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"If this E3 was any indication, it's going to be a hell of a year for PC games."

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Electronic Entertainment Expo
E3: The crotchety and hirsute CGW crew spends three glorious days in L.A., seeing games and asking the hard questions. This is their story.

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What happens when Jeff goes to E3 without his Depends.

20 Letters

In the old days, people used to get a pen, get some paper, and send us actual letters telling us how great we are. Now you just e-mail us your death threats. Yay!

26 Loading...

This month in Loading we take you online for **Anarchy Online: Shadowlands**, a sweet-looking new expansion to the *AO* universe, and in line to get into this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo.



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Kids: They cause a lot of problems. Now some states are drifting legislation to punish retailers for selling Mature games to minors. We take a closer look. Plus, first looks at add-ons for **Medal of Honor** and **SimCity 4**, and a profile of the brains behind **Bejeweled** and **Bookworm**.

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Check out our complete guide to character building and speedy leveling in **Shadowbane**. Plus, developer tips for **Galactic Civilizations**, the ultimate battle plan for **Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield**, the best start for **Rise of Nations**, and victory in any John Tiller game ever.

116 Scorched Earth

Robert hates everything—especially MMORPGs.



"Gunshots result in fountains of blood—so you'd better do what this guy wants."

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Belgian comic fans—and anyone who likes a good amnesia-based FPS—take notice.



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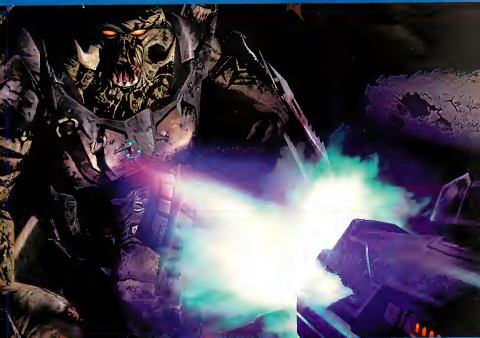
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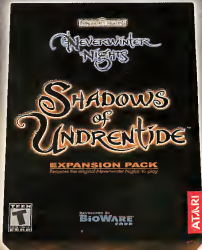
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DARREN GLADSTONE

"Hi, I'm Darren Gladstone. You might remember me from such memorable previews as *Leisure Suit Larry: The Teen Years* and *The Erotic Adventures of Hercules*." And, like most celebrities, he's just checked himself out of rehab for his latest addiction. This month's obsession: endlessly logging on to disturbinginfections.com.

MARK ASHER

Swashbuckling gallant, raconteur, bon vivant, one of the people the people-watchers peep-at-contributing writer Mark Asher is none of these because he's too busy playing games until a quarter to three and worrying about life's ineffable mysteries, such as why *Sea Monkeys* don't really look like monkeys. On his deathbed, he will be asked if he regretted spending so much time playing games, and his answer will be: "Only Black & White."



HARRY CAMPBELL

Born the son of an FBI special agent, Harry's dad was convinced that Harry was destined to pursue a life in law enforcement. However, all those pictures of J. Edgar Hoover his father positioned around the house had the reverse effect. So he pursued a career that didn't entail the use of a firearm and required as little personal responsibility as possible—the career of an illustrator. Harry lives in Baltimore with his wife Melissa and two energetic sons Ian and Evan.



TOM EDWARDS

The only staff member not to go to E3, copy editor Tom Edwards spent his time alone in the office pretending he was Hank Williams, rifling through coworkers' desks, and working on his upcoming PC release, *El Gafito de la Muerte*.



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Letters

Don't be afraid to care at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Diary of a Mad Housewife

Husband: Didn't you say you had homework?

Me: Mmmm...Bookworm...

Husband: Have you eaten yet today?

Me: Look! I spelled "insipid"!

Husband: Don't you work today?

Me: But, sweetie, I just got to Level 30!

Husband: It's 4 a.m. You should go to sleep.

Me: But I have seven burning titles!

Baby Cheesy

Actual genuine fan mail!

Thank you for one of the best issues I have ever had the pleasure of reading (July 2003). You may have been faced with an overwhelming slew of bad games (to review) but boy, did you ever make up for it. Previews of *The Sims 2*, an article about the NV35, *Halo*, Republic, and a decent tech review by WL. And the mere I read of Tom and Bruce's *Garner's Edge* matches, the better they get, so keep them coming. You guys rock! Oh yeah, kudos and 10 points to whomever used the *Aliens* reference on page 67: "Game over, man. Game over." Truly a classic. Peace out.

Jimi

Harold and the purple vomit

Just a comment about the *Sims 2* cover (July 2003). I love how the father is cheering on his redheaded son, who's beating up his little sister as the scantily clad mother ignores the crying young star. The best part, however, is how no one notices that the baby on the floor is vomiting up a bright-neon purple colored



substance. Exactly how many crayons did the little tyke have to eat to come up with that shade of purple?

OEVo

Sexy time!

In the June issue, someone said "I am tired of opening a magazine (even a computer gaming magazine) and seeing pictures of real/fake scantily clad women." Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't pictures of "scantily clad

women" the whole point of a computer gaming magazine?

Christian

Last month, a letter was sent to you on the topic of porn. I agree wholly with his opinions, for I am female, and the pictures are not "cheesecake" for me. I think that a gaming mag should be a gaming mag...not an edited *Playboy* mag.

Rowen



OK, just to show that we aren't completely sexist here at CGW, here's a little something for the ladies this month.

Actually, Di was referring to Groucho Marx

Dudes (and dudette), Di Luo needs to go back to poli-sci class. In his July review of *Tropico 2*,

"How many crayons did the little tyke eat to come up with that shade of purple?"

DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY THAT THE NUBIANS SET FOOT ON THE MOON?



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MAIL BITES

I'm just writing to let you know that William O'Neal is the man, I wanna be just like him, except not black. If you got a problem with Wil, you got a problem with ME.

Visk

Computer games this month must really suck for you guys to put the freaking Sims 2 on the cover. My condolences to whoever had to do the article.

Sam Allison

Is Robert Coffey just a nasty hateful writer, or are you guys purposely giving him games that stink?

Lendshark



Pirate Cove he says the game is "a dissertation on Marxist economic theory," where the "product of the proletariat's labor is used to increase the happiness of the ruling elite." That sounds pretty intellectual (lots of syllables), and it does describe how communist societies generally end up working in practice, but it's incorrect. A Marxist would say that Tropico 2's economic model describes a capitalist society. In a Marxist society, the slaves in Tropico 2 (the proletariats) would rise up against the ruling elite (the prates) and oust them. All labor would be for the common good, and the product of that labor would be spent among everyone equally. Not that I'm some commie prick...

You're my favorite gaming magazine because of your smart writing, but sometimes you tend to outsmart yourself. Then again, I tend to nipack.

Jason Drury

Robert Coffey: love and hate

It was extremely refreshing to see your Scorched Earth article in the June 2003 issue of CGW. I also wanted to commend you on the first zero-star CGW review (in the same issue). I read with horror and disbelief that a game like Postal 2 was created, and with the profound satisfaction that the publisher and developer are being called out on their lack of context for the statement they're apparently trying to make.

Thanks for taking on the tough topics and shaking my fellow gamers and me out of our collective Trailer Park Tycoon-induced stupors so that maybe we'll open our eyes and see what kinds of messages are being shoved subliminally down our throats. At the risk of sounding clichéd, "Thanks for keeping it real, dawg!"

Jason Fields

After reading your article "The Gong Show" I've come to two conclusions. 1) You have no sense of humor, and 2) you need a new career, since you can't seem to handle this one. The majority of people find stereotypes amusing because they are smart enough to realize that not everyone in a group acts a certain way. You don't seem able to distinguish between insulting stereotypes and mocking the idea of stereotypes.

The computer games industry has a lot of controversy; since you can't seem to cope with the high stress of controversy, maybe you should find a different job. Like living in a tree in order to prevent it from being chopped down. Trees have feelings, too (or at least the Sierra Club thinks so).



Here's some free advice that I think many people would tell you: Lighten up. **Tiv Akil**

I think the reason people send you letters defending racism and sexism or whatever is because they are sick and tired of hearing people whine about it when it isn't even a real issue. I'm just happy that there are people out there who have the balls to stand up to political correctness.

Tom Bell
Edmonds, Washington

["The Gong Show"] was an EXCELLENT article. I commend it for bringing to light questionable material, and I hope that those who condemn your writing have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of an Asian American who may have just installed the game for the first time and then played the game. I'd be shocked and disgusted. In fact, I am shocked and disgusted that the production, development, and publishing teams didn't think this was any big deal. I'm a white guy who doesn't completely understand this,

mainly because I'm not of any "real" minority myself, but I can certainly see why other people would be upset.

I'm writing you to basically tell you that I approve of your article 100 percent, and I hope to read more quality journalism like this in the future. Thanks for writing this article, and tell your critics to STFU!

Seth Cunningham

Mr. Coffey went "postal" in his semi-hysterical "review" (and I use the term lightly) of Postal 2 (July 2003). To review the review: Mr. Coffey's politically correct diatribe underscores why games like Postal 2 are necessary. Mr. Coffey ignored the gameplay, graphics, and sound to criticize the game's politically incorrect sense of humor. And this game does have a sense of humor—your reviewer doesn't.

I've played the game, and I very much like it. The review told readers almost nothing about the game. All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a humorless prig. Postal 2 deserved better, much better, than Mr. Coffey's PC hatchet job. I give this review no stars.

Jonathan Sprague

I was reading your July 2003 magazine, and you said the only thing worse than Postal 2 was boated syphilis. Well, I sell boated syphilis and I don't like you jerks bashing my product. I don't say the only thing worse than canned AIDS is CGW, do I?? OO I??? Other than that, your magazine is all right.

Barry Levites

And more politics!

As a long-time subscriber to your magazine, I was disappointed to see two different stupid and pointless jabs at Republicans in your July 2003 issue (page 53, Cheney, and page 54, Bush). Although this may shock you, some of your readers are—gasp!—Republicans! I know it may be hard for you to grasp since you apparently live and work in the San Francisco area, but a sizable segment of the population isn't made up of liberal Democrats.

I don't care what your politics are—what I subscribe to your magazine for is our supposedly common interest in computer games. Why your staff feels it necessary to turn your magazine into an opportunity to make their personal political views known is a mystery to me. I don't recall jokes about Clinton when he was president. I complained about this very thing a year or so ago (Wil O'Neal was the culprit then). If you want to ignore me, mock me, or whatever, go right ahead—just remember, I don't have to be your customer.

Brian Barsiek

"All we learned is that the holier-than-thou reviewer is a prig."

Just take solace in the fact that as a result, large FBI files have probably been opened on all of us. Especially Will.



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

SHADOWLANDS

Last year's expansion, *The Notum Wars*, actually made *Anarchy Online* fun to play. Now, Funcom is turning its online world on its ear with *Shadowlands*. There's a deep story here, no doubt, but the long and short of it is this: The greedy Omni-Tek corporation unintentionally forces open a hole in reality while trying to research the Notum ore. What they find on the other side is the Shadowlands—a metaphysical dimension deep in the throes of all-out war. Omni-Tek sides with the vicious Unredeemed, the fight rages on—oh, and a vortex is threatening to destroy all existence on this plane. Got all that? Good, maybe you can explain it to us before next month's preview.

This big fellow lumbering ever closer is one of the 40 to 50 unique creatures in the Shadowlands. There will be a total of roughly 500 new creatures and NPCs in the world.

This is one example of some of the new creatures you'll see in the haunting city of Ludo.



Why do big, evil
monsters have to look
so big and evil? Here's
one of the Unreformed
— all his cloven-hooved,
scaly s---

ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

As a part of Operation:

Enduring Nerd-dom, we see here a crack troop on patrol in front of the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo. Ira "Wild Men" Messershimdt (names have been changed due to classified intel), in the gun turret, leads Easy Company through the show floor. We've got our own reports from E3, where we've seen the rebirth of PC gaming—end it is good! Check out our feature on page 56 to see the best of the show.







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Read Me

Crazy riffs from the gaming beat Edited by Ken Brown

PUBLIC POLICY

Child's Play?

Lawmakers continue to try to restrict kids' access to violent videogames By Ken Brown



INTERVIEW

OGA with the brain behind Bajewski.
Page 36



SOMCITY 4

Rush Hour expansion
coming this fall.
Page 37



MOB ADD-ON

Breaking through in North Africa and Monte Cristo.
Page 39



LORDS OF EQ

MMORPG seeks RTS for good times, rough trade.
Page 40

Parents continue to fight to restrict kids' access to Mature games, but they haven't won a case yet. On June 3 the Eighth U.S. Court of Appeals again found that games are protected under the First Amendment. Lawmakers don't like the fact that kids can buy games with violent or sexual content, but the court found no compelling reason to regulate the sale of Mature games at retail.

Games are in good company since movies, music, and videos aren't regulated either. There is no law saying a kid can't go into an R-rated movie. Theater owners voluntarily adopted a policy not to allow children under 17 to view those films. According to the FTC, kids can get into an R-rated movie in about half of the theaters they visit.

But the FTC's numbers for minors who attempt to buy M-rated games is closer to 80 percent. Some retailers have been unwilling to even adopt a policy to prevent the sale of Mature games to kids, let alone try to enforce it.

Which has caught the attention of politicians like Mary Lou Dickerson of Washington. In May Washington State passed a law sponsored by Dickerson that would impose fines on retailers for selling violent videogames to minors. If it survives the inevitable constitutional challenge, Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17. Violators from store owners to clerks could be fined up to \$500 per incident.

"I believe violent videogames do harm children," says Dickerson. "I'm both a mom and someone who has worked extensively with at-risk kids. I also was trained in operant conditioning in graduate school and I know the power of these games to operantly condition players."

Dickerson says recent research shows that violent games can lead to aggressive behavior in children. She also cites real-life incidents of violence such as murders in Minneapolis and carjackings in Oakland that she believes were inspired by a *Mortal Kombat* game and *Grand Theft Auto III*, respectively. She also referred to the April school shooting in East Germany that resulted in the deaths of 16 people plus the assailant. After the massacre, stories emerged that the troubled student played *Counter-Strike*. Much like Columbine, the murders triggered a national debate about the impact of videogame violence, with some German legislators calling for an immediate ban on sales of first-person shooters.

"I'm not saying all videogames are evil.



Disc or Xbox? Extreme Beach Volleyball is one of the few best games to carry a Mature rating.

Washington will become the first state to make it a crime to sell or rent violent videogames to kids under the age of 17.

I know there are a lot of great games out there, and a lot of very responsible players and very responsible parents. What I am for is blocking the access of some ultra-violent games from minors," says Dickerson.

...And in this corner

The gaming industry and retailers want no part of Dickerson's law. The Interactive Digital Software Association and the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association are preparing a suit as this issue goes to press to challenge the constitutionality of the Washington statute. IOGA president Doug Lowenstein says, "I think it's the wrong solution for this problem. We're very confident that this law is unconstitutional and it will be struck down."

Lowenstein admits that retail enforcement is "spotty and needs to get better." But he says lawmakers have exaggerated the problem for their own political purposes. He cites his own FTC





statistic, which found that "parents are involved in the purchase and rental of games they got for their kids 83 percent of the time." The remaining purchases may be made without parental involvement, but Lowenstein insists that that doesn't mean

they are all Mature games.

"You can look at this and say this is some massive problem with retail, or you can say 'Hold on a sec, there is a problem and we need to get better all at retail.' There is no evidence—none—that there are tens of thousands of minors buying Mature-rated games. In fact, all the available data from both our own research and if you talk with retailers and the federal government is that if a minor has a copy of GTA3, for example, chances are they got it from mom and dad."

What about the retailers?

PC and videogames sales account for \$10 billion annually at retail. Given the money involved, the recent economic doldrums, and intense competition at retail, it's not surprising that retailers would be reluctant to start refusing sales to anyone, especially kids who want to buy games. But some retailers have done just that.

Wal-Mart, Target, Toys R Us, and KB Toys have adopted policies to prevent kids from buying Mature games, and some of them have implemented



Games such as *Scion of Fortune II* feature strong violence, but the courts say it hasn't been proven to be harmful to minors.

systems to prompt cashiers to card younger-looking customers. Other retailers, such as Best Buy and Electronics Boutique, seem indifferent to the issue. The president of the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, Hal Halpin, says some of the retailers in the IEMA have purposefully chosen not to change their policy. "The rationale is likely that they have witnessed their competitors make the move to restricting the sale of M-rated games to minors, and then seen the ramifications of those voluntary efforts go unappreciated," he says. "Once a retailer formally announces that they are investing the considerable time and money into that effort, they are susceptible to spotlight-hungry politicians and the media who are out for quick sensationalism."

Such reluctance is why politicians like

Dickerson have started to take

aim. But Halpin and Lowenstein say the reasons for slow implementation are more complicated than critics realize. Says Halpin, "Implementing new procedures throughout our retail channel is not as simple as it is in other industries. When you go to a theater for example, you're there to see a movie and purchase the corresponding ticket. Even in a multiplex that has 20 screens, that translates into 20 SKUs [stock keeping units, the common term for individual retail products]. Most of the [major] chains carry thousands of SKUs of varying assortment. In some of our retailers, games as a category represent less than one percent of their business. So, politicians don't understand the complexities of what we have been doing and the idiosyncrasies of implementing ideas."

Lowenstein puts it another way, "If you have 3,000 stores, and you have 10 or 15 registers per store, and you have two or three shifts working those registers a day, and you have people from the ages of 16 to 70 working those registers, and you have massive turnover in the store, to assert that this is easy is simply ignorant."

Some may argue that the only way to get the attention of all those clerks at all those stores is to threaten to punish them for ignoring the policy. Enter Congressman Joe Baca (Democrat) from California. Baca has submitted the "Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2003," which would make it a federal crime to sell or rent adult videogames to minors. Baca defines "adult" as a game with nudity, sexual conduct or "other content harmful to minors."

"There is no evidence—none—that there are tens of thousands of minors buying Mature-rated games."



Violators could face a fine of up to \$1,000 the first time, up to \$5,000 the second time and a minimum of \$5,000 and/or 90 days in jail for subsequent offenses.

Lowenstein doesn't think much of the Baca bill: "If you think that by criminalizing the sale of these games you make it any easier to implement, you're wrong. The practical issues are there. They can be overcome, and they will be overcome, and some stores are getting much better at it. If you look at stores like KB or Toys R Us, they are doing a very good job."

Baca's bill is also anathema to Halpin. "Should laws pass and succeed in the long-term, it is likely that many retailers will pull M-rated product from their shelves for fear of seeing their employees carried off to jail for selling a Mario Brothers game. R-rated movies would likely be next."

Halpin's dire prediction is unlikely to come true, but we'll see if the Washington statute actually takes effect on July 27.

"We're very confident that these laws are unconstitutional and they will be struck down," says Lowenstein. "The way it's written, it's so vague that you would have no idea what content would be covered by it."

The recent appeals court ruling clearly backs that up: "If the First Amendment is versatile enough to shield the painting of Jackson Pollock, music of Arnold Schoenberg, or Jabberwocky verse of Lewis Carroll," we see no reason why the pictures, graphic design, concept art, sounds, music, stories, and narrative present in videogames are not entitled to a similar protection. The



mere fact that they appear in a novel medium is of no legal consequence. Our review of the record convinces us that these 'violent' videogames contain stories, imagery, 'age-old' themes of literature,' and messages, 'even an ideology,' just as books and movies do."

The one form of entertainment that is not protected by the First Amendment is pornography. Should games be regulated the same as sex? Lowenstein disagrees. "The analogy to

porn is ignorant and stupid. There's a clear body of law that says that you can regulate obscene content. The Supreme Court has said so, and there's a specific test to define that. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that you cannot regulate violence, which is why we're confident in the outcome of [the Washington] case. There has never been anything comparable with respect to violence whether it's in games, in films, in books, or in other medium."

So it's unlikely that the Washington statute will survive its pre-enforcement challenge. If it fails, it will also make it less likely that other governors will sign such bills, since the state would have to pay the legal fees of organizations bringing suit (namely the IDSA and retailer groups).

But the issue isn't going to go away. With games like GTA3 selling in the tens of millions, it's inevitable that there will be more games—with ever greater levels of sex and violence—that continue to push people's buttons. Perhaps by then more parents will pay attention to the ratings systems and take an interest in what their kids are playing.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

Yes! You young'uns may not remember this one, but the

original *Pirates!*, released in 1987, is one of the great PC gaming classics, a way-ahead-of-its-time genre blender that, along with *Civilization*, ensured Sid Meier's status as a legend. Firaxis' surprise E3 announcement that Sid is remaking the game, complete with a brand-new 3D engine, is cause for rejoice indeed. All we know is, we can't wait to make Wil walk the plank.



THE BAD ENTER THE MATRIX

Gee, you couldn't see this one coming, could you? Yet another lame game based on a movie franchise. The summer this time is that the franchise is an awesome one, and the gameplay possibilities seem fantastic. But once again, we have a shoddy product rushed out the door to cash in on the unsuspecting laybays. The other few million will end up in a landfill somewhere, next to those 5 million Atari E.T. cartridges. And rightly so.



THE UGLY DUCK GOES BUST

Like an old, sick horse, *DUCK* is finally being put out of its (and our) misery, and as sad as it is, we can't help but think that it's about damn time. The truth is, this company has been in a long, sad, slow decline for years now, criminally destroying and sullying the names of at least two great franchises—*High Heat* and *Might and Magic*—in the process. Remember what Neil Young said: "Rust never sleeps." Good night, 3DO.

WHAT THEY SAID

"A ton of kids play this game [GTA3], and it's a status symbol in Washington State. The kids who have it get points for having sex with prostitutes and then brutally beating them to death. They get points for each time they kick that prostitute in the crotch. Is that what we want to teach our kids?"

—REPRESENTATIVE MARY LOU DICKERSON, WASHINGTON

"I am not for censorship and I'm not for blocking the sale of any game. I'm a former journalist, I don't like censorship."

—REX DICKERSON

"I think that adult content in videogames should be dealt with in the same way that adult magazines and videos are handled. I would say that if [the new law] is on par with the laws that handle adult magazines and videos, then it is a fair law."

—CHRIS TAYLOR, GAS POWERED GAMES



"I would say she's a better politician than she is a constitutional lawyer."

—DOUG LOWENSTEIN OF THE IDSA, REFERRING TO MARY LOU DICKERSON

THE CGW INTERVIEW

The Brains Behind Bookworm

Q&A with Jason Kapalka, the man who taught us all what "qua" means *By Jeff Grubb*

After losing two months of my life to Bookworm, I set down with the designer, Jason Kapalka—also the brains behind Bejeweled—to find out why he keeps torturing us with compulsively addictive puzzle games.

JG: Even my mom knows Bejeweled now.

JK: Yeah, lots of people in my bowling league play PopCap games. It's definitely different from the traditional computer game demographic. Personally, I like more hardcore games, but some are unnecessarily complex these days. We're trying to bring our games toward a simpler standard.

JG: So, did Bejeweled make you rich?

JK: It depends on your standards of "rich." I own a third of the company, so a lot of it is on paper—it's not money in the bank. We've sold nearly 500,000 units of Bejeweled in all its incarnations across different sites and platforms, but we're not obscenely rich because we're at nearly 20 employees.

JG: Tell me one thing about Bejeweled I don't know.

JK: Microsoft actually came up with that name for The Zone. Before that, it was Diamond Mine. In retrospect, Bejeweled is obviously a good name, but at the time it sounded terrible to me. It sounded like a topical reference to Bezzazzed, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie.

"Bejeweled' sounded terrible to me—like a topical reference to Bezzazzed, that stupid Brendan Fraser movie."

JG: Let's move on to Bookworm. How did this game come about?

JK: It started out as an experiment by our head programmer, Brian Firta. We wanted to make a word game that wasn't timed. It would have been easy to include a timer—to do so many words before time ran out—but that made it harder to come up with interesting words, which is what we wanted. After we had the basic theme, development time was about six months.

JG: Six months? How many people worked on the game?

JK: Four. Along with Brian, Nick Newhard

did the coding, Tyson Henderson did most of the art, and I did most of the design. Oh, and I'm also the voice of Lax, the bookworm.

JG: Well, you're that annoying high-pitched voice that says "Awesome!" when I make good words?

JK: Err...yes...that's me, pitch-bent quite a bit. I'm also the guy who says "Go!" and "Game Over" in Bejeweled.

JG: Wow, that's kind of embarrassing.

JK: We couldn't define every word, because that would've made the program too large. The plan was to define only harder words, but, again, how do you define "harder" words? There's no foolproof way. Ultimately, we just tried to define all the tricky short words. We figured those who make 10-letter words knew what they mean already.

