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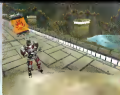
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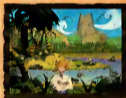


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TEEN
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ANIMATED BLOOD
ANIMATED VIOLENCE

Strategy Spectacular

72

Looking for help beating your favorite games? Who isn't? You can count on your friendly neighborhood game gurus at CGW to help you out with the latest tips, tricks, and strategies to get you over the hump.

Freedom Force

64

By day, we may be mid-mannered game editors. By night, we dream of living in a world where wearing a cape and tights in a dark alley won't get us arrested. We think we've found the answer to our superdreams.



46

Games | Art | Culture

It's just a matter of time before games are recognized as legitimate art. Of course, that hasn't stopped some artists from already recognizing the potential of game-style graphics.



62 Hall of Fame

In an ephemeral medium, it's important to recognize the classics and give them a forum in which to be remembered. This month, we induct two games and a legendary programmer into the hallowed halls.

INSIDE GAMING

124

Reinforcements Arrive

Tactical Sims by Raphael Liberstee124

TF2 a FPSRTS? WTF?

Strategy by Robert Coffey.....126

DEUS EX Storms Europe

Roleplaying by Deslock127

Graphics Shmaphics

Sports by Tom Price.....128

Halfwits With Guns

Action by Thierry Nguyen129

Squad's Labors Lost

Wargames by Bruce Geryk132

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Games we're looking forward to playing in 2001: the first *UO Faire*, Digital Anvil founder takes flight on a *WING COMMANDER* and a prayer, *EVERQUEST*' suicide hoax; plus *Pipeline*, *Reality Check*, *Top 40*, and more.

PREVIEWS

Hotshots48

Quick looks at *PLANETSIDE*, *SERIOUS SAM*, *STRONG HOLD*, and *ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER*.

PLANETSIDE



Morrowind52

After four years, Bethesda finally comes through with a follow-up to *DAggerfall*. Is it good enough to compete with the latest RPG heavyweights?

Clive Barker's Undying56

The master of the macabre enters the computer gaming fray.

ON THE COVER

Where to find the stuff on the cover...



118 HARDWARE

Dave evangelizes Dolby 5.1 sound for games; Loyd looks at Intel's new set of wireless peripherals; plus Tech Medics and Killer Rigs.

95 REVIEWS

Escape From Monkey Island.....96

Sacrifice.....98

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2.....100

Zeus.....102

Gunman Chronicles.....103

Delta Force 3.....104

FIFA 2001.....105

Wizards & Warriors.....108

4x4 Evolution.....110

Sudden Strike.....111

Space Empires IV.....112

Links 2001.....113

Devil Inside.....114

Jet Fighter 4.....115



GAMER'S EDGE

Gamer's Edge will return next month.

THE USUALS

21 George Jones

George's Top 10 games of all time.

23 Letters

Gamers go postal.

134 Index of Advertisers

In case you can't find the ads.

136 Greenspeak

Jeff is a cranky old fart. What else is new?

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LETTERS

Adventure Gamers Say Huzzah

Congratulations on being the first of the prominent computer gaming publications to "re-enfranchise" all of us adventure gamers who have been putting up with all that "death of the adventure game" shtick for the past few years. Audrey Wells' new column (*Inside Adventure*, January 2001) was a breath of fresh air for this avid gamer, who was first lured into the wonderful world of computer gaming by playing such outstanding titles as *QUEST FOR GLORY*, *STAR TREK (20TH ANNIVERSARY and JUDGEMENT RITES)*, *GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS*,

RAMA, *AZRAEL'S TEAR*, and others. Heck yeah, I love a solid RTS, RPG, or FPS as much as the next gamer-type individual, but my recent foray into the world of *SEPTERRA CORE* (an RPG with strong adventure elements) has made me homesick for good ol' well-written adventure fare. Power to ya, Audrey!

Rob Price
Dallas, Texas

I just wanted to thank you for including coverage of adventure games. I have been a subscriber of your magazine for quite a while now, and was on the brink of

canceling, since I was very tired of people telling me that adventure games were dead. No, they're not dead, they're just being ignored. Just because they don't have the "big" companies behind them anymore, does not mean they do not exist. Trying to convert adventure games into hybrids does not seem to work, since action/adventure games make no one happy, neither action nor adventure gamers. But many of the smaller companies seem content to continue to produce pure adventure games, and I think it's time they're given the credit they are due.

Mary R.

CGW vs. The Canadians: Part XXIV

In the Letters section of your January issue, a Canadian wrote in to offer some information on how to get games cheaply here in Canada. I took offense to the editors' reply: "Thanks. All the moose who read our magazine will be thrilled."

I'm Canadian, and a female gamer at that (no resemblance to a moose), and I read your magazine for tips and reviews on the latest releases. After all, I want to read about what games are out there as it's a pain to chip our way out of the igloo, don our loques, and get the dog sled hooked up to get to the only gaming store within 2,000 miles. Pull-lease!

While we understand that you can write only about what you know, and most of that isn't beyond your own borders, such stereotyping is old and not funny anymore. Can I say that? Or do I need to fear that all you will pull out your own variety of guns, because every American owns one?!

Nicky R.
Canada

You're a female Canadian gamer and you don't resemble a moose?! There goes another one of our stereotypes! Could you send

a pic? Just kidding. We're sorry we keep picking on you Canadians, because, really, we love you, eh? Now take off!

Inside Gaming: Missing Homebrew

Just went through my December issue of CGW and to my surprise, one of my favorite features was missing: Homebrew. Hopefully this was just a one-month slip? Homebrew highlights one of the reasons that PC games are better than consoles. The gaming community is responsible for such great add-ons, mods, support, and so on, and that section helps people find these internet sites. This is a vote for continuing the column.

Mike

Actually, we're glad you brought this up, Mike. Yes, Homebrew is definitely continuing, as are all the other columns. We keep adding new ones, too, like this month's *Tactical Simulations* column by Raphael Libaratore. The idea is to have a semi-rotating pool of columns that embrace the entire computer gaming world from a multitude of angles. Different months will feature different columns, but we'll always try to run as many as we can each month.

Peery Arcade by Mike Krehlik and Jerry Holkins (www.peery-arcade.com)



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Are NOLF Cut-scenes Too Long?

The remarks about the "painfully long" cut-scenes in *NOLF* are a disservice, and border on insult to the CGW readership. It presumes that the development of plot and character and the resulting immersion are either uninteresting or beyond the attention span of those who'll play the game. By ZD's own research, most of us reading *CGW* are between 25 and 35. Considering it's such a rare occurrence, are we incapable of sitting through the "torture" of scenes that not only are integral to the story, but are very well done to boot? That might be descriptive of console-



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LETTERS

juries suffering from ADD, but it certainly doesn't represent the folks who read CGW.

Eric Schwartz
Portsmouth, NH

Point taken. The cut-scenes, and all the incidental dialogue throughout *NO ONE LIVES FOREVER*, are, in general, outstanding, and play a big part in making this one of the best games of the year. No argument there. However, there were a few times when they just went on a bit too long for us, and we wished they were either shorter or broken up with bits of interactivity.

Game of the Year: COUNTER-STRIKE?

You include the demo of **SERIOUS SAM** in the **Top 10 Stories of 2000** (RoadMe, January 2001), yet fail to mention the "Game of the Year" **COUNTER-STRIKE**. During the year, Cliff and Goosenan went from guys making a game for themselves into partners with Valve. Most people have played CS than C&A and UT combined over the past year, compared with a few who have downloaded a demo of SS. How's that for a group that started out small and unfunded? Until **SERIOUS SAM** gets packaged, I think CS was bigger news.

Michael Guidotti

Scooter's Got the Bends

I was flipping through the reviews of the January 2001 issue, and was reading the **BALDUR'S GATE II** review, when I noticed the subtitles of the article. Cleverly, each one was the name of a Radiohead song, including several off the new album, *Kid A*. It's apparent Trieny Nguyen actually has taste in music, which is to his credit. I thought that all of *CGW* listened to Jimmy Buffet and drank margaritas. I guess I was wrong.

Ryan Meier

Now, you were right. As soon as we found out that Scooter was listening to Radiohead, we set him straight with a nice boxed set of Eitel Merman tunes. Now, that's music!

Scariest Letter of the Month

I am glad that the mainstream press has finally accepted mullets.

I would wager the majority of your readers spot some serious plumage. My only objection is that you ranked the fine femme-mullet as "very good" when it obviously deserves to be outstanding.

P.S. Jeff Green would look sexy with a nice mullet.

Ryan "Camaro Mullet" Watson
Chicago

The Incredible Disappearing SIMS Strategy Article

I am writing with either a piece of errata, or a mysteriously disappearing article. On the cover of your October issue, under the headline that says "Strategies, Cheats, Tips," you reference five games: **DIABLO II**, **DEUS EX**, **THE SIMS**, **SHOGUN**, and **DARK REIGN 2**. I eagerly leaf through the pages, and a question pops into my mind...where is the section on **THE SIMS**? I have gone through the magazine eight times, and the only time I can find **THE SIMS** mentioned is in ads and the Top 40.

Call me old-fashioned, but if I see the name of a game on the cover of a magazine, I expect something to be written about it inside. Any help, guys? Now excuse me, but I have another letter to write. Cosmo's front cover explicitly promised my wife 50 ways to satisfy me, and I count only 47!

Jeff Easter

Apparently, **THE SIMS** strategy piece was published in the game alternate dimension as the ill-fated second page of our **HOWM3S** review a year or so ago. Here in our world, the piece was mistakenly pulled - and we apologize for the error. But good god, man! With 47 other ways to occupy your time, what is blazes are you doing playing computer games?!

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Playing with death

Alleged suicide rocks the EVERQUEST community...and magnifies the fine line between fantasy and real life

■■■ On Sunday, November 12th, the EVERQUEST community was devastated by news of 19-year-old Sheyla Morrison's suicide. She was judged pretty by the photo posted on her website and considered to be a wonderful artist who did character portraits for EQ friends. "She was a blast to play with," a friend, Kinudin, said. "Really nice, sweet."

Not everyone agreed. Sheyla tore through five guilds like wildfire. She claimed to have won 500,000 platinum pieces in a GM event no one could find a record of, while Companions of Light guild members found expensive items missing. She insulted members of the Afterlife Guild as they died while storming a dragon. Confronted on the guild message boards by angry players, Sheyla blamed her sister, who played Tolens on the same account.

Then came a wrenching tale of a tumor found three inches beneath her skin, close to the aorta. Six hours after surgery, she said, she was online, playing EVERQUEST from the intensive care unit. "She totally suckered me into caring about her," a former

guildmate said.

Despite the sketchy rep, Sheyla earned a guide account as Leza The Forest Wind on the EQ server Quelthous in September.

To Luxian and Kinudin, who had talked online with Sheyla for almost a year, she was a young girl haunted by tragedy. She spun stories of a life filled with sex and

"The EQ community was forced to face the fragility of online intimacy, where you can be anything to anyone, and no one knows your name."

violence, including a miscarriage when she was 16 after her father stabbed her in the stomach. Her mother died while driving around looking for her when Sheyla skipped school to have sex with her boyfriend. "She was involved in several incidents that, to say the least, questioned her integrity. She was known for

Continued on page 31

The 10 Most Anticipated Games of 2001

Ten games—and who knows how many hours of gaming rapture—stuffed up in an enormous digital castup bottle, and here we are, with our meager virtual knife, jabbing, jabbing; pounding on that stupid little “57” on the side, waiting for even one to pop out. It’s enough to make you crazy.

The Games



|||| Halo

As if the gaming media’s collective mania over this title wasn’t evidence enough, Microsoft bought Bungie outright to use HALO as their showcase Xbox title. Hate Microsoft all you want, but their interest in this title is enough to convince even the worst skeptic of this game’s powerful potential.

|||| Black & White

We keep hearing that early spring is when to expect Peter Molyneux’s magnum opus. That’s a good thing — it means East Coasters will be able to enjoy warmer weather in the game, which reflects real-world weather conditions.



|||| Return to Castle Wolfenstein

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER confirmed that single-player shooters need strong personalities — that’s why we can’t wait for WOLF and its gritty molotov cocktail of Nazi-busting sci-fi WWII mayhem.



|||| Oni

It may only be single-player now, but we’re still optimistic. ONI is gorgeous: The animation and combat look fantastic, and the anime style is an honest artistic choice and not a cynical attempt to milk a fad. And who’s to say they won’t patch in multiplayer later...?

|||| Dinosaur

The word is rum on Sid Meier’s DINOSAUR project — the Fraxis website barely mentions it, and the Dino Diaries have gone dead. We hope this means the maestro is holed up somewhere in Maryland play-balancing one of the most anticipated CIVILIZATION-style games ever.



|||| Freelancer

FREELANCER promises to be the most ambitious, chronometrically-esquisite space opera ever. A game with such ambitious goals is bound to suffer some betting pains. But while Microsoft’s recent takeover of Digital Anvil may arouse suspicion, designer Chris Roberts says the single-player game has all the features he intended, and Microsoft says it will ship with multiplayer intact.



|||| Tribes 2

It’s been a long wait for the follow-up to our favorite massively multiplayer team-based shooter, but more weapons, added vehicles, and lush environments should make it all worth it when TRIBES 2 is released this spring.



|||| Neverwinter Nights

Play 3rd Edition AD&D sessions, with live Dungeon Masters and everything, over the Internet. No need to clean up the living room, or to restock those big bags of Cheetos. Isn’t technology grand?

|||| WarCraft III

Finally, a new WARCRAFT! Blizzard is expanding its signature fantasy/real-time strategy series into three dimensions and five races this time out, and yes, we’re excited. We need a new compulsively addictive RTS game, and does anyone doubt this’ll qualify? Or, to put it more succinctly: Zug Zug.

|||| Anachronox

From the fertile, warped, and frightening mind of Tom Hall comes this 3D, sci-fi RPG inspired by classic console games like CHRONO TRIGGER. It’s been in development forever, but we’re optimistic. The game has been looking great, and Hall is too much of a freaky genius to release anything less than totally compelling — we hope.

EVERQUEST (continued)

"Those who are caught up in the daily lives of servers and characters are subject to depression and loneliness"

having an attitude and a short temper," Luxian said. "Regardless, I cared about her very much."

On November 3rd, she sent Kinudin a message: "Got a gun from friend, I'm holding it to my head right now." They talked for hours about the way she felt torn between her boyfriend and a secret lover. Finally she said she felt better. Kinudin said, "I felt great for saving someone's life."

So when news of Sheyla's suicide struck a week later, people grieved, but started digging for proof. A long trail of IP addresses, disconnected phone numbers, unanswered emails, and abandoned houses finally led to a real-life voice. A man's voice.

Sheyla Morrison did not exist. The man, James Arnold, owned an EQ account that he shared with his ex-girlfriend; she played as Tokens, he played as Sheyla and Leza. They broke up in August. When Verant busted the guide account on November 10th over concerns about the player's judgment, he staged Sheyla's suicide. He even posed online the next day as a grieving spouse, then as a stepmother, begging friends for information about Sheyla.

When the trail led to his door, the man pointed a finger at his ex-girlfriend, saying, "That bitch. I'll find her and murder her myself." The ex insists that Sheyla and Leza were his characters. The evidence is on her side, but he still

plans to drag the story into court to gain custody of their baby girl, hoping that the judge will believe him and find the mother unstable.

Community sympathy turned bitter, as the EQ community was forced to face the fragility of online intimacy, where you can be anything to anyone, and no one knows your name. Luxian and Kinudin are relieved that no one died, but embarrassed at failing for Sheyla's lies. "I would have felt better if a real girl had been behind it," Kinudin said.

At Lum the Mad, a popular EQ rant site, players reminded each other of life outside the game. Some, like Chris Skinner, took the lesson to heart. He has founded Beyond EQ, an online support group for EQ addicts and their families. "Those who are caught up in the daily lives of servers and characters are subject to depression and loneliness," the former addict said. "I wish to provide a forum to help those who are struggling, because, let's face it, we are a community."

Some gamers, it would seem, could use the help.

By Sandy Brundage, Gamers.com

Chris Skinner's Beyond EQ can be found at <http://pub37.ezboard.com/>
Jump to ezboard: [avaliansanonymous](#)

15

February 1988

ULTIMA IV was the game on everyone's minds back in issue 25. And with good reason—it was the first computer game in which your character was

"determined by your own personal ethics, rather than simply choosing a character at will." For many role-players, the ULTIMA series never surpassed this one. The top five games of the day: KAMFORGE, WARSAW, MICH BARRAGE, ULTIMA II, and M.U.L.E.



10

February 1991

Two CGW lists graced issue 76: the granular of Opponents Wanted, a personal-type section that

allowed gamers seeking multiplayer action to submit listings for their "modest" games; and the first CGW review of a console game: TV SPORTS FOOTBALL for the Turbo Duke. The CGW top five way back was: WING COMMANDER, THE FIRST HOUR, RAILROAD TYCOON, THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND, and ULTIMA VI.



The Wild Cards

Duke Nukem Forever

The last time we saw this game, it looked incredible. Unfortunately, that was two years and two engines ago. The DUKE team is committed to quality and may yet pull off that trademark DUKE butt-kicking gameplay. Then again, DUKE may look like an outdated stereotype by the time it actually ships.

Team Fortress 2

Valve's free HALF-LIFE add-on, TEAM FORTRESS, hooked us hard in early 1999. Two years later, we're still waiting. After spending a year reconstructing the game engine from scratch, Valve assures us that 2001 is the year for TF2.

Unreal 2

A mix of UT and HALF-LIFE, sometimes set in gigantic outdoor landscapes. It'll be big, beautiful, and full of ballistic mayhem.

Sigma

Since we couldn't cross Scooter with a monitor lizard, our only chance to pervert nature lies with this game's genetic mutator that creates units by blending animals

5

February 1986

"Once you've seen one of these in action, there's no going back."

That was the word on 30 cards in 1986, an issue with DANIEL KNIGHT 2—one of the best great full-motion-video adventures—on the cover. Also announced was the anonymous title PREY, described as a cross between Spontaneous and Predator. Ship date? Winter, 1986. Bob! The top five games: STEEL PATRIOTS, WING COMMANDER 3, PANZER GENERAL, X-COM, and CRUSAHER.



UO Fans Get Medieval

Wine, women, and song at the Ultima Online World Faire

I knew I was in the right place at Origin's first-ever ULTIMA ONLINE World Faire when I saw an impromptu sword fight between two of Satan's Cheerleaders. I guess I'm a sucker for cute women in short skirts who've pledged their souls to the dark side, especially when they start grabbing each other. I quickly realized this was going to be way better than your typical fairy festival.

Indeed, it was. More than 1,000 fans, many dressed in character, came from as far as Europe and Japan to swap stories, attend workshops, and experience demonstrations of martial arts, medieval combat, even madrigal singing.

spell effects, and terrain. The only objects that will remain 2D are the buildings.

Fans, many with big grins on their faces, crowded around several machines running a networked version of THIRD AGE. Even though Origin said the game was barely in alpha, it ran very well. Origin said the new 3D engine will make it easier to update the game with new creatures and items. Players who don't want to upgrade won't be left out, though. They'll still be able to play with the players who do upgrade.

No ULTIMA event would be complete without a happy hour to sip some mead and swap some tales, so after each day's festivities the group tramped over to the



Take a load off your feet this fairy fest

Are you ready? You can start to add your first Ultima Online World Faire to only \$20 if it's a nice costume, and includes the drink, appetizer, coffee, spell book, and more!

I see Merin, bright as the sun, despite all her bards and never of unbridled lustful!

There were also some vendor booths and a charity auction that included a signed copy of Richard Garriott's first game, AKALABETH, which sold for \$450. In all, the auction raised more than \$5,500 for Families of Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

The biggest news was the unveiling of ULTIMA ONLINE: THIRD DAWN, a cool-looking expansion in the works for UO. What's exciting isn't so much the new land mass or new monsters that will be added to the game, but the major graphical upgrade the game will get. It's going 3D for all the character models, monsters,

Copper Tank Brewery for some massively multiplayer umbling. On the last night, Origin showed a brand-new trailer of game footage from ULTIMA WORLDS: ORIGINS, and lo, how the people did cheer. ORIGINS, which mixes medieval fantasy, Jurassic Parkish stunts, steampunk science fiction, and Todd McFarlane artwork, looked both amazing and amazingly weird.

Origin told CGW that it's planning another event next year, and I'll definitely be there. It was fun. It was fascinating. It was happy hours and good fellowship and satanic yet cute cheerleaders. Let's see a meeting of the local Rotary Club match that! —Mark Asher



Reality Check

	IGN	PC Gamer	IGN	GameSpot	GameSpot	GameSpot	Average
Baldur's Gate II	A+	A	A+	A+	A-	A-	A
Crimson Skies	B	B+	C+	A+	B-	C+	B
Metal Gear Solid	A	B-	C-	*	B	C+	B-
Midtown Madness 2	C+	B	C-	B-	B	C	C+
NASCAR Heat	B	B	C+	B+	B-	C+	B-
NHL 2001	A	A-	B+	A+	B+	A-	A-
Reach For The Stars!	C	C	C	A	C-	B-	C
Star Trek: Voyager: Elite Force	B	A-	B	B+	B+	B	B
Superbike 2001	A+	B	A	B+	A-	B	A-
Wizards & Warriors	C	C+	B+	B-	C+	C+	C

* Indicates game has not been rated

And the Winner Is... BALDUR'S GATE

It, the game that makes DABLO II look like a walk in the park. All of these games came out before the holidays, and it's good to see their average ratings are so high. There are no obvious duds, and several really strong titles, such as NHL 2001 and CRIMSON SKIES. Even the Star Trek game on this list managed to break the typical Red-ware curse. It's good to be a gamer during the holidays.

STEALTH MODE

by Rodney Allen Sneaky

...It's always good to acknowledge true sneakiness. Westwood had a press event in early December to officially unveil **EARTH AND BEYOND**, a massively multiplayer, space-based science fiction game. The sneakiness of note is that they've been working on this game for at least four years and have done a good job of keeping the lid on it. It probably helps that their offices are in a former high security building that Loral used to build aircraft avionics.

...Sierra somehow scored the *Gladiator* license, giving the company something good to talk about following their latest round of layoffs. The company wouldn't provide specifics on what projects were affected, but it's merely the latest in an almost uninterrupted string of bad announcements that has gone on for, well, about two years.

...Leisure Suit Larry creator Al Lowe's Internet startup Jacknabbit has gone to the dot-com graveyard. Lowe was serving as Chief Technology Officer at Jacknabbit, a company that was developing scheduling software for the Internet. Let's hope Lowe considers working in the games industry again.

...Mark Randall at Terminal Reality has reportedly been working on the NOCTURNE engine to convert it to a first-person/third-person perspective engine. What's cool about this is that it would still retain all the nice features, such as translucent fog, real-time shadowing, and so on while allowing for a better gameplay experience with the first-person view. The downside is that it needs a smokin' PC to handle it. TR has other projects in the chute, such as FLY 2, that will buy them some time and allow PCs to catch up while they work on a possible NOCTURNE 2-engined game.

...Wizards of the Coast was poised to jump into computer game development with a massively multiplayer Dungeons and Dragons game. Now they may farm out that development, and the game may end up being a bit smaller in scale with its multiplayer, more along the lines of Interplay's NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

...It's hard to get through a rumors update without mentioning Ion Storm.

Word is that Eidos will shutter the Dallas offices and relocate everyone to Austin, under Warren Spector. Eidos needs to cut their expenses now that they couldn't find a buyer, and I guess the idea of funding a potential **DAIKATANA 2** type of game isn't very appealing.

You're going to turn me into **WHAT???**



200TH ANNIVERSARY
Next month marks CGW's 200th issue, and in an industry that measures life cycles in

weeks, we think that's cause for celebration. So we're going to get drunk. But before we do, we'll bring you

a special gaming retrospective, the top 10 games of all time, 20 fall games on CD, and the World Exclusive OMI drama. Tune in next month for the biggest love-in since Halibut Playday Movie! West.



The BAD...

JANE'S CANNED

The Electronic Arts Jane's team in Baltimore, widely acknowledged as one of the best sim teams ever (responsible for JANE'S FJA-18 and JANE'S F-18), has been let go. The team was working on what was rumored to be an automobile racing sim, which they are now shopping to other publishers.



What an inplausible and to use of the most fabled groups ever to soar in the silicon skies. Best wishes to the crew on a safe landing with a new publisher.

and the UGLY

D&D MOVIE

Brady was in the Eye of the Beholder, but it wasn't sitting through this drivel. To dub-rector Courtney Solomon: Did you get a "Spell of Muzon Herd" cast on you? Hey TSE, next time call Brian Singer and get a real budget, so that your dragons don't look like a 4th grader's paper mache project. You awarded your place in the "good game license gone bad" hall of shame.



Charles Moylan

The man who revolutionized wargaming

Most of the latest PC games are evolutionary advancements of existing designs, and they cost millions of dollars to produce. **COMBAT MISSION** is a glaring exception. This game, from an almost unheard-of developer with two full-time employees, accomplished three remarkable things: 1) It turned wargaming on its head by obliterating the abstractions of hexgrids and going fully 3D. 2) It made wargaming fun again. 3) It proved that a developer can sell its games exclusively over the Internet and make money. Not even Sid Meier's vaunted Firaxis had been able to achieve that with **ANTHETAMI**, *CGW's* 1999 Wargame of the Year.

Big Time Software is a tiny company, and **COMBAT MISSION** won't appeal to everyone, but we thought that anyone who could do what Sid Meier couldn't deserved some real credit. This month, we bring you an interview with Big Time's President, Charles Moylan.

CGW PROFILE

There are 14 reviews excerpted on your website (battlefront.com), all with Editors' Choice ratings for COMBAT MISSION. How pleased are you with the game's success?

I think overwhelmed is the most accurate description. **COMBAT MISSION** has tapped into a desire for a certain kind of gaming experience that we were only partly aware of during the process of creating it. The 3D graphics, hybrid turn-based and real-time action, and attention to historical detail have turned out to have an appeal as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

How many retail copies would you have had to sell to equal the revenue from direct sales?

It's hard to do a direct comparison to retail sales because it depends on the terms of a given publisher, but a very rough translation of how we're doing would be about 200,000 to 250,000 sales in retail. We are happy enough to throw a party right now, but way too busy to do it!

What example do you think CM sets for developers of other "niche" titles?

I think **COMBAT MISSION** sends a positive message to other indie developers without the support of a traditional publisher, but with a caveat. Here's the catch: A game must have a unique quality that sets it apart from competing products if it hopes to sell well over the Internet.

I don't mean simply that the game has to be good, though it does have to be that; it must be noticeably different from other games. One reason that **COMBAT MISSION** has caught fire like it has is the simple fact that there aren't any other games out there, even from the big publishers, that try to simulate realistic WWII tactical combat in 3D. Gamers who want that experience just can't get it at their local software store, because it isn't there.

CM shattered many of the conventions of traditional wargames. How do you think this will affect the future of wargame design?

It's primarily an issue of scale. 3D potentially brings an immediacy, a gut-wrenching "you are there" feeling to any game. This is perfect for the tactical level of **COMBAT MISSION**. And I expect to see virtually all tactical-scale combat gaming move to 3D very soon. But this doesn't necessarily apply to larger scales.

When do you think we'll be able to play games that approach the visual fidelity of war movies?

That's a tall order. It will take at least four or five years, I think. A lot of hardware improvements will have to occur before we can even begin to approach photorealism in real-time graphics, especially display resolution. A 72 dpi computer monitor just can't do it, no matter how good the artwork, software, and 3D chips running the game are.

