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CRIMSON SKIES TIPS

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TO ISSUE 200
3

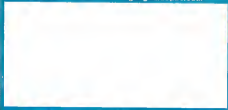
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

ZIFF DAVIS THE #1 PC GAME MAGAZINE

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2



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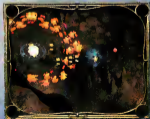
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"... Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn will be one of most important RPGs ever released. It is a beautiful epic, bringing to the field a new level of polish, detail and design. And, it's going to change everything." - IGN



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EPIC IS TOO SMALL A WORD.



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"Every aspect of Sacrifice blew me away.... the graphics engine, the unique style of gameplay, the in-depth storyline." - 3DGPU.com (August 2000)

"Sacrifice is a stunning game, and you won't be disappointed..."

- Gamespy.com (August 2000)

"... checkout the breathtaking eye-candy....."

- Riva3D.com (August 2000)

"While the game itself is revolutionary in its style, the graphics absolutely blew me away."

- 3DGPU.com (August 2000)

"Shiny Entertainment's Sacrifice is in a league of its own and left this avid game player just drooling."

- Ferra.com (August 2000)

"I like Sacrifice. A lot..... fantastic gameplay, inventive ideas backed by even more inventive character designs..."

- IGN.com (August 2000)

"The game is drop-dead gorgeous. It controls easily and its unique twist on gameplay mechanics makes it just quirky enough to stir interest among both casual and hardcore players."

- Daily Radar.com (August 2000)

"After spending a good deal of time playing Sacrifice, we're as excited as ever about Shiny's latest opus. It's refreshing to see a developer that is committed to inventing innovative settings for its games."

- Gamepot.com (August, 2000)

"... It's really rather impressive..."

- cdnag.com (September, 2000)

"Not only does the game boast a gorgeous 3D graphics engine, but it exhibits some smart design and gameplay as well."

- Firingequal.com (August 2000)

Actual Gameplay Screens



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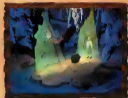
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Lean Machines 112

They fly like butterflies, sting like bees, and they've got price tags that won't K.O. your wallet. Six lean, mean, gaming machines face off in our annual Ultimate Game Machine roundup. Find out which machine scored the TKO.



Return to Wolfenstein

It's been 10 years since B.J. Blazkowicz busted Nazi heads in **WOLFENSTEIN 3D**. Now B.J. is back, facing a fresh army of hideous Hitlerite henchmen in true 3D. See why we think this could be the best single-player shooter since **HALF-LIFE**.

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Bobby Labonte

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NASCAR

Actual game footage

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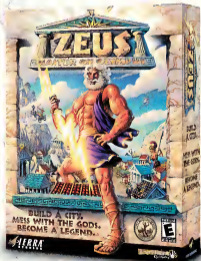
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RUNES

It was Ragnar the mighty
wielder of battle-axe,
shiver of sword, and master
of magic.

It has been said of old
and decadence raging
since I last sleep free well
the Viking lands have been
ripped open like a scar!
The mares flowing
dark shadows emanated
from the underworld
by the

BESIAL SARK ANEN

When first I bore on and saw
the pillage and looting
by those bands of evil,
I Ragnar the mighty;
with knives in
the most violent of retches
after surveying the sights of
three-day spall left
being stretched and named
of the field of battle.

AS I EMERGED,
UNHURT AND UNSCATHED
FROM THE UNDERWORLD.

I found I was the
CONQUEROR AND CONQUEROR
WHO SCARPEATED
THE BLAZE AND BANE OF SARK ANENS
ATTACKS.



"Its melee-intensive combat and absolutely evil visuals should put it a cut above the rest." -IGN

"Prepare to be knocked flat on your ass by Rune from Humanhead Studios" -Iwate

HIS CITY, TORN AND MANGLED,
IT WAS HERE I MET
AND LOPPED THE HEAD
OF MY FIRST
DARK WARRIOR AND LEARNED
THAT MY VILLAGE AND PEOPLE
WERE TO BE THE NEXT SPOLLS

OF **SARKAMEN'S WAR.**

IT IS HERE
MY QUEST TOOK FORM.

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MATURE
M
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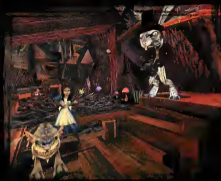
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I've been called back to Wonderland,
It's darkened since I dreamed.
The Queen rules with an evil heart,
It's time I intervened.



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LETTERS

Best Letter Ever!

My subscription just started and I must say, CGW is a sight to behold. I did almost nothing but play video games when I was growing up, and even though I'm in prison, I still like to read about all the cool stuff I'm missing.

That's kind of pathetic, huh? I'm so addicted to video games that I subscribed to CGW, even though I have at least five more years to go before I can play any of them. By that time they will be obsolete, and console systems will rule, but I'm looking forward to playing all the games I miss, in chronological order, to see how PC gaming evolved while I was "away." I've been down since '92, so it's going to be a long list.

Of course, I'll have to rob another armored car to be able to afford it...just kidding! Ha, ha! I would never do that again. From now on I strictly rob drug dealers. Doh! No, no, I'm retired. Yeah, that's the ticket...retired.

Bobby "redrum" Hopper
03771-078 Unit 7F

Yes, but They Did Make Those Crop Circles

Your review of ASHERON'S CALL in the July issue was entertaining and thorough. We feel compelled, however, to clarify one minor point.

Your article references "pyramid schemes" under a section titled "My Way or the Amway." The comparison clearly implicates Amway as a pyramid and this is a highly inaccurate characterization of our business

model, as the enclosed card explains.

In all likelihood you were not aware that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has established a legal definition of pyramid schemes. According to the FTC, a pyramid scheme compensates people for the simple act of recruiting additional people, regardless of consumer sales. Pyramid schemes are not tolerated by the FTC, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the U.S. Postal Service, and any of the 50 state Attorneys General, or Amway. In 1979, the FTC found

that the Amway Sales and Marketing Plan is not a pyramid because it is based on retail sales to customers. Amway is recognized by federal and state courts and regulatory agencies as the example to follow for multilevel marketing plans.

We hope this clarifies matters, and would appreciate a correction of the inaccuracy.

Anna Bryce
Public Relations
Amway Corporation

Okay, sure. We're sorry. While you're here, would you like to buy some of George Jones' Nutrilife products?

Penny Arcade by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (www.penny-arcade.com)



© Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins

Thumbs Up for PipBoy!

I just wanted to make a comment regarding Dirk Swanson's letter ("Cover Caring," November 2000). It's very obvious that Dirk is totally unfamiliar with the FALLOUT series (blasphemy!!!). Otherwise, he would have instantly recognized PipBoy. Considering the fact that the issue had a huge story on FALLOUT, I think the PipBoy cartoon and the radioactive orange was very apropos. I, for one, instantly said "Oooh...FALLOUT...I gotta see!" Keep up the good work, guys!

Anna McKay

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LETTERS

Internet Sports Leagues

George Jones' recent column about MADDEN 2001 (*Inside Sports*, September 2000) states that "From here, it's only a matter of time before we see...career modes that play out over multiple seasons, and hype and hoopla commensurate with real-life sporting events."

I just wanted to let you know that thousands of users are already using the BASEBALL MOGUL and FOOTBALL MOGUL games to play career-mode simulations. And unlike EA and HIGH HEAT, we've already spent years working out the bugs, and we are focusing our efforts on Internet play, not 3D engines.

A recent Internet search revealed that BASEBALL MOGUL leagues outnumber any of the other products. Moreover, we are continuing to support the product and leagues with patches and new versions. A QuickPoll survey of over 1,000 users shows that BASEBALL MOGUL leagues are preferred 5-to-1 over rts-some baseball, and are considered "easier to learn" by an amazing 13-to-1.

So, if your readers want some baseball action in the off-season, they should pick up BASEBALL MOGUL 2000 at mMonkey.com and join a league!

Clay Dreselough
 President, mMonkey.com

Scooter Knows Games...

Just finished Thierry Nguyen's review of DEUS EX (October 2000). I don't usually write to the magazines I read, but I felt compelled after this game review. I bought DEUS EX the first week it was out in my area, and was totally absorbed as soon as I started playing. So when I saw the 3 1/2 star rating in the review, I felt it should have been higher. Until I read the review.

Scooter's analysis of this game was on the money; the AI, crappy frame-rate at some points, etc. The one thing he did, which I don't usually get from reviews, was that he conveyed the fun the game brings to the player. I agree that maybe some won't be as forgiving of the flaws, but as the article reads, it's a game well done and ultimately a fine rds.

Again, great review, and thumbs up for an



200th Edition!

Your Favorite Gaming Moment

What was your favorite gaming moment? As part of our countdown to issue 200, we're inviting everyone to submit their wildest gaming experience in 200 words or less. We'll collect the most interesting stories and print them in a special section of the March issue. Here's your chance to be a part of gaming history. Write to us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

informative article based not only on all the tech stats of the game, but throwing in the more relative gamer's opinion: it was fun!!!

Ken Hall

...and Robert Coffey Doesn't

Please Lord God King Game Designers, don't listen to the rantings of blasphemer Robert Coffey (*Inside Strategy*, October 2000). Please continue to innovate the interface of your blessed games. Refrain from using the cookie-cutter approach to game-interface design, and try something new and innovative. It might not always work, but it's the only way the interface is going to improve and get better.

Mike Hansen

Robert Coffey responds: I'm all for innovation. I've just played too many games lately that have bent over backwards to be different and have only succeeded in creating needless hurdles for their games. Who wants to keep right-clicking on empty menus, because the game's funky interface prohibits you from simply deselecting units? Try something new and innovative? By all means, but only if it helps the game and makes sense.



ZIFF DAVIS

Adult Business of
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The logo for 3dfx, featuring the letters '3dfx' in a stylized, bold font. The '3' and 'd' are connected, and the 'f' and 'x' are also connected. A red swoosh underline is positioned beneath the letters.

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INSIDE
Won't Be Home for Christmas
Talking With Jason Hall
Buying Games Online

SCOOP!!!



Marvel This

FREEDOM FORCE could be the superhero game we've been waiting for

■ ■ ■ Fifty years of comic books have given us some of the best stories and characters in fiction, spawning dozens of books, magazines, and movies (including the recent X-Men), but not one superhero game has been worth the box it shipped in. Finally, we hope, that's about to change.

Irrational Games, creators of last year's award-winning **SYSTEM SHOCK 2**, is taking a very rational approach to the subject. "We decided not to license a comic book property, which would cut our resources in half for the game," says Ken Levine, creative director at Irrational. "Several of us are huge comic book fans, and we love to create characters and settings for superheroes, so we thought we could create a universe as compelling and detailed as anything we could have licensed."

They plan to create three superhero games, the first one set in 1962 in New York City. "The early 60s were the coming-of-age of comics, where heroes had interesting quirks—they were not paragons of virtue," says Levine. "Our game will be in the style of Steve Ditko's Spiderman and Jack Kirby's *The Fantastic Four*."



The game will use the same engine as the upcoming **BRIDGE COMMANDER** and **DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE**, which supports plenty of graphic detail in a pannable, zoomable environment.

FREEDOM FORCE will reportedly have much of the visual complexity of **FREEDOM RIDGE**, combined with the bustling activity of **SYNDICATE WARS**. The streets will be filled with traffic and people, the latter of which are sure to become hapless victims.

You'll start out with one superhero with adjustable attributes, and you'll acquire more heroes throughout the game. Taking down the evildoers confers prestige points to invest in increasing your heroes' powers.

When news of trouble reaches headquarters, you'll choose up to four superheroes per mission and sweep into action. Sometimes it'll be henchmen harassing the crowd; other times it'll be supervillains tearing up parts of the city. This is where the game should shine: Everything is being built with destructibility in mind. Your superheroes will be able to grab a telephone pole or a bus, and commence with some high-octane as-

lucking Walls will be smashed, trees uprooted, bystanders injured, and large structures destroyed. Depending on their ability, heroes can fly, burrow, or use force beams to contend with villains wielding powers that could be stronger than that of your heroes.

"You can make a mess, from knocking over the Statue of Liberty to taking out the Brooklyn Bridge—the scale and scope of these battles should be huge," says Levine.

Irrational intends to support multiplayer and a wide range of mods from users. But for now, they're focusing on the basics: story and characters. "Aside from the technical aspects of blowing stuff up, it's important to have a range of characters with interesting motivations and complexities to them. We're really working hard to make these worlds feel honest and realistic to the period, on top of making it an incredible game."

Stay tuned—we'll bring you more details as it nears its Winter 2001 release.

—Ken Brown



Next-Gen Jukebox

Play games, music, or strip poker via broadband at your local pub

■■■ As our wired society hurtles ever closer towards a merger of The Jetsons with The Matrix, even the corner bar will have to enter the Internet age. Don't be surprised the next time you stumble into your neighborhood watering hole if some biker dude is swiping his Gold Visa into a spiffy jukebox to play ZZ Top while he surfs the Net.

But surfing isn't all you can do on the I-G.E.M. With a 500MHz processor running Windows 2000, the unit beats with the heart of a PC. The company making the units, Ecacst, is working with Activision and other developers to bring perlor games like Shanghai and action titles like QUAKE III to the system, either solo or multiplayer. Instead of a mouse, the I-G.E.M. will have a special trackball device to help you get your frag fix while waiting for your drink. All of the systems will be wired with broadband connections for zippy performance.

When the transvestite in the corner starts looking good, you can serenade "her" with music on demand from emusic or downloading.com. If you like what you hear, another swipe will send the CD on its way to your door via Amazon.

The company has installed 15 units in San Francisco, Denver, Oakland, Los Angeles, and Dallas, and plans to roll out an additional 300 throughout the United States by the end of the year.



EURO STUDIO WAVE

Thank God for the Eastern Europeans. While established PC developers are keeping like leanings toward next-gen consoles, game design studios are popping up all over the former Eastern bloc.



Creation developer Criterion is working on SENJUS SAM; Russian house Buke Entertainment is working on ECHOLON; Bohemia Interactive in the Czech Republic is developing RAGEPOINT 1985; and 1C-Maddax Games is programming a great-looking lightsim in Moscow (see page 62). Welcome, comrades!

The BAD...

BUGS IN BILL'S HOUSE

Boy, do we expect more from Microsoft. The company that proudly proclaims its testing ability, and has an impressive record of releasing clean games, recently shipped MIB:OWN MADNESS 2 and CRIMSON SKIES with bugs. Numerous users have reported locking problems with MIB2, and a memory leak in CRIMSON SKIES can result in the loss of your career. We hope this isn't a sign of things to come from the company that has to set the standard for all software publishers.



and the UGLY

3DFX'S FUTURE

The picture at 3dfx isn't pretty. The company reported second-quarter losses of \$100 million. Meanwhile,

Nvidia's GeForce 2 leads the way in 3D performance. None of the systems in this month's Ultimate Game Machine roundup were 3dfx-powered. Their next release, the \$996 Voodoo 5000, isn't exactly going to sell like hotcakes. But we hope this 3D pioneer can reverse its fortunes.



TCHOTCHKE OF THE MONTH

Yes, the CGW editorial staff is a misbegotten aggregate of seething human balls of hate—but we're future spree killers with a heart. So thank you Blue Byte for providing us with this month's tchotchke, an inflatable SETTLERS IV mouse that lets us unleash the white-hot fury bubbling beneath our deceptively benign facades, providing us with all the visceral thrills of unchecked skull-bashing homicidal mania, with none of the messy viscera. Now all we need is a form rubber Iron Maiden, and our lives will be nearly complete.



What's Up With...

The latest news on a dozen games we'd like to yank from the bitstream

■■■ You might just as well be sneezy as nice this year, because a lot of games you may have expected to be ready for gift wrapping this holiday season are slipping until next year. Let's take a look at some of the biggies.

Tribes 2

Sierra is going to "extend the beta appropriately to fine-tune the game so it meets the highest standards." Translated, this means that Sierra is taking an extra six weeks to make sure their title can capitalize on the void created by TEAM FORTRESS 2's absence and HALO's defection to

the time to polish the game—we just hope they can keep their word and get this cool-looking team-based shooter out by December.

C&C Renegade

At last, a C&C game that doesn't resemble all the previous C&C games! Westwood didn't have much to say, other than to intimate that it wouldn't be out this year and that they'd have more informa-



tion soon. Since the engine looked sharp and ran smoothly the last time we saw it, we're guessing Westwood has found incorporating the game's shooter focus while retaining the feel of the C&C universe more challenging than they'd imagined. Rumor has it the game is still another year off.

Duke Nukem Forever

Last month we reported on Pipeline that 3DRealms recently advertised for multiplayer programmers. We're hoping that's a sign that they're nearing completion with single-player. Meanwhile, George Broussard recently posted an update on the 3DRealms Web Forums that talks about some of the weapons in the game. Nothing's finalized yet, but the max

sounds similar to DUKE 3Ds, with the addition of sniper rifle and a revamped version of the ever-popular Shrinker. Most weapons are said to have alternate-fire capabilities as well.

DNF has long been rumored to include racy content that might prevent it from being sold at retail, but in a recent interview with GGW, Broussard denied that would be the case. You can expect some strip club scenes and off-color remarks, but it'll be closer to PG-13 than R.

DNF still has no official release date, but we think we'll finally see it by summer of 2001.

El Sid's Games

DINOSAURS and CIVILIZATION III are coming from you know who, but neither will be out this year. "Sid is deep into game creation" Friesns told us, which sounds like he's either working feverishly or taking a nap. According to Hasbro Interactive, we can expect CIV III in August of 2001, while no date has been set for DINOSAURS, which is an EA game.

Dungeon Siege

This action-oriented RPG from the maker of TOTAL ANNIHILATION, Chris Taylor, and Gas Powered Games looks like a Summer/Fall 2001 game. Gas Powered recently got the multiplayer game up and running. "We are plowing forward!" Taylor told us. We're waiting, Chris!

Anachronox

One thing's for certain, nobody's going to be able to accuse



Xbox. Much of the extended beta will be focused on balancing and performance-abuse testing, but by giving the team more development time, they've recently been able to add whistling mortars and grenades, new explosion effects, bases that go dark when generators are destroyed, moving stormfronts that will disrupt the battlefield, and grav cycles that now can hover over water as well as submerge. We're glad they're taking

What's Up With ONI?

This one's a bit of a first. It's still being worked on by Bungie, which is now owned by Microsoft, but will be published by Take 2 as part of the Bungie purchase agreement. Did they get together and play scissors-paper-rock to decide who owns this game? No matter who publishes it, you can expect this anime-flavored action game in January, so take back that copy of DAIKATANA you get for Christmas and exchange it for ONI!





What's Up With Max Payne?

"What people saw at E3 and before represented very little of just how amazing the game is," says G.O.O. high priest Mike Wilson. From Remedy in Finland comes this action game inspired by Hong Kong's John Woo films, slated for mid-2001. We're told the level design is basically done and that Remedy is polishing, polishing, polishing the game. All that polishing and some quita likely Xbox development as well (Microsoft has been showing a lot of MAX PAYNE footage of late) are what's holding it up, but according to sources, it would take something major to delay it past another E3—G.O.O. doesn't want to take it to the trade show a third time.



ARACHNOFobia of being boring when it ships in G2 next year. All the parts of this epic, futuristic RPG are finally falling into place, and we like what we're seeing, a wickedly playful sense of humor, scraps of mini-games including a rail shooter and an exotic male dancing challenge (yes, you read that right), imaginative graphics, and a combat system with very cool spell effects that easily trumps its console RPG inspiration. The whole package looks

very promising—we're just hoping that constant feature creep doesn't delay this baby so long that gamers lose interest.

Team Fortress 2

"Not the dreaded TEAM FORTRESS 2 questions," joked Sierra's press department as we interrogated them. We didn't get much beyond name, rank, and serial number, other than to confirm that Valve's notoriously high standards (remember, this is a company that scrapped the first incarnation of HALF-LIFE and started over from scratch) are pushing this title until sometime next year. The game is being refitted with a brand new engine with the rumor being that they've dropped QUAKE III and licensed Havok technology (also used in WARCRAFT III) to depict realistic physics properties. Take off your shoes and pull up a chair, it's going to be a while.

Obi-Wan

Finally, a small sliver of hope for us game-starved gamers. LucasArts said that QEI-WAN may make it out this year. Yay! Then they also said, "Until next year early you may also wait." Dreat! Memo to LucasArts: Stop letting Yoda answer the phones.

Loose Cannon

Another title from Digital Anvil. Tony Zurovich, the man behind the CRUSADER NO REMORSE series, is also behind LOOSE CANNON, a game which combines driving and first-person-shooter action. Digital Anvil is currently taking a step back and retooling the game to make sure it still looks current when it ships late next year, and possibly (much like DA's real-time strategy CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS) reevaluating its overall playability and fun factor.

Freelancer

This is the game Digital Anvil's Chris Roberts said he wanted to make when he was making Privateer—now, if we could figure out what movie he was trying to make when he made Wing Commander. While we don't think Roberts' reach extends his grasp, the scale of this space opera seems to be more of a challenge than the team anticipated—witness the dropping of the very ambitious multiplayer. This one looks like it will docking in the Fall of 2001.

—Mark Asher and Robert Coffey



15

December 1995

This issue saw the game design debut of a group calling itself Interplay Productions. Its first game, THE BARD'S



TALE, set new standards in role-playing games for atmosphere and dungeon design. Now, 15 years later, Interplay is the undisputed king of RPG publishing with the release of BALDUR'S GATE II. Our first impression of BG II Contender for one of the best RPGs of all-time. Check out the review and watch.

10

December 1990

WING

COMMANDER. Ah, we get all warm and tingly remembering the rush of a turning duel with a Kireeth cat-warrior.



What we had forgotten, before re-reading our review in this issue, was just how revolutionary its design was. It was the little things—like seeing your pilot's hand on-screen reacting to your own joystick movements; how training and the save-game function were integrated into the game's fiction; how the music changed dynamically to match the pace of the action. We'd also forgotten that we used to pay \$30 a pop for games. Dack.

5

December 1995

Speaking of big bucks—how about \$12 million? That's how much Origin led designer Chris Roberts spent making WING COMMANDER IV, our cover subject for this issue. As far as we know, that's still the all-time record for computer game budgets.



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ACTUAL GAME FOOTAGE



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GRAND PRIX 3

BY GEOFF CRAMMOND

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THE CGW PROFILE

Jason Hall

Monolithic Chief may be world's largest geek

SANITY, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, the LithTech engine being licensed all over—you guys are on a roll!

I'd like to believe that, but I really think that this industry is cyclical and that it just happens to be that all of these events lined up in a way that makes it all seem very impressive.

You're like what? 7'2"? If you played id's John Carmack in basketball one-on-one, you'd destroy him, wouldn't you?

Actually, I'm 6'8". You would think that if I played him one-on-one I would win, but actually, Carmack is so fast on the court that to even attempt to stop him from his drive to the hoop would result in me catching a pointy elbow to the eye—so I dare not!

If Carmack played you one-on-one in an IQ test, he'd destroy you, wouldn't he? We already competed in the 1994 U.S. Mental Olympics. In the finals, both he and I had to sit facing each other at an empty table with a drinking glass in the middle of it. The goal was to push the glass across the table into the other guy's lap with only the powers of our minds. We both failed to accomplish this. I guess we both need to work on our telekinetic skills. I consider it a draw.

What's with the hair? Extreme male-pattern baldness?

Hair is for women, or men who can't bench press more than 300 pounds.

Why is LithTech so hot right now? How many

businesses have you sold?

Well, the quick answer is that

LithTech is hot because it saves developers time and money. We have sold a number of licenses. I think we have only publicly announced around 15. I may be wrong on that, though...

Your strength is legendary. Is it true that you threatened to bench-press a reviewer after a bad BLOOD 2 review?

No. I never threatened anybody. I was at home with my girlfriend that night! Those are some pumped-up charges! I'm innocent, I tell you!

Does your girlfriend play games?

Sure—but that could get very x-rated and probably isn't appropriate for public discussion.

SHOGO and BLOOD 2 were disappointing. What happened?

SHOGO and BLOOD 2 did well in their overall game reviews (SHOGO more so than BLOOD 2), but the sales of each product were less than spectacular to be sure. As for what happened, it was probably a combination of factors like timing, competition, etc. We'll do better next time!

Ice T did the voiceover for SANITY. What was he like?

Cool guy. Very mellow. A much more knowledgeable and thoughtful person than you would expect. He's very creative.

What's this TEX ATOMIC game?

TEX ATOMIC'S BIG BOY BATTLES is for Real Networks' Real.com Games. When it's complete, the game will be available as a free download to demo under 5MB. The full version is scheduled for an internet release during the first quarter 2001. Electronic software distribution will be a growing trend in the future, and TEX ATOMIC'S BIG BOY BATTLES marks the beginning of our effort to produce incredibly fun commercial-quality games that are of the appropriate size and cost for consumers.

How do you make a game that appeals to both the hardcore gaming crowd and a mainstream audience?

Generally speaking, you don't.

They're very different groups with different expectations.

levels. You can shoot for one—I choose markets and put in some elements that may attract members from the other—but it's a tough goal to achieve. Very few games have ever been able to appeal to both the hardcore and mainstream crowds.

What's down the road for Monolith?

Expect to see more of a push toward console development. Of course we will maintain our PC competency, but you can expect strong growth from us in the console area.

—Interview by Mark Asher

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Game	CGW	Gameplay only	Graphics	Sound/Interface	Average
Dark Reign 2	B+	B-	A	A-	B+	C	B+
Dogs Of War	F	C	*	D-	C-	D-	D+
Earth 2150	B+	A	*	A-	B+	B+	A-
Enemy Engaged:							
Comanche vs. Hekum	A+	A	*	A-	A	B-	A
Evolve	B-	B	B-	C	B	C	B-
Icewind Dale	A	A+	B+	A-	A-	B+	A-
KISS: Psycho Circus	C	B-	B+	C	C+	C	B-
Klingon Academy	B+	B	C	*	C+	B-	C+
Metal Fatigue	C	C+	B-	B	C+	B-	B-
Warlords: Battletory	B+	A-	A	B	B+	B+	A-

* indicates game has not been rated

And the Winner Is... ENEMY ENGAGED: COMANCHE VS. HEKUM, showing us that while the genre may be fading, it's not going down without a fight. Note that the high marks tend to go either to interesting real-time strategy games, or to the less RPG of the pack. Action games didn't seem to score as well, and while opinion on KLINGON ACADEMY was a bit spread out, everyone agreed on the dog that was DOGS OF WAR.

Shopping Online?

■■■ Being lazy isn't always wrong. Consider online shopping: Sure, it's more fun to hag your game in a software store, but do you really want to spend hours looking for parking, waiting in line, and then paying full price for a game you could buy in 10 minutes for less? It's far easier to order online.

Online shopping is fast, safe, and relatively cheap. There are probably 25 good sites to choose from, most of which will deliver overnight if you pay the extra shipping. You always know if the game is in stock, you can leisurely shop for the best price, and there's plenty of information on many of the sites to help with your decision. Compare this with the strug you'll get from the sales clerk who only downloads Mac wares.

Fight Back With CGW

We wanted to find out who had the best price and service online, so we decided to put eight e-tailers to a real-world test (see chart). We ordered two games (DIABLO II and MADDEN 2001) from all eight within a one-hour period on Friday, September 8th. We opted for the standard or default delivery, which usually meant USPS Priority or UPS Ground.

Most of the sites sent an email confirmation and shipped the game promptly. We got all of our games within five working days of the order, except for the deliveries from EBworld and Egghead. EBworld took issue with the billing address on our credit card. After sorting it out with them over the phone, we got the game two weeks after the order date. Egghead captured our customer information but failed to record the order, so we dropped them from the list.

Most of the sites charge about the same amount, usually \$40-50 for major new releases. There were some standouts, though. DIABLO II was \$10 less from Compuexpert than on most other sites—it happened to be the "48 Hour Madness" special that Compuexpert was running that day. (Other Madness specials have offered BATTLEZONE 2 for \$9.90 and

THE SIMS for \$14.90.) Compuexpert even threw in a free game.

Shipping fees are also a factor. Most sites charged us \$4-5 for standard delivery within a week.

Outpost.com is the big standout here, with free overnight delivery. This meant Saturday delivery in our case—you can't beat that. They aren't the cheapest, but their prices are roughly the same as most other sites. And once you factor in the free shipping, Outpost.com becomes extremely attractive.

Barnes&Noble and Compuexpert delivered by the next working day (Monday). They both charged about the same, but Compuexpert has the edge because they guarantee two-day shipping via Fed-Ex for only \$4.

Eight online game stores take the CGW challenge

Making the Grade

But there's more to a site than price and delivery. The organization and presentation of game-related content is also important, as is the quality of the information available. Amazon leads the field with the best site design and the best game information, complemented by tons of reader reviews. Edworld is also excellent and easy to navigate. At the other end of the spectrum, Chips & Bits is outdated and jumbled, but features all of the content from Computer Games Magazine to peruse.

All of these sites will meet your needs, but we recommend Amazon, Outpost, and Compuexpert for the reasons stated above. If you know what you want, order your game from Outpost for the fastest delivery or Compuexpert for the lowest price. If you want to browse games leisurely, and perhaps buy other things like books or DVDs, Amazon can easily swallow an afternoon, but they'll meet all your needs.

Before you place your order, be sure to check the returns policy—most e-tailers will only refund your purchase if it remains unopened or if the CDs are defective. Some sites require that you send the discs to the publisher for replacement. A few sites, such as BN, will allow you to exchange a game you didn't like for another one.

One last note: Before you start shopping, you might want to check the range of prices at price-grabber.com or comparison-shop. Unfortunately, not all the above sites show up. If you're not sure if a game has come out, drop by gonegold.com to find out the latest word.

Happy hunting.

Rating the Online Game Sellers

	Price	Speed/S&H*	Site quality	Overall
Amazon	3	4	5	4
Barnes & Noble (bn.com)	2	4	4	3
Buygpcsoft.com	4	3	3	3
Chips & Bits (cdmag.com)	4	3	2	3
Compuexpert.com	5	4	4	4
Electronics Boutique (ebworld.com)	3	2	5	3
Outpost.com	2	5	4	4

Rated on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best. *Speed of delivery, considering how much we paid for shipping.

read.me

Season on the Brink

CGW picks the **Top 10** games for the **holiday season**

■■■ The times, they are a-changing. Five years ago, the onset of the PlayStation, Nintendo 64, and the ill-fated Sega Saturn meant nothing but good things for PC gamers, as every console game developer scrambled towards the only stable platform around.

The situation couldn't be more different in the year 2000. Given the PlayStation 2's anticipated success—despite Sony's ability to ship only half the projected number of units by launch—PC and console developers alike are shifting their focus away from the PC to the theoretically greener pastures of the Sony, Sega, and even the Microsoft console platforms.

Even retailers appear to be console-based. When asked what they would sell a customer seeking an out-of-stock PlayStation 2, managers at a San Francisco consumer software store didn't even flinch. "We'd probably push them towards a Dreamcast," they commented. "It's too hard to get PC games working, and Sega has better games right now."

Ironically, this year should see one of the strongest, most diversified collections of PC games in the last five years. Will this year's hatch of A-list games be enough to recapture the waning attention of game developers? Considering the two-year development cycles on most PC games, and next year's influx of the Xbox and Nintendo's Game Cube, we may have to wait until 2002 to know for sure.

For now, judging by CGW's projected best-seller list for the holiday season, the present day looks pretty spectacular. And by itself, that's a strong, positive sign for PC gamers. —George Jones

Projected Holiday Winners

- 1. Diablo II**
Blizzard reigns supreme...again.
- 2. Who Wants To Be a Millionaire 2**
Unfortunate but true. Regis' global domination continues.
- 3. The Sims**
Everyone who hasn't sinned will.
- 4. The Sims: Livin' Large**
Everyone addicted to THE SIMS will have to have it.
- 5. Baldur's Gate II**
The original sold a million games; the sequel can't do much worse.
- 6. Crimson Skies**
Proof that air-based action games—especially unique ones—still sell.
- 7. Frogger 2**
Don't underestimate the power of retro-games. And don't forget about Hasbro's new PAC MAN title.
- 8. C&C: Red Alert 2**
Even the mediocre reception of C&C 2 won't dampen Westwood's sales.
- 9. Combat Flight Simulator 2**
Microsoft knows how to sell the FLIGHT SIMULATOR franchise.
- 10. Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force**
Hut-cutes! Hut-cutes! A Star Trek game makes good.

