

**WORLD'S BEST STRATEGIES: SIMCITY 4 & HITMAN 2**

**COMPUTER**

# **GAMING**

April 2006 \$5

THE #1 PC GAMING MAGAZINE FOR YEARS **WORLD**

**Game of the Year Awards!**

CGW picks the year's best and worst, plus Readers' Choice Awards!

**Unreal II Reviewed**

PLUS: Sims Online, Impossible Creatures, Silent Hill 2, and more!



**EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW!**

# **COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS**

Head to the front for the first review of EA's explosive game of modern war

**INSIDE: Nvidia's GeForce FX tested!** PAGE 36

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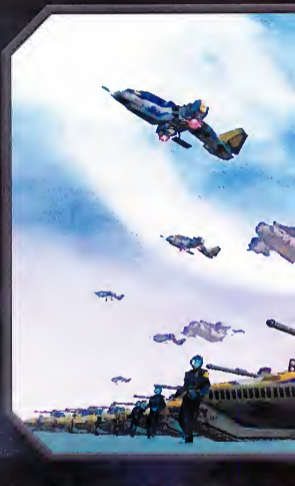
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**THOUSANDS  
WILL DIE.**

**YOU MAY NEVER KILL THE SAME PERSON TWICE.**



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Game Experiences May  
Change During Online Play.

New Conglomerate forces overpower enemy defenses and begin their assault on the Yanu Sovereignty base.

A New Conglomerate squad of infantry and armor prepares to reinforce their empire on Soastus, where hundreds of friendlies and enemies are presently waging war.

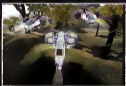
Terran Republic forces begin their assault on the Yanu Sovereignty base, where hundreds of friendlies and enemies are presently waging war.



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## JACKHAMMER

It's automatically the New Conglomerate's primary anti-armor heavy assault weapon. With solid armor capacity and rapid fire capabilities, it's a devastating weapon for head-to-head action.



## VANGUARD

With its armor, the New Conglomerate Vanguard is equipped with armor and heavy firepower to battle the main tank, which boasts both a 100mm cannon and a 30mm machine gun, in capable of a 360-degree pivot. It can dispatch a deadly 100mm rocket.



## VANU SOVEREIGNTY



The New Sovereignty soldiers fight to preserve the advanced planet's advanced technology using a blend of human and alien technology to gain an edge against other empires. Adapt, evolve, succeed. Technology equals might!

## LASHER

The New Sovereignty Lasher is a precision energy rifle that lets you pick off and vehicles at close range. Damage directly impacted by an orb receive maximum damage.



## THRESHER

The New Sovereignty Thresher is a heavy assault buggy built upon a gyroscopic drive system that engages wheels with rail-grooves that propel the vehicle. The Death Fan Cannon serves as the primary weapon. The Thresher's hover capabilities allow it to strike without being easily cross water or obstacles.



## TERRAN REPUBLIC



Terran soldiers' intense mind and loyalty to the cause adds to its struggling military and pushes the fighting empire. Their goal is to restrict and regain superiority over those who oppose the Terran Republic. Loyalty will defeat!

## CHAINGUN

The Terran Republic's Chaingun is a heavy assault machine gun designed to rapidly shell out rounds from a generous ammo source. The speed at which it fires can easily rip apart enemy soldiers.



## PROWLER

The Terran Republic's largest battle tank, the Prowler is heavily armored with a 30-degree 100mm cannon. A secondary gunner can control a Dual 10mm Rotary Chaingun, which is stacked upon the primary turret. The Prowler can lay down more than 100 rounds per second.



For more information on each empire's capabilities, armor, weapons and vehicles, visit [www.station.com/planetside](http://www.station.com/planetside)



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Violence

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HUGE**  
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**14 Editorial**

Jeff presents that his favorite game wasn't *Animal Crossing*.

**18 Letters**

Fearing fan mail and love letters from you to us. Gosh, if only we weren't married.

**28 Loading...**

It's condition manon according to Donald Rumsfeld. So, it's officially "gear up for war" month in the Loading section with some tasty new screens of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, *Enemy Territory* and *IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles*.

**36 Read Me**

We finally got our hands on Nvidia's smokin' new **GeForce FX** and the verdict is that it blows more hot air than Rush Limbaugh. And it runs only slightly faster. OK, that's a Rush-like exaggeration—see the story for the real poop. Also this month, check out our field trips to a real Army base and the CES show. Because we're equally at home with soldiers and geeks. In fact, we're thinking of starting a comic book for geeky soldiers: *Sergeant Scooter*. Whatta ya think?

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**56** Scott McCloud

**83 Games of the Year**

COW takes over the local Chevy's and hosts a party to celebrate the best PC games of 2002. Read about all the winners here, and keep an eye out for Robert Coffey dressed as a little ballerina.



**120 Tech**

Firstly, a flat panel that's worth its gaming salt: Hitachi's 17" LCD. Also reviewed: Asus' External USB 2.0 CD-RW and Hercules' DV Action Pro. Woo-WOOOO! There's also a new Cracked Case, Killer Rigs, Tech Medics, and everyone's favorite, Will Power.

**129 How To**

Be at the top of your aim in *Hitman 2* with tips straight from the developer. Plus, how to build a RAID configuration for your home PC, and things you can do with the box of crap known as *NightFire*.

**135 Gamer's Edge**

Will the fight between Russians and Germans in WWI be uglier this time around? Chloé and Geryk turn to *Combat Mission 2* to find out. Also, get a handle on your finances in *SimCity 4*, and the ever-popular Dirty Trick.

**144 Scorched Earth**

Talk to the weeds.

Battles are vintage  
C&C—overtly  
micromanaged  
affairs that quickly  
devolve into  
chaotic melees  
between mobs.

**74** COVER STORY  
**Command & Conquer: Generals**  
C&C is back, but not better than ever.





Almost  
no aspect of  
this flight sim  
has gone  
untouched.

## 70 IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Don your flight suit and rev up your engines, fly boys.



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## 116 SILENT HILL 2



## 36 READ ME

Is that a secum cleaner in your PC?



## 120 TECH

Enter a new gaming dimension.



WE ARE  
FREEDOM'S ANSWER TO FEAR.  
OUR DUTY BEGINS WHEN NEGOTIATIONS END  
FOR WE DO NOT BARGAIN WITH TERROR.  
WE STALK IT, CORNER IT, TAKE AIM,  
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## SQUAD-BASED COUNTER-TERROR

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Blood  
Violence



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## Medals of Honor

The king of the dorks picks his games of the year

The cool thing about being editor-in-chief is not that I have power, because I don't, but because certain people, like my mother, think I do.

"My son runs a national magazine," she says, as she introduces me to the ladies in her Friday night bridge club. "There's 150 people in the office, and he's in charge of all of them, aren't you, son?"

"Well, no, Mom. I told you. There's, like, eight of us. And Dana makes all the decisions."

"Don't be so modest. And pull up your pants! He never could keep his pants up. It's those bony legs of his."

"I noticed that," says one lady.

"He should eat more," says another. "It's his like a stick!"

Anyway, the point is, I don't have a lot of power here, despite the highfalutin job title. And at no time of year is this lack of power made clearer than right now, when we pass out our Game of the Year awards. Because no matter how much I may want things to go a certain way, the fact is, we all have an equal vote here—mine doesn't count any more than anyone else's.

Not that I don't agree with the awards in this issue. I do. All are worthy. But we all have our personal favorites—those games that reach us or move us or speak to us—and my list is going to be just as different from the other CGW editors as yours is from your pain-in-the-neck siblings or friends.

So here's my own Top 10. I put it roughly in order, though this list might be totally different if I were to do it another day, or when in a different mood. My favorite game of the year, at least today, is honestly one I completely ignored when it came out. But now, it's the one game that has its claws in my brain and won't let go. Whatever. This isn't a beauty pageant. All these games are great for different reasons. Ranking them is stupid. The really cool thing is that 2002 was an unbelievably great year for PC gaming. We can only hope that 2003 will be even half as good. Happy gaming!

- |                           |                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Warlords: Battlecry II | 6. Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast    |
| 2. Battlefield 1942       | 7. Warcraft III                    |
| 3. Grand Theft Auto III   | 8. No One Lives Forever 2          |
| 4. Freedom Force          | 9. Morrowind                       |
| 5. Systema                | 10. Medal of Honor: Allied Assault |

**Jeff Green**  
Editor-in-Chief

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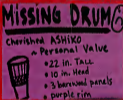


**DANA JONSEWAARO**

A year and a half into the job, Dana's still not quite sure how she ended up working on a computer gaming magazine, but now she can't imagine a job environment without nonstop *Lord of the Rings* analysis interspersed with the occasional observation about the smell in the 8th floor men's room. When she's not yelling at everyone else about their missed deadlines, she's procrastinating her own work—this month it was *The Sims Online* review on page 104.

**ERIK WOLPAW**

Erik Wolpaw loves games. His other interests include four chairs that he's selling. All four of Erik Wolpaw's chairs must be purchased as a set. Only three of the chairs look like the one in the picture. Imagining yourself in these chairs? Stop imagining! All serious offers should be sent to Jeff Green.



**RON DULIN**

Ron Dulin loves adventure games, but he lives for experimental pop music. He's getting a band together. He has a car, a place to practice, about a hundred original songs, and an open mind to your knees. No classic rockers, please. "I'm also missing a drum," says Ron. All serious inquiries or any information about the drum should be sent to Jeff Green.

**MICHAEL JENNINGS**

Our associate art director appeared on our steps out of the backwoods of Carolina to dance to the death with the graphic mariachi on his back. Since his addition of a skull and crossbones to the CGW secret sauce, our magazine has mysteriously begun to glow in the dark. After hours you can find him scoring waves to the *Frisco* moonlight and indulging his fetish for adult cereal.



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- EW

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# Unreal TOURNAMENT 2003

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effin' amazing."

- PC Gamer

"Unreal Tournament 2003  
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- Philadelphia Inquirer

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graphically stunning  
shooter to date."

- GameSpy

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Blood and Gore  
Violence



# Letters

The whistles go woo-wooooo at [cgwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cgwletters@ziffdavis.com)

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Parents: Don't Dilute Your Children

Why do players of bloody, violent games insist on filtering out "coarse language"? Every time I ask, I usually get the same response: "There could be children watching." Well LA-DEE-DA! They're still seeing the gory violence. Sure, they can see a decapitated head on a pike oozing blood with maggots crawling around, as long as the head doesn't come alive and say, "Damn! That f\*\*king hurt!" If you're blocking these words from your kids, you'll probably end up with a child without a sense of reality. Without that realism, they could cause something like Columba. Videogames aren't the WHOLE cause; it's the parents diluting their children that causes this kind of crap.

Robb Frye

Robb, parents don't dilute children, they delude them; children dilute parents. That's how it works. Second, you make an interesting point, but we're not sure how censoring foul language can lead to murderous rampages. Third, you forgot to mention nudity as another example of our society's illogical mores: Ripping a woman's heart out is OK—just be sure her nipples don't show.



ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY CAMERON



### Dell Dimension dementia

The 10th Annual Ultimate Game Machine Shootout among seven different computer vendors (January 2003) showed a price of \$2,899 for the Dell Dimension 8250. That made the Dell the least expensive machine; \$379 cheaper than the second-least-expensive vendor, and more than \$1,000 cheaper than the

most expensive vendor.

This was such an amazing price that I went online to buy an identical system from Dell. I configured a system almost identical to the one in your shootout, but the price was \$1,248 greater than the same machine in your article! What's going on here?

Hal Toomer

It must be a good deal, because we've had several inquiries about it. Those tricky marketers at Dell apparently created a special bargain PC for us, and then buried it on their site because they don't make money on it. You can click on [www.dell.com/us/en/dhs/offers/specials\\_outrageous\\_dimen.htm](http://www.dell.com/us/en/dhs/offers/specials_outrageous_dimen.htm), or from their site click on "Home and Home Office," "Hot Deals," and then "Outrageous Desktop Deals," where you'll find several customizable Dimension systems.

### Shame! Moral outrage!

Dear Mr. Jeff Green, As a loyal reader, I feel that it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk. In your February issue, the last page ("Scorched Earth"), which I am guessing was an attempt at humor by the moron who's (sic) name is not fit for me to waste my printer ink on, wrote the most gratuitous display of repressed sexuality that I have ever witnessed in your once-fine-but-now-tarnished periodical. While I realize that this country was built on free speech and that you did not write this offensive bit of tasteless literature, I am holding you responsible. Your job title is editor-in-chief. Your job is to let your staff write and then to edit it.

I realize that no one likes to be told what to do, myself included. And maybe you didn't even see the "editorial." But

**"I feel it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk."**



...the right to keep and bear arms,  
shall not be infringed.

Forget what you know  
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Walk a week in the  
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protesters, policemen

and civllians,

with or without weapons.  
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choice; experiment with  
everyone and everything.

And remember  
...it's only as violent as you are!



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and irreverent, Postal 2 pulls no  
punches."

—Rob Smith, Editor in Chief  
PC Gamer

"Shoot me, kill me, it's only a game."

—Gary Coleman

"Finally—for real and for true—a game  
developer that doesn't give 3/16ths of  
a rat's ass what anybody else thinks.  
Anybody. ANYbody."

—Chris Hudak,  
Games Database

"Dranch 'em and light 'em. Postal 2  
has such a way with gasoline."

—Computer Games Magazine

"Running With Scissors: great games,  
just don't go drinking with these guys."

—Kevin Paul  
Gamechry

# POSTAL 2

Ever have one of those days?



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## MAIL BITES

If you took that chick from EverQuest and put her on ice skates, you'd get Tonya Harding. That's creepy.

Stigbob

Some of your readers scare the hell out of me.

Justin Yann

Robert Coffey scares me!

Sean

Old guys do play PC games; we're slow, but we're steady. We're the bull that walked down the hill.

Wayne Rice

Your mg is so much better now that Green-speak has been replaced—sorry, Jeff!

Kung Fu Joe

## "I hope younger readers realize that in real war, there are no respawns."

That article was without question the most thoughtless thing I have ever witnessed in your magazine. Two of my good friends, ages 5 and 11, have had their [sic] access to your [sic] magazine cut off when their [sic] mothers read Scorched Earth. Was publishing that article really worth the price of two faithful readers? And maybe more?

Gregory P. Hamblock III, Esq.  
Beautiful Butte, Montana

Jeff Green responds: Thanks for filling me in on my role around here, Gregory. I wasn't too clear on that before; I thought my job was to buy staff lunches and get my beautiful butte kissed.



### Robert Coffey: amazing in every way

I've been worshipping this guy since I read his column last month [Scorched Earth, January 2003]. He is amazing in every way. How come he didn't take Green's spot sooner?! I am off to sacrifice a small mammal tonight in his honor; tomorrow, I think it's baby night.

Andrew Pejo

### How dare EA call German soldiers Nazis!

In the January issue, there's an Electronic Arts ad for Medal of Honor: Spearhead that says "Can you see the 300,000 Nazis, 600 Panzer tanks, and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture? Neither could they."

I am appalled at this flagrant and ignorant label given to the German army. The Nazis were a political party, the same as any other party (though not in action) such as the Republicans or the Democrats. There were SS divisions (who swore allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi party) in the Ardennes offensive, but the rest were regular Wehrmacht army (who swore allegiance to Germany). To label the entire German army as Nazis is almost criminal. EA has slandered hundreds of thousands of German war



veterans by falsely claiming that they had allegiance to the Nazi party. I advise that for future publications, this offending material be amended.

Pete Moss

Pete, ease off on the sauerbraten and doppelbock. When have you seen advertisements be rigorously accurate? Besides, American boys fell just as dead from the German soldiers who weren't Nazis.

### He should know

Hi, I just thought I'd let you know that game geezers like me love your mag, I'm 51 years old and a 'Nam vet (two tours as a Ranger). More than the other... um... competitors you have, your mag is humorous, informative, and fun to read.

By the way, I hope younger (read, draft age) gamers fully understand that in real war there are no respawns, I sometimes worry that the fascination with military hardware in young minds that is fed by these excellent games lulls them into not fully appreciating the brutal horror of actual combat. I don't mean to sound preachy, but I remember a lot of gung-ho buddies who went home in pieces, or worse, in bags.

X-Airborne Ranger

### Why No Laptop Coverage?

How come in your Ultimate Game Machine story there was no category for laptops? I own a laptop and I can never find any information in any magazines about them.

Kyle Zimmerman

We only have limited space, so we have to focus on desktops. We review laptops individually, and occasionally will do a smaller roundup. Be sure to see our award in this issue for Technology of the Year—it might surprise you.

### Chicks dig War and Peace

I read your magazine every month and I particularly like Get a Life. There are some handy tips for rising up the ranks of the social ladder rather than spending Saturday nights trying to figure out the

Neverone trials in Morrowind.

Well, friends, I have discovered something guaranteed to impress the socks off most women: Read the 1,400-page monstrosity of a book that is Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. It was a long, hard journal, but if I can do it, so can you! And if it gets too tough, just do what I did and get the condensed 600-page version. Telling a girl you read War and Peace will definitely impress her more than telling her you completed every quest in Morrowind twice.

Daniel Polera

Yeah, spending Saturday nights reading War and Peace develops that anime magnetism much more than playing games. Nothing turns a girl on like an epic story of starvation, war, and hopelessness.

### Speaking of Tolstoy...

I've received CGW for about a year now, and I have one simple problem with it: the reviews. Maybe it's that all games with the word "sim" in them seem to get 3- to 5-star ratings, or maybe it's that Wii O'Neal can't tell a good computer from a penguin's wazoo.

Because of my slight distrust for the accuracy of your reviews, I have tried to switch magazines many times, but each time, I find myself thinking, "What was that guy smoking when he wrote this review?" It made me wonder, "Why is this??? CGW sucks, so why don't I like these other magazines better?"

Then it hit me. It's your writing style. Although I find your reviews strangely inaccurate, crappy writing does not make a good magazine. When I'm reading a magazine, I don't want just game ratings. I'm looking for bathroom reading, and in that sense, you guys really follow through with your snide remarks, sarcastic comments, self-hating editorials, and ironic humor. You don't just give me reviews, you give me a reason to look forward to my next trip to the crapper.

So, with all that said, you will find my subscription renewal amongst many others this month. My advice is, cool it with the sim reviews and don't fire anyone from your writing staff.

Aaron Jones

### And now, humble pie

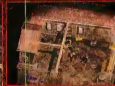
Siege-noun, slang for "keeper" Used by game magazine editors to cover up the fact that the person who proofreads the table of contents does not know the difference between Peter Molyneux and Chris Roberts.

Jamie Adams

Thank you, smart ass. But your snarkiness would be more effective if you got it right. Actually, Chris Taylor developed Dungeon Siege.

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**ROM**

# Loading...

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

## IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Outkast's new "Bombs Over Stalingrad" video is coming along nicely...and so is the stand-alone expansion for the sleeper hit *IL-2 Sturmovik*. *Forgotten Battles* promises a whole lot more of what made the first game great, with plenty of new additions. Here, we see a HE-111 taking fire while on a bombing run over enemy territory. Check out the searchlights, the incoming flak, and the full preview on page 70.

There are 150 planes to choose from!





There's much  
smarter A.I. here.



Fly in dynamic  
campaigns with  
night missions.

## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

It may be *Wolfenstein* in name, but *Enemy Territory* is no mindless FPS sequel. The game is shaping up as a decent squad-based action game. This prequel puts you in command of a Dirty Dozen-caliber squad. Whether taking on the single-player campaign or joining your buddies in a multiplayer match, there's a lot to get a handle on: commanding troops, avoiding a hail of gunfire, or navigating with the onscreen map. This title is expected to ship out for combat soon.

Fireteam: Alpha

F RR2DO2   4 82 ▲

S Fluffy gIMp   5 85 ▲

C Wils   6 76 ▲



You and your troops can earn ranks in the field.

Notice the slick orange-red use of a map.



New weapons, like the MG-72, let you go prime.

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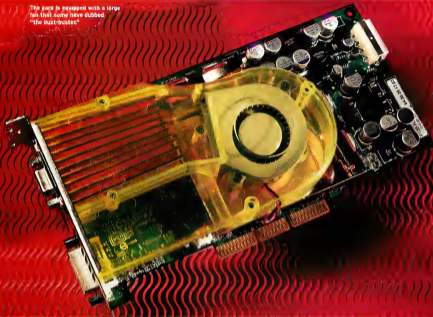
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# Read Me

A gentle laxative formulated for gamers Edited by Ken Brown

The pack is equipped with a large fan that some have dubbed "the dust-buster."



3D GRAPHICS

## Behold, the GeForce FX

Like the hype preceding it, it blows a lot of hot air **By William O'Neal**

The GeForce FX makes games like *WiiSports* Challenge look utterly amazing.



## STAR WARS GALAXIES

A look at combat with walkers like the AT-ST. Page 40



## TROPICO 2

Awest ye scurvy dog! Unfurl the Jolly Roger. Page 42



## C.E.S. SHOW

Gadget-hunting with the CGW tech weasels. Page 48



## ARMY MEN

See what the Army has in store for Saddam—and you. Page 52



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. features unprecedented detail, but will gamers really pay \$400 to watch faded post?



## The GeForce FX 5800 is big, hot, and loud—and costs \$150 more than its closest competitor.

We tested the GeForce FX on a 3GHz Pentium 4 with 512MB of DDRAM running Windows XP Home Edition (full system info next to benchmarks). We put the card through our normal battery of tests, including 3DMark2005E Pro and 3D GameGauge 3.0. We were under tight time constraints, so we only tested in two different resolutions (1024x768x32 and 1600x1200x32) with 4x full-screen anti-aliasing (4xFSAA) both on and off.

### Radeon has more memory

A lot has been made of Nvidia's decision to equip the GeForce FX with 128-bit DDR2 memory as opposed to the 256-bit DDR1 memory on the Radeon 9700. While the Radeon's 256-bit DDR1 memory is capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 19.8GB/sec, the GeForce FX's 128-bit DDR2 memory is only capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 16GB/sec. Several months ago, Nvidia claimed its memory architecture was more efficient, and capable of achieving peak bandwidth closer to 20GB per second.

If you're just looking at engine performance, our tests showed the GeForce FX to be more than 50 percent faster than the Radeon 9700. However, once we upped the ante with higher resolutions and various flavors of anti-aliasing, it seems the power of the GeForce FX's engine clock gave way to the Radeon's seemingly superior memory bandwidth. For instance, the GeForce FX scored 16108 in 3DMark2005E Pro at



Splinter Cell looks plain awesome on the GeForce FX.



**L**ast year, Nvidia's CEO Jen-Hsun Huang called the company's then-secret next-gen 3D chip "the most important contribution we've made to the graphics industry since the founding of this company." That's a strong statement, and based on Nvidia's track record, most people expected a major leap forward. But after spending some time testing Nvidia's latest offering, the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra, we're not so sure Huang's bold prediction has proven true—at least not yet.

In a nutshell: The GeForce FX 5800 Ultra is big, heavy, hot, and loud. It also costs \$150 more than its closest competitor, and doesn't offer significantly faster performance. That about covers the main points. But obviously that doesn't tell the whole story.

The GeForce FX we tested is a final version of Nvidia's new technology, but this is not a review, because the particular board we tested is not available in stores (Nvidia doesn't sell 3D cards, just the chips). The model we tested sports Nvidia's Flow FX thermal management cooling system, a setup that results in the card taking up not only your motherboard's AGP slot, but the PCI slot next to it as well. Rumor has it that Nvidia will offer scaled-down versions, without the bulky fan, that will run at slower clock speeds. Similar to ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro, the GeForce FX needs its own power supply to operate at full strength, however, where the ATI card won't even boot up if it's not plugged in, the GeForce FX will simply clock down and run at a fraction of the speed it's capable of when juiced by the power supply.



A 3DSPORT driver stops to take a picture of a result.

1024x768x32 with no anti-aliasing, compared to the Radeon's 15670. While the GeForce FX did best the Radeon in this particular test, it's important to note that a 438 point difference isn't much, especially when you consider that the Radeon is more than six months old. Once we increased the resolution and added 4x full-screen anti-aliasing, things got interesting. It was at this point that the Radeon showed its brute strength, scoring 6301 in 3DMark2000SE Pro at 1600x1200x32 with 4xFSAA, compared to the GeForce FX's score of 5663!

**Neck and neck**

In game tests, the GeForce FX and the Radeon 9700 were so close, choosing one card over the other is a toss-up. Because of its superior GPU, the GeForce FX does a better job of dealing with titles that boast complex shaders, such as Comanche 4 and Unreal Tournament 2003. UT2003 is one of the few games in which the GeForce FX bested the Radeon 9700 at 1600x1200x32 with 4xFSAA, burned out, achieving 33 frames per second compared to the Radeon's 28. The Radeon beat the GeForce FX in most of the other game tests. While this sounds bad for the GeForce FX, it's important to point out that the majority of the games in 3D GameGasp 3.0 are DirectX 7 titles incapable of utilizing much of what the GeForce FX (or the Radeon 9700, for that matter) has to offer. Former CGW Technical Editor Dave Salvator summed it up in an article on ExtremeTech.com: "Here they are [Nvidia and ATI], building these very sophisticated procedural



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. looks great, but it's no death camp.

pixel processors, capable of executing long shader programs to produce amazing "smarter" pixels, and yet, given the current crop of games available, we still wind up evaluating these cards by and large as pixel blasters."

Nvidia is aware that the GeForce isn't quite living up to expectations, but it feels much of that results from the product being delayed by several months. We can see the GeForce FX is indeed fast and powerful, but it appears not to offer enough of a performance advantage to justify its higher price, compared to the Radeon 9700.

Meanwhile, ATI isn't exactly standing still. It's scheduled to release its next product, codenamed R350, in the next few months.

And so, the battle of the 3D behemoths continues, but for now, it appears that Nvidia has lost the latest round, while ATI is no doubt eager to deliver more body blows.

**THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY**



**THE GOOD SAVAGE**

This "real-time strategy shooter" now in development from upstart developer S2 Games is something increasingly rare in this business: a non-derivative new idea. Marrying the RTS and FPS genres may at first seem unpromising, but once we saw the game, we were pleasantly surprised and excited. Read our preview in this issue.



