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MechWarrior 4
Motocross Madness**

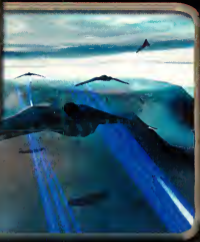
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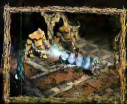
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1



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2



2nd Lieutenant Gorga

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, **Battle of Tatooine (killed).**

3



Sergeant Krung

Served: Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, **Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).**

4



Sergeant Major Corillon

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, **Battle of Tatooine (killed).**

5



Lieutenant Major Antilles

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, **Battle of Tatooine (wounded).**

6



1st Lieutenant Spiker

Served: Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, **Battle of Tatooine (promoted).**

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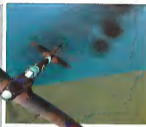
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COVER STORY

The Sims**64**

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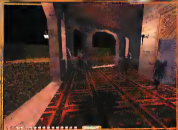
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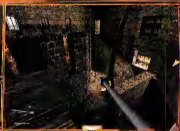
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"Cover me, I got to pay the plank guy."

"I can't shake that. Can I get some love while I hunt?"

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No-Brainer

Every now and then, we witness a gaming phenomenon so profound and transcendent, we know we have to put it on the cover of Computer Gaming World.

The fact that THE SIMS is one such phenomenon became startlingly obvious to me the other night. I couldn't sleep, so I figured I'd just "check in" on the fledgling alter-ego residing in my notebook. Right.

Seven hours later, the sun came up. I was still sitting at my computer. It was 6:00 in the morning. I couldn't straighten my mouse finger, and there was a permanent indentation at the tip. And I had that funky, slightly depressed and hungover feeling I get whenever I expose myself to such a massive dose of computer entertainment.

Thank god. It's been ages since I've gotten extreme game-lock on a single-player game. And man, did THE SIMS run me through the emotional gauntlet. In the course of seven hours, I felt:

Terrified. When a tragic BBO accident claimed the lives of Jorgita Jones and dinner guest Bella Goth.

Wounded out. When Jorge Jones, Jorgita's long-lost brother, arrived in the neighborhood and quickly became a squatter in Jorgita's old haunt. Visitors cried mournfully beside the deceased's gravestones.

Sored. The ghost of Jorgita haunted her old home in the middle



It's been ages since I've gotten extreme game-lock on a single-player game. And man, did THE SIMS run me through the emotional gauntlet.

of a dance party, freaking out Jorge and some of his guests. Giddy. When, unbeknownst to Mortimer Goth, Jorge made the moves on his wife Bella. (Don't act like you didn't do the same thing!)

Passed off. Jorge simply refused to go to work two days in a row, and lost his high-paying job as an inventor. He got it back eventually.

Manipulative. Befriending people just to move up the corporate ladder doesn't feel good.

Indecisive. With three women and a guy vying for Jorge's attention, he needed to make a decision regarding a housemate. (Eventually, he chose Chris Roomae.)

Greedy. Did Jorge really need the hot tub, mini-bar, and plasma screen TV?

Shocked. One day at work, Jorge drank some kind of strange concoction and turned into a criminal. Talk about mid-life crisis.

Excited. Games haven't seen an open-ended, emotionally-laden game like THE SIMS in a good while.

Thank you, Maxis. THE SIMS couldn't have come at a better time.

George Jones





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LETTERS

HOMEWORLD Expansion

I just finished reading the April issue of your magazine and the article on HOMEWORLD CARACDISM. I don't mean to sound negative here, but all of the improvements and everything won't mean squat to me unless they somehow allow a person to adjust the difficulty level in the campaign more.

Jay



Powerplay—Whazzuuuuup?

Can you guys give me some help finding information about PowerPlay, which you wrote about in the March 2000 issue? I am intrigued by this technology but I can't find any more information on the Internet about it.

Thomas Roult

Powerplay is still in its infancy, so there's not a whole lot of information out there about this promising solution to latency and lag time. There is an official Web site however, at www.powerplayinfo.com. Check it for updates, and sign up for the mailing list.

Disturbing Trends

Having just read your review of REVENANT in the February 2000 issue, I noticed a minor mistake that seems to echo a growing trend in the game industry. The relevant quote is, "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."

Excuse me. Eidos implemented combat control (combat system). The most Eidos ever had to say about REVENANT during its creation was, "Hmmm, do you think you could make it more like Mario 64?" Eidos, like most publishers, is just a big company who gives money to developers to create games.

I could continue to rant, but there is an article online that discusses this question in much

greater detail than I can enter into here. The URL for this article is: www.gamezero.com/teams/articles/features/feature_gaming_2000/part_1_page_1.html.

You, as the game media, can directly affect this problem by focusing more on the talent that produces these games than the money behind them.

Adam Wiggins
Ex-Cinematrix Studios
employee

CGW Awards Redux

For years I have been reading CGW, and generally find your viewpoint clear and logical. Even when I don't agree with you, I can at least see where you arrived at your conclusions. In your choice for RPG QI of the Year, however (March, 2000), you left me open-mouthed and in shock at your blatant brush-off of what was undoubtedly the most influential and perhaps the best overall game of this past year. Of course, I speak of the massively online RPG, EVERQUEST!!

Murray Allinger

UNREAL TOURNAMENT was a good game (great to some). In my opinion, it was nowhere near the quality of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT. I am the type of person who prefers a well-written story over flashy graphics and multipity. These things are good, don't get me wrong, but given the choice between graphics and story, give me story any day of the week. How I mourn the passing of the adventure game.

Stephen Lerch

It Tastes Like Burning

I have an idea for a piece of gaming hardware that would intensify the thrills of playing first-person shooters. Currently, it is of

small consequence to catch a rocket in the teeth as all one needs to do is hit your trigger to reenter the fray. Imagine for a minute that as you recklessly storm into battle to slaughter your opponents, you experience actual fear. Instead of force-feedback controllers or mox, how about a device that inflicts large quantities of PAIN?

Maybe an electric headset that shocks the crap out of you, or maybe a force-feedback vest that upon sensing your death attempts to squeeze the life out of your chest. Make it costly to die. Make those emperors pay dearly for their actions. Give emperors what they truly deserve. AGONY.

Now, I understand that hardware manufacturers will of course look at this and feel the liability isn't worth the return. But I say, slap some disclaimer stickers on the box and hook me up.

Mike Paulsen, aka
Nightwatch

CGW Feel Good Dept.

I have been reading your magazine for two months and I must say, Gordon Berg (Inside Gaming Simulations) is a HILARIOUS author (no, he didn't put me up to this). I find myself saving the humorous remarks he makes in his overviews of flight sims. Despite not being a major flight-sim fan, I think his articles are full of pratice and I believe he is worthy of professional praise.

Adam Turk

Ed: We're sure he didn't put you up to it, Gordon. I mean, "Adam."

Jeff Breen, I just wanted to tell you (again) that your columns are funny and right on. Your wit and self-deprecating humor elevate the magazine. However, I don't like the feel comments that the editor always sticks in to poke fun at you...you deserve more respect.

David

Ed: No he doesn't.

Reader Tips

This is my favorite controller configuration for any FPS game, deathmatch or single-player. For the mouse, have MouseLock enabled (of course), primary fire for mouse button one, and secondary fire for mouse button two. For the keyboard, use S to move forward; X to move backwards; Z to turn left; C to turn right; A to strafe left; D to strafe right; end Q, W, and E for any special commands that are necessary.

The advantage of having a turn-left and turn-right button is to prevent having to turn the mouse around so far that you almost break your wrist every time you are back-attacked. I am doing much better using this combination than I ever have in an FPS before.

Adam Bosen

I don't know really if this constitutes a hint, but in PLANESCAPE, you probably know who Pharoed is. During the conversation with his daughter, you will discover that Pharoed has a horde of wealth stashed away somewhere. To get there, you just need to go back to his court after his death by the shadows, and retrieve his staff. Moving left, you'll come upon an arc which is in reality a portal. Touch the clutch to the arc and you will be teleported to Pharoed's Vault. Search among the bookshelves for some goodies.

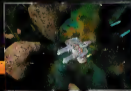
Secondly, to get a really cool hammer at the beginning of the game, just go to the Big of Dangerous Angles. Go to the ruined cathedral and talk to the priest. Let him persuade you to join his cause. Then exit to any place after that in the Hive. You will be transported to the Player's Maze. Proceed to the left side of the maze where you will find one of your journals and a weapon, the Bristons Hammer. To exit, courting the portals from the top right-hand corner, enter the third portal, and then WALK back all the way to the third portal and enter it again.

Mike Ax

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Read.Me

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



**Microsoft
Rolls Out Big
Titles, Big
Designers at
Annual
Editor's Day**



MECHWARRIOR 4
THE ALPHA BATTLEBOTS

MECHWARRIOR 4 FASA's next game in its much-beloved BATTLEBOTS universe kicked the gaming press over with slick graphics and the promise of a deep, dramatic narrative.



Big Guns at Gamestock 2000

You have to hand it to Bill Gates and company. The mega-corporation that used to be a bit of a joke amongst gamers is now a major force to be reckoned with, with all-star designers on the payroll and a number of grade-A, major-league titles on the slate. What's more, Microsoft's annual Gamestock event—the official rollout party

for its yearly lineup of games—has become one of the premiere gaming events of the year. This year's edition showed Microsoft having a scarily strong roster of new games.

Leading the pack, at least in terms of sheer wow-power, was MECHWARRIOR 4—being developed by Jordan Weisman and FASA Interactive. MECH 4 stunned Gamestock attendees, not just for the cool visuals, but for the promise of a strong mission-based storyline as well as a focus on character and narrative that has always been central to the franchise's enduring popularity. The game will feature 21 different Mechs—including six that have never been seen before—and a robust set of multiplayer options, including the ability to create customized missions, host your own servers, and play cooperative missions.

FASA Interactive also grabbed the Gamestock spotlight with CRIMSON SKIES, the action-oriented air combat game featured on the cover of our March issue. Those lucky enough to actually sit down



DUNGEON SIEGE Chris "TOTAL ANNIHILATION" Taylor's DUNGEON SIEGE may be the first DUNGEON-KILLER to actually have a chance against Blizzard's RPG behemoth.



and play the early version of the game Microsoft had run-ning emerged incredibly excited about this title, which has a unique, tongue-in-cheek storyline set in an alternate-reality 1930's America. The game's flight model is incredibly user-friendly and will likely appeal to a broad range of gamers—not just sim-heads.

Chris Taylor, the mastermind behind TOTAL ANNIHILATION, showed off his new 3D action/RPG

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 The second combat-based game in Microsoft's sim series takes place in the WWII Pacific Theater.



MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 Microsoft's outrageous, pop-art motorcycle game vaults into a new dimension with better graphics and slicker gameplay, thanks to the addition of a mesh-wheeled career mode.



DUNGEON SIEGE. To the surprise of no one, it looked as cool as the outspoken designer has said it would. Boasting a continuously flowing world with no load time whatsoever between game environments, and an interesting blend of RPG and real-time strategy elements such as waypoints and formations, **DUNGEON SIEGE**—even at this early stage—looks like a real

contender to challenge **DIABLO II**.

Microsoft trotted out two other gaming superstars to peddle their wares: Tony Zurovec (**CRUSADER: NO REMORSE**), who showed **LOOSE CANNON**, a futuristic auto-combat game previewed back in our November 1999 issue; and Chris Roberts (**WING COMMANDER**), who gave us a peek at his highly anticipated space epic **STARLANCER**. And in a surprise move, Microsoft brought Rebb's Alex Garden—creator of **HOMEWORLD**—onstage and announced that

continued on page 43



SHREWDINDER STRATEGIC COMMANDER. This add-to-keying device may help boost the **Die Hard** family into a real-time strategy genre like **AGE OF EMPIRES 2**.

Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotchke (tchotch'ke). slang, from Yiddish, a cheap, showy trinket.

This issue's Tchotchke of the Month is a pair of fuzzy dice, and the only real surprise is that it took so long for this to happen. Fuzzy dice are kind of your all-purpose tchotchke, good for any product or any occasion. The occasion this time is the **DIE HARD TRILOGY, PART 2** from Fox Interactive, which we know absolutely nothing about. Is this a computer game? Who cares! All we know is, these dice will look great hanging from the rear-view mirror of the **CGW** bus when we go on our traditional Saturday-night joyrides in search of booze, chicks, and **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** add-ons.



The GOOD...

THE SIMS MANIA

It's the number-one game in the country and it's likely to stay that way for a while. It also happens to be a great

game—Maxis' best since the original **SIMCITY**. And just when we were starting to get a little blasé about it, the game took on a broad new life thanks to the tone of resources, stories, and tools sprouting up all over the Web. Start at www.the Sims.com and go from there.



the BAD...

MORE DIABLO 2 DELAYS

Guess what—It's delayed again. Now they're saying August. Don't get us wrong here, though. We're all saying it's bad for Blizzard to take so long. We all know what it's going to mean in the long run: a better, more solid game. And we'll take that over a nightmare like **ULTIMA IX** any day. What is bad, in



that we have to wait even longer to play it. **DIABLO 2** looked great at last year's E3. Knowing that it is almost certainly going to be worth the wait just makes the anticipation that much worse.

and the UGLY...

PANTY RAIDER

We're not prudes here at **CGW**—remember our Vampire cover? But the resurrection of the "game" **PANTY**

RAIDER from Sims & Schuster felt us more embarrassed about it ever. Let's see: You get to play on some kind of mouth-breathing career, taking photos of supermodels in their underwear to satisfy the lustful urges of a group of teenage e-fens. We are not making this up. Yes, yes, it's supposed to be "a joke." It's a "parody" of **TOMB RAIDER**-style games. Right. We're sure the game will be loaded with feminist subtext to drive that point home. Another depressing, use-less piece of shovelware from the geniuses behind **DEER AVENGER**.

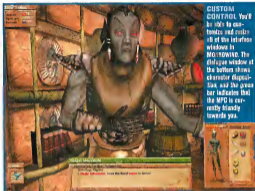


Morrowind Lives!

Bethesda Finally Announces Long-Awaited Sequel to DAGGERFALL

Ever since Bethesda Softworks released its much-loved (for its gameplay) and much-loathed (for its bugs) DAGGERFALL way back in 1996, fans of the Elder Scrolls universe have clamored for a follow-up. The wait has been longer than expected, even for the company that took forever with DAGGERFALL. Bethesda's been so quiet, in fact, that many had wondered whether the company was actually open for business anymore. The answer, happily, is that they are still open, and they are a good full year into the development of the DAGGERFALL sequel, officially titled **THE ELDER SCROLLS 3: MORROWIND**.

Although the game is not due until late 2001, Bethesda has at least made the announcement official,

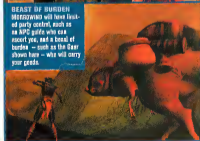


CUSTOM CONTROL You'll be able to customize and control all of the interface windows in MORROWIND. The dialogue window at the bottom shows character disposition, and the green bar indicates that the NPC is currently friendly towards you.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY MEASUREMENTS will require full 3D acceleration, which will allow for much greater detail than in previous games. That floating rock thing in the background is a location you'll visit in the game.



BEAST OF BURDEN MORROWIND will have livestock of party interest, such as an NPC guide who can recruit you, and a breed of burden — such as the Bear shown here — who will carry your goods.



released some preliminary info and art, and launched a Web site (www.elderscrolls.com) for fans eager to follow the game's progress.

All we can tell you at this early date is that much of the same team that worked on DAGGERFALL is back on MORROWIND, and the company is promising the same kind of gigantic, open-ended, single-player RPG, with "hundreds of hours" of gameplay. The game will be in full 3D, and every single location will be individually hand-crafted—no random dungeons this time. Bethesda said that the world itself will be more cohesive than in DAGGERFALL, but players will still have the complete freedom to explore at will, as in the earlier game. They've also promised that they've learned their lessons following the bugginess of DAGGERFALL, and are completely working out every single kink in one town first—gameplay, combat, spells, character interaction—before getting in over their

heads with the rest of the world.

That's all we've got, and it's a ways off, but we'll have much more detailed, exclusive information in an upcoming **CGW THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA** ran away with our RPG award in 1994, and **THE**



BOYACIOUS! You'll stroll by grade in the recent *Yuletide* style city of *Wau*.

ELDER SCROLLS 2: DAGGERFALL took it in 1996. Can Bethesda make it there in a row? The RPG field is more crowded than ever, but this is a series with a rich history and some hardcore, dedicated developers. Welcome back, MORROWIND. —Jeff Green

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

CGW PROFILE

Raven's Big Bird Talks About
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and More

Brian Raffel

1. Where did Raven get its name? Herbiegar of death? Bird of dark wisdom? Traumatic experience with bird poo on a park bench?

When my brother and I first started Raven Software back in 89-90, we were heavily into D&D. Our first game was an RPG, so we wanted our company name to reflect us. We chose Raven Software because it was dark and medieval. Also, my father is a Raven.

2. What was it like to be assimilated by a giant company like Activision? Did you go from Schlitz to Heileken?

Well, before being assimilated we ate mainly cheese and drank sour buttermilk from the dairy farm next door, being from Wisconsin and all. Now we eat tofu, drink the best sparkling water, and I have a big urge to get a cell phone. The best thing about being part of Activision is that we have more resources to hire more quality talent. We are freed up from a lot of business responsibilities. I think if you look at HERETIC II, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, and STARTREK ELITE FORCE you will see that we are doing our best work ever after becoming a part of Activision.

3. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE — Is the violence and gore a bit of a touchy topic?

Only to the models in the game. Some of the terrorists, in particular, set up and get uppity, so we just make an example out of some of their buddies with our rocket launcher and they pipe down. We wanted this game to be more realistic than others in the past so that people get a gaming experience they have not quite had before. We also put in the ability to look out all or parts of the gore, depending on what the player wants to do. The final touch is that the box is clearly marked "M" for mature and the gore lockout has a password protection.

4. You have three kids. How old will they have to be before they will be allowed to play SOF? I took the SOF demo home to show my wife. She thought the game looked awesome but felt the violence would be too much for our kids, so I took it off the computer. I think SOF would be fine for my oldest when he is 10.

5. Favorite gaming memory?

I think one of my most favorite gaming memories would have to be when we were finishing up HERETIC and John Romero came to Raven to help us test. We had just gotten the Morph Otrum (turns other players into chickens) working and the first person I nailed with it was John. I give him credit. He was almost able to hide from me behind a barrel. When I finally got him, the chicken exploded into a pathetic mess of blood and feathers. When the last feather hit the ground, I knew I was changed forever.

6. You're also doing a Star Trek Voyager game. What do you say to people who say Star Trek Voyager sucks as a series? I get my phaser and MAKE them love it.

7. Ever wonder if 6 of 9 is hotter than 7 of 9?

Actually, I have wondered that. But when I do think about it, this soft music starts playing and both of them walk out and tell me that they must assimilate me. Then I say to myself, this is a good thing to wonder about.

—Interview by Mark Asher



15

May 1995

In 1995, girls were and men were men, and just about everyone who owned a computer could program it, at least a little. So it was natural that game designers would create games out of programming. The most popular of these games took the form of robot battles. You designed a robot, programmed its limited AI, and then sent your robot off to battle against other robots. CGW reviewed two such games in our May 1995 issue, ROBOT ODYSSEY I and CHIMPETS, in addition to announcing the winners of a CGW-sponsored ROBOTWAR Tournament. This month, the robot battles concept makes a return in MANDRIVER. Check out the review on page 15.



10

May 1980

The past decade has been pretty heavy good for computer baseball fans. If you concern our computer baseball roundup from 1000 (which featured STRAT-O-MATIC, LANCE BARNER, APBA and PURSUE THE PENWALT) with our roundup in this issue (page 84), you'll notice one very striking difference—graphics. If you wanted any sort of statistical verisimilitude in your computer baseball games ten years ago, you'd have to go the text simulation route. Thankfully, statistical modeling has finally caught up with graphics, resulting in games with great graphics and great statistics models like HIGH HEAT 2001.



Reality Check

If you're expecting consistency from the media, have a nice time in Beijing. The gaming press is all over the place, which is great because it gives us a chance to gleat. For starters, check out the ratings for QUAKE III, Nice 3D game porn. But this month's widest spread comes courtesy of GABRIEL KNIGHT III. The most consistent ratings were for PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and that should tell you something.

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	DEM (out of five)	PC Actionista (out of 10)	Damaged (out of 10)	Sourcestar (out of 10)
Age of Wonders	4	91%	4	5	5.5	5
Close Combat IV	4	84%	3.5	8	8.2	8
FIFA 2000	4.5	88%	4	*	3.1	8
Flight Simulator 2000	4	75%	4	*	8.7	6
Gabriel Knight III	2	80%	3.5	5	6.7	8
Omikron: The Nomad Soul	2	68%	3	7	6.0	8
Planescape: Torment	5	92%	4.5	9	8.0	8
Quake III Arena	3.5	80%	3.5	10	3.2	7
SWAT 3	4	80%	4	9	8.3	8
Tomb Raider: TLR	4	78%	4	8	7.3	7

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

5

May 1995

Our cover story was for a game that never really was: Donark's CONVERGED KIL. This multiplayer online flight sim had huge promise, but Donark could never pull it all together. Fortunately, while the project died, the game's concept, premise, and programming live on to bring a spate of new online flight sims, previewed this issue on page 81.



CYBER DALE DEMOLITION CO.
BLAST ZONE, NEXT 500 MILES.



The Latest Hearing Pile of Rumors, Insuendo, and Gossip

StealthMode

Why did Brian Reynolds leave Firaxis to form Big Huge Games? There may be \$5 million reasons why, which is apparently the minimum Big Huge Games is asking for in their discussions with publishers. Reynolds is trying to go from 1 to 30-35 employees the fast way, which is why he needs the big bucks, and \$5 million plus is his asking price to do a game.

While a warm and fuzzy Vulcan mind-meld might be enough for Kirk and Spock, Activision hoped to embrace something a bit more green-skinned when they shelved out the big bucks for the Star Trek license. HIDDEN EVIL's out and VOYAGER and ARMADA are on their way, but Activision isn't stopping there. By the time you read this, Activision will have announced another Trek game, this one called STAR TREK: CONQUEST ONLINE. It's a turn-based, online strategy game based on the Star Trek: The Next Generation universe. It's made by Genetic Anomalies—the people behind CERON X—and features “collectible” pieces. In other words, expect to buy digital booster packs.

Brutal. When Take 2 closed down an internal studio, Gearhead Studios (STAR CRUSADER, HELL, RIPPER, and BLACK DAHLIA on the PC, and BASSHUNTER 64 on the N64) came in, changed the locks, and told everyone to pack their stuff and leave—now! Employees got minimal severance pay (three weeks pay only, for those who'd been there four years). Artists weren't even allowed time to make copies of their art for their portfolios. What a bunch of sweethearts, eh? Ali Sneaky can say it, “Remember the Battlecruiser!”

Rumor is that not everyone at Cavedog was

by
A Flock Of
Sneakies

sorry to see the game company assimilated back into Humongous. Cavedog's success can be traced to Chris Taylor, who left to form Gas-Powered Games back in 1996. Since then, AMEN and ELYSIUM were cancelled and GOOD & EVIL is on indefinite hold. I'm hearing that some egos at Cavedog were a bit bruised, and that shifting the spotlight from Cavedog back to Humongous was welcomed by some.

Rumor tucker: Ensemble is working on an expansion for AGE OF EMPIRES 2: AGE OF KINGS. We should see it this summer... Hasbro has been showing their upcoming games on a press tour, and X-COM ALLIANCE seems less playable now than it did at ECTS. Meanwhile, a Hasbro producer has been soliciting fan sites for ideas for a MASTER OF ORION 3, so that's apparently in the works... Bill Gates is expected to announce the X-box, a TV set-top gaming system, at the Game Developers Conference in March. This would-be PlayStation 2 killer should ship in the third quarter of 2001... Diablo 2 is now shipping until August, and several Blizzard notables—including Bill Roper—have gone to Blizzard North to oversee the final development efforts... Nels Brackner and two other developers are leaving Dynamix, which is not doing TRIBES 2 development any good. What I hear is that Dynamix is struggling with the bot AI for that game, which is one of the untold reasons why TRIBES EXTREME was cancelled... New World

Computing's HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC is being ported to the Game Boy Color “HOMM, I choose you!” Take that, Pikachu... Rumor is that Gonzo Linn, author of the spy thriller Counterpart from Putnam, is the man who penned the backstory for Activision's SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE is, of course, the game where you can target and hit an enemy in a place where it really hurts. Gentlemen, I think you know what I mean.

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



DIABLO 2'S AMAZON
Don't expect to slip into her outfit until August.

Spies Like Us

GameSpy Branching Out With More Funky Internet Game Tools

By now, you've either seen or at least heard of GameSpy 3D. It's that nifty utility (it's on our disc this month) that connects you to hundreds of servers playing your favorite games. Now, GameSpy Industries is bringing us even more cool tools for internet gaming.

Due this March (hopefully) is GameSpy Arcade, a much more social utility than GameSpy 3D. With GameSpy Arcade, players will be able to take charge of their games by connecting to a giant chat server and setting up net games as they would over a LAN. One player becomes the host, and everyone else joins their game. It all makes for some crazy peer-to-peer action. Players will be able to chat, browse the Web, and keep track of their friends. And best of all, you won't need any quarters to play.

But GameSpy Industries aren't limiting themselves to just gaming. They've recently released RadioSpy, and for those who tired of listening to the same lame music

repeated over and over on the local soft-rock station, it's a godsend. RadioSpy does for streaming radio stations what GameSpy does for internet gaming. Sign on to RadioSpy, and you'll be greeted with thousands of live MP3 streams, categorized by genre and run by Joe-Sixpack. Want to set up your own station? You can SHOUTcast your mp3s directly into RadioSpy, no questions asked, no fees required. And don't worry about censorship, either: GameSpy Industries has made it abundantly clear that they have no interest in regulating what can and can't be played.

