

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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100 Best Games of '99

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BALDUR'S GATE 2

JANUARY 2000 • ISSUE 106 • cgm.gamespot.com



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ANY QUESTIONS?



"DIDN'T THINK SO."

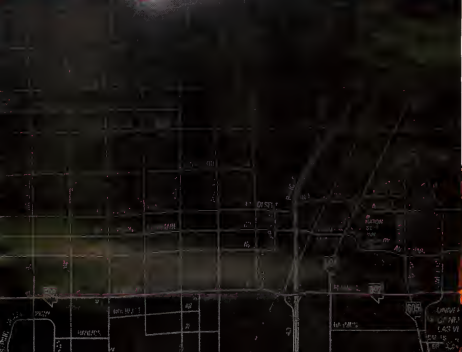
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182

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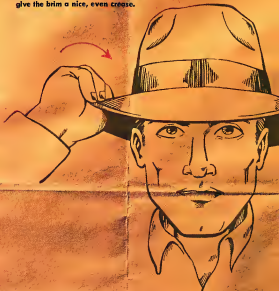
www.giant.com

HOW TO BREAK IN A FEDORA:



- 1 Make sure each side of the crown has a smooth, curved indent.

- 2 For a look that says you've got places to go and bad guys to hurt, give the brim a nice, even crease.



EXPERT METHODS:

- 4 Canine chew toy.



- 5 Mine shaft wind shear.



- 6 High altitude bridge-hopping.

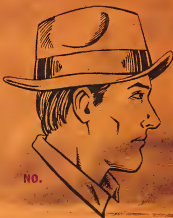


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YES.



NO.

- 3 Never, under any circumstances, turn the brim up. Remember, you want to look like a stud archaeologist, not some guy named Cletus.

7 Raging H₂O soaks.



8 Lava vaper treatments.



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COVER STORY

CGW's Holiday Hot 100

All we want for Christmas is 100 of the season's best games, gizmos, and gadgets. That, and one of Regis' millions. **66**

FEATURES

Y2K Gaming Survival Guide **86**

Let the world go to hell; we'll keep gaming. Here's all the gaming news, previews, and reviews you can use if the social fabric hits the technological spin cycle.

PREVIEWS

Baldur's Gate 2

Grand-style, of-fantasy role-playing games are back, thanks to BALDUR'S GATE, last year's million-selling AD&D smash NL. Now, get an exclusive peek at what the D&D RPG geeks are doing for an encore. **50**

High Heat 2001

3D's HIGH HEAT 2000 was the best baseball game in a decade. Hell, it may have been the best game of the year. The next game in the series adds a ton of visual, statistical, and managerial refinements. Here's our pre-season report. **58**



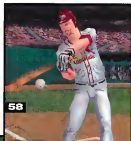
66



86



50



58





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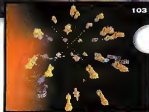
The Ultimate Gaming Machine



140



30



103

ON THE
CD



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your demo daddies?

- Grand Theft Auto 2
 - NHL 2000
 - Madden NFL 2000
 - Rogue Spear
 - Sid Meier's Alien Crossfire
 - USAF
- And a whole bunch more!

Cover photo of Michael Jordan provided by AllSport

READ ME 30

G.O.D. bless *The Blair Witch Project*, the coming MIGHT & MAGIC century, Sid Meier: The *CGW* Interview, HALF-LIFE hilarity, and the usual cast of idiots.

REVIEWS 99

Homeworld	103
Penzer General 30	108
Freespace 2	114
Seven Kingdoms 2	118
NHL 2000	120
Driver	124
Shadow Company	126
Cutthroats	130
Armored Fist 3	132
Quick Hits	134
AMA Superbike, Front Office Football 2, Soul Reaver, Sid Meier's Alien Crossfire, Professional Bull Rider, X-COM Email, Thief Gold, Heroes of Might & Magic 3: Armageddon's Blade	

HARDWARE 140

Build Your Own Ultimate Game

Machine: Take the fate of your gaming machine into your own hands. Here's your guide to building your own killer rig piece by piece.

Loyd Case Windows 2000 and the gamer	150
Tech Medics Technical help in troubled times	167

Hardware Reviews

Guillemot Prophet 30 Accelerator	172
Wingmen Force Feedback Mouse	173
Klipsch ProMedia Speakers	173
Guillemot Fortissimo Sound Card	173
Logitech Wingmen Gamepad Extreme	174
Microsoft Sidewinder Pro Gamepad	174

GAMER'S EDGE 178

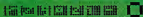
Rogue Spear Mission Planning	178
Queue 3 Camping Tips	182
Homeworld Ship Stealing	186
Gamer's Edge Tips and Cheats	192
Tips for RAINBOW SIX, ROGUE SPEAR, DARKSTONE, AGE OF EMPIRES II, FREESPACE 2, DESCENT: FREESPACE, HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III, SEVEN KINGDOMS, ARMORED FIST 2	

INSIDE GAMING 200

Action Thierry Nguyen	200
Strategy Robert Celfey	201
Sports George Jones	204
Simulations Gordon Berg	206
Adventure/RPG Dedeck	206

DEPARTMENTS

George Jones Admits he's a Pokemon	21
Letters Wechoo talking 'bout?	26
Advertiser Index	212
Greenspeak A Loser Picks the Winners	214



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- exec scan procedure.....
- security level COVS.....
-clearance granted.



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PUBLISHER

PATRICK GIPP

Surviving the Apocalypse

Y2K may mean the end of the world (as we know it) to some, but here at *Computer Gaming World*, we feel fine. Just fine. Because despite all the craziness, we've breathed deeply, centered ourselves, and have maintained perspective.

Like the soft, syrupy sweetness of a Celine Dion ballad, perspective will allow the stars and get you through these manic times. Let me give you a taste of the enlightened state of mind that permeates the CGW offices.

Pokémon: How easy it would be to simply bash the POKÉMON phenomenon. But the CGW comically-attuned directive (and the need to rationalize the countless hours some of us have spent playing the game) dictates that we not gush over or dis such phenomena. We must dig into the deeper truths. We must attempt to learn something from these noble, chubby, amme creatures. Like how—despite all the collectible craziness and pop culture cuteness—Nintendo's remarkable success with this product is also due to a simple, exquisitely addictive game design that succeeds despite outdated graphics and barebones technical limitations. Many a game com-



1 According to marketing types, the mainstream press, and even some of our competition, we gamers have suddenly become cool and hip. **1**

pany could learn a lesson from POKÉMON for the Game Boy.

Adventure Games "They're dead!" At least that's what we keep hearing. Sure, GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 may be the last epic adventure game...of its sort. But the adventure genre's heart still beats. Instead of 2D mouse-baits, this endangered format has recently taken cues from all the other gaming genres, and has started to liberally borrow action-gaming elements. Don't fret, though—someone will eventually figure out how to achieve the prime goal of the adventure game: telling an interesting story that doesn't get repetitive in terms of plot or gameplay.

Gaming = Coolness According to marketing types, the mainstream press, and even some of our competition, we gamers have suddenly become cool and hip. We work out. We're into the coolest movies, music, and TV shows. We wear Gap fleece vests.

Slow down, folks—we're talking about gamers here. It's not that we don't work out. It's not that we are (or aren't) geeks. It's just that we're as demographically disparate a group as the Democratic party. Gaming is cool only if and when there are cool games to play. Sometimes I worry that the industry gets so focused on derivative, marketing-generated hits that this fact gets lost in the equation.

Let's worry about transcendent gaming experiences for the next millennium. Perspective dictates that the rest will come.

George Jones



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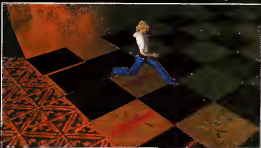
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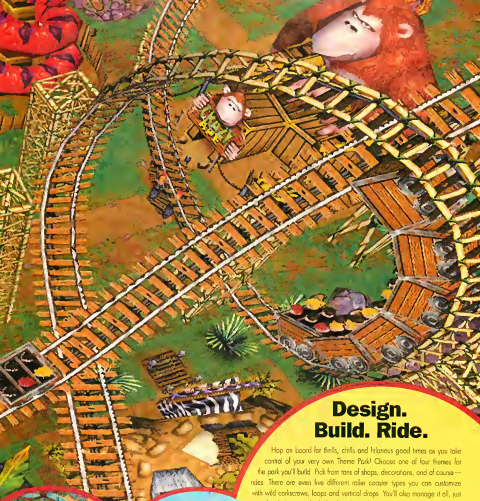


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LETTERS

Catching Up With PREY

I's PREY the latest victim of the so-called Bermuda Triangle of Gaming? The last time I read about it was way back in June '98 (issue 167). I also watched it be curiously pushed back into the dreadful "TBD" status in the Pipeline, until it completely vanished. What's up?

Leo

We talked to a 3D Realms spokesperson and received the following information: PREY isn't dead, but it is in critical condition and on life support. Most of the design team was yanked off the project to work on the next DUKE NUKEM game, the result being that the game was pushed to the utmost back burner. Its future is so indeterminate now that not even Nostradamus could predict whether it will ever actually ship or not. So don't hold your breath, Leo.



Dell's Delays

After seeing your rating of the Dell Dimension XPS 6008 in the December issue I tried to find the same system for purchase on Dell's web site. According to Dell, "based on late-breaking developments from Intel, Dell cannot take orders on any Dimension XPS B advertised products that feature the Intel 820 chipset and Rambus technology." Does anyone know what these "late-breaking developments" are and when the XPS B will be available for purchase? I am also curious as to why no gaming rigs from Alienware were included in your review.

Scott Ruark

Technical Director Dave Salvator says: Unfortunately, after we'd put this story into our production pipeline, Intel announced a delay in delivering the 820 system chipset to PC makers like Dell. According to one Dell official we spoke with, you'll be able to order an 820-based system by the time you're reading this. As for Alienware's absence, they were invited to participate in this year's roundup, and elected not to send systems in. The reason given was that the systems they would be selling when the magazine came out versus what they could send us for testing would be too different. We'll hopefully be getting review systems from them sometime soon.

The Ultimate Gaming Processor?

Iwanted to know why you don't use a system like **Kryotech's 900 MHz Athlon PC** in your Ultimate Gaming Machine section. If you're building the "Ultimate" gaming machine, regardless of price, this would be the top of the line for a base system that you can get right now.

Jason Becker

Tech Whenie Dave Salvator says: The Athlon is indeed a very solid CPU that stacks up well clock-for-clock versus the P-III. Lloyd Case and I have gone through a long, arduous process of trying to locate stable and solid Athlon motherboards to build up CGW's Ultimate Gaming Machines. And frankly, they've been hard to come by. In this month's hardware feature, where we show you how to build an Ultimate Gaming Machine yourself, we gave AMD very serious consideration as the main engine in our systems. But we opted for Intel for several reasons. First and foremost was clock-for-clock performance. With their new 820

chipset, RAMBUS memory, AGP 4X, and the Coppermine CPUs, we found that Intel was actually a bit faster than AMD overall. All of this was validated by our high-resolution testing, where Intel fared better. We also found that overall, the Intel motherboards were more stable, and produced fewer crashes. Remember, when putting together a gaming system, you need more than just a speedy CPU and 3D card. The system chipset and memory type are very important performance factors as well.

As for using Kryotech technology, active refrigeration is an interesting way to wring more performance out of the chip, but no matter how fast the Athlon CPU is, it will still be somewhat limited by its chipset's slower speeds/feeds versus Intel's 820 chipset. If you've found an Athlon motherboard you like that runs smoothly, tell us about it at cgw_hardware@ed.com.

CGW = Cheap Game Wankers?

Hi, just a quick comment on the CG Tips section in the November issue. You gave Tim Rodner a copy of **BEATDOWN** to reward him for providing a cool easter egg. **BEATDOWN**? Wasn't that your Coaster of the Month a few months ago? Come on you guys—you can do better than that. I feel bad for poor Tim.

Al Filotto, Canada

If it makes you feel any better, in addition to BEATDOWN we also sent Tim a copy of PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER. Thanks for writing in. We were so touched by your concern that we're sending you your very own copy of BEATDOWN! Enjoy!

Dissenting DISCIPLES

I must take exception with your review of **DISCIPLES** (Dec., p. 158). I have found it to be totally absorbing. It's been quite a while since I have played a game that is so engaging that I can't stop playing. If your reviewer approached the game as only a clone of HOMM, his perceptions were colored by his expectation of DISCIPLES vis-a-vis HOMM. They bear only a passing similarity—an that both are turn-based fantasy games. Once past that, you need to evaluate the game for what it is—not what it was never meant to be. I feel that a rating of 1.5 stars is totally inappropriate for this game.

Dave Bensley

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Digital Anvil



Read.Me

The Latest News From All Around the Computer Gaming World edited by jeff_green@zd.com

G.O.D. Wants You To Be Blair Witch

EXCLUSIVE

The Gathering Signs On To Do Three Blair Witch Games in 2000

The success of *The Blair Witch Project* may have shocked you, but after seeing the parade of licensed merchandise it spawned (t-shirts, caps, comic book, book, CD, magnets, keychains, etc.), it should come to no one's surprise that computer games are now in the offing. The Gathering of Developers, lead by master tap dancer Mike Wilson (who could teach Jake "the Snake" Plummer a few moves), put on such an impressive performance for *Blair Witch* creators Haxan Films that they've signed on with G.O.D. to create three computer games based on the film.

All three games will use Terminal Reality's NOCTURNE engine, which may be more suited to *Blair Witch* than NOCTURNE itself (see our review next month). All three will be developed sepa-

rately in cooperation with Haxan, and they'll focus on a different part of the *Blair* mythology. Players become investigators looking into different chapters of the bizarre backstory of the movie. Terminal Reality will develop the first game for release in May. Human Head Studios, currently working on *RUNE*, will develop the second one for August; and the third will be developed by Ritual Entertainment (SIN) or Third Law Interactive (KISS: PSYCHO GIRL/COS), depending on who draws the shorter bundle of sticks.

Despite the long history of movie licenses propping up flimsy games, both the Gathering and Haxan say that these games will be faithful to the movie, and that Haxan will work closely with the developers to incorporate their ideas. Haxan Producer Rob Cowie said, "It's



going to be a game, not a movie that's a crossover into a game. We want it to be a cool game with a good story. That's really important to us.

"We want to do a lot with light and shadow and point-of-view stuff," he added, suggesting that the *Blair Witch* games may require a switch in the NOCTURNE engine to be able to handle a first-person perspective. "We can push what they were able to do with NOCTURNE, and bring the gamer into that world."

Next month, we'll head into the Woods near Burkittsville, Maryland, for a closer look at all three games. —Ken Brown

COMING SOON

Half-Life: Opposing Force

CGW Gets To Play It, and Our Lives Stop Once Again

From STARCRAFT to BARBIE'S DOWN-HOME CLAMBAKE LOVE GROOVE, every game released these days seems to cough up an add-on pack. Frankly, we've had about enough—who really wants to spend more time with SETTLERS? But when the add-on pack is for our 1998 Game of the Year, a game we still find ourselves ignoring work, family, and duty to our country to play, well, the pack of smits and parolees that is the CGW edit staff sits up and takes notice.

Simply put, Gearbox's HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE has been the most anticipated product in our offices all season long, so the arrival of the press demo was a rare and special day. Firing up the demo only whetted our appetites for the full release, much the way DAY ONE did for HALF-LIFE a year ago. While you play as one of the military pawns pursuing the hero from the original game, the essence of gameplay seems to have survived intact.

Interaction with characters is more important this time around, since you'll have to persuade military specialists to blowtorch welded doors open, get medics to heal other soldiers, and so on. Gearbox has made ample use of scripted events in the game. In just the short duration of the demo, we were kidnapped, trapped in a thunderously explosive room as it collapsed, and watched an alien vessel take out an army chopper. Only a glimpse of new weapons and monsters was available, but that's almost beside the point. What really matters is this: The headcrabs will still scare the living bejesus out of you, and isn't that sense of fear and dread what made HALF-LIFE the high point of last year?

We'll have our review of OPPOSING FORCE—including our take on what processes to be a fantastic multiplayer component—as soon as we can tear ourselves away from the game long enough to write it. —Robert Coffey



5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

January 1995

Before he made more money than several small nations by writing pulpy, pseudo-science fiction paperback novels, Hollywood golden boy Michael Crichton actually worked on a computer game. In 1985, Crichton was heavily involved in the creation of AMAZON, a text/graphic adventure. Row among celebrity designs, it was a pretty good game. In an interview with CGW, Crichton said that games were "the future of fiction" and claimed he was going to write a novel based on the game. Could this have been the origin of Cargo? No, wait, we said it was good.



10

January 1993

If you wanted multiplayer gaming in 1990, you had to really want it...and pay out the ass. Kosmal's *Alt WARRIOR*, the pioneering "massively multiplayer" simulation on the EGen network, cost a mere \$5 per hour when connecting with a 300 bps modem. If you were among the technocracy who could afford a 2400 bps modem, you had to pay for the privilege, to the tune of \$10 per hour. Miles your ISP look like a charity organization.



5

January 1995

It had the ugliest cover in CGW's history (thanks to our corporate cover "experts"), but our January '95 issue was chock full of nuts. In addition to our first member survey feature, we reviewed WARCRAFT ORCS & HUMANS. WARCRAFT wasn't the first real-time strategy game (see Westwood folks will always remind you, and yes, they're still bitter), but it was the game that truly launched the genre.



Reality Check

Mid Glasser may be popular with the chicks, but he didn't do as well here in computer gaming land, with BRAVEHEART hopping across the board. Maybe that's because he's popular with the chicks. 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.

	CGM (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	IGN (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamepot (out of 10)	Demomaster (out of 10)
Braveheart	2	34%	1.5	4	5.0	4
C&C:Tiberian Sun	4	75%	4	6	7.5	7
Orkan	4	69%	4	7	7.5	6
Gulf War	3	60%	1.5	5	5.0	—
Madden NFL 2000	4	90%	4	6	7.4	8
Night And Magic VII	4.5	65%	4	6	6.3	7
NFL Fever 2000	4	74%	3	—	7.0	8
Rogue Spear	4.5	90%	5	6	8.0	9
Shadowman	3	74%	4.5	6	5.0	6
Starfleet Command	4.5	65%	4	5	7.5	9

* indicates game has not been rated • red = editor's choice game

More **MIGHT** AND **MAGIC** Madness

New World Computing Unveils Y2K Plans for M&M Franchise

It's been an embarrassment of riches for **MIGHT AND MAGIC** fans the last couple years, and the new millennium looks like it will be no different. New World Computing recently revealed their plans for both their signature RPG franchise—as well as one interesting new offshoot.

First up is **MIGHT AND MAGIC: DAY OF THE DESTROYER**. New World is giving up the numbering system for the RPGs, and this is not being considered internally as either a sequel or an expansion to **MMVII**, but as a kind of "new direction" for the series.

The first thing to know is that it will use the same engine featured in the last game, but with a couple long-requested, long-overdue refinements: mouse look and a wide-screen mode. The game takes place in Eiroth again, but the focus is different. This time, you'll be playing from the "dark" side, and among your potential party members will be such creatures as dragons, mamotaurs, lizardmen, necromancers, vampires, andliches. You'll actually start the game alone (a first for this series), and will be able to recruit up to five others. New World is working hard to create actual backstories and agendas for the NPC party members, so that they'll be more than just a collection of stats.

The storyline sets you out on the trail of a mystic being who has created an interdimensional gateway that is now causing chaos in the land. New World said that choosing alliances with other characters will factor in big, and will affect how the game plays out. Look for this title sometime around March.

The more exciting news, actually, is what happens to the series after **MIGHT AND MAGIC: DAY OF THE DESTROYER**. For the following game,



New World Computing is finally doing what many gamers have long wished for: They're abandoning their own, outdated engine and adopting a state-of-the-art 3D one. **MIGHT AND MAGIC IX**, due in 2001, will use Monolith's outstanding LithTech engine. New World is playing around with LithTech version "1.5" right now, and is upgrading it in pieces as Monolith slowly migrates towards LithTech 2.0. It's a huge change of direction for New World Computing, who have always done things in-house, but a change they recognize as vital if they wish to keep their games competitive. Look for more details on both **MIGHT AND MAGIC** games in an upcoming **CGW**.

Finally, many fans will be thrilled to know that **ArcoMage**—the surprisingly addictive Magic: The Gathering-style card game from **MIGHT AND MAGIC VII**—is striking out on its own, due to popular demand. New World said that they're gearing up to have **ArcoMage** available as a direct download from 3DO's website, priced in the \$10–\$15 range. The game will support multiplayer games, as well as the ability to set custom rules and winning conditions. —Jeff Green

The GOOD...

POKÉMON

Aside readers will recall that, just a few months ago, we stashed Pokémon in "The Red" section here. That's because we were turned off by the overinflating hype and cutesy product placement. We still are. But then something interesting happened: We played it. So off if you want, but ask anyone who really knows and they'll tell you—this is a surprisingly deep and addictive game. Once you see your first Pokémon evolve as it levels up, we defy you to quit.



the BAD...

NEW MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER D-PAD

The original Microsoft Sidewinder was a great gamepad, with one exception: the godawful, painful 4-pad. So, given the chance to go back to the drawing board with the new Sidewinder, what did Microsoft do? They made it even worse. Now the 4-pad hurts less, but it's masher than ever, and feels so unresponsive as to be nearly useless. Didn't anyone test this thing before it went out?



and the UGLY...

HYPOCRITICAL GAME COMPANIES

The very public tussle that one game company threw over a Web review of its game was the most entertaining event in egs. It seems they were upset that the reviewer berped on the game's scantly-clothed babe, which the company said was immature and tasteless. You gotta love it: They completely exploit the female's body in every ad for months, throw a party for gamers at the Playkey mansion—and then cry foul when journalists focus on the girl. Gee, you say "you reap what you sow?" We thought you could.

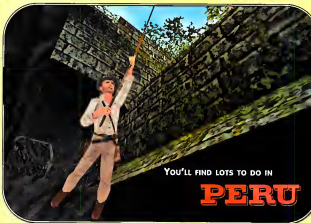


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and the
EMERALD MACHINE



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PERU With lush rainforests, snow-capped mountains and ancient ruins, there's something for everyone. There's also a sneaky boulder, so keep a watchful eye.

INDIAN JONES
and the
EMERALD MACHINE



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PALAWAN Get lost in the serene splendor of these majestic islands. Your machete can be an effective shark repellent.

INDIAN JONES
and the
EMERALD MACHINE



STAMP

STAMP

STAMP

Sid Meier



Does your wife ever say things like, "He can design a game that encompasses all of civilization history, but he can't take the trash out!" No, but every year we celebrate "We Love the King Day."

What are some of your favorite PC games? STARDRAFT, ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON, DIABLO, WARCRAFT, AGE OF EMPIRES.

What's with the "Sid Meier's This" and "Sid Meier's That" business? Do you hand out business cards that say "Sid Meier's business card"? Actually, the full inscription is "Sid Meier's business card, a division of Sid Meier's Creations, a registered trademark of Sid Meier Intergalactic. Look for our IPO later this year."

What's the one game idea you wish you had come up with? "Hollywood Squares."

What do you do when people come up to you and say, "I have this great idea for a game!" I hand them a C++ compiler and a copy of DPware.

What's the worst game idea you ever had? Well, my first version of CIVILIZATION was a real-time game; the initial RAILROAD TYCOON prototype was about model trains; and CPU BASH was designed exclusively for the revolutionary 3DO system. Take your pick.
—Interview by Mark Aster



stealthmode

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

Sneaky here, with a very uncivilized rumor. An anonymous source tells me that the next Sid Meier game will be a strategy game set on prehistoric earth. This will round out the Sweep of Time trilogy, with CIVILIZATION and ALPHA CENTAURS making up the other two games. Firaxis refused to confirm the rumor, but told us to keep an eye on their website for future details about Sid's new game.

Did you hear that *Activision* is planning on going the massively multiplayer route with that 10-year Star Trek license they purchased? It's true. Word slipped out that they are going to do a MM RPG Trek game during a business conference call and was reported by the snoops at Well-Rounded Entertainment. What wasn't revealed was who was going to build this game for them. Well, Dr.

By Sneak Doggy Dog

"Bones" Sneaky has taken a recorder reading of the situation and discovered that *Verant Interactive*, of *EVERQUEST* renown, is going to develop it. Time to die a Klingon!

Das ist verboten! *Ion Storm* has banned employee Web access to several websites that have been ripping on Ion/Romero and his girlfriend/lead level designer Steve "Killcreek" Case. The most popular topic at these sites has been how Killcreek posed for Playboy on Ion Storm's conference room table (I guess bringing a box of donuts to work isn't good enough anymore), sporting a couple of new "mods" that Romero bought for her recently. Romero decided that his employees didn't need to read that "garbage" and ordered his MIS manager to block those IPs.

Meanwhile, deep in the heart of Texas, *Origin* purrs along. *ULTIMA ONLINE 2* was announced, but they still haven't announced the other multiplayer game they are working on: *PRIVATEER ONLINE*. Word is that this will be much more than just an online space sim. There will be large elements of non-stop activities, so expect bases and possibly even planet surfaces you can explore.

It's Halloween as I write this, but that doesn't explain the mysterious man in the trenchcoat who is sending out self-introducing letters to game companies alongside a "publisher's package" from the former *BABYLON 5* developers. He's directing all comers to "address any business related correspondence through me." He also writes, "While someone could try to reverse engineer our work, it would be a formidable, and somewhat costly task, mostly due to the state of what little documentation does exist outside the circle of people who worked on it." Ok. Sneaky understands that trying to work with someone else's code is tough, but this mysterious stranger doesn't exactly have the actual *BABYLON 5* license to sell. What good is anything he's offering if it doesn't include the license? Which, by the way, at least four parties have expressed an interest in to *Sierra*. No bids so far, though, and Sierra only wants cash for the license—no royalty deals. How much cash do they want? "Needs to be high enough to be worth doing," Sierra says. Clever negotiators, those *Sierras*.

When *Hasbro* assimilated the tottering *Microprose*, a lot of hardcore gamers lamented that the grand old days were over for the venerated company that birthed *CIVILIZATION* and other classics. Happily, *Hasbro* seems to be treating *Microprose* properties with respect. They will be publishing *CIVILIZATION 3*, and now I've learned that *MASTER OF MAGIC 2* is definitely in the works. This one looks like a 2001 release.

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

Tchotchke of the Month

tchotchke (tchotchka): slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket

Okay, now this is what we're talkin' 'bout. After months of halfheartedly passing out this award to such dubious product as Ted Nugent Gonzo Meat Biltong and Gus Gutz dolls, we finally have a genuine winner on our hands. This Bugs Bunny pocket watch, sent by Infogrames to promote their new *BUGS BUNNY: LOST IN TIME* game, is actually cool in a non-ironic way. It looks good, with a nice engraved Bugs Bunny on the case, and it's a real, functioning watch. Bravo! Vendors, let's keep this rhythm going. More stuff like this, less beef jerky. That's how to keep editors happy.

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The "kill-zone" as seen by a
standard 350 dpi mouse.



The "kill-zone" as seen by the
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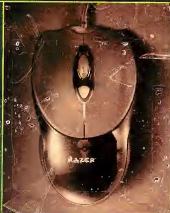
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Live, and in the Thresh

QUAKE King Thresh Creates Internet Portal for Gamers

Remember Thresh, the only guy to ever make money and a name for himself playing QUAKE? For a while he was undefeated—until a 12-year-old kid knocked him off the throne. Soon after, Thresh was looking for a real job. First, there was [firingsquad.com](#), a hardware-oriented Web site for gamers. After only a couple years on the Web, the site proved to be incredibly successful and the cash started raining down.

Now, Thresh has something new up his sleeve, and chances are that someday you'll be taking it for granted and wondering why it was never there before. It's an Internet portal specifically designed for gamers, called [gamers.com](#). You'll be able to look up information on any game, not just computer games; from Abomination to Zelda, Piker to Pokémon. The idea is that if you search for "Quake" on Altavista or Yahoo, you're likely to get



earthquakes or quacking ducks and, of course, porn. So what makes this site different is that it is all gamers. They'll have the typical email accounts, on-line papers, chat rooms, and all the other buzz-features you could ask for, but the most of the site is an extensive databank of game info. Literally millions of dollars have poured in since the project's inception, so this will not be some fly-by-

night site. The initial builds we saw were very well put together, packed with data, and in fact, very useful.

So it seems like Thresh is making a good-faith effort to give something back to the gaming community (besides making a pretty penny for himself). But hey, he could have driven his QUAKE-earned Ferrari off to Cabo San Lucas a long time ago, never to be heard from again—so at least he's sticking to his roots. —Jesse Hartz

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

	Age of Wonders R.O.D.	04 09	Need for Speed: Motor City Electronic Arts	01 09
NEW	American McGee's Alice EA	04 09	Neverwinter Nights Interplay	04 09
	Allergence Microsoft	02 09	Nex Wheatwood	01 09
GAME	Asynchronous Ion Storm/Eidos	02 09	Oni Bungie	01 09
	Asphalt Xtreme Gameloft	04 09	Panorah Impressions/Sierra Studios	01 09
	Asheron's Call Microsoft	04 09	Planescape: Torment Interplay	01 09
	Axis & Allies Expansion Hasbro	04 09	Pool of Radiance IISSI	01 09
	Black & White EA	02 09	Quake III Arena id Software	04 09
	Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge Atari/SSE	04 09	Ranch for the Stars SSE/SSI	04 09
	Comanche 4 Homologic	04 09	Revelant Eidos	04 09
	Comanche/Pokémon Empire	02 09	Rising Sun InterSoft	01 09
NEW	Codemasters: Eagle TripSoft	01 09	Risk II Hasbro	04 09
	Comcast: Framler Wars Microsoft	02 09	Rock RT	03 09
	Crateras & Mindscap	04 09	Snoopy McNoiff	04 09
	Creators Adventures Mindscap	04 09	Shadowport Blue Byte	04 09
NEW	Crimson Sides Microsoft	02 09	Shadow Witch Red Storm	01 09
	Dark Reign II Activision	04 09	Shogun: Total War EA	01 09
	Deus Ex Ion Storm	02 09	Sid Meier's Civilization III Firaxis/MicroProse	04 09
GAME	Diablo II Blizzard	01 09	Silent Hunter II SSE	01 09
	Duke Hunka Forever 3D Realms	02 09	SimMars Meras	03 09
	F/A-18E Super Hornet Interplay	04 09	Sim Thru Perk EA	04 09
	Felony Punish THQ	02 09	Soldier of Fortune Raven/Activision	04 09
	Fant Fantasy VII SquareEA	04 09	Sovereign Verne/Sony	04 09
	Flight Simulator 2000 Microsoft	04 09	StarSector Microsoft	01 09
	Force Commander LucasArts	04 09	Star Trek Armada Activision	04 09
	Freelancer Microsoft	04 09	Star Trek: The Hidden Evil Activision	04 09
GAME	Gladius: Gladius Kabuto Interplay	01 09	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	01 09
	Road & Exit GT	03 09	SWAT 2: Close Quarters Sierra Studios	04 09
	Ground Control Sierra Studios	01 09	Tachyon: The Fringe NovaLogic	01 09
	Half-Life: Opposing Force Sierra Studios	04 09	Team Fortress 2 Valve/Sierra	02 09
	Hero Engine	04 09	The Sims Maxis	01 09
	Harpoon 4 SSE	02 09	Thief 2: The Metal Age Sierra	02 09
	Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 GDD	02 09	Tombs Raider IV: The Last Revelation Eidos	04 09
NEW	Hidden & Dangerous: Devil's Bridge TetonSoft	01 09	Tribes 2 Sierra Studios	02 09
NEW	High Heat 2001 3DO	02 09	Ultima Accession Origin/EA	04 09
	Jediace Jones/Infernal Machines LucasArts	04 09	Ultim Tournament Epic/ET	04 09
	Jester's '02 Activision	04 09	Vampire: The Mesquerian Activision	04 09
	Jesse's F/A-18 Electronic Arts	01 09	WarCraft III Blizzard	04 09
	Jolt Strike Fighter Homologic	04 09	Warlords: Battleground SSE/SSI	01 09
	Loose Cannon Microsoft	02 09	Warwolf DreamForge/ASC Games	01 09
	Motorcross Madness 2 Microsoft	01 09	Wheel of Time Legend/ET	04 09

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1

Half-Life
Havas Interactive
5 stars



Top 40

Rank	Title	Developer	Score
2	StarCraft	Havas	5
3	Baldur's Gate	Interplay	4
4	StarCraft: Brood War	Havas	5
5	Final Fantasy VII	Eidos	4.5
6	Quake II	Activision	4.5
7	Heroes of Might & Magic III	3DO	4.5
8	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	4.5
9	Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri	Firaxis	5
10	Fallout 2	Interplay	4
11	G&C: Tiberian Sun	Electronic Arts	4
12	Thief: The Dark Project	Eidos	4.5
13	System Shock 2	Electronic Arts	4.5
14	Unreal GT		4
15	Age of Empires: Rise of Rome	Microsoft	4
16	Dungeons Keeper II	Electronic Arts	4.5
17	FIFA 99	EA Sports	4.5
18	SimCity 3000	Electronic Arts	4
19	FreeSpace: Silent Threat	Interplay	3
20	EverQuest	Sony	4
21	Baldur's Gate: TOTSC	Interplay	4
22	Battlezone Tycoon	Havas	4
23	Need for Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	5
24	MechWarrior 3	Havas	3
25	Caesar III	Havas	4.5
26	Myth II	Bungie	4.5
27	Falcon 4.0	Havas	3.5
28	Might and Magic VII	3DO	4.5
29	Rogue Squadron	LucasArts	3.5
30	Battlezone	Activision	5
31	Civilization: Call To Power	Activision	3.5
32	Warren Armageddon	Microprose	4
33	Allies vs. Predator	Fox	3
34	Railroad Tycoon II	G.O.B.	4.5
35	NHL 2000	EA Sports	3.5
36	Drakan	Progression	4
37	Rainbow Six: Eagle Watch	Red Storm	4.5
38	StarSiege: Tribes	Dynamo	4
39	Total Annihilation: Core Contingency	Cavdog	4.5
40	Barkstone	G.O.B.	3.5

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.

