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Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON PREVIEW!

SPLINTER CELL

Tom Clancy's latest hits the PC—
find out why it'll blow you away!

CGW PREDICTS

Best Games of 2003

Star Wars Galaxies? Doom III? Unreal II?
Turn to page 32 to find out!

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PREVIEWS!**
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WORDS**

the threat



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By PETER ROSEBY

Recent military aggressions around the globe have many nations worried. Between the United States, China and the Global Liberation Army, tensions run high. Their leaders profess no interest in escalating the situation, but words ring hollow when satellite photos tell a different story. The issue is no longer "Will there be military conflict?" but instead, "Who will prevail?"



CHINA:

No longer just a red-communist step-child, China's modern army is well-financed with a strong nationalistic bent. Parading technology like Dragon Tanks and Nuclear Missiles, China's military goes beyond large troop numbers. But defeating the agile GLA is still no walk in Yangmingshan National Park. So while their new military is formidable, so is the task ahead.





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We're confident that PC gamers won't be forced to buy an Xbox to experience one of the best Clancy games ever produced.

52 COVER STORY
Splinter Cell

Silent but deadly Sasofer sneaks into Ubi Soft Montreal to get hands-on time with Splinter Cell, the PC's answer to Metal Gear Solid 2.

14 Editorial

Jeff rambles again. Just keep smiling and nodding, and maybe he'll go away.

18 Letters

Fear the wrath of the angry Druids! Plus: one woman's lament for Greenspeak, and the first (and hopefully last) ever Belgian Corner.

26 Loading...

It's sequel month in the Loading section, and we've got some good stuff in store. (Does that make this Loading 2: Electric Boogaloo?) Check out **EverQuest II** in all its glory and some of the sick weaponry in action from **Unreal II: The Awakening**.

32 Read Me

What will be the best games of 2003? Find out on page 32. Also, see our exclusive update on **Counter-Strike: Condition Zero**, and get the latest on Nvidia's highly touted GeForce FX. Plus Pipeline, a readers' choice Top 20, and Jeff Green prancing around in a pink tutu. Maybe we better skip that last part...

Columns

40 Homebrew



60 Handhelds Got Game

Do a whole lot more with your Palm. Easy there, slick, we're talking about the digital handhelds that slash phone numbers. They've been evolving and are finally ready to play. In fact, we found some portable games that are better than some PC titles.

100 Tech

Reviewed: Velocity Micro's latest laptop, Via's P4 motherboard, Creative Lab's Audigy 2 soundcard and 6.1 speaker setup, Logitech's newest MOMO wheel, and a Saitek joystick. Also, how to create a dual boot system, Tech Medics, Killer Rigs, and Loyd Case's new column.

113 Gamer's Edge

hone your running and gunning skills with our comprehensive strategies for **Battlefield 1942**. Plus, check out some of the best maps for **Unreal Tournament 2003** and master the Night Elves in our final installment of the Encyclopedia WarCraftik.

128 Scorched Earth

One man's solution for floppies and software

Unreal II is shaping up to be the first-person shooter to beat in 2003.

48 UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

Nepalm flamethrowers, grenade launchers, spider guns—can you say “Yüpeel”?



74 HOT PURSUIT 2



90 NHL 2003



81 MEDAL OF HONOR: SPEARHEAD

Previews

- 48 Unreal II: The Awakening
- 50 Rainbow Six: Raven Shield

Reviews

- 70 Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin
- 72 Earth & Beyond
- 74 Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
- 76 FIFA Soccer 2003
- 77 EverQuest: The Planes of Power
- 80 ShadowFare: Episode One
- 80 Heroes of Might and Magic IV: The Gathering Storm
- 81 Medal of Honor: Spearhead
- 82 Combat Flight Simulator 3
- 84 Project Nomads
- 85 Treasure Planet
- 86 MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries
- 87 Airline Tycoon Evolution
- 88 Worms Blast
- 88 Beam Breakers
- 90 NHL 2003
- 91 Civilization III: Play the World
- 92 NASCAR Thunder 2003
- 92 Revisionist History: Medieval Total War
- 94 Hearts of Iron
- 96 Virtua Tennis
- 96 Rayman Arena
- 97 Real War: Rogue States
- 97 Eagles Strike
- 98 Iron Storm
- 98 The Italian Job
- 99 Review Index



32 READ ME
What games will you be playing in the new year?



100 TECH
Time to get hot and busy.



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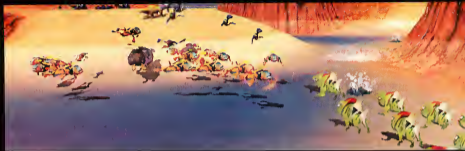
Ultima Online

AGE OF SHADOWS

Dry Highlands



YOU'RE BEING ATTACKED (HALF PIRANHA / HALF



James, 20
biology student
Denver

Jessie the Kid: let's face it. The only good Pirawolf is a dead Pirawolf. 🟡

You need to have balance. A good air combat squadron of Vulturesharks, plus a battalion of Hyenadragons, and finally, Turtellions for the amphibious fights. "Snakes and snails with scorpion tails." These are what real men are made of.



Tommy, 23
computer programmer
San Francisco



Violence
Comic Mischief

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game studio

realic

BY AN ARMY OF PIRAWOLVES (WOLF)... **WHAT WILL YOU DO?**



cjm1565: send in my
goons. Egorillos and
Rhinobulls.

These boys will punish
anything. If the French
had them, they wouldn't
have needed us in WWII.

END OF STORY, BIZATCH!

Craig, 22
pro skateboarder/slacker
Providence



Tom Toor: let's just say,
MAJOR PAIN IN THE...;)

A Tigebra is pretty wicked, or
a Tiganzee. Haven't tried a
tiger and a rhino yet.

My bet is it terminates with
extreme prejudice. I like that.



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Band of Boneheads

CGW: keeping America strong

Well, it's been four weeks since our last issue, and I'm proud to note that, once again, we have come through and made another one. Phew. Sometimes I don't know how we do it, to be honest—the endless, grueling burden of playing games and writing about them. When you think about it, we're kind of like 21st-century warriors, fighting the good fight, keeping America safe. Yes, like our forefathers fought for liberty and justice in years past, we sacrifice, we sweat, we do the things you don't want to do—like play *The Italian Job*—so you don't have to. So on behalf of all of us here in the trenches, let me just pause for a moment before the magazine formally begins and say this: You're welcome.

This month was extra grueling on us. Over the course of four weeks, we had about six different cover stories, three of which featured photos of men's abs. If you quickly flip to the cover now, you'll see that we're featuring Splinter Cell, which wasn't even in the running at first, but which I now believe to be better

than all our other choices combined. The game's been getting rave reviews on Xbox, and we were able to send Scooter up to Canada to get the first hands-on time with the PC version. He liked what he saw: hot Canadian chicks. He also liked the game.

Our other big feature this month is a special report on handheld gaming, written by new previews editor and techno-fetishist Darren Gladstone, who's been floating around the game industry for years before washing ashore, like a dead, bloated body, at

CGW. Yes, I know these aren't "PC gaming" devices, but handheld gaming is a force to reckon with, and worth a quick look once in awhile. So take a chill pill and read it.

A couple changes to report. First, check out the new, revamped, actually-relevant Top 20 in the Read Me section (page 45). Happily, this is no longer an out-of-date bestseller list of games never played by those who read and write this magazine. Now, it's an up-to-the-minute online poll conducted at www.gamers.com of the games you're currently playing and loving. If you don't like this month's results, put the D-Boxes down for two minutes, log on, and submit your own votes. Those who don't vote don't get to complain.

Finally, join me in extending a warm welcome to uber-snarly pants and CGW alum Loyd Case, who returns with a monthly column in the Tech section. Those who complain that they can't understand WJ O'Neal's street lingo now have Loyd's geek lingo to complain about. Word to your mother!

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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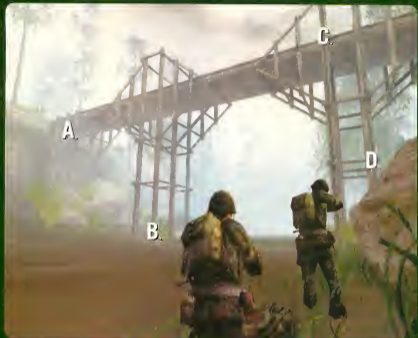
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DARREN GLADSTONE

"It was either this or hating myself at the corner of Pole and Post," said Darren as he feverishly finished the handheld gaming feature in this month's issue (page 60). With this issue, Darren takes up the mantle of Tom Price for CGW. Don't worry, he's already put his name down on the donor list for a new liver.

LOYD CASE

Lloyd Case hides out in his basement office, testing hardware for ExtremeTech (www.extremetech.com), the Ziff Davis Web publication dedicated to really geeky, but cool, people (you know who you are). Lloyd is probably the foremost propeller-head in gaming journalism, but he's also a hardcore strategy gamer with a home LAN and monthly multiplayer parties. Lloyd just wrapped up his third book, *The Extreme Gamer's PC*. His new column for CGW begins this month.



GEORGE JONES

George Jones kicks himself in the rear end every single day for vacating the top spot at Computer Gaming World in order to restart Gamers.com for Ziff Davis Media. His current mission as a freelancer writer/reviewer: uncovering the essence of game design, which is no easy task these days. Just to prove he's not totally billey, he wrote this month's glowing review of *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries*.

JACK HORNAOY

Washington, D.C.-based illustrator Jack Hornady (Searched Earth illustration, page 108) has used his RISD art education to create a world of "little people with big heads." Some of Jack's clientele include *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, Johns Hopkins University, *Book of the Month Club*, and MacMillan Publishing. Jack has been profiled in *Step by Step Graphics* and *Impress Magazine*, a Korean art journal.



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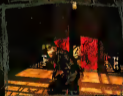


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Letters

Carry on my wayward son at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Gaga for Greenspeak

Just wanted to say a whopping THANKS for my boyfriend, who is lying next to me curled into the fetal position upon hearing Jeff "run off to Hawaii and find Zen" Green won't be doing his column any longer.

It started as a good day for the ball and chain, having just completed *Baldur's Gate XL*. But on this day, he had finally done whatever to kill the atypical Baal-looking thingy, and he stalked down to the mailbox to pick up the latest CGW—God FORBID he buy a game without getting your OK first. I heard the scream of terror and revulsion all the way up the driveway. The neighbors' dogs haven't shut up since.

So, thanks, Green, for giving me another lunatic to deal with. I would write more, but the people in the white coats are here to take my boyfriend to La-La Land, which I assure, you has no beach. Thanks for the years of funny columns, and one big kick in the ass for abandoning us.

Victoria Majere



Age of PC greatness

Thanks for putting together a sweet layout on *Age of Mythology* [December 2002]! But there is an error on page 99. The caption of the image for the Egyptian deity says "Ra," but the deity shown is actually Horus. No sweat, though, since the rest of the layout is incredible. Looks like I'll really have to get that new hard drive to hold *ADM*, *UT2003*, *Unreal II*, and *Duke 4* (if they ever get it together). And then *Halo* is

out in 2003. Jeet, I may need a new computer!!

Congrats on putting out a top-notch magazine.

Ken L.

Thanks, mom

First off, kudos to everyone at CGW for putting up with all the hash they take every month in the Letters section. It's unbelievable how many people write in to tell you how they're canceling their subscriptions because of one article they didn't like—the *that guy* a few issues ago who said he's dropping because you wrote an article about Macs. Did it ever occur to anyone that if fine publications such as CGW held back every article that might conceivably offend someone, all we'd get every month is about three pages detailing the awfulness of the latest 200 *Tycoon* games? Personally, I don't find it too difficult to turn the page past an article I don't want to read, but apparently some people find this burden too much to stomach and would rather cancel their

subscriptions than tolerate it. Go figure. Anyway, good job to everyone at CGW and keep it up!

Jeff Green's Mom

More bots for shooters

I've been a loyal reader for the past few years, and I remember the agony which was the *Dashkano* demo and the greatness of the *Bejeweled* and *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* demos. While trying out the *UT2003* demo on the December 2002 CD, I was once again beset by the same thought I've had before...where are the bots in most games?

Why are there so few shooters that provide the ability to use bots in the multiplayer games? I had my machine running *Capture the Flag* with just me and 16 bots...and it was great fun. I'm one of those poor souls too far in the boonies and too poor in the economy to have access to anything faster than dial-up, so home or office LAN use is usually the only multiplayer gaming I get in. Playing *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* with only two players becomes a repetitive who-sees-who-first game after a while...why can't we have a dozen bots to give us the proper feel of the fight? Why can't I lead a full team in my *Nerf*

"All we'd get is three pages detailing the awfulness of 200 *Tycoon* games."

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MAIL BITES

Dama you, CGW! I will figure out how to pronounce "Thierry Nguyen" if it kills me!

Andrew Schran

Trailer Park Tycoon—this is a joke, right?

Zach McDermitt

I hear that you guys have a lot of extra stuff lying around, so I was wondering if you could toss a GeForce4 Ti 4200 or a high-end GeForce3 my way. I'd buy one, but I got no job and my parents are incredibly cheap.

Stefan

What the world needs now is Jeff, sweet Jeff.

ParrotHead

"And no, the Satanists don't sacrifice babies either."

ArenaBlast games? I can just imagine playing the MOH Normandy scenario with a few dozen bots running around. RTS games almost always have computer players that can be allies or adversaries, why not shooters?

Cheshire Cat

Attack of the Druids

Just picked up CGW. I got a chuckle from most of the letters (and loved the graphic of the rampaging penguin). However, one thing did disturb me, the letter from the Christian asking for games without Druidic content. While I respect other people's choices of religion, I had to shake my head sadly at the spouting of untrue stereotypes.

I am not a Druid, but I am a Witch. Yes, I am male. "Witch" is a gender-neutral term. Do most people even bother to learn that fact before insulting a valid religion? And this emphasizes my point exactly. (Please don't say I'm a Warlock—Warlock means "deceiver" and is an insult to many Wiccans.)

It's debatable whether Druids carried out the human sacrifices that they were supposedly responsible for. The records of Druidic practices are mostly Roman, and Rome didn't think too well of the Druids. It's also wrong to say that they're Satanic. Satanism is a totally different religion than the Druidic practices, and no, they don't sacrifice babies either.

The letter came across to me as vaguely insulting, as well as sadening. Sad because the writer seemed to spew the standard line of the Christian church, and insulting because he didn't even get the facts right. Much like the anti-Wicca page I found that said there was an ancient race of people called the Celts. It's just done without thought. The Celts are a basketball team, the CELTS were the ancient people.

Ben "Bearfoot" Nelson

I'm writing in response to Michael who voiced his problems with the Druidic content of some RPGs. While the representation of this Celtic caste in gaming is in almost no way accurate historically, there is no reason for him to describe the beliefs of the various Celtic peoples as "Druidic garbage."

Maewyn Succot (St. Patrick to you) sat and helped write the Fenecus (the law of the land fillers) with a group of Irish etelers that included three Druids, so a saint disagrees with you. Please stop talking about things you know nothing about, it hurts others and just shows how intolerant the three monotheistic belief systems from the Middle East



really are to the naive beliefs of various peoples around the world.

And to you folks at CGW: Mo grae fir (I love you guys), keep up the great work.

Edmond O'hannodhian

Scorched Earth reactions

At first, I admit, I was a little worried. In last month's mag [December 2002] Jeff Green announced his retirement from the back page. And quite frankly, I didn't know what I was going to do without his column. I mean, let's face it, he is a gaming god. When I picked up this month's magazine and read Jeff's article in the front, I couldn't have been happier. Still I thought it was a step down from his normal Greenspeak column.

Then I read Robert Coffey's article. Just as good as Greenspeak if not better. I've been around this magazine for a few years, saw when Jeff took over as editor, the change in looks, etc., and I've been worried about how it would end up turning out. Until now. I look forward to reading Robert's articles every month and I'm not worrying anymore.

iZooz

PS. Who the hell is Zepko Marx? I mean I know a Karl Marx, but who the hell is Zepko?

Since this is America, I would like to voice my opinion after reading Scorched Earth in January's issue of CGW. I have been enjoying the back page for a long time now. It's sad, I know, but I think I'm going to be looking forward to it even more. The world doesn't need to be filled



with near senseless hate and garbage, but every person needs some. Reading January's back page, and the back pages before it, help me vent without venting because it's true-to-life issues that I can relate to...well I can't say that...OK, so I can't. But I can understand them and agree, or at least understand the emotion that the article presents. I look forward to your next one and I will read my next issue starting from the end (I bet the advertisers will be that. Raise the price for the cover space.)

Brian "Zeven"

I know that lots of people are going to be upset that Jeff had to give up Greenspeak for his editorial. I understand that Jeff has a duty as editor to write the column that has "Editorial" passed across the top, but I think I have a solution that will make everyone happy. Give Jeff a thankless desk job and his old column back, and make Coffey the editor-in-chief.

Sam Jack



Belgian corner

I felt compelled to set the record straight. In your December 2002 issue, you have a nice article on the upcoming cel-shaded shooter game called XIII. In the article, you keep mentioning that the game is based on a French comic book series. This is not true. The XIII series is not French but Belgian. Both the writer, drawer, and publisher of this comic book series are from Belgium. Although this series is written in the French language, it is not made in France. Calling XIII French would be like calling CGW Canadian. How do I know this? I'm a Belgian native who ended up in the United States a couple of years ago.

Other than this, no complaints about the magazine. Keep up the good work!

Thierry Wemaers



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CGM

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IGN

Italy, July 18—fighting is still heavy on all fronts with word of new battles ringing throughout Italy. Reports continue to stream in of never-before-seen tanks and bombers joining the conflict, a total of 43 military assault vehicles at last count.

Join the fight at: battlefield1942.com

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1942

Intel suggests the possibility of online engagement with up to 64 soldiers of unknown allegiance. Armed resistance is expected to be fierce utilizing any combination of 23 lethal weapons. These battles are huge. But then again so is the prize! Victory.

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Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone



This screen-shy skeleton is one of more than 160 monsters you'll be stalking in the new *EverQuest*. And yes, the ever-popular rats will be back. (Rat meet is mmm-mmm-good!)

EVER-QUEST II

Four years and hundreds of thousands of RPGeeks in the making, *EverQuest II* is on the way. San Francisco recently hosted a Fan Faire where ye olde computer gamers gathered for mead, meals with online pals, and some comic books. While there, we got a sneak peek at *EverQuest II*, which promises to show up on store shelves in the winter of 2003, or "when it's ready."

It's manifest destiny time in Norrath, and the race for real estate is on. This is a dystopic world, so you can grab some land, alter the environment, and hopefully, someone'll be around to keep a close eye on your stuff while you're away.




See this big fella? He's a prime example of the new 3D graphics engine. All these sexy terms, such as per-pixel lighting, dynamic environment mapping, and a fully programmable surface shader system, are put-to-good use here.

It won't take years to hoof it across the lands this time around. Now that characters are able to mount and control horses and hop in boats, you can finally travel more quickly than just your two feet will allow.


Stop and enjoy the scenery in the high-resolution indoor and outdoor environments.

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

With mere weeks left until you can get your greedy little hands on this hot title, we wanted to tease you further. Here, and in the full-blown preview on page 48, is an exclusive, up-close-and-personal look at some of the new weapons, creatures, and highlights of a recent *Unreal II: The Awakening* press junket to scenic Chantilly, Virginia. We could blab on about how slick this game is (and trust us, we do in the preview), but for now, we'll let this picture speak for itself.



Turtie soup, anyone? Forget the Skaarj—these cafspace-laden critters are one of the many new types of aliens that'll be swarming you. And with advanced A.I., they'll be trying to outflank you every step of the way.




Let there be light! Check out the advanced particle systems—there are some amazing weapon and creature effects throughout *Unreal II*.

A whole new arsenal of wificked-out weaponry allows you to ignite, poison, electrify, knock down, or blow-up your foes. Take this Drakk laser, for example: it can fire rail gun-like shots and it uses live, wriggling creatures as ammo.


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EA GAMES

Read Me

The opposite of reality TV Edited by Ken Brown

HYPE

CGW's Top 10 for 2003

Time to rub our crystal balls **By the Staff**

Just because Mrs Cleo is going to jail doesn't mean she can't see into the future. And just because we haven't yet picked the best games of 2002 doesn't mean we can't tell you what the best games of 2003 will be. We're actually not half bad at this: In the predictions for 2002 that we made last April, we ballted *900*. Our one mistake? We actually believed Valve would release Counter-Strike, *Condemned*

Zero. We're still hopeful about *CZ* (see page 36), but predicting when Valve will ship a game is something even Mrs Cleo isn't dumb enough to do.

In any case, here's the list. Hopefully, it took us quite awhile to narrow it down to 10, as PC gaming continues to enjoy a remarkably great run. So, ignore the naysayers—upgrade that system. And get ready for 12 more months of awesome gaming.



EverQuest II



Unreal II



FreeSpace 2



Tribes 2.0



GEFORCE FX
Is Nvidia's next chip worth waiting for? **Page 34**



CONDITION ZERO
The latest on the upcoming Counter-Strike game. **Page 36**



WOLF ADD-ON
Chris Watters and grumpy present: Nazi! **Page 38**



UT2003 BONUS PACK
More free UT-lovin' from Epic. **Page 40**

EverQuest II

The 800-sound quartet of MMORPGs is leveling up in a big way for the sequel, due late in 2003. Everything is new, from the engine, to the class structure, to the combat and spell system. EQ conquered the world the first time around, so despite heavy competition, its second iteration will still be the online game to beat.

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic

Having conquered *Dungeons & Dragons*, BioWare now moves on to the holy grail of geekdom: *Star Wars*. This single-player, party-based RPG is set more than 4,000 years before Anakin Skywalker stinks up movie screens, to a time when war rages between the Jedi and Sith powerhouses. No word yet on whether Mace makes a cameo.

Splinter Cell

Tom Clancy attaches his name to the best stealth game since the *Thief* franchise. Less about counterterrorism and more about being a 21st-century ninja, this Xbox port is going to be one of the best games of 2003. Read our cover story to find out why.

Star Wars Galaxies

We think the new *Star Wars* film trilogy is terrible so far ("Who da man? Yoda man? Ugh!"), but that doesn't deter us from geeking out over Sony Online's epic vision for *Star Wars Galaxies*. We can't wait for our chance to be a Wookiee Jedi or a Twi'Lek dancing girl.

Tron 2.0

Monolith applies its masterful first-person-shooter skills to make a great-looking game based on a 20-year-old Disney movie. If the "glow" effect doesn't wow you, the deep, *System Shock 2*-inspired gameplay—and Monolith's penchant for smart scripts—should convince you that this is a top 2003 title.

Deus Ex 2: The Invisible War

"There were quite a few things wrong



Warren Spector promises *Deus Ex 2* will be smarter and more immersive than the original was.

Sam Fisher looks for his next neck-snapping victim in *Splinter Cell*.



with *Deus Ex*, and we're liking all of those in *DX2*," says lead designer Warren Spector. With an emphasis on better physics, better AI, stronger mission design, and a more immersive world, it looks like *DX2* will far surpass the original and become a great futuristic action-RPG.

Unreal II: The Awakening

Any game that arms you with a splinter-launching gun can't be half-bad. *Unreal II* is the PC's answer to Halo, with spectacular graphics, varied and interesting gameplay, a well-developed story, and a finely tuned arsenal of weapons to choose from. This will be the shooter to beat in 2003.

Freelancer

In development for more than three years, this ambitious title lets you cruise through space trading, evading authorities, and looting to your heart's content. With hints of *Privateer*, this wonderfully open-ended game will make you forget how long you had to wait for its release.

C&C: Generals

With a pedigree longer than the list of "beats" in Genesis, *C&C: Generals* will continue the great *Red Alert* tradition. It'll have intense multiplayer action featuring three distinct sides, including a collection of "freedom fighters" with scrapheap tech and terror weapons.

Republic

Can a game about Russian power politics be fun? We're guessing yes, based on the tight design we saw at last

We're geeked about Galaxies. Who doesn't want to be a Wookiee Jedi or a Twi'Lek dancing girl?

year's E3. Players will try their hand at wrestling power by any means, good or evil. Finally, it seems that the freedom to do what you want in living game worlds, like those of *GTA3* and *Morrowind*, is coming to strategy games.

THE WILD CARDS

Returning for the third straight year as the top wild card is *Half-Life 2*. We have high hopes for the sequel to our readers' favorite game of all time, but when will it ship? No one really knows (not even Valve).

Doom III, on the other hand, looks like it will definitely ship this year. So why is it a wild card? Because all we've seen is graphics and not gameplay. We wanna play *Doom III* just like everybody else does, but we're holding off judgment until we do.

Resident Evil: Raven Shield could be a worthy heir to *Rogue Spear*, but we're not sure it'll be as distinctive. We also like the idea of *Melbora*, but we'll have to see how Civ elements will work in an Age of Empires-style RTS. In name, *Full Throttle 2* sounds awesome. How can you not like a game that lets you kick ass and ride a monster motorcycle? Too bad that Tim Schefer isn't involved; hopefully, LucasArts can still make it great.



3D GRAPHICS

Nvidia's Radeon-killer!

The next-generation GeForce FX is either too early or too late **By William O'Neal**

If there's one thing this industry is lousy at, it's keeping secrets. The veil of mystery surrounding Nvidia's NV30, the would-be Radeon-killer, had more holes in it than the Shroud of Turin. While rumors of the NV30's specifications have been surfacing since last March, it wasn't until November's Comdex that the Santa Clara-based company let us in on what we pretty much knew already: NV30 is gonna be one ferociously powerful graphics card.

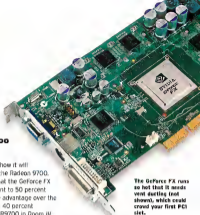
Christened the GeForce FX (an amalgam of "effects" and an homage to the 3dfx engineers working at Nvidia), the card's entirely new architecture is reminiscent of Nvidia's jump from the GeForce2 to the GeForce3. While it's easy to look at the GeForce FX as simply more muscle, Nvidia likes to think of the card as a highly programmable processor, with myriad features that game developers will eventually have a much easier time tapping.

Unfortunately, the GeForce FX still isn't available. Originally scheduled to ship in late 2002, Nvidia now expects the FX by February. The cause of the delay has been a source of considerable speculation, but it seems it's mostly due to Nvidia's desire to reduce the size of the transistors from 15 microns to 13 microns, to conserve energy and reduce heat. The GeForce FX chip also needed 125 million transistors (double the number of the GeForce 4) to achieve

board, we can't say how it will benchmark next to the Radeon 9700. Nvidia is claiming that the GeForce FX will have a 30 percent to 50 percent overall performance advantage over the Radeon 9700, and a 40 percent advantage over the R9700 in Doom III. However, it's important to point out that Doom III is essentially a DX 8 title. Like the R9700, the GeForce FX will require a power connector to operate. Unlike the R9700, though, failing to connect the power cable won't disable the part; it will simply force it to run at a slower clock speed.

Knowing that gamers demand the very best components, we won't be surprised if people shell out \$400 for

the top-of-the-line graphics card. Nevertheless, the FX's February ETA puts it that much closer to the release of ATI's next salvo (the rumored R10000). Add to that a dearth of titles that will even take advantage of the technology and we again find ourselves in a place where the hardware may be years ahead of the software



The GeForce FX runs so hot that it needs venting (see below), which could crowd your first PCI slot.