**THE BAD MMORPG OVERKILL**

It's a familiar pattern: Game becomes popular, 8,000 other games try to emulate its success, gamers get sick of the whole thing. Such is the prospect now facing the massively overcrowded online genre, which is seeing way too many new titles, none of which are catching on in the way everyone optimistically expected. Maybe gamers just don't want to commit to multiple monthly fees. Or maybe everyone's still waiting for Star Wars Galaxies.

**How They Stack Up**


**TESTS**

	Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	16100	15070
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	5663	6301
3D GameGasp 3.0 (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	69	78
3D GameGasp 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	34	43
Comanche 4 (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	56	57
Comanche 4 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	38	56
Sirius Sans TSE (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	186	113
Sirius Sans TSE (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	44	53

TEST SYSTEM: 3.0GHz PENTIUM 4, 2GB RAM, SAMSUNG PCH444 B0RAM, INTEL D850DHV MOTHERBOARD, HYPERPIPEREADING OH, 10GB 8MB D85KSTAR 7200RPM HARD DRIVE, SOUNDBLASTER AEC62Z PLACING WINDOWS XP HOME EDITION.

3D GAMEGASPs CONSISTS OF RECORDING FRAMERATES IN THE FOLLOWING GAMES AND AVERAGING THEM: COMANCHE 4 (DIRECTX3D), DUNGION SHED (DIRECTX3D), IL2 STURMOVIK (OPENGL), NASCAR 2002 (DIRECT3D), SERIOUS SAM SE (OPENGL), AND UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 (DIRECT3D).

**THE UGLY PC GAME SALES**



A recent report from NPD Techworld showed PC game retail sales down 5 percent in 2002. In contrast to a 21 percent increase in console game sales. Which isn't that surprising, considering the latest crop of console games and the power of the platforms. But these things go in cycles, and as the current consoles begin to show their age, PC games will again outshine their console siblings.

DO YOU BELIEVE?

# Enter The Matrix

The movie sequels look awesome, but what about the game? **By Ken Brown**

**T**he world's faithful have something to believe in, like Judgment Day, or the Second Coming, when the Messiah comes and smites evil and takes us all to a floating Wotke-land of cocame clouds and filtering faeries. But for those of us sinners who don't believe, we can still have faith. The thing we believe in is that *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions* are going to break the crusty accretions in our chests and make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves after a colon.

Much of that faith comes from knowing that the creators, Andy and Larry Wachowski, are doing both sequels, and that the signs as revealed to us during the Super Bowl are that the first sequel shall indeed manifest itself into a glorious vision. And that day is coming soon: May 15, in fact. Hallelujah, brothers and sisters! But what stretches the boundaries of

our faith right now is the hope that the game won't suck. The prophesy claims the game will let you dodge bullets, run up walls, and flip through the air in slow-mo while unloading clip after clip of automatic weapons into agents and their minions. But we were deceived by the false prophet of Shiny's Messiah, and we're not about to be taken in again. A little prayer may be in order.

Still, miracles can happen. And we won't have long to wait, because next month, CGW will take you behind the scenes at Shiny for an in-depth preview with hands-on gameplay of the PC version. And all will be revealed, whether Shiny begets a withering lamb like Messiah, or a kindly lion like Seorice.

For now, all we have faith in is Trinity. For she doth truly kick ass and taketh our breath away.

**It will make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves.**



## REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	GameSpot.com	IGN.com	GameSpy	GameRankings.com
America's Army	A	A-	B-	B+	A-	*	B+
Combat Mission 2	A	A	A	A	A	A	A-
Law & Order: Dead on the Money	D	D	C-	C+	*	*	C
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	A	A-	A	B	A	B	B+
Head of Honor: Spearhead	B-	B+	D-	B+	B+	B-	B
Strike Fighters: Project 1	D	C	F	C+	*	C	C



Hit location doesn't matter, so don't bother shooting for the legs.

UPDATE

## Walker Combat

Imperial walkers you wish to fight, huh? Die you will **By Ken Brown**

**Watching one of the Empire's most feared weapons keel over and blow up will be a reward in itself.**

**R**eady to join the Rebellion and take on Imperial walkers in *Star Wars Galaxies*? Since the lumbering behemoths attacked the Rebel base in *The Empire Strikes Back*, we've all wondered what it would be like to bring down a clanking all-terrain armored transport (AT-AT). Or, better yet, imagine driving the walker, tucked into its cockpit and blasting Rebel defenses with laser cannons while crushing puny residents. Well, hang on to your blaster, Boba—you're about to get your chance.

LucasArts producer Haden Blackman says *Galaxies* will feature plenty of combat with walkers, generally in designated battlefield areas. Upon entering the battlefield you'll have to pick a faction (Empire or Alliance), which you can change when you leave the area. If you ally with the Empire and have enough faction points, you can

even purchase and control walkers. But you won't be able to sit in the cockpit and blast noobs when the game launches on April 15; John Donham and Dan Rubinfeld at Sony Online Entertainment say cockpit control won't be incorporated until after the game ships.

For now, Imperial leaders will control walkers like pets: They can be ordered to guard a place or thing, to patrol an area, to attack, or to defend. If the walker's "owner" dies, the walker's effectiveness is greatly reduced. If your walker gets killed you can buy another one, but they're not exactly cheap.

### You'll make a nice footprint

If you happen to be on the business end of one of these quints, you'd better be prepared. AT-ATs are impervious to handheld blasters. (Note to Jeff,



With enough faction points, you can build a turret and man a blaster.

throwing your blaster at it probably won't do much either.) Running up to and trying to hit one with a melee weapon will just be suicidal (the designers aren't sure if a walker will actually crush players, but it'll likely cripple them). If you're not a Jedi with a lightsaber, you'll need specialized combat skills to go walker hunting. And the commando profession is specifically geared toward fighting large-scale battles; Commandos can make and use heavy weapons like rocket launchers, and thrown weapons like grenades.

If you don't want to be a commando, you can try buying weapons from one. Or, if you have enough faction points, you can build and man blaster turrets. There's no hit location on walkers, though, so don't bother trying to blow their turrets off.

Eventually, you'll be able to buy and equip vehicles with various types of weapons. This holds some wild combat possibilities, but unfortunately, vehicular combat will have to wait for the space expansion scheduled for spring 2004.

If you survive the battle and kill opponents or destroy their facilities, you'll get more faction points with which to buy more combat assets (faction points are different from credits, which are the basic currency). Bringing down a walker will reward your team with a hefty bounty of faction points. But watching one of the Empire's most feared weapons keel over and explode should be a reward in itself.

Commandos can make their own rocket launchers, as they're better suited for jangling with the heavies.









All your efforts are aimed at outfitting these beauties for delectable deeds.

HANDS ON

## Port of Booty Call

Tropico 2 lets you be a pirate king in the Age of Sail **By Di Luo**

**W**enching, drinking, gambling, and slavery—Senator Lieberman would have an aneurysm over Tropico 2: Private Cove. Sequel to the acclaimed island-building sim that gave you the chance to be a dictator, Tropico 2 promises to make the political murders and imprisonment that characterized its predecessor look like child's play.

We've been playing its preview version of the game, and so far, we like what we see. The game's developer is now Frog City instead of Pop Top, but Frog City's experience making economic strategy games (Trade Empires and Imperialis) will come in handy, because Tropico 2 boasts an entirely new economic system.

As a Caribbean pirate king during the Age of Sail, you won't need to work for a living in Tropico 2. Tossed onboard are the cheap clips and commodities from the original. Instead, your entire economy will be based on illegitimate means.

Starting with a handful of captives, you must build up a logistics base to supply your pirates and build their ships. Once your buccaniers have their cutlasses, you can loose them to terrify the seven seas. If successful, they'll return with gold for your chests and captives to expand your fields. Though you won't have direct control of the ships in combat, you can set their aggression level and general combat tactics.

All the while, you have to keep your pirates happy by providing them amusement. Tropico 2 adds depth in this area by forcing you to balance the pirates' love for lawlessness with the desires of your captives. If you're too lax, your captives may flee or even revolt. Too



Pirates snaking wenchies for fun and profit.

strict, however, and your pirates will grow unhappy and desert.

With its irreverent attitude and the simple pleasures of pillaging and piracy, Tropico 2 will be a welcome breeze to chase away the stagnation of city-building games. Expect to start terrorizing in April.

## GET A LIFE

Do you really need that expansion pack?



### Nudo Por Sobra

Barely nudging out Fat Guy Gene Mulvaney for best movie tittin' ever,

Nudo Por Sobra is a prime slab of the underappreciated niche genre of Incontinent Italian nudo Sotanism films. Screw the subtitles—watch this with the horrible dubbing turned on and provide your own MST3K commentary.



### If China Could Kill

When not being quoted by Duke Nukem, Bruce Campbell spends his time doing

grunt-level acting for cult movies and TV shows. Don't dismiss this humorous and fascinating autobiography; his recs cover such topics as the arduous process of making Evil Dead and how you can tell if your show's been cancelled.



### Senon Coconut y Su Conjunto - El Baile Aleman

Worst idea ever or work of genius? It's a collection of songs by Knifflerk-planners of icy, robotic electronic music—reworked as campy, easy-listening Latin pop. Even more unlikely, it's catchy as hell. The GGW editors now do dance lines around the office to the best of "Trans-European Express."



### Scuba

We may not have a turtleneck or cap like Jacques Cousteau, but an increasing number of GGW staffers are taking the plunge and learning how to scuba dive. Actually, it's a great way to spend the winter: Take your classes, do your pool dives indoors, then rationellan a trip to Tahiti as a way to get your certification. Go to [www.pndi.com](http://www.pndi.com) for more info.

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**95%**

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ATARI







## FIELD TRIP

## Fast Talking and Gizmo Gawking

Our tech weenies check out the latest toys at CES By William O'Neal and Darren Gladstone

**A**s Microsoft and Sony continue waging digital war for control of your home, the once-humble PC is ascending to its rightful place as the real brains of the household. This explains why—after the parties, the schwag-fests, and the porn convention up the street—the two hottest tickets at this year's CES were for the Microsoft and Sony press conferences. At one, Bill Gates and Shaquille O'Neal went head-to-head in *Madness 3* via Xbox Live. At the other, Sony President Kunitake Ando scored points with Drew Barrymore when he showed off a high-tech watch you'd expect to see in *Charlie's Angels 2*.

But what these camera-friendly presentations didn't show are the battle lines being drawn in the living room. At

comes to mind, PC products have had little success breaking out of the home office. Microsoft's new Media Center software aims to park a PC near your sofa. The goal: One device—with one remote control—will control all your entertainment devices, plus organize your video and photo libraries. It'll even link up with other computers in your house. Alienware is already building convergence PCs that will do everything a TiVo, DVD player, and MP3 player do.

Since the television really remains the focus of the living room, this year's exhibitors showed off plenty of digital TV sets with built-in tuners. Sharp's 3D set (still on the drawing board) particularly caught our eye. Its experimental technology uses curved TV tubes with different emitters that can convert any image to 3D—no dopey



Where's the WTF? At the porn convention.

Alienware's Navigator is a PC/TV/DVD entertainment system.



One remote to rule them all.

### Microsoft wants to park a PC near your sofa that will control all your entertainment with one remote.

stake is nothing less than control of your personal entertainment, including television, movies, and music. While there have been a few furtive attempts by PC companies to establish a beachhead in your den (iGobay's abortive Destination

glasses required. For those who don't mind the dopey glasses, X3D offers the Extreme 3D System, an affordable video technology that converts any 2D video source to 3D. Versions for television and Nvidia-equipped PCs are already in the works.

Another gaming-friendly



The Zboard has overlays for different games.

peripheral we liked was the Zboard ([www.zboard.com](http://www.zboard.com)), a normal-looking keyboard with a lift-off face, which allows you to replace keys with overlays optimized for different types of games. The *Medal of Honor* keyboard actually offered space-out buttons for movement, actions, and weapon selection. The product is still being finalized and pricing hasn't been set, but we'll follow up with a review when it's ready.

All in all, it's good to see more PC products at CES...so we can look forward to more opportunities to meet the legends in adult entertainment at the convention next door. Rock on, Roccol!





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ONLINE GAMING

# TerraQuest Crashes After Launch

Online gaming greenhorn learns lessons the hard way  
By Rob Smolka



**W**ith the gold rush mentality in online gaming, dozens of developers have sprung up to exploit the burgeoning segment. But like the 49ers who raced to California to find their fortune, there were bound to be hard luck tales when some of these online startups found that gold wasn't just lying on the ground.

The latest title to suffer a harsh wake-up is TerraQuest, an interactive mystery reminiscent of EA's failed Majestic. The game was shut down early this year after failing to get enough paying players.

MindQuest Entertainment, the company behind the game, had promoted it with the promise of awarding big cash prizes. The plan called for six monthly segments, each requiring a bigger monetary investment from players (starting at \$25 and ending at \$100 for the sixth month), with a grand prize of more than \$250,000 awarded to the player who could solve the mystery first.

MindQuest will award \$25,000 to the player who solved the initial segment, and they said they would refund all other registration fees. The company says it will regroup and try to make the game more compelling by modifying its structure. It seems obvious in retrospect that MindQuest would have some lessons to learn, since none of its founding partners had any experience in game design, according to the company's site.

## NEWS FEED



### Rome: Total War

■ If blood in the game quashes like ink on the Rome: Total War website, expect the ground to run red when

Activision releases the latest edition in the Total War series. Developer Creative Assembly claims that a new Total War engine uses "groundbreaking design" to deliver "the biggest and most cinematic battles ever seen in a videogame." Rome preserves the series' basic focus, but troops have gone 3D and the scope of the battlefields is even bigger than before. "The result is truly spectacular," Creative Assembly says.

The developer says players can choose to fight as (or against) Julius Caesar, Hannibal, and Spartacus. The game will feature hundreds of troop types, including legionaries, hoplites, barbarian hordes, war elephants, gladiators, and scythe chariots. There will also be giant war machines like siege towers,

battering rams, and catapults hurling flaming missiles. For more screenshots and information, go to [www.totalwar.com/rome.htm](http://www.totalwar.com/rome.htm).

### Vietnam War Shooter

■ Vivendi Universal Games is working with the developers of Medal of Honor Allied Assault to create a historical first-person shooter set during the Vietnam War. Men of Valor: Vietnam will be developed by 2015 using the Unreal engine, according to the company.

2015 president Tom Kudrka says Men of Valor "aims to recreate the tension, risk, and excitement of the jungle battlefields of the Vietnam War" much the same way their award-winning Medal of Honor did with WWII combat. The game will reportedly feature team-based action involving search and destroy missions around Quang operations during the Tet offensive, and the counter-attack on Hue. Various multiplayer modes will support co-op play or give you the option to play as NVA or Viet Cong guerrillas, as well as U.S. forces.

The game is slated for release in 2004 on PC and Xbox, and it will be published by Sierra Entertainment.

## 5. 10. 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, April, 1988

Five years ago we were on the cusp of a gaming revolution, courtesy of

the explosion of 3D technology. Our "3D Exposed!" cover story—all 12 pages of it—detailed every bit of the new technology and looked forward to then-upcoming 3D cards sporting a mind-boggling OMB of RAM. We slapped a Dalkotone image on the cover, with no inkling of the fact that its 3D would actually stand for "Doody Doody Doody."



Ten Years Ago, April, 1993

Talk about a game having legs. Exactly five years after the Dungeons

Master review first appeared in CGW, Scorpia was still writing about it in her monthly column. No wonder this groundbreaking RPG was one of the earliest inductees to our Hall of Fame. But while Scorpia was happy dropping tidbit hints, the magazine as a whole felt more expansive, publishing a guide to Gary Gygis's Pacific War that sprawled an amazing 31 pages.



Fifteen Years Ago, April, 1995

You guessed it! We wrote a glowing Dungeons Master review—so

glowing that the last paragraph actually ended the review three successive times: "This game is fantastic! It is a welcome addition to any fantasy player's library. Those who want a good fantasy/RPG with excellent graphics will love this one." Not too slick, but at least it didn't go on for another 3D pages.

# The Elder Scrolls III

# BLOODMOON

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Xbox Evolved, Game of the Year  
IGN, Best Xbox RPG Game

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The Stryker will be rolling into America's Army shortly after the real cars roll into Baghdad.

# War Games

We spend a day at Fort Lewis playing with the Army's newest toys By Bryan Stratton

**W**e know combat games make up a huge portion of the consumer videogames market, but you might be surprised by the impact videogames have had on the Army.

Take the Shadow 200 Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAUV). This surveillance craft, organic to the Army's new Stryker recon brigade, is a small, pilot-less craft controlled by a two-man ground crew; one operator flies the Shadow, and the other controls a camera mounted on the craft, which provides real-time intelligence to the grants on the ground. According to the Army's Lt. Col. George Juntiff, who is involved with the ongoing development of the America's Army game, the controls are no more complex than a joystick and throttle control—in fact, they're probably simpler than some of the more advanced flight sims out there.

The Army has come to rely more and more heavily on computer-game tech as a means of training its troops on increasingly complex weapons systems. "Trucks and vehicles can go

twice as far now as they could in the World War II and Korean War days," says Juntiff. The ranges of the latest weapons systems are measured in miles, not hundreds of feet. "To fully deploy them [in order to test them], we'd need a huge expanse of land, and who's going to give us that land? Now, we can do it all virtually and get the same experience."

For example, take the Army's new Javelin anti-tank rocket launcher, a successor to the shoulder-fired Stinger missile of the '80s. The Stinger simulator required a huge climate-controlled dome surrounding a bulky, non-portable computer. By contrast, the Javelin simulator is nothing more than a 12-by-20-foot room containing a modified Javelin that connects to a PC running Windows 98. An instructor feeds scenarios from the PC to the Javelin trainee, who sees, locks on,



The heart of the vehicle is a mapping system that fuses friendly and hostile forces via GPS.

The Shadow 200 flies over the battlefield and feeds real-time intelligence to the Stryker brigade.



The Army uses PC game technology to create military simulations, at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

and fires at targets seen through his sight. It's essentially a souped-up version of Duck Hunt with the screen built into the Javelin's sight. All future military hardware will likely include a built-in training mode, so a soldier can push a button and practice using the actual weapon via a computer simulation—at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

Today's military simulators also have the advantage of being intuitive to a generation of gamers. Lt. Col. Justiniff, who admits to being a huge fan of SSII's Computer Ambush on the Apple II, explains, "My generation was growing up with the Atari and the Apple II. Now, we're at the senior ranks and the younger kids are the ones playing the Game Boys and the really high-speed computer games. And they're saying, 'Why not use these for training? This is a wild medium for training.'

"[In early Army simulators], you were looking at green blobs and pixelated forms; it wasn't entertaining, but it wasn't designed to be entertaining. It was designed for training. But if you have an entertaining thing that's also accomplishing the training requirement of the soldier, well, that's a marriage made in heaven. You'll have a guy out there who's happy to practice, because he's being entertained at the same time he's being trained."



Long-haired frecks have infiltrated the Army!



The Javelin simulator uses a P4 Processor Windows 98.



The Stryker's living room.

## FRESH RECRUITS TO AMERICA'S ARMY

During our visit to Fort Lewis, we kicked the tires of various vehicles in a Cavalry unit of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division—some of which will appear in the next version of America's Army, slated for release this summer. Here's a look at some of what you can expect:



**STRYKER:** This new eight-wheeled recon vehicle looks like something out of Command & Conquer. Fast and rugged, it can make its way through

just about any terrain, and can even climb hills. Outside, it's covered in thick armor plating and has a roof-mounted weapon system (either a .50 caliber machinegun or a Mark 19 grenade launcher). Inside, it's loaded with more gadgets than a Best Buy. The heart of the vehicle is a battle command system that displays maps of friendly and hostile unit positions. Stryker teams update the map via GPS and feed the information into a network that's shared with nearby friendly forces. The vehicle can seal itself off and filter its occupants' air supply if it senses radiation, chemical, or biological agents. Each Stryker team is equipped with small arms, plus an M-240 heavy machine gun and a Javelin rocket launcher.

**JAVELIN:** These shoulder-fired weapons allow Strykers to hold their own against more heavily armored enemies. They are "fire-and-forget" weapons: Once the Javelin has locked on and fired, the operator's job is done. With a 98 percent kill rate and a 35-foot tank-killing blast radius, second shots are overkill. Javelins can be used

against ground and air targets, and are equipped with night-sight technology. The Javelin's targeting system can distinguish a one-degree difference in a target's surface temperature.

**SPECIAL FORCES:** America's Army players who successfully complete several missions will get the option to enter Special Forces school. Special Forces soldiers will have new career choices, including pumped-up versions of infantry, medics, engineers, heavy weapons specialists, and language specialists. Special Forces soldiers won't be limited to the assigned weapons; they'll be able to customize their M-4s with M-203s and night vision scopes. This is part of a larger effort to include an inventory system in the game, so players will be able to take equipment from enemy corpses and use it to improve their own weapons.

**DRONES:** The development team is working on incorporating unmanned aircraft like the Shadow 200. You won't be able to control the Shadow, but it will circle the battlefield and feed intelligence to the Stryker's command system. Larger battlefield maps are also in the works, so that devastating weapons, like the Javelin and mortars, can be used at long ranges without throwing off the balance of the game.



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# DISCOVERING GAMES

#14 *Going it*  
**ALONE**




by Scott McCloud

Here in 2003, the idea of a lone game developer creating whole games from scratch may seem absurdly impractical.



But while the battle for shelf space inspires an ever-escalating demand for big-budget dazzle --



-- and discourages the financially risky path of experimentation --

Check the credits for a game like *Battlefield 1942* and you'll see over 150 names in categories ranging from "concept" to "level design" to "animation" to "special effects."

PRODUCTION: John Pearson


PROGRAMMING

Mats Dal  
Cemil in Giris  
John in Giris  
Walter YAM He  
Ma, Ulas He  
Tobias Karlsson  
Michael Schmitz  
Thomas Sjoelundberg  
Torbjorn Sjoelundberg  
James A. ...

LEARN ART

-- a few mavericks in the realm of online games have decided to go it alone.

Ferry Halm of California is one such maverick.



ORIGINAL

Halm's games, designed in *Flash* and aimed at children, are, at first glance, fairly simple creations.



But because their gameplay springs from a single imagination,\* there is an unmistakable coherence of vision to each one --



-- and a poignancy and beauty of a sort rarely seen in any medium.

And because Halm's instincts for what makes addictive gameplay don't have to be filtered through corporate committees, his games can be addictive indeed.



In a mere three years since immigrating to the U.S. from Indonesia, Halm has created more than 36 new games using off-the-shelf tools like *Flash*. Each game has its own personality, but they all reflect the childlike joy of invention that makes Halm's work unique.



"If you're developing by yourself, you don't have to follow anyone's orders," says Halm. "I'm not a follower."

It'll be interesting to see if any of the thousands of kids who play his games every day and gain access to those same tools as they get older --

-- will follow his lead.



\*Halm creates all of the games himself, though he often seeks outside sources for the music. His games are available at [www.original.com](http://www.original.com)



UNPLUGGED

# Civilization: The Boardgame

Eagle Games pulls off a decent conversion of Sid Meier's classic **By David Wilson**

**I**t's not for everyone, but Sid Meier's *Civilization: The Boardgame* will interest some PC players. Especially if you're into boardgames, or you've always wanted to play Civ multiplayer and you got tired downloading the latest patch of *Play the World*.

The \$60 boardgame includes a treasure trove of little plastic pieces: men, ships, artillery, aircraft—nearly 800 miniatures in all. There are multiple types of cards representing the cities, the technologies, and the wonders. It also includes a giant game board—46x36 inches—that is so big that it comes in three pieces. The sections often get separated, requiring frequent repositioning unless you tape them together.

But the game authentically adapts the PC game, and the flow feels right. The initial phase of the game centers on exploration for eight different resources (oil, wine, rare metals, horses,

iron, spices, coal, and gems). Players have to consider such matters as Happiness in their cities using some of the same variables found in the PC game. Advancements in technology also play a big role.

Unfortunately, combat has much more of a "rock, scissors, paper" feel than the PC game. When two forces meet, only one piece from each force can fight. If the players have more than one type of force (infantry, cavalry, or artillery) then each player chooses a piece to fight with. The choices determine one's advantage or disadvantage in the form of a die roll

**Combat has much more of a "rock, scissors, paper" feel than the PC game.**

modifier, a modifier that often proves decisive.

Overall, the game plays like a cross between Avalon Hill's *History of the World* and Rio Grande's *Puerto Rico*. But fans of the PC game will not be disappointed. And if this game interests you, check out Eagle Games' upcoming conversion of *Age of Mythology*, scheduled for this spring.



PHOTOGRAPH BY HAYDEN HIGGINS



RECON

## New Wargame From SSG

Matrix Games releases Keating and Trout's *Korsun Pocket* **By Bruce Garyk**

**S**trategic Studies Group isn't a big-name developer like Blizzard, and their games aren't as flashy, but SSG's games shine where it counts the most: gameplay. In fact, many people consider SSG's *Warlords Battlecry II* a better all-around game than *WarCraft IV* when you take out the gorgeous cinematics. Part of the reason for their success is a relentless focus on A.I., which is a specialty of legendary designers Roger Keating and Ian Trout.

Keating and Trout are probably better known among wargamers for their landmark *Command & Conquer* titles. It's been a while since the two released a new wargame, but by the time you read this, their new *Korsun Pocket* will be available

from Matrix Games. The name refers to the desperate German attempt to break out of a Russian encirclement on the Eastern Front in early 1944.

As a bonus, *Korsun Pocket* will include an updated version of SSG's *The Ardennes Offensive* (which inaugurated the system used in *Korsun Pocket*). SSG previously released an updated, free version of *The Ardennes Offensive* on the Internet (sans music and sound), but according to Matrix Games' director of operations David Heath, this one is a "whole new ballgame."

You can still get the free version of *The Ardennes Offensive* at [www.ssgus.com/ardennes-download.htm](http://www.ssgus.com/ardennes-download.htm). For more information about *Korsun Pocket*, see [www.matrixgames.com](http://www.matrixgames.com).

**If you liked *Warlords Battlecry II*, then check out this game.**

## THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



**Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided** *(Xbox360)* 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.



