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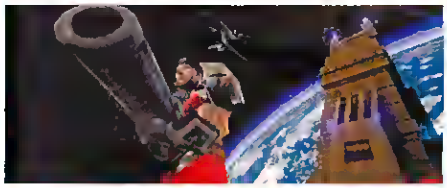

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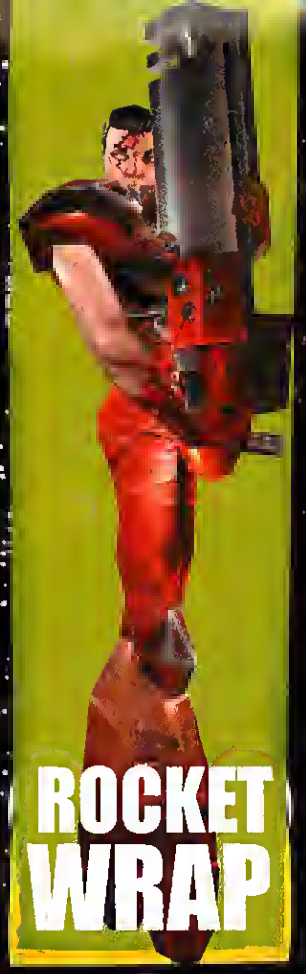

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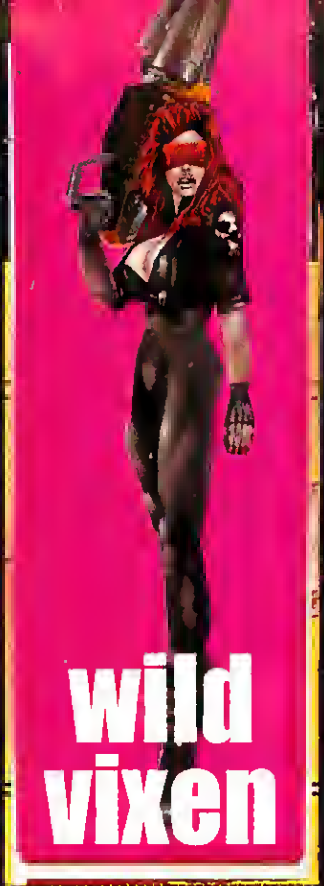

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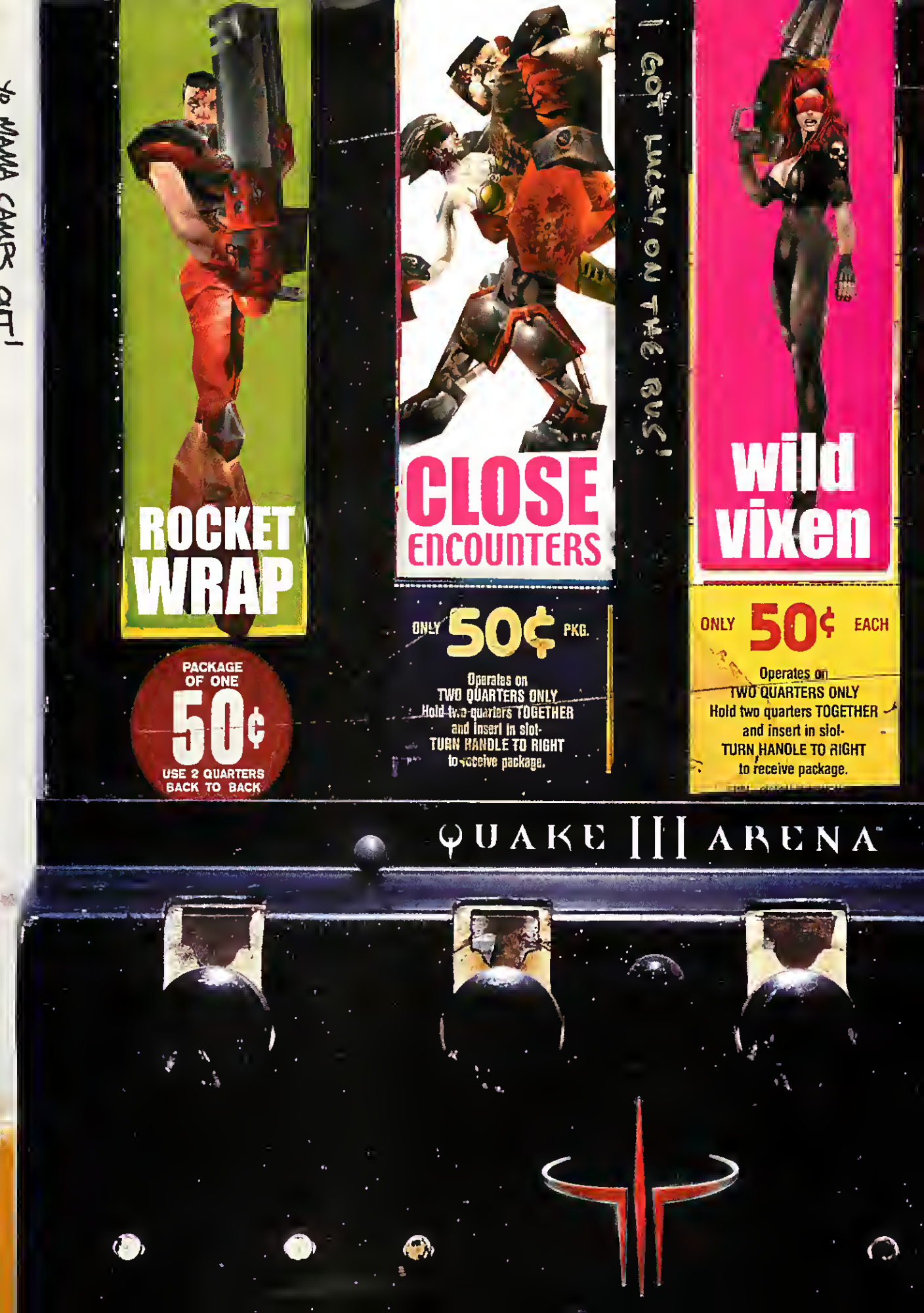

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REVIEWS
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Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensely realistic, organic look of the Arena. But don't get caught staring at the scenery, or you'll end up as part of it.
Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player gamers are safe. Q3A's single player game IS a Fragmatch. The computer opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and whatever they steal from your fragged remains. These aren't the predictable, learn-how-to-kill-them-once and move on bots you remember. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let's hope you can say the same.
BE GENTLE, I'M A NEWBIE.

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Poaaeaaion... Naked and defenaeleaa, Bob ueea hie only weapon and takea poaaeaaion of the firat character he aeea, a worker.

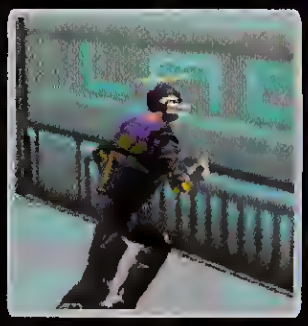
Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker doea not have aecurity acceaa to leave the room. So to cauae a commotion, "Bob" lowera a 5-ton tank on unsuapecting worker.

Then he can poaaeaa the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, medics have aecurity acceae.

Now through a warehouee door, Bob atill needa acceaa to the lab where he believee he'll find some answers.

Dumping the medice body, Bob realizee that Cops have access to tha lab.

Cops also have laaer sighted GUNS! How heavenly!



While being acanned at the door Bob attracte eome unwanted attention.

The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tossas his lifeleaa body across the room.

After eeeing the awe-eome power displayed by the behemoth, who needa a cop. Bob takes poaeeaaion of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

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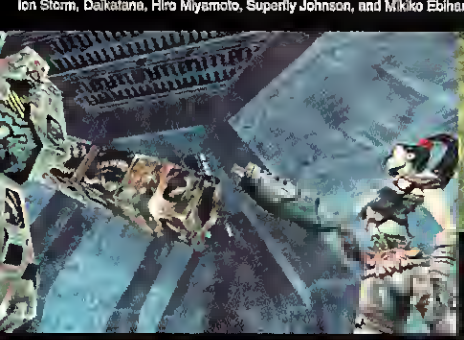

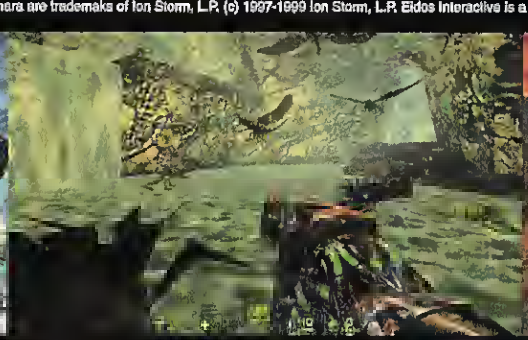

evoke sheer terror among a few ill-fated network friends. Just remember, this is a place stalked not only by creatures but by change. new world filled with horrors even more unimaginable than in the one before. WWW.DAIKATANA.COM

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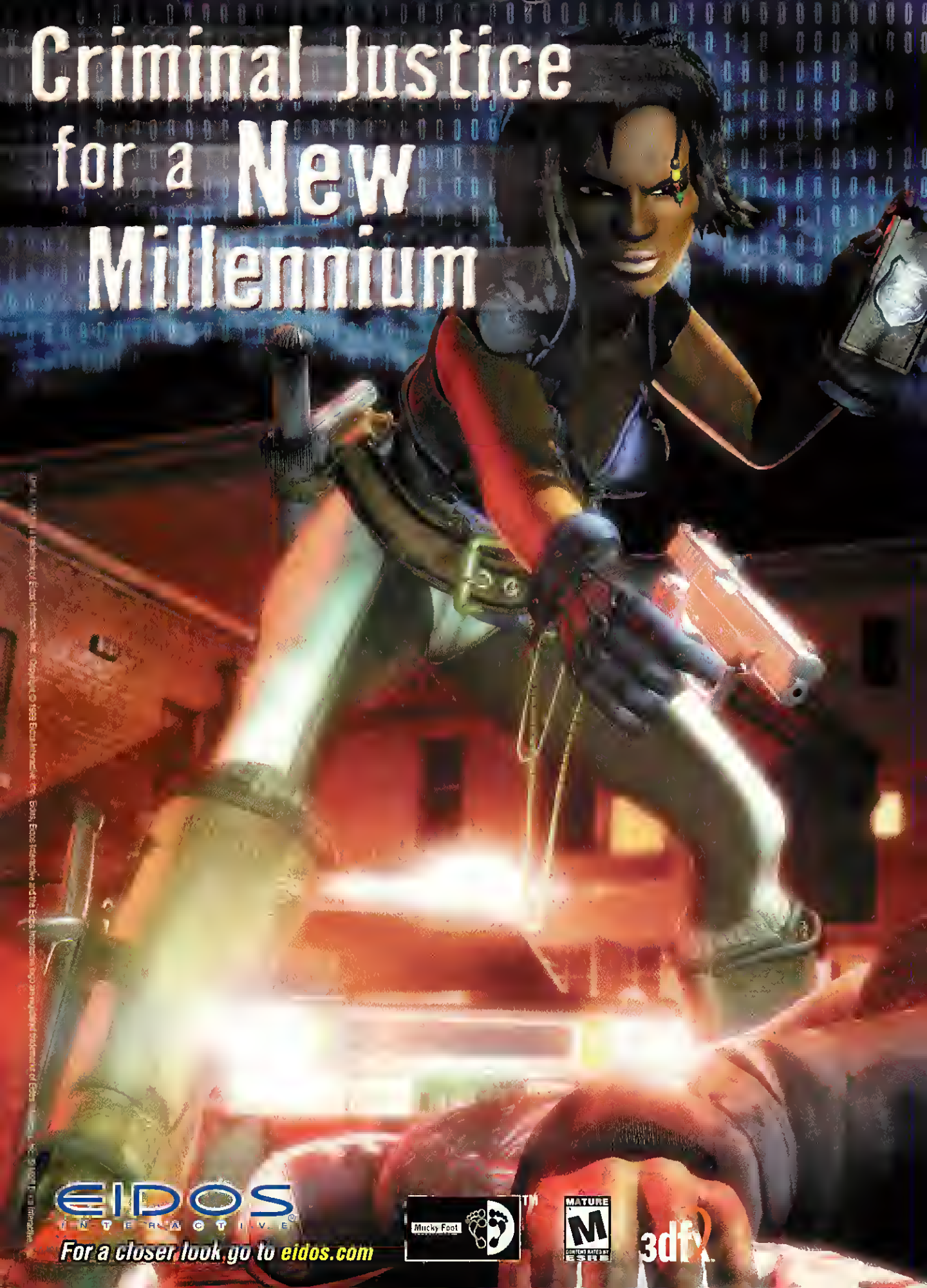
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HOW TO BREAK IN A FEDORA:

1. Moka sure each side af the crawn has a smooth, curved indent.

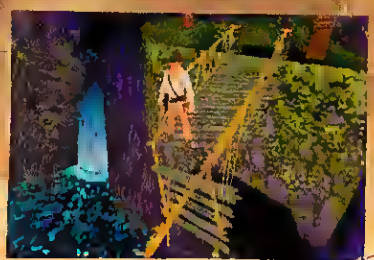
2. For a look thot says you've gat ploces to go and bod guys to hurt, giva tha brim o nice, evan crease.

EXPERT METHODS:

4. Canine chew fay.

5. Mine shoft wind sheor.

6. High altitude bridge-happing.



From tha mauntoins af Kazakhstan ta the ruins of tha Olmecs. It's 17 chaptars

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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 H_2O soaks.

8 Lava vapor treatments.

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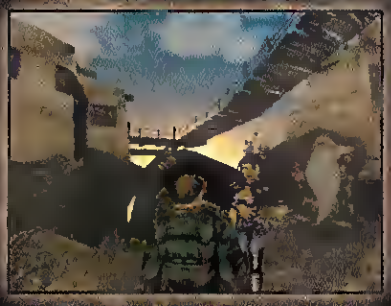

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

FEBRUARY 2000 • ISSUE 187

COVER STORY

Beat the Best New Games 60

Getting whuped by your games? No one pushes our readers around! (Except us.) Repeat this mantra: read, win, repeat. We'll show you how to kick the crap out of all these great games:

Age of Empires II: Age of Kings

Age of Wonders

Homeworld

Quake III

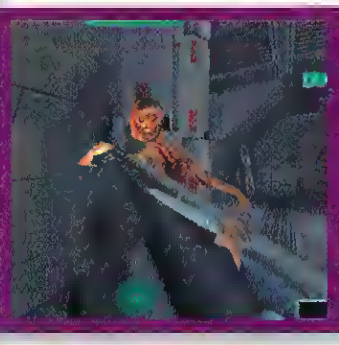
Panzer Elite

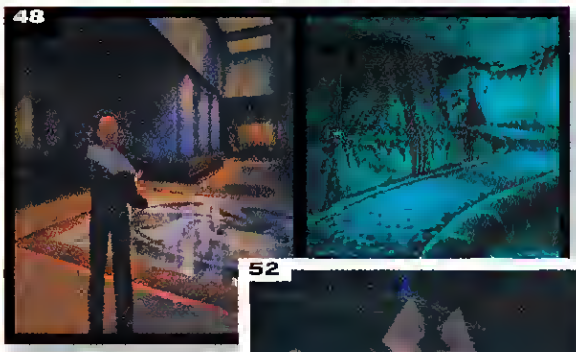
Panzer General 3D Assault

Rogue Spear

System Shock 2

Unreal Tournament





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PREVIEWS

Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

After StreetWalker, Star Trek may be the oldest license around. But wait! These two games utilize the UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III: ARENA engines, and they could be the long-awaited "great" Trek games that will make even those without facial hair and Federation t-shirts beam down for a closer look 48

Thief 2

Looking Glass ups the ante on its innovative "first-person sneaker" with THIEF 2: THE METAL AGE, an even more in-depth crash course on 19th-century burglary..... 52

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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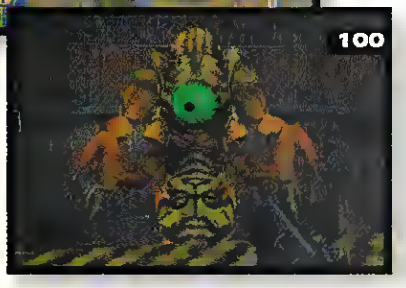

ON THE CD

Game demos to try before you go out and buy.

AGE OF EMPIRES II: AGE OF KINGS

- **Unreal Tournament**
- **Tomb Raider:** The Last Revelation
- **Armored Fist 3**
- **Dirt Track Racing**
- **Final Fantasy VIII**
- **Dungeon Keeper 2**
- **1602 A.D.**

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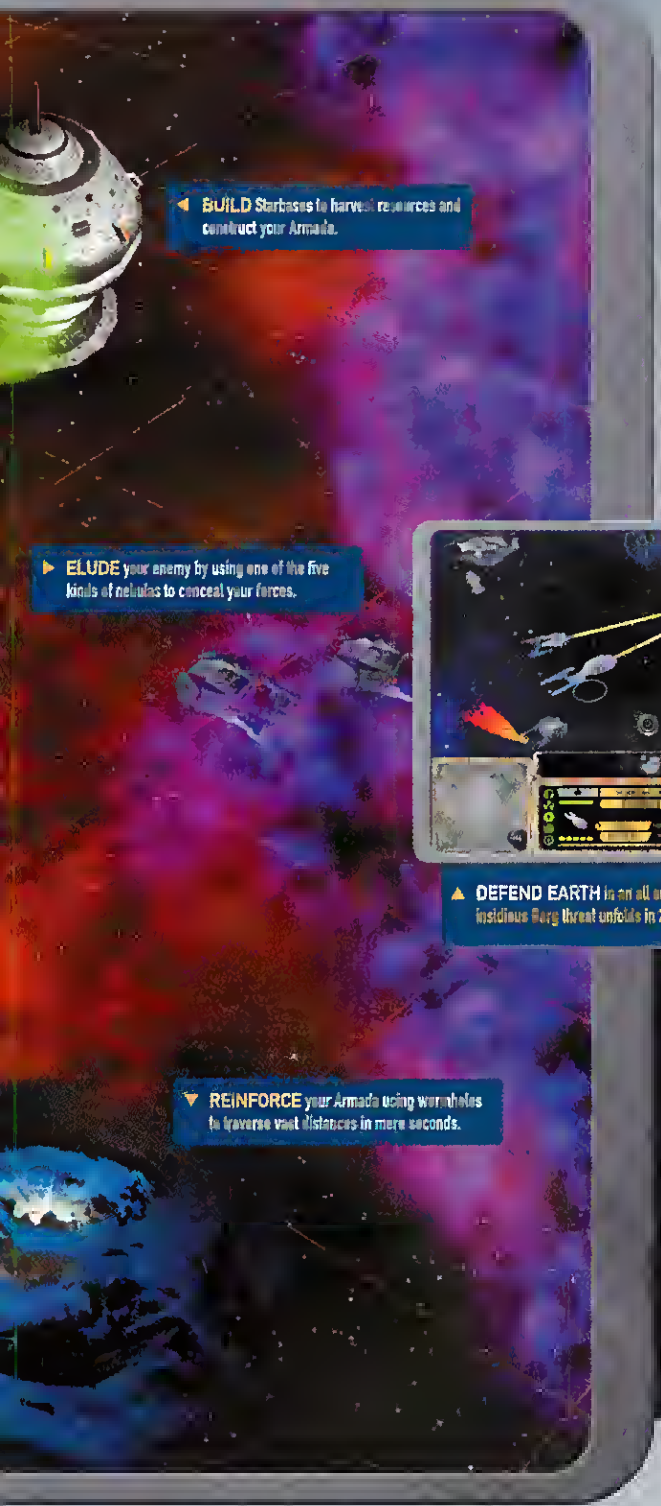

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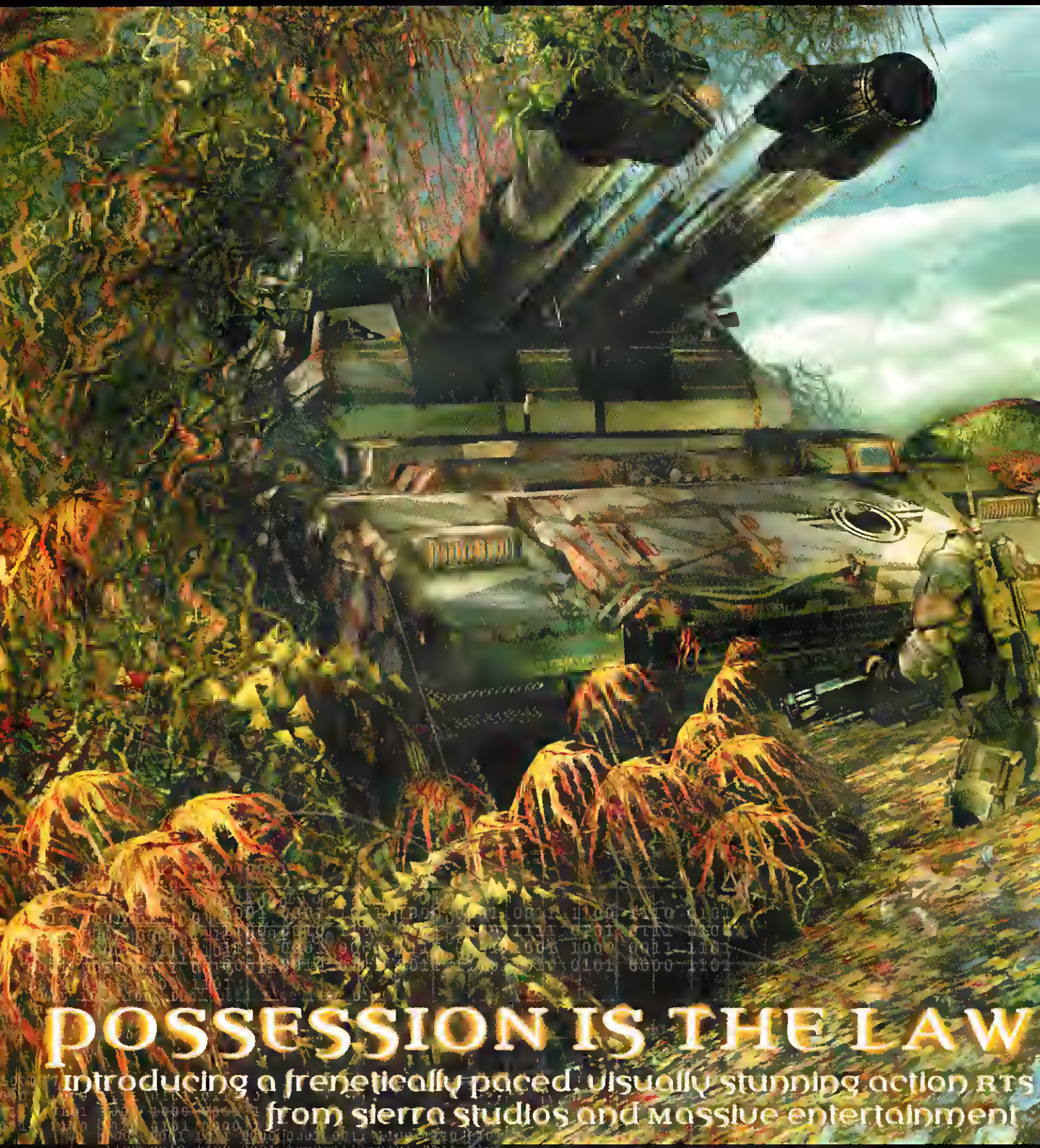
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I. *** SUPER-TERRORISM AND THE MANIPULATION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.

I.Since the 1990's, technology available to terrorists has improved, the scope of their destruction has expanded. [redacted] Sources say Deus Ex was created by Ion Storm to uncover the truth. Some say it's merely the latest conspiracy fueled by a madman. And some say it's a future training tool made to look like a hyperrealistic 3-D roleplaying computer game. Whatever it is, proceed with caution. They know you want it.

II. A recent pandemic, popularly referred to as the "Gray Death", has made an already chaotic world situation even worse. According to a report by the Federal Disease Control Center, it is the worst virus since AIDS. It is not yet known what compounds make up this deadly virus, but current data shows [redacted] are likely candidates. Ambrosia, the virus' stabilizer, has been linked to VersaLife. What is significant about the number 12? Does UNATCO maintain control over Ambrosia distribution? [redacted] can only mean www.unatco.com.

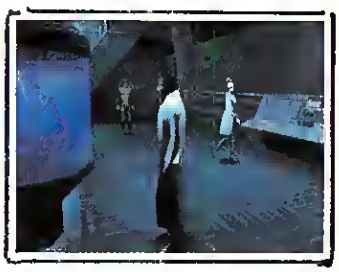
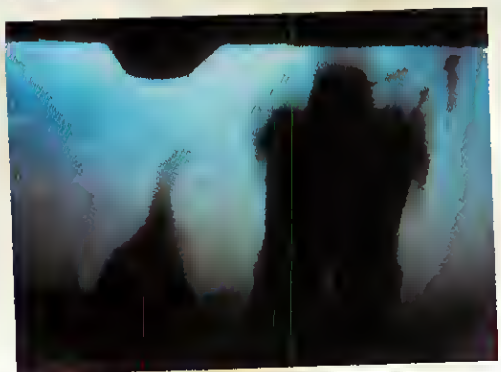


Fig. 2.5
Interact with 100's of characters.

Fig. 2.4
Do not attempt to use small arms

Fig. 2.3
Be a generalist or a specialist



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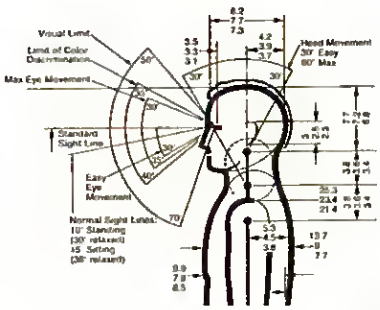

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Fig. 2.2
25 weapon types known.

Fig. 2.1
Travel through New York to Hong Kong

Fig. 2.6 Advanced AI and conversation systems.
These people are real!

III. J.C Denton is a powerful, nano-augmented agent for an anti-terrorist organization. Little is known about this person, but it seems that he is on a mission. [redacted].
He works for UNATCO but what side he is working for is inconclusive at the moment. [redacted]

[redacted] Can he be the one to save this world from complete annihilation?

****URGENT****

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[redacted]

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d. Torso (3)
e. Arms (1)
f. legs (1)

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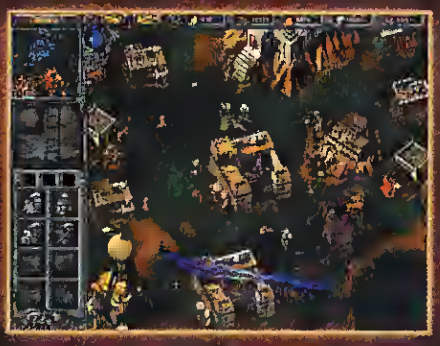

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Losing by Saving

Has computer gaming suffered irreversibly because of the save game? I found myself asking this question recently after spending 25 minutes watching Chris, our managing editor, play his way to a high score in Galaga on our classic arcade game emulator. After his game ended, I wondered why I had been so riveted to his game, and the answer was obvious. I was procrastinating. But this question triggered another thought. Part of the reason I was watching was because at any point during his bid for digital immortality, Chris could have choked and lost everything—the double-fire power, the high score, and the Galaga greatness.

There aren't any save mechanisms in arcade games, which can make for a greater sense of accomplishment.

Aside from sports games and multiplayer contests, this kind of hugely dramatic moment seems harder and harder to come by in PC gaming. I wonder if we're spoiled when it comes to the ability to save our games. Take, for example, one of the hints included with ULTIMA ASCENSION. "Save often," the tip says. "Brittania is a dangerous place." That it is. But by saving every four minutes, don't we nullify some of the thrill and sense of accomplishment of playing the game? It seems that game designers are designing their games around the save-die-reload-repeat process, creating situations where the only way to succeed is to die over and over, reloading the same saved game again and again. Gaming death is cheap and meaningless, rather than a powerful motivator and source of emotional tension.

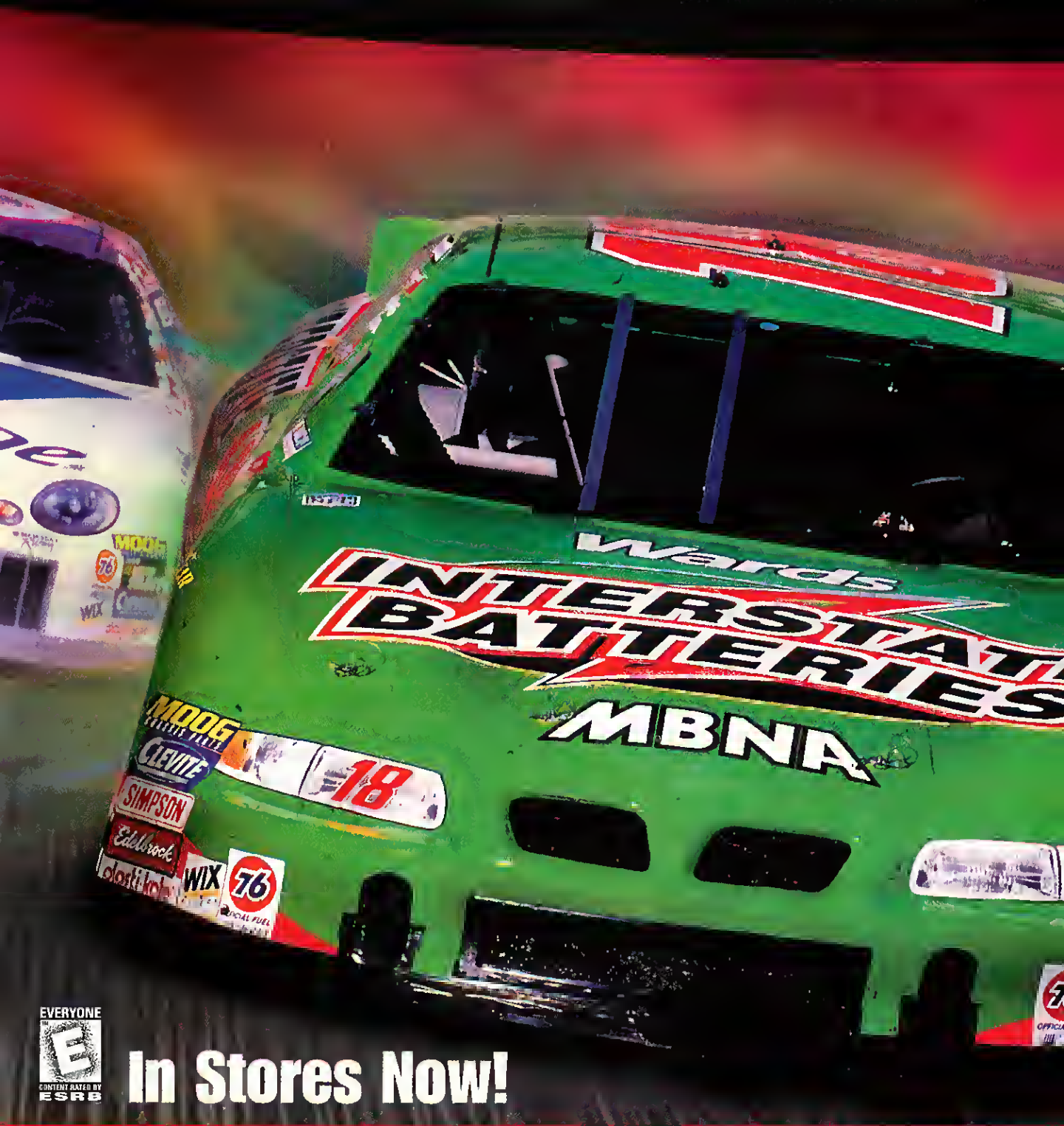
> **Gaming death is cheap and meaningless, rather than a powerful motivator and source of emotional tension.**

Hey, I'll be the first to admit that we'd ding a computer game that didn't allow us to save our game at any point. And while I understand the reasoning—like a book or a movie, you want to be able to leave your game at any point, and return to the exact same place—I've begun to fear that, over the long run, this expectation is hurting gaming. (Yes, there's an easy answer. *Save your game less often.* This is akin to asking the Fox Network to stop airing shows like *When Vegetables Attack.*)

Maybe there's a new solution that sits somewhere between saving and not saving. Like rewarding the gamer who saves less frequently, or punishing the gamer who saves more frequently. Maybe death can be less final and fatal so that when you die in a game, it's emotionally devastating, but not so devastating in terms of gameplay. Or perhaps true gaming death can be made harder to come by, depending on what you've previously accomplished in the game...kind of like those pop-ups that miraculously save your ball from going down the side chutes in pinball.

A climactic, save-the-world-or-lose-everything moment loses some of its tension when it stops being a moment and becomes several moments, punctuated by frequent quicksaving.

George Jones



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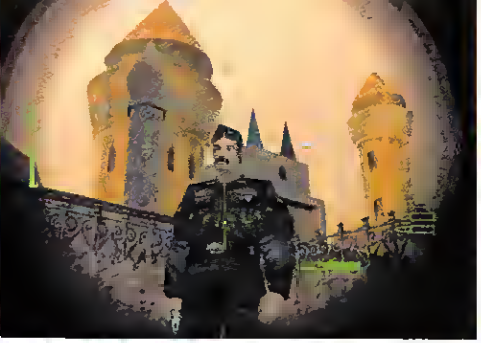
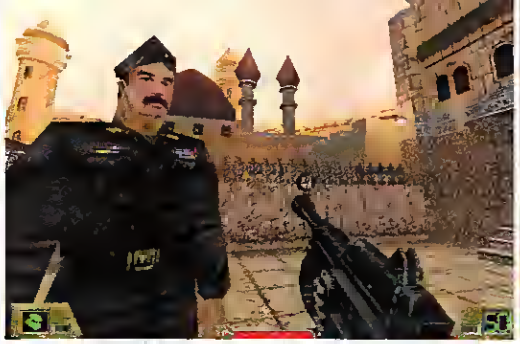

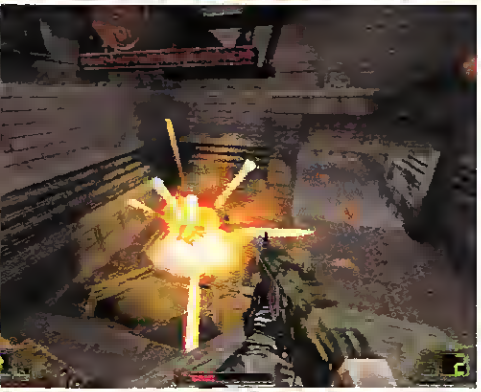

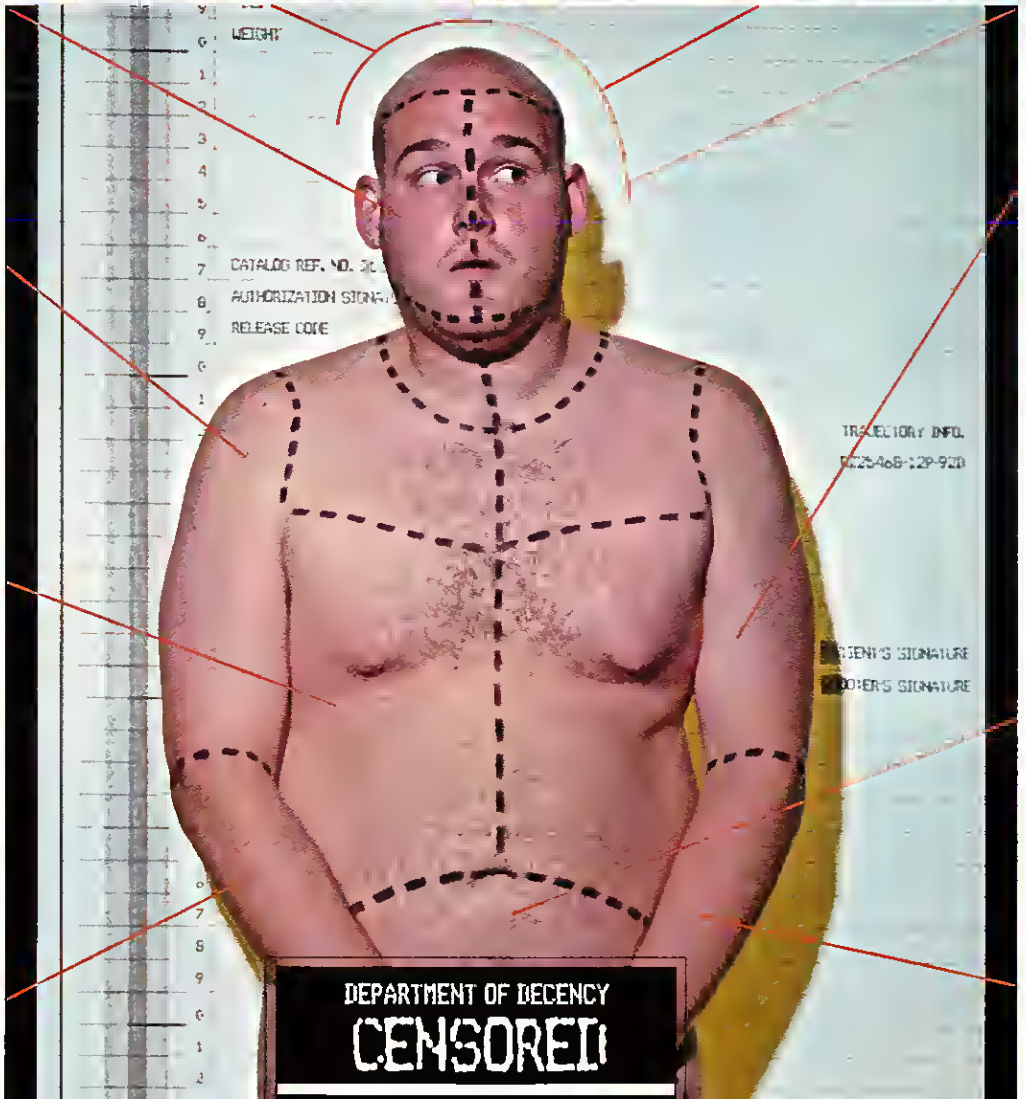
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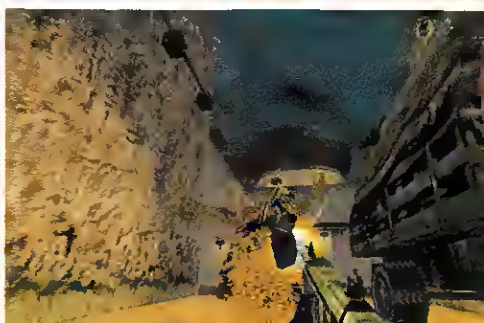

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LETTERS

ULTIMA Aggravation

Thank you for exposing the facts about ULTIMA 9: It does not work, it's not finished, and Origin isn't winning my vote. I'll wait and see in about two or three months if they have finished the game. As I see it, the CD demo was an "alpha," the boxed CD is somewhere close to a "beta," and anyone who paid cash was ripped off.

Most games come out with a few "bugs," and it's darn near impossible to be even 95 percent "bug-free" (just big stuff like crashing), but it seems like some companies just don't learn. Too many teams are held hostage to the publisher, who owns the rights and pays the bills. The result: a too-early release due to "fiscal" concerns. How long will the public take it? I know that I personally am FED UP!

Denny Figuerres

After being sued over ULTIMA ONLINE, we thought Origin would make sure UA ran smoothly. Unfortunately, it does seem unfinished. We had problems just installing it, let alone getting it to run. See our review on page 86.

Confessions of a Pokémon

It was great to see in your January 2000 issue several positive references to Pokémon, the Gameboy game. I know this had to be a hard opinion to go public with, seeing as how the only thing easier to bash these days is Jar-Jar Binks. I'm closer to 40 years of age than to 30, I wear a white shirt and a tie to work, and I am an after-hours Pokemon junkie. I bought a second Gameboy as well as the Red, Blue, and Yellow versions so that I'd always have a trading partner.

You're right—the game is amazingly addictive. Last weekend, I almost bought a Nintendo 64 just to play Pokémon Snap. Thank you for affirming my addiction. I may be a Pokemon loser, but at least I know I'm not alone!

John Coppersmith

Actually, the ranks of Pokemon losers grows ever stronger. In late November, the top two selling PC games were Pokemon Blue and Red. We were even thinking about doing a Pokemon special issue, until the following letter gave us a better idea.

And GOD Gave to Gamers: Girls

I was more than a little shocked and disappointed when I received the latest issue of *CGW* with the Gathering of Developers "Girls and Games" calendar. I am a big fan of computer games and a very big fan of curvaceous females. However, I have no desire to have these two interests combined and forced upon me. I do not recall paying for a subscription to "PlayGamer."

So here's to games and here's to girls, but please let me be the one to decide when and how to combine them.

Spencer Grey

Several people wrote to tell us that they don't like cheesecake served with their gaming fare. We respect that, but we also like your PlayGamer idea, so we're pretty sure this problem will solve itself.

$7/Hour Gameplay

I just finished OPPOSING FORCE. It was truly full of gaming goodness! Lots of fun, great story. But I live in Canada, where the game is between $45 and $55. That much money for seven hours of gameplay, plus some extra multiplayer maps, is a rip-off. Is Sierra in that much financial trouble that they have to soak customers by charging more for this add-on than it costs to buy the actual game?

Catseye

Are We Living Room Bound?

I'm responding to the Read.Me article from the December 1999 issue entitled "X marks the Box," in which the writer previewing the new gaming consoles asks, "Are we really living room bound?" He suggests that since PC monitors have such a higher resolution than TVs, it doesn't seem likely.

But what's going to happen in a few years when HDTV is pumped into our homes on huge 64-inch, 16:9 aspect-ratio screens? Our homes are going to become home theaters. When that happens, will we still be content to sit in front of our desktops when we can be totally immersed?

Brian A. Mercer
Seattle, Washington

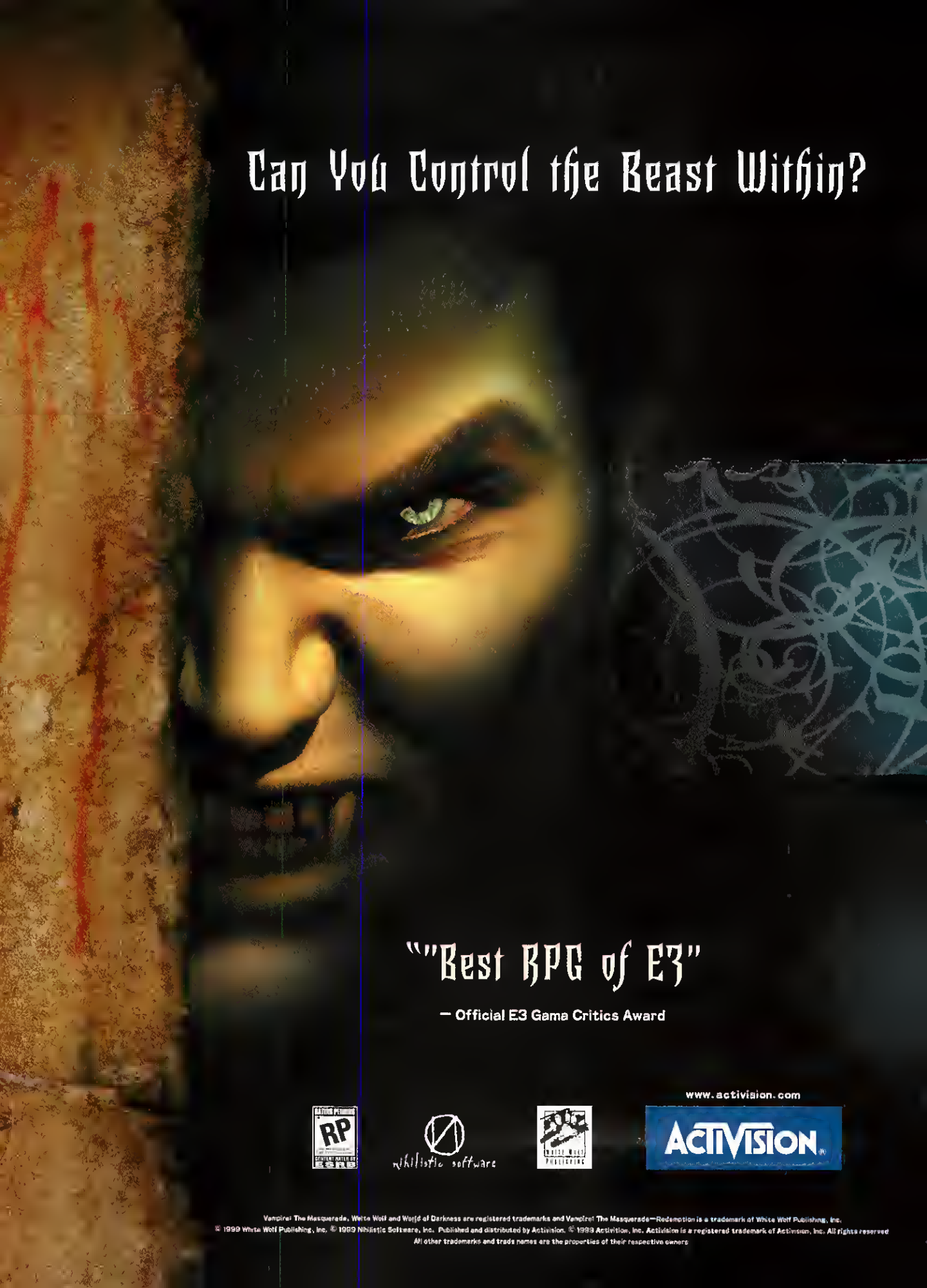
You make a good point, but a lot of games don't lend themselves to playing in the living room. Aside from that, when our significant others and kids are glued to the HDTV screen, we'll be glad to have our PCs back again.

This Month's Soapbox Letter

I really like the issue about AGE OF EMPIRES 2—my personal favorite game series. But I must say that it will probably be the last game that I buy for my PC for a long time. I have a "dream system," a Hewlett Packard Pentium-III 500MHz with 128MB RAM and an Nvidia 32MB video card. This is more than adequate to play any PC game on the market. But I just bought MOTOCROSS MADNESS and it freezes after about 10 minutes of play. MECHWARRIOR III plays great, then the screen craps out with horizontal lines. This has gone on for years, and it hasn't really gotten better. Screw that "did you load the latest drivers" BS. I JUST WANT IT TO WORK. I don't have the time—I barely find time to play the games, much less putz with my system to get these things to work. PCs have to be as foolproof as TVs or...game consoles!

This year will be a Dreamcast Christmas in my house.

