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By PETER CROSSBY

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Zeus lights one off.

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COVER STORY
Age of Mythology

Philosopher-prot George Jonas examines his God complex and ramblings on the future of the RTS genre in this hands-on look.

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID CHERRY

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Will O'Neaf suddenly realizes he's not cool anymore.

20 Letters

This month, we hear from a few people who actually like us. Plus some Tribes fans who hate us.

34 Loading...

Cars, dragons, and Klingons. We've got a wide gaming spectrum covered this month, with big beautiful shots of **Ralliesport Challenge**, **Asteron's Call 2**, and **Star Trek: Elite Force II**.

46 Read Me

Hop on a chopper and fly into Mogadishu as we take **Black Hawk Down** for a test ride. Also, check out our first impressions of **SimCity 4** and **Pro Race Driver**. Plus, Blizzard's Big Announcement, Game Art Culture, and Jeff Green eats a large bowl of crow over **Tribes 2**.

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Learn how ad burns over one hundred grand just to throw a big free LAN party for you and the rest of the little people.

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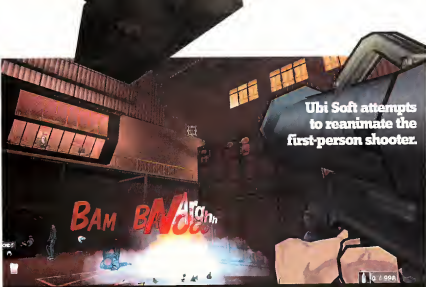
Wl reviews ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card as well as a Dell Inspiron 8200 that boasts ATI's new mobile chip, the Mobility Radeon 9000. We also beat up on a machine from Starfish Technologies, and Raphael puts two sets of speakers through their paces. Of course: Tech Medics, Killer Rigs, and Wi Power.

153 Gamer's Edge

Sick of being harassed by the Undead? We show you the best ways to take on your enemies in **Icewind Dale II**. Plus, find out about life as an Orc in **WarCraft III**, and learn what it takes to be a professional armchair quarterback with our strategies for **Madden NFL 2003**.

168 Greenspeak

Jeff says aloha, and then he says goodbye.



Ubi Soft attempts to reanimate the first-person shooter.

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At long last, cel-shading stumbles into the world of PC gaming.



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The Coolest Dad in the Third Grade?

I recently attended my son's back-to-school night. He's in the third grade now, and I have to tell you, each year this school thing gets easier. Getting him to complete his homework is no longer an exercise in coercion. "Julian, if you finish your homework by 8:00, I'll let you play RollerCoaster Tycoon until 9:00—or until your mom says it's time to go to bed." In fact, he seems downright into school these days.

While sitting at his desk on back-to-school night, my wife and I found my son's journal, which his teacher encouraged us to check out. On the first day of class, students were required to write about what they hoped to accomplish in school. My son had written, "I want to be a good student so that I can go to college and learn how to become a videogame designer."

My wife looked at me and smiled as I beamed. While I'm by no means a game designer, my son's desire to work in the gaming industry made me feel a sense of validation that I've never experienced before. I guess it shouldn't come as a surprise though; what 8-year-old boy wouldn't want to make games for a living? I mean, he looks forward to coming to my office to play games and harass the other editors. And every day when I get home from work, while my daughter comes over to give me a hug and a kiss, my son yells—never taking his eyes off of the computer screen—"Did you bring me any new games?"

In fact, a few weeks ago I was hanging out with him and a classmate before class when his friend approached me and said, "Julian says that you work for Computer Gaming World magazine. Is that true?"

"Yeah," I replied. "Do you miss the Canadian Corner too?" "I don't know what that is," he bluntly countered, "I was just wondering what characters you play as in Diablo II." I was floored. "Uh..." I stammered, "I'm not a big Diablo II fan. I mostly play sports games, like Madden, and Counter-Strike."

"Counter-Strike's cool," he replied before running over to the play structure. That morning when I got to work I installed WarCraft III. Sure, I've never been a big fan of games like that, but if I'm going to continue to be the coolest dad in Mrs. Lee's third grade class, I'd better bone up on what the kids are into these days.

By William O'Neal
Technical Editor

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Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

I Was Happier Being Stupid!

Your stupid reviews kept me from walking out of Best Buy with a new game. Instead, I ended up with three measly music CDs, which won't fill the empty void I feel inside. Dammit—they had the new *Aliens Versus Predator 2* expansion pack for \$20, and I couldn't buy it! The Thing was right in front of my face, and I COULDN'T BUY IT. All because I swore an oath not to spend another dime on a game without first reading the review in your crappy magazine. Thanks to you, I can't take the chance of wasting my money on lousy games just because I lacked the patience to wait for your review. I hope you people are satisfied—you've turned me into an informed and responsible consumer, you sick bastards.

Brian



Tribes 2 Patch: The Fans React

I'm writing to express my concern about a paragraph written in your October issue [Read Me] in which you stated, "At one time we actually thought Sierra's Tribes franchise had the potential to own online gaming. But after the promising first game, things have just steadily gone to hell." I think this statement is totally in error. While I will agree that Tribes 2 was a failure on a massive scale, I believe the series still has a great deal of potential. While I'll agree with you that up until this point, Sierra has not done the best job of fixing its mistakes, I

have been extremely impressed with their recent efforts.

They have poured countless dollars into the community with features such as the Tribes Council, and they're actually paying a mod developer to make a mod to fix their game. This to me says they still stand behind this franchise, and that it is in fact NOT dead. Perhaps you should rephrase your statement to read: "Sierra's Tribes franchise has the potential to own online gaming," as I believe that would be a much more accurate assessment.

Fraser "Sioqos" McCracken

Thank you so very much for not knowing anything about a game that you have written an article on! I think it's just great that you obviously can't do any research into a game before you write something flaming it. When Tribes 2 was first released, there were bugs and gameplay problems. Those have been almost totally resolved, and the resulting gameplay experience is far above ANY other FPS game that I've ever played. Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, and Quake III Arena don't hold a candle to the scope and beauty of Tribes 2.

That thing about the GarageGames patch making the game worse seems to

me to be very far off the mark. I'm very involved with the Tribes 2 community and almost every single player I know is very excited for the new patch that GG is going to release.

Again, thanks for being ignorant!

Gen Craychee

Check your sources, because the real word is that the new patch brings Tribes 2 back from the dead. I have heard nothing but positive feedback from the best of the best in the Tribes 2 and Tribes communities.

Tempestajemc

Okay, we rubbed the Tribes fans the wrong way with that item, to which the mall-bombing will attest. Just to prove we're not complete dillweeds all of the time, we decided to take a better look this month at what really is going on with the franchise—see the article in Read Me on page 72.

More on Violent Games and Teens

I am writing in regard to your September 2002 article "A Minor Problem." I believe retail stores should behave just as movie theaters do. They should allow the purchase of any game by a minor provided the game doesn't have an Adult rating. (That's NC-17 to all you movie-viewer folk.)

That brings me to my second point:

**"Thanks for not knowing anything
about a game you've written about."**



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MAIL BITES

I was wondering if Will could do a review on 8-track players since it is so hard to find a good one presently.

Brett

I'm 13, and I'd like to apologise to the gaming community for the 12-year-old rejects you put in your Letters section.

Goat

Everyone reading CGW at this exact moment needs to get a life.

Markeming

I held out hope that not every person that sends letters to CGW is a complete moron, but apparently that is not the case. Huh...I just called myself a moron.

John McCoy

"Mac users have it bad enough without having to endure whiners."

the current ESRB rating system just plain sucks. I believe the more rating criteria (which can be found at www.fimratings.com/questions.html) is a more accurate rating system. Many games rated Teen and Mature by the ESRB would be the equivalents of movies rated PG-13 and R by the movie rating system, but they should have ratings like PG and PG-13, respectively.

I'm 16 and have been playing Mature games for as long as I can remember. All but five or six of the 40-something games in my collection are rated Mature, and I think all of them are rated excessively harshly. Once the ESRB rating system is fixed, the world will be a better place for gamers like you and me.

MastaOfDisastax

Mac Reviews: Yea and Nay

What possibly can be the point of reviewing two Macs in the October issue? Yes, they are computers, and yes, you can play games on them, but I could say the same about the Sun SPARCstation I used to have on my desk, and I don't see those being reviewed. CGW is a magazine for people who play games on PCs. Every game that is reviewed or previewed in your magazine runs on a PC, so why would you ever include Mac-related articles? I very seriously doubt that people who only own Macs are buying your magazine, so what's the point?

Yes, I know that some people like Macs, and I'm sure there are a few good ports of games for the Mac, but so what? Everyone who buys CGW does so because they own a PC and want to play games on it. How can you ignore this fact?

Greg Sommerville

Will O'Neil is reviewing Macs because the name of your magazine is Computer Gaming World—not a less encompassing, completely limiting name like PC Gamer or the Wonderful World of Windows Gaming. Mac users have it bad enough without having to endure people whining over a hardware review. Please remember that some of the brightest and brilliant gems in computer gaming's crown were first released on Macs only.

I remember that one of my friends actually had a temper tantrum because he couldn't play Fallout on his PC. Well,

but, for every millisecond of pain you felt, Mac users have endured years of the same. The absolute wasteland that Mac gaming is a horrible place to be. People like me were so desperate to play PC games that we would actually buy awful Windows and DOS emulation programs in an attempt to get gaming software to run. I now own a G4 Powerbook for graphic design and two PC gaming rigs just so my wife and I can play Warcraft III and Dungeon Siege at the same time.

So while PC gaming is enjoying a great year, I sit quietly wishing for another Mac-only release like Fallout, Myst, or Miralith to come to-yatch slap a few more designers into the realization that there are millions of Mac users out there that could be contributing money to computer gaming. A guy can hope, can't he? Thanks for a great review, Will.

Mark Cosley

If I wanted to know about Mac hardware, I would have subscribed to an Apple magazine. I expect reviews about PC hardware, not about "alternative" systems. Next thing you know you will be reviewing consoles. This is one subscription that isn't going to be renewed.

Larry Ware

I would just like to say that I appreciate so much the addition of two Mac reviews in your magazine. This has been by far my favorite issue—although you put up the PowerMac review just as the new PowerMacs were coming out. This is forgivable since the review is exceptionally good and gives the tower what it deserves. Great job. I hope to see more Mac articles in the future.

Florian Maurer

Fulda Gap in Logic?

Regarding John Fletcher's review of FuLda Gap '95 (October 2002): Does he have borscht for brains? The review is comprised of three paragraphs, only one of which discusses the game's quality. The other two deride the game's subject matter.

Fulda Gap is a strategy war game that covers hypothetical battles between NATO and the Communist Bloc in the 1980s. Mr. Fletcher criticizes the game's subject as being "dated" and "banned." Dated? The game is set in the 1980s! Are games set



during World War II or the Napoleonic Wars dated? Foranoid? In the twentieth century, the Communists formed brutal totalitarian dictatorships that killed millions of people. (Stalin and Mao each killed tens of millions of their own people. Pol Pot wiped out one third of his own country. Other Communist states had similar bloody purges.) In the 1980s the Warsaw Pact outnumbered NATO three to one in tanks and troops and almost as badly in combat aircraft. Would the reviewer describe games having Mac opponents as "dated" and "banned"? M. I.

Wait 'Til You See Our SimDaBastana Review

For the love of all that is holy and righteous, would you please cease and desist from this NAMBLA-like relationship with The Sims? It's not even a real game! It's some freakish mind-control scheme to make people think that mundane elements of everyday life are somehow entertaining when you put them on a monitor with graphics reminiscent of an old Sierra adventure game. I know it's summer and review pickings are slim, but if CGW continues like this, the magazine will be known as SGW—Sim Gaming World. Forget about John Romero, Will Wright is making you his bitch!

Eric Schwartz

Mmmmmmm... Monkey Kabob

I just read Thierry Nguyen's little nugget entitled "Less Dorky Role-Playing" (Read Me, October 2002) where Nguyen proclaims, "Shadowbane will be the first massively multiplayer online RPG to offer multi-classing." You guys ever hear of Asheron's Call? It's arguably the best MMORPG out there, yet it's also consistently ignored by the press (present company very much included). In Dereth, you can't swing a cat without hitting an archer-mage, a melee-mage, or a mage who melees. Hell, hand your cook a crossbow, toss him/her into a dungeon full of lusters (ape-like critters), and voila...monkey kabob! Shadowbane may offer multi-classing, but it sure ain't the first to do so.

Archer-mage, Level 99

I  Apple

AGE of MYTHOLOGY

From the creators of *Age of Empires*
and *The Age of Kings*



Zeus : God of Lightning



Anubis : God of Death



Thor : God of Thunder

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like to pick out the stupid ones and make fun of the author?) Anyway, I read your article on *The Sims Online* (October 2002) and really liked it. I can't wait till this game comes out. Problem is, I don't even know if I'll be able to play it. I am 14 and have no job and I certainly don't have a credit card. My question: will *The Sims Online* require a monthly subscription to play? I could probably scrounge up enough birthday money to actually buy it, but my parents hate giving out their credit card number and wouldn't want to pay for me to play a game. If there is a fee, does EA plan to have a way for minors to play?

Ben

The Sims Online will require a monthly subscription, but as of this writing we don't have details on price or method of payment. Oh, and to answer your other question: yeah, we like to print the stupid letters.

Correct Correction

In the most recent issue, you briefly mentioned the RPG *Divine Divinity*. You said that the designers came up with the title. That's not true. The original title was *Divinity: The Sword of Lies*. When they signed on with their publisher, the first thing the publisher did was change the name to that stupid title it is now. So, don't blame the devs. The original title was cool. The publishers created the laughable title it is now.

Dave

You'd Be Cooler if You Didn't Make Us Look Bad

Hey, I just like to say that I love your mag (especially the reviews and Jeff Green) and everything that is in it. I would just

"I've seen the whole evolution that this magazine has gone through, and I'm still a loyal subscriber and huge fan."

like to point out a typo. In the *Operation Flashpoint: Resistance* review (October 2002), the captions listing the new weapons available state that the name of one weapon is "FM-FAL." This is incorrect. The real name for this weapon is "FN-FAL." It is made by Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre in Herstal, Belgium. That is the same company that makes weapons such as the P90 submachine gun, the M-249 SAW machine gun, and the Five-Seven pistol. I understand that this was a very minor error, however, I felt it was my duty to point it out to the readers. Thank!

J.B. the Gun-Nut!!!

Happy Readers, New and Old

Dear cool people at CGW, I am writing to your magazine for the first time. I just wanted to say, YOU GUNS ROCK!!!!!! I have been reading your magazine since August 2000 when I happened to find an issue lying on the street on my way home from school (I'm 12.) Ever since, I have always read CGW. Your reviews are always right and I want to tell all those hate mail senders to **** off and die. I have to end this letter now and do my homework.

Dan

I'm a new reader and I wanted to comment on Jason Babin's review of the game *Gate: Uprising* in your September issue. I would have to say that it was the best review I have EVER read. I

laughed my ass off. Secondly, I wanted to tell you that *Neverwinter Nights* is a highly overrated game. While you hit the nail on the head when you said that the first chapter was boring, you forgot to mention that the plot does not get much better from there. But the graphics can be phenomenal with a high-quality video card. Plus, the editor is great.

Thanks for putting out such a great magazine; it's really entertaining to read.

Squidboy

Hi, CGW! I've been a subscriber since just before my daughter was born, and that was more than 13 years ago. I've seen the whole evolution this magazine has gone through and all the different design changes, and I'm still a loyal subscriber and a huge fan. I've laughed and cried (about game reviews for games that never made it) and still I keep coming back and take everything with a grain of salt. I don't have any complaints—save for the fact that I have to wait a month between issues (grin). I don't know why there are so many people complaining about this article or that review. Come on, people, lighten up—IT'S ENTERTAINMENT! Here's is to another 13 years!! I'm here for the long haul.

Mark

PS. If you have an extra GeForce TI 4600 lying around that you don't need, I'd be happy to accept it. My wife says I spent my video card money on CGW subscriptions.

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS



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PROJECT

NOMADS

Available November 2002

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Story

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You have work to do and a vengeance to attend to in this unique action strategy RPG.

Get to work!

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- 3D world with breathtaking graphics
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- Multiplayer game for up to 8 players via LAN or Internet
- Innovative storyline



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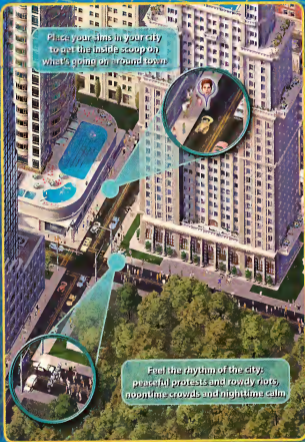
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Place your Sims in your city to get the inside scoop on what's going on around town

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UNLESS YOU ARE BROUGHT ALIVE BEFORE THE SEAT OF THE DARK LORD.



Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE



LIVE THE LEGEND...



Fun and dynamic gameplay

Use cunning or might to complete missions

Play as Robin Hood, Little John, Maid Marian and other

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Robin Hood

THE LEGEND
OF SHERWOOD



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Violence



BECOME THE HERO

Take on the role of the legendary nobleman, Robin Hood or one of his Merry Men and play over 30 different missions that combine action and adventure with stealth tactical elements as you battle for control of the King's throne in the stunning, lush backdrop of Sherwood Forest.

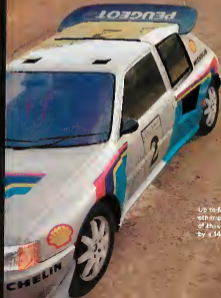
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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price


RALLI-SPORT CHALLENGE

For some reason, rally racing has never really caught on here in the States like it has in Europe. But rally racing videogames sure have been big here, and the latest rally racing title to take the U.S. by storm is Microsoft's *RalliSport Challenge*, originally released for Xbox but now finding its way to the PC. *RalliSport Challenge* features multiple game types like hill climb and traditional cross-country rallies, a deep career mode, and a graphics engine that's...well, just look at it! *RalliSport Challenge* should be spraying mud all over your PC by this holiday season.

Over 25 real-world rally cars are included, from manufacturers like Peugeot, Mitsubishi, and Subaru.



Up to four players can race each other online. That means that one of these cars might be controlled by a 34-year-old girl in Taipei.



The environments are some of the most stunning you'll see in any game, with swirling dust, swaying trees, and wild animals running across the track.

Damage modeling is very detailed, right down to broken windows and dented fenders.

AC 2 will have a roughly 12-hour day/night cycle, with the gorgeous sky colors shifting accordingly.

ASHERON'S CALL 2

Finally, a massively multiplayer game that graphically outshines *World of Warcraft*: OK, so *Asheron's Call 2* didn't really hurt itself clearing that bar, but the developers have practically busted a spleen reimagining their own game. Seamless dungeon loads, tons of visual feedback, a streamlined yet deep character creation process, a newbie experience that actually welcomes players instead of intimidating them—the list of improvements goes on and on. Microsoft is insisting this baby will squeak out in time for the holidays, but online release dates are notoriously liquid. We'll believe it when we play it—and we hope that's soon.



All actions and spells are item-based. So if this mage is going to help his party, he better start beating on that drum slung across his hip.



Expect lots of visual feedback in the game. These puny arrows stuck in the dragon's nostrils are a hilarious sight. Expect a badass roar, "Get bigger arrows!"

Lots of armor and a big sword would slow you down in any other game, but not in AC2—no encumbrance!

Hold this page at arm's length. Now move it back and forth. Aren't the waving trees and grass animations cool?

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

"Don't worry, *Elite Force II* will be a lot longer than *Elite Force*." That's the first thing the guys over at Ritual, developers for *Elite Force II*, are fixing. The previous game was a great *Star Trek* shooter, marred by its minimal length, and Ritual is making sure to maintain that same standard of good gameplay, this time with more game time. With a whole slew of new gadgets (like a tricorder that has multiple viewing modes) and new aliens (more than just Borg, Romulan, and Klingon), *Elite Force II* looks like it'll be a good addition to the *Star Trek* franchise.

This big critter is an Exomorph Quaduped. Ritual got the chance to design entirely new aliens and critters for *Elite Force II*.





This Romulan has one of the new toys: a Romulan redline gun.

This is Juliet Jurot, one of your plucky new Hazard Team members.

You're holding a Federation assault rifle, one of the mainstays from the previous game. Primary fire is a three-shot burst, while secondary fire is more of a shotgun effect.

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PlayStation 2



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Become the ultimate creator with *Civilization III: Play the World*. This multiplayer expansion pack transforms Civ III into an intense online challenge that allows you to go head-to-head with anyone you choose via the internet, e-mail, hot seat or LAN. You can also play a game in under an



one god? And it was you?



hour so it's easy to squeeze in a few turns whenever you have the time. And with more civilizations, leaders and an enhanced scenario builder, your options for playing god are virtually limitless. Pay a visit to civ3.com to find out just how powerful you can be.



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During the worst blizzard in war history, Hitler's greatest gamble begins on a 90 mile loosely held Allied front.

Dec. 24: The Ardennes Forest

Hold the Allied line until a break in the weather allows American and British forces to begin bombing again.



Read Me

The opposite of reality TV Edited by Ken Brown

Two Delta teams swoop in on U.S. troops at the beginning of the key mission.

HANDS ON

Black Hawk Down

NovoLogic recreates the infamous battle of Mogadishu By Thierry Nguyen

SIMCITY 4

It's still beautiful and still wacky. **Page 50**

**TRON 2.0**

Get sucked into cyberspace. **Page 56**

**MMORPG NEWS**

The Hulk and Hobbits head online. **Page 70**

**GAMEART-CULTURE**

Games are all Greek to people in power. **Page 78**



You can use the minigun in the Blackhawk to tear up militants and their technicals.

The Battle of Mogadishu was perhaps the most shocking and humiliating event involving U.S. troops since Vietnam. Most Americans remember it from the news footage of a half-naked American soldier being dragged by Somalis through the streets. Within days President Clinton made plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Somalia.

But to the men who served in Operation Restore Hope, the withdrawal was a disgrace. In their minds, they accomplished the mission that day with great valor and distinction. They captured the bad guys they set out to get, and after 18 months in Somalia, they thought they were making some progress. Which is the message that comes through at the end of Mark Bowden's book, *Black Hawk Down*.

Now, NovaLogic is nearing completion on its game based on the events of Operation Restore Hope. But the game is sure to arouse controversy. Mark Bowden is said to consider it to be "in bad taste." In a recent poll on Gamers.com, more than half of the online respondents thought that a game based on the battle of Mogadishu shouldn't be made at all. Clearly, the public's perception of Somalia and the

At this point it looks more like a shooter than a rigorous sim such as *Flashpoint*.

view of the soldiers who fought there continue to be at odds.

Colonel Lee Van Arsdale (Ret., U.S. Army) commanded the Delta Force team at the heart of the operation in Mogadishu. A 25-year-veteran of the army, Van Arsdale cites two main reasons for being involved in the development of the game. First, NovaLogic agreed to donate part of the proceeds to charities for the families of Special Ops veterans. Second, he wants to counter the popular perception that the operation was a failure. According to Van Arsdale, it was a successful operation in which American troops fought off overwhelming odds, destroyed Mohamed Farrah Aidid's military arm, and captured some of Aidid's top lieutenants.

The ex-Delta operative had several suggestions for the developers. The artists had to make changes when Van Arsdale told them the soldiers held their guns "two girls." He also provided information on subjects like formations and room clearing. Still, Colonel Van

Arsdale acknowledges that *Black Hawk Down* is for entertainment only and makes no pretense at being an accurate reenactment of the battle.

From what we saw of the game, it looked more like a shooter than a rigorous simulation like *Operation: Flashpoint*. While both the novel and the movie focus more on the battle of



The view from outside a little blink.



This scene as you ride into Mogadishu is even more dramatic when you hear the music.

The artists had to make changes when Van Arsdale told them the soldiers held their guns "like girls."

Mogadishu, the game will depict a whole range of missions that led up to that operation (20, in fact). You start the game as a soldier in the 10th Mountain Division, switch to being a member of Task Force Ranger, and play the last batch of missions as a Delta Force operator. Mission objectives run the gamut from snatching enemy VIPs to defending an area or capturing key installations. And every mission takes place on a huge map, to boot.

The best example of the vast scale of the maps is the mission Sweet Irene ("Irene" was the codeword for launch in the actual mission). It renders the entire pathway between the American base and the Bakera market in Mogadishu; you actually get to sit on one of the Little Bird helicopters, flying from your base to the mission area. In fact, during the last leg of Sweet Irene, you will even run the "Mogadishu Mile"—the evacuation run between Mogadishu and the Pakistani-held stadium where everyone regrouped afterward. In another mission, River Raid, you'll waltz through even more sprawling outdoor areas. You'll find that the Somali militia aren't the only ones trying to kill you—the river is also teeming with crocodiles.

While the scale is large, the levels aren't always heavily populated. In the actual battle there were thousands of civilians and militia members running around. There will be far fewer in the game, due to technical constraints, but there will still be plenty of hostile characters. But you can't just fire at everyone you run into. If you shoot civilians indiscriminately, the mission is over.

The weapons list only includes weapons that were available historically. It ranges from pistols all the way up to an anti-tank weapon, plus various

grenades, demolition charges, and claymores. There are three assault rifles (the CAR-15, M16A2, and M16/203 with grenade launcher), M249 SAW and M60 machine guns, and three sniper rifles,

humvees, and technicals to lay down suppression fire.

From the levels we were able to play, it's looking more like a lone warrior shooter than an authentic combat experience, but the game wasn't freshed yet. NovaLogic says its goal is to portray the whole scenario (not just the battle itself) in order to educate gamers who may have only seen the film. And with technical consultants like Van Arsdale, it looks like NovaLogic is



RPGs are a constant threat. They're what shot down the Black Hawks in real life.

including the legendary Barrett 50 caliber. As mentioned earlier, you'll sit in the Little Birds and the Black Hawks and get the chance to man the miniguns. While you can't drive any of the vehicles, you can still hop onto jeeps,

trying to deliver a good game and a respectful tribute to the 16 fallen and 84 wounded soldiers from the battle. What remains to be seen is how good the game will be, and whether gamers are going to be willing to play it.

CGW Quick Poll

Are you looking forward to *Black Hawk Down*?

Not really, but it's nice for a game.

32%

Why not? I want to see what it was like.

26%

Yeah, I want to shoot some Sammies!

20%

Source: Gamers.com



Pro Race Driver has the most realistic damage modeling we've seen yet.

PREVIEW

Pro Race Driver

A need for some serious speed **By Tom Price**

Are you ready to drive your first "car-PG"?

Racing games on the PC, with few exceptions, tend to focus on the heavy-weight leagues of NASCAR and Formula 1; other types, like rally racing or touring cars, are left mostly to the console crowd. To amend that oversight, we've got rally racing on the way courtesy of RealSport Challenge, and touring cars will finally get their due in Pro Race Driver: the new "car-PG" from CodeMasters.

I say "car-PG" because that's what PRD is trying to be: a racing game that focuses on the life of a driver, telling a story as if it were a movie, with some really exciting racing sequences interspersed throughout. If I compare it to Days of Thunder or Driven, but those movies suck, Pro Race Driver looks like it definitely won't suck.

You play as Ryan McKane, the

youngest son in a legendary racing family, who is a rising star in the touring car circuit in his own right. Ryan lives in his successful brother's shadow and suffers through personal tragedies in the course of the game's story. But racing is still what this game is really all about, and PRD has racing in spades: Thirteen licensed championship series, including DTM in Germany and the British Touring Car Championship, 38 real tracks, including Hockenheim, and 42 licensed race and touring cars from manufacturers like Mercedes, Alfa Romeo, and Dodge all help make PRD one seriously deep racing game.

