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17 Reviews

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"Every single combat in the game is a breathtaking, original ballet of death."

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COVER STORY
Max Payne

Read our exclusive preview on the sequel to Finland's No. 2 export (right after Nokia phones).

18 Editorial

Jeff recommends some games. Like we care.

22 Letters

Every month, hundreds of people write in with thoughtful, intelligent letters. Those we throw out. Next, we pick two pages worth of really dumb ones and make fun of them. Next, huh?

32 Loading...

This month's Loading shots invade Paris. British Commandos and Nazis duke it out in *Call of Duty* and speed freaks blow past the Eiffel Tower in *Midnight Club II*.

40 Read Me

George Jones smells a story in the mysterious life of game clubs. His discovery: They often stink. Darren Gladstone tests out the latest *Battlefield* expansion (*Secret Weapons*). Thierry Nguyen learns that the creators of *Stronghold* have sold out to *The Sims*, and Ken Brown takes a look at the new *C&C: Generals* expansion. Plus, our regular bunch of goobers bring you your regular diet of game news and commentary.

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46 Homebrew

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82 Online Overload

There are dozens of MMO games coming out to milk your wallet dry. We found five that are trying something different and—pss—might actually be worth the money.

114 Tech

Wii reviews Toshiba's new laptop and a rig by ABS, while Loyd beats up on a couple of motherboards. Also, Dave checks out the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. Of course, there's a new Cracked Case, Wii Power, Tech Medics, and Killer Rigs.

125 Gamer's Edge

Be a pastel blazer-wearing king with our guide to *Vice City* shenanigans. Plus, Bruce and Tom vie for control of the world in *Rise of Nations*, and the world's No. 1 FPS player offers his trips for *Unreal Tournament 2003*.

140 Scorched Earth

Robert hates everything—especially MMORPGs.



"Has there ever been a better time to be a Tolkien geek?"

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 Can Electronic Arts' latest offering beat the odds against good movie-based games?



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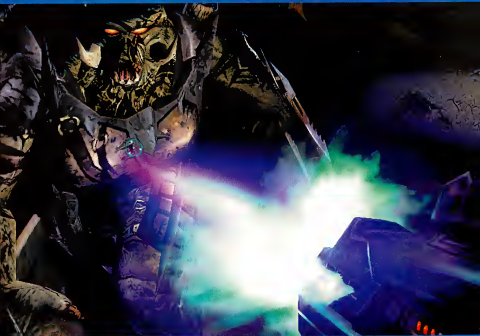
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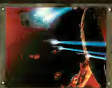
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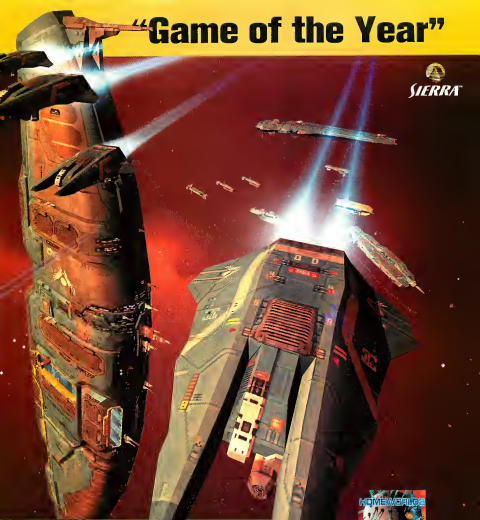
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Happy Fun Time!

It's happy time with senile old Uncle Jeff

We tend to be a cranly bunch here at CGW. I know this. You know this. The whole gaming industry knows this. What can I say? We blame our parents. A little more hugging by mommy and daddy back in the day, and a little less dressing us in clown clothes and beating us with salamas, and there'd probably be a lot more positive reviews around here today.

I feel kinda bad about it though, the way we complain all the time. It's not your fault our parents were monsters. So this month, I thought I'd start off on a more upbeat note, instead of complaining. I thought I'd accentuate the positive, and share with you the games that are making me happy these days. Looking for something to play right now? Consider the following games to be personal recommendations from your dear old Uncle Jeff. I promise you'll like 'em. And if you don't, send a nasty letter to WF O'Neal or Robert Coffey, because they're used to the hate mail.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell - I've never been able to play the *Rainbow Six* games, or any tactical sims, because those take the kind of planning and coordination that I started losing right around the time that Pink Floyd albums started sounding good to me. But *Splinter Cell*, blessedly, is much more like *Thief* than a tac sim, and, in fact, it's the best stealth game I've ever played, with great A.I., a nice variety of missions, and unbelievable graphics. An early contender for Action Game of the Year.

Rise of Nations - My favorite strategy game since *Warlord: Battlecry*, *Rise of Nations* blends elements of *Age of Empires*, *CM*, and even *Risk* into an impossibly addictive mix. I'm halfway toward conquering the world and loving every minute of it.

SpongeBob SquarePants: Employee of the Month - OK, first of all, shut up. I'm playing this with my 9-year-old daughter. Second, *SpongeBob* is the best show on TV after *The WB's*. Third, like the old Humongous adventure games, this game is funnier and better designed than most "adult" adventure games. Your kids could do way worse. So could you.

The Hulk - No, it's no masterpiece, but, it looks great, has outstanding controls, and, most important, lets you break things and kill stuff in a virtually nonstop rampage, except for the dumb Banner stuff. A no-brainer smash-'em-up for those times when even *American Idol* seems too mentally taxing.

So that's what I'm playing, if you play them too, you can be happy like me. Now burn the page and read about other things. *The Mix Playn 2*, it's a good issue. It's a happy issue. We hardly complain at all. Well maybe a little we do. But only about those games that deserve it.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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DAVE SALVATOR

When it's not stealing Wi's lunch money, Dave covers audio, 3D graphics, and gaming-related technologies at ExtremeTech.com, which he helped launch two years ago. Prior to that, he was Computer Gaming World's technical director and lead (JK, only) smogherist for five years.

WADE HERMES

Wade hails originally from the hinterlands of Minnesota but has now escaped to sunny San Diego. His first 286 computer was purchased in 1991 and forever hooked him on PC games. Wade enjoys working out and currently holds a second-degree black belt in Kravpa. Aside from online racing, his latest hobby is his new motorcycle.



JOHNATHAN WENDEL

22-year-old FPS phenom Johnathan "Tactical" Wendel is the reigning shooter king, having won the CPL World Championships three years in a row. The champ splits time these days between practice and hawkng his line of Ret gear. Check out his strategies for *Unreal Tournament 2003* in this month's issue to get an idea of the insane level of attention he lavishes on his game.

RIK SEALOCK

A childhood among wild herds of roving antelope, buffalos, and chickens in southern Alberta, Canada, influenced Rick's decision to become an illustrator. Since then, Rick has successfully wrangled illustrations from such clients as Rolling Stone, Texas Monthly magazine, and the L.A. Times. While continuing to rope in a heap of wild illustration awards, Rick has returned to his alma mater, Alberta College of Art & Design, to teach illustration, cool safari rope tricks, and Hawaiian shirt couture 101. For more of the adventure, visit www.ncksealock.com.



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Scary World of Robert Coffey

Keep Robert away from socks, pillowcases, dead squirrels, internal organs, and other such elements. He seems to have a penchant for putting these kinds of things together in descriptive phrases. Kinda scary...

Brian McMahon
San Diego

We agree. Robert is scary. That's why he still works here. No one wants to end up dead and pickled under the floorboards of his house.



Violence and gaming—again

I couldn't believe my eyes when I read your last issue (August 2003). In your Read Me article titled "Child's Play?" you reported that politicians in Washington were blaming violent behavior on games like *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Counter-Strike*. I myself play these games and disagree with their reasoning.

Their idea behind the carjackings in Minneapolis and school shootings is crazy. Deckeron believes that GTA3 inspired the criminals to go steal a car or shoot their classmates. How many copies of GTA3 or SOF have been sold? Millions! If the games did cause this behavior, there would be waves of school shootings and/or carjackings in the U.S.

If a law is passed prohibiting stores from selling M-rated games to minors, it would be following a present-day trend: shifting blame. It is the parents' responsibility to regulate the purchase of these games. The parents should decide if their kid is mature enough to play violent games. A large portion of adults just don't want their kids to, and when something wrong happens, they point in the other direction. The same thing goes

for movies, music, and books. If something violent happens, the games aren't to blame. I would bet that the people who carried out these acts were violent even before they received an M-rated game. If you can't take the content, don't play the game.

CC
Cincinnati, Ohio



No wonder our society is crumbling. Adolescents are sitting around inside torturing cyber-prostitutes in *Grand Theft Auto*. They should be outside in the clean fresh air torturing puppies and burning kittens like in the good old days.

Harold Minkwitz

We love co-op

I want to thank Loyd for his August article, where he asks game developers to include cooperative multiplayer in their games. I'm glad I'm not the only one who enjoys co-op. My wife and I love to play games on our home LAN, and our favorites are co-op games, which are few and far between (*System Shock 2* and *Heretic 2* are classics). I echo Loyd's sentiments about the *Serious Sam* games and also find it curious about the save-game situation with *Dungeon Siege* (you should be able to save games in multiplayer, not just your character—hint to Chris Taylor for DS2). I'm looking forward to playing the co-op part of *NDU/F2*, just haven't gotten to it yet.

It would be great if CGW could make sure and mention when games have co-op and possibly do a feature on the best co-op games (which would unfortunately be a short story).

Thanks and keep up the good work,

Gary Neel
Palm Springs, Florida

"They should be torturing puppies and burning kittens like the good old days."

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MAIL BITES

Robert Coffey sucks. Jeff Green was a pansy, but he was OUR pansy!

Paladin Lord Green

William O'Neal is a joke, and it's high time you offed him. Do us all a favor and make it happen quickly, the sooner the better.

Scott Marsh

I'm trying to make this long enough so it gets more attention than the Mail Bytes section.

John Oehlert

Am I the only one who noticed the baby spewing Klingon blood on the July cover?

Eric

This month's Who Does Jeff Look Like entry

No disrespect intended, Jeff, but has anyone ever pointed out to you bear a striking resemblance to Fred "Hereman Munster" Gwynne? This applies to when he was alive, of course. He has been dead since 1993, so by now he probably looks like a jack-o-lantern six months after Halloween, or Strom Thurmond 20 years ago. Either way, you can no longer cash in on free meals by looking on his face.

I suggest you alter your appearance to any of the other *Monsters* stars who are, fortunately, still with us (i.e., Butch "Eddie" Patrick, Yvonne "Lily" DeCarlo, or even Al "I Can't Believe the Guy Who Played Grampa Munster Is Still Freaking Alive" Lewis).