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For a free demo, check out www.gamevoice.com

THIS MONTH'S TOP 10 PREORDERS



Escape from Monkey Island (LUCASFILM)
The first Monkey Island 3D graphic adventure game, with all the humorous antics and addictive gameplay of the first three installments.



Black & White (ELECTRONIC ARTS)
Complex in detail, graphically gorgeous, with free-flowing, individualized play. Already voted one of the games that will change gaming forever.



Tribes 2 (GIGAWATT STUDIOS)
No armchair generals need apply, since the action in Tribes 2 promises to be so fast, you'll need your wits about you before you charge into the fray.



Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor (SIEMEN STUDIOS)
Not your run-of-the-mill, lesser role-playing game. Has a cooperative multiplayer mode and a good deal of character development interaction.



NBA Live 2001 (ELECTRONIC ARTS)
The most visually appealing basketball game on the PC. Enhanced franchise mode lets you assume the role of a general manager.



Everquest: The Scorn of Velious (SIEGENT INTERACTIVE)
This 2nd expansion is designed for mid- to high-level players, and features new areas, new enemies, new treasures, and an improved interface.



4x4 Evolution (GIGAWATT STUDIOS)
A 4x4 racing game that's all about rough-and-tumble off-road 4x4 racing. Features an interesting cross-platform multiplayer option.



Battle of Britain (DAVE 2 ENTERTAINMENT)
Dramatic with all the details of the vital air campaign over England in 1940, with literally thousands of pilots and statistics to boot.



Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (LUCASFILM)
Follow the adventures of the young Obi-Wan as he learns the ways of a Jedi knight and the awesome power of the Force.



Half-Life: Counterstrike (SIEMEN STUDIOS)
This mod is now the newest game for Half-Life! Join a terrorist or anti-terrorist assault squad and play hostage rescue, assassination, or just blast the enemy!

THIS MONTH'S TOP 10 RELEASES



Star Trek: Voyager: Elite Force (GIGAWATT)
An outstanding first-person shooter that pits the Voyager crew against Klingon scavengers, the Borg menace, and other sinister forces.



Crimson Skies (INTERACTIVE)
An air combat game set in the 1930s with slick, tricked-out prop aircraft, a nutty pulp-fiction storyline, and a '30s-era Big Band/swing soundtrack.



Rainbow Six: Cover Ops Essentials (GIGAWATT)
This is a stand-alone mission pack that includes new levels as well as historical information about counterterrorism from 1970 to the present.



Madden NFL 2001 (EA GAMES)
With much improved graphics, this game offers the most complete online football experience available, as well as scrimmage and ranking modes.



NASCAR Heat (NASCAR HEADRUSH)
A thoroughly immersive and brutally honest driving experience. Even running practice laps or chasing the pole is worth the price of the game.



The Sims: Livin' Large (ELECTRONIC ARTS)
More character skins, more career paths, more home furnishings, and more of the original game's quirky, sarcastic humor.



Dukes of Hazard: Racing for Honor (GIGAWATT INTERACTIVE)
Fans of the '70's TV show will enjoy this one, where the adventures of the Dukes of Hazard are turned into a mission-based driving game.



Homeworld: Defiance (SIEMEN STUDIOS)
The beautiful graphics, top-notch sound, and 3D play mechanics of the best Homeworld remain intact, but now enhanced by deeper gameplay.



Star Trek: New Worlds (INTERACTIVE)
Witness colony life at the most fundamental level as you go on missions that require you to build colonies capable of making vehicles and structures.



Pezzer General III: Scorch'd Earth (INTERACTIVE)
Your skill and experience as a tank commander is tested in the armored warfare of the Eastern Front campaign of World War II.

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Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Midtown Madness 2

Microsoft's arcade-style racing game is fantasy role-playing at its best: driving in San Francisco with no traffic or SUVs or masses taking on cell phones. But where's Pac Bell Park and the CGW building?



Baldur's Gate II



DIABLO II and ICEWIND DALE were just appetizers for the marvellous feast is BALDUR'S GATE II. This RPG has the word "epic" written all over it, and quite a few CGW staffers have been seen dicking around Chapter Two, which means we still have, oh, about 120 hours of gameplay left.

Homeworld: Cataclysm

The original game was probably more respected than played around the CGW offices, but the highly original missions and gorgeous spacescapes of the follow-up has hooked more than one space cadet in staff.



Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force



An exciting, fun, polished first-person shooter with all the subtlety of a Star Trek episode and more depth than any movie-licensed game. Examine you into the world of pretty-boy Neelix, and - believe it or not - make it cool to be a Trekie.

Unreal Tournament: Strike Force

Just when we thought it was safe to shove UT, the mad game along and smothered half our staff. Borrowing the best elements from ROGUE SPEAR and HALF-LIFE, STRIKE FORCE combines real-world weapons with some great level design, creating an addictive tactical sim. Don't say we didn't warn you.



It's an earth-shaking month here in the Top 40. The sense of order, continuity, and predictability that has ruled our lives has been ripped apart by DIABLO II displacing HALF-LIFE at #1. Ye gods! It's been over a year since we've seen anything but HALF-LIFE on top - what does this mean? It means Blizzard has done it again.

Most of the other changes are minor, with the exception of two superb add-ons that made their debut this month: THE CONQUERORS and CATAclysm. Both are worth your time and money. CRIMSON SKIES and BALDUR'S GATE II just missed this poll, so watch for them next month.

Rank	Game	CGW Rating
1	2 Diablo II Havas	5
2	1 Half-Life Havas	5
3	6 StarCraft: Brood War Havas	5
4	3 Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (Brazil)	5
5	4 Unreal Tournament Epic/UT	5
6	7 Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear Red Storm	4.5
7	5 Baldur's Gate Interplay	4
8	8 The Sims Electronic Arts	5
9	12 Homeworld Havas	4.5
10	8 Quake III Arena Aethylen	3.5
11	13 Deus Ex Edos	3.5
12	22 Final Fantasy VII Edos	4.5
13	- Age of Empires II: The Conquerors Mowalt	4
14	11 Half-Life: Opposing Force Havas	3.5
15	23 Heroes of Might & Magic III 3CD	4.5
16	18 Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri Firaxis	5
17	29 Icewind Dale Interplay	4.5
18	24 Fallout 2 Interplay	4
19	16 Planescape: Torment Interplay	5
20	31 Final Fantasy VIII Edos	2
21	17 System Shock 2 Electronic Arts	4.5
22	15 Thief: The Dark Project Edos	4.5
23	25 Thief 2 Edos	4.5
24	32 Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast Interplay	4
25	27 SimCity 3000 Electronic Arts	4
26	15 Grim Fandango LucasArts	4.5
27	21 Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed Electronic Arts	4.5
28	28 Rainbow Six: Covert Ops Red Storm	4.5
29	25 Roller Coaster Tycoon Hasbro	4
30	33 MechWarrior 3 Hasbro	3
31	34 Worms Armageddon Hasbro	4
32	- Homeworld: Cataclysm Havas	5
33	28 Command & Conquer: Tibetan Sun Electronic Arts	4
34	14 Soldier of Fortune Activation	2.5
35	39 Freespace 2 Interplay	4.5
36	35 Age of Empires: Rise of Rome Microsoft	4
37	- Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade 3CD	4.5
38	40 Dungeon Keeper II Electronic Arts	4.5
39	- Caesar III Havas	4.5
40	37 Shogun: Total War Electronic Arts	4.5

WE WANT YOU!

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.

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joins the galactic war with fighters, carriers and twice the missiles.

Meanwhile the Organians have returned, orchestrating the rise of the
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pipeline

BLACK & WHITE: Was set to debut sometime in November, just in time for gamers to give thanks to Ubisoft for producing such a unique genre. But a combination of development issues and the overcrowding of the market made Ubisoft push the release to next Spring.



Black & White

Escape From Monkey Island

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND: Must be in the home stretch, because LucasArts has released the demo, and for that, that's a fair indication that the game is almost done.

STARWARS SAN: While the game itself is still on-track for its spring 2001 release, the multiplayer is lagging a bit.



Software development is an inexact science, so pinning down release dates is like predicting Madonna's next persona. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgpipeline@ziffdavis.com.



Crutcher has delayed their multiplayer test in order to tighten the network code.

DEFIANT: CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE: The physics engine is the focus of the Mythos team for DEFIANT. That is, they're focusing on integrating the physics engine into that good ol' X-COM-style gameplay. They officially pushed the release date to ensure Easter of next year.

WARSOW VI: They're still going. The game is in the late stages, and is about to enter the "polishing" stage. They still don't

have a publisher, though.

X-COM: ALIENSE: Without saying why, Hasbro announced that this formerly winter release is now a spring 2001 release. Our guess is that the artificial intelligence is probably the culprit.

STAR WARS CHRONICLES VOLUME 1: ELUSTI PAIR: Even though the NOSTALGIC engine was adjusted to no longer require a Gryo computer, this game still runs on the rocky side.



SWAT 3: Elite Edition

SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION: This should be out by the time you're reading this, which means that owners of the original SWAT 3 should be able to download the enhancements. Either way, you can finally take on mission with some buddies, thanks to the multiplayer additions.

4x4 Evolution EA	Winter 2001	Biker Sprints: Motorhead Deluxe	Winter 2001	Protections EA	March 2001
Jefferson Model's Miss EA	Winter 2001	Engine Earth Clara	Spring 2001	Republic: The Revolution EA	Winter 2001
ARCAD: Assassins EA	Summer 2001	Escape From Monkey Island LucasArts	Winter 2000	Fast Reaction THQ	Spring 2001
Ace McCloud's Freedom		Patrol Tactics: Brothers in Steel Interplay	Spring 2001	Fakers & Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000
Final Destination: Bad Streets	December 2000	Pyll II EA	Winter 2000	Flaw EA	November 2000
Assassin Sony	February 2001	Freedom Force Sierra	Winter 2001	HW: Survival Sun EA	Spring 2001
5-17 Flying Fortress EA	Winter 2000	ARCAD: Freelancer Microsoft	Fall 2001	Sea, Wags & Cats EA	Winter 2000
Battlestar: Midwinter THQ EA	December 2000	Galactic Commander Deluxe 2000 EA	Summer 2001	Setters in Blue Sony	November 2000
Battle Isle: The Android War EA	Fall 2000	Gladius: Gladius Interplay	Winter 2000	ARCAD: Sid Meier's Civilization II EA	August 2001
Battle Isle: Outpost EA	Spring 2001	HW: Grand Central: Dark Conspiracy Sierra	Winter 2000	Star Meiner's Obsidian EA	Winter 2001
Battle of Britain EA	Winter 2000	Jack EA	January 2001	Stargate Microsoft	Fall 2001
Battle: Heroes Drive Activision	Summer 2001	Juggernaut 4 SSI	Spring 2001	Steel: Hunter II SSI	Summer 2001
ARCAD: Black & White EA	March 2001	ARCAD: Mission: Code 47 EA	December 2000	Sumville EA	Spring 2001
Black Witch Project (a) EA	Winter 2000	ARCAD: Lord of the Rings II: Winter Interplay	Winter 2000	HW: Survival: Dog EA	Summer 2001
Blade: The Edge of Power & Reflection	Winter 2000	IL-2 Sturmovik: Rise Sony	Spring 2001	Speed: Leader EA	Winter 2000
ARCAD: Bob Barker's Bobbly EA	Feb. 2001	I'm Killing It EA	November 2000	StrikeWings EA	December 2000
Clear Command: War Back EA	Winter 2000	Legends of Might & Magic 100	Winter 2000	HW: Star Trek: Bridge Commander Activision	December 2000
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	ARCAD: Lanza EA	Fall 2001	Star Wars Episode I: The Force LucasArts	Winter 2000
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 EA	November 2000	Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art of Magic EA	Spring 2001	Star Wars Online EA	Winter 2001
ARCAD: Command & Conquer: Escape From EA	Winter 2001	HW: Republic EA	Summer 2001	Summer: 1933	Spring 2001
Commander 2 EA	November 2000	HW: Mass Payne EA	December 2001	Team Fortress 2 EA	Fall 2001
ARCAD: Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Winter 2000	MedCommander 2 Microsoft	Summer 2001	The World Is Not Enough EA	Winter 2000
Destroyer Command EA	Winter 2000	MedMoria 4 EA	Winter 2000	That'll Be EA	Winter 2001
Drive In 2 EA	Winter 2001	Motor City Deluxe Deluxe EA	Spring 2001	Three 00 EA	Winter 2000
ARCAD: Double D: Escape EA	Spring 2001	Mutator EA	Spring 2001	know: Tides 2 EA	Winter 2000
Danger's Line: 30 EA	April 2001	ARCAD: World of Warcraft	Spring 2001	Topdog EA	March 2001
ARCAD: Deserted: Desert: From Sony EA	May 2001	WormWar: Revenge & Storm	Spring 2001	WormWar II EA	Summer 2001
ARCAD: Duke: Return From EA	Summer 2001	WormWar: Elites Interplay	Summer 2001	Wizards of Waverly EA	Spring 2001
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	August 2001	Yo, Dis Live: From EA	December 2000	Wizards: Spellweaver EA	Winter 2000
Deliver: Roberts	Winter 2000	ARCAD: 04 EA	January 2000	ARCAD: X-COM: Alliance EA	Spring 2001
		Psi 04 EA	Winter 2000		

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TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

In light of Lara's recent disappearance, those closest to her gather together at the Croft Estate on a gray, rainy day for a memorial service in her honor. Afterwards, the friends sit quietly together in the study of the Croft Mansion and provide new insights about Lara's past exploits that have until now remained a secret...





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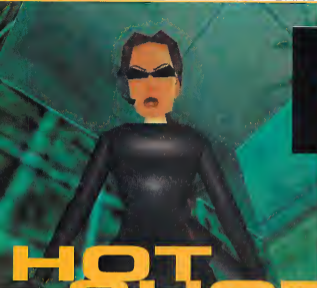


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Tomb Raider Chronicles

■■■■ You know those TV shows toward the end of the season, when the producers combine a bunch of "best of" clips because the writers ran out of ideas? That's about the same feeling you'll get in **TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES**, where the "present day" Lara has disappeared, so all you can do is play the flashbacks. Fortunately, these are all-new settings, like a Russian U-boat, Rome, and a

leached-out futuristic city, and Lara will have access to some brand-new weapons, including a sniper rifle

and chloroform. *Chronicles* will also include a level editor, so you'll be able to design your own levels if you don't like the ones in the game.

As to where Ms. Croft has disappeared, rest assured that all will be revealed in a future episode of the game...or perhaps in *Angelina Jolie's* upcoming *Tomb Raider* movie. (www.eldos.com)

HOT SHOTS

II-2

Sturmovik

■■■■ With Microsoft's superiority in the silicon skies, only the Russians would be crazy enough to take them on. Fortunately for us, that's just what they're doing. A Russian development group called 1C:Madbox Games has dusted off the I-2 Sturmovik "flying tank" Russia used to defend itself against Germany in WWII, and they're using it as the centerpiece in a painstakingly detailed sim that focuses on the long-overlooked Eastern Front.

STURMOVIK ("stormer") looks almost as good as Microsoft's **COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2**, and boasts as many features. Madbox promises excellent flight dynamics, scalable difficulty levels, and personalized paint schemes and nose art. You'll be able to fly 17 different aircraft and dogfight with up to 32 players, as well as take the rear-gunner position of the I-2. To reflect the plane's close-in ground support role, a large number of ground- and naval-attack missions will be included. Watch for the stormer coming in fast and low next spring.

(www.bluebyte.com)





Sammy Sosa's High Heat 2002

It's a little bit late for the end of the 2000 Major League season, but it's not too early for our first look at the new iteration of our favorite computer baseball game. *High Heat 2002* promises some significant improvements to the best baseball game ever, including an enhanced graphics engine, animated base coaches, play-by-play commentary, conferences on the mound, a new pitcher's mound, and an enhanced user interface. As usual, we can't wait. Coming next spring. www.2k.com



Links 2001

LINKS 2001 is a wholesale upgrade to the respected LINKS franchise, most notably in its beautifully enhanced graphics engine. Everything from golfer animations to satellite green surveys have been updated and improved. But hardcore golf nuts will be most impressed by the full-featured – yet easy-to-use – Arnold Palmer Course Designer Architect included with the game. For more info, go to www.microsoft.com/games/links2001/.



Microsoft Train Simulator

As anachronistic as they may seem in our frantic jet-and-Internet age, the romance of the rails still evokes a powerful lure. Witness the popularity of Stephen Ambrose's *Nothing Like It In The World*, describing the transcontinental railroad—#1 on the NY Times non-fiction list for the last three weeks.

MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR is the most ambitious attempt yet to recreate the experience of riding the rails. You can take the controls of nine different trains – from steam locomotives and modern diesels to high-speed "bullet trains" – and operate them the way an engineer would, or enjoy the views as a passenger or bystander. Microsoft is laying 600 miles of track from around the world to depict the scenery and towns of six famous routes, and editing tools will let model railroaders build any route they desire. Listen for that whistle blown' next Spring.



Ancient Enemies, Frozen

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- * Full version of either EverQuest or Ruins of Kunark required.



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Wastes, & New Adventures



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RUEFUL DECISION Things might not have worked out so nicely if the Luftwaffe kept attacking the RAF Battle of Britain.

Battle of Britain

MIG ALLEY follow-up hits closer to home by Gordon Berg

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." —Winston Churchill

More appropriate words were never spoken in describing how the RAF defeated the Luftwaffe above the skies of England. On the brink of destruction and with the fate of a nation hanging in the balance, the overwhelmingly outnumbered pilots of the RAF dashed Hitler's hopes of invasion. This year marks the Battle of Britain's 60th anniversary, and Rowan Software wants you to relive that storied struggle.

With 13 years' experience in the simulation business—and being British—the folk at Rowan feel they can do justice to the most famous air conflict of all time. If the preview build I've

been flying is any indication, **BATTLE OF BRITAIN (BOB)** will do justice and then some, surpassing even the quality of last year's Sim of the Year, Rowan's **MIG ALLEY**.

It can only be a good thing that BOB will employ a modified MIG ALLEY engine that makes improvements in just about every facet. BOB will have better-looking terrain with an increased distance to the horizon, interactive 3D cockpits with functional switches and levers, and the introduction of 3D clouds into which planes can make their escape. But what will truly set BOB apart from its contemporaries will be the scale of battle. Some of the worst raids encountered by the British during the battle involved as many as 1,000 attacking planes,

GAME BY: ROWAN
GENRE: Simulation
RELEASE DATE: Q4 01
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
DEVELOPER: Rowan Software

Rowan's BOB will put those same numbers onto your computer screen! Even more amazing is how Rowan has pulled off believable AI behavior with this many planes in the air, without murdering the graphics frame-rate.

The Glorious Few

Five of the planes modeled in BOB will be player-flyable, and you'll also have the option to man individual gunner positions in the German bombers. The British aircraft include the famous Supermarine Spitfire and the true workhorse of the battle, the Hawker Hurricane. Although the Spitfire is the better known of the two, it was the Hurricane that shot down the lion's share of German aircraft in the conflict. For the Germans, you can fly the Me109, the twin-engine Me110, or the Ju87 Stuka dive-bomber. The hardcore crowd has long been acquainted with Rowan's dedication to providing phenomenally intricate and accurate flight models in their simulations, but BOB will offer a friendly arcade mode as well. With the option to customize all of the individual factors that compose the flight model and combat environment, those new to flight sims can provide themselves with greater challenges down the line.

Choose Your Battles

Although BOB is a historical sim, the campaign itself is dynamic and unpredictable—a different fate could be in store for the once-mighty British Empire. In 1940, the Luftwaffe nearly broke the back of the RAF to pave the way for invasion. If it wasn't for Hitler's insistence on bombing London instead of maintaining the continuous attacks against factories and airfields, the RAF might never have recovered. The campaign can be set to reflect this blunder by forcing the German forces to operate within the appropriate historical context; or, it can be lot looser of history's shackles, enabling you to wage war with the benefit of 60 years of hindsight.

Taking direct command of the war effort is a game unto itself. Those up to the challenge will be responsible for marshaling Britain's limited resources against the seemingly non-stop raids Germany launched against shipping lanes, radar towers, RAF airfields, and eventually London itself. Which raid is a "decoy" to draw up the precious few RAF fighters? How many planes do you send and to

UNDER-ACHIEVER The Ju87 Stuka was a terror over Poland, but ineffective in England.



UNDERSTUDY The Me-110 fighter was forced into a dive-bomber role to replace the Stuka.



GOING DOWN This guy is on the wrong end of the fight.



NERVE CENTER BOB's Operations Room, where all of the action unfolds in real-time, uses plotting tables with historically correct markers.



where? When do you let your weary pilots rest? As the Luftwaffe Commander, what will you do differently? Can you make the Stuka more effective? Is it truly possible to knock out Britain's early-warning network? Can you avoid repeating history?

Whether you're playing the role of the Commander or pilot, the campaign is played out in a real-time war room that comes alive with reports of potential raids and the calling out of likely targets and anticipated responses. Triggers can be set that determine when you fly on take off, once planes have reached the coast, once the enemy has been spotted, etc. Those of you who just want to fight can let the AI do all the tasking, freeing you to simply choose when you go up into the air. And in the air is where BOB will truly shine. Even in this late-alpha build of the game, it's obvious that this is a sim that lives up to the Rowan pedigree. Like MIG ALLEY before it, the dogfighting is just plain fun. The radio chatter gives the sim life, and the friendly and enemy AI fly so believably that you can't help but get sucked in.

Can I Have a Quickie?

Single missions will be included for those who don't have time for a full campaign. These encompass training missions as well as historic re-enactments—including the massive fuel raid on September 15th, 1940. These missions are also multiplayer-capable, in addition to the team-play and deathmatch multiplayer options.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN will have competition from two other WWII sims when released this holiday season. But given what I've seen of the work-in-progress, I've little doubt that BOB will hold its own against even the toughest odds, and deliver the finest hours of air combat we've seen in a good long while. **EW**

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Dragon's Lair 3D

Can an old hero rescue third-person action gaming?

by Robert Coffey



AS IT WAS, SO IT SHALL BE DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is looking many of its environments as seen from the original game. The recent hallway here is the new 3D version, minus the skulls that will be added later in the development cycle.



DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q2 01

PUBLISHER: Blue Byte Software

DEVELOPER: Dragontone Software

CONTACT: www.dragonslair3d.com



GLOOVY GHOULIE? No, that's a little baby, one of the monster control new toys the level team, now lovingly referred to as...



If Blue Byte can squeeze a couple slices of crappy pizza, a minimum-wage job, and a chain-smoking, mildly-psychotic girlfriend with an oddly beguiling lisp into the DRAGON'S LAIR 3D box, then I will declare that, *ya, venly*, these mortals have o'erleapt the swift running naves of time and space and have perfected time travel. No classic game updated for today's PC has come close to recapturing the giddy, quarter-popping frenzy of our arcade-haunted youth, but by recreating and reenvisioning its source material, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D seems poised to succeed where ASTEROIDS and CERTIFIDE 3D failed.

Blast Into Your Past

I first played DRAGON'S LAIR coin-op in a pizza joint on 8th Street, NYC, during lunch breaks from my grueling cashier job. Where were you?

With countless millions having played the original game in one of its many incarnations (arcade, console, DVD, PC, and a soon-to-be-released Color Gameboy version that has to be seen to be believed), DRAGON'S LAIR is one of the bricks in the foundation of our hobby. The first 50-cent arcade game, its film-quality cel animation made it the easiest game to find in the arcade—it was the one with a gaggle of onlookers crowding behind the player.

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is less of a sequel than a recreation. It opens with a minute of brand-new 2D animation by original animator Don Bluth, before morphing into the game's new 3D look as you guide your cartoonish avatar—returning-hero Dirk the Daring—into a forbidding castle to rescue Princess Daphne. As in the original, a pair of iron gates drop and heavy wooden doors slam shut behind you as the adventure begins.

Those slamming gates and doors are just the beginning of many familiar elements. Designers Dragontone Software have licensed several of the original rooms (and some of the talent—the texture artist was part of the original animation team 17 years ago) from the coin-op game in order to allow gamers to rediscover them. You'll drop down the same perilous tower

elevator, get blown down the same hallway as you try to pull Daphne from a monstrous hand, and battle the same Black Knight as you hop across the same checkered floor. Even though most of the 200 rooms will be new, this will be a game that will lean heavily on nostalgia to provide its enjoyment.

Playing in Teen

Part of that nostalgia comes from a faithful recreation of the game's 2D animated look. A sharp new 3D engine will bring colored lighting, a particle system, and more detailed Giddy Goons and Crypt Creeps to the party, but the whimsical look of the source game isn't being compromised. A toon-shading system inserts black lines on models' joints when they are bent, and anti-aliasing smoothes the characters' edges in order to maintain that hand-drawn look. As opposed to the hyper-realistic textures of other 3D games, the fanciful weathered woods and stonework of the coin-op game are being recreated using the original cells and concept art as guides. The cumulative effect is astounding—you actually feel as if you're controlling a cartoon.

But DRAGON'S LAIR 3D will be much more than a stroll down memory lane. For one thing, the gameplay will be opened up incredibly, offering players a full 3D world to explore and interact with. As in the original, danger will lurk just about everywhere. You'll have to dodge falling stalactites as you dart through a cavern flooding with black ooze, hopping from ledge to ledge to escape into a chamber where you must catapult yourself over jets of fire, then...well, you get the idea. The focus is on fast-paced, action/reaction gameplay.

Still, some of the game's lady-or-the-tiger, multiple-choice gameplay has been retained. For starters, one play option allows you to charge through pre-scripted sequences and make well-timed decisions, just as in the 1983 version. The core game will feature classic-feeling moments, such as a

GOING DOWN? The hot-rising elevator drop is one of the most licensed directly from the coin-op version of the game.

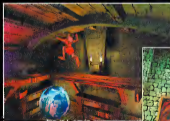


room where the exit is through one of three different caskets—finding the right one is a matter of luck. Most gamers will probably take advantage of the new save-anywhere system to store their game, so that they can try each coffin and treat themselves to the faithfully recreated "crumbling skeleton" death animations that helped to make DRAGON'S LAIR so endearing.

Along with a much more involved story, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is adding a crossbow with three types of arrows, new attack moves, and, most significantly, a magical amulet. The amulet will serve two functions. First, it will act as an online help system, gently prodding players in the right direction at crucial points in the game; second, it will bind the five magical "dragon essences" you'll gather, and store the mana required to power the essences. While you'll need all five essences to defeat the dragon at game's end, each of the essences will act as short-term powerups: The Dragon Scale protects you from fire, the Dragon Spirit makes you stronger, and the Flame Sword will ignite your blade and allow you to blast fireballs. Essences will not only help you fight, but will also be vital to progressing in the game, for instance, you'll need the Dragon's Wing to protect you from falling damage so that you can drop down a shaft to reach new parts of the castle.

With an enormous worldwide fan base, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D would seem to be a slam-dunk hit. There's only one stumbling block—publisher Blue Byte now sells games exclusively online. Keeping this game away from the eyes of less Net-savvy casual gamers browsing Wal-Mart or EBX is bound to deny them sales. But for those who seek it out online, DRAGON'S LAIR 3D just might be the freshest thing they've played since, well, since the first time they played it. **GGV**

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D seems poised to succeed where ASTEROIDS and CENTIPEDE 3D failed



LEAPING INTO THE 21st CENTURY
Over 200 mini-faces, 1000 polygons, and some nifty anti-aliasing let Dirk the Daring retain a smooth hand-drawn look as he courts in the new 3D environment.



A ROOM WITH A SERIOUSLY SCREWED-UP VIEW
Among new rooms in the castle is this scene, which lures parts of itself upside down every time you enter and exit.



REFUGEE FROM SCOOBY DOG
The droning zombie wailer may be new, but he retains the game's classic animated look.



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EYE CANDY *Myst III* will continue the series' tradition of creating rendered artwork, as seen in this shot of a gazabo.

Myst III: Exile

The most popular adventure game of all time is back for thirds by Raphael Liberatore

MYST was one of those rare gaming gems that captured the hearts of gamers and non-gamers alike, a genuine phenomenon that remains one of the top-selling PC titles of all time. After *RIVEN*, the somewhat disappointing sequel, the game's creators—Cyan's Rand and Robin Miller—made it clear that they were not interested in doing another *MYST* title. Broderbund was in a quandary. They knew they had a very successful franchise on their hands, but without the Miller brothers' supervision, they would have difficulty living up to *MYST*'s success. The search for another developer ensued, but only a handful of studios came close to meeting the challenge. Enter Presto Studios, the creators of the highly successful *JOURNEYMAN PROJECT* adventure game series.

The story of *MYST III: EXILE* is set 10 years after *RIVEN*. Atrus—the D'ni scribe who creates worlds from his magical linking books—and his wife Catherine have escaped the past

tragedies of *Myst* Island and now live peacefully with their newborn daughter in Tomahna. But their peace is quickly shattered when a mysterious new villain (played by actor Brad Dourif) arrives to exact vengeance on Atrus. As in the previous games, players must explore a series of mysterious and wondrous ages (five in all) to gradually uncover the

mystery of this new adversary.

Presto feels that *MYST III: EXILE* is a natural evolution of the series, not just a continuation. Unlike *RIVEN*, where puzzles and ages seemed illogical and confusing, *MYST III* returns to its roots. Puzzles are more focused and coherent, also, the game is more dynamic than linear, so players can move from age to age without feeling like they have to finish a particular

puzzle before jumping to the next age. More interestingly, unlike the original *MYST*, *EXILE* will feature

MYST III: EXILE

GENRE: Adventure • RELEASE DATE: Q2 01

PUBLISHER: Midway Interactive

DEVELOPER: Presto Studios

CONTACT: www.myst3.com

a number of different possible conclusions.

MYST III: EXILE features major upgrades to the series' graphics and technology. Presto is using a new real-time 3D

navigation engine, which allows players to pan a full 360-degrees in any direction. *MYST III* will have sound enhancements—including an orchestral soundtrack—and more movie footage, so you can expect to see more of Atrus (played by Reed Miller) and Catherine in the game. The net result is that the game's environments now feel more alive, without losing any of the artistic beauty or spirit of its predecessors. Should Presto actually pull this off without a hitch, *MYST* fans will have a lot to be excited about when the game ships next year. **COT**

NO MAN'S AN ISLAND Unlike *RIVEN*, all of *EXILE*'s live, unique ages will allow players to travel from one to the other in a non-linear fashion. Each environment allows for real-time movement and interaction — so no more of the click-and-pause of yesteryear.



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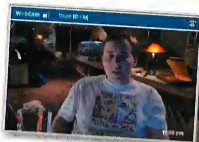
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Majestic

Knowledge is danger in the most startling game you've ever seen.

by George Jones

Let's get one thing straight—there's absolutely no way not to use hyperbole when describing MAJESTIC. So here goes: EA.com's top secret, web-enabled-in-secrecy, mystery project represents the most unique experience the computer gaming industry has seen since, well, since computer games themselves. No kidding.

We're talking about an experience that retools our hobby in an entirely different light, one that will change your conception of what a computer game can be, and will probably introduce scores of new gamers into the mix. After all, does your typical computer game character call you at home, screaming that they are in mortal danger? Does your typical game Instant Message you five times a day?