**Counter-Strike: Condition Zero** *(Xbox360)* 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.



**Delta Force: Black Hawk Down** *(Xbox360)* Engage in urban Close Quarters 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 Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield** *(PlayStation 3)* Command an elite, multinational squad of special operatives against a hidden terrorist foe. Race against time to stop terror and unravel a mystery. Lead your team in a desperate effort to battle a madman and foil his doomsday plot.



**Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb** *(Xbox360)* Join Indy as he travels to 1935 China to prevent a powerful artifact from falling into evil hands. You'll leap, punch, climb, and swim, in a race against evil Nazis and the Asian underworld to possess the mysterious Heart of the Dragon.

## THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



**Duke 2: The Awakening** *(Xbox360)* The long awaited follow-up to the groundbreaking single player opus Unreal. This sequel has the same absorbing story-driven gameplay, ferocious enemies, and nail-biting tension that made the original title the top choice for first-person action fans worldwide.



**Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell** *(Xbox360)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWII.



**Master of Orion 3** *(Xbox360)* Play one of 16 unique star-faring races or create your own custom race, and explore rich solar systems, complete with jump lanes, worm holes and hostile alien races. Engage in Colonial Space Battles that feature beautiful, tactical real-time combat resolution.



**Command & Conquer: Generals** *(Xbox360)* The U.S. and China are fighting against a rogue terrorist-like state, the Global Liberation Army. The game supports well-developed air-to-air combat, a new feature for a C&C game, and new units and tactics that build on all the fun from past C&C games.



**Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome** *(Xbox360)* Arm Up to six new maps to fight on, including Operation Husky (Sicily) and the battles for Anzio and Monte Cassino. This multiplayer-focused expansion pack gives you more of everything—maps, vehicles, weapons, and more fighting forces.

All available now at the  
Computer & Video Games store at

**amazon.com.**

Get thousands of game titles at [amazon.com/videogames](http://amazon.com/videogames)

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SURVEY

# CGW Top 20

It's Blizzard's world—we just live in it



Tons of gamers think Warcraft III is just perfect.



GTA3 rules, but now we're hungry for Vice City.



Lord of Destruction: quality add-on, dude.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos (Blizzard/Activision)	★★★★★
2	Grand Theft Auto III (Take 2)	★★★★★
3	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (Blizzard/Activision)	★★★★★
4	Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (LucasArts)	★★★★★
5	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
6	Unreal Tournament 2003 (Infogrames)	★★★★★
7	Battlefield 1942 (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
8	Neverwinter Nights (Infogrames)	★★★★★
9	The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind (Bethesda)	★★★★★
10	Hillman 2 (Eidos)	★★★★★
11	SimCity 4 (Electronic Arts/Maxis)	★★★★★
12	TIE—Age of Mythology (Microsoft)	★★★★★
12	TIE—No One Lives Forever 2 (Gameloft)	★★★★★
14	Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal (Oxford/Activision)	★★★★★
15	Sid Meier's Civilization III (Infogrames)	★★★★★
16	Matia (Take 2)	★★★★★
17	RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 (Infogrames)	★★★★★
18	TIE—Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)	★★★★★
18	TIE—The Sims Online (Electronic Arts/Maxis)	★★★★★
20	Allens Versus Predator 2 (Gearbox)	★★★★★

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. To vote, visit our website at [www.computergaming.com](http://www.computergaming.com).

## GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES



**Blow Online:**  
Age of Simons  
(Star Wars: The Clone Wars)

Regular Price: \$29.99  
Sale Price: **\$24.99**

The game's most aggressive expansion pack to date. Get ready for a new level of customization and personalization. Lead the life you were born to live!

- Features:**
- Latest edition of the popular massively multiplayer online fantasy rpg
  - Explore a new land for adventure and settlement, which adds over 40,000 houses to the game
  - New custom house design tool lets you piece custom features wherever you like.



**Freelancer**  
(Microsoft)

Regular Price: \$59.99  
Sale Price: **\$44.99**

Adventure, intrigue, and opportunity in an insanely epic and fascinating science-fiction universe.

- Features:**
- Open-ended universe open for exploration
  - Game advances based on decisions players make
  - Players' reputations constantly evolve as they choose their missions, make allies or enemies and succeed or fail.
  - Choice of distinctive styles of play for different gameplay experiences.



**Unreal 2: The Awakening**  
(Infogrames)

Regular Price: \$49.99  
Sale Price: **\$44.99**

New technology delivers intense life-or-death action in the most breathtaking scenery and environments ever displayed in a computer game.

- Features:**
- Intense first-person shooter action combined with the magic of exploration and RPG-style character interaction
  - Unique tactical challenges in each mission
  - Tools for amateur level designers and mod makers

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

**amazon.com.**

# PIPELINE

## Ship dates and slip dates for games in the channel **By Di Luo**

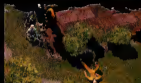
There's a world where games actually ship on time, where games never need patching and PCs never crash. Where giddy insider models bring you friends and rub your feet when your gaming is done. But that ain't the world we live in, dude.



**1 KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC:** BioWare is developing this RPG and action hybrid for both the PC and Xbox. As a Jedi in the Old Republic 4,000 years before the movies, your party of three is fighting against thousands of Siths in a galactic war. Originally scheduled for a Q1 release from LucasArts, it's been delayed significantly. Lucas hasn't explained the situation, but according to their website, MOTOX won't hit the shelves till fall of 2003 for PC, and June for the Xbox.



**2 COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO:** This single-player version of the popular multiplayer Half-Life mod has had a journey more laborious than Ulysses. It's changed developers several times before settling down with Ritual Entertainment. We visited them recently and were impressed by what we saw. Despite having to redo most of the game, they seem on target and you should see the game by May. See the gameplay trailer on this month's demo disc and check out our full preview coming next month.



**3 SILENT STORM:** For years, publishers have belted at any game unlucky enough to earn the label "turn-based." Sequels of great games like X-Com and Jagged Alliance were often cancelled because they were considered too difficult or obscure to sell. Thankfully, the Europeans are still "bechereris" enough to make these games. Russian developer Nival Interactive is currently working on Silent Storm, a turn-based 3D strategy game that takes place during an alternate history World War II. It's planned for release from JoWood in Q4 2003. We'll give you more details on the game in a full preview coming soon.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
ISO 1 A.D. The New World	EA	Q2 2003
All American: The 52nd Airborne	Stratcom	Q2 2003
Avatar: Moby's Dr.	Carfax 6	Q2 2004
Battlehammer Dimensions	Dramaticolor	Q3 2003
Black Moon Chronicles: Winds of War	Cryx Networks	Unknown
Blitzkrieg	CDV	Q2 2003
Breed	CDV	Q2 2003
Bubb Robb's Whistle Tip Rally	U2'Sis	Nov-2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Civil War: My Betwixt the States	Warrior Boys	Unknown
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q2 2003
Cossacks: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Q3 2003
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Q2 2003
Criminals Kings	Strategic First	Q1 2003
Deadlands	Redfired	Q3 2003
Demolition	Atari	Q3 2003
Death Forces: Black Hawk Down	NovLogic	Q1 2003
Dies Is: The Invisible War	Eidos	Q2 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q2 2003
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q3 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Empire: Dawn of the New World	Activision	When it's done
Enter the Matrix	Infogrames	5/15/03
Escape From Alcatraz	HP	Q1 2003
Ethelreds 2	Strategy First	Q2 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
FreeRacer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Fuk Throttle 2	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Genetic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Gladi Madder	Empire	Q1 2003
Gotik II	Jeffrey	Q1 2003
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Q2 2003
Harsh	Arath Tribe	Q2 2004
Hein	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubisoft	Q1 2003
Heaven and Hell	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Compromised 2	000 Games	Q2 2003
HomeWorld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Imperator: Galactic III	CDV	Q2 2003
Indian Jones and The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Q2 2003
Lineage II	NCsoft	Q3 2003
Llanterns	Intelligence	Q2 2003
Loch-On	Ubisoft	Q1 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Max Payne II	000 Games	Unknown
Medal of Honor 2	EA	Q1 2004
Metal Gear Solid 2	Sony	Q1 2003
Menemaster Rights: Shadows of Deception	Infogrames	Q6 2003
Miner	Overcatcher	Q2 2003
PlanetSide	Sony	Q1 2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Omni 4	Acclaim	After 000M III
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Ubisoft	Q2 2003
Rolling Thunder	Strategy First	Q2 2003
Rose: Total War	Activision	Q4 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Strange	James	Q2 2003
StratOps II	Ubisoft	Q3 2003
Streakline	Ubisoft	Q1 2003
Silent Storm	JoWood	Q4 2003
Sovereign	Sony	Unknown
Starz Superman Genesis	Meru Crisman	Q1 2003
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ubisoft	Q2 2003
Star Wars: Galactic	LucasArts	04/15/03
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Stickers: Blivian Lost	ESC	Q4 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Unknown
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
The Menks	Lionhead	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Moler	Q2 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q3 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q2 2003
Trois Assassination 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tribes Game	Sierra	Unknown
Tres 2.0	Highlight	Q2 2003
Trooper 2	000 Games	Q2 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Vallures	CDV	Q4 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Warlands IV	Ubisoft	Q2 2003
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	Q3 2003
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubisoft	Q4 2003



**DETAIL #66212**

ITEM: Windshield debris

TAKEN FROM: #12 ALLTEL windshield  
at North Carolina Speedway

NOTES: Simulate native cicada  
(aka *Tibicen chitronemea*) for  
realistic Rockingham visibility



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RED FRACTION II

# THE PLIGHT OF



EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS

# THE RED FACTION®



## ■ SOPOT'S LAST STAND

Commonwealth soldiers attempt to fend off Red Faction rebels in a last ditch effort to save Dictator Sopot from certain demise. From the beginning, the Red Faction's heavy artillery was underestimated by the Commonwealth Army, who are now paying the price.



RED FACTION II

# COMMONWEALTH COUP

The Red Faction is using their entire arsenal in the latest attempt to



Aesir Fighter 2.0

## FROM THE AIR

The Red Faction customized Aesir is a maneuverable air assault vehicle equipped with optical zoom which allows for precise hits on enemy targets.



Drop Point 5:37am  
Troops assemble at the Sopot Harbor.

# SOPOT CITY

## CIVILIAN UPRISING

After Sopot's harsh withdrawal from the main city, several Red Faction rebels joined Harbor Island and announced the symbolic strike of the dictator.



Blood and Gore  
Violence

For more up-to-the-minute coverage of the conflict, go to [www.redfaction2.com](http://www.redfaction2.com)



# D'ETAT

overthrow the Dictator Sopot.



**Public Information Building 8:05am**  
Commonwealth Elite Guards attempt to fend off the attacking Faction soldiers.



**NGL-4 Nanotech Grenade Launcher**

**Little Armored Personal Combat System**

**Demolition Charges**

## THE WEAPONRY

These are only a few of the many weapons found in pockets of the Red Faction arms.



### CMRD-32 MAGNETIC RAIL DRIVER

Five metal slugs that go through a rail that says it's not without being deadly. The only thing you'd expect this to be used for is heavy weapons.



### N.I.C.W. - NANOTECH INDIVIDUAL COMBAT WEAPON

One of the most advanced combat weapons in the game, as well as handling grenades.

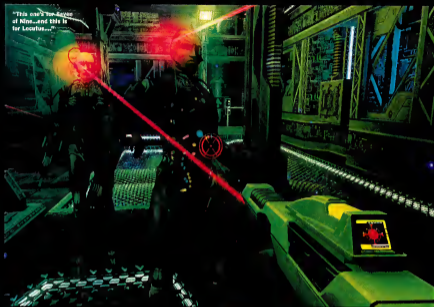


### CAR-72 MILITARY ASSAULT RIFLE

A fully automatic, high-powered rifle in a light weight compact form.



**The Slums 6:22am**  
Rebel soldiers continue to fight despite rumors of growing animosity between Faction leaders.



# STAR TREK: ELI

Love and guns in the *Star Trek* universe **By George Jones**



Just a nice stroll around the ship.



Crack eat the elite hardware.

**T**he six-year run of *Star Trek: Voyager* may be over, but the *Elite Force* unit is far from done with work. Trumpling the original *Star*

*Trek: Elite Force*, the sequel picks up where the show left off. And, *Trek* or not, there's an epic story in the making that'll make you want to sign on for the new mission.

The setup is this: After destroying a Borg sphere—an event that occurs at the end of the *Star Trek: Voyager* television series and serves as your first mission in *Elite Force II*—your crew gets unwillingly reassigned to desk jobs by an annoying Star Fleet bureaucrat. Thankfully, Captain Picard (voiced by Patrick Stewart) intervenes, reassembles your crew, and whisks you off on a surprisingly atypical series of missions that involve *Alien*-style creatures and two races new to the *Star Trek* universe: the Attrexians and the Idryll.

The Attrexians are a gnomish society centered on mining and construction. The Idryll, an allish-looking race long oppressed by the Attrexians, are much more sophisticated—and mystical. The conflict between these two races, as well as the origin and nature of the alien menace, is central to the game's main story line.

#### PLAY LONG AND PROSPER

*Elite Force II*'s plot is massive (at least three times as big as the original, which should please fans unhappy with

## *Elite Force II*'s plot is massive—at least three times as big as the original.

the first game's short length) and spans more than 10 different locales, which range from trippy bio-sci-fi factories to erdic Roman outposts. This large number of worlds and settings promises to keep gamers interested, especially given the amount of play variance *Ritual* and *Activision* are striving to achieve.

The bigger a game gets, however, the more important play balancing becomes. Somewhere between alpha and beta stages right now, *Ritual* is trying to strike that balance between action, door hacking, and puzzle solving. In the alpha build we saw, producer Doug Pearson explained that the designers are devoting themselves to ensuring that players don't get lost or bombarded with momentum-killing puzzles. "Something we have to admit was everywhere in the early version was played." Our gut feeling says that by the time it's released, *Activision* and *Ritual* will have figured out the proper balance and removed many of the door-oriented mental challenges.

*Elite Force II*'s strong point is that it's geared to keep players off balance and moving forward. *Ritual* is trying to keep them consistently engaged in the plot and story through a variety of techniques: timed levels, minigames, conversations with long-term consequences, entertaining side

conversations, and a slew of cool new weapons, including the mystical staff and the radiation gun, which sports a secondary fire that resembles a nuclear blast.

#### FELL IN LOVE WITH A TREKKE

But what good is a *Star Trek* adventure without a little onboard romance? Early in *Elite Force II*, you meet an engineer named Katarina Scott on a derelict ship. She's the granddaughter of Scotty, the *Enterprise*'s engineer from the original television series, and she explains to players that she was able to keep a portion of the crew alive in the ship's transporter amidst failing life-support systems by utilizing a technique that her thick-browed grandfather actually developed on the original series.

Aside from sounding cool, this homey makes it crystal clear that *Activision* and *Ritual* truly get *Star Trek*. And it's not just the history; they also understand the series' continuity, science fiction, sense of adventure, and embrace of human behavior and emotion. As the story develops, you'll even find yourself caught in a bit of a love triangle where your choices will affect the game's ending. And so, we're not saying who's involved. You'll just have to wait until *Star Trek: Elite Force II* pulls out of warp this May.

# TE FORCE II

#### GAME STATS

PLATFORM: ACTIVISION

RELEASE: RETAIL

ERIC FERGUSON/SOFTWARE

RELEASE: MAY 2003



Cut a swath through the grass and through these guys.



The cabin is still some action...



# SAVAGE

Hey, you got your RTS in my FPS! **By Darren Gladstone**



## It requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win.

**C**ontrol freaks, action junkies, there's a game for both of you. *Savage* delivers a first-person shooter beef down and a real-time strategy campaign at the same time—it all depends on how you want to play.

S2 Games is billing this multiplayer online game as a real-time strategy shooter. What the hell does that mean? It means you've got a choice up front beyond just picking sides. Up to 64 people can join a match to gun for each other, earn gold and experience, and blow away enemies, while two commanders direct grunts in the field.

Imagine the multiplayer action of *Battlefield 1942* (and a bit of *EverQuest*) mixed with a real-time strategy game. That's this relatively unknown title's biggest drawing point. From the get-go, you either control the action in a typical RTS god's-eye-view fashion or carry out orders in first-person mode. Those with a good memory will recall seeing a similar blending of genres in Microsoft's space game, *Alliance*. But this new slant puts you firmly on the ground and requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win. If a commander is pleased, he can allot extra money to a player; and when a player scores a kill, some gold goes to his commander.

### STRATEGIZE OR TERRORIZE

When playing *Savage* as a real-time strategy game, you control the resource management and technological development of your tribe. In typical RTS fashion, you earn money by harvesting and end resources as you develop your base with factories and watchtowers. There are workers to direct, ancient technologies to research, and troops to command by setting waypoints on the map and telling your troops (both players and NPC worker drones) where to work or focus an attack.

In first-person mode, you're the grunt

getting your hands dirty—kill this bad guy, attack that structure, gather these resources. The guy in charge of tribe development better be good at running the show. His successful planning means more technologies with which to arm yourself and more money to buy your combat supplies. And if you're good, follow orders, and stay alive long enough, you'll earn experience. Kill random enemies or enemies populating the maps, and you'll be able to move efficiently cut through the competition and earn gold.

### MAN OR BEAST

*Savage* is based in a far-flung fantasy world. Mankind has been blown back to the Stone Age and is rediscovering old technologies. Pick your side: human or beast. The human tribes strip the land of natural resources for their technology, which is based on magnetism, electricity, and chemical research. They have weapons ranging from axes and crossbows to rocket launchers and demolition packs. The beasts, on the other hand, rely on magic and the elements to fight the good fight.

Jesse Hayes, lead designer and COO at S2 Games, promises that network code will be optimized to support 64-player matches. In our office tests, we couldn't get the game to crash once. And though at the moment there is no plan for a single-player campaign or bots to be able to join your matches, Hayes assures us that the game is very customizable: "With a couple changes to the config file, you can create a whole new experience." Hayes used some conventional arms and military skins to create his own wergame. While *Savage* will be locked down at first, there are plans to open up the engine for the mods. They are working on a campaign creator, but Hayes says, "It's with the support of the modding community that we'll be a success." With this unique approach, it could be a hit when it ships in May.



**GAME STATS**  
 EDITION: FRAMES  
 RECENT: 52 GAMES  
 TIME: REAL-TIME STRATEGY  
 SHOOTER  
 RELEASE: MAY 2003



This time around, you get to fly the ME-262.



Fly over the new mountains multiplayer map.

You can now manage multiple stations in bombers.



# IL-2 STURMOVIK FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Go plane crazy in this action-packed sim **By Denny Atkins**



It's a little bit of a process, but it's a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process.

Evelyn Cooney, Co-Editor  
Karl Tamm, Pilot Actor

**A** couple of years ago, only the most hardcore aviation buffs knew what an Il-2 Sturmovik even was. Ubi Soft's eponymous sim changed all that. The Russian-developed sleeper hit took the market by blitzkrieg—storm with its excellent flight models, spectacular graphics, and the inclusion of nearly 60 aircraft. But even with all the bells and whistles, Il-2 wasn't the perfect sim. *Forgotten Battles* looks to remedy that by taking the number of aircraft to a whopping 113 and adding a dynamic campaign, multistation flyable bombers, new combat theaters, and a host of other improvements.

#### STURMOVIK UND DRANG

Originally planned as an add-on for the original game, *Forgotten Battles* is now being released as a standalone product, containing all the original's features and a number of enhancements. With improvements extending far beyond the new campaign, you won't feel ripped off.

One of the most significant changes is one of the least publicized: improved AI. In Il-2, you could watch "air combat on the inside," with computer-controlled pilots in crippled planes flying back into combat or circling fuel-laden enemy airfields to their doom. Behavior is

much more realistic now, with crippled aircraft burning for hours, and healthy pilots even more skilled in their attacks.

*Forgotten Battles* includes a whole new set of scripted missions, as well as the original game's superb mission editor. Once you've played through those, dynamic campaigns await. Yes, plural campaigns. You'll find the expected Russian campaign, as well as the sinister Luftwaffe option. But you probably weren't expecting the chance to relive a Hungarian fighter ace's career or to defend Finland against Soviet (and later, Nazi) aggression in a Brewster B-239 Buffalo.

Campaign missions are randomly generated based on the current war front. Your influence on the war is handled fairly realistically. You won't change the outcome, but successes or failures will affect supply lines, available aircraft, and other factors, appropriately accelerating victory or defeat.

Micromanagement fans will be giddy about the detailed airplane controls available: precise trim, propeller pitch control, mixture setting, manual supercharger control, and more—all individually adjustable for each engine. Almost all of these can be left on auto, thankfully, for less intense players.

#### COMBAT ROCK

Where the original featured tons of aircraft never seen in a flight sim



It's a little bit of a process, but it's a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process.



It's a little bit of a process, but it's a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process. This is a little bit of a process.

before, *Forgotten Battles* features an amazing 119 aircraft, of which at least 80 will be flyable. There's plenty of variety with American I/P-40s, P-47s, and A1 P-510s, Nazi technology (He-111), and nerve-wrecking Russian bombing runs (TB-3). The most interesting addition, though, is multicrewed bombers. Whatever your choice, chances are good you'll need to test the new engine fire extinguishers.

Almost no aspect of the sim has gone untouched. Graphics are spruced up, with more detailed aircraft textures, spectacular new paint-shaded water, and updated aircraft models. Five new gameplay maps include winter and summer versions of Hungary and Finland. A mountainous map for online combat makes for some breathtaking dogfights up and down the cliffs. The already impressive flight models have been tweaked; planes are now much harder to fly when damaged. Barrage balloons surround some cities, searchlights scan the night sky, and flak will home in if a light locks on your plane.

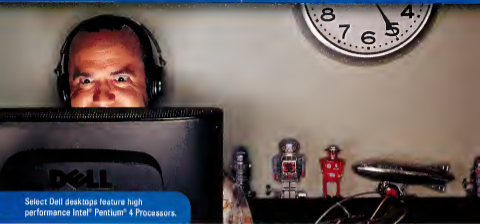
Despite its historical accuracy and slavish attention to detail, *Forgotten Battles* should be accessible even to first-time sim pilots thanks to the Quick Combat mode that lets you start in the air, point the plane at the bad guy, and start shooting. Hopefully, combat will start before the snow melts in Moscow.

#### GAME STATS

PRICE: USD \$49  
 DEVELOPER: UBISOFT  
 GENRE: WW II FLIGHT  
 SIMULATOR  
 RELEASED: 02/2009

# THE TTILES

Great power. Blazing speed.  
You'll have 3D villains surrendering in no time.



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# Command & Conquer

# GENEALOGY



# RAALS

Vintage  
C&C—for  
better and  
worse

BY DI LUO







An American particle beam slices through a Chinese factory like a knife through butter.

gongs at the Chinese bases—perhaps to call the troops in for a lunch of chop suey? The voice acting is suitably fresh-off-the-beat accents that would have made Fu Manchu cringe.

With the only “normal”-sounding faction being the gung-ho Americans, *Generals* gives one the distinct feeling of watching a “Big American Kicks Ass” movie from the Reagan era. Though

micromanaged affairs that quickly devolve into chaotic melees between mobs. There are no formations, no easy way to select particular unit types from a group, and little unit A.I. Unless attacked within their own weapon range, they won't defend themselves. Would an A.I. that shoots back be too much to ask for? The poor A.I. is evident in skirmishes against the computer as well. Even at the

## THE END RESULT IS A GAME THAT PLAYS OLDER THAN IT LOOKS.

none of these factors are truly offensive, they are dated and unfortunate.

The interface also feels antiquated. Rather than using right-clicks to move troops and left-click to select them, *Generals* continues to use the left-click interface created for *Dune II*. You use the same button to select and order troops, and the right button has been relegated to simply unselecting troops. It's clunky and difficult to get used to, since every other RTS uses the right-click interface, and the game doesn't allow you to remap anything.

Other anachronisms are a problem. You can't set rally points on the minimap, and issuing guard and attack move orders on the minimap yields different results than on the main screen. Despite being 3D, *Generals* doesn't take advantage of the technology much. Rotating the camera is done with the number pad, an awkward procedure for right-handed folks. You can get close and enjoy the unit details, but even at the highest zoom level, you'll barely see more than a couple dozen units at once.

Battles are vintage C&C-overly

hardest level, it isn't very good. With a strong defensive setup, you can take a nap while the game runs, without any ill effect. The standard computer tactic is to build small forces and launch incessant raids incapable of doing real damage.

**Time to demote this general**  
*Generals* ultimately looks better than it plays. Despite its faults, there'll no doubt be plenty of C&C diahards who won't mind the primitive control scheme and gameplay. With dozens of maps and a full-featured scenario editor, these fans will find endless hours of enjoyment in the multiplayer experience that's been the hallmark of the series. For everybody else, there's nothing new to see here and no reason to sit through the anachronisms.

### VERDICT ★★★★★

It's vintage C&C with some updated graphics.



## CASE OF THE MISSING SCENARIO

Recently, a press release from EA announced that *Generals* had gone gold and that “players can annihilate the opposition in the 22-mission single-player campaign.” If you actually play the game, you'll find only 21 missions. Have the EA folks forgotten how to count?

Turns out it was a case of conscience rather than bad arithmetic. Originally, *Generals* had seven missions each for the American and Chinese campaigns, and eight for the GLA. When the gold was submitted to the European publishers however, one of the GLA missions was deemed inappropriate and nixed.

The missing mission was a tedious and tasteless affair involving the murder of civilians. With a fleet of anthrax trucks, your goal was to kill 300 civilian units in a Chinese-occupied city.

The removal was a small victory for good taste, but does it really matter when your ultimate goal as the GLA is to spread anthrax on a global scale?



# YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A PIRANHA TIGERS HAVE YOU



**Bambito:** It looks a little ridiculous, but pound for pound, the best aquatic fighter is definitely the Sharkantis...

That's right. Take a shark and breed it with a praying mantis.

Trust me. This thing will knock you out and bite your ear off. 😊



**Jack B. Quick:** Shark Shark Shark.

If I hear another shark combo, I'll puke. When it comes to fighting in the water, the word "utritition" comes to mind. It's a numbers game.

I like to load up on piranhas and put them with a fast predatory feline. When you got an army of Piranha Tigers, you'll be King Neptano faster than you can say "Mermaid Sandwich." Get my drift??? :-)



Jack, Philosophy student, Portland, OR



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# MASSIVE SEA BATTLE, AND SURROUNDED. **NOW WHAT?**



**Traceydell:** Ok sharks are good, but why mess with bugs when you can take something vicious and mix it with straight-up nastiness. Give me a hammerhead shark and a crocodile and I'll show you a mean machine.