Reader favorites stayed nearly the same at the top of the charts the month, with the notable exception of **COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN** which plunged six spots to fall out of the Top 10. Making a surprisingly strong showing again is **FINAL FANTASY VII**, over a year old and still going strong. Note that each month's poll starts with a clean slate—votes are not accumulated from month to month. Make your vote heard at www.gamespot.com.

Top Action Games

1	Half-Life	Eidos	5
2	Quake II	Activision	4.5
3	Thief: The Dark Project	Eidos	4.5
4	Unreal GT	Interplay	4
5	Rogue Squadron	LucasArts	3.5

Top Adventure/RPG 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	System Shock 2	Electronic Arts	4.5

Top Simulations Games

1	FreeSpace: Silent Threat	Interplay	3
2	MechWarrior 3	Havas	3
3	Falcon 4.0	Havas	3.5
4	Heavy Gear II	Activision	4.5
5	Wing Commander: Prophecy	Gold	4

Top Sports/Racing Games

1	FIFA 99	EA Sports	4.5
2	Need For Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	5
3	NHL 2000	EA Sports	3.5
4	Midtown Madness	Microsoft	4
5	NFL Blitz	Midway	3.5

Top Strategy/War Games

1	StarCraft	Havas	5
2	StarCraft: Brood War	Havas	5
3	Heroes Of Might And Magic III	3DO	4.5
4	Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri	Firaxis	5
5	Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	Electronic Arts	4



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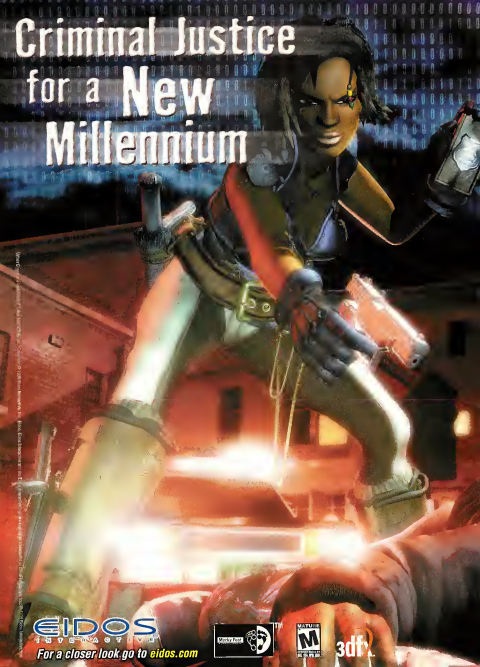


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Fig. 2.3
Interact with 100% of characters.



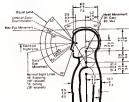
Fig. 2.4
Do not attempt to use small arms



Fig. 2.5
Be a generalist or a specialist



Item No. 14428 562



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Fig. 2.2
25 weapon types focus.



Fig. 2.1
(Left) through New York to Hong Kong



Fig. 2.6
Advanced AI and conversation systems.
These people can react

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~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Can he be the one to save this world from **complete annihilation**?

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~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

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- b. Cranial (1)
- c. Eyes (1)
- d. Torso (3)
- e. Arms (1)
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EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEW

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn

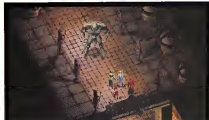
Understand that computer role-playing games were in the dumps. Understand that Advanced Dungeons and Dragons games, in particular, had gone from bad to worse, culminating in Interplay's wretched DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN. Understand that, and perhaps you'll excuse the humble editors at COW for being unable to muster up any enthusiasm a few years back, when Interplay came peddling an AD&D RPG by the name of BALDUR'S GATE.

We all know what happened next. BALDUR'S GATE was a runaway hit both critically and commercially, surprising everyone with—to date—nearly one million copies sold. The game's developer, Bioware

(whose only previous credit was the MEGAWARRIOR-like game SHATTERED STEEL) successfully melded the accessible look and feel of Blizzard's DIABLO with an extremely faithful recreation of D&D's complex gameplay. As a result, BALDUR'S GATE assured the return of the RPG to the forefront of computer gaming, and revived Interplay's reputation as a serious role-playing force.

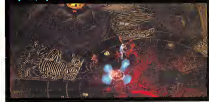
Now, to no one's surprise, Bioware is coming back with a sequel, and this time we needed no convincing. We flew up to the company's office in Edmonton, Canada to see the game the second they'd let us. Here's the scoop.

Bioware Returns for a Sequel to the RPG Smash of 1998 by Jeff Green



UM, WHERE'S THAT RUN KEY? BALDUR'S GATE II is going to save more and bigger monsters, as figured by the silver leaping line game.

FAR FREAKING OUT With a higher resolution to work at, and a creative desire to give the game a more intense look, Bioware is creating some very weird, very detailed environments.



Once More to the Realms

BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN picks up where the first game left off. Those who played the original will be able to import their main character into the new game. New players—or those who want to start from scratch—can create new characters, but everyone will start off as a 7th or 8th-level character (depending on class) with about 89,000 experience points.

The plot, which Bioware wanted to keep mostly under wraps at this point, is going to continue the Bhaal storyline begun in the first game. In the opening scene, you learn that you have wandered south from Baldur's Gate into the kingdom of Amn, where you are kidnapped by The Shadow Thieves—a secret, evil-aligned guild of thieves and assassins based in the city of Athkatla. As the game begins, you awake to find yourself imprisoned at the Shadow Thieves' headquarters, stripped of your weaponry and other belongings. Joining you are a few old friends making a welcome return from the first game: Minsc, Imoen, and Jaheira. Why you have been kidnapped, and how it relates to a bigger plotline involving the failed assassination of an elf queen, are the mysteries to be solved that we know of—though Bioware promises that there will be a lot more going on in this game.

The game's scope is, in fact, going to be huge, and those expecting simply more of the same are going to be in for a pleasant surprise. In terms of locations, BALDUR'S GATE II is all over the place—literally. Bioware really wanted to mix up the environments and locales this time, so in addition to Amn, you'll also travel to The Nelambar (the Pirate Isles, located off the coast of Amn), an underwater city, the astral plane, and the underground world of The Underdark. According to James Ohlen, the lead designer, The Underdark began as an afterthought, but because of the coolness factor, it ended up growing in impor-



I Played BALDUR'S GATE 2 (nyah, nyah)

Not to brag or anything, but I believe I may be the first person on earth outside of BioWare or Interplay to play **BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN**. (Okay, so I'm bragging.)

The fact is, BioWare is so far along in the production of this title, I could have played through half the game had they not been so insistent on showing me the strange Canadian ritual called "like, getting stinking pissed, eh?"

Even so, I can tell you a few things about the playing experience. First, the increased resolution and full-screen mode are huge improvements. Now your attention can focus much more clearly on the game in front of you, without distraction. Combat worked pretty much the same with one noticeable exception: Some monsters will follow you now. It's brutal, but realistic, eliminating a rather lame way you could escape combat previously (BioWare has said that some monsters may even follow you across maps!).

Also noticeable was the addition of more puzzle elements. As soon as the game opens, you need to figure out how to free Minsc from his cell, and how to stop a group of annoying monsters from respawning in the adjoining room. Frustrated by my slow progress, producer Ben Smedstad jumped in and cheated for me so that I could solve the puzzle. Then we went out and got drunk.

Concept Sketches

An elvagh



A mind flayer



tance in the game. Ironically, one of the places you won't visit is Baldur's Gate—but the game name has taken on a life of its own, at least as far as Interplay's marketing weasels are concerned, so a new name for this sequel was not an option.

Fan Favorites

BioWare has done an incredible amount of work on the game already, so I was able to see many of these environments in place—and they are stunning. John Gallagher, the game's art director, has created a surreal, phantasmagoric look for many of the areas, with a variety of architectural styles and influences that simply

blow away anything seen in the first game—or any other games, for that matter. The underwater city, for example, is like something out of *Rome* by way of H.R. Giger, but bizarre, towering anthropomorphic statues and fountains.

Although **SHADOWS OF AMN** is using the same basic engine as the first game, the BioWare team has made a number of significant enhancements. For one, the game will now run at a resolution of 800x600 (up from 640x480), providing a much greater level of detail and clarity. In addition, there will

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now be 3D-card support (not required), which will allow for some new spell and water effects. The interface looks largely the same, with one big improvement: You can now toggle it off for a full-screen look. Bioware divided the interface into three separate panels—one each for the buttons on the left, right, and bottom of the screen—and you can keep any combination on or off the screen.

As far as other tweaks go, the team is working from a gigantic wish list of fan suggestions, trying to incorporate every one that makes sense. So, look for some of BG's more annoying problems to be fixed. For example, while you still can't run (Bioware says it's a play balance issue), the basic walk speed has been increased, and they've eliminated a lot of the "dead areas" on screens, so you won't be walking as much. Pathing has been greatly improved, so you won't find yourself trapped, or heading off in unexpected directions. The quest log and map are annotatable and more dynamic, with the log now keeping track of your active and completed quests. Among the primary multiplayer tweaks include the ability for only one player to visit a store, and for random encounters to be ignored by other players.

More Butt Kicking for Goodness' Sake

Gameplay is largely the same, though again, Bioware has been working to deepen and improve the experience. All the character classes from the first game are back, with the addition of half-ons. The more exciting news is the addition of a number of more detailed class kits, such as kenops, berserkers, undead slayers, spe-

5 THINGS

Five Ways BALDUR'S GATE 2 is Improved

1. Annotatable map and quest log.
2. Better path-finding.
3. Quicker movement.
4. Optional 3D support for cooler-looking spells.
5. Full-screen playdog area.

cially priests, and many more, which will allow experienced AD&D players and others to create a much more specialized character, each with distinct strengths and weaknesses. How you align yourself at the beginning will play a more important role this time around, with specific quests opening up to you depending on your moral stance. Bioware is promising tons of side quests—way more than in the original, including a primary subquest for each major character class.

The weapon proficiency system is being revamped to include specific weapons, rather than just generic weapon groups as in the first game. Specific weapon styles—such as Two Weapon Style (dual wielding)—have also been added to further increase the customization, and will be reflected by animations in the game engine.

Gamers wanted more monsters, so now there are about 20 new unique models—doubling the number from BG 1—including mind flayers, Earth elementals, genies, vampires, and beholders. Bioware is adding about 130 new spells, bringing the total to somewhere over 300 (if anybody really needs that many), including the brutal 7th-level Finger Of Death and 9th-level Chain Contingency.

Class Act

Even though BALDUR'S GATE was the game that put Bioware on the map, the sense you get from the design team is that SHADOWS OF AMN is the one they really wanted to make, the one that will set their reputation in stone. "When we finish this game," said impassioned art director John Gallagher, "we want to be able to say that this is the best game we could possibly have made. We want to be able to say, 'okay everybody, top this.' Because otherwise, why bother?"

We've just covered the tip of the iceberg here, and hope to have more as the project gets closer to completion. BALDUR'S GATE: SHADOWS OF AMN is due next fall, and this time, we're on the bus. Thanks to Bioware, role-playing games are cool once again. **CGW**

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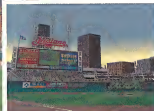
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LET'S PLAY TWO *Camden Yards and Jacobs Field are just two of the four dozen parks in the game, all of which are getting a graphical upgrade.*

High Heat Baseball 2001

3DO Builds a Baseball Dynasty by Robert Coffey

HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 wasn't just the best baseball game of last year, it was the best baseball game of the last ten years, the first title worthy of that special place in our hearts formerly held by CGW Hall of Famer EARL WEAVER BASEBALL. Like an athlete after an unexpected career year, the risk now is for the design team to rest smugly on their big fat laurels, collect a big fat paycheck, and bleed that big fat success dry while fans lament what could have been.

But Team 3DO is no Super Joe Charbonneau. They're building a franchise that will be a definite contender for years to come.

Brand New Uniforms

Not surprisingly, HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001 (HH2001) will sport some spiffier graphics.

With the schedule now supporting day and night games, each of the 48 stadiums is being re-textured for both times of day. Some stadium textures will also be animated, allowing for spurting fountains in Kansas City's Kauffman Stadium, and lots of scoreboard animations, including that old standby—the screaming home run ball. Around 95 new player animations have also been added. There are new, spectacular diving catches; unspes dodge scooping line drives; outfielders run up the wall to snag a home run ball; and there's a new collision-at-the-plate animation where the catcher drops the

ball (no more automatic outs at the plate). A newly-3D pitcher's mound should affect gameplay as hot grounders up the middle will carom and skid realistically off it.

A lot of attention is being paid to the larger player models in the pitcher/batter interface. The polygon count has been bumped up about 15%, and motion-blended animation means hustling batters will no longer jerk from position to position in the strike zone, but move in a smoother, more lifelike fashion. To heighten the drama, a slew of new batter and pitcher "fidgets" is being implemented, and the game camera

will capture every batter's purposeful walk to the plate (though you can toggle that off to speed up the game).

The most significant visual change will also have a real impact on gameplay. Instead of just one player model, there will be four body types in HH2001: the regular body type carried over from HH2000, a thin, Randy Johnson-style model, a pumped-up Mark McGwire type body, and a more stout, Tony Gwynn-ish model. All the models will be scaled, meaning strike zones will fluctuate from batter to batter, forcing both hitters and pitchers to adjust with every at bat.

A REAL BANG-BANG PLAY *Seeing the new animation in High Heat 2001 is a play of the plate when the catcher actually drops the ball—no more guaranteed outs at home.*



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Infotainment at Its Most Infotaining

HH2001 should be a statistician's dream with around 35 new stats tracked. Managers will be able to check players' fielding range, runs created, double plays hit into, pinch hitting effectiveness, and lots more. Team stats are being expanded to track home and away records, while the league standings screen will keep track of the wild card race in addition to league leaders.

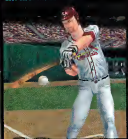
The biggest off-field change has got to be the custom league utility, the most ambitious of any sports game—if only for its incredible flexibility. While the program requires an understandable element of league symmetry, you can basically set up leagues comprised of as many divisions made up of as many teams as you want. Better yet, you can totally structure the schedule to suit your needs. Want to play a 40-game season? No problem. Want three rounds of "Best of Five" playoff series? You've got it. Would you rather play an unbalanced schedule with more intradivisional games and no interleague play? So be it. Better yet, you can draft a dream team in one league, then transfer that same team to another separate league. This is exactly the sort of tool hardcore sports gamers have been waiting for.

Many of the game's new features have been delivered in direct response to user feedback. Gamers wanted more control over whether to hit the out-of-man or not, so HH2001 lets you decide whether or not to throw through to the base. A new batting practice feature lets you not only practice hitting every type of pitch in the game, but also lets you set location so you can

really focus on improving your hitting weaknesses. A play-by-play synopsis of the game will be available along with last year's newspaper-style boxscore, and a highlight show spotlighting pivotal moments will be generated after every game.

Saved games at any point in

BIG AS LIFE With new body models and the mapping of players' hips to their, *HH2001* will be even more realistic.



STARRY STARRY NIGHT Night games will be a new part of the *High Heat 2001* season schedule.



A LEAGUE OF YOUR OWN Finally, a baseball game that lets you create your own custom leagues.

CUSTOM LEAGUE SETUP



SOME TIME IN THE CAGE *HH2001*'s new batting practice mode lets you work on weaknesses by not only letting you dictate which pitches you'll see, but where they'll be in the strike zone as well.

BATTING PRACTICE



any game

mode, instant access to the team options screen, detailed manager profiles, more realistic ball physics, a playable All-Star Game—the list of improvements just goes on and on. While such a sweeping wish list is often the sign of a design team about to choke from biting off more than they can chew, the incredible improvement between the first *HIGH HEAT* game and *HIGH HEAT 2001* leaves us confident that Team 356 can pull it off. We can't wait. **GGW**

5 THINGS

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HOLIDAY HOT
100**

Like any other family, we here at CGW pull together when the holiday season rolls around. It all starts in late October, when the preening, pelvis-thrusting, dancing Santa robot miraculously appears atop one of our cubicles. From this point on, life becomes nothing but smiles and jokes told at each others' expense. And then there are the tearful memories of how the staff brutally and mercilessly ridiculed our holiday selections from last year. It all culminates in the yearly ritual of arguing over the picks for the deeply moving beauty you see before you: The Holiday Hot 100.



AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS

Let the clang of sword and the screams of the dying ring across our fair land this holiday season. AGE OF EMPIRES 2 is here, and there is much rejoicing among fans of real-time strategy games. AGE 2 offers many improvements over its best-selling predecessor: slick interface enhancements; new races; new special units; and beautiful, detailed graphics. The game offers five historically-inspired campaigns for single-play, but you'll get the most out of this AGE when you take on up to eight players in the intense and flexible multiplayer mode. Don't argue with Grandpa over the turkey leg—settle the issue with a fight to the last man.

\$45, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com





2

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

Winning every gaming award on the planet last year with *HALF-LIFE* just wasn't enough for Valve and Sierra. Thank god. Case in point: the recently-released *HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE* add-on. Sierra deserves a standing ovation for working with Gearbox (OP FORCE's developers) to shunt convention and craft a story that manages to sit within the original game's plot. Instead of a geeky scientist-turned-stud, you play one of the peace-keeping marines who Gordon Freeman tangles with early in the original game (which you must have in order to play this expansion). Some amazing new weapons and units help preserve the fright and excitement of the original.

\$40, [Valve Interactive](http://ValveInteractive.com), www.sierra.com



3

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

The creepiest game since last year's

HALF-LIFE, this sci-fi action/RPG hybrid provides one of the most immersing gaming experiences of the year. While *SYSTEM SHOCK 2*'s twisting storyline, chilling sound effects, and terrifying combat would make any game a stand-out, the old-fashioned role-playing elements give this game its soul. Each of the three available character classes plays differently from the others, with the only similarity being the tough choices you'll have to make as you define your character throughout the course of the game.

\$40, [Electronic Arts](http://ElectronicArts.com), www.shock2.com



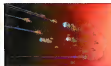
4

HOMEWORLD

HOMEWORLD, Relic Entertainment's space-themed RTS, captures the essence of space opera like no other game. You play through the game's engaging

story as a race of people searching for their home planet after their adopted world is obliterated. Utilizing a gorgeous 3D engine, *HOMEWORLD* allows you to control a fleet of spacecraft—from small interceptors to gigantic capital ships—in your interstellar quest. More than just eye candy, this is one of the most original and unique games to come along in years.

\$50, [Nexus Interactive](http://NexusInteractive.com), www.relicentertainment.com



5

RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR

The realism in this tactical combat sim will make your blood run cold.

As you lead teams of elite commands infiltrating locations controlled by hostile forces, you'll notice first the crack of enemy fire and intense action. Then you'll notice how *ROGUE SPEAR*'s depth of planning, cool replay options, and utterly immersing atmosphere set new standards for tactical combat simulations. Finally, when you see your fellow operatives exhaling steam in the Kosovo

mission, you'll have a full-on transcendent gaming experience.

\$40, [Red Storm Entertainment](http://RedStormEntertainment.com), www.redstorm.com



6

HIGH HEAT 2000

3DO must have placed a thin layer of liquid crack on each *HIGH HEAT 2000* disc they shipped to the Computer Gaming World offices. That's the only way we can explain the baseball fever that engulfed us in 1999. You probably know that already, seeing as every issue of CGW for the past six months has contained some reference to *HEAT*. But we feel it important to warn you about the downside of *HIGH HEAT BASEBALL*: a sudden, deep-rooted, and entirely unexplainable craving for real-life baseball. Now that's just weird.

\$40, 3DO, www.3do.com



7 UNREAL TOURNAMENT



We expected **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** to be visually **stunning**—we didn't expect it to be a pulse-pounding, adrenaline-charged re-creation. Packing the most variety of any multiplayer-focused shooter this year, UT lets gamers compete in traditional Deathmatches, Capture-The-Flag, area-controlling Domination, and the goal-oriented combat of Assault. Vicious Bots can be used

as opponents for both solo and team play, or to fill out predominantly human squads. Whickee'd fast, brutally fun, **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** is an action fan's dream. **\$55, 67 Interactive, www.unrealtournament.net**

8 QUAKE 3: ARENA



Multiplayer was a side project for **DOOM**, and it ended up **killing productivity** in business and government offices around the world. It's now the sole focus of the Q3A team, so now might be a good time to begin gently brown-nosing your network administrator. **QUAKE ARENA** has such standard improvements as a better-looking engine and tighter network code, along with all-new additions like a

built-in server browser and a training mode (so even Jeff Green can get a fighting chance) that lets you play against AI-driven Bots. This is a must-have for the diehard deathmatch fan. **Price 184, 14 Software/Electronic Arts, www.quake3arena.com**

9 GRAN TURISMO 2



Last year's blockbuster racing sim for the PlayStation, **GRAN TURISMO**, changed a lot of console-phobic minds with its realistic physics, intricate tuning system, and a career mode of play that was the closest thing we've seen to racing role-playing. **GRAN TURISMO 2** for the PlayStation improves on all this. It sports an improved graphics engine, several new modes of play, and more importantly, it

includes more cars—over 500 this time! **GRAN TURISMO** will please racing fans of all shades, from arcade junkies to hardcore enthusiasts. **Price 184, Sony, www.playstation.com**

10 DUNGEON KEEPER II



Brush that rattling angel off your right shoulder and listen to the little devil on the left—it's the heart way to enjoy the wicked delights of **DUNGEON KEEPER 2**. A visually stunning mix of real-time combat and **SIMCITY**-style management, **DK2** has you leading hordes of demons, goblins, and skeletons as they claw their way from the bowels of the earth to the sunlit world of the nobby-pammy self-righteous heroes that would stop them.

While the gameplay is outstanding, it's **DK2**'s devilish sense of humor that truly sets it apart. **\$40, Electronic Arts, www.dungeonkeeper.com**

SEGA DREAMCAST

It's time to test your faith. Are videogame console systems really the tools of Satan? If you haven't already started believing, take a look at the stunning graphics of the new 128-bit Sega Dreamcast. You'll have your soul up on eBay in no time. Visually, the Dreamcast surpasses anything you've ever seen on the PSX, N64, or—get this—current PC state-of-the-art. And some of the launch titles are truly fantastic. Must-have games for the Dreamcast include Sega Sports' **NFL 2000** and the sublime fighter **SOUL CALIBER**.

11

\$28, Sega, www.sega.com



OUTCAST

A voxel-based adventure game made by Belgians may not sound very promising. It sure didn't to us. But then we played it—and we were amazed. **OUTCAST** does something that is increasingly rare in computer games: It tells a great story while still being thoroughly entertaining. You are stranded on an alien planet, where the natives have mistaken you for their long-awaited messiah.

The game deftly combines action gameplay with standard adventure game puzzle-solving, and seals its coolness with a very self-deprecating sense of humor. An offbeat, surprisingly fresh sleeper. **\$45, Infogrames, www.infogrames.net**

12



IT'S ALL GUNS & GIRLS GLORY



Smooth combination of rapid-fire action and puzzle solving.



Customize the difficulty settings for both action and adventure.



Immerse yourself in a stunning 3D world.

ONCE YOU GO WEST

James West.

He could out-shoot any marksman and out-think any mastermind. Now you can put on his holster, tilt your hat to the horizon and start an all new mission in the Wild Wild West.

Your gun play has to be quick—and your mind even quicker—as you race to uncover a plot to assassinate the President. Play the parts of James West and Artemus Gordon and get into predicaments as wild as their personalities.

So if you think you're ready to tame the new frontier, then reach for your six-shooter, muster up your courage and go West!

WILD WILD WEST THE STEEL ASSASSIN



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SOUTH PEAK™
WASHINGTON

Own the movie
on VHS or DVD!



• Challenging missions for both James West and Artemus Gordon.

WILD WILD WEST CD-ROM Warner Bros.

13 **USAF**

The latest game from the fabled Jane's Combat Simulations group (of WW II FIGHTERS fame), USAF puts you into the cockpit of the coolest warplanes in the U.S. stable—the F-4E, F-15C, F-16E, F-16, A-10, and F-117A—plus, the futuristic F-22 Raptor and the Russian MiG-29. While complex enough to be used for fighter training, it can be scaled down to give casual pilots a fun ride. Four deep campaigns, several replay options, and a great mission builder will ensure that USAF flies well into the 21st century. \$40, Electronic Arts, www.janes.com

14 **NHL 2000**

Imagine, if you will, a PC hockey game that simply scorches the ice. A game that favors speedy skating and passing over plodding, defensive struggles. A game with action so intense, that many of the CGW editors can be seen clutching their left hands in pain after playing back-to-back contests. EA Sports

does the winter sport tremendous justice this time around by supplementing the already-amazing visuals and atmosphere with superb gameplay. \$45, Electronic Arts, www.espsports.com

15 **HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE**

The latest entry in New World Computing's ferociously addictive turn-based strategy series may not break any new ground, but for the game's legions of fans—which include us—it hardly matters. New World has perfected an irresistible blend of exploration, conquest, combat, and spellcasting guaranteed to keep you up all night, swearing to yourself "just one more turn..." The tenth new ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE expansion set includes new (and tough) campaigns, scenarios, and most welcome of all, a random-map generator. Great fun for strategy fans of all ages.

16

FIFA 2000

For the second year in a row, EA Sports has managed to take their FIFA license and perform a seemingly impossible task: make it better. In addition to the superb visuals, this year's iteration incorporates a level of animation that appears closer to life than any other sports game on the market. And to top it all off, the game plays easier and smoother than its

evandid: G0000AAAAAALLL!
\$45 EA Sports, www.easports.com

17 **VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE: REDEMPTION**

It's probably the most highly anticipated role-playing game of the year, and for good reason: It looks awesome. Based on the popular pen-and-paper game from White Wolf, VAMPIRE submerges gamers in an emotionally complex storyline in which, for once, you are not the heroic knight, but a vampire. The epic story, which spans from 12th-century Prague to modern-day New York, challenges you to balance your desire to be "good" with your need to feast on blood to survive. A horrifyingly intriguing premise from the multitalented creators of JEDI KNIGHT. Price TBA, Activision, www.activision.com

18 **NFL FEVER 2000**

Microsoft's first foray onto the gridiron is an impressive one. NFL FEVER 2K is a great-looking title with realistic players, amazingly varied animations including vicious bone-crunching tackles, and a detailed playbook that could have been ripped from the desk of any NFL head coach. But here's what will really get you up out of your chair to chicken dance: all this for \$20. \$20, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

19 **NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES**

Your commute is hell. Two hours each way of stop, start, stopstart. Kind of makes you want to drive a bulldozer to work, doesn't it? But since plowing traffic out of your way will net you a prison sentence and video clip on Fox's new series When Commuter Attack, here's your alternative: NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES. New to the fourth installment of the NFS saga are car damage, career mode, and the return of some primo Porsches for your driving pleasure. \$50, Electronic Arts, www.electronicarts.com

20 **HYPERSONIC SILVER BULLET SE**

Maybe the gamer in your life has been very good this year. The winner of our 1999 Ultimate Gaming Machine Bang for the Buck competition, the Silver Bullet SE proved itself to be a well-balanced system that provides good stability and 3D performance, for \$2,000. \$2,000, Hyperonic, www.hyperonic-pc.com



21. JAGGED ALLIANCE 2\$50, TalonSoft, www.talonsoft.com**22. MIGHT AND MAGIC VII**\$40, 3D, www.3ds.com**23. HEAVY GEAR 2**\$40, Activision, www.activision.com**24. MADDEN 2000**\$45, EA Sports, www.easports.com**25. GUILLEMOT PROPNET DDR**

The hot 3D-graphics chipset this holiday season is nVidia's GeForce-255, which adorns Guillemot's screaming Propnet DDR. The DDR designation stands for double-data rate, which is a new type of memory that effectively doubles video memory bandwidth, a potential bottleneck for the quad-pipelined GeForce. The Propnet DDR should be available now with 32MB of RAM, and while it is pretty pricey—owing to the new memory type—it should be the fastest gun in the 3D West for a good while.

\$388, Guillemot, www.guillemot.com

**26. DELL DIMENSION XPS 600B (COMPUTER)****29. FINAL FANTASY VIII**

The follow-up to one of the most successful PlayStation titles ever, FINAL FANTASY VIII trades in the epic scope of FF7 for a more personal, character-driven storyline that will please

hardcore FINAL FANTASY fans alike, and keep gamers new to the series enthralled for hours (and hours and hours). Set in a different universe than FF7, FF8 follows the life of a young military academy student, Squall Leonhart, as he finds adventure as a soldier for hire, falls in love, and battles evil. FF8 checks the super-deformed graphics of its predecessor for a consistently realistic look that serves as the backdrop to this emotionally complex story. FF8 will be remembered by those who experience it for years to come.

\$50, SquareSoft, www.squaresoft.com

\$3,300, Dell Computers, www.dell.com

27. ASNERON'S CALL

\$50 plus monthly fees, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

28. DARK REIGN 2

\$50, Activision, www.activision.com

30. ALPHA CENTAURI EXPANSION

\$40, Firaxis, www.firaxis.com

31. INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE

\$50, Infogrames, www.infogrames.com

33. SWAT 3

\$40, Navas Interactive, www.nvasierra.com

34. BATTLEZONE 2

\$45, Activision, www.activision.com

35. ROLLER COASTER TYCOON

\$40, Microprose/Kasbro Interactive, www.microprose.com

36. STARFLEET COMMAND

\$50, Interplay, www.interplay.com

37. DESCENT FREESPACE 2

\$50, Interplay, www.interplay.com

38. SIM THEME PARK

\$50, Maxis, www.maxis.com

40. ZELDA 64

\$60, Nintendo, www.nintendo.com

41. RE*VOLT

\$40, Acclaim, www.acclaimentertainment.com

42. MICROSOFT INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER

\$75, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/hardware

43. ULTIMA ASCENSION

\$50, Origin Systems, www.origin.com

44. GUILLEMOT XENTOR 32

\$100 (street price), Guillemot, www.guillemot.com

45. FLIGHT UNLIMITED III

\$55, Electronic Arts, www.ea.com

46. DRAKAN

\$40, Psygnosis, www.psygnosis.com

47. HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS

\$50, TalonSoft, www.talonsoft.com

32. KLIPSCH PRO MEDIA V.2-400

Some great PC speaker systems have shipped this year: Yamaha's YST-M55s and Cambridge's DeskTop Theater DTT2800 Digital system to name a couple. But by far the most impressive speakers to grace our ears are from long-time speaker expert Klipsch. Their ProMedia V.2-400 offering is a 4.1 setup with 400-watts worth of amplifier power. And these things crank. But never mind huge volume levels, these speakers sound great at comfortable levels with very good high and midrange frequency definition, and throat-rattling bass. At \$249, they're a steal.