How many people did you have working on COMBAT MISSION, and how long did it take to develop?

COMBAT MISSION had only two full-time people on the project, but there were dozens of part-time contributors, many of whom volunteered. This was a consequence of our limited budget when we started out, but fortunately, the wargaming community on the Net really stepped in to help.

The game took about two and a half years from start to finish. The 3D engine was a pretty massive undertaking, as was the tactical AI (which needed lots and lots of tweaking to the fussy logic to make it seem "human") and all the research we did into the armies, vehicles, and weapons.

What are your plans for your next game?

The next game will take place on the Russian Front of WWII: Soviets, Germans, and Finns locked in mortal combat from the opening gas of Operation Barbarossa in 1941 to the collapse of Berlin in 1945.

Charles Moylan's other games include **FLIGHT COMMANDER 2**, **OVER THE REICH**, and **ACHTUNG SPYTYRE**. For more information, visit www.battlefront.com.



Microsoft Takes Over Digital Anvil

Founder Chris Roberts to continue as Creative Director

As a game designer and businessman, Chris Roberts is undoubtedly gifted. The creator of WING COMMANDER and founder of Digital Anvil sold Microsoft on his vision of four killer games (STARLANCER, CONQUEST, LOOSE CANNON, and FREELANCER), and used Uncle Bill's money to develop them. As a producer, however, Roberts seems less exceptional. Three and a half years after founding his company, the only game to come from it is his brother Ern Roberts' STARLANCER.



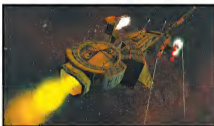
Chris Roberts

No one appears to be more frustrated by this than Roberts himself. For months he's lamented the obligations inherent in running a 100-person company. Including an Xbox game in development (tentatively titled BRUTE FORCE), Roberts has been running a four-ring circus. All of which takes time from his own game, FREELANCER—which has grown so enormous that even Microsoft can't pin down its ship date.

That's about to change. Microsoft announced in early December that they were stepping in to take over the studio. After three and half years of funding Digital Anvil—and recently rejecting two DA games that it had previously agreed to publish (CONQUEST and LOOSE CANNON)—it appears Microsoft wants to ensure that FREELANCER will come together how it wants, when it wants. Those DA employees who accept Microsoft's offers will become Microsoft employees.

Publicly, Roberts says he is pleased with Microsoft's takeover of DA, since it will relieve him of his administrative burdens. He will continue to serve as creative director of FREELANCER, he says, while shopping CONQUEST and LOOSE CANNON to new publishers. He will also be free to pursue other interests, pointedly remarking that "there has to be a better way to develop games than working on them for three and a half years."

Microsoft Games Manager Ed Fries maintains that FREELANCER will suffer no reduction in scope or resources, and that, in reality, the staff may grow. He said it wasn't possible at this time to estimate FREELANCER's ship date, but added that by reducing the studio's focus from four games to two, "we feel we can devote the time and attention needed to ensure that these two games will be truly outstanding."



NEWS & NOTES

Alice: The Movie

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE may be headed to the big screen. McGee told Well Rounded Entertainment that Dimension Films has agreed to film a movie based on the game, directed by horror-meister Wes Craven (Scream 1-3). We're thinking Christina Ricci or Michael Jackson for the lead.

Operation Cyborg

An English professor has decided to implant a silicon chip in his arm that will communicate with his brain. CNN.com reports surgeons will connect the chip to nerve fibers in his left arm, and the chip will be able to exchange signals between his brain and a computer. What's going to happen? They have no idea.

Gaming Goes to the Frogs

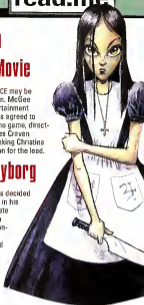
Infragames is buying Hasbro Interactive for \$100 million, mostly in Infragames stock. Infragames will have sole rights to interactive games based on current and future Hasbro properties, including CIVILIZATION, ROLLER COASTER TYCOON, MONOPOLY, SCRABBLE, and RISK. The French company also gets an unannounced massively multiplayer game based on Dungeons & Dragons, as well as Games.com, which will let users play Hasbro board games online.

STEEL BEASTS Goes to West Point

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point is buying 1,000 copies of STEEL BEASTS, the modern tank sim from Shrapnel Games. Kudos to West Point for not soaking U.S. taxpayers for a multimillion dollar, proprietary program that would be obsolete the day it's finished.

Razor Scooter Games

Crave Entertainment is working on games based on the Razor scooter. The first game in the series will be a Sony PlayStation release titled RAZOR FREESTYLE SCOOTER, where players can control ten different riders along three main levels and six secret levels.



THIS MONTH'S TOP 10
PREORDERS



Myst III: Exile (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Follow the story of the extremely popular graphical adventure series, but from the standpoint of an embittered villain who seeks revenge against Atrus.



Black & White (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Complex in detail, graphically gorgeous, with free-flowing, individualized play. Already voted one of the games that will change gaming forever.



Hemlock Tycoon (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
The family-favorite board game has been turned into a 3-D city-building sim. Practice cutthroat schemes against your opponents on the Internet or LAN.



NBA Live 2001 (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
This edition features a realistic stadium environment, an enhanced franchise mode, and an Internet community for online matches.



Island of Gods: Heart of Winter (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
You get to create your own heroes and send them to the Spine of the World to fend an ancient evil. A worthy addition to any AD&D fan's game library.



Ascension: Of Spellswords & Magic Wizards (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Imagine a place where magic and technology hold equal sway, and an adventurer might just so easily wield a firelock pistol as a flaming sword.



Sin Coaster (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
An easy-to-use interface and stunning 3-D graphics makes it fun to create and enjoy the most outrageously exciting rides anyone has ever seen.



Freeser's Battle of Britain (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Be a pilot or commander in the famous air war over WWII Britain. Virtual cockpit features interactivity, which allows for realistic engine management.



Pool of Radiance: Gates of Myth Drifter (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Not your run-of-the-mill, linear role-playing game. Has a cooperative multiplayer mode and a good deal of character environment interaction.



Throne of Darkness (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Combines the hack and slash gameplay of Diablo with the rich historical texture of feudal Japan. A good-looking game with interesting action-RPG twists.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 10
RELEASES



DarkQuest: The Scars of Valeros (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
This 2nd expansion is designed for mid- to high-level players, and features new zones, new enemies, new treasures, and an improved interface.



Alice (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
As a wisest and more industrious Alice, you set out in this third-person 3-D action game to free Wonderland from the tyranny of the Queen of Hearts.



The Longest Journey (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Gorgeous graphics, excellent animation, and the cinematic sequences add up to a mesmerizing plot and a wonderful gaming experience.



No One Lives Forever (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Contented with deadly agents, evade traps, unravel mysteries, and become entangled in a cleverly constructed conspiracy that threatens the entire free world.



Zero: Master of Olympus (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Summon heroes and gods to protect your city-states from monsters and other Greek cities. One of the most fun city building games of 2000.



Escape from Monkey Island (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
The first Monkey Island 3D graphic adventure game, with all the humorous antics and addictive gameplay of the best three installments.



Half-Life: Counterstrike (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
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!



Sacrifice (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
Serve one of five gods who will grant you their unique powers for each mission. A deep, absorbing, unique story with fully realized action gameplay.



Cell to Power 2 (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
This deep and complex game challenges you to manage the technology, diplomacy, trade, and warfare of your empire through a millennia.



Control Flight Sim 2: Pacific Theater (AGES 10+) (GIGAWATT)
A deep, involving game with excellent graphics, great sound effects, and adjustable realism settings. A dream come true for historic flight sim fans.

All available now at the
Computer & Video Games store at
amazon.com.

Get thousands of game titles for up to **50% off** at amazon.com/videogames

Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

No One Lives Forever

Wow, is this game great. Do top of the fantastic storyline, gameplay, and graphics, **NO ONE LIVES FOREVER** also boasts the best, funniest dialogue of any game this year, in any genre. Major props to Monolith — we are awed this coming



MechWarrior 4: Vengeance



We've been pointing on this game for a while, and it's looking pretty good so far. Some of the aim aspects that fans of the previous games cherish have been modified — or simply eliminated — but overall, the game is closer to being an action title and the multiplayer is a blast. See our review real soon.

Tomb Raider Chronicles

The diary industry is looking cloudy at this latest Lara Croft game, hoping to glean some tips from sides regarding how to walk something to death. Not even the upcoming movie helps draw up enthusiasm for this dress-up adventure game. Maybe the level editor will be worth checking out — but it looks like Eidos should just let Lara out to pasture, once and for all.



Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon



Combine Ang Lee's emotionally-restrained, character-driven direction with light cinematographer Yau Wo Ping's *The Matrix*-inspired shots, and you have *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, one of the best martial arts films in years. Once you see Chow Yun-Fat (*Hard-Boiled*, *The Bodyguard*) and newcomer Zhang Zhi Yi duel in a bamboo forest without ever touching the ground, less *The Matrix* postyay.

Several movies are debated as the Top 40 this month, including *TOMY HAWK 2*, *CRIMSON SKIES*, and *4X4 EVOLUTION*. If you've played any of them, you know that they've earned longevity rights. *ELITE FORCE* also distinguished itself by popping halfway up the charts, a testament to the movie-quality thrill ride it delivers. But the big surprise this month is that a slayer wins! *COMBAT MISSION* — developed by an indie just not only writer — has set new games like *SYSTEM SHOCK 2* and *ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON* (the top-selling game of 1999). That's an underlying victory akin to *Dogme* winning an Oscar for best film. To find out more about this amazing hit, see page 34. Copyright, Big Time Software.

	Game/Publisher	CGW Rank
1	1	Diablo II Xbox.....5
2	3	Age of Empires II: Age of Kings Microsoft.....5
3	5	Unreal Tournament Epic/UT.....5
4	4	Baldur's Gate II Interplay.....5
5	11	Half-Life: Opposing Force Xbox.....3.5
6	6	The Sims Electronic Arts.....5
7	12	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood/EA.....4
8	10	Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear Red Storm.....4.5
9	8	Age of Empires II: The Conquerors Microsoft.....4
10	-	Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2 Activision.....4
11	9	Deus Ex Eidos.....3.5
12	15	Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri Firaxis.....5
13	7	Icewind Dale Interplay.....4.5
14	7	Quake III Arena Activision.....3.5
15	17	Homeworld Westwood.....4.5
16	28	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision.....4
17	20	Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast Interplay.....4
18	36	Thief 2 Eidos.....4.5
19	38	The Sims: Livin' Large EA.....4.5
20	-	Combat Mission: Beyond Rapture Big Time Software/Battlefront.com.....5
21	32	Worms Armageddon Neoplon.....4
22	13	Final Fantasy VII Eidos.....4.5
23	-	Escape from Monkey Island LucasArts.....3.5
24	26	SimCity 3000 Electronic Arts.....4
25	23	RollerCoaster Tycoon Interplay.....4
26	22	Planescape: Torment Interplay.....5
27	21	Homeworld: Cataclysm Westwood.....5
28	29	System Shock 2 Electronic Arts.....4.5
29	-	Crimson Skies Microsoft.....4
30	24	Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade 3DO.....4.5
31	25	Metal Gear Solid Microsoft.....4.5
32	-	4x4 Evolution: Terminal Reality 3DO.....4
33	27	Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Electronic Arts.....4
34	28	Final Fantasy VIII Eidos.....2
35	26	Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed Electronic Arts.....4.5
36	-	Battlezone II Activision.....4
37	30	Caesar III Xbox.....4.5
38	-	Dungeon Keeper 2 Bullfrog/EA.....4.5
39	-	FIFA 2001 EA.....5
40	-	Frogger 2 Xbox.....NR

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pipeline

Software development is no exact science, so predicting release dates is like forecasting next year's weather. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cqw@pipeline.com.

■■■■■ CHARGES: CITIZEN KASATO We were worried that this game wouldn't make it before year's end, but it won't get just in time. Keep an eye out for this title: It's unusual enough that we're monitoring how gamers are going to react to it.



■■■■■ ROGUE TACTICS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL This turn-based Fallout game is still chugging along. The most significant addition in resolution support: originally gameplay was entitled with 800x600, but they went and added 1024X768. You can see more bumbling mutants, if you have the hardware to support the bigger resolution. The team's next priority is tweaking the AI.

■■■■■ ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER This is in the homestretch. The bug list is getting shorter and shorter, and the main issues are balancing these lovable monsters and making sure those higher resolutions don't break the rest of the game.



■■■■■ WARCRAFT III Finally, all five races have been revealed. To recap, you'll be playing as the Orcs, Humans, Undead, Burning Legion (big bad demons), and the Night Elves. That means that Blizzard's game has a whole lotta balancing to do, and if STRATAGEM was any indication, this is a wister title rather than a summer title.

NEW Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare <i>Interplay</i>	Spring 2001	Empire Earth <i>Sierra</i>	Spring 2001	UPDATE Eye of Resistance II <i>SSI</i>	Spring 2001
UPDATE Anachronix <i>Claris</i>	March 2001	Empire: Battle For Earth <i>Westwood</i>	Summer 2001	Red Faction <i>TIG</i>	Spring 2001
UPDATE Area McCallister's Freedom		Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel <i>Interplay</i>	Spring 2001	Return to Wolfenstein <i>Apogee</i>	Spring 2001
First Resistance <i>Red Storm Entertainment</i>	Spring 2001	NEW F1V 2001 <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001	Sammy Sams: Slip Next Summer 2001 <i>SSI</i>	Spring 2001
Arise <i>Sierra</i>	February 2001	Freelancer <i>Microsoft</i>	Fall 2001	Saviors Sam <i>SSI</i>	Spring 2001
D-17 Flying Fortress <i>Hasbro</i>	February 2001	UPDATE Halo <i>Microsoft</i>	Fall 2001	St. Mike's: St. Francis III <i>Hasbro</i>	August 2001
UPDATE Battle of Britain <i>Future Software</i>	Spring 2001	Harpoon 4 <i>SSI</i>	Spring 2001	St. Mike's: St. Francis IV <i>Hasbro</i>	Winter 2001
Battle Britain <i>Dave Eastwood</i>	Summer 2001	UPDATE Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter <i>Interplay</i>	Spring 2001	Sigma <i>Microsoft</i>	Fall 2001
NEW Bio Strike <i>Red Storm</i>	Spring 2001	IL-2 Sturmovik: Fire By Night	Spring 2001	Trick Hunter II <i>Hasbro</i>	Summer 2001
Black & White <i>EA</i>	March 2001	UPDATE Legend of Night & Magic <i>SSI</i>	Spring 2001	UPDATE Star Trek: Enterprise <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001
Oliver Decker's Ladybug <i>EA</i>	February 2001	Loose Cannon <i>Microsoft</i>	Fall 2001	Shogun <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001
UPDATE Crusader & Conquer: Rearguard <i>Westwood</i>	Spring 2001	Majestic <i>EA</i>	February 2001	Star Trek: Enterprise <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001
UPDATE Crusader 2 <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001	Max Payne <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001	NEW Star Trek: Bridge Commander <i>Apogee</i>	Summer 2001
UPDATE Destroyer Command <i>Hasbro</i>	Spring 2001	Medal Commander 2 <i>Microsoft</i>	Summer 2001	UPDATE Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds <i>LucasArts</i>	Spring 2001
Area 51 <i>EA</i>	Winter 2001	Medal: City Defense <i>Electronic Arts</i>	Spring 2001	Team Fortress 2 <i>Sierra</i>	Fall 2001
Double II Expansion <i>Blizzard</i>	Spring 2001	Nord III <i>Hasbro</i>	Spring 2001	UPDATE The World Is Not Enough <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001
Dragon's Lair 3D <i>Hasbro</i>	April 2001	NASCAR Racing 4 <i>Sierra</i>	Spring 2001	Trials III <i>EA</i>	Winter 2001
Unleashed: Champions: Franken Ridge <i>Hasbro</i>	May 2001	NEW PIRA Line 2001 <i>EA</i>	Spring 2001	Tronics <i>EA</i>	March 2001
UPDATE Duke Gokun Power 3D <i>Hasbro</i>	Fall 2001	Revenant <i>Midco</i>	Summer 2001	UPDATE Warcraft III: Blizzard	Winter 2001
Dangerous Stage <i>Microsoft</i>	August 2001	San Soule	February 2001	X-COM: Alliance <i>Hasbro</i>	Spring 2001
UPDATE Elder Scrolls: Morrowind <i>Bethesda</i>	Summer 2001	NEW Pantheon <i>Yeast</i>	Fall 2001		

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PICK YOUR POISON.



THIS IS NOT



TOP: Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Memphis, Tennessee, 1968)

MIDSET: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shoots a Viet Cong prisoner during the Tet Offensive (Saigon, 1968)

BOTTOM: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold at the Columbine High School cafeteria (Lafayette, Colorado, 1999). This scene was taken from the security camera and ran on the corner of *Tomb*

These startling, bone-chilling screenshots do not advertise the "next big thing."

What you're seeing is 40-year-old Jon Haddock's amalgam of history and pop culture. As with *THE SIMS*, whether you see a message, the medium, or a combination of these is itself the point.

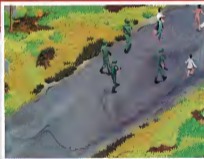
Haddock, a computer systems administrator, recently displayed prints of *Screenshots*, his 20-picture exhibition, at the Arizona State University Art Museum. In true gaming fashion, the original images are 800x600 and 72 dpi, drawn with Photoshop and a Wacom pad.

Haddock's concept for *Screenshots* took root in the mid-1990s, when the artist first saw intellectual property becoming a big issue on the Web. He noticed that people no longer used historical images on their homepages. "Just the fear of being sued was stopping people from using them; it instilled a climate of fear. It was less rich, more restrictive, and more commercial." Haddock, who lives in Arizona, believes that people have a right to historical legacy—and total access to it.

By re-creating these famous images in a new medium, he aims to give ownership of these events back to the public. (True to his own beliefs, his images are all freely available on the Web for personal use.) But why game screens?

"I wanted to reach kids with my message—gaming was a medium I could adapt to," the artist explains. Ironically, he's never played *THE SIMS*, but his appreciation of its isometric perspective—along with such games as *CAPTAIN MAGNITO* and *LEGEND OF ZELDA*—provided inspiration for *Screenshots*.

A scene from *Mary Poppins* can sit next to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. because Haddock connected with the scenes in the exact same way—through print and television. "I wanted to use universal images that emotionally affected how I turned out as a person. Both fictional and nonfictional events, they came to me the same way. I was



TOP: *Quang Duc* reveals secrets to protect the Vietnam War (Seigon, 1953)

MIDDLE: Reginald Dewey and Norman Wilkins (Los Angeles, 1932)

BOTTOM: The Plaza and other businesses fire outside (Hong Kong, Vietnam, 1972). Haddock deliberately changed the perspective of this brown plate so that the event was the focus—not the reality of the little girl.

A GAME

by Jason Babler

affected by all these things, one way or another."

Columbine Revisited

The most disturbing image of the series may be of the Columbine gunmen, armed with shotguns in the cafeteria. In the aftermath of the shootings, the media pointed fingers at computer games. The irony, however unintentional, is plain and clear. Haddock's intent, however, was not to trivialize any of the scenes. In fact, *Columbine* had a more personal effect on him than most.

"My girlfriend was murdered when I was 18. If someone had taken a picture of that moment in time, I wouldn't project my grief and anger at the photographer," he soberly confides. "With all the research I had, I could have done the library scene where people died, but I picked a room where nobody was killed. I really did think hard about that. I have sympathy for the kids and the parents, but here I'm dealing with my reactions to that event. To all those events."

The strength of these images lies in our powerful reaction to the juxtaposition of two different forms of media. Art Spiegelman helped liberate the comic art form from spandex superheroes with his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*. When the scores of Beethoven, Geršwin, and Stravinsky were laced with a 1940 psychedelic of sight and sound, animation evolved into modern art in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*.

Haddock took emotionally loaded images that had been captured on film and video and focused the details through a pixelated gaming medium. The startling results shake us awake, and at the same time

reminds us that, whether brought to us by the matinee or the seven o'clock news, the power of the image is the same.

This is not a game.

But it just might be the next big thing.

Jason can be reached at jason_babler@effdavis.com

TO SEE THE COMPLETE EXHIBITION:
<http://whitelead.com/jrh/screenshots/>

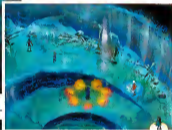
HOT SHOTS

ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER



■ The other big sprawling Black Isle role-playing game (RPG) of 2000 is set to get a whole lot bigger with the HEART OF WINTER expansion pack. Much more combat intensive than BALDUR'S GATE II, ICEWIND DALE captured our hearts with sprawling D&D-based brawls that played like X-COM decked out in classic fantasy drag.

In HEART OF WINTER, your heroic party is tasked with stopping a barbarian invasion, but that story is simply a setup for more of ICEWIND DALE's trademark strategically deep hacking, slashing, and spellicasting. Dozens of new quests will allow party members to advance beyond 20th level – all the better for exploiting more than 80 new items and 50 powerful new spells. The game is also getting a nice facelift courtesy of improved 3D acceleration and (even better) an 800x600 resolution that will really show off the beautifully rendered legend world of the game. www.blackisle.com



PLANETSIDE

■ Come summer 2001, massively multiplayer, persistent world universes will make the big move away from the lordliest realm of RPGs and into the blood-drenched arena of first-person shooters with PLANETSIDE. We're putting our skepticism aside for a number of reasons, the most prominent being that the current god kings of multiplayer massivity – Verant Interactive (co-creators of EVERQUEST) – are the people behind the game.

Players will compete as mercenaries, serving one of four corporations. Cash earned from battling other factions can be used to purchase better equipment. Verant recognizes the death-in-minute nature of the first-person shooter and assures us that PLANETSIDE will not punish players severely for dying – you'll suffer a minimal loss, but the goal is to encourage players to fight and not run from the threat of being fragged. On the contrary, a growing Citizenship ranking for participation will reward players with improved technology and new game modes. Verant hopes this slight RPG element will get gamers involved with their avatar and spur them on to developing their character. We'll bring you more details in the April issue of CGW. www.verant.com

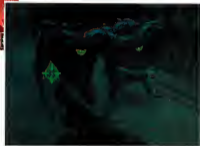




Serious Sam

■■■ You know what CGW likes? Dead things. Lots and lots of dead things. That's

why we're so excited about **SERIOUS SAM**. After a mind-bumming, adrenaline-pumping death spent through this shooter's first five levels, we feel safe to say that no other game will carry the DOOM-style endless hordes of monsters any better than **SAM**. Imagine being locked in a room and beset by 300 monsters with only your wits, your chainsaw, and your god to save your ass. Imagine a good three down headless bomb-toting kamikaze bastards screaming over a sand dune right at you. The absolutely relentless barrage of action in this sharp-looking shooter should have you sweating bullets sometime in early 2001. www.croteam.com



Stronghold



■■■ File **STRONGHOLD** under "Why Didn't Anyone Think of This Earlier." A blend of city-building and traditional real-time strategy, **STRONGHOLD** will give you the opportunity to design, build, and defend a medieval castle. You'll start by developing your small local economy and populace, picking a site for your fortress, then slowly building it up — complete with moats, towers, and drawbridges. Smart design will be crucial since you'll inevitably be under siege, forced to unleash your vats of boiling oil as your forces try to repel wall-scaling invaders. If the concept weren't cool enough, the pedigree of the designers gives us even more confidence in this title: Firefly Studios is made up of expatriates from Impressions Software, the designers behind city builders such as **ZEUS**, **PHARAOH**, and the **CAESAR** series. We just hope we'll get to see invaders catapult some diseased livestock at us. www.godgames.com



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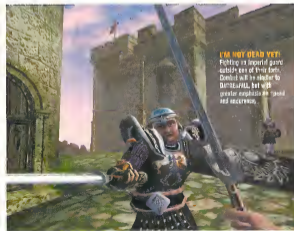




HOLDREWEY A care of guard. That's not his face—he's wearing a golden helmet, which you could take for yourself if you have the nerve.

Morrowind

Bethesda Readies Its New Elder Scrolls RPG—Finally *by Jeff Green*



I'M NOT DEAD YET! Fighting is important game outside even of this form. Death will be added to DAGERFALL, but with greater emphasis on speed and accuracy.

It's a good thing that the folks at Bethesda know so much about role-playing, because they have a tough new role for themselves right now: the underdog. Four years ago, things were a lot different. DAGERFALL, the company's second role-playing game (RPG) in its epic ELDER SCROLLS series, was a humongous best seller and easily won CGW's RPG of the Year award. At a time now widely acknowledged as the genre's nadir, DAGERFALL scored big-time as the only RPG around to appeal to both the hardcore faithful and the more mainstream gamers.

But four years is forever in the gaming world. Because of that, MORROWIND, its new ELDER SCROLLS RPG, has its work cut out for it. DAGERFALL is just a distant memory to many, and newer gamers may never have heard of the series at all. Since Bethesda's last big RPG, role-playing has roared back, and all sorts of titles—the DIABLOs, the FALLOUTs, SYSTEM SHOCK 2, BALDUR'S GATE 1 and 2, and EVERQUEST, among others—have successfully captured gamers' attention. So now that Bethesda finally has a sequel to DAGERFALL well on its way, two big questions come to mind: One, does anyone care? And two, should anyone care?

This Is Our World

The answer to the first question is Yes, many people care. Like the first two ELDER SCROLLS games, Arena (1994) and DAGERFALL, MORROWIND is a single-player RPG set in Bethesda's fantasy world of Tamriel, a world with the kind of detailed mythology and backstory that fans of Tolkien, Feist, and the Forgotten Realms love and expect. It's a world that lives on beyond the games now (which also include the smaller-scale BATTLESPIRE and REDGUARD), with thousands of obsessed fans who know more about Tamriel than the game designers themselves; they flood message boards, write fan fiction, and even post pictures of themselves in Tamrielian garb. The reason they care, and—to

KEYWORDS

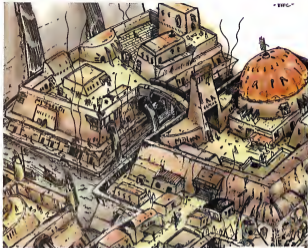
GENRE: Role-Playing • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 01
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks
CONTACT: www.bethsoft.com

answer our second question—the reason you should care, is that the ELDER SCROLLS series, perhaps more than any other computer RPG series, has always encouraged non-linear, open exploration rather than forcing you down a fixed path—like an online RPG, without the lag and the player-killers. Bethesda has created a world, through its RPGs, that you can live in for hundreds of hours at a time, without the monthly fee.

ARENA, the first game, gave you the entire world of Tamriel to explore. DAGGERFALL narrowed the scope to just two of Tamriel's eight provinces, and still gave gamers somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 hours of gameplay. MORROWIND narrows the focus down to just one province—MORROWIND (more specifically, the volcanic island continent of Vvardenfell)—but again, this will not translate into less gaming; it just means that Bethesda will flesh out the one region in even greater detail.

"We didn't really like the result of DAGGERFALL," admitted project leader Todd Howard. "There were about 20 to 30 hours of good gameplay, but then it began to just be the same thing over and over again. We went into MORROWIND thinking that less is definitely more."

To avoid that feeling of sameness, Bethesda is eliminating one of DAGGERFALL's key features: the random location and NPC generation. Instead, every location and NPC is being uniquely crafted for the game world. To illustrate the change in scale, Howard said that instead of the roughly 10,000 towns



RENDER ME Concept art for the ancient city of Vivec, one the hand-crafted localities in MORROWIND. Green are DAGGERFALL's random locations.

and cities you could have visited in the previous game, Morrowind will have 30. Likewise, the game's dungeons will be of a fixed number, but all will be hand-crafted.