JG: What's the maximum size word, by the way?

JK: Yeah, I know.

JG: Okay, so what's up with Bookworm's language filter? Some words seem to get censored, but others don't.

JK: Yeah, this was tough. There were many debates over what's offensive and what's not. What about real words like "fellation"? It's a great word, but do we really want that sitting on PopCap's high score board online? We still monitor the board to remove potentially offensive words that players post.

JG: The other annoying thing is the dictionary. It seems random what you guys choose to define.

JK: Twelve letters. Some players have complained about that, believe it or not.

JG: What's your best word? Mine is "elevation."

JK: I'm not that good, actually. The best word anyone at PopCap has made is "apparlition." But "elevation" is pretty good.

JG: So what's up next for you guys?

JK: Something new for us: an RPG. It's called PopQuest. It's like Diablo Lite or NetHack for Moms. And of course the inevitable Bejeweled 2 and Bookworm 2.

JG: Oh no.

JK: Oh yes.





Vazhar
by Full Sail Student
Brian Germain



PREVIEW

SimCity 4: Rush Hour

Grand Theft SimCity By **Thierry Nguyen**

W if Wright's other big Sims franchise is getting its first expansion pack bits fall, *SimCity 4: Rush Hour Expansion Pack* (a working title if we've ever seen one) will focus on enhancing the way people get around in their SimCities. Now you can add transit features like ferries, buses, subways, and light rails to your town. Players get more information about and

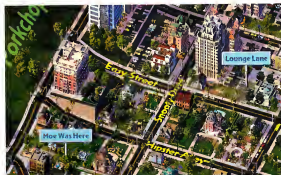
Sim's car and drive it around town. It's still being tested out at press time, but the team plans to possibly add the ability to control the helicopter and even a tank as potential awards.

As always, there's the requisite new disaster, which is the three-stage alien invasion. First, a massive spaceship beams up some poor Sim for an alien abduction, then it blasts some buildings

Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your Sim's car and drive it around your city.

control over their transportation options; one example is displaying not only the bus' travel route but the route of its commuters, showing you who is using it from where. Another wacky addition is the ability to directly control your

down, the scenario ends with a bunch of little UFOs flying out and shooting up the place. Since players can now personalize points of interest, you'll feel more attached to Scooter Lane or Scooter Point when the aliens demolish them.



Now you can put down names on everything. We want to make an "EA A OE'S" sign.

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#17 **MIND GAMES** Part One

At E3, trying to hook up with my friend *Bernie*.

So, where can I find you?

I'll be at Atari at 1 p.m.

by Scott McCloud

When I got there, Demo Guy* was showing Bernie the differences between combatants in the new *Terminator* game.

Compare this to, say, *Battlefield 1942*...

The only difference between the *Americans* and the *Germans* was the kinds of *guns* they used!

Now...

...we all know what he *MEANT* of course.

But the unintentional *irony* of the statement points out how games often tend to reduce everything down to mere *tactics*.

Writers know that the key to good *characterization* is in knowing what each character *wants*.

Varied *desires* means varied and interesting *conflicts*.

When creating characters in *software*, though, it's easiest to fall back on just *two basic motivations*.

Ally

Enemy

Can you imagine *personal ads* organized that way?

Hmm, let's see... Trying to kill me... trying to kill me... trying to kill me...

Hey, here's one: "SWF 24... Bustander."

Stylish productions like *No One Lives Forever* create effective characters through *dialogue* and *voice acting*.

But as soon as the real *gameplay* begins, you really only need to know *one thing* about the people around you.

TRYING TO KILL YOU

Introducing *true characterization* into actual *game-play* won't be *easy* --

-- because as sophisticated as *tactics-oriented A.I.* has become --

-- having even the simplest *conversations* with our machines is still *science fiction* --

Good morning, Dave.

-- for now.

To be continued



The add-on will feature new levels, weapons, tactical maps, and a new multiplayer mode.

RECON

Medal of Honor: Breakthrough

New add-on for Allied Assault coming this fall By **Ken Brown**

Since *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* isn't scheduled to ship until early 2004, EA is hammering together another add-on for *Allied Assault* to keep your trigger finger warm. *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault—Breakthrough* will be set in the European theater from 1943 to 1944 and will feature 11 new single-player levels in locations ranging from Kasserine Pass in North Africa, to Messina in Sicily, to the battle of Monte Battaglia in Italy.

The game will have nine new multiplayer maps, including the monastery at Monte Cassino, the streets of Messina, and Anzio Beach. A new multiplayer mode entitled *Liberation* will require captured teammates to be rescued in

order to continue the fight.

The last MOH add-on, *Spearhead*, was a rocket ride that didn't last long. Here's hoping *Breakthrough* will be just as thrilling but offer a little more game for the money.



Welcome to Vienne, France

NEWS FEED

SHADOWBANE HACKED

Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of *Shadowbane* players were thrown into an uproar in late May when hackers



wreaked havoc with the game. Wired.com reported that the inhabitants of an entire town were transported to the bottom of the sea, where they drowned. City guards attacked local residents, and swarms of new creatures suddenly appeared and slaughtered stunned players. Even newbies in neutral areas were hacked up by an-emerging ogres, according to Wired. Wolfpack Studios and Ubi Soft posted a message acknowledging that a "serious attack" had occurred and vowing to "prosecute [those responsible] to the full extent of the law."

When the companies figured out what had

happened, the game was restored to a previous point before the attacks began. Ubi Soft banned all of the members from two clans for "using teleport exploits." The members of those clans—whether or not they were involved in the hack—will lose all their property in the game, their cities will be left to die, and they will also be banned from other Ubisoft.com games.

MAX PAYNE 2 COMING NEXT MONTH

After a long driven sequence, Max Payne seems to be finally emerging in time for his big sequel. *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* is scheduled to ship this fall. Pick up the September issue of *IGN* for the exclusive first preview of this stylish, sexy, noir romance shooter.



BETTER BY DESIGN



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PREVIEW

Lords of EverQuest

In your face, Blizzard! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! **By Robert Coffey**

Okay, so maybe it's not a direct response, still it's hard not to see Sony Online's foray into RTS gaming as some kind of a reaction to Blizzard's moving their WarCraft franchise into the Sony-dominated MMORPG world with *World of WarCraft*. Maybe it's coincidence, maybe it's revenge, or maybe it's just lust for the mighty dollar, but *EverQuest* is moving into a brand new neighborhood.

Lords of EverQuest is looking to budgeon WarCraft by giving gamers more more. More units, more players in multi-player games, more magical items and artifacts, and more hero units. The game takes place some 10,000 years prior to events in the current version of EQ, and has to do with the Shadowlands fighting the um, not-Shadowlands for the typical complete and utter control of the world.

Yeah, OK, whatever. What really matters is that virtually everything in EQ is making the jump—and that includes both spells and monsters. Developer Rapid Eye Entertainment (made up of New World Computing vets, which is a very good thing) is promising a single player campaign that could take 70+ hours to complete. Also, for the first time ever, Sony will deliver free, that's right free, online multi-player gaming via a very Battle.net-like matching system. Our initial peek at this game was positive, with the 3D engine doing a fine job with terrain and rendering the plethora of units and heroes very well. The spell effects, however, were serviceable if not particularly impressive.

Stay tuned for hands-on impressions of *Lords of EverQuest* when the beta test begins. We're intrigued as to whether Sony can best Blizzard at its own game.

Lords of EverQuest is looking to budgeon WarCraft by giving gamers more more.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, August 1998

What game was everybody talking about in the summer of '98? Nothing,

really. Our highest rated games that month were *Might and Magic VI: World Cup 98*, and the *Total Annihilation* expansion. Ho-hum. The big news was EQ, where there was a terrific lineup of PC titles, just like this year. Back then we analyzed *Homebrew* as *Game of Show*, but also called out *Half-Life*, *Grim Fandango*, *Age of Empires II*, and *Alphie Centauri*. OK, we also praised *Mission*, but nobody bets 1000.



Ten Years Ago, August 1993

Adventure games ruled 10 years ago, with reviews that ran three pages

apiece! We proclaimed *Freddy Pharkas*, *Frontier Pharmaclet* a left riot and gave *The Seventh Guest* a thumbs-up even though its "very stringent hardware demands include a 3860X processor, 2MB of RAM, and a 16-bit SVGA video card with 512K of memory." Zainka! You could run that baby on one of those computerized Japanese super-toilets today.



Fifteen Years Ago, August 1988

We celebrated our glorious 50th issue by announcing the

winners of our easy contest. Here's the runner-up's entry: "I was playing *Dungeon Master* and crossed the room when I noticed some movement on the screen and yelled to my friend 'Kill that Beholder!' My mom thought I was talking to her and picked up the mouse and attempted to kill the monster by applying the mouse directly to the screen."



FREE GAMING: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrd Baker

Shareware and freeware

In this era of 4GB installs, it's easy to forget that games don't have to be complicated to be good. Here are three titles with play value that far exceeds their simple mechanics.

Starbase 600

\$24.95

www.mozoad.com

Starbase is best described as Asteroids on steroids. Action

plays out on vast maps packed with enemies, asteroids, and bases; the entire game is tied together with a simple storyline and role-playing elements. It's a great combination, and graphics are colorful and verted enough to dispel complaints about the low fixed resolution.



Bandits Rage: Infinite Pain

Free

www.o3software.net

Don't let the screenshot fool you—a static image can't convey the bloody,

nonstop action of this freeware tribute to the click-and-play gem *Destruction Carnage*. Seven weapons randomly appear on the screen, and it's your job to pick them up and destroy waves of enemies. Sounds easy, but everything moves so fast that it's hard to dodge bullets and guard dogs, let alone shoot anything. The game takes up only a few meg of disc space, making it a terrific laptop diversion.



Car Thief 4

\$19.95

www.maximegames.com/carthief

Players are tasked with stealing cars across the U.S., with a variety of

items like locks, wiring and electronics that improve with practice and training. Specialists can be hired to compensate for weaknesses, but they take a cut of the money, making it even tougher to pay off loan sharks or upgrade tools. It's packed with just enough surprises to justify the price.



DAY OF DEFEAT

World War II Online Action From the Makers of Counter-Strike!

Back the Attack!

"One
endlessly-playable
package."

— PC Gamer



★ IN STORES NOW ★



Connect with voice support.



Battle with authentic artillery.



Play WWII's greatest battles.

VALVE

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ACTIVISION

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight Microsoft
A new milestone in the award-winning Flight Simulator franchise. Experience history at the controls of historic aircraft, such as the Spirit of St. Louis, and the world's first successful powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer.



Halo 2 Microsoft
Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.



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



EverQuest II Sony
Adds significant improvements over the original massively multiplayer online role-playing game with a completely new, cutting-edge 3-D engine with a host of technological features that generate an unparalleled, visually stunning 3-D world.



Madden NFL 2004 EA Sports
The most complete, authentic sports video game ever: in-depth features like free online gameplay, new Draft Match play, League play, tournaments, and more career stats allow you to create championship caliber plays.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Star Wars Galaxies: The Empire Divided Sony
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.



Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne Blizzard
Following in the tradition of previous Blizzard expansion sets, this game provides gamers with a vast new chapter in the epic Warcraft saga. Revisit the war-torn world of Azeroth where a new threat has arisen throughout the land.



Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Undeath Expansion Pack BNW
BNW'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.



Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness Ubi
Interactive Lara Croft returns in Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. Accused of the murder of her one time mentor Von Croy and pursued by the police, Lara is drawn into a dark world of blood, betrayal and vengeance.



Enter the Matrix Ubi
Features awesome martial arts and spectacular gunplay as they 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.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

The gamers have spoken



Road to Rome paved with gold and soaked in blood.



C&C: Generals rakes the competition.



Spearhead: WWII roller coaster of love.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome (EA)	★★★★★
2	Command & Conquer: Generals (EA)	★★★★★
3	Medal of Honor: Spearhead (EA)	★★★★★
4	Unreal II: The Awakening (EpicGames)	★★★★★
5	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubisoft)	★★★★★
6	SimCity 4 (EA)	★★★★★
7	Freelancer (Microsoft)	★★★★★
8	RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 (AtariGames)	★★★★★
9	Medieval: Total War (Activision)	★★★★★
10	DeLa Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)	★★★★★
11	Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (LucasArts)	★★★★★
12	Day of Defeat (Activision)	★★★★★
13	Vietcong (Gathering of Developers)	★★★★★
14	EverQuest: Legacy of Ykesha (Sony)	★★★★★
15	Bookworm (PopCap Games)	★★★★★
16	Civilization III: Play the World (Maxis/Simulacra)	★★★★★
17	High Heat Baseball 2004 (3DO)	★★★★★
18	Impossible Creatures (Microsoft)	★★★★★
19	Galactic Civilizations (Strategy First)	★★★★★
20	Praetorians (Eidos)	★★★★★

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last six months. 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**

A note on the delay system: the quarter system that we list many games in divides the year into quarters with Jan-Mar being Q1, Apr-June being Q2, and so on. We can only give you approximate dates because the companies are often uncertain about the exact release dates.



1 OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2 Bohemia Interactive is hard at work on the sequel. Though details are scarce, we know that the game will take place between 1968 and 1974 during the wars by proxy between the two superpowers. They'll take place in three different locations: Southeast Asia, Central Europe, and Angola. While there will be graphics improvements, Bohemia promises the feel of the game will be true to the original.



2 DUNGEON SIEGE II Continuing the trend of enclosures without screenshots, Microsoft unveiled plans for *Dungeon Siege II* during E3. Though it uses the same engine as the original, the graphics have been notched up quite a bit. Gas Powered Games, the developers, have been working on the sequel since the original came out, so they've had a lot of time to focus on gameplay. We expect it towered fell of 2004.



3 VICTORIA: EMPIRE UNDER THE SUN *Victoria: Empire Under the Sun* will focus on the later stages of the Industrial Revolution, from 1835 to 1920. The diplomatic model will be akin to *Europa Universalis*, with alliances, limited colonial wars, and national prestige. The military side will be more like *Hearts of Iron*, with division-size units and tactical decisions playing a major part. This title should be finished near the end of the year.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
<i>Age of Mythology: The Titans</i>	Microsoft	Q3 2003
<i>Age of Wonders: Reactor Magic</i>	Gathering	Q3 2003
<i>Anarchy Online: Shadowlands</i>	Fancom	Q4 2003
<i>Aquaax 2</i>	Jethead	Q3 2003
<i>Armed and Dangerous</i>	LucasArts	Q4 2003
<i>Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of War</i>	EA	Sept. 2003
<i>Battlefield Command</i>	Codemasters	Q1 2004
<i>Battlefield Vietnam</i>	EA	2004
<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2003
<i>Rock & White 2</i>	EA	Q2 2004
<i>Call of Duty</i>	Activision	Q4 2003
<i>City of Heroes</i>	NCsoft	Q2 2004
<i>Conexxos 3</i>	Eidos	Q4 2003
<i>Cold Zero</i>	Jethead	Q3 2003
<i>Croaking Tiger: Hidden Dragon</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2003
<i>Crossfire Kings</i>	Strategy First	Q4 2003
<i>Defender of the Crown</i>	Codemasters	Q3 2003
<i>Deus Ex: The Invisible War</i>	Eidos	Q4 2003
<i>Deus II</i>	Activision	Q4 2003
<i>Dragna Engines</i>	Codemasters	Q1 2004
<i>Driver 3</i>	Absari	Q4 2003
<i>Dungeon Siege II</i>	Microsoft	2004
<i>EverQuest II</i>	Sony	Q4 2003
<i>Evil Genius</i>	Wired	Q3 2004
<i>Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island</i>	EA	Q3 2003
<i>Frost Fantasy XI</i>	Sony	Q4 2003
<i>Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels</i>	LucasArts	Q4 2003
<i>Galaxy Antromede</i>	CIV	Q4 2003
<i>Outcasts & Demons: Temple of Elemental Evil</i>	Azari	Q4 2003
<i>Ground Control 2</i>	Wired	Q3 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
<i>Gold Wars</i>	NCsoft	Q4 2004
<i>Half-Life 2</i>	Sierra	Q4 2003
<i>Half-Life Counter-Strike: Condition Zero</i>	Sierra	Q2 2003
<i>Halo</i>	Microsoft	Q3 2003
<i>Harpoon 4</i>	Ubisoft	Q3 2003
<i>Blades & Demons 2</i>	200 Games	Q3 2003
<i>The Hobbit</i>	Wired	Q3 2003
<i>Ironwrest 2</i>	Sierra	Q3 2003
<i>Naked: Kings of War</i>	Unknown	Unknown
<i>Lineage II</i>	NCsoft	Q3 2003
<i>LionHeart</i>	Interplay	Q3 2003
<i>Lock-On</i>	Ubisoft	Q3 2003
<i>Lords of EverQuest</i>	Sony	Q4 2003
<i>Lords of the Realm III</i>	Sierra	Q4 2003
<i>Lord of the Rings: Return of the King</i>	EA	Q4 2003
<i>Madden NFL 2004</i>	EA	Q3 2003
<i>The Matrix Online</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
<i>Max Payne 2</i>	Rockstar	Q4 2003
<i>Model of Honor: Pacific Assault</i>	EA	Q1 2004
<i>Men of Valor</i>	Wired	2004
<i>Midnight: North Dallas</i>	Wired	Unknown
<i>The Movies</i>	Ubisoft	Q1 2004
<i>Nyctica</i>	Microsoft	Q2 2004
<i>Warhammer Night: Shadows of Helmspit</i>	Azari	June 2003
<i>Operation Flashpoint 2</i>	Codemasters	2004
<i>Pezors</i>	CDV	Q4 2004
<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i>	Behaside	July 2003
<i>Prince of Persia: Sands of Time</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2003
<i>Quake 4</i>	A division	Unknown
<i>Refined Toyon 3</i>	Gathering	Q3 2003
<i>Republic: The Revolution</i>	Eidos	Q2 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
<i>Return of the King</i>	EA	Q4 2003
<i>Rome: Total War</i>	Activision	Q4 2003
<i>Sam and Max 2</i>	LucasArts	Q1 2004
<i>Savage</i>	Games	June 2003
<i>Secret Weapons Over Normandy</i>	LucasArts	Q3 2003
<i>Shade</i>	Tri Synergy	Q1 2004
<i>StarCity 4: Rush Hour</i>	EA	Q3 2003
<i>Star Wars Galaxies</i>	LucasArts	Q3 2003
<i>Star Wars Jedi: Knight: Jedi Academy</i>	LucasArts	Q4 2003
<i>Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic</i>	LucasArts	Q3 2003
<i>Slayers: Oblivion Lost</i>	GGC	2004
<i>SMART: Urban Justice</i>	Sierra	Unknown
<i>Team Fortress 2</i>	Sierra	Unknown
<i>Thief III</i>	Eidos	Q4 2003
<i>Tom Clancy: Angel of Darkness</i>	Eidos	Q3 2003
<i>Total Annihilation 2</i>	Azari	Q4 2003
<i>Trikes Weapons</i>	Sierra	Q4 2004
<i>Trinity</i>	Activision	Q1 2004
<i>Tron 2.0</i>	Disney	Aug 2003
<i>The Treach</i>	Wired	Q3 2003
<i>Ultima X</i>	EA	Q4 2003
<i>Ultima: Dawn of War</i>	Azari	Q4 2003
<i>Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines</i>	Activision	2004
<i>WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne</i>	Blizzard	Q3 2003
<i>War of the Rings</i>	Wired	Q3 2004
<i>War Times</i>	Strategy First	Q3 2003
<i>Warlords IV</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2003
<i>World of Warcraft</i>	Blizzard	Q2 2004
<i>World War II</i>	Codemasters	Q5 2004
<i>XIII</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2003

■ NEW ■ UPDATE

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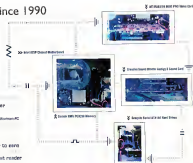
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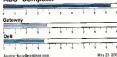
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Bob Tribel shows off the amazing new toy retro, since Tribes: Vengeance is a prequel Phoenix needs to see.



Two tribesmen trade fashion tips in Tribes: Vengeance.



It's not the official Tribes: Vengeance trailer, but it's a good one.

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Single-player strikes back with, you guessed it, a vengeance **By Thierry**

While many players enjoy plugging bullets into Jerry in Battlefield 1942, they're unwittingly paying tribute to 1999's Tribes. Incorporating both heavy teamplay and easy-to-use vehicles, Tribes helped kick-start the whole "cooperative teamplay" dynamic in online multiplayer-action games and introduced slang like "skling" into the multiplayer-shooter vernacular. The unfortunately early release of Tribes 2 snatched away goodwill from the fans, and the collapse of Dynamix as a company pretty much put the kibosh on the franchise as a whole. Until now, that is, thanks to Tribes: Vengeance.

Since Dynamix is no longer around, Tribes will continue with the most surprising of developers: Irrational Games. Being developed in Irrational's Canberra (the same studio that worked on Freedom Force), Tribes: Vengeance will be the first Tribes title with a true single-player component. Where the previous games used single-player as a tutorial only, Tribes: Vengeance will have a fully fleshed-out campaign that draws upon a lot of the Starsiege lore seen only in manuals, among other enhancements (such as multiplayer and the current Unreal engine).

THE TRIBE HAS SPOKEN

Slated for release sometime in 2004, Tribes: Vengeance features a sprawling



This Phoenix Heavy armor is really to tear stuff up.

Freedom Force, is the scribe for Tribes: Vengeance, expectations amplify.

Tribes: Vengeance will also use multiple perspectives to tell the story. An early prototype scenario showed Julia encountering a key character at the end of a mission; the next mission takes place 20 years earlier with the player as a 5-year-old Julia. Other examples include witnessing a character get assassinated and then playing the next chapter as said assassin. You'll likely play a total of five to six characters, with three of them being the central characters.

SECRET TRIBAL RITUALS

Producer Chris Mahanek is being exceptionally coy about specific game details, in light of the fact that Tribes: Vengeance is scheduled for a late 2004 release—the game is still in a very early state. "There are going to



Multiple-level floating bases, missing in Tribes 2, are back and better than ever. Really.



There will be a sniper rifle; it just has to undergo careful multiplayer balancing.

Tribes: Vengeance features a sprawling and epic story that echoes the Bible in content and Pulp Fiction in storytelling.

and epic tale that echoes the Bible in content and Pulp Fiction in storytelling. Without giving away too much, the plot starts with the main character, Julia, wondering what's up with her mom—and then learning more than she bargained for. Set about 300 years prior to the previous games, Vengeance should define the Tribes universe we've seen in earlier iterations. In another game, we'd scoff at the idea of an "engaging story," but considering that Ken Levine, who crafted the superb stories of both System Shock 2 and

be jetpacks, skling, and the disc launcher, but everything else is up for grabs," comments Mahanek. "There will most likely be four vehicles, two air and two ground, but nothing more specific than that right now." Mahanek doesn't want to commit to naming any specific vehicle, only to have it removed in testing.

Despite Tribes: Vengeance taking place roughly 300 years before Tribes, the weapons and vehicles will still look pretty slick and modern. Mahanek has an actual explanation for why tech looks

roughly the same, despite the 300-year gap: Tribes 1 and 2 featured only the tribes, with no presence of the Empire, and are far, far away from the centers of technology. The tribes are so backward in the earlier games that everything they have is considered "old, broken-up crap," à la Tiberium. The perpetually up-to-date Empire possesses such vastly superior technology that for them, 300-year-old tech is roughly equal to weapons from other Tribes games.

As for multiplayer, Irrational recently hired Michael "KineticPoet" Johnston, a well-known member of the Tribes community, to helm the multiplayer design. Since he created the popular Team Rabbit 2 mod for Tribes 2 and knows the community inside and out, die-hard fans should feel relieved that Irrational is planning to hit both single- and multiplayer with full force.

The launch of Tribes 2 was a major debacle, but with the realistic time frame and the developer behind it, Tribes: Vengeance could easily wipe the tarnish off the Tribes name.

GAME STATS

BASED: WICKED MINDFUL
 DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES
 GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
 TROUPOUS: SHOOTER
 RELEASE: 2004

ANCE

Nguyen



You can knock out the lights and leave bad guys tumbling around in the dark.

There are plenty of things to interact with in the environment, including this turret.



"They can take away our development time, but they'll never take OUR FREEDOM!" Apparently, *Acta prima* were inspired by *Breshaart*.

FREEDOM

Patrick Swayze, eat your heart out **By Darren Gladstone**

Forget everything you know about World War II. The Russians, hot to make Communism a household ideology, developed and dropped the first A-bomb. Germany crumpled, Japan gave up, and Europe quickly fell under the boot heel of Stalin. Who is left to stand up to the Red Menace? Not us. America is being invaded in EA's *Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty*. IO Interactive, the creative force behind the *HITMAN* series, has been working on *Freedom* for some time now, and all we've got to say is "Vive le révolution!"