PRD is also dedicated to realism, with professionally-tested physics and a detailed damage modeling system that will blow your mind. Jump into the driver's seat and strap on your seatbelt THIS winter.



The game has more than a dozen leagues, including a touring car division.

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Highland Warriors	Data Becker	11/8/02
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	Electronic Arts	11/8/02
Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory	Advision	11/12/02
Hegemonic: Legions of Iron	DreamCatcher	11/14/02
NBA Live 2003	Electronic Arts	11/15/02
The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	11/20/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	11/21/02
Unreal II - The Awakening	Infogrames	11/21/02
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Just like real life, giant killer robots and peaceful neighborhoods aren't a good mix.



The cities you create interconnect and influence each other, gradually filling in the map.



This bustling sports park reflects the game's remarkable sense of life.



There are a ton of special structures, including a major league ballpark.

HANDS ON

SimCity 4

Is it urban renewal or just a little fresh paint? By Robert Coffey

With its target release date drawing close, we decided it was time to drop by Maxis' offices one last time to check out the development of SimCity 4. And this time, Maxis even let us drive.

While previous updates of this franchise have delved deeper and deeper into the kind of simulation that infiltrated casual gamers and scared ruthlessly incompetent gamers such as ourselves (we can't even pay our utility bills on time), this year's version seems to have found a balance between the depth the hardware will demand and the simple enjoyment and sense of discovery that the bazillions of consumers who bought The Sims will crave.

If anything, this game is even more complex than previous versions. The traffic engine is a marvel, modeled right down to working streetlights and computers that get peeved if you thoughtlessly throw down a tangled

knit of roads—trust us, we know.

Thankfully, the game eases you into your civic nightmares—that mess of roads takes a while to develop since SimCity 4 very considerably lays out the basic neighborhood street structure every time you slap a huge swath of zoning across the map. There's so much to do in this game from the get-go, from designating farmland to positioning fire and police stations to negotiating teachers' salaries, that every little bit counts.

Maxis has taken much of what it has learned from The Sims and applied it to this game, right down to the interface. Everything in the game provides visual feedback. You can consult your advisors for game info, but the nobs, wildfires, and crumbling homes of your city will tell you everything you need to know well before then.

Still, the most obvious change is in the game's format. The scenario challenges of previous incarnations are


gone; in their place is an enormous sandbox with 64 different-sized "lots" where you can build unique yet interconnected cities. Some gamers may be disappointed, but the design is so open and so complex that new challenges are going to constantly confront players. In the few hours we played the game, we endured teacher strikes, a housing shortage, angry commuters, and a giant robot from outer space that destroyed our industrial base. Strangely, that giant robot was kind of comforting, letting us know that Maxis hasn't lost the weird sense of humor that has blossomed in the Sims products. And there's lots of that flavor in the game. Next to the giant robot, our favorite is the federal prison that you can build, complete with occasionally escaping felons.

This game is going to be huge, both in terms of gameplay and popularity. Look for it to dominate sales charts this coming January.

Our favorite is the federal prison that you can build, complete with occasionally escaping felons.



YOU HAVE 60 SECONDS TO SAVE THE WORLD. GO.



You'll need gadgets, lots of gadgets, gadgets to master the art of becoming invisible, infrared goggles to start, maybe a grappling hook



Violence
Suggestive Themes



tick a laser camera, **tock** and magnets **tick** all to help you obtain secret documents **tock** and then scale the walls of a large international organization 60 stories above Tokyo,



tick or defend yourself from sniper fire high above the alps **tock** while dodging bullets from **tick** would be jungle assassins all in time to **tock** get the girl

but don't pat yourself on the back yet **tick** because that was only one minute **tock** and there are still 1,400 left in the day **tick** and 14 more classic Bond enemies to fight online.

Sixty seconds of Bond's world. It's more than most people do their entire life.

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HEAR your friends beg for mercy!
BUILD the ultimate civilization!



ANCIENT ERA

Finally! A boardgame version of the award-winning PC strategy game. Create a civilization to stand the test of time. Start with one small village in 4000 B.C. Move your settlers out to explore the world, discover hidden treasures for plunder, and create new cities.

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- Research new technologies from writing to flight
- Build military units to defend what's yours and take what's not
- Meet and defeat neighboring civilizations
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This game intends to be a first-rate shooter, with a detailed storyline and lots of action.

[UPDATE]

Tron 2.0

Monolith hacks into the mainframe **By Tom Price**

It may seem odd to revive a 20-year-old license from a movie that can be described as a cult favorite at best and make it into a cutting-edge first-person shooter; but it won't seem so odd once the gorgeous graphics of *Tron 2.0* are lighting up your screen next year.

Currently in development at Monolith (creators of *NOLF*, *AVP2*, and *Shogo*), *Tron 2.0* picks up the original story from the movie, but 20 years later. You are Jett Bradley, the son of Alan Bradley, the creator of the original *Tron* program (played by Bruce Boxleitner in the film), and you will be sucked into cyberspace just like the user Flynn (Jeff Bridges) was to fight off an encroaching computer virus and find his missing father.

The world is newer and better looking than in the original movie, but a lot of the same themes—light cycles, discs, etc.—are still a part of the story. The original concept designer, Syd Mead, is guiding the look of the game in the same way he established the movie's look. Built off the same technology powering *No One Lives Forever 2*, *Tron 2.0* looks amazing, especially the neat glowing-edge stuff. More important though, *Tron* intends to be a first-rate shooter, with a detailed storyline and fast-paced action.

Of course plenty of bells and whistles (such as team-based multiplayer that's reminiscent of the classic *Discs of Tron* arcade game) are being added to make for an even bigger experience. Tune in next month for our exclusive hands-on preview, featuring the world's first look at the amazing light cycles you'll be able to ride in the game.



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The expansion pack will include new content and quests available to all players at any time.



Mournhold, the capital city of Morrowind, is one of the major new areas in the expansion.

PREVIEW

More Morrowind To Love

When a 300-hour game just isn't enough, there's always the expansion **By Jeff Green**

Great. Just what we needed. An expansion pack to The Longest Game in the History of the Universe. Hey, God, can we have two lives, please? Coming to PCs next month is *The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal*, an expansion pack to *Morrowind*, Bethesda's outstanding epic RPG released earlier this year.

Thankfully, the expansion pack will include new content and quests available to all players at any time, not just to the 12 who actually managed to finish the original game. *Tribunal* will take players off the island continent of Vvardenfell and onto the mainland of Morrowind, where they'll get to explore Mournhold (the capital), the Clockwork

City of Sotha Sil, and other locations as they follow a brand-new storyline involving the rise of a brutal new king.

The expansion includes new weapons, armor, monsters, and dungeons, but the best news for current players will be the new journal, which replaces the right-clickable inefficient one in the original game. The new journal, which will be backwards-compatible with the original game, will group all entries for a quest under one heading and will allow you to sort lists of active and completed quests. Bethesda is also adding in the ability to annotate the maps.

Now all we need Bethesda to include is a bacterial virus so we can get sick for a month to play this massive game.



"Hi! I'm here for your daughter!" This is a quest from the Dark Elf infernal clan.

DEVELOPER

BEAT *Raves and faves of the game designers* **By Mark Asher**



ERIC VON ROTHKIRCH

3D realms, multiplayer level designer for *Duke Nukem Forever*

NOW PLAYING: *Neversetter Nights* and *WarCraft III* for the PC. For the Xbox I'm playing *Gunfight: Dark Legacy*. And *Rush Hour* keeps my puzzle-solving skills sharp.

LISTENING TO: The Abandoned Poets' album *Humanistic* has been in my player since I bought it.

READING: I've been beefing up on business. My current reading is *Focus: The Future of Your Company Depends on It* by Al Ries.



MARK SKAGGS

General manager of EA Pacific. In charge of production for *Command & Conquer: Generals*

NOW PLAYING: I've mostly been playing *Generals*, but I've also been playing *WarCraft III*, *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* and a little of the *Earth and Beyond* beta test.

LISTENING TO: The CDs I have in my car right now include *Third Eye Blind's* self-titled CD, *Van Halen's Balance*, and a techno mix.

READING: I'm reading several for work, including *Forbes Greenest Business Stories of All Time*, *Good to Great*, and *Directing Actors*.



RICHARD GARRIOTT

Executive producer, *NCsoft Austin*

NOW PLAYING: I just finished *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. This is only the third or fourth game, not including *Ultimas*, that I've enjoyed playing enough to complete.

LISTENING TO: There are two CDs that we are listening to right now, *Clash Back's Electrified* and *Dido's No Angel*.

READING: I'm currently reading a philosophy book titled *Dictionary of Symbols*. This is part of the research I'm doing on history, culture, and symbolism of new works for *Tobias Raza*.

O.R.B.

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Actual screenshot

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The Yahoo Games on Demand Website



Majesty is also available from Yahoo.

ONLINE

Should You Yahoo?

Yahoo rents PC games online **By Robert Coffey**

There are two things you can't rent at your local Blockbuster: You can't rent the version of *Bad Lieutenant* where Harvey Keitel wields Little Harvey, and you can't rent PC games. You can rent seeds of console games, sure, but nothing for that state-of-the-art gaming

selection of more than 40 titles at launch. Yahoo Games on Demand has a tiered pricing plan, letting gamers rent three, five, or 10 games for a monthly fee ranging from \$9.95 to \$14.95. Are there 10 titles worth renting for that fee? Well, not yet. Many of the service's initial offerings are dated or just kinda

of about 10 minutes per game, we were up and running. Performance was generally good—while there were some ugly sound glitches during the slower real-time strategy play of *Majesty* sound and graphics during an extended *Serious Sam* session were as solid as if we had the CD in our PC.

Are there ten titles worth renting for \$14.95? Not quite.

rig you rationalized as a tool for "tracking your investments." What's a PC gamer to do?

Well, if you've got a broadband connection, you could try renting games online from gamesondemand.yahoo.com. A pay-to-play service for high-speed internet users brought to you by Yahoo, the service went live September 23 with

leasy: *Hitman: Codename 47*, *Heavy Metal FANX 2*, *Star Trek: Away Teams*, and the just plain terrible *Fast Food Tycoon*. That said, there are a sprinkling of good titles like *Age of Wonders*, *Civ IV*, *Star Trek: Elite Force*, and a few others.

We took a few titles for a spin and were generally impressed with the performance. After an initial download

Yahoo Games on Demand could be on to something. If you have lots of time and can wisp through five games in a month, then the \$12.95 monthly cost is a bargain compared to buying five titles individually. The hitch is that Yahoo is going to need to add higher quality titles, and soon. Even a low low price is asking too much for *Call to Power II*.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.

GAME	CEW	PC Gamer	CEW	GameRankings.com	IGN.com	GameSpot	GameRankings.com
AMP2: Primal Hunt	C-	C+	D-	C		C	C
Celtic Kings	A	B	C	B+	B+	A-	B+
Farseep	F	C	n/a	D-	D+	+	C-
Icewind Dale II	A	A-	B+	B+	A	B+	A-
Mingie: The Gathering Online	D	B	B+	B-	B	B	C
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	A	B	D	B+	B	A-	B+

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LOADING, HOT PROPERTY AWARD

ACTION TRIP, EDITORS' CHOICE
VOODOO EXTREME, CAN 'O WINDOPASS
ZEN GAMER, GOLD ZEN AWARD
RPGDOT, EDITORS' CHOICE
XISTENZE, CHOICE AWARD
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WORTHPLAYING.COM, EDITORS' CHOICE
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"As a general rule, if we are working on games that we enjoy, then I believe that other people will enjoy them, too."

THE CGW INTERVIEW

John Tiller

The iron man of wargaming explains how he shipped 18 titles in 36 months **by Johnathan Holm**

John Tiller could be the most prolific wargame designer of all time. He's developed more than 30 titles, including two CGW Wargames of the Year (Dietrichsund Shirok and Vietnam Squad Battles), and his Battleground series has been inducted into the CGW Hall of Fame. Tiller, who has a PhD in mathematics, lives with his wife and two daughters in Alabama. He says his combat experience comes from being married for more than 20 years to an Irish Canadian.

CGW: It seems like you ship a new title every month. How do you stay so prolific?

JOHN TILLER: I believe I have the best wargame development team ever assembled. Probably the single most important person to me is my graphic artist Joe Amorati. Greg "Storm" Smith is someone I depend on to do first-class research and advise me on military matters. Another person who is heavily involved in my games, both as a scenario designer and a play-test coordinator, is Glenn Saunders, if you have good people and give

them freedom to pursue their ideas, an incredible amount of work can be produced.

CGW: What criteria do you use in choosing a title?

JT: Personal interest is the fuel that powers wargame development; for each game we do, you can find at least one person who is very motivated to see that game get finished. If we are working on games that we enjoy, then I believe that other people will enjoy them, too.

CGW: What's the key decision in a game?

JT: In wargaming, the single most important decision is scale. For example, take the Squad Battles games set in Vietnam. The higher you get in scale, the more discouraging the result becomes. But by staying down at the squad level, the level that individuals fought, and by just focusing on specific battles and not trying to include higher-level considerations, it is possible to create something that is representative of the tactical fighting and interesting to play.

CGW: In what areas do you think your games succeed?

JT: We never stretch the historical facts. I consider every game I've done for HPS to be a solid representation of the historical situation while at the same time being very playable and a lot of fun. If we can continue the approach of having highly-detailed and accurate data, while providing the game player with an enjoyable experience, then we have succeeded.

CGW: In what areas are you looking to improve?

JT: It's clear to me that the intricate calculations of my old board-game days are not necessarily the same thing that today's players are looking for. Most customers want the results to be backed by solid calculations, solid data, and meaningful interrelationships, but otherwise want the satisfaction of seeing a Tiger tank blow up just as it is about to overrun their position. They don't need to be in the loop on the results as long as they find them convincing and can audit them to their satisfaction from the documentation. If I take a look at my newer games, you can see the results of that approach.



Computer Games Magazine (Editors' Choice)



Computer Gaming World (Editors' Choice)

95%

PC Gamer (Editors' Choice)



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THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM RETURNS!

We forgot how much we missed this stuff. The CGW editors have been lost in so many great single-player games for so long that we forgot how much fun it is to kill each other repeatedly online. But thanks to the release of great multiplayer games like UT 2003 and Battlefield 1942, we have rediscovered our fragtag love once more. Yay!



MORE MMORPG

The Hulk and Hobbits Head Online

Vivendi to put the "massive" in massively multiplayer with games based on Marvel Comics and *The Lord of the Rings* By Robert Coffey

In a pair of announcements certain to warm the hearts of every former AV Club geek on the planet, Vivendi Universal recently announced that it is in the process of developing two new online RPGs based on the Marvel Comics universe and the print-not-movie-version of *The Lord of the Rings*.

We were excited by the announcement about *The Lord of the Rings*—back when we first heard it five years ago at the Game Developer's Conference. The securing of the Tolkien property was revealed with an appropriately giddy sense of victory at Sierra's hospitality suite, and we could barely wait. But wait we did. And wait and wait and wait, inexplicably, Sierra let what was arguably the biggest licensing coup in gaming wither on the vine.

Does a MMORPG make sense now? Sure it does; the incredible current and future success of the films makes this money in the bank, with or without the movie tie-in. That's exactly why Vivendi is squeezing hard on the LOTR levi, with a Fellowship

of the Ring title due this fall and *The Hobbit* due in 2003. But don't expect to see *The Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online* anytime soon. We'll be surprised if we're bashing Grog before 2005.

The target date for Vivendi's Marvel universe massively multiplayer online game is also 2005. CGW makes a comic book fun every Wednesday, so we couldn't be happier about this announcement. We also couldn't be more puzzled. Just how many X-Men and Incredible Hulks can the game world support without screwing it up? If we get stuck playing as Power Pack, we're not logging on.

These are heartening announcements. Letting us play in such-much-beloved worlds is a geek dream come true. Sbl, we wonder if there isn't a downside. With these games, as well as *Star Wars Galaxies*, *The Matrix Online*, and a rumored DC Comics universe MMORPG, will original, non-licensed online games have any hope of competing? And is some idiot going to try and make us endure an online *Star Trek* game? It can only be a matter of time.



THE BAD STARCRRAFT GHOST

OK, we're not as bitter about this as some of you are, if the 5,000-word BLIZZARD SUCKERS emails are any indication. But the announcement that Blizzard's next game is going to be console-only did hit a bit hard. It was inevitable, though, and they're saying that they're sticking with PC games in the long run...so let's not freak out just yet, gang.

THE UGLY THAT AWFUL ROLLERCOASTER TYCOONAD

It's not like we're prudes or anything. It's not like we don't have our disgusting side. But the new Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 ad showing five people—including a mature, white-haired lady—with wet stains on their crotches crosses right into the realm of ick. Hey, marketing guys, we know you're trying to be clever, but lay off the urine!

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thibery Nguyen

Would you rather have a great comic book game, a Sid Meier masterpiece, a space sim, a third-person shooter, and a swashbuckling action game, or a game that makes rabid fans of a cancelled TV show weep? Hey, it's your money. We are merely your entertainment yogs.





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UPDATE

Rebirth of Tribes 2

Sierra relaunches the multiplayer shooter—and it's finally fixed; CGW eats crow **By Jeff Green**

The game is much more stable now—so we got that wrong.

Mmmmm, this crow sure is tasty! Our snotty item back in the October issue about the decline of Sierra's Tribes franchise was met with an avalanche of hate mail not seen since our old Canadian-bashing days, and it seems like we had it coming.

Instead of saying the online multiplayer shooter was dead, it looks like it would have been more accurate to say that it's been revived. By the time you read this, Sierra should have a completely relaunched version of Tribes 2 back on the shelves, at the bargain price of \$10. The new version will include the complete game with a huge patch made by GarageGames, as well as two new player-made mods—Tribes Classic and Ivan Rakov 2—and a host of new maps. (The patch and the mods are also available separately as a free download.)

Why did GarageGames—an independent third-

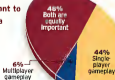
party developer—make a patch for a Sierra game? Because the company is actually made up of former Dynamix employees and Tribes 2 project members who took off to form their own company before Sierra shut the studio down in August 2001. Tribes 2 was released in March 2001, but suffered horribly from a plethora of bugs, followed by a series of hasty patches that did little to make things better—so eventually Sierra contracted with their former employees, now called GarageGames, to fix the game.

That fix is finally here, and the reports of numerous members of the fan community who've played the final—as well as our own hands-on time with it—do indeed make it clear that the game is much more stable now.

We'll take a closer look at the game next month in "Revisionist History" in the Reviews section to see whether it finally lives up to its original potential. Cross your fingers.

QUICK POLL

What's more important to you in a game?



Source: Gamers.com

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, December 1997

In anticipation of the holiday, editor-in-chief Johnny Wilson

climbed onto Santa's lap and wrote up his holiday wish list. It took a few years, but Johnny must have been at least partly good, because he did eventually get his dream of a superhero RPG (*Freedom Force*) and an organized crime sim (*Mafia*). But he's still waiting for a stable PC gaming platform, game distribution where retailers care about the games they sell, and a non-Q4 focused calendar of releases.



Ten Years Ago, December 1992

OK, we don't know how to pronounce *V for Victory*: Valkiye

Laki, let alone play it, but you know what? Lots of the games in our 1992 holiday guide still have appeal: *Lemmings*, *Spear of Destiny*, *Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Seven*, *Might and Magic: Clouds of Xeen*, and *X-Wing*. Less appealing were the category headings for the gift guide, including the wine-inducing "To My Pilot with the Fanciest Maneuvers," ick.



Fifteen Years Ago, December 1987

is a riveting 1987 Game of the Year awards

showdown, somehow *Gunship* beat out two baseball games, *Merble Madness*, and a *Cinemascope* title for Action Game of the Year. We're not sure how that happened, but thankfully, our award criteria is much more sensible now: If we can't hydraulically force a box set copy of the game to pass through Scott DeLo's digestive system, it's ineligible. With age, comes wisdom. With wisdom, comes maturity.

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Videogames?

For politicians and the media, it's all Greek to them By W. James Au

Greek froggers dodged a legal bullet recently—but gamers here still need to wonder when that gun will be turned in their direction. This September, a



judge in Thessaloniki, Greece, overturned an ineptly written law that had banned all computer and videogames—but not before three gamers were arrested and hauled out of an Internet café for the crime of playing Counter-Strike. Although American gamers are presumably protected by the First Amendment, the reason the Greek law passed at all should speak concern to the gaming community.

According to Arcedios Reppas, the

founder of the Athens-based Gamerspot.gr, it started when a reporter's hidden camera caught a member of Greece's Parliament in an arcade gambling on a game console that had been illegally retrofitted into a video slot machine. After the scandal hit, Parliament stepped together a law against electronic and online gambling. In their haste, says Reppas, "They categorized all software that you use on the computer for entertainment in the same category with casino-style software."

In other words, the Greek politicians didn't know enough about computer games and videogames to realize they were banning them, too (including handhelds like Game Boys), if any of the politicians were even casual gamers, they might not have written such a flawed law. And gamers in the U.S. should be a little worried about a similar snafu happening here.

Actually, it already has: last April, U.S. District Judge Stephen N. Limbaugh, Sr., upheld a St. Louis, Missouri, law requiring parental consent to buy or play M-rated computer and videogames. The research he conducted to make this ruling was curious: he simply read the scripts to four videogames. And the kicker was that he misidentified one of those four, *Resident Evil*, as *Resident of Evil Creek*. Somehow, Limbaugh, his clerks, the St. Louis County defense team, and the plaintiff simply didn't know the proper name to one of the most popular videogames of all time.

"We have a major generation gap between those in power and those who play games," says Doug Lowenstein, president of the Interactive Digital Software Association, the game industry lobbying group which sought to dismiss the St. Louis law. (The IDSA is seeking to have Limbaugh's ruling overturned.) "Many decision makers, not just in government but in the media, are in their forties and fifties and have limited involvement with videogames."

Indeed, perhaps mainstream media coverage of the industry is at the root of the problem.

A *New York Times* article on February 30, for example, debilitated how violent and offensive *Grand Theft Auto III* is supposed to be—but then edded parenthetically, "Fans say the game offers an intricate plot." The journalist from the paper of record didn't even bother to play the game he was

"We have a major generation gap between those in power and those who play games."—Doug Lowenstein, IDSA

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VEGAS-STYLE PRODUCTS



A videogame publicist had to put out a press release to explain that you can't rape women in *GTA III*.

writing about, at least not long enough to realize that the game had an involving story and a lot of other elements to it besides carjacking and other antisocial activities. A few months later, a videogame publicist told me she was writing a press release to explain that you can't go around raping women in *GTA III*—this in response to a major civil rights group's claim that the game allowed that very thing.

Crass distortions like this are often put out by major press outlets, which are then spread to TV and radio news outlets and local papers, usually mutating even further in the process, until they end up in the hands of legislators and advocates in an almost unrecognizable form.

Fortunately, some help is on the way. The IDSA now gives regular presentations to Congress, bringing in a wide selection of games to let the lawmakers have a firsthand look. According to Lowenstein, even Senator Joe Lieberman—perhaps the harshest critic of videogames in Congress—has attended these sessions. "And we believe these

events have contributed to their getting a much broader appreciation for the industry's creativity, technology, and the diversity and range of the titles we produce."

But are there any members of Congress who actually play computer or videogames?

"We know of several who play games with their families," says Lowenstein, "but are not aware of any—yet—who regularly play games."

So maybe a real shift in attitude won't happen until the first generation who grew up on videogames—they're in their thirties now—begin taking over. But what can gamers do in the one or two decades it'll take for that to happen? At minimum, keep a vigilant eye on game-related articles in the mainstream press, and when there are glaring errors, send emails that politely point them out. Be sure when you do this to CC the editor of the offending writer, too—there's nothing worse for a professional journalist than a reputation for factual sloppiness. They'll learn to be more scrupulous about the medium next time around.

Unsurprisingly, some in the industry are weary of having to constantly correct and educate the general public, especially when the message never seems to take. "I resent the idea that we as gamers have to defend ourselves from myths and misconceptions," says Jason Bergman of Shacknews.com. "I have some very simple advice for anyone who wants to project a positive image of the hardcore gamer: don't shoot people." In any case, it's going to be a long 20 years.

EPILOGUE

After their botched law was overturned, Greek lawmakers issued new guidelines to all police stations in Greece to reassure Internet café owners and tourists. The guidelines said, "It is clarified that there is no problem with any citizen, or tourist visiting Greece, using or owning electronic or other games such as PlayStation, Game Boy, Xbox, etc."

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Violence



PREVIEW

Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf

Vengeance, in this real-time strategy, is a dish best served cold. **By Darran Gladstone**

When *Battle Realms* first came out, it brought something new to the RTS table—interactive environments and tight resource management. If those nearby trees blocking your farm are bugging you, just light 'em on fire. Then, like something out of a cartoon, push a boulder off a cliff and roll it through the neighboring village. Ah, the joys of medieval urban renewal.

Soon, like a Jar Jar-less *Episode I*, the prequel expansion pack *Winter of the Wolf* will be hitting store shelves. As you can guess from the title, this is the first RTS game to ask the question, "How the hell can you grow rice in the winter?" And with new environments come new challenges: Troops leave tracks in the snow, food's a little harder to come by, and your army's blood will stand out nicely in the freshly fallen powder.

You'll be able to square off in multiplayer matches through an improved interface or battle through the 12-mission single-player campaign. The only real surprise here is the single-player game isn't

really an RTS experience—you'll need to go into skirmish mode for that. It's more like a tactical RPG with a bang-fur-meets-Breathmaster storyline. Your mission is to escape the Lotus Clan's shale mines while finding elders and enslaved warriors along the way. For your daring escape, the Wolf clan gets bolstered with eight new archer-ready units and four elders to add to your roster. If you liked the original, check out *WO7W*. It should be on store shelves now.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrd Baker

Take a Free Ride

Feeling the need for speed? Some of the best racing games are not available in stores, but are waiting for you on the Web. These games are as realistic and fun as anything you'll find on store shelves.

HL Rally

HL Rally Team
Hrallynet



With any luck, the ambitious *HL Rally* mod that turns *Half-Life* into a racing sim will be finished by the time you read this. It's been a long time in the making, and the final version is slated to have at least four racing modes, including straight rally racing and a hot potato mode where a bomb is passed from car to car. A number of cars and tracks will come with the initial release, and editing is easy enough that a fleet of new vehicles should appear within weeks of the official release. Players can also win or earn cash to upgrade their vehicles and become more competitive.

Live for Speed

Steven Roberts, Eric
Belley, Victor van
Vierdingen
vic.pinet@net.nl/livespeed
Requires: 600MHz or
faster CPU, 3D accelerator



Every so often a freeware gem comes along that just blows away all your expectations, and *Live for Speed* is one of them. The team has put together a dazzling graphics engine that allows for high-res textures, varied track surfaces and elevations, high polygon counts, and fancy special effects like reflective lighting. Top that off with a physics and force-feedback model that makes you feel like you're really behind the wheel, and you have one incredible racing sim.

GeneRally

Hennu Rönkä,
Jukka Rehalä
kot.lmbnet.fi/genrally
Requires: 200MHz CPU,
16MB RAM, DirectX 8,
DirectX accelerator,
Windows 95 or higher



GeneRally looks like a simple top-down arcade racer, and you can play it that way, but without diligent practice you'll never win a race. This little gem is deeper than it looks, with varied track surfaces (including banked corners), several cars to choose from, and a customizable AI. The included track editor is so easy to use that even the most artistically inept people could create a playable track. Barring that, dozens of tracks are available online. Get yourself a good joystick or wheel and watch the hours melt away.

I've gotta talk Trish into this.
I mean, look at that picture.
It's so clear. Even with my eyes.
That's it! I have bad eyes!
I need this for health reasons.



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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(Square Enix)* A massive multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe and interact with thousands of other players' characters as well as established characters from the movies.