Dean Chinni
San Antonio, TX



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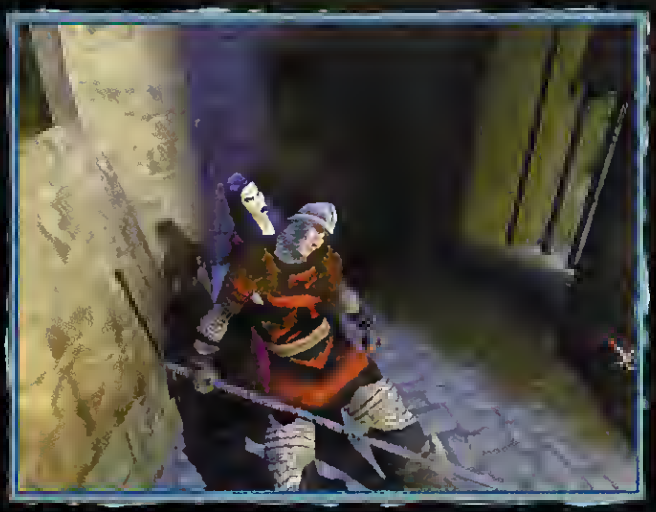
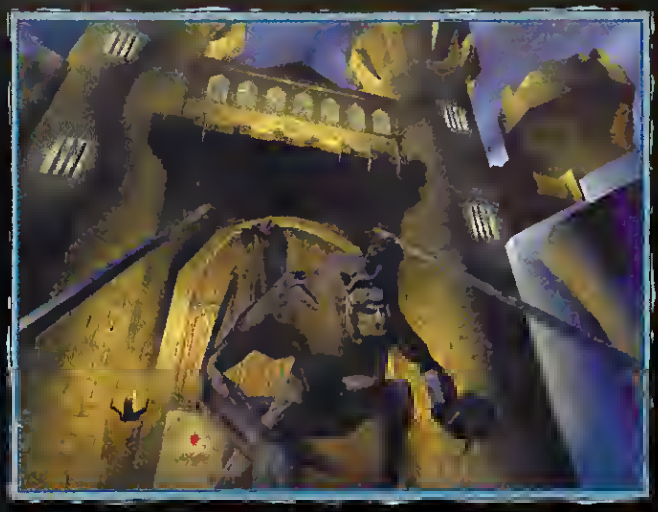


Liva as a vempire, feeding on human pray while struggling to maintain your humanity.



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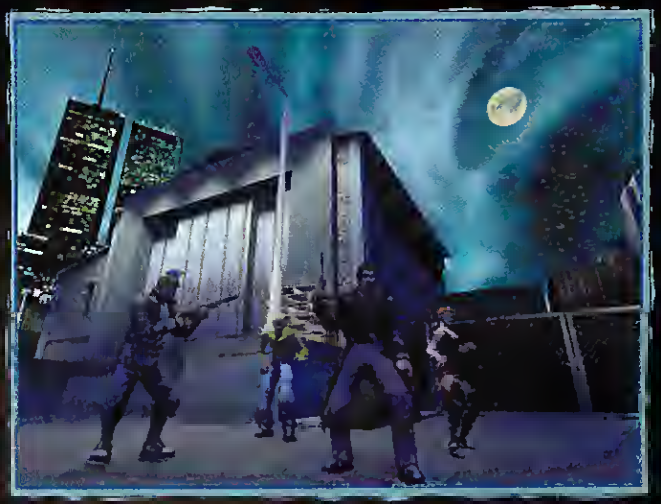

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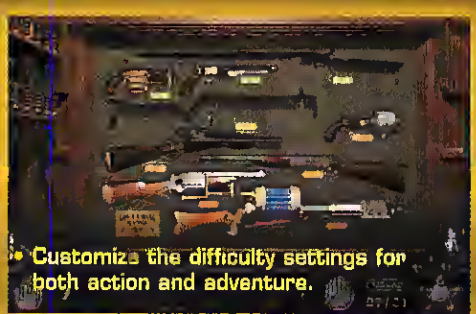

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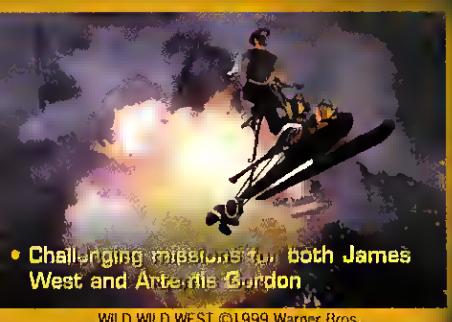

• Challenging missions for both James West and Artemis Gordon

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SOUTH PEAK INTERACTIVE

Read.Me

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

CGW Premier Awa

Action Game of the Year
Battlezone II (Activision)
Quake 3: Arena (id Software)
Rogue Spear (Red Storm)
S.W.A.T. 3 (Sierra)
Unreal Tournament (GT Interactive)

Adventure Game of the Year
Gabriel Knight 3 (Sierra)
Outcast (Infogrames)

Multiplayer Game of the Year
Age Of Empires II: The Age of Kings (Microsoft)
EverQuest (989 Studios)
Quake 3: Arena (id Software)
Team Fortress (Sierra)
Unreal Tournament (GT Interactive)

Puzzle/Classic Game of the Year
Chessmaster 7000 (Mindscape)
Fantastic Journey (Empire)
Mind Gym (Simon & Schuster)
Pandora's Box (Microsoft)

Racing Game of the Year
Midtown Madness (Microsoft)
Need For Speed: High Stakes (EA Sports)
Star Wars Episode One: Racer (LucasArts)
Re-Volt (Acclaim)
Superbike World Championship (EA Sports)

Role-Playing Game of the Year
Asheron's Call (Microsoft)
EverQuest (989 Studios)
Might and Magic VII (3DO)
Planescape: Torment (Interplay)
System Shock 2 (Looking Glass/Electronic Arts)

Sci-Fi Sim of the Year
Freespace 2 (Interplay)
Heavy Gear II (Activision)
Mechwarrior 3 (Microprose/Hasbro)
X-Wing Alliance (LucasArts)

At this writing, it is 17 days until the end of the millennium. If the world actually ends, and no one but a few radioactive bugs end up reading this, then we can at least take solace in the fact that computer gaming went out not with a whimper, but with a bang. More great games were released in 1999 than in any year in recent memory, making it an embarrassment of riches for gamers, and a real pain-in-the-neck for your humble *CGW* editors, who are faced with the unenviable task of having to pick and choose the year's best.

This was a year in which no single game dominated the world like HALF-LIFE did in 1998, but which nevertheless saw more original and exciting titles than any normal person who actually talks to other humans would ever have time to play. In virtually every genre (with the notable exception of the moribund Adventure genre), we had more candidates than we had room for. If you don't see your favorite game listed below, chances are it probably just missed the cut. Or else you have really bad taste. That was a joke.

This was also a year of great surprises. Games that we had not much hope for at all—OUTCAST, FREESPACE 2, even UNREAL TOURNAMENT—turned out to be awesome experiences. Each are strong contenders in their categories, and are easily among the best games of the year. On the other hand, some high-profile games that we were really anticipating turned out to be utter bombs—PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D and INTERSTATE 82 come to mind. We were holding a spot in the RPG-of-the-Year category for ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION until the last minute, but the boxed release was so buggy that we immediately disqualified it (see our review in this issue). No game that ships in this state deserves any kind of award—except the negative kind.

Finally, this was a year in which multiplayer gaming really came into its own. Many of the candidates here in different categories are either multiplayer only, or emphasize multiplayer over the single-player experience. While we will always be looking for good single-player games, the multiplayer trend is still very excit-

Sim of the Year
Apache Havoc (Empire)
Flight Unlimited 3 (Looking Glass)
Jane's F/A-18 (Electronic Arts)
Jane's USAF (Electronic Arts)
MiG Alley (Empire)

Strategy Game of the Year
Age Of Empires II: The Age Of Kings (Microsoft)
Alpha Centauri (Firaxis)
Dungeon Keeper II (Bullfrog/EA)
Homeworld (Sierra)
Jagged Alliance 2 (Sir-Tech Canada/TalonSoft)

Sports Game of the Year
High Heat 2000 (3DO)
Jack Nicklaus 6: Golden Bear Challenge (Activision)
Madden Football 2000 (EA Sports)
NBA Live 2000 (EA Sports)
NFL Fever 2000 (Microsoft)

Wargame of the Year
Battle of Britain (TalonSoft)
Close Combat IV: Battle of the Bulge (SSI)
The Operational Art of War Volume II: 1956-2000 (TalonSoft)
Panzer General 3D Assault (SSI)
Sid Meier's Antietam! (Firaxis)

rd Nominees

ing, especially as the technology for implementing it gets better and faster. In our minds, anything that gets gamers to interact with something other than their keyboard and joystick is a good thing.

What was the Game of the Year? HOMEWORLD? ALPHA CENTAURI? SYSTEM SHOCK 2? AGE OF EMPIRES II? Will the *CGW* editors let their year-long obsession with HIGH HEAT 2000 carry over into the big category itself? Will the 11th-hour landing of the stunning UNREAL TOURNAMENT carry it to an upset victory? Be here in 30 days for the answer to this and other questions, as *Computer Gaming World* hands out its coveted Premier Awards for 1999. CGW

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

February 1985

Things we don't miss about the old days: the graphics, copy-protection, floppy disks. The thing we miss the most: the variety of games available. Since games were still largely labors of love—and didn't cost a million bucks to build—designers took lots of risks, resulting in an amazing variety of titles on obscure subjects. Take RAM!, "a realistic game of ship-to-ship combat in the Peloponnesian War," for instance. Or CAVEMAN, an adventure game in which you played a Neanderthal. There was SQUIRE, the game of financial planning, and the thrilling, chilling TRAIN DISPATCHER. Not all the games were for everyone, but there was a game for everyone.

10

February 1990

CD-ROM is what everyone was talking at 1989 Winter Consumer Electronics Show. There were no CD-ROM games yet, but everyone had big plans for the technology. Unfortunately, most of those plans were pretty bad. Cinemaware planned to shoot film footage for a CD-ROM version of IT CAME FROM THE DESERT that would supposedly create 200 hours of play (they soon went belly-up). Then there were the interactive soap operas, music videos, movies.... It was a brave new "multimedia" world.

5

February 1995

It would take 5 years of disasters for the wrong-headed thinking about CD-ROMs to filter out. The last gasp of the interactive movie came 5 years ago in two horrible failures: one was THE VORTEX, a cloying New-Age i-movie created by a guy who billed himself as the "Stephen Spielberg of multimedia" (and where is he now?). Then there was JOHNNY MNEMONIC, an experimental game/movie that was damn near unplayable. The lesson: while you can have games with cinematic qualities, you can't make a game out of cinema.

Reality Check

The big winner this month: HOMEWORLD, an across-the-board home run with every gaming publication. The big loser: PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D, a case study in how *not* to make a sequel. Here's our roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and websites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system.

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CGM (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
C&C: Tiberian Sun	4	73%	4	6	7.9	7
Disciples: Sacred Lands	1.5	89%	3.5	*	8.3	7
Fly!	3.5	80%	3	*	7.9	4
Force 21	1.5	90%	2	6	6.7	7
Homeworld	4.5	93%	4.5	9	8.9	9
NHL 2000	3.5	89%	3	8	9.0	9
Panzer General 3D	3.5	80%	4	*	7.9	5
Prince Of Persia 3D	3.5	70%	3	3	6.0	3
Rogue Spear	4.5	90%	5	8	8.0	9
Seven Kingdoms II	3.5	90%	4	8	9.1	8

*** Indicates game has not been rated ● red = editor's choice game**

Hasbro Slashes Workforce, Kills FALCON and Other Games

Bad Day at Microprose

Hasbro fired 130 software developers and shut down two of its four MicroProse studios in December as part of a massive worldwide layoff that included 2,200 employees.

By closing its Chapel Hill, NC, and Alameda, CA, studios, Hasbro terminated X-COM GENESIS, MASTER OF MAGIC II, and add-ons to FALCON 4.0. In a press release announcing the closures, Hasbro asserts that the brands and traditions that have made MicroProse an industry legend—minus hardcore flight simulations, a MicroProse staple since the company's inception—will continue at the Hunt Valley, MD, studio. The projects in development there, GUNSHIP III and X-COM ALLIANCE and their respective teams, were unaffected by the layoffs. Hasbro also said it will publish CIVILIZATION III and M1 TANK PLATOON III under the MicroProse brand.

The layoffs hit the teams in Chapel Hill, NC, particularly hard. Some of the employees were recent hires who had "uprooted their lives and moved 2,000 miles in the last month just to get a pink slip two weeks before Christmas," said a member of the X-COM team.

"The worst thing for me," said another X-COM member, "is that we don't know why. We had a killer game that looked great and was right on schedule. If we sucked, I'd understand it. But we did everything right. I just don't get it."

Hasbro's cutbacks follow similar moves at Sierra and Interplay, where several hundred developers have been let go and numerous games cancelled. While softer sales in the PC market are often blamed, flight sims have been especially hard hit. These latest cutbacks mark the end of MicroProse's high-end flight sim line, which was responsible for such famous games as F-15 STRIKE EAGLE, F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER, and FALCON—the latter two being *CGW* Hall of Fame winners.

At the Alameda offices where the FALCON team worked, one artist found his dismissal sadly ironic. "One thing we heard repeatedly over the last year was that Hasbro was about 'making the world smile.' We're not smiling much around here."

Sierra President Dave Grenewetzki Discusses Changes, Cancelled Games

Sierra Talks Back

Sierra On-Line's late-September announcement of major organizational changes, layoffs, and the cancellation of BABYLON 5 and a few other games created a vocal wave of criticism from gamers and the gaming press—not all of it accurate, according to Sierra. We sat down with Sierra president Dave Grenewetzki and let him tell his side of the story.

Grenewetski corrected us in our report last month that Dynamix had shut down. Although there were numerous layoffs, the office is still open, and the Dynamix name—at this point—still exists as a brand. The teams still in operation include those working on the TRIBES franchise, and the 3D ULTRA titles.

As far as the BABYLON 5 cancellation goes, Grenewetzki had this to say: "We know people had their hearts set on this and we did too. But this game was in development for so long, and we were considerably farther out than [the development team] wanted to believe. During all the development time the TV show went off the air, and we were still throwing a lot of money at it. We just didn't see any way to get to the other end of this—to produce a game good enough to satisfy those waiting for it, and to make back what we spent on it."

Grenewetzki says the future is still bright for MIDDLE EARTH and other Tolkein games. "We are not getting out of the Tolkein business," he said. "We've done a 'reset' on the design of MIDDLE EARTH. The original team just wasn't taking us where we wanted to go. We have one of the seriously cool worldwide licenses here and we want to make sure we do the right thing."
–*Jeff Green*

The GOOD...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Well whaddya know. *CGW* was underwhelmed at best by UNREAL, which seemed more like a pretty engine than an actual game. But UNREAL TOURNAMENT is nothing less than amazing, with some of the best, most creative deathmatch levels we've ever played. *CGW* has been a "QUAKE house" for years—it's been the default deathmatch game from the first release on. Not anymore. All hail UNREAL TOURNAMENT—the New King of first-person deathmatching.

the BAD...

RED STORM'S CARAMEL CORN It arrived every Christmas. It looks horrible. Those who don't know what it is don't even want to look at it, let alone eat it. But the big vat of extra-sweet, chocolate-coated caramel popcorn that Red Storm sends is possibly the most delicious food ever created by man or beast. It resides in "The Bad" this month, because we are all sick from eating too much. And it was gone in two days. Next year, Red Storm, we want two vats.

and the UGLY...

ULTIMA IX Here we go again. Apparently, the multimillion-dollar class-action lawsuit filed by angry consumers for the premature release of ULTIMA ONLINE was not enough incentive for Origin to do the right thing this time. The right thing? That would be to finish their game before selling it to the public. ULTIMA IX's horrid performance and massive bug list is an embarrassment to the industry, and a blight on the name of this great series. All involved should be ashamed.

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

StealthMode

By William Jefferson Sneaky

Jar Jar, say hello to my boomstick. It's not enough that they've taken over our computers with elves and orcs, and caused us to lose jobs and families to our online EVERQUEST addictions. Now **Verant Interactive** is rumored to be making an official *Star Wars* massively-multiplayer game. It's frightening to think how popular this game could be. Verant has also opened a second development studio in St. Louis to go along with their headquarters in San Diego.

Not to let Verant have all the fun, **Hasbro Interactive** and their new acquisition **Wizards of the Coast** are planning a massively-multiplayer *Dungeons & Dragons* game. Requests for proposals have gone out to various developers and are being sorted through by Hasbro Interactive. A persistent-world *D&D* game could hit the sales chart with a magic missile. How the recent massive layoffs at Hasbro affect this plan is not for Sneaky to say, however.

They've been working on the railroad, so now it's time for a tropical vacation for **Poptop**, makers of the well-received RAILROAD TYCOON 2. Sneaky was picking up his usual monthly shipment of black-market Havanas when a voice whispered out of the shadows. "Senor Sneaky, you leesten now. You know Poptop, no?" I nodded, all ears. "Their next game weel be called Tropica." This mysterious figure went on to explain that the game will put players in charge of a banana republic country as a sort of Fidel Castro-like leader. The game will be a mix of building and tongue-in-cheek politics. "But what about a RAILROAD TYCOON 3?" I asked. "Maybe... maybe," the stranger said and disappeared.

Buried in **Eidos'** third-quarter financial statement was a mention that, yes indeedy, they had acquired 51% of **Ion Storm**.

Impressions is cancelling the Mac port of PHARAOH. They're not happy with the support that Apple is providing for games, and the market isn't exactly huge, either. The more things change...

Sneaky understands that in Europe the perception of the U.S. is formed by *Baywatch* and *Miami Vice* re-runs. Europeans think we strap on a glock and slip a couple combat knives into our boots, just to take out the garbage. Still, did the Finnish level-designers of MAX PAYNE really need a couple of armed bodyguards just to check out some abandoned buildings on their trip to New York? In their own words, they had "...some close encounters with the natives, curious of the six strangers visiting their hoods. Thanks to our security personnel, we managed to get out of there alive."

MAX PAYNE would be proud of you, boys. Sneaky hopes you were served milk and cookies on your flight back to Finland.

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

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

	Americee McGee's Alice Rogue/EA	Q4 00
	Allegience Microsoft	Q2 00
	Anachroeox Ion Storm/Eidos	Q2 00
NEW	Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Bioware/Interplay	Q3 00
	Battle Isle IV Blue Byte	Q3 00
	Black & White EA	Q2 00
	Comenche/Rokum Empire	Q2 00
	Codeeeme: Eagle TalonSoft	Q1 00
	Coequest: Frontier Wars Digital Aevil/Microsoft	Q2 00
	Crimson Skies Zipper/Microsoft	Q2 00
	Oerk Reign 2 Activisioe	Q1 00
	Oeus Ex Ion Storm	Q2 00
	Oiablo II Blizzard	Q1 00
	Duke Hukem Forever 3O Realms	Q2 00
NEW	Evil Oead: Ashes 2 Ashes THQ	Q3 00
	F/A-18E SuperHornet Interplay	Q4 99
	Felony Pursuit THQ	Q2 00
CHANGE	Reel Feetasy VIII SquareEA	Q1 00
	Force Commender LucasArts	Q1 00
	Freeloecer Digital Anvil/Microsoft	Q4 00
	Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Q1 00
	Good & Evil Cavedeg/GT	Q3 00
	Ground Coetrol Sierra	Q1 00
	Halo Buegie	Q4 00
	Herpoon 4 SSt	Q2 00
	Heevy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 G.O.D.	Q2 00
	Hidden & Oengerous: Oevil's Bridge TaloeSoft	Q1 00
	Righ Heat 2001 3DO	Q2 00
	Joint Strike Fighter Hevalogic	Q1 00
	Loose Coneon Microsoft	Q2 00
	Motorcross Medeess 2 Microsoft	Q1 00
	Need for Speed: Motor City Electroeic Arts	Q4 00
	Neverwieter Nights Interplay	Q4 00
	Nox Westwood	Q1 00
	Oni Bungie	Q1 00
	Pool Of Redieece II SSI	Q4 00
	Reech for the Stars SSG/SSI	Q1 00
	Rising Sue TalonSoft	Q1 00
CHANGE	Risk II Hasbro	Q1 00
	Roch GT Interective	Q3 00
	Saeity Monolith	Q4 99
	Settlers IV Blue Byte	Q4 00
	Shadow Wotch Red Storm Entertoinmoet	Q1 00
	Shogue: Totel Wer EA	Q1 00
	Sid Meier's Civilization III Firaxis/MicroProse	Q4 00
	Silent Hueter II SSt	Q1 00
	SimMors Maxis	Q3 00
	Soldier of Fortuee Raven/Activisien	Q1 00
	Soverelge Verent/Soey Onilee Entertaiement	Q4 00
	Starteecer Oigitel Anvil/Microsoft	Q1 00
	Star Trek Armede Activision	Q1 00
	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Q2 00
	Summoner Volition/THQ	Q3 00
	Tachyoe: The Fringe Novalogic	Q1 00
	Team Fortress 2 Valve/Sierra	Q2 00
	The Sims Maxis	Q1 00
	Thief 2: The Meiel Age Looking Glass/Eidos	Q2 00
	Tribes 2 Sierra	Q2 00
	Vampire: The Masquerade Nihilistic/Activision	Q1 00
	WarCraft III Blizzard	Q4 00
	Warlords: Battlecry SSG/SSt	Q1 00
	Werewolf Dreamforge/ASC Games	Q1 00

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CGW PROFILE

The Creator of the ULTIMA Series Talks About His "X" Project

Richard Garriott

1. What's been the biggest change in the game industry since you started?
Richard Garriott: The amount of hard work it takes to make a game versus the financial return. When I published the ULTIMA prequel AKALABETH in 1980, I worked for a few weeks to create a couple thousand lines of BASIC, which generated a simple 3D dungeon game. That game cost me effectively nothing to create and sold about 30,000 copies on the Apple II, for which I received about $5 per copy. If you do the math, $150,000 is not a bad return for a hundred hours of work by a high school kid.

2. Online only? Are you crazy?!?
RG: At first, I thought so too. One great aspect of single-player games not yet found in online games is that each player has the ability to play the lead role in the story. You get to see each and every feature as if it was created for you and only you, oblivious to the fact that every other player is thinking the same thing. In online games, you can travel with all your friends; you can literally live in a constantly changing world far richer in many ways due to the thousands of other real people, than one we could create artificially. However, in online games, everyone cannot play the lead role. Your life is therefore often less "charmed," which is a basic attraction of fantasy.

So...I believe I have the answer. I believe I have a plan for a bold new type of online game. A game which embraces the best aspects of single-player games, yet also shares these experiences with new and future friends across the globe. My pet name for this new game is the roman numeral "X." Whatever we call this game, it is the spiritual successor of ULTIMA; thus, having just released ULTIMA IX, I call it X.

3. Now that ASCENSION is wrapping up the ULTIMA series, how do you feel embarking on a new game like "X"?
RG: Honestly, I am really quite sad that I can't take time to do everything I have an interest in doing. I am far from done with my interest in the series. Yet, I also have been waiting years to do something new, to create a new world and fiction. Still though, for me the new game will be an Ultima, in that it will be a detailed, immersive, virtual world with a compelling reason to be there. It will still be an interactive sandbox with lots of things to touch and play with. It will still have a philosophical basis underpinning the society within it.

Honestly, I am also rather scared. I am honored that Electronic Arts and Origin feel that I am one of the best bets they can make in creating a big new property, which is a financial holy grail in gaming. And though I have strong confidence in my skills and dedication to this craft, I have proven that I can do this only once...20 years ago...when there was no competition.

As I have gotten deeper into the new design recently, my confidence has grown that I am onto something really good. With the new game, I am trying to showcase the far future of games, to really go out on a limb and try to grab some aspects of what games might be like 20-50 years from now. Which means this game will be hard to make—another aspect of my work which can often get my teams into trouble. Wish me luck!

4. "X" is still in the very early stages, obviously. Where do you get your ideas for it?
RG: I believe there are always way too many good ideas within easy reach. But, a good individual idea is far from being a complete great game. How you sort through potential ideas and fill in around initial key concepts requires a great deal of work and insight. When I am in the early stages of a game, as I am now with "X," I document and study the core concepts I am considering. For example, I am reading a great deal of Buddhism right now, as there is a strong corollary with Buddhism and the philosophy I am considering for "X."

I have retold the broad game design to many of the employees at Origin, five at a time, over five-hour dinners in private rooms of my favorite restaurants. I find that in retelling the design over and over again, while watching the body language and listening to their feedback, it helps me promote as well as subdue design precepts. Plus, quite frankly, most of the best new ideas come from them! Thus, I get to gather the best ideas from throughout the company. It's a huge time sink, and very repetitious for me, but it works well to slowly craft a gem from raw ideas.

5. What kind of game do you want to play that hasn't been made yet?
RG: I want to plug into the ultimate virtual reality, such as in the movie Total Recall. I want the virtual world to be indiscernible from reality. I hope I help make such a game in the future. *—Interview by Mark Asher*

Tchotchke of the Month

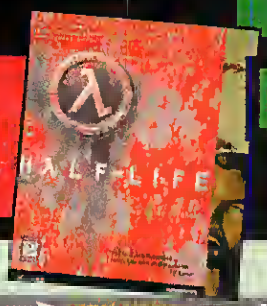
Tchotch·ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

It's a history-making day here at Tchotchke of the Month. For the first time ever, we have been forced to award a tie. Award #1 goes to this charming gardan gnome, given to us by CDV Software, a Garman game company who wanted us to have something...Germen...no matter how unrelated to their WWII strategy game. (Hey, how about a bratwurst next time?) Award #2 goes to this "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" candy bar, with Regis Philbin's handsome face adorning a million dollar bill, cerefully worded with a "this is not legel tender" message, in case there was any confusion. A Garman garden gnoma or Regis Philbin? Like you could decide!

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

Top 40

1 Half-Life Havas Interactive 5 stars



Each month we take a new poll of your favorite games, and each month we're amazed at the consistency of the results. The terrible trio of HALF-LIFE, STARCRAFT, and BALDUR'S GATE continue their reign, and apart from AGE OF EMPIRES II—which debuted at number 4—the rest of the Top 10 are stalwart favorites. After that, the raft of new releases is starting to take hold, including ROGUE SPEAR, OPPOSING FORCE and UNREAL TOURNAMENT.

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
2	2	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
3	4	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
NEW	4	-	**Age of Empires II** Microsoft	5
5	4	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
6	6	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
7	5	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
8	10	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
9	7	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
10	9	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
NEW	11	-	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
12	11	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
13	8	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
14	12	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
15	13	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
NEW	16	-	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
17	16	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
18	25	**Caesar III** Havas Interactive	4.5
19	18	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
NEW	20	-	**Unreal Tournament** Interactive	5
21	24	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
22	21	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
NEW	23	-	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
24	20	**EverQuest** Sony	4
25	22	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
26	23	**Need for Speed 4** Electronic Arts	5
27	26	**Myth 2** Bungie	4.5
28	27	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
29	17	**FIFA 99** Electronic Arts	4.5
NEW	30	-	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
31	40	**Darkstone** Gathering of Developers	3.5
NEW	32	-	**Delta Force 2** NovaLogic	2
33	30	**Battlezone** Activision	5
NEW	34	-	**Gabriel Knight 3** Havas Interactive	-
35	36	**Drakan** Psygnosis	4
36	15	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
37	28	**Might and Magic VII** 3DO	4.5
NEW	38	-	**Pharaoh** Havas Interactive	4
NEW	39	-	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
40	34	**Railroad Tycoon II** Gathering Of Developers	4.5

Top Action Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
NEW	3	-	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
4	3	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
NEW	5	-	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	2	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
3	4	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
4	3	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
5	5	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5

Top Simulations Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
2	3	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
3	1	**Freespace: Silent Threat** Interplay	3
4	5	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
5	4	**Heavy Gear II** Activision	4.5

Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
NEW	1	-	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
2	2	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
3	1	**FIFA 99** EA Sports	4.5
4	3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
5	4	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
NEW	2	-	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	2	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
4	3	**Heroes Of Might And Magic III** 3DO	4.5
5	4	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5

WANNA VOTE?

You can't gripe about the Top 40 if you don't vote. Log on to www.gamespot.com and scroll down to the CGW Top 40 Poll.

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PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

GAMEWORTHY cnet

GAMERS' CHOICE PCGame REVIEW

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD ★★★★½

GAMING EDITORS' CHOICE

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Be afraid of what it hides.

Just beyond the edge of death is your brand new life

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

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

Now there's one thing you know for certain about Omikron.

Death is no escape.

- Assume the role of up to 40 different characters through "virtual reincarnation."
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Star Trek

Two Trek Games That Might Not Be Drek Games? Set Our Phasers on "Stunned"

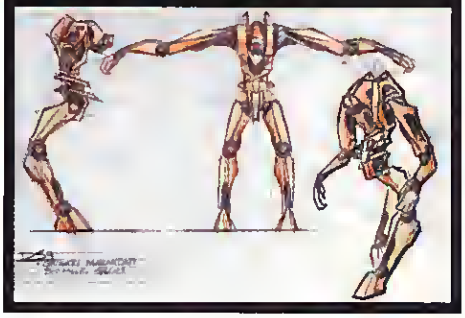
By Tom Price

Deep Space 9: The Fallen & Voyager: Elite Force

I have a confession to make: I don't like Star Trek. Some of the movies were cool, but the TV shows based on the license have always been an insomnia cure for me.

Star Trek has never contained enough action to keep me interested. I mean really, what's with this "set phasers to stun" crap? Couple that with the fact that very few of the Star Trek-licensed computer games have been worth playing, and you might wonder why they're letting me preview these two action-oriented Trek games. Here's why: STAR TREK DEEP SPACE 9: THE FALLEN and STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE are the first Star Trek games I've ever been excited to play. Very excited to play. Built upon the UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III: ARENA engines respectively, THE FALLEN and ELITE FORCE could be the long-awaited "great" Trek games that will make trekophobe-gamers like me understand what the hoo-ha is all about.

MIDNIGHT MARAUDER The Grigari Marauder is one of the races created in-house by the Collective team that will be making its way into the official Star Trek canon.



Star Trek Deep Space Nine: The Fallen

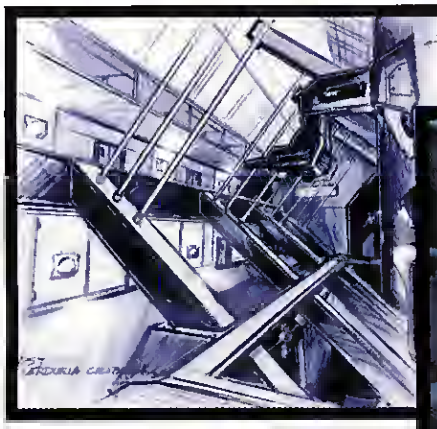
The capsule description of STAR TREK DEEP SPACE NINE: THE FALLEN—third-person, action/adventure, Star Trek universe—could make the toughest game editor's skin crawl. But "Trek Raider" this is not. The Collective—a game developer known more for their PlayStation titles—is utilizing UNREAL TOURNAMENT's 3D engine to recreate the interiors of Deep Space 9, as well as various starships and diverse alien worlds. With the capabilities of the UT engine, The Collective has created a dark and moody Star Trek game that's more intriguing than the cold, antiseptic feel of the show's sets.

The plot, based on the first part of a multi-part DS9 storyline, the Millennium Saga, will intertwine threads between the characters Sisko, Kira, and Worf. You'll be searching for three Red Orbs: ancient relics with amazing powers that various factions inside (and outside) the Federation would like to get their hands on. Gameplay for each character will be based on their TV personas. Playing as Worf will involve a lot of fighting; Kira uses stealth and cunning; and Sisko is a balance between the two. Each character will follow a separate path through each level, occasionally running across the other characters or working cooperatively with them. So in one mission, you might have Sisko and Worf stealing an entrance code that Kira will then use to sneak into a hostile base.

GENRE: Action/Adventure • **RELEASE DATE:** Spring, 00
PUBLISHER: Simon & Schuster Interactive
DEVELOPER: The Collective
CONTACT: www.collectivestudios.com

Despite the third-person perspective, the game will be played very much like a first-person shooter, with mouselook controlling an aiming reticule that floats in front

of the character, a la HERETIC II. The most immediate concern I had was for the camera, due to the notoriously buggy camera engines of third-person titles. But the programmers at The Collective seem to have worked out a lot of the kinks. In the build we saw, the camera always stayed tightly on the character, allowing for a complete view of enemies and obstacles. When backed up against a wall, the character model simply goes transparent. Still, making the control comfortable and consistent throughout the game is probably the biggest task facing the developers.



STONEY LONESOME Many of the environments – like this Jem'Hadar internment camp – are based upon actual set designs from the show.

The designers are maintaining a strict adherence to the Star Trek canon throughout THE FALLEN. Not only are large areas of the space station DS9 recreated in exact detail, but so is the entire interior of the USS Defiant, as well as some altogether new worlds. There are over 30 environments in all. The designers took a lot of inspiration from the show, and even tried to backwards-engineer some buildings.

Various races will take roles in THE FALLEN, including the Bajorans, Cardassians, Jem'Hadar, and more. The game designers have taken some license with lower forms of life, and created a slew of beasties and critters to populate the outdoor areas. They've even created a new race that has been officially adopted into the Star Trek universe: the Grigari, a race of biomechanical killbots.

STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE
GENRE: Action • **RELEASE DATE:** Spring, 00
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
CONTACT: www.ravensoft.com/eliteforce/

Overall, the game is shaping up to be quite intriguing. The use of the UNREAL engine seems to be ideal, considering how beautiful (and yet dark and disturbing) most of the environments are. Action looks to be pretty fast and furious, again thanks to the UT engine, but the development of a strong story and the interesting way it's being presented is what's got us itching to play.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

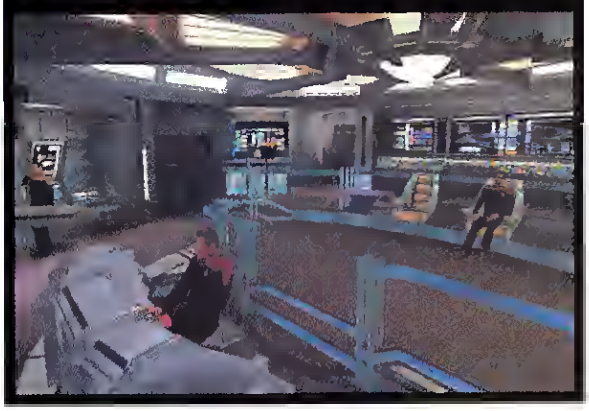
ELITE FORCE is being developed with the QUAKE III: ARENA engine, so the level of fast-paced shoot-em-up action should be more intense than anything ever seen on the Voyager show. Raven software knows a few things about first-person shooters, being the masterminds behind such games as SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and HEXEN. Their straightforward use of the QIII engine makes sense—not just because it's one of the best looking engines out there, but because of its ability to create curved surfaces. The 3D interiors of the Voyager and other starships look dead-on like the TV show's sets, making it easier for gamers and trekkers alike to suspend their belief.

Over the 30 levels and 8 missions of ELITE FORCE, you'll play as Alexander Monroe, who's not your typically doomed red-shirt ensign. He's a member of Elite Force, Voyager's answer to a SWAT team, who will be called upon to lead away teams on dangerous missions off and on the ship. The game opens with Voyager under attack, which results in being transported into a strange segment of space cluttered with derelict ships. As a member of Elite Force, you'll be charged with exploring some of these ships in search of parts needed to repair Voyager's warp core, as well as defending your ship against hostile aliens, privateers, and other unpleasant sorts.

The starship interiors look really fantastic, due in great part to QUAKE III's ability to render curved surfaces. In fact, Elite Force uses the engine so well that the game would seem more like an elaborate mod, if it wasn't for the innovative AI being developed by Raven. Your squad won't be capable of following complex commands, but in a firefight they'll cover each other, take cover behind objects, and fall back when overwhelmed. Some aliens will also behave in unique ways. The Borg will generally ignore intruders on their ship until provoked, and will also use their adaptive technology to render your weapons useless.

Of course, it wouldn't be a first-person shooter without multiplayer. The justification for being able to frag Janeway or Seven of Nine in a fight to the death is that it is taking place on the ship's holodeck. Some more obscure multiplayer settings—like Sherlock Holmes' London and the Wild West—might be included among the 30+ maps.

If the final versions of these titles are as good as they appear to be shaping up, they could really change attitudes about Star Trek games. Trekkers might start playing more games and gamers might start watching more Trek Just what America needs...more geeks. CGW



A BRIDGE TOO FAR The curved surfaces that the QUAKE III engine is capable of producing help make some of the most realistic-looking Star Fleet interiors ever seen in a computer game. The developers spent a lot of time on the actual set of Voyager to get the environments right.

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Thief 2: The Metal Age

THIEF 2: THE METAL AGE
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q1 '00
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
DEVELOPER: Looking Glass Studios

Looking Glass' First-Person-Sneaker Gets More Down-to-Earth

by Thierry Nguyen

Whereas most first-person shooters encourage you to indulge in murder, one of last year's best action games promoted a different and more interesting vice: theft. THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT was the most original first-person-perspective game last year, and developer Looking Glass is upping the ante with THIEF 2: THE METAL AGE, an even more in-depth crash course on 19th Century burglary.

Quite a bit has changed since the ending of THIEF. According to Steve Pearsall, project director for THIEF 2, "the story unfolds with the Pagans (The Trickster's followers) in a much weakened state. The Hammerites have undergone a schism, and so there are now two sects: The Hammerites and The Mechanists. Besides those main factions, there are also now a variety of Guilds vying for control in the city."

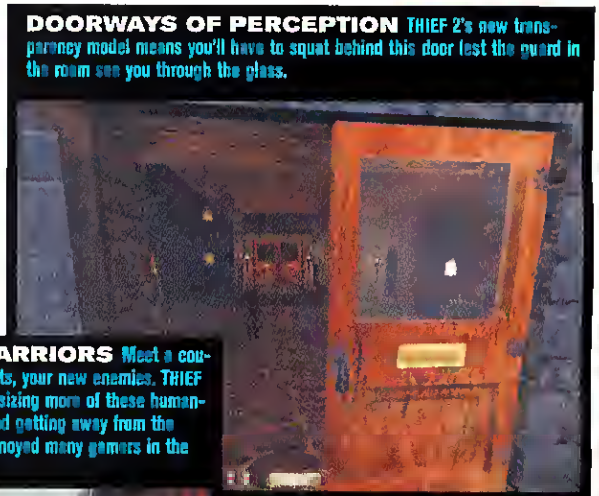
THIEF was focused on the hidden war between the Hammerites and the Pagans, so with the Pagans effectively out of the equation, there's a more personal tone. THIEF 2 starts with Garrett just wanting to be left alone plying his trade, but increasing interference from the city's sheriff makes him realize the sheriff is out to get him. Garrett then becomes more of an investigator, trying to find out why the sheriff is hassling him so much.

Straying from the supernatural conflict that irritated quite a few gamers before, THIEF 2 is more grounded in reality. One of the goals for THIEF 2 was to make it "thiefier," focusing more missions on thief-type activities. Expect more mansion raids as well as missions involving framing people, a bank heist, and a blackmail mission where Garrett must break into a well-guarded house, find the bedroom, confront his target with the blackmail materials, get paid, and then get out alive.

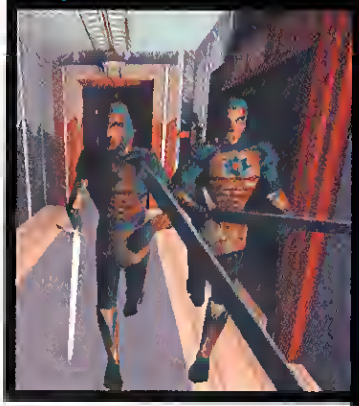
While THIEF's zombies won't totally be extinct (there's one graveyard mission), enemies will be more believable, with a lot more humans and fewer monsters. 'The Metal Age' subtitle refers to some technological advancements made in the society, so you'll see some interesting new non-human opponents based on those. The game uses a modified version of the SYSTEM SHOCK 2 engine, and one of the placeholder enemies was that game's Protocol Droid—perhaps a model for a steam-driven enemy automaton? At any rate, there will now be mages firing fireballs or webs, and those cursed guards (some armed with torches, now) are back.

Most of Garrett's arsenal will be the same. The team wants Garrett to be a better thief, not a stronger fighter, so they're working on better scouting tools to allow players to case joints and to do more strategic planning. One new item I saw was a set of flares, perfect for illuminating pitch-black areas or marking trails. Garrett lost an eye in THIEF, and the team is playing with a new mechanical eye that zooms in on distant sights.

Losing the trappings of the supernatural and concentrating more on the Metal Age motif is a good move in my opinion. THIEF 2 is working to refine an already-original concept and make it even fresher. Aspiring crooks who hate zombies should find it to be worth the wait. CGW

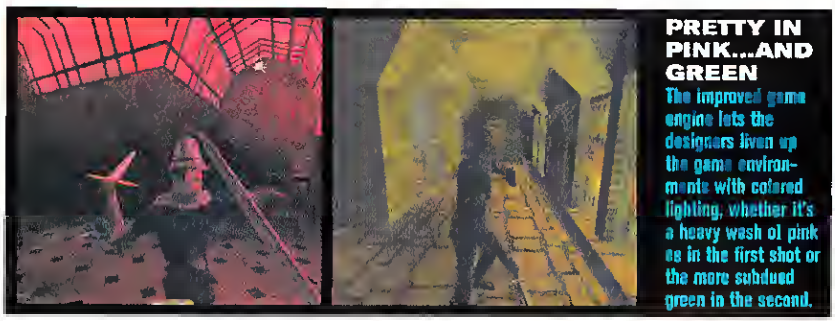


DOORWAYS OF PERCEPTION THIEF 2's new transparency model means you'll have to squat behind this door lest the guard in the room see you through the glass.



MECH WARRIORS Meet a couple of Mechanists, your new enemies. THIEF 2 will be emphasizing more of these human-type enemies and getting away from the zombies that annoyed many gamers in the first game.

BREAKING AND ENTERING Behold the Mechanist Tower, just one of the many well-guarded structures you'll be tasked with breaking into.



PRETTY IN PINK...AND GREEN The improved game engine lets the designers liven up the game environments with colored lighting, whether it's a heavy wash of pink as in the first shot or the more subdued green in the second.

Creation
is the easy part...

David	Shannon	Stan	Justin	Doris	????
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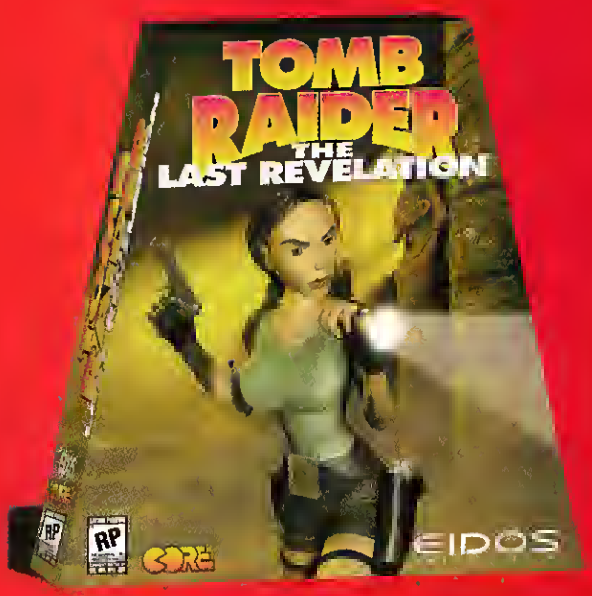

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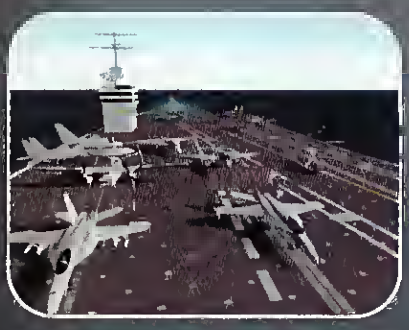

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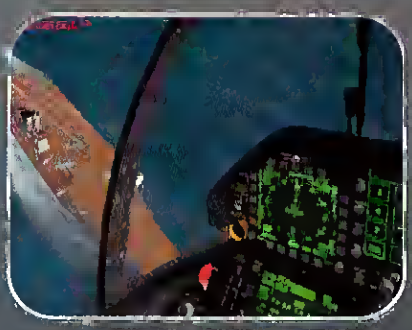

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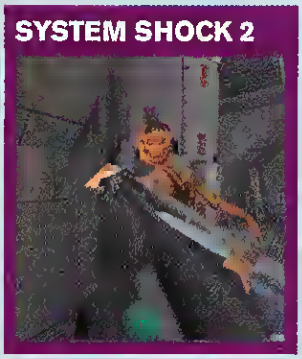

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

QUAKE III ARENA

PANZER ELITE

HOMEWORLD

ROGUE SPEAR

AGE OF WONDERS

AGE OF EMPIRES II

PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT

ADMIRABLE FLEET MANAGEMENT 101

Homeworld

Writer profile

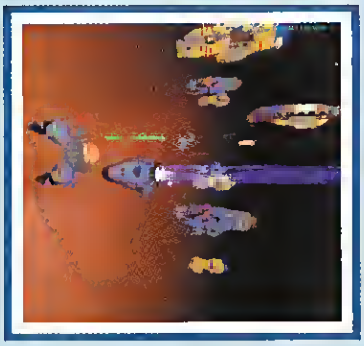
Greg Fortune is the kind of strategist who goes not only for mere victory, but for complete annihilation. He's finished all but one or two missions in both MYTH I and II without any casualties, has amassed the biggest fleet seen in a HOMEWORLD campaign, and finished the last mission in HOMEWORLD in under four minutes. Frankly, he scares us.

I keep hearing rumors of people playing HOMEWORLD using the old rope-and-click method of unit management (selecting batches of ships with the mouse). If you find yourself using this highly inferior tactic, I hope the following pointers will get you back on the true path to galactic dominance.

Support Your Troops!

