

SURE-FIRE STRATEGIES: UNREAL II & ASHERON'S CALL 2

COMPUTER

MAY 2003 ZIFF DAVIS

GAMING

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15 Hot
Reviews!

Freelancer is here—
was it worth the wait?
PLUS: Battlefield 1942:
The Road to Rome,
MOO3, and more!

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW!

EverQuest II

See the future of online
gaming: killer design,
scorching graphics,
& fantastic worlds

Hands-on!

Neverwinter Nights:
Shadows of Undrentide

13
PAGES
OF KILLER
STRATEGIES
INSIDE!

ACTUAL IN-GAME CHARACTERS

SPECIAL REPORT

SO YOU WANT TO MAKE GAMES FOR A LIVING?

Indie developers reveal their secrets



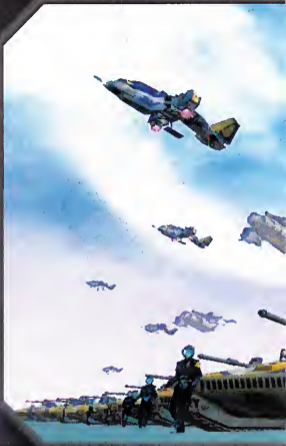
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Terran Republic forces reinforce the border facility, waging war.

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The Jackhammer is the New Conglomerate's primary anti-aircraft heavy assault weapon. With solid armor, capacity and high fire rate, it's a devastating weapon for close-range combat.

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LASHER

The new Sovereignty Lasher has concentrated energy that can destroy vehicles and vehicles at close range. It's a deadly weapon for close-range combat.

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CHAINGUN

The Terran Republic's Chaingun is a heavy assault weapon that can destroy vehicles and vehicles at close range. It's a deadly weapon for close-range combat.

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VANGUARD

The New Conglomerate Vanguard is a heavy assault vehicle that can destroy vehicles and vehicles at close range. It's a deadly weapon for close-range combat.

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THRASHER

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PROWLER

The Terran Republic's Prowler is a heavy assault vehicle that can destroy vehicles and vehicles at close range. It's a deadly weapon for close-range combat.

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MULTIPLAYER GAME of the YEAR: GAMESPY.COM

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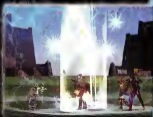
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72 COVER STORY
EverQuest II

Bigger, better, EverQuest-ier—our in-depth look at the sequel to the king of the MMORPGs answers all your questions and then some.

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EverQuest blah blah EverQuest blah blah blah...

20 Letters

It's the all-love edition! Orc lovers, Coffey lovers, Bruce and Tom lovers. Plus, professional advice for the lovelorn!

30 Loading...

The Force is with the Loading section this month. We've got some sweet shots from new LucasArts games, and Nvidia's pixie posed for a pinup.

40 Read Me

CGW—the magazine that puts you in control—gives you the opportunity to design Scooter's head. See page 49 for details. Also, we head to Vegas for a wild bender with 300 game developers. Plus, ATI R300 news, a review of *Masters of Doom*, and countless witticisms that'll leave you in hysterics.

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80 Indie Developers

How hard is it to make a game when you don't have balltubs full of cash from your corporate sugar daddy? A peek behind the scenes of different indie game developers all vying for your dollar and hard drive space.



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Reviewed: Kilpsch's new GXH D-5fs and Dell's awesome new Inspiron. Also: Cracked Case, a really big WI Power, Tech Medics, and Killer Rigs.

109 How To

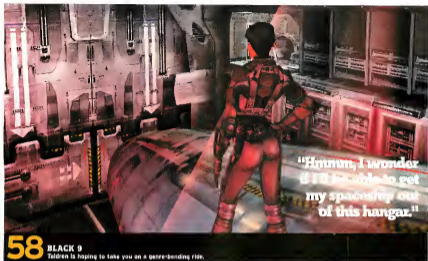
Track down the Drakk overseers from *Unreal III* and fry them like the ugly beasts they are. Plus, speed up your PC for free, find a mother of a ship in *Freelancer*, and get yourself thrown out of multiplayer games with panache.

113 Gamer's Edge

Find out how to make the treadmill of *Asheron's Call 2* go faster. Plus, spunkastic fun with the unidimensional *Impossible Creatures*, cheat codes and Easter eggs for *Unreal II*, and the always-popular Dirty Trick.

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New month, same old cranky bastard.

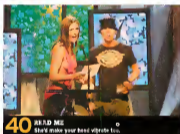


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Doofaeus' Online Adventures

Or, don't sell that PC just yet

One should keep an open mind. One should be willing to try new things and not limit one's life experiences. Most importantly, one should never refer to oneself as "one" all the time, lest one be mistaken for a pompous windbag. Because I am editor-in-chief of this magazine, it is my duty to be a "gaming expert." This means keeping an open mind. And this means looking at console games. No, I am not a "traitor!" No, I am not trying to be "kewl" with the "youth of Today, I haven't been kewl in 40 years, and I don't plan on starting now.

But one cannot reasonably claim to know what one is talking about if one keeps one's head in the sand. Being loyal to your system of preference is a noble ideal—but not to the extent that you're being ignorant. As such, I have both an Xbox and GameCube at home, and follow all the console news. Most recently, I reviewed *EverQuest Online Adventures*, the PS2 version of my beloved EQ for our sister magazine GMR. The assumption is that I would hate it and sneer at the low-res graphics and the simplified gameplay. Even I thought this when I began. But surprisingly, and against my own will, I ended up giving it a positive review. Yep, it was *EverQuest*, with the same addictive qualities as the PC version, now running on a console system. Read it and weep.

But here's the thing: Now that I've played *EverQuest Online Adventures*, I can say with much greater authority and conviction that online gaming on the consoles, while truly viable and happening now, is still light years behind the online PC gaming scene.

Yes, *EverQuest Online Adventures* is fun on the PS2, but it does not, in fact, measure up to the original. The graphics are ugly. The gameplay is more simplistic. The online PC community is bigger and savvier and more experienced with the kind of game—and of course, community is what this is mostly about. It's still a horrendous kludge to be gaming and chatting online without a keyboard, and most console players aren't so equipped yet.

Nothing I've tried online on the consoles comes anywhere near the organic genius of *Battlefield 1942*, the brutal competition of *Battle.net*, or the complex richness of the best MMORPGs. And now, as you'll read about in this issue, we have *EverQuest 3* on the way. It's a monster. It's the beast. It's got some of the coolest graphics we've ever seen. It's a superior upgrade in every way to a game that is still as popular as ever, four years after its original release.

So you hear what I'm saying to you? One should not sell one's PC anytime soon. One should stop worrying. One should flip over to our cover story and read what one will be addicted to sometime soon. And then one should join me in a group hug.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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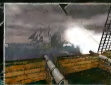
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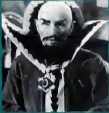
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THIERRY NGUYEN
Working tirelessly and/or merciless? Steamster Jeff Orfan, Scott's silently waits for the day when, in a fit of man-machine rage, he can eliminate the entire CGW staff and declare himself king for a day, only to weep bitterly in the end. Until then, he plows through such games as Protonizer (page 86) as far as an Internet nerd looking for pictures of Monica Bellucci with the Linux penguin photoshopped onto her.

SCOTT MCCLLOUD

Scott McCloud has been writing and drawing independent comic books since 1984. His 1993 book *Understanding Comics* has become a "must-read classic" for web designers (Seybold Seminars Online) and has been praised by Matt Groening, Gerry Trudeau, and Will Wright. His most recent book, *Reinventing Comics*, explores comics' potential in digital environments. McCloud has lectured on comics and digital media at M.I.T., Pixar, Harvard University, Microsoft, and The Smithsonian Institution. His online comics can be found at scottmccloud.com.




JOHN BRANDON
John Brandon was a corporate drone, for several years before he decided to pursue his lifelong passion: orchid sniffing. Now, he cultivates his garden of sumptuous flowers and sports their tendrils in between raging, tension-filled *Unreal* Tournament battles and writing stints for *EDGE* and a bunch of brassy technology magazines.

ROB SCHULTZ

Rob's peaceful life will soon be turned upside down by the birth of his daughter. In fact, this is probably the last issue in which you will see any semblance of design come out of our art director as he slowly goes insane from lack of sleep. But fear not—raising a crying baby and changing soiled diapers won't be too much different than working with the CGW editors.



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Letters

Cry us a river at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

CGW's Love Line

Hey CGW,

I was just wondering, what's more romantic to give to your girlfriend on her birthday: RAM or a new hard drive? I was thinking RAM was the total pimp gift, but a new hard drive looks like it took a lot of thought. Well, that's something to ponder about, ain't it?

Opus Penguin

Good call coming to us with this question, Opus. If there's one thing we know here at CGW, it's how to romance the ladies. Neither option you suggest is going to win you any points. Trust us. If you really want to win her heart, get her Windows XP Service Pack 1. Scooter did this for his girlfriend on Valentine's Day, and he hasn't gotten any sleep since.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHNNY MOLO



Blizzard: Traitors R Us

Hey, how do you guys feel about Blizzard releasing StarCraft: Ghost on console systems first? The game looks pretty hot. I can't wait to play it and get into the StarCraft world.

Jason "VIO" Quense

Guess what? StarCraft: Ghost isn't coming out on consoles "first"—it's only coming out on consoles. No PC

version. But whaddya gonna do? Whining changes nothing. Which doesn't mean we won't whine about it anyway. We will. Then we'll shut up and buy the console version like everyone else.

Korekshun to our korekshun

In your March issue you received a letter correcting your preview of Warhammer Online. It stated that Warhammer was not a pen-and-paper RPG.

That is an incorrect correction. There was and is a Warhammer pen-and-paper role-playing game. It was published long ago by Games Workshop, the same company that makes the tabletop wargame. It was recently published by Hogshead Publishing. If you're a pen-and-paper RPG fan, check it out. It's a good game.

Bernard Loucks

Orcs need love, too

OK, there's no Orc campaign in WarCraft II: The Frozen Throne (March 2003).

despite the fact that:

1. Ner'zhul, the central character in The Frozen Throne, is a former Orcish shaman who leads the Horde (page 93 of the WarCraft II game manual).
2. He sold their souls to the Burning Legion (page 93 of game manual).
3. He blew up their homeland of Draenor (page 94 of game manual).

Wouldn't you be just a little annoyed if someone you trusted as a leader sold your immortal soul to demons and destroyed your planet? Hell, we fought an 8-year-long revolutionary war because of expensive tea. His name is no secret (ohet with those acolytes saving "My life for Ner'zhul" all the time), the Orcs know he exists, and there's no way



"Wouldn't you be annoyed if someone you trusted as a leader sold your immortal soul to demons?"

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MAIL BITES

Coffey, you make me sick
One Pissed Off Reader

A gaming column that uses the word "factory-mose"
[Scorched Earth, March 2003?]
Bravo.

H. Leigh Davis

I enjoy your magazine, but the previews are a waste of space.

Dean Kuzral

In your March 2003 Loading section you mentioned something about "the dark hues in the color palate."
Sigh. Another case of CGW trying to sound smart and falling miserably.

Andrew Schran

in heck they wouldn't seek out and destroy their greatest traitor!
Keep up the good work and I apologize for the fan-boyishness.

Wesley Hinkley

They have classes for this stuff?

While reading your magazine one day I was struck with a question: Who the \$@#!% has the time to play all of those games? My latest obsession—Medieval Total War—has more than 300 turns from start to finish. If you figure, conservatively, 20 minutes a turn, that's over 100 hours to complete just one game.

And then one night while in EB Games, I got my answer. Two geeks were behind the counter and three of their friends were hanging around making arrangements for that night's game of Halo.

"I'm not playing unless we get at least six guys to play," I heard one of them announce. "I've got computer journalism class in the morning."

Oh, did I tell you guys how much I like your magazine, and that I wish I could work for CGW?

Brian McGowan

Cheaters = TEH SUCK

Have you ever considered a "cheating level" category for online games?

The only thing that is going to push some developers into doing something about cheating is if future sales of a product are affected by cheating. The problem for a buyer is that you never know how bad the cheating is until you've already purchased a game.

Somehow, some way, game reviewing mags like yours need to start letting us know BEFORE we purchase the game if the developer is making active efforts to stop the cheating, and if those efforts are successful.

Brett Lathrop

We agree, Brett. Nothing ruins an online gaming experience faster than the presence of cheaters. Unfortunately, cheaters are everywhere and it's an uphill battle to fight them. Both EA (with *Battlefield 1942*) and Blizzard (with *WarCraft III*) recently took aggressive measures to ban cheaters, and we applaud those efforts. We'll do our best to keep reporting on the problem.

Might we suggest...some time outside in the sun?

Looking through your most recent issue (March 2003), on page 35 I saw an



advertisement for a game called *American Conquest*. I looked a little deeper into this suspicious advertisement and saw that the general, sergeant, or whatever holding the flag has the EXACT same face as Tom Berenger. Now, was this intentional or is that just coincidental? I'm an idiot for noticing that, I know, but still...it had to have been intentional.

Mike Lebson

Everybody loves Robert

I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but you seem to have some kind of lunatic writing a column on the last page of your magazine. Being one with "connections," I could easily "take care" of this menace in exchange for his "job." The details are secret, but essentially, the plan is for me to simply to take over his "life." No one even needs to know he is gone. This should be easy; I doubt he has many friends or family members that could tell the difference. This email will self-destruct in 17 seconds. Please leave your reply in a brown paper bag in the dumpster out back where Wil smokes pot.

Easy

In response to Robert Coffey's Scorched Earth article, "Hardcore on the Hard Drive," in the February 2003 issue, I have one word for you, RESPONSIBILITY. What on earth were you thinking when you (Robert) wrote the article, and what were the editors thinking when they thought that was appropriate to print? I realize, or at least hope, that the article was some sort of attempt at humor. However, I find it totally irresponsible for you to write or print such an article in a magazine that you know kids read. I know that the "average" reader is in their twenties or even thirties, but you know that kids read your magazine and you have a responsibility to them. That article said a lot about your integrity and the integrity of this magazine.

Matt McClellan

Thumbs up to Scorched Earth, Robert Coffey does a great job filling Jeff Green's

shoes. He's got it all the humor, the sarcasm, and the wisdom of master Yoda.
Blame2600

Everybody loves Tom and Bruce

Yes, I still read your damned magazine *Lunchtime* was too depressing reading *Golf Digest*. Just thought I'd submit my vote of confidence for the head-to-head sections you put in *Gamer's Edge*. Not that these are games I'd play in a pink flt, but the articles are fun to read anyway. The format with plans, execution, and wrapup works very well.

Jonathan

Please keep up the Bruce-versus-Tom articles. I enjoy them a lot for the story, the humor, and the learning of new ideas and strategies. March 2003 was my favorite one yet.

Go Bruce!

Denny O

Am I hardcore?

Hey guys, first time writer here. Your mag is great, dudes. Good job. I've seen in a lot of your articles the phrase "hardcore games," and was wondering if I was a "hardcore gamer." I'll give you examples and maybe you can give me an answer.

I'm 27 years old and talk to my girlfriend like Darth Vader when I'm playing *Jedi Outcast*. After a high score on a free-for-all map, I pretend to decapitate her with my purple lightsaber. If I'm lucky enough to get 20 kills in *Wake Island* in *Battlefield 1942*, I shoot her Remo-style with my fake machine gun, then tell her she shoulda been hiding in a bunker. When she asks me if I paid the bills last week, I answer "How did you expect me to take the control panel...Charlie is three clicks to my left with grenades out the ass?"

Well guys, let me know. Thanks for your time.

Sniper

Yeah, uh, sure Sniper—you're hardcore. We're not sure whether to suggest some anger management courses or offer you a job here.



"You seem to have some lunatic writing a column on the last page."



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A character in a dark tactical suit with glowing yellow visor lights stands behind a chain-link fence. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a bright light source.

"A hell of a techno-espionage title
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Computer Gaming World ~ 4 1/2 stars out of 5

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

PC Gamer ~ 91%

"Sam Fisher utterly outclasses
his competition."

GameSpy ~ 91%

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Loading...

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

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

If adventure has a name...it's somewhere in this screenshot. Lara Croft was—how shall we put this?—a tribute to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. People loved sterling at her, and eventually they made a movie out of the game. Now Indy, the explorer who started it all, is taking to the PC in this new adventure. Set in 1935, you've got to stop Nazis (who else?) and a number of kooky mystics from unleashing an ancient army. Sorry, there's no cute Asian kid sidekicks this time around (Duke and Scooter were busy).



Fight grave robbers, Nazis, and turan-cotta soldier impersonators.



The man with the hat is
back, pit stains and all.

Use whips, guns, your fists,
glass bottles—you name it.

NVIDIA GEFORCE FX

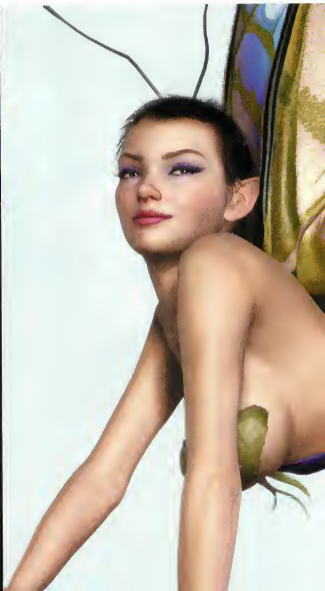
NAME: Dawn (Nvidia's GeForce FX spokesperson)

TURN ONS: She loves PR people who promise things—like 40 percent more horsepower than the Radeon 9700 Pro. "Our top-of-the-line 128MB card can produce detailed and layered textures," she says.

TURN OFFS: Hardware editors who ask, "How many games will actually take advantage of this new technology?"

PET PEEVES: Leaf blowers and ATI graphics cards.

Believe it or not, this isn't some air-brushed prerendered picture. She actually animated and moved on the fly in a demo of the new GeForce FX cards. Don't worry, we won't bother cluttering up this picture with cell outs. We know what the people want.





STAR WARS GALAXIES

A long time ago, in an issue far, far away, we broke the news about being able to tool around in a *Star Wars* MMO game.

You've patiently waited for your chance to become a Wookiee smuggler (there are eight species and 30 professions to choose from), and soon you'll get your chance. Join the Rebel Alliance, the Empire, or work both sides as a mercenary. With a large 15x15 kilometer map to explore, there should be plenty to keep you busy when the game launches. And yes, the Force will be with you...so long as you ante up the monthly fees.



Crouching soldier, hidden blaster.



Either a minefield or
user-controlled turret
did this guy in.

"These aren't
the droids we're
looking for."

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Read Me

The hype starts here Edited by Ken Brown



Top: Here and back the crowd present the Game of the Year trophy to Digital Illusions for *Red Faction* (142).

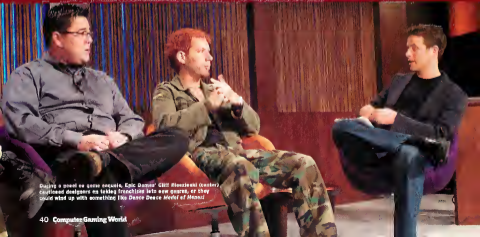


Wright seemed unsurprised to receive an award for *The Sims Online*.

DUBIOUS AWARDS

Raspberries for the Oscars of Gaming

Cringing through the sixth annual Interactive Achievement Awards in Sin City By Ken Brown and Jeff Green



Doing a great or game review, Eric Dumas' *Bill Remstead* (center) captured designers as taking franchises into new areas, or they could wind up with something like *Dance Dance Revolution* (142).



INSIDE
RAD NEW RADEON
The first 256MB 3D card—any chip!
Page 44



NEVERWINTER ADD-ON
We get our hands on The Shadows of Underwest
Page 46



MASTERS OF DOOM
The new book about Carmack and Romero
Page 49



DESIGNING SCOOTER
His head's a blank canvas, and you are the brush
Page 49



Rockstar walked away with awards for both computer and console Action/Adventure Game of the Year (GTA and Vice City, respectively).

Are the awards biased in favor of companies with large Academy memberships?

Maybe we shouldn't be so cynical and just bask in the glory of seeing a PC game honored with the Oscar of gaming: The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences named *Battlefield 1942* as overall Game of the Year at its sixth annual Interactive Achievement Awards in late February. We were thrilled; we were surprised, and we were certainly gratified to see one of our favorites earn the kudos it deserves. Especially since *Battlefield* was up against stiff console competition from *Animal Crossing*, *Metroid Prime*, and *GTA: Vice City*.

Going into the awards, we actually thought the Academy had gained some credibility now that it does a better job of categorizing games. (The only glaring inconsistency was seeing the Aurora *Neverwinter Toolset* categorized as a simulation along with *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries* and *Combat Flight Simulator 3*.) But our faith in the awards soon evaporated when an embarrassed Will Wright received an award for *Massively Multiplayer Game of the Year* for *The Sims Online*—a game he has admitted "isn't finished yet" and isn't quite where he envisioned it would be. In accepting the award, Wright blinked sheepishly at the trophy and admitted: "I don't know what to say about this one. But I'll accept it. And thank everyone for it. And I promise that we will make this game live up to its promise."

Are the awards suspect? The AIAS emphasizes that only active developers

can vote in certain categories, while gaming execs can vote in the overall categories. However, to be eligible, you must be a paying member of the Academy, which costs \$95 a year. There are group rates for large companies, which raises the possibility that large groups from EA and Microsoft could swing the vote toward their company's titles. To be fair, EA dominates awards in magazines (including *IGN*) and websites each year because it produces first-rate games. But when a prematurely released *Sims Online* beats *Asheron's Call 2*, *Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles*, and *Anarchy Online: The Notum Wars*, it makes you wonder if EA's voting block may have stacked the deck for Game of the Year (*Battlefield 1942*) as well. At the least, the Academy should talk about the perception of a problem and consider ways to ensure fairness.