Oh, and for those of you who've been listening to that CHRONO TRIGGER soundtrack over and over again until your ears bleed, here's a comforting thought: RadioSpy plays host to a number of gaming music stations. In fact, there's a whole subsection of game music stations to listen to. Now, if only someone will convert the music from STAR CONTROL 2 into mp3 format....—Alex Handy

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Little Green Men Spilling Little Red Corpuscles

Y2K Is Going To Be a Bad Year for Alien Invaders

With two titles seeking to expand and build upon the legacy of CGW Hall of Famer X-COM: UFO DEFENSE, 2000 figures to be a very good year for alien hunters and a very, very bad one for the little mind-bending bastards from Mars. It should be an interesting face-off, with Microprose's license-holding X-COM ALLIANCE representing the body of the series, and Bethesda Softworks' DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE representing the spirit.

X-COM ALLIANCE has more in common with RAINBOW SIX and its ilk than its own source material. Gamers will play as the leader of a four-man squad infiltrating various alien installations across several planets. At first glance, the UNREAL engine-powered ALLIANCE may look like just another Tom Clancy rip-off, but the design team is making a real effort to duplicate many of the things that made X-COM so engrossing. Every squad member will have special abilities that will increase with use; you'll still research alien technology; and the vulnerable minds of your team members will still be part of the background. Slated for a Q3 release, ALLIANCE shows some promise, though we worry



that meaningless puzzles and other shooter-type design traps could suck all the X-COM flavor right out of the game.

Hardcore X-COM fans will be most excited by Bethesda's game, since the original X-COM designers (Mythic Games) are building this one—it's not an official sequel the same way ALPHA CENTAURI (wink wink, nudge nudge) isn't a CIVILIZATION II sequel.

DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE retains the classic turn-based squad tactics and overall strategy of the original, as gamers strive to liberate a future Earth enslaved by aliens. Instead of buying weaponry and soliciting money from world governments, the covert nature of your revolt will force you to seize or capture what you need. Take over a town to recruit manpower, liberate an ammo dump for munitions. FREEDOM RIDGE is the first game of a series, and is being built to retain the random nature of X-COM's firefights while still telling a complex story involving humans, alien factions, and those shadowy Men in Black. Fully 3D with all the requisite lighting effects, deformable terrain, and free-floating camera movement, FREEDOM RIDGE is the clean spiritual successor to the X-COM throne. —Robert Coffey

Brian Reynolds Leaves Firaxis

The Gaming God Behind CIV 2 and ALPHA CENTAURI Hits the Road

The news hit strategy-gaming fans with all the force of a dinosaur-destroying asteroid: Firaxis announced that Brian Reynolds, the chief force behind SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION 2 and SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI, was leaving Firaxis. Computer Gaming World contacted both Firaxis and Reynolds to follow up on this surprise announcement.

Kailey Gilmore, Communications Manager at Firaxis, declined to comment on Reynolds' plans. Gilmore did say that his leaving should have no adverse effect on the development of CIVILIZATION 3, which Reynolds was heading up. "Obviously we had to do some reorganization, but the reality is that we have a pretty deep team here that is very experienced in the whole CIVILIZATION line. Sid Meier will continue to direct creative development, just as he has been all along." In the Firaxis press release Sid Meier praised Reynolds, calling him a "talented designer." Firaxis has known about Reynolds' planned departure since December.

This was just the start, though. It was widely believed that Reynolds would form his own game company, and that's just what he did several weeks later, announcing Big Huge Games. In what is sure to be a blow to the development of current Firaxis games (Meier's DINO SAUR game

and CIVILIZATION 3), three other notable Firaxis employees are joining Reynolds at Big Huge Games. Tim Train—the producer and designer of ALIEN CROSSFIRE, producer of Sid Meier's ALPHA CENTAURI, and producer of CIVILIZATION 3—is signing up with Big Huge. Also leaving is Jason Coleman, senior programmer at Firaxis and the man who built their development libraries and coded the graphics engines for their games. The third notable Firaxis employee to leave is David Isacore, the lead artist on the DINO SAUR project.

In a further surprise, Reynolds, who has made his reputation on turn-based games, said that Big Huge is going to make real-time strategy games. "Yes, turn-based games are fun, but now we want to try real-time," said Reynolds in an interview with CGW. "That is the kind of game to which we are all addicted. We think we can bring something new and exciting to the genre. Clearly historical games have been our strength, but we haven't ruled out any type of subgenre at this point. We have a number of ideas that are cool and fun."

Reynolds also told CGW that Big Huge hasn't settled on a publisher yet, though several have shown a lot of interest. He said he wasn't ready to announce anything on that front.—Mark Asber

Gamestock Trivia Cup 2000

Microsoft's Attempt to Stump the World's Geekiest Game Journalists

For the second year in a row, Microsoft kicked off its Gamestock event with a gaming trivia contest, which pitted groups of journalists against each other in hopes of winning a lava lamp for each member of the victorious team. Journalists were divided up at random, so that the geniuses at CGW couldn't clump together and eas-

ily walk away with the award. Unfortunately, no one from CGW ended up on the winning team, which tells us that the event was fixed, obviously. Here's a small sample of what they asked. Get all of them right, and you win the Geek Who Most Needs To Turn Off The PC And Go Outside award.

- 1) What was different about the character of Lara Croft as she appeared in the opening tutorial level of *TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION*?
- 2) Which former head of Tribby's Studios was appointed to the role of game designer at id Software?
- 3) LucasArts' adventure game *So in with The Phantom Menace* let you control which four characters during various parts of the game?
- 4) According to PC Data figures, what was the top-selling game aimed primarily at girls in 1999?
- 5) Which "groovy" B movie actor signed on to provide the voice of lead character Jake Logan, in Novaglog's space-combat sim *TACHYON: THE FRINGE*?
- 6) The voice of Duke Nukem — radio DJ John St. John — also provided voice talent for another popular 3D game in 1999. Name it. A bonus point for the character he voiced.
- 7) Poker expert Sklanaky lent his name to a poker simulation published by which company?
- 8) Which two members of the *Star Trek: Next Generation* cast gave voice to their characters in Activision's recent *Trek* game *HIDDEN EMU*?
- 9) Name the real-life mercenary who served as technical advisor on Raven Software's *SOLDIER OF FORTUNE*.

- 1) Which former LAPD police chief was an advisor on Sherri's *POLICE QUEST* series?
- 1) Name the three character classes you can play in the original *PARLO*. Score one point for each.
- 1) Name the four character classes in Atari's classic coin-op *GAUNTLET* (not just the character classes, but their actual names too).
- 1) What four-digit number was associated with the Commodore 64's floppy disk drive?
- 1) The original *PRINCE OF PERSIA* gave players three lives and a fixed real-time limit of exactly how long to complete the game?
- 1) What cheat code do you type into *DOOM* to obtain all weapons and armor?
- 1) In Sega's classic coin-op *OUTRUN*, which make of car did you drive?
- 1) What is the name of the character you play in *PLANESCAPE: TORMENT*?
- 1) The first role-playing game ever written by Richard Garriott, prior to *ULTIMA I*, was called what?
- 1) *SYSTEM SHOCK 2* takes place aboard which two stricken starships?
- 1) Which famous speedway track is missing from NASCAR *LEGENDS* due to an exclusive licensing agreement with Sega?

ANSWERS

15. Duke Nukem	18. Duke Nukem	19. Duke Nukem	20. Duke Nukem
12. The Fall Guy	13. The Fall Guy	14. The Fall Guy	15. The Fall Guy
11. The Fall Guy	12. The Fall Guy	13. The Fall Guy	14. The Fall Guy
10. The Fall Guy	11. The Fall Guy	12. The Fall Guy	13. The Fall Guy
9. The Fall Guy	10. The Fall Guy	11. The Fall Guy	12. The Fall Guy
8. The Fall Guy	9. The Fall Guy	10. The Fall Guy	11. The Fall Guy
7. The Fall Guy	8. The Fall Guy	9. The Fall Guy	10. The Fall Guy
6. The Fall Guy	7. The Fall Guy	8. The Fall Guy	9. The Fall Guy
5. The Fall Guy	6. The Fall Guy	7. The Fall Guy	8. The Fall Guy
4. The Fall Guy	5. The Fall Guy	6. The Fall Guy	7. The Fall Guy
3. The Fall Guy	4. The Fall Guy	5. The Fall Guy	6. The Fall Guy
2. The Fall Guy	3. The Fall Guy	4. The Fall Guy	5. The Fall Guy
1. The Fall Guy	2. The Fall Guy	3. The Fall Guy	4. The Fall Guy

The Race to 1GHz

Large Clock-Speed Increases on the Horizon

The race between CPU makers Intel and AMD to 1GHz (gahertz) clock-speed is on, and like the race to the moon, both parties are hell-bent on being first. Although both CPU makers dismiss the 1GHz mark as merely another checkpoint in the never-ending battle for CPU supremacy, both are also keenly aware that clock speeds sell CPUs. At press time, Intel appeared to have the edge in passing that milestone first. In fact, as you're reading this you may well be able to order a 1GHz Pentium III. How long it will take your favorite PC company to ship it is another story. Given some of the long lead-times gamers have experienced trying to order 800MHz Pentium IIIs, 1GHz Intel CPUs—though technically "shipping"—may be very hard to come by, and very expensive.

At their recent Intel Developers Forum (IDF), Intel showed a Pentium III running at a stunning 1.5GHz. But in a display of spy industry bromance, AMD set up camp a few blocks away to brief industry analysts about their

upcoming chips, and float an Athlon running at 1.1GHz. AMD is planning on shipping 1GHz CPUs by Q3, although the schedule may get moved up to keep pace with Intel.

AMD seems to have gotten Athlon over some of its initial motherboard instability issues, and has earned favor with nearly all the large-volume system makers including Gateway, Compaq, and IBM. Gaming PC makers like Alienware, Falcon, and Hypersonic are also building Athlon-based systems. According to one Alienware official, the coincidence of the recent shortage of high-speed Pentium-III CPUs and RDRAM memory, with the arrival of high-speed Athlon CPUs, has Alienware shipping the bulk of its systems with "Athlon inside." Alienware still ships Intel-based systems and like the performance Pentium-III delivers, but its customers have been clamoring for Athlon-based systems, and Alienware has been obliging. For the latest on the Athlon/Pentium-III blood feud, check out this month's CPU Slap Down on page 118. — By Dave Salvatore

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- + Command your knights in menacing formations.
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Top 40

Half-Life

Havas Interactive
5 stars



	This Month	Last Month	Game/Publisher	CGW Rating
2	3		StarCraft Havas Interactive	5
3	3		Age of Empires II: Age of Kings Microsoft	5
4	5		Unreal Tournament Epic/GT	5
5	4		Baldur's Gate Interplay	4
6	6		StarCraft: Brood War Havas Interactive	5
7	33		Homeworld Havas Interactive	4.5
8	7		Quake III Arena Activision	3.5
9	11		Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear Red Storm	4.5
10	8		Thief: The Dark Project Eidos	4.5
	11	13	Half-Life: Opposing Force Havas Interactive	3.5
	12	9	Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri Firaxis	3
	13	10	Heroes of Might & Magic III 3DO	4.5
NEW	14	-	Planescape: Torment Interplay	5
	15	14	Quake II Activision	4.5
	16	16	Fallout 2 Interplay	4
	17	12	System Shock 2 Electronic Arts	4.5
	18	13	Final Fantasy VII Eidos	4.5
	19	22	Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast Interplay	4
	20	19	Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Electronic Arts	4
	21	17	Grim Fandango LucasArts	4.5
	22	21	SimCity 3000 Electronic Arts	4
	23	18	Freespace 2 Interplay	4.5
	24	20	Rollercoaster Tycoon Hasbro Interactive	4
	25	25	Allies vs. Predator Fox	3
	26	23	MechWarrior 3 Hasbro	3
	27	40	Need for Speed 4: High Stakes Electronic Arts	5
	28	24	Dungeon Keeper II Electronic Arts	4.5
	29	30	Worms Armageddon Hasbro	4
	30	26	Jagged Alliance 2 TalonSoft	4.5
NEW	31	-	Starfleet Command Interplay	4.5
	32	28	Age of Empires: Rise of Rome Microsoft	4
	33	27	EverQuest Sony	4
	34	31	Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade 3DO	4.5
	35	29	Caesar III Havas Interactive	4.5
	36	35	FIFA 2000 Electronic Arts	4.5
	37	28	Myth II Bungie	4.5
	38	32	Rainbow Tycoon II G.O.D.	4.5
	39	17	Total Annihilation: Core Contingency Cavedog	4.5
	40	25	NHL 2000 Electronic Arts	3.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT awakes as Top 40 debut this month at #14. A strong start, to be sure, but it's got a long way to go before challenging the reigning RPG champ, BALDUR'S GATE. In other news, HOMEWORLD, CGW's Strategy Game Of The Year, made a hyperspace jump to #7, up 23 spots. Check in next month to see if THE SIMS can shake up the top of the charts.

This Month → Last Month → Game / Publisher → CGW Rating

Top Action Games

1	1	Half-Life	Havas Interactive	5
2	2	Unreal Tournament Epic/GT		5
3	3	Quake III Arena	Activision	4.5
4	5	Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	Red Storm	4.5
5	4	Thief: The Dark Project	Eidos	4.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

1	1	Baldur's Gate	Interplay	4.5
NEW	2	Planescape: Torment	Interplay	5
3	4	Fallout 2	Interplay	4
4	2	System Shock 2	Electronic Arts	4.5
5	3	Final Fantasy VII	Eidos	4.5

Top Simulations Games

1	1	Freospace 2	Interplay	4.5
2	2	MechWarrior 3	Hasbro Interactive	3
3	3	Wing Commander: Prophecy	Gold Electronic Arts	4
4	5	Falcon 4.0	Hasbro Interactive	3.5
NEW	5	European Air War	Hasbro Interactive	4

Top Sports/Racing Games

1	3	Need For Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	5
2	2	FIFA 2000 EA Sports		4.5
3	1	NHL 2000 EA Sports		3
4	4	Midtown Madness	Microsoft	4
5	5	NBA Live 2000 EA Sports		5

Top Strategy/War Games

1	1	StarCraft	Havas Interactive	5
2	2	Age of Empires II: Age of Kings	Microsoft	5
3	3	StarCraft: Brood War	Havas Interactive	5
NEW	4	Homeworld	Havas Interactive	4.5
5	4	Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri	Firaxis	5



****CONFIDENTIAL****

**III. BREAKING THE OATH:
TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~**

1. A verbal warning accompanied by a review of security oath.
2. A stronger warning, sometimes accompanied by browbeating ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and intimidation.
3. Psychologically working on an individual to bring on depression that will lead to suicide.
4. **Elimination of the individual** that has been made to appear as an accident, suicide or heart attack



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.

[SECTOR 1]

The year is ~~XXXX~~, and the world is a dangerous and chaotic place. Terrorists operate openly, killing thousands. The world's economics are close to collapse and the gap between the insanely wealthy and the desperately poor has grown to the size of the Grand Canyon. Worst of all, an ages old **CONSPIRACY** bent on world domination has decided that the time is right to emerge from the shadows and take control. No one believes they exist. The conspirators must be stopped from spreading **-GREY DEATH-**. This world is full of lies and betrayal, a world where nothing is as it seems and entire nations can seemingly be turned at the push of a button. **TRUST NO ONE.**

No. 34561

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 ADVANCEMENTS in technology.
 Research shows, it was happen.

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 environments is useful.

← TRUTH

- o Fight terrorists, as ordered by UNATCO, to maintain control over ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
- o Survive constant attack and/or incarceration as you establish ties to a new ally base.

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 INTERACTIVE
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JOIN THE CONSPIRACY
 at deusex.com



o Send any and all information to www.umatco.com. It could be the difference between life and death.

o Establish a new base of operations with **James Torg** and forge alliances.

o Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with **God-like powers**.



01997219013-1
1525 6862

Item No. 14428 562

CONSEQUENCES:

Diagram 82 Situational Awareness (Fig's 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 build your own capabilities



Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations



Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Adriaan



Fig. 2.4 Survive Incarceration



Fig. 2.5 establish ties to ally base



Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies



ionstorm.com

DEUS EX
QUESTION EVERYTHING.

Icewind Dale

Black Isle Studios Serves Up an AD&D Hack-and-Slash RPG by Jeff Green

Black Isle Studios isn't just on a roll these days—they're on a d100 roll with a +10 bonus to all attacks. (Sorry.) Interplay's RPG group, created out of thin air a few years ago during role-playing's most notorious slump, has, to everyone's surprise, emerged as perhaps the dominant RPG maker in computer gaming today—eclipsing the achievements of RPG heavyweights like New World Computing and Origin. If you think that's a bit hyperbolic, consider this: They have now won CDW's (and many other publications') RPG Of The Year award three years in a row—for *FALLOUT* in 1997, *BALDUR'S GATE* (through *Bioware*) in 1998, and *PLANESCAPE: TORMENT* in 1999. And they show no signs of slowing down.

While everyone waits for *Bioware's* highly anticipated *BALDUR'S GATE 2*, Black Isle looks to satiate their fantasy RPG fans with *ICEWIND DALE*—a straight-up, old-fashioned, hack-and-slash dungeon romp set in *Dungeons and Dragons'* Forgotten Realms universe. Yeah, you can go ahead and say the "D" word (*DIABLO*)—Black Isle won't deny the obvious influence. In fact, the looming, gigantic presence of *DIABLO 2* is a very good reason why you'll probably see *ICEWIND DALE* sooner, rather than later—they want to beat *Blizzard's* monster out the door.

Shut Up and Fight

Unlike their three previous RPGs, there is no central hero to *ICEWIND DALE*. As in the classic RPGs of yore, you'll start the game by creating your entire party (up to six characters), and the game will open in a pub where the adventurers are hanging out, looking for a good epic story to get mixed up in. It's the classic D&D setup.

You'll begin the game in Easthaven, one of the "Ten Towns" of the Icewind Dale region in the far northwest tip of the world, and soon find yourself joining an expedition to the mountain-pass town of Kuldahar, where you must help fight (what else?) a great evil plaguing the area. From Kuldahar, a number of quests will branch out around the Spine of the World mountain range—and Black Isle is still keeping quiet about what the larger plot points will be here.

Perhaps the main thing to note, however, is that though there is a story here, the emphasis is not on plot or dialogue, but on combat. Dialogue is largely going to be used to drive you forward to the next combat situation—there won't be a lot of random yammering going on. Just to give you something to compare it to, *ICEWIND DALE* is going to have about 250,000 words of dialogue, compared to *BALDUR'S GATE*'s 500,000 and *PLANESCAPE*



ICEWIND DALE
 GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Q2 2000
 PUBLISHER: Black Isle Studios
 DEVELOPER: Interplay
 CONTACT: www.interplay.com

EAT IT, BONES A skeleton gets roasted to a crisp with the 9th-level *Fire Storm* spell.



NEED A RUN KEY You'll spend most of your time in *ICEWIND DALE* fighting in dungeons. Here, a cleric casts *Secretary*.



TORMENT'S 900,000. "We want people out killing everything they see," said associate producer Darren Monahan, "not sitting and flapping all day." On the other hand, role-players shouldn't worry that dialogue is totally superfluous or superficial—it isn't. There will be different dialogue options depending on alignment, sex, class, and race, and how you choose to respond could affect how certain conversations and quests play out.

While **BALDUR'S GATE** was set in a largely undeveloped area of the Forgotten Realms, Icewind Dale is one of most well-known areas, thanks to a number of best-selling books by Robert Salvatore. But *Black Isle* was only granted the use of the Icewind Dale setting because they were promising a plot-light dungeon romp, thus ensuring that the game wouldn't mess with any official continuity. Thus, hardcore fans should know that the game will not feature any of the major characters from the book, such as the ever-popular dark elf Drizzt, or Wulfgar the Barbarian. And just to make sure we're all clear on that, *Black Isle* set the game in the year 1281, a full 16 years before the first recorded mention of Drizzt.

Rules of the Game

As far as the gameplay goes, those familiar with **BALDUR'S GATE** will be right at home here—expect no big changes or surprises this time around. **ICEWIND DALE** will use Bioware's Infinity engine with a few minor modifications (some created by Bioware for **BALDUR'S GATE 2**)—including a "bumping" technology that should help eliminate some pathfinding problems, an accelerated walking speed (you won't be able to run, as in **PLANESCAPE**), the ability to rest your party until fully healed, and integrated MPlayer matching support for multiplayer games.

Black Isle has also made a couple subtle modifications to the interface that may go unnoticed by many, but will be greatly appreciated by those who obsessed over **BALDUR'S GATE**. The Rest button has been unbundled and moved to the main screen; the Guard button has been removed (since, apparently, no one used it in **BALDUR'S GATE**); and dialogue is going to float above the characters as in **PLANESCAPE**.

Combat is going to use fundamentally the same system—there's just going to be a lot more of it. As Chris Parker—**ICEWIND DALE's** producer—described the game, "You're either going to be in a fight or licking your wounds," and he estimated that well over 90 percent of the game takes place in the dungeons themselves. The biggest change to combat actually occurs at the character creation stage. Weapons proficiency has been altered to more closely reflect the AD&D Second Edition rules, which have you optionally assign your character a proficiency in a specific weapon, rather than a general class of weapons as in **BALDUR'S GATE**. This should add greater strategic depth to the combat, as should *Black Isle's* promise of smarter monsters, who will use terrain to



SNOW DAY Expect lots of snowy scenes in **ICEWIND DALE**. Here, a mage dazes it out with a snow trail. That's gotta suck!

FORGING AHEAD This is a concept sketch showing a great forge located in some ruins found later in the game.



MAD MONSTER PARTY Here's your party getting slaughtered by undead creatures, zombies, ghosts, and more.



MY CRYPT OR YOURS? A shot of the party meeting more friendly undead (skeletons, orcs, or otherwise).



their advantage.

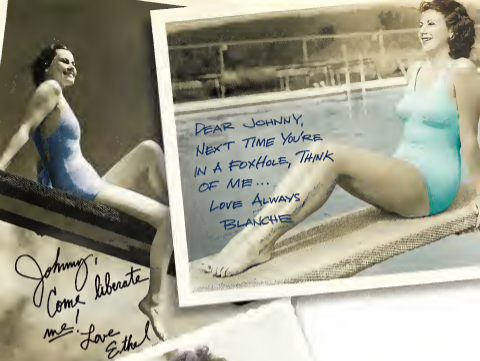
At the moment, *Black Isle* is saying that there will be around forty new spells in the game. In addition, the experience cap is currently set at about 1.8 million points, which will let your characters grow to between Level 14 to 16, depending on class (all characters will start at Level 1).

You Got a Purty Mouth

The artwork was still in progress when I checked out the game, but what I saw—some dungeons, character portraits, and other background art—revealed that the game is going to easily live up to the high standards set by the earlier games, with the same combination of meticulously rendered backgrounds and lovingly painted high-fantasy portraits. Expect to see lots of ice- and snow-covered mountainsides, along with geothermal caves, ancient crypts, ruined Elven towers, and Dwarven keeps—all the stuff that keeps fantasy fans up way too late at night.

ICEWIND DALE, with its complex gaming system rooted in AD&D, its already-proven engine, and its meticulous artwork, is far more than just a

DIABLO clone—and may in fact be that deeper, more hardcore hack-and-slash experience that many gamers have lusted after. Will it rise to the level of quality established by the other *Black Isle* RPGs? Hope for some good dice rolls when the game ships later this year. **CGW**



DEAR JOHNNY,
NEXT TIME YOU'RE
IN A FOXHOLE, THINK
OF ME...
LOVE ALWAYS
BLANCHE

Johnny,
Come liberate
me!
Love
Ethel



Johnny,
I miss your
plastic fantastic!
Call me...
Love, Agnes

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Dear Johnny,
You Cox stars
My beauty any day.
Love,
Edna
XOXOXO

Edna? How'd you
get this number?
No! I can't talk
right now...we're
about to launch a
major offensive!



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Tons of devastating weapons, and
vehicles was the rule of thumb.



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Motocross Madness 2

Rainbow Studios Gets Down and Dirty With Hotly Anticipated Sequel

by Gord Goble

When **MOTOCROSS MADNESS** left the gates back in the summer of '98, PC riders were suddenly faced with a whole new concept—freedom. Freedom to race through point-to-point or closed-course circuits, freedom to explore the world outside the designated track, and freedom to forsake the racing altogether and embark upon a trick-turning orgy to put Heidi Fleiss to shame. It was dirt bike action on a grand and muddy

scale, and it's coming at us once more in this summer's hotly anticipated follow-up, **MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2**.

Again developed by Phoenix-based media production house Rainbow Studios, Microsoft's latest journey into high-flying motocross action promises to dramatically advance the sensory experience while adhering to the "simulation meets arcade" flavor of the first title. To that end, Rainbow has designed the entire game in-house, with virtually all original design-team members.

Certainly **MADNESS 2** promises to be nothing if not comprehensive, with larger environments than the original, more tracks (48 in all), more events (a total of 64), new exploitation-style "Enduro" racing, authentic

motocross bikes, and a Pro Circuit mode that will guide riders through an entire career

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

GENRE: Racing • RELEASE DATE: June 2000

PUBLISHER: Microsoft

DEVELOPER: Rainbow Studios

CONTACT: www.microsoft.com/games/motocross2/

and 40 individual events. But the big news out of Rainbow can be expressed in one word: Graphics.

According to **MADNESS** lead designer Robb Rinard, the days of barren landscapes are a thing of the past. This time around, environments will feature "terrain with the illusion of one-half inch resolution" and up to "nine times as much raw geometry data than in the first game, where we had a huge terrain, but no sense of being in a particular place. Now we have entire ecosystems, ranging from forest to desert to tropical locations, each with numerous settings such as farms and trailer parks inside them."