Sure, it's fast—but few titles can even take advantage of it.

DirectX 9 compliance, because DX 9 requires floating-point calculations.

Unlike the Radeon 9700's 256-bit DDR-1 memory interface, the GeForce FX uses a 128-bit DDR-2 memory interface, which Nvidia believes to be faster and more efficient. Nvidia refused to specify final clock speeds for the GeForce FX, but it's hinted that at least one iteration of the card will run somewhere close to 500MHz. Similar to the Radeon 9700, the GeForce FX will support AGP 8x, though that feature is academic at this point, since we haven't come close to maxing out the AGP bus.

Since we've yet to get our hands on a



To show change, textures usually need to be reloaded. But the GeForce FX can use vertex and pixel shader programs to show changes, like rusting, over time.

	ATI Radeon 9700	Nvidia GeForce FX
Current core clock	300MHz	500MHz
Current memory clock	300MHz (DDR-1)	500MHz (DDR-2)
Number of pixel pipes	8	8*
Peak pixel fill rate	2.56 pixels/sec	4 pixels/sec
Memory bus width	256-bit	128-bit
Peak tex memory bandwidth	104GB/sec	16GB/sec
Manufacturing process	0.15µ	0.13µ
Maximum addressable memory	256MB	1GB

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UPDATE

What's Up with Condition Zero?

And why do Valve games seem to take forever to finish? By **Ken Brown**

Valve is either full of perfectionists, or it spends more time playing games than finishing them. Whatever the reason, it didn't come as much of a surprise when *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* failed to ship last year as scheduled. The question remains, though: How does this company have the Midas touch but the speed of molasses?

Condition Zero has undergone a rather convoluted development, so try to follow along. It lived at Ragoo Entertainment (now defunct) before Valve adopted it. A few months later, Gearbox (shortly the project after its work on the widely acclaimed *Half-Life: Blue Shift*). But something must have bothered either Valve or Gearbox—neither will say—because now, it's Ritual's turn. The Dallas, Texas-developer has had a fairly spotty track record (see *Six*, prematurely shipped by Activision, and the disappointing *Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2*).

But some things emerge from chaos better than they were before. Ritual's lead art director, Robert Atkins, and lead designer, Tom Mustaine, were excited to talk with us about how it's shaping up. It remains focused as a single-player game for *Counter-Strike* cherries who are tired of getting fragged, or for gamers with

slow (or no) Internet connections in third-world countries and Canada.

Although *CZ* is a single-player game, it won't have a single story line. Different scenarios cast you as a various elite members of a counterterrorist strike force, such as the Navy SEALs, British SAS, and French GIGN. Atkins says the focus on individual missions gives the designers more flexibility because the setting, characters, and themes are always changing. "This keeps the game fresh from mission to mission, and our designers are able to focus on smaller pieces of the game at a time," he says.

Ritual spent weeks researching real-world situations that would form the basis for the game's missions. A sample of what you can expect:

"Your team must stop a hijacked Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker before it raises the docks of a Norwegian city, causing a massive nuclear accident.

"You are air-dropped into a tropical forest in Colombia to fight armed drug lords. The goal is to destroy their manufacturing equipment while extracting local political hostages.

"An armed robbery has gone awry at a downtown Miami Beach bank. Police were fired on with automatic weapons, and there are reports of casualties



inside. The robbers are holding hostages and have demanded an armored car or they will kill all the hostages.

Players will have all of the weapons from *Counter-Strike* at their disposal, along with 10 new weapons such as a riot shield, and Goli and FAMAS assault rifles. As you would expect in a *CS* game, you'll be part of a team with several AI members who will conduct various tasks. "Through complex animations and sculpted in-game sequences, we've done a lot to add personality to the teammates," Mustaine says.

Atkins says the team is adding custom personality events, unique deaths, scenario-specific dialogue, and special animations to make characters seem more alive. "You'll see characters rolling down stairs when shot, flying out of windows while shooting at you, carrying an injured buddy away from the battle, and other wild and unexpected things." Unfortunately there won't be human co-op play, but there will be bots to play against in offline and LAN play, Mustaine says.

Unless Valve or Ritual adds yet another era to *CZ*'s already-long history, the game is scheduled to ship by this summer.

"You'll see characters rolling down stairs, flying out of windows, carrying an injured buddy away from the battle, and other unexpected things."



The new characters look great, with nearly double the poly-count of the characters from the first *Counter-Strike*.

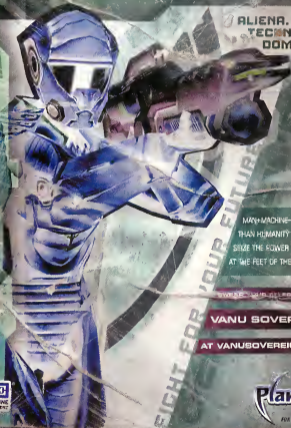


"Oh, I really have to go now!"

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The new Wolf add-on lets you play a bunch of squad-based missions with A.I.-controlled teammates. It is Medal of Honor.

RECON

Behind Enemy Lines...Again

The return of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* By Darren Gladstone

Expansion packs are usually patches and a few add-ons masquerading as a new game. But *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* is actually shaping up to look like a whole new experience. The two most notable changes from last year's shooter: You're fighting Nazi soldiers (not mutants, monsters, or zombies), and this time, you're not alone.

Before getting captured in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, you led a crack squad of U.S. Rangers into German-occupied territory. In this prequel stand-alone expansion pack, you "relive" those squad-based missions. Initially, it looks like an action-packed *Rogue Spear*. In truth, the computer A.I. handles most of your teammates' actions—and the folks behind *Enemy Territory* are boasting that the bots are bad to the bone. Todd Hollenhead,

CEO of id Software, explained, "In the single-player campaign, each of your squad members has a unique identity. Beyond their different skills, each has intelligent behavior." For example, the medic will reluctantly go the front lines if ordered, but he's smart enough to quickly break for cover.

So, while you can yell for a medic, boss around engineers, and call out waypoints to grunts, the emphasis here is on giving you that multiplayer feel without requiring you to actually go online. And, for when you're ready to play with-gasp—real people, Activision is planning 15 additional multiplayer maps, enhancements to classes (the engineers will be able to build battlefield bridges), and new classes (the covert ops class lets you go prone with a sniper rifle and spot land mines). Prepare to ship out by the end of March 2003.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD ASHERON'S CALL 2

Look, Ma—a smooth MMORPG launch! Microsoft launched *Asheron's Call 2* with just a few glitches, which they worked out before we had time to get pissed. CWG's resident RPGoosers are enjoying the early game experience immensely—we'll have to see how it holds up over time. Look for our full review next month.



THE BAD 907 NIGHTFIRE

Ay caramba. We got a bad feeling about this when they told us the PC version wouldn't have the cool Aston Martin driving stuff that the console version has. Great idea! Because, you know, PC gamers don't like the cool parts of games! Just the boring, generic parts! Which, it turns out, is exactly what we get. So, sorry about the November cover story. We blame Halle Berry's breasts.



THE UGLY CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD

What should have been a great expansion from one of the most trustworthy developers on the planet turned into a complete fiasco when it was released in a nearly unplayably buggy state (see our review this issue). Yes, a patch has been released, but this is not supposed to happen with classic franchises like *Civ*. A real disappointment, this one. Et to, Sid?

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thierry Nguyen

OK, so the atrocious condition in which the *Civ III* expansion was released makes children weep and causes random panic in nearby animals. Instead of dodging a stampede, take those 30 bucks and buy two of the best strategy games ever and one of the simplest and funnest shooters around. You can walk away smiling while some other poor schmuck burns his money upon the desecrated altar that is *Civilization III: Play the World*.



Shogun: Total War \$30



Serious Sam \$5



Civ III: Play the World \$30



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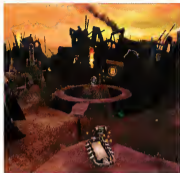
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FREEWARE

UT2003 Bonus Pack

More UT lovin' from Epic, with new maps and game types

By Ken Brown

One thing you can count on from the folks at Epic is that you'll actually be rewarded for being their customer. Instead of making you shell out \$13 for an add-on with a few crummy levels (can you say Mech pack?), Epic puts together bonus packs with new artwork, maps, and game types and gives them out for free.

After releasing three bonus packs for Unreal Tournament, Epic's working on their first UT2003 bonus pack, expected in early 2003. According to lead designer Cliff Bleszinski, it will have at least seven maps, including a combination of one-on-one Tourney maps, larger Deathmatch

maps, CTF, Domination, and Bombing Run maps. It will also have at least two new game types: Last Man Standing and Mutant. In Mutant, one player is "M" and must evade the rest of the players; he also has invisibility and speed. The other players have a radar that can track the mutant.

The bonus pack will feature all-new artwork, so the maps will look nothing like UT2003, says Bleszinski. An Ogg Vorbis music player will also be included, to let players hear their own music during play and to make playlists. Watch for the approximately 50MB bonus pack to be available sometime early the year.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrd Baker

Two Killer Mods

Natural Selection

(www.natural-selection.org)

Just when we thought the Half-Life engine couldn't be pushed any further, along comes Natural Selection. Although the theme of pitting a team of well-equipped marines against bloodthirsty aliens is a rip-off, Natural Selection has plenty of surprises. It combines an intense shooter with an equally intense RTS, implementing a resource model for building units and equipment and giving one marine player the role of commander. Commanders view the action from overhead, doling out

resources and giving orders, so the other marines can deal with the biggest threats. The aliens have the ability to evolve into a different type of unit—provided there's enough time and resources.



Wild West

(www.the-wildwest.co.uk)

It's ironic that a good shooter set in America's Old West was created by a team in England. But Wild West is the real deal. This TC for Return to Castle Wolfenstein includes everything from cowboys sporting Henry rifles to bandits willing to stick a knife in your back. You also get to dulle it out in classic western settings like a gold mine and a governor's hacienda. All that's missing is the music.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago: February, 1998

Five years and countless school shootings and negative mainstream news reports ago, 10 Six's two-page ad featuring a cocked handgun pointed at a sleeping man's head seemed like harmless fun. Violence in games hasn't at all decreased, but extremely violent images like this one, and the infamous Blood ad with the guy soaking in a bathtub full of human plasma, are firmly things of the past.



Ten Years Ago: February, 1993

The next time you're grousing about the Golden Age of Gaming, remember that a decade ago, patching a game was as convenient as an alien abduction. Long before auto-updaters and high-speed internet access, CGW printed a monthly Patch File page. Ease of use began and ended right there. Getting the patch meant navigating a BBS with your 14.4 modem while paying an hourly access rate. Or you could ask the publisher to mail you a floppy. Yeah, that was efficient.



Fifteen Years Ago: February, 1988

Talk about a department guaranteed to make you avert your eyes: The Staff Exposed. Intrepid souls who didn't hurl their meg into the nearest open flame were treated to a profile of CGW staffers. What an eclectic bunch! Our publisher was into astrophotography and dancing. Johnny Wilson enjoyed comic books, drama, and hockey; and our advertising person, Carole Andrews, liked knitting, gourmet cooking, and people. We're guessing Carole wasn't hosting the weekly D&D game.



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GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Eratz	Ubi Soft	12/5/02
The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	12/19/02
Riddle Of The Sphinx II: Omega Stone	DreamCatcher Interactive	12/20/02
Vivaoo	Gathering of Developers	1/1/03
SimCity 4	Electronic Arts	1/16/03
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	1/23/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	1/25/02
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	2/5/03
Unreal II - The Awakening	Infogrames	2/6/03
IL 2: Forgotten Battles	Ubi Soft	2/6/03
Counterstrike: Condition Zero	Sierra	2/15/03
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novologic	2/20/03
Rainbow Six: Ravena Shield	Ubi Soft	2/27/03
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	3/1/03
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	Simon & Schuster	3/4/03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory	id software	3/25/03

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Reserve dates subject to change. Will be online for current information. Not all titles available in all countries/regions.

GAMERS.COM

READ ME



The kit includes an antenna, USB device for PCI card, and some software.

NEWS

Piles and piles of files

Game Silo beams loads of gaming crap to your PC each day
By Ken Brown

Here's a service for the insatiable file fanatic who either doesn't have broadband or has better things to do than wait in a queue to download demos and trailers. Game Silo is a wireless service that broadcasts loads of files to gamers, without tying up their online connection. You have to have Internet access for the system to recognize you as a subscriber, but the files are received with an antenna that sits somewhere in your room and drops files onto your hard drive. Several times a day, the service beams 2GB to 3GB of game trailers, demos, screenshots, and patches, so you just have to leave your PC on for a few hours, and you'll get them automatically.

System performance can be affected as the files are copied to your hard drive. If you're surfing the Web, it's not a problem, but if you're playing UT2003 online, it might be. However, you can disable the system and still get your files—if you turn it back on that same day. Game Silo says that to receive your daily dose, you need to leave your PC on for at least three hours a day (preferably longer). There is no option to receive the files at a preset time.

There's also no way to request certain files or file types. At this point, it's like TV—you get what the company broadcasts. And the company can only broadcast what it gets from publishers. Right now, most of the content is game trailers

and interviews with developers. There are some top-name demos and a few unlockable games, but mostly it's preview trailers, game intros, patches, and screenshots.

The introductory price is less than \$100, with a monthly fee of \$9.95. The network (iBlast) claims that most people can be up and running within 30 minutes. We had some problems getting the system to run in our office: One PC running Windows XP choked on the software, while another installed the software and received the signal without a hitch.

So, who is going to be able to use iBlast? Basically, if you can get a clear HDTV signal at your location (and that's a big "if"), you're a prime candidate for the fledgling service. Currently, it's available only in a limited number of areas (San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Atlanta, Phoenix, and San Diego and surrounding communities). iBlast says it will be rolling out to 150 cities nationwide over the next 10 months, and the company certainly has the means to do it: It's backed by major media conglomerates such as Cox Broadcasting, Gannett, Tribune, and The New York Times. The infrastructure is already mostly in place: iBlast uses the same antennas TV stations use for HDTV broadcasting—it's just using the extra bandwidth that's lying dormant until companies broadcast more channels in HD.

Most of the content is game trailers, cut-scenes, screenshots, and interviews.



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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Star Wars Galactic Republic EA GAMES
Divided Windows A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.



SimCity 4 EA GAMES
 Don't just build your city, breathe life into it. With god-like powers, sculpt mountains, gorge rivers, and seed forests to lay the groundwork for your creation. The impact of your touch will be immediate but not entirely predictable.



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down EA GAMES
Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire. Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives using combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Force Soldiers.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell EA GAMES
 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.



Counter-Strike: Condition Zero EA GAMES
 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



The Sims Unleashed 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.



The Sims Online EA GAMES
 Take your Sims to a multiplayer online world where you get to be whoever you want to be. Build a network of friends from around the world to enhance your power, wealth, and social standing. In this open-ended world, you choose your role, your attitude, and your destiny.



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.



Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets EA GAMES
 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.



Impossible Creatures Microsoft
 A 3D real-time strategy game that pits the player against an evil madman. Using Earth's most formidable animals as building blocks, the player creates an army of unique, mutant monsters in a struggle to protect an unsuspecting world.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

New and improved! Readers' choice top 20 games



The kids love carjacking and lead-bashing with GTA3.



They also love the Blizzard games like WarCraft III.



Max Payne still stands tall in gamers' minds.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Grand Theft Auto III (Take 2 Interactive)	★★★★★
2	WarCraft III (Blizzard/Activision)	★★★★★
3	Max Payne (Glu/Games)	★★★★★
4	Unreal Tournament 2003 (EpicGames)	★★★★★
5	Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (LucasArts)	★★★★★
6	Honor of War: Allied Assault (EA)	★★★★★
7	Doom 3: Land of the Dead (idSoftware)	★★★★★
8	Hitman 2 (IO Interactive)	★★★★★
9	Battlefield 1942 (EA)	★★★★★
10	The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind (Bethesda)	★★★★★
11	Ninja (Take 2)	★★★★★
12	Neverwinter Nights (Infogrames)	★★★★★
13	Age of Mythology (Microsoft)	★★★★★
14	No One Lives Forever 2 (Sierra)	★★★★★
15	Civilization III (Infogrames)	★★★★★
16	Alien Versus Predator 2 (Sierra)	★★★★★
17	Madden NFL 2003 (EA)	★★★★★
18	Returnerz Tycoon (Infogrames)	★★★★★
19	The Sims: Unleashed (Maxis/EA)	★★★★★
20	The Sims: Hot Date (Maxis/EA)	★★★★★

This month, we're proud to bring back the Readers' Choice Top 20. Rather than a list of best-sellers, the Top 20 is derived from the results of a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. Anyone can vote at our website, www.computergaming.com, and we'll print the results each month. If you're ever in doubt about what to play, this is a good place to start.

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(Microsoft)

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(EA Games)

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Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

(Ubit/Ubisoft)

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PIPELINE

Our latest educated guesses By Di Luo

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.



1 XIII: We previewed this comic book-based shooter in the December issue; little more has been revealed since then, except that the game will be delayed till Q4 2003. Powered by the Unreal II engine, this game uses pixel-shaded graphics and is full of stylish cartoon action. As an indication of how far off the game is, Ubi Soft, its publisher, still hasn't created an English language webpage. Even the info on the French page is scanty. According to Bebbelish, you will be the embodiment of XIII, as it "celebrates it here as the debut base workshop." Once we figure out what that means, we'll tell you more about the game.



2 Praetorians: The folks that brought you the Commendos series are branching out. Instead of a squad-based tactical game, their upcoming project is a real-time strategy game set in the time of Julius Caesar. Gorgeous to behold, this game promises to combine realistic factors like formations and terrain with the playability and speed found in traditional RTS games. Praetorians will focus entirely on battles, and there will be no resource management beyond controlling towns for recruiting purposes. If all goes well, you will be able to begin your conquest of the known world by March of 2003.



3 Delta Force: Black Hawk Down: One of the more controversial games to be released since GTA3, the newest Delta Force focuses on Operation Restore in Somalia. Oft criticized for being insensitive to the events of the Battle of Mogadishu, Delta Force is supposed to be a shooter merging real-life tactics with the excitement of action-oriented games. Originally slated for a holiday release in 2002, it's been pushed to early 2003. According to Lee Milligan, NovaLogic's president, the company wanted to "invest some additional time in 'polishing' the title to make sure that when it does hit the streets, it will be a benchmark for the genre."

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
ISD3 A.D.: The New World	EA	Q1 2003
All American: The 82nd Airborne	Empire	Q2 2003
American Conquest	CDV	Q2 2003
Battleline 1942: The Road to Rome	EA	Q2 2003
Bleak Men Chronicles: Winds of War	Crya Networks	Unknown
Brink	CDV	Q2 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2003
Civil War: Between the States	Walker Boys	Unknown
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	Q1/Q2/03
Conflict: Desert Storm	SOI	Q4 2002
Cyberchase: Nephrolic Wars	CDV	Q3 2003
Crossed Kings	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Dark Age of Camelot: Shattered Isles	Mythic	Q4 2002
Demolish	Headfirst	Q3 2003
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Q1 2003
Deas Ex 2	Edis	Q2 2003
Devil ID	Activision	Q2 2003
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Escape from Alcatraz	HP	Q1 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Full Throttle II	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	Q1 2003
Gothic II	JoWood	Q4 2002

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Hamlet	Axel Tribe	Q2 2004
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Harmon and Hart	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	SOI Games	Q2 2003
Highland Warriors	Bala Becker	Q1 2003
HomeWorld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Iron: covert strike	CodeMasters	Q1 2003
Impossible Objectives II	CDV	Q2 2003
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Italiano Jesus	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q1 2003
Loch-Go	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Lords of the Rings II	Sierra	Unknown
Max Payne II	GDD Games	Unknown
Medal Over Sable 2	Konami	Q1 2003
Monoworld: Tribesal	Bethesda	Q4 2002
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q4 2002
PlanetShin	Sony	Q1 2003
Pental 2	Unknown	Unknown
Praetorians	Edis	Q1 2003
Pay Race Driver	CodeMasters	Q1 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Ratchet and Clank: Up to You	Ubi Soft	Q2/Q4/03
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Ryabitch: The Execution	Edis	Q2 2003
Robin Hood: Legend of Sherwood	Strategy First	Q4 2002
Rolling Thunder	Strategy First	Q2 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Saint and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
See Dogs II	Bethesda	Q4 2002
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
SimCity 4	EA	Q1 2002
SevenDays	Sony	Q1 2004+
Sprinter Get!	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars: The Old Republic	LucasArts	Q1 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Q1 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
The Movies	Urbanead	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Scipios Motor	Q2 2003
Thief III	Edis	Q2 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Edis	Q1 2003
Totem Architecture 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Troika 2.0	Hamlet	Q2 2003
TopGun 2	SOI Games	Q2 2003
Unreal II	Infogrames	Q1 2003
Vietcong	HP	Q1 2002
Yellows	CDV	Q4 2003
Yslands IV	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
World of Warcraft	Blyzard	Unknown
World War II	CodeMasters	Q4 2002
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

NEW UPDATE

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FEATURES

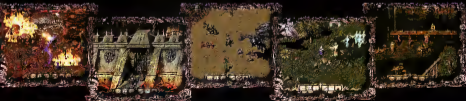
- Detailed role playing game
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"Divine Divinity is a real pleasure to play." GameSpot



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The itty, bitty spiders went up the soldier's suit...



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2004 Olympic Games' mascot sport: bullet catching. Halo: Reach from Team Slurp is going for the gold in a ball of gunfire.

UNREAL II: THE

Halo, goodbye. We've waited for three years and found something

When you talk about a game for more than three years (in our case, running a cover story and an updated preview in the past year alone), it had damn well better be good. Still, after all this time, people carry on like *Unreal II: The Awakening* is the second coming for PC gaming. Is it? Well, we're not bowing and praying yet, but after a hands-on preview of a majority of the game, we can honestly say that *Unreal II* is shaping up to be the first-person shooter to beat in 2003.

Great graphics redux

We've already teased you about the level of detail in the world, and yes, after all this time, it continues to make jaws drop. Firing off a smoke grenade and then watching the air clear as you launch rockets at an enemy is just one example. The GOLEM skeletal system adds realistic textures and animations to the creatures populating the game, whether they walk on two legs or skitter along on eight.

You'll also find more than 30 areas strung across 13 missions. Varied exotic locales include swamps, wistful outposts, underground weapons facilities, and speechees to name but a few—it's standard shooter fare. The groundbreaking stuff that makes this title stand out is the tightly scripted story, the freaky firepower, and a couple RTS elements thrown into the mix.

An epic adventure

Half-Life set the standard: It showed that you could create a first-person shooter with a half-way-decent story line. While other games focus on multi-player matches, *Unreal II*'s deep story line is so interesting, you won't miss blasting apart your buddies (well, maybe you'll miss it a little). Legend Entertainment, the company behind *The Wheel of Time*, has a great pedigree when it comes to storytelling. Within the game are *Medal of Honor*-caliber scripted events that help add tensorial Characters shout warnings to you as anomalies swirl all around. An alien disables an elevator you're in, causing it—and you—to plummet. It's engaging stuff.



Heavily armed and armored: This is one of the guys you'll be able to boss around.



Is *Unreal II: The Awakening* the second coming of PC gaming?

Sure, you can race from one mission to the next, but there are payoffs for exploring your patrol ship and talking to your crewmates aboard the Atlantis. With branching dialogue choices, you can learn more about the backstory, plus off your crewmates, or gain access to new weapon modifications by talking to your engineer at the right time.

Unreal II also has some of the most creative—and sinister—weaponry ever conceived in a game. Among our favorites: a flamethrower that can hose the floor with a layer of napalm, and a versatile grenade launcher that shoots off incendiary gas, smoke, concussion blasts, and electromagnetic pulse rounds. To counterbalance the ubiquitous shotgun/rocket launcher arsenal, there's a whacked-out alien-weapon arsenal. How about, for example, a gun you arm with an arachnid's reproductive organs in order to shoot spiders at your target? Another creative weapon is the Tekkris. In your hand, the weapon looks harmless. But when thrown, these evil metallic balls (how many times will you see those words together?) circle you defensively and shoot incoming bullets out of the air. Or the balls can attack enemies on their own.

OK, so the freaky firepower has us



A bad day at the VD clinic.

lamenting the absence of multiplayer. Thankfully, a carryover from a proposed multiplayer mode appears in the final game. In a few RTS-like levels, you need to race around, grabbing field generators, creating laser barriers, setting up turret emplacements—heck, you can even directly command some soldiers to help repel invaders.

Corporate mouthpieces say all that's left to do now is minor bug fixing and balancing. Barring any lame "Unreal" jokes about meeting deadlines, they swear the final game will be shipping shortly after this issue hits the stands in January.

GAME STATS

PC
 FUTURE INTERGAMES
 RICHARD LEMOND
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 3D
 FIRST PERSON
 SHOOTER
 ISSUE NO. 41 2003

AWAKENING

better By Darren Gladstone



Improved A.I. means you can actually rely on your teammates to do some damage.



The three-language delivers graphics more detailed than those in any other Rainbow game.



The A.I. is smart enough to wait for your door breach before charging ahead.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE OPERATIONS

Shielding the world from terrorism **By Di Luo**

Some fanatics never learn. Given all the terrorist plots across the globe that Rainbow Six has thwarted, you'd figure the bad guys would just give up. And yet, they're at it again in *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*. That's right—the granddaddy of tactical shooters returns with a huge face-lift, more cool toys, and, most important, a new brain.

Judged by its cover

You'll notice that *Raven Shield* boasts vastly improved graphics over its predecessors. Based on the latest Unreal engine, this game easily rivals most action-oriented shooters on the market—just don't expect to see any



The outdoor environments are a sniper's paradise.



Raven Shield will be full of right-wing fanatics rather than Arab extremists.

The granddaddy of tactical shooters returns with a huge face-lift, more cool toys, and a new brain.

flak cannons or huge explosions. What you will get, though, are incredibly detailed and gritty settings. You can see the wrinkles in the uniforms and the dirt on the walls.

But consider yourself warned: From what we've seen, these visual improvements may come at a cost. Though minimum system requirements are supposed to be in the 600MHz range, the *Raven Shield* beta copy we looked at chugged quite a bit when played at medium detail on our middle-of-the-road 1.3GHz machine with a GeForce3 card. The developers will probably optimize performance before release, but those who want to enjoy all the details at an acceptable framerate will likely have to shell out for the latest and greatest graphical workhorses.

If they only had a brain...

The *Rainbow Six* series is reaching out to new fans with more manageable tactical controls. What we've seen of the new features should make the game more appealing to newbies without disappointing fans of the previous installments.

Central to these improvements is your teammate's behavior. The A.I.-controlled comrades in previous games charged ahead like mindless

berserkers, and usually got their dumb digital asses filled with lead. They're much smarter now. This A.I. competently watches your flanks and advances at the pace you set. They can also be given specific orders, such as opening doors or tossing flashbangs into a room before an assault. The command interface was a bit awkward in the beta we tested, but those kinks should be worked out before release.

Your capability to conduct a stealth assault is enhanced by the ability to slowly open doors with a cautious dial of the mouse wheel. There's something satisfying about inching a door open, bit by bit, before throwing a grenade into a room of unsuspecting enemies.

