its type I have ever played."

Cool Links
www.pop3d.com
The official Prince of Persia web site.

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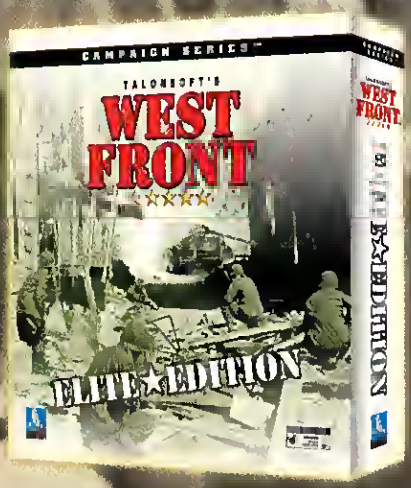
THROUGH THE EYES OF A SOLDIER



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13th Century Quality Control Plagues an Ambitious Design

Patch-Work Kilt

Imagine a game that combines turn-based strategy, resource management, building, trade, political intrigue, and 3D action based on an award-winning movie. Can't miss, right? Wrong. A project as ambitious as BRAVEHEART hinges almost entirely on taking the time to patiently marry all the intricate components. Unfortunately, Eidos has released a BRAVEHEART more plague-ridden than the Dark Ages.

BRAVEHEART
reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Kilts and Castles

BRAVEHEART is two games in one. The first is a turn-based game of empire building through micro-managing resources, construction, trade, alliances, subterfuge, and military prowess. The other BRAVEHEART is a real-time tactical game emphasizing combat on gorgeous 3D battlefields that make you feel like you stepped into a great epic movie.

There are two objectives in BRAVEHEART. First, you must unite the 16 clans of Scotland through military expansion, diplomacy, or both. Once the majority of clans have been conquered or allied to your side, you are crowned King. As the new King of Scotland, you must now drive out the English and their seemingly infinite army of seasoned knights, infantry, and fortified castles. It's no easy task, even at the easiest of settings.

Clan management is the blood and guts of BRAVEHEART. You select a clan from the pool of 16, according to how you want to approach the game. For the deception and intrigue necessary for a political victory, you'd want Clan Campbell over the MacLeod clan, which is best-suited for military expansion. As the new chief of your clan, it's your duty to manage and manipulate every facet of your towns and settlements, right down to the clothing they produce.

Militarily, you have to pay attention to your leaders. Each clan starts off with two leaders, but more join your cause as your territory expands and your clan's reputation grows. Keep your leaders happy, well paid, well fed, and don't overwork them, and you'll be rewarded with loyal troops who won't desert you. Good leaders are crucial for expansion, if only because leaderless troops on the march cannot fight, patrol, or perform diplomatic missions.

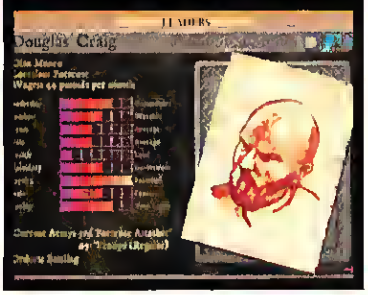
All this management is handled through an iconographic management screen further divided into clan and town overview subsystems. A sorry manual does little to explain the profoundly non-intuitive interface, but the screens are easily linked so that navigation is fluid, if confounding. However, as your territory expands, navigating the multiple screens can be overwhelmingly tedious. An auto-AI feature lets you task your computer with handling the resource and economic management of your individual towns and settlements, so that you can focus on combat if you wish.

But the auto-AI is a good idea that falls flat, mostly at the cost of your clan's welfare. Like it or not, you're better off doing it yourself rather than dealing with bungled resource allocation, unfinished buildings, and idle peasants wasting your hard-toiled stores. Auto-AI does work effectively in trade, the only exception.

UPHILL BATTLE BRAVEHEART's real-time 3D combat looks good, but cumbersome controls get right smack in the way of the fun.

IF YOU BUILD IT, YOU'LL GO NUMB Fans of resource management will love every little thing that requires your attention. But as your empire grows, all that micromanagement gets as tiresome as a forced march.

CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN Strong loyal leaders are crucial for victory. Put some spineless turncoat in charge of your army, and they'll desert you – if they don't die first.



CGW RATED

PROS
Lots of resources to manage; various victory paths; cool 3D combat; political intrigue; action-only mode.

CONS
Unfinished game with bad auto-AI and interface; limited 3D combat; lackluster multiplayer; some nasty bugs.

Requirements: Pentium-233MHz, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM, 600MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Glide and Direct3D.
Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-12 players), one CD per player.

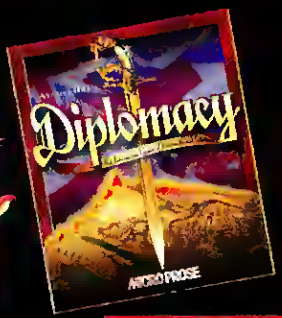
Publisher: Eidos Interactive • Developer: Red Lemon • $50 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence

Try diplomacy first.

You can always invade them later.

AVALON HILL'S

Diplomacy



Bring out your inner dictator

May your wit be as sharp as your sword, because Avalon Hill's Diplomacy has captured the true spirit of the legendary board game. You'll start as one of the seven pre-WWI superpowers, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. These political boundaries will become your prey as you negotiate your way to the top. Beg, threaten, plead and argue your way past nations where friends become pawns and enemies become allies. You'll have to be cunning. Smooth. And deceitful. This is a game that can't be left to chance.

RP

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Keeping What's Yours

As you conquer neighboring clans, build impenetrable lines of supply and communication by dotting them with keeps, stockades, watchtowers, and patrolling forces. A strong defensive position allows forces to quickly support attacks as well as your offensive moves. At the same time, keep your forces intact through managing their morale. Troops grow restless when engaged in the same task for extended periods, so rotate garrisoned troops, change their duties, and keep them well fed. If that doesn't work, disband them – then reform from the peasant pool for a new, happy squad.

Claymores Into Haggis

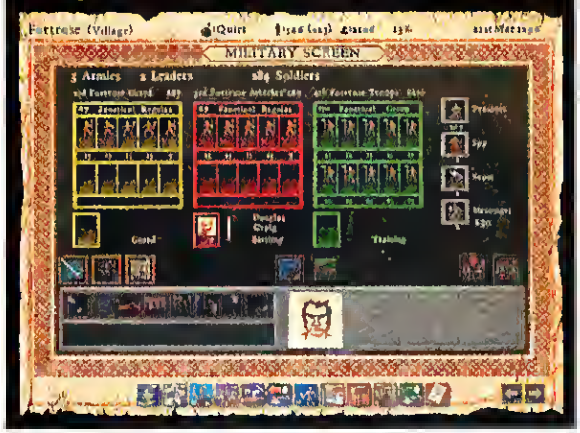
Large scale, real-time 3D combat is BRAVEHEART's most distinguishing feature, but also one of its biggest disappointments. Gamers familiar with MYTH's fluid combat interface will cry for mercy from BRAVEHEART's clumsy battlefield woes. Once your army reaches its military objective or is attacked, you have the option of backing out or of being thrust onto a 3D battlefield that takes some time to load. Every battle begins with complete disorientation, because you have no idea where enemy forces, towns, or villages lie. So you spend a good five minutes scouring the map searching for the enemy – or, you can just read something entertaining while waiting for the enemy to find you.

Sadly, computer forces blindly attack, even if their army pales in comparison to yours. You may form units into three formations a la MYTH, but this does nothing to enhance your tactical advantage since everyone ends up fighting in one big, massive scrap. The victor is usually the army with the most units, turning combat into a battle of attrition rather than battlefield prowess.

BLOOD ON THE HEATHER For all its posturing as a tactical game, BRAVEHEART combat generally boils down to bloody free-for-alls, where the army with the most guys wins.

The clunky camera-control interface is also a nuisance. Not only do your mouse and fingers have to perform acrobatics to get the best viewing angle, but panning across the 3D environment gets even trickier. Throw in some clipping problems when zooming close to the action and you've got all the ingredients for frustration.

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW Over time, your clan's arsenal should provide the swords, axes, bows, spears, lances, shields, and armor you'll need for equipping your troops. There are even ballistas and siege towers for assaulting enemy fortifications.



NOCTURNAL COLLISIONS BRAVEHEART's 3D weather effects add considerable battlefield ambiance. You'll fight in rain, snow, fog, storms, and nightfall. Just make sure you stay away from the trees when lighting strikes.

On a positive note, BRAVEHEART is graphically stunning. 3D-rendered hills, trees, water, units, and objects, coupled with really cool night battles and weather effects, enhance the overall atmosphere and realism of BRAVEHEART. The battlefield has an authentic feel for what it must have looked like when facing a Tartan army seven centuries ago; the developers used topographical satellite images of Scotland for added realism. BRAVEHEART's battle sounds, unfortunately, sound trite and cartoonish.

Fair Is Foul and Foul Is Fair

Then there are the hardware requirements. A whopping installation of 600MB on your hard drive is too much, especially since there's no minimum install choice. Add another 50 to 100MB for each saved game, and this becomes a real concern for those with limited space. In addition, stability issues with Direct3D forces TNT and TNT2 card owners to download a patch – a patch that was released about the same day as the game. Talk about pushing something out the door.

Multiplayer falls flat, because Eidos released a net game unready for prime time. At press time, you can only play direct connection or TCP/IP against four players, regardless of the manual's claim of up to 12 competitors. It's moot; due to BRAVEHEART's limited combat capabilities, a free-for-all battle grows boring very quick.

BRAVEHEART's resource and territorial management is its only saving grace. I was really looking forward to this game, and though I find the resource management highly addictive, the bulk of the game is a buggy letdown. Considering what this game could have been, that really pisses me off. As it stands now, if you wait for another three or four patches, BRAVEHEART will be a steal in the bargain bin. CGW

Cool Links

bayt.bjt.net/~melanie/braveheart3.html
A great fan site full of BRAVEHEART information, including a historical background on the film's characters.

www.macBraveheart.freeserve.co.uk/
Good resource for all things BRAVEHEART.

www.brave-heart.net/tips.html
A fantastic BRAVEHEART gaming resource.

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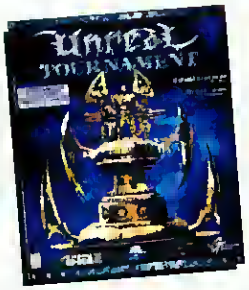

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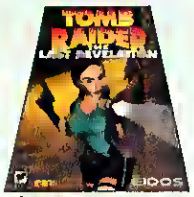

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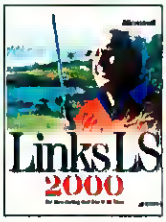

Microsoft Links LS 2000
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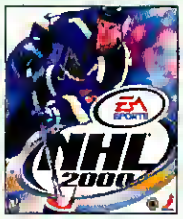

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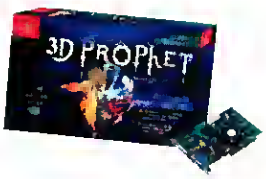

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I Know Diablo. Diablo Is a Friend of Mine. You, Sir, Are No Diablo.

Darkclone

The marketing wonks at Gathering of Developers want you to believe that DARKSTONE will fill the void between DIABLO and DIABLO II – and why not? There are a few great new elements to be found here, as well as much that is familiar. So do I recommend that you rush out to buy it? Well, that is the major problem with DARKSTONE. Of all its environments, it leaves me with the one that I'm least comfortable in – the middle of the road.

DARKSTONE
reviewed by Greg Fortune

Déjà Vu All Over Again

The premise will most likely be familiar to you: You must stop the evil that threatens to destroy the world by destroying the inhabitants of various dungeon levels, collecting gold and items to be taken to town. Once in town, you can buy and sell items, get quests, repair your equipment, and heal yourself. As you gain experience, you reach new levels and earn points that you can distribute between your character's four attributes – these determine which weapons and armor your characters can use, as well as which spells. You will also find the standard health and mana system alive and well in DARKSTONE. Sound like anything you've played before?

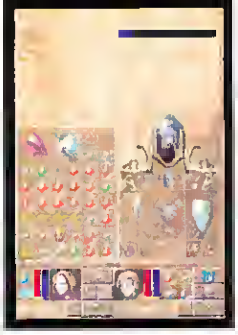
The game is not totally derivative. The most prominent new feature is the ability to take two characters into a dungeon in single-player mode. You can choose from any of the four character classes, creating a team with complementary skills. You can switch between the characters at will, with the computer assuming control of whichever character you don't control.

The addition of a rotating, zoomable 3D perspective is also welcome. It's very nice to be able to step back to control combat, and then step back in to grab items on the ground. You must also take food with you or forage in the dungeons, as hunger is a factor. There are new skills to learn in town, each with multiple levels to buy. These skills allow you to learn new ones that require no mana to use.

If there are so many cool new features built on top of a successful framework, what's the problem? The problem is that, despite my thoroughly addictive personality, DARKSTONE never made me want to play it. Unlike DIABLO, I never felt that urge to put my entire life on hold so that I could be with it.

The whole affair is decidedly ho-hum. Play some more, kill some more, sell some more, repeat. The character classes are cool, but they just didn't help me overcome a strong feeling of detachment. At times, it was almost boring tromping through yet another dungeon on another dreary quest – yet never so much so that I hated doing it. Even after I had finished the game, the thought of continuing on to a harder level left me thinking, "Do I really want to go through all that again? Well, maybe..."

ITSY BITSY SPIDER? These spiders win the prize for the most startling appearance. Most other enemies look about as threatening as a box of laxatives.



FAMILIAR? Equipment, inventory, and attributes are handled in a manner most of us will recognize. Be prepared to do lots of equipment juggling.

On the Fence

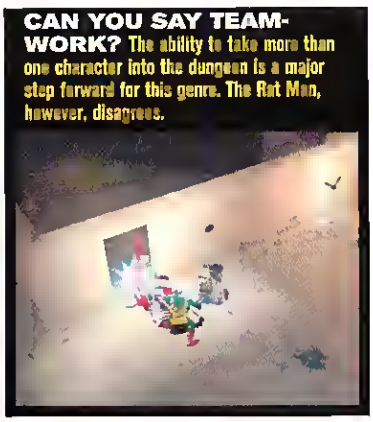
So, you see the problem. I can't say that you should rush out and buy DARKSTONE because I'm sure you'll be hooked, but I can't say that you shouldn't rush out and get it, because it's still a decent game. The game's look and gameplay are strong, and there's a good amount of replay value. I just can't assure you that it will capture your imagination enough. DARKSTONE is a very solid game, but is it, as the ads claim, enough to make you forget about DIABLO II?

I don't think so. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Cool 3D engine; dual-character single-player mode; decent interface.

CONS
Lack of compelling environments and addictive play.



CAN YOU SAY TEAMWORK? The ability to take more than one character into the dungeon is a major step forward for this genre. The Rat Man, however, disagrees.

CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS There are several townspeople walking about waiting to give you quests. It's too bad the only thing gained by completing most of them is 10,000 gold pieces.

Requirements: Pentium-233MHz MMX or equivalent, 32MB free system RAM, 170MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-233MHz MMX, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** IPX (8 players), Internet (4 players), one CD per player

Publisher: Gathering Of Developers • **Developer:** Delphine • **$40** • **www.godgames.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen

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MADDEN 2000 Kicks Off the New Season in Fine Form

Boo-Ya!

Even the most rabid Sunday afternoon Fox-watcher has to admit that John Madden has been slowing down. Where he once energized a game and served as the goofball-enhanced "after" to Pat Summerall's "before," the big guy is now edging closer to obsolescence. Perhaps it's all those years in the broadcast booth catching up with him, but now he's more cornball shtick than great show.

MADDEN 2000
reviewed by Brett Todd

Thankfully, the same can't be said for EA Sports' MADDEN football series. The most-celebrated franchise in PC sports gaming celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, with perhaps the most complete re-creation of the NFL ever seen. MADDEN NFL 2000 has it all: cleat-crunching action, an involving franchise mode, and weighty enough stats to blow out tires on the famed Madden Cruiser. It has a few problems, but it's still a must-buy for anyone who gets couch sores each autumn.

Fill 'er Up

All of MADDEN's longstanding features are back, many sporting spiffy additions. You can take the field in practice, arcade, exhibition, season, franchise, tournament, situation, and online modes. Franchise play returns in an enhanced format that supports up to 30 consecutive seasons. (I guess that was necessary to sate those Browns fans. Enjoy the rebuilding, folks.)

Given the recent problems that other sports franchises have had with online action gaming (sister title NHL 2000, for example), Internet play here is amazing. While I still experience the odd stutter with my

ONE SINGULAR SENSATION While waiting for the ball to arrive, players often demonstrate their love for Broadway musicals. Here, the Cowboys' Ernie Mills and the Falcons' Marty Carter stage an impromptu chorus line.

COMING THROUGH As the Jags' Fred Taylor is demonstrating to the Miami defense and this terrified referee, you can run the ball effectively in MADDEN 2000. Holes are opened up inside, and outside runs such as this one aren't sealed off like they were last year.

CGW RATED

PROS
A complete simulaton; allows an unprecedented level of AI tweaking; realistic passing and running game; Internet play almost lag-free.

CONS
Most brutal interface in the history of the world; a few glitches in franchise play.

Requirements: Pentium-133/AMD K6 with software rendering, or Pentium 200/AMD K6-2 with 3D accelerator card, 32MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive, 30 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide **Multiplayer Support:** Two players via TCP/IP, modem (56K connection recommended), LAN, serial

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Tiburon Entertainment • $40 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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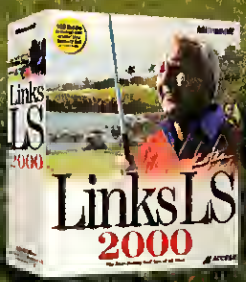

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msn Gaming ZONE

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56K connection, most of my games have been lag-free. EA Sports and Tiburon have really upped the ante here. No PC football game can legitimately ship without killer online play now.

You can replay 10 legendary matchups in situation play. You start with the Miami-San Diego overtime thriller from 1982 and work your way up. More classic teams can be unlocked by reaching in-game milestones and answering 200 trivia questions with the Madden Challenge feature enabled.

The best new wrinkles are slider bars that allow the gamer to adjust aspects of the offensive and defensive artificial intelligence. Along with general guidelines telling the computer coaches to run more often than pass (and vice versa); and to call plays with a conservative, normal, or aggressive bias; you can tweak specific areas of gameplay. Offense, QB accuracy, pass blocking, WR catching, RB ability, and run blocking can each be modified separately. Defensively, you can tinker with awareness, pass knockdowns, interceptions, breek blocks, and tackling. Special team settings can also be changed, in case you find field goals and kickoffs unsatisfying. A few games of experimentation, and you'll find the NFL you know.

It's about time that designers gave us this sort of control over the AI. I can't recall a single sports game where I haven't cursed my inability to turn off a penalty that's called too often, or dial down some characteristic that was overblown.

Daylight at Last

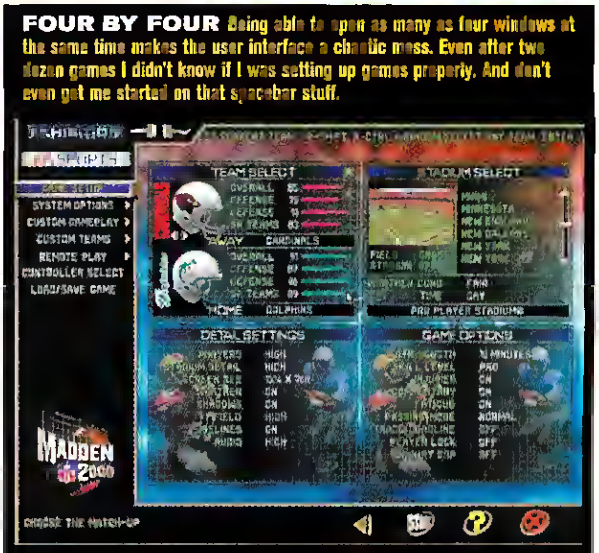
Perheps the best news about MADDEN 2000 is that we can finally run the ball. If you've got a good enough offensive line, your running backs will see plenty of daylight. Holes open up just like they should. So say goodbye to the magic tackles that killed any sense of realism at higher difficulty levels in previous editions. As en example, I've been regularly guiding Emmitt Smith to 100-yard games in the franchise I'm currently playing with the Cowboys. It's not easy, of course, but it's doeble.

Passing is equally well done, elthough the AI slider bars have to be adjusted somewhet to avoid too many interceptions. I was getting between seven and ten a game before nudging up throwing accuracy and catching, and practically turning off interceptions. After this, I found just about everything to my liking. Backs and safeties no longer react to balls thrown in their direction with preternatural swiftness. The addition of "hot route" eudibles – where you can manually adjust a receiver's pattern with the gamepad – is another welcome touch. It's a great way to take advantage of a suspect defensive formation.

Passing plays are affected by one irritating problem, though. Players seem to have no awareness of where the sidelines ere. Quick outs have to be completed at the speed of light, or your target will elready be cruising toward the Gatorade. Even if you do catch the ball with both feet on the green, your momentum will likely carry you immediately out of bounds. I lost a lot of yards before finally just giving up on out patterns coming from the backfield.

Given the enjoyable on-field play and the season and franchise options, longevity isn't a problem. Well...it isn't a problem as long as you can overlook a few quirks. AI trading still requires a fair bit of work. While you generally can't hoodwink anyone, computer GMs will often stage ludicrous fire sales in the offseason. So wait 'til June to rebuild that porous secondary. Poor clock management also stends out over time (no pun intended). The PC doesn't recognize situations es well as it should, leading to some bizerre pley choices in the closing minutes. With no time-outs and a scoreboard deficit in the final seconds, a run up the gut is almost as likely as a Hail Mery.

Another sore thumb is the interface. Equal parts REBELLION end FoxPro for DOS circa 1990, it is absolutely horrendous. Designers have provided a window system that allows us to open more than one at a time. Theoretically, this should make the whole thing a little like the standard GUI. Realistically, it's a nightmare where you can't figure out where anything is. And did I mention that the spacebar (?!) is used to enter some commands? I wish I could explain things better, but after two solid weeks of playing, I'm afraid I still don't understand it.



FOUR BY FOUR Being able to open as many as four windows at the same time makes the user interface a chaotic mess. Even after two dozen games I didn't know if I was setting up games properly. And don't even get me started on that spacebar stuff.

THIS WAY, GUYS Arizona's Adrian Murrell leads the way on a dark and stormy night in San Francisco. Unfortunately for Adrien – who's about to be placed in traction – he's supposed to be behind the tubby guy on the upper left.

Oh, and it also slows your mouse to an irritating crawl. I feel like I've developed St. Vitus' Dance every time I return to regular-speed Windows. All in all, this is easily the worst interface I've seen in a computer game, and it cost the game a half-star in the rating.

Looking Okay

Graphics and audio are about the only places that MADDEN 2000 doesn't set new standards for a football game. For an EA Sports title, the chrome isn't what it should be. The 3D-accelerated visuals are good, but they seem choppier and elmost unfinished in comparison to last year's game. Animations stutter at times and heads, arms, and elbows go through opposing players far too often. Microsoft's NFL FEVER 2000 is far better from a purely graphical point-of-view.

Sound also falls a touch short of current standards. Generic on-field effects are done well enough, but nothing stands out. Grunts, smacks, trash talking, and so on all seem canned and predictable. I was never really immersed in the game by anything I heard. And Summerall's and Madden's commentary actually had the opposite effect. Pat is confined to enlightening observations such as "Third down coming up," while the big guy simply repeats many of the same things he said last year. None of it is useful or entertaining.

But in the areas that really count, MADDEN 2000 is the real deal. Atrocious interface and minor aesthetic letdowns aside, this is the most entertaining and thorough tribute to NFL football currently available on the PC. CGW

Don't worry, at NVIDIA, amazingly fast, cutting-edge graphics processors are all we do. The results are ultra-smooth frame rates and incredibly vivid colors that allow you to see and play 3D/2D games exactly the way game makers intended. Not to mention an Internet experience that comes to life. If you demand this kind of performance out of your games and the Internet, then demand your next PC or graphics accelerator comes loaded with a NVIDIA chip. There's no reason to settle for anything less. Graphics to the nth degree.