Pardon our French, but MAJESTIC is simply going to fuck with your head in ways you've never imagined. Decoded by Electronic Arts' VP Neil Young as a cross between The Game and X-Files, his brainchild sees a bizarre and effective combination of video, AI, the Internet, and real life to set your imagination ablaze, and as the process develops a character-rich story that is driven by the most powerful CPU around: your brain.

What Is MAJESTIC, You Ask?

At its core, MAJESTIC is a fairly straightforward adventure game. In fact, given the game's lack of fancy, newfangled visuals, you could easily consider the experience old-school gaming, with the exception that old-school games wouldn't carry on an elaborate conversation with you via AOL's Instant Messenger. And, you wouldn't make a long distance call to Oregon to solve a puzzle in an old-school game.

As Young tells it, MAJESTIC has three significant points of departure from standard adventure gaming:

1. **Relativity.** The relationship between gamer and game is fundamentally changed. Typically, games require you to come to them. MAJESTIC pushes itself to you. You might be sitting in your office and then get a phone call on your cell phone from one of the game's characters.

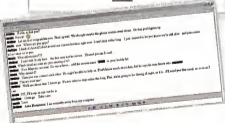
MAJESTIC
GENRE: Adventure • **RELEASE DATE:** Feb. 2001
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts **CONTACT:** www.ea.com



EA MAJESTIC with extensive first screenshots are based on screenshots. There is a full screenshot when accessed via EA.com. EA.com screenshots are copyright © EA.



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SAY YOU, SAY ME

Part of MAJESTIC's appeal lies in its use of making: captured webcam conversations, real tones that are sent to the player, and early file-like Instant Messenger conversations.

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Diablo II:

The Lord of Destruction

Blizzard should be under investigation by the DEA. Like a pusher on the corner handing out dope to the kiddies, Blizzard has been ruining lives and destroying marriages to the tinkling sounds of "click click click." But just as we were finally recovering from our severe DIABLO II addiction, just as our mousing fingers were beginning to heal, yes, even as we slowly worked our way through the Nightmare difficulty level yet again, Blizzard turns around and tells us "Hey man, we got some new primo stuff fo' ya." Should we check into Betty Ford now or just give up, take the DIABLO-stuffed pipe, and slowly inhale the heck-and-slash goodness within?

Yes, DIABLO II: THE LORD OF DESTRUCTION is coming. Evidently, Diablo's brother Beal is none-too-pleased that we've cleaved off 'red in two. While his namesake resides in biblical Israel (Beal was the pagan Canaanite god of pleasure and love; he even had temple prostitutes), this Beal has headed north into the Barbarian Highlands. His mission: Destroy the Worldstone. Apparently, this stone keeps the forces of hell out of the mortal realms, so in destroying it Beal and his minions would heat up a few of those northern ice cepe. Naturally, you'll have to stop them before they do anything rash; you'll have two new characters and a hoard of new weapons to help you along.

LORD OF DESTRUCTION is the 5th act in the play that is DIABLO II. Most of

What do you call an expansion for computerized crack? **by Alex Handy**



LEVEL: 10 **TYPE:** Expansion
GENRE: Role-Playing • **RELEASE DATE:** Q2 01
PUBLISHER: Blizzard **DEVELOPER:** Blizzard North
CONTACT: www.blizzard.com

EASTERN GIRL With a heavy Asian influence, the Assassin will be a martial arts powerhouse able to wield two weapons at once.

RENDER ME THIS Of course there'll be new cut-scenes to dazzle the eyes and ears.



LittleBunny_32 just **KICKED YOUR ASS**

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the action takes place in the frozen mountains to the north. In holding with the Barbarian theme of the region, maps will now include interactive environments such as siege engines and battlements. Joining you stop those battlements will be the two new character classes: The wily assassin, and the giant fur-clad Druid. The assassin spends her time learning shadow magic and building wickedly powerful traps; the Druid can shapeshift, call upon wild animals, and cast ice/wind (dale?) spells. The assassin is quite good with martial arts, and will be able to wield two weapons at once, while the Druid falls somewhere between the Necromancer and the Sorceress: lots of minions and lots of boom spells.

Of course, new characters require new weapons. While the Blizzard press release says that there will be thousands of new weapons, there will more likely be around 100 new weapons, magic effects, and enchantments—combining in various ways to make thousands of new combinations. And speaking of combinations, the Horadric Cube will have some nifty new combos as well. And, best of all, your stash will be bigger, so you can hold all these goodies in storage for a good long time.

Unfortunately, with Blizzard taking their time to build THE LORD OF DESTRUCTION, there's been no mention of a BattleNet overhaul. As of this writing, things online were still slowed to a crawl around 50% of the time. Let's hope Blizzard does a little updating of the server code while they're tinkering with the new expansion.

While there's no actual release date set, Blizzard North is hoping to finish DIABLO II: THE LORD OF DESTRUCTION before the halfway mark of 2001. Our thought on the matter: The sooner the better. Our hands are already starting to shake from withdrawal. Come on Blizzard, just one mo' hit. We really need it had, man. **CGW**

I COME TO SERVE

The Druid will be raising damn terror in the form of ice storms and grizzly bears. Deal break.



NICE... WINGS
One of the many new battles you'll have to contend with in the frozen north. Won't she get cold?

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The first rule of computer game sequels: You can't keep the Undead Hordes and the Damned down. No matter how thoroughly you crushed them under the heel of your mighty empire in the first game, they'll be back in any sequel. Strategy First's **DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY** brings back the aforementioned evil races, as well as the Mountain Clans and the Empire, for some turn-based strategic fun that plays a lot like the **HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC** series—but with enough unique elements to create its own brand of undead fun.


A decade has passed since the First Great War in the Sacred Lands. The game's storyline is different depending on which of the four races you choose to inhabit. The Empire is on the brink of civil war. The Mountain Clans have



TOWN RENOVATION Strategy First is giving **DISCIPLES II** a major graphics face-lift, including a switch to 800x600 resolution.

Disciples II: Dark Prophecy

Fight the undead again in the sequel to Strategy First's sleeper
by Mark Asher



assembled the runes to prevent the Ragnarok, but dissenting clans refuse the authority of the Cloudkeeper clans and prevent the unification of the rune wisdom. The Undead Hordes want to revive the defunct god Gelleon, who was slain by the god of the Mountain Clans. And the Damned must find a way to help Belzeem escape from where he's been imprisoned by the Empire. Whew!

The most noticeable difference in **DISCIPLES II** is the new 800x600 resolution. All the art and animations have been redone and the spell effects—one of the first game's high points—should be even more spectacular this time around.

We'll also see some new units, according to Lead Designer Danny Belanger: "We are adding 50% more units and buildings in the capitals," he said. "This will greatly increase the variety and the possible combinations in each race. There are actually around

38 units per race. We are adding about 50 new units in all, giving the player more choices and options when upgrading units. For example, players might develop an Elementalists, who summons in battle an air elemental, or the Doppelgänger, who can take any shape."

DISCIPLES II is adding content-specific triggers for surprise adventures and events. "There are multiple conditions that can trigger effects," Belanger explained. "Some possible conditions are: Move unit to location, move unit to location, destroy party, be in alliance, capture a city, etc. These can be combined in any way to trigger any effect: Give item, spell, cast spell, summon creature, and so on. An example of a triggered event might be that if the necromancer were killed, skeletons would no longer come out of the cemetery."

Neutral creatures in **DISCIPLES II** will also be more aggressive and may pursue the player's forces. The battle system will feature more attack options, and the capital cities that players upgrade to produce new and better units are being completely redone.

Strategy First is aiming for a Spring, 2001 ship date for **DISCIPLES II**, which will include 28 campaign scenarios and a number of stand-alone quests. Besides the single-player game, **DISCIPLES II** will support LAN, IPX, a gaming service network yet to be determined, and hotseat play. Maybe this time, we can finally toll those pesky Undeeds and Damned for good! **IGN**

DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY

GENRE: Strategy RELEASE DATE: Q2 01

PUBLISHER: Strategy First

DEVELOPER: Strategy First

CONTACT: www.strategyfirst.com

captain's log.



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Put down that damn cell phone and drive! *by Tom Price*

The term "4X4" may inspire thoughts of guys named Cletus tearing through muddy backwoods in a jeep filled with empty beer cans and Slim Jim wrappers, but a "hubba" game this is not. Instead of fallibles, think soccer-mom; instead of shotgun rack, think cell phone, instead of tearing through the dirt and mud in a powerful, big-tired, four-wheel-drive beast, think—no wait, think that. Because 4X4 EVOLUTION will have you going all-terrain in the newest and slickest SUVs on the market. 4Runners, Pathfinders, Xterras; over 50 SUVs and light trucks will be available to race in over 16 tracks. This ain't your inbred cousin's automobile.

But the most interesting thing about 4X4 EVOLUTION from Terminal Reality (makers of MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 1 and 2) falls under the "evolution" part of the name. Gathering of Developers is concurrently releasing the game for PC, Mac, and Dreamcast, and the cool part is, you'll be able to play cross-platform over the Internet, courtesy of Gamespy's "peer to peer" technology. So, say your buddy in Baltimore is a dyed-in-the-wool Macophile and your cousin in Colorado is a Red Bull-swilling console freak, and the three of you want to play an off-road racing game online against each other. Well, here's your game.

In fact, up to eight players (four, if the host machine is a Dreamcast) can play at once, and the game designers have plans for a work-wide, online ranking system. Cross-platform multiplayer gaming is looking like the wave of the future, with 4X4

EVOLUTION as one of the clear forerunners.

4X4 EVOLUTION's light trucks and SUVs are all fully-bonned, real-world vehicles. Makes and models include the Toyota 4Runner and Land Cruiser, Nissan Xterra and Pathfinder, Lexus RX 300, and more. Because of the licenses, the vehicles won't have external damage models (would someone tell me why car makers are so paranoid about letting games show their vehicles banged up? It happens, you know), but will take hits to the physics model if you damage your truck. The game will also allow you to create your own custom vehicles and paint jobs, if you're not satisfied with the ones that ship with the game.

The 16 tracks will take the player through various environments, from the Arctic to the Arizona desert. Terminal Reality is planning on including a track editor as well, which should extend the life of this game quite a bit—especially online. The tracks are set in very active worlds, full of moving scenery like

4x4 Evolution



RIDING OFF INTO THE SUNSET Graphically, this is a beautiful game that should look good no matter what platform it's on. The moving background objects are specific to the track (I bet you couldn't guess this was an Air Force base).



BIG AIR The suspension reacts realistically to having the ground drop out below it.



THAT'S NO WAY TO TREAT A LEXUS Sure, most Lexus SUV owners (OK, most SUV owners, period) wouldn't do this to their extremely expensive automobiles, but it is just a game...

hills and airplanes, as well as moving obstacles like bulldozers and other heavy equipment.

As a rule, off-road racers are hit or miss, but Terminal Reality has an excellent track record for this kind of game—they have the MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS titles under their belts. The dedication to online gaming, and the pro-gaming community flavor of 4X4 EVOLUTION are good signs that this title could be another monster hit. **CCC**

4X4 EVOLUTION
GENRE: Racing • **RELEASE DATE:** Q1 01
PUBLISHER: G.O.D.
DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality
CONTACT: www.terminalreality.com

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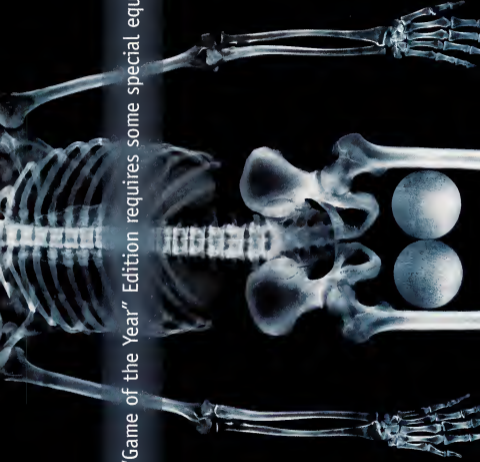


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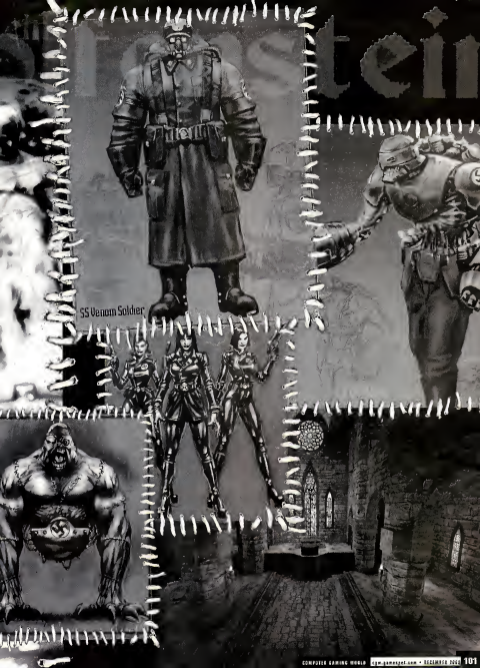
Number One With a Bullet

...and a Grenade.

... and a Flame-thrower

*A post-modern Prometheus brings
new life to the genre it spawned*

by Robert Coffey



SS Venom Soldier

RETURN TO CASTLE
WOLFENSTEIN

Genre: First-Person Shooter

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Gray Matter Studios

www.activision.com



DEAD ALIVE Evil means + creepy modeling = lots of zombies.



PRETTY POISON The leather Goddesses of Phobos have nothing on the wicked dominatrix Prostitutes of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN.

Pretenders to the throne are a dime a dozen, with store shelves packed with digital doorstops claiming to be the next DOOM, the next QUAKE, the next HALF-LIFE. These poseurs have yet to get it even close. So why should anyone care about a game claiming to be the next CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN? We've heard that "next" crap countless times already, right?

We should care because CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN is the game that started it all. Because the creators of WOLF, id Software, are deeply involved—even if they're not actually designing the game. Because after a lifetime of creating envelope-pushing, niche products like KINGPIN and REDNECK RAMPAGE, Gray Matter Studios (formerly Xatrix) has the time, support, and drive to shoot for the big time and apply their personal brand of evil genius to a certifiable A-list title.

Two years and counting after HALF-LIFE, and the single-player shooter bar is about to get raised again.

All Action, All the Time

If Gray Matter wants you to know one thing about RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, it is this: The focus is *stuck on fast, hard-hitting action, every step of the way.* From the first chaotic moments straight through the final showdown, the designers are creating the kinds of memorable moments that scar themselves into your memory, the kind of unforgettable slabs of riveting gameplay that lead to reverential rereadings years later—think “Knee Deep in the Dead” from DOOM, think of HALF-LIFE’s “Surface Tension,” think of virtually every step of the original WOLFENSTEIN. With a game this revered, this high-profile, the pressure is on Gray Matter and they are determined to rise to the challenge.

Skeptical? Then imagine this: You’ve jumped in a landing craft with other soldiers, surging to shore through pounding surf. The door drops and you and your squad storm the beach, slopping through water toward a shore that seems ever more distant with each whirling mortar shell. One of those mortars hits the man next to you, killing him just as he reaches one of the many barbed-wire traps lining the beach. You push on, starting for cover, eventually reaching the towering structure carved out of the cliffside. Mowing down hordes of godless Nazis, you finally infiltrate the base and recover the top-secret codebreaking machine you were sent after. One problem, however—your tape is hacked by the new troops warning the beach from an ill-fated landing craft. Thank God you cleared out that rubble first and can now turn the gun against this new threat.

And this nonstop charge into the maw of war is, quite literally, the very beginning of the game. It’s just the tip of an iceberg that runs through the twisting alleyways and crumbling homes of

LAYING PIPE It looks nice, but honestly the game will find a way to turn up the nuclear screw.

ID AS SUPEREGO

■ So what the hell does “significantly involved” really mean? If id Software isn’t actually making the follow-

up to their little baby of mehen, CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, then what is the scope of their role — what defines their “significant involvement”?

According to

Greeme Devine of id, it means that Gray Matter and id are being very cooperative on virtually every aspect of the game, “from how hard the first mission is, to the placement of weapons.” Characters, level design, story — every game element is shot over to id for their input (which runs from specific suggestions to a simple “try something else”), and then is revised accordingly before being implemented. id enjoys veto power over any idea.

So is RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN the next game from id? Nope — that would be DOOM. But id does consider RETURN to be the next id game — it’s their franchise line, after all. It’s a pretty fine hair they’re splitting there, but it does make sense: id’s stake in RETURN is very personal if not practical, hence all that “significant involvement.” Given how obviously close the WOLF series is to their heart, it speaks volumes about the degree of confidence they have in Gray Matter’s ability to create a game true both to the spirit of the franchise, and to the demanding standards of the company that originally created it.

“Two years and counting after HALF-LIFE, and the single-player shooter bar is about to get raised again.”

Big Unanswered Questions About RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

[1] WILL HITLER APPEAR? We don't know for sure, but we'd be shocked if he didn't make a cameo at the very least. He does appear in numerous portraits hanging throughout the levels.

[2] SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT MULTIPLAYER? Yes, if only because Gray Matter does. They won't say anything specific about multiplayer beyond the fact that the presence of several hardcore multiplayer fans on staff guarantees a multiplayer element.

[3] WHAT IS THE STORY ABOUT? Gray Matter swears the huge plot will have several twists and turns, but isn't saying much more than it involves Nazis, the occult, and genetic experimentation and will be told through brief cut-scenes and overheard dialogues.

[4] WILL I BE ABLE TO COMMAND OTHER SOLDIERS? While other soldiers will fight alongside you, the designers haven't decided if or how much you'll be able to control them.

[5] WHEN WILL IT SHIP? No set date, just when it's ready.

Big Answered Questions About RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

[1] WILL THERE BE SECRET AREAS? While you won't have to go around slapping the space bar every step of the game, there will be lots of secrets in homage to the original game.

[2] WILL BOSSES REQUIRE YOU TO PUMP EVERY BULLET YOU HAVE INTO THEM? While bosses will need to take a beating to die, you'll have to use your wits to beat them as well. For example, one boss is vulnerable only while using a powerful smelter to direct lightning at you.

[3] WILL RETURN SET NEW STANDARDS OF GORE? No. You'll be able to gib enemies, but there won't be any pain skulls, hit location, or limb loss.

[4] WILL I EVENTUALLY JUST USE ONE BIG WEAPON ALL THE TIME? No. Enemies will be vulnerable to certain weapons, invulnerable to others. For example, the flame-thrower-wielding Venom Soldier can't be torched, but can be shot. Or blown up. Or just kicked to death.

[5] WHAT KINDS OF ENEMIES CAN BE EXPECTED? All sorts and lots of them. The game will start you off with various sorts of soldiers; then, as the genetic/occult plot unfolds, you'll come up against a wide variety of failed experiments, elite forces, huge-breasted leather-clad priestesses, mad scientists, and even mad ninjas. Some bad guys will require you to blow chunks of their cagyls away off in order to expose their weak points. Boredom doesn't seem likely.

*"The pressure is really on
are determined to rise to*

SIDESHOW BLOB This fun little horror is a Loree or... of the Reich's failed genetic experiments. He'll take you to the next level by simply hugging you. If at you and by...ing you to die with his... into slung.



bombardment villages; crawls through caves teeming with undead (and worse); ascends to remote mountain bases reachable only via a perilous tram ride; and ends in the most sinister, top-secret labs and bunkers in Hitler's black empire.

Dangerous Beauty

As deadly as the game world of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN is, never have you seen one as gorgeous as this. It starts with the stone, the rough, slightly damp, incredibly nuanced textures that are so convincing you'll have to touch your monitor to check (too yourself they're not real. In a sense they are; the textures are the result of hundreds of digital photographs taken in Europe's villages. This painstaking texture harvesting is already paying off in big ways, creating environments that—while chiefly



BLAZING TRIUMPH
RETURN's flame-thrower is amazing, easily surpassing the current "Best Flame-Thrower" titleholder, Gray Matter's own KINGPIN.

Gray Matter and they the challenge."



Wolfenstein 3D

ART IMITATING ART By requiring id to approve every facet of the game's production, the finished game models have an stylized fidelity to the initial approved concept sketches.

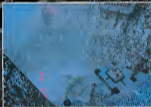
composed of various rock, brick, and weathered woods—are strikingly vibrant and varied. Some recognizable rock with shadows

results in filmy, airblown cobwebs, glowing cauldrons on smoldering logs, and great water-surface animation. These almost hyper-real environments should go a long way toward creating a crucial suspension of disbelief.

But the jaw-dropping art isn't limited to the walls, floors,



CONTINUED ON PAGE 108



AS ABOVE, SO BELOW. Two views of the same scene: either of two of the game's cheapest textures, although maps that include large outdoor spaces, and a striking level of model detail.



You've Come A Long Way, Wolfie

■ ■ ■ The original WOLFENSTEIN 3D was a revolutionary game, not its cover-art shift (although it's truly what 3D video games in the eight years since WOLF's release, a number of mid-revelations in 3D game design have occurred, bringing elements to the genre that the original id designers could never have imagined). Here are some of the highlights.

TRUE 3D

WOLFENSTEIN 3D was 2.5D, not 3D. It gave the appearance of a 3D world, but it was actually 2D (or 2-and-a-half D, as some called it). When you watched a character in WOLF 3D turn around, you were actually seeing different polygons for sprites of the character drawn from different angles. It wasn't until QUAKE that we had an environment capable of rendering characters as 3D objects.

HOUSE LOOK

Believe it or not, one of 3D gaming's most essential tools—the ability to look around a 3D environment by moving your mouse—didn't exist until 1988. DOOM used 2D-level environments, but you couldn't look up or down; your weapons auto-targeted. DUNE MAXIM 3D allowed us to look up and down with the keyboard, but not with the mouse. Catch up another first for QUAKE.

INTERNET PLAY

Multiplayer games wasn't even a blip on the radar when id released WOLFENSTEIN 3D. It finally broke through the barrier with DOOM, and IT evangelists are still suffering nightmares from its brazenest packaging scheme, which crashed the networks of every large corporation, including local. But with due respect to Duggan and Kell, true out-of-the-shrine-cave Internet action—of any kind—didn't exist before QUAKE.

STORY

They: William J. "B.J." Blazkowicz must escape a Nazi prison by shooting everything that stands in his way. This "story" is comprised of a couple files of text in a README file.

Now: HALF-LIFE's Gordon Freeman unknowingly triggers a dimensional rift, knocking Black Mesa facility with a bang. The army intervenes, but not in the way the gamer imagines. The story is seamlessly and classically woven into the game's action.

MONSTER AI

Like a sci-fi horror story come true, monster AI has evolved to a frightful point. Back then, tough enemies meant higher hit points and more destructive weapons. Now, tough enemies mean higher hit points and more destructive weapons. Now, tough enemies UNREAL Bots, who viciously track and shoot even on high-level players; or HALF-LIFE enemies, who pull their grenade pins as they die, hoping to blow you up when you go for their heads. Now their progress.

TOOLS

DOOM signified a huge shift, not just for 3D shooters but for the whole gaming industry. Up until this point, gamers rarely cracked into their games to modify them. With DOOM, id openly embraced user modifications. Hell, even without their innovations, would we have classic mods like Counter-Strike?



QUAKING in Your Boots

■ Besides RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN, there are a few other games that'll try to make your eyes bleed by using the QUAKE III ARCH engine. Here's your quick 'n' dirty guide to the current and upcoming 3D engine wars.



American McGee's Alice

Wrote Tim Soutter and Edward Carey (collaborators on visual novel Lewis Carroll's best, and, you've got an idea of what the game is going to look like). This psychological action-adventure (think "TOME RADER on acid") is slated to hit shelves by Christmas (like everything else).



The World Is Not Enough

Further steps led you with add-on cars and glitzy effects, this game is going for a more cinematic, semi-realistic, action-suspense look. Look for release next Spring.



Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2

It's a knockout, but stays as if not very-unique game. First to see review in the November issue (C&G #18) for the full scoop.



Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Proves you can have a beautiful and fun game based on the Star Trek license. Check out the review in this issue for more info.

THE WOLF PACK

RAVEN

Heretic
Hexen
Soldier of Fortune

5

John Romero

John Carmack

Wolfenstein 3D

Adrian Carmack



Doom
Quake

1

\$

Scott Miller

Spear of Destiny

APOGEE

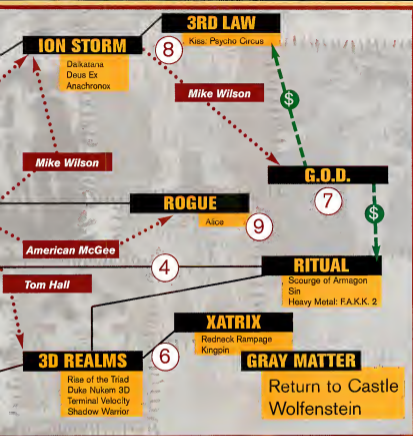
2

Id Software is as much a virus as a game company. This demon seed has spawned a huge web of 3D gaming, both in spinning off its technology, or by spinning off employees who go on to create more 3D games. Here are just the major threads in the web of evil that will inevitably ensue as id

1. Scott Miller pays John Romero to develop shareware games for Apogee Software. Romero taps John Carmack, Tom Hall, and Adrian Carmack to form id Software in 1991. Eight months later, monthly royalty checks roll in exceeding six figures.

2. Scott Miller, pocketing two-thirds of the revenue from WOLF 3-D, grows rich. He funds WOLF add-on SPEAR OF DESTINY and several new shooters, including RISE OF THE TRIAD. When id abandons Apogee, he creates 3D Realms to make his own shooters.

3. Raven worked closely with id during its early days. They created HEXEN and HERETIC with id's DOOM technology before branching out into SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE.



4. Six members of 3D Realms leave to start their own company, Ritual Entertainment. Ritual creates *QUAKE* add-on *SCOURGE OF ARMAGON*—a huge critical success. Activision funds their next game *SIN*, only to yank it from the oven half-baked, hampering Ritual's fledgling reputation.

5. Game designer Todd Porter persuades John Romero to form a new game company. Romero unites Tom Hall, Mike Wilson, Warren Specter, and others to form Ion Storm. Romero predicts *DAIKATANA* will ship in November, 1997.

6. Xatrix licenses the *DUKE NUKEM 3D* engine to create *REDNECK RAMPAGE* (1997). Two years later, they unleash the jarringly violent and obscenity-laced *KINGPIN*. Rechristened as *Gray Matter*, they begin working on *RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN* later that year.

7. Former id marketing wiz Mike Wilson leaves Ion Storm to found the Gathering of Developers with Ritual's Harry Miller. *G.O.D.* soon signs 3D developers Ritual (*HEAVY METAL: F.A.K.K. 2*), Terminal Reality (*NOCTURNE*), 3D Realms (*MAX PAYNE*), and Poptop Software (*RAILROAD TYCOON 2*).

8. Eight disillusioned developers leave Ion to found Third Law Interactive (1988). They immediately start work on *KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS*, which ships in one-fourth the time of *DAIKATANA*—and outsells it.

9. Former *RAPTOR* developers found Rogue Entertainment and create *STRIFE*, *QUAKE MISSION PACK 2 (DISSOLUTION OF ETERNITY)*, and *QUAKE II* add-on *GROUND ZERO*. After joining Rogue, former id-ling Barrett Alexander helps persuade fellow former id-ling American McGee to work with Rogue on *ALICE*.

The History of Gaming 101

THE BIRTH OF WOLFENSTEIN

■■■■ Wolf 3-D was the flame that ignited the shooter craze, but who sparked that flame? It wasn't John Carmack sitting around in his attic, dragging on a stank couch and wondering what to do that day. Or maybe it was, but that's not the story we got from John Romero, who was there in The Beginning.

In 1985, Romero joined a gaming magazine called *Softdisk* to create one program a month for the magazine's floppy disk. Many of those programs were conversions of his earlier games for the Apple II. He began receiving fan mail for his games, which he would proudly tack up on the wall of his office. Not long after, while reading an article in *PC Games* about shareware publisher Scott Miller, something struck him as strangely familiar. Glancing up at the fan mail, Romero realized for the first time that all the postmarks on all of the fan letters came from the same Dallas suburb. The same Dallas suburb where Scott Miller lived. He lived off the analog predecessor of a flaming email.

That was all Miller needed. Miller explained that he had a proposal for Romero, but he was concerned that *Softdisk* might censor his calls. He asked if Romero would create shareware games for Apogee Software, for a percentage of sales. For \$3,000 up front, Romero agreed. He tapped colleagues John Carmack, a game programmer, and Tom Hall, who was creating games and utilities for the Apple II, to help.

Three months later, in December 1989, they finished their first Apogee game: **COMMANDER KEEN**. "When KEEN came out, it started making a lot of money," Miller recalls. He began sending Miller monthly checks of \$10,000-\$20,000.

"I recognized from the beginning that they had a lot of talent," says Miller. "I spent hours on the phone with [John Carmack], and there was no doubt this guy was a genius."

Up until this time, Carmack had mostly programmed 2D games. At one point the three even created a Mario knock-off that made it all the way to the store of Nintendo. Nintendo's refusal was a boon to PC games, because not long after Carmack began programming first-person perspective games.

His first 3D shooter was called **FLYING TANK GUE**. It had first-person play, with an isometric mapping. Miller recalls, "When I saw this it was like, 'Oh my God, we need to make a shareware game based on this.' It was mind-blowing. It didn't take a rocket scientist to recognize this was the future."

It's not 3D games, **CRAYONS 3-D**, had texture-mapped graphics, but never did drawbacks. "There were still some fish-eye problems," says Romero. "The movement wasn't quite right, and it was in VGA; it wasn't the magic formula."

The next game got it all right. He knew it was going to take an unprecedented six months to complete, so they asked Miller to provide a \$100,000 guarantee in case it didn't sell. Originally, he wanted to set the game in a blood-soaked research lab with mutants and call it, "It's Green And Pinned."

Romero recalls, "It really bugged me. I thought, we've got a cool new technology, why not have a cool idea? I was thinking, why don't we do it in a make of **CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN**? It was 11 years later, but a lot of people still remember it as an amazingly cool classic game. It would be in 3D, with you moving down Nazis. I thought, what are they going to do? No one cares if you kill Nazis. So I proposed the idea, and we did that."

They began working on **WOLF** in January of 1992. When they showed it to Miller a couple of months later, he had strategy and education game elements.

Romero recalls, "In the original **WOLF**, you could move bodies, you could kill someone and drop their round corners. We took those elements out, because it slowed down gameplay. The game was so overpoweringly speed-oriented, we needed to make that appear. We said, 'Let's make this game violent and fast.' That was a 70fps game."

"When it was done, we thought the game was awesome. I remember thinking 'This is the coolest game I have ever played.'"

He released **WOLF 3-D** on May 15, 1992, and then they went to CluseyWorld. While he'd rule the coaters on the Grand Plan, Apogee rule the wave of **WOLF** sales that ultimately tallied 150,000 copies in only two years.

And the fan mail is still pouring in. —Joe Brown

HOUSES OF THE UNHOLY This gothic cathedral and the village street really show off the game's attention to detailed, realistic textures and architecture.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 105

and unbelievably intricate stained-glass windows and fineries. The character and monster models are shaping up to be some of the best to populate a game, and one of the best examples of what the **QUAKE III** engine is capable of. A dizzying aggregation of real-world soldiers and nightmarish monstrosities, the level of detail is so astounding you can practically smell the leather of the elite guard uniforms as the ozone crackling off the exposed electrical circuitry of the legless Lopers.

And then there's the flame-thrower. Expect to be hearing a lot about it. From the flickering pilot light that whips back and forth with your movement to the great gouts of flame it spews, **RETURN's** flame-thrower is the best flame-thrower we've ever seen, and the kind of weapon that inspires gamers to write gushing sonnets.

As great as all this eye candy is, it might be the sound that will be most integral in creating mood and tension. Howling winds in cimiteric, the sounds of trees banging against windows as you investigate a cathedral, and the moaning of the damned lurking for you just around



EUROPE ON FIVE BULLETS A DAY Much of the action will take place in interactive environments reflecting the images of 1942.