And those new landscapes aren't merely for show, either. **MADNESS 2** will introduce fully-interactive elements such as animated freight trains and massive slices—items that must be operated or otherwise dealt with by the rider. In Enduro racing, gamers can expect to pick their way through forests and other natural

roadblocks just to find a quicker route between gates—an interesting new wrinkle to be sure, especially when some Enduros are stocked with upwards of 100,000 individual trees, and each of them with a polygon count of 150-300.

To better analyze and improve your ride, the game offers a pair of new utilities: a VCR-type replay suite, and an innovative ghost-racing mode that records each consecutive fastest lap and then replays it immediately for your riding pleasure. Satisfied racers can then send their finest ghost laps to friends for what is essentially a delayed multiplayer mode, or they can simply pass along their most horrific accidents. To sweeten the pot, Rinard says **MADNESS 2** will offer even more broken-boned hilarity than the first, with "gut-wrenching animations that should make you wince as you laugh."

Rainbow has also made serious moves to enhance the aural experience of **MADNESS**, wiring real-life motocross rider Stéphane Roncoda (see sidebar) and recording the sound of a true built-for-racing bike in the heat of action. Rinard recounts, "We put thousand-dollar Sennheiser microphones in backpacks, on the suspension, on the handlebars, under the seat, and everywhere else on Stéphane and his bike. Many microphones were crunched and some were destroyed, but on our eleventh multi-day trip into the desert, we finally got it. I think this is the best engine sound in any racing game ever."

Flip, Flop and Fly With crashes designed by world-class motocross rider Stéphane Roncoda, improved suspension technology and dynamic new bike graphics, **MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2** is a good deal for hot dirt bike action like no other.



TRAINS, PLANES, AND MOTORCYCLES *MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2* will be packed with enough animated objects and environmental obstacles to keep virtual riders constantly busy.



No bad, actually, but one extreme deviation about rider making a very high-level pass over a very low-level flight. Note the footage down below, something we didn't see in the original game.



Also transformed is the MADNESS bike physics model. Though Rainbow hasn't tinkered appreciably with the steering, Rinard tells us "There were certain aspects of the bike's behavior we didn't like in MOTOCROSS 1.

There was no hint of a powerslide and we thought the actions of the suspension could use some work." The solution? Rainbow lead programmer and physics-engine developer Glenn O'Bannon located a PhD thesis on the mathematics behind modern suspensions and progressively-wound spring technology, then incorporated his findings into the game. The result, according to Rinard, is "funky arcade powerslides," more realistic force absorption, and a better ride throughout.

What won't make it to the sequel? As in the original,

DETAILS, DETAILS... On the left, a circa-1990s *MOTOCROSS MADNESS* rider. On the right is his 2000 equivalent, decked out in software gear, aboard a real Honda bike, and featuring an attention to detail and curved surfaces that's downright striking.



STEPHANE RONCADA



20-year-old Stephane Roncada is one of those guys who knows no limits. A dirt bike rider since the impossibly young age of five, Stephane left his native

France in 1997 to seek motocross fame and fortune in the U.S. And he's done just that—the Yamaha of Troy rider has managed to keep himself at or near the top of the championship standings in each of his first three years on the grueling 125cc Supercross and National Championship circuits.

Yet Roncada doesn't confine his love for the sport to the track. An ardent gamer, he was immediately taken with the original *MOTOCROSS MADNESS*, and in particular its coarse-grained utility. One year and dozens of self-designed tracks later, Roncada set out to meet the Rainbow Studios team at last summer's E3. He immediately hit it off with Rainbow senior designer Robb Rinard, who picks up the story from there.

"Stephane was very interested in becoming involved, and his role in *MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2* has become absolutely huge. He's designed every one of the Supercross tracks and five of the National tracks in the new game, using Photo Shop and 3D Studio MAX. He's an artist prodigy. He has this ability to see the entire track in his head, and then to design obvious lines and bluffs, faster lines that allow you to better set up for the action ahead."

Roncada contributed in other areas of the too, engaging in time-consuming audio capture sessions and assisting with physics modeling and game testing. He maintains an independent website (www.zetronnx.com) filled with information and links to his newest pet project. He certainly seems to be one athlete whose involvement with computer gaming goes far beyond a mere on a box.

you won't find handlebars in the first-person view, or lens flare in the sky (Rinard calls the latter "too distracting"). Also not part of the initial release is a track editor, though that doesn't mean Rainbow isn't working on it. In fact, when the MADNESS 2 editor does become available as a no-cost download in late summer, Rinard says we can expect a stand-alone "monster" capable of full-terrain editing and allowing aspiring designers to "hit a button, drop your bike on the new course, and test it right there." All of which sounds mighty cool.

But perhaps the most intriguing MADNESS 2 component will be the Pro Circuit career mode. Here, riders will begin in Enduros with what Rinard calls a "sorry hunk of machinery," no pro racing gear, and a distinct cash shortage. As you progress through the various indoor and outdoor events and move to a better class of bike, you'll be forced to handle such issues as repairs, sponsorship dealings, and—as in real life—medical expenses. And should you fail to maintain a strong championship ranking, get ready for a most shocking development. Suffice it to say that I know all about it, and it sure ain't pretty.

The game as a whole, however, looks to be very pretty indeed. *MOTOCROSS MADNESS* will support Windows 95, 98, and 2000 when it jumps and crashes its way to retail this June. **CGW**

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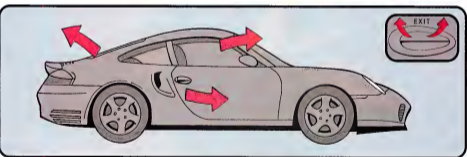
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EXIT OPERATION:
OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS. IF SCENERY IS MOVING—REMAIN IN VEHICLE. IF STATIONARY, PROCEED WITH CAUTION TO NEAREST EXIT.



Independence War 2

Space sims have traditionally been about quick, flash-hang-zoom dog-fighting without the constraints of "physics." Consider the irony, then, last year when INDEPENDENCE WAR—a game making heavy use of realistic physics—got the nod for top Sci-Fi Sim within such a fantasy-based genre. In addition to the physics engine, INDEPENDENCE WAR featured a good story and interesting—if linear—mission design. INDEPENDENCE WAR 2 (a working title; the definitive title will most likely be "Independence War" with a subtitle) will retain the same physics model, but this time the mission design will be more open-ended.

Don't expect another spin on the Commonwealth vs. Indie theme from the first game; fast-forward 100 years and you'll have the current setting. The universe is filled with corporations and colonists—think *Blade Runner* mixed with the Western Frontier. The storyline is on a more personal level this time; you start out as young fellow Cal Johnston. After seeing Pa Johnston killed, you're raised by Jefferson Clay (the same Clay from the original game) to become an enterprising space rogue, and then you progress into a Robin Hood-esque freedom fighter.

GENRE: Space Sim
ANTICIPATED RELEASE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Intergames
DEVELOPER: Particle Systems

While the first game focused on naval combat, this one will be on free-form piracy. Glyn Williams, lead designer and founder of Particle Systems, cites ELITE as a major influence here.

And so, you won't go through a string of canned missions as in the first game; you'll be given the freedom to pursue your own agenda. The game is split into discrete chapters, and each will have a few missions that require completion before progression, other than that, you can do pretty much whatever you want. The few missions that you must complete mix elements of piracy with bits of old school, "Fighting The Man"-style missions.

The original game had a pretty good-looking engine;

SOME CALL IT A PIRSY, I CALL IT HOME As you progress, you'll add more than "stuff" to your home base.



Physics Collide With Open-Ended Gameplay

Thierry Nguyen



THE LIGHT, IT BLINDS ME SO

Light in the world's gone so bright but I cannot see if my galaxy lives!

its main limitation was its 3D support, which was Glide or bust. Now the team is using Direct3D and reaching into its bag of graphics tricks to render stunning ships. The nebulae and various space backdrops already look snazzy, the ships are going to be dropping your jaws.

Through a complicated series of programming tricks, the ships properly reflect light and shadow based on the types of material they're made from and the location of the light source. That is, you get very realistic metallic sheens, lens flares, and reflections—all of which combine to give the ships a tactile look.

The ship variety has also been upped significantly. The familiar corvette class is now accompanied by miners, civilian yachts, smaller police vessels, and more fighter craft. The designs range from evolutions of designs from the previous games, to some that were influenced by James Cameron's *The Abyss* or Kurosawa films. To reflect the more personal storyline, the focus will be on the personal fighter ships, rather than on the massive vessels of the previous game.

Right now, the team is still banging on the engine itself, and letting bits of gameplay leak into their work. There's a lot that's being planned, but not quite implemented yet—like multiplayer, base-building, and ship customizing. Even though a few key issues are still "up in the air," I'm confident in Particle Systems; they've already taken a not-too-successful aspect of past sims (realistic physics), and crafted a great game around it. Now they're taking their physics, and adding the open-ended gameplay that's been missing since PRIVATEER. So keep an eye out for this one, come Christmas. **CGM**



HAVE SHIP, WILL TRAVEL This command section of a larger ship may be the biggest ship you'll get.

The Sims is not a game. It's a way of life.



By Chris Lombardi

Welcome to



It's lunchtime on a Friday at a grimy pub in downtown San Francisco. A pack of editors from a computer game magazine are there to order greasy burgers, ogle the beautiful bartender, and gab. So far, so normal.

But this day is not normal. It's about as far from normal as you can get without Rod Serling as your host. For when these editors usually talk games and movies and comic books in conversation thick with off-color jokes, today they're talking interior decoration, landscaping, the secrets of good housekeeping, and, egad!, relationships. Understand that these are guys who regularly fail to match their socks, who could learn something about social graces from the average orangutan. These "guy's guys" have suddenly transformed into Martha Stewarts and Mrs. Manners, nattering away a mile a minute, effusively gossiping about the marriage troubles of the so-and-sos, and so giddy with enthusiasm over a par-

CGW RATED ★★★★★

PROS

A breakthrough design that's entertaining and innovative on many different levels.

CONS

Maniacal details of the Sims' lives can become just as rote and tedious as in real life. No sea!

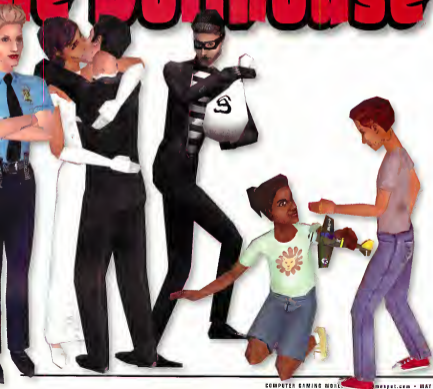
Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 54MB RAM.

3D Support: None/Multiplayer Support: None.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Maxis • \$49 • www.the Sims.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; mature sexual themes, mild oriented violence, comic mischief.

The Dollhouse





Winter 2000.

www.ThroneofDarkness.com

RP

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ticularly successful combination of mauve carpeting and Japanese wall coverings that they're seriously at risk of wetting themselves.

Just what the hell is going on here? Who turned the cosmos upside-down and inside out? Something wicked has surely come this way.

So Wrong, It's Wright

The name given this evil is **THE SIMS**, the latest brain-contagion-disguised-as-software from Will Wright and Maxis. You may remember Wright as the man who unleashed **SIMCITY** on an unsuspecting world in the early 90s, and whose company Maxis has subsequently riffed on the Sim theme to create titles like **SIMLIFE**, **SIMEARTH**, **SIMFARM**, and **SIMANT**, among others.

THE SIMS concept follows naturally from **SIMCITY**. In **SIMCITY**, you played the planning god of a simulated urban environment. In **THE SIMS**, you drop down an order of magnitude in scale and enter the homes of the Sims to play household deity, directing the day to day lives of the average Sim-on-the-street. In **SIMCITY** you laid out zones, created urban amenities and services, and dealt with disasters. In **THE SIMS**, you design a house from the slab up, using very elegant home-design tools; you furnish and decorate and help individual Sims negotiate the daily trials of life, as well as the occasional life crisis. Sims make friends, find love, have children, climb career ladders—and yes, even face death—all of which is depicted with charming animations and a rich and clever sound design.

Like most Sim games, **THE SIMS** is not so much a game as a "software toy." In fact, **THE SIMS** is even less "gamey" than the open-ended **SIMCITY**, which attempted to offer game-like challenges by presenting urban crisis scenarios as problems to be solved. There are no "scenarios" in **THE SIMS**, and no explicit goal. This is free-form, exploratory gaming in the extreme.

Money and How It Gets That Way

That's not to say that **THE SIMS** is completely without structure. Money motivates and frames a Sim's behavior. Money buys and furnishes homes; feeds Sims; pays their utility bills, their gardeners, and their maids. Sims earn cash by working at one of 10 different career paths, which range from medicine to entertainment to crime. They move up the career ladder by improving their skills (including such things as mechanical aptitude, charisma, and physical fitness), building their social network, and going to work in high spirits.

The mood of a Sim is all-important, and keeping your Sims happy is your number-one concern. The Sim's psyche is divided into nine basic needs (social, hygiene, bladder, hunger, energy, entertainment, comfort, and environmental satisfaction) that must be adequately met in order to keep a Sim grinning. The fundamental challenge of **THE SIMS**, as in life, is to find the time to meet all of your Sim's basic needs and still have time to boogie. Each sim day, you face questions like: Do I spend my two hours of free time tonight playing pool with my friends, or studying for a promotion? Computer games until the wee hours, or a good night's sleep? A bath tonight, or in the morning? It's the juggling act that each of us performs every single day, each in our

own way and to varying degrees of success. It's life in all of its drab, humdrum detail, as well as in the little victories and achievements that make it all worthwhile.

Free Willie

The Sims are autonomous beings, to a degree. They can take care of their basic needs, but never as well as an attentive and conscientious player/caretaker. So, if you want to maximize your Sim's success in some realm, you'll need to take control, which means directing every action a Sim makes: going to the bathroom, flushing the toilet, washing its hands, cooking dinner, washing dishes, turning on the TV, sitting down to watch TV, turning off the TV, setting the alarm clock, going to bed, getting up, going to the bathroom, flush-



ing the toilet, taking a shower...every freaking day.

Sound tedious? It certainly can be. Fortunately, success in Sim life brings some relief from the drudgery. You can hire a maid to clean up, a gardener to garden, and (hallelujah!) a toilet that will flush itself. Other appliances and improved skills can reduce the amount of time spent with dirty details.

But initially, the micro-management of life's minutia is unrelenting. This, combined with some limitations, can lead to initial disappointment. A game that bills itself as a "life simulator" can't fail to disappoint to a degree, given one's intimate familiarity with the subject matter and the huge expectations one can't help but heap onto the simulation. For instance, in a life simulator, you might hope that your Sims could get out of the house, go on a date, go to the bar. But **THE SIMS** is centered entirely on the home. The career choices are rather limited, as is the actual effect that a career has in the simulation, the only operational difference between careers being in the wages earned and hours worked. Sims have relationships with other Sims, but the purity of Sim friendships can be tarnished by the fact that one must amass funds to climb up most of the career lad-

ders, reducing friends to objects that must be collected like Pokémon in order to "gain a level." Then there's the fact that the only obvious objectives are the acquisition of consumer goods and the enlarging of one's home. The sum effect is that THE SIMS can come off as an aphorobic Yuppie simulator, without enough tasteful wallpaper and flooring combinations

And Now, the Rest of the Story

However, such a view only skims the surface of THE SIMS. There is deeper magic coursing through this software that's not at all obvious from viewing the bare bones of the simulation. In several difference senses, THE SIMS disc that you bring home from the store contains but a small fraction of what the complete experience has to offer.

First, a very interesting thing can happen to players while they are taking their Sims through the paces of their lives: They begin to spontaneously create stories. Wherever there are gaps in the simulation, wherever details are left unspecified, one's mind compulsively fills these holes with narrative. An example:

Chumpy Lombardi, my first Sim, was on the business career path. He was successful, he was financially secure, but he was bitterly unhappy. One day, he could bear it no longer. He quit his job, and used his savings to go back to school to study his true passion: science! To support himself, he became an artist, selling his paintings to pay his tuition. Once his education was complete, he joined the ranks of working scientists, and—because he was so delighted to have finally discovered his bliss—flew up the academic ladder, eventually becoming a full professor. The end.

Now, very little of this scenario actually happened within the simulation. There is no "midlife crisis" module programmed into the game. You can't really go back to school! And it's really hard to tell the difference between a Sim who's found his bliss and one who has not. But the simulation provided just enough of a framework for my imagination to work upon and spontaneously weave this tale.

Everyone I know who's played THE SIMS has experienced this phenomenon, and those who've allowed themselves the greatest freedom to "think outside the box" of the simulation, to meet it half-way with one's

imagination in full gear, seem to be enjoying the game the most. THE SIMS is designed such that the more imagination you bring to it, and the more you are willing to explore and push beyond its apparent limits, the more you get out of it.

The second sense in which THE SIMS is more than it appears is that the game you buy off the shelf offers just a slim percentage of the household objects, characters, and home-decorating options available. The Maxis team was clever enough to realize that they could not provide everything that people might want in THE SIMS. So, they've given players the tools and support they need to create new elements. As I write, the game has been out for just three weeks, and already there are hundreds of new character "skins" available, ranging from Frankenstein to The Flash to the entire KISS band, in addition to thousands of new wallpaper and flooring options. Maxis itself is releasing a new object each week, and plans to continue releasing one a week for the foreseeable future.

Finally, Maxis' Web site, www.thesims.com, offers players a whole meta-level of social interaction with other real people. Players can upload their neighborhoods and families to the Web site and download others to compare and contrast their efforts. By far, the most interesting component of the site is the "photo albums," assemblages of screenshots from the game with captions. Players have been using this tool to create surprisingly good graphic novels of sorts about their Sims families. They're worth checking out, even if you're not into the game.

So, if you're able to engage THE SIMS at one or more of these levels, it's a totally addicting, fascinating, charming, and—in small and unexpected ways—enlightening experience. It's remarkable how one's life and personality can be mirrored by the game, and how the game can show you your own life from fresh angles (I know I'll never look at my co-workers in quite the same way). That a piece of entertainment software is capable of evoking so much from its players is rare and praiseworthy. But when one considers THE SIMS' other achievements—among them, vigorously affirming the commercial viability of non-competitive games, enlisting players as co-creators at an unprecedented level, offering long-term support and extension of the game universe (for free), and, perhaps above all, getting gamers to think about things like hygiene, nutrition, and a good night's sleep (not that it's had any real effect around CGW)—one realizes that what we have in THE SIMS is an important game, one of those rarities—a SIMCITY, a DOOM, a HALF-LIFE—that will make an indelible mark on our hobby. Such games only come

around once in a while, and shouldn't be missed. **CGW**

THE SOCIAL SIM

The range of Sim social behaviors is quite broad: dancing, kissing, hugging, hugging, hugging, and all sorts of wiggles, leeching, and spreading—*with the exception of sex. The social component is extremely well designed, with intricate gestures and body language, realistic speech balloons (see hot tub shot) that suggest the Sims' topics of conversation, and an evocative parent-lingage.





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THE SIMS: Sick & Twisted



Here's a small sampling of the weirdness to be found in the online photo albums at www.the Sims.com. 1) Mr. Seelistic (the raked one on the bench) helps Sims in pain....



2) A scene from inside the compound of a Sim cell....



3) The "command center" of an evil genius plotting world destruction....



4) Things take a turn toward the tragic in the life of Gitzley Adams; shot by the deputy, he lies bleeding while faithful companion Tee-Bear grieves. (note: the image was declared to add the blood. There's no bloody violence in THE SIMS... yet).

Good Will Gaming

An Interview With Gaming's Great Constructor, Will Wright

"Klapaucius is my hero," says Will Wright, the designer of SIMCITY and THE SIMS. Klapaucius, Wright explains, is the protagonist in a series of stories by Polish science-fiction author and mathematician Stanislaw Lem. A robotic demi-god in the far

future, a Great Constructor with the power to move stars and construct impossible contraptions, Klapaucius roams the universe, looking for fresh ways to put his construction skills to the test, and at the same time humble the proud, disarm the war-like, and explore knotty issues like free will, information theory, and the nature of consciousness.

When we visited Wright in his cramped, windowless office, he looked the perfect human analog of his robotic hero. On his computer screen, he was browsing the recent photo albums uploaded to www.the Sims.com like a doting amateur with the antics of his creations. On his desk, he toyed with the prototype of a plastic home construction set which he designed (whether the kit becomes a children's toy or a architectural space-planning tool, he's not yet sure). Just outside his office is a romper room filled with toys, among them a model railroad. One gets the impression that, for Wright, a day without creating something is not a complete day.

I'm in a very rare and special position today from the perspective of The Sims, in that I have an audience with their creator. I suppose the Sims would want me to ask something like, "What's the meaning of SimLife?"

There's a short story by Stanislaw Lem about some programmers who create a virtual world like THE SIMS. And there's a debate among the creators of this world about whether or not they should tell these simulated people that they just live inside a computer and that they created them. Eventually a law is passed that says they're not allowed to tell the simulated people anything; it's considered unethical. But these people deduce that there are creators watching them, they notice that information is leaking out of their environment and coming back in with feedback, so obviously someone is



changing the environment based on what they're doing. Anyway, the moral implication of all that is pretty interesting and I'll just leave it at that.

You obviously had to make many difficult ethical choices and deal with lots of sensitive issues in creating a game about life.

Oh yeah. We had a whole list that we had to tread through quite carefully. We had long discussions about each one. Homosexuality. Domestic violence. Child abuse. Pedophilia. All these touchy things. With each one, we tried to figure out just how far we could go without upsetting too many people, but keeping the game as open-ended as possible. It was all about that balance. There were a couple things that we decided we just didn't want to touch, like pedophilia. Others we decided we were fairly comfortable with, like homosexuality. Other things we tried to leave open to interpretation.

The domestic violence issue was an interesting one. One of the social interactions is a slap. Our initial slap was a "knock your head off" kind of slap. It was fine, except when you saw a husband slapping his wife, it was a "break your jaw" kind of slap, and a lot of people were uncomfortable with that—it was just too gritty and realistic. So we ended up doing two slaps: If a man and woman are slapping, it's much more of a British officer's-dueling slap. But if it's a woman to woman or man to man slap, it's the more violent slap. So there were things we had to fine-tune to skirt around some of these issues.

THE SIMS is a pretty big break from traditional game designs. Did you have any trouble getting support for the idea?



The Destroyer Walks Again



Oh yeah, I started on this seven years ago. Before SIMCITY 2000. And a lot of people thought it was iffy. In 1993, the marketing people wanted to do a focus group, which was hilarious. I still have it on tape. We described the concept to the focus group almost exactly the way it shipped, and everybody said they hated it, that it was the stupidest idea they'd ever heard of. It was classic.

After that, there was a lot of resistance to the idea within Maxis, but I kept fighting for it. Then I put down the project to do SIMCITY 2000. In 1996, we got the project before our internal product-review council, and the review council cancelled the project. Or attempted to. But I kinda raised a stink and then took it over as my secret project. I basically had one programmer working with me in the background.

By the time EA bought Maxis, we had a prototype running. EA was very excited about the project and they gave me three or four times more resources than I've ever had on any project. EA either does something, or doesn't, there's no in-between. It was just amazing how many resources we could

apply to THE SIMS over the past two years.

I find the reactions that people have to THE SIMS to be fascinating. Some absolutely hate it, and for some it's a new religion.

Yeah, THE SIMS is like this weird mirror. Two out of ten people find the game to be incredibly boring. Another two think it's okay. And the other six love it. It's interesting just how bipolar the reaction can be. It has a lot to do with how much people allow the game to reflect their own lives, and how much imagination they're willing to put into the game.

In a lot of games, you can be very imaginative and the game just rejects it. So I can see how someone could get very attached to that, not expecting to be able to bring in their own imagination. They're waiting to see the next cut scene, and thinking "Whoa, there's no cool cut-scene here, what am I supposed to do? This is work!"

Why is the game able to evoke such a strong response from those six of ten?

Well, the essence of worlds like SIMCITY and THE SIMS is up here [in your head], not here [in the computer]. The most detailed representation and simulation of that world is what the players carry around with them. So the computer models are really just a tool to spark the model in your head; the game supplies the dynamics, but it's your head that fills in the details. There's a space between the computer model and the brain's model where this thing actually lives. The computer is good at certain things that prop up the simulation; the human is good at other things—so the human is actually actively simulating the things that the computer is very bad at simulating.

The original SIMCITY had a pretty profound impact on gaming. After SIMCITY, many games started to incorporate SIMCITY-like elements into their designs. What do you think THE SIMS' impact will be? What elements of the game might people incorporate into their designs?

I wouldn't be surprised to see the speech presentation used again—the way we communicate the emotions and topic, but not the details. One thing people haven't mentioned that we thought was quite innovative was the use of the pie menus for the social interactions. But really, there's nothing we're doing here that's that remarkable, except for perhaps the architecture of our simulation, its object-oriented nature is quite innovative.

The biggest impact though is that you'll have all the good, creative designers out there who might have had ideas in this direction who will now be able to get publishers to support them. I'm sure there are plenty of people out there who had similar ideas, but could never sell the idea in a million years. If THE SIMS is a market success, it'll be much easier for them to get their projects greenlighted. So I think we might see a lot more games that involve social interaction. That's the effect of an innovative game that's a commercial success—it makes a new design space safe for game designers to explore.

THE SIMS seems a natural for an online world with thousands of people interacting.

There are a lot of multiplayer ideas that sound good in the abstract, but as you dig into the specifics, there's hard problems to be overcome. We're working on a multiplayer world, but right now we're working down at the level of identifying little problems that pop up that don't seem obvious at the high level. Designing is kind of like playing a game, in that you have all these potential paths you can take, and a lot of times you're going to go down branches that are wrong. What we're trying to do is prune the branches of potential multiplayer designs as quickly as possible. I have an instinct for where it might go, and based on that instinct we've built a prototype.