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NVIDIA graphics n

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Microsoft Goes Long With Their First Entry in the PC Football Genre

DirectFootball 1.0

NFL FEVER 2000

reviewed by Tom Price

The PC football game market is being fought over by two serious heavyweights this year. Electronic Arts' MADDEN 2000, the perennial 400-pound gorilla of the genre, has a new challenger in NFL FEVER 2000 from Microsoft, the 400-pound gorilla of, well, everything. The MADDEN franchise has run plenty of contenders into the turf, but this year, EA may have something to worry about.

It's hard to resist the temptation to joke about Microsoft making sports games (the image of Bill Gates in a clean-room suit inspecting a pigskin comes to mind), and based on earlier attempts like MS BASEBALL 2000, it would be easy to apply a general stereotype about MS products – that they are technically proficient, but lack "soul." NFL FEVER 2000 bucks that stereotype by offering one of the most realistic-feeling football experiences ever to be had on the PC. It's an intense and brutal football simulation that will have you shouting ESPN cliches at the top of your lungs and checking your face for cleat marks.

UPON THE FIELD OF BATTLE The rain is going to turn this field into a serious mess by the end of the game, kind of like what the 49ers are going to do to the Browns.

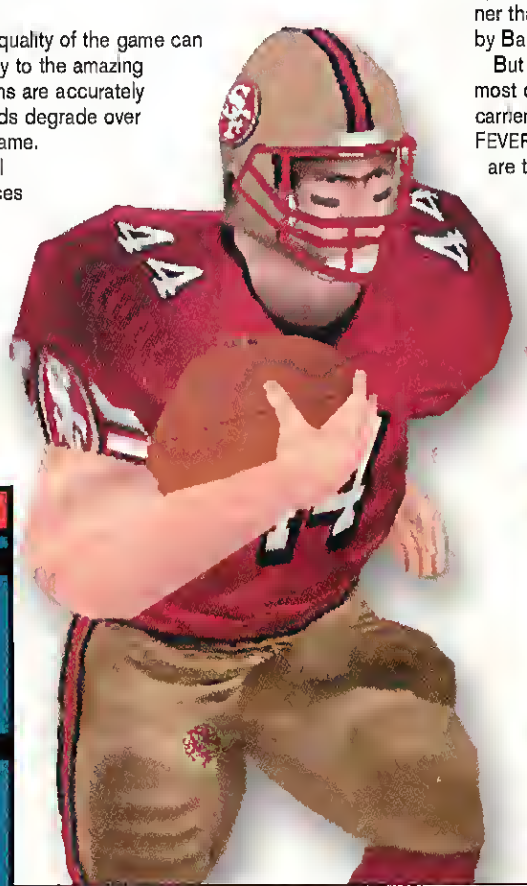
Hit Parade

The immersive quality of the game can be credited mostly to the amazing graphics. Stadiums are accurately modeled, and fields degrade over the course of a game.

Players are well designed with faces clearly visible under masks, body types that accurately mimic their real-life counterparts, and legible names on the backs of jerseys. Passing and running animations are top-notch, with pump fakes and fake hikes by the QB and a full compliment of spins and jukes for the runner that – for once – don't look like they were motion captured by Barishnikov.

But the animations really pop when it comes to tackling. In most other titles, a defensive player makes contact with the ball-carrier and a pre-rendered tackling animation ensues. In NFL FEVER 2000, such a great variety of things happen when players are tackled that one might think the programmers were using inverse kinematics or some other esoteric physics calculations to render the animation.

Example: Running back Garrison Hearst goes on a strong side sweep, and is wrapped up around the waist by the cornerback about three yards short of the first down. Any defensive player in the NFL knows that Hearst doesn't go down easy, so he starts dragging



LITTLE BLACK BOOK The playbook provides numerous options for getting the ball into the endzone – and keeping it out.

CGW RATED

PROS

Amazing graphics; realistic gameplay; deep playbook.

CONS

No draft; no custom leagues or seasons.

Requirements: Pentium-200MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-300MHz processor, 64MB RAM.

3D Support: Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-4 players on same computer

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Microsoft • $20 • www.microsoft.com/sports/fever2000 • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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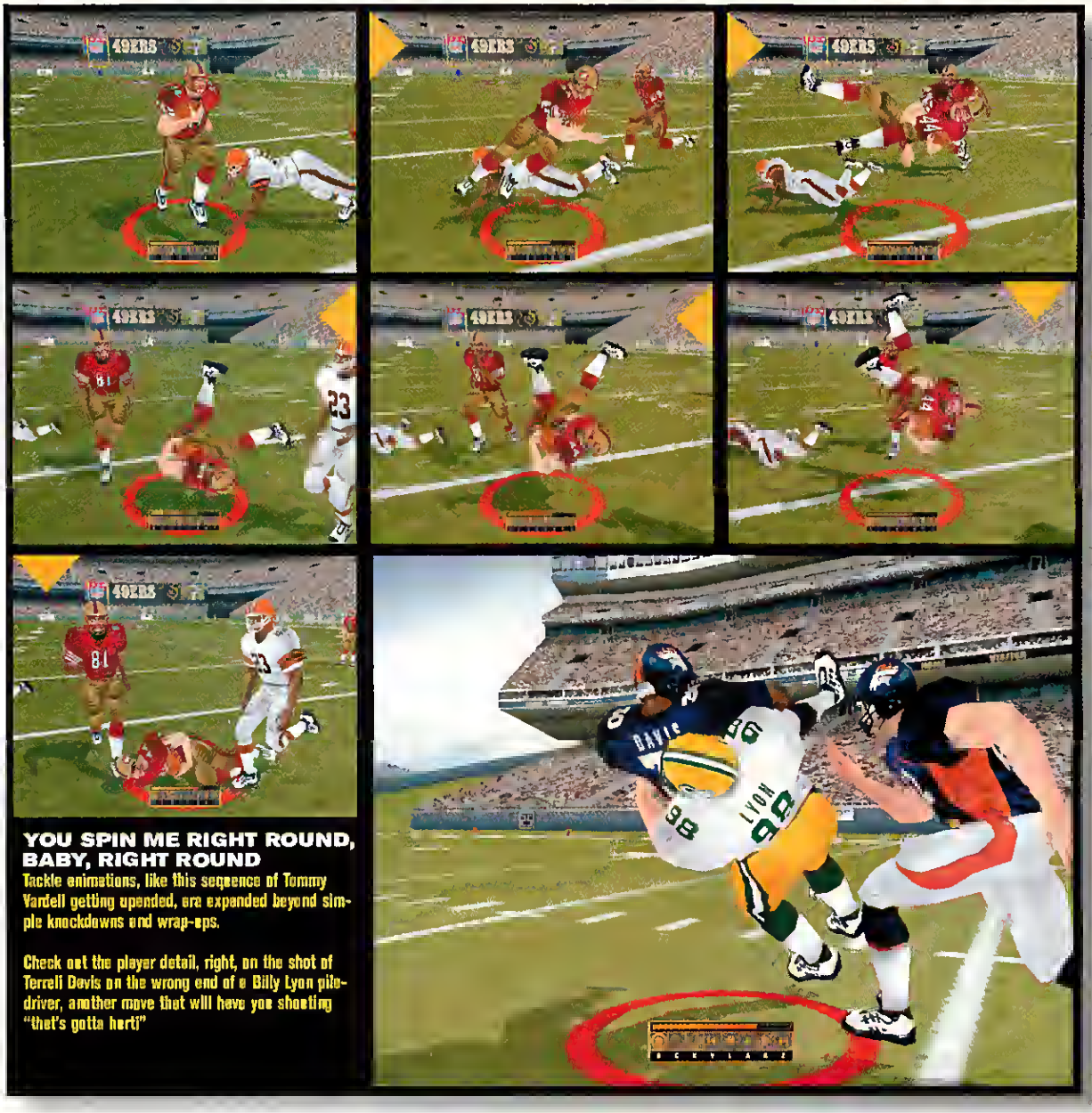

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND, BABY, RIGHT ROUND
Tackle animations, like this sequence of Tommy Vardell getting upended, are expanded beyond simple knockdowns and wrap-ups.

Check out the player detail, right, on the shot of Terrell Davis on the wrong end of a Billy Lyon pile-driver, another move that will have you shouting "that's gotta hurt!"

the puny CB slowly to the marker. Out of nowhere comes a linebacker who lays a hit on Garrison broadside, knocking him a few feet laterally, and spinning the hapless CB around on his axis. Replays of hits like that, plus guys getting upended and helicoptered around, are what you'll be showing off to your friends.

Number Trouble

NFL FEVER 2000 is hindered significantly by its lack of drafting capabilities or an ability to create custom leagues and seasons. Maybe Microsoft assumed that those features are enjoyed solely by stat nerds who prefer a screenful of numbers over a screen into the numbers. But even Red Bull-swilling arcade junkies want to see their QB's passing rating.

Microsoft clearly needs to add improved statistics, a draft feature, and customizable seasons to this already-superb football engine before they make it to Monday night prime-time.

Whatever depth the game lacks in customizing, it makes up for with a huge playbook and play editor. You'll appreciate the complexity of some of the plays deeper in the book, and you'll definitely need them when playing in All-Pro mode. But in the default rookie mode, running and passing are criminally easy. Your biggest full back can break loose for the endzone on just about any sweep play, and your air attack need only consist of sending all your wideouts on streaks. Thankfully, the AI gets much more clever and challenging as you dial up the difficulty.

If the multitude of formations and plays are too much for you to digest, or if you would rather have a pro scripting your plays, you can choose one of the options listed under "Millen's Call," a group of plays suggested by color commentary man, Matt Millen. Millen is no Madden, but the guy's been in the trenches and knows his way around the gridiron, so the plays he suggests are usually good ones. Thankfully, the developers have also kept his and Dick Stockton's in-game commentary to a minimum.

Ultimately, if you're looking for a fun, action-packed football title that's more realistic than NFL BLITZ (but with a lot of the same boo-yah factor), but less stat-oriented than FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL, NFL FEVER 2000 is your game. CGW

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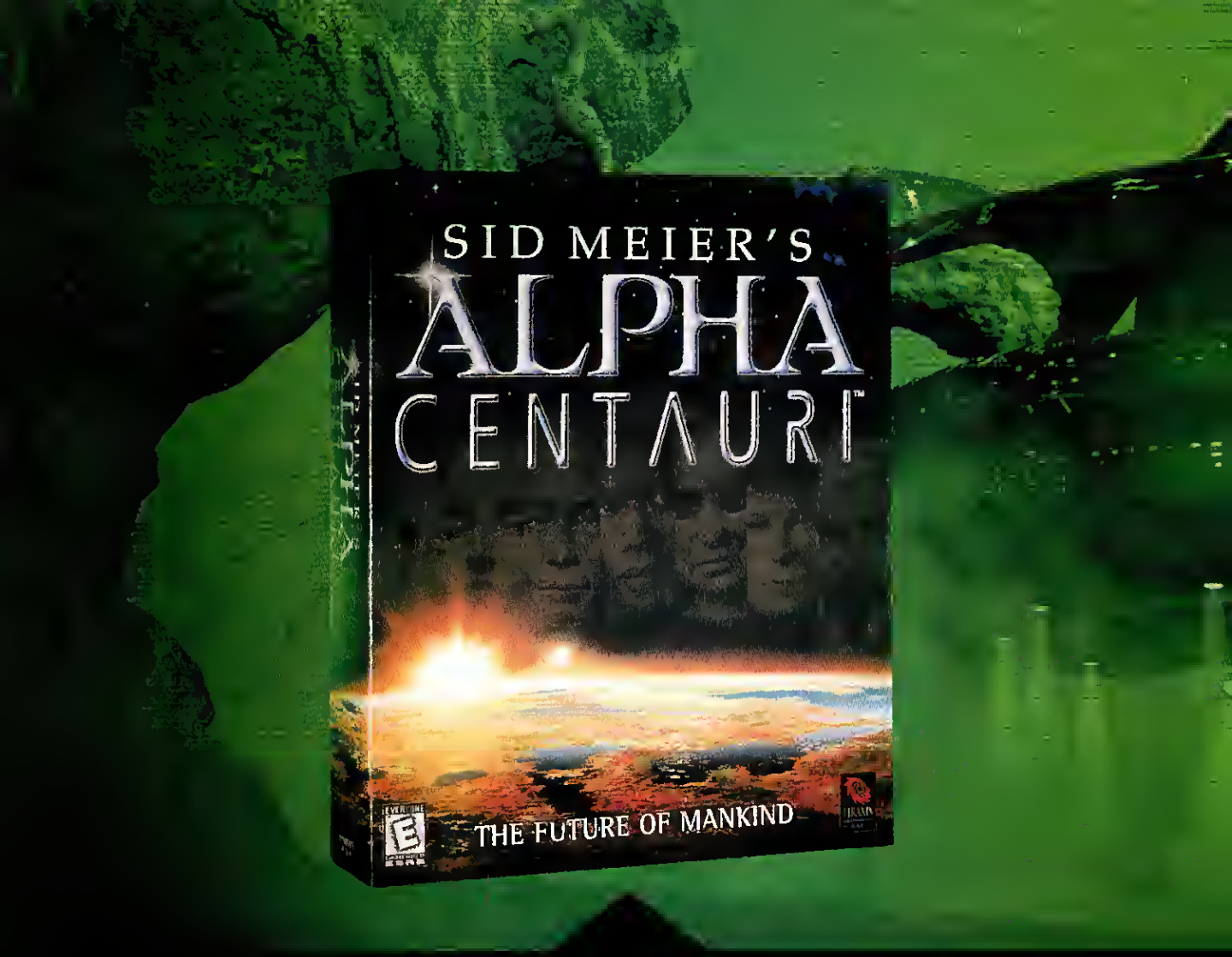

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Updated SINISTAR Is a Fast Blast From the Past That Doesn't Last

Back to the Future

The underrated 1984 sci-fi flick *The Last Starfighter* chronicled the exploits of a teenager who went from humdrum rural-American existence, to savior of the galaxy, in just a few days. All this because the kid kicked *ET* ass in a stand-up space-shooter arcade game that, as it turns out, was surreptitiously planted by our interplanetary allies as a way of locating natural-born alien killers.

Real-life video gamers never got so lucky. Yet the early 80s was a magical – and expensive – time for fans of this new breed of interactive entertainment, with hordes of quarter-suckers based on the "blast the space ship" theme. One of the most captivating machines of the era – and surely an inspiration for *The Last Starfighter* – was Williams Electronics' "SINISTAR," a game that has now been significantly revamped and re-launched as SINISTAR: UNLEASHED.

SINISTAR UNLEASHED

reviewed by Gord Goble

SINISTAR: UNLEASHED asks you and your trusty spaceship to battle aliens and halt construction of their massive "Jumpgate," a portal through which the ultimate space weapon, a Sinistar, will eventually emerge. Should the Sinistar arrive on time, prepare for a space barbecue with you as the main course. However, the longer you can hold off the completed Jumpgate, the longer the Sinistar remains in hyperspace, and the weaker it becomes.

From a first or third-person viewpoint, you command an upgradeable ship wielding weapons that include single long and multiple short-range missiles, charging photons, concussion bombs, lightning storms, mind control, and nifty drones and turrets that orbit around you and fire independently. The catch? Crystals must continually be harvested from passing asteroids to keep your weapons energized.

If you play your cards right, the Sinistar will arrive in substantially un-sinister condition and ripe for the picking, or, ideally, won't arrive at all. In this case, the jumpstation explodes in spectacular fashion and all is well. Until the next level, that is – when you're off to another quadrant of the galaxy where another bunch of spacedinks are hard at work on another seemingly identical Jumpgate for the teleportation of yet another Sinistar.

And that is the downfall of what is otherwise a frantic edge-of-the-seat ordnance and graphics bonanza. Despite the rare bonus level where you're ordered to protect a colony or other such task, the game becomes a case of "been there, done that," leaving you wondering if you can take 20 increasingly more difficult levels of defending yourself from warrior ships, attacking others, hunting asteroids, stopping enemy transports, and making near-suicidal runs at the Jumpgate to slow its completion. Before that sense of repetition kicks in, however, SINISTAR is riotous good fun.

A REAL HEAD CASE This is your worst nightmare – the ultimate Sinistar, looking mighty peeved and surrounded by a flock of his minions.

And graphically, this is not the SINISTAR of your teens. Explosions are cataclysmic, from traditional fire and brimstone to wild plasmatic light shows. Each insect-like enemy vessel is distinct in appearance and movement; the Jumpstation itself is a translucent delight; and the backdrops are surreal in their makeup, color, and shading. Overall, SINISTAR is a sleek – albeit CPU-intensive – visual *tour de force*.

Those, um, mature enough to remember the original game will be happy to know that the ultimate, final Sinistar retains his evil façade, vocabulary, and susceptibility to your nastiest weapon–the Sinibomb. If you were hooked on the game back in old days, or if you simply hunger to watch your explode in front of you, SINISTAR will deliver. Just don't expect to be playing it a month or two down the road. CGW

BURN, BABY, BURN! This ugly fellow is reduced to an insect inferno with three blasts from a short-range missile. The blue appendages around the screen are the wings of your craft, turned translucent for first-person view.

CGW RATED

PROS

Mayhem galore; stunning light shows; a commendable updating of a classic.

CONS

Lack of variety between levels; sensation of moving through space can be unconvincing; hefty system requirements.

RING AROUND THE JUMPGATE This is when things get tricky, as a Sinistar bursts forth from hyperspace. Note the game's typically gorgeous depiction of space.

Cool Links

www.videotopia.com/errata2.htm
The philosophical revelations of Sinistar – very cool
http://www.users.interport.net/~eglide/WILLIAMS/SIN.HTM
A SINISTAR addict's page
http://www.theinspiracy.com/ArPAYSIQ.htm
Behind the scenes of the original SINISTAR

Requirements: Pentium II-233MHz, Direct3D or 3dfx Glide compatible hardware accelerator card, 32MB RAM, 279MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-300MHz, AGP 3D hardware accelerator card, 64 MB RAM, 376 MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** 3D accelerator required, Direct 3D, 3dfx Glide.

Publisher: THQ • **Developer:** GameFX • **$40** • www.sinistarunleashed.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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I'm Not a Pilot, But I Play One on PC

Let's Fly!

Terminal Reality Incorporated once made a living out of crafting simulations for Microsoft. Then they "got religion" and became one with publisher G.O.D. Planning to go boldly where Microsoft and Looking Glass have gone before, TRI is hoping that FLY! won't be just another blip on the general aviation simulation radar.

FLY!
reviewed by Tim Cable

THE GREAT WIDE OPEN FLY!'s generic scenery is modeled with 2 km spacing that offers some nice mountain effects.

CLEARED TO LAND FLY!'s O'Hare airport is about the best looking anywhere—except Chicago.

Representative of the sim as a whole, the graphics in FLY! range from excellent to bland. While the focus scenery areas are extremely good, they still aren't quite the equal of the FLIGHT UNLIMITED series. Additionally, the generic scenery leaves something to be desired: The textures have harsh transitions; roads are nothing more than gray lines crossing the landscape; and

MIRAGE Although spreading the map out on the windshield is not a good idea in real life, the "mirage map" is a nice feature in the game.

the rivers are a joke. Although the coverage is indeed worldwide, this basic scenery seems to be more of an afterthought. Even MS FLIGHT SIM98's generic scenery – especially the coastline – is far superior.

The aircraft themselves, however, are some of the most accurate ever depicted, with an exceptional level of detail, ranging from the external models to the out-the-window and panel views.

The atmospheric effects in FLY! are simply the best. The clouds are wispy and breathtaking. Falling rain and thunderstorms all look stunning and very realistic. FLY! does not model raindrops on the windows like FLIGHT UNLIMITED 2, but it does go the extra mile by modeling the glow of light pollution found at night over populated areas, a subtle and welcome effect.

The flight model is comparable to FLIGHT UNLIMITED 2's, with realistic fluidity and feelings of inertia. In fact, FLY! has the most precisely modeled Cessna 172 found in a flight sim today, making this the first sim ever to cry out for a yoke over a joystick. All of the planes seem to handle just right, with a heavier control feel on the faster and weightier aircraft. Unfortunately, FLY! enforces its namesake and doesn't allow for any crashes. Land a wee bit hard and your aircraft systems suddenly shut down, leaving you to wonder what you've done wrong.

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME Downtown Chicago with the Sears tower in the background. Do try to keep from wrapping yourself around it.

The gameplay in FLY! is the typical stuff of civilian flight sims, in that its canned adventures are rooted more in the real world than in whimsical flights of fantasy. In fact, although general aviation sims are never intended for the twitch crowd, FLY! may model just a little *too much* reality. Few concessions were made for greater ease of use. A single key start sequence and clickable maps to tune radios made it in, but that's about it. Even those who are fond of extreme realism in their flight sims could probably do without having to scroll through the instrument panels (stunning as they are), flipping every switch.

It's obvious FLY! was released way too early. Although technically excellent, the sim ultimately amounts to a lifeless experience.

To their credit, TRI has been very aggressive with post-release patches and additional documentation, but FLY! will probably frustrate more than please until all of the promised features and bug fixes are in place. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Quality instrument panels; clouds and focus scenery; excellent flight modeling.

CONS
Poor documentation, generic scenery; bugs and missing features.

Cool Links

www.avsim.com
The unofficial FLY! forum is here, with frequent visits by the design team.

www.landings.com
A real world aviation site – lots of information.

www.avweb.com
A real world aviation webzine – lots of good reading, and gadgets galore!

Requirements: Pentium-200MMX (or equivalent), 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM, 3D-accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 400, Windows 98, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive space, 24X CD-ROM, 3D card that supports 32-bit color. **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** Internet

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** Terminal Reality • **$55** • **www.ilfytri.com** **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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Microsoft Jumps Into the Hoops Game in Grand Fashion

Billy Ball

NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2000

reviewed by Eric Jones

The ding on the Los Angeles Lakers is that they all stand around waiting for whomever has the ball to take a shot. Well, PC basketball is Lakers basketball. In good basketball, players work together as a team. Computer basketball fails miserably to mimic this concept. Here, every time someone gets the ball, you look to score first, and then – if you're feeling particularly imaginative – you pass the ball.

Right about now you might expect me to say that Microsoft's NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2000 breaks the mold, gets it right, zigs where every other game zags. No: The flaws within digital basketball still exist here. But DRIVE does go a step further than any other hoops game on the market, including EA Sports' NBA LIVE 2000.

We should get one thing straight. If you like run-and-gun, NBA JAM-style play, or NBA LIVE's emphasis on dribble drives and slam dunks, Microsoft's surprisingly good first attempt at basketball might not be your bag. Their take on roundball aims for the knowledgeable fan who is willing to sacrifice a little soul for the sake of gameplay.

Do You Know How to Pass?

Microsoft has made a solid jump in correcting several flaws in digital b-ball. For one, you have to pass the rock to win over the course of an 82-game season. Even though scores have plummeted in the real-life NBA, winning teams successfully find the open man and get the ball to them. INSIDE DRIVE replicates this aspect of the game better than any other game on the market.

Defense, however, is another matter. Time and time again I saw the computer shoot exceptionally well, rarely ever dipping below 50% in a game (the one exception was when the AI controlled the Knickerbockers – could be a rough year for Spike Lee). Too often, I got frustrated by playing solid defense for 23 seconds, only to watch the AI pop in a 26-foot three-pointer at the buzzer. Like most other PC hoops titles, rebounding is much harder than it should be. No matter where I was or who I controlled, the computer seemed to beat me to loose carom more often than not.

On the plus side, the computer plays excellent one-on-one defense, which keeps games tight, and forces you to pass the ball. It's not productive to simply take the ball and drive on the basket.

GO KOBE Relying on stars like Kobe Bryant will get you to the hoop, but you won't win unless you pass, too.

Although it lacks NBA LIVE'S one-on-one mode and the presence of Michael Jordan, INSIDE DRIVE boasts options galore, starting with the play modes. In addition to the single game, season play, and playoffs, you can get your team on the court for practice mode. Outside on an outdoor schoolyard court, you can work on your game in private. And it actually works – you can figure out how to run your plays to perfection here.

During a contest, you can select from a number of options that are now standard in PC basketball. Choose your offensive strategy, including game tempo. Tailor the playbook to your liking, picking from authentic NBA sets. Defensively, customize your matchups to shut down the computer. Call plays on the fly – the pick and roll while John Stockton is bringing the ball up the court, the Iso for Shaq down on the low post.