"The flame-thrower is the kind of weapon that inspires gamers to write gushing sonnets."

the corner should add up to an unrelenting feeling of dread. Additionally, the excitement of the actual fighting is ratcheted up by the sound of bullets rattling off a warehouse's tin walls during a firefight, and perhaps the most visceral, painful sound of bullets hitting a player character ever.

Fighting the Good Fight

Atmosphere and stellar graphics are all well and good, but what about RETURN is going to elevate it above the rabble and make it the landmark single-player game that Grey Matter contends it will be? For starters, they are adamant about including only those game elements that make the experience fun—readily refusing to include anything that has even the potential to detract from the game's enjoyability. Translation: no crates, no bars, no key cards, no save points, no vaulting bodies, no objects you can't destroy, and no robotic mosquitoes. The realism of reloading your weapons has been sacrificed to keep gameplay moving, but every weapon should have an alternate firing ability; for example, the tesla gun can fire in bursts or continuous arcs, while the Mauer rifle features a sniper scope. One nod to realism is the way enemies will not spawn; this means Nazi reinforcements will be precluding its arrival in APCs, etc.—not suddenly appearing in a hallway you thought you'd cleared.

Grey Matter is also spending a lot of time beefing up the enemy AI. Already, enemies will pick up and throw grenades back at you—provided the fused bombs still have enough time left that they won't kill themselves trying. We've also seen enemies acting in groups, using grenades to flush you out from cover so that their robots can run you down with machine-gun fire. Enemies will also intelligently use cover, run for help, and—defying years of suicidal shooter/ladder tradition—actually realize that your RPG trumps their pistol, and will run away if you burst into a room toting serious hardware.

Walking a Tightrope

While they're elated to be working on the new incarnation of a much-loved classic game, Grey Matter is acutely aware of how high the expectations are bound to be. How do they stay true to the spirit of the original, while updating it and still giving it some of their own personality? Fortunately, Activision is just as aware of how high

gamers' expectations are going to be and have a robbed-a-Christmas 2000 release, in favor of letting Grey Matter take their time and get it right. Plus, Grey Matter has the added bonus of original creator id Software's input to guide them as well (see sidebar for more on this).

Can they do it? From what we've seen, the answer would seem to be a solid "yes." If there's any knock against the game, it's that RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN can't ship soon enough to satisfy our adrenaline addiction. **CGW**

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MIDWAY

A detailed illustration of a F4F-4 Wildcat fighter aircraft in flight, viewed from a low angle. The aircraft is dark blue with a white star on the wing and fuselage. The background shows a vast, blue ocean under a clear sky.

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You'll be surprised at how much gaming rig \$1,700 will buy



Photos by Hayden Houser

Illustration by Jason Babler

ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINES

The opponents square off in the ring, sizing each other up, looking for a weakness or an opportunity to land the knockout punch. These aren't the heavyweights, but the fighters' smaller size belies their power and ability to withstand punishment. The systems in this year's competition for the Ultimate Gaming Machine "Lean and Mean" crown all came hungry, with their eyes on the prize. But in the end, only one emerged as champion—though three others made a respectable showing, and the final two had the tools, but not the talent. Step into the ring with us to see who can go the distance, and who will wear the champion's belt.

by Dave Salvator, Raphael Liberatore, and Jeff Green

Got What it Takes?

As we present this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup, the hardware landscape has once again changed dramatically. All but two systems in this roundup have AMD CPUs. They all have nVidia-based 3D cards and sound cards from Creative Labs. M.I.A. are both 3dix, which is endeavoring to ship Vodoo 5 6000, and Aureal, which has gone to that great PCI slot in the sky. But despite the uniformity, we saw a gamut of performance ranging from not so hot to very speedy indeed. So it is with great pomp and circumstance that we present this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine (somebody cue the bagpipe player and the garden gnome).

Usually, we present a deluge o' benchmarks, and let the numbers speak for themselves. But this year we decided to look beyond performance, and extend our consideration into five other important areas.

Performance and stability are still the main consideration, but so that we have added: component choices; included peripherals; ease of assembly and documentation; case and innards accessibility (for the inevitable upgrades); and finally, warranty and tech support. We'll walk through these criteria one by one, pointing out the good, the bad, and the...well, you know.

Performance/Stability

What to Look For:

- Fast, rock-solid performance
- Inclusion of good utilities (i.e. PowerStrip, System Mechanic)
- Beady power supply; at least 250 watts, preferably 300
- Plenty of ventilation to keep things cool

What to Avoid:

- Flaky, crash-prone performance, even if it's fast
- Motherboard-drops graphics and audio
- Aggressively overclocked systems



ALIENWARE GREY

★★★★★

- 3D GAMEGAGE SCORE: 742
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: \$1,700
- CPU: Pentium III 600MHz
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 1GBMB PC133 SDRAM (Kingston)
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: Intel 815E
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY:
GeForce 2 GTS/4MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE):
IBM DeskStar, 30.7GB, ATA-66
- SPEAKERS: Aice Lansing ACS84
- MODEL: Grey



The choice of 3D card coupled with the choice in CPU/chipset are the biggest determining factors of gaming performance. Thanks to some new chipsets from Via (KX-133 for Slot A and KT-133 for Socket A), AMD is now more evenly matched with Intel. These chipsets bring AGP 4X, 133MHz SDRAM, and ATA-66 and Ultra-ATA 100 support to the AMD platform. Intel, meanwhile, backing off on its expensive RAMBUS memory, has released its 815e chipset—which offers nearly identical features to the Via chipsets. 3D graphics card performance is also close among these systems, since they're all powered by nVidia chipsets. However, some feature GeForce boards with 32MB of DDR





memory, while others boast GeForce 2 GTS boards with 64MB of DDR memory.

In 3D GameGauge and 3D WinBench testing, Alienware's Grey system took the top honors. Its 3D GameGauge score of 74.2 is one of the fastest scores we've seen. But the Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC weren't far behind, all hovering around 68 in 3D GameGauge. One of the reasons for Alienware's dominance was its 64MB GeForce 2 3D card

WIDE OPEN SPACES

Alienware's case, after unplugging the Noisefixer ventilation fan, has plenty of room for air to flow. Just watch that sharp side-edge clip.

(Hercules Prophet II). Alienware also overclocked the card by raising the engine clock from 200MHz to 212MHz, and raising the memory clock from 333MHz to 365MHz. So we're talking about an overclock of 6% on the 3D chip, and about 10% on the video

memory. But even with the clocks set at spec (200/333), Alienware only lost 2 frames-per-second off its 3D GameGauge score, and still led the pack. Alienware has an additional fan to force air across the 3D card, and this configuration is backed by Alienware's warranty. The Grey never locked up, and always snapped back to life from sleep-mode.

Performance Comparison

	Alienware	Compaq	Dell	Falcon NW	Hypersonic	VoodooPC
3D Card Engine Clock/ Memory Clock	212/365	128/300	200/333	200/333	200/365	130/300
AGP Mode	4X, fast-write on	1X	4X, fast-write on	2X	2X	4X
CPU	Pentium-III 665MHz	Athlon 800MHz	Pentium-III 800MHz	Athlon (Thunderbird) 800MHz	Athlon (Thunderbird) 750MHz	Athlon (Thunderbird) 800MHz
System Chipset	Intel 815e	AMD 751	Intel 815e	Via KT-133	Via KT-133	Via KT-133
3D Tests						
3D GameGauge	74.2	58.0	64.8	66.4	67.6	66.2
3D WinBench 2000 (1280x1024x32, Triple-buffered, 32-bit Z)	64.7	44.6	71.8	66	79.5	47.3
3D WinBench 2000 CPU Test	1.73	1.35	1.63	1.49	1.43	1.53
QUAKE 3 (1600x1200x32)	DNR*	DNR*	42.4	42.2	DNR*	DNR*
3D GameGauge 3 Preview Tests (1280x1024x32)						
QUAKE 3	33.7	13.3	31.5	32.6	31.6	32.6
MDK 2	69.75	16.5	56.3	56.2	51.14	42.41
UNREAL TOURNAMENT	18.6	33.17	39.22	33.43	52.47	37.65
2D Graphics						
WS99 High-End Graphics WinMark	1040	974	917	1090	1070	1160
Storage and Other Tests						
WinBench 99 HE						
Disk WinMark	20100	16500	18000	19100	21100	15000
CD WinBench 99 WinMark	1700	1180	972	1250	1430	1730
Audio WinBench % CPU Usage (16 sounds via DirectSound 3D —lower is better)	0.65	1.20	10.10	3.04	2.98	3.39

* Couldn't complete test because monitor doesn't support 1600x1200 resolution.

The Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC—all having similar components—performed well, but they trailed Alienware. These systems were loaded out with AMD Thunderbird Athlon CPUs, though the 3D card in each varied. Interestingly, of the three, only the VoodooPC was set to run in AGP 4X mode, despite all three systems using Via's KT-133 chipset, which supports AGP 4X. The VoodooPC had an earlier GeForce card, but was actually able to achieve nearly equal performance as the Falcon and Hypersonic, both of which boasted GeForce 2 cards. But looking forward, Falcon and Hypersonic have more performance "headroom" in them for future games. Unfortunately, the Hypersonic was the only system that crashed repeatedly on our JANE'S USAF test, though its scores were otherwise respectable.

Dell and Compaq brought up the rear. Dell has performed well in past shootouts, and their system's performance was okay, but it wasn't as fast as past systems. Compaq, however, shot behind the duck on its component choices, and its Presario used older versions of NVIDIA's drivers. The Presario's gaming performance suffered as a result, and was nearly 15fps behind the leader in 3D GameGauge.

Component Choices

What to Look For

- At least 700MHz CPU and 128MB of PC133 SDRAM
- NVIDIA GeForce, GeForce 2, ATI Radeon, or 3dfx Voodoo 5 3D card
- At least 250 watts of power
- At least 3 free PCI slots for future upgrades

What to Avoid

- 3D cards other than the ones above

How We Tested



To shake these systems down, we hammered them with our own cruel cocktail of tests that include a healthy dose of Ziff-Davis' benchmarks, 3D WinBench, WinBench, and Audio and CD WinBench.

Then we unleashed our own 3D GameGauge, a collection of six Direct3D games (REMYLT, EXPENSIBLE UNIBAL TUBURNANT, JANE'S USAF, PANZER ELITE, and NFL FEVER), and one OpenGL game, QUAKE 3 ARENA. These tests are run at 1024x768 with a mix of both 16-bit and 32-bit color settings. We also used three tests from our spawning version of 3D GameGauge (3.1), which you'll soon be seeing as our primary testing tool. In these tests, we crank the test resolution up to 1280x1024x32 for every game tested.

We also ran the simple "burn" test of leaving the systems on for over a week, letting them "go to sleep," and making sure they'd wake up usefully. All of the systems ran reliably.

PRAY TO YOUR GOD. PRAY FOR YOUR LIFE. PRAY FOR MERCY. PRAY TILL YOUR KNEES BEEB.



FALCON NORTHWEST TALON 2.2 ★★★★★

- 3D GAMEGUAGE SCORE: 684
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: \$1695
- CPU: AMD Athlon 900MHz (T-Bird)
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 128MB
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: VIA Apollo KT333
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET/ VIDEO MEMORY: GeForce 2 GTS/32MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFAC): IBM Deskstar 15GB 7500RP Ultra 8E/100 ATA
- SPEAKERS: Klipsch PM 2.1

- No-remote sound cards
- Integrated CPU/monitor is in Intel, which limits upgradability

This year, we saw more AMD iron in the roundup than Intel, which is a testament to AMD's ability not only to offer a high-performance chip, but to put it out in large numbers.

Intel, on the other hand, has had difficulty keeping the channel fed with high-speed parts; the CPUs it has made available in the one-gigahertz range generally oared more than Athlons at the same clock rate.

All the AMD-powered systems except one use the Thunderbird Athlon, which has a 256KB onboard Level 2 cache, though it's still marketed under the Athlon moniker. Two ways to tell if the CPU is a T-Bird are that it will be a Socket-A chip, and its clock speed will be 700MHz or better. Although onboard L2 doesn't deliver a large performance gain on games, every little bit helps; so if you're going AMD, opt for T-Bird, or at least Duron. None of our contestants had the value-priced Duron CPU, owing to AMD's aggressive pricing of T-Bird chips. Compaq was the only company to send a non-T-Bird Athlon.

Alienware opted for Intel. Their Grey system has an \$156 chipset that is surprisingly fast, considering that its predecessor, the 810, was a dog. We liked Alienware's inclusion of the extra KoolMax cooling fan on the side of its case to keep air moving, especially since Alienware was overclocking the GeForce 2 GTS 3D card. The Dell also has an \$156 chipset with a GeForce 2 GTS card, but Dell's box was slower, due in part to a slower CPU.

Every one of these systems arrived with either a Sound Blaster Live or the Value edition of that card. A competent port with a beefy audio processor, it'll certainly get the job done. We were hoping to see Turtle Beach's new Santa Cruz card, but no such luck.

The VoodooPC and Compaq have only two free PCI slots for

future upgrades, whereas all the other boxes had at least three.

Peripherals

What to Look For:

- Front-mounted USB ports on the case
 - A split ergonomic keyboard (your wrists will thank you)
 - A good wheel-mouse you've actually heard of
- What to Avoid:*
- No-remote mice without wheels
 - Low-end speakers without a separate bass unit
 - A 15-inch monitor; it's just too damn small

Peripherals can either enhance a gaming system, or make it mediocre. Quality components such as 17-inch monitors or higher, good game controllers, and the other goodies listed above are desirable components for hardcore gamers.

All of these computers sport brand-name 17-inch monitors, keyboards, and mice. The best keyboard and mouse combo belongs to VoodooPC for using the innovative Logitech Cordless I-Touch Keyboard and Mouse. The rest of the boxes have either the MS IntelliMouse or Logitech's Wheel-Mouse. Unfortunately, none had a split keyboard, which we certainly recommend for those who do a lot of typing on their PC.

Since sound is a major component of the overall gaming experience, most of the PCs include good speaker systems. Both the Alienware and Hypersonic sport Altec Lansing's

BIG BOYS, BIG NOISE
Falcon wins the speakers-to-rock-year-world award with the inclusion of these Klipsch PM 2.1s.



ACS34 4.1 speaker system (four satellites + bass unit), while Dell uses the Altec Lansing ACS340. Compaq's JBL two-channel speakers crapped out at louder volumes. Falcon NW leads the field with Klipsch's powerful ProMedia 2.1 THX-certified speakers. But the Cambridge Soundworks FPS2000 4.1 speaker system on the VoodooPC MotocrossExtreme is also first-rate.

With DVD growing in popularity, Dell, VoodooPC, and Compaq all arrived with DVD-ROM drives and software DVD players. Of these systems, only the VoodooPC contains a slot-loading CD tray from Pioneer. Both the Hypersonic and Falcon use standard 48x CD-ROMs, while the Alienware features a

72x Kenwood CD-ROM. Ethernet cards are also in half of the systems, whereas the Compaq, VoodooPC, and Falcon all have 56k modems. Only Compaq sports the very useful front-mounted USB ports for game controllers, though Hyperoson's Silver Bullet does have two additional USB ports in the rear. But Compaq gets extra credit for also having a front-mounted FireWire port, which is great for connecting digital camcorders.

Ease of Assembly

What to Look For:

- A big color poster that clearly shows how to put things together
- A detailed description of installed components, and which cards use which I/O resources
- Manuals for every piece of hardware in the box

What to Avoid:

- Any company unwilling to provide the above, even if it isn't part of their "standard" documentation

We took a straw poll here at the CGW office to determine who was the most technically challenged editor on staff, and Jeff "bad hardware mojo" Green won by a landslide. We wanted to get the most non-technic test subject possible to get these systems up and running, and see how long it took



DELL DIMENSION 4100



- 3D GAMEGAUGE SCORE: 646
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: \$1,859
- CPU: Pentium III 800MHz
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 128MB PC133 SDRAM
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: Intel S15
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY: GeForce 2 GTS/32MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE-SIZE-INTERFACE): Quantum FireBall 19GB, Ultra-ATA
- SPEAKERS: Altec-Lansing ACS-340
- MODEL: Dimension 4100

I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO HEARS YOUR CRIES. I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO WILL LEAVE YOUR MIND. YOU WILL FEEL MINE.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME II: THE LEGEND OF COFFIN ROCK
OCTOBER 2000

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HYPERSONIC SILVER BULLET ★★★★★

- **3D GAMEGAGE SCORE:** Incomplete (USAF crashed)
- **MODEL:** Silver Bullet
- **PRICE AS CONFIGURED:** \$1,699
- **CPU:** AMD Athlon 700MHz (T-Bird)
- **RAM (AMOUNT/TYP):** 1GB PC133 SDRAM (Kingston)
- **SYSTEM CHIPSET:** VIA Apollo KT133
- **GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY:** GeForce 2 GTS/64MB DDR
- **HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE):** IBM Deskstar 15GB 75GXP Ultra 66/100 ATA
- **SPEAKERS:** Alien Lansing ACS54

them. We'd wanted to use Bobo the Baboon, but he was playing a bar mitzvah at Lake Tahoe during our testing, so we settled for Jeff. Here he is, ladies and germs, our very own Jeff "Shocky" Green...

Gee, well thank you very little for that rousing introduction. But okay, fine. I can handle it. I can still do this piece and maintain my self-respect. See if I ever write for this section again, though. Stupid doody-head Dave.

Anyway, I'm happy to say that all of the machines in question here are certifiably doofus-proof. Even if, like me, you hate manual labor, and would rather skinny dip with Janet Reno than set up your own computer, you can rest easy knowing that any of these systems will be easy to get up and running without any professional assistance, or asprin.

I set up three of these systems—the Dell Dimension 4100, the Compaq Presario 7000, and the Falcon Yalce 2.0—in about 20 minutes each. That's from a sealed box to a completely running PC, give or take a few trips to go wee wee and to get a supportive hug from Jason. Not bad. The Dell system was the easiest, thanks to a nice setup poster that included not just mouse-friendly pictures but actual English words (and three other languages, too) to explain the pictures. Never underestimate the power of decent documentation to subdue the frightened mind. Compaq's documentation was also good, but



FEED ME VoodooPC was the only box with a handy slot-feed 3FD-RDM drive.

lacked that whole "word" thing. Falcon had pictures of what plugs into what, but didn't put them into a step-by-step setup guide. The other three systems, Hypersonic, VoodooPC, and Alienware had documentation closer to Falcon's, showing wiring, but lacking the step-by-step guidance that soothes my soul.

The actual manual labor itself, in all cases, was surprisingly painless, with such modern conveniences as color-coded cables, so I was never tempted to plug the keyboard into the sound port, for example. A nice job overall by these companies, who got my official Doofus-Proof Certification.

Now get this hardware out of my face and let me go play some games.

Case Accessibility

What to Look For:

- **Mini-sawer design, tool-less entry, and no sharp edges!**
- **Quick-release drive cage**
- **Easy unblocked access to the CPU, memory, expansion slots, and storage devices**

What to Avoid:

- **Most "desktop" cases—they're too small to work in**
- **Access panels with more than two screws**
- **Cases without individual side panels**

From time to time, you'll need to jump inside your box to add or upgrade components. So we tore open these systems and rated them based on accessibility and general case design. The important factors include: ease of entry, tool-less entry; unblocked access to the CPU, memory, expansion slots, and storage devices; quick-release drive cages; and, of course, airflow and ventilation.

Of the systems we tested, most require the removal of two



VOODOOPC MONSOONEXTREME ★★★★★

- **3D GAMEGAGE SCORE:** 68.2
- **MODEL:** MonsoonExtreme
- **PRICE AS CONFIGURED:** \$1,747
- **CPU:** AMD Athlon 800MHz (T-Bird)
- **RAM (AMOUNT/TYP):** 1GB PC133 SDRAM (Crucial Technology)
- **SYSTEM CHIPSET:** VIA Apollo KT133
- **GRAPHICS CHIPSET/VIDEO MEMORY:** GeForce 256/32MB DDR
- **HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE):** Maxtor Diamondmax 204GB
- **SPEAKERS:** Cambridge Soundworks FPS2000

screws and a side panel to gain entry. Only the VoodooPC MonsoonExtreme and Dell Dimension 4100 machines use tool-less entry. VoodooPC actually topped everyone's design by using an impressive tool-less mini-tower with removable side panels for easy access.

Once inside, the Falcon Talon, Hypersonic Silver Bullet, and Alienware Grey offer plenty of room to maneuver. However, both the Alienware and the Hypersonic force you to remove a hefty fan before gaining access. Actually, the Hypersonic's video card fan gave us fits, since it's placed alongside the 3D card and it requires simple fingers or a helper to get it out of the way. The Alienware system had a sharp metal clip on the hard drive cage, so be careful when removing it.

Overall, both the VoodooPC MonsoonExtreme and Falcon Talon offer plenty of space to play around in. Considering the VoodooPC's tool-less entry and nifty box design, it gets the nod with a 14-point rating, followed by the Falcon, Hypersonic, and Alienware, all with 13. The lowest scores go to the Dell and Compaq, whose crowded layout makes it hard to access their drive bays and motherboards.

Warranty/Tech Support

What to Look For

- Toll-free tech-support line, 24/7

OPEN WIDE

VoodooPC's case allowed for tool-less entry, and plenty of play space inside for future upgrades.



- Web-based support
- Drivers & BIOS loaded on the hard drive, in case you need to re-install them
- A bootable disaster recovery CD that can restore the system's original state

IT HAS GROWN STRONGER SINCE THE LAST TIME IT CALLED FOR ME. I GROWN WEAKER. MY BLOOD STILL RUNS RED, BUT THIS POISON RUNS DEEPER. ALL I WANT TO DO IS FIND A PLACE TO REST.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME III: THE ELIJAH KEDWARD TALE
NOVEMBER 2008

© & TM Arango





COMPAQ PRESARIO 7000

★★★★★

- 3D GAMEGANCE SCORE: 58
- MODEL: Presario 7000
- PRICE AS CONFIGURED: \$1689
- CPU: Athlon 700MHz
- RAM (AMOUNT/TYPE): 84MB PC100 SDRAM
- SYSTEM CHIPSET: AMD 761
- GRAPHICS CHIPSET: VIDEO MEMORY: GeForce256MB DDR
- HARD DRIVE (MAKE/SIZE/INTERFACE): IBM DeskStar 307GB, ATA-66
- SPEAKERS: JBL, custom 2-channel

Cool drive image

- Windows CD physically included

What to Avoid

- Any company with spindly tech-support hours (three hours of available tech support per week don't cut it).

Warranty and tech support are the most overlooked features when considering a system. All of our system manufacturers offer a one-year warranty on components, including free shipping. They also offer extended warranties if you so choose. Compaq, Alienware, and Dell offer a comprehensive 24/7 toll-free phone and Web-based tech support via FAQs, forums, online help, email, and "how to" guides. Voodoo PC and Falcon

offer the same, except for no toll-free numbers and limited Monday through Saturday tech-support hours. Hypersonic has banker hours for phone support, but they do offer a toll-free line. They also have one of the more helpful Web-based tech-support sites of the group, though that assumes your system is alive enough to see the Internet.

Other important support features include a recovery CD and drivers, plus backup files on the hard drive, which are all helpful items should you require a re-install. Hypersonic and Falcon led the way by offering a recovery CD, and drivers, while including a DirectX 7 backup folder on the hard drive. Compaq has a recovery image on the hard drive, while Dell has some of its drivers on the hard drive, but it fell short on the other items.

Alienware, surprisingly, lacked drivers on the hard drive, but does offer a special recovery CD for an additional fee.

BASS-CHALLENGED Compaq's custom JBL speaker set sounds OK, but low-end response is MIA, and if leader volume these guys throw in the towel.



◀ **UPSIDE-DOWNSIDE** Compaq's was the only case to offer front-mounted USB (and FireWire) ports, and this CD holder on the lower half of the front-panel is not a bad idea for a recovery CD, but it is pretty flimsy.

And THE WINNER Is...

After watching the contestants slug it out in our six-round title bout, we have a unanimous decision. Alienware is our new Lean and Mean champion, although Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC could come close to matching Alienware's performance with a few component upgrades, namely faster CPUs and/or 3D cards. But Alienware's combination of top-flight performance, solid stability, and an accessible case with extra cooling—with a side order of good component choices and readily available tech support—combined to be an upper-cut knock-out punch.

Falcon, Hypersonic, and VoodooPC all have similar components, and, not surprisingly, they have similar performance to one another. Kudos to Falcon for including Klipsch's thunderous PM 2.1 speakers, the two-channel follow-on to the cranium-peeling ProMedia V2-400s.

Dell and Compaq have fared better in past soundbys, but Dell's performance wasn't where it should have been given its components, and its shortfall remains a bit of a mystery. Compaq was the only company whose system has USB (and

fireWire) ports on the front of the CPU where they belong. But its component choices, particularly its motherboard running at an AGP 1X setting, cost Compaq in performance. In addition, its (BL) speaker set lacks a bass unit, so low-end response was poor.

Also keep in mind that given potential CPU and memory price drops, you might be able to load up one of these systems with even more horsepower and still limbo under the \$1,700 price bar, so check with the system maker and see how much bang your buck will get you. **CGW**

The Tale of the Tape

	Allinware	Compaq	Dell	Falcon NW	Hypersonic	VoodooPC
Rating (out of Five)	4.5	2.5	3.5	4	3.5	3.5
Price	\$1,700	\$1,839	\$1,699	\$1,695	\$1,699	\$1,434
POINTS POSSIBLE						
Performance/Stability	30	30	22	24	26	26
Component Choices	14	12	6	12	12	10
Peripherals	14	12	8	8	12	14
Ease of Assembly/Documentation	14	12	12	12	12	12
Case/Inwards Accessibility	14	12	8	8	13	14
Warranty/Tech Support	14	14	10	14	12	12
TOTAL	100	92	66	78	87	67

COMING NEXT MONTH

Tune in next month for the heavyweight bout of our Ultimate Game Machine slap-down, where we'll pit even more machines against each other in a high-end shootout, and money will be no object. We're talking Pentium IV systems with RAM for years, and monitors the size of Shaq's Barcelonaer. Don't miss it.



Blair Witch Volume I: Rustic Pan
Rustic Pan combines traditional adventure elements such as research, exploration and puzzle-solving with a healthy dose of heart-pounding action to create a lightening-quick gaming experience.

Blair Witch Volume II: The Legend of Coffin Rock
Human Head Studios infuses the power of Nocturne™ technology with Bethesda's Fall-style game play, making The Legend of Coffin Rock a uniquely satisfying romp through hell on Earth.

Blair Witch Volume III: The Elly Kuchward Tale
The Elly Kuchward Tale focuses on action and will feature a spell-based combat system.

BLAIR WITCH™

Gathering of Developers proudly announces a three-game series based on the rich mythology behind the blockbuster film, *The Blair Witch Project*®. Hexan Films has granted unprecedented access to its wealth of intricate folklore, providing developers Terminal Reality, Human Head Studios and Ritual Entertainment with ample fodder for detailed and compelling storylines. These chilling narratives are powered by the awe-inspiring Nocturne™ engine, creating infinite opportunities for masterful suspense and blood-curdling realism.



COMMAND
&
CONQUER

RED ALERT
2



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REVIEWS

HOW DO WE RATE?

We review only finished games—no betas, no preorders.



Outstanding The only game that gets it all right. A must-try experience.



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



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



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



Abysmal The new game that gets it all wrong. Predictable. Don't bother.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: CRIMSON SKIES



ACTION

reviewed by Charles Arda

ACE THROUGH THE HOLE Flying through the lattice: "Hollywood" sign is just one of the game's ridiculous highway challenges.

CGW RATED

PROS

Fast-paced feats of derring-do; larger-than-life heroes; a colorful, alternate universe.

CONS

May be too basic for hardcore fliers, but too hard for those who just want some popcorn-flavored arcade fun; some awfully technical problems.

Flight sims meet Robin Hood in **CRIMSON SKIES**

Flier Tuck

Back before it meant airport delays and endless lines at the metal detector, flying was synonymous with romance and adventure. And back before there were striking workers griping about having to put in too much overtime, pilots were striking in another sense: They were the

dashing young men whose exploits made headlines in the afternoon papers and the newsreels. It's been a while since a computer game has tried to recapture this early spirit of adventure. Most flight simulators spend all their time trying to authentically depict the minutiae of flying a real plane, forgetting that authenticity and fun don't necessarily go hand in hand. I, for one, don't want to know how to fly a real plane—but I've always wanted to try my

Requirements: Pentium-3 266, 64MB RAM, 32MB3D card (32MB for swap file)

Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 128K card (32MB swap file) 3D Support: Direct3D

Multiplayer Support: Modem (2 players), LAN, Internet (24 players)

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Zipper Interactive • 985 • www.microsoft.com/games/crimsonskies
ESRB Rating: Teen, selected violence, use of alcohol

T I have a theory that someone accidentally replaced the STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS design docs with a list of things you're not supposed to implement in a real-time strategy game." —Tom Chick, reviewing STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS.



RED SKIES AT NIGHT Taking on a Soviet zeppelin by moonlight is fun, but the real trick is to avoid confusing the water for the equally dark, moonlit sky.

hands at a little seat-of-the-pants barnstorming action in the style of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Buster Crabbe, or Indiana Jones. And that's exactly what Microsoft's CRIMSON SKIES offers.

Based on the pencil-and-paper game of the same name from FASA Corporation, CRIMSON SKIES is set in an alternate universe where the year is 1937 and the United States has dissolved into more than a dozen separate nation-states. There's the Kingdom of Hawaii, where the game begins; the Republic of Texas; the Confederation of Dixie; the Nation of Hollywood; the Empire State; and so on. The system of highways and train routes encircling the continent either never got built or has fallen into disrepair, and in its place air travel has emerged as the dominant form of transportation. Cargo is carried in huge dirigibles, borders are patrolled by local air militias, and hijackings and raids are perpetrated by those most daring of rogues, air pirates. Some pirates—like the dastardly Black Hat gang—are ruthless, stupid, and unprincipled. But others are spirited rascals, preying only on the greedy, sparing the innocent, rescuing the imperiled, and adhering to a creed of sporting conduct—modern-day Merry Men, if you will.

Now, all bands of Merry Men require a Robin Hood, and sure enough, that's where you come in: You're Nathan Zachary, gleaming of tooth and square of jaw, air duelist by day and toast of the town by night. You and your loyal shipmates tool around the skies in the captured zeppelin Pandora, seeking wrongs to right, purses to cut, and buckles to swash. CRIMSON SKIES comprises five ripping yarns about Captain Zachary and his crew, each divided into four or five missions, each mission containing several objectives. All the action takes place behind the throttle of one plane or another, but the designers riff so cleverly on the theme "What can you do in a plane?" that by the time the game ends, with an edge-of-your-seat flight through the streets of New York City, you feel you've done a lot more than flown two dozen missions in a flight simulator.

The Plane Truth

That said, what you actually have done is flown two dozen missions in a flight simulator. And this is one of the game's few weaknesses, because the simulator in question is somewhat too basic for the sort of grizzled veteran who wants a separate keyboard control for each aileron, yet a tad hard to handle for the flight sim novice who just wants to zoom around, shooting things. One person I know who falls clearly into the "retaran flier" category (to protect his anonymity, let's call him my editor) tells me he completed the first five missions in under an hour. Another person I know who has logged for fewer

A Tale of Two Licenses

By Tom Price

This month, we review two games based on what's probably the most exploited license in computer gaming: Star Trek. While we've become quite accustomed to deriding Star Trek games, thanks to the preponderance of stinkers (i.e. HIDDEN EVIL), we can easily forget the decent or downright good games based on the Star Trek license (anyone still playing STARFLEET COMMAND?). STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE is one of those good games; STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS is a stinker. In fact, these two games perfectly illustrate how a license can be utilized correctly and oh-so-incorrectly.