Are you thinking large-scale?

Depends on your definition of large. I'm thinking 100,000 players.

In a single world?

Depends on what you mean by single world. This could change at any time, but right now we're thinking of a design that appears to be a persistent world. But you'd play one house at a time. You can choose which house you want to go to, but you're then in that house's environment. It's not like a free-form world where you could walk up and down the streets. And we're not going to force people to just do a house. It could be a lounge or a bar or a business, whatever they want.

Will there be an economy?

Right now we're looking at more than one project. The first project will not have a secure economy. We can have a secure economy—and in fact we're going to, in a later version—but that would add about a year to the project. So, we decided we want to come out a year earlier with a design that works without a secure economy, and instead let people role-play and interact and make it all about social interaction.

In the future version, I'd like to base the economic model on creativity, so that people are encouraged and rewarded for entertaining the other players—whether it's creating cool skins, or objects, or a house. I'm not sure how we're going to accomplish this yet, it's just a gut

feeling as to where I think we should be going with it.

Tell us a little more about the object architecture.

Almost all of the behaviors in the game are inside the objects, which is how we're able to extend the behavior just by downloading an object. All the Sims know is that objects can help meet certain needs; they know "I'm hungry" and they look for the highest scoring hunger item, at that point they start running code in the object, say, the refrigerator. The refrigerator actually contains the animation and sound effects and the computer code that allows them to eat, including cooking and finding a chair and table. So that way, with downloadable objects, we can totally change the behavior and add new layers of simulation on top of them.

Have any of your recent downloadable objects done something like that?

We've done a little. Our next download is a guinea pig. People can take it out of its cage and pet it and play with it. But it's kind of a Trojan Horse object. If the guinea pig bites you, you'll actually get sick. But you won't notice this for maybe a day. You'll start seeing the Sim sneeze, then cough. And it's a communicable disease, so they can spread it around to other Sims. If you don't get enough rest, you'll eventually die. So there's this whole new dynamic—sickness—that we've added to the game with just one object.

So you're going to be adding more ways for Sims to die?

Oh yeah. People really seem to be enjoying that. One

thing I'm doing is looking at the stories on the Web site—the direction that people are trying to go in with the stories and hitting brick walls. I want to look at those brick walls and figure out how to remove them with downloadable objects. The real long-term attraction of THE SIMS is as a story-telling platform, so we're giving players new props that they can use on their stage.

How long will you support the game?

We're not sure. In the long term, we want to transition from us creating the stuff to the players creating the stuff. We've got a lot of very hard-to-use tools right now for creating objects. Creating objects is a very complex process. But I'm still convinced that I want to give these tools to the players. They won't be useful to the average player, but there are some people out there that can figure this out and do it. So at some point, we'll be ramping these skilled fans up so that we can start ramping down our efforts, and then get on to the next version of the game. **CGW**



It's Time to Gather Your Champions

The Habits of Highly Effective Sims

Relationships

- **Go a'Calling.** You don't have to wait for your friends to come to you. You can go to them. Go to the neighborhood selector and choose another house. Then call up the Sim you are working on and invite him or her over. Then, bombard the Sim with social options. This works great with large families. The Sim you've invited can interact with three or four other Sims and boost his relationship rating. An extra bonus to this technique is that it doesn't cost the Sim any time or energy. When you go back to the original Sim's house, no time will have passed.

- **Instant Friends.** If your Sim is in dire need of new friends, create a large family of new Sims and move them onto a lot. You don't have to worry about completely outfitting a new house, or building any house at all. Just give them a phone. Without a phone, you can't call the new Sims and invite them over.

- **Relationships With Kids.** Having good relationships with neighborhood kids can be tough for the working adult due to the narrow window of social time between school hours and the eight o'clock curfew. But there's a way around this. If a kid is visiting and the kid's parent comes over to collect the kid, ignore the parent. Don't answer the door and keep the kid occupied. Eventually, the parent will go away and you can keep the kid well past midnight.

ELVIS IS A FRIEND OF MINE If you need lots of new friends fast, create a huge family, plug them on a plot of land, and give them a phone (and no jobs). Here, we have a family consisting of Santa, Elvis, Wil Wright, a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, and agents Mulder and Scully — all of whom are now just a phone call away.



Tips for Making the Most out of Sim Life

"Me" Time

- **Divide and conquer your Sims' needs.** Don't try to satisfy all of the needs every day. We've found it useful to set up a 3-4 day schedule that focuses on one need each day. So, we have a Study Day, a Take Care of Personal Groom Day, a Fun Day, a Social Day, followed by a day off. Adjust this schedule according to your Sim's personality.

- **A fine day off.** Early in THE SIMS it's going to be hard to address all your Sim's needs, especially social needs. There just never seems to be enough hours in the day, and the economic constraints you face early in the game keep you from efficiently doing much of anything. The key is to take occasional days off of work; but instead of just lying around—like you do when dodging work in real life—you need to make your days off work for you.

Once you have some money in the bank, turn off "Free Will" in the Options menu and take over your Sim's life entirely. Once he/she gets up, ignore the carpool and binge on food, gorging yourself silly. Take a couple of showers; eat some more; then watch tons of TV to shoot your Fun rating up. Take a long nap after lunch so you're well rested and comfortable. Right before the rest of the neighborhood gets off from work (generally around 3:00 p.m.), eat some more, then call everyone you know over for a big party. Use the toilet before they show up, whether you need to or not. Once everyone arrives, prepare a meal so they can eat, then talk to everybody as long as you can—talking is the big Social activity. If you've timed everything out right, you'll be able to stay up late and socialize for a while with no ill effects. You can supplement your new, high Social rating by having individual guests drop by most every evening until your next party.

Good Housekeeping

- **Do not disturb.** Getting a Sim woken up in the middle of the night by a phone call or noise from a TV or radio can be disastrous to the following day. To ensure peace and quiet at night, make sure that all of the passageways into the Sim's sleeping area have either a door or a doorframe. Doors and doorframes block out all noise from other rooms, ensuring a good night's sleep.

- **Invest in comfort.** The most important furnishings in a Sim's life: bed, toilet, bath, and couch. When starting out, keep your house small and buy the highest quality models of these items you can. The

In the Kitchen

• **Get cooking!** Cooking is a very important skill, as it reduces the amount of time you'll spend feeding yourself. When starting a new bachelor Sim, it's a good idea to immediately study cooking, even before you get a job. It will save you lots of time in the long run, and reduce the risk of fire.

• **Fire bad!** If you're cooking skills are weak, for God's sake: **DON'T USE THE RANGE.** Fires are frighteningly frequent when you're a rookie chef. When starting a new Sim, it's best to avoid a range/stove altogether. You can get by just fine with a food processor and a microwave, although there is still some risk of fire with the latter.

• **Plan your kitchen for maximum efficiency.** Try to set up your various appliances so that Sims can proceed from one to another in a straight line.

COOKING FOR ONE Here's a simple but efficient bachelor kitchen setup. From trip to food processor is one step. Then the Sim need only turn to the left to reach the microwave. Notice how the trash compactor comes in a counter top, and that there is no stove in sight.



• **Singe eating.** For those times you need to get a lot of food in you, Serve Dinner instead of making a series of single meals. It costs \$20 (twice the cost of a single dinner) but provides about five or six plates of food, regardless of the fact that no one else is around. This way, you can just eat and eat and eat without wasting time repeatedly preparing food—more time to socialize when you call friends over later.

• **Do your Sim's dirty work.** While in Build mode, you can move any object that's not currently in use. You can use this ability to do lots of micro-management. For instance, before you can afford a maid, you can help your Sims with clean up. Gather all of the dishes and stack them next to the sink. Or gather trash and place it next to a trash can. If you're really cheap and lazy, you can create a garbage pit at the side of your house where you can throw your trash.

A New Adventure Beckons

THE SIMS

investment will pay off hand-over-fist in your Sim's energy, comfort, and hygiene levels.

- **Paying bills is a pain in the butt.** So you may as well spend as little time as possible doing it. Rather than having your Sims tote the mail all the way into the house and then back out to the mailbox, try this trick: Place a tasteful little end-table in your front yard, as close to the mailbox as possible. The Sim will then place the bills on the end-table. It may look funny, but it will allow you to pay your bills very quickly when you are either coming home or going to work. If you'd rather not have furniture on the front lawn, have your Sim get the mail and then immediately cancel the action. The Sim will drop the mail at his feet. You can also place a fish tank next to the table, so that your Sim can get a quick "fun" boost right before stepping into the carpool car.

- **Hot tub hot!** Hot tubs are one of the best luxuries in the game. They improve hygiene and comfort, and they are a great social activity. Highly social Sims swear by the hot tub.

GOCHRA! The exterior burglar alarm is sounding near before the thief has stepped through your door. He'll not caught, and you'll get a reward - without losing a single cent to the insurance company.



CURBSIDE NICKS! Yeah, the fish tank on the front lawn looks funny. But the "fun" boost you'll get, just before carpool, could give you the edge you need to get your next promotion.



- **Burglars.** Put a burglar alarm on the outside of your house near the main entry. The range of the burglar alarm is "the room it's currently in," and the exterior of your house is considered a room. As soon as a burglar steps

onto your property, the alarm will sound and the police will catch him before he has a chance to take anything. You earn the reward for capture without having to pay to replace any stolen goods.

- **Don't neglect the front lawn.** Many players tend to ignore the outdoors of their homes, to the detriment of their "room" rating. As soon as you can afford it, hire a gardener and then go wild with the flora. Don't bother planting before you can afford help; the time needed to care for plants is not worth the benefit.

The Working World

- **Match your Sim's career and personality.** Certain personalities are better suited to certain careers. Highly social careers like business and politics require high "outgoing" and "nice" ratings to win friends and influence others. Physical jobs like athlete and daredevil are nearly impossible without a high "active" rating.

- **Take a sabbatical.** If you find that you're having trouble advancing in your career due to social or skill limitations, and you have a fat savings account, go on "sabbatical." Quit your job and start working on your skills and/or social life. In just a week or two, you can max out your important stats and have a truck-load of friends. Then, get another job and giggle with glee as you soar up the corporate ladder.

I Want My MP3s!

Went to listen to different music on the Sim's stereo? Just drop your favorite MP3 files into either the Latin, Country, Rock, or Classical folders in the "The Sims/Music/Stations/" directory. You can also change the music that plays during the Build and Buy modes (Music/Mode) as well as the sounds coming from the TV (SoundData/TVStation).

Damn Your Cheatin' Heart

While in the mode, press [Ctrl] + [Shift] + [Alt] + [C] to display a box in the upper-left corner of the screen. Type in the codes below to activate the cheat.

CODE

Playobjects
water tool

Interest

retaway (1-100)

ret_hour (1-24)

EFFECT

Give you 1000 Simoleons.

Even the SimShackler can afford waterfret property with the water tool. Inpat this code red your career becomes a water dowsing tool. Be warned, since a water Sim, always a water tile.

Allows you to view your Sim's career/rational interests.

This cheat allows you to change your Sim's level of love skill. Set to 0, your Sim will just stand there waiting for your commands. Set to 100, the Sims do a good job of meeting their own basic needs. Useful for when you want to put your Sim on a work-a-bottle binge in order to rack up the Simoleons.

If only Sim had this cheat, if you want to give your Sim an extra hour or two of sleep, use this cheat to set back the clock.



NO SIM IS AN ISLAND Put with the "water tool" cheat, a Sim can live in a lovely paradise.

- **Be an artist.** There's at least one way to make a living without having a "career." With a maxed-out Creativity skill, a Sim can sell paintings at \$166 a pop. A Sim can create 1.5 paintings a day, on average. It's not going to make you rich (what did you expect?), but you can get by while living an "alternative lifestyle."

CGW

Might and Magic

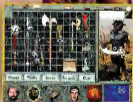
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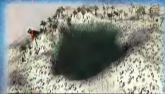


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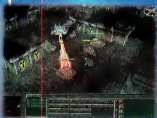
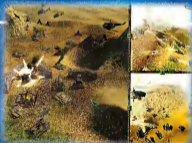
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FLIGHT & FLIGHT ON

Embattled Flight Sim Genre Stakes Its Future

By
Gordon Berg
and
John Nolan

It comes as a shock to no one that retail flight sims are the latest poster child for a genre in trouble. In fact, most investors consider the funding of a new flight simulation in today's gaming climate to be the equivalent of financial suicide. But mention the terms "Internet" and "multiplayer" and an investor's eyes light up with dollar signs, like a character in a Saturday-morning cartoon.

This might go a long way in explaining why

there are already six online sims based on the WWII era (with a possible seventh on the way) competing for your time and money. While we're at it, throw in a couple of WWI sims and a Vietnam-based effort as well. It seems the Internet has taken what was once known as the most obscure of niche markets—the online flight sim—and has turned it into a hotbed of frenzied gaming development.

If you haven't tried multiplayer flying yet, you're missing out on some of the best fun you can have online. Now's the time to give it a try, because you have more options than ever before.

WWII Online

Flight Plan: The "Electronic Battlefield" has long been a Holy Grail of sorts for the online sim enthusiast—intensely desired, but impossible to find. So when 15 employees left the now-defunct iMagic office in Grapevine, TX to form Playnet Inc./Comrad Rat Software, they asked themselves, "Why not us?" As the title implies, WWII ONLINE is going to be more than just a flight sim. Those of you who've long craved a grander strategic model than simply capturing an airfield just might get your wish. In fact, you're going to get an entire war, where you can do more than fly: You can drive tanks, captain ships, or even grunt it out as a soldier on foot, as in a first-person shooter. Successful mission completion

gives your persona the ability to climb the ranking system, giving you access to more resources and better equipment. Do well enough, and you could earn a trusted command position in one of various branches of a service. Or, you can screw all of that and occasionally pop in just to blow stuff up. WWII ONLINE will be broken up into various theaters. Each theater can accommodate up to 1000 players, and eventually a total of ten theaters will be made available (Russia, North Africa, South Pacific, and so on).

Choose Your Weapons: The first theater will be based on the Blitzkrieg of 1940, and equipment will reflect that period. The usual suspects will be there—the Spit, Hurricane, and assorted Messerschmitts. There will also be other planes, like the Stuka and the French Curtiss Hawk H-75. For those who prefer to drive, there'll be plenty of the early Panzer tanks to choose from, or the

FLY-BY action, nearly every other title in the works. WWII ONLINE will let you take on the role of ground forces, including tanks and infantry.

LINE

Multiplayer Arenas

French Char Bis B1. Throw in half-tracks, trucks, supply ships, U-boats, battleships, artillery—even a Lee Enfield rifle—did you start to get the picture.

Targets of Opportunity: Continuous successful operations against the enemy will be vital, such as the capture and control of key centers of production and transportation. Players will come and go online as they please, obviously, so the teams that manage to work together by communicating and developing plans will fare best. Ultimately, though, the designers intend to accommodate all manner of play-styles into one giant, dynamic environment.

Angle of Attack: WWII ONLINE's ambitious design is endeavoring to create a world where WARBURDS meets PANZER ELITE meets HIDDEN & DANGEROUS. The thinking is that there are hundreds of isolated communities out there right now, enjoying various forms of WWII simulation/gaming. What if all were somehow brought together into one giant game?

Ready for Takeoff: An open beta should start before the end of the second quarter of this year, followed by the production release sometime in the third quarter. Pricing is yet to be determined, but will be a flat rate.

www.wwiioonline.com

NOT HIS FINEST HOUR This Spit flew in the BATTLE OF BRITAIN, we'll bet you won't last long in all the anti-aircraft fire.

Aces High

ACES HIGH, a new sim by the guys who developed WARBURDS, offers 15 WWII planes in a three-country turfball arena. Check out this month's review on page 98.



DOWN FROM ABOVE If you want to fly, you've got to see these test-crafts, or they just ain't realistic. If you want to fly, you need detail of key sights to fly up your target. ACES HIGH does a good job in both areas.

Battle of Britain

Flight Plan: SimGuild, a two-man operation in Oklahoma, made their mark with the WWI-based FLYING CIRCUS. Now they've set out to deliver the same unique brand of gameplay in a WWII setting: the famed Battle of Britain. Their new title, named after the historic battle, is an intentional mix of uncompromising realism and concession to play-balance, all based on what the developers think works best in a "mondo-player" arena. For example, BOB exhibits some extremely precise flight and damage modeling, so the original tactics that carried the day over the coasts of England work just as well here. On the other hand, you won't experience any blackouts; the takeoffs and landings are user-friendly; and the low-speed handling is a tad more forgiving than in other online sims. All of this makes for some quick and frenzied dogfights.

Choose Your Weapon: Five fighter aircraft are already in place, and bombers are soon to follow. Take to the skies in the legendary British Spitfire Mk 1 or Mk 1B, or try the work-horse Hurricane Mk 1. For the Luftwaffe, fly the twin-engine Bf 110 or the infamous Bf 109 (E4).

Targets of Opportunity: A single arena, with the English Channel as the obvious focal point. Hosted historical scenarios are soon to come.

Angle of Attack: BOB is geared toward the quick-fly dogfighter who usually wants to spend no more than an hour or two online, per session.

Ready for Takeoff: At the time of this writing, BOB was in beta format, and available only to SimGuild customers. Compared to the competition, the pricing is mid-range: \$10/month for 40 hours. Once past the 40, it's 25¢/hr.

www.simguild.com

Fighter Ace II

Flight Plan: **FIGHTER ACE II** (FA II) from Microsoft Games improves the original uninspired program by adding new aircraft, 3D-graphics support, "Territorial Combat" arenas, and more special events. New planes are always welcome, but the vast majority of FA II players use the Arcade Arenas, where "the laws of physics are not strictly enforced." As a result, the aircraft all "fly" pretty much alike, with weapons packages providing the main contrast. There is a much better flight model available in the "Realistic" arenas, yet few players choose that option. The new 3D graphics still can't match those in similar games, although they're far better than the previous version. The overall "muddy" color palette and indistinct artwork just doesn't provide that "you are there" feeling. On a brighter note, the Territorial arenas are a major enhancement to gameplay, capturing enemy assets affords relief from the endless furballs of the original **FIGHTER ACE**. The increased emphasis on special historical missions and tournaments also brings greater interest and a sense of community to this version.

Choose Your Weapon: Fly 35 famous WWII fighter and bomber aircraft from U.S., British, German, Japanese, and Russian factories.

Targets of Opportunity:

I MEANT A BUD LITE! The lessons and aircraft are heavy, dark, and gloomy in **FIGHTER ACE II**. Of course, a good burst of cartoon fire can lighten the mood.



I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW! Hitting FA II's FO key removes cockpit artwork, allowing unobstructed vision in all directions. While not too useful, it sure makes shooting a whole lot easier!

FA II offers typical online combat opportunities with "arcade," "capture the flag," Special Events, and tournament arenas.

Angle of Attack: Aimed at less-demanding pilots, this is simplified air combat with features like remov-

able cockpit art and podlock views that are hanned in other online sims.

Ready for Takeoff: FA II is up and flying at www.zcne.com/fighter for \$1.95 per day, or \$9.95 per month. www.zcne.com

Air Warrior: Vietnam

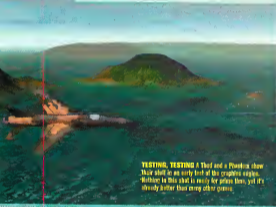
Flight Plan: Work continues at Kesmai for an assault on the Vietnam-era combat sim market. AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM features missions and campaigns from the 1964-1968 period. Flight models will use recently declassified "official" sources for aircraft performance and handling characteristics. Both "relaxed" and "full realism" options are planned, along with all-new 3D graphics and AI modeling. Given the public attention to this war, a well-executed AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM could revitalize interest in this era's air combat.

Choose Your Weapon: U.S. Navy: A-4, A-6, F-8, F-4. U.S. Air Force: F-4D, F-105. Vietnamese People's Air Force: MiG-17, MiG-21.

Targets of Opportunity: Gameplay features 13 campaigns covering different phases of the four-year period. While blowing stuff up is always fun, there are major political considerations in this war. You'll start with the initial bombing raids against the North, continuing towards Hanoi with the MiGs, the AAA, and SAMS getting tougher as you go. Players/pilots try to gain rank and earn medals in both the solo and online modes. The "team" goal is to make the other guy die for his country, while achieving the politicians' war aims. Online opportunities will be similar to AIR WARRIOR, with free-for-all and historical arenas.

Angle of Attack: AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM aspires to provide a great solo game and an exciting massively-multiplayer online game on the same CD.

Ready for Takeoff: Kesmai declined comment on a release date, but noted that development began in early 1999. Price was also unavailable at press time, but the box set "will be typically priced" and plans include "a monthly fee for unlimited play online." www.kesmai.com.



YESTER, TESTING A Thai and a Phoenix show their stuff in an early test of the graphics engine. Nothing in this chat is ready for press time, yet it's already better than many other games.

Can't Name Names, but...

What do have one more WWII online-only flight sim to report on, but we can't tell you what it is yet. We can tell you that it's being made by a well-known sim developer, and there are plans to go beyond what is standard in many of today's online sims. In addition to user-created missions and AI-controlled enemies and friendlies, there will eventually be a dynamic campaign online, so that missions can be generated by the campaign engine itself. You'll start up your campaign and fly it through with 100+ people on both sides, fighting it out of the same time.

Finally, there might be one retail boxed product that overshadows all of the online ones: What if you could set up your own persistent server that allowed dynamic joining and leaving? Less EA, this was what Looking Glass Studios' Constantine Hantopoulos promised that FIGHT COMBAT THUNDER OVER EUROPE would achieve. Since then, Electronic Arts has stepped the Jesse's tag on the project, altered some of the feature set, and re-branded it ATTACK SQUADRON. EA has been tight-lipped on the design changes, so we don't know if the previously reported multiplayer options have remained intact or not. But, given EA's desire to get more mileage out of its Jesse's titles, a persistent online mode seems a logical place to do just that. We'll keep you posted. —Gordon Bray

Old War Horses

WARBIRDS, from iEntertainment, remains the leader in online ACM. Its excellent 3D graphics and sophisticated flight models set the standard. The latest improvements include a refined damage model, fresh terrain, and the B-24 bomber. An all-new version in development, WARBIRDS 3.0, will raise the bar higher still. The flaw is the price; the cheapest plan costs \$1.50 per hour, and many a WB ace gets hit with a huge three-digit bill for flying time.

DAWN OF ACES

iEntertainment's WWI stable mate of WARBIRDS, is a newer game that shares most WB features and is clearly the best WWI sim available. It suffers from the same pricing flaw, however.

Kesmai's AIR WARRIOR III soldiers on with dated flight and damage models, but offers an attractive \$10/month price for unlimited play. A dedicated community makes full use of the numerous arenas and new automated historical scenarios. Continual updates refresh this old vet and make it worth a look. —John Nolan

BASEBALL 2001



Power Rankings for This Season's Top Contenders

BY TOM PRICE

Spring is in the air. Birds are singing; bees are buzzing; and across this great land, washed-up lounge singers are practicing the national anthem—for baseball season has come again. Many fans turn to the scouting reports to see if their team has the necessary tools to go all the way. With this in mind, we did a little digital scouting of our own, and now present to you the CGW breakdown of this year's three big baseball contenders: MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2001, 3DO'S HIGH HEAT 2001, and EA Sports' TRIPLE PLAY 2001.

Can 300 Repeat as Sports Game Of The Year?

High Heat 2001

Developer: Team 396

Publisher: 300

Last year's record:

★ 4.5 ★

The follow-up to Computer Gaming World's 1999 Sports Game Of The Year is one of the most hotly anticipated games in the CGW offices. Many of us, carrying a grudge from last season (which was "wcn" by Editor-in-Chief George Jones in a shameless display of obvious cheating which none of us can prove, but which would explain his outrageous 66-13 record), are already looking to gain an edge this time around.

Everything we've seen of HIGH HEAT 2001 suggests that it will continue to improve upon last year's already impressive gameplay, while adding all of the league and team customization options that we were begging for.

Hello, Custom League

HIGH HEAT 2000 had one major failing: its limitations in creating a custom league. To get a custom-drafted league to work, you had to come up with a burdensome work-around that involved extra tasks and simulating games involving non-player-controlled teams. In our interface league this year, we'll get to dispense with

the aforementioned, and set up a league with exactly as many teams as we want, playing a schedule that will foster as much interdepartmental resentment as humanly possible.

The game's on-field management—which allows a wide variety of realistic decisions—is largely unchanged, which is a good thing; they got it just about perfect the last time.

Building on Perfection

What really set apart HIGH HEAT from the other baseball games that were released last year—or any year, for that matter—was the exquisitely-modeled gameplay.

With this in mind, the designers are keeping the basic game engine intact. The second-to-none pitcher/batter interface hasn't changed, but now bunting is a lot more fluid, with the bat's position no longer limited to a couple of points in the strike zone. Base-running, one of the

MAMA SAID KNOCK YOU OUT
One of the new animations involves infielders running into walls.



few weak points of HH2K, has been improved. Now your runners won't be afraid to run on a two-out fly ball. Also improved this time around is the rate at which players will fatigue. Each player now has an individual fatigue rating, allowing you to more easily decide when to give your star players the rest they need.

New to this year's version is a nifty batting practice feature, which will let you take swings against the pitches (or the pitchers) that are giving you the most trouble.

No More Nomar

The most notable update to the HIGH HEAT engine is in the graphics department. Last year's single Nomar Garciaparra-esque player model has been given a few new benchmarks. The burly Albert Belle model looks like it could lay off the donuts a bit, while the diminutive model could almost be used to recreate Eddie

SWINGING OUTSIDE THE BOX Pitcher explores an automatic after-midnight, one-and-done after a walk, placement for your entire pitch series in three.



Gaedel. Game presentation has been improved with the addition of animations depicting players strolling into the batter's box, and new camera- and replay-views.