Unfortunately, questionable awards weren't the only problem at the AIAS Awards. In an utterly misguided attempt to bring some sort of glitz to the proceedings, the organizers decided it would be a good idea to enlist a cadre of *Clint* Hollywood "celebrities" and has-beens (e.g., Mötley Crüe's Vince Neil) to team up with high-profile game industry types to present the awards. So, for example, Epic Games' Cliff Blaszczak was forced to share the stage with the world-famous Nina Kaczorowski, who, while possessed of a stunning pair of boobs and a spectacular peel-a-boo dress, probably never played a game in her life.



Cliff Taylor describes the size of his company to a cheering, mostly male, crowd of members.



Gina Raczynski, whose breasts are barely fully ready to go out.



Sexy Games Director of Development, Rick Lyle, of *Call of Duty* leads game writer (center) and our questions for our featured panelist, John Taylor.

"You gotta lie if you develop games—we're kind of a sneaky bunch."
—Chris Taylor

The procession of odd couples were forced to stand in front of a TelePrompTer and read an abhorrible, cringe-inducing script that was not only not funny, but at least half the time didn't make sense.

Rather than making the game industry look like it was worthy of occupying the same cultural space as the film and music biz, it further demonstrated how much of an inferiority complex we still have. "Look—we got Hollywood celebrities to attend! We must be important!"

Lessons of Dungeon Siege

Fortunately, the embarrassing awards ceremony wasn't the only thing on tap for folks in the games biz. It was sandwiched between two days of seminars known as the DICE Summit. Leading members of the gaming industry took the stage to discuss and debate various trends in the biz, and to share their wisdom with other developers.

Chris Taylor led one of the most entertaining sessions to impart the lessons he learned from *Dungeon Siege*. Here are a few of his most quotable comments:

On games that start too slowly: "Where's the exit to town? I just want to kill something! Can I kill you? I can't kill that woman with the baby? That sucks!"

On dealing with publishers to massen funding: "You gotta lie if you're a developer—we're kind of a sneaky bunch."

"The dark days of game development are like being hung naked upside down in the jungle, and they're boiling the stew and throwing in the carrots."

"Clearly, when we fell down was a polishing [*Dungeon Siege*] after following this wonderful engine. [If we had spent more time improving the game] we could have broken out of the \$60,000 copy range into 1 million to 2 million."

"We got schooled heavily in the economics of game development. We have to use [the DS engine] again."

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD FREELANCER

Usually, when a game is delayed as long as this one (it appeared on our cover in November 1999), it's nothing but bad news. And the departure of original designer Chris Roberts inspired no confidence whatsoever. But, hey, every once in a while, something goes right. Miraculously, *Freelancer* delivers. See our full review in this issue.



THE BAD WOLFENSTEIN ADD-ON CANCELLED

Def. Ignore our *Loading* shot from last month. Activision and id have cancelled *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, saying that single-player "did not progress as anticipated." The multiplayer portion is still being produced and will be released as a free download. But will anyone stop playing *Battlefield 1942* long enough to care?



THE UGLY WESTWOOD SHUTTERED

OK, so we were harsh on C&C: *Generals* in our review last month. But, *Westwood Studios* is—or was—one of the most venerable, innovative game companies around. That's all over now, as Electronic Arts, *Westwood's* owner, has shut the place down as part of a recent consolidation.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrd Baker

actual lawn-mowing portion of the game uses simplistic controls, but it's the choices you make between missions that bring the game together. Do you eat your mom's boyfriend's steak? Do you try to steal from the little old lady when she goes to get your cash? Fans of lewrow humor should definitely give the demo a spin.

Nifty Indies

Here are a couple of the finalists from the recent Independent Games Festival that are more than worth the download.



Teenage Lawnmower (Free)
(www.rtssoft.com)

The creative mind that brought us *Clunk*, *Smellwood* has now

delivered a totally jenseless action game that centers on a lawn-mowing business. As a teen living with your single mother and her abusive boyfriend, it is your job to pay for the groceries, fix the stove, and keep things working. The pressure is on because you only have so much time to collect enough money to buy your way out of each increasingly expensive crisis. The



BaseGolf (\$29.95)

(http://www.games.com/basegolf)
BaseGolf is a combination of golf and a home run derby. Each level has bunkers and other hazards, along with fairways, greens, and a hole.

You control a batter who swings at pitches and attempts to hit the ball as close to the hole as possible. Hit a bunker and you're out. Get it on the fairway for a single or a double depending on the ball's proximity to the hole. Land it on the green for a triple, or sink it for a home run. You need a fixed number of runs to progress to the next course, and per is established for each level. It's a beshic game that's perfect for when you have a few minutes to kill.

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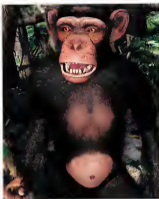


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3D GRAPHICS

Roll Out the Radeons

New 9800 Pro will be the first gaming card to boast 256MB of memory **By William O'Neal**

From time immemorial, or at least since 1997, graphics card companies have made the lives of PC gamers difficult by leapingfrogging each other at such short intervals that purchasing a card has always meant dealing with that feeling of dread a month later when your new \$350 card has already been eclipsed.

While I would like to report that those days are behind us, I can't. No sooner did Nvidia release the much-maligned GeForce FX 5800 Ultra than did ATI come around to rein on Nvidia's parade with their latest offering, the Radeon 9800 Pro and its R. Diddy-sized posse of hangers-on.

ATI's new flagship, the Radeon 9800 Pro 256MB, is likely to be the most powerful graphics card ever—for about a month, until Nvidia releases the NV35, a card that should provide the technological leap we all thought the NV30 would (hopefully without that noisy fan). Code-named the R350, the Radeon 9800 Pro will come in three flavors: the 9800 Pro 256MB (price unavailable), the 9800 Pro 128MB (\$399), and the 9800 128MB (\$349).

All three flavors will boast OpenGL 2.0, AGP 8x, and DirectX 9.0 support. The 9800 Pro will also be the first board to ship with 256MB of memory. According to ATI's tests, the 9800 Pro is about 50 percent faster than the GeForce FX

5800 Ultra in Unreal Tournament 2003 at 1024x768 with 4XFSAA and 8XAF turned on, and nearly 75 percent faster at 1600x1200 with those same features turned on.

But Nvidia's not standing still: Rumor has it they are about to announce a version of the NV35 with 256MB of memory. So, the competitive picture will change if they clinch ship their next parts on schedule.

Rounding out the new Radeon triumvirate are the 9600 for the "performance" market and the 9200 for the "mainstream" market. The 9600 will have an MSRP between \$150 and \$200 and will come in both 64MB and 128MB flavors as well as Pro and non-Pro versions. Similar to the 9800, the 9600 will boast DirectX 9.0 compliance, AGP 8x, and advanced forms of both anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering. The 9200 will have an MSRP ranging from \$79 to \$129 and will support AGP 8x and DirectX 8.1. The 9200 Pro will be DirectX 9.0 compatible and cost up to \$150. While the 9200 will ship in both 64MB and 128MB versions, the 9800 Pro will be 128MB only.

While the war for graphics card supremacy rages on, the real battle is in the mainstream trenches. See, top-of-the-line parts get much of the press, but it's the company that dominates the \$200-end-under market that will clock the most cheddar.

ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro is likely to be the most powerful graphics card ever—for about a month.

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HANDS ON

Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide

More elves and fairies for your inner D&D doze

By Thierry Nguyen

Neverwinter Nights was already a massive elf romp, but BioWare just had to find a way to add more stuff in the *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide* expansion slated for May. We got some hands-on time to test out the new content.

Of the five new prestige classes (blackguard, arcane archer, assassin, halper scout, and shadowdancer), we particularly liked the assassin and

Enhancing Arrows (up to +5, rounds), Seeker Arrows (which always hit their target), Hail of Arrows (hits every enemy), and the Arrow of Death.

New critters on which to test these classes out include little kobolds, humanoid manticores, and creepy-crawly formians (ant-men). We wanted to try out all of the new fanslars, but Jeff Green was too fixated on the fairy dragon. Three new 9e sets—desert, snowy rural, and rains—mean you're no longer

The arcane archer has pretty killer moves, including the Arrow of Death.

arcane archer. Prestige classes work as another class for your character to multiclass with, but each has strict prerequisites (i.e., assassins need to have eight points in both Hide in Shadows and Move Silently). Assassins can perform death attacks (which instantly paralyze the target), a multitude of dodges, and the *Invisibility* and *Darkness* spells. The arcane archer has some pretty killer moves, such as

confined to wandering around green landscapes. The slickest addition is the throwable weapons, such as acid flasks, caltrops, and other grenade-like items.

We haven't even seen the single-player campaign yet, but since it's being done jointly by BioWare and FloodGate (a new company staffed mainly by ex-Looking Glass employees), we have faith the campaign will be an improvement upon the original's unevenness.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, May 1998

Once upon a time, we believed that people cared about *Star Trek*. Oh, we

knew we didn't—we really pretty much hated it—but we thought you cared. So we ran a cover story previewing a bunch of *Trek* games, including *First Contact*, *Klingon Honor Guard*, and the incredibly doomed *The Secret of Vulcan Fury*. We threw in a review of the hideous *Star Trek: The Game Show* and then *Vanguard* would do a *Farscape* cover before we'd ever inflict *Trek* on anyone again.



Ten Years Ago, May 1993

Pride of ownership is all well and good, but when you're compelled to

step a paceless on something like *Doom's* Tomato Game, maybe it's time to take a step back, ponder your existence, and then make a bold move—like putting a bullet in your head. I mean, c'mon—it's a game about tomatoes for cryin' out loud. *Hydro Bill* was taking a cue from *Ken's Labyrinth*, which we also reviewed this issue. Social perish, thy name is *game*.



Fifteen Years Ago, May 1988

"Deceptively simple and addictive, it is certainly worthwhile." Talk about an

understatement—this was our ridiculously low-key assessment of the most viciously time-devouring game ever: *Tetris*. The original *Doom* may have shut down countless servers, but this little puzzle game shut down entire lives. In case that didn't disrupt your existence enough, you had other options: 15 years ago this issue also had reviews of *Wasteland*, *Ultima V*, and *Menace* Mansion.

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John Cena

He's old now, and that deep baritone is getting really raspy, but the Man in Black is still cooler than any of us will ever be. His most recent CD, *American IV: The Men Come Around*, features a riveting version of Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt" that chills to the bone. Discover him now, while he's still a living legend.



X-Men 2

We just saw the trailer! *Bem!* We're really, really excited! *Bem!* It's got Nightcrawler! *Bem!* And Pyro and Cyclops and Deathstrike and more of the almost naked Mystique! *Bem!* We can't wait! We're gonna be first in line! So what if we're wallowing in darkness! It's got Nightcrawler! *Bem!* *Bem!* *Bem!*



Rounding

Gamers have got to keep up their reputations for fine physiques, and running's better than using the stair-climber next to the untard-wearing methhead at the gym. Dena's so crazy she's training for a marathon, but the rest of us prefer a round jog to the comic book store. Put on your shoes and get out the door, fatso!

DISCOVERING GAMES





DEAD TREES

From Cradle to Doom

The lives (so far) of Id Software's Carmack and Romero

By Charles Ardal

Where do visionary computer games come from? We like to think they're made by T-shirt-wearing, coke-swilling, pizza-devouring, shower-schlewing, beany-something boy geniuses, their stereos cranked, their fingers flying over their keyboards. This generally isn't true.

But once in a while, it is, as David Kushner tells us in *Masters of Doom*, his clumsily written but nonetheless compelling joint biography of the creators of Id Software, legendary designer John Romero (manic, narcissistic, "a human exclamation point") and coding god John Carmack (afflictless, Spock-like, "an amoral little jerk"). Together, Carmack and Romero created a new



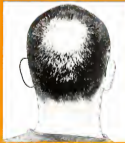
type of gaming experience, inventing the first-person shooter with *Wolfenstein 3-D* and then refining it in *Doom* and *Quake*. The games they dreamt up made millions, made headlines, and redefined what a computer game could be.

Unfortunately, in spite of all their success, their Ferraris, their Playboy-model girlfriends, and their rock star ways, their story is mainly one of

disaffection and disappointment as they strain to reach ever greater heights and are laid low by hubris, infighting, and managerial incompetence. It's a memorable cautionary tale, marred only by Kushner's favored prose and his tendency to come across as a bit of a square, peeping enviously through the glass at the doings of people cooler than him.

DESIGN SCOOTER'S HEAD

And Win a Radeon 9700!



If you see this man's head as merely the CPU for a geeky Asian dude, think again. It will soon become a living canvas for the

ultimate artistic expression. That's right, among the world's design triumphs—the Guggenheim, Venus de Mila, Homer Simpson—we hope to someday add Scooter. It will take a breathtaking design to elevate his noggin from Azn Q-tip to timeless classic, and that's where you come in. Send us a bold design for what Scooter's hair should look like, and the winning entry will receive a brand-new ATI Radeon 9700 Pro. Plus, we'll carve the winning design into Scooter's head in time for E! (or use dyes if necessary). All you have to do is design an image on paper and mail it to us, or download a .JPG from www.cgwizards.com/Scootershead, imprint your genius, and e-mail it to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com (for complete legal details, see page 123). All entries due by May 1, 2003, so get your graphic rear in gear. Because Scooter's head is a terrible thing to waste.

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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *Star Wars* 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.



Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Underspire Expansion Pack *Neverwinter Nights* NA's first official expansion pack includes a new 40-hour single player campaign plus game features new to Neverwinter Nights, such as additional D&D skills, feats, classes, monsters, weapons and spells.



Enter the Matrix *Enter the Matrix* Features awesome gameplay and spectacular martial arts that bend the rules of the Matrix. This game is an integral part of the experience, with a story that weaves in and out of The Matrix Reloaded, the sequel to the Academy Award-winning film.



The Sims Superstar *The Sims* In this expansion pack for The Sims, players can realize their fantasies of fame and fortune as they pursue the dream of being a rock star, a movie star, or a supermodel and live the lifestyle of a celebrity. This is your all-access pass to the world of superstardom.



Rise of Nations *Rise of Nations* Combines the sweeping scope of epic historical turn-based strategy games with the quick decision-making of real-time games. You can move through the entire sweep of human culture quickly and have a satisfying game experience without playing for hours!

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Raven Shield *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* 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.



Command & Conquer: Generals *Command & Conquer* 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.



Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb *Indiana Jones* Join Indy as he braves 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 hoods and the Asian underworld to possess the mysterious Heart of the Dragon.



Freelancer *Freelancer* Adventure, intrigue, and opportunity in an instantly epic and fascinating science-fiction universe. Features an open-ended universe open for exploration. Players have a choice of distinctive styles of play for different gameplay experiences.



Shadowbane *Shadowbane* This is EverQuest with an edge. Shadowbane is the first persistent world massively multiplayer online game to combine the fantasy role-playing and strategy genres. A dynamic world design model, allows players to physically affect the history, politics, and landscape of the game itself.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

What a surprise, *NightFire* didn't make the list



1
WarCraft III: Dragoon at its best



GTA3: moral tale for our times



3
Medal of Honor: the best FPS since Half-Life

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	WarCraft III (Vivendi/Bizzard)	★★★★☆
2	Grand Theft Auto III (EA)	★★★★★
3	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (EA)	★★★★☆
4	Neverwinter Nights (Baldur's Gate)	★★★★☆
5	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (Vivendi/Bizzard)	★★★★★
6	Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (LucasArts)	★★★★★
7	Age of Mythology (Microsoft)	★★★★☆
8	The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind (Bethesda)	★★★★☆
9	No One Lives Forever 2 (Sierra)	★★★★☆
10	Urbal Tournament 2003 (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
11	Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal (Black Isle/Biosware)	★★★★☆
12	Civilization III (Infogrames/Hasbro)	★★★★★
13	Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)	★★★★★
14	Battlefield 1942 (EA)	★★★★☆
15	Medieval: Total War (Activision)	★★★★★
16	Kitman 2: Silent Assassin (Eidos)	★★★★☆
17	Mafia (Take 2)	★★★★☆
18	Unreal II: The Awakening (EpicGames)	★★★★☆
19	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder (Ubisoft)	★★★★☆
20	MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries (Microsoft)	★★★★★

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.

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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 lingerie models bring you drinks and rub your feet when your gaming is done. But that ain't the world we live in, dude.



1 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY: You knew it was coming and it should be here by mid-May. Sequel to our choice for 2002's Game of the Year, Vice City will be another masterpiece of murder and mayhem. According to Leslie Benzies, president of Rockstar North, "The open-ended world of Grand Theft Auto allows us to stretch the limits of our imaginations by giving us an open canvas to work with." Look for a better story line, more cool toys, and "G0D" chat.

2 THEY CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD: In the grand tradition of monster B-movies, you are a hungry monster, bent on revving hellacious cilles. According to Octopus Motor, the indie developer/publisher, TCFH is a hybrid action-RTS. The coolest thing may be its compatibility with the PC Dence Pe4, which you can use to control your monster's stomping, kicking, and smashing actions. We'll bring you e-hends-on-preview before the game's late-summer completion.

3 STALKER: OBLIVION LOST: The setup is your typical post-apocalyptic, hero-seven-the-day FPS, but it's never looked like this. With the help of the X-Ray engine and constant input from Nvidia and CSC World, Stalker's Ukrainian developers promise to fully exploit the GeForce FX's new features. The game should support more than 2 million bulgy bump-mapped polygons per frame. The official release date is late this year, but don't be surprised when it slips to next spring.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
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ISO 4.0: The New World	EA	02 2003
All American: The Streets	Shogun	02 2003
America II	Data Becker	02 2003
American McGee's Oz	Carbine	02 2004
Animals	Codemasters	02 2003
Ballbuster Demolition	Demovatcher	03 2003
Ballfield Command	Codemasters	01 2004
Black 9	Hajesco	04 2003
Black Moon Chronicles: Wars of War	Cryo Networks	Unknown
Batavialy	COV	02 2003
Brace	COV	02 2003
Chrome	Strategy First	02 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	02 2004
Civil War: War Between the States	Walker Toys	Unknown
Commandos 3	Eidos	02 2003
Conflict: Desert Storm	SI	04 2003
Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars	COV	01 2004
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Valve	02 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	3/8/03
Deadlands	Headfirst	03 2003
Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware	03 2003
Demolition	Amish	03 2003
Dev Ex 2	Eidos	02 2003
Deen III	Activision	04 2003
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	03 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	03 2003
Empire of Magic	SumoSoft	02 2003
Empire: Dawn of the New World	Activision	When it's done
Ever the Merks	Infogrames	5/15/03
Escape from Alcatraz	HP	02 2003
EverQuest 2	Strategy First	02 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
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EverQuest II	Sony	04 2003
Fall Terminate 2	LucasArts	04 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	04 2003
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	5/10/03
Hamurai	Arise Tribe	02 2004
Halo	Microsoft	02 2003
Hogwarts 4	Ubi Soft	5/6/03
Heaven and Hell	COV	02 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOO Games	03 2003
The Hobbit	Vivendi	03 2003
HomeWorld 2	Sierra	03 2003
The Hulk	Vivendi	02 2003
Imperial Galactica II	COV	02 2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	02 2003
Ligeia II	HCSoft	03 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	02 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	02 2003
Lords of the Rings II	Shiva	04 2003
Max Payne II	GOO Games	Unknown
Medal of Honor 2	EA	02 2004
Medieval Total War: Viking Invasion	Activision	02 2003
The Mercia	Lionhead	Unknown
MVP Baseball	EA	02 2003
Message	Strategy First	02 2003
No Man's Land	COV	02 2003
Prinkler	Demovatcher	02 2003
Powers	COV	01 2004
Part Boyle	Tri Synergy	02 2003
Pentia 2	Unknown	Unknown
Psychotanks	COV	04 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	02 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Entas	02 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
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Belling Thunder	Strategy First	02 2003
Bonus: Total War	Activision	02 2004
San and Max 2	LucasArts	01 2004
Savage	Illwee	02 2003
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	03 2003
Silent Storm	JoWood	04 2003
The Silent Superstar Expansion	EA	02 2003
Sovereign	Sony	Cancelled
Silent Supremacy	More Creative	Unknown
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Blizzard	02 2003
Star Wars: Galactic	LucasArts	4/15/03
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	03 2003
Stalker: Oblivion Lost	GSC	04 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Unknown
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Motor	02 2003
Thief III	Eidos	03 2003
Tom Clancy: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	02 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	04 2003
Triforce Game	Sierra	Unknown
Trek 2.0	Blazy	02 2003
Tropics 2	GOO Games	02 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	03 2003
Vulture	COV	04 2003
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	03 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	03 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	02 2003
Warcra of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	01 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	04 2003

NEW UPDATE

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- gameSpy.com



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"NEVER BEFORE HAS REAL TIME STRATEGY SPANNED THE AGES AS IT DOES IN EMPIRE EARTH!" —COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, 2001

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[†] GameSpy, 2001

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**HANDS-ON
EXCLUSIVE!**

On a quiet night, you
can take a walk on
the moon.



Check out the groovy neon
lighting in this heaper.



Besides you are derment
intimidate hole.

BLACK 9

Sci-fi, secret societies, and something different **By Darren Gladstone**

Taldren, the developer behind *Black 9*, is hiding something—a new game that's almost impossible to sum up in a couple words.

Is it an RPG? Is it an action game? Is it *Battlefield 1942* in space? It's a little of all three, and the guys behind *Star Trek: Starfleet Command III* hope to deliver both a deep, story-driven single-player campaign and a strong set of multiplayer modes in one box.

CEO Erik Betske explains that "not much is going to change 78 years from now. There's no apocalypse, no World War III, no clichéd bleak cyberpunk future." But there will be plenty of cybernetic technological developments, and nine duplicitous, warring secret societies to look forward to, in an effort to keep spoilers to a minimum, we'll leave it at this: You'll find a linear but plot-twist-riddled single-player campaign where you'll cross paths with the nine different Illuminati (for whom the game is named) as missions take you to the moon, Mars, and Hong Kong.