ELITE FORCE is fortunate in that it's based on a solid foundation, the QUAKE III engine. But the designers at Raven made more than a Trek-based QUAKE mod. In fact, the game is structured and looks very much like an actual episode of the show, with accurately-recreated uniforms and sets, similar camera angles and directorial style during the cut-scenes, actual voices from the show's stars, and a requisite corny Vulcan joke at the end. It's evident the designers are fans of the show, and the final product ends up being not just a satisfying experience for Voyager fans, but for gamers in general.

Now NEW WORLDS, that's another story. Take the license away, and you still have a piece of crap real-time-strategy game that no one in their right mind would want to play. But this game publishing theory of taking any piece of software, regardless of quality, and slapping a license on it is far too common. Besides, what marketing moron came up with the idea of a Star Trek RTS on the ground? Helllooo! It's called Star Trek!

Feel free to chime in (tom_price@ziffdavis.com) with what you think are some of the best (and worst) licensed games of all time and why. I'll be here, setting my phaser to uninstal.

DECEMBER REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Crimson Skies	★★★★★
Dukes of Hazzard	★★★★★
Homeworld: Cataclysm	★★★★★
Madon 2001	★★★★★
NASCAR Heat	★★★★★
Panzer General III: Scorched Earth	★★★★★
Rainbow Six: Covert Ops	★★★★★
Spec Ops II: Operation Bravo	★★★★★
Star Trek: New Worlds	★★★★★
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	★★★★★
Steel Beasts	★★★★★



BLAZING A CONTRAIL Headbanging to a heavy dub mix is the sort of thing you like to see in an rummy

hours behind a virtual throttle (for the sake of argument, let's call this person me) kept veering into mountains, losing speed during over-aggressive ascents, miring up ground and sky at critical moments, and generally making it seem like the cockpit was under the control not of Errol Flynn, but of Jerry Lewis.

Mind you, I had a lot of fun playing CRIMSON SKIES, and so did my editor — but he'd probably have enjoyed it more if if the aim aspects had been dialed up a notch, and I know I'd have enjoyed it more if they'd been toned down. I relished the swinging period music, the faux-grainy newsreel footage, the sassy pirate banter, and the crazy stunts, but I didn't appreciate that my plane was just hard enough to fly that I had to re-play each mission three times to get through it. (One nice touch is that if you die four times on any mission, the game gives you the option to skip it. Unfortunately, if you take advantage of this option, it means you enter the next mission even less well-equipped than you were in the one you just exited, which leads to a cycle of mounting frustration.)

Should Microsoft have given users a choice between a "high realism" mode and an "auto-pilot" mode? Maybe, maybe not. But by choosing a middle ground, they may have succeeded in satisfying neither audience perfectly.

That's a shame, because in every other way, this is one of the most satisfying games I've played in ages. Most flying games think they've given you enough variety if they allow you a choice of planes, and feel they've done their duty as dramatic storytellers if during one mission they ask you to put the plane down during a rainstorm. CRIMSON SKIES gives you a choice of planes and plenty of weather effects (the handling of clouds and smoke is particularly nice), but that's just the beginning. You also have a very interesting technology and a high-octane plot that's full of twists, and you have a lot to do for more than just participating in dogfights. In one mission, you have to rescue a captured cohort by flying over a speeding train and dangling a rope ladder. In



UP, UP, AND AWAY Throwing water in your face from a spinning train is all in a day's work for a galloping pirate

another, you have to match speed with an enemy plane, jump from your plane to theirs, and menace the crew into ejecting. While in Hollywood, you have to lay down enough cover for a crewmember to steal Howard Hughes' famous "Spruce Goose," and then you have to fly through an obstacle course made up of movie sets and landmarks (through an "O" in the "HOLLYWOOD" sign, for example). It's crazy, it's over the top, it's fun. CRIMSON SKIES is to the average realistic flying game what the WWF is to regulation geo-roman wrestling.

Skies Matters

Unfortunately, there are a few other small points that detract from the game experience. Too many of the actors deliver their lines with a sort of ironic smirk, as if aware of the fact that they're imitating old movie serials. (The right way to do this sort of thing is the way the

Serial Heroes

Want to get a taste of the real thing? If you hunt around on the Web, you can find information about (and sometimes actual copies of) the old serials to which CRIMSON SKIES is an homage. Try www.movielefts.com for a free download of serials, ranging from the 1940 epic *Buck Rogers Conquers the Universe* (which happens to be the source of the alarmed-look scroll that George Lucas stole for the opening of *Star Wars*), to 1932's *Radar Men From the Moon*, starring George Wallace as Commando Cody. For a less science-fictional view of the aviation world, learn about Sky King at home.kascable.com/ter/skyking, or snap up copies of *The Adventures of the Flying Cadets*, Bruce Gentry Daredevil of the Skies, and Talspaq Tommy in the *Great Air Mystery* at sepeet.com/rcramer/serials.



CAUSE AND EFFECT Saving this first-class hospital ship was your cue, allowing for one more thing to add to your scrapbook. CRIMSON SKIES is full of such rewards.

Indiana Jones films did, with no sign that the characters think their implausible, outrageous adventures are anything less than a matter of life or death.) The game's soundtrack is jaunty to a fault and gets tiresome after a while. The audio stutters badly when the game is loading a new scene, and the loading itself can take a very long time. Having to wait through multiple loading sequences each time you crash your plane is egregious.

But the handling of the planes themselves, once you get used to the controls, is fine, and the levels are laid out well enough that flying around in them is fun. There are plenty of tunnels, canyons, and crowdes to fly through, whether of the natural (Hawaii) or human-made (Manhattan) variety, and you win kudos from your team and snapshots for your in-game scrapbook for flying through especially tight spots. Meanwhile, the worse the odds against you become, the more exhilarating it is when you prevail. It may take three or four tries, but when you finally sneak your plane through the gap between two bridge struts, blowing the thing up as you pass, there's no feeling in the world like it.

It may not be "The Bridge on the River Kwai," but CRIMSON SKIES can certainly hold its own with all the Universal Studios serials I've ever seen, and that's more than any computer game before it could say. **CGW**



ADVENTURE CAPITAL In this alternate history, seaports are swarming, and the capital ships just begging for barnstorming steering suits

An Avenging Angel



The alien Cotten forces have crashed Earth. Humanity has been enslaved. All hope is lost, until a defiant Angel Sanchez and her band of rebels appear on the scene to exact revenge and take back the planet. Join Angel in the fight to restore FREEDOM — at any price!

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STEALTH — Hide in the shadows unseen, but prepare for action when you step into the light!

TEAM-BASED GAMEPLAY — Control up to three characters per mission. Lead a unified force or take your chances going solo!

FULLY VOICED DIALOGUE — Connect with other characters and immerse yourself in the story!

EASY-TO-USE INTERFACE — Whether you're a first-time gamer or a true veteran, jump right into the action!

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Animated Violence
Animated Blood



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Microsoft



Barking Dogs don't lie—**HOMEWORLD: CATAclySM** improves upon an already great game

Unleash the Beast

JUST BEASTLY The Best Command ship (available in multiplayer and skirmish mode) produces just like a normal Command ship, but can also commandeer enemies with its Infection beam.

The real-time strategy genre was already on its way to becoming a bit stale when **HOMEWORLD** gave it a jolt of adrenaline. Thanks to a seamless blend of storytelling and mission structure—and the first effective use of three-dimensional space in a strategy game—**HOMEWORLD** deservedly became a critical and popular smash. Everyone involved in the follow-up,

HOMEWORLD: CATAclySM, insisted that it's not a sequel or a mission set, but a kind of "new episode" in the **HOMEWORLD** saga, no doubt hedging their bets in case it turned out to be a gobbley. They needn't have worried: The designers at

Relic did well in entrusting their code to Barking Dog Studios, who have produced a game that improves upon almost every aspect of the original.

CATAclySM picks up 15 years after the Kith reclaimed their home world of Higarra. The different factions have once again splintered, as has the Tardin Empire, creating instability once more. You play as the

Somtow, a Kith clan who seeks their fortune in deep-space mining. As the game begins, you answer a distress call from an Ion Cannon Frigate under attack by the Tardin. Though you no longer have the "mothership," you control the mining vessel *Kuun-Lan*, which is capable of producing a limited amount of combat ships. With these beginnings, you start a new campaign with a very different tone (as that of the original **HOMEWORLD**).

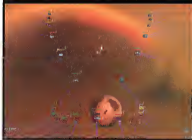
Enemy Mine

A number of factors stand **CATAclySM** in

sharp contrast to **HOMEWORLD**, giving it a unique feel and opening up different tactics and approaches. The very premise effects the flow of the complex missions: 15 in all, most with 5 or 6 individual goals. As in the original **HOMEWORLD**, the missions in **CATAclySM** weave a very complex and engaging story that is told primarily in-engine, with some occasional cutscenes to bridge larger gaps. This approach keeps you in the game, and—along with the nicely dovetailed mission structure—gives **CATAclySM** a remarkably fluid, driving pace. Since the *Kuun-Lan* is not primarily a ship of war, it has a much greater arc of mission types, from the scrambling early assistance mission through research and expansion of the *Kuun-Lan* fleet, until its roots in mining are lost altogether.

Unlike the *Mothership*, the *Kuun-Lan* can move, which has a huge impact upon gameplay as you shift the center of your force for maximum strategic effect. There are no more research ships. Instead, research has been combined into the build menu, and research top-

CHARGE OF THE FASTER THAN LIGHT BRIGADE Nothing is more stirring than a fleet of ships in close formation as they close in on the M.O. In this case, get their butts locked by superior numbers.



HOMEWORLD: CATAclySM

Reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

CGW RATED

PROS

More great missions, some welcome interface and gameplay improvements.

CONS

Feridishly hard at times; dodgy Direct3D support.

Requirements: Pentium-III 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 550MHz, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 128MB or better 3D card. **3D Support:** Software: 3dfx, Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (1-4 players), via CD or play.

Publisher: Sierra Studios • **Developer:** Barking Dog • **S-10** • homeworld.siemer.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone, minimal Violence.

BIGGER IS BETTER Great ship ships bring powerful teams and battling with smaller ferrets still form the core of late-game strike fleets, and aren't we glad for that?

HOMEWORLD 2
COMBAT 1.0



ics become available in groups, forcing you to choose groups of technology that will allow production of specific ships and upgrades (including special attacks for some ships). These new technologies also enable the Kuun-Lan to recreate itself as it jetsons mining pods to add specialized technology modules. As the game unfolds, the Kuun-Lan evolves into a real ship of war. The other major effect of this gradual evolution is to limit the size of your fleet, since the game imposes a cap on the number of ships that can be built.

This addition cuts both ways, and whether you like it or not, will have a lot to do with the way you play. The maximum number of ships in your fleet can be expanded by adding new modules and creating carriers (which may also have expansion modules). This ship cap is certain to be controversial among HOMEWORLD-ers, but it makes sense in context and forces you to think tactically rather than to use superior numbers in all cases. No mission is lost because of the fleet limits that can't be won through more clever means. The only real annoyance comes in salvaging ships, since you have to make sure the fleet isn't maxed-out before you salvage, or else scurry to decommission other ships to make room.

The Beast Cube?

A more complex mixture of ships also helps to increase the tactical sophistication of the game. Ships now work better in tandem with other ships, and finding the best strike-force compositions becomes a major element of the game. The radically different nature



DON'T TOUCH IT! Well, you have to touch it. This is the cube that releases the beast. Haven't we learned anything about deep-space cubes YET?

of the enemy also becomes part of this equation, since you soon move from fighting Taldan and Tzaric raiders to facing a Borg-like foe dubbed "the Beast." Beast fleets are unique in that they can't construct new ship models without enemy contact. Using their infection beam, they assimilate enemy ships and turn them to their own purpose. Once the Beast has control of a new ship model, it will be able to construct the ship itself. This gives the Beast fleet a ragtag mixture of vessels and technologies culled from everyone it encour-

ters. It also makes fighting them very tricky, since you need not only to destroy them, but to do so while avoiding infection.

Several other changes have been made to the core gameplay of HOMEWORLD, and all add to the richness of the game. The ability of the Kuun-Lan to move is balanced by the addition of fog-of-war, which places a new emphasis on the formerly worthless scout-class ships. Complementing this change is the inclusion of waypointing. You can set waypoints anywhere – including the "Z-zones," or third dimension – and have patrols run the waypoints and then return, or run them as a loop. Space is larger in CATAclysm, and the mixture of fog-of-war with the increased control of patrols gives missions a more realistic flavor. Yes, it adds a layer of complexity, but one that adds to the overall effectiveness of missions. Ships can now mine different types of objects, including dense, resource-rich crystals. Finally, the new system adds a very welcome time-compression feature and the ability to give all orders from the sensors screen.

All of this may sound suspiciously like I'm saying CATAclysm is better than the original HOMEWORLD. Well, get started on that late mail, 'cause you know what? It is. Relic was busy creating an entirely new world, game, and system from scratch, and they did it incredibly well. But when a talented third party has time to work with a good system, they often can improve it. They learn what worked and what

DIG PICTURE You can now view complete orders from the sensors menu, which is absolutely essential given the new complex battlefield.



didn't in the original, and then make it better. That's what Barking Dog has done.

CATAclysm plays very differently than HOMEWORLD does due to the combination of simple design enhancements, premise, and new ship types. There's more emphasis on preparedness. There are moments when caution is called for, and moments when you have to react quickly. The game can turn on you in an instant, such as when a plot twist in an early mission caught me with an insufficient force. Simple design decisions demand more thoughtful, careful gameplay, and that ultimately makes for a more enjoyable experience, even if it those used to the original might find it frustrating at first. By setting a few new elements in motion, Barking Dog created a game that looks back to the original while moving the entire genre forward a bit further. Call it what you will: sequel, add-on, new episode. CATAclysm is HOMEWORLD and then some. **CGW**



GET THE RED OUT *Tired of those early, unattractive Borg-like lasers? Apply proper liberality.*



Resisting fun is futile while playing ELITE FORCE

Borg-a-licious!

STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE

reviewed by Jason Babler

I expected to hate this game. I expected an unhappy, unenjoyable tangle to an unrewarding end. I expected to have to endure yet another unendable Star Trek game thrown onto store shelves in the desperate hope that hordes of basement-dwelling, being-with-Mom, 38-year-old, Doctor Who-quoting nerds might stop stuffing nacho

cheese Doritos into their blubbery mouths long enough to blow some of their comic book money on a PC game. My expectations, to say the least, were low.

But then I actually played STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE and discovered not another failure, but an impressive first-person shooter light years ahead of other Trek games and most other shooters to boot. ELITE FORCE beams you into the world of post-year Vulcans, and—believe it or not—makes it cool to be a Tookie.

Space Marines

The game starts off with a little "Kobayashi Maru" twist, quickly easing you as to what universe you'll be operating in. If you've ever wanted to know what it feels like to face the chilling blank stares of Borg waiting to annihilate your

but, well, here's your dream come true. In short order, Voyager becomes disabled by The Forge, a huge station run by a new alien race; it generates a dampening field that traps all nearby ships. The basic goal of the game is to restore power and fight off space pirates, aliens, Borg, and a little insect problem along the way. You meet up with a group of alien races drifting in the grip of the Forge, including Klingons, Malans, Humans, and a new stingy-like race called Etherians.

Your character is Ensign Murro, part of Voyager's Hazard Team. His group, formed by that oh-so-sensuous Tuvok, is exactly what the game title suggests: an elite team that gets in when the action is too tough for the usual away-team suspects. They pack new weapons, new characters, and a whole lotta attitude.

Engage!

While the game plot has all the makings of a Star Trek episode—subplots involve budding romance, tension among the crew, and an alien menace to end life as we know it (gaaa)—the sounds and visuals (textures and sounds were licensed directly from Paramount) pull you deeper into ELITE FORCE than any television/movie-franchised game out there.

You will be amazed at how beautiful this game is—a refined QUAKE III ARENA engine captures the Star Trek milieu perfectly. Every space-ship (particularly the Borg cube) is gorgeous and imaginative. Further, you will be treated to a wide range of colorful and sometimes bizarre weapons, all with secondary fire. Shoot a nasty Reaver with the insane personal Photon Torpedo Launcher, and you will see exactly what I mean.

Character facial animations actually sync up with speech and are rendered with a high degree of authenticity, down to Chakotay's facial tattoo. You interact with Captain Janeway, help B'Elanna deal with the warp drive, get reprimanded by Tuvok, and get patched up by the holographic Doctor (looks like there's no hope for us guys with receding hairlines, even in the 24th Century). Only Seven of Nine isn't voiced by the actual actor from the show; the voice-acting really helps to give the game an authentic flavor.

Requirements: Pentium III 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space.
3D Support: OpenGL, Multiplayer Support: Internet, LAN (2-32 players)

Recommended Requirements: Pentium III, 128MB RAM, GeForce II 20 or above.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Javes Software • \$44 • www.activision.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; parental advice.

CGW RATED

PROS

Outstanding visual and sound effects provide the best-ever sense of immersion in the Star Trek universe.

CONS

Very short, very linear gameplay could be more challenging; some game triggers fail to activate.



SIDESHIP All the ships look fantastic, especially this sleek, colorful *Ebenezer* ship, complete with little "friendly" creatures that make getting to the ship

GOTCHA, SUCKA! He may look good, but work it and my subzero cutter like *Kilnax* may rethink.



BUGS IN SPACE When you become infested by interstellar cockroaches, you'll need to rely on the beamwalkers across the ship's bay to provide cover as you make your way through.



MOORWALK Late in the game, you'll have to battle bird-gravity as well as ships as you make your way around the available air throughout the ship.



MEET THE NEW BOSS Save as the old boss. More old AI and a futuristic encounter make the game's final confrontation its finest, rather than highest, point.



Your teammates have personalities, which is hard to pull off without a certain amount of cheesiness (especially with *Star Trek*). From the hard-ass, practical joker to the constantly whining engineer, your squadmates play significant roles throughout the game, providing added drama, firepower, and comic relief. When a heroic team-member dies in a long, heavy battle against the *Reavers*, it affects your entire crew and you as a player. How many games do that successfully? Not many.

Another reason to love your crewmates is their pathfinding. You hit the elevator button, and they all rush to you so you can continue your quest — no rounding up members who get stuck behind corners or who can't see you when you're five feet away from them. Other games could learn from a lot from this little feature.

Your battle leads you through different ships that are strung together, floating scrap-heaps. Each vessel is a unique and richly detailed experience that mirrors the race that built it, whether it's the cold, dingy appearance of a *Klingon Bird of Prey*, the *Human* federation ship that winks at an original *Star Trek* episode, or the *Hyw* like *Harvester* that tears up ships for scrap.

Each craft has its native alien that you must reach out and pulverize, most from the *Star Trek* universe, all dramatically rendered. Watching a cavernous level full of Borg beams in and set their collective red lasers on your forehead will please any player, fan or not.

Disengagement

Navigating through these beautifully designed ships, however, can be as boring as watching a *Vulcan* play chess. I won't spoil what you get to do in the game, but I will tell you what you won't get to do. You won't get lost in these huge ships, because doors simply don't open and elevators only go to one floor, always steering you in only one direction. You won't get outmanned by an enemy, because the AI isn't that smart —

humble, in fact, when it comes to some bosses. Apparently, "intelligent life" doesn't notice I just vaporized its buddy (adjacent) and that I'm setting my sights on them next.

And you won't be able to vary your gameplay more than planting your phaser on whatever's in front of you. Stealth... well, there's not a lot of opportunity for being sneaky, even when you're supposed to be. Your enemies' main tactic is to rush at you in groups. (A note to AI programmers: Beating one cunning *Tribble* is more enjoyable than 100 dumb *Klingons*, every time.)

clever scripted events move the game along and create that *Voyager* feel. Navigating across an invisible bridge, a little space walking, and firing up a laser to vaporize an obstruction may not be brain-bogglers, but they add to gameplay. Unfortunately, some scripted

events failed to trigger, forcing me to replay small sections so a door would open after a battle, for instance.

Oddly, the game's best asset is also its biggest weakness. It feels like a compact, satisfying episode of the *TV show* cautious exploration punctuated by riveting sequences, such as a desperate last stand on an alien vessel, or returning from a mission to find *Voyager* swarming with swaders. There's a lot of well and good, but the sweeping excitement of a big-budgeted movie picture, with more of those memorable battles, would have been more rewarding. That, and more than the 10 or 15 hours of gameplay the brief game offers.

But for *Trek* fans and gamers in general, this is a quality game that brings respect and real fun to the *Trek* gaming franchise. Hopefully, now that the standard has finally been set, we will see a better, less cynical effort the next time a developer bravely goes where everyone and their moms have gone before. **C-67**



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Check the Rating!

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system can help you decide whether a computer or video game is right for your family. The ESRB system offers both **RATINGS** that tell you what age the game is appropriate for, and **CONTENT DESCRIPTORS** that indicate whether there are particular content elements which may be of interest or concern.

RATING SYMBOLS (found on the front of the game box):



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Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.



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Content suitable only for adults.



Product is awaiting final rating.

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The content descriptors tell you whether the game includes elements such as:

MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE

Contains scenes depicting cartoon/ animated/ pixilated characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations.

MILD REALISTIC VIOLENCE

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COMIC MISCHIEF

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ANIMATED VIOLENCE

Contains depictions of aggressive conflict involving cartoon/animated/pixilated characters.

REALISTIC VIOLENCE

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ANIMATED BLOOD AND GORE

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REALISTIC BLOOD AND GORE

Depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts in realistic or photographic-like detail.

ANIMATED BLOOD

Animated/pixilated or cartoon-like depictions of blood.

REALISTIC BLOOD

Representations of blood in realistic or photographic-like detail.

SUGGESTIVE THEMES

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MATURE SEXUAL THEMES

Contains provocative material, including depiction of the human body in either animated or photographic-like formats.

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Graphic depiction of sexual behavior and/or the human form (i.e., frontal nudity) in either animated or photographic-like detail.

MILD LANGUAGE

Product contains the use of words like "damn".

STRONG LANGUAGE

Commonly referenced four-letter words.

GAMING

The depiction of betting-like behavior.

USE OF TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL

Product contains images of the use of tobacco and/or alcohol in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.

USE OF DRUGS

Product contains images of the use of drugs in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.

INFORMATIONAL

Over 80% content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text.

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Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product.

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UNFORTUNATE BROTHER If you're not moving, you're dead.

Another small-time developer comes through big-time for military sim fans

Tank God

Tank simulations have always been a bit thin on the ground, and with the cancellation of *TANK PLATOON*, it looked like 2008 was going to be a lousy year for bread-heads. Fortunately, unexpected reinforcements have arrived in the form of *STEEL BEASTS*, a

superb modern armor sim from online publisher Shrapnel Games. In what has been a theme in military titles this year, Shrapnel Games shows that as long as you don't require top-of-the-line

graphics, a small development team can produce a realistic simulation with gripping gameplay and not a trace of a bug.

Team Yankee

STEEL BEASTS is a modern armored warfare simulation in which players can directly command either the U.S. M1A1 Abrams, or the German Leopard 2A4 main battle tanks. While these are the only two driveable vehicles, *STEEL BEASTS* models a wide range of contemporary APVs, from tanks to armored personnel carriers, as well as infantry. Thanks to the designers' consultation with

some real-life tank jockeys, the gunnery systems in both the Abrams and Leopard are meticulously recreated, to the extent that expensive use of laser range-finding can actually burn out the tank's lasers. Few compromises are made to realism, resulting in a stark recreation of the modern battlefield. Being caught in an artillery barrage usually means death for your entire platoon.

The graphics in *STEEL BEASTS* are 2D only, but they're surprisingly effective at depicting trees and terrain contours. Smoke effects obviously suffer, but the lack of 3D doesn't functionally detract from the game. The combination of graphics and sound does

much to create a compelling battle experience, regardless of the lack of polygons.

STEEL BEASTS is very much a strategy game as well as a sim. Before riding into combat, players plot out their strategy in the planning phase. The orders given can be made sufficiently complex (and the unit AI is generally good enough) that engagements can be fought almost entirely from the map screen, with only occasional forays into the tank commander's seat.

Once the planning is over and the execution phase starts, *STEEL BEASTS* is one intense game. When the shooting begins, you have to pay attention to the combat environment, listen to your gunner, and keep track of the other vehicles in your platoon. If you've spent some time devising a comprehensive strategy, you can just sit in the gunner's position of any one of your tanks and do the dirty work while your battle plan unfolds.

LASER OPTICS Being to death whether to use the first or last laser often shows how comprehensively the gunnery optics are modeled.

Failing to Plan Is Planning to Fail

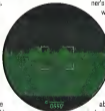
If *STEEL BEASTS* is engaging in solo mode, it's absolutely engrossing in multiplayer. The tension inherent in facing a human opponent is magnified by the fact that against a capable player, the planning phase takes on immense significance.

When playing larger scenarios, *STEEL BEASTS* becomes almost a wargame, a sort of one in which you can jump into one of your tanks at a crucial moment and turn the tide of battle. Should their own tanks be destroyed, players can jump to any other friendly unit — even taking over as the gunner in a tank controlled by another friendly player. Cooperative multiplayer in *STEEL BEASTS* is a blast.

STEEL BEASTS comes with a delightfully thick manual that provides a fascinating look into the workings of a modern tank while describing the game in detail. The \$40 price tag is a great value, considering the wealth of gameplay in the many scenarios, multiplayer, and scenario editor. Score another one for the little guy. **CGW**

STEEL BEASTS

reviewed by Bruce Boryk



CGW RATED

PROS

Excellent simulation/strategy blend; realistic; attention to detail; multiplayer.

CONS

Mediocre graphics; sim limited to two tanks; no campaign mode; fixed graphics resolution.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 20MB RAM, 20MB free drive space, 2MB 286B video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-3 400MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** Internet LAN (2-8 players), modem, one CD per player.

Publisher: Shrapnel Games • Developer: eSims • \$40 plus shipping • www.shrapnelgames.com • ESRB Rating: M for mature.

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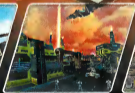


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Red Storm writes the definitive field manual on kick-ass tactical simulations

The Killer Elite

Love it to Red Storm to come up with another tactical simulation well worth your time and effort. **COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS** is a stand-alone game that is basically two products in one: part **ROGUE SPEAR**, and part Counter-Terrorism encyclopedia packed with more CT info than the terrorist archives of the FBI and NSA combined. Well...almost. Not only do players get to experience three

new gutsy **ROGUE SPEAR** missions and six well-designed training missions, they also get an insider's look at the secret world of CT operations, via an interactive database loaded for best.

COVERT OPS comes in two CDs. The Mission CD is

where three heart-pounding **RAINBOW SIX** missions take you into the jungles of Bolivia to rescue hostages, the Arctic Circle to insert a satellite module, and to North Dakota where mercenaries have seized a nuclear silo. All of these missions are tough, and require detailed planning; the experience of **ROGUE SPEAR** and **RAINBOW SIX** grandrands should pay dividends here. These are some of Red Storm's best missions yet – too bad there're just three. Fortunately, **COVERT OPS** includes all of the multiplayer components and refinements that make **ROGUE SPEAR** the best tactical simulation on the Internet.

The second CD is what makes **COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS** a keeper for the tactical sim library, or for anyone contemplating a career in Counter-Terrorism (CT). **COVERT OPS** provides a comprehensive overview of Counter-Terrorism from 1970 until the present. You start out in the Ready Room, the central hub where you pick an operative to train and test. Information is gathered via a "Nodeball," an easy to use, multi-layered, navigational interface. Utilizing Nodeball, candidates have the opportunity to access over 15,000 briefings and articles on various CT subjects. Your goal is to learn everything there is to know about CT Forces, Historical Operations, Gear, Tactics, Intelligence, Psychology, and the Future of CT operations.

COVERT OPS also contains video interviews with top experts in the field, as well as photos and video footage of weapons and equipment, along with a description of the tactics typically employed. There are several presentations and interviews on subjects such as ballistics and room clearing, as well as insertion methods and equipment use. For example, under the topic of Counter-Terrorist Tactics, players learn about Field Tactics, Combat Training, Military



BEAUTIFUL BUT DEADLY The level details of each mission are extraordinary. This Bolivia jungle waterfall feels as cool as it sounds.

vs. Police Tactics, and Operational Tactics. Click on Combat Training, and primers surface in two more areas of study – Basic and Combat Training. There's also a special section about the making of the **RAINBOW SIX** and **ROGUE SPEAR** games. The information is quite thorough—including field manuals and bibliographies – but even as comprehensive as it is, the intel is still basically at a survey level. Great for a layperson, but don't kid yourself that you've been trained as a CT operative. You'll have to join the SAS, Delta, GSG-9, or other Special Operations units for that. If there's a knock against the presentation here, it's that more video of actual situations would have been welcome – there's a lot of discussion about the hostage crisis at the 1972 Munich Olympics, but no video.

Once you feel ready, you can test your skills and knowledge through a nifty little testing feature known as Officer Candidate School. Using one of the many R6 operatives as an alter ego, you take multiple-choice and image-based exams in topics ranging from psychological profiling and hostage negotiation to kit selection and Intel photo analysis. You'll discover quickly whether or not you learned which weapons and equipment are best used in certain types of covert missions. Once you successfully pass a test, you gain a certification ribbon. Complete four ribbons, and you've done with that field of study. Once you pass all seven fields of study, you gain the rank of Rainbow Commander.

COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS feels like a natural extension of Red Storm's **RAINBOW SIX** series. Fans of tactical sims will find the game a challenging and worthwhile experience. Just don't go setting up a kit house in your backyard before checking with the neighbors. **CGW**

MAKING AN OIL SLICK The junkyard training mission is a real level for testing your skills while fixing up your ride. These dead terrorists didn't spend all the time before the entry team hit them hard, making the job easier than what it could have been.



CGW RATED

PROS

Enough goodies to make anyone a CT wannabe.

CONS

Enough goodies to make anyone a CT wannabe.

Requirements: Pentium® III, 64MB RAM, 50MB free disk space
File Size: 3D Support: Direct3D Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-16 players)

Recommended Requirements: Pentium® III, 128MB RAM, 10 MB CD acceleration, 166 MHz

Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • **Developer:** Red Storm Entertainment, Magic Lantern, and Zombie Studios • **3D3** • www.red-storm.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen, restricted blood, gore, and violence.

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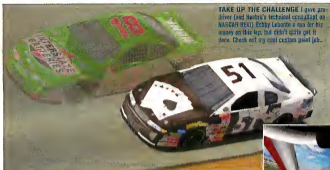


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TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE I gave pro-driver (and NASCAR's technical consultant to NASCAR CEO) Bobby Labonte a run for his money on this lap, but didn't quite get it done. Check out my cool custom paint job.

UP ON THE ROOF Dale Earnhardt finds himself in a tenuous position at Daytona. You too can find yourself upside down if you aren't careful - racing at 200mph on these super speedways.



This rookie has championship potential

Bring the Heat

Hadiso Interactive has accomplished something Papyrus and Electronic Arts haven't been able to do. They've created a NASCAR game that's enjoyable for both newbie racers and simulation gurus alike.

Now, you may find that hard to believe, since most NASCAR games usually appeal to one or the other. Papyrus's NASCAR RACING series has always been geared towards the hardcore simulation progheads, while Electronic Arts' NASCAR titles - with their

reduced emphasis on realism - have appealed more to arcade-style racers.

NASCAR HEAT has all the options that those other games have and more: 19 authentically reproduced

tracks, including Daytona from the Winston Cup circuit (only Indianapolis and Pocono are missing, due to licensing issues); 27 Winston Cup drivers and their respective cars and sponsors from the year 2000 season; and the usual single-player options such as single race and championship modes, which allow you to race a single race at a time, or to compete in a full season for points against the other Winston Cup drivers.

What's different about NASCAR HEAT is that its very realistic physics model and near-photorealistic graphics engine are made

more enjoyable by the number of single-player gameplay options that the most experienced player can handle, but that the hardcore

simmer will still find fresh and challenging.

Can You Beat the Heat?