At the time of this writing, Bethesda was still being very tight-lipped about the main storyline, revealing only this much: You begin the game by being released from a prison ship (for what is up to you) onto Vvardenfell, where a "magical evilness" emanating from the island's volcano is threatening the land. You're given your freedom in exchange for performing certain tasks—but whether you perform them, or

do anything related to the main plot at all—is up to you. Howard estimated that the "main story" takes up only about 20 to 30 percent of the game, and that there will be plenty to do after that storyline is wrapped up. The world will proceed space—with certain time-sensitive side quests—and it will be up to you to participate or not.

All This, and It's Not DOS-Based

Bethesda started working on MORROWIND immediately after DAGGERFALL, according to Howard, with an original intention of getting it out in 12 to 18 months. But the developers regrouped as their ambition, especially in terms of graphics, increased. "We were sick of RPGs looking ugly," said Howard simply. "We wanted to push the limits."

It shows. Although they're being coy about the engine's origin, we can tell you that it's a full 3D engine (supporting Direct3D only), not related in any way—thank goodness—to Daggerfall's DOS-based engine. Howard

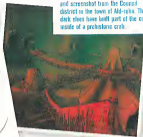
DOES THIS ARMOR MAKE MY BUTT LOOK BIG?

You'll be able to switch to third-person mode, but the game is designed for first-person play.





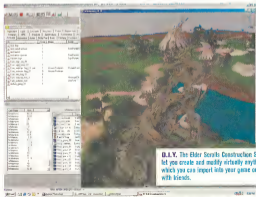
SMELLS LIKE CRAB Concept art and screenshot from the Council district in the town of Ald-ruha. The dark shies have built part of the city inside of a prehistoric crab.



MAPQUEST Morrowind takes place entirely within the one province—a narrowing of scope over the last two games.



DARK CITY Like DAGGERFALL, MORROWIND will have full daylight cycles, as well as variable weather. But this time, it'll actually look good.



O.I.Y. The Elder Scrolls Construction Set will let you create and modify virtually anything, which you can import into your game or share with friends.

walked me through various indoor and outdoor environments, cycling through day and night—and it was beautiful. Characters, items, weaponry, and armor are all rendered in exquisite detail—if nothing else, we won't have to say that MORROWIND looks good "for an RPG." The perspective is still first-person (though you'll be able to switch to third-person), and you can play using the full screen—the interface is practically transparent. Stats, inventories, and other screens will all appear in toggle-able, resizable windows, so you can have up as much or as little information as you wish.

As far as that little matter of gameplay goes, it's too early to tell. Neither the character generation nor magic systems were in place at the time of my visit—and the game is still a year away. About character generation, all Howard would say is that it was partially inspired by SYSTEM SHOCK 2's opening, in which you make your star choices in-engine as the game begins. As in DAGGERFALL, conversation will play a big part in how your character fits into the world over time—how you treat and talk to other players will come back to haunt you if you're not careful. You can taunt, intimidate, or even bribe an NPC to get information, for example, but that may affect how they and others treat you next time around. Combat, too, will be somewhat similar to DAGGERFALL, with a variety of attack styles—though more attention is being paid to a weapon's weight and speed. A dagger, for example, will be able to mete out, say, 4 points of damage per hit very quickly, while a long sword will issue far more damage, but at a much slower rate of attack.

Plug In, Tune In, Drop Out

Bethesda's ace-in-the-hole for MORROWIND, however, is nothing within the game, but a tool that will accompany the game: the Elder Scrolls 3 Construction Set. This tool, which is essentially the same one being used by Bethesda to create the game, will allow users to create or modify any aspect of the game—and share those creations (as plug-ins to the main game) with other users. The possibilities are limitless. You can create quests, characters, objects, monsters, weapons, buildings, entire towns—anything, really—and stick them into your game or share them with others online. In addition, you'll have complete access to tweak the stats of every single item or character in the game—making

things as hard or easy on yourself as you want (a move, Howard said, that was inspired by 3DO's HIGH HEAT BASEBALL tune files, oddly enough). Want to make yourself an unbeatable badass? Go ahead. Having trouble beating one particular monster? Give it an attack strength of zero. "It's your game," said Howard. "You can do what you want."

Thus, though MORROWIND is single-player only, Bethesda is hoping to build a thriving online community, a la THE SIMS, whose users will go to exchange files and keep the game alive indefinitely. It's a brilliant idea, and the surest sign that Bethesda, despite its old-school roots, is making an RPG that will matter to 21st-century gamers. That's the theory, in any case. We'll revisit the game later this year, as it gets closer to completion, to see how well Bethesda is pulling it off. **GGW**

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Clive Barker's

Undying

If Dreamworks Interactive wants to succeed with its upcoming horror title, it need meet but one challenge: to be consistent. Consistently scary, consistently frenetic, and consistently hitting you over the head with unexpected twists, turns, and fights. Otherwise, Dreamworks might as well forget it—in the horror genre, four freaky, edge-of-your-seat hours of gameplay are quickly forgotten if the remaining 20 hours are the same-old, same-old. Especially in the post-HALF-LIFE world.

So rather than taking the well-worn approach of building a 3D shooter and turning it into a horror game, the UNDYING team is intent upon building the horror game first, then translating the experience into the first person. To accomplish this, the team enlisted the aid of Clive Barker, who has played an active role in developing the game's narrative, pacing, and cinematic effect.

An example of the horror master's influence is the decision to change the main character from the aristocratic Magnus Woffram to the more down-to-earth Patrick Galloway. Ever the storyteller, Barker explained to the Dreamworks team that UNDYING would create a stronger connection between player and character if it featured an accessible hero. In this way, games will sympathize more with Galloway as he tries to prevent four ghostly siblings from slaying his good friend Jeremiah.

Creature Double Feature

Consistency in the horror/action space is crucial in terms of gameplay, unrelenting action that keeps the player off-balance is paramount. Realizing this, the design team is avoiding the temptation to begin the game with frogs, flies, guards, or the usual uninspired starter enemies. This isn't to say that the game will start at a high

MAMA? Clive Barker's influence is pervasive, horrific and scary — but long and short — also.



Enter the mind of Clive Barker
by George Jones



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THE TOSSED SAL'D MAN Free early on, *UNDYING*'s brutes come about, perfect, and this after lengthy moments at you.



level of difficulty. The Howlers—the game's first monsters—are fairly easy to kill. But they're intelligent, super-creaky, and appear in large enough numbers to make the first stages of *UNDYING* quite memorable, and quite fun. When's the last time you got to mow down monsters DOOM-style?

The game gets only more intense from here. The monsters get more vicious and more intelligent; at one point you run into Jemmas, huge golden-like creatures that can evade your fire and shoot at you from a distance, then drop their range weapons and engage in hand-to-hand combat. Amplifying (and personalizing) the monsters' ferocity are *MORTAL KOMBAT*-style death cinematics featuring Patrick Galloway getting sliced, diced, neared, and eaten. They're violent, to be sure. But they're also entertaining in a Nightmare on Elm Street sort of way.

UNDYING breaks from typical first-person fare with a weapons and inventory system that combines eight standard weapons and 16 magical spells. As you move through the game, you'll accumulate weapons such as the revolver, spore-gun, and dynamite...all of which feature alternate-fire modes. But as the game develops, you also gain access to an inventory of offensive and defensive spells, each of which can be powered up.

The unique nature of the spells—which serve as one of the game's reward mechanisms—creates some much-needed variance in the realm of the 3D shooter. Skull Storm, for instance, summons cackling demon skulls that chatter like Beavis and Butt-head before you launch them at your enemy.

Players will also use their spell inventory to solve venous game puzzles that the designers hope will help create proper pacing for the game. Also key to the experience is the large number of in-engine cut-scenes: They flesh out *UNDYING*'s storyline and, under Becker's direction, should amplify the tension.

Amazingly, *UNDYING* has moved through Electronic Arts' development queue without the kind of hype or hoopla a title this promising usually receives. Given the glut of mediocre 3D shooters and the general lack of success in the horror category, the media spotlight has tended to focus on well-known franchises and sequels instead of upstart titles such as this one.

All of this may work to *UNDYING*'s advantage, however. After all, surprise is one of the key ingredients to horror. *UNDYING* should be out around March 2001. **CGW**

AMBIDEXTROUS COMBAT *UNDYING*'s hero is ambidextrous: He casts spells with his right hand, and can snuff monsters with his left.



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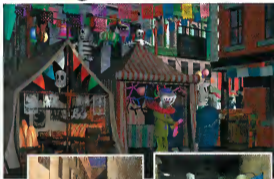
HALL OF FAME

Inductions

Grim Fandango

Every medium aspires to be referred to as an Art Form. Films, prose, visual experiences—while all of these have “legitimate” claims to being considered art, it’s hard to argue the case for games. Particularly when the majority of the medium is filled with pixels hitting and shooting other pixels with a monotonous color palette. That was before GRIM FANDANGO.

From the day LucasArts released it, GRIM FANDANGO was destined for the CGW Hall of Fame. The visuals are an eclectic blend of Mexican folklore, Ed Roth, and Caroll O’Connell; no other game manages to successfully fuse Aztec architecture with Hitchcock’s visual design. Its music is a never-heard-before blend of Big Band and mariachi. All of this is fleshed out with a smart script that brilliantly mixes in elements of *Chinatown*, *Gleegary Grim Row*, and the Mexican Day of the Dead. Top it off with the rock-solid, traditional graphic-adventure gameplay that veteran designer Tim Schafer has perfected, and GRIM FANDANGO makes a strong supporting argument for those who see gaming as an art form. As with *BATTLEZONE* and *SANITARIUM*, it’s a shame that this true work of digital art didn’t succeed on the money-making level.



What we said then

February 1999

A fascinating plot; beautiful and original art direction; memorable characters; excellent script and music; puzzles are generally “just right!”

“Epic isn’t a word normally associated with LucasArts adventure games. That term conjures up images of *The Two Crowned Kings of Ambo*, but not of, say, *THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND* or *FULL THROTTLE*. Yet, Tim Schafer’s newest adventure game, *GRIM FANDANGO*, fits the criteria quite well.”

—reviewed by Thierry Nguyen



John Carmack



For the population at large, the events that people knew would change history were the assassination of J.F.K. and the fall of the Berlin Wall. For gamers, it was seeing *DOOM*. In one brief moment—walking down a corridor with our “head” bobbing naturally,

Half-Life

Ge, here's a surprise, huh? The fact is, the CGW editors knew that HALF-LIFE would end up in the Hall of Fame probably a day after the game shipped two years ago.

Because all you have to do is boot it up and play through the brilliant and frightening opening scene to know you are dealing with something rare and special.

Incredibly, Valve Software had never made a game before, and none of its staff is coming. But HALF-LIFE's release was one of those watershed moments in computer gaming, immediately shaming every other first-person shooter in existence, sending other developers into a panic and back to the drawing board, and becoming the benchmark for the genre ever since.

HALF-LIFE had it all: a fantastic storyline, intense gameplay, outstanding level design, genuinely scary monsters, excellent AI, and robust multiplayer support that helped create a well-thriving community of mapmakers and mod-makers. HALF-LIFE, simply put, is one of the greatest pieces of interactive entertainment ever made, and a must-own title for every computer gamer.



What we said then

February 1999

Awesome storyline;
intense, nonstop action;
scary monsters, super creeps; atmospheric music and sound effects;
inventive level design and weaponry.

"HALF-LIFE is not just one of the best games of the year. It's one of the best games of any year, an instant classic that is miles better than any of its immediate competitors" - reviewed by Jeff Green



hearing an Imp snort nearby—we knew our lives had changed. Forever.

DOOM was the product of a small group of developers at id Software, but we all know who created the underlying technology. John Carmack's reputation as a programming wunderkind was frayed the moment DOOM went live (and subsequently crushed several servers due to overwhelming demand). This is all the more remarkable considering that most of his programming knowledge was self-taught.

But Carmack didn't just create great games, he created an entirely new gaming genre. The world had never seen a fast-paced first-person shooter before. WOLFENSTEIN 3-D. Games had never experienced a multiparty deathmatch before. DOOM. QUAKE marked the dawn of the 3D era. These games defined first-person gaming for years, and it wasn't until HALF-LIFE came along in 1998 and UNREAL TOURNAMENT in 1999 that anyone seriously challenged id's dominance in the genre.

Ever pushing the boundaries, Carmack's

networking code in QUAKE enabled action gamers to go head to head on the Internet for the first time. QuakeWorld—a free add-on from id—made it easier to find opponents online, and helped pave the way for host sites like GameSpy and BattleNet, as well as multiplayer frag lists like TEAM PORTRESS CLASSIC and COUNTERSTRIKE. QUAKE stars spring up all over the world, followed by regional gaming tournaments and QuakeCon, which draws thousands of gamers to an annual competition in Dallas.

All of this would not be possible, or would exist in a far different form, were it not for John Carmack's rapacious intellect, programming genius, and dedication. His views on technical openness, and early support of game mods and open source code have had far-reaching effects on the industry.

For the enormous influence he has had on computer gaming and his continuing commitment to advance the state of the art, we proudly induct id owner and lead programmer John Carmack into the Hall of Fame.

The CGW Hall of Fame

People

Sid Meier, Game Designer

Dani Buntin Berry, Game Designer

Games

Alone in the Dark (E-Music, 1992)

The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)

Battle Chess (Interplay, 1993)

Battleground series (Activision, 1993-present)

Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix, 1992)

Chessmaster (Softway Networks, 1994)

Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)

Command & Conquer (HighWood Studios, 1995)

Crusader: No Remorse (Empire, 1992)

Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1992)

Diablo (Blizzard, 1997)

DOOM (id Software, 1993)

Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)

Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1991)

Empire (Activision, 1978)

F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1991)

Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum Software, 1991)

Fallout (Interplay, 1997)

Front Page Sports: Football Pro (Dynamix, 1992)

Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1994)

Gunship (MicroProse, 1992)

Harpoon (20th Pacific, 1992)

Heroes of Might & Magic II (New World Computing, 1997)

Kampfgruppe (SSI, 1994)

King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1994)

LeMmings (Poppendieck, 1991)

Links 365 Pro (Massa Software, 1992)

M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1993)

Master of Magic (MicroProse, 1994)

Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1995)

Mech Brigade (SSI, 1993)

MechWarrior 2 (Activision, 1992)

Night & Magic (New World Computing, 1997)

N.U.L.E. (EA, 1992)

Myth (Sierra, 1997)

Panzer General (SSI, 1994)

Practical (MicroProse, 1997)

Quake (id Software, 1996)

Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 1998)

Red Baron (Dynamix, 1994)

The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)

SimCity (Maxis, 1987)

StarCraft (Blizzard, 1997)

Starflight (EA, 1991)

Teotris (Spectrum Software, 1994)

Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1994)

THE Fighter (LucasArts, 1994)

Tomb Raider (Sierra, 1996)

Ultima III (Origin Systems, 1990)

Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1991)

Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1991)

Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)

War in Russia (SSI, 1994)

WarCraft II (Blizzard, 1994)

Wasteland (Interplay, 1991)

Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1991)

Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)

Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)

Wizardry (Bio-Tech, 1977)

Wolfenstein 3-D (id Software, 1992)

X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)

You Don't Know Jack (Berkley Systems, 1991)

Zork (Activision, 1981)



It's Cllobbered Tim

By casting back to the 1960's, Irrational's superhero game re-creates the glory of the Stan Lee era by George Jones



in
e!

Ultimately, we react rather than act. Even in computer games, this holds true. Case in point: The world grows more complicated and technical; we respond by reaching back to far simpler themes. Not surprisingly, comics and superheroes have come to the rescue by popping back into the mainstream: *Batman* and the *X-Men* movies, *Spiderman* and *Superman* films in the works, and rumors about the *Fantastic Four* and the *Sub-Mariner*, of all people.

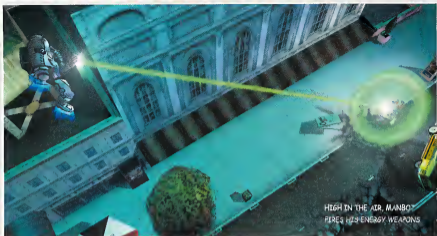
Finally, after several aborted attempts, computer games will pay homage to one of the most popular entertainment forms around with Irrational Entertainment's *FREEDOM FORCE*, coming in November from Crave.

It's about time.

Riddle Me This

When *FREEDOM FORCE* debuts late next year, it will be the first PC superhero game released in some 10 years, excluding the slew of uninspired side-scrolling platform games in the mid-1990's. This kind of gap is unthinkable—shouldn't gaming and comics be the perfect fit?

Yes, but consider two things. First, comic properties are on fire right now. They weren't always, particularly in the late 80's and early 90's, when they became overly complicated, hard-to-follow soap operas. Second, up until now, the technology hasn't really existed to allow the kind of over-the-top visual effects gamers would expect from a superhero game.



HIGH IN THE AIR, MANBO
FIRE'S HIGH-ENERGY WEAPONS

At the core of Irrational's ambitious project lies the same powerful engine that designers Nick and Julian Gollup (*X-COM*) chose for Bethesda's upcoming *DREAMLAND CHRONICLES* title. In addition to making for beautiful graphics, this engine allows for fully movable and destructible environments. *FREEDOM FORCE* is a mission-based game inspired by *X-COM*, albeit with a unique twist: This

strategy experience is set in a world similar to the 60's Marvel universe, one of the golden eras of comics. Consider *FREEDOM FORCE* an homage to the Stan Lee and Jack Kirby era of Marvel. From the simplistic color palettes to the nature of the superheroes to the obsessive mania of the game's supervillains, this experience is all about capturing the styling and attitudes of the 60's comic books and turning it into a story-based interactive experience.

Meanwhile...

The homage starts with the game's

HULK... SMASH!



I ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE...



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IT'S NOT AS GOOD AS RAID, BUT IT WORKS.



THAT ANT LOOKS HUNGRY, IT MUST BE STOPPED.



MUST...LIFT. CAR



look and feel, which instantly recalls the early work of Jack Kirby and Stan Lee in *The Avengers*, *Iron Man*, and *Tales of Suspense*. Even when they're rendered in 3D cut-scenes, the graphics in *FREEDOM FORCE* appear straight out of the comic pages from the early days of Marvel. The characters are simply drawn, and their faces lack intricate details. This facial abstraction, as Irrational Games' General Manager Ken Levine points out, allows gamers to imbue the characters with more of their own imagination. Scott McCloud wholeheartedly supports this notion in his all-encompassing 1995 treatise, *Understanding Comics*, a book the *FREEDOM FORCE* team repeatedly refers to when discussing the game.

Along these lines, the characters' backgrounds and lives are also linear and simple. In keeping with the retro feel, the good guys are clearly right, and the bad guys are obviously evil. But in keeping with early Marvel tones, while their motivations are typically unidimensional, each character does possess some emotional complexity. Some are haunted by their past. Some get along with some heroes, but not others. Some even have sidekicks who make like the Wonder Twins and create more trouble than help. Part of your job in the game is to identify who works better with whom, in which situations, and against which villains. If Irrational is smart, the game will even give some heroes phobias of certain enemies—this can add some interesting meta-aspects to the game.

As it is, the roster of heroes in *FREEDOM FORCE*, which changes over time, is clearly influenced and informed by some of Marvel's classic do-gooders. Minko Man is clearly a goody-goody Captain America type, who will even have his own Rick Jones-style sidekick. Marbot conjures up shades of Iron Man. Law and Order immediately call to mind Cloak and Dagger, two of Marvel's more intricate characters. Part of the game's reward mechanism is that as you play further into the game, you gain access to more and more heroes...as well as different heroes' histories.

The game unravels a key mystery. All over New York, ordinary people, including the game's main characters, are turning into superheroes and supervillains. Why is it happening? Who's causing it? And how do you stop them?

Come and Get It!

The action in *FREEDOM FORCE* plays out a lot like X-COM. As various wannabe world conquerors attack the planet, you scramble to assemble teams of superheroes to take them on. Once you intercept the supervillains, you enter combat mode—the core of the game.

Much like the recent *FINAL FANTASY* games, combat is played real time, meaning that each character has a certain amount of time for you to give him or her orders. The character's action points determine the



BLAST! MISSED HIM AGAIN, LOOKS LIKE NEW YORK'S
FINEST WILL BE WORKING OVERTIME TONIGHT!

FREEDOM FORCE ASSEMBLE!

As you progress through the game, you'll acquire a roster of heroes and begin to unlock each character's unique



number of moves and attacks they can perform in a "turn," as well as how fast they perform them. As you issue a command the game pauses automatically, then resumes combat when you're finished. The designers are hoping that this will keep the player from being overwhelmed. Unfortunately, it could also slow down and weaken the thrill of combat.

In true comic style, heroes can fly, make superleaps, even throw cars and buses at each other. Also in homage to the old-school comics, some enemy characters will let you know what they're going to do before they do it. So an enemy might announce his intentions to crush you with a car, leaving you time (if you stashed some action points) to dodge the attack. During combat, heroes can be knocked down, stunned, knocked unconscious, or get thrown into—and occasionally destroy—buildings.

Much like X-COM, a big part of the action consists of achieving mission objectives. In one mission, for example, you have to save the city from giant ants. But you also have to make sure that no innocent bystanders and police officers are hurt.

The real wild card in FREEDOM FORCE is how well Ironfall is able to lead what could be fairly straightforward gaming action with the over-the-top attitude and style of classic comics. Despicable environments, characters announcing their attacks, and even being able to select results to hurl at each other definitely represents a step in the right direction. The game's settings



What Diabolical Scheme Is Afoot Here?

Believe it or not, only one superhero game (that wasn't by Acclaim) has made it to the PC in the last 10 years. Here are some noticeable non-starts that promised much, but ultimately delivered nothing at all.

Champions (Hero Software) — Debuting on the cover of the April 1992 issue of *Computer Gaming World*, it promised to "focus on the psychological drama and story elements of the graphic storytelling art found in comic books." Ironically, that article featured a sidebar on the sparse history of comic book-oriented computer games.



Indestructibles (Bullfrog) — One of Peter Molyneux's brainchilds. A handful of journalists were able to get a glimpse at the 1995 Electronic Entertainment Expo. We saw a MAGIC CARPET-based engine and heard Peter talk about heroes who could heave telephone poles and buildings at each other. When Molyneux left Bullfrog, the game did, too. Gamers can only pray that after BLACK & WHITE, he revisits the project.

Agents of Justice (MicroProse) — Put simply, it was superheroes meets X-COM. When MicroProse started fading, AOJ left the building, much to many gamers' dismay.

The single game released? Legend's SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN, by legendary adventure game designer Steve Meretzky. The game received high praise in the October 1994 issue of CGW.



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also add to the overall vibe: Missions will take place at the Empire State Building, Central Park, and Liberty Island. But this strategy game will need a lot more along these lines to fully capture that particular vibe of fast-paced action, humor, and tension comics fans remember so well. Close-up reaction shots of bystanders and villains during combat, plot-advancing scripted events mid-mission, and intercutting and overlapping missions will ensure that the game maintains a steady, intriguing pace.

Choose Your Own Comics

One of the instantly noticeable absences in *FREEDOM FORCE* is the lack of any official comic license whatsoever. Levine explains this away with the argument that a license ultimately proves creatively and financially restrictive. He's right—given how modernized and loaded with

history most superheroes are these days, using the X-Men or the Fantastic Four would prove tricky. Still, a Marvel license would have undoubtedly given the game some extra exposure.

It's probably better this way, though, because games will be able to personalize their characters. We'll also be able to create our own, or recreate our favorite superheroes and villains using *FREEDOM FORCE*'s character and mission designer in conjunction with multiplayer action. Imagine re-creating Marvel's *Secret Wars* series with your friends—you'll even be able to set specific goals within the missions you design.

One touch many old-school comic fans would appreciate is a Marvel Team-Up of sorts. If the designers could generate random missions using random teams of heroes, it would extend the life of *FREEDOM FORCE* in a big way. How about

it, Irrational?

Retro Nouveau

All of Irrational's ideas, while promising, underscore one very big reason why comic-themed games haven't been developed up until now: Building such a game is incredibly challenging, as you have to successfully balance several diverse elements. You have to mill down the gameplay, which is decidedly concrete, while at the same time capture the proper tone, look, and feel of comic books—which by their very panel-oriented nature, are abstract. *FREEDOM FORCE* has to get its arms around something many computer games can't: an engaging, twisting storyline. At the same time, it can't let the action get redundant. And it has to honor an era and a genre whose time is past, while at the same time spoofing it and creating tension and excitement. Otherwise, it won't be a comic book game, just a game with a comic book theme. There's a big difference.

A big part of the last decade involved retro and nostalgia. The newfound appeal of comics is an extension of the desire to reminisce about simpler times by embracing the past and making it new. When we were young, a pair of new sneakers could make us run faster and jump higher, we compensate by buying \$140 Nikes with real springs. Likewise, we compensate for the simpler pleasures of the comic books of yesteryear with computer games. In many ways, *FREEDOM FORCE* completes the circle.

—Irrifand, CGW



Understanding Comics

You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover... Not Even a Comic Book

Come on now...I'm going deep. Technologically, the world shifts from analog to digital. The reacting Informational bulge extends our awareness, making for a more enlightened society. But we've also more confused than ever—the transition from analog to digital has created an even stronger cultural wall from a black-and-white, binary existence to a far murkier, gray-scale, analog reality. Absolute wrong and right don't exist anymore. Every point has an indisputably valid counterpoint. Clinton, just yourself in their shoes. Even elections make for cloudy waters, subject to bipartisan interpretation and litigation. We are confused. We are bitter. We are suspicious. We are jaded. And most important, we are indecisive. At least, we think. When it's applied to race, gender, and foreign affairs, coming made undeniably represents a leap forward. But when it's applied to TV journalism, the environment, and politics...well, let's just say it

asks for a rather disorienting social climate. The world was a similarly confusing place after World War II. The Russians, former U.S. allies, quickly turned bad guy as the world reshaped itself into the bipolar structure that existed up until the early 1990s. Add in the threat of nuclear war and the intensely propagandized threat of communism, and the times, they were a-changin'. **Heroes of Might and Magic** Enter the comic superheroes—stereotypical do-gooders with superpowers who embodied optimism, the American dream, and everything that is "right" with the world. They worked hard by day in conventional jobs, and periodically saved the United States from the evil-doers who attacked us. It was all a big metaphor. But then again, let's meet media? As time went on, and the world became more and more enlightened—both economically and psychologically—comics and the superheroes gradually began to transform. The

traditional DC comics format gave way to the more intimate Marvel universe, where superheroes still saved the world, but also had biting satire of human. And *Heaven, Magic, Curses, and Other Destructive Powers*, such as Iron Man's alcoholism. As the world expanded and became more complicated in the mid-1990s, comics became more interwoven, bizzaro, and even metaphysical. This ultimately proved to be the breaking point for readers and Marvel alike; the company's sales slipped as readers bleached at the surreal nature of the superheroes' adventures. Given the success of 20th Century Fox' X-Men, Marvel is experiencing renewed vigor. At the same time, the company is perhaps realizing that its stable of heroes, not tripped-out soap opera-style cosmic adventures, is its most valuable possession. Which might just mean better, self-contained comics for the rest of us. —George Jones



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Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn

Make Some of the Toughest Monsters Whimper Before You by **Thierry Nguyen**

There are many monsters to choose from. But the three that cause the most headaches are the dragons, the mind flayers, and the liches. Vampires may be pretty bad, but once you know about things like Negative Plane Protection and weapons with bonus against undead, you're fine. Beholders just need either strong magic resistances, or someone wearing a Cloak Of Mirroring. Those other monsters, though, require specific tactics. Learn and love these tips, and you'll be able to take down monsters that make most "heroes" flinch uncontrollably.