SMAT: Urban Justice *(Gaming)* Los Angeles, 2006. Gangs rule the city and crime's at an all-time high. As an elite SMAT officer, you must protect the lives of the innocent throughout 16 intense missions. There's no room for mistakes. Or mercy. What's it gonna be, rookie?



The Glascy's Splinter Cell *(Ubisoft)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWII.



Master of Orion 3 *(Paradox)* The sequel to one of the best-loved strategy games of all time. You become the controlling force behind an entire galactic civilization. Apply your political, administrative, and espionage skills to craft your civilization's glorious chapter in the Annals of Time and Space.



CounterStrike: Condition Zero *(Valve)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets *(Warner Bros)* Be Harry Potter in a new adventure with more magic, friendship and danger. Learn new spells, undertake new quests, make new friends and challenge new adversaries to confront the powers at the heart of the Chamber of Secrets.



Everquest: The Planes of Power *(Sony Online Entertainment)* You will be introduced to an arching story line through the Planes of Power, home of the gods of Norrath. Hundreds of new items, quests, and encounters will keep even the most veteran players challenged and enthralled.



Age of Mythology *(Microsoft)* Transport yourself to a time when heroes did battle with monsters of legend and the gods intervened in the affairs of mortal men. Wage war using human armies and diplomacy, enhance military and economic performance through resource gathering and trade.



The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring *(New Line)* Explore the massive environments of Middle Earth as one of the Fellowship. Solve puzzles and fight enemies like Orcs, Black Riders, and an evil Balrog in the quest to destroy the One Ring of Power.



The Sims 2 Released *(EA Games)* For the first time ever, you will give your Sims the chance to add a furry friend to the family. An expanded neighborhood with 15 additional residential lots and five community lots will give your Sims and their pets a variety of places to meet their neighbors.

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RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

WarCraft III still reigns supreme



WarCraft III—third straight month at No. 1.



Another 50,000 people took a virtual vacation in August.



The Sims—7 million copies sold and counting.

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	1	WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos (559, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
2	3	The Sims: Vacation (529, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
3	4	The Sims (541, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
4	—	Hadden NFL 2003 (533, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
5	2	Neverwinter Nights (555, Infogrames)	★★★★★
6	5	Backyard Basketball (519, Infogrames)	NR
7	7	Medal of Honor Allied Assault (545, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
8	8	The Sims: Hot Date (528, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
9	6	Grand Theft Auto III (548, Take 2)	★★★★★
10	—	Medieval: Total War (536, Activision)	★★★★★
11	11	Zoo Tycoon (527, Microsoft)	★★★★☆
12	9	The Sims: Livin' Large (526, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
13	13	RollerCoaster Tycoon (518, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
14	12	RollerCoaster Tycoon Gold (528, Infogrames)	NR
15	14	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (537, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★★
16	18	The Sims: House Party (525, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
17	15	StarCraft: Battle Chest (533, Vivendi Universal)	NR
18	—	Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (520, Microsoft)	★★★★★
19	—	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (527, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
20	—	Icewind Dale II (548, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆

August retail sales results by NPD Intellect

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES



Combat Flight Simulator 3: Battle for Europe (Microsoft)

Regular Price: \$49.99
Sale Price: **\$39.99**

Feel the adrenalin rush as you start strafing enemy positions at 390 mph, 600 feet above the European countryside.

- Features:**
- New collection of 16 aircraft
 - Custom Graphics Engine
 - Cooperative multiplayer missions and free-for-all dogfights via the internet & LAN
 - Reactive World—Areas of the campaign world will trigger events: spawn aircraft, generate flak, etc. in response to the presence of the player.



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down (Newline)

Regular Price: \$39.99
Sale Price: **\$34.99**

Experience missions similar to those encountered by U.S. Special Operations Forces during 10 months in Somalia.

- Features:**
- Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives
 - Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire
 - Fire heavy weapons mounted in Black Hawk helicopters and Humvees
 - Exclusive combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Soldiers



Earth & Beyond (EA Games)

Regular Price: \$49.99
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The first online role-playing galaxy cutthroat commerce, perilous quests, and epic wars await you and the friends you'll adventure with.

- Features:**
- Form powerful alliances and team up for group adventures to reap the benefits of cooperative exploration, trade, and combat
 - Create and command your starship
 - As this epic story of humanity's struggle to colonize the stars unfolds, the galaxy will change before your eyes.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"It's just as likely that StarCraft II will be released at the same time as Ghost." —Blizzard's Bill Roper, interview on Gamespy

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

amazon.com.

PIPELINE

Our latest educated guesses **By Rich Laporte**

Keep in mind that release dates are basically best guesses for most companies until the game gets closer to being finished. Generally, the further along the game is, the more accurate its release date, but even then anything can happen. For up-to-the-minute dates, stop by [GameGold.com](#).



1 Frog City, the development team behind the acclaimed imperialism series, is developing the sequel to Pop Top's *Beano Republic* game *Tropics*. In *Tropics 2* you'll be a pirate, maintaining your wealth by plundering merchants at sea. To add insult to injury, not only will you steal their goods, you'll bring them back to your island as captive workers. Blackboard and other famous pirates will star in the game, so it should have some personality. Look for this one in the early part of next year.



2 After Bethesda ships *Morrowind Tribunal*, the next game they'll be sending our way should be *Sea Dogs II*. This time the "at sea" portion of this pirate RPG should be more involving. You'll once again star the ship, raise and lower its sails, and handle artillery engagements, but you'll also manage the ship, her hold, armament, the crew, passengers, and prisoners. You'll also be able to head into towns, entering taverns, churches, and shipyards, as well as getting into a brawl or two.



3 Screens of the highly anticipated *Knights of the Old Republic* are finally here, and by the looks of them, we won't be disappointed. Your party in this *Star Wars* RPG can contain up to three characters and can include humans, droids, Twi'leks, Wookiees, and other yet-to-be-announced races. There will also be minigames within, such as swoop bike races or tarrot can shoot-outs. With 10 different worlds to explore, it looks like *Star Wars* fans will finally get to star in their very own episode by early 2003.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
TSDD A.G. The New World	EA	02/2003
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	11/01/02
American Coasts: COV	COV	02/2003
American Army: Attack on Iraq	Realsoft	02/2003
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	04/2002
City of Heroes	NCsoft	04/2002
Civilization III: Play the World	Infogrames	10/30/02
Combat Flight Simulator 3	Microsoft	10/25/02
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	City Line	04/2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	01/2003
Conflict: Desert Storm	SSI	04/2002
Crossbar Kings	Strategy First	11/04/02
Deadly Demos Pacific Theater	Infogrames	11/06/02
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Revelation	10/24/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	01/2003
Doom III	Activision	Unknown
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	04/2002
Driver 3	Infogrames	02/2003
Duke Hudson Forever	GOO Games	Never
Escape from Alcatraz	HP	01/2003
EverQuest: The Flames of Power	Sony	10/22/02
EverQuest II	Sony	04/2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	01/2003
Full Throttle 2	LucasArts	03/2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	01/2003
Ghost Master	Empire	11/10/02
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	10/17/02
Gothic II	JoWooD	04/2002

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Hogwarts	DreamCatcher	11/5/02
Hot	Microsoft	02/2003
Morgue 4	Ubi Soft	01/2003
Islands and Hell	COV	02/2003
Midian & Daughters 2	GOO Games	02/2003
Highland Warriors	Sata Ecker	10/02/02
Neverworld 2	Serra	03/2003
100% Coward Strike	Codemasters	11/20/02
Imperialism Galactica III	COV	01/2003
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	01/2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	01/2003
Jones Rand 007: NightFire	EA	11/20/02
Lionheart	Interplay	04/2003
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft	12/20/02
Lords of the Realm III	Serra	Unknown
Master of Orion III	Infogrames	11/20/02
Max Payne II	GOO Games	Unknown
Medal of Honor: Bloodline	EA	11/10/02
Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	01/2003
Morrowind: Tribunal	Bethesda	04/2002
Nascar Thunder 2003	EA	10/23/02
NBA Live	EA Sports	04/2002
Need for Speed: Pursuit 2	EA	10/23/02
Nicozon	COV	11/15/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Fox Interactive	10/03/02
O.A.B.	Strategy First	11/10/02
PlanetSide	Sony	01/2003
Platoon	Strategy First	11/15/02
Prenterians	Eidos	01/2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	01/2003
Project Nomads	COV	11/06/02
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	01/2003
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	01/2003
Ringside: The Revolution	Eidos	01/2003
Robin Hood: Legend of Sherwood	Strategy First	04/2002
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	10/15/02
Sans and Mex 2	LucasArts	01/2004
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	04/2002
Shadowbane	EA	01/2003
StarCity 4	Ubi Soft	11/10/02
The Sims Online	EA	11/21/02
Splitter Cell	RedStorm	11/27/02
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	11/11/02
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ridgid	01/2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	01/2003
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	01/2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Serra	01/2003
Team Fortress 2	Serra	Who knows?
Thief III	Eidos	02/2003
Tiger Woods PGA 2003	EA Sports	11/06/02
Tom Hood: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	11/20/02
Trojan 2.0	Monolith	02/2003
Tropics 2	GOO Games	01/2003
Ultima II	Infogrames	10/20/02
Vallure	COV	04/2003
Warlords IV	SSI	12/11/02
World of Warcraft	Bizzard	May 03
World War II	Codemasters	04/2002
Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania	Microsoft	10/10/02

NEW UPDATE



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TEEN
Mature Sexual
Themes

Use of Alcohol



"Earth & Beyond continues to impress with great graphics and great gameplay."


*Jeff Green, Editor-in Chief
Computer Gaming World*

TRANSMISSIONS




"Earth & Beyond should offer the hardcore sci-fi crowd the persistent-world game they've been waiting for."

*Rob Smith, Editor-in Chief
PC Gamer*



"Earth & Beyond is winging its way to the very top of the game industry..."

Matt Leyendecker, ActionTrip.com



"Earth & Beyond sets the standard for the online RPG genre."

Troy Roberts, Gamespace



Blood
Violence

The content of this game may change
due to interactive exchanges.

"...Earth & Beyond shows a lot of style and a lot of vision."

Chris Hudak
Computer Games Magazine

"Leaves the tired fantasy realms behind."

Andrew S. Bub, GameSpy

"...a much needed change to the genre."

Adam Sessler, TechTV

RECEIVED.....

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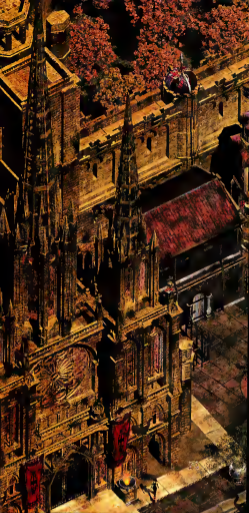
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Earth & Beyond™ is a free game you play on the Internet, allowing you to play with thousands of other users. AN INTERNET CONNECTION IS REQUIRED TO PLAY. Internet service providers usually charge a monthly fee to provide this service. ELECTRONIC ARTS CHARGES A MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR THIS ONLINE SERVICE, separate from your Internet access charges. Online gameplay subject to the Earth & Beyond Membership Agreement and Terms of Service. YOU MUST BE 19+ TO REGISTER FOR THIS GAME. EA RESERVES THE RIGHT TO TERMINATE THE ONLINE SERVICE FOR THIS PRODUCT AFTER 90 DAYS NOTICE.



The setting includes places like France, England, and Persia, where this cathedral is located.



Goblins are born dumb, but after eating brains, they absorb the intelligence of their opponent and become smart little bastards.



Magic is all skills-based; how good and cool-looking your spells are depends on how many points you poured into them.

LIONHEART

Black Isle's nuclear fantasy By Thierry Nguyen

GAME STATS

FROM: Black Isle Studios
 ROLE: Reflexive
 ENTERTAINMENT
 WWW: lionheart.blackisle.com
 RELEASE: Winter 2002

All right, so you're the RPG king of the world, but you're not allowed to really do D&D games anymore. High fantasy is now all the rage, thanks to Peter Jackson's version of *The Lord of the Rings*, so how do you fulfill the fantasy niche without falling into a D&D trap?

Developed by Reflexive Entertainment, with extensive help from Black Isle Studios, *Lionheart* melds *Fallout*'s gameplay into a revisionist fantasy setting. And while this isn't actually *Fallout 3*, it was internally codenamed "Fallout Fantasy." It's not quite the traditional Tolkien-style fantasy; it's an alternate take on Renaissance Europe, combining dragons and magic with real people and events like Saladin, the Knights Templar, and the Inquisition.

Merry Old England

The backstory of the game takes place during the Third Crusade. While Richard the Lionheart was attacking Saladin, a cataclysmic rift of magic (referred to as the Disjunction) bore into Saladin's castle, and Richard and Saladin had to team up to stop the spirits and demons from overtaking the world. (Producer Chris Parker equates the Disjunction to the nuclear war that set the stage for *Fallout*.) Gameplay begins in 1186: England has wholeheartedly embraced the magic set loose during the Crusades, but the rest of Europe remains suspicious of any magical activity. The player enters the game right when the Spanish Armada sets sail to sniff out those magic-casting



While combat is penance-real-time, you can still do things like targeted shots, special attacks like knockback, and most of the other actions available in *Fallout*.

even more special abilities. Finally, you also have the opportunity to join one of four factions: the Templars, Saladin, the Inquisition, or the Walders (people who are proficient with magic). Each faction has its own series of quests, which helps build replay value.

There's *Fallout* in my Fantasy Gameplay is more action-oriented; think of it as a melding of *LostEden* and *Fallout*. There's a whole lot of combat, but you have the option of trying to smart, or talk, your way past most things. Combat is now real-time, though you can still pause it as in

For example, instead of traditional idiot Goblins, they are actually smart and articulate; you can even try matching wits, instead of swords, with them. Don't expect to see any Orcs, though—they're so closely identified with D&D and Tolkien that the developers felt that they couldn't change them at all, and therefore, the Orcs didn't make it into the game.

Reflexive is bold in designing a fantasy RPG with no ties to the stalwart *Dungeons & Dragons* brand, but with the extensively RPG-experienced Black Isle guiding them, *Lionheart* looks like another noteworthy notch for the RPG revival.

In *Lionheart*'s setting of fantasy and medieval history, developers can tweak existing fantasy conventions.

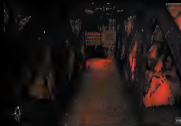
dorks in ya old England.

During character creation, players have a choice of four races: Pureblood Human, Demokle, Ferallide, or Sylvant. While Pureblood Humans are, well, just Human, the other three races dictate the type of spirit (Impish, Animal, or Elemental, respectively) that you possess, which in turn affects the type of magic you're proficient with. Like in *Fallout*, you select traits—in addition to general traits like Acrobatic, you also get traits keyed specifically to your race. The next selection is top skills (skills you emphasize, which will improve faster), and then you pick a specific spirit to further shape your magic aptitude. As you level up, you can gain perks to add

past Black Isle games. Like in *Fallout*, you have control of only one character; your character will snag NPC companions along the way, but you don't directly control them. Since the SPECIAL system is a skills-based one, even magic is skill-based; you'll need to pour skill points into different magic trees in order to unlock new spells and enhance existing ones. Thankfully, because the game doesn't use D&D rules, you won't have to identify magic items; you'll immediately know what they are and how to use them.

Because *Lionheart*'s setting is a melding of fantasy and medieval history, the developers have a chance to tweak existing fantasy conventions.





Gameplay wouldn't be stealthy if you weren't crawling around a hunch of air ducts and access hallways.



The "Bah Bam" adds some nice graphic novel flavor, but I especially appreciate the classic "Arghh" and plaintive "Nooo."



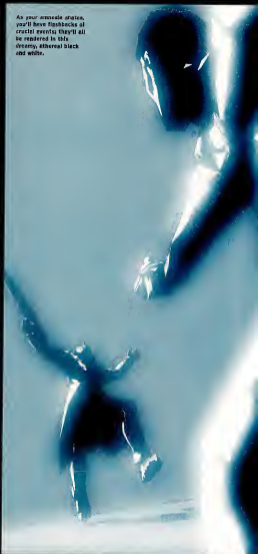
The game is full of silent but deadly weapons like this nasty-looking knife.



GAME STATS

FRONT: Ubi Soft
BEHIND: Ubi Soft
PC: www.ubi.com
RELEASE: OCT. 01 2003

As your armorle shates, you'll have flashbacks of crucial events; they'll all be rendered in this dreamy, ethereal black and white.



A French comic book comes to life in a new cel-shaded shooter By Tom Price

Don't be afraid of foreign things. Cal-shading, the 3D texturing effect seen in so many cool console games like *Jet Set Radio* and *Auto Modellista*, has been heretofore foreign to PC gamers. The comic book that this game is based on, also titled *XIII*, is French, as are the developers of this game. And as we all know, the French are extremely foreign. But that's OK, because at its heart, *XIII* is a stealth-based first-person shooter, and that's a type of game near and dear to any gamer's heart.

Secrets and Spies

Unless you're a big fan of French comic books, you probably don't know the basic story behind *XIII*. It goes like this: our hero (you) wakes up on a beach with a head wound, amnesia, a tattoo that reads "XIII," and a key to a safe-deposit box. Over the course of



Uncovering the conspiracy that lies at the heart of *XIII* will take you from mountain-top fortresses to high-security submarine pens.

why. First, the cal-shading technique, this time applied on top of the latest Unreal technology, makes everything

The developers are doing everything they can to stay true to *XIII's* comic book roots.

the game's 13 chapters (clever, ah?), you'll discover who you are, what the mysterious organization known as "The 20" is, and what all this has to do with assassinating the President of the United States of America.

XIII is a game built on stealth, a lot like *Thief* or *Metal Gear Solid*. You'll spend most of your time sneaking around, listening for enemy footsteps, and reacting lethally but silently. To facilitate this, you'll be given weapons like the crossbow (with a scope for some long-range you-know-what-ing) and the ability to grab bad guys around the neck. Once you've done that, you can choke them into submission, break their necks, or use them as human shields—hey, it's your headlock, do what you want with it! Your environment will be totally interactive as well, so you can throw objects in the room or use them as weapons. Don't think the entire game is like that though. There will also be plenty of assault rifle and rocket launcher goodness to go around.

Graphic Love

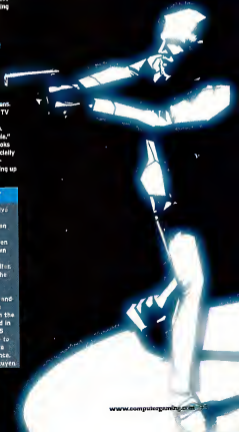
The developers at Ubi Soft France are doing everything they can to stay true to the comic book roots of *XIII*. In fact, they describe the game as an "interactive graphic novel," and based on some of the graphical touches incorporated into the game, we can see

look like it was drawn and outlined in ink. Additionally, sounds in the game are represented as words on the screen. You know, like on the old *Beavis* TV series when they would fight and "Pow!" and "Blast!" would pop up. Smart people call it "onomatopoeia." Whatever you want to call it, it looks like a whole lot of fun to us. Especially since there will be a robust multiplayer mode too. *XIII* will be lighting up your screens this winter.

COMIC HISTORY

In Europe, comics rarely involve superheroes; instead, they feature either crazed dystopian futures, surrealist capers, or modern action thrillers. Written by Jean Van Hamme and drawn by William Vance, *XIII* was a tried-and-true espionage thriller. The original series involved the assassination of President William Sheridan, who was basically modeled after JFK, and many other real-world events were given fictional tweaks in the series. Even though it started in 1994, you can still snag all 15 graphic novels; you just have to go to www.amazon.fr and have them ship it to you from France.

—TERRY NGUYEN

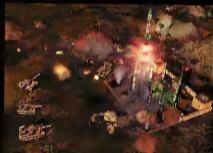




Besides the Middle East, gameplay locations also include Western Europe and mainland China.



The new 3D engine allows for destructible buildings and terrain, letting you use the map itself as a weapon.



That sucker launching is the GLA Scud storm, a superweapon that can really tip the balance of the game once it's been fired.

COMMAND & CON

C&C meets Operation Infinite Justice in EA's latest By Thierry Nguyen

Like that other big RTS franchise (the one with the Orcs), Command & Conquer is now all 3D. But rather than stick with Westwood's traditional sci-fi-style units and gameplay, Command & Conquer: Generals has a more realistic edge. A mishmash of Seeing Private Ryan, Black Hawk Down, and Operation Anaconda is the driving style of Generals.

top, and do something more realistic this time," comments Mark Skaggs, executive producer for the game.

Most of the other units are realistic extrapolations based on current research. "We basically read a lot of issues of Popular Mechanics and used those ideas as blueprints for the units," says producer Harvard Bonn. Examples of real-world extrapolation

more of any enemy infantry in the area. The EA team is working on the burden of balancing every move, from the Aurora's supersonic strike to arming an enemy mob (another Black Hawk Down-Inspired unit).

That's not counting the generals themselves and their superweapons. Each side has three different generals, each one controlling a unique super-

Like StarCraft, the three sides of Generals play differently from each other; each emphasizes unique units and tactics.

The single-player storyline starts with the Chinese repelling a Global Liberation Army offensive. The second part of the game switches to the perspective of the GLA while they regroup and target a new nation: the United States. There's no hokey full-motion video this time; every cutscene is displayed via the game engine now.

Modern War

Like StarCraft, the three sides of Generals play very differently from each other, and each of them emphasizes unique units and tactics. For example, the U.S. cares about using technology to preserve life, so many of their units are expansive automotons and vehicles, with pilots being the most valuable unit. The Chinese, on the other hand, strike a balance between firepower and manpower. They have dominant fire-based units (flame tanks and so forth), and their infantry gets a morale bonus: a large slew of infantry receives bonuses to health and damage just for being in a big group. The GLA are all about sneaky, fast attacks; their guerrilla warfare arsenal is stocked with chemical weapons, tunnels, and bomb trucks.

The units themselves are the most realistic seen in any C&C game. Sure, there are still wacky units, like the GLA's toxic tractor, which spews an arc of poison around it wherever it goes. And the Chinese overlord tank is so big that it can fit a defensive structure onto its back. "We decided to stop being so comic-book-ish and over the



This epic brawl is easy to construct, thanks to the super-easy-to-use map/general editor that will ship with the game.

include the "Delay Cutter" bomb that has been used in Afghanistan and Aurora fighter jets.

New Point Job for an Old B-52

Every unit is now upgradeable: you can add flesh-bang grenades to all U.S. Rangers or strip rockets onto GLA technicians. Units can also pull off special moves; for example, when a building is garrisoned, U.S. players can have Rangers rappel down from helicopters and clear the building instantly, popping the enemy out into the open. Or the GLA can have snipers kill U.S. pilots, letting their own soldiers jump in and pilot the now-empty vehicles. The Chinese can strip a propaganda radio tower onto an overlord tank and enhance any nearby Chinese infantry, while lowering the

weapon. The most destructive of these weapons is the Chinese nuke, but the other sides have some impressive weapons as well. One of the U.S. weapons is an upgraded version of the GDI satellite-based ion cannon; this time, you can put down specific waypoints, and the laser will follow the laid-out path. The GLA have the Scud storm, which is basically a group of five Scud missiles filled with chemical weapons; they may not be accurate, but blanketing an opponent's base with chemicals is nothing to sneeze at.

The developers are keeping new multiplayer options a secret, but from the looks of the new style of the units combined with all of the gameplay tweaks, this appears to be another solid hit for the franchise. Get ready to launch nukes this January.

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: EA
 PUBLISHER: EA Pacific
 ©: generals.ea.com
 RELEASE: January 2003

QUER: GENERALS

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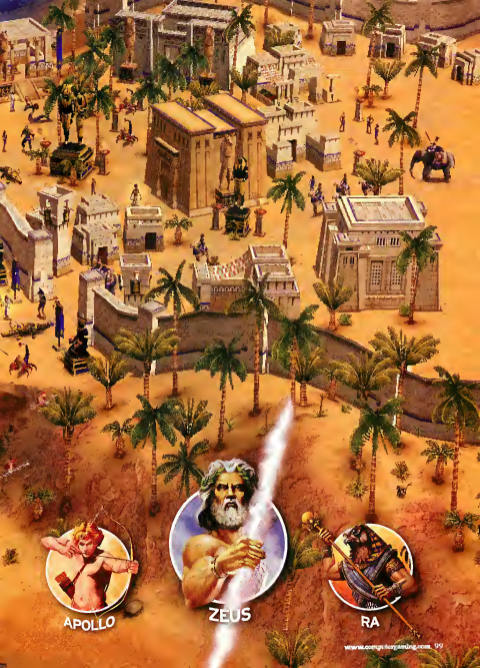
Blood
Violence

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ENSEMBLE
AND
MICROSOFT
STRIKE IT
BIG WITH
AGE OF
MYTHOLOGY

THE LAST GREAT RTS

BY GEORGE JONES



APOLLO



ZEUS



RA

ARKANTOS



JARL



KAMOS



OK, so we have our concerns. And we'll come back to those later on. First, know this: *Age of Mythology* is about as close to perfect as a modern real-time strategy game can or will ever be.

By incorporating a single-player campaign that matches the frenzied pace and excitement of the *Age of Empires* series' multiplayer contests, Ensemble, the game's Dallas-based creators for Microsoft, has finally brought its vision of the RTS to gamers who like playing by themselves against AI. By adding in a pantheon of gods, mythical creatures, and god-power miracles, Ensemble has added an extra dimension of decision making and real-world mythology that very few games tap into.

For their third time around, the developers clearly understood what gamers needed and expected out of this best-selling series: expansive, fast-paced battles that seesaw back and forth, special units, multiple paths to victory. And a story.

Here are the highlights of what makes *Age of Mythology* stand out from the previous AOE titles and other real-time strategy games:



Epic, thrilling battles define the mark of Ensemble's real-time strategy games.

IMMEDIATE IMMERSION Right off the bat, *Age of Mythology* delivers on the critical elements—fast pacing and a story. And it doesn't ever let up. The game begins by dumping you right into some fairly thick battles, sans warm-up (unless you play the mind-numbing tutorial), a clear sign that the pace will be unrelenting. And it is.

STRONG SINGLE-PLAYER Ensemble said it would be focusing on the single-player experience this time around, and the company delivered. *Age of Mythology* is driven by a story that connects all the levels together and somehow manages to explain the presence of the three different civilizations in the game. Our only gripe is that not enough of the

OF GODS AND MONSTERS

Perhaps the coolest aspect of *Age of Mythology* is the presence of special mythical units. A cut above the standard infantry and arrow-bearing troops, you'll find yourself using these units more and more—once you figure out the sometimes subtle nuances behind their power. Here are some of our faves.

COLOSSUS



The gigantic unit is powerful, slow, and can heal itself by eating bees or porrbons of gold mines. Send a few of these into a battle in the enemy camp and listen for the screams as your Colossi destroy units and resources. **Greek**

TURTLE

These armored creatures have lots of hit points and can quickly destroy enemy ships by throwing them out of the water. **Egyptian**



HYDRA

As it kills enemy units, the Hydra grows extra heads. Three heads=triple damage. **Cool Greek**



The tin dinosaurs are not real, of course, but in mythology, at the mythical dawn of the game, he is like an angel. It shows each beast, and in which it falls in water 300 times in a row.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY IS AS CLOSE TO PERFECT AS A MODERN REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME CAN GET.



The temple is a nice addition. Villagers have to pray at the temple to generate the in-game currency necessary to acquire mythical units.



The Nemean Lion can damage units with its special roaring attacks. The Colossus' war-like aura is a great thing and can be used to control the battlefield.