You could even focus your celebrity impersonations on that other family of creepy people who resemble monsters from the 1960s, *The Brady Bunch*. With your haircut, you are already halfway to a stellar Alice impersonation.

Sincerely,

Evil Kumquat

Jeff would like to point out that in the last few years in *Letters*, he has been told he looks like Phil Hartman, Walter Matthau, Jan-Michael Vincent, and now Herman Munster. That's three dead people and the Knight Rider guy. Thanks, everyone.



Hey CGW-WTF?

I've been a long time subscriber and I should know the acronyms, and I do know many; however, you continue to use so many without explanations that it is impossible to keep up. I am not a teen who dedicates his life to gaming (honest, I know).

Most of all is Will O'Neal's Will Power column. I know he has something to say but his column is almost all acronyms

and then his own lingo, such as "I was in fact cold chillin' in discrete S.I. audio Nirvana." Can't tell what was going on even from context.

How about doing something no other gaming magazine has done: include a glossary page at the back with the acronyms and a short description. And remind Will that he is not writing just for himself and his own cleverness, but that he is supported by ALL subscribers and should try to reach many of them. There has to be an easier way to say what he means.

berehugg

Hi guys and gals, just wanted to drop you a quick note on how I think you can help many of us not familiar with some of the prefixes you mention so often in your mag, like FPS, RTS, MMORPG, etc.

In your upcoming issues can you please put an article or a page together to outline what each prefix stands for? This would really help me and a few of your readers.

Thanks in advance.

Sam Sturino

RIS: Robert Coffey is a dink!!!!!!

We are merely here to serve. See our glossary of terms on page 139 this month. And Robert Coffey may indeed be a dink, but he's our dink.

Robert Coffey is a stupid-oh, wait a minute...

I'm the guy who wrote you complaining about what I felt was Robert Coffey's excessively dour take on the political incorrectness of *C&C: Generals* (June 2002). I just wanted to let you know that I loved the *Postal 2* review. Three words: nail, head, hit. Your review was the best CGW smackedown since, uh, well, since Martin Crulls smacked *Running With Scissors* down for the first *Postal* game. I sense a venerable tradition in the making—especially now that 300 is gone. Be well.

George Heingartner

Day of DeChent

I just read the review of *Day of Defeat* in the August issue and I am really dismayed that nowhere in the review does it state how bad the cheats are.

I've played *DOD* since the initial release way back when and was totally addicted to the game. As time went on,



the cheats became more and more prevalent. Since I am not one of those low-life bottom-feeders that likes to cheat, I gave up on the game.

Now, I know that just because the game was officially released it did not clear up the issues with the massive cheating online. I can only shake my head when the reviewer (oh my god, it was Jeff Green) states, "*DOD*'s biggest problem is simply the fact it's based on a now-aging engine." Jeff, you weren't being killed so much because you sucked, it was due to the massive cheating.

I do base a lot of my purchases on the reviews and I compare this one to the other two nameless magazines. But, if I didn't already know of the biggest problem (not the now-aging engine), I would be upset.

I know you hear this all the time, but my renewal just might not be renewed.

Richard Bombardier

Jeff Green responds: As most of us know now, online games are only as good as the servers you play on. Certainly there are tons of cheaters out there, in every online game. Maybe I just got lucky, but in the few weeks I played *DOO* for this review, cheating never marred the experience.

Get a life with CGW

I'd just like to say thank you for introducing us to *The Song of Ice and Fire* ("Get A Life," July 2003). This is the greatest fantasy series I've ever read, except of course for *The Lord of the Rings*. This is why I read CGW, to get my monthly humor reviews, insults, commentary, Canadian bashing, and the old piece of information or two that help add something to life. Thanks for making such an excellent magazine, and keep up the great work.

Peppino

I don't want to admit how old I am, but I've been reading CGW since Russ Sipe. Not all of the changes since then have been for the best. Still, change is the only thing we can truly count on. Thanks for the tip on Johnny Cash's *American IV* ("Get A Life," May 2003). CGW has given me good advice on games, so I took a chance on this one. WOW!

Dan Butler

"I am not one of those low-life bottom-feeders who likes to cheat!"

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JULY 13, 1943 SICILY, ITALY

Glide into Sicily under the cover of night with a dead pilot at the controls, crash land in the Italian countryside and find your unit. The assault on the boot begins...



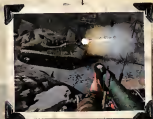
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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone



The Nazis are digging in. At this bunker, they're expecting a large force—big mistake.

CALL OF DUTY

There's an old saying about three sides to every story. It holds true for *Call of Duty*, Activision's ambitious World War II shooter, which casts you as an American GI, a comrade in the Russian army, and a British commando—all in the span of a single game. Even more interesting is that each role gives you different ways to play. Just feast your eyes on this exclusive first shot of what's in store for the Tommies. Next month, we'll deliver a detailed preview of the game.



Here we see British
commandos in the act
of being sneaky. Creep,
soldiers, creep!

Take potshots at Kravts
while you wear a funny
red cap. This sets up a
distraction for the real
ritings.

MIDNIGHT CLUB II

Think about this next time you're stuck in that commute home: You could be breaking every rule of the road without jacking up your insurance rates. *Midnight Club II* lets you blaze through the realistically mapped streets of L.A., Paris, and Tokyo. You'll plant jumps and engage in car chases down crowded city streets when you take part in the "slideshow." Ready to get in touch with your inner Vin Diesel? Hit it.



Hop on a motorcycle or any number of "riced-out" racers.



This is only one of the familiar sites you'll see in Paris. Saddy, no mimes were hermed in teking this shot.

It doesn't matter if you're racing the computer or some buddies online—as long as you only see 'em in your rearview mirror.



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Read Me

Rocket-powered gaming with a whiff of baloney Edited by Ken Brown

CAFE SHOOTERS

Arcade 2.0

The future of public gaming doesn't accept coins By George Jones



"This is where the serious gamers are," say the players at CyberCafe in Concord, CA.

BF1942: SECRET WEAPONS
Even better than Road to Rome.
Page 44

GENERALS ADD-ON
New things to rule enemies with.
Page 46

EMPIRES: MODERN ERA
What's next for the creators of Empire Earth?
Page 48

SPACE COLONY
Sims in space, from the makers of Stronghold.
Page 55



They may not be as hardcore, but girls like to be where the boys are.

"What we're seeing now is the very beginning of a trend that is starting to explode." —Mark Nielsen

Change—much like adolescence—occurs quickly, subtly, painfully. When soda shops started sprouting pinball machines in the late 1950s, America's moral and civic guardians expressed fear and outrage. Kids congregating to engage in idle play, the argument went, could not be productive members of society. When pinball became Pac-Man and Donkey Kong and the soda shop transformed into the arcade, America's civic guardians again expressed fear and outrage.

So, what happens now that game centers—the evolutionary descendant of both the coin-op arcade and the LAN party—are popping up all over the world?

7:00 p.m., CyberGlobe 2, Pleasant Hill, CA

A group of eight kids, ages 15 to 22, lick a fluorescent pink Hacky Sack back and forth outside of CyberGlobe 2, located in the middle-class San Francisco Bay Area suburb of Pleasant Hill. On this early Thursday evening, the minimal's digital thermometer reads a balmy 75 degrees.

This group of six boys and two girls came to CyberGlobe 2 a few times a week because, like most teens, they

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THU	HyperPack 1 hr & Bowls \$5 <small>1 hr 1 Bowls per Customer</small>
FRI	Happy Hour 5-9pm \$10
SAT	Turbo Game Pack 5 for \$15

don't have anything better to do. "It's cheap, it's fun, and our parents aren't here watching over us," an 18-year-old high-school senior explains. The girls, 16-year-old twins each dressed in brylcreem tops and destroyed denim jeans, nod and their heads in agreement, but they also admit that they wouldn't be here dropping five bucks for three hours of gaming if it weren't for the boys. One of

the older boys—a 20-year-old with no job and no desire for college—sticks to the back of the crowd, lustily attempting to conceal a 22-ounce can of Budweiser in a paper bag.

A large, open space with contemporary design, CyberGlobe 2—formerly known as Next Level—is practically empty on this Thursday night, as it is most nights of the week. A 20-year-old



GAME OVER

Like a little risk with your cyber talent gaming? Try gaming in these dreary locales:

Garberville, CA
On Tuesday 30,000, at the PC Caffe in this lower middle-class suburb south of Los Angeles, a 20-year-old is slugged to death with a screwdriver in the club's parking lot. Antagonism fueled by Counter-Strike trash talking and gang making is blamed. The brutal murder is one of 300 separate incidents police respond to at Garberville's more than 20 internet gaming clubs.

Northridge, CA
On the same day of the Garberville stabbing, one teen is shot in the leg and another suffers a neck laceration. Local word in what police call a PC game-related dispute at NetStreet, a popular gaming club on the border of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. Reports suggest that the brawl involved up to 800 combatants, all of whom were on hand to witness a Counter-Strike tournament. Los Angeles city councilman Dennis W. Sims immediately demands a citywide investigation by the LAPD into internet and game calls.



Coccolino, British Columbia

On January 18, 2002, at the Portland Internet Café is suburban Vancouver, 17-year-old Christian Koen's mortality of Counter-Strike ended in death. Witnesses report that after some introductory text messaging, three young men jammed the 15th printer and flew immediately after Koen as shot. However, police discussed speculation that gang activity or drugs are involved.

Kevington, South Korea

On October 5, 2002, in an Internet gaming club 150 miles southeast of Seoul, 28-year-old Kim Hyun-jun overdoes on an entire 400. After playing for 46 hours straight, the game-obsessed young man collapses in front of the store counter, receives consciousness, and then dies moments later in the bathroom. Evidence is discovered in the case of death.

Keungsook, Taiwan

Almost two weeks after Kim Hyun-jun dies the extraordinary bond in South Korea, 27-year-old Liu Hui-cheng goes out the same way after a 32-hour nonstop Internet gaming binge in a game club in central Taiwan. Staff members did like the drug on the floor of the club's bathroom, spewing at the mouth and bleeding from the nose. He dies before he reaches the hospital.



Not every store welcome parks with aggressive attitudes, but this one does.

As in any other male-dominated competitive environment, the testosterone levels are palpable.

plays Madden 2003 by himself on the center's Xbox. Two high-school sophomores play Counter-Strike over the Internet in a far corner of the room; the stars of 19-year-olds freely playing M-rated games they can't even buy at stores is striking. Even more striking, however, is how dead CyberGlobe 2 seems. All the hardcore gamers, says the guy working the counter, are at the other club.