THIS ISN'T YOUR FATHER'S SHOOTER

That sets the stage for a game that, on the surface, looks like your standard issue third-person action/adventure, but actually has the story and character growth of an RPG. Take, for example, your three alter egos in *Black 9*: There's the military bruiser, a stealthy hacker/thief, and a cybermage with nanotech "magic" abilities. But just because you choose to play as a soldier doesn't mean you have to blast and bash your way through the entire game; Develop hacking skills or buy nanotech upgrades to open other means of playing through objectives. Betske was quick to bust out the old *Dungeons & Dragons* references, noting that the player can be any permutation of a multiclassed magic-user, fighter, and thief within *Black 9*. Otherwise, you can create your own jock of all trades.

Once you square away how you want to play, you can make your character even more customizable. With every completed mission, you'll gain attributes and skill points. And with all the credits you earn on the job, you'll be able to load out your merc with new weapons and nanotech implants.

In the early build we saw, only a handful of standard-issue ballistics weapons were in place. Handguns, machine pistols, and the like are all fired from a third-person chase-cam perspective, while some sniper weapons push you into a first-person view. Ultimately, they will include grenades, mines, detonation packs, crossbows, and much more—roughly 20 weapons in all.

The variety of 30 skill and nanotech

upgrades, though, is what impresses even at this stage. There are some blend but helpful upgrades that improve targeting or give you onscreen stats of enemies. Then there are some genuinely cool new conventions. Urban tracking, for instance, turns you into a cyber-bloodhound able to see stray DNA molecules that come off your prey (they appear onscreen as colored blips that quickly fade away). A magnetic grasping hook will let you work out your Spider-Man fantasies as you swing through levels.

Other nanotech-based skills work a whole lot like magic-users in most RPGs. There are five schools of tech based upon the four elements and dross. The later focuses on skills that let you leech health and mental energy, or chi, which is required for spell-casting and the various cyberskills you'll use in the game.

There are also a number of vehicles at your disposal, though it's too early for a final count of how many there will be. In our demo, we climbed into a hover-bike, strapped on a flight pack, and jumped into an assault ground car. Word has it that between six and eight vehicles will be available when the game is done.

TWO GAMES IN ONE

While the single-player experience is shaping up to be a huge character-building quest, Taldren also has big plans in store for multiplayer. Maybe that's because it's had plenty of inter-night sessions of *Battlefield 1942*, inspired by *Counter-Strike*, *City of Defeat*, and *Battlefield*, various combat scenarios will support up to 16 players. Betske explains, "We are using the backstory of *Black 9* to pit mercenary agents of the various Illuminati in thematic scenarios. There will be capture-and-hold matches like in *Battlefield*, rescue/kidnap VIP missions, and scenarios that have you hacking into or defending important installations."

Betske also mentioned that the multiplayer modes will sport additional crafts not available in the single-player game. Even more ambitious, though, is Taldren's attempt to create a persistent game universe. Each Illuminati has its own set of ups and downs, and those are reflected in the game world. Every time you log onto a multiplayer game, the side you choose may have a tougher time acquiring vehicles, weapons, or money.

No doubt about it: *Black 9* is striving to be a new kind of genre. There's a lot that still needs to be done before hitting the target November launch date, but Taldren is definitely onto something with the 40 percent-complete build we saw.



Willie the piller? This is an indoor lunar safety. Kind of reminds us of the mall at Green's Palace.



These are huge—before and out-to explore.

Word has it that six to eight vehicles will be available to drive in the game.



If only all space vehicles looked this nice.



"Oh...I need...all..."

GAME STATS

FREDDY MALLESO

FRANK TALDREN

THE ACTION RPG

ESQUIRE NOVEMBER 2003



Take flight!

Here's how you separate the old-school gamers from the new in any crowd: Say "defender of the crown," and then wait for a reaction. Any former Amiga owner will begin waxing poetic about Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown, a then-revolutionary strategy game. The original title melded the graphics of an epic Errol Flynn adventure with a

the battlefield, and you select which forces to throw into the fray.

Defender is also part action game. At any time, you can ambush crevans using your archery skills, raid castles by sword fighting, joust for glory, and attack enemy strongholds with siege weapons. These minigames might not be able to stand up on their own, but as a whole, they complement one another.

So far, it looks as though Cinemaware

Cinemaware isn't just banking on nostalgia to defend its crown.

variety of gameplay elements, creating a (then) whole new experience. Now, it's back for a new generation.

Cinemaware's seminal game has gotten a major makeover. But there's no quick-and-dirty way to sum it up because, like the first iteration, Defender has so many different elements.

For starters, it feels a bit like Risk as you command your campaign across England, trying to take territories by force and hoping to become the new king. As in *Warlords 2: Betlicery*, some parcels allow for feaster/cheaper troop production, while others earn you a higher income. The combat is handled more like a simplistic digital board game than an RTS or turn-based strategy battler. Each unit type is represented by a chess-like piece on

isn't just banking on the nostalgia factor to defend its crown. While on the right track to capture the spirit of the first game, it still has plenty to do.

There's a solid single-player experience in place, but there's no word on any skirmish modes or multiplayer matches. The final code is still a ways off, and would-be conquerors will have to wait until late 2003 to play.



GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CINEMWARE
 QUALITY: CINEMARE
 2001 ACTION-STRATEGY
 ISSUE: 83 2003

ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

Gamers in tights? I don't think so...

By Darren Gladstone



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- NEW MUSICAL SCORES • EXCITING NEW STORYLINES



PlayStation®2

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Lacking a 5-ak repository, this camper sets up shop in a church.



Despite the delay, the detailed textures are still looking sharp.



"You'll get the job done!"

COUNTER-STRIKE CONDITION ZERO

Comin' under fire—and finally coming out **By Di Luo**

Right now, more than 30,000 people are playing Counter-Strike on GameSpy. Thousands more play on LANs. Not bad for a free mod of a 5-year-old game based around a 7-year-old engine. We've waited patiently for Condition Zero, but c'mon, it's time for something new.

As reported in February's Read Me section, Ritual has the unenviable task of developing this high-profile title in about eight months. Recently, we had the chance to see where things stand in a live demo. According to Lead Designer Tom Mustaine, the team had to scrimp over nearly from scratch when it took over the project, keeping only parts of some maps and a few lectures from previous versions.

Ritual has made it clear that Condition Zero isn't Counter-Strike 2.

To keep the Half-Life engine up to date, Ritual is giving the graphics a major face-lift—creating models with 60 percent higher resolution and updating many textures. The artists have also spent a lot of time cheating the system to pull off improvements, like animating death scenes to create rag doll-like effects. Ritual claims that in many cases, these effects end up looking better and more realistic than the rag-doll physics found in the latest Unreal engine.

The team has also added a rudimentary scripting language to create big moments, like helicopter crashes and tanks hunting you down. Mustaine says Ritual will include at least one of these cool moments in each level, to immerse players further into the experience.

REPORTING FOR DUTY

The single-player aspect takes a novel approach for the genre. Rather than one long story focusing on the heroics

of a single soldier, Condition Zero places you in a different role for every mission. In more than 20 globe-spanning missions, you play operatives in various counter-terrorist organizations. Some missions are organized efforts that begin with cut-scenes and briefings, while others simply dump you into the middle of the action and let you figure out why you're being hunted by mobs of angry, AK-wielding terrorists. Despite the variety of settings, Ritual promises the missions will retain many of CS' gameplay dynamics, including many of the same objectives and missions that require stealth over brawn.

In order to ramp up the single-player excitement, however, some CS basics have been modified. Characters have

more health and can pick up med packs to heal, and some of the action looks decidedly more Half-Life than Counter-Strike. Will that entice some hardcore players? Ritual maintains it will not deviate from the original's spirit.

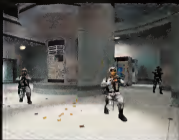
Similarly, on the multiplayer side, CS fans need not panic. There'll be 10 new multiplayer maps and the addition of A.I.-controlled bots. The bots can fight on both sides in the single-player or multiplayer game and can respond to basic radio commands. CZ will also use Valve's Steam technology as a means of continuously updating the game. This will not only facilitate the release of new assets, but will also keep the code ahead of the hordes of cheating bastards out there.

NOT A SEQUEL

Although upgrades like the improved graphics and new maps won't be immediately available for download, Valve plans to integrate CS with CZ by releasing Counter-Strike version 1.7. Owners of either version can play with each other as long as they stay off the Condition Zero-exclusive maps.

Considering all the time and effort being put into CZ, we're expecting some great innovations. However, due to the long development time, there are some technologies that may not wow us anymore. Take the voice-over-net technology for multiplayer; it's nice, but will soon be incorporated into other Valve games through Steam.

Mustaine has made it clear that Condition Zero isn't Counter-Strike 2. With a slew of upgrades and an intriguing single-player game, it should be enough to keep the legions of fans happy for a while. We'll see for sure when it comes out this spring.



Give orders to your squadmates through the caserecord radio interface, and the A.I. does all the rest.



Condition Zero makes it easy to get up hot matches for those long lonely nights without broadband.



GAME STATS

ENGINE: HALF-LIFE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: RITUAL
DISTRIBUTOR: GIGAWATT
GDD: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
RELEASED: MAY 2003

LIKE: RO



There's still a home run competition—but thankfully, it's not in a castle with some stupid grunting giant.



The new picture-in-picture base-running display should help you decide when to go for that extra base.



When something dies, it's a sad thing. Unless that thing is Triple Play Baseball, the most

monumentally hell-essed baseball game not involving monkeys ever made. And while half dozens of fans will lament the passing of home run derbies held in castles, we cannot be but heartened at EA's professed desire to bring actual baseball to its baseball games this summer in the shape of MVP Baseball 2003.

MVP Baseball is a whole new franchise, and that alone may be the most encouraging news about EA's baseball plans—the company finally realized it needed to start over from scratch. You'll be able to start from scratch as well, since MVP Baseball will have a more sim-like slide to it, complete with rookie dreads, player contracts, and player development. Considering the popularity of fantasy baseball and the minutiae-obsessed nature of baseball fans, such a strong (well-executed) French mode can only enhance the game's appeal.

But will this be the first EA game to actually play and feel like baseball? Well, we haven't been able to get any early code out of the tribe of participants at EA, but the new game

Will this be the first EA game to actually play and feel like baseball?

mechanics have filled us with a strangely feeling that—while initially frightening and confusing—we have come to understand is that thing called hope. Instead of the certainish ball-mashing and twitchy arcade play of the Triple Play games, which left us lightly balled up in the Intel position, MVP is introducing baseball strategy to the action. Pitchers will have a pitching arsenal that reflects their real-life counterparts both in number and effectiveness; meanwhile, gamers will have to balance power and release points to effectively deliver curves, sliders, etc. For betters, real-life hot/cold zones in the strike zone will help determine their ability to hit certain pitches in certain areas over the plate.

Toss in detailed scouting reports, a more-demanding fielding model, and a picture-in-picture base-running display, and EA just may be on track to dethrone High Heat as the best in PC baseball.

GAME STATS

FRANCHISE: EA
 DEVELOPER: EA
 GENRE: SIM BASEBALL
 RELEASE DATE: Q3 2002

MVP BASEBALL 2003

Can EA finally deliver an all-star? **By Robert Coffey**



DETAIL #66212

ITEM: Windshield debris

TAKEN FROM: #12 ALLTEL windshield
at North Carolina Speedway

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



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HANDS-ON
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The level of detail is so nice, you can stare at
Twee's stratified butt.



Set up sniper ambushes
behind the tree line...



...Or be really ballsy and wait in
the middle of an open field.

BATTLEFIELD CO EUROPE AT WAR

War usually isn't pretty—but it is in this game **By Elvis Bacon**



The Russians are coming!
The Russians are coming!



Any game based on the
IL-2 engine is bound to
have a place in it.

The game uses *IL-2 Sturmovik's* engine, reworked to a much higher level of detail.

Once upon a time, people moved little green blocks around a screen and called them armies. Now, we're looking forward to *Battlefield Command*, a real-time strategy game with more ground-level gloss than your average first-person shooter. It's so detailed, you can zoom from a birds-eye view of the battlefield right down to Sarge, the anti-tank-gunner with his fly updo.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE
Battlefield Command is Russian developer IC Maddox's first strategy title. That's right, the guys who put together those *IL-2 Sturmovik* games are coming in for a striding run on RTS titles. Unlike *IL-2's* high-flying flinths, here, you're in command of a small group of units in major battles of the European theater—from the invasion of Poland to the war on the Eastern front, D-Day, and the fall of Germany in 1945. You can play just about any Allied or Axis nation, and your missions can involve recon, city skirmishes, ambushes, or sabotage.

It's a tactical game. A unit might be a

single infantryman or a tank and its crew. These troops each have their own personalities and skills, and with a decent commander they'll swallow their abilities to the point where a T-34 crowd antirally by medics might still acquit itself well.

It'll be up to you to kill out your units from a changing pool of available resources—right down to handguns and ammunition. To make the game more accessible, much of this can be automated, so slacker strategists can concentrate on the simpler joys of playing with tanks.

Given its paratage, it's no surprise that *Battlefield Command* majors in historical and visual realism. The unusual part is that the game uses *IL-2 Sturmovik's* engine reworked to a much higher level of detail. Reconstructed from period topographical data, the terrain is deformable, so you can see leaves rustled by wind, individual blades of grass, and the best ripples and reflections in water I've seen.

Units are modeled to a similar degree of authenticity: You'll see German tanks with stenciled markings, while Russian ones have scuffed, hand-painted jobs. Sometimes it's taken to an extreme that's just plain silly—fling boxes with individually scribble-numbered anti-tank shells shows the real-life relative.

However, all this detail should have a very dramatic effect on gameplay. For example, when you shell a building, you'll see appropriate levels of damage played out on a room-by-room basis, complete with interior decor. Or watch as survivors of a gun crew go through raw and longer loading animations as they double up on gurney choras.

SUITING UP FOR E²

With a little less than a year until its release date, the engine is already performing minor miracles while the animations and unit modeling are well on schedule. The interface isn't finalized yet, but we can safely expect a fairly conventional mouse, keyboard, and hockey combination. Meanwhile, IC is working with designers from *Codemasters* on mission balancing, multi-player, and fine tuning the A.I.

We should have an even better idea when the game officially previews at E² later this year. If IC nails the great imponderables of A.I. and mission difficulty, then *Battlefield Command* promises to be by far the most visually delightful, detailed, and personal WW2 wargame to date.

So, how far have we come from moving green blocks around? This game has an active battlefield of one square kilometer, but entire battles are waged around a 16x16 kilometer periphery just for decoration and atmosphere. A game with its own military mood lighting? Now that's style.

COMMAND: 1939-45

GAME STATS

PROUD COORDINATORS
FOUR PLAYERS
CORE STRATEGY
RELEASED 01/2004



just got better.



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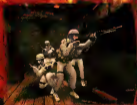
Powerful, new and deadly devices — including projectile traps — are also available to adventure designers through scripting. And the recently released Plot Wizard makes adventure creation easier than ever!

Neverwinter Nights...
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ATARI



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FREEDOM'S ANSWER TO FEAR.
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The father of all tactical shooters returns, in an all-new game, locked and loaded to change the face of action gaming. **AGAIN.** Advance to a new level of gaming realism with new high-tech gear to hunt the Targos and 57 weapons to take them down. Experience unmatched graphical realism and high velocity multiplayer action powered by next generation Unreal™ technology. We wrote the book on tactical squad-based combat. Now we're rewriting it. Study up.



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FOR WORLD DOMINATION,
AND NOBODY BETTER
GET IN THE WAY



THE RETURN OF THE KIN

BY ROBERT COFFEY







An Iksar does battle against a scorpion. Yep, monster hunting is still what it's all about.

The cornerstones of the franchise are still there. The strong focus on cooperative play. The sweeping game world. The intricate economy with a thriving player-created market. And rats. Lots and lots of rats just begging for killing early in the game. This was Sony's winning formula for *EverQuest*, and with 400,000-plus players happily forking over money every month to play, the company's not about to radically alter that formula.

But it's not afraid to radically enhance it. To completely redo the interface, overhaul the early game experience, rework the classing system, rewrite the book on the game's fiction, and undertake the most dazzling graphic upgrade in gaming history. Sony is busily building a game it hopes will last a good five years or more. From what we've seen, it's more than well on its way to succeeding.

NEWBIES WELCOME

This is a design team unafraid to learn from the success of others. A lot has changed in Norrath some 500 years after the first *EverQuest*. From the very beginning of the game until somewhere after hitting Level 10, *EverQuest II* does its utmost to acquaint you with this new game world and the new game mechanics, so you're well-prepared to tackle all the challenges ahead.

Character creation is more streamlined than before. Taking a cue from *Asheron's Call 2*, you simply click on a statue representing the race you wish to be. Using a series of slider bars, you deform and tint the facial characteristics of your avatar, then you're shot to the gameworld. At this point in the



A human male doesn't hide his stats. Peek in: 500 years after the original EQ.

game, the mind-boggling plethora of character stats is hidden, to avoid overwhelming players (though experienced players can still open them up). Besides, there's no real reason to reveal them early on, when every character is a blank slate. You're not locked into a class nanoseconds after you first log on, so you're free to experiment and experience the world.

Rest assured, racial characteristics will still influence your effectiveness in a given class—just differently. The thinking about racial modifiers right now is in terms of upper limits. An Ogre and a Gnome may both become fighters with roughly the same stats, but the Ogre will have a higher upper limit on his strength score, so he'll eventually dish out more punishment

than the Grooms, whose higher dexterity aptitude will turn him into a more nimble combatant.

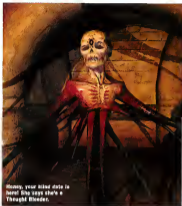
After entering Norrath, you'll immediately be given a quest. Unlike the clunky search-for-the-type-the-keyword questing system of the first game, the questing system in EQ2 (like every object and NPC in the game) uses a now context-sensitive radial menu. You'll simply click on dialogue choices to accept the quest, and it will be logged into your journal (see sidebar for more on EQ2's quests). The earliest quests will come fast and furious, teaching basic gameplay functions and rewarding players with essential items like their first spell, first weapon, and—best of all—a compass. Sense heading, ladies and gentlemen, is finally dead.

MOVIN' ON UP

Levels will come quickly after starting a new character, and before you know it you'll be hitting Level 5, which is about when you'll first experience the new class system.

Sony is figuring that by around Level 5 or 6, you'll have a feeling for how you want to play the game, and that's when you'll finally select a profession from one of the archetypes: fighter, rogue, druid, mage, priest, or tradesman.

You need that right. In EQ2, dedicated tradesperson is a full-blown, experience-earning new character



BETTERHANEQ!

Nothing casts a better pall over a long night of obsessive EQ gaming quite like stumbling into the wrong part of Norrath and having your ego handed to you repeatedly. And when the XP hit that came with death meant that far too many unlucky players could see their hard-earned skills and abilities actually decrease as they lost levels they'd spent countless hours gaining. That won't happen in EverQuest II. Instead of taking away experience with death, the game will levy an XP debt on players. It's like a credit card: a certain percentage of all XP you gain post-mortem will go toward paying off your debt. So death will only put a temporary drag on your advancement. Or you can just log off—experience debt will expire slowly over time on its own, so you should be good to go 24 hours later.

IN EQ2, DEDICATED TRADESPERSON IS A FULL-BLOWN, EXPERIENCE-EARNING NEW CHARACTER CLASS.

class, not just a possible sideline for your character.

Tradespeople will get XP for successfully creating new items, items that will be among the very best in the game.

Additionally, tradespeople will enjoy the same benefits of grouping as adventuring classes, even to the point of having the trade equivalent of raids. "Trade raids" will essentially be enormous civil engineering projects that require the efforts of several players in order to create large structures (such as temples) that will then provide huge benefits to other players. After construction, maintenance of these structures will be another crucial task for tradespeople.

Regardless of profession, all characters will move along the new tiered class-development tree. After picking an archetype around Level 5, players will choose a class around Level 10, and a sub-class after Level 30 or so. So, to become a paladin, the progression would be fighter, crusader, and finally paladin. Of course, you could always choose warrior or brawler instead of crusader; thus starting you down a path toward ranger or shadow knight. Characters can be developed up to Level 100,

but the game engine is being built to allow development room up to Level 200.

MOB MENTALITY

Big surprise—there are lots of new monsters in EQ2 waiting to chop you into tiny digital bits. From early-game standards like bats, rats, and armadillos to the enormous dragons, overly muscled minotaurs, and light-sucking void beasts of higher levels, Norrath is chockful of nasty critters. And they're tougher and smarter than ever before.

A dramatically complex new pathing system will prevent monsters from attacking through walls; the downside is that anywhere you can go, they can go, too, making for some hair-raising chases as MOBs follow you through hallways and tunnels without getting caught on the odd corner or stalemate. Oh, you can still zone to lose a pursuer, but with EQ2's vast zones, that's going to be a much longer run than before.

One of the primary MOB behaviors Sony is working on has to do with an area of comfort for all creatures. This concept is a

AGING NEVER QUEST II



The level of detail in the graphics is dramatically shown in the aging of a player character. Don't worry, you won't actually get old—except maybe as a temporary spell effect. Sony doesn't want 400,000 old men running around Norrath.

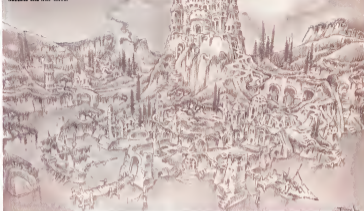
BETTER THAN EQ!**NO MORE CAMPING!**

Among EverQuest's annoyances is the dreaded problem of "camping"—players hanging out incessantly at certain localities in the game making for murders to spawn. The worst camping problems, notably, occur at places where rare, high-level creatures needed for quest completion spawn maybe only once or twice a day—leading to ridiculous horse-herd-style lines, lots of bickering, and frustration all around.

To fix the problem in EverQuest II, Sony is creating a "gated zone" system—similar in idea to the one in *Anarchy Online*—in which, once you've triggered a quest or met specific requirements, you and your group, if applicable, will be taken to a zone that is essentially your own. Sony will be able to create as many pocket areas as necessary for any players at the same point at the same time so no more waiting.

Sony is not guaranteeing there won't be camping in the more general, open hunting grounds with common monsters, saying that some of this is simply part of the game. But it's said that it hopes to make it less of a problem by keeping the areas populated with ample critters and loot to keep the populace from growing.