FENRIS WOLF BROOD

One of the coolest mythical units in the game, the Fenris Wolf is also immensely affordable for a late-stage unit. What makes it special is that the more wolves you have, the more powerful they are. A pack of 10 makes for an amazing collection of power. **Norse**

VALKYRIE



Not so tough, but can heal surrounding units. Armies should always have a few Valkyrie around. **Norse**



BATTLE BOAR

Sporting a name that sounds like a separate game, the Battle Boar is strong, tough to kill, and boasts a special attack that can send enemy units flying through the air. **Norse**



ROC

This overgrown eagle is capable of transporting 15 land units to anywhere on the map, which means that two Rocs can equal an instant attack army. **Egyptian**

You could reconstruct a neat base like this, but you probably won't.

AGE OF EMPIRES 3?

Age of Mythology is eminently enjoyable. A sublime experience. A certain best-seller. The game has such high entertainment value that anything less than a four-star review in Computer Gaming World and other gaming publications will be astonishingly low. It would be a major upset.

The entire gaming public will collectively nod in agreement. Wow, this version of Age of Empires—even if it's not named Age of Empires—is truly the best RTS yet from Ensemble. Age of Mythology will be favorably compared to Warcraft III and will hold its own. Age of Mythology will consume the competitive freaks on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone.

But it's hard to shake the thought that these days, playing an RTS—even a great one—is just not as much fun as it used to be.

THE LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE ONLY AMPLIFIES THE PROBLEM.

Experienced gamers have subconsciously known this for some time now, but with Age of Mythology we're going to have to face the hard truth. The heretofore unthinkable thought. The hard-to-believe but very real feeling that becomes more apparent with the release of such masterful real-time strategy game by Ensemble, Blizzard, or otherwise. The overwhelming notion that this whole RTS thing is starting to feel...well...a little stale.

In many ways, the level of excellence in Age of Mythology only amplifies the problem. You play through it, appreciating the grandeur and high design, but you're confused.

The truth is, gamers have been feeling this way for a while now. The very play mechanics that made the genre so intriguing—harvest, construct, train, attack—just can't evolve too much farther than they already have. After all, we've been playing the standard mission typeset up a base and destroy your enemies—for

about 10 years straight, ever since Dune II's release in 1992. The RTS is now so popular that it's becoming one of the gold mines or forests in the genre, on the verge of being mined out, detested.

Make no mistake—Age of Mythology is very capable of wowing gamers. There will be transcendent gaming moments galore here. You will still experience game lock, and you will still feel that odd combination of relief, euphoria, and tension when you defeat the Trojans with the Trojan Horse early in the game. This is a tremendous evolutionary leap for Ensemble's real-time strategy series.

But a certain something is missing. It's not gameplay. It's not visual quality, and it's definitely not fun factor—Age of Mythology has all this in spades. So what is it?

It's the feeling of experiencing something totally new. Because human nature dictates that nothing is ever fascinating for long.

Sports fans know the pattern well. By the third go-round, high-pitched enthusiasm morphs into appreciation, respect, and even loyalty, but not fanatic, cease-everything, manic excitement. Ask the Los Angeles Lakers or the last great Michael Jordan-led Bulls dynasty. Once you jump the shark, there's no turning back.

So what happens when the very nature of a genre becomes less exciting, even when the quality of games keeps improving?

These are the tough questions forward-thinking design shops such as Blizzard and Ensemble will be asking themselves, and answers are a few years away. But for now...well, for now, you play and enjoy the living daylight out of what could be one of the last great real-time strategy games.

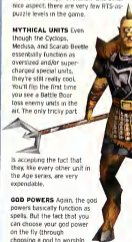
story is actually bolted into the gameplay. In the Trojan Horse mission, for example, you build the horse, but it functions just like a Wonder. Once it's completed, you immediately advance to the next level. We would have liked to have actually built the horse, placed it in front of the enemy camp, seen soldiers saw out of it, and so on...

MULTISTAGE MISSIONS In one mission, you have to rescue a fellow hero from a squadron of attackers. Once you finish this, the game jumps into a cut-scene and then seamlessly segues into the next part of the mission. Yes, it's been done in other games, but for this series, it's a major evolution. One other nice aspect, there are very few RTPuzzle levels in the game.

MYTHICAL UNITS Even though the Cyclops, Medusa, and Scarab Beetle essentially function as oversized and/or supercharged special units, they're still really cool. You'll flip the first time you see a Battle Boar toss enemy units in the air. The only tricky part

is accepting the fact that they, like every other unit in the Age series, are very expendable.

GOD POWERS Again, the god powers basically function as spells. But the fact that you can choose your god power on the fly (through choosing a god to worship when you advance an Age) makes the game more strategically reactive. And since each power is a single-shot deal, they add an extra element of decision-making tension.

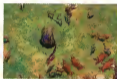




NO MORE IRON Thank heavens—the elimination of one resource makes the game simpler and more playable. Now it's just wood, food (forms exist eternally now), and gold.

RELICS Age of Mythology is filled with objects that provide widespread improvements to your civilization, army, or resource-gathering abilities. Once you find one, all you have to do is get one of your heroes to transport it to your temple and—voilà—you've got a kick-ass power-up. Examples include the Ring of Nibelung, which provides you with a steady supply of gold, and the Wadjet Eye, which allows your mythical units to train faster.

AGE ADVANCEMENT Now players can choose any of a number of ways to advance through the Ages; each method allows for different bonuses.



God powers like Lure (top, attracts animals) and Frost (freezes all enemies for one minute) add an extra layer of depth.



DIVINE DIVINITY

Age of Mythology features 36 god powers that range from short-term and combat-oriented to permanent and utilitarian. Whenever you use your town center to advance an Age, you also choose a god to worship and gain the corresponding god power. Here are our top seven:

1. PLENTY Creates an indestructible storehouse that generates 10 food, wood, and gold every five seconds. Incredibly useful, particularly late in the game. **Greek**



2. HEALING SPRING Spawns a spring that will magically heal all damaged units within range. Very useful when defending your home base or in combat situations with swift units—you can send multiple battle groups into battle consecutively, striking, then returning and healing, then striking again. **Norse**

3. DWARVEN MINE Creates a mine wherever you specify. Gives you a nice advantage early in the game. **Norse**

4. METEOR SHOWER Sure, it's a glorified C&C nuke, but its power is spectacular, and it looks really cool. When used in conjunction with Vision, which briefly reveals a portion of the map, it can create a lethal first strike. Meteor Shower followed by a large army is tough to handle. **Egyptian**

5. BOLT A single bolt of lightning destroys any unit you target, regardless of power. Hang onto this one until late in the game; you can use it to instantly hamstring your opponent's attack by targeting his most destructive unit. **Greek**



6. NIOHOGG Summons the massive mythical dragon, which is super-powerful and does splash damage. **Norse**

7. UNDERWORLD PASSAGE Creates a two-way portal between two parts of the map. More useful than you can imagine on bigger maps. **Greek**

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WARCRAFT III vs. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Which game is better? It's really too early to say, but several key differences illustrate the philosophical differences between the two titles.



UNITS Age of Mythology encourages and allows tons of units, with no upkeep penalties to artificially dollate numbers for the sake of play-balancing. The presence of special mythological units is cooler than we ever imagined, but every unit is disposable. Warcraft III emphasizes powerful units that are fewer in quantity. Upkeep—which penalizes players as they build more units—constantly reinforces this notion.

SINGLE-PLAYER VS. MULTIPLAYER The mechanics in Age of Mythology are based on the multiplayer model, which means larger quantities of expendable units and a quicker overall pace of individual levels and battles. Warcraft III's emphasis on a smaller number of units that are less expendable makes for a slower pace we find more fun in the single-player experience than online. Age of Mythology, it has to be said, is equally fun in both settings, mainly because it plays similarly in both modes.

STORY Age of Mythology has one now, which is more than could be said for the previous two Age of Empires games. Even better, it's an interesting story. While the quality in-engine cut-scenes in the game are nice, Warcraft III does a great job of tying gameplay and story together. Additionally, the comic-style design in Warcraft III is mighty refreshing. Interestingly, both stories embrace some similar themes: culture clash; dark, unknown, behind-the-scenes entities; and more.



Fig. 1 from Age of Mythology

HEROES In Age of Mythology, heroes function as super-special units, meaning they do much more frequently than in Warcraft III, and don't gain experience, items, or spells. In Blizzard's version of the RTS, heroes function more like RPG characters, leveling up and collecting magic items

and spells as they go. Conceptually, the RPG elements sound better, but the inflated value of heroes in Warcraft III makes for a more cautious approach with them.



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY'S HEROES FUNCTION AS SUPERSPECIAL UNITS.



The repeating part of Age of Mythology is its mythological bias, which means that gamers will recognize most special units.



Fig. 2: Hit-kill.



Fig. 3: Overlaid units engage.

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BEHIND THE SCENES OF

QUAKE

Id's Mesquite-roasted QuakeCon is a Texas-sized LAN party

LAN parties are easy to coordinate, right? Just slap a whole bunch of computers together in a central location, get some cable, and start gaming away. But what if you wanted to network more than 1,000 computers together? And then what if you wanted to add in some demo stations, making the show a miniature E3? And then to top it all off, what if you did all this at your own expense, making registration and admittance completely free of charge?

That's what id software goes through every year in coordinating and maintaining QuakeCon, easily the largest LAN party in the world.

"QuakeCon started when a bunch of guys said, 'Hey, let's throw a LAN party in Mesquite and see if id wants to contribute anything since it's their town,'" said Todd Hollenhead, CEO of id

software. "John [Carmack] felt sorry for these guys, who gathered here on their own and didn't quite have enough to cover the hotel, so he gave them a few bucks and took the time to speak. From then on, we took on the responsibility of putting it on."

It's quite a party, one that compels people to drive more than 20 hours from central California. Gamers cite all kinds of reasons to go, whether for a shot at the tournament prize money, a chance to play on a huge LAN, or just a look at the Doom III demo from E3.

Doom and Oblivion
Most of the organizational

of QuakeCon. Getting sponsors is often difficult, getting sponsors who will actually help with the event is even harder. Says Hollenhead, "Everyone wants to get their name on the credits, but no one wants to do the work." While Activision and AMD have remained stalwart sponsors throughout the years, this was ATI's

QuakeCon by the Numbers:

Number of registrants: Around 3,000

Average age of registrants: Late teens to mid-20s

Number of volunteers: 150

First prize in Quake III tournament: \$20,000 + trophy

First prize in Return to Castle Wolfenstein

tournament: \$25,000 (divided among 6 people) + trophy

"The guiding philosophy for QuakeCon is

nightmare takes place right after E3, but the seeds of it are planted as early as March. "First day after E3 ends, I start finalizing QuakeCon details, but March is when I usually try to line up the sponsors," says Marty Stratton, director of business development at id and general overseer

first QuakeCon. Though Nvidia had been the big technological sponsor in past years, Doom III was demonstrated on an ATI Radeon card at this year's E3, so it made sense for ATI to roll out the big bucks this time. In fact, not only did ATI give out prize money, they constructed a booth





BY THIERRY NGUYEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE JONES

complete with a lounge and free massages. In addition to heightening their brand recognition with thousands of gamers, sponsors are also able to use QuakeCon to sell current and future products. All look forwarders for their new Radeon 9700 right on the show floor.

A lot of the coordination and planning is done in the weeks before QuakeCon starts. Id works out details like arranging free parking, lining up catering for the free BBQ, and getting the immense power generator running; volunteers, meanwhile, meet online to discuss construction plans. The actual physical grunt work is done the week of the show. While the show runs from a Thursday through a Sunday, the Doom IV theater is constructed on Monday. The Bring Your Own Computer area is set up mostly on

constantly holds calls on his cell phone, troubleshooting issues ranging from demo display optimization to safe trophy storage. All the while, gamers line the halls of the hotel, waiting to register.

The biggest challenge is usually the first day, when generator overheating and network outages are most likely to occur. But with so much time beforehand spent settling up and coordinating, once the first day hurdle is over, everything, from the BBQ lunch for all attendees to the closing party, complete with bands and food, to Carmack's keynote speech, goes off without much of a hitch.

QuakeCon by the Numbers:

- Servers needed to run BYOC: 8
- Number of confirmed spots at Bring Your Own Computer (BYOC) area: 1,250
- Number of people on waiting list for BYOC: 1,700
- Miles of cable used in BYOC area: 4
- Cost of putting on QuakeCon: More than \$100,000

free for all the fans. Since each QuakeCon centers around a game, we still have Quake IV and Nerve's untitled game to talk about, so QuakeCon has a healthy future."

As long as Id continues to put this much time and effort into the enterprise, we're sure that the fans will keep on coming.

that it's a party we put on for the fans."

Tuesday and Wednesday, Wednesday evening is reserved for double-checking all the network cables and servers to ensure everything is a go for Thursday morning. All of Wednesday, volunteers scurry around plugging things in and making sure booth stay upright. Stratton

QuakeCon 2007

What lies ahead for QuakeCon?

Todd Hollenshead said, "Hopefully, we'll have Doom III done, so the focus would be turning QuakeCon into a huge launch party,





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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



Medieval: Total War

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How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches



★★★★★

OUTSTANDING
The rare gems that get it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★☆

VERY GOOD
Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆

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

★★☆☆☆

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

★☆☆☆☆

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



Siege weapons played an important role in Middle Ages warfare. Aside from ballistae, mangonels, and trebuchets, Medieval: Total War introduces the more effective cannons, culverins, and mortars for destroying enemy castles and fortresses.

Medieval: Total War

if only history class were this cool **By Raphael Liberatoro**



IGN.COM Activision
IGN.COM Creative
Assembly

IGN.COM Total War
Violence: 15+ \$29.99

IGN.COM Pentium II
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1.7GB hard disk space
0300000 0000000

Product #: 200000
EAN 030000 000000
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LAN (2-4 players)

Medieval: Total War is a digitized epic, as detailed and sweeping in scope as computer games get. As with its predecessor, *Shogun*, *Total War: Medieval* is a deft blend of empire building and real-time strategy that evokes a powerful sense of atmosphere. It's not only a great-looking game, it'll also put your strategic and battlefield skills to the test as you juggle resource management, diplomacy, politics, religion, and medieval combat. The game marches into a broad, violent part of history, from the Early Period to the High Middle Ages, spanning some 400 years. Numerous nations, expansive terrain, diverse military units, multiple diplomacy options, streamlined tech trees, and strong historical content make for a thrilling and heady gaming experience.

Blood and Glory

The strategy aspect of *Medieval* is as

straightforward as classic Avalon Hill and Milton Bradley war games. This game is all about ambition and war. In the campaign game, victory can be accomplished in one of two ways—conquer two-thirds of the map through combat or subterfuge, or gain victory through glorious achievements connected to the historical accomplishments of your faction (e.g. the Almohads must carry out a jihad to reclaim certain territories).

The biggest enhancement from *Shogun*, aside from religious aspects, rests in the diplomatic arena. Since political unrest, dynastic struggles, provincial loyalty, religious zeal, and geopolitical events play bigger roles in *Medieval*, there are more strategic agents and diplomatic options at your

disposal. Princesses can be used to gather intelligence, bribe rival armies, negotiate treaties, or even be wed to royalty of rival nations or your own generals, thus bolstering alliances or ensuring loyalty. Producing an heir is also important lest your kingdom crumble should your leader die.

Besides the turn-based campaign game, *Medieval* offers four additional single-player variants in real-time: Historical campaign, historical battle, quick battle, and custom battle. Players can experience historical campaigns ranging from the Hundred Years' War as either the English or French to Genghis Khan leading the Golden Horde. Likewise, the Historical battle mode allows players to fight three renowned

Medieval: Total War is a fantastic historical strategy game.



Medieval's enormous battles are as awe-inspiring as they are challenging.



The most obvious difference between Shogun and Medieval—castle sieges.

historical battles in suitably epic fashion: Bannockburn, the Battle of Hastings, and the Battle of Stirling Bridge. The realistic troop types and terrain features in both the historical campaign and historical battle modes provide an authentic glimpse of the past. What if Harold repels William the Conqueror's attack at Hastings? Custom battle allows players to create their own army unit dispositions, weather, and terrain. For faster access, the quick battle mode will generate the period, units, and terrain, and you're on your way.

Mastering the Art of War

Medieval's real-time combat model is as authentic and compelling as they come. During battles, factors like leader ratings, troop types, morale, valor, experience, formations, terrain, weather effects, and fatigue all come realistically into play. Creative Assembly did its homework and applied several principles of warfare to the AI, so brute force alone is usually not enough to win. Play again or move on to multiplayer for a true test of your generalship.

Like its predecessor, Medieval possesses incredible depth and replay value in both strategy and tactical



gameplay, making the Total War franchise once again a leading candidate for Strategy Game of the Year. And yet, Medieval Total War exceeds its predecessor in almost every way—there simply isn't enough room in this magazine to extol its virtues. It is a fantastic historical strategy game, so strap on your armor, sharpen your sword, and join the armies of the Middle Ages.

VERDICT ★★★★★

One of the best strategy games to grace the PC, Medieval: Total War should be a mandatory supplement in every history class.



The addition of ships plays an important role for commerce and military action. Effective mechanics can really stifle trade.



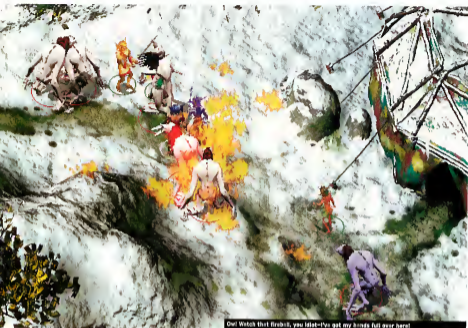
New ratings and characteristics such as influence, loyalty, greed, piety, avarice, and the quirky personality trait vices and virtues, all play a role in combined leadership scores.

DYNAMIC TURN-BASED STRATEGY

Medieval: Total War goes far beyond any competitor in offering an abundance of game choices for long-term replay value. The in-depth turn-based campaign mode, for example, allows players to rewrite history during three Middle Age periods as the ruler of any one of 12 factions; from Spain, France, and England to Egypt and Russia, each nation possesses varying strengths and weaknesses, and each period has subtle differences.

For example, in one scenario as Constantine XI, grand ruler of the once illustrious Byzantine Empire, my coffers were chronically dry from constant war, and the kingdom suffered from internal strife. As a massive German crusade marched toward Palestine, seeking and pillaging northern provinces along the way, the Egyptian sultan threatened my eastern border at Antioch. A French fleet blockaded my trade route at Malta, the Roman pope attempted an assassination of my highest-ranking general, and famine plagued the people of my northeast regions.

Restoring order took more than muscle. I dispatched the Katakastroi Cavalry, fresh from battle and high on the success of defending Nicea from Italian aggressors, to Constantinople, stopping the German crusaders from entering the heart of my kingdom. It was a nice victory, but marrying my youngest daughter, Princess Matanthis, to the Turkish Emir while ordering the construction of improved ferries and trading posts to counter the famine was just as critical to my success. As dizzying as all this action was, I could have easily opted for a more diplomatic approach or tried to recruit more allies. The bottom line is Medieval is so huge that the possibilities are practically limitless.



Oh! Watch that fireball, you idiot—I've got my hands full over here!

Icewind Dale II

This time the Third Edition's a charm **By Jeannie Kim Trais**



FRS,061 Interplay
FRS,061 Black Isle
Studios (SR) Role
playing game (R)
Icewind2.BlackIsle.com
1311188K: 766c: 8100d,
voice: 101: \$49.99

REQUIREMENTS
Pentium III 300,
128MB RAM, 1.5GB
hard drive space
EDUCATION: 950000000
Pentium III 300,
128MB RAM, 1.5GB
3DPI: LAN, Internet
(2-8 players)

Dropped off in Targos, surrounded by armies of goblins, orcs, and bugbears—what's a Dreadmaster of Bane to do? How about putting together a ragtag band of adventurers? Every shadowy corner in *Icewind Dale II* harbors one intense, challenging, and difficult battle after another, as well as a steady stream of juicy plot bits to keep the unwitting on their toes. From the looks of it, knowing the ins, outs, and in/outside colors of everyone lagging along is going to be crucial.

3E Rules and JWD II: A Love Story
Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition has a mixed track record when it comes to being adapted. Thankfully, *IWD II* has the

Third Edition rules down, and in no other place in the game is it more apparent than with character development. With the addition of skills and levels, every aspect, from roleplay potential to combat, improves as characters gain new levels of specialization and expertise. No more unuse penalties for wanting to create characters that are dual- or multi-class. Now everyone can jump on the multi-class bandwagon at every level, and races (except humans and half-elves) now have favored classes. *IWD II* also presents new classes (monks, sorcerers, and barbarians) and new races (half-orcs, drow, and gold dwarves) that provide viable, well-balanced, and distinctly attractive options for players. By staying true to the Third Edition rules, *IWD II* successfully

streamlines the old way of doing things, resulting in less maintenance, more game playing, and mucho delicious bloodletting. And boy, is it sweet, albeit as hard as an ice Golem champion with a weakness for Auril's priestesses.

As the gold rolls in, you'll want to visit weapons dealers pronto and snag whatever magical items they have in stock. It's not like *IWD II* throws one or two familiar monsters at you at a time—expect a host of cuss-inducing enemies, yet to be seen in full affect by any D&D player. In fact, until at least about Level 5 or 6 when the player is at a turning point in his experience, the difficulty doesn't let up a bit. But make no mistake, players will love *IWD II* for its intensity and will be duly rewarded.

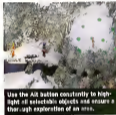
Every shadowy corner in *Icewind Dale II* harbors one intense, challenging, and difficult battle after another.



All right now, kids. Didn't anyone ever tell you showing off to bad manners? Now go outside and play nice.



No longer do druid spells pale in comparison to cleric or wizard spells. Check out nature's fury as Smashing Wave crushes these pathetic yells.



Use the Alt button constantly to highlight all selectable objects and ensure a thorough exploration of an area.



This just got considerably more scary when you're out of place. The only thing to this, well, now just appear to be finished.

Beautifully painted backgrounds never get old...just creepier. Yikes.

To Improve or Not To Improve? Remember the good ol' days of rolling the perfect stats for not one, not two, but six characters for hours on end? Gone. Thanks to *IWD II*'s point distribution system, it's possible to begin the Prologue the same day you click on "New Party." Other immediate improvements include the less intrusive and more customizable interface.

Characters now have four weapon slots, allowing you to switch weapons on the fly. Action buttons for special abilities like foals also are customizable and can be placed on the quick bar for easy access—a big bonus since Third Edition rules allow characters to perform a much wider variety of abilities. Instead of separate buttons for accessing priest or mage spell books, one button now

goes to a branching spell book interface that lists all available spells. Voila! More maintenance, fewer steps.

Speaking of steps, one thing that's still hurting in *IWD II* is pathfinding. Although the level designers broadened wellways and created alternate paths, baby-sitting party movement is still necessary, especially in more labyrinthine levels. And baby-sit one must, because monsters are definitely more vigilant this time.

Yes, the monster AI in *IWD II* has improved quite a bit. Now monsters will heal themselves, run away for reinforcements, and pay better attention to the action in their surroundings. But the AI could use a bit more polish. Monsters love to close in on one target (usually the first character they see) and then run after and attack only that character. Although cool conceptually, in practice these bad guys with tunnel vision won't even pause to smack a weakling wizard firing ~2 bolts at them from the side. Fortunately, this is more a question of polish than problem. Since 90 percent of combat in *IWD II* isn't so bare bones, it's something to note, but not to fret over.

Sound effects, music, and voiceovers are all excellent and are critical to prosecuting *IWD II*'s immediately engrossing story and light, humorous dialogue. Visually, of course, it's one of the few games that's still created in 2D land, but it consistently offers the same striking and imaginative environments that establish the tone and immersive charm of the game. The newly designed interface and the ability to run the game at 800x600 or higher helps show off *IWD II*'s visual goods. Multiplayer, which has always taken a back seat to single-player, is still available, but it hasn't shown any marked improvement from the first game.

Despite the high-profile hoopla over *Dungeon Siege* and *Neverwinter Nights*, *IWD II* earns the right to sit in the top ranks of RPG games. When hack comes to slash, its imperfections are dwarfed by the level of gameplay it offers. The only thing really holding it back is that time is running out for titles in this 2D vein, but quality is still quality, so stop walling. Go out and have a hell of a good time. Now.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Icewind Dale II is as good as any of the more beloved RPGs released this year.



Arabian Nights

No magic carpet ride **By Dana Tjengvord**

PC \$50 DreamCatcher
WORLD Windows
TYPE Action-adventure
URL www.dreamcatchergames.com
ESRB Teen
SUGGESTED THEMES
Violence PG, \$14.99

CONTROLS Puckin' B
233, 64MB RAM
40000KB hard drive
40000KB CD
80000KB Save
REQUIRES SPEAKERS

Arabian Nights the literary work offered hundreds of stories of the battle between love and evil. DreamCatcher tries to capitalize on this spirit in their game of the same name. The Sutter's quintuplet daughters have been kidnapped on the eve of their twentieth birthday. If they are not found and married off before their birthday is over they will be cast out of the palace and become women of the street. You, playing as Ali, must slash your way through seven levels, fighting against the evil minions of the Grand Vizier and rescuing the princesses from his clutches so you can marry them and save them from lives of shame.

This game was originally online only,



Ali frolics in the forbidden garden of the Sultan.

This isn't a good game for fans of action or adventure.

with each level available for pay-and-play. As such, each stage can be played on its own with no repercussions except the disrupted storyline. While this is nice if you get stuck on a particular level, it also means that there is no skill development in the game—later stages just mean more enemies with higher endurance.

Sadly, this isn't a good game for fans of action or adventure. Ali doesn't have any combat skills, and he seems to do equally well with or without his sword. Fighting boils down to whacking away at the Colonel say until you're able to kill the

villain; this technique worked just as well in Level 7 as it did in Level 1. And enemies, while they come in many guises, don't have a wide range of combat skills either. For adventure fans, the puzzles are few and simplistic (e.g., match up some Arabian-looking patterns, don't drink from the wrong-colored fountain), and the fighting is a nuisance.

Graphics are pretty low-res, and the voice acting and dialogue are laughable. Sound effects are okay, and the levels provide a good variety of settings, ranging from dungeons and graveyards to castles and gardens. Ultimately,



Maybe if I drink from the fountain in the corner, this poison will kill me.

however, Arabian Nights boils down to a tedious combination of elementary puzzles and primitive fighting.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

The first time 19-year-old dinosaur-clad quintuplets have been a bad thing.

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Arthur's Knights II: The Secret of Merlin

An adventure game with little adventure By Arcadian Del Sol

PRICE: GreenCatcher
RATED: GreenCatcher
TYPE: Adventure
OS: www
.greencatchergames
.com OS: Win9x, Mac
Violence: Nil, 9/10/99

CONTENT: Pevliss II
300, 64MB RAM,
320MB hard disk
space: 320MB/320
320MB/320/320
WINDOWS CONTROL: None

Fans of adventure games have regularly written this magazine to protest our frequent assessment of the adventure genre as dead. "It isn't dead," they cry, "DreamCatcher just released three more adventures!" Okay, we give—no, the adventure genre is technically not dead. But this kind of argument carries about as much weight as "Nightclub acts aren't dead! Tony Danza has an act now and he emotes, sings, and tap dances!" Consider Arthur's Knights II: The Secret of Merlin the Tony Danza of adventure games; it can do a passable softshoe to "Mr. Bojangles," but it's probably not worth the \$20 cover charge.

Arthur's Knights II is a visual treat whose graphics and cut-scenes are occasionally stunning, from the opening montage to the final frames, the artwork strives to recreate the age of chivalry and mysticism, and the voice acting, though suffering at times from amateur quality post-production, is top-notch. "Americanized" British accents are surprisingly painless, and even the adult-pretending-to-be-small-child voice is refreshingly wince-free. Unfortunately, all of this is wrapped around nothing more than a lethargic scavenger hunt pretending to be an adventure game.