9:00 p.m., CyberGlobe, Concord, CA

CyberGlobe stands in stark contrast with its newly named sister club. No qdjh, just dudes slumped in their high-backed black leather chairs along one side of what is essentially a 25-foot-long two-sided table, the kind of office equipment that is in large supply in the post-doom Bay Area. The lights are off, and it



Good place for a 911c-Up-or-10.

smells like adrenaline-fueled young man, a scent that bears a striking resemblance to baloney.

Hip-hop and alt-punk music blares along with gunshots and explosions coming from the PC speakers. Unlike at

CyberGlobe 2, quiet is not the desired state here.

"This is where the serious gamers are," admits one of the players—a slightly overweight high-school dropout with his hoodie pulled over his head—after he

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REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	IGN	PC Gamer	COM	GameSpot.com	IGN.com	Gamepy	GameRanking.com
Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down	B+	B	B+	C	A-	B+	D
Galactic Civilizations	A	B+	A	B+	B+	A-	B+
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	B+	B-	C	B-	B-	C+	B+
Postal 2	F	B	D	D+	C	*	C
Shadowbane	B+	B	C	B	B-	B+	B
Vielcrow	B-	B-	A+	B	B-	*	B

gets whacked in Counter-Strike. "That other place...it's cool and all, but this is the spot for real gaming."

There's no drug menace to speak of at CyberGlobe. There's never even been a single fight at the past. But like in any male-dominated competitive environment, the tension and testosterone levels are palpable. It's easy to infer that neighborhoods lower on the socioeconomic scale—like the working-class suburb of Garden Grove, CA, where more than 22 game centers have generated close to 300 police calls and several murders—might mean more unsavory elements, less control, and more violence in these clubs. And what's a 22-year-old club staffer going to do when the fists start flying?

Mark Nielson, executive director of iGames (www.igames.org), an advocate organization that believes game centers

can become more financially efficient, popular, and successful by banking together, sees no link between games like Counter-Strike and the violent episodes that have broken out at these clubs (see Game Over sidebar). "I've had some experts who have done some very hard work in this field, and they haven't found any correlation," he explains. "I think what's important is to follow the guidelines the industry has laid down."

Violence or no violence, Nielson expects the number of game centers in the United States to exhibit hockey-stick

growth in both raw numbers and dollar signs. "What we're seeing now is the very beginning of a trend that is just beginning to explode. There are easily 1,000 legitimate centers in the United States today. I expect this number to continue to grow for years and years."

Remarkably, Nielson envisions a future in which community gaming centers—ideally united under a single iGames affiliation—play a critical role not just for gamers, but also the gaming industry as a whole. Big money tournaments will be held, new products will be available for evaluation, and perhaps gamers will even be able to buy and rent games at these neighborhood centers.

"In the future," Nielson speculates, "game centers will be as important to the gaming industry as movie theaters are to the movie industry." Microsoft, Blockbuster, and Sony—you listening?

A neighborhood street like this one has been a hotbed for the club.



The regulars at CyberGlobe & like to kick a Mucky Duck before kicking each other's butts.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD JANE JENSEN RETURNS

The Adventure Company, which wowed the gaming

community with the excellent *Syberia* last year, made the exciting announcement that it has signed legendary developer Jane Jensen to produce a new adventure game due in 2004. Jensen, for you kids out there, is the brains behind the classic Gabriel Knight series, which features some of the best adventure games ever made. Welcome back, Jane. We missed you.



THE BAD UPHEAVAL AT BLIZZARD NORTH

While it's not nearly as bad as some of the Internet hysteria would suggest, the announcement in June of the departure of Bill Roper and the three founding members of the Blizzard North team—Erich Schaefer, Max Schaefer, and David Drevlis—is nevertheless a minor summer worth noting here, as these four can take at least partial credit for the successes of the *WarCraft* and *Diablo* franchises. (And Roper's voiceover on the *WarCraft* games will never be equaled.) A hearty good luck and "zug zug" to the departing crew.



THE UGLY GALAXIES LAUNCH

It was one of the most hyped and anticipated PC games in years. It was made by two of the biggest game companies on Earth—Sony and LucasArts. But the opening day of *Star Wars Galaxies* was as chaotic and unprofessional as any we've seen for an MMORPG, with most people unable even to connect to the servers. The most egregious problems were solved quickly, but that doesn't negate a profoundly disappointing beginning, which instantly and needlessly turned off many players.



HANDS ON

Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons

Bullets, blood, and bizarre vehicles will fly **By Darren Gladstone**



In case you missed our huge preview of *Secret Weapons of World War II* (June 2003), here's the story in a nutshell: eight new levels, a new Assault mode, several new weapons, and, as you can gather from the name, a bunch of top-secret vehicles. After storming EA's offices to play a late beta, we're here to tell you that it's shaping up to be even better than *Road to Rome*.

The battlefield looks bloody good in the assault missions we played—the bullets (and, finally, blood) will fly in this new expansion, which takes full advantage of the EA patch. In the snowcapped Helendrom map, we drove amphibious vehicles and staged a secretive assault on a Nazi outpost.

Some maps are designed for stealth, using recessed waterways and other less-traveled routes, and there are many ways to execute a quick strike or to fly under the radar, including motorcycle/scooter units, rocket-packs, and a C-47

transport plane. The rocket-pack is tough to control and shoot from, but it makes for very quick insertions. Unfortunately, however, it's also highly combustible. Once choice shot and—blam!

Our new favorite map is Mimoveques, in which your job as the Axis is to defend a few messy vents at a V2 rocket facility from the Allies trying to take 'em down. As the Allies pour on waves of air strikes and amphibious landing craft, the Axis man AA guns, the Flaikanzer AA tank, and even V2 rockets. But nothing topped one moment we had late in this match: As the Allies dropped troops behind the Axis lines with C-47 transports, we manned a V2 launch across the map (navigating in first-person mode). After locating the Allied runway, we spotted a C-47 loitering for a takeoff, bore down on the plane, and detonated just behind it—taking out the plane and its six passengers with one blow!

Rocket-packs are highly combustible. One choice shot and—blam!



BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM

If you're already eager to play the true sequel to the *Battlefield* series, get ready to wait some more. *Battlefield: Vietnam* is still about a year out, so any information you see is likely to change long before the game gets its full 2004 ship date. We played around with it a bit at EA's offices, and it's plain that it aims to deliver a deeper experience with better graphics and more immersive audio.

In the demo, we tore through the Mekong delta as a North Vietnamese enemy soldier. The dense foliage changes the experience by dramatically slowing the pace, making the game all about stealth and ambushes—that is, until the Americans call in a napalm strike. Driving a rusty old jeep, we headed into the hills and crossed a rope bridge in search of a sniper spot. That's when the roar of rotors and the distant sound of *Boomerang's* "Born to Be Wild" gave us a heads-up: Huey choppers, the workhorses of U.S. troops in Vietnam, play a major role in this game. They can be used to insert or extract soldiers or to airlift vehicles into combat, and their door cannons can lay down torrential suppressing fire.

We'll be sure to bring you more when the game is a little better "cooked."



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ENGAGE IN EPIC CONFLICT against a force of alien invaders and other foes in the single player campaign. Deathmatch-style Multiplayer gameplay modes include Robotch, Capture the Flag, Teamwork, Action Hero and many more.

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A U.S. laser hits enemy units with advanced microwave technology.



Even bigger global war

C&C Generals add-on boasts new Challenge mode, new campaign, and plenty of units

With combat cycles, these crazy GLA tunnel attacks are new even more devastating.

Smart generals are always looking for an edge with their arsenal, and desktop generals are no exception. So EA is equipping C&C Generals: Zero Hour (working title) with loads of new high-tech weapons, including the U.S. specter gunship, the MDA8 (Mother of All Bombs), and next-generation weapons designed with microwave, laser, and satellite technology.

You'll have ample opportunity to put those weapons to use in 15 new single-player missions that let you destroy the U.S. fleet in the Mediterranean, root out a splinter cell in Cairo, infiltrate a U.S. intelligence building, and send in special operatives to capture weapons of mass destruction.

In addition to the new units and campaign, the expansion will boast a new game type: the General's Challenge. In the Challenge mode, you control any of 12 new armies in a battle of world domination against (2 A.) generals. Players pick which of the armies they want to use (toxin army, air power army, etc.) and fight against the progression of enemy generals. With 15 new missions, the new mode delivers a substantial amount of gameplay (12 armies against 12 generals = 144 new battles).

If you can defeat all of the generals, you'll unlock their armies for play in Skirmish and Online modes and earn bragging rights online with new medals for each enemy general you defeat.

HOME BREW: SHAREWARE & FREWARE



By T. Byrd Baker

Things are topsy-turvy this month: We have a game that used to be free and now costs money, as well as another game that should have cost money but is now totally free.

Crimsonland



It's back, and it's badder and bloodier than ever. We featured *Crimsonland* on our cover CD last year

when it was freeware, and this updated shareware version offers enough improvements to justify its \$20 registration fee.

The gameplay: Point and click until everything is dead. The only problem is that the screen is crawling with so many enemies that it takes the reflexes of a Jolt-swilling 13-year-old to keep up. Fortunately, the dead baddies occasionally drop new weapons, which range from rocket launchers and miniguns to shotguns and plasma rifles.

Even that firepower isn't enough to keep the enemies at bay for long, and that's where the perks system comes in. As you gain experience and reach higher levels, you'll get a random menu of perks, which are skills that stay with you until your character perishes or the level is complete. Some offer extra experience or health, others power up weapons. Many are just plain crazy, and all are a complete blast to experiment with. This is the kind of game you could play for five minutes to kill some time—or until the wee hours of the morning.

Check it out on this month's demo disc or at crimsonland.reflexive.com/crimsonland.

Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory



Return to Castle Wolfenstein was known mainly for its team-based multiplayer action, and the free

Enemy Territory expansion pack expands on that legacy. It comes with a truckload of new gameplay modes, including a rudimentary campaign system and a team-based last-man-standing variant. Best of all, you don't even need the original game to enjoy this stand-alone expansion, so get downloading. Go nab it at www.splishdomegame.com.

FIVE TURKEYS NEED NOT APPLY

It's time to clean up the streets of Bay City the only way Starsky and Hutch know how! With your Ford Ford Torino and .357 Magnum, it's up to you to race and shoot your way to the top of the TV ratings!



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PlayStation 2



Violence

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READ ME



PREVIEW

Empires: Dawn of the Modern Era

Rick Goodman sets out again to conquer the world By Di Luo

As the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Rick Goodman, the co-designer of *Age of Empires*, enjoyed considerable success with that project, and later with *Empire Earth*. This fall, RTS fans will be treated to another of his historically inspired creations with *Empires: Dawn of the Modern Era*.