One of the most important aspects of any *Rainbow* game is the planning phase, during which you plot out your teammates' route of attack. The interface here has been simplified to make it accessible to new players, and there's even an option to run simulations of the plan before going into the real thing.

There's also an arsenal of equipment to choose from before you go out into the field. You'll find more than 50 weapons at your disposal, including light machine guns for fire suppression, and Uzis for secondary



The in-game tactical map allows you to track the progress of your team in real time.

weapons in situations where the Beretta proves too weak. Flashbangs have also been improved: they'll effectively blind you and leave your ears ringing. Instead of limely exploding like they did in previous versions. Even more impressive are improvements to your reconnaissance capabilities. Sniper rifles can now be equipped with thermal sights used to "see" through buildings. Likewise, your assault troops can use heartbeat detectors to listen for occupants inside a building—though you won't know whether they're friend or foe.

With its many improvements, *Raven Shield* looks very promising and should prove to be a worthy successor to this vaunted franchise. If all goes well, look forward to saving the world yet again in the first quarter of 2003.

RAVEN SHIELD

GAME STATS

FRANCHISE: RAINBOW SIX
 DEVELOPER: GIGAWATT
 PUBLISHER: GIGAWATT
 PLATFORM: PC
 RELEASE DATE: Q1 2003

Tom Clancy's

Splinter Cell

**SPLINTER CELL MAKES A
STEALTHY-AND ASS-
KICKING-LEAP TO THE PC
BY THIERRY NGUYEN**



Having trouble getting past a door with a radial scanner? You can't use a lockpick or even your feet like Jack Bauer did, but you can grab sensors with appropriate clearance and shove his face into the scanner.

er er



BEE 101: Wait for someone to enter the keypad; use thermal vision to see the heat signature on the keypad; figure out the code.

WRITTEN BY DAN SOLT
 DIRECTED BY DAN SOLT AND MICHAEL
 CHOI; ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN SOLT
 RELEASED JANUARY 2008

Met Sam Fisher, Tom Clancy's latest and greatest hero. He's not like CIA analyst-turned-president Jack Ryan, or like *People's* soldier man alive, Ben Affleck. Sam Fisher is a medley of G.I. Joe's Snake Eyes, *Metal Gear Solid's* Solid Snake, and *Escape From New York's* Snake Pliskens: a straightforward, ruthlessly efficient secret agent with an aged soldier's attitude. He's also the focus of the newest game in the Clancy universe, *Splinter Cell*, an Xbox darling that's getting the PC treatment—and we can say with authority, after getting some hands-on time with the PC version, that the treatment it's getting is very, very good.

NO BACKUP

Splinter Cell is a deliberate departure from other Tom Clancy games. While previous excursions have focused on either counterterrorism or infantry squads, SC focuses on a lone-wolf operative, Matthew Ferland, the senior producer, says the team simply felt it was time for an espionage-focused, solo, stealth-action game to flesh out the Clancy-verse, as it were.

The premise has Fisher as the first

operative for a new division of the National Security Agency, called Third Echelon. It's a covert-ops division that has been given discretion to do whatever necessary to protect America, even if that involves kidnapping, assassination, or spying on fellow agencies. The term "splinter cell" refers to the fact that Fisher acts alone and with extraordinary freedom. In true Clancy fashion, there are a whole lot of whiz-bang gadgets, and the plot centers on a conflict between Georgia (the country in Russia, not the state next to Alabama) and China—think of it as an extension of Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon*. Russia and China were chosen because, as Ferland puts it, "They're still seen as unstable threats to our national security, and they have the advanced technology necessary to carry out some of the threatened attacks in SC."

To ensure realism, the scriptwriter for SC met with NSA officials, and, as it did with the *Rainbow* games, the team had access to an NSA technical advisor, Mike Grasso. Also, Clancy himself signed off on the game's concept to make sure it fulfilled his requirements for realism in story, setting, and equipment.

Fisher's look went through several



In the real world, night-vision goggles are completely different from thermal imaging goggles. But since this is a game, the development team assumed that in the future, both technologies can be combined in one set of goggles. *Splinter Cell's* goggles can switch between image enhancement and thermal imaging.

changes, fluctuating from a foxglove to a Navy SEAL look. "Civilian suits are nice if you're a party spy, but in the field, a Swifite Row suit isn't going to get the job done," says Ferland. Martin Caya, the lead concept artist and lead character modeler, researched several types of recon suits before deciding on a variant of the Navy SEAL scuba scout outfit as the basic framework for Fisher's appearance. Also, the hero isn't a young hotshot, so the team went for the seasoned-veteran look.

21ST-CENTURY NINJA

Splinter Cell is often described as a *Metal Gear Solid* killer. In reality, it's more a combination of *MGS* and *Theif*. Like *MGS*, you're a government badass who sneaks around bases, evades guards, and chats it up with your superiors via radio. There's no handy radar showing where your enemies are, and you can't see your enemies' vision cones; like *Theif*, you have to rely on your own stealth meter (explained in the game fiction as some sort of "phosphor-based optic" dopplekey), which tells you how hidden you are. Additionally, you don't have many bullets, and you won't get many during the course of a mission, so subtlety and stealth are emphasized over killing power. SC focuses on enemy observation, figuring out the best way to move forward and disable nearby guards and alarms, while avoiding detection. Thankfully, Fisher has a host of moves and toys that help him accomplish all this.

While his stash contains only two actual weapons, Fisher's arsenal is designed to silently incapacitate enemies or gather information to plan his next sneaky move. Whether he's using cameras that can map out an area, nightmishers that dispense tear gas, or a fiber-optic cable to peek through a door, Fisher has plenty of options besides

THIS IS A DELIBERATE DEPARTURE FROM OTHER TOM CLANCY GAMES.



This is the optimal Sam Fisher situation: The enemies are clueless to his presence, he's poised to strike, and he has a really big gun with which to take them out.

IGN Editors' Choice Awards ★ GameSpot scores it at 8.4 (great) of 10 ★ "Best of E3 2002,"

"The U.S. Army's new recruiting videogame is an online phenomenon"

—Newsweek

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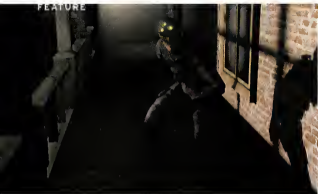


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In the real world, people would notice the three dots from Sam's goggles against a completely dark backdrop, but they won't in the game. Why did the developers leave the goggles lit? Without these dots, you'd have no way of knowing where Sam is in a completely dark room.

shooting to get past obstacles. Ferland said a lot of research went into the gadgets; in fact, everything in the game is being either used in the field or tested in secret government labs somewhere. For weapons in particular, Ferland comments that decisions were based on "what a solo operative would need in a mission, [what would] be light and take minimal space, and make sense with the game concept and gameplay."

Along with the technotools, Sam displays plenty of awesome physical moves. Besides requisite sneaking and crouching, he can bounce off walls, rappel, shoot from a hanging position, and perform a Jet Li-style split jump that has him straddling the walls of a narrow hallway to quickly hide above an approaching enemy. To take out guards, he can drop down on them, grab them, and use them as human shields, or simply knock them out with a swift punch.

ANONYMOUS GOONS AT HOME

The SC A.I. is smart enough to investigate oddities and call for backup. For example, an A.I. guard will notice if some lights are off and will attempt to turn them back on. If that doesn't work, he'll either call for backup, turn on a flashlight, or attempt to feel his way around the room with an outstretched hand. If you're stupid enough to knock someone out and leave the body in the open, another guard will probably revive the unconscious one. Additionally, if you take someone hostage and use him as a human shield, other guards will balk at shooting you.

SC has very open maps with multiple entry points and varying solutions. At the very beginning of one mission, for example, you can either climb into a nearby fan vent while it's temporarily shut off, or sneak around the guards and climb into a different vent. In another case, you can enter an embassy by going through a side door or walking through the front door. To enter a defense ministry building, do you rappel down to a window close to your objective, or slowly climb down via a more remote route?

LIGHT: A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

The PC development team started work in late summer. Thankfully, the transition from Xbox to PC mostly involved minimal hassles: stuff like gameplay, animation, and art remained the same. Instead, changes the team focused on for the PC version had to do with ensuring that the lighting stayed the same, and with making a PC-centric interface.

The best aspect of the Xbox version is the lighting, which legitimately compares to the great effects seen in the demos of Doom III. The SC lighting system had to be totally redone for



SECRET AGENT MAN

Former SAS sniper team commander Chris Ryan was the last member of Bravo Two Zero, a team secretly dropped behind enemy lines in Iraq. Now that he's crawled his way across the hostile dunes to safety and settled back into civilian life, Ubi Soft is about to publish Splinter Cell. CGW got some time with Ryan to pick his brain about this latest game.

Q: What do you think of the Red Storm titles as a whole?

A: They're very good as a general rule. Most of the games feature a nice range of scenarios and weaponry. The only downside is that there's so much to consider even before you begin a mission that it's a royal pain in the ass. But that's realism for you.

Q: How would you sum up Splinter Cell in one sentence?

A: A soccer version of Metal Gear Solid that involves cracking a lot of enemy heads.

Q: Why is the premise of the game so appealing to players of all stripes?

A: The James Bond element. It's suave and cool. There's no blasting right through, staying calm under pressure, thinking your way through situations is the challenge. Of course, the wide range of available ass-kicking equipment doesn't hurt either.

Q: Fancy it's somewhat realistic then?

A: You've seen the split-leg concealment maneuver? Let me think of the last time I used that one...like, never.

Q: But surely you got a kick out of it?

A: Oh yeah. The broad range of maneuvers you can pull off is one of the most attractive features. Stealth is so important that they had to come up with all sorts of cool actions you can take.

Q: The most ringing endorsement that you can give it?

A: I know a few guys are waiting for it. And that's saying a lot. The last thing a veteran usually wants to do is see more action on the front lines.



With the split-jump, Sam can straddle the hallway up high while an unsuspecting dupe passes below. Time your jump right, and you can fall onto the guy, knocking him out.



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Shoot out the lights on this chandelier, then switch to night vision and take out enemies while they feel around in the dark.

the PC version, using a combination of shadow buffers and projector systems in order to generate the natural lighting conditions in the game. The PC version was developed under the auspices of its own team; however, team members for the Xbox version came aboard to help polish the engine.

Hardware requirements currently aim for at least Xbox-level specs to get the full effect—that is, an 800MHz CPU and a GeForce2 would be enough to get some graphical goodies at a nice resolution. Those of us blessed with 2GHz CPUs or greater and GeForce FXs or Radeon 9700 Pros should be able to pop the game up in

glorious 1600x1200 resolution. The only major hurdle left for the graphics team is supporting antialiasing, to correct all the jaggy lines found in the Xbox version.

CONTROLLED BADASSNESS

The biggest difference between the two versions is the control scheme. Rather than make a lazy port that requires PC gamers to buy a gamepad, the team specifically refined the interface for mouse and keyboard. The basic interface design principle is for camera and equipment controls to be handled by the mouse, with everything else to be controlled via the keyboard.

It's a pretty smooth setup; the WASD keys control Sam's movement, and the mouse fluidly controls the camera. Everything is remappable, but for the most part, the default keys for things like jump, inventory, back-to-wall, and interact work well as they are. The mouse swings the camera around, and the middle mouse button controls equip, left mouse controls fire, and right mouse controls alternate fire.

The mouse wheel plays the most interesting role. On Xbox, the left analog stick controls your speed; pushing at all the way forward makes Fisher sprint, while nudging it keeps him quiet and sneaky. The PC version will use the mouse wheel as a speed controller; scroll down to slow Fisher to a stealthy crawl, or scroll up to get him running. It's not a true analog control, but it provides the same varying degrees of speed, and because the setting stays put, you can dial



Okay, Splinter Cell isn't all darkness and gloom. There's the occasional raging fire to spice things up.

Sam doesn't have a whole lot of weapons handy, but he has a bunch of gadgets and ammo types to get him through his missions. Here's a sampling of the wonderful toys he can use in the field, many of which are designed for stealth gameplay.



CAMERA JAMMER

This will be your best friend when sneaking around a base. Just aim this at a camera and squeeze the trigger; a progress bar will indicate whether or not the camera is jammed, and how much battery life is left in the jammer. It takes a couple minutes to recharge the jammer, so you can't just waitz around, jamming things right and left.

STICKY SHOCKER

You can load this knockout gadget into your SC2DK rifle and fire it off. It's basically a projectile-based fuser; the sticky shocker will attach itself to the target and silently deliver an electric charge, instantly knocking the enemy out.



FIBER-OPTIC CAMERA

Sam uses his PDA for mission objectives, intelligence gathering, and, yes, recon. Slide the cable itself underneath a doorway, and the PDA displays whatever the cable sees, in night-vision mode.





the mouse wheel all the way back and remain forever stealthy.

The biggest change control-wise is the lockpicking scheme. In the Xbox version, you rotate the left analog stick in a circle until your controller vibrates, and then keep the stick held down to pick the tumbler. The whole process of finding and picking the individual tumblers simulates the jiggling motion of picking a lock. For the PC version, you hold down various combinations of the WASD keys in order to find the right pair that will undo each tumbler.

At press time, the PC version is set to support a save-anywhere feature (as opposed to the checkpoint system used in the Xbox game), but the SC team wants to check the game balance before setting that in stone. Additionally, the team wants to make extra content (missions, gadgets, etc.) available, but as of press time, details are still being finalized.

To some degree, *Spindel Cell* seems similar to *Grand Theft Auto II*: It's a great part of a great game. Ferland says, "To hear that Hideo Kojima [director of *Metal Gear Solid 2*] was looking forward to the *Spindel Cell* release was an amazing compliment. I felt like Michael Jordan was complimenting me on my jump shot!" And after some hands-on time with the PC version, we're confident that PC gamers won't be forced to buy an Xbox in order to experience one of the best Clancy games that has ever been produced.



It's John Carmack's team that seems to have some competition in the lighting area. Check out this scene of Sam descending a staircase while bright light filters through a grate and projects a seat-bleeding shadow on the wall.

DISTRACTION CAMERA

The best gadget in the game. Fire it into a distant corner, and it acts like a remote camera. Next, have it make noise (like a bird chirping), and nearby enemies will be curious enough to check it out. When the victim gets close, the camera can spray tear gas to take him out instantly.



LASER MICROPHONE

All cool spy people use this for eavesdropping—even Batman did at one point. Just point the laser at any window, and it will read the vibrations off the glass and convert them to speech. Nice way for Sam to get some intel before crashing through the window and cracking some heads.

AUTO-TURRET

Sam can hack into existing auto-defense turrets with his PDA and either turn them off altogether or disable IFF (Identify-Friend-Or-Foe), so they'll fire on enemies, too.



handhelds got

g



TOSHIBA E335 POCKET PC

ame

BY DARREN GLADSTONE PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO



SONY CLIE PEG-T665

Quake in the palm of your hands

Put down that Game Boy Advance, Sparky. It might be nice for a couple rounds of *Street Fighter 2*, but it's a little hard to go stealth and play in the middle of a meeting (and believe us, we should know). Odds are, the Palm Pilot's inventors didn't have gaming in mind when working on their creation, but hey, that's what handhelds have become—unassuming business devices that get your life organized and, conveniently enough, support game playing.

Handhelds were originally just places to stash appointments and phone lists. Hundreds of companies armed their corporate drones with PDAs—and just as you once goofed off by playing *Sokoban* on the company desktop, so began the humble origins of handheld gaming. Today, there are hundreds of games for both the Palm OS and Pocket PC handhelds, and that number is steadily growing. As a result, hardware manufacturers are unleashing multimedia marvels that can play videos, MP3s, audiobooks, and—you guessed it—games. The real trick is figuring out which PDA is best for you.

rosy palms

While Palm handhelds have been around the longest, they've always had that simple-to-use, business-first focus, and it's shown in their games. Because they're tailor-made for the Palm's original poky 16MHz processor, grayscale and text-based game titles have long been the mainstay of the device. Take the game *Dope Wars*, for example. This simple-yet-addictive game has you trading-ahem-commodities in New York City, and it remains one of the more popular Palm titles around, according to CNET's Downloads.com. If you can make do with minimalist titles, Palm addresses basic needs with the likes of the bargain-basement *Zire* model, which sells for less than a hundred bucks.

That isn't to say the platform hasn't grown—Palm OS 5 is now promising to place an emphasis on multimedia. Games for handhelds once fell flat graphically, with blips and beeps on a 160x160 screen, but they're starting to get more sophisticated. Heck, Sega is now helping to provide the gaming API to supplement Palm's new OS.



But a game can only look as good as the device it's played on. PDAs now support better resolutions (320x320) and more colors (65,000), and also provide better audio support. Sony's CLIE line has been pushing the limits of what a Palm can do. In fact, the two newest poster children for Palm OS gaming are Sony's CLIE PEG-T665 (\$400) and CLIE NR-70V (\$600). The T665 is a good all-around machine, while the NR-70V is a gadget-lover's dream. Both are fantastic devices for playing games—and, in typical Sony fashion, they don't look half bad, either.

But there's still a general problem with Palm devices: the controls. A Game Boy Advance has a direction pad and a few action buttons to control moving and fighting. Palm handhelds have buttons for opening phone lists and calendars—hardly ideal when you want to play *Tony Hawk 3*. Sony, however, created a workaround, an optional gamepad attachment,

5 games you've gotta get: Palm OS



Pitfall 4: 3D motion picture game (www.palm.com/games/3d)



300 Bowl: Bowling for Pitms (www.300ball.com/)



Serious Sam First (get serious action on a Palm!) Get Serious (www.digital-storm.com/)



Ancient Red Get a taste of Dante's style RPG fun (www.ancientred.com/)



Zap 2000 Get school-shedding action (www.rickwatts.com/)



By The Developers of the Award-Winning Imperium Galactica* and Imperium Galactica II

HEGEMONIA

LEGIONS OF IRON



IN 2104, MANKIND IS ENGAGED IN A FRATRICIDAL WAR BETWEEN EARTH AND MARS POPULATIONS. AFTER WEEKS OF FIERCE SPACE BATTLES AND HEAVY LOSSES, BOTH SIDES HAVE TO JOIN TOGETHER AND FORM THE LEGIONS OF IRON TO FIGHT A NEW ALIEN ENEMY FORCE.



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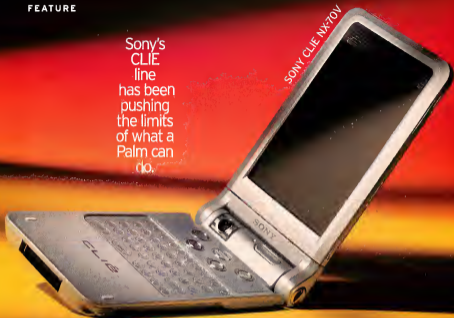
"...the game simply looks gorgeous and also plays very well to boot." - HOMELAN

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Sony's
CLIE
line
has been
pushing
the limits
of what a
Palm can
do.

SONY CLIE NX-70V



the CLIE PEGA-GCKL. With it, you can turn a CLIE PDA into a GBA just by sliding on an overlay. The only other Palm PDA showing promise is the new Palm Tungsten (5500), which has a built-in thumbpad controller.

As it stands, there are a tremendous number of Palm owners, and that large audience is looking for new games all the time. Regardless of which Palm handheld you pick up, there are plenty of titles to choose from. Just don't expect to get blown away by the graphics.

a rocket in your pocket

While the Palm OS has always hung its hat on being basic and straightforward, Microsoft has positioned its handhelds as portable computers. (Big shocker with a name like Pocket PC, eh?) For years, Pocket PC devices have put an ever-growing emphasis on multimedia and gaming. Now, you'll start finding the power of an old Pentium II system in your hands.

Currently, all Pocket PC handhelds use Intel's 206MHz StrongARM processor. They work well enough, and perform like your trusty old PC. But newer models will start packing Intel's new XScale processors, which offer a whole lot more multimedia oomph. And while Palm OS 5 is only now concerning itself with graphics and sound, Pocket PCs have had crisp, colorful LCD screens and good audio for a few years already. Thankfully, it looks like someone talked to gamers before designing these new PDAs. Almost all Pocket PCs come with a built-in thumbpad and a bunch of launch buttons that can easily substitute for action buttons. As a result, more advanced games are taking advantage of the Pocket PC.

Need a few examples? How about a platform that not only plays MP3s and video clips, but also churns out PC-caliber

games such as *Soak*, a well-done, colorful, handheld tribute to *Worms*? There are shooting games, driving games, and even a number of first-person shooters coming out. Developers are also working behind the scenes to create 3D engines for these handhelds. For a great example, check out a demo of Falhammer's *X-Forge* at www.falhammer.com.


With so many Pocket PC handhelds available, it's easy to get confused. They all offer similar traits, but the main differences you'll find are in the form factors, the RAM, and the software bundle. These handhelds can vary, from the funky Toshiba e335 (\$400) to the chunky Casio E200, but the important part is what lies under the hood. As it stands, the most basic Pocket PC has at least 32MB of RAM available to split between system resources and files. (Attention gamers: Start setting money aside now for expansion cards, to make room for all those beefy, resource-intensive titles.) That's enough room for a couple of games, but if you really want to get the most out of a Pocket PC, you need a unit that's packing 64MB. Right now, there are no fewer than five different game-ready handhelds on route. Among them is Toshiba's e335, which has the new XScale processor and an appealing exterior HP's iPaq, always a favorite with the corporate types, is also pushing its new model—the 5400, which promises horsepower and built-in wireless connectivity. And though details were sketchy at press time, it looks like Dell is also going to get into the mobile-devices game.

big game hunting

It's true that the first PDA games were slapped together by enthusiasts, but big business is now starting to get in on the action. Electronic Arts has probably been the most prolific, cranking out sports titles (*FIFA 2002*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*

Where to go online

Pocket PC games:
www.pocketpcgame.com
www.pocketpcgame.org
Palm OS games:
www.palmgaming.com
www.handsapp.com
www.download.com



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www.microsoft.com/games/combats3

5 games you've gotta get: Pocket PC



Argentum A rock-solid RTS game that's better than some PC titles (www.battle.com)



Sealis Turn-based, god-of-war, master the satshaker (see www.sealis.com)



Tomb Raider The original adventure but portable (www.ra.com)



SimCity 2000 Build your futuristic city or destroy it (www.simcity.com)



Ride An old-school graphic adventure to save Britain you get to work (www.ride.com)

Golf), action games (*Need for Speed*), and old-school simulations (*SimCity 2000*) through developer Ziosoft. But EA is far from alone in getting involved in the mobile racket. Serious Sam has shot up the handhelds, Lara Croft is raiding Pieg, and Take 2 Interactive plans for *Grand Theft Auto* charges to be filed on the Palm. Just as we're getting a taste of what's to come, more rumors and titles keep cropping up. Age

of *Empires*, *WarCraft* it, and *Quake IV*—the list goes on. In fact, as we went to press, Sony Online gave us a sneak peek at *EveQuest* for the Pocket PC.

Soon, you'll no longer be wondering if you should play games on a handheld. Instead, you'll be too busy trying to figure out how to scam your company so you can write all of this hardware off as a business expense.

976-gaming

Over the past few years, cell phones have slipped with any number of stupid, uninteresting games: *Snake*, anyone? Realizing that the gaming market is exploding, providers like Sprint PCS and Verizon Wireless have started offering "real" games for your cell phone. Which begs the question: Just because you can play games on your cell phone, will you actually want to? For many people, the answer will likely be yes. After all, since you've always got a cell phone on hand, why not play a round of golf, work through a few levels of *Pac-Man*, or drive a few laps between calls?

To that end, Sega is bringing out mobile versions of *Super Monkey Ball* and *MotoGP*, and we've seen early betas of *Tony Hawk* on Verizon's JAMDAT phone. We also got our hands on the two phones leading the cell phone gaming charge: Motorola's T720 from Verizon Wireless and Samsung's SPH-A500 from Sprint PCS. Here's our take on this burgeoning trend.

in this corner...Verizon Wireless

The Motorola T720 is Verizon Wireless' answer to the Sprint PCS Vision phones: It's a silver flip-phone with a 4,096-color display. However, the Motorola's display isn't very bright,

and the slow refresh rate results in a noticeable onscreen lag when playing games. The T720 is, in many ways, a color version of Motorola's awesome V60 series: It boasts changeable faceplates, a 500-name phone book, and, like the V60, mediocre battery life—we got only about two hours of talk time! Using Verizon's Get It Now service (similar to Sprint PCS' Vision service), you're able to download custom ring tones, screensavers, and JAMDAT games (which cost from \$1 to \$5) like EA Sports' 2002 FIFA World Cup and Tiger Woods' Fox Sports' Hit the Pro! JAMDAT Football; and Jeopardy, to name a few. Because of the button and D-pad layout, it's generally easier to play games on the T720, but this preference may vary



from person to person. Also, the JAMDAT games are simpler than many of those available for the Sprint phone, which makes them easier to play on this platform.

and in this corner...Sprint PCS

Samsung's \$300 SPH-A500 was the first gaming-enabled phone to hit the market, so in many ways, it set the bar by which all others will be measured; we even recommended it in last month's Gift Guide. Weighing only about 3.5 ounces, it manages to sport one of the brightest displays we've ever seen on a cell phone: a 128x160 pixel TFT color LCD. Other amenities include wireless Web browsing and a pretty good battery life—for a color phone. However, our test came up a little shy of Samsung's claimed 150 minutes of talk time. That said,

what makes this phone stand out (beyond that awesome display) is the list of fun things you can do with it. We've downloaded and played mobile versions of *Tetris*, *MotoGP*, *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, and *Super Monkey Ball* (\$5 each); and we've learned that some games are better suited for play on a tiny screen with little buttons than others. *Tetris*, *Super Monkey Ball*, and *MotoGP* are addictive, while the phone's small screen and buttons made games like *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* more difficult than fun. The downloadable ring tones (\$1 each) are fun, too; we love watching heads burn when the *Knight Rider* theme signals an incoming call.

it's a split decision!

Ultimately, choosing one of these phones over the other will have more to do with which service—Verizon or Sprint PCS—you currently use than with the phone itself. Verizon users would probably enjoy the T720; the same is true for Sprint PCS customers and the A500. However, if you're currently using a different provider, you may want to get some hands-on experience before taking the leap.

—William O'Neal

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.

EARTH & BEYOND 72



INSIDE

- 70 Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin
- 72 Earth & Beyond
- 74 Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
- 76 FIFA Soccer 2003
- 77 EverQuest: The Planes of Power
- 80 ShadowFlare: Episode One
- 80 Heroes of Might and Magic IV: The Gathering Storm
- 81 Medal of Honor: Spearhead
- 82 Combat Flight Simulator 3
- 84 Project Nomads
- 85 Treasure Planet
- 86 MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries
- 87 Airline Tycoon Evolution
- 88 Worms Blast
- 88 Beam Breakers
- 90 NHL 2003
- 91 Civilization III: Play the World
- 92 NASCAR Thunder 2003
- 92 Revisionist History: Medieval Total War
- 94 Hearts of Iron
- 96 Virtus Tennis
- 96 Royman Arena
- 97 Real War: Rogue States
- 97 Eagles Strike
- 98 Iron Storm
- 98 The Italian Job
- 99 Reviews Index



Weather effects and details like swaying trees and rustling leaves add a lot to the game's atmosphere.

Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin

Your ticket to the Russian front, comrade! BY BRUCE GERVYK



GAME STATS

PC/PS2 BATTLEFRONT.COM
 PS2/PS3 BATTLEFRONT.COM
 PCX TACTICAL PURSUE
 CD/DVD/BOX SET/BOX
 \$111.99/129.99/149.99
 PC/PS2/PS3/PS3/PS3
 PC/PS2/PS3/PS3/PS3
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If you played the original, *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* won't shock you with its elegance like its predecessor did. Then again, it would be hard to top the effect *Combat Mission* had in 2000. Despite being available only online through Battlefront.com, the game sold beyond all expectations, and a follow-up was never in doubt. Two years later, the sequel is a face-lift, update, and expansion all in one. It's also still the best wargame out there.

This time, the setting is the war in Russia, and the game is no less comprehensive than its predecessor in depicting weapons, vehicles, and soldiers from all the combatants, including Finland and the minor Axis nations. Battles range from the early days of *Barbarossa* to the last stand in Vienna, and all the famous (and obscure) places in between. There is so much here, the game can be overwhelming.

Elegance defines the game system, and it remains as beguiling as ever. Its genius is that it keeps control-freak wargamers happy, letting them issue detailed orders to their units at each turn in a planning phase, and then transforming these orders into a 60-second war movie that is as gripping as any real-time game.

Playing a movie

Good movies tell stories, and chances are that your games will have their share of them, whether it's the machine gunner who holds out in a building despite being



The engine works best when depicting mixed-force or pure armor action.

rushed by waves of enemies, or the plucky squad that crosses 50 yards of open ground while under fire. As a veteran tank crew racks up the kills, you'll start looking for them each turn, cheering every shot they take and



Steel tank battles like *Kampf* are new to the arena.



Russian humor-move attacks are modeled, complete with authentic voice shouting. "Urrrr!"

wincing as shells ricochet off their tanks' hull armor. You can replay these movies from multiple angles, watch different parts of the battlefield, and enjoy the game's improved graphics, from the terrain to the unit models. You can also watch the lead fly as you pray your troops can hold that burning for just one more turn. You get even more attached to your units when you play through one of the many multibattle operations in which you lead a force through linked scenarios and redeploy in between. Your veteran Tiger crew becomes much more valuable when you know you'll need it in the future. It's even possible to salvage lightly damaged tanks.

Exciting as it is, the game makes no concessions when it comes to realism. The detailed armor-piercing algorithms of the original have been tweaked further; rules have been added to reflect Russian command constraints, and other refinements appear, such as the modeling of six different types of

German gunnery optics. If it's not in the game, it probably never happened.

Minor disappointments

With all the things *Battlefront* changed under the hood, it's disappointing it didn't take care of some of the game's exterior flaws, like the lack of a unit manifest to make it easier to keep track of your army. The real-time A.I. still makes some odd choices (switch out for traffic jams), and the planning A.I. won't be mistaken for a skilled player; if it's skilled opposition you want, though, it's hard to beat *Combat Mission* as a multiplayer game, and the huge online community offers plenty of opponents, whether for direct Internet play or via the almost cheat-proof e-mail system.

With a superb game system, unrivaled detail, great graphics for the genre, and outstanding multiplayer, *CMBB* is more than enough to please any wargamer. Its 260-page manual will make new recruits think like military men. Plus, with the



New building and rubble features update the genre's look.

It's still the best wargame out there, period.



Large indoor battles are hard to model, but the game does a decent job with the aid of Dazdrilovsky Tractor Works.

NEW ORDERS

The fact that *CMBB* resolves turns in 60-second chunks means that for those 60 seconds, you have to give up some control of your units to the game's tactical A.I. when the turn brings something unexpected (as most of them usually do). This version introduces several new orders, including

"move to contact" and "shoot and scout." The former is a good way to tell the TacA.I. that you'd rather have your units react to enemy fire than press on to the fixed waypoint you set. The latter lets tanks pop up from concealment to deliver a shot, and then quickly scoot to cover before the enemy can react.



This *StuG III* is facing several *Leut-Loose Sherman*. It can't stand up to them, but it should be able to fire on eye targets they can inflict targets. This is a good time for the shoot-and-scout order.

dedicated fan base that cranks out tons of mods, it should keep grognards happily pushing Panzers for a long time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It isn't the perfect wargame, but it's the closest thing we have to it.



Overhead is as pretty as it is boring.

Earth & Beyond

A zero-gravity leveling treadmill BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL

GAME STATS

TRIBES: ELECTRONIC ARTS
 SERIES: WESTWOOD
 STAVOS: 100% HONORS 100%
 BORG: 100% BLOOD AND
 VIOLENCE: 100% \$20.00,
 \$4.99 MONTHLY AFTER
 FIRST 30 DAYS
 REVENUE: PONTIUM IN \$0.00,
 120000 \$100, 200 \$100
 DRIVE: SINGLE, MIDNIGHT
 CONNECTION: OF SAN OR
 FASTER: 1000000
 REQUIREMENTS: NONE
 SUPPORT: MULTIPLAYER

EverQuest brought online gaming to the masses and the masses to online gaming, breaking every subscription record to date. Developers want the best of both worlds that come with this success, but are wary of the financial risks of innovation, so they tend to find comfort in a successful formula. Hence, most every online game to follow EQ has been some sort of emulation. Westwood Studios' first MMO/RPG is set eight years away from Normandy, but if imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.

We have launch

Earth & Beyond does offer some new features to veteran online gamers. The

level of hand-holding in the tutorial is beyond anything seen before in computer gaming. From the moment you launch, each daunting decision you must make is carefully explained by the wilyly-smooth voice of Megan, your personal animated avatar of assistance. Megan will have you playing like an expert within minutes, making camera-angle adjustments and managing ship resources. This is the tutorial by which all other computer games should be measured, and developers should be well served to construct their own Megan, whose dialogue is every bit as good as the NPCs within the game—and believe you me, that is high praise.

As is customary with this type of game, your greatest source of

experience will come from quests assigned by the various characters you encounter. It is here that *Earth & Beyond* truly shines. Its universe is thick with the most interesting and engaging characters ever programmed. Their quests are not simply a means to an end; they are the chapter and verse in a highly entertaining story. Each character is more than the sum of its dialogue, which for most is seemingly endless. If you enjoy online games for the quests, *Earth & Beyond* will not disappoint.

Not all the innovations in *Earth & Beyond* are as masterfully implemented, though. There are three basic types of characters: hunters, explorers, and traders. As a hunter, you earn combat

If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.



Shopping is practically your only opportunity to mingle with other players, yet everybody is too busy shopping to care.



There's a lot of various physical options for your characters, but why? You'll never see them again, and most players will encounter you while you're in your spaceship.



Over half your time playing *Earth & Beyond* will be spent watching this screen as you hyperspace between star ports.



While you can fly by and visit various planets, you cannot get out of your ship and explore them on foot. *Earth & Beyond* is a very ship-centric game.

experience by killing things, naturally. As an explorer, you gain exploration experience by taking long drives around the dark side of Jupiter, for example. As a trader, you earn trade experience by collecting loot from combat or by mining asteroids for precious minerals—all to be sold at the nearest starbase. Each method of play tabularizes experience independently.

The problem is that the hunters and the traders are explorers by necessity, and all players become traders as the increasing need for credits puts dents in your wallet. All classes present you with an array of skills that require frequent advancement in all three subdivisions. Despite your personal preference for one class, you are required to be all three players at once, making the concept of subdivided experience pointless. And if you think that's pointless, wait until you've done some fighting.

Star bores

Combat in *Earth & Beyond* is exactly like combat in *EverQuest*. You approach a mob, dig in, and fight until one of you dies. While this may work fine with swords and sorcery, the whole point of having a rocket ship is to actually rocket around while fighting. Unfortunately, this is no *Wing Commander*. Instead, you shift your engines into park and fire missiles until you either win or retreat. This could have been a *Wing Commander*, but that would require the courage to step away from the *EverQuest* formula.

Not all of *Earth & Beyond*'s shortcomings are the fault of the game itself. Space, by definition, is an empty void, in its effort to re-create this vacuum, *Earth & Beyond* succeeds...a little too well. Places of interest are separated by stretches of empty space with a redundant serving of navigation points, which, despite being in outer space, all seem to



Character experience accumulated along three primary play-styles reads a lot better than it plays.

have been built at the same time. The visual (reat that is the hyperdrive effect becomes painfully boring by the time you've crossed your hundredth navigation marker if the solution is to populate the empty space with various objects, then you lose the silent solitude of space travel, which calls into question the concept of an *EverQuest*-style game in outer space to begin with.

Is *Earth & Beyond* fun? The answer is both yes and no, depending on your particular opinion of *EverQuest*. If you've burned yourself out on *EQ*'s leveling treadmill model, *Earth & Beyond* will do nothing for you. On the other hand, if you're an avid *EQ* player seeking a new addiction, then *Earth & Beyond* will be every bit as engaging.

VERDICT ★★★★★
EverQuest in space, for better or for worse.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

Zoom zoom BY WADE HERMES

GAME STATS

MAKER EA GAMES

DRIVE ELECTRONIC ARTS

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EVERYONE (10) \$29.95

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(2-8 PLAYERS)

If you played the first game, you already know the drill in *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*:

You outrun the law with a stable of licensed exotic cars—including Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Porsches, and McLarens—that most of us can only dream about driving. Little has changed, and that's good—it means *Hot Pursuit 2* is still a high-speed blast of fender-bending fun.

Driving these exotic cars at speeds in excess of 150 mph is a gearhead's dream come true, and with upgraded graphics and gameplay enhancements, this game is a great arcade-racing experience. Cops are more aggressive and possess more tools to help them do their job. Now, they can call for backup and coordinate a roadblock or placement of spike strips if these fail to stop you, they'll call for air support, which consists of a helicopter flying in and dropping barrel-sized Molotov cocktails on the road. Terribly realistic? Not even close. But dodging plummeting fireballs at extremely high speeds is a blast, so shut up.



King-size Molotov cocktails are part of the new arsenal the cops can use on the more difficult offenders.

Dodging plummeting fireballs at extremely high speeds is a blast, so shut up.

You can play the game in either Single Challenge or Career mode—and the results are mixed. The Single Challenge mode is outstanding. You simply select the type of car, race course, and difficulty level, and you're on your way. I pumped the difficulty up to advanced, picked my favorite cars, and tore through one gorgeously rendered racecourse after another, breaking a sweat as I dodged Molotov cocktails, oncoming traffic, and other competitors—all while trying not to get busted by the cops. Everything here

adds up to a racing experience that lives up to the NFS legacy.

Unfortunately, the game's Career modes (Championship and Hot Pursuit) are simply unsatisfying and boring. They consist of a progression model for winning a gold, silver, or bronze medal, with the difficulty increasing as you go. A.J. cars in both Career modes are weak and slow, and they lack options for players to adjust their skills for a stiffer challenge. Even the cops, with their more aggressive driving skills, had a tough time keeping up when I drove the



Zippering along at 200 mph, I was unable to avoid this firebomb. Fortunately, NFS: HP2 has no damage model to speak of, so I could continue.

higher-priced cars, and, as a result, I was practically handed a gold medal in nearly all of the scenarios. The only real point of playing the Career mode is to unlock the cooler cars and tracks for racing in the far more satisfying Single Challenge mode.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 may not break new ground, but it's still one of the best high-octane racing experiences around, and the better graphics and tougher cop A.J. are great improvements to a sweet game. Too bad the lame Career modes can't match the rest of the game's quality.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The disappointing Career modes just pour a little too much sugar in the gas tank.



Tweaked A.J. lets the cops make their quote using some very aggressive tactics.



At extremely high speeds, getting airborne is quite common. Some landing gear may have broken here.

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FIFA Soccer 2003

Looks great, plays dumb BY JEFF LACKEY

GAME STATE

PLATFORM EA SPORTS

DEVELOPER EA SPORTS

CANADA LEVEL: SOCCER

ESRB RATING: EVERYONE

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SPACE, 3,000 CD CASE

REQUIREMENTS LINK

INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

NOTE: EA (2-16 PLAYERS)

FIFA 2003 is a few brain cells short of being a superb game. It gets so much right that you want to overlook its IQ deficiency, and for many gamers—maybe most gamers—the great looks will be more than enough to compensate for what it lacks in player A.I. For real soccer aficionados, however, FIFA 2003 is just good enough to be a frustrating tease.

FIFA 2003 is unsurpassed in graphics, sound, and its ability to capture the atmosphere of world-class soccer. You can manage any of 450 clubs from around the world, and the animation and lighting effects of the stadiums, crowds, and players are incredible. The fans' chants, songs, cheers, and whistles create a wonderful you-are-there feeling. And John Motson's announcing is the best in computer sports (and not just because most PC sports commentary sucks). All these elements create an unbeatable package for presentation.

The past few versions of the franchise have been rightly criticized for exhibiting arcade-style gameplay. The ball stuck to the dribbler, and passes were always laser-beam accurate—gross inaccuracies that completely changed the way the game played. FIFA 2003 finally rectifies that problem. Now, the ball can realistically slip away from the ball handler; the player can choose to dribble the ball away from himself, and passes can go astray. Those changes may sound minor, but the result is a game that plays much more like its real-life counterpart.

Cutting-edge graphics and sound,



Arzenal's Ljungberg takes a hard feat.



Free kicks are now controlled with a puff size-like power meter.

Why isn't this a perfect 5-star game?



Defenders standing around while the offense strikes is an AI—common occurrence.

superb commentary, and a fundamental change to the gameplay engine that significantly improves the realism—why isn't this a perfect 5-star game? For a few reasons, the first of which may not matter to those who don't follow real-world soccer. Real names are used on the rosters, but many players' skill ratings are a far cry from those of their real-world counterparts. Some are far too high, while others are so unrealistically low, you'll be tempted to think the designers have a personal beef with the player. And many on-field strategy options present in previous versions are now absent.

But it's the day-witted defensive A.I. that's the real killer. Players often aimlessly wander the field. Defensive players appear to have strict scripts

that require the ball to be in a certain location before they take action. Forwards benefit from copious scoring chances as defenders brainlessly attend to other matters.

FIFA 2003 is an impressive game; its eye and ear candy are unsurpassed in sports gaming. It does so much right that the poor defensive A.I. is much more of a disappointment than it would be in a lesser game. Your enjoyment will be a matter of whether the incredible presentation outweighs this deficiency.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If the A.I. were as sharp as the graphics, this would be a fantastic game.



EverQuest: The Planes of Power

Just one more hit, I swear BY JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

FORMAT: SOLO ONLINE
 ENTERTAINMENT
 OS: WINDOWS
 DEVELOPER: SONY ONLINE
 PUBLISHER: SONY ONLINE
 RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 2002
 PRICE: \$29.95
 MODE: MMORPG
 PLATFORM: PC
 HARDWARE: PENTIUM III, 40MB RAM, 40MB HD
 NETWORK: 30 CABLE, 30 CABLE, 30 CABLE
 CONNECTION
 MODIFIABLE: YES
 PARENTAL: PARENTAL
 LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
 CONNECTION
 MODIFIABLE: YES

The year 2002 will go down as the year that the cutting-edge developers of EverQuest finally discovered the compass. OK, that sounds staid, but as a former EQ addict with hundreds of hours logged in, I say it with love. Seriously, the game is three years old now, and Sony Online could really just kick back and collect monthly fees from the 400,000-plus addicts without doing any more work. So I credit the developers for being smart enough to keep EQ's loyal fanbase happy and well fed with new content and gameplay and interface tweaks.

The newest expansion pack, The Planes of Power (which includes the full version of the game), is aimed primarily at the highest-level players, with 19 new zones, all but one that require you to be at least Level 46. That 19th new zone, however, is available to all players, and is so significant that it may actually help suck lapsed players back in—it sure did with me. The Plane of Knowledge is a hub from which you can now easily teleport to locations all over Norrath and Lucin, thus significantly reducing the horrendously-long travel times that have always been such a drag in EQ. In three weeks, I saw more of Norrath than I did in three years. I was also pleasantly surprised with the largely revamped interface, now with transparent, customizable windows and, yes, a freakin' compass at last.

The new stuff is great for newbies and lower-level players, but Planes of Power is really a gift for veteran players, like the earlier Scars of Velious expansion was. The level cap has been raised to 65, raids are now easier to organize, and the new upper-level zones are gigantic and challenging, with a central story line linking them all together. The story line has an organized, almost linear structure to it in which new, tougher planar zones open up as you complete certain tasks. How tough are the new zones? As of this writing, a month after launch, not one player had yet made it into the final zones. So veterans need not worry about returning to Earth's any time soon.

The bigger question is whether those who've never cared before should try EverQuest now, because, clearly, the clock is ticking. Planes of Power offers the most accessible, best-looking EverQuest yet, but it's still getting awfully dated, both in looks and gameplay mechanics. With a number of next-generation MMORPGs out or on the way—including Asheron's Call 2, World of Warcraft, Star Wars Galaxies, and, yes, EverQuest 2—this might be an expansion that's best left to the already addicted.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you're still playing EQ, you might as well get it.

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ShadowFlare: Episode One

Diablo for dummies BY T. BYRL BAKER

GAME STATS

FRIGHT DEMONSLIT

100%1 DEV/50%1

100%1 ACT/100%1

100%100%1 100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

100%100%1 100%1

Finally making a showing in the States after enjoying incredible popularity in Japan, *ShadowFlare* lives up to its name by burning brightly for a few hours only to be overshadowed by the games that inspired it. This Diablo clone tempts players with some intriguing aspects, like accessories that let characters augment their stats by using fire, water, and other elements to defeat foes associated with opposing elements. Unfortunately, cool features can't disguise the stale, simplistic gameplay.

Players begin as generic mercenaries but switch to other classes depending on their actions. Unfortunately, wizard, warrior, and hunter are the only classes to choose from, but players are free to cross-train, and new spells and attacks open up automatically as characters level up.

Companions are the only things that set this game apart from other hack-and-slash clickfests. These animal buddies have their own elemental affiliations and are lifesavers, launching themselves at packs of enemies and leaping over walls to trigger switches. You can set companions to act autonomously or to follow simple commands. *ShadowFlare* uses larger and more colorful sprites than most games of this



This is what happens when you pose a mage with a broadsword.

type, but ultimately, the game's blandness kills any potential it had. There aren't enough types of monsters or equipment to keep things interesting, and quests involve little more than killing foes or fetching items. The outdoor areas look alive, as do all dungeons save the last one. Combat is repetitive because nearly all the monsters wander toward you like zombies, and although there's an online component, there's no guarantee you'll find an English-language server.

Game balance is also out of whack. Playing as a wizard is challenging at first, but as higher levels, magic attacks are devastating. Taking the warrior's path, I died only once during the entire game,

and the idiotic A.I. makes a hunter's mines outrageously effective. Money is so plentiful that by the end I was throwing away thousands of gold pieces just to clear inventory space.

If SIS looks like a bargain, consider that this game is the first of four installments. The \$60 you'll eventually spend is enough to buy *Diablo II* and *Divine Divinity*, two games that define what action-RPG hybrids should be.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you want carpal tunnel syndrome, there are far more entertaining ways to contract it.

Heroes of Might & Magic IV: The Gathering Storm

Heaping disappointment on top of letdown BY ELLIOTT CHIN

GAME STATS

100%100

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

100%100%100%1

The dearth of creatures hasn't been alleviated. The A.I. isn't appreciably better. And the few additions are available only in the new campaign. There are no new town types, no new units to recruit, and no buildings to construct. Yeah, that's worth your \$30.

We were really hoping this expansion would redeem one of our formerly favorite franchises, but *The Gathering Storm* falls far short of even previous Heroes expansions, such as *Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade*. Here, the real additions are more single-player campaigns and scenarios, which, for better or worse, feel very similar to the those in the original—right down to the cheating A.I. There are also four new creatures, but those appear late in the six-part campaign, and then only as

adversaries controlled by the A.I.; you can't build them yourself or face them in scenario games. There are more than a dozen new artifacts, as well as a handful of new adventure objects, but definitely not enough to enhance the previous Heroes IV experience.

The only truly significant addition in *The Gathering Storm* is multiplayer support, which honestly should have shipped in the original game (as it did in previous Heroes games) if you weren't disappointed by *Heroes IV*—and, more important, have friends who feel the same way—you might want the expansion for multiplayer purposes. Otherwise, you'll find nothing here that changes your mind about the game.



You'll find five new heroes to control in *The Gathering Storm's* six-part campaign.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's a lot more of the same—the same grinding disappointment.

Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Spearhead

From Normandy to Berlin in five hours flat BY KEN BROWN

GAME STATS

RETAILER EA

RETAILER EA

TYPE ACTION

ESRB RATING: TOON VIOLENCE

PRICE \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450

4GB RAM, SOUND CARD

DRIVE SPACE

RECOMMENDED: PENTIUM III 500

8GB RAM, SOUND CARD

INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

It's got plenty of highs and just a few lows, but the worst one is that it's over so fast. When you plunk down \$30, you expect to slug it out for a week or two, but Spearhead bolts for Berlin faster than a Nazi found naked with a rabbit.

Spearhead's nine missions feature more of the team-based, heavily-scripted action that made Medal of Honor so popular. This time they're tougher and more exciting as you link up with various units to blow up a bridge carrying German reinforcements, repulse an onslaught of soldiers and tanks in the Battle of the Bulge, and take on swarms of Panzers in bomb-blasted Berlin.

The first mission alone is worthy of an award. You bail out of a troop transport into the night sky over Normandy on D-Day, crash through the roof of a barn, fight off half a dozen soldiers trying to kill you, take out the crew of an anti-aircraft gun, turn their gun on a Jerry truck carrying reinforcements, then link up with British commandos and take out a Tiger with a flak gun. Whew! Several other missions are equally intense.



This roll segment, where you're shooting onerous vehicles and soldiers with a truck-mounted antitank gun, is one of the wildest in the game.

Dying repeatedly to learn the magic path can get tiresome, even in a short game.

You're running and gunning through most of the levels, but now you're able to use heavy mounted weapons that punctuate the action. You can blast troops and half-tracks with the rocket-launching Nebelwerfer, as well as anti-tank guns, flak cannons, and mortars. In addition to blasting off tank turrets and throwing enemy soldiers through the air like rag dolls, heavy weapons can also cut down trees.

In the last mission, you take over a Russian T34 and put the hurt on numerous Panzers and troops that get in your way. It's a much better experience than driving the Tiger in MOH, partly

because it's a more hostile environment, but mostly because you can now alternate between the main gun and a 50-caliber machine gun.

But if you know what you're doing, you can plow through the game in just a few hours. So to make it last longer, the designers have made it tougher and harder to know where you're going. It's not as bad as the sniper level in MOH, but some areas still require you to solve the mission through trial and error. Dying repeatedly to learn the magic path can get tiresome, even in a short game.

Fortunately, the designers have also added new maps and game types to

Spearhead's multiplayer component. If you're not much of a multiplayer fan, then there's probably nothing here to sway you, but the servers are active day and night with plenty of new recruits. Spearhead adds 13 new maps and 20 new weapons, including a portable MGA2 that will shred anyone who steps in front of it. Spearhead's default movement is also faster, which makes the game livelier.

But if you're only interested in single player, wait until the price drops below \$20, and then you won't feel cheated when you finish the game in a weekend.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Probably the most exhilarating and intense shooter yet...for five hours. Wait for the price to drop before you go out shelling more Jerries.



Shaking a Tiger: Get rid of that tank commander, then plant the sticky bombs quickly before the gunner wipes out your whole team.



Combat Flight Simulator 3

Sputtering into aerial combat BY DENNY ATKIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
 DEVELOPER: MICROSOFT
 YEAR: 1994
 GENRE: ACTION
 PLATFORMS: PC
 MODE: SINGLE-PLAYER
 EQUIPMENT: 3D SOUND
 4MB RAM (2MB FOR WIN)
 200/0/0/50/0/0
 HARD DRIVE SPACE
 30MB/300/0/0/0/0/0/0
 POSITION IN SERIES: 3/0/0
 BAY: 100/0/0/0/0/0/0
 INTEREST: LOW
 CPU: 10/0/0/0/0

Remember the golden days of yesteryear, when valiant young American pilots took their P-80 jets into battle against Nazi flying wings? Neither do I, because it never happened. But that didn't keep Microsoft from squeezing some of that speculative, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe flavor into the latest Combat Flight Sim. Too bad they didn't bother to squeeze in a better game engine,

Kicking the tires

CF3's missions take place from 1943 through the end of the war—and then into a hypothetical "extended war." Late in the war, you'll get to fly prototype aircraft such as the pusher-prop Curtin P-55 Ascender (or Assender, as test pilots

called it), the German Gotha Go-229 flying wing, and the British Vampire jet.

This is the first Microsoft sim to include flyable bombers. You can pilot various models of the B-25 Mitchell, B-26 Marauder, and Junkers Ju-88 medium bombers; or you can let the PC do the flying and jump between gun turrets and the bombardier station. Notably missing, even as A.I. aircraft, are heavy bombers like the B-17, B-24, and Lancaster, which were key to this period of the war. CF33 does support third-party add-on aircraft, so perhaps those will come later.

Aircraft modeling is decent enough to be convincing during combat, with differences in maximum speed, acceleration, and roll rate all well represented. Anischar's test pilots won't

have to dig too hard to find things to gripe about, though, such as difficulty in bleeding off speed in some planes, or the inability to dive a P-47 past Mach 1 without ripping its wings off.

Damage modeling has been beefed up, so there's much better visual representation of rips, fire, and smoke. The sim is supposed to accurately model damage specific to those systems that were hit, but as with previous versions, it too often seems that all damage leads to the same result: Your plane is suddenly extremely difficult to turn.

A.I. pilots run the gamut from competent to insane. Some fighters will use vertical maneuvers realistically, but most are easy to drag into turning fights. The bomber behavior, though, is

The best-looking and most entertaining sim in the series is marred by performance and A.I. problems.



Detailed damage-modeling in action.



Special effects abound: here, a P-47 flies in the rain over a just-attacked complex.

especially wacky—AJ, bombers attack targets by dive-bombing them, a highly unlikely move for a real B-25.

CFS3 includes four mission modes. Quick Combat lets you define location, plane types, and form of mission, such as ground attack, escort, dogfight, or intercept. The Missions section boasts a too-small selection of historical missions, "what-if" scenarios featuring the post-war prototype aircraft, and tutorials.

The heart of the game is the dynamic Campaign mode, which lets you choose the type of missions you want to fly. Click on a map sector and you'll have your pick of ship attack, combat air patrol, recon, and more. As you win missions, the front line begins moving into enemy-held territory, and you begin amassing prestige points. With enough points, you can launch a ground offensive, but that happens fairly rarely because the number of points needed is extraordinarily high. The campaign's dynamic nature makes it

infinitely replayable, but some missions end up feeling sterile; I'd like to have seen more historic missions. CFS3 also has a slight RPG element—as your pilot gains experience, you can allocate points to improve qualities such as vision, G-force endurance, and health.

Multplayer mode lets you mix it up in aerial dogfights or play cooperative single missions. You can even play with multiple humans in a single bomber, flying and manning the gun barrels. Unfortunately, the Campaign mode is not supported in multiplayer; the limited pool of single missions gets old quickly.