The Bottom Line

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. HIGH HEAT made a serious name for itself last year, capturing the hearts of nearly everyone. HH 2001 looks like it will improve upon an instant classic.

PROJECTED FINISH: 1ST

The Redmond Giant Makes Its Move

Microsoft Baseball 2001

Publisher/Developer: Microsoft

Last year's record:

★ 2.5 ★

Microsoft is quickly building a name for itself in the PC sports market. Last year, NFL FEVER and NBA INSIDE DRIVE surprised sports fans and provided interesting competition for the genre's two-ton gorilla, EA Sports. But MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2000 didn't fare as well, though it was dominated not by EA Sports' TRIPLE PLAY franchise but by 3DO's award-winning HIGH HEAT 2000. It seems as if Microsoft took HIGH HEAT's successful approach to heart. This year, they are definitely going after the core audience of baseball sim fans.

Boosted by Brainpower

By incorporating the code for the critically-acclaimed, text-based BASEBALL MOGUL into the back-end of BASEBALL 2001, Microsoft makes a strong move towards enticing hardcore players who like to manage all aspects of their team. MOGUL was a fascinating baseball-and-business sim that allowed you to manage

player salaries and ticket prices, as well as line-ups and overall game strategies. The ability to do all this, and then play the actual games in Microsoft's engine, should please both detail junkies and casual gamers alike.

Nice features include an economic model that lets you trade players for cash, and team strategy sliders that allow you to customize how the AI manages your team. We'd still like to see more custom teams and leagues.

Love for the Game?

The ultimate challenge, however, is replicating the joy we have for the real-life sport by giving us the visceral feel of playing baseball on the PC. In other words, does Microsoft's BASEBALL 2001 have The Love?

MS BASEBALL 2000 didn't, and our early look at this year's version gives us the same impression. Most of this can be blamed on the awkward and confusing implementation of the most crucial aspect of any baseball sim: the pitcher/batter interface. As in last year's version, BASEBALL 2001 reveals pitch placement prior to the pitcher's delivery. This negatively affects pitch-selection strategy and reduces the drama of each at-bat, as each player can see the intended result before each pitch. Turn off the cursor and you're essentially pitching blind, with ball placement left up to guesswork and luck. Fielding is straightforward, but the pathfinding for the outfielders needed a little work in the beta version of the game we played. We expect Microsoft to have this fixed by show time. In a necessary nod to reality, players will make throwing errors in this year's version—but injuries remain nonexistent.

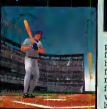
Polished Up

Although their animations are slightly robotic, BASEBALL 2001's player models are incredibly realistic, with several different body types, batting stances, swings, and pitching motions. A good job has been done of importing

BASEBALL TONIGHT The television-style presentation and camera angles add a good dose of realism to Microsoft's game.



I LEFT MY GLOVE IN... Ben Francisco's new Pac Bell Park is one of the new ball joints included in this year's edition.



I'VE JUST SEEN A FACE

The application of real player faces is done extremely well. Open up the photo in the status bar with the player model.



Lance Johnson
#1 Center

photos of the players' faces onto the polygonal heads as well. The game features nicely polished menu screens and interfaces that make up for what are otherwise lackluster stadiums.

It would be useful if more information—like current pitcher and batter stats—was displayed more frequently than before the first pitch of each at-bat. And the baserunner radar can

POINT AND HIT Microsoft's *Baseball* hitting/pitching interface is still its biggest weakness.



be a little disorienting in that it tracks both baserunners and fielders at the same time. But at least it will give you both sets of data in the same space.

The Bottom Line

MICROSOFT
BASEBALL 2000 was a decent, good-looking baseball sim that suffered the

same shortcomings that have plagued the PC baseball genre for years: lack of gameplay. Its strong points—lifelike player models, a large number of pitch types, and above-average presentation values—all make their way into this year's version; unfortunately, so does the convoluted pitcher/batter interface.

BASEBALL 2001 improves on its predecessor in some ways, but still doesn't measure up to HIGH HEAT. Yet, but the inclusion of the BASEBALL MOGUL module is a nice touch that suggests that the designers are aggressively seeking a title. This could pay off big in next year's edition.

PROJECTED FINISH: 2ND

EA Sports Stands Pat

Triple Play 2001

Publisher/Developer: EA Sports

Last year's record:

★ 2.5 ★

It's a sad sight when a big-time star begins to mull it in. Apparently satisfied with the success of TRIPLE PLAY 2000 on video-game consoles, EA Sports is unwilling to do much more than port the PlayStation version over to the PC. This year's version of the vaunted franchise hyper-extends realism in favor of a more arcade-like experience that seems to be aimed more at the Mountain Dew-sipping console crowd than PC baseball fans.

Mini Mogul

Like Microsoft's BASEBALL 2001, this year's TRIPLE PLAY has an economic system that uses points instead of actual dollars to let you manage the finances of your team (though to nowhere near the extent of the Microsoft game).

Although you can draft your own team, other team and league customizations are limited. One cool function is the trade system, which generates trade offers by and between computer-controlled teams. The one aspect where TRIPLE PLAY trumps the competition is in

FACE OFF Face in the Game technology makes players like Jaret Wright instantly recognizable.



ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

Travis, both visual and verbal, are included in TRIPLE PLAY 2001 to make internet multiplayer a bit more interesting.

Animations for batters—how their swings to their warm-up movements—have been greatly increased.



More pitching animations have been included, including the unique high kick of *Nolan Ryan*.

the inclusion of legendary players who belong to the 500 Home Run Club. You can even draft this roster—which includes Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron—onto your team. Or you can simply use them in Home Run Derby.

TRIPLE PLAY 2001's gameplay hasn't changed too much from last year, which is a disappointment. The pitcher/batter interface, among other on-field elements, could have used some help. Instead, EA Sports is pumping up the "extreme" elements of the game by incorporating power-ups, hidden players, and weird stadiums.

The game's Home Run Derby is licensed by Major League Baseball's Big League Challenge, an update to the classic Home Run Derby TV show from the 60's, being remade this season for ESPN. Unfortunately, these contests are held in fantasy-themed ballparks with bonus targets and other weirdness.

EA is well-known for its above-average graphics engines; TRIPLE PLAY is no exception. Player models look fairly realistic if a little bit chunky, and player faces are well done.

Like most other EA Sports' titles, their Face in the Game technology, which allows you to put your own face on the players you create, is included. Twenty-six different batting styles—from Mark McGuire to Babe Ruth—have been included to add more realism.

EA should be commended for trying out their new first-person perspective for fielding. It's an interesting idea, but I doubt anyone will find it serviceable.

The Bottom Line

If EA Sports is happy with the console sales of TRIPLE PLAY, and is uninspired to chase after 3DO and Microsoft for the PC baseball market, this could signal the end of the TRIPLE PLAY franchise on the PC.

But the scary thing is that last year's version of TRIPLE PLAY—which was vastly inferior to 3DO's HIGH HEAT—still managed to top the charts in the baseball category. Maybe there are more "extreme" baseball fans than we think.

PROJECTED FINISH: 3RD

RECAP

There aren't any big surprises in the PC baseball game this year. Barring some horrible, bug-ridden catastrophe, HIGH HEAT 2001 should easily walk away with the honors as this year's best baseball game. The only real question in our minds is whether or not it will repeat as the Best Sports

Game Of The Year. The game to watch, however, is Microsoft's. Their forays into PC sports titles have been fairly interesting and impressive thus far. We expect big things out of the boys in Redmond, who are rapidly building momentum and could be serious contenders next year.

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REVIEWS

HOW DO WE RATE?



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 minor flaws, or just average.



Weak Certainly lacking in play value, rarely conceived, or just another clone.



Appalling The rare game that gets it all wrong. Publisher/Coverer: crated!



We review only finished games—no beta, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: NOX

Westwood's Polished RPG Is More Than a Fast-Paced DIABLO Clone

Don't Knock Nox

ROLE-PLAYING

reviewed by
P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki



MMX GLORY While appearing 3D RPGs like *DIABLO 2* feature faded 3D video support, *NOX* relies upon these good, old, over-used MMX protocols to create impressive spell effects.

After *DIABLO*'s remarkable success, it's surprising that it has taken three years for the predictable wave of clones to arrive.

It's even more shocking that, unlike the slow of real-time strategy clones that followed *WARCRAFT II* and *COMMAND & CONQUER*, most *DIABLO* clones have actually p-owed to be quality games — and *NOX* continues that trend. While few elements in *NOX* are entirely novel,

Westwood has created a polished game that provides challenging and entertaining single-player campaigns and multiplayer battlegrounds.

NOX's isometric perspective and action/RPG gameplay are unquestionably reminiscent of *DIABLO*, but *NOX* provides a more arcade-ish, action-oriented experience. Character movement is quick and combat is very fast-paced. Only enemies can be attacked, and — unlike some traditional RPGs —

there are no ethical codes. If the game permits you to destroy an object, slaughter a creature, or pilfer possessions, then rest assured that it's the right thing to do. Since causing chaos isn't penalized, action is almost constant as your character frantically runs through levels, smashing objects and dispatching foes.

Deathmatch RPG

Multplayer *NOX* is a pure action game that features respawning items, quick kills, and geographically limited areas; and it's completely devoid of character development, NPCs, or monsters. It's closer to an isometric, sword-and-sorcery version of *QUAKE* than it is to *DIABLO*. Multplayer characters immediately possess all of their class' abilities and spells (other than those removed for gameplay balance), which makes the deathmatch, capture the flag, and other multiplayer games included more tactical than they typically are in first-person shoot-

CGW RATED

PROS

Fast-paced action;
great interface;
distinct character
types and single-
player campaigns;
solid AI.

CONS

No difficulty
levels; no cooper-
ative multiplayer
campaigns.

Requirements: Pentium II or Pentium 200 MMX, 22MB RAM, 30GBs hard drive space.

Recommended Requirements: P4 256, 512MB RAM.

3D Support: Non-Multiplayer Support: up to 32 players over Network On-line, or by LAN.

Published/Developer: Westwood Studios • \$39.95 • www.westwood.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; unlimited violence.

“The next time a snooty German makes a rude comment about how we Yanks made DEER HUNTER the top-selling game in the U.S., you can whip out a copy of 1602 A.D. and slowly, deliberately begin to chuckle.

—Jason Kapalka reviewing 1602 AD

Killing Time

Nothing can give white hair to CGW's Managing Editor—the guy responsible for getting the other editors to turn in their work on time—like the arrival of an addictive game in our office. Everything comes to a complete stop as editors (ignore piles of work to play the latest game for eight hours straight. (OK, we're exaggerating a bit; we do break for lunch.) Currently, it's THE SIMS that has the staff by the short ones, but for some strange reason, current Managing Editor Chris Lombardi isn't complaining, which is a little unusual.

When QUAKE took over the office in 1996, then-ME Ken “Genghis” Brown tried everything from begging to crying to running around naked with his hair on fire to get people back to work, so no avail (although that little episode was the inspiration behind a very cool QUAKE skin).

In 1998, Joe “Woody” Vellina couldn't get us to take down our HALF-LIFE server, so he gave up and played with us with the proviso that anyone he dropped with the crowbar had to get back to work immediately. And back in December, UNRAK, TOURNAMENT dominated our office to such a degree that Lombardi struck in after-hours and confiscated the 3D cards from every PC. Thank God for software rendering.

But now we think we have this whole ME problem figured out. You see, we assigned the review of THE SIMS to Lombardi. How can he bitch at us for playing while he's in his office with the door closed, trying to up his fun meter while managing his Medder (and playing THE SIMS, to boot)? We just got word that HIGH HEAT 2001 has gone gold. Hey Chris, you want to do another review?
—Tom Price

Illustrated technique by Ken Brown



HOW MUCH FOR THE BOOTY? The action rarely slows down, except when you're cackling in your ill-future gods. The campaigns are subtitled with brief—but entertaining—scripted sequences.



ers. Still, multiplayer NOX may not experience the longevity that more visceral shooters have enjoyed.

The single-player campaigns feature a few additional RPG elements, as characters acquire experience points and solve simple quests, but the gameplay emphasis remains on action. The campaigns are linear and level-based, so there's no way to personalize your experience other than through your choice of attire and armaments.

Surprisingly, there are no difficulty settings, so you'll have to adopt with occasionally frantic action in order to complete the campaigns. Fortunately, NOX features a remarkably intuitive and effective highway interface that permits you to quickly change weapons or access available spells and abilities. There's never been a more efficient interface in an action/RPG.

Each of the three character classes has a separate campaign, but you'll travel through most of the same areas and have the same overall quest. The classes have significantly different abilities and the campaigns play out differently, even when you're exploring familiar territory. While a wizard may peacefully stroll through a stronghold, a warrior may be immediately attacked.

As far as plot goes, it's pretty uninspired. A dislocated trailer-fresh youth must assemble a multi-component artifact and slomp undead hordes led by a maniac necromancer queen. The campaigns are saturated with brief, but entertaining, scripted sequences that play out using the game's engine. Westwood has a penchant for adding goofy

BEAR WITH US FOR A BIT Actually, two of them, plus a westerly hole WFC. Despite its obvious cut-scenes or other features, the game seems to really enjoy out-bugs enemies with every little effect in its arsenal.



MAY REVIEWS

GAME	RATING	PAGE
1602 A.D.	★★★★★	110
Aces High	★★★★★	96
Dirt Track Racing	★★★★☆	112
Final Fantasy VIII	★★★★★	92
Hidden & Dangerous: Devil's Brigade	★★★★★	116
Mind Rover	★★★★★	118
Nox	★★★★★	88
Rising Sun	★★★★☆	106
The Sims	★★★★★	84
Superbike 2000	★★★★★	114
T.A. Kingdoms, Iron Plague	★★★★★	118

humor to its RPGs, and the buffoonery here works better than in the past couple of LAND OF LORE games, partially compensating for the plot's lack of originality. There's a few big laughs, such as an early scene in the wizard campaign when an expected showdown with a formidable nemesis is prematurely cut short in comical Raiders of the Lost Ark fashion.

See No Evil

NOX's most distinctive features are its method for handling your character's line of sight, and its interactive environments. The game uses a line-of-sight system that blacks out areas behind trees or other obstacles that characters couldn't reasonably see beyond. The effect isn't revolutionary, since 1993's ULTIMA II featured a rudimentary version of a similar system, and it can be more distracting than interesting. It does give NOX a distinctive look, however, and it's easy to adjust to the onscreen autopilot if you require additional navigation.

NOX's levels are littered with malleable furniture, bones, and other objects. Occasionally you must use these objects to solve puzzles — moving a crate over a pressure plate, for instance — but usually the objects are just there to be smashed or heaved wildly when they're struck by explosive spell effects. A lot of attention to detail went into NOX's level design, as dwellings are decorated with appropriate objects, and subterranean lairs look suitably homey for their tell-inhabitants.

NOX's two-dimensional, isometric graphics are highly detailed and similar in style to those in ULTIMA ONLINE and Diablo. While some upcoming isometric RPGs like BALDUR'S GATE 2 feature limited support for 3D video cards, NOX relies instead on those mysterious,

WELCOME TO BALDUR'S GATE!
The isometric graphics can look beautiful, but NOX distinguishes its own style.



WIDESCREEN FORMAT, PLEASE! All of the cutscenes play out using the game's engine. You can tell you're in a non-interactive segment when the screen narrows to this letterboxed view.



GANDALF, HELP ME OUT!
The signs are raising suspicion through the wizard's tower. Thankfully, this NPC wizard will zap a few for us.



superceded MMX protocols you heard so much about in 1997 to create its impressive spell effects. Three different resolutions are supported (640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768), but the highest resolution isn't practical for most gamers, since the characters look tiny and the screen scrolling gets pretty choppy — even on high-end machines.

The artificial intelligence of the monsters and NPCs in NOX's campaigns is generally excellent. AI-controlled NPCs will periodically ally with your character for the duration of a level. You'll have no

direct control over these NPCs, but they'll capably follow your character and engage any enemies you encounter. Conjuror characters can also summon or charm creatures that will loyally carry out basic commands until they are killed or banished. There are memorable levels where settlements are attacked and you can acquire a whole flock of allies to help fight the waves of intruders. Since the AI is so good, however, it's especially disappointing that there are no cooperative multiplayer campaigns.

The only notable AI flaw is that enemies at extreme visibility range won't react until they're attacked. Since there are a variety of spells and weapons that either kill enemies instantly or do massive damage, you can pre-empt otherwise challenging battles by advancing slowly and picking off immobile enemies as soon as they're visible. Like grandpas used to say, nothing clears a path better than a gigantic Fiat of Vengeance. Or a Death Ray.

Who You Callin' a Clone?

It's unfair to simply dismiss NOX as a Diablo clone, since the game had been in development limbo for years prior to its acquisition by Westwood. Westwood acquired the orphaned NOX following the dissolution of Virgin Interactive's U.S. gaming division, and the company has done a great job freeing the game. Even though it likely could have been released several months ago, the additional attention to detail put into the game has resulted in a streamlined interface, solid single-player campaigns and, overall, a considerably more polished product. Even the installation program is almost as interesting as the great one that shipped with the original COMMAND & CONQUER.

NOX could easily have been a game with a few original ideas that devolved into a hastily developed, derivative, unit-tossing clone. Instead, the developers have taken the necessary time to create a unique game that offers different and enjoyable single- and multiplayer experiences. **C+1**

STOP THAT NECHROMANCER!

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FINAL FANTASY VIII Is a Major Disappointment as a Port and as a Game

When Ports Go Bad

Like forks, coffee mugs, and black 3.5-inch disks with something indecipherable written on them in pencil, the omnipresent PlayStation is just a thing that you have, and you don't know when or how you acquired it. So, a developer creating a PC port of one of the most successful PlayStation games ever made really needs to differentiate it from its console incarnation by playing to the strengths of the PC platform. SquareSoft's port of its PlayStation mega-hit FINAL FANTASY VIII not only doesn't improve upon the original, but, thanks to the exactness of the port – more emulation than translation – it manages to make an already flawed game truly awful.

Looks Bad, Less Filling

Most PlayStation games run in 320x240. While that's pretty chunky, when viewed from your couch six feet away, it's acceptable. All of FINAL FANTASY VIII's complex backgrounds are rendered in that low resolution. Instead of reworking the graphics for the PC version, the developers decided to leave the low resolution intact, and the

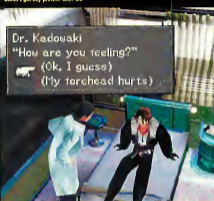
game suffers because of it. Thanks to this decision, FINAL FANTASY's greatest asset on the PlayStation – its amazing pre-rendered imagery – becomes its predominant flaw on the PC. The backgrounds are blurry and pixelated. What looks good from six feet falls apart at six inches.

Virtually all of the game's dialogue is presented as on-screen text, and even the font resolution hasn't been upgraded from its console counterpart. The font is jagged and amazingly ugly, and serves as a constant reminder that you're not playing the game as it was meant to be experienced.

The character models themselves have been upgraded somewhat. FINAL FANTASY VIII supports 3D acceleration and, apparently, this is where the power of that device is being applied. However, rather than adding any value to the game, the more detailed models simply clash with the indistinct backgrounds, giving the graphics a nasty disjointed look. The texture work on the models remains low-res, and could be described most kindly as fuzzy.

PC sound hardware also appears to give the FINAL FANTASY VIII emulator a savage licking. On two different systems, every scene transition (and there are a lot of them) resulted in three or four seconds of stuttery sound and general slowdown. The music, too, often sounds tinny and distant. And speaking of slowdown, while the game generally runs at a good clip, the outside-world navigation screens crawl. And here, we're talking about slowdown noticeable and painful enough that you could make a case for calling it a bug. On the plus side, this area isn't accessible until about fifteen or twenty hours into the game, so you'll probably be back to playing PLANESCAPE: TORMENT before you have to deal with it.

FANTASTICALLY UGLY! This is the very first scene in the game. And that text doesn't get any prettier later on.



MIXED MEDIA Here's a consequence of the blurry backgrounds, the shockingly lazy and cheap shrines, and the muddy font. That text doesn't look like any other.



The Unbearable Boringness of Guardian Force

Even with all of these graphical and sound problems, there's one simple thing that the developers could have done to redeem themselves. The major, and – in many gamers' opinion – fatal flaw of FINAL FANTASY VIII PlayStation is the dreaded, uninteruptible Guardian Force attack. For those of you not already familiar with the game, Guardian Force attacks are a kind of combination summoning spell and semi-party member. They evolve over time, using a compl-

FINAL FANTASY VIII

reviewed by Erik Wolpew

CGW RATED

PROS

It doesn't flat-out crash, and it has a fun subgame.

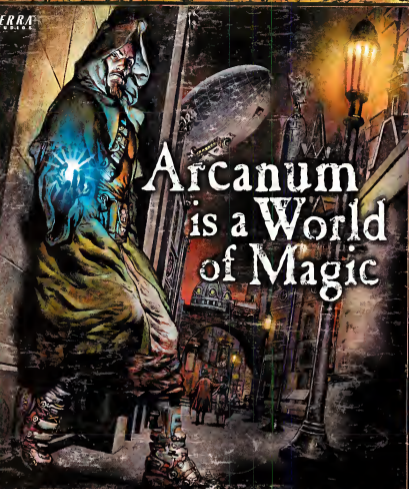
CONS

Laziest console translation ever.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DX7 3D graphics card, 100MB disk space **Recommended Requirements:** P-III 500, 64MB RAM, 1GB HD, 10 card, 3D Support: 3Dx, Win9x, Win98, Win95 **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: SquareSoft/Eurocom Arts • **Developer:** SquareSoft • **CD-ROM** • www.squaresoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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cated "junction" system that lets them gain new abilities. They're sort of like a Pokémon, only more confusing.

In battle, Guardian Force attacks quickly become your primary offensive ability. When cast, every Guardian Force is accompanied by an over-the-top but often beautifully rendered animation. The problem, and it's a big one, is that these displays take upwards of a minute to present, and you can't interrupt them or turn them off. FINAL FANTASY VIII doesn't buck the genre tradition of requiring you to fight thousands of random battles to advance the plot, meaning that you'll be watching these long animations many, many times. What's impressive at first soon becomes annoying, and then — depending on your patience and desire to perform rote, non-interactive combat actions over and over again — unbearable.

The fact that this was the single biggest complaint with the PlayStation version, and that the developers chose not to expand the small amount of effort it would have taken to fix it in the PC version, should be reason enough for you to boycott FINAL FANTASY VIII on general principle. Maybe there's some technical reason it can't be done, but since modern technology is capable of producing clones and the U.S. government's amazingly realistic moon-landing hoax — not to mention FINAL FANTASIES I-VII — I'm going to apply Occam's razor and chalk it up to laziness.

Love and Money

If you've read this far and have no previous experience with FINAL FANTASY VIII and are still considering purchasing it and want more information, then perhaps you missed three or four of the preceding paragraphs, but fine, here's some more.

Eschewing the previous installments' takes of heroes saving worlds from disaster, number eight's plot is smaller and more personal, centering more on individual redemption and combat against evil of a less planet-imperiling nature, while not forgetting to include lots of random fighting. The series is famous for covering issues not usually addressed by console RPGs. Topics such as love, betrayal, and seduction are par for the course, and while these are novel concepts for a video game, Beverly Hills/les The Movie included some love and betrayal, so these ideas by themselves don't necessarily guarantee compelling entertainment.

SquareSoft has made a few interesting design choices that represent a rethinking of some genre conventions. Gone is the pursuit of wealth, armor, and weapons. Your team gets a periodic stipend which you can use to buy various basic supplies, but other than that, there's no pressing need for money. Armor is essentially non-existent, and, aside from each character's single standard weapon (which can go through a few upgrades), your major offensive tool is the aforementioned Guardian Force attacks.

Another feature worth mentioning is a very cool little collectible card game called Triple Triad that appears throughout the entire game. Triple Triad is an addictive, simplified version of Magic and it's well integrated — rare cards can be traded for rare items. It's a fun bonus, and you may find yourself wishing you didn't have to slog through the interminable other parts of FINAL FANTASY VII to get to your next card match.

Final Answer

No matter what your feelings are about FINAL FANTASY VIII as a game, with some minor and a few major tweaks, the PC version could at least have been a great reworking of the PlayStation original. Unfortunately, the released game is inarguably substandard because absolutely no effort has been made to add value to the initial product. And this from a company known for the quality of its work. Shame on you, SquareSoft. **C-+**

WE SHOP AT THE GAP Regular pants, workout pants, miniskirts... (just-loose for men). Also sets Mustang.



IN CASE YOU DIDN'T GET THE POINT.... This battle scene really shows off the lame pants-free position SquareSoft takes regarding female characters.



IS THERE A DRAFT IN HERE? Male members of SepD wear pants. Female members wear no pants.



MORE BLURRY PANTSLESSNESS If you're going to have half-naked girls in the game, you might as well get them closer up and less blurry.



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ACES HIGH Raises the Online Air Combat Stakes

Mayhem at 30,000 Feet

In an era of gigabyte-sized installs, it's simply amazing what some guys can do with 6 megs of disk space. Two key ex-programmers from the renowned WARBIRDS franchise — Dale "HiTech" Addink and Doug "Pyro" Baimos — have formed HiTech Creations and produced a new WWII online air-combat game using that tiny bit of magnetic real estate. ACES HIGH has lots of features, too; it's not just a "bare bones" fighter arena with average artwork and modeling. Small in stature, this game is large in promise.

Been There, Done That, Great Fun!

ACES HIGH isn't a revolutionary breakthrough in the world of online air combat. If you've spent any time playing WARBIRDS or AIR WARRIOR, you already know the drill. Enlist in the Air Force of your homeland, fly against opposing countries, and try to capture airfields from the

enemy. When any side is reduced to a single base, the arena automatically resets and the war begins again. With a worldwide online player base, the action continues around the clock. The hangar

presently offers 15 different aircraft, with two bombers to pound the enemy defenses, 12 fighters to establish air superiority, and a paratrooper-dropping C-47 to conquer the aerodromes. HiTech Creations delivered new aircraft every month during the beta period, and more are in production. All the standard favorites — like the Spitfire, P-51, and BF-109 — are here, but a few interesting lesser-known models are also showing up, like the Italian Macchi 205 fighter.