This ambitious game traces the rise and fall of many of Earth's great civilizations in five different eras, including the medieval era, the Renaissance, World War I, and World War II. It features between five and 10 playable civs, including the British, Chinese, Germans, and Koreans. Instead of similar units with different skins and a few stat modifications, each side is unique and has distinctive units like the Korean war ox, which is basically a bovine explosive. (As anti-PETA as it may sound, the war ox is historically accurate.)

Gameplay is more massive and detailed than in *Empire Earth*. Huge maps and combined arms tactics are preferred over early tank rushes—battles rely more on tactical skill and require more finesse and manipulation of the various units' special abilities. So instead of the mass combat usually found in this genre, perhaps more thinking will be required. *Stainless Steel* also claims to have taken several steps to streamline the game, including eliminating the need to micromanage transports by giving every unit the ability to sail across water (nod to *Rise of Nations*).

Despite the historical inspiration, *Empires'* focus is on entertainment. You won't, for example, need to build endless trenches and slog it out in the muddy fields of Flanders during World War I. Besides, what is history but a fable agreed upon?

Gameplay is more massive and detailed than in *Empire Earth*.

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DISCOVERING GAMES

#18 MIND GAMES

Part Two by Scott McCloud



-- don't you wish you could walk up to a pedestrian in GTA and start a conversation, or just go get a cup of coffee?



The denizens of "Vice City" seem to have plenty of personality when they're scripted.



But the *sleepwalking clones* that fill its streets expose how limited *artificial intelligence* in games still is.

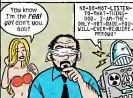


It's been 52 years since Alan Turing proposed his famous test for *artificial intelligence*.

And it's all they ever remember about me.



The test postulated that machines might truly be said to "think" if they could simulate *human conversations*.



Language has been called our *highest function*, and it's been a *hard nut* for AI researchers to crack.



In *contrast*, it's amazing how the AI of *pure action* has matured. Your character can *turn left, turn right, jump, or hide*, but you know the program will be *on your ass* no matter what.



That moment-to-moment *interactivity* tells us that our opponents are *watching us, reacting to us--*



-- *thinking about us!*

To create that same interactivity through *language*, we need systems that can understand *random sentences*, formulate *replies*, and *act accordingly*.



Obviously, that's not going to happen any time soon.



Online gamers are discovering the joys of real-time conversation already -- with other humans --



-- but the game play isn't *determined* by those words and the two rarely *intertwine*.



Bringing the two together will be a huge *challenge*, but whoever does will have a *killer app* on their hands --



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1942



1942



O-47 Skytrain will serve as a mobile spawn point equipped with door gunner. [redacted] drop in like the unexpected angel of death.



Stratiger. Powerful naval gun mounted on tank. Design ideal for louder explosion [redacted] more casualties.

4074



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CUTTING DOWN THE INFANTRY
AT THEIR KNEES.



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FONDLING

WarCraft Toys for Man-Boys

Fear Tichondrius, for he is mighty! By Thierry Nguyen

Beware the Dreadlord Tichondrius! For he and his mighty points of articulation (all whopping 34 of them) will warp you into a world of EVIL! And he's not alone. Prince Arthas, then-paladin-now-death knight, is available to watch Tichondrius' back. But fret not at the abundance of evil in Toycom's lineup of WarCraft (II) figures. For a sweet dosage of good, get the comely/fit/beautiful Stannis Feathermoon,

a joyously articulated Night Elf archer. For a mere \$12 each, you can have an epic WarCraft saga right on your toy chest/mantle/cubicle—and a constant reminder of just how sad your adult life is. Once you've gotten over your lost pride, Toycom will be popping out! Another series of WarCraft-themed toys (as well as toys based on StarCraft and Diablo). They'll be lurking at Best Buy, GameStop, CompUSA, and other geek shops.

GET A LIFE

And maybe you can get out of mowing the lawn.



Krav Maga
Need an outlet for that pent-up aggression? Sign up for a Krav

Maga class and work it out by punching, kicking, and gouging other people. Krav Maga is the official hand-to-hand combat system of the Israeli Defense Forces. Yes, it's made Robert a little scarier than before, but a happy psychopath is a safer psychopath. Check out www.kravmaga.com for info.



20 Days Later
"The end is extremely [f**ing] nigh!"

Charlton Heston may have cornered the market on being the Omega Man, but when it comes to zombie survival flicks, *20 Days Later* is no lame-ass qorefest. Unlikely director Danny Boyle has produced a gripping zombie thriller that won't leave you craving brains.

20 QUESTIONS

Computers are smart. Scary smart. We recently found this 20 Questions website and have banned way too much of our time trying to stump its eerie item-guessing genius, an A.J. that's managed to guess both "marmot" and "Hecky Seck" in the allotted set of questions. It even identified "orc." Check it out at y20q.net/3095/btest.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, September, 1998

Our cover touted 100 Hot New Games, but what really

grabbed us by the seat of our pants—literally—was the Intensor chair. Basically a subwoofer planted in a very uncomfortable plastic chair, this gaming peripheral chewed up three ad pages and warranted a mention in Lloyd Case's column that month—he didn't like it. Successful as a lexative, a failure as a device approaching any sort of usefulness, the Intensor chair would soon take its place in the hardware scrap heap next to 3D eyeglasses.



Ten Years Ago, September, 1993

Old game journalists don't die, they go on to make

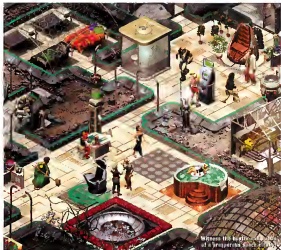
games. Case in point, CGW's own Alan Emrich, who coined the 4X (aXplor, aXpend, aXploit, aXterminata) description of games like Masters of Orion this month in his preview of that game. Years later, Emrich would move on to work on MOO3 and add a new X (aXperience) to his favorite genre. Sadly, MOO3 was a disappointment, but you can't blame Emrich, since he and his promising design were scrapped before the game's release.



Fifteen Years Ago, September, 1988

Our big cover story was "Politics '88," an overview of

all the political-campaign games coming out that year. While we can't remember the last time one of these games was produced, 15 years ago there were three: *President Elect*, *Campaign Promises*, and *On the Campaign Trail*. Need more proof of how times have changed? The ad for the original *High & Magic* touted the feature "Sticker free!"



PREVIEW

Sims in S-P-A-A-C-E

The makers of Stronghold build a space colony **By Thierry Nguyen**

After Stronghold and Stronghold Crusader, you might expect Firefly Studios to announce it's developing Stronghold: We've Got Guns Now! But Firefly has zipped right past the modern era with Space Colony, which Firefly director Simon Bradbury describes as "playing Mr. Burns in space."

While the Stronghold games focus on castle management, Space Colony focuses on a mere colony. Rather than having a bustling structure filled with servants, knights, and other feudal fellows, Space Colony has a whopping 20 people to maintain in your intrepid colony. The intimate focus adds a Sims-like people-simulation aspect to the game, and the artwork's similarity to The Sims is probably no coincidence.

The object of the game is not only to build

structures and gather the resources needed to maintain them, but also to manage your crew's happiness so team members stay motivated and keep the colony running smoothly.

Characters range from do-gooding know-it-alls to surly barflies who cause lots of trouble.

Juggling these personalities will be tricky, some people will be content to have more work, while others will demand recreational items, like a zero-g chamber. Finally, when all else fails, you might have to either toss some people into the brig or assign them to psychological counseling.

Besides managing your crew, you may find yourself on a planet with a competing colony jockeying for tourists and resources. You'll deal with all of these challenges in either a linear campaign or a free-form Sandbox mode.

Gamers can roleplay as an intergalactic Mr. Burns this fall.



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DATABASE MANAGEMENT



Learn more.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Star Wars Jedi: The Force Unleashed 2 *Game Boy Advance*
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.



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



Uru: The Ages Beyond Myst *Game Boy Advance*
Ask Sethi! Myst goes online with Uru. Ages Beyond Myst. Players will have the opportunity to explore and interact with meticulously crafted environments in, around, and beyond the newly discovered underground D'ni empire that predates human civilization.



Counter-Strike: Condition Zero *Game Boy Advance*
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.



Halo: Combat Evolved *Game Boy Advance*
The PC adaptation of the hit console sci-fi shooter is based on the original concept. The action is set on a mysterious alien ring-world, and your objective is to uncover its horrible secret, and destroy mankind's nemesis—the Covenant.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight *Microsoft*
The next 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.



Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *Microsoft*
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: Reign of Chaos *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 Underridge Expansion Pack *Atari*
WN'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.



Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader *Atari*
During the 3rd Crusade, the history of this world diverged and ripped open a long-sealed breach to other worlds. Set upon by human factions and powerful spirits, you must hone your skills and triumph over obstacles that keep you from your true fate.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

The best PC games, as voted by gamers



Vice City beats the crap out of everything.



Road to Rome: paved in gold and soaked in blood.



Generals still has staying power.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
2	Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
3	Command & Conquer: Generals (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
4	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance (Konami)	★★★★★
5	Rise of Nations (Microsoft)	★★★★★
6	Enter the Matrix (MTR)	★★★★★
7	Freelancer (Microsoft)	★★★★★
8	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Eidos)	★★★★★
9	SimCity 4 (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
10	Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)	★★★★★
11	Boskorm (PopCap Games)	★★★★★
12	Day of Defeat (Activision)	★★★★★
13	The Sims: Superstar (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
14	Medieval Total War: Viking Invasion (Activision)	★★★★★
15	IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles (Eidos)	★★★★★
16	EverQuest: Legacy of Ykesha (Sony Online)	★★★★★
17	Impossible Creatures (Microsoft)	★★★★★
18	Vietcong (Gathering)	★★★★★
19	Blitzkrieg (CDV)	★★★★★
20	Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (LucasArts)	★★★★★

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of online readers' favorite games from the last six months. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES



Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight and Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 Joystick
Buy them together and **Save \$10**
See site for details.

Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 Joystick Features:

- 16 programmable functions; 8 buttons plus 8-direction hat
- USB connection for plug-and-play ease
- 16-bit 25-MHz on-board processor delivers 100 different forces

Flight Sim: \$54.99
Joystick: \$59.99
Total: \$114.98
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Price after Savings: **\$104.98**
See site for details.



Online role-playing universe spanning both familiar and never-before seen worlds from Star Wars.