\$250, Klipsch, www.klipsch.com



39. TIVO PERSONAL TV RECEIVER

The land of the couch potato just got a little bit warmer, softer, and more effortless thanks to TiVo and Phillips' mammoth gignabyte hard drive cum Personal TV Receiver. With TiVo, when you get that annoying call from mom/mom-in-law/the IRS right when Alex Trobek is giving the answer to Final Jeopardy, you don't lose out. You simply press the pause button on the remote, and the system starts recording the rest of the show. When you get off the phone, press play and continue watching from where you left off. This vigilant device, which plugs into your phone line, doubles as a digital TV guide and allows you to quickly scan what's on any station in your area at any time, and select the programs you want recorded. Sports fans in particular will love TiVo's ability to skip commercials and replay in slow motion. Genies in so many ways, TiVo makes watching television—especially sports—easy.

\$459 for 14-hour recordable version, \$599 for 30-hour recordable version. Subscriber to TiVo service: \$10 per month, \$99 per year, \$199 for a lifetime membership. \$499/\$599 plus monthly fee, TiVo, www.tivo.com

48. THRUSTMASTER REFLEX 3D

\$28.99, Thrustmaster, www.thrustmaster.com

49. APACHE HAVOC

\$58, Empire Interactive, www.empire-us.com

50. MIDTOWN MADNESS

\$45, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games

51. PLAY BY MAIL 5 SCRABBLE

\$30, Hasbro Interactive, www.hasbrointeractive.com

54. MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER DUAL STRIKE

\$50, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

55. EVERQUEST

\$45, 989 Studios, www.everquest.com

56. INTERACT FORCE V4 FEEDBACK WHEEL

\$130, Interact Accessories, www.interact-acc.com

57. GABRIEL KNIGHT III: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED

\$49.95, Sierra Studios, www.sierra.com

58. DARKSTONE

\$45, Fathering of Developers, www.godgames.com

59. EMINENT TECHNOLOGIES LFT 11 SPEAKERS

\$500, Eminent Technologies, www.eminent-tech.com

60. MECNCOMMANDER GOLD

\$48, Microprose/Hasbro Interactive, www.microprose.com

61. REVENANT

\$45, Eidos, www.eidos.com

62. MESSIAN

\$50, Interplay, www.interplay.com

70. PLANESCAPE TORMENT

Interplay hit major payroll last year with BALDUR'S GATE, the first Advanced Dungeons and Dragons computer RPG in years that didn't suck. Now they're coming back with an arguably more ambitious title, the surreal PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and it promises to be another of the year's high-lights. Set in the most bizarre of all AD&D realms, and using a modified version of the BALDUR'S GATE engine, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT is a darker, more twisted, more plot-oriented game than BALDUR'S, and is focused on telling one shorter, single-player story. **Price TBA, Interplay/Black Isle, www.interplay.com**



63. LINKS LS 2000

\$50, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games

64. INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

\$50, LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com

65. CNESSMASTER 7000

\$60, Mindscape, www.mindscape.com

67. FIGHTER SQUADRON 3D

\$45, Activision, www.activision.com

68. EVERGLIDE MOUSE PAD

Think a mouse pad recommendation is funny? Well then, laugh it up, wise guy. But consider this: One of the *CGW* editors—who will go unnamed to protect his integrity—permanently upped his frag count by switching to



66. AIRSOFT WEAPONRY

Airsoft is the newest rage in projectile toys on overseas to arrive here in North America. Safer than either paintball or regular BB guns, air soft models fire lightweight custom plastic pellets that (normally) do not break skin or glass. The real appeal is their full-auto firepower. Even this diminutive, cartoon-caricature rendition of the famous MP5-A5 sub-machine gun can empty all 70 rounds in one trigger pull.

The 15-inch minis are powered by 4 AA alkaline batteries. The most popular are the MP5-A5 (shown) and M-15 versions, but you can also scare the crap out of someone with the AK-47, XM-177, G3, AUG, and even the SC553.

Ask for the info, data, and details on this special report.



"If you buy a single game this fall —

HOME WORLD

(3D REAL-TIME STRATEGY)

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www.sierrastudios.com

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make sure it's this one!"

— Adrenaline Vault.com

"Homeworld is an epic — epic in its story, graphics and presentation. This homerun has yet to land."

— CNN.com

Score: 9 out of 10

"A groundbreaking title that you simply must own."

— CNET Gamecenter.com

Score: 92%

"Where C&C2 failed, Homeworld stuns. Where other games relied on contrived formula, Homeworld manages to shine above the crowd."

— Gameover.com

Score: 9.5 out of 10

"Relic not only tackled space, but may have just changed strategy games forever. Welcome to the best game of the year."

— IGN.com

Score: 5 out of 5

"Listen close because I'm not going to hesitate in the least when I say Homeworld is the best game of the year."

— Checkout.com



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EVERYONE



52. NBA LIVE 2000

One good reason, in and of itself, to buy the next in the NBA LIVE series is the presence of His Airness himself. For the first time in more than five years, Michael Jordan has lent his likeness to a basketball game, which means that you don't have to settle for trying to be like Mike anymore. Jordan is on the roster of great players and teams, and you can play with him as a member of the 90's greatest players team—NBA LIVE features all-star teams for each decade going back to the 60's. Or you can get him out on the schoolyard one-on-one court against the likes of Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, or even Bob Cousy to settle once and for all who was the greatest player of all time.

\$45, Electronic Arts, www.easports.com



53. NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2000

Microsoft takes the road less travelled with NBA INSIDE DRIVE, their first real basketball game. The graphics aren't as strong as EA Sports' NBA Live 2000, and the game is lacking a certain hold-headed, clutch-shooting guard, but the gameplay in this hoops title feels incredibly authentic. And that's the ultimate point, isn't it? INSIDE DRIVE locks some of the soul the EA Sports line has honed in on over the years, but at \$20, it's worth anyone's attention.

\$20, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games

77. DAIKATANA

This long (and boy do we mean long) awaited shooter from John Romero and Ion Storm is a big, sprawling blast-fest spread across four different settings in four different areas. Each level features a unique weapon set, a dozen unique monsters, and truckloads of mayhem. The inclusion of AI-controlled partners and a light RPG element (i.e. other elements indicative of DAIKATANA's ambitious reach.)

\$25, www.ionstorm.com



the Everglide. Its plastic surface makes for fast, smooth mouseplay, and protects those precious little mouse balls from gunk. \$17, Everglide Inc., www.everglide.com

69. NASCAR RACING 3

\$50, Sirius Interactive, www.siriusports.com

71. TROPNY BASS 3D

\$40, Sirius Interactive, www.sirius.com

72. DIAMOND MONSTER SOUND MX 300

\$98, Diamond Multimedia, www.diamond.com

73. OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II

\$50, Lakesoft, www.lakesoft.com

75. PALM PILOT VII

\$495, Palm Computing, www.palm.com

76. DRIVER

\$40, GT Interactive, www.gtinteractive.com

78. STAR WARS RACER

\$45, LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com

79. BELKIN USB DIRECT CONNECT HOME LAN

We've seen several direct-connect USB networking kits over the past year, but what impressed us about Belkin's approach is that its USB Direct Connect can run at upwards of seven Mbit/sec, which is approaching 10Base-T Ethernet speed. For "fast and easy" networking without having to crack open your machine, this is a great open way to go. The only downsides are that Direct Connect uses a daisy-chain type configuration, meaning that every time you want to add another machine to the net, you'll need to buy another Direct Connect adapter. But if you're only looking to connect two machines together—say a laptop and your desktop system—then this is the perfect way to go. \$65 (street), Belkin Components, www.belkin.com

74. CREATIVE LABS NOMAD MP3 PLAYER

Smaller than a pack of smokes, the Nomad is a ball of an MP3 player. It's diminutive, but has an FM tuner and voice recorder. When you're tired of your MP3 tunes, that's the radio—or record yourself when genius strikes. The digital sound is great, and with no moving parts, it's ship-free. The 64MB of memory gives you an hour of music, or you can double that by dialing back the audio quality of your MP3 files—you may never notice the difference.

\$50, Creative Labs, www.creative.com; www.nomadworld.com

80. ATARI ARCADE HITS

\$28, Masbro Interactive, www.masbrointeractive.com

81. UM JAMMER LAMMY

\$40, Sony Computer Entertainment, www.sony.com

82. YAMANA YST-HSSSD SPEAKERS

\$150, Yamaha, www.yamaha.com

83. GRAVIS STINGER LAPTOP GAMEPAD

Many laptops don't have joystick ports, so the Stinger instead connects via a traditional serial port. Install the software, and it's good to go. The Stinger gives you a 10-button gamepad with a tilting D-pad that's surprisingly comfortable—all in a diminutive package that drops easily into a briefcase or backpack. \$40, Gravis, www.gravis.com.

85. GAME BOY COLOR (AND POKEMON)

Hey, at first we laughed at POKEMON, too. But then we started playing around with it. And then we started hearing the tiny music—for hours—after actually playing the game. Now we can't see how life ever existed without the ever-continuing quest for our funky little anime creature-friends. Laugh it up now...but get a Game Boy color and one of the 45 different POKEMON games, and you'll see exactly what we're talking about. Trust us.

\$70, Nintendo, www.game-boy.com; www.pokemon.com; Red, Yellow: \$30, www.game-boy.com



FORGOTTEN REALMS

ICEWIND DALE™



A Baldur's Gate™ Engine Adventure beneath the Spine of the World

www.interplay.com/icewind



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IMMERSIVE ENGINE



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Dungeons & Dragons



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I've loaded on my computer."
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The world's never seen a dirt track racing game - until now.
The physics are real and the competition is fierce. With 30 tracks and 18 cars, your racing career depends on accumulated prize money, car upgrades and aggressive driving. Get your car in gear or get off the track.



DIRT TRACK RACING



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www.wizardworks.com

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PC
CD
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84. EUROPEAN AIR WAR

\$46, Hasbro Interactive, www.micro-prose.com

86. SUPER BIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

\$45, EA Sports, www.easports.com

87. TIGER WOODS PALM PILOT

\$28, Electronic Arts, www.easports.com

88. PANZER GENERAL 3D

\$50,SSI, www.sstntion.com

89. NFL BLITZ 2000

\$45, Midway, www.midway.com

90. CIVILIZATION CALL TO POWER

\$45, Activision, www.activision.com

91. MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000

\$50, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

92. MOTOCROSS MADNESS

\$40, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

93. STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON

\$45, LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com

96. RISK II

Who didn't play Risk as a kid? This digital sequel from Hasbro makes a good thing better, with over a dozen artificial opponents available for single-player games, and animated battle sequences that are remarkably entertaining. Risk II includes virtually every rule variation, and includes a brand-new simultaneous-move mode that introduces an exciting new way to play the game, as well as making multiplayer matches over the Internet something that can be received in a reasonable amount of time.

\$40, Hasbro Interactive, www.hasbro.com



HOLIDAY HIT LIST

94. KOSS R-65B HEADPHONE/MICROPHONE

The sound emanating from Koss' well-cushioned headphones/mike set is fabulous. The clarity of the microphone is above average, too. There's even a little battery-powered microphone preamp for weaker sound card inputs. If you play games on a LAN or the Internet and like to talk with other players using Roger Wilco or Battlecom, then this is the gear for you.

\$50, Koss, www.koss.com

95. SIDEWINDER GAME PAD

\$30, Microsoft, www.microsoft.com

97. DIPLOMACY

\$50, Hasbro Interactive, www.hasbro.com

98. DESCENT 3

\$45, Interplay, www.interplay.com

99. TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

\$50, Eidos, www.eidos.com

100. HOTROD ARCADE CONTROL SYSTEM

If you're reading this magazine, then there's a good chance that you spent much of your misadvised youth draining quarters into arcade video games. Do you ever find yourself pining for a simple game of JOUSE?



or TRACK AND FIELD? Hanaho's HotRod joystick is just the thing for that trap down memory lane. HotRod does a great job of recreating the feel of an arcade controller, which is ideal for

sating that "games of my youth" jones. And best of all, you don't have keep feeding quarters into your PC. \$500, Hanaho, www.hanaho.com

YOU ARE HERE

So are 999,999 other heavily armed thugs.

Have fun.



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light into the darkness. Trying not
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without murder.

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Be afraid of what it hides.



Mig Alley™



Presented by
Intercoastal



empire

No Guts No Glory

"All of a sudden the lead MiG's wing dropped, the nose came around, and I could feel the hair at the back of my neck try to stand up. I realized there, in that moment of time, I saw him, he saw me, and one of us was not going home."

— Major General Frederick "Bugs" Blesse, USAF (Ret),
10 air victories, Korea

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Awesome Graphics

- ◆ Features Rowan Software's new, advanced 3D graphics engine.
- ◆ 16 different authentic aircraft. Over 150 can be in the skies at any time.
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Full Air Campaign

- ◆ Real dynamic campaigning means your actions directly influence the UN ground war.
- ◆ Scalable involvement lets you take part in dogfights or manage the entire UN air offensive.

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Includes a complete copy of the RAF Central Fighter Establishment report *The F 86 v. The MiG 15*.
A previously classified document covering the strengths and weaknesses of the aircraft, their pilots, and tactics.
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CGW Y2K

Keep On Gaming Amidst the Killing and Maiming!

Special Supplement

Read.Me

Apocalypse Wow!

Our inside sources tell us that Firaxis has scrapped all its future development plans in favor of a brand spanking' new **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION**. This won't be an actual game, but an honest-to-goodness civilization based primarily on stockpiling of food, water, and automatic weapons. Units in **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** include the destitute, the savage, and a dangerously violent RuPaul. While the rest of mankind struggles to literally reinvent the wheel, **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** should subjugate North America within weeks—the only threat seems to come from a new race of super-intelligent apes based in Pittsburgh and led by a gorilla called

Mr. Sneak-A-Lot

General Utrius. However, Mr. Sneaky hears that a robust diplomacy model in **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** should allow for strong alliances. In the backlands of what used to be Texas, rumor has it that John Romero has thrown himself out the window of Ian Storm's penthouse offices. Apparently Romero had finally finished **DAKATAMA** only to have the **Y2K** bug destroy the gaming rigs of the world mere seconds later, thus rendering the last three years of Romero's life terribly, terribly moot.



Sid Meier Poses

Meanwhile in Austin, the castle-styled mansion of playboy game designer Richard "Lord British" Garriot was the scene of horrific bloodshed and potty-mouthed language. Throngs of former **ULTIMA ONLINE** players began gathering at Garriot's mansion seeking guidance and protection from their "Savior and King." Things got ugly and oh-so-deliciously ironic when an armed and crazed Lord British, who as Producer and Lord of **UC** had struggled so valiantly against the practice of "player killing," climbed a parapet and began killing players. Above the din of the dying, Garriot, asked but for a stained **ULTIMA 2: PAGAN** t-shirt, could be heard screaming, "Get thee the S%& off my hands, thou pathetic, deluded sons of S%&!"

Finally, Will Wright and Maxis haven't given up on **THE SIMS**, but they have had to restructure the game radically in light of the complete and utter global technological breakdown. Instead of

Reality Check

Just because planes are falling out of the sky, railroad locomotives are crumbling, and packs of wild dogs are mauling the earth doesn't mean we game journalists can't continue to express our opinions. **Y2K** has more than a technologically-predicted apocalypse in what we op. All sources are each job's own rating system. **Color games are in red.**

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CGW (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	GameSpot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Godkrahm Derby 1001	4.5	30%	4	2	8.2	8
Murphy's Pro	4.5	52%	4	4	9.5	8
Sid Meier's Popucivil	4	53%	2.5	7	8.6	9
Falout 3: The Sins Revisited	4.5	10%	3	7	8.4	7
Grant Hubert Deer Hunter	3	99%	2	9	3.5	6
Blings	1.5	20%	2.5	3	2.8	6
Frozen Fog Gold	4	88%	3.5	1	1.8	2
Open-Up 3 Exp-Pack: Fifty Rings	1.5	10%	5	7	6.5	—
Writing Book With Stick	3	—	—	—	—	—
Thunderdome Tournament	—	—	—	—	—	—
Outbound 3 - Alpha Code	—	—	—	—	—	—

Read Me

The GOOD...

Bill Gates Gets Beat Down With Microsoft bearded up and rendered completely irrelevant, the former master of the universe has quickly found himself with no power or authority whatsoever—a fact not lost on the gathering of former CEOs from around the world who stormed Gates' bunker last month with the specific intent of, as one source put it, "hitting his screwy little ass." "It's payback time," said another. "We followed his rules for 23 years. Now he's gone and eat some shit." You see? And skeptics said that the end of the world was all bad!



managing the lives of cute animated computer characters, the new version of the game asks gamers to interact directly with the people (and mutants) in their lives. Frankly, Mr. Sneaky thinks he speaks for all gamers when he says that no gamer in his right mind has any interest in interacting with real people.

Got a hot rumor? Or maybe a case of Spam we could share? Contact Mr. Sneaky by yelling "Mr. Sneaky!" really loud. **EW**

the BAD...



Myat Re-Released Again We were hoping that the recent global apocalypse might put a stop to at least one thing: the continued repackaging of MYST. But no. This time, End Orb has released it as MYST OPUS, which is essentially a flipbook and a

place of choroni for puzzle-solving. As usual, sales are already through the roof, though we suspect that his love to do with the name itself does the trick that End Orb obviously packaged the game with a rebate coupon for a generous glass-of-juice refund. Even when there are only rats and ravens left on the planet, MYST will still sell like hotcakes.

and the UGLY...

Cannibalism Last, we know our planet's hungry. We know there's a shortage of food. It's not like we're not hungry, too. But eating other people for sustenance is just not cool, okay? Figures of widespread cannibalism in former hi-tech societies like Seattle, San Jose, and Dallas only confirms our worst fears: Heavy-set computer geeks are quickly becoming converted sources of food stuff. Note this, you human-flush-using bioteknoids: We have guns here in our backer. We



will not be eaten. If anyone is gonna eat us, it's us, starting with Scooter, Myazara, Scooter.

PREVIEW

Rock, Scissors, Paper II

How Do You Follow Up a Blockbuster? With a Sequel! By Rob "Three Eye" Culley

You've got to hand it to the strategy masters at Blizzard—their underground bunker is under almost constant assault by rioting Los

Angelenos, and yet they're still finding the time to craft a worthy successor to their super smash hit, ROCK, SCISSORS, PAPER. Early indications are that this multiplayer-only brawler could be the most insanely addictive RSP ever.

Blizzard's underground retreat spared our edit staff only their safehouse and laid out their ambitious plans for the port remote play broadening the game's reach beyond the

subterranean shelters where it first rose to prominence. "With the collapse of the Internet, multiplayer gaming has gotten more difficult, but," claims spokesman Bill Roper, "we think we've solved that." The solution is as simple as it is elegant—stroke signals. "With all the smoldering rumors, it's a wonder we didn't think of it before," says Roper.

As exciting a prospect as long-distance ROCK, SCISSORS, PAPER II, we cannot help but be concerned that gamers may be placing their lives at risk playing the must-have nuclear power plant catastrophe have irradiated much of the planet's surface. In order to conquer this game-killing quinine pigs

Games may be disappointed to hear that the RSP II still won't have a single-player game, but a host of new features are planned, including a new game piece. Play balance is an obvious concern, so Blizzard isn't tapping their hand just yet, but early indications are that ROCK, SCISSORS, PAPER II will probably totally revamp the game with the exciting addition of "Oven-Fresh Sourdough Bread." Of course, the game will still support user-created mods such as the wildly popular ODDS ON EVENS.

Wish luck (and enough vitamins and drinking water) we hope to live to see RSP II in late 2K. **EW**

5 Things to Know About Your Weapons

- 1) Rock breaks Scissors
- 2) Scissors cut Paper
- 3) Paper covers Rock
- 4) With new advanced 3D-angle, players can be either right or left handed
- 5) Special "Opposable Thumbs" patch available



PREVIEW

Looter's Gate

Role Playing Gets Real by Rob "Six-Finger Discount" Duffy

The release of BALDUR'S GATE established BioWare as the 300-pound gorilla of RPG games, and they're not about to let the worldwide technology apocalypse slow them down. Instead, BioWare is ingeniously capitalizing on planetary anarchy with its next title, LOOTER'S GATE.

BioWare is betting that the massively multiplayer LOOTER'S GATE will be even more addictive than online RPGs, with players breaking from the game only to catch a little sleep. Amazingly, BioWare has completed the entire game design—a simple canvas shopping bag with two ragged straps, or “handles” in game lingo. The LOOTER'S bag should be reaching the black market as you read this.

Gameplay is relatively straightforward, yet possessed of deceptive depth. Gamers take their bag, ransack the abandoned shops of their blighted cities, and amass a stockpile of consumable or tradable goods. With no rules to speak of, character development is individualized to a degree we've never seen before, offering up an endless series of character-defining game events.



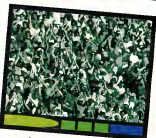
PREVIEW

Do you shotgun the feisty grocer protecting his canned goods, or do you save the ammo and bludgeon him with a tire iron?

While BioWare encourages gamers to define their own roles, the bag will ship with a few pre-set roles for those eager to dive into the action: Among the roles to be found at the bottom of the bag are Look Out, Window Smasher, Torch Man, Guy Who Can't Quite Carry a TV, and Giggling Leon With a Machete.

LOOTER'S GATE is a game whose time has come. We expect gamers will

be LOOT-ing for years, or at least until a credible law enforcement presence is established. **GGV**

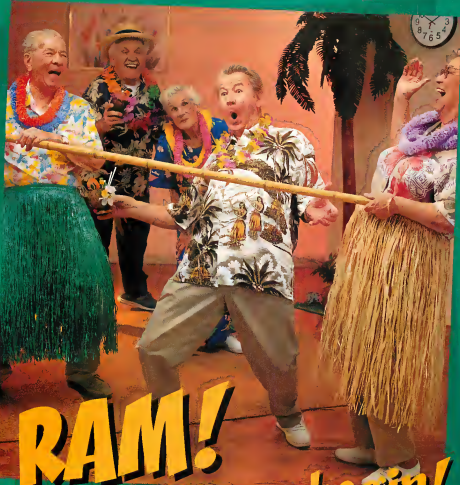


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Warning!
If you're not who should deal with any more, up your PC with at least 128 MB of RAM. Otherwise, the more RAM you have, the longer you'll live.
Desktop Shopper

REVIEW

A New Dimension in Post-Apocalyptic Sports Gaming

It's Up and It's Good!

PAPER TRIANGLE FOOTBALL

Available at \$4

Fans of Three Penny Hockey be warned – once you play **PAPER TRIANGLE FOOTBALL (PTF)** you'll never go back again.

That's because PTF heralds a brave new world in sports gaming: the advent of 3D. The game ships with two pieces of paper and folding instructions. The game designers wisely recognized hardcore gamers' persistent desire to customize their games, so both footballs can be re-textured, though you'll have to have working knowledge of crayons or Magic Markers to do it since an editor isn't included.

Once your paper footballs are folded, the digit-pounding action begins. Players take turns pushing the football across any flat surface, scoring a touchdown whenever they maneuver one of PTF's few shortcomings: The playing field must always have two edges, so while you can play on any table or morgue slab, playing on the floor or in the street just isn't possible. However, the designers are hard at work on a patch that will allow **PAPER TRIANGLE FOOTBALL** to coach as the option of drawing a pair of straight, opposing lines

CGW RATED

PROS

First real 2D sports game; incredible paper football action; incredibly easy league play.

CONS

Starting players fail to cushion football in inexpensive kid to stay safe; playing surface must have two edges.



TOUCHDOWN!



on the ground to serve as end zone demarcations.

But that's a niggling concern in light of the intense action PTF provides. You'll go absolutely gaga watching the paper football execute dizzying spin moves and daring slide across your horizontal surface. But the real locker (no pun intended) comes in the special teams play where PTF breaks from the 2D pack, exploring the Z-axis to take primitive sports

gaming into the 21st century. Using the special kicking football (made of a heavier duty, construction-paper type sheet) you actually tee up the football and "kick" it by flicking it with your finger! Yeah, that's right – you flick the paper football with your finger and it flies into the air! It's an innovation so thrilling, you're bound to miss your first few extra point conversions because your kicking hand will be shaking with excitement.

PAPER TRIANGLE FOOTBALL is far and away not only the best sports game of the year, but best game period. CGW's incredibly addictive **PAPER TRIANGLE FOOTBALL** office league has threatened to keep us from putting out the magazine (well, that and a lack of food, water, and adequate shelter). Buy it today. You'll be glad you did. **CGW**



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- Computer Gaming World, Dec. '99




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- PC Gamer, Dec. '99



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A blue-tinted photograph of a forest at dusk or dawn. The sky is a deep blue with some lighter, hazy clouds. The trees are dark silhouettes against the sky. The overall mood is serene and somewhat melancholic.

"At Last... a Medicine"



val Tomb Raider...”

-Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine



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The Legion of the Fallen is ravaging the lands, killing everything in their path. Only determination, lightning-fast reflexes, and an unquenchable thirst for revenge will save the lands of Ardon. Now is the time to fight with the fury of demons. Are you hero enough?

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CRUSADERS

-OF-

MIGHT AND MAGIC™



Prime Strategy Guide Author

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The Science-Fiction game will
transform your reality when you crash
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MICRO PROSE
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JANUARY REVIEWS

The flood of games released near the end of every calendar year creates a quandary for game magazine editors like your pals at CGW. So many games, so little time (yeah, boo-freakin'-ho). So what is the hot game around our office right now? Believe it or not, we're reliving our geeky adolescences with the ArcadePC, an arcade game emulator with thousands of our favorite classic games, including STREET FIGHTER, TRACK & FIELD, GALAGA, and BUBBLE BOBBLE. You can almost taste the Dr. Pepper and Oxy-5. Mmmmm.

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

RAMP	RATED	PAGE
AMA Superbike	2.5	134
Armored Fist 3	2	132
Cutthroats	2	130
Belver	4	124
Prospace 2	4.5	114
Front Office Football 2	4.5	135
HOMMM: Armageddon's Blade	4.5	134
Homeworld	4.5	103
Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver	3	135
NHL 2000	3.5	129
Passer General 3D	3.5	108
Professional Bull Rider	1	135
Seven Kingdoms 2	3.5	118
Shadow Company	3.5	126
Sid Meier's Alien Crossfire	4	134
Thief Gold	4.5	134
X-Com Essential	3.5	136

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“A delicate mix of booze, booty, and brawling is required to keep your men loyal.”

—Brett Todd, reviewing CUTTHROATS

STAR WARS

Prospace 2



Homeworld



PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER

HOW DO WE RATE?

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



Outstanding The new game that gets it all right. A game you must play.



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



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



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



Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Primitive. Clunky. May costar material.



8:30 A.M.

Pre-Assault Briefing

First stop on any mission is the pre-assault briefing. Here you'll receive the latest crisis updates, configure your team's arsenal, and determine your tactical approach.



Los Angeles, 2005

In the next seven days, representatives from every nation around the world will converge here to witness the signing of the United Nations Nuclear Abolishment Treaty. Only one organization is responsible for the protection of these dignitaries: LAPD SWAT.

Lead your 5-man team through a single mission or an entire career in 18 stunning photo-realistic locations. Working together to fulfill your objectives, you must be on alert at all times. More than 100 goal-oriented characters are waiting to challenge you with a revolutionary artificial intelligence that reacts to your every move.

It takes more than weapons to make it through each mission. Your arsenal includes C2 charges, flashbangs, tactical grenades, and other devices critical to meeting your objectives.

10:33 A.M.

Hostile Contact





9:47 A.M.
Initial Approach



When lives are in danger, it's time to go dynamic. Control, discipline, teamwork, and fast, accurate shooting are the skills you will need to survive.

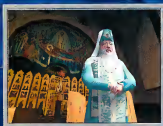


IN STORES NOW!



SWAT is on call 24/7 to deal with the next crisis. It's the lives you save, and the way you save them, that earns the respect of the Department.

4:12 P.M.
Emergency Dispatch



**UNCOMPROMISED DUTY,
HONOR AND VALOR**



SWAT 3

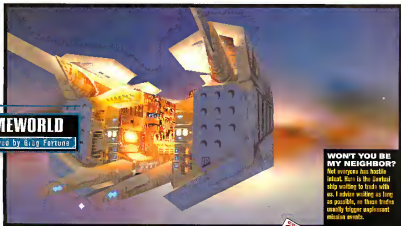
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HOMEWORLD

Reviewed by Greg Fertone



WONT YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

Not everyone has hostile intent. Even in the earliest ship-wrangling to trade with us, I advise writing as long as possible, as these trades usually trigger explosive mission events.

HOMEWORLD Is a Bright Spot in the RTS Sky

A Star Is Born



Have you ever wanted to command a huge fleet of warships, complete with fighter waves and support vehicles? If so, the game you've been waiting for has arrived. I'm speaking, of course, about HOMEWORLD – a real-time fleet management game set in deep space. What's most impressive is the way the design team recognized the flaws in most real-time strategy (RTS) games on the market, and avoided them in HOMEWORLD. This game is a breath of fresh air for anyone who is tired of the horde rushes, repetitive tech trees, and endless resource gathering found in most RTS games.

Once Upon a Time...

The premise is simple: Your race lives on a barren world at the fringe of your galaxy. Deep in the desert a discovery is made, one that brings to light the fact that this planet is not your home – your true home is far away, near the center of the galaxy. Generations labor to construct a huge orbital platform, a framework for the massive mothership that will carry your people home. I'll not tell you much more of the plot, as the story is one of the beautiful elements HOMEWORLD has to offer. As you set out on your journey toward a distant planet your race has long forgotten, there is a tangible feeling of isolation and the despair that comes from being all alone in an unknown galaxy. The story is nicely accented by brief cut scenes, many occurring in the middle of a scenario to help advance the plot, or to bring new developments to your attention.

The graphics also work to set the mood;

THANK YOU SIR, MAY I HAVE ANOTHER?

The factories in the mothership and aboard your carriers can build multiple unit types simultaneously. You can even issue build orders for multiple ships from the single interface.



the backgrounds give the feeling of being adrift in a vast ocean of space. Everything is nicely detailed – very smooth – and presents the proper sense of proportion. In order to give you access to all of your ships throughout the huge mission areas, an inventive view, zoom, and scroll system was put into place. This camera system is one of the real joys of the game, giving you total viewing control of the action, while creating an impressively sweeping cinematic feel. You may view any ship or group of ships from any angle, zoom in and out, and jump to

CGW RATED

PROS

Shining example of how to do RTS right; awesome gameplay and engine.

CONS

No time compression; mothership stuck in single-player.

Recommended: Pentium III-333MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB free disk space. **Discontinued Requirements:** Pentium II-333MHz, 32MB RAM, 40MB free disk space, VGA 640x480. **3D Support:** DirectX MultiPlayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-4 players), max 60 per player.