TAKEN FOR GRANTED Grant Hill swoops in for the kill. The graphics in INSIDE DRIVE are decent, but lack the sizzle of EA Sports' NBA LIVE.

Star Power

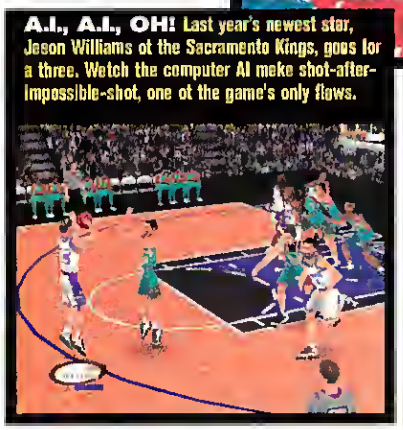
As in the NBA, the stars really stand out in this game. The players reflect their real-life counterparts, which means Shaq is hands down better than Greg Ostertag (sorry Utah fans, truth hurts). Allen Iverson is lightning quick, and Kobe Bryant can score from anywhere. This can present problems, however. In most games, it is easy to rely entirely on the stars and the stars alone to win ball games. Not so in DRIVE. After losing to the computer on Easy mode several times, I realized that this is closer to a true team game. In order to win, you have to share the rock. Like I said before, though, if you favor run-n-gun games, you probably won't find that here.

In the final analysis, INSIDE DRIVE's graphics aren't as slick or as sharp as EA Sports' NBA LIVE 2000, and the game lacks some of the heart and soul of its primary competitor. But the gameplay is more akin to real basketball than anything that has come before. Not bad for a rookie. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Great graphics; realistic gameplay with tons of options; practice mode; solid strategies.

CONS
Generic crowd noise and graphics; difficult rebounding; computer shoots a higher-than-average percentage.



A.I., A.I., OH! Last year's newest star, Jason Williams of the Sacramento Kings, goes for a three. Watch the computer AI make shot-after-impossible-shot, one of the game's only flaws.

Requirements: Pentium-166, 32MB RAM, 90MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-266, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** High Voltage Software Inc. • **$20** • **www.microsoft.com/sports/insidedrive2000/**
ESRB Rating: Everyone

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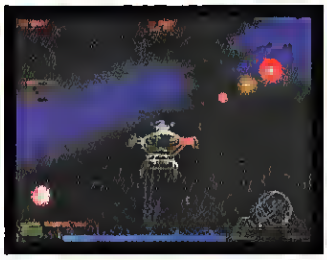
QUICK HITS

INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE

Warning: This game just may ruin you for other space sims. If you haven't played IWAR yet, you've missed a game that features the best modeling of flight in a vacuum that we've ever seen. The missions have more twists and turns than a bag of snakes, and the combat is just outstanding. For those of you who've played the original—the DELUXE edition features an entirely new campaign from the Indie perspective. It's easily as good as the first, with more of everything you loved before. This time, however, you're low on resources and vastly outnumbered by the Navy. I wish that there were a module for putting a custom paint-job on your ship, but that's being nitpicky. The original campaign is included, making this a must-have for anyone who never purchased the original. Remember folks – this was last year's Space Sim Of The Year, and for good reason. The down side is that the next time you're locked in a turning fight with an enemy in space, you'll be begging for INDEPENDENCE WAR's physics model. If you like space sims, you've got to check out INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE. *–Greg Fortune*

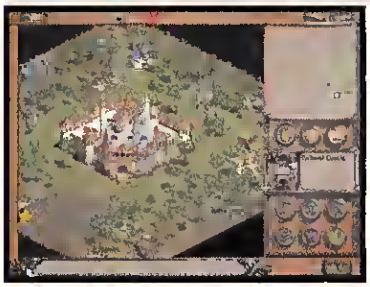


★★★★★

Genre: Space Simulation • **Publisher:** Infogrames • **Developer:** Particle Systems • $30 • www.infogrames.com

DISCIPLES: SACRED LANDS

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** GT Interactive **Developer:** Strategy First • www.strategy-first.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence and blood.



I've played more HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC than your granny can shake a stick at. I even enjoy the clones and knockoffs, if they're halfway decent. But "halfway decent" is a few notches higher than I can rate DISCIPLES: SACRED LANDS.

★★½☆☆☆

First, if you're going to clone something, you want to clone the latest game in the series. But DISCIPLES is even cruder than HEROES I. Gameplay is a shameless ripoff. You advance your fantasy-medieval units around a map, collecting resources, battling enemies, and building up your castle. Sound familiar? Combat is a joke. Units can't move. To attack, you click on a unit's portrait, and then on an enemy's portrait. The move is animated – poorly – on screen. The graphics, murky and low-res, give the game a woeful shareware-type feel throughout.

Heck, even if they were giving this game away, I'd still pass. It's 1999, fellas. Time to stop making 1989 games. *–Jeff Green*

SKYDIVE

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Gonzo Games • $20 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

On the surface, a skydiving simulator seems pretty much like a hit-or-miss kind of thing. Either you make it to the ground alive after jumping out of a plane into an intense free-fall, or your parachute fails to open and you die. So why would a computer game seek to emulate an experience that derives its thrills mostly from sheer visceral experience? Good question. SKYDIVE allows you to plunge toward the earth in three different mini-games: a skydiving slalom, an accuracy test, and a freestyle mode where you accumulate points for making special mid-air maneuvers.

★★☆☆☆

Problem is, the game's graphics are average and the controls are overly simple. Making matters worse, when you cannonball into the ground – which is, in some demented circles, the most entertaining aspect of the game – there are no consequences. SKYDIVE should have been made into a Java game on EA's Web site. *–George Jones*

CORSAIRS

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Ubisoft • **Developer:** Microids • $40 • www.microids.com • **ESRB Rating:** None

Fans of the classic PIRATES! who have been waiting for a worthy update won't find it in CORSAIRS, a privateer-themed strategy game from French developer Microids. It's too bad, because the concept of the game has a lot of potential, and graphically the game is very nice; but idiotic AI, shallow gameplay, and a frustrating interface conspire to sink this galleon before it leaves the harbor.

★★☆☆☆

The oversimplified battle scenes are one of the biggest letdowns. Fighting gameplay, in both ship-to-ship mode and hand-to-hand boarding sequences, consists mainly of clicking on the people you want to attack. Back in port, the clunky interface will foil any attempt to conduct necessary trading and ship upgrades in time to avoid having your ships captured by enemy raiders. CORSAIRS could have been a great new title in the largely untapped pirate genre, but there are too many holes in the hull to keep this game afloat. *–Tom Price*

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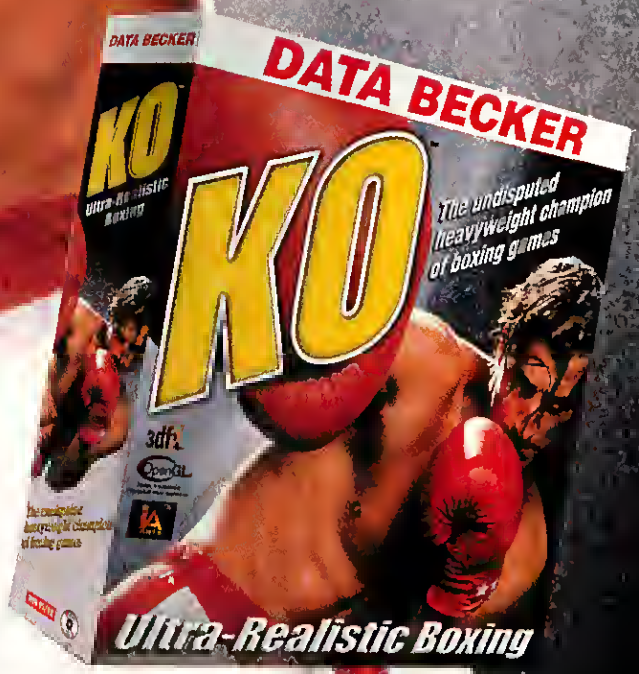

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RATING PENDING RP ESRB

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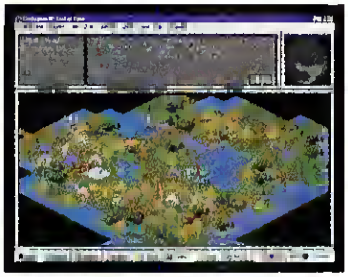
CIVILIZATION II: TEST OF TIME

One's initial impression of CIVILIZATON II: TEST OF TIME is that it's merely CIVILIZATION II combined with all of the expansion products published over the last couple of years.



Wrong! TEST OF TIME does incorporate all of the expansions, but it also features a new wrinkle in gameplay. Now, you don't simply worry about the surface area of the globe, but also about undersea civilizations, underground civilizations, and celestial civilizations as well. Now, you not only add elements of magic and the far-future technologies that many believe are tantamount to "future magic," but you have the capacity to teleport and move both vertically and horizontally between venues and vistas. The new technology trees are sophisticated enough to warrant a new poster for each style of game (fantasy, original and extended, and science-fiction), and either the artificial opponents are smarter than in previous versions, or I've grown dumber. TEST OF TIME features humor, challenge, and variety. The only thing missing would be improved graphics – you still feel like you're playing an older game, even though the gameplay is much improved. – *Jasper Sylvester*

★★★★☆

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Microprose • $50 • www.microprose.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

MOB RULE

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Simon & Schuster • Developer: Studio 3 • $30 • www.simonsays.com

The interesting part about an organized crime simulation is the crime. So what is one to make of this odd British import which casts you as a gangster, but has you spend most of your time erecting and repairing buildings, responding to tenant complaints, and overseeing construction workers?

★★☆☆☆

Sure, you also get to bribe the cops– and when opposing families try to muscle in, you get to whack some people– but the game is too little Martin Scorcese and too much Bob Vila. It's far less ponderous and complicated than Eidos' recent GANGSTERS, but that's not saying much. –*Charles Ardai*

TIGER WOODS GOLF [PALM PILOT]

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: EA Sports • $30 • www.easports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

After extensive testing on subways, buses, and staff meetings, it is very clear to us that the Palm Pilot's strength is not in its organization of phone numbers, or even in the writing of memos to oneself. No, it's strength is old school, black-and-white, Gameboy-style gaming. We've played Tetris clones, Donkey Junior, Gin Rummy, and even Space Invaders rip-offs. But we couldn't get a sporting fix until we received TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR GOLF from EA Sports. The graphics aren't pretty, the tri-click interface moves a little slowly, and the putting is more difficult than it should be. But Palm owners will appreciate the quick draw times and the speedy mode of play, in which you can play 18 holes over a 30 minute bus ride. The game, solo or with real-life AI golfers, even comes with three courses. At $30, TIGER is a little pricey, but if you spend some time commuting – or thinking about golf while you're trapped in another two-hour meeting – you'll appreciate the simple beauty of this golf title. –*George Jones*

★★★★☆

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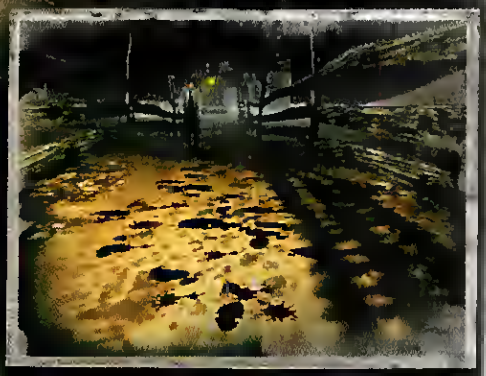
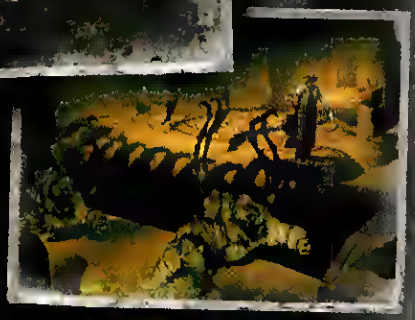
"...the ghouls overwhelmed the hero, clubbing him with their own severed limbs before feasting on his guts. And that was right about the time we knew we couldn't wait to play Nocturne. This game will be causing some hellacious nightmares later this year."

- Computer Gaming World

"It is unforgettable, astonishing, and teeming with riveting visual realism. Yet behind the rich lighting and gossamer fog is a timeless sense of adventure. This is gaming at its best."

- Adrenaline Vault





It is 1933, and in the shadowed world around you there exists an ungodly evil: werewolves, vampires, ghouls and flesh-eating zombies that wait just outside the light's unlocked door to feed upon innocence. There also exist guardians of the good and just, tireless vigilantes capable of tracking down this evil and turning it upon itself. You are one of them. And you hunt, as your vile quarry does, by night.

NOCTURNE

In the womb of darkness, a new genre of game is born.

UNLEASHED HALLOWEEN 1999

created by

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GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS

WARNING!
This game contains strong scenes
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Suitable for mature audiences only.

Hideous monstrosities are all around us.
But they come out only when the sun is spent.
They are like roaches. Where there is
one, there are hundreds. Beneath you, in
your walls, in the shadows, waiting for
darkness to open their door. And like
roaches, they are survivors. Nuclear holocaust,
ice ages, drought, famine, the Spookhouse
will not wipe them out.

Aren't you going to ride it? (After all, you built it.)

RATING PENDING RP

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10 TOP-OF-THE-LINE GAMING SYSTEMS REVIEWED

In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine (part one)

by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

Fierce Competition Among Hardware Makers Means Great Gaming Machines Are More Affordable Than Ever

It's been one hell of a year for computing hardware. We've seen shake ups in both the CPU and graphics card arenas, as both the perennial performance champs, Intel and 3dfx, have been overtaken by upstart competitors. And hardware prices have continued to drop like the fall guy in a Don King boxing match. So, if you're ready for a gaming system upgrade, it's a good time to go shopping.

To assist you in your shopping adventure, we've rounded up a pack of top-of-the-line complete gaming systems and put them through their paces. We've divided these systems into two categories: "Burn, Baby, Burn," where price is not a consideration, and "Bang for the Buck," where value for dollar is key. It's interesting that this year the line of demarcation between the two categories began to blur. We saw a couple of systems priced below $2,000 that turned in very respectable performances, and we also saw a lot less exotic hardware than in years past. Gone are twin SLI Voodoo2 cards eating two PCI slots. Hell, there wasn't a Voodoo2 board to be found in any of the systems we tested – a testimony to the fading importance of having Glide support.

And our earlier findings about AMD's Athlon outgunning Intel's Pentium III were confirmed with the three top performers this year all using Athlon. Intel's Pentium-III shouldn't be discounted, however, as it made several very respectable showings.

Another interesting finding was that the gap between the winners and the rest of the pack narrowed considerably. This was due in large part to the big system makers getting their 3D graphics card acts together, and making sure that they can make 3D games – not just the word processors and spreadsheets – go fast.

There's a lot to cover, so strap yourself in—and let's have at it.

Systems photographed by **Michael Falconer**

Burn, Baby, Burn!

Performance at All Costs

For this section of this roundup, we're looking for the best there is in gaming rigs, irrespective of price. This, obviously, can lead to some pretty ridiculous price tags, but we're looking for a Testarosa, not an Escort. For some gamers, these systems will fill the bill nicely. For others, it's more a chance to see just how fast these things can go.

Intel's hold on the high ground of PC gaming has been broken. AMD marshaled its forces and pushed Intel off the peak of performance leadership, and even allies like the new GeForce 256 3D accelerator didn't help. This year, we found ourselves in a bit of a dilemma: On the one hand, Falcon Northwest once again kicked ass and took names, but then there was Dell with their Dimension XPS B600, just four points off Falcon in 3D GameGauge, and $1,500 cheaper. In some sense, we're breaking our own rules here, since we normally don't factor price into our final decision in the "Burn, Baby, Burn" category. But given a price difference this big, we just couldn't overlook it. So we're declaring a tie, but each system gets the nod for a different reason. Falcon is in the winner's circle yet again for simply being the fastest system in the roundup that ran nearly hiccup-free. Their attention to detail and choice components make this latest iteration of the Mach V yet another in a series of impressive gaming boxes from this crew of Oregonians. Dell, on the other hand, delivers a solid box with a lot of performance, but for considerably less money than the Falcon. True, Falcon has better components in several instances, including speakers, case, and mouse, but Dell nonetheless delivers very solidly.

Another system of note was Sys Technology's Cold Fusion, which married an active refrigeration unit with an Athlon running at 800MHz. However, Cold Fusion's performance was marred by sub-par performance of the Diamond Viper 770 Ultra's stock Diamond drivers. Gateway, Compaq, and Micron also nipped at the leaders' heels, and even the slowest of the big rigs were no laggards by any means.

BURN, BABY, BURN CO-WINNER

Dell Dimension XPS 600B

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

When it comes to making a solid – if somewhat generic – machine, Dell has the routine down pat. Their latest Dimension B series continues that trend, offering Intel's new Pentium-III 600MHz B CPU. The B designation means this CPU has a 133MHz front-side-bus (the connection between the CPU and the North bridge), though it lacks an integrated Level 2 cache. Dell's entry was unique in being the only rig in the roundup to use Intel's new 820 chipset. Other components include a Creative Labs graphics card powered by nVidia's GeForce 256 chipset, as well as Creative's Sound Blaster Live Value. Another interesting footnote: Dell's box was the only one to arrive with DirectX 7 on it (the rest have DX 6.1a, which is part of Windows 98SE).

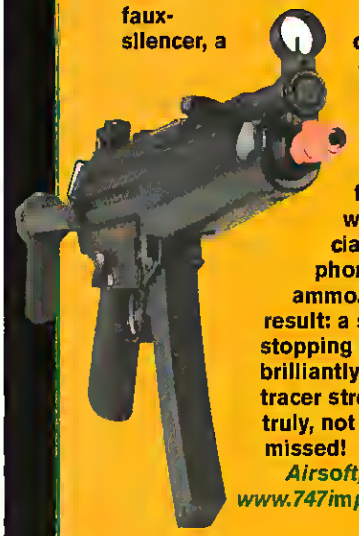
As for performance, Dell presents an interesting case. They offer somewhat unbalanced performance that favors games over traditional benchmarks. On ZD benchmarks, with the exception of WinBench 99's Disk WinMark and 3D WinBench 99's 3D WinMark, Dell's scores are all below the group average. However, on 3D

GADGETS FOR GAMERS

Airsoft MP5-A5

Is it real or is it Parkay? This battery-powered, full-scale MP5-A5 airsoft model faithfully reproduces nearly every detail of the real submachine gun used by SWAT and special forces teams. The folding stock extends and retracts. The sights adjust. The magazine detaches. The selector switch lets you toggle between semi- or full-auto: Pull the trigger in full auto mode, and this baby spews out 800 rounds of 6mm plastic pellets per minute until the magazine runs dry. To keep the party going, slap in a fresh 50-round mag. Or to rock'n'roll Hollywood-style, use high-capacity mags that hold 200 rounds each – plenty for chewing big gaping holes through lots of bull's eyes.

Among the must-have accessories is the faux-silencer, a cleverly disguised tracer unit ($145) designed for use with special phosphorescent ammo. The result: a show-stopping stream of brilliantly glowing tracer streaks – truly, not to be missed!



Airsoft, $395, www.747imports.com.

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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

HOW WE TESTED

Every year at this time, the dynamic duo of Loyd and Dave have to bid farewell to loved ones and embark on the yearly quest that takes us down to ZD Labs, the mother of all testing labs, for two weeks of testing, testing, and more testing. While locked away in this Tech Mecca, we put these systems through a series of brutal tests that look at all sub-systems' performance, and especially at how well they run games. We're looking to ferret out weakness; to find bugs, glitches, or any shortcoming that might keep a gamer between them and the thing they love most.

We start with ZD's benchmarks, including WinBench 99 (2D graphics, hard-drive, CPU), 3D WinBench 99 1.2 (3D graphics), CD WinBench (CD-ROM), and finally Audio WinBench to look at CPU usage by the sound card while playing WAV files. Next we bring in the big guns, which are the nine 3D games we use (seven Direct3D, two OpenGL) that comprise 3D GameGauge 2.0, whose final score is an average of the nine demos. The Direct3D games are: EXPENDABLE, MADDEN 99, UNREAL, DESCENT 3, POWERSLIDE, and JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS. The OpenGL titles are HALF-LIFE and QUAKE II. We run 3D GameGauge tests at 1024x768x16-bit with v-sync turned off to "let the ponies run;" that is, to give the most accurate performance picture possible. And finally, as this year's fill-rate torture test, we used QUAKE 3 TEST v. 1.08. We ran the game at 1024x768x32-bit with all the rendering goodies (vertex lighting, trilinear filtering, flare effects) turned on.

We also looked at case accessibility, and other bells and whistles that can add to the gaming experience, to round out the system's overall rating. And of course – mainly because we like annoying everyone at ZD Labs – we put the bundled speakers through our RFL (really frickin' loud) test to see how they handle game audio. — *Dave Salvator*

The Reviewers (Faces You Can Trust)

Dave Salvator

Loyd Casa

Dell Dimension XPS 600B (continued)

GameGauge this Dimension shines, essentially tying Sys' Cold Fusion box for second place. Interestingly, Dell's use of the 820 chipset and RDRAM only bought them two points on 3D GameGauge, versus the Gateway high-end system (the systems are otherwise nearly identical).

Other notables include Dell's choice of Harmon/Kardon's HK-595 Sound Stick speakers. Curious-looking things, the 595s sound pretty good overall, and develop decent, though not ear-shattering volume. But at louder volume levels, it became evident that the magnetic shielding on the satellites wasn't enough to prevent magnetic interference with the 19" Dell Trinitron display. So if you're considering Dell, you'll want to steer clear of the Sound Sticks until they revisit this magnetic-shielding problem.

All told, Dell has put together yet another very competent, albeit boringly beige, box that – thanks to good component choices – makes high-end games run very fast.

www.dell.com • Price: $3,300 as tested

BURN, BABY, BURN CD WINNER ★★★★½

Falcon Northwest Mach V

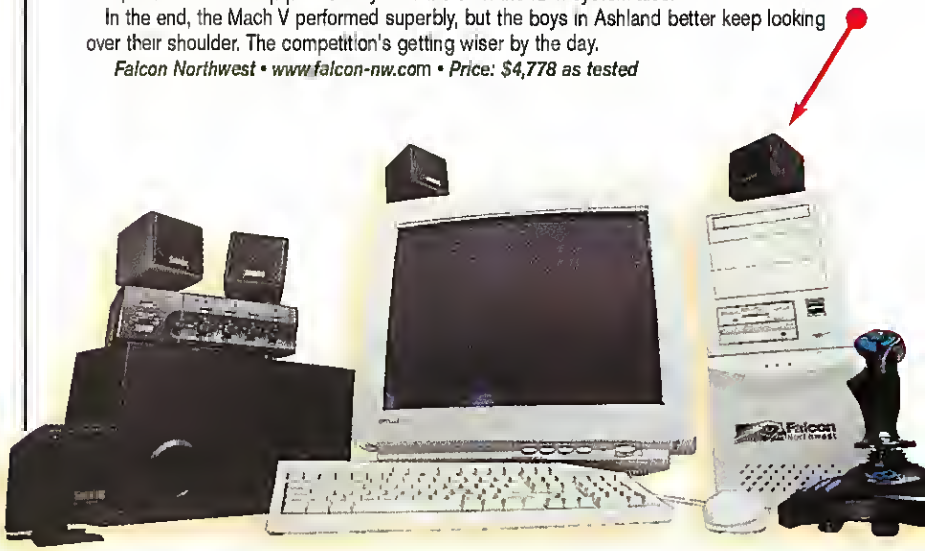
Falcon Northwest once again leads the pack, though the pack is baying at their backs. The Mach V demonstrates that a judicious combination of well-tuned components can outpace other systems that may be stronger in individual areas. This year's Mach V marries a 700MHz Athlon with their Xentor 32 Special Edition TNT2 Ultra card, to beat the Sys box by an average of four frames-per-second on 3D GameGauge 2.0. The Sys Technology Cold Fusion boasted a faster processor, but its Diamond Viper 770 Ultra couldn't stand the heat. The Gateway came stock with an Nvidia GeForce 256 card, which pumped out one of the highest QUAKE 3 scores, but the overall 3D GameGauge average suffered, because the 600MHz Pentium III couldn't cope.