With all the FedEx quests in the game, you'll see a lot of yourself on a horse heading somewhere to fetch something.

This genre, almost by definition, will require a certain number of "go here, fetch that" assignments. No matter the setting, the denizens of adventure games all seem to suffer from short-term memory loss. They spend so much time misplacing some of their world's most important items, it's no wonder they haven't the time to spend looking for them. In most cases, mixed in among the scavenger missions are a number of mind-bending riddles and doors sealed with locks whose level of

intricacy would stump Rube Goldberg on a good day.

Arthur's Knights II: The Secret of Merlin does offer a few diversionary noddies, but they rest only as temporary distractions from finding yet another missing object. So despite the game's tragically short length, it still manages to capture that "just a little bit too long" feeling by the time you've crisscrossed the map for yet another misplaced bauble.

Adventure games are written and designed to test one's creativity, but this entrant displays very little of its own-kind of five Who's the Boss?

Adventure games are written and designed to test one's creativity, but this entrant displays very little of its own.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

An enthralling interactive short story, nothing more, nothing less.

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- 40' Boxcar
- 50' Boxcar
- 50' Gondola
- 50' Covered Hopper Same Tank Car
- 50' Bay Window Caboose
- Flatcar w/ Coalhopper
- Soap/15 - Single Flatcar

- Go - Covered Van
- Go - Covered Van
- Pass - Single Wagon
- Pass - Single Open Wagon
- Oil - Tank Car
- Oil - Single Covered Wagon



Visit www.osrb.org or call 1-800-771-2072 for Rating Information

Mafia

Grand Theft Jolopy By Tom Price

PC Gathering of Developers
WII The Italian Job
PS3 The Italian Job
OS Action III
www.mafia-games.com
CRITIC Metacritic Score
violence
RET \$49.95

ESRBES: Mature III
SD, 96MB RAM,
1GB hard drive space
SCREEN 1280x800
Peripherals 4 USB,
256MB RAM
WARRANTY 1 Year

The line between games and movies and their relative abilities to artfully tell a complex story that involves participants or viewers emotionally is becoming more and more blurred. Mafia is the latest piece of interactive entertainment to achieve the level of art that a good movie is capable of. Unfortunately, it succeeds more at that than it does at being a fun or engaging game.

Mafia tells the story of Tommy Angelo, a taxi driver in the city of Lost Heaven who gets caught up with big-time mafioso Don Salieri in the early 1930s. Tommy tells most of the story in flashback from 1938 as he rakes out the family to a police detective. The narrative style is very cinematic and comes across well thanks to solid writing. And the writers put some mature thought into the moral choices that would have to be made by someone in Tommy's position.

Even though the two games are fundamentally different, it's difficult to

What Mafia does have going for it is style, and it has that in spades.

avoid comparing Mafia with *Grand Theft Auto III*. Both games involve you taking on the role of an underworld thug who is being given assignments by mob kingpins; both have you driving around a large, open city and occasionally getting out of the car to give someone a beatdown.

From there, the similarities come to a halt. For one, the games' structures are different. Where *GTA III* is completely open-ended, Mafia follows a more traditional design of static missions interspersed with cut-scenes. I'm not making a judgment call on the relative merits of those two different gameplay designs; linear missions can be fine, as long as they are consistently entertaining. Unfortunately, Mafia's are not. The game's first mission has you careening through the streets in your cab as your fares return fire at the rival gangsters chasing them, which is pretty exciting. But the very next mission has you acting as a cabby, driving passengers in your taxi from one part of town to the next. It's not until four or five missions into the game that you even get to shoot anything. The pacing seems a little off in this game, and to compound



Indoor environments are rendered quite nicely, but the third-person camera can play some funky tricks.



Car physics are surprisingly realistic in Mafia, but the best part, of course, is being able to shoot out the windows.

the issue, there's no in-mission save.

What Mafia does have going for it is style, and it has that in spades. The entire look and feel of the game is spot-on for the 1930s (not that I'm old enough to speak from personal experience—I'll have to ask Jeff Green). The cars, while not representations of actual makes and models, look great and handle as they should. The scenery, the clothes, and especially the music (which is chock-full of depression-era jazz classics from Louis Prima, Louis Jordan, and Django Reinhardt) help to create a mood and feel that evoke classic movies about the

era like *Goodfellas* or *Once Upon a Time in America*.

The experience of playing Mafia is a good one, but this reviewer felt like it could have been better. Throw in a save-anywhere feature, utilize more of the city and countryside for the missions, and get rid of the slow parts and you'd have a certified classic. Instead, what you've got is an offer that's quite able to be refused.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Big on flavor, but leaves me hungry at the end of the meal.

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The Sims: Unleashed

The Sims goes to the dogs By Elizabeth McAdams



PUBLISHED BY EA GAMES

DEVELOPER Maxis

TYPE Life simulation

URL www.the Sims.com

ESRB RATING Teen

EDUCATIONAL, mature content

THEMES, mild violence

PRICE \$29.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III

350, 128MB RAM

1.3GB hard drive space

RECOMMENDED PENTIUM III

Pentium III

256MB RAM

RECOMMENDED HARDWARE

You've taken your Sims on dates, out shopping, and on vacation—now with *The Sims: Unleashed*, you can discover the highs and lows of owning pets. This fifth expansion pack in the successful Sims franchise features plenty of new social interactions to hook you for at least another million hours. And if any of your Sims are unemployed (like half the people I know), there are five new glamorous career paths to tempt them into the working life, ranging from high fashion to culinary expertise.

In *Unleashed*, you can adopt a new member into the family by visiting a pet adoption center. There are plenty of animals to choose from, too: birds, turtles, reptiles, and fish are just some of the living, breathing trophies your Sims can display in their homes. However, most of the new pet-related gameplay is focused on the more high-maintenance task of adopting a kitten or a puppy; there are several varieties of each, such as an all-black cat or a cute little yellow Labrador. Cats and dogs



All sorts of animals and pet toys are available for purchase at the local pet store.

The variety and sheer size of the expanded neighborhood make the lots in *Hot Date* seem puny.

become full members of the family and receive their own character icon on the status bar. Their needs are not quite as complex as those of your Sims, but they do determine other objectives of the game, and they will definitely play a factor if your pet enters a pet show. Trainers are available for hire if your pet requires a little extra discipline.

Perhaps the most exciting addition to

Unleashed is the expanded neighborhood, which features community lots. By hanging out in these areas, your Sims have even more options to socialize with the neighbors, grab a latte, or check out the local farmers' market. The variety and sheer size of the expanded neighborhood make the lots in *Hot Date* seem puny. As in the previous expansions, you access the community lots by calling from home, and a shuttle service arrives to transport the entire family. That's right, the entire family must be available in order to access the community lots, and it can be bit of a burden to properly coordinate all of their schedules.

But furry little animals aren't the only thing you'll be tending to. The producers at Maxis have also added a gardening component to *Unleashed*. Now your Sims can purchase seeds and grow a variety of veggies in the comfort of their very own backyard. These crops can be sold for a profit or stored in a pantry to be used for tomorrow night's dinner. To be honest, the gardening aspect was lost on me, but hey, it beats playing with those crappy VR glasses again. New hobbies are a good thing.

Unleashed is an invaluable addition to *The Sims* family and provides a ton of



All the new public spaces are a great way for Sims and SimPets to interact.

new distractions for all Sims froaks everywhere. Fans will appreciate the innovative dynamics and interactions that *Unleashed* brings to the original. Take the adorable pets and couple them with all of the new skins, objects, jobs, and places, and it practically feels like a brand-new game. Yet another something worthy to tide us over until *The Sims Online* goes live.

VERDICT ★★★★★

By impacting the micro and macro of Sims life, *Unleashed* isn't just a great addition, it's essential.



Sims with green thumbs are going to love all the new gardening behaviors and items.



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GAME PATCHES



Revisionist History

Battle Realms, Warcraft III, Morrowind

By Thomas L. McDonald

Battle Realms is one of those low-it or hate-it games. Be that as it may, Battle Realms found many devotees who probably know something I don't. Three Battle Packs have been issued since its release, leading up to a new add-on package called Winter of Wolf (read more about this on page B2). These Battle Packs are simply patches with a couple of maps thrown in, and can be downloaded either one at a time or in a complete update package.

The smallest release is Battle Pack 1, which fixes a few crash bugs and a copy protection error. A Delete button now appears on the Save Game screen, and three new multiplayer/skirmish maps are tossed in for good measure. Battle Pack 2 includes a much longer list of tweaks and fixes, some of which actually improve a game a bit. New commands are added that allow you to select all idle peasants, all combat units, or all units of a certain type. Some pretty important fixes made this patch, correcting errors such as horses that become inappropriately killed and/or invisible and xan arrows that stayed around forever. A few units and weapons are better balanced, and three new multiplayer/skirmish maps get checked in just because. The big addition, however, is a new map editor.

Finally, Battle Pack 3 washed ashore with a hostleed of major changes and fixes clinging to its soggy back. One of the biggest is that most units get their hit points doubled to drag-out-or-lengthen battles, which is a curiously huge change at this late date. All missile damage and building-hit point values are increased by 25 percent, while fire values are reduced by 25 percent. Several dozen other value modifications are implemented across the

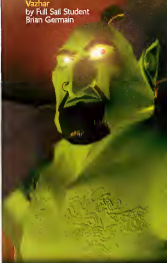
board to compensate for the increased hit points. There weren't a lot of fixes in this pack, but the major changes to core game values will no doubt require some in the future.

Critique—even after taking several years to develop Warcraft III, Blizzard still found a host of game balancing issues to address in version 1.01b. The cooldown level for several Creep spells is now higher, and goblin sappers may no longer ride in goblin zeppelins. Orc shamans get a reduced Bloodlust mana attack and lower hit points for their catapult. Human mortar teams and Undead meat wagons also have lower hit points now. The most changes by far were meted out to the Night Elves, with a hit point reduction for their ballista, more powerful moon walls, an increased mana burn range for the demon hunter, and other refinements.

A few major changes and countlacs fixes are added to Morrowind in the latest series of patches. The hippest news of all is an autonrun option, since travel in the game is terminally slow. Activated by pressing O once, the feature causes you to run forward until disengaged, imperial altars and temple shrines now restore damaged skills as well as attributes. There's a new NPC health bar that appears during combat, so you know how much damage an NPC has taken.

Thanks to a new difficulty slider in the Preferences menu, gamers are able to either increase or decrease the amount of damage dealt and received. Far too many general bug fixes and specific quest fixes have been added to detail them all here, but you can pretty much assume that this is a mandatory patch.

Vazhar
by Full Sail Student
Brian Germain



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Rousing imps and giant spiders never gets old—graphics like this, on the other hand, get old. Fast.

Divine Divinity

The ultimate *Ultima* By Charles Aedai

RETAILER: CDV Software
 Entertainment AG
 DEVELOPER: Larian Studios
 GENRE: Role-playing
 game
 URL: www.divinedivinity.com
 ESRB: Sues, violence
 MSRP: \$39.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III,
 450, 128MB RAM,
 2.5GB hard drive
 space (20MB HD)
 OPERATING SYSTEM: Pentium III,
 256MB RAM
 MODIFIED SUPPORT: None

There was a time, not that many years ago, when computer fantasy games were more about exploration than about combat. If what you wanted was to slaughter swarms of orcs and demons, you went down to the local pizzeria and dropped some quarters in their Gauntlet machine. When you sat down at your PC, it was to play games like *Ultima*, which certainly had their share of combat, but at their best were mostly about mapping unknown lands, discovering what the inhabitants were up to, intervening in crises, solving problems, and playing a role in great events as they unfolded. You were playing a role—hence the term “role-playing game.”

With the advent of *Diablo*, though, PC role-playing games started looking more like *Gauntlet* and less like *Ultima*, with less emphasis on telling a good story than on simply clicking your left mouse button like a hyperactive telegraph operator. The

pure adrenaline rush of swinging a broadsword and making heads roll (or casting a spell and watching them fry) took the place of the careful attention to story and character that made games like *Ultima IV* and *Ultima VI* legendary.

Flexible Flexibility

I'm not saying that one type of game is bad and the other good—but one is plentiful today, the other scarce. *Divine Divinity* represents a somewhat quixotic bid to even the scales a bit. Designer Soren Veenke has put together an old-fashioned role-playing adventure in the vintage *Ultima* style, and it's every bit as good as the classics it models (see "After To Be Sure, the game features plenty of *Diablo*-style fighting for the telegraph operators among us, but there are lots of other interesting things to do as well, and many different ways to do them. When gaining access to a castle requires heroism on your part, for example, there



Need a side quest to boost your experience? Just talk to an NPC.

are three distinct ways you can demonstrate this attribute, and each path offers a subplot of its own. There are also dozens of side quests unrelated to the main story, which you can pursue as you see fit. And your conduct in each of these has a real impact on how other characters perceive you: a reputation for honorable behavior will precede you into new towns, while poor conduct will get you the cold shoulder, or worse.

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If *Divine Divinity* had come out for Christmas 1992, we'd have raved about it unreservedly.



There are other choices, too. You can confine yourself to using objects you find, or you can make your own, brewing up potions, for instance, out of wild herbs and mushrooms. Similarly, you can confine yourself to the 32 skills native to your character class (fighter, magic user, or thief), or you can choose freely from the 64 skills officially allocated to the other two classes. There is enormous flexibility, and the choices you make really have an impact on how your character develops and how the story progresses.

Shortfalls Shortfalls

That's the good news. The bad news is that while *Divine Divinity* may be as good as the classic games it emulates, it isn't any better. It has something of a musty air to it, as if it were an old game itself, unearthed at a yard sale or on eBay. A gamer accustomed to the rotating, zoomable 3D worlds of *Dungeon Siege* and *Neverwinter Nights* will be disappointed by the flat, static, and frankly unattractive isometric 2D graphics on display here. Even *Diablo* did better, and not because of a technological advantage—Blizzard's artists and

animators were simply more talented.

And it's not just the graphics that remind me of an earlier era. It's also the lack of a multiplayer option, the lack of multicharacter parties, and the lack of a decent pathfinding algorithm (your character keeps walking to spots you don't mean for him to visit, and the creatures you summon tend to wander off entirely). It's the way the game's text is peppered with typos, it's the clumsy installation process, with its overlapping windows and disappearing cursor.

When you say that a game reminds you of the old days, it's a compliment if you're talking about elements like storytelling and character development; if you're talking about gameplay, graphics, or robustness of code, it's a fairly serious condemnation. *Divine Divinity* reminds me of the old days. If it had come out for Christmas 1992, we'd all have raved about it unreservedly. Ten years later, well, there's still some raving to be done, but with reservations. The visuals are frankly crummy, the gameplay is at times awkward, and the writers don't seem to know what an apostrophe is. On the other hand, the role-playing



elements of the game are fantastic. Is that sufficient? For me, yes—and I don't think I'm the only gamer who will share enough of Vincke's nostalgia to find it in their hearts to forgive *Divine*. But if you're not prone to nostalgia, steer clear.

VERDICT ★★★★★

An old-fashioned RPG in the best sense—but, alas, also the worst.

R.I.P.

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Blood
Violence



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Chessmaster 9000

The king of chess games By Rob Smolka

PCB02 UM Soft
 B0402 UM Soft
 ©1998 Strategyfirst
 www.chessmaster.com
 GRADE: Everyone
 MSRP: \$39.99

SYSTEMS: Pentium II
 4SD, 64MB RAM,
 300MB hard drive space
 RECOMMENDED:
 Pentium 16 GB,
 256MB RAM, 1.2GB
 hard drive space
 MULTIMEDIA: Internet
 (2 players)

If you're like me (and 99.99 percent of the rest of population), it really doesn't matter if the chess game you own could make Boris Spassky break into a cold sweat—what you want is a program that will improve your understanding of strategies and offer a challenging opponent who won't overwhelm you. This is both Chessmaster 9000's biggest strength and greatest failure.

As a learning device, Chessmaster 9000 is unsurpassed in explaining the basics to beginners and helping intermediate players improve—courtesy of a fantastic array of features. Two new devices—Follow the Game and Memorize the Position—will advance your game by stressing the importance of paying close attention to every move and detail of the game board. My favorite addition is the endgame quiz: this multiple-choice drill gave me a better understanding of how to finish off my opponent (always a weak point in my game). And while it's



Some of the 3D sets are charming and cute, but they prove distracting during games, especially for those with less powerful computers.

I consider myself at least a competent player, but even on the lower difficulty levels I felt overmatched.

only available in practice games, the Blunder Alert feature is a godsend, warning you when you make that bone-headed move that destroys an otherwise well-played game.

As with prior Chessmaster titles, the database is crammed full of annotated games. A new addition is a piece called "The Psychology of Competition." This multimedia presentation is narrated by Josh Waitzkin (whose story is told in the

film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*) and is both entertaining and instructive, as it covers the finer points of positioning and tactics, using 20 different games as examples.

If aesthetics are important, the game now lets you use completely 3D boards and pieces, though most prove annoying to play with because of difficulties in grabbing pieces. You'll probably default to the standard 2D set for its practical qualities and the fact that the 3D options aren't all that visually impressive. Sounds are limited and workmanlike, but customization is an option.



The database has thousands of past matches to analyze, such as this classic Spassky/Fischer meeting from the World Chess Championships.

Amazingly, the last few versions of Chessmaster haven't had a built-in online component, but that's changed with 9000. Now you can go directly to Ubi Soft's site and get a game going...in theory. The number of opponents available is pretty meager—especially when compared to Yahoo or other free gaming sites—and finding an equally matched adversary is pretty difficult.

What really hurts Chessmaster 9000, though, is its vicious AI. I consider myself at least a competent player, but even on the lower difficulty levels, I felt overmatched. Some work needs to be done in getting the computer to act more like a human with average ability who will occasionally make a mistake. With today's powerful PCs, it only takes a millisecond for the computer to assess nearly every possibility, so merely reducing the time taken to analyze a move isn't good enough anymore.

All in all, though, you won't find a better program for increasing your knowledge and appreciation of the ancient and amazing game of chess. Chessmaster 9000 is filled with the resources you need to improve your performance against other players but falls a bit short as a complete package because of its unforgiving AI.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A powerful learning tool for sure, but the AI's lack of subtlety is geared more toward the already-accomplished player.



The Blunder Alert is just one of many new features that will help improve your overall game.

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ESRB RATING
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The Mystery of the Nautilus

Like scuba diving in a septic tank. **By Robert Coffey**

03/01/05 **DreamCatcher**
 03/01/05 **9 out**
 10/02 **Adventure**
 at www.dreamcatcher.com
 03/01/05 **Everyone**
 03/01/05 **Violence**
 MSRP: **\$19.99**

03/01/05 **Paradise II**
 35G, 32MB RAM,
 305MS hard drive,
 48KB CD-ROM/DVD
 03/01/05 **None**
 03/01/05 **None**

The *Mystery of the Nautilus* embraces every single adventure-gaming cliché without the subtlety of an ananias, squeezing the life out of it before swallowing it whole, crapping it out, sticking it in a box, and collecting your \$20.

In the unforgettably stupefied setup that passes for plot in this aberration, you and a team of scientists make the discovery of the century when you find the astonishingly non-fictional Captain Nemo's legendary Nautilus deep undersea. Of course, the other scientists decide not to investigate the sub, and after you run away to investigate it alone, they try to blow you and it up. This makes as much sense as SETI fiddling and burying E.T. alive, but it makes more sense than the evil steam-powered computer you must battle onboard the Nautilus. There is no doubt in my mind that the original script for this game was written in crayon on wide-ruled paper.

The marvel of *The Mystery of the Nautilus* is how ruthlessly and efficiently it bludgeons every other aspect of gameplay to death. The water in a jumpie rest stop toilet is clearer (and prettier) than the blurry smear that passes for graphics in this mess. The game is an endless, torturous pixel hunt, with art so incredibly dark and tremendously indistinct that the strain on your eyes literally makes it painful to play. I jacked the brightness up on my monitor to the point that I could tan by email, and I still had to mouseover virtually every black inventory box so I could read the help text, determine if I had anything in that box, and figure out just what the hell it was. Incredibly, the visual strain gets worse when the



Straight from the inside cover of my sixth grade math book—an illustration that has nothing to do with anything that happens in the game.

submarine floods and you're forced to view a sizable chunk of the game through a dark blue filter and a distorted diving helmet.

Of course, the interface does its best to thwart you. There's a single magic pixel in the upper left quadrant of the circular cursor that must brush against an interactive pixel in just the right way to trigger any kind of interaction. Putting the cursor directly over, to the left, on top of, or underneath an object does nothing. Dealing with this handicap during one of the game's ludicrous and lethal timed action sequences guarantees that you'll loathe it even more. In terms of things to do and infuriatingly illogical puzzles to solve, this is a short game. But everything about it prolongs your agony, right down to a soundtrack that sounds like infernal leftovers from a Bernaby Jones episode.

What does *The Mystery of the Nautilus* get right? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Like a hot coffee enemy, but with less giddy fun.

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Sudden Strike II

The spirit—if not the reality—of WWII By Thomas L. McDonald

FRS02.CD.V

2001/01 Fireglow

32X Real-time strategy

PC www.suddenstrike2

© 2001/01: The

violence: PG-13

REQUIREMENTS

333, 64MB RAM,

400MB hard drive,

Space 1000000

REQUIREMENTS

450, 128MB RAM

REQUIREMENTS

LAN (2-12 players)

When creating a real-time strategy game based upon dozens of little guys running around, it's usually pretty helpful to a) make the guys big enough to see without having to press your nose to the screen, and b) make various units look different enough that you can tell them apart. German developer Fireglow can be somewhat excused for failing to do this once, in the original *Sudden Strike*, but doing it in the sequel, particularly after critics and fans singled out this aspect of the original game for the harshest criticism, makes it seem like they're just not paying attention.

Those critical flaws aside, *Sudden Strike II* could actually be a fairly decent game. Oh, it has its share of other problems, foremost among them a limited control scheme and AI routines seemingly written by someone banging their head on the keyboard in random patterns. But it has some lofty intentions and surprisingly deep unit design for an RTS. It's a



Air support is a major factor in the game, revealing important map info and laying down heavy fire, with suitably impressive pyrotechnics.

Sudden Strike II tries to mix elements of the hardcore *Close Combat* series with more lightweight RTS fare.

frustrating experience, no question about it, but one not without rewards.

The gameplay of *Sudden Strike II* tries to mix elements of the hardcore *Close Combat* series with more lightweight RTS fare. The setting is World War II, with units from (and playable campaigns for) Germany, America, Great Britain, Russia, and Japan. Fireglow has pitched all building and resource management, beginning each mission with a fixed roster of units and introducing reinforcements

at key trigger points. Unit modeling is more complex than in the original, edging the game closer to wargame territory. On higher difficulty levels, the damage model attempts a rough approximation of realism, particularly for armor and AT units. While player units on the easy level can mow down the enemy and clear entire roads and cities with a single armored transport, matches are more plausible on the top difficulty setting, taking into account the historic performance of a wide array of weapons.

Morale, which didn't factor into the original game, affects play in *Sudden Strike II*, influencing how well a unit performs in battle, though low morale doesn't appear to make them rout. Officers in the vicinity of units raise morale, while the new enemy propaganda vehicles can lower it.

On the other hand, an attempt to incorporate another realism element—line of sight—doesn't fare so well. In a game where tiny infantry units can completely disappear under trees, making enemy units practically invisible merely adds to the confusion. It's very easy to be fired upon for some time without being able to see your attacker. Control is insufficient for a game with units modeled in this



New to *Sudden Strike II* are Pacific Theater tiles and Japanese units.

level of detail. I tried in vain to create any viable formations, since the only real orders are move, attack, lie prone, and other basic commands. Combined forces don't match speeds with others in their grouping, creating tactical headaches.

Balanced against all these negatives is a largely playable game with nicely designed maps and missions that attempt to evoke the spirit—if not the reality—of actual WWII battles. Unit control takes more work than it should, and sorting out your forces takes too much effort, but missions manage to strike a fairly engaging balance between the pace of an RTS and tactical finesse of a wargame. It doesn't work consistently, but it's entertaining when it does.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A flawed but interesting, semi-realistic World War II RTS with some irritating features.



Neither enemy nor friendly unit AI are particularly impressive, with enemy units grinding themselves away to nothing and friendly units blithely walking in the line of fire.



Hey! I'm running around a wrecked factory in my favorite mech! It almost makes me forget about the 13 bucks I just wasted!

MechWarrior 4: Clan Mech Pak

Some mechs for more money: round two **By Thierry Nguyen**

EDITOR Marc Hoff
EDITOR Cyberlore
URL www.scdirect.com
WWW www.scdirect.com
ISSN 1049-8001
ISSN 1049-8001

EDITOR Perleau II
300, GAME RAM
32MB hard drive
space, MechWarrior 4:
Vengeance
300MB free space
Perleau III 800,
256MB RAM
400MB free space
Perleau IV 1600
256MB RAM
400MB free space

Hi again. If you read the review for Inner Sphere Mech Pak, you can stop reading, as this review is pretty much the same. If you're new to the over-priced Mech Pak trend, here's a Cliff's Notes' version. Imagine a shooter expansion including just a few new weapons, some skins, and a map or two. Or an RTS expansion with only units and multiplayer maps, and no single-player content, so to speak. That's what you get in these Mech Paks.

Four mechs, a modified medium missile, bigger zoom, and a wrecked factory map—there's your 13 bucks right there. Maybe MechWarrior fans are unruly and impatient, but couldn't Microsoft and Cyberlore just hold this stuff off and put it in MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries instead.

making that game cooler?

On the bright side, the mechs themselves are spiffier, but I am more of a Clan guy than an Inner Sphere guy. I always loved the Koshka as the coolest mech since Ghost Bear's Legacy, and seeing the Masakni and the Gadrinor-Born is a bit of a thrill for a robot-nerd like myself. And the one new multiplayer map hasn't been offered online. Yet. For multiplayer duhards with scores of disposable income, go nuts. Me, I'd rather save my money for MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries, which will include an actual game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Read the review for the MechWarrior 4: Inner Sphere Mech Pak, and replace "Inner Sphere" with "Clan."

Space Horse

Not even a one-trick pony **By John Fletcher**

EDITOR Shrapnel Games
EDITOR Cyberlore
URL www.scdirect.com
WWW www.scdirect.com
ISSN 1049-8001
ISSN 1049-8001

EDITOR Perleau 300,
32MB RAM, 32MB
hard drive space
Perleau 800
256MB RAM
400MB free space

The second I saw the cover of Space Horse, I knew I was in for a lame-o game. In Space Horse you compete against three other factions colonizing a new planet. You claim land and build factories on each plot, then sell surplus production to other colonists or to the government store. If it sounds staid, it is. Worse, it's blatantly stacked against you. During one game, I was trying to get by on bismuth while all the other factions were making a king's ransom in zirconium. Next game, I monopolized zirconium, which became worthless as the others cashed in on titanium.

Space Horse is underdeveloped and boring. Attempts at livening things up with "humorous" messages and random events reek more of desperation than wit or purpose. By the end of two



I'm playing a bird, rustling a winter cornucopia, injured in a bizarre gardening accident. This is stupid.

rounds, I wondered, "Why am I wasting time on this drivel?" I've kept every game that I've ever reviewed for CGM. Space Horse is going into the trash.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

This M.U.L.E. wannabe makes an ass of you.