Publisher: Storm Studios • Developer: Rolo Entertainment • \$50 • www.stormstudios.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

NICE LIGHT SHOW This shot not only shows off the beautiful effects offered by the *HOMEWORLD* engine, it shows why fighters hate engaging large groups of capital ships.



RAINING FIRE AND BRIMSTONE Missile destroyers are particularly useful, as they can attack multiple targets at once. They also make really quick work out of enemy fighter formations.



DROP YOUR STUFF NEXT DOOR Among your support ships is the Resource Controller frigate. When told to guard your collector, it keeps you from having to heal off that rock back to the mothership.



grouped ships via hotkeys. There is also a long-range sensor screen that gives you an overall look at all friendly and enemy ship positions; it also allows you to zoom the focus to any area where friendly ships can be found. I discovered that even with over 200 ships at my command, directing multiple strikes on multiple targets was still fairly manageable.

Fleet Commander

What would all of this control be worth if you were confined to only a couple different ship types? Not to worry — there's plenty of variety to choose from. You can build everything from fighters to heavy cruisers and carriers, and just about everything in between. Of course, a fleet is not made up solely of combat vehicles. You will also command research vessels, cloak generators, sensor arrays, resource collectors, and gravity well generators, just to name a few.

But don't think for a second that you'll be building swarms of ships to throw at enemy formations in hopes of overwhelming their defenses. Your unit management will more likely swing toward the MYTH paradigm than that of C&C or STARCRAFT. Try those "less is more" tactics in *HOMEWORLD* and you'll quickly find yourself with no resources, no ships, and a serious butt-kicking on your doorstep. Amen! You'll need to preserve every ship you can — and employ formations composed of multiple ship types — if you ever hope to see the final battle.

Another improvement over the usual RTS games is the resource collection model. Instead of forcing you into an endless campaign of resource collection, the development team has actually balanced the amount of resources available for collection with the cost of building ships. The end result is that you will get to spend most of your time engaged in tactical engagements, and less time managing your supply lines.

Your resources also carry over from mission to mission, as does your technology tree. No more will you be forced to research the same tech advances over and over, simply because you've advanced to the next area. In *HOMEWORLD*, your technology advances are all

SPINNING PLATES The Sensor Manager's dish-shaped navigational map lets you move your fleet anywhere in space, whether it be above, below, or right on the primary plane of movement.



done through your research ships, and are spaced out throughout the game.

All Hands to Battle Stations!

Believe me, you are going to need every bit of technology, resources, and strategy you've got to overcome the obstacles ahead of you. Combat does not take place on a flat plane, but in a cubic volume of space, merely ordering your units to move in two dimensions will not be enough to win the day. You'll be attacked from above, below, and behind by formations of fighters, corvettes, frigates, and capital ships. Your task is to respond with your own formations and to protect the mothership at all costs. There are many tactics that you can use to defeat the enemy in a given situation, as long as you complete all of your objectives. You might decide to create a fleet of huge capital ships, or to build carriers and tons of small strike craft, or devise a fleet that is somewhere in between.

Regardless of which ships you choose for your fleet, you will be treated to some of the best fleet battles ever seen in a computer game. Whether you've just obliterated a wing of enemy fighters with a group of heavy corvettes, or held off a wave of frigates and destroyers attacking your mothership, your victories will be satisfying because they were hard fought and well won. You won't even be able to use the same formations and attack methods throughout the game, as there are perks for each ship class around every corner. This constant

Tips from Fleet Command

Using all the ship types at your disposal is key to winning decisive battles. Here are some uses for your non-combat ships that might be the difference between a hyperspace jump and rigor mortis:

Proximity Sensors: Keep a couple of these guarding any large formation of ships. They're fast enough to keep up with fighters and will foil any cloaked enemies in your path.

Cloak Generators: Too slow for fighter escorts, these bear-like are perfect for cloaking destroyers, cruisers, and frigates. My favorite use for them, however, is in conjunction with salvage ships.

Salvage Corvettes: These are arguably the most useful ships in the game. In one level alone, I managed to steal eight destroyers, three missile destroyers, a heavy cruiser, and a carrier. Now go check this month's Gamer's Edge for advanced ship-trick techniques.

Look For More **HOMEWORLD** in
GAMER'S EDGE
On Page 388

need to use your existing ships in new combinations keeps the game alive and entertaining all the way to the end.

Houston, We Have a Problem...

OK, you may ask, if this game's so brilliant, why didn't I get five stars? Well, there are just a couple of minor issues standing between HOMEWORLD and a perfect score. The most glaring of these is the lack of a time compression feature. After completing all the objectives in a particular area, you are faced with two options: Harvest or leave. You won't want to leave resources floating around in space, so I'm betting that you'll choose to harvest. That, my friend, could take a while. I frequently left the game running while I went to bed, because watching resources being collected is as entertaining as watching Daffy run. In these cases, the best option would have been a time-compression feature, allowing the resources to be harvested quickly. This would also have been a very useful feature when slow ships had to travel long distances. The other annoyance is that you will be unable to move the mothership around the level unless you are engaged in a multiplayer game. There were many times I wished I could move the mothership a few measly kilometers, but could get nothing more useful out of it than "Orees offline."

The multiplayer aspects of HOMEWORLD are very good, as long as you're not looking for a twitch-feat. With cloaking generators, cloaked ships, the ability to steal enemy ships, and a couple of gravity wells thrown in, you have the making of some great naval battles. You can decide what technology will be available, how many resource points each faction will have, and more. It's all the same gameplay that makes HOMEWORLD great, but with (hopefully) trickier opponents.

Bringing the Fleet Home

HOMEWORLD is an outstanding tactical fleet game, and an example for future RTS games of how to handle resources and tech trees. It's one of those rare titles that uses some of the better aspects of similar games while dodging most of their pitfalls. If you think that you'd make a great admiral, then HOMEWORLD may be just what

you've been looking for. While it doesn't have lots of really fast action, the action this innovative game does have is definitely worth checking out. **CGW**

DID I DO THAT? Once you've gotten the hang of the limitations, enemy ships will drop like flies. Here, a couple of heavy cruisers find out why the sphere formation is so effective.



SPACE GHOSTS The use of cloaked fighters can really rattle an enemy fleet's ego. They may not be big and powerful, but they can suddenly appear in the most inconvenient places...

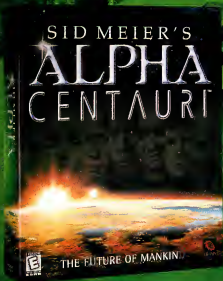


SPACE (FUR)BALLS Some of the battles in HOMEWORLD can involve hundreds of ships engaged in various attack maneuvers. Notice how all the action isn't taking place on a horizontal plane—but actually involves all three axes present in space.



ANYBODY WANT SOME OF THIS? It's possible to acquire reactive firepower in HOMEWORLD. This reacto fleet is a big ball of death.





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PANZER GENERAL Goes 3D, but Recaptures Familiar Territory

Pretty as a Panzer

History repeats itself, so why shouldn't historical wargames? With the tanks set to roll in the eighth game inSSI's venerable "General" series, PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT (PG3D), the real question is: With which historical perspective will gamers identify? Will they feel like the architects of Blitzkrieg ("Hey, this is a lot better than last time"), or some anonymous Belgian frontier commander ("Oh no, not again!")?

be hard to spot in the cities. They can be found again using the strategic map or by moving the mouse over the town in question, but this is something of a nuisance. Some scenarios have visible scenes running down the map, although these don't affect gameplay.

The Leadership Factor

More significant than the graphics are changes to the game system itself. While the interface remains simple and intuitive, building your core force no longer revolves around unit types. Instead, individual leaders comprise the heart of your army. Each leader is rated for experience, translating directly into battlefield abilities and options. He may also gain special abilities (such as better movement, or stronger attack or defense). Each leader is trained to command a particular unit (armor, infantry, air defense, and so on), and while you can assign leaders against type, doing so prevents you from benefiting from experience-based abilities. This can be an important issue in the longer campaigns, because specialty leaders (of aircraft units, for instance) will likely be in short supply.

Instead of a limit on units, you now manage a number of leadership

PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT

reviewed by Tim C. Miller

Fighting in 3D

Most gamers will judge PG3D by comparing it to its illustrious predecessors. While PG3D offers much that is good and much that is new, it fails to recapture the magic of the original. Strangely, the

design owes more to some of PANZER GENERAL's less successful sequels than to the line's founding father.

The result is a game that's enjoyable in its own right, but suffers by comparison to its practically ancient predecessor.

As the title suggests, PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT features 3D maps, units, and animations. These are attractive and, in the case of the maps, allow for improved terrain and sighting rules. The trade-off is that gamers need at least a 6MB 3D card, and may prefer a 16MB or better card. You'll also need relatively recent 3D drivers, as PG3D uses DirectX 6.1.

The graphics, while picturesque, take some getting used to. It can be difficult to place air craft into the right hex, and ground units can

BLITZ MASTER Even the nitpickers outside B.A. Stevens can't stop *General*. Why be in the front — instead of the rearguard — is another question.



CGW RATED

PROS

Clean and easy interface; long campaign; pretty 3D graphics.

CONS

Units sometimes hard to spot; some repetitive scenarios; less-than-compelling AI and campaign structures.

Requirements: Pentium II-233MHz, 6MB RAM, 25MB hard drive space, 6x CD-ROM, 6MB DirectX-compatible 3D graphics card. **Recommended Requirements:**

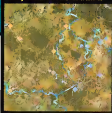
Pentium II-333MHz, 6MB RAM, 3D Support: Direct Multiplayer Support: Internet (if playing on a network)

Publisher: Mindscape • Developer: SSI • 543 • www.panzergeneral.com • E5 • 88 Rating: Excellent

HIGH COMMAND ALRIGHT This juicy German invasion force won't get very far in America.



DEJA VIEW The strategic view looks like previous PG games, but it doesn't show you which units have been used.



LEADQUARTERS Commanders switch seats with leaders in the HQ screen, and can occasionally receive reinforcements during battle.



slots. More experienced leaders take up more than one slot, so players must strike a balance between the size and ability of their core army. The strength of individual units is now determined by the historical availability of equipment (sorry—no overstrength Tiger IIs), while your superiors will also be somewhat frugal with advanced equipment (especially the Germans). Because an experienced force is vastly more flexible and powerful in the field, your ability to manage leaders (and keep them alive) is a key to success.

Uninspired War Plans

The real meat of this game, as with all "General" games, lies in the campaigns. Unfortunately, PG3D doesn't fare any better in this regard than previous sequels. There's a lot to choose from, with four lengthy campaigns (two German, one British, one American), as well as four short campaigns and a selection of stand-alone scenarios. However, there are no Russian Front battles of any kind, and after a while the West Front scenarios have a sameness about them.

Shifting from a German to an Allied commander provides a refreshing change, as the units, force composition, and challenges are different and add new flavor. For instance, my American core depended greatly on tactical air power, as the Germans, I barely used it. Yet, after a few Allied scenarios, that repetitious feeling crept in again. None of the campaigns carry the sense of historical drama and tension that made PANZER GENERAL so entertaining.

The attribution of leadership slots can also detract from the emotional appeal. Having spent 10 scenarios knocking France and England out of the war and driving American forces from Africa, I was poised to lead a triumphant German invasion of North America. The High Command rewarded my brilliance by reducing the number of slots available to me, diminishing my core forces. Moreover, some equipment types were no longer available, forcing me to overrun the

AUTOPILOT The computer has a tendency to stick up aircraft within easy range of your AA guns. German side will have a field day with those Allied planes.



Yanks without the benefit of decent anti-aircraft guns. Needless to say, it was frustrating to spend hours and hours carefully husbanding my elite units, only to lose access to them when they would have been most useful.

Final Action

Objections aside, PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT is still a fine game. Given the dearth of accessible turn-based strategy games, it deserves a stay on your hard drive. It doesn't live up to the original, but gamers shouldn't let that stop them from enjoying it as a decent — though uninspired — member of a fine gaming tradition. **CGW**

Quirky Computer Generals

As in the past, PANZER GENERAL 3D demands a combined-arms approach involving a well-rounded force.

Reconnaissance units are critical to navigating the 3D maps quickly and effectively, while air defense and assault infantry both play key roles in most battles. In fact, because of a lack of aircraft leaders, I tended to use a much more ground-based approach than in the past. It goes without saying that a strong air defense presence was critical in the absence of fighters.

Which brings up a relatively significant flaw in the computer AI. While competent in most situations and still capable of inflicting stinging counterattacks if you leave yourself exposed, the computer opponent doesn't seem to know what to do if you don't make an obvious mistake. Enemy aircraft will fly over a prospective target, discover that it's covered by air defense units, and then just sit there. The computer will then fly three or four more aircraft into the same area, with the net effect of parking its entire airforce on top of your anti-aircraft guns.

Moreover, the computer will sometimes defend objectives with artillery in front of entrenched infantry, and on more than one occasion held back tanks for (presumably) a counterattack that was never launched. Even more oddly, I often found that in a given scenario the defenders of one objective would deploy foolishly, while at the next they'd take a more conventional and effective approach. One thing the computer AI does do well is enqueue units behind the front lines. Thus, all conquered objectives must be garrisoned, and it doesn't hurt to have a unit or two covering your flanks if you want to keep your artillery intact.



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- Heavengames.com

"The sight of the massive structures taking shape stone by stone is quite impressive."

- CNET Gamecenter.com

"The graphics are mouthwatering with lush colors and a level of detail that's rarely seen in games like this ... Just be ready for a visual feast okay?"

- GamersCentral



Interplay Injects Originality, Life Into FREESPACE Universe

100% Derivative-Free



Here's a surprise — the best traditional space sim to come along in some time isn't from LucasArts or Origin. It's the sequel to the well done (if derivative) **FREESPACE**, the imaginatively titled **FREESPACE 2**. Suddenly, Interplay has a very solid contender in a genre previously dominated by **WING COMMANDER** and **Star Wars** games.

Story-wise, all you really need to know is that it's 32 years later, and while all is fine, there's nevertheless a rogue group of seceded Terrans calling themselves the Neo-Terran Front. You're just another pilot (like last time), and the already-interesting plot amps up when, during a "police action" in a nebula, you find out that the "Shiven war fleet" of the previous game was just a scouting party.

The campaign structure is again a mix of dynamic and linear story-telling: You have a set of objectives, but there are varying degrees of success. Meet every goal and life gets easier; miss an important objective or two, and

you can either accept it and have a harder time later, or replay it for better performance. While the missions ultimately end up being on the standard side (escort ship A to point B, destroy all in your way), they often have little twists and turns to throw you off. Of particular note are the black ops missions, with undercover recon and ship hijacking, and missions during which you test new hardware in the field.

FREESPACE 2 is the kind of game you show off to your non-gamer friends — I've had it mistaken for episodes of *Babylon 5*. Early on, it looks like a snazzy version of most other space sims; but when you hit the nebula your jaw will drop. Not only are the billowing gasses and electrical storms gorgeous, but they act like what would normally be called "fog" in a real sim. Besides obscuring your vision, the nebulae emit electrical surges that can disrupt your systems and distort your targeting HUD.

The nebulae effects aren't the only eye-candy treats; the ships and their actions are top of the line as well. Capital ships do not merely possess more of the same guns you do, but have tank cannons, anti-fighter beams, and anti-capital ship beams. The new capital ships are perfectly to scale, and watching any battle with two or more of them cutting each other in half serves up a special-effects-laden scene

ROUND AND ROUND THE GYRE GOES Perhaps you'll learn more about the Shiven and their crazy galaxy — perhaps not.



FOG OF WAR Nebulae are not only pretty, they also mean that the enemy needs to be on top of you in order to be seen.



I'LL CUT YOU, FOOL! Stand back and let the capital ships do their work. You do not want to be caught in-between.



worthy of any recent sci-fi sim. Add to all this the much more solid multiplayer play (including a league for gamer-created squadrons to fight for sectors of the galaxy), and the **FRED2** mission editor, and you've got something worthy of a nice long stay on your hard drive.

With such a well-made game, the dings are more noticeable. For one thing, **FREESPACE 2** is quite a hardware hog. My PIII400 with 128MB RAM is no sissy, but it started choking at a 1024x768 resolution; alas, 640x480 is the only other option. A 800x600 option is sorely missed.

Also, 64MB RAM won't quite cut it — otherwise your hard drive will be thrashing. Gamers with ASD cards will have switch to DirectSound or experience minor sound bugs. Finally, while the plot doesn't leave you hanging, its lack of real closure may disappoint some players.

For those spoiled by the sheer originality of **INDEPENDENCE WAR**, **FREESPACE 2** is still a very traditional, dogfighting space sim — but if you have the hardware for it, **FREESPACE 2** is simply the best there is. **GDV**

FREESPACE 2

reviewed by Thierry Noüy

CGW RATED

PROS

Best graphics in a space sim yet; well-designed missions; great ship design; more stable multiplayer this time around.

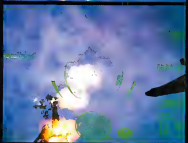
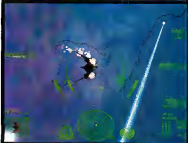
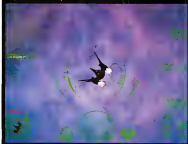
CONS

No mid-level video resolution option; high system requirements; still a traditional space sim.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 48MB hard disk space, 3D card. Recommended Requirements: Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 100MB hard disk space. 3D Support: Direct3D. Multiplayer Support: LAN (max 24 players), or CE or proxy.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: VolSys Inc. • CD • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

RELEASE THE HOUNDS Here, I'm testing a new weapon: "dog" a target, and said target is then targeted by nearby capital ships. Oh, no! His oil takes place within a minute.



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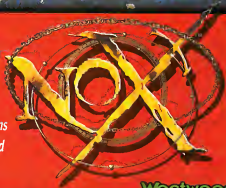
100's of spell combinations

Summon and control creatures

Create your own traps, ambush victims

Defeat Hecubah, Queen of the Undead

What's YOUR strategy for action?



SEVEN KINGDOMS II Is Easy to Like, Hard to Cozy Up To

Tough Love

Marketing hyperbole aside, it's usually pretty easy to tell a good game from a bad one once you get your hands on it.

But there are a few rare titles where the distinction is harder, games afflicted by what I call Modern Era Sid Meier Syndrome: MESMS games such as COLONIZATION, GETTYSBURG, and ALPHA CENTAURI are obviously not bad — carefully and cleverly constructed, with compelling mechanics and sensible interfaces — but somehow, I can't bring myself to play them for very long. They're like tofu burgers or earnest biopics about Gandhi; you have to admit they're good, but you wouldn't want them as a steady diet.

The five or six games who picked up the original SEVEN KINGDOMS a couple of years ago discovered not another

WARCRAFT rip-off, but a well-conceived, richly detailed game that combined the appeal of

SEVEN KINGDOMS II

rated by Jason Kapalka

real-time strategy with the deeper interactions of an empire builder. Dated graphics, excessive micromanagement, and that intangible MESMS factor made it hard to warm up to the game, and SEVEN KINGDOMS wound up in the "cult classic" category, ignored by everyone except game reviewers and a small but rabid pack of fans.

Cut to today, where if you accidentally blunder past the racks of AGE OF EMPIRES II, HOMEWORLD, and TIBERIAN SUN, you might find SEVEN KINGDOMS II: THE FRYHTAN WARS. The pleasant surprise is that designer Trevor Chen and the gang at Enlight Software have performed a low-budget miracle; they've produced a slick and well-polished game that can stand without shame beside any Microsoft or Westwood product.

The Age of MythCraft

Set in the same indeterminate dawn-of-civilization period as the original, the inaccurately titled SEVEN KINGDOMS II features not even half twelve human kingdoms, including the Vikings, Romans, Chinese, and Egyptians among others. Unlike the more realistic AGE

OF EMPIRES series, SKII freely mixes in fantasy elements, such as fireball-chucking druids, magic swords, personal appearances by "Greater Beings" such as Thor, and vast hordes of hostile monsters known as Fryhtans.

These latter besides, a minor element in the first game, have taken on a larger role in the sequel. No longer content to lurk in their lairs, the seven tribes of Fryhtans now aggressively expand their own empires, enslaving and destroying human towns. And, most importantly, you can now play as one of the Fryhtans, which is an almost completely different experience. For

TALK ABOUT COMBINED ARMS A mixed group of archers, druids, cavalry, monks, bruteforce Fryhtans, and a Chinese dragon all rock it to this lustrous lake.



FRIGHTENING FRYHTANS

They're big, they're ugly, they spit fire and form living fortresses. They're the Fryhtans, and they've just dropped by to set your land.



instance, the Fryhtan economy is based on murder — the only way to get the "Life Points" necessary to breed new Fryhtans is to slay other living creatures.

The core gameplay of SKII is so involved, and so unlike anything else out there, that it's easier to summarize the chrome and extras first. Suffice it to say that the game includes just about every feature and option you've ever seen or desired in a real-time strategy game. Through tuto-

als? Check. Stand-alone scenarios? You got it. Massively configurable single-player skirmish mode? Randomized campaign with multiple difficulty levels? Multiplayer via the Internet, LAN, or Enlight's admittedly non-too-stable servers? It's there. Waypoints, rally points, log-of-war options, formations, tech trees, unique units for each race, siege engines, map filters, pop-up help, hotkeys? Check, check, and check again, and as a bonus, you can toss in a truly inspired scenario editor that lets you actually play a map while you edit it. And the graphics don't suck either. Capable of running smoothly at 1024x768 resolution, they stack up nicely against anything in AGE OF EMPIRES II or TIBERIAN SUN.

As for gameplay, forget everything STARCRAFT and C&C taught you. In SKII, the only similarity is that you usually start with a single town and the goal of conquering the world, which typically includes a slew of independent towns and several other human or Fryhtan players. But military force is not the only way to win, and frequently is the worst possible option. For instance, you can send your troops to batter an independent town into submission, but in all likelihood you'll end up killing most of the population, rendering your prize worthless. Instead, you'll need to build a nearby fort to influence the town, staff it with a general of the same nationality, and follow through with cash grants or an agent provocateur to finally bring the town under your own control.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, 32MB RAM, 16MB free disk space. Recommended Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM.

3D Support: Use Multiplayer Support: Works in dual monitor (2 players), Internet, LAN, (2-4 players); use CD for every four players.

Publisher: Ubi Soft • Developer: Enlight Software • F40 • www.sevenkingdoms.com
ESRB Rating: Teen

CGW RATED

PROS

Encyclopedic variety of features; rich gameplay; near infinite replayability.

CONS

Too much to keep track of; games can descend into micromanagement hell; good luck finding anyone on the Net to play against.

It's all a bit more involved than sending some peons to chop down a tree — one of the most basic tasks in SKI. There's also a fully-fledged economic system in which you mine various resources, ship those raw materials to a factory, then move the finished goods via caravan to your own markets or those of neutral or allied players.

Combat, when it occurs, is the usual RTS melée, but it's what you do before the fight that determines your chances of success. Each and every soldier has loyalty, fighting, and leadership ratings that really matter, and knowing how to maximize these is the key to developing an effective force. You'll also need the judicious use of special race-specific units, like Viking axe-throwers or Japanese Ninjas, six different siege engines; unique heroes; mercenaries; and magic items to create a truly ass-whopping marvel of a military machine.

Finally, you can eschew both the military and economic routes and concentrate on espionage, if you like. Spies can be trained to infiltrate almost every aspect of the enemy's empire. Once inserted, they can cause dissent, bribe key officials, perform assassinations, start international incidents, and — if promoted by the foe while undercover

RAINBOW NATION With a bit of work as a Frytite, you can get other Frytites (Kingdoms) to join you. This allows you to recruit their troops and special buildings. A color key of these different Frytite types lies only for war.



KEY LINES All structures in SEVEN KINGDOMS II must be connected via "lines of control" to other important sites. For instance, a mine needs to be connected to a city to supply the workers, and to a factory or market to ship the raw materials.



— ultimately take control of enemy forts and armies or even the whole kingdom, if you're lucky enough to have one of your agents crowned.

HAMMER OF THE GODS The mighty Thor puts down lightning bolts as this unfortunate Frytite lies. Each nation has its own unique "Greater Being" that can be invoked for various effects.



An Embarrassment of Riches

It sounds great, and it is. Almost. The problem is, there's just too much going on all the time. Although SKI streamlines and simplifies the most aggravating aspects of the original game, there's still so much happening that even at the slowest speed settings, the latter stages of any scenario become almost impossible to manage, with dozens of forts, cities, spies, research projects, diplomatic requests, menacing Frytites, caravans, and more all demanding your attention right now.

The best games in the genre keep the player riding a fine line, busy keeping track of things and giving orders, but rarely leaving them bewildered with information overload. Even after dozens of hours of play, the "what's goin' on?" response is all too common in SKI. My most common experience was starting a scenario, enjoying it for about half an hour, then gradually getting more and more lost in the maelstrom of clanking details.

Even at its most frustrating, there's no denying SKI is an awesome achievement, offering almost unlimited depth and minute replayability. It's too bad that only the most dedicated of players will be able to master the game's complexities. The majority, sadly, will find the MESMS factor in effect. In the end, SEVEN KINGDOMS II is a game that's easy to admire, but difficult to love. **CGW**

SOME CALL IT A DEATH RAY An Evil King's Tor machine will torch various long-distance Frytite-style.



Still Not the Coolest Game on Earth, but Getting There

Too Much of a Good Thing?

Ofense has been tough to come by in the NHL over the past few years. That defense-first trend has been transferred to EA Sports' NHL series for the PC, with recent editions in the series sporting goals with superhuman reflexes. Firing more than 30 shots a period rarely resulted in more than one goal crossing that thick red line.

That's all changed in NHL 2000. Players can now touch twice on slappers from the point, one-timers from the slot, wristers from the lower circles, and just about any other combination of shot and location. Unfortunately, thanks to the same old deficient defense, they'll do the same a whole lot. So much so that you'll be hard-pressed to lose a game. In the end, this title is just about equal parts good and bad news. While it's a lot more fun than its frustrating predecessors, it still isn't hockey.

SO, YOU WANNA HOLD OUT, EH? *Legendary Center* Alvin Tuckin gets his just desserts from the elbow of the "Big" Vladimir Malin. Hope they're stopping you around just like this in the Swiss Elite League, pretty boy.



NHL 2000

Reviewed by Brett Todd

the three former choices before, this is the first year for the latter. Net play is a bit of a mixed bag. Lag can be a serious problem, and as of late-September, EA Sports had yet to get the promised online-matching service up and running. Career play allows you to guide your favorite NHL club through 10 consecutive seasons. This includes drafts (you can even start a new career league by redrafting the entire NHLPA), free agent signings, trades with computer-controlled teams, and so on. Rival GMs aren't brilliant, but they're not mouth-breathing morons, either.

Another interesting addition is the ability to turn player and goalie attributes up for either team. This works

quite nicely in exhibition play, where you can crank up the opposition goaltenders to help prevent routs. Unfortunately, both teams have to be adjusted at the same time in season/career play, meaning that you receive any boost given to the PC. Does this make any sense? Allow customization, but only if it creates a level playing field? Whoever made this design decision must be missing a few fries from his Happy Meal.

As already mentioned, the best news about NHL 2000 is the complete extermination of the hated super-goals. Remember how the

A LONG, LONG TIME AGO *Max Merzley travels back in time, puts on the Canucks' '76 uniforms, and still manages to split the defense to go in alone on the Leafs' Curtis Joseph. Pretty early exit, huh? Tuckin was called last year before I finally realized that Vancouver's old patch-like logo thing was supposed to be a "C"*



likes of Garth Snow used to snap from one post to the other at the speed of light? Not anymore. Cheap passes, high-percentage shots, and proper positioning are all rewarded with pretty goals now. Almost every game features a couple of highlight reel falls, something that the real NHL has been unable to boast since the start of this decade.

Bad News

Of course, the only way to dump the super-goals and preserve challenging gameplay would be to rev up the computer's defensive AI. Unfortunately, that wasn't done, and the result is a title that does little to push an experienced sports gamer. I've found at least three shooting locations that beat the PC zelminder

almost every time. Wraparounds from behind the net, quick wristers after cutting across the crease in the slot, and hard slappers from just above either hash mark are pretty much sure things.

Now, I have to say that that's fairly true to life. If the defenders give an opponent that much room to wheel, he'll burn you nine times out of ten. In the real NHL, however, defenders aren't nearly as courteous as they are in NHL 2000. A horizontal cut from the blue line in should get you to intensive care, not the crease. Same with wraparounds, where getting cranked into the end boards should be a far more likely result than a shot on net.

Without these basics, NHL 2000 turns into a bit of a farce. Even

CGW RATED

PROS

No super-goals; varied, realistic scoring; career play and fantasy draft add to longevity; looks realistic.

CONS

Brain-dual defensive AI; sacri-ficing scoring locations; lagggy net play.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3D HW accel drive option **Recommended Requirements: Pentium 4 300MHz, 64MB**

RAM, 3D Support: Direct3D and GDI. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-12 players via XFRW, modem (25K connection recommended), LAN.

Publisher: EA Sports • Developer: EA Sports Canada • \$10 • www.nhlsports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

at All-Star difficulty with the goalie and player sliders turned all the way up for the computer, I'm still able to score in bunches. I can try to ignore the sweet spots, but if I'm down in the closing minutes, the temptation is simply too great. Furthermore, I don't want to have to handicap myself this way. Nearly a decade into the series, EA should have a better handle on the defensive positioning.

Great News

As expected, these shortcomings are nicely hidden behind spectacular visuals. Thanks to the higher-resolution settings, NHL stars such as Eric Lindros, Mike Modano, and Mats Sundin are recognizable even while playing; faces are dead-on, providing a wealth of detail that would make these guys recognizable to their nearest and dearest. All of the special details, such as arena pennants, on-ice ads, and so on have been carried over from the past two years. Everything seems much sharper and more fully realized this time. There's a smoothness to the animation and artwork that was absent the last time out. It's hard to imagine PC game visuals getting any better than this.

Audio effects are also at the head of the class. Skate blades cut and scratch the ice, errant shots thunk into boards and clank off glass, and collisions rumble loud enough to rattle your teeth. However, play-by-play and color commentary — courtesy of series veteran Jim Hughson and newbie Bill Clement — is awful. Hughson repeats himself a lot and Clement seems even more stilted and out of place here than he does on ESPN. Head north of the border and give Harry Neale a try, guys.

Wanna Feel Around?

As enjoyable as feeling around with NHL 2000 is, there's no way to deny that the game still lacks a serious side. Even semi-dedicated players will master it in no time. Dumb defensive AI, obvious money spots, and the inability to independently adjust an opponent's skill level in career play simply neuter the challenge factor. While you'll see some good-looking goals focking the twine now, you won't see the PC putting up much of a fight.

NHL 2000 is here for a good time, not a long time. That's more than I could say for last year's game, but there's still nothing here to hold much interest beyond the first dozen games or so. Unless you find notching countless hat tricks with the like of Joe Sakic and Tony Amonte to be the ultimate in computer entertainment, this one will gather more dust than spines in your CD-ROM drive. **CGW**

ORIGINAL SIX LOOKING SWEET A nice bit in NHL 2000 is the ability to play with authentic old-time uniforms in addition to the current home, away, and third jerseys. Adds a lot of spice to those Original Six matchups. Now we just need some classic linings to go along with the ersatz halos.



Late Results

Just before press time, EA Sports released a comprehensive (4.0 MB) patch that addressed a number of gameplay issues. The biggest improvements were to computer AI, which has been made significantly more aggressive in all zones. While the PC players still don't play the best strategic game of hockey, they do pressure you at all times. Goalies are far less sieve-like in the post-patch era. While we haven't returned to the super-goalie era, wraparounds and other previous hot spots are no longer gimmicks. Oh, and gamers can now access the player and goalie slider bars during season play. Needless to say, all of these changes make for a much improved and more challenging NHL 2000 experience.