Dragon-Thwacker

■ If you haven't yet, check out last month's issue for a primer on what protective spells you should set before battle. No matter which dragon you fight, you'll need all the help/boost you can get. Depending on the dragon, a Protection spell would be useful also; red calls for fire, black calls for acid, and silver calls for cold.



FLY FIRST Get the drop on a dragon by surrounding it, while it still thinks you just want to talk to it.

With one exception, you always get the initiative. Only one dragon will attack you first; the others will attack only after you've insulted them, or they'll wait for you to attack first. Use this: Place your melee attackers around the dragon while it's still non-hostile. Not only will you get to deal the first blow, but you'll also minimize the damage from the powerful Wing Buffet attack, as it'll first have to physically turn to face someone, and it'll probably

hit only one person instead of your entire party, since you're spread out.

While the fighters pound on the dragon, the mages can use a few Lower Resistances, and then follow up with direct-damage spells such as Magic Missile. Or, if you're feeling lucky, you can try casting an instant-death spell (like Finger Of Death) and hope that the dragon falls the saving throw.



FREE YOUR MIND Three holy fighters with clerics surrounds equal mind-flay attacks.

Lick the Lich

■ Liches are the ultimate spell-casters. They're also undead. First, send a "sacrificial lamb" (a fighter buffed up to the max with spells and items to boost magic resistance/avoiding them) to absorb the initial spell attack (usually Time Stop followed by several death spells). Then, have your mages tear down the lich's magical defenses and let your fighters pound on it. If you happen to wield the Deaptor longsword, use its Searry ability.

For the one deathlich, you're going to have to pray. The designers at BioWare recommend sending in a buffed-up paladin

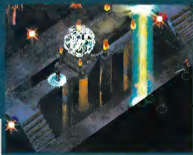
(the Undead Buster hit works best) wielding the Holy Avenger. I'd also recommend casting the level-five spell Immunity, and specifying "Abjuratio" to counter the Imprisonment spell. Without a paladin, you'll need either +5 weapons to even hit the deathlich, or several Lower Resistance followed by some direct damage spells (Melf's Minute Meteors works well) to take it down.

Flaying of the Mind

■ Illithids (a.k.a. Mind Flayers) seem to be grossly unfair, as not only do they instantly confuse and dominate you with their psionic blasts, but they also can "suck your brains." Meaning that if they physically hit you, you have about two turns before you suddenly collapse dead, unless you kill them.

Fortunately, two things will help you prevail: strong fighters, and the priest spell Chaotic Command. Chaotic Command grants complete immunity to any mind effects an enemy will throw at you. You'll know

about every illithid encounter ahead of time, so make sure to memorize a few of these. The best thing to do is buff up your toughest fighters, cast this spell on them, and let 'em tear the illithids apart. With their psionic blasts nullified, illithids can't really stand up to a burly fighter-type smacking them repeatedly with a weapon, and even if one does manage to start the brain-sucking process, your fighters' melee might should kill it before it sucks you dry.



SPRY DEQUICK Try using the great spell Spray or Dagon's Scurry ability to weaken, or perhaps outright destroy, a lich.

Red Alert 2

Tips for Multiplayer Mayhem by Jason Kapalka

While RED ALERT 2 has shifted and tuned the game balance from earlier COMMAND & CONQUER titles, these strategies remain timeless.

BUILD ORDER

■ What to build first? A War Factory or another Refinery? Many RA2 players have a religiously codified build order they follow for maximum efficiency, and while few can agree on the single best formula, here's a good place to start:

-Power Plant
-Barracks
-Refinery
-War Factory (+2 Harvesters)
-Airport/ Radar
-Power Plant
-Refinery
-Battle Lab

On a water map, you may want to build a Shipyard before you go for the Battle Lab, since it's nearly impossible to do so later on if your opponent gains sea superiority.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

■ A lack of money will cripple even the most brilliant general. The key is to get a good constant income without leaving yourself open to an early assault by building too many Harvesters. To this end, most players favor building at least two Ore Refineries fairly early on; if your only Refinery gets destroyed, you can easily end up in a bind where you have to sell lots of other buildings to get the cash needed to rebuild it.

As for Harvesters, a ratio of 2:5 for every Refinery seems to work well—that is, with two Refineries, you should have five Harvesters out gathering resources. If your opponent sends to "turtle" (build massive base defenses), you may be better off attacking their Harvesters than making a full frontal assault. Once their income is shut down, you can overwhelm them with sheer numbers. Similarly, if you're up against someone who prays on Harvs, be sure to make extras and escort any Harvs heading into dangerous territory.



THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

■ A nasty Soviet strategy for Libyan players is to build multiple Demolition Trucks, then pack them together and hit them with the Iron Curtain. Drive the now invulnerable trucks into key locations in the enemy base. Your foe can do nothing but wait for the Iron Curtain to wear off, at which point the fireworks begin.

COMBINED ARMS

A force of multiple Soviet Tanks with IFVs for air support makes for a deadly combo.



HOT SHOTS

Soviet IFVs are best used at a distance as stationary targets for the buildings.

AIRSTRIKE TACTICS

■ In all cases, air attacks become much less effective once you lose the element of surprise and your opponent begins building sensors anti-air. For this reason, keep your air units well to the back of your base, hopefully out of radar sight, until you've built up an overwhelming force—for the Allies, this means eight or more jets; for the Soviets, four or more Kinigs. Then make sure you take out the Construction Yard with your first strike, or you can expect a storm of risk on your next flyover.

TIME TRUCKERS

■ Allied players fond of Chrono Legionnaires may find it more useful to put them into IFVs than to let them run about on foot. Though they lose the ability to teleport while in an IFV, they become much tougher, and their weapon increases in effectiveness. Moreover, they can now maneuver around within the period of vulnerability their regular teleport entails.

PARATROOPS FOR PENNY-PINCHERS

■ When they're selecting their country in multiplayer, Allied gamers who aren't planning on mounting massive airstrikes with the Korean Black Eagles should usually go for America, with its paratrooper assault. Even if you can't use them to take out tightly defended enemy buildings, it's still \$1,000 worth of free infantry every few minutes. Defensive players may prefer the French Grand Cannon, but it's generally less effective than a network of two or three Power Towers.

CHRUNO IVAN

■ It's very hard to get the super-tough Soviet unit, making it more of an Easter egg than a viable strategy, but it's still pretty cool. You'll need to micro-control an Allied Spy using Yuri, then send the Spy into your opponent's Tech Center. You'll then be able to build the expensive Chrono Ivan unit, which sets time bombs like the regular Ivan, but has the added ability of being able to teleport anywhere on the map. Needless to say, this can wreak havoc on undefended base interiors or fields of unrecruited Harvesters.

No One Lives Forever

But You Can, With These Surefire Tips

■ You can't kill everyone you see while you're sneaking into the facility in the third level of "Trouble in the Tropics," but you can menace them. A few karate chops to those peely alarm-sounding scientists will leave them literally cowering in fear for the duration of the level — they'll never hit the klaxon and you can move by them freely.

■ Just because you can't blow your cover doesn't mean you can't blow away bad guys. You can prevent alarms and clear out rooms by parking yourself in front of the alarm pads and mowing down guards that try to trigger the alarm behind you. Just make sure you and the resulting corpses aren't in front of a camera.

■ Sniper rifles are great tools for scouting out areas ahead of you. If you do this a lot, make sure not to fire your last bullet, or the scope will be disabled.

■ Kicking Armstrong's arse is tough, but not impossible. Time your blows to hit just after he throws an uppercut, and jump into the air right before he



Slip scounders around, and they'll be too scared to sound an alarm.

punches the ground. Alternatively, you can jump on top of his head and smack away — he won't be able to lay a hand on you.

Homeworld: Cataclysm

Barking Dog Tells You How to Beat Mission 7

Save all the refugees without losing a single ship!

■ The Beast Cruise Missiles will come in four waves; each one larger than the last, and the last two escorted by Interceptors. The best way to save the refugees is to see as much of the area as possible, while fielding as many fighters as your support limit will allow. If you have lots of resources, dock your workers and keep them inside. Ramming Frigates are useless here. So while Hive Frigates can be micromanaged effectively for long-range intercepts, your best bet is to retire the low-experience ones and keep the skilled captains close to the Kuan-Lan, set to Aggressive.

To save all the refugee ships, you'll need six to eight Recones, spread around the edge of the level, to give yourself maximum targeting and interception time on the incoming Cruise Missiles. As soon as the mission starts, spread those

Recones across the level. Soon, you'll see the flight path the convoy ships are on, as they pass from sliggats to sliggate. Drive your command ship in a straight intercept to this flight line while building at least 30 Acolytes and 21 Recones.

Separate the Acolytes into attack groups of five each, the Recones into groups of seven. These flight groups will act as your interceptor wing. Position them near the edges of the level, half high and half low, with more groups positioned towards the sliggates. Leave only one group guarding the side you entered from, as you will have plenty of time to intercept any group that comes in on that attack vector. While the Recon groups have less firepower, they can get somewhere in a hurry, and you should use them for emergency interceptors.

If you do this, the first two waves should be relatively easy to deal with — but do

not let your interceptor wings get pulled too far out of their initial guard positions, as the 3rd and 4th waves of Missiles are the most dangerous. The key to surviving these two waves is precise use of the Sensors Manager to distinguish Beast Escorts from the Cruise Missiles. The Missiles will continue to be the real threat, so ignore the escorts until the Cruise Missiles have been destroyed. The most dangerous attacks will come from the general area of the exit sliggate, so station three or four interceptor wings in the area. If you have any Sentinels, they should be set on Aggressive and stationed here.



Roller Coaster Tycoon

Looking to Add Excitement to Your Park? Use These Tips From Game Designer Chris Sawyer



Build tunnels close to tracks, or even faster, a bridge across the side of an exciting point. This gives straggling guests an up-close look of the ride in action, which may entice them onto the ride.



With some roller coaster types, careful use of the "bread-cropper" element can open up the ride. While this single-roll coaster has plenty of clearance, it doesn't seem that way to the guests.

■ Use tunnels to make drops more exciting. A steep drop into a narrow tunnel can be much more thrilling than the same drop out in the open air. This applies to flumes as well as to coasters.

■ Carefully combining two or more rides into the same area of land adds excitement to both rides. Look for ways to intertwine attractions.

■ Let the guests see other rides while they're on another. Run a log flume through the vertical loop of a roller coaster – imagine the log flume riders' surprise when the roller coaster train roars through the loop and over their heads!

■ Use the gentle rides, like monorail and miniature railway, to allow people to see the best bits of the park. This will make the ride more exciting and will also entice them onto the more thrilling rides later.



Try to surround the riders. This well-known-style coaster emerges from the dark tunnel at high speed, rounds a 180-degree bend to the bright sunlight, then plunges back into darkness. That's exciting.



Clever use of theme and scenery can make even the most mundane ride exciting. This loop car ride is enhanced by the use of scenery, flume, variation in height, and tracks.

SWAT 3 Elite Edition

Multiplayer Team Tactics by Raphael Liberatore

■ In every multiplayer game, assign an element leader to each team for better coordination and supervision during team movement. The rest of the players should concentrate on searching and providing cover.

There are two modes for room clearing: Stealth and Dynamic. Using Stealth Mode, a team stops at the door and stands ready. The first member of the team begins slicing the pie to search the room for suspects and/or hostages. Use the optwand if needed. After the search, the assaulters step into the room, with the second and subsequent assaulters moving into the room in a button-hook fashion, peeling off left and right. Always have the rear assaulter "checking their six" (rear). Players should use the "Copy" and "Clear" keys for team communication.

For Dynamic Mode, the Point of Entry (POE) is the point at which room clearing requires "Breach, Bang, and Clear." The team quickly assembles in a stack at the POE, where the first player checks for locked doors. If the entry point requires an explosive breach to enter, the second assaulter moves to one side of the opening, while the rest of the team stacks on the other side. The second assaulter then breaches the door. Once breached, the first assaulter quickly tosses an NFD (flashbang) into the room, waits two seconds after detonation, then moves into the room – followed by the rest of the team, each splitting right or left and covering their Point of View.



TALK IT OUT

This element just took out some bad guys while rescuing hostages. Interestingly, now the element is out of sync, milling around while trying to figure out which of the multiple directions they need to search and clear next. To avoid this confusion, players should assign chat-key commands and/or use voice communication software to maintain communication and operational tempo.

sacrifice™

A movie poster for the film 'Sacrifice'. The title 'sacrifice' is at the top in a stylized, glowing red and orange font. Below it, a large, multi-eyed alien creature with a glowing blue mouth and four long, purple, tentacle-like arms is shown. A man in a white and orange jumpsuit is being held up by the creature's arms. The background is a dark, cloudy sky with a bright blue light emanating from the creature's mouth. The bottom of the poster features the text 'TO WHICH GOD WILL YOU MAKE YOURS?' in a yellow, serif font.

TO WHICH GOD WILL YOU
MAKE YOURS?

A sacrifice to

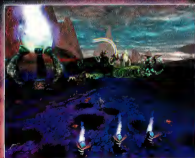
Charnel GOD OF DEATH

offers the power of destruction
and carnage.

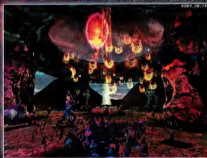
I am Charnel, the God of Strife, Lord of Slaughter, Master of Death. Where there is pain, I am. Where there is suffering, I flourish. Without conflict, without struggle, without me to hate, who would have cause to call themselves just? Only a fool would seek contentment in peace and tranquility.

-- Charnel, God of Death

sacrifice



Your creatures need you! Cast deadly spells to aid them.



Make a Sacrifice, secure your victory, your God feeds well.



Choose a God...
Make your Sacrifice.



The dark beauty of Chernel's world awaits...

THE ULTIMATE sacrifice

The Holy War is over.

The Demons of Gologotha have been banished, yet the cost has been terribly high. The Creator, God of the Fyllid, has been defeated and the faith of the people has begun to wane. Petty squabbles among the five remaining Gods has caused the land to split into five mystical territories - each at war with one another. Into this divided land steps a wizard, a man haunted by his past, whose choices will shape the future. Which God will he choose? Will he sacrifice himself to change this world for the better, or will what remains of this world be sacrificed for one God's alone?



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The Sims: Livin' Large

Time for a Potty Party by Robert Coffey

While time and money make it relatively easy to improve room scores throughout your home, even the most contented Sims have their room ratings plummet whenever they enter the bathroom. Why? Sims like rooms that are large, well lit, and complicated (i.e., not big squares). Since most players would rather buy stereos and pinball machines for their game rooms instead of dumping high-end lighting and art into enormous bathrooms, their scores suffer.

But there is a quick fix—the severed head. Drop a human head in a jar right across from the toilet, have your Sims gaze upon it, and you'll never dread poop-time again.



Call to Power 2

Four Ways to Beat the Toughest Missions

The Nuclear Defense mission is fairly challenging, particularly at the higher difficulty levels; it's hard enough just getting your arms around the Empire you've inherited, let alone meeting the game's victory conditions. Here are four different ways to win:

SPIES

■ You're going to need 16 Spies (at least) to successfully investigate every city's launch codes. Send them in non-stacked groups of two—in order to get every one of them in. Because the launch codes in the scenario reset every six turns, don't move one in until you've gotten all of them in position.

NUCLEAR SUB DESTRUCTION

■ This method is friggin' hard, particularly since you have to explore the map first just to discover all the Vendikari subs. Negotiate with the Vendikari to obtain a map of their empire, even if it means giving up gold (but not nukes). Your best bet is to build a powerful Navy by stacking ships up. Remember, you have to destroy all the subs in one turn, or you'll probably lose the game.

NANITE WONDER

■ If you want to go the science and production route, use CTP 2's new goal-setting research feature to set your research goal to Nano Machines. This will take you via the shortest route to the Nanite Defuser Wonder. While the research is ongoing (boost your science as high as you can in the meantime by developing the Internet and science-enhancing buildings), select one city and boost its production capacity to the max. I'd recommend Jauf-Alpha or Joos; just make sure you balance the unhappiness in those cities with an Arena, Shrine, and anything else you can build. Caution: You have to decide on this strategy early in the scenario, or you won't be able to win this way.

DIPLOMACY

■ Build the Empire State Building immediately—it will improve your negotiating stance. From here, it's a simple matter of using a friendly approach, advancements, and gold to get what you want. One other strategy is to use the diplomatic approach as a decoy. It pays off to butter up the Vendikari while you work on the Nanite Wonder or your Spy network.

One other note: No matter what path you pursue, don't forget about the Kariss—if you can ally with them and persuade them to harass the Vendikari, you'll make your life a lot easier.



Sacrifice

Apocrypha: Shiny's Unrevealed Creatures by Tom Chick

At first glance, these tactics may seem like no-brainers. But since these critters aren't covered in the game manual, even the most accomplished wizard will benefit from studying the following breakdown.

Stratos

■ Flying units are important in the initial race to grab neutral souls, because they're so fast. But since they're also frail, it's rarely a good idea to send them into battle without other troops supporting them. Since Stratos' Frostwolves have the special ability of Speed, his wizards can assemble a group of Frostwolves and flying Breinisks for fast early rushes that won't crumble under a missile attack.

Stratos' undocumented creatures are the Yeti, a powerful melee fighter; and the Silverback, a frost-breathing beardedragon with an area-effect freezing attack. The Silverback's Speed ability can move it across the map faster than any of the other powerful units.

James

■ James' Earthlings (and their undead counterpart, Chamel's Fallen) can camouflage themselves to set up ambushes. When the Earthlings assume rock form or the Fallen play dead, they remain that way until given new orders. Wait for unsuspecting enemies to pass, and then order them to attack. If you can coordinate this attack from behind with a frontal assault, the defender may not even realize it's being attacked with missile weapons. Note that while Earthlings are in rock form and Fallen are playing dead, they'll still give you a line of sight — so you can use them as invulnerable observation posts around the map.

James' undocumented creatures are the Jabberwock and the Rhinok. The Jabberwock disrupts enemies with a miniature earthquake, and the Rhinok has an area-effect spike attack. It can also summon a hail of rocks that will automatically attack enemies from a distance.



Persephone

■ Persephone's Ringed Dragon can't be seen. Sight while opening the map to sniff out neutral souls and enemy units. Summon a Scario and order it to guard a group of Persephone's more powerful creatures; the puny little bug's healing abilities will automatically sustain creatures in a fight.

One of Persephone's ultimate creatures is the Ent, a slow but powerful guy who can cast a Protection spell for nearby units. Protection-aided troops backed by a Scario or two will prevail in almost any battle, if they aren't heavily outnumbered. Persephone's Dragons have Breath of Life, which outpaces Chamel's Animate spell. Keep the Dragon on a handy hotkey to quickly get dead units zok into the fray.

PERSEPHONE'S ENT: Its strength is its weakness. It's slow, but it's also tough.



Pyro

■ Pyro's Warmonger is one of the best missile units in the game because it doesn't miss, its shots are instantaneous, and it has a high rate of fire. The Warmonger can use its Firewalk to lay an ambush or to teleport out of harm's way. Pyro's Phoenix is also an excellent missile unit, because its beams are powerful and have such a long reach.



Chamel

Chamel's units are good for hit-and-run attacks, since many of them cause poison damage that continues over time and prevents healing. Attack, and pull back for a little bit to minimize casualties and to let the damage on your enemy build up.

Chamel's ultimate (and undocumented) creatures are the soul-eating Hellmouth and Styx. The latter is a ranged attacker who throws bombs and can eat friendly souls from a distance. Eating souls

makes the Styx more powerful, but it's also a good way to keep your souls out of the enemy's hands. If you can't get close enough to retrieve them, the Hellmouth is Chamel's most powerful unit. With a few souls in its belly, it can take on any other single unit in the game. Beware that soul eating is a one-way street: Eaten souls are lost forever, since you won't get them back if the creature dies.

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Combat Flight Simulator 2

Surviving the Pacific War by **Lloyd Case**

Microsoft's spiffy COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 can be pretty tough, especially in some of the larger missions. Here are a few hints for surviving to fight another day.

■ If you're flying an American fighter, never ever try to out-turn the Japanese Zeros — it's sure suicide.

Instead, since most U.S. fighters (except the F4F-4) have significantly more power than either of the Zero variants, use "zoom and boom." Zoom in, try to rake the enemy, then zoom away — this will compensate for your lack of nimbleness. Conversely, if you are flying a Zero or George, try to get into a turning duel.

■ Although there are only four wingman commands, they offer a lot of flexibility. Using the "Split" command (the "S" key), you can spread out your formation. When your squadron is sufficiently spread out, give the attack order ("A" key). This enables you to perform a pincer attack on the enemy.

■ If you're not into hyper-realism, pause occasionally and take a look around using the view keys. If you're new to combat flight sims in general, this is a



Hit-and-run tactics are best for U.S. fighters. Use your superior power to charge a Zero, shoot like mad, then speed away. Don't get into barbells — a Zero's better maneuverability will send you on an express trip to the land, hard ground.



Use the "S" key to spread out your formation. Then, when you issue the "A" (attack) order, your squadron will attack from two different directions.

great way to gradually develop situational awareness. Over time, you'll get a feel for the ebb and flow of combat, and you'll "know" the relative location of friendlies and enemies, even when they're not visible.

Finally, read the manual. No, really! The manual for COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 has some excellent suggestions for tactics in a variety of circumstances.

Crimson Skies

Load Out for Winners by **Tom Price**

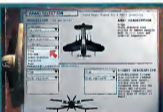
CRIMSON SKIES offers you quite a few options in planes and weapon load-outs in order to successfully complete each mission. While some of the rockets and ammo types do some gee-whizz-type things, you really need only a few basic options to defeat any foe.

Ammo

■ It's all about the explosive rounds. They damage armor and plane interiors equally, and they can be quite devastating on ground targets. You might want to pick some lower caliber dum-dums to finish off wounded planes, so as not to use up valuable explosive rounds.

Rockets

■ Sure, the beepers and seekers and chokers have cute names and even cooler functions, but you really need to concentrate on only three kinds of rockets to complete 99 percent of your mission objectives. Flak rockets are the best air-to-air weapons in the game, sending burning metal out in all directions upon explosion, and virtually tearing other planes to shreds. For ground targets, stick to the high explosive rockets for maximum damage. If it's an air ship you want to sink, nothing gets it done faster than the aerial torpedo.



FIXING YOUR POLARIS (left) load-out on air strikes. Stick up in the right window, and your enemy is as good as dead.

Metal Gear Solid

icing Liquid Snake by **Alex Handy**

■ Your final confrontation with Liquid Snake may feel a bit like a *Friday the 13th* movie — no matter what you do, it still seems to come back for more. Initially, you'll have to defeat Liquid in Metal Gear itself. Get in close and wait for Liquid to use Metal Gear's lasers and machine guns. Once it does, hit the radar pod on Metal Gear's left shoulder with your stinger missiles (you don't need a lock to fire). After you've destroyed the radar pod, attack the nose cone. Stay as close to Metal Gear as possible, as there's no way to dodge the rockets Liquid fires at you. After you've defeated Metal Gear, you'll still have to face Liquid twice more, but without the mech he's not quite so tough as Jason Voorhees.

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NHL 2001

Getting the Puck in the Net by Jeff Lackey

www.nhl4kids.com

Having problems scoring in EA Sports's NHL 2001? Here're a few tips to help you slip the puck past the AI goalie.

- Slide the AI goalie slider to the left before each game. Even with the boost lowered, the effect is subtle: According to EA, the slider affects how likely the goalie is to misjudge a shot, and is most notable when you take a shot at the 5-hole or corners with a big shooter when he's all alone.

- Wait a second when firing off a one-timer. You'll often catch the goalie sprawling and can flip it into an upper corner of the net, if you're using manual aim.
- Set your strategy to

"Cash the Net" and then use the Deflection button, which aims your shot at a teammate near the goal who will attempt to redirect it past the goalie.

THROUGH THE 5-HOLE
Learning to use the Manual Aim option will allow you to take advantage of a goalie who is out of position.



Space Empires IV

Defending Your Space by Bruce Goryk

- Because movement from system to system in SPACE EMPIRES IV is slower only through warp points, those become the focus of defense when you're protecting your empire from enemy incursions. The most effective defense is based on a combination of mines and guardian fleets. Lay a heavy minefield on the warp point in the neighboring system leading into the system you want to defend, and place a space fleet on the warp point inside your own system. Then, when an enemy fleet strikes your mines, you'll not only be alerted to their presence, but you'll possibly be able to jump through the warp point on your turn and attack their damaged ships. Keep a minelayer in your guardian fleet to replace detonated mines.



Zeus: Master of Olympus

Building a City for the Ages by Tom Price

- The early years of a city's inception can be the toughest, with or without the grace of the gods. Finding the balance between a prospering economy and providing a hygienic and safe haven for new immigrants is one of the keys to succeeding at ZEUS. What often happens, though, is that you have a lot of open jobs and not enough people to fill them. That may seem like a minor problem, but when your farms are producing plenty of food – and your people are starving because there's no one to distribute the goods – you have a major problem. Solution: the workforce allocation screen, a handy little tool for directing your workforce.

Put more people on Husbandry until harvest time, then temporarily switch all these people over to Storage And Distribution so that food can find its way to citizens. If you're building a temple, throw your workforce into Industry and Storage And Distribution so that the raw materials can get to the building site quicker. You might want to stockpile some food first. Just remember to redistribute your workforce once you're done dealing with the imminent issue.

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Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2

Making Your Sidewinder Work for You by **Alex Handy**

TONY HAWK 2 rules, but the manual sucks. Here's what your SideWinder gamepad buttons do.

X, Z, L, and R: Spin.

These buttons (L and R being the shoulder buttons) spin you in whichever direction the button is facing. X and L spin you counter-clockwise, Z and R spin you clockwise. You can usually spin faster with these buttons than you can with the D-pad, but when you pull a 540 using only the D-pad, you'll get more points than you will using these buttons. Also, these buttons will switch your stance if you're landing the wrong way (i.e., goofy foot or regular foot).

Y: Grind.

This is the button for your lip tricks. To use, jump near a rail, edge, or lip. Then press Y as you're landing near or on the surface you wish to grind. Once you've started grinding, you can let go of this button. To do a lip trick, such as a handplant, press Y and any direction on the D-pad as you come to the top of a ramp or halfpipe.

C: Grab.

C grabs your board for any one of thousands of different tricks. Tricks such as Japan Air, Madonna, and the Benifano are done with this button. Use it the same way you use the flip button. The only difference is that you'll hold onto the board for as long as you hold onto the button, so be sure to let go before you land. The longer you hold a trick, the more points you'll get.

A: Flip.

This button executes a flip trick; that is, spinning the board independently of your body. Kickflips, heelflips, and varials are all executed with this button. To do a flip trick, jump and press A along with a direction on the D-pad.

B: Jump.

Hold it down to charge, let go to jump. Most good players keep this button depressed whenever they're skating around on the ground.

Shogun Total War

Don't Get Burned by Bridges by **Raphael Liberatore**

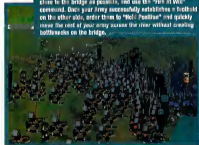
Bridge Crossing 101

■ River crossings require detailed planning, proper troop allocation, and persistence at the point of attack. Here's a couple of

options to keep those pesky bodies of water from stunting your growing empire.