The rest of the Mach V's components were a curiously conservative choice. We would have preferred the Optiquest V115T (which has an aperture grill tube) over the more sedate V115. A natural flat monitor like the Mitsubishi 2020u would have been better still. Falcon's choice of the Creative DTTS-2500 speakers is great for gamers, since it can do both four-channel DirectSound 3D imaging, as well as 5.1 Dolby Digital imaging for DVD movies – but it couldn't match the audio quality of the THX-certified Klipsch speakers that came with the Compaq.

We did run into a couple of crashes with the 3D GameGauge tests, but all–save one–were resolved by removing EMM386 from the Mach V's CONFIG.SYS file – something needed only for certain DOS games anyway. Also, the MADDEN 99 test seemed quite sensitive to heat, and would lock up periodically – as it did on the IBM system also.

In the end, the Mach V performed superbly, but the boys in Ashland better keep looking over their shoulder. The competition's getting wiser by the day.

Falcon Northwest • www.falcon-nw.com • Price: $4,778 as tested



BURN, BABY, BURN ★★★★

Compaq Presario 5815

Compaq likes engineering. No, strike that, Compaq REALLY likes engineering, sometimes to a fault. Past systems saw configurations that were obviously put together by engineers who sort of forgot to have their case designs reality-checked for usability. Their notorious inverse mezzanine card for I/O slots will live in infamy as one of the great knuckle-busters of our time. But Compaq must have heard the complaints levied by users and analysts alike, because their latest box continues an encouraging trend of using good commodity components, and putting them into an accessible box.

Compaq was the only entrant this year to include a digital flat panel (DFP) display, which was unfortunately only 15" (viewable screen about equivalent to a 17" CRT monitor). The only problem with this choice is that the DFP uses the now-proprietary PanelLink connector, which means you're essentially married to the graphics card that comes with the system – thankfully based on the TNT2 Ultra chip. Future DFPs will use the DVI (digital video interface) connector, which is different from the PanelLink pin-out.

Compaq also gets credit for being the only system with USB ports where they belong: on the front panel of the CPU; and it's the only system with FireWire (which goes under Sony's name i-Link). The only problem here is that Compaq put them low on the front panel, and given that the case is a tower form-factor, it's most likely going to live on the floor, making these ports not as accessible as they could be.

Compaq also has what are without a doubt the best sounding speakers in the roundup in Klipsch's four-channel ProMedia v.2-400s. These babies carry THX certification, pack a 400-watt power amp (that's right, 400 frickin' watts), and put out some serious sound. Another plus: This Presario also has a CD-RW drive.

As for performance, Compaq fared quite well, owing to their choice of an Athlon 700MHz CPU and TNT2 Ultra graphics. Their 3D GameGauge score of 59.6 tied them for the bronze medal with Gateway's high-end entry. Their 3D WinBench score is deceptively low, because their DFP's maximum refresh rate at 1024x768 was only 60Hz, and many of the tests "pegged;" that is, ran at exactly 60Hz, because the system was held back by the DFP.

Still, all told, Compaq has put together a solid system. Good components, an accessible case, and solid performance make this box worth looking at.

www.compaq.com • Price: $3,684

BURN, BABY, BURN ★★★★

Gateway Performance 600

Like the Dell and Micron systems, the Gateway big rig arrived with a GeForce 256. This system posted the single highest score in QUAKE 3 v1.08, in full 32-bit glory at 1024x768. Now, QUAKE 3 doesn't generate enough triangles to make the GeForce's transform acceleration do much more than hiccup; but that, coupled with the quad pixel engines, clearly demonstrates that nVidia's new baby will be a force to be reckoned with. The drivers were still a bit rough, and performance can only get better.

There's a lot to like about the Gateway, from the thumbscrew entry to the case to the Boston Acoustics Media Theater digital speakers. These speakers take a direct digital signal from the customized Sound Blaster Live and handle the analog conversion in the amplifier. The Gateway performed the best among the Pentium III systems, posting very solid scores all around.

The system even arrived with a couple of decent game controllers and a home phone-line networking card installed. About the only downside was the 3Com Winmodem. The big boys still send crappy modems with their systems–you can't play online games with a Winmodem. Unlike the Dell or Micron, the Geteways shipped with the venerable 440BX chipset, which more than held its own.

Gateway • www.gateway.com • Price: $2,979

36-24-36

In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

WHAT'S IN THE BOX???

	Compaq Presario 5851	Dell Dimension XPS B600
	★★★★★	★★★★★
Price	$3,684	$3,300
CPU	Athlon 700	Pentium-III 600MHz B
RAM (type/amount)	256MB SDRAM	128MB RDRAM
Chipset	Via VT82C686A	Intel 820
BIOS	Compaq	Phoenix
Motherboard	Compaq SPS BD 1394	Intel OEM
Graphics Card	Compaq OEM TNT2 Ultra	GeForce 256
Graphics Clocks (Chip/Mem)	150/150	120/166
Monitor	Compaq FP720 DFP (15")	Dell P990 (19")
DVD Card	none	none
Disk Controller	onboard EIDE	onboard EIDE (UltraATA/66)
Hard Drive	IBM DeskStar 34GXP 13GB	IBM DeskStar 27GB
DVD-ROM Drive	Compaq GD-5000	Hitachi GD-5000
Removable Media	LG CD-RW 5042B	Sony CD-RW CRX100E
Sound Card	SB Live Value	SB Live Value
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400	Harmon/Kardon HK 595
Secondary Audio	none	none
Case	Compaq	Dell
Power Supply	250 watt	230 watt
Networking	none	none
Modem/Connectivity	Conexant HCF V.90 56K	USR Winmodem
Game Controllers	none	none
DirectX Version	6.1a	6.1a
Win98 Version	Win98SE	Win98SE
Mouse	Compaq	Microsoft Wheel
Keyboard	Compaq	Dell generic 101

	Gateway Performance 500	Hypersonic Silver Bullet SE
	★★★★★	★★★★½
Price	$1,969	$1,999
CPU	Pentium-III 500	Pentium-III 600
RAM (type/amount)	128MB	128MB
Chipset	440BX	440BX
BIOS	Phoenix	Award
Motherboard	Intel OEM	Abit BE6
Graphics Card	Creative Labs GeForce-256	3dfx Voodoo3/3500 clocked to 195MHz(also Guillemot TNT2 Ultra)
Graphics Clocks (Chip/Mem)	120/166	195/195
Monitor	Gateway VX900 19"	Mag DX700T 17"
DVD Card	none	none
Disk Controller	Promise UltraATA/66 EIDE	Abit onboard UDMA 66
Hard Drive	IBM DeskStar 34GXP 13GB	IBM Deskstar 22GXP 15GB
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba SD-M1212	Samsung SC-1486 CD-ROM
Removable Media	none	Zip 100
Sound Card	SB Live Value	Creative SB Live Value
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA 735	Cambridge Four-Point Surround
Secondary Audio	none	none
Case	Gateway	generic ATX
Power Supply	200 watt	250 watt
Networking	none	none
Modem/Connectivity	3Com WinModem	3com V.90 ISA
Game Controllers	none	none
DirectX Version	6.1a	6.1a
Win98 Version	Win98SE	Win98SE
Mouse	Microsoft Wheel	Logitech MouseMan+ USB
Keyboard	Gateway	Logitech NewTouch

Red Denotes Editors' Choice

Falcon NW Mach V	FuturePower	Gateway Performance 600
$4,778	$1,700	$2,779
AMD Athlon 700	Pentium-III 550MHz	Pentium-III 600
256MB	128MB SDRAM	128MB
AMD 751	440BX	440BX
Award	Award	Phoenix
ASUS K7M	Abit BH6	Intel OEM
Falcon Guillemot Xentor 32 SE	Diamond Stealth III S540 (Savage4)	Creative Labs GeForce-256
180/225	125/125	120/168
Optiquest V115 21"	19"	Gateway VX1110 21"
RealMagic Hollywood Plus	none	none
onboard EIDE (UltraATA/66)	onboard EIDE	Promise UltraATA/66 EIDE
Western Digital Expert 27GB	Western Digital Expert 19GB	Quantum Fireball KX 27GB
Toshiba SD M1212	Toshiba SD M1212	Toshiba SD-M1212
Zip 250	none	none
Diamond MonsterSound MX300	SB 64PCI (Ensoniq)	SB Live Value
Cambridge DTTS 2500	none included	Boston Acoustics Dig. Media Theatre
none	NewQ Gold Console (front-panel)	none
Falcon ATX	generic ATX	Gateway
300 watt	235 watt	200 watt
3com EtherLink XL (10/100)	none	HPNA PCI NIC
none	USR 56K WinModem (PCI)	3Com WinModem
Thrustmaster Reflex USB 3D	none	MS Sidewinder (USB)[1]
6.1a	6.1a	6.1a
Win98SE	Win98SE	Win98SE
Microsoft IntelliPoint LED	Microsoft Wheel	Gateway custom w/wheel
Microsoft Natural Elite	Future Power w/extra controls	Gateway w/extra buttons

IBM Aptiva S Series 865	Micron Millennia Max 600/133	Sys Cold Fusion
$2,688	$2,841	$4,299
AMD Athlon 650	Pentium-III 600	Athlon 800 (overclocked to 850MHz)
128MB SDRAM	128MB PC133 SDRAM	128MB
AMD 751	Via KX133	AMD 751
AMI	Award	Award
IBM OEM	Tyan S1854	MSI 6167
ELZA Erazor II (TNT2)	Creative GeForce 256	Viper 770 (TNT2 Ultra)
150/183	120/168	150/183
IBM G98 19" CRT	Hitachi 21"	KDS VS 195 19"
none	none	Creative Labs DXR3
onboard EIDE	Ultra ATA/66 onboard	Promise EIDE RAID Array
Maxtor 5120 20GB	IBM Deskstar 34GXP 20GB	Twin IBM DeskStar 22GXP (16GB each, striped RAID 0)
Toshiba SD-M1212	NEC DV5500A	Creative 6X
none	Sony DVD-RW	none
Vortex 2 (motherboard-down)	SB Live Value	Creative SB Live Value
Infinity	Monsoon (non-flat) MC-200	Altec-Lansing ACS-54
none	none	none
IBM	Micron	Sys/Krytech
(not marked)	(not marked)	300 watt
HPNA	none	3com EtherLink XL (10/100)
Rockwell HCF 56K	3Com Winmodem	none
none	none	none included
6.1a	6.1a	6.1a
Win98SE	Win98SE	Win98SE
IBM	Microsoft OEM IntelliMouse	Microsoft Wheel
IBM	Micron	Sys generic 101

[1] Can substitute for Gravis Gamepad Pro USB

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www.microsoft.com/mouse

In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

BURN, BABY, BURN ★★★☆☆

IBM Aptiva S Series 865

The IBM system revealed little ironies throughout our testing. Only the IBM, for example, came in black, complete with matching black bezels for floppy and CD-ROM drives. The case popped open quite easily without tools, but the latch was cleverly hidden at the bottom of the chassis bezel. Inside was a Maxtor hard drive, making IBM one of the few systems to ship without an IBM hard drive. The Vortex 2 chip was on the motherboard itself, but the Infinity speakers lacked punch. And the less said about the kludgey mouse, the better.

On the other hand, it did have a 650MHz Athlon CPU and an ELSA TNT2 Ultra card. The ELSA isn't the fastest TNT2 Ultra card you can get, and it showed in the game tests. Its 3D GameGauge score of 47.9 – not a bad score until recently – outpaced only the Future Power system. The ELSA card does have TV-in as well as TV output, and a home phone-line networking card was plugged into one of the PCI slots. Finally, the IBM had three USB ports on the back, a total exceeded only by the Compaq.

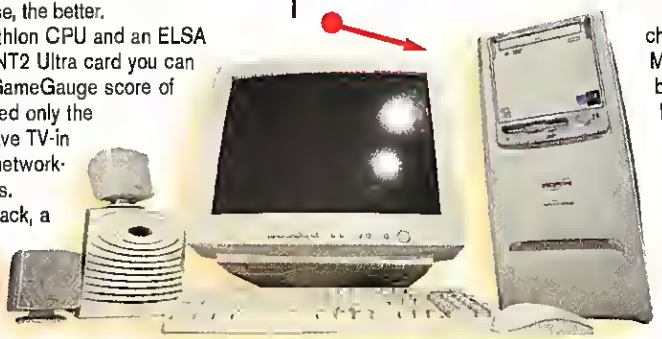
Despite having relatively low scores, IBM gets the "most improved" award. It offers decent performance, a good set of components (except for the lame speekers), and comes in black. And that's not a bad combination.

www.aptiva.com
Price: $2,888
as tested

BURN, BABY, BURN ★★★½☆

Micron Millenia Max 600/133

Opening up the Micron system is a dream. Lift up a catch on the side, and the cover slides off neatly. Inside, you find a swing-out plastic bracket that can hold additional cooling fans if needed. Lifting this up reveals a most interesting motherboard, which uses the VIA Apollo Pro 133 chipset. This chipset fully supports PC133 SDRAM, and the Micron came equipped with a full 128MB of PC133 memory.



Unfortunately, the VIA chipset actually held the Micron back. You can see this best in the CPUMark 99 and FPUMark scores, which trailed all the other 600MHz Pentium III systems. Although equipped with a 600MHz Pentium III and a Creative Labs nVidia GeForce 256 card, it posted benchmarks significantly slower than the 440BX-equipped Gateway system. The low-end Monsoon speakers get the job done, but they won't win any awards for volume or audio quality. Kudos go to Micron, however, for supplying a CD-RW drive to facilitate backups. Also, Micron ties with Compaq and IBM for shipping a chassis that wasn't just a plain beige monolith. We'd love to see more interesting form factors and colors in the future.

One problem we encountered was with AGP 4x mode. The 3D benchmarking software kept crashing until we disabled AGP 4X, so clearly some work needs to be done with the chipset or BIOS. While we applaud the use of technology such as PC133 SDRAM, the VIA chipset needs attention before it can match the throughput and stability of the more mainstream Intel 440BX core logic.

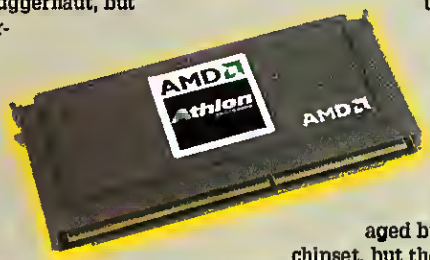
www.micronpc.com • Price: $2,841

The King Is Dead! Long Live the King!

It's a shooting war, finally.

During the opening days of World War II, Polish cavalry made valiant but fruitless attacks against the German onslaught. Like the Polish cav, AMD has been fighting the good-but-fruitless fight against the Intel juggernaut, but has been hobbled by relatively poor performance in games when stacked up against Intel CPUs. As this roundup demonstrates, that's no longer true. It's as if the Polish miraculously got hold of a few dozen M1 tanks. Of the ten systems reviewed, the top three slots were captured by Athlon-based systems. Given that a 700MHz Athlon simply clocks faster than the fastest Pentium III system, that may seem obvious – but again, that hasn't been the case in the past. As we saw in our recent testing, an Athlon system will run games faster than a Pentium III at the same clock rate, all other things equal. And if AMD can crank out high clock rate CPUs that are stable, more power to them.

However, AMD would do well not to rest on its laurels. We've seen the first 820-equipped system in the Dell system, and while its scores don't approach Athlon, by the time you read this, Intel will be shipping 667MHz – and possibly faster – Coppermine CPUs.



All of the Athlon systems we tested used the AMD 751 chipset. While it does support some advanced features, such as ATA/66 hard drives, it doesn't offer AGP 4X or advanced memory types (like PC133 SDRAM or RDRAM). Those advances will be left to chipset maker VIA, whose Apollo KX133 chipset looks like it may deliver the goods. We weren't encouraged by the performance of VIA's Slot One chipset, but the KX133 is newer, and the Athlon's raw horsepower may overcome any deficiencies.

What is clear is that this Intel/AMD slugfest is now a much more evenly matched fight on the technology and product fronts. Intel's sheer size and resource base, plus its manufacturing prowess are now its competitive edge – but not its CPUs. The world has changed. — Loyd Case

One Chip Can Turn One Second Of Gaming Into

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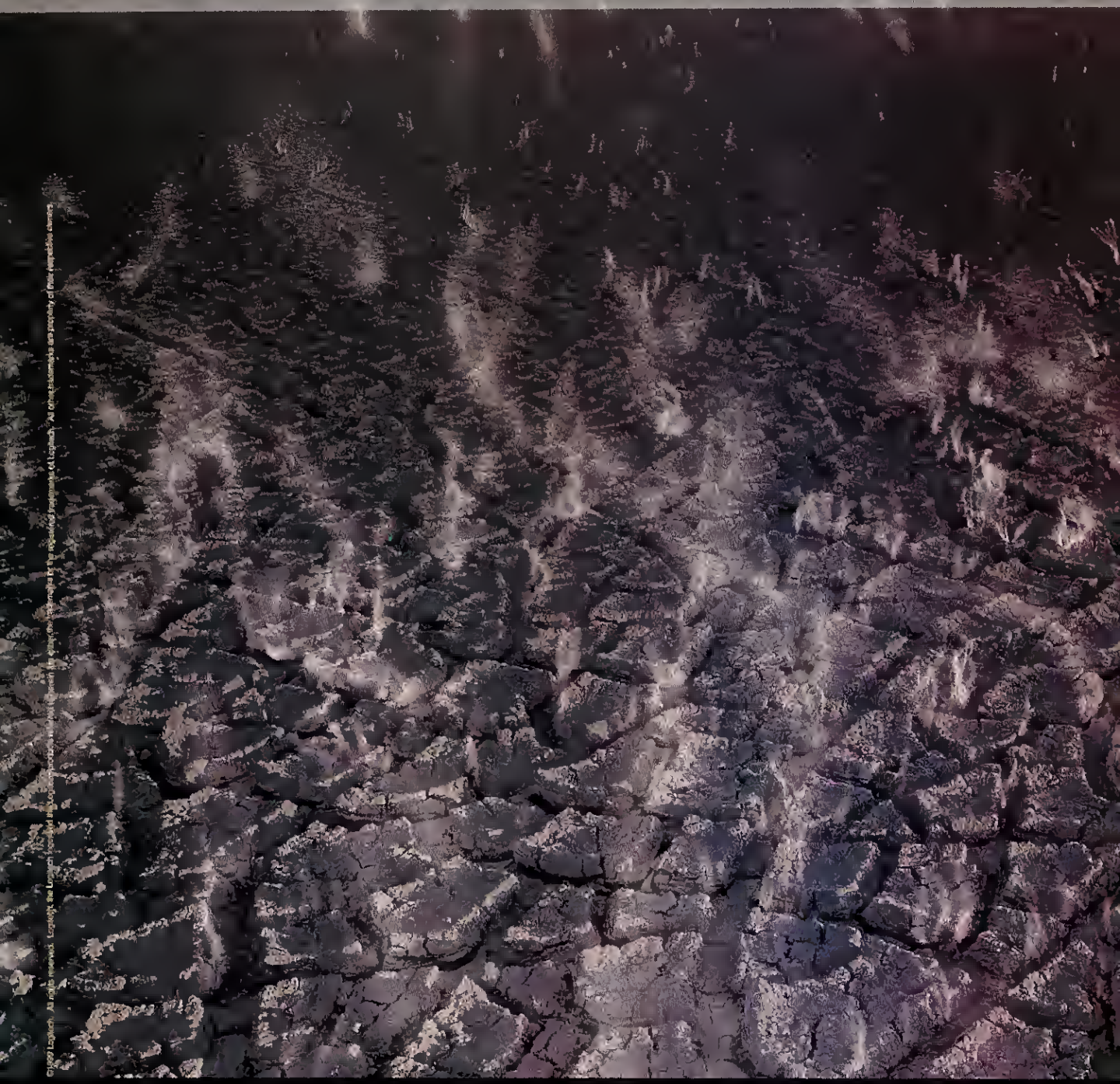

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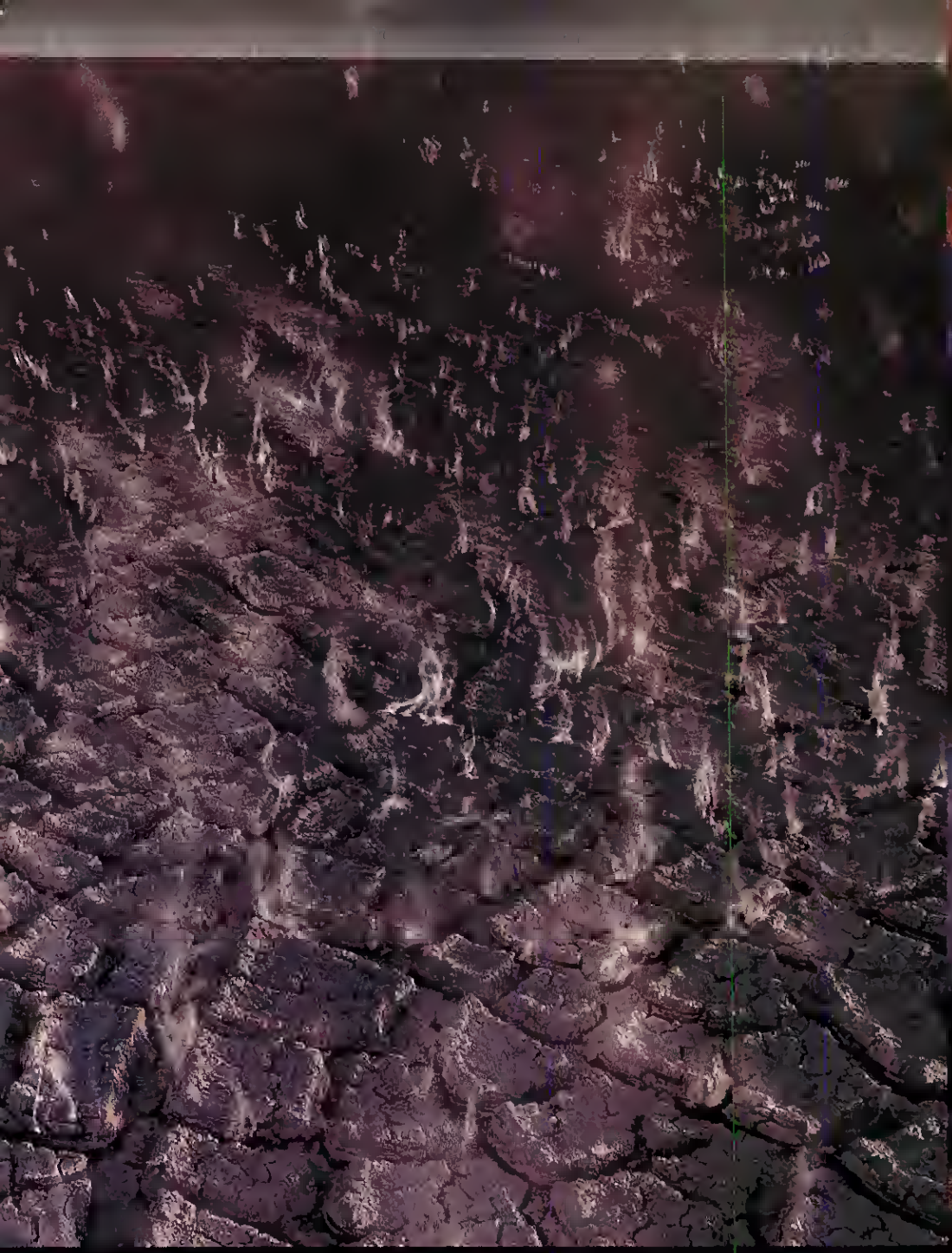
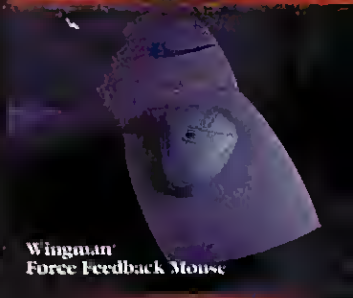
All this can be yours.