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Destruction Derby Meets The French Connection in GT's Car Chase Extravaganza

Get In and Drive

He pled his trade just before the dawn of disco, an undercover cop so obsessed with cracking an organized crime ring that he'd break the rules and endanger innocent lives in the process. He did some of his best work behind the wheel of a V8-powered gas-guzzler, a vehicle he used as a weapon on the streets of America's cities. Improbable high-speed car chases under the tracks of an elevated train, acrobatic jumps over the hills of downtown Fresno, a mysterious French-speaking adversary...is all this beginning to sound familiar?

If you guessed 1971's *The French Connection* or maybe 1988's *Bullitt*, you'd be close. But it happens to be the formula for GT Interactive's *DRIVER*, a game where the urban replications and driving freedom of *MIDTOWN MADNESS* meet the attitude of *INTERSTATE '76* and the utter carnage of *DESTRUCTION DERBY*.

It's a driving game, pure and simple – so simple – so aside from the nicely voiced but poorly rendered cutscenes, you can forget about trading bullets or witticisms with the other characters. The driving is all the entertainment you're gonna need.

You play the role of Farmer, an ex-nerc turned undercover police officer. Your assignment? Gain the trust of the bad guys and run enough successful missions that you become their lead wheelman. In the end, you'll find that the Big Boss has far more lofty goals for you than you had envisioned.

But little of that really matters when you're playing the game. *DRIVER* is a collection of 10 minute tasks that highlight action and downplay any grand scheme. You needn't even sit through the cutscenes if you don't want to, though you will need to occasionally check your answering machine for assignments.

So, what does a driver do? You may be asked to disable a rival gang member's vehicle, rescue someone from – or deliver someone to – a "hit," and assist in virtually any other nefarious activity you can imagine. Often you'll have a time restriction, in which case you'll be forced to smash and crash through traffic just to get the job done.

This, in turn, will attract the attention of the local police, who'll attack you en masse until they've either rammed your car into a smogging hunk of metal, or you escape. Believe me, having three or four of

PIGS IN HEAT Aside from the main quest, *DRIVER* is filled with mini-games such as this one, where you'll try your level best to fight off swarms of aggressive cop onagers.



these suckers on your tail as you hurtle along city streets at triple the posted speed limit, negotiate handbrake turns, grab big air, and somehow master the wild but oh-so-appropos physics and suspension models is a total blast.

On the other hand, your best course of action may be to slow down and not attract attention, mixing with low-abiding drivers and sidling alongside the vixy cops who'd otherwise hunt you. In this way, the game's AI is quite intelligent, even more so when you consider it's spread out over condensed replicas of Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York.

DRIVER features convincing, detailed cityscapes on par with those of *MIDTOWN MADNESS*; beautiful depictions of inclement weather and night driving; and particularly great audio over a surround-sound system. And for you budding film directors, the game comes with the finest replay and editing suite to ever grace a driving title—one that lets you create, basically, your own personal movie.

Sadly, the game does not sport break-apart cars. Nor will it let you race against your buddies, and it is prone to the odd lock-up and graphic glitch. But even those blemishes do little to cripple this otherwise immensely engaging and lively vehicular lockout. **C+GV**

DRIVER

reviewed by David Gent

CGW RATED

PROS

Superb stunt capabilities; detailed cityscapes; stellar replay editing suite.

CONS

Dull cutscenes; no break-apart cars or multiplayer driving; periodic technical anomalies.

AERIAL BALET The *DRIVER* replay and editing suite is the best in the business.



TAG TEAM *DRIVER*'s in-car view doesn't even have a dashboard, but with the action coming at you from all angles, the chess perspective is better replay.



Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 16MB RAM, CDROM hard disk space, 4MB 3D accelerator card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 486MHz, 32MB hard disk space, 64MB RAM, 6.4 MB or higher 3D accelerator card. **3D Support:** Glide, Glide2, Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: GT Interactive Software Corp. • Developer: Reflections Interactive Limited • \$49 • www.driver.gtgames.com
ESRB Rating: Teen, simulated violence.

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SHADOW COMPANY Makes it Official—1999 Is the Year of the Commando

Dogs of War

With all the stealth of a highly trained assassin, *Ulti Soft* slipped **SHADOW COMPANY** onto store shelves with no fanfare. Too bad, because it's a solid squad-based strategy game, and a treat for gamers into gritty military action.

From the beginning, a world of vicious subterfuge slaps you across the face: A small team of highly trained mercenaries is left for dead by their employers, and forced to fight their way out of an Angolan battlefield in order to save the world from a nasty global conspiracy.

You control your team from a 3rd-person perspective—think real-time **JAGGED ALLIANCE 2**. Not an easy game to master, you'll benefit from playing **SHADOW COMPANY's** tutorial and reading its manual, though some gamers may still get frustrated trying to target

enemies or manage the movements of your tiny squad members. Each of the nine

sprawling missions begins with a planning phase where you're presented with a slew of objectives, including securing hostages, taking out enemy bases, photographing munitions plants, and destroying submarines and convoys.

You handpick and equip your men from a pool of 16, each with ratings in weapons skills, demolitions, electronics, and more. These skills improve with use from mission to mission, so you'll really want your mercs to survive.

Though you can command up to eight mercenaries on any given mission, you won't always have the funds to outfit a complete team. You'll constantly walk a financial tightrope strung up between properly equipping your team and making sure you have the money to pay them. Weapons and equipment collected during an operation can be sold for extra cash, so don't forget to pry those AK-47s from the enemy's cold dead hands.

Non-linear missions let you fulfill your objectives in any order. Death comes quickly in **SHADOW COMPANY**, so you'll spend considerable

CAMPING OUT Scouting the best possible point of entry to a mission is a crucial part of the game. Even then, you'll have to watch out for patrols like these two bad guys, recently shot dead.



ARMS DEALER The Equip screen is where you'll buy weapons and items for your mercenaries, or where you'll sell surplus to keep your little band of paid killers in the black.



time at the beginning of each mission sneaking around in order to find the best, safest approach to any given objective, especially early in the game (weapon and equipment choices make or break operational success in the later missions). Once you complete a mission, your surviving team members are extracted from the site, paid, and provided a new mission for more pay.

The game world is sharp looking and full of possibilities for interaction with the environments. You can pick up weapons and equipment from slain enemies to resupply your team, though it's an annoying oversight that you can't strip the ammo from the guns you find. You can commandeer vehicles and boats—it's great to jump into an enemy tank and blast the bad guys away. The terrain has a feel similar to **MYTH**, but I found the free-floating camera to be cumbersome. While you can control your commandos individually, they can be safely left to their own devices, thanks to some pretty good artificial intelligence. Each merc has his or her own personality, and may react differently to the same situation depending on their skill set, but all will shoot the enemy when attacked.

On the flip side, the enemy AI can be weak; enemy soldiers patrol over fallen comrades without batting an eye, while other soldiers standing near a freight do nothing to support their comrades. Some missions are incredibly tough, because every AI enemy soldier within a mile of your shot comes racing to the freight with weapons blazing. This game is punishing enough without every AI hothead burn-rushing you. Sharper variation in difficulty levels would have been a welcome addition.

SHADOW COMPANY strikes an interesting balance between the real-time action and tactics of a game like **ROGUE SPEAR**, while giving gamers a lighter version of the character interactions and resource management of **JAGGED ALLIANCE 2**. It's not perfect, but **SHADOW COMPANY** is a rough little gem of a game.

CGW

SHADOW COMPANY: LEFT FOR DEAD

Reviewed by Raphael Libertini

CGW RATED

PROS

Spitty graphics; mercenaries improve with every successful mission; nice balance of character and resource management.

CONS

AI glitches; clunky camera; hard to target enemies at times; very difficult, even on easy setting.

DRIVING LESSONS

Commandeering vehicles, boats, snowmobiles, and tanks is a real kick in the pants.

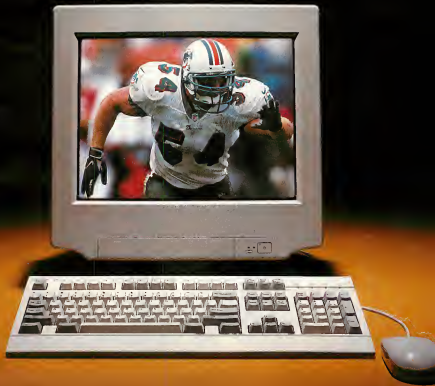


Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 40MB free disk space, VGA 3D card

MSRP: \$49.95 3D Support: Direct3D Multiplayer Support: Internet or LAN (2-4 players), on CD per player

Publisher: Ulti Soft Entertainment • Developer: Starbuck Games • 248 • www.ultisoft.com
ESRB Rating: Mature, advised blood and violence.

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A Good Keelhauling Is Preferable to Playing CUTTHROATS

Planksters

How's this for a great idea? Take a tiny sloop out on the ocean (like of the early 17th Century, create a pirate engine, and launch a Caribbean crime spree with cannon and cutlass, taking

the occasional break to bury treasure chests on windswept beaches...

All of these thrilling elements went into the design of CUTTHROATS: TERROR ON THE HIGH

EIGHT MILES HIGH Boy, these crews could fly awfully high in the 17th Century. CUTTHROATS' sleek, pre-bath-crow's nest view drains all the tension out of volcanic eruptions.



Raiding towns involves little more than sending a bunch of marines ashore and hurling them at the enemy in waves. Just point your troops at likely sources of money (treasury buildings) and weapons (barrack houses) and let 'em go to it. The resulting carnage is initially fun to watch, but I was a bored spectator by port number three.

Swinging From The Yardarm

While strategy games usually don't require much in the way of visual chrome to do a good job, CUTTHROATS demands a few extras to recreate a proper pirate atmosphere. Needless to say, these aren't provided. The graphics are dated (that crow's nest looks like something from the original SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD), ports of call have identical menu screens, and Tortuga looks exactly like the Florida Keys. Both land and sea battles are shown from a quasi-somewhat point-of-view too distant to provide much detail.

Audio is highlighted by an interesting orchestral score that truly evokes the open ocean, but other effects — especially voice samples — are limited and repetitive. Hearing my whiny little crow's nest guy repeat "They look like...traders," for the hundredth time made me want to hang myself from the yardarm.

Overall, it looks like Hotheose and Eidos have missed with another "can't miss" idea. Instead, it's just a mediocre bore. Save your doubloons for something else. **CGW**

BOOMTOWN Grenades don't explode in use; explosives when you land in their towns.



CUTTHROATS: TERROR ON THE HIGH SEAS

reviewed by Brett Todd

SEAS; unfortunately, the people responsible for the decidedly mediocre GANGSTERS haven't improved much on the game design. Mayhem on the high seas has never been so dull.

Booze and Booty

Although CUTTHROATS lays claim to being a wild and woolly battle fest, it's really more of a management/tactical simulation. The idea is to build a powerhouse criminal regime, and you can't do that by simply attacking every ship you see. A great deal of time will be spent in port, stocking up the foodstuffs, hiring crewmembers, arming your vessels, and recruiting officers. A delicate mix of booze, booty, and brewing is required to keep your men loyal. Mass up in any area, and you could be voted out of a captaincy. This can be both enjoyable and challenging.

Still, the majority of the game takes place on the waves, and it's here that the game really sinks. Much of the excitement should come from the tension before and during battles, but this is smothered by poor design choices. When you move in for the kill after spotting a target, the view switches from map to crow's nest. Sound appropriate? Well, this crow's nest seems to be located somewhere between Mr and the Hubble Telescope. So you get an extreme top-down view of two little ship icons slowly coming together. And when I say slow, I mean it. I've left to make myself a sandwich — and I mean the big, kick-ass, Dagwood Bumstead kind — and returned without missing a beat.

Yo-ho-ho and a Bottle of Dumb!

CUTTHROATS doesn't get any better when it speeds up. Battles themselves are chaotic catastrophes with simply no way to control your ships properly. Selecting them all and giving basic orders results in galleons spinning in circles, slamming into each other, or just leaving the fight entirely. Micro-managing each craft through either constant clicking or the advanced options list leads to similar results, especially with the larger fleet you'll have later in the game. I lost a number of battles I should have won, simply because I couldn't properly use my numerical superiority.

Requirements: Pentium 55MHz, 32MB RAM, 25MB HD free space
3D Support: Non-Multiplayer Support: Non

Recommended Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • Developer: Red Storm Games • \$49 • www.eidosinteractive.com
ESRB Rating: Teen, simulated violence.

CGW RATED

PROS

Open-ended game design adds to the replay value.

CONS

Slow, repetitive gameplay; ships very frustrating to handle during combat; dated visuals and poor view angles take all the fun out of piracy.



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-Strategy Gaming Engine

"...This is easily one of the best games of the year."

-Next-Generation Online



The Definitive Simulation of Unrealistic Armored Combat

Armored Fisticuffs

I could cut NovaLogic some slack for the lack of realism in **ARMORED FIST 3 (AF3)** if the company didn't claim on the front of the box that its game is "the definitive M1A2 Abrams battle tank simulation." It most assuredly is not. That honor currently goes to MicroProse's **M1 TANK PLATOON II**, despite that game's faults.

STUDD TREADS In this version of reality, the 70-ton M1A2 can hop over vertical slopes like as if they were.



quite good considering that it doesn't use 3D hardware. However, the days of playing games at a maximum resolution of 640x480 are rapidly coming to an

end. Even at that, my 450MHz Pentium III would sometimes chug along when the action became intense.

The big selling point for AF3 is multiplayer Internet support through NovaWorld, NovaLogic's free network of game servers. Unfortunately, this is the only way the game can be played with more than one player. Anyone hoping to play it over a LAN or by modem is out of luck.

NovaLogic says that NovaWorld offers the advantages of supporting Voice-Over-Net technology and smooth gameplay for up to 32 players. When I tested the game, however, almost no one bothered communicating by voice. Lag and warping were evident with as few as 12 players in a game. Still, this might be tolerable for those looking for a tank-versus-tank multiplayer experience.

If dogfighting in tanks is your idea of a good time, then playing AF3 on NovaWorld might be worth checking out. But if you're looking for an even remotely realistic experience of going head-to-head against humans in tanks, you won't find it here. All engagements take place at what would be short range for an M1A2, and

Abrams tanks sometimes strut off point-blank flank shots. It's not the sort of game likely to catch the Pentagon's eye as a training tool.

ARMORED FIST 3 is heavy on bad AI, action-oriented

gaming, scripted missions, and improbable linear campaigns. (When did the Somali militia men trade in their pickups and assault rifles for T-80s and anti-tank missiles? Would the United States and China really form an alliance to defend Pakistan from Iran?)

For now, I'm putting AF3 on the shelf and waiting for a truly definitive simulation of the M1A2. **CGW**

ARMORED FIST 3

rev. wud by Patrick C. Miller

Tanks but No Tanks

If a realistic tank sim is what you desire, then don't bother with AF3; this is not a simulation, but a game loosely based on the U.S. Army's M1A2 Abrams. In this game, your 70-ton tank can cling like a fly to the side of a near-vertical slope. You routinely knock down attack helicopters with one round of armor-piercing ammo, while your vehicle and the aircraft are moving at top speed. The helicopters supporting your missions don't know the meaning of the term "standoff attack." They fly like soda to the flame, where they fall burning from the sky without accomplishing much, if I could go on, but you get the idea.

AF3 could more accurately be called **ARMORED FIST 2 1/2**; so if you didn't like **ARMORED FIST 2**, you probably won't like AF3. If you did, the 50 new missions and six campaigns in AF3 should satisfy you. NovaLogic managed to keep all the features in AF3 that I grew to despise in AF2, such as the ability to turn on gun stabilization (why would you not want to?), toggling the control for minor adjustments when zooming the gunner's sight in and out, and those kamikaze helicopters. The best new feature is dismounted infantry, although it does little to improve gameplay.

AF3 does not use 3D-accelerated hardware; it relies instead on NovaLogic's Voxel Space 32-graphics engine. And the game looks

SORRY, LOST MY HEAD In every tank finds itself in the wacky end of the Abrams' 100mm gun.



CONNECT THE DOTS The U.S. Army finally gets looks in this Somali campaign, but now the local militias are armed to the teeth with mortar and anti-tank weapons.



AI? WHAT AI? Hey, guys! Why don't you try using the bridge like I did!



CGW RATED

PROS

Easy-to-use
Internet play; mis-
sion editor;
decent non-accel-
erated graphics.

CONS

A game, not a
simulation as
billed; wretched
AI; lack of multi-
player options.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX, 64MB RAM, 115MB hard drive space. Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 20 Support: No
Multiplayer Support: Internet for up to 32 players via NovaWorld, one CD per player.

Publisher: NovaLogic • Developer: NovaLogic • \$35 • www.novalogic.com • ESRB Rating: Teen, simulated violence.

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QUICK HITS

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE does what any good expansion pack should: It gives gamers

more of what they like, with enough new twists to keep things interesting. It's actually more generous than these things usually tend to be. What you get here, in a nutshell, is six new campaigns, 38 stand-alone

scenarios, a random map generator, a new town type, and a campaign editor. The campaigns alone — especially the title one — are huge and difficult, and will keep most gamers occupied for dozens of hours, at least. Gameplay remains the same, with a few cool tweaks. You can now garbion creatures at captured mines, which can ease resource management, and you can recruit either upgraded or base units at any town after upgrading, which is helpful when you're hard-up for resources. The new town, the elemental conflict, includes the elemental creatures from previous games, as well as sprites and phoenixes. Nothing stunning here, but good solid HOMM gaming. And the long-overdue random map generator works very well, ensuring an endless supply of decent maps from now until death. That's all I ask for. —Jeff Green

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: 3DO • Developer: New World Computing
\$30 • www.3do.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



★★★★★

SID MEIER'S ALIEN CROSSFIRE

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Electronic Arts
• Developer: Firaxis • \$35 • www.firaxis.com
• ESRB Rating: Everyone



How do you construct an add-on pack for a game that doesn't have any scenarios? The folks at Firaxis answer the question with ALIEN CROSSFIRE, an add-on to the ALPHA

★★★★★

GENTAURO game system. ALIEN CROSSFIRE contains an amazing amount of depth and nuance — its additional factions, alien races, and other tweaks add considerably more to the game.

This expansion doesn't substantially alter the game's mechanics, but you can choose from new human factions when settling the planet, or load one of two new alien factions whose motivation is the search for lost tech-

nology. CROSSFIRE also introduces new technologies, new unit attributes, and new indigenous life forms.

The alien races have substantially different victory conditions: They win by building the capacity to communicate with their homeworld. CROSSFIRE breathes new life into a spectacular game. —Tim Carter

AMA SUPERBIKE

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Motormans • Developer: Motormans • \$45
www.motormans.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

AMA SUPERBIKE is nothing if not poorly timed. Arriving just a half year after EA's superlative SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP, AMA is in a race only perfection could win. Yet it was released in such a curious state of incompleteness that this otherwise promising affair doesn't have the opportunity to compete.

How does a 60-plus MB patch grab you? How about possible system lockups and program crashes, graphics and AI glitches, unrecognized podiums and perplexing menus? Compounding matters, AMA's big incentive — a multiplayer website with

★★★★★



THIEF GOLD

Genre: Action • Publisher: Eidos • \$39 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Mature

THIEF GOLD holds true to its name.

It really is a gold-plated version of the original. In addition to some much-needed play balancing for the original game's 12 missions, you get three superb new missions that are mixed into the original story, fleshing it out a bit.

Whether I was relieving former colleagues of excess wealth they had lying around or helping a few nages with their schemes,

★★★★★

I had a blast stepping back into Gamic's boots. You may encounter a few annoying hardware compatibility problems, but nothing insurmountable. And, at \$29.95 (\$19.95 for current THIEF owners and another \$10 off of THIEF 2), it's a steal. Same action, better play, and more missions make this a deal for players and non-players of the original game. —Lance Larke



scheduled events and prizes — was still stuck at the starting line at press time.

That said, when it's repaired, AMA can please the sim enthusiast. In it you'll find authentic physics, an intricate garage, and astoundingly accurate scenery across each of its nine U.S. circuits. A bobbing first-person perspective helmet-cam, nice animated details, and an unprecedented level of bike and rider control only add to the possibilities. It won't sport the perks and raw excitement of EA's SUPERBIKE, but virtual riders with multiplayer desires may want to jump in...once Motormans works out the kinks. —Gordon Goble

FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2

Running a NFL franchise is a bear: Do you give in to your veteran quarterback's outrageous salary demands, or give that hot rookie the starting job? If the city doesn't give you a new stadium, do you move the Packers to Peoria? Do you use your draft pick to grab that Heisman trophy winning running back, or trade it for a replacement for your aging middle linebacker?

FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2 is a text-based sports management simulation that offers you all of these choices and much more. You'll find numerous improvements in FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2 over last year's version, including the ability to call your own plays, an in-depth, twenty-stage, free agency bidding module, improved interface; and much more. If sitting in the General Manager's box seat sounds like fun (and it will), you'll find this simulation to be as addictive as a bowl of honey-roasted cashews.

(Note: FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2 is only available directly from www.espsports.com and requires downloading of a license for installation.) —Jeff Leckey

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Selectronic Software
\$20 • www.espsports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



★★★★★

PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Sierra Sports • \$20 • www.sierra.com/sierraspports • ESRB Rating: Everyone



More like Professional Bullshitter than anything else, Sierra's PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER does something amazing for the dreaded "bubba" genre: it makes all the other games look good. PBR is an attempt to make a computer game out of a niche sport that puts a mammoth horned beast in a little pen with a rope tied tightly around his package, then finds someone who's willing to get on the beast and ride him until he falls off and gets kicked in the head.

It's all quite simple, but this game can't even get that right. Where are the rodeo clowns? And who the heck are Ty Murray

and Tuff Hedeman? (They're famous bull riders.) And although you get to play as both the rider and the bull — contain your enthusiasm — the miserable gameplay consists only of leaning from side to side via your keyboard. Now that's fun!

The goal of bull riding is to stay on for eight seconds. That's eight seconds longer than you'll play this game. —Tom Price

EMAIL X-COM

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Resre Interactive • Developer: Microgruse
\$30 • www.resreinteractive.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



Email X-COM is a turn-based, multiplayer-only game that pits one player as the aliens against another as the X-COM squad.

There's no campaign — each game takes place on one of the fifty included maps and is completely self-contained.

★★★★★

Gameplay couldn't be simpler. You start with three to six soldiers or aliens (The usual X-COM alien species are here: Mutons, Sectoids, etc.) and move them around on a one-screen map. Plot your moves, click End Turn, and then watch your turn unfold as it is sent via email to your opponent.

When you receive a turn, open it and Email X-COM starts right up. Fast, simple, and fun.

The only drawback is that if the Haabro servers aren't running rapidly, the back-



LEGACY OF KAIN 2: SOUL REAVER

Genre: Action/Adventure • Publisher: Eidos • Developer: Crystal Dynamics • \$30 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence, simulated blood and gore.

LEGACY OF KAIN 2: SOUL REAVER could have been a sublime

action-adventure game. Instead, it will have to settle for being merely good. Holding back this PlayStation-to-PC port abbreviated gameplay and repetitive scenery, which are a result of the limitations of the Sony PlayStation

★★★★★

more than anything else.

You play as Raziel, a vampire cast into the Lake of Fire by his evil god, Kain. The story, which borrows liberally from the Lucifer myth, is one of the most well-developed elements of the game, and it keeps the plot on a steady course until the very end, when it peters out in an unsatisfying climax. The gameplay is very good for a third-person game, with minimal camera problems and a good amount of varied forms of combat. Devouring souls, Raziel's method of powering up, rarely gets old.

What does get old, however, is looking at SOUL REAVER's visuals, which are mind-numbingly boring. It's too bad Eidos couldn't put some effort into sprucing up the game's graphics when they ported the game to the PC. As a result, what was a very good game for the PlayStation will probably fail to satisfy PC gamers.

—Tom Price

and-forth process could take a while, and you may even have to replay some turns. Hot seat play is also supported.

While the game is quite entertaining, it does have some shortcomings.

There's no running total of your wins and losses. And a mini-campaign consisting of a few maps strung together would have been welcome.

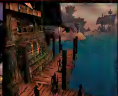
Graphically, it's behind the times — heck, it runs on a 486-66. But still, it can't be beat for quick, leisurely fun against far-away friends. —Mark Asher



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- ◆ 5 tutorial games guarantee a quick and easy entry into gameplay
- ◆ Real time land and sea battles
- ◆ Lavish 3D animation replace functions filled by statistics in other games
- ◆ Dynamic artificial intelligence automatically adjusts to player's skill level
- ◆ Cinematic transitions between scenarios
- ◆ Multiplayer mode for up to 4 people per network or 2 players via modem and includes over 30 unique multiplayer scenarios
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PC CD-ROM

In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine (part two)

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

**THE DO-IT-YOURSELFER'S
GUIDE TO BUILDING THE
ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE**

Usually, writing this story is pretty straightforward. Every year at this time, we find the fastest processor on Intel's product list, pop it into a system with a fast graphics card, and, voila, the ultimate do-it-yourself game machine.

But this year, it was a lot tougher, for several reasons. First, Intel now has serious competition in the processor game. AMD's Athlon has given Intel heartburn, and for good reason. Clock for clock, Athlon is faster than the Pentium III. To rub things in a bit, the Athlon has been available at clock rates up to 100MHz faster than the fastest Pentium III. So it looked like this year's Power Rig would have a fast Athlon CPU.

But Intel is nothing if not tenacious. They've come out swinging with a new line of CPUs called Coppermine that use 0.18 micron process technology—which means they run fast and cool. We managed to score up a 733MHz Coppermine, and an associated 820 motherboard. At the same time, ASUS sent their new Slot A motherboard for Athlon CPUs, and we scored a 700MHz Athlon CPU. So we had a real race this year—more work, but it was a lot more interesting than just slapping in a bunch of components.

The other problem was graphics. We had been hoping for a shootout between nVidia's new GeForce 256 and 3D's Savage 2000, but alas, it was not to be. 3D didn't quite make their schedule. However, the GeForce is a strong graphics chip, so we felt no shame in using it.

Decisions, Decisions...

As you pore over the product list, bear in mind that these are not hard and fast lists. You can mix and match components from all three machines we've assembled here, and still come up with a very solid box. In addition, you don't necessarily have to build the whole rig at once. If you're looking to upgrade components in your current system, the items here also make for great upgrade options. There are some points to consider when considering your next CPU/motherboard move, since you have to make a choice between AMD and Intel and their associated motherboards.

Hardware photographed by
Hayden Houser

Your budget may fall somewhere between the systems assembled here. What if you have \$3,500 to spend? For \$3,500, you could probably put together a 733MHz system with incredible performance. Just add a smaller, EIDE hard drive (the \$20 chipset does directly support ATA/66, after all) and a good 15" monitor. Presto, you've just knocked about a thousand bucks off the price of the Power Rig. Like the Lean Machine, but want more horsepower? Drop in a 600MHz CPU instead of a 500MHz processor for that added bit of CPU oomph. This is your ultimate engine of entertainment, so build the box that makes sense for you and then tell us all about it at cjw_hardware@aol.com.

The Power Rig: Caching In



Despite a really close race, this year's Power Rig is still Intel-based. The Athlon 760 couldn't quite keep up with the 733MHz Coppermine. The higher clock rate of the Intel CPU—coupled with 256KB of full speed, highly optimized Level 2 (L2) cache—edged aside the Athlon. It's possible that the Athlon may have run a bit faster in a true AGP 4X environment, but the AGP 4X boards for AMD's new brandchild weren't available as we tested. The edge also had to go to Intel on the stability front. While both systems performed well, the Athlon suffered a few more annoying lockups than Intel. Note that we were pushing both systems very hard, so it's no surprise we ran into a few problems; the \$20 motherboard seemed to shake off most of them.

Intel Replumbs the PC

In real estate, it's all about location, location, location. In modern 3D games, the mantra becomes bandwidth, bandwidth, bandwidth. On the CPU side, we now see processors running in excess of 700MHz, with 1 Gigahertz not far off. On the graphics side, we have highly capable graphics chips, like NVIDIA's GeForce 256 and 33's spiffy new Savage 200.

The problem lies in the data pipes connecting graphics to the CPU. AGP 2X maxes out at 512MB per second—abysmally slow for modern 3D games. Also, PC100 SDRAM—and even PC133 SDRAM—have bandwidth limitations.

Intel's solutions are AGP 4X and Direct RDRAM. AGP 4X is pretty simple; it basically doubles the throughput of AGP. RDRAM is a different beast altogether: It's a serial memory bus interface, capable of moving data at up to 1.6GB/sec peak. More importantly, the sustained memory bandwidth is only a little lower, whereas SDRAM's sustained memory throughput drops substantially. This comes at the expense of some memory latency; in other words, getting the memory transfer started takes a little longer. However, since game data consists of large sets of data, the latency issue isn't a big deal.

Overall, AGP 4X and RDRAM are steps along the way to a more balanced system. All the CPU and graphics horsepower in the world is pretty useless if the data can't move between them in a timely manner.

GADGETS FOR GAMERS

Take timepiece oneupmanship to a whole new level—that is, 23,000 miles into space.

That's where the Casio Pathfinder will be checking to determine your location on the planet. After triangulating from

Where Are You, Dick Tracy?

as few as three satellites (or as many as eight), this little Buck Rogers bauble gives you your current latitude and longitude in as quickly as four seconds. A map plot feature

lets you scale the screen to match a map grid, so you'll know exactly where you are. Just remember to look up before you drive into a building.

Even better, if you specify the latitude and longitude of your destination, the damn thing will tell you the direction and distance to get there. It may not exactly get you the babes, but you'll never again have to capitulate to your spouse about pulling over to ask directions.



Casio Pathfinder GPS Watch, \$600, www.casio.com

INSIDE HARDWARE

Lloyd Case	150
Tech Medics	167
Reviews	172

In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

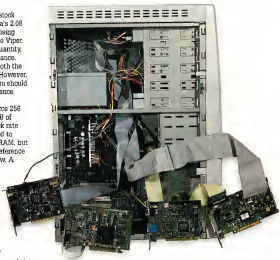
We did our pure CPU testing with a stock Viper 770 (TNT2 Ultra) card with nVidia's 2.08 reference drivers. While we ended up using Guillemot's new GeForce 256 board, the Viper with 2.08 drivers were a well known quantity, which made it easier to gauge performance. Intel's new baby outscored Athlon in both the new CPU tests and all the game tests. However, if you decide to go the Athlon route, you should still be quite pleased with the performance.

The graphics card we chose was the Guillemot Prophet. Based on the GeForce 256 chip from nVidia, the Prophet has 32MB of 1630MHz SDRAM, and ships with a clock rate utility (use with care). We really wanted to score a board using the faster DDR SDRAM, but all we had at the time was an nVidia reference board, so we decided to hold off for now. A DDR-equipped Prophet should run faster at higher resolutions. The monitor is Mitsubishi's elegant Diamond Pro 2020u.

We'd been using sound cards based on Aureal's Vortex 2 chipset, but we couldn't resist the pull of Creative's new Sound Blaster Live Platinum sound card. In particular, we liked the cool new front panel controls, which mount into a free 5.25" drive bay. ROGUE SPEAR, for example, sounds terrific through a four-speaker setup using Creative's EAX 2.0 audio API.

We hadn't anticipated changing speakers this year, but Klipsch surprised us (and a lot of others, apparently) with the new ProMedia four-speaker package. Sporting a 400-watt RMS amplifier, these speakers made us feel like the guy in the Maxwell ad.

The motherboard is Intel's new VC820 board. Unlike Intel's past efforts, the VC820 actually has five PCI slots, plus the AGP slot for graphics. It does have a dodgy AC '97 audio CODEC, but that's easily disabled. There's just enough room for all the expansion boards, including the Adaptec 2940U2W Ultra2 SCSI host adapter, 3Com Ethernet card, Sound Blaster Live, and Creative Labs DXR3 DVD decoder. Missing in action for the first time is a Voodoo2 card. As we look at our game collection, we realize that we have no games that are Gbde-only anymore. Mass storage is handled by a Quantum Atlas 10K and a Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD drive. Backup is handled by a



Creative Labs DVD-RAM drive. Wrapped around all this technological wizardry is a stock InWin 0600 full tower with a PC Power & Cooling Silencer 275 power supply.