Quickly send your heavily armored units like Knights and Cavalry in "Loose" formation across the bridge to establish a foothold on the other side. Support their efforts with missile fire by positioning archers along the riverbank. Bring them as close to the bridge as possible, and use the "Run at Will" command. Once your army successfully establishes a foothold on the other side, order them to "Hold Position" and quickly move the rest of your army across the river without creating bottlenecks on the bridge.

Another tactic involves sending your archers close to the bridge while sending War Advisors across the river. This draws the enemy near the bridge so you can weaken them with an archer assault. The archers line up on the right bank have already piled up a serious heap of enemy bodies on the other side. Now that the enemy is weakened, the red army can send the rest of their troops across the bridge to finish them off.





—Computer Games



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MechWarrior 4: Vengeance

Multiplayer Mech Mechanics by Bruce Geryk

Multiplayer MECHWARRIOR is the ultimate test of both your mech design skills and your piloting prowess. When venturing into that jungle, use these tips to increase your life expectancy.

Choose an Appropriate Mech

■ Match your machine to your playing style. Quick, agile mechs are ideal tools for the skilled pilot who can put these advantages to good use on the battlefield. If you're just a beginner, though, you'll find this kind of mech less a help than a hindrance. A slow, stable mech with some long-range missiles allows a newcomer to stand back and deal damage from afar.

Choose Appropriate Weapons

■ Weapons like the gauss rifle may cause a lot of damage, but the long recharge time (and limited ammo) means you need to make every shot count. For beginners who have a tendency to miss their shots a good portion of the time, auto-cannons or machine gun arrays are a better choice, although they do far less damage.

When playing games like Attrition that reward not only kills but also damage you've inflicted, make sure to take some missiles along. Missiles cause splash damage – inflicting damage not only to the target they hit, but to adjacent areas as well. This translates to more points.

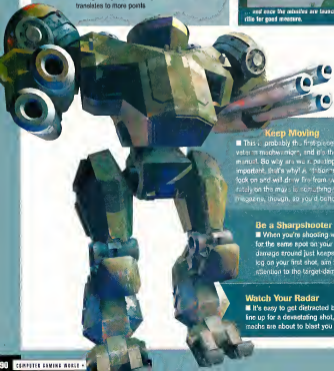
USING THE ZOOM



The zoom window is excellent for long-range sniping. First you get the missile lock ...



... and once the missiles are launched, you hit with the gauss rifle for good measure.



Keep Moving

■ This is probably the first piece of advice you'll be given by veteran mechwarriors, and it's the first tip numbered in the game manual. So why are we re-posting it here? Because it's so damn important, that's why! A stationary mech gives missiles a chance to lock on and will draw fire from everyone. Learn to pivot constantly on the map to constantly gain a new term by rearing this megalomaniac, though, so you'd better get practicing.

Be a Sharpshooter

■ When you're shooting weapons other than missiles, aim for the same spot on your target each time. Spreading damage around just keeps the enemy alive longer. If you hit a leg on your first shot, aim for the leg again until it's gone. Pay attention to the target-damage indicator on your HUD.

Watch Your Radar

■ It's easy to get distracted by a juicy target that you're about to line up for a devastating shot, and not notice that three enemy mechs are about to blast you from behind. Don't get tunnel vision.

Use Your Jump Jets, if You Have Them

■ Jump jets can get you out of tight spots very quickly. When you're using them, make sure you have a plan to escape to, such as over a nearby ridge or to the other side of a building. But an airborne mech makes an inviting target — so don't fly any longer than necessary in order to escape the threat.

Steeplechase

■ In urban environments, jump jets can be used to make a particularly sneaky kind of attack. If you have a target that lies between you and a building, run directly at it, firing all your weapons. Then, just as you reach it, engage your jump jets and fly right over the building to safety. Just be careful to check your rear and make sure there's not a nasty surprise waiting for you on the other side.



SPRINGING THE TRAP Use jump jets to

If You Are on a Team, Use It

■ MEGHARRIOR 4 team games can be chaotic affairs, but you don't have to draw up plays like a football quarterback to take advantage of your teammates. If you sense that you're starting to lose a head-to-head encounter with an enemy mech, retreat toward friendly mechs while inflicting whatever damage you can. Your teammates won't pass up the chance to grab a kill if you manage to lead a damaged enemy into range. And you'll live to fight another day. Or, live more minutes.



A LITTLE HELP When you're badly damaged, stick close to your teammates.

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- Gamers Depot

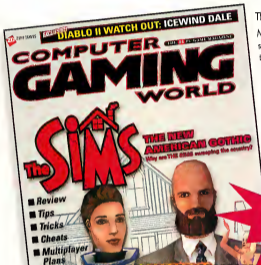
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- PC Zone (UK)



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FEBRUARY REVIEWS

Readers often ask us how we decide on the star rating for each game we review. The exact wording may be more like "What brand of crack were you guys at: CGW smoking when you gave MY FAVORITE GAME only two stars?" Some assume that it is entirely up to the discretion of the reviewer. Others think that we give out star ratings based on secret agendas or out of personal favoritism (or disfavoritism, as the case may be). But in reality, we have a well-established and highly refined method for determining the final star rating of every game reviewed in the pages of CGW, and no, it doesn't involve a dart board.

Every month, once the deadline has passed and all the reviews are in (two events that rarely occur on the same day), the editors gather in the star chamber — er, I mean, 12th-floor conference room — with printed versions of the reviews they assigned that issue. They discuss, debate, argue, cajole, insult, weep, and ultimately agree upon a star rating for each game. Aside from the editors, the only other attendee at the ratings meeting is the CGW gnome (issue #198, pg. 73). The gnome is kind of like a mascot to us, and no rating can be finalized without the editor of the review ceremonially "blowing the gnome." You know, like a horn. Get your mind out of the gutter.

For each review, we first consider the rating suggested by the reviewer. Some reviewers are notoriously harsh, others a bit too easy, so we have to take that into consideration. The editor of the review reads a few passages that outline the main pros and cons, and those are bandied about, with all considerations made for the game's context historically and within the genre. We also take our personal experiences playing the game into account. And then, in what can be described as a miracle second only to the Lemmings Conception, we seven editors and one very tired gnome come to an agreed-upon conclusion.

So the next time you want to accuse us of wrong-headedness, ignorance, or just plain stupidity because you disagree with a particular star rating, keep in mind that a lot of time and effort goes into giving these games their due consideration. That's our job, after all. And if we make a huge mistake, we can always blame it on the gnome. —Tom Price

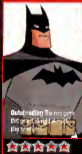


THE CGW
GNOME

FEBRUARY REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
4X4 Evolution	★★★★★
Delta Force 3	★★★★★
Devil Inside	★★★★★
FIFA 2001	★★★★★
Bunman Chronicles	★★★★★
Jetfighter 4	★★★★★
Links 2001	★★★★★
Sacrifice	★★★★☆
Space Empires IV	★★★★★
Sudden Strike	★★★★★
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2	★★★★★
Wizards and Warriors	★★★★★
Zeus	★★★★★

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.



SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

LucasArts makes a good adventure, but it lacks that certain monkey magic

Marred Monkey Mojo

When it comes to franchises, you need to know when to end them, otherwise you end up with something more akin to *Police Academy* than to, say, the *Indiana Jones* trilogy.

Reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

Thankfully, *ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND* (EM) hasn't crossed the border into rampant mediocrity, but it's getting there. While it possesses the brain-expanding puzzles and the zany, madcap humor of the previous games, there're some problems that blamish it overall. One of these is the unquantifiable sensation that it lacks the "magic touch" of other LucasArts adventures.

Nathin' Goes Right

Picking up right after the all-too-brief ending of *CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND*, we return to Melee Island with Governor Elaine and her doofus-extraordinaire husband (and protagonist) Guybrush Threepwood. What starts as a simple task of "prevent demolition of house" soon spirals into a search for yet another mighty-woodoo-artifact-with-a-goofy-name, the Ultimate Inuit. Along the way, Guybrush will have to deal with the suspiciously familiar Charles L. Charles and Australian land developer Cezie Mandrill's attempted gentrification of the pirate-infested Teal Island Area into a family-friendly environment (think of Gaillon's New York, or what's been happening in Las Vegas lately). Along the way,

secrets are revealed, old friends are revealed, monkeys are summoned, and the game paves the way for another sequel.

Following *GRIM FANDANGO*, EM tears itself away from the confines of the two-dimensional screen and revels in the still fashionably hip 3rd dimension. Depending purely on personal preference, this is either a good or bad thing. Granted, the backgrounds are great; they maintain that sense of absurd beauty needed in a cartoon and are superb reinterpretations of nostalgia-filled locales in certain parts. While the backgrounds maintain the signature LucasArts greatness, the 3D characters are...different. They do a good job of using facial expressions and animated gestures to keep the cartoony feel, and fellow CGW editors think the characters are just dandy, but for some reason, they still make me feel like I'm watching some bizarre puppet show instead of an out-and-out cartoon. Again, it's a preference thing.

Comedy's Dirtiest Dozen

While the art is decidedly new and hip, the puzzles and gameplay hit you hard with their old-school sensibilities. It starts out pretty easy and newbie-friendly, but the puzzles eventually require you to start applying an odd mix of lateral thinking, a knack for remembering small-



Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 16MB hard disk space, 2D cart. Direct-compatible sound card.

Recommended Requirements: Pentium 400, 64MB RAM, 16MB hard disk space, 32 CD-ROM, 2D cart.

2D Support: Direct3D or OpenGL. Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher/Developer: LucasArts • \$46 • www.lucasarts.com

ESRB Rating: Teen (13+); comic mischief, suggestive themes, use of tobacco and alcohol.

CGW RATED

PROS

It's got the humor and gameplay expected from a *MONKEY ISLAND* game...

CONS

...but jeez, ease up on the self-referential humor, fiddle with the controls, and fire the monkey who designed Monkey Kombat.



THAT CLERK GETS AROUND The role-playing, jarring at times, is often on the mark. I swear that goofy clerk from the Simpsons is the clerk at this Starbucks here.



WALLA WALLA! The insult swordfighting classic is leered on its head by the presence of Australian slang.



I'M A-MAZED! Yes, this is a maze, but hey, you don't have to map it; it presents a world, yet cool segment about time travel.

yet-important clues, and the patience to start randomly combining inventory items. A few of the puzzles leap straight into the "what the hell were the designers smoking?" category, but most of them simply require you to get into that adventurer-gamer's mind-set of logical thinking and attention to detail. For example, to find a hidden stash of treasure, you'll need to act on an off-hand comment about Ozzie Mandrill's dislike of the way pirates smell. In yet another scavenger hunt, you need to remember a comment about drunken parrots. In contrast, there's a great revision of the oft-loathed maze, and most of the puzzles on Jambalaya manage to fire up your synapses without making you pull out tufts of your own hair.

Not only will you be flexing mental muscles, but you'll be poking the ol' funny bone also. Like most comedy acts, there are quite a few hits and misses when it comes to the jokes.

Yet when they hit, they hit hard. EMI wallows in sharp dialogue, pop-culture references, and plain ol' goofy, over-the-top shenanigans. Whether it's attending a Pirate Re-Education Class, or listening to the ravings of a surly figurehead, the game constantly reminds you that it's okay to laugh while you're gaming. Jokes even break the fourth wall (where the game directly addresses you, the gamer): A dart player in the Scumm Bar throws a dart at you and cracks your monitor, and at one point Guybrush cries in exasperation, "My life seems to be a series of random puzzles!" The script is filled with a good mix of meta-game and traditional humor.

Rant in E-Minor

Funny as it is, the humor has a serious problem: It's too self-referential. The game uses way too many cameos and tells too many jokes that only veterans will understand. Would anyone who didn't play the original SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND get Ota's bit about having a breath mint in a jail cell? Murray, who stole the show in the previous game, is reduced to a pointless and glorified cameo; after a funny conversation, he serves no purpose other than to just be there. If you're gonna bring back old friends, tie them into the game — as with Herman Toothrot and Meathook — rather than throw a few jokes in a vacuum and leave them be — like Cafe and Ota.

Also, the control scheme, expanded from GRIM FANDANGO, is very twiddy. It's improved with the use of textual cues, but it still has problems. You'd think there'd be no pael-hunting when you're using a mouseless interface, but now you have the problems of positioning —

of making sure Guybrush is in exactly the right spot to notice what he's supposed to notice. I missed inventory items in a few locations simply because Guybrush wasn't oriented the right way. He'd also sometimes randomly turn around and run in a direction different from where I'd intended. I expect wonky control problems with TOMBS RAIDER, not with MONKEY ISLAND.

Finally, there's the problem of Monkey Kombat. I see the interior: Make a new and interesting puzzle that will cause gamers to remember the game, while parodying MORTAL KOMBAT and other fighting games. But it ends up being a textbook example of "great idea, bad execution." Like insult swordfighting, it uses a scissors-paper-rock approach to victory. Too bad it also uses a nonsensical language and it's completely randomized. Rather than apply any sense of logic or neurotransmitting firepower, you are completely bound to the confines of rote memorization and trial and error.

It's an integral part of the game, yet it managed to foster a deep sense of apathy and boredom for me whenever I played it. Everyone who watched me engage in Monkey Kombat — adventure veteran and newbie — all commented on how this puzzle design completely broke the pace of the game. Sorry designers, this is a losing scar instead of a winning streak.



BUT ENOUGH ABOUT ME! Sometimes, the game shows its knowledge that A) it's a game, and B) it's part of a series of games.



HOLLYWOOD SPRINGER SKULL! When a game combines a character cameo, a joke about commercials, and a song from Jerry Springer, one of them is bound to make you laugh.

Too Much Monkey Business?

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND left me with mixed feelings. Aside from the Monkey Kombat, it's an extremely solid adventure game. It has good puzzles and funny writing. But many of its jokes will simply fly over the heads of newbies not wholly familiar with the series. Gamers who've been

with the series since the beginning will get a nagging feeling that something is missing, that it's not "up there" with games like the other MONKEY ISLANDS or GRIM FANDANGO. It's well done, but an imperfect MONKEY ISLAND game. Let's hope that the next game (as predicted by the ending and the characters) manages to end the series on a high note, rather than dive the name into mediocrity. Guybrush, and his legion of fans, deserve better. **CGW**



THE SAC DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW is a rare display of self-control, as *CGW* will refrain from the easy joke. Turn your head, cough, and make one up yourself.



Out of left field and onto your hard drive

Shiny's Crazy Diamond



If there's one thing better than a good game, it's a good game that's weird. And if there's one thing better than a good game that's weird, it's *SACRIFICE*. It's shot through with a vivid abandon that animates its artwork, gameplay, campaign structure, production design, sense of humor, even its manual. This is one of those instances of a developer capturing lightning in a bottle; it crackles and buzzes warmly with a rare magic.

SACRIFICE

reviewed by Tom Chick

On its most basic level, *SACRIFICE* is another real-time strategy (RTS)/action hybrid, a genre that goes back to Bullfrog's *MAGIC CARPET* and found its most advanced expression in Activision's *BATTLEZONE* titles. In *MAGIC CARPET*, you have fantasy dragons and fireballs. In *BATTLEZONE*, you have sci-fi tanks and robots. But *SACRIFICE* is too bizarre to sit comfortably in any established style. In *SACRIFICE*, you have goggled gnomes with flamethrowers, and prancing, grinning clowns with machine guns. You have slurping mutants who sound like the Elephant Man and putting insectoid cat crabs. You have squat droidy things with spinning blades on their heads. You have bug-eyed dwarves with huge, floppy dog ears. You have spiders with heads slung under their bellies, and bulls made of rock and dirt. You have bugs and pestilence and slime and oil. You have giant malicious

beastlike volcanoes, and spiraling sinkholes 100 yards across. And, yes, you have artillery that fires a giant cow. It is at once spectacular, beautiful, and really weird. I don't know how the developers at Shiny come up with this stuff. I'm not sure I want to know.

In keeping with its unique sensibilities, the gameplay is also distinct from other RTS/action hybrids. In *MAGIC CARPET*, you mainly cast spells. In *BATTLEZONE*, you mainly pour units around. In both games, you float about the world like an air hockey puck, with the vaguely disconnected sensation of wearing socks on linoleum. But your small wizard in *SACRIFICE* is both a spellcaster and a general, trotting slowly across hill and dale in these strange worlds, wrapped in their alien skies. He is both frail and powerful, capable of calling down apocalypses, but vulnerable to being knocked out of his own skin. *SACRIFICE* achieves a balance where other RTS/action hybrids have failed. Your creatures are an important part of the game, but you're neither relegated to the role of spectator (*BATTLEZONE*) or left to your own devices (*MAGIC CARPET*). Your creatures may be smart and determined, but it is your own magic hand that can tip the balance.

Soul Power

The resource model is an important part of the game's unique mechanics. Each game is a battle for the pool of souls on the map. You gather these souls — which are the limiting factor in the size of your army — and use them to summon creatures. If you win a battle and hold the field long enough, you can map up the souls from your vanquished enemy's dead beasts. These souls are your treasure and your firepower, but the mana you use for spells is an easily replenished fuel, like solar power. This encourages the frequent spellcasting that keeps you constantly engaged in the action.

Requirements: Pentium III 300, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, Direct 3D compatible video card

Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 3D Support, Direct 3D Multiplayer Support, LAN, Internet (2-4 players)

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Shiny Entertainment • **ESRB Rating:** Mature, min./red blood and violence.

CGW RATED

PROS

An exhilarating mélange of action, strategy, Sac Doctors, Mana Hoars, and Bovine Intervention.

CONS

Ten fingers may not be enough.



WHEN ENTS ATTACK

This is what happens if you taunt, tease, or poke an Ent. Try to avoid it.



HI-HO, HI-HO, IT'S OFF TO BURN
We go. Enemies with Banethorws wedding off to battle. This is just the tip of the weird-ent iceberg.



The pace of *SACRIFICE* sometimes outstrips its interface. Hotkeys go a long way toward making it all manageable, but the default setup seems to have been designed for one of the game's 13-fingered beasts. Rebinding the keys is oddly inflexible. You are allowed only one keyboard setup, although you may have multiple wizards with different spell books. Beware the dreaded F2 key – it will instantly quickload you out of any game without so much as an “Are you sure?” Some players might complain about how hard it can be to target small fast units, but this seems to be a part of the game balance. There's no dazing that *SACRIFICE* requires a quick eye and an even quicker wrist. Because there's no difficulty level, it will probably be overwhelming to some casual gamers. And I can't imagine anyone enjoying the game's final mission – which is one of those infernal back walls you'll spend three days pounding your head against.

There's a lot of strategy in the combats of creatures and spells, but it isn't easy to see under the pace of the action (the manual's breezy “figure it out yourself” approach doesn't help). At first glance, *SACRIFICE* just looks like weird things beating each other up. Don't be fooled – it's a game with legs. The longer you play, the more the game reveals and the more you learn. It's an entertaining learning curve. The single-player campaign follows bickering gods on a funky cool Olympus, all brought to life by impeccable voice work. As you choose sides in their arguments, you determine which missions you'll play and thus which spells and creatures you'll get. It's a do-it-yourself spell book, cobbled together in a cauldron of divine and petty spats.

As a multiplayer game, *SACRIFICE* is a fine first flurry of thrusts and counterthrusts, bluffs and bumps. As in most multiplayer games, new players won't have much fun being steamrolled by experienced players. But the gameplay – together with the variety of game types, spells, creatures, and maps – makes it a merry-splendored bag of surprises and choices. Kudos to Shiny for not requiring the CD in the drive and for providing a competent AI that uses all the spells and creatures. But respawns to them for not supporting direct TCP/IP connections over the Internet, when the servers are down, so is the game. *SACRIFICE* also needs some sort of post-game debriefing. As it is, you come out of an exhilarating battle eager to see scores or stats or even some sort of line graph, only to be dumped into the crowd in the multiplayer lobby. It leaves you with a hollow “is that all?” feeling, to come out of an extended rush with nothing to show for it. It's like abruptly flipping on the lights after an intense movie.

Altar-ed State

But it is exhilarating and it is intense. It is lovingly unconventional and singularly alive. *SACRIFICE* captures that intangible joy of gaming often missing from otherwise competent titles. There will be a great moment when you're crossing a step – leading a troop of flapping, crawling, loping, wheeling, hopping things – when, out of curiosity, you will open the camera around to see your wizard at the vanguard of his odd army. The shimmering weirdness of it all will strike you and you'll think, “This is what gaming is all about.” **CGW**

SOUL DESTROYER Convert an enemy's altar with a group of sacrifice doctors, and victory is yours.



THE GODS MUST BE ANGRY This tower of liquid magma is just one of a slew of incredible spell effects in the game.



Finally, a console port that won't make you hate console gamers even more

All of the Fun, None of the Broken Bones

High expectations are a game developer's double-edged sword.

On one hand, a healthy dose of them may lead to pre-conceived notions of a game's quality that can skew the experience toward the positive. On the other hand, unrealistically high expectations may lead to some major disappointments. Can you say DAIKATAN? Which leads us to TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2 for the PC. THPS2 is in a unique situation. While it is a sequel of a seriously great game, TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER, this is the game's first foray into the realm of the personal computer. On the computer, it is a different beast altogether.

THPS kicked ass on PlayStation and Nintendo 64, so we were admittedly a little giddy the first time we fired up THPS2 on a PC. The thing is, though, certain things that you'll let slide on a console system just don't cut it with PC gamers. First and foremost, there's

the game's clunky menu system. When compared with other console games, it's just fine. But next to many PC games—a good number of which boast extensive options and intuitive menu systems—navigating around THPS2's menu screens is

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

reviewed by William D'Neer

almost as grating as a seven-stair rail-grind to face plant. But hey, a game isn't defined by its menu system...is it?

Once you get in and set about the task of playing, things get much better. Players can select a skater from one of the 13 pros featured in the game, including Mr. Hawk himself, Kareem Campbell, or Steve Caballero. In career mode, you're given a ton of different goals to achieve per level, such as collecting items, performing specific tricks in specific places, scoring points by landing tricks, or even picking up cash. Achieving these goals translates into cash awards that are then compiled in your total winnings. Reaching certain cash amounts opens up new levels. Cash can also be spent on attribute points, tricks, and equipment. It's a good thing the game is fun as it will take you multiple tries to achieve all the goals.

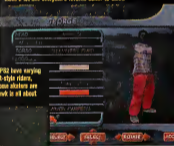
Since THPS2 is in many ways a part of the console game, the developers could spend a lot of time focusing on things other than gameplay, such as taking advantage of the game's platform, the PC. To that end, THPS2 supports some killer multiplayer options enabling you to whoop up on as many as seven of your buddies over a LAN in multiplayer modes like tag, a turn-based, judged skate competition; Graffiti; and H-O-R-S-E. There's also a park editor that's fun to fiddle around with.

Now here comes the part where our high

SLIDE SLIDE SLIPPITY SLIDE Sure, this front-side board slide looks cool, but in real life, the six-foot drop-off would lead to some serious pain.



FRANKENTHRASHER With Create a Skater, you can make a character who looks like anyone you want. "Create" here is from legward and looks a lot like everyone's favorite editor-in-chief.



AIR TONY Skaters in THPS2 have varying specialties. Some are street-style riders, others are game vert, and some skaters are balanced all-around. Mr. Hawk is all about vertical air.



expectations get in the way. Because PC gamers have had to wait so long to get a piece of the THPS action, it's safe to say that we wanted—no, expected—perfection. And perfect THPS2 is not. THPS2's graphics pale in comparison with other PC games. On a Pentium-III 450 with 128MB RAM and a GeForce2 GTS graphics card, visual glitches were aplenty. This is unacceptable but not unwarranted for console-PC ports. Sure, it looks way better than anything seen on an N64 or PSX 1, but who cares? The bar's been raised, and THPS2 doesn't quite make the height.

All the being said, I'm hard-pressed not to recommend THPS2. While visually it's far from perfect, the fact remains that the game is still as addictive as anything in a Hollywood medicine cabinet. So it all comes down to this: If you've ever fantasized about bringing home some X-Games gold, or if you've ever just wanted to say that you can pull off a 720 no-lie judo kick, you'll definitely have fun whiling away the hours on your virtual dock. Just be aware that while this game is fun as hell, it's far from perfect. **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

Pure addictive fun.

CONS

Graphically inferior to many other PC titles.

Requirements: Pentium III 330, 350MB hard. Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 400, 30 Support: 630

Multiplayer Support: 24 players over LAN

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Neversoft • C/D • www.activision.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; mild simulated violence and language.



The publication codes by the Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices developed by the Advertising Review Council of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

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):



Content may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older.



Content may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older.



Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.



Content may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older.



Content suitable only for adults.



Product is awaiting final rating.

CONTENT DESCRIPTORS (found on the back of the game box):

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

MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE

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

MILD REALISTIC VIOLENCE

Contains scenes depicting characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations in photographic detail.

COMIC MISCHIEF

Contains scenes depicting activities characterized as slapstick or gross vulgar humor.

ANIMATED VIOLENCE

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

REALISTIC VIOLENCE

Contains realistic or photographic-like depictions of aggressive conflict.

ANIMATED BLOOD AND GORE

Animated/pixelated or cartoon-like depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts.

REALISTIC BLOOD AND GORE

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

ANIMATED BLOOD

Animated/pixelated or cartoon-like depictions of blood.

REALISTIC BLOOD

Representations of blood in realistic or photographic-like detail.

SUGGESTIVE THEMES

Mild provocative references or materials.

MATURE SEXUAL THEMES

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

STRONG SEXUAL CONTEXT

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

Overall content of product contains data, facts, accurate information, reference materials or instructional text.

EDUCATION

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

SOME ADULT ASSISTANCE MAY BE NEEDED

Early Childhood Descriptor only.

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RATING BOARD

1-800-771-ESRB

www.esrb.org

Impressions Games squeezes the Mediterranean dry

Her-cu-les! Her-cu-les!

Darن't be fooled by the name of the game, the towering stud with a beard on the cover, or the dramatic opening cut-scene of famous mythical events. You will not be playing as a god in this game, nor will you be slaying seven-headed hydras, nor doing anything too exciting. You'll be an ancient urban planner. In a nutshell: If you loved CAESAR III, you'll probably like ZEUS; because if you've played CAESAR III, essentially you've played ZEUS. The latest in Impressions Games' City Building Series™ (PHARONAH, CLEOPATRA), ZEUS takes that well-tested game engine and completes the tour of the classical world by setting the game in ancient Greece. To say that ZEUS is just CAESAR III in the Hellenic world may sound like an easy dismissal, but it isn't too far from the truth. Of course, CAESAR III is a sold game, built upon a highly robust engine, so that's not necessarily a bad thing.

have'n't, but are interested in the genre, skip ZEUS and buy one of the SIMCITY games. Any of them would be better.

Ultimately ZEUS has a hard time finding its identity. The average gamers are going to be disappointed if they are expecting high jinks on Mt. Olympus, and the hardcore gamers are going to have a definite "been there, done that" taste in their mouths. I suppose that die-hard fans of Impressions' series will have to live it, but beyond jaded gaming journalists who got a copy for free, no one will consider the money well spent if it's spent on ZEUS. **CGW**

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

reviewed by Tom Price

The Gods Must Be Crazy

The packaging is going to fool more than one person into buying this game. The concept of playing as a Greek god

is intriguing, and there's a lot of action to be had in the mythical world, but the connection between those fantastical events and what happens in the game are tenuous at best. It's all about city building and managing the economics and daily administration of an advanced society, something that was pioneered by the SIMCITY series — the games that still do it best. The gods really only make cameo appearances in this game, either as rampaging invaders (as in SIMCITY's random disasters) or as protectors of your realm and resources — provided you build the requisite temples in their honor.