RISE TO POWER

Not since the Reagan-era classic *Red Dawn* has there been such a jingoistic tale of resisting the Communist maniacs. In this guerrilla warfare adventure, you're cast as an everyday Joe turned underground soldier. There are 19 levels spanning nine open-environment neighborhoods to explore, and each has misquests you can solve along the way to your larger goal: liberation.

Tear down a propaganda sign here, raise a flag there—as you begin fighting back, you gain more street cred. Unlike IO's previous games, you're far from alone in gunning for your objectives. Sure, things start off small, but as time moves on the game takes place during all four seasons in New Moscow—er—New York City, our hero gains charisma and the ability to recruit others to the cause.

The realtest aspect of *Freedom* is the recruiting and commanding of your troops. The open-ended levels will have you rescuing some people and drafting others scattered throughout a war-torn New York City. By the end of the game, you'll have as many as 12 freedom fighters covering your back. Unlike *Rogue Spear*, though, this third-person squad-combat game focuses on action. Point at a location onscreen and you'll be able to quickly issue commands. More important, in a first-hand demo we saw the computer-controlled comrades behaving well under fire.

SMART SOLDIERS

Astute eyes may have caught this game at E3 2002, but there was a lot of work that needed to be done back then—mostly on the A.I., according to assistant product manager Anthony Calazzo. But now it's starting to look feebly buttoned down. Troops duck for cover, smartly move to proper positions, and even brace against walls and look around corners before advancing. When near turret positions, they do a decent job of holding the line. If only some gamers played this well. Lead designer Mats Prahm also promises plenty of unscripted intelligence driving the



Take to the gritty city streets—and rooftops—of New York City.

Unlike *Rogue Spear*, this third-person squad combat game focuses on action.

Russians. "They will react to how you play, chasing you around corners and into buildings if you run away," says Prahm. When you aren't bossing troops around, *Freedom* supports eight-player multiplayer matches.

Now that IO has worked out most of the A.I.-related bugs, the focus of development is on graphics, gimmicks, and levels. The terrain changes through the course of *Freedom* (as the game progresses, New York City reverts to its pre-Ghaziani squalor), and the Glacier graphics engine has been polished to a keen shine at this point. The now prerequisite dynamic lighting, rain, snow, and smoke effects are already in place. Whether shooting out lights down a hallway with a machine gun or lobbing a Molotov cocktail into a car (there will be about 12 weapons in all), what's here looks pretty good.

At press time, the game was only 40 percent complete. Not bad, but IO has an ambitious schedule laid out by Electronic Arts. In order to hit its late fall deadline, the developer needs to blast through the remaining 60 percent of the development process and do some beta testing and bug killing. After consulting former play tester and COG whipping boy, Di Luo, it seems like there's a lot to do in a short amount of time. This means one of three things: 1) the developers will light a fire under their asses and get it done, 2) the release date will be pushed back, or 3) the game will release simultaneously with a 25MB patch. Let's hope for choice No. 1.



"We like the cars, the cars that go BOOM!"

GAME STATS

FOR ONE ELECTRONIC ARTS
 RELATED IO INTERACTIVE
 GIGI: SOULD-BASED
 ACTION-ADVENTURE
 BUDGET: FALL 2003



Heroic? No.
Effective? Yes.



Avoiding a good kill.



You can kill by flinging garbage.



Color-coordinated violence has never before looked this pretty.

XIII

There goes the comic book code **By Di Luo**

Amesia is all the rage these days. Between *The Bourne Identity* and John Doe, there's a glut of memory-impaired übermenschens who can kill with their plinky fingers and play a mean Mozart at the same time. Add one more to the pileup, XIII, the first-person shooter from Ubi Soft, is looking to fill the amnesia slot in the game market.

A BLANK SLATE

Based on a successful series of Belgian comics, you begin on a deserted beach with nothing but a gunshot wound, a funky XIII tattoo on your neck, a key, and hordes of enemies out to annihilate you. While attempting to clear out the cobwebs, you also happen to be the prime suspect in the assassination of the president of the United States.



We may have seen it all before, but we haven't seen it like this.

Fighting against mysterious terrorists and government organizations, you must try to regain your memory and uncover the truth that lies behind the vast conspiracy.

We may have heard it all before, but we haven't seen it like this. XIII is highly stylized and designed to make you feel like you're flipping through the pages of a gory graphic novel. Thanks to gritty cel-shaded graphics and the Unreal II engine, there's a surprisingly adult vibe here. (Although after you've lodged a glass shard into someone's head during the game, it isn't as surprising.)

Playing to the comic aesthetic, there are some interesting conventions carried over from the books. There will be the requisite "BAM!" "BOOM!" and "AWRRGH!" sounds that correspond to the onscreen violence. Gunshots result in fountains of blood, and explosions send bodies flying. Good shots with certain weapons even conjure pop-up comic panels with grisly close-ups of the hit.

The comic-book conventions assist in gameplay as well as in the gruesome visuals. "We wanted to tell a story by using everything used in comic books," says associate producer Damien Moret. To illustrate that point, we saw "zap, zap, zap" appear onscreen to represent the sound of enemies walking around a corner. Occasionally, you'll even get pop-up panels warning you of impending ambushes and close-ups of key areas you need to visit.

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT
XIII's 13 missions (which cover 34 levels)

run the gamut of spy-thriller conventions. There will be infiltration missions where your character begins unarmed and intense VIP escort missions where you must fight off dozens of enemies in order to keep your charge safe.

To do the job, you'll have the usual array of weapons and gadgets. There are 13 standard weapons, including crossbows, assault rifles, and rocket launchers, each with an alternative-life mode. You'll need to choose your weapons and tactics carefully, though, because you can only hang onto four weapons at a time.

And when you run out of bullets, you can improvise with objects: Chairs, bottles, ashtrays, and shards of glass can turn into deadly weapons in your hands. Heck, you can even take your enemies hostage and use them as human shields. "We really want people to interact with the environment in as many ways as possible," says Moret.

The story-driven missions and comic-book feel can easily give you a very memorable single-player experience, no doubt, but it looks like Ubi Soft is putting a good deal of attention into the multiplayer as well. Since this game is coming simultaneously to just about every platform known to man, Ubi Soft is looking to create unique multiplayer modes specific to each platform. What's in store for the PC? Expect the usual Deathmatch and Capture the Flag. No word on what it'll be called, but one of Moret's favorites is a cover/escort-type mission that has one player running through the level and the other acting as a sniper providing support.



Let me introduce you to my less-than-friend.



Your mission objectives unfold in a comic-book style.

The code we had the pleasure of witnessing was nearing completion, and the developers are now adding the last touches to the various levels before putting the game through the standard testing and balancing routines. If all goes well, we should be able to play this unique, stylized game by September.

GAME STATS

PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX
 DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT
 GENRE: ACTION/SHOOTER
 COMIC BOOK
 RELEASE DATE: Q3 2003

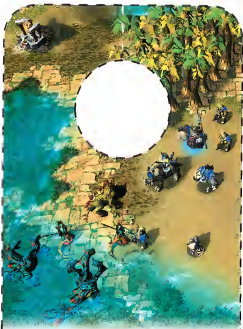


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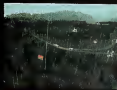
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You whippersnappers think you've got it made with all your fancy scooters and Jet Skis. Well, you don't know diddly until you've been on the 6222 to Wichita! At least PopTop's Railroad Tycoon 3 hasn't forgotten what that's like.

The first, and most obvious, change to the Railroad Tycoon series is that it's now fully 3D. Not only is the game much prettier, but by letting action unfold in a "real" world, PopTop also

require a ton of horsepower to play? Think again. Railroad Tycoon 3 will run on a mere Pentium II 350 with a 16MB TNT1 card. Of course, all you fancy-pants gamers with newfangled rigs can run the game at up to a 1600x1200 resolution.

Track laying is done essentially the same way as in previous games, but this time, bridges, tunnels, and overpasses (made of stone, wood, or steel) are automatically put in when needed. Gamers can also add up to two

Not only is the 3D game much prettier, but it will make gameplay more versatile.

sets of double tracks in their stations (up from one) to better manage train traffic. The folks at PopTop say there should be about 45 different locomotives to choose from, with designs from the 1830s to the future, and artistic players will be able to customize skins.

The single-player game will include about 15 scenarios and a separate tutorial. Not satisfied with the campaign to riches? Build custom 1000x1000-mile maps with the included editor, and the 3D world lets you add tunnels, bridges, and the like. Also added is a much-requested Undo feature to edit mistakes. Think it'll

hope to make the economics and gameplay more versatile and easier to dig into. Now, budding robber barons can buy Industries and place them wherever they want on the map, thereby building 3D towns. Instead of just clicking on a station, Industries produce goods on their own, and beginners can choose automatic management of trains, so they don't have to specify cargo. There are some other new twists as well. For instance, if you buy a coal business, you'll get a bonus on fuel costs.

The strategic map view has a zoom, so you can now view two entities that are close together. A speed control and custom halkeys let you stay on top of the action, and there's even a feature that lets the camera follow an individual train's route. Improved multitasking lets you do things like buy or sell stock while following a locomotive's progress. Naturally, there's multiplayer competition as well, and as of this writing, it will probably include support for up to eight players. Look forward to riding the rails when Railroad Tycoon 3 pulls out of the yard this fall.

GAME STATS

PRICE: \$49.95
 INTERACTIVE
 DEVELOPER: POPTOP
 PUBLISHER: NEWMEDIA
 TITLE: SIM
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2000

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

Captains of industry can ride the rails again **By John Marrin**



The forces of good and evil duke it out for control of a stone.



Control the desert to increase your own trade level and magic income.

Triumph has been cooking up plenty of new goods in its cauldron.

Wizards are always mucking things up. Even with Michael Jordan on their team they couldn't...ah, sorry—not those Wizards, I mean the ones in Triumph Studios' latest fantasy game, *Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic*. In this latest Age installment, mages have caused an imbalance in nature by playing too fast and loose with the natural order. They've used too much magic, and now the Shadow World's nasty denizens threaten to consume all that's good. Naturally, everyone is blaming the magic users for this debacle, and it's up to you to set things right.

New to the series? This turn-based empire-building game has you spread your influence over the map by controlling territory and resources—essentially mana for magic and gold for buying the services of heroes and constructing buildings and other items. Naturally, you have competition, and when you square off against an enemy, the game switches to a tactical battle mode where you pit your fantasy forces against your foe.

In development since the release of *Age II*, the game offers plenty of new goods that Triumph has cooked up in its cauldron. Most notable is a new desert

race dubbed the Nomads. Able to relocate cities by picking up and moving out in a caravan, they can help spread your influence. And living off slave trading, these wanderers make for a very unique race that can capture enemy units.

A magic-item forge has also been added. With the forge, gamers can create magical weapons, but the cost is extremely high, making these items quite valuable. In addition, a slew of new units (40 to 50 at the time of this writing) and around 30 new spells have been put into the game for a total of more than 150. That should give even veteran gamers plenty of magic to research. If you'd rather focus on the bigger picture, there's no need to get your hands bloody. Triumph added an Auto-battle mode that quickly resolves conflicts. There's also another added twist: Enemies will surrender if you have an overwhelming force.

Age veterans will find plenty of ways to dig into the game after finishing the single-player campaigns. Whether you're in skirmish mode or crave eight-way multiplayer matches, you can utilize a number of tweaks to the map generator. First, you pick a game style: Battle Scenario, Epic, or Empire. Next, a slew of options, including settings for terrain, treasure, and



This is what happens when you leave a cold cup on top of a pile of screenshots instead of a coaster. (OK, it's really a water spell in action.)

number of heroes, let you create just the type of world you want. A new customization feature lets more hardcore creative types import their own artwork to the game, as well as edit all of a unit's individual stats, basically giving the creative gamer a fantasy-strategy construction set to tinker with.

Stay tuned for more updates as we wait for the game's release this coming September.

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: TRIUMPH STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: TRIUMPH STUDIOS
ONLY TURN-BASED SPELL-CASTING
RELEASED: OCT. 11, 2006
PRICE: \$19.99

AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC

Fantasy empire-building enters new territory **By John Marrin**



Money can't buy everything, just premium ad placement. So what is undiscovered game development talent supposed to do? Rely on word of mouth alone? Not here, friends. Each month, we'll keep our eyes peeled and ears to the ground, picking the best and brightest titles under production worldwide. Your job is to check out these titles and make the developers so big that they won't return our calls.

SPACE EMPIRES: STARFURY

BY SHRAPNEL GAMES
ONE-PLAYER GAME
RELEASED: JULY 2000

SPREAD THE WORD: In the swirling maelstrom of computer gaming trends, few markets remain as steadfast as the 4X genre. Developer Malfador Machinations knows this; it has struck gold four times over with the cult classic Space Empires series. In its latest incarnation, the franchise boldly ventures into unknown territory: an RPG. Rather than control entire galaxies, as in previous installments, interstellar conquistadores command a lone ship, pursuing the path of pirate, merchant, or mercenary. Is this the next Freelancer?

BEST UNHEARD: In space, no one can hear you squeal with girlish delight. Sold only online in Shrapnel Games' virtual store, the unwashed masses could easily overlook this sweet-looking game. Return customers

summons an army of Templar heroes to him. Joining them or the haughty Heretics, you'll fight for sole possession of 12 sacred sites in an ongoing conflict spread across 48 vast environments. Someone remind us—just how many Hall Marys was it for slaughtering an innocent newbie?

BEST UNHEARD: The Cthulhu mythos hasn't had much luck games-wise. Shadow of the Comet bit, and Dark Corners of the Earth scored a second chance by the skin of its teeth. Korean publisher JC Entertainment isn't a fan favorite either...at least, we think, since no one in this hemisphere knows who the hell they are. But, given the popularity of the subject matter and the company's track record for successful Asian launches, Priest could be a sleeper hit.

PLANET PRISON

BY SCHNITZ INTERACTIVE
ONE STRATEGY
RELEASED: CHRISTMAS 2000

SPREAD THE WORD: Ach du lieber! Ze Germans are at it again, crafting yet another intriguing tactical strategy game. As one of two characters who've just crash-landed on a (duh) prison planet, escape is paramount. Controlling several dozen units, you'll explore futuristic locales from a top-down, isometric perspective, doing battle with vying gangs and evil imperialist forces.

OUTTA SIGHT

The best games you've never seen **By Scott Steinberg**



might not appreciate the change of pace either...lock what a sweeping makeover did for Messiah of Orion 3. As the game is still in the beta stage, it's too soon to tell if Starfury will wind up rocketing to success or such like a black hole.

PRIEST

BY JC ENTERTAINMENT
ONLINE MMORPG
RELEASED: JULY 2000

SPREAD THE WORD: H.R. Lovecraft meets High Noon—what's not to love about that? Here's the only MMO set in a twisted Wild West scenario, where monsters roam free and scheming archangels threaten heaven's very sanctity. Disgraced priest Ivan Isaacs

Simulated social structures actually come into play across 30 levels and 16-player network confrontations, as does a suitably pleasing amount of blaster fire.

BEST UNHEARD: We know what you're thinking, but no—there isn't a shower scene in sight. Graphically, the game resembles Fallout Tactics (which means it looks kind of dated), but the chief drawback operating here is inexperience. Both the developer, Numlock Software, and publisher, Schanz Interactive, of the project have little to no track record regarding game development. That isn't to say these guys won't be capable of pulling an ace out of their collective sleeves, but then one never gets a second chance to make a first impression.



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CGW ASKS THE QUESTIONS EVERYONE
ELSE IS TOO LAZY TO ASK

NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.

For the first time in two years, the CGW editors were able to enjoy the annual E3 convention in Los Angeles without once having to endure the dreaded "What's up with PC gaming?" question. Why? Because this year, the answer was all over the show floor: It's thriving.

With the hype and novelty of next-gen consoles waning off, PC gaming reasserted itself in a big way, grabbing a surprisingly significant share of the E3 buzz. We need offer no more proof than *Half-Life 2*, which was by everyone's account the hands-down game of the show, regardless of platform. At times, the lines to see the *Half-Life 2* demo were four hours long—that's how excited people were. And the amazing demo only justified the hype.

The bigger story, however, was not this one game, but the fact that there were so many PC games—and so many promising ones. We went into this show a little weary and jaded—because that's how we are here—but we left completely invigorated and excited, remembering why we love this job.

If this E3 was any indication, it's going to be a hell of a year for PC games. Read the next 10 pages to find out why.

E3 SUPERGUIDE

PC!

BY THE EDITORS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

HALF-LIFE 2 OR DOOM III?

THIS IS PRETTY DAMN easy, since we saw a full-blown *Half-Life 2* demo and only a looping trailer of *Doom III*. Since *Half-Life 2* was the one of the show with a presence, it kinda wins the "best PC shooter of E3" question by default. *Doom III* still has an amazing engine with the best lighting around, but *Half-Life 2* totally dominated the show with its use of characters, graphics, physics, and gameplay. Id has a lot to live up to—*Half-Life 2* is pretty much making straightforward shooting galleries irrelevant.



HALF-LIFE 2



DOOM III

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

10:

MYTHICA/GUILD WARS

ETA: 2004



OF ALL THE massively multiplayer games we saw at E3, the two that made the biggest impression got our attention because they skip the "massively" of multiplayer and use the turn-based combat. Microsoft's *Mythica* charges players to become a Norse god with honest-to-god action-based combat (conducted in private realms; see "MMORPGs, too much of an OK thing?" on page 60).

Guild Wars from NCsoft also lets you undertake your action-packed adventures in private battlegrounds and features a unique leveling system. Players acquire skills they can select prior to missions, basically composing an eight-skill "deck" that ideally complements the rest of their pal's skills. With support for guild tournaments, bonuses for 100-plus players, and no monthly fee, *Guild Wars*, like *Mythica*, is a 2004 release.





THANKFULLY, THE DAYS OF EVERYONE AND their great aunt making an RTS are long gone. After all—does mankind really need another *Trials of Mana* or *Dominion*? With few exceptions, the real-time strategy genre was notably unrepresented at E3. In fact, the closest things to big-time traditional RTS titles were add-ons for *WarCraft III* and *Age of Mythology*. *Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age* is OK, but struck us as little more than a tightly focused *Empire Earth*, while *Lords of the Realm III* and *War of the Ring* are just depressing. The one truly bright light is Kohan's sequel. In short, it's looking like the real-time genre is right about where RPGs were a few years back—a bit played out and in need of fresh ideas.

And it looks like RPGs are once again in need of those ideas, at least for lone players. The vast majority of the RPG game seems to be moving online—*Lineage II*, *Mythica*, *EverQuest II*, and on and on and on. Oh, Bethesda was showing the latest *Morrowind* expansion and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but those two titles alone made up almost half the single-player RPGs shown. *Knights of the Old Republic* looks like a perfectly serviceable RPG, *Temple of Elemental Evil* is impressive, and *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* is just too sad for words. Bottom line: if you're looking to role-play over the next year, be prepared to do it with strangers.

THE RUNNERS-UP



ARMED & DANGEROUS From the minds that brought you *Gladius*, *Clive Barker* comes this messed-up action game. Best new weapon: A corkscrew you drill into the ground and use to flip the entire screen upside down, launching enemies into space.

CITY OF HEROES Finally, a game that lets us wear tighties without eliciting puzzled stares from our coworkers. This superhero MMORPG is shaping up nicely, as Cryptic Studios keeps loading the game with tons of cool superpowers and beautiful character and environmental graphics.

OCUS EX: THE INVISIBLE WAR Warren Spector swears he'll fix all the problems of *Deus Ex* with *TW*. Mum's the word on the story, but everything we've seen—signature Spector gameplay and slick Unreal-powered environments—looks good.



EVERQUEST II Sony Online's monster sequel is looking better than ever. The E3 demo, featuring a battle with a humongous red dragon, gave us hope this will be more than just a retreat. Let us pray.



FINAL FANTASY XI Sure to cheese off console fans, *FFXI* is coming out for PC first. It looks cool, there's a huge online world to explore, and...well, it's *Final Fantasy*. And you'll be able to play online with PS2 gamers.

HALO PC The closest thing Xbox ever had to a killer app is finally coming to PC and it looks pretty sweet. Gearbox is putting a lot of work into Halo's team-based, vehicle-centric online multiplayer, and we couldn't be happier.

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II It's a *BioWare* RPG in the *Star Wars* universe. One of the NPCs is a smart-ass assassin droid. What's not to love? It may feel a little too console-y, but it's still good *gamin'*.

HEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM The creators of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* are putting together an intense depiction of the Vietnam war that seems inspired by movies like *Platoon*.

THE MOVIES Peter Dinklage's next game shows lots of promise. We loved the idea of making movie trailers and sending them to friends. Let's hope there's more of that and less of the *RollerCoaster Tycoon*-style stuff they demo'd.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 Epic talents and gives the people what they want: assault and vehicular combat with hovercraft, flying vehicles, *Hot*-style dune buggies, and more.

RPG
AND
RTS
MIA?
WTF?



ANYONE REMEMBER HOW *Darkfall*, *Pool of Radiance* sucked? It kinda sure did, and the company has taken what it learned from *Fallout* and *Arcanum* and created a sweet-looking *Dungeons & Dragons* RPG. Combining signature *Fallout* gameplay with the D&D setting and some stunning good looks, this game lets your party of five (you can recruit additional mercenaries along the way) relive the classic pen-and-paper module. New twists include starting the game differently according to your party's alignment—evil parties start off by slaughtering townspeople, while the good are welcomed by the king on a quest. And your followers level up with you, so you can theoretically have a Level 10 Chicken of Choke.

**DUNGEONS & DRAGONS:
THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL** ETA: FALL 2003



CITY OF HEROES



GUILD WARS



MYTHICA

MMORPGS: TOO MUCH OF AN OK THING?

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GAMES WERE OUT in strong force at E3—more than 20 titles were shown, while the kinds of games ranged from medieval fantasy (most popular) to superheroes to an occult western (Prestid), there was one notable design trend across the board: story-driven content. Designers hope to achieve this through numerous quests and something many of them referred to as “pocket dungeons.”

Pocket dungeons are private areas spawned for individual players or groups. For example, in the superhero game *City of Heroes*, we tried a pocket dungeon mission that took us into a lost city beneath the bustling metropolis. That secret area was created just for our group of spandex-wearing do-gooders; no other players could come in. Many other games, including *World of Warcraft*, *Mythica*, and *Guild Wars*, have similar schemes. Will these kinds of innovations be enough to excite gamers who may view the MMORPG genre as flooded with clones? Probably not, since the basic gameplay doesn't seem to have changed much. We expect many to hang on to niche titles, if they hang on at all.

Notable games at E3 included *Mythica* and *Guild Wars* (see Top Ten for more info); *The Matrix Online*, which showed off some cool slow-motion action moves; *Warhammer Online*, with some amazingly detailed character graphics; *Middle-earth Online* (you can be evil and still fight Sauron!); *Horizons*, which promises to be a “craftier’s dream”; and *MU*, a hippy-looking Diablo clone from Korea. Most are 2004 titles, so expect bandwidth to be sucked up next year.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

8:

THE SIMS 2

ETA: SPRING 2004



on target for achieving a goal of bringing the Sims back to hardcore gamers, and vice versa.

MAXIS IS REVITALIZING its signature franchise by introducing human mortality and regeneration. Even after Bob Hefwie dies of old age, the introduction of successive generations and digital DNA means you'll be shaping the personalities and traits of his (and other "Sims") infinitely branching family line. Throw in a gorgeous 3D engine, new gameplay elements like the Life Score, and a facial animation system that brings your Sims' emotions to vibrant life and it appears Maxis is



9:

THE GREAT ESCAPE


Shot down behind enemy lines.
A prisoner of the Nazi war machine.
You must guide your band of heroes in the
greatest escape in history.



Strike at the Reich with an
ultimate WWII arsenal!



Commandeer motorcycles, jeeps,
and other military vehicles as
you speed to freedom!



Break from the shadows as you break
past Nazi guards and the Gestapo.



PlayStation 2



ESRB RATING



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WHO'S MAKING MEDAL OF WAR?

SINCE EA'S SUCCESSFUL *Medal of Honor: Front Assault*, three major historical-combat games have been announced, and we've seen some confusing moves among the developers. Let the trusty, crusty soldier's hunk E.C.O.W. set you straight by who's making what.