Concept drawing of the new Geyser, home of humans and half-elves.



THIS TIME AROUND, YOU'LL HAVE TO EARN YOUR XP VIA A CRAFTING SYSTEM THAT MIMICS COMBAT.



direct answer to the griefing tactic of pulling large trains of hostile creatures directly into a cluster of underpowered players who would be summarily slaughtered. In EQ2, monsters will stay focused on the character that pulled them. Once that character has died or escaped, monsters that have moved out of their area of comfort will ignore other potential targets and make a beeline for home, thus protecting innocent players. Of course, some critics at higher level zones are going to feel at home just about anywhere, so gamers are going to have to play smart and not blithely walk into high level areas when they're still relative newbies, expecting the game to wrap them in a warm cuddly blanket of safety.

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS

The good news is that monsters still die and, lucky you, you get to kill them. Combat hasn't changed a ton, but the differences are notable. For one thing, every weapon has the potential to

FIGHTING HAMMER & TONG

Crafting items won't be a simple matter of piling materials into a box and smacking a "create" button à la Asheron's Call 2. Since EQ2 awards XP for successfully making an item, you're going to have to earn it via a crafting system that mimics combat, complete with risk and tension. Upon selecting a recipe for something—say, a very rare shield—you'll go to the crafting window. There you'll see the basic components you need, as well as any special, rare ones, if you've got it all in your inventory, the crafting process will begin. Separate bars on the crafting interface track the item's progress and your character's concentration. As long as your concentration outlasts the progress bar you're fine. But events will occur during crafting to complicate matters, and you'll have to execute "maneuvers" (which are essentially trade-based spells) to deal with them. Maneuvers are chosen before crafting and are lined up on the left side of the interface so that when you see an alert like "Overheating Metal" you can click on "Cool Metal" to salvage the crafting process. Of course, maneuvers cost you concentration, so you have to select and use them with care. Should you fail, you lose the raw components and money you put into the item. Happily, rare components, like that golden sea tortoise shell you were hoping to convert into a shield, aren't lost. And a planned secure transaction window will protect adventurers who spent the last week trying to get that tortoise shell—you won't have to relinquish possession of your rare items when contracting a craftsman.



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PC Gamer

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—Gary Coleman

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—Chris Hyatt,
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—Computer Games Magazine

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

—Aaron Paul
Gameclv

POSTAL 2

Ever have one of those days?



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The Black Queen—right here as she kicks your ass.



Sony will keep the pain of death by letting you survive—kinda points—throughout. More D.

deliver a slashing, piercing, or blunt attack. Obviously, a club isn't going to slash anything (unless there's a spell driven through the end of it), but you can use the blunt of the sharpest sword to deal out some blunt force trauma—very useful when you're up against a skeleton or some other creature more vulnerable to crushing attacks.

Attacks can also be targeted to creatures' specific body parts. While this doesn't mean you can clip a Dragonfly Pixie's wings or hack the sword arm off an Orc, it does mean you can focus a portion of your attack on a monster's vulnerable spot. If Tommy the Bad Ogre isn't armor his arms, hack away at 'em—the bulk of your damage will still be calculated as hitting Tommy's torso, but that extra 10 percent can mean the difference between a dead Tommy or a dead you.

The EQ magic system is largely unchanged except for the addition of concentration as a new spell resource. While you'll still need mana to fire off any spell, concentration represents your character's ability to maintain spells and will be primarily

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE 800 HOURS SPENT ON EVERQUEST!!

Those of you worried that the lifetime you've already blown on EverQuest will all be for naught once EverQuest II ships, fear not. Sony has no plans to pull the plug on the original game once the new one ships. In fact, not only will the original EverQuest stay live indefinitely, according to Sony, but the company will continue to expand the game with new content and expansion packs. It's no big surprise, and for Sony it was a no-brainer: There are more than 400,000 dedicated players still active in EQ, and there's no guarantee that a majority of them will make the switch. Some, as Sony realizes, may actually try the new game but ultimately prefer the original.

Not that they won't try to nudge you anyway. First, some kind of bundle or group subscription plan is in the works, so you'll be able to subscribe to both games at a discount rate. (No details are set yet.) Second, though you won't be able to import your original EQ characters into the new game, Sony is working on an "ancestral" plan, in which your new EQ2 character could be the descendant of one of your EQ characters. How will this be represented? The team is still working on it. But one idea is to reward your descendant with an heirloom from your older character—maybe a piece of jewelry or armor—though not something that would unreasonably twink your character.

Finally, understanding that many veteran EQ players may balk at making the switch because they'd be leaving their longtime in-game friends behind, Sony is ensuring that player communication will be open and seamless across both games. Once you're logged into either version of EQ, you'll be able to communicate with any player in either game, across all the servers.

Now all we need is a cloning device, so we can play both games all day long. Get on it, Sony.

used to maintain player buffs. So, you can cast a slew of protective spells on party members and never have them run out just as long as you have the megal bandwidth to keep them running. Should you need to reclaim concentration to cast a different spell, you can "shut off" any currently maintained magic and immediately recoup the necessary brainpower.

PRETTY AS A PICTURE

Every new iteration of every game undergoes some kind of graphical enhancement, and EQ2 is no different. What is different is just how striking a visual overhaul is being undertaken. This is a game that will put any single-player RPG to shame, let alone a massively multiplayer one. The

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

Death, chop, and slice and dice with all new weaponry, both ornate and beautiful.



HAMMER



AXE



KNUCKLES



RAPIER



AXE



landscapes are uniformly gorgeous, ruining the game from sweeping plains to murky swamps to seemingly endless mesas complete with canyons that put the Grand Canyon to shame. Creature models are marvels of detail and imagination, from the delicately lined wings of a pree to the glistening wet meat hanging off a zombie's bones. We could go on and on about particle effects that allow for some dazzling spell animations or a dungeon with walls lined with giant eyes that follow you as you pass, but the proof is in the screenshots scattered across these pages.

And as snazzy as these shots are, they still don't capture their richness in-game, a depth of texture and detail greatly nuanced through an art ethos brilliantly centered on the nuanced interplay of painstaking bump-mapping and light.

The obsessive detail of the graphics is just part and parcel of a game that is being designed to build upon the success of its predecessor by judiciously adding features and eliminating annoyances. That's why every player will have access to some sort of secure player housing, either by renting a room in an inn or pooling resources to buy a guild hall. That's why the inventory will automatically sort to make efficient use of space. That's why new binding spots are scattered across the land, thus eliminating your need to beg other players to bind you. That's why player-owned boats and other modes of transportation (but not horses—not yet!) will be available when the game ships. That's why you can create macros of different armor/weapon/spell set-ups, so you can easily toggle to whatever the situation demands without laboriously rearranging everything in your inventory.

Sony got just about everything right the first time out. We're betting it's about to do it again.



A human roque, or Jeff Green in his motorcycle clothes?



Genetics for you in MS. Even better, they're reborn!

BETTERHANEQ: NO MORE CORPSE RUNS!

What do you call a wingless lordship wearing Grand running into a horde of Orcs? Lunch. As if dying weren't punishment enough, the original EverQuest

helped aggravation on top of humiliation by forcing players to run naked and unarmed back to the scene of their demise in order to reclaim their possessions. Multiple deaths frequently ensued, with angry log cuts close behind. For *EverQuest II*, Sony is taking the frustration out of death without dulling the sting. Upon your demise, you'll face a choice: float around your corpse and wait for another player to resurrect you, or sacrifice a randomly selected item.

Onkidding things stored in player housing) in order to respawn at your last bind point. Don't worry—while EQ2 will pick a level-appropriate item to sacrifice in order to resurrect you, it won't devalue prized, rare items.



SCIMITAR



FLAIL



AXE



SWORD



AXE

INDEPENDENCE

WAR



The plight of indie
game developers

BY JOHN BRANDON - ILLUSTRATION BY JIVE STUDIOS

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RPG Vault, RPG of the Year
RPGDot, Best Single Player RPG

RPG Vault, Game of the Year
Telefragged, Best PC RPG Game
GameSpot, Best Xbox RPG of the Year
Xbox Magazine, Best Role-playing Game

XGR, Best RPG of the Year
Shack News, Reader's Choice RPG of the Year
Xbox Evolved, Game of the Year
IGN, Best Xbox RPG Game

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You're stuck in some crapped-out office complex. Overhead, fluorescent bulbs hum as you take a slug of cheap coffee. Across the cube wall, a container is bubbling to an irritating sales pitch about popcorn and movies. "Sir, our product tastes just like what you get at the theater," he drones. You snarl at him under your breath and hammer out another line of code. Eric hardware waits from your bargain-bin computer speakers as you ponder the date. In three hours, an E3 demo is due to the big-name publisher, and it needs to work perfectly or else the company will scrap its plans for a corner booth at the show.

This is the life of the independent game developer—among the most unglamorous, high-tension jobs on the planet. Tight project schedules, and press relations staff, and publishers expecting pure-gold games made from garbage can metal—not exactly the road to the money farm. At any time, the



This indie fellow at E3 is becoming more and more in demand if players keep overlooking their favor of familiar, corporate-backed games.

GarageGames: life in the trenches

These days, making a game usually involves some sort of publishing agreement or corporate funding. Some development shops have loose ties with large publishers and signed contracts that keep the cash flow steady. A few big-name developers founded the GarageGames publishing label, but it operates under a completely independent model: Developers aren't funded by a traditional publishing agreement—they're simply allowed a presence on the GarageGames website and full creative control over their endeavors.

"We don't have to answer to anybody

overhead, creating prototypes for never-before-seen game styles while still benefiting from a web presence and publisher-like support. "Being an indie gives you the freedom to pursue more original ideas, to take risks," says Mychal McCabe of *Island Games*. "With multi-year and multimillion-dollar investments in games, large publishers have next to no incentive to pursue original content or to take risks."

"Something we've learned so far is that often, great ideas don't necessarily translate into great games," adds Justin Melte of 2i-G Productions. "Because we're a small shop and have low financial overhead, we can afford to prototype more game ideas, looking for that magical formula needed to make a game extra special and unique."

Artifact Entertainment: stuck in the mire

Artifact Entertainment, a start-up based in Mesa, Arizona, is steadily building its new MMORPG, *Horizons*. The game certainly looks promising, featuring such innovations as toolsmithing for clan members and an inventive spell-creation system. But *Horizons*' real struggle is getting noticed. At E3 2002, Artifact, lacking a U.S. publisher, demoed the game from a cramped cubicle on the dimly lit Kenna show floor. "Marketing and advertising can be challenging for independent developers," says David Bowman, president and creative director at Artifact.

Bowman claims that independence leads to better games, but the development process requires much more discipline, realistic goal setting, and the talents of a dedicated staff willing to work in less-than-glamorous surroundings. Corporate-owned competitors generally have better tools, and their many perks—such as readily available recreational equipment and vacation time—are compelling to young, college-educated developers.



The *Horizons* team creates its own look without resorting to corporate overlord.

"The indie's greatest asset is its ability to profitably target a niche that a large publisher would never bother with." —David Michale, Samu Games



publishing advance can dry up, executives can cancel contracts, and you can end up broke and destitute with nothing more than 10,000 lines of code and stale popcorn.

Ask any indie game developer: Creating computer games without corporate backing is seriously stressful. But it has its rewards, too—enough that some companies have actually chosen this way of life, forgoing the bureaucratic monoliths in favor of more idealistic separatism.

but ourselves and our customers," says Jeff Turnell, GarageGames' founder. Early on, the company offered developers a low-cost development engine called Torque (purchased from Sierra in 1998), the same engine used for *Tribes 2* and *StarSiege*. Torque allows developers to create 3D games with all the latest bells and whistles: scripting, particle effects, texturing...you name it.

The independent model has proven to be a winning one for several small development shops. Companies like *Island Games*, *Samu Games*, and 2i-G Productions can operate with low

There is just as much here as you craft out in *Horizons* as there is in any other MMORPG...except it just reads you better.





Irational might not have many games, but each, like Freedom Force, is a quality title made with love.

"We offer the opportunity for people to work on a project that's massive in scale, liberating in its implementation, and at the forefront of new visual, client, and server technologies," claims Bowman. But that creative payoff may not be enough. Horizons has been in development for two years, and the closest it's come to a firm release date is "summer 2003."

Irational Games: primed for success

At Irational Games, the story is much richer. Founded by Ken Levine, who helped create System Shock and Thief in his early days, Irational most recently pushed Freedom Force out the door to critical acclaim. Long-standing relationships with powerhouse publishers such as Crave Entertainment have paved the way for success, but the battle for independence still rages.

"Here's the big secret about being an indie developer: it's freaking hard," says Levine. "The average publishing agreement is something more akin to indentured servitude than a meeting of the minds of two business partners."

A successful developer strives to build enough consumer loyalty that the creative minds, not the bean counters, call the shots. This is true at Blizzard, a company often cited as an example of independent success. For Blizzard, that means having more than enough cash on hand to build amazing new games, regardless of who's paying for box art and distribution.

That's exactly what Irational Games is aiming for. A fan-loving wisecracker, Levine is the spitting image of an independent technogeek with great ideas. His latest creation, The Last, allows players to easily shift between Dante-inspired demon mazes and lumbering, two-headed zombies. Creating the game, according to Levine, has required adherence to some strict credos: Irational doesn't work with agents; it handles its own business deals; it hires

based on talent over credentials, and it retains all intellectual property rights.

"Publishers are working with us for a reason," says Levine. "They believe we can make a quality product."

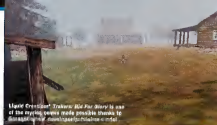
Zombie Games: riding the wave

During the last nine years, Zombie Games has proven the theory that independence can be a privilege, not a detriment. The company has found a way to diversify, creating games for publishers like Disney, EA, and Red Storm while maintaining an indie spirit by working on unique and innovative projects like a look system for Disney World. It's a company that knows how to keep its options open.

"Think of the most innovative titles you've played and then recall the developer," says Mark Long, CEO at Zombie. "Doom, Myst, Warcraft, Ultima, Half-Life, Grand Theft Auto II—all genre-generating breakthroughs. And all made by independents. It's not that the major publishing studios aren't innovative or that they're staffed by less talented artists or engineers, but the nature of larger-scale collaborative design and development filters out innovation."

Long notes several strategies he's used to maintain independence: Always release fully playable demos that truly demonstrate the game's capabilities.

When seeking a publisher, look for a common vision—if a publisher has always released action games, don't try to sell it on an RPG. Sharing the vision for a game is very important, he says—too many times,



Light Creations' Trakus: The Last story is one of the many games made possible thanks to Sonlight's indie development platform.

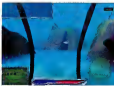
a publisher has stalled development rather than helped it along.

In the end, the ultimate goal is to make a great game that attracts interested gamers. For each company, maintaining indie status means keeping the focus squarely on the player. And that's what puts game development on the cutting edge, where creative programmers are less susceptible to the whims of suit-and-tie executives. Which means better games for all of us.

"All the best independent developers say the same thing when you ask when their game is going to ship: when it's ready." —Mark Long, Zombie



Flexion and cheap analysis allow indie level-ups to concentrate more on gameplay and less on marketing and less on creating new tech: try for games like Freedom Force.



GarageGames fronts shores the Torque engine, seen here in Chess Hunters.



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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



A little known fact is that the Native American population was decimated by ferocious bison and deer attacks.

AMERICAN CONQUEST 90



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Whether it's busy New Berlin or remote pirate base Melba, *Freelancer* has plenty of systems and cities to explore.

Freelancer

Privateer 3, I dub thee *Freelancer* BY THIERRY NGUYEN



GAME STATS

PILOTS: NICKERSON

PILOTS: DIGITAL ANIM

OS: IBM PC/AT/ compatible

OS: IBM PC/AT/ compatible

PRICE: \$49.99

DEVELOPER: FRODOLO BILBO

LEADER: SAM, I DUB THEE

BOSS: SPACE

RECOMMENDED SYSTEMS:

MINIMUM: 16MB, 28MB RAM

RECOMMENDED: INTERNET

LAN OR SERIAL PLAYERS

Three-and-a-half years ago, we boldly proclaimed that *Freelancer* would change gaming. Not only would it propel the space sim genre forward, but it would also push PC gaming further. Many games have been released since 1999, and while *Freelancer* may not shake the foundations of gaming as we predicted, it's nevertheless a great throwback to classics like *Privateer*.

A Han Solo sojourn

The story line itself is a passable genre piece, the kind in which the player jumps among professions like space merc, fugitive, freedom fighter, and Last Hope of Mankind. The only real story benefit is an exclusive, story-only ship. Otherwise, you can easily forgo the plot altogether and play alone in the multiplayer mode, which gets you right to good gameplay.

Think of *Freelancer* as *Privateer 3*, with hints of *Duress* and *Morrowind*. You take on combat-intensive missions for money, buy and sell commodities for extra profit, and use the money to buy better

ships and equipment. *Freelancer* tracks who you attack and who you help, which determines your reputation among the 50 different factions. Your reputation dictates who helps you, where you can land, and who tries to kill you.

Multiplayer presents a giant universe in which to fight, loot, and explore. There's no central architecture like an MMO—since servers are user-maintained like BF1942—but it's the closest we have to *Privateer*. Online. As fun it is to explore the single-player universe, hooking up with friends on an Internet server to explore and loot together is much better.

No need to exercise your flexor muscles with a joystick, as *Freelancer* sports a mouse-control interface. Adopting the familiar first-person-shooter interface (WASD plus mouse), *Freelancer* makes traditional space-sim combat feel more precise and elegant. Combat can be as simple as point-and-click, or as complicated as a frantic *FreeSpace 2* dogfight using hombeys for missiles, countermeasure, mines, and tractor beams.

Millions and millions of stars

Freelancer is rife with little details that flesh out the "living universe." Pilots here are the most talkative bunch in any space sim; they're constantly yammering about who they're fighting, what they're shipping, or why they need help. While you can't hear anyone scream, you can certainly hear everyone chatter. Luxury food and



This is my map after finishing the story campaign. Notice I barely entered the Rimland sector, and almost none of the Edge Worlds. Does big universe, this is.



Meet missions involve killing fighter ships, seizing control, or destroying an entire base.



alien organisms are perishable cargo, and decay much faster if you foolishly travel through a radioactive nebula. A derelict ship hauling cargo from a military research station might carry experimental weapons not sold in normal retail outlets. In multiplayer, I saw fellow editors use different docking bays in the same station when we all landed simultaneously.

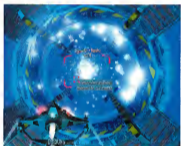
Exploration is encouraged, and is perhaps the most exciting aspect of the game. Playing the story, I went through 30 (out of 48) systems in a little more than 25 hours, with my pilot hitting Level 18 out of 40. I only flew a handful of ships, and some ships I've never seen before were on sale at certain dealers. One time, I found myself in a heavily trafficked system through which all the shipping companies ferry, and I decided to become a pirate and raid all the freighters there (free tip: it's the Galileo system in between Libertania and Kusari space).

Freelancer is one of those games in which the flaws are made more

prominent by its general excellence and polish. The most annoying are the minuscule mana potions—oh wait, I mean “shield batteries.” Unlike in Diablo II, these only come in dinky size. Your Uber-ship might hold 50 of them, but can only recharge five times. Couldn't Digital Anvil put in more expensive batteries for the same space, so that 30 batteries means 30 heals, not three?

Despite its polish, the interface could use more work. Specific attacks on wings or engines require players to select the sub-target from an onscreen menu—except that using the menu means you're temporarily not steering the ship with the mouse. It's difficult to mount a surgical strike during a frantic dogfight—something a few more hotkeys could easily change.

Players who like acting as intergalactic FedEx might be disappointed with the lack of cargo run missions. Without explicit “take item x from point a to point b” missions, players use options like “best prices” and “best path” to plot custom and profitable trade routes, and



While actual travel time isn't too bad (thanks to jump gates and trade lanes), it can suck in a multiplayer game if you and your buddy are two or three systems apart from each other.

they can query NPCs for juicy rumors. Still, it would have been nice to have a defined cargo run as an option. The economy isn't dynamic; prices for all commodities in all systems stay fixed. I personally don't really care, but I realize some players demand fluctuating prices in games like these.

What makes Freelancer a compelling game is the sense of a living universe, vast areas begging for exploration, and the ability to hook up with friends online and start being either total bastards or glorious do-gooders together. Freelancer doesn't necessarily advance the genre or the landscape of gaming, but it presents an extremely polished revision to a languishing genre. It's the best Chris Roberts space sim Chris Roberts didn't actually make, and is well worth the wait after all these years.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It may not change gaming, but it's the finest space sim since *FreeSpace 2* and *Privateer*.



Master of Orion 3

Spreadsheets in space BY DI LUD

GAME STATS

DESIGNER QUICKSILVER
DEVELOPER QUICKSILVER
SOFTWARE
GENRE FUTURE/SCF
SPREADSHEET TUTORIAL
GET SOME TECH, BLOGS
SCORE 95/100
FILE SIZE 99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300,
64MB RAM, SOUND CARD
DRIVE SPACE
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS
PENTIUM III 300,
32MB 3D CARD
NEEDS HARD DRIVE, LAN,
INTERNET (2-3D PLAYERS)

In the options menu for Master of Orion 3, there's a toggle for an alarm clock that will alert players when they've been playing too long. It's over-confidence to the point of futurism—despite six problematic years of development, Quicksilver Software apparently thought it had succeeded in shipping the biggest, most detailed, most ambitious strategy game ever. Nice try. Despite the admirable goals, the unmanaged scale of this long-anticipated title prevents it from becoming a pinacle of the genre. You'll be asleep long before that alarm rings.

Tower of babble

The scope of MOO3 is overwhelming for newbies and experienced players alike. A typical game will have hundreds of star systems and planets, and up to 16 rival factions. Each inhabited planet will have its own budget, economy, and military. Along with the planetary economies,

there's an imperial budget, diplomacy, ship building, and a tech tree with several hundred possibilities.