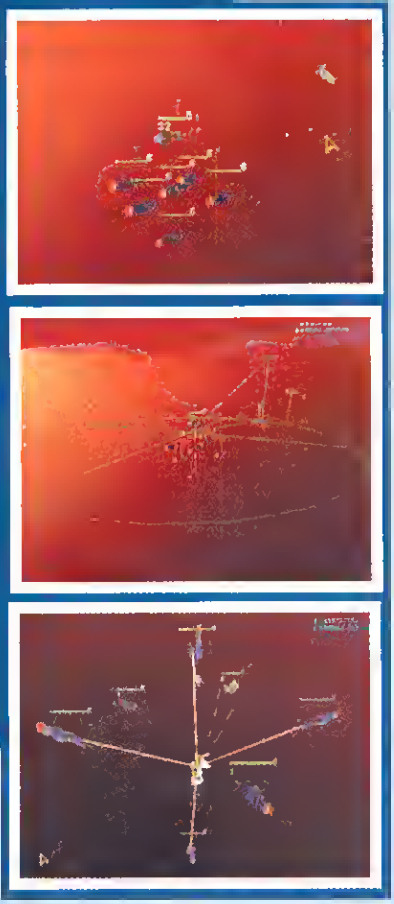
Sure, it's important to send the right combination of combat units into battle. It's also critical to your operations to send the right supporting units along for the ride, too.

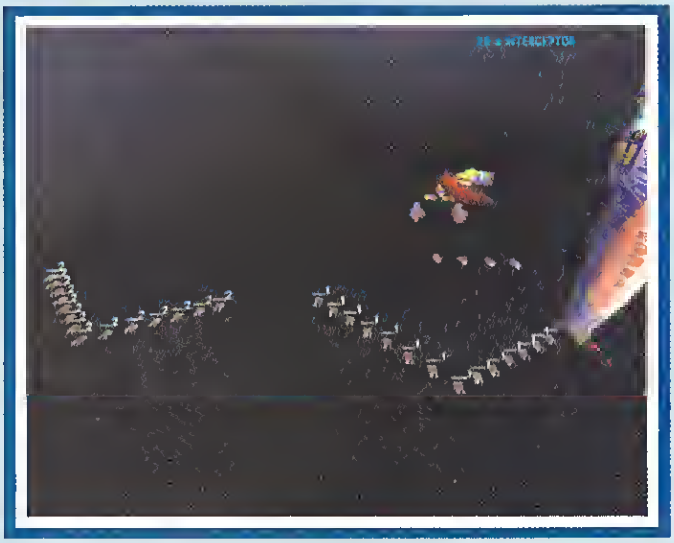
Adjust for your progress on the tech tree, but assault fleets (those venturing away from the Mothership on attack missions) should carry one or more of the following: repair corvettes, proximity sensors, cloak generators, and salvage corvettes. If you have one (or better yet, a captured one), send a carrier as well. A little preparation will save you from having to call reinforcements to the front from your home fleet.



Weren't You Listening?

Early in the game, you learn a vital piece of information that most people forget within the next two missions: *Enemy capital ships are more vulnerable from above and below.* This means that if you aren't using the shift key in battle, you're wasting an easy advantage. Another way to get your ships – especially capital ships – to flank enemy units is to switch to the sphere formation as you attack. Of course, this will also distribute units to the sides and front of your target. Whichever you prefer, make sure to attack from multiple vectors. Don't get your units so separated that they can't assist one another, but don't attack in a clump on the same plane as your opponent, either.





Shifting Isn't Just for Underwear

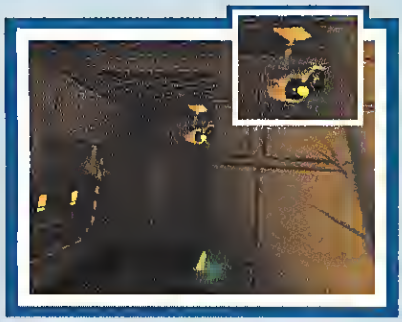
Once you get more than 20 or so fighter-class ships, it's a good idea to break them into squadrons of about 15-to-20 ships each.

Assign each squadron its own hotkey, so that you engage units with fighters as needed. This tactic also allows you to refuel your fighters in shifts during long engagements – without depleting all of your fighter strength when the juice runs low.

You can still attack a target with all of your fighters by selecting multiple hotkeys (using the shift key), but when you just need to peel off a handful of fighters, you won't be caught doing that bad mouse-lasso trick. CGW

DESSLOCK'S QUICK TIPS FOR SHOCKING SUCCESS

System Shock 2



Lean Is Life

Listening to sound cues and leaning are the keys to survival aboard the Von Braun. You can hear security cameras from far away; as soon as you hear the telltale "whirring" of a camera, back up and lean. Even if you're leaning in the direction of a camera when it's facing you, you're far less likely to activate it if you lean around a corner, than if you walk or side-strafe in. You'll then be able to safely pick it off with either a weapon or PSI blast. Remote electron-tampering is a handy PSI skill that'll quickly shut down alarms you accidentally triggered.

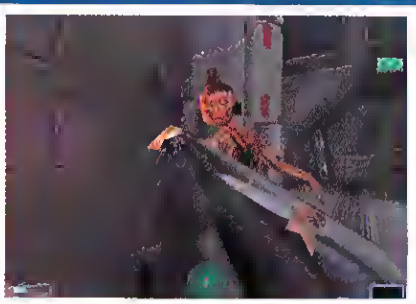
Writer profile

P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki is *CGW*'s role-playing game columnist and runs his own news site at desslock.game..pot.com.

Melee Combat

Playing as a pure PSI character, there will be occasions when you have to rely on your fisticuffs, since PSI hypos are so rare. Because ammunition is also rare, melee combat is a good skill for all characters to learn. Prepare for battle by equipping a BrawnBoast implant (if you have a second implant slot, use SwiftBoost also), your best weapon (usually the crystal shard, even if it's not as cool as the laser rapier), and use psychogenic strength if you have that ability. Robots (other than protocol droids) are good opponents to engage; just charge up as close as you can get to them and start swinging away. Even assault robots will find it difficult to get a shot in when they're being bounced back by your blows. Choosing the cyber-assimilation OS upgrade will allow you to recover health from these battles.

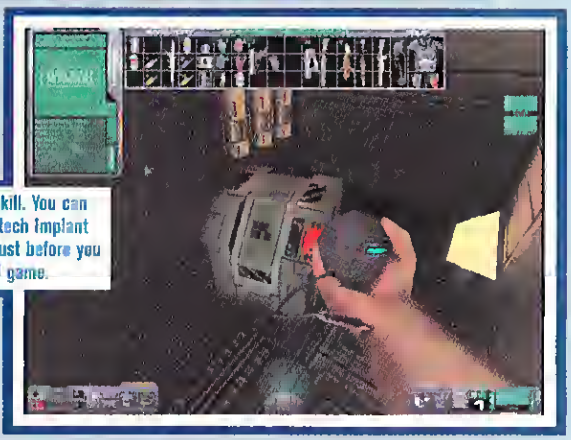
Pipe-wielding hybrids are easy prey in melee combat when you master this tactic: As soon as you encounter one, back away until you see it attack with its exaggerated, looping swing; then charge in and smack it a couple of times before backing off, until you see it swing again. Lather, rinse, repeat.



MELEE GONE WRONG There's too much that's wrong here: This hybrid's packing a shotgun, and there's another right behind me. Don't bring a knife to a gunfight: Ambush gun-toting enemies as they come around corners, instead of going toe-to-toe with them.

Looking for a Few Good Skills

The best way to get your start in SYSTEM SHOCK 2 is to choose a Navy character, even if you ultimately hope to emphasize PSI or weapons skills. You'll have plenty of opportunities to personalize your character later on, but in the beginning, Navy characters can quickly get the basic skills (hacking, research, and standard weapons initially – and then repair/maintenance as soon as you have enough cyber-upgrade modules) that will help all character types. If you must be a pure "PSI-guy," choose cryokinesis, kinetic redirection, research, and remote electron-tampering as your starting skills.



READY, SET...HACK! Hacking is an extremely useful skill. You can hack almost everything you need by keeping an Expertech implant handy, and using the psychogenic cyber affinity skill just before you start hacking. Keep a few ICE picks handy for the end game.

Know Your Enemy

As soon as you spot a floating PSI reaver late in the game, immediately look for its nearby pod. Enhanced motion-sensitivity is a great PSI skill to help you spot hiding places for PSI reaver pods and other targets, like eggs and even robotic enemies. Use anti-personnel ammo against arachnids, psi reavers, monkeys, and hybrids. Armor-piercing ammo works best against robots, turrets, cyborg midwives, and those pesky cyborg assassins. Finally, Rumblers are vulnerable to incendiary grenades.

CLIFFYB GIVES YOU SOME UT TIPS

Unreal Tournament

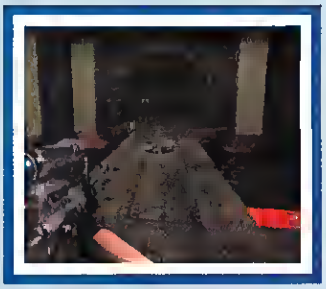
Designer profile

Cliff "CliffyB" Bleszinski was one of the main level designers for UNREAL TOURNAMENT, and is now the producer for UNREAL 2.

As one of the designers of UNREAL TOURNAMENT (UT), I've been playing the game for quite a while. I may not the best deathmatcher around, but I'll definitely give you a run for your money when I meet you online. Here are a few of my favorite secrets of how I work my fragging mojo!

Wear Protection

When playing "Codex" in Free-For-All (FFA), you'll want to control the shield-belt (it's in a central location near the flak cannon on the bridge). Make sure to grab it when you spawn; this goes for most maps in FFA, as the shieldbelt is the best defense in deathmatching.



Architectural Anarchy

In Deathmatch, you need to use the architecture of the level to your advantage. First, make sure you always have cover; always be conscious of how visible you are to your foes. One good technique is to get a structure between you and the guy trying to take you out. You also need to constantly face any potential areas your foes might come from; learn how to run around backwards so you can watch your back and avoid getting nailed.

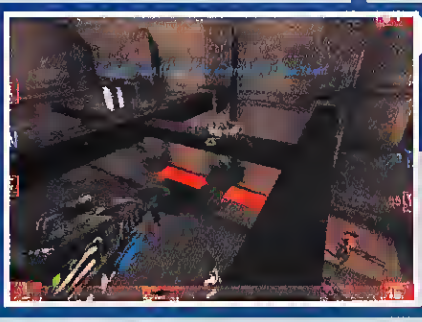
Another way to use the architecture to your advantage is to make sure you're always on higher ground. Height is extremely important, especially with weapons that impart "splash damage" (such as the rocket launcher or flak grenade). If you're pelting someone below, you not only get to shoot him like a fish in a barrel, but you can also back up and become a smaller target since the ledge occludes his view of you.

Dodge This

Tap a movement arrow twice and you'll "lunge" in that direction for a short distance. If you can master dodging with the lunge then you'll be able to zip around UT'S maps more often, as well as get out of the line-of-fire faster than normal.

Hammer Time

Like most of the guns in UT, the impact hammer is a multi-purpose tool. With some practice, you can really surprise and pummel your enemies with it. For example, hold down the fire button, hide in a tight corner, and wait for unsuspecting victims to stroll by! You can also "impact jump" by looking at the floor and releasing the fire button and jumping. Use this technique to create shortcuts (like getting to the shieldbelt in Tempest) or to get hard-to-reach powerups (like the damage amplifier on Turbine).



In my domination maps, I always make sure there're lots of great camping spots in the rafters near control points. In "Cinder," there's a shieldbelt above the control point in the lava room; you can spray death on your foes from above while being well-defended!

Another technique that I find to be very useful is called "lift jumping." It works like this: When you're on a lift that is reaching its apex, jump at the last second before it stops. You'll keep your vertical momentum and do a super-high jump, and you can spray your foes with rockets as they unknowingly meander around below you!

THE ART OF DEATH-FROM-ABOVE

Quake III: Arena

Writer profile

V. Long works over at AMD and parties with the id guys whenever he can. He is also a rabid AirSoft-gun nut. He would like to thank John Cash for dispensing such sage advice.

John Cash, network programmer at id, says the secret to QUAKE III: ARENA is air power: the fine art of maneuvering and fighting in flight. After all, why not rain death from above while you're in the air, instead of falling down and turning into just-another-frag? Here're our tips on how to master the vertical dimension in QUAKE III: ARENA.

ROCKET TO ME Rocket jump whenever you can, even if it's not your rocket.

Johnny Can Rocket

While there are various pads that'll propel you everywhere, skilled deathmatchers still rely on the ol' fashioned rocket jump at times. Rocket jumpers can reach places that would be either difficult or impossible for those relying on the bounce and acceleration pads. Here's an alternate route to the railgun platform on "The Longest Yard": Quad-rocket-jump backwards from the red armor – completely bypassing the acceleration pad that most players use.

Skilled rocket jumpers can also rocket jump off the bounce pads to perform incredible Evil Knievel-style stunts. Cash advised, "You must get the rocket to go off as close as possible – but after hitting the acceleration pad – to get the highest velocity." Believe it or not, on the "The Longest Yard" map, he can rocket jump from a bounce pad clear to the floating Quad platform, bypassing the intermediate bounce pad.

NO WALLS HERE Space maps like this are perfect for nasty air tricks.

Hit the Ground Turbo-Sliding!

Remember: Always keep moving, even when landing after an acceleration-pad assisted jump. Here's how: When you land, you "stick" (as they say in gymnastics), so use your directional keys to keep moving as soon as you land. For even more speed, hit your "jump" key while you're sailing through the air, and hold it down. The resulting effect is similar to landing on super-slick ice: You turbo-slide across the floor until you release your "jump" key. Be careful not to unintentionally turbo-slide into a hazard or endless space. Some of the space maps, like "The Longest Yard," have curbs in places, but a nearby rocket blast can get you sufficiently airborne during your turbo-slide so that you go sailing off the edge of the map.

Shotguns for Jousting and Jumping

When using facing acceleration pads, switch to the Super Shotgun. Oftentimes during a frenzied battle, you will collide midair with someone from the other direction and stick to him. While the two of you are falling, shoot him point-blank. A shotgun blast at such close range is devastating, and will frequently kill an opponent with depleted health and armor.

Use the Super Shotgun against other players who are using the acceleration pads. On the space maps, a well-timed blast to the opponent's backside in midflight may give him that extra oomph that nudges him past the intended landing point and into the empty void of death. The shotgun is best because its blast is less likely to be noticed than the machine gun's repeated ratatat, the rocket's smoke trail, or the rail slug's trail.

CLEAN SKATE Jump just before you land, and you'll be skating on the ground.

HAVE AT THEE! If you're going to joust with someone in midflight, use the shotgun – not the rocket launcher.

Dress for Success

One underrated powerup is the battlesuit. This provides total invulnerability to environmental damage for a limited amount of time. Not only can you swim freely in lava or slime, but *rocket splash damage doesn't affect you.* While you're wearing the battlesuit, you can rocket jump to your heart's content.

STAY ON TARGET WITH THESE GUNNERY TIPS

Panzer Elite

Writer profile
"General Der Panzertruppen" Marc Dultz is an avid wargame enthusiast and noted military historian. While he's never driven a tank into battle, he does know a thing or two about modern military warfare, particularly as it relates to WWII.

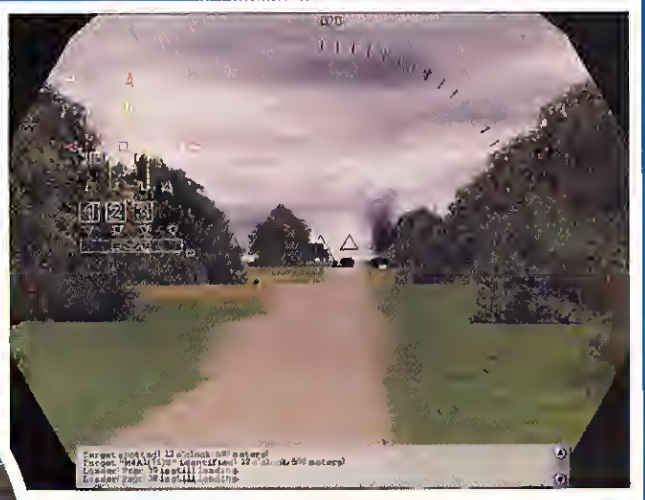
While there's nothing wrong with letting your computer-controlled gunner engage enemy targets, it's a bit more satisfying to know that you can make a quick and effective kill by yourself. Unfortunately, your skills are going to be put to the test in actual battle rather than in training, because the manual fails to discuss some of the intricacies involved in armored combat. To allay your fears and soften the learning curve, I've put together a short primer that should help you better understand the inherent differences between German and American armor.

American Schweinhund!

American tanks are outfitted with much more simplified sighting gear than their German counterparts. To compensate for this, the American equipment features range-finding calibrations. Each number on the sighting display is expressed in hundreds of yards, so a target appearing on the "18" line would be about 1800 yards away. Keep in mind that when you're scouring the battlefield, the distance to identified targets will be reported in meters rather than in yards. For argument's sake, this means that a target situated some 600 meters distant is, in reality, some 333 yards away from your vehicle.

Through a Looking Glass

During World War II, German optics were far better than anything the Allies could field. That's why the range-finding equipment in the German tanks feature a magnification mode that enables them to zoom-in on enemy targets, even from great distances. In the relaxed mode, you should lay the gun so that the target appears inside the center triangle.



If the target fills the triangle, you can assume that a target measuring some four meters in width by four meters in height is approximately 500 meters away. If it fills up only half the triangle, then the target is about 1000 meters away. In the expert mode, however, you should train the gun so that the target is situated above the smaller triangle to the right of the center triangle. That's because in expert mode, the spin of the shell is now being modeled, which typically pulls the shell slightly to the right as it leaves the firing chamber.

The Infantry Scourge

It's never a good idea to send armored units into towns or villages without proper infantry support. Armor usually falls victim to enemy anti-tank teams hiding amongst the rubble. One way to find out if enemy forces occupy a village is to hold your armor at bay along the outskirts of town. Next, order a light reconnaissance unit (such as an armored car or jeep) into the town square. If it draws fire, you've got your answer.

BE THE BOMB WITH THESE SURE-FIRE DEMOLITIONS

Rogue Spear

Writer profile

Raphael Liberatore is a former Army Special Forces fella and the only *CGW* freelancer who can kill with his bare hands. Nowadays, he balances between playing Mr. Mom and all of these tactical sim games.

Studying the map is the first rule of survival when playing ROGUE SPEAR. For single-player maps, this means spending a lot of time looking at the planning screen.

Use the "Recon" tab and walk yourself through each portion of the mission map; red icons mean stationary tangos, yellow means they are patrolling, and white icons are hostages. For multiplayer games, you need to play the map over and over again until you familiarize yourself with the layout (most multiplayer maps are taken from the tutorial and the single-player missions anyway). Refer to last month's issue (#186) for more tips on making the perfect plan.

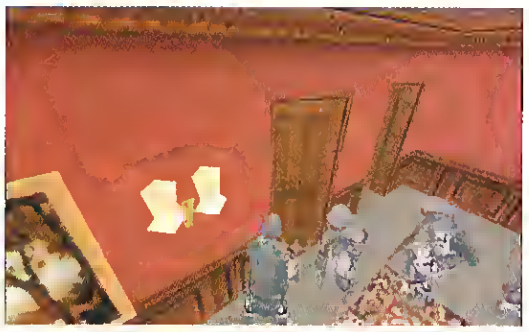
The Big Bang Theory

Room clearing is the trickiest part of the action phase in ROGUE SPEAR. Clearing out an entire nest of tangos without dying is even trickier. Players often blitz into areas without regard for enemy locations and strengths, and quickly discover that submachine guns alone aren't the best choice for taking on multiple threats. That's why the best players arm themselves with heartbeat sensors (HBS) and frag grenades; these items are a potent part of the ROGUE SPEAR arsenal.

While the HBS is often overlooked, it's also one of the most valuable equipment load-outs in ROGUE SPEAR. It points out tangos and hostages in the vicinity (even behind walls and doors), without your having to physically recon the area, thus keeping you and your teammates out of danger. Before assaulting an objective like a building or a room, check it for tangos by pulling out your HBS and sweeping around. Look for magenta (tangos) or white (hostages) circles in the mini-map from your current operative's Action Bar; it helps to expand your mini-map for a better view of the area.

Once you've located a nest of tangos (in a room for instance), move your troops cautiously to the breech point or doorway. There are two room-clearing methods: using your current operative to open the door and toss the grenade in, or using your whole team via Action Bar Orders mode. When using your current operative, make sure you move to the side of the door (by the doorframe and wall) and not directly in front of it. Next, pull out a grenade while making sure your teammates are gathered in front of the door, with assault Rate-Of-Engagement (ROE) enabled. Open the door and then toss the grenade at the adjacent wall inside. The grenade should then bounce to the center of the room, and incapacitate everything in sight. If you prefer using the Action Bar Orders mode, then have your team breach the door while you stand ready to toss the grenade in. If the room contains hostages, then switch from frag grenades to flashbangs.

FRAG HOPPING Toss grenades against walls and floors in order to assault tricky places. Applying proper angles will insure well placed detonation. Make sure your teammates are in position so they can waste tangos at a moment's notice.



SIDE STEPPER The best way to open doors is from the side. This allows your teammates to react to whatever is on the other side of the door – like this bozo – without putting you in immediate danger. Make sure you use 3rd-person view for the best possible area assessment.

TIPS TOO GOOD TO LAST

Age of Wonders

Writer profile

Jason Kapalka reviewed MASTER OF MAGIC way back in '95 or so, and still has a special DOS boot-disk to play it. He thinks these strategies are so cheesy and potent that an upcoming patch might "correct" them, so use them while you can!

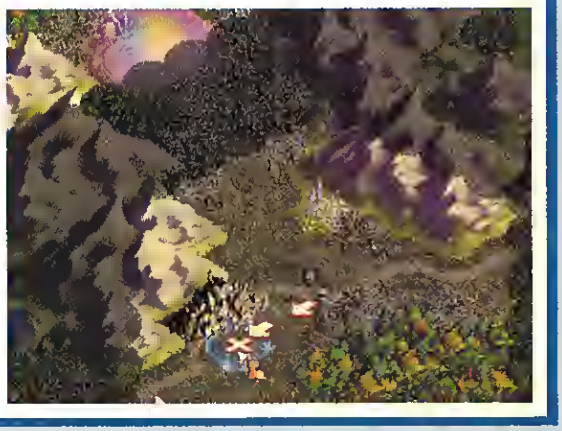
While Microprose debates whether or not to get started on MASTER OF MAGIC 2, Triumph Studios has already released the spiritual successor to the cult favorite with its AGE OF WONDERS. Here're some of the more underhanded tactics for use in exploring the Valley of Wonders.

The Ultimate Warrior

Create a nigh-unstoppable hero with Life Stealing, Dominate, First Strike, and Wall Climbing. The Life Steal+First Strike combo means you get a free shot and bonus healing every time someone takes a swing at you. Dominate will let you convert the enemy's best units to your own side. And Wall Climbing ensures you'll never have to cool your heels outside a fortress, waiting for those darn battering rams to arrive.

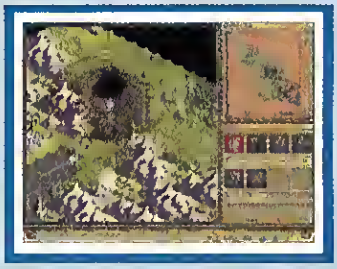
Blitzkrieg From Beyond the Grave

If you're playing as the Undead, can get your hands on the third-level Death magic spell Animate Ruins, and don't mind trashing your diplomatic relations, you can race across the map without a pause and actually increase the size of your forces as you go. Don't bother converting conquered cities the usual way – just raze and Animate them, getting a stack of bonus skeletons in the process. Non-Undead races with the Animate Ruins spell can try this strategy as well, but you're in for big trouble if your diplomatic rating with the Undead ever slips.



Cast One, Get One Free

Here's a slightly sleazy trick you can pull in Campaign Mode: When you're nearly done in a scenario, cast a big, expensive spell (such as Flood, Death Storm, Summon Dragon, or the Mastery series) but *don't* activate it. It will carry over, ready to launch, into the next scenario.



Know Your Strikes

Not exactly clear on what the 'Strike' special abilities do? Consult the handy chart below, and remember, Strike abilities are cumulative, so a unit with three different Strikes will have a chance to inflict all three penalties on every melee target.

Strike Type	Strike Effect
Death Strike	Target cursed for 3 days (cannot heal)
Holy Strike	Target has Vertigo for 3 days (-2 attack and –2 defense)
Cold Strike	Target frozen for 3 turns (cannot act and –2 defense)
Fire Strike	Target takes extra fire damage
Poison Strike	Target poisoned (all stats lowered) for 3 days
Lightning Strike	Target stunned for 1 turn (cannot act and –2 defense)
Magic Strike	Hits creatures with physical immunity (elementals, etc.)

Enemy leader ensconced safely in a fortress and you with no siege engines? Remember the "adjacent hex" rule, which means that units in all hexes surrounding the target will be automatically pulled into combat when it's initiated. If there's a straggler or two outside the walls – yet still adjacent to his leader – attack them. The leader's stack will be dragged into combat without the benefit of the city walls.

The 280 pages that came with the game not enough for you? Head over to www.stratosgroup.com, where the team responsible for the manual has posted a bonus 14-page addendum, full of crunchy stats for the hardcore player.

"This game rocks, you

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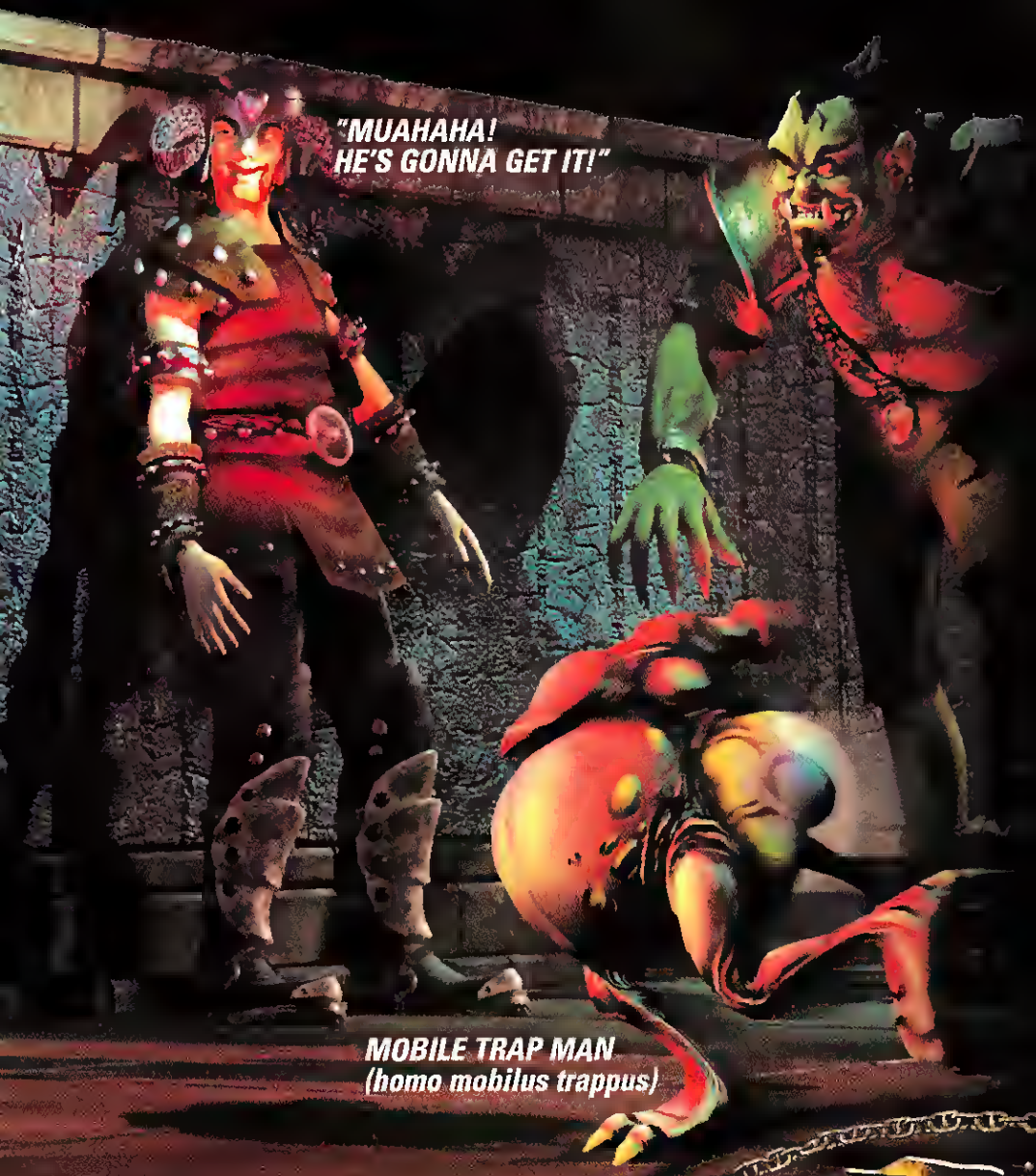

TOP 10 REASONS TO PLAY NOX

10. Summon blood thirsty wolves to track down your enemies.
9. Fight against an evil queen of the undead.
8. Discover destructive weapons and powerful spells.
7. Hang out with female Dgres.
6. Smash people with a giant stone fist.
5. You get to be obNOXious!
4. Build the soul sucking staff of oblivion.
3. Join your friends in multiplayer madness.
2. Create your own diabolical traps.

AND THE NUMBER 1 REASON TO PLAY NOX...

1. Conquer the land of Nox wearing only your underwear!

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"This is all the action you can handle."

GUERILLA WARFARE IN THE FEUDAL AGE

Age of Empires II

Writer profile

In a past life, Paul Schuytema was a regular *CGW* columnist. Now, Paul heads up his own development studio, Magic Lantern Playware (www.mlantern.com). In addition to FORTS, a 3D RTS game, Paul is working on the AGE OF EMPIRES II: AGE OF KINGS Official Scenario Editing Toolkit, to be published by Sybex.

Read any tactical treatise prepared by the Armed Forces and you'll come away with one certain nugget of information: Superior numbers of superior forces often win the battle. This is so obvious that is it almost common-sensical; the real trick is achieving this goal.

In AGE OF KINGS this holds equally true: A larger force of better troops almost always wins. But there is one little wrinkle here that we can exploit, if we adjust our "tactical thinking." In AGE OF KINGS, at a micro level, superior numbers almost always have the advantage in a melee battle, *even over units of superior strength*. The trick then, if you have a lesser force, is not to think of a conflict as a single battle, but as a multitude of micro-battles.

Consider the situation of a force of long swordsmen attacking your town and all you have are a handful of militia. If you send your whole force to meet the attackers, you'll be cut to ribbons in no time. On the other hand, if you have four of your militia attacking a single long swordsmen, odds are, you'll drop the invader. The superior fighter can only attack a single target at once, while your militia can deliver four attacks at the same time.

The real trick, then, is to coordinate a battle (offensive or defensive) in which you can manage micro battles of multiple friendly units attacking single-enemy units. How do you do this? It's far easier against computer-controlled opponents, since they won't be able to deduce what you're up to – but with some careful planning, you can achieve success against human opponents as well.

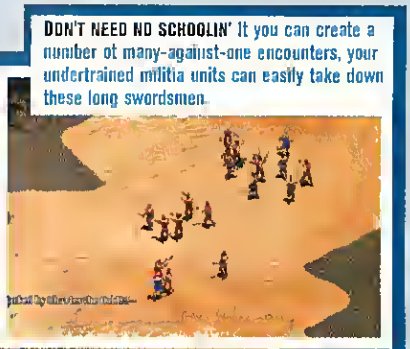
When units are in battle mode – even when controlled by a human player – their second-by-second actions are controlled by artificial intelligence. Those AI routines instruct a unit to pay primary attention to units that are attacking it. Position several "guerilla" forces of troops at the outskirts of the battle (be sure to group them for easy control). If you see a line of troops advancing on your position, send in a light cavalry to attack the end unit, and then move off towards one of your groups. The just-attacked enemy will follow its attacker and when it's far enough away from the main force, select your guerilla force, attack the unit, and destroy it quickly.

In most cases, you'll have positioned your settlement in a favorable tactical setting and will have a good idea from where the attack will come. Use a network of cheap palisade walls and towers to funnel the enemy forces into your settlement, while breaking up their ranks. You can also position guard towers on the perimeter and hide small forces behind them. When an enemy unit breaks off to attack the tower, finish him off with your strike force.

Finally, in open-field battles, use an initial full-force meeting to trigger the enemy AI, and then retreat your forces in a myriad of directions, splitting their ranks and guiding the enemy into your waiting guerilla strike teams.

This tactic works surprisingly well in offensive attacks against AI enemy fortifications. Use a number of small strike forces and get into the rhythm of advance-retreat to draw out single units from the fortification to destroy them. Done quickly enough, you can cut through their force quicker than they can replenish it via their military buildings. Use this type of raid on enemy villagers working on resource piles out from the central village as well.

This technique requires great tactical awareness, quick speed, and a lot of micromanaging. But once you get the hang of it, you can deliver some very potent strikes on your opponent, and help to mitigate any disadvantages you might have with a less superior force.



DON'T NEED NO SCHOOLIN' If you can create a number of many-against-one encounters, your undertrained militia units can easily take down these long swordsmen.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO A network of palisade walls can force your opponents to break ranks. Notice the guerilla militia strike groups hiding in the nooks and crannies

ALL ALONG THE WATCH TOWER This watch tower was used to attract the attention of the enemy knight. Before he could make his escape, a force of swordsmen (who were hiding behind the tower) launched their attack

In open-field battles, you want to draw opponents out into the open – notice how this enemy unit was drawn out in a quick advance-retreat maneuver by a force of swordsmen. Now, all they have to do is turn and attack, finishing him off in just a few seconds.

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CONCENTRATION IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PANZER GENERALING

Panzer General 3D Assault

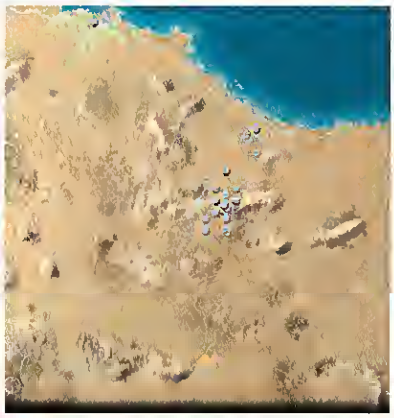
Writer profile

Tim Carter holds a degree in Strategic Planning, meaning he actually knows how to plan things strategically. During working hours, he masquerades as the managing editor of *Recovery* magazine, a quarterly publication on medical, legal, and traffic safety issues arising from automobile accidents.

All of the PANZER GENERAL games have relied to one degree or another on combined arms, and PANZER GENERAL 3D (PZG3D) is no exception. Your core force must be a mixed one, and you must use each unit type properly to win at all, much less win on time.

Perhaps more importantly, it's crucial to keep your forces together when attacking. The computer opponent will aggressively attack your flanks, and will also sneak behind your forces to try and pick off victory cities. Don't get distracted.

You absolutely must keep your forces unified (especially as the Germans). While many scenario maps may seem to require more than one axis of attack, most (but not all) can be dealt with using a single, overwhelming thrust. The time you lose by having to take an indirect path to some objectives will be more than made up for by the momentum you gain through concentrating your forces.



ONE MIGHTY BLOW

Forget history – at El Alamein, as in most other battles, a single thrust with all your troops is best.

KEEP IT TIGHT, PEOPLE This small column still retains its cohesiveness. Note that the AA unit doubles as flank protection while still keeping aircraft at bay.

The Big Guns

As in past versions of PANZER GENERAL, artillery is the master of the battlefield. The new suppression rules, combined with the inherent defeneive strengths of virtually every unit on the field, mean that effective attacks must be predicated by artillery fire (or bombardment if you have aircraft to spare). By keeping your forces together, you should have enough artillery to overwhelm even the most heavily-defended positions in a single turn.

Right Man for the Job

As you progress through the campaigns, develop a few specialized units to conduct your most important moves. I prefer to have a decently-sized force of four-star armor and artillery surrounding an elite group of anti-aircraft, assault infantry, and perhaps one or two tank units. When approaching a well-defended city, suppression plus a seven-star Stoeppstrussen unit (or Ranger, Commando, etc.) can mop up just about anything. Pay careful attention to the relative abilities of your high-level units, though. My elite infantry, for instance, had only three moves per turn – but could attack many more times. Thus, it was best to move them into the heart of the enemy's defense, and then have them attack in all directions.

Falcon's Eye

Reconnaissance is also crucial for quick movement over most maps. Your core force should include one or two recon units, and you should make good use of the "send out patrols" function when approaching potential ambushes or defensive positions. You must know where the enemy is before attacking them, especially dangerous supporting units like AA and artillery.

The Not-So-Mighty Luftwaffe

When playing the Germans, I didn't find aircraft to be particularly useful. It's much harder to obtain air superiority in PZG3D, and for the most part I found artillery to be better than bombers at softening up defensive positions (bombers are quite useful, however, at countering enemy attacks behind your own lines). If you keep your core group together in a single attacking thrust, it should be relatively easy to cover it with AD and AA units. Airpower is much more effective for the Allies, particularly early in the campaigns when your ground units will be badly led and thus slow and inflexible. However, you may still find it useful to bring along one or two AD units, as it's easier to shoot down enemy fighters from the ground than from the air. CGW

WORTH THE WAIT This German advance in the Carolinas may seem to take a circuitous route, but the overwhelming force it contains will be sufficient to subdue defending Americans

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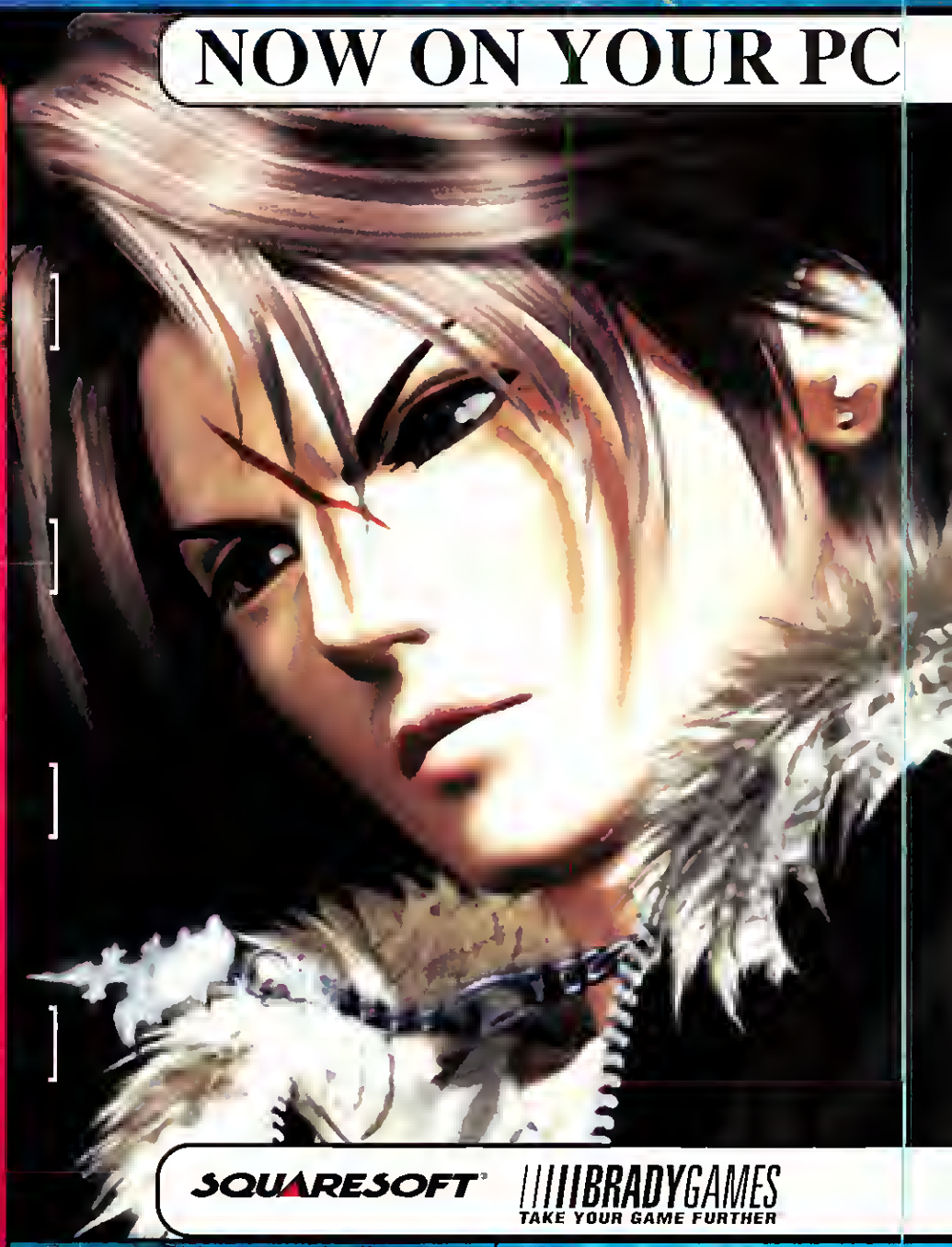

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PC game of the year."
– MSNBC.com

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

Score: 9 out of 10

"A groundbreaking title that you simply must own."
– CNET Gamecenter.com

Score: 92%

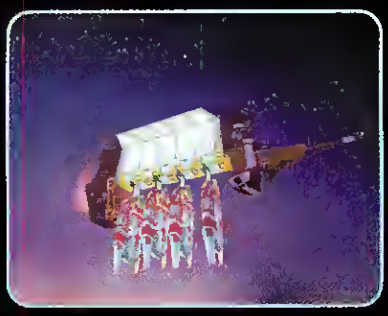
"Where C&C2 failed, Homeworld stuns. Where other games relied on contrived formula, Homeworld manages to shine above the crowd."
– Gameover.com

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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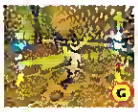


MDK 2
"Visually the game is quite stunning; the lighting and shadow effects are the most impressive features."

Final Fantasy VIII
"Amazing plot and character development, great cinematics; good battle engine."

Majesty
"MajestyTM is a unique sim putting you in the crushed velvet hotseat of your own kingdom."

Soldier of Fortune
"Plunge into the secret and deadly world of the modern-day gun-for-hire in Soldier of Fortune."

Gun Ship
"This is one of the most immersive games about modern combat in years."

1602 A.D.
"Discover islands, build roads and houses, trade with the native, conquer an empire—the age of discovery is upon us."

Star Trek New Worlds
"It's time to leave the vastness of space behind and play out your destiny in the biggest land battle."

Boarder Zone
"Boarder Zone is definitely the most realistic snowboarding video game of its generation"

Risk II
"Risk II includes virtually every rule variation and a brand-new 'simultaneous move' mode that's an exciting new way to play the game."

Evolva
"Combine equal parts genetic engineering, third-person action and overhead strategic/tactical gameplay and this is what you get."

Nox
"Character balance is well-done, what is even better are the spell traps and combinations."

Soulbringer
"Soulbringer is a new 3D classic fantasy Adventure RPG in the true sense of the words."

Diablo II
"Explore the world of Diablo II, journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures and uncover ancient mysteries."

Oni
"Lara Croft may have opened the door for the third-person-perspective action game, but Konoko, Oni's heroine, could lead the charge."

Giants
"Giants is a 3D real-time strategy game that takes place on planet consisting of 30 separate islands."

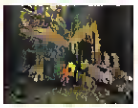
Dark Reign 2
"Dark Reign 2 will introduce new strategic elements, incredible graphics, new RTS enhancements and spectacular multiplayer gameplay."

Vampire: The Masquarade
"Based on the popular tabletop role-playing game, the PC version of Vampire: The Masquerade offers fans of the series a true translation."

Urban Chaos
"Crooks, thieves, terrorists and violent cults lurk around every corner. It is up to you to enter into the tattered remains of this city and bring order."

Planescape Torment
"The next epic RPG from the people who brought you Fallout 2 and Baldur's Gate."

Die Hard Trilogy 2
"Try to beat the odds as you match wits with the meanest, smartest villains in the most explosive adventure John McClane has ever faced."



KISS Psycho Circus
"This upcoming title from Gathering of Developers inspired by the KISS legacy, conceived by the imagination of Todd McFarlane."

Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2
"Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 will blow your mind with its immersive story line and special FX."

The Sims
"From Will Wright, the creator of SimCity, comes a new strategy game that hits close to home. It's up to you to decide... their fate is in your hands."

NASCAR 2000
"Take your favorite NASCAR cars and stars and let it rip with fender-to-fender racing action."

Amen
"Begin the most dangerous adventure of Bishop Six's life, as he slowly uncovers the horrible truth behind this strange affliction..."

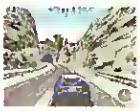
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms
"If you're ready for the challenge of true team-based online action, you'll find it in Team Fortress™ 2: Brotherhood of Arms."

Metal Fatigue
"If you're a real-time strategy gamer and this news only gets you vaguely interested in Metal Fatigue, there IS something wrong with you."

Triple Play 2001
"EA Sports' award-winning Triple Play Baseball™ series is back for another big season."

Command & Conquer: Firestorm
"Kane is Dead and a new enemy has emerged. You've played the biggest game of 1999, it's time to experience more."

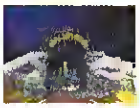
Duke Nukem Forever
"Duke fans, sign on up, this game is amazing."



Test Drive Cycles
"Put on your leather and helmet (where the law requires), and get ready for the ultimate cycle challenge."

Test Drive Le Mans
"The ultimate driving challenge. And if you feel like staying up all night, there's a 24-hour challenge packed in."

MechWarrior 3: Expansion Pack
"It's the best of the best against a race of genetically perfected warriors."



Sim Themepark
"The Theme park is back in town and the kids are clamoring at the gates. The only thing is you haven't built it yet."

B17 Flying Fortress
"The B17 Flying Fortress, alongside the legendary Avro Lancaster, was the ultimate bomber in WWII."

Hired Guns
"A futuristic, first-person 3D shooter set in a slick, neon-washed cyberpunk world."

FEBRUARY REVIEWS

This month's review section is our biggest in what seems like eons, with a hefty 32 games going under the *CGW* microscope. There are a lot of really good games in that group; two 5-stars, six 4.5-stars, and four 4-stars, plus a couple huge disappointments. UNREAL TOURNAMENT has had us addicted like crackheads on payday, while NOCTURNE and HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE have left us fairly cold. The highlight of the month has to be watching little kids puke in SIM THEME PARK. Yes, we're easily amused.