Let's start with EA's *Medal of Honor* franchise. *Armed Assault* (developed by 2015 EA unicornatoriously dumped 2015 in favor of developing the sequel [*Pacific Assault*] itself at its Los Angeles studio [EALA], 2015, high end dry, decided to make a Vietnam-era shooter [*Men of Valor: Vietnam*], which actually looked darned good at E3.

But some 2015 employees didn't want to make a Vietnam-era shooter, so they drafted up ideas for improving upon a *Medal of Honor*-style game. They broke off from 2015 to create a new company (Infinitely Ward) and a new WWII shooter, *Call of Duty*, which earned a berth in our Top 10 E3 games list.

Of those three games, the only one we haven't seen running is *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*. But we know that all of these titles have unique features, and we believe each will be a worthy contender for the FPS combat crown.

So, are you ready for the quiz? Here's your cheat sheet:
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault, World War II, EALA/EA
Call of Duty: World War II, Infinitely Ward/Activision
Men of Valor: Vietnam, Vietnam War (2015)/Vicendi



MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

HERE'S A GAME you'd think we didn't seem to get enough of: comic-book-graphic violence resides with a first-person shooter. What's not to love? Even after all the times *Ubisoft* has rolled through our offices touting this genre, we were still wowed by what we saw on the show floor at E3. Gorgeous and inventive use of cel shading, some variety in multiplayer modes, and slick new twists on the FPS genre make this cartoony contest one of our top picks from the show.

XIII ETA: WINTER 2003





GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

ARE CROSS-PLATFORM GAMES BAD FOR THE PC?

THIS IS A LOADED QUESTION because cross-platform titles can be both good and bad. On one hand, some titles are coded for the lowest common denominator—that is, if a game comes out on all platforms, you'll often find that the PC version is an afterthought (hello, DOOM: NightFuel!). When done right, though, it's magical, and you wind up with a great game that looks awesome on a hopped-up PC. Case in point: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. Yes, the PS2 had it more than six months ago, but the PC version looks crisp, and what the hell—if the gameplay ain't broke, don't fix it.

As for the trend progressing upward, we're starting to see some good come of this, thanks to the latest powerhouse platforms. Take Xbox, for example. Since Xbox games are based on the Windows XP kernel, some serious cross-pollination with the PC only makes sense. Already, titles like Doom III, Counter-Strike, and Half-Life 2 are Xbox-bound. With all the good console games we've seen, who's to say that pattern can't work in reverse? For cross-platform games to really work, we need each version to take full advantage of the system it was made for. Hey, Rockstar! If you're listening, how's about a 32-player riot in Vice City?

PLEASANT SURPRISES AT E3

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME We'll admit that we almost steered clear of Ubi Soft's booth in hopes of avoiding another Dragon's Lair 3D-like debacle. But after giving our collective loins (not a pretty sight, trust us), we got an eyeful of this cool-looking revamp. Is this the heir apparent to Jordan Mechner's classic? That's still to be determined, but this 3D tilt on the original shows serious promise.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL We were hesitant about this, as we really looked forward to Troika's Arcanum only to find ourselves with mixed feelings about it. But it looks like Troika both fixed what was wrong with Arcanum and preserved and enhanced the mix of Fallout and Dungeons & Dragons, which puts this game into our Top 10 list.



LINEAGE II Lineage, Korea's biggest MMORPG, never really grabbed our attention—but its sequel certainly has. Lineage II makes the Uthgal engine its own, creating a world of towering buildings that features tremendous depth and layering. Incredible spell effects, and mind-blowingly beautiful player-controlled dragons. Riding those dragons will be a key part of Lineage II's enormous castle sieges when it ships this winter.

6:



ROME IS GOING to be a landmark strategy /wargame. From its epic widescreen battles to the finely detailed armor and shields on each soldier, there's never been a strategy game as stunningly cinematic as this one. Picture thousands of soldiers in full motion attacking castles with siege towers, battering rams, catapults, war elephants, war dogs, and more. No other game has even come close to the sweeping spectacle of the one—and we saw it running at E3. Plus, unit control will be easier, with conventional click-and-drag RTS mechanics.

ROME: TOTAL WAR ETA: SUMMER 2004

IS IT ALL ABOUT THE SEQUELS NOW?

PAST E3s HAVE BEEN sequel-driven, but this year's show seemed especially so. At first glance, most games we saw were either direct sequels (we noticed a lot of games with a "2" after the title—and one with a "5" if you can believe that), or re-visits of older franchises. This trend is affecting both PC games and consoles—titles were all aflutter over Halo 2, Metal Gear Solid 2, and even the revised Pac-Man game. In years past, we've managed to find a standout new game to proclaim as Game of Show (such as the original Halo, Star Wars Galaxies, and even Republic), but this year, our big titles tended to have numbers after their names. Even the grand guru of PC games, Sid Meier, announced Rivals 2: a sequel to a 16-year-old game. Thankfully, there are still some original games to watch for, despite this year's sequel-liciousness—and the originals constitute more than half of our Top 10 games from the show.



THE SIMS 2



HALO 2

ARE THERE ANY GOOD LICENSED GAMES?

A FEW, FOR YEARS, LICENSED games—games based on other media, like TV shows, movies, or comics—were practically guaranteed to suck. Gamers recognized the games for what they were: cheap, lazy shelfware cynically designed to take fans' dollars without bothering to provide decent gameplay. These kind of licensed games still exist, for sure (hi, Farscape!), though more common is the licensed game that tries to be good but still can't rise above the mediocre (hi, Enter the Matrix!). This year's E3 was crammed, as usual, with licensed games—American Idol, Buffy, Futurama, Stargate, and Hutch—that we avoided like the plague. But a notable few that we saw—Tren 2.0, Return of the King, Star Wars: Galaxies—give us hope that a license does not have to equal "leeh suck." Call us crazy. Call us naive. But if kicking ass as Gandalf turns out to be as cool as it looked at E3, we may eventually forget all about the trauma that was Survivor.



TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

5.



Call of Duty: World at War (Xbox 360, PS3, PC) is a World War II-themed first-person shooter that offers realistic combat without blood.

CALL OF DUTY ETA: FALL 2003

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DOES MICROSOFT EVEN MAKE PC GAMES ANYMORE?

THAT DEPENDS ON WHETHER YOU consider Microsoft Train Simulator 2.0 to be an actual game or an interactive screensaver. OK, that may be a little harsh, but the truth is that this year's E3 featured tons and tons of Microsoft games on Xbox and something less than a handful of titles for the PC—hardly surprising, considering that a highly placed Microsoft staffer admitted to us that Microsoft has no plans to announce any new PC titles before the year's end. Ouch. So what—other than the choo-choos—was Microsoft showing this year? A trailer for the sequel to Dungeon Siege, a new Flight Simulator, the Rise of the Titans expansion for Age of Mythology, the Xbox port Halo, and—the only truly new title—the MMORPG Mythica. None of these titles was godawful—Mythica looks promising and the graphically upgraded Halo appears to have absolutely killer multiplayer—but compared to recent history, it's hard not to conclude that the giant from Redmond is throwing all of its resources behind its console and leaving the PC behind. Only time will tell if this refocusing is a permanent thing.

GAMES WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

LODS OF THE REALM III Gloddy anticipation rapidly became bitter retdown when we saw the latest incarnation of this storied series. By going fully 3D, completely real-time, and really focusing on multiplayer, Lords has seemingly abandoned everything that made us love this game, and has instead become a pallid Total War clone.



BLACK & WHITE 2 Maybe we're overcompensating for our Black & White review, but we're not sure whether the sequel can riden the original. Graphically, the game looks great, and Lian, and will make creatures smarter and easier to train. But adding Age of Empires-style city-building and armies could make the game unwieldy or unfocused.

FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS Maybe it's because it was running on a PS2. Or maybe it's because it was a too-short demo in a too-load room at E3. Whatever the reason, we walked away a bit worried about this one because it looked far more action-oriented than we expected. Stay tuned, though. We could be totally wrong—and we hope we are.

TOP 10 GAMES FROM E3

4:

TRON 2.0 ETA: AUGUST 26, 2003



OK, SO JUST because we got an autographed photo of Bruce Dickinson at E3 doesn't mean we're biased. We still thought this game rocked. Menzies' 2nd console update of the 1982 movie is looking volder and more fun than ever. What seemed like a horrid idea a year ago has now manifested as one of the most original, startling-looking shooters we've ever seen. Running counter to every other game's fix on "realism," Tron's deliberately artificial game world set inside a fantasy digital universe is a beauty to behold. And Menzies, the maker of such outstanding shooters as NOLF and Akira vs. Predator 2, knows its genres, too. We can't wait.



WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THESE FOREIGNERS?

IT USED TO BE THAT the majority of good PC games came from American developers. Now, we're seeing development houses all over the world bring in top-notch titles for the PC. Why is that? Well, while the big boys stateside are looking to make games for consoles, foreign developers with a PC in the basement and a dream are putting together some fantastic stuff. Where do you think last year's hit, *Battlefield 1942*, came from?

We risked the tiny boats scattered around E3 and came away with a stack of some very cool—and very promising—stuff from those dingy fur-traders. Take GSC's *Stalker: Oblivion Lost*. We've had an eye on this game for a while, and before the start of E3, THQ announced it was picking up the North American rights. Clearly, we were on to something there. Another nod to the underdogs? You're not hearing much talk about Encore's *Galaxy Zoo*, Tri Synergy's *LYD: Aftermath*, or stuff from the Korean-confident JC Entertainment's *Call of Callu*—inspired horror/western MMORPG *Priest* and NCsoft's *Guild Wars*—but you should.



STALKER: OBLIVION LOST



KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS from TimeGate was one of 2003's biggest surprises—a truly original fantasy-strategy game that amazingly beat out Civilization IV for our Strategy Game of the Year award. Now, TimeGate is back with the official sequel, *Kohan: Kings of War*. Based on what we saw at E3, it looks like a solid follow-up. *Kohan*'s unique company-level gameplay remains, but has been tweaked so it's much more newbie-friendly. And a brand-new 3D engine seriously ups the game's look, with great-looking fantasy units and towns—no longer abstracted—now coming to life. It's the best fantasy-strategy game we saw. Now it just needs a publisher.

KOHAN: KINGS OF WAR ETA: 2004



SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT PORTABLE GAMING?

AFTER THIS YEAR'S SHOWING AT E3, we'd have to say "Hell yes!" Though maybe someone should ask Jeff again, since he's too busy playing Pokémon Sapphire on his GBA SP. Sprint PCS is quick to show how dedicated it is to pushing the gaming segment for its users. Sanyo's BIDD is the current cream of the crop, doing a pretty tight job on graphics and games. Even cooler still is what's on the horizon: Samsung's SPH-A600, which will let you flip the LCD screen over on itself and dock the phone in a mini gamepod, so it handles like a GBA. Sprint's game selection looks promising but is still best suited for less taxing titles—we played friggin' Deer Hunter 3D (it wasn't!) and Mr. Pac-Man.

Nokia is trying to explode in the cell phone-gaming space with the N-Gage—a clunky, funky cell phone that'll play games, MP3s, and even radio when you're not chewing up talk-time. It'll sell on October 7 to the tune of \$300 with 10 launch titles. Are you ready to spend that kind of money? We're not. This ambitious cellie strives to be more than a phone, but while the games we knocked around—such as Tomb Raider—looked OK, we've seen better.

That kind of dough for a splayed-up cell phone may seem excessive, but that's cheap for a powerful PDA. Enter Tapwave. This tiny company showed off the Helix (tentative codename), behind closed doors and impressed the hell out of us. This thing boasts more features than we have room to go on about here, including a 3.8-inch LCD with 480x320 resolution, ATI 2D graphics chip, Fathammer's 3D software engine, two SD-card slots, and IR and Bluetooth support. Tapwave has already signed on Activision, Atari, and Midway to make Helix-specific games. And let's not forget that this is also a fully functional Palm OS S/PDA, able to juggle contacts, play MP3s, and show crisp video at 4D frames per second.

Sony threw down the gauntlet by announcing a portable PlayStation (PSP for short), which the company is touting as the Walkman for the 21st century. Still more than a year away, it's an interesting notion: PS3-caliber games on a tiny handheld. No prices cited, no games announced—there wasn't even a prototype device to show off! Still, Sony promises extensive support from the likes of Electronic Arts, a built-in memory stick slot (for digital audio), and an optical drive that'll play tiny 1.8GB discs. We wonder how much juice the disk drive and LCD will eat up—and if we can wait until the official release in fall 2004.

So, what is the venerable GBA doing in light of all this competition? Nintendo is trying to bolster all its GameCube games with GBA support (some cool Pac-Man and Link adventures are in store), but after the announcement of Sony's PSP, Nintendo's stock has dipped lower than Mario's mustache.



2:

EVIL GENIUS ETA: SUMMER 2004



as torture devices, ubiquitous henchmen in brightly colored jumpsuits, and the ability to capture a secret agent and gloat to him about your secret plan, Evil Genius will let you build your doomsday device come 2004.

A ONE-LINE DESCRIPTION could read "Shogun-style stealth '04," but that still doesn't quite describe Evil Genius. Designed by Dennis Hassabis (fresh off Republic: The Revolution), Evil Genius has you managing a classic '60s spy movie-style secret agent base built underneath a volcano, all while lording off secret agents and sending your own henchmen off on various missions. Featuring supervillain accoutrements such as exploding coconut trees, food mixers, and libraries





HALF-LIFE 2

ETA: SEPTEMBER 30, 2003

GEE, WHAT A SURPRISE! The sequel to the best first-person shooter ever manages to garner our Best in Show. The demo was so good it made our fellow console magazine (EGM) jealous of the PC, and it pretty much dethroned Halo 2 as the king of shooters at E3.

New features in the E3 demo included a drivable dome buggy and actual models for things like the antlion pheromones and the physics gun (a weapon that picks up nearby objects and manipulates them). In one of the gameplay demos, Barney Dumb, "Remember what we thought Black Mesa was as bad as it could get?" before running out into a wrecked street with other AI humans and engaging in a firefight against the Combine (we assume those are the main enemies).

Game hero, founder of Valve Software, made a big deal about the underlying physics of Half-Life 2 by demonstrating all the physics-based gameplay in one level, a friendly AI sets up a bunch of booby-traps that Freeman triggers, such as directing giant garbage containers to crush Combine soldiers, or giant metal beams to swing and smash Combine against the wall, or propeller-based contraptions to shred up headcrab zombies. Other physics-based gameplay scenes included barricading doors with nearby objects, using barrels or radiators as shields, and watching Newell fling giant "T" and "U" letters onto a giant strider. Valve combined the awesome physics engine with its amazingly detailed character animation to make a surprisingly believable gameworld. Add the signature gameplay, and Half-Life 2 easily became the most exciting game of E3.



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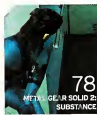
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 **PlayStation**

Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



Each time the game calls for some derring-do, a cut-scene kicks in and the derring gets done without input from you.

ENTER THE MATRIX 84



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Rise of Nations

Another good RTS BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY MICROSOFT
 DEVELOPER BIG HUGO GAMES
 GAME REAL-TIME STRATEGY
 PLATFORMS PC, XBOX, PS2, BLOOD AND
 BONE, VIOLENCE
 MSRP \$49.99 (US/UK)
 FOUNDED IN SPOKANE, IDAHO
 BORN, BLOOD AND BONE
 SPACE (2-4 PLAYERS)
 FOUNDED IN SPOKANE,
 IDAHO
 (2-4 PLAYERS)
 BORN, BLOOD AND BONE
 SPACE (2-4 PLAYERS)

It has been more than a decade since the first PC RTS was developed and the genre has evolved quite a bit since the days of *Dune II*. Instead of three sides, you now have dozens. Instead of plain 2D graphics, you now have magnificent 3D. Despite the changes, the basic concept remains the same: harvest, build, research, and conquer. *Rise of Nations*, like the latest crop of big-budget RTS titles, continues this tradition of "evolution not revolution" and successfully adds new wrinkles and intricacies to an oversaturated genre. And like its brethren, it is good—but without being amazing or breathtakingly original.

Real-time Civ

The developer behind *Rise of Nations* is best known for his work on turn-based games. Brian Reynolds was the chief designer for *Civilization IV* and *Alpha Centauri*, while working with the legendary Sid Meier. ROW is his first release since leaving Firaxis to form his own studio, Big Huge Games. Reynolds borrows unabashedly from his turn-

based past, and ROW is so full of concepts from his previous games that it is probably the most complicated and involved game in the genre.

Gameplay revolves around the building and control of cities. Many structures, such as libraries and granaries, must be built inside your city's radius, and the loss of your capital means automatic defeat unless you take it back within an allotted time. Cities also extend a national border, which affects where you can build and the amount of taxes you can collect; it can even cause attrition damage to enemy units when they invade your territory.

Just the addition of the borders would have made ROW stand out in the genre, but the list of new complications is breathtakingly long. There are 18 distinct civilizations, a huge tech tree that spans eight different ages, spies, commands, generals, supply wagons to counter attrition, and trade routes. Add to this a global resource market reflecting supply and demand, wonders giving concrete benefits to your civilization, and six different resources to harvest. The list

goes on, and ROW at times seems to be an exercise in seeing how many different strategy gaming conventions the designers could cram into one little package. While many of these aspects work for a turn-based game like *Civilization*, in hectic real-time, it can become quite overwhelming.

Too much of a good thing?

Big Huge Games must be given credit for making improvements in the economic game. While there are many resources to manage, the peasants are highly automated and will generally be smart enough to gather resources or build structures on their own if left idle. Resource-gathering structures, such as mines and farms, never run out of supply, so you won't need to scramble to find virgin forests or another gold mine. There is also a global market where you can purchase or sell the primary resources of food, oil, wood, and metal. If the world supply is abundant, prices will be low, but if everyone's trying to grab the



A well-built army turning the opposition into dust.



Fighting over oceans is essential as resource collection is so much more efficient.



Units in RON can march in pretty little formations and combat will take flanks and terrain into account.

resource, the price gouging would make OPEC envious.

Other than dispensing with the cumbersome use of troop transports over bodies of water, RON's combat model is also more complicated than those of most conventional RTS games. Units attacked on the flanks and rear or while crossing a river receive extra damage. There's a rock-paper-scissors factor in how various units match up—which might change depending on the tech level of the forces—and a general can do things like entrench his forces or even create decoys to fool the enemy. Throw in attrition, supply, spies, and commandos into the mix, and you'll probably need four hands and eight eyes to manage everything properly at normal speed settings. The attrition is a nice touch, but the other stuff is mostly window dressing for people lacking the aforementioned appendages.

Also breaking the mold of the genre is the single-player campaign, which eschews the story-driven campaign in favor of a *Rise*-style map. You begin with

At times, *Rise of Nations* seems to be an exercise in seeing how many different strategy gaming conventions the designers could cram into one little package.

one province and must lead your civilization to global domination before the game advances past the Information Age. As you conquer territories, you gain special resources and bonus cards that grant benefits in battle. It's no *Medieval Total War* but it's serviceable and interesting enough to warrant a play through.

Like any good RTS, RON shines in multiplayer mode. With a large selection of nations, game styles, and maps, it offers a lot of bang for your buck. All the new game concepts allow for varied styles of play and help keep the experience fresh in each game. Unfortunately, connections over GameSpy are a bit iffy at launch time, and getting a full game of eight players

can feel like a day in the life of Tortolus.

Though newbies probably shouldn't touch this game with a 10-foot pole, RON is worth the price of admission for die-hard RTS fans. It seems to offer more of the same, but it does it better and bigger than most. There has been enough added to keep even the most jaded players playing. It will certainly wrest the title of "the last great RTS" away from *Age of Mythology*, but in the end, it's still just another RTS.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Bigger and better, but feels almost like an expansion pack to the last generation of RTS.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Haulin' ass, Hall and Oates, and a hail of bullets BY RON DULIN



GAME STATS

DEVICER: ROCKSTAR GAMES

DESIGNER: ROCKSTAR NORTH

GENRE: ACTION

ESR: US:18; MATURE; BLOOD

AND GORE; STRONG

LANGUAGE, STRONG SEXUAL

CONTENT, VIOLENCE

PRICE: \$49.99

RECOMMEND: PENTAGON III

BOOKING: IGNITE BAKI

SCORE: HARD DRIVE SPACE

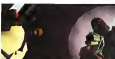
RECOMMEND: ROCKSTAR

PENTAGON 4, IGNITE BAKI

SCORE: HARD DRIVE SPACE

RECOMMEND: NONE

Grand Theft Auto III was a big surprise. Its predecessors were silly and simple top-down racing games with a crime spree twist. So it was shocking when Rockstar applied the series' basic formula to a three-dimensional world and ended up with one of the most exciting, and arguably best, games in recent memory. Grand Theft! Auto III received a great deal of attention due to its amoral gameplay, but what was overlooked in all the hot air and hand wringing was the fact that the game itself was revolutionary, giving you unprecedented freedom to go almost anywhere and do almost anything in a huge virtual city.



The game doesn't look great, but at higher resolutions, you won't even notice.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City doesn't alter the substance much, but it does give the game a stylistic overhaul.

The big change is the setting. Gone are the modern-day, gritty streets of Liberty City. Vice City is set in the 1980s, in a town that looks like a made-for-cable version of Miami, with soulless men in pastel blazers shooting it out amidst palm trees and neon-lit strip clubs. The vehicles, including flimsy speedboats and renamed Ferraris and DeLoreans, evoke the era, but nothing seals the deal like the soundtrack. The licensed songs may make you miss the parody music from Grand Theft Auto II, but the music selection is both large and varied, running from Latin jazz to new wave to hair metal. And an argument can be made that songs like Cutting Crew's "I Just Died in Your Arms Tonight" and Autograph's "Sink up the Radar" are funny enough on their own.

Simulating neon-lit murder

Apart from the setting, however, the basic formula remains intact. You

perform tasks for competing crime lords: stealing vehicles, killing thugs, and trying to stay away from—or just sever an artery on—the long arm of the law. The missions rarely get repetitive, and the variety is one of the game's strengths. There are boat races that end in shootouts with helicopters, drug deals that end in armed bolts across the whole of Vice City, and bank heists that end with a battalion of soldiers chasing you through the streets. Almost every mission requires you to perform several tasks, and on the whole, the missions are much more interesting than those in Grand Theft! Auto III.

You'll get most of your missions as you follow the story line, which involves a cocaine deal that went bad for both parties, and the protagonist's attempt to make things right with his bosses. But, as in Grand Theft! Auto II, you can create a crime spree of your own without even visiting any of the major characters. You can steal cabs and pick up fares, steal ambulances and deliver patients to the hospital, or you can just



Roadblocks are only a problem if you aren't driving fast enough.



The decade of available cars all have unique handling.



You can earn money by selling "treaties" to junkies.

Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to.

range through the streets and see how long you can survive with the police, the FBI, and the army on your tail. Vice City also allows you to purchase buildings, such as dance clubs and apartment buildings, that provide additional save points and, later in the game, can provide you with income.

Handles much better than your jolopy

While the majority of the scripted missions are great, there are a few clunkers that are notably frustrating, including a mission in which you must guide a radio-controlled helicopter and plant some bombs at a construction site. The PC-specific control scheme is not suited for the task, and as such, it will likely take you numerous tries just to figure out how to operate the thing. But this problem is the result of one of

the game's strongest features. The controls have been completely redesigned for the PC, and running around on foot uses the standard WASD keys and the mouse. Though it seems like a simple change, it makes Vice City not only an excellent console-to-PC translation, but also the rare port that is actually better than the original.

Vice City was obviously an expensive production, and the money shows in more places than a Michael Jackson song on the radio. The characters' voices are provided by actors such as perennial psycho Ray Liotta, independent film staple Luis Guzman, and no-description-necessary Burt Reynolds. More important, though, the characters themselves are distinct and funny, and the dialogue is great. The game may rely on toilet humor much of the time, but it is undeniably funny toilet

humor. And the occasional subtle moment shows that there's an intelligence at work behind the ass jokes, like when a host on Vice City Public Radio announces that the station is for "teachers and nerdlings."

As a sequel, Vice City doesn't improve much on the few shortcomings of its predecessor. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. The minor improvements—such as better missions and the addition of motorcycles—are enough to make the game worthwhile for anyone whose moral barometer can handle a game in which mass destruction and murderous rampages are not only encouraged, but also required.

VERDICT ★★★★★
A minor overhaul for one of the best games in recent memory.