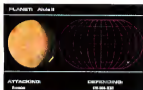
The economy is the central focus of MOO3. You expand your planets through a multilayered system rather than simply creating structures like aqueducts or granaries. Most important is deciding upon the dominant economic activity of the various zones on the planet, which in turn dictates the planet's efficiency in tasks such as research or production. You'll also have to manage a planet's terraforming, research, economic development, and both military and civil production. All these features will make sense if you spend enough time at it, but the overwhelming masses of numbers and options, along with the abstract nature of the data, make MOO3 far harder to comprehend than its more intuitive predecessors.

MOO3 doesn't make much of an attempt to ease you into your job, either

There's no tutorial, and the manual is poorly organized and uninformative. The manual, the in-game "master's notes," encyclopedia, tech, and unit descriptions also suffer from ambiguity and only gloss over the game in vague terms—as if they were written long before the game was done. You'll have to spend either many hours experimenting or \$20 extra for the strategy guide in order to figure out what everything does.

Deus ex machina

Should you find the game too difficult to comprehend or too tedious to play, you can trust in the A.I. to alleviate your pains. A victory runs your planets as a default. For a computer governor, the victory is pretty good. It's customizable and will develop planets along a general course that you lay down. However competent, the A.I. isn't as good as a human and will sometimes make strange decisions, like building obsolete units. It



Let loose the dogs of war with this exciting ground assault interface.



The situation report helps you manage news about your empire.



The ship building is as flexible as in previous games in the series, and even more detailed.

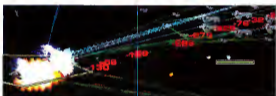
doesn't deal well with crisis and can drive your planets into rebellion or bankruptcy if you don't pay careful attention, especially during times of war.

Giving your trust to the planetary A.I., however, means there isn't much left for you to do except hit the next turn button, build fleets, and answer the occasional diplomatic missile. Everything else, from battles to research, can be automatic. Even with the A.I. turned off, the victory might make changes to your development or research plan.

Diplomacy, the only area in which you must exercise direct control, is hampered by too few options and poor A.I. While you can choose among a vast variety of tones with which to address aliens, what you can actually say to them is limited. There isn't any of the bartering seen in Civ AI, and you're never provided with all the information you need. To confuse matters further, the A.I. will make ridiculous decisions, like declaring war for inscrutable reasons, even if you are massively more powerful, located on the other side of the galaxy, and have no way of ever getting into combat with them. The Orion Senate that waxes on various laws and provides an opportunity for a



The easy graphical highlight is in the game's alien designs.



True to MOO3 form, there are swarms of numbers to digest even in the midst of a real-time space battle.

The overwhelming masses of numbers and options make MOO3 harder to comprehend than its more intuitive predecessors.

diplomatic victory is equally silly. Dominated by the New Orions faction, which begins with 100 times more votes than any other faction, it's of no use to you until victory is a forgone conclusion.

Paradise not quite regained

Beyond the baroque economic concerns, there is an improved ship building system. Instead of treating your ships as individual entities, you may build them into large task forces, with ships given specific roles and missions like picketing, long-range bombardment, or close-quarter actions. When these fleets enter real-time space combat, it makes you feel more like a fleet admiral than a ship's captain. The real-time combat is generally well executed, with a simple interface, hotkeys, and enough tactical depth to keep you interested. Quicksilver tries to spice up ground combat a bit by allowing you to choose from more than

a dozen tactics, but this too suffers from a lack of clear information and requires the strategy guide to explain them all.

Those with the patience to overcome MOO3's initial learning curve will eventually discover a deep and engrossing game with unrivaled detail and strategic possibilities. The enemy A.I., while not dazzling, will put up enough of a fight to make things interesting, and the truly dedicated can spend several thousand turns fighting other fanatics in the multiplayer mode. For normal folks, though, there simply isn't any justification for the time investment required to learn the game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This almost brilliant game demands too much and provides too little to win the hearts or minds of any but the most patient gamers.



Europeans don't intrude with their "high tech" armies, only they're to play to ahead.

American Conquest

Dances with interfaces BY TOM CHICK

GAME STATS

GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
 SUPPORTING OS WINDOWS
 DEVELOPER GSC GAME WORLD
 CREATING TECH VIOLENCE
 ADVANCING PLATFORMS 4.0
 GAME RANK 1,569 HOURS
 DRINK SPACE
 ESCROWED RESOURCES
 PENDING 41 HOURS, 50442 RAIN
 RELEVANT SUPPORT LAA
 INTERNET 12-0 PLAYERS
 1002 57005

Among the lessons learned in American Conquest is one little-known fact: The Native American population was not decimated by Europeans or foreign disease, but by ferocious bison and deer attacks. That's right, bison and deer. Playing American Conquest will make you fear and respect man-eating deer capable of completely wiping out a tribe of Sioux. You'll witness 100 peasants whipped into an arrow-slinging frenzy at the sight of a passing buck. And, five minutes later, you'll see them all dead as the deer quietly grazes in the middle of your abandoned city.

This is only one of the million minor and not-so-minor annoyances that bring down what should have been a far better game based on the discovery and colonization

of the Americas. American Conquest tries to translate into RTS-ese the clash between native populations and the Europeans who arrived from the 16th century and on. Using Civ as a foundation, GSC creates 12 different sides that fall into two factions: the New World's locals and the phony come-latelys from the Old World. Everyone has their own distinct twists in terms of how they collect resources, build armies, upgrade their troops, and even fight. You get swarms of Indians descending like zerglings on expensive musket-wielding troops arrayed in perfect formation as if they'd just marched in from Age of Empires. And you get them by the hundreds. This is a big game with a lot of room for epic battles

and to manage a wildly erratic economy and some truly esoteric rules for building formations. You also get to direct all the tactical details of a battle, like when to open fire with your muskets, which loadouts you want for your cannons, how to fit your formations around each other and the terrain, and from which angle to approach a redoubt so you'll be exposed to the fewest defenders.

American Conquest needs more hobbies, more feedback in the game about how the units are faring, and better control over your units, who are liable to end up on the wrong side of the map if you're not careful. This is the kind of game that has you constantly asking yourself vague questions like "What...?", "How do I...?", and "Where are my...?" You feel like an old man who forgot why he walked into the room.

The A.I. isn't any help, as you'll learn after your first encounter with rampaging stags. The enemy A.I. is a handful, mainly because it gets some egregiously unfair economic bonuses. The real challenge comes not from a smart enemy, but from a bad interface. The most significant lesson of American Conquest is that an interface that bad can easily kill an otherwise decent game.

All the nuance gets left in the dust when the game runs away from you.



A nice European town ripe for an Indian attack.

There are details for morale, army maintenance costs, peasant training, weapons ranges, formations, cavalry bonuses, diplomacy, and naval combat. It's a solid design presented with a lot of style and flair. Unfortunately, it's almost impossible to play. This would all work great in a turn-based game, or at least a game with a better interface. But in American Conquest, all the nuance gets left in the dust when the game runs away from you. There's too much to manage and too little help from the interface. You

VERDICT ★★★★★

Like a herd of stampeding buffalo, American Conquest is impossible to control and thus impossible to play.

Highland Warriors

William Wallace is (very slowly) spinning in his grave BY JONAH JACKSON

GAME STATS

70,000,000 DATA ROCKER
100,000,000 DATA ROCKER
ONE-PLAYER STRATEGY
200 HOURS FROM FREE \$49.95
WINDOWS PENTON III BOX
10000 RAM, 600MB HARD
DRIVE SPACE
100,000,000 DATA ROCKER
PENTON III 2 GB, 256MB
RAM, GAME 30 GB
MULTIPLAYER LAN,
INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Like Scotland's famous sausage of oatmeal, suet, and various chopped animal organs stuffed into a sheep's stomach and boiled to perfection, *Highland Warriors* may not appeal to everyone. The latest real-time strategy offering from German publisher Data Becker is a clunky mix of features from other titles in a fully 3D bladder that has some merit, but will probably leave most gamers wondering why on earth they should take a bite.

While gameplay follows the time-honored tradition of resource gathering, unit creation, and technology trees, *Highland Warriors* aims to separate itself from the pack with a unique historic setting and distinctive visuals. The game includes experience levels for units and the interesting notion of labor specializations for your resource gatherers. Players can survey the action from almost any angle, including a zoom feature that allows you to get close enough to count the hairs on your kilt-wearing clansman's legs.

There are four playable nations—three Scottish clans and the revived English—each with unique units and powerful heroes available. The single-player campaign contains 30 missions grouped into a story line for each nation. The campaign roughly follows Scottish history from the ninth century through the early 1300s, with some less-than-historical detours for monsters and magic along the way. There are also several single mission maps for skirmish play against computer or human opponents, as well as a map editor.

If *Highland Warriors* delivered all it advertised, it would be a nice addition to your shelf, even with the \$50 price tag. However, this bag of haggis needed a little more time in the pot. The game is riddled with irritating bugs, and the much-touted graphics are jerky and awkward. A few of the problems you'll find include installation failures, extreme slowdown when playing a restored save-



Up close and personal, a peasant gut-punches the enemy crossbowman.

Highland Warriors will probably leave most gamers wondering why on earth they should take a bite.



Cut-scenes use the same graphics as the game. Pictured above is the Jason Voorhees cloning factory.

game file, and units that occasionally fail to heed orders. I noticed some units occasionally taking damage and even dying while attacking enemy structures, yet others remained unaffected by the mysterious Killer Building Death Force. Large battles are difficult for the engine, even on systems that surpass the recommendations, which can wreak havoc with your command abilities as units teleport around the battlefield as the game redraws their positions. Even when it's functioning correctly, the animation looks pretty sloppy. Watchtower guards hover in midair long after the tower has crumbled beneath them, and soldiers don't march—rather, they glide across the terrain at about 100 yards per stride.

Veteran RTS gamers will find the



Heroes can provide bonuses to their troops—here the attacking army has their strength increased.

single-player campaign easy and a bit boring. The skirmish maps are more fun and provide adequate challenge, even when playing against computer A.I. Multiplayer, available via Gamespy or direct connection with friends, may be your best bet for enjoying *Highland Warriors*, but that will depend on how many people fork over the money for this subpar game.

Highland Warriors is good enough to appeal to a few people who can see past the bloated sheep's stomach to enjoy the few bits of meat, but it certainly won't be to everyone's liking.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Better than haggis, but not by very much.



Notice chaos at a watchtower.



Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome

Tanks, planes, and frogs galore by JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

DESIGN: ELECTRONIC ARTS
 PUBLISHER: DIGITAL DIMENSIONS LLC
 THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
 CAN BE PLAYED WITH: MULTIPLE
 PLAYERS
 PLATFORMS: PC, PS2, XBOX
 FEATURES: ANTI-AIRCRAFT FRAG,
 POINT-BLANK SHOTS, LAMINAR FLOW,
 AIRBORNE TANKS DRIVE SPACE,
 SOME 3D CARS
 ADVANCED EDITORIAL
 POSITION: 11, 2000, 25,000, 30,000
 4,000, 30,000
 WITH COMMENTS: LAN,
 INTERNET (2-44 PLAYERS)

Battlefield 1942 was so under the radar when first released that even its publisher, Electronic Arts, didn't appear to know how great it was. But word of mouth spread, and it now rivals the long-dominant Counter-Strike as the multiplayer shooter to play online—a status that is well deserved. With gameplay more akin to a sophisticated *Half-Life* mod (which I mean in a good way) than a hardcore war sim, *Battlefield 1942* offers the accessibility of standard shooters, but with the huge additions of vehicular combat and coordinated team play.

The *Road to Rome* is EA's first official expansion pack for *BF1942*, and it's mostly a winner. Set in the Italian campaign of the war, *The Road to Rome* includes six new maps along with two new fighting forces: the Free French Forces and the Italian Army (neither of which, oddly enough, comes with a handy Instant Surrender option). The move to Italy (and Sicily, to boot), from a gameplay perspective, is fantastic: every map offers an abundance of variety in terrain and landscape—from rolling hills to beachfronts, from steep cliffs to flat, open fields—making every character

class vital to victory. Though planes and tanks can dominate large portions of the maps (more on that in a second), there is ample opportunity for wily players to dominate as mere foot soldiers by sneaking over hills, slogging through water, and hiding in narrow pathways and brush. And now, getting a bayonet kill as an engineer might be the most satisfying frag since *Half-Life's* crowbar kills.

Tanks in particular are less dominant now, as welcome, powerful new weaponry has been added to each side to slay them off: There are German and British stationary antitank guns and a fast American M3 half-track, equipped with an antitank gun on the rear. As a result, tank camping is far less prevalent on the new maps, which is good.

What isn't good is the balance of the planes. Depending on who you're playing with, these planes can be so dominant, they ruin the entire experience. The new British Mosquito and the German BF-110 fighter-bombers let players rain down fast, repeated, and brutal ground attacks, which is already hard enough to deal with. The developers compounded the problem on a few maps (like *Operation Husky*) by not providing enough anti-aircraft defenses. The result? If you get on a server with effective air aces, you might spend your entire game time waiting to spawn, only to get blown to bits the



One of the coolest features of *Road to Rome* is the hilly Italian terrain, which makes it easy for grunts to compete with the ubiquitous tanks and planes.

second you do. A few more AA guns on the maps would've been a big help here (some servers now ban plane campers, so pick your server wisely).

Other than the jerks exploiting this imbalance, the only thing to complain about here is a slight stinginess on EA's part. Most of this could arguably have been a free download, especially since no new game types are offered with the new maps. However, it's only \$20, and the maps are so much fun that I honestly have had no desire to go back to the originals. That pretty much makes it a must-have in my book. Now, if they would just rebalance those fricken' planes...

VERDICT ★★★★★

Great new maps and weapons enhance an already-classic multiplayer shooter. But those planes are just a little too brutal.

The engineer's bayonet kill might be the most satisfying frag since *Half-Life's* crowbar kills.



While the game is 3D, the camera can only move slightly up and back, or slightly low and close.

Praetorians

You're in the (Roman) army now BY THOMAS L. McDONALD

GAME STATS

DESIGNER: BONES INTERACTIVE
 DEVELOPER: PADD
 GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
 EARLY ACCESS: YES, \$19.99
 RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 10, 2016
 PLATFORMS: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE
 MULTIPLAYER: LOCAL AND ONLINE
 MODES: CAMPAIGN, SINGLE-PLAYER, CO-OP, MULTIPLAYER
 DEVELOPER COMMENTS:
 PITCHMAN: "IT'S A REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME, BUT WITH A FOCUS ON TACTICAL WARFARE."
 BOARDING CREW:
 DEVELOPER CONTACT:
 INTERNET: WWW.PRAETORIANS.COM

Strategy games—particularly real-time strategy games—have developed so many layers that it's easy to lose sight of the core element: combat. Simplicity is not among Medieval Total War's many virtues, nor are we likely to find it in the forthcoming *Rome: Total War*. *Praetorians* takes on the same era as *Rome*, but strips away all those accretions to offer a pure real-time tactical war game. The result is remarkably effective and engrossing combat that calls to mind *Six*, *Alaric's Gothicusburg*.

Praetorians vectors in on a particularly fertile period for its events. In 59 B.C., Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus formed the First Triumvirate, inaugurating two

decades of brilliant, brutal campaigning throughout Europe and North Africa. The campaigns against the barbarians of Gaul (spurring much of modern Europe) form the bulk of Caesar's war commentaries, and resulted in a series of battles still studied today. These battles are the inspiration for *Praetorians*.

Revisionist History 101

In fact, the game doesn't lay claim to any level of authenticity or attempt to meticulously re-create Caesar's battles.

Instead, you play an anonymous Roman general brushing, Zelig-like, against the major moments and figures of the period. In the

course of 20-odd battles over the campaign game, you fight both against and as Roman, Egyptian, and barbarian forces in actions spanning a wide array of terrain types: mountains, snow, desert, grasslands, forests, swamps, and beyond.

Praetorians' appeal lies in its purity as a combat game. Rather than sending villagers out to harvest grain, cut down trees, and mine resources, you begin each game by taking over a village. These villages are the game's sole resource, with their utility measured by

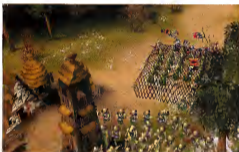
***Praetorians* never really achieves the gigantic scope of a *Total War* game, but it is more easily controlled and offers much more obvious tactical problems.**



Scouts are vital for understanding enemy positions and movements. The wall scout can send out a wall to keep an eye on a spot, while the hawk scout can use a hawk to recon from the air.



The iron-clad legion are a standard force for cavalry. ADS offers stability of way, the direction of movement, the main in a unit.



All units have a special attack, with elite units having some of the most interesting. These gladiators can throw a net over enemy infantry.

the quantity of citizens available to recruit into military units. Each basic unit is paid for by a certain number of citizens and a certain amount of time. A legion takes 30 citizens and 70 seconds to build, while the less effective spearmen take 30 citizens and 30 seconds. Advanced units (cavalry, gladiators, praetorians) require not only people and time, but also Command points earned by battlefield victories.

Smart growth

All of these forces you to measure and pace your growth without using typical means of resource management. While each unit is comprised of a couple dozen men moving as one, the total number of units is capped, adding to the overall manageability while giving battles the epic feel created when lots of little guys are onscreen at once. Although it never really achieves the gigantic scope of a Total War game (despite some initial comparisons of the two), it is more easily controlled and offers much more obvious tactical problems.

The key to effective combat lies in the terrain, which makes excellent use of elevations, choke points, defensive and offensive terrain, and strategic locations. Each map is dotted with villages of varying sizes. Since you can drain an entire village if you build enough units, you wind up carving out a corner of the map with enough villages in close proximity so each can aid in the defense of the other and provide a steady stream of fresh recruits. Each mission in the campaign game has a particular goal that is only really achieved by understanding these maps.

Done to excess, these elements often result in a puzzle war game, with only one or two solutions to each military problem. Praetorians comes close to this, but remains a pure war game by virtue of its use of combined forces. Each unit has a military purpose and a special attack that complement each other. While there are some cannon fodder units, such as auxiliary infantry, there are no expendable units. The auxiliary infantry, for instance, not only



Battles start as organized affairs, but once formations are broken and ranged attacks spent, they quickly dissolve into the muddled confusion of hand-to-hand combat.

builds very fast, but is the only unit that can capture a city or build attack towers, ladders, and other heavy weapons.

Units can be grouped, formed, moved as a formation, and used in a variety of ways. For example, auxiliary anchors can assume a stationary posture, making them less maneuverable while giving them longer range, and spearmen can form a long line with their spears stuck in the ground.

The emphasis on good deployment of combined, balanced forces certainly captures the feel of ancient warfare, and while its level of realism is open to debate, it gives enough of a realistic illusion to remain convincing. This, combined with strategic depth and accessible controls, makes Praetorians an effective, addictive real-time war game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Who cares if there's a year until Rome? Total War? Praetorians is a tight, rewarding real-time Roman war game on an epic scale.

Chemicus: Journey to the Other Side

It puts the "bore" in "bore" BY DENICE COOK

GAME STATS

OSCAR TRIO

ENTERTAINMENT

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

OSCAR TRIO

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How's the weather in the ancient city of Chemicus? It's as dry as the rest of the game is. Unfortunately, Heureka didn't tear a page from Discovery Channel's fabulous 1997 adult-entertainment adventure epic, *Byzantine: The Betrayal*, and provide its chemistry-filled *Chemicus: Journey to the Other Side* with an intense, escalating tale, intriguing characters, narrated multimedia tours, and plot-propelling puzzles. Instead, after a vague introduction involving the kidnapping of a scientist buddy and the discovery of an amulet leading to



Perhaps they should have called it *Chemi-Nyarl*?

Chemicus was weaned on *Myst's* first-person, point-and-click slideshow gaming formula.

Chemicus is an educational game that mashes the game part. Endless unrelated, compulsory test tube chemistry puzzles await you (capped off with tedious analyzer-machine molecular puzzles at the end). Some puzzles do exemplify the basic principals of chemistry, such as using lemon juice to clean a calcified waterpout. Others range from mere complicated to downright nonsensical, requiring tedious trial-and-error placement of odd articles (unless you can scroll through 45 inventory items and immediately guess that you must put the golden arm you found four locations ago onto a certain pedestal).

Some experiments require components to be used in a strict order or not at all. Most objects require exact placement or they will slide right back into the inventory, necessitating repetitive scrolling to find them again. Generally, there is much guesswork and backtracking involved in completing the more-complicated chemical conundrums, with the only reprieve being the game's on-CD walkthrough.

Moving on, once you find some transporter modules and insert them into an underground trem's control panel, it escorts you across abandoned alchemic areas. These modules liberate the

landscape in the form of elemental symbols, accompanied by circular knowledge chips you must collect as well. These chips add to a database you can use to assist you with your puzzle solving. Unfortunately, the clusters of chemistry facts drone on and on across virtual pages of texts and tables that are lengthier than the chemical formula for isopentanol.

Chemicus was weaned on *Myst's* first-person, point-and-click slideshow gaming formula, and there is even a robbed refugee running smok in the game, too. Here, though, there is never an explanation given as to who he is or what he wants. Unlike *Myst*, the sound effects and voiceovers are minimal but acceptable. There is usually no musical score—except when reading the chemistry text or exiting the game.

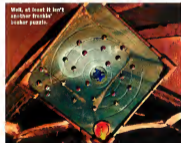
Chemicus can be saved anywhere and has no timed puzzles, mazes, or combat scenes. You can't blow yourself up, either, even though you may desperately want to by game's end.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Chemicus risks just below those childhood nightmares of being narked in class.



Bubbles, bubbles, boiling test tubes. With each beaker, tenfold doubles.



Well, at least it isn't another frustrating beaker puzzle.

another dimension, the story vaporizes faster than water on a Bunsen burner.

You find a communication device and your pal occasionally pleads for rescue through it, but you can't reply. Therefore, you begin solving puzzles to enter the lovely but lonely land of Chemicus and find your friend. *Chemicus'* picturesque locales harbor fanciful, *Myst*-like metallic structures with unexplained origins. However, these buildings' interiors are inevitably laboratory laden. You enter them and exchange elegance for elements.