There's a whole slew of game controllers we've tossed into the mix. Most notable is the CDS 4000 Pocono racing wheel. It's expensive, but has a fluid-damped wheel and pressure-modulated brake pedal. For flight controls, there's the CH F16 Combatstick USB, mated to the CH USB Pro Pedals. The CH USB Pro Throttle isn't out as we write this, but you can be sure it will be added in when it ships. Finally, for gamepad use, we kind of like the Interact HammerheadFX, a near-close of the Sony PlayStation's Dual Shock controller. Finally, I'm now using the Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro, with a Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer attached to one of the two USB ports on the keyboard.

The Internet link is handled by a 3Com SDSL modem, along with a real gamer's luxury: 12 dedicated IP addresses.

ULTIMATE GAME MACHINE BENCHMARK TEST SCORES

3D Card Core/Mem Clock	CPUMark99	FPUMark 99	Business Disk WinMark	CD-ROM WinMark 99	WinBench 99 Business Graphics WinMark (1024x768x32)		3D GameGauge	Q3Test 1.08 512x384K1E (CPU test)	Q3Test 1.08 1024x1536x32 (3D card test)
					3D WinBench	3D WinBench			
Pelican 512/166	182/290	59.4	3580	6219	892	265	1190	65.52	111.10
Power Pkg 128/186	130/186	58.0	3990	5920	1260	307	1490	69.76	111.10
Lead Machine 175/162	175/162	38.4	3500	4440	1500	192	1910	51.45	72.60
Hypercube Server Sublet SE	115/186	43.3	3080	6130	1960	220	1070	55.00	did not run

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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

POWER RIG COMPONENTS

	Manufacturer	Price
Motherboard	Intel VCE80	\$125
CPU	Intel Celerone 330	\$70
Memory	256MB PC133 certified SDRAM	\$60
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2040/06	\$20
Primary Graphics	Dallmeid Phogat	\$20
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	\$21
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	\$60
Backup	Creative DVD RAM drive	\$66
Hard Drive Copley	PC Power and Cooling Bay Cool	\$40
CD-R/DW	Power to 80x DVD	\$140
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020c	\$1,250
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	\$175
Speakers	Klipsch Phantom	\$250
Modem	3Com 56K modem	\$40
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	\$60
Networking Hub	Netgear DS100	\$170
Case	In-Win Q600 full tower ATX	\$185
Power Supply	Silverstone 275	\$35
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$30
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	\$65
Action Game Controller	Intex HomeFront FX	\$40
Fight Joystick	OH Pro CombatStick USB	\$65
Thriller	OH Pro Thriller	\$115
Rudder Pedals	OH Pro Pedals USB	\$100
Driving Controls	EOC CDR 4000	\$1,500

LEAN MACHINE COMPONENTS

	Manufacturer	Price
Motherboard	Asus P8B-P	\$125
CPU	Pentium E5500	\$50
Memory	1GB PC100 SDRAM	\$20
Disk Controller	BioStar LOMA/35	\$20
Primary Graphics	Gallinot Xentor 32	\$120
Floppy Drive	Teac	\$20
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 220GP 8.1GB	\$135
CD-R/DW/DVD	Power DVD-814	\$125
Monitor	Digipost V96	\$200
Primary Audio	Kanool Vertex2 Superquad	\$50
Secondary Audio	N/A	
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA 035	\$10
Modem	Ascom PCI Call-Waiting Modem	\$01
Case	Kentec Gemstone Case	\$60
Power Supply	Bulfin, 295W	
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$30
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse	\$20
Joystick	OH Diamond 3D	\$42

BUDGET RIG COMPONENTS

	Manufacturer	Price
Motherboard	Abit BM8	\$120
CPU	Intel Celeron 500	\$10
Memory	64MB SDRAM	\$10
Disk Controller	Bull in UDMA/33	
Primary Graphics	Sils Velocity3000 AGP	\$120
Secondary Graphics	N/A	
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	\$20
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 220GP 8.1GB	\$135
CD-R/DW/DVD	Toshiba 4x CD drive	\$52
Monitor	Optquest Q79	\$220
Primary Audio	Gallinot Fortstone	\$45
Secondary Audio	N/A	
Speakers	Labtec LCS 2414	\$20
Modem	Diamond SuperExpress internal	\$60
Networking	N/A	
Case	Euro-Vel Y8401	\$67
Power Supply	Bull in 205W	
Keyboard	Logitech Gemini	\$20
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech ProMouse Plus	\$18
Game Controller	OH GameStick 3D	\$42

Total \$7,687

The Skinny	URL
ACP 4 RAMBUS	www.intel.com
It's the top of the heap, for now	www.intel.com
Just think, a quarter gigabyte	www.consumer.com
80 megabytes per second	www.adapter.com
Ready for DirectX 7?	www.galileo.com
You still have to leave one	www.kmc.com
Runs warm, but very speedy	www.garmin.com
2 gigs of backup	www.comshare.com
Keep that Atlas 15K cool	www.gigawattcooling.com
New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD	www.third.com/highend/dvd.html
Perfectly flat, good USB support	www.mitsubishi.com
For a power Deadload, A3D and EAX	www.comshare.com
Fit with imaging, clean coated	www.spsch.com
OSL, at last!	www.3com.com
For fixing our buddies	www.3com.com
Multitask & DSL, modern support	www.edge.umc.com
New improved mode!	www.gigawatt.com
More power, Scooby!	www.gigawattcooling.com
It's with NetVista, out with NetVista	www.microsoft.com/hardware
No ball!	www.microsoft.com/hardware
Dual Shock close	www.mitsubishi.com
It just feels right	www.chronosoft.com
More control than anyone needs	www.thirdsource.com
Nearly perfect foot placement	www.thirdsource.com
For the serious sim driver	microsoft.com/competitive/games/online/advant

Total \$1,934

The Skinny	URL
8 PCI slots, Submenu, 4400X	www.abt.com.tw
Half a gigabyte and 33C	www.ants.com
120MB at last	N/A
Want for 33 bits	www.falouts.com
Still gets here it	www.finc.com
ISBAs low cost, fast drive	www.westbridge.com
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Solid 19" monitor at a budget price	www.optique.com
A3D and clean audio for under a C-note	www.diamond.com
Want back to our favorites	www.bostandirect.com
Solid performance, good price	www.gigawatt.com
The color! The color!	www.galileo.com
The old layout, plus two USB ports	www.microsoft.com/hardware
Better than the "gaming" mouse	www.logitech.com
Very nice little optical disk	www.chronosoft.com

Total \$1,247

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130 would be better...	www.ants.com
Best budget board	www.3com.com
Tax	www.3com.com
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42 cheap	www.falouts.com
17" low cost tube	www.optique.com
A3D and a low price	www.galileo.com
Unbeatable bargain	N/A
Not a "holmodrum"	www.falouts.com
Best speaker's case	www.diamond.com
Ergonomic and low cost	N/A
Great mouse and cheap	www.logitech.com
Good all around controller	www.clyp.products.com

area 51

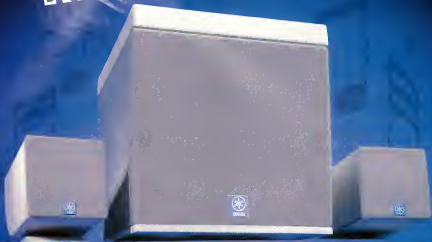


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Lean And Mean

This year's lean machine has hit 500MHz. You can find some off-the-shelf systems that either cost less or have a slightly faster CPU, but our low-end rig represents a fully balanced system. You can either lower the cost or up the performance by changing out a few components. It's also designed with stability and future growth in mind. The motherboard is the ASUS P3B-E, which uses the very sound Intel 440BX chipset. Toss in a 500MHz Intel Pentium III, 128MB of PC100 SDRAM, and a Guillemot Xentor 32 graphics card, and you have the core of a very solid system. Since Intel is shipping Coppersmine CPUs with a 100MHz frontside bus, you can add one of those instead—up to 700MHz, with a BIOS update.

Mass storage chores are handled by IBM's 9.1GB Deskstar 220XP. This is a slightly older drive that's cheap and fast. A new Pioneer 10x DVD-ROM drive rounds out the storage arena. The display is still the Optique95 V95 19" monitor. Every time we think about replacing it, the price drops.

Now for the important stuff: the chassis. It's teal! Okay, it's sapphire (according to the maker, anyway). It's an Antec Gemstone series Sapphire, complete with a 250-watt power supply and ducted CPU fan. It's not quite as slick internally as the Elan Vital T10, but let's get our priorities straight: It's not beige! Antec makes sturdy PC cases with rolled metal edges and removable drive bays, so this is a practical case—if a little on the bright side.

No gamer's system would be complete without sound. To keep the pace down but the sound quality high, we went hunting on the Internet, and found an Aureal Superquad sound card. It has a Vortex2 chip on it and a digital-optical output port, as well as the usual analog ins and outs (this card is also sold under the Xeel and 10Mega brands). The speakers are the

still-strong Boston Acoustics BA-635E—some of our favorites. However, if you're craving a low-cost, four-speaker rig, look no further than the Atec Lansing ACS-64s, though we still like the sound of the BA-635E better.

The only game controller is the CH GameStick 3D, which is a decent, versatile, 3D joystick. The connection to the Internet is via an ActionTec PCI Call Waiting modem, one of the few PCI modems to actually have an onboard controller chip.

The bottom line is that this Lean Machine is poised to grow with your gaming needs. It's balanced, easily upgradeable, and should perform well for most games over the next year or so.

HOW WE TESTED

We used quite a few of the Ziff-Davis benchmark tests to put both the Athlon 700 and Coppersmine 733 CPUs through it.

They included WinBench 99 version 1.1, including CPUMark99 and FPU WinMark testing, plus the usual graphics and disk testing. We ran 3D WinBench 99, version 1.2, at a slew of resolutions and color depths, and also ran the processor tests built into 3D WinBench. We then used 3D GameGame 2.0 for baseline game testing. Next, we used a subset of games to determine 32-bit and very high-resolution performance, stressing the 3D card, system chipset, and system memory. Finally, we ran QUAKE 3 (Test v1.03) to round out the mix of game tests.

The systems all had Windows 98SE and DirectX 7.0 installed, plus all the games, benchmarks, and latest driver sets.

Finally, a transform and lighting test was run on the GeForce-equipped systems using the Dagoth Moor Zoological Gardens demo. Note that this is a special, high-polygon-count demo created for nVidia using the Experience game engine. It is not a game itself, however, so results may not reflect actual game performance for high-poly-count games.

HYPERSONIC PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS

Defining THE GAMING PC



Optional Config: (Up to 50% off)
Rear Panel I/O (Other Accessories) (Warranty)

SONIC STANDARD S2599


- 733MHz Intel Coppersmine Processor
- 733MHz Coppersmine Cooling System
- 620 Intel Chipset, AGP 4X Ultra ATA/66
- 256MB High Performance DRAM
- ESB IBM Deskstar 7200rpm Ultra66 HD
- 32MB GeForce 3D Prophet GeForce 256 DDR
- Interworks 3D Optimization System
- Interworks Dual Video Cooling Architecture
- Pioneer 5th Generation 10x/40x DVD-RDM
- Creative Labs Soundblaster Live! X Gamer
- Cambridge Soundworks FPS 2000 Digital with Subwoofer and Remote Volume Control
- 100MB Imstage Zip Internal w/ Cartridge
- 300M/USB Scepter 56k Fax/Data Modem
- Logitech MouseMan Wheel 4 Button USB
- Logitech Enhanced Keyboard w/ Palm Rest
- Microsoft SideWinder Precision Pro USB
- L44MB Floppy Drive
- HyperSonic PC HX45 ATX Tower Case
- Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition
- HyperSonic PC System Recovery CD
- HyperSonic PC One Year Full Warranty
- HyperSonic PC Three Year Toll Free Support

SONIC BOOM S3599

- 733MHz Intel Coppersmine Processor
- 733MHz Coppersmine Cooling System
- 620 Intel Chipset, AGP 4X Ultra ATA/66
- 256MB High Performance DRAM
- 273GB IBM Deskstar 7200rpm Ultra66 HD
- 32MB GeForce 3D Prophet GeForce 256 DDR
- 34MB Dual 30fx Voodoo2 1000 S/U (Slick)
- Interworks 3D Optimization System
- Interworks Dual Video Cooling Architecture
- Pioneer 5th Generation 10x/40x DVD-RDM
- RealMagic Hollywood Plus Hardware DVD
- Creative Labs Soundblaster Live! X Gamer
- Cambridge Soundworks DTS2500 Digital with Subwoofer and Remote Volume Control
- CD-R/Writer Plus 5100 18x/4xRW/32xR
- 300M/USB Scepter 56k Fax/Data Modem
- Logitech MouseMan Wheel 4 Button USB
- Logitech Enhanced Keyboard w/ Palm Rest
- Logitech Wingman Force USB
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In Search of The Ultimate Gaming Machine

Don't Have Two Grand? Not To Worry...

Two grand is a large chunk of change for most of us, including yours truly. So if you want a solid gaming rig, but don't want to spend a ton of money, consider some alternatives.

You'll have to give up a little performance — but surprisingly little. First up on the fast-but-cheap menu is Intel's Celeron CPU. A 500MHz Celeron can be had for well under \$200. Add a good Socket 370 motherboard and 64MB of SDRAM, and we're up to about \$500. Now let's add graphics, in the form of a 3dfx Voodoo3/3000. It's a speedy, 16MB 3D accelerator that can be found for \$130 or less. By the same token, 17-inch monitors have gotten startlingly cheap. You can go really cheap, such as an Optquest Q71 for \$220, or splurge for better visual quality in the new Sony HMD-A200 flat display, at \$375. It's more expensive, but does come with the luxury of a four-port USB hub built into the base. Next up is audio. The Guillemot Maxigamer Fortissimo sports a Yamaha audio chip and Sensaura 3D sound; all that for \$45.

It takes some hunting, but you'll then have very good positional audio. Another \$40 (or less) buys you a Labtec LCS-2414 3-piece speaker system. For a game controller, let's add the CH GameStick 3D for \$42 — it's a rugged, 3D joystick that will outlast most cheaper controllers. Budget another \$40 for keyboard and mouse, and you're in business.

An Internet connection is a necessity these days, so add the Diamond SupraExpress for \$69. You also need a chassis for all this, so check out the YY-6401 case for \$87. All this comes in at around \$1,250 with very few compromises. You can probably do even better with some careful shopping. Now, what was your excuse again?

The Athlon Alternative

If shelling out the big bucks for an Intel system sticks in your craw, chew on this: The 700MHz Athlon CPU we tested was no slouch in performance, and finishing second to a CPU running 33MHz faster is nothing to be ashamed of. That 128KB of Level 1 (L1) cache and the high clock speed definitely have pizzazz.



There are a couple of concerns about AMD-based systems, though, which should shape your thinking as you buy components.

The first is power. The Athlon is still made using a 0.25micron manufacturing process. That means that a 650 or 700MHz CPU will run hot, and it will draw a lot of power. AMD has a recommended list of cases and power supplies — definitely heed their advice (www1.amd.com/athlon/config), and don't be afraid to add some extra cooling.

The other problem is the motherboard issue. There are only a handful of Athlon motherboards shipping, and they all have teething problems. We couldn't find one with VIA's new AGP 4X chipset, though that may be out as you read this. The motherboard that worked best, and seemed most stable, was the ASUS K7M. However, be sure you get the 1.03 version of the board, which seems to have a more stable set of power regulators than earlier versions.

If you stick with AMD's recommendations, you'll find that an Athlon system is a speedy alternative to the Intel spread. Although the GeForce 256 isn't listed as we write this, it seems to run just fine in an Athlon system. Alternatively, you might wait several months and pick up an Athlon when AMD moves to a 0.18 micron process; the CPU should then run cooler and faster, and draw less power.

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Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE



Can Windows 2000 Deliver for Gamers?

Early Version of Microsoft OS Both Tantalizing and Frustrating

On my bookshelf is a copy of **Windows NT 4.0 Workstation**. It's been sitting there, gathering dust, for nigh on two years now. I installed it once, played with it a bit, then bashed it from my hard drive. It wouldn't run many games, and all my standard apps run under Windows 98 just fine. Later service releases added support for DirectX, but hardware DirectX drivers were hard to come by.

When I heard that Windows 2000 (or NT5, as it was once called) would have full hardware support for DirectX, my mouth began to water. Increased stability, a full 32-bit operating system, multi-processor support... ah, the imagination runs wild (and don't tell me about Linux—I want to run all the games, thank you).

When Windows 2000 beta 3 arrived, I wasted no time installing it on CGW's Power Rig. Installation from the bootable CD was pretty smooth. The only headache was configuring the network; Windows 2000 has more robust networking than Win98, but it's also a bit more complex. I wound up having to go on a driver safari for the RIVA TNT2 Ultra-based graphics card and the Monster Sound MX300, since Windows 2000 didn't recognize either of them. Installing the drivers was a lot like installing them in Windows 98.

One Small Step for Mouse-kind

Next, I explored Windows 2000 a while. One cool bit is that if you're in one of the control panels that access hardware—such as the multimedia control panel, or the display control panel—one click takes you to device manager. That's very handy for troubleshooting.

However, I was unhappy to discover that MSCONFIG32 wasn't present. Interestingly, MSINFO32 was there, but not MSCONFIG. However, there was another tool called Computer Management that looked intriguing.

Then I came across an item of instant appeal to action gamers everywhere. I launched the mouse control panel and discovered you could specify the mouse sample rate. A slow mouse sample rate can cause "jag lag" in a 3D shooter, as the mouse movement will trail the frame rate of a fast system. You either needed a USB mouse or a tool like ps2rate. Now, you can just set it in Windows.

That was certainly cool enough. Then came games. First

up was **QUAKE 3** (test v1.08). I can attest that id Software has done a superb job of creating a portable game. **QUAKE 3** booted up, ran fine, and soon I was connected to several servers on the net and getting myself thoroughly humiliated. So far, so good.

Next up was **HALF-LIFE**, which uses a heavily-modified version of the **QUAKE** engine, so it's the next step down the compatibility ladder. After installing and patching

Windows 2000 looks promising, but until we can get more robust drivers, it's still uncertain how many Windows 9x games will run on it.

HALF-LIFE, I was once again up and running without a hitch. Now I was really jazzed. But, as usual with technology, the pleasure goeth before the pain.

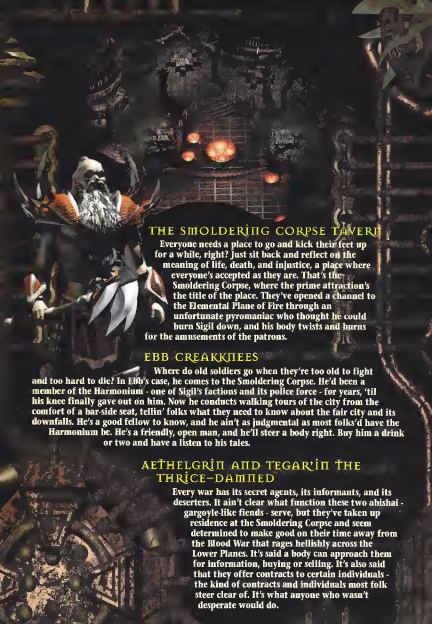
It Was All Going So Well...

Next, I installed several Direct3D titles, including **JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS**, **DUNGEON KEEPER 2**, and **DRAKAN**. All failed to run properly, either crashing or spontaneously quitting. Even **TIBERIAN SUN**, a straightforward 2D game, locked up with repeating audio. So audio was certainly part of the problem. But I also suspected that either the **TNT2** drivers or Windows 2000 didn't work well with Direct3D as of beta 3.

And therein lies the lesson: Drivers, not the operating system, still determine in large part what you can and cannot do.

Windows 2000 looks promising, but until we can get more robust drivers, it's still uncertain how many Windows 9x games will run on it. Meanwhile, Windows 9x isn't dead yet, Microsoft was originally going to do a consumer version of Windows 2000. Instead, we'll be getting an updated version of the Windows 9x kernel in an OS called Windows Millennium. This begs an interesting question: If there's Windows 2000, does that mean that Windows Millennium is 1000 years behind it? **CGW**





THE SMOLDERING CORPSE TAVERN

Everyone needs a place to go and kick their feet up for a while, right? Just sit back and reflect on the meaning of life, death, and injustice, a place where everyone's accepted as they are. That's the Smoldering Corpse, where the prime attraction's the title of the place. They've opened a channel to the Elemental Plane of Fire through an unfortunate pyromaniac who thought he could burn Sigil down, and his body twists and burns for the amusements of the patrons.

EBB CREAKKNEES

Where do old soldiers go when they're too old to fight and too hard to die? In Ebb's case, he comes to the Smoldering Corpse. He'd been a member of the Harmonium - one of Sigil's factions and its police force - for years, 'til his knee finally gave out on him. Now he conducts walking tours of the city from the comfort of a bar-side seat, tellin' folks what they need to know about the fair city and its downfalls. He's a good fellow to know, and he ain't as judgmental as most folks'd have the Harmonium be. He's a friendly, open man, and he'll steer a body right. Buy him a drink or two and have a listen to his tales.

AETHELGRIP AND TEGARIN THE THRICE-DAMPED

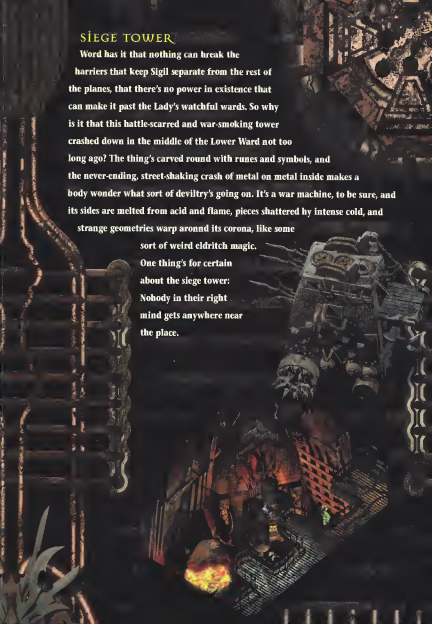
Every war has its secret agents, its informants, and its deserters. It ain't clear what function these two abishai - gargoyle-like fiends - serve, but they've taken up residence at the Smoldering Corpse and seem determined to make good on their time away from the Blood War that rages hellishly across the Lower Planes. It's said a body can approach them for information, buying or selling. It's also said that they offer contracts to certain individuals - the kind of contracts and individuals most folk steer clear of. It's what anyone who wasn't desperate would do.

SIEGE TOWER

Word has it that nothing can break the barriers that keep Sigil separate from the rest of the planes, that there's no power in existence that can make it past the Lady's watchful wards. So why is it that this hattle-scarred and war-smoking tower crashed down in the middle of the Lower Ward not too long ago? The thing's carved round with runes and symbols, and the never-ending, street-shaking crash of metal on metal inside makes a body wonder what sort of deviltry's going on. It's a war machine, to be sure, and its sides are melted from acid and flame, pieces shattered by intense cold, and strange geometries warp around its corona, like some

sort of weird eldritch magic.

One thing's for certain about the siege tower: Nobody in their right mind gets anywhere near the place.



THE WEEPING STONE CATACOMBS

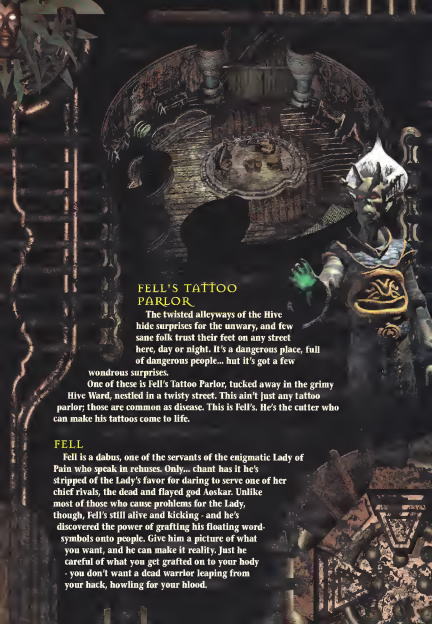
Where do the dead in Sigil go? There's got to be some hural ground that's safe from the prying hands of the Collectors and the death-greedy Dustmen, right? There is - or there was - and this is it. The Weeping Stone Catacombs, a lightless labyrinth of crypts and coffins, filled with the dead of Sigil's past. Rumor is that more than the dead lie down here - that there's something more. Ahyssal bats, undead... and cranium rats.

CRANIUM RATS

What's one rat? It's nothing. It's vermin, a piece of furry garbage to be kicked aside. Two, five, even ten of them: it don't make much of a difference. That is, it don't make a difference unless they've got glowing hralns exposed on their heads. That's a different story altogether. See, cranium rats get smarter the bigger their groups get. Two rats still ain't much of a challenge - hnt put ten to twenty of 'em together, and suddenly they've got hralns and magic. They waylay drunkards for their dinner, topple houses, and start raising the Nine Hells. That's only twenty of 'em.

There've been whispers that thousands of these filthy creatures live in the Weeping Stones.





FELL'S TATTOO PARLOR

The twisted alleyways of the Hive hide surprises for the unwary, and few sane folk trust their feet on any street here, day or night. It's a dangerous place, full of dangerous people... but it's got a few wondrous surprises.

One of these is Fell's Tattoo Parlor, tucked away in the grimy Hive Ward, nestled in a twisty street. This ain't just any tattoo parlor; those are common as disease. This is Fell's. He's the cutter who can make his tattoos come to life.

FELL

Fell is a dabus, one of the servants of the enigmatic Lady of Pain who speak in rehus. Only... chant has it he's stripped of the Lady's favor for daring to serve one of her chief rivals, the dead and flayed god Aoskar. Unlike most of those who cause problems for the Lady, though, Fell's still alive and kicking - and he's discovered the power of grafting his floating word-symbols onto people. Give him a picture of what you want, and he can make it reality. Just be careful of what you get grafted on to your body - you don't want a dead warrior leaping from your back, howling for your blood.



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GREETINGS, AND W

Don't look so surprised, sir prime: You're standing there with an addle-coved look on your face and your bone box wide open. You're practically crying 'bob me' to the peelers around here. Allow me to introduce myself: I'm Etain the Quick, professional tout: Best guide in the multiverse.

Formalities first. Just twelve silvers, berk, and we'll be off on a tour that'll make your guts crawl. What? You can't find your purse? Well, look at this, must have fallen into my own hand. I'll just help myself, and here's the rest of your jink back. Best to keep your hand on it from now on - you can't be too peery around here.

Try not to look up if you're feeling a bit queasy. It takes some time before

most Clueless get used to seeing the city curve away overhead. No doubt Sigil's different from any place you've ever been - it's like the city's wrapped inside the curve of a hollowed-out wagon wheel, if you get my meaning. Step lively now, 'cause we've got lots to see and I don't have all day.

This is Sigil, City of Doors, the Cage, crossroads of the multiverse. In the planes you'll spy things you'd never even begin to imagine. You'll see angelic devas drinking bub with toadlike slaadi. You'll see barmy wizards living in walking castles. You'll see an eternal Blood War between fiends bent on annihilation. And you'll see the powers themselves. All you have to do is walk through the right kind of portal, and



WELCOME to SIGIL!

you can go anywhere.

But don't worry about bumping into a power on the street here in the Cage - the Lady keeps them out of Sigil. That's the Lady of Pain: She runs Sigil, and keeps a serene and watchful gaze on things as a whole. She's the one who creates and removes the planar portals, among other things. All a body need remember is that she's not to be peeled - not to be crossed. The Lady keeps Sigil out of the politics and bloodshed that rage through the planes, and she does it with an active hand. Those who defy her rule end up alone in the Mazes - little prison demiplanes - with her compliments. Or else they're flayed alive, just by her gaze!

Watch your step - that street's closing in! Looks like the Lady's doing some rearranging. Think of it this way: Sigil's not some third-rate burg somewhere. It's alive. Sometimes at night, or when the smoke and drizzle ain't so bad, a cutter can almost feel the city breathing. It grows, it shrinks, whole streets disappear, and true Cagers don't skip a beat. Yes, it's alive... But that don't mean it's got a heart.

We've got lots to cover yet; dabus, factions, those pesky cranium rats... if you're a good Clueless I may even tell you a few darks - that's secrets to you. Where do I begin? Quick, hand me another bit of jink; it helps put my brain box to work...



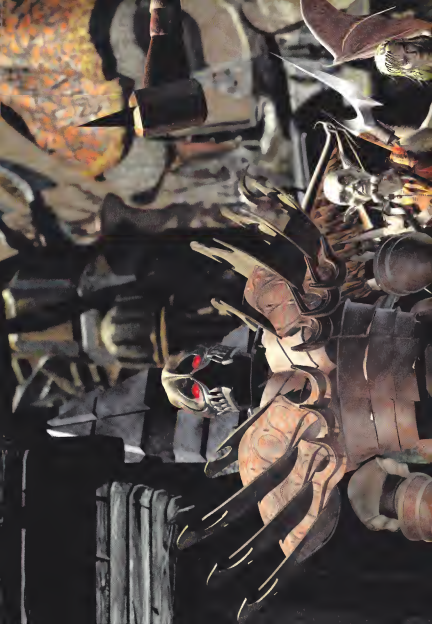
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Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers



by Loyd Case and Dave Salventer

PC on the TV

I'm building a second computer and plan on using our 32" Sony TV as the monitor, kind of like WebTV—only better. I have an older Viper 330 with a TV-out jack, but when I connect it to the TV input, the best resolution I get is 640x480 in 16-bit color. It doesn't look that bad but could be better.

Is this the best resolution I'm going to get with a standard TV, or is there a card out there designed specifically for an application such as this?

This is probably the best you can do, given the limitations of TV output on most graphics cards. Even with a better solution, such as a Matrox G400 dual-head, your TV will be limited to 800x600. Note that you can also get an external scan converter box, which will do a better job with TV display than the TV-out on the Viper 330.

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

On the Old Upgrade Question

I have a new Sony PCV-R522DS PC with 128 MB PC-100 memory, Woodoo3 3000, AGP, Celeron 466. My grandkids want faster and more powerful gaming capabilities for such games as ALIEN VS PREDATOR and future games. Is there anything I might add to this system, or custom settings I might use (over-clock?) to accomplish that goal?

With your current setup, you should be fine for the next 5-12 months. Your grandkids may have to run at a lower resolution for the most demanding titles, but frame rate shouldn't be much of a problem. Since you have a Woodoo3 card, you will want to run games using the Glide option—if the game supports it—for the best performance out of your accelerator.

Two PCs, One ADSL Line

My phone company is finally offering ADSL in my area. I am going to order it. The problem is, according to the phone company, that the modem can only be hooked into one computer. I have two PCs. Can I network my two systems to share the ADSL ser-

vice, or am I doomed to return to the days of sharing my rig with my wife?

Yes, you can do exactly that. Each system will need an Ethernet card, and you'll probably need a hub. A lot varies, depending on the type of DSL modem your phone company supplies you.

Some do require their own Ethernet card, and won't work with a hub. In that case, you'll need two Ethernet cards on the system with the DSL modem: one for the modem and one for the network. If that's the setup, you can skip the hub and just get a "direct connect" Ethernet cable, also known as a "crossover" cable. It's a special cable that will allow you to connect two systems with twisted-pair cables directly—no hub needed. However, if you can attach the DSL modem to a hub, that's the best of all worlds.

On the software end, you'll need either Windows 98SE—which has Internet-sharing software built-in—or a third party solution such as Sygate.

Either way, you can share the connection. This will allow you to share for browsing and email. If you want both systems to connect to the Internet simultaneously for gaming, you will need to contact your ISP for

a discrete IP address for each system. Otherwise, only one system at a time can connect to gaming servers for online gameplay.