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No purchase necessary. You may enter by going to the website at www.jaleco.com beginning on 10/22/02 through 11:59PM (ET) 02/28/03 and submitting an on-line entry in accordance with the printing instructions. You may also enter by hand-printing your name and complete address on a 4" x 5" card. Mail entry in an envelope to: Trailer Park Tycoon King of The Park Sweepstakes, P.O. Box 8533, Prospect Hts., IL 60070. Entries must be postmarked by 02/28/03 and received by 03/07/03. Limit one entry per person regardless of method of entry. Multiple entries, including multiple entries by the same person using different email addresses, will void all entries by the entrant. In the event of a dispute regarding the identity of the person submitting an online entry, the online entry will be deemed submitted by the person in whose name the email account is registered, provided that person meets all eligibility criteria set forth in these Official Rules. Jaleco Entertainment ("Sponsor") assumes no responsibility for computer system, hardware, software or program malfunctions or for other errors, omissions, or delays in computer transmissions or retrieval of entries, including, but not limited to, errors in transmission, or lost, late, illegible, incomplete, damaged, postage-due or misdirected entries or mail. All entries become the property of the Sponsor and none will be returned. It is in Sponsor's opinion, there is any suspected or actual evidence of tampering with any portion of the sweepstakes, or if technical difficulties compromise the integrity of the promotion, Sponsor reserves the right to suspend, modify or terminate the sweepstakes and conduct a random drawing to award the prizes using all entries received as of the date of action taken by Sponsor. DRAWING: Winner will be selected in a random drawing on or about 03/12/03 by an independent judging organization whose decisions will be final on all matters relating to this sweepstakes. ELIGIBILITY: Sweepstakes open to legal residents of the United States and the District of Columbia, 18 years of age or older, except employees of Jaleco Entertainment, its respective affiliates, subsidiaries, advertising, sales promotion and judging agencies and the immediate families and household members of each. PRIZES: One (1) Grand Prize: a King of The Park PC game (Retail Value: \$29.99); 200 (200) First Prizes: one (1) 12" Television, one (1) Electric Bug Zapper, one (1) 12" Inflation Pool and Six (6) Plastic Puck. Approximate retail value ("ARV"): \$2,960.00. Twenty five (25) First Prizes: a Trailer Park Tycoon PC game. ARV: \$30.00, each. Total ARV: \$4,250.00. Limit one prize per household.

GENERAL TERMS & CONDITIONS: Potential winners will be notified by mail. Grand Prize Winner will be required to execute and return an Affidavit of Eligibility and Liability. Publicity Release within 21 days of stamped delivery of notification. Failure to comply may result in disqualification and award of prize to alternate winner. Odds of winning depend on the total number of eligible entries received from all methods combined. Prizes will be awarded, provided they are properly claimed. By entering, entrants agree to abide by and be bound by these rules and the rules and regulations of the game. Prizes are non-transferable. No cash redemption or substitutions permitted, except by Sponsor who may substitute a prize of equal or greater value if the lessened prize becomes unavailable. All taxes on prizes are winner's sole responsibility. By accepting prizes, winners agree that neither Jaleco Entertainment, its respective affiliates, its subsidiaries, and/or any of their respective shareholders, directors, officers, salespersons, employees or agencies will have any liability whatsoever for any injuries, losses, harm, damage, cost, or expense arising from or in connection with participation in this promotion or any prize related activities or the acceptance, possession, use and/or misuse of prize including, without limitation, any personal injury or property damage. Acceptance of prize further constitutes winner's consent that the Sponsor may use winner's name, likeness and/or prize and promotional information received from this promotion for advertising or promotional purposes without further compensation, except where prohibited. All Federal, State, and Local laws and regulations apply. Void where prohibited. WINNERS LIST: For a list of winners, available after 03/12/03 send a self-addressed, stamped envelope before 04/01/03 to: King of The Park Sweepstakes, P.O. Box 8416, Dept. TK, Prospect Hts., IL 60070. Sponsor: Jaleco Entertainment, 119 W. Tupper St., Buffalo, NY 14202.



Farscape: The Game

Cancellation's too good for it By Charles Ardai

DEVELOPER: Simon & Schuster Interactive
TELETYPE: Red Lemon Studios
OS: Windows 95/98
WWW: www.farscapedgame.com
ESRB RATING: Teen
PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 450, 6-8MB RAM (128MB for Windows XP), 375MB hard drive space
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 700, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows XP)
CONTROL: Mouse

As I was walking to work the other day, I was accosted by a wild-eyed, evangelical fellow who was waving leaflets at passers-by, urging them to join him in protesting the cancellation of a TV series called *Farscape*. He looked like your worst nightmare of a science-fiction fan, bedraggled and hirsute, underwashed and overcaffeinated. The Ancient Mariner had nothing on him when it came to buttonholing pedestrians with an overlong tale of woe. All I could think (as I politely began chewing off my leg to get away from him) was, I'm sure *Farscape* is a fine show, but you're not doing it any favors by eliciting yourself as its representative. If I'd ever had any inclination to watch it, this desperate fanboy had driven any likelihood of that happening away.

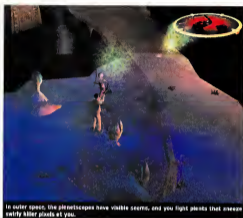
Playing *Farscape: The Game* gave me much the same feeling. This game is so annoying and poorly designed that it left me vindictively cheering the show's demise. *Farscape: The Game* asks you to take control of a band of interstellar

This game is so annoying and poorly designed that it left me vindictively cheering the show's demise.

fugitives and steer them through a series of *D&D*-style melee encounters and shopping trips. Unlike *D&D*, *Farscape* offers a 3D environment, and the visuals are occasionally striking. The one good thing I have to say about this game is

that it's nice to see a game of this sort that's not full of demons, skeletons, and wizards. Unfortunately, the pretty pictures are attached to a game engine that does everything it can to prevent you from playing the game: the screen rotates too quickly and in the wrong directions; you frequently have your view obstructed; the character you're controlling is often blocked by the one you aren't; you have to keep clicking the mouse button throughout each fight; your inventory is hard to manage; your weapons constantly run out of ammo, and if any one of the characters you control ever dies, the game instantly ends.

These are ways in which *Farscape* is bad because it's too hard to play, but there are also ways in which it's too easy, or at least too mechanical. A radar screen on each level gives you advance warning of where your enemies are, along with a purple arrow showing that level's objective—all you have to do is run toward the arrow, shooting everything in your path and collecting whatever the bad guys drop. The designers try to spice things up with occasional bits of dialogue (voiced by



In outer space, the planetscape has visible seams, and you fight plants that sneeze swirly killer pixels at you.



Click alien bugs. Click until dead. Pray there are no robot frogs. Repeat.

the show's actors, who sound drugged) and changes of setting (you start out abandoned on a strange planet and work your way back to the belly of our heroes' living spaceship), but I don't think even my friend from the street corner would find these scraps of authenticity thrown in for the fans sufficient incentive to struggle through a game about which the best thing you can say is that it sometimes rises to the level of being merely tiresome. Never having watched it, I can't say whether the *Farscape* TV series had been better—but it could hardly have been treated worse.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆☆

A crappy combat game that's based on a cancelled TV show. Pretty irresistible, huh?



I'll remove my steel rod from your crutch as soon as you remove your forearms from my frigate's skull!



RADÉON™ 9700 PRO

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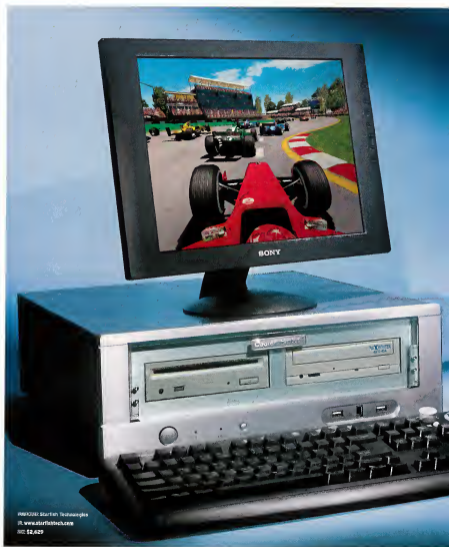


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Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money Edited by William O'Neal



RAK200: Starline Technologies
R: www.starlinetech.com
MSRP: \$2,629

A black, boxy gaming PC tower sits on a blue surface. Two monitors are attached to the top of the tower. The monitor on the left is tilted upwards and shows a dark screen with vertical lines. The monitor on the right is also tilted upwards and shows a similar pattern. A black mouse is positioned in front of the tower. The background is a solid blue color.

The New Kid on the Block

The boutique gaming rig market gets more crowded

Every time I open my inbox, there seems to be another boutique shop getting into the gaming PC business. What Starfish Technologies has going for it, however, is that while it's a new outfit, the people behind the name are experienced. In fact, their president used to be the primary system builder for Hyperonic.

By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

The fact that it's highly upgradeable means that you'll be using this machine for quite some time.



By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Starfish Technologies	ABS
Model	Starfish SS2000	ABS 5500 35
Price	\$2,629	\$2,794
Operating System	Windows XP Home	Windows XP Professional
Processor (CPU)	2.53GHz Intel Pentium 4 w/ 533MHz FSB	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 w/ 533MHz FSB
Motherboard	Abit 667M Micro-ATX Intel D45G	ASUS P4T533-C
Case	Cooler Master ATC-689-V31 green glass	Custom case
Memory	256MB PC2700 DDR SDRAM	512MB Kingston PC1066 RDRAM
Hard Drive	Western Digital 80GB Special Edition	Seal 80GB Maxtor 780L2001 drives in RAID array
Graphics Processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	ASUS 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 9 Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 9-Gamer
DVD-ROM Drive	Pioneer 16X0 D19-R0M	Pioneer 16X DVD-ROM drive
CD-ROM Drive	Pioneer 16X1240 CD-RW	Pioneer 40X1240 CD-RW
Monitor	Sany 500/8 Black 19" LCD	NEC MultiSync FE950E 19"
Speakers	Harman MM 1000 2.1	Flipshot Praxedia 5.1
Keyboard	Rotare Power Black keyboard	MultiMedia keyboard
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	ESD mouse
Power Supply	Genmax 300-watt PSU	500 2.0, FireWire ports

BENCHMARKS

3DMark0991 SE Pro (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	1324	1393
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	4890	6715
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32, No FSAA)	8506	9403
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32, 4x FSAA)	2154	2645
Duress 3D Area (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	242.4	207
Duress 3D Area (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	117.2	114
GameGauge 3.0* (1600x1200x32, No FSAA)	56.7	68.7
GameGauge 3.0* (1600x1200x32, 4x FSAA)	24.5	24.6
GameGauge 3.0* (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	659	723
GameGauge 3.0* (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	29.8	53.0

*GAMEGAUGE 3.0 INCLUDES THE FRAME RATES OF THE FOLLOWING GAMES (COMPARE 4-DUNGEON SIEGE, 12-DARKWOLF, JEDI KNIGHT II, NASCAR 2000, SERIOUS SAM, TLOZ)

What struck me most about the SS2000 that I received was the clean design. While everyone else is building towers, this machine's Cooler Master case is a throwback desktop model. Furthermore, it ships with a sleek 19" Sony LCD that (surprisingly) was pretty good for gaming. The SS2000 wasn't a powerhouse in the same vein as the Voodoo PC and ABS machines that I reviewed last month, but considering that it's built with a 2.53GHz Pentium 4 processor and a scant 256MB of PC2700 DDR RAM, it actually gave the similarly equipped ABS a run for its money.

Because it shipped with the GeForce4 Ti 4600 (as opposed to the ATI Radeon 9700 Pro, like either the Voodoo PC from last month or my Power Rig), I decided to compare the SS2000 to the ABS Diablo XS, which also shipped with the GeForce4. In 3DMark2001 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with full-screen antialiasing turned off, the SS2000 scored a respectable 1324 compared to the 1393 of the more expensive and better-equipped ABS scored. Other tests, too, showed that while this machine won't beat the big machines for performance, it's still a very able gaming rig.

At first, I was taken aback by Starfish's decision to use a desktop case as opposed to a tower. However, I liked the Cooler Master case that they used. The drop-down window looks cool, and it's nice to have the USB ports right up front.

With the SS2000, Starfish Technologies has put together a very capable rig that's pretty sensibly priced. Of course, being as picky as I am, I would make a few changes to any rig that I outfitted from them. One change would be to forgo the LCD monitor for a more traditional CRT. Also, I'd up the total system memory to 512MB.

Ultimately, Starfish's SS2000 is a sweet machine that's well put together. While it's not going to break any speed records, it'll definitely get the job done. And the fact that it's highly upgradeable means you'll be using this machine for quite some time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The GeForce4 Ti 4600-equipped Starfish SS2000 didn't impress us as much as it could've. But if you configured this rig with a faster graphics card and more RAM, you'd be good to go.



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- Bend sensor and optical-tracking technology gives true-to-life mobility.
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You Can Take It With You

Dell's latest Inspiron could be the ultimate desktop replacement **By William O'Neal**



REVIEWED BY
BY: www.dell.com
MS: \$3,699



With both batteries installed, you're looking at more than five hours of battery life.

I I've been reviewing Dell's Inspiron line of notebooks for some time now, and I've yet to be disappointed. Big, heavy, and fast because they include the latest graphics chips, Dell's Inspirons are

consistently the champions of mobile computing. The newest Inspiron is no exception, featuring the new ATI 64MB Mobility Radeon 9000 (M9) graphics chip. The 8200 boasts performance rivaling that of many mid-range desktops.

While mobile gaming has been moving in positive directions, the lack of available hardware shaders (both pixel and vertex) has always loomed as the platform's Achilles' heel. With ATI's M9 though, that has changed. The Dell Inspiron that we received shipped with the M9, and we were immediately taken by the gains that hardware pixel and vertex shaders afforded us. Add to that the fact that this laptop showed up with a Mobile Intel 2.2GHz Pentium 4 CPU, 512MB of DDR memory, and a 5400-rpm 60GB hard drive, and the search for a true desktop replacement is damn close to being over.

The M9 that this laptop shipped with is, in essence, an underclocked version of ATI's Radeon 9000 (the entry-level counterpart to their flagship Radeon 9700 Pro), and performance tests showed this machine's true power. We ran the machine through our standard barrage of tests: MadOnion's 3DMark2000 SE Pro as well as ExtremeTech.com's 3DGameGauge 3.0, which measures the performance of a suite of games plus DirectX and OpenGL. The Inspiron 8200 scored an impressive 6999 at 3DMark2000 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off and an equally impressive 4002 at 1600x1200x32, also with FSAA turned off. Compare those scores to the 5201 and 2947 that a similarly equipped Inspiron 8200 running a GeForce440 Go scored. Game tests also showed that the M9-equipped Inspiron 8200 is a good gaming rig, either coming extremely close to, if not breaking, the coveted 60 frames per second barrier in many games at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. And while the Inspiron's scores with FSAA turned on were considerably lower than those of its desktop counterpart, numbers rarely crop into the binaries. Some of these numbers are purely academic—no one will play Serious Sam. TSE at 1600x1200x32 with FSAA on if it means your frame rate is 33 frames per second.

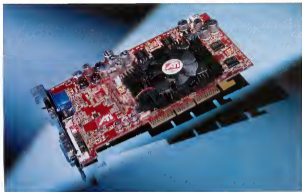
All in all, the Inspiron 8200 with the Mobility Radeon 9000 is one of the best gaming laptops I've ever seen. At 8.66 pounds (with both batteries installed), you're looking at more than five hours of battery life. Add to that ATI's PowerPlay technology for conserving power, and you've got enough juice to game or watch a movie on a transcontinental flight.

VERDICT ★★★★★

With help from ATI's Mobility Radeon 9000, the Inspiron 8200 is the most capable desktop replacement yet.

By the Numbers

MODEL	DELL INSPIRON 8200
Price	\$3,699
Operating System	Windows XP Home
Processor (CPU)	2.2GHz Intel Mobile Pentium 4
Memory	512MB DDR SDRAM
Hard Drive	60GB Ultra ATA hard drive (5400 rpm)
Graphics Processor	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000
DVD-ROM/CD-ROM Drive	DVD-RW/CD-RW combo drive
Display	15" UTGA LCD (1600x1200)
Connectivity	Second battery, TrueMobile WLAN wireless LAN, FireWire, 2 USB Ports
Weight	8.66 lbs (with both batteries installed)
BENCHMARKS	
GameBench 3.0 (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	46
GameBench 3.0 (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	48
3DMark2000 SE Pro (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	6999
3DMark2000 SE Pro (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	2515
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	57
Just Knight & Just Outcast (1024x768x32, 4xFSAA)	93



King of the Hill

ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro grabs the title belt from Nvidia By William O'Neal



WINNER ATI
at www.offbeat.com
no. 5399

Earlier this year when ATI announced that their next card, the R300, was going to beat the crap out of Nvidia's vaunted GeForce4 Ti 4600, Nvidia was instantly on the horn downplaying the news, reminding me that the yet-to-be-announced NV30 would surely outperform the R300. Since then, I have received and tested the 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro, which confirmed that it is indeed the new king of graphics cards. Meanwhile, Nvidia has been strangely quiet about its upcoming NV30, and as of this writing, they still don't have a launch date in sight.

I tested the Radeon 9700 Pro on my Power Rig: a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 machine with 1GB of DDRAM running Windows XP Home Edition. The Radeon 9700 Pro outperformed the GeForce4 Ti 4600 at nearly every test. But at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off, the GeForce4 Ti 4600 can still hang with the Radeon. Once the test parameters were intensified, though, by turning on 4x FSAA or increasing the resolution to 1600x1200x32, the Radeon blew the GeForce4 Ti 4600 away. What was most impressive about the Radeon 9700 is the relatively little effect that 4x FSAA had on its performance. Running 3DMark2001 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off, the Radeon 9700 scored an incredible 1540 while the GeForce4 Ti 4600 scored 1262. While that 3,000 point difference may seem staggering, it's important to remember that 12622 is still an incredible score. However, once I turned FSAA on, the

RADEON VS. GEFORCE4



Radeon kicked ass, scoring 10922 while the GeForce4 Ti 4600 dropped to 6144. Other tests showed the Radeon's dominance when the details are cranked up. While the Radeon and GeForce4 Ti 4600 scored 104 and 100 at Serious Sam: TSE at 1024x768x32 with no FSAA, their scores dropped to 86 and 50 once 4x FSAA was turned on. Turning on 4x FSAA had similar effects in 4.2: Sturmok, Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, Dungeon Siege, and Conqueror 4.

The big question surrounding the Radeon 9700 is whether gamers should drop \$399 now for the current leader or wait for Nvidia to release the NV30, a card that Nvidia claims will be somewhere between two to two and a half times faster than the GeForce4 Ti 4600. It's been speculated that Nvidia may not release the NV30 in time for the holiday buying season. Even if they do, it makes you wonder if NV30 is worth waiting for if it's only going to be 10 percent to 15 percent faster than the Radeon 9700.

VERDICT ★★★★★

With this kind of performance, it makes you wonder if it's worth waiting for the NV30.



WIL
POWER

By William O'Neal

Renaissance Man, My Ass

I fear that I may be losing touch with reality. And when I say that, I'm not talking about some John Nash-inspired solipsism; I'm talking about my ability to relate to so-called "normal" people.

Just this month, I received two products that, while busy excited me, gave me pause as I thought, "I am genuinely excited about this." The products to which I refer are ATI's 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro and VIA's P4PB 400 motherboard. When they first arrived, I brought to the other editors about their relative benefits: "This graphics card is blowing the GeForce4 Ti 4600 away at 3DMark2001 SE Pro. And this motherboard gives you DDR 333 support, and it's also compatible with Pentium 4 processors that boast a 533MHz front side bus." As you no doubt could guess, the blank stares were immediately followed by not-so-stilled laughter.

Blank stares were followed by laughter.

You see, I fancy myself a Renaissance man, one who can talk as easily with tech with a vendor as he can chat up a beautiful woman at a nightclub. But problems arise when you try to mix the two: chat up Nvidia's Brian Burke in a nightclub, and who knows what may happen: worse yet, casually mention Rambus to a hottie—we all know where that's gone end.

I suppose the same holds true for my technically illiterate coworkers. While they won't ask about the merit system of some dumb RPG or bicker like old women about which game's violence (SOF II or GTA III) is more gratuitous, I'll save my precious words for you all: people who can appreciate a good RAID grinny when you see one.

Not Another Speaker Company!

EV crashes into the multimedia speaker bandwagon with a loud bang **By Raphael Liberatore**

VERDICT Electro-Voice
 EE www.electrovoice.com
 MSRP \$200

Electro-Voice, a manufacturer of professional-grade audio equipment for more than 75 years, joins the computer multimedia craze with its first entry, the SonicXS 2.1 speaker system. Can a company that makes quality sound equipment for some of the greatest musicians in the world score big in the computer speaker market? Maybe eventually, but their first foray offers mixed results.

For its hefty price tag, I wasn't overly impressed with the 2.1's build quality or performance. The sub looks cheap, and the shared treble-bass dial is old school. Also, where desk space is limited, these massive satellites may get in the way. If you have the space, the true benefit of this two-way satellite system lies in its "big" performance. The stable audio imaging and enhanced details heard in games like *Medal of Honor* and *Ghost Recon* are impressive. With 4" mid-range drivers, mids are loud, offering plenty of punch. Bass is also strong, but not overwhelming. Highs, however, sound zipped, with slight distortion during a



listening round of contemporary jazz and Russian classical music tracks.

EV is thinking loud. However, there are many better-sounding 2.1 speaker sets for much less money.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Not the cheapest 2.1 system, but it certainly is the loudest.

Pretty Performance

Altec Lansing's 5100 5.1 speakers provide good performance in an affordable package **By Raphael Liberatore**

VERDICT Altec Lansing
 EE www.alteclansing.com
 MSRP \$100

For Altec Lansing, form is equally as important as performance. The 5100 speakers look like something out of the

future, and this is easily the smallest 5.1 system to grace the PC. Each satellite possesses dual neodymium drivers for superior sound. The 5100 system works

with a variety of media devices, including DVD players, portable stereos, and MP3 players.

Setting up the 5100 is super easy due to the color-coded connectors. The system was up and running with a Trance Nation America CD in less than two minutes flat. Sound comes across as natural and smooth, with coherent surround sound presence heard from DVDs like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Sirek*. The 5100 makes ambient games like *NierCraft II*, *Neverwinter Nights*, and *Medieval: Total War* sound fantastic. The bass, though uninspiring, conveys loud booms and rumbles. However, the 5100's performance is less than stellar for subtle tones and female vocals. In testing the Dixie Chicks' latest CD, *Home*, and Enya's *The Memory of Trees*, the women's voices sounded flat.

Considering that 5.1 speaker packages can run upwards of \$300, this is a great price. If you want cool-sounding speakers in a small package, then the 5100 5.1 speaker system is worth every penny.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The 5100 scores high on the cool factor.



Revamped Peripherals

The exciting world of input devices By William O'Neal

Microsoft makes the kind of peripherals that, while you may not write home about them, if you find yourself with someone else's keyboard or mouse, you quickly realize how much you appreciate them. And it was with this bit of acquired knowledge that we went about evaluating Microsoft's Optical Mouse Blue and Notebook Optical Mouse, as well as the Natural MultiMedia Keyboard.

Natural MultiMedia Keyboard

I love multimedia keyboards. However, when they first arrived on the scene, I scoffed at the perceived need to launch applications and control multimedia functions on the keyboard. "What's so hard about reaching over and turning up your speakers?" I proclaimed. "Is it that hard to use your mouse to launch Internet Explorer?" I asked. Well, years later, I'm hooked. I do pretty much everything from the keyboard, including launching apps and controlling multimedia functions in Media Player. So I was pretty excited to hook up Microsoft's latest Natural MultiMedia Keyboard. That was until I realized that it connects only via PS/2. Why MS decided to go with PS/2 only with no USB option is beyond me. And while the keyboard is super-sturdy, feels comfortable, and is great for gaming, the lack of USB (and in that regard, additional USB ports) means that instead of upgrading to the new version, I'll probably continue using last year's Internet Keyboard Pro.

Optical Mouse Blue

Microsoft's Optical Mouse Blue takes the company's optical technology and simply adds a little color. Gamers who are either left-handed or have small hands



When multimedia keyboards first arrived on the scene, I scoffed; years later, I'm hooked.



will like the ambidextrous design and definitive size of this mouse; however, it lacks the two Thumb buttons that the bigger IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 has, buttons that I've grown accustomed to using in gameplay. During Counter-Strike sessions, I repeatedly found myself trying to push buttons that were just not there. If you like the IntelliMouse Explorer design, this version will leave you longing for those missing buttons.

Notebook Optical Mouse

The Notebook Optical Mouse is the most unique of Microsoft's new peripherals. It's basically a shrunken-down version of the Optical Mouse to be used with laptops by those who like to have a mouse they can hold in their hands. I tested it out by lugging it around with

the Dell Inspiron 8200 that's also reviewed in this issue. While the mouse is great for general use, its small size was difficult to get used to when gaming. I played Unreal Tournament 2003 with it, and when the action heated up, I found myself again longing for the IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 with its bigger size and plethora of buttons. But if you're traveling, the Notebook Optical Mouse sports a short cord that won't get in the way when space is at a premium. Note too that this mouse is USB only and doesn't work with PS/2 ports.

VERDICT

These solid products that, while they won't quicken your heart, are decent additions for your system.

2003 Natural MultiMedia Keyboard
MANUFACTURED BY Microsoft
© www.microsoft.com
Hardware Price: \$25
RECOMMENDED PS/2 port
RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆

2003 Optical Mouse Blue
MANUFACTURED BY Microsoft
© www.microsoft.com
Hardware Price: \$35
RECOMMENDED USB or PS/2 port
RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆

2003 Notebook Optical Mouse
MANUFACTURED BY Microsoft
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Hardware Price: \$35
RECOMMENDED USB port
RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

How To Upgrade Your Motherboard

So you want that new 2.8GHz Pentium 4, but you're running a Socket A AMD CPU. Only one thing to do: swap out that motherboard **By Joel Durham**

There aren't many things you can do to your system that are as jolting as a motherboard upgrade—except maybe dragging the case behind your car for a few miles or dropping an electromagnet on it. Which brings us to our first step.



STEP #1
BACK UP YOUR
IMPORANT STUFF
If there's anything you can't bear to be without—game saves, research papers, financial information, songs you've downloaded but not burned to CD—yet-back it up. Data loss doesn't always occur after a motherboard



upgrade (in fact, it usually doesn't), but if for some reason you have to start fresh, you'll want your old goodies.

STEP #3

REMOVE ALL EXPANSION CARDS AND CABLES Next, you have to open up the case. Be static safe: plast your feet, ground yourself on part of the case's metal frame, and don't move. If you accidentally shuffle your feet, repeat the grounding process. Remove the expansion cards, such as your video card, sound card, network interface card, and so on, and store them in antistatic bags. Then remove all of the cords and cables connected to your motherboard. These will include power supply cables, IDE and floppy ribbon cables, and cables attached to expansion gate extras (the USB slots,



STEP #2

POWER DOWN AND UNPLUG THE PC. This is important. First, you. Don't just power down the computer; unplug its AC cord completely. Then unplug all the stuff connected to the back riser plate and expansion cards, like audio cables, USB stuff, your keyboard and mouse, your game controller, and so on.



STEP #4

REMOVE MEMORY AND CPU Now that you've got all that other junk out of the way, you'll want to remove the most delicate components: the RAM and the CPU. Be mindful of static. Removing the CPU will probably first involve removing a processor cooler; there's usually a trick to it, such as a slot for a screwdriver to pry the sucker off. Don't force it.

When you've exposed the processor, lift the ZIF socket arm until the processor lifts freely from its socket. Store it in an antistatic bag, preferably with the pins pressed into a piece of foam. For the RAM, use the release handles on either side to pop it out. Store it in an antistatic bag, too.



STEP #5

SWAP THE BOARD: You're finally ready to ditch the old motherboard. Grab your screwdriver and remove all the screws holding it down. Put the screws in a place where they'll be easily accessible in a few minutes.