Day of Defeat

A two-year-old mod holds its own against BF1942 BY JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE SOFTWARE

ONE OF THE BEST FPS PERSON SHOOTERS

LAST YEAR'S BEST

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

Is there really any argument, at this point, whether *Half-Life* was the best PC game of the past 20 years? If so, just consider this. Not only is *Half-Life* itself a certifiable masterpiece, yet to be equaled by any competitor five years after its release, but the tools released with the game have allowed users to create free mods that, in some cases, have become classics in their own right. Exhibit A, of course, is *Counter-Strike*, a squad-based multiplayer mod that has ruled the online world for years now, and is the only amateur game to reside in CGW's Hall of Fame.

Now we have Exhibit B: *Day of Defeat*, another squad-based multiplayer mod, set in WWII, which further solidifies *Half-Life*'s amazing legacy. Like *Counter-Strike*, *Day of Defeat* has actually been around awhile (since January 2000 as a free download, but it became so popular that Valve Software wisely "adopted" the game and added new content; the company has now released *Day of Defeat* as a retail product. The result is a pretty great game, easily recommendable, that, though it suffers in some ways due to its age, holds up surprisingly well, even in comparison to newer, awesome titles like *Battlefield 1942*.

Set in the European theater in 1944, *Day of Defeat* pits two squads (Axis versus Allies) against each other over 15 different multiplayer maps—10 of which were created for this retail version. In contrast to *Battlefield 1942*, *Day of Defeat* is strictly infantry-based—there are no vehicles or air units whatsoever—



It's all about lurking—*Day of Defeat*'s claustrophobic maps encourage stealth. No, we didn't say "camping."

Day of Defeat makes up for the lack of vehicles with a couple neat tricks of its own.

and the map designs reflect this difference. While *Battlefield 1942* features huge, open environments, the *Day of Defeat* maps tend to be smaller, narrower, and more claustrophobic in feel, with a generous, clever, well-planned collection of tunnels, crawl spaces, ledges, and nooks and crannies to stalk around and (though I would never do this) camp. The maps are small enough for newbies to comprehend, but complex enough to require multiple sessions to discover how to best pilot your moves and strategies. The retail version's new minimap, which can toggle to a near-full-screen display, further eases the newbie pain—clearly marking routes and dynamically marking the location of friendly units.

While the lack of vehicles may turn out *Battlefield* veterans, *Day of Defeat* makes up for it, somewhat, with a couple neat tricks of its own. Best of all is the weapon-handling, which really takes some practice to master. The recoil on some of the weapons is brutal, making it nearly impossible to fire a decent shot while moving. You can avoid this by setting your weapon on a tripod, but the setup incurs a serious delay—and you must remain stationary while firing. (Using the scope on the sniper rifle incurs a similar delay.) *Day of Defeat*'s respawn system is much friendlier than *Battlefield*'s, penalizing you with, at most, a 10-second delay before thrusting you back in the action. For those who die often, like me, it's a serious reduction in

frustrating down-time.

Day of Defeat's biggest problem is simply the fact that it's based on a now-aging engine. The textures and objects can't help but look dated and jaggy, and some of the animations really just don't cut it anymore. On the other hand, the newly redone character models are quite detailed, and the sound, with whizzing bullets and explosions adding real tension, is fantastic.

Day of Defeat is not going to stop the juggernaut that is *Battlefield 1942*, but it does get props for being here first, and for stily holding its own against the newer game. Shooter fans with less-than-state-of-the-art systems could do a lot worse.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Day of Defeat is a great squad-based game mod married only by its age.

Regardless of the machine's main objective, you can usually count on a lot of chaotic frothy races along the way.



North Africa, 1942: French soldiers scorched Axis troops with blistering flamethrower assaults.



Bandits: Phoenix Rising

Forget Mad Max...we've got Furious Fennel by ROB SMOLKA

GAME STATS

FOR SALE: THQ GAMES, INC.
 DEVELOPER: GUN FINE ACTION
 CATEGORIES: TECH, WARS/DRG
 FULL \$39.99; RETAILERS
 FENNEL IN \$30, \$29.99
 BOX, 1 CD; HARD \$49.99
 SPACE TECHNOLOGY
 REQUIREMENTS: FENNEL IN
 700, 256MB RAM,
 REQUIRES 800MHz CPU
 CARDS/FIGURES/SOUND CARDS,
 INTERNET CD-R PLAYERS

Stop me if any of this sounds familiar: Earth is a barren wasteland with very limited resources. Groups of bandits driving heavily armed vehicles made of spare parts bottle over what little is left after a global catastrophe. One of the characters is a thick-browed Scot who says "crapp" a lot. There's also a powerful doomsday weapon called the Phoenix that everyone would love to get their hands on, and it's hidden within the walled city of Jericho. All we're missing is Tina Turner in chain mail waving that she doesn't need another hero.

None of this is too problematic if the gameplay is exciting, and *Bandits* comes through in spades. The two characters—Fennel and himself—

Bandits supports both steering wheels and joystick controllers, you're going to want to play it like you would a first-person shooter—using the keyboard and the mouse. Being able to fire the mounted turret independent of the direction the car is moving is a welcome improvement over the typical turn-in-circles monotony of other vehicular combat games. You'll need to master this method, too, as the enemy A.I. on all three difficulty levels will make you pay if you're not up to snuff. The in-game music covers a wide variety of styles and all fit the action beautifully. There is also a decent selection of multiplayer maps for when you have a hankering to blast your buddies via a LAN or fight

This Fall, it's your turn.



You'll want to play *Bandits* like you would a first-person shooter—using the keyboard and the mouse.

Scottish mid get—whose car you control are quite funny and add a lot of charm to the proceedings with their bender. The 20 or so missions, while not terribly innovative, are nicely varied and give you plenty of opportunities to test out the awesome physics engine and the large selection of weapons you'll get to add to your vehicle. *Bandits* is also easy on the eyes, with great detail in the cars and enough special effects to make Hollywood jealous.

Combat is one of the game's strongest features. Even though

complete strangers over the Internet.

Since the game is fun, I'm willing to overlook the story elements that *Bandits*' "barrows." I can also forgive the fact that at times it's just too damn hard, even at the lowest difficulty level. For \$20, though, you get a lot of bang for your buck.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A fun first-person shooter dressed up in a third-person racing game's clothes.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

Loses both substance and style on the PC BY CHR CHOU

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER KONAMI

RELEASER KONAMI

MULTIPLAYER STEALTH ACTION

100 HOURS, RATING: M, 100%

AND GORE, PARTIAL NUDITY

VIOLENCE (PG-13)

RECOMMEND PENTAGON IN 60%

STEALTH: 90% AND HARD DRIVE

SPACE: 10GB AND 100 HOURS

PENTAGON 4 LEGAL, 2004

RAM: 1GB AND 100 HOURS

SPACE: 10GB AND 100 HOURS

Terrorists. Rogue nations. Nuclear war. These were urgent themes that dominated Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, 2001's stealth-action blockbuster on PS2. While the game's topical elements persist, MGS2, which arrives on the PC in the form of a bonus-laden director's cut, feels outdated two years down the line. The problem here isn't so much with the game's content, which remains as ambitious and poignant as ever, but rather with Konami's sloppy porting efforts to the PC and the two-years-too-late release date.

Taking place a short while after the events of Metal Gear Solid, part deux opens with returning covert ops roughneck Solid Snake investigating rumors of a new type of Metal Gear, a bipedal tank capable of launching nuclear strikes with little preparation. And what an opening it is: Producer/director Hideo Kojima combines Hollywood's action-movie tradition with the stylistic flair of Japanese animation for an epic, bungee-jumping sequence off the George Washington Bridge onto an unsuspecting oil tanker. The event is a breathtaking one-of-a-kind experience rarely seen in PC games, setting up nicely for an excursion into MGS2's narrative-driven stealth-action gameplay.

Similar to titles like *Theif* or *Spinter Cell*, MGS2 encourages players to keep out of sight. To that end, the game gives you plenty of ways to stay stealthy and



If you're stupid enough to wander in front of a projector, everyone in the room will notice you.

deadly. Solid Snake has the ability to punch, kick, choke, shoot, and tranquilize (in first-person perspective no less) his enemies, as well as the option to hang from bannisters and hide under boxes, within lockers, and under tables should such situations arise. And even while the gameplay with its slightly lethargic A.I. and simplistic col-and-mouse routines, does nothing in the way of realism, MGS2 is nonetheless an exceedingly deep game worth exploring—once you learn its rules. Having mastered its philosophy, you can challenge your skills in MGS2's many story-free VR training missions that boil the game down to its purest form.

That said, much of MGS2's excellent

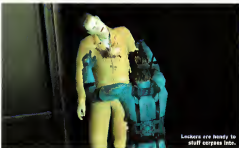


The VR missions provide some narrative-free sessions that focus on pure stealth gameplay.

playability has been mangled by the game's terrible transition to the PC. For starters, this game begs for a game pad controller of some sort (I used a Microsoft Sidewinder). Even with a console-like controller in hand, however, MGS2's default button layout makes for an awkward (or even unplayable) experience. To make matters worse, much of MGS2's controls were optimized for PS2's Dual Shock 2 controller—which features eight analog buttons and two analog sticks. Without the use of analog buttons, simple actions like putting your gun away (by slowly lifting your finger off the trigger button) or gradually leaving around corners are obfuscated, making the game clumsy and difficult.

Underneath the shoddy user interface and disappointingly high system requirements (in resolutions higher than 800x600, expect to see lots of slowdown) is a bold game that needs to be experienced. The question is, should you play MGS2 on a PC? Well, not if you can help it.

The problem here isn't so much with the game's content, which remains as ambitious and poignant as ever, but rather with Konami's sloppy porting efforts to the PC.



Lockers are handy to stuff corpses into.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This is supposed to be MGS2: The Director's Cut, but the sloppy port makes this more like MGS2: The Chimp Next Door's Cut.



Stalingrad, 1943:
Russia bombarded
invaders with the
Katyusha launcher's
hail of rockets.



Port Royale

It's Pirates! with cheese BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY: ARCADIA

DEVELOPED BY: ARCADIA

GENRE: STRATEGY

OS: WINDOWS

PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIRES: PORTABLE PC

4GB RAM, 500MB HDD

ONLINE: NO

REQUIRES: PORTABLE PC

4GB RAM, 500MB HDD

ONLINE: NO

REQUIRES: PORTABLE PC

4GB RAM, 500MB HDD

F or those who think Sid Meier's *Pirates!* is one of the few Games That Should Be Remade (and now apparently will be), the makers of *Patrician IV* may have just answered your prayers—*Port Royale* loosely follows Mr. Meier's buccaneer blueprint but takes it to new strategic depths.

Set in the 15th and 16th centuries, as settlements in the Caribbean were coming into prominence, *Port Royale* allows you to sail for the Dutch, the English, the Spanish, or the French, trading goods, running errands for local governors, and fighting (or joining the ranks of) pirates. The game is impressive in its open-endedness, allowing you to trade goods, develop towns, or find a profitable balance of the many options.

Liveling yourself to just one means of income can be a troublesome path. *Port Royale* features a somewhat complex system of supply and demand. As you sell goods, the price decreases, and as you buy them, the price escalates. This system makes it difficult to find a single source of income—Vera Cruz may be paying premium prices for tobacco today, but tomorrow could be a different story. Operating businesses is similarly tricky. Once too many of the same sort opens in a town, the overabundance of goods drives prices down.

As a result, you're constantly adjusting your strategy to keep gold supply high. One method is to run often-lucrative missions for governors, in towns where you are sufficiently respected, the local



This is a game with ship-to-ship combat, however simple.

government will offer you tasks like delivering goods or hunting down a particularly troublesome pirate. As your experience increases, you can hire additional convoys, and these can even be automated to run certain trade routes for you.

Once you've explored the map and have a few convoys in your fleet, *Port Royale* gets exponentially complex. It is at this point that the game is the most enjoyable, because there are so many interesting choices available at any given moment. Unfortunately, the early game can be tedious, and once you've commanded 10 fleets from the Yucatan to Hawaii, it's difficult to test yourself with few known ports and few assets to your name.

It can be difficult to get into—the manual is thin for such a complex game, and there's a notable lack of in-game feedback. But taking the time to learn its ins and outs is a worthwhile task: *Port Royale* offers a great blend of combat and economic strategy.

VERDICT ★★★★★

After a slow start, a different (and better) pirate game emerges.

This Fall,
it's your turn.



Medieval: Total War—Viking Invasion

Odin's war cry BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE



King Harold Godwinson and his Vikings get cut down by King Harold and his famed Huscarls in the epic Battle of Stamford Bridge, 1066 A.D.



Reinforcements are key to any battle. Viking Invasion gives you the ability to reinforce your troops on the field at any given time.



GAME STATS

DESIGNER: CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
DEVELOPER: CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
AGE: VARYING
CONTENT: EVERYONE
TIC: \$29.95
RECOMMEND: PENTON #250,
SQUARE ENIX, XBOX360 RATED
DRIVE SPACE
DOWNLOADS: 24,000,000
PENTON #1, IGNAN RAL,
3,000 3D CARD
REVIEWED BY: MARIAN
G+4 PLAYERS, LAN
G+8 PLAYERS

Last year's *Medieval: Total War* blew away many gamers with its masterful scope and design. So it's welcome news that *Viking Invasion* provides the same exhilarating blend of strategy and tactics while enhancing both the campaign game and 3D combat. Creative Assembly has also streamlined the tech tree, tossed in several more unit and building types, added more epic historical 3D battles, and included the Dark Age period. Simply put, this is an outstanding expansion.

Viking Invasion's most prominent feature is the Dark Age campaign, which takes you back to the eighth-century British Isles, where Vikings ravage the region with lightning fast raids using sleek long boats. Creative Assembly does a great job recreating this fascinating part of history. Each of eight new Dark Age factions—Picts, Welsh, Mercoens, Irish, Scots, Saxons, Northumbrians, and Vikings—has its own set of unique units, culture, economy,

and religion. Compared to *MTW's* three large campaign maps of later medieval Europe, this campaign is more focused; therefore, it takes less time to complete.

New units such as the strong attacking Saxon huscarls, the two-handed sword-wielding Irish galloglasses, raging Viking berserkers, and feist Irish darbrann, along with several other unit types specific to the eighth-century British Isles, provide an engaging world of warfare and offer new strategic challenges. The noncombat strategy portion of the game is enhanced by spies and assassins (who have benefited from upgrades), levants, brothers, and drinking halls. Armed with the appropriate upgrades, assassins now have a greater chance of eliminating higher-ranking enemy generals, while spies will find they have a better chance of subterfuge.

Viking Invasion is about warfare, and Creative Assembly deftly introduces a handful of features to its already excellent 3D real-time tactical combat without muddying the battle system. The pre-battle system is a welcome addition, allowing better management of forces before, during, and after combat. Not only do you get to organize reinforcements before the first arrow flies, but you also get to save the game before the fighting begins—in case

things don't go as planned. Spies also have the distinct ability to scout enemy forces and formations in the province you're about ready to conquer.

Benefits aren't limited to just the new Dark Age campaign either, as the expansion adds plenty to the original game—including three new factions (Hungarians, Arnonese, Sicilians) to the later three campaigning ages. Armchair tacticians can form armies from 25 unique unit types, such as the Byzantine lancers, agile Sherwood Foresters, Steppe heavy cavalry, and fierce berserkers. Building upgrades are more manageable and provinces are easier to control, which makes administering your holdings more fluid. For example, the Vice and Virtues report at the beginning of each turn allows for easier overseeing and rewarding of loyal generals.

Viking Invasion is practically a full sequel. The depth and scope of this add-on ensures that fans of *Medieval: Total War* will be keeping the game on their hard drives for a long, long time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The brand-new Dark Age campaign, lots of new units, and plenty of new gameplay make *Viking Invasion* a must for *Total War* fans.

Compared to *Medieval: Total War's* three large maps, this Dark Age campaign is more focused.

Mix and match from the 250+ new elements for a super-wacky, crazy-idea amusement park.



RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds

An up-and-down journey around the globe BY THOMAS L. McDONALD

GAME STATS

FAVORITE INFORMANTS

ROBUST: CHRIS SEWEY

GAME BUSINESS: SM

FOR KIDS: EVERYONE

WILD: VIOLENCE

PRICE: \$29.95 (RECOMMENDS)

FRONTIER: 3.5 (RECOMMENDS)

AGE: 10 AND UP (MAY BE DIFFICULT)

SPACE: (RECOMMENDS)

RECOMMENDS: FANTASY: 4

ADVENTURE: 5 (MAY BE DIFFICULT)

RECOMMENDS: 3 (MAY BE DIFFICULT)

It's not that *Wacky Worlds* is a bad expansion pack. It delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on set: new scenarios and elements. The problem lies with *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2*. After the original *RCT* managed to cling to the top 10 best-seller list for more than two years, just like PC gaming's very own *Lamprey*, an audience was primed and ready for a next-gen *RCT* experience. Instead, they got *RollerCoaster Tycoon* with a modest spit polish. If designer Chris Sewey were looking for an ideal way to squander the goodwill and brand-name recognition created by *RCT*'s stellar gameplay, mission accomplished.

Wacky Worlds delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on.

Wacky Worlds builds on this aging foundation but adds nothing to the overall playability of the game. The general specs appear to line up quite nicely, with new content based upon the seven continents. This adds a nicely diverse set of architectural styles, such as igloos (which, technically speaking, would be Arctic rather than Antarctic), a mixed Chinese/Japanese/Incan style, Wild West structures, and the like. Themes extend from the look of buildings to the rides, concessions, and major landmarks, including giant Buddhas, the Great Wall of China, Shalott's Entrance, and other doodads to dress up your park.

What, exactly, does all this amount



Wacky Worlds has more Antarctic-themed park features than you'd believe even possible.

to? Well, about 250 odd, new "elements," which can be cross-pollinated using the scenario editor, allowing you to mix and match themes from different continents. As far as the effect on gameplay, well, it's almost nil. Many concessions and

rides are simply old rides with new graphics. While the 17 new scenarios—at least one for each continent—are uniformly good and often interesting, there is, this late in the life of the game, an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. Even the best games can get tired with age, and these repeated attempts to inject new life into the old *RCT* design rather than expanding upon that design results in little more than a face-lift and a tummy tuck.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

It adds some window dressing and a smattering of new scenarios to a game well past its prime.

Normandy, 1944: U.S. paratroopers assaulted German forces with daring drops behind enemy lines.



This Fall, it's your turn.





Empire of Magic

Looks like strategy, plays like an RPG BY GEORGE JONES

GAME STATS

FOR ONE SUMMITORY
 HEROES MAYBE STRIBES
 CORE ROLEPLAYING GAME
 GUY NAME: FEEL VIOLENCE
 PRICE: \$49.99 (SUGGESTED)
 PLATFORM: PC, XBOX, PS2
 RANK: 1,200 (HARD DRIVE)
 SPACE: 100MB
 FEATURES: NONE
 REWARD: SUPER NONE

If PC games were high art, Empire of Magic would be identified and perhaps even lauded as the first shot of the post-*Diablo* or post-retro-*Diablo* anti-RPG-twee movement. But gaming is firmly rooted in the here and now, so SummitSoft's import from the Slovak Republic will simply be identified and unfairly written off as a cheesy old-school new-school RPG in which *Diablo* meets *Heroes of Might and Magic*.

It's an unfortunate and possibly erroneous tag, but understandable. *Empire of Magic* may possess a crude look straight from the early 1990s, but it puts forth a style of play that, while rough and unrefined, also feels fresh enough that RPG gamers will enjoy the experience, if only for a short while. The setup is classic fantasy role-playing. There's a mystical afloat in a mythical empire, which is being overrun by corruption and the undead. As Yano,

the dashing horseman hero, you get pulled into a story that spans 16 long scenarios involving long journeys, massive battles, optional subquests, and characters whose attributes, spells, and skills improve over time.

Empire of Magic puts forth a refreshingly retro model of the RPG: Parties (created by simply stacking three units together) have action points that limit their movement and actions; an End Turn button signals the A.I.'s turn to move NPCs and enemy units; combat zooms in on the terrain for a level of tactical strategizing; a diary displays quests and subquests. This methodical attitude looks and feels like that of *Heroes of Might and Magic* but also calls to mind the pleasurable—and not-so-pleasantable—aspects of the fantasy role-playing games of yesteryear.

A great example of *Empire of Magic*'s duality comes in the third scenario. Transported to a desert land, you encounter a massive battle outside a castle miring good skeletons and guards against the great RPG intro monsters: skeletons and zombies. Watching the little A.I. shank icons move around and defend their land proves entertaining. But when you win, you get no reward and are sent all the way around the castle through more zombies to a starway, where an NPC forces you to travel back around the castle and all the way to the north and through more zombies to complete another quest before he helps you. The scenario is fun in spots, but the Fed Ex-type missions get tedious real soon.

Still, the *Heroes of Might and Magic* series could easily steal a few pages from *Empire of Magic*, which maintains interest with a consistent hero and ambiguous story, which, while overused, connects all 16 scenarios together and weaves non-player characters in and out of the plot.

Unfortunately, *Empire of Magic* doesn't borrow or steal from other RPGs. The combat model, a mere game of checkers compared with *Heroes of Might and Magic*'s chess, unfairly comes over action points into battle. A long walk-up to an enemy encounter will leave friendly units with no action points, which makes for repeated failure and ultimately a slow, crawling pace. Compounding this flaw is the lack of a constant flow of rewards and incentives to keep gamers excited.

Patient and tolerant gamers might feel rewarded with *Empire of Magic*. After all, it's not so bad to slow down every once in a while.

VERDICT ★★★★★

An odd duck of an RPG, *Empire of Magic* both entertains and annoys.

Heroes of Might and Magic could easily steal a few pages from *Empire of Magic*.





Wotcom

Revisionist History

O.R.B., Vietcong

By Thomas L. McDonald

OR.B. version 1.04 offers an attractive set of enhancements along with a few fixes that improve overall gameplay. At the top of the bill is a spiffy 3D tactical screen, which replaces the crummy old 2D one. Four new playable units (two frigates for each race) have arrived on the scene, along with one new alien carrier each for the Kyzetek and Elakhan. Eight skirmish and multiplayer scenarios, a few weapons, and some fresh sound effects round out the slate of additions. The capital-ship limit is up to 20, and the build screen now has a Pause function.

On the maintenance side of things, multiplayer stability is significantly improved, with code enhancements implemented to make O.R.B. run more smoothly. The leading time is (thankfully) better, but whether or not it reaches the "200 percent faster" claims of Strategy First is up for debate. That's not really something you can quantify across all computers. The company is also touting better A.I. and improved explosions. On the first count, the A.I. does seem a little better, or maybe it's just cheating better. Good A.I. is like Justice Stewart's famous

definition of pornography—"I know it when I see it"—but O.R.B.'s A.I. pulls the plow. On the second count, why yes, explosions do look a bit more explosive.

If you toddle on over to the official site (www.orb.com), you'll also find the second package of three new maps by the Phoenix, along with a 1.04 upgrade to his first map pack.

Vietcong version 1.01 claims a "significantly" improved framerate. "Significantly" is another one of the unquantifiable words in PC gaming, since everyone has a different notion of what "significant improvement" is. Vietcong could really use an improvement that a reasonable person might call "significant" or even "adequate," i.e. call v1.01 a "marginal" improvement. The Pterodon engine still kicks few asses and takes down no names whatsoever.

While framerate was by far the most serious problem dogging Vietcong, there are a few other fixes in the patch: no more respawning inside another player during multiplayer, a functional team autopick option, and supposedly better cheat protection, though I couldn't verify this last improvement.

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The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II

A different kind of tomb raider **BY DENICE COOK**

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY: THE ADVENTURE COMPANY
DEVELOPER: OMNI ADVENTURES
EVERYONE: MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE: \$29.99
ESSENTIAL PLATFORM: PC
GAME DATA: 12,000,000
DEVE SPACE: 100MB
ESSENTIAL PLATFORM: PC
DEAR MOM: 100MB
SUPPORT: NONE

Developer Omni Adventures has a skeleton crew in more ways than one. First, its games are created almost in their entirety by husband-and-wife team Jeff and Karen Tobler, and second, both of its works are archeological puzzle adventures. The Omega Stone, sequel to Omni's 2000 release *Riddle of the Sphinx*, manages more diversity by adding locales such as the Bermuda Triangle, Easter Island, Stonehenge, and the Yucatan's Chichen Itza to the Egyptian spelunking of the first game. And although *The Omega Stone's* doomsday prophecies first sound as bimew as its adventure game topics of Egypt, Atlantis, and the Knights



Cryptic patterns emerge in the most unlikely places, so examine each scene carefully.

While a cohesive story and organic puzzles make the game a gem, it doesn't mean this Stone is flawless.

Temple, its plot actually has more backbone than a Celtic cemetery's. The story seamlessly blends historical facts with engrossing fiction, adding another twist with every book, letter, or scroll you uncover. Challenging puzzles also emerge from the landscapes and link ancient symbols and archeological artifacts to future chaos.