In a 30 min. fight to the death, it's sink, swim or be devoured.

Looks like Jack B. Quick may be in for a nice and slow death. You hear me, Jack? You got nothing!



Tracey, Li. *Wicked Bad Photographer, Boston*



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# 2002 GAMES OF THE YEAR

**W**e hate to gloat. Well, OK, no we don't. We love to gloat. And as we reflect back on the past year, we have a lot to gloat about. Because, despite the drawing pontifications of so-called "experts," along with the usual annoying blather of Internet whiners and smug console fanboys, PC gaming not only failed to die in 2002, it actually had one of its strongest years in memory. In fact, you really have to go all the way back to 1997 (*Half-Life*, *Quake*, *Rainbow Six*, *StarCraft*) to find a year so overloaded with great PC games. In a way, it was too much. Even though we get to do this for a living, we still didn't have enough time to finish every game we wanted to finish. Heck, some of us are still trying to complete *Medal of Honor*—released way back in January. So, we can't imagine how you folks with real jobs coped with it all (we suspect pharmaceuticals). As a result, this year's awards decisions were tougher than ever for us, and the list of great games that didn't win anything here puts us more than it does you. All we can say is this: Buy them all. They're all great.

Now, sit back, relax, and get ready as the *CGW* editors don their best Chester-stained tuxedos and proudly hand out the 2002 Game of the Year awards!

## GAME OF THE YEAR

# GRAND THEFT AUTO III

PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR GAMES NORTH

## NOMINEES

BATTLEFIELD 1942  
 MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT  
 FREEDOM FORCE

## READER'S CHOICE

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

**I**s *Grand Theft Auto III* an example of sociopathic desensitization or brilliant game design? While the mainstream media likes to harp about the former, we prefer heralding GTA3 for the latter. Rockstar Games North took a humble little franchise and overhauled it into an amazing game for the third go-round.

GTA3 proves two things: it's entirely possible to make a great combination of linear storytelling and open-ended gameplay, and such games can sell millions. Oftentimes, games lean too much in one of these directions; either the game strings you along a clichéd and linear story line, or it gives you so much freedom, there's actually nothing to focus on. GTA3 provides the perfect combination of the two: a finite, linear narrative that rewards players for progressing through it, yet the freedom to do whatever the heck they want in the meantime. If you don't quite feel like tracking down and neutralizing an



**GTA3 PROVES TWO THINGS: IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO MAKE A GREAT COMBINATION OF LINEAR STORYTELLING AND OPEN-ENDED GAMEPLAY, AND SUCH GAMES CAN SELL MILLIONS.**



informant for a rival drug cartel, you can just cruise around the city looking for trouble—or for more opportunities to make cash and get a better set of wheels. Players also have tremendous freedom in how they complete a mission; the CGW staff constantly discusses different approaches to similar missions, with some editors favoring car bombs while others choose sniper rifles. One simply uses a really big bus as an assassination tool.

The closest competitor to GTA3's design this year is *Morrowind*, of all things, which provides flexibility within the confines of a linear, overarching story. However, GTA3 essentially improves upon our previous Game of the Year winner, *Operation Flashpoint*. While that game has a great open-ended design, our one reservation about awarding it Game of the Year honors was how insanely hardcore and niche-y it is. *Operation Flashpoint* is a great game, but it's also intimidating in appearance and difficulty, and demanding when it comes to players' skills. GTA3 provides the same genius design, but in a much more accessible wrapper for both newbies and hardcore players alike to appreciate.

It is also one of the few major games in which the player is the central villain. Span it how you will, but not many other games allow you to cheat, steal, betray, lie, murder, and solicit



prostitutes (yep, players can offset the frank criminality by doing goodwill missions like being a firefighter or an ambulance driver, or even a vigilante cop). As a result, most people joined the bandwagon in denouncing this as a morally corrupt game featuring violence and pornography, but playing the game is no different than watching *Goodfellas* or *The Sopranos* or *Scarface* (from which Rockstar licensed the soundtrack for one of the game's radio stations). Frankly, we applaud a game that is willing to drive into such morally ambiguous territory rather than sticking with some cookie-cutter "you're a cop on the edge and out to get the baddest" type of scenario.

There was also the concern that we're giving an award to a game that's a port of a PS2 game. First off, the franchise debuted on the PC in 1998. Additionally, the game doesn't feel like a port. It doesn't stupidly tell you to use the Triangle and Circle buttons, the mouse-and-keyboard interface is actually much better than the PS2's control pad, and the addition of an internet MP3 player makes GTA3 a natural PC fit.

Numerous little touches simply round out the rest of the game. The radio scripting is sharp, and while the graphics aren't as amazing as, say, those in *Unreal Tournament 2003*, they still look damn fine and stay playable despite generating all the buildings, vehicles, and people in your way. The high production values allow for voice talent like Joe Pantoliano, Michael Madsen, Dobi Mazar, and Robert Loggia, who all help to generate the atmosphere of a genuine mob movie.

While GTA3 wasn't a unanimous winner, it still obtained the clear majority of votes from our staff. Other noteworthy games

## PAST WINNERS

- 2001** Operation Flashpoint (Codemasters)
- 2000** The Sims (EA)
- 1999** Unreal Tournament (GT)
- 1998** Half-Life (Sierra)
- 1997** Jedi Knight (LucasArts)
- 1996** Diablo (Blizzard)
- 1995** Gabriel Knight 2 (Sierra)
- 1994** X-COM (Microprose)
- 1993** Doom (Id Software)
- 1992** Links 286 Pro (Access)
- 1991** Civilization (Microprose)
- 1990** Wing Commander (Origin)
- 1989** Railroad Tycoon (Microprose)
- 1988** SimCity (Maxis)
- 1987** Empire (Interstel)
- 1986** Earl Weaver Baseball (EA)
- 1985** Ultima IV (Origin)
- 1984** Kampgruffe (SSI)

nominated for overall Game of the Year are *Freedom Force*, *Medal of Honor*, and *Battlefield 1942*. *Freedom Force* is a font of creativity and joy, but as much as we love the game, the design and style of GTA3 overcame it. *Medal of Honor* is the best shooter we've played in years, but GTA3 proves to be the better game overall, and while *Battlefield 1942* is also a blast to play, again, we give the nod to GTA3 for its implementation of vehicular mayhem and mission design. Besides, GTA3 has the one thing *Battlefield 1942* lacks: a flying tank.

*Grand Theft Auto IV* is a brilliant game. Exploring such bold and taboo territory and offering a great example of open-ended design make it a worthy award winner, and Rockstar Games North deserves accolades for crafting such a superb game



## STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

# FREEDOM FORCE

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES

## NOMINEES

EUROPA  
UNIVERSALIS II  
MEDIEVAL:  
TOTAL WAR  
SINGOLF  
WORLDWIDE  
BATTLECRY II

## READER'S CHOICE

WARCRAFT III

**T**he superhero game curse has been broken. Irrational's game, *Freedom Force*, is the best strategy game this year. Irrational crafted a respectful and loving parody of the Silver Age of comics, complete with the requisite "word jazz"-style dialogue, often studded with improbable circumstances, and classic four-color art style of the period. Though it's a game swathed mostly in primary colors and word balloons, *Freedom Force's* use of a 3D engine ensures it resembles a game from 2002, not 1992. The sheer creativity behind the "comic universe" of this game is worthy of recognition alone.

But what appeal does *Freedom Force* have to the nonsuperhero dorks, the masses that won't stoop to wearing Green Lantern shirts or arguing about who should be cast as Lillimite Nick Fury? What is it about the game that's so good? Well, there's a great real-time tactical combat engine that melds plausible action with completely destructible environments. Speed freaks can plough through the game without pausing, while tactically minded people can pause, survey the action, and figure out what to do. Don't have time to pull off a nipped attack? Grab the nearest lamppost and swing away. Your opponent's attacking from an elevated position? Destroy the building he's standing on. The RPG subsystem and the large built-in roster allow for lots of replay value—many CGW staffers talk about the different heroes and abilities used for particular

missions. In fact, reviews editor Robert Coffey replayed the game using all the lame heroes (Eve, See Urchin, Mentor, etc.), and realized that they, in fact, don't suck—you just have to develop them like any of our favorite heroes (Microwave, Man O'War, El Diablo). There's also the ability to create your own heroes and use the Danger Room to get a quick standalone skirmish. Besides, people who don't find one-liners like "Your evil is unwanted here!" amusing are probably too morose for life itself!

We respect Medieval: Total War and its grandeur and flourish in simulating European history, but it doesn't quite grab us the way *Freedom Force* does (though our freelance writers were nigh-unanimous in picking Medieval for this category). We admire how

Warlords: Battlecry II is a perfect example of an honest-to-god RTS (role-playing strategy), but the RTS conventions—it's still all about managing an economy and amassing a larger force to brute your way to victory—keep it from grabbing the god. Europa Universalis II is far too risqué, even for us. Sid Meier's craft in *SimGolf* is good, but again, *Freedom Force's* creativity ultimately won us over.

## GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE YEAR



### Magic: The Gathering Online

Yes, the pricing plan is ludicrous; yes, it's horribly unfriendly to newbies; yes, it's just this side of a pyramid scheme, but dammit—as much as we want to hate it, Magic is still one of the most addictive play-every-day games, thanks to a brilliantly designed game underneath its irritating online manifestation. Oh, we want to hate it, we do, but we loves it, we loves it...

## FUNNIEST GAME

### Grand Theft Auto III

Both *No One Lives Forever 2* and *Freedom Force* have loads of laughs, but we're giving the nod here to GTA3, largely because of its hilarious, irreverent radio station parodies—in particular "Chatterbox," which talks talk radio dead on and provides a steady stream of comedy amidst all the killing and looting.



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PlayStation 2



R P G O F T H E Y E A R

# THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS DEVELOPER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

## NOMINEES

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS  
ARK FATALIS  
DUNGEON SIEGE  
ICEWIND DALE II

## READER'S CHOICE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

**M**emorable characters. Great graphics. Amazing tools. Fierce combat. Man alive, pretty much every nominee for RPG of the Year in 2002 has most or all of those, making this the best year for editors since, well, maybe forever.

We were wowed early in the year by Dungeon Siege, a Diablo-killer with spectacular graphics, real-time party-based gameplay, no level loading, and so many smart tweaks and twiddles that developer Gas Powered Games has practically added five pages of mandatory features to the design document of every action-RPG released in the next 10 years. Ark Fatalis, well, no one is going to imitate its tweaks, and it

the main story. Or you can simply wander the gorgeously rendered landscape, freeing slaves, exploring dungeons, meddling in romance, and picking up random quests. And just in case the epic story line, massive environments, pitched battles, and great enchanting and spell-creation systems aren't enough, Morrowind shipped with an editor every bit as impressive (though not as user-friendly) as Neverwinter Nights', allowing users to edit every single item and aspect of the game, as well as create their own adventures, structures, character classes, quests, NPCs, pick tables, and more. In a year of big RPGs, none is more ambitious, more accomplished, or more deserving of RPG of the Year than Morrowind.

## BEST GRAPHICS



**Unreal Tournament 2003** is a crowded first-person-shooter world where good visuals are everything—you've gotta do something really different to impress us. Enter UT2003. The weaponry and aliens may look cool, but the backgrounds, cascading skies, and detailed levels almost make us forget about how good the previous Unreal Tournament is—almost.

## BEST TREND

### Open-ended gameplay

One of the holy grails of gaming—letting players "live" in a game world and do whatever works best—is finally coming to glorious fruition. Two games do it masterfully this year: Morrowind and Grand Theft Auto III. Thanks to their unquaffed success (especially GTA3), expect much more to come in the years ahead.



ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

# MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: 2015

## NOMINEES

JEDI KNIGHT II:  
JEDI OUTCAST  
GRAND THEFT  
AUTO III  
HITMAN 2  
NO ONE LIVES  
FOREVER 2

## READER'S CHOICE

MEDAL OF  
HONOR: ALLIED  
ASSAULT

**T**his is the toughest category we faced this year. There are five outstanding titles, and it's hard to find fault with any of them. Jedi Knight II is a blast, and the force powers and lightsaber control are perfectly executed. But the pacing is a bit off (everything before getting a lightsaber was "ah"), and we realized that what makes JK2 so great is also what makes Jedi Knight great—which is why that game won Game of the Year in 1997.

No One Lives Forever 2 is among the funniest and most entertaining games of 2002. We love the intelligence and wit, the incredible variety, and the wacky elements like machine-gun toting mimes and bananas-as-weapons. But the pacing isn't as brisk as the original's, and there are fewer thrills like the skydive gunfight in NOLF. Maybe Monolith spoiled us with the first game, and now we just expect too much.

In contrast, Hitman 2 is a huge improvement over the original, and it's one of the best games of last year in any genre. The game's huge levels are always interesting, and you can play them any number of different ways. The five saves per level adds another challenging element without adding frustration.

But in the final votes, it came down to GTA3 versus MOH, and that's where we deadlocked. Half of us love playing through the beautifully designed MOH despite its linearity. The other half argue that while MOH is a superb evolutionary advancement, GTA3 broke the mold with its wide-open



gameplay that lets you play any way you want. Ultimately, it would've been a tie, had GTA3 not clobbered the field by winning Game of the Year. On our view, Game of the Year transcends genre boundaries, so there's no point in duplicating the award.)

That doesn't take away at all from the best single-player shooter since Half-Life. More than any game we've played, MOH makes you feel like an action hero in a WWII movie: storming the beach, manning a machine gun from the back of a jeep, infiltrating enemy installations, taking control of a massive Tiger tank and blasting Panthers and buildings while crushing enemy soldiers under your treads. There are so many great moments—from viewing spectacular scripted events, to disguising yourself as a German officer to infiltrate a submarine base, to calling in air strikes while peering through binoculars—that MOH remains the year's best shooter even though it came out in January of 2002. Had it shipped 30 days sooner it would've been our 2001 Game of the Year. Good job, 2015! Now, give us the sequel.

## BEST LEVEL



### Omaha Beach in Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

The Omaha Beach level borrows heavily from Saving Private Ryan, but that doesn't bother us a bit. Surviving the hail of bullets and mortars, killing the machine gunners, and clearing out the pillboxes is incredibly difficult—and incredibly memorable.

THE ACCLAIMED ONLINE RPG OF 2001



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MULTIPLAYER GAME OF THE YEAR

# BATTLEFIELD 1942

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE

**NOMINEES**  
AGE OF MYTHOLOGY  
AMERICA'S ARMY  
OPERATIONS  
UNREAL  
TOURNAMENT 2003

**READER'S  
CHOICE**  
UNREAL  
TOURNAMENT  
2003

**W**ar is hell, and so is trying to yank ourselves away from *Battlefield 1942* long enough to finish this story. After countless Deathmatches, *Battlefield 1942* survives the onslaughts of other contenders to be named the best multiplayer game of 2003.

*Unreal Tournament 2003* has some seriously fast-paced action, while *America's Army* seriously scares us as a not-so-subtle but very good recruiting tool. And *Age of Mythology*? Well, we couldn't pick any game that Di is good at. Seriously, though, *BF1942* is a ridiculously addictive online warfare title. Sure, there's a single-player campaign, but the real reason you want to play is the insane 64-player team Deathmatches.

The biggest selling point of *BF1942* isn't the realism, either. We saw people leaping out of planes directly into tanks waiting below. We witnessed fighters screaming in from above with snipers on each wing taking out all comers. We then witnessed a newbie exodus of players too intimidated to compete after seeing these kamikaze tactics firsthand.

So, what is it about *BF1942* that makes it too irresistible to put down? It has to be the fast-paced action and elegant simplicity

of setting up matches inside a variety of World War II campaigns. Air combat at Guadalcanal, beach landings in Normandy, storming Stalingrad, duking it out with the Desert Fox—the list goes on and on. Despite the realistic scenarios, *BF1942* is the farthest thing from a sim game. In fact, if you've ever played a first-person shooter, you're instantly at home—whether you're running out in the fields, jumping into a tank, flying a plane, piloting a landing craft, manning a turret...you get the idea. Similar to *Tribe8*, you quickly decide the role you want to take on in combat: Antibank, assault, scout, medic, engineer—pick an occupation and then man your station.

The only snags so far are finding people who want to play as a proper team as opposed to the every-man-for-himself *Counter-Strike* run-and-gun style. After all, how many people out there really want to volunteer for the left-gunner position in the back of a Stuka? And, while we're at it, how many people do you really think will be ready to serve as medics?

For creating a game that blends the best bits of warlike action with a solid FPS and a wide variety of vehicles, we're standing at attention for this battle-hardened title.

## BEST SOUND

### Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Part of what makes *Medal of Honor* great is its convincing audio: the terrifying cacophony of gunfire on Omaha Beach, the shouts and cries of American and German soldiers, the distinctive "ping" of an M1 clip being ejected—it all makes you feel like you're experiencing more than just a game.

## BEST DEVELOPMENT TOOL

### Neverwinter Nights

The last time we had good tools to make RPGs was freekin' *Adventure Construction Kit* in 1994. Blowers has RPG gamers thinking about being RPG designers in the same way people thought about shooter design during the *Doom* and *Quake* days. If *Half-Life*'s tools can beat *Counter-Strike*, who knows what great user RPG will spring from *NW2*?

## MMO OF THE YEAR

# ASHERON'S CALL 2: FALLEN KINGS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIO DEVELOPER: TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT

### NOMINEES

EARTH & BEYOND  
THE SIMS ONLINE

### READER'S CHOICE

THE SIMS  
ONLINE

**A**nother year of MMORPG hype—and another year of waiting for that breakout hit.

The big guns are still going as strong as ever: EverQuest, Ultima Online, and the rest have their hardcore devotees who will apparently fork over monthly fees until they drop dead. But none of the MMORPGs released in 2002, despite an avalanche of hype (including a Newsweek cover for The Sims Online), really hit it out of the park the way some folks (including us) were expecting. The Sims Online has its charms, but at this point, it's more a curiosity than a success—though it's also too early to write it off entirely.

Earth & Beyond is another noble experiment—an attempt to take the genre away from the elves and into an outer space sci-fi setting. We had lots of fun with this game, at first, but the more we play, the more we feel like we're just playing EverQuest in space—thus betraying the very notion of its



originality. Ultimately, it's the most traditional MMORPG, Asheron's Call 2, that proves to be the best game in a weak year. Which is not to dismiss its achievements. Actually, AC2 did an amazing job of fixing or improving virtually everything that was wrong with every other fantasy MMORPG, providing an easy, accessible, stable, and beautiful-looking online game world. The crafting is cool, a real story line keeps things moving, and the advancement paths provide for lots of variety. Microsoft and Turbine get lots of credit for an incredibly smooth launch and for really working to lose all the annoyances (hello, corpse runs!) that make these games so reverb hostile. We never really took to the original game, but Asheron's Call 2 is now the fantasy MMORPG to beat. Nice job.

## WARGAME OF THE YEAR

# COMBAT MISSION: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN

PUBLISHER: BATTLEFRONT.COM DEVELOPER: BATTLEFRONT.COM

### NOMINEES

AIRBORNE ASSAULT  
EAGLES STRIKE  
UNCOMMON VALOR

### READER'S CHOICE

COMBAT MISSION:  
BARBAROSSA TO  
BERLIN

**B**oy, air, and land wargamers got a bunch of great games in 2002. Whether it's playing cat-and-mouse with aircraft carriers in the Solomon in Uncommon Valor (perhaps the year's best P3DM wargame), launching the world's largest-ever airborne operation in Airborne Assault, or slogging it out on the ground in France in Eagles Strike, wargame developers had some interesting new takes on World War II. But the best new game of all is a familiar face: Battlefront's Combat Mission. Beyond Overlord won this award in 2000, and while the sequel—Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin—doesn't change the genre the way its predecessor did, it still towers high above the competition. The game system's armor-friendly focus is perfect for Eastern Front combat, and a host of improvements



(including an updated graphics engine) assure the top spot for a series that keeps pushing tactical wargaming to new heights. CM2B suffers from the same affliction: AI that seems to plague most wargames, but that doesn't prevent it from offering plenty of challenge, and the multiplayer experience is unmatched. Like its predecessor, the game is great at creating memorable moments, and it leaves you recalling your troops' exploits long after you've moved on to more missions (and less entertaining) endeavors. Whether it's the tide-turning ambush, the seemingly invulnerable lone tank, or the Squad That Wouldn't Quit, CM2B makes the game come alive in a way possible only on the computer. That's quite an achievement, and well worth the award of Wargame of the Year.

## ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR

## SYBERIA

PUBLISHER: OREAMCATCHER INTERACTIVE DEVELOPER: MICROIDS

**W**ell, whaddya know! An Adventure Game of the Year award! Contrary to the bleating of certain Internet whiners, we here at CGW actually do like adventure games—a lot. But with most of the best developers abandoning the genre in the last few years, the pickings are mighty slim. Thank goodness for *Syberia*, an unabashedly old-school point-and-click adventure that very likely would have won this award even in a competitive year. Beautiful original artwork, clever



puzzle design, and a transparent interface all support the one thing that always sets the best adventure games apart, a great story. *Syberia's* odd tale of an American lawyer's spiritual journey as she searches for the eccentric heir to a toy factory ultimately plays out as a poignant meditation on loss, love, and destiny. It's the most emotionally rich adventure game since the great *Sanitarium* and a worthy reminder of how rewarding this struggling genre can be when put in the right hands.

## EXPANSION PACK OF THE YEAR

ANARCHY ONLINE:  
THE NOTUM WARS

## NOMINEES

EVERQUEST:  
SHADOWS OF LUCLIN  
GHOST RECON:  
ISLAND THUNDER  
OPERATION  
FLASHPOINT:  
RESISTANCE  
THE SIMS:  
UNLEASHED

PUBLISHER: FUNCOM DEVELOPER: FUNCOM

**F**or a category that generally doesn't stir much debate, the competition for Expansion of the Year was incredibly fierce. Expansions for former Game of the Year winners *The Sims* and *Operation Flashpoint* are as outstanding as their source material. *Shadows of Luclin* introduces horses, moons, and heliocentric system requirements to *EverQuest*, while *Island Thunder* finally makes *Ghost Recon* a

5-star game. In the end, the redemption packed into every box of *The Notum Wars* won our votes.

*Anarchy Online* had one of the worst launches ever, but for the stalwart fans who stuck with it, *Notum Wars* comes through big time, adding a load of new gameplay features (like the land control and attendant rewards that led to sprawling clan wars) and virtually reinventing the game. And if you haven't been playing forever, no problem. *Notum Wars* includes the full (and vastly improved) original *AO*, but with a brand-new, incredibly more newbie-friendly front end. All that at one of the lowest price points in PC gaming. The best thing? This is a "booster pack"—just wait until Funcom releases its full-fledged expansion later this year.



## SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

MADDEN  
2003

## NOMINEES

GLAND PRIZ 4  
TIGER WOODS PGA  
TOUR 2003  
US OPEN TOUR 2002

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS

READER'S  
CHOICE

MADDEN 2003

**I**f anyone was inclined to ring the death knell of PC gaming, they'd have to look no further than the pathetic PC sports-gaming arena, where most developers jumped ship to Xbox and PS2. What we have left is EA's lineup and noble attempts like *US Open Tour 2002*

(almost, but not quite as good as *Virtual Tennis*) and *Grand Prix 4* (one of the better racing games in years past).

Thankfully, EA has yet to abandon us, and *Madden 2003* is more than simply "the only title in town." It's a great game. Where *Madden 2002* is nothing but a poorly executed port of the PS2 version of *Madden 2001*, the 2003 version is actually a new game that takes advantage of the power of the PC, including internet play and graphics that blow the PS2 version out of the water. Besides that, the developers smartly integrate some of the best twists and balances in the Madden franchise thus far. Say goodbye to cheap 80-yard pass plays and hail the return of the king of football.



## HARDWARE OF THE YEAR

# ATI'S MOBILITY RADEON 9000 & NVIDIA'S GEFORCE 4 4200 GO

### NOMINEES

INTEL CORE  
PENTIUM 4 WITH HT  
DELL INSPIRON  
1200

**T**he early frontrunners for 2002's Hardware of the Year award were ATI's and Nvidia's respective top-of-the-line desktop boards. The thing is, we've come to expect faster and more powerful graphics chips. But, until recently, we hadn't come to expect truly gaming-capable laptops. Both ATI's Mobility Radeon 9000 (M9) and Nvidia's GeForce4 4200 Go have at least 64MB of DDR memory and support for DirectX 8.1, and the GeForce even boasts AGP 8x support.

While the Mobility Radeon is currently the mobile graphics chip of choice, it's only a matter of time before Nvidia leapfrogs it. As it stands, a Dell Inspiron 8200 Laptop with a 2.2GHz Mobile Pentium 4 processor and the 64MB version of the Mobility Radeon graphics card gets a 3DMark2001SE score of 7000 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. When the desktop GeForce3 board first came out, that's about what you got on a high-end desktop with a top-of-the-line graphics card! Furthermore, this machine is achieving Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast frames rates nearing 100 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off.

So, if you want a laptop but don't want to compromise gaming power, you can thank Nvidia and ATI for making laptop gaming much less of a compromise as it used to be.



### SPECIAL AWARD FOR HARDWARE DESIGN AESTHETIC



#### Logitech MX 700 Cordless Mouse

With a price tag of \$80, Logitech's MX 700 Cordless Mouse isn't cheap, but with a plethora of customizable buttons and a rechargeable battery, this is a wireless product that's actually worth the added cost. The MX 700 doesn't suffer the latency that plagued earlier cordless mice, and the remote base doubles as a battery charger. While many still prefer to game with Microsoft's IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0, the MX 700 deserves kudos for innovation.

### BEST HARDWARE THAT DOESN'T MATTER

#### Logitech Z-680 5.1 speakers

Logitech's Z-680

5.1 speakers

are so

versatile,

CGW's

hardware

editor got rid of his AV

receiver and uses the Z-680s

as the centerpiece of his home theater.

Splitting out a whopping 500 watts RMS, these babies

are THX certified and support both Dolby Digital and

DTS. The breakout box has connections for any device

you could possibly think of, including coaxial, optical, and

direct inputs. In other words, you can hook the Z-680s

up to a PC, TV, DVD player, Xbox, PS2, or GameCube.