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

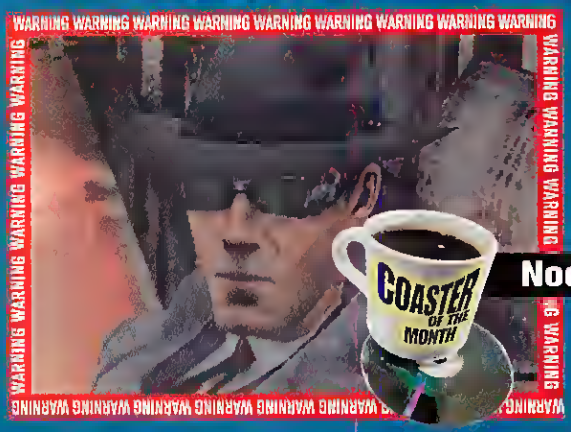
Game	Rating	Page
Age of Wonders	4	122
Axis & Allies: Iron Blitz	4	152
Delta Force 2	2	96
Diplomacy	1.5	153
FIFA 2000	4.5	106
Flanker 2.0	3.5	144
Flight Unlimited 3	4.5	128
Grand Theft Auto 2	3.5	152
Half-Life: Opposing Force	3	100
Indiana Jones & the Infernal Machine	3	92
Interstate '82	2	136
Jane's USAF	4.5	112
Links LS 2000	3.5	138
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000	4	128
Mig Alley	4.5	150
Napolean 1813	2	153
NBA Live 2000	5	134
NFL Blitz 2K	3.5	152
Nocturne	1.5	142
Op. Art of War II: Flashpoint Kosovo	2.5	153
Pandora's Box	3	152
Panzer Elite	3.5	110
Pharoah	4	124
Revenant	3	148
Sid Meier's Antietam!	4.5	96
Silver	3.5	146
Sim Theme Park	4.5	89
Slave Zero	3	116
Spec Ops 2	2.5	96
Unreal Tournament	5	82
Ultima Ascension	2.5	86
Wheel Of Time	3.5	102

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"...what they've done is make a perfect tribute to the 1980's: a mechanical, soulless product, with more of an eye on making a buck than on having a good time."

– Jeff Green, reviewing INTERSTATE '82.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: UNREAL TOURNAMENT



Nocturne

HOW DO WE RATE?

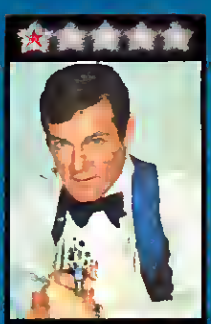
We Review Only Finished Games—No Betas, No Patches.

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

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

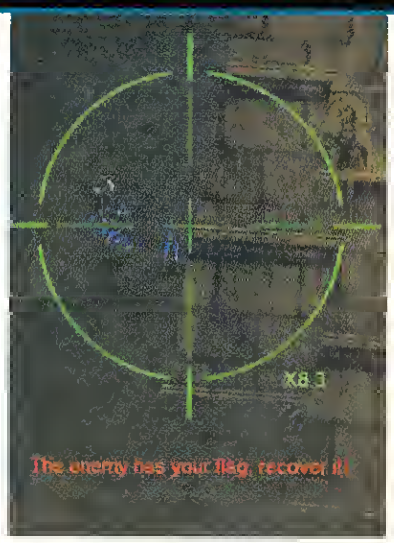
Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla

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



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

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: UNREAL TOURNAMENT



READY, AIM, SCOOT! Sniping in CTF is easy to learn, but difficult to master. Just pick up a rifle, zoom in on some poor schmuck on the other team, squeeze the trigger, and pop his head off – all from the comfort of your tower.

UNREAL Finds Its Soul in Blistering Multiplayer Action

Real Redemption

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

I used to refer to the original UNREAL as "MYST with guns." While it was perhaps the most beautiful game out there at the time, the UNREAL world felt empty and soulless. I refer to the new UNREAL TOURNAMENT (UT) as "STREET FIGHTER II with guns." That is, it's tournament-based, it has fast and furious gameplay, and there's a single-player component that, while competent, is really only there to prepare you for the multiplayer matches. My fearless prediction: Just as STREET FIGHTER II set the pace for arcade fighting games, so UT will direct the future development of the multiplayer shooter on the PC.

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

CGW RATED

PROS

Excellent bot AI; five play modes; well-designed weapons, levels, and interface; better D3D and network performance; great overall feel and polish.

CONS

Voice-command menu is cumbersome; unable to give commands to bot groups; character models are too similar; not enough maps for some game types.

GOTTA LOVE THEM FLOATS Some levels have interesting gimmicks, such as this deathmatch map where the center of the structure is gravity-free.

Playing With Yourself

The storyline is pure fluff material, of course. All you need to know is that deathmatching is now a sport, and you can win a trophy. You enter the deathmatch league, and then progress through an additional three leagues before winning it all in the Challenge league. At the start of each league is a tutorial that teaches you the basic concepts behind each game type. When you finish, you'll have earned a new character to play with, filled a nice trophy room, and have 41 matches under your belt. The matches start off small and slow, but the final Challenge league cranks up the speed to its max, and is as fast and furious as you're going to get in deathmatch without humans.

The computer-controlled bots that you can play with or against are a high point of UT. Epic's goal was to make playing with the bots seem like playing with human players online, and they got pretty close. At lower difficulty settings, they're complete pushovers, but dial them up to a setting like Masterful or above, and they start using weapons better, navigating the level more effectively, and dodging. Sometimes they display what seems like adaptive behavior; they once figured out my camping spot and flushed me out with indirect weapons. In team-based games, this is even more evident; bots will automatically assign themselves offensive and defensive roles, and even stage attacks on multiple fronts. The bots can auto-adjust their skill, so when you start feeling too confident (or ashamed) in your abilities, the game will shift settings to keep it competitive. Also, bots will pinch-hit for your team if a friend bugs out of a multiplayer match, and will participate as team members in multiplayer games.

Pushing Things to Unreal Levels

The biggest improvement Epic has made over UNREAL is in the weapon department. Each weapon (yes, even the goofy

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-300MHz, 64MB RAM, Glide based 3D card.
3D Support: Direct3D, Glide, OpenGL. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-16 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: GT Interactive • **Developer:** Epic Megagames • **$50** • www.unrealtournament.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

GREEN DEATH Even the bots are tweakable when creating a game; here, I've made the Jeff Green bot: He likes the rocket launcher, he's not very good or accurate, and he likes to camp and jump a lot.

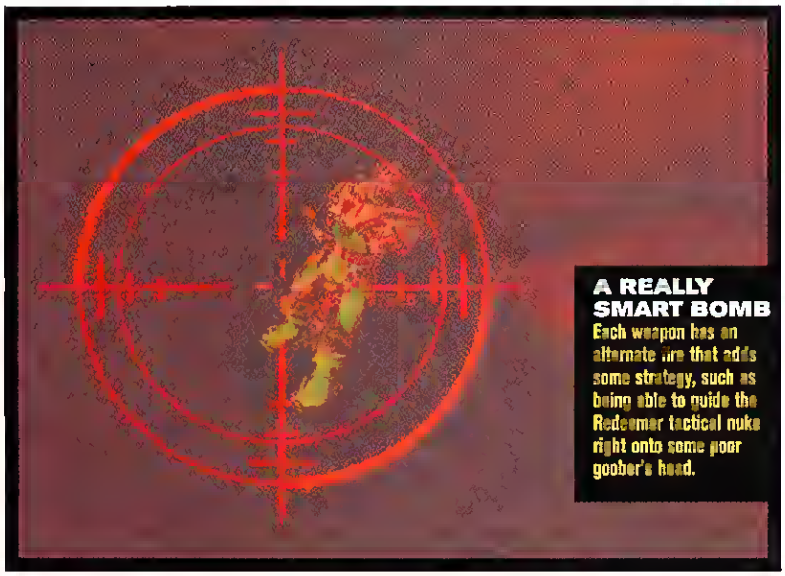
Biosludge/Goo Gun) has been overhauled (the Ripper *nee* Razorjack no longer sounds as if it's flinging dimes), and they're all perfectly balanced to boot. There is no one dominating weapon; each can equally snag or miss frags based on the situation. The Impact Hammer can kill in one hit, yet it's a melee weapon; the Rocket Launcher can unload six rockets at once, yet the rockets move slowly enough to dodge. Even the almighty Redeemer can be avoided, if you shield yourself from the blast with a wall. The only downside to the weapons is the lack of a trapping kind (unless you count the Biosludge's gooey droplets).

HAVE A NICE FRAY! Epic maintains the fun, arcade-feel with weapon details such as this happy Flak Grenade.

The overall level design is richly varied. Environments range from standard warehouses to pirate galleons to spacecraft in flight. While UNREAL levels focused on awe-inspiring architecture, UT levels are designed more for playability and flow, while retaining some aesthetically pleasing architecture. The deathmatch level set in a mountain monastery with precarious, twisting stairways is a masterful blend of beautiful visuals and beastly gameplay, as are the Capture-The-Flag (CTF) level with two massive towers placed on a spinning asteroid, and an Assault level on a runaway train.

Go Team, Go!

UT offers many more ways to slay than just deathmatch. There are teamplay-based modes, such as the familiar CTF, Domination (a Capture-And-Hold scenario a la TRIBES or TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC), and an all-new game-type, Assault. In an Assault game, one team pur-



A REALLY SMART BOMB Each weapon has an alternate fire that adds some strategy, such as being able to guide the Redeemer tactical nuke right onto some poor goober's head.

Tips For Tackling the Tournament

See page 63 for some tips from Cliff Bleszinki, one of the designers of UNREAL TOURNAMENT, on how to be a better deathmatcher. But while you're here, check out some of my hard-earned death-dealing wisdom.

▲ Use the Speech Binder function in the Input menu! This is necessary for surviving team-based games. For example, I bound the brackets and backslash to "All" commands, such as "Everyone defend" or "Everyone attack." I also did things like binding the semicolon key to "I need backup here," or the period key to "I'm in position." And for lemmings like me, I put "Roger!" over at the quotation mark.

▲ When fleeing for any reason (like flag-carrying or cowardice), use the Biosludge gun. Spray it on the floor while you weave from side-to-side, and you'll leave gooey little landmines for pursuers.

▲ CTF flags are often in enclosed rooms; when playing goalie, the best weapon is the Flak Cannon, as you can just follow the flag-grabber and put him down from behind. When no Flak is present, use the Rocket Launcher, as pursuing a flag-carrier may allow the rockets to lock on the poor sap. Sharp shooters can try using the Sniper Rifle, as a headshot is a one-shot kill.

▲ Take the time to learn your weapons, and then go to the Weapons Option in the Main Menu, and reprioritize your list. For me, I put the Flak Cannon first, then the Sniper Rifle, and so on, and I turn "autoswitch weapons" off, as I like to pick my weapon on my own terms—not when I run over a weapon.

▲ Learn from others. Put your player into Spectator mode in the Player Setup menu; then set up a Turbo-speed game with several Godlike AI bots and watch how they move. Then go into the online world and spectate to your heart's content to get a feel for how other gamers move and shoot.

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FATBOY VS. SLIM To add some spice to the game, Epic has bundled a few Mutators (UNREAL's mod system) right out of the box, such as the goofy "Fatboy," which makes the lead player fatter and the trailing players progressively skinnier.

TO HYPERSPACE Some levels are truly inspired, such as this starship-to-hyperspace map where the exterior has different gravity rules than the interior.

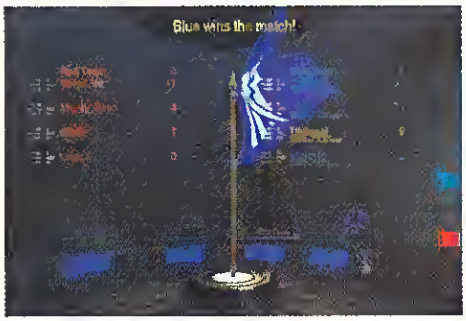
sues objectives while the other defends, and then the two switch roles. The adrenaline rush of trashing an underwater base or escaping a prison with your buddies in under a minute can exceed the head-spinning excitement of deathmatch scenarios.

For team games, both with or without bots, players can use the voice command menu. While there is no voice-support, gamers can pull up a menu with common sayings and orders to broadcast to your team. A nice bonus is that each saying is accompanied by an indication of your current location, eliminating all the "where?" questions whenever someone says "I need some backup!" Unfortunately, the menu is mouse-driven, and it can be cumbersome to use in the heat of battle.

The key to a multiplayer game is the online play, and again, Epic has learned their lesson from UNREAL. The network code is much better, as lag becomes less of a problem, and there's hardly any packet loss (I've only seen the network socket icon three times in my two weeks of online playing). Even on servers with pings of 400 or above, the game was still as playable as QUAKE II under similar conditions. All in all, playing online maintains the pulse-pounding feel of the single-player mode. On top of that, all your matches – both online and solo – are logged, so you can take a look at your "career" and examine stats such as weapons used, frags-per-hour, and so forth.

UT uses a modified UNREAL engine, which means that Glide-based 3D accelerators have an advantage over others. Epic did work on their Direct3D code, though, so I was able to play the game comfortably at 800x600 resolution with 32-bit color-depth on a P/II-400 with 128MB of RAM and a TNT1 accelerator. The main problem with the engine is memory usage: Gamers with 64MB of RAM will want to use lower resolutions. Also, 3D sound tends to drop the frame rate, and the first few discs shipped had a goofy installation bug that wouldn't detect D3D cards, but that should be fixed by now. UNREAL graphics may not be the sheer visual marvel they used to be, but

FLAGGED FOR LIFE Finishing the single-player prepares you to go online and not completely suck. I'm the dashing robot who's racing to guard the flag here.



PACKING PURPLE POWER UT is a bit slim on power-ups; besides health and armor, there's the Damage Amplifier (shown here), the Shieldbelt, and Invisibility

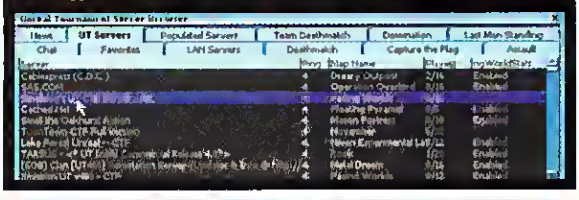
there are still moments where you have to sit back and admire the colored lighting and varied backgrounds.

Unperfections

There are a few flaws in UT, but they're all so negligible that it doesn't impact the overall feel of the game. While bot AI is great, it's still primarily path-based, so astute players can figure out the patterns of bots even at Godlike difficulty (bots can also be extremely easy sniper-bait in maps such as CTF-Facing Worlds). The character models look too much alike; with the exception of the purely robotic or undead-style skins, the characters pretty much blend in with each other. As mentioned earlier, the voice menu is too cumbersome to use in the heat of battle, and even with hotkeys, I would prefer both a quicker way to specify recipients of orders and a way to give commands to groups of players/bots rather than just to individuals. Also, while the game offers 50 maps, I would have liked more than seven Assault missions, since Assault is the best game-style in UT.

That UT includes a weapon called the Redeemer in entirely appropriate: UT has completely redeemed both Epic and the UNREAL franchise to action gamers. With the combination of great AI, depth and variety of gameplay, and accessibility to both newbies and the hardcore, UT has shot the pulse-pounding mayhem of multiplayer shooters to new heights. CGW

TAKE ME THERE Hopping into a game is easy; just select a tab for what game type you want, then double-click. You don't even need GameSpy.



Cool Links

www.planetunreal.com The uber-site for all that is UNREAL.

unreal.epicgames.com Epic's own tech site is a good resource for mod and map makers.

www.unrealtournament.net/forum/flash.html The official UT message board from GT; Cliff Bleszinski, an UNREAL TOURNAMENT designer, is one of the moderators.

The Avatar Returns to a Beautiful, Broken Britannia

Premature Ascension

ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION
reviewed by Desslock

Another ULTIMA, another huge disappointment. Although it was in development for over five years, ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION has been prematurely released. ASCENSION went through a variety of controversial design changes since its original conception. During the game's extended production, its outspoken producer – and most of its original design team – departed from Origin, and the bulk of its development team was transferred for several months to work on its multiplayer sibling, ULTIMA ONLINE.

Yet, in spite of the controversy that surrounded its creation, ASCENSION could have been a memorable game set in one of the most beautiful and immersive worlds ever seen in a computer game. Unfortunately, the premature release of ASCENSION is a disappointing final chapter in gaming's best known series, laden by unoptimized code and other extensive technical problems.

The plot involves the Avatar returning to Britannia to stop his arch-nemesis, the Guardian, from corrupting and then destroying the world. The Avatar quickly learns that he'll be unable to ever return to Britannia, so he needs to find a way of permanently resolving the world's problems. The plot has some twists, but it isn't as deep as its weighty premise might suggest, and it's fairly derivative of previous ULTIMAs.

ULTIMA fans should be pleased that a number of key characters, items, and locations return, but this installment doesn't respect ULTIMA lore in a number of ways. There's a surprising amount of revisionism, and the inconsistencies are never adequately explained. Unlike ULTIMA VIII, however, ASCENSION doesn't completely abandon its roots, although the plot lacks the moral ambiguity of the best games in the series.

Britannia Does Not Rule

While previous Origin products pushed system requirements to new extremes, ASCENSION suffers from more fundamental problems. The game requires a 3D card and supports both Direct 3D and Glide, but it runs very badly under Direct 3D. As a result, even gamers with state-of-the-art systems equipped with TNT2 Ultra cards and tons of RAM will experience choppy gameplay.

The game plays better using Glide (and when you're exploring areas away from the main cities), but it never runs smoothly, and has memory leaks that gradually deteriorate performance. Since gameplay is slower-paced than in a pure action game, a silky smooth frame rate is less of a prerequisite. But only patient, tolerant gamers possessing a Pentium-III system stocked with a Voodoo 3 card and at least 128 MB of RAM will be satisfied with ASCENSION's current performance.

The game includes melodies from previous ULTIMAs, and quality music composed by George (WING COMMANDER) Oldziey. Unfortunately, there's a bug that causes one of ULTIMA'S most repetitive tunes, "Rule Britannia," to bleat incessantly and to stalk your character through a variety of inappropriate areas. The interface is finicky at times, regularly delaying access to backpack items by construing attempts to open them as decisions to move them. There are occasional 3D graphics errors as well, resulting in objects getting stuck inside walls or in mid-air.

NIGHTY-NITE A day/night cycle was noticeably absent in the last ULTIMA game, PAGAN. It's back in ASCENSION and it's never been better.

MAYBE THE RAIN WILL MAKE THE DRAGON GO AWAY... Weather effects are great, as you can see from these individually-modeled raindrops. Unfortunately, it occasionally rains indoors. Notice the stationary dragon in the top-left corner.

Britannia the Beautiful

ULTIMA IX abandons the series' traditional isometric perspective in favor of a third-person view. It was a controversial move, but it generally works well, granting a detailed view of Britannia while maintaining the overall style of its predecessors. The world is undeniably gorgeous, full of incredibly varied locations and some absolutely fantastic views. A variety of birds, insects, fish, and livestock realistically populate Britannia, and the game's day/night cycle is particularly well done. Unlike other 3D-gaming worlds, Britannia is impressively interactive. Some series veterans will enjoy just thoroughly exploring the world, discovering all of the different objects and locations.

Britannia is smaller than in previous ULTIMAs, but the detailed environments are so full of unique landmarks that it still feels expansive, at least until you've explored it. The game is initially fairly linear, and rather than rewarding you for cleverly slipping your way into an unexpected area, you're more likely to encounter scripting errors. Most of

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful world, with unique environments and interesting characters.

CONS
Horrific Direct 3D support; extreme system requirements; loads of technical problems; poorly implemented combat system.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive, 8MB 3D card, 600MB hard drive space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 128MB RAM, 16MB Voodoo 3 card, 1GB hard drive space **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Origin Systems • **$50** • **www.ultima9.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Mature: animated blood, gore, and violence

the scripting quirks are minor and just display conversations inappropriately, but there are serious ones that can prevent advancement if you don't undertake actions in the most obvious sequence. Later in the game you can explore Britannia more freely, although the story-driven nature of the game always makes it obvious where you should next proceed. The linear plot and lack of character-development options make ASCENSION more of an adventure game than any previous ULTIMA.

NPCs have considerably more personality than in most RPGs, and are well-animated and graphically detailed. There are numerous entertaining scripted scenes between them, but the voice acting is generally poor, with the exception of Bill Johnson's reprisal of his role as the Guardian.

LOCK HIM UP! An appropriate sentence for prematurely releasing yet another ULTIMA game. Character models are varied and graphically detailed.

Battling Avatar

There's a lot of climbing, jumping, and swimming in the game, which may annoy players who prefer less action-oriented gameplay. While the jumping interface works well, it's sometimes difficult to navigate underwater. The spell system effectively combines the reagent, spell-book, and ritual systems of the past few ULTIMAs, but the combat system is a mess, generally devolving into rapid mouse-clicking on your enemy. Each weapon has four different attack modes, but since combat is so simple, they rarely seem meaningful. Arrows are woefully under-powered at the beginning of the game, as targets routinely turn into inadvertently humorous pin-cushions.

Characters spurt blood when hit and bodies decay into red piles of goop, both of which are farcical graphical effects. Combat is generally meaningless and easy to circumvent, although even rodents produce gold coins when slain. While it may be an RPG convention to unrealistically reward gamers for trivial combat, it's a practice that the ULTIMA games had historically avoided.

ASCENSION's AI seems particularly unfinished. Enemies frequently look like statues and aren't triggered until you're on top of them, sometimes literally. While certain monster animations are excellent, too many creatures barely move or prove to be incapable of navigating the terrain. If you attack monsters from a distance, you'll usually be able to gleefully fling arrows into their skulls before they'll move an inch. Occasionally, I'd read sinister significance into a vulture's circling overhead and conclude that some monster AI was fine, only to subsequently watch the vulture smash into a nearby cliff. Even the best AI in ASCENSION is only as good as the most basic AI in MIGHT AND MAGIC VII, which certainly didn't do anything special; the AI at its worst is as bad as it gets.

Its technical flaws make ASCENSION a chore to play, which is truly unfortunate, since it provides the most visually detailed and immersive world yet featured in an RPG. Unlike ULTIMA VIII, ASCENSION doesn't abandon the traditional strengths of the series. While some gamers may not appreciate the action-oriented gameplay and certain design decisions, there's no doubt that ASCENSION has a story that focuses predominately on the ULTIMA virtues and related lore.

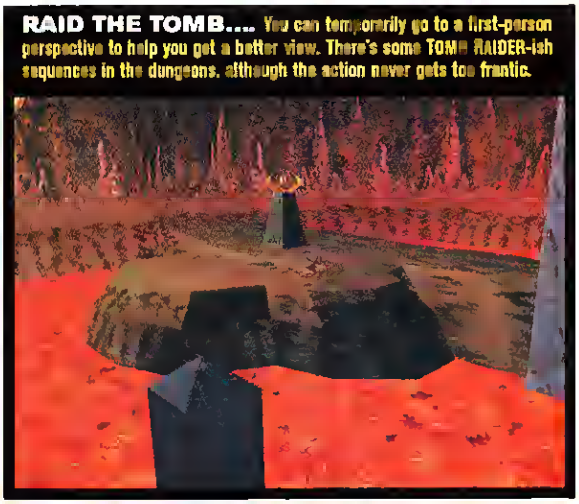
The plot is somewhat revisionist, but does wrap up loose ends that gamers have waited half a decade to resolve.

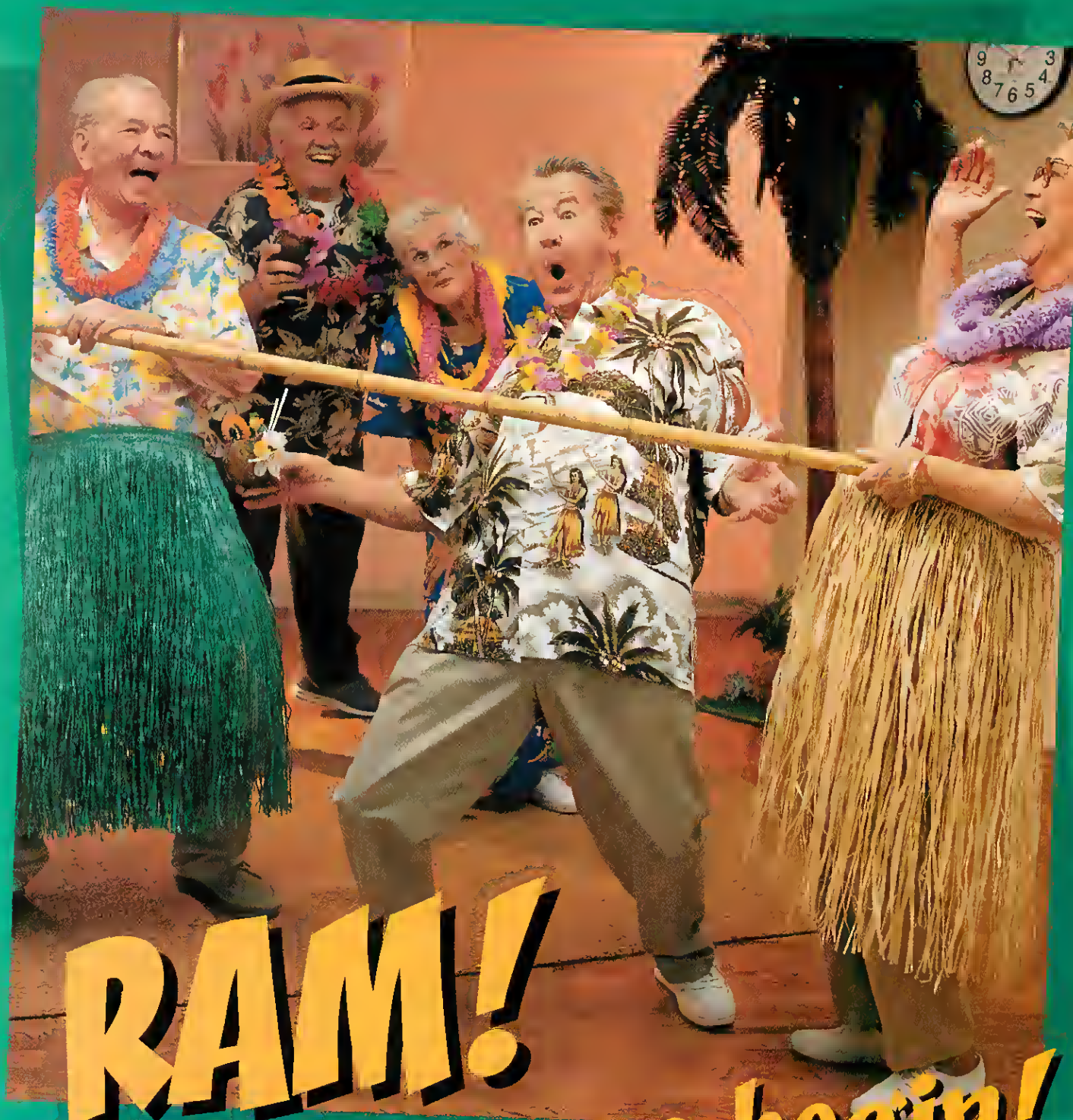
LET ME OUT OF THIS TABLE, YOU FIEND! Getting this badly stuck doesn't happen often, except when swimming. But you'll still occasionally discover a skeleton hapless stuck in a tree.

Members of the development team have publicly stated that the game had a "non-movable" ship date, which is pretty disappointing considering that ULTIMA ONLINE was released in a similarly unpolished state. If Origin had taken the time to properly complete this game prior to release, it may well have been a worthwhile finale to the series. But they didn't, and it's not. CGW

FLY AWAY LITTLE DOGGIE... This wolf is having a bit of difficulty navigating the spiffy 3D-terrain.

RAID THE TOMB.... You can temporarily go to a first-person perspective to help you get a better view. There's some TOMB RAIDER-ish sequences in the dungeons, although the action never gets too frantic.





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From Start to Finish, SIM THEME PARK Is an E-Ticket Ride

Sim-ply Irresistible

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Perhaps the only truly unpleasant thing about SIM THEME PARK is finding a way to distill the overwhelming sense of delight that permeates every facet of this game into one page of text. Describing the game? That's not hard. You design and manage your own very individualized theme park. But capturing the magical sense of challenge, humor, and fun that blossoms in tandem with your budding park? That, my friend, is the daunting part.

SIM THEME PARK

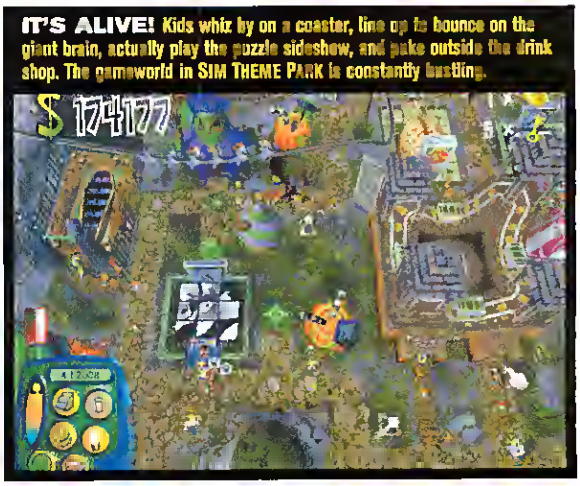
reviewed by Robert Coffey

Funny Business

At its heart, SIM THEME PARK is a business simulation. Success is measured in dollars earned, so you'll not only set entrance gate prices but the prices of the souvenirs, costumes, and refreshments you sell as well. You can juggle the quality of goods you sell to increase your profit margin, but if you sell crap at high or even moderate prices, you can expect to anger your patrons; they'll buy less, fewer will visit your park, and before you know it EuroDisney will look packed by comparison. While vendor placement is key (put costume shops near the exits of your best rides for higher sales) you can also micromanage in other ways – for instance, loading your fries with salt to make your customers thirsty for the over-iced sodas you sell at a premium. Occasional challenges let you earn cash or golden tickets to unlock special rides.

You'll also have to juggle a full staff of janitors, researchers (for developing new rides and upgrading existing ones), wandering entertainers, security personnel, and mechanics. Fail to keep them happy and they'll strike. Fail to keep them efficient, and your rides will break down as your park degenerates into a lawless sea of unmopped vomit.

And in a sense, that vomit is just the tip of a different iceberg: While many business sims are dry, flavorless affairs, SIM THEME PARK wraps its capitalism in a cocoon of unmitigated goofiness. The big-headed kids wandering your park puke unabashedly, squeal in unchecked delight, and are just flat-out adorable toddling around in the spaceman or jack o' lantern costumes they buy. The game ships with four themes (Halloween, a fairyland, a jungle motif, and space) but as wildly different as they are, they all share the same giddy cartoonish sensibility, be it the giant vampire-shaped balloon store, the juggling space alien entertainers, or the careening pumpkin bumper cars. As much fun as it is to watch the constant bustle of life from above as you manage your park, it's even better to hop into first-person mode and wander your park, taking time to ride the suspended roller coaster you just designed, or to hop aboard the spinning rocket ships.



IT'S ALIVE! Kids whiz by on a coaster, line up to bounce on the giant brain, actually play the puzzle sideshow, and puke outside the drink shop. The gameworld in SIM THEME PARK is constantly bustling.

THRILL RIDE After designing your roller coasters, hop on for a wild ride and a great aerial view of your park.

TRACK OF MY TEARS Designing your own roller coasters is a huge part of the fun, but getting the track to loop back to the ride's exit can be incredibly confusing.

Six Flags Over the Whole Damn World

And when you tire of your own parks, you can go online and visit parks made by people the world over. Ride their rides, check out their layout, and maybe steal an idea for your next coaster. If you really like a park, you can vote for it, since every city on the globe ranks its online parks. And if you're really enjoying your virtual vacation, snap a screenshot and send a postcard to a friend using the game's e-mail utility.

With everything SIM THEME PARK has going for it, its few problems are fairly inconsequential. The lure of building new things really helps drive gameplay, so once you've maxed out on researching the new, the motivation to continue drops off. Also, as cool as the roller coaster designer is, getting the track to end up back where you started can seem virtually impossible at times; a pause feature while building coasters would've been nice.

But you know what? I don't care. SIM THEME PARK offers more fun than ten other games combined. If you don't need to wipe out an enemy to have fun, this is a game any gamer would love. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Wildly entertaining; lets you manage every aspect of your park without becoming tedious; fantastic online component.

CONS

Little motivation to continue after making out your research; roller coaster designer could be friendlier.

Requirements: Pentium MMX 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-300MHz, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D accelerator
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None competitively, but unique Internet support.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Bullfrog • $40 • www.simthemepark.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; comic mischief.

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Crack Your Bullwhip in LucasArts' INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

Lara Who?

We've come a long way in the 18 years since they started making Indiana Jones games. When Atari was gearing up to adapt Raiders of the Lost Ark in 1982, they said their greatest challenge was making a realistic-looking bullwhip (this from a company that thought a rectangle with a hat was a dead ringer for Harrison Ford). Fast-forward a decade or two and LucasArts has the bullwhip problem licked. If their Harrison Ford still looks a bit rectangular, so what? That gives them something to work on over the next 18 years.

Heaven knows, there's still room for improvement. INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE is easily the best game yet to feature

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

reviewed by Charles Ardai

Hollywood's favorite tomb raider, but that doesn't mean it's flawless – or anything close. This is one of those games where if you're not positioned just right, the computer won't let you pick up an object, open a door, or climb a ladder that's right next to you (it took me 15 minutes of trial and error to hang a bucket on a hook). There is a lot of jumping in the game, from pillar to pillar and ledge to ledge, and you should plan on plenty of slow saving and restoring to get you through these sequences intact. Saving and restoring is also the only way to get you past the instances where the game crashes completely – this happened to me four times.

Also in need of improvement is the story itself, which starts out pretty generically (Indy hunts through the ruins of a temple in the Middle East), takes a turn for the better (Indy has to escape from a Russian ship where he is held captive; Indy befriends a Nubian boy in the desert, Indy races through King Solomon's mines in a mine car), and ends with a trippy sci-fi sequence (Indy fights a giant robot and chases a demon through "the Aetherium," an alternate dimension that looks like the inside of M.C. Escher's computer). Except when it springs to life in the middle segment, the dialogue is flat and out of character – the Indy we know from the movies wouldn't make smirky comments when encountering ancient artifacts or supernatural phenomena. And the mild sparring between Indy and Sophia Hapgood (whom gamers with long memories will remember as the female lead from INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS) ignites no sparks.

CINEMA PARADISO At its best, INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE lets you recreate great movie moments like the minecar sequence from Temple of Doom.

CINEMA PARA-SO-SO At its worst, the game serves up uninspired boss sequences that are hampered by poor controls and the unavoidable sense that they just don't belong here.

PLOT POINTS The story is told with cut-scenes rendered within the game engine. They're great when they work, but too many story moments just fall flat.

Indy the Third Dimension

So in what sense is this the best Indiana Jones game ever? It's simple. This is the first game to actually put you into the man's boots and under his fedora. Granted, it's a third-person game of the TOMB RAIDER variety, not a first-person DOOM clone, but you really feel like you're in there with the man. The environment is so immersive that by reflex I kept craning my neck to see

CGW RATED

PROS

Immerses you in the world of Indiana Jones more effectively than any game ever has.

CONS

Sticky controls and occasional crashes; story has some pretty weak moments.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 55MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator required. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 64MB RAM
3D Support: DirectX **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher/Developer: LucasArts • **$40** • **www.lucasarts.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated blood and violence.

A REAL SWINGER Sure Indy jumps, climbs, and fights just like Lara Croft, but the coolness factor of using his famous bullwhip shouldn't be underestimated – it elevates portions of the game above the usual TOMB RAIDER fare.

around corners and over obstacles. The music, which combines familiar John Williams themes with original material by Clint Bajakian, is extremely effective in creating its mood of danger and awe. And, by God, they got that bullwhip right – the thrill of using it to swing across pits or disarm enemies doesn't wear off, even after you've been doing it for hours.

The character graphics are blockier than they need to be – when Indy shakes hands with a CIA agent it looks like two beer steins clinking – but the variety of photogenic settings makes up for it. Your globetrotting quest for machinery stolen out of the wreckage of the Tower of Babel takes you to the mountains of Tibet, the clear waters of the South Pacific, and the sands of Egypt, as well as into the visually distinct temples of several civilizations. Indiana Jones fans have

GLOBETROTTER Egypt, Tibet...it just wouldn't be Indiana Jones without a lot of exotic locales.

the thrill of recreating not only the mine car race but also the river-rafting sequence from *Temple of Doom*, as well as numerous traps reminiscent of the first movie – including the giant rolling boulders.

While the story could be stronger, it does have its moments. Since the tale is set in 1947, on the cusp of the Cold War, your foes throughout are Stalin's soldiers rather than Hitler's (expect plenty of shouted Russian exclamations in place of the conventional "Achtung!"). The sequence on the Russian ship is outstanding, not so much because of the puzzles it contains as because of the variety it adds, making the whole enterprise feel less like a climbing/jumping game set in a gameboard world of blocks, ramps, and ledges than like a real Indiana Jones movie.

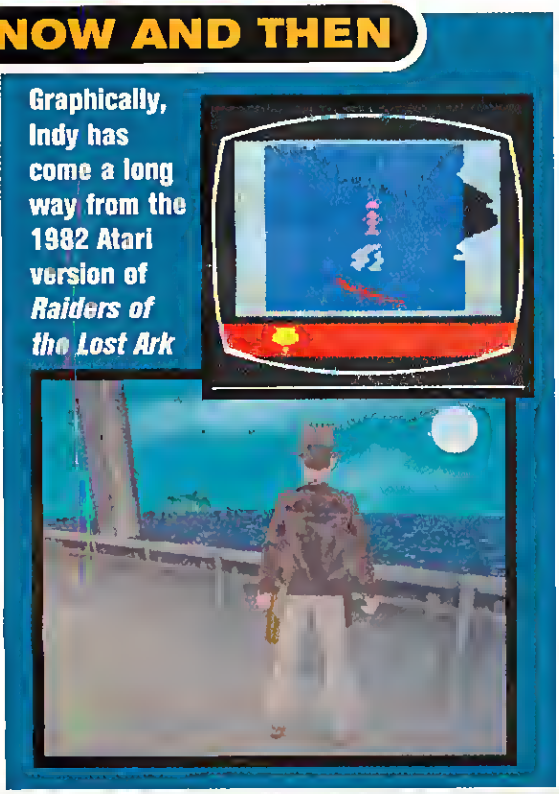
When you get to Egypt and find an urchin cowering in a mineshaft, whimpering "I don't like hyenas," it's a genuinely affecting moment. And when you reward him for an errand with a dead explorer's pocket watch and his eyes light up ("Now I own a machine! I am going to be an industrialist!"), the game momentarily achieves a depth of characterization and self awareness that even the movies lacked.

But the moment doesn't last, and by the time writer Hal Barwood has sent you scurrying into a floating neverland out of William Gibson's subconscious, you realize it isn't inspiration so much as expiration. By the end, he's used up every possible climate and every device from the movies, and all that's left is a pyrotechnic last-ditch eruption meant to bring things to a climax, like when all the members of an orchestra play at once to finish off a symphony. It doesn't really work here, not least of all because the big battle with the demon Marduk takes forever (you've got to aim a mirror just right to bounce his fireballs back at him, and you've got to do this not once but five times). It's got all the worst aspects of the game: overly fussy controls, lots of saving and restoring, a difficult action you've got to do over and over, and a fundamental misunderstanding of what does and doesn't fit in the world of Indiana Jones.

Fortunately, scenes like this one are in the minority. Most of what the game contains does fit and, hell, you get used to the controls. For a certain generation of gamers – who have had their *Star Wars* fantasies fulfilled for years but never their Indiana Jones fantasies – playing even this imperfect specimen of a game will feel like finding a great treasure. CGW

NOW AND THEN

Graphically, Indy has come a long way from the 1982 Atari version of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*



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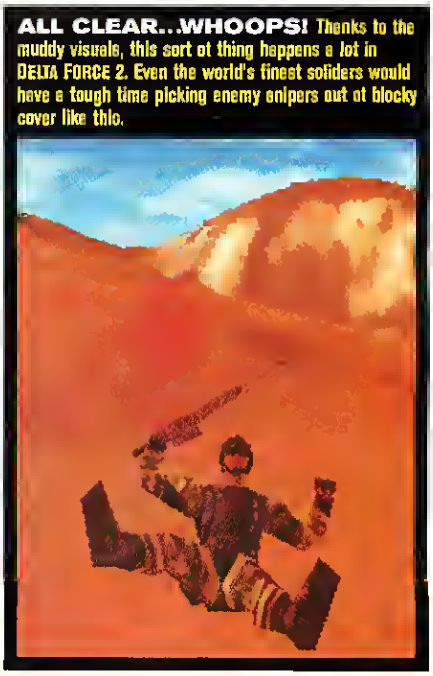
HEAD to HEAD REVIEW

DELTA FORCE 2 and SPEC OPS II: GREEN BERETS

reviewed by Brett Todd

Tom Clancy and ROGUE SPEAR Have Nothing To Fear From These Tactical Sim Sequels



ALL CLEAR...WHOOPS! Thanks to the muddy visuals, this sort of thing happens a lot in DELTA FORCE 2. Even the world's finest soldiers would have a tough time picking enemy snipers out of blocky cover like this.

Threat Eliminated

In the follow-the-leader world of computer gaming, it only takes one successful innovation to start a craze. Ever since Red Storm Entertainment published RAINBOW SIX and proved that tactical combat simulations could sell, game developers have been falling all over themselves to jump on the bandwagon.

Well, the bandwagon has come around again, heaped high with sequels. Once again following in the footsteps of Red Storm and its worthy successor ROGUE SPEAR, are NovaLogic's DELTA FORCE 2 and Ripcord Games' SPEC OPS II: GREEN BERETS. Tom Clancy should be able to sleep nights – neither come close to ROGUE SPEAR. The more action-oriented DELTA FORCE 2 collapses under the weight of awful graphics and questionable design decisions. SPEC OPS II is more successful, but comes up short in strategy, playing more like a really good military mod for an existent first-person shooter than as a game in its own right.

Head Shot

DELTA FORCE 2 (DF2) isn't a tough game to summarize, with a number of adjectives coming to mind. Words like interesting, exciting, challenging – oh, and unplayable. Can't forget that one. You see, while a great deal of the basic game design here should lead to some enjoyable gameplay, NovaLogic's abysmal Voxel Space 32 engine graphics turn virtually every mission into an eye-straining pixel hunt. Big, blocky voxels instead of sharp little polygons may be great for creating lush terrain, but they're lousy for just about anything else. Further, since voxels can't be accelerated via graphics hardware, today's fancy video cards are unable to help. DF2's accelerated mode tops out at a crude-looking 640x480, and only helps render background elements such as radar installations, SCUD launchers, and buildings. Higher resolutions are available in software mode, but I found even 800x600 resolution to be an unplayable slide-show, and this on a PII 450 with 128MB of RAM running a TNT 2 Ultra!

SPEC OPS 2 (SO2), on the other hand, looks very good, particularly at higher resolutions in 32-bit color mode. The visuals are still more JEDI KNIGHT than ROGUE SPEAR, but they're miles above DELTA FORCE 2. Settings look very realistic, and truly evoke just about every environment on earth. I particularly like the jungles of Thailand and the industrial complexes of Germany. There is one bizarre design choice here in that you have to choose a display adapter and resolution each time a mission is started. This does nothing more than add a mouse-click, but it's strange that the

CGW RATED

DELTA FORCE 2

PROS
Good mission design and tense action; solid multiplayer mode.

CONS
Extremely poor visuals; sound effects non-existent; doesn't support 16-bit video cards in accelerated mode.

Requirements: Pentium II or Celeron 400, 64MB RAM, 465MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium III, 128MB RAM, 32-bit 3D hardware accelerator **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 50 players via NovaWorld matching service, 2-16 player via LAN, one CD per player.

Publisher: NovaLogic • $40 • www.novalogic.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

SPEC OPS II

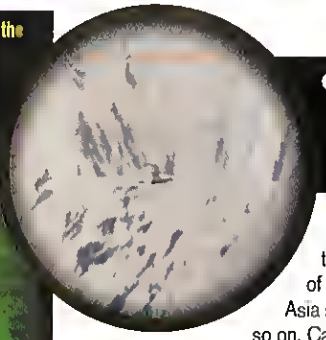
PROS
Real-world locations and plausible missions; detailed visuals; authentic sound.

CONS
Vague mission objectives; no map, once you hit the ground; no military strategy required.

Requirements: Pentium MMX-200MHz, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space, Direct3D-compatible video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-200MHz, Direct3D-compatible video card with 16MB RAM **3D Support:** Direct 3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-16 players) one CD per player.

Publisher: Ripcord Games • **Developer:** Zombie Studios • $40 • www.ripcordgames.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

IT AIN'T EASY BEING GREEN Night vision goggles bring the world of SPEC OPS II into clear focus. Expect to use them a lot, as even some of the indoor missions take place in darkened hallways and corridors.



GOTCHA! Perhaps the only major difference between SPEC OPS II and most first-person shooters is the importance of preventative sniping. If you get close enough to see the whites of their eyes, expect to restart the mission.

preference isn't simply saved.

Sound is absolutely spectacular in SO2. The budda-budda of automatic weapons is suitably threatening, and little touches like the crunching of boots in the Antarctic snow are well done. These elements lend a lot to the overall atmosphere. Sound in DF2 is quite the opposite – virtually nonexistent.

Covert Operation

As you'd expect, it's very difficult to creep around stealthily when you can't see the guards you're supposedly slinking past. Such is the curse of DF2. Missions quickly devolve into taking baby steps, listening for gunfire, and then frantically scanning the horizon to see where the shots are coming from. Pixelated visuals make it no easy task. Enemies can only be spotted by searching for off-colored pixels in the terrain. If a block flashes, kill it. If a dot is colored differently than the others in the area, kill it. Of course, if these points of light turn out to be hostiles, you're often toast by the time you bring up your weapon and scope. All of this is incredibly frustrating. The graphical limitations all but cripple the game, since its primary focus is on stealth and long-range sniping.

If you can somehow get over this hurdle – and it is a rather high one – DF2 can be mildly entertaining. The designers did a great job of evoking the tension of Special Forces combat. Every one of the 45 solo missions in the two campaigns and single-mission mode evokes that "alone behind enemy lines" atmosphere, whether you're on a search and destroy escapade in the Middle East or invading a drug kingpin's estate in Central America.

NO, AFTER YOU... SPEC OPS II's large team missions are the best, since you can use your buddies as cannon fodder. If the point man gets it, just switch off and try your luck again.

EIGHT MILES HIGH One of the few cool twists in solo DELTA FORCE 2 play is the occasional parachute drop into enemy territory. Unfortunately, a bird's-eye view of the terrain doesn't make things any clearer.