Pretty cool, like one all well and good, but they'll make your computer choke on the frames.



Improved A.I. options for three-wheeled racers.



War wagons along pit road make for a busier, more lifelike pit, but they also make it more difficult to find your pit stall.

NASCAR Racing 2003 Season

New game or retail patch? BY WADE HERMES

GAME STATS

FORBES SIMBA

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

PAPERS RACING STUDIOS

REAL RACING SIMULATION

100% FINE, EVERYONE

PRICE \$49.99

RECOMMEND FOR PC 1.415

64MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD

RECOMMEND FOR PS2

PENTIUM 4, 128MB RAM,

32MB 3D CARD

RECOMMEND FOR XBOX

MINIMUM 12-42 MB (PLAYERS)

Papyrus has long been known for its attention to detail and incredible realism with its NASCAR Racing series, but NASCAR's growing popularity in recent years has prompted EA Sports to buy exclusive rights to the development of any future racing titles in this genre. NASCAR Racing 2003 Season is Papyrus' final release, thus ending the successful series that put it on the map as the king of realistic racing simulations. So is it going out with a bang or a whimper?

NASCAR 2003 sports some new color schemes and background sounds to give it a different look from its predecessor, but once you navigate around, you'll find it's not much different than before. The newly introduced instructional lessons feature from NASCAR 2002 is still present, but the missing track tours

Once you navigate around, you'll find that NASCAR 2003 isn't much different than its predecessor.

section narrated by Winston Cup champion Darrell Waltrip is a big disappointment because these tours really helped beginners learn the best way around each track. Graphically, the game looks much the same but with the addition of the crews' war wagons stationed along pit road, helicopters flying around, and track debris buildup on the windshield. All these graphic additions add to the overall realism of the game.

Somehow, Papyrus has managed to tune and tighten its signature physics model to new, exciting heights. The result is a game that has an even more realistic driving feel than its predecessors. Instead of a tickle overpowered racer that spins out of control at the slightest mistake, the car now feels more stable and fun to drive. Tire wear and grip is more accurately modeled to allow for true side-by-side racing. The damage model has been greatly improved so when you brush the wall hard enough to sustain damage, your car will drive differently, just as it would in real life.

A.I. has been vastly improved, creating some of the most intense offline racing yet. The new adjustable A.I. option lets computer-controlled cars adjust their speed to that of the player, allowing

beginners to jump right in and experience bumper-to-bumper racing.

Unfortunately, these graphic additions come at a severe price. It takes at least a Pentium 4 with a GeForce4 graphics card to get decent framerate to race in a game that really doesn't look that different from NASCAR 2002. The lack of an intro movie and the disappointing omission of Waltrip's track tours really make the game feel incomplete. This limits the title's appeal to only serious hardcore simulation aficionados who don't care about the missing elements because they have the experience to appreciate the gameplay improvements and added eye candy.

If you're a casual gamer or first-time buyer looking to experience a realistic and full-featured racing simulator, you should really spend your hard-earned dollars on NASCAR 2002 Season. This year's model leaves you feeling like it's nothing more than one big, full-priced retail patch.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Papyrus' final NASCAR game deflates like a bad tire—not with a dramatic blowout, but a strong, steady leak.



Debris buildup on your windshield really adds to the realism of racing.

REVIEW INDEX

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

GAME	GRADE	REMARK	SCORE
ArcheAge	4/10	All that's missing is fun and competent game design-as action/adventure nightmarer	★★☆☆☆
Arx Fatalis	3/10	A little cough around the edges, this Ultima Dookworld wannabe is good fun	★★★☆☆
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	3/10	This real-time MMORPG will need killer monthly episodes to justify the fees	★★★☆☆
Astoria III	3/10	Deeper and better thought-out than many of the prettier MMORPGs	★★★☆☆
Battlefield 1942	1/10	The multiplayer game of the year is a complete blimp	★★★☆☆
Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf	3/10	Older, duller and unchallenging. It adds little to Battle Realms	★★☆☆☆
Civilization III: Play the World	2/10	Inexcusably buggy as shipped, unplayable without the patch	★★☆☆☆
Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin	2/10	The closest thing we have to the perfect wargame	★★★★☆
Command & Conquer: Back to War	3/10	Too many units, too much micromanagement, not enough fun	★★☆☆☆
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	4/10	Fleeting of new stuff for the serious DAOC addict	★★★☆☆
Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater	3/10	Budget price with better-than-average gameplay	★★★☆☆
Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair	3/10	Buggy, poorly designed, and disappointing, it's still better than the arcade version	★★☆☆☆
Earth & Beyond	2/10	2-Dimensional space	★★☆☆☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal	3/10	This expansion hits on both the strengths and weaknesses of Morrowind	★★★☆☆
EverQuest: Planes of Power	2/10	More fuel for the fires of die-hard EQ fans	★★☆☆☆
FIFA 2003	2/10	A good soccer game with World Cup-quality graphics	★★☆☆☆
Frage: The Great Quest!	4/10	The only thing "great" about this quest is finally being done with it	★★☆☆☆
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	1/10	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one	★★★★☆
G.I. Combat	3/10	It's Clear Combat game 3D and game bad	★★☆☆☆
Hearts of Iron	2/10	An enormously ambitious WWII strategy game with a lot of flaws	★★☆☆☆
Megamek: Legions of Iron	3/10	Not enough strategy, not enough game	★★☆☆☆
Witnes 2: Silent Assassin	1/10	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth	★★★★☆
Impossible Creatures	4/10	All style, no substance, this native RTS is a huge missed opportunity	★★☆☆☆
Ice Storm	2/10	A boring, buggy <i>Men of Honor</i> lite, with bad AI	★★☆☆☆
James Bond 007: NightFire	3/10	Almost got the first-ever half-star rating in CGW	★★☆☆☆
Kick!Warrior 4: Mercenaries	2/10	The best Kick!Warrior yet	★★★☆☆
Legend of Honor: Allied Assault-Spearhead	2/10	Taut, well-scripted add-on that's just too short	★★☆☆☆
NASCAR Thunder 2003	2/10	A solid racing game, but not the same caliber as Popper's NASCAR Racing 2002	★★☆☆☆
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	2/10	One of the best high-octane racing experiences around	★★☆☆☆
Noroon	4/10	The so-far MMORPG doesn't have what it takes to beat <i>Anarchy Online</i>	★★☆☆☆
NHL 2003	2/10	The same old arcade hockey game, with updated rosters and downgraded AI	★★☆☆☆
No One Lives Forever 2	1/10	As funny and stylish as the original—and more fun to play, too	★★★★☆
O.R.B.	3/10	This <i>HomeWorld</i> clone abandons much of what that game did well	★★☆☆☆
Palooza	3/10	Every bit as bad as you'd expect it to be	★★☆☆☆
Project Nomads	2/10	Pretty floating islands crash on the shores of mediocre gameplay	★★☆☆☆
Ridiculous Challenge	3/10	The fun of the Xbox version doesn't quite make the jump to PC	★★☆☆☆
Silent Hill 2	4/10	It'll bore you... to death	★★☆☆☆
SinCity 4	3/10	A fresh, gorgeous take on a classic, but you'll need a beefy computer to run it	★★★☆☆
The Sims Online	4/10	More chat room than game, this is the first blimpish on the Sims engine	★★☆☆☆
Soldiers of Anarchy	3/10	Save time and money and pull <i>Raided Tactics</i> from your local bargain bin	★★☆☆☆
Spies in the Gl	3/10	One of the best-ever stealth-action games comes to the PC	★★★★☆
Star Trek: Starline Command III	3/10	The <i>Star Trek</i> license is wasted on a game a few big patches away from being good	★★☆☆☆
Strike Fighters: Project I	3/10	Months of bug fixes, polish, and user needs away from being worth your money	★★☆☆☆
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	3/10	Better than <i>Clubs</i> the way Tiger is better than you	★★★☆☆
Treasure Planet	2/10	Starfleet Command for kids, with rock-powered sailing vessels	★★☆☆☆
Ultima Tournament 2003	1/10	Coarse and polished up, but lacking rivaled gameplay	★★☆☆☆
Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania	3/10	If you gotta have whales and seals in your zoo, buy it	★★☆☆☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



Unreal II: The Awakening

Yes, we were disappointed it didn't refresh an old formula, genre, and platform, but *Unreal II* still is a really good game. This single-player shooter has the sharpest graphics of any game this year, some thunderously brutal combat, and a bigger enemy than the U.S. National Guard.



Medieval Total War

Most computers would be satisfied with creating either a wide-open turn-based historical strategy game or an exciting real-time ancient warfare game, but Creative Assembly jammed it all into one game, called it *Medieval Total War* and gave gamers the ultimate historical wargame. This is a huge game with almost infinite replayability—perfect to keep you busy until Rome: Total War invades next year.



Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood

Played *Commander 2* through three times already? Well, don't despair—there's a new kid on the squad-based tactical game block, and he's wearing bright green tights. Granted, it may not be the most aggressively masculine game of the year, but *Robin Hood* is a visually rich, tactically challenging squad game with some cool gameplay twists and a great story.

Tech

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

Torp



MSRP: \$149.99

10 Computer Gaming World

edo Tubes

Klipsch revamps the ProMedia line with the flagship GMX D-5.1 Speakers

Often, company A's product will perform function B well, but will come up a tad short on function C. Another company's product may perform C superbly while falling at B. For instance, my home theater setup consists of the satellites from Cambridge SoundWorks' MegaWorks 510D speakers (the satellites are well designed and easy to mount) and the subwoofer and breakout box from Logitech's Z-600 speakers (the breakout box provides versatility the MegaWorks lack, enabling me to hook them up to my DVD player, PC, and Xbox).



By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo



By now you're probably wondering why a hundred words into a review about Klipsch's new ProMedias, I've been talking about Cambridge and Logitech, in the past. Klipsch's speakers were great for one thing: hooking up to your PC. If you wanted to use the ProMedias with a DVD player or console system, you often had to trek down to Radio Shack and give them your mother's maiden name, your social security number, a blood sample, and your previous year's W2 just to buy a 60-cent adapter. Well, Klipsch has learned that versatility is what it's all about, and their new ProMedia GMX D-5's are just that: versatile.

We all know that hooking your speakers up is part of the "fun."

Besides the obvious aesthetic changes to the satellites, the new ProMedias boast an interesting saucer-shaped control module that's equipped with Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro Logic II decoders. The control module has coaxial, optical, and analog right and left inputs, so you can take advantage of these features. Yes, you can finally hook your ProMedias up to a game console or DVD player right out of the box. Though Klipsch's ProMedia line has traditionally focused on PC connectivity, hooking the GMX D-5's to my PC's Audigy 2 card required an adapter to convert the digital out on the back of the Audigy 2 to the coaxial in on the ProMedia's control module!

We all know that hooking your speakers up to your system is part of the "fun." But what really matters is how they sound, and this is where Klipsch speakers continue to shine. The GMX D-5's ship with a 100-watt amplifier

that gets plenty loud, and the satellites (typical of Klipsch) offer up a good combination of mids and highs. The highs are achieved using MicroTractrix Horn tweeters. But who cares what they're called? The fact remains that they sound good. I hooked them up to my Xbox and played more than my share of Ghost Recon, and the GMX D-5's handled everything from the soft ambient sounds of water flowing and wind blowing through canyons to the harsh sounds of incoming shells and outgoing heavy machine-gun fire. With the game test behind me, I hooked them up to my DVD player and watched the battle scenes in *Pearl Harbor*. The only

thing better than seeing Ben Affleck go down in a hail of Luftwaffe bullets is hearing that deep, thumping sound of his plane hitting the water. In fact, the satellites are so good that you could easily make out the sounds of bullets ricocheting off the metal ships.

The look of the satellites is the first thing you notice. Unlike previous ProMedia models, the GMX D-5's satellites are mounted on stands that pivot, so you can easily angle the sound. As for their shape, the jury's still out: I'm glad to see Klipsch mixing things up a bit, but another editor thought they seemed a bit overdesigned.

Regardless of how you think the GMX D-5's look, you'll be pleased with the sound and versatility they offer.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Finally, Klipsch offers gamers some versatility.



WIL
POWER

by William O'Neal

Who cares how fast your graphics card is?

In my June 2001 column, I said, "Graphics cards are so fast nowadays that achieving super-frames in today's games is a no-brainer...The thing is, though, we need a benchmark that measures not how fast a card is, but how realistic the images are that it spits out." Well, here we are nearly two years later, and with the arrival of Nvidia's latest graphics card, the GeForce FX 5600 Ultra, we're in the exact same place.

Everyone agrees—sort of—that the GeForce FX is a good piece of hardware. Easily one of the most complex processors ever built, its engine routinely clocks a better-than-50 percent advantage over ATI's 9700 Pro. While the debate rages over the effect of Nvidia's decision to go with 128-bit DDR2 memory over the 256-bit DDR1 memory the Radeon boasts, the fact remains that both of these graphics cards kick inordinate amounts of ass.

Because 3D graphics technology is so new, it seems to me we're still subject to falling into a "gee whiz" state whenever a new chip is released. In the beginning, we bragged at length about how many frames per second our rig was getting in *GLQuake* or *James Longbow*, and those speed increases were significant. But the current crop of graphics chips is so powerful that judging them solely on speed doesn't even tell half the story.

We like to think that benchmarks like 3D GameGauge 3.0 and 3DMark2001SE Pro test how well a graphics chip performs with certain 3D features—like mip-mapping, bump mapping, and/or anti-aliasing—turned on or off. In reality, these benchmarks only tell us how quickly the graphics chip is performing with these features turned on or off (a very abbreviated explanation). Well, both the GeForce FX and the Radeon 9700 are plenty fast. Because the GeForce FX is faster than the Radeon at some tests, are we to say that it's better? Of course not. Likewise, are we to say that the Radeon is better than the GeForce FX because it beats it in other tests? Again, no.

This leaves reviewers like me in a pretty tight spot. How are we to gauge one top-notch card against another? According to some, the GeForce FX, while slightly slower than the Radeon, handles many 3D features better—meaning that, while it processes images more slowly, the final image quality is actually superior to that delivered by the Radeon. That said, the notion of judging a card based on its "image quality" opens a Pandora's box of subjectivity that scares the crap out of me. Both Nvidia and ATI have released drivers that offer gamers a seemingly infinite amount of configurability, with the nudge of a slider, you can easily improve your image quality while foregoing a few frames per second. But image quality is subjective; what looks good to me might not look good to you. And image quality could easily vary from machine to machine, since everyone is using different monitors, and cables.

Someday, someone will come up with a solution, but for the time being we'll have to make due with synthetic benchmarks like the already controversial 3DMark2003.



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Dell's DVD Dream System

Dell's Inspiron 8500 is a monster of a laptop **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**



TECH STATS

MANUFACTURED BY: DELL
PRICE: \$2,399

Dell's previous flagship laptop, the Inspiron 8200, aimed to be a true desktop replacement. Its latest top-of-the-line desktop replacement, the Inspiron 8500, is all about giving the user an awesome visual experience. The first thing you'll notice upon opening its lid is the superhuge, iBook-inspired 16-inch wide-aspect UXGA display with a native resolution of 1920x1200. In other words, the 8500 is a gamer/DVD buff's dream portable.

It seems Dell managed to keep the 8500's price reasonable with that awesome screen by cutting back on a few extras. Unlike the 8200, which shipped with a 60GB hard drive, the Inspiron 8500 ships with a 40GB drive. Of course, that's more than enough disk space for "normal" computing like playing games and listening to music. The 8200 I reviewed also supported S-Video and S/PDIF audio outs, and boasted an additional battery that bumped its overall computing time up to more than five hours—the 8500 that I tested lacked the second battery (it's an option that you can configure at Dell.com), but enough about what the 8500 doesn't do. Let's talk about what it does do.



BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	DELL INSPIRON 8500	DELL INSPIRON 8200
Price	\$2,399	\$2,099* (as of December 2002)
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	2.4GHz Mobile Pentium 4	2.2GHz Mobile Pentium 4
Memory	512MB DDR	512MB DDR
Graphics Processor	64MB Nvidia GeForce4 4200 Go	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000
Display	15.1" WXGA Active Matrix TFT (1920x1200)	15" WXGA Active Matrix TFT (1600x1200)
Hard Drive	40GB 5400rpm hard drive	60GB 5400rpm hard drive
DVD-RW/CD-RW Drive	24x DVD/CD-RW combo drive	8x DVD/CD-RW combo drive
Weight	4.59 lbs	4.66 lbs (with both batteries installed)
Extras	64MB disk-on-key (DOK) drive, two USB ports, iSMB ProWire port, iPort, FireWire port, iPort, 802.11a and 802.11b wireless PCMCIA slot, iTouchPad, pointing stick	Extra battery, TrueMobile WLAN 802.11a wireless LAN, two USB ports, iSMB ProWire port, iPort, FireWire port, iPort, S/PDIF and S-Video out, two PCMCIA slots, iTouchPad, pointing stick

NOTES: CURRENT DISPLAY DRIVER IS 10.13.0.6541. @GABE15: 4X FSAA AT 1600x1200x32 IN MOST GAMES. COULDN'T RUN 3DMARK2001SE PRO WITH 4X FSAA TURNED ON.

Although it lacks some of the little things I've come to expect from Inspiron notebooks, the 8500 does pack a punch. I'm glad Dell hasn't jumped on the Desktop Pentium 4 bandwagon, the 8500's 2.4GHz Mobile Pentium 4 is more than powerful enough to play any game out there, and, as we all know, sticking with the mobile chipset keeps costs, heat, and—most important—weight to a minimum. I expected the 8500 to show up with ATI's 64MB Mobility Radeon 9000 graphics chip and was surprised to see Nvidia's 64MB GeForce4 4200 Go. But this machine benchmarked better than any laptop I've ever seen: It scored 9314 on 3DMark2001SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with no FSAA, and 4984 at the same resolution with 4x FSAA turned on. One thing I really like about Nvidia's drivers is that they let you push the graphics card to its outer limits, rendering, for example, images at 1600x1200x32 with 4x FSAA turned on. ATI's drivers flat-out refuse to do things that tax the card too much, so although the driver may say you're running at 1600x1200x32 with 4x

FSAA on, it'll sometimes turn FSAA off during a game (which is why framerates don't appear to change). I decided to put the 8500 through its paces by watching Pearl Harbor on DVD and playing Ghost Recon. The 16-inch screen worked amazingly well. During gameplay there was little if any ghosting, and this display was made for playing DVDs. Images were not only big, but also super clear. Like other top-end Inspirons, the 8500 comes with a pointing stick and a TouchPad, but nothing beats a real mouse for gameplay.

Compared to other high-end notebooks, at 6.59 pounds, the 8500 is pretty light, which is amazing considering the screen size, but I must've liked more of the little extras Dell laptops usually ship with, but I must acknowledge that this is the reddest gaming laptop I've ever tested.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The display size and speed make this one of the best notebooks I've ever tested.

Lloyd's Cracked Case

System Restore ruleZ! By Lloyd Case

There's a truism stating that for the best gaming performance, the Windows System Restore function should be turned off. I've certainly spouted it on multiple occasions, and it's true: If you define "best performance" as the maximum possible framerate, then you should disable System Restore.

However, we're now in the era of fast CPUs—typically 1.5GHz or better—and great big drives. These days, the single platter of a new 40GB hard drive is considered entry level. And more memory is now the norm: most gamers I know have a minimum of 512MB in their machines. Together, these factors decrease the performance hit System Restore once caused.

A performance hit might occur if a normal System Restore checkpoint is created, but even that's unlikely; System Restore only creates a checkpoint if some critical system change occurs, such as the installation of an unsigned driver or a new application, or if an automatic update is downloaded and installed. In general, you should probably disable auto-update anyway, some believe that it can cause a lot more headaches than it's worth. If auto-update is disabled, then Windows System Restore behaves in a much more predictable manner, and overall system resource usage—other than the minimum 200MB free disk space requirement—is pretty minimal.)

Recently, we were setting up for a multiplayer session of *Icewind Dale II*. But the server and one other system refused to run the game—any attempt to start *Icewind Dale II* resulted in a crash to the desktop. I traced the problem back to DirectX 9, which had been automatically installed during the setup for *Impossible Creatures*. Microsoft giveth and Microsoft taketh away.

So, we used System Restore to step back to the system state that existed prior to the installation of DirectX 9. Since *Icewind Dale II* had been installed before the date when the System Restore checkpoint was created, it was still there and intact. Better yet, when we ran *Icewind Dale II* on the client system that had DX9 installed, the game worked just fine.

However a new soundcard had been installed on the server system after the creation of the DX9 restore point.



After 15 minutes and three reboots, we were up and gaming, with relatively little wailing and gnashing of teeth.

This arose an interesting situation in which all the drivers for the old soundcard were happily restored, while the drivers for the new soundcard were wiped clean. It took a few more minutes to uninstall the old drivers and reinstall the new ones—which, of course, created a new restore point. After 15 minutes and three reboots (one for the client and two for the server, since we installed new drivers there), we were up and gaming, with relatively little wailing and gnashing of teeth.

At any rate, the System Restore calendar had set a restore point at the time DirectX 9 was installed. It's easy to just launch the System Restore wizard, click on the correct calendar date, and follow the instructions. You can even choose an earlier System Restore point if the most recent turns out to be undesirable.

Note that any applications you install after the time of the restore point will still be on your hard drive, but they probably won't work, since all the registry entries will be gone. Also, System Restore is not a substitute for a backup; all it does is restore the system to a previous state with regard to drivers, system-file changes, and registry changes. System Restore will not back up any of your data files, so you can't use it to retrieve any irrevocably deleted files.

You can, of course, always disable System Restore, then enable it and manually create restore points when you want. But if you're as absent-minded as I am, you'll probably forget to do that at a really critical time. My professional advice to you: If you have the disk space, processor speed, and memory, leave it on. You'll keep more of your hair.

Tech Medics

You've got questions...and Dana's mad at me! By William O'Neal

How could I be in ATI's pocket if I'm already in Dell's pocket?