The game's designers do make an attempt to infuse plot and storyline into ZEUS, mainly by breaking the game up into adventures, which are then further subdivided into episodes. Each episode requires you to complete a series of objectives (leading a certain population mark, building a hero's hall, etc.) in order to move on. This seems like a good idea, but the more you play the game, the more it just seems like window dressing. And considering the mix of actual and mythical people and events that are jumbled together in the ZEUS world, it doesn't really give the gamer historical context. It's just as much (maybe even more) fun to play in the open, or "sandbox" mode. There, your city can evolve at your own pace.

BOWLINGER Building her-les dedicated to different deities will help you different bonuses, and will generate the increased masses of gold daily within the city limits. This temple to Artemis the Goddess protects us from wild animals, increases the food in my granaries, and puts two halves of Justice within my grasp.



LAND HO Frills had to be a premium in ZEUS. You can use it for food-producing farms, or other houses, or storeys, or livestock grazing — all of which you'll need for a healthy economy, as well as for unexpected brain demands from more powerful neighbors.



CGW RATED

PROS

Solid game engine.

CONS

A weak rebirth of a game that's been done before (and repeatedly).

Easy as Baklava

As said before, the CAESAR III-based game engine is a solid one to build upon, and ZEUS only makes it more accessible to the common gamer. To that end, the game is fairly successful. It's easy to jump right in and start building your towns. Help menus are generally informative, and the game is fairly intuitive. That is, if you've played this kind of game before. If you

Requirements: Pentium 586, 32MB RAM, 45MB free disk space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200 MHz MMX, 64MB free disk space.

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

Publisher: Sierra Studios • **Developer:** Impressions Games • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

GUNMAN CHRONICLES' reach exceeds its grasp

Shooting Blanks

Without the HALF-LIFE pedigree, probably no one would be paying much attention to GUNMAN CHRONICLES.

The game simply isn't able to rise above its humble origins as a total conversion mod developed by die-hard HALF-LIFE fans. Its true-believer enthusiasm lifts GUNMAN CHRONICLES above the truly mediocre, but that same blinkered game love is pulled down by too many "wouldn't it be cool if" gameplay elements, and an excess of many things the designers obviously (and rightfully) loved about HALF-LIFE.

GUNMAN CHRONICLES

reviewed by Robert Coffey

Lone Gunman Theory

The rollercoaster gameplay of GUNMAN casts you as The One Who Can Set Things Right in the face of

genetically engineered, killing-machine aliens. There's some plot about your treacherous former general and his role in the proliferation of these Xenomorphs, but once you're abandoned on a jungle planet early on, it's just you against the alien world. You'll battle these critters as well as robotic drones and turret gunners throughout the game. Overall, the monsters are a challenging, diverse, well-rendered lot, but your human adversaries are cartoonishly drawn and not too bright. Only the rocket-launching gunmen pose any real danger, solely because of their brutal weaponry.

Frankly, all the letdowns of the game to low the same pattern: long on ambition, short on execution. There's a ton of enemies, but they're not used inventively. There are four different worlds, but the first is a mandatory tutorial, the second is incredibly short, and the fourth takes place in the kind of generic underground facility you've

THE BOSS THAT TIME FORGOT One of GUNMAN's biggest fails is when this towering dinosaur attacks you. One of its biggest let-downs is that you never get to fight it.

shot up a thousand times before. Some weapons can over-heat, but this added management only dissuades you from using those guns.

Magic Bullet

GUNMAN's biggest fault lies in its weapon

systems. You can reset every weapon for various attacks. You can set the number of shells and the spray range for your shotgun, choose one of four settings for your default energy pistol, even customize the compounds splatted by your chemical gun. But this added layer of complexity is negated by an interface that is both cumbersome in single-player, fatal in multiplayer. Odds are, you'll find a couple of settings you like on one or two guns and just lean on those guns. It's the kind of feature that looks good on paper but not on your monitor.

GUNMAN makes heavy use of HALF-LIFE's scripting — too heavy. While it's fun to round a corner and see a scripted event, the idea loses its impact when you see something every time you round a corner. You can't take a step in GUNMAN without a ceiling or wall collapsing or a couple of monsters fighting among themselves. The game goes so overboard with the shaking camera near the end of the third world, you'll be fighting nausea for a good two hours. Sometimes, there can be too much of a good thing.

Or not enough. GUNMAN CHRONICLES has a tendency to tantalize you with something cool, then yank it away. You can operate a tank, but you're invulnerable while using it; it's basically just a tool for creating puzzles. You're mentored early by an enormous, beautifully detailed dinosaur, but you never get to fight it. In fact, you don't get to battle many of the presumptive bosses — one dies in a scripted cut-scene, and you don't even directly engage in the big end battle.

This isn't to say GUNMAN CHRONICLES is bad. I enjoyed it much more than the HALF-LIFE OPPOSING FORCE add-on, and it's easily twice as long. The action is pretty much non-stop and full of peril, level design is good, and the engine cinematics are outstanding. But without the HALF-LIFE connection, I suspect GUNMAN would be pushed off the radar by repeated playing of NO ONE LIVES FOREVER. **CGW**

DRONE GUNNER These mechanized enemies are so tough, you'll be too busy killing to stay alive to enjoy the dramatic level design.



Requirements: Pentium 233, 34MB RAM, 40MB hard drive space.

3D Support: Barell, Direct3D Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-32 players)

Recommended Requirements: Pentium 266, 64MB RAM, 30 MB hard drive

Publisher: Sierra Studios • Developer: Revell Software • \$49 • www.gunmanchronicles.com
ESRB Rating: MATURE: Selected Violence, Blood, and gore.

CGW RATED

PROS

Plays like a solid, action-packed mod.

CONS

Excessive use of scripted events; useless features.

Novalogic takes some flak with its third DELTA FORCE game

Ready, Aim, Shoot in Foot

Novalogic's tactical shooters have been playing catch-up with Red Storm's RAINBOW SIX series for a couple years now. While the first DELTA FORCE game showed promise, each successive release has squandered it to the point that with this third installment, DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR, we can now declare this dead horse officially beaten.

Even more than DELTA FORCE 1 or 2, LAND WARRIOR's wide-open gameplay focuses on simple shooter skills at the expense of strategy or tactics, with a repetitive single-player game. The 3D

Direct Action missions in Egypt, Japan, Lebanon, and Central and South America are divided into two formats: Quick Action and Campaign. You choose from one of five different charac-

ter types to play, each with its own special abilities: Sniper, Close-Quarters Battle, Demolitions, Grenadier, and Heavy Weapons. But it's irrelevant which you choose, since you'll be equally effective, regardless; the grenadier can handle the COB-focused first mission as well as any other. Why weren't these missions designed with the abilities in mind? Who cares if there are 27 real-world weapons if they're all most?

LAND WARRIOR's only real improvement is its graphics engine, and that's

not likely to blow anyone away. Gone are performance issues that marred DELTA FORCE 2. The new 3D engine capably blends voxels and polygons for sharper-looking space terrain and smoother, more detailed textures. Unfortunately, the look and feel of the engine is much less impressive than ROGUE SPEAR or SWAT 3, with environments that are lacking in terrain features like trees and bushes. If you're a sniper, forget about concealment in tall grass or rocky features - Novalogic dumped them as well, so taking that 800-meter shot without being seen is going to be difficult. Sporadic clipping problems from the previous two games remain.

LONGSHOT The good news: You can still sniper snipers from long distances. The bad news: Even the non-sniper characters can do it with no problems.

The interface has been streamlined and everything is accessible from a commander's screen where you can review waypoints, support elements, and teammates; conduct mission briefings; and/or change gear. Novalogic has also added realistic ballistic effects with bullet trajectory, tracers, penetration, and some cool night-vision optics. Also noteworthy is the ability to save your game in-mission - another nod to the game's shooter feel.

As in previous DELTA FORCE games, the AI is still badly wanting. Team member support is

UNBELIEVABLE A variety of ballistic and weapons effects add realism. Oh, gung problems and enemy AI that lets you easily kill bad guys with your little ruku II.



BROWN OUT This is what you get when you develop a new 3D engine, and there exists bloody, unrecognizable levels.



basically worthless - and enemy AI is even

worse. I cannot count how many times the enemy allowed me to approach as they watched my character close the distance, pull a knife to dispatch them, then die a horrible "surprise" death. For the most part, all 19 campaign missions, 10 quick missions, and single training mission can be played in one sitting. The enemy just begs to be killed. Where's the challenge in that?

If there's a redeeming feature, it's the multiplayer. Online game types on wide-open maps include Cooperative, Deathmatch, King of the Hill, Search and Destroy, Attack and Defend, Flagball, and team variants. Up to 50 players can compete on Novalogic's own NovaWorld 2 servers and a very neat ranking system separates novice and experienced players for balanced competition. Add Novalogic's own Voice-Over-Net system for voice communication during games, and you have a decent multiplayer package.

LAND WARRIOR is a slight improvement over its predecessors, but still falls short. Given the improved stability, new graphics engine, multiplayer features, and interface tweaks, it should have been better. Unless you've enjoyed DELTA FORCE on NovaWorld, avoid this game like the draft. **CGW**

DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR

reviewed by Raphael Liberators

CGW RATED

PROS

Improved graphics engine and multiplayer elements.

CONS

Repetitive single-player game.

Requirements: Pentium 4, 512M RAM. Recommended Requirements: Pentium 4 3.0G, 1GB RAM. Support: DirectX 9.

Multiplayer Support: LAN (subset via NovaWorld) (2-50 players)

Publisher: Novalogic • Developer: Novalogic • SFO • www.novalogic.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; selected blood and violence.

EA Sports gives its vaunted FIFA game a makeover

Can You Improve on Perfection?



Years ago, long before 3D acceleration, EA Sports' FIFA series managed to keep us glued to our four-button gamepads in spite of chunky, pixelated graphics and goalies with a penchant for letting shots from the midfield "slip by" them.

The games weren't pretty, and they were far from perfect. But we kept coming back.

We were at first inclined to think that soccer was the perfect sport to receive a digital makeover. But if that were the case, then any soccer game would've

been good, and we all know that wasn't the case. There's something else going on with EA Sports' FIFA series. Thank goodness that some-

thing hasn't faded in the glare of lock-ass 3D graphics and enhanced multiplayer network play.

Several years ago, it seemed publishers were dying to get in on FIFA's action. One even boasted that it didn't waste money on licenses when all gamers really wanted was gameplay. Yeah, right. Gamers want gameplay and licenses. And FIFA 2001 has both in spades. FIFA 2001 sports some 50 national teams and 17



GOOOOOOALLLLL! Who did it? That's Paul Spector's baby-daddy David Beckham about to get one for Manchester United.

different leagues including the English Premier League, the German Bundesliga, and America's very own not-so-vaunted MLS. These licenses give players of FIFA 2001 the feeling that they are involved in a real game of soccer. This illusion is made even more believable with dynamic commentary from the real world's John Motson and Mark Lawrenson.

Oh, That's an Excellent Challenge!

Graphically, FIFA 2001 has received an upgrade that we didn't believe was possible. With motion capture from the MLS' very own Eddie Pope and Zack Thornton, players move even more realistically and are noticeably larger on the screen. Players in FIFA 2001 sport individualistic attributes like dreadlocks, long hair, even bald spots. Maybe in FIFA 2002 we'll see a Rogaine ad on the pitch. One drawback with the game's beefed-up graphics is the lack of compatibility with laptops. Previously, the FIFA games were great for traveling, but now, attempting to play the game on a Pentium III Compaq Amada with an ATI Rage Mobility chipset yielded one frustration after another. Thank goodness for a desktop machine with nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS chipset.

Like its predecessors, FIFA 2001 boasts a plethora of play modes including friendly matches, full seasons, and cups. The friendly matches are where you can pit the MLS' DC United against the English Premier League's Manchester United—kind of like watching Jordan's Bulls take it to Lisa Leslie's Sparks. If these play modes aren't enough for you, FIFA 2001 also supports multiplayer play over the Internet, LAN, or multiple players on one computer.

Well Played!

Having perfected the soccer sim years ago, EA Sports is in the enviable position of being able to sit back and make a great game better. FIFA 2001 sports full-on environmental effects like a rotating sun, moving clouds, and changing weather conditions. If you're an old-school FIFA fan, you'll love the graphical makeover. And if you've never played a FIFA game and you love soccer, it's high time you found out what you've been missing. **ACT!**

FIFA 2001

Reviewed by William O'Malley

JUST THE GOALIE TO BEAT It seems like a longer creation; look-how-like this exactly mean one thing.



JUST LIKE I WROTE IT UP Things are going your way? Maybe it's time to check out your favorite.



CGW RATED

PROS

Enhanced graphics engine.

CONS

Has trouble running on a laptop.

Requirements: Pentium III, 32MB RAM, 16 GB-RAM, 60MB hard disk space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium III, 64MB RAM.

3D Support: GDI and Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** TCP/IP, IPX, modem-to-modem, 2-20 players.

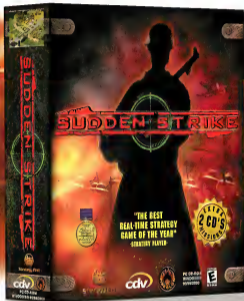
Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** EA Sports • \$40 • www.easports.com
ESL Rating: Everyone

SUDDEN STRIKE IS SET DURING WORLD WAR II AND OFFERS ELABORATE RUSSIAN, GERMAN, FRENCH, AMERICAN AND BRITISH MISSIONS.

CONQUER THE ENEMY'S POSITIONS, LAND YOUR TROOPS ON HIS SHORES, WITH THE CLEANUP OPERATIONS OR CALL IN PARATROOPERS AND FIGHTER BOMBERS FOR SUPPORT. WHATEVER YOU CAN THINK OF, YOU'LL FIND IN SUDDEN STRIKE!

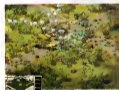
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- Bridges, houses, fortifications, trees and other objects are destructible
- Multiplayer mode with up to 12 player and 4 teams
- Realistic battle simulations and explosions
- More than 40 exciting missions
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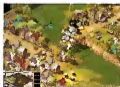
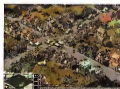
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SUDDEN STRIKE



D.W. Bradley's back-to-old-school RPG

Good, Bad, & Ugly

It's been eight years since D.W. Bradley, the creator of the **WIZARDS & WARRIORS** series, made a role-playing game. It shows: His **WIZARDS & WARRIORS** is a patchwork game, battered by a long and arduous development process under a variety of publishers and titles. The result is ugly and unwieldy. It looks old. It offers no immediate gratification. It is ill tempered and slow, like a cranky old dog. In fact, you'd never guess it's as good as it is — the path to appreciating **WIZARDS & WARRIORS** is long and fraught with obstacles.

The most immediate obstacle is that there aren't many games this side of 1990 that look like this. There isn't a single attractive element in the 3D engine, which instead offers busy and grainy textures, stiff and blocky character models, a chunky bit-map tacked on every horizon, generic spell effects, and half-hearted lighting. It looks absolutely wretched, particularly when it leaves its dungeons. The engine simply isn't up to the task of rendering outdoor environments, much less the sorts of events and settings Bradley imagined.

At one point, after you've slain a demon, an owl artifact is supposed to sprout tentacles and drag the demon down to hell. Before the demon's body simply vanishes like every other poly-

gonal corpse, you can almost hear the artists pause — considering whether to attempt to render this — and then say, "Aw, screw it, we'll just mention it in the narration." At another point, you're supposed to be standing between two raging waterfalls, but you'd never know it by the vaguely wavy blue patterns on the walls. Cue the narrator. The engine is a pageant of old, weak graphics that could not have been given a more appropriate name: Deep Six.

Ugly on the Outside...

Long after you've resigned yourself to staring at an ugly game, you'll still be wrestling with the almost exclusively mouse-driven interface. **WIZARDS & WARRIORS** is oblivious to the wonders of the hot-key, or even the practice of grouping often-used buttons next to each other. Editing the game requires seven clicks on different screens. You might as well just keep playing.

The combat system gives another example of an inter-

CAUTION: FLAMES HOT As a great overworld dragon burns the foliage.



Requirements: Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 1024KB free disk space. 3D Support: Direct3D Multiplayer Support: none

Publisher: AcFunline • Developer: Bluebird Park • \$20 • www.acfunline.com • ESRB Rating: Mature, advised for Males and violence.



DRESS BY VERSACE, MASK BY BEEZEBUB Another day, another wretched dress practice.



MY, WHAT BIG WINGS YOU HAVE Ever since X-Men and Farscape, the chicks on "It"

face in search of a clue. **WIZARDS & WARRIORS** plays in real time, whether you're looking at the marginally helpful map or assigning points when your characters level up. But when you get into combat, it shifts to turn-based gameplay in which everyone takes a turn attacking or casting a spell. The problem is that this turn-based gameplay exists only in a small bubble about five feet around your characters. Ranged combat is an utterly stupid blend of action and real-time interface juggling. The player can easily dodge spells and arrows, but other creatures never do this; the simple act of stepping to the left gives you a leg up over **WIZARDS & WARRIORS**'s most fearsome opponents. But the playing field is leveled when you consider that they don't have to page through the interface in real time to select spells.

The dialogue system is a constant annoyance: "Hell, traveler," says a smeared and blocky character model. Three-second mandatory pause. "I am Wormo, the wizard!" Three-second mandatory pause. "Here is a bit of information about me!" Three-second mandatory pause. "What can I do for you?" Now it's your turn to enter keywords to try to elicit a new reaction from Wormo. You ask him about the gypsies. "The gypsies are a band of acrobats that live by the lake who are led by Gypsena." Wormo explains before his

WIZARDS & WARRIORS

Reviewed by Tom Chick

CGW RATED

PROS

If you're in the game for the long haul, it pays off.

CONS

It's old, ugly, and inconvenient.

YOUR PARTY'S LARGE *Sailing takes you away to where you're going.*



mandatory three-second pause. This unlocks the keywords *nympfs*, *lake*, and *Gypsies*.

So you ask Wemo about *nympfs*. "The gypsies are a band of nympfs by the lake who are led by Gypsira," he says. Three-second mandatory pause. Ask Wemo about *lake*. "The lake is where the gypsies who are led by Gypsira live." Three-second mandatory pause. Ask Wemo about *Gypsira*. "Gypsira is the leader of the gypsies who live by the lake," he says. It's like talking to an *Athena's* parent without being able to interrupt. This is a real hoot when you come across someone with a lot of exposition, complete with a three-second mandatory pause between every line of dialogue.

...but a Real Beauty Within

Yet, something happens about five hours into *WIZARDS & WARRIORS*. You start to see how D.W. Bradley's almost 20 years of experience with RPGs has served him. The kernel of this game is a shrewd, meticulous, character-advancement system woven into the gameworld. You define your characters by the quests you finish, not by simple choices from a menu before the game even starts. From four basic classes and a few races, *WIZARDS & WARRIORS* blossoms as you play, sprouting new classes, new skills, and unique bits. You can become a vampire or a ninja or a poison resistant

dual-class spellcaster with the power to breathe flames. It's all about discovering the options to become new things.

Hidden under this ugly awkward mess is the sort of compelling old school role-playing system that made *NETHack* great: Your almost sole occupation is building up characters, and the rest of the game is just the framework — graphics and interface be damned. As your characters get more powerful and the variety of choices widens, *WIZARDS & WARRIORS* becomes an exponentially better game.

With a few exceptions, the pace is snappy and engaging. It's usually clear where to go next, although you'll occasionally overlook a lever on a dark wall or a chest at the back of a small room. The rather

ET BUTTERFLIES *Are not a killing jar in sight.*



THE TALKING TREE *The Espalitan Oak is a common form of fantasy flora.*



sleepy story is driven by a quest for a magic sword, which you find halfway through the game rather than immediately before the ending. Most of the dungeon locations have distinctive flavors that go a long way toward overcoming their graphics limitations. In an early prison level, for instance, there's an enjoyable variation on the hackneyed trick of making the game more difficult by taking all the player's weapons. Many puzzles have multiple solutions that encourage exploration or experimentation. Although the last act of the game plays like a romp in a small lake, by the time you get that far, you're willing to buy into the illusion of a high seas adventure. Unfortunately, the ultimate battle resorts to the underhanded trick of forcing you to fight according to new rules.

But by the time it's over, you'll be so invested you'll want to keep playing. "There's no more?" you'll ask. Three-second mandatory pause. There's no more, but it was fun while it lasted. Here's hoping D.W. Bradley's next game has a better engine and smoother development. Because in the boat and worst sense of the phrase, they just don't make them like this anymore. **CGW**

BURNING FOR YOU *You'd be sorry, too, if you were on fire.*



DON'T CALL ME SMAUG *No, it doesn't sound like Smaug.*



Terminal Reality lets you go off-roading in style

Off the Beaten Path

SUV lunacy is still sweeping across North America.

Exploding tires, instability, and inflated gas prices aside, people are still purchasing those outrageously priced vehicles that must give Ralph Nader heart palpitations every time he's on an interstate. Whether it's a Toyota Land Cruiser or a Ford Explorer, some wreath on the damn things can be found everywhere.

Now the phenomenon has been brought to your PC, courtesy of Terminal Reality's 4X4 EVOLUTION. The enjoyable arcade-oriented racer lets you get behind the wheel of those SUVs you loathe (or secretly love) and take it all away from highways and strip malls. It's an ode to off-roading that is nearly a complete success, thanks to a wealth

of options, a pile of vehicles, and enough modes of play to ensure a long lifespan on your hard drive. Best of all, Freestone tires are nowhere to be found.

4X4 EVOLUTION

Reviewed by Brett Todd

Say Goodbye to Ford Country

The licensing department at

Terminal Reality was certainly thorough when it lined up vehicles for inclusion in 4X4 EVO: a whopping 80 sport uses for your driving pleasure. Nearly every manufacturer, from prestigious international names like Lexus to homegrown blue collar standards like Chevy, is represented. You can navigate each ride through the featured 18 courses in four game modes. Quick Race is just as it sounds, while Time Attack lets you chase a ghost car representing benchmark times. Career play starts you off with a straight-off-the-line cheapie that you must drive through progressively difficult races for cash prizes. Do well, and you'll soon be trading up from Ford Country. Multiplayer modes are supported through Internet and LAN connections. As an added plus, Dreamcast and Mac owners can go head to head with the PC crowd online. The GameSpy Arcade program has been included, so you'll almost always be able to find an opponent.

As for how these options play out, fun dominates over physics. While the laws of gravity are still in effect, just about everything else has been tweaked. Thankfully, this doesn't mean that all the vehicles perform identically. On the contrary, there's a vast difference between, say, the handling of a Dodge Dakota and that of a Toyota 4Runner. A strategic approach has to be taken in each course, depending on your current ride. Setting plays a major role as well.

Snow must be respected or you'll soon find yourself sliding past checkpoints or off the edge of cliffs. There is also no damage model, so feel free to leap across chasms, rivers, and battlefields with no risk of injury to life or limb.

Fast and Loose

Playing as loose with the laws of physics leads to the occasional jarring moment. For example, it's odd that you can bounce off an opponent's fender with no ill effects, while running into a barrel can slow you to a crawl. I understand the design reasons behind imple-

BUMP AND GRIND Coop/ai drivers are both aggressive and caring. If they're not blatantly vanishing you out of the way, you can be sure that they're crashing by you in a heartbeat.



BARRRR! The driver's seat point of view leaves something to be desired, even with such great scenery outside the cab. I get dizzy just looking at the frozen wasteland of the arctic track.



menting collision detection like this, but that doesn't mean I accept it when it pops up on my monitor. I'm also not crazy about being able to rip right through any sort of terrain feature. "Fun comes first" philosophy be damned; you shouldn't be able to drive underwater.

The courses are as fully realized as anything ever seen in a driving game. Each one comes with complete environments that include birds taking off right in front of your windshield, planes and hang gliders roaring the nearby skies, and everything from common transports to sleek fighters jarring the pavement. They represent many different themes as well, including an arctic wasteland, a restricted or force-bee that bears a strong resemblance to Area 51, and a tropical paradise, among others. Audio lacks those immersive qualities. All the vehicles sound the same, and environmental sound effects are either non-existent or dialed so far down in the mix as to be inaudible.

4X4 EVO is a great choice, whether you'd like to be the guy driving that cherry red Lexus LX-470 blocking the lane in front of you, or if you'd like to blow him off the road with a rocket launcher. No matter what you think of SUVs in the real world, there's a lot of entertainment to be had with them in the virtual one. **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

Career mode and the impressive vehicle count provide outstanding longevity.

CONS

Arcade physics can be a turn-off.

Requirements: Windows 95/98/2000/NT 4.0, Pentium 200MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 30 accelerator video card with 4MB of texture RAM, 30MB hard drive space, sound card, DirectX 7.0b (included) **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 400MHz, 64MB RAM, 30 Support: DirectX, OpenGL, Sims Multiplayer Support: Internet (uses the GameSpy Arcade networking program), LAN

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

Fight WWII without hexes and supply lines

Less Is More

Once you realize that **SUDDEN STRIKE** is a real-time strategy (RTS) game and not really a wargame, you can sit back and enjoy it for what it is: a solid, 2D RTS. The craft of European developer Fireglow Software, **SUDDEN STRIKE** has been a major hit in Europe. Now, the U.S. version is set to invade our shores.

Other RTS games have tried to adopt a historical flavor; the AGE OF EMPIRES series comes to mind. But **SUDDEN STRIKE** is one of the most detailed depictions of a historical milieu not seen in a combat simulation. There are many units, all rendered in glorious detail. You've got everything from Panzer VTs (King Tigers), the venerable T-34, artillery pieces, and a large variety of aircraft.

The lush, 2D backdrops are painted in loving detail, with urban environments, farms, and forest and winter landscapes. You can

choose single missions or multiplayer, and one of three campaigns. The campaigns are set in different periods of the war: The Germans begin early in the war, with the invasion of France; the Russians have to fend off the German assault in 1941. The Allied campaign begins with D-Day in Normandy. Each campaign plays a little differently, partly because of the unit mix, but also because tactics and weaponry evolved as the war progressed.

SUDDEN STRIKE

Reviewed by Lloyd Case

choose single missions or multiplayer, and one of three campaigns.

Revisionist History

Fireglow has done such a wonderful job of depicting the World War II environment that I got jaded out of my immersion when I encountered game conventions that were more RTS-like than wargame-like. For example, in an early Allied mission, I captured three German armored cars and used them to mop up the rest of the Wehrmacht forces. So what, you might think—except that none of my men drove the armored cars. Nor did they fight back—they simply capitulated and went instant armored force!

Smart but Stupid

The AI is reasonably aggressive, and many of the set-piece encounters have overlapping fields of fire. You can't use standard RTS tactics to flood the enemy with forces. For one thing, you have a

fixed number of units, though you occasionally acquire reinforcements. Using smart, combined-arms tactics is a must. But pathfinding can be a problem at times. On more than one occasion, key units wandered away from the designated axis of advance and got massacred.

Some of the missions are gargantuan, leaving you to manually manage hundreds of units, yet the only tools you have are the standard "Ctrl-number" grouping. While the vehicle renderings are gorgeous, it's easy to lose track of the tiny human soldiers, especially in forested areas. Performance was occasionally a problem, even on an 866MHz Pentium III. There would be a visible "surging" of units,

BOMBS AWAY! Bombers can be devastating, but you frequently don't have enough of them. As was true in the real war, the Allies often have more airplanes than the Axis.



HOME WRECKERS Russian T-34s prowl through one of **SUDDEN STRIKE**'s typically well-rendered villages.