However, while a cohesive story and organic puzzles make the game a gem, it doesn't mean this Stone is flawless. Even

though some skull collecting leads to two creepy puzzles, exploring the dark catacombs under Chichen Itza to get the skulls becomes drawn out and disorienting because of the long look-alike paths. Moreover, the dim graminess of the caverns sometimes turns your excavations into guess hunts. (Yes, Stone's graphics are an improvement upon its predecessor's, but they're still grainy in spots and somewhat blurry overall.) It's also surprising that an archeologist in the year 2012 isn't equipped with a lantern or a mapping device. Subterranean skullduggery aside, there is one other annoying area later at a posh mansion, where you must navigate a garden maze twice.

But overall, *The Omega Stone's* puzzles are absorbing and intricate. A

monlit cemetery harbors stones with markings paralleling those seen in ancient texts. How you correlate these stones to manuscripts you find about alchemy and how you use materials such as crystal, sulfur, and mercury will determine whether you save the world or not. Oh, and did I mention that you can be micrometered, blown up, or electrocuted during the game? At least *The Omega Stone* is an exciting puzzle game, and the ending creatively explains the link between the locales you've visited. Despite Stone's imperfections, this retool improved sequel is worth digging up.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A puzzling archeological find that adventure gamers will dig.

Uplink: Hacker Elite

L33T! **BY DI LUO**

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: INTERVISTA
SETTING: SCIFI
GAME TYPE: CRIME
EMULATION: NONE
EVERYONE: MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE: \$29.99
ESSENTIAL PLATFORM: PC
32MB RAM: 200MB HARD
DEVE SPACE: 100MB
ESSENTIAL PLATFORM: PC
DEAR MOM: 100MB
SUPPORT: NONE

Like the anti-establishment hackers that the game tries to depict, *Uplink* goes against the norm of modern games. Instead of 3D graphics, you have a low-res, bare-bones look resembling something from the CGA era. Rather than giving you instant gratification, the game rewards research, preparation, and covering your tracks thoroughly. And it's damn fun.

As an enterprising hacker, your goal in *Uplink* is to make money and upgrade your equipment as you get rich. You accept missions through a bulletin board, scout out targets on a world map, bounce your connections around to hide your steps, and then attempt to crack

your target. Once in, you'll use various specialized tools to copy information, sabotage files, and forge records. Some of the more complicated missions will even involve cracking security devices protected by voice recognition and file encryption. While the early missions are cakewalks, the more challenging ones can be quite exciting, especially when seconds mean the difference between rich rewards and incarceration.

It takes a while to actually get into the somewhat convoluted conspiracy story in *Uplink*, and the gameplay eventually becomes repetitive, but for a while, it's a breath of fresh air in a gaming world with staled ideas.



Here, let's make this guy a dead man, shall we?

VERDICT ★★★★★

An intriguing premise and quality execution make *Uplink* a winner.



The Sims: Superstar

Bella Goth gets her 15 minutes of fame BY ELIZABETH MCADAMS

GAME STATS

VIDEO ELECTRONIC ARTS
IMMERSED MANOR
TYPE: SIMULATION
CHARMING: TEEN, COMIC
MUSICIAN, NATURE SCENE,
TRICKER, MILD VIOLENCE,
PUBLIC DRINKING
PRICE: \$29.99
RECOMMEND: PENTAGON 8 2004,
64MB RAM, 1.3GB HARD
DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMEND: 2GB+RAM
FORUMS: 61, 12,800 KIB
RELEASED: 2004 10/26

Almost everyone has fantasized about being famous, and now in *The Sims: Superstar* you can find out what it would be like—albeit virtually.

Superstar allows you to venture down three new career tracks and actively determine and witness how your Sim's career advances. As in previous expansions like *Hot Date* and *Vacation*, a brand-new location (in this case Studio Town) has been included. Here, you can follow your dreams and become the next singing sensation, the latest InqInue actress, or a sexy model. Whichever career you choose, you'll gain your own entourage of groupies as you manipulate the new fame-focused gameplay. It's all about who you know and who knows you in Studio Town.

Perhaps the best part of living the life of a celebrity is the luxuries—spa treatments, sushi dinners, and a butler await you in *Superstar*. After a truly exhausting day working the catwalk, you can relax with a steam bath and a visit from Inga, the Swedish massage sensation.

The Fame part of the game gives "starpower" to each Sim who has signed up with an agent; each star you receive unlocks areas of the game, and the possibility of getting new objects and interactions will motivate you to invest quality time in *Superstar*. Obviously, the game becomes more challenging as you progress, and your Fame may decay if you play hooky from Studio Town too often.

Superstar takes a small cue from the console versions of the franchise



Inga beats the hell out of, er, massages, a virtual Brad Pitt.

by adding minigames is the form of performances for your budding celebrity. Musicians perform in music videos, models strut on catwalks, and actors perform in scenes—all of these activities are broken down into three sections, and you have three chances to make the right choices to please your director or audience. Choose the right dance moves for your music video and your career will bloom; make the wrong decisions in that big light scene and your career may stall. The random nature of these minigames makes them more an exercise in guesswork than actual strategizing, but sequences are done with typical Mass flair and remain entertaining several hours into the game.

The pursuit of fame and fortune adds a new level of intensity to an already overly addictive game. The *Sims: Superstar* is a worthwhile investment for diehard fans and newbies alike.

VERDICT ★★★★★

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Blitzkrieg

World War II in real-time BY THOMAS L. McDONALD

GAME STATS

PLATFORM: PC

DEVELOPER: MIND INTERACTIVE

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

ESRB RATING: TEEN, VIOLENCE

PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 300MHz

RAM: 8MB, 160 MBHD DRIVE

SOUND: 32KHz 16-bit

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTIONS:

PENTIUM 4 800MHz 256MB

RAM: 64MB 20 GBHD

REQUIREMENTS: 16MB

INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

When real-time games seized their first beachhead, hardcore wargamers were dismissive. Good, realistic wargames could not, the common wisdom went, be done in real time, primarily because RTS games eschew lavish tactics in favor of fast pacing. Time and titles such as *Close Combat* and *Sid Meier's Gettysburg* have proved that realism and real-time are not mutually exclusive, but a good, large-scale realistic World War II game has yet to roll into battle. *Sudden Strike* didn't do it, nor did *World War II: Panzer Claws*. *Blitzkrieg* doesn't, either, but it has a fun time trying, largely succeeding with a game that can best be described as "realistic."

Blitzkrieg accomplishes this by modeling the statistics that matter and placing them in a real-time context. For example, armored units have ratings for front, rear, and side armor strength, and each unit backs shells and machine guns independently. Tanks can throw a tread or be disabled without being destroyed, and a battlefield repair unit can get them up and running again. Units expend their ammunition as they fight, requiring fairly constant attention to logistics.

Clearly, much research went into this game, and much of it is apparent in the gameplay. The problem comes down to one of scale. For a game to be realistic, it needs to work with historical orders of battle, which were vast and complex. *Blitzkrieg* deals with infantry abstractly, placing men on the field as part of a generic squad that can be moved as a single unit in marching, assault, or defen-



Blitzkrieg looks fabulous, with the smooth movement of 3D objects (there are about 250 units) and detailed 2D terrain.

sive formations. Although this effectively removes it from the realm of realistic wargame, it creates a remarkably playable game that captures the feel and many of the tactics of WWII operations.

The other large flaw is the quirky handling of air power. All aircraft (fighter, bomber, recon, and airdrop planes) are assigned to a single pool. You can only launch one mission at a time, and then you have to wait for an arbitrary cycle to end before you can

access the pool and launch another mission. This effectively eliminates fighter support and relegates bombing to a rather confusing supporting role. Aircraft follow a preset route and cannot be controlled once they take off.

The maps provide a handsome 2D terrain complete with functional elevations and plenty of roads, rivers, houses, buildings, supply depots, and places for ambush. Infantry can pile into buildings for house-to-house fighting, dig in, build bridges, lay mines, and establish various defensive structures. The units and vehicles themselves are 3D and to scale, which has its up- and downsides. They do look quite good, complete with impressive special effects, but without a zoom or rotate feature, individual infantry units such as the sniper simply vanish into the map.

While there's no shortage of gameplay spread among the three campaigns (Axis, Allied, and Soviet, each with seven long missions), extra features are somewhat wanting. A Skirmish mode didn't make the cut, and a paltry three stand-alone missions are all that exist beyond the campaigns. Multiplayer modes feature Assault and Flag-Capture set on a dozen or so unique maps, but internet play is a bit sluggish.

Overall, however, *Blitzkrieg* delivers the best World War II real-time gaming experience to date. It may be faint praise, but with so many stale RTS games, it's good to find one that can hold your attention.

Blitzkrieg delivers the best World War II real-time gaming experience to date.



Snow, desert, and European tile and building styles give the game a sharp, diverse look. All of these tiles and objects can be manipulated in the editor.



Every object and tile available with such as trenches, and mountains, surely help make maps into a mosaic of chaos.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A sturdy meat-and-bones real-time wargame that even manages a bit of realism.

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CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

Another one bites the dust BY DANA JONGEWAARD

GAME STATS

AVAILABILITY: ONLINE
 DEVELOPER: 3AO INTERACTIVE
 LIVE: RARE TV SHOW
 LICENSING: CBS HOME
 MATURE, BLOOD AND GORE
 VIOLENCE: TITL \$25.99
 RECOMMENDED PERFORM: 4/200
 US/UK RANK: 25/200 RARE
 DRIVE SPACE: 10GB/100MB
 RECOMMENDED PERFORM: 4/200
 US/UK RANK: 150/100 RARE
 DRIVE SPACE
 RECOMMENDED NONE

Lots of people will buy CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and enjoy it. They will write reviews on Amazon.com, raving about complexity of gameplay and excellence of the graphics. Most of these people, however, wouldn't recognize a quality computer game if it bit them in the ass.

CSI the game offers you the TV show's music and intro, voice acting from all of the show's regular cast members, and dialogue from the show's writers. Your character is a new member of the force, and in each of the five cases, you work to solve the mystery with a different partner from the TV cast.

It's not a bad game, but neither is it a good one. Playtime is incredibly short unless you're stupid: I easily polished off the game in one day at work, in between several meetings and a long martini-laden lunch. The graphics are less scary than those in some equivalent games ("cough" *Law & Order*), but you still get stuck watching long, boring cut-scenes of conversations between characters.



Gil and Catherine in a tender moment.

And players who perform well enough are rewarded with (ah, excitement) concept sketches of characters from each case.

If you're a big fan of the show, not a big computer gamer, and not that bright, then this game is well worth your time and money. If, however, you don't

meet all of the above criteria, then I would save both for a game of the non-licensed variety.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes.

Playtime is incredibly short unless you're stupid.

Heroes of Might and Magic 4: Winds of War

Dial "M" for murdered franchise BY JONAH JACKSON

GAME STATS

RELEASE: 300 TERRIBLE MEN
 WORLD COMPUTING GME
 TURN-BASED STRATEGY
 OS: LINUX, EVERYONE
 UNRATED BLOOD,
 VIOLENCE: TITL \$39.99
 RECOMMENDED PERFORM: 4/200
 US/UK RANK: 100/100 RARE
 DRIVE SPACE
 RECOMMENDED 4/200/100
 PERFORM: 4/200/100/100 RARE
 RECOMMENDED 4/200/100/100
 INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

3 DO: 300 customer service, how may we help you?

Me: Hi. I just bought the

new HoMM4 expansion pack and...

3DO: You mean Winds of War, the second all-new expansion pack loaded with new features and maps.

Me: Um, yeah. Anyway, I think I'm missing the manual. I have only a flimsy CD liner that vaguely mentions three new units and six new creature generators.

3DO: No, sir, you're not missing anything. That's it.

Me: But where is the information about the improved AI?

3DO: There isn't any. It's the same AI. Me. How about the random scenario generator?

3DO: No random maps. You can always use the map editor to make your own.

Me: Did you improve that?

3DO: Not much, but we did include

several maps that were actually designed by fans. You could use those as a model.

Me: You mean you're charging

\$30 for a bunch of content that

wasn't even designed by you?

3DO: Yep. Pretty sweet, huh?

Me: OK, well did you add

anything else, maybe some

additional town or hero types?

3DO: Nope.

Me: New spells?

3DO: Nope.

Me: New artifacts?

3DO: Yes!

Me: Useful ones?

3DO: Nope.

Me: So, aside from a bunch of new

maps, is there anything that makes this

expansion pack worth the money I spent?

3DO: There's some more of that

irritatingly repetitive style of music... Oh,



Luckily, vampires can still suck the life force out of those mean catspaws.

and did you play the campaign in which the king is named Spazz Matcus? That's some h-larious writing.

Me: Uh-huh. Thanks.

3DO: No problem. Feel free to call

again. And look for our next exciting

expansion, HoMM4, Gobvins Gore Wld!

[cAck]

You mean you're charging \$30 for a bunch of content that wasn't even designed by you?

VERDICT ★★★★★

The degeneration continues.

REVIEWINDEX

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

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
1503 A.G.: The New World	6/03	The game's depth keeps things interesting, if not addictive	★★★★☆
American Conquest	5/03	Impossible to control, impossible to play	★★☆☆☆
Battleline 1942: Road to Rome	5/03	Great new maps and weapons enhance an already-classic multiplayer shooter	★★★★☆
BloodRayne	7/03	Wildly distracting, fairly generic, totally tasteless	★★☆☆☆
Cosine Inc.	7/03	Been there, done that business sim with bookers	★★☆☆☆
Championship Manager 4	7/03	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★☆
Chemistry: Journey to the Other Side	5/03	Puts the "bore" in "bore"	★★☆☆☆
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	4/03	Plenty of new stuff for the verbose MMOG addict	★★★★☆
Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down	6/03	This surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics	★★★★☆
Devolution	7/03	Too big to be a med, too bad to be a full retail release	★★☆☆☆
Excite	7/03	20 to 30 hours of gameplay, not one of them worth a dime	★★☆☆☆
Europa 1400: The Gold	5/03	There are three or four games like this, all of them enjoyable	★★★★☆
EverQuest: The Legacy of Flerika	6/03	It's about time for Sony to ease up on the constant CD expansions	★★☆☆☆
Freelancer	5/03	The final space sim since Freelance 2 and Privateer	★★★★☆
Galactic Civilizations	4/03	Triumphs where MS02 fails—the best 4X space game it years	★★★★☆
The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games	6/03	Rise-of-the-mill blood sport	★★☆☆☆
Gran	7/03	This pedic Andrea Jones clone is hamstrung by horrible controls	★★☆☆☆
Herbinger	6/03	This sci-fi Diablo clone is toped at best	★★☆☆☆
High Heat 2004	6/03	A great franchise goes in the wrong direction	★★☆☆☆
Highland Warriors	5/03	Better than hogs, but not by much	★★☆☆☆
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7/03	This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces	★★☆☆☆
IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles	6/03	The paragon of WWI flight sims	★★★★☆
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/03	It may look a little funky, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★☆
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	4/03	A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bones of a 3D RTS eating people	★★★★☆
Laser Squad Nemesis	4/03	Incredibly addictive play-by-email tactical strategy	★★★★☆
Line of Sight: Wisconsin	7/03	Keep this lousy shooter out of your sights	★★☆☆☆
Master of Orion 3	5/03	This disappointment demands too much and provides far too little	★★☆☆☆
MVP Baseball 2003	6/03	This is the PC baseball game to buy this year	★★★★☆
NASCAR Racing 2003 Season	5/03	Papyrus' last NASCAR game goes out with a whimper	★★☆☆☆
New World Order	7/03	Just about the loudest shooter ever	★★☆☆☆
Postal 2	7/03	No	★★☆☆☆
Post-Mortem	6/03	Five-star story undone by two-star dialogue	★★☆☆☆
PvTactics	5/03	This rewarding game eases the pain of waiting for Rome, Total War	★★★★☆
Pro Race Driver	7/03	The self-proclaimed "DRPG" is utterly lame	★★☆☆☆
ProSim Baseball 2003	5/03	If you're looking for a good real-based baseball GM sim, this is the game for you	★★★★☆
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/03	Surpasses the earlier RS games in every way to become the definitive fac-sim	★★★★☆
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	7/03	Decent console port with finicky camera control	★★☆☆☆
Reinank Empire	6/03	Forget those cheapie wishes and carrier dreams—this is closer to Demis's	★★☆☆☆
Revolution	6/03	Now say you want a revolution? Not this one you don't	★★☆☆☆
Silent Hill 2	4/03	It's bore you...to death	★★☆☆☆
The Sims Online	4/03	More chat room than game, this is the first breach on the Sims empire	★★☆☆☆
Tropics 2: Pirate Cove	7/03	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★☆☆☆
Unreal II: The Awakening	4/03	Only the early parts of this FPS match the outstanding graphics, sluggishness ensues	★★★★☆
Vietcong	7/03	Vietnam shooters barely come of age in this solid title	★★★★☆
World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	6/03	There's a whole lot more to this racer than "regrecks lining left"	★★★★☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



A Tale in the Desert

★★★★☆

This MMORPG is worth checking out if you're more into the social aspect of online gaming than the combat. Is there another online RPG that lets you pursue a career as a leader, an artist, or an architect? If you're a gamer who favors gameplay over graphics, this Desert is worth exploring.



Shadowbane

★★★★☆

In Shadowbane, players are encouraged to work together to build and maintain their own sprawling cities—and then go out and destroy the cities of their enemies. This game eschews the plodding character advancement and dungeon-crawling typical of MMORPGs in order to let players rapidly develop powerful characters suited for Shadowbane's signature castle sieges.



Bookworm Deluxe

★★★★☆

Want to feel inadequate? Check out the unbelievably high scores online for the latest insidiously addictive puzzle game from evil geniuses at Popcap. Pert Beagle, port BeJeweled, all mind-consuming, this voracious gobbler of time has done more to impale CGW's productivity than Nickel Beer Night. Download and register it at www.popcap.com at your own risk.

Tech

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

Gateway Finally Does Gaming Right

Gateway's 700XL features great components and upgradeability at a good price



MONITOR: GATEWAY 700 \$149



I

was shocked when the people at Gateway contacted me a few weeks ago about their latest gaming rig, the 700XL. You see, for the past couple of years, I've consistently slammed

Gateway for shipping gaming rigs that failed to live up to the promise of their components. Guefts from Dell to Alienware use the same components that Gateway uses, yet their machines consistently outperform Gateway's offerings. What is Gateway doing to slow down these machines? Well, that question is moot, as the latest 700XL does more than simply live up to the promise of its components; it actually manages to perform quite well.

The first thing I do when a machine shows up is open the case to check out what's going on inside. Gateway shipped the 700XL with some impressive components, most notably Intel's D875PB2 (Cantonwood) motherboard. As a starting point, you can't beat that motherboard, which has an 800MHz frontside bus and support for DDR 400 memory. The 700XL also rocks a 3GHz (800MHz FSB) Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of DDR 400, two 250GB hard drives in an incredible 500GB RAID configuration, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro! Not only do these components contribute to the Gateway, matching Dell's similarly equipped Dimension XPS (reviewed in the July issue) in nearly every test, but they also help make the rig pretty damn similar to the Falcon machine I also



reviewed in that issue. The Gateway scored 2589 in 3DMark2003 at 1024x768x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on. Compare that to the 2619 the Falcon scored and the 2533 that the Dell managed. In actual game tests, the 700XL's performance was similar to the Qel's, scoring 56 frames per second in 3DGameGauge at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on; the Qel scored 57 frames per second. In fact, while the Gateway dominated the Dell in benchmark tests, the two machines were so close in actual gameplay that it was easy to call the competition a draw in that area. It's also important to note that the Gateway sports more belts and whistles than the Dell, is nearly \$500 cheaper, and includes an 18-inch LCD—a display that works surprisingly well with games.

While the 700XL beats the XPS in many tests, the fact that it's significantly more upgradeable is an enormous advantage. Also, while the Dell shipped with its proprietary Intel i850-based motherboard, the 700XL shipped with Intel's DB75P82 motherboard. And unlike Dell's case, Gateway's is more

standard. You can quickly remove the panel and access all of the components, and because it has a more standard ATX configuration, you can easily change the motherboard or even upgrade the power supply. Other touches that make the Gateway appealing are its eight USB 2.0 ports (two in the front and six in the rear), as well as four FireWire ports (three in the front and one in the rear). Hardcore types are gonna wonder about Gateway's continued decision to go with Boston Acoustics speakers, but the fact remains that the BA7900s are great.

For gamers interested in getting a gaming rig from a more mainstream company, there used to be one choice: Dell. Now, with its revamped 700XL, Gateway has established that when it comes to those mainstream gaming rigs, it's no longer a one-horse race.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great choice for gamers who want to buy a machine from a more mainstream outfit.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	GATEWAY 700XL	DELL DIMENSION XPS
Price	\$359	\$400
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	3GHz Intel Pentium 4	3GHz Intel Pentium 4
Motherboard	Intel DB75P82 (Greenwood)	Dell Intel i850-based
Memory	1GB DDR 400	1GB DDR 400
Hard drive	Dell 200GB 7200RPM in 500GB RAID array	300GB 7200RPM in 240GB RAID array
Graphics processor	ATI Radeon 9000 Pro	ATI Radeon 9000 Pro
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2
Primary drive	DVD-RW drive	8x DVD-RW drive
Secondary drive	18x24x16x CD-RW drive	DVD-RW drive
Monitor	18-inch Gateway F70030 (flat-panel LCD)	18-inch Dell E500P (flat-panel LCD)
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA7900 5.1 speakers	Logitech Z400 5.1 speakers
Keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard	PS2 enhanced multimedia keyboard
Mouse	Logitech USB Optical Wheel mouse	Logitech M300 mouse
Speed (Performance)	45	45
Price	4	4
Stability	5	5
Support	5	5
Upgradeability	5	3
SCORE	4.70	4.30



WIL POWER

By Williams O'Real

Got wireless?

There was a time—not so long ago—that I not only didn't own a cell phone but also didn't even really see the need for one, other than for emergencies. For a long time, I felt the same way about broadband Internet access. I spend all day on my company's T1 line, so why should I spend \$50 a month to do what I can do at work for free?

Of course, I bit the bullet and became like every other cell phone-obsessed member of Generation X. Now I am never without my cell phone, and whenever a fancy new one comes out (with features I'll never use), I have to have it. You don't believe me? I was one of the first people to get Samsung's SPH-A500 model, and downloading 50 Cent's "In da Club" as a ring tone actually made me happy. The DSL connection I finally ponied up for makes me just as happy—few things

The DSL I finally ponied up for makes me happy.

are as simple and convenient as an "always on" broadband connection.

The latest technology I've reluctantly adopted but now can't live without is wireless Internet access. A while ago, Actiontec sent me its 802.11b wireless-ready Gateway and router. It sat in a box in my office for well over a year before I even took it home. When I finally set it up, I was floored by how easy it was to get it up and running, and sitting on my couch with a laptop that's wirelessly connected to the Internet is the bomb. Actiontec recently sent me its 54g wireless solution, and it's even more impressive than Actiontec's. If you're like me and you use both desktop and laptop computers, then there's no reason for you not to jump on this bandwagon. While it's easy to think you don't need wireless Internet access at home, once you get it going, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it.

Gaming Rig for the People

If you don't have \$4,000 to drop on a computer, iBuypower's Zillion Pro could be for you **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**



TECH STATS

UNUSUAL: iBUYPOWER
 HOT: \$499

Compared to behemoths from Gateway, Dell, and Falcon, iBuypower's strangely named Zillion Pro PC is a breath of fresh air. It doesn't rock the biggest, baddest component list around, but it's a terrifically solid nForce2-based machine that more than gets the job done at a reasonable price.

What the Zillion Pro tells me is that you don't have to drop three large on a top-notch machine to get the most out of the games currently available. The machine we tested was built around MSI's K7N2-Delta nForce2 motherboard, and it came equipped with 1GB of DDR400, AMD's Athlon XP 3200+ processor and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro—which explains why the Zillion Pro performed so well. Its scores were lower than those of the Gateway 700XL, but not by much. That's astonishing when you compare their prices.



It's a solid nForce2-based machine that gets the job done at a reasonable price.

The Zillion Pro's 30Mark2003 score of 2533 at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4X AF turned on totally competes with more expensive Pentium 4-based

machines. That said, in some game tests, the Zillion Pro didn't perform as well, compared to the Pentium machines, at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4X AF turned on. But we're really talking about only a few frames per second. In other words, while you can run games at 1600x1200 with all the features turned on, don't expect the Zillion Pro to be as fast as some Pentium 4-based machines—but you should have no problem running games at 1024x768 and 1280x1024 with the features on.