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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

BURN, BABY, BURN ★★★★½

Sys Technologies' Cold Fusion

Sys gets the "close but no cigar" award this year, with its Cold Fusion system. Sys' claim to fame is that it ships the only 800MHz X86 CPU on the planet, thanks to their use of Kryotech's active refrigeration units that allow Sys to take a 600MHz AMD Athlon CPU and over-clock it 33% to 800MHz. The Kryotech unit chills the CPU to a frosty -55° C, which keeps the seriously over-clocked CPU from going up in smoke. The result is impressive, though not quite as impressive is it should be. Sys' inability to claim the crown lies in their decision to go with Diamond's stock driver for the Viper 770, based on nVidia's TNT2 Ultra chip. In the wake of the S3/Diamond merger, Diamond has been very lax about posting driver updates, and had yet to incorporate nVidia's 2.08 reference drivers at press time. The result is a somewhat unbalanced system, with a very potent CPU coupled with a fast 3D graphics chip that should go faster. And the proof is in the numbers.

Sys trounces all comers on CPU tests because Athlon has proven itself a very worthy CPU, and because Sys is running the chip 100MHz faster than the next competitor. The speedy CPU also put them on top in 3D WinBench testing. But turning to 3D GameGauge, the Viper 770's drivers delivered a score of "only" 61.43. Now bear in mind, this is the second fastest score in the roundup, and is only four points off winner Falcon NW; but given Sys' 100MHz CPU advantage, and that it's using the same 3D graphics chip as Falcon, Sys should have won handily. It didn't.

Sys packs aboard a Promise EIDE RAID array, running twin IBM DeskStar hard drives striped together to form a single volume (RAID level 0), which accounts for Sys' first-place finishes in storage testing. In stark contrast, their CD WinBench score was the lowest of the pack.

The Sys rig is a solid competitor to be sure, and a driver update to nVidia's 2.08 reference drivers might be all it needs to take the brass ring. But one issue with the active refrigeration unit is that if the day comes – and it's a ways off, to be sure – you want to upgrade the CPU/motherboard, you'll probably have to ship the unit back to Sys, or forego active refrigeration on your next CPU.

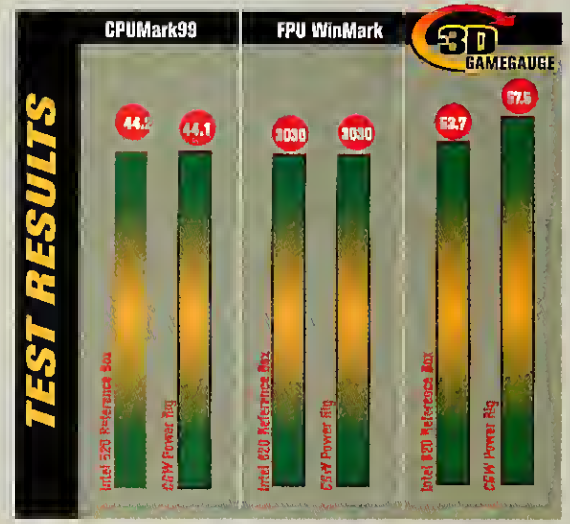
www.sys.com
Price: $4,299 as tested

Intel 820 Chipset: Worth Waiting For?

Intel made a lot of hay at their recent Intel Developers' Forum (IDF) about the new 820 system chipset. "Look at this neato benchmark we wrote to show 820's higher memory bandwidth with RAMBUS, versus the 440BX chipset with SDRAM. The 820 delivers nearly three times the system memory bandwidth of the 440BX box. Pretty cool, huh?" This was the mantra. Well, we viewed the results with the skepticism one should when seeing any vendor-created benchmark. The results could be true; they could be bogus; or more likely, they could be true given a very specific set of conditions.

What we did find when we got our own Intel 820 to bang on is that using current benchmarks, an 820-equipped system with 800MHz RDRAM was no faster than a similarly-equipped 440BX-based system (see table). This was further borne out by how Dell – whose latest Dimension is equipped with the 820 and RDRAM – fared versus the other boxes in this roundup. As you can see from the test results, Dell was about on par with – but not much faster than – the other contestants. So what can we conclude from this? On paper, the 820 chipset should make games go faster with its speedier front-side bus, architectural enhancements, faster system memory, and AGP 4X. But for now, there's not really any difference.

Could it be that the 820 chipset has more "head-room" than the 440BX? That current games haven't brought the 440BX to the "knee" in its performance curve where it will run out of gas, whereas the 820 will keep going? Given the 820's specs, and admittedly giving Intel a little benefit of the doubt, that's probably the case. But we won't really know until we have more demanding titles that push the "plumbing" herder. We're looking into some newer games currently in development that will do just that, and when they're ready to be rolled into 3D GameGauge, we may be able to see just what the 820 chipset buys us. But until then, the 440BX/820 showdown is basically a draw.
— *Dave Salvator*



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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

Bang for the Buck: Gaming on a Budget

The second part of the Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup is where we get tough with the system makers. What we want is the best gaming machine they can build for under $2,000 (including monitor), which involves making tradeoffs while at the same time keeping system performance balanced. What we found here were two competent boxes, and one that could be a contender with a different 3D card choice. All in all, these three systems ran well through our tests, and two out of three would be good choices for gamers on a budget.

BANG FOR THE BUCK WINNER ★★★★½

Hypersonic Silver Bullet SE

Hypersonic, a new entrant into our Ultimate Gaming Machine competition, proved to be this year's winner. With a Pentium-III 600MHz CPU, a Voodoo3 3500 over-clocked to 195MHz, and 128MB of SDRAM system memory, this box proved itself to be a solid contender, scoring 54.1 on 3D GameGauge testing. It just edged out the Gateway, owing primarily to its 100MHz CPU clock advantage. The Voodoo3 3500 has some digital video features that were still rough around the edges, but the rig does ship with the 3500's AV input/output breakout box. The crew at Hypersonic wrings a little more performance out of the 3500 by over-clocking it to 195MHz, and to keep things cool, they include twin fans mounted above the AGP slot in the case to move more air across the chip. The system was very stable, and we experienced no lockups. The one limitation with the 3500 is that it can't run in 32-bit color (despite 3dfx's claims of "22-bit equivalent rendering" using a post-RAMDAC filter), which is why Hypersonic took a "Did Not Run" in 3D WinBench and QUAKE 3 testing at 1024x768x32-bit color. If you like, however, Hypersonic's alternative graphics load-out is Guillemot's Xentor 32, based on nVidia's TNT2 Ultra.

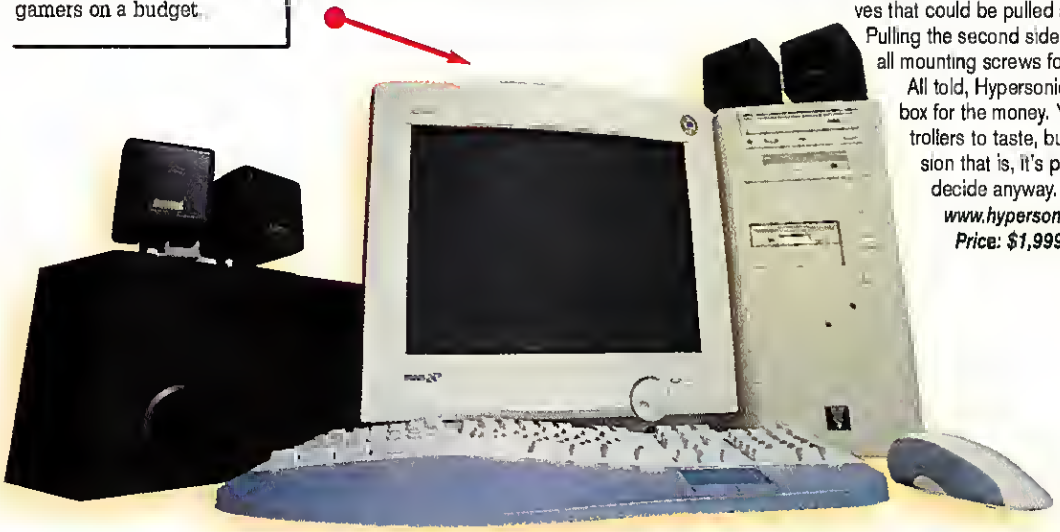
Other accoutrements include Cambridge's Four-Point Surround speaker system, replete with flimsy rear-channel tripods. Although real Tinker-Toys would make for better tripods, these speakers – coupled with Hypersonic's choice of the Sound Blaster Live Value – deliver good four-channel output for DirectSound 3D-enabled games. We also liked their keyboard and mouse choices: Logitech's NewTouch keyboard and the MouseMan Plus USB mouse.

Getting into the case involved removing two screws and sliding off a side panel, which allowed easy access to most system components. Storage components were easily accessed, with a removable cassette for the hard and floppy drives that could be pulled after removing one screw. Pulling the second side panel allowed for access to all mounting screws for the DVD-ROM.

All told, Hypersonic has put together a terrific box for the money. You'll need to add game controllers to taste, but given how personal a decision that is, it's probably better left for you to decide anyway.

www.hypersonic-pc.com

Price: $1,999 as tested



ULTIMATE GAME MACHINE BENCHMARK TEST SCORES

	3D GameGauge 2	Quake III Fill Rate Torture Test	WinBench 99 Business Graphics WinMark (1024x768x32)	CPUMark99	FPU WinMark	Business Disk WinMark	CD WinBench CD WinMark	3D WinBench (1024x768x32)
Compaq Presario 5815	59.64	376	238	62.6	3790	3770	1350	785
Dell Dimension 600B	61.23	384	226	42.4	2980	5930	1170	887
Falcon NW Mach V	66.52	391	265	59.4	3560	5240	1650	972
FuturePower	25.90	(crash)	122	40.9	2760	2630	1310	472
Gateway Performance 500	53.64	42.5	175	37.3	2500	5070	1640	920
Gateway Performance 600	59.61	42.9	200	43.2	2970	4750	1660	900
Hypersonic	55.09	(did not run)	220	46.3	3080	5430	1650	DNR
IBM Aptiva S Series	47.87	35.4	296	58.9	3530	4760	1520	815
Micron Millenia Max	57.52	375	229	43.7	3000	4060	1460	900
Sys Cold Fusion	61.43	31.1	326	66.6	4350	6030	916	1090

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— Loyd Case July 1999
Computer Gaming World

April 30, 1999 June 1999

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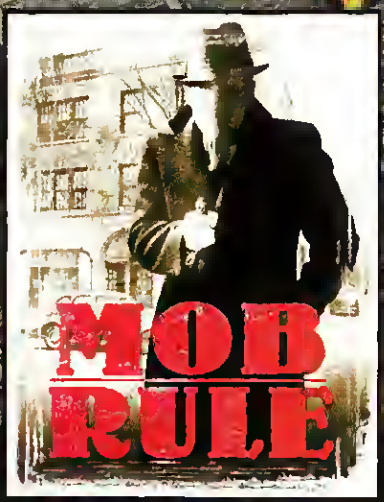

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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

BANG FOR THE BUCK ★★

Future Power Power Series

This system demonstrates what happens when someone makes one bad component choice. The Power Series uses Diamond's Stealth III S540 (based on a 125MHz Savage4 chip), which managed to drag the 3D GameGauge score down to 25.9 – over 20 points lower than the second slowest system. Although this system is the least expensive in the roundup at $1799, it simply can't keep up. Here's where a Voodoo3 card would have been a much better price/performance choice for gamers.

One cool feature of this system is the audio controls on the front, tucked into one of the 5.25" drive bay. It even sported a LED graphic equalizer, which allowed you to tweak the audio, though the Spatializer audio adds excessive reverb without really creating any sense of, well, space.

Still, for only $200 more, you could have a 600MHz Pentium III and a much faster graphics card. So unless you're a very casual gamer, look elsewhere.

www.futurepowerusa.com • Price: $1,799

BANG FOR THE BUCK ★★★★

Gateway Performance 500

This system was clearly a smaller sibling to the other Gateway system. It had a smaller hard drive (still 7,200RPM), smaller monitor (19"), less powerful speakers, and a 500MHz Pentium III (instead of a 600). Gateway also left out the home phone-line networking card. However, it did have a GeForce 256 card, 128MB of RAM, and the same motherboard and chassis as the high-end Gateway. Even with a "lowly" PIII/500, the cheaper Gateway posted a 53.6 on 3D GamaGauge, a testament to the capability of the GeForce. It didn't quite match up with the Hypersonic, but it's a pretty solid offering.

www.gateway.com • Price: $1,968

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Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

System Upgrade 2000

Making Sense out of the Bevy of New Upgrade Options

The year 2000 will surely bring with it a number of incredible new advances: personal rocket-packs, complete meals-in-a-pill, and an end to human labor. But sadly, it won't bring an end to the age-old human dilemma: How and when should I upgrade my gaming machine?

Between Intel's unveiling of their Coppermine Pentium-III CPU and 820 system chipset, and AMD's impressive Athlon chipset performance, the upgrade puzzle for the following six to nine months just got a few more oddly-shaped pieces.

New questions arise: With Intel's new wares, is AMD's Athlon still faster? What happens to all my old SDRAM? Will AMD be around to support Athlon? Will my hardware investment stay with me for the next year, or three? Let's try to sort out this mess.

Getting to Warp Factor 13

Let's talk CPU performance. You've seen the numbers that show Athlon is faster for games than a Pentium III at the same clock speed. But there's more to a system than raw CPU horsepower.

As games—particularly 3D games—become more complex, the ability of a system to move data around from chip to chip becomes just as important as raw CPU speed. The fastest CPU in the known galaxy is reduced to a glorified doorstop if the system chipset "data pipelines" aren't fast enough to feed the CPU data when it needs it.

It's in the area of "data pipelines" that Intel is innovating with their new 820 chipset. When these "fatter pipes" are coupled with the new Coppermine Pentium III CPUs, the performance gap between the Intel and AMD CPUs will narrow. The fatter pipes include AGP 4X (1.1GB/sec of maximum throughput), a 133MHz frontside bus (FSB), and a new memory type, RAMBUS DRAM (RDRAM, a.k.a. RIMMs), with a peak data rate of 1.6GB/sec (twice as fast as current SDRAM).

The next consideration is the Level 2 cache type. Anything with an on-chip cache is one of the new Coppermine class CPUs. These new CPUs are built using a higher-density semiconductor process, which enables Intel to put 256KB of Level 2 cache on the chip itself.

Intel has also finally lifted the veil of secrecy shrouding their new Copparmine CPUs. But with this unveiling comes a new alphabet soup you'll need to understand, so hang on.

You'll now be seeing some extra letters at the end of a Pentium-III's designation. The letter "E" means the CPU has embedded Level 2 cache. Next, the letter "B" indicates that the CPU has a 133MHz FSB. And any CPU over 650MHz won't have any of these markings, because all CPUs above 650MHz will have both features. So a Pentium III 650 EB CPU has both embeddad L2 cache and the 133MHz FSB, for example.

Now the Good Part...

Here's where we get to the good news for upgraders. You don't have to upgrade everything—CPU, motherboard, and memory—at once. The 820 chipset supports both PC100 SDRAM and the newer RDRAM RIMMs. This is good news, because moving to RDRAM means discarding your current memory.

And since RIMMs will initially cost two to three times as much as the PC100 SDRAM, you'll be paying through the nose if you really want the latest technology. The reason for the outrageous prices for individual RIMMs is that all the big system-makers—Dell, Compaq, Gateway—will be grabbing almost all the available RDRAM for a few months. But most 820 motherboards will also ship with sockets for PC100 SDRAM.

The good news for upgraders is that you don't have to upgrade everything at once.

Any CPU with a 100MHz FSB clock will run in most newer 440BX motherboards, although you'll almost certainly need a BIOS upgrade. So if you bought your system in the past year, you're protected to a great extent, especially if you've built your own or are comfortable with upgrades. So if you have a 440BX system that's less than a year old, you can probably install a Coppermine CPU that runs as high as 650MHz.

If you want to upgrade your motherboard, then you can drop in an 820 motherboard, a Coppermine CPU, and your old PC100 SDRAM. Just know that any new Intel CPU with a "B" designation (133MHz FSB) will need an 820-based motherboard.

Then there's Athlon. The new chipset from VIA supports PC133 SDRAM. At the same clock speed, the Athlon CPU is definitely faster than a Pentium III, but the question is: Will an Athlon system be as fast as a Coppermine system? At press time, I still couldn't buy an Athlon motherboard from my usual sources, and I can't recommend something you can't buy. From our testing for the Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup, Athlon-based systems cleaned up, taking the number one, two, and three slots in 3D GameGauge performance.

The jury's still out on Intel's 820 chipset. 3D GameGauge testing didn't show any real performance gain versus 440BX, though I suspect that as the newer, more complex titles come out, 440BX will begin to run out of gas whereas the 820 will keep going.

It's a good time to be a gamer. With 500MHz CPUs at rock bottom prices and the top performers hitting 700MHz, anyone can afford a good gaming rig. CGW

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Throttle Thrustmaster TQS • $115 • More control than anyone needs.

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Monitor Mitsubishi DiamondPro 202Du • $1,250 • Perfectly flat; good USB support.

Optiquest V95 • $405 • Solid 19" monitor at a budget price.

CD-ROM Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD • $180 • New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD.

Pioneer DVD-103 • $130 • Slot drive DVD.

Case In-Win Q500 full tower ATX • $115 • New improved model.

Elan Vital T10-AB • $82 • THE case for upgraders.

Speakers LFT-11 • $500 • Beautiful imaging, clean sound.

Boston Acoustics BA-635 • $70 • Went back to our favorites.

Joystick Thrustmaster F22 Pro • $129.00 • It just feels right.

CH Gamestick 3D • $55 • Very nice little symmetric stick.

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F	$125	Six PCI slots!
CPU	Pentium III / 600	$730	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	256MB of PC133 certified HSDRAM	$378	Just think, a quarter-gigabyte
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940u2w	$349	80 megabytes per second
Primary Graphics	Guillemot Xentor 32	$199	Fastest TNT2 card available
Secondary Graphics	3dfx Voodoo2 / 1000	$99	Single Voodoo2 for Glide compatibility
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$800	A little warmer than the Fujitsu, but much faster
Backup	Iomega Jaz 2	$249	2 gigs of backup
Hard Drive Cooler	PC Power and Cooling Bay-Cool	$49	Keep that Atlas 10k cool!
Primary Audio	Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla	$89	For four speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX
Rear Channel Speakers	Jamo CS-5	$420	Ultimate rear-channel-powered speakers
Modem	Copper Rocket OSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$70	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & OSL modem support
Power Supply	Turbocool 300	$129	More power, Scotty!
Mouse / Pointing Device	Logitech USB Mouseman Plus	$49	No tether!
Action Game Controller	Microsoft Sidewinder Dual Strike	$50	For the circle-strafe-challenged
Rudder Pedals	Thrustmaster Elite RCS	$79	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI COS 4000	$1,129	For the serious sim driver
		Total	$7,917

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. Compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F
CPU	Pentium III / 500
Memory	128MB Corsair PC100 SDRAM
Graphics	Guillemot Xentor 32
Floppy drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Western Digital Expert 9.1
CD-ROM / DVD	Pioneer DVD-103
Monitor	Optiquest V95
Audio	Diamond Monster Sound MX300
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Diamond Supra 56e
D-Link 10/100 ethernet	D-Link
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB with 235-watt power s
Keyboard	Logitech Newtouch
Mouse / Pointing Device	Logitech PS/2 Wheel Mouse
Joystick	CH Gamestick 3D

"Which 3D Card Should I Buy?"

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So—you asked for it, you got it.

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. So, we have two recommendations for you:

Choice A: If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or if you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo2 1000 board. At just under $100, it will do a very good job with current games, and a pretty good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is, when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo2 board to the new setup.

Choice B: If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Guillemot's Xentor 32, which was still the fastest 3D gun in the west at press time. At about $200 street price for the 32MB version, this card is well priced for what you get. Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the card into your new setup, and it has room to grow with whatever CPU you mate it with. NVidia's new GeForce 256 chip has just been announced, and it looks to be a serious contender, but we didn't have a product at press time to test. Look for more on that next month.

Product Watch

What? Still No Athlon?

This month's Power Rig is still using the 600MHz Pentium III. But you can rest assured that it's not a conspiracy against AMD. The Athlon is demonstrably faster in games than the Pentium III at the same clock rate, but finding a motherboard that you can buy has turned out to be quite a chore. Over the next month, we'll be checking out several Athlon motherboards. If we find one that's stable with the components in the Power Rig, then you may see the first non-Intel Power Rig Machine ever. – *Loyd Case*

Intel 820 Chip Fails to Make Good First Impression

Intel has a world of worry about AMD's Athlon. Athlon has proven itself to be a worthy competitor, besting the Pentium-III across the board. We were wondering if Intel's new 820 chipset, with its faster front-side bus, faster main memory, AGP 4X and faster disk controller, might not even the score a little. In our initial testing, it hasn't. A system with the 820 was dead even with a 440BX-equipped system in benchmark testing. For more information, check out the Ultimate Gaming Machine feature.

Price	The Skinny
$125	5 PCI slots, Softmenu, 440BX; ready for Pentium III
$260	Half a gigahertz and SSE
$174	128MB at last
$199	Went for 32-bits
$20	Still gotta have it
$157	7200RPM from Western Digital
$130	Slot drive DVD
$405	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$70	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Went back to our favorites
$85	Solid performance, good price
$29	
$82	THE case for upgraders
$45	In with the new, out with the Natural
$18	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$55	Very nice little symmetric stick
Total	**$1,924**

Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back in the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to cgw_hardware@zd.com.

I just installed a Voodoo3 card to replace my old Monster 3D II. But when I try to run a game that uses Direct3D, the game locks up or goes into software acceleration mode. Help!

Go to the 3dfx Web site at www.3dfx.com/view.asp?IOID=96 and download the DELV.INF file to your desktop. Now, uninstall your Voodoo3 drivers and reboot; you'll be in VGA mode. Find the DELV.INF file on your desktop, right-click on it, and select the installation option. This will remove any old 3dfx drivers, including those leftover from the Monster 3D II.

Now reinstall your Voodoo3 drivers and you should be good to go.

Q I recently installed a Voodoo3 3000 in my computer. Since then, I've have a number of problems relating to "Shell32.dll," which I discovered to be a desktop icon library. I get general protection fault and invalid page fault errors. My icons have disappeared, for the most part. I tried changing the icons, but to no avail – they just show up as white boxes with a few scattered pixels of color. The weird part is when I open the icon libraries, the icons look fine there, but on the desktop they are all messed up. I reinstalled Windows 98, but this didn't seem to work. What can I do?

A If you have Windows 98, check out TweakUI, a program that can be found in the following directory: \tools\reskit\powertoy. There's a "repair icon" tool built into TweakUI that should fix your problem. Note that if you have Windows 98 Second Edition, it doesn't come with TweakUI, but you can find the program on the Internet. One place you might look is members.theglobe.com/windows98/software.html.

Q Ever since installing the new edition of Windows 98, the Shutdown and Restart commands have not worked right. When I select Shutdown, my computer restarts, and when I Restart the computer, it goes to a black screen. Any idea what is wrong?

A Yes. Run MSCONFIG by selecting the Start button, selecting the Run command, and typing "msconfig" in the text entry field. Under the "General" tab, select "Advanced." Check the box labeled "Disable fast shutdown." That should do the trick.

Q I recently set up an Ethernet network at home with 3 PCs. I want to play some of the games my son enjoys head-to-head, but I'm wondering if I need a second copy of the game (or third, if using the third PC), or is it possible to play multiplayer with one copy?

A It depends on the game. Some games can be played from one CD (often called "spawning"). For example, STARCRAFT and STARFLEET COMMAND will allow up to three players on a network to play with a single CD. Other games, such as NEED FOR SPEED III, allow you do a multiplayer-only installation on multiple computers. However, the majority of games require that you have a CD in each computer when you play multiplayer.

Q Help! I can't run the BATTLEZONE II demo! I get a blue screen of death, a weird message, and the whole system locks up!

A Check your CONFIG.SYS file. Chances are you have the EMM386.EXE memory manager loaded. The BATTLEZONE II demo – and a number of other Windows games – don't like EMM386.EXE. The memory manager may have been installed by your system vendor before you bought the computer, by the Sound Blaster Live installation program, or by other software. Either delete the EMM386 program or remove the command that loads EMM386 from your CONFIG.SYS file. Note that you will lose the ability to run DOS audio with the Sound Blaster Live if you have one. But the BATTLEZONE II demo should now run. CGW

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Reviews

MICROSOFT INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER

Requirements: USB Port, Windows 98 Price: $75 Manufacturer: Microsoft Contact: www.microsoft.com/hardware

The Castrated Mouse

Xerox laughed at it. Apple made it a household word. Microsoft and IBM were late bloomers with it. The mouse is one of those pieces of hardware that made the PC revolution possible. The mouse has also long been a staple of PC gaming, and in the world of 3D shooters, mouse preference often slips into the realm of religious altercations and slap fights as to who's got the best gaming mouse out there. There have been incremental design improvements: more buttons, more comfortable shape, and most notably, the scroll wheel. But the fundamental "guts" of the mouse have remained unchanged for 20 years. Microsoft is looking to change all that with their new USB-based IntelliMouse Explorer. Gone are the ball and roller sensors that detected its movement, replaced by a LED sensor that takes 1,500 "pictures" a second to determine how the mouse is being moved. The result is that this mouse can operate on nearly any surface, except for transparent glass, without a mouse pad.