The ACES HIGH flight model is respectable, and offers a great compromise between playability and total realism. It isn't anything you haven't seen before, and — not surprisingly — it's pretty close to

WARBIRDS. The aircraft are more difficult to fly well than AIR WARRIOR's mounts, primarily

Hit and Run Striding in cannon-equipped aircraft like the La-5FN will destroy your ground targets, but if the "ack" is up, it's show or hide. Wait for the bombers to blow back the ack, and then "watch" (so for the Italian kid!)



because of torque effects. However, they don't require the gentle touch of WARBIRDS planes near the stall, so you can be pretty hand-handed in an ACES HIGH cockpit without spinning the aircraft. If you fly decently in the other games, you can fly this one. There'll be a period of adjustment, *pyrofly* know online as "clubbing the baby seal," but eventually you'll be the predator instead of the prey.

The two biggest gripes with the modeling are drag and structural failure. These planes are difficult to slow down in the "clean configuration," even with the engine off. Using full rudder to slow down helps, but there's work to be done in the drag department. Deploying gear and flaps doesn't cause much change in pitch or power either, and that's another indication. Frustrating structural failures can occur without warning in some aircraft. Since most of these fighters had at least a +6 G limitation, there ought to be a visual cue to indicate that you're

pulling enough G to bend something. Blackout and red-out are modeled, as is buffeting, but you can often rip a wing off without inducing these effects, which is pretty strange. Pieces don't just snap off of airplanes without some kind of warning.

Good Picture, Excellent View

ACES HIGH features modern 3D graphics, with five resolutions from 640x480 up to 1600x1200, using either 16- or 32-bit color. Standard texture mapping is 64x64, but hi-resolution 256x256 textures are available if you have the horsepower to run them. It's all very good stuff, but like the flight model, the competitive graphics don't shout "breakthrough." The view system — perhaps the crux of any air-combat sim — is excellent. For each aircraft, you can adjust your "head" position and save over 24 "customized" views. The system offers snap, pan, and zoom modes; however, despite the anguished wailing of some of the beta testers, there is no padlock view and the cockpit artwork is non-

ACES HIGH

Reviewed by John Rolan

CGW RATED

PROS

An impressive debut of a "bound for glory" game that stokes your thirst for non-stop WWII air combat at a reasonable price.

CONS

You if expect a few "breakthrough" innovations in an all-new online air-combat game, but while well-executed and lots of fun, this one is "business as usual."

FRESH BLOOD This Italian C-205 is rarely seen in any flight simulators. It's a capable fighter and its inclusion shows HiTC's responsiveness to its worldwide clients.



JUST CAN'T WIN Remember those two simple rules: 1. Don't land the plane. 2. DON'T OBEY THE FORCE! Up to 7000 feet above the field, ack ack; the airplane chugs loose.



Requirements: Pentium II 233, Pentium MMX or better; 640-compatible video card; joystick, sound card, speakers. OS: Windows 95/98

Publisher: HiTech Creations • \$29.95 per month • www.hitechcreations.com

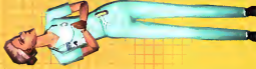


Meet The Sims at www.TheSims.com

- **Another must buy for the first time homeowner is a telephone. If your Sim doesn't have a phone, they can't talk with the neighbors, call the cops, hire a maid, or even order pizza.**
- **Once your Sims have a good pile of cash you can earn a nice living by just buying and selling expensive artwork that appreciates over time (buy low, sell high).**
- **Another possible moneymaker is the burglar alarm. Buying one can protect your Sims' possessions and allow your Sims to collect reward money when the crook is caught.**
- **Don't wait until your appliances break down to call the repairman. Call him over to do routine maintenance.**



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Live!

- You can encourage guests to do fun things with your Sims - getting in the hot tub or playing pool - by having the host Sim partake in those activities and inviting the guests to join them.
- Guests will leave if they're not comfortable. Make sure there are plenty of places to sit.
- Each kid in the family counts as a tax credit. Bills are 10% lower for each kid in the family, so four kids = 60% (100% - 40%) of the regular tax bill.
- Sims' personalities determine the kind of interactions they like to have. Consult the astrological signs for some clues about which Sims get along and which will clash.
- If your Sims are in a bad mood, they are not likely to have a good time when interacting with their friends and neighbors. Do your best to make sure both parties are in a good mood before they interact.

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- To save interior space, you must buy trees and shrubs.
- Once your Sims are happy, you can also buy a car.
- Building your house is the best way to catch the cash.

● All player-created Sims enter the world as horrible cooks and are a

Build!

overextending yourself when constructing your Sims' first home, places (like a refrigerator and a bathtub) before building the house. house, start small. You can always expand it later.

s early on will allow you to hold more objects than many smaller rooms. s with interesting shapes rather than boxy, rectilinear ones.

pace, place your staircases outside.

ve a hefty bank account, don't neglect your landscaping possibilities.

require no maintenance, and can boost your outside room score.

elevated walkways around your lot using the columns and floor tool.

e close to the street makes it easier for your Sims

ol or school bus.



Play with the twins 0



removable (as it should be). You have to fly the airplane to keep the bandit in sight and do it without view-key crutches. Some players do view the zoom feature as a crutch, but ACES HIGH uses the "industry standard" way of rendering aircraft in air combat maneuver games.

Bottom Line: Bucks

The trump cards of ACES HIGH are the quality components and its \$30/month unlimited-play pricing structure. This is a good game of near-WARBIRDS quality, with a great player community. Gameplay is essentially the same in all these games, so that's not the major factor. WARBIRDS may feature a slightly more difficult (or a bit more accurate) flight model and a huge hanger full of different aircraft, but it's

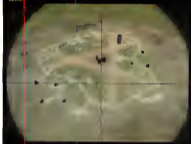
GRAND CANYONS The rally terrain makes the map area much larger. Oxygen lights are flashing, requiring the aircraft flying skills to get the victory and avoid crashing.



also prohibitively expensive. At the lowest WARBIRDS "Platform package" price of \$1.50/hour, \$30/month buys you 20 hours – a mere moment in combat online. **AR WARRIOR** – with new revisions to its dated flight, gunnery, and damage models – is only \$10/month for unlimited play, but it doesn't begin to give you the tangible feel of air combat that ACES HIGH provides.

Furthermore, HitTech Creations' philosophy is that ACES HIGH will probably never be a "finished" game. They promise constant development and improvement in overall gameplay and technology, and a total focus on this one game. So far, they've been true to their words, with new aircraft and game features arriving every week or two. The "value" should go up while the price stays low. This one is good, and will only get better. **CGW**

LINING UP THE MONEY SHOT Super accurate, "zoomable" bomb-sights can take out key targets from six miles up. Knocking out structures can limit the enemy's capabilities. This building is Radar HQ and it's going down!



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music.zdnet.com/radiospymusic.com



RISING SUN Captures the Desperate Feel of WW II Jungle Warfare

South Seas Slugfest



RISING SUN does such a good job of bringing the Pacific war to your computer that you'd be wise to invest in some mosquito netting. While the Campaign series has steadily improved through its several iterations, the way in which RISING SUN accommodates the many special conditions unique to the Pacific theater makes it far more than just a version of WEST FRONT with funny-looking tanks. In fact, the nature of jungle combat actually lends itself better to the scale of the Campaign series, which at 260 yards per hex make Eastern Front scenarios feel a bit cramped. Because of the restrictive effects of jungle terrain on combat, the close ranges at which engagements are fought in RISING SUN seem quite authentic,

RISING SUN

Reviewed by *Chris Garry*

and do much to highlight the importance of high ground and indirect fire, as well as the deadliness of close assaults. Don't waste those mortars! Night combat, caves, barbed attacks, and many new terrain types round out what has to be the most complete package available to tactical wargamers. Yet even with all of the detail, the game preserves the elegant feel of the Campaign series.

RISING SUN provides a wide range of scenarios from introductory to very large and complex, and complements the package with several campaign games, both dynamic and linked. In keeping with Campaign series tradition, RISING SUN is practically a stand-alone database of weapons, and the included scenario editor should allow players to transfer their favorite battles to the computer screen with a minimum of difficulty.

Tokyo Express

While the AI in RISING SUN is decent and puts up a good fight, the multiplayer game is spectacular. Up to 16 players can take part in internet or LAN games, allowing for many separate players per side. The network code is simply glassy, with absolutely no lag or hiccups, even with several players on slow dial-up connections. The PBEM implementation allows players to see a complete replay of an opponent's turn, and includes password protection in case you suspect your opponent has his own Enigma machine.

RISING SUN takes the hex-based, sequential-turn wargame to a level of refinement previously unseen in a genre known for its preference for accuracy over polish. If you even remotely enjoy this form of combat simulation, RISING SUN is your game. The mosquito netting is extra. **CGW**

SAFE TO JURF THIS BEACH? Every scenario offers a stiff challenge, but the Japanese defense at Pohna Island proved trickier, deeper's tank, and supporting artillery.



NICE TO SEE A FAMILIAR FACE Wargame purists still have several 2D views available.



UP AGAINST IT These Marines have nowhere to go but forward.



CGW RATED

PROS

A fitting cap to the Campaign series.

CONS

It took them five games to get here.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 48 GB HD, 32MB text drive space, 2MB video card **3D Support:** None

Multiplayer Support: Internet or LAN (2-16 players), modifiable (2 players), one CD per player

Publisher: Targem Interactive • **Developer:** TalaeSoft • \$15 • www.talaeoft.com
ESRB Rating: 1: Violence, damage to realistic objects.

Sound



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RATING PENDING

RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Windows 7/8/10



Found a New Civilization—Then Watch it Flounder Helplessly and Die!

Doomed To Repeat the Past

Certain phrases in the 1602 A.D. press kit sent shivers up my spine. Specifically, these were: "It's Best Selling Game of All Time in Germany!" and "PC Hit! A Spel Game of the Year... 1992!" When it takes two years for the #1 German computer game to find a stateside publisher (aging all the while, rather unlike fine wine), one can't help but wonder what in the world the #2 and #3 bestsellers in Germany were—BEER HUNTER, BARBIE'S SCHNITZEL MAKER, or what?

1602 A.D., in any case, turns out to be a city-building strategy game set in a rather abstract New World. Players anxious for a successor to COLONIZATION or CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD will be disappointed to learn that instead of competing to colonize the Americas against Spain, Portugal, and England, you'll struggle against the ominously-titled Red, Blue, and Yellow Players for control of a very small chain of Gilligan-esque tropical islands. More than anything else, 1602

A.D. resembles CAESAR II and its sequel PHARAOH, but with itchy-bitsy pilgrims and pirates instead of toga dudes and legions.

Like any good explorer of a New World, I decided to keep a journal of my discoveries, which I'll share with you now:

HISTORICALLY-ACCURATE STEALTH GALLEONS This would be the basic form of the much-loved pirates of 1602 A.D., who come equipped with some sort of Flakbuster sinking device that shoots down from your "radar."



the narrator's announcement that "The alcohol is running out!" causes far more urgency than his notice that "There is not enough food," which perhaps is why there are half a dozen different structures required to produce beer. Restart.

20 hours: Feeling confident enough to try one of the many campaigns and scenarios instead of the "sandbox" mode, Pirates, who helpfully do not show up on the radar map, immediately sink my single irreplaceable ship. Restart.

25+ hours: Start eyeing "Uninstall" icon hungrily. Restart. Restart. Restart.

In fairness, the game does have a weird, counter-intuitive charm that keeps you coming back, restart after restart—at least if you're a reviewer who isn't allowed to just go back to THE SIMS. And if nothing else, the next time a snooty German makes a rude comment about how we Yanks made DEER HUNTER the top-selling game in the U.S., you can whip out a copy of 1602 A.D. and slowly, deliberately, begin to chuckle. **CGW**

1602 A.D.

reviewed by JASON KAPRIKA

0 min: After ESCing through a predictably lame CGI intro, I glean false hope as I breeze through the tutorial missions in about eight minutes flat.

8 min: Start "free-form" game. Problems arise three hours in when I realize that I've run out of tools, the traders aren't selling any more of them, and I have no idea where or how to find iron to make my own. Restart.

4 hours: Find lots of tobacco, spices, and sugar, but no iron, making it difficult to advance beyond Hirstone tech levels. Manual oddly silent about the seemingly vital task. Eventually trigger "iron detection" feature accidentally when my brow impacts the keyboard.

6 hours: Puzzle over the strange icon of what seems to be a scoop of Kellogg's Raisin Bran that has been appearing over my buildings intermittently. The manual helpfully

instructs me to "Draw your conclusions and correct the problem" in this I fail. Budget drops hopelessly into the red. Restart.

10 hours: Still trying to figure out the economic/city model, which bears little resemblance to SIMCITY, CAESAR, or, for that matter, reality. Industries don't appear to need citizens to work them, while residents don't seem to care if their house is located between a galleon and a cattle farm. Run out of tools again. Restart.

13 hours: Finally succeed in building an iron mine and tool factory on a nearby island and spend an hour puzzling out the intricacies of the "auto-trade" system. As my bank account again slips inexorably into the red, I note that

FAST YOU LAUNCH I hurry right into up the residents of the daily harpings. With the lovely high-pitched redness adjacent to the yellow with their partial window view.



FAKE IT SO The thirren, healthy city you're unable to see when, ahem, you start looking about with the handy-dandy Scimitar Editor.



CGW RATED

PROS

Unquestionably the best CAESAR/SIMCITY knock-off to ever come out of Germany, after THE SETTLERS I, II, and III.

CONS

Economic model more confusing than the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Requirements: Pentium 160MHz, 32MB RAM, 1GB HD and drive space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 233, 64MB RAM **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** LAN (2-4 players), modem, serial, broadband (2 players), on CD per player

Publisher: GT Interactive • **Developer:** Sarcophagus • \$20 • www.gtinteractive.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone; unrated violence.



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If So, Then Ratbag Has a Game for You

Bored By Asphalt?



I had one thought in mind when I first loaded Ratbag's **DIRT TRACK RACING**: Red Man chewing tobacco. Even though I know better than to pre-judge games, with this one I just couldn't help myself.

Hell, is there anything else in contemporary America that better evokes images of a cheek full of tobacco, the video for John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses," and a '65 Chevy Bel Air rusting on somebody's front lawn?

Man, was I on the wrong page. While **DIRT TRACK RACING** sure is redneck-friendly, it does not bow to the lowest common denominator. This is a great racing title, period. It's packed with excitement and boasts an immersion factor that's second to none. It's right up there with **NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES** as one of the finest racers of the past year. And as much fun as I had with **NFS:HS** since its release last summer, after two weeks with Ratbag's game I'd have a tough time deciding which to take with me to a desert isle.

Doing That Bump and Grind

Gameplay consists of guiding hunks of junk around short dirt ovals located in small towns across the United States. Races are chaotic affairs, both because of the friction-free earth beneath your tires and because of narrow tracks that turn every attempt to pass into a bump-and-grind frenzy. They're also more intense than the average NASCAR event, since the courses are so short (expect to take a lap in no more than 18 seconds). Computer opponents are vicious at the higher difficulty settings, and will freely bounce you all over the place in their attempt to gain that vital few extra feet.

While you can stage one-off races, they're just warm-ups for my favorite part of **DIRT TRACK RACING**: career mode. You start off with a measly thousand bucks that's just enough to get you an aged '60s or '70s era muscle car (given take names like Jupiter and Mars here, but look closely and you'll recognize Chevy and Chrysler silhouettes), and a spot in the lowly Stock Class. From there, you invest for cash purses and sponsorships that bring in additional green needed for car repairs, purchases, and upgrades. Vehicles are fully configurable, so expect to spend some time playing with gear ratios, weight distribution, and the like.

Success doesn't come easy. Pure money is next to nothing at first, forcing you to drive conservatively to avoid high repair bills (if you're playing with "realistic damage" on). One or two serious early collisions, and you'll be left without enough money to fix your ride — meaning that it's time to restart your career or load a save. Some might not like the nicks and dings stuff here, but nobody should expect life to be glamorous when racing in places like LaFayetteville, NY.

Personally, I enjoyed the gritty attention to reality. It adds a lot to the game's longevity, and makes you think twice before trying to bump your way to the head of the pack. The Internet multiplayer option is another serious plus. Ratbag did a great job with this, providing an online experience that is virtually lag-free. About the only drawback is the 10-

PRETTY ON THE INSIDE? **DIRT TRACK RACING** is anything but pretty. Rusted, bent-up cars and advertising boards that generally double as late-night television targets make for a unique environment that's worlds away from other PC racing games.



player maximum, which isn't much when you consider that NASCAR RACING 3 supports fields of 32 drivers.

You Got the Look

The look of **DIRT TRACK RACING** will be familiar to veterans of Ratbag's previous racing effort, **POWERSLIDE**, as each uses the same graphical engine. It again does the job more than adequately, with well-drawn — yet still blocky — muscle cars, and a host of depressingly atmospheric rural racetracks. At the same time, however, the engine is still rather colorless. Let's put it this way: it renders all the browns and blacks that make up the standard dirt track in a way that would make the people at id Software proud.

Racing games just don't come any better than this. The "bedlam on wheels" races, ballistic career mode, and outstanding Internet multiplayer support make **DIRT TRACK RACING** a good bet for anyone who likes to hook a wheel and pedal set to their PC. And it's a retail price of less than \$20, you'll have plenty of cash left over for a big bag of chips. **CGW**

HIS PRICES ARE IN-SANE! **idiot** shoppers will love the cars on sale here. Don't expect to pay more than \$500 for your first dirt track racer. You can't buy a headlight in **NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES** for that sort of cash.

SELECT CAR

1968 LIGHTNING	3.5
BLACK LIGHTNING	3.5
VEHICLE VALUE	10,000
HP	100
MAX SPEED	150
ENGINE CAPACITY	350
WHEEL POWERWEIGHT	200
FUEL SYSTEM	GASOLINE

PORT: \$500

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz MMX, 2MB RAM, DirectX 3.0 compatible sound card with cards OK CD-ROM drive, DirectX hard drive space.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX, 6MB RAM, 20-connector video card (just loaded objects supported), 220MB hard drive space.

3D Support: DirectX, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 10 players via LAN, TCP/IP.

Publisher: WizardWorks • **Developer:** Ratbag • **ESRB:** ESR • **www.wizardworks.com** • **ESL:** idiot • **idiot** • **Everyday**

DIRT TRACK RACING

Reviewed by **Dratt Todd**

CGW RATED

PROS

Each event is packed with more mayhem than a dozen NASCAR races.

CONS

Like Ratbag's earlier **POWERSLIDE**, this is not a game for control freaks.

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Sit Down and Hang On



I don't know what's in the water at EA, but they should bottle it and sell it to other publishing houses. What they do best is make superior games, and SUPERBIKE 2000 is certainly a superior game. Accessible to novice and seasoned riders alike, this game truly captures the essence of what makes motorcycle racing exciting.

Some Assembly Required

Talk to a racing engineer and you'll find they speak their own language. From gear ratios to tire compounds, you'd be amazed at the diligence required to keep one of these machines tuned for a sprint to the checkered flag. SUPERBIKE 2000 lets you choose between having the details managed for you or becoming a control freak, with many levels of control in between. Hey, if you want to stretch out third gear, that's your choice.

In talking about the tracks, I'm going to focus on the one I know best, Laguna Seca in Monterey, CA. The first time I did a lap around Laguna Seca in SUPERBIKE 2000, I had a very strong feeling of déjà vu. You see, a few years back I actually

worked for the SCCA at Laguna Seca on race weekends. I've walked that track many times, and let me tell you, I was stunned at how realistically the track is modeled in this game. Stunned. From turn three leading around the back of the course, to the corkscrew, to infamous turn nine, this is Laguna Seca. Now, you too can find out why this is one of the premier road-racing courses in the world. Doing five practice laps, you can almost imagine that it's a sunny Friday afternoon in Monterey. It's as close as you'll come without a pit pass or a sponsor.

Need Some Help, Sparky?

Also welcome is the number and variety of assists available to those new to racing bikes. With all assists turned on, I could probably teach my cat to pilot a bike around a track. On the other end of the spectrum, it's clear that the people who really ride these machines are superhuman. Acceleration, shifting, and braking are all perfectly modeled. Come into a corner too fast, and you'll slide right out of the apex like a wet watermelon seed. Brake early, lean into the turn with proper body position, roll the throttle on as you pass the apex, and you'll glide through the corners like a gentle spring breeze. Panic and grab the brakes with the bike loped over in a turn, and you'll be picking your machine up off the ground.

The exhilarating sense of speed is one of SUPERBIKE 2000's best elements. Even without the assists, I had an easy time tilling when I was going too fast or too slow. After kicking all the difficulty settings up, I decided to try a track that I saw pro rider Kenny Roberts do many times. Kenny would come flying through a corner and roll up onto the apex berm, which is a raised concrete patch on the inside of the corner, covered with nasty little ridges. Most riders would either vibrate like a jackhammer or eat it right there in the corner when facing the berm, but not Kenny. He'd just downshift, grab some

WIDE ANGLES The display system allows you to view your race from a variety of angles, which is both entertaining and informative.



HEAD OVER BARS You can race from multiple vantage points, including third-person and the ever so fun over-the-bars cam. It's a little more challenging using this way, but it sure is fun.



throttle, hit his front tire about six inches off the track, and ride through the corner on his back wheel. Yes, SUPERBIKE 2000 will let you ride like that and no I'm not that good. Kenny, you're still my hero.

Blue Flag Special

If you like racing games and/or motorcycles, you shouldn't pass up this title. It's beautiful, stable, and a whole lot of fun. If racing games in the past have left you cold, give this one a try. The addictiveness of SUPERBIKE 2000 may just be enough to convert you. **CGW**

CATCHING AIR THE HARD WAY The physics model includes much dynamics. If you're ever wondered how a superbike performs when it's flipping and over and into a guard rail, here's your chance to find out.



SUPERBIKE 2000

reviewed by **W. D. FORTUNE**

CGW RATED

PROS

Great game, all around.

CONS

This space intentionally left blank.

Requirements: 233MHz processor, 33MB RAM, 30MB free disk space, CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** 233MHz processor, 64MB RAM, CD-ROM

OS: Windows 95/98/NT. **3D Support:** Direct 3D. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-6 players via LAN and Internet.

Distributor: EA Sports • 310 • www.sportsuperbike.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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QUICK HITS

MIND ROVER

Every year at places like MIT, contests are held between robots. The tasks range from bumping robots out of an arena to running a maze. If you've ever had a yen to build robots like those — and maybe lose in a rocket launcher for good measure — then MIND ROVER is for you.

MIND ROVER is both a strategy game and a "software toy." You design robots by picking attributes like propulsion type, motors,



★★★

and so on. However, the real heart of the game is lying all the various parts together with "wires." You do this in a sort of virtual breadboard, and the wires are really circuits with conditions and outcomes you set. For example, you might set the radar to tell the steering to move toward an object when it sees something. With some practice, you can program some pretty complex behaviors. Unfortunately, the debugging tools are almost nonexistent. After you build your robot, you test it in various scenarios, but they almost never work on the first try. So you have to puzzle out each connection to figure out the problem.

The scenarios range from simple races around tracks to actual combat. From the scale of things, the robots are only a little larger than remote-controlled cars, and most of the contests take place onboard a fictional space station. After you've exhausted the canned scenarios, you can import robots created by other users and compete against them. It's not exactly multiplayer, but it can be pretty unpredictable.

The game is cool, educational, and fun, and Cognitoy has done an excellent job of supporting it with downloadable add-ons. You can only order MIND ROVER directly from the Cognitoy Web site and there's a goofy, morally-objectionable pyramid discount scheme in which you hand out email addresses so the company can spam your friends with sales pitches. If you buy the game, make sure you download the 1.02 patch, which fixes some nasty launch crash bugs. —Lloyd Case

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Cognitoy • Developer: Cognitoy • \$45 • www.cognitoy.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated violence.

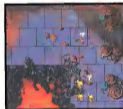
TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS, THE IRON PLAGUE

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Cavedog • \$20 •
www.cavedog.com • ESRB Rating: Teen;
animated blood and violence.

When in doubt, add more guns. That seems to be the theory behind THE IRON PLAGUE, the add-on to Cavedog's semi-sequel TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS. While it does a

fair job of adding nifty items and missions (as expansion packs are expected to do), that's all it is: a fair job.

The main additions are a 25-mission campaign and a new, fifth-side Creon. Creon likes technology and not magic, which means that all your little fezzies and mages are replaced with slightly-bigger, steampunk-driven automatons or guys with guns. Creon might be a little too cool, though; combine their gun-toting units with the most powerful defensive structure in the game (the



Prismatic Mirror, a laser-tower on speed), and you have a nigh-invulnerable base. You're gonna need to rush a Creon player before the first Prismatic Mirror gets built.

Internet-abhorring gogwands will get a ton of new maps, all downloadable units released to date, the much-needed 2.0 patch that greatly improves performance, and other online goodies that Cavedog has released. Not-very-wired TA: KINGDOMS fans will dig the pack. Otherwise, you'll have to ask yourself if you really want bigger zeppelins and more tanks with your zombies in your RTS. —Tienvy Nguyen

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DEVIL'S BRIDGE

Genre: Tactical Simulation • Publisher: TolonSoft • Developer: Illusion Software • \$30 • www.tolonsoft.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.



Offering the defunct HIDDEN & DANGEROUS fan rite new wonderfully designed missions spread across three

★★★

campaigns.
DEVIL'S
BRIDGE is

sabotaged, River Kwai-style, by just about as many bugs as the original, some obscenely-slow load times, and finicky WinDoo 3 support.