The most unique gameplay option is the Beat the Heat challenge: 36 different challenges that are introduced by popular NASCAR commentator Allen Bestwick. These challenges help you develop your stock car racing skills by putting you in various real-world situations. They range from running a lap at a competitive pace, to using proper drafting techniques to pass, to working your way through a multi-car pitstop. Some of the scenarios require you to use overly aggressive tactics when, overall, finishing an actual stock car race requires a cool hand and a lot of patience. Keep that in perspective while completing this mission-based portion of the game.

Race the Pro is another new gameplay option not seen before in



E-TICKET RIDE The new physics model lets a driver just do the job, and if you are the luckiest, he'll make contact, you better catch up! - Bobby Labonte, my buddy.

NASCAR HEAT

Reviewed by Wed. "Gunsol" Hermes

CGW RATED

PROS

Incredible graphics; numerous single-player modes, catering to all levels of experience.

CONS

Steep hardware requirements; a few bugs.

Requirements: Pentium III 233 Mhz, 32 MB RAM, 25 MB hard drive space, 3D-GPU HW driver, Direct 3D-compatible video card (6MB VRAM min.), DirectX-compatible sound card, DirectX version 1.0 or higher. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium III 500 Mhz, 128 MB RAM, 6GB MB hard drive space, 3D-GPU HW driver, GeForce or Radeon 5 MB or more, DirectX 2.0 or higher, DirectX-compatible sound card. **OS Support:** Direct 3D Multiplayer Support: Up to 16 players (TCP/IP).

Publisher: Hadiso Interactive • Developer: Monster Games, Inc. • \$19 • www.hadiso-interactive.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

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NASCAR games. It lets you race against a ghost car, representing one of 10 top NASCAR Winston Cup drivers like Bobby Labonte, Rusty Wallace, and the Intimidator — Dale Earnhardt himself — driving their best lap at their favorite tracks. The king, Richard Petty, even gets a cameo doing a lap at Daytona.

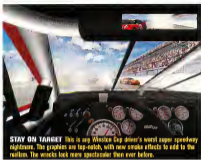
You'll have to drive your best laps to beat the pro-driven ghost cars, because you can't collide with them; you can use their line as the best example. When you're done, save the replay and then watch the pro through the cockpit view to see how they drive the track. While this is a great feature, I would like to have been able to compete against even more drivers and more tracks.

Look, Mom—I'm on ESPN

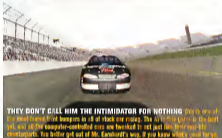
Graphically, this is the best NASCAR title to date. The car detail is simply amazing, and in some views, it's as if the cars drove straight from your TV set to your computer monitor. Adding to the perception of realism, particle effects are especially well done, as evidenced by the realistic smoke that comes from your tires and burning engine (post-crash). Each track is authentically reproduced to the finest detail. Skid marks and scrape marks look much more realistic than before. The detail of the pit area is finally done right. All the crew trailers with number signs are present, representing specific pit boxes. Pit crew animations are vastly improved over previous NASCAR titles, with more polygons giving them a more rounded, human appearance. All this stunning graphical styling comes at a price, however. Even my Pentium-III 500

with a GeForce2 video card struggled to display all this detail as the number of cars in the field increased. The release notes state you need at least a P-III 600MHz to run a full 43-car field. Expect nothing less than a super-charged, Winston Cup-rated computer with 700MHz horsepower to be able to produce all the billiating visuals the game is capable of.

Once you take the wheel in NASCAR HEAT, the physics model really shines. Driving these cars feels like you really do have 700 horsepower at your disposal. The cockpit moves forward and back to simulate the force of braking and acceleration on the driver's head. Your wheels lock up from braking too hard, causing your car to spin out — and if you do spin, be prepared to get airborne. You may quickly find yourself upside down. Unfortunately, the default damage model is set to extreme arcade mode, and moving up to expert or hardcore mode doesn't improve the realism as much as it should. You can



STAY ON TARGET This is one Winston Cup driver's worst super-speedway nightmare. The graphics are top-notch, with new smoke effects to add to the realism. The wrecks look more spectacular than ever before.



THEY DON'T CALL HIM THE INTIMIDATOR FOR NOTHING (This is one of the best trackside bumpers in all of racing car racing. The AI in this game is the best yet, and all the computer-controlled cars are tweaked to act just like their real-life counterparts. No bitter pit out of Mr. Earnhardt's way, if you know what's good for ya).



TALKING HEAD Miles Gastwick runs the show in the Heat, races and pro challenges. It's a very nice touch in the game, and will help rookies learn the ropes.



pitting. They drive at inconsistent speeds and run you under flags, causing your car needless damage. They have problems reentering traffic from pit road at the super speedways, causing major jams. I was also unceremoniously removed to the desktop every time I finished racing Daytona in championship mode with a 43-car field.

The game does have multiplayer capability, but it is far from complete. There's no built-in player matching ser-

vice to search the Internet for active races. And once you manage to find a race and connect to it, there are no practice sessions to allow you to practice with your fellow drivers. You can only go directly into a race. Also, there's no option for yellow flags in multiplayer, so you always have to race under green flag conditions. This is a big disappointment for online



ELVIS IS NOT THE KING You can use the ring (and the bumper) of the great Richard Petty to see what true legends are made of.

racers who want perfect recreations of NASCAR events, and it detracts from the overall potential of the game.

Once the patch is released, you should have many options, from extreme arcade-style racing to advanced simulation mode. That, coupled with the new physics model, will make NASCAR HEAT a real jewel to satisfy any racing fan — whether you're an arcade racer or a realistic-simulation guru. Until that time, however, this game is truly a diamond in the rough. **GVW**

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STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS sucks harder than a black hole

She's Gonna Blow, Cap'n!

I have a theory that someone accidentally replaced the **STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS** design docs with a list of things you're not supposed to implement in a real-time strategy game. This would explain a lot. It would explain why you can't save a game in progress, so you'll have to play through an entire hour-long scenario in one sitting; if you lose, you get to start over from the very beginning. It would explain why there is no way to change the game speed, or to pause and give orders. It would explain why you can't change any sound or graphics options from within the game. It would explain how **STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS** turned out to be one of the worst real-time strategy games you could inflict on yourself.

STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS

reviews by Tom Chick

Set Tricorders to "Huh?"

It would also explain how some basic features you expect in any RTS managed to be left out: A skirmish mode, waypoints for units, patrolling orders, configurable hot keys, designated gathering points for newly-built units, options to move your armies together, and Internet multiplayer support are nowhere to be found in **NEW WORLDS**. It would explain the hideous interface and the lack of useful information available to the player: It would explain how Klingon, Federation, and Romulan units and buildings are functionally identical with almost nothing to distinguish the three races, aside from a single vehicle at the top of each race's "tech tree." It would explain a convoluted resource model that's completely artificial to the pace of a real-time strategy game — five raw resources are converted into five processed resources with silly science-fiction names, with no discernible pattern for why you need them, what they're used for, or where you can

INACTION UNDER FIRE Highly trained Federation units refuse to break formation when fired upon.



ROCKETS' YELLOW GLARE A Federation base is attacked with less than bare guns and dynamic lighting balls. Who cares?



get them. It would explain unnecessarily tedious and vague building upgrades, and poorly-used rules for crewmembers and unique transferrable officers who can be assigned to different tasks.

It would explain why **NEW WORLDS** is a textbook example of an entirely useless 3D engine making a game harder to play — the limited camera control makes it a chore to look where you want to look, not to mention the insufferable difficulty of giving units

specific orders for movement and combat. It would explain why drag-selecting a bunch of units and ordering them to attack a target results in a strung-out column of units lumbering their way across the map and arriving at different times — so that they can be conveniently destroyed one by one. It would explain the limited group-control options, the way you can only build bases on pre-set tiles, the sluggish graphics, the twitchy mouse support, and the absence of feedback at the end of a scenario.

Praising With Faint Dames

However, what's not explained by my theory is how this wretched excuse for a game was actually packaged into a box and put on shelves.

If you were feeling charitable, you might enjoy the atmospheric graphics, the gratuitous lens flare given off by photon artillery, and the detailed bustle of a developed base's cargo ships and construction bees buzzing to and fro. You might even appreciate the unfolding storyline about a new alien race, and some interesting alien ships and structures. And if you were desperate to find some redeeming value, there's always that: After playing **NEW WORLDS**, suddenly **STAR TREK: ARMADA** and **FORCE COMMANDER** don't look so bad. **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

No glaring spelling errors in manual.

CONS

Horrible game-play, interface, design, and engine detract from the well-spelled manual.

DARE TO BE (STUPIDLY) DIFFERENT A row of icons indicates unit health instead of the standard green bar.



Requirements: Pentium III 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 40MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct 3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN (Internet 2 or 3 players), via CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** 31 Degrees East • **ESRB:** www.interplay.com • **ES-Rating:** Teen, occasional violence.

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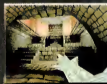
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Exiled to the Eastern Front, with only a Panzer General for company

Burnt Ground

PANZER GENERAL was a game that interested hardcore wargamers while enthralling almost everyone else. The game played like a cross between chess and Stratego, had no discernible scale, and borrowed the conventions of wargaming while at the same time giving that hobby a great big raspberry. The genius of the design was that it reduced all the complication of traditional wargames to a simple formula, while retaining an emphasis on strategy. Only the most cantankerous history buffs were immune to its pleasures. Three sequels later, that appeal is fading.

Go With What You Know

PANZER GENERAL II: SCORCHED EARTH is not an expansion pack. Ownership of previous games in the series is not required. In

PANZER GENERAL III: SCORCHED EARTH

Reviewed by Bruce G. Gryn

fact, it's not even recommended, because if you have played any of the previous games, you'll probably end up wondering why this game wasn't released for half the price as an add-on for PANZER GENERAL 3D: ASSAULT. The core game is exactly the same, and while the scene has shifted to the Eastern Front, previous little else has changed. There are four new campaigns (two German and two Soviet), and a Battle Generator that will let you create scenarios with British, American, German, or Soviet units, but besides that and a few improved 3D effects that you'll barely notice, calling PANZER GENERAL III: SCORCHED EARTH a "new game" is like calling vinyl "genuine Nalgaflyde."

SCORCHED EARTH does have its moments. The strategy of coordinating units (catching infantry at the open with your

THE "STRATEGY MAP" This is when you play your "strategy." It leads the strategy map new shows which units have movement left.



WINTER VACATION It looks nice, but the interface still suffers from many of the same problems as PANZER GENERAL 3D.



HOT STUFF Realistic tanks and vehicles... etc.



tanks, bringing up artillery to reduce towns, protecting your assets with air cover) requires thought and planning, and is no walkover, either. While not even close to a military simulation, the PANZER GENERAL series has an almost puzzle-like feel, and if you're into strategy puzzles and military history, so much the better. The new campaigns can be very tough, meaning that it'll take several playings of each scenario in order to advance. When you do, you'll be able to "promote" chosen leaders, which allows them to perform more actions each turn with the units under their command. This role-playing-like character building used to be tied to the units themselves, but was shifted to a leader-driven system in PANZER GENERAL 3D: ASSAULT. The old system, however, had a bit more character.

It's Not Easy Being 3D

The biggest problem with the game, though, stems from SSI's assumption that 3D graphics would make the game better. In PANZER GENERAL, it's exactly the opposite. While some may enjoy seeing their tanks kick up little clouds of dust, this amusement turns sour when the ambiguous 3D view makes you overlook an anti-tank gun, or misjudge a mouse click for a bomber attack. The map can be rotated so that the view is nearly vertical, but there isn't a functional 2D view. A 2D "strategy map" (what does that make the normal map?) allows viewing of the entire battlefield, but it primarily serves as a general overview and "jump map" for repositioning the camera.

PANZER GENERAL III: SCORCHED EARTH is, minor improvements notwithstanding, a box with four campaigns that could have been included in PANZER GENERAL 3D: ASSAULT. Those who have not yet sampled the addictive pleasures of this system are encouraged to pass this one by and find a copy of PANZER GENERAL II. **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

Has the same engaging gameplay that made the original a classic.

CONS

The 3D view still gets in the way.

Requirements: Pentium III 233MHz, 8MB RAM, 350MB free disk space, IBM S3D video card. 3D Support: Yes. Multiplayer Support: LAN/FFX, IPX/FFX (2-4 players), hot CD per player.

Publisher: Mattel Interactive • Developer: SSI • ©1999 • www.ssi.com • ESRB Rating: Rating pending.



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The only football game in town soars to new heights.

Wide Open

With Microsoft's decision to scrap this year's version of NFL Fever, PC football fans are faced with the old Henry Ford Choice: they can have any football game they want, as long as it's MADDEN 2001.

Fortunately, you need not fret over this lack of options. Because whether you choose to play MADDEN 2001, or you decide to play MADDEN 2001, either way you'll be getting the finest title in the series, and quite possibly the finest PC football game ever.

But what's really interesting is that this year's PC version — provided you have some serious horses under your hood — actually looks better than EA's ball-kicked PlayStation 2 version,

mostly due to the PlayStation's lack of anti-aliasing and to the lower screen resolution of the TV.

Smooth...

The gameplay in both games is virtually the same, with incredibly fluid action that moves faster than any other game on the market.

Unlike some previous versions, you can actually establish a running game, though its success — much as on the real gridiron — is largely dependent on your offensive line. The passing game works extremely well, too; you have to check safeties, check for man or zone coverage, and then throw the ball on the break to your receivers. And the blitz creates some terrifying moments.

Although a little unbalanced, the juke moves (controlled by the left- and right-shoulder buttons on the Microsoft gamepad) make for many oohs, aahs, and red faces on opponents. Better still, sure-bet plays appear to be absent, although on defense, you'll probably play it safe and consistently pick the same pass and run defenses.

Win or Else

Like last year's version, MADDEN 2001 allows wannabe Dikis to manage their teams' on-field strategies, as well as personnel (including free-agent signings) and front-office decision-making in either single-season or an extended franchise mode. Also as in last year's version: You really can make the Dikes and get the big leave-ho if your team underperforms.

Where EA really demonstrates its appreciation for the PC market is in the online suite that allows you to engage in an entire season or career play, both playing games and managing personnel. It works well, although finding your way into the league is a little tricky.

Players interested in just setting up single



MADDEN 2001

Reviewed by **Gregg Kessler**

LIVE OR MEMOREK? If you look carefully, you can even see the *Tomorrow's Game's* seal reflected in Marshall Faulk's helmet.



SERIOUS HOPS

You're going to need a serious PC to get this kind of performance. Think *Pentium III* with a GeForce 2 card.

games can still get their online fix. Unfortunately, although the gameplay is faster than last year's version, it's still nowhere near the quality of the online play in Sega's NFL 2K1 (for the Dreamcast [see page 176]). Players still slip around a little bit

too much, which makes tackling extremely difficult, and the game tends to crash mid-game.

The only other aspect of the game that needs serious work is the game commentary, which is horribly inadequate. Pat Summerall and John Madden sound under-sampled and flat, and their commentary appears to consist of no more than 20 lines of dialogue.

But for the most part, MADDEN nails everything else right on the head. In fact, we have only one suggestion for next year's version. The Great Games mode, which allows you to play through over 25 classic games, needs to allow you to play through all the games without successfully completing each one. The infamous Heidi game — where the Raiders scored 14 points in the last 1:30 — is impossible, and you can't get to any of the other games until you beat this one. Maybe EA could incorporate a challenge mode, which awards you a score based on how many Great Games you win? **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

The amazing visuals complement the fast-paced action and rock-solid AI.

CONS

The commentary is surprisingly flat; Internet play is still not all the way there.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32 MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 4 400 MHz, 64 MB RAM
OS Support: DirectX 8 Multiplayer Support: Internet, LAN, modem, and cable system.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **ESR:** ESRB Rating: Everyone

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Microsoft

SPEC OPS II: OPERATION BRAVO



Game Development Lesson #1: A sequel should not build upon the problems of the original. You should stay off the Harley's until you've taken the training wheels off your Schwinn. Not following this simple law will make you fall down and go boom – much the way SPEC OPS II: THE GREEN BERETS did. Don't our fighting boys deserve better?

Enter SPEC OPS II: OPERATION BRAVO, a free downloadable expansion of SO2 that upgrades your game into the PLATINUM COLLECTION, the retail re-release of the SPEC OPS series (along with a strategy guide). OPERATION BRAVO contains 25 nicely rendered missions in jungle, desert, urban, and arctic terrain. But much of the game's interface has been watered down, with fewer menus, FMVs, pre-mission briefings, and operatives (there's only two instead of four – making some missions almost impossible to finish). OPERATION BRAVO sees minor tweaks in both AI and gameplay, but your AI buddies still shoot beyond the line-of-sight while ignoring orders. Sadly, most of the bugs (and shoddy AI and gameplay) still remain from SO2, especially when using D30. Both my Pentium II and III constantly crashed during play. Even though former SO2 owners can get OPERATION BRAVO for free, it's time we call in the fimp squad and shoot this game dead. —Raphael Libustone

Genre: Action • Publisher: Nippon Games • Developer: Zenobe • Free Download • www.zenobe.com • ESRB Rating: Teen: animated violence.

DUKES OF HAZZARD: RACING FOR HOME

Genre: Racing • Publisher: South Peak Interactive • Developer: Sinister Games • \$39 www.southpeak.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



Reviewers often slam games inspired by movies or TV shows for not being true to the originals. Rest assured, this piece of crapware is completely true to the original TV series from whence it was spawned: It's stupid, inbred, cheap, boring, and ultimately a waste of time. Oh



yeah, and it will rot your brain.

Rather than engage in the debate of why this game was made in the first place, let's just take a look at what makes it suck. First, it's a PlayStation port, and a very bad one to boot. The graphics engine is atrocious, with glaring seams between polygons, low-res textures, and chunky frame-rates that put it on a par with anything pre-NEED FOR SPEED. On top of that, the missions are extremely repetitive (just like episodes of the show), and usually offer nothing more than getting from point A to point B while either ramming someone or evading the cops. Plus, you only get to bust out your dynamite-equipped arrows once! All these country bumpkins seem to do is deliver mortgages and get mistaken for bad guys. Gosh, will those old Duke boys ever quit? God, I hope so. —Tom Price

Dirty Deeds, Done to Sheep



SHEEP

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COOL NEW FEATURES IN WINDOWS ME, BUT IT'S NOT A MUST-HAVE FOR GAMERS

Don't You Need ME?

The bane of PC gaming is, well, the PC: an often-cantankerous beast that all too frequently stands between you and your games. Meanwhile, the neighbor's game console just fires up and goes. Sure, our games

no, not really. It does add some cool features to Windows, but if your system is running fine with Windows 98, the upgrade isn't necessary. An exception would be if you're looking to build out your own Pentium-IV system, since Windows ME is Pentium-IV-aware, whereas 98 is not. But given the short supply of those chips, and that the top system makers will snarl up the lion's share of them, home-built Pentium-IV rigs are a ways away.

by Dave Salvator



are usually cooler, and deeper, but getting dragged into driver hell when all you really wanted was a little taste of UNREAL TOURNAMENT is about as pleasant as a prostate exam.

Enter Windows ME, Microsoft's latest incarnation of the "Windows 9X" dynasty. As Windows 9X has evolved, it has steadily improved, added features, and generally gotten more stable. But a major plumbing overhaul won't happen until the next version of Windows 2000, code-named Whistler, due sometime late next year. So Windows ME is the swan song for the Windows 9X Oses.

Is Windows ME an essential upgrade for gamers? In short,

My System's Keeper

ME's new features include system utilities to help maintain OS stability—like System Restore and System File Protection—as well as Microsoft's Movie Maker and an enhanced Media Player that now has trippy visualizers like WinAmp. Also new are several Wizards for adding functionality like ISDN, home networking, and digital cameras and scanners. Of all the new stuff found here, System Restore and System File Protection are the most valuable to gamers, since they're intended to eliminate the annual Windows re-install ritual.

System File Protection (SFP) essentially "plays goalie," guarding about 800 system files and monitoring application installs. If an app's installer tries to over-write a critical system file, SFP first copies that file to another folder before letting the installer continue (the installer could crash if

PROS

System Restore and System File Protection are welcome additions; faster boot times; Pentium III-ready; likely to have better long-term stability than Windows 98, bet...

CONS

No radical advances; no gaming performance increase; full version is expensive.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 50MHz or better, 32MB RAM, 40MB to 245MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, CD-ROM drive, Internet connection, Windows-compatible sound card, speakers or headphones, mouse.
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium-II 400MHz or better, 128MB RAM, plus the above.

Price: \$50 upgrade version (from \$2,069), \$70 upgrade version (from \$5,069/\$532), \$110 full version.

www.microsoft.com/windowsme



Win98 vs. ME Performance Comparison

	Windows 98SE	Windows ME
3D GameBench Score	72.7	62.5
Additional 3D Tests		
3D WinBench 2000 (1296x1024x32)		
24-bit Z, triple-buffered	72.7	72.5
3D WinBench 2000 (1800x1200x32)		
24-bit Z, double-buffered	52.2	43.8
QUAKE 3 (1600x1200x32)	42.5	42.5
QUAKE 3 (800x600x16)	134.7	135.4
2D Graphics Tests		
WB99 Biz Graphics WinBench	371	485

not allowed to write all of its files). After installation, SFP compares the two files, and if the new files are older or tweaked versions of the originals, SFP copies the originals back, ensuring a basic system stability.

Smooth Ride In

It takes about 45 minutes to install ME, which looks almost the same as a Windows 98 installation. Unfortunately, the ME disc isn't bootable, so I had to hunt down a DOS CD-ROM driver to start the installation. They call this progress? Windows 98 CDs have been bootable for some time now, so if your machine supports using the CD-ROM as a boot device, you can launch the install right off the CD-ROM. That hiccup aside, the install went painlessly, and Windows ME discovered and installed drivers for my somewhat obscure sound card, and the motherboard-down Ethernet adapter.

Performance: More of the Same

We ran Windows ME through our usual benchmark obstacle course, which includes 3D WinBench, 3D WinBench 2000, and CD and Audio WinBench. We of course also tested with CGW's own 3D GameGauge, a suite of games that we run to measure real-world game performance. The test system was a 1.1GHz T-Bird Athlon, running on Gigabyte's G-7A motherboard that uses Via's KT-133 chipset. The box was equipped with a GeForce 2 GTS 3D card with 32MB of DDR memory running version 6.21 of nVidia's reference drivers, and 256MB of PC133 SDRAM for system memory.

What we found is that Windows ME, for the most part, runs about even with a clean install of Windows 98SE for 3D gaming performance. Windows ME was about 4% faster on 3D GameGauge performance. In additional 3D graphics tests, the two OSes were even on both high-resolution tests that stress the 3D card, and on low-resolutions tests, which exercise the CPU, chipset, and memory. Through the course of testing, both operating systems appeared equally stable.

A Miraculous Recovery... Well, Mostly

To test System Restore, we created a Restore Point, then installed some games. We changed some of the system's network settings, adding the IPX protocol and a Netware client. Next, we took the system back to our initial restore point. We found that System Restore removed all Registry keys from the three installed games, but only deleted some of the game files from the hard drive. The games were only installed and not played, so there weren't any save-games that an installer wouldn't have known about; this partial deletion struck us as odd. The games were also removed from the uninstall list. So, you'd still need to go and delete the games' folders yourself, but the Registry appeared to be completely clean of any keys from these games. System Restore also reset the network settings to their original state, removing both the IPX protocol stack and the Netware client.

All told, Windows ME does add some valuable features for gamers, but they aren't essential. If you're running Windows 95, or if you think you need a fresh installation of Win98, you should consider upgrading to Windows ME (alternatively, Symantec's \$60 Ghost utility offers System Restore features for Windows 98). But if you and your system are living in harmony with Win 98, keep it. **CGW**

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GADGET OF THE MONTH

What the hell does an electric scooter have to do with computer gaming? Um, nothing. But I saw one buzzing around the streets of San Francisco, and said, "It will be mine, oh yes." ZapWorld makes "alternative transportation" vehicles, all electric, that range from the Zappy to motorized bicycles all the way up to a full-sized motorcycle. They even make small cars. OK, well, glorified golf carts. The Zappy can move along at a pavement-searing 15MPH, and can go several hours per charge. In a congested city, this is just the thing for getting from point A to point B, provided there are no hills (up or down) between you and your destination. At that point, the Zappy neds you. But, the handle bars fold down, and at 37 pounds, you can schlep it onto a bus or the subway.

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 Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital



Action Gamepad
 Microsoft Xbox Gamepad
 Game Gearpad USB

Power Rig

NEW REVIEW

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Story
Case	Ancis SA-840	\$210	380 watts, 4 bays, plenty of cooling
Motherboard	Ancis EUC2	\$180	AEP 4X, Intel 800, RAMBUS
CPU	Intel Pentium® III 1GHz	\$130	Expensive, but if you want the best...
Memory	Kingston 2GB PC800 DDRAM	\$80	RAMBUS, baby!
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2018D	\$10	Slightly faster, but also PCI 94 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet II Ultra 9440	\$225	Can you say pipedream?
2.5" floppy drive	Teac	\$20	You still love to love one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 80... II	\$850	How at 3GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	\$210	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer for DVD DVD-DVD	\$170	New Pioneer, Stee Drive, DVD
Monitor	Microsoft GamePro ZC™ 2015K	\$170	Perfectly fit, good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live, Platinum	\$160	For four-speaker DirectSound, ASB, and EAX
Speakers	Easton Acoustics SA400	\$100	Load, clean, uncluttered, and kick!
Keyboard	3200T Etekless IV-100 PD	\$40	March out and buy yourself one
External Hub	Netgear GS130	\$25	Multiplexer & DSL, system support
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$55	Natural in NewTouch use
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	\$60	No hold!
USB Hub	Logitech WingMan 7-port USB Hub	\$70	Get those USB ports up there

Total w/o Game Controller: **\$5,577**

Flight Joystick	CH F15 Conquest USB	\$85	Robust Thriftie
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	\$100	Nearly perfect for placement

Total **\$5,742**

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average list prices from Web page source reported via www.computershopper.com or www.pricegrabber.com. Lists compiled by Gene Schiavo.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Case	Ancis Spaceframe Case
Motherboard	ASUS A7V
CPU	AMD Athlon 600 w/cooling fan
Memory	170MB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Belt in 9440/95
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet II 2MB DDR
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Western Digital RAID ES30 for 20.1GB use
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-105
Monitor	Dupont DS8
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live
System	Eastern Acoustics SA-630
Mouse	Acoustix PC 2-Button Mouse
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you: For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo 5 5500 PCI board. At around \$280, the V5 5500 delivers solid performance and has very good FSAAs compatibility. And, when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo 5 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules' 3D Prophet II Ultra, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS Ultra chipset. With 64MB of DDR SDRAM, this board will blast games at 1600x1200 — if your monitor can handle it. At its \$500 price tag is too much for you, get Hercules' 3D Prophet II, using the GeForce 2 GTS chipset; the 32MB version comes in at just under \$300.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ON PENTIUM-IV AND DDR SDRAM

We've been testing Pentium-IV systems for next month's high-end Ultimate Gaming Machine shootout, and the early numbers are provocative. A 1.5GHz Pentium-IV is about 44% faster than the fastest 866MHz Pentium-III in this month's system roundup, using 3D WinBench's Processor Test — which tests CPU performance handling 3D data. But that same Pentium-IV was only about 11% faster than a Thunderbird Athlon t.tGHz on the same test. Given Pentium-IV's 36% clock advantage, my guess is that Athlon will fare well against Pentium-IV, given equal clock rates. More on this next month.

Early performance data on AMD's new 760 chipset shows that DDR SDRAM used as system memory could challenge RAMBUS for performance supremacy in the coming months. The

760 offers a 266MHz front-side bus, which could allow for system memory to hit a whopping 2.2GB/sec of peak bandwidth. At press time, chipset maker Via had just announced its Apollo Pro266 and Apollo KT-266 chipsets for Pentium-III and Athlon respectively. All is also reportedly at work on DDR chipsets for both platforms.

Intel is developing its own DDR chipsets for release in 2001, responding to customer demand. And while Intel isn't walking away from RAMBUS, it would certainly appear that they're hedging their bets.

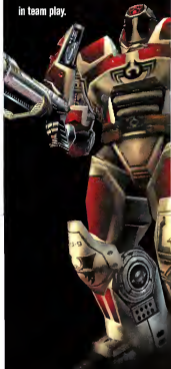
WHICH
3D CARD
SHOULD I BUY?

Price	The Skinny
\$499	3d cards, all sizes
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\$295	Supermicro Thunderbolt
\$160	128MB, squeezed in
\$0	It's in there
\$290	Supermicro GeForce 2 GTS card
\$29	SMI gotta love it
\$120	Fast and sleek
\$130	She-shes 890
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Gettin' an Earful

The latest Turtle Beach sound card flirts with perfection

Product photos by
Hayden Heuser/DIGITAL CLARITY



Turtle Beach Santa Cruz



TURTLE BEACH SANTA CRUZ

Requirements: Free PCI slot, Windows 98 or SE, Pentium 75MHz or better with 16MB or more RAM.

Price: \$100 • **Manufacturer:** Turtle Beach • **Contact:** www.beach.com

This card is damn near perfect. The laundry list of features is nearly endless. On the gaming side, there's a support for EAX 2.0 and Sensaura enhancements to DirectSound3D. For MP3 fans, there's hardware-accelerated MP3 playback. The card can support either a full 5.1 speaker rig, or you can set up one of the ports for digital output to a Dolby AC-3 receiver. And it even supports hardware MIDI daughtercards? What's not to like? Okay, you do have to type in the serial number if you want to install the software. And, the mixer could have had dB markers. Big deal.

The Santa Cruz uses a true digital-signal processor from Crystal. Since DSPs are programmable, the card can support a vast array of functionality, as noted. The audio positioning seems very good, both in synthetic testing and in games.

Since the card supports EAX as well as DirectSound3D, there's already a healthy library of games that will take advantage of the card. There's also very little noise generated when you crank up the speakers with no audio being played back. There are hints at future expandability, with a connector on the rear of the card mysteriously labeled "upgrade header."

On the software side, there's a lightweight bundle of audio utilities, but the most compelling piece is the sophisticated, yet easy-to-use mixer that installs with the card. One of the coolest features is Sensaura's "virtual ear" which allows you to tune 3D audio effects (when using headphones) to your own preferences.

The only [minor] concern is CPU utilization. On an 800MHz Pentium III, the Santa Cruz uses about 2.2% of the CPU — roughly twice that of a Sound Blaster Live. However, the actual number is so low as to be in the noise, and it's unlikely to have any impact on game performance. On the plus side, the MP3 acceleration will mean better performance than the Live when playing back MP3 files. —Lloyd Case



Videologic Sirocco Speakers

VIDEOLAGIC SIROCCO SPEAKERS

Requirements: Sound card with 2- or 4-channel output, and crossovers to put the rear-channel speakers. • **Price:** \$150 (though Weyer's/Turtle Beach)

Manufacturer: Videologic • **Contact:** www.videologic.com

Why would a company called "Videologic" make speakers? Then again, is the hokey-pockey really what it's all about? Alas, some questions will always remain a mystery. But Videologic — of PowerVR fame — has lurked themselves headlong into the speaker business, and its Sirocco Crossfires are a solid first outing, albeit not an unblemished one.

The Crossfires show up with a separate five-watt amp. This is a first for PC speakers, as the amp more often than not lives in the bass unit. The overall construction of the speaker housings and fittings seemed solid until I went to connect the first wire, when the connector clamp promptly popped off — making for an aggravating ten minutes of needless surgery to get the damn thing back together. But after that, the rest of the assembly was uneventful.

Another noteworthy feature is its multiple inputs — one four-channel, and two two-channel inputs that can be run in "quad" mode, which duplicates the signals from the front channels in the two rear channels. There was a delightful absence of power-brick or soap-on-a-rope power supplies, and the amp's controls are fairly straightforward. Extras include a headphone jack, as well as a front-mounted, line-level, 1/8" WalkMan-style input for connecting an MP3 player or iPodMan.