Engine problems

CFS3's new graphics engine is beautiful but cranky. Aircraft exteriors look great, with silver planes reflecting the scenery around them. Unfortunately, exterior views of aircraft other than your own are unavailable, as is the flight recorder mentioned in the documentation. Virtual



As your pilot gains experience, you'll get points that can be spent to beef up his talents, select a personal aircraft, and launch ground offensives.



A low-level shipping attack in a B-25; the cockpit is fully virtual.

cockpits are unspectacular in detail, although snap views and a padlock are both available for tracking enemies.

Special effects are impressive, with realistic smoke and explosions, and nice touches like oil slicks around sinking ships. 3D trees and buildings give an excellent sense of speed at low levels.

While it looks great when working as designed, this is the most problematic engine I've ever seen in a Microsoft sim. Using WHOI-certified drivers on a GeForce4 Ti 4600, I encountered misplaced textures, flashing damage graphics, and ground textures that morphed as my plane approached them. While the overall framerate is good, and the graphics are adjustable to match a variety of system configurations, I often encountered stuttering effects during which the action got jumpy, sped up, and then stuttered again.

CFS3 is by far the best-looking and most entertaining simulation in the series so far. But the improvements are marred by AI oddities and performance problems. Microsoft hasn't patched previous entries in this series, but we hope they do here, because graphical glitches and stutters mar what could be an excellent sim.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's like driving a Benz: really great ride, but with a fairly troublesome engine.

Project Nomads

islands in the airstream BY JEANNE KIM TRAVIS

GAME STATS

PLATFORM: PCW, SOFTPHONE
DEVELOPER: TROJAN LABS
GENRE: STRATEGY/ACT
ESRB RATING: TEEN, PARENTAL
 STRONG LANGUAGE
PRICE: \$29.99
CONTENT RATING: PEGI 16, IAN
 16, IAN 16, IAN 16
GENRE: SPACE, 3D
GENRE: STRATEGY/ACT
PLATFORM: PCW, SOFTPHONE
ESRB RATING: TEEN, PARENTAL
 STRONG LANGUAGE
PRICE: \$29.99
CONTENT RATING: PEGI 16, IAN
 16, IAN 16, IAN 16

Beset by sunset-painted landscapes of rock provide the eerie, post-apocalyptic canvas for Aeres—a world of floating islands that survived a destructive big bang—in *Project Nomads*. Aircraft ranging from WWII-reminiscent bombers to fighters inspired by dragonflies, as well as barrel-constructs built on an island/battleship, all point to what could have been one flurry of exciting freights after another. But, early on, *Nomads* becomes the casualty of a tug-of-war between ambition and execution, and regrettably fails to realize its otherwise refreshing concepts.

Take island (base) building, for example. After establishing the watchtower and lighthouse (both required for a functioning island) and placing gun towers or cannons to cover defensive duties, it doesn't take a genius to figure out from the few choices left where to build accessory



Not offensive relations against imposing key structures can open one's flight skills.

Nomads becomes the casualty of a tug-of-war between ambition and execution.



Lizarded specs on your island makes placing buildings a no-brainer, robbing the game of any real sense of strategy.



The game looks great, even during the nighttime battles.

buildings like a silo or hangar. In fact, most constructs have size restrictions, so you can only place them in one of two designated areas. Where's the strategy in that? *Nomads* also seems to make it a point to keep players in the dark about the state of their battleship and their enemies; the only indicators about an island's status are a vague energy bar, an alarm, and eventual bonfires. It's as if offering more information would have called attention to how thin the strategic layer of gameplay actually is. In *Nomads*, so the developers decided it would be best to omit it altogether.

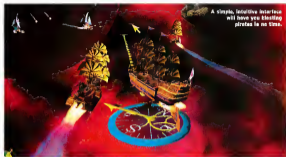
Level design also suffers from restrictions. In most missions, winning boils down to trial-and-error deduction concerning which weapon or aircraft is effective (or not) against an enemy structure, or tedious, arcadey shooting from one sublevel to the next. Although *Nomads'* third-person ground missions break up the monotony of the shooting levels, the lack of strafing coupled with annoyingly sticky collision detection and the disappointing *Skins* (gassy, oversized dung beetles) make exploring an island for artifacts nothing but mere maintenance. To make matters worse, after an uneventful day of using these idiotic bugs for target practice, it's not uncommon to return to your battleship

and see your own fighters behaving as stupidly as the *Skins*. They'll fly right into a rock face over and over again, even when nothing's attacking them.

At times, the story takes just enough of a surprising turn to keep you interested. Unique concepts like Possession, which allows jumping from, say, a cannon turret to an airborne bomber, and the artifact press, which lets you create hybrids of artifacts for more powerful structures, are engaging ideas. Quality sound effects succeed in expressing what you might imagine to be the clash of machinery or the wispy aura of magic in Aeres. Although the voiceovers are a bit overdone in some instances, overall, they're far. The inclusion of multiplayer over a LAN highlights good intentions, but frankly, you'd probably be hard-pressed to round up two, let alone eight players interested in playing. The lack of Internet play makes this even more difficult.

Nomads' most commendable attribute is its attempt to create something new. But, although it offers a mix of strategy, vehicle-based shooting, and third-person action, none of these elements surpass mediocrity due to the lukewarm gameplay. *Project Nomads* will easily grab your attention—it just won't hold it for long.

VERDICT ★★★★★
 All work and no play make
Nomads a dull game.



A simple, intuitive interface will have you blasting pirates in no time.

Treasure Planet: Battle of Procyon

Lightweight delight BY LLOYD CASE

GAME STATS

PLATFORMS PC/MAC
DEVELOPER BARKING DOG STUDIOS
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ONLINE CASUAL EVERYONE
PRICE \$29.99/\$29.99/MSRP
PUNISHOR 2 AND 64MB
RAM 256MB HARD DRIVE
SPACE 200MB
RECOMMEND NONE
REQUIRES SUPER LAN,
INTERNET CD-IN PLAYBACK

Think of *Treasure Planet* as *Starfleet Command* for kids, only with rocket-powered sailing vessels maneuvering in space across the etherium, surrounded by planets right out of a Roger Dean painting. It's Jules Verne run riot, but with laserball cannons, pocket black holes, and a feline, feminine, feisty admiral handing out your missions.

The game takes place after the events of the Disney movie. You are Jim Hawkins, the movie's hero, now a junior officer in Her Majesty's navy. At the start of the single-player game, you're given a torpedo boat to conduct your initial missions. As the game progresses, you gain victory points that you spend on better crew and weapons—but not ships, as they're handed to you in the campaign.

The lively pace will have you eagerly clicking the Next Mission button.

An entertaining, if predictable, story of treachery and redemption unfolds as you take on tasks such as ferreting out pirates, delivering relief supplies, and escorting transport ships. The lively pace will have you eagerly clicking the Next Mission button.

The single-player campaign is a terrific introduction to real-time tactical-combat games. My 11-year-old daughter is having a great time working through it. The campaign is

great, as far as it goes, but it's too short and relatively easy for experienced gamers. If that was all there was, *Treasure Planet* would be only a couple evenings of light entertainment for most players.

Thankfully, there's *Skirmish* mode. The A.I. is merely competent, but the point system for buying ships, crew, and weapons creates balanced, challenging battles. *Treasure Planet* also supports up to eight players in multi-player, although the maps are the same as the ones in *Skirmish* mode. You can play in the historical scenarios or with open maps, some of which allow you to co-op play against the A.I.

The one downside is the lack of a scenario generator or map editor. Developer Barking Dog Studios has the tools ready to roll, but Disney is waiting to see how the game is received before releasing them. The game would be much better with these additions. As it is, all the maps are text-based, so you can go in and change them by hand if you're willing and able.

All told, *Treasure Planet* offers exhilarating combat in a fantastic setting, with *skirmish* and multiplayer action that will have you snaking the CD out of your kids' computer.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If this surprisingly engaging but short real-time tactical game had a scenario generator, we'd be adding half a star to the score.

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MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries

Strong game design turns a great game into a classic BY GEORGE JONES



GAME STATS

DEVELOPER MICROSOFT
PUBLISHER CYBERLORE

STRATEGY GAME, SHOOT 'EM UP

WIN: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

UNRATED VIOLENCE

MSRP: \$49.99

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

ESSENTIALS: PC (WINDOWS XE64)

Technically an expansion to MechWarrior 4: Vengeance, Mercenaries is a stand-alone game, requiring neither expertise nor familiarity with previous editions of the game. The gorgeous graphics engine, stunning sound effects, and excellent enemy and mercenary A.I. haven't changed much in the two years since the original's groundbreaking release, but the play mechanics and overall flow and pacing sure have. The end result is one of the most satisfying games of 2002.

The most appealing and surprising aspect of Merc is how shockingly fast and entertaining combat feels. Once you drop into a mission, it rarely takes more than a few seconds for the action to heat up. The battle feels frenetic, furious...and manageable. You never feel out of control, and your tasks are straightforward and specific. That's a far cry from previous games in the series, which have had a tendency to get bogged down in nav panels and overly



The exciting battles in MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries will leave you standing and shouting.

The end result is one of the most satisfying games of 2002.

complex mission objectives.

That Cyberlore Studios was able to so perfectly blend near-arcade action with the deeper tactical elements of the MechWarrior franchise is a minor victory in itself. The complexity and difficulty of the 30-plus nonlinear missions increase gradually—and in just the right doses. Even when victory requires multiple attempts, you're not likely to spend more than 15 minutes on any one mission. And with the exception of the final battle, which should be tough, the game never becomes discouraging to play.

Although Merc still clings to the outdated notion that losing a mission means you have to replay it until you succeed—a nonlinear game should allow you to continue even when you lose—the game's mechanics are still inspiring. Basic, powerful elements of game design are at play here. You're rewarded with salvaged mechanized robots that you can customize, and variety in the form of different mission types, such as a spectacularly eerie, no-radar night sortie.

And then there's the wide-open gameplay, which allows you to pick and choose your missions, and a story that branches depending on your choices. Unfortunately, only the most devoted, interested, or compulsive will notice this, because a large percentage of the story

is background info, depicted solely through big chunks of text and short voice-overs. This is the title's only major shortcoming, and it has plagued every game in the series. But what does a money-hungry mercenary care about politics and intrigue, anyway?

Granted, it's no easy task to incorporate big-budget cut-scenes and an epic story into a game design that allows players to pick and choose missions whenever and wherever they desire. But the setup seems like a no-brainer for the kind of financial success and mainstream accessibility that companies like SquareSoft have created with the Final Fantasy franchise. The payoff will be huge if Microsoft invests in some extra development, because Merc, more than any other game in the series, is imminently playable and perfectly suited for a broad audience. Action-game broad. Big-money broad. Xbox-version broad. Major motion picture broad.

Someday, this sci-fi universe is going to be huge. When it finally happens, fans of MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries won't be surprised. Hey, we knew it all along.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Probably the best MechWarrior game in the series.



Part of MechWarrior's appeal is the destructive payoff that comes when you figure out the perfect combination of weapons.



Using the mouse and keyboard instead of a joystick is much more enjoyable and effective—the mouse clicks for easier aiming and firing.

Worms Blast

The worm has turned by BOB SMOLKA

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: URB SOFT

DEVELOPER: TEAM 17

GENRE: PUZZLE (CART RACING)

EVERYONE: PEGI: 3/5/7/9

BOXING: PENTON 1 250

BOARD GAME: 12000 1800

DRIVE SPACE: 1000 20

CARD: 1000000 1000000

PENTON 11 400 12000

2000 1200 30 10000

2000 1200 30 10000

GAMEPLAY: 1000000 10000

10000 10 10000

If you've played any Blast-4-Move games on a console, you'll have a good idea of the basics behind Worms Blast. The general goal of the game is to clear away colored blocks at the top of the screen by shooting ammunition at them. The many variations on this basic theme help keep things somewhat interesting, but that's the core of the gameplay. As a big fan of the prior turn-based Worms games, I found myself really disappointed by this unwelcome shift away from the giddy worm-versus-worm combat of earlier games.

The 3D graphics look good—they retain the style of the older games, as do the giddy voices and sounds. The control scheme is also reminiscent of the rest of the series: You use the keyboard to move left or right, choose the angle of your shot, and decide how much power to use by holding down the Fire key. It's a simple method that works quite well... in a turn-based game. Unfortunately, the many modes of Worms Blast are all timed, either by an actual time limit or a frenzied rush to eliminate the lower levels of blocks before they reach you. Maybe I'm just aspecific, but after many games, I still find the controls terribly difficult to use.

In its favor, Worms Blast has a good deal of variety. Roughly 60 levels of Puzzle mode present a ton of challenges, such as clearing an entire level in a



Interactivity in the multiplayer game is limited to lobbing a few beseech shells at your opponent through the opening in the bunker.

limited amount of time or with a limited amount of ammo, or collecting or avoiding falling objects. In Tournament mode, you'll find five minigames with similar objectives, but they're frenetic and tend to be over rather quickly. There's also a series of two-player contests in which you can race against the CPU or another player to clear a level, collect items, etc.

One cool feature of the game is an opening between the two sides, which allows you to fire at your opponent if you time your shot just right. All the modes and levels share one particular trait: They're extremely difficult, even

after you master the controls.

Worms Blast isn't a bad game, but even with the variety of modes and goals, I found myself growing bored too quickly and frustrated even more often. My hope is that for the next game in the series, Team 17 will return Worms to its former direction, while maintaining the high level of creativity that went into the design of Worms Blast.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The new direction the designers chose for the Worms series is not for the better.

Beam Breakers

Space racing my ass—where's Milla Jovovich? BY DARREN GLADSTONE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: JORDAO

DEVELOPER: SHELUS SOFTWARE

GENRE: RACING

EVERYONE: PEGI: 3/5/7/9

BOXING: 1000 1000

BOARD GAME: 1000 1000

DRIVE SPACE: 1000 1000

CARD: 1000 1000

PENTON 11 400 12000

2000 1200 30 10000

2000 1200 30 10000

GAMEPLAY: 1000000 10000

10000 10 10000

Despite the lame names (Beam Breakers? Neo-York? You guys are killing me here!), this game plays like a PC tribute to the mean skyways shown in The Fifth Element. The game even offers instant flashbacks to Bruce Willis spouting inane comments while dodging cops and oncoming traffic. There are some notable attempts to re-create the cinematic movie races in decent detail, but after a few races, it all comes across as generic.

The audio is hardly award-winning, with lame voice taunts and an annoying "computer" voice that warns you of your ship status, but the biggest possible knock is for something this game doesn't have: speed. It feels like you're moving in slow motion, the racers are sluggish at best, and traffic "swimming"

around you feels more like granny's on the freeway than a frantic cruise through rush hour.

Beam Breakers does try to compensate with varied gameplay. In one of 30 upgradeable racers, you speed around 30 pre-charted courses throughout the city. A nice touch: You can take shortcuts through alleys or between buildings in order to finish first. There's also a 57-mission campaign, though I found it hard to care about the plight of a pizza delivery boy who's mixed up with the mob.

Ultimately, the controls are easy to pick up, although it was more tempting to break the keyboard than the game's "beams." There's some high-flying fun in this racer, but the numerous unnecessary hurdles will send you cruising back to the slow to return Beam Breakers.



A virtual Bruce Willis willing for a fire to drop in, or a missile in Beam Breakers? You make the call.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If Beam Breakers weren't a flying-car racing game, we'd be making jokes right here about it having flat tires and running out of gas.

STEPPING OUT OF THESE PAGES AND INTO YOUR HOMES!

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NHL 2003

Hi-octane pseudo-hockey BY ROB SMOLKA

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER EA SPORTS
 PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
 GENRE SPORTS
 ESRB RATING LANGUAGE
 MSRP \$49.99
 SYSTEMS PENTAM 4, XBOX
 44MB RAM, 1GB+ HARD
 DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
 DEMONSTRATED FEATURES
 PENTAM 4, XBOX, XBOX
 RAM, 4GB+ HARD DRIVE
 SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
 GAMEPLAY FEATURES SPORT
 LAN, WIRELESS, NETWORK
 64-BIT PLAYERS

There comes a point when it's apparent that something you've been hoping for is just not going to happen, and you have to come to grips with that fact. This is where I'm at with EA Sports' NHL series. The game will just never be the hockey simulation so many of us have been pining for. It has been, is, and always will be an arcade game of hockey, and no amount of criticism or whining will change that. So, now that I've given up the ghost, I can look clearly at the game without saddling it with any undue expectations.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that NHL 2003 isn't much of a leap over last year's game...or the one from the year before that, or the year before that. There are updated rosters, a spiffy new menu, a host of cool animations, and improved presentation, but beyond that, it essentially plays like the same game we've seen since the days of the Sega Genesis. In fact, the A.I. in this year's version is so lame, it may be a step backward.

Programming the goalies was by a huge challenge since they vary so greatly from year to year. This year's version features Swiss cheese-like boneheads. High-scoring games are commonplace, with shots hitting the back of the net early and often. You can't place all the blame on the goalies, though; the hockey-headed defensemen must be chastised as well. Setting up one-timers (and, conversely, defending one-timers) is child's play; the defensemen are completely clueless about how to prevent this from happening. It leads to ludicrous shots-on-goal numbers and scores more reminiscent of a basketball game than a hockey match, regardless



The fighting in NHL 2003 is boring and ugly, which is strange since it's just the kind of peripheral part of the game that EA Sports generally focuses on.

NHL 2003 isn't that much of a leap over last year's game...or the one from the year before that.

of the difficulty. You can increase the goalie's abilities via sliders, but only in exhibition games (not in Franchise mode...why?), and the options are suspect at best.

If you can get past these little problems, you'll find a game that looks great (except for the laughably bad-looking fighting sequences), controls really well, and can deliver an adrenaline rush as exciting as any first-person shooter. The new deke-control feature is nifty and comes in especially handy against another human player, if only for the purpose of showing off. The online

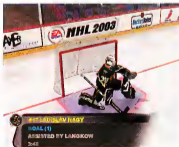
play is fairly solid (although there's still too much lag for my liking, even over a cable modem), and there's nothing better than deke-chaining a few joystick-wielding friends come over.

Like so many other things in today's world, the NHL series is moving more toward the mantra of style over substance, with a feature list boasting a sound track of today's "hot" bands and the ridiculous, one-on-one heart-beat zoom cam during breakaways that's useless and distracting. Even the announcers have become completely wacky, with more emphasis on being cute than trying to emulate a real hockey broadcast.

In the end, the single-player game is enjoyable for a short while, but as soon as you gain any skill whatsoever, you'll get bored by regularly trouncing the CPU, and you'll start looking for real people to play against. I know I'll only be returning to NHL 2003 for its multi-player capabilities.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It may not resemble real hockey, but it does have its moments.



Get used to this sight: This year's goalies are absolutely terrible.



Some of the zoom-out views are of limited use.

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Virtua Tennis

Fault! BY TOM CHICK

GAME STATS

FRONT ACTRESS VALUE
 BEATS SGA FOR SPORTS
 SHL FOR REAL EVERYONE
 FEEL \$20.99 \$30.00
 PERSON 1: 424, 6400 RAM,
 20MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
 RETROGAD EDUCATION,
 GAMING DEVELOPER
 LAN, NETWORK, INTERNET
 2-4 PLAYERS

You would love Virtua Tennis. It's OK if you don't even care about tennis itself. The fact remains that you would love Virtua Tennis. Yes, you who doesn't know a score of love from nothing would love Virtua Tennis. If you can't tell Venus from Serena, you would still love Virtua Tennis. Unfortunately, if you don't have a Sega Dreamcast hooked up to your television, your only recourse is this disappointing PC port.

Virtua Tennis is the hypnotic simplicity of Ping, but with tennis-shaped graphics led over it. Your job is to simply move your paddle, in this case an elaborately animated polygonal model of a famous tennis player in front of the oncoming ball. Once you've done this, you hold down the Swing button and the polygonal model takes over from there, doing fancy-looking things that make you feel super-smooth and graceful. Except, of course, for those times you screw up, in which case your polygonal model might do frantic things like diving, rolling, swinging wildly, or other displays of athletic determination. Ultimately, the game offers a great sense of accomplishment while requiring only a minimal amount of skill, almost like mashing buttons in a fighting game and pulling off some dramatic combo, but not as fast, cheap, and out of control. Unfortunately, this PC version of Virtua Tennis is one of those poorly



Thirty years later, we're still playing Ping.

executed ports that feels like someone slapped it together in his spare time. The Main Splash screen instructs you to "Press the start button," the subtlet being, "You do have a gamepad, don't you?" This subtlet is reinforced when you reach for your mouse to navigate the menu and find there's no mouse support. Using the keyboard is a lousy way to control your player, but this game refuses to recognize any analog device with lower than five buttons.

Virtua Tennis is a sublime multiplayer experience, particularly with four players. Ideally, they should be sitting shoulder-to-shoulder, but that's not how the Internet works. However, without any online player-matching

support, you're probably not going to be playing on the Internet. You'll be stuck taking on the ruthless A.I. opponents until you get a LAN or persuade your friends to crowd in front of your computer, where at least one unlucky schmuck will be stuck using the keyboard to play. Ultimately, this is a fifth-rate way to experience the joys of Virtua Tennis. Your \$30 would be better spent going toward a used Dreamcast from eBay along with a cheap copy of the original game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A half-hearted port of a brilliant game.

Rayman Arena

He'll steal your heart and probably destroy your CD drive, too BY ERIK WOLPAC

GAME STATS

FRONT SHL SOFT
 BEATS SHL SOFT
 SHL ANGSTY RACING
 SHL FOR EVERYONE WHO
 VIOLENCE FEEL \$29.99
 PERSON 1: 424, 6400 RAM,
 20MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
 EDUCATION, RETROGAD
 DEVELOPER
 LAN, NETWORK, INTERNET
 2-4 PLAYERS

Since every successful platform-jumping series eventually spawns a racing-focused sequel, actuarial scientists have warned us for years to expect the release of some sort of Rayman-endorsed karting product. I'm happy to report that we can all stop thinking about it now, because Rayman Arena is that game. Against the odds, however, it doesn't actually involve driving karts. Instead, you pilot one of the lovable Rayman characters through a series of footraces across a bunch of wacky-tobacco inspired surreal landscapes.

Other than the fact that it was created by the French, there's nothing particularly offensive about the game part of Rayman Arena. You run around and jump a little, and there's a battle mode, and one level is haunted.

But here's the thing: The game comes packaged on two discs. Which is fine, because, you know, that means more Rayman, right? The problem is that for some insane reason, the developers decided that you have to insert both discs in sequence every time the game boots. I feel like one of those shocked society women at the pie fight clutching



Whoever is that coffin is probably adorable.

my chest while saying, "Well, I never!" Because—really—I seriously never have. It's just completely preposterous.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Two too many disc swaps.

Rayman Arena is a karting product that doesn't actually involve driving karts.

Iron Storm

The tedium of war BY **DI LUO**

GAME STATS

FOR THE RECORDS
 RELEASED: 2005
 TYPE: ACTION/SHOOTER
 NATIVE: PC, XBOX, GORE, AND
 VIOLENCE: PG-13
 DEVELOPER: PENTON II SOU.
 \$24.95
 15MB RAM, 700MB HARD
 DRIVE SPACE, 2560 3D CARD
 RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION: 1024
 CPU: 2500MHz RAM
 MULTITASK SUPPORT: LAN,
 INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

Playing through Iron Storm gave me a renewed appreciation for the men who endured years of drudgery in the muddy trenches of Flanders during the Great War. The hours spent with this alternate-history shooter have traumatized my eardrums, caused me to tear out my hair, and (worst of all) given me hours of boredom. If 30 hours of fiction was this bad, it's difficult to imagine the suffering of four years of lice, rats, gas, and shellfire.

The setting of Iron Storm is its highlight. World War I in this alternate universe never ended, and the world is divided into two warring camps. Fifty years since the outbreak of war, Germany has been turned into a wasteland of burnt-out buildings and endless trenches. Although the graphics in Iron Storm aren't spectacular, they do a good job of creating an atmosphere of devastation and hopelessness in a world without peace.

The sound, when it works, also adds to the experience. Unfortunately, there's a horrible bug in systems using Sound Blaster Live and Windows XP. Explosives will cause ear-ringing crackles in the speakers and make all other sounds muffled. Why the developers didn't rectify a conflict with two of the most common products on the market is a question for the ages. Crashes are also frequent, and people in Iron Storm's support forums have reported problems



Please shoot me so I don't have to play this anymore.

with various videocards, mice, and attempts at remapping the controls. The gameplay itself isn't worth the headaches. The combat and weapons are standard fare, with sniping situations, mines in tight quarters, and occasional stints manning stationary turrets. Much of it feels derivative—almost a Medal of Honor lite, complete with a town of snipers, research base, and tank theft. Worse, there are stealth missions requiring you to sneak past enemies who are often omniscient and occasionally invincible. Unless you follow the exact path defined by the designers, you'll get spotted by the enemy even with their backs turned to you. Add that

to vague mission objectives, snipers who never miss, as well as puzzle-like sequences, and you have a few hundred quick saves and loads ahead of you before you can get through the game.

Iron Storm isn't as bad as getting trench foot or being castrated by shrapnel, but it's still so full of boredom and frustration that paying for the game is pretty much an act of self-flagellation. Fans of alternate history are better off buying a few *Turtledove* novels.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Trench warfare might almost be preferable to playing this game.

The Italian Job

The closest the world may ever come to getting the Benny Hill game it deserves BY **ERIK WOLPAW**

GAME STATS

FOR THE RECORDS
 RELEASED: 2001
 TYPE: DRIVING/POP CULTURE
 REFERENCE DRIVING
 DEVELOPER: THE MIND
 VIOLENCE: PG-13
 DEVELOPER: PENTON II SOU.
 \$19.95
 15MB RAM (RECOMMENDED)
 RECOMMENDED: 1024
 MULTITASK SUPPORT: 2-4 PLAYERS

In 1969, a British car-caper movie called *The Italian Job* starring Michael Caine and Benny Hill was released. There wasn't a whole lot of Italian car news for the next 33 years, but then last summer an Italian Job racing-adventure game came out for PS2. Rather than wait another generation to cash in on another Italian Job merchandising opportunities, SCI took just six months to publish a PC conversion of the generally ignored PS2 game based on the largely forgotten film.

Like most PS2 conversions, *The Italian Job* doesn't look very good. Every-

thing's blocky, the textures are all blurry, and the grainy horizon bitmap brings back memories of the first Doom demo. Even though it involves driving through a city while pursuing a life of crime, *The Italian Job* is no *Grand Theft Auto W*. It's basically 16 short driving challenges (which require no improvisation) that are connected by a thin plot. There're some extra mods available, but the driving model is so stiff that it's hard to imagine bothering to play them. However, it does feature an anonymous voice actor doing an honestly spectacular Michael Caine impersonation. SCI should keep him in



I don't know exactly what "halcked" means, so I just assumed it meant "you lost," and I stopped playing.

mind if they decide to bankroll a Nintendo 64 version of *The Hand*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Too little, too late.

SCI took just six months to publish a PC conversion of the generally ignored PS2 game.

REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Age of Sulfur: Privateer's Beauty	12/03	A game of great promise delivers mostly crushing disappointment	★☆☆☆☆
Alien vs. Predator 2: Primeal Hunt	11/02	The add-on to last year's Action Game of the Year isn't worth the \$20 price tag	★★★☆☆
America's Army: Operations	06/03	The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—and it's free	★★★★★
Batman: Vengeance	04/03	Frustrating controls, incoherent gameplay, and killer bugs	★☆☆☆☆
Battlefield 1942	01/03	Contender for multiplayer game of the year—a complete blast	★★★★★
Call of Kings: Rage of War	11/02	Fine blend of strategy, combat, and role playing, plus men in skirts	★★★★★
Chessmaster 9900	12/02	A good learning tool, but the tough A.I. is only saving for already strong players	★★★☆☆
Divine Divinity	12/02	An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and the worst sense	★★★★★
Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project	9/02	The only Duke game you'll see in your life is a pretty good side scroller	★★★★★
Earth 2150: Lost Souls	1/03	Earth 2150 redux all over again, only harder and undocumented	★★☆☆☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	8/02	The definitive, open-ended RPG epic	★★★★★
Empire: Rise of the Middle Kingdom	9/02	Aggressive Software has just about perfected the historical city-builder	★★★★★
Empire Earth: Art of Conquest	1/03	Unbalanced, too tough, and poorly designed	★★★☆☆
F1 2002	10/02	Delivers authentic yet accessible racing enjoyment for all	★★★★★
Farscape: The Game	12/02	Won't even appeal to the show's deluded fans	★☆☆☆☆
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	1/03	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one	★★★★★
Grand Prix 4	12/02	An embarrassment of riches for F1 fans	★★★★★
Grand Theft Auto III	9/02	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock-full of all that's fun in gaming	★★★★★
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	1/03	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth	★★★★★
Liars 2003	2/03	Everything you'd expect from Liarx, plus a new, real-time mouse swing	★★★★★
LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring	1/03	Tom Bombadil and real-estate transactions in place of gameplay	★★☆☆☆
Madden NFL 2003	11/02	Finally as good as the console version, this is a football classic	★★★★★
MechWarrior 4: Clan Mech Pak	12/02	Should have been a free download, not a \$19 product	★★☆☆☆
MechWarrior 4: Laser Spheres Mech Pak	10/02	Should have been a free download, not a \$19 product	★★☆☆☆
Medieval: Total War	12/02	The ultimate historical strategy game	★★★★★
Morrowind: Nights	5/02	Buy this one for the multiplayer and user-made mods	★★★★★
NHLF2	1/03	As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too	★★★★★
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	10/02	In features and content worthy of a brand new game, this is a benchmark expansion	★★★★★
Prince of Ops	1/03	For every potentially cool element, a worse one awaits to ruin it	★☆☆☆☆
Prisoner of War	1/03	More Hogan's Heroes than The Great Escape	★☆☆☆☆
RobinDawson: Tycoon 2	1/03	Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more fun than dunes	★★☆☆☆
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	9/02	Run-of-the-mill shooter with an offensive focus on excellence	★★☆☆☆
Stronghold: Crusader	1/03	Nowhere near as good as the original	★★☆☆☆
The Sun of All Pears	9/02	Not quite Rogue Spear, not even close to Counter-Strike	★★☆☆☆
Spyeria	10/02	The best new adventure game in years	★★★★★
The Thing	11/02	Great game concept bogged down by glitches and inequities	★★★☆☆
Ultima Tournament 2003	1/03	Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay	★★★★★
Virtual Resort: Spring Break	1/03	Like Spring break in Berlin—only worse	★☆☆☆☆
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos	9/02	A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement	★★★★★

CGW RECOMMENDS



Age of Mythology ★★★★★

We've had this game for less time than we've had WarCraft III, and already we've played more multiplayer games of it than Blizzard's game. The powerful new myth units and battle-shifting god powers add a new layer of strategy and a lot of new life to the tried-and-true Ensemble Studios Age formula.



Mafia ★★★★★

We've taken more flack from readers over our Mafia review than any game in recent memory. It's understandable. This is a game that has a great story, some very cool missions, and an incredible cinematic feel—but it's also got some pretty dull stretches of just driving around, and the lack of an immersion save can be really frustrating at times. That said, if you've got the patience for it (and it seems tons of you do) this is one of the most stylish action games in years.



Icewind Dale II ★★★★★

While we're as guilty as the rest of the gaming media for focusing on high-profile RPGs Morrowind and Neverwinter Nights, the sword-and-sorcery title that's won our hearts is Icewind Dale II. This party-based dungeon crawl does the best job of implementing Third Edition rules, and its wild and wacky non-stop battles are a tour de force of tactical combat.

Tech

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



WINDRIVER VELOCITY MICRO PC \$3,395

Hot and Heavy

Hefty 2.8GHz Velocity
Micro notebook can
handle just about
anything

Ten pounds is damn heavy for a notebook, but it's a heck of a lot lighter

than trying to drag your desktop out the door. That's the kind of logic you've gotta have when buying Velocity Micro's NoteMaqX.

While this notebook has some serious horsepower (a 2.8GHz Intel "desktop" Pentium 4 CPU), it's slightly more portable than an anchor (9.94 pounds without the AC adapter). The thing is, this is the kind of machine you're gonna need if you want to play games on the go.

By Darren Gladstone Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Velocity Micro	Dell
Model	NoteMagix 306	Del Inspiron 6200
Price	\$3,395	\$2,995
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	2.0GHz Intel (Desktop) Pentium 4 w/ 512KB L2	2.2GHz Intel Mobile Pentium 4
Memory	1GB PC5300 DDR-533	512MB DDR-533
Hard drive	40GB 5400 RPM ATA/100	40GB 5400 RPM ATA/100
Graphics processor	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000
DVD-ROM drive	8x DVD 16/10/16 CD-RW combo drive	8x DVD 16/10/16 CD-RW combo drive
CD-ROM drive	24x CD-ROM drive	N/A
Display	15" QVGA Active Matrix TFT LCD	15" UGA Active Matrix TFT LCD
Pointing device	TouchPad	Pointing stick; TouchPad
Modem	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 mouse; 56 Kbps modem; 10/100Mbps ethernet adapter; 4 USB 2.0 ports; FireWire port; SPDF out	2nd battery; TrueMedia WMA5 wireless LAN; IEEE 1394; 7 USB ports
Display (inches)	6.13/10.61/18	6.13/10.62

BENCHMARKS

3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	7072	6099
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	2250	2529
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	2017	4032
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	2328	2548
3D GameBench 3.0 (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	52	46
3D GameBench 3.0 (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	22	18
3D GameBench 3.0 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	29	36
3D GameBench 3.0 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	26	29
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	24.9	25.5
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	69.3	64.8
Counter-Strike (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	12.85	33.17
Counter-Strike (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	14.03	21.95
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	16.5	57.2
Serious Sam: TSE (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	31.4	32.9
Zero! Knight II (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	979	92.4
Zero! Knight II (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	24.6	92.6
Zero! Knight II (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	56.1	52.9
Zero! Knight II (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	56.1	52.8
Dogma Sleep (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	41.22	43.92
Dogma Sleep (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	53.6	34.71
Dogma Sleep (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	26.39	34.69
IL-2 Sturmovik (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	12.56	53.75
IL-2 Sturmovik (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	18.663	26.376
IL-2 Sturmovik (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	29.275	33.052
HASCAR 2002 (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	16.271	33.692
HASCAR 2002 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	26.405	21
HASCAR 2002 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	13.652	21
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	32.263	34.724
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1024x768x32; vs FSAA)	79.604	35.544
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	17.03	15.87
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1600x1200x32; vs FSAA)	13.286	15.408

*3D GAMEBENCH 3.0 INCLUDES THE PARAMETERS OF THE FOLLOWING GAMES: COUNTER-STRIFE, DUNGEON SIEGE, IL-2 STURMOVIK, ZERO! KNIGHT II, MACHO 2002, SERIOUS SAM, TSE.

Boasting 1GB of DDR-RAM and ATI's 64MB Radeon Mobility 9000 (M9) graphics chip, this is one hot little gaming machine. In benchmark tests, it scored just about on par with the other Radeon 9000, and even faster than GeForce4 440 Go-equipped notebooks. However, we did come across some unusual results in several 4x FSAA (Full Screen Anti-Aliasing) tests. Take, for example, Quake III: Arena. At 1024x768x32 with 4x FSAA turned on, the NoteMagix scored an abysmal 24.9fps! A similarly stacked Dell Inspiron B200 with the new Radeon chip scored a seemingly impressive 125.5fps in the same trial. What we realized is that the Inspiron uses an older ATI driver (v. 6.13.10.6162), which simply turned FSAA off when it suspected the card was being asked to do more than it was comfortable with. The Velocity Micro shipped with a newer driver (v. 6.13.10.6178) that runs at 1024x768x32 with 4x FSAA turned on. At 1600x1200x32, the Velocity Micro—similar to the Inspiron—simply turned FSAA off, and the machine seemed to perform rather well. What this tells us is that you can expect pretty good gaming performance with this machine—if you leave 4x FSAA off.

With all this hardware hardware, you

This machine gets hotter than a stripper in Chernobyl.

can expect a notebook to heat up a little. But jeez, this sucker gets hotter than a stripper in Chernobyl. When I burned my fingers on the keyboard playing UT2003, I thought to myself, "I remember having the same problems with Alienware's Area-51m notebook." You see, Velocity Micro's NoteMagix may not have the cool logo or funky colors of Alienware's Area-51m notebook line, but I'll be damned if this ain't the same computer. The biggest difference I could spot: the price tag. When I configured identical systems on each company's site, Velocity Micro's powerhouse portable costs more than \$600 less! So, even if it lacks the panache and support of Alienware, you're still getting a solid machine for your gaming ducats. But you'll definitely want to invest extra money in an external keyboard—or a set of oven mitts.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It looks like an Area-51m, it handles like an Area-51m, but it lacks the slick logo and hefty price tag.



RADEON™ 9700 PRO

MADE WITH NO LIMITS ON MIND



It's totally legit. The amazing RADEON 9700 PRO is the fastest board powered by VLIW™ 3D technology, delivering the ultimate 3D gaming experience. It's the first to provide 8 pipelines for twice the rendering power. The first to fully support DirectX® 9.0. And the first to deliver the highest level of realism possible. Now you're unstoppable.



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No Silver Bullet

The VIA P4PB 400-FL is about as versatile as any gamer would want **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS
MOTHERBOARD
\$151, \$90

When I first got my hands on VIA's P4PB 400-FL motherboard, I was genuinely excited. While VIA has taken heat in the past for building slower Pentium-based motherboards than their Intel counterparts, I was willing to forgive a few extra frames per second in exchange for all the extras the P4PB 400-FL promised. But, while the board performed pretty much as I expected, several hangs made me reluctant to replace my Intel D850EMV2 with the VIA.

What initially impressed me about the P4PB 400-FL were the included extras: onboard 5.1 audio, multiple USB 2.0 ports, and IEEE 1394 FireWire ports, to name a few. I also like the fact that it supports DDR memory as opposed to RDRAM. However, because my other Pentium rig is RDRAM-based, I couldn't do a complete apples-to-apples comparison. Instead, I compared it with



While the board performed as I expected, several hangs made me reluctant to replace my Intel D850EMV2 with the VIA.

something close (and something I thought might actually favor the VIA motherboard) my old Power Rig, equipped with a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 beast, 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, a 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card, a 120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm hard drive, and a Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer soundcard. First, I dropped in an Intel D850EMV2 mobo sporting 1GB of RDRAM, and ran my standard suite of tests—3DMark2001 SE Pro, Quake III: Arena, Comanche 4, Serious Sam's TSE, and Jedi Knight II:

Jedi Outcast. Then, I replaced the Intel mobo with the VIA P4PB 400-FL and 1GB of Corsair PC-3200 DDR-RAM, wiped the hard drive, reinstalled Windows XP Home Edition, downloaded and installed the latest drivers for the VIA board, and prepared to run the tests again by reinstalling the benchmark apps.

While everything went reasonably OK, the machine—which has always been pretty solid—hung inexplicably several times during installation. Granted, it was nothing a simple reboot didn't fix, and the games all ran just fine, but hangs

make me nervous and erode my confidence in a machine.

In terms of performance, the P4PB 400-FL-equipped machine was a tad slower than the same machine with the Intel motherboard. With the VIA board, the rig scored 14788 in 3DMark2001 SE at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off, compared to the 15140 the machine scored with the Intel motherboard. Scores in Quake III: Arena at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off were about the same (280), though the VIA was about 8 frames per second slower with 4x FSAA turned on. The Comanche 4 and Serious Sam's TSE tests also yielded similar scores for both motherboards, while the Intel motherboard soundly dominated the Jedi Knight II tests.

It's probably best leaving my Intel board in my old machine. But if you're a DDR nut, generally have a hard-on for the VIA chipset, don't mind dropping a few frames per second, or want a motherboard that's more versatile than Intel's, check out the P4PB 400-FL.

By the Numbers

MOTHERBOARD	VIA P4PB 400-FL	INTEL D850EMV2
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz T58	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz T58
Motherboard	VIA P4PB 400-FL	INTEL D850EMV2
Memory	1GB Corsair PC-3200 DDR-RAM	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer

BENCHMARKS

3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	14788	15140
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	13053	13922
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	18	19
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	19	19

VERDICT ★★★★★

VIA's P4PB 400 series motherboards boast everything you think you'll need—with the exception of brute force.



Too Little Too Soon?

The Audigy 2 is everything you need—and don't. BY TYRIL BAKER



TECH STATS

PROCESOR: CREATING LIVES
 TITLE: \$200 (AUDIOP 2)
 PLATFORM: \$200 (AUDIOP 2)
 2D TEXTURE: PREMIUM II
 SOUND: \$40 (AUDIOP 2)
 DRIVE SPACE: \$100 (AUDIOP 2)
 STORAGE: 4 SPEAKERS

Going from the Audigy to the Audigy 2 is a lot like upgrading from a Sound Blaster Live to a Live 5.1. If you have speakers good enough (and numerous enough) to take advantage of the Audigy 2's capabilities. But, for the most part, it's musicians who'll benefit from the extra fidelity.

The card's support for a 6.1 speaker arrangement is outstanding: positional audio using an Audigy 2 coupled with Creative's Inspire 6.1 6600s was the most accurate we've heard yet from

The card also works much better under Windows XP than the Sound Blaster Live does, but that's due more to a driver problem with the Live than anything else. The Platinum version we tested comes with a 5.25-inch internal drive slotted with ports and knobs, including a headphone jack, volume control, FireWire port, and an infrared receiver for the included remote control. Be aware: There are so many jacks on the card itself that the included joystick/MIDI port has a separate metal plate that will take up an extra PCI slot.

If you're a gamer with an Audigy but

Positional audio using an Audigy 2 was the most accurate we've heard yet from a relatively inexpensive consumer setup.

a relatively inexpensive consumer setup. This was especially true in games like *Hitman 2* (included as part of the generous software bundle) that support EAX Advanced HD. Screaming armies and beeping horse hooves shifted smoothly from front to rear as we panned the camera in *Medieval: Total War*. And the whoosh of rockets passing behind as from left to right let us pinpoint enemies more accurately in *Battlefield 1942*.

no 6.1 speaker system, there's little reason to jump up to an Audigy 2. If you watch lots of DVDs, want to listen to DSD/Aurora, or are considering a 6.1 speaker system, the Audigy 2 is worth the extra cash.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Barely qualifies as evolutionary, but still a damn fine audio card.



WIL
POWER

By William O'Neil

Hardware Beats Software

Back when I was a lowly quality assurance tester for a little-known software company called Geoworks, my coworkers and I found leaked screenshots of the as-yet-unreleased *Id* title, *Quake*, and were blown away. We were happily surfing the Internet on monochrome Sparc stations when someone told us he had heard that in order to play *Quake*, you absolutely had to have a Pentium-based machine. We all decided right then and there that we'd be buying Pentiums. The software actually pushed the hardware. And I don't mean that a faster machine meant playing *Quake* at 30fps as opposed to 20; the game actually looked noticeably better.

We're in an entirely different situation these days, a situation that Haxor Ruiz, president and chief executive officer of AMD, articulated quite well in his *Comdex 2002* keynote address: "I urge you to demand that these companies who are currently serving you today begin developing technology not for its own sake. Not in isolation from the real world. But in line with what you are really trying to do.... People have to be able to do something a whole heck of a lot better than they did before. It's time to get a reset around the customer."

While we all know what his comments are about, Intel has soundly kicked AMD's ass by doing the opposite: creating superfast CPUs that, for all intents and purposes are designed to be as fast as they can be, not to serve any particular software. There aren't many reasons beyond *3DMark2001* bragging rights to run out and get the fastest CPUs and/or graphics cards. Ninety percent of all PC games out there will run just fine on an Athlon XP 2400+ with 512MB of RAM and a 128MB GeForce4 TI 4200, a fact born out by seeing PC sales.

Now that Nvidia has announced the GeForce FX (code-named NV30), let's cross our fingers and hope that game developers give us compelling reasons to save our pennies.



In the Rear With the Gear

The Creative Inspire 6.1 6600 speaker set has your back BY T. BYRL BAKER

TECH STATS

BRAND: CREATIVE LABS
 PRT: \$400
 CATEGORY: 6.1 SURROUND

Creative Labs' Inspire 6.1 6600 proves that when it comes to gaming, you can't necessarily judge a speaker system by its spec sheet. Yeah, the subwoofer bottoms out at the very point good subs are just starting to rumble. And yeah, the puny satellites support just 8 watts apiece (20 watts in the front center speaker). But when you consider that there are six little satellites jangling out some of the most accurate positional audio on the block, this relatively inexpensive 6.1 setup suddenly sounds a lot better than, well, it sounds.

It should come as no surprise to any of our readers that a 6.1 system at this price point is going to have some drawbacks, and to that end, the Inspire 6.1 has several. For some reason, Creative Labs designed the Inspire 6.1 6600s such that the speaker cables are

laced on. Because of this design decision, there's no easy way to extend the cables. Furthermore, while the bass response is loud, it's not particularly accurate. And that's not the end of it: compared to high-end computer speakers like the Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 5000s or Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, the overall fidelity of the satellites is relatively low. Compared to our Klipsch reference speakers, the Inspire 6.1 6600s delivered music that sounded muddier and game audio that had lost its crispness. And since the Inspires 6.1 6600s are analog speakers, you can forget about using them with your fancy digital outputs.

Despite these faults, the Inspire 6.1 is a solid system for the money as far as gaming and watching DVDs are concerned. The rear center speaker, which is the 6.1's most appealing

characteristic, is just as effective as a front center speaker for letting sound realistically swirl around your head. The addition of the rear center speaker makes it easier than ever to track enemies in 3D games using EAX Advanced HD, or to immerse yourself in DVDs with Dolby Digital EX sound tracks. The system also comes with a small control unit that includes a bass control on one side, a volume control and power switch on the other side, and a headphone jack built into its end.

For the money, the Inspire 6.1 6600s work well when coupled with an Audigy 2 card that natively supports all six speakers. But if audio quality and volume are of paramount importance, a more expensive 4.1 or 5.1 setup'll better serve you. If all you care about is positional accuracy, these speakers are worth a listen.

A 6.1 system at this price point is going to have some drawbacks.

VERDICT ★★★★★

True surround sound on a budget.

"Move, B****, Get Out the Way!"

Logitech's MOMO Racing Force Feedback Wheel is a great wheel at an affordable price BY WILLIAM O'NEAL



TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: LOGITECH
MSRP: \$100

Logitech's MOMO Racing Force Feedback Wheel is the low-end version of last year's \$200 Logitech MOMO Force Wheel. But that's all relative. While this wheel isn't as swank as the red, leather-clad, brushed-aluminum MOMO Force Wheel, it's still super sweet and \$100 cheaper. The wheel itself is fully rubberized and thicker than the MOMO Force. It sports an F1-style sequential shifter, as well as two paddle shifters. The gas and brake pedals are attached to a solid base and feature what Logitech calls "a unique carpet grip system," which is, in essence, a little spike-studded foot that prevents the base from slipping on carpets. (The foot can be folded into the base if you're not using the wheel on carpet.) During rousing sessions of EA Sports' *F1 Racing*, the base never moved.

The wheel has six programmable buttons, which is great if you have a specific setup for your driving system. We also liked the triple clamping system, 'cause nothing's worse than yanking the wheel off the desk in the middle of a heated race.



What really make Logitech wheels stand out are their force feedback effects. While other wheels attempt to mimic the feel of driving on specific surfaces like cobblestone, gravel, or sand) in unsable ways, the Logitech wheels simply add different levels of resistance. The effect helps create resistance that makes it easier to control vehicles on various surfaces.

If you were excited about last year's MOMO Force Wheel, but the idea of

dropping \$200 was too much for the wife to stomach, then the Logitech MOMO Racing Wheel, at only \$100, is a significantly easier pill to swallow. And, you didn't hear this from us, but seeing that it's USB, we think it may even work with some PS2 games.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you enjoy racing games, you'll love this wheel.

Meet Robo-Stick

Saitek Cyborg 3D Rumble Force offers force feedback for less BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: SAITEK
INDUSTRY: PERIPHERALS
MSRP: \$69
RECOMMEND: HIGH POINT

Saitek really knows game controllers. Its Cyborg line of USB joysticks is known for quality at a great price. When it comes to meeting that standard, the Cyborg 3D Rumble Force Stick is no exception.

A tad larger than its predecessors, the Cyborg 3D is an ambidextrous stick, built for comfort during long hours of gameplay. Packed with nine ergonomically placed buttons (eight of which are programmable), a rapid-fire trigger,

rudder twist, dual-handle throttle, four fire buttons, eight-way POV hat switch, and LED displays, this is one multi-purpose stick. Driver setup is simple using Saitek's new Smart Technology control-panel software. Configuring custom settings and modifying profiles has never been easier.

The Cyborg's force-feedback motors are driven by Immersion's TouchSense technology; effects feel smooth and precise. In both *Il-2 Sturmovik* and *MechWarrior 4*, the Cyborg performed as well as the higher-priced Microsoft SideWinder. In one combat-heavy *MechWarrior* scenario, the rumble effects, though somewhat choppy, made the high-intensity action feel authentic and fluid. If you want a good force-feedback joystick for less than \$100, look no further.



VERDICT ★★★★★

An excellent marriage of design, ergonomics, force feedback, and budget.

How To Set Up a Dual-Boot Config

Enjoy the best of both worlds with an option to boot to Win 98 or XP. By T. Byrl Baker

Windows XP is a great all-purpose OS, but many legacy titles (especially Glide-related stuff) from the '90s won't run under it without patches—and even then, in many cases, it's easier to just use Win 98. Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed, for example, won't work with XP unless you remove a file called GIMME_DLL or download a patch from Microsoft that changes the way SafeDisk gets handled.

A good way to get around this is to simply create a dual-boot configuration. You'll be equipped for 98 or XP use and reap the added benefit of better DOS support under Win 98. (To check a game's compatibility with XP, check the list at www.compatible.com/compat.php?cat=games&sort=WindowsX.)

The easiest way to set up a dual boot is with commercial software (like Vcom's System Commander 7 (www.ocm.com), or the free, open-source XOSL (www.xosl.org)). But the most reliable method is to manually configure your rig with fdisk.

Unlike 98 and Me, XP does not need to be installed on a machine's primary partition. If you want to add XP to a drive on which 98 SE is already installed, simply create an extended partition and logical drive, and install XP there. Or, you can install a second hard drive and put XP on it. Format using FAT32 if you want access to the XP partition when 98 SE is loaded.

This article assumes you have one hard drive with one large primary partition, and that you want to do fresh installations of 98 SE and Win XP. Obviously, you'll need the software for both operating systems in order to do the installation.

BOOTDISK.COM

BootDisks - PC Support - Essential Utilities

<p>WINDOWS AND DOS BOOT DISKS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOS 5.00 To 6.22 Win 95/98/Me Bootdisks By wRm DOS 5 - XP Most Excellent Bootdisks Via Mirrors.Org XP Install Disk / Win 95 To NT6 Bootdisks From Dr.D Windows XP Boot Disks Home / Professant/ Via MS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readme Utilities BootList Helpdesk
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STEP #1

CREATE A STARTUP DISK

Download a Win 98 SE boot disk from www.bootdisk.com, and extract the contents to a floppy disk. Back up all your important data, since partitioning using fdisk requires reformatting the drive.

The screenshot shows the MS-DOS 5.00 fdisk utility. The title bar reads "MS-DOS 5.00 - FDISK". The menu bar includes "Auto", "Format", "List", "Delete", "Create", "Change", and "Quit". The main window displays the following text:

```

Microsoft Windows Millennium
Fixed Disk Setup Program
(C)Copyright Microsoft Corp. 1993 - 2000

FDISK Options

Current fixed disk drive: 1

Choose one of the following:

1. Create DOS partition or Logical DOS Drive
2. Set active partition
3. Delete partition or Logical DOS Drive
4. Display partition information
5. Change current fixed disk drive
  
```

STEP #2

NEED THAT OLD PARTITION

Reboot the system with the floppy diskette in the drive and select Minimal Boot from the menu. Type "disk" at the prompt, and when asked if you want to enable large disk support, press "Y". Now delete the existing partition by selecting Option 3 (Delete partition), then selecting Option 1 (Delete primary DOS partition). When asked what partition to delete, type "1" and enter the volume label for the drive, which is listed near the top of the screen. When asked for confirmation, press "Y" and then press Esc to continue.

STEP #3

HIT IT AND SPLIT IT! Now it's time to set up the new partitions. Choose option 1 (Create DOS partition). Choose Option 1 again on the next menu (Create primary DOS partition). When asked if you want to use maximum available space for the partition, press "N" and wait for a bit. Then, enter the partition size (in megabytes) you want to devote to 98 SE—the total hard-drive space is listed by default. Whatever you don't allocate to SE will go to your XP logical drive. Press Esc when finished; this returns you to the Main menu.

STEP #4

WHEN YOU'VE MADE IT THIS FAR, CHECK BACK AT www.bootdisk.com. (Option 2 (Create extended DOS partition). When asked to enter the partition size, leave the default value; this will use up the remainder of the drive. Press Esc and wait. When asked to enter a logical drive size, again leave the default value. Press Esc, then select Option 2 (Set active partition). When asked what partition to make active, type "1". Press Esc, exit fdisk, and restart the computer using the Minimal Boot option.

uration

C:\WINDOWS\System32\cmd.exe

```
F:\dir
Volume in drive A has no label.
Volume Serial Number is 2687-6C21

Directory of A:\

05/08/2000 05:00 FH          58,400 E082.CPI
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          68,763 F0B3.CPI
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          58,400 FCB.CPI
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          31,697 FIVE.COM
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          34,566 FIVESETUP.DYS
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          31,942 FIVESETUP.SYS
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          31,633 FIVESETUP.SYS
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          31,914 FIVESETUP.SYS
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          25,239 NICE.COM
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          77,000 COMMAND.COM
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          17,175 BATTERY.DAT
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          0 BATTERY.DAT
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          0 CONFIG.SYS
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          0 AUTOEXEC.BAT
11/18/2002 10:02 FH          524,288 NLS0000.DLL
11/18/2002 11:13 FH          48,813 W00R145H.DLL
05/08/2000 05:00 FH          1,913,328 bytes free
05/08/2002 05:00 FH          234,688 bytes free
```

STEP #5

FORMAT THE HARD DRIVES At the A:\ prompt, type "format C:" and wait until the format is finished, then repeat the process to format the other logical drive (D), unless a different drive letter was assigned during partition creation. Insert your Win 98 SE installation CD and reboot the computer. Select Option 2 at the Boot menu to start with CD-ROM support. Switch to the CD-ROM drive at the DOS prompt, type "Setup," and install 98 SE.