As I mentioned, the Zillion Pro's price is great. And this computer is also an extremely upgradable machine, and many people seem to think Nvidia's nForce2 audio is better than Creative's. The Zillion Pro comes with some excellent peripherals, like Viewsonic's 19-inch 900F+SB monitor and Klipsch's GMAX 0-51 speakers (which, as we all know, work perfectly well with the onboard nForce2 audio solution). Ultimately, the first question I ask when someone is looking to get a new rig is "How much are you willing to spend?" If your answer to that question is something less than "My kid's inheritance," you'll no doubt appreciate this rig.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	iBUYPOWER ZILLION PRO PC	GATEWAY 700XL
Price	\$499	\$699
Operating system	Windows XP Professional (basic)	Windows XP Home (G2104)
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ (4000MHz FSB)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4
Motherboard	MSI K7N2-Delta nForce2 (4000MHz FSB)	Intel D85SPU (Gateway)
Memory	1GB DDR 400	1GB DDR 400
Hard drive	Western Digital 7200RPM 10GB hard drive	Dell 250GB 7200RPM hard drive in 500GB RAID array
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	256MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
Soundcard	Integrated nForce2 5.1 audio	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2
Primary drive	16x DVD-ROM drive	DVD-RW drive
Secondary drive	50x24x150 CD-ROM drive	16x24x150 CD-ROM drive
Monitor	19-inch Viewsonic 900F+SB	19-inch Gateway 700B03 (flat panel LCD)
Speakers	Klipsch Professional GMAX 0-51 speakers	Boston Acoustics BA7900 5.1 speakers
Keyboard	PS/2 enhanced multimedia keyboard	PS/2 enhanced multimedia keyboard
Mouse	3-Button	Logitech USB Optical Wheel Mouse
Speed (Performance)	4	4.5
Price	5	4
Stability	5	5
Support	4	5
Upgradability	5	5
Score	4.60	4.70

VERDICT ★★★★★:
 A fast, well-priced gaming rig.



The War to Replace the Keyboard and Mouse

Ideazon's Zboard is actually a good idea **BY DARREN GLADSTONE**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER IDEAZON
 MSRP \$299.99 FOR
 ADDITIONAL OVERLAYS

Don't get me started on how the keyboard and mouse combo is the only way to go when it comes to controlling games. Companies ranging from Belkin to Saitek have tried to reinvent the gaming wheel with unsightly hunks of plastic. Finally, after countless harebrained ideas, something half-decent comes along—Ideazon's Zboard.

It's a pretty simple concept when you think about it: You're going to need that keyboard anyway, so why clutter your valuable desk space with some semifunctional lump of modern art? Instead, Zboard's base remains the same,

but you can remove and latch on pre-programmed game-friendly keyboards. The Zboard comes with a relatively generic—but amply tactile—keyboard. It starts veering into the cool range when you slip on game-specific overlays like the one made for *Medal of Honor*.

Keys are spaced specifically for the staunchest FPS fan, and it works wonders in the game it's designed for. There are two problems with the execution here, though. First is the fact that this keyboard is PS/2 only. That's not a big deal for most desktop owners, but many without legacy ports will be left in the cold. Second, and more

important, is that you can't use the keyboard with other first-person shooters. So, you're basically expected to shell out 20 bucks for every game you like playing if you want to take advantage of this keyboard. This keeps Zboard from earning better marks, but if Ideazon can create some firmware upgrade/software patch, this could be the must-have item in every gamer's arsenal.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's about time someone came up with a good keyboard solution. Now just fix it!

This Controller Blows—in a Good Way

Sweaty-palmed gamers will be happy to know there's a peripheral built just for them **BY DARREN GLADSTONE**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER NYKO
 MSRP \$29.95

Gamers must be a freekin', sweaty lot you'd never want to meet in public. At least that's the impression I got using Nyko's Air Flo controller—this console-inspired gamepad has a lot of ventilation holes and a fan built into its frame. Nyko released similar controllers for the consoles last year, and now it's the PC's turn at bat.

For paws that tend to overheat, this controller is mana from heaven, but I'm here to tell you, folks, if your hands sweat the much, maybe you should put the controller down and get yourself some Gold Bond powder. Gimmicks aside, the Air Flo actually feels good. The rubberized hand grips and responsive buttons slip into your hands nicely, giving



you a very PS2-like gamepad.

The Air Flo works well enough as a plug-and-play device, whether blasting air on your damp mitts or not. The one thing you should be aware of is that as a USB-powered controller, you probably won't get ample juice from an unpowered

hub for the Air Flo to work properly.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Sturdy? Check. Feels good in the hand? Yep. Lets holes and a fan? Who cares?

DEFINING A CULTURE,
CREATING A NATION



XBN
XBOX NATION

THE **ADVANCED** XBOX MAGAZINE

ZIFF DAVIS

PICK ONE UP ON NEWSSTANDS EVERYWHERE.

Lloyd's Cracked Case

Friday night follies By Lloyd Case

On most Friday nights, a bevy of cars pulls up outside my house and a motley crew makes its way down to my basement. They think they're here to play LAN games.

OK, so they are here to play LAN games—but there's an ulterior purpose for their visit. The Friday Night Follies LAN party actually exists to test system and network stability. If games are the most demanding applications a PC must run, then multiplayer networked PC games are even more demanding.

During networked games, I've seen graphics-hardware problems I would never see during a single-player game. I've seen audio work beautifully in single player and then crap out during multiplayer. Curiously, playing online—even over a broadband Internet connection—doesn't seem to offer quite the same test as playing over a LAN.

Of course, the members of the Friday Night Follies gang have varying perspectives on all this. One is an Apple employee who continually complains about how much Windows sucks. For some reason, PC hardware seems to fail more often when he uses it. Said failures completely vanish when I sit down at the same system—and these issues aren't specific to one system, either. Perhaps there's some technological irony at work.

The Follies crew and me, we have a deal: They don't complain about the need to frequently reinstall games and play on systems totally different from those they were on last week. In return, they (usually) get a great gaming experience on recent or even bleeding-edge hardware. Manufacturers of PC hardware who ship me gear before it's released may get a little nervous as they read that, but most of the Friday Night Follies crew isn't in the tech business. Even the Apple employee never talks business—he's not in marketing, and I don't bug him to leak stuff about Apple.

Network gaming has become an integral part of my testing process. When I bring up new hardware—to it a motherboard, CPU, graphics card, or soundcard—I always hold final judgment until I can see how it performs in an intense LAN gaming session.

Over the years, I've developed a list of pet peeves and bad habits exhibited by many PC multiplayer games. In a magnanimous gesture, I offer them here in the hope that game developers might heed the call.



Please, please let's have more games that offer co-op play.

- LAN game servers that feel compelled to check the master server. Never mind that the LAN may not actually be connected to the Internet.

- Games that require a CD per person for LAN gaming. I recall fondly the days when *Age of Empires* or *WarCraft* allowed three players per CD. For seven grownups, it's no big deal to buy a copy per person. But a parent who wants to play a multiplayer game with their kids will have to buy two or more copies. This is about as likely as Jeff Green winning a Pulitzer for his column.

- Games that don't report their version number in a very visible place. Hint: The Main menu would be good. If you patch a multiplayer game, you usually have to patch every copy because you typically can't play together with different versions of the game. It's astonishing how many games make it freaking impossible to find the version number!

- No multiplayer saves. This really bugs me, especially in long games. Curiously,

the worst offender is a game that allows a weird sort of partial save: Your character can be saved, but not the world state. I speak, of course, of *Dungeon Siege*. When you restart a multiplayer game, your character encounters the same conversations, is presented with the same quests, and carries around the same useless quest items, even though she's already done all of the 20 times before.

- My last pet peeve isn't really a peeve so much as it is a plea: Please, please let's have more games that offer co-op play. I personally don't care if the AI sucks, if the game isn't balanced in co-op mode, or whatever other silly excuse a developer may have. Multiplayer co-op gaming is as much about the social experience as it is about the gameplay. Serious Sam was a somewhat uninteresting, repetitive shooter in single-player mode. Playing co-op, though, was an absolute blast. Let's see more of that!

Tech Medics

You've got questions; Wil is pathetic By William O'Neal

Does anyone really watch DVD movies on their PC?

I'm looking into buying a new PC and wanted to ask about DVD drives. Why would I want one? Am I missing the killer app? I have no desire to flop down in front of my PC to watch a movie. Are games going to be released in DVD format soon? What's the compelling reason to spend money and an expansion slot on a DVD drive? Thanks and have a happy Easter—though I don't want to read about the O'Neal family Easter egg hunt in the next issue.

Steven

Great letter! I agree with you about DVD drives—I think they're pointless for most people. Years ago, there was talk of releasing games on DVD, but I haven't heard much about it recently. If I were buying a machine right now, I'd just get a really good CO-RW drive.

Some PCs go "Woo-WOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

I'm looking to get an Ultimate xS computer from ABS. I was just wondering if you've ever tested these computers. If so, I want to know how loud they are. Currently, I have an HP Pavilion, which runs louder than I'd like. My ears ring for a short time after using it! Thanks for your time, and keep up the great job at CGW.

Richard Carpenter

While rigs from other manufacturers have been noticeably loud, I've never found ABS machines to be particularly noisy. This highlights a couple of points: 1) I haven't rated machines on how loud they are, and 2) because I haven't noticed how loud an ABS machine is, you can take that to mean they aren't too loud.

We need better fact checkers. Hell, we just need fact checkers!

In your June 2003 issue (#227), you stated that the ATI Radeon 9800 Pro costs \$300. Well, first I thought it was a misprint, but I also noticed that the Review section listed the same price

(page 103). It clearly says the price is \$300. If this is true and not a misprint, can you tell me where you bought the Radeon 9800 Pro for \$300? If it's a misprint, can you tell me, so my soul can rest? By the way, good magazine.

That was the crack. The Radeon 9800 Pro is \$400. The 9700 Pro is \$300. Sorry, dude.

Suckling at the government teat

What kind of machine should I put together to run Akes Wavefront's Mays software (I'm going to school to learn computer animation and modeling)? Should I get dual or single CPUs? What about videocard configurations and so on? Also, would you recommend a particular company from which I should buy said system (Alienware, Voodoo, Falcon NW, etc.)? I know there is an nForce motherboard (powered by Nvidia), but will it work only with Nvidia-based graphics cards, or will it also work with, for example, the ATI Radeon 9800?

Eric

While I've never used Mays, I'd suggest getting a machine with at least the following: 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB) processor, 1GB of DDR 400 memory, either a 256MB Radeon

9800 Pro or 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (NV35) graphics card, and a RAID configuration. As for who to buy the machine from, any of the companies you mention will be able to hook you up, although I suspect that Alienware can offer you the best price. I spoke to a friend who works at Nvidia, and he told me that while the nForce1 and nForce2 don't support dual CPUs, the nForce3 will. Of course, nForce3 motherboards won't be available for a while. Also, nForce mobos work with any graphics card.

Stick with what woos

Why does Motherboards.org rate the Gigabyte board as the best board to use with an Intel chip, while you continue to stick with an Intel motherboard? Is there something I'm missing?

Bob

Not really. I stick with Intel motherboards because, while they may not be the fastest around, they're plenty solid, and I've never had any problems with them. If a few extra frames per second is worth it to you, then feel free to go with Gigabyte boards. I know that many of the boutique system builders use them, which speaks volumes about their quality.



Killer Rigs

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

I was going to start off by saying that a reviewer's life is never easy. Then I realized that...well, it actually is. When your day's decisions revolve around which top-notch 256MB graphics card to put in a machine you just built—ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra—you're gonna be hard-pressed to find a sympathetic ear. I'm sure, however, that critical words will be flying faster than the proverbial bird that perched the fan. 'Ya' heard?

Tests seem to show that the two cards mentioned above are pretty darn close to each other, performance-wise. But because I got the GeForce FX first, I decided to build this month's Power Rig with that card. These cards are so close that many reviewers—including Dave Salvatore—are calling this match a draw. With the exception of the graphics card, I only changed one other component on my Power Rig: the soundcard. Since cash is, in theory, no object with the Power Rig, I dropped Creative's Audigy 2 Platinum EX in. The breakout box adds nifty features like S/PDIF and optical audio-out.

My Lean Machine is the same as last month's: AMD's Athlon XP 2200+ is so cheap that it's practically free, and that nForce2 motherboard is awesome. Be sure to come back next month, as I'm considering upgrading the graphics card power in the Lean Machine. That should make Ken Brown happy.



The cards are so close that many are calling this match a draw.

3GHZ PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	\$300
Processor	Intel 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	\$706
Case	Arcix PlasmaView 1000AMG	\$100
Power supply	Arcix Five (360-100 (400 watts))	\$90
Motherboard	Intel D07SPR2 with Intel R7SP chipset	\$300
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX KHX590 PC3500 DDR	\$350
Hard drive	Qual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 256GB RAID array	\$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	\$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Platinum EX	\$208
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor PleXCombo 20x/10x/16x DVD/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	22-inch NEC MultiSync FE22150	\$400
Speakers	Cardinalge MegaWorks 6100	\$200
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$35
TOTAL		\$3,940

3DGameGauge 3.0
(1600x1200)

POWER RIG
65

LEAN
MACHINE
24

3DGameGauge 3.0
(1280x960)

POWER RIG
79

LEAN
MACHINE
35

ATHLON XP 2200+ LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$200
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	\$125
Case	Arcix Lanbey (300-watt SmartView power supply included)	\$100
Power supply	N/A	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS KT780 Deluxe (nForce2)	\$340
Memory	512MB Corsair DIMM PC3200 DDR	\$100
Hard drive	4GB IBM DeskStar 7200 RPM	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra	\$100
Soundcard	OnBoard nForce2 5.1 Audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sanyo D90-RM drive	\$40
Monitor	19-inch ViewSonic E920	\$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire 2.1 2500	\$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft Int Mouse Optical	\$45
TOTAL		\$1,325

Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less Edited by Dawn Joughward

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield

Ready...set...attack!

PAGE 102

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's Dirty Trick is for *Medieval Total War*.

Here's a way you can steal provinces from your allies! First, find a territory you wish to take and make sure there are a lot of Catholics in it. If not, send over a mission to convert the populace. When there are enough converts, send in an Inquisitor. Soon an Inquisition will run rampant through the territory and

peasants will be very unhappy. Hopefully, a rebellion will be sparked. When the rebels conquer said territory, bribe them with an emissary to fight for you. You have just successfully stolen both a territory and an army from your allies!

—Steven Palm



Steve's determination has won him a free copy of *Freelance*—nice work, Steve! If you have underhanded tactics to use in multiplayer matches of recent games, send them to gary_letters@ew.com with a subject line of "Dirty Trick." Next month's winner will be chosen with a copy of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*.

How To...

RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD

Pentagon envy: planning the perfect mission By Raphael Liberatore



1 BRIEFING DONE RIGHT

Begin with the Briefing Room, where Control provides a detailed overview of the operation. Control members offer tactical analysis, terrorist background, mission objectives, and various news wire reports. Pay attention to the type of mission and mission objectives that your operatives must perform.

The Briefing Room also offers a 3D view of the mission map, where various tension zones are highlighted for review. Study the location of tension zones, enemy emplacements, and preferred routes for securing mission objectives. Operation: Lion Shadow encompasses straightforward COB objectives: You'll need to eliminate terrorists and keep them from destroying records while rescuing hostages. By understanding these particular objectives, you'll better ascertain which operatives, how many teams, and which weapons and equipment are required.

2 THERE IS NO "I" IN TEAM

The Gear Menu is where you pick operatives and equipment and assign them to teams. Create red, green, and gold teams for the best possible combination. Assign assaulters to two teams, with an additional team containing a sniper and another assaulter. Make sure the sniper has a high Leadership score. A demolitions expert should accompany the red assault team for that extra punch when breaching vault doors. All three teams should contain an operative who has been promoted to the top position and has a high Leadership score. Ding Chavez is the best operative and should be used primarily as your PMV character.

Assault	\$500
Demolitions	\$1
Electronics	\$4
Sniper	\$11
Swabits	\$99
Self-control	\$2
Leadership	\$100
Observation	\$9

Planning Raven Shield missions like a professional takes plenty of intelligence, the right mix of gear, and loads of patience. We all know shooting skills are important, but what good is taking out targets if you indiscriminately kill innocent hostages in the process? To avoid this casualty of war, it's important to fully understand Raven Shield's Briefing, Gear, and Planning Rooms before inserting steps into a mission. Let's study Operation: Lion Shadow, a classic hostage rescue mission, for instruction. As we engage, terrorists have seized a bank with the intent to destroy critical documents. Thwart this act of terrorism by planning the perfect mission and successfully carrying it out.

3 USED GEAR FOR SALE

Since Operation: Lion Shadow is a daytime urban operation, choosing a camouflaged dark uniform with medium to heavy body armor is the best way to go. While lighter body armor may allow operatives to react more quickly, heavier armor will afford more protection in the tight spaces where firefights may be encountered inside the bank. Also, take along a heartbeatsensor to get a handle on terrorists' locations.



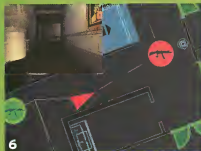
4 WEAPONS "R" US

Weapons selection should be tailored to mission type. Since Operation: Lion Shadow requires rescuing hostages in close quarters, you'll want to provide your teams with silenced submachine guns like the MP5SD5, MTAR-21 and P90. All three weapons are excellent submachine guns for COB. Silenced weapons are best used for hostage rescue ops since they limit the number of bad guys you alert. Load up the team with silenced pistols like the USP .40 cal or Barrett 92FS. You'll also want to take along plenty of flash-bangs, which are a necessity for clearing rooms in COB. Not only will they temporarily blind terrorists as your team storms each room, but you run less risk of accidentally killing hostages. Give operatives from each team carry smoke grenades, breaching charges, and tear gas in their second team slots. Smoke grenades cover your team's movement, while tear gas will temporarily subdue terrorists. Make sure you equip your sniper with the PSG-1 or M24L. Bullet types can also play a vital role depending on the terrain. Go with FMJ rounds for primary weapons since the bad guys will probably be wearing body armor as well.



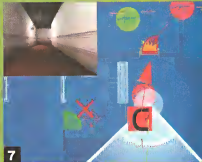
5 PLAN LIKE THERE IS NO TOMORROW

Raven Shield's heart and soul takes place in the Planning Room. It's here that you plant the seeds for future frustration or utter failure. Study the map and search for terrorist positions, choke points, entry points, exit points, hostage locations, and special objectives. Familiarize yourself with planning icons and camera commands. Keep your teams in balance by covering threat areas with snipers and/or overwatch teams while moving teams into position. Make sure you coordinate team advances on each objective with similar waypoints. Go codes, end rule of engagement (ROE) speeds so teams remain fluid and active using the same commands. Planning the perfect mission takes practice and, above all, patience, so make sure you allocate considerable time for the planning phase.



6 INSERT HERE

Raven Shield's default mission plans are extremely well thought out. The default plan is a fantastic tool to utilize if you're having problems understanding the dynamics of planning. Study it and learn from it. Follow team waypoints and Go codes for better clarity on saving objectives. The Observation mode is also useful for uncovering weak areas in your plan. If you're having problems with the mission, the default plan can be tweaked and modified to fit your needs. The Planning Room also offers a 3D view of the area of operation, which can be launched by selecting one of the teams and hitting the Play icon. The 3D camera will show the appropriate team's route in the upper-left corner of the Planning Room map. Return to the Planning Room and make adjustments where you or your computer-controlled teams struggle. Hit bot biceps, or suffer casualties. Through trial and error you'll develop a cohesive and ultimately successful plan.



7 GO GO GO

Make sure you look over each team's route with the idea of noting grenade orders. Some teams may be ordered to utilize a specific grenade at a precise location on the map. Don't forget to utilize flash-bangs to disorient enemies or toss a frag grenade to wound or eliminate pesky terrorists. In crowded rooms, add a breaching-charge order to assist the computer-controlled team past enemy defenses. Keep an eye on waypoints, ROE, and Go codes. ROE should be set at Assault where your team will fire at will. Go codes are an integral mission order and should not be treated lightly. Most of the time, it's best to order Go codes only when all teams are in position and can move into action simultaneously. Other times, it may be more advantageous to ignore one particular Go code in order to eliminate a nearby terrorist before ordering the Go code to your other teams. If one team has a breach order, consider tossing a flash-bang grenade into the same room. Always order Go codes immediately after grenades explode. The Hold command is also important; don't hesitate to use it. Sometimes, it's necessary to keep the other teams in position while you scout ahead or eliminate a particular threat. Be patient.



8 OBJECTIVE OVERRIDE

Remember, your objective is to liberate the bank, rescue the three hostages, and prevent the destruction of valuable financial records. These terrorists are well armed and prepared to defend themselves at all costs. Set your weapons to semi or full auto and stay alert. Use the heartbeat sensor when unsure of possible terrorist positions. You can also jump from team to team if necessary.



SHADOWBANE

The newbie's ultimate starter guide to *Shadowbane* By Di Luo

It's two years into the game, but the bugs are still here, and the game's plagued by lag and network problems. Yet *Shado*—where a rift affliction thins souls and combat happens everywhere. The game's main draw seems to be the myriad possibilities for character development and the opportunity for full-on guild wars. For the sheer chaos among you who are denied by the sheer number of options, *GW* has compiled a few hints to help you along.

It builds character

The center of any MMORPG is, of course, your character. *Shado*'s dozens of occupations and disciplines all stem from four basic classes: fighters, rogues, healers, and mages. While most options aren't open to characters under Level 10, the way you develop your character in this initial stage will impact your character for the rest of its existence and may cripple you severely if you choose the wrong options. *Shado* is very unforgiving, and you'll never get a poorly spent ability point back.

You should, of course, study any race carefully before choosing it, since the race affects basic abilities quite a bit and may also restrict the classes open to you. Only Humans, for example, can be confessors, while Minotours are restricted to fighters.

Once you've chosen your race, you must adjust your attributes. You may subtract up to five points from any ability to use as you see fit. Take advantage of this and put these points into your character's primary attributes. For fighters, this is strength or

constitution, rogues want dexterity, and spellcasters should get intelligence. Generally, all of the attributes that aren't primary to your class should be lowered. Intelligence is the only exception, as it affects the maximum level of all your skills, making it important for every class to have its intelligence at an average or better level.

Additionally, you can add traits to your characters. While this can be useful, you should never overindulge. Your character only has a limited amount of space for rune stones, and each trait takes up a slot. You'll need these slots later to augment your abilities. The traits you should focus most on

are the runes that increase your primary attribute or special abilities like ambidexterity, which grants fighters the ability to use dual weapons.

Fighter

The backbone of any army, fighters are also the most newbie-friendly class. All you really need is a good weapon, some armor, and lots of muscle, and you're ready to charge in and hack away. Decide on what kind of fighter you want to be from the start, though. If you wish to be the tank at the forefront of every battle, you should focus on strength and constitution. Most melee weapons are not modified by dexterity, so you can usually ignore this stat. Conversely, warriors who rely on finesse and missile weapons should concentrate on dexterity since it helps in dodging as well

as the missiles. Centaurs, Dwarves, Hall Giants, and Minotours are all good race choices for this class.

Rogue

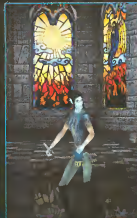
Rogues in *Shado* can be quite effective. With a high dexterity, they can dodge most attacks, wield a weapon in each hand, and backstab enemies with devastating effect. Since player killing and guild wars are common, assassins and thieves can have a grand ol' time stealing and ambushing the opposition. Rogues can also become scouts who focus on hunting down the thieving scum



Fighters are tough and can take down huge beasts by themselves. It's still inefficient, though.



The healer class is quite flexible. Although it lacks the punch of a fighter, many find the staving ability to be a real handy trick.



There are many talents and traits available, but you shouldn't take more than four so you have room later for disciplines and attribute boosts.



of Shadowbane and act as the eyes and ears of their groups.

Mage

With the mage, it's all about intelligence. Everything from your skills to the damage you can inflict depends upon it. Make intelligence as high as possible, and you're halfway to a successful character. Mages are violent spellcasters, and many focus on ranged spells that damage or hinder the opposition. Being able to lob massive amounts of damage from afar earns them the nickname of "nukes." With the lowest number of hit points, mages should always have some support in combat.