These speakers are very clean beasts, delivering uncolored sound for the most part on both music CDs and game audio. There was good frequency response; missing, though, were thunderous lows. The 80-watt RMS amp can pump out good volume, but you have to make it work to get there. As for running DVD's 5.1 audio through them, you'll either need a decoder that can "ghost" a center channel, or to run your decoder's center-channel output into your television or PC speakers to get that all-important center channel going.

Despite some good design decisions, the Crossfires are pretty solid but not the best 4.1 offering out there. That honor still belongs to Klipsch. What's more, Klipsch's ProMedia V2-400s are a good bit cheaper than the Crossfires. But with a bigger power amp and a lower price tag, the Crossfires could be serious contenders in the next go-round. —Dave Salvatore



Princeton Arcadia 27" Monitor



Microsoft Strategic Commander

MICROSOFT STRATEGIC COMMANDER

Requirements: Windows XP, free USB port, 25MB free disk space.

Price: \$30

Manufacturer: Microsoft

Contact: www.microsoft.com/movers

The Strategic Commander is an attempt to reinvent the mouse-based strategy game interface. Unfortunately, unless you're an ambidextrous savant, its edge locks and bold promises of strategy gaming ecstasy won't quite meet your expectations.

Two fundamental problems get in the way. First, the learning curve of this device is outrageous. Gamers who have spent years creating deep mental grooves for their favorite games will find it virtually impossible to retain commands using the Strategic Commander. And once you do, you're still going to find yourself clumsily fumbling with six buttons and three shifts, and unintentionally moving your view by putting pressure on the controller's 3D axes.

Once you do get the hang of it, however, you'll be able to perform tasks that are otherwise impossible due to an artificial bias, isn't that cheating, or at least exploiting a very unfair advantage?

Although fixed, you have to respect this attempt at innovation, which could perhaps pave the way for a enhanced mouse that incorporates the three-dimensional aspects and programmable buttons into a single unit. —George Jones



PRINCETON ARCADIA 27" MONITOR

Requirements: Graphics card with VGA output.

Price: \$799

Manufacturer: Princeton

Contact: www.princeton.com

When it comes to your gaming display, bigger is undoubtedly better. Princeton's revamped Arcadia line of monitors look that noble to boot, coming in 27", 32", and 36" sizes. We took a gander at the 27" model and liked what we saw.

The Arcadia actually pulls double duty as computer monitor and cable-ready TV tuner. It's adorned with multiple inputs, including two VGA inputs, one of which is front-mounted for a quick PC hook-up, one component video, and one S-video input with matching stereo-audio inputs. Missing, however, was a component video input, something you'll want to get the best image quality from your DVD player. S video is good, but component video is better. Princeton also decided to put stereo speakers into Arcadia, and they sound pretty much like you'd expect built-in monitor speakers to sound — not bad, but not good enough to use full-time.

Arcadia supports a maximum resolution of 1024x768 at 60Hz, but it seemed more comfortable running at 800x600, where the refresh rate can go up to more eye-pleasing 75Hz. The Arcadia is HDTV-ready, supporting 480P, 720P, and 1080i resolutions — though you'll have to use the VGA connection to run Arcadia at HDTV resolutions. So, this isn't destined for your study or office. Where it would fare well is in your living room as the nerve center of a home entertainment system.

Image quality was very solid in a run through standard video tests, as was color saturation and hue in both games and DVD movies. Gaming on big displays definitely rules. UNREAL TOURNAMENT on the 27" Arcadia, audio cranked very loud, all the lights off... you get the idea.

If you're looking for a PC-friendly living room display, consider the Arcadia line. The omission of component video is a pretty serious oversight, but that aside, Arcadia is otherwise a solid and inexpensive multipurpose display. —Dave Salvator

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Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR

Fast off the Line

Tips to make your computer boot faster



Put down this magazine and go to your television. No, I mean it. Go over to your television and turn it on. How long did it take to "boot"? Probably about three to five seconds. Now, turn your PC on, and start timing. How long did it take to boot? Probably two to three minutes. In this month's UGM roundup, all but one of the Windows ME systems booted to a usable desktop in under 50 seconds, whereas the one Windows 98SE box we got took two minutes to get its act together.

How does Windows ME do it? Well, the answer lies in what it doesn't do. Microsoft studied the boot sequence, and looked for ways to streamline it. They determined a minimal set of drivers needed to get you started. They also got rid of real-mode (DOS) driver-loading altogether. That's great for those of you who buy Windows ME, but what if you don't? Not to worry, friend. Stealing a page from the Windows ME play book, here are some tips on how to get your system to boot faster.

Who Am I?

In some sense, your PC poses the Question Of The Ages every time you power up. Your system's BIOS stores information about your system and its settings, but it also auto-detects system components like amount of memory, hard drives and CD-ROM drives, and your CPU type and speed. Your BIOS also performs a Power-On Self Test (POST) to make sure that key system components are functioning. But many BIOSes have an option for a "quick" POST that takes less time, and lets the BIOS do a quicker "hand off" to Windows. To get into your BIOS when your system first starts up, hit Escape. Then press the hot key to get into the BIOS, which is usually Delete or F2, though yours may be different.

Another BIOS speed-up is to change your boot order, which is usually done under the BIOS Boot Options screen, though it varies from BIOS to BIOS. By default, most systems first seek the floppy-drive, and most now also check the CD-ROM drive to see if there's a bootable CD-ROM in it before hitting the hard drive and beginning to load Windows. Change the boot order to make your hard drive the first boot device, so you

“ Will this combination of tweaks get your boot-time down to under 50 seconds? No. But could it shave 30 seconds off your current boot-time? You betcha. ”

won't waste time hitting empty floppy and CD-ROM drives before going on to the hard drive. If you need to boot from a floppy or CD-ROM in the event of a disaster, go back into the BIOS and rearrange the boot order accordingly.

Get Real

Another place to shave startup time is in a couple of dusty old files called AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS, holdovers from the bad-old DOS days. Believe it or not, some hardware still loads real-mode drivers, usually sound cards that want to provide Sound Blaster compatibility in old DOS games. In some cases, your CD-ROM drive may be loading its old real-mode driver and MSCDEX, the DOS CD-ROM interface driver. Unless you're still playing DUKE NUKEM 3D, odds are you don't need real-mode driver support for either device.

So go into SysEdit (Start Menu → Run... → sysedit), and take a look at these two files: If your computer is loading real-mode drivers, put the word "REM" in front of the commands to load these drivers. Don't delete them, as you may want them again.

Lighten Your Tray

After real-mode drivers load, Windows continues to load other protected-mode drivers, and then loads applets into your system tray, located on the right of your Start menu toolbar. One unfortunate trend in Internet software is that apps like RealPlayer, WinAmp, and Shockwave seem to think they need to be in your system tray. Well, they don't. Another culprit is game-controller and mouse control-panel software. If you actually make use of these applets, let them load; if you don't, get rid of them. Your mouse will run fine, and most

game controllers will, too. If a controller starts giving you trouble, you may have to load its tray applet.

How do you get rid of these pesky tray applets? Go to your Start menu, select Run, and type MSCONFIG. This utility is in Windows 98 and ME, and gives you "fine-tune veto" power over all applets. Go to the Startup tab dialogue, and from here, you can decide which applets you want to load. There are several items you should definitely load—like ScanRegistry and TaskMonitor, both of which are essential OS components. When in doubt about whether a component should load or not, leave it be. After you've trimmed the obvious fat, you can try the questionable applets one by one. If your system has trouble rebooting, you'll want to re-enable that applet's loading.

Windows 95 users can download WinBench 99 at www.zdnet.com, which has a utility called Startup Manager; it, like MSCONFIG, gives you that same fine-tune veto power.

Will this combination of tweaks get your boot-time down to under 50 seconds? No. But could it shave 30 seconds off your current boot-time? You betcha. **EW**

Let me know how much time you cut from your boot sequence at cjw_hardware@ziffdavis.com.

DAVE'S MIX

1. Encounter, Pepper Adams
2. STAR TREK ELITE FORCE
3. The Pattern on the Stone, J. Daniel Hill
4. ...
5. MADDEX 2001

I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerates. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature wif come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ 64MB DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI



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You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Dave Salvator

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

The Disappearing CD-ROM Drive

I just got a CD-R/W drive, which I installed on my secondary IDE channel. Now, Windows only sees the CD-R/W drive, but not my normal CD-ROM drive. What did I do wrong?

Each of your two EIDE controllers can have two devices on them, a master and a slave. It sounds like you probably have your CD-R/W drive set as the slave device (set with jumpers on the back of the drives), and that you put it first in the EIDE "chain." The problem is that to the EIDE controller, it sees the slave device as the end of the chain, and can't see the master device that's wired at the end of your ribbon cable. So you need to either swap which device is the master and reconnect your ribbon cable the same way, or reverse the order of the two connected drives so that the master device is first on the ribbon cable, followed by the slave. When you reboot your system, Windows should see both devices.

Freeze Frame

I recently upgraded my system and I'm having some problems. I have a Pentium-III

500MHz, and a Creative Annihilator 2 32MB video card with 128MB of RAM. My screen freezes when I play any 3D games. The freeze is only momentary most times, and I also hear the hard drive working when it's happening. Any ideas on what's causing this? **Answer:** Your config sounds like my system at home. I've also run into this type of problem, and after much great screaming I started looking at how much RAM was free in Windows. It turns out that after loading, Windows has very little "free" memory left. This was disconcerting, to say the least. After some looking, I found a utility called **TweakAll**, which is available at www.stbms-stred.com/tweakall.html. This is a very cool freeware utility that lets you tweak Windows in many useful ways, but as with any tweaking utility, tweak only one thing at a time, and BE CAREFUL! That way, it things go badly, you'll know which tweak is the culprit. **TweakAll** has a function that recovers leaked memory, and they recommend attempting to recover about half of your physical memory. So on your system, you should have about 64MB of free memory before going into any game. I've been doing this, and suddenly frame-rates in **High Heat 2001**, **UT**, and other 3D games are a lot less chuggy.

Beige Box Feedback

I got a good bit of mail about last month's column on boring case design, along with some good pointers to places to find cooler cases. In particular is a company called **ColorCases** (www.colorcases.com), whose Millennium case, part of their 200 Series of cases, has an Apple G4-like even-door side panel that allows quick access to all parts of the motherboard. I also got some mail pointing me to this site: www.virtual-hideout.net/cool_cases/, which is a gallery of users' custom-tweaked cases. I haven't gotten my hands on one yet, but believe me, I will. If the fit and finish on this case are solid, look for this guy to be the new Killer Rigs case for both systems, since it comes in at \$99. Thanks for writing in, and if you see any other cool case designs, send me mail at cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com.



TECH TIP Try a Drink From a Fire-Hose

Just not that spiffy new DSL or cable modem installed? Loving the amazing speed gain? It really is a world apart from the 56K doldrums, and life is good as a lapping bastard. But now that you've gotten a taste of speed, do you find yourself craving more? Well, you can open up your Net connection and milk it for even more speed by making a few Registry tweaks to your TCP/IP settings.

The two settings you need to tweak are called **DefaultRecvWindow** (TCP/IP Receive Window) and **MTU** (maximum transmission unit). As with any system tweaks that involve tinkering with the Registry, make backup copies of the Registry's two files (**SYSTEM.DAT** and

USER.DAT, which live in the **C:\WINDOWS** folder, or the folder where you've installed Windows) in a separate sub-folder. That way, if the tweaks don't work out, you can easily restore your Registry to its pre-tweaked state. Now head over to www.dellreports.com/tweaks and follow their excellent step-by-step guide to getting your connection tuned. Mileage will vary, a lot, but my **MindSpring DSL** connection - rated at a minimum service of 384Kbps downstream - went from a downstream data-rate between 300-400Kbps (already good) on long downloads, to a whopping 1Mbit/sec (about tripled). Check it out and let me know how you fare.



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Crimson Skies

Air combat maneuvers of the rich and famous
by David Chong

Learning the following advanced maneuvers will give you an edge over your opponents in dangerous skies. No single maneuver fits all situations, so it's important to be able to perform all of them. The art of applying the right maneuver in a given situation comes with practice and the careful reading of the Gaining Position section, opposite.

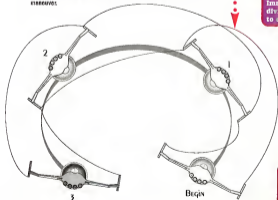


The following text is excerpted from *Crimson Skies™: Sybex Official Strategies & Secrets™*, by David Chong, which can be ordered at www.sybexgames.com.

The Barrel Roll

■■■■ Barrel rolls are useful for bleeding speed, or for adjusting your position without altering your course. A barrel roll is essentially a regular aileron roll, plus elevator input. To perform a barrel roll, roll about 30 degrees in the direction you want to start the roll. Pull up on the stick, and simultaneously throw the ailerons in the opposite direction from which you started the roll. Apply the opposite rudder to keep your nose pointed in roughly the same direction. You'll begin to arc up and over in a sideways loop, as if the top of your plane was stuck to the outside of a rolling barrel. Zero your controls when you return to level flight. You can stop your lateral movement at any time by zeroing the elevators and rudder, and rolling upright.

Use the barrel roll to help you stay behind a slow-moving target when you are in danger of passing it up. The barrel roll will bleed off your speed while maintaining your firing position throughout the maneuver.



The Immelman

■■■■ Much like a half-loop, the Immelman is a climbing turn. However, a simple aileron roll allows you to turn in any direction you wish instead of being limited to doubling back upon your original course. To perform an Immelman, start a half-loop and zero your pitch rate as soon as you're pointing directly up into the sky. Now, execute an aileron roll to point your lift line in the direction you want to exit the maneuver. Once the top of your head is pointing the way you want to go, release pulling back on the stick to complete the loop. Recover as usual to complete the Immelman.

TIP alert

The Immelman is a great way to shake a pesky bandit off your tail. If you're low on ω , just perform an Immelman in reverse order, diving instead of climbing to execute a split-S.

BEGIN



The Yo-Yo

■■■■ The yo-yo is a high-G turn combined with vertical movement. By spending some of your turn's arc in the vertical, you effectively reduce your total turn radius. To perform a high yo-yo, roll your plane slightly upwards, approximately 30 degrees above the horizontal axis. Your nose will travel through an arc above the horizon as you pass through 180 degrees. You can also reverse the maneuver, dipping your wings below the horizon to perform a low yo-yo.

TIP alert

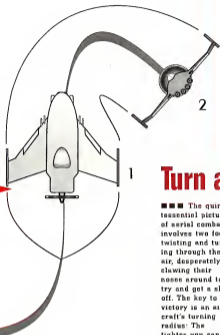
Use the yo-yo to get an even tighter turn out of your airplane than you can get with the high-G turn when that extra cornering can spell the difference between victory and defeat. For an even faster turn-rate, kick the rudder into the turn on the ascending half of the yo-yo.



BEGIN

Gaining Position

■■■ As complex as it all may seem, air combat really boils down to shooting the other guy while avoiding getting shot yourself. The best way to do that is to get on the fighter's tail. This brings your weapons to bear and allows you to follow your opponent's movements, while simultaneously staying out of reach of your enemy's weapons. There are two basic methods to achieve the all-important trailing position, and they are outlined below.



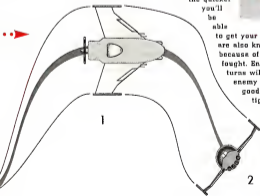
Turn and Burn

■■■ The quintessential picture of aerial combat involves two foes twisting and turning through the air, desperately clawing their noses around to try and get a shot off. The key to victory is an aircraft's turning radius: The tighter you can turn your plane, the quicker you'll be able



to get your nose around on your enemy. Turn fights are also known by the slang name "knife fights," because of the short distances at which they are fought. Energy management is critical, as the turns will bleed your E quickly. Be aware of other enemy planes in the area, as you'll make a good target while you're struggling through a tight turn.

The high-G turn is the cornerstone of a knife fight. It gets your nose around quickly, and pulls your turn radius in as tight as possible. Put your lift line on the enemy plane (centering the spyglass on the top edge of your screen is a sure way to do this), and just pull back on the stick. If your plane's turn radius is tighter than your enemy's, then that's all you need to do.



The Powerslide

■■■■ Nathan Zachary, leader of the Fortune Hunters pirate gang, has granted us an exclusive on his trademark powerslide maneuver! Mr. Zachary has claimed many an air victory against far more maneuverable planes through the use of this special move, which essentially squeezes approximately twice the standard sustained turn-rate out of his plane. Here, he shares this secret weapon with our devoted readers!

"In order to execute a powerslide, drop your throttle to idle. Let your airspeed fall down to under two-thirds of your maximum (about 200 knots in a *Desolator*, for example). As you decelerate, roll your lift line over into the direction you wish to turn. Once you've decelerated, peg your throttle wide open and bury the stick to your lag. You'll pull some serious Gs, and your tail will actually slide out of your flight path as you pull through up to 90 degrees in the blink of an eye.

"You'll continue at your increased turn-rate for as long as you see the smoke trailing out of your straining engine's exhausts. After your tail stops sliding, you'll return to a standard turn-rate. Therefore, this maneuver is best used at the very beginning of a turn fight to wrap your nose around on your enemy before he can begin his break toward you.

"If the enemy is out-turning or equaling your turn-rate, you can also use the high end low yo-yo to coax a bit more coaxing out of your plane. Beginning your turn fight with a powerslide will give you an immediate edge as well. If you still can't out-turn your opponent, it's best to exit the fight and try a new approach.

"Executing a turn fight is one of the hardest things to do end survive. To maximize your chances, apply full throttle and execute a high yo-yo. Instead of continuing the turn after you descend out of the maneuver, continue in the direction of your nose in a moderate dive. Fly straight and fly fast—if you need to dodge fire as you extend, use your pitch to alter your flight path. After you're out of short range, you can throw in a bank or two to help you dodge gunfire and rockets. Extending in this manner will buy you some distance between you and your foe, who will naturally come onto your six soon after you abort your turn."



Bleed some speed with a barrel roll to stay on the six of a particularly juicy target.

Boom and Zoom

■■■■ The boom and zoom, or B&Z for short, is the antithesis of the turn fight. Whereas turn fights are fought at short range and at ever-decreasing speed and altitude, the B&Z pilot seeks to perform high-speed slashing attacks in which only a very short period of time is spent within gun range of the

enemy. Although you won't have long to line up your target for a shot, if executed properly, your enemy will never have the opportunity to return the favor. The B&Z is perfect for those times when you're outtaumbered by enemy planes. It minimizes your exposure to enemy fire, and preserves an energy advantage over planes that you aren't even targeting at the moment.

Begin a B&Z at a higher speed and altitude than your target. Turn toward the enemy and perform a sustained dive of 30–40 degrees. As you approach your foe, try to point

your gunsight ahead of the target, so that you're



Keep your roll synced as you extend away from a turn fight to maximize your acceleration.

advantage over planes that you aren't even targeting at



Turn to face a low and slow target as you set up for a boom and zoom attack.

your gunsight ahead of the target, so that you're

flying toward where they will be, instead of where they are. Don't leave your corrections to the last moment, or you'll bleed speed and allow your enemy to pull in on your six as you extend away. When you've got your enemy in gun range, squeeze off a long burst, and concentrate on one specific part of the target to maximize damage.

If you're not facing any other opponents, and you've set yourself up on the target's six, go ahead and throttle back to stay on the

tail of your enemy. A barrel roll will help shed some of your excess speed. On the other hand, if another enemy aircraft threatens, complete the "zoom" portion of the maneuver. Just before you pass your target, pull up and away, using all of the speed that you built up in the dive to regain some altitude. Your target should not be able to follow you straight up into the sky. If you are followed, perform an Immelman to get back on the tail of your opponent, who will be quite slow in gaining altitude, giving you and your guns a ripe target. After you've extended out of gun range, use an Immelman to set up another B&Z attack. **COW**

TIP alert

You can maximize your firepower in the high-speed pass by using your longer-range light cannons first, then switching over to your short-range heavy hitters once you've closed the distance. This tactic combines a long firing window with the heavy firepower you need to get a quick kill.

"Think of *Sea Dogs* as *Pirates!* in 3D but with more depth to it... *Sea Dogs* simply looks great."

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Sea Dogs



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Homeworld: Cataclysm

Secrets of the Somtaaw arsenal
by Thomas L. McDonald

With a single-player game of 17 missions, each averaging 5 sub-missions, there's a lot to do in **HOMEWORLD: CATAclysm**. The best way to win is to understand your gear and how to use it. Since The Beast can acquire your technology as you proceed – and use your own ships against you – you need to know the Somtaaw hardware inside-out. Here's a good idea of how to use it.

Worker

The AI routinely goes for resource gatherers (since they're slow and unable to outrun the enemy), so give them a light escort (Acolytes if you're light on resources; ACVs otherwise) set to Neutral tactics. Upgrade them constantly and you'll wind up with a single ship that can harvest, repair, and salvage.

Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Nose

Processor

Send Workers out in teams of four-to-six with a Processor. It speeds collection times by allowing the Worker to drop off loads without returning to the Kuan-Lan, and it can also repair damaged ships. It has light gun turrets and can take on Energy Cannon and

Armor Level 2 upgrades. Set a team of escorts – six should do – to guard it in Sphere formation.
Tactics: Neutral
Formation: Nose

Recon

Think of Recon ships as mobile sensor arrays, and set patrol paths far from known hot-spots. They're your eyes, no more.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Nose

Mimic

A form of recon ship, Mimics are remarkably useful deep-space spies. Unarmed and lightly-armored, they earn their bones by their ability to imitate asteroids or small enemy vessels. Park a Mimic in each asteroid field to keep an eye on enemy Processors. Attaching them



The Acolyte is a frequently useful ship. Not only is it your fastest—and smallest—fighter, but two Acolytes can “mimic” to form the more powerful ACV. One Acolyte turns upside down and links to the other, and keep your dirty comments to yourself. You can also unlink the ACV if you need speed over firepower.

to enemy strike wings is less practical, but they do enable you to get a good picture of an enemy fleet. Remember that Proximity Sensors and ships with the Advanced Sensor upgrade can detect them. Their only attack is a light kamikaze strike.

Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Use singly

Leech

Unless detected by Advanced Sensor upgrades or Proximity Sensors, the Leech will remain unseen while it drains an enemy ship of life, converting that life into RUs for your use. Best used in teams of two to more rapidly drain a target,

they can take down even large ships.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Broad

Sentinel

Though it has a decent fighting capability, the Sentinel is most effective in groups of twelve to create a closed-sphere force field around the Kuan-Lan. It may also provide protection for carriers, and may be used in a strike force against slow-moving cap ships – where it can provide a small froat shield for attacking frigates.
Tactics: Evasive
Formation: Sphere (or part of Claw strike force)

Acolyte

As your most basic fighter,



Multiplayer games are often a rush to get the tech for the destroyer, which is the key attack ship in any well-composed fleet.

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Microsoft



As new techs become available, constantly send workers back to the Command ship for upgrades, and soon they will be able to salvage and repair as well as harvest.



The Claw, which is essentially a concave X-formation, is good for mobile strikes because it allows for a broader sweep of fire and more in-formation maneuverability.



The Taidan Ice Beam Frigate is a slow-turner, but its uni-directional beam can chew up Cap ships without fast defender support.

the Acolyte will always have a role at those times when you need a quick defense or a large number of cheap ships. Keep them away from anything with more than one gun; a swarm of Acolytes will still get shredded by Corvettes and Destroyers.
Tactics: Aggressive
Formation: Claw

ACV

Once you get Linking Technology in the middle of mission one, you can use two Acolytes to form a single ACV. The ACV can be unlinked if you need the additional speed and maneuverability of the

Acolyte, but in practice, it will be your core attack ship. ACVs can easily defeat Frigates, but are weak against Cruisers.
Tactics: Aggressive
Formation: Claw

MCV

There is really no reason to use the MCV, which comes with Holographic Emitter technology. A Mimic can do the same job at a tenth of the cost.
Tactics: Don't use

Ramming Frigate

You get the Ramming Frigate right away, and may be tempted to build it - since you won't see a new frigate model until about mission eight. They don't have

weapons, but can be used to push large Cap ships out of a battle. I didn't find this useful very often, but in heavy battles after mission five or so, you may find that it helps blunt a heavy Cap-ship attack. A more common use is to push Gravel Generators out of the way, thus breaking up the enemy's most useful defensive tactic. Never ram a Beast vessel! The Ram will become infected.
Tactics: Normal
Formation: None

Multibeam Frigate

For the last half of the game (mission eight onward), this ship will take the place of the ACV as the backbone of the fleet. Not very good against Destroyer-class or above, they're formidable against anything smaller. Even faster ships have a hard time getting past a few Multibeams in formation. Group several, and select multiple targets for the best spread of fire.
Tactics: Aggressive
Formation: Sphere or Claw



The Command ship grows with your forces. Those modules along the centerline are added as you research new technologies, and can increase the support, research, defensive, and offensive abilities of the ship.

Hive Frigates

These are tough to use effectively, since they have a very specific role. Essentially an upgrade of the Drone Frigate in the original HOMEWORLD, the Hive sends out a swarm of six mini-fighter drones. A couple of Hives at the front of an attack can provide some distracting fire for enemy escorts, while Multibeams or ACVs hit the main target. Similarly, at the rear of a fleet retreat they can seed up harassing swarms to slow an enemy counter-attack. Keep the ships back and out of the range of Cap-ship weapons. The temptation to rely upon them to protect the Kuun-Lan should be avoided.
Tactics: Neutral
Formation: Broad or Wall

Destroyer

You don't get them until mission eleven, but once you do, just build and build and build. They're slow to turn, and while they're armed on all sides, the bulk of their attack

power comes in the front quarter. Thus, a wall or broad-formation concentrates firepower the best. These are immune to Beast infection attacks, so use only these against Beast Cap ships. Expect the AI to use sphere attacks and ramming frigates when possible. Use a large ACV escort.

Tactics: Aggressive
Formation: Broad or Wall

Dreadnought

The big mack-daddy of the fleet is oftstage until mission fourteen, and then you usually only get one. Park it in the middle of a mondo-escort of ASVs, Multibeams, and Destroyers (with a couple Hives for good measure) and you will be unstoppable. Other large ships are not the problem. Swarms of small and medium ships are the real danger to a Dreadnought.
Tactics: Aggressive
Formation: Claw

Carrier

Essential to expanding your fleet size, the Carrier may also be used to carry the fight to the enemy, where it can tax and produce all but the largest cap ships. They're pretty durable and can shake off fighters, but give them an escort anyway.

Tactics: Neutral
Formation: None **GM**

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

READER TIP

Deus Ex

- In the first mission, choose the GEP-gun instead of the crossbow and the sniper rifle, because it's a handy weapon and you won't find another one until later in the game. Use it to take out bots, cameras, and barrels.
- MJ-12 commandos are tough, but can easily be destroyed by heavy weapons. I personally suggest the Plasma Rifle. Since the Men/Women-in-Black don't run fast, and explode when they die, you'll want to take them out from a distance with the GEP-gun.
- When confronting a huge group of enemies, sometimes you should be creative and try to lure them into a trap of LAMs. They'll kill or weaken most of the enemies, leaving you to either finish them off or to scrounge for loot. —Tommy Chan

For writing a few good tips on DEUS EX, we're giving Tommy a copy of MORTYR from our dwindling cache, a MIGHT & MAGIC VI: THE MAHADE OF HEAVEN notepad, and an OMMRON shirt. Enjoy!



ICEWIND DALE

■■■ Mages and clerics are only as good as the spells in their heads. Here's a quick overview of the spells you should take the time to learn, in order to

thump those demons and giants and bears good.

Mages: Early on, depend on Magic Missile and Sleep. If you have the brainpower, throw in an Identify or Two. Soon, you'll be running into trolls; spells like Busting Heads, Agassur's Scurcher, and Nell's Acid Arrow will serve you well. At level three, the two best spells are Haste (it almost makes the battles unfair in your advantage) and Fireball, with Lullance as a good backup for when you want to surgically isolate certain enemies. Skull Trap is also a good safety measure for sets to lay down. When your magic is at a high level (nine or higher), Chromatic Orb becomes a very powerful spell.

Mid-level, you'll run into a lot of spells involving Enchant and Summoning. Learn as many



Summoning spells as you can (real summons, as opposed to Shadow Monsters). The critters you summon serve

as great cannon fodder or distractions to draw the enemy away from your real demon-slayers. Emotion, Hope and Emotion. Gaunage are worth learning for battle-preparation purposes. Out of all the Summon Elemental spells, the Fire Elemental is the best bet, since it deals great damage and has enough hit points to last most battles. As for level two-end-up spells, it then becomes a matter of preference.

Prests: Besides healing, the best overall spells for clerics to memorize are party boosters. At high enough levels, you can stack on Rejuvenation, Prayer,

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put CGWTIPS in the subject line). We'll publish one submission each month. Please do not simply cut and paste cheat codes from the Web. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World Backlist!



THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE

■■■ If you bought yourself the new-fangled chemistry set and started cranking out potions, you might want to check this list out. Your Sim, if successful, will make one of eight different potions, each producing different effects after drinking it.

- **Red:** Makes the Sim fall madly in love with another Sim in the neighborhood.
- **Orange:** Turns the Sim invisible for a short period of time (a few Sim-hours).
- **Yellow:** Reverses the Sim's personality traits.
- **Light Green:** A "bad" one, as all of your Sim's needs plunge into the red, putting your Sim in the worst mood possible.
- **Dark Green:** Creates an evil twist of the Sim. Think of it as the Jekyll & Hyde potion.
- **Blue:** Has the opposite effect of the Light Green, so after making it, you'll probably want to save it for when your Sim needs a quick boost in their needs.
- **Purple:** Another "bad" one, as it'll make your Sim a brain-dead monster for a couple of Sim-hours.
- **White:** Cures Sim-sickness; hang onto it in case the gerbil infects you again.

and Bless for a substantial set of bonus improvements to your party. As for other spells, Magical Storm is a nice "guaranteed opposite hit" early on, Protection From Evil helps against undead, and Sacred Mago is good for enemy angles. Later on, you'll want to stock up on Protection From Fire/Cold, as you'll be facing enemies with those designations.

Druids should use Flame Blade for trolls early on, and later, keep an eye out for Static Charge and Insect Swarm. Stock up on Animal Summonings, and if your Druid is an active fighter, then Entropy Shield will be your best friend in high-level combat.

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CGW TIPS

MADDEN 2001

■ Know who love the left and right juké buttons. (They're the left and right shoulder buttons on the Microsoft SideWinder gamepad.) They will drastically boost the efficiency of your outside running game. Run a sweep or pitch-out, and then as you approach the linebacker and/or secondary, juké in from the sideless, out of the tacklers' way. Don't even bother with the spin move.

■ Unless your secondary is the pits, a good all-purpose pass defense is the Nickel Under 2 Men. You get a decent four-man rush, tight-man defense, and an extra cornerback. The Madden AI tends to pass more often than run, so it's a good first-down defense as well. It's also solid against the run.

■ A great run defense is the 4-3 Run Zone. It also compensates decently against the short pass.

■ A good goal line defense is the Goal Line Blitz II. It serves well against the inside or outside run.

■ The key to successful passing is twofold. First, don't take more than a two-yard drop. You'll only make it that much harder for the quarterback to hit his target. Second, you have to throw the ball when the receiver makes his break. Be out-of-picture, wait for the receiver to cut. As soon as he does, rifle the ball to him. Be fly and corner patterns – the easiest to time and the easiest to complete against man coverage – make your throw as soon as the receiver cuts up.

■ In general, hard throws work better than lob passes.

When O. defense approaches from the right, juké to the left.