The missions take place in Poland, Southern Greece, and the besieged city of Bastogne, and include objectives such as ensnaring your four-men squad of British SAS commandos behind enemy lines to rescue captured agents, stealing top-secret jet aircraft, or blowing vital bridges. Each DB mission plays at an extremely challenging level, even for old-school tactical sims/shooters. Alternating between the tactical map and action screens becomes more complex due to the multiple objectives of most missions. The German troops' AI has been beefed up, so there's no more waiting behind an unsuspecting bad guy and popping a cap without consequences; try that now and you'll only invite nearby grenade-tossing airmen to the party.

New weapons like Thompson submachine guns, German Parabellum sidearms, and M1 Garand rifles are welcome, but TolonSoft goofed by not including the one feature fans really wanted: bug fixes. This expansion pack is almost as buggy as the original game, and sports hard lockups that occur when you start the edge of the map, and characters that can get stuck in ravines until you surrender control of them and have another squadmate command them to move.

All in all, DEVIL'S BRIDGE is a decent expansion, but only if you enjoy overly challenging action/strategy combat, tactical simulations, or are just a fan of HD. If this doesn't describe you, you're better off bumping this bridge behind you. —Raphael Liberator

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Pentium III vs. Athlon

In this corner: the undefeated champion, weighing in at 800MHz, the master of disaster that still dominates the gaming world...Pentium III. In the other corner, in leopard-skin shorts, eyeing the competition hungrily, the 800MHz Athlon. Can the cocky contender beat the reigning ruler for the title of top gaming CPU? To find out, we brought in

by Dave Salvator
and Ken Brown

two almost identical systems from one source: Alienware, which specializes in gaming PCs. We then put them through a torture test of system benchmarks and actual game testing. As your referee and color commentator, we can say that both systems put up a helluva fight, and we were a bit surprised by the results.

The following will be a three-round fight. Unfortunately, you won't be able to see the round marker when she introduces each one.

Round one will establish stability. Up until now, AMD systems have been crash-prone when using a SCSI controller with a Vortex2-based sound card. But Alienware's AMD system uses an MSI motherboard and EIDE storage components. Even though their systems have Vortex2-based Aureal cards, our evaluation rig aced all of its tests without a complaint. Alienware's Intel-based Area-51 was also rock-solid, so score this one a tie.

Round two deals with clock-speed performance. As you're doubtlessly aware, Intel and AMD have been struggling mightily to beat each other's clock speeds (see our story in Read.Me). At press time, AMD had the lead on Intel with the availability of 850MHz machines (which we also tested). If you compare just the 800MHz numbers, Intel still maintains a slight clock-for-clock performance lead, but that lead starts to fade when you consider that Alienware's Athlon 850-based Area 51: Aurora is \$400 cheaper than their Pentium-III machine. This round was close, but by performance numbers goes to Intel.

Round three is price vs. performance. The only area where Intel still has the edge over AMD is in SIMD floating-point performance. Clock for clock, Intel was 20 percent faster in our 3D WinBench 2000 Processor Test, which exercises the CPU's floating-point SIMD hardware with a very high triangle-count scene. However, the two processors were close in nearly every other measure of system performance—most importantly, 3D GameGauge scores. Given that, the focus turns to price, and on this count Alienware's Athlon-based Aurora clearly holds the advantage, coming in at \$600 less and packing in twice the system memory than the Pentium-III system. That puts Aurora on top with a TKO.

How They Stack Up

	Rating	3D GameGauge Score	ALU/FP (MIPS/OPS) 3D (score) (ops/float)	EXPENSIVE (MIPS/OPS) 3D (ops/float)	3D WinBench 2000 (clock/clock)	Price
Alienware 800 MHz Pentium-III	★★★★	93.3	59.9	56.9	85.8	\$3,999
Alienware 800MHz Athlon	★★★★	93.2	68.7	43.6	65.2	\$3,399
Dell XPS800	★★★★	82.8	85.7	43.8	68.2	\$3,650

Both Alienware systems ripped through our testing with nary a hiccup. We tested using 2D's complete set of benchmarking tools for each system component, Windows performance, and games performance. Since we didn't find any irregularities in the numbers, we distilled the results to give you the most pertinent info.

We give the nod (and it was close) to the Athlon-based Aurora, because it stacked up very well in 3D GameGauge testing versus

the Pentium-III-based Area 51; it packed twice as much system memory, and was \$600 cheaper. But either system will keep you in the groove, and gaming very smoothly at high resolutions. If you're set on getting a Pentium-III-based box, Alienware's 800MHz Pentium-III-based Area 51 is a burner, and was dead even with the 850MHz Athlon-based Aurora in 3D GameGauge testing. However, Dell's Pentium-III offering has the 64MB DDR GeForce card and a lower price tag (by virtue of Dell's huge volume).

What's in the Box?

Both systems come loaded for bear, and include more than what you'll see here. Head to www.alienware.com for more details.

Alienware 800MHz Pentium-III

Memory	128MB PC300 SDRAM
3D Card	ASUS V6800, 32MB DDR SDRAM
Monitor	Viewsonic G5790 15"
Sound Card	Diamond MonsterSound MX400
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.0 THX
CD-R/DVD	Pioneer 10X/40X DVD
Other Storage	HP 9100i CD-R/W
DVD Decoder	Hardware
Joystick	Microsoft SideWinder Precision Pro
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad



System Speeds and Feeds

✓ = EDGE

AMD		Intel	
✓	950 MHz	Highest Clocking Speed	500 MHz
	128 KB	L1 Cache Size	32 KB
✓	512 KB, on-die, variable speed	L2 Cache Size, Speed, Type	512 KB, on-die, full clock speed
✓	200 MHz, 1.6GB/sec	Front-side bus interface speed*	133 MHz, 1.1GB/sec
	PC100 SDRAM, 800MB/sec	Memory Type, Peak Data Rate	RAMBUS, 1.0B/sec
	2X	AGP Interface	4X

NUMBERS GAME: On paper, Intel's components are still faster, but Via's NX133 for the Athlon chipset will soon support AGP 4X and PC133 SDRAM system memory. Intel's 840 chipset — which was shipping but hard to find at press time — supports multiple channels of SDRAM, which can allow peak system data rates to jump to 1.2GB/sec.

How do these CPUs stack up in terms of overall system performance? This is a difficult question, because it's not just a matter of pure CPU horsepower. You also have to consider the system chipset, and the speeds of the Level 2 (L2) cache, front-side bus, system memory, and AGP port. So who's got the goods? Intel does hold a chipset advantage on paper (as seen in the table, above), and this advantage showed up in one isolated 3D WinBench test, but the

truth is that it was barely noticeable in actual game testing, even at very high resolutions. The reason? Even with 32MB DDR SDRAM GeForce-based 3D cards—the fastest 3D gun going—both systems' chipsets can process data fast enough even at 1600x900x32-bit, so that the 3D card is still the "bottleneck." At 60+frames per second, you should be very happy—but in this case, the 3D card is what's keeping frame rates from going that much higher.



Alienware 800MHz Athlon

Memory	256MB PC133 SDRAM
3D Card	NVIDIA GeForce 3, 32MB DDR SDRAM
Monitor	Viewsonic E790B 19"
Sound Card	Aureal Vortex II Super-Dual
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.0 THX
CD-R/DVD	Pioneer 10X/40X DVD
Other Storage	HP 9100i CD-R/W
DVD Decoder	Software
Joystick	Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback Pro
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad

Photos by Hayden Kozner/
DIGITAL CLARITY

Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE



Pinhead Ergonomics

Why Can't PC Connections Be as Easy as Consoles?

Not long ago, while hooking up a couple of console games for my daughters, I was struck by the thought of how easy it was to connect everything. I forgot about that thought until recently. What happened was that my desktop (the wooden one, not the one on my screen) decided to get my attention by honking me on the head while I was trying to align a DIN adapter. A few colorful expletives later, I peered at the connector and realized that one of the pins was horribly bent. Now, a mini-DIN adapter is actually a relatively friendly connector, all things considered, but it's still all too easy to mangle a pin. Far worse are Ultra-Wide SCSI connectors—68 tiny pins that beg to be damaged. The connectors for any of the Dreamcast connections, on the other hand, are idiot-proof and a child could (literally) hook it up properly.

Then there's USB. Excuse me, I need to take a gulp of Maxlo before tackling this. Ah, can't beat that taste. Now where were we? Oh yeah...

Video Ergonomics

I'm very grateful that many PC monitors now have USB connections—but why are they on the back of the display? In some cases, they're on the side, buried in small recesses that force me to lift a heavy monitor to plug them in. Having USB connections on monitors makes up a bit for the fact that the vast majority of PCs put the connectors on the back of the system. Yeah, I know that's how motherboards are built, but is that an excuse for the big OEMs to be lazy? (There are exceptions, such as Compaq and Apple.) Having the connector in an inaccessible location is aggravated by the connector design. It's a symmetrical shape, but the external connector is asymmetrical. On top of that, there are no tactile cues, so it's a coin toss as to whether you'll align it correctly. Murphy's Law dictates that you have, more or less, an 80% chance of aligning it wrong. I'm talking about the downstream (peripheral) connector here. Why couldn't they have made that connector like the upstream connectors on some monitors? You know the one—it's shaped like an irregular pentagon, and it's nearly impossible to connect incorrectly. You would think that both ends of the cable would use this connector, but some engineer thought differently.

Then there are, of course, software issues. The latest minor

I

We've got a long way to go before plugging in a PC peripheral is as easy as plugging in a Dreamcast. Maybe PC companies should hire some nine-year-olds.

debate is DirectX 7.0. I ran into this when checking out Microsoft's new Precision Racing Wheel. It wouldn't work with NASCAR 3, the game was getting viruses way out of whack with what it expected. Oops, it turned out that USB/HID device support was broken in DirectInput as of DirectX 7.0. Didn't this happen in DirectX 6.0 and DirectX 5.0? Will this happen again in DirectX 8.0? Where's that Maxlo?

And Another Thing...

Power connectors are a royal pain, too. There are two types of device power connectors: the larger one—with four large holes for very large pins—which is used to connect hard drives, and the smaller, compact one that's used mostly for floppy and Zip drives. Why doesn't the industry move to the more compact, floppy-style power connector? It's much easier to connect and remove. I've successfully destroyed hard-drive power connectors with very little effort. Once, two of the female pins (the ones on the power-supply connector) remained with the hard drive when I pulled out a power connector.

The bottom line is this: We've got a long way to go before plugging in a PC peripheral is as easy as plugging in a Dreamcast. Maybe the PC companies should hire some nine-year-olds. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think the Maxlo bottle is beckoning again.

THE GOOD...



The Dreamcast's controller plugs make connecting/disconnecting consoleless a no-brainer — they just work. PC connections still suffer from bent and broken pins. They could learn a lot from their console brethren.

THE BAD....



THE UGLY...



Shameless Plug

And speaking of plugs, I get lots of email from regular readers asking me about information in past columns. Now you can find a lot of that information compiled in a single place: my recent book. It's called *Building the Ultimate Game PC*, and is published by Brady. The ISBN number is 0-7697-2204-6. If you pick it up, drop me a line and let me know what you think. **GGW**

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You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Lloyd Case and Dave Salvador



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.

One Gigabyte Question

I was planning to buy a Pentium-III 733MHz processor, but AMD and Intel just announced processors at 1.1GHz! Will a P-III 733 be able to run new games for the next couple of years, or should I wait till Christmas and get one of these new processors running at one gigabyte?

This is an eternal question in a society where the pace of technology outstrips the pace of our salary increases. You should know that CPUs that run at over a Gighertz probably won't be widely available until summer or fall, and they will be expensive. However, if you get a 733MHz CPU today, it will give you two or more years of gaming pleasure. By the time 1GHz arrives, we'll be talking about 1.6GHz, and so on. At some point, you just have to put a stake in the ground and tell yourself, "Now is the time to buy."

LCD Displays

I am mightily tempted by those 18-inch flat-panel displays. However, I know that some LCDs don't handle resolution resizing, and I'm also concerned with the picture quality. The laptop monitors that I've seen don't look as good as CRTs. So, if size weren't an issue, would an LCD be preferable to a CRT?

Desktop LCD monitors don't have the limitations that many notebook PCs have. For example, many notebook screens simply use the actual number of pixels for a given resolution. If the native resolution is 1024x768, and you run at 640x480, you get a giftably streaked image in the center of the screen. Desktop LCDs, on the other hand, can interpolate pixels; this results in a slightly "grainy" image, but it generally works well. Note that even good LCDs often lack the color saturation and image quality of a good CRT, though.

Celeron + i820 = ?

Can I use a Celeron in an 820 motherboard, like the Asus P3C-E or P3C-2000?

No. The 820 chipsets support a minimum front-side bus clock rate of 100MHz. Since current Celerons use a 66MHz FSB, it won't run in an 820 motherboard.

Cool Running

I'm interested in putting some additional cooling fans in my PC case. How should they be installed?

What you want is airflow through the case. Power-supply fans in modern ATX-based systems exhaust air out of the case. So if you place an additional fan in the front, make sure it pulls air into the case. If you place the fan along the back panel, you can orient it either way.

Mix n' Match RAM

I was thinking about getting some ECC SDRAM, but it comes in different speeds such as 6, 7, and at 8ns. I have a chance to get a great deal on a 6ns piece, but I can only get one.

Can you mix RAM pieces if they're different speeds? Say they're both PC100 SDRAM ECC DIMMs, except one runs at 6ns, and the other 8ns—will they run together?

Yes, they'll both run fine, and both at 100MHz. The 6ns RAM may handle higher front-side bus speeds than the 8ns, but if you're not over-clocking, both run at the same speed. The 6ns RAM is simply capable of running faster.



TECH TIP

Here's a tip that will make adding new hardware go a lot faster. If you have plenty of space on your hard drive, take your Windows 98 CD, and copy the contents of the X:\Win98 (where X is your CD-ROM drive letter) folder to a folder on your hard drive, like, ah, C:\Win98. By doing this, every time your machine asks you for your Windows CD-ROM, you can just point to this folder rather than having to go hunt the frickin'

CD-ROM yet again. And, when the day comes, and it always does, that you have to reinstall Windows because your machine is just too damned unstable to do any meaningful gaming, you can actually run Windows setup from your hard drive. Just remember to create a folder somewhere on your hard disk and copy the contents of the C:\Windows\command folder. That folder contains the DOS commands you'll need to nuke your old Windows folder and begin anew.

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Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	Our Verdict
Motherboard	Asus P4C-E	\$200	ASP As
CPU	Intel Celeron® 600	\$750	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	1GB of PC800 DDRAM	\$850	RAMBOS
NEW Disk Controller	Adaptec 3945U	\$250	Slightly better, but also has PCI-E support
Primary Graphics	NVIDIA GeForce FX 5600	\$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	None	\$20	You will have to live with it
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 30i	\$680	A premium, but runs a bit warm
Backup	Comdex DVD-RAM drive	\$590	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM	Pioneer Ec SCS DVD	\$160	New Pioneer Slim Drive DVD
Monitor	MSiWatch GuardPro 2020i	\$1,250	Perfectly flat, good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	\$425	For four-speaker Dolby Digital, A3D, and EAX
NEW Speakers	Beats Accolade BA1800	\$110	Low, clear, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com 5620i modem	\$400	OK, at best
Networking	3COM Ethernet XV100 PCI	\$50	For keeping my building
Networking Hub	Netgear DS100	\$110	Multilayer A, DSL, modem support
TV Monitor Case	Yony Yony	\$213	Lots of cooling
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling TurboCool 3.0	\$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$59	Switched back from Logitech
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	\$65	No ball!
Total with Game Controller:		\$6,489	

Flight Joystick	Logitech Wingman USB	\$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	Logitech Wingman USB	\$100	Nearly perfect, but placement
Driving Controls	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse	\$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Logitech Gamepad FX	\$49	Out-of-the-box controller
Total:		\$7,944	

The **File Field** AT recommendations are based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from the price watch engine for www.computerparts.com or www.filefield.com. Use complete by the date and last file.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P4C-E
CPU	Intel Celeron 600
Memory	1GB of PC800 DDRAM
Disk Controller	Adaptec 3945U
Primary Graphics	NVIDIA GeForce FX 5600
Floppy Drive	None
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 720XP 13.1GB drive
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-14
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum
Speakers	Beats Accolade BA-505
Modem	Asus PC104 Modem
Case	File Field T18-46
Power Supply	File Field 330W
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital
Gamepad	Game Gearpad \$59

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well and will put you into the fray - without your ever having to charge-up your electric screwdriver.



Dell Dimension XPS 800

• \$3,000 • (800) 515-0258 • www.dell.com

Power Rig

Dell's Dimension XPS 800 impressed us with both its features and performance. The Pentium® III 600MHz system features a GeForce-based 3D card with 64MB of DDR SDRAM, a set of Alien-Clawing™ THX-certified speakers, and 1GB of DDRAM. This Dimension scored a 3D GameBench score of 68bps, the highest score we've seen to date. At press time, Dell was quoting lead times of 7-10 days for these beasts, due to the tight supply of DDRAM memory and Intel 520 chipsets, but its Dimension is worth the wait.



Hypersonic Silver Bullet

• \$2,801 • (800) 523-0438 • www.hypersonic-pc.com

Lean Machine

Hypersonic was a first-time entrant into our Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup last December, but its Silver Bullet system came, saw, and kicked us in our "Bing for the Black" category. The Silver Bullet is adorned with a Pentium® III 600MHz CPU, 1GB of SDRAM, Hercules' GeForce 3D card with 32MB of DDR SDRAM, and a 1GB hard drive. This system comes in at just over \$2,800, and for that price, it packs one helluva wallop.

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

If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-dominant 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.



If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Creative's 3D Annihilator Pro, which goes for around \$270. Admittedly pricey, this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep its four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a \$300 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2

WHICH
3D CARD
SHOULD I BUY?

Ultra, which is available now for around \$150.

Even if you're running a Pentium-III 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 whichever CPU you decide to use.

GET IT TOGETHER

So how do you put all this stuff together? Head over to **Lloyd's PC Workshop** page on **GameSpot** at www.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop/ for step-by-step instructions on how to get your killer rig up and running.

Price	The Skinny
\$125	3 PCI slots, GeForce, 4GB RAM - ready for the FBI
\$145	P-III/500
\$160	6GB RAM, apartment in
\$0	Gets the job done
\$215	Went for 32-bits + T4L
\$20	Said gotta have it
\$148	IBM's low cost, fast drive
\$185	Set-thing (TV)
\$350	Solid 10" monitor at a budget price
\$60	ASD and clean audio for under a Grand
\$10	Said the best low-cost speakers along
\$80	Solid performance, good case
\$75	Back to the old-timer
\$5	Apex, gets the job done
\$14	Cheap, nice, set-on business
\$58	Refer to the "gaming" mouse
\$35	Cheap, but very solid 3D stick
\$30	Solid, basic keypad

Total \$2,005

Speaker Roundup

PC Noisemakers



Yamaha YST-M30 speakers



Midiland 7100



Cambridge SoundWorks Digital

YAMAHA YST-M30
SPEAKERS

Price: \$79

Manufacturer: Yamaha Corporation of America
Contact: www.yamaha.com

Designing good, low-cost speakers is as much an art form as an engineering exercise. In most cases, there are too many concessions made, and the YST-M30 is no exception. This three-speaker combo — amplifier/bass cube and two small satellites — delivers a maelstrom, with an odd emphasis on mid-range.

On top of that, our 10KHz test tone



revealed nasty distortion at high frequencies, creating very unpleasant effects. Bass output is lacking, even with the "subwoofer" control cranked up. The one positive is that, at moderate volumes, the stereo imaging is sharp and well-defined. Games do fare a little better, but anything with loud explosions gets distorted if the volume is above three-quarters. If you watch DVD movies on your PC, these aren't the speakers for you.

We recommend spending a little more for the Boston Acoustics BA-635s, or the Yamaha YST-M28s. —Lloyd Case

Photos by Hayden Hazer/DIGITAL CLARITY

MIDILAND 7100

Price: \$96

Manufacturer: Midiland, Inc.
Contact: www.midiland.com

You want loud? When I played the live version of Born in the USA, these speakers got up to 106 decibels with some noticeable clipping, and 103 decibels with clean audio. It took a few minutes for my ears to recover. Getting to that point, however, was like navigating the maze in the original ZORK. You have to figure out what type of setup you want (Dolby Digital? Four-channel game audio?). Once you decide, you then need to set an unlabeled, four-position dip switch. These speakers are crying out for some form of digital input that will automatically switch soundshare types. With most PCI sound cards now having some form of digital audio output, digital input is now viable for speakers.

There is definitely some mid-range coloration. The 7100's sound much better on rock/pop music than purely acoustic jazz or classical. This makes them ideal for games, though, and they sound great when set up as a 4.1 system with a 3D sound card. DVD audio sounds pretty good, too. At \$90, they're not a steal, but if you have a penchant for playing loud rock music — or just pumping up the volume in OUNCE III — then check 'em out. —Lloyd Case

CAMBRIDGE SOUND-
WORKS DIGITAL

Price: \$109

Manufacturer: Cambridge SoundWorks
Contact: www.csl.com

Cambridge SoundWorks originated the idea of the very small satellite/woofer combination, and its MicroWorks are still some of the finest PC speakers available, both for clear uncolored sound and plenty of volume. The low-end SoundWorks speaker set — Cambridge's original offering — delivers good audio quality and impressive volume output, but lacks the MicroWorks' tonal clarity.



Cambridge has revisited this design, adding digital-audio input to create the SoundWorks Digital. The low-wattage rating of these speakers — 8 watts per satellite and 22 watts for the woofer — belie the SoundWorks' volume output. Despite delivering good volume, however, the SoundWorks still sound a bit muddy playing music, although it's not as noticeable with gaming audio. The SPDIF digital connection works as advertised, though there wasn't any real difference between using the digital or analog inputs. Long story short, the SoundWorks sound good, but there are other low-cost offerings that sound better, like Boston Acoustics' BA-635s or Yamaha's YST-M28s. —Dave Sakwa

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Inside **STRATEGY**

I Am a Social Leper

Gaming is supposed to be a joy, an escape from the day to day cares of the world, where socially inept misfits can believe for a few precious hours that they really are Blahg the Gnome, warrior/mage supreme. It was true in the Doritos-drunk AD&D weekends of my high-school years, and it's been pretty much a constant during my adult life as a computer gaming shut-in—just one baby step away from relying on Meeks on Wheels to keep me fed. Until now. Until **THE SIMS**. Until those heartless bastards at Maxis rubbed my face in my pathetic loseriness, and sucked all the joy out of my worthless life.

So, other than losing the will to live, little in my life has changed.

It started when I made the cardinal mistake of **THE SIMS**—designing a Sim that more or less approximated me. Along with locking into a mirror after having a nice big bowl of Frosted Pezote Flakes for breakfast, this is one of the worst missteps you can make with your life. My Sim, Ruben Kincaid, was an almost too-perfect digital doppelganger, whose thirst for fun and neatness came at the expense of any desire to have friends or engage in activity. Thus began Ruben's torturous slide into crippling virtual depression.

Even a Sim with a low Outgoing rating will eventually feel the gnawing pangs of loneliness. While they might be able to stave off the urge for companionship longer than the social butterflies of the game, sooner or later they're going to want a friend. You'll find them—as I did my poor, shattered Ruben—sobbing on the couch after dragging themselves with long bouts of avoid, but ultimately unsatisfying, cartoon viewing. My heart breaking for my little avatar, I had Ruben call up some neighbors, thinking "You'll fix things." It didn't. Things got worse.

See, once the neighbors came over, they had a great time—eating, talking, and even dancing. But they did it amongst themselves. Try as he might, Ruben could never successfully engage his guests in conversation or activity. He literally stood by as they utterly ignored him and his Social score plummeted. After a couple hours of penitence, Ruben succumbed to the easy charms of the TV, driving his would-be friends away as he refused to clean up the mess they made. After several hours of TV, Ruben passed out on the floor in the wee hours of the morning. Thank God Will Wright didn't include an option for suicide, for I completely expected to see Ruben stuck his head in his brand-new oven, or throw himself in front of his car-pool. I'm hoping a Sim psychiatrist moves nearby, before Ruben lashes out and obliterates the neighborhood.

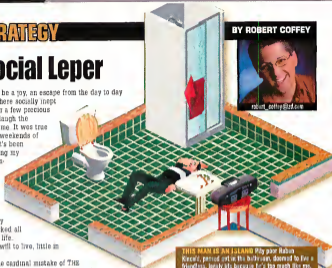
As much as I enjoy playing **THE SIMS**, it has—through no fault of its own—damned me. Now my real-life days are a pathetic, frantic charade of friendliness and vivacity as I strive to avoid the fate of Ruben Kincaid. It's killing me. I can feel my cerebral cortex shriveling under the duress of all this panicky anxiety. The dreadful aftermath of creating a Sim-style Miss Me has plunged me deep into a steadily sucking spiral of desperation, anxiety, and crying jags the frequency and severity of which frighten my co-workers. Do not make my mistake. Make your Sim a complete human or face the horrific consequences.

All is darkness... terrible, terrible darkness...

BY ROBERT COFFEY



robert_coffey@td.com



THIS MAN IS AN ISLAND My poor Ruben Kincaid, perched out in the bathroom, doomed to live a friendless, lonely life because he's too much like me.

Art Too
Closely
Resembles
Life in **THE
SIMS**

From CPU
to Tabletop?

It's generally the other way around, but believe it or not, **Bugle's MYTH** universe has been translated into a Y2K compliant version requiring only pencils, paper, and some loosey-cheesy dice. Steve Jackson Games has converted the CSW Hall of Fame title into a **SRPS** (Generic Universal Role-Playing System) framework, allowing gamers to create their own tabletop campaigns and to play on their favorite chessboard. For gamers interested in using Bugle's Fear & Loathing tools for creating PC scenarios, the book has a fully detailed section that should alleviate some of the trepidations necessitated designers might feel employing such powerful tools. While it probably won't tear diehard MYTH fans' hearts away from their PCs, they might well appreciate the nice job the book does flexing out the genre universe. Check out www.sjgames.com/stare or www.sjgames.com for more info.