Startup and Recovery

System startup

Default operating system:

Microsoft Windows XP Professional (FastStart)

Time to display list of operating systems: 30 seconds

Time to display recovery options when needed: 30 seconds

To edit the startup options file manually, click Edit.

System failure

Write an event to the system log

Send an administrative alert

Automatically restart

Write debugging information

Small memory dump (64 KB)

Small dump directory: %SystemRoot%\Minidump

OK Cancel

Welcome to Microsoft Windows XP

What do you want to do?

- Install Windows XP
- Install optional Windows components
- Perform additional tasks
- Check system compatibility

STEP #6

INSTALL THE OS When installing multiple Microsoft operating systems, always work your way from the oldest to the newest. Depending on the OSes you want to install, DOS comes first, followed by 95/98 OSR2, 98/98 SE, Me, Win2K, and finally, XP. You can't use 95 and 98 (or 95 and Me) together in a multi-boot configuration.

In this case, first install 98 SE on the primary partition, then install XP on a different partition. To install XP, boot into 98 SE, insert the XP installation CD and click Install Windows XP. CD should appear on the Autorun menu. From the installation Type pull-menu, select "New Installation (Advanced)" and follow the prompts. After you enter a product key, you'll see a dialog box with an Advanced Options button. Click it, and then check the "I want to choose the install drive letter and partition during setup" box, and the "Copy all installation files from the Setup CD" box (if you have enough hard drive space). Follow the prompts again, and when XP setup runs, use the arrow keys to select the logical drive (D:) or whatever other letter was assigned as the installation drive. At the next menu, select "Leave the current file system intact" and then install XP normally.

STEP #7

CHOOSE YOUR DEFAULT OS Now, you can set the default operating system to avoid manually choosing an OS each time the computer boots. Load XP, click Start, right-click My Computer, and select Properties. Choose the Advanced tab in the Startup and Recovery box, click the Settings button. Now, you can use the dropdown Default Operating System menu to select 98 SE or XP, and use the settings beneath it to determine how long the boot menu stays onscreen before the default OS loads.

STAR WARS
JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

- Single Player Game
- Multiplayer Game
- Help
- Options
- Quit

STEP #8

INSTALL YOUR SOFTWARE Install your hardware drivers, games, and other applications. You'll need to do separate installations for each operating system, so dual-boot configurations always eat up more hard-drive space than a single-OS setup.

Cracked Case

The New CPU Bottleneck

A funny thing happened on the way to the graphics revolution **By Loyd Case**

Yeah, I'm back. OK, enough of the maudlin reminiscing. All I can say is that it's good to be back. If you're curious about what I'm up to these days, drop by ExtremeTech.com. Former CGW tech editor Dave Salvatore's there, too, and we cover the gamut of PC hardware in great depth for PC enthusiasts. We assume that includes you. Now that I've gotten my shameless plug out of the way, let's talk about graphics.

There's a lot of noise about the cool, new graphics hardware coming out. Headlines appear daily on the Web and in magazines, touting the features DirectX 9 will bring to the table. ATI has had the Radeon 9700 Pro out for several months, and Nvidia's GeForce FX is set to ship in February. When you think about it, the graphics battle is in many ways more intense than the CPU battle. Compare the more than 100 million transistors in the Radeon 9700 Pro to the 55 million and 38 million



As gamers, we demand better, smarter, and more robust A.I. A.I. takes CPU cycles—the better the A.I., the heavier the CPU load.

transistors that the Pentium 4 Northwood core and AMD Athlon XP boast, respectively. It makes the gate count of these graphics chips seem a bit excessive. Still, they are solving complex problems, so all those transistors are pretty busy most of the time. Which begs the question, "Why does my game performance suck?"

The dirty little secret is this: As game developers have improved graphics by taking greater advantage of programmable shaders; hardware transform and lighting; and large, gorgeous textures, the bottleneck has moved. The problem now lies in two areas: PC memory bandwidth and your CPU.

"Wait a minute!" I hear you crying. "I just spent my kids' college fund on a 3GHz processor and a gigabyte of RAM. My graphics card has 128MB of RAM! What the heck are you talking about?"

What I'm talking about is that all those triangles and textures have to get to the

graphics card. This means shipping all that data to the graphics memory over the AGP bus. Even compressed textures take time to move into graphics memory, although most of that occurs during level load time. But as textures get bigger, more complex, and more numerous, more stuff gets swapped in and out of graphics memory.

Bandwidth out of main memory, across AGP, and into the graphics card itself is one problem. Another is the ever-increasing load on the CPU. For example, some newer game engines can perform per-polygon collision detection. But guess what? Collision detection is actually handled by the CPU. If you have a lot of polygons interacting on the screen, that's a lot of CPU load.

As gamers, we've also demanded better, smarter, and more robust A.I. A.I. also takes CPU cycles—the better the A.I., the heavier the CPU load. Have you ever watched a big army try to make its

way through complex terrain in a game like *Medieval Total War*? It's a wonder pathfinding is as good as it is.

We've also demanded better physics. We want the game to accurately calculate the actual trajectory of each bullet or missile through the virtual world, taking into account wind drift and projectile drop. We want the airflow over the wings to be dynamically modeled. We want enemies to fall realistically, vehicles to bounce off one another accurately, and sheet metal to crumple properly. But all of this takes CPU cycles.

We'll soon see CPUs with a 667MHz front-side bus and dual-channel DDR333 memory. That will help a little—but then, the bottleneck may just shift again. Still, the goal of cinematic realism in games gets that much closer.

The good news in all this is that PC hardware is getting cheaper so upgrades aren't quite as painful. The other good news is that cranking down a game's graphics quality isn't quite as painful as it used to be. Even midlevel graphics in a game like *No One Lives Forever 2* look damned good. So, if your performance in new games suddenly sucks, it may not be your fault, Windows' fault, or even the game engine's fault. Consider it the cost of the revolution.

Tech Medics

You have questions, we have worthless opinions **By William O'Neal**

Time for a motherboard upgrade

My computer is only about two years old, but I'm wondering what I should do to it so I can play the latest games. I've been thinking about getting an Athlon XP in the 2GHz-or-more range and getting a new motherboard. My parents won't buy me a new computer, and everything in my current one seems fine except for the motherboard and 833MHz Pentium III CPU. What should I get?

Meivie

I see no reason why you wouldn't be pleased with a 2GHz Athlon XP. Also, try to get your hands on ABIT's AT7-MAX2 KT400 motherboard. While it has no legacy ports (serial or parallel), it's a solid unit and its performance is top notch.

Which videocard should I buy?

Should I get a 128MB ATI Radeon 9000 Pro or a different videocard in the same performance and/or price range?

Sean

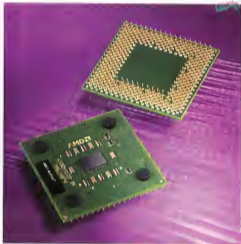
Get the Radeon.

To Pricewatch or not to Pricewatch

I am getting ready to build another gaming rig. Basically, I want to know where you get your equipment. Pricewatch.com lists some items I want, but some things, like Kingston DDRAM, I can't find listed there. Is there an easy way to get all this stuff pieced-together? Or do you know of any good sites that sell more or less everything I need, so I can avoid a bunch of shipping and handling charges? One other question: I am looking for a good flatscreen monitor, between 17 and 19 inches (I can't fit anything bigger in the available space). Any suggestions?

Jay

This is exactly why people buy pre-built computers. The problem with a site like Pricewatch.com is that they link to a bunch of other e-tailers, so you invariably encounter the situation in which you're waiting for 10 packages from 10 different places to show up before you can build your rig. For the sake of keeping things simple, you may want to go to a place like Bestbuy.com or CDW.com and order as many products as you can from one place. You may not get them at the



"When I play games, they're very laggy and choppy."

lowest prices, but you'll save money on shipping and handling, and it'll be less stressful. As for a good flatscreen, while I haven't played with it myself, I've heard good things about Hitachi's 17-inch CML17A. I should be reviewing one soon, so check back.

It's all about that AGP

I'm planning to get a GeForce3 Ti 200. Can my AMD Athlon Thunderbird 700MHz on an ASUS A7V handle it?

Pregec

The A7V has an AGP slot, so it can no reason why the GeForce3 Ti 200 wouldn't work.

Time for an upgrade, Josh

I have a Dell Inspiron 4100 laptop with 256MB of RAM and a 16MB ATI Mobility Radeon videocard. When I play games, they're very laggy and choppy. I tried lowering the settings, but it doesn't help.

Josh

In the words of my Scottish friend

George Jones, "You're right looked, lad!" I'm not sure when you got that laptop, but it may be that that graphics card can be replaced with a newer one like a 64MB GeForce4 40 Go. I'd call Dell and ask them about it. I know the GPUs in those laptops are socketed, so in theory, it should be replaceable. Unfortunately, Dell might charge so much to do it that you may be better off replacing the notebook altogether.

Win-Mart can kiss my rear

Hey, CGM! Have you heard of Linux? It's a new OS made by Linux. It is much better than Windows. It is like Mac OS, but made for people who prefer Windows, although it is not fully Windows compatible. And it is only \$29.

Margolis

Yeah, I've heard of Linux. I've also heard of Linux. Rather than buy a Linux PC from Wal-Mart, go to Redhat.com and buy a real version of Linux. Of course, you won't be playing too many games on it.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming system By **William O'Neal**

With the exception of the motherboard, choosing components for the Power Rig was a no-brainer. I was lamed by Asus' P4PE but decided to forgo the speed boost that the Asus would give me for the stability that the Intel D850EMVR offers. I've yet to have any problems getting an Intel motherboard to work properly. I'm running my machine with Hyper-Threading enabled, even though games don't really take advantage of it yet.

The first thing you'll notice about the Lean Machine is that it's not really all that lean. I built this machine with upgradability in mind. Asus' A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2-based) is a rock-solid Socket-A KT400 motherboard that has tested well, and it's dependable. Because the motherboard supports 6-channel Dolby Digital audio, I don't have to pony up for a soundcard. The Lean Machine also has the hottest videocard on the market, the Radeon 9700. If you're on a budget, you'd be fine with the 9500. While the Power Rig is its performance numbers, it's still a very capable gaming rig. And if you throw an Athlon XP 2800+ in this baby, the numbers would be much more competitive. Ultimately, the choice between the Power Rig and the Lean Machine depends on what's more important to you: Do you want 40 more frames per second, or do you want an extra \$1400 in your pocket?



The Lean Machine also has the hottest videocard on the market.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	\$520
Motherboard	Intel 8930IMVR	\$170
Case	Airtec Plus6423	\$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC1066 4096M	\$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200.9PM	\$175
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	\$300
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	\$85
OVD-ROM/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	\$80
Monitor	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ (22")	\$400
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 5400	\$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Multimedia keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$55
TOTAL		\$3,080

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Processor (CPU)	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ (1.6GHz)	\$140
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2)	\$130
Case	Airtec Plus6508	\$100
Memory	512MB Crucial PC-2700 DDR-RAM	\$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200.9PM	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	\$300
Soundcard	Onboard nForce 2 Audio	N/A
OVD-ROM/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	Samsung SyncMaster 766M (17")	\$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	\$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	\$45
TOTAL		\$1,660

Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Deena Jougeward

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick is for *Battlefield 1942* and comes to us courtesy of Daniel Lozano.

Japanese engineers on Wake Island should place mines at the top of the ladders—it makes it so enemies can't get to the machine gun towers. Also put mines in the enemy's spawn points, so when they spawn, they land on a mine. Another trick is to move a tank, put mines under it, then slowly move it back over the mine. When the enemy starts up the tank and moves forward, he will instantly blow up, giving you a free kill. That trick is best used for the APC, as you will kill more people.

—Daniel Lozano

WIN



As Daniel obviously already owns *Battlefield 1942*, we're sending him a copy of *UT2003* instead. If you have a dirty trick for the latest games like these and want to win a free game, then send an e-mail with your trick to cglletters@zildavis.com with the subject line "Dirty Trick." The winner will receive both the *EverQuest: The Pieces of Power* expansion and the *EverQuest: Atlas of the Maps of Myrist* book. Happy gaming!

Battlefield 1942
Attack on Ira...er, the enemy

PAGE 114

BATTLEFIELD 1942

We were originally going to do this as a Chick-versus-Geryk-style Chet-versus-Erik piece, but that article turned into a filthy war of name calling. Instead, we're proud to present a more straightforward compilation of our best strategies, developed over the course of 10,000 hours of *Battlefield 1942* warfare. If you think you're better than us, prove it online, tough guy. But don't read this article before you try to prove your skills to us online. If you read this first, it'll be like we're fighting you plus us, which isn't fair.

Also, we only play *Battlefield 1942* in Conquest mode. If some of our awesome strategies can be applied to Capture the Flag, it's entirely by accident. Here's one tactic for anyone interested in *Battlefield 1942* CTF: Why don't you play a real game? Camper.

INFANTRY

General tactics

Here's the most important rule of foot soldiering. Don't stand in line waiting for a plane! If there isn't a plane around, get busy doing something useful. If a group of your teammates are milling around waiting for their turn to fly, immediately switch sides—there's a good chance you're on the losing team.

The second rule of infantry: Don't shoot while moving. Accuracy is much better when firing from a stationary position. Map "kneel" to an easily accessible key and get in the habit of hitting it just before you fire. This improves aim and makes you a smaller target without the time-consuming theatrics of going prone. When you do move, move erratically to aggravate snipers. Since you have no armor against bombs, run and hide when you see a plane. If you're being chased by enemy infantry, run behind a building, wait for a beat, and then toss grenades toward each corner of the building. Often, you'll catch your pursuer in the blast.

A lot of people are oblivious to the fact that you can change packs by running over one and pressing (by default) G. It's a good way to rearm yourself if you're not anywhere near an ammo station. On any level with planes, everyone always has a parachute; these can be used to jump relatively safely from any high spot, such as the tops of windmills.

Speaking of planes, their weakest point is the

engine. Shooting up the wings may look cool, but it doesn't cause nearly as much damage as a well-placed engine shot.

Scout

When sniping, it's best to find a spot to lie prone. Always move after you've landed a kill or two. Defensive towers are great spots for sniping, as long as you lie down and fire out the back. Most people will assume a tower is empty if they don't see anyone when approaching it. This lack of awareness gives you a clear shot at their backs once they've trotted past you. If you're sniping from a window, find a spot that's far back but still affords you a decent view of the target area. Farther back in a building, you're less visible and a much harder target for tanks.

Spotting for artillery can be more helpful to your side than head-shot assassinations would be. If you have a good bead on a busy area, call for an artillery strike. If none comes, you can always go back to sniping. However, if a teammate is able to follow up with an artillery strike, stay with your target—changing every 10 seconds will just confuse your gunners. And be alert: A few maps don't have any artillery pieces, which makes spotting useless.

Antitank

Never challenge a tank head on. Always try to strike from the rear or, at worst, from the side. If

Get ready for battle

By Erik Wolpaw
& Chet Fallszek



A sniper's dream.



Typical medic scene: A wounded teammate uses a tank to run away even faster.



Investigating a crate while passing the time waiting in line for a plane.

You spot a tank, hide yourself and wait until it passes you before attacking it. Once you land a hit, move. Rockets drop quickly, so adjust your shot above your target accordingly.

Half-tracks are great to keep around for

healing and rearming; hiding one of these just around the corner can be a lifesaver. Hit an enemy tank a few times, retreat, let them think they're safe, and then come back and pop the tank one last time.

Engineer

To aggravate and demoralize the enemy, grab a plane, parachute onto an enemy ship, plant charges in their troop transports, and then wait for any unlucky soldiers to launch. Most ships have a resupply point and plenty of good hiding spots. You can often get away with this attack multiple times before anyone will catch on to what you're doing.

If there aren't any ships available, mine the enemy's airfields by placing charges under or in front of aircraft respawn spots. Place land mines where they are hardest to see, such as just over the crest of a hill or bridge, or on ground that's similar in color to the mine.

The engineer's rifle is a decent sniper weapon. If you're going to hole up for some sniping, first spread out a few detonation packs a safe distance from your nest, making sure you give yourself a clear path for retreat. Most important, don't forget that the engineer is the vehicle medic. When you see your vehicle needs it, take a minute to fix your team's damaged equipment.

Assault

If you just hold down the trigger of your weapon, you're practically guaranteed not to hit anything. Standard weapons must be fired in short bursts to be effective. Don't forget you have grenades.

Medic

If you accidentally become a medic, don't panic. Bring up the Respawn menu, pick another class, and press the Suicide button. Medics can heal people, but levels are filled with alternate ways to get healed. The best tip we can think of for medics is to give it up already.

You can actually take out low-flying planes with a tank shell.

VEHICLES

Tanks

If you're going to be a dedicated tank commander, pick the engineer class. The way you can repair your tank in the downtime between battles. Remember: Even though you're encased in a metal shell, you're not invincible. Keep moving to avoid being an easy target for anti-tank gunners. Since the front of a tank is more heavily armored than its side and rear, always turn to face any threat head-on. More important, don't forget to use cover. Ridges, bridge crests, the smoking wreckage of other vehicles, and pretty much any other solid object will help break up incoming fire. Sandbag piles are especially good for absorbing damage from bombs dropped by planes.

Situational awareness is the best key to survival. Map the third-person-chase view camera and reverse-angle camera to two easily accessible keys. This lets you quickly get a view of what's behind you without having to manipulate the turret. If you hear the distinct clink of incoming grenades, move! And always head forward when possible, since it's faster.

As a tank commander, the tank is your best friend—until it's almost destroyed. At that point, it becomes your worst enemy—a giant bomb strapped to your body. An exploding tank is one of the most powerful destructive forces in the game. Don't be sentimental. When your tank is down to its last few health points, abandon it

and run. If you toss a grenade at your old pal as you flee, you can often catch a few pursuing enemies in the subsequent blast.

When fighting against other tanks, always try to attack them from the rear—avoid head-to-head battles. Try to trick your opponent into thinking you're planning to engage in a head-on slugfest, then rush past him (turning your turret as you go) and plant one right up his metal ass. Don't forget to use your right mouse button machine gun. It inflicts only light damage to the sides and rear of enemy tanks, but the damage adds up pretty quickly. Whether your target's a vehicle or a stationary artillery piece, black and brown smoke indicates a hit. White smoke means you missed. Remember: With practice, you can actually take out a low-flying plane with a tank shell.

Half-tracks

These are fine for transporting troops, but the best use for them is as mobile healing and rearming stations. If you're holding a position, hiding one of these just out of sight can be a lifesaver. Unmanned vehicles will self-destruct after a few minutes, so be sure to occasionally pay your half-track a visit.

Jeeps

Jeeps provide fast transport, but they're also wheeled anti-personnel devices. One of their

best targets is the line of morons waiting for planes. The long, flat runway lets you build up a good head of steam and doesn't offer much cover for your targets. At full speed, jeeps will kill infantrymen on impact. A head-on jeep collision, however, won't destroy a full-health tank. Try to aim your jeep-missile at a tank's side or rear.

Ship artillery

When planes begin to attack your ship, don't jump out of your artillery piece and look for an aircraft carrier. Most pilots are unskilled and lazy; they'll make straight, slow passes over your ship. This behavior makes it relatively easy to hit them. One-shot kills with the ship's big guns are incredibly satisfying and will make enemy pilots fear and hate you.

Remember to call for spotters. A good place for target practice is the area where everyone waits in line for planes.

Planes

People will tell you that they can pilot planes well with a mouse or keyboard. Those people are liars. Here's a strategy for you: If you're going to fly a plane, use a joystick. If you don't have a joystick, let somebody on your team who does have one manage the air war. In fact, if you don't have a joystick, don't even bother to read the rest of this section.

When taking off, move very slowly until you're facing the direction you want to fly. Once you're lined up, hit the throttle. If you catch any air before you're facing your initial flight path,



Wingwalking: incorrect.

you'll end up in a spiral—you lose the ability to control your turn once the tail of your plane lifts off. Every time you exit a plane, reset your joystick's throttle to the midway point. This will keep you from backing up as soon as you enter another plane.

Learn to land. To land successfully, simply slow down, and your landing gear will automatically lower. Airfields make good landing spots, but it's also possible to land on roads and open fields. This is helpful on large maps, where you can use planes to quickly transport yourself to capture points. By landing instead of simply bailing, you can capture a point, take off again, and go grab an additional point. Also, your rear gun has no heat restriction, which makes your plane a fun (though lightly armored) mobile ground turret.



Wingwalking: correct.

If you do bail out of a plane, you can slightly control your descent by looking in the direction you want to go. To avoid enemy fire, free-fall as far as possible and engage your parachute only at the last second. If your landing zone is crowded with enemies, don't forget to drop grenades on them as you descend.

Play your role. If you're piloting a torpedo plane, make runs against ships. If you're in a bomber, drop bombs. Bombs create some serious vertical splash damage, so be careful when dropping them while flying low. Torpedo runs are deadly against enemy ships. The key is to come in low—below the ship's deck level. When you're just about to touch the water and are still a small distance away from your floating target, slow down, drop the torpedo, then hit your throttle and pull away.

It's also possible for other players to ride on your plane's wings. To do this, the riders must lie prone on the wings and face toward the front of the plane. While airborne, the pilot shouldn't make any sudden turns or drastic elevation changes—those motions make it impossible for riders to hang on. The B-17's large wing size and sluggish controls make it a good choice for wing walking. This maneuver looks cool and will send a threatening message to the enemy that your entire team is crazy. It also has the more tangible benefit of allowing you to quickly transport extra infantry to the front lines.

Another airborne psychological warfare tactic is the midair vehicle switch. You can actually free-fall from a plane straight into another vehicle without engaging your parachute. Just before the moment of impact, press the Enter

HOW TO USE ARTILLERY

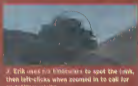
Artillery pieces can fire much farther than the operators can see, and scouts can spot remote targets for their team's artillery. Because it's not explained well in the manual, the steady scout/artillery operator combination is underutilized. Here's a step-by-step guide for artillery use.



1. This is all Chat can see from his offshore artillery piece.



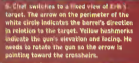
2. On the beach, Erik, the scout, spots an enemy tank on the ridge.



3. Erik uses his binoculars to spot the tank, then left-clicks when zoomed in to call for an artillery strike.



4. Chat (as well as any other artillery gunners on the team) now sees a white shell icon above the greenish health bar in the lower left corner of his HUD, indicating that someone on his team has scored a target.



5. Chat switches to a fixed view of Erik's target. The arrow on the perimeter of the white circle indicates the barrel's direction in relation to the target. Yellow hashmarks indicate the gun's elevation and facing. He needs to rotate the gun so the arrow is pointing toward the crosshairs.



6. The semi-transparent yellow hashmarks on the gauge lines to the top and left of the center crosshairs indicate the settings of your previous shot, not where you're supposed to aim. Fire a shell, observe where it lands, adjust aim accordingly, and then repeat the process to take out the tank.

Vehicle key. If your timing is right, you won't receive any damage. Any enemies that witness this unbelievable act of skill and courage will usually just quit.

Submarines

Submarines are the game's secret weapon—partly because they creep around underwater, but mainly because most players don't seem to know how to use them, or even how to recognize them. When your sub is entirely submerged, you can navigate only by radar. Occasionally, you may want to enter this superstealth mode. Usually, though, you can get away with submerging to where only your periscope is sticking out of the water (about 1.5 on the depth meter). This makes you more or less invisible, while still permitting you to see exactly where you're going.

To assault a ship, line up your sub and fire



At 1.5 on the submerge-a-meter, you can still see the periscope, but those two little peeps are pretty much all of you that the enemy can see.

both torpedoes (always shoot both, since there's no way to reload until you're empty). Remember that torpedoes fire straight out of the bow of your sub, not the direction in which your periscope is pointed. Also, the closer you are to a ship, the higher out of the water you'll need to be, or your torpedoes will sail right under the target. Most players are utterly baffled by submarines and will simply stand around on the carrier deck waiting for planes while you assault them, so even if you're spotted, you can usually reload your torpedoes and fire again. If the enemy does mount a token retaliatory strike, you can submerge, move a little, and then wait about 30 seconds before surfacing to finish the job.

Landing craft

Once you point a landing craft in the correct direction and set it in motion, you can hit the

back key to lock in cruise control. This can be convenient on large watery maps, such as Midway, which often require long sea voyages.

If an enemy doesn't irrevocably beach his landing craft, feel free to borrow it. It's nice to surprise the opposing team by boarding their carriers using their own transports.

Anti-aircraft guns

One little-known fact about anti-aircraft guns is that you can use them to target vehicles and infantry as well as planes. If you are attacking a plane, however, be sure to lead your target a little. Splashes appear where your shells burst. Dark splashes indicate hits, and white splashes are misses. Once you've damaged a plane to the point that it appears to be crashing, don't let up your fire until the plane explodes. Otherwise, the pilot may bail out and parachute into your position.



This pilot doesn't know that on island maps, you can often fly under the effective angle of fire of anti-aircraft guns.

Unreal TOURNAMENT 2003



Runnin'-and-gunnin' Exclusive maps from Prima

Have you ever found yourself trapped in a corner, low on health, and desperately wishing you'd found that redeemer so you could blast everyone away? Well, wish no more! Instead, turn the page and feast your eyes on three of UT2003's most popular maps—IceFields, Antalus, and December—complete with full descriptions of weapon, shield pack, and health pack locations. Happy sniping!



IceFields

What was once an endless field of obsidian has become a cold and desolate wasteland of permafrost and broken stone.

Weapons

1. Ball launcher
2. Lightning gun
3. Link gun
4. Minigun
5. Redeemer
6. Rocket launcher
7. Shock rifle

Items

8. Ball
9. Health pack +25
10. Shield pack +50
11. Shield pack +100

Broming Run is UT2003's newest mode of play. The huge, outdoor M-shaped level of IceFields has steep cliff walls that keep the action in the narrow, snow-filled valleys below. Although you can move along the plateaus lining the valley walls, most of the action takes place on the valley floor.

The team goals stand vertically on top of raised platforms at opposite ends of the level. An elevator on the valley floor near each goal takes you directly up to the goal. You can put the ball through the goal from either side. Underneath these platforms rest a lightning gun, a link gun, and a health pack +25. Heading away from the team goal and toward the arena's center takes you to a small platform on the valley floor, where a shock rifle sits.

On the opposite side of the valley from the shock rifle is a short tunnel cut through the cliff wall that takes you to the center of the level. It's a handy shortcut, but you need to use your translocator to reach it. If your aim is true, fire your translocator so the beacon flies through the tunnel and lands on the other side of the cliff, making it easier to instantly appear

on that side of the arena.

Past the shock rifle and tunnel shortcut on either team's side of the arena is a rocket launcher. Past the rocket launcher and away from the middle of the arena is a small alcove with four adrenaline capsules, two health packs +25, and a shield pack +50. This alcove appears on each team's side of the arena.