FIGHTING ON THE BEACH FRONT Allied units preparing to move off the beaches at Normandy on D-Day.



particularly fast-moving aircraft.

Still, **SUDDEN STRIKE** is undeniably fun. It's not really a wargame, but it does extend the RTS genre into an interesting new direction. It's definitely worth checking out if you're tired of the standard "harvest-build-rush" games. **CGW**

CGW RATED

PROS

Lots of beautifully rendered, smart units battling across lush landscape.

CONS

It's not even "wargaming lite"—more of a real-time strategy, with some performance issues.

Requirements: Pentium 233 32MB hard disk space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 6MB RAM 3D Support: No
Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-10 players)

Publisher: CDF Software • **Developer:** Fireglow Software • 04250 • www.suddenstrike.com • ESRB Rating: Pending

It's a big job, but somebody has to do it

King of the Universe

Fans of space empire-building games have long been searching for a successor to the **MASTER OF ORION** series. Microprose's classics are the standard by which subsequent space games have been measured, and most have fallen short. **SPACE EMPIRES IV** is the latest in what began as a series of shareware titles, and the current incarnation (available only through online ordering from boutique publisher Strategic Games) has matured to the point where forlorn gamers can stop carrying the torch for the old love. While not a clone of the **MASTER OF ORION** series, **SPACE EMPIRES IV** shares with it a depth and breadth that no other current space-empire game can match. The functional graphics and lack of special effects may turn off those looking for an impressive display, but serious strategy gamers will find virtually every wish fulfilled.

SPACE EMPIRES IV

Reviewed by Bruce Goryk

My Kingdom for a Meson Blaster!

SPACE EMPIRES IV has all the hallmarks of a game designed by someone who knows exactly what the hardcore audience wants. From the start, you're faced with a galaxy of options, tweaks, and choices. Almost everything about the setup is customizable, from the galactic layout to the characteristics of your race; when you take charge of your empire, you'll have to make decisions in dozens of research areas. Systems are connected to each other through a series of warp lines, so you don't need to constantly scan the galaxy for threats.

In **SPACE EMPIRES IV**, the immersion is in the details. The universe is divided into star systems, and each system has a variable number of planets—each with a different size, atmosphere, and resources. Minerals, food, and radioactive ore are the three resources that make **SPACE EMPIRES IV** tick; you need to balance production carefully over a wide range of planets in different systems at times. It's not tiresome because you are provided with so many choices at every step; the feeling of control is total. Not only is there a tactical space combat element, but there is a design component to vehicles for ground combat as well. Each planet can support a variety of different structures chosen by the player. While there are no individual tech trees for different races, the game has enough variety to make this seem important. Only the lack of comprehensive documentation (and a less-than-satisfactory HTML manual) mars this outstanding game.

Space Junk

With so much to manage, it's almost inevitable that the game becomes somewhat unwieldy at times, and there are indeed points at which **SPACE EMPIRES IV** threatens to swamp its interface. The need to close one



MY GOD, IT'S FULL OF ... STARS! Be prepared to explore a big universe.

window before opening another leads to a lot of extra clicking, but for the most part, Millador Motivations has stuck to the tried-and-true model present in games like the **MASTER OF ORION** series. Where **REACH FOR THE STARS** built a game around an interface design and discarded anything that would have bogged it down, **SPACE EMPIRES IV** cheerfully throws in everything but the kitchen sink and trusts that the committed player will manage. For the most part, the game gets it right.

SPACE EMPIRES IV has that uniquely satisfying feel that veteran gamers associate with the "good old days" of gaming. Never flashy but rarely clunky, **SPACE EMPIRES IV** captures the essence of what it must be like to rule a galactic empire with a mouse and keyboard. Micromanagement fans are in for a strongarm of mouse-clicks. Space strategy has never been so good. **CGW**

STAR FLEET BATTLES Battles too big to manage can be unraveled at the strategic level.



DECISIONS, DECISIONS Damage control is inspired by an auxiliary bridge. But what about the uranium gas? These are the decisions you're faced with every time you design a new ship.



CGW RATED

PROS

A space micro-management extravaganza with all the trimmings.

CONS

Not for the spreadsheet-challenged or manual-dependent.

Requirements: Pentium 32MB RAM 120MB hard drive space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200 for longer games, 3B Support: None

Multiplayer Support: Internet and PCMC (2-42 players) networked; simultaneous-move games available. No CD required in drive

Publisher: Strategic Games • **Developer:** Millador Motivations • \$46, plus shipping • www.strategicgames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Not rated

A course designer and some significant tweaks pump new life into LINKS 2001

Tee Time

What do you do when you own the PC golf franchise that has led the pack since the days when hard drives were smaller than today's game patches, but find that the competition's innovative new features have blown you away? If you're Microsoft, you release LINKS 2001, adding a few new features and a long-awaited course design tool, and declare it a revolutionary change in the series. Is it? The answer depends on what you value in a golf sim

Drive for Show...

This is still very much a LINKS golf sim in terms of gameplay. The main swing interface remains the venerable tri-click that was introduced back when the Commodore 64 was the hottest machine on the market. The Powerstroke mouse swing is also back, but while it allows some in-depth swing control, it is really too tough for most weekend duffers to master. Also, it



TIGER WHO? Singh: Garcia plays at an inhuman level in LINKS 2001.

LINKS 2001

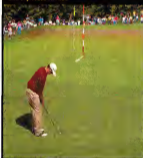
Reviewed by Jeff Labrecque

is still not synched in real time to the onscreen golfer. The tri-click and the Powerstroke are primarily about reflexes, while a real-time mouse swing (such as the Trueswing in PGA 2000) is about feel. It's literally different strokes for different folks: if you love one, it's tough to convert to the other.

Graphic improvements have made this the prettiest golf game on the market. Past versions were marred because the golfers looked "pasted" on to the course. That's been eliminated in this version: Now the entire course looks beautifully integrated. LINKS 2001 still lacks a "snap-to-tilt" view, in which the full screen switches to a view of the ball's landing area, substituting an inset picture which doesn't really capture the same feel. However, the insert view can be set to just about any location or angle your heart desires.

Sound quality is quite good in tournament mode, not so in non-tourney mode. There are no commentators in tourney mode – instead, you're in the swirl environment of an actual competitor. The crowd oohs and aahs and groans, cheers when, and cheers arise from

CHIPS AWAY! A new color-coded grid and a slope indicator on the aiming pole make raising greens easier than in previous versions.



nearby greens. Be forewarned that this is a tough crowd; they'll meet long approach shots landing close to the pin with stony silence. In non-tourney mode, you are cursed with playing partners who tend to repeat the same phrases over and over and over. Thankfully, you can turn their comments off.

Ball physics are always superior in a LINKS game, and they're only improved in LINKS 2001. Suffice it to say that the ball behaves precisely the way you would expect it to in real life.

Putt for Gough

You'll notice a few changes on the green. To start, a color-coded grid with different hues represents different elevations. Also, the aiming pole now projects a slope-indicating arrow. Putting feels a bit tougher – quick putts that would have

dropped last year now bounce out of the hole.

Last but perhaps most significant is the Arnold Palmer Course Designer. It's complex enough that the average gamer may have a tough time re-creating his or her local club course, but the top course designers on the Internet will love the power of this baby. Expect some awesome free courses to start flooding the Web. Finally, Augusta in LINKS 2001 graphic glory! Unfortunately, until Microsoft releases a promised course converter, your old courses will not run on LINKS 2001.

In summary, it's still LINKS, but with the course designer and graphic improvements, it truly is improved. And that means that this is indeed a very fine golf game. Is it the ultimate, be-all-end-all golf sim? Not yet – add a real-time mouse swing, some dynamic full-screen camera views, and a real career mode to LINKS 2001's superb physics, superior graphics, huge number of play modes, and outstanding online play. Then, there may be no need to look at any other PC golf game. **CGW**

PROS

The best graphics and ball physics in computer golf; the new Arnold Palmer Course Designer

CONS

Still no real-time golf swing or "snap-to-tilt" cam; problems with installation on Nvidia cards; courses from previous versions of LINKS will not run on LINKS 2001.

Requirements: Windows OS/95/98/ME, or 2000; Pentium 4 233 MHz, 4MB RAM (32MB for Windows 2000); 256MB hard drive space; support: 4MB video card, 4x CD-ROM

Recommended Requirements: 485 RAM, 5MB video card with hardware acceleration; 30 Support: 800 MultiPlayer Support; LAN modes in modern Internet

see MSN Gaming Zone or CDW (7-4 4944)

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Access • \$55 • www.microsoft.com/games/link2001 • ESRB Rating: Everyone

A horror game pioneer returns with more sinful entertainment.

The Devil Is in the Details

Combine the marketing philosophy of the guys who developed *Survivor* with the spooky mansion that served as the backdrop for every film that Vincent Price ever made, and you'll get **THE DEVIL INSIDE**. The latest effort from *ALONE IN THE DARK* creator Hubert Cherdel attempts to rework the trusty action/adventure horror formula into a TV-like experience that is equal parts hoot and horror. Interesting concept aside, the experience isn't very good.

This House Is Cursed to Hell

You take the role of Dave Cooper, an investigator for a cable TV show about the paranormal called, interestingly enough, "The Devil Inside." The reality-based program is inquiring about an executed serial killer called The Night

Howler who seems to have returned from beyond the grave. This baddie has locked himself up in a cursed mansion along with all manner of zombies, ghosts, and other horror genre staples that you must gun down on route to the final battle. Dave has access to

both high-powered weaponry and his very own devil inside, a curvy succubus named Deva. Find an activated pentacle and you can morph from one to the other, trading a shotgun for magic spells or vice versa. Every move that either character makes is captured by a trailing cameraman and is beamed back to a studio set hosted by a sissy game-show-host-type named Jack T. Ripper.

Gameplay is action-oriented, though combat is never all that terrific. Those adventure buffs who fear that their twitch skills won't be up to snuff shouldn't shy away. The pace is leisurely—even when you're facing off against bondage suit-wearing red devils toting machine guns. At the same time, however, the adventure angle is under-emphasized. You'll mostly be hunting down keys and other items necessary to open doors.

Presentation values are fairly high, though the proverbial boom mike shows up in a few places. Visuals are appropriately dark and gloomy, and the accompanying soundtrack is both eerie and energetic. At the same time, many of the rooms in the run-down

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! Journeying into the darkness of a haunted house (and its zoo) when a camera is always at your back and computer-generated "news" from *Weekend Update* clips in his two cuts, every time you creep around a corner.



mansion look the same, and the audio often comes through as lively and grating.

A Botched Experiment

That's about it for the positives. A number of major obstacles have been placed in the path of anyone who wants to enjoy **THE DEVIL INSIDE**. The clunky reality show theme is one of the most annoying contrivances I've experienced in a computer game. Constant interruptions from the nasal host and his bevy of limos break any tension that might be developing; it also seems that Gamesquad rounded up kids from the nearest mall to provide the voice acting. Yet even if the studio cutaways were performed adequately, it doesn't seem possible that the TV show idea could have been successful. *ALONE IN THE DARK* was a hit because it looked the lone protagonist in a haunted house. That atmosphere can't be re-created when a cameraman dogs you every step, and catcalls and cheers from a live studio audience punctuate each showdown with the undead.

Those who appreciate the setting have to deal with other flaws. Gamepad support isn't provided, and the mouse and keyboard control system isn't satisfactory. Swiveling to face enemies in combat is very tricky. My Windows volume setting nixed out every time I started the game, forcing me to drop back to the desktop to dial it down. Playing with the in-game sound options to fix this resulted in the program's refusal to initialize my sound driver. A reinstall was needed to get up and running again.

THE DEVIL INSIDE plays more like a botched experiment than a game. That wouldn't be so bad if the designers accomplished something meaningful in the midst of all the miscues, but this is a poorly thought-out gimmick that grows tedious after less than an hour. If there is a next time, Gamesquad should concentrate on the basics and leave the reality television to television. **CGW**

ONE FINE LOOKING LI! **DEVIL** finds the right balance in the minutes and Deva can release Deva. Her mastery of magic spells makes a nice counter to Deva's non-aid-god tactics. Plus, she's wearing a vinyl corset.



CGW RATED

PROS

Shadowy visuals lead an ominous air to the proceedings.

CONS

Irritating reality-TV theme kills that special alone-in-the-dark (pun intended) atmosphere.



Requirements: Pentium III 233, 32MB RAM, 128MB hard drive space. Recommended Requirements: Pentium III 400, 64MB RAM, 3D Support, DirectX Multiplayer Support: Yes

Publisher: Take Two Interactive/Talesoft • Developer: Gamesquad • \$10 • www.totrust.com
ESRB Rating: Mature: simulated blood, gore, and violence.

Fight the bad guys in the skies over California

I Left My Afterburner in San Francisco

A flight sim doesn't have to have a manual the size of the *Gutenberg Bible* to be a lot of fun. The JET FIGHTER series has historically been one of the better flight combat games for those more concerned with shooting lots of missiles than with figuring out how to set the STT mode in a complex radar system. Unfortunately, JET FIGHTER 4: FORTRESS AMERICA appears to take the franchise one step forward and two steps back.

This Land Is My Land...

Russia and China have joined forces and attacked the U.S. mainland. Your job is to drive the evil super-empire out of your homeland and restore Truth, Justice, and the American Way. Your role is that of a U.S. hot-dog pilot, qualified to fly the F-14 Tomcat, the F/A-18 Hornet, and the F-22 Raptor. Unfortunately, beyond the graphic representation of the planes, there's no discernable difference in flying any of the aircraft. One

LOOKING FOR ACTION
The F-22 Raptor is looking for the bad guys.



HE WHO LIVES TO HUN AWAY... Regularly this ejection seat comes with a life raft.

reason for this is that there's not even a hint of realism in the way the planes fly. The flight model is simple: The plane instantaneously goes wherever you push the stick. While it may seem unfair to attack a flu flight sim for poor flight physics, there should be at least some distinguishing characteristics of a flight model, if for no other reason than to warrant three different planes to choose from. In real life, the F-22's raison d'être is its stealth capability, yet here, it is no more sneaky than a lumbering F-14 Tomcat. The graphics are quite nice, although the optional high-resolution set requires an additional 1 gig plus of hard drive space. You get to fly and fight around such landmarks as the Golden Gate Bridge, the familiar settings add a nice touch of immersion. Even with the eye-candy, the game ran almost as smoothly on a Pentium-III 400 with a TNT2 video card as it did on a Pentium-III 833 with a Voodoo 5.

UH OH Drinking and carrier landings do not mix.



JETFIGHTER IV: FORTRESS AMERICA

reviewed by Jeff Labkey

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You Against the World

Since JET FIGHTER 4 makes no claim or effort to be a realistic simulation, it lives or dies by how good a game it is. It's not bad, but there are some significant deficiencies. Most glaring are options that have been left out of the game. Multiplayer is simply missing (the company has promised a patch to fix this). Want to use that fancy force-feedback joystick? While you can select it as an option, force-feedback has been left out of the game. In addition, both of the systems on which JET FIGHTER 4 was tested had some crashes.

But the more significant flaws are in the

CGW RATED

PROS

Good graphics; accessible; smooth frame-rates on average machines; random mission generator.

CONS

Multiplayer and force-feedback options don't work; "Cheat" keys are unnecessary; no practical differences in the three planes.

Requirements: Windows 95/98, ME, or 2000; Pentium-III 333 MHz; 32MB RAM; CD-ROM; last drive open; DirectX-compatible 3D accelerator with 4MB RAM; 4x CD-ROM
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-III 400 MHz; 32 accelerator with 16MB RAM; 64MB RAM; 3D Support: 320 Multiplayer Support: N/A as shipped

Publisher: InterSoft • Developer: Mission Studios • ©1999 • www.jetfighter.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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Personalized Technical Support Manual
Optimized & Configured for High-Performance
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Intel Cuts the Cord

NEW CORDLESS DEVICES NEED MORE TIME IN THE DESIGN STUDIO—AND A LOWER PRICE.

With all the debris of our modern lives cluttering our workspaces, not to mention candy wrappers, magazines, and the assorted detritus of a thousand gaming episodes, the prospect of cordless input devices is an attractive one. The less we have to untangle to get a joystick, mouse, or two gamepads going, the better. Logitech's cordless mouse and keyboard have grown so popular that Microsoft and Intel are struggling to catch up. Microsoft has dropped the price on its cordless mouse down to a little over \$30. Mighty Intel has responded by introducing three new wireless controllers that are expensive, obtrusive, and seemingly in need of further refinement.

Baseless Station

You would think that Intel would have studied the competition a little more closely. Logitech's base station is about the size of a Walkman, and is easy to hide. The Intel base station is huge by comparison, and looks like one of

the mutants from that old LucasArts game *DAY OF THE TENTACLE*. It's ludicrously shaped, isn't stackable, and has a huge footprint. Granted, it

supports up to eight cordless devices, but it's an eyesore. On top of that, Intel has the temerity to charge \$0 bucks for it.

The base station plugs into a free USB port. This means that the mouse and keyboard are both USB peripherals, which can make installing Windows or bringing up your BIOS setup screen a bit awkward—keep your old PS/2 keyboard around if you need to install anything. In fact, when you set up, you have to install the base station and its drivers before you install the other cordless gear—and you need to keep your PS/2 keyboard plugged in until the Intel keyboard is up and running.

The Keyboard

Of all the Intel cordless peripherals, the keyboard is by far the best.



KEYBOARD



by Loyd Case

BASE STATION

PROS

Cool, spread-spectrum wireless technology with a range of up to 10 feet.

CONS

Ludicrous shape and size; should be free with peripheral.

Cost: \$60



KEYBOARD

PROS

Good tactile feedback; good overall feel.

CONS

Can't be used for BIOS setup or installing the OS; non-ergonomic; a bit pricey.

Cost: \$80



MOUSE

PROS

It's cordless.

CONS

Slick surface makes it problematic for gaming; a little on the heavy side.

Cost: \$60



GAMEPAD

PROS

Cordless; mouse activation button; good feel.

CONS

An otherwise undistinguished gamepad; expensive.

Cost: \$65





GAMEPAD

The keys have excellent tactile feedback, and the keyboard feels solid and durable. The cursor keys are in a nifty rocker switch that's vaguely reminiscent of a gamepad's D-pad. There are four LEDs that show the status of Caps Lock and other functions, plus buttons that can be used for controlling the CD drive (when used as a music player). Four more buttons can be customized to launch whatever application you desire. The first time you press one of the buttons, a dialog box that lets you easily assign a function to the appropriate button opens up. There's also a large button that resembles a power switch, but all it does is launch the Intel wireless peripheral control panel.

This cordless keyboard has a better feel than Logitech's standard cordless keyboard, but Logitech's ergonomic wireless seems like a better design: I'm a heavy-duty typist, so your mileage may vary.

The Mouse

The mouse is symmetrical, so left-handers can use it easily. However, it's a little too smooth for my taste, and a bit awkward to pick up. It seems ill-suited for intense gaming, when a slippery mouse top can be a handicap.

The Intel wireless "mouse accessory" is otherwise a pretty ordinary three-button wheel mouse. Intel made a stab at being chic with its translucent blue base, but it's not quite transparent enough to be noticeable, and doesn't light up—so even that gesture falls flat.

The Gamepad

The Gamepad Accessory looks a bit like those airline pillows that fit around your neck. It works pretty well. However, since it's cordless, it practically cries out for motion-sensor capability, like the Microsoft Freestyle. But, alas, it's a pretty standard gamepad, once you get used to the odd

MOUSE

Product photos by Hayden Newell/IGN.COM

shape, it works as advertised. The buttons and D-pad have a firm feel, with good tactile feedback, and they don't require excessive pressure. One nifty feature is the mouse activation button. When you press it, the D-pad can move the mouse cursor—a handy touch to have as you lean back to play a game, only to discover you need to navigate menus with a mouse.

More Power, Scotty!

Did I mention batteries? Intel must own stock in the Energizer Bunny. The keyboard requires three AA batteries, and the gamepad and mouse each need three AAA batteries. If you have any type of cordless peripherals, I strongly recommend finding rechargeable NiMH batteries, which have no "memory" and last for thousands of recharges. **IGN**

Killer Rigs

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Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Case	Antec SR-393	\$215	230 watts, 8 bays, plenty of cooling
Motherboard	ASUS 47N	\$140	Has ATX-135, 80P 44, Solid state
CPU	AMD Athlon 1.2GHz	\$530	Not to the King, baby
Memory	2GBMS of PC133 SDRAM	\$200	Beauty has a quality of its own
Primary Graphics	NVIDIA GeForce FX Ultra 5600	\$240	Can see any opponent?
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2000 Ultra 160 SCSI	\$100	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
3.5" floppy drive	Teac	\$29	You still have to love 'em
Hard Drive	Quantum Fire 30k - 8.0 (Ultra SCSI)	\$499	Now at 20k!
Backup	Quantix DVD-RAM drive	\$270	\$2 size of backup
CD-R/W/DVD	Plextor 32C6 DVD-2045	\$40	New Plextor Six-Que DVD
Monitor	MSI 64-0911 21"	\$170	Screening tube, perfect for beautiful color
Primary Audio	Sony Stereo Line X-Game 5.1	\$69	For some weird 5.1, 3.1, 2.1, or 1.0-channels
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia V2-160	\$250	Lead, clean, woodsy, and clean!
Networking	3COM Ethernet TV100 PCI	\$49	Reach out and tag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS105	\$85	Multiplayer & DSL, modern support
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$59	Keyboard in, Mouseback out
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech MouseMan Explorer	\$29	It just feels better
USB Hub	Logitech WayMix 2-port USB Hub	\$70	Get them USB ports upstairs
Fight Joystick	Orb F16 CommandStick USB	\$65	Unbeatable throttle, it just feels right
Tracker Device	GI Pro Pen Drive	\$100	Needs perfect hat placement

Total \$5,710

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Case	Antec Streamline Case	\$100	In stock, at least!
Motherboard	ASUS 87N	\$140	Solid state, Socket-480 bios motherboard
CPU	Athlon 1.0GHz excelling fan	\$190	Superior Thunderbird
Memory	1GBMS PC133 SDRAM	\$100	1GBMS, unexcited in
Disk Controller	Realtek UDMA133	\$0	It's in there
Primary Graphics	Galileo Product II 3200S DDR	\$290	So-called GeForce 2 640 card
floppy drive	Ben	\$30	Soft globe love it
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6030 Plus 20 4GB	\$125	Fast and cheap
CD-R/W/DVD	Plextor DVD-4050	\$170	Out-drive DVD!
Monitor	Refugee 685	\$300	Sold '87 monitor at a budget price
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Nitro	\$45	BLP, Aurac!
Speakers	Boston Acoustics SA-325	\$60	Good highs for better guitar
Mouse	Acertech PCI Call-Writing Mouse	\$10	Solid performance, good price
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	\$20	Cheap, nice-align buttons
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse	\$25	Better than the "padding" mouse
Joystick	Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital	\$39	Very solid 3D joystick with USB

Total \$1,729

The Price Point: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines. Go to www.computerprocessor.com or www.pricegrabber.com. Last compiled by Dave Silver

Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR



Gaming in Dubly

New sound cards bring 5.1 to games. But do we need it?

When Britain's loudest rock band, Spinal Tap, recorded the now-legendary album *Smell the Glove* (released as the *Black Album*), they mixed it in "Dubly" (Dolby) to give it that unique sound. When we heard Dolby Stereo in *Star Wars* (1977), it forever changed how we experienced movies. And when Dolby Digital 5.1 invaded our homes, Ray Dolby et al again redefined the cinematic sensation. The ability not only to re-arrange an experience but to fundamentally change our conception of it is one of technology's greatest powers.

Bringing Dolby's sonic wizardry to gaming seems like a no-brainer. With a wealth of \$300 5.1 speakers, and 5.1-capable sound cards from Turtle Beach, Creative, and Philips, these companies are betting that 5.1 will be the next Big Thing. [A 5.1 speaker setup has a subwoofer and five satellite speakers: front-left, front-center, front-right, surround-left, surround-right.] If Dolby Digital can do for games what it's done for movies, it may be on to something. When you consider that all three of the new consoles (PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox) will have Dolby Digital capabilities too, suddenly this starts to get interesting. But there are several hurdles to clear.

First, there is the practical consideration of uniting the tribes. Most PCs don't live in the family room, where most 5.1 speaker rigs wind up, so let's approach this the other way. Put the 5.1 speakers where the PC is. This might seem the easier way to go, except that you've got to run wiring for the two rear-channel speakers, which—given the home office (read: converted broom closets) where most PCs live—may not be an easy task. Here's where it makes sense to fall into console gaming's slipstream.

Console Drafting

In bike racing, drafting is a technique in which you ride behind the leader of the pack, letting him or her bear the brunt of the oncoming wind while you pace and don't have to work as hard. It's this kind of arrangement that console games (the leader) will have with PC games (the drafters) with Dolby-enhanced audio. Several factors combine for console games to lead the way. For starters, the new consoles will be in gamers' living rooms where that 5.1 speaker army will be. So, given the presence of the needed run-time hardware (the console and 5.1 speaker set), console game developers can begin to seriously consider how their game audio could sing in 5.1 glory. Great. But what about us PC gamers, who

are feeling just a little neglected amidst the harangue of hype? Here's the silver lining: As console developers, many of whom also make PC titles, and PC game developers, venturing into console waters (Epic, Bungie, Molyneux, and so forth), get their collective brains around how to make game audio resonate in Dolby Digital, they can leverage that know-how into subsequent PC titles they create. This cross-platform pollination will most likely be strongest with Xbox games, given the platform's PC roots and that games written on it will use DirectX.

Sonic Parlor Tricks

I've been evangelizing about 3D positional audio here at CGW for several years, and I continue to believe in its power to make great games greater. Titles like *SYSTEM SHOCK 2* and *THIEF* serve as prime examples. But the problem with 3D positional audio in two channels is that listen-



I've been evangelizing about 3D positional audio here at CGW for several years, and I continue to believe in its power to make great games greater. Titles like *SYSTEM SHOCK 2* and *THIEF* serve as prime examples.



ers localize (determine the location/direction of a sound emitter) with varying ability, both in the real world and when parked in front of a pair of PC speakers. There's also the problem of "sweet-spotting," when you move your head out of a certain, fairly limited area, and the 3D imaging essentially falls apart. Despite some success stories, the truth is that a real speaker beats a phantom speaker any day of the week, and it looks like our sonic future has six channels in it. Although truly Dolby Digital-aware titles are a good way off, these new sound cards can take existing DirectSound game audio and output it in a Dolby-like 5.1 format, even though the game isn't Dolby-aware. This is a great step in the 5.1 direction and allows game developers to begin thinking in six channels instead of two. Although I'm not ready to clutter my broom closet/home office with a 5.1 speaker rig just yet, as soon as the first killer game ships that proves Dolby Digital's mottle for PC games, I'll figure out a way to stry those surround channels to transport me further into that game's world.

Will Dolby Digital advance the state of PC gaming audio, or is it just hype from Dolby and soundcard makers looking to sell their latest wares? Give me your take at cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com. **CGW**



Midland's \$4 \$200 speakers offer true Dolby Digital surround sound for about \$400, but you'll need a 5.1-capable sound card to fully experience them with your gears.

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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.

Cable Modem Users Are People Too...