Mission specifics are rather annoyingly obscure, though. In the quickies, you're given regions instead of countries and asked to fill in the blanks: that Central Asia stands for Chechnya, the Balkans for Kosovo, and so on. Campaigns are wholly fictitious, taking place in Antarctica and Chad. Chad? Doesn't exactly get the blood pumping, does it? Where are the crazed Egyptian terrorists, the Russian mobsters, the paranoid Midwestern militas?

Well, they're in SO2, actually, which is designed around a number of training levels and five campaigns of four to six missions set in every corner of the globe. You'll try to stop Pakistan from launching a nuclear strike on India, tear across frozen Antarctica in search of a crashed satellite, and take on terrorists attempting to steal Stinger missiles in Germany. Oddly enough, each separate mission in these campaigns can be played in any order. So if you want to blow up the Pakistani missile base before you've even found out where it is, go ahead, though this can kill the sense of immersion and make you feel as if you're playing through single episodes.

Just a Flesh Wound

Of the two games, SO2 is more successful in almost every way, even though it still falls well short of the standard set by ROGUE SPEAR. More of a military sim than the run-and-gun DELTA FORCE 2, most of SO2's missions have a first-person shooter feel to them. Part of this comes from the lack of solid objectives. Campaign intros are dramatic and fun to watch, but they're more movie-trailer than military briefing, with mission notes just a few brief bullet-points. As a result, you land with little real idea about what you're supposed to do. There's also a useless overhead view for a map and an incredibly awkward waypoint system. To compensate, each mission is forced down an obvious path. The good news? There's really only one route to each destination, so it's virtually impossible to get lost. The bad? Missions play out like shooter levels, with the notable (and unrealistic) exception of your being unable to move and fire your weapon at the same time. To blur the lines further, enemy weapons and ammo can be picked up, and you'll occasionally run across hidden items. No health packs or BFGs, though.

SO2 multiplayer looks like it could be a lot of fun, with deathmatch, team, and King of the Hill modes, along with cooperative play through the game's single-player missions. Unfortunately, I was unable to hook up with enough fellow players on the SPEC OPS II server to give it a proper whirl. The game had just hit stores when I made my attempts, however, so your experience may vary.

On the other hand, DF2's lone highlight is multiplayer. Online play on the NovaWorld server can be a real blast, with up to 50 players taking part in games ranging from traditional deathmatch to cooperative and Capture the Flag. Of course, since the same basic engine problems show up here as well, the fun is mitigated by a fair bit of frustration.

So Who Wins the War?

If you buy just one tactical sim this year, it shouldn't be either of these; neither can hold an M4 to ROGUE SPEAR or the original RAINBOW SIX, still the unquestioned leaders for armchair commandos. While there are certain elements that might appeal to some gamers – the exciting multiplayer modes of DF 2, the unique "Green Berets do DOOM" feel of SPEC OPS II – the Tom Clancy-inspired titles outclass them every step of the way. CGW

SID MEIER'S ANTIETAM! Slices A Page Right Out of The History Books

Fix Bayonets!

More American blood was shed on September 17th, 1862 than on any other day in U.S. history. In just under 12 hours, 23,000 men laid down their lives during the pivotal Battle of Antietam, when Lee's army of Northern Virginia clashed with forces from McClellan's army of the Potomac on the rolling countryside near Sharpsburg, Maryland. Several recent wargames have attempted to recreate this disastrous struggle to bring the Civil War to an end, but none have succeeded like SID MEIER'S ANTIETAM!

Firaxis used their award-winning GETTYSBURG! engine to recreate the Battle of Antietam, making changes that address the vagaries of the battlefield. To begin with, ANTIETAM! does a better job of modeling all of the units, going so far as to depict the uniforms each unit wore. Virtually every important unit is present and accounted for, from the Confederacy's Louisiana Tigers to the Union's Iron Brigade. While the Federals typically retain their distinctive "blue wall" façade, the Southern Army looks more like a collection of ragtags than a well-disciplined machine, better reflecting the historical composition of the Confederacy's forces.

ROLE CALL New units have been added to the mix, such as these Zouaves operating on the Confederate's extreme left flank.

YOU WANT REAL TIME? With ANTIETAM! you can re-fight the mammoth 11-hour battle from start to finish.

SPIKES OF FIRE You can see how well your troops are doing by watching the red firing-damage markers.

Eight types of artillery are now modeled, as opposed to just two in GETTYSBURG!. Each side has a much better mix of cannon at its disposal, ranging from 32-pound howitzers to lightweight Parrott rifles. This means that players can now use their artillery as it was originally intended, whether for long-range counter-battery fire or for much shorter-range infantry support.

Other improvements include a set of revamped command bars; in the case of brigade commanders, this enables them to issue "fall back" and "retreat" orders to units taking heavy fire. Division and corps commanders can now "gather up" all of their subordinate artillery batteries that may be scattered around the map, then re-deploy them. Artillery can even be ordered to hold its fire until enemy units have closed to within canister range. And to make things clearer on the battlefield, damage markers have been added to show the firing effectiveness of each unit.

Like GETTYSBURG!, ANTIETAM! includes loads of historical and "what-if" scenarios that cover every conceivable aspect of the conflict, from the skirmish in the East Woods to the fateful battle along the sunken road. Players can even re-fight the entire endeavor from start to finish if they're up to the task, something they were unable to do in GETTYSBURG!. Commanding the entire battle is a bit unmanageable – particularly at the height of the action – but, hey, that's what gamers claimed was lacking in the original game.

So how does it all hold up? Very well, I'm happy to report. Even at the lowest competency setting, the computer opponent is quite challenging, steadfast on the defense but just as determined on the attack – especially when it comes to seizing key objectives. In fact, the computer seems to be rather adept at rushing reinforcements to where they're needed the most, oftentimes snatching victory from the maw of defeat at the most crucial moment.

That said, Sid Meier and his Firaxis team have once again captured the tempo and ferocity of mid-19th Century warfare, ably portraying the field of battle during one of the darkest periods of American history. When it comes to tearing a page out of the history books, no one does it with as much elegance and accuracy as the gang at Firaxis. CGW

SID MEIER'S ANTIETAM!

reviewed by Mark Asher

CGW RATED

PROS

Ability to re-fight the entire battle; improved interface; spruced-up graphics; incisive, first-hand account of the battle as described by Ezra Carman.

CONS

Game available only from the Firaxis website.

STONEWALL JACKSON The command bars have been overhauled; with one click, brigade commanders can now issue "Retreat" and "Fall Back" orders to units under their command.

Requirements: Pentium 90MHz, 32MB RAM, 70MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 166MHz, 4x CD-ROM, 2MB DirectX-compatible video card **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** 2 players by modem or serial, 2-8 by LAN, playable through MSN Gaming Zone

Publisher: Firaxis • **$30** • **www.firaxis.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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OPPOSING FORCE Tries Hard but Doesn't Measure Up

Half-Right

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

reviewed by Robert Coffey

Change an integral part of any successful creative endeavor and it's bound to suffer. Just think of the Sid Meier-free CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER, the *Planet of the Apes* TV series, or Van Halen with (shudder) Sammy Hagar. A similar challenge faced Gearbox Software: Make a game worthy of HALF-LIFE without the original creative team behind it. OPPOSING FORCE is better than most single-player shooters, but while Gearbox had all the tools, the end result is like giving a good sculptor a slab of marble, a chisel, and Michelangelo's *David* as a template. He's not going to come close.

As Colonel Adrian Shepard, you are cast as one of the troops hunting down HALF-LIFE hero Gordon Freeman. While OPPOSING FORCE's extended intro sets up this intriguing premise, it's dropped almost the second your character bails out of a helicopter and hits terra firma at the Black Mesa Research Facility. Your mission quickly becomes solely one of escape, with Freeman utterly forgotten but for a brief glimpse early in the game that only ensures you'll have no hope of interacting with him.

That disappointment would be easier to swallow if this rather brief game's action were up to HALF-LIFE standards, but it isn't. While the game is still broken up into titled sub-chapters, none of them hold together the way they did in the original. Yes, you'll explore new parts of Black Mesa, like the alien observation areas and toxic waste facility, but your time in each location is brief. You never have the unique sense of place that was created in HALF-LIFE: the frenzy of Surface Tension, the creeping menace of On a Rail, or the alien confusion of Xen. Instead of a game where every room and every corner brought something new and exciting, you charge through a series of environments packed with enemies both old and new – but nothing that makes you pause and whisper to yourself, "That was cool."

HALF-LIFE's sturdy AI remains, so the firefights are still challenging, especially when OPPOSING FORCE ups the ante by throwing *five* leaping assassins at you along with a handful of grunts. But that's about all of the core gameplay that remains. Gone are the episode dominating bosses that gave each chapter structure and tension; there are really only two bosses and they're a letdown. Bosses from HALF-LIFE do pop up for Special Guest Appearances, but you don't really interact with them, and they only underscore how disappointing their replacements are.

There's an awful lot of puzzle-solving, especially difficult jumping puzzles made more daunting by surfaces that practically repel you, and by your tendency to get trapped on edges and in corners. Jumping puzzles are so prevalent that any time you get stuck in the game, you should immediately start looking for the nearest crate you can push to reach someplace higher.

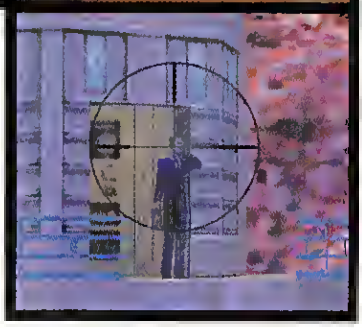
OPPOSING FORCE does bring some new things to the game. You can climb ropes, use alien barnacles as grappling hooks, and new monsters – including packs of spike-shooting Pit Drones – make formidable, if uninspired, enemies. New weapons include a brutal SAW machine gun, an entirely moot sniper rifle that replaces the cooler crossbow, and the Shock Roach – an electricity-spitting alien bug. The new weapons are kind of fun, but a lack of any real *need* to use them had me leaning primarily on the SAW and the MP5 throughout the game. New multiplayer maps created by a team of all-star level designers like Levelord provide some new death-dealing playgrounds.

In the end, OPPOSING FORCE is done in by simply not being able to reach the bar set so high by its predecessor. The gaming here is solid and better than most, but if you're itching for more HALF-LIFE, you're going to have to wait for HALF-LIFE 2. CGW

MEET THE NEW BOSS Not the same as the old boss. Dealing with OPPOSING FORCE's bosses is a letdown, especially compared to the original HALF-LIFE.

NOW AND XEN This is about all you'll see of the alien world. Your trips to Xen are very brief jaunts that serve only to teleport you around Black Mesa.

OLD FRIENDS Some familiar faces will pop up in OPPOSING FORCE, but they don't play much of a role in the game.



CGW RATED

PROS
Still better than most single-player shooters; new multiplayer maps.

CONS
Doesn't deliver a HALF-LIFE caliber experience; very short; weak weapons and monsters; puzzle elements can get in the way of play.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, 24MB RAM, 125MB hard drive space; HALF-LIFE must be installed. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator. **3D Support:** Glide, Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-32 players), one CD per player on Internet, one CD per four players on LAN.

Publisher: Sierra • **Developer:** Gearbox Software • **$35** • **www.sierra.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Mature, animated blood and violence.

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GT Interactive Lets Greatness Slip Away

Cinderella

THE WHEEL OF TIME

Reviewed by George Jones

THE WHEEL OF TIME is a game that begs to be loved...at least initially. From the moment I entered the game, I found myself stunned by amazing visuals and wowed by the ambience of the first few levels. "Robert Jordan's novels weren't this scary," I thought as I found myself jumping (and yelping).

But after I got through the beginning of the game, *Cinderella*-syndrome hit THE WHEEL OF TIME hard. The magic wore off, and a game with infinite potential turned back into what it really is – a typical, action-oriented fantasy/adventure game with typical, action-oriented fantasy/adventure devices, punctuated by the occasionally cool/unique/interesting level. Grab as much magic ammo as you can. Learn from your deaths. Fight off a group of monsters. Heal yourself and replenish your magic ammo. Advance to the end of the level. Fight off the occasional big bad boss, or deal with some sort of monstrous challenge. Watch a cut scene. Repeat.

3D Graphics, 2D Story

THE WHEEL OF TIME's flimsy plot sounds like it comes straight from some kind of Microsoft Word macro generator gone mad. You play the role of Elayna Sedai, a reluctant heroine who finds herself in the middle of a traitorous plot to re-release the Dark One from his lockdown status by gathering the four Cuendillar Seals, the hero who originally imprisoned the Dark One stupidly left these lying around. (Note to self: If you save the world, make sure you leave no powerful artifacts – be they rings, spears, crystals, seals, or sporks – lying around afterward.)

The game starts with a bang. An assassin breaks into your room in the White Tower and demands that you hand over one of the seals. When he realizes that you don't have any, he steals some weird, horn-looking artifact (one of the few mysteries in the game) from a hidden closet and escapes, slitting the throats of 14 of your sisters as he leaves. After confiding in you that she fears traitors within the Tower helped the Assassin, your boss, a woman known as the Amyrlin, sends you after the Assassin. I'll let you figure out the rest of the story. It won't take you long.

It's understandable why Legend, the game's designers, stuck to such a formula. Most fantasy novels keep retelling a similar tale. But why such shallow story development? Given the game's explosive and frightening opening sequences and levels as you chase the Assassin, I had hope that we would all finally see a fantastical storyline that actually breaks new ground. Instead, the story progresses in exactly the way you would imagine, with no twists, surprises, mysteries, or explanations.

Momentum Shift

To be fair, WHEEL OF TIME does create

LOVE THOSE LEMMINGS In one of the cooler levels of the game, you have to protect your kind from increasingly stronger waves of enemies. Allow five of your wounded sisters to die, and you lose.

TOWERS OF POWER

Although a straightforward deathmatch-style game exists, the real multiplayer action in WOT lies in The Citadel, which is similar to CTF, except the object of desire are Cuendillar Seals. The intriguing twist is that Citadel allows you (or the leader of your team) to actually go in and edit your environment; you can place traps, obstacles, and guards in your citadel. Theoretically, this is very cool, and can create some interesting skirmishes on the Citadel servers on the Net. The only problem we experienced is that WOT's weapon/Ter'Angreal system, which emphasizes crafty weapon combinations and slow-moving attacks, makes for a slower and less intense style of multiplayer than we like. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it is a marked shift from games like UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III: ARENA, which also feature computer-controlled Bots.

CGW RATED

PROS

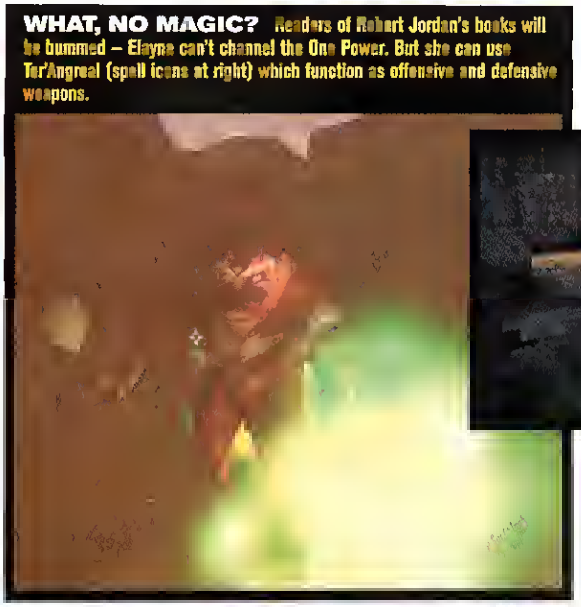
Beautiful graphics; occasionally stunning gameplay; cool multiplayer mode.

CONS

Shallow story for an game set in Robert Jordan's universe; uninspired level designs.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** Optional, Direct3D and Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** 1-4 players via TCP/IP.

Publisher: GT Interactive • **Developer:** Legend Entertainment • $50 • www.gtinteractive.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated blood and violence.



WHAT, NO MAGIC? Readers of Robert Jordan's books will be bummed – Elayne can't channel the One Power. But she can use Ter'Angreal (spell icons at right) which function as offensive and defensive weapons.

some fantastic moments. But the game is never able to sustain or capitalize on their momentum, mostly due to a lack of pacing, and levels that inevitably devolve into typical first-person shooter mode. For example, toward the end of the first third of the game, you're supposed to be helping to defend the White Tower from attack. When you begin, you see and hear your castle preparing for attack; war horns sound off and soldiers start running around. Then the attack starts, and the momentum rapidly dwindles to the point where you feel like you're simply playing another level.

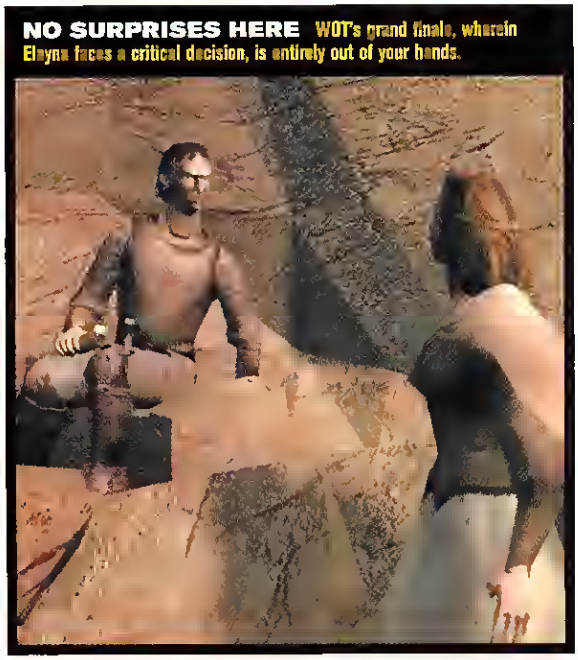
The same goes for the Assassin-chasing sequences that begin the game. You're supposed to be chasing this guy, but the levels are designed in such a way that you have to take your time. This contradicts the nature of the mission. Since you don't feel the need to hurry, the tension of the chase is totally depleted.

One of the few moments where this isn't the case comes midgame, and illustrates how great WHEEL OF TIME could have been. You enter a dangerous nether-region known as The Ways in order to quickly cross the continent. The catch is that you can't be in this region for long before the Machin Shin – a dark sinister wind – gobbles you up, so you have to sprint from one gate to the next, pop out of the region, wait for the winds to recede, and then go back in. The tension and fright this stage of the game creates is so palpable, you'll be frantically digging for the exit. If only this was the norm.

On the plus side, the game's monsters are superb. Outside of a few bugs that let me attack monsters before they "saw" me, or made them simply run back and forth without attacking, they all boast above-average AI and fighting them is an enjoyable challenge. Trollocs nimbly sidestep your fireballs. Whitecloak Soldiers use their shields to deflect your attacks back at you. And the spell-casting enemy Aes Sedai hits you with an arsenal of offensive and defensive magic that mirrors your own.

Unfortunately, about two-thirds of the way through WHEEL OF TIME, the surprises end. At this point, you've encountered pretty much every monster, and eventually you start to realize that the best way to deal with an evil Aes Sedai is to use a powered-up blast of Balefire. Or that the best way to deal with the teleporting Myrddraal is to use Freeze and then blast them away with Seekers or Fireballs.

UNREAL GRAPHICS WHEEL OF TIME makes the most of the UNREAL engine with excellent weather and weapon effects.



NO SURPRISES HERE WOT's grand finale, wherein Elayne faces a critical decision, is entirely out of your hands.

Your knowledge at this point, in combination with the uninteresting story, results in an outright crawl towards the finish line. And once you get there, not surprisingly, an anticlimactic end-sequence and Quicktime finale will leave you totally unsatisfied. On the plus side, it does do a nice job of tying you into WOT's multiplayer mode.

Compounding the problems, the game's cut scenes are all handled outside of the game's UNREAL engine. Nothing punctures your suspension of disbelief more than finishing a level in the attractive 3D environment, and then having to wait while a full-screen Quicktime video loads up.

Because the story is so generic, the cut scenes usually fall flat, and worst of all, these movies depict actions that are totally incongruous with Elayna's in-game achievements. I just kicked about 4000 demons' asses, took on the whole damn Whitecloak army single-handedly, and then I'm going to be surprised and captured from behind by some chump at one of the most critical moments of the game? And I can't do anything about it but keep watching the movie? That's not right.

The 80-20 Rule

If THE WHEEL OF TIME could be this exciting 80% instead of 20% of the time, it would easily join the ranks of HALF-LIFE and SYSTEM SHOCK 2. Unfortunately, a consistent tendency to fall back on mediocre, formulaic structure and story renders the cool moments and interesting multiplayer-mode moot, and turns WOT into a slightly above-average 3D shooter. CGW

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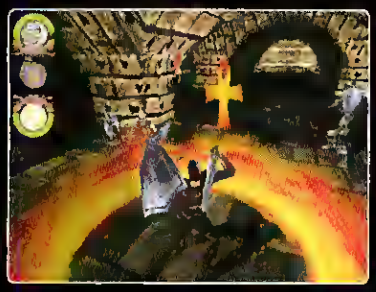

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EA Scores Another One With This Year's FIFA

Goooooooooooal!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

FIFA 2000 is just the latest in a line of exceptional soccer titles from EA Sports. Soccer – or football, as it is known the world over – has always been a difficult sport for America to fathom. Partly because, as in other popular sports, it is the offense that puts people in the seats, but the defense that wins championships. In soccer, unfortunately, that leads to low-scoring affairs. The purist can appreciate the superior play in a titanic 0-0 battle, but for the casual fan, such a score is perceived as boring. This is not a spurious issue, because publishers are in the business of making entertaining games, not necessarily rigid simulations. Fun – with a dose of authenticity – is the name of the game, and EA does it better than anyone. FIFA 2000 is no exception and features a series of design decisions that are meant to enhance your overall gameplay experience.

FIFA 2000

reviewed by Wallace Poulter

First up this year is the addition of the Major League Soccer teams and their commentators. The 12 new teams are a welcome component to a product that traditionally contains numerous club teams from around the world. This year is no different with an emphasis on Europe and teams from such nations as England, Italy, Norway, Israel, and Turkey.

EA's presentation is second to none. An opening sequence highlighting the difference between the old classic teams and the modern cyber athlete is accompanied by a rollicking soundtrack. Player animation is very crisp, with motion capture used to its full advantage. There are also some nice little touches, such as your player sometimes tapping the ball to the ref at the end of the half. Sure it's a canned sequence, but it's done seamlessly.

The different game modes provide many options. The most detailed is season mode, in which you play an entire season as one team. Tournament mode allows you to set up various competitions; the league component of this mode is powerful enough that I used it to set up the schedule for my son's soccer league.

Once into the game, player control is very responsive. A variety of kicks, tackles, and headers are available via button presses and combinations. Your player has a yellow circle around their base with a red, yellow, or green arrow that points in a direction to indicate that there is a player to pass to, and your odds of the ball making it there. In addition, you can also try what is called a "through ball," this is played into open space for one of your players to run onto the ball. It's most effective against a very square defense.

There are three levels of difficulty that ramp up pretty quickly; the opposition AI becomes much smarter and quicker. What would have been much more interesting would be incremental difficulty settings for each of the areas on the field: defense, midfield, and attack. Being able to up the capabilities of the defenders – without changing the midfield or attackers – would allow for a more challenging game.

One of the few criticisms that can be leveled at FIFA 2000 is that the trade feature and the overall management choices should have more depth. While understanding that this is an action sports title first and foremost, the ability to run your own team as well as controlling play would be most welcome.

From great gameplay to a myriad of options, FIFA 2000 has it all. At the end I am left only with a request for more – more regular teams, more classic teams, more management options, and the ability to play more than three seasons in Season mode. FIFA 2000 comes highly recommended. CGW

THAT'S USING YOUR HEAD Multiple special moves – including bicycle kicks and diving headers – are available. They take some practice, but the payoff can be great. Remember to check out the replay after you make a great play.

GETTING HIGH Proof of the American scope of the game is the use of indoor stadiums. Such facilities are not used anywhere else in the world, as part of the traditional challenge of soccer is playing in tough weather conditions.

A STRONG SHOT ON GOAL The animation is very realistic, with accurate representations of a fluid follow-through after a shot is taken.

CGW RATED

PROS

Superb animation; ease of gameplay control; multiple options.

CONS

Needs more management options.

RECOMMENDED GEAR

HAMMERHEAD FX GAMEPAD

See review on page 158.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 16 MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 375MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-20 players; up to 8 over IPX network.

Publisher: EA Sports • **$40** • **www.easports.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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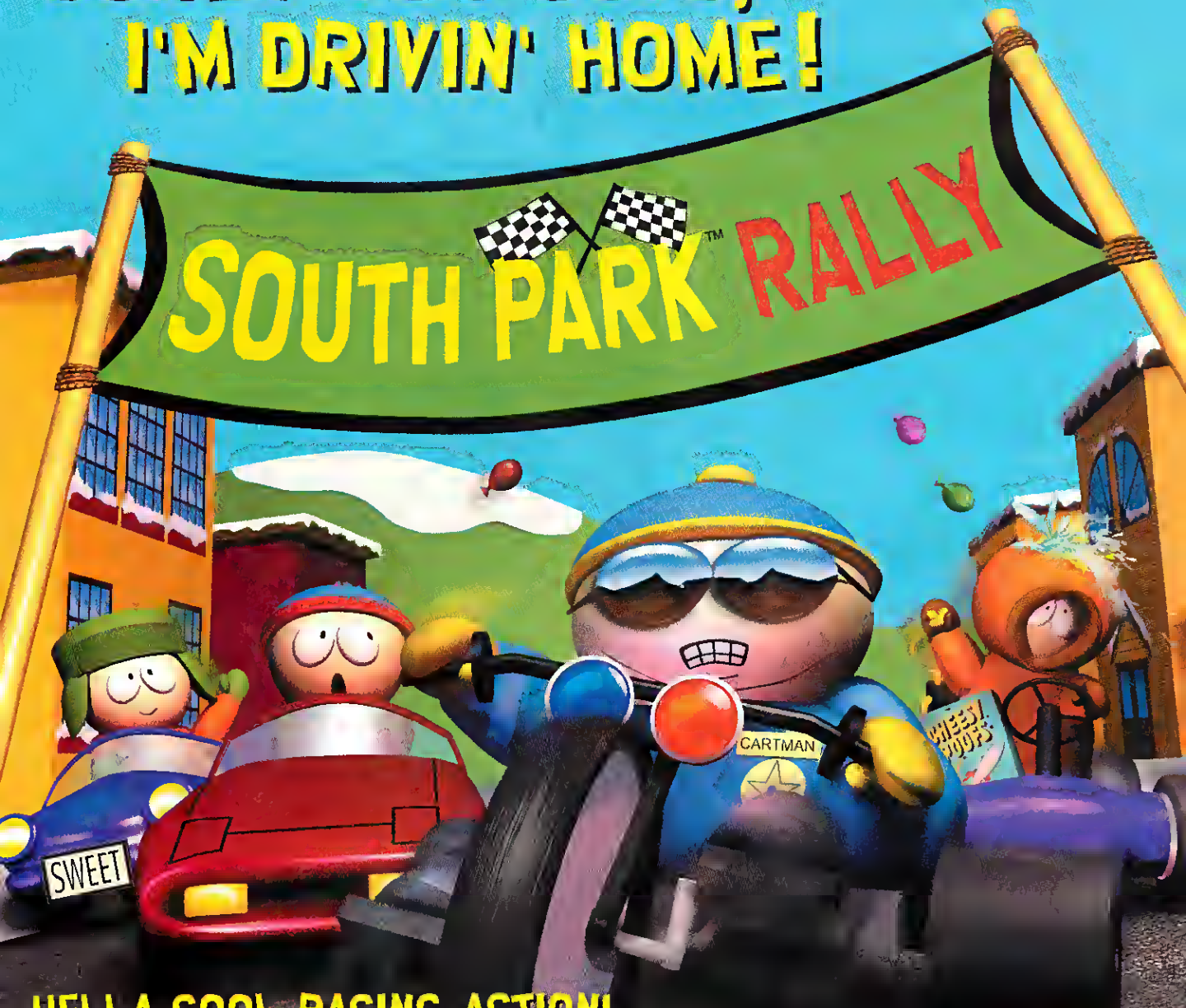

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PANZER ELITE Is a Marvel of Fine German Engineering

Hell on Wheels

PANZER ELITE
reviewed by Marc Dultz

After seeing so many dismal simulations of WWII tank combat, I was beginning to wonder if anyone was capable of making a good one. But someone finally has: Wings Simulations, with the help of Psygnosis, has proven that when it comes to waging war, no one does it better than the Germans

To borrow a popular adage, PANZER ELITE is a marvel of German engineering. For starters, it's the first WWII ground-combat simulation to effectively incorporate infantry. Though the troopers are stiff and cartoon-like, their presence on the battlefield deepens the simulation and helps elevate PANZER ELITE to a level others have had trouble achieving.

The developers have done a remarkable job of modeling the most prominent armored vehicles and the different types of weaponry. You'll soon discover the inherent difficulties of firing on the run, especially over rough terrain. The developers went so far as to depict the ballistic properties of each type of shell.

The terrain looks great, although it has some shortcomings. Everything is exquisitely detailed, from the rolling hills of Sicily to the lush fields of the Norman countryside. Unfortunately, all of the foliage was created using 2D sprites, which look flat and pixelated up close. Not a major problem, but one that could've been solved given the current state of technology.

YOUR KRAUTS ARE DONE Accurate gunners are rewarded with a variety of cool special effects.

KILLING PRIVATE RYAN While not quite cinematic, the graphics realistically convey the intensity and chaos of the battle.

AFRICA KORPS Several theatres of war are portrayed, from the hedgerows of Normandy to the desert sands of North Africa.

Engine Trouble

Like so many games these days, PANZER ELITE is somewhat unstable, occasionally crashing while loading the scouting report screen or even a campaign. Fortunately, version 1.07 – downloadable from the developer's website – cleans up some problems, including some of the speech and other sound-related conflicts currently plaguing the system.

Other problems can't be addressed with a simple patch. For instance, the manual fails to explain how to target the main gun or plot artillery. In addition, the designers could have spent more time improving both the mission briefings and after-action report phases. As it stands now, some of the English dialogue sounds amateurish, which is unfortunate considering the effort that went into other facets of the game.

What's most disappointing, though, is the fact that you can't switch vehicles in your platoon. If your tank is destroyed in combat – which occurs with alarming frequency – there's no way to continue the mission. From a gameplay standpoint, this is an inexcusable *faux pas*, especially when you consider that many of the missions can take an hour or more to play.

I'm also surprised that the designers chose a scripted-campaign structure instead of a more dynamic system. Given the nature of ground warfare, and wealth of historical evidence to draw upon, it would've been more interesting to fight a series of shorter engagements where the player influenced the course of the campaign.

Despite these problems, PANZER ELITE is a highly immersive armored warfare sim that vividly recreates some of the most brutal battles of the war. It's not the game it could have been, but it's still the most realistic and challenging WWII tank sim you can buy. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Good graphics; impressive weapon and vehicle modeling; nice interface.

CONS
Buggy; poorly-written briefings; can't switch between tanks; inadequate documentation; scripted campaign structure.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 374MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM, 745MB hard drive space, force-feedback controller. **3D Support:** Direct 3D. **Multiplayer Support:** 2 player modem and serial connection support, up to 16 player network support.

Publisher: Psygnosis • **Developer:** Wings Simulations • **$40** • **www.psygnosis.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated violence

Evolva
Evolving Spring 2000
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Latest Jane's Sim Has Everything but a Kitchen Sink (Unless We Haven't Found It Yet)

Aim High

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

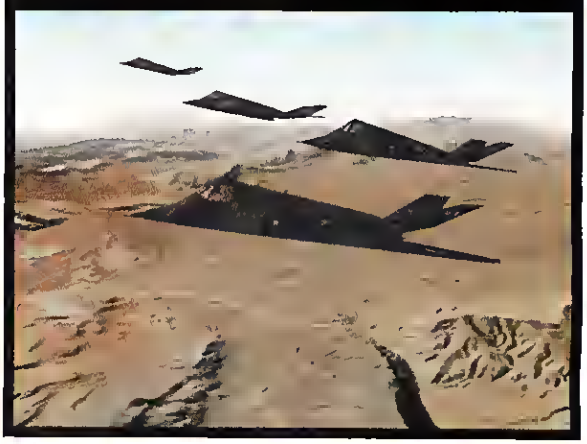
Ever wonder what it was like to fly the stealth fighter at night over Baghdad during Desert Storm? How about how tough it might have been to rescue a downed pilot during the Vietnam conflict? Imagine yourself saving the President's plane from hostile MiGs, just like in the movie *Air Force One*. While you're at it, you might as well throw in a precision lead strike against an atomic reactor's control center – *within* the United States, no less – using only your guns. If this blend of historical and hypothetical air combat is your idea of a good time, then let me introduce you to your new friend, JANE'S USAF.

USAF is developer Pixel Multimedia's second foray into the world of combat flight simulation. Their debut release of last year's ISRAELI AIR FORCE was often criticized for its ugly graphics engine, especially in regard to the terrain's awful "shimmering" effect. Pixel got the hint, because USAF proudly boasts one of the most stunning graphics engines ever seen. In fact, USAF is essentially IAF Plus – and that's a good thing. For example, both offer a variety of planes that span a few decades of deployment in a specific air force. Both offer the same two types of campaign structures. Both have the same multiplayer feature set. Both handle avionics in the same fashion, and both shamelessly endorse a style of play that practically forces the player to control most of the friendly aircraft at some point during a mission. The "Plus" comes from a year's worth of improvement by way of USAF taking the IAF template to greater heights. In addition to the improved graphics, USAF also offers a mission recorder (yeah!), a built-in voice command interface, and a resource-tracking component within the "future" campaign scenarios. Use up all of your ever-important AMRAAM missiles? You'll have to successfully complete a resupply mission if you want more. There's even a pilot career-mode that embarrassingly keeps track of just about everything you do within the sim itself. USAF allows you to upload your pilot's stats to the Jane's "Kill & Compare" webpage. You won't find my listing up there any time soon, thank you very much.

JANE'S USAF
reviewed by Gordon Berg

Until Kesmai's upcoming AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM makes its debut, USAF is the only 3D-accelerated sim on the market that will take you back to that stoned conflict and let you fly either the F-105 "Thud" or the Phantom II F-4E. Those of you bummed out by the cancellation of JANE'S A-10 can find some solace here; you can strafe tank after tank in the "Warthog" over Iraq (or even Colorado, of all places). Although none of the four included campaigns are dynamic in nature, USAF takes full advantage of its pre-scripted missions, often revealing new goals, pitfalls, or problems mid-flight. While the campaigns themselves are a bit on the short side in total number of missions flown, they can be very puzzle-like in nature and therefore require a few repeated attempts. And for those of you so inclined, you can make your own potential mishaps with the included mission editors. The training missions are excellent and have quickly become a standard feature in a simulation bearing the Jane's label. Once you have passed a sufficient number of these training missions, the famous "Red Flag" scenarios become available so that you can test what you've learned.

BLACK BEAUTIES These are definitely not the guys you want visiting your town late at night...



NO JOY IN YOUR STICK?

The biggest complaint among early players of USAF was difficulty controlling the aircraft. Some players experienced extremely sensitive input from their joystick, resulting in excessive "bobbing." Others found that the roll rates were overmodelled, making simple bank turns practically impossible. And some, of course, were not having any trouble whatsoever. Hopefully Pixel will address these matters, but in the meantime there are some things that might help you get by. Some have claimed setting the graphics to 32-bit color eliminated their problems, so give that a shot if your video card supports it. Also, make sure to go easy on the joystick. I mean, *really* easy. If you want to roll 90 degrees, an ever-so-slight tilt will suffice. If you find yourself bobbing more than you care to, you might try some gentle taps with the "trim" controls [PG UP] and [PG DN]. It won't eliminate any excessive oscillation, but it will help with minor pitch issues. There's also an included "joystick.exe" utility that can adjust your pitch, roll, and yaw. The default is set to a linear progression, but you might want to change it to something more parabolic. The problem with this utility is finding a single setting that works for all planes: You might make the F-16 or F-22 more manageable, but end up turning that A-10 from a warthog to a slug.

CGW RATED

PROS
Fantastic terrain; many classic airplanes; excellent training; solid multiplayer.

CONS
Overly-sensitive joystick input; graphics scale poorly on lesser systems; some sound problems.

Requirements: Pentium 200MMX with 64 MB RAM or Pentium 266 with 32 MB RAM, Windows 95/98, 450MB hard drive space; 6X CD-ROM, 4MB 3D-accelerator
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 450MHz, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HDD Free, 24X CD-ROM, Next-generation 3D-accelerator capable of 32-bit graphics
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN (one CD per player)
Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Pixel Multimedia • **$40** • **www.janes.ea.com/usaf/** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

LOCK 'EM UP The Padlock view is really great in USAF. Notice the nice reflections on the canopy.

VEGAS! Do you think there's valet parking at the Luxor for my F-22?

If you prefer to focus mid-flight on one plane rather than on several, you might want to look elsewhere. Like IAF before it, USAF adopts an extreme hands-on approach when it comes to achieving mission success. In fact, both the mission tips as well as the manual strongly encourage this. If you want to succeed, you'll often find yourself shifting back and forth between cockpits to help your planes suppress air defenses, fly escort, or drop bombs. The friendly AI rarely succeeds when left to its own devices, practically eliminating the option to fly throughout any given mission in just a single aircraft, while the enemy AI is extremely competent when set to expert. Is it an intentional design decision on Pixel's part – to "encourage" the player to fly every aircraft and liven up the gameplay, or a clever means of getting around some deficient programming? Either way, it makes for some intense and exciting hands-on action, and there's never a dull moment.

Most survey simulations are often synonymous with compromise, and USAF is no different. The time normally devoted to the creation of a single-plane study simulation gets spread out among several aircraft instead. As a result, the flight models aren't as exact as they could be, nor will you find any avionics that vary from one plane to the next – they all work the same way, regardless of the plane's era. This is not to say USAF won't be of interest to the hardcore enthusiast – far from it. Set the game to its most difficult and realistic of levels, and see if you aren't challenged. Or, give yourself a break from FALCON 4.0 or FLANKER 2.0 and actually evade a missile for once. Nonetheless, USAF should be considered a medium-level simulation with a strong emphasis on helping out the novice player. Like USNF before it, USAF has the ability to educate and encourage a whole new generation of flight-sim fanatics, because it captures the one ingredient so rarely found in many of today's simulations: It's fun. CGW

'PALM SUNDAY 'Cause it sticks to kids!

BUDDY SYSTEM Your wingmen may not be the brightest streetlights on the block, but they'll always stick real close.

HERE'S SNORTING AT YOU KID It's ugly, mean, built like a titanium bathtub, and we love it! Since JANE'S A-10 wound up in the round file, USAF is your best bet for Warthog action.

HOMEWORK The mission planning and tactical map screens are beautifully designed; here we see the front lines in the Red Crown scenario, over Nellis AFB and the Colorado River.

PHUN WITH PHANTOMS It's great to finally have a decent simulation of this venerable workhorse of the Vietnam era.

Cool Links

www.wingtech.net/usaf/index.htm Good place to go for all things USAF.
www.limech.com Well-established Jane's fan site.
www.wargamer.com/janeshangar/ Another good Jane's fan site.
www.migman.com.au/rat/simhis/USAF/USAF.htm Migman does a sim justice like nobody else.

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Great Graphics Plus Shallow Gameplay Doesn't Add Up to Much

Less Than Zero

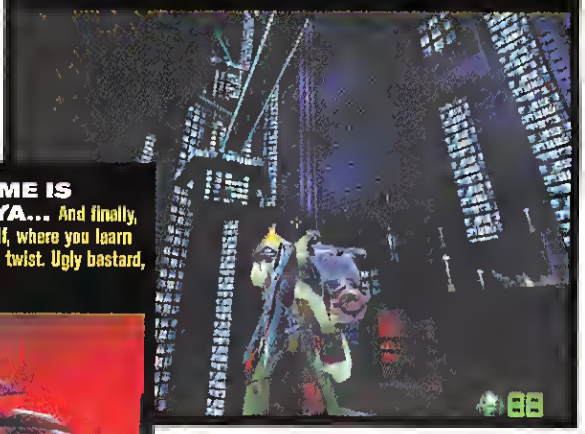
With innovative titles like HALF-LIFE, SYSTEM SHOCK 2, and BATTLEZONE blurring the line between action, strategy, RPG, and adventure, the good ol' "grip it and rip it" shooter concept seems to be running out of gas. And despite a great looking graphics engine and lots of stuff to blow up, SLAVE ZERO treads (make that stomps) over very familiar ground that will enthrall old-school shooter fans, but leave them wanting after they rip through the game's scant 16 missions. And no multiplayer support means ZERO's replay value won't hold up.

ZERO does have some innovations: Instead of weaving an engrossing story or character development into the action, the SLAVE ZERO team instead melded aspects of the 'Mech genre with run-and-gun action. The result is a simplified 'Mech-like character, a 60-foot-tall giant robot with 3D-shooter mobility, seen from first- or third-person chase-cam perspectives. ZERO's Ecstasy Engine impressively renders a dense, futuristic, high-rising Tokyo, equal parts *Blade Runner* and comic book. But while the look and sound are convincing, ZERO's lack of a sufficiently involved storyline, challenging opponents, or innovative level design prevent the game from being a top-shelf title.

SLAVE ZERO
reviewed by Dave Salvator

ARACHNAPHOBIA You'll face down various end bosses, replete with big bar o' health, on your way to battling SovKhan.

WHERE'S RAPUNZEL WHEN YOU NEED HER? Most of SLAVE ZERO's levels are pretty horizontal, but this one has you scaling buildings to make your way through.



HALLO, MY NAME IS INIGO MONTOYA... And finally, you battle SovKhan himself, where you learn the story's one interesting twist. Ugly bastard, isn't he?

Chan, Get Your Gun

If you rooted for Godzilla as he pulverized Tokyo in film after cheesy film, then ZERO will appeal to your sensibilities. You are Chan, part of the rebel band known as the Guardians, and you're fighting the nefarious SovKhan and his evil military-industrial empire. Equipped with a Slave unit and armed to the teeth, your mission is to fight the SovKhan's forces, battling your way into his lair where you'll have to face him down. The fairly clichéd storyline is executed decently, and in-engine cut scenes provide the mission briefings. Your commanding officer's melodramatic female voice guides you along, and is reminiscent of a Flash Gordon movie. "The fate of the free world rests in your hands [again]!!!"

ZERO often feels like a rail shooter, because the missions are so linear, and the only way to defeat end bosses is to simply blow them to smithereens. Enemy AI is borderline nonexistent, and – if you don't enter their hot zone – pretty easy to pick off at a distance, since they don't really respond to a far-off attack.

Weapons come in three flavors: bullets, rockets, and energy. You can only carry three weapons at any time, and rockets are fired from your shoulder as a kind of secondary fire. Later on, you're given targeting systems that increase the rockets' accuracy, as well as beefier bullet and energy weapons.

Most of the levels are very horizontal in design. And while your Slave unit can jump pretty high, you don't have Mech-like jump jets for any real airborne mayhem. One mission, High Climb, has you jumping like a frog to ascend into the Upper City as you make your way to the final showdown. There's some variety of mission objectives (escort, defend, etc.), but most of them are simply kill, kill, kill.

There Can Be Only One

The final battle pits you against the SovKhan himself, where you learn the game's one predictable plot twist. The SovKhan is a big-assed end boss with a bajillion hit-points who finally gives up the ghost in grand fashion to end the game. With ZERO's very impressive graphics engine and sound, and its interesting initial concept, it had the potential of being one of the Great Ones. And if you're pining for an old-school blast-and-laugh shooter, then this one will certainly entertain. But its overly linear and tedious gameplay, lack of multiplayer support, and the missing X factor keep this one from being all it might have been. CGW

CGW RATED

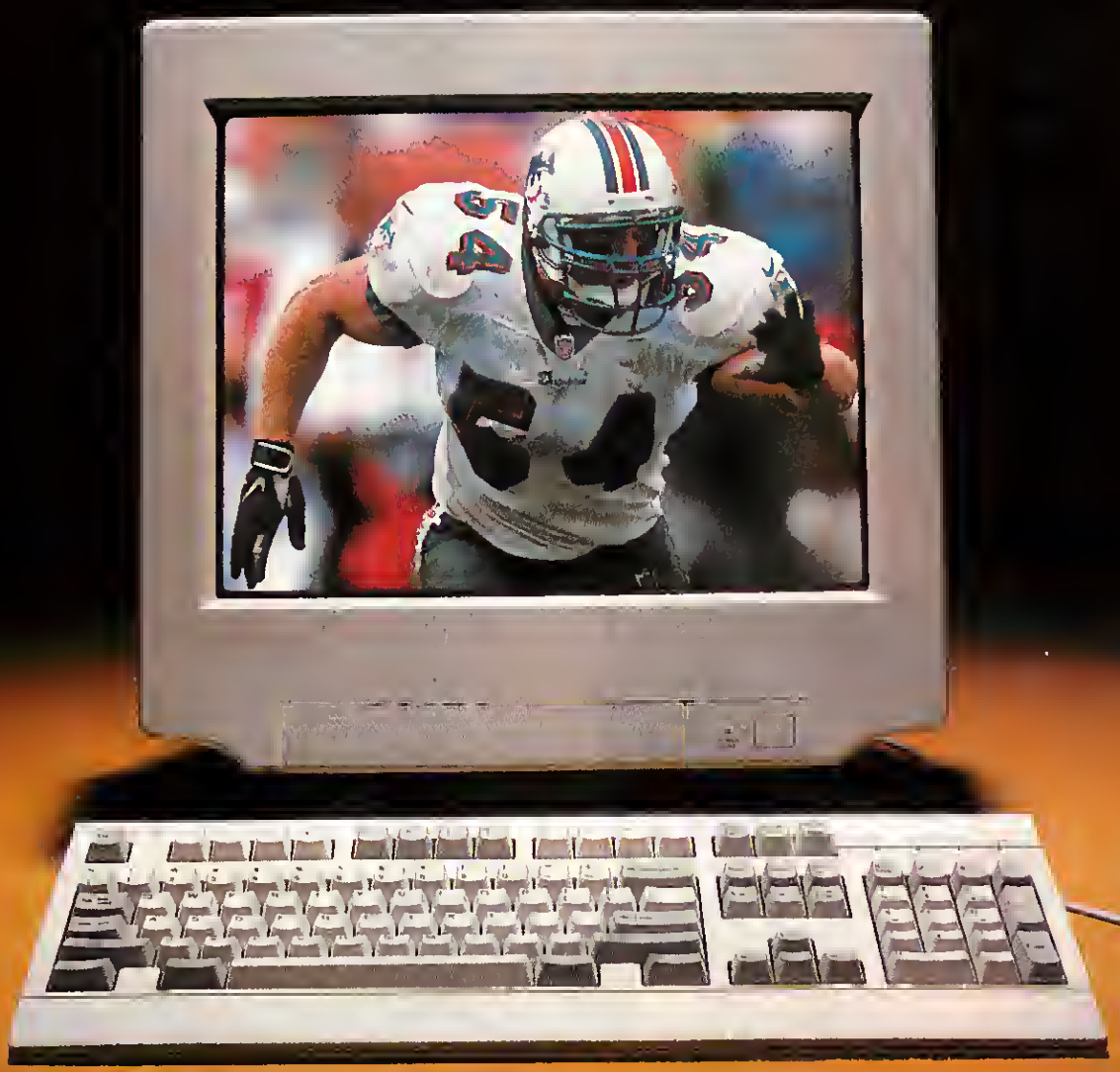
PROS
Great graphics; everything gets blow'd up real good.