The High Price of RAM

I just have one simple question. Why in the hell is memory so expensive now? Over the summer, I bought 128MB PC100 6ns SDRAM for my computer for \$89. Now that I am thinking of upgrading, this same RAM costs \$289, and that's actually considered a good bargain.

There are several things going on, all resulting in a synergistic increase in memory prices. First, a number of manufacturers are moving to higher density, 256-megabit SDRAM chips. While they make that transition, the supply of the older, 64-megabit chips has gotten tighter. Secondly, Intel is moving to a new memory type called RDRAM.

As memory makers ramp up for RDRAM production, their capacity to create SDRAM declines.

Finally, the earthquake in Taiwan has caused something of a panic. We anticipate that the prices will start coming back down soon, though how rapidly is hard to say. **CGW**

KANE IS DEAD

A NEW ENEMY



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Reviews

The Waiting Game

Guillemot's Next Generation Card Is Ready (and Waiting) for Next Generation Games

The next generation 3D accelerator card from Guillemot is perfectly named, for the Prophet is a herald of 3D-accelerated games to come. The card's new acceleration features will make tomorrow's game graphics fly; but today, with no games that actually support its advanced features, the only way to experience the card's promise is with a demo.

Although the 120MHz chip clock rate seems a mite low, performance is right up there with TNT2 Ultra cards running at much higher clock rates. Four pixel pipelines make up for the lack of raw speed. The real Achilles' heel of the Prophet is its 32MB of standard SDRAM. The



GF256 practically begs to be run at high resolutions in 32-bit color. But with a chip clock rate of 120MHz, the GF256's memory interface doesn't have sufficient bandwidth to feed this hungry monster, and sometimes the result is lower frame rates. Guillemot has announced a version of the Prophet using DDR (double data rate) SDRAM, which should be shipping by press time. It will be even more expensive, however.

And They're Off...

Having said all that, the Prophet is no performance slouch. It posted a very respectable 3D GameGauge score of 47.2 on our 500MHz Pentium III test-bed—slightly slower than a TNT2 Ultra running at 150MHz core/183MHz memory speed. I also took the card for a spin in a 650MHz Athlon system, and was rewarded with a 3D GameGauge score of 64.8—one of the best scores we've seen yet. However, the Prophet was only a little faster in QUAKE 3 (Test v1.08), mainly because there's just not enough tran-



GUILLEMOT PROPHET 3D ACCELERATOR

Requirements: AGP 2x slot, AGP 4x preferred Price: \$289 (after rebate) Manufacturer: Guillemot Contact: www.guillemot.com

gles in QUAKE 3 to make the GF256 even break a sweat.

During testing at 1600x1200, I discovered another wrinkle. The Prophet's T&L engine locks some memory down, even when there's no T&L acceleration being requested. The result was that 3D WinBench 99 couldn't run at 1600x1200, triple-buffered; neither could triple-buffered game titles. The Prophet also has TV-out, but it's pretty

Double Your Pleasure

Video loaned us a GF256 reference board equipped with DDR SDRAM, and this type of memory effectively doubles the memory bandwidth by reading both the leading edge and trailing edge of the clock signal, cramming twice the data into the signal. This ups the memory bandwidth available to the GF256 from 2.9GB per second to 5.8GB per second. The DDR version of the card still runs at 120MHz, and outpaced the TNT2 Ultra card in 3D GameGauge. But it really shone when running in 32-bit color mode. A Prophet with DDR memory may be just the thing for running games at higher resolutions with 32-bit color.

GRAPHICS CARDS

	WinBench 99 Business Graphics WinMark (DirectX/OpenGL)	3D WinBench 99 (OpenGL/OpenGL)	3D WinBench Large Texture Test	3D GameGauge	Q3Test 1.08 Demo1 (OpenGL/OpenGL)	Q3Test 1.08 Demo1 (DirectX/OpenGL)	Quake II Crusher (OpenGL/OpenGL)	DMZ2 Demo (OpenGL/OpenGL)
Guillemot Prophet / PIII 500	197	1280	174	49.22	34.09	240	55.30	33.30
Guillemot Prophet/Athlon 450	268	1382	228	64.76	34.70	860	92.50	33.50
GeForce 256 / DDR / PIII 500	201	1330	18.5	51.03	49.33	8.50	58.10	40.1
GeForce 256 / DDR / Athlon 450	276	1420	14.9	66.33	51.40	10.30	78.80	43.00
Viper 776 (OpenGL) / PIII500 (OpenGL)	200	1150	22.0	50.25	32.30	10.10	44.30	29.20

Notes: 3D WinBench run in double-buffered mode on GeForce boards. All testing done using version 3.48 drivers.

much limited to 640x480. The most interesting test was the Dagoth Moor Zoological Gardens demo, created by The Whole Experience, using its WXP3D game engine. The demo has over 80,000 polygons in some scenes, yet the Prophet was able to pump out 40-plus frames per second, whereas a TNT2 Ultra could barely muster 20.

You'll notice that the Prophet is often about on par with our TNT2 Ultra card used for baseline comparison. But look at the Quake II Crusher demo scores! Because of the higher triangle counts, and because the OpenGL-based Quake II engine gets T&L acceleration "for free," you can see the difference that offloading T&L can make to overall frame rate. So, again, the Prophet is very aptly named, and I'm hoping it really is the shape of things to come. But \$269 is a lot to spend for a 32MB card, even one that's this fast.—Lloyd Case

WINGMAN FORCE FEEDBACK MOUSE

Requirements: Windows 98, a free USB port. Price: \$30. Manufacturer: Logitech. Contact: www.logitech.com

Forceful Rodent

At first look, a force feedback mouse seems silly, but Logitech and Immersion have come up with an intriguing idea, albeit with limitations. The Wingman Force Feedback Mouse builds on Immersion's FeelIt technology by using the now-dated-but-wheeled-challenged Logitech 3 button mouse, and Logitech's Wingman software.

It installs like any USB device — first install the software, then plug it in. It can coexist with a PS/2 mouse, which is good if you want a standard mouse for some games. The mouse is attached to a sliding pad that's connected to the force feedback motor.

The Wingman is an absolute device, meaning that it moves in a fixed area defined by the pad area — there's no picking up the mouse.

The FeelIt desktop adds tactile feedback to the Windows desktop, through subtle bumps over menu entries, slight tugs when you stretch windows, and similar effects. It would be a boon to sight-impaired users. In games, the results are mixed. Force effects in GRUNTZ allowed me to easily find my little "guy" and other obstacles easily. But it was less compelling in a more traditional shooter-type game like HEAVY GEAR 2.

Only time — and software support — will tell if the force feedback mouse has a future. But it's an intriguing idea waiting to be fully explored. —Lloyd Case



★★★★

Klipsch Promedia V 2.400

Requirements: Sound card with four-speaker support. Price: \$250. Manufacturer: Klipsch. Contact: www.klipsch.com

Eviction Notice Guaranteed

When I popped in the DVD of *The Matrix* and cranked up the Klipsch Promedia speakers, I could feel the air coming out of the subwoofer. And it was three feet away. These suckers

★★★★★

pump out a lot of volume and some serious bass.

The Promedias are the first computer speakers that are THX-certified, meaning that they passed a rigorous set of tests developed by Lucasfilm for sound reproduction. To achieve this, Klipsch has built a 400-watt RMS amplifier into the Promedia's bass unit — none of this "peak music power" crap. What's even more astonishing is that they got THX certification with only a phantom center channel — there's no physical-center channel speaker.

Setting up the Promedias is about as easy as it gets with a four-speaker rig. Speaker wires are joined in pairs, so you need only string a single line to the first rear speaker, then split it to the second. The dual-output jacks are also attached to one cable. The controls on the right-front speaker are extremely simple: volume, surround, and bass. It would have been nice to be able to manually adjust surround modes, but based on listening tests, this is a minor quibble.

And they sound beautiful. There is a bit of a midrange boost on musical material, but it's not a serious flaw. On gameplay and DVD movie audio, these speakers are nothing short of awesome — a word I don't use lightly. Currently, you can only order these directly from Klipsch or Compaq, but they're well worth \$250. Get them now, thank us later. —Lloyd Case



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
EDITORS' CHOICE

GUILLEMOT FORTISSIMO SOUND CARD

Requirements: PCI 21 connector slot. Price: \$49. Manufacturer: Guillemot. Contact: www.guillemot.com

Fifty-Dollar Flyer

When I opened the box containing the Fortissimo, I had to look twice to make sure I hadn't missed anything.

There were the sound card, two CDs, a couple of thin documents — and that was all. There wasn't even a CD audio cable included.

The lack of a CD audio cable is a minor nuisance, but the card

retails for fifty bucks. Based on the YMP744 audio chip from Yamaha, and sporting 3D positional audio technology developed by UK-based Sennsaura, the Fortissimo offers superb value for the money. It also supports ASB 1.0 and EAX 1.0, making it a jack-of-all-trades for 3D game audio.

At this price, however, your corners do get cut. In addition to the lack of cables, the Fortissimo ships with a sparse software bundle: Acid DJ (for creating music mixes from digital WAV files), a MIDI playback and mixing utility from Yamaha, and a media playback tool

★★★★★



from Guillemot.

CPU usage was surprisingly good for such a low-cost card — under 5% for 16-stream 3D sound at 22KHz, 8-bit resolution. It jumped to 6.7% at 44.1KHz, 16-bit audio, but that's still a pretty reasonable number.

Game audio sounded great, and four-speaker sound coming out of HEAVY GEAR 2 was robust. However, there was some ambient hiss present with the rear's volume slider mixed out.

All in all, the Fortissimo is a good, no-frills card at a no-frills price.

It supports a wide array of 3D sound effects, and even has a digital optical output for mini-disc decks and similar devices. —Lloyd Case

Photos: Richard Flowers

LOGITECH WINGMAN GAMEPAD EXTREME

Requirements: 15MB hard drive space, 15-pin game port or USB port.
Price: \$49 Manufacturer: Logitech Contact: www.logitech.com

Totally Twisted

Just a couple of years back, motion-sensitive handheld controllers were in their infancy. Then, out of the blue, Microsoft unveiled its SideWinder Freestyle Pro, a hardwired and full-featured gamepad with a built-in motion detector. What a concept!

Microsoft's new baby was successful enough that the other peripheral giant, Logitech, has concocted a similar animal — the WingMan Gamepad Extreme. This gamepad features six action and one start button on the right; a macro button in the middle; an 8-way d-pad on the left; and two perfectly-placed index finger triggers underneath.

But after pressing the "Sensor" button, the unit becomes a completely different beast. By merely tilting or twisting the gamepad from side-to-side or forward-and-back, you can execute analog D-pad actions, while the D-pad becomes a viewing control. But sedly, the simple fact is that the on-screen responses to all that tilting just aren't up to par with that of its only competition, the Freestyle Pro. Essentially — and despite sensitivity adjustments in Logitech's game "Profler" — the visual responses to the WingMan Extreme's movements seem studded (as if jumping, albeit minimally) from level to level, without the subtle deviations of true analog movement.

But tilt aside, WingMan Extreme is a satisfactory, traditional pad. And, since its low price sits far below that of its Microsoft peer, you're practically getting all that motion sensitivity stuff for free. If you must live within a budget, can make do without a throttle wheel, and gravitate toward games where sensor-dictated movement doesn't have to be silky-smooth — this just may be the pad you're after. —Gard Goble



MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER PRO GAMEPAD

Requirements: Windows 98, free USB port
Price: \$45 Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.microsoft.com

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Microsoft's SideWinder gamepad has become one of the most widely used gamepads in the known universe, owing to its rugged reliability and nearly glitch-free performance.

That, and the fact that it's made by Microsoft, and shows up everywhere on store shelves, and is packaged with some computer systems. So what do you do for

an error? Make it better, of course.

Except that they didn't. Microsoft's new SideWinder Pro gamepad, despite the move to USB and some good configuration



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software, took SideWinder's so-so D-pad design and made it worse. Instead of the rigid D-pad, the new design opts for a mushy feel, with only four little tactile markups to tell your thumb where absolute up/down/left/right are. Because gamepads tend to be a personal decision, I had all the editors give the new controller a test-try. No one really liked the new design, though a couple said it was "okay."

We took the Pro for a spin through a variety of sports titles, including FIFA 99, NFL FEVER 2000, NBA INSIDE DRIVE, NEED FOR SPEED III, and NHL 2000. While the controller can fine with these titles, the D-pad design — in addition to its mushy feel — did little to alleviate "game-dew" (that aching you get in your left thumb and forearm after an hour or so of extended gameplay). Game controllers are a personal choice, so you may want to head down to your nearest Binary Barn (or whatever store you reg- ularly haunt) and try it out for yourself.

The controller works fine, and USB is a welcome addition, but given its \$45 price tag — and a D-pad that's not to our tastes — it's not the gamepad of choice. —Dave Salvatore

MONSOON MULTIMEDIA MH 500 SPEAKERS

Price: \$99 Manufacturer: Monsoon Contact: www.monsoonpc.com

Hybrid Sound

Flat-panel speakers can sound frighteningly good. But the price tag can be just as scary.

Fortunately, Monsoon, a player in the PC speaker market for the last year-and-a-half, has pushed down the price of flat-panel speakers while keeping quality high. With their MH500s, they've hit the \$100 mark. While the MH500s can't crank way loud, they still do well with both gaming audio and CD music.

The MH500s are a hybrid design, with each satellite having a 2.5" cone driver, as well as a planar-magnetic high-frequency transducer (the actual sound emitter in a flat-panel design). Total

★★★☆☆

wattage on these pups is 51 watts.

The result is happy ears. The MH500s develop good volume, with solid response across the frequencies. And, because flat-panel speakers tend to have tight stereo imaging, the MH500s do a good job with 3D audio. Connected to a Sound Blaster Live, the MH500s worked well during a lap through SYSTEM SHOCK 2. Music also sounded good, though the bass unit went into distortion when pushed too hard. The units have a volume control "puck" with a mute button, but no headphones jack.

For \$100, these are solid speakers. If you're a fan of flat-panel speakers, have a listen. But there are some very good cone-based speakers out there that deliver great tunes for less money. —Dave Salvatore

Feel Lucky, Punk?

Here is yet another attempt to build a better 3D-shooter controller. Despite having a high fat factor in its bundled target-shooting game, and beta mode for both HALF-LIFE and QUAKE II, ACT Labs' GS Game Gun probably won't give you the control you really need in 3D shooters. This light gun interacts with your monitor so that you can point it at a target on the screen, pull the trigger, and score a hit. The GS ships with Activision's TOP SHOT, a target-shooting simulator, and works very well. In fact, it spent so much time in the urban punny range, my arm got sore. The "bat sights"

ACT LABS' GS GAME GUN

Requirements: PC gamepad, Windows 95/98 Price: \$29 Manufacturer: ACT Labs Contact: www.actlabs.com

★★

on the GS do the job, once you calibrate the gun properly. However, the only upcoming title with GS Gun support at press time is SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.

My only real complaint (other than the goofy look and lack of support) is that button 2 is too high on the surface for me to reach easily. The unit ships with a pair of guns and a hand controller that substitutes for the mouse. The problem is that the hand controller doesn't give you enough movement control in a 3D shooter to really be effective. You can't use both guns if you use the hand controller, but most games don't support two guns anyway.

If you're hankering for a little quick-draw action, then check these puppies out. Otherwise, stick to the keyboard and mouse. —Lloyd Case

Saitek

Evolution of a species

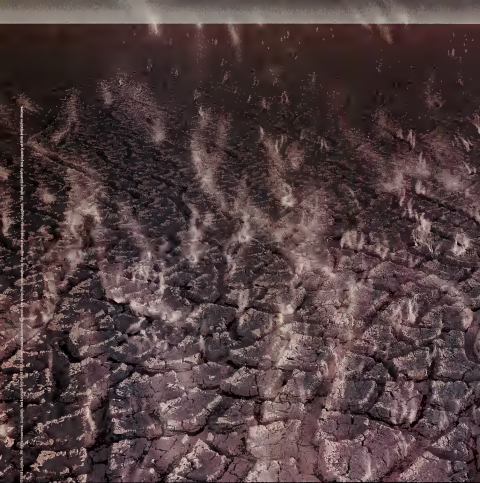
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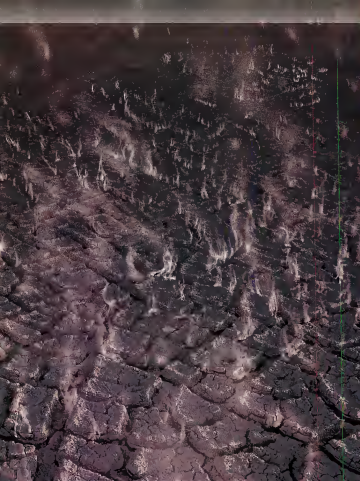
For over 20 years Saitek has led the world in manufacturing cutting-edge game products. Precision-engineered Saitek controllers feature state-of-the-art electronics and software, and are designed for maximum comfort in game play. Saitek controllers have been deemed simply the best by leading critics, and our awards prove it: CG Choice, PC Gamer Editor's Choice, Maximum PC Award, Gamers.com Top Pick, and CNET Gamecenter.com. Whether you fly, drive, run, punch, or rocket-jump, Saitek controllers give you the winning advantage.

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CONTROL			
John Clark Susan Holt	Operation: Majestic Gold		
MISSION ORDERS	Communication between the base and the outside world has been cut. Your first objective is to enter the main complex, and use explosive charges to destroy the core of the bomb manufacturing facility. None of Kulkov's men must be allowed to leave the base.		

Rogue Spear

PLAN THE MOST LETHAL OF MISSIONS WITH THIS HANDS-ON PRIMER

BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

"You win not by chance, but by preparation."
— Roger Maris

Planning the perfect mission is both the most rewarding and most difficult aspect of ROGUE SPEAR. One wrong decision, and your mission is FUBAR. Pay attention, and you'll be taking out tangles in no time.

Something Objective

Each mission offers a sequence of planning screens that allows you to plan every tactical phase of your operation. The Briefing and Intel screens provide you with an overview of the operation, and they are often the screens that gamers gloss over. One word: don't. Pay particular attention to the type of mission and its objectives. For example, in Operation: Temple Gate, you'll need to plant/detonate explosives in order to destroy the nuclear-bomb making facility, but you also have to make sure that no terrorist leaves—alive. Taking the time to understand your objectives will help you better ascertain which operatives, how many teams, and which weapons and equipment to choose.

Team Concept

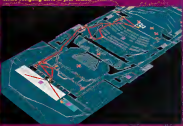
Roster selection is a crucial part of planning. In the Roster screen you'll find your operatives and their most

proficient skills. Choose operatives specialized for the job. If the mission calls for disarming/detonating bombs, or breaching numerous entry points, add a couple of demolition experts to your teams. If you need to plant hugs or download files, put in at least one electronics expert for

WEAPON ENVY Choosing the right weapons for the job will increase your chances of success. Use long-caliber rifles for outdoor reconnaissance (shown here), while sticking with submachine guns like the MP5 for close-quarters battles.



WHERE'S AN USHER WHEN YOU NEED ONE? *Heatmaps, Red speed, and Go codes provide team direction during the planning phase. Make sure you consult the map thoroughly before resupplying teams to your teams.*



better success. Refer back to the Briefing screen for help in choosing the right combination of operatives. When outfitting the individual teams, make sure you put in at least one operative with high leadership skills—good leaders include Bogart, Chavez, Lofquist, Noronha, Novikov, Price, and Walther. Use the Team Screen to arrange Red, Blue, Green, and Gold for the best possible four-team combination, and make sure each team has a leader promoted to the top-most position.

The Armory

Picking the right combination of weapons is also important. If the mission calls for rescuing hostages, then go for silenced weapons like the MP6SD6 or MP6SD10. You'll also want to take along a heartbeat sensor and flashbangs, which are necessary for clearing rooms in Close-Quarters-Battle (CQB). Not only will they blind terrorists when storming rooms, but you'll also run less risk of killing hostages. Make sure you equip specialty operatives with appropriate weapons. For instance, give the Benelli M1 shotgun, breaching charges, and demolitions kit to the demolitions experts, while giving sniper rifles to, well, snipers. Bullet types can also play a vital role depending on the terrain. Missions taking place in wide-open areas like Sand Hammer or Sarpasso Fade call for Full-Metal-Jacket (FMJ) rounds and larger caliber rifles. Conversely,

The Jackal's Day

Adding a team or two of snipers for support is often wise when planning direct action and hostage rescue missions.

Make sure you choose operatives with sure-fire sniper skills: Galanos, Johnston, Narino, Peterson, and Weber make the best snipers. Pick two snipers for each sniper team and arm them with rifles like the Walther WA 2000, Barrett, and the PSG-1. Sidesarms come in handy when moving snipers into position, since moving with sniper rifles can be cumbersome and slow. Study the map and locate the best fields of fire for possible sniper positions. In Perfect Sword, for example, taking out terrorists while overwatching your teams' assault on the objective is crucial for mission success. Get the snipers into position first, before assigning other teams' waypoints, for better tactical assessment of the mission.

use Jacketed-Hollow-Point (JHP) bullets for missions emphasizing CQB. Once again, pay attention to the mission objectives—as equipment like binoculars and electronics kits are sometimes necessary for mission completion.

FRONT AND CENTER *Make sure you choose operatives specialized for specific needs. Demolition Experts are great for breaching doors, while Precision Experts (like Teedy here) are best suited for double strikes.*



Tactical Fortitude


This is where it all goes down: the Planning Screen. Here's where you separate the Scooters (see Inside Gaming: Action, this issue) from the Commandos. Study the map while searching for terrorist positions, choke points, entry and exit points, hostage locations, and special objectives. Cover threat areas with either snipers or overwatch teams, while moving other teams into position to maintain team balance. Keep your teams fluid and active by coordinating their advances on each objective with similar Go codes and Roe speeds. A good tool to use if you're

having problems understanding the dynamics of this phase is the default plan; study and learn from it. Follow team waypoints and Go codes for better clarity on how best to seize the objectives. Use full watch mode to find weak areas in your plan. Planning the perfect mission takes practice and above all, patience, so make sure you allocate considerable time for the Planning Phase. You'll be pleased with your results. **CGW**



BANDIT AT 12 O'CLOCK

Positioning your sniper(s) in the best possible hill zone is crucial for successful strikes. These two snipers have a clear sector of fire for the entire front side of the aircraft, making this an excellent sniper haven.



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lump
in your throat,

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heart.



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F/A-18
simulator

A KILLER RECIPE FOR THE CAMPER'S COOKBOOK BY V. LONG

Quake III: Arena

Nearly everyone claims to hate campers. It's that whole "jealous of success" thing. Campers seem to rack up a good number of frags just by letting their victims do all the running—often into the campers' hungry crosshairs.

Campers, by nature, find out-of-the-way spots to hide and wait for unwitting victims. Because these spots generally provide little or no mobility, campers must rely on long-range firepower and deadly accuracy.

The campers' weapons of choice are the rocket launcher and the railgun. Rockets, while inflicting a good dose of damage, are hampered by their speed. On the other hand, the railgun is an instant-hit weapon and deals even more damage, but requires much steadier aim. Either way, accuracy is key.

While merely zooming in on the target is handy, the higher magnification also increases the perceived mouse sensitivity. You may be able to see the guy, but if you twitch your mouse, you'll lose your target.

"Xian," an id level designer and resident camper, has whipped up a delicious macro that every camper should add to his/her toolkit. Indeed, it's so good that I recommend it for any deathmatch, because there will be times when ambushing your foe is the way to go.

This macro allows you to catch up (and down) the magnification on the fly and automatically adjusts the mouse sensitivity so that you can stay on target with astonishing precision.

Xian's macro is already included as "xian.cfg" in QUAKE III/ARENA. You can activate Xian's control settings by typing "exec xian.cfg" (not a typo, but for future reference, most macros are *.cfg files) at the console (press the "-" key to pull up the console). While that particular macro is built-in, you may not like the rest of Xian's control settings. In that case, you can then make your own custom macro. I've included the text of the

macro for reference; create a text document (something like "zoom.cfg"), edit and save it in the BASEQ3 subdirectory, and then execute it in the game.

Done properly, the macro starts when you hit the "X" key, which zooms in on the target. To zoom back out, hit the "Z" key.

As with any tool, this zoom macro won't help you find the railgun or save your ass from determined foes, so be sure to hone up on other skills.

Stay tuned for more tips in the next issue of CGW!

Thanks to id Software's Christian "Xian" Antbow, camper extraordinaire, for his help. **CGW**



The zoom is nice—but once you learn to use this macro, you won't
he can hide up there, but once I fine-tune my aim with the new

3



6



4



5



go back. This little camper thinks
zoom, he's just another frag for me.

- Here's an opportunity for the camper: a fool with a rocket hiding on a platform.
- First, wait for the smoke to clear...
- ...then tap your new zoom key once to get a closer view.
- Tap it again a few times to get a better look and to refine your aim.
- Now pull the trigger...
- ...and watch him become just another frag.

The Macro of Doom

```

set zoomin1 "cg_fov 30; wait; sensitivity 10; wait; bind x vstr zoomin2;
wait; bind x vstr zoomout6"
set zoomin2 "cg_fov 20; wait; sensitivity 8; wait; bind x vstr zoomin3;
wait; bind x vstr zoomout4"
set zoomin3 "cg_fov 10; wait; sensitivity 4; wait; bind x vstr zoomin4;
wait; bind x vstr zoomout3"
set zoomin4 "cg_fov 5; wait; sensitivity 3; wait; bind x vstr zoomin5;
wait; bind x vstr zoomout2"
set zoomin5 "cg_fov 1; wait; sensitivity 2; wait; bind x vstr zoomout1"
set zoomout1 "cg_fov 5; wait; sensitivity 2; wait; bind x vstr zoomout2;
wait; bind x vstr zoomin6"
set zoomout2 "cg_fov 10; wait; sensitivity 3; wait; bind x vstr zoomout3;
wait; bind x vstr zoomin4"
set zoomout3 "cg_fov 20; wait; sensitivity 4; wait; bind x vstr zoomout4;
wait; bind x vstr zoomin3"
set zoomout4 "cg_fov 30; wait; sensitivity 5; wait; bind x vstr zoomout5;
wait; bind x vstr zoomin2"
set zoomout5 "cg_fov 90; wait; sensitivity 16; wait; bind x vstr zoomin1"
bind x vstr zoomin1
  
```

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NEVER DESTROY WHAT YOU CAN JUST AS EASILY STEAL BY GREG FORTUNE

Homeworld

The funny thing about **HOMEWORLD** is that the best way to accumulate massive firepower is...to not use it! If you come across a group of destroyers that really scares you, don't destroy them! My advice is to use the valuable (but overlooked) salvage coevettes and steal the enemy fleet. In one mission, I managed to steal three carriers and five assault frigates. In another, I stole—get this—six destroyers, three missile destroyers, and about 50 ion cannon frigates. No cheats, no hacks, just sound strategy and a couple of hours of time.

CHECK OUT THE **IGN** **REVIEW**

in Page 103

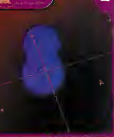
1



How have your salvage coevettes follow them at a distance.

The trick with using salvage coevettes is to present your target with a more pressing problem than a small group of non-capital vehicles hanging out at the fringe of the battlefield. Start by making a couple of missile destroyers way from you and towards your target, using them as bait.

2



Once your intended victim begins moving to engage your bait, move your ships to keep them just out of firing range, but still within visual range. Then give your salvage coevettes the order to capture the target(s).

3



4



Once your coevettes have control of the enemy ship, they'll start moving the captive towards the nearest safe volume of completing the capture. The captured ship no longer poses a threat to any of your ships.

5



In this case, only the Mullerite is big enough to handle a heavy cruiser.

6



There are heavy cruisers are now under our management. Won't the Empire be surprised?

7



When used with cloak generators, you can avoid most salvage ships without a mercy. These destroyers won't even see me until they're been captured!

Creation is the easy part...



David

Lazy
Shy

Shannon

Active
Playful

Stan

Serious
Neat

Justin

Outgoing
Nice

Doris

Grouchy
Sloppy

????

??
??

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

READER'S TIP: RAINBOW SIX

I don't know if you've ever published the following codes for RAINBOW SIX. I love them, they're a real gas! (Press [Enter] to bring up com window, then type the codes.)

1-800 _____ Heavy breathing

infactionresponsetrain _____ Excessive fatalities (observe third person for the real effect)

silentbutdoadly _____ Patience that can kill (be sure you don't have a team member behind you)

Have fun. —Ronnie Spalier

Congratulations to this month's winner, who won for his amazing last post! We'll be sending him some limited items pulled from the CGW BuzzBin by our lovely assistant editor, Dilany "Gusker" Nguyen. Our lucky winner will receive FFA-18 NUMBER 3.0, DEADBOLT, a 24" KNOCKOUT poster, and a HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 strategy guide from BradyGames. Enjoy!



ROGUE SPEAR

Codes Press [Enter] to bring up the communication window and type the following codes:

Code Effect

Teamgod

Team god-mode

Avntergod

Godmode for current agent

Hoboliner

Brain usage

5fingdiscount

Refill inventory

biggoggin

Big head mode

megoggin

Mega head mode

Thashdownknows

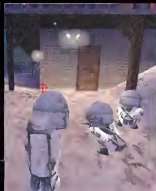
Invincible mode for current agent

Invisibledude

Team invisible mode

Explore

No victory conditions



CODES

DESCENT: FREESPACE

To activate the code, type "WWW.VOLUTION-INC.COM"; hold the "-" (dash) key and type:

Code	Effect
C	Send messages to enemies
Shift-C	Toggle availability of countermeasures for all ships
K	Kill target
Shift-K	Destroy targeted subsystem
Alt-K	10% damage to yourself
I	Invulnerability
Shift-I	Toggle invulnerability for target
G	Toggle DESCENT-style physics
Shift-W	Infinite weapons for all ships, including yours
W	Infinite weapons for just your ship
B	Mark all primary goals as completed
Shift-B	Mark all secondary goals as completed
Alt-B	Mark all bonus goals as completed

SEVEN KINGDOMS

Note: Using these cheats will reduce your score to zero.

To enable the cheat mode type "!!!@@@###"; then press any of the following keys:

Code	Effect
C	\$1000 cash
V	100% food
T	All tech advances and scrolls
M	Reveals map
.	Increases the population in the selected city. The increased population will be of a random nationality, so be careful.
=	Increase prayer points in select Seat of Power
B	Finish construction of selected building immediately
Z	Toggle on/off fast build mode
U	King becomes immortal

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). We'll publish one submission each month. If your tip is published, we'll send you some junk drawn at random from the Computer Gaming World BuzzBin!

You Think Malls are Just
Where You Go to Shop?
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FREESPACE 2

Codes Within a mission, just type "www.freespace2.com", and you should see a "Cheats activated" message. Then, hold down "-" (tilde) in combination with the following:

Key Combo	Effect
Shift-C	Toggle availability of countermeasures for all ships
K	Kill target
Shift-K	Destroy targeted subsystem
I	Invulnerability
Shift-I	Toggle invulnerability for target
Shift-W	Infinite Weapons for ALL ships, including yours
W	Infinite weapons for just your ship
B	Mark all primary goals as completed
Shift-B	Mark all secondary goals as completed
Alt-B	Mark all bonus goals as completed



Darkstone

Tips

Cleaner Doorways: By far, the best technique we found for cleaner doorways is to position your characters like those in this screen shot. When enemies stop through to get to you, they'll get hit from both sides. Don't put your ranged character in front of the door! If there is an enemy on the other side that also uses ranged attacks, your character may get hit, and the attacker won't clear the door because it already has a target.

Knives vs. Bows: Consider equipping your ranged attacker with throwing knives instead of a bow. You can find knives that do lots of damage, and since they're one-headed weapons, you can also give your character a shield and barr up his AG.

Persistent Doorways: Use one character to create a Magic Door, then use the other to reenter the door in town. The door will remain until the character who created it exits another, or enters the door from town as the active character.