I'm a longtime reader of your magazine and I just noticed something odd in your February 2003 issue. It seems William O'Neal is either an obsessed ATI fanboy or he's working for them on the side. He pushes a \$300 ATI card in the Loan Machine (the same card you have behind your Power Rig), and he tells a guy (Tech Questions) to buy a Radeon card without offering an alternative. I just find it more than a little biased that he doesn't even come close to mentioning GeForce4 cards. You wouldn't have someone reviewing your strategy games if he loathed turn-based but loved RTS titles, would you?

Ian Pittman

As I write this, you can buy a 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro for \$220! Having spent some time with Nvidia's so-called "Radeon-Killer," the GeForce FX 5600 Ultra, and seeing the Radeon actually outperform it in many game tests, I see no reason to push anything but the Radeon: It's a solid, fast card that's inexpensive. And if the idea of paying \$220 for a graphics card seems too expensive, then buy a \$100 Nvidia-based card and see how it compares to the Radeon.

Backwards compatibility is, like, all the rage and stuff

I just wanted to ask some questions about the new Nvidia GeForce FX. Do you know if gamers will be able to play older games such as StarCraft and Age of Empires with the card? Most important, though, will I be able to play The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind with it?

Ian Pittman

Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

Run silent, run deep

I was wondering if one of your tech people might be able to answer and explain a few things once they're finished evading the robot frog in a G-string. What is ping?

Jim

It took me a while to get to this: that frog is so darned compelling. According to CNET.com's glossary, "When submarine crews wanted to test the distance of an object, they would send out a sonar 'ping' and wait to hear the echo. In the computer



world, ping is a program that 'bounces' a request off another computer over a network to see if the remote computer is still responding. If the ping comes back, the remote computer is still alive." That's pretty much it—except that in games, "ping" refers to how good a client gamer's connection is to the server. For instance, if your ping is high, then it's taking a long time for the digital signal to go from your computer to the server, then back to your computer, and that's bad. Conversely, if your ping is low, then the time it takes for the signal to go from your computer to the server and then back to your computer is low, and that's good. All hail the LPBs!

Which router should I buy?

I want to network my two computers together for games. I also have a cable modem that I'll want to use for both PCs. I haven't seen much networking hardware reviewed in CGW. Does that mean all routers are equal when it comes to games? Does one brand have huge speed advantages? Another area I've not

seen much information on is wireless keyboards and mice. I can see where it would be handy to be without wires when I have to slide everything out of the way to clamp my driving wheel onto my desk. Can I get a cheaper set with good response? Have you considered a roundup of wireless input devices?

Ben

Where to start? You haven't seen a lot of networking hardware in CGW because Will is lazy. But seriously, there's a lot of stuff to cover in the limited pages of the hardware section, and typically, stuff like networking products gets lost in the shuffle. In any case, not all networking products are the same, so I'd suggest sticking with products from reputable companies like Linksys, D-Link, Belkin, and Actiontec. Right now, I'm running an Actiontec 802.11b wireless setup at home (I have DSL) and I'm pleased with it. As for wireless keyboards, they've gotten much better lately—you can't go wrong with either Logitech or Microsoft's offerings. And we love the Logitech MX 700 cordless mouse.

Killer Rigs

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

Originally, I thought this would be an easy Killer Rig to write—the 'd just replace the Radeon 9700 Pro in my Power Rig with a GeForce FX 5800 Ultra and replace the 9700 Pro in the Lean Machine with a lesser card.

But after putting a GeForce FX through its paces, I decided to keep the Radeon 9700 Pro. While the FX bested the Radeon's 3DMark2001SE Pro score (65670) at 1024x768x32 with no FSAA by scoring 16100, the Radeon beat the FX at 1600x1200x32 with 4x FSAA turned on! Furthermore, the Radeon beat the GeForce FX in most of my game tests, with the exceptions of *Serious Sam: TSE* and *UT2003*. While the GeForce FX does boast a more powerful GPU, it seems Nvidia's decision to ship the product with 128-bit DDR2 memory ultimately hobbles its performance. The Radeon comes with 256-bit DDR3 memory. Add to that the fact that you can now find a Radeon 9700 Pro for as little as \$220 (at some sites), and leaving it in my Power Rig was a no-brainer.

I decided instead to put an S80 GeForce4 MX 440 in the Lean Machine. But after running some tests, I couldn't go through with it. I put the Radeon 9700 Pro back in the Lean Machine, bought a swanky new flame-retardant jumpsuit, and have readied my pinky to hit the Delete key as soon as the flames start rolling in. For more info on my Killer Rigs and to see a complete list of benchmarks, head over to www.gamers.com/06/williams.



I bought myself a swanky new flame-retardant jumpsuit.

3GHZ PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	\$500
Motherboard	Intel 8S530MVR	\$170
Case	Antec P184603	\$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC-1600 DDRAM	\$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200 rpm	\$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 FY250+	\$400
Speakers	Centipede SoundWorks MagnaWorks 5100	\$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Multimedia keyboard	\$35
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$35
TOTAL		\$3,060

3DMark2001 SE Pro*



ATHLON XP 2200+ LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Processor (CPU)	1GHz AMD Athlon XP 2200+	\$140
Motherboard	ASUS A7NEC Deluxe (nForce 2)	\$130
Case	Antec P184603	\$100
Memory	512MB Crucial PC-2700 DDR	\$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200 rpm	\$60
Graphics processor	64MB ATI Radeon 9100 Pro	\$300
Soundcard	Onboard nForce 2 Audio	N/A
DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive	Plextor PleXCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	17" Samsung SyncMaster T500B	\$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	\$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	\$45
TOTAL		\$1,640

*1024x768x32, 40 FSAA

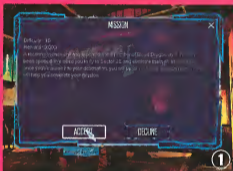
How To...

Wussing for dummies Edited by Dana Jongewaard

POWER-LEVEL IN FREELANCER

Upgrade your ships at the speed of light By Thierry Nguyen

With a bit of planning in *Freelancer*, it can be pretty easy to jump straight from low-level light fighters to much more durable heavy fighters. This is how we moved from startlers to defenders, from cavaliers to crusaders, and so forth. It generally takes about five to seven missions to get enough cash to buy a better ship.



AIM LOW

Accept missions rated below or around your own player level. They may not pay as much, but they'll be easier to finish, and you can plow through more missions this way.



JOIN A CROWD

Go for missions that specifically mention backup. These are usually the straightforward clean-up missions. Backup means there's less chance of you dying, as there will be other targets for the enemy to attack.



ENLIST

Get missions from the local military, such as the Liberty navy, Bretonia armed forces, Russian navy, or the Rheinland military. Until you reach the Border Worlds, the military often has the best heavy fighter ships of any region. You need to curry favor with the local military in order to buy a ship from them.



LOAD UP

Spend your money on a couple of new guns and a missile launcher with a countermeasure dropper. Get the best guns you can afford for your current ship. Then save up for an alien ship, plus 5,000 extra credits. From then on, primarily use guns and missiles salvaged from the enemy.

UPGRADE YOUR RIDE

Go to a battleship and purchase a new heavy fighter. Your powerful weapons from the previous ship will transfer over, and since your new ship is more powerful, it will most likely be more efficient with the weapons. Use your spare cash for miscellaneous upgrades.

KILL DRAKK OVERSEERS

Don't run like a sissy, fight like a man **By Robert Coffey**

There are a lot of tough enemies in *Unreal II*, but few are as unforgiving or capable of killing you as quickly as the Drakk overseers on the Drakk homeworld. While it's tempting to pump two or three rounds from the laser rifle into them, you'll run out of ammo before you run out of overseers—especially if you use the rifle on the drones that repair the overseers. You need a quicker, more efficient approach in order to live long enough to reach the end boss.

PULL THE PIN

Once the overseer appears, you need to take her down immediately, and nothing is more effective than an EMP grenade. Hoard these exclusively for the laser-spitting overseers. One EMP grenade will drop an overseer instantly.



LOOK OUT FOR PODS

First, anytime you see a pod with a healing drone, go on alert—overseers should attack you soon. Many of the overseers will rise up from blue cells on the floor. They rise pretty slowly, so if you spot a cell, pick a partially obscured position between the cell and the drone pod.



TAKE OUT THE DRONE

Once the overseer hits the floor, swing around to face the nearest drone pod and switch to your preferred gun—I recommend using all fire on the assault rifle. A couple of shots will destroy the drone and keep it from being able to revive the overseer.

SMACK DOWN

Even if you don't take the drone out before it reaches the overseer, you'll still have a little time to eliminate it before the healed overseer rises again. With the drone dead, you can eliminate the smoldering overseer at your leisure.



OPTIMIZE YOUR BIOS SETTINGS

Squeeze a little more power out of that rig of yours By Joel Duzham

3D games are some of the most demanding software products, sucking up every bit of your PC's performance capability. Because of this, the gaming community has been embroiled in a seemingly endless discussion about how to improve a given computer's performance without buying new parts. One place where you can improve things is in the BIOS setup menu, where you can tweak various settings to squeeze more juice out of your rig.



ENTER THE SETUP MENU

Shortly after you power up your PC, you'll see the POST screen. Your PC is checking its memory, detecting its IDE devices, and so on. Watch the screen for instructions on how to enter Setup. In most cases, you can hit the Delete key to enter the BIOS setup menu, although some computers require you to hit F2 or another key. Not every BIOS setup utility will have the settings we discuss here. You might have more or less control over your BIOS than indicated here. After changing each setting, boot up and run a current 3D title to test for system stability. If it crashes, return the setting to its original state.

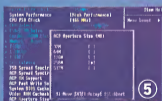
SPEED BOOTUP

Last through your BIOS menu and find the page with an option labeled Quick POST or Quick Power On Self Test. Make sure it's enabled; this reduces the amount of time the PC takes to test itself before it loads your operating system. Then find the page with bootup options, and make sure your hard drive is the first boot device. You can always change this if you need to boot a floppy or a CD-ROM.



GO TURBO

Often, faster settings compromise system stability. Use the fastest mode and see if your system remains stable. If it doesn't, back down one mode at a time until you find a stable preset.



TWEAK MEMORY SETTINGS

Find the page with memory settings, including CAS Latency and DRAM Command Rate. Lower the CAS Latency to 2 and set the DRAM Command Rate to 1. Check whether your system is stable. If it isn't, use trial and error to see if you can keep one of those settings. Turn off ECC, even if your memory is ECC compliant and check for system stability.

REDUCE AGP SETTINGS

Set the AGP Aperture Size to half of your system's main memory, e.g., if you have 256MB of RAM, set AGP Aperture to 128MB. Run a benchmark such as 3DMark2001 (free for download at Futuremark.com) and then bench the other settings to find the sweet spot. Make sure AGP Fast Write is enabled and the AGP Mode is 4x (or 8x, depending on your card and motherboard).

CLEAN UP ODDS AND ENDS

Turn off any BIOS caching options and BIOS shadow options. Disable both in periphery you're not using, such as an onboard LAN adapter, sound codec, or RAID controller. Turn off the virus detector and use Norton Antivirus instead. Make sure CPU L1 and L2 caches are both enabled.

GET BOOTED OUT OF MULTIPLAYER GAMES

Tired of being Mr. Nice Guy? Try these tips By **Darren Gladstone**

Some people like nothing more than pissing off folks in the middle of a heated multiplayer match or MMORPG session. Now, we'd never do anything like that, but consider this a handy guide for spotting those who do.

PICK A GOOD USER NAME

Apparently, the corporate overseers don't approve of some names and will shut down your account if you've got an offensive handle. We tried getting some choice examples, but no dice—they don't want to give us any more ideas. While Tippy Tinklepants isn't too bad, we don't think KillyT, MustacheRider_Chen, or HotCarl will make the cut.



BE A CAMPER

It's pretty shady when some guy is out in a hidden corner of the map sniping at people, but at spawn points? A new low is camping out in Battlefield 1942 at an enemy spawn point with a couple tanks. Someone appears, open fire.



KILL YOUR TEAMMATES

You're running down a corridor, covering your squad's six. When they aren't looking, shoot 'em a couple of times in the back. Then turn around and start shooting as if someone was behind all of you. Later, rinse, repeat until you're out of squad members.

JUMP TO THE WINNING SIDE

When playing an RTS multiplayer match, form an alliance with someone. Share resources, build armies and factories right next to each other. Then at the moment he needs you most, switch allegiances. All of your military units will instantly turn and attack your former partner while he's trying to figure out why he's under attack...and since you're still set as a friendly nation on his computer, his forces won't attack you.

Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less *Edited by Keith J. Richardson*

Asheron's Call 2

Who's the king of the fights?

PAGE 114

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick for *MechWarrior 4: Narcosis* comes to us courtesy of Jesse Zarotsky.

When customizing a mech for 1v1 battle, equip as many slots as possible with heavy flamers. Fill all other slots with some type of heavy weaponry. You should still have a lot of dough left, which should be used to buy extras such as armor, engine upgrades, and antimissile systems. Use this mech in the 1v1 coliseum to rack up some extra cash. This tactic annoys the heck out of your opponents in multiplayer, too. Rush your opponent and get

right up next to him as fast as possible. Wait until he performs an alpha strike, and then fire all your weapons into his center torso. This should cause him to overheat. If you keep firing your flamers into his torso, he will never be able to reboot, thus paralyzing him and allowing you to pummel him without taking damage. (It is a good idea to back away right before you blow him up so you don't take concussion damage.)



Jesse earned himself the special edition of *Age of Mythology*. Next month's winner will receive a free copy of *Hillman 2*. Send your dirty tricks for recent games in an e-mail with the subject line "Dirty Trick" to cwletters@ziffdavis.com.

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BIG MAN ON DEREETH

Bruce Geryk and Tom Chick fight it out in Asheron's Call 2, Frostfell server

While AC2 does have player-versus-player action, Bruce and Tom choose a slightly unorthodox way to compete: Take two characters, play for a day (usually an afternoon, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.), and see who could get the most experience. In order to make the strategy a bit more interesting, they stick to high Level 18 characters in order to have more choices for allocating their skill points.

Bruce

Anyone who makes a melee character in AC2 is either crazy or really wants to roleplay a knight who gets killed a lot by monsters. Most enemies in AC2 have ranged attacks, so if you're always charging in to fight in close, you're going to take a lot of damage getting there. While there's nothing preventing a melee character from training some missile or magic skills to offset this, there is nothing stopping them from just skipping the melee skills altogether and concentrating on one of the other two. Since I started a Tumerok, I'm going to train the invoker line. That gives me some nice ranged spells (Lightning Bolt and Ghost of the Past), as well as some healing capabilities that can help me get into a few groups. Invokers are also a pet class, but that doesn't come into play until later, and I won't get to those levels today.

Tom

For a guy who complains so much about Elves, Bruce sure does seem to love these massively multiplayer RPGs. He's the one who got me into Dark Age of Camelot before I hated the habit. And now he's gotten me involved in AC2 (am I the only one who sees that acronym and assumes it means I'm wearing plate mail in the old AD&D rule set?). AC2 has a much different rhythm than DAOC. Groups are more casual and the roles are more loosely defined—everyone just blithely bashes away. This puts support characters like healers at a disadvantage because they don't solo well, and groups don't tend to coordinate as much as in other MMORPGs. Because we're competing during a limited time and I don't want to be left behind if I can't find a group, I need someone who can solo. Since I didn't know what these Tumerok things were when I started, and since I didn't want to be one of those big, ugly guys, I chose a Human. I figured a ranger would be a good class, because the ranger's Trailblazing skill increases the running speed of both me and my group, which will mean I can get around the map faster than Bruce. Also, rangers are a good class, because, well, chicks dig Aragorn in the Lord of the Rings movies.

Bruce

I cleverly suggested that we start near Capstone so I'd be close to the Lost Wish Explorer quest. A quick trip through the Lost Wish Ringway to tag the three obelisks, and I get a number of buffs, including increased armor health, and speed. All are on timers (one to three hours) but they should help me at the



It's possible Bruce might be going to place a bet on the players who reach level 18 and go to group with...



A good, good fight! Bruce's invoker character is able to solo, but still in danger of being out of combat.

beginning while I fight solo and look for a good group. I did this once already in the Esper Reaches, but this one is identical, and most AC2 quests are repeatable, anyway. You have to wait a day or two, but it has been longer than that since I started this character, and that's when I did it. At these levels, it's a good way to get a quick bonus if you're in that area.

Tom

I made sure I was fitted with the best armor and weapons I could buy before we started. To get basic weapons, crafting is easy and useful early on. But once you progress to Tier 4, you need all sorts of special components that require a lot of shopping or a lot of extra time making stuff. Not for me. Between kindergarten and Ultima Online, I got enough arts and crafts to last me a lifetime. The forge at Cavendo on Osteth (D.G.ON, 28.8E) is a great marketplace to purchase all kinds of goodies. I managed to buy

some reinforced armor and a nice compound bow. I'm not going to bother with a shield, because the bow is a two-handed weapon. I did, however, buy a sword as a backup melee weapon. Not that I'll ever use it, but you never know, you know?

Bruce

My first stop is the Prosper Ringway Northwest Forest (B.4N, 0.3W) on Osteth. There's lots of bird-like things here called Scrawlers, and weird scorpion dogs called Lashers. All are Level 13 and 14 monsters. After about 20 minutes of this, I join a Lugan mage and a Human ranger and start killing Grutts, which are bipedal pig-like things to the east of the Scrawlers. With the three of us, taking down a 1,200-hit point moribund Grutt is easy, especially with my Lightning Bolt and Ghost of the Past. My heels come in useful, too. I hit Level 16 in about 15 minutes, and Level 17 30 minutes after that.

INITIAL CHARACTER SKILL ALLOCATIONS

Bruce

While I have a lot of options at Level 15, I'm going to limit my special attacks in favor of spending three points on Magic Grandmaster. My other option would be to train up to Eye of the Storm and Wingfoot to get Embellish (both of the former are prerequisites). I'm just going to put a lot of experience into Lightning Bolt for now (and no extra XP into Horn besides the one skill point that lets me move past it on the tree). I also take Heal so I'm more useful in (and attractive to) groups. While raising Magic Grandmaster is expensive, I can raise it one level for every 10 levels I put into the much cheaper Magic Master. Even for a magic specialist, getting something like Melee Master is not a bad idea, as it helps you evade attacks when a melee enemy gets close. That's a pretty low priority for me right now, though. I also spend a whopping five skill points on Ghost of the Past, since I might as well start training up that invoker tree immediately.

Tom

My skill choices center on my bow, which I plan on using almost exclusively. Missile Grandmaster is a given. Otherwise, Critical Shot and Fire Arrow are the most useful skills. Critical Shot gives me a head start dishing out damage. Fire Arrow packs a nice initial punch, but it also keeps giving since it sets the target on fire and does continual burn damage. Disease Arrow has a similar effect on vigor, but doesn't do a lot of damage. Renger Adapt isn't really helpful since it doesn't provide anything until I hit Level 20, when Evanesce Kicks In. So until I find a group, my main strategy will be to open with Critical Shot against a stationary target followed by a few venilla shots, then a Fire Arrow. Hopefully, I'll take out any creatures before they get close enough for melee, but if that happens, I've always got Point Blank to hit back and eventually Trailblazing if I need to escape.

Tom

I'm plinking around imagining that Bruce has already gained three or four levels by cheating and using a chalkboard to calculate some sort of mathematically optimized leveling-up formula. And here I am picking off monsters while looking for a group. I run into a few people and ask them about grouping, but the pickings are slim. One guy asks me how to cheat. Another guy just wants to know if I have a value 50 crystal item. I've gotten to Level 15 mainly by doing quests and vaults, which give better



When a monster with 4,000 hit points, back two, just



experience than the one monster at a time nonsense. They're best fought when you group, because you can easily plow through them. Plus, when you finish a vault, you get a little history slideshow without even having to take a cut when it's over. Nothing like a little sacketary to break up a leveling treadmill! Finally, I got some guys who invite me to come along for the Burun Slave-taker quest. We take the Prosper Ringway to Eastern Prosper and head west to a citadel at 0.6N, 10.9E where we talk to some Dudge Heretics and get the quest (just double-click on

Prosper Ringway portal at Shoushi to Cavendo and solo the man's along the way. There're plenty of Lashers here, which are at a slightly higher level (15) than in the Northeast Forest, plus Level 16 Drudge mystics, which is perfect. Not much more experience, but a little better loot. Too bad I don't get a bonus for money against Tom.

Tom

Wow, that was some quest. There were lots of really tough beasts, like crones, reapers, and

Once we got to the King Toad idol, it was like standing around in a grocery store.

one of them). My compatriots tell me we have to go to the King Toad Idol at 2.5N, 17.9E.

Bruce

My partners had to log off or go elsewhere, so I'm alone again. At Level 17, it's time to drop by the Cavendo forge, buy some equipment, and hop the portal to Omshan, which is the Tumerok home continent. The monsters there are generally higher level than on Osteth, and there are a few large gathering points for groups. Maybe I can get into one. I run from the

wesps, on the way. Our group of eight was up to the task even though half the time it was over before I could get in a shot. I could never have gotten through without the group, as I would have been slaughtered just running down the road. Because there were so many of us, we were handily taking down monsters up to five levels above us. Once we got to the King Toad idol, though, it was like standing in line at the grocery store. Everyone was waiting for his turn to kill the Slave-taker. Unfortunately, I couldn't do enough damage to get credit for

the kill, which went to the more powerful higher-level characters. I suggested going back on foot, since I could have used the experience I'd get by running through that monster gauntlet again, but no one listened to me; instead, they all recalled back to the Lifestone where we were bound.

Bruce

Level 15 to 17 Darkenfoes are good for hunting on the way from the Omshan entry point to the Kyd Ringway portal that takes me to Mayo. In Ikeras, a guy offers 100 gold for someone to show him where "the beach with all the XP is." OK, I'm Nevil Shute, let's go. Maybe I can get a group set up there. Just take the gateway to Zo, run south along the road, turn left at the Tou-Tou Bathhouse (not kidding) and you're basically there. Call R 14.5N, T3.6E. Unfortunately, when we get there, there's no one else around, and these monsters are too tough for just the two of us to take, even if this guy seemed like he knew what he was doing, which he doesn't. He can play in the sand all he wants—I need to get in a group and start getting some serious XP. It's too bad, since with a few Level 15 or 16 characters, you can generate a lot of XP in a relatively short period of time. I wonder what Tom is up to. Probably complaining about the character outfits.