Set your old board aside. Put it in the big antistatic bag that your new board came in. Then gently place your new board in the case. Make sure the holes line up with the brass risers; if there's a riser without a hole, it can create an electrical problem. Use a pair of pliers to remove any extra risers. Then drop the new motherboard in and screw it in tight, using as many screws as possible.

You may have to change the rear shield, depending on your riser port configuration. That's the metal bracket that surrounds the parallel port, serial ports, USB ports, and so on.



STEP #7

REPLACE POWER CABLES AND EXPANSION CARDS

Remember those cords you had to pull out of your motherboard? Now you have to find the sockets on your new motherboard to put them back. Be warned! If you're going from an Athlon mobo to an Intel Pentium 4 configuration, there's an extra four-prong power cord required. Many Pentium 4 motherboards have a standard Molex connector as a workaround for non-Intel-ready power supplies. Don't forget to insert your expansion cards and plug in all the stuff in the back.



STEP #8

REPLACE CPU AND MEMORY: Still being static safe, pop your RAM in tight, being sure to line up the notches in the memory sticks with the bumps in the memory slot. If you're using Rambus DRAM and you're not filling all of the slots, insert C-RIMMS in a configuration recommended by your motherboard manual.

Next, grab your CPU. Don't touch the pins. Lift the ZIF socket open and line up the odd corner(s) of the pin array with the corresponding corner(s) in the socket. Drop the processor in. **DO NOT USE FORCE.** If you find yourself having to push the processor, you've either lined it up wrong or the ZIF socket isn't open all the way.



STEP #8

IT'S VERY HARD

You're about to try to start Windows. This is when you find out whether it'll make the transition or whether you'll have to reinstall or repair it, reinstall drivers, or heaven forbid, wipe your hard drive and start from scratch.



STEP #9

PLUG IN AND POWER UP: Connect the AC cord and fire up the computer. Take a deep breath. If Windows loads, you're probably in the clear! It'll recognize the new hardware and do some driver installations. You might have to reinstall the drivers for any sound, video, and LAN cards you have. Be sure to load the drivers that came with the motherboard.

If you're running an NT version of Windows, including Windows 2000 and XP, and the first thing you see is a blue screen of death, you're hosed. Pop in your Windows CD, boot it, and try to repair the installation. If the repair doesn't work, you'll have to install a new copy of Windows and start clean. This usually happens when you make a major platform change.

Tech Medics

You have questions, we have witticisms **By William O'Neal**

I Want My Home Theater!

I want to merge my PC with my home entertainment system. While getting the video signal out is not an issue (with TV's supporting VGA connections and video cards with TV-out), I am having a problem with the sound. I see all these sound cards with digital-out ports and whatnot, but I really want to connect my PC to my Dolby Digital 5.1 DTS home receiver so both DVDs and games on my PC play in surround sound through my home theater.

Justin

Your best bet is a sound card like Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum. The cool thing about the Platinum is that it boasts a breakout box that has a gang of audio out options, including optical and coaxial out. With these outputs, you should easily be able to connect your PC to your receiver. Another cool (but expensive) option is Yamaha's RP-U200. They call it an audio soundboard with receiver, but basically it's a receiver that hooks up to one of your PC's USB ports. With this, you won't even need your home receiver.

An OS Quandary

I'm finally ready to replace my aging dinosaur of a computer with a custom-built rig. I've got all the components pegged except the operating system. Shortly after its release, I read that Windows XP doesn't do well with older games. I don't want to take a chance on not being able to play the games I've got, so would I be better off with 98 or ME?

Keith

Windows 98 and ME are horrible. Get Windows XP Home or Professional, and you can play most older games in compatibility mode. Install the game and then right click on the game's icon; in Properties you can launch the game in compatibility mode. While this may not work with all older games, do you really want to play Dark Forces that way?

Eeld A Mouse!

My new optical mouse connects to a USB port, while my old mouse had connected through a PS2 port. I installed drivers for the new mouse, but it still didn't work. Even rebooting my computer after installation didn't solve the problem. How can I switch my mouse settings to look for a USB mouse?

Igor



"I want to merge my PC with my home entertainment system."

You may have to muck around in your BIOS. When your machine is booting up, it should tell you which button to push to enter Setup, either F2 or Delete. Once in the BIOS, look for something that says Legacy USB Device and make sure that it's enabled, if that doesn't work, you can pick up these little connectors at any store that will connect a USB mouse to a PS2 mouse.

What Kind of RAM Do I Have?

I want to upgrade my RAM, but I don't know what kind to get. I am currently running 1GB of RAM and am having problems running newer games.

Bolsac666

It depends on what kind of motherboard you're running. Crack your case and check the manufacturer and model of the motherboard, then go to the manufacturer's Website to find out which types of RAM are compatible with that model. Once you figure that out, you can go to any computer store and pick some up.

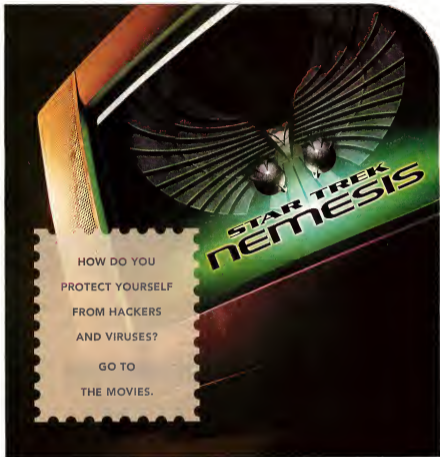
Mobile Aliens

I need to get a laptop computer and I'm looking for one bad molo of a

desktop replacement. Your recent laptop roundup in September's CGM was enlightening, but it leaves me with a few questions. Up until I read it, I was sold on the 2GHz Dell Inspiron 6200; your article supported my research, but the 2.4GHz Alienware 51-M had me solvating as well. The turnoff about the Alienware machine, however, was that it ran on a 64MB Mobility Radeon 7500 graphics card instead of the 64MB GeForce 440 Go. When will Alienware ship the 51-M with a GeForce card? And are there any other big technological advancements coming out anytime between now and early November worth waiting for before I go out and blow \$3,000 now?

John

Kevin at Alienware said, "A GeForce4 Go is in our future, but my crystal ball is a little too cloudy to tell you when. However, now that the Mobility Radeon 9000 (M9) has launched, that's probably a moot point. We will definitely be offering the M9, and it will be available by the time this is in print." So there you have it: Alienware will be shipping the 51-M with ATI's kick-ass M9 mobile graphics processor by the time you read this.



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IN THEATRES EVERYWHERE
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Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine **By William O'Neal**

Some of you have been asking why I don't include gaming peripherals with my Power Rig. Since I didn't have a good answer, I decided to update my rig with the three peripherals that I actually use: Saitek's Cyborg 3D USB Gold joystick, Microsoft's Sidewinder Gamepad USB, and Logitech's MOMO Force wheel. While the joystick and gamepad are standards that any gaming machine needs, the Logitech MOMO wheel is simply awesome. The wheel is wrapped in leather and the force effects add to the gaming experience without feeling...well...stupid.

Everything else is the same: 2.8GHz Pentium 4 with a 533MHz FSB (front side bus), ATI's 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card, and 1GB of Kingston PC1066 RDRAM, just to call out a few of the items.

The Power Rig scored an impressive 1540 at 3DMark2001 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. Even more impressive though, was the score of 10922 that the machine scored at the same resolution with 4x FSAA turned on. While the Power Rig was outperformed by the Voodoo machine that we tested a month or so ago at Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, Dungeon Siege, and A2: Sturmok, it was right there with it with Serious Sam: The Golden Gun, and Quake III: Arena.



I decided to update my rig with the three peripherals I use.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	\$600
Motherboard	Intel D850EM2	\$150
Case	Airtec Plus608	\$90
Processor	Intel 2.8GHz Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	\$600
Memory	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	\$400
Graphics Card	ATI 128MB Radeon 9700 (R300)	\$400
Monitor	NEC MultiSync FE150+ 22"	\$190
Hard Drive	120GB IBM DeskStar Z200RW	\$200
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16x DVD/48x CD-ROM	\$30
CD-RW Drive	Toshiba 40x24x8	\$100
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	\$100
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks Megalyns 1100	\$300
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	\$50
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg 3D USB Gold	\$40
Gamepad	Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad USB	\$30
Driving Wheel	Logitech MOMO Force	\$200
TOTAL		\$3,710

BENCHMARKS

TEST	POWER RIG	VOODOO ROAD
GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32, No FSAA)	70.5	78.0
GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32, 4x FSAA)	54.9	55.9
GameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	65.2	81.2
GameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	64.9	82.1
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	1540	1586
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	10922	1449
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32, No FSAA)	10697	1118
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32, 4x FSAA)	6255	6454
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32, No FSAA)	280.1	289
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32, 4x FSAA)	205.8	206
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32, No FSAA)	167.6	162
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32, 4x FSAA)	90.2	91

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Edited by Dana Longweard

Icewind Dale II

Know your enemies

PAGE 154

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

Here's a sneaky and devious prank to ensure a solid victory in *WarCraft III* when playing the Humans.

For this trick to work, you'll want to level up an archmage hero as quickly as possible (at least to Level 6) and invest loads of resources into getting elite sorceresses. The archmage's ultimate ability, Mass Teleport, instantly teleports the casting hero and any friendly units around him to anywhere else on the map, making it an awesome offensive maneuver, particularly against heavily fortified bases. The catch? There must be a friendly unit at the target of the teleport. The obvious

choice would be to turn one of your units invisible and send him into your opponent's base. But the detectors will pick him out in a flash, and he'll be dead before you can say "damnit!" This is where the sorceresses come in. Sneak to the outside of your enemy's base and cast Polymorph on one of your own units, a footman or something. A sheep is harmless, right? That's what your enemy will think, and chances are he'll ignore the pathetic thing. So just lazily move your sheep

into the base, squeezing past all the guards and defenses, until the little lamb has reached a key point, like their gold mine. Now the fun begins. Target your sheep with Mass Teleport from your archmage; your enemy will find that an entire army has suddenly appeared right in the middle of their base. Destroy everything in sight. When the battle is pretty much over, mock your enemy even more by turning his remaining units into sheep.

—Franz LaZerte

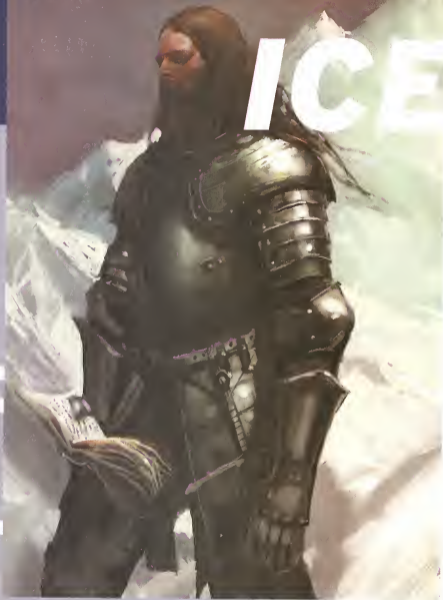
WIN



Nice work, Franz. For your efforts, you'll be receiving a copy of *The Art of Warcraft: 1942*, an excellent addition to any *WarCraft* fan's collection.

Next month, the winner will receive a copy of *Battlefield 1942*, so send us your current tricks!

ICE



Improve your chances of victory by studying up on the best ways to defeat your enemies. Below is a comprehensive list of all the baddies and their weaknesses.

Dale II

Abishai

Abishai are demonic creatures from a different plane of existence. They look like animated cathedral gargoyles. Abishai come in two types—white and red. **White Abishai** do additional cold damage when they strike. The more powerful **Red Abishai** do additional fire damage. All Abishai are immune to fire and electrical damage, and resistant to cold and acid. Use non-elemental spells against them, and protect your characters with spells such as Elemental Barrier. Ahu, Abishai, since they are not native to this plane, can be removed with spells such as Dismissal and Banishment.

Barghest

A Barghest looks like a mutated troll, and killing one is about as difficult. Devilish creatures of pure evil, Barghests are resistant to nonmagical damage and weapons. They are quick to attack and deadly when they strike, but their armor class isn't high. Attack relentlessly with your whole party, use spells to knock them off guard, and follow with your best magical arms.

Beetle

Beetles are huge versions of normal insects. They range in size from as small as a dog (Fire Beetles) to larger than an elephant (Rhinoceros Beetles).

Boring Beetles are troublesome. Their tough carapace guts them in a good armor class. Worse, they appear in large, swarming groups. Take them down with area-effect spells (Sinking Cloud, Cloudkill), then quickly get past the infested area. Boring Beetles can steal items.

Bright red **Fire Beetles** are resistant to fire attacks. Individually, they aren't much of a problem, but they generally travel in packs of six or more, easily swarming your party. Use area-effect spells to slow down or kill several before they surround you.

You see masses of **Rhinoceros Beetles** only as summoned creatures, brought into existence by the Giant Vermin spell. They're huge but aren't

very difficult to defeat. Hammer them hard with low-level spells such as Magic Missile and Frost Fingers, while your best fighter attacks in force.

Beholder

One of the most feared creatures in the Underdark is the terrible Beholder. Also known as an Eye Tyrant, a Beholder is a bloated sphere that hovers a few feet off the ground. It has a large central eye and 30 smaller eyes on stalks on the top of its head. Each of these smaller eyes casts a different magical effect, ranging from a simple charm to Disintegrate. The large central eye acts as an Antimagical Field spell, preventing spell use and the operation of most magical items.

There is no good way to fight a Beholder. The most useful way is to flank it with spellcasters, ensuring that at least one spellcaster is out of the way of the antimagic eye. A Beholder's armor class isn't too good, so get close with a fighter. One eye casts Telekinesis, so getting a fighter in range is difficult.

Bugbear

Bugbears are the largest of the goblinoids. These huge creatures tower over the battlefield, striking terror into all who see them. Like many large creatures, bugbears are both helped and hindered by their size. Their tremendous strength makes them wrecking machines in combat, but it also drops their armor class, making them easier to hit. No special tactics are needed to fight them, but their size makes them immune to Charm Person and Hold Person spells.

Bugbear Captains are larger, tougher, and nastier. They cause more damage, generally have a better armor class, and are tougher to kill. The basic tactic is the same—hit them hard with ranged weapons and have your melee characters focus on them first.

Chimera

Chimeras are three-headed monstrosities combining the best and worst elements of lions, drag-

ons, and goats. All three heads perform powerful attacks (the lion and dragon bite while the goat head/butts), and the Chimera can strike with its claws as well. The dragon head can breathe a column of flame. A character with fire resistance and the ability to strike regularly can face off against a Chimera if assisted by powerful spells and other characters flanking the beast.

Chumbra

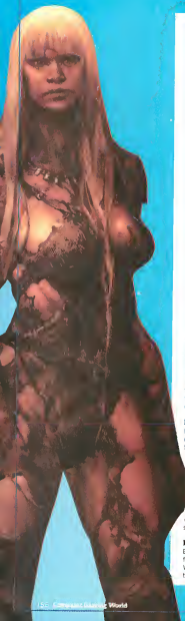
A Chumbra is a spectral creature that won't attack if left unprovoked. Chumbra is immune to all damage but poison and fire. Causing 10 points of poison damage to a Chumbra causes it to fall into a temporary sleep. Only fire kills the creature permanently. Unless you have good fire-based weapons and spells, avoid Chumbra completely.

Cornugon

Cornugons, like all devils, are immune to fire and poison, and resistant to acid and cold. These powerful creatures have an armor class substantial enough to block attacks from anything but high-level fighters and similar characters. Cornugons exude an aura of fear, making direct attacks difficult for those without the will to stand and fight. The Cornugon's tail causes bleeding wounds that drain hit points from stricken characters. They are virtually immune to nonmagical and +1 weapons. Despite all the problems, straight combat is the best way to deal with Cornugons. Attack them on mass with your best warriors, using spellcasters for support rather than offense.

Dark Treant

Dark Treants are animated trees that drink the blood of living creatures. Their natural woody exterior makes them difficult to hit with bludgeoning and piercing weapons. This makes them extremely vulnerable to fire. Use slashing weapons, especially those enchanted with fire-based magic, and fire spells. If you can make your characters resistant to fire, use powerful, area-effect fire spells such as Flame Strike and Fireball.



Dragon

Dragons are the most powerful, most fearsome, and most deadly opponents imaginable. Huge and terrifying, Dragons frighten off most attackers by their very presence. You will face several Dragons, and these fights will be among your most difficult.

A giant **Green Dragon** is both awesome and terrifying, and this beast has no weak point. Its thick skin is more effective than any plate mail, and it has enough hit points to crush entire armies. Green Dragons can attack with multiple weapons—teeth, claws, tail, and even wings. They breathe a noxious cloud of acidic vapor, melting anyone in its path. Equip your characters with many protective spells to help them withstand the Dragon's corrosive breath. Surround the beast to prevent it from attacking your entire party at once, and use any non-acidic spells, especially those that cause damage even if the Dragon makes its saving throw.

White Dragons are the smallest and weakest of dragonkind, but don't think they are pushovers. While not nearly as large as other Dragons, White Dragons have a substantial armor class and many hit points. Their breath weapon is a column of icy cold vapor. Elemental Barrier is useful, as are any items that offer protection from cold. Their cold nature makes these creatures immune to cold-based magic but vulnerable to fire-based spells.

White Wyrmings are immature White Dragons. Their armor class is lower, hit point total smaller, and their breath weapon does substantially less damage. They are serious opponents, particularly when encountered with a White Dragon in the area. Use fire-based spells and weapons that strike fire damage.

Driders

Driders are Drow/Spider combinations that look like warped Centaurs. Driders are naturally adept at moving through webs and entangling foes whenever possible. In a straight fight, they are not much of a match, but their spellcasting evens the playing field. To prevent their spell use, hit them with Magic Missile while your combatants close in to melee.

Drow

Drow are subterranean elves, noted for their grace, intelligence, and sparkling personalities. Stereotypically evil, Drow have become one of the dominant races in the Underdark. Drow are vicious combatants, both in melee and from range, and they frequently use spells. One of the most dangerous enemies you will face are

Fallen Bladesingers, a type of Drow that enters combat protected by spells; they can sap your characters' maximum level of hit points through a connection with negative energy. Use Slow to daze them and Charm to stop them from attacking.

Elemental

Elementals are creatures made up of one of the four basic elements: air, earth, fire, or water. While you will see (and fight) Elementals from time to time, most of your encounters with them

will be as a result of either Planar Ally or Planar Binding spells.

Air Elementals appear as huge whirlwinds and attack by buffeting their enemies. Air Elementals are most vulnerable to earth-based magic. They are unaffected by nonmagical weaponry except in extraordinary cases, and they cannot be flanked, making your rogue less effective.

The **Earth Elemental** is the opposite of the Air Elemental, where the Air Elemental is fast and agile, the Earth Elemental is slow and cumbersome, but few things strike as hard as an Earth Elemental's fist. Put your most powerful magic weapons in hand when facing one. You cannot flank Earth Elementals, so keep your rogue away from them; instead, have him handle other enemies or attack from a distance.

Fire Elementals appear as vague humanoid shapes encased in a blazing flame. These creatures are immune to any fire-based magic and fire damage caused by enchanted weaponry. They are vulnerable to cold magic. Even lower-level spells such as Frost Fingers and Snail's Snowball Swarm are useful.

Water Elementals are the opposite of Fire Elementals. Immune to cold and similar effects, Water Elementals are badly damaged by fire-based attacks and spells, even low-level ones.

Feyr

A Feyr looks like a quint, floating, purple brain. Completely malevolent, Feyrs attack physically but begin combat by scaring the wits out of your party. It's best to have a few powerful warrior characters who are immune (or at least highly resistant) to fear. Feyrs go down quickly, provided that one of your characters can get close enough to strike or can maintain his or her wits long enough to cast a few spells. Greater Feyrs are larger and more powerful and exude a more potent fear aura.

Gelugon

Gelugons are nastier, larger, and deadlier versions of Cornugons, with a better armor class and more hit points. Like Cornugons, Gelugons are immune to poison and fire and resistant to cold and acid. They ignore damage from mundane and +1 weapons. Characters struck by the tail or spear of a Gelugon are overcome with numbing cold, as if affected by a Slow spell.

Glabrezu

Glabrezus are demons and indescribably evil. Like all demons, Glabrezus are immune to poison and electrical damage, and they're highly resistant to cold, fire, and acid. A Glabrezu sees any creature as if truly is, so invisible characters (even those using improved invisibility) can't sneak up on them. They are powerful fighters, sporting a decent number of hit points and a very high armor class. Because of their immunities, Glabrezus are difficult to destroy with spells. Use magic to beef up your warriors and take down these monsters with +2 or better weapons.

Goblin

Goblins are nasty little humanoids—nothing more than a nuisance. If left unchecked, however, their



rapid breeding and rapaciousness can lead to the overrun of civilized lands and destroyed towns. A single Goblin isn't a match for even a member of the Targos militia, but in groups, they can be devastating. Goblins travel in packs of up to 10 members. They prefer to swarm their enemies, focusing their attacks on one or two characters at a time to thin your ranks. They have a high enough armor class to last for a round or two, but can't survive a single solid hit or crossbow bolt. Split your forces to battle their numbers, with each character targeting a different foe.

Goblin Archers strike from a distance. They have a slightly lower armor class because they don't carry shields, and they have the same number of hit points as their axe-wielding brothers. Attack quickly and strike hard. A single hit will put them down.

Elite Goblins are tougher. They are more capable combatants than their weaker cousins. They hit harder and more often, and they stand up to more damage. Group your attacks on one or two at a time.

Debanter Goblins are similar to normal Goblins, but they are as difficult to combat as an Orc. Debanter Goblins are highly resistant to

cold. They regenerate lost hit points every combat round. Their armor class isn't exceptional, and if you can consistently hit them in combat, they will quickly go down. Double-team them to reduce the effectiveness of their regeneration.

A **Goblin Captain** or **Goblin Chief** is a powerful Golem armed with significant, often magical, weaponry and armor. They are tough to hit because of their magical protection. They are competent in battle and can split a defender in two in just a couple of rounds. When you see Goblin Captains, focus on them. Use magical attacks to slow or wear them down. Spells such as Magic Missile and Melf's Acid Arrow are highly effective. Goblin Captains are surrounded by lesser Goblins, so focusing on the Captain leaves the others free to rampage. Have three or four characters concentrate on the Captain while the others whittle down the followers.

Goblin Shamans can cast spells. They hang back in combat, standing near or behind Goblin Archers, where they can cast spells with impunity. They have more hit points than other Goblins but a lower armor class. Nevertheless, they are tough combatants.

Goblin Shamans love to cast enchantments,

particularly Hold Person and Charm Person. The best defense is to disrupt their spells. Concentrating attacks on them is effective, but be sure to disrupt their spells with a single melee character in their area and another firing missiles or spells at them.

Worg-riding Goblins are two enemies rolled into one nasty package. In combat, both the Goblin and its Worg mount attack—a potentially lethal threat. A successful hit will strike either the Worg or the Goblin, and it's possible to kill one before killing the other. The main threat from Worg riders is their speed. Block their movement to keep them from mowing down your spellcasters and flank them with one or two characters.

Golems

Golems are artificial constructs—they have no mind and are immune to charm- and illusion-type spells. Because Golems have no definable internal anatomy, rogues cannot gain a flunk bonus, and feats such as Arsenical Strike and Hamstring do not work.

Crystal Golems, massive Golems made entirely of crystal, are immune to all forms of physical attacks but blunt weapons, including bare-handed attacks. Worse, Crystal Golems (like most Golems) are resistant to magic spells. Use spells to heal and buff your characters while your most powerful warriors use their best magical blunt weapons.

Most Golems are constructed of inorganic material. The exception is the **Flesh Golem**, constructed from the bodies of dead humans and humanoid. Flesh Golems are highly resistant to nonmagical weaponry, taking no damage from all but the most powerful strikes. Flesh Golems are virtually impervious to spells. Fire- and cold-based spells slow Flesh Golems (as the Slow spell), and electrical attacks heal them. Slow a Flesh Golem down with magic and follow up with good magical weapons.

Made entirely of ice, **Ice Golems** are immune to cold and similar spells. They are particularly vulnerable to fire-based spells and weapons. Ice Golems are too powerful to be dealt with entirely by spells—they won't melt fast enough. Attack with your best magical weapons, hitting from range until the Ice Golems are close enough to swing at a melee. Use spells to bolster and heal your characters.

Iron Golems are the kings of golemkind, constructed entirely from iron, their bodies are impervious to anything but the most potent (+3 or better) magical weapons. Like all Golems, Iron Golems are immune to most spells, but can be slowed by any electrical effect. Fire heals Iron Golems, and they have a breath weapon—a cloud of poisonous gas that affects anyone in its path. Their magical immunity makes Iron Golems difficult to kill from range. Get close and hit with your most powerful weapons. Arm all characters with +3 or better weapons, even if they aren't very proficient.

You will encounter **Mind Golems** in Mind Flayers' lairs. Mind Golems are similar to Iron Golems and should be treated as such. They are staunch combatants and often take precedence

over the equally dangerous and challenging Mind Flyers.

Half-Dragon

Virtually anything can crossbreed with a Dragon. The resulting offspring is something somewhat less than Dragon, but much more than its other half. Dragons often mate with Humans and humanoid creatures. The half-breeds are shunned in most societies, an unfortunate fact considering the tremendous power Half-Dragons wield. Half-Dragons follow any normal character class available to their non-Dragon half. Many become Wizards or Sorcerers, and their spell-casting prowess is legendary.

Quickly prevent spellcasting. This is impeded by the Half-Dragons' naturally high armor class. Keep your party spread out to prevent a single spell from taking down the whole group, and keep these creatures off balance with multiple spell attacks of your own. Half-Dragons have minions. Have your spellcasters keep the Half-Dragons occupied and disrupted.

Hook Horror

Hook Horrors are cave-dwelling creatures that lure surprising intruders by attacking from two directions. They possess a rock-hard exterior, which makes them hard to hit. Hook Horrors are quelled with powerful spells because they have no particular resistances to magic. Your best magical weaponry will suffice. Keep lightly armored characters away from them because their pointed claws cause terrible wounds.

Lich

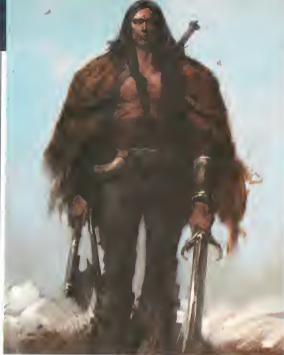
A Lich is what remains when a powerful spell-caster becomes undead. Liches gain all of the benefits (and problems) of being undead. They are unaffected by any spells that influence the mind. Liches are too powerful to be turned by Clerics. Liches have high-level deadly spells, so focus all your efforts on disrupting them.

Malarite

Malarites are humans who combine the nastiest elements of shamans and warriors. They prefer to summon creatures to fight for them, using their spells to further affect combat once their summoned beasts attack. They join in hand-to-hand fighting. In combat, Malarites frequently cast healing spells on themselves. Once a Malarite tries to heal, the battle is almost won if you can disrupt the spell.

Mind Flyer

Mind Flyers are inescapably evil, existing only for their own pleasures, even at the great expense of



hundreds of other creatures. Mind Flyers feed by extracting the brains of their victims and devouring them whole, and they attack with both spells and a powerful blast of mental energy that stuns its victims. They use this tactic to extract the victim's brain at leisure. Those few creatures that Mind Flyers decide not to devour are mentally dominated and turned into slaves. Because they use spells and mental abilities, Mind Flyers enjoy fighting at a distance. If you can get close without being mentally dominated or stunned, they quickly go down.

Myconid

Myconids are animated, man-sized mushrooms that often blend in with non-animated mushrooms. Their physical attacks are ineffective. Myconids release clouds of spores that cause confusion (like the Confusion spell). Use fire-based spells on Myconids when they appear. Slashing weapons are effective against them.