Features:

- Define your own role in the galaxy; become a bounty hunter, merchant, smuggler, Jedi and more
- Personalize your character with detailed custom ability choices
- Encounter and interact with famous Star Wars characters
- Ally with the Rebel or Imperial sides of the Galactic Civil War, or remain neutral

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided
(LucasArts)

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



A sweeping scope of epic historical turn-based strategy games combined with the quick decision-making of real-time games. Move through the entire sweep of human culture quickly and have a satisfying game experience with out playing for hours!

Features:

- Zooming scale goes from a territorial view to a close-up of individual units
- Accelerated multi-player mode lets you quickly accumulate resources and move up through the ages.

Rise of Nations
(Microsoft)

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

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

amazon.com.

PIPELINE

The waiting is the hardest part **By Di Luo**

It's human nature: No matter how many games are stacked on your desk and pecking your shelves (and cluttering your closets), they're never as interesting as the ones that haven't shipped yet. Love and the perfect game—why are they so hopelessly elusive?



1 JOAN OF ARC: Enlight Software recently announced Joan of Arc, an action/strategy hybrid that is set during the Hundred Years War. Players will take on the role of the Maid of Orleans and lead her through epic 3D battles on nine different maps against the enemies of France. The battles will include hack-and-slash action, as well as strategy elements where you deploy and lead your armies. This title should be showing up on store shelves toward the holidays of 2003.



2 COSMIC ENCOUNTER ONLINE: The game is for the rules lawyers. This little Web jewel is based on the popular board game of rule bending and interpretation. Players can choose from dozens of alien races, each with unique abilities. The goal is to colonize your people on an opponent's planet and doing so requires an ecumenical negotiation with other players and a keen awareness of isogophles in the rules. The online version supports play against both humans and bots. Check it out at www.cosmicencounter.com.



3 LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT: When French publisher Ubi Soft bought up SSI, one of the oldest publishers around, the SSI brand died, but Ubi Soft kept many of the company's hardcore aims alive. Lock On's being developed by the same people who made Su-27 and will feature eight flyable planes and 20 single-player missions. The developers promise the same unrivaled realism in the flight model and great detail in the planes that is evident in their previous game. Prepare for takeoff in September.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	04 2003
Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic	Gathering	03 2003
ArcheAge Online: Shadowheads	Foxconn	04 2003
Arcades 2	Joncod	03 2003
Arms of Oblivion	LucasArts	04 2003
Battlechaser: Generations	Dreamcatcher	04 2003
Battlefield Command	Codemasters	01 2004
Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts	2004
Reyes Good and Evil	Ubi Soft	04 2003
Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	02 2004
Call of Duty	Activision	04 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	02 2004
Command & Conquer 3	EA	04 2003
Contract Jinx	Wizards	04 2003
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	04 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	04 2003
Defender of the Crown	Chaosware	03 2003
Disciples II: Servants of the Dark	Strategy First	03 2003
Doors 2	Edios	04 2003
Doors III	Activision	04 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	04 2003
Dungeons & Dragons: Temple of Elemental Evil	Infogrames	04 2003
Empire in Arms	Mitric	03 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	04 2003
Exil Games	Wizards	03 2004
Far Cry	Ubi Soft	04 2003
Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island	Electronic Arts	03 2003
Fleet Fantasy XI	Sony	04 2003
Full Throttle 2: Hell on Wheels	LucasArts	04 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Galaxy Ambassadors	CDV	04 2003
Grand Central 2	Vivendi	03 2003
Grind Wars	NCsoft	04 2004
Hall-Lite 2	Sierra	09/2003
Hall-Lite Counter-Strike: CoDZone Zero	Valve	04 2003
Hele	Microsoft	03 2003
Herpoc 4	Ubi Soft	03 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	03 2003
The Hobbit	Wizards	03 2003
Homebrew 2	Sierra	03 2003
Joan of Arc	Enlight	04 2003
Kingpin II	NCsoft	03 2003
Loamont	Interplay	03 2003
Lock On	Ubi Soft	09/2003
Lords of EverQuest	Sony	04 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	04 2003
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	04 2003
Madon NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	03 2003
Madon Grid II: Roundy Hunter	Sierra	03 2003
Magix: The Gathering-Battlegrounds	Infogrames	04 2003
The Matrix Online	Ubi Soft	04 2004
Max Payne II	Rockstar	04 2003
Model of War: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	01 2004
Min of Valor	Wizards	2004
The Movies	Ubisoft	01 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	02 2004
Necromancer Nights: Hordes of Undeads	Infogrames	04 2003
No One Lives Forever: Expressions	Sierra	04 2003
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2004
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	04 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Railroad Tycoon 3	Gathering	03 2003
Robbed Six 2: Alphas Sword	Ubi Soft	04 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Edios	03 2003
Return of the King	Electronic Arts	04 2003
Runes: Total War	Activision	04 2003
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	01 2004
Savage	Games	03 2003
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	03 2003
Shade	Tri Strategy	01 2004
Sim City 4: Rush Hour	Electronic Arts	03 2003
Star Wars Jedi Knights: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	04 2003
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	03 2003
STALAEER: Ostland Lost	EGC	04 2003
Third III	Edios	04 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	04 2003
Tribe Yempooze	Sierra	04 2004
Trinity	Activision	01 2004
Tree 2.0	Disney	03 2003
Two Towers	Wizards	03 2003
Ultimate X	Electronic Arts	04 2003
Ultimate Tournament 2004	Infogrames	04 2003
Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines	Activision	2004
War in the Pacific	Mitric	03 2003
War of the Kings	Wizards	03 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	04 2003
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	02 2004
World War II	Codemasters	01 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	04 2003

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PRODUCTIONS



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ATARI

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Judges for next year's American Idol competition.



"Duff! Gave...
Kazushige's castle!"

Cyane use



This cute and
dainty race is all
the rage in Japan.

Tarutaru



FINAL FANTASY

Can you call it "Final" if this is the 11th game? **By Michael Vreeland**

In the console world, Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series is bulletproof. But it seemed that whenever *Final Fantasy* tried transmuting to PC, the franchise got caught in a hell of gunfire. *Final Fantasy XI*, however, promises to be different with this first stab at creating a MMORPG. Is this more than just a Japanese-influenced *EverQuest* with a console coat of paint? Oh, yes....

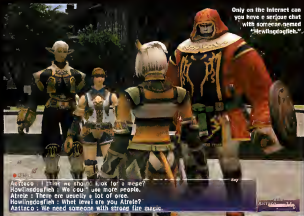
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO VANADIOL

For the uninformed, each game in the *Final Fantasy* series isn't a true sequel. Rather, the series is built on similar themes and ideas that carry over from one game to the next. Each one has a few characters, monsters, and items in common, but in every other respect, each game's plot is totally different and on an entirely new world.

This is the story of Vanadiol: Years after a terrible war with a great evil, a tenuous peace among the three kingdoms of Bestok, Sen d'Orle, and Windurst has allowed the mystical world of Vanadiol to recover. Of course, evil is tough to kill (eww-rr-rr), which is where you came in. You have to choose a kingdom to side with to help steal off the forces of evil.

The stories that have kept people coming back over the years are the story-drenched plots and, more recently, the heavily produced (and gorgeous) CG cinematic cut-scenes. While they will be worked into the narrative, those elements need to be cut back for a MMORPG; otherwise, you'd spend more time watching than playing. There may be some cinematics worked into key game moments, but you'll find plenty of deep story-driven quests to keep you adventuring.

Another trademark of the *Final Fantasy* series is that the characters in the world are, well, unique. With the exception of the Hume and Elvaen races (your stereotypical human/elfish fantasy fare), the same holds true in this iteration. The other three races you choose from are a little more esoteric. The childlike Terutaru are short, mischievous, and sickeningly cute in the Japanese Hello Kitty-esque, while the feline Mithra look like sex kittens and are the perfect thieves. Finally,



Is this more than just a Japanese-influenced *EverQuest* with a console coat of paint?

there is the hulking, asexual Galka race, which is skilled at combat.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Despite having unrelated stories, the series has traditionally stuck to a very rigid, turn-based battle system, famous for random encounters and abstract "let's line up and attack in turns" battles. In order to make the online jump, *Final Fantasy XI* eschews old gameplay in favor of a much more fluid, online-friendly experience. That is, you'll see roaming monsters you can approach and engage in battle—much like in other MMORPGs.

Of course, how combat unfolds for you will depend on the role you play. *FFXI*'s career system is another one of the ways it stands apart from the MMORPG mob (beyond the gorgeous-looking graphics, that is). At the start of the game, you can select one of six career classes: warrior, monk, thief, black mage, white mage, and red mage. Later in the game, performing special quests will unlock additional careers, such as the paladin, dark knight, beast tamer, ranger, bard, summoner, samurai, ninja, and dragon. Each class has a number of unique spells and abilities to learn, as well as a single class-specific "super ability" that can be used only once every two hours. As the limited use would imply, these are real-time turners—the black mages' super ability, for example, allows them



to temporarily cast spells without using mana.

While this may not sound especially unique, the career system has a strong focus on flexibility. Your character is never bound to a single career—you can change any time you like, free of charge. As in *Dungeon Siege*, *FFXI* will track the time spent using each skill, and you'll accordingly evolve. Upon reaching Level 18, you can perform a quest that allows you to establish a secondary career, enabling you to use another career's abilities at a reduced level. If filling up 15 careers' worth of progress bars isn't enough for you, there are also item-craft guilds, giant chicken riding (yes, we said "giant chicken riding"—the chickens are also known as chocobos), home decoration, the auction house, and fishing to keep you busy.

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX USA
PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
GENRE: MMORPG
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2003

Y XI

COMMUNICATE AND CONQUER

Not only is *Final Fantasy XI* the first of the series to go online, but it's also the first true MMORPG developed in Japan. The Japanese mindset is generally one of cooperation, and *Final Fantasy XI* reflects that by completely disallowing player-versus-player gaming—it'll be interesting to see how this resonates with U.S. players, given their backstabbing predilections.

Forming parties is essential, and fortunately, *Final Fantasy XI* has a number of well-thought-out systems to facilitate this. Up to 18 people can join a party, and there are a variety of fair ways to divvy up the items, like the drawing of lots for them amongst your party members. Additionally, players can form massive world-spanning chat groups by means of psychic shellfish known as link shells. These convenient magical chat items allow you to converse with people by giving them a link pearl, no matter where on Vana'diel they are.

This doesn't mean that the game is without a little friendly competition, though—each of the three kingdoms vie for control of the battle areas by teaming up and killing the highest number of monsters in an area, earning both the kingdom and the player notoriety. At the end of every week, the number of conquest points is tallied up, and areas are awarded to the kingdom that has earned the most points. Areas run by a particular kingdom will yield new item drops, and back in town, certain shops will be able to sell rare goods imported from the region.