Tom

My group's next idea is to "camp Feliches," which I think is illegal in some states. Since that last idea worked out so well, I'm glad to hang with these guys for a while longer. It's in Omshan, which is like a whole other continent or something. There are a lot of hops on the way, so I made a point of writing down how we get there so I can find my way back: Portal to Mayo, then Ikeras, then Rakani. Looks like Ikeras is the Cavendo of this continent. Good to know for future shopping sprees. We take the first Naderu Ringway to Northwest Outpost, then run east-southeast along the road to a wide-open field. There is a Lifestone just off the road where we bind. You can see some goofy-looking dead trees on one edge, and hills with woods on the far side. Call it 34.6N, 65.2E.

Bruce

I'm striking out on groups. Someone wanted to do the Drudge quest (where you kill one of each of about eight different Drudges), but he wasn't at a high enough level to be of use to me. I'm a decent solo class, but I get bored with that pretty fast. If Tom gets a good group and I don't, he'll crush me on XP. He's still taunting me about the Age of Mythology game. I need to win this one, dammit!

Tom

I'm wondering if an errant zero has worked its way into the game: It looks like these things have 5,300 hit points! A few guys have left the group and now there are a half dozen of us beatnik-looking guys with bows and arrows. How are we going to kill these things? Felich spawn and hunter Shraah and Opor Nelane, oh my! At least the last one has only 500 hit points.



Bruce

I'm stuck solving Nimbus (Mimbl?) near Mayo. Doing a vault would be a good way to get some quick XP, but I don't have any vault glyphs, and no one is selling them although often people will give them away to get someone to help them do the vault in question—they are rarely doable solo. Just not my day, I guess. A Level 46 guy did stop and power-level me for a little while, which was nice of him. He didn't fight the monsters, but he used taunts to make sure they kept attacking him (although they always missed) while I attacked from behind. That kept me from having to regenerate health (although vigor was still a problem). He had to leave and go wash dishes, though. Don't you hate it when your mom tells you that it's time to get off the computer?

Tom

This is great. It's like Ye Oldie Archery Practice as we let loose with our arrows on these giant monsters. By the time one of them crosses the field, it's been hit a dozen times by arrows and is burning and disease-ridden. When it starts attacking a party member, the hapless archer just takes off in a big circle with the monster following while everyone else drills it with arrows. As long as you can resurrect before the monster dies, you get experience for it, which wipes out all of the vitae loss. And since the Lifestone is right there, it's like having to tag in in baseball. We don't die too often, though. We have a healer who's pretty good, and he's keeping the guy who's getting beaten on alive until he can start running. If the running guy is tricky, he can get the monster stuck between the trees so it can't move. The Flying Feliches get stuck like this more often than the hunter Shroths do. The whole thing has a vaguely



I kill things by playing the drums!

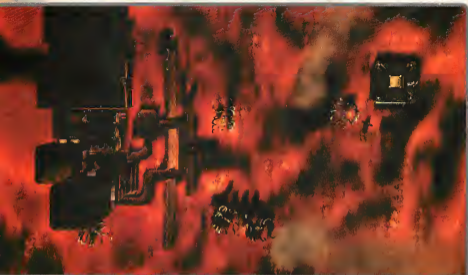


I thought my group was going to help me!

Keystone Kops dynamic, but we're racking up our experience.

Bruce

I just got a message from Tom that he is Level 20. Gotta hand it to him. The first rule of MMOORPGs is that if you find a good camp spot, you mk it dry. Tom learned that lesson well. He can stand there all day if he wants, and since he's nearly disintegrated, I want to go eat. He wins this round. He's better at roleplaying a fight-wearing ranger than he'd admit.



UNREAL II

Cheat codes galore from your friends at Prima Games

Cheat codes

Unreal II: The Awakening includes a number of cheat codes that make things easier when the going gets tough. To enable the cheats, press **~** and type **BEMYMONEY**.

Once the cheats are enabled, type the codes as shown and press Enter. Press Esc to return to the game. (After the cheats are

enabled, you can enter any new cheats by pressing **~**, entering the desired code, and pressing Enter.)

ALLANMO: This gives you the maximum amount of ammunition for all of the weapons you are currently carrying.

FLY: Nullifies gravity, allowing you to "walk" through the air. This comes in handy when you're having trouble "legally" making a jump.

GHOST: This cheat allows you to walk through walls, ceilings, floors, and other solid objects.

GGG: Makes you virtually indestructible. You are immune to weapon and fall damage, but you are subject to damage effects from fire.

GOODIES D 100: Enter this to gain all of the weapons in the game, as well as one each of the following: auto turret, rocket turret, plasma field generator, and

proximity sensor.

INVISIBLE (I/O): **INVISIBLE 1** makes you invisible to all enemies, traps, doors, and so on. **INVISIBLE 0** will make you visible again.

OPEN mapname: This allows you to open any Unreal II map, where **mapname** is the name of the map you want to open. The maps for all the game levels are located in the Maps folder. You

Defense: Sulfuron

At the beginning of the Sulfuron mission, a marine ship drops off a technician to retrieve the data, as well as a group of marines to help you defend him. The first of three ships full of Tronaji guest warriors arrives a little after a minute after the mission begins (with the countdown). Deploy your marines immediately (step toward and talk to them to give them orders). Deploy the marines as follows (in the order shown):

- Lt. Cosner: guard the front wall
- Lt. Caruso: guard the front door
- PFC Taber: guard the back door
- Sgt. Esley: guard the control room



must type the file extension as well as the name—for example, "OPEN M11.un2."

PHOENIX: With this cheat enabled, you are instantly resurrected, with full health and shields, if you should die.

PLAYERONLY: When this cheat is enabled, the entire game world is frozen. Nothing moves except you. Entering **PLAYERONLY** again restarts the action.

SLOWO speed: Controls the speed of the game. One (1) is the default normal speed. Entering a number lower than 1 causes the action to proceed in slow motion. Zero (0) is the slowest possible speed. Entering a number higher than 1 causes the action to speed up.

TOGGLERLOADS: When this cheat is active, you don't need to reload your weapon—you can continue firing without interruption until all your ammo is exhausted.

WALK: This code nullifies the effects of the **FLY** and **GHOST** cheats. When you enter this, make sure you're not in space, outside the defined map boundaries, or hundreds of feet above the map floor, so you avoid unpredictable—or deadly—results.

Note: You must re-enter the **GOD** cheat every time a new section of the level loads.

Easter eggs

The developers at Legend Entertainment included some fun hidden features in the game. The following sections provide a guide to the location and function of these Easter eggs. The first one is available in the Avolon training mission.

Secret Nail shooting range: When you mantle onto the raised block in the obstacle course, jump over the fence on the right. Step inside the crate to pick up the head. Proceed through the rest of the course and let **Nail** show you the three weapons on the shooting range. When **Nail** finishes the weapons training, proceed to the fourth shooting range (the one beyond the grenade launcher range). The range gate opens, revealing a pair of **Nail** targets you can blast to your heart's content.

There are also a number of Easter eggs aboard the Atlantis. The following are available during any Atlantis interlude.

Seagot hologram: In the briefing room, there's a button hidden on the holotank's right side (on the table's edge in the small space between the table and the wall). When you press it, a hologram of a seagot appears in the holotank.

Flashbang: In the armory, there is a secret button located inside the door (under the edge of **Isaak's** computer station). When you press this button, you hear **Isaak** say "Flashbang!" and an **DMP** blast goes off.

A few laughs: Follow the upper corridor toward the back of the ship, past **Ne'Ban's** quarters, and jump into the open hatch. Turn toward the front of the ship to see a **fly** button hidden inside (on the left, near the top). When you press this button, **Lincoln** and **Grant** appear and laugh at you.

License plate: You must use the **GHOST** cheat for this one. Go behind the locker in **John's** quarters to see a Virginia license plate that says "Seegot!" attached to the back of the locker.



A number of additional Easter eggs appear aboard the Atlantis as the game progresses: Dalton's photo album: After each completed



the succeeding interludes on the table in the back of the Armory.

Wandering seagot: During all Atlantis

Defense: Janus

During the **Janus** mission, you will have to set up a defensive perimeter to protect **Myeur** while he sends his transmission. You have four marines and a lot of equipment at your disposal. Grab the equipment and weapons in the control room, then head outside. Grab the turrets and plasma field generators outside the main entrance, then deploy the marines as follows:

- **L1. Crabie:** guard the perimeter
- **L2. Chavez:** guard the front entrance
- **Pvt. Sedes:** guard the right wall
- **Sgt. Harrison:** guard the left wall

Secret Interludes

There are two secret Atlantis interludes you can access by pressing - and typing the appropriate command.

Unread II Dance Party: At any Emv, open the console and type **OPEN ATLANTIS7MISSIONCOMPLETE0=83**. Then press **Enter**. You'll find yourself at a seagot dance party on the bridge of the Atlantis, complete with balloons.

Balloons Afloaty: At any time, open the console and type **OPEN ATLANTIS7MISSIONCOMPLETE0=10276**, then press **Enter**. You'll find yourself in **John's** cabin, surrounded by balloons in the shape of seagoats and **Abraham Lincoln**. There are additional balloons in the corridor outside.

mission, a new photograph of the planet you just visited is attached to the large screen in **John's** cabin.

Artifacts: Whenever you find a piece of the alien artifact during a mission, it appears during

interludes after the **Kalydon** mission. There is a seagot aboard the Atlantis. The first two times you encounter it, it will run a way. Thereafter, you can interact with it and hear **Dalton** make a comment about it.

Finally, there are several Atlantis Easter eggs included in the game that are specific to certain Atlantis interludes.

First interlude: During the first Atlantis interlude, you can activate a special version of the mission briefing. Open the hatch opposite **Ne'Ban's** quarters on the upper deck and interact with the seagot inside. Reply to the seagot as follows: "Spam," "Spem," "Spam," "Humbug." You will receive a message stating that "**Lincoln** is pleased." Proceed to **Aida's** briefing. During the briefing, when **Aida** plays the distress call, **Abraham Lincoln** appears on the briefing screen instead of **Danny Miller**.

Fifth interlude: When **Ne'Ban** gives the mission briefing for the **Kalydon** mission, 12 images display in the holotank in rapid succession. Use the "Slow" cheat to get a good look at the images.





Deploy a warble from another enemy class of your kit will cause damage to enemies, and will still give your warble access to its ability.

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES STRATEGY GUIDE

By Erik Wolpaw & Chet Fallszek

One day, in a time, a section editor for a computer game magazine assigned a strategy guide to a pair of writers before any of them had played the game. The writers heavily criticized it despite the game's questionable quality. This is that strategy guide.

Someone should write a strategy guide for writing strategy guides about games that don't require much strategy. We seriously could have used it for this one. If most real-time strategy games are sophisticated versions of rock, paper, scissors, impossible Creatures' balancing issues and simple, nonbranching tech tree make it more like the world's most elaborate game of rock. In the 1983 cyber techno-thriller *WarGames*, when some bad things started happening, a computer told Matthew Broderick, "The only winning move is not to play." In this case, that's our best strategy, and it's been optimized and endorsed by an Army super-computer. If that seems reasonable to you, then the strategy guide's over and you're free to go.

For the statistically insignificant percentage of you who aren't satisfied with the not-playing tactic, here are some other strategies we've unearthed after many long weeks spent playing impossible Creatures, primarily against each other, but also against the 20 people playing the game online at any given time. Some of these tips are guaranteed to make you a better player. Others are psychological tricks that will probably only work once, if at all.

Economy

Impossible Creatures has two resources: coal and electricity. Of them, coal is the most important. Electricity is essential early in the game, but five minutes into a match, it will be as overproduced and useless as German marks in 1923. We tried, but we couldn't think of anything to use all the extra energy on. Unlike most RTS games, having way too much of a key resource isn't a sign you're doing something wrong, so when you find yourself with 10,000 units of extra electricity, don't panic. It's not your fault. We blame Microsoft. To get your electric economy moving, have a henchman build a lightning rod. Then have him construct an electrical generator on the thermal vent near every starting location. Build one more lightning rod, upgrade the generator to Level 3 as soon as possible, and then forget about electricity.

Cool, on the other hand, is the real force behind all the nature tampering and God playing required to mix hapless animals together before sending them out to kill each other. Remember that only one henchman at a time can excavate a coal pile. Extra henchmen simply curse up and walk their turn. However, a second henchman can start digging while the first transports a load of coal back to the drop-off spot. In practice, the most efficient worker/coal ratio is 1/2, rounded up when necessary. Henchman will automatically move to any unattended nearby pile, so just put the correct number of them near a set of coal mounds and let them sort out the details.



Creatures with the Digging ability can't burrow under bremble mounds.



Soundbeam towers are cheap and pack a serious wallop, even against high-level flying creatures.

Send a nasty letter to Jeff Green about which way works best for you.

Research Advance Structures and then build a research clinic as early as possible, preferably before you advance to Tech Level 2. Once it's built, research the henchmen's Extra Carrying Capacity upgrade, which increases the amount of coal each henchman can tote from 20 units to 25. Opinions vary as to the usefulness of the henchman Speed upgrade. At least one of us says it's a good idea. Other members of the two of us say yeah, go ahead and waste your stupid coal on it—it doesn't make your coal assembly line go any faster, but maybe it makes you feel better or something. So, we're both for it—one of us is just for it sarcastically. Try it both ways, and then send a nasty letter to Jeff Green about which way works best for you.

The gyrocopter is useful for enhancing the prosperity of your all-important coal-mining

operation. The copter is relatively cheap to build, can be manufactured early, and, most important, can mine coal from a pile at the same time a henchman on the ground is mining from the pile. Since it can build structures and carry an extra henchman as cargo, the gyrocopter is also great for scouting out coal piles and setting up remote mining operations on them. You can only build one gyrocopter, so it's more of a slightly useful novelty unit than a cornerstone of your workforce. Still, the bigger a coal advantage you can maintain, the faster you'll win, and the sooner we can all go home.

Combat

The most durable creature combat strategy is to reach Tech Level 5 as quickly as possible, and then to make as many of your best creature as

you can and send the pack toward the enemy base. Impossible Creatures is a game in which fancy-pants tactics usually end badly because brute force is almost always preferable to guile. For some reason, many members of the small community of online players have adopted a "no attacks for 10 minutes" rule. If this rule is in effect, then there's really no reason to build anything but your best Level 5 creature. Ten minutes is plenty of time to barrel through the simple tech tree and manufacture a force of powerful beasts. If you end up in a game without the 10-minute armistice, you should build a few sonic towers inside your base and pause at Level 3 to pump out a few creatures that can defend your base against a rush. In either case, build a genetic amplifier and start upgrading your best creature design as soon as possible. By the time you're ready to produce them, they'll already be enhanced.

Creatures

Impossible Creatures' 51 stock animals can be combined into more than 50,000 different units. This variety can be daunting for new players. Luckily, we've discovered that 99.9 percent of these combinations stink. First of all, flying units are useless. Ground units with ranged attacks chew through them with ease, and cheap air-defense towers chew them even more easily. Not since Battlefield 1942's medic class has a unit ability been so pointless in

Impossible Lobsters. Lobsters have pincers, they have a high defense bonus, they get damage bonuses when attacking structures, they heal themselves, and they're amphibious. Everyone has their favorite lobster combo—and that's great—but if you want to win, the unit to build is the lobster and sperm whale combination. Not



An example of how many henchmen one can have.

Every creature in this game should be part lobster. In fact, Microsoft should have just called the game *Impossible Lobsters*.

practice. Even henchmen apparently hate air units, since they refuse to heal them. The only tactic we could dream up is building a couple of cheap air units early in the game and flying them over to the enemy base, so that he or—more improbably—she may get the impression that you have no idea what you're doing and will either take pity on you or become overconfident. You can reinforce the illusion of incompetence by naming your army "My First Air Force" or "DETH FROM ABOVE!!" or really, anything with the words "air" or "above." We're sure someone will write an angry letter to CGW about how they win all the time using nothing but snowy owls. Our preemptive response is that you should stop lying just to get attention. Artillery is another ability to avoid. The area of effect damage is nice in theory, but since it also damages your own units, groups of artillery units tend to be big, hairy suicide squads. Flying artillery avoids the self-destruct problem, but introduces the much worse flying problem.

So, what does that leave? One word: lobsters. Every creature should be part lobster. In fact, they should have just called the game

only does it get all the lobster bonuses previously mentioned, but the Spermster is also huge, has a lot of hit points, and is armed with a sonic ranged attack that does area-of-effect damage without harming friendly units. This creature has no known weakness. A good midlevel creature for early-game base defense is the eel/lobster combo. It's Level 3 and has a nice ranged attack that comes in the form of a cool-looking electric beam.

One surprisingly effective nonlobster attack strategy is the early game henchman rush. If you send a pack of them into an enemy's base and have them build several sonic turrets, you can seriously disrupt your opponent's creature production line. For some reason, sonic turrets won't target enemy henchman, meaning you're usually free to go about your building business deep inside an opposing base.



The final stage of a successful henchman rush. Rather than being one of those plans so crazy that it just might work, it's pretty much a plan so crazy that it never works. When it does, though, it's really satisfying.



If your opponent has an air chamber, don't attack it. Let him waste resources pumping out crappy air units.

That's basically it. To paraphrase a funny (or someone once sent us: You don't have to be crazy to win at Impossible Creatures, but it helps!) it doesn't, however, help as much as building a sperm lobster force as fast as possible and then launching it at the enemy base. And if you're on the other side, do the same thing.

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Entries must be received by Ziff Davis Media Inc. before May 1, 2003. Ziff Davis Media Inc. assumes no responsibility for lost, mutilated, misdirected or late entries. The staff of Computer Gaming World shall select the winner in its sole discretion based upon whatever warped design aesthetic we choose. Entries that CGW determines in its sole discretion are obscene, pornographic, defamatory or otherwise objectionable will be rejected. The winner's design will be dyed onto Scooter's head before the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), and the winner will receive an ATI Radeon Pro 9700 video card (retail value \$400).

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Scorched Earth

Dummies for Gaming

Designers to gamers: You're stupid **By Robert Coffey** robert_coffey@xiffdavis.com

Remember playing *Army* as a kid, and there was that one kid that you would shoot but he wouldn't die because he'd claim you missed him because you had bad aim or he suddenly and magically was wearing body armor or a test-run of the Rapture just happened so he was momentarily sucked up to heaven and then, once God was sure that all Second Coming systems were "go," he was shot back down to Earth to continue waiting for the four horsemen, but in the meantime your bullet had gone by? Remember how you hated that kid for not playing by the rules? Well, good news, friend: That same kid is now making games and charging you 4D bucks as he continues not to play by the rules—rules he ostensibly created.

Case in point: *Impossible Creatures*. I'm willing to accept this game's premise, that some wacky machine can combine two incredibly disparate species into some strange new creature. Not so far-fetched really—as Americans, we had to face such a grim possibility back during the mercifully brief yet unspeakably terrifying marriage of Ernest Borgnine and Ethel Merman. *Impossible Creatures* further points that hero Rex Chance can suck the DNA from animals by using an amazing magical dart gun capable of transmitting this DNA data all the way back to the creature cooker across the island immediately after said dart sticks a critter in the ass. Again, I swallow this willingly. But then, after setting up the rules, *Impossible Creatures* doesn't play by them.

Why can't I use the super-magic long-distance-communicating DNA dart to extract DNA from combined enemy creatures? Why can't I pop a needle into an eel-gorilla's ass and get its DNA? Or at least its ass DNA? And if for some reason I can't extract DNA from combined species, well, DK, fine, but why can't I have Rex shoot himself or Lucy Wilfing or a henchman in the ass so he can make a whole army of buffalo-Reas, give 'em some guns, and go shoot the living crap out of the bad guy? Relic sets up all these weird rules and then refuses to play by them. But it's not alone.

James Bond 007: NightFire not only doesn't play by the rules of the *James Bond* franchise, it also completely ignores



Why can't I pop a needle into an eel-gorilla's ass and get its DNA?

facts of reality readily observed and accepted on preschool playgrounds. To wit: When a 4-year-old playing *dogeball* is struck by the ball and is thus removed from the field of play, the 4-year-olds remaining in the game—even those still in *Pull-ups*—have the good sense to stop talking to him. Not so with the bad guys in *NightFire*, who continue sharing recipes long after a bullet has shattered their competitors' skulls and they've tumbled to the ground. Toddlers are savvy enough to know that stealth means not standing on the shoes of whoever's "it" during hide-and-seek, and they're smart enough to know that a super-spy doesn't reveal his camouflaged spy-cam, press it against his subject's nose, and start snapping away. This is a spy game? I would suggest that Gearbox Software hastily slapped a Pierce Brosnan face on a big fricked chimp and thus transformed *Linkbot Link*, *Secret Chimp*, *The Interactive Game Into James Bond 007: NightFire*, but to suggest that would be damning legions of hard-working lip-synching orangutans who frankly deserve better. For even thinking

this, I apologize.

These are simply two of the more extreme and recent examples of failing to follow the rules or observe simple logic in games. Enemies in *Hellman 2* who are supposed to be alertly guarding your targets will only sound an alarm if they spot a body—never mind that huge smear of blood on the wall. *High Heat Baseball* won't allow my pitchers to pitch-run or pitch-hit without pulling the current pitcher off the mound. And a long time ago, I was killed by a rabbit and then a goat in *Ultima Online*. I may not be the roughest, toughest editor in game journalism, but I'm fairly confident that even unarmed, I am capable of murdering non-caricatured livestock. At the very least, I think I could beat the goat to death with the bunny.

Once upon a time, we PC gamers regularly reconfigured *himem.sys* or created custom boot discs to play our games. Just because we're willing to accept outer space tigers in spaceships as our mortal enemies doesn't mean we are entirely stupid. We only ask that game designers acknowledge this.

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