Between each team's alcove with the shield pack +50 is a single alcove in the center of the arena that contains two health packs +25 and a shield pack +100. Enter this alcove through one of two narrow pathways—one on each team's side—along the valley floor. Moving toward the arena's center, you'll pass a row of health walls +5. The other side of the shortcut tunnel through the cliff is just overhead.

This pathway takes you into the center of the arena. At the end of this wide-open area nearest the health walls +5 is the minigun. Translocate on top of the platform above the minigun to get the redeemer, a powerful weapon in an open arena. Head away from the minigun toward the other end of the center of the arena to pick up a link gun, two health packs +25, and the ball.



Antalus

The temple of Inu at Raia Antalus was an ancient meeting place for warriors of the Gen Mo'kal. Through treaties, it has become a popular place for Tournament events.

Weapons

- 1. Flak cannon
- 2. Lightning gun
- 3. Link gun
- 4. Minigun
- 5. Redeemer
- 6. Rocket launcher
- 7. Shock rifle

Items

- 8. Double damage
- 9. Health pack +25
- 10. Shield pack +50
- 11. Shield pack +100

Antalus is an outdoor arena with uneven terrain. Watch your back at all times, as it's easy for your opponents to surprise you amidst the many levels of terrain.

Start by collecting weapons and ammunition at the bottom, then head for high ground. Return to the bottom when your health and shields start running low. A rocket launcher, rocket packs, several adrenaline capsules, a link gun, and link gun charges await you along Antalus' grassy floor. In the outdoor part of the ground floor are several health packs +25.

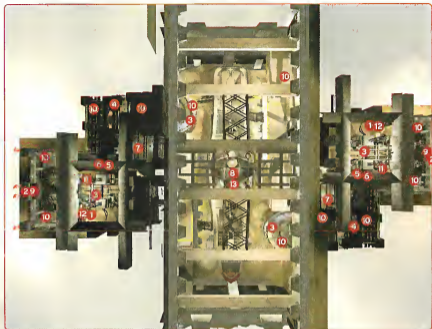
Enter the temple in the center through any of its three entrances to get a super shield pack +100. This shield pack is valuable and easily accessible, meaning your opponents will attempt to reach it as well. Don't stay inside the temple too long—it's impossible to watch all three entrances at once.

The bottom of Antalus is great for those who like to run and gun. Although the valley's curves limit visibility, it's fairly open—perfect terrain for you to use the rocket launcher, flak cannon, or minigun. To move up to the hilly high ground, take any of the elevators up from

the floor or jump repeatedly up the gentler slopes of the valley. Up here, you can pick up a flak cannon and flak shells, a shock rifle and shock cores, a minigun and minigun bullets, a shield pack +50, and a double damage modifier. Another rocket launcher and some rocket packs are also here, as well as another link gun and a few link gun charges.

You'll find health packs in the higher ground, but not as many as on the bottom. If you're low on health, scoop up those health packs and the super shield pack +100. A lightning gun and some lightning charges can be found in the uppermost part of Antalus. This weapon is up here for a reason. From some of the higher peaks, you can easily pick off enemies below you. If you're up high enough and not averse to camping and sniping, there are several areas that are perfect for picking off your foes.

Finally, hidden on one of the spires of the large structure at the top of the center of the level is the redeemer. It requires some difficult jumping to reach, but it goes without saying that anyone who grabs this hardware can all but guarantee racking up a few easy kills.



December

Hidden on the shores of a small South Pacific island is a once-great naval resupply station, code-named December.

Weapons

1. Bio rifle
2. Flak cannon
3. Lightning gun
4. Link gun
5. Mmgun
6. Rocket launcher
7. Shock rifle

Items

8. Double domination
9. Flags (red and blue)
10. Health pack +25
11. Big bag o' health +100
12. Shield pack +50
13. Shield pack +100

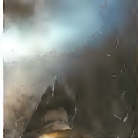
December's bases are identical: A large room with the team flag, a labyrinth of small rooms, and hallways that lead to a loading dock with a decommissioned battleship. The flag area of each base has the link gun and two health packs +25 on the ground. The ramps lead to a row of adrenaline capsules and the team flag. Continue up the ramp to reach a small room with a lightning gun, a bio rifle, and a big bag o' health on the ground. Use your transporter to reach a shield pack +50 that's floating above a crate.

You can leave the room by running back into the flag area or by translocating up to a tunnel in the wall near the big bag o' health. This tunnel takes you into the labyrinth of rooms and corridors beyond the flag area. In this labyrinth (also reachable through either of the steel doors at the bottom of the flag area) are most of the weapons and items in the game. Ammunition for various weapons is scattered throughout. Near the entrance to the team base, a shock rifle hovers above a crate near a wall stencil that reads "Dock." From this room, head under the ramp to pick up the mmgun. Near the mmgun is an elevator shaft that

leads down to the lower entrance of the base. In a small room near the shock rifle is a small set of stairs leading to a flak cannon.

A rocket launcher sits in a small room just beyond the right door from the flag area (as you face away from the flag). Around the corner from the room with the large pumping pistons is a small room with a link gun, four health vials +5, and a health pack +25. Head past the health vials to reach two good sniper posts. One overlooks the crate room holding the shock rifle and health vials. The other overlooks the battleships in the center of the arena and contains a lightning gun and two health packs +25.

Exit the base by following the "Dock" stencil on the wall. You emerge on a landing. From here, jump onto the dried-up dock between the two bases or run onto the battleship. Head straight to find a health pack +25 and a small diving hole that takes you directly into the dried-up dock. You can also turn left and run up the ramp that leads onto the battleship. A double damage modifier rests on top of the battleship. If you explore underneath the battleship, you can find a shield pack +100.



WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

Night Elf tactics *By Elliott Chin*

The fourth race of *WarCraft III* is the Night Elf Sentinels. These Elven warriors are adept at hit-and-run tactics because of their lethal combination of ranged units. They also possess formidable spells and impressive air forces. About the only thing the Night Elves lack is durable, early-game melee capabilities, and even then, this weakness is compensated for by the race's other strengths, and is negated later in the game. With excellent scouting ability and versatile heroes, this race is powerful and straightforward enough for beginners, but diverse and versatile enough to entice veterans. To help you master the Night Elves, we'll provide you with basic tips and explain their more important units.

Night Elf buildings and expansion

Night Elves have the ability to uproot their main buildings and move them. Unlike other races, you can simply relocate your towers and town hall to a new mine when you deplete the current one. This ability makes it cheaper for Night Elves to expand, provided you can protect your buildings through the game.

Because of this, you should expand at the earliest opportunity. Even before your early units clear out a mine, build your tree of life and walk it over once the mine is free of creeps. Be sure to build a few ancient protectors and moon wells near your expansions for protection. The ancients do a good deal of damage and can eat trees to replenish their health. As soon as you advance to a tree of ages, research the Nature's Blessing upgrade, which increases the armor of your ancients by five and boosts movement

speed. However, it's best to avoid uprooting your tree of life, as that action destroys your entangled gold mine, ceasing your gold mining and forcing you to waste time entangling the mine again. But if your ancients of war, lore, and ward aren't producing anything, definitely uproot them and start attacking. This could buy you time to run back to your base with your units.

Night Elf heroes

As always, the choice of heroes depends largely

on the type of game you're playing. In one-on-one or FFA games, go with the demon hunter or keeper of the grove. In the short term, the demon hunter is great for soloing creeps and is the only true melee unit you have for awhile. Keep in mind that he can die easily if enemies gang up on him. As you level up, the demon hunter gives you a good choice of spells and skills. His Mana Burn ability is a great way to damage and neutralize heroes, robbing them of mana so they can't cast spells. Mana Burn can even kill fleeing heroes if



Use huntresses to persecute units. Do not click on the running unit to attack it! Instead, have the huntresses run past the unit in question and attack only after they overtake it.



Tranquility is a lifesaving ultimate that can heal 20 hit points per second for 30 seconds. Use it in battle to stay alive longer, or afterward to restore your units. It even heals dryads and bellisae.

They have enough mana left, but you need to keep your eyes open and be fast on the draw. Upgraded to Level 3, it will burn up to 300 mana and do 300 damage to the target. Also, his Immolation Aura lets him do extra damage to surrounding units. It's generally a good idea to go with Mana Burn and Immolation, and then get Metamorphosis (his ultimate) for rapid hit-point

regeneration and a ranged attack with splash damage. When in demon form, the hunter also switches to chaos damage instead of melee damage, meaning he does full damage to all armor types. The demon hunter's other ability is Evasion, which, at its highest level, negates nearly a third of all attacks. In truth, all the hunter's abilities are good. Be sure to use Moon Wells and Rejuvenation on him to keep him in good health.

The keeper of the grove isn't a great fighter, but with his Entangling Roots spell, he can solo creeps effectively. This is his best ability because it immobilizes units while doing damage and is great at stopping heroes. With the new patch, Thorns isn't as effective anymore at low levels against early units, but at Level 3, it's still good against high-level melee units. Even Force of Nature, despite giving you extra units, isn't that great, since treants have weak attacks. But they do serve as good cannon fodder, especially against footmen and ghouls. As you plan long term, you really want to have the keeper's Tranquility ultimate for in-the-field area healing, which can turn the tide of battle.

The priestess of the moon should be your second choice (unless you are new to Night Elves and poor at micromanagement, in which case she should be first). Your army is composed mainly of huntresses and dryads, so her TrueShot Aura is essential. In the short term, she provides excellent support for ranged units, and in the long term, her Starfall ultimate is the best area attack spell, since it doesn't hurt your own troops and automatically hits any enemies in the area of effect. Her Searing Arrows skill adds a lot of bonus damage per shot (+30 at Level 3), which bypasses armor and makes her better at destroying buildings. You don't really need her Owl Scouting ability, since you have the huntress' sentinels, but if you choose it, it makes for a better scout than any other unit in the game. Ideally, you should get her as soon as you hit the tree of ages, so she can level up quickly and provide early support for your army.

In team games, your choice depends on your team strategy, if you are designated as the



The great lord's Sleep spell is a great way to control how you fight creeps, and it is also useful for stopping heroes.

ranged specialist, then your first hero must be the priestess of the moon. If you are going for air, then your hero is a matter of personal taste.

Huntress

Among the Night Elf units, the huntress is your workhorse. In the beginning of the game, your archer is vulnerable to the higher hit point melee units of the other races (the ghoul, gnom, and footman). Thus, the huntress is the bread and butter of your army. She has great hit points and her attack ricochets to a second victim for half damage. En masse, these units are deadly.

To get her right away, build a hunter's hall as soon as possible and bypass archers altogether. With a demon hunter and huntress in tow, you'll have a very effective early army. During midgame, when you get the tree of ages, supplement your army with dryads and a few druids. Later in the game, you'll replace huntresses with druids of the claw and fully upgraded archers. However, if you insist on using huntresses throughout, research the Moon Glaive ability for a third hit.

An often-neglected ability of the huntress is Sentinel Research. Immediately with it, you can set up a permanent sentry at any tree that cannot be dispelled. This ability also reveals invisible units, so park a huntress in your base to root out any shades. With only a few huntresses, you can set up spies across the entire map and keep constant tabs on your enemies. If you are the victim of a sentinel owl, simply damage the tree with a worker, bellisae, or the keeper of the grove's Force of Nature spell.

Late-blooming archers

While the archer is your first available military unit, she shouldn't be used until later in the game. With low hit points and a ranged attack, she is extremely vulnerable to melee units. She doesn't really become a powerhouse until you research all her upgrades by the third stage of the game. Research Improved Bows for increased range and Marksmanship for extra damage. Once you have fully upgraded archers, crank out a half-dozen and place them behind high hit-point units like huntresses, since archers still have low hit points. While the front-line units soak up damage, the archers destroy heavy units with focused fire.

With this high damage and cheap cost, archers are a perfect anti-air unit. They also provide good cover fire for your own air forces. Archers should definitely be a staple of your Night Elf army, but only in the late stage of the game. By then, they are awesome ranged units made even better with

Air Chimeras

The Night Elves enjoy a very potent air force. You won't need to worry much about enemy air because your archers and druids of the talon provide all the defense you need. Any air units that try to escape the withering firepower of your archers can be pummeled and finished off with sticky creep.

If you can, also go as the offensive with air power. Chimeras provide a crushing siege attack against towers and towers need a good supporting attack against ground units. Chimeras can't attack air units, so it is possible to attack them with archers or creeps when attacking over trees or water. Despite their power, do not attempt to tech straight up to chimeras. Only rush for them in a team game when your focus is air power and you can count on allies to defend you.

When using ultimates, be sure to research their Corrosive Breath upgrade, which gives them a siege attack against buildings, reserving their normal pierce attack for units. A balanced ground force supported by three or four chimeras is awesome, as they add enormous extra damage but remain well-protected by Rejuvenation, Abolish Magic, and your workers and creeps. While your enemy panics at the sight of your chimeras and tries to deal with them, your other troops will make him pay.



Rejuvenation saves this unit from death. It heals this druid of the claw faster than this tower can kill it.

the druid of the claw's Roar and the priestess of the moon's True Shot Aura.

Dryads

Some consider the dryad the best unit for the Night Elves. She is a hybrid that combines the abilities of a spellcaster and a ranged unit. She has a good ranged attack that can be upgraded (along with her armor), but she also has spell-like abilities. She is immune to both helpful and harmful spells, and her attack automatically deals poison and slows the target. The effect is short, but over time it can really hamper an enemy unit, making it easier for other Night Elf units to finish them off. The dryad is not intended to be a stand-alone unit but is a great support unit. Her attack is best left to weaken each enemy unit, rather than to target one in particular. Her Slow Poison ability even affects magic-immune units, such as those under a banshee's Antimagic Shell.

Research the Abolish Magic upgrade for the dryad as soon as you can, as it gives her the ability to automatically dispel any negative spells on your units, such as Cripple or Curse, without requiring any micromanagement on your part. However, she only has 200 mana, so you'll want to have several dryads around. If you leave Abolish Magic on autocast, you might not have enough mana remaining to dispel the really debilitating spells like Cripple. But with enough dryads, you can neutralize other



An excellent combination: a druid of the claw casting Unholy Frenzy on abominations while a druid lord's Vampiric Aura heals them.

spellcasters. If you wish to damage summoned creatures, like water elementals, you will have to manually cast Abolish Magic. Although immune to spells, the dryad can be healed by Moon Wells, Healing Scrolls, and the keeper of the druid's Tranquility ultimate.

Go bezz!

The druid of the claw is an essential unit for its two spells. Once you achieve the tree of ages, build two ancients of lore so you can train dryads and druids of the claw concurrently.

Roar, the druid's first spell, is an area-effect buff that gives all your units a +25 percent bonus to damage. It's better than Bloodlust (despite the inferior damage bonus), because it is available much earlier and affects multiple units in one casting, thus costing less mana per unit.

The second spell is Rejuvenation, which can

The Mighty Wisp

These workers can harvest resources, provide valuable reconnaissance, and dispel magic. Because they don't need to be near your town to gather wood, you can have them attach to any tree on the map.

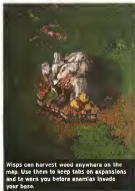
Having a wisp or two harvesting wood near enemy points to your base gives you advance warning of enemy troops before they invade. You can even perch a wisp close to your enemy's base to monitor his troop movements. When you use a wisp to build an expansion at a new gold mine, instead of waiting there while you amass enough resources to build a new tree of life, you can have the wisp gather wood while it waits, ensuring that it doesn't remain idle. In fact, you can send one wisp to each gold mine and leave it as a scout to keep tabs on each expansion.

The other wisp ability is Detonate, which causes the creature to kill itself, dispel all magic in the area, and drain 50 mana from enemy casters. If you are being faced by a horde of bloodlusted Orcs, just one wisp can dispel the buffs on the entire bunch, and for a cost of just 70 gold. This rarely used ability can be a boon if you use it in the heat of battle.

Elven warriors are adept at hit-and-run tactics; they also possess formidable spells and impressive air forces.

be researched as soon as you build druids. It's a healing spell that restores 400 hit points in 12 seconds. It's so fast that it can sometimes prevent a unit from dying even as it's being attacked. And it doesn't occupy the druid's

action constantly (unlike the Human priest). Ideal candidates for Rejuvenation are your heroes (especially the demon hunter), chimeras, druids, and huntresses. Cast Rejuvenation on the victim of focused fire to occupy the enemy's



Wisps can harvest wood anywhere on the map. Use them to keep tabs on expansions and to warn you before enemies invade your base.



The priestess's ultimate, Starfall, has the largest attack area of any spell, and only damages enemies. But she must maintain it throughout its 30-second duration.

troops even longer, giving your other units more time to attack without retaliation.

Because these two spells are so effective, some Night Elf players won't even bother transforming their druids into bear form, where they gain greater hit points, armor, and attack. But the druids of the clan are your only true melee unit (in Elf or bear form). By themselves, they aren't as strong as the other final stage melee units, but in bear form (with the help of Roar, Rejuvenation, and the druid of the talon's Faerie Fire), they are immensely powerful units.

Have your druids cast their spells before entering battle, then transform them and enter melee. You should have archers in tow behind them for supporting focus fire. Keep in mind that in bear form, druids cannot cast spells. If you need to recast spells, switch back. As essential heavy units, druids of the clan are especially vulnerable to master-level spells like Cripple. Keep druids nearby to dispel any such spells. The only spell you need watch out for is Cyclone, which cannot be dispelled.

Fine feathery friends

While the druid of the clan is there to make your units stronger, the druid of the talon is there to make your enemies weaker. This druid can automatically cast Faerie Fire, which reduces the armor of an enemy unit by five. A unit can even go into negative armor due to Faerie Fire, giving all your units bonus damage against that particular unit. In our Humans strategy guide in



Night Elves' greatest advantages are their ability to upgrade their buildings in order to move and attack. Don't hesitate to use this ability when under siege.

enemy's own camp. This vision lasts for only two minutes, but you can receive vital reconnaissance during that time.

Once you research the first upgrade for the druid of the talon, he can transform into storm crow form. In this form, he becomes your best air-to-air unit, able to attack from range and in possession of a light armor type. Other units with piercing attacks, like the gryphon rider and

Your talon druids should always be in Elf form, transforming only when your archers need extra help against air attackers.

Life after huntresses

A Night Elf player cannot rely on huntresses alone. The second tier of units—the druid of the clan, and druid of the talon—are incredibly effective additions to the Night Elf army. Their

You'll have an incredibly powerful force that can immobilize heavy enemy units, dispel magic automatically, and neuter enemy heroes.

the November issue, we discussed armor values and what they mean. But in general, a five-point loss in armor can mean a unit takes anywhere from 5 percent to 15 percent more damage per hit (or more if the unit starts out with low armor). Combine Faerie Fire with the Roar spell and the priestess of the moon's True Shot Aura for amazing bonus damage to enemy units. An additional benefit of Faerie Fire is that it gives you sight of the afflicted unit. If a unit with Faerie Fire survives a fight and runs away, you can see what he sees, giving you a spy in the

wyvern rider, are less effective against it.

With their final upgrade, druids of the talon can cast Cyclone, which tosses an enemy unit into the air for 30 seconds, during which time it cannot act, but is invulnerable. Cyclone won't work on air units and lasts only five seconds against heroes. But against other units, it effectively immobilizes them. Cast Cyclone on heavy units. Then concentrate on the remaining forces in the battle. Best of all, Cyclone cannot be dispelled. When using it, turn off autocasting of Faerie Fire so you don't blow your mana.



Archers are weak in the early game, but become powerful once you upgrade them. Use them midgame or later paired a wall of huntresses or druids of the clan.

Ancient Protectors

The job functions the Night Elf way, which cannot be built and left alone like the others. It turns buildings at ground and air units but has a minimum range. That means it can't hit nearby melee units unless it's upsets, thereby getting a melee attack of its own. When upgraded, the ancient protector does siege damage, which means it is less effective than other towers against light armor and heavy armor. But this also means it can't be affected by the footman's Defend ability. When spotted, it does normal damage. If you are under attack from a mixed force of ranged and heavy-melee units, the ancient protectors are much less useful than a split tower or guard tower. At those times, invest your protector and best on the melee attackers, as opposed to leaving it in the ground to attack ranged units. The ancient protector's weakness also underscores the need to use units to protect your bases, rather than leaving town defense solely to towers (as some undead players do).

Remember that ancient protectors can move. If you want to fewer offensively, you can build protectors near the enemy base and then walk in, because they do siege damage, the ancient protectors rip apart buildings. Also, ancient protectors cost no food, yet can be used as mobile siege units.



Always add dryads to your army for support. Their attack slows and poisons a unit for five seconds, and they can also autocast Dispel Magic to protect your units.

special abilities alone give the Night Elves a huge advantage in midgame, during which time you'll want a mixed force of mages and dryads, backed by a few druids of each type.

Once you get to the late stage of the game, you will want to have more druids in your army. With a force of five or six druids of the talon, you can effectively negate half of any enemy's army with Cyclone and have a powerful anti-air contingent at a moment's notice. Having three druids of the claw in bear form and one or two in Elf form gives you rapid healing, ready damage bonuses from the roar spell, as well as strong magic attack and damage absorption. Add several dryads, a force of eight or so fully upgraded archers, and three

chimeras. The chimeras will be well-guarded by your archers and druids. Chimeras also give you instant siege capability when you enter a town, and will add bonus damage to ground units. Attach a priestess of the moon with True Shot Aura and a demon hunter with Mana Burn, and you'll have an incredibly powerful force that can immobilize heavy enemy units, dispel magic automatically, absorb huge amounts of damage, focus fire extremely effectively, and neuter enemy heroes. With such a large army, battles can get unwieldy, and you will need to be very quick and effective with your micromanagement, especially with your spellcasting. Still, if managed correctly, this army can be very difficult to stop.

The Beauty of Moon Wells

Night Elf moon wells replenish the life and mana of nearby friendly units (including allies). You can set this ability to autocast, giving you a quick and easy healing mechanism without micromanagement. Moon wells don't start with autocast on, so turn it on as soon as the moon well is built. Build a long line of moon wells at the front of your base and make your stand there. As you unlighting and losing life and mana, the moon wells will automatically heal units. Always build more moon wells than your food needs dictate.

Aside from during town defense, use your moon wells after every battle to regain health and mana. In the beginning, you can solo creeps with your hero and then return to the moon well to heal. Moon wells can also be used to give spellcasters and heroes full mana after they are built.

Because moon wells are so useful, build several at each expansion and near heavily trafficked areas of the map. With moon wells near your enemy's town, you can rush in to kill his workers and then back out for healing. It will make your units harder to kill and increase their staying power.

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CompUSA GameFixx	42	Microsoft Freelancer	2-3
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Data Becker Highland Warriors	21	Pricegrabber.com Comparison Shopping Online	57
Dell Computer Corp. Dimension & Inspiron Systems	4-5	Primo Games America's Army	55
Dreamcatcher Interactive Hegemonia	63	Sony Online Entertainment PlanetSide	35, 37, 39, 41
Earthlink Earthlink	demo	Strategy First Off-World Resource Base	demo
Electronic Arts Battlefield 1942	22-23	Ubi Soft Entertainment Rainbow 6	6-7
Electronic Arts C&C Generals	C2-4, 1	Ubi Soft Entertainment Splinter Cell	17
Electronic Arts SimCity 4	30-31	University of Advancing Computer Tech Rack the Tech World	85
Electronic Arts Ultima Online	1D-11	Voodoo Computers Voodoo Computers	87
Full Sail Real World Full Sail Real World Education	B3		

Scorched Earth

Hardcore on the Hard Drive

Everyone loves a robot frog in a G-string **By Robert Coffey**

What the hell is going on with console-game developers these days? Just who the hell do they think they are? Charming out the gratuitous mamm-fest *Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball*, a title that sets the physics-engine bar when it comes to bodacious (to jiggling). Or creating a title like *BMX XXX*, where hapless bike riders get good and drunk while cute (FI) doggies make the best with two backs. And don't get me started on *Bikini Karate Babes*. All this titillation on game consoles is simply outrageous, and I, for one, am suitably outraged.

You don't see PC developers making this sort of trash, and I want to know one thing: Why? Why the hell not? Have you guys just given up? Hey, we PC people used to own this stuff, we're the platform that brought hot bare-naked titles to the home office in "games" like *Phantasmaspore* and *Plano Rouge*. What about *Cessure Surf Larry* and all three hundred and seventy-six of its sniggering sequels? Have we all forgotten the pioneering text-based fifth of *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*? *Smut* is our friggin' turf and I say we do something about it, or we're going to be forced to live in a world where an unspeakable new version of *Super Monkey Ball* owns the minds and bodies of all gamers!

Catching up won't be easy, so I say we follow the sterling example of the real porn industry. Did you think that *Shaving Ryan's Privates*, *Harry Bottom* and the *Sorcerer's Bone*, or *Edward Penislands* spent years in development? No sirree, they spewed these babes out right after the inspirational mainstream Hollywood flicks hit the multiplex. That's what PC developers can do to save time and reclaim the home office porn delivery system throne: Base some smutty games on existing titles and shove them out the door. Fiddle with the title a little and boom! You're good to go. Some games won't even need that much effort—at *Hidden & Dangerous* needs is a new focus and a few choice new textures.

But time's a-wastin'. In the interest of keeping the PC still-bettingly supreme, I've come up with a few ideas to jump-start the process.

Sexy Sexuality This all-nude mod for *Dave's Dexterity* is a surefire hit. And this time, gamers won't be going blind



I see a brave, new, sexy sexy gaming world.

because they're squinting at the murky graphics.

World of WhoreCraft Blizzard breaks new ground with an MMORPG in which soloing is never as much fun as joining a party... and partying down, oh yeah!

Quake III: Team Arena You figure it out. Here's a hint: The nalgun ain't firing longanosis.

Aliens Love Predator This fetish product is a can't-miss proposition. Who hasn't spent their entire honeymoon locked in the bathroom fantasizing about that dreamy dreadlocked Predator getting all down and dirty with a whole pack of acid-dripping, chest-bursting, low-hungry Aliens? No way! It's the only one.

SiNcity 69 A simple title and version-number change, and Maxis is guaranteed to continue keeping EA's PC division afloat with this brothel and bathhouse simulator.

I-2 Sturmewik Three words: Milk High Club.

Schlenkerd: Crusader You can't have infidelity without infidels, and this Ren Faire romp has plenty of heathen happy to burn in hell for the right kind of mortal sin. Unleash your sword and get to it with King Richard the Lionheart.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite III-Curious Force Boldly going where no Star Trek game has gone before, a game in which the crew rescues at rutting into the Borg and all their mechanical snap-on accoutrements. Resistance is futile.

Assmaster 9000 Face it, this radical makeover is the only way anyone is going to be tricked into playing a friggin' chess game. And when the bishop takes the queen, watch out!

Age of Tall This release from a newly christened Bethesda Hardworks is one non-stop Love Boat. Mizzernmast, "walking the plank," "crossing the sea," "coming about"—this game sounds plenty dirty already!

We can do this, people: It's not exactly pig-squalling I see a brave, new, sexy sexy gaming world that isn't really all that different from the one we're in now. A world of cheap thrills and low brows, where Sid Meier is still the unquestioned god straddling the gaming globe—albeit a disquietingly quivering, sweaty god with a black mesh thong awkwardly hunched over something more accurately described as "gloves." Let's go!

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6.1 Surround



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