Final Fantasy XI has now been out in Japan for more than a year, so don't expect it to show off your new graphics card. Still, the engine remains solid, the world is beautifully realized, and the system specs are shockingly



SUMMONING 101

Since *Final Fantasy III* on NES, the summoner career class has become a *Final Fantasy* trademark. Unlike the typically wimpy woodchuck-familiar spells of other MMORPGs, *Final Fantasy XI*'s summoner spells create powerful monsters to fight alongside you, draining MP while they exist. Some monsters, like the carbuncle, aren't great fighters but cast useful support spells, while others, like the fiery Ifrit, are primarily offensive and elementally inclined. Great for high-level solo players, the summoner class is a popular secondary job class—it's like a party in your character, and no one's invited. Likewise, dragons can summon an adorable wyvern to fight alongside them, which can eventually learn some support spells.

reasonable. Vana'diel is a world of stark contrasts, offering deserts, forests, organic catacombs, volcanic badlands, and even ethereal voids. Weather is realistically portrayed and affects everything, including monster appearance, spell strength, and item construction. Vana'diel is already huge, but according to the game's developers, they predict that the game is currently only 20 percent of its ultimate size.

By the time you read this, *Final Fantasy XI* will be nearly done with its U.S. beta

test and only a scant two months away from release. One thing that *Final Fantasy XI* can promise is a strong start, thanks to more than a year of hands-on play in Japan. More significantly, the game spans not only the Pacific but also the console barrier. That's right, this is the first game that will let you talk trash and finally play against your most hated console kin. Here's your first bit of smack-talking ammo for PS2 owners: Not only will *Final Fantasy XI* look and play better on PC, but it's also coming out a few months ahead of the PS2 version.

"Yeah, sure, this is a fair fight."



A lot of wayward gamers get ready to hit the road.

TRON 2.0



ICP REGULAR

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Maintaining order means eliminating
rogue programs, such as humans.



NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0



For those who miss
Beltwater Galactica...



There's a current mantra bubbling amongst publishing bigwigs making sequels: "Evolution, not revolution." That is, try to improve upon the original without screwing up what made the first game so good in the first place. And there's no doubt about it, we like the original Homeworld. Hell, we gave it 4½ out of 5 stars. So, when Sierra offered to give us one last look at the sequel before it hits store shelves, how could we say no?

Up front, there's a lot of familiar ground covered in Homeworld 2 as your people are again threatened by an interstellar enemy, and you must again take flight with your mothership and your fleet to find and strike the source of the threat in order to save your people. Sheesh, you'd think they'd move someone safer this time.

The enemy is different and so are its ships, but you will, of course, still

have to overcome insurmountable odds like you did before. There'll be lots of huge maps filled with asteroids, debris, and sparkling stars, and there'll also be dozens of different ships to command. As with other real-time strategy games, you mine the asteroids, build the ships, then destroy the enemy force.

What's improved? The clunky interface of the original is better: You can now move your ships via the traditional RTS methods, and they respond to simple mouse-clicks rather than arcane keyboard-and-mouse combinations. Orders can also be issued more easily from the overview map, and camera control is far easier.

On the tactical side, fighters and corvettes are now built in squadrons, so you can have finer control over tens of units rather than hundreds. Perhaps taking the simplification too far, the intricate formations of the first game are gone. Instead of stately walls of

battle, capital ships in the sequel move about like the mobs of any RTS. Due to fan demands, however, the formations might appear again in the final release.

The only real addition to the game is the use of subsystems. Your mothership and carriers must build specialized production facilities before manufacturing ships, and there are limited slots for these systems, so ships can't be good at everything. These subsystems can be targeted and neutralized individually. Another little wrinkle is the use of marines to capture enemy ships rather than the hokey salvage corvettes of the original.

Still, the preview code we played was polished and entertaining, full of all the elements that make the first great, so we can only hope that there's enough new in the final release to keep us entertained while we chant the mantra "Evolution, not revolution." Maybe then we'll believe that's enough to make a game great.

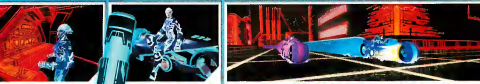
GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT
 PUBLISHER: SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT
 DATE RELEASED: DECEMBER 2000

HOMEWORLD 2

In space, nobody can hear you make a sequel **By Di Luo**

TRON 2.0



MERCURY

THE GAMEBOT

A light cycle champion isn't
coded to feel fear.



NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0



EXCLUSIVE
HANDS-ON!



Your squad gets even smarter in this expansion.



"Stop downloading porn now!"

So much for killing 'em with kindness.



Another country, another terrorist threat.

game. The bad guys have undergone a minor facelift, which has been retextured from the already handsome-looking Revan SN/als, according to Ubi Soft brand manager Mike Jeffress. And in addition to the new maps (which we'll get to in a moment), Jeffress says Ubi Soft is bringing back three fan-favorites maps that take advantage of the new Raven Shield engine: Embassy, Subway, and Siberia.

But new gloss on old maps only gets you so far; you need a variety of levels to make it worth the money. Done. Eight new missions are set in six new locations that have you globa trotting from Italy to Croatia. Five new multiplayer levels have you chasing down tengu in a chemical factory, a university, the jungle, Italian back alleys, and on a ferry boat.

The addition of three new multiplayer modes also bolsters the troops. Jeffress explains that the Adversarial Hunts play a little more like Counter-Strike. The Terrorist Hunt is simply team deathmatch with terrorists. The Scattered Hunt is essentially the same but has scattered start points throughout each map. Last is the peace-loving Capture the Enemy mode, where you only make arrests. According to Jeffress, those captured are handcuffed, go to a third-person

view, and can't shoot. Of course, your teammates can free you.

While the addition of third-party Punbuster software will reduce cheaters, the addition of seven new weapons helps you move down the competition. You have a Barrett M03R, a Spectre M4 SMG, two assault rifles (HK G3KA4 and OTS-14 Groze 9/40), the latest Benelli shotgun, the M240 light machine gun, and the HK SL8-1 sniper rifle at your disposal. So much for killing 'em with kindness.

When you run out of hostiles online, there's still plenty to offer in the single-player campaign. You've got the eight missions that follow the story immediately after Raven Shield. More important, the A.I. is getting tweaked beyond what has already been done. While Jeffress concedes that there's still work to be done, he says it stands above the competition. "I played Condition Zero at E3 and really wasn't as impressed [with the A.I.]. I may be a little biased, but I think we're doing a better job here." The proof is in the gameplay, but maybe we're not the best judges. Take Kar, for example. He led his crack squad into an ambush and shot the hostages, not the terrorists. (Good job, soldier!) So long as terrorists keep getting smarter, the developers at Ubi Soft will have a job.

There are two things you can count on in this world: the sun rising another day and Ubi Soft churning out yet another expansion pack for its landmark *Rainbow Six* series. After getting escorted through the latest sortie, we've encountered smarter hostiles, reconnoitered savant new levels and new gameplay modes, and used new armaments. Intel follows before the mission begins this fall.

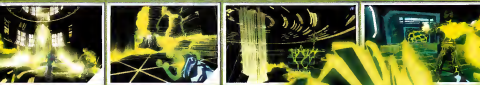
If there is an overarching theme for *Athena Sword*, it is the further refinement of what is already a good

GAME STATS
DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT
TITLE: RAINBOW SIX: ATHENA SWORD
GENRE: TACTICAL EXPANSION
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2003

RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD

Tho, you theena thword ath well? By Darren Gladstone

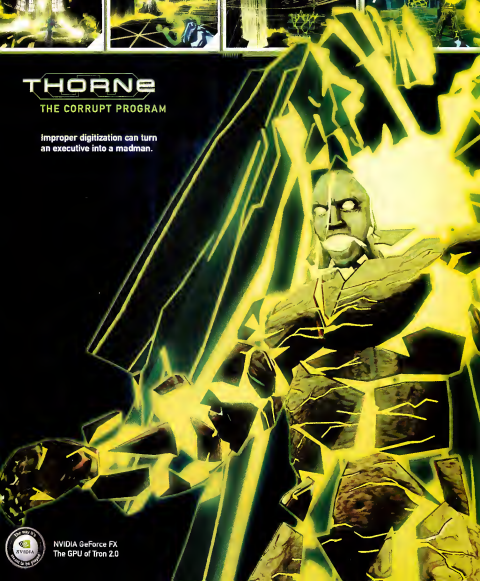
TRON 2.0



THORNE

THE CORRUPT PROGRAM

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an executive into a madman.



NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0



The 619 to Syberia II: a boarding at Trak



Syberian skill role

"We wanted to create that feeling of unfinished business in the first game."

The Belgian comic-book artist turned game-designer Benoît Sokal, there is no *Syberia I* or *Syberia II*—only *Syberia*. It's the story of Kate Walker's journey from the mundane world of a career woman into the fantastic that takes place after she meets Hans Vorelberg, the mysterious automaton inventor. As originally conceived, the first game's surprise ending should have been the midpoint of the story, but for various reasons, the project had to be cut in half. So *Syberia* concluded with Kate abandoning her original quest, abruptly joining Hans, and then, well, who knows? Because that's where it ended.

"It was important for us to make sure *Syberia* had a real ending. I mean, it could have ended like that," says Sokal, who insists Kate's choice wasn't a "to be continued" gimmick. "Endings don't necessarily need to be all sweet and cheesy. But obviously, we wanted to leave a door open. We wanted to create that feeling of emptiness, of unfinished business. It kind of worked. A lot of people sent us testimonials about how they liked that ending, how they cried and were impatiently waiting for the story to continue."

Syberia II begins at the exact moment the first game ends, but as the story continues, you'll notice a few differences. Sokal acknowledges that some players felt the first game was too short and the puzzles were too easy. "We won't make stupid choices just to make [*Syberia II*] longer. It would be easy to toughen up the puzzles to the point where you have to spend three hours on each of them and then claim 45 hours of gameplay. This is not what we are going to do. We worked on enhancing the story. We wanted to make the story deeper and stronger and, by the same process, make it longer."

The developers also have some new technical tricks up their sleeves, such as dynamic lighting, shadows, and weather effects, as well as some animation improvements. The aesthetic will be a bit different this time. "Except for Romansburg, each location will mostly be outdoors, so visually, the game will offer a completely different look. [There will be] less architecture and more stunning outdoor and natural environments."