Now, if only more PC games truly supported 5.1 sound.





## COASTER OF THE YEAR

# EVERYTHING MIGHT & MAGIC

PUBLISHER: 3DO DEVELOPER: NEW WORLD COMPUTING

## NOMINEES

**CIVILIZATION III:  
PLAY THE WORLD**  
JAMES BOND OUT:  
NIGHTFIRE

**T**here is more than one game this year that makes us feel we were trapped in a giant cocktail shaker full of the muddy blue fluid from ten chemical toilets.

Yes, 2002 was a banner year for crap. How on earth could we pluck the single plumpest turd from the tangle of soggy tissue? Hard work, gritty determination, and a perverse predilection for wallowing in misery—that's how.

So, unglued and unvaccinated, we reached in to our elbows and fished out a fetid fistful of filth. First out of the pot-pond, James Bond 007: NightFire, the most aggressively unplayable game since the unrelenting hammer to the forehead we call *Trespasser*: Electronic Arts greedily gobbled up the supersty license... and, once it was done digesting it, started charging gamers \$50 for what was left.

Bad as *NightFire* is, it is but a passing whiff of earthy flatulence on a midsummer breeze compared to the face-straining quader known as *Civilization III: Play the World*. Frankly, this was the game to beat, a \$30 add-on with one single god-multipayer—that shipped with one major distinguishing

characteristic: nothing resembling playable multiplayer.

Compounding matters, *Play the World* savages the 5-star jewel that was *Civilization III* with a Jaro unimatched by two score of overly caffeinated Manson family members. El tu, Sid? El tu?

Beating out *Play the World* took a Herculean effort and, regrettably, 3DO is more than up to the task. While its dream project, *Army Men of Might & Magic*, languishes in development, 3DO went to the *Might & Magic* cash cow one last fateful time, this time squeezing the now-dry M&M teat so hard that not blood, but black, gritty bile issued forth, forever spoiling the memories of two of the most beloved CGW Hall of Fame franchises. Yes, we know we gave *Heroes of Might & Magic IV* 2½ stars, and we're here to tell you we were wrong, so very, very wrong. This stubborn aberration features broken, unfriendly combat; simultaneously cheating and brain-dead A.I.; pointless changes to the core hero system; horribly designed campaigns; and...and...and...arrghhh! I just want to bile someone! 3DO got Day of Infamy bonus points by releasing *Might & Magic IX* on the same day. God, what can we say about that game? It's been wheezing along for years, but this year's version shipped with a kitchen-size Huffy bag duct-taped over its head. Everything about this once proud series is horrifically mangled, except its stoned length. So, not only is M&M9 boring, frustrating, infunating, and a big stinking load of crap—it is boring, frustrating, infunating, and a big stinking load of crap for a really long time.

In effect, 3DO stuffed everything *Might & Magic* into a pillowcase full of finishing nails before heaving it off a cliff into a pit full of shark teeth. The gooey mess left behind gets the award.

## WORST FANS

### Farscape

Just because we never watched your favorite show doesn't mean we don't recognize a lame game when we see one. Face it: The game is lame. And your show is cancelled. So, stop mail-bombing us and move on with your lives—those of you who have them.





## BEST MUSIC ▲

### Mafia

Ay, fehgedabowd!! Any game that can instantly summon images of *The Godfather* ("make them an offer they can't refuse") and *The Untouchables* ("just like a w@\* to bring a knife to a gunfight,") simply by turning up the volume can't be all bad. This little gem does a great job of capturing the mood of the Roaring '20s.

## BEST USE OF A LICENSE

### Skittles in Darkened Skye

*Darkened Skye* proves that if you're collecting supernatural tootchticks, they may as well be something tasty like Skittles. In fact, the license entertainingly subverts some otherwise crusty fantasy dialogue, such as when a wise old crone intones, "People knew magic then, and 'twas Skittles what fueled that magic!" The game may be average, but we salute the way it uses Skittles, of all things, so creatively.



## WORST USE OF A LICENSE ▲

### James Bond 007: NightFire

A towering ass-terpiece of ineptitude, *NightFire* sloppily emasculates one of the most successful movie franchises with a dull, rusty straight razor. The A.I. is broken, the levels suck, the gadgets are pointless, and the cut-scenes look like especially blurry *Duany* and *Gollath* rejects. *NightFire* is not so much a game as it is an evil weapon worthy of a Bond villain.

## BEST STORY

### Freedom Force

Somehow, the writers at Irrational crafted an interesting story that integrates dinosaurs, gods, aliens, and time travel into one sensible whole. Every scrap of writing, from the origin stories to the corny one-liners to the great reveal at the end, is worthy of salute from us.

## BEST ART DIRECTION

### Freedom Force

Irrational Games' comic-book love is so complete in *Freedom Force*, it bleeds all the way out to the awesome, Silver Age-style install screens. From the primary-color scheme to the word balloons to the cheesy cut-scenes and dialogue, *Freedom Force* is a joyous, reverent comics homage, brilliantly executed by an inspired team of artists.

## BEST CINEMATICS

### WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

While some are disappointed with *WarCraft IV's* gameplay, no one with eyes and a brain can argue with the virtues of the game's absolutely incredible cut-scenes, which feature some of the best CG animation ever. Some day, Blizzard should just go for it and make the movie it's obviously dying to make.

## SLEEPER OF THE YEAR ▶

### Arx Fatalis

Who would've thought an *Ultima Underworld* wannabe from a French developer wouldn't be a big bag of stink? Certainly not us. Hence our complete surprise when JoWood's *Arx Fatalis* turns out to be one of the best RPGs in a year checkful of 'em. Gorgeous, deep, and challenging, *Arx* is the game you should be playing now that you're done with *Morrowind* and *Neverwinter*.



# "GAME OF THE YEAR."

Xbox Game of the Year (IGN, Gamespy)



I ALONE HAVE THE FIFTH FREEDOM.  
THE RIGHT TO SPY, STEAL, DESTROY AND ASSASSINATE,  
TO ENSURE THAT AMERICAN FREEDOMS ARE PROTECTED.  
IF CAPTURED, MY GOVERNMENT WILL DISAVOW  
ANY KNOWLEDGE OF MY EXISTENCE.

I AM SAM FISHER.

I AM A SPLINTER CELL.



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You make the rules in the high stakes game of covert espionage. Work alone, outside the boundaries of the law, to thwart cyberterrorist attacks against the United States. With thermal goggles, fiber optic cameras, prototype guns and other dirty tricks, you redefine justice and punishment. Rappel, split jump, glide along ziplines, force information from your enemies, even use them as human shields. And remember - a dead witness is not really a witness.



A character in a dark, tactical suit with glowing yellow eyes stands behind a chain-link fence. The background is dark and industrial.

"A hell of a techno-espionage title  
made even better on PC."

*Computer Gaming World* ~ 4 1/2 stars out of 5

"The PC has been crying out  
for a game like this."

*PC Gamer*

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Microsoft



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EA



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Eidos



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Sega



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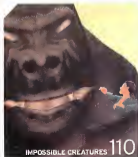
# Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



**"I want to take the mother-croaker out back, chop off his hindquarters and serve 'em up at a prissy Paris bistro."**

FROGGER: THE GREAT QUEST 114



## INSIDE

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This planet is a giant, living organism—hence the big toothy-maw mechs on the ground. Unfortunately, you spend most of your time on this planet flipping other humans.

## Unreal II: The Awakening

Too much of the good things, not enough of the great things BY ROBERT COFFEY

### GAME STATS

PLATFORMS: PC, PS2, XBOX

DEVELOPER: EPIC GAMES

GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

ESRB: M

PRICE: \$49.99

RECOMMENDATION: BUY

REASON: GREAT GRAPHICS AND SOUND

CONS: FEELS LIKE A REHASH OF UNREAL I

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

**T**he harsh and not entirely fair way of describing *Unreal II* would be to refer to its subtle and quiet. "The Awakening is something you'll need after playing this game." Like I said, harsh and not entirely true, but just true enough that some wag somewhere is bound to say it. *Unreal II* has a lot going for it—things like state-of-the-art graphics, outstanding sound, and some viciously efficient AI—but while the game starts off strong, its personality steadily dribbles away, leaving you feeling you've played enough of it and never need to play it again. Compare that to the "I really want to play that level again" feel of games like *Medal of Honor* and *Half-Life*—games *Unreal II* obviously wants to emulate—and it's hard not to see the game as something of a letdown.

### Pretty on the outside

Provided you've got the flame-splitting super-turbocharged computer of death that *Unreal II* really needs in order to shine, you cannot help but be wowed by

the graphics. Simply put, this resets the bar in terms of what a game can look like, with incredibly rich colors, painstakingly detailed and gorgeously textured models, and some startlingly vivid weapon effects. This is a game engine that will be used for years and years to come.

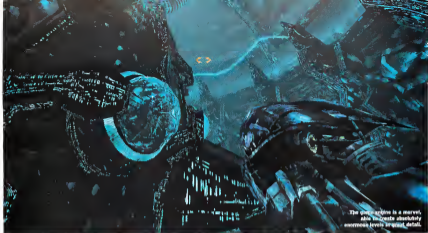
Unfortunately, a lot of that graphical brilliance is wasted on a game that earnestly tries to bring the gameplay up to a similar caliber, but fails outrageously short about a third of the way in. At the very beginning, *Unreal II* is up to the job. Haunting sound effects and spare-but-effective-use of scripted events create an at times excruciating sense of tension in the first series of missions, as you investigate a ravaged mining facility. When the hordes of hobnobbing blue space monkey aliens finally start attacking and refuse to let up, the result is a bracing jolt of frenzied action that has you flipping through the levels with the very

best sort of murderous glee. And the first appearance of the deadly quick Skaarj is a white-knuckle nightmare.

The game radically shifts gears in the next mission, as you wander a swampy landscape at night, trying to locate a stranded squad of marines. Absolutely nothing happens as you find your way through the murky night, yet the stormy weather and profound sense of isolation ratchet up your unease to the point that, when the inevitable attack finally comes, it's almost a relief.



Yeah, it's pretty, but it's still a jumping puzzle.



The game engine is a marvel, able to create absolutely gorgeous levels in just a few days.



Ladies and gentlemen, Unreal II's constitutionally mandated flamethrower.

**Less is more, more is too much**  
Not long after that, Unreal II starts deflating. The excitement starts to peter out somewhere after the scary giant alien spiders. In place of anything new or exciting, the game just starts piling on more and more stuff. More bad mercenaries in more powerful armor with more rocket launchers. More lengthy boss fights in locked arenas. More corridors, more hordes of enemies in more loaded battles, and more smacking the reload key after you die more and more, the more you play.

The overuse of stuff is most obvious in the weapons. Unreal II has a great armory with some devastating weapons, including the very first grenade launcher that matters in a single-player shooter. The problem is, it has enough guns for three games (each gun also has an alternate fire), and you just don't need them all, especially since you have what is arguably the most vital and useful gun—the assault rifle—from the very first moments of the game. It's great that there's a shotgun and a magnum and an

energy pistol and a shock lance and a flamethrower and a gun that shoots space spiders, but I never, ever had any reason to use them. You won't either. And if you do, you'll be ignoring about five other weapons in order to do it.

Unreal II does have its moments, even during the saggy, routine parts. While fighting waves of other human types isn't that thrilling (and if I really wanted to fight smart Russians with rocket launchers, I'd be playing Unreal Tournament 2003), a few missions let you order a small squad of fellow space



My energy fence up, my rocket barrals set, I wait for the first wave of enemies to start sneezing over the distant hills.

marines into position and set up defensive turrets and energy fields. No one is going to confuse this with Rainbow Six, but deploying these guys/things gives these missions a more tactical feel and engages you more.

Late in the game—very late, in fact—Unreal II throws a few curves into play and revitalizes the action, giving the hoary “free the disintegrating spaceship” mission a bit more flavor. It won't knock your socks off, though.

If Unreal II could maintain the tension and excitement of the early parts of the game, we'd be looking at a probable five-star title. But it doesn't, instead settling for a dazzling new coat of paint on a particularly brutish version of standard shooter gameplay. Unreal II is a good, enjoyable game made maddening by tantalizing glimpses of what it could have been.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

You're going to like this shooter, but you're not going to love it.

**The excitement starts petering out somewhere after the scary giant alien spiders.**



## The Sims Online

The biggest chat room in the world BY GINA JUNGWEAARD

### GAME STATS

PICTURE ELECTRONICARTS  
300,000 MALES  
500K SIMS  
LIVE LONG, SEEN, GONE  
BAGGLES, NATURE SERIAL  
KILLER, 100K MONTHLY  
SUBSCRIPTION EARNINGS  
PENTON II 500, 100M  
RAM, 1.5GB FREE RAM  
GIVE SPACE, INTERNET  
CORRECTION  
REMOVED EQUIPMENT  
PENTON II 700,  
300GBAND INTERNET  
CORRECTION  
REMOVE SPOT, BROADCAST  
MULTIPLAYER

**O**n the surface, *The Sims Online* is exactly that: *The Sims*, online. Anyone who has played *The Sims* will be instantly familiar with how this world functions. The same eight needs must be monitored, the lookset will be instantly familiar, and similar types of character interactions are available. So, as the biggest-selling computer game ever moves online, is it for better or for worse?

Somewhere in between.

### Same game, different verse

New players can create up to three characters in three separate towns (each town is a server capable of housing up to 80,000 characters). Each new character starts out with 10,000 simoleons; additional money must be earned. When you create a character, you have the option to buy your own plot of land and build a house. If you

choose to do this, you can invite people to be roommates. The more people living on a property, the larger the house can be. Roommates are allowed to add onto and redecorate the house as they desire, but property owners retain ultimate control—roommates who get too crazy can be kicked out, but when they leave, so do their possessions.

As in *The Sims*, your character can work to develop certain skills; for example, pumping iron, swimming, or riding the mechanical bull will increase your Body ability. One motivation for developing skills is that higher skill levels allow you to make more money. A character with a Logic skill of 10 earns more by solving a math problem and selling the solution than someone with a Logic skill of 1. The only other apparent reason to develop skills is to earn the additional character interactions that are melted out with skill increases.

The other measurable gaming activity

in *TSO* is making friends. The touted advantage of making friends is networking (what is this, a job fair?), plus more gestures become available to your character as she makes more friends. Each Sim can grant up to 10 friendships, with no limit to the number of friendships coming in.

### Awful lot of weather we're having, huh?

The big problems with *TSO* appear after you've been logged in for awhile. One very noticeable difference from any other online game is that, rather than offering an existing world, this game is essentially a scaffold for the gamers to create their own world. That's great if the gamers are creative people, but a lot of the people in *TSO* aren't. Instead, they use their characters as little more than chat room avatars. If you're lucky enough to stumble onto a property with players actually willing to play, or if you





Some houses offer services, such as this wedding chapel.



Practicing the gutter oil by my lonesome.



There are plenty of opportunities for the egg donor. In so all to get down and dirty.

log on with a group of like-minded real-life friends, the game can be pretty entertaining; otherwise, the experience isn't much more riveting than average water cooler chat. And when you're trying to build up your Logic with a chess match—a chess match you cannot accelerate like you did in *The Sims*—you'll be praying for at least a competent, if not sparkling conversationalist.

Ways to win in *The Sims Online*? Well, right now, the only real "winning" is making it onto one of the Top 100 lists in your city, which offers you an achievement bonus. But, as of this writing, the only Top 100 list is "Most Liked Sim," so if you don't feel like chat room schmoozing, then there's not much for you to work toward.

#### Easy street

The main problem with *TSO* is that you don't really need money. Players who have homes receive money whenever other players visit, and they also receive a cut when a visitor makes and sells items while on the property, so homeowners offer incentives to entice people to visit, which means that you can eat for free, sleep for free, be entertained for free.

## You'll be praying for at least a competent if not sparkling conversationalist.

and even acquire skills for free—which in turn helps you make more money that you don't need to spend. And if you don't need money, there's not a whole lot of reason to develop skills, and if you aren't developing skills or making money, then what exactly are you doing?

Most of the properties online right now are dedicated to either skill development or money making. The property owners and roommates are taking the game pretty seriously, so they aren't tolerating much harassment of other people, since there's the potential that you'll chase people off and cost the owners money. While that's their prerogative, the silliness of *The Sims* was what made the game so fun. Here, there are no random zombies wreaking havoc, no burglars, no sad clowns, no career paths. And characters who try to shake things up on their own are usually banned pretty quickly. Which leaves you with a lot of Sims whose primary goal is making more money.

Frankly, it isn't very fun.

The servers seem pretty stable, if a little bit laggy, but they're not always very populated. Since the rate at which you acquire your skills and/or make money is directly related to how many other people are participating in the activity with you, it's more efficient for you to visit full properties, and those are sometimes hard to find.

Maxis has more plans for *The Sims Online*. By the time you read this, new Top 100 lists like "Most Hated Sim" should be live. Player-made objects are also in the works, and death is scheduled to be coming sometime in the future. But for now, the game is pretty boring. If you like chat rooms, then this is your kind of game. If not, then steer clear.

#### VERDICT ★★★★★

Instead of providing lol, this game kind of sucks.

# Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles

Hundreds of wasted hours await you **BY BRUCE GERYK**

## GAME STATS

**FRANCHISE** ARDA  
**DEVELOPER** MYTHIC  
**PUBLISHER** MYTHIC  
**GENRE** MMORPG  
**ESRB RATING** TEEN, VIOLENCE  
**PRICE** \$29.99 (DISCONTINUED)  
**PLATFORMS** PC (4GB, 256MB RAM, 800MB FREE DISK SPACE, XBOX 360 CARS)  
**BASE GAME OF** DARK AGE OF CAMELOT  
**ORIGINAL GAME**  
**DESCRIPTION** INTERNET  
**CONNECTION** BROADBAND  
**REQUIRED PERIPHERALS** NONE  
**LAUNCH DATE** JAN. 2006  
**DEVELOPER'S WEBSITE** DARKAGE.COM  
**RELATED TITLES** MASSIVELY  
**MULTIPLAYER**

**W**hen Dark Age of Camelot was first released, it made its mark with classic

EverQuest-style gameplay that cut out a lot of tedious, and introduced a high-level, cooperative, player-versus-player dynamic as the game's ultimate goal. If this didn't turn you on the first time around, there isn't anything here to change your mind. However, if you were on every night and found yourself getting bored with the original game world, you're probably already exploring Shrouded Isles' enormous new content.

For each of the game's three realms, Shrouded Isles adds one new race, two new classes, and a whole new continent to explore. The new lands are mostly stocked with monsters appropriate for groups of characters Level 30 and above, so players will find themselves revisiting a lot of their old haunts if they decide to start new characters. For those with high-level characters, there are huge new areas to adventure in, and the addition of new dungeon areas makes high-level dungeon raids an enjoyable endeavor.

For a game that's so focused on upper-level realm-versus-realm combat, it's surprising that there's no new content in this area. The action remains restricted to frontier areas, since the keeps that guard the realms themselves remain impregnable. Although Mythic is considering starting a server where these keeps are weak enough to allow for actual realm invasions, the player-versus-



High-level dungeon raids are possible in places like Tuscarn Glacier.

player component of Shrouded Isles is essentially the same as before.

A major feature of the expansion is the graphics engine. While significantly improved over the original (especially the monster models), the terrain textures and water effects have already been surpassed by *Asheron's Call 2*, and some graphics (like Hibernia's cartoonish pool-like vistas) seem dated. Nevertheless, thanks to good art design, Shrouded Isles extends the original's ability to create striking and memorable locations that give the game world a real sense of depth and character.

Mythic is constantly tweaking and updating the game from patch to patch, so comments on the specifics of gameplay will probably be obsolete before this review even makes it to the editor. What remains true is that Dark Age of Camelot has a large, active community and is constantly improving content. No one should play DAOC without Shrouded Isles.

## VERDICT ★★★★★

Plenty of new stuff for the already addicted.

# Cossacks: Back to War

Thousands die, no one wins **BY DI LUO**

## GAME STATS

**FRANCHISE** C&W  
**DEVELOPER** GIGAWATT GAMES WORLD  
**PUBLISHER** BEAUMONT STRATEGY  
**ESRB RATING** TEEN, BLOOD, VIOLENCE  
**PRICE** \$39.99  
**REQUIRED PERIPHERALS** XBOX 360, XBOX 360 HARDWARE  
**GENRE** STRATEGY  
**DEVELOPER'S WEBSITE** WWW.COSSACKS.COM  
**RELATED TITLES** C&W: THE ART OF WAR  
**INTERNET** (2-8 PLAYERS)

**E**xpansion packs are the roaches of the gaming industry. No matter how you stomp them, even the remote possibility of profit spawns them by the dozens. Technically not an expansion, *Cossacks: Back to War* is a standalone that incorporates the gameplay features of *Cossacks: European Wars* and *Cossacks: The Art of War* into a lackluster package with 101 scenarios, a tutorial campaign, two new nations, and a few extra units.

The *Cossacks* series takes place in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, and gameplay is traditional RTS fare except in scope. *Cossacks* supports up to 8,000 units on a map, and you'll regularly have hordes of peasants and massive armies. It's initially novel, but the masochistic pleasure of creating armies of

thousands, one soldier at a time, then watching them die by the hundreds, wanes before long. There's just too much micromanaging for the game to remain enjoyable for long.

*Cossacks* makes no attempt to hold your interest with intriguing story lines or captivating campaigns. Some scenarios are fun, but only dechords will have the endurance to find the gems in the horde. These self-flagellating fanatics will certainly be entertained, but why pay when they can find plenty of custom scenarios to download for free?



Spaniard horde versus Dutch horde. Who can tell the difference?

## VERDICT ★★★★★

Everybody new—*Cossacks*! Humh! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again! Yeah!

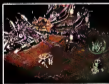
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1998: Unreal forever changes the face  
of the first person shooter.

The artwork features a central composition with a woman's face in the foreground and a man's face behind her. Two large, curved blades frame them. The background is a fiery, orange-red landscape with various creatures and characters in the foreground. The title 'Unreal II' is in a large, black, gothic-style font, with 'THE AWAKENING' in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it.

# Unreal II

THE AWAKENING

# 2003: Unreal II - The Awakening...does it again.

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**C&W**

"Without question...will change the face of first-person shooters..."

**PLAY**

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**GameSpy.com**

"And while the graphics are an excellent draw, there's much more to talk about here - from the surprisingly compelling story to the sheer variety of environments to the awesome balance and design."

**pc.ign.com**

"...the best single-player game I've seen since Half-Life and Return to Castle Wolfenstein. For you fans of single-player FPS, watch out - there's a new BOOB Gonia coming. You have been warned!"

**actiontrip.com**

"The defend-your-base missions that include commanding a squad of your own troops...are some of the most exciting gaming moments I have experienced."

**XGR.com**

"Pants-wetting visuals and physics...it's firmly placed to set the benchmark for this year's slew of FPS games...it's going to be a hard one to beat."

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Bulls are generally a matter of numbers as opposed to any real strategy.

## Impossible Creatures

Stalking the competition BY RON DULIN

### GAME STATS

PICTURE MEDIUM

ISSUE: BILAC

ENTERTAINMENT

GEN: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

USING: TEEN/COMIC

MILD/SLIGHT VIOLENCE

FILE: \$29.99

BOUNDED: POSITION IN SOG

120MB RAM, 1 GB HD

ONE SPACE

ESSENTIAL FEATURES:

PLAYING 4, SHAR GUN

REMOVING BATTLE LOG

INTERNET 2-4 PLAYERS

**O**ld joke: What do you get when you cross an elephant with a rhinoceros? Relic Entertainment, maker of 1999's excellent *Homeworld*, has built a whole game around the punch line. *Impossible Creatures* is a real-time strategy game with a single hook: You create units by combining animals. It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story. But the game is all style and little substance: *Impossible Creatures* doesn't have the strategic complexity of more

recent RTS games, so while designing units can be entertaining, putting them to use is often a repetitive task.

### Pulp fiction

*Impossible Creatures* takes place in the 1930s. The protagonist is James Chance, a scruffy adventurer who is contacted by his long-lost father. He learns that the senior Chance was involved with the development of sigma technology, which allows the combining of animals. You must help James put the technology to use, gathering animal DNA and creating bigger and better units as the plot grows increasingly silly. Relic has opted to ape sources like *King Kong*, *101 Dalmatians*, and even *Mad Monster Party* for its characters, creating an occasionally humorous but not very engaging story on which to hang the missions.

These missions follow a fairly typical build-a-base, create-an-army, sweep-the-map blueprint. There are occasional deviations,

giving you challenges like stopping a fire from reaching your base or finding a missing cohort. Most missions also require that you collect the DNA of resident creatures, and occasionally these will allow you to build significantly better units. The missions are fairly predictable, and the AI seems more scripted than dynamic. Also, your computer opponents always have better unit components than you do, so you're constantly fighting an uphill battle.

### Building imperfect beasts

The best part of the game is designing your units. You choose two creatures and mix and match segments. There are some interesting combinations, such as flying hippos, and lobbers with bull's heads. The unit's final characteristics and statistics are determined by the chosen segments. For instance, slapping praying mantis legs on a bull will give the unit a powerful leaping/going attack. It's fun to tweak the available combinations, trying to get the best beast for your buck. The possibilities are varied but, unfortunately,



Combining creatures is the best part of the game.



The story is told both with imaginative cut-scenes and the sort of stylized art utilized in Homeworld.



He's even called "The King."



A butterfly slingshot of reinforcements.



The chameopotamus uses its tongue as a ranged attack.

the useful combinations aren't. Though weaker creatures have some unique abilities, such as burrowing or poison, these characteristics often aren't as useful as pure might and defensive strength. What's worse, flying creatures are all but useless. They're usually weak, and anti-air towers are so powerful that they don't stand a chance. Flying whales look great as they sail around their home base, but try to free your Willy-birds from an opponent and they'll be torn to shreds.

You can only keep nine creature designs in your zoo, so there's a constant need to rethink your army. The small number of available units seems like an artificial constraint in the single-player campaign, and it's most likely there to keep some semblance of balance in multiplayer games, in which you load one of your armies and have at your opponents. Multiplayer and skirmish games are all about who has the better army for the map, so the strategy all takes place before the match even starts. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can make games quick and

painful when someone has a far superior force. You can also select from some pre-designed armies, or have a random army selected for you. The latter, though, is a foolish choice! It's no fun finding yourself on an island map with no aquatic or flying units.