★★★★

This new design has yielded a well-heeled mouse that produces smooth movement. New to this mouse as well are two thumb buttons, which neighbor one another horizontally. In game testing, this button design proved to be uncomfortable, as it requires you to shift your hand position on the mouse to get at the front thumb button. An over/under design would have probably been the better way to go. During a spin through some QUAKE 3 deathmatches, the IntelliMouse proved itself an agile instrument, with quick response and an overall comfortable feel. Microsoft paid careful attention to add weight to the Intellimouse to compensate for the absence of the ball. In fact, the Intellimouse is about a half-ounce heavier than its predecessor.

All told, the new IntelliMouse Explorer is a solid offering, though it is a bit pricey. There are other excellent USB-based ball-design mice out there for less money that get the job done. A less expensive version of the IntelliMouse Explorer, the IntelliMouse, will use the same design but with the LED guts, and will cost about $55. *–Dave Salvator*

MICROSOFT DUAL STRIKE CONTROLLER

Requirements: Windows 98; USB Port Price: $59 Manufacturer: Microsoft Contact: www.microsoft.com/hardware

Circle Strafe This!

I have a confession: I can't circle-strafe. I must hang my head in shame at such an admission.

I've played 3D shooters fairly regularly, but haven't been particularly good at it. So when the Dual Strike came along, I viewed it with some skepticism. Other attempts at 3D controllers have either had a steep learning curve or been spectacular failures.

Not so the Dual Strike. If you can already rocket jump, circle-strafe, and fire on the fly with mouse and keyboard, stop reading. The Dual Strike is for the middling-to-average action gamer (me), who plays often enough to be familiar with the game style, but not so much that they pick up on all of the "pro" nuances.

★★★★½

The Dual Strike looks like a gamepad that's been broken in the middle and rejoined with a gimbal. The right side rotates about the gimbal in discrete axes (not freely). This is key, because it's much easier to get used to. For the best performance, you should turn on "mouse-look" in the game's controller setup.

I was circle strafing in no time, something I never quite got the hang of with mouse and keyboard. The cool thing is the mode change that happens when you push the right half to the extremes of the gimbal (which you can feel in a sudden change of force required at the margins). The controller goes from mouse-look mode to fast-rotation mode in an instant, but you can still move the aiming cursor. It's much harder to describe than to *do*. The sensitivity of the turning and the movement (which comes from a D-pad-like control on the left half) is adjustable.

Overall, the Dual Strike is one of the best attempts at a 3D game controller around. It won't make you a PGL champ, but you may, at least, finally be able to hold your head up. *–Loyd Case*

Photos: Michael Falconer

ACTIONTEC USB NETWORKING KIT

Price: $75 Manufacturer: Actiontec Contact: www.actiontec.com

Plug and Pray Networking

Just plug it in and it works – that's the promise of the Universal System Bus (USB). While this promise is made good with most USB devices these days, there are a few that have some problems.

Take the ActionTec USB networking kit, for instance. My natural inclination when I popped open the kit was to plug in the single USB cable. This dual-headed cable is unique in that it has two male downstream connectors, so you can plug it directly into the USB ports on the back of your PC or a USB hub. However, my eye caught a small slip of paper in the package that warned against this; it told me I had to install the software first. These folks must have taken a lesson from Thrustmaster. Unfortunately, trying to scrupulously follow the instructions brings you to a point where you have to hunt for the software driver, and that step is not documented. In fact, all you need do is to click a "Next" button, but the screen is likely to baffle many users.

★★

Once running, the installation software installed TCP/IP itself, but not IPX – you'll have to do that through the Network Control Panel. Windows 98 self-configures IP addresses, so we were up and running pretty quickly. This kit performs a lot like a standard Ethernet. A 10MB file transferred in slightly over 17 seconds. Ping times of 9-10ms were common.

We played several network games, including STARFLEET COMMAND, HALF-LIFE, and QUAKE II, and all performed nicely. Then we tried Q3TEST, which failed miserably. Whenever the second system would try to connect to the server, it would hang with repeating audio noise. This didn't happen when connected to normal fast Ethernet. Q3TEST is only a test, so you can't completely fault the networking kit; still, it was a bit worrisome.

The real issue is that this kit is too expensive at $75. You can get fast Ethernet kits, complete with hubs, for $100. Still, the ActionTec kit might be an ideal solution for USB-equipped laptops. *–Loyd Case*

CREATIVE LABS 3D BLASTER TNT2 ULTRA

Requirements: AGP 2x slot; Windows 95 OSR/2 or Windows 98 Price: $185
Manufacturer: Creative Labs
Contact: www.creative.com

Creative Lowers the Bar

So the Creative Labs TNT2 Ultra graphic card package doesn't include the fastest TNT2 Ultra around, but the package is easy to find and easier on the pocketbook than many others. At an average street price of $185, Creative Labs' 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra brings decent 32-bit graphics performance and very solid 16-bit performanca into a more affordable arena

★★★★½

According to Creative Labs, a lot of work went into ensuring compatibility with e wide variety of motherboards. The default clock rate as shipped is the standard 150/183. The card we tested came with 32MB of 5ns (200MHz) SDRAM, and Creative's 2.04 driver release. Creative also supplias a performance enhancement utility on the company's web site that allows you to adjust the core (TNT2 chip) clock and the memory clock up to a maximum of 166MHz core clock and 200MHz memory clock (166/200). The package includas a memory clock slider.

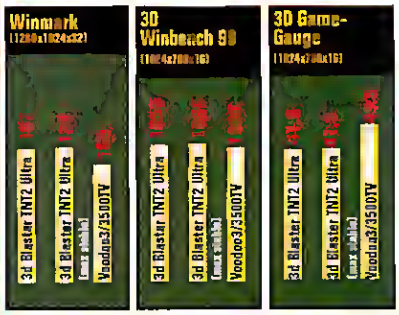
We ran it successfully at the maximum 166/200MHz clock speed supported by Creative's utility without any problems on our 500MHz Pentium III test bed. Performance at the higher clock speed falls into the top third of all cards we tested. As you can see, it's faster than Voodoo3 3500 on 2D, though the 3dfx part is speedier on 3D. But to get the highest-clocked 3dfx part, you need to get the 3500, which also includes a TV tuner, and many other extras that gamers may not need.

The limited software bundle includes Colorific color matching and 3Deap gamma correction utilities from Sonnetech and an MPEG (*not* MPEG-2 or DVD) player. But the value of this card is in its relatively low cost, not the bundled software. You even get TV output for that price, though it's limited to 800x600 at 60Hz. So if you've been looking for a good TNT2 Ultra card and have been put off by the higher prices, this may be what you've been waiting for.

TNT2 ULTRA VS. VOODOO 3

TEST RESULTS

Clock Speeds	Core / Mem
3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra	150/183
3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra (max stable)	166/200
Voodoo3/3500TV	183/183



ENTREGA 3PLUS PORT ETHERNET USB HUB

Requirements: Windows 98 Price: $99
Publisher: Entrega
Contact: www.entrega.com

Easy-Net

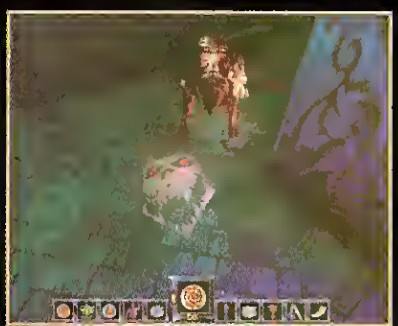
It's the easiest networking I've ever installed. Period.

I was skeptical about Entrega's 3-USB port plus Ethernet combo hub, especially after wrestling with their nearly nonfunctional serial/parallel port multifunctional hub. To be fair, I did have to connect it to a hub, and configure network settings, such as IP addresses and so on. But the physical connection was a piece of cake: Plug in the USB cable to a USB port on the PC, connect the small power brick, and slip tha floppy with the drivers into the drive. The hub and Ethernet port are auto-detected on boot-up. Several mouse clicks and one reboot later, the Ethernet port drivers are installed and a basic TCP/IP setup is live. You do have to configura IP addresses if necessary, and add IPX protocols for games, but after wrestling with a number of different "home networking" setups, this was a cakewalk.

★★★★½

The hub ships with drivers, small power pack and a USB upstream cable to connect to the PC. To connect to a second PC, you need either an Ethernet hub or a direct connect Ethernet cable (a.k a. an Ethernet crossover cable, which has two wires swapped so that the hub isn't required). Note that it's more expensive than some Ethernet kits, but you do get a couple of additional USB ports in addition to networking. This is also different from USB networking kits that daisy-chain via USB ports. The Entrega's port looks like a stock, 10-Base-T Ethernet port to the network, and it played well in a mixed 10-megabit/100-megabit network. It moved a 10MB fila across the network in under 17 seconds – about par for 10Mbit/sec speeds – and ping times with HALF-LIFE and TRIBES were well under 20 milliseconds. This is *real* Ethernet!

So if you want easy networking, plus e couple of additional USB ports, the Entrega 3Plus Port is it. –*Loyd* Case



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PC CD ROM

TEEN T

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System Sh

GET OFF TO A GOOD START AGAINST SHODAN WITH HELP FROM OUR PALS AT GAMEGUIDES.COM

BY DOUG RADCLIFFE

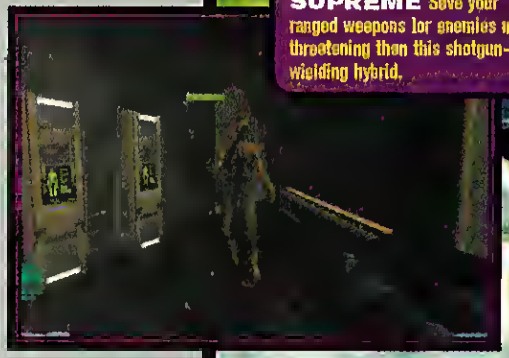
We know it's been a while. You're used to the traditional run-and-gun game, and when you suddenly need to start thinking, confusion ensues. Here's a few tips for early survival in SYSTEM SHOCK 2. If you want more help in the game, check out our CD for the entire Game Guide.

Secure Stationary Items

When you reach a new deck, you should concentrate on locating a bio-reconstruction machine, which regenerates your body if you should die (at a cost of ten nanites); a recharge station, which recharges energy-based weapons and implants; and a working surgical bed, which heals your wounds for five nanites. Most of the surgical beds you locate aren't in working order – you must search thoroughly for surgical-unit activation keys to enable them. Don't waste two keys on a single deck unless it's an emergency. You can always return to the first bed, but if you need healing desperately (especially to pass a difficult section), consider the use of two keys for two inoperable beds.

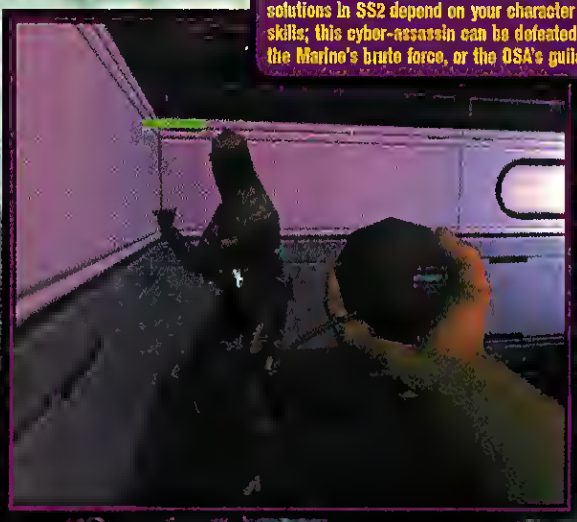
If you've got a nice stock of portable batteries, locating the recharge station isn't so necessary. But, the machine's power to recharge each inventory item with a single click makes it an item you'll want to seek out on each deck. Remember that you can also use the elevator (once you've activated main power on the engineering deck) to return to any previous level. For instance, if you remember where the working surgical bed was on the medical-science deck, just hop in the elevator and return. Though it'll take some time (as the new deck loads), your patience pays off in the long run.

Be sure to check out gameguides.com for complete walkthroughs and strategies for the latest games.



BOOM STICK SUPREME Save your ranged weapons for enemies more threatening than this shotgun-wielding hybrid.

CHARGE ME UP Be sure to remember locations of energy recharging stations, bio-reconstruction machines, and surgery machines.

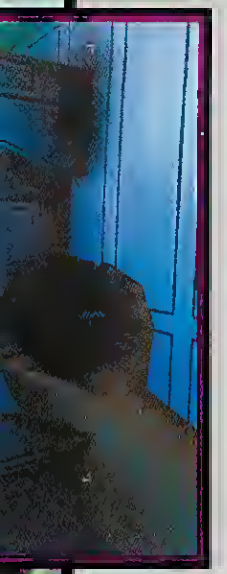


MR. ROBOTO-NINJA Many solutions in SS2 depend on your character skills; this cyber-assassin can be defeated via the Marine's brute force, or the OSA's guile.

ock 2

Winning Melee Battles

Good melee skills can take you through the entire game. Sure, they aren't very effective against rumblers or maintenance robots, but you'll still find plenty of hybrids and lab monkeys throughout the game on which to practice your skills. Being a successful hand-to-hand fighter is more than just charging your opponent and swinging wildly with your wrench, repier, or crystal shard. To both win the fights and minimize damage, you must combine your swings with good moves, both strafing side-to-side and forward-to-back. A higher egility skill does prove to he advantageous in melee battles, because you'll move a lot faster when strafing, making yourself a tougher target.



Against pipe-wielding hybrids, approach and then immediately back off. Continue this method until you see the hybrid begin his slow swing process. Once he does, back off and wait for the pipe to finish its motion. When it does, get in close and thrust in a few whacks with your melee weapon. Don't charge in while the hybrid is swinging – it packs a lot of punch, and it won't take long before you're killed and sent into the nearest bio-reconstruction machine.

Other hybrids, those that carry shotguns or grenades, are a bit tougher. You can't he patient and stand directly in front of the creature like you can against pipe-carrying hybrids. Instead, you must use the environment to your advantage, es well as the sidestep and forward/back keys. In using the environment, lure the ranged-weapon-carrying hybrid to a corner or perhaps a doorway entrance. If you hide behind the wall or around the corner, he can't hit you, but will continue to approach. When he pops into view, swing your melee weapon into its gut, then quickly dodge back around the corner or into the doorway. Wait a moment for it to approach once again and repeat. Once you've built your strength statistic up a few notches (or are using a BrawnBoost implant), it won't take many swings of your weapon to take out a hybrid.

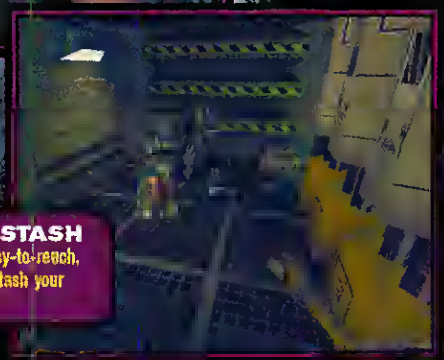
Against other creatures – such as lab monkeys and cyborg midwives – a successful melee campaign is significantly more difficult. To face monkeys, you must crouch and get right in their face. These guys fire a nesty ball of psi energy, so you can't waste any time in getting up close and personal. Use a technique like that mentioned previously. Lure these little critters to corners and stay out of their line of sight. Once you're crouched and in their fece, dodge in and out, avoiding their claw strike while you swing your own melee weapon ecross their midsection. CGW

Weapons Management

One of the most unique aspects of SYSTEM SHOCK 2 is that your weapons degrade over time. If you let them degrade too much, they'll break and require repair before you can use them again. This presents an interesting challenge, one that isn't found in traditional first-person shooters. If you plan on using a lot of weapons, you'll need a good maintenance skill to keep them in working order. The higher your maintenance skill, the better your maintenance tools work in keeping the weapons in good condition. For instance, if you have a skill of just one, your maintenance tool only upgrades the weapon one quality point. But, the higher your maintenance skill, the more effective your tools are, and the more quality points they'll improve.

Keep a stock of maintenance tools in your inventory at all times. Consider carrying more than one of a particular weapon type, especially if you use it frequently. Once one weapon degrades down to an unusable condition, discard it instead of repairing it; switch to the other weapon in better condition. Also, if you plan on upgrading your maintenance skill further at an upgrade station, wait until you do so before using any maintenance tools in your inventory, after you upgrade, the tools will have e greater effect.

TOOL TIME Make sure that no matter what kind of person you are, you have maintenance tools to keep your weapons in good condition.



MIDNIGHT STASH It's good to find easy-to-reach, isolated places to stash your excess supplies in.

Dungeon Keeper 2

MULTIPLAYER STRATEGIES STRAIGHT FROM THE BULLFROG'S MOUTH

Outside of the Marquis de Sade and Hannibal Lecter, no one knows dungeons better than the developers at Bullfrog who designed DUNGEON KEEPER 2. So we asked the horny devils themselves to let us in on their own strategies for keeping rival dungeon keepers at bay. Here's what they said.

NICK RICKS' TIPS

Imps

Early on in the game, you will find that you do not have enough imps, but as the game progresses and your dungeon takes shape, your need for them will decline. Then, it is important to remember that just keeping imps alive will drain mana. Therefore, if you do have a large number of idle imps, get rid of them – especially lower-level ones.

Mana & Gold

Mana is a recharging resource and can be converted into gold. In a long game with many creatures, you will quickly exhaust all of the gold around you, so it is vital that you manage your mana well. Mana intake is limited, as is the amount you can store; when you reach the upper limit, you are wasting a resource. Whenever your mana is maxed-out, it's a good idea to cast a Create Gold spell into your treasury. This will immediately add gold to your reserves, and your mana will soon reach its maximum again without your having wasted any.

Possession

During a fight, a possessed creature can make the difference between winning and losing. If you are fighting near traps, possess a creature and use him to deal with the trap; your minions will concentrate on enemy creatures first, but will be hindered by the trap. A warlock's heal spell does not cost you any mana, thus a possessed warlock standing at the back of a fight makes a very effective free medic, who can also hurl fireballs at the enemy.

Nicholas Ricks

- **Age:** 26
- **Current Project:** Dungeon Keeper III
- **Previous Games:** None.
- **Favorite Thing in DK2:** Watching heroes march to their death in a trap-riddled corridor
- **Best Trap Combination:** A lightning trap behind a barricade. no wait .. a dozen lightning traps behind a wall of barricades

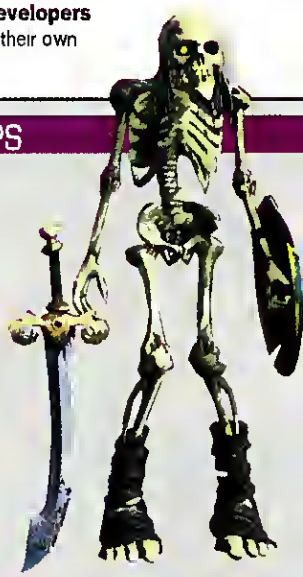
WHAT HORNY WOULD SAY IF HE VISITED BULLFROG: That Dark Mistress–she makes me Horny.

Prisons and Enemy Low Level Creatures

A portal will only attract 15 creatures into an enemy dungeon, and while your opponents' creatures are alive, they will count to that tally. Therefore, keep the captured lower level creatures alive, especially fireflies and goblins. They will require minimal healing, but will ensure that your opponent's number of creatures remains capped.

If you want your combatant units (like this dark knight) to stay interested and committed to a fight, drop them some chickens and gold.

ANDY TROWERS' TIPS



Fortify

When you take over areas of high strategic importance (such as Portals and gem blocks), ensure that you protect them heavily with traps. Always use at least one alarm trap so that you are notified immediately when the area is under threat, you can then provide backup if so required.

Home Sweet Home

Protect your dungeon heart and its approaches with traps and doors. If an enemy creature enters that area, your rival will be able to use call to arms against you.

Squad-Based

Small groups of powerful creatures can be more effective in battle than a larger group. With a smaller group of creatures, you can concentrate your mana on healing them without wasting it on less effective minions.

Andy "Love Machina" Trowar

- **Age:** 26
- **Current Project:** Classified
- **Previous Games:** Theme Hospital PSX
- **Favorite Thing in DK2:** Disco Inferno
- **Best Trap Combination:** The Fea Trap in front of a Lightning Trap–the enemy doesn't know whether they're coming or going!

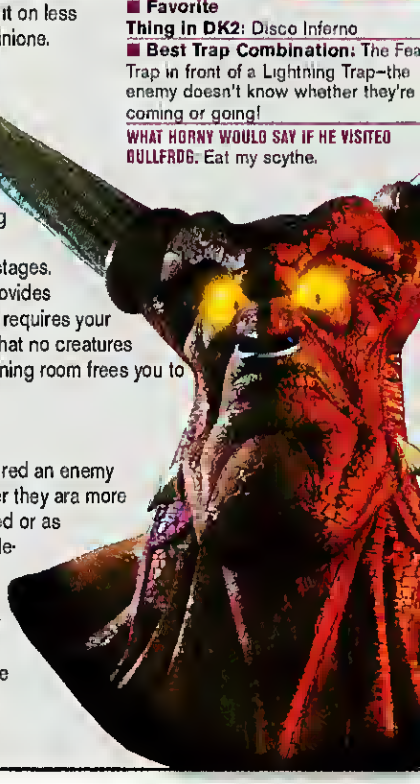
WHAT HORNY WOULD SAY IF HE VISITED BULLFROG: Eat my scythe.

Training

If money is of no concern, use the training room to build creatures' experience in the early stages. While the combat pit provides quicker advancement, it requires your attention to make sure that no creatures are dying. Using the training room frees you to do other things.

Rehabilitation

When you have captured an enemy creature, decide whether they are more valuable to you converted or as skeletons. Although skeletons are relatively weak in battle, their fearlessness makes them handy as shock troops that won't run away when the battle goes against you.



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JULIAN GLOVER'S TIPS

Preparation

Always look at the map before entering the game; check where your opponents are, where the Portals are, where the gold and gems are, etc. Knowing where everything is, roughly, in relation to you can often give you an edge. You'll know the quickest routes to get somewhere and can second-guess where your opponents' attack will come from.

Dark Angels are one of the more powerful units in the game, so small groups of them (as opposed to large groups of Goblins) are usually more effective as an attacking force.

Attractions

Don't be afraid to build your rooms in a seemingly odd order; although all rooms are important, there is no need to build them in the order in which they were introduced in the campaign. If you want Black Knights early, make the Combat Pit your first room. This may leave you a little understaffed at the beginning, but will pay if you can hold off early attacks.

Trapping

Traps placed on their own can be ineffective. A truly masterful Keeper will find his/her favorite combinations of damage-dealing devices. Some good combinations include a Sentry trap behind a Freeze trap, a Lightning trap behind a Barricade (which in turn is next to water), and a Trigger trap surrounded by Inferno traps (mana allowing, of course).

Breaching

Place well-populated rooms near to where you think the breach will come from; it'll be a nasty shock if your opponent is faced with 10 duelling Dark Angels as opposed to an empty Library. If you're the one doing the breaching, try to breach in at least two places at once, with at least one of these in an unexpected area.

Attacking

Help your Call to Arms following creatures by dropping chickens and gold on them to keep them happy. While your opponent is distracted by your main attack force, a secondary attack of a possessed creature and some grouped friends is always a nasty surprise.

Julian Glover

- **Age:** 26
- **Current Project:** DK2 Plus
- **Previous Games:** Theme Park, Syndicate, Space Hulk, Darkening, Dark Omen, Magic Carpet 1 & 2, Gene Wars, Football Manager, DarkLight, Rugby WC, Dark Earth, Beasts and Bumpkins, and more that he can't remember.
- **Favorite Thing in DK2:** Imp Water Bubblee
- **Best Trap Combination:** Freeze and Sentry

WHAT HORNY WOULD SAY IF HE VISITED BULLFROG: Why, why, why, why, why?