Age of Empires II: Age of Kings

Cheats Press [Enter] while playing to bring up chat box, then type in:

Code	Effect
ROCK ON	1000 stone
LUMBERJACK	1000 wood
ROBIN HOOD	1000 gold
CHEESE STEAK JIMMY'S	1000 food
MARCO	Reveal map
POLE	Reveal top-down
REGIS	Fast build
HOW DO YOU TURN THIS ON	Bless a castle for
NATURAL WONDERS	Control animals
TORPEDO	Kill opponent if
TO SMITHEREENS	Bless a unit/hero
BLACK DEATH	Destroy all enemies
I R WINNER	You win



CODES

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III

Just press the Tab key to bring up the message bar and type in these codes:

Code	Effect
Nevercrymodel	Build all buildings in your castle
Nevercrobini	Immediate follow
Nevercroyrabbitt	Immediate success
Nevercvoertingouryes	Hero gains extra 35 archangels
Nevercvoloch	Hero gains test, testlets and ammo
Nevercvoibetter	Hero gains a level
Nevercvoiskeenthrax	
	Hero gains highest luck
Nevercvoiconuts	Hero gains unlimited move points
Nevercvoimuchejoking	
	Hero gains top morale
Nevercvoicreadygotone	See the full revealed secret item map
Nevercvoigeneraldirection	See the full map
Nevercvoishrabberry	All sources increased
Nevercvoistm	Hero gains all magic and 999 spell points
Nevercvoistleshound	Hero gains Death Knights
Nevercvoisphuberpriest	Brighter colors

ARMORED FIST 2

For each cheat below, just follow the directions after the mission has started. **OVERVIEW** (shows big map of battlefield):

To enable, press and hold Ctrl-F12; repeat to disable

RELOAD (loads maximum amount of ammunition):

To enable, press and hold Alt-Shift-R.

REPAIR (lets you repair all damage):

To enable, press and hold Alt-Shift-D.

INDESTRUCTIBLE (makes your tank indestructible; each tank must be enabled separately):

To enable press and hold Alt-Shift-L. All Weapons, Unlimited Fuel and Health: During the game, press [Backspace] and type "KYLE".

nanotechnology

bioactive mutation

ōdi·um™

n. def. - hate coupled with disgust

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only you can discover the truth.*

teleportation



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MESSIAH { EXORCISE YOUR RIGHT OF POSSESSION



PROBLEM:

How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper find out the source of evil on earth?

LEVEL 100 100% 100%



SOLUTION:

Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.



Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker does not have security access to leave the room. So to cause a commotion, "Bob" lowers a 5-ton tank on unsuspecting worker.



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



Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.

LEVEL 100 100% 100%



Dumping the medic's body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.



Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! How heavenly!

LEVEL 100 100% 100%



While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.



The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.

After seeing the awesome power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop. Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!



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!

Visit www.messiah.com/content.htm to register for your chance to win!
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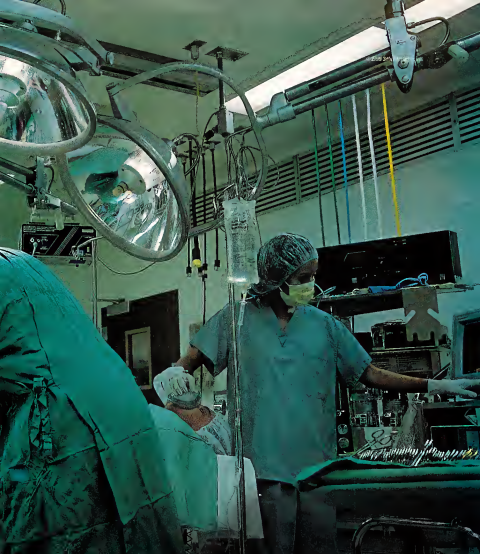
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A photograph of a man in a white t-shirt with the '3dfx' logo and a burger graphic, sitting in an operating room. He is holding a burger. Two surgeons in green scrubs and masks are performing surgery on a patient on the table. The room is lit with large overhead surgical lamps. The overall color palette is dominated by teal and green.

**In your professional opinion,
would a leg blown off by, say, a plasma gun
have a similar texture?**



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INSIDE

ACTION

by Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen



BANG! You're dead. Mouse-click. Reload. Die. Repeat. That's the summary of my ROGUE SPEAR games. No matter how many times I peek around corners, stay in a crouched position, or slice-the-pie when entering a room, I eventually take a bullet to the head. I've worn heavy body-armor and still gotten capped by amateurs with handguns. Worse, I've had entire fireteams out down by no joke—two crazy terrorists.

Thing is, I'm way too conditioned to the "Run, Gun, Take-it-Like-A-Man" mentality behind other shooters. I'm used to absorbing bullet-after-bullet as a space marine, armored-up scientist, or cyborg. But drop me into a world that is soaked in realism, and I start flailing.

Yes, I realized that I was getting myself into a "thinking man's shooter" that demanded precision and caution on top of keen reflexes; I was willing to stay with it, regardless.

That's just me, though. While some games really do like to think while shooting, reflex-jocks like myself tend to pursue other games: ones that we can survive.

Despite this, I actually love ROGUE SPEAR. Yet the frustrations I sometimes feel may escalate, because there's a whole wave of tactical shooters coming up that have a heavy emphasis on realism—more games where one bullet kills. While I'm willing to stick with dying over and over

so I can get the point and learn to use my head, I'm pretty sure others will get too

Thierry Ponders Death by Realism, and Asks for a Compromise

Scooter Down!

impatient and just stop playing in dissatisfaction.

I'm not proposing that these games be dumbed down, either. I'm asking for the option to make things a little less real. Yes, I'm asking for a toggle, between "one hit ends all" and "bring it on." It lets the thinkers play the game the way it was meant to be played, while the neanderthals like me can still have the thrill of rushing a hipcocked sniper and not die in three minutes.

I understand that balancing a title for two such modes may be difficult, but it's been done. Look back at LucasArts' *OUTLAWS*, where you can play the game as either DOOM with cowboys, or like a scene from *Unforgiven*. It preserves the gameplay while making it accessible to all (always a good thing).

It's eventually learn to play ROGUE SPEAR to the point where "Tango Down!" is said more often than "Your team has been wiped out." But for future developers following a similar path, a toggle between the two action schools would be a welcome thing. *CGW*

Scooter's Mix

1. *Hardboiled*
Wanderlust and the End of the World by Harold Murkomi
2. *Transmetropolitan* by DC Comics/Ventura: A comic book that goes beyond men in fights.
3. *Rogue Spear*: Reminds me of why I'm not a connoisseur.
4. *American Beauty: Movie of the Year?*
5. *Butterfly by Smiler*: Check out this JPop/tricho mix.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

VS.

QUAKE 3 ARENA

As it took was a couple of life uploads, and a full-scale war started. Everyone was rare or less content with life's QUATESE, but when Epic released the UNREAL TOURNAMENT demo, the action newsgroup was flooded with both civil debate and of-fashioned mudslinging. The tide seemed to be in UT's favor, with many posters impressed by its polish and the much-improved weapon design. The id loyalists stuck to their guns, though, with the bulk of their argument being how it's only a test and not a real demo. For now, I'm giving the nod to UT because of the bot AI, the weapon design, and the general atmosphere. That doesn't mean I'm counting Q3A out; QUAKE TEST was substantially different from QUAKE's final release, and it may have a surprise or two in store.



Unreal in Reality

If you ever find yourself seeding an example of how games could be useful, these two projects might help. First, there's the Virtual Reality Notre-Dame Project, which is a recreation of the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral. In addition to realistic textures and architecture, the team will also use the AI bots to create "tour guides" that will show you around the Cathedral and provide historical background. Right now, there's a beta at www.vrmdproject.com, and the team is still looking for a sponsor.

Even more practical is what the Unrealty project is doing: real estate design. Architects should be able to create preliminary designs with Unrealty, then have clients tour these virtual buildings. Essentially, you'd be getting a tour of a prospective house (or complex or even entire neighborhood) right on your PC. Check out www.unrealty.net, and snag the demo that lets you tour Heartland Business Park out in Long Island.

INSIDE

STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey



robert_coffey@aol.com

The Persistence of Vision

Quick, name the following Robin Williams movie: Robin plays a free-spirited but deeply feeling man whose unconventional approach rises superior but touches ordinary people. By the end of the film we learn a little about life, a little about love, and while he may lose, we know he's the real winner.

Oh, and he bonds with a child.

Can't quite put your finger on it? Name this strategy game instead: You lead a ragtag band of rebels against an evil corporation in a post-apocalyptic world, using resources to build your army. Among your units are a

clocking vehicle, a unit that lets you take over enemy units, and something with a really big gun. Oh, and it's in 3D.

Formulas are not intrinsically bad. Formula 409 is a fine cleanser, Formula 1 racing is fine racing, and dog feces in a burning paper bag is a fine formula for tomfoolery. But the rigidity inherent in all formulas means that by adhering to one, you automatically limit yourself—your efforts listed to be pretty much indistinguishable from everyone else's. That's why the games that have a unique voice, those that can bring something new to the strategy gaming experience, are worthy of special recognition.

Right now, no game better exemplifies this than **HOMEWORLD**. From the moment the game starts, you are immersed in a world unlike that of any strategy game. The cold immensity of space is wonderfully captured; the stylized comic-book cutscenes actually enhance play and never

come off as a jarring, bridging nod to audience expectation. Even the most spittled firefights still maintain the majestic, stately feel of the entire game. As integral to the overall experience as the fully-3D environment of deep space, the elemental atmosphere of the game is what makes **HOMEWORLD** really

stand out for me.

You'd think it would be easier to accomplish this whole conceptual individuality thing. The problem is, too many designers get bogged down in coming up with marketing hooks instead of with something truly unique. So we get games that desperately try to convince us that 3D terrain, customizable units, or cutscenes with "real Hollywood actors" are legitimate reasons to shell out money for a game.

Good Lord, *Showgirls* and *The Postman* are definitively "Hollywood style" projects—and why on Earth would I want to subject myself to them? Soulless, calculated, clumsily executed, a waste of time and money; they breed on the same creatively sterile ground as handwagnones like **DOMINANT SPECIES**, **MACHINES**, and the one-hundredth **CIVILIZATION** rip-off.

It's not like designers need to reinvent the wheel every time they start a game. The truth is that there is so much commonality in strategy gameplay that tone, story, and presentation are some of the very few elements

that designers can truly make their own. Taking an established game form and stamping it indelibly with your personality can be done in countless ways. Witness the incredibly entertaining veins of **JAGGED ALLIANCE 2**, the deliciously evil indulgence of **DUNGEON KEEPER 2**, or the overwrought, comic-book overtones of **STARCRRAFT**.

Are we as strategy gamers asking for too much? Is it unreasonable for us to want to have designers thrill, surprise, and captivate us? Perhaps the real question is one we should be asking those who make the games—weren't these the types of games that drew you to this business in the first place? **CCW**



Two Sides of the Same Evil Cells



ments that designers can truly make their

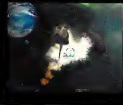
Robert's Pick

1. *High Heat Baseball 2000*
2. *HONM III: Armageddon's Bl-d!*
3. *Fiddling with my Diamond Rio*
4. *Brockol Rab: (for dinner)*
5. *Re-visiting The Fellowship of the Ring*

A Real Jumping Off Point

Like kids using their hot wheels to stage spectacular crashes instead of racing them, a coalition of **COLLEGECAST**, **TYTON** fans is using the game to see who can design the most elaborate death machine. Among the death-dialing round tips: End an incomplete Go-Cart track with a ramp, set switch cars near and explode in the air; build a 90-mph wheel fitty with a few lower and watch cut-throats soar to new heights; or just place a your right at a nice cut and watch people march head-on—like in a wacky game. Check out the newsgroup: offjumpstrategies@msn.com.

Drive, He Said



The blurring of genre boundaries is going to get even blurrier thanks to Microsoft's **ALLIANCE**, set to ship in the first half of next year. This online-only game may at first appear to be a straightforward space sim, with a strong team focus allowing cooperation between members, to the extent that some ships will accommodate multiple players such as a pilot and a pair of turret gunners. But underneath the test-paced space combat is a traditional, real-time strategy element. Money earned from killing enemies and resources mined by droves will provide the materials for teams to build structures, and to undertake research for improving their weapons or upgrading their ships. The most interesting aspect is how these teamwide decisions will be made; while one player can be designated to make all the calls, the more intriguing option is to have every team member vote on which direction the team takes.

Should both **ALLIANCE** and the moments-from-release **BATTLEZONE 2** really take off, expect to see more first-person action/strategy hybrids at a store near you.

DISCIPLES

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Strategy First

by George Jones



SPORTS

The Case Against Realism

Realism's Great...
Until You Stop Having Fun

Fore...
Three...
Two...
One!

Sometime next year, you may actually be able to beat Tiger Woods in a PGA tournament. EA Sports is in the process of perfecting a technology that will impart real-life tournaments to your digital contents in Tiger Woods 1998 and 2000. As the pros take their shots, a team of EA technicians spat the ball and broadcast its location. This information is then converted into data and downloaded into your game, allowing you to play against the pros in near real-time. EA Sports claims they'll be able to go from real shot to digital data in under 20 seconds.

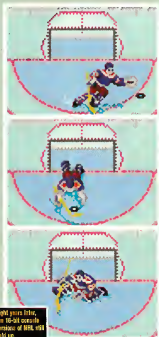
What really got us excited, though, is the possibility of this technology being used in other sports games. Imagine a NASCAR game that imports real-time results from the previous day's Daytona 500. Or a baseball game that imports Greg Maddux's pitch selection to use against your digital batters...

Above and beyond its eerily accurate insights into the male mind, the movie *Swingers* confirmed an important fact: There is something special about EA Sports' NHL title for the Sega Genesis. Ask anyone who's played the original versions of the game what they think of the veracious Electronic Arts has released over the past few years. You'll likely hear some pining for the good old days.

Now ask that same person what they think of the recently-released NHL 2000. You'll likely hear enthusiastic comparisons to the old-school versions of the game. This must sound like music to the ears of the NHL 2000 designers—because this is exactly what they set out to do.

The changes between this and last year's version, and the thought process behind those changes, serves as a first-hand illustration of the fine line between realism and playability that PC sports game producers often tread.

"The shift to a more arcade-style of play was a conscious decision," Kevin Wilkinson, Producer of NHL 2000, acknowledges. In fact, when it came time to start talking about NHL 2000, he and the NHL team had to make some hard decisions. Should they stay true to the NHL, or shoot for a more fun and responsive style? After talking about what kind of game they wanted to play, and reading the gaming message boards about recent NHL releases, the decision became a no-brainer. "Our motto for NHL 2000," Wilkinson revealed, "became keep it like [the Sega] Genesis."



Eight years later, the 16-bit arcade version of NHL still held up.

guys at 3DO. Their game designs reflect their personal preference. By building the games they want to play, rather than games the designers (or the game companies) think other people want to play, they're one step closer to their goal of producing something entertaining.

"For this year, we're taking a little gamble," Wilkinson shrugs, a little concerned that some of the PC players—who are typically used to more realism—will be upset with the play style in NHL 2000. "But everybody loved that Sega Genesis version of NHL."

It appears that they found the right balance. Want to bet they never turn back? **GGW**

Super-Human Talents

Released back in 1991, the first generation of NHL games stretched realism, and sometimes simply rejected it. "The players really moved around in that game, often in physically impossible ways, which created a faster-paced, wide-open game," Wilkinson explains. To get back to that style, the design team allowed players higher top speeds, faster passes, and the ability to make tighter turns and to stop on a dime. They also made it easier for players to score by taming down the "super-goals" in the game. "Now when you score, you feel like you deserved it," he laughs. "Before, you felt like it was more luck than anything else, because you could only score on reflections and put-backs."

So what's the magic formula that determines the modifier that governs realism? If I knew that, I wouldn't be writing this column. But one thing stands out when you talk to guys like Kevin Wilkinson or (here I go again) the HIGH HEAT

George's Mix

1. NHL 2000
2. Unreal Tournament
3. Temporalis by Everything But The Girl
4. Age of Empires II
5. Ender's Shadow by Orson Scott Card

In a world of floating continents,
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INSIDE

SIMULATION & SPACE

by Gordon Berg



gordn@concrete.net



Maybe the Sky Really *Is* Falling...

This month's column was supposed to be about spreading holiday cheer. I had originally planned to write an appeal to the "significant others" of the world on behalf of sim enthusiasts everywhere—you know, reasons why we simmers need another brand-new 3Dx card, after having dropped \$200 on a similar card six months earlier. I'll save that pitch for Valentine's Day, though, because I haven't felt too chipper ever since I heard about Dynamix's *DESERT FIGHTERS* being cancelled.

I know this topic is getting old, but I feel compelled to chime in anyway regarding the sim genre's straits. Did you know that around five to seven years ago, flight sims outsold all other games combined? I remember when *ACES OVER THE PACIFIC* first came out and I saw about a hundred copies of it sitting on a store's giant promotional rack. I was broke at the time, and wouldn't have enough money for a copy until payday later that week. When I returned to the store that Friday, *ACTP* had sold out entirely. I haven't seen a flight sim sell out like that ever since—and according to current trends, I may never again.

Ironically, the total sales of flight sims have increased overall since those glory days. This linear progression isn't too impressive, however, compared to the exponential growth of other genres. Based on this, I can understand why there would be fewer and fewer titles—but the cancellation of projects far into development is another matter entirely. What the hell is going on?

I don't think the issue is necessarily with the sims themselves. Sure they have their problems, but what game

doesn't? No, the blame mostly resides squarely on the shoulders of the bean counters. For a sim to even justify development in this day of Triple A, one-million-units-plus-sold wannabes, it had better sell close to 400,000 or 500,000 copies worldwide. And it better be completed in two years or

less. And it better not miss its milestones or ship date either. Not easy when we're talking about the most complicated kind of game there is to make. Obviously, there were internal reasons why *DESERT FIGHTERS* got the ax. Yet what's so fascinating is that DF exemplified all the reasons you don't cancel such a project. (1) It was leveraging existing technology and therefore less expensive to make, (2) it had a shorter than normal development cycle, (3) it was exploring a unique subject matter, and (4) it promised to include the most definitive of dynamic campaigns, allowing for alternative historical outcomes. So what if it's late and misses a quarter or two? What if it still makes a profit in the end? Clearly, it's not enough to just be in the black anymore.

Many cling to the hope that flight sims aren't dead and that we're simply seeing a downturn in development, similar to what RPGs once went through and what the adventure genre is currently enduring. Theory holds that a sim will supposedly come along and exploit an absence, cornering a previously vacant market. The success of said title then spawns a host of "me too" games, heralding the return of sims. While I would love for that to be true, I just don't see it happening given the staggering rise in "lowest common denominator" gaming.

Nonetheless, thank god there will always be developers out there who have sim-making in their blood, and will find a way to get their games made. Do them all a favor by rewarding that kind of effort with your wallets—and hopefully prove that I'm not Chicken Little after all. **GGW**

Cancellations Leave the Sim Genre Reeling

Open Letter to Hasbro

Dear Hasbro Interactive,
Thank you for allowing your MicroProse development group to make *Falcon 5.0*, scheduled to go into production roughly one year from now. The team's idea of wanting to incorporate a strategic air element commander into the game is a wonderful idea. I also like the notion of wanting to create a more persistent online world as well. Please make sure to tell them it's okay to tell me what else they have planned, as I promise not to tell anyone. Honest. In the meantime, thank you for making both the *F15E* and *F18* stand alone add-ons to *Falcon 4*, based on the same engine. Also, kindly ignore my rant in this month's column. I'm sure that no one in your company is a bean counter and that everyone plays games. Good luck, and enjoy cornering the market. Also, I've been a really good boy this year and kept my room clean and did all my chores.

—Gordon

When not engaged in serial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

Gordon's Mix

1. *Jave's USAF*
2. *Age of Empires 2*
3. *ACES High beta*
4. *The Matrix and Meltdown: my current DVD obsessions.*
5. *William Gibson's Neuromancer: rediscovering a classic.*

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INSIDE

RPG / ADVENTURE

by Deslock



deslock@deslock.com

Enter ARCANUM

After disbanding the development teams of **RETURN TO KRONOOS** and **MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE**, you'd think that Sierra On-Line might have been completely given up on the RPG genre. Fortunately not, as the company recently announced that it would publish **ARCANUM**, an original RPG being developed by Troika Games. Troika Games was founded by Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky, and Jesse Anderson - all of whom played key roles in Interplay's acclaimed **FALLOUT**. While including Tolkien-esque elves, orcs, and other races, the game is set during an alternate world's "industrial revolution" and abandons character classes in favor of a **Fallout**-like skill-based development system.

Online Trials

The most ambitious online game to date, **ULTIMA ONLINE**, was released two years ago and ran smack into the Coaster of the Month award and litigious happy gamers. **ULTIMA ONLINE** always had its devoted fans, but most gamers were disappointed with the game's inability to provide a gaming experience that was free from socio-pathic gamers and internet lag.

ASHERON Ships, MIDDLE EARTH Sinks

To the development team's credit, **ULTIMA ONLINE** significantly improved after its initial release. A nominally-proced expansion pack provided a detailed manual and several other initially omitted features. **ULTIMA ONLINE** is now available worldwide, and with the included on-the-fly translation software, gamers can now interact with other players across the globe. Now you can squash the characters of teenagers in Tannaxis and gleefully watch as your mocking boast, "I relax," is translated into their native tongue.

Verant's **EVERQUEST** received a more enthusiastic greeting and has surpassed **ULTIMA ONLINE** in active accounts. **EVERQUEST**'s addictive hack-and-slash gameplay has made it a solid Game of the Year candidate, and the development team is polishing off the game's first major expansion.

But all is not well in the online world. First, Sierra On-Line has shelved the current design of **MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE** and fired the development team. When the game returns to production with a new team, the most innovative - and controversial - aspects of the game will be aban-

done. No feature was more contentious than "permanent death" for characters. Online RPG developers have been concerned that gamers would be reluctant to embrace a system so punitive to player mistakes. But many tabloid RPG gamers play with "house rules" that prohibit raising dead characters.

Obviously, there would have to be some protection from player-killing, and it would have to be very difficult for a character to die. No one would be enthused to play a game where weeks of character development could be wiped out by a mistimed jump or a dropped online connection. But I've always thought that permanent character death - at least as a server option - could create more innovative role-playing opportunities and a more realistic, accountable gaming world. The team's ideas for character psychology, race population limits, and "realistic" race strengths also seemed original and interesting. Best of luck to the departing team, who will hopefully get the opportunity to explore their concepts in a new product.

In addition, Turbine/Microsoft's **ASHERON'S CALL** hasn't generated the anticipated buzz that **ULTIMA ONLINE** and **EVERQUEST** did.

Featuring a 3D gaming world like **EQ**, **ASHERON'S CALL** boasts more opportunities to individualize your characters, complex combat, and monster AI. Yet, features that the developers hoped would distinguish **ASHERON'S CALL** from its competitors - such as its feudal allegiance system, spell economy, and original creatures (as opposed to traditional mythological beasts) - may in fact be contributing to the lack of enthusiasm for the title. Has the market for massively multiplayer swords-and-sorcery RPGs been saturated, or are AC's features unappealing? Maybe gamers just feel less incentive to beta-test a game when comparable commercial products are already on the market.

The potential market for online RPGs may not be tapped out, but this month's developments suggest that it won't be easy to dethrone **EVERQUEST** and **ULTIMA ONLINE** as the reigning kings of the genre. **GGV**

Deslock's Mix

1. **FreeSpace 2**
2. **Chris Claremont's return to the X-Men comics**
3. **Fight Club**
4. **Starship Troopers on DVD**
5. **Baywatch: Wing Commander IV and its companion Casper Van Din on Starship Troopers as Redshirt #3; Kowloon to Mark Hamill and Tom Wilcox.**

In Brief

SYSTEM SHOCK 2 Multiplayer and More

The developers of **SYSTEM SHOCK 2** have fulfilled their promise to release a cooperative multiplayer patch, adding even more value to an excellent game.

Download the patch from www.shock2.com. Hasbro has completed its acquisition of Wizards of the Coast and the D&D franchise. Almost concurrently, the controversial Assassin class disappeared from the current draft of the 3rd Edition D&D rules. An unfortunate coincidence, or a sign of a more family-oriented future for the game?...**STAR CONTROL 2**, developed by Paul Reiche and Fred Ford, featured an unparalleled combination of humor and action/adventure/RPG elements. Accolade's official sequel was a disappointment, so series fans should check out the freeware game in development at www.star-control.com/time-warp.

For daily RPG news updates, check out Deslock's RPG News at deslock.com/rpg.

Company	Product	Page
3dn	Woolies 2	188-189
3DO	Crossfire	99-95
3DO	Night & Magic	59
3DO	Night & Magic	123
Adventure	Soldier of Fortune	14-15
Adventure	I 92	C2 C4, 1
Aarni, Inc.	AGD	16-17
Blaze of Glory Entertainment	Duke II	4-8
Booly Games	Duke II strategy guide	41
BUTCOM	SupPCClean.com	84-85
Credog	1600 A.D.	136-139
Cyber & Bits	www.cdnrg.com/cyberbits	210-211
Council on Computing Power	RAM	69
Dell Computer Company	Dimension 4 & Inspire Lines	C3, C5
Discworld Multimedia Systems	Monter Sound	27
Discworld Multimedia Systems	Viper	143
EA Sports	ea.com	129-130
EA Sports	EA EA Line	190-191
EA Sports	eaurl.com	72
Edut Interact	Edut Interact	30
Edut Interact	OnLine	10-12
Edut Interact	SimB Builder: The Last Revolution	42-45
Edut Interact	Ultra Chess	46-47
Edut Interact	Draw EA	48-49
Edut Interact	Thal 2	82-83
Edut Interact	DeKavina	64-65
Electronic Arts	San Diego Park	24-25
Electronic Arts	Alan Cooper	184-187
Electronic Arts	EA, EA	180-181
Electronic Arts	The Sims	163-164
Excite@Home	Mach V	91
Frant	Asistent	39
Fullmoon.com	DSL Connection	52
Fox Interactive	Alan vs. Predator	62-63
Game Case	gamecase.com	2-9
GT Interactive	Wheel of Time	164-165
Hedera Interactive	Delusion II: Test of Time	90
Hypersonic	Hypersonic PC	147
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Star Trek: New Worlds	2-3
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Kingdom Academy	5-7
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Lowland Dale	79-80
Integrity Productions, Inc.	MG Alley	64-65
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Star Trek: Starfleet Command	131
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Tamers	161-165
Integrity Productions, Inc.	Worship	196-197
Logitech	Family Gaming	133-137
LucasArts Entertainment Grouping	Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine	6-9
LucasArts Entertainment Grouping	Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	32-34
Macromed	Star Lancer	39-93
Macromed	StarWinder: Force Feedback	54-55
Macromed	StarWinder: Dual Strike	56-57
Macromed	WebMouse	144-145
Madfinger Entertainment	WebDogs: BuildYour	125
Maxfli	Oldies	165
Maxfli	Sixties: Don	205
nVidia	nVidia	148
Origin Systems, Inc.	Ultima Ascension	136-137
Proxi, Inc.	Rockline Joystick	149
Razor	Beamazing Mouse	36-37
Red Storm Entertainment	Duke Makes CD	115
Red Storm Entertainment	Roger Spear	76
Reveal Games	Spear Ops II	129-133
Shink Industries Ltd.	Cyberg	178
Sigagsoft Networks, Inc.	10ax	53
Sigagsoft Networks, Inc.	10ax	51
Sigagsoft Networks, Inc.	10ax	121
Serra De Line	Alacaz Legende	96-97
Serra De Line	Phantax	112-113
Serra De Line	Hameworld	76-77
Serra De Line	Passax 2	166-167
Serra De Line	Global Knight II	33-35
Serra De Line	SWAX 2	100-102
Serra De Line	Wild West West	70-73
Sigma EA	Final Fantasy VII	119-111
Strategic Software	Quiver Software	2-13
Strategic First	Disciple: Grand Lench	200-203
Talonn	Tar	20
Talonn	Dante Bridge	61
Westwood Studios	Farstar	162-169
Westwood Studios	Nia	116-117
WizardWorks, Inc.	Dot Track Racing	60
Yamaha Corporation of America	Yamaha Speakers	146

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Second Annual Greenspeak Awards

Featuring the Very Last Ion Storm Joke of the Millennium!

Hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the **Second Annual Greenspeak Awards**, the absolute highest recognition that anyone in the gaming industry can receive, according to my mommy. I'd like to thank Editor-in-Chief George Jones for keeping me on the staff for another year. That was the right decision, Jones, and you should have your cat back, mostly healthy, in just a few days. Sorry about the tail.

Before passing out the awards, I'd first like to send my warmest congratulations to all of this year's winners. In the interest of maintaining my journalistic integrity, I'd like to officially noted that winners were not chosen on the basis of whether or not they sent me free gifts over the year. However, next year's winners will be chosen that way, so this should give everyone ample time to get it together and send me some cool stuff. Cash is especially encouraged.

Marketing Weasels of the Year

Eidos Interactive for their insidious multi-page ads cleverly designed to look like our own magazine articles. The idea, it would seem, is to fool you into mistaking their bogus "interviews" and "previews" for actual articles written by us. That's just great. We love that. If you ever have trouble distinguishing our articles from theirs, just know that theirs probably won't have lines like this: **TOMB RAIDER 4: Who gives a rat's ass?**

Brainiacs Of The Year

Sierra On-Line for deciding at year-end that "an enhanced focus on market success" might be a better way to do business. Good thinking. That'll give them the edge over all those other gaming companies who are focused more on failing. In announcing their new strategy, Sierra killed the Dynamix line, the fan-favorite **BABYLON 5** game, the J.R.R. Tolkien games, and two promising flight sims. But hey, thank goodness they held on to **PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDING**, huh? That'll sell like hotcakes! [Insert sound of cow flatulence here.]

Scum-Sucking Hypocrites of the Year

The **mainstream press** for descending upon the gaming industry like wild vultures in the wake of the tragedy at Columbine. Yes, you had to love those TV reporters gravely pontificating about the prevalence of violence in computer games. If only gaming could be as good an influence on today's youth as, say, television—then all of society's problems would be solved! The greatest irony is that the only time the mainstream media ever pays attention to computer gaming is when the subject of violence comes up. Now, why could that

be? Here's hoping for a little less finger-pointing and a little more adult responsibility in the next millennium.

Guilty Pleasure of the Year

LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME. Yeah, it's a Nintendo game. Write a letter if that makes you mad. All I know is, this is the game I rushed home to play every night, played way too late, and avoided other responsibilities for, just to get in a few more minutes. Anything that makes me feel this had has to be good.

Best Role-Playing Experience of the Year

"The Hunted" map in **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**. I know it isn't a "real" RPG, but this multiplayer scenario, which pits a group of assassins against a president and his bodyguards, provided the **CGW** editors—and many others—with the most immersive sense of role-playing

The Greenspeak Awards are the absolute highest recognition that anyone in the gaming industry can receive, according to my mommy.

all year. Ficking out the president with a sniper rifle, or guiding him to safety, or playing the president himself and cowering in the dark corners, provided an adrenaline rush like no other and taught us the joy of working together. If this is what we have to look forward to in **TEAM FORTRESS 2**, I'd like to formally say goodbye to my family right now.

Adventure Game of the Year

Just kidding!

Good Sports of the Year

John Romero and the gang at **Ion Storm**. For enduring a year's worth of heckling from smarty-pants game journalists like me. They could have (and maybe should have) kicked my ass, but instead chose to take it with the same humor and carefree nonchalance with which they approach things like, say, their project deadlines. Seriously, here's hoping that this group shows us up—and shuts us up—by delivering some really fun games. Because remember, that's all this is ever about.

Happy New Year. See ya after the apocalypse.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the real role-playing experience of the year was being the bull in **Professional Bull Rider**. Send your meanest cowboy stories to jeff_green@rd.com. **CGW**

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