The rest of the game is straightforward. There's a small research tree that allows you to improve your base defenses and the efficiency of your harvesters. You can also research improvements to individual

units' statistics, which is a helpful, if somewhat unsatisfying, way of strengthening your army. Base building is likewise straightforward, but buildings look so similar that even late in the game you may have to consult the pop-up help to determine which is what. Luckily, the animals look good when you zoom in and watch them work, though they all look similar when playing from the default distance—especially if you're fond of a particular torso.

The ability to play Dr. Moreau keeps impossible Creatures from being a completely generic RTS, but the missions don't require strategy so much as huge armies and brute force. Most likely, the novelty of the campaign will wear off before you can access the strongest creatures and answer the riddle posed by the game with an elephant of your own.

**It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story—too bad it's all style, little substance.**

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

This by-the-numbers RTS fails to guarantee any magnificence, animal or otherwise.



If more magic had graced teachers, I bet there'd be a lot fewer students.

## Archangel

To hell in a handbasket BY DENISE COOK

### GAME STATS

GENRE: ACTION

PRODUCTION:

30070 METROPOLIS

SOFTWARE: SMC

OS: PC/9X/PS2/360

NATURE: INDIA, STRONG

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

100 \$2000 EQUATIONS

PICTURE IS ABO, 15000

RAM, 20000 HARD DRIVE

SPACE REQUIRED

1000000 PICTURE 4

LAGO, 25000 RAM, 50000

HARD DRIVE SPACE,

2500 30 CARB

NEEDS 10000

**W**hile driving home one night, Michael Travinisky scours the radio for good songs. "Sympathy for the Devil" gets the ax. "Earth Angel" is stalkerly. "Highway to Hell" cuts out suddenly as a truck hits his car...Michael comes to in a medieval monastery, where resident monks promptly pronounce him "The Awakened One" and hand him the Sword of Light, an evil-purging magical weapon. Unable to remember his past, Michael accepts his supposed destiny to destroy every nasty thing that louts the Earth. If only Michael could read the fine print on the sword: "Using this weapon depletes your spirit energy in three seconds, and you must then idle by a calendar to replenish energy—he might be a little less likely to undertake this great quest, I know I would be.

It seems that the local Master of

torturous to the tainted, while its armor-like skin takes half-normal damage from the damned.

Nearby enemies often target and beat the hell out of your supposedly invisible ghost-form. The ghostly combat spell is also slow and weak. The warrior fares better in battle, but in either case, once spirit energy drains you become a human track star while waiting for it to refill.

While progressing through Archangel's endlessly cackling, map-beret, identical-for-ghost-and-warrior paths, you receive item-gathering quests from NPCs. You also earn upgradeable spells like Regeneration, Hypnosis, and Holy Protection by slaughtering the sinister, and can increase form-transformation time as well. Regeneration uses spirit energy to increase health; this is critical, as first aid kits are scarce. Sinfully, spells

are accessible only via inventory scrolling, which freezes you but not your aggressors. Slaying hordes of satanic sycophants transforms Michael's appearance into that of a supposed archangel, but there's little enemy variation, and even less AI, and the copycat bosses just require repetitive slashing with the Sword of Light (in between those pesky spirit-energizing retreats). You can't block attacks, either.

You collect knives, arrows, axes, and guns, depending upon which of the three inexplicably linked worlds throughout time (Old Ages, Berlin 2039, or Forgotten Place) you inhabit. As for those worlds, various monks and an angel make cut-scene appearances in them, but there's little connection between lands.

Archangel's plot is almost nonexistent.

Although fire, water, and spell effects are decent and the settings colorful, Archangel's dated 3D graphics feature gray pathways and backdrops that sometimes leap forward from the shadows. Jerky, cookie-cutter character models are blocky and expressionless, and bystanders ignore battles.

The diverse soundtrack is divine, but the voiceovers range from good to damnable, and dialogue is lazier than a wingless angel. As far as heavenly gaming goes, this Archangel doesn't just fall, it plummets from grace.

### VERDICT ★★★★★

The light at the end of the tunnel needs a new bulb.

## Archangel's plot is almost nonexistent.

Darkness has unleashed a demonic army, and villagers are dropping faster than your Spirit energy bar. After brief tutorials on jumping, sneaking, and slashing, you're sent out on a third-person adventure, where a floating head asks you to choose one of two battle forms you will be able to temporarily morph into throughout the game. The ghost form offers invisibility plus one combat spell, but takes twice-normal injury from the infernal. Alternatively, the warrior form's slicing arm is more



The only weapon that damages bosses is the Sword of Light, which drains spirit energy so fast, there's nothing left to fuel spells with.





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It's Frogger versus mosquitoes dressed like the Village People

## Frogger: The Great Quest

It ain't easy seein' green... BY DARREN GLADSTONE

### GAME STATS

FOR SALE NOW  
 DEVELOPER: PAPA PETE STUDIO  
 TYPE: EVERYONE  
 ESRB: EVERYONE  
 1992, 2009  
 RECOMMENDS: PENTAGON III  
 SOUL, OCEAN RAM, ARBOR  
 NARR: BRUCE SPALD  
 RECOMMENDS: OCEAN RAM  
 PENTAGON 4, OCEAN RAM  
 NETWORK SUPPORT: NONE

**F**rogger and I go way back. The arcade original had me frantically navigating rush-hour traffic with a pile of quarters at my side. And now that I think about it, Hasbro's 3D sequel in 1998 wasn't half-bad either. But it's all over now. In fact, after playing this luscious Reymann-wannabe crap, I'm ready to take the little mothercracker out back, chop off his headquarters, and serve 'em up at a prissy Persian bistro.

The old green guy now has a more human demeanor (complete with an Old Navy-esque vest and cargo shorts), and you guide him through a half-assed console port by jumping, spitting

out loogies, and performing frog-frog chops. That isn't too bad, but the uninspired, me-too gameplay—and the problems that come with 3D platforming titles—plagues Frogger: The Great Quest every hop of the way.

Saying the camera controls are hard to manage as you try to navigate your way through the game is a gross understatement. Whether you are climbing up a tree (I'm assuming so you can hang yourself) or spelunking in a cavern, even the most basic areas become a constant battle of readjusting the camera angle on the fly. But the really annoying thing to watch is the painfully ported graphics. The god-awful grainy graphics (maybe 800x600 resolution—if I'm being kind) should be considered a felony.

OK, so maybe I'm not the target audience for this game. Maybe I'm being overly harsh here. But for the money that they're asking, I could just as easily snag a title that's a whole lot less offensive to my senses—for example, Reymann.

On its best day, Frogger is just a pale imitation of a good platforming title. The only thing "great" about this quest is finally being done with it. Hell, the fact that I needed to come back and revisit Frogger to fill up this much space on a page has made this my own personal Vietnam. Ribbit.

### VERDICT ★★★★★

This game will make you wish he got run over by a truck back in 1983.

GAME PATCHES

## Revisionist History

Age of Mythology/Arx Fatalis  
 By Thomas L. McDonnell

**T**he number of polished RTS games this past year—Medieval Total War, Age of Mythology, Warcraft III, and Warlords: Battlecry II—shows a genre that has achieved a rare level of refinement. Each of these games has received some postrelease tweaking, but in almost all cases, these were fine-tunings, not game-saving overhauls. Ensemble



continues this trend with Age of Mythology version 1.02, dedicated primarily to minor balance issues.

Most changes come in the form of numerous unit tweaks. Loki's ox carts lose 80 hit points and ancestors lose 40. Odin gets a husting bonus in order to increase Odin village and dwarf hunting rate from -10 percent to +20 percent. Thor's pig sticker improvement increases hunting rate from +10 percent to +20 percent. Riding cavalry have +10 percent more Pierce and +5 percent Hack armor. Helepoll—one of the most problematic units in the game—now have -15 percent Hack armor, occupy +1 population slots, and have -50 hit points. The costs for the Norse long-house, Isis obelisk, and Egyptian barracks are modified. A minor stat error in Ensemble Studios Online is also fixed.

Oh, those wacky French. Arkane Studios has issued a patch for Arx Fatalis that fixes one problem, but for maximum confusion they left the version number at 1.15. Has it come to the point where small development houses can't even afford the price of a "6"? Anyway, if a player failed to free Kultar from prison at the beginning of the game, Kultar would attack the player in the castle. This led to a dead end because the sewers wouldn't open. Well, this is fixed in unnamed patch number—well, let's just call it US Part Deux, and maybe we can chip in to buy Arkane a new version number.



The ladies love it when you puff out your sack.

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The city's ghastly location hardly provides for an heroic-but-a-shopping-cart-in-a-butcher's-apartment? Now that's weird.

## Silent Hill 2

No thrills and maybe two chills BY ERIK WOLPAW

### GAME STATS

DEVICED KONAMI

DEVICED KONAMI

GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

OS: PC, PS2, XBOX

OS: PC, PS2, XBOX

GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

PRICE: \$49.99 (RETAIL)

PLATFORM: PC, PS2, XBOX

RAIL, 1-800-848-8488

SPACE: 300MB

RECOMMEND: FORTNITE

SCORE: 10/10

RECOMMEND: FORTNITE

SCORE: 10/10

RECOMMEND: FORTNITE

SCORE: 10/10

**T**he *Silent Hill 2* box cover folds open to reveal small, dark screenshots amid enthusiastic quotes from reviews of the original PS2 version. Stuff magazine warns, "Don't play this terrifying action game alone," while Maxim calls it "hands-down the creepiest videogame ever." It's possible that America's mass lifestyle magazines somehow mistook confusion for terror, because *Silent Hill 2* doesn't make much sense even when judged against the already (as sense-making standards of the survival-horror genre, which might be excusable if it was scary—which it isn't—or if it featured decent combat—which it doesn't).

As the game starts, you're received a letter from your dead wife asking you to meet her in a town called Silent Hill. The search for her unfolds with a sort of

dream logic—the logic that leads people to believe you'd be interested in hearing their boring dreams. Every character you run across appears to have one foot in a plot from some other game. Most of the dialogue and character actions make no sense, especially considering that the streets of Silent Hill are filled with monsters on a killing rampage. People go from being sarcastic to fearful to your best pal to your worst enemy, all within the span of a sentence. Virtually every word from the characters' mouths is as senseless as the puzzles. And it's all accompanied by a hugely inappropriate light-jazz soundtrack. *Silent Hill 2* may be the world's first survival-Dada game.

Your main enemy is a beefy guy in a butcher's smock wearing what looks like a rusty sink on his head. To be fair, Pyramid Head (as he's called) is a



Prepare for a whole lot of wondering around aimlessly in the fog.

This might have made sense if the camera had been used to generate sudden shocks, but there isn't a single startling moment in the game. The camera's tendency to face you so that you can't see what's in front of you seems to have been engineered for maximum annoyance. There's a

## *Silent Hill 2* may be the world's first survival-Dada game.



This wouldn't be such a puzzle if he'd just remember that the town is overrun with terrifying monsters.

weirdly creepy invention. Other than that, though, *Silent Hill 2* is all hackneyed atmosphere and no payoff. The city is blanketed in thick fog (later replaced by thick inky blackness). For fog to inspire terror, however, it needs to obscure something terrifying. Instead, it merely obscures the places you need to go and the crazy objects you need to find to solve the hambrained puzzles, making the fog significantly more aggravating than scary.

The graphics engine is Jelly 3D, but the camera isn't really under your control

command that rotates the camera behind you, but it only works sporadically. These camera problems, combined with shift, awkward controls and a lack of monster variety, make combat very unsatisfying.

With its lackadaisical pace, clumsy action sequences, and surreal atmosphere that's more disjointed than disturbing, *Silent Hill 2* is a nightmare, but only to play.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

It'll bore you...to death.



If Tsushima's battles get out of control, slow down the game speed or hit the Pause button in order to reassess your strategy.

## Tsushima

Gesundheit BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

### GAME STATS

PREVIOUS HPS SIMULATIONS  
 2009 HPS SIMULATIONS  
 2010 WARGAMES (2010)  
 2011 BLOOD AND VIOLENCE  
 2012 PENTON 113  
 2013 2010 RAIL 15000  
 HARD ON THE SPACE  
 2014 2010 2010 2010  
 2015 2010 2010 2010  
 2016 2010 2010 2010

**J**ohn Tiller and his development team are known for creating top-notch wargames without the "messy distraction" of eye candy. *Tsushima*, the second installment from HPS Simulations' *Naval Campaigns* series, offers balanced playability rarely seen in war simulations.

For those left out of military-history circles, *Tsushima* was a ferocious naval battle fought during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The Japanese Imperial navy defeated Russia's Baltic fleet near

secondary ranges, torpedo attacks, mines, opening and closing ranges, as well as ship speeds and damage assessments. Managing all of the and fighting against the deft AI, can be daunting at times, especially if you're using the Fog of War option. However, there are several speeds of play, and you can issue orders while passed.

The game also provides a simulation of the smaller, individual portions of the epic battle. There's an alternate version where the Russians get to combine their Baltic and Pacific fleets for a massive

## Tsushima offers the balanced playability lacking in most war simulations of this period.

the Straits of Tsushima in 1905, and this decisive engagement ultimately dictated the outcome of the war.

Simpistic in design, *Tsushima* allows players to pick either the Russian or Japanese side, or both, with the eventual outcome resting solely on a player's strategic acumen. The tactical naval engagements are fought in real time and are balanced by the Objectives feature, which makes otherwise lopsided scenarios playable. You won't need to destroy the entire enemy fleet that outnumbers you three to one in order to score a win.

Many factors are involved in successfully commanding your fleet. You must understand the capabilities of the various steamships, including primary and

engagement with the Imperial navy. *Tsushima* includes the battles of Yellow Sea and Utsun, fought during the Russo-Japanese War, which allows the game to offer a variety of scenarios.

*Tsushima* has a multiplayer experience with more than 200 players (only one Admiral per side), and it comes with a full-featured scenario editor, allowing you to create and modify scenarios using a chart overlay along with naval charts of actual battles. If you're a naval tactician or a wargamer, then *Tsushima* is for you.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★  
 John Tiller takes another obscure conflict in history and makes it playable.

Vazhar  
 by Full Sail Student  
 Brian German



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# Neocron

In the future, life is...boring BY GEORGE JONES

## GAME STATS

APPROX. CDV SOFTWARE  
 REVENUE: SEARATED MEDIA  
 GENRE: MMORPG  
 ESRB RATING: MATURE, TYPICAL  
 THEMES: STRONG LANGUAGE,  
 USE OF DRUGS, VIOLENCE  
 PEGI: 12+ / 15+ / 16+ / 18+  
 MONTHLY FEE: \$14.99 / \$19.99 PER  
 MONTH (FREE TRIAL) / PAKTUM  
 IL, 12MM BAK, 1 HD HARD  
 DRIVE SPACE, 56 KB MODEM  
 CONNECTION REQUIREMENT: 56KB  
 BAK, HIGH-SPEED INTERNET  
 CONNECTION RECOMMENDED  
 SUPPORT: 24/7 AND 24/7

**I**t's not often that pacing problems plague a massively multiplayer RPG. More often than not, this is a genre that overwhelms and paralyzes gamers with way too much, way too soon. But not Neocron. From the moment you enter CDV Software's postapocalyptic online world, you'll be confused, bored, and lonely. Which is a shame, because as far as concepts go, Neocron has promise. But structure and setting aren't enough these days. Not anymore—we gamers need fundamentally strong gameplay in our online experiences to stay interested and occupied. Lacking that, we at least need a large, enthusiastic community in the game world. Neocron, unfortunately, falls startlingly short on both fronts.

Clue number one that Neocron is on the wrong track: to get into the game's backstory, you have to read 16 pages of text at the back of the manual. What a bummer—it's an interesting postnuclear setting that should have been conveyed in the context of the gameplay. Clue number two comes the moment you exit your alter ego's apartment and enter the game world. You only have two apparent options to build up your wealth: courier missions or combat. Both will provide a mind-numbing halt to your enthusiasm for Neocron.

The courier missions consist of moving from one part of the city to another, picking up a package, then delivering it. Yawn. The upside of these missions is that you get to take in the spectacular sights and sounds of the city, but still.

So, this leaves you with combat. However, if you didn't select the GenTank (genetically modified human tank) character type, the typical newbie diet of rats, roaches, and bats is going to repeatedly kick your ass. Thankfully, when you die, you respawn in your apartment, where you only have to pay 200 credits to retrieve your backpack and belongings. The problem is that you start with 600 credits. Die four times and you're out of cash, with no way to get your belongings back until you get more money. Oops—looks like it's back to being a delivery boy.

It's all so frustrating and depressing—even if MMORPGs evolved beyond these



Darkness, seen fights, lots of men with facial hair...is this an MMORPG or the Blue Oyster?



Be careful in the red-light district. Entering the Passycot Club repeatedly crashed the game for me.

basic boring notions of gameplay? Open-ended online play does not mean directionless, slow-paced gaming where you have to pay your dues for hours before anything exciting happens. Who's going to wait around for that?

These game design issues are compounded by recurring server errors and crashes. And then there's the lackluster social nature of the world. Most of Neocron is a ghost town, utterly devoid of human characters, which feels decidedly nonfuturistic. While a

community of gamers does exist, it tends to congregate in a few choice spots that you'll have to stumble upon. Unfortunately, gamers in Neocron aren't all that friendly. You'll get answers to your questions, but that's about it.

As you play deeper into the game, Neocron does become a little more entertaining and complex, with grander missions and greater intrigue. But as it stands, very few gamers will make it that far—certainly not at the rate of 10 bucks a month.

**From the moment you enter CDV Software's postapocalyptic online world, you'll be confused, bored...and lonely.**

## VERDICT ★★★★★

Reaktor Media should have spent less time on Neocron's look and more time on the game's feel.

# REVIEWINDEX

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

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
<b>America's Army: Operations</b>	1/03	The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—and it's totally free	★★★★
<b>Asiana III</b>	3/03	Deeper and better thought-out than many prettier MMORPGs	★★★★
<b>Battlefield 1942</b>	1/03	The Multiplayer Game of the Year is a complete blast	★★★★
<b>Battle Realms: Water of the Well</b>	3/03	Office dull and unchallenging, it adds little to <i>Active Worlds</i>	★★☆☆
<b>Civilization III: Play the World</b>	2/03	Inevitably buggy as skipper; enjoyable without the patch	★★☆☆
<b>Combat Flight Simulator 3</b>	2/03	Launched without adequate flight testing	★★★★
<b>Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin</b>	2/03	The closest thing we have to the perfect wargame	★★★★
<b>Deadly Omen: Pacific Theater</b>	3/03	Budget price with better-than-average gameplay	★★★★
<b>Divine Divinity</b>	12/02	An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and worst sense	★★★☆☆
<b>Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair</b>	3/03	Buggy, poorly designed, and disappointing, it's still better than the arcade version	★★☆☆
<b>Earth &amp; Beyond</b>	2/03	Overstuffed in space	★★★★
<b>The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind</b>	8/02	No surprise that the definitive, open-ended RPG is our RPG of 2002	★★★★
<b>The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal</b>	3/03	This expensive hit on both the strengths and weaknesses of <i>Morrowind</i>	★★★☆☆
<b>EverQuest: Planes of Power</b>	2/03	Mere fuel for the fires of die-hard ED fans	★★★☆☆
<b>FIFA 2003</b>	2/03	A good soccer game with World Cup-quality graphics	★★★★
<b>Check Please! Island Thumper</b>	1/03	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one	★★★★
<b>G.I. Combat</b>	3/03	It's Close Combat gone 3D and gone bad	★★☆☆
<b>Hearts of Iron</b>	2/03	An enormously ambitious WWII strategy game with a lot of flaws	★★★★
<b>Hegemony: Legions of Iron</b>	3/03	Not enough strategy, not enough game	★★☆☆
<b>Hitman 2: Silent Assassin</b>	1/03	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth	★★★★
<b>Iron Storm</b>	2/03	A boring, buggy abject of hover life, with bad AI	★★☆☆
<b>James Bond 007: NightFire</b>	3/03	Almost got the first-ever hall-of-star rating in CGW	★★☆☆
<b>MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries</b>	2/03	The best MechWarrior yet	★★★★
<b>Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Spearhead</b>	2/03	Taut, well-scripted add-on to the just too short	★★★★
<b>Medieval: Total War</b>	12/02	The ultimate historical strategy game	★★★★
<b>NASCAR Thunder 2003</b>	2/03	Solid, but not the same caliber as <i>Papyrus' NASCAR Racing 2002</i>	★★★☆☆
<b>Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2</b>	2/03	One of the best high-class racing experiences around	★★★★
<b>NHL 2003</b>	2/03	The same old arcade hockey game, with updated rosters and downgraded A.I.	★★☆☆
<b>No One Lives Forever 2</b>	1/03	As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too	★★★★
<b>Operation Flashpoint: Resistance</b>	10/02	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion	★★★★
<b>O.R.B.</b>	3/03	This <i>Morrowind</i> clone abandons much of what that game did well	★★☆☆
<b>Platoon</b>	3/03	Every bit as bad as you'd expect it to be	★★☆☆
<b>Project Namod</b>	2/03	Pretty floating islands crush on the shores of mediocre gameplay	★★☆☆
<b>RailSport Challenge</b>	3/03	The best of the Xbox version doesn't quite make the jump to PC	★★★☆☆
<b>Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood</b>	3/03	A fresh, deep speed-based game in the <i>Commander</i> vein	★★★★
<b>RollerCoaster Tycoon 2</b>	1/03	Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs	★★★☆☆
<b>SidCity 4</b>	3/03	A fresh, gorgeous take on a classic, but you'll need a beefy computer to run it	★★★★
<b>Soldiers of Anarchy</b>	3/03	Save time and money and pull <i>Fallen</i> 's tactics from your local bargain bin	★★☆☆
<b>Star Trek: Starfleet Command III</b>	3/03	The Next Gen license is wasted on a game a few big patches away from being good	★★☆☆
<b>Strike Fighters: Project 1</b>	3/03	Months of bug fixes, polish, and user-requests away from being worth your money	★★☆☆
<b>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003</b>	3/03	Better than <i>Coke</i> the way Tiger is better than you	★★★★
<b>Treasure Planet</b>	2/03	<i>Starfleet Command</i> for kids, with rocket-powered sailing vessels	★★★★
<b>Universal Tournament 2003</b>	1/03	Congress and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay	★★★★
<b>WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos</b>	5/02	A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement	★★★★
<b>Waris Blast</b>	2/03	Warrior games <i>Just a Move</i> and loses something in the process	★★☆☆
<b>Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania</b>	3/03	If you gotta have whales and seals in your zoo, buy it	★★★☆☆

## CGW RECOMMENDS



### Asheron's Call 2:

#### Fallen Kings ★★★★★

With the original overshadowed by *EverQuest*, this first big next-gen MMORPG came with a bit of a chip on its shoulder. While it hasn't totally blown us away, *AC2* is doing a lot of things right: a great noble experience, stellar graphics, and a forgiving skill system that makes sense.



### Ark Fatalis ★★★★★

We edit our expectations weren't the highest for this out-of-nowhere, French-developed *Ultima Underworld* wannabe, so maybe that's why we were initially wowed. But by the time we finished the game, *Ark* had earned our respect, not just beaten our lowered expectations. It may have the most annoying interface of any RPG ever, but it looks great, plays better, and is as worthy of your time as any of the more battle-hardened RPGs from 2002.



### Splinter Cell ★★★★★

Once upon a time, console ports were the absolute drags of PC gaming—uniformly horrible, garish, buggy wastes of time and money. Not any longer—if *GTA3* didn't convince you those days were over, *Splinter Cell* definitely will. Loaded with atmosphere and cool gadgets, this amazing first-person sneaker is even better on the PC thanks to sharper graphics and mouse-look.

# Tech

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



PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS



# FINALLY, AN LCD THAT WON'T LET GAMERS DOWN

Hitachi's 17-inch flat panel is a gamer's dream come true.

Everyone wants an LCD monitor. The technology is hot, and it's taking the industry by storm. Furthermore, LCD monitors are more than just easy on the eyes; they're also ergonomic masterpieces capable of making tired old colors look bright and scintillating. But although everyone agrees that flat panels are damn sexy, LCD monitors have historically had a couple of huge downsides that leave the average gamer unwilling to buy one: price and resolution.

The fact remains that purchasing a decent 17-inch or 19-inch LCD monitor is going to sink you into a very deep hole. Add to that limited resolution and refresh rates, and it's no wonder that gamers shy away from them. Who wants to limit their Radeon 9700 Pro or GeForce4 Ti 4600 GPU to playing Unreal Tournament 2003 at 12x7 simply because that's the highest resolution your monitor can handle?

By Raphael Liberatore Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

Hitachi's 17-inch CML174 LCD monitor, though, comes packed with innovation. It has a sleek enclosure and small bezel, which makes it the smallest 17-inch LCD on the planet using both DVI-D and analog. It also comes with a five-year warranty, making this one of the better values on the market. Viewing angles are more relaxed with the CML174's SuperView technology, which provides a full 160 to 170 degree range. That's especially nice considering how restrictive LCD viewing angles tend to be—basically, you have to sit directly in front of them to get the best visual.

Firing up a couple of games of Age of Mythology, Battlefield 1942, and Unreal Tournament 2003 in 1280x1024 at 60Hz showed excellent image quality. Saturation and clarity also are top notch, with blues and reds really shining through. The screen's faster response times kept the action from choking. As a matter of fact, the 12 millisecond and 135MHz video clock frequency are way better than any other LCD monitor in its class. It has a lot to brag about.

If you crave an LCD monitor for gaming, then the CML174 is the one to get. Take it from us, you won't be disappointed.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

Hitachi proves gaming on a 17-inch LCD is, in fact, rewarding.



**The CML174 monitor comes packed with innovation.**

## Many Cards in One From Hercules

Gaming action takes on an entirely different perspective BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

**TECH STATS**

MANUFACTURER: HERCULES

MSRP: \$99.99



**O**K, you're probably asking, "What the hell is a DV imaging card review doing in a computer gaming rag?" Good question. It may seem as though we've been hanging out at the bar with Will a little too much, but we just thought you'd be interested in something cool from a company known for its quality gaming components. Hercules has been offering a plethora of video and audio cards for years, and the company has made watching and creating DVD movies on your gaming rig a treat.