But all those graphic improvements are taking a backseat to the story. Sokal says the emphasis on character development will continue in the



What better place to go to church than in a game?

second game. "Hans will figure more prominently in the story line, as he is the main reason Kate has decided to make a cross from her professional and past life. The whole story line of *Syberia II* is orchestrated around Hans' dream and how Kate will support him into that journey." Only this time, Sokal promises, the conclusion will be more, well, conclusive.

GAME STATS

FRANÇOIS MICHONNE
FRANÇOIS MICHONNE
THE ADVENTURE
ISSUE 187, OCTOBER 2003

SYBERIA II

The cliffhanger graphic adventure gets a conclusion **By Tom Chick**

TRON 2.0

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The GPU of Tron 2.0

"You like Legolas? Stand on his side? I'll take the thousand of the night."



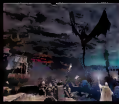
Gandalf gets his action on.



Orc on a pike—mmm, tasty.



Now that's how to make an entrance.



Great balls of fire!

THE RETURN O

Get inside Legolas' leather breeches—at last! **By Jeff Green**

Do you know where you'll be on December 17? No? Then your Geek Card has been revoked. That's the day *The Return of the King*, the final installment of Peter Jackson's awesome, epic film adaptation of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, hits the movie screen. We're a little too staid here at CGW to admit just how excited we are, but let's just say that if you listen very closely, you can actually hear Scooter sweating.

If December seems like a lifetime away, we have good news. Electronic Arts' *The Return of the King*, the officially licensed game version of the movie, comes out in November on PC and will feature scenes from the film. Even better, the game looks pretty dang good, too.

Yeah, yeah, we know. Games based



You are one catalyst against an army.

Yeah, yeah, we know: Games based on movies tend to stink worse than Gollum's pits.

on movies tend to stink worse than Gollum's pits. And *Lord of the Rings* games have always sucked. We're with you. But as console gamers already discovered last year with *The Two Towers*, Electronic Arts is not messing around with this license—instead, it's working hard to let you "play the movies" while getting a decent action-RPG experience in the process. The *Two Towers* was never ported to the PC (bastards!), but EA is rectifying the sin this year with *The Return of the King*—and the PC demo we saw gave us high hopes indeed.

A WIZARD IS NEVER LATE

The Two Towers is essentially a Oblivion-style hack-and-slash in which you play as one (or sometimes more) of the *LOTR* main characters, slaughtering orcs and trolls and other bad guys, and purchasing new moves and abilities as you level up. *ROTK* is, to some extent, more of the same, but with a few key enhancements.

While *Two Towers* is linear, letting you play only as Aragorn, Gimli, or Legolas,

the new game is divided into three distinct paths: Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas comprise one path, Gandalf another, and Frodo and Sam the third. Different levels, with different gameplay styles, will open up depending on the characters you choose. The Aragorn/Gimli/Legolas path emphasizes melee and ranged combat, Gandalf emphasizes magic (duh), and Frodo/Sam focuses on stealth. Along with this, the developers are also adding a two-player co-op mode, so you can battle your way through Mordor alongside a friend. Developers have confirmed hot-seat play and are hoping to add LAN support.

Finally, while *The Two Towers* offers mostly static settings, the environments in *ROTK* have been made much more interactive. Objects like warplikes can be grabbed and thrown like spears, while working catapults can be fired at enemies or wells.

THE WORLD IS CHANGED

The real draw for Tolkien geeks is just how well the game is integrated with the movie. The graphic design and



Stop dragon my heart around.

character models are simply beautiful—especially in *Heroes* on the PC—and instantly evocative of the movie. All the original actors did the voiceovers for their characters, while the original stunt doubles for those actors re-created their moves. Howard Shore's emotional score plays throughout, and actual scenes from the movie bleed seamlessly with the game, adding resonance and weight to the gameplay. And for true geeks, there are a host of cool rewards and Easter egg-like interviews with the films' actors and behind-the-scenes artwork—that are unlocked as you play.

Has there ever been a better time to be a Tolkien geek? No, there hasn't.

F THE KING

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
GENRE: ACTION RPG
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2003



Northland

Damn, we're good. This column has just started and already two of our Outta Sight picks have been snuggled by larger companies: THQ recently announced it will publish Stellar: Oblivion Lost, and Simon & Schuster nabbed Pure Pinball. That's a .500 betting average—let's see Jester top that. Want a sneak peek at the next potentially big things? Get a load of this month's gems.

NORTHLAND

BY GAB HERRA
 RELEASED: Q4 2004
 GEN: ADVENTURE/STRATEGY

SPREAD THE WORD: Europeans love micromanagement like they love beer and world domination. Continuing the criminally underappreciated Cultures series of adventure-strategy games, Northland pits four heroes against cheeky Norse god Loki. Pursuing an eight-mission campaign, you work to build, burn, and battle atop delightfully detailed backgrounds, Internet play, half-a-dozen multiplayer missions, and a working map editor round out the package, which is so amusingly German that it practically comes packed with free Wiener schnitzel.

BEST UNHEARD: If it weren't for the fact that Blue Byte was out of business, the company would see—you'll notice disturbing similarities between this title and real-time strategy great The Settlers. Come to think of it, those

used by the boys in this promising stab at World War I-era aerial combat.

Aiming for staunch realism and supreme accessibility, the dozens of accurately modeled planes this game boasts are designed for play by veterans and novices alike. Historically accurate markings and precise damage modeling are added attractions.

BEST UNHEARD: Unproven development crews are dubious. Flight simulations are a niche market. Put the two together, and it doesn't exactly spell mainstream success. Still, we had the same feeling about a similar title you might have heard of: IL-2 Sturmovik. Then again, 3C Maddox Games wasn't eluding its attention the way Aspect is; the company is also producing two other entertainment products and some military-grade software. Pity the poor, overworked programmers, and pray management stocked up on the Red Bull.

SACRED

BY ASCARON
 RELEASED: Q3 2004
 GEN: ROLE-PLAYING GAME

SPREAD THE WORD: Attention, Jaded gamers: While this may look like yet another Diablo clone, at some point, somebody is bound to get it right. After choosing from six characters—such as a vampire, a sereghim, or a battle mage—you enter into a vast story-driven world that



Knights Over Europe

OUTTA SIGHT

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



Sacred

similarities are also present in JoWood's The Nations, Interactive Magic's Knights and Merchants, and countless other products imported from the Fatherland. Funny, no one seems to notice that while these titles move millions of copies overseas, they barely make enough here to cover the cost of import duties.

KNIGHTS OVER EUROPE

BY ASPECT SIMULATIONS
 RELEASED: Q4 2004
 GEN: FLIGHT SIMULATION

SPREAD THE WORD: From Falcon 3 to Red Baron II, members of the Aspect team cut their teeth on some serious flight sims. But enough with the heat-seeking missiles, back to the biplanes

found more than 30 primary missions and 200 subgoals. Up to 16 players can get in on the journey, questing through a like number of regions, such as forests, mountains, and deserts that bristle with danger.

BEST UNHEARD: In its native Deutschland, Ascaron is well-known for business sims like The Tribician and Anstoss, a wildly successful soccer management series. But nowhere in the company's storied 12-year history do you find any role-playing games. Whether a firm renowned for precisely detailed products such as Pure Pinball can do justice to a lightweight game set in a fantasy realm is anyone's guess. Given the publisher's reasonable track record though, Sacred could very well cast its spell on us.

Look Inside

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A: "Blistering performance." "A fantastic system for games." *—Gizmodo, GNET.com*

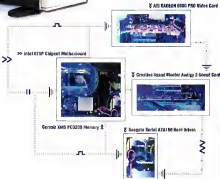
Q: What about service?

A: "ABS was the only national PC vendor to earn a rating of Good for service in our latest reader survey." *—Mik Lasky, PC World*



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CNET.com 3D Graphics Performance Test

ABS® Ultimate X5 (ATI Radeon HD3850) **M:177**

Dell Dimension XPS (ATI Radeon HD3850) **A:119**

Alienware Area-51 (ATI Radeon HD3850) **S:114**

Futuremark's 3DMark05: Second Edition v1.6.0 (32-bit) score

June 2005

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KIS



SOME DEADLY

IF THE BULLETS DON'T KILL MAX PAYNE, LOVE WILL

BY ROBERT COFFEY

THESE DAYS TAKE A ... GENRE: SHOOTER RELEASE DATE: 04 2003

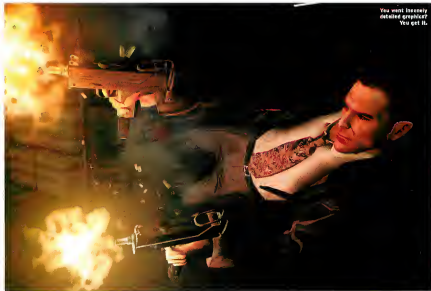
The Things I Want' by Max Payne—a drink, a smoke, unlimited ammo, and a license to kill. But right then more than anything, I wanted her." And with that quote from *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*, any

questions as to whether the tough-as-nails noir hero from the long on stylish action, short on playtime shooter would be speaking the same bruise-purple prose should be resolved. After all, it just wouldn't be Max Payne without the over-the-top dialogue, would it? Without the delicious suspension of bullet-splattering carnage in sultry slow-motion bullet time? Without the graffiti-scarred streets, the viciously evil bad guys, the delicious watercolor graphic-novel cut-scenes, and the gritty homage to classic noir that's shot through every pixel thrown across your monitor? Rest assured, all of these elements are back and then some as every gamer's favorite antihero loads his dual Ingram machine pistols as he prepares to take on *Half-Life 2* later this year.

MURDER MY SWEET

So, what's happened to Max since we last saw him? We can't say for sure, since Remedy is playing its cards so close to the vest that the cards have actually been

"THE THINGS I WANT,' BY MAX PAYNE—A DRINK, A SMOKE, UNLIMITED AMMO, AND A LICENSE TO KILL. BUT RIGHT THEN MORE THAN ANYTHING, I WANTED HER."



pushed through its body and have come out its back. Be that as it may, we do know that some time has passed since Max wreaked bloody revenge on the killers of his wife and child, and he's left the DEA to rejoin the NYPD. Oh, and he's framed for a murder. Again. This time he stands accused of the murder of his own partner. When the game begins, it's late on a rainy autumn night and, like the original, the hero's story starts as one long flashback detailing the road to hell and back he's traveled the last few days. And this time he's taking someone along for the ride: Mona Sax, a classic femme fatale who played a small part in the first game. What's her role in

The Fall of Max Payne? You got us (that whole reluctant-to-divulge-facts Remedy thing gets in the way), but we're betting that Mona will be pivotal in the whole "Fall" part—whether that means she's tripping him up or picking him up, we don't know.