SHELAGH LEWINS' TIPS

Warlocks and the Combat Pit

You generally start a multiplayer game without most spells, traps, and doors. In order to get those vital spells all the sooner, it pays to train your Warlocks to level three or four before sending them into the Library.

By far, the fastest way to train your Warlocks is to drop them straight into the Combat Pit. They don't do each other a lot of damage, and will advance much quicker than they would in the Training Room Plus—it's free.

Mistresses are fast and have a good attack, but becau of their vulnerability should always be followed by a Warlock (as if he minds).

Combat Pit Combinations

If you pair up the combatants in the Combat Pit carefully, they'll spend less time unconscious. Don't pit a Firefly against a Dark Angel...most cre tures are best off fighting others of the same kind. It may be worth buildin several separate Combat Pits so you can control who fights whom.

Dropping and the Call to Arms

Dropping your killer attack squad near the enemy is a good way to get concentrated force into the combat zone, but don't drop them too near enemy creatures, or they'll get clobbered while stunned. Drop them a bit ther away and use Call to Arms to lead them – that's what it's for. Droppi Goblins before Bile Demons can tip the balance as well, since the Goblir get back on their feet quicker and can protect the slower risers.

Protect Your Mistresses

When you're attacking an enemy Keeper, maintain a watchful eye on yo Mistresses. They will cut through enemy ranks and can win you valuable t ritory, but because they are easily injured they may get into trouble. Make sure to heal them. You can also support them by possessing a tougher fighter and moving it towards the Mistresses

Small Temples

Although a Temple has to be 5x5 in order to attract Dark Angels, any size of Temple can be used for prayer and thus generate extra mana

Shelagh Lewins

- **Age:** 30
- **Current Project:** DK2 Plus
- **Previous Games:** Aliens vs. Predator
- **Favorite Thing in DK2:** Horny's fiery footprin
- **Best Trap Combination:** Boulde Trap and Freeze Trap

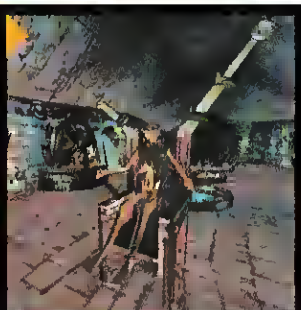
WHAT HORNY WOULD SAY IF HE VISITED BULLFROG: Theme Park World? Pah! F too cutesy for me!

BEELZEBUB'S BOOT CAMP

The training room is the easiest and most cost-effective way to train your evil minions, but the Combat Pit is faster.

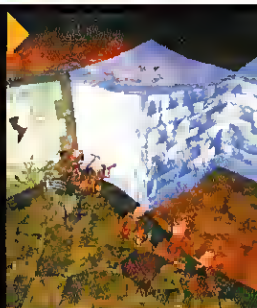
DID I LEAVE THE ELECTRIC CHAIR ON?

Sometimes you'll want to torture someone until they give up the info you need; other times, you'll just want to kill them.



NUKE THE SLACKERS

Imps who stand around with nothing to do should be eliminated. They're just sucking up mana.



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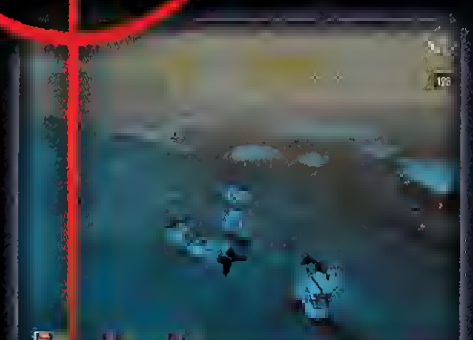

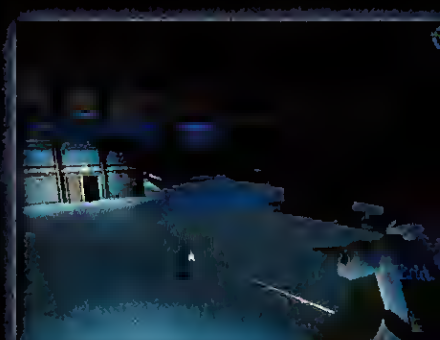

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

Need for Speed: High Stakes

Easter Egg Here's a neat Easter Egg for NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES I found by chance. Set the data on your PC to July 4, then play any track at night. I bet you can guess what the Easter egg is! Dig it, folks, and enjoy.

– Tim Rednar

Congratulations to our CGW BozoBin winner, Tim Rodner, who dominated the field of entrants this month by being the only one. We'll be sending him some fantastic items pulled from the BozoBin by our lovely and talented spokesmodel, Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen. Our lucky winner will be receiving a copy of BEATDOWN, a DRAKAN poster, and a FORCE 21 sales video from Red Storm Entertainment. Enjoy!

Outcast

Tips If you are having some trouble with the local gestapo, here's some news you can use: Soldiers have a routine that you can pick up on if you watch carefully from a safe distance. (Use your map's radar function or your x-ray binoculars). Every so often, they will group together and stand at attention for inspection by the local commander. Right as they are lining up, you want to cloak yourself (with the PPC), run in there, and drop some dynamite at their feet. They will probably look at the dynamite and scratch their heads... "Hey where did this come from?" Meanwhile, you have to quickly get to a safe distance and hit the remote detonator before your cloaking field runs out and they all spread out. If you time everything just right, you can take out a dozen soldiers at a time this way and it will save you a bunch of ammo.

Drakan

Cheats Press "\" to enable talk-mode. Then type in "iamgod" or "sanctuary" to enable god-mode. When you're low on health and there are too many Wertoks sniffing around, type "smeghead" for full rejuvenation.

CODES

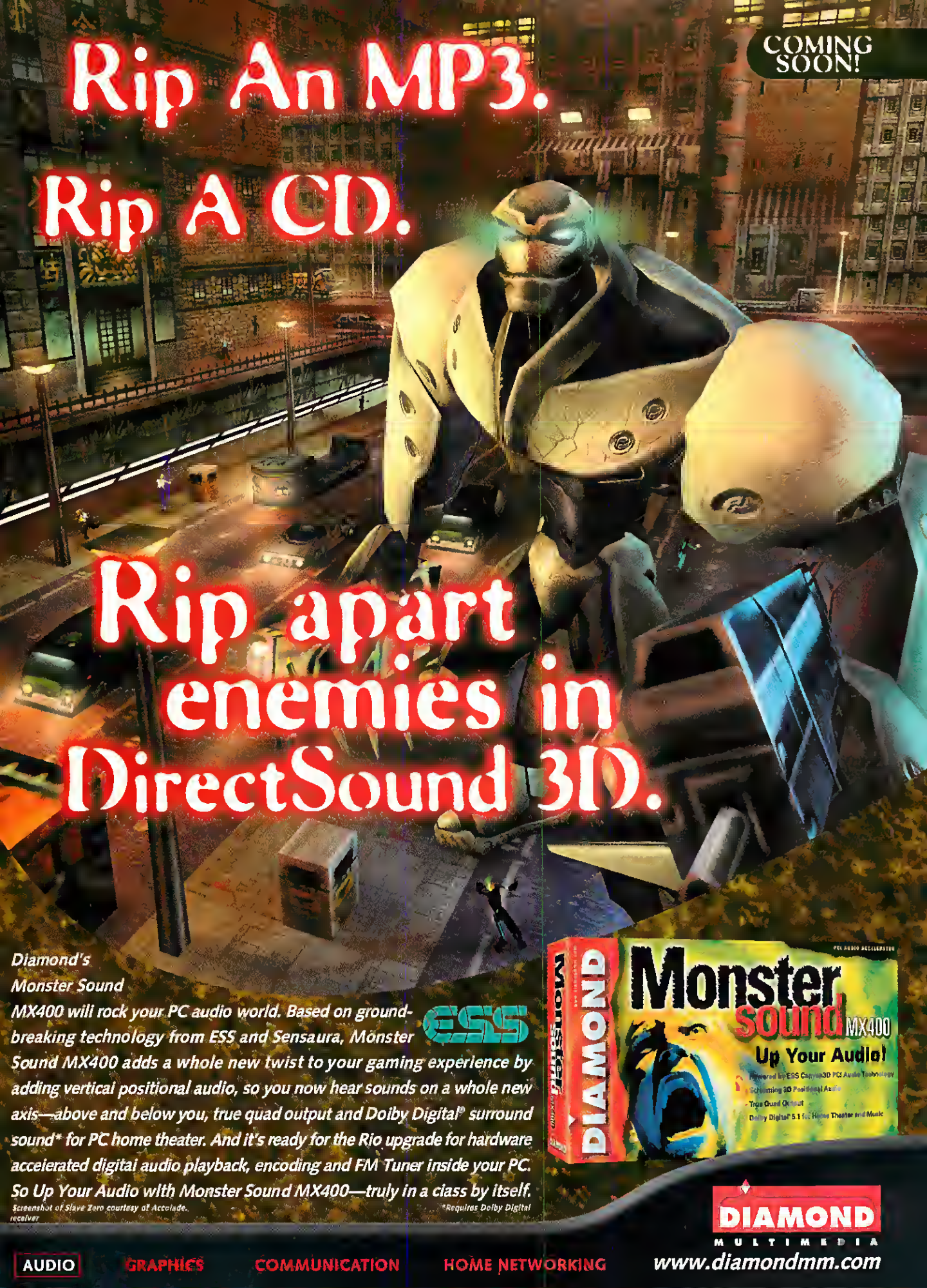
WarCraft 2: Beyond the Dark Portal

To use these codes, hit "enter" and then type them during gameplay:

Code	Effect
IT IS A GOOD DAY TO DIE	Invincibility
GLITTERING PRIZES	10,000 gold, 5000 lumber, and 5000 oil
VALOEZ	5000 oil units
HATCHET	Get wood in 2 chops
MAKE IT SO	Speed up production
TITLE	Increases the speed of your units
NOGLUES	Disables magical traps
SHOWPATH	Displays entire map
ON SCREEN	Displays entire map (without fog)
THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE	Final Ending
FASTEMO	Demo starts earlier
UCLA	Shows "Go Bruins!" message
DAY	Shows "FIEF" message
NETPROF	Laser display
TIGERLILY	Enables jumps between levels by typing HUMAN x or ORC x
ORCx OR HUMANx	By typing in either ORC or HUMAN followed by a number from 1 to 14, this cheat will immediately jump you to that scenario in the campaign. Must enter the TIGERLILY cheat before you can use this cheat.
OECK ME OUT	Upgrades all technologies
EVERY LITTLE THING SHE OOES	Upgrades your magic users with all spells
HATCHET, AXE AND SAW	Dramatically increases lumber harvesting speed
UNITE THE CLANS	Instant Victory
YOU PITIFUL WORM	Instant Defeat

Got a great tip for your favorite game?

Send your tips, tricks and strategies to cgw_letters@zd.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line) and we'll publish one submission each month. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!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Braveheart

Codes In 3D mode press the DEL key for sending AI messages, then type the codes below:

Code	Effect
bannockburn	Kill All Enemies
dresden	All Buildings on Fire
stava reeves	All Troops Hard as Nails
bucks fizz	All Troops Retreated
bastille day	All Walls Breached
haemorrhage	Blood Disabled
killcam	Cameraman Dead

E-Mail X-Com

Tips Here are a few basic tips for Email X-COM:

1. Use opportunity fire and plot a path that will allow your units to shoot and then find cover. They'll move, spot a target, fire, and retreat back to safety.

2. The order in which you move your units is important. You may or may not have a clear shot at your target, based on who has moved. Your units will suffer friendly fire if you're not careful.

3. Power-ups are tempting, but you may want to avoid them if you already have an advantage. A negative power-up may put you on even terms again. Don't let them fall into enemy hands, though.

4. The blaster bombs are area-effect weapons. They do major damage to their target and minor damage to anything adjacent. You can sometimes "hit" an enemy behind cover by targeting an area right next to the enemy.

CODES

Age Of Empires

Type in these codes during gameplay.

Code	Effect
MEDUSA	Villagers become medusa. If killed, black rider, and then catapult.
DIEDIEDIE	You all die
RESIGN	You resign
REVEAL MAP	Reveals all the map
PEPPERONI PIZZA	Give yourself 1000 food
COINAGE	Give yourself 1000 gold
WOODSTOCK	Give yourself 1000 wood
QUARRY	Give yourself 1000 stone
NO FOG	Remove the fog-of-war
HARI KARI	Suicide
PHOTON MAN	Get a 'Nuke Trooper'
GAIA	Control animals
FLYING DUTCHMAN	Juggernaughts turn into the Flying Dutchman
STEROIDS	Instant build
HOME RUN	Win the scenario
KILLX	Where 'X' is the player's position (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8)
BIGDADDY	Get a cool car w/ rocket launcher
BIG BERTHA	Heavy catapults that have greater range and damage
ICBM	Ballistas get 100 range points
HOYOHOYO	Priest speed up, get 600 hit points
JACK BE NIMBLE	Catapults fire peasants
E=MC2 TROOPER	Get a futuristic trooper who fires nuclear missiles

Need For Speed III

Type the cheats below at any menu to activate the cheat.

Code	Effect
Bullhorn	Police talk on bullhorn
Elnino	Enable El Nino Car
Merc	Enable Mercedes CLK-GTR
Jag	Enable Jaguar Sports Car
Empire	Enable Empire City Track
Rushhour	Lots of traffic
Gofast	Twice the speed in single player
Allcars	Enable All Cars (including Pursuit)
Newcars	Bonus Police cars

Type the codes below then click RACE to drive the different non-player cars.

Code	Effect
go01	Miata
go02	Toyota Landcruiser
go03	Cargo Truck
go04	BMW 5 Series
go05	71 Plymouth Cuda
go06	Ford Pickup with Camper Shell
go07	Jeep Cherokee
go08	Ford Fullsize Van
go09	64/65 Mustang
go10	66 Chevy Pickup
go11	Range Rover
go12	School Bus
go13	Taxi: Caprice Classic
go14	Chevy Cargo Van
go15	Volvo Station Wagon
go16	Sedan
go17	Crown Victoria Cop Car
go18	Mitsubishi Eclipse Cop Car
go19	Grand Am Cop Car
go20	Range Rover Cop Car/Ranger Vehicle
go21	Cargo Truck (same as 03)

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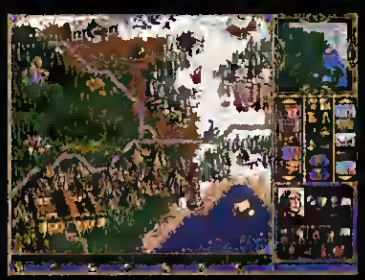

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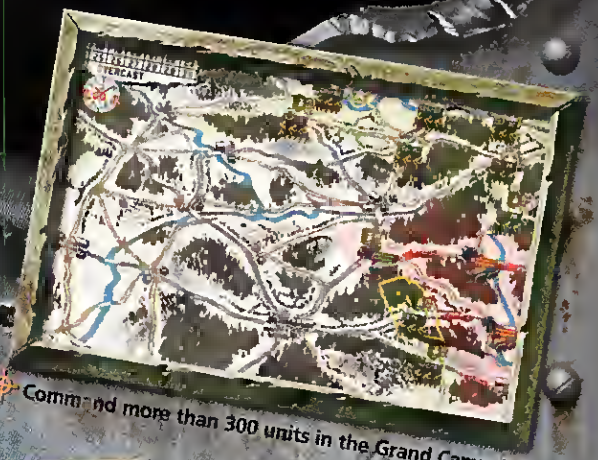

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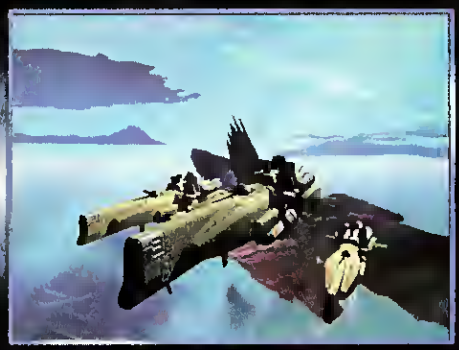

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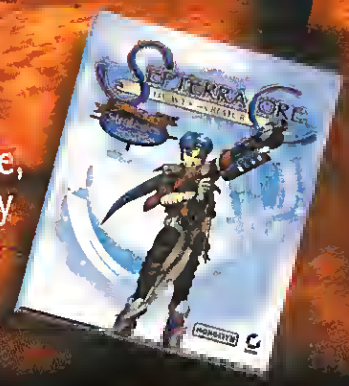

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INSIDE
STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

robert_coffey@zd.com

Not Dead Yet

Most of the big strategy hits these days are real-time games, suggesting that gamers are leaving turn-based gaming behind. Check out Usenet, and you'll pick up on a subtle "old fogey" bias against the turn-based genre among the RTS crowd. Why?

Turn-Based Gaming Looks to the Future

The most obvious culprit is the simple fact that gamers have a fundamental moth-to-flame reaction toward anything new and flashy. Movable cameras, 3D graphics, real-time lighting, blah, blah, blah. Put a brand-spanking-new RTS game, even a dud like MACHINES, up next to BATTLEGROUND: CHICKAMAUGA and even your grandmother's eye would be fixed on the real-timer.

The deluge of RTS games is also directly attributable to the fact that the biggest hits of the past few years were games like C&C, WARCRAFT II, and STARCRAFT. Like music industry weasels trying to genetically engineer the next carbon copy of The Backstreet Boys, game industry suits are engaging in a quintessentially human response: claiming the accomplishments of others for themselves. This copycat mentality is just as prevalent on the turn-based side of the equation (there have been plenty of CIV and X-COM wannabes). Throw in the fact that RTS games are rarely as difficult to create as other types of games, and you have one more reason developers find the format popular.

Robert's Playlist

1. *High Heat Baseball 2000*
2. *System Shock 2*
3. *Risk II (beta)*
4. *Age of Empires II (beta)*
5. *Candyland (with his daughter)*

Perception Is Reality

But look past all the noise generated by these RTS games and you'll notice something: For every established C&C or WARCRAFT franchise, there's a HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC or WARLORDS. Original ideas and strong execution are the true elements that win gamers' hearts. The good developers know this, and they see it as the key to future successes.

As Executive Producer of both the real-time WARLORDS: BATTLECRY and the turn-based WARLORDS IV, Dexter Chow has a unique perspective. He foresees continued success for the turn-based genre, but also room for change. "Turn-based games need to look less like a board game and more like a dynamic environment with cool lighting effects, realistic terrain, and big explosions."

Designers are moving in this direction. The latest PANZER GENERAL game, for example, incorporates 3D terrain and unit models for the sleekest, coolest looking PANZER GENERAL yet. You can also expect to see more games that let you zoom and rotate the map *a la* FINAL FANTASY TACTICS to let gamers get a better view of the action.

The real struggle is in the multiplayer arena. My bet is that the faster-paced RTS titles will always enjoy a big edge here, but that doesn't mean that turn-based games are going to ignore such a large potential audience. The challenge is finding a way to occupy players so that they're not just twiddling their thumbs waiting for their turn to roll around again. The best example of this is probably RISK II. If other games are half as successful as RISK II, we could see a real renaissance in turn-based multiplayer gaming.

So are turn-based games on the way out? Not by a long shot. Someday – someday soon – a dazzling game that incorporates both the ease of use of a RTS with the depth of a turn-based title will take gaming by storm. It's just a matter of time.

That's about the same time we'll start wondering if real-time games have a future. CGW

IN THE CARDS

While Monolith's SANITY is keeping its single-player action style, the multiplayer component of the game has developed a strategic *Magic: The Gathering* feel. The focus is on the spells, which can easily be compared to *Magic*'s game cards (they're even animated as cards), and gamers will have to balance their "deck" for combat. Monolith will be releasing new spells after shipping the game to maintain interest in the title. If there's interest, Monolith would like to go whole hog, fostering a community with secure servers where players would fight for special limited-edition spells.

Adapt or Perish

To reach a broader audience, RISK II is beefing up its multiplayer with an exciting simultaneous turn-mode that totally changes the game dynamic, while staying absolutely true to the game's spirit.

Play takes place in four phases, with players issuing reinforcements, battle orders, and more at the same time. All troop movement occurs simultaneously so that territories can be invaded by a single player's massed troops from several countries, or by multiple players invading at once, with the invaders then battling for the spoils. Countries that choose to invade each other will have to fight out a border clash to decide who actually gets to invade that turn.

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INSIDE

SIMULATION & SPACE

by Gordon Berg

grognard@concentric.net

Spaced Out

So my subscriber copy of the October *CGW* arrives in the mail, see. I walk into the house with extreme tunnel vision and trembling hands, staring at the wonder I hold before me. Kissing the cat on the lips and scratching my wife behind the ears, I proceed to the kitchen table, oh-so-eager to read my very-first-ever printed article. Other than lamenting over how my mugshot is noticeably absent (I think Jeff Green boycotted its inclusion because he was threatened by my stunning good looks), I'm pleased as punch with myself. I'm in the Big Leagues now. I've been *published*.

Are Space Sims Realistic? How Should I Know?

And then I notice it. The actual name of my column. "Simulation" I expected, but "Space?" As in, the Final Frontier? As in, the vast gulf between my ears? Suddenly I'm not feeling so sure of myself.

Although I have plenty of opinions about flight sims, I'm not what you would call a space sim fanatic.

I suppose I do enjoy a good romp through the universe as much as the next gamer, but you'll sooner find me spending my free time killing dragons in some RPG (coincidentally, fellow *CGW* columnist Desslock has admitted to me he prefers adding to the total annual tonnage of floating space debris). So, until I can convince the editors here that my column really needs to be entitled "Gordon's Favorite Pre-Avionic Flight Sims & The RPGs He Plays in His Spare Time," someone around here has to talk space sims. Tag—I'm it.

Gordon's Playlist

1. *Independence War Deluxe (obviously)*
2. *Aces High (beta)*
3. *Jagged Alliance 2*
4. *Apache Havoc*
5. *Fighter Squadron (new flight models!)*

Fresh Air

Obviously it's difficult for space games to offer much in the way of accurate simulation. After all, there aren't a whole lot of examples in real life to draw from (there's, well... none). We can only imagine what space combat might actually be like, and *Star Wars* has forever colored our interpretation. Ironically, Lucas was inspired by WWII dogfighting when he created his famous trench run scene. Therefore, I find it interesting that while just about every space sim out there is emulating *Star Wars* in one fashion or another, they've largely failed to capture the crucial features that make WWII-era dogfights so compelling.

The key to all of this is the presence or absence of an atmosphere – and I don't mean ambience. Most space sims have taken the best of both environments when crafting a flight model for their spacecraft. You get many of the properties of flight through air (lift, drag, etc.), combined with the benefits of space (e.g., no gravity). The result is flight without risk: just simple yank-and-bank on the joystick, without fear of stalls or spins. Frankly, I find that boring.

When I played through the WING COMMANDER series, I stuck with it because of the story, not the combat. So far, FREESPACE has been the prettiest space shooter out there and a joy to look at, but it's not what I'd call a simulation (I can't comment on FREESPACE 2 because, at the time of this writing, I can't get the demo to work).

TIE FIGHTER is my all-time favorite. I remember drooling over the prospect of one day being able to engage in multiplayer combat against an X-Wing, later to be hugely disappointed when it amounted to nothing more than cutting speed to 1/3 and turning in circles, ad *nauseum*. By the way, XVT: BALANCE OF POWER did a good turn by offering cooperative multiplayer. So why is it that there's only a skirmish mode in X-WING ALLIANCE? Heck, even the original DOOM got it right by including both deathmatch and coop modes, yet few games since have managed it.

Not My Department

So at this point I'm thinking maybe Thierry Nguyen's column should read "Action & Space," because there's very little realism going on out where no one can hear you scream. Then I remembered which game *CGW*'s Space Sim of the Year award went to last year: INDEPENDENCE WAR. Never having played this title, I swung by my local software store in the hopes of picking it up cheap. Lo and behold, INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE has been released and is extremely inexpensive.

Now, I may only have just started the main campaign, but I can already tell IWAR is the best reason this side of RED BARON 3D to keep a 3Dfx card handy. It's official: I'm booked, and have become a bonafide space sim fanatic. I mean, they've actually modeled lateral thrusters and inertia!