DIABLO II

■■■■ Diablo himself is quite the tough guy; face it, his hitpoints alone range from 5,000 to 37,000, depending on what difficulty you're fighting him on. There are a couple of things that will help you more than anything else against Diablo: resistances to fire and lightning. Diablo's main attack is lightning-based, and while there is a cold-based attack tucked here and there, he'll let you the rest of the time with fire. Diablo also follows his own advice, as he's quite resistant to most elemental attacks. So opt to use skills that inflict direct damage – rather than elemental damage – when you can.

■ **Sorceress:** Use Static Charge to knock down Diablo's hitpoints, then follow up with either Glacial Spike or Fireball. Even though he's quite resistant to these spells, they should be developed enough to deal significant damage to him.

■ **Paladin:** If you have Salvation, by all means, use it! Even with only one point into it, it will significantly reduce the amount of damage Diablo deals. With Salvation, you can afford to just stand next to Diablo, and



throw away with either Vengeance (again, it does do elemental damage, but it also ups your base damage), or Zeal.

■ **Barbarian:** This is yet another straightforward battle. Activate your standard "Defensive Stack" (Battle Commands, Battle Orders, and Shout), and go and pound Diablo with either Leap Attack or Whirlwind (since either one will keep you moving – hence, avoiding – most of Diablo's attacks).

■ **Necromancer:** Stand back, and let your minions do some work. A good Blood Golem will serve as both a decent damage-dealer and a damage-soak. Help him out with Curses like Iron Maiden or Amplify

Damage, and either sit back, or cast Bone Spear to bring Diablo down.

■ **Assassin:** If you have a Bowazon, it's just a matter of running around and pelting Diablo with Freezing arrows; while they may not inflict much more damage than a normal arrow, they'll at least slow him down and prevent him from catching up to you. Spearazons, well, it's time to break out your best spear and start impaling away. If you're afraid of breaking your spear with Impale, then use a beefed-up Jab instead. Throw up a Valkyrie if you can, just to distract Diablo or to lend offensive support.

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With WAR IN RUSSIA, Matrix Games revamped an old 1993 classic, but all the changes are under the hood.

Art of War

COMBAT MISSION succeeds because, as many war gaming pundits have joked about X-COM and JAGGED ALLIANCE, it allows you to use the game to tell your own stories. How many anecdotes do we have about the squad that would not break, or the hair-raising bazooka ambush, or the lone sniper that took out our company commander on the first turn? Squads, teams, and leaders take on individual lives in a way that would be impossible if we couldn't see them up close.

The endorsement is made possible by graphics, but is also inextricably tied to scale. After all, THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR has a 3D view, but no one comes away from that game telling stories about the tank icon that represents the Fifth Panzer Army. COMBAT MISSION didn't introduce any new concepts regarding morale, command, or weapons modeling. What it did was bring those concepts to life in the form of 3D soldiers that focused your thoughts and feelings directly on the battle. It became a window into the war.

End of the Road to Moscow?

Long before Big Time Software began work on

COMBAT MISSION, Arsenal Publishing released TACOPS, a turn-based, simultaneous-execution, tactical simulator that went on to be used as a training aid for several national military organizations. Arsenal's next project, though, was to be the real breakthrough, an operational-level simulation of the war on the eastern front in World War II, with the player actually taking the role of a staff officer and planning operations using an interface that simulated drawing up actual battle plans on military mapsheets. The game was to be played in realtime, although in an apparent concession to reason, time was somewhat accelerated.

Called ROAD TO MOSCOW, this ambitious project by developers Battlefield Design Group would have been to operational games what COMBAT MISSION has been to the tactical side: a game which finally brought reality—or at least, the appearance of it—to wargaming.

Sadly, ROAD TO MOSCOW bounced from publisher to publisher (from Arsenal to Interactive Magic, and then on to UbiSoft) and eventually faded into oblivion. It had been scheduled by UbiSoft for release in the first quarter of this year, but at the recent ECTS show in

London there was no sign of it, and the rumor is that it hasn't advanced beyond the early beta stage—a victim of its own ambitious goals (like dynamic AI that learned to counter a player's preferred strategy). I got a chance to play an alpha version of the game, and while I loved the fresh approach to operational wargaming, I have to admit that it would have been tough to imagine a 12-year-old seeing ROAD TO MOSCOW and exclaiming, "Oh, wow, can I be a chief of staff?"

A Better Tomorrow

It's hard to envision a bright future for wargames that doesn't have a tactical simulation aspect. Now that possibilities for 3D tactical wargaming are out of the bag, they will inevitably color gamers'

hopes for future releases. Matrix Games (www.matrixgames.com) has done a wonderful job updating STEEL PANTHERS (version 4.0 of SP: WORLD AT WAR) and Gary Grigsby's WAR IN RUSSIA, but games from 1993 aren't going to recruit a new generation of wargamers the way COMBAT MISSION might. And that new generation is going to expect improvements on what got them hooked in the first place, not retro-upgrades. Where's that VR helmet, comrade?

Perhaps a glimpse of this future can be seen in games like STEEL BEASTS (reviewed on page 136), where traditional 2D tactical planning and first-person battlefield simulation go hand-in-hand. Whatever path wargames will take, one thing is certain: The traditional, hex-based wargame is dead. COMBAT MISSION done blew it right up. **CGW**

BIG TIME'S NEXT BATTLE

■■■■ We caught up with Big Time Software's Chris Mayler to get the scoop on the company's next game:

"It will take place on WWII's Eastern Front: Soviets, Germans, and Poles locked in mortal combat from the opening years of Operation Barbarossa in 1941 to the collapse of Berlin in 1945.

"We've received a huge list of suggestions for new features and improvements from the people playing COMBAT MISSION right now. We'll be incorporating a lot of them, plus new weapons (all new tanks and artillery pieces), new units (like ski troops), new terrain types, different combat organizations, expanded treatment of long-range tank dashes and gunnery tactics, and probably a new way to simulate the limited command and control abilities of early-war Soviet troops. We'll make steady graphic improvements as well, though the overall look of the game will be similar to the current COMBAT MISSION."

BY TOM PRICE tom_price@nfl.com

Let Us Console You

I made Videogaming? What the-?!

Now before you start writing that pithy beta-email that starts off: "I didn't know CGW stood for Console Gaming World..."—relax. We're not abandoning PC gaming or changing the focus of the magazine. Instead, we're acknowledging the simple facts that we play console games, you (over 65% of our readers) play console games, and that paying attention to what's going on in their world and how it affects ours only leads to a more complete gaming experience. Plus, the next generation of consoles have a lot more in common with PCs and the PC gaming experience than ever before. With all the crossover titles, advanced 3D graphics, and plug-and-play Internet multiplayer innovations, it's a great time to be a console gamer.



shooters like *UNREAL TOURNAMENT* and *QUAKE III* are getting the console treatment, perhaps the greatest FPS of all time (if not the greatest game of all time) is also headed for the Dreamcast. *HALF-LIFE DREAMCAST* is currently in development by Gearbox software, the development house behind *HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE*. Slated for a holiday release, HLDC will be much more than a simple port. An entirely new single-player mission centered around the actions of one of Black Mesa's beloved Barneyes, called *Half-Life: Blue Shift*—plus 27 multiplayer levels and a graphics engine enhanced for the Dreamcast should bring plenty of the original's PC fans back into the fold. Based on the screens we've seen so far, we're definitely looking forward to playing the new mission. Just as long as it's not with a gamepad (yes Virginia, there is a Dreamcast mouse).

ONLINE GAMING DONE RIGHT?

SegaNet Goes Live

■■■ Sega's recent developments in the online arena should be of significant note to console gamers who have never known the joy of easy set-up, lag-free, Internet gaming—as well as to long-time PC online gamers who have likewise never known those joys. SegaNet, Sega's massive ISP/gaming portal/player-matching service, launched on September 7th with an enticing offer. Sign up for 18 months, and get a free Dreamcast (currently valued at about \$150). Considering that SegaNet works as a fully-functional ISP for your Dreamcast or PC (e-mail, web-browsing, etc.), that's not a bad deal.

We've played *NFL 2K1* and *QUAKE III* multiplayer online, and the experience was no less than amazing. There was no perceptible lag playing either one over the Internet on a 56K modem, and logging into the game took about two button clicks. You might ask how on earth Sega could deliver a painless and working online gaming experience when PCs have struggled for years to achieve that very thing. Simple. When end users are all using the exact same device with the same connection speeds, configuration is taken out of the user's heads. When console users can be up and playing football against their cousins in Procia or some guy called *LANDRY_IS_GOD* in Texas in a matter of minutes, it will make *EVERQUEST* look like your Grandma's bridge club. Hopefully, some of SegaNet's innovations will migrate over to the PC. **CGW**

GOROON GOES GLOBAL

HALF-LIFE for the Dreamcast

■■■ The increased power of next-generation consoles like the Sony PlayStation 2 and Sega Dreamcast is allowing for a lot more crossover PC titles. Popular first-person-



Nintendo Announces Next-Generation Console and Handhelds

■■■ Microsoft's projected Xbox release next Christmas may be a year after PlayStation 2 and two years after the Dreamcast's respective launches, but that doesn't mean it won't have competition. Nintendo finally unwrapped its plans for the 2001 holiday season: its next-generation console, the Gamecube (formerly code-named "Delphin"), and the Gameboy Advance, a 32-bit version of the classic handheld device. The massive crowd at Nintendo's big Japanese tradeshow, Spaceworld 2000, were wowed by an impressive tech demo that featured favorite characters from the worlds of Mario and Zelda, among others.

Don't count Nintendo out. They do still employ the Shakespeare of videogame design, Shigeru Miyamoto.



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October 2000
Game Commander PC

BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD tom@ew.com

Massively World War II

WARBIRDS VETERANS READY TO LAUNCH GLOBAL WARFARE

The virtual battlefield is the Holy Grail of Internet military simulations. Imagine thousands of people taking on the roles of individual infantry, pilots, navy gunners, radar operators, supply gurus, and other combatants in realistic simulations—all tied together into one whacking huge online war. All who have tried it have failed. Oh, long-running hits like *AIM WARRIORS* and *WARBIRDS* had strong followings, but they were flight sims, not battlefield sims. The idea of the Virtual Battlefield (VBF) goes back as far as net gaming, with Gilman Louie's plans to link up *FALCON* with other air and land sims to create a giant, multiplayer military theater. The late *JANE'S WORLD WAR* was another shot that strayed off target. Now, finally, someone might be doing a real VBF, and doing it in high style.

As with other recent innovations in massively-multiplayer gaming, this one is coming not from the majors but from a small startup company willing to pack up the ball and run. *WORLD WAR II ONLINE* (www.wwiionline.com) is

a game in which members can join the Army, Air Force, or Marines and go to war. For many, it is a fantasy product that they'd grown up on ever seeing. For *Cornered Rat Software*, it's an open-beta.

My War

The specs for this game are enough to make action fans, sim fans, and wargamers all drool. When you sign up for an account at a standard monthly fee (probably about \$10), you create a character, choose a side to fight for, and select one of the three branches of service. All sides of the conflict are represented: U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, France, China, and Commonwealth.

You can join each branch of each country for a total of 27 different career paths on a single account. Career paths are each separate, so as you rise through the ranks in the Japanese air force, you may still be a Private in the Russian army. It all depends on which path you choose to spend the time playing. All of these choices mean a staggering array of gameplay options. You can fly, man the guns of battleship, fight

in the trenches, drive a tank, or even handle supply. The logistics of all of it have crushed the will of larger companies, so what makes a start-up think they can lick 'em?

For starters, *Cornered Rat* isn't just any start-up. They were formed by several key members of the *WARBIRDS* team after *Interactive Magic* shut down their Texas office. Beginning with a dozen seasoned programmers from one of gaming's landmark multiplayer titles, the *Cornered Rat* staff has ballooned to 40 people in the year they've spent working on this project.

"We began by cataloging all the VBF games and why they failed," says Producer Chris Sheild. "How did those teams approach these problems? What mistakes did they make? Since we knew we were breaking new ground, we had to understand these issues before we began, so we lined them up and looked at them. One of the main problems is modularity. You can't approach it by building a flight sim and then adding tanks. So we designed it from the bottom as a vehicle simulator that could model anything that moved, from a bike to a

battleship. The other problem is time-to-battle. A ship sim and an aircraft sim travel at different speeds. It may take hours to get into battle with a ship, but only 14 minutes in a plane. We addressed that by creating dynamic spawn points to equalize time to combat for all the branches. So, players will be able to get into action regardless of branch."

Choose Your Weapon

The peculiarities of all this are daunting, but the solutions are logical. For instance, what will keep the infantry element of the game from becoming a first-person shooter like *QUAKE* or *UNREAL*? When you log in for a session, you may want to take part in a specific large battle, or you may just want 30 minutes of shooting action. The game embraces both approaches, but is always geared toward realism. Weapon types are very limited: bolt-action rifles, hand grenades, and a limited number of submachine guns.

The advanced physics model prevents the running and jumping techniques common to shooters. If you run and jump, you'll just tire out and faint. There are

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WWII...



BY LAND, SEA, AND AIR

Corneec Rat

Software's hugely ambitious **WORLD WAR II ONLINE** will let you experience the hell of war from an Army, Air Force, or Marine perspective.

enough leashes on the players to prevent rampaging gunfights and to keep to the tone of a realistic large-scale infantry battle, but enough action to keep things interesting. By using dynamic spawn points, new gamers are always close to the action.

Each time you start a session, you're presented with specific options. If you're in the Air Force, maybe you'll see a roster of current or pending battles and of the planes available to fly. In the Navy, you may find that a capital ship has just entered the area and choose to man big guns, AA, or even a radar station. At any time you'll find specific, goal-oriented missions. Successfully participating in these missions from start to finish will yield a point award, which can be applied towards raising a particular character's rank. Higher ranks get more options and different weapons. Reach a high-enough rank and you can take over the role of theater commander, directing resources on a large map.

Death doesn't really exist. You never lose rank or what you have acquired. If you die in a specific mission, you will lose the points you've accumulated for that mission, but it affects your

progress—not your overall character. The hardware will also be scalable in terms of realism workload. While the realism level is always high, for complex objects like tanks and planes the user can choose between hardcore mode and a mode which automates some of the more difficult functions.

The naval aspect of the game is also intriguing. Since you can't just let players spawn a battleship in an enemy port, all capital ships larger than destroyer class will be treated as slow-moving, permanent objects in the game. You can spawn into these objects, but not move them. This means that in the scope of the campaign, the big ships may only arrive at the battle at certain points, and are "at sea" the rest of the time. Small boats like coastal patrol boats, corvettes, and PT boats, however, can spawn any time they like for quick action.

You Are There

A central menu tracks it all, displaying the current options available to a character. In this way, you can evaluate the unfolding battle at any time and pick the

hottest zone to fight in. The game runs a persistent timeline through multiple theaters, beginning with Blitzkrieg 1940. After 1940 is done, new vehicles and weapon sets will be added and the game will move on to the next year. This repeats until the war is finished, or may possibly continue with hypothetical post-1945 scenarios featuring jets and Pershing tanks. Large historical battles such as Bulge and Sicily are mixed with smaller historical encounters to keep the whole system constantly moving. If the system does well, they may rewind and start all over again, or move into fantasy and science-fiction realms with all-new vehicle and object sets. The scratch-built graphics engine and network code look sharp enough to carry the system through several years' worth of iterations.

And that's what Corneec Rat wants: a strong, long-

term MM solution that offers users something they're not getting. As Shekard points out, "The massively-multiplayer online market is poised for something new. The technology is ready for this. Massively multiplayer has to be bigger, show you more, and allow you to interact with more people. It's not about how many people you can get on at once. Games have to be more compelling in order to keep a large market share, these games have to get better in two aspects: How many people can I see, and how many people can I interact with?"

Or, in the case of **WORLD WAR II ONLINE**, how many people can I see and then kill with a 54-pound explosive projectile fired at a rate of 15 shells per minute from a Fletcher-class Destroyer off the coast of Normandy? Kinda makes a RPG look like a peashooter, no? **CGW**

BY ROBERT COFFEY robert_coffey@allgame.com

Embrace Your Inner Elf



ICEWIND DALE IS THE SQUAD-BASED STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

I've already played the best squad-based strategy game we're likely to see this year. And it's an RPG.

Now that I've desecrated the holy altar of turn-based hex-mapped/crystal- and oomping RTS tank-rash clickfests in the hallowed sanctuary of puzzle strategy seclergy, hear me out. The simple fact of the matter is that the party-based combat in ICEWIND DALE flat-out kneecaps anything we're likely to see in an ancient sub-genre that hasn't had a worthwhile offering since JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 over a year ago. COMMANDOS 2? It looks cool and fun, but it lacks real depth. STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM? Not bloody likely. Unless Mytheos pulls a rabbit out of their hat and gets THE DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE out the door this year, fans of squad-based strategy are going to have to look elsewhere for their kicks.

So why should you give ICEWIND DALE a

shot? Think of it as X-COM with fireball spells. You can totally create and customize your party, choose their loadout (with the added subtleties of choosing your spell mix), and develop every character as you wish. Remember the X-COM squad that booted your team members? He's your

Cleric now, and he kicks ass in melee combat to boot. Your plasma gun-toting killing machine? He's the Ranger, swinging a two-handed sword, hacking towering giants into literal chunks of meat. Every melee confrontation in ICEWIND DALE offers its own unique challenges and rewards, continually keeping you on your toes as you react to the ever-changing battlefield. Of the four or five guys playing ICEWIND DALE in our office, none of us has approached the myriad challenges of the game in the same way—if that's not testament to the depth of the title, what is?

The fact is, more traditional strategy titles could learn a thing or two from a game like ICEWIND DALE. What strategy game gives you the opportunity to dictate precisely the blend of real-time and turn-based combat you desire? Why doesn't as overwhelming a game as HOMEWORLD offer you the ability to create detailed scripts, so that your units have standing orders on how to respond in any given situation?

Do yourself a favor. Nudge those anti-elf, pro-cloaking tank bases aside and try something different. You'll be glad you did. **GGV**

HOMEWORLD: RAIDER RETREAT

■■■ If you've never played the original HOMEWORLD, this is your chance to get up to speed. Available free to those who pre-order HOMEWORLD: CATAclysm, HOMEWORLD: RAIDER RETREAT holds the first four missions from the original game, one new mission, and full LAN and skirmish capabilities. The new mission is basically a game of blockade: Stop two Raider carriers from landing on their home planet. The new mission is fun, but the real draw here is Skirmish mode, as it includes the game's full complement of units and upgrades — that's a real bargain if you don't already own the first title. —Alex Handy

Star Trek Review Correction

■■■ CGW's recent review of Activision's STAR TREK CONQUEST ONLINE had one fairly significant error—the PC game is not based on or related to the original Star Trek Customizable Card Game from Decipher. So while this means that the PC game's problems are problems it has all on its own, we still sincerely regret the error.

BATTLE REALMS Update

■■■ The innovations in Liquid Entertainment's upcoming BATTLE REALMS keep coming. Liquid just announced the implementation of the Battle Gear System, which allows even further unit customization. Essentially a simple inventory system, the Battle Gear System allows units to enjoy special abilities based on items in their possession. For example, a musketeer might find some healing herbs, letting him heal himself once. Or the same musketeer could go to the metal shop and buy a blunderbuss, get a little training, and radically change the way he fights. Since the abilities are treated like items and are not hard-coded, gamers will be in full control of their unit mix, giving the game even more strategic depth.

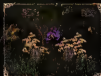


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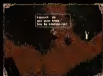
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BY GORDON BERG gordon@gamesthe.com

Will History Repeat Itself?

UPCOMING WWII SIMS WILL ONCE AGAIN COMPETE FOR SHELF SPACE AND YOUR WALLET

I'm starting to temper my enthusiasm for capitalist economic theory. I've tired of similarly-themed games being released within the same time frame. Therefore, I hereby nominate myself as Chair of the "One Sim at a Time, Okay? Please?" committee, or O-STOP for short. Besides, "Chairman Gordon" has a nice ring to it. Here's how it works: Everyone tells me what they're making, and I get to tell them when to release it! And, to continue with this fantasy, let's pretend nobody nuzzes a deadline and everything ships on time! Uhhuh. Right?

Until my little Utopian paradise is realized, I say to hell with the notion of "competition is good" for consumers, because—so far—competition has done nothing but dilute our choices and attention spans. So far, competition has meant good products can get overlooked. Three next-gen WWII titles are due out now (or in the near future), and I'm already concerned. When I consider how good these sims look and how well they play, they definitely deserve a much better chance at the market.

Two years ago, three other major WWII-era sims made their debut at the same time. Back then, only one emerged with enough sales to consider itself proud. One was real pretty (Jane's WWII FIGHTERS), but looks alone weren't enough. One was real smart (EUROPEAN AIR WAR), and I'm a bit befuddled as to why it didn't do well, because it was one of the best sims ever released. I guess popularity will always win out, because what many

consider to be the weakest of the three out-sold everyone else combined (COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR).

Regardless, the question of which sim was truly the best had nothing to do with success. And that's precisely what has me worried. I don't want history to repeat itself, and neither should you. There's not much I can do for the uninformed consumer, and since I'm made Chairman, I can't stem the tide of carbide-balanced sales. Therefore, I'm left with this lone little page to convince you—the savvy, intelligent, extremely good-looking, well-informed CGW reader—why you should get your hands on all of these sims.

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2

Let's pretend for a moment this sim isn't from Microsoft and that there aren't hundreds of thousands of FLIGHT SIMULATOR devotees



out there who buy each and every incarnation of this eternal franchise; just clear your mind of all that. Ready? Good, now repeat after me: Pacific Theater. Now say it again, as if you were Homer Simpson: "Mmmmm, Pe-ci-he Theater. Woohoo!" Thankfully, the campaigns, and just about everything else, are much improved when compared to the original.

The Catch: Unlike B-17 II

and BATTLE OF BRITAIN, the campaigns aren't truly dynamic. But there are enough trigger events per mission to warrant better replay value over its predecessor. Besides, CFS2 comes with a bona fide mission builder, so there should be new missions available over the internet in no time.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

What to do for an encore? It's a tall order to top Sim of the Year MIG ALLEY, but I think Rowan Software/Empire Interactive will pull it off. MIG ALLEY served up the best dogfighting ever seen on a PC by melding realistic tactics with convincing AI.

In my opinion, Rowan has delivered an equally compelling, but altogether different experience with BOB: it's just as fun. The best compliment I can give BOB is that the feel of its dogfights are as close as you can get to the real thing.

The Catch: The Supreme Commander-mode interface, much like the one in MIG, could probably be more intuitive. At least this time, it's more fun to use.

B-17 II

Talk about going out with a bang instead of a whimper. Just in case you were worried that B-17 II would suffer the same fate as



GUNSHIP. Hasbro's final hardcore flight sim—developed by Wayward Studios—doesn't appear to be compromised at all. Granted, the company dropped multiplayer in order to get the title shipped before year's end, leading some to say they won't buy this sim. That would be plain idiotic, as B-17 still offers a truly unique experience. Here's a chance to experience life aboard the Memphis Belle



instead of just watching the movie. You don't even need to fly a plane if you don't want to; instead, you can play the role of Strategic Commander—determining targets and allocating resources—and leave the AI to handle the flying and bombing.

The Catch: You'll have to concoct another excuse for your spouse as to why you must upgrade your computer, yet again. **CGW**

Beyond Looking Glass

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR EX-LOOKING GLASS DEVELOPERS

The closing of Looking Glass might have been a good thing. Ah, got your attention now, didn't it?

Before you run off to write an irate letter telling me what an insensitive goober I am, let me elaborate. Back in May, it was indeed sad that such a talented development studio was forced to shut down. Hearing that news made me remember all the good times I had with their games: sneaking into a base without firing a single shot in *TERRA NOVA*; marveling at how I could look up and down in *ULTIMA UNDERWORLD*. I'll never forget the time in *SYSTEM SHOCK* when my character, hopped up on speed drugs, sliced Edward Diego in psychedelically beautiful slow-motion.

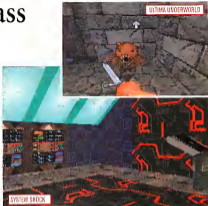
But it's been months now, and as in any other business, these people were talented enough to find work elsewhere. What used to be a centralized pool of talent is now scattering itself around the industry. After snooping around, I got to see where some Looking Glassers ended up...

That Sounds Irrational

Take Eric Brosius. He was

the Sound Guru over at Looking Glass; he's the reason you wanted to stay quiet in the *THIEF* games. Heck, he's even married to SHODAN (well, the woman behind her voice, at least). Now he's the Audio Director over at Irrational, meaning he'll be applying his aural talents to titles like *FREEDOM FORCE* and *THE LOST* (a PS2 title). Brosius said that he's "sad that LG is gone," but that it's "exciting to start fresh on new projects in a change of environment, even if the change is somewhat subtle."

Also at Irrational is *SHOCK 2* designer Dorian Hart, who's working on *THE LOST*. He comments, "In many ways, Irrational feels like Looking Glass did seven years ago, when it was a small company with one great game under its belt, and great potential." Shawn Robertson, formerly the Lead 3D Artist for *JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON* (and now the sole animator for *THE LOST*), muses: "Surprisingly, the transition was pretty painless. I didn't realize how highly regarded Looking Glass was, until I was bombarded with calls and e-mails from headhunters and developers



mere hours after I myself got the news."

Massively-Multiplayer Church

I also managed to hunt down Doug Church, who many people consider to be the "heart and soul" of Looking Glass. He's been spending most of his time trying to form a start-up and create a massively-multiplayer title. Unfortunately, things are still up in the air, as the publisher he talked to decided to back out. You'd think a publisher would have more faith in a key architect of the *UNDERWORLD*, *SHOCK*, and *THIEF* games, but that's the way the industry goes. Right now, he's been floating around, mostly hang-

ing out with Warren Spector over at ION Austin, and with some other ex-LG staff at Harmonix. Here's hoping that someone will pick up this talented designer's work.

Fornicators and Thieves

While a good portion of the *THIEF* team hopped over to ION Austin to work on *THIEF 3*, a few of the members took their own paths. Programmer Rob Ferrier got himself a nice place over at Ensemble Studios, while Lead Designer Tim Steilmisch is floating around—though he'll be doing consulting work for *THIEF 3*. Other LG members have gone to Papyrus, Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), or Turbine Entertainment.

Point is, these people scattered around; that's the good thing. That means that they'll be influencing a larger number of titles on the horizon. While I will miss the signature mark of a tried-and-true Looking Glass game, I'm comforted in knowing that their talents are now all over the industry. As I said, maybe the closing of Looking Glass was a good thing in that it helped the industry move forward, just a little bit. **GGJ**

HALF-LIFE Overkill

■■■ All right, Sierra's starting to get a little annoying with their endless repackagings of *HALF-LIFE*. Coming up next is the *HALF-LIFE PLATINUM EDITION*, which includes the original game, the *OPPOSING FORCE* expansion pack, *COUNTER-STRIKE*, and a whole bunch of other mods. There's also the stand-alone *COUNTER-STRIKE* product for gamers without *HALF-LIFE*, which is just *COUNTER-STRIKE* and some other *HALF-LIFE* mods (even though *COUNTER-STRIKE* itself will still be available as a free download).

Jeez, and we thought the *TOMB RAIDER* franchise was getting milked. Along similar lines, Infogrames will be releasing *UNREAL TOURNAMENT: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION*. It includes *UT*, all the bonus packs, and, you guessed it, some of the slicker *UT* mods.

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Battle Across War	1200	\$21.95	New Regional	0300	\$20.95	World Atlas
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Baywatch 2	0800	\$14.95				
Baywatch 3	0800	\$14.95				
Baywatch 4	0800	\$14.95				
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Baywatch 11	0800	\$14.95				
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Battle Across War	1200	\$14.95		
Battle Woods	0600	\$14.95		
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Baywatch 2	0800	\$14.95		
Baywatch 3	0800	\$14.95		
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Baywatch 5	0800	\$14.95		
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Baywatch 7	0800	\$14.95		
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Baywatch 13	0800	\$14.95		
Baywatch 14	0800	\$14.95		
Baywatch 15	0800	\$14.95		
Baywatch 16	0800	\$14.95		
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A Word to Our Sponsors

Jeff's love letter to those who pay our bills

Puzzle time, kids! What takes up over half this magazine every month, but isn't written by those hired to write the magazine? I know it's a tough one, so take your time. And no cheating by flipping through the pages, now! You should have studied.

Okay, ready? Pencils down. The correct answer is: the ads. Now I know most of you probably got that wrong, because the ads are so hard to find. But, yes, ads comprise the bulk of the magazine. So let's talk about them.

I hate the ads in this magazine. I loathe them. If I had my druthers, *CGW* would be 100 percent ad-free, with nothing but page after page of exciting gaming information—preferably not written by me, because that'd be a lot of work, and that's not exactly what I signed up for.

But let's not live in fantasyland. Let's take off our +1 Elven Cloaks of Nerve and face reality. *CGW* is a business—not just a halfway home for gaming slackers. The fact is, we must have ads. We must make money. The lust of the Corporate Gods can only be sated by green blood.

One of the things I hate most about the ads is just how lame and ugly they are. Here, the game companies have this giant space to hit readers over the head with something cool or funny, and what do most of them do? They blow it. By my count, there's three approaches used in 95 percent of all gaming ads:

1. Hey sissy-boy—our buff game will kick your ass.
2. Look at these breasts.
3. We know our game kind of sucks, but look—David Bowie is in it.

But, whatever. It's not as if the ads were any better I'd actually start liking them. No, what I really hate about the ads is how they distort the perception of our relationship with the game companies. How can we write objectively, readers want to know, when the very companies we're writing about are paying us money to advertise in the magazine? Wouldn't there be pressure on us to play nice, to go easy on them, so that they keep on paying us?

The answer is a resounding and emphatic no. Never, not once, in the more than four years that I've been here has anyone from the ad sales side of this magazine even implied we should go easy on a company, let alone actually had the nerve to say it out loud. Why? Because they know better. Because they know that to do so would be to inspire a raging editorial hussy fit of epic proportions. Our opinions are all we have here. Take away our right to say what we really think, even once, and we cease to be a real magazine. We become just a catalog.

This is so obvious that you'd think even the game companies themselves would understand this. You'd think

that our integrity would be important to them, too. Because what good is a good review from a magazine that everyone knows is in your pocket? Wouldn't you rather get a good review from editors who are known to be tough to please? And if you get a bad review, well yeah, that's a bummer, but maybe—just maybe—the editors had good reasons for coming to the conclusions they did. Right?

But no. Some companies never get it. They get a bad review from us and they get angry. They get bent. They read what we wrote and they think we're out to get them. So what do they do? They try to "punish" us. They take their ad dollars away and run home to mommy.

"I loathe the ads in this magazine. If I had my druthers, *CGW* would be 100% ad-free, with page after page of exciting gaming info—preferably not written by me..."

"Why should we play with you guys," they ask, "when you're so mean to us? See if we advertise in your stinky magazine anymore!" I think every major game company has pulled this stunt, or at least threatened to, at least once since we started, and one of them is doing it right now. Though, oddly, they don't seem to mind taking the free publicity that goes with getting a cover story.

What jackasses. What babies. You know, I'm sure the business people on staff here aren't thrilled about it, and are desperately trying to woo you and your money back, but here's a message from the *CGW* editorial staff: We don't care. You can spend a million dollars a month, or you can never come back. Either way, our review criteria remain the same: We'll praise the good games, we'll pan the bad ones. The end. Our job, as editors, is to speak our minds, not to make you feel good about spending money on ads. So grow up.

If our opinions are so wrong, then readers will figure that out and go buy a different magazine. And when readers stop spending their money on us, we'll start to worry. Our readers—and our readers only—have the power to punish us.

But enough of this. This is the Christmas issue, after all, and I hate to end it in such a cranky way. So how about a game recommendation instead? For my money, you just can't go wrong with Activision's *ELITE FORCE*. It's easily one of the best shooters of the year! Happy holidays, everyone.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that we bought him *ButtSoft's ResumeMaker 2.0* for Christmas. Send career advice to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com. **CGW**

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