CONS
Gameplay grows repetitive and tedious a few missions in; brain-dead AI; no multiplayer.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6-compliant 3D card, 120MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 225MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

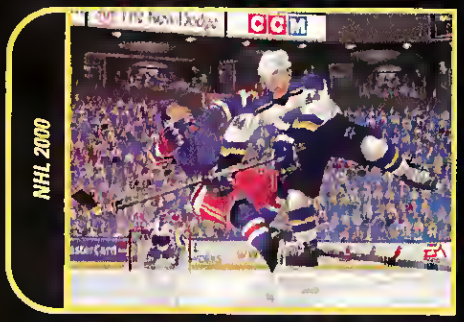
Publisher: Infogrames • **$40** • **www.slavezero.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated blood and violence.

Beating the computer is one thing.



Madden NFL 2000

Tiger Woods PGA TOUR® 2000


NHL 2000

NBA Live 2000

NASCAR 2000

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NASCAR

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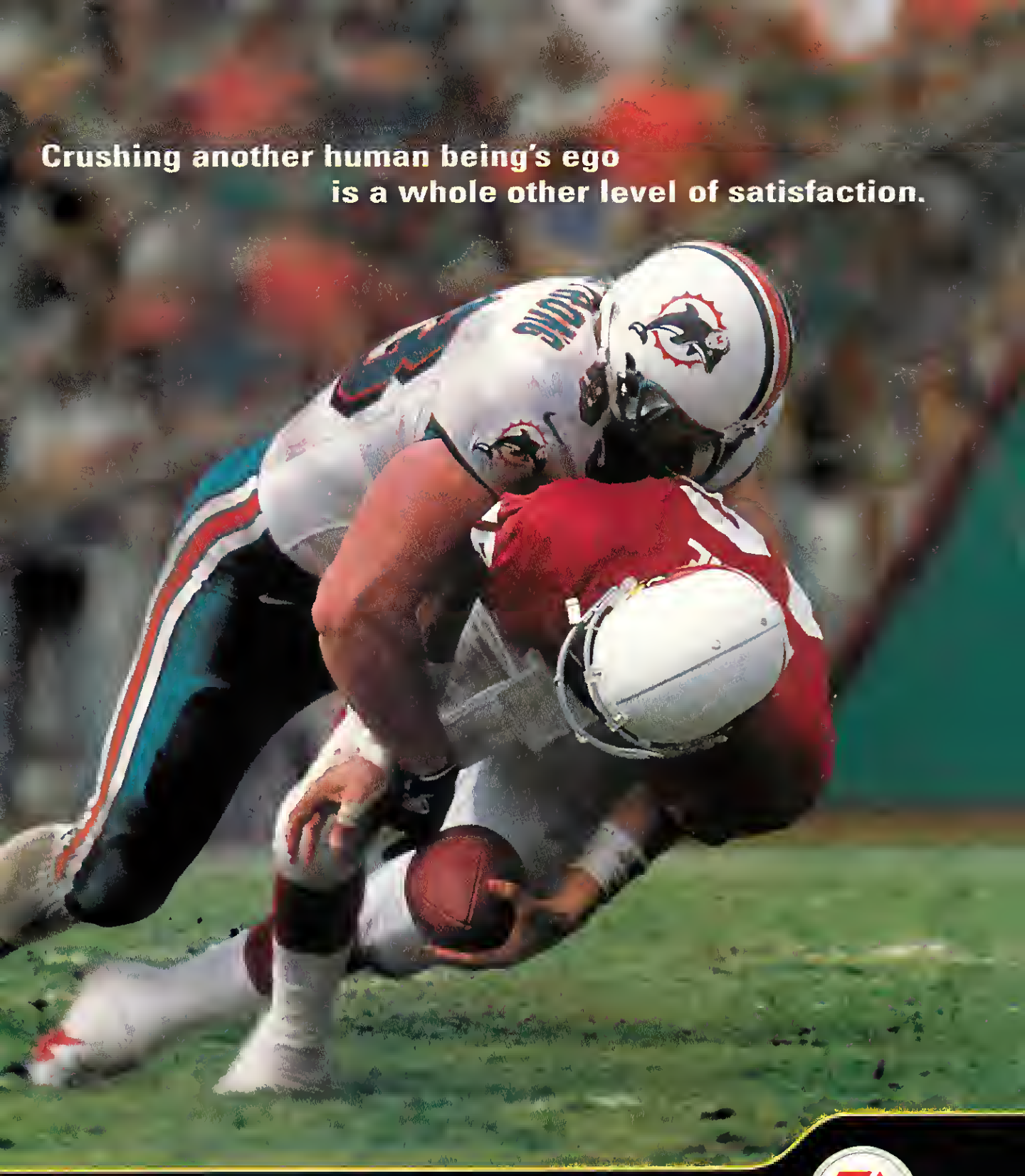
NHLPA



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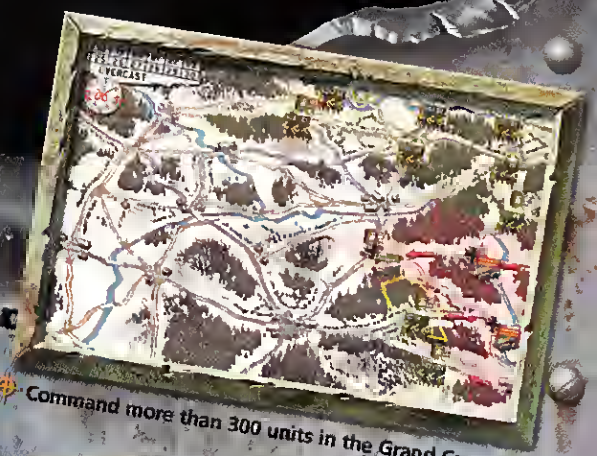

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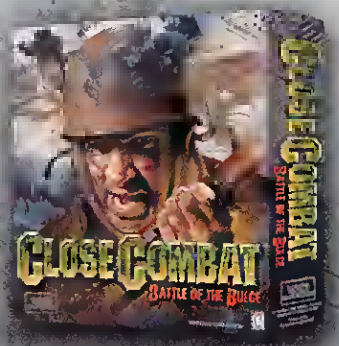

An Atomic Games Wargame

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AGE OF WONDERS Is Almost Fantasy Strategy Gaming at Its Finest

When Elves Attack!

Boy, do I hate elves. High elves, wood elves, gray elves, half elves, dark elves, Keebler elves, whatever – to me they all represent the most cloying, puerile elements of the refried Tolkien hash we call "High Fantasy." So imagine my horror when I learned that the campaign mode in AGE OF WONDERS (AOW) allows you to play as either the good elves, or – wait for it – the bad elves. Argh!

So my first pleasant surprise came when I read the backstory explaining why the Keepers (good elves) are fighting the Cult of Storms (bad elves) for control of the Valley of Wonders. I'm usually ready to blow off the "story" for most games, but AOW's is actually pretty good, sketching a detailed world with a long and believable history. Even the villains have logical motivations instead of the usual megalomaniacal schemes.

AGE OF WONDERS
reviewed by Jason Kapalka

BE AFRAID, BE VERY AFRAID Invoking the Terror spell in combat reduces enemy units' morale...you can sorta see why.

All Together Now

As for the game itself, it's turn-based strategy on the grand scale, with lots of vast armies, besieged castles, and cities razed to the ground. Comparisons to other games are a lazy reviewer's best crutch, but it's pretty clear here that the developers are paying homage to three great games even as they pillage them for ideas: the WARLORDS and HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC series, and Microprose's cult classic MASTER OF MAGIC. Hardly an element or idea here hasn't been swiped from one of these games. But while Triumph Studios isn't the first to patch together a game like this, the second pleasant surprise in AOW is that they have generally succeeded.

The whole in this case really is greater than the sum of its parts. While AOW resembles the HEROES series in its colorful background, array of special map structures, and gorgeous fairytale graphics, its guts are most heavily influenced by WARLORDS 3. As in that title, AOW scenarios are large, hex-based maps dotted with cities that serve as recruiting centers for your troops. You can't create new cities; you can only seize and upgrade various neutral towns and – as in WARLORDS – each hex can stack a strict maximum of eight units, eliminating the "Mega Stack" and making army composition a delicate balancing task.

CIVIC PLANNING In the town screen, you can queue up various units, build fortifications, migrate the population to a new race, or just burn the whole place down.

When conflict rears its ugly but inevitable head, you can resolve it with a quick and abstract replay of the battle (dull, but good for obvious blowouts), or opt for the more detailed tactical combat. In an "homage" to MASTER OF MAGIC, the turn-based tactical combat occurs on a rather large isometric playing field that accurately represents the city or terrain in contention. One clever twist is the way you can get around the eight-unit limit on stacks. All units surrounding attacked hexes are automatically drawn into the combat, so you can end up with over 50 units in a battle.

Over 100 different units are all lovingly detailed with heaps of special abilities, ranging from the nymphs' power to seduce male humanoids to a basilisk's death gaze, from the poisoned darts of assassins to the boulder-hurling of giants. In city sieges, the use of heavy weapons like battering rams and catapults is mandatory unless you have creatures that can fly over, pass through, climb, or crush the defending walls.

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful graphics; detailed tactical combat; awesome spells; heaps of cool units; deep and satisfying gameplay.

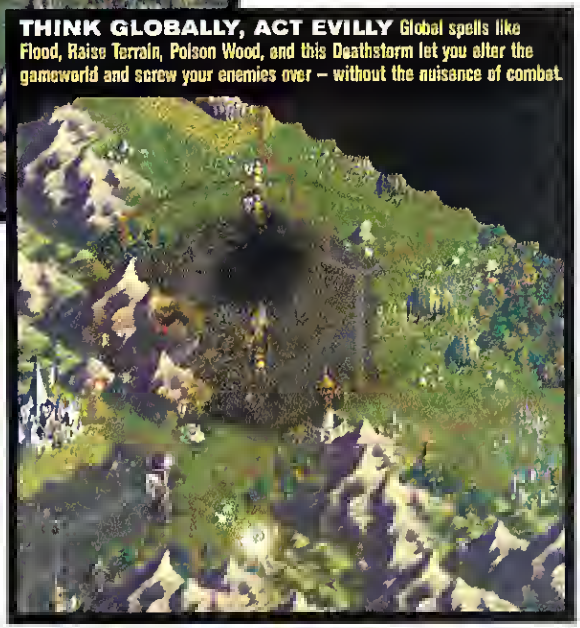
CONS
Bugs, bugs, bugs; a couple aggravating interface omissions.

I NEED A HERO Heroes are your most important units, and can have their various skills and abilities customized to suit even the most finicky buyer.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-266MHz, **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: TCP/IP, IPX, hotseat, email (2-12 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** Triumph Studios • $50 • www.ageofwonders.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated blood, mild animated violence.

A BAD STRETCH OF ROAD Several units, like the Undead Reaper, change the terrain as they move. In this case, the Reaper's passage transforms fertile fields into the wastelands more hospitable to the unliving.



THINK GLOBALLY, ACT EVILLY Global spells like Flood, Raise Terrain, Poison Wood, and this Deathstorm let you alter the gameworld and screw your enemies over – without the nuisance of combat.

The most powerful units of all are heroes. As in HEROES, these are clearly the focus of the game and the core of any army. Heroes are built on a point system and can be assigned abilities with every level, from the power to steal life points, to raising the morale of accompanying troops, to stealthy movement.

But spellcasting is their real forte. Only heroes may cast spells, making the safety of your chief caster a serious concern. At the same time, you need to keep him near the front lines to gain experience and to work his magic effectively.

And what spells! AOW's magical effects are the grandest I've ever seen in a turn-based strategy game, including huge elemental storms that can scorch fields to a crisp, magic to raise and flatten mountains, and the terrifying flood that makes every river on the map overflow its banks. An assortment of more utilitarian spells for unit healing and buffing – as well as your basic combat zappers – are also available, but it's the big global enchantments and summonings that are the showstoppers.

Strange Bedfellows

The robust diplomatic model requires a master diplomat to integrate more than a handful of races into a coherent nation. Elves and Orcs don't get along too well in garrisons, for example, and even in a more balanced empire you may find your troops rebelling if you commit violence against their race – burning enemy-controlled Halfling shires will displease your own Halfling troopers. You can change the population of towns to better suit your purposes, but even this must be carefully considered – expel Goblins from a captured city to make room for Lizardmen, and the Goblins become more hostile even as the Lizzies are appreciative.

There are about 30 scenarios included, each playable from the vantage point of multiple races and difficulty levels, along with the dynamic campaign, which branches at various points as you decide just how evil or good you want to be. There are multiple possible endings for the campaign, including a fairly bleak pyrrhic victory for those fighting on the side of the Undead hordes. It's enough to keep one busy for a while, and a very polished and powerful map editor is also included, so you can expect user maps to start showing up shortly.

The downside? There are one or two interface tweaks from WARLORDS they forgot to copy, such as a way of automatically routing units in a build queue to your front-line cities. But more grievously, the initial release of AGE OF WONDERS is rife with bugs, ranging from the minor (occasional graphics glitches) to the major (frequent slowdowns due to sound problems) to the heart-stopping (frequent crashes and lockups). The developers – to their credit – appear to be working feverishly on fixing these problems, so there's a very good chance that by the time you read this the most egregious errors will be fixed.

Now, I hate bugs almost as much as elves – but AGE OF WONDERS has made me live with them both. This is one of those games I wish I could wait a month or so to finish rating, since my hunch is that, once patched, this could be a five-star title. Even as it currently stands, it's way, way above average, and anyone with even the slightest interest in turn-based strategy games owes it to themselves to check it out. CGW

STRIKING OUT Magic effects are colorful and gorgeous, as in the flamboyant Holy Strike (left) and the Fire Strike (right).

PHARAOH Builds A Monument Atop CAESAR's Success

Jewel of the Nile

In need of an ego boost? There's really nothing like having a massive stone monument that'll last three or four thousand years built in your honor. Most of us – not having access to unlimited funds or an army of slaves – won't be able to accomplish this in real life, and will have to settle for the somewhat more limited gratification that comes from playing PHARAOH.

Fortunately, while the game probably won't immortalize your name forever or get your sarcophagus into the Smithsonian, it will provide you with many hours of electronic monument building and the narcissistic thrill that comes with it. Based on the successful CAESAR III system, PHARAOH puts you in charge of constructing and managing a series of cities in Ancient Egypt. As with CAESAR, you must attract citizens by supplying food, religious services, a healthy economy, and defense from a variety of military threats. You must also, as you'd expect, built the massive monuments for which the Egyptian civilization is best known.

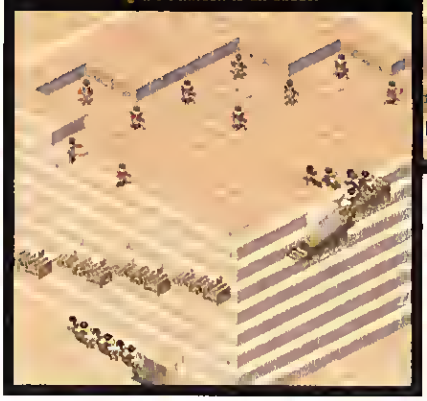
PHARAOH
reviewed by Tim Carter

Gameplay in PHARAOH is very similar to CAESAR III, charging you with plopping down stonemasons, bazaars, temples, dentists, and housing along with dozens of other buildings as you build and nurture the micro-civilization that is each city. The unique challenges of creating a thriving city along the Nile River – with its periodic floods and unique farming methods – add new and interesting elements not present in CAESAR III. The construction of pyramids and other monuments like the Sphinx – necessary for successful death and burial – is the focus of most of the cities you'll build, especially after moving through the first few introductory scenarios.

PHARAOH follows your career through a number of different city types, presenting you with a variety of strategic challenges. You may find yourself defending an isolated but mineral rich outpost at one turn, then building a bustling trade center at the next. Also, you may find yourself dragged into a civil war, particularly if you don't keep up your relations with your fellow Egyptian cities and the imperial ruler.

PIT CREW Limestone quarries, like the one in the lower right of this shot, are crucial to building both trade routes and monuments.

LEAVING YOUR MARK Nothing beats erecting enormous, resource-gobbling, labor-intensive monuments to the glory of all that is you. And isn't that what being the Pharaoh is all about?



The pyramids represent both a strength and a weakness in PHARAOH. On one hand, these enormous monuments sap your manpower, tax your economy, mess up your trading system (as not all materials will be readily available, and you're going to need a lot of everything to get even one pyramid built), and generally skew the way your city must be built. All of this provides for additional challenges, with a concrete sense of accomplishment when you finally get the damn thing built.

On the other hand, most of the scenarios where monument building is a key to victory follow the same path. First, you must get your city functioning effectively. This means providing food for everyone and generating a positive cash flow through trade and industry. Then you're ready to start building your monuments. Even with a healthy population and a lot of cash on hand, pyramid building can take a long, long time. But if you've built your city properly, you won't face many other challenges while you wait for your stonemasons and others to finish their masterwork. Monument construction tends to draw out the game for quite a while after you've addressed the primary challenges of a scenario.

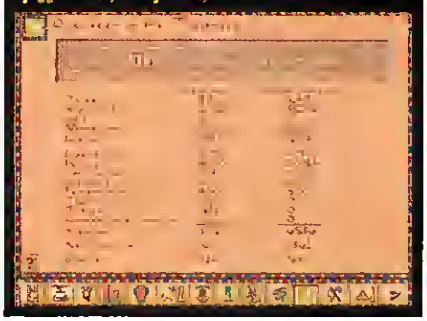
While PHARAOH also contains some of the more irritating elements of the CAESAR III system – such as randomly wandering service providers, irrational traders, and a relatively constant need to micro-manage warehouses – these tend to come off more as challenges to be overcome than flaws in the game itself. The Egyptian setting provides enough variety to make PHARAOH new and interesting, while the strong core game of CAESAR III remains intact. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Based on the excellent CAESAR III system; monument building is a nice addition to the game.

CONS
Somewhat repetitive; takes quite a few cities to get to the heart of the game.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID
Cash flow is everything in PHARAOH. The game punishes fiscal mismanagement harshly, so you'll need to juggle taxes, heavy trade, and more to thrive.



Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, 32MB RAM, 460MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space, 2MB SVGA video card **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Sierra • **Developer:** Impressions • **$50** • **www.sierra.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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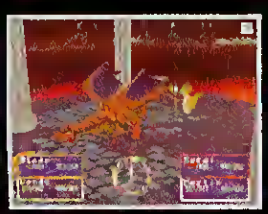

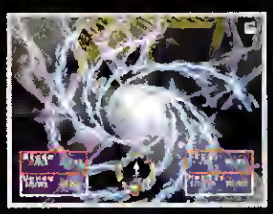

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HEAD to HEAD REVIEW

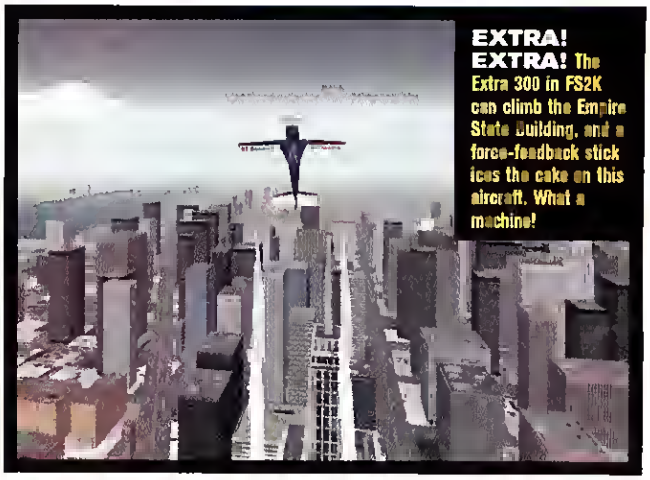
The Great Waldo Pepper and The FAA Duel for Hangar Space on Your Hard Drive

Civil Aviation Shootout

Owning your market segment for 17 straight years has to be an ego-booster. It proves you know your customers and understand the need to continually update your product. Microsoft's FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 is the latest refresh of their "franchise" game, and the goal is to stay king of the hill. FLIGHT UNLIMITED III from Looking Glass Studios is the premier competitor, and – as the name suggests – is also a revision. The average Joe won't have the money or drive space for both, so it's time to wring these babies out and see which one deserves your hangar.

FLIGHT UNLIMITED III and FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000

reviewed by John Nolan



EXTRA! EXTRA! The Extra 300 in FS2K can climb the Empire State Building, and a force-feedback stick ices the cake on this aircraft. What a machine!

Flight Model Marketing Magic

It's a rare flight simulation that doesn't claim realistic flight models, and these two make the standard boasts. Both programs provide similar basic plane sets with single-engine aircraft, a WWI fighter, a glider, and a bizjet. FU3 then diversifies its stable with seaplanes, light piston twins, and the P-51. FS2K opts for more exotic types such as the aerobatic Extra 300, a Bell helicopter, the Concorde, and a 737-400. The truth is that the planes all do the simple things pretty well. Constant speed climbs and descents, standard rate turns, and acceleration/deceleration rates are easy to model, and both of these sims are sufficiently accurate in these realms. The tough part is getting the variables right; torque, drag, spins, and configuration changes provide the real clues on flight-model detailing. In their "full realism" settings, neither game is particularly outstanding in these areas, but FS2K has a clear edge. Comparing FS2K's 737-400 flight characteristics to actual experience in the 737-800 left me slightly impressed. Initially it porpoised faster than Flipper, but after damping elevator sensitivity to a very low setting, the plane felt pretty familiar. It mimicked the power/pitch change relationships very well. The FU3 flight models just don't display as much attention to detail. Torque effects are so mild that you can almost ignore them; configuration changes gradually produce minor drag and pitch effects. It's too difficult to spin an FU3 aircraft; they just mush through the sky until you ease the stick and instantly recover. The trim modeling needs work, too: One "notch" of trim is often too much and the next lower "notch" is not enough. Maybe it's not all Microsoft marketing hype when they say Cessna and Learjet validated the appropriate

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

CGW RATED

Flight Unlimited III

PROS

Excellent graphics of Seattle area; superb Air Traffic Control environment; easy interface, great weather effects; just plain fun to fly.

CONS

Below-average flight instruction features; less IFR simulation capability; simplified cockpits; less demanding flight models; flight area limited to Western U.S.; minimal aviation-related documentation.

Flight Simulator 2000

PROS

World-wide database; detailed cockpits; accurate avionics; wide-ranging planeset with airliner availability; good flight instruction/instrument flying features; improved flight modeling.

CONS

Clumsy, slow interface; repetitive, blurry terrain graphics; meager printed documentation; no real Air Traffic Control environment.

Flight Unlimited III

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 300 MB free hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM, 4MB video card with Direct Draw driver. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350MHz, 64 MB RAM, 3D accelerator card, 2.1 GB free hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** None

Developer: Looking Glass • Publisher: Electronic Arts • $40 • www.flight3.com ESRB Rating: Everyone

Flight Simulator 2000

Requirements: Pentium 116, 32MB RAM, 350 MB free hard drive space, 3D graphics accelerator with 4MB RAM, 50 MB hard drive swap file space, 4x CD-ROM, SVGA 16-bit color monitor, DirectSound 7.0 compatible sound card. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Modem, Serial Cable (2 players), LAN (7 players), Internet via ISP or MSN Gaming Zone (up to 256 players)

Publisher: Microsoft Corporation • $69; $75 (Professional edition) www.microsoft.com/games/fsim • ESRB Rating: Everyone

BE SHARP, LOOK SHARP! The FS2K Professional Edition's two "IFR Training" panels put the radio stack into the standard view. Both versions of the Microsoft cockpits are great at high resolution. Looking Glass has taken a more relaxed approach and it shows. Compare the FS2K "Professional" IFR C-182 on the top, the FS2K "Standard" C-182 in the center, and the FU3 Trainer on the bottom.

flight models – FS2K does have a better flight "feel" than its competitor.

Fingerpaint or Photo Realism?

One of the primary ways these games have carved out niches for themselves is in how they deal with terrain. FS2K attempts to model the whole world (over 20,000 airports). It even includes the little grass strip where I keep my PT-19, with the hangars in the correct locations. While the attempt to cover the globe is a resounding success, something has to give, and detailed terrain is the sacrificial lamb. Despite the six major cities that are called "high resolution," most of the terrain in FS2K is a repetitive, muddled blend of seasonal colors. And the closer you get, the worse it looks. Even the "high res" cities aren't eye-watering. FU3 took a completely different approach; it absolutely cannot match the geographical diversity of the other game, but what it does, it does very well. It primarily models Washington state in excruciating detail, accurate to four meters per pixel. An "outer terrain" region of eight western states in lower resolution fills out the flight map (it's worth noting that you can also load in the California terrain from FU2). The end result is that the scenery in this game – including the spectacular weather effects – just blows Microsoft away. It becomes a "quantity or quality" decision.

For those who like to watch their flights from the outside, both simulations do a really nice job on aircraft exteriors. The camera control in FS2K is so cumbersome, however, that you might not want to bother. Conversely, FU3 still has one of the best cameras in the biz, which makes flying from outside the cockpit a real joy.

The bottom line is that FU3's graphics will delight those who fly these sims in a VFR way, checking out the scenery and special effects. FS2K will satisfy the instrument pilots who spend most of their time "heads down," practicing IFR flying.

The Learning Curve

These sims aren't FAA-authorized flight instructional programs, but both feature "flying lessons." FS2K provides the more detailed and effective approach. Rod Machado, resident Flight Instructor for the *Aircraft Owners & Pilot's Association* magazine, guides you through the 15 "Learning To Fly Tutorials" (and offers to sell you his book). Afterwards, you're ready to try the lessons and check-rides. In the Lessons, the instructor demos the learning objectives and then allows you to try the maneuver. Instructor feedback could be more extensive, but what's there does help. The check-rides allow you to earn flight ratings loosely based on real-life counterparts, such as Private or Commercial Pilot certificates. To earn each rating, you take four lessons and a check. Here, the examiner simply requests a series of maneuvers. There is no feedback and you can't progress until you satisfy the silent examiner. It can be very frustrating, to say the least.

FU3 has 26 flight training sorties in basic and advanced flying, weather techniques, and familiarization rides in four airplanes. This training is in a very different style and not nearly as effective. A lesson consists of reading through instructional screens and then riding along as an observer, the instructor demos the maneuvers while verbally instructing. The information is good, but then you're flying solo. When you practice the ride, there's a total absence of feedback or debriefing. FU3 has an excellent air traffic control feature that the Microsoft marketing moguls overlooked. Out there in the real world, you have to

Learning to Fly

Today's crop of civilian flight sims are getting so good that they can be used as a serious tool for pilot training. FLIGHT UNLIMITED III is a stellar example, as it incorporates realistic IFR flight planning and communications sequences from Ground Control through Approach Control, allowing the student pilot to request and copy clearances and Automated Terminal Information Services (ATIS weather). The student pilot is able to put communication strings together to request and respond to controller instructions. If things are not done in the proper order, the student is prompted for the required information. This tool trains pilots to create usable flight plans, copy clearances, and to communicate accurately and concisely. No other training tool for pilots (not even the FAA-approved simulators) is able to offer such a realistic and forgiving environment for this type of student practice. Student pilots who come to flight instruction with experience in these advanced flight simulators will have a big-picture understanding of the ATC system and IFR navigation that otherwise takes months – if not years – of training to build. Although it should be obvious that you can't get your pilot's license without proper real-world training, civilian sims can be used as a complement, and save you time and money if you want to make the jump from the desktop to the skies.

Caroline Bryan is a CFI (Certified Flight Instructor) who teaches out of Concord Flight International in California.

CUT & PASTE AIRPORTS These are overhead shots of the SeaTac airport taken from about 5000 feet in both games. The Microsoft version looks like a cartoon caricature of an airport, while the Looking Glass shot looks like the real deal.

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Use whatever means necessary

Turn up the heat

Zoom in for the kill

YOUR CODENAME:
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both make radio calls and listen up to maintain situational awareness. FU3 has the best ATC features of any sim to date, and it adds a lot to the experience. Make a mistake, and the controllers will broadcast your flaws to one and all; running off the taxiway brings a reminder that "you're not in an all-terrain vehicle." FU3's ATC is accurate, timely, and funny.

What's up, Docs?

These programs are the Donald Trumps of disk-space real estate; a "Typical" install on FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 uses 670MB of space, while the "Full" install scarfs up 1.1 Gigs. FLIGHT UNLIMITED III is guilty of greater gluttony, devouring 670 MB in "Typical" and gorging on 2.1 Gigs in the "Full" mode! The irritating part of this conquest of the drive is the space used to provide documentation. In the good old days, flight sims came with thick "how to" manuals. Game features and options, aircraft checklists, and good real-world aviation techniques were included. FS2K's method provides a "bare bones" printed manual and puts a ton of stuff on the CD. The CD isn't an improvement; they didn't include a key-chart. "Popping up" the needed information wipes out a chunk of the screen, and you can't take it with you anywhere.

FU3 has an even smaller manual, which is in keeping with its "don't worry, be happy" outlook. Although small, the booklet includes an abbreviated checklist and cockpit familiarization for four of the ten aircraft. It also does a good job of explaining the game interface. Thankfully, Looking Glass provides a complete keyboard command reference card – a real plus when programming a stick and throttle. FU3 does more with less, but there's room to improve. There's no happy medium here – FS2K puts too much information on the CD and not enough in the manual, while FU3 could use more in both places.

Face-off

Lastly, the human/machine interface defines the difference in these two games. FU3 is designed to be easy to use, and sacrifices some detail to accomplish that goal. Selecting an airport and an aircraft, laying out a flight plan, and creating some weather requires a minimal number of mouse clicks and takes about half as long as the preflight in FS2K. FU3 is experience-oriented. It's user-friendly, graphically glamorous, and lots of fun. It does simplify flying to a degree, almost like VFR barnstorming. Call it "the Great Waldo Pepper" of sims.

FS2K doesn't have a simple, intuitive interface; it's more like a cumbersome challenge. The reward for persistence is depth. This sim allows you to tailor a large number of variables to your own specifications. FS2K is detail-obsessed, and the result is an unwieldy yet capable flight simulation. It covers a very wide spectrum of the civil aviation experience. Call it the "FAA of flight sims;" it's only here to help, but it can be a real pain.

IFR OR VFR? The bottom shot shows a FS2K B-777 practicing on the ILS into Kansas City, while the top shot shows the FU3 Fokker doing touch-and-goes on the Seattle Kingdome. These two shots emphasize the difference: FS2K is a mom serious approach, while FU3 underscores the fun of flying VFR.

WALL TO WALL PANELING You can display and arrange just about every cockpit panel with a click of the mouse in FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 (top). It's great for procedures, but makes it a bit hard to see. FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3 keeps it simple; only two aircraft have an extra drop-down panel (bottom).

You Make the Call

So which one of these space hogs should get the coveted spot on your hard drive? That depends on what attracts you to civil aviation sims. Looking to improve your VFR and IFR flying skills as either a PC or a real-life pilot? FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 has to be your choice. The world-wide scope, higher cockpit detail, slightly more accurate flight modeling, better checklists, and superior instruction make it an easy decision. The downside is a clumsy interface, an absolutely minimal ATC environment, and average 3D-terrain graphics. As this goes to press, FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 PROFESSIONAL EDITION has arrived. Unless you're desperate for two more prop planes, six more "hi-res" cities, a flight model/instrument panel editor and additional AVIs – just save your bucks. There really isn't an excuse for releasing both these versions. At best, the "professional" version is the same game with a patch; at worst, it's just a feeble ploy to get an extra 15 bucks.

On the other hand, if you're looking for the VFR joy of flying, FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3 is the handsdown winner. The Seattle-area terrain and weather graphics are cutting edge, and the rest of the graphics are above standard. The interface is smooth and easy, the flight models are decent, and the ATC environment sets the current standard for excellence. It has weak areas, too – primarily in flight instruction, limited cockpit views, simplified instrument panels, and limited geography.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000 is hogging my hard drive. At this stage of my aviation career, I like being able to practice my annual checkride in the airplane I fly, at the places I fly. FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3 is going on the shelf for now. It doesn't take that long to uninstall one, and reinstall the other anyway! CGW

John Nolan is hooked on PC Flight Simulations, owns a PT-19, and flies the 737-800 for a major airline. His wife's favorite song is "Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be pilots."

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EA Sports Continues Its B-Ball Domination

Air Apparent

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

You're down two with eight seconds left. Having just called timeout, you review your options. Should you hit Wilt down low, or Jerry West coming off the screen? Wait a minute. Wilt? Jerry West? Are you dreaming? Nope. EA Sport's latest installment in its basketball series has all the old timers, and tons of new features and options, along with sizzling graphics and in-your-face gameplay.

NBA LIVE 2000

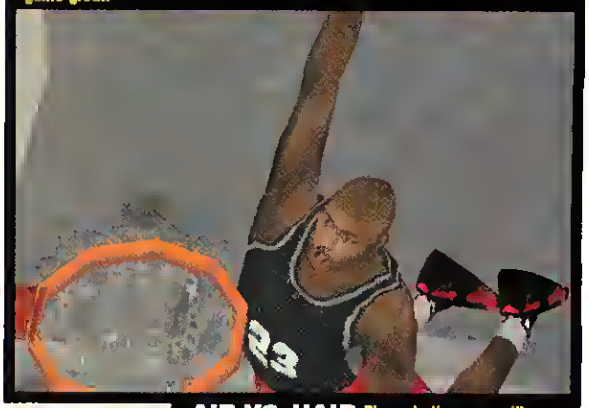
Reviewed By [illegible]

Simply the Best

The essence of NBA LIVE 2000 is in its players. And it has a bunch. Not only does it boast all of the current NBA players, this year's batch of rookies included, but it also has a slew of all-time great teams. Borrowing a page from its cousin, the Madden football franchise, all-star teams from the 50's through the 90's are here, including the greatest all-star of all time – Michael Jordan. You can now settle those debates you've had with your dad about whose generation of NBA players is better. The Big "O" versus Grant Hill. Wilt versus Shaq. While the old-timers don't have unique moves, the nostalgia value alone will keep you playing.

Another new feature is the one-on-one mode, something we haven't seen from EA in over 10 years. You can play one-on-one against any NBA star, past or present. Work on your game against the greats, and if you really got game, challenge Michael Jordan at the highest difficulty level. Hope you like humble pie! With a franchise mode that includes negotiations and free agent contracts, along with a practice mode on the black top (available day or night), NBA LIVE 2000 offers an impressive array of options. Throw in the multiplayer mode, allowing you to play hotseat or over the Internet, and you have one solid basketball simulation.

BE LIKE MIKE The addition of Michael Jordan may have been a long time coming, but there are plenty of other elements that make this game great.



SCREEN! Computer AI is smarter than ever, but you can still call plays for your teammates as well as call for a pick.

AIR VS. HAIR The only time you will ever see Dr. J and Jordan going 1-on-1 on an inner-city playground (aside from in your dreams) is in NBA LIVE 2000.

Along with the features comes the fast-paced, intense basketball we have come to expect from this franchise. Given this emphasis on action, play sets aren't as important as they are in, say, Microsoft's INSIDE DRIVE. However, you can definitely see shooters coming off screens for the jumpshot, and big men fighting for post position before they drop-step dunk on you. Passing the ball is a snap, which allows you to whip the ball around the perimeter for the easy score. Shooting does require a little practice; after building many a house with wayward bricks, I finally learned that practice does make perfect. A variety of dribble moves, including a killer crossover and behind the back dribble, add spice to your drives.

The most frustrating part of the game is rebounding. Time and time again the computer would beat me to the ball, no matter how good my position or how high I jumped. Watching the computer grab four straight offensive rebounds is no fun. But this tougher AI makes the game more enjoyable. The computer will block shots, double-team your high scorer, press at any time, and even foul when behind, all of which add up to closer, more intense games.

Final Buzzer

The NBA is driven by its stars, and so is this game. The top players dominate, from Shaq's bull-rushes to the basket to Reggie Miller's rainbow jumper. The tight graphics are capable of rendering noticeable differences in player faces and physiques, and even details like Kobe Bryant's elbow pad and Patrick Ewing's trademark kneepads. And Dr. J's afro will strike awe in the hearts of all who behold it.

The only element truly lacking is the crowd, which is rendered in 2-D and looks like paper cutouts lying down. But this is such a minor flaw when put up against the complete package. The customizable regular season and playoff options, stunning graphics, great gameplay, and, of course, the roster of classic players give NBA LIVE 2000 what it needs to totally dominate its competition and continue EA Sports' championship b-ball dynasty. Long may it reign. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Michael Jordan, all-time all-star teams; one-on-one mode; fast-paced gameplay.

CONS
Cheesy crowd graphics; no playbook; difficult rebounding.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 90MB hard drive space, DirectX 6.1. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz or faster, 165MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Glide and Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** 2 players hotseat, 2-8 players over IPX and Internet, 1 CD per player.

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

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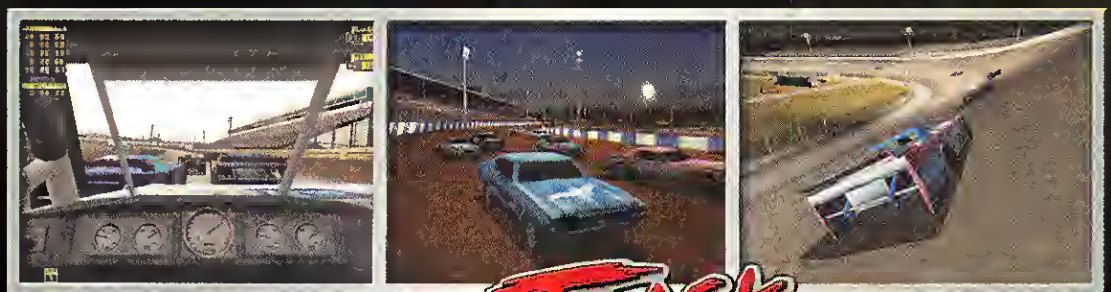

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INTERSTATE '82 Is a Dull, Soulless Retread

Through Being Cool

We have before us a car wreck. It is not a pretty sight. The name of this wreck is INTERSTATE '82. I'm not exactly sure what happened here, but, judging from the scattered debris, it appears that Activision – in a flabbergasting display of bad decision-making and timidity – has taken one of the best games of the decade, INTERSTATE '76, stripped it of everything cool and unique, and left this...thing...behind as a sequel. Let's examine the wreckage.

INTERSTATE '82
reviewed by Jeff Green

Gut Feeling

I'76 was set in an alternate-universe 1970's-era America, a *Mad Max*-ian place where "auto-vigilantes" roamed the streets in heavily-weaponed vehicles. The concept was pulled off brilliantly, with a clever 1970's-TV look, awesome funk soundtrack, and – most importantly – deep and unique gameplay that crossbred auto sims and shooters.

I'82 reintroduces the main characters – with new 80's-era clothing and hairdos – and tells a new story. Groove Champion is missing, and his sister has hired you – Taurus – to find him. As in the first game, the story is told with wit and cinematic flair, evolving into a hilarious riff on the "Contragate" scandal. It'd make a great movie.

Unfortunately, there is a game to be played too, and here, it's just one bummer after another. I'76's gameplay has been completely gutted. What used to involve an engrossing mix of semi-realistic driving skills and combat strategy has been reduced to a one-dimensional, cut-rate, first-person shooter, in cars. Damage modeling is gone, replaced by a generic "health bar." Both you and your enemies can shoot and be hit anywhere, with no local consequence.

STRIPPED DOWN Environments are plain and lacking in detail, often looking no better than your average console port.

WHY BE ORIGINAL? I'76's localized damage model has been replaced with a "health bar." Very innovative. Also, check out the lackluster weapon effects. Nice sunset, though.

Tires stay intact, lights don't blow out, and neither your speed nor control seem to alter no matter how much damage you've suffered. Terrain doesn't seem to exist. You'll drive at the same speed, with the same feel, whether you're on a paved road, dirt, or...*in a river*. Crashes bear no resemblance to reality – and the impact is the same whether you crash into a building, cliff, or circus tent.

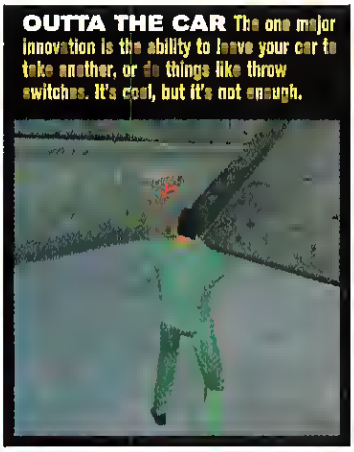
Car salvaging has been revamped for the worse. In I'76, there was a tactical advantage in fighting conservatively, because you could salvage your enemies' vehicles for spare parts. Here, in some bass-ackwards leap of logic, you receive cash only after you destroy your enemies' cars. Where this money comes from, and how you are supposed to have applied your upgrades between missions, goes conveniently unexplained.

Shrivel Up

Add to all this the inexplicable removal of a dashboard view, and you get the feeling that Activision was determined to make sure you did not feel like you were in a car at all. What they wanted, it seems, was a mainstream shooter, without all that complicated "car stuff." The problem is, there are lots of great shooters out right now, so if you're going to compete, you better offer something vital and original. But INTERSTATE '82 doesn't even come close.

The missions are tedious, repetitive, and unimaginative. There isn't one level that's better than any in I'76. It's basically just run-and-gun, over and over. The environments are unimaginative and generic, and the graphics in certain areas – like Las Vegas – are almost embarrassing in their lack of complexity and detail. The weapons are uniformly uninteresting, with utterly feeble visual effects. The perfunctory nature of *all* the gameplay, really, is just hard to believe.

It's a real shame. Activision, seeking a larger audience, has taken a great franchise and gutted it of all the originality that made it a hit in the first place. They may not have intended it this way, but what they've done is made a perfect tribute to the 1980's: a mechanical, soulless, product, with more of an eye on making a buck than on having a good time. Someone call a tow truck. CGW



OUTTA THE CAR The one major innovation is the ability to leave your car to take another, or do things like throw switches. It's cool, but it's not enough.

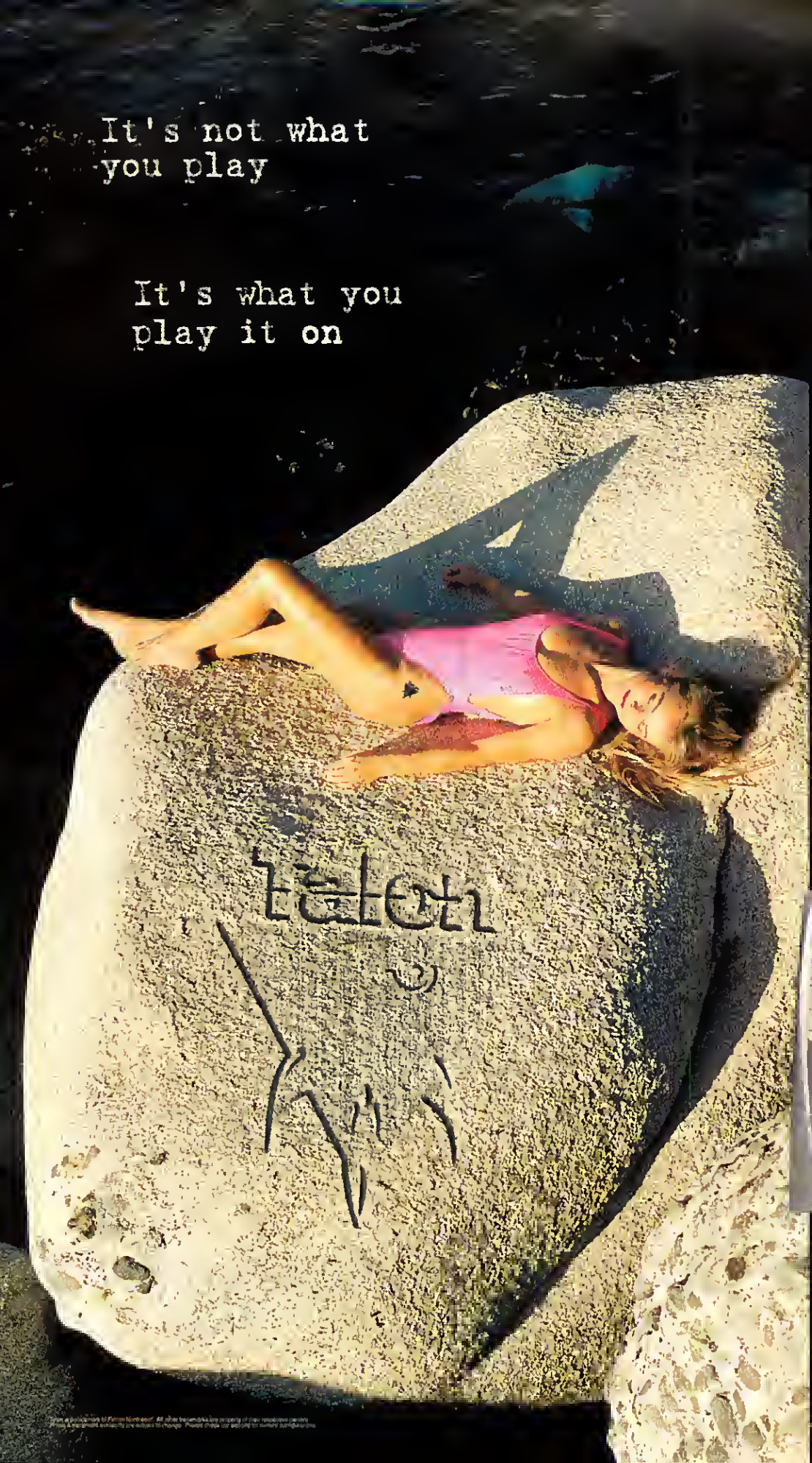
CGW RATED

PROS
Great storyline; hilarious cut-scenes; good acting.