Rob's
Mix

1. **The Sims**—is so life or it ain't.
2. **NOX**
3. **UNREAL TOURNAMENT**
4. **Leavin' Anderson's** United States of America
5. **Henry Fool**

Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

BY T. BYRIL BAKER

Bargain Game Hunter

As you learned in the last installment, I'm a notorious skinnflak. I'll waste hours each month digging through various bargain bins to see if any new titles have fallen from grace. Most months I am greeted with the typical dreck, but lately things have become peculiar: Games are dropping to \$20 or less only a few months after their release.

T. Byril Finds Cheap Games and a Cool Tool for THE SIMS!

I struck the motherload when I found JACK NICKLAUS & GOLDEN BEAR CHALLENGE at CompUSA for five bucks. That's right; five lousy dollars for a gorgeous golf game that is known for its excellent course editor. I've found over 200 user-made courses

since purchasing GBC, and that's just the beginning. You can get everything from custom clubs to designer flags.

Fun as it is to play on real courses, some of the fantasy courses available are stunning in both their originality and execution. A favorite is Manuel Kalline's *Geucic Village*, set in the cartoon world of Asterix. It was introduced to the world of Asterix in a college French class and it makes a terrific setting for a golf course. Each hole is populated with characters from the comic, and I've encountered obstacles ranging from a pack of wild boars crossing the fairway to a Roman legion blocking the approach to a green. Every tree, bush, rock, and background screen is replicated by scanned images from various Asterix books, and the end result is highly entertaining.

In fact, the only bad thing about *Geucic Village* is the 28-MB download. All GBC course downloads are on the large side of enormous, but most will leave you thinking that a second GBC-dedicated hard drive isn't such a bad idea. In any case, it heats paying for course expansion CDs every few months.

Activision's Golden

Bears Den (www.goldenbeardsden.com) teems with enough goodies to bring your cable modem to its knees. And if that's not enough, The Course Depot (www.coursedepot.com) hosts a variety of excellent GBC sites, including Puhman's Course Index. More than 200 GBC courses are available here, with full reviews and screenshots (equalling more than 2GB of downloads, in case you have a few months with absolutely nothing to do...).



Cheap Thrills

I found a \$5 copy of SIN sitting in a bin at GBC and bought it out of morbid curiosity. A few hours of downloads later, I was bowing a blast. The game finally has been patched into the master of playability, and the few unusable enhancements do much to address the remaining weak spots. Take the gun, for example. A single-pump Red Ryder has more audio punch than most of the pea shooters in the original release. *Awesand's Awesand Pak* extends this deficiency nicely, as does *Darklight's HS-Scand Files*. My neighbors may never forgive me. These and other SIN mods are available at the SIN Post (www.sinpost.com).

You can pick up a copy of JANE'S FLEET COMMAND for under \$20 now. Be sure to patch it and immediately go to the *Worship Database Project* site to download an enhanced database. The site jams around a lot, but currently is located at members.worship.com/Worship10/WOR. Whatever you do, don't pass up a bargain title just because it received lukewarm reviews. Chances are, in the time it took the game's price to tumble, patches and mods were released that change it into a worthy experience.

In the days of yore, when all that stood between me and a title was my Commodore 64, I got the play-a-game-on-the-LITTLE-COMPUTER-FORGE-I-remember-just-giving-poker-with-the-pottery-pans-ability-by-telephone, writing the code, and then sitting there to see what happened to play poker with an apple for brains. Memories like that probably go back as far as THE SIMS for me, except it isn't the shenanigans.

Simmer's Paradise

It's one of those things about THE SIMS—the idea that you can do it all and still not really enjoy it—like take a drive to a beach or mountain town—but all gables inside, the old string there every night and I can't imagine to see what happens next.

My main gripe is that only one neighborhood can be active at any one time, and I don't want my wife interfering with all the virtual clubs that reside in my little townhouse. I finally solved the problem with 2x Brother Systems Inc.'s *ResidencePlanner*.

(www.gamedazz.com) It has a "Swap and Play" feature that lets any number of users have their own neighborhoods. When THE SIMS is launched from the *ResidencePlanner*

interface, the appropriate user files are added or removed before the game begins, and everyone is happy. The total screen lets two users establish neighborhoods for an unlimited time while a \$29 non-user subscription of two for unlimited users. *ResidencePlanner* works perfectly with a number of other games, like *SYSTEM SHOCK 2*, *BALANCE OF GATE*, and *HOMEWORLD*, with support for new titles added as necessary.



NOT IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD *ResidencePlanner* lets you swap user files so gamers sharing a computer can each have their own neighborhood in THE SIMS.

T. Byril's Mix

1. UNWELL TOURS/MENT
2. N' SCAR RACING 3
3. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
4. BROMIC COMMANDO for the Game Boy Color
5. "W You Survive?" by George Wilson

Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

Smoking Barrel Be Damned!

Too Many Guns and Not Enough Fisticuffs

There're too many guns nowadays. Lead-shooting guns, energy-shooting guns, guns that turn enemies into livestock, guns that cause the Inner Märcaren to emerge from the target...it's just guns, guns, and more guns. Of course, with "first-person shooter" being the driving force behind this culture, it looks like I wouldn't have any room to complain. Where the heck else can the genre go?

One word: **melee**.

Whether you think of me as a visionary or a hack, you have to admit: Guns are nice, but they're hardly surprising anymore. Everyone

has variants of gun archetypes such as sniper rifles, shotguns, rapid-fire guns, and explosive-socket guns. Other excuses for gun-based weaponry include magical spells, psychic skills, or swords/axes/hammers that somehow fire miniature versions of themselves toward flunkies. It's time to step away from the "trigger a weapon to toss out a projectile" and get back to basics, whether we strip down to bare fists or create weapons that call for swinging rather than firing.

Why did I even think of melee in the first place? Blame a combination of re-watching Bruce Lee's *Enter The Dragon* and reading Sam Sekai's *Uchi Yuzube*. Take a look at other media, and you'll find that melee matches often surpass gunplay in terms of excitement. *The Matrix* had a few slick Hong Kong style gunfights and stop-time effects, but the heart of that movie was the incredible martial arts scenes, such as Carrie Ann Moss' acrobatics at the very beginning, or the amazing fight scene between Keanu Reeves and Lawrence Fishburne. Swords have always provided great entertainment, from early swashbuckling Errol Flynn adventures to *The Phantom Menace*'s two-versus-one bout of Darth Maul, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan.

Melee combat seems to elicit both a sense of vulnerability and finesse. You have to actually get in-your-face for such scenes, and boy, getting locked in the face sure stunts. The moments when you land a blow seem a lot more rewarding than when firing off a gun at a distance, which is why the final blow seems more climatic than the final gunshot in a movie. On the other hand, guns are essentially simple aim-and-shoot. If you're about to send me a letter about the skill required to fire one, don't. I've actually fired a few in real life, but none of that skill is involved when using a gun in a computer game.

The biggest obstacle to the use of melee combat is the interface. *DIE BY THE SWORD* was a fine sword-fighting game, but the interface was way too complicated for most people to grasp. Guns model an arm, melee would require a larger range of movement and more body parts to model. I imagine that may be the reason why the hammer-as-true-melee idea for *DUAKE* got scrapped. Right now, we'd either have to get more button-friendly, or work on

being dexterous enough to pull off mouse-keyboard combos. Both *JEDI KNIGHT* and *HERETIC II* did a good job with an easy-to-use yet maneuver-filled system of melee combat using mouse and keyboard. *URBAN CHAOS* had a workable hand-to-hand system; I wished the weapons hadn't overpowered that aspect. Looking forward, Bungie's *ONI* and Infinite Machine's *NEW LEGENDS* (by *JEDI KNIGHT* designer Justin Chin, no less!) look to be good candidates to tackle the melee task.

There will always be more shooters with nifty guns that can kill while sipping your cocktails, and I'll still derive the same sick pleasure from sniping some poor halfwit a mile away. Yet, when a game offers me the chance to feel the same sense of raw combat that either Bruce Lee or Toshiro Mifune felt while engaging their opponents, I'm putting the gun down.



thierry.nguyen@stl.com



SIM JACKIE CHAN
Oh's melee combat may be just the kick in the head the action game needs.

Scooter's Mix

1. Developing artificial intelligence. *Max Power* to induce my friend's single-mother Cheryl Radosiewicz in *The Sims*.
2. *Pokémon* Zaps.
3. The new *Puncher* comic book miniseries from the *Puncher* team (writer Garth Ennis and artist Steve Dillon).
4. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*.
5. *PLANSCAPE/TORMENT*.

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Inside ADVENTURE/RPG

BY DESSLOCK

@vlock@deslock.com

Got Them 3D-Engine Blues

In a six years, SSI released nine successive *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* games using essentially the same engine. Nicknamed the "gold box" series, the games are still widely praised by RPG fans, even though the last game was produced in the early 1990s.

The series certainly proved to be commercially golden for SSI, as *AD&D* fans kept salivating the games off retail shelves almost as quickly as SSI could mass-produce them. It's hardly surprising that several RPG creators have since vowed to create "the next gold box series." After all, what company wouldn't want to defer the sizeable cost of creating a new engine, and to consistently release profitable games using the same, proven technology?

But it'll never happen again.

Gamers' expectations have risen to the point where it's impossible to have another successful series that recycles the same technology. Recent RPGs that reused their predecessors' engines have garnered unenthusiastic receptions. Although *FALLOUT 2* was cut-

The Next "Gold Box" Series Isn't Gonna Happen

up risk running into an *ULTIMA* DX-line problem of spending a ton of money on an engine that looks great, but doesn't work well, reducing the likelihood of recouping on the investment.

RPG developers have resorted to licensing established engines, especially since 3D engines have become a commercial necessity. Recently, both New World Computing and Interplay announced that they would be making RPGs based on Monolith's *Lightspeed* engine. But it remains to be seen if an engine developed primarily for action games can be effectively

Desslock's Mix

1. *SOX*
2. Discovering the amazing puzzle-based mission design of *Bungie's* otherwise excellent *MYTH*
3. *Legion's* *Dracota* and *Kain's* *Mummy* and *Frankenstein* on DVD.
4. Oscar Nomination Blues (The *Cider House Rules?* *Get. The overrated American Beauty* is SO going to win...)
5. *NIGHT AND MAGIC VIII* beta



THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD: Will these two beloved series get the *Lightspeed* treatment? Apparently Interplay has other plans, but the next *NIGHT AND MAGIC* game will definitely use the licensed engine.



sidered by many gamers to feature gameplay that was as good as that in the original, many reviewers were disappointed that the engine was virtually unchanged.

But that doesn't compare to the hostile reception that *NIGHT AND MAGIC VII* received in Internet newspapers after using the same graphically-dated MMVT engine. And yet, New World Computing decided to risk an even harsher reaction by opting to reuse the engine, yet again, for *NIGHT AND MAGIC VIII*. That decision is largely responsible for the game departing only slightly more anticipatory buzz than a *Fairy Shore* summer-combat flick.

Unfortunately, RPGs are particularly susceptible to being outperformed by prehistoric technology. While many action games can be quickly assembled as soon as the graphics engine is complete, that engine is only the preliminary foundation for an RPG. RPGs require a more expansive gaming world, with systems for character development, inventory management, and NPC interaction; there are often dozens—if not hundreds—of unique items, weapons, spells, and characters. Even if an RPG's engine is initially impressive, by the time all the mandatory features have been built in, the engine will likely look stale compared to those in the latest shooters.

So what should RPG developers do? Ideally, they would have the financial backing and skill to develop an engine that suits their unique needs. Unfortunately, the costs are formidable, and develop-

transformed into a compelling RPG.

The advantages of acquiring a proven engine may be offset by the requirement to adapt someone else's technology to fit your game's design. When Valve licensed the *QUAKE II* engine, the developers of *HALF-LIFE* reportedly had to modify over 70% of the code, even though they were creating an action game, not *Starm's* RPGs based upon the *QUAKE II* engine (*ARCHONOX*) and the *UTREAL* engine (*DEUS EX*) are still not available in spite of their prolonged development, even though they started with established 3D engines.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2—which used a modified version of the *TRIEF* engine—is the only RPG released that uses a licensed engine, and it's a largely action-oriented game itself. Its gaming world is also indicative of another limitation of most current 3D engines: They are incapable of depicting expansive environments. Even though the *NIGHT AND MAGIC VI* engine is dated, it permits dozens of enemies to be on-screen at once, and can render wide-open outdoor environments. Licensed 3D engines may help create more beautiful gaming worlds, but those worlds will seem smaller and less populated.

We're in a strange interim period in computer gaming, when spiffy 3D graphics have become necessary for commercial success, and yet 3D-technology limitations are imposing restraints on design and gameplay, especially for RPGs. While RPG developers are understandably struggling with competing demands, game fans are left waiting for a single product to finally get it all right.

It's enough to make you hostage to a gold box.

Who dares ignore the clues? For comments from the creators of *DEUS EX*, *FALLOUT*, and *SYSTEM SHOCK 2* on this column's topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at deslock.gamespot.com.

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Inside SPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

The Great American Pastime?

Some Frightening Numbers in the PC Sports Game Business

Stadium sports get the hard squeeze on the PC platform, where hunting, golf, and fishing games accounted for close to 70% of total PC sports-game revenue for 1999. Inside Gaming is almost afraid to publish these numbers—we're afraid that sports game companies will see them and get out of the game entirely.

Source: PC Data, Inc., Reston, VA (703) 435-1025

Sport	On the shelf	% of total \$5
Hunting	43.1%	38.7%
Golf	15.3%	19.8%
Football	7.2%	9.1%
Fishing	9.5%	7.7%
Baseball	5.4%	5.8%
Basketball	3.7%	4.2%
Hockey	3.1%	4.4%
Pool	2.7%	2.0%
Soccer	1.3%	1.6%
Wrestling	1.9%	1.8%
Rodeo	1.2%	1.2%
Bowling	1.0%	1.1%
Winter Sports	0.2%	0.2%
Skiing	0.2%	0.1%
Boxing	0.1%	0.1%
Other Sports	2.8%	2.4%



George's Mix

1. *The Sims*
2. *Turn of the Century* by Kurt Anderson
3. *HIGH HEAT 2001*
4. Promotion of my own personal radio station at www.5launch.com
5. *Darwin's Radio* by Greg Bear

CGWHBL Grows First-Ever Champion

The fantasy baseball rage that began almost a year ago ended with a huge upset, a four-game sweep, and the crowning of the first ever champion of the CGWHBL: the Computer Gaming World/HIGH HEAT Baseball League. After more than 700 games played and viewed, the new-legendary league opened the playoffs with Chris Lombardi's miracle Angels pitted against Robert Coffey's Yankees, and George Jones' Red Sox matched against Dave Selvester's Indians.

In the first round, the mighty Red Sox machine headed the Indians 3-1 in four closely-contested games, while the upstart Angels—who weren't given a chance against the Yanks—pulled off the upset of the century by shocking a Yankees team that thousands of fans considered to be unstoppable.

In the division finals, however, Jones' Boston squad pulled off a four-game sweep of Lombardi's Angels. Although three of the four games were tightly contested, the Sox proved to have too much power for Anaheim's beleaguered pitching staff, winning each of the last three games with critical, come-from-behind home runs.

Rumors that Jones was allowed to win the title because he is "our boss" were quickly squashed by league publicists, who are eager to begin promoting the mysterious essence of the CGWHBL.

Diamond Legends Online

The one problem with the current batch of PC baseball titles (see our preview on page TK) is that they don't let us play with classic players. We can't draft a team with Babe Ruth, Johnny Bench, or Sandy Kousser on it. Foxsports.com is partially fixing this with DIAMOND LEGENDS, their new online fantasy-baseball sim.

DIAMOND LEGENDS allows you to draft from a huge roster of baseball legends and perform the usual range of fantasy league management—setting up starting lineups, pitching rotations, and hitting orders. You can also try to create some home-field advantage by "drafting" one of over 65 home ballpark, including old-school stadiums such as the Polo Grounds.

One big difference in this fantasy league is that DIAMOND LEGENDS will actually simulate each game on the schedule. This means that would-be Earl Weavers can specify all sorts of aggression levels for their teams, from how soon their relievers will enter games to how often a team will hit-and-run. You can also specify individual tendencies for certain players; a Ty Cobb can be told to be more aggressive on the base paths than your overall team setting, or certain pitchers can be made more conservative, depending on who's at bat.

The only drawback in our minds is that in order to join a league, you have to pay \$50. Plus, you get charged \$1 on any day you make any sort of transaction. But for some of us, that's a small price to pay to be able to engage in the ultimate fantasy league.

Check it out at foxdiamondlegends.com.

Inside Sports Solution Department

	8:35
	BUF 1 DAL 0
1st	

In NHL 2000, when the score of the game is being displayed in the upper left-hand corner, occasionally the name of one or both of the teams turns red, along with the score. I can't figure out what this means and have been unable to find the answer on the Net.

—Steven G.
 Steven, we asked Dave Warfield, the Producer of NHL 2000. Here's his answer:

The team names turning red in the score clock are indicators that the teams are frustrated and/or angry, and someone may be dropping the gloves soon. This would be a good time to get your enforcer on the ice.



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Inside SIMULATIONS & SPACE

BY GORDON BERG

The Joy of Multiplayer

Since this edition of *CGW* details the latest offerings in WW II online aviation, I thought it would be fitting for this month's column to touch on multiplayer as well. Of course, I realize that most of you have never known anything but the solo flight. Simply compare the relatively-high sales figures for popular flight sims with the relatively-low number of you actually found flying and fighting online, and you'll see what I mean.

Gordon Says Get Online or Get Lost

(And such a comparison is nothing new, really—the same point has long been made regarding other games that prominently feature multiplayer gaming.)

Things are changing, though. Even if your reclusive ways have kept you from shooting at a live opponent so far, your choice of AI-controlled computer opponents will dwindle in the years to come. [Insert favorite "flight-

sims are dead" arguments here, followed by standard "all genres are cyclical" retort.]

Like it or not, more and more multiplayer sims are slated for our immediate future. For example, a recruitment sim developer had plans with more than one publisher to do various sequel projects and follow-ups related to the kinds of sims that please the flight-sim community at large. He ultimately saw all of his contracts cancelled. It turns out that the only way he could get funding for any kind of venture was if it was based on a massively-multiplayer model. As he once told me, "Every publisher and investor is willing to spend a lot of money on anything online, no matter what. So while a 'packaged flight sim' is considered very 'high risk' and no one is willing to spend a dime on it, they are more than willing to throw over ten times as much on an 'online flight sim,' just because it's online. It's really screwed up."

Consequently, there will soon be at least seven different WW II online-only

sims competing for your dollar. Glass half-full drinkers are now thinking, "Having so many choices can only benefit the consumer," while those of the half-empty persuasion ponder, "Great. Those multiplayer WW II sims will cannibalize each other, just like all those boxed retail versions of the WW II European theater a year and a half ago."

Personally, I wouldn't necessarily mind an all-multiplayer future if it turns out that way. I spend more time flying sims online than offline, for one very simple reason: the social factor. In-game voice chat utilities like Roper Wilco have forever changed my online experiences, and the next version of DirectX is going to incorporate the similar function of Battlefield Communicator for free. So if multiplayer-only ends up being the only way I can fly a next-generation sim, so be it.

If you've never given online flying a chance, you're really missing out. Therefore, your mission this month is to get your butt up into the virtual air and to engage, or cooperatively fly with, another human. Take baby steps first. Try your favorite offline sim online for a change, such as EAW via Microsoft's Zone.com, or USAF over at Jane's Combat.net (www.janes.es.com).

Then find a pay service that sports a huge

multiplayer arena and look for a free trial membership. (I think these large games are the most fun, so no excuses!) Try out one of the real-time voice utilities if you can. Then, report back to me with your experiences. Was it a positive encounter, or did it royally suck? Easy to get up and flying, or a major pain in the ass? If enough of you write in, maybe a trend can be spotted and we can "discuss." Otherwise, I'll just end up toying the letter myself, and you don't want that on your conscience.



FLIGHT RISK: Plunge into the crazy online sim world at places like Jane's Combat.net.

Gordon's Mix

1. All of the online WW II sims
2. FIGHTER SQW/DROK, SCREAMING DEMONS OVER EUROPE (w/Plane Pirck 5.3)
3. RED BARON 3D (w/Barry's latest .fltp)
4. NOX
5. DVD remote from Netflix.com

When not engaged in serial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

You can have my Thrustmaster when you pry it from my cold, dead fingers...

When it comes to joysticks, everyone's got a favorite. Getting someone to switch over to a new brand is tantamount to asking them to change their religion, politics, or operating system. Personally, I've always been a CH bay muck, but I sympathize with the Thrustmaster faithful. Needless to say, it didn't go over too well when the TM high-end line of joysticks was discontinued, thus erasing no more commercially available F 22 Pro, FGCS sticks, or the ever-popular TCS throttles. (Indeed, high-end Thrustmaster HOTAS gear has become quite the hot ticket on the auction sites. Contributing editor Layne sold a set for \$400! So, in this day and age of digital USB connections, what's a poor Thrustmaster (er, now Gullerick) user to do with their aging analog sticks? Glad you asked. Head over to Bob Church's site, www.stickworks.com (of CTFU utility fame), and read up on the SWF32 Digital Upgrade Kit. Essentially, you install a new chip into your gear that allows for digital-mode operation under Windows, improved stability, and increased functionality.





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VISIT ZDNET'S GAMEPOT TO DOWNLOAD A FREE DEMO AND OFFICIAL GAME GUIDE FOR LARA'S LATEST ADVENTURE: TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

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My Job Does Not Suck

Or, I'm Sorry This Column Is Late Again and Please Don't Fire Me

I am not a cranky guy. Really. I enjoy life, when not sober, and I like my job a lot—especially on Mondays when George brings donuts. But when I look back on what I've written in this magazine lately, both on this page and in various reviews, I see nothing but whining and complaining—broken up by the occasional bit of narcissism and self-congratulation.

Such crankiness might be understandable if I were working for, say, *Proctology Today* magazine, or *Fungus World*. But dangit, these are computer games—this is supposed to be fun. Of course, when you look at what I've had to write about, my bad mood becomes much more understandable.

The last three games on my plate have been *ULTIMA IX*, *CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC*, and *INTERSTATE 82*—a veritable Larry, Curly, and Moe of computer gaming incompetence. One more game as bad as these, and I might have reapplied for my previous job testing modems for the Mac. Or the job before that, dancing naked to cowboy music.

So I have decided to change course this month. To fight back, as it were, and accentuate the positive. To remind myself how good I have it here. What I present to you this month, for your sake and mine, is a list of all the cool things about working at *Computer Gaming World*. Those of you who have always suspected that this job is ridiculously easy and fun—here's where I come clean. I know that in the past I've whined about how hard it is, how much pressure is on us all the time, how little we get paid. But, honestly, that was just a cheap ploy to elicit sympathy email from attractive women. In truth, I love my job. Here's a few reasons why.

Free games.

Big surprise, huh? Yeah, this will never get old. I've been here for over three years, and I still get as giddy as a little girl when the new pile of games arrives. True, I'm always as giddy as a little girl, and sometimes I like to dress up and call myself "Princess Sissypants," but that's not really any of your business, is it?

No need for discipline, maturity, or self-control.

Imagine recess at nursery school. Then imagine all the kids on five espressos each. Add to that a roomful of games and no adult supervision. This is *Lord of the Flies*, with paychecks.

A chance to mingle with gaming gods.

Not to brag or anything, but I'm on a first-name basis with some of the greatest game designers on the planet: Sid, John, Will, Derek, Lord—the list goes on and on. Someday I'd like to meet those people for real, but until that day, I continue to have the most amazing personal conversations with their lifelike cardboard cutouts in

my basement. Now, if only my mom would stop interrupting me!

A chance to watch Scooter grow up.

Go look at this guy's picture in the *Inside Gaming* section. What is he, 12 years old? Does any other magazine have an editor on staff with a milky bottle? Seriously, the chance to help mold and shape Scooter makes me understand how Dr. Frankenstein must have felt. By the time we're done with him—no "dating" or "going outside" or "having a life" for Scooter!—my fellow editors and I will have transformed this once-promising young man into something we can be proud of: the world's ultimate gaming dork.

Scaring people in the elevator.

Our office is in the Bechtel building. I don't know who those people are or what they do, but they look serious and I don't think they play games. They wear sunglasses indoors and they don't smile. They might be working

The last three games on my plate have been *ULTIMA IX*, *CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC*, and *INTERSTATE 82* — a veritable Larry, Curly, and Moe of computer gaming incompetence.

with aliens. In any case, imagine what is going on in the head of the poor sap who steps into the elevator on his way to the meeting in Block 7G, only to be confronted by a clan of disheveled misfits, shouting things like: "Only wusses use sniper rifles. Use the flak cannon instead—you can easily mow everyone down in seconds!" or "Last night Bella kept peeing in my living room! And her husband kept trying to kiss me!"

No perceivable line between work and play.

Let me guess, there is someone in your home who thinks you waste too much time on games. I hear you, brother. Before I worked here I was just another oppressed gamer, trying to get his daily fix while getting yelled at to do things like clean the house, pay attention to loved ones, or bathe. Now I have the built-in, socially-sanctioned excuse of having to "work." As a matter of fact, as far as my wife knows, I've been working on the *HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III* review for nine months now. Please don't tell her. I'm begging you. I've worked too hard to give it up now.

Jeff would like to dedicate this month's column to one of his childhood idols, Mad magazine's late, great Don Martin. Send email to jeff_green@zd.com

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