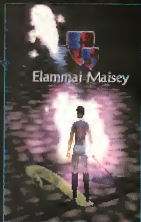
Healer

Healers are the rarest yet most indispensable class. They keep a group alive, provide buffs that increase everyone's abilities, and are invaluable in support. They do lack damage-dealing ability, though, and are thus very difficult to solo with. That said, you can usually count on finding a group in desperate need of a healer's attention. Healers should also focus on intelligence, since it determines the outcome of their spells. A few healer classes, such as the crusader and confessor, do focus on combat. These healers should have decent strength and constitution while serving in their second-line combat duties.

Road map to success

Levels 1-5: Shadowbane is one of the fastest games in which to level up, and it should only take an hour or so for the first five levels. Outside of every village are spawn points for low-level fodder like snakes, spiders, and lizard men. Get yourself a group and pick on them. Focus your points on upgrading your primary stats and save up your money for training. You won't need to buy equipment for a while yet. The monsters around the towns are so pitiful that you can even solo this part, although it generally takes a bit longer to level up.

Levels 6-10: Things will get a bit more interesting after Level 5. You'll find that it takes way too long to level up if you continue to sit around town. Start hunting for bandit and goblin groups, which are located in the northern and central parts of the island respectively. Camp these spawn points and watch your experience increase. Focus on your primary stat, and once you max it out, move on to the next most important one



Stick to the snakes, spiders, and lizards when you first get started. Anything tougher and you'll be looking for your corpse regularly.

for your class.

When training your skills, remember that Shadowbane has a soft cap. While you can technically train a skill to as high a level as your intelligence allows, it is often impractical due to pricing issues. After you've reached a skill level at which the game items are suitable for your character's current level, the training price will jump astronomically. Unless you have a lot of money donated by friends, just wait till you level up to keep training.

Levels 11-20: This is when you set your character's eventual path. At Level 10, you can pick a profession for your class. There are dozens of possibilities, and the Shadowbane

manual is pretty worthless at describing what they actually do. Head over to the Shadowbane forum at shadowbaneabi.com—people there seem to be a lot more knowledgeable than the manual.

In the lower levels of Rank 1, you should stick to fighting bandits unless they become "bite" for you. You should then head to the Bogs. These can be quite tough, and there is even the occasional Rank 3 monster in this area. Make sure you have a good group with you since dying now actually penalizes you more than just making you drop your stuff.

Levels 21-30: It's time to start playing with the big boys. Once you reach Rank 2, you'll be forced to pledge your allegiance to one of the cities outside of the newbie island. When you get there, you need to be careful since the safety zone that protected the newbie island no longer applies. Player killing becomes rampant, and thieves and assassins will around every corner to prey on hapless newbies. Unless you're a really tough fighter, try not to wander outside of the cities by yourself.

The city you choose also dictates what you fight and what items you get. I personally prefer Khar, since there is a large variety of creatures to fight and the

city's layout is relatively simple, unlike the mess that is King's Crossing.

The monsters that you can fight for experience here are top varied to list, but as a general rule, it's never a good idea to fight monsters more than a rank higher than your current level unless you have a group to back you up. Of course, soloing is the most ineffective method of leveling up anyway, so antisocial types should either give up or swallow their hatred of fellow gamers.

You should also lay down the groundwork of your future here. Network a bit, find possible guilds to join, and figure out what powerful runes you might want to buy. Runes will give you access to new disciplines and skills, and they increase your maximum abilities. They are quite pricey, however, and can range into the hundreds of thousands in gold.

When you finally make it to Rank 3, it's time to join a guild and take part in the more interesting parts of Shadowbane. The regular cities don't have trainers that'll be of much use to you by this point, so players who continue to focus on mindless monster hunting will find their growth stunted. Besides, why play a game about guilds and wars if all you want to do is camp a spawn point?



Fighters should always interact attacking monsters and keep them away from the spellcasters. Taunt and run if necessary.



A good group is essential for the bigger monsters. Support characters provide front-line troops with a variety of buffs to increase survivability.

SHADOWBANE CHAT DICTIONARY

- 1H, 2H:** One handed or two handed. Used to describe weapons.
- Buff:** Spells and abilities that increase abilities for a brief time.
- Con:** Constitution.
- Debuff:** Spells and abilities that decrease abilities for a brief time.
- Def:** Dexterity.
- Drop:** Looting up.
- Dot:** Damage over time, used primarily to describe certain spells.
- Gen:** Intelligence.
- GGC:** Looking for group.
- HP:** Health.
- PK:** Player killing.
- PM:** Please tell, used when asking someone to send you a private message.
- R1, R2, and Rank 1, 2, and so on:** Each rank denotes 10 levels, thus an R3 can go anywhere from Level 20 to 29.
- Slow:** Spells or abilities that slow an opponent down. Great for catching up to an enemy or giving you time to flee.
- Str:** Strength.
- TTL:** Tree of Life, the center of any city and a gathering place for groups with. Want to buy.
- Wb:** Want to buy.
- Wt:** Want to sell.



How To...

RISE OF NATIONS

The best way to play the first 10 minutes of *Rise of Nations* By Di Luo

TEAMS

When choosing a team, a lot of your decision depends on the map choice, although some nations are definitely better than others depending on your style of play. Aztecs gain resources from slaying enemies, which gives an edge in rushing/raiding battles early on. The Japanese are also good for rushing since they have good unique units in the earlier ages, create barracks units more cheaply, and also get food production bonuses. Mongols are great for raiding but don't

have the lasting power of some other nations. Germans not only have a long list of unique units from the Classical to Information Age, but they also gain economic bonuses for all their cities, making them equally competent in peace and war. The British are also a good choice due to good taxation rates, which reward an economic game. They have a good complement of units and bonuses for their defensive structures. The Spanish are great for early exploration and controlling the oceans. In a map full of islands, they can dominate territorially, but they require a good economy to chum out units due to their lackluster military. The Egyptians, Romans, Chinese, Mayans, and Koreans are all good defensive civilizations. Most of them have either economic bonuses or can build farms and towers cheaply. They favor a slow approach and wars of attrition where they expand their borders slowly while building up huge economies.



2 BREED

Once in the game, the first thing you should do is select your initial city and hit Shift-V to start a building queue of five peasants. Unless you're the Koreans, who get peasants for free at the start, you'll need to chum these out in droves to build up your economy quickly. Falling behind in the initial few minutes can doom your entire game.



Rise of Nations, like most other RTS games, is a game of economics and strategy rather than battles and tactics. While it focuses a bit more on tactical acumen (with factors such as flanking damage), a stronger economy will still win the war in the end. To help you become competitive with the RTS fiends out there, here are a few steps to follow.



Click to research. **3** Complete Level 5 research. **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10** **11** **12** **13** **14** **15** **16** **17** **18** **19** **20**

4 New Technology Book Market. Complete Level 5 research. **5** Complete Level 5 research. **6** Complete Level 5 research. **7** Complete Level 5 research. **8** Complete Level 5 research. **9** Complete Level 5 research. **10** Complete Level 5 research. **11** Complete Level 5 research. **12** Complete Level 5 research. **13** Complete Level 5 research. **14** Complete Level 5 research. **15** Complete Level 5 research. **16** Complete Level 5 research. **17** Complete Level 5 research. **18** Complete Level 5 research. **19** Complete Level 5 research. **20** Complete Level 5 research.

3 RESEARCH

A handy shortcut is the L key, which takes you directly to the library. You'll find that you need to visit this place often. Always research science first. This lowers the cost for other research and increases the benefits of exploring ruins. Doubling the result of ruin finds is the beginning as essential in building your empire. Next, you should research civics to build a new city quickly, followed by economics to increase your commerce cap. Military and age advances can wait until you're making out on your population cap, unless you're fighting off rushers who come at you early and often.



4 BUILD

Your initial city will always start with farms and lumber production. With your first batch of peasants, build up to the maximum number of farms and fill up the lumber slots. These two resources are the game's basic building blocks, and you can never have too much of them. You should also build a temple, a market, and some caravans as soon as possible to generate wealth, an important resource after the first age. Iron can wait slightly longer unless you're fighting off rushers.



5 EXPLORE

Don't forget to send your scout exploring. If you find yourself overwhelmed, use the auto-explore feature. It's not as efficient as using waypoints (hold down Shift and right click to do so), but it's one less thing for you to worry about. You need to explore to find ruins, unique resources, and enemy cities. Ruins give you the resource that you have the least of, so it's sometimes wise to hold off your explorer until your most desired resource is the lowest of the lot.



6 EXPAND

The medieval borders play an important role in Rise. They provide wealth through taxation, inflict attrition damage on your opponents, and limit where your opponents can build. Also, farms are limited to five per city except for the Egyptians, so you'll need quite a few cities to support a large army, especially in landlocked maps without fishing. You should expand to three or four cities as quickly as possible.



7 DEFEND

While towers aren't particularly powerful, it's good to have at least one at some point during the game. You can only research attrition technologies here, and they are quite useful in limiting your opponents' attack routes. You'll also need to build barracks and stables early on so you can generate units in case of an attack. The economic and military models in Rise are designed to favor the underdog, so you should never neglect either mounted or foot units. Only your nation has good bonuses in one or the other.



8 ATTACK

Unless you're after a completely peaceful victory, it's not a bad idea to send some raiding units out early. Opponents often become paranoid and defensive if a few of your probes come close to doing real damage. If they're busy building forts and looking after their bases, you'll have time to expand your borders without much opposition.



GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS

An insider's guide to galactic domination By Jeff Lackey and Brad Wardell

Galactic Civilizations are a *deeply* deep game to play. With a few strategic clicks of the mouse, you can launch a ship, colonize a planet, attack a star base, threaten another civilization, and lead aphrodisiacs to your demise. But it doesn't take long to realize that there's a lot more depth and complexity to this game than meets the eye. We asked the man behind the curtain, lead designer Fred Wolfell, to provide you with some insider tips and tricks for conquering the known universe.

You can please all of the people some of the time...

The citizens in Galactic Civilizations are ungrateful. And while you may eventually be the path of reeducating them to be more appreciative of your excellence, you'll still have to put up with their unreasonable demands for food and shelter and services.

The good news is, the better the planet, the easier it is (initially) to have happy people. Our experiments have led us to conclude that people generally are happier when they live in a nice place than when they live on a hellish ice ball. Galactic Civilizations has dozens of planet classes, however; the first 14 planet classes are basically useless (see "hellish ice ball" above) without serious terraforming efforts. Earth-like planets tend to range between classes 15 and 19. Planets above class 19 have citizen morale so high that they're hard to describe. So we won't. (See Planet Class & Morale chart.)

Of course, not everything is perfect in happy

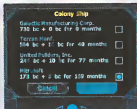


The difference in how you're treated when you're strong and when you're weak. (Strong is a lot more fun.)

POPULATION & MORALE	
BILLIONS	MORALE PENALTY
1	33%
2	33%
3	33%
4	33%
5	33%
6	33%
7	33%
8	33%
9	33%
10	33%

set at the beginning of the game), building up morale (galactic resources, propaganda, destabilization, being in debt, and unique events unique to that planet). But these three factors are the main ones to focus on in your attempt to keep your people happy.

Can't we all just get along? No. You've brought the human race into the 23rd century and are misading your own business when the Drengin Empire announces that it needs your civilization's carcasses to power its death furnaces. Was it something you said? Your diplomatic relations in Galactic



in the early race to colonize good planets, you can't afford the time to build colony ships—take advantage of leasing.



The miser races are a good source of income—surely they'd never use those capital ships on the humans...

TAX RATE & MORALE	
TAX RATE	MORALE PENALTY
0%	0%
20%	0%
30%	0%
40%	0%
50%	0%
60%	0%
70%	0%
80%	0%
90%	0%
100%	0%

Civilizations are based upon these main factors: **Military might** It's more complex than a direct companion. A master diplomat can have a weak military, but avoid war by using

PLANET CLASS & MORALE

PLANET CLASS	MORALE BONUS	ADJUSTED MORALE
15	8%	89%
16	7%	96%
17	1%	103%
18	3%	110%
19	4%	118%
20	5%	125%
21	6%	133%
22	8%	140%
23	8%	148%
24	8%	156%
25	7%	164%
26	6%	172%

land. Your citizens want stuff. And you can build stuff that makes them happy. An entertainment center, for instance, will increase your base rating by 20 percent. However, people don't like to share their space. So while feeding them aphrodisiacs to get the population up seems like a good idea at first, you may soon find people grumbling about the crowding. (See Population & Morale chart.) Planets will stop increasing in population when morale hits around 55 percent. So to get beyond a couple billion people, even on a nice planet, you'll need to build stuff.

There is another way to really tick people off—taxes. People get really angry when you tax them too much. (See Tax Rate & Morale chart.)

There are other factors that affect morale: your civilization's morale ability (which you can

MORALE TIP To win an election, you really need only half the population to like you. Don't get obsessed with high morale ratings. At first as 50 percent of the people like you, don't exceed it. It can be tempting to lower taxes temporarily to boost approval ratings with the people, but remember, people come to expect ever-increasing entitlements. So don't lower taxes and then jack them back up unless you're prepared for some very unhappy people!

RELATIONS TIP
Do for trade first and then immediately for Deflector technology as you can build defenses. The combination of a recent defense and active treaties can help you avoid war early in the game.

diplomatic skills to keep everyone else at bay. If the Drengin are starting to get nasty with you, use diplomacy to try to get other powers to go to war with

them. The Drengin will ignore you when Altarian and Terrian dreadnoughts start parking in their backyard.

→ **Trade more** Trade with a civilization equals better relations. If half the Drengin's economy is based on trade with you, they're going to think twice about going to war with you. You can build up your trade with a given civilization by enhancing starbases on your trade ships' paths.

→ **Morality** Being evil in *Galactic Civilizations* may seem like the easy path, but it makes life tougher diplomatically. Become too evil, and the good races may seek regime change on Earth. Evil races tend not to get along that great with one another either, but they won't hold it against you. They also won't generally go out of their way to destroy you.

→ **Tactical situation** The A.I. is designed to play like a human and it knows the human tricks of the trade. Build up a force by their planets, and they'll take notice and possibly preemptively attack you. Some with offensive star bases.

→ **Cultural misunderstanding** If you don't spy on a race, you won't know their traditions either. This increases the odds of a diplomatic incident.

There's more than one way to skin a Drengin.

Every strategy game that comes out tends to boast multiple paths to victory. Then you play it and discover that every path but conquest is tedious to the point of wanting to go back and reread *Vogon poetry*.

But *GalCiv* is different—really! You not only have conquest, but you also have the political, technological, and cultural paths to victory. Here are tips on how to win via each one.

→ **Conquest** Kill lots of stuff.

→ **Cultural** If you can get 90 percent of the sectors to be under your influence and renies at peace with the living civilizations, you win. Gain control of influence galactic resources and build star bases throughout the galaxy with cultural magnification modules on them. There are several wonders that can greatly enhance your cultural influence as well. Follow communication theory to interstellar business, and down that path is the mother lode of influence technologies.

→ **Technology** The key here is to keep everyone at peace with you. Ironically, to win this way, you need to combine your diplomacy skills with your technology skills. The reason: Even if you remain at peace with everyone, one civilization will eventually conquer the others in the time it takes to become a Vorlon-like being. And at that point, you'll be next no matter what. Your challenge is to maintain a balance of power in the galaxy. Send ships and money and technologies to whichever civilizations seem to



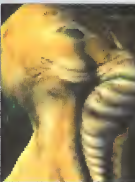
Different forms of government can increase production, but at the cost of making it more difficult to keep everyone happy.



"OK, we're trading with the Terrians, who are war with the Drengin, but we're friends with the Arcans, and the Arcans are friends with both the Terrians and the Drengin." Diplomacy can be very tricky in *Galactic Civilizations*.



The little square next to the sector ID number will show you the civilization influence points for that sector.



Evil end start! You'll have to keep a sharp eye on these guys.



Setting your tax rate too low (such that morals is more than 50 percent) is a waste of resources.



To have a chance of winning, you must find and take resources and inhabitable planets faster than your rivals do.



Sometimes the best way to take care of enemies is to bribe someone else to do it for you.



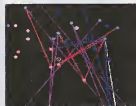
Propaganda can be an effective way to convince your people just how great they have it.



Galactic waterparks and shopping malls can convince other races of the superiority of Human culture.



Sure, you can conquer a planet, but there's a special satisfaction in having them voluntarily defect due to your cultural superiority.



Battleships and Death Stars are cool, but good trade routes are critical to any successful dynasty.

ONLINE GOODIES Monday to the 11th. You can create your own beta, alpha, Delta Planets, rebellions, events, and more, and this all rolls them to the GalCiv.com library. Visit www.galacticcivilizations.com to learn how to make your own mods.



The other civilizations won't idly sit by while you invade their space with starbases.

PLAYER	POTENTIAL FRIEND/ENEMY	LIKELY VIEWPOINT
Evil	Evil	One of the gang, but still won't trust them
Evil	Neutral	Doesn't trust them
Evil	Good	They're just trying to get us, will fight if they're not
Neutral	Neutral	Just doesn't care
Good	Evil	Must be wiped out no matter what the cost
Good	Neutral	Can visit, but must keep ahead on
Good	Good	If they're not completely defenseless, future allies

AGGRESSION LEVELS	RESULT
Passive	Will likely make an ally, military might
Not Very Aggressive	Diplomacy over 25,000 military might
Fairly Aggressive	Diplomacy over 40,000 military might
Bloody Warmonger!	Looking at your military might as well as at the aggression level, you'll find out whether you'll be able to get an ally or not.

be losing against stronger ones so that they all remain viable for as long as possible. You will want to make sure you control the technology-enhancing galactic resources and build them up. Use your diplomacy to give capital ships to the enemy of anyone who happens to control a technology resource.

◀ **Political** This path is much harder than it first seems. Get all races to ally with you and you win. Easy enough. Except that in order to do that, you need their diplomatic relations with you to be "close." This requires an immense amount of trade and the occasional "gift" to their ambassador. Having a decent-size military helps as well. You will need Alliances technology to do this. Building up trade will require careful planning of your trade routes. Don't just randomly send your freighters out there; pick a path that will be easy to follow up with a line of star bases with trade enhancing modules. Make sure your freighter goes to a planet with a high population and comes from a planet with high population.

Before you start the game, have an idea about which path you want to take. But don't count on your starting abilities to be enough to make your victory preordained.

Good and evil

Humans start out as neutral civilizations. The game has a scale from 1 (demonic) to 100 (angelic). Pure neutral is 50. Different events will occur during the course of the game, in which your actions will tilt you one way or another. For instance, converting excess population to food stuffs would be considered an evil action.

One key thing to keep in mind is that no one said good guys never perform any military action. Look back through history and remember at least one time that a "good guy" sent military forces to some far-off place for regime change or, whatever. If the regime is evil, it greatly increases their odds for military action, but even if they are good, military action can happen depending on the aggression level. To find out the aggression level of a given alien civilization, click on the info button on the negotiation screen.

Start, set a course for home

As you can see, becoming the head pooh-bah of the galaxy can be a tricky undertaking. For even more tips, tricks, and insults, head on over to www.galactic.com.

THE ART OF WAR AND THE JOHN TILLER GAME OF THE MONTH

By Di Luo

You've seen the reviews, you've seen the screenshots, and you must be wondering how even our intrepid reviewers can wade through so many titles without committing harl karl. Here are a few tips to help you in the latest generation of hex-based wargaming.

1 ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LOGISTICS

Get a book. If you like, get a military history book to set the mood, but definitely get a book. Or turn on the TV, or the radio, or a game of solitaire. Anything really, as long as it distracts you enough to keep you from falling asleep and damaging your keyboard with a badly placed headbutt. When playing larger scenarios, each turn will take the A.J. 30 minutes or more to move its units back and forth with the purpose of a drunkard fresh off a merry-go-round.

1 JOHN KEEGAN



THE FACE OF BATTLE



2

ON THE VALUE OF HOPE

Hopeless causes are good things. Unlike real life, where all you's get is a bullet in the head or years in a Russian POW camp, forlorn hopes are the only way to keep a Tiller game against the A.J. Interesting. Pick the most lopsided scenario possible and take the weaker side. Since your enemy has the tactical acumen of a rock, it will never press its advantage. You can spend the next few hours target practicing and picking its army apart piecemeal. It's not particularly entertaining except for alternate history buffs who want to brag about routing a Russian corps with one SS division.

ON THE VALUE OF FRIENDS

3

If you're one of the lucky few who actually has friends brave enough to venture into the obscure world of wargaming, the Tiller games can be fun. While most games can be played by e-mail or through a direct TCP/IP connect, you're better off with the PBEM, since few people have the patience to sit around for the hours needed for even the smallest of scenarios. Be warned that this breed is nearly as rare as a good Star Trek game. Indeed, this webber will propose marriage and undying devotion to any female who voluntarily plays a wargame and puts up a good fight.



4

ON INTELLIGENCE

In order to succeed in any wargame, you must understand the system. Always read the manuals, since even games from the same designer might have very significant changes. In Tiller's black powder-era games, units can fire after expending all their movement points, whereas his more modern games use movement points for both fire and movement. Playing all his games the same way is usually a recipe for disaster.

ON PRINCIPLES OF WAR

5

The military doctrines of the modern world all agree on the importance of surprise and mass. If playing against a real person, study the ground. You should try to approach the enemy unseen or with as much cover as possible. Attack where you are least expected and concentrate at least 3 to 1 odds against the enemy. If you spread yourself thin and attempt to be strong everywhere, you will instead be weak everywhere. Overwhelming force somewhere will allow you to roll up the enemy's flanks or break through the middle, split his army, and defeat him piecemeal.



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Scorched Earth

Include Me Out!

Why MMORPG is pronounced "More Pigs" By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@buffdavis.com

As I was meditating in my traditional English rose garden the other day, sipping upon a piping hot cup of a particularly delightful Darjeeling, I thought to myself, "What should I kill by any means necessary to improve not only my life but, by extension, the lives of the worthless curs called 'mankind' whose very presence despoils this green and pleasant planet?" I thereupon began composing a list of things the world would be better without: movies starring chimps as unlikely sports stars, Tyne Daly, the designated hitter, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games. And while my peculiar but easily suggestible Uncle Richard has already promised to deal personally with the "Daly Dilemma," there's precious little I can do about the rest. Except the MMORPGs, and what I propose is this: Everybody follow my lead and stop playing them now.

If this is the future of gaming, then the future of PC gaming is an anesthetized deme-world where narcotized gamers are reduced to monthly fee-paying veal calves. These products are as far from fun as Tyne Daly is from mankind's current rung on the evolutionary ladder (memo to self: explore possibility of pitching movie featuring Tyne Daly as unlikely sports hero). Whose bright idea was it to create a virtual world and then invite every halfwit with a credit card to join in? I already participate in a massively multiplayer game called My Hellish Daily Life, and the last thing I need to do is spend time interacting with the pretentious suspender-wearing cretinous captain of industry holding up the Starbucks line because he's imperiously holding up one finger to stush the barista while he chats with Chuck on his super-vision cell phone—just because the clown decides to go online and call himself Lorrick the Impudent, I'm supposed to chuckle good-naturally and be his pal? I don't think so. And don't start telling me about PvP services until My Hellish Daily Life features PvP. I'm just not interested. Quite frankly, these games are the laziest pieces of work known to man. If MMORPG designers were held to the same standards as other manufacturers they'd be issuing recalls about five seconds after going live. Instead, they cough up half-finished games with half-stapled-together



I was sipping a piping hot Darjeeling.

servers to eat up half your discretionary income. At this year's D.I.C.E. summit, the group working on Star Wars Galaxies confessed they are counting on the hardcore games to create the infrastructure and social framework for their game—having thus shunted off responsibility for the most important part of their product to pants-wetting fanboys they have commenced cutting features in order to keep missing their original ship date. The Sims Online was relying on players to create a bright and vibrant world as well, and look how great that turned out. Despite my creeping sense of dread, I wouldn't call Galaxies a debacle in the making—but don't let that stop you.

Pop quiz: What game is this? "You are one of three factions fighting for dominance in a world torn asunder." Is it Asheron's Call 2, Earth & Beyond, or Anarchy Online?

And that points to the biggest problem with these games: They're all the same and they're all the same in most of the bad ways. Each and every bill bends over backward to make sure the early game experience actively discourages you from playing. For the love of God, if you're making one of these games, even on the first part so gamers aren't rab-bashing for hours (and making your rats bipeds and calling them drudges doesn't count). Why should I pay \$9.95 a month to kill rats when I can club the vermin feebing on what I like to call "The Hitchhiker Study" in my crawl-space for free? Mix it up a bit, give us laser beam-shooting rats, or better yet, make a whole army of flesh-eating Time Daly zombies and equip gamers with an ice pick and some rock salt.

That's something I'd pay \$12.95 a month to do

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