Meleo combats with Myconids take extra time because half of your party is confused and unable to strike.

Ogre

Ogres are classic front-line bad guys: big, tough, hard to kill, and dumber than a sack of hammers. Ogres prefer not to have to think, and their favorite solution to any problem is to smash it. They aren't smart enough to gang their attacks on a single enemy. They are too big to be affected by Hold Person or Charm Person spells, but are quite vulnerable to Hold Monster as well as any spell that requires a reflex saving throw. Ogres sport a decent armor class, especially against lower-level characters. They have an impressive number of hit points, which means they can take a significant beating. Hit them with enchantment spells early or fry them with mid-level offensive spells before closing with your warriors.

Orog

Orogs are another half-breed race, a mixture of Orc and Ogre. They are the size of an Ogre, with the bestial, pig-like appearance of an Orc. Big and strong, they belong to a decent armor class and have a lot of hit points. Orogs don't have spellcasters, which makes your own spells very potent when used against them. They are often found with Orcs, Ogres, Bugbears, and similar creatures. Their sheer power makes them a high priority for your spellcasters to disable or your warriors to slay.

Rakshasa

Rakshasas are perhaps the most malevolent creatures in existence. Normally a tiger-headed human, Rakshasas can take any humanoid form they desire. They love to deceive Humans, mainly to lure them into their stomachs. Rakshasas are uniquely immune to spells—any spell of Level 8 or less fails to work on them. Because you probably won't have Level 9 spells when you face a Rakshasa, physically attacking becomes your only option.

Remorhaz

Remorhazes are polar creatures, capable of living in frigid environments. They generate tremendous amounts of heat, allowing Remorhazes to burrow through ice and snow quickly and making them deadly opponents for anyone not protected from fire. Despite this, Remorhazes have no particular immunity to either cold- or fire-based magic. Whittle them down from a distance with magic and quickly finish them in close combat.

Shadow

Shadows are among the deadliest undead monsters you face. These restless undead spirits leech the living creatures and attack on sight. Shadows sap the life essence from their targets. Any character struck by a Shadow is permanently drained of 5 hit points, and these lost hit points can be restored only by Greater Restoration. Worse, because Shadows are incorporeal, their attacks bypass any armor worn by a character, and any attack that would normally hit a Shadow has a chance to pass through it. Turn Shadows with a cleric or paladin, or strike them from range.

Olive Slime

Olive Slimes, the kings of Slimes, are completely immune to normal weaponry and highly resistant even to most magical weapons. The only way to defeat them is with powerful magical weapons, spells, or fire. Avoid them entirely because they

can damage your characters terribly and it's incredibly difficult to kill them. Olive Slimes are damaged by dangerous barehanded attacks.

Snake

Snakes are big and deadly. Most are wild creatures with no particular special abilities. They are tough but shouldn't cause much problem. Their speed makes them difficult to move against and hard to hit. Gang up on them with your best warriors and handle them with spells when more powerful enemies are about.

Troll

Trolls are disgusting humanoids who regenerate over time. Any hit points they lose come back rapidly. Trolls are vulnerable to both fire and acid, and don't regenerate hit points lost from these forms of attack. Huge and green, dripping with slime and drool, they attack with their massive claws, striking at anything in their path. They can be dropped temporarily with normal weapons, but they quickly heal and return to battle. The only way to rid yourself of them permanently is with fire and acid. Flasks of oil, potions of fiery burning, and spells such as *Melf's Acid Arrow* and *Fireball* are the extermination methods of choice.

Fire Trolls are similar to regular Trolls, but their affinity for fire makes fire spells and flasks of oil useless against them. Fire Trolls lack the regenerative properties of normal Trolls. Cold-based magic does additional damage to them. Attack them with a few cold spells and a warrior or two.

Ice Trolls have the same regenerative properties of normal Trolls, with some significant immunities. Ice Trolls aren't affected by cold spells and don't take much damage from piercing or slashing weapons. Use fire and fire-based magic, although bludgeoning weapons are effective.

Skrags are aquatic Trolls, and you rarely encounter them. Handle them exactly as you do normal Trolls—hack them to pieces, then use flaming oil or similar substances to completely exterminate them.

Snow Trolls are similar to Ice Trolls, having the same regenerative properties and immunities to cold. Snow Trolls lack the Ice Trolls' immunity to piercing and slashing weapons, and their inability to stand up to as much damage makes them significantly easier opponents. Use fire-based spells and weapons.

Umber Hulk

Umber Hulks are humanoid only in the most general sense. They look like a combination of Cave Bear and Giant Beetle, having the former creature's size and strength and the latter's goblin



mandibles and multifaceted eyes. Umber Hulks are chaotic—anyone who looks into their eyes may become confused. Umber Hulks like to hide inside walls, bursting out to surprise anything that walks by. Avoid direct combat with them whenever you can.

Wight

Wights are twisted undead monsters similar to Shadows, but they have corporeal bodies. A Wight's touch permanently drains 5 hit points per strike, a nasty effect against weaker characters like sorcerers and wizards. Wights are susceptible to being turned by clerics and paladins—the perfect way to start a battle against these foes. Their draining ability is enough of a threat that you should stand back and use damaging spells and missile attacks. Fight Wights in melee only when forced to, and use negative energy protection when available.

Wyvern

Wyverns are related to Dragons but are not nearly as powerful or dangerous. These flying reptiles have a poison sting at the end of their tail. Wyverns lack forelegs, making them look like reptilian birds. Wyverns' poison is dangerous. Your characters are strong enough to handle them easily when they show up. Make sure your front-line warriors have antidote to take care of the poison and don't worry about casting spells.



WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Help for the horde **By Elliott Chin**

The time has come to turn our gaze to the shamanistic Orcs under the care of the war chief Thrall. The Orcish horde has the strongest melee fighters in the game, and yet combined arms are very much a core component of its strategy. You can grunt rush with the Orcs because of their initial brute strength, but they actually have much greater potential than that.

Orc Heroes

As with the other races, your selection of hero is the first important strategic choice you make in the game. All three Orc heroes are excellent

on offense. The tauren chieftan can eventually become the beefiest hero in terms of hit points, while the blade master acquires a tremendous attack. The farseer has excellent recon abilities as well as potent offensive spells.

In general, the best hero to choose first is the blade master. He starts off with a higher damage range and better armor. In addition, his abilities are very useful no matter what foes you face and what maps you play on. Wind Walk is a good first ability, and should be upgraded quickly. With this spell, you can create effective ambushes and scouting runs. Once your hero is buff, run him over to the enemy base, casting

Wind Walk just before he enters. Rush over to the enemy workers and then attack. Odds are, you'll kill at least one, if not two, worker units before your opponent notices. If your enemy doesn't pay attention, you could cripple his economy in no time at all. Wind Walk is also great for saving your blade master when he is near death. Because players don't tend to invest in detection research, most players you face won't be able to target your blade master anymore, letting you flee, or even stay still and collect experience while you watch and heal. A great ambush tactic in the later game is to go invisible into the midst of your enemy's forces



With Wind Walk, the blade master can sneak into town and do some damage to the enemy gold mining operation.



Bladestorm is the best Orc ultimate, able to decimate units and buildings.



The farseer provides good offensive spellcasting, as well as excellent scouting capability.



lest one should mine gold. As soon as you get enough wood to build the barracks, switch to gold mining. You'll need all the gold for your grunts. Build a second Orc burrow when you have the resources, because the grunt costs more food than any other Level 1 unit. Meanwhile, crank out four or five more peons, taking two to wood and the rest to gold. You should eventually have about five peons on gold, three on wood, and one or two to construct

buildings. Build a war mill as soon as you can for the crucial upgrades and the troll headhunter. After you have a small force of grunts to back up your first hero, upgrade your great hall to a stronghold so you can get kodo beasts. Then make the jump to the fortress as fast as you can for the Shaman Bloodlust, upgraded War Drums, the witchdoctor's Healing Ward, and banners.

Build two spirit lodges so you can upgrade both spellcasters concurrently, or pump out shamans while you research their upgrades.

Orc Build Order

The build order of the Orcs isn't as straightforward as the Humans because the costs of the initial Orc buildings have been tweaked by Blizzard so that you can't rush to heroes and grunts at the same time for a fast initial rush attack. Unlike the Humans, who start with enough resources to build an altar, a barracks, and a farm, the Orcs only have enough to begin building two of those buildings. Make the wrong choice and you might end up having to wait for a late Orc burrow to be constructed, stalling your ability to recruit a hero right away.

You should start by building an altar of darkness with one peon and an Orc burrow with the other. Two peons should collect wood, and the

Parting Tip

The Orcs are at their best when you use all the abilities of their disposal. That means going for Shaman Bloodlust as soon as possible and having upgraded kodo beasts give your units faster attacks and higher damage. That also means adding headhunters for ranged support. Grunts, unlike the Human footmen, are still

The Mighty Kodo Beast

The kodo beast is a valuable part of the Orc arsenal. While your units are already very strong collectively, with the kodo beasts backing you up, your heavy hitters become even greater. If you add Bloodlust, they're nearly unstoppable. Consider getting kodo beasts as soon as possible once you upgrade to a stronghold. At that level, the Kodo adds +10 percent to the attack of every unit in its radius of effect. Once you advance to the fortress and research upgraded War Drums, the bonus jumps to +20 percent. The game takes the average damage of your unit when calculating the percentage bonus, rounding to the nearest whole number. A low-level kodo gives a +2 damage bonus to a nonupgraded grunt (average damage 20.5), and a +3 damage bonus to a nonupgraded headhunter (average damage 25). When you fully upgrade all your units, the kodo lets you give your footmen a +8 bonus, your headhunters a +7 bonus, and your grunts a +6 bonus. Your witchdot gets a massive +25 bonus because its average damage is so high. Once you hit the high-level units, add more full upgrades, you should absolutely bring along kodo beasts to support your army.

Note that your opponents will usually take the kodo beast out to neutralize its benefits. With that in mind, take two or three kodo beasts with you into battle. In team games, having a kodo beast around is also a great tactic, as it will benefit both your units and your ally's.



Sentry Ward is a great way to spy on enemy bases and keep an eye on well-traveled areas.



The full Spiked Barricade upgrade does 16 damage to enemy melee attackers.



Add a kodo beast to boost your army's attack strength, and bring two or more for backup.

Orc Defenses

The Orcs have among the best defenses in the game. They have a normal tower that can be built after you build a war mill. But they also have an immediate tower structure in the Orc burrow. It does much more damage than the watch tower, but must be garrisoned with peons in order to have an attack. The damage-per-attack is the same whether you have one peon or four in there, but the attack speed increases with each peon inside. If under attack, pop out a peon to repair your burrow. If he comes under attack, pop him back in. Don't rely solely on burrows though. It takes time to garrison them, so have two towers or so supporting your line of burrows. Moreover, burrows have neither normal nor fortified armor, so they succumb to attack much more easily than towers.

You should also research spike barricades, so that you do damage to any melee attackers hitting your buildings. Barricades alone won't stop an invasion, but if you use one of the Orcs' defenses—burrows, watch towers, and spike barricades—along with diligent repelling, you can field a better town defense than any other race.

Your initial burrow should be near your gold mine and close enough to defend the gold mine if the enemy rushes through your initial buildings to get at your gold supply line. After that, space your burrows out so they provide overlapping fire and can cover any threats that come at the buildings on the periphery of your town. Remember to treat them like towers, not farms, and build them beside or surrounding your town to benefit from their defense.

Allied Games

Communication is key. You and your ally should talk from the beginning about strategies and paths you will take with your particular race. Play up your strengths and commit to them. If you are Orc and your ally is Night Elf, you'll want to go all melee units and let your ally cover air and ranged support. This forces you up to concentrate on acquiring burrows, stasis, and melee upgrades. It also forces your ally to focus on the slow and burrowless in favor of other units.

Recognize that your skills will stack with your ally's. For example, fully armored knights with Inner Fire, the Devotion Aura, and Priest Healing are already nearly unkillable. Add in Bloodlust, a Hero boost, and more healing via the Ward, and you have a unit that transcends the incredible.

viable even in the later game, but you must research the Berserker Rage upgrade to give them +100 hit points and +3 attack. If you have the resources, though, it's still better to go with taurens with the Pulverize ability. En masse and with full support, these brutes are devastating.

The raider is something of an enigma. The grunt is actually better against units because of its better hit points. While the raider is better against buildings, it also has heavy armor, making it more vulnerable to lower fire. It's better just to go with cobaltus to take down buildings from range and have regular units around for support. But raiders are useful for scouting and taking down lightly-defended expansion bases.

When you go into battle, have your troll witchdoctor ready his Healing Ward and then plant it down where most of your units are embroiled in battle. It heals 2 percent of a unit's

hit points per second, enhancing the longevity of your units. Unlike the Human priest's Heal ability, the Healing Ward helps all of your units in a sizeable area of effect. While not as big a priority as Bloodlust, Healing Wards greatly increase the effectiveness of your troops and can make the difference in battle.

Using the witchdoctor's Stasis Ward is a lot trickier and is not as good a use of your mana as the Healing Ward. Still, it comes in handy if you know where the enemy's units are. You can place a Stasis Ward just outside your town if you know your foe is amassing troops nearby. Make sure, though,

that your own units aren't near, because Stasis Ward doesn't discriminate between friend and foe. On the other hand, Sentry Ward, because of its invisibility and long duration, is a great way to spy on other players. Plant it near the enemy base and enjoy vision into it for 10 minutes.

When using the shaman's Lightning Shield spell, remember

that it also hurts friendly units. It's not wise to cast it on your own units unless they are completely surrounded or away from friendlies. Instead, cast it on the back ranks of lined up enemy ranged units or on clusters of enemy broods.

Don't count on the wyvern rider to save the day against air units. But understanding its limitations and abilities will help you get the most out of this unit. Because of its mobility and Envenomed Spears ability it is great for attacking expansions and harassing enemy workers. Against other air units, you'll want troll headhunters underneath for support. Still, against unsuspecting enemy players, especially other Orc players who tend to ignore Orc air and thus neglect headhunters, wyvern riders might be just the surprise you need for victory.

The Beauty of Bloodlust



Orc burrows provide good defense. They have weak armor though, so they need lots of repair.



Unit management, combined items, and good spell use are key to surviving large battles.



In allied games, combine your strengths to achieve ultimate power.

Managing Units in the Thick of Battle

It's easy to see why you'd panic during a battle. You're trying to control dozens of units together so you can concentrate them, often you have dozens of units that can't be moved or healed. You'll also do things to yourself, like heh-heh-heh. Instead, pour all your fire on one unit at a time to eliminate it from battle quickly. At the very least, you should have your ranged units fire on groups. First, target ranged abilities. Use headhunters and archers, because of their fire units. They often have lower hit points and so more damage. If you see large groups and archers, target them before ranged units.

When in the thickest end of such attacks, take control of the unit under the arrow and move it from the battle. You'll be able to heal it later and use a just-wasted spell. Use your own abilities to take control of the unit. If the unit is being attacked by your other units, then, moving units as they get low in hit points, and then rearing them to battle when the enemy has acquired new targets, can win the day for you.



Effectively running the ball makes play action calls like this easier to sell to the defense.

Madden NFL 2003

How to be a football hero **By Rob Smolka**

It's amazing how far the Madden football games have come. The visuals are so good these days, it's sometimes hard to distinguish the game from an actual television broadcast. The feature list is long and impressive, letting us control our own leagues and franchises down to the smallest detail. What's perhaps most impressive, though, is how far the gameplay has come, even just in the last several years. You can actually apply the same strategies as NFL coaches and general managers, and because the game now behaves so realistically, the results on the monitor will mirror the results seen on Sunday afternoons and in corporate boardrooms.

Controlling the Controls

The old joke that says the best way to get to Carnegie Hall is to practice applies to *Madden 2003* as well—the best way to get good at the game is to play it. The vast array of buttons that are used to control your players can only be mastered with repetition. Fortunately, there's an excellent way to do this under controlled conditions, and that's using the practice mode.

To get the most out of your practice sessions, you need to use a little discipline. Decide which

play you want to master and set up the practice so that there is no defense to worry about. This way, you can run the play and observe what the other players on your team are supposed to be doing. Then, when you put a defense on the field, you can tell right away where the trouble spots are, such as pass patterns or blocking assignments that don't work well against certain coverages.

It's also a good idea to run the same play against all of the different defenses. This allows you to learn the look of the different formations so that you can read the defense from the line of scrimmage during a game. With this knowledge, you'll be able to call an audible at the line (more on this later) and take advantage of the defense. The same theory applies in reverse for learning how to play defense. See how the 11 players interact and behave on each of your defensive plays, and then see who's not getting the job done when going up against a particular offense.

One other thing you should try to accomplish during practice is to use all of the moves as much as possible. In other words, even if you don't need to do a spin move, do it anyway. What this does is help you intuitively learn the



Learning the coffin corner kick will ensure that your opponent starts against the wall.



Timing your passes to go both through the ring and hit your receiver is tricky.

buttons for certain moves; it will also give you a better feel for how the player will move when you try that particular action. The proper timing and use of a stiff arm or a juke has another advantage besides getting you additional yards on a play—it looks impressive, and style counts too, especially when you're playing against a human opponent!

Maximizing Mini-Camp

Another fantastic way to improve your abilities is to go through the mini-camp mode. Here, you'll focus on very specific skills that will aid you during games. Some of the challenges are quite difficult, and just getting the bronze cup (there are also silver and gold cup levels, depending on your final score) will make you feel like you've won the Super Bowl. Here are some specific tips that will help you:

QB - Sweat Ball: This one is all about getting in the proper position. Once you know where the ball is heading, run to the spot in front of the tackling dummy and time your jump. The worst mistake you can make is to try and go after every ball, especially on the higher difficulty levels where the targets are further apart. It's better to let a ball go than to put yourself out of position for two or three of the next attempts.

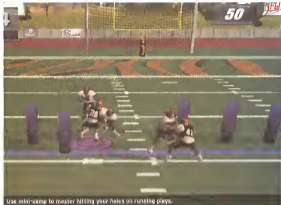
DL - Trench Fight: Constantly battling multiple 300-pound behemoths can be really frustrating. The idea here is to use the bull rush when there is only one blocker, and to use a combination of swim and spin moves when you are facing more than one guy. Try to approach one of the blockers at an angle from the outside, use the arm closest to him to push him away, and then spin in the opposite direction. Usually, this will let you avoid the second blocker altogether. If you get caught in a shoving match, you will more than likely run out of time.

K - Clutch Kicking: There's not much strategy here, other than to keep your eye on the wind meter and adjust accordingly. Also, the stronger the wind, the lower you'll want to keep the trajectory of the kick.

QB - Pocket Presence: It's kind of like rubbing your stomach and patting your head at the same time. Short, controlled movements are a must, or you'll be disqualified for leaving the pocket; it doesn't take more than a step or two to avoid the balls coming at you. Try to concentrate on not getting hit over completing the pass, as you will lose more points if you get sacked.

QB - Precision Passing: The sooner you complete all three passes in a round, the bigger a bonus you'll receive. It's almost always better to stand still after snapping the ball and time the release by where the receiver is in his pattern; trying to move and throw is a lot harder and much more imprecise. Also note that if you hit any ring while completing a pass—not just the one that is assigned to a specific receiver—you'll get credit for the play. Some throws will require you to lob the ball, which is much harder to time than a sharply thrown pass, so keep that in mind.

RB - Ground Attack: If you don't have an immediate opening, don't waste time trying to take out the tackler or fight for that extra yard



Use mini-camp to master hitting your holes on running plays.



The sweat ball drill for defensive backs gives you the option of just trying to knock the ball down or going all out for an interception and some bonus points.

or two. This wastes valuable time that is better used for running another play that might lead to a touchdown.

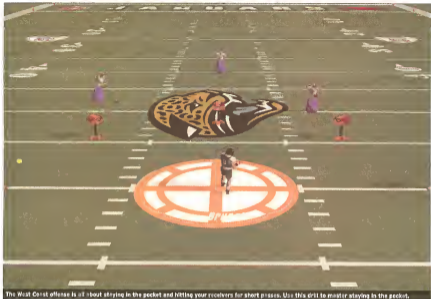
P - Coffin Corner Punt: This is another one of those maneuvers that can only be completed after you get a feel for where to position the aiming meter. As you move up in difficulty, you'll find that hitting the sweet spot at the bottom of the kicking meter becomes more important and helps to avoid shanking the ball.

LB - Chase and Tackle: This is probably the most fun test in the mini-camp. The key to doing well is to remember to be patient. Always control the player closest to the line of scrimmage at the start of the play—you can always switch to the back defender if you miss the tackle. Wait for the running back to make his move to the right or left before committing.

Try to stay square with his shoulders and don't let him get to your outside.

Don't Dodge the Draft

One of the most rewarding parts of the game is drafting your own team and controlling it in the franchise mode. The first thing to do is decide whether you want to focus on offense or defense—trying to keep a balance between the two will result in a mediocre team in all areas. It's better to use trades and the draft to work on your problem areas. Don't be afraid to spend a lot of money in the early going, if there's a player that you really like with a high salary, go after him early. As your overall spending limit declines, so does the maximum amount you can spend in that round of the draft. So, even if you've got plenty of money left toward the end



The West Coast offense is all about staying in the pocket and hitting your receivers for short passes. Use this drill to master staying in the pocket.

of the draft, you'll only be able to spend a small percentage of it for any one player.

There are several positions that you should wait to fill. Punters and kickers are the least important, as the other teams will ignore them until the middle rounds, and there's not a huge difference between the best guys and the middle-of-the-pack ones. Other positions that can be put off for a while are fullback and free safety. There are a plethora of above-average players at these positions, and you can usually grab a very respectable (and cheap) player toward the end of the draft. Early on, your focus should be on the positions of quarterback and wide receivers (if you're going for offense) or middle linebacker and cornerback (if you're building a defensive team).

Calling Audibles

During your time spent in the practice mode, you will probably come up with a few favorite plays. You'll also know when these plays are most effective. These are the plays you should set up as your audibles. It will help you remember them better if you use a system, such as using the first slot for short running plays, both on offense and defense, the second slot for blitzes (both defending against them and using them), etc. There are only five slots, so make sure to use them to their fullest.

Offensively, you should have a running play up the middle and one to the outside, a short passing play, a long passing play, and a screen

play (or something similar for beating the blitz). On defense, you need to be able to adjust quickly, so it makes sense to have a short and long zone play, a short and long man-to-man play, and a blitz. Which individual plays you choose can be based on your personal preference (using your fullback or fullback on short running plays, for instance), but this selection should be handy for all situations. You can augment these audibles by using the hot

routes. These let you change a receiver's pattern or a blocker's assignment at the line of scrimmage—see the manual to learn how to call these plays.

Of course, playing against another human player, online or offline, calls for more deception. If you're playing the same individual more than a couple of times, you'll want to change your audible calls once in a while to avoid being predictable.

Miscellaneous Tips

- ▷ If you have an older PC and you want to get the best performance with the best graphics possible, start by turning down the shadow detail and density. If that doesn't fix the lag, then turn off helmet mapping and make sure texture detail is at 16-bit rather than 32-bit.
- ▷ Don't forget that you can listen to your own MP3s in the menus and during the min-games. Go to Audio Options on the System Settings page and type in the name of the directory where you keep MP3s. The game will even randomize playback for you!
- ▷ Want to keep track of all the stats of all your games? It's possible. Just go to the Madden03 file, usually located in your Madden 2003 subdirectory, and edit it using

Notepad. Look for a section that reads: "Option Group: Stats Log Settings." There you can change the Franchise Log Files and the Game Log Files from "Overwrite" to "Unique." That way every game is saved to a unique text file in your stats subdirectory.

- ▷ Earn tokens with the online two-minute drill by playing a weak offensive team against a strong defensive team. You get more tokens for setting new weekly high scores, so don't forget to play at the beginning of the week.
- ▷ Don't quit an online game if you are losing! Not only does it go on your record, labeling you as someone with a high disconnection percentage, but you don't gain tokens like you do if you complete a game.

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Greenspeak

Greenspeak Unplugged

When the going gets tough, the tough go to Hawaii By Jeff Green

When in the course of living the ridiculously easy, stress-free life of a "gaming journalist" you find yourself repeatedly and inexplicably acting like a constipated, ill-humored grump, that is the time in which you need to step away from the computer and gain a little perspective. This is not hard labor. This is not hog disassembling at the slaughterhouse. This is not a whole lot of the time, anything remotely resembling "work." When the biggest stress point of your day is worrying about whether the office firewall will prevent you from playing *Half-Life 2* 1942 all day long, well, you know, you should pretty much just shut up, lay low, and be glad no one's caught on yet.

Still, though—it can catch up with you. Anything done repeatedly, no matter how fun, can get old if you don't take a break once in a while. (Reminder: insert masturbation joke here.) So even though I really do love my job here at CGW, it became clear to me a few weeks ago—right around the time I broke my mouse in frustration while trying to beat that last frickin' *Unreal* mission in *WarCraft III*—that it was time for me to unplug my electronic umbilical cord and get the heck out of here for a while. So that's what I did. I packed up the wife, the kid, a big pile of books, and a gallon of Extra-Strength Sunblock for Computer Users, and took off for two weeks to the big island of Hawaii.

Ain't, Hawaii. The weather, the beaches, the girls shopping in public in bikinis—seriously, why does anyone live anywhere else? For two solid weeks I enjoyed this somewhatistic, tropical lifestyle, completely divorced from all things electronic—and boy did it feel good. My original plan, because I'm a certified professional dork, had actually, pathetically, been to bring a laptop with me. Yeah, sure I was going on vacation, but I had e-mail to check! And it wasn't going to be sunny all the time. I figured I'd maybe just play a minute or two, here and there, of *Morrowind*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Grand Theft Auto III*, and *WarCraft III*. And maybe finish up a couple Game Boy Advance games. And *Beyoncé* on the Palm Pilot. Like I said, I was lacking perspective. Fortunately, the wife had plenty of perspective to spare,

One thing my vacation nailed me for was that I was due for a change.



along with a large frozen fish and some papers from her attorneys, so upon careful reconsideration, I decided to leave it all at home.

It was not easy. I've gone about six years with no break from this stuff—so we're bliking cold turkey here—shakes, hot flashes, and lots of blackouts and weeping. One night I was found half a mile from our rental home, suitcase in hand, disoriented and moaning incoherently about leaving Hawaii immediately because I had to "help the mages guild in *Balmora*." At my lowest point, I apparently screamed "Zug zug!" over and over for four hours straight, until a doctor slapped the unconscious state I remained in for the next two days.

But ultimately, it was a good break. I was happy. I did lots of snorkeling, swimming, lazing, and even took some scuba diving lessons. Once my body became reacquainted with actual fresh air and sunlight, I discovered that I actually liked it out there.

I did lots of thinking, too. And while floating around on a boogie board at Hapuna Beach, I came up with the headline to this column. I knew, right

then, that it was going to have two meanings. The first one was obvious: Jeff Green in Hawaii, without computer games. But the second meaning was one I had been pondering for a while and knew I had to do: pull the plug on this page.

Yeah, yeah, I know—it's about time. The first *Greenspeak* appeared on the back page of CGW in July 1998, making this the 54th in a row, and, ya know, that's plenty. I'm not going anywhere, really. I'm still running this rag, I'm still writing, and after that two weeks in Hawaii, I actually love games again. So you're not done with me yet.

But one thing my vacation really nailed for me was that I was due for a change. And you probably are, too. Be good, everyone. Happy gaming. Remember to save early and often.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that abandoning *Greenspeak* does not mean Dana's gonna let him play games all day now instead. Give him hell one last time at jeff_green@idvavis.com.

Like the illustrations you've seen here? Pick up artist Michael Suck's comic book, *Kind of 9* for \$13.95 + \$3.95 from www.fictor.com or your local comic book store.

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