I've received a ton of mail from readers whose DSL and cable modem connections are now going much faster after using our suggestions ("Under the Hood," December). Many readers got the 3X speedup I saw when I tweaked my ADSL connection, and while I'd like to bask in the glory on this one, the real props go to dsreports.com for being such a terrific resource. If you haven't tweaked your connection yet, try it out, and you'll likely be pleased with the results. There was one point of confusion, though, that this reader brought to light:

I just read in your December 2000 issue that there was a guide for tweaking DSL connections, but that site seems to talk mostly about DSL and not cable modems. It also doesn't seem to have any information for Windows ME users.

I should have mentioned that these TCP/IP stack tweaks apply to any broadband connection. The goal is to have your IP stack to run optionally with whatever pipe it's talking to. Cable modem users, as well as ISDN users, can benefit from these tweaks. As for Windows ME, despite the addition of several new wizards to help install things like home networking and ISDN, its networking guts are pretty much the same as Windows 98's, and as such, they're not particularly bright about auto-configuring for whatever connection you're using. I'll suggest trying to tweak your connection using dsreports.com's [DockerTCP](#) utility, and if it doesn't yield you any speed gain, you can either revert back to your previous

settings (note them before you begin tweaking), or leave the now settings.

A Momentous Decision

I have a Diamond MX300 sound card in my machine right now. It's based on the (now defunct) Aureal Vortex 2 chipset. It was designed specifically for A3D. On your Power Rig profile, you chose Creative Lab's "Sound Blaster Live Platinum" sound card. Under "The Sidnyy" it says, "For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX." Is it, indeed, compatible with the A3D 2.0 format? Not to pressure you, but your answer will determine whether or not Creative Labs sells another Sound Blaster Live Platinum card. This sale could make

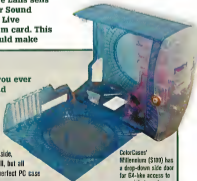
or break Creative Labs. Their fate is in your hands.

I'm sure the guys at Creative are trembling as they read this. Hey, a guy can dream, can't he? Anyway, I'm pretty sure that the Sound Blaster Live cards do not support A3D 2.0, though the latest version of EAX supports many of the same features (occlusion and "wave tracing" in particular). Not many games actually implement A3D 2.0 features, but if they're doing 3D audio via DirectSound3D, the Sound Blaster Live family are certainly up to the task. What will be interesting is this: Creative bought out the A3D intellectual property portfolio at Aureal's fire sale, and it remains to be seen how those technologies (A3D 2.0 among them) will re-emerge, if at all, or whether Creative will just bury them somewhere. More to come on that one.

Case Quest Continues

I was reading about the ColorCases' Millennium case. Did you ever get one? If so, how was it? Is it the answer to your long-held dream of a G4 case for the PC?

Yes, I did get ColorCases' Millennium case, and as billed, it does indeed have a side-panel that opens like an oven door, bringing the motherboard out where it can easily be worked on. What it doesn't have is any shielding whatsoever. In other words, it's just plastic, with no metal liner to keep the electronic "noise" that a PC generates isolated. The debate continues as to the dangers of EMI (electromagnetic interference) to human health; that issue aside, the workmanship on the case was good, but not great. The side cover-door panel fit pretty well, but all of its fittings are plastic so it doesn't feel as solid as you might expect. The search for the perfect PC case presses on. If you find that dream case, let me know.



ColorCases' Millennium (\$100) has a drop-down side door for G4-like access to your rig's innards.

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INSIDE GAMING

INSIDE TACTICAL SIMS

BY RAPHAEL "SF COMMANDO" LIBERATORE rlc000@inf.com

Reinforcements Arrive

THE TACTICAL SHOOTER GENRE IS THE REAL DEAL

Who would ever have thought that games dedicated to realistic military combat models would have this much appeal? Although I'm a big fan of tactical sims, I didn't think the genre would last much beyond TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX, and neither did the tank-nuker nucleus at CGW HQ. Thankfully, after demonstrating hand-to-hand combat, room-clearing, survival, pyrotechnics, and interrogation techniques on the editors, they suddenly found the wisdom to grant me an Inside Tactical Simulations column. As some of us already know, the tactical sim genre truly began less than three years ago with the release of SPEC OPS: RANGERS LEAD THE WAY, the first realistic combat shooter since NAVY SEALS. But most folks didn't join the fray until RAINBOW SIX made its mark, after entrenching tactical sims in the hearts and minds of gamers worldwide. The time for this genre couldn't be better—operational tempo is in full swing. Here's a SOTREP of what to expect.

Current Deployments

SWAT 3 Close Quarters Battle Elite Edition Developer: TakeDown Studios • Publisher: Sierra Studios • Deployed

■ SWAT 3 ELITE EDITION is both a free download for former SWAT 3 owners, and a stand-alone product. S3EE offers plenty of enhancements to an already realistic 3D game about police counter-terrorist/hostage-rescue missions. Not only does S3EE provide five new maps, 150 characters, improved AI, and in-game tweaks, but TakeDown Studios has included one of the best map, mod, and scenario-editing tools around to keep the SWAT community churning out add-ons. Most heralded is S3EE's multiplayer component, containing co-op and deathmatch games.



Rogue Spear: Urban Operations Developer/Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • Deployed

■ URBAN OPERATIONS is the ROGUE SPEAR mission pack where players send an elite team of international counter-terrorists on five new missions. UO also includes the entire collection of original ROGUE SPEAR missions, as well as additional weapons, interface tweaks, mods, and new multiplayer game types. RS/UO is the benchmark tactical simulation.

Rainbow Six: Covert Operations Essentials Developer: Majic Letters/Zombie Studios/Red Storm

Entertainment • Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • Deployed

■ COVERT OPERATIONS ESSENTIALS is a ROGUE SPEAR stand-alone product. COE comes with three new missions, including an almost realistic Bolivian jungle operation, as well as seven challenging training missions. But the meat of CO is loaded onto the 2nd CD, and contains all of the counter-terrorism information you'll ever want to know.



Delta Force 3: Land Warrior Developer/Publisher: NovaLogic • Deployed

■ DELTA FORCE 3: LAND WARRIOR is the most recent installment of the DELTA FORCE series, and offers a more robust 3D engine in both polygons (for more complex indoor environments) and voxels (for larger outdoor environments). LW also adds five new characters, 30 single-player missions, an in-game save feature, and additional weapons and equipment including the U.S. military's Land Warrior modular, integrated weapons system. However, LW's main appeal is multiplayer, where up to 50 players can shoot it out in a variety of games, and earn rank on NovaLogic's own Noxaworld 2 servers.



Half-Life: Counter-Strike Developer: Valve Software • Publisher: Sierra Studios • Installed

■ HALF-LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE contains a number of online favorites: COUNTER-STRIKE, OPPOSING FORCE, and TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC. COUNTER-STRIKE is arguably the most popular shooter mod roaming the net. CS is high on team-based gameplay where players assume roles of terrorists or counter-terrorists. Depending on which side they play, gamers have access to different weapons and equipment as well as to unique attributes and gear upgrades. A number of missions include rescuing a hostage or eliminating key enemy structures. If there's a benchmark game for realism vs. gameplay, then CS is it.



INSIDE TACTICAL SIMS

Awaiting Deployment

Project IGI Developer: Ion Storm • Publisher: Eidos • Q1 2001

■ I'M GOING IN is a 3D action/tactical shooter stressing cunning and covertness over firepower. Players take on the role of Agent Jones dispatched to stop a rogue Russian colonel from taking all of Europe. Equip Jones with the latest spy gadgetry and spec ops weapons while utilizing skills in thievery, computer hacking, sabotage, and reconnaissance. Players may interact with military vehicles and aircraft across extensive environments.



Hidden & Dangerous 2 Developer: Russian Software • Publisher: Telesoft • Q1 2001

■ HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 follows its predecessor as a tactical simulation based on the exploits of WWII British SAS commandos. As expected, H&D2 will bring several improvements to the original, like a tactical map enabling players to advance soldiers using the same 3D mode commands. Add simultaneous camera views from all commandos, improved AI, multiplayer games beyond co-op play, and the all-new INSANITY 2 engine sporting real-time shadows, real-body physics, and object morphing; plus, players will now be able to shoot through objects and destroy the environments around them.

Team Factor Developer: 7IX • Publisher: To be determined • Q3 2001

■ TEAM FACTOR is another modern-day tactical shooter containing 16 missions, thematically bunched into four campaigns. TEAM FACTOR is unique because each mission goal is divided into three teams, each possessing their own specialties: There's Blue NATO, Red Spetznatz, and Black World – formed from various nations and unique objectives. Teams can raid or recon an area, capture an individual, or secure information online.



Operation Flashpoint Developer: Bohemia Interactive • Publisher: Codemasters • Q1 2001

■ OPERATION FLASHPOINT takes place in the alternate history of Cold War 1985. Command a large squad of up to 12 soldiers or use any of the available military vehicles or aircraft, including parachute insertions from Hinds and Blackhawk helicopters. The developer is also including a full featured mission editor and multiplayer combat.



Battlefield 1942 Developer: Digital Vision CE (formerly Reflexion Games) • Publisher: Pan Interactive • Q3 2001

■ From the makers of CODENAME EAGLE comes BATTLEFIELD 1942, a highly realistic 3D tactical simulation reconstructing the great battlefields of WWII – such as D-Day, El Alamein, Stalingrad, and two Iwo – in 16 scenarios. Players may feel as if they're playing a role in Saving Private Ryan. Chose a side for your POV character: Allied Forces or the Axis Forces of Germany or Japan. BF will have many of the same large maps and the interaction with objects that CE did, such as driving armored vehicles, tanks, and aircraft, or directing an artillery strike and watching the shells hit their targets. Look for a full-featured multiplayer component as well.



Rogue Spear 2

■ There's rumors circulating around the Net about Red Storm developing another sequel to its highly regarded RAINBOW SIX line. I'll let you know all about it as soon I gather more intel from Red Storm.

■ Though currently retired from the U.S. Army Special Forces, Raphael Liberatore remains active in the Special Forces community, including his local chapter of the SF Association. When not writing reviews for CGW, serving as a technical advisor for military contractors, or playing "Mr. Mom" to his two kids, Raphael can be found running his Mac gaming website at www.clanmacgaming.com.

What's going on?

... with PRIVATE WARS? TS Group Entertainment had been developing this game well before SPEC OPS. RANGERS LEAD THE WAY and RAINBOW SIX hit the shelves many moons ago. Last I checked, TS Group divided PRIVATE WARS into two games: PRIVATE WARS for tactical shooter fans, and PRIVATE WARS COMPONENT. Stay tuned. **CGW**

BY TOM PRICE tom_price@effnet.com

FOR MANY SPORTS FANS, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STATS, BABY

Graphics Shmaphics

Use, the reflection of the Trans World Dome's stadium lights off of Marshall Faulk's helmet in *MADDEN 2001* may dazzle us into dementia, but hardcore sports games don't care none for no purty graphics. Text-based sports games are still where it's at for many who prefer an exact statistical recreation of a sporting event. Unfortunately, they don't get the kind of marketing push that the *MADDENS* and *HIGH HEATS* enjoy, but based on the number of emails and calls about them that we get here in the CGW offices, text-based sports sims still have a significant audience. Here's a look at the latest happenings with your favorite text-based sports games.

Front Office Football

Fans of the *FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL* franchise are no strangers to frustration. When Socratic founder and chief programmer Jim Gindin signed a contract to do the sequel to the highly successful original *FOF* (a *CGW* Editor's Choice Award winner) for publishing powerhouse EA Sports, many gamers were thrilled to see a text-based sports game get the kind of mainstream acknowledgement (as well as the support of a major publisher's marketing and PR machines) that other action-oriented sports games receive. *FOF 2* sold well through EA's website, generating a lot of anticipation for the third installment, *FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2001*. So where is it?

Well, it is complete. After considerable wranglings over the official NFL license, the game was made available for download from EA Sports' website on November 1st. But a few days later, the NFL and AOL asked EA to take it down. Due to a licensing and distribution dispute involving rights to all officially licensed NFL products. As of press time, the game is still in limbo, but Gindin is hoping for a quick resolution. Hopefully, the game will be available by the time you read this—regardless, you can count on a review in next month's *CGW*.

Probably more exciting to football fans may be Gindin's new title, *THE COLLEGE YEARS* (working title). More than just *FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL* with college rosters, *THE COLLEGE YEARS* allows you to create football dynasties, from the recruitment of blue chip high school players to the hiring of crack assistants to the winning of national bowl games. Plus, you'll be able to export your graduating players into a draft file that can be used in *FOF 2001* (or any other *FOF* title). With the dearth of college sports titles for the PC, this one has us waiting on pins and needles for its 2001 release.

iMonkey's Mogul Series

Infinite Monkey was another text-based sports game success story. Their *BASEBALL MOGUL* software—which allows gamers to control every aspect of owning a major league baseball franchise,

from salary negotiations to setting the price of hot dogs—was licensed by Microsoft for their *BASEBALL 2000* title. The inclusion of the *MOGUL* code was one of the higher points of that very flawed title. So when Microsoft announced the discontinuation of their burgeoning PC sports line this year, it left some people wondering what would happen to iMonkey. Fear not, because iMonkey president

Clay Dreslough assures us that they retained the rights to the *MOGUL* name and software, and will be releasing a new *BASEBALL MOGUL* game in time for next year's season.

No exact word on the status of *FOOTBALL MOGUL*, but Dreslough confirms that there are several *MOGUL* titles currently in development, with no publishers attached as of yet.

The Future and the Past Meet Head On

The next natural evolution for text-based sports sims would seem to be online, or so think the people behind www.SportsatHome.com, the latest Web venture to attempt to be the all-end-all PC sports gaming site on the Web. And based on the model they have in development, they could very well do that.

What SportsatHome.com wants to do is to let gamers play text-based sports sims (or "strategic coaching sims," as they're calling them) in "virtual stadiums" on their site, against other human gamers or the computer. By logging on, you'll be able to play Major League Baseball, NFL, NCAA, World League, and USFL Football; and NBA and ABA Basketball—among others—with fully accurate historical teams. There will be leagues, full seasons, tournaments, or just one-on-one matchups. The system is even "appliance agnostic," meaning that the site is being configured so that people can play not just over computer, but with PDAs and cell phones—in essence, anything that can connect to the Web.

So now you're asking, what about the games themselves? How do we know they'll be any good? Well, you can take this little fact as an indicator: SportsatHome.com has bought the rights to the entire catalog of Lance Haffner's games. That's right—the Sid Meier of text-based sports sims has partnered with SportsatHome.com (as have other developers like *Time Travel Games*) to embed his game engines into their site.

So not only are you getting a potent matching and player-ranking system, you're also playing games developed by the best and brightest sports sim developers out there. This is not only big news for fans of text-based games, but for PC sports fans in general. And lord knows we could use some good news. **CGW**



2001 Season, Week 17

Conference	Game	TV
AFC	Atlanta (14-12) @ New York (11-17)	TV 1
AFC	Washington (10-11) @ San Francisco (10-10)	TV 2
AFC	Minnesota (12-5) @ Denver (14-10)	TV 3
AFC	Arizona (10-7) @ Pittsburgh (10-11)	TV 4
AFC	Louisiana State (17-2) @ Mississippi State (10-14)	TV 5
AFC	San Diego (14-10) @ Oakland (11-12)	TV 6
AFC	Indianapolis (14-11) @ Houston (11-10)	TV 7
AFC	San Francisco (10-11) @ Tennessee (11-10)	TV 8
AFC	Duke (11-11) @ North Carolina (10-11)	TV 9
AFC	Navy (14-12) @ Georgia Tech (14-11)	TV 10
AFC	Florida (14-12) @ Michigan State (14-10)	TV 11
AFC	West Virginia (14-12) @ Wake Forest (14-11)	TV 12
AFC	Missouri (14-12) @ Oklahoma (14-11)	TV 13
AFC	California (14-12) @ Oregon (14-11)	TV 14
AFC	North Carolina (14-11) @ Texas Christian (14-11)	TV 15

THE COLLEGE YEARS

BY THIERRY NGUYEN thierry.nguyen@timeinc.com

WISHING FOR AI THAT'S MORE LIKE 2001'S HAL AND LESS LIKE BUCK ROGER'S TWINKI

Halfwits With Guns

The action staple of the meconic terrorist/hellspawn is fading away. With modern gaming machines capable of performing a bajillion calculations per second, we're no longer satisfied with the ubiquitous goon that shambles forth into your gun barrel. We want enemies that flank us, enemies that use cover, enemies that follow the same rules and conventions that we do—rather than have their own unique rule set that is akin to cheating (godlike aim being a common one). With shooter AI being pushed further and further, where do we go next? What should be the next step in AI evolution? Well, since the last thing I "programmed" was an insane text-game for my TI-82 calculator, I decided to ask the people who are actually paid to create good computer brains for shooters. I asked these guys what they're looking for in the future, and two topics came up: better teamwork and environmental awareness/interaction.

Go Team Go!

Teamwork is becoming a bigger part of shooter AI, and while there has been progress, there's still room for improvement. John Anderson, the AI Lead for SWAT 3 and 4, remembers focusing on team AI because "if a bad guy does something dumb, you shoot him and then go on to the next one. If a teammate does something dumb, it breaks the immersion and makes you want to restart the mission." He thinks that the next step calls for "an AI-controlled enemy team that actually works as a team. Or having your team managed by an AI, for [gamers] who would rather follow orders."

Steve Polge, AI Guru for UNREAL TOURNAMENT, also wants smarter buddies for the player. He wants teammates who "behave realistically, are not annoying, take orders, and react intelligently to unfolding situations." Interestingly, he cites the use of graphics to enhance AI, saying, "skeletal animation will also really help, because it'll allow a much greater number of animations, and animation is one of the best ways for a creature to convey intention. [It will] make it clear to a player what it is doing and why."

Simple Wants, Simple Needs

Brian Long, AI Programmer for NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, went for a bigger vision when it came to answering this question. While there will still be some "AI fundamentals that all these games will share—systems for pathfinding, animation, motivation, senses, etc.," the diversification of the game will call for specific, focused AI goals. For the traditional, story-driven action-shooter, he sees the

industry "aiming to create a much more vibrant world around the player, that is in motion even when there is no action happening."

Echoing many of the sentiments from DEUS EX, he asks for a game where "the player feels like they are the hero in a real world, not just a virtual shooting gallery. I also would like to see a lot more interaction between AI and their environment. I want an object-rich environment for both bad guys and bystanders. I want to see an AI buy a newspaper, read it, and throw it into the trashcan. Little touches like these that make the world feel more real. I want to be in a shootout with some henchmen in a kitchen, have one of them run out of ammo, grab a large metal tray, and use it in a vain attempt to deflect my bullets."

Long mentions a surprising influence in relation to where he thinks game AI should be headed: "In all honesty, one of the most unique gaming experiences I had last year was with THE SIMS, and I think there is a lot the shooter world can learn with regards to the motivational and environmental interaction components of their AI, as odd as that may sound." Looks like Will Wright was onto something when he crafted his people simulator.

This is just a little bit of what some of the top minds behind shooter AI are looking forward to. Teammates who can clearly illustrate what the heck they're thinking, and do a competent job of it; enemies that really take advantage of the world around them. We'll be starting a new year by the time you read this, so hopefully we'll be on our way to having shooters with brainiacs instead of bumpkins. **CGW**



BY BRUCE GERYK gerway@er16.com

LEARNING A LESSON FROM SQUAD LEADER

Squad's Labors Lost

What a wasted opportunity. What a shame.

No one expected Microprose's SQUAD LEADER to be a carbon copy of Avalon Hill's uber-complex boardgame. But we did hope that it would be a fun, engaging tactical wargame that would bring all the excitement of JAGGED ALLIANCE or X-COM to the Western Front. Sadly, all we got was a refash of an old, broken game.

Derailed in the Roundhouse

The reason this bothers me so much is that watching the development of SQUAD LEADER was like watching a train wreck that you know is going to happen long before impact, but which you are completely powerless to prevent. I got to see the game twice during development—first at E3 2000 in May, and then at GenCon in August—and it was apparent at first glance that the game had problems. I played it at GenCon for a good thirty minutes (which is a long time at a convention) and came away convinced that the game was doomed. Two months later, that prediction came true.

What strikes me about the situation is that so many problems with the game appeared to be built into the design from the beginning. The decision to use the SOLDIERS AT WAR engine left the game vulnerable to all the flaws that made SAW a problematic game, and additions like the "letters from home" feature showed that the designers had the right idea in wanting to emphasize the soldiers' personalities—but had no clue as to how to go about it. Problems like the lack of multiplayer or a mission editor can be chalked up to missing a production deadline, but the key decisions that shaped how the game would develop were made long before the game was shown to the public. How could these errors have been avoided? Easy. Microprose should have asked gamers for input from the very beginning.

This may sound silly or unworkable, but it isn't. After all, biotechnology firms contract with academic professionals to evaluate their project proposals all the time. Why not have experienced gamers offer their opinions on what they'd like to see, and take that into account while setting the game's parameters?

Who would these gamers be? The press would be a good place to start. Most writers who cover games are just gamers with a lot of accumulated experience; they could provide perspective on how a proposed game would fit into current offerings, and what it might need to capture the imaginations of fellow gamers.



No baby soldier, no little children screen here.



These soldiers are too homogeneous, and the animations are downright awful.

Bitzkrieg Instead of Maginot

So, what would I have told Microprose?

(1) Concentrate on building a hex-based (rather than square grid) game engine that focuses on the soldiers. Make the figures and animations attractive and believable. When units look silly, you destroy any sense of immersion. It doesn't have to be chop-dead gorgeous, just stylish.

(2) Make sure the engine doesn't have obvious flaws, like vehicles only moving orthogonally or line-of-sight rules seeming out of whack. A soldier shouldn't be able to see and fire at a soldier moving in the trees all the way across the map, even if his theoretical line-of-sight isn't blocked. Tanks shouldn't move like rooks; they should move like tanks.

(3) Make your characters memorable. Three hundred soldiers are going to blend together, especially if you just write some basic biographies and don't flesh them out. Cut the number of soldiers down to sixty and concentrate on making each of those sixty soldiers individual personalities. Spend some time on voice-acting and make the player identify with each one. Give them widely vary-

ing strengths and weaknesses, and allow players to create their own unique teams. The characters in SQUAD LEADER are too vanilla to make me notice them.

SQUAD LEADER's producer did a great job of making himself available on Usenet and answering questions a month or so before the game shipped. But at that point, there was nothing to do but provide information. Once the game was in stores, he heavily stuck around and fielded complaints. How different might things have been had he tried this at the very beginning? **GGW**

What's in a Story?

An essential ingredient of tactical games like X-COM and JAGGED ALLIANCE is the extra-tactical storyline. Interactions on the battlefield (picking up items, stunning and capturing skulls) influence the story by opening up new avenues of exploration. Historically based games like SQUAD LEADER are therefore at a disadvantage when attempting to engage the gamer with a story. Everyone knows how WWII turned out, right? And the idea of a single squad (or even a battalion) consistently driving the course of the war would clearly be ludicrous: They can't find looted Nazi art or a secret weapon in every French chateau. This is a serious concern when trying to combine a human-level personality approach with a military simulation. Depicting commandos—where you can think of any number of inventive and unusual missions—is one thing. A regular army unit that's ostensibly part of a much larger battle is another story. No wonder the campaigns in SQUAD LEADER seem flat and uninteresting.



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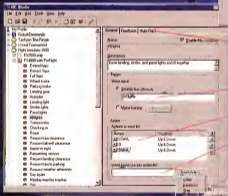
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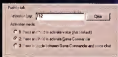
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The Feel-Good Column of the Year!

Jeff's so excited, and he just can't hide it!

Hi everyone! Jeff Green here! Boy, do I like games! Sometimes I complain about them, though! I get cranky! I think some game companies do some pretty stupid things and that makes me all pissy! But it's not my fault! I'm old! Being cranky is what old people do!

But I don't like to be cranky all the time! Really! I like to be happy and excited! Just like I am right now! No, I don't mean it like that! Shut up! This is a family magazine! I mean I'm excited about the gaming industry! Because everything is great! PC gaming rocks, duh! The industry is not in a downturn! At least, that's not what I think! Because I'm going to be a cheerleader! That's what some game companies think we should do! They don't want us to complain because that turns people off gaming!

So this is the new me! I hope you like it!



So anyway, check this out! I've been playing a bunch of really cool games lately! No really, I have! I'm not being sarcastic!

One game I really like is TONY HAWK PRO SKATER 2! That game rocks! I'm serious! I haven't been skateboarding in like 30 years! Because I'm old! That's the theme for today, so don't forget! There's a test later! So, anyway, I love this game! There's more gameplay on any one level of TONY HAWK than on the average 10 PC titles! Plus, I'm learning all sorts of new lingo! Like "nosegrind on the halfpipe" and stuff like that! Now I gotta use those phrases in real life so people will think I'm younger! Except for that whole gray hair thing! Dang! I hate gray hair! But at least I'm not bald! Boy, would that suck! Except just think of Telly Savalas! Or that dude in the Smashing Pumpkins! Chicks love bald guys!

Another game I can't stop playing is METAL GEAR SOLID! Uh, oh! That's two console ports in a row that I just mentioned! Maybe PC gaming really is dying! But wait! I wasn't gonna write any bumper comments this issue! So forget I said that! My bad! But METAL GEAR SOLID is really great, though! That Snake guy—he's cool! I love all the stealth missions! But I hate Psycho Mantis! I must have replayed that part like 30 or 40 times! And I still haven't beaten it! Send me your saved game! Really! Oh yeah! There's one thing I don't like! There's too many cut-scenes! They go on forever! I like zones but I want to play a game too! If you want to make a movie go to Hollywood!

Take NO ONE LIVES FOREVER! This game is great! Best first-person-shooter since HALF-LIFE! And it's funny, too! Read our review in this issue if you don't believe me! But I had to wait like 10 minutes before I could even start playing, because of the long opening

cut-scenes! That's like eight minutes too many! Hello! I don't like to watch my games! ELITE FORCE started way better! And that was a Star Trek game! Those always suck! But not this one! That opening segment is the best opening in any game this year!

Hey game designers! Listen up! Stop boring us! Don't take 10 minutes to tell us what your story is! Just put us in the story and let us figure it out! Just like they do in the movies! Go watch Star Wars again! Or The Matrix! Or any movie worth a damn! They get the story moving and fill in the background stuff later! It's called a media res! That's Latin! Homer started The Iliad that way thousands of years ago and we've never looked back!



Oops, I did it again! I'm complaining! It's like I can't stop! And I just quoted Britney Spears! That's just

16 One game I really like is TONY HAWK PRO SKATER 2! That game rocks! I'm serious! I haven't been skateboarding in like 30 years! Because I'm old! **19**

wrong! I could be her father! She could call me Daddy! I might like that! Let's talk about something else! Quick!

DEUS EX! I just got around to this one! It's an Ion Storm game! And it's good! They finally got it right! Eight trillion dollars later! Just kidding! Those guys rule! Seriously, I like this one! It's smart and atmospheric and the gameplay is cool! I love conspiracy theories! It's a great game for X-Files fans, like me! This new season is intense! I can't believe Mulder got abducted! Those aliens should stop stretching his face, man! That's messed up! But anyway! Some people think our DEUS EX review was harsh! I don't agree! Scooter got it right! It's fun, but that AI is as dumb as dirt! That's a problem! And it runs too slow! And there's too many crates! But buy it if you find it cheap! You won't be sorry!

Okay, I'm out of space! More good times next month! And the month after that! It's all good! Now go buy more games! Keep those developers employed! Don't worry about quality! Just buy buy buy! Tell 'em Jeff Green sent you! I love everything and everybody! Especially you! See you next month!

Send email, Ritalin, and a large horse tranquilizer to jeff.green@ziffdavis.com. **GGG**

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