CONS
Bland graphics; tedious missions; rote, generic gameplay.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator required. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300 MHz, 64MB RAM, 700MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN.

Publisher: Activision • **$50** • **www.activision.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, animated blood and violence.



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The Crown Slides Off the Head of the King of Computer Golf

Mulligan Stew

LINKS LS 2000

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

The ancestry of the LINKS golf simulations can be traced all the way back to the days when the Apple II was king. Over the years, the LINKS games have been the one constant in the volatile sports sim world, a franchise that you could always count on. So it's more than a little disappointing that LINKS LS 2000, the latest game in the line, appears to be a meager repackaging of its predecessor (LINKS LS 99) with just the barest minimum of additions necessary to justify the new package and name.

Tee it Up

Let's start with the basics, and here LINKS LS 2000 accounts for itself quite well. A golf sim lives and dies on its ball physics, and LINKS LS 2000 maintains the stellar ball physics models of its predecessors. Sand play – criticized in the LINKS series in the past – now requires the player to adjust his swing to either "pick" the ball or explode into the sand, making bunker play a trickier proposition. The core golf simulation is as good or better than anything on the market.

The graphics, once awe-inspiring, haven't changed much at all in the last couple years. They're still quite good, but compared to the 3D-rendered graphics of recent competitors, they have a "flat" look. The swing interface includes the venerable two- and three-click modes, and the Powerstroke. The latter is a mouse swing, very versatile, but with one major drawback: It's not in real time (as opposed to the real-time mouse interface in PGA 99).

Multiplayer is excellent, with every type of online play available (include the MSN Gaming Zone) and multitudes of potential opponents online at all times.

The Back Nine

So, what's new in LINKS LS 2000? Six courses are included: the St. Andrews Old, New, and Jubilee courses, Covered Bridge (Indiana); and the Hawaiian courses Mauna Kea and Hapuna. St. Andrews Old and Mauna Kea were available in previous versions, so you essentially get four new courses. None of the new courses are anything to write home about; they're fairly straightforward and have nothing unique enough in their design to compel you to play them multiple times. And this leads to perhaps the key area in which LINKS LS 2000 trails the competition: JACK NICKLAUS: GOLDEN BEAR CHALLENGE and PGA 99 include course-designing tools, which are used by very talented designers to create a plethora of breathtaking, free courses. With LINKS LS 2000, you must purchase new courses, and even then some of the most desirable venues (such as Augusta) aren't available. Since a major pleasure of golfing is playing new courses, LINKS LS 2000 takes an immediate hit in value compared to its competitors.

What else is new? You get a few new modes of play, but since the '99 version included a mode-of-play designer, that's nothing to get excited about. An "Easy Swing" is included, requiring only one click, but it's hard to imagine anyone wanting to stick with that interface for more than a game or two. New commentators add a nice variety of new quips and observations.

FUZZY WUZZY Fuzzy Zoeller uses some body english on a short par 3.

WHOOPS A rambunctious putt puts a hole in the reverse-view camera.

The 19th Hole

If you own LINKS LS 99, there's no compelling reason to purchase this version. If you don't own a golf sim, while LINKS LS 2000 is a good golf game, the wealth of free courses available for JACK NICKLAUS and PGA '99 make it hard to recommend LINKS LS 2000 over them. PC golfers can only hope that the next incarnation in this venerable series offers something substantially new. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Still boasts one of the best golf physics models in the genre.

CONS

Almost no changes from LINKS LS 99; lacks a course designer.

LINKS IN LINKS The Scottish links courses resemble cow pastures (to the unenlightened).

Cool Link

www.lstour.com The Links Online Tour

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz (or Pentium 166MHz with MMX), 32MB RAM, 90MB hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive **3D Support:** None

Multiplayer Support: 2 to 4 players via Internet (TCP/IP), IPX, modem, or serial.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Access Software • $55 • www.microsoft.com/games/links2000 • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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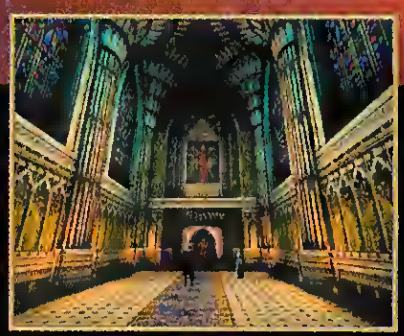

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TEEN T
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This Wannabe Spookfest Is More Count Floyd Than Count Dracula

The Horror, the Horror

Disappointment and computer gaming often go together. We've all felt it. Sometimes it's that TRESPASSER kind of hurt that hits from the very first level, and doesn't let go. Sometimes it's a creeping sensation that gradually lets you know that you've been wasting your time. Since that impression only comes after several butt-numbing hours with the game in question, it's easily the worst kind of letdown.

NOCTURNE, an action-horror hybrid, falls into the latter category. While it starts out with a promising blend of pistol-blazing action, classic monsters, and pulp-fiction accoutrements, design problems and an overall lack of inspiration kill its early promise.

NOCTURNE
reviewed by Brett Todd

THE PIT, THE PENDULUM, AND A GUY PACKING HEAT Some parts of NOCTURNE just don't seem to fit together. These funky pendulums come straight out of Edgar Allen Poe, while the Stranger has dropped in from John Woo's Hong Kong.

Strange Days

The initial storyline, at least, is gripping. You play the Stranger, a mysterious agent working in the '20s and '30s for a secret organization known as "The Spookhouse." Its purpose? To protect citizens from evil, supernatural forces – meaning vampires, werewolves, zombies, and other horrors. The best way to protect folks is to blow said beasties away, so the Stranger and his Spookhouse companions pack all manner of weapons, including crossbows, sub-machine guns, and a sunlight cannon that dusts vampires. Each of the four acts – which are self-contained and can be played in any order – features more scraps than scares. If you're looking for traditional horror atmosphere, you won't find it here.

BANG, BANG Most of the action in NOCTURNE involves coming upon gory scenes – like this one with two hungry werewolves – and then adding the perpetrators' innards to the bloody mix.

You also won't find any enjoyable gameplay. Basic movements are frustrating. Picking up objects, descending stairs, and even opening doors requires the Stranger to be in exactly the proper position. The game is littered with unintentional obstacles. The most obvious nuisance is the rotating camera. As the point-of-view switches constantly to the "spookiest" angle, it often leaves the protagonists behind. Battles are carried out, but you'll see nothing but flailing monster arms and the flash of the Stranger's pistols. Attacks typically require you to replay them with the camera in mind, making sure to stay out of the "blind spots" that bring up the impossible views.

In some ways, this doesn't matter. Combat is ridiculously simple, requiring just ammunition and a quick trigger finger. As long as you stumble across most of the ammo scattered throughout each mission, conquering the monsters of NOCTURNE is a matter of drawing and shooting. Over and over again. It gets tedious very quickly.

Who Knows What Evil Lurks in the Hearts of Developers?

NOCTURNE's lone saving grace is the pulp-horror setting. Terminal Reality has crafted one great-looking title, full of old castles, misty fields, and creepy caverns. Everything is decrepit and corrupt, and this extends to the monstrous opposition, which does provide goosebumps; I jumped out of my skin the first time a vampire bride appeared behind me.

Yet while the settings look good, their design leaves much to be desired. Many scenes simply end, with obvious passages blocked off by invisible walls. Others aren't fully visible, forcing blind exploration that often leads to a deadly plunge. Character animations are clumsy. With his guns drawn, the Stranger leaps about like Michael "Lord of the Dance" Flatley. Tough to be scared when you're laughing so hard. Character modeling doesn't include facial animation, so when characters discuss a case in tedious detail, they apparently do so while throwing their voices.

And then there's the monstrous system requirements. Running in hardware-accelerated mode requires 96MB of RAM and a 32-bit video card. Millions of Voodoo owners out there are stuck in software mode. Your card also has to have 32MB on board to get resolutions higher than 640x480. A proper installation will take up more than a gig on your hard drive. This is one game that costs much more than the sticker on the box reads.

When you get right down to it, only those starved for a horror game will consider NOCTURNE a worthwhile purchase. The pulp-horror concept is attractive, but the execution is horrific. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Exciting, spooky blend of action and horror; beautiful graphics and sound.

CONS
Annoying controls; pointless and repetitive combat; some graphic glitches; massive system requirements.

Requirements: Pentium II, Celeron, Pentium-III or AMD Athlon CPU; 64MB RAM (96MB required for 3D acceleration), 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II or III/Celeron/Athlon at 400MHz; 128MB RAM; 1GB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** Terminal Reality • **$40** • **www.godgames.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Mature

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FLANKER 2.0 Doesn't Do Much, but Does It Very Well

From Russia With Love

Flanker 2.0 is not an ambitious flight sim. It doesn't try to model a ground war, and it doesn't even model an air war so much as a single sortie. There is no attempt to make a fully-interactive cockpit. The only communication is the scant wingman interaction. It has only the barest of excuses for a campaign mode. There are no carrier ops – just a floating carrier-shaped block you can land on. Even the sound effects are almost apologetically muted. There is a feeling that the development team wasn't ready to do anything dramatic after the original FLANKER, and this lack of ambition is at once this sim's greatest weakness and its greatest strength.

It's a weakness, because many hardcore flight simmers – who are the obvious target audience for this in-depth and complex sim – have been spoiled by the great ambition that has driven recent sim development, from successes like JANE'S F-15 and EUROPEAN AIR WAR to disappointments such as FLY! and FALCON 4.0. Compared to what those sims have achieved (or tried to achieve), FLANKER 2.0 seems downright lazy.

FLANKER 2.0
reviewed by Tom Chick

Like the original title, it's set in the Crimea, an uvula of land dangling in the Black Sea. It only models a single aircraft, the Su-27 Flanker (the included Su-33 is just a variant), in fully-scripted tactical situations. It doesn't even have a random mission generator. The included single-player scenarios are good for nuggets of practice and isolated combat experiences, but the campaign is full of brick walls and annoying puzzle missions that require repeated playing to succeed. Luckily, the FLANKER series has accumulated a robust fan base, so the flexible and easy-to-use scenario editor guarantees that lots of user-made campaigns and missions will be available on the Internet.

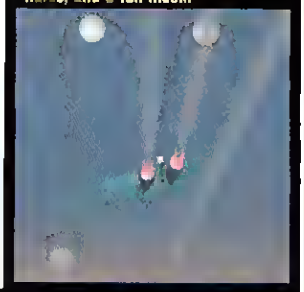
The lack of ambition is also a strength, in that it gives the game a tight focus and a distinctive flavor that's often lost when a sim tries to accomplish too much. There's an obvious affection for this battle-hardened Russian aircraft that you won't find in any F-22 sim. From the Cyrillic characters on the HUD, to the flight model's attention to the aircraft's stunning aerodynamic capabilities, to the sometimes unwieldy analog cockpit, FLANKER 2.0 is equal parts ode and sim.

The graphics are some of the best you'll find in the latest generation of sims. The 3D engine doesn't have the photorealism of a game like FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3, but it is much smoother and faster without those huge texture maps hogging the processor and slowing down the frame rate. This is in line with the FLANKER philosophy, as the fluid control and quick responses are some of the signatures of the original. The cloud effects are easily as good as FLY! or JANE'S WORLD WAR II FIGHTERS. After flying a mission, you can enjoy the visuals at your leisure by playing FLANKER's trademark ".trk" files, which are still excellent tools for training and mission analysis. They're even better than FALCON 4.0's ACMI for aesthetic value and available information.

NO HABLAS RUSKIE? If you're afraid of the Cyrillic alphabet, the HUD does English.

Although there's a beefy manual and thorough in-game tutorials, there are surprising gaps in the documentation; there's no information on wingmen interaction, the unintuitive padlock system, or the Byzantine mechanics of playing through the campaign. It's a difficult enough sim for hardcore players to learn, much less someone trying their first (or even second or third) flight sim. This is an uncompromising toy for grownups, and though it may be limited in scope, its insight is so thorough and its realism so unflinching that it more than makes up for its small arena, stilted campaign, and a handful of bugs. What it should have been is open to debate. But what it does do, it does tremendously. CGW

LIGHT SHOW Fox two, flares, and a full moon.

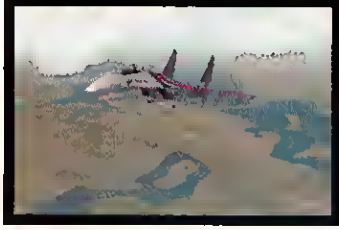


CGW RATED

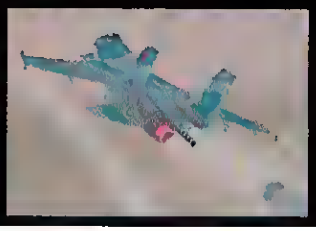
PROS
Vivid and thorough simulation of the Su-27; lush graphics; unflinching realism.

CONS
Stilted campaign and single-player missions; minimal wingman interaction; patchwork documentation.

PUFF DADDY Scattered clouds over Crimea.



HALF LIFE Flying on a wing, a prayer, and the left engine.



BING! The captain has turned on the seat-belt sign, due to our impending doom.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, DirectX-compatible 3D card, 8x CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz, 64 MB RAM.
3D Support: DirectX-compatible 3D card required. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-16 players via LAN or Internet.

Publisher: SSI • Developer: Eagle Dynamics • $45 • www.flanker2.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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Infogrames' Console-Style RPG Is Good, but No FINAL FANTASY

Silver Takes the Bronze

Japanese-style RPGs, while popular on consoles, have been woefully underrepresented on the PC. Those few that have been released are mostly shareware efforts or unembellished conversions of console titles, FINAL FANTASY VII being the most notable example. Infogrames has attempted to fill this gap with SILVER – a purported "FINAL FANTASY killer" designed specifically for the PC – and the result is a decent, often entertaining game.

SILVER
review by Erik Wolpaw

Less Filling

SILVER plays out on pre-rendered, 3D backgrounds through which you must guide polygonal characters. The environments are essentially static bitmaps. They look good for the most part, and some are spectacular, but everything tends to have an overly-clean feel that FINAL FANTASY VII managed to avoid.

Spiral House, the game's developers, has chosen to streamline the traditional console RPG, removing many standard elements. Thankfully gone are the thousands of random encounters typical to the genre. Instead, most screens are stocked with monsters that must be fought only once. The exits to each area are sealed during combat and reopen only when all enemies have been defeated. While this feature removes much of the tedium associated with this type of game, the finite number of available battles makes open-ended stat building virtually impossible.

SILVER does include character stats and levels, but eliminates experience points completely. Levels are gained by reaching key plot points and defeating boss monsters. Only a few instances exist where extra levels can be accrued "out of sequence" with the story. In general, you are kept in strict parity with your foes. This feature tends to dilute the sense of escalating power that is a key draw of RPGs, but the discarding of an endless series of uneventful brawls makes it more than worth it.

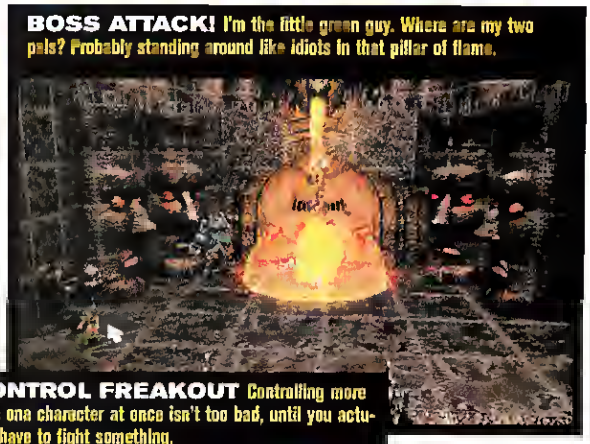
The fights themselves occur in real-time and are very fun. Melee attacks are launched with the mouse as controller, with various mouse movements resulting in different thrusts and slashes. The number of moves is kept to a reasonable five, and each has its own obvious use. Once the control is mastered – and this doesn't take long – the battles become both more exciting and more tactical than your average turn-based fare, which, strategic pretensions aside, tend to degenerate into an endless attack/heal/repeat loop. Because you're free to move around each environment, positional advantage becomes a big factor and many of the battles are staged as mini-puzzles in which features of the landscape must be exploited to win the skirmish.

With Friends Like These...

For the first few hours of play, SILVER's story is completely linear. Your grandfather accompanies you throughout this beginning section, controlled by the computer, and he's generally pretty helpful. Later in the game, you're saddled with up to two companions who you must control yourself. This feature wouldn't be bad if they were as intelligently autonomous as Grandad, but you're expected to control everyone. Unless you've got unusually evolved hand-eye coordination, you'll eventually end up using one character to kill everything, while the other two stand motionless as monsters hit them over the head with clubs.

SILVER's story is an equally big problem. The plot starts out well and is bolstered by some excellent voice acting and loopy plot twists, but simply runs out of surprises long before the end. This is a critical flaw in a game that has consciously pared away many of the gameplay elements that compose the bulk of other entries in the field.

SILVER is an RPG simplified by the removal of much of the complex stat-based baggage of its brethren. It's a good idea that almost works. Infogrames has come close to successfully creating a new sub-genre – one based on fun fast-action battles mixed with rich story. It's fun enough while the story remains compelling, and even if you find yourself unmotivated to complete the entire quest, you'll at least enjoy the ride to the halfway point. CGW



BOSS ATTACK! I'm the little green guy. Where are my two pals? Probably standing around like idiots in that pillar of flame.

CONTROL FREAKOUT Controlling more than one character at once isn't too bad, until you actually have to fight something.

GROUND ATTACK! SILVER looks good, even though the characters don't really blend in with the scenery.

CGW RATED

PROS
Innovative, fun combat system.

CONS
Poor control for multiple characters; story becomes predictable and tedious.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 160MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 233MHz, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: Infogrames • **Developer:** Spiral House • **$40** • **www.infogrames.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

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REVENANT Is a Middling DIABLO Clone That Burns Out Early

Alive and Dead

What we have in REVENANT is a product that follows the all-too-familiar DIABLO formula. While several elements have deviated from the norm, only some of them are actual improvements. The rest gradually work to erode what could have been a very good product. Like so many relationships, my affair with REVENANT started hot and heavy but cooled quickly once I got to know it better.

REVENANT
reviewed by Greg Fortune

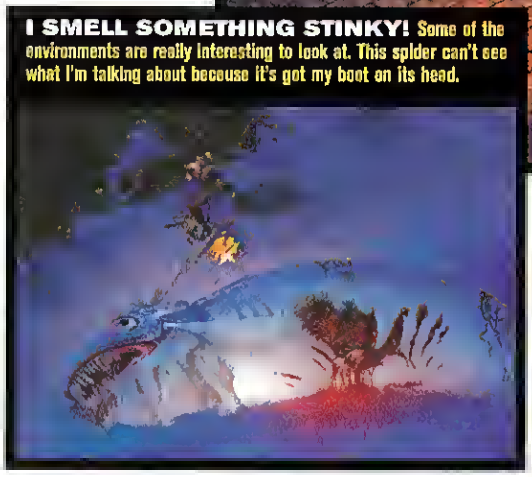
Who Wrote This?

The first problem is the story itself. Maybe it's just because I frequently read books that don't have lots of pictures, but I found the plot to be completely predictable and fairly trite. While the plot in a game rarely makes or breaks a title, it doesn't help when you can figure a story out from the very beginning, with not one notable twist along the way.

The other major problems are related to REVENANT's interface. The inventory system is not too bad until you accumulate a significant number of items, at which point scrolling through the tiny inventory window becomes a chore. Even worse, there's no method for identifying the items you have in inventory. If you can equip an item, you can get a description of the item's attributes from the character window. Otherwise, you'll have to either drop the item and pick it up again, or memorize the appearance of all of the potions, keys, and equipment you carry.

The spell system fares no better, as you must manually scroll through all the spell descriptions to find the spell you want. You can hotkey up to four spells, and given the amount of time it takes to scroll through all of them, those that you have hot-keyed will likely be the only spells you'll use in combat.

NOW WHERE'D I PUT THAT SPELL? New spells are learned by combining the power of talismans found throughout the game. However, since the scrolling list on the top-right is the only way to browse spells, finding the one you want in a hurry can be a pain.



I SMELL SOMETHING STINKY! Some of the environments are really interesting to look at. This spider can't see what I'm talking about because it's got my boot on its head.

Of course, this isn't a game of inventory management, so you should know that while these problems are certainly annoying, they don't make the game unplayable. In fact, REVENANT comes out of the gate like a hellhound. Rather than opting for the "click on your enemy until he dies" method of combat, Eidos implemented a combat-control system that more closely resembles a console game than most PC dungeon romps. You've got three standard attack buttons and three combo buttons.

Combinations of these yield additional moves, once you learn them from your teacher in town. The first time Locke finished off a spider by stomping on its head and grinding it under his heel, I thought that this was going to be an outstanding game. After 50 spiders had been dispatched the same way, it lost some of its luster.

This is the biggest problem with most elements in the game. They are great at first, but wear thin rather quickly. Add to the mix the interface problems, a story that nosedives almost immediately, and puzzle elements that are frequently tedious and redundant, and you've got a recipe for disaster.

I'M ALL BROKE UP This boss is very tough, as both halves of Locke will confirm. The boss fights are actually one of the highlights of the game. Due to the huge number of hit points these goliaths have, they make for some very long and challenging battles.

You Bore Me

So, while REVENANT initially generates a decent amount of excitement and fun, it just doesn't carry it throughout the game. By the time you reach the end, you aren't surprised to find one of the lamest closing scenes in recent gaming history. If you are hungering for an action RPG, have a high tolerance for redundancy, and don't care about the backstory, you may want to look at REVENANT. Those looking for a deeper gaming experience should look elsewhere – or keep waiting for DIABLO II. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Nice variety of combat moves; pretty graphics.

CONS
Horrible story; sloppy interface design; terrible inventory and spell management.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN, modem, up to 4 players, 1 CD per player.

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Cinematix • $40 • www.eidosgames.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence, suggestive themes.

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MIG ALLEY Takes You Back to the Beginning of Jet Combat

Birth of an Era

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

It was a conflict coined "The Forgotten War," yet it was one of the most fascinating eras in the history of air combat. The Korean War saw the birth of widespread jet combat. Prop vs. jet was common, and new jet vs. jet tactics were developed on a daily basis. The fighter pilot had more power available to him than ever before, but the fighting was still up close and personal. No radar-guided missiles here, bucko, combat was eyeball to eyeball, guns only. This is the era that MIG ALLEY portrays, and it does it so well as to make the game an instant classic.

MIG ALLEY
reviewed by Jeff Lackey

Migs and Sabres

Flight sims today typically come in two flavors: "survey" sims, offering a large number of aircraft while compromising on realism; and hardcore sims that focus on one plane, but promise extreme fidelity. MIG ALLEY breaks that mold. You can pilot an F-51, F-86, F-84, F-80, or a MiG-15, yet the flight model is uncompromisingly realistic. You can toggle off a wide range of flight characteristics, such as buffeting, stress effects, or realistic spool-up if you're a novice, and yank and bank to your heart's content. However, if you want to experience a true simulation of flying these aircraft, toggle everything to full realism and you will be treated to a flight model as realistic as anything on the market. Everything from torque effects in the props to the reality of available power exceeding the yield stress of the airframe (you can tear the wings off your plane with high-stress maneuvers) is modeled. Damage modeling is also top notch. While the visuals for aircraft damage don't accurately portray the specifics, you'll find that a damaged wing will lose lift, an injured engine will struggle to keep you in the air (and perhaps burst into flames), a shredded rudder will make maneuvering a struggle, and so on.

The artificial intelligence is superb for both the enemy and your wingmen. You can set the range of skills for both enemy and friendly pilots such that you will never be sure of whether the MiG pilot you are chasing is a rookie – ripe for the plucking – or an ace who is about to teach you a lesson or two. In addition, your friendly computer pilots don't require the micro-management necessary in so many other flight sims. They fly and fight smart. Your wingman will cover your tail when requested, and the rest of your flight will only holler for help when they really need it. The enemies can be downright crafty. You can't help but smile when you think you have a MiG dead to rights, centered in your sights, and doing little to evade – only to find you've been suckered as his wingman slips behind you and shreds your Sabre. And that smile will turn into a wicked grin when an unshakeable MiG on your tail suddenly explodes, as your wingman slips behind him and teaches him not to pick on his partner!

DEATH FROM ABOVE Rolling into an air-to-ground attack.

MAYDAY! Bad luck and good shooting forces you to punch out.

PROP JOBS The Korean War saw a mix of jets and prop planes, such as these F-51s.

The Sights and Sounds of War

A great flight model and first-class computer opponents are critical to a sim's success, but you also expect today's sims to look and sound great, and MIG ALLEY passes this test also. The terrain graphics are OK – maybe even good – but not spectacular. However, the aircraft themselves are absolutely beautiful, including unit markings and nose art that you can import. Cockpits, at 1024x768 resolution, are sharp and authentic. Little touches add to this authenticity; for example, your forward canopy will become grimy as the sortie progresses. Reflections are seen on your cockpit, and reflections off of enemy cockpits in the distance are often the first clue of their presence. Sounds are also satisfying, including the spooling up of the engines and the creaking of the airframe as it protests against the extreme stress you place upon it. Radio chatter is first-rate, realistically exciting in battle without going over the top and sounding too "Hollywood."

CGW RATED

PROS
Great flight models; superb dynamic campaign; fascinating mix of props and jets; huge, intense dogfights.

CONS
Some occasional graphics stuttering; manual could be more informative about the campaigns.

Requirements: Windows 95/98, Pentium 166 MHz, 32 MB RAM, 400 MB hard drive space, 6X CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 12X CD-ROM, D3D video card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2 to 8 players via TCP/IP, IPX, modem, serial

Publisher: Empire Interactive • **Developer:** Rowan Software • **$40** • **www.empire-us.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

IFR Cockpit gauges are authentic and sharp looking.

The gun camera is a very welcome feature. The camera can be set to record the action either all the time, or only when you press your trigger. The recorded footage can be replayed with a full set of VCR-type controls, and the "film" can be recorded in either authentic black-and-white or full color. The ability to record and replay your flight comes in particularly handy with this sim, as it is common to enter into a 36 on 36 plane furball, resulting in more action than you can process during the fight ("where did THAT guy come from?").

Scores of planes in the air – and yet the frame rate is normally silky smooth. I say normally, because there is an occasional "stutter" in the graphics. There are also a handful of other minor graphics glitches, crashes, and bugs that should keep the game's developer busy for a while. But they've come a long way from the U.K. version already, and they seem to have a genuine interest in continuing to improve the product.

A Campaign To Die For

Great AI, great flight models, top-notch sounds and graphics – but they would all go to waste if the environment in which you fly and fight was sub-par. Not to worry: Believe it or not, I've saved the best for last. As you might expect, you can fly in one-on-one missions that are a breeze to set up, and there's a quick-action option that throws you into the fray at the touch of a mouse button. It's a tribute to how good this simulation is that both of those modes are extremely enjoyable – in fact, almost addictive. But the campaign in MIG ALLEY is more than icing on the cake; it's a whole new course. There are five campaigns, but only the fifth, The Spring Offensive, is truly dynamic. In the Spring Offensive, you have complete strategic and tactical control in the air war over Korea. You can control as much or as little as you like. For example, you can simply change target priorities and let the computer plan the missions. However, the interface makes it easy to jump in and plan every sortie, every bombing mission, every escort and BARCAP, and so on. You can control how many of what type of plane will fly each sortie, the timing of the routes, the formation and attack strategy, and much more. Examine the map and decide whether you think you should commit your limited air resources towards taking out enemy airbases – or perhaps destroying the supply depots will slow down the enemy incursion. You're in charge of all the strategic decisions, and then you can drop yourself into whichever plane you want to fly during the mission. There's enough depth, flexibility, and variety here to give this sim spectacular replayability, as you develop new strategies and try them out.

If you have any interest in flight sims, you owe it to yourself to try MIG ALLEY. This is one of those rare sims that gets it all right, resulting in a flight sim that others will be measured against for years to come. CGW

GUARDIAN ANGEL These B-20s are counting on you to get them safely to their target and back.

IN CONTROL The outstanding campaign engine allows you control over all facets of the air war.

Cool Links

The following links are great resources for campaign planning in MIG ALLEY:

www.frugalsworld.com/mig-guide.shtml

www.combatsim.com/htm/sept99/mig-camp1.htm

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST A MiG falls prey to your cannons.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE Two flights of Sabres on the prowl.

QUICK HITS

PANDORA'S BOX

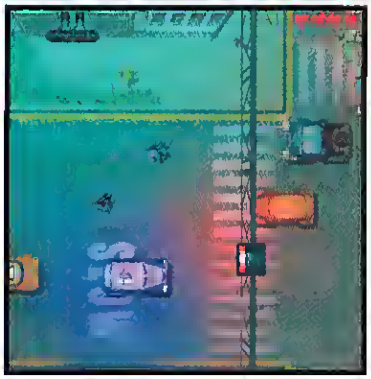
Build a better TETRIS and the world will beat a path to your door. For years now, Alexey Pajitnov, the Russian creator of TETRIS, has been trying to do exactly that, but has only managed to create a spate of mediocre derivations on his original falling-block theme. PANDORA'S BOX, Pajitnov's latest work, is at least original, but it's surely no TETRIS in either its originality or sheer addictiveness. Pajitnov uses a handful of digital gimmicks and 3D tricks, along with 350 pieces of artwork, to create a collection of 21st century jigsaw puzzles. There are 10 puzzle types – some quite clever, some quite annoying – wrapped up in a hastily cobbled storyline about the capture of the great trickster figures in world mythology. Fans of jigsaw puzzles and Kai's Power Tools will find some good rainy-day fun here; others won't be amused for very long. *–Chris Lombardi*

★★★

Genre: Puzzle • **Publisher:** Microsoft • $20 • www.microsoft.com/games
ESRB Rating: Everyone

GRAND THEFT AUTO 2

Genre: Driving • **Publisher:** Take 2 Interactive • **Developer:** Rockstar Games • $40 • www.rockstargames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; animated blood, strong language



The original GRAND THEFT AUTO was something of a cult hit, inspiring a large online community of wannabe thugs and car-jackers, partly due to its controversial subject matter. The success of this sequel will probably be the greatest indicator of whether the hubbub over the original was hype, or based on great gameplay. After playing GRAND THEFT AUTO 2, which simply rehashes the original game with a few new bells and whistles – like colored lighting, car-mounted weapons, and a more elaborate organized crime system – I'm sticking with the former. The new retro-future look of the cars leaves a lot to be desired. Heck, the London 1969 expansion pack for the original GTA seemed cooler than this. GTA 2 will probably bring very few new fans to the series, but should satisfy those hooked by the first game. *–Tom Price*

★★★½

NFL BLITZ 2000

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** Midway • $45 • www.midway.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence, mild language

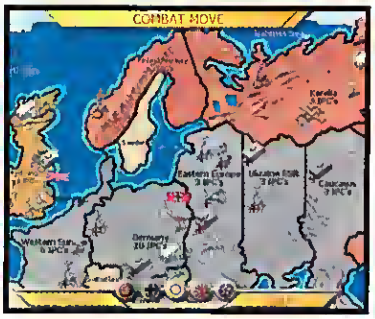
NFL BLITZ was one of the freshest, most devilishly fun sports games since BLADES OF STEEL for the NES. This year's model adds some much needed features like a play editor, an extra page of offensive plays, and weather. Most importantly, it stays true to BLITZ's skull-crushing charm and amazing looks. However, the game still lacks replays, and you still can't make substitutions. I know team management isn't in the spirit of BLITZ, but since you're limited to four controllable players on offense, I would like to choose my receiving crew as well as return and cover men.

The new animations are cool, but extremely choppy – even on a Pentium-III 450 with a Voodoo2 3D accelerator. A few other technical glitches also mar NFL BLITZ 2000, which in many ways is better than the first, but highly flawed. Midway dropped the *chalupa* on this one – it could have been legendary. *–Tom Price*

★★★½

AXIS & ALLIES: IRON BLITZ

Genre: Wargame • **Publisher:** MicroProse • **Developer:** Hasbro • $30 • www.axisandallies.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone



IRON BLITZ is an expansion pack to AXIS & ALLIES that gives players two new units, eight new scenarios, and the ability to edit the existing units, alliances, and setup. While I liked the idea of the new scenarios, from a 1939 start to a cold war variant, almost all are woefully unbalanced and unlikely to provide the kind of close contests for which A&A is known and loved.

In contrast, the new units (marines and destroyers) are a welcome addition. Destroyers in particular make the naval portion of the game more logical and more fun. The ability to change unit attributes through the edit menu is also welcome, although once again play balance ought to be the primary consideration when tinkering. If you don't already own A&A you might as well buy IRON BLITZ, as it comes packaged with the original game. For veterans, the $10 rebate that comes with the economically priced IRON BLITZ makes this a reasonable and rewarding buy as well. *–Tim Carter*

★★★★

THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II: FLASHPOINT KOSOVO

Calling the first battle pack for THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II "Flashpoint Kosovo" is, at best, a questionable marketing move. To begin with, the invasion of Yugoslavia by NATO forces in the summer of 1999 never transpired. Second, the battle pack includes but a single scenario in Yugoslavia. The remaining dozen or so scenarios are set in other hotspots around the world, from the lengthy Iran/Iraq conflict to a supposedly inevitable showdown between Chinese and Russian forces at the end of the 20th Century. While a few historical engagements are thrown in, including the lopsided '91 Gulf War and the proposed U.S. invasion of North Vietnam at the height of the Vietnam War, the majority of the scenarios are based on hypothetical conflagrations, including an unlikely conflict in Central Europe and a rather preposterous U.S. Civil War in 2008.

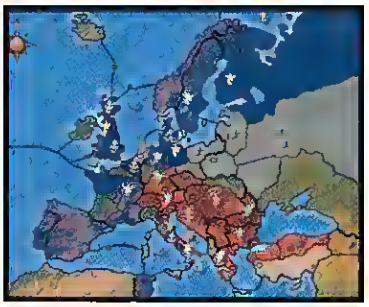
★★½☆☆

These issues aside, FLASHPOINT KOSOVO ably picks up where its award-winning predecessor left off, taking a highly entertaining and replayable second look at some of the world's most troubled regions. *–Marc Dultz*

Genre: Wargame • Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Norm Koger
$20 • www.talonsoft.com • RSAC Advisory: Violence, 1

DIPLOMACY

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • Developer: Meyer/Glass Interactive • $40 • www.hasbrointeractive.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone



Back in the early 80s, Avalon Hill released a computer version of its classic multiplayer boardgame, DIPLOMACY. The game was marred by a poor user interface and atrocious AI, but that wasn't much of a surprise; back then it was an achievement simply to develop a game that worked. It's much more of a surprise that 15 years later, Avalon Hill's new owner, Hasbro, has brought its considerable development firepower to bear on the classic game with the exact same result.

★½☆☆☆

DIPLOMACY is built upon very simple rules. The players represent the seven major powers of Europe in 1901. The map consists of 75 spaces, 34 of which are "supply centers" that confer the ability to build additional units. Control of 18 centers by a single power at the end of a year results in victory. Each player secretly records his orders, which are revealed and resolved simultaneously each turn, after a period of negotiations.

Capturing a province is as easy as moving a unit there. Beating your enemies to this space, however, requires a little help from your friends, and the preceding negotiations between world powers are what make DIPLOMACY such a deliciously devious multiplayer pastime.

Graphically, the game is a polished affair. Colors indicate territorial control, and map motifs can be changed to suit one's taste. Players are represented by historically-attired personages who sneer and leer while waiting to conduct negotiations.

These negotiations are carried out in "rooms" where only invited occupants can participate. Players make proposals through a simple system of icons, which turns "Germany should attack Russia" into a simple three-click process; this is hindered only by the poor placement of these icons and the fact that a player's "offers received" arrive on a different screen than "offers made" – meaning that only one screen can be monitored at a time. The icons are a good shorthand communication method in games against human opponents, although there is also a chat feature available.

Unfortunately, the computer opponents are unable to provide the barest modicum of resistance, even at the highest setting. The computer repeatedly tries to perform illegal moves, although the game engine prevents them from being resolved. No coordination occurs, either between two allies or even between units of the same power. Two units will repeatedly try to dislodge an enemy from a supply center, both of them trying to move to that space, rather than one providing support for the other.

You'd expect the multiplayer game to be the shining point, since inter-personal exchanges were the heart and soul of the original design. Alas, the multiplayer game via Internet or LAN with up to seven human players is so slow that it makes the game unplayable. A simple two-player TCP/IP game brought a Pentium III-550 to its knees. There are play-by-email and hot-seat modes available, but if you're going to play that way, you may as well play the boardgame.

DIPLOMACY, the boardgame, was an example of game design at its best. DIPLOMACY, the computer game, is an example of how an excellent design does not guarantee a good computer translation. *–Bruce Geryk*

NAPOLEON 1813

Genre: Wargame • Publisher: Empire Interactive • Developer: Empire Interactive
$45 • www.empirestrategy.com • ESRB Rating: Ages 11 and up.

We haven't seen a good Napoleonic wargame on the PC for years. Sadly, this title does little to change that. NAPOLEON 1813 recreates the struggle of one of history's most notorious generals to maintain a hold on central Europe in the wake of his disastrous 1812 campaign in Russia. You command your units (the smallest of which is a division) in a variety of individual battles or extended campaigns via an interesting slow-motion, real-time mode.

★★☆☆☆

While the strategic map looks okay, the battlefield graphics are unimpressive. By itself, this poses no problem. Numerous bugs, glitches, and interface difficulties, on the other hand, create some serious hardship. Units disappear or switch sides with no explanation; scrolling is cumbersome, and the manual fails to explain several basic points. On top of all this, crashes are not uncommon. NAPOLEON 1813 is full of promising ideas, each of which seems to be plagued by a bug of some sort. Even the patched version will please only serious Napoleonic buffs. *–Bruce Geryk*

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- 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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CONQUER

Use battle ships and troops to keep your settlements safe and trade routes free from hostile enemies.
Or, wage war against your enemies.

PC CD-ROM

Time to Upgrade?

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT MOTHERBOARD CHIPSET AND MEMORY

Competition is a wonderful thing for consumers—products get better and cost less. But the downside of choice is that, well, you have to choose. In the world of motherboard chipsets and memory, the choices are about to go from mildly confusing to totally baffling. Why? New chipsets and memory types, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, are coming onto the scene. What to do? Stay with us, and we'll give you the low-down on what your best choices are now, and what they will be soon.

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Short-Term Memory

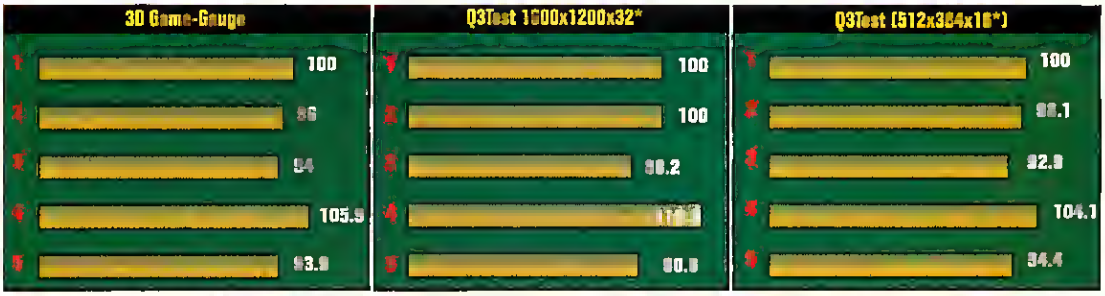
Right now, there are two types of memory to consider: SDRAM and RAMBUS (or RDRAM). RDRAM can deliver a performance gain with current games (test results below), but it requires Intel's 820 chipset, which wasn't available as of press time. When it is available in early 2000, RDRAM will be expensive relative to SDRAM. And until RDRAM is shipping in quantity, it will stay that way. A third memory type is on the horizon, called Double Data Rate SDRAM (DDR SDRAM), which could be an interesting high-performance alternative to RDRAM. To make sense of the upgrade options, check out the table below.

Meanwhile, Intel has decided to support both PC133 SDRAM and DDR SDRAM sometime later in 2000. But Via's Apollo chipset will soon make the move to DDR SDRAM, and could be a dark horse in the performance sprint versus Intel 820 and RDRAM. So if you can wait to upgrade, hold off until more is known about DDR SDRAM and its price/performance versus Intel's offerings.

CPU TEST RESULTS

CPU/Chipset/Memory Type
1 Pentium-III 700/Intel 440BX / PC100 SDRAM (baseline)
2 Athlon 700 / AMD 751 / PC100 SDRAM
3 Pentium-III 733 / Intel CC 820 / PC100 SDRAM
4 Pentium-III 733 / Intel VC 820 / RDRAM
5 Pentium-III 733 / Via Apollo 133 / PC133 SDRAM

In our recent testing, Intel's new 733MHz Pentium III, running on an 820-based motherboard with RDRAM, came in first. The real surprise was the performance of the 700MHz Pentium III running on the "aging" 440BX platform: It came in second. Athlon hung in there, finishing in the middle of the pack. The other shock was the low performance of the 733MHz Pentium III running on an 820 motherboard, but using SDRAM (not RDRAM).



*NOTE: All systems tested using Creative's Annihilator 3D card, Windows 98SE, and DirectX 7. *QUAKE III version 1.08, demo 1*

GADGETS FOR GAMERS

The revolution will not be televised; it will be downloadable. Diamond sparked a stampede of knock-off MP3 players with its first Rio MP3 player two years ago, and has enjoyed great success – not to mention weathering a flood of litigation from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). But Diamond has thus far prevailed, and is about to bring it on again with their new Rio 500. New to the Rio are several notable features: USB support, enhanced controls; and a small display to tell you the name of your current track, and to let you browse through others stored in the unit's 64MB of memory. With this memory load-out, the Rio 500 can store at least 70 minutes of music, and more if you're willing to dial down the quality setting a bit.

Rio M500 MP3 Player

MEMORY SPEEDS AND FEEDS

RDRAM will be on the scene first, but DDR SDRAM may give it a run for its money in the performance arena. The question here is who'll have the better price/performance story.

Memory Type	Approximate Sustained Data Rate	Pros	Cons
PC133 SDRAM	700MB/sec	Inexpensive, available	Not the fastest game in town
RDRAM	1.5GB/sec	It's got headroom for future performance needs	Expensive
PC266 DDR SDRAM	1.4GB/sec	Could be an interesting alternative to RDRAM	Still too many unknowns, including price

The Athlon Alternative

AMD's Athlon CPU has delivered very good price/performance versus Intel, though we've seen a few stability problems. If you're interested in Athlon, we urge you to buy a pre-configured system. There are still some combinations of peripherals that give Athlon motherboards hissy fits, but off-the-shelf systems have tested pretty well. Don't build using Athlon components yourself, unless you're very confident in your troubleshooting skills.

Chipset Upgrade Paths

Finally, to help you navigate the twists and turns of the upgrade path, we've got the following "IF-THEN" recommendations for upgrade alternatives. To figure out which chipset your system has, right-click on the My Computer icon, and go to the Device Manager tab dialogue. From the list of devices, click on System Devices, and see which "Processor to AGP Controller" you have. Intel's 440BX will be listed as the 82443BX.

IF... You have an older 440BX or 440LX motherboard (a system that's two or three years old), and have a CPU that's 400MHz or less, and want more performance now.

THEN... Consider making a motherboard/CPU/RAM swap, and take a look at Intel 820-based Pentium-III solutions with RDRAM memory (fast but pricey), or consider a new off-the-shelf system—especially if you're thinking about opting for an Athlon-based system (less expensive).

IF... You have a recent 440BX motherboard that supports 1.65 CPU core voltage, like the Abit BX6 rev. 2 and ASUS P3B-F, and a 450MHz CPU or less

THEN... Consider the Intel Pentium-III 700MHz, which will work in your current motherboard with a BIOS update. You can add an 820-based motherboard and RAM further down the road.

IF... You have a recent 440BX motherboard with a 500MHz CPU or better.

THEN... Hold off until RDRAM memory and 700MHz Pentium-III CPU prices drop. CGW

Reviews

Cut Off Their Tails...

New Cordless Mice Get You Off the Leash

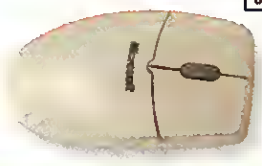
You're in the middle of a heated skirmish on an Internet UNREAL TOURNAMENT server, and you're battling. All of a sudden, someone gets the drop on you from behind; you go to wheel around and let 'em have it, but you get stuck midway around by a tangled mouse cable. Boom, you're dead. After the expletives, you get the mouse untangled and get on with your life, muttering that there must be a better way. Well, there is. Go wireless. We took a look at the latest cordless offerings from Microsoft and Logitech, and both proved to be solid performers that will never cost you another

MICROSOFT CORDLESS WHEEL MOUSE

★★★★½

Price: $45 Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.microsoft.com

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE



LOGITECH CORDLESS MOUSEMAN WHEEL

★★★½

Price: $60 Manufacturer: Logitech
Contact: www.logitech.com

Photos: Hayden Houser

INSIDE HARDWARE

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Logitech Cordless MouseMan Wheel
Microsoft Cordless Wheel Mouse
Hammerhead FX Gamepad
Diamond HomeFree USB
3Com Home Networking Kit
Saitek R100 Wheel

cord-tangle frag again. Both install without a hitch, and depending on your personal preference (and hand size), one of them will serve you well.

We tested these mice in QUAKE III, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, HALF-LIFE, and HOMEWORLD. Through all these games, both mice performed well, and neither introduced any "frag-lag" in the 3D shooters; it came down to a subjective feel that each delivered. Both ran fine using the PS2RATE utility for jacking up the mouse-polling rate to smooth mouse tracking. So what's the dif, you may be asking? There's the $15 price difference, as well as button and wheel placement and response – and this is where Microsoft's mouse pulls ahead.

THE WEIGH-IN

Varmint	Weight (oz.)
Microsoft IntelliMouse (baseline)	4.6
Microsoft Cordless Wheel Mouse	5.1
Logitech Cordless MouseMan Wheel	5.8

Microsoft Cordless Wheel Mouse

Microsoft's wire-free offering uses a slightly modified design of their hallmark IntelliMouse, the most notable difference being that the new mouse is ambidextrous. By removing the curvature of the original IntelliMouse, the Cordless Wheel Mouse (CWM) will fit the hands of both righthanders and southpaws alike. Button design is very simple: left and right, and this rodent's wheel has very clear click-points that served well for weapon switching in shooters, and for zooming in/out in HOMEWORLD. The buttons also felt solid and were very comfortable during long 3D-shooter sessions. About the only complaint CGW editors had was the lack of a thumb button. The mouse's weight was very close to a typical Microsoft mouse, and wasn't a problem. All told, this is a great mouse whose relatively low price and "goes both ways" design will keep lefty and righty mousers alike happy.