It looks like the fate of Arulco or the exploration of Durlag's Tower will just have to wait. I've got a dreadnaught to pilot. CGW

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

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INSIDE
ACTION

by Thierry Nguyen

thierry_nguyen@zd.com

License Revoked

No doubt, *The Matrix* has all the elements of a great action game: intriguing premise, lots of guns, unique visuals, and gun-play scenes straight out of a John Woo flick. Too bad it'd probably become a horrible game, if it were adepted

It's a sad fact that licenses of creative properties are gravely misused when they are turned into games. For every JEDI KNIGHT or ALIENS VS PREDATOR, there are many more YODA STORIES or SOUTH PARKS. In fact, good games using creative properties are the *exception*, rather than the rule

Creative License Should Be...Creative

Why is this? It seems thet companies expect the license to sell the game, and they focus more on promoting the title than on such trivial things as, oh, game design. Marketing, rather than Development, is in charge of the project. This is the only plausible reason why complete dreck such as TEKWAR or TRESPASSER got into stores in the first place. Gamers sometimes get suckered at first, but then a title ends up dropping off the chart after word-of-mouth has spread. What companies need to do is to learn how to use a creative license as more than a name-brand gimmick.

Scooter's Playlist

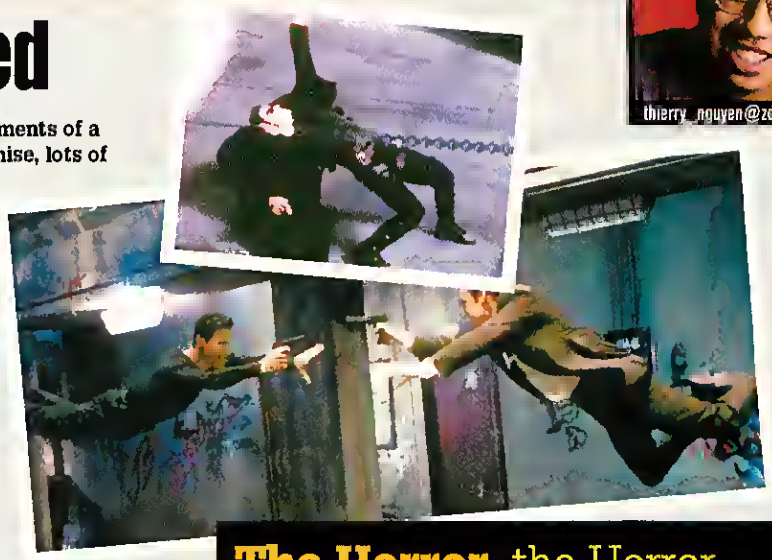
1. *System Shock 2*
2. *Soul Caliber (DreamCast)*
3. *Gebriel Knight III (beta)*
4. *Battlezone*
5. *Quake III Arena Test*

And the way to do this is simply stated: Explore -- rather than rehash -- the license.

It sounds exciting to recreate entire scenes or films in a game, in theory. But the reality is that such games are never very fun. We already know what happens, so it isn't fresh. What good games do is use *elements* of the license to explore concepts *unseen* in the original properties. Bethesda's TERMINATOR games let us tour the apocalyptic Los Angeles that was hinted at in the films. JEDI KNIGHT presented classic, archetypal themes with the *Star Wars* universe as a backdrop. The world wes briefly seen from the Alien's eyes in *Alien3*, and that perspective constituted a full third of ALIENS VS. PREDATOR. By contrast, STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE was a dull play-by-play of the film with barely a hint of variation

This lack of variation, of creativity, is the kiss of death. It's conservative; it sticks to "whet people know." There're some that do try to explore the license, but then lose sight of fundamental design issues, like SOUTH PARK. A few just screw up everything (TRESPASSER).

Hopefully, companies will start to learn to balence solid design with creative use of a license (as in JEDI KNIGHT – still the standard, two years after release), rather than to be sorely lacking in one or both elements. We'll see if anyone learned these basics when the next wave of licensed action games – including the *Star Trek* games, QBI-WAN, and HEAVY METAL: F A K K 2 – hits over the next year. CGW



The Horror, the Horror...

Two games have really stood out in action gamers' minds in recent memory: SYSTEM SHOCK 2 and HALF-LIFE. A lot of the reason why is their atmospheres. I asked the reepective deeigners what non-gaming influencee went into the overall etmosphere and mood of their gamee, and here are their responees:

Marc Laidlaw, Designer end Story-Writer for HALF-LIFE: "*Alien* comes up frequently in our discussions of how to create frightening atmoephere without the trappinge of Gothic horror. Early literary influencee included Stephen King's *The Mist* (e horror etory with a eomewhat "technological" rationale for the horrors) and the work of H.P. Lovecraft, who wrapped his beet horror etoree in the scientific method. When it came time to [deeign] the alien vistas of Xen, we tried to avoid standard ecience fiction imagery as much as poasible, end drew our texturee largely from biological eourcee (ineecte, marine life, microorganisms) to creete a queaey, squamous environment."

Ken Levine, Lead Designer of SYSTEM SHOCK 2: "Ridley Scott's films are far more influential than James Cameron's. Scott directed both *Blade Runner* and *Alien*, which pioneered the look of cinematic, dark sci-fi. For storyline, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* was a strong influence. I was fascinated by the notion of persistence of societal norme in the absence of a real society, as you'd find on a space ship billions of miles away from Earth.

The monkeys were another etory. We had some extra time leftover in motion-capture one day. I thought, 'Well, Jonethon (our motion-capture artist) could probably do a pretty believable monkey. I'm sure there'e some way to make a monkey fit into the game.' While we did the capturing, I created the monkey backstory. And the lead progremmer heted the idee like poison! But I stuck to my guns."

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INSIDE
SPORTS

by George Jones

This Magic Moment

Women's tennis is far more entertaining to watch than the men's game, for one critical reason: It has more drama. More meaningful big moments created by lots of little elements...longer, nail-biting baseline rallies; shorter matches that create more tension, more quickly. It makes for a much more exciting experience than the men's three-hour long, three-bit rally matches

Little Things Mean A Lot in the Sports-Game Game

This fact – which dawned on me when I was in Europe, starving for baseball or football – got me thinking about PC sports games, and how drama and the ability to crystallize and emotionally convey big moments through little details define success in our arena as well, far more so than killer 3D graphics. Realizing this, I now feel I have resolved two mysteries I've been grappling with for some time now:

1. Why do people who can't stand the thought of watching a two-and-a-half-hour soccer, hockey, or baseball game play FIFA or HIGH HEAT (or TRIPLE PLAY) for hours at a time?

2. Why do five-on-five computer basketball games (still) suck?

The easy answer to both questions rests in the details. Baseball, soccer, hockey, and even football games are great, not because of killer graphics or how fast the gameplay speeds by. The top-tier games in these categories succeed because the designers found a way to break down and distill the fundamental elements that comprise the essence of the sport.

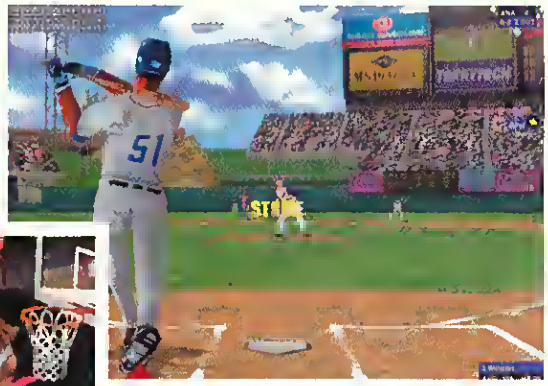
George's Playlist

1. *High Heat 2000*
2. *Age of Empires 2*
3. *Madden 2000*
4. *NFL Fever 2000*
5. *Quake III*

Consider soccer, a sport that resembles most relationships between men: couch potato-dom – punctuated by intense moments of excitement – followed by couch potato-dom. Yet EA Sports' FIFA is absolutely intense, because they have successfully abstracted the finer details of what makes soccer entertaining – quick passing, fluid motion, a lack of selfishness, and the emotional damage resulting from a single score.

The same holds true for baseball. The great baseball title has to do all the little things right; a baseball game has plenty of dramatic moments built into it already. Designers have to pay attention to the pitcher-batter confrontation/guessing game, the odds playing in the dugout, various pitchers' ability (or inability) to get the ball over the plate, and the almighty change-up – one of the most psychologically devastating plays in sports. No surprise that HIGH HEAT 2000 – one of *CGW*'s favorite games this year – surpasses expectations in all of these categories, much as the original Nintendo RBI BASEBALL did.

Which brings us to basketball. Even though NBA LIVE and Microsoft's INSIDE DRIVE are fine games, they lack the drama even a five-on-five, pickup park-and-rec game provides. Why? Because thus far, no one has done an extraordinary job of bottling the essence of roundball.



EAT IT HIGH HEAT's devastating changeup is one of those sublime elements that makes the game great.
ON THE OTHER HAND... Basketball games still focus on supposedly "big" moments like dunks, while ignoring smaller fundamentals.

It's not the dunk. Dunks make the highlight reels, but they're more of an exclamation point than sustained drama. The drama comes from the emotional tug-of-war within the game; when the Bulls, Lakers, or even Warriors bring the ball slowly down the court, trailing by three points, and hit a crucial three-pointer to tie the game after swinging the ball around the perimeter several times. Hoops drama comes at the end of a game, when the other team picks up their efforts and starts playing hyper-aggressive defense. Or when they start fouling intentionally to send the other team to the line. It comes when one of your teammates blows two free throws at the end of the game. It doesn't come when you shoot free throws with a glorified swing meter, and it sure doesn't come when a game plays more like JOUST than basketball. CGW

UPDATE • UPDATE

CGW's HIGH HEAT Baseball League!

The season trading deadline has come and gone with no last minute deals – though Robert Coffey did manage to con Jesse Hiatt's Texas Rangers out of starter Curt Schilling for Greg Vaughn and Andy Ashby a few weeks earlier. Complaints were registered, but Robert, being the commissioner, ignored them.

The real player movement occurred behind the scenes, with new ownership taking over for every team in the West. The most notable addition has undoubtedly been Copy Editor Holly Fleming – the only player in the league without a Y chromosome. Caterwauling like a rabid lemur, Holly's animated playing style consistently threatens to topple computers and destroy gamepads as she leaps, lunges, and prances about the room in her efforts to manage just one hit. With an inadvertent walk the only flaw in an otherwise perfect game for Steve Wanczyk's Orioles against Holly's Oakland A's, Holly figures to be a real (some would say disturbingly) wild card as the pennant races heat up.

Keep up the good work, Holly.

Enemy cruisers fast approaching. Deflector shields not operational. Ion drive in critical condition.

Hint-page time.

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INSIDE

RPG / ADVENTURE

by Desslock
desslock@desslock.com

Roll Call

Interplay Productions recently unveiled its BALDUR'S GATE spin-off, ICEWIND DALE. ICEWIND will recycle the BioWare Infinity engine created for BALDUR'S GATE (adding enhancements, including limited support for 3D video cards), and is essentially a single/multiplayer dungeon crawl in a hardcore *D&D* setting. Interplay's other Infinity engine game, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, is a single-player, more story-driven game that'll explore some truly bizarre environments. BioWare's NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will use a new 3D engine and put players in control of a single character, while emphasizing online multiplayer action. Lastly, Stormfront Studios's sequel to the original "gold box" game, POOL OF RADIANCE, looks similar to BALDUR'S GATE but features an interactive environment and 3D characters (see preview in this issue). NEVERWINTER NIGHTS and POOL OF RADIANCE 2 will use the upcoming 3rd Edition *D&D* Rules.

For daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

Dungeon Keepers

The company founded to create *Dungeons & Dragons*, TSR Inc., was rumored to be in financial turmoil a few years ago. Tabletop *D&D's* popularity was waning, and SSI's once-successful series of *D&D* computer adaptations was winding down to a not-so-glamorous finale.

Can D&D Survive Hasbro?

Wizards of the Coast was the corporate "white knight" that acquired and revitalized TSR – ironic, considering that the overwhelming success of WOTC's *Magic the Gathering* card game contributed to TSR's financial misfortunes. Many gamers were skeptical of WOTC's chances of restoring *D&D* to prominence, especially given the company's focus on competing products. Those concerns turned out to be unfounded – WOTC has done a fantastic job with the *D&D* franchise.

One Man's Filth...

Prior to WOTC's acquisition, *D&D* was reshaped against the desires of its customers into a less controversial (and less interesting) game. Ill-conceived concerns over the effects of fantasy role playing on presumably malleable teenage players led TSR to adopt a rigid "code of ethics" for all *D&D* products. Authors were required to compromise their creativity by, for example, requiring evil actions to be punished, even when they were consistent with a character's moral alignment.

Desslock's Playlist

1. *System Shock 2 (still)*
2. *Independence War Deluxe*
3. *Starfleet Command*
4. *EverQuest*
5. *Asheron's Call (beta)*

The code, and changes effected by *D&D's* 2nd Edition Rules, removed character classes and races of ambiguous morality, downplayed the role of mythological supernatural beings (in spite of the game's fantasy setting), and discouraged material considered by the code's authors to be potentially harmful. The code was cynically established to stave off potential legal liability. So blatant was TSR's effort to detach itself from aspects of *D&D* perceived to be controversial, that it added save-yer-butt ambiguous declarations to the code, such as "the depiction of 'filth' should be minimized."

With such restrictions inhibiting creativity, it's not surprising that *D&D's* commercial viability began to be questioned. While other tabletop games such as White Wolf's *Vampire* and *Werewolf* games attracted players in droves to their novel, edgy settings, *D&D* felt outdated in comparison.

After TSR's sale to WOTC, *D&D* seemed to get back in it. BALDUR'S GATE was a tremendous commercial and critical success, perhaps in part due to WOTC's more open-minded involvement with the franchise, and there are a number of other promising *D&D* games in development.

WOTC has also been actively involved in improving *D&D*, recently announcing that next year it will release *D&D's* 3rd Edition Rules. The 3rd Edition Rules have been almost universally lauded, as they remove discriminatory class restrictions, restore demons, devils, assassins, monks and half-orcs; and establish a new skill system. When I learned about the pending acquisition of WOTC by Hasbro Interactive, I was disappointed – what impact would the change of control have on the enlightened *D&D* fostered by WOTC?

Toying Around

Once Interplay's and Stormfront's *D&D* licenses expire, it wouldn't be surprising if Hasbro developed its own *D&D* games. Whether a company with a lineup consisting largely of board and arcade game adaptations and children's games is capable of creating compelling *D&D* games is questionable.

My concerns are somewhat assuaged by WOTC Vice-President Ryan Dancey, who announced that Hasbro would not alter WOTC's *D&D* strategies, and that they accept the more adult aspects of *D&D's* language, tone, and content. And on the plus side, *D&D* will now have access to Hasbro's formidable distribution and advertising.

In spite of Dancey's stay-the-course message, it would be naive to believe that Hasbro's acquisition won't have any impact on *D&D's* future, and I remain skeptical that the impact will be positive. But it's good to learn that – in the short run – the course plotted by WOTC will remain unchanged.

And the demons and devils are coming back! CGW

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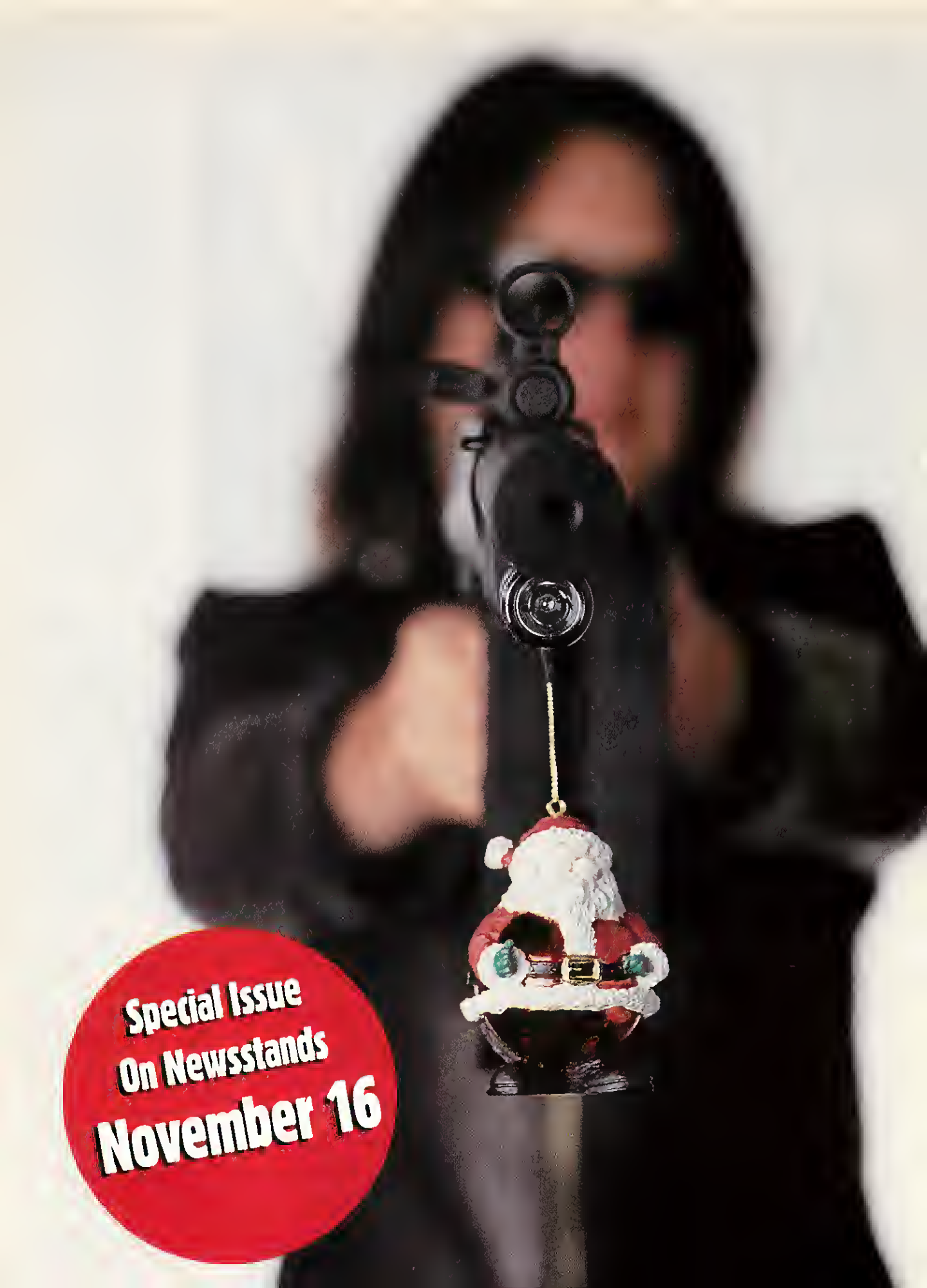
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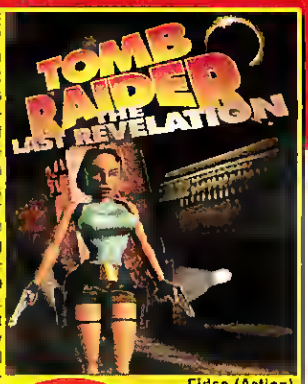

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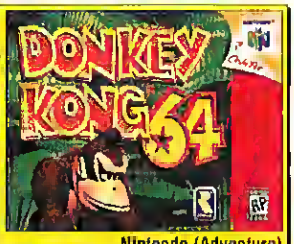

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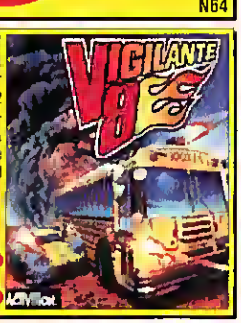

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by Jeff Green

Insert Your Face Here

So You Wanna Be A Game Journalist? Join My School!

As a mildly respected member of this field, the one question I'm asked the most (other than "what's that thing on your nose?") is, "How can I get your job?"

Believe me, folks—it isn't easy. To reach this pinnacle, to ascend this dizzying mountaintop, entails a commitment for which few have the stamina. Like all the tough professions—medicine, law enforcement, terrorism—game journalism requires you to give yourself over to something more than just a job, a paycheck. It is a way of life. Those of us who have chosen to walk this difficult road have sacrificed much. A decent salary, for example. A healthy complexion. The respect of people over age 12.

Yet we walk on.

• • •

Some of you—the few, the proud—may still not be discouraged by this. To you I say "bravo!" To you I say, well, you just might be crazy enough, brave enough, to be one of us. Which brings me to my point.

While deep in meditation one recent Saturday morning—during the break between *Batman Beyond* and *Pokemon*—it struck me that while tomorrow's young leaders have more than ample access to medical schools, law schools, and terrorist Web sites, there is a rather appalling void in our education system for the aspiring gaming journalist.

Having recognized this void, I've decided to "share the wealth," as it were, to spread my knowledge and skills through the formation of the Greenspeak School Of Gaming Journalism. This fully accredited correspondence course will teach you, through a series of low-cost tapes and videos—narrated by entertainment legend Joe Piscopo—all you need to know to launch a career in this glamorous profession. Soon you too can be playing games at home while earning, literally, hundreds of dollars a year. Here's but a small sample of the courses I'll be offering:

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Introduction To Preview Writing: Honing Your Cliches

Prerequisites: Proven willingness to step up and take it to the next level.

This intensive writing workshop will train you in the fundamentals of writing game previews. Critical to the course will be learning how to sprinkle copy with such essential phrases as "gorgeous 3D graphics," "the next generation of [insert genre here] games," and that catch-all closer, "we can't wait to play it." Rewriting press releases will also be discussed, as will the best techniques for interviewing game designers without asking any real questions.

The PR Flak: Friend, Or Spawn Of Satan?

In this reflective 10-part series of seminars, we will examine the complex, sometimes difficult relationship between the gaming journalist and the game company public-relations flak (or "stooge.") On the one hand, the PR flak will annoy you endlessly on the phone, demanding covers for games like REGIS PHILBIN 2D SOLITAIRE. On the other hand, the flak can prove an invaluable tool for gaining last-minute access to screen shots, spec sheets, and other pertinent info that you forgot to get on your own because you were too busy playing QUAKE 3 all week.

Game Review Workshop: Channeling Your Bitter Jealousy

Prerequisites: Lifelong hatred of those with more talent and money than you. Lack of tangible accomplishments accompanied by need to criticize the hard work of others.

It's well known that game designers and programmers make lots more money than game journalists. For example, most can actually afford to eat everyday. Just because they have more talent and money, though, is no reason to sulk. In this course we'll teach you how to channel years of resentment into revenge-exacting game reviews. Yes, in one evening's bit of work you can undo three years worth of a talented person's effort. Even better, you can do it without actually playing past the first 10 minutes of a game, or knowing how to fairly critique a product. Specific techniques such as false assumptions, unrealistic expectations, and unfair comparisons will be discussed.

Stress Management Workshop

The greatest misconception of our profession is that it's easy. In this course we discuss the often backbreaking pressures of this job, and how best to cope with them. Through proven psychological methods such as whining, psychopuppetry, and group hugs, each session will help you come to terms with different problems. In the first week, we'll deal with these topics: How Come Everyone Got An AGE II Beta But Me?, Lunch Crisis: Taco Bell or Burger King?, and Why Can't I Get A Chick Like Lara? *Tissues recommended.*

• • •

Sounds great, huh? Amazingly, this is but a taste of what my school has to offer. About the only think you won't get here is a Pulitzer Prize—you'll have to earn that yourself!

So what are you waiting for? Send me your money now—and see you in class!

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the authorities were alerted to this scam weeks ago, and should be closing in any minute. Send your favorite jailhouse survival tips to jeff_green@zd.com. CGW

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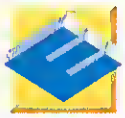

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- *NEW* 48X Max[5] Variable CD-ROM Drive
- *NEW* SB Live! Value Digital with MusicMatch® Jukebox Enhanced Version
- harman/kardon HK-195 Speakers
- 3Com® V.90 56K[11] PCI Telephony WinModem
- *NEW* 1-Year Dellnet℠ Internet Access[14] with 20MB Online Backup[15]

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- *NEW* 8X Max[10] Variable DVD-ROM Drive
- 100MB Zip Drive with One Disk

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High Performance, Great Value

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Dell® Recommended Upgrade:

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