So, what's with the DV Action Pro? It's really several cards in one. First and foremost, it's a video editing card that allows you to create your own DVDs, CDs, and other media in MPEG1 and MPEG2 formats. The user-friendly software packages are extremely easy to learn, and the ShuttlePRO device is

easy to navigate. Just drag and drop your scenes, music, titles, commentaries, transitions, and special effects with programs like MediaStudio Pro, DVD Authoring, or 3D Cool! Pretty neat, eh?

Second, and more to the point, the DV Action Pro allows you to play movies in DVDs, SVCDs, VCDs, and other media on your PC and home DVD player, creating less of a bottleneck on the processor. To use the DV Action Pro as a video capture card, you can attach a PAL or NTSC-capable camcorder in any of the three FireWire ports. You can even capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and then e-mail them to all your buddies.

Now the world can have the DVD full of your gaming highlights that it's been clamoring for.

**VERDICT** ★★★★★

It's not technically a gaming device, but heck, knowledge is power, right?

**You can capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and e-mail them to your buddies.**

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## Affordable and Effective Optical Storage

A perfect CD-RW solution BY JOEL DURHAM



### TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: ASUS  
RETAIL PRICE: \$79

**I**t takes a near-perfect product to get this picky reviewer to type "None" in the cons category. However, with its CRW-4012A USB 2.0 External CD-RW drive, Asus has constructed quite a marvel: it does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

With speeds of 40x (write), 12x (rewrite), and 48x (read), it's a solid, state-of-the-art drive. Asus concentrates on usability, forgoing fancy ports, lame-style styling for functionality: The CRW-4012A is a simple computer-

remarkably well, comparable to any internal unit. It wrote a 75MB file to a CD-R in 74 seconds, matching the time it took an EIDE 40x/16x/40x drive on the same PC to write the file. Both drives' transfer rates trailed around at 40x, a bit ahead of spec. Asus' CPU utilization was lower than that of the internal drive, requiring only 6 percent of the processor's power for 8x transfers versus the internal drive's 10 percent.

The Asus drive's only limitation is true for any external drive: It doesn't play audio CDs through the system speakers

## Asus has constructed quite a marvel: The CRW-4012A does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

being rectangle, 9x6x2 inches. It requires its own AC power and comes with a small adapter, and it's as portable as any product in its category.

Asus went all out on the documentation, including a friendly 26-page manual (we didn't know there was that much to say about a CD drive) and a foldout quick-start guide. Also included is a copy of Ahead Nero Burning ROM 5, an exceptional audio and data CD-burning software package.

In testing, the drive performed

It does include a 1/8-inch headphone jack, volume control, and two buttons that control play/fast forward and stop/object.

Asus went all out with the CRW-4012A. It's highly recommended for anyone who wants a fast, quiet, and reliable external CD-RW drive.

### VERDICT ★★★★★

Asus' External CD-RW drive is sleek, speedy, and easy to use.



**WIL  
POWER**

By William O'Real

## Wear Your Condoms and Save Your Driver Disks!

**T**he other day, I decided to install an Audigy 2 card on my work rig: a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 with 1GB of DDR, a Radeon 9700 Pro, and an Intel 08450G motherboard.

I installed the card and proceeded with the driver installation...which was about 95 percent complete when the machine mysteriously rebooted, causing me to put my head in my hands and mutter, "Oh crap!" Eventually, the machine booted, but the hard drive was churning like an Amish farmer making butter. In my Device Manager, something called the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator "wasn't working," and neither was my Plextor CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo drive. I muttered some more: "This can't be good."

To make a long story short, the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator is, apparently, kind of important, so I mentioned difficult to reinstall, but alas, that didn't help.

After a couple hours of dealing with that (and my IT guy reminding me that I'm "officially not supported by Ziff Davis"), I decided to build an entirely new rig. I yanked out my mobo and hard drive and installed VIA's P4PB-400, 1GB of Corsair memory, and an 80GB hard drive "borrowed" from a machine I reviewed (I hope the manufacturer doesn't remember the machine I sent me had a RAID). I also put in a Radeon 9700 Pro and a 2.0GHz Pentium 4.

The physical installation took about 15 minutes, but I had misplaced the driver disk for the motherboard. Well, it took me all friggin' day to get that machine up and running. And the lesson I learned and am sharing with you all is this: Never, ever throw away driver disks.



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# Lloyd's Cracked Case

Be the server **By Lloyd Case**

**I**f you've played such online games as *Unreal Tournament* or *Battlefield 1942*, you've no doubt encountered both good and bad game servers. When you find a good server, it's akin to finding a little patch of heaven: The players are considerate (even as they hunt you down), the team-killers are absent, and your own side always seems to be in the groove. But, after a while, gaming on other people's servers may seem stale. If that's the case, it may be time for you to host your own.

If you've got a broadband connection, this can definitely be fun. But, as with most things PC gaming, there are pitfalls and difficulties to consider.

First, having a broadband connection doesn't mean you can instantly put a server on the Net. You need to be aware of a few details about your setup:

- Is it always on, or is it a virtual dial-up connection, such as PPPoE? If it's an always-on connection, putting up a server is as easy as launching an app. But if you have PPPoE, you'll need to set up some type of virtual autodialer to keep the connection live. Many

## Trying to run a 32-player *BF1942* server on certain types of connections is like trying to drink an Icee with a cocktail straw.

broadband routers can do this.

- What does your ISP think about your server scheme? Read the terms and conditions of your ISP contract; you may be expressly prevented from running any type of server.

- How many IP addresses do you have? If you have just a single address dynamically assigned by your ISP, then running a 24/7 server may not be practical, even if you're using a router. Still, you can run a server for hours at a stretch (like when you're in bed). You might want to consider investing in a second, dedicated IP address, which often comes at an additional charge.

- Do you have a good hardware broadband router? Putting your lone PC on the Net as a server means potential exposure to script kiddies and other unfriendly people who would be very happy to use your system as a slave for

their denial of service attacks.

- If you have a router, it's worth learning the ins and outs of techniques like port forwarding or port triggering. These allow you to set up game servers without exposing the system to the harsh realities of hacker life on the Net.

- Don't forget your upstream speed. Some servers consume relatively little upstream speed. Others, like *Battlefield 1942*, consume as much as 32Kb of upstream speed per player. A typical cable connection mases out at 128Kbps upstream, or perhaps 256Kbps if you're lucky. Trying to run a 32-player *BF1942* server on this type of connection is like trying to drink an Icee with a cocktail straw: You can do it, but it'll be a frustrating experience.

If you still think you want to set a system up as a game server, then there are just a few other details you need to

know. First, find out if the game has a dedicated server package. Most shooters do, and few other multiplayer games do as well. A dedicated server doesn't need a lot of beefy audio or graphics hardware.

Do some upfront research on the particular game you want to serve up. Become familiar with the needed commands, learn about connection logs, and be prepared to log on periodically as the administrator and boot out unruly people. Also, to help attract the right type of players, consider a server name that's somewhat evocative of what you're trying to present to the world.

You can also dip your toes more gradually into this strange and wonderful universe. Start by offering a password-protected server that only select people can connect to, and be careful about who gets the password. In the end, being the guy with the server is like being the host of a party. Whether or not people—and you, for that matter—have a good time is directly proportional to the amount of effort and passion you bring to your venture.

Finally, drop me an e-mail at [lloyd\\_case@jifltdavis.com](mailto:lloyd_case@jifltdavis.com) and let me know your server name. Some enchanted evening, I just might drop in.



# Tech Medics

You've got questions, I'm not very helpful **By William O'Neal**

## "Dude! You're getting a Dell!"

I am thinking about buying a Dell Dimension desktop PC because of the price. In the January Issue you said, "One consistent knock against Dell is its machines' use of proprietary motherboards." Do I need to be that concerned about Dell's proprietary motherboards? Are their motherboards trash? Does Dell provide BIOS updates as needed? And lastly, their video and audio are actually cards and not built into the motherboard, right? I just wanted to make sure that their motherboards aren't flaky before I buy one.

Brent

Dell's motherboards are by no means "flaky" or "trash"; in fact, I've never really had any problems with Dell motherboards. In my experience, though, Dell's motherboards aren't as fast as those made by other manufacturers, like Asus, Intel, or Abit. That said, with top of the line machines, we're talking about rigs that score 15,500 in 3DMark2001 with Dell motherboards, as opposed to 16,000 with competitors' motherboards. It's like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari. As far as support is concerned, Dell offers BIOS updates and I've always had an easy time finding drivers for their products on their website. And lastly, they do offer machines with onboard audio and video, but I would shy away from those configurations. For instance, the machine that I tested in January shipped with ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card and an Audigy 2 soundcard. You can't beat that.

## Keep your money

I have a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor and I was wondering if I should go ahead and upgrade to the 3.06GHz processor and wait for Asus to release their new BIOS for Hyper Threading, or just wait till an even faster processor comes out? Also, do you have any idea when Nvidia will release their new videocard?

Berba

I don't think there's any gaming-related reason to upgrade from a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 to a 3GHz Pentium 4. Hyper Threading (HT) might be cool if you use applications that can take advantage of multiple processors, but since games don't, your money is better spent somewhere else.



## "Comparing their motherboards is like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari."

### Spend your money

Which is more powerful, the GeForce3 Ti 500, or the GeForce4 Ti 4200? Both are around the same price on the Fry's Electronics website. Also, can you suggest a good set of speakers in the \$50 to \$80 range? Thanks for the help, and I don't know why you get so much hate mail—you seem to know your stuff.

Jack

Get the GeForce4 Ti 4200. A good, inexpensive speaker set is the Inspire 2.1 2500 set from Creative Labs.

### The Internet is your friend

I decided to get the Radeon 9700 Pro after reading a review by some guy in a gaming magazine. I opened up the box to install it and discovered that it says I need Windows XP, 2000, or ME. I am still running 98SE, since it is pretty stable and has handled everything I do. Do I really need to change to XP for this card? Or is there another option?

Tom B.

I went to [mirror.ati.com/support/driver.html](http://mirror.ati.com/support/driver.html) and found 98SE drivers.

### Emulation nation, baby!

Do any of the PC emulators for Macs actually work? I know you did a Mac review recently, and I like Macs better (I use them for video editing), but I am an addicted gamer. Are any of these good enough to support newer games?

David

I forwarded your message to Raphael Liberators, CGW contributor and Mac guru, and this is what he had to say: "If you're talking about PC emulators like Virtual PC, they don't work well for gaming, especially if you're into shooters like Operation Flashpoint and Counter-Strike. The lag is noticeable even with a Quad 1GHz and GeForce4 Ti videocard. However, Virtual PC is functional with games like Celtic Kings and Age of Mythology."

Well, there you have it. You may have to pony up for a PC.

# Killer Rigs

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

## It's all about the components, kids!

People have been jumping down my throat because of my Lean Machine price. However, it's important to remember that my machine simply serves as a guideline. If you're on a strict budget, then swapping my 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro with a 128MB Radeon 9000 Pro will save you more than \$150. Furthermore, going with a \$50 16x Toshiba DVD-ROM drive as opposed to my Plextor Combo Drive will shave off an additional \$100. If that isn't enough, you can go to a website like Pricegrabber.com and find an OEM copy of Windows XP Home for as low as \$65. That alone will save you an additional \$26! So, how's that for a lean machine? Methinks that \$195 ain't too shabby.

## Watch as Wil removes his foot from his mouth!

In the February issue I said, "Asus A7NBX Deluxe (nForce2-based) is a rock-solid Socket-A KT 400 motherboard..." Well, as many of you pointed out, a motherboard cannot boost both nForce2 and KT-400 chipsets. It is, in fact, an nForce2-based mobo. Now, if Jeff Green would just stop making me take those U.S. Air Force-issued Go pills in order to, in his words, "increase my productivity," I'm sure I'd stop making mistakes.



If only Jeff Green would stop making me take Go pills.

## POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 531MHz FSB	\$500
Motherboard	Intel D950DWR	\$170
Case	Antec P156608	\$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC-1066 DDRAM	\$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	\$175
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	\$300
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	\$125
DVD-ROM/ CD RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	\$600
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks S100	\$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Multimedia keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$55
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$300
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$3,060</b>

## 3DMark2001 SE Pro\*

15670

13050

POWER RIG

LEAN MACHINE

## LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Processor (CPU)	1.8GHz AMD Athlon XP 2200+	\$140
Motherboard	ASUS A7NBX Deluxe (nForce 2)	\$130
Case	Antec P156608	\$99
Memory	512MB Crucial PC-2700 DDR-RAM	\$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	\$300
Soundcard	On-board nForce 2 Audio	N/A
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	17" Samsung SyncMaster 766MB	\$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	\$50
Keyboard	Microsoft IntelliNet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	\$45
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$300
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$1,660</b>

\*3DMARK2001 SE PRO



# How To...

Winning for dummies Edited by Dana Jongewaard

## HITMAN 2: WIN FAST

Provided by Eidos and I/O Interactive



### ANATHEMA

- + KILL THE DON
- + GAIN ENTRANCE TO THE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT

Enter the don's compound, then go to the garage and grab the sniper rifle that's next to the car. Without being seen or heard, snipe the don from within the compound walls. Enter his mansion and get the key off his body, then head to the basement. Use the key to enter the basement room, then turn around and run out of the compound and down the dirt road to complete the level.



### ST. PETERSBURG STAKEOUT

- + KILL THE CORRECT GENERAL
- + DON'T HARM ANYONE ELSE

Get the sniper rifle from the locker in the train station. Go to the apartment building indicated on the map and look through any of the windows facing the Pushkin building to see the meeting taking place. Wait for Diana's description of the general and kill the right one. Get back on the train to complete the level.



### KIROV PARK MEETING

- + KILL GENERAL NAKAROV AND HIS HAFIA BUDDY

Get the car bombs from the pick-up spot shown on the map. Then, go into the sewers and use the map to find the manhole closest to the bottom of the map. Attach a bomb to the underside of the car parked over the manhole. Next, head to the manhole closest to the top of the map. Wait for the limo driver to walk by the wall pee in the corner, kill him, take his clothes, and walk (don't run) to the limo and place the car bomb on it. Then, get back to your boat to finish the level.



### TUBEWAY TORPEDO

- + FIND THE REMOTE BOMB
- + KILL YET ANOTHER GENERAL
- + FREE THE PRISONER

First, find the remote bomb and locate the elevator heading into the basement (it's a lot faster if you kill a guard and take his clothes). Use *Stealth* all the way, there is a security control box you should disable. Kill the general in the second basement and talk to the prisoner. Use your map to find the exit. You'll have to blow up a wall, using the remote bomb, to get into the sewer; it's shown as a point of interest on the map.



### INVITATION TO A PARTY

- + KILL THE FOURTH GENERAL
- + SECURE THE SUITCASE

Dress up as a waiter, get the poison (find the pick-up spot on the map), and take a champagne glass from the kitchen. Poison the champagne and walk up to the general; he will take the drink. The ambassador will be the only person whose icon on the map is white. Stay with him until he opens the safe. Kill him, take the suitcase, and go back to the boat.



### TRACKING HAYAMOTO

- + KILL HAYAMOTO JR.
- + PLANT A BUG ON HAYAMOTO JR.'S CORPSE

As soon as this mission starts, head to the front door of the house and kill anyone in your way. Walk right up to Hayamoto Jr.; kill him and everyone else in the room. Plant the bug on his body and run to the exit.



## HIDDEN VALLEY

- THERE ARE REALLY NO OBJECTIVES FOR THIS LEVEL

Just kill a ninja, take his clothes, and use the underground passage to reach the exit.



## SHOGUN SHOWDOWN

- KILL HAYAMOTO SR.
- SECURE THE MISSILE GUIDANCE SYSTEM

First, stealth your way to the missile guidance system in the museum under the basement. You'll need a keycard to avoid setting off any alarms; all guards carry them. Then head to the top floor and kill Hayamoto. Get in the helicopter on the ground floor to complete the level.

## THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT

- PLANT THE HACKING DEVICE
- EXIT ON THE SKY BRIDGE

Locate the system administration room on your map. Go there and snatch the keycard off the desk. Then head to the server room. Place the hacking device on the computer and get to the far end of the sky bridge to exit the level. Use a silenced gun on this level or you'll have to kill every single guard.



## THE JACUZZI JOB

- KILL THE OTHER CHARLIE SIOJAN (TWIN BROTHER WITH THE SAME NAME)
- STEAL THE MONEY
- STEAL THE STATUE

This is a small level with only a few guards, so your best bet is just to kill everyone on the level. A machine gun will come in handy. Open the safe (an alarm will sound, but don't worry about it) and take the money that's in it. Then grab the statue off the pedestal in the room with the piano. Kill Charlie in the hot tub and call the elevator. A group of security guards will be waiting when the doors open; kill them and get on the elevator to exit the level.



## AT THE GATES

- GET TO THE CASTLE UNDETECTED

If you use a sniper rifle, you can get to the castle without being seen. Shoot the generator that's to the right of the castle. Inside the castle are two security panels that you must activate. Then find the exit.



## BASEMENT KILLING

- KILL CHARLIE SIOJAN
- DISABLE THE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

Obtain the smoke bomb from the pick-up spot shown on the map. Set it off anywhere and head to the fee department room. Dress up like a fireman and you'll be given access to the basement via the stairs. Use your map to find Charlie in the basement. Next, head to the elevator near the surveillance screen, in the basement. Shoot the screen and get on the elevator.

## MURDER AT THE BAZAAR

- KILL LIEUTENANT AHMED ZAHIR
- GET THE MAP FROM THE LIEUTENANT
- KILL COL. MOHAMMAD AMIN
- GET THE KEY FROM THE COLONEL

Go to the guard quarters. Grab the Dragunov rifle and shoot the men outside. This will make Col. Amin run toward you. Snipe him as soon as possible, so he doesn't escape. Pick up the key from his body, then snipe the men outside Lt. Zahir's shack. Enter the shack and kill the lieutenant. Take the map from his body. Then take his clothes and run to the exit.





## THE MOTORCADE INTERCEPTION

- ▶ GET THE .50-CALIBER SNIPER RIFLE FROM YOUR CONTACT
- ▶ KILL THE KAHN
- ▶ DON'T KILL ANY U.N. GUARDS

First, snipe every guard on the level, they're easy to kill from a distance, and killing them now will make things easier for you later. Next, find your contact and get the M-195, a .50-caliber sniper rifle. Find a set of stairs that leads to a ladder to the rooftop. Wait there for the convoy. When it's close to you, shoot the engine of the first jeep with the M-195 (only the M-195 rifle will stop a car). Then snipe the Kahn through the windshield of the limo. Run to the exit and don't kill anyone wearing a blue helmet.

## TEMPLE CITY AMBUSH

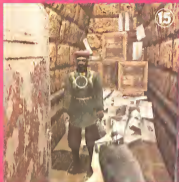
- ▶ MEET WITH THE AGENCY'S CONTACT
- ▶ MEET WITH YOUR CIA BUDDY
- ▶ KILL BOTH ASSASSINS AND TAKE PICTURES OF THEIR BOOIES

First, head directly to the red hitman insignia indicated on the map. After you talk to the Agency's contact, head to the next insignia, then find the two assassins in the marketplace (one is wearing a NY Yankees hat, the other a yellow Glikson's Island-type hat). Kill them and take their pictures with the camera the second contact gave you. Take the pictures back to the second contact (the red insignia will still be on the map). Then find the exit on the map to complete the level.



## TERMINAL HOSPITALITY

- ▶ KILL THE CULT LEADER
- The easiest way to complete this level is with a heavy machine gun. Sneak all the way to the back right-hand side of the main building, where you'll find a locked door. Shoot at it, and guards will run out. Kill everyone that comes out, and then head inside and shoot the cult leader (he'll be on one of the operating tables). Go back to the exit, keep shooting Agent 17 until he leaves, and get in the boat to complete the level.



## TUNNEL RAT

- ▶ KILL YUSSEF HUSSEIN
- ▶ TRANSPORT THE CARGO TO THE SURFACE

Enter the base via either entrance. Kill only those you must, and sneak up to Hussein's room. Kill him and take his clothes. Find the cargo by using your map. Transport it to the surface and kill the guards outside.

## THE DEATH OF HANNELORE

- ▶ GET THE KEY TO THE HINGING PLACE
- ▶ KILL DR. VON KAMPRAD
- ▶ NUDGE DR. KAMPRAD'S BODY
- ▶ KILL NO CIVILIANS

Gain entrance to the hospital (killing one guard and taking his clothes is the easiest way). Find the hitman insignia on the map; the key you must obtain is in this room. Next, you will see a point of interest indicated on the first floor map. Go there and put on the white patient clothes (a robe and slippers). On the way to Dr. Kamprad's office, talk to the nurse in the first floor main lobby. She'll take you directly to Dr. Kamprad. Kill the doctor and drag her to the hiding place indicated on the map. Be careful. If anyone sees her dead body, you'll fail the mission. Once she's hidden, find the exit to complete the level.



## ST. PETERSBURG REVISITED

- ▶ KILL AGENT 17
- Regardless of the direction from which you approach the Pushkin building, Agent 17 will be sniping at you from the closest window. To get past him, run straight at him while sidestepping back and forth. Don't run too close to the building or the guards inside will become alerted. Stop running when you are just out of Agent 17's view, and walk to the front door. Once inside, locate Agent 17, sneak behind him, and use the fiber wire on him. Take his clothes and gun, and walk past the guards outside. Then go into the sewer. Snipe one of the two guards that you see here, take his clothes, and walk to the exit to complete the level.



# SET UP A RAID CONFIG

Looking to squeeze as much power as possible from your system? Set up a RAID configuration. **By Joel Duzham**

**M**ost folks have one hard drive in their computer, and they hardly ever think about it unless something goes wrong. Other than optimizing your hard drive for performance, there's little anyone can do to overcome its primary characteristics in hopes of speeding up access and transfer rates or making it less likely to suffer a data-corrupting heart attack.

RAID, which stands for redundant array of inexpensive (or independent, depending on who you ask) disks, can solve those problems for you. While there are many levels, or types, of RAID, we're going to go through the most commonly used consumer ATA RAID approaches.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

To get started with RAID, you'll need a pair of hard drives (two identical drives work best), one ATA 100/133 cable for each drive, and a RAID controller. While more and more motherboards have RAID controllers built in, they're also available as an expansion card. Check your motherboard documentation to see if there's a RAID controller on the mobo, or just open your case and have a look: There will be two extra 40-pin IDE connectors (often labeled IDE 3 and IDE 4) if you're RAID enabled. If you must purchase a RAID controller card, look for something of high quality, like Adaptec's ATA RAID 1200A.



## CONNECTING THE HARD DRIVES

This is the most straightforward step in this handy guide. Connect the drives with the proper cables either to your motherboard's RAID slots or your RAID expansion card. Give each hard drive its own channel (or connector), and make sure its jumpers are set to solo/master. Be sure to secure each drive tightly in its case. Now that you've got all those ribbon cables crammed in there, you might want to tidy them up for the sake of airflow. Use plastic cable ties to hold them in place. Never use something metal, like those little twist ties that come on loaves of bread.



## WHICH RAID FLAVOR DO YOU WANT?

The two versions of RAID found on non-server motherboards are RAID 0 and RAID 1. They're very different in their purposes. RAID 0, or striping RAID, writes and reads data simultaneously across both hard drives. Since the work of one drive is being done by two, data transfer to and from the RAID array becomes very efficient.

RAID 1, however, is for data protection. Using RAID 1, the computer writes identical data to both drives in the array, creating a perfect failsafe should one of the drives go bad; it gives you time to swap out the dead drive and replace it, and the computer remains fully functional throughout the repair process.

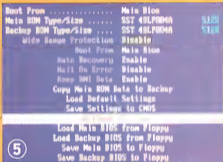
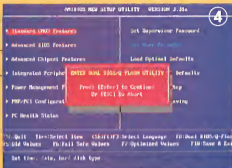
In either case, the computer sees only one drive because the drives work in virtual synergy with one another. In RAID 1, it sees the drives bearing the capacity of only one drive—in other words, if you bought two 120GB drives, RAID 1 will see them as one 120GB drive. In RAID 0, it sees one huge 240GB drive.

It's worth noting that RAID 0 doubles your chances of losing all of your data to a hard drive failure. Since the data is spread from one drive to the next, when one drive goes down, the other is rendered useless.

# URATION

## MAKE SURE RAID IS ENABLED

Most RAID-equipped motherboards have an option in their BIOS setup programs to disable the RAID controller. Enter your setup program (you can usually do this by pressing DEL during the power-up self test). Check around for a RAID option, depending on the motherboard, it could be anywhere from "advanced chipset features" to "onboard devices." Make sure RAID is enabled. Of course, if you purchased a RAID card, you can skip this step.



## CONFIGURING THE RAID BIOS

After the initial power-on tests, you'll be given a short grace period to enter the RAID's BIOS screen. This is different from the main PC's BIOS screen. It's in here that you check to see if your drives are recognized and choose how to implement RAID. Remember, RAID 0 is for speed, RAID 1 is for protection.

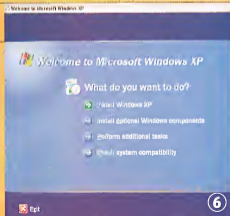
A typical RAID bios will let you choose the RAID mode, the drives you wish to use, and other important options via an easy-to-navigate GUI similar to the BIOS setup program. (Note—ALL of the data on drives added to a RAID array will be lost!)

## INSTALLING THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Once you're happy with your RAID settings, you're ready to stuff the drives with Windows (or Linux or BSD or whatever flavor pleases you). Your POST screen may not show any drives attached, save for optical drives like CD- and DVD-ROM drives. However, if you enter the RAID BIOS, you should see your two drives as masters on RAID channels one and two.

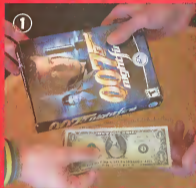
Install an operating system by plopping a boot OS disk in the CD drive. Windows Me, 2000, and XP all come bootable. During the process, if the computer fails to see any drives, restart the computer and hit F6 just as Windows Setup starts to load. Then pray that you didn't lose the little floppy disk with the proper RAID drivers, because you need it now.