Logitech Cordless MouseMan Wheel

Logitech took their very comfortable WheelMan canted design and turned it into a wireless offering. But in making the move to leash-free, they made some design changes that make this mouse less comfortable to use than its tethered sibling. First, in order to accommodate the wireless transmitter circuitry, Logitech moved the left and right mouse buttons back onto the mouse body. Couple that with two short-throw buttons, and the result is that we often found our fingertips off the buttons in 3D shooters, which can be fatal. Logitech's canted design is comfortable, and their thumb button is a plus–but the Cordless MouseMan's wheel didn't quite have the sure feel of Microsoft's wheel. Also, this Logitech is a little over 25 percent heavier than a standard Microsoft mouse, and you could feel the weight difference after prolonged use. This is still a fine mouse, and if you like Logitech's canted design, then this may be the one for you. But because of their moving of the left and right buttons, the cordless proved a little less sure-handed than the conventional MouseMan Wheel. *–Dave Salvator*

HAMMERHEADFX GAMEPAD

Requirements: PC with supported game port; two AAA batteries. Price: $40
Manufacturer: Interact Accessories
Contact: www.interact-acc.com

Duly Shocked

If you've envied the PlayStation players their DualShock gamepads, envy no more. Interact has felt your pain and offers you the HammerheadFX, a force-feedback gamepad that rumbles when, say, you get shot in a 3D shooter that supports the effect. Although it requires a pair of AAA batteries, the rumble effect taps into DirectX's force-feedback capabilities and works quite well.

The HammerheadFX doesn't support USB, nor can it be daisy-chained, unfortunately, but installs easily. The profiling software is somewhat nonintuitive, but the controller is fully DirectInput-compliant, and so is easily configured within most games. You can set it up to use the twin mini-joysticks, or one joystick and the D-pad. Control response is quick and fluid. The one downside is that the unit is rather weighty; my forearms got a little tired after a half hour. *–Loyd Case*

★★★½

DIAMOND HOMEFREE USB NETWORKING KIT

Requirements: Free USB port; Windows 98 for PC or USB-equipped Macintosh
Price: $136. Manufacturer: Diamond Multimedia. Contact: www.diamondmm.com

Easy, but Not So Fast

Diamond's HomeFree USB phone-line networking kit arrives on the scene just as other companies are starting to ship 10Mbit/sec home networking kits. Unfortunately, Diamond's kit is limited to 1 megabit per second. Despite this deficiency, I found the Diamond USB kit to be easy to install, fully-featured, and great for gaming, provided you have the requisite phone jacks. Note that, as with any home phone-line kit, your phone setup needs to exist on the same sets of wire pairs.

★★★

The network module looks like a pale blue, translucent modem. There are three ports: one for the USB connection to the PC, one to connect to a phone jack, and the third to attach a phone. The module draws power from the USB port, so there's a refreshing lack of power brick. The kit includes Macintosh and PC drivers, wiring, Internet sharing software for two PCs (or one PC and one Mac), and documentation. Setup is a snap: Plug the module in, install the software, and let it walk you through the network install process. The setup software is very friendly and smart.

The real downside is performance. For gaming, the ping time is a very good 33ms, but the transfer time is pathetically slow; a 10MB file took nearly two minutes to move from one PC to the next. I wouldn't use this to install large games over a network. *–Loyd Case*

Cheap Ride

Ever driven your car with a joystick? Didn't think so. So why are you still trying to get through games like NEED FOR SPEED using that old joystick? I know, it's not worth the $100+ investment to get a wheel. But Saitek might have what you're looking for: a decent wheel for part-time motorheads that comes in under $50. Their new R100 wheel is a no-frills wheel that installs easily, handles well, and surprisingly, has pedals that don't suck—a hallmark of nearly all "budget-oriented" wheels.

★★★★

SAITEK R100 WHEEL

Requirements: Soundcard joystick port
Price: $49.95 Manufacturer: Saitek
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

The R100 has a single screw-peg that attaches the wheel to your desk, and you can mount/dismount it quickly and easily. I took the R100 for a rip through NEED FOR SPEED, and the R100 was well-heeled, though the wheel itself has a somewhat springy feel. But it tracked evenly from hard-left to hard-right, and the pedals even allowed for somewhat subtle acceleration and braking. The wheel has two front buttons, and two shifter paddles, and all worked without a hitch.

For the part-time wheelman, the R100 will get the job done without walloping your wallet. Better pedals would be a welcome addition, but for under $50, they'll do. *–Dave Salvator*

3COM HOME NETWORK ETHERNET KIT

Price: $160 Manufacturer: 3Com Contact: www.3com.com

Fast and Easy, but Not Cheap

Networking is a pain. Installing the cards, stringing cable, and getting it all talking is not a chore for the faint-of-heart. Along comes networking behemoth 3Com with a home Ethernet kit that claims to be easy to install.

It's certainly the simplest Ethernet kit I've seen, but you still have to be comfortable with popping open the hood of your PC and installing PCI cards. The kit comes with a five-port hub, two 3C450 PCI home networking cards, cables, directions, and a pack of CDs. The hub is "stackable," meaning it can be uplinked to another future hub if you need more ports. The software includes a Windows 98 to Windows 98SE upgrade CD, Microsoft's HomeClick Network Software, and a sampler CD of Microsoft games.

★★★½☆

The key is the HomeClick software – it automates most of the network setup. By following the onscreen directions you can have a fast ethernet network going within a half hour, if you already have Windows 98SE. The twisted pair cable is a little unsightly, but the fast transfer time (10MB in less than six seconds) and low ping times (33ms) make for a pleasant gaming experience. The only downside is that TCP/IP addresses are assumed to be auto-assigned, so for the best results, you need to have Windows 98SE Internet Sharing turned on. Though 3Com's offering is solid, D-Link offers a similar-performing kit for about $100. *–Loyd Case*

Coming Next Month

GAME OF THE YEAR?

WE'LL TELL YOU
IN CGW'S 15TH ANNUAL GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS

A year's worth of games enter the ring....only one emerges the *CGW* Game of the Year. What's it going to be? HOMEWORLD? AGE OF EMPIRES 2? UNREAL TOURNAMENT? SYSTEM SHOCK 2? HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000? One thing it won't be...easy to decide.

Killer Rigs

When you're ready to put your dream rig together, check out cgw.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop5/index.html for Loyd's step-by-step guide to getting your Ultimate Gaming Machine up and running.

YOUR TWO BEST RECIPES FOR BUILDING THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

Speakers
Klipsch Promedia • $250 • NEW! Beautiful imaging, clean sound.

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

Monitor
Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u • $1,250 Perfectly flat; good USB support.

Optiquest V95 • $389 • Solid 19" monitor at a budget price.

Case
In-Win Q500 full tower ATX • $105 New and improved model.

Antec Gemstone Case • $75 The colors! The colors! NEW!

CD-ROM
Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD • $160 • New Pioneer slot drive DVD. Sweet!

Pioneer DVD-114 • $105 • Slot drive DVD.

Rudder Pedals
CH Pro Pedals USB • $100 • Nearly perfect foot placement.

Keyboard
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro • $59 NEW! In with the Natural, out with the Newtouch.

Microsoft Internet Keyboard • $24 Cheap, nice add-on buttons. NEW!

Mouse
Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer • $65 • The mouse with no balls! NEW!

Logitech USB Wheel Mouse • $30 Better than the "gaming" mouse.

Game controller
Interact Hammerhead FX $40 • Dual shock clone.

Joystick
CH F16 Combatstick USB • $65 • It just feels right.

CH Gamestick 3D $42 • Solid symmetrical stick.

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Intel VC820	$140	AGP 4x
CPU	Coppermine 733	$730	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$500	RAMBUS
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940u2w	$260	80 megabytes per second
Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Annihilator Pro	$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still gotta have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$680	Runs warm, runs fast
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	2 gigs of backup
Hard Drive Cooler	PC Power and Cooling Bay-Cool	$49	Keep that Atlas 10k cool!
CD-ROM	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer slot drive DVD. Sweet!
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u	$1,250	Perfectly flat, good USB support
Primary Audio NEW!	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX
Speakers NEW!	Klipsch Promedia	$250	Beautiful imaging, clean sound
Modem	3Com 56SL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM EtherLink 10/100 PCI	$60	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub NEW!	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Case	In-Win Q600 full tower ATX	$105	New improved model
Power Supply	Silencer 275	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard NEW!	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Natural, out with the Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device NEW!	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	$65	The mouse with no balls!
Action Game Controller	Interact HammerheadFX	$40	Dual shock clone
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI COS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
		Total	$7,526

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

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F
CPU	Pentium III/550
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Graphics Blaster TNT2 Ul
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 22GXP 9.1GB
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest V95
Primary Audio NEW!	Aureal Vortex2 Superquad
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem NEW!	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case NEW! NEW!	Antec Gemstone Case
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	CH Gamestick 3D

"Which 3D Card Should I Buy?"

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So, you asked for it, you got it. Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. So we have two recommendations for you.

Choice A: If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a very good job with current games, and a good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

Choice B: If your motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Creative's 3D Annihilator 3D Pro, which goes for around $300. A somewhat pricey bugger, but this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep the GeForce's four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a $300 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra, which is available now for around $150.

Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup, and they've got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate them with.

3D NEWS FLASH! 3dfx Napalms Comdex

3dfx finally took the wraps off its Napalm project, and announced a series of products based on its new chip. The company stated that this is the last graphics chip to be based on the Voodoo architecture; the next chip, code-named Rampage, has been built from the ground up with a new architecture.

The chip formerly known as Napalm is now the VSA-100, which sports a fill rate of 333-367Mpixels/sec, depending on clock speed. To put this in perspective, nVidia's new GeForce 256 chip delivers about 480Mpixels/sec, and their TNT2 Ultra comes in at around 300Mpixels/sec. Boards using the VSA-100 will ship in two flavors: single chip (Voodoo4) and multichip (Voodoo5). That's right kids, SLI is back, but a single board this time. The Voodoo4 will ship with a single VSA-100 and 32MB of RAM. It will not be able to handle 3dfx's much ballyhooed T-buffer effects. Pricing will be around $179.

The Voodoo5 comes in three flavors: the 5000 PCI, the 5500 AGP and the 6000 AGP. The 5000 has two VSA-100s and 32MB of RAM (which is effectively 16MB of video memory due to the way SLI works). The 5500AGP will also have a pair of VSA-100s, but 64MB of RAM (32MB effective memory). Both cards do full scene anti-aliasing, though with a performance hit. The PCI card's suggested price will be $230, and the AGP card will come in at $299.

The mother lode is the 6000, which has four chips, 128MB video RAM (again, 32MB effective memory) and, get this, its own separate power supply. That's right, you'll have to plug this into a wall outlet. Oh, and did we mention it will be $600? Ouch. But it does deliver humongous fill rate—roughly 1.3-1.47 gigapixels per second. —Loyd Case

Price	The Skinny
$125	5 PCI slots, Softmenu, 440BX, ready for Pentium III
$359	Half a gigahertz and SSE
$188	128MB at last
$150	Went for 32-bits
$20	Still gotta have it
$135	IBM's low cost, fast drive
$105	Slot drive DVD
$389	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$99	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Went back to our favorites
$91	Solid performance, good price
$75	The colors! The colors!
$24	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$42	Solid symmetrical stick
Total	$1,893

Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

Arrrgghhh!

A Bit of Fire and Brimstone About Ease-of-Use

I recently ripped a Voodoo2 graphics card out of my system in sheer disgust. My anger and frustration was not directed at the Voodoo2 card, which has been one of the most trouble-free and reliable pieces of hardware I've ever used. No, my ire was directed at Electronic Arts.

The Voodoo2 card lived in my computer next door to a TNT2 Ultra card. When I recently installed Electronic Art's NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES, I wanted to run it in 32-bit color. But when I ran NEED FOR SPEED's 3D-setup program, I wes offered two choices. Glide 3D or softwere 3D acceleration. Huh?! The game was designed to support Direct3D!

I only wanted to teke advantage of a feature *thet was built into the game*. But the design oversight by some numbskull et Electronic Arts was standing in my wey. Only after I uninstalled the Voodoo2 card and flung it out of my system in revulsion did the game allow me to choose Direct3D. But then it promptly informed me that "my hardware was unsupported."

My scream was deafening. I hope it shook a few Silicon Valley engineers out of their beds.

I've said it before, and I'll surely say it again: Computers should just be easier to use. I don't mean easy like a toaster. I don't mean thet the PC needs to fundamentally change to work more like, say, a television. I'm not talking about some future where we'll talk to our computers and they'll respond in a sexy voice.

I'm talking about the hundreds of little ways, here and now and today, that computers could be better designed for greater ease-of-use. I'm talking about eliminating the stupid design decisions or oversights that need never occur if hardware and software engineers spent a moment or two meditating at the Temple of Common Sense.

Patchwork Quilt

It's a given these days that games will require patches. Ignoring the issue of whether patches *should* be necessery (Jeff Green hes mercilessly beaten thet horse already), they are a fact of life. If that's true, why are patches so difficult to install?

For example, when running many patch setup programs, I'm asked to specify the locetion of the geme on my hard drive. Huh? This is a Windows world. The patch program should just check the Windows registry or search the drive.

I'm not talking about patches that are just compressed files containing whole files to copy over to the game directory. I'm talking about elaborate patch programs with dozens of components. My favorite was the patch that asked me, "You have version xxx.x of the game, right?" Gee, I dunno. You tell me!

Now let's talk compressed files. All of you who have had to download patches, then "unzip" them, raise your hands. What an annoying process!

For one thing, there's no consistency as to where the unzipped files get placed. Then there are the differing decompression programs that default to different directories. Imagine the new gamer who has no clue what a ".zip" program is, poor soul. No wonder console gaming is growing faster than PC gaming.

This is not rocket science. Most commercial zip programs can create easily executable files. Some of the better ones will auto-launch a program, like an install script. I know they exist, because some patches do show up that way. Why can't all of them?

Maybe a few hardware engineers and programmers will read this and make a much-needed pilgrimage to the Temple of Common Sense.

Hardware Headaches

Installing hardware can be equally painful. Many of us have been through the hell of installing a graphics card or sound card. But those are extreme examples. There are simple things that can be done to ease our pein.

For instance, why do the Sound Blaster Live cards that ship with systems from Dell and other big computer companies have color-coded connectors, but the $200 Sound Blaster Live does not? Why aren't all ribbon cables and matching connectors keyed, so thet you can't insert them incorrectly?

The same goes for USB connectors. And why are USB connectors still on the back of PCs? Why are those terrible, fragile, four-pin power connectors still used for hard drives, when the ones used for floppy drives are so much easier to connect?

I could go on and on, but I've run out of space. Maybe, just maybe, a few hardware engineers and progremmers will read this and make a much-needed pilgrimage to the Temple of Common Sense. Hey, a columnist can hope, can't he? CGW

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Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

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

Drawing A Blank (Screen)

If I leave a game alone for about a half hour, the screen goes completely dark and when I try to resume, the sound is usually off. This is not the screen saver, which I disabled. Is there a way I can prevent this from happening?

Your computer is going into "sleep mode." From the Display control panel, click on the "Screen Saver" tab, then click on the "Power" or "Settings" button on the lower right (depends on which version of Windows 98 you have). Select the "Always On" option. If you want your monitor to remain on, select the "Never" setting for turning off the monitor, or the number of minutes you want your system to wait before it puts the monitor into sleep mode.

Slot Swap Bingo

I recently added a new sound card. Windows detected the card, but then couldn't find the drivers, so I added the drivers and restarted the computer. When Windows came up, I checked in Device Manager and saw the yellow exclamation mark next to the sound card. It said that the drivers were not installed. What did I do wrong?

Sounds like there's an unknown I/O resource conflict of some kind. Try moving the sound card to another PCI slot. With sound and network cards, it's generally good practice to avoid the slot directly adjacent to the AGP slot. In motherboards with five or more PCI slots, you may want to avoid the very last slot with these cards as well.

Slurping Acronym Soup

When an upcoming video card like the ATI Rage Fury MAXX says that it supports texture compression, is that the same as supporting S3TC, like the Diamond Viper2 will? From what I've gathered from previews, the MAXX will support DX6 and DX7 compression. Is that the same? Will it support the S3TC textures of QUAKE 3: ARENA, as this is not a DX game? Any enlightenment you could share would be greatly appreciated.

The texture compression in DirectX is, in fact, S3TC. Microsoft makes S3TC available in a flavor called DXTC for Direct3D. However, if a company wants to use S3TC in an OpenGL game, they need to license it directly from S3. Recently, ATI has announced a licensing agreement with S3, but they're the only PC graphics maker to date to cut such a deal.

Good PCI Card

On my eMachine computer, all I have for a 3D accelerator is a PCI slot. I read *CGW* and saw that you recommend a Voodoo2 1000. But I want more than 12MB. What would be another good 3D accelerator for a PCI slot?

Your eMachine has a fairly fast CPU, so a Voodoo3/3000 PCI might be a better fit than a Voodoo2. However, you need to determine if the graphics hardware currently built into the system can be disabled. If it can, then consider the Voodoo3/3000 PCI accelerator.

Cheaper To Build or Buy?

I am a college student. I was wondering if it would be cheaper/better to build my own system, or to buy one complete from somewhere like Gateway and do a financing program. The main reason I would like a computer would be for games, mainly strategy games like TIBERIAN SUN and SEPTERRA CORE, but I would also like it for Quicken and Word. Any advice would be appreciated.

This is an age-old question that has no clear answer. It's not necessarily cheaper to build your own system. But if you're comfortable doing this, it's almost always better, because you have 100% control (within your budgetary constraints) over the components that make up that system. CGW

Quick Tip: Easy Access to Game Controller Panel

Tired of plowing through the Control Panel to see if your joystick is connected or calibrated? There's an easy solution. Create a Game Controllers shortcut on your Desktop. To do this, open Control Panel, right-click the Game Controllers icon, and hold down the right mouse button. Drag the "ghost" of the icon onto your Desktop and release the mouse-button. Select "Create Shortcut(s) Here" to create the shortcut, and voila—instant access to the Game Controllers control panel. This is especially handy for gamers who like to use different controllers for different games.

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by Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen

thierry_nguyen@zd.com

Pistol-Packing Pokémon

How Pikachu Taught Me The Joy of In-Your-Face Multiplayer

The most memorable multiplayer experience I've had recently didn't involve an Assault level in UNREAL TOURNAMENT. Rather, it prominently featured characters like Pikachu, Mario, and Donkey Kong, and it wasn't even on a PC. I'm talking about how I've spent a lot of my downtime playing SUPER SMASH BROTHERS on my neighbor's Nintendo 64.

If you've never played it, imagine a traditional fighting game seen through the eyes of Japanese children's show programmers. Instead of the same ol' martial artists and panty-flashers in other fighting games, this one has the signature characters from Nintendo's most famous games, and doesn't even have any blood. What appeal could a Pokemon/Mario fighting game have for me? The four-player mode.

While the PC is spearheading the multiplayer revolution, it's missing the multiplayer appeal that can be found in arcades and consoles everywhere: human contact. In PC action games, you're almost always playing from the comfort of your own system against people who are, in turn, in their own environments, while the consoles and the arcades collect their players in the same area.

I wonder why there aren't as many "head-to-head on the same machine" options for shooters as there are for sports games right now. Sure, it's fun to anonymously frag some goon online, but it's way more fun to talk trash face to face. Even if voice technology becomes workable, seeing your opponent's expression is half the fun. Only hermits find the distant anonymity more appealing. While LAN games are a pretty good substitute, it's not always convenient to lug your machine to your buddy's house. It's easier to just play a console game that he has right there.

What are the obstacles to head-to-head PC gaming? Playing a deathmatch on one machine will require split-screening, which some claim takes away from the experience, but I don't see those GOLDENEYE or QUAKE64 addicts complaining. Monitors would have to be bigger, since 17 inches can get crowded with four players. The only real obstacle is the control scheme, because even with USB, two sets of keyboard and mouse are impractical. Gamepads are getting more shooter-friendly, like the SpaceOrb and Microsoft's Dual Strike. The Gravis Xterminator is another step in the right direction; reposition one of the D-pads, and use one for movement and one for mouselook (a *la* the GOLDENEYE control scheme).

Given some time, single-machine-multiplayer may become more plausible. But until developers start trying it, I'll have to stick to playing on my friend's Dreamcast or Nintendo 64 to get a regular dose of in-your-face multiplayer. CGW

Scooter's Mix

1. *Dogma*
2. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*
3. *Paradise Lost by John Milton*
4. *Saving Private Ryan on DVD*
5. *I Am Legend by Richard Matheson*

Matrix, The Game?

After I wrote about creative licenses in my December column, I read a story about how Hideo Kojima (the director of Konami's METAL GEAR SOLID for the PlayStation) talked with the Wachowski brothers (writers/directors of *The Matrix*) about how he admired the movie. The Wachowskis, in turn, talked about their addiction to METAL GEAR SOLID after putting *The Matrix* together. Of course, with these like-minded individuals coming together, rumors of a *Matrix* game began flying. Nothing official has been confirmed, but this sounds like an interesting first step. I'll keep you posted.

Head-to-Head Shrink

Since I've been using common sense psychology to make my point in a couple of columns (namely "Deathmatch is Dead" and this one), I found a recent article about multiplayer psychology fascinating. This paper was originally published in the proceedings of the 1999 Game Developer's Conference, and Gamasutra has reprinted it at www.gamasutra.com/features/19991110/Baron_01.htm. Check it out while you're waiting for that new version of COUNTERSTRIKE to download.

INSIDE
STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

It's Okay To Play With Yourself

Imagine you're a square-beaded lipless freak, irredeemably ugly, sbunned by all of mankind and tbe bulk of tbe animal kingdom. Your only hope for a normal life is to bave a human head transplant. But before you undergo your cranial upgrade, you'll bave to make a decision – do you have the family doctor squeeze in the noggin-swap between flu sbots and ear exams, or do you opt for a human head transplant specialist? I'm betting you'll pass up tbe risk of forever looking over your shoulder and choose the specialist. So why aren't more of us applying the same kind of logic to our thinking about solo and multiplayer gaming?

One or the Other

Just as action games are increasingly breaking down into either single-player or multiplayer titles, strategy games are subtly doing the same thing. I say "subtly," because so far no strategy title has flat out declared itself a multiplayer-focused title the way that games like STARSIEGE: TRIBES or UNREAL TOURNAMENT have. Yes, both of these games have or will have a single-player component, but the emphasis there is more on tutelage than on a bugely rewarding solo experience along the lines of HALF-LIFE. So why can't gamers cut the same sort of sleck for strategy games? Why can't we let a game do one thing great?

Not Every Strategy Game Needs To Be Multiplayer

Look at JAGGED ALLIANCE 2, e rich, incredibly deep single-player-only game blessed with an enormous amount of replayability, yet a game some pundits in the gaming press dinged for not having a multiplayer side. Good Lord, why? I cen think of nothing more tedious than slogging through a geme of JA2 waiting for some anonymous online halfwit to decide whether or not to have one of his mercs reload – let alone stand by while be manages all tbat militia training. I'd rether choke on my own vomit.

AGE OF EMPIRES 2 illustrates the other end of the spectrum. Sure the single-player campaigns are exponentially better than those of the first geme, but AOE2 really shines in its multiplayer game. While I've fiddled around with tbe campaigns, I find myself primarily playing the game against other humans, or recreating that experience on a random map. As great a job as Ensemble did with the single-player game, for myself end countless other gamers AGE OF EMPIRES 2 is a multiplayer game, and really nothing more.

Unconditional Game Love

Does this mean that games shouldn't heve both a single- and e multiplayer side? Not at all. A game like COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN tbat does both pretty well, but neither overwhelmingly, would be feirly disappointing if it opted for just one side or tbe other. But tbe insistence of gamers that *every single* game give them stars as well as the moon hog-ties developers into delivering both types of games, whether they are called for or not. As exhilarating an experience as single-player HOMEWORLD is, the geme as e whole is somewhet diminished by a multiplayer game that doesn't come close to comparing to its solo game. Had the multiplayer component ectually sucked, Relic's visionary masterpiece would have been significantly tarnished by tbe inclusion of a feature for which there is just no real need.

APPLES

ORANGES

I predict that we'll start to see a rise in strategy titles designed primarily for either multi- or single-player play. In fact, we might be starting to see the beginning of this in the shape of online-only titles like Verant's SOVEREIGN. The either/or model adopted by the action gaming genre will extend to the strategy side of the gaming world, with multiplayer games offering up limited campaigns as nothing more than training scenarios.

And for this, we should be grateful. In a marketplace kneedeep in crap masquerading as entertainment, there's absolutely no reason why we shouldn't embrece games thet provide outstanding gameplay, regardless of focus. Denigrating a game thet has fabulous solo play but has no multiplay is like disparaging Hendrix for not being Picasso – there's no basis for comparison. If we as gamers free designers from the limiting, greed-born tyranny of our unreasonable expectations, we will only be rewarded with better games

And e HOMEWORLD II that will kick your ass straight to the moon. CGW

Rob's Mix

1. *FREESPACE 2*
2. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*
3. *SIM THEME PARK*
4. *The minimalist opera, Einstein on the Beach, by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson*
5. *"Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" (still waiting for Regis to call me)*

Thank You, God

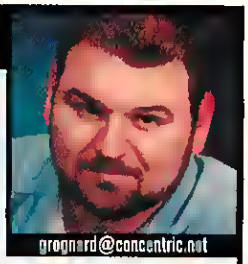
Just in time for burning up those holiday gift certificates, two of the most beloved *CGW* Hall of Fame strategy games are out in new and exciting forms. Blizzard has finally granted the fevered wishes of WARCRAFT II fans with the release of the WARCRAFT II BATTLE.NET EDITION. Forget about the enhanced controls, low $19.95 price, and the 100+ new maps; the Battle.net Edition has only one feature that truly matters – free Internet play over Blizzard's Battle.net.

If that's not enough retro gaming for you, look for Hasbro's X-COM COLLECTOR'S EDITION. All three of the alien-busting epics are bundled in one box for $30. Forget about playing the misguided third game of the series, and focus on the first two, with their ingenious blend of strategy and squad level tactics.

INSIDE

SIMULATION & SPACE

by Gordon Berg



grognard@concentric.net

Fighter Pilot for a Day

CGW Editor Ken Brown – a shifty, shadowy, behind-the-scenes kind of editor – called me up recently and asked, "Ever hear of Air Combat USA? You know, one of those dogfighting-for-real type of flights? Wouldn't that make for a dandy column?"

"That depends," I responded, "on how you feel about puking."

"Oh, puking is great!" Brown exclaimed. "Our readers really like puke. The more puke the better!"

With that, I and my oh-so-weak stomach accepted the assignment: to throw up all over the skies of Cincinnati.

Air Combat USA (and other services like it) definitely let you find out just what a real dogfight feels like. It's an adrenaline pumping, positive G-inducing, stomach wrenching, full blown (pun intended), incredibly intense once-in-a-lifetime experience. You are at the controls. You make the decisions. You pull the trigger.

Such an experience begs some obvious questions: How closely can I compare a computer simulation to the real thing? What do I think most simulations get right or wrong? Just how many times did I heave?

What They Get Right

Much to my surprise, most simulations capture the visuals perfectly. Despite the obvious limitations presented by a computer display, I had a sort of "been there, done that" experience while up in the air. For example, in many simulated dogfights there's an alternating state of energy advantage/disadvantage between both aircraft, especially in maneuvers containing a mixture of both vertical and horizontal elements. Each pilot experiences a fleeting moment of near elation, quickly followed by near panic because the target is suddenly an aggressor. I have long hated the way the opposing plane seems to hang suspended in mid-air, while you revolve around his axis and he dives toward your tail. "Bah," I always thought, "damn 2D screens." But that's precisely what it looks like in real life.

I'm also less inclined now to bitch about flight models. Much of what I did up in the air was the same thing I've been doing for years on a computer, *regardless* of the simulation. WARBIRDS, EUROPEAN AIR WAR, JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS, SDOE – they all more or less recreate the fundamental concepts of ACM and BFM perfectly, by approximating any given fighter plane's strengths and weaknesses. Yes, stalling a Mustang requires different techniques for each sim, but you still perform a low yo-yo the same way in each game. Even though each sim flies differently, they all do very well in capturing the heart of the fight itself: the tactics necessary to win.

What Could Use Improvement

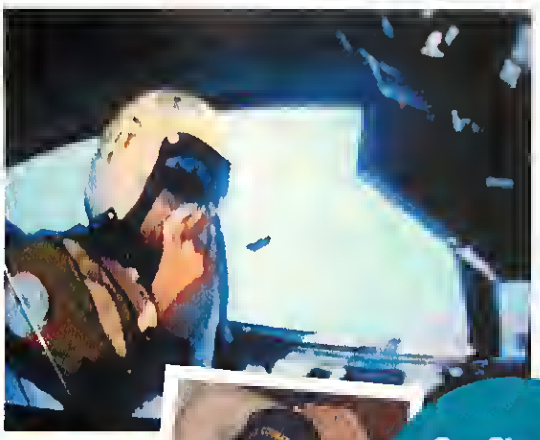
There was one thing that got me into a lot of trouble up there, and for that I blame my sim experience. I was constantly buffeting my Marchetti, meaning I didn't stay within its ideal performance envelope. Avoiding this requires a pilot to "ride the tickle" of the stick, but I had a hard time noticing the buffetting – I was too busy trying to point the nose of my plane at the enemy. In fact, if it weren't for my Instructor/Copilot ("Quit buffeting...quit buffeting ...*stop buffeting the damn aircraft!!!*"), I would have had no idea that there was a problem.

Still, it explained why I often couldn't quite line up my target. But if I didn't notice the problem in real life, how am I going to tell in a simulation? While most sims do penalize extreme behavior, hardly any give enough indication that you're doing something less than ideally. Force feedback is the most obvious solution, but I've yet to encounter a feedback effect as realistic and as subtle as what I personally experienced.

Oh yeah, I filled three barf bags while in flight, and one on the ride back to the hotel. This thrilled Ken Brown to no end. Now he's trying to get me to take one of those Mig rides over in Russia. Ken...uh...no. CGW

Gordon's Mix

1. *JANE'S USAF*
2. *DELTA FORCE 2*
3. *PANZER ELITE*
4. *AGE OF WONDERS*
5. *WARBIRDS (can't miss squad night)*



Our Sim Guy Meets the Real World of Flight, and Barfs

"See Gordon Fly. See Gordon Puke. Puke, Gordon, Puke." Catch the photo essay of Gordon in all his high-flying glory at www.cris.com/~grognard/aircombat/

Bali High

Last year's cannibalization of WWII European Theater aims has placed a damper on the most obvious choice of follow-ups: a WWII Pacific Theater sim. Despite rumors of Microsoft doing COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 in the Pacific, we all know what happened to Dynamix's ACES OVER THE PACIFIC 2, and I can't dare let myself hope for a PACIFIC AIR WAR 2 from Microprose (yet).

So, in an effort to spark some interest and hopefully to provoke an effect akin to what Smallwood's *Strike Eagle* had on the development of JANE'S F-15, might I suggest the following tome: *Fire in the Sky, The Air War in the South Pacific* (ISBN#081332985X). Written by Eric Bergerud, this 723-page volume chronicles the strategy and tactics, the technology, and most importantly, the stories of the pilots themselves from both sides of the conflict.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

INSIDE
SPORTS

by George Jones

The PC That Knew Too Much

Back in our November issue, Inside Gaming questioned – with moral indignation – the pigskin integrity of MADDEN 2000 and NFL FEVER 2000, our official prognosticators for the current football season. We wondered what kind of drugs these games' designers were on when we saw the Tennessee Titans and Jacksonville Jaguars dominating the digital AFC. We gasped with horror when the Niners failed to make the playoffs, and when the Broncos barely played .500 ball.

Who knew that MADDEN 2000 would be more right than just about every sportscaster and odds-maker in predicting the abrupt changing of the guard the NFL has seen this year? This is particularly the case in the AFC, where the Tennessee Titans and Jacksonville Jaguars did very well. In fact, in two season sims, Madden picked the Jags and the Titans to go to the Super Bowl. In both cases, however, the AFC champ lost out, first to the Vikings and then to the Packers. NFL Fever also picked the Jaguars to play themselves into the Super Bowl.

Outside of predicting that the 49ers would stink, neither game was very strong in looking at the NFC's future. Both titles picked the Packers and the Vikings to play well. Both titles totally dismissed the Rams and Lions.

Here are each game's two Super Bowl predictions:

NFL FEVER 2000
Denver 27, Minnesota 14
Jacksonville 7, Minnesota 28.

MADDEN 2000
Minnesota 24, Jacksonville 10
Green Bay 31, Tennessee 17.

Sports Game Controllers

Given the pending arrival of Microsoft's brand new Sidewinder Game Pad, we assumed that our sports game pad decision was a no-brainer. But the controller's outrageously mushy, non-tactile directional pad (see our review last issue) makes it surprisingly horrible for sports games. With Logitech's WingMan Extreme also failing to satisfy us – its overly long handles create too much fatigue in fast action games – we found ourselves right back where we started.

Here's hoping that Microsoft gets it right the next time around. In the meantime, the *CGW* offices are currently divided into two different old-school gamepad camps: the original Sidewinder Game Pad and Gravis' Game Pad Pro.

George Jones: Sports Psychic

I write this before January 1, with no idea who will actually be reading this month's Inside Gaming: average, everyday human beings; or lipless, drooling nuclear mutants with teeth where their eyeballs should be. I guess it doesn't really matter. No matter who or what you are—if you're reading this, you like sports games. Or you're desperately in need of paper. Either way, I press on.

Bold Predictions for the Future of PC Sports Games

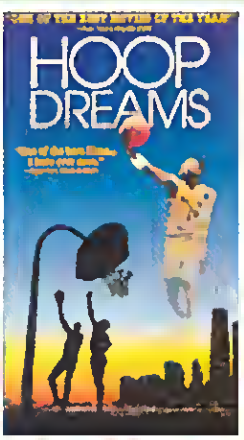
Since this is the first official sports column of the "future," I can indulge an urge I've had for many moons: making profound, earth-shattering predictions. Read and heed the wise words of George Jones, Sports Psychic. And take these futuristic visions to the bank.

George's Mix

1. *WHEEL OF TIME*
2. *NBA LIVE 2000*
3. *The Chris Rock Show (HBO)*
4. *Snow Crash by Neal Stephanson*
5. *Los Angeles Lakers (God's team)*

● Following in the footsteps of VR Sports and the unrealized ESPN PC sports line, Fox Interactive Sports will fail to make inroads into the digital sports arena and abandon the project, mostly due to a lackluster first year in a category dominated by other brands. Hey, I wish it weren't true, but the coffee grounds don't lie. And Fox's first batch of games were average at best. By 2001, Fox Sports won't exist as a PC sports game label.

● In the next two years, some bright sports gaming group will devise an amazingly elaborate, widely-embraced online fantasy football league that will transcend the typical ESPN.com and Yahoo format by allowing more strategic depth than simply picking your starting players. (Imagine career rotisserie leagues with varying levels of difficulty in coaching strategy and front office decision-making.) EA Sports has a little bit of a head start here. Will they be the golden ones? The crystal is cloudy ...



● Infogrames (or someone else) will try to resurrect the HARDBALL series. It will not work.

● A wise sports game group will create a sports game that incorporates story and role-playing. The gaming equivalent of *Hoop Dreams* or *The Longest Yard*.

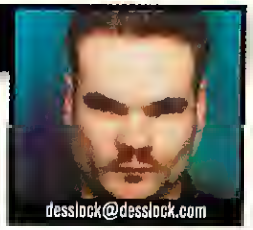
● Text-based sports games will make their return. .on the Web, in Java. Perhaps in multiplayer form, these could serve as the sports junkie's equivalent to "classic" gaming like checkers and chess.

● We'll see yet another *Monday Night Football* game. It will suck, just as the previous two incarnations did.

● Someone will take a stab at a game that allows five-on-five or eleven-on-eleven multiplayer action. The only thing I can't predict is whether or not it will work. If someone figures out ways to balance these multiplayer games so that everyone plays a meaningful and interesting role, it will work. CGW

INSIDE
RPG / ADVENTURE

by Desslock



Going Pagan

In spite of its funky proprietary memory manager, chaotic combat, and the nasty bugs in its initial release, ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE is now regarded as one of the best role-playing games ever made. Creator Origin Systems knew that ULTIMA VII was special, even for a product in computer gaming's most acclaimed series, and quickly released an equally successful spin-off and two expansion packs.

In spite of the accolades the game and its spin-off garnered, Origin Systems opted for a substantially different design for the next core game in the series. The result was ULTIMA VIII: PAGAN, a game that was almost universally panned by ULTIMA veterans and the North American gaming press.

Revisiting the Darkest Hour in the ULTIMA Series

While other games that receive poor reviews quickly fade from memory, PAGAN inspired gamers to hurl vicious criticisms at Origin Systems (and its new parent company, Electronic Arts), initiate accusations of betrayal, and clamor for a virtual coup of ULTIMA'S sovereign, Lord British.

The backlash caused Origin Systems to reconsider the direction the series had taken, resulting in the cancellation of the planned expansion pack and delaying the release of the next game for over five years. With the benefit of hindsight, I'm going to reexamine whether the outcry was justified, or just the result of unrealistic expectations.

Mario the Avatar?

Even though each successive ULTIMA game sold more copies than its predecessors, by the mid-1990s role-playing games were no longer the most commercially successful genre. The creators of PAGAN tried to reach a broader audience by emphasizing visceral, action-oriented gameplay and downplaying the complexity and non-linearity of earlier ULTIMA games. Making a more accessible game was an understandable corporate goal, and even if that decision alienated veteran fans, it wouldn't inherently result in a bad game.

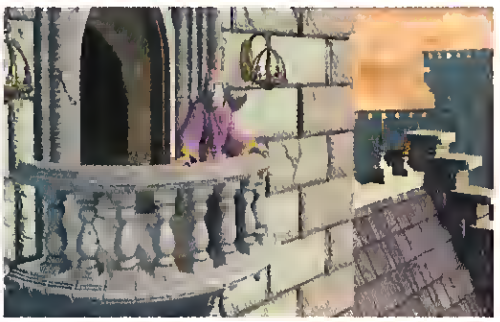
Unfortunately, even judged as an action/RPG hybrid, PAGAN was disappointing. Action-oriented jumping puzzles and arcade-like combat didn't just feel out of place; they were badly implemented. Combat lacked the depth and fluidity of a polished action game and was, at best, a dull clickfest. At worst, it was extremely frustrating. The isometric perspective and interface proved pathetically inadequate for the jumping puzzles. It was extremely difficult to predict where your character would land, making each of the hundreds of mandatory jumps a potential trip to the reloading screen.

PAGAN's soundtrack was outstanding, but few gamers had General MIDI sound cards, and the non-MIDI soundtrack was far less interesting. The character animations were excellent, but in many ways the graphics seemed less stunning than those in ULTIMA VII. The beautiful beaches of that game, for example, were replaced in PAGAN by jagged, blue "edges" that bore little resemblance to actual shorelines. Gamers would have to wait a couple years for Blizzard's DIABLO in order to play a well-crafted, accessible, action-oriented RPG hybrid.

Lack of Morals

Judged as an ULTIMA game, PAGAN rates even worse – as it abandoned most of the innovations that made the ULTIMA series so popular. The games were legendary for their detailed and immersive gaming worlds, but PAGAN provided a non-interactive, stagnant realm that was populated by only a handful of NPCs.

Gone were the day/night cycles, the interactive environment, and meaningful subquests. A more notable omission was the ethical theme infused in the series since ULTIMA IV. Since that landmark game, the ULTIMAS had established both an ethical code of virtues, and plots with great moral depth. In PAGAN, the series protagonist, the Avatar, enters an unknown, relatively-stable world and leaves it in shambles, all in pursuit of a selfish quest to return home. There was nothing virtuous about the Avatar's actions, and there was certainly no moral depth. It was just a bad action game that foolishly abandoned the traditional strengths of the series.



ULTIMA VIII: PAGAN was a project that failed on almost every level. A significant patch subsequently fixed the most egregious problems, but that effort came too late to save it from gaming infamy. Series creator Richard Garriott would later apologize for PAGAN, saying his terrible strategic mistake was deciding to be a good corporate citizen and ship the game on schedule, instead of when it had been properly polished.

It's been a long time since PAGAN was released, but the game is still worth remembering as an example of how a lack of perspective can cause an experienced development team with justifiable ambitions to produce a disastrous product. Did they fare any better with ULTIMA IX? My verdict on that game is on page 86 of this issue. CGW

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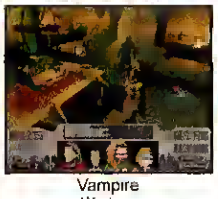

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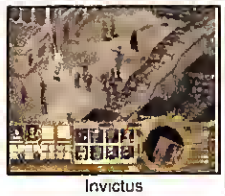

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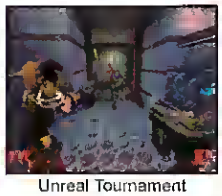

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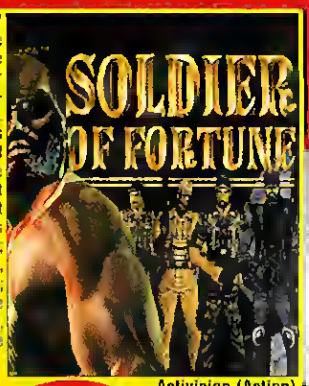

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Release: 1/00
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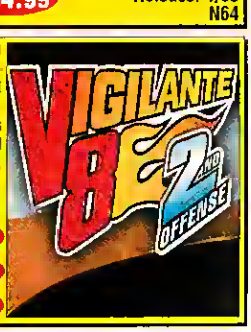

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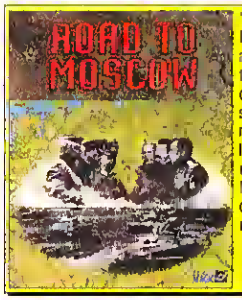

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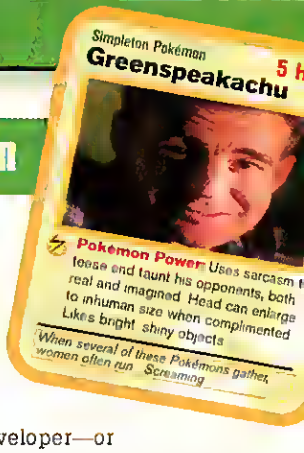

The Importance Of Being Pidgey

Is that a Gameboy in my pocket, or am I just happy to be here?

As a lifelong oddball, nothing turns me off more than trendy marketing fads. Okay, I suppose naked photos of Bea Arthur might turn me off more, but I'm still waiting for those to arrive in the mail, so I can't say for sure yet. The point is, when something gets extremely popular, that's usually my signal to run in the other direction.

So when this whole Pokémon thing began heating up, I fully intended to ignore it with my usual snobbish disdain. I did this quite successfully at first, laughing with my fellow wizards in my online Magic guild about what loser geeks all those Pokémon fans were.

But over the last month or so, as the mania has reached an insane critical mass—appearing on the cover of *Time* the week I write this—it became clear to me that I needed to check it out. I am, after all, a gaming professional. A pundit, if you will. And no gaming pundit worth his Protoss action toy can ignore a phenomenon that has now raked in tens of billions of dollars in cross-promotional sales.

Besides, our esteemed editor-in-chief, George Jones, recently became addicted to Pokémon. In addition to being a gaming professional, I am also a world-class suck-up. What better way to bond with the boss and advance my career than to share in one of his interests?

Me: This Pokemon game sure is great, huh sir?

George: I'm kinda busy here.

Me: Who do you think is cooler, sir, Jigglypuff or Cubone?

George: Get back to your desk, Green.

Me: Another excellent idea sir! You're a genius!

■ ■ ■

So I bought Pokémon for the Color Gameboy. (Pokémon Red, for those who care.) And what I learned, and what I want to share with you this month, is this: It's not the godawful kiddie toy from hell that I was expecting, but it's actually...good.

I know that this is not what you want to hear. It's certainly not what I planned on writing. If there's any topic ripe for ridicule, it's Pokémon. For example, when I read that over 200 people lined up before 6 a.m. at my local Toys R Us on the day after Thanksgiving just to get some kind of Pokémon scratch card, all I could think was: These people should have all been rounded up, put in a bus with bars on the windows, and sold to the Pentagon for military experimentation. Because clearly their time as functioning members of society has long since passed.

But, see? There I go again, being a snob. The fact is, you need to separate Pokemon the game—which is what started this whole mess—from Pokémon the annoying media phenomenon. You may not want to know this, but the game itself is really quite incredible, and any PC game developer—or gamer—looking for a sterling example of game balance should drop their pretentions and check this thing out. Because what it is, really, is a pretty serious role-playing/strategy game, masquerading as a kid's toy.

To try to catch and train all 150 Pokémon, you'll explore and fight your way through a huge gameworld, with a variety of rewards constantly propelling you forward. The fighting and magic systems are creative and deep, and the sheer number of monsters at your disposal ensures that no two gamers will ever have the same experience. Your first fights will seem almost too easy, lulling you into thinking that you are in fact playing a dumb kids' game, but I guarantee that once you're far into it—I'm 30 hours in and not halfway done—you'll be just as engrossed and obsessed with winning as in any PC game. And if you think I'm joking, then you haven't played it.

■ ■ ■

My point here is just that gamers, all gamers, should be careful who and what they disdain. We shouldn't get above ourselves here. We shouldn't pretend that just because we play OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR or ALPHA CENTAURI that we somehow occupy a loftier, more respectable position in society than the Pokemon fans. I mean, who are we kidding? To the lumpen mainstream mass out there, to those who have no clue what the difference is between Mario and CIVILIZATION, we're all a bunch of immature geeks, right? So why fight amongst ourselves?

Pokémon is really quite incredible, and any PC game developer—or gamer—looking for a sterling example of game balance should drop their pretentions and check this thing out.

The fact is, the Pokémon crowd is a lot closer to us than you might realize. And a lot of them are going to grow up to *be* us. So the next time you see a kid playing the game, don't shake your head and mutter to yourself about the decline of Western civilization. Let it be a time for bonding, instead. Ask him if he's caught a Snorlax. You'll put a smile on his face, and he just might remember that the first time he goes online to kick your ass in STARCRAFT.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that his 42nd level Venusaur is no match for his PR pal Erica's 72nd Level Mewtwo. Pity the fool at jeff_green@zd.com. CGW

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