After that, the installation should go smoothly. When the dust settles, you'll have a superspeedy or super-safe system on your hands!



# MAKE THE MOST OF NIGHTFIRE

OK, so it was runner-up for Coaster of the Year, but somehow you got suckered into paying \$50 for this insult to PC gamers everywhere. What are your options? We show you how to get something more from *NightFire* than utter agony.



## EXCHANGE IT AT A RETAILER NEAR YOU

Many stores, from local shops to national chains, offer store credit—and sometimes even cash—for your old games. Expect about 60 percent of the original purchase price for your exchange.



## SELL IT ON EBAY

Sure, \$10 may be one-fifth of what you paid for it, but it's still more than what you're getting from it collecting dust on the shelf. And you can always make money on the shipping.



## BATHROOM RECREATION

Liven up those trips to the john by using the CD as a visual target. Yes, James Bond can improve your accuracy!



## MAKE CRAFTS

You'd be amazed at how many neat objects you can make with useless CDs, and any one of them would be a great gift for the brother who for Christmas gave you the complete set of *Percy Jackson* on VHS that he picked up from his own garage sale.



## USE IT AS A CARPET PROTECTOR

James Bond may have a tough time dealing those bad guys, but he's great for protecting you from those nasty furniture indentations.

# Gamer's Edge

Edited by Dana Jongewinkel

## Combat Mission 2 The Russians are coming!

PAGE 136

### DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick is for our multiplayer  
Game of the Year, Battlefield 1942.

On any map with a carrier, spawn as an engineer, get in a plane, and take off. Parachute out over the enemy's carrier and land on it, preferably undetected. Plant mines on the runway, so whenever a plane flies over them it gets destroyed. Use the crates to refill your mines. If you hide up in the bridge and keep yourself

out of sight, people will never be able to take off. This works best on a map like Coral Sea or Midway, where virtually the only option is to spawn on a carrier. Also, if possible, get in the back of the plane with a trail gun and mercilessly gun down people who spawn at the back of the carrier.

—Chris Young



The Age of Mythology collector's edition will be coming Chris' way. If you'd like a chance to win Hillman 2, send us your dirty tricks for recent games in an e-mail with the subject line "Dirty Trick" to [cwletters@ziffnews.com](mailto:cwletters@ziffnews.com).

Sea of the Tiger  
tank's slow MS.

First P

Front upper hull penetrati  
Knocked out

# COMBAT MISSION

## Barbarossa to Berlin



**M**axdorf is a small town along the main road, a vital road to Berlin along which Russian forces are advancing in the spring of 1945. The town runs north and south along the road for about a kilometer. There are wheat fields to the west and the Letzen Forest to the east. The Russians, under the command of Tom Clark, hold the town with a single rifle company. Reinforcements will arrive from the north and out of Letzen Forest to the east. The Germans, under the command of Ernie Goryb, are moving in force from the north and out of the wheat fields to the west. At the center of the town is a 300-pedal victory flag, with 200-pedal flags at the northern, northern, and eastern edges. The scenario ends after 20 minute-long turns.

### Bruce, Turn 1

All good plans need a goal. Mine is to control two of the four objective flags in the town, including the large one in the center. Since I am German, I can count on scoring more casualty victory points than I concede. Combined with the objective-flag count, that should add up to a comfortable victory.

In keeping with the German concept of *schwerpunkt* (concentration of force), I'll focus my initial assault on the flag at the southern end of town. My recon platoon loads up and makes a dash straight for town. The scenario briefing suggests Tom has a weak force in town but will be getting reinforcements. I'll unload near the southern flag and use that as my jumping-off point for a drive on the town center.

At the south edge of the map, I have a single Panzer VIII King Tiger. With its 88mm gun, it can easily control the eastern approach to Maxdorf. Barring the arrival of a platoon of JS-II heavies, Tom shouldn't be able to get anything into town from the east. If he does, he could make mincemeat of my half-tracks. My only concern is that I won't be able to do anything if Allied tanks arrive from the north.

### Tom, Turn 1

I'm going to wait till my T-34s are all here, which won't be until about halfway through the scenario. Then I'll make a run from the Letzen Forest to fan out and fire at Bruce's Tiger from a variety of angles. Maybe I can buffet him up and get a few tanks to town to hold the flags.

In town, I'll hide A company's 2nd platoon, its HQ, and a Maxim machine gun at the southern flag. I don't expect them to live, but hopefully they'll delay anyone approaching from the south. Their job is to hold out long enough for reinforcements to get to the central flag, which is occupied only by A company's 1st platoon. B company, which is arriving with my T-34s, will take a shortcut through the woods to cross a 100-meter gap between the edge of the forest and the north end of town. They'll then work their way toward the center of town to hold the large flag.

### Tom, Turn 3

I see six German half-tracks approaching from the south. I was trying to get my tanks to set up



Ernie Goryb's King Tiger is the only one left in the town.



A Soviet T-34 is the only one left in town.

a line of sight through the gap in the woods without exposing themselves to the Tiger's 88mm gun. Sgt. Goryshin's tank strayed too far out and was promptly knocked out.

### Bruce, Turn 4

So far so good. Reinforcements from the west will join my lone southern platoon to overwhelm whatever garrison Tom might have at the southern tip of Maxdorf. I have two half-tracks with 75mm guns mounted on them, I'm sending one along the woods to the east and the other along the wheat fields to the west. If they don't attract any attention, they should be in perfect positions to get side shots at any tanks my Tiger can't reach.

### Tom, Turn 5

Now, there are also four half-tracks and four trucks approaching from the wheat fields to the west. Fortunately, it looks like Bruce is sending

all his men to the southern tip of town. If he'd attacked the center of town where the large objective flag is located, I never would have had a chance to get B company there in time.

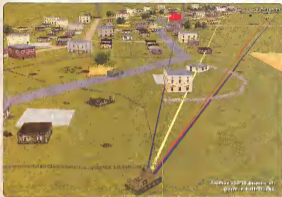
The 2nd platoon of A company has orders to hide and restrict their firing arcs, so they'll only open fire when targets are within 30 meters. Just a little further, Bruce...

### Bruce, Turn 6

Ambush! At the southern end of town, Tom's Russians opened fire as I approached the buildings where they were hiding. Several squads took casualties before anyone could react.

### Tom, Turn 6

I managed to cut down some infantry as they were disembarcing and sent the rest scattering for cover. Now to weather the massive response from the machine guns mounted on all those German half-tracks.



Russians use grenades to drive back a German half-track.

A team of infantry in the Lietzen Forest, where my tanks are amazing, reported a sound contact down the road that borders the woods. Perhaps a German half-track trying to reach the flag on the east end of town?

#### Tom, Turn 8

Everyone in A company's 2nd platoon is either dead or in retreat, and my machine gun never even got a chance to open fire. I had hoped to



delay Bruce on the southern end of town a little longer so B company could hunker down near the center flag. For some reason, Bruce's trucks have unloaded their squads at the edge of a wheat field about 250m out from the town. Now, B company keeps slowing down to take potshots at them.

Sgt. Bobrov's T-34 peeked out and killed a lone half-track skulking along the edge of the forest, only to pay for his temerity with a lethal 88mm shell to his turret from that damn Tiger. I'm pulling my

tanks back until reinforcements arrive.

#### Tom, Turn 9

I just got three more T-34s, which gives me eight tanks. Is anyone else coming? I'll give them a few more turns.

#### Bruce, Turn 11

I've established an anchor point in a large building on the west side of town about halfway to the central objective flag. I've put an MG42 heavy machine gun on each floor. I'm advancing up both sides of this street, heading for the intersection where a dirt road from the west hits town, which is exactly where the main flag stands. Unfortunately it's going slower than I expected as I leapfrog from building to building trying to keep platoons in command range of

**"Sgt. Guriew's T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris."**

their HQ. After I accidentally unloaded them from their trucks prematurely, an entire platoon of panzerreaders that arrived by truck are stuck west of town under sporadic fire.

#### Tom, Turn 13

OK, I'm moving my tanks out. I've given them orders to fast move to various points in the half-kilometer gap between Lietzen Forest and Mandort, at which point they will rotate and engage the Tiger. Sgt. Guriew is the first out of the woods. His T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris.

#### Bruce, Turn 13

Robert Frigg and Brian Eno once put out an album titled *No Pussyfooting*. I'm going to follow their advice, especially since I've been playing far too conservatively up to this point. This game is half over, and I need to move decisively. I'm going all-out for the two-story building next to the main flag. Tom's trying to break out of the woods with his tanks, but I'm confident the Tiger can park them off before they get too far.

#### Tom, Turn 14

This was a bad idea. I've lost two more T-34s this turn, and two of them have run back into the woods. Cowards. This leaves three tanks out in the open, and they haven't even covered half the distance. The good news is that reinforcements have arrived from the north, including a T-34, which I'm rushing around the west side of town to head off all those half-tracks advancing on the center of town. A full-strength platoon has arrived in M5s, which will proceed along the road through the middle of town.

#### Bruce, Turn 14

Achtung! Panzer! Tom got reinforcements. The M5 half-tracks and whatever leintery they're carrying aren't a problem, but that single T-34/M5 is enough to rip through my entire force of half-tracks. I have a few panzercheck anti-tank squads, but they aren't far enough forward to raise his tank any trouble. Unless I think of something fast, he'll be able to sit back and pick off my troop carriers one by one. I do have a bit of an ace at the hole: the one surviving half-track armed with a 75mm gun.

#### Tom, Turn 15

Yikes, some of his half-tracks have 20mm cannons. I'd forgotten about them until one of my M5s was destroyed. I've given the other M5s orders to pull into cover and unload troops. This new platoon will have to hump it to the middle of town on foot. There's about to be a serious firefight over the central flag. I can see Bruce's troops coming with half-tracks alongside them.

#### Bruce, Turn 16

Another ambush. After my last experience, I knew Tom would have troops in the large building near the main objective flag, which is why I drove two half-tracks up to it in the hopes his troops would get nervous and break concrete. Instead, the Russians held their nerve until my squad got inside. They opened fire from the upper floor and drove back my half-

tracks with grenades. I have a tenuous foothold in this building, but it will be hard to reinforce.

The half-track with the 75mm gun is almost in position to take a flank shot at the T34/B5 that just arrived from the north.

#### Tom, Turn 18

All of the T34s from Lietzen Forest have been knocked out except for the two cowards who ran back into the woods. Never mind the Tiger. They're going to rush the town to try to get an angle on the half-tracks. I'm afraid it's suicide. The eight dead T34s in the field ahead of them aren't a very encouraging sight.

A heated exchange is brewing up around the central objective flag as B company slowly gets into position and Bruce's half-tracks reinforce his approaching infantry. My lone T34 from the north, commanded by Sgt. Akimov, is creeping around the west end of town, rounding up the German half-tracks beautifully and scoring kill after kill. At one point, Akimov started traversing his turret to the right instead of firing at all those juicy half-tracks in front of us. There was a lone half-track 500m off to one side that wasn't bothering anyone. Why did Akimov fire at it instead of the ones pinning B company down? That's when I noticed Akimov's target was a SPW 251/9 Stummel with a potentially deadly 75mm gun on it. After a quick kill, he returned his attention to the other half-tracks. Three cheers for Combat Mission's tactical AI! And a medal for Akimov when he gets home.

#### Bruce, Turn 19

My Tiger has one armor-piercing round left. I'm sure he'll make it count, but without that cork to bottle up Tom's tanks, I have no way to stop him from crushing my troops in a T34 sandwich.

#### Tom, Turn 19

The two surviving T34s that ran off into the woods are closing on the town when I notice dirt being kicked up around them, as if they were being shelled by artillery. The Tiger must be down to high-explosive ammo, which is used against infantry and shouldn't be a threat to my tanks. The Tiger has been decimated! So, I slow my T34s down to let them pick off half-tracks more effectively. Also, more reinforcements arrive. Three T34s enter the map from the northwest corner, above the wheat fields. Why does the cavalry always wait till the end to come to the rescue?



Russian reinforcements razing towards the center of town to consolidate their hold.

## "It's a slaughter as the Russians pick off German half-tracks from different angles."

#### Bruce, Turn 20

This could be the German high tide. My King Tiger is down to firing high-explosive ammo at Tom's tanks. I score a lucky kill on one, but there's no chance I can hold back his armor without proper ammunition. In town, two squads pushing up toward the victory flag turn around just shy of a heavy building that would have given them great cover. I think I can control the central flag, but this is based only on troops that are visible to me. Given the amount of fire I'm taking from buildings across the street, Tom must have lots of infantry near the objective.

#### Tom, Turn 20

Yikes! One of my T34s falls prey to an HE round. I didn't think that could happen! So, Sgt. Gubarevich driving my lone surviving T34 from Lietzen Forest isn't taking his time hunting half-tracks anymore. He's heading full speed toward covering Marsdorf as HE shells land around him. Go, Gubarevich, go!

#### Bruce, Turn 22

My King Tiger ran out of explosive rounds of any sort, and is now firing smoke! Talk about fanatic troops.

#### Tom, Turn 23

With a curtain of smoke rising behind him, Gubarevich reaches the safety of Marsdorf and gets back to the business of hunting half-tracks.

#### Bruce, Turn 23

Out of shoks, my King Tiger commander opens the hatch, empties his pistol clip at the one Russian tank now marauding through the town of Marsdorf, and heaves the pistol at the enemy.

#### Tom, Turn 24

It's a slaughter as Gubarevich, Akimov, and the three Ivan come-latelys, all in their magnificent T34s, pick off German half-tracks from different angles. There's no place for them to hide.

Meanwhile, I'm stacking up infantry around the central flag. B company is holding admirably as the newly arrived platoon gets into place. I'm pretty sure I'll control the central flag by the time the scenario is over. However, I've taken heavy losses (Bruce's Tiger tank killed one T34s) that I need to offset by controlling flags. So, Gubarevich and Akimov are going to make a run for the southern flag that Bruce controls. I'm guessing he can't afford to leave anyone to guard it and I'll find it unoccupied.

#### Bruce, Turn 25

Sometimes success costs you. Probably spurred on by my lack of antitank fire on the west side of town, some of Tom's tanks drove right past my anchor building and gave my panzer-schrecks flank shots they couldn't pass up. I got two more T34/B5 kills and kept Tom from taking the southern flag. This gives me valuable casualty points and also consolidates my hold on the building closest to the main flag.

#### Tom, Turn 26

Argh, I got greedy and lost Gubarevich and Akimov to German antitank squads. I shouldn't have let them get so close to town without infantry support. I spend my last turn getting as many men close to the central flag as I can. With fog of war enabled, you can't be sure whether you control a hotly contested flag.

When the game ends and the smoke clears, it turns out the main flag is indeed mine. However, the battle is not. It was very close, at 2,360 Axis points (100 of which are from controlling the southern flag and the rest are for casualties inflicted) to 2,445 Allied points (500 of which are from controlling three flags in Marsdorf and the rest for casualties inflicted). Game to Bruce Geryk, although I can take small comfort in the knowledge that his Germans will lose the war.

Taxi wala? Yaar!  
Karo ya Simoleons,  
but at a cost.



# SIMCITY 4:

## The Money Game

Simoleons management from your friends at Prima Games

Simulators make the world go round. Without them, there can be no transportation, zones, or schools—and if the treasury gets empty enough, there'll be no more mayor! Managing the plex of dough is, therefore, one of your primary concerns.

With several changes to the money game in SimCity 4, you need great stuff to avoid building yourself a money pit of a city. Even life in a city's life, when many seasoned mayors are accustomed to going on financial autopilot, the money game constantly challenges you to stay ahead of monthly expenses and find new ways of enhancing income.

You set taxes in nine categories (by type and wealth level), and they're no longer based on land value. A lot of items—power plants, landmarks, rewards, and parks—now cost money to purchase and maintain. Loans are now amortized, resulting in higher monthly payments but also less confusion.

The current treasury balance is visible in the mayor mode interface. To get behind this number, call up your budget pane. The budget pane puts your city's financial transactions in one easy-to-read place. Clicking on any line item in either the income or expense areas brings up both income and expenses for the chosen item. This helps keep things in perspective and relieves you from having to swap back and forth between detail ledgers.

### Income

Income is the money you have coming in on a monthly basis. Increasing this amount is harder than increasing expenses, and therein lies the challenge. Taxes are your primary form of income, and no city is successful without a skillful tax strategy. Your city's taxes are based on tax rate, building value, and occupancy.

You set the tax rate for each of the 12 developer types. Commercial office and commercial service are set collectively as commercial. This wealth-type breakdown lets you use your tax rates with fine precision to attract or deter the kind of developer you want. The tax rate does have some side effects, however: The degree of change you make affects mayor rating. Lower taxes to improve your mayor rating on every property of the changed wealth level. Raise them, and you'll make yourself unpopular.

Changing tax rates has an effect on demand. There is, however, always a tax rate that has no effect on demand, but this neutral rate declines as population increases. Lowering a tax rate from this neutral rate stimulates demand, while raising it above neutral dampens demand. The ratio of the rate you select versus the neutral rate dictates the amount of the demand boost/penalty; the more you vary from the neutral rate, the more dramatic the effect.



**QUICK TIP** BE WITH THE OLD Modernizing RCI buildings, along with many rewards, landmarks, and feature-ful buildings, can exert a fortress. This is meant to encourage the preservation of old development.



**QUICK TIP** NO NEW TAXES The least per-site tax revenue comes from a city with lots of low-occupancy buildings and, conversely, lots with high building value. Keep things even: low wealth and attract as much hi-wealth development as your city can bear.

RCI buildings in the game have inherent building values. This value is changed only if the property downgrades to a lower wealth type (i.e., an R955 building becomes inhabited by R95). A change of one wealth level drops the building value 25 percent. A two-level drop decreases building value 50 percent.

The only income-producing ordinance is to legalize gambling. If you pass it, you'll receive a guaranteed \$100 per month. On the downside, you'll see increased crime. The spoils of incoming neighbor deals (garbage import or power/water export) appear on this line while a deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Because only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, exact incoming deals late in the month, if you accept

any business deals by plugging an army base, casino, federal prison, missile range, or toxic waste dump in your city, the income amounts from each appear on this line item.

### Expenses

Everything you provide your Sims in SimCity 4 costs money on a monthly basis. You can alter some of these budgets. Many items can be funded locally at individual buildings, or centrally through the budget. If budgets have been set locally, the slider in the budget pane reflects the average funding of all applicable buildings. Moving the slider resets every building to the same funding level.

The transportation department shows monthly costs for all your transit stations, airports, seaports, and transportation networks. Seaports and airports can be overfunded or underfunded individually, but road maintenance and mass transit must be overfunded or

## If you can't manage efficiently, the treasury will empty and there'll be no more mayor.



Recreative facilities can raise the desirability of an area, drawing in Sims and raising your tax profit.

Not to mention a ready-made solution with which to deal.



## When times get tough, you can take out a loan—but it's not always advisable.

underfunded collectively.

Public safety encompasses the fire, police, and corrections departments. Police and fire department funding reflects in their coverage area and effectiveness. Fire stations and police stations are funded individually (via the query box of each station) or collectively. The department of corrections can only be funded collectively through the budget ledger.

Health and education systems are funded locally, but you can collectively control them from here. An underfunded health and education structure can operate at top grade if the demand for the facility is less than its capacity. Structures that are over capacity will have

strikes regardless of funding level. Health and edu-

cation can be funded locally or collectively.

The utilities department covers all of your utility infrastructure, including power, water, and garbage. The sanitation department must be funded collectively. Power plants can be funded locally or collectively here, but power lines can only be funded collectively. No water elements are individually funded. Water tower and pump capacity can be altered by the level of funding.

All city ordinances are enacted through the budget entry. Some don't appear in the list until you meet certain prerequisites.

The costs of all outgoing neighbor deals (garbage export or power/water import) appear on the line as long as the deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see and make both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, so enact outgoing neighbor deals early in the month (as with the income entry).

City beautification includes parks, recreation structures, and landmarks. Parks and recreation structures are funded through the collective parks and recreation funding slider. All

landmarks are included in one line item, and funding is controlled collectively in the budget.

If you have any governmental rewards (e.g., mayor statues, city hall, bureau of bureaucracy, etc.), they're funded collectively from the government budget.

### Loans

When times are tough and you need cash, take out a loan. It's not always advisable, but you can do it.

You can borrow up to \$200,000 for each loan, and carry \$2,000,000 in total outstanding debt or 10 loans at any time. Money can be loaned in \$5,000 increments over a period of 10 years at 8.5 percent. Payment amounts are amortized every payment includes a portion of principal and a portion of interest.

Only take out loans when you anticipate increasing revenue in the near future. This can be for any reason, but usually involves what you're spending the loan proceeds on (mass transit, zoning, etc.). If you're already operating at a deficit, a monthly loan payment increases it. Unless you can increase revenue or reduce expenses to cover your existing expenses plus the monthly payment, the loan only delays your dive toward impeachment.

When you're operating at a profit or need to make a large capital investment that will (directly or indirectly) increase revenue enough to cover the loan, a loan is a good idea, if traffic in your city is terrible and you need a good public transportation system, a loan may get things moving. If you think loosening your traffic problem will affect your tax collections (Sims returning to abandoned homes and back into the tax base), then take out a loan for a subway system. This is good city management. Taking out a loan to buy a landmark or stop the bleeding of a deficit budget is not.

### Overfunding and underfunding

The funding sliders are great weapons in the bottom-line war. They can save money or buy you time. On the other hand, they can undercut and sabotage your city if not used properly, costing you more in the long run than leaving everything at full funding.

Funding above 100 percent can get you nice benefits, but also can be a waste of money. Its effect depends on the department. For many buildings, such as fire stations and police stations, funding is tied to efficiency. Raising funding above 100 percent provides moderate increases in efficiency (10 percent efficiency at 120 percent funding), usually not worth the extra money. Other kinds of buildings, such as schools and healthcare buildings, link funding to grade (capacity versus usage). In these cases, funding beyond 100 percent expands capacity (though less so than changes between 0 and 100 percent considered). Such a building is considered underfunded only if the set funding level causes it to operate over capacity.

Underfunding is an attractive way to save money and, if done selectively, can be effective. It also can be costly and disastrous, especially in important departments. You may get away with it for a while, but the longer you do it, the longer you risk a strike. Strikes occur in some departments if funding or grade fall below certain levels. When a department is on strike, effectiveness drops to 20 percent for the duration of the strike. Strike conditions vary by department.

### QUICK TIP

**NEVER THE HIGHWAY** Never reduce your road maintenance budget; it ends up costing you more money in the long run and causing more problems than it solves.





# Scorched Earth

## Moot Gesture of the Year

CGW's awards don't mean nothing **By Robert Coffey**

**F**or this month's Scorched Earth, I had planned to play virtual ferret in the Skinner box that is The Sims Online to see just how long it took the pigeons to kick me out of their coops. Alas, it proved dishearteningly easy to get systematically banned everywhere, the magic banishment words coming courtesy of the 6-year-old catchphrase machine that is my son: "Talk to the weenis." Gaffeless, direct, a phrase of simple beauty and unmatched efficacy, it pretty much killed the column, thanks to the wuffed inhabitants of Alphaville and Blazing Falls.

Thus, I was left stewing about how there was no way I was going to give the denizens of this spiritless netherworld my vote in the impending Game of the Year uber-meeting, and if anyone else on the staff so much as suggested it, I vowed to surgically staple them to the chattering skinless simian that was our last intern, damning them to a torrent of Farscape trivia and his unsettling fixation with nude male Greek statuary. OK, I admit I got a little worked up at times. But as I happily reflected upon the image of my coworkers desperately blinding themselves with melon ballers in order to blot out the image of the uncouth demihuman cruelly sutured to their hip, I thought, "What is wrong with me?" No really, I did. After all, it's not like our awards mean what they once did.

Remember back when this magazine ran roughly 3,000 pages a month? Back then we had a staff, two score and twelve of the hardest gaming men the world had ever seen. Did any other mag have editors whom were present at the dawn of our hobby? We did, and we were better for it. Did any other mag boast a toothless old prospector and a guy who dressed like a clown? We did, and we were, um, well, we sure were different for it. And every one of these swarthy, exacting bastards, clad in the exact same grey muck turtleneck, would once a year gather in a verdant, dew-beyewetted glen under a blazing full moon, slathering bear grease on their rippled, oak-hard bodies as they descended into the pit to grapple with their brethren, until one would emerge victorious, roaring a wordless eponym of triumph, the mangled ear of their opponent drenched in their blood-smearred teeth. That was how Adventure



### Talk to the weenis.

Game of the Year used to be decided.

But now, our staff diminished by rampant cannibalism and the loss of advertising dollars, the awards meeting is but a shadow of its former glory. There are fewer of us, less conflict, less diversity of opinion, and I can't help but wonder if we're not the worse for it. Would Grand Theft Auto II have cruised to victory if there were one old-school hex-based gamer left on our staff? Probably, but I can't help but feel that it would have earned its status a little more if there had been stronger opposition.

I believe that the paper-triangle football playoffs we use to break ties nowadays produce more right decisions than wrong. But our decisions remain moot in the extreme. Why? Because while there are fewer of us, there are more of them—more of the sweaty guy in a dorm room plastered with Howard the Duck posters who's got his own website so he can try to con a few free games out of a glibbie PR person. And when this leech manages to score a couple copies of *Hookers' Road Trip and Mystery of the Neutrons*, and not *Hitman 2* or *Morrowind* or any real game,

well, what kind of crap do you think he's voting on for Game of the Year? Next time you're browsing EB or visiting Wal-Mart or barging the house of the people next door, take a good look at the game boxes. There's a Game of the Year version of just about everything, right up to *Mew*! *Beacon Teaches Typing*. Great for the marinating weasels, awful for the gamers. This is the same slack selection process behind the millions of "World's Greatest Dad" t-shirts stretched over every dithering fat bastard slowing up the Orange Julius line at the mall whilst—tragically—I go unrecognized.

Fortunately, despite the winnowing of our staff, it seems pretty clear that with each and every one of us a towering genius, the quality and accuracy of our awards is as sound as sound can be. But what to do about the tribes of halfwits muddying the crystal-clear blue waters of CGW's unassailable imprimatur? A suggestion. The next time you're accosted by a garishly emblazoned box declaring *Soldier of Fortune 2: Game of the Year*, respond like so: Talk to the weenis. You'll be glad you did.

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