Storytelling-wise, *Max Payne 2* is strikingly similar to the first game, with some notable differences. While the game will employ the same foggy graphic-novel

depictions of key story events, these will occur only between levels. This is welcome news for any gamer who was frustrated by the abrupt halt in action that happened in the first game anytime Max wandered by a telephone, radio, or television. There you'd be, charging through waves of bad guys, when suddenly an exclamation point would pop up over Max's head and the game throw on the brakes. Still, medieval parsons of the game will be peppered with quick cut-scenes, done in-engine to heighten dramatic tension, such as when Max boards an elevator to yet another bloody date with destiny or when a murder scene is first revealed.

Remedy was able to confirm that extended dream sequences will also reappear in the sequel since it feels these sequences were particularly adept at getting gamers into Max's tortured mind. It wouldn't confirm whether the planned dream sequences will feature the same annoying mazes as the first game—we're hoping they won't, since those sequences were particularly adept at getting into our minds and torturing us.



THE LONG GOOD-BYE

Even with Remedy trimming the frequency of cut-scenes, we were happy to hear that *Max Payne 2* will clock in at roughly 20-plus hours of frenzied single-player mayhem, doubling the length of the original game. While we weren't among the tribe of gamers lamenting the brevity of the first game—we thought it felt just right—more of *Max Payne*'s singular brand of action can only be a good thing. The script for the game (penned by Sam Lake, who wrote the first game) is three times longer than the original.

**MORE OF
MAX
PAYNE'S
SINGULAR
BRAND OF
ACTION
CAN ONLY
BE A GOOD
THING.**



Unlike the first game, Max will be able to keep shooting after a slow-and-bodge dies.



IF REMEDY HOLDS TRUE TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF CUTTING THE CRAP AWAY, THEN MAX PAYNE 2 SHOULD BE AN EXHAUSTING EXCURSION INTO ONE MAN'S PERSONAL HELL.

Body-specific hit location and lots of new animations make every enemy death unique.



And we're not expecting that additional gun slinging to be simple, repetitive padding, since Remedy's adamant defense of the length of the first game really sums up its game-design philosophy. "The reason it was short," states lead game designer Petri Järvelä, "was because we cut all the crap away." If Remedy holds true to that philosophy, then *Max Payne 2* should be absolutely, relentlessly dense and an exhausting excursion into one man's personal hell.

Remedy is promising plenty of twists and surprises throughout the game. To drive those plot points home, Remedy is actually using fewer characters than in the first game. Järvelä explains: "In *Max Payne*, we introduced lots of characters, only to kill them off almost immediately afterward. The plot of the sequel is much tighter, more movie-like. There is a smaller crew of more complex core characters." The thinking here is that by investing more time into character development (and giving them some sort of meaning and emotional energy), the payoffs in the inevitable showdowns will be much higher than in the first game. In *Max Payne 2*, the goal, much as in *Half-Life 2*, is to get you to care about the game's characters.

4. THE JURY

While Remedy was typically stingy demonstrating levels in the game, the bits of Max dishing out his brand of justice it did design to show us were outstanding. Everything you'd expect to see in a *Max Payne* game is there and then some. There are showers of cascading bullet casings, rundown tenements

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**MAX
PAYNE'S
BULLET-
TIME
EFFECT
IS, IF
ANYTHING,
EVEN
COOLER
THIS
TIME
AROUND.**

packed with gangsters, and not quite enough painkillers to give you a comfortable health cushion.

Max Payne's signature bullet-time effect is, if anything, even cooler this time around, ratcheting up this feature's uniquely cinematic feel. Remedy has put a ton of effort into beefing up character animations so that now you'll see Max randomly perform spinning dual-weapon reloads or pump a full clip into an enemy while slowly twisting and contorting his body in midair. These new additions go a long way toward evening up the first game's sometimes-still bullet-time sequences. As if that weren't enough, a slew of new enemy death animations will punctuate the gun battles and, taken with the new bullet-time animations, should make every single combat in the game a breathtakingly original ballet of death.

One more thing about bullet-time: Remedy is reworking the way bullet-time, um, time is metered out to the player. In the first game, you kill bad guys to accrue bullet time; unfortunately, less-skilled players found it hard enough just to kill the enemies, let alone build up a nice supply of bullet time. Skilled players didn't have this problem... *Jarvis* promises that little conundrum is something it will address in the sequel.

THE BIG SLEEP

The biggest change in the game has to be the beefed-up A.I. Where the first game relies heavily upon scripted enemy responses, Max Payne 2 is letting smarter adversaries—and not programmers—provide the challenge. After two years of serious

development, enemies are now vastly more self-aware and are capable of perceiving the environment.

In action, the A.I. is remarkable. We watched as Max battled a gang of thugs in a wide-open street fight. Toughis seemed to come out of every doorway and alley, popping out to squeeze off a few shots before ducking under cover again or creeping forward to a more advantageous position.

Remedy has torn apart the rendering engine in order to create more insanely detailed and atmospheric environments—you can practically smell the rain during a rooftop shootout. Highly improved radiant lighting allows developers to sustain an incredible level of shadow definition, all the better for defining Max's gritty noir look. Particle effects are much improved, with location-specific sparks flying off a van struck by ricocheting bullets. Remedy has also incorporated the Havok physics engine into the game; when that same bullet-riddled van has reached critical mass, the force of the resulting explosion—and not some scripting—rips it off the street.

The last, but by no means least technical improvement comes in the characters themselves. A few dozen professional New York actors provided the faces for all the game's characters (incidentally, the physical actors do not provide the voices for the characters, just their faces). A new facial animation engine lets Remedy manipulate the faces to lip sync dialogue and create facial expressions. While the faces are more realistic in their skins than those in *Half-Life 2*, the eyes and facial expressions are stiffer and less believable. That said, Remedy has created eerily lifelike figures that should go a long way toward drawing players into the fiction of the game and giving the story the emotional resonance the developers are so driven to create.

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY

As different as Max Payne 2 is from *Half-Life 2*, the two games are strikingly similar in one major way—well, OK, two major ways, since neither group is all that generous with the facts. The main way, however, is that both teams have somehow managed to work steadily through years of development without breathing a word to an anxious, hopeful public.

Until now. Until just a handful of months prior to release. With these powerhouse franchises both slated for late fall releases, 2003 is shaping up to be the year of the gun.



Every character's face is individually modeled from a different actor.



Max won't always fight alone.



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B lame *EverQuest*, it started making money hand over fist with monthly subscriptions to a massively multiplayer world. Quick to see a trend, there are now dozens of games in production—more than a hundred total are expected by the end of 2004—and they're angling to suck up your time and hard-earned money. How many variations can there be? And how many of them will be good? Pretend you're an elf, a knight, trapped in *The Matrix*, or a superhero jammed into spandex (three sizes too small). What's next? An Anheuser-Busch-sponsored title in which you try to pick up the last woman at the bar?

By now, you've been carpet-bombed with information about the big hitters, such as *World of Warcraft*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, and *EverQuest II*, in every magazine—including ours. This time, we're putting our reputations on the line and choosing five titles you haven't heard much about. However, each of these games has the potential to make it big by doing something fresh and different. Will they succeed? We'd like to think so.

BY MARK ASHER



LINEAGE II

UNREAL ENGINE
UNREAL ENGINE 4.0
RELEASED 2005

Lineage II is going to fix a lot of the issues that North American players had with the original game—bad graphics mostly—by using a modified version of the Unreal graphics engine. In short, the game looks gorgeous. "[Lineage II]

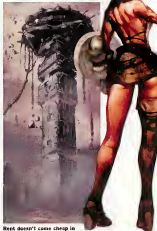
plays more like a movie than a typical MMO game," says lead designer Rood Kim. "Not only are the environments robustly rendered, they come together seamlessly with a single lead technology. Backgrounds unfold naturally, as if you were really in a forest, castle, or temple."

It wouldn't be a Lineage game without the politics and castle warfare, though, and that's going to be even more detailed than in the previous game. "The combat and strategies are raised to an even higher level than before," says Kim. "Now you can mount a dragon and fly over castle walls, or you can summon huge creatures to break down those walls." Blood pledges, which are similar to guilds, will battle one another for



control of these castles. Several blood pledges can ally and form a nation. They will also get a message board, which web-page members can use both inside and outside of the game. It's medieval fantasy gone high-tech!

The move to a 3D engine also means that air battles and sniping from the ramparts will be possible. Besides the blood pledge warfare aspects of the castle sieges, Lineage II will feature normal quests, as well as special quests that will require dozens of players to complete. And did we mention that you can ride dragons?



Next doesn't come cheap in these medieval towers.

MYTHICA

UNREAL ENGINE
UNREAL ENGINE 4.0
RELEASED 2005

Microsoft's Mythica intends to find an answer to a perplexing problem peculiar to playing

MMORPGs: How can you feel like a hero when something about as dangerous as a bunny rabbit, and which might even be just a bunny rabbit, can kill your new character?

The answer? Put the game on an epic stage. In Mythica, you'll be playing as a Norse immortal and trying to avert Ragnarok (the end of the world, Norse-style) from being brought about by the fire giants. You'll still nurture and grow your character, but you'll start off with epic encounters instead of rat-killing quests (when you aren't answering the mortals' prayers on your own, you pledge fealty to higher gods for special abilities).

Mythica, like Guild Wars, uses private-adventure areas created for individual groups. Executive producer Matthew Wilson explains,

**YOU'LL BE
 PLAYING AS A
 NORSE
 IMMORTAL.**



Mythica's Norse warriors look great with some private areas.

"With Private Realm technology, our focus is to bring the best of the traditional single-player RPGs to the MMORPG space. We can make them feel like they are the hero and not just another person lost in an MMO world."

Mythica may be able to pull it off. We watched three players—a barbarian, a dwarf, and a female fighter—have a private adventure battling ice giants, interspersed with cinematic cut-scenes you'd expect to find in a single-player game. The battle included a pack of dire wolves being frozen in ice by the barbarian and then turned into not-so-dire wolf ice cubes by the dwarf and his hammer. It ended with a truly impressive battle against several giants. Our dwarf did some magic stuff and grew into a 90-foot tall dwarf, plus, lots of fighting occurred, and the battle ended with the leader of the giants being snared up in the air by a tornado spell and destroyed.



"By the power of Graystull!"



CITY OF HEROES

DEVELOPER
GUILD WARS STUDIOS
WAS: \$1.99

Of all the games we've looked at, *City of Heroes* makes our imaginations soar the highest. We can only squint skyward in slack-jawed wonderment at the prospect of playing as a weirdly lovable do-gooder along with hundreds of other equally weird superheroes. Sure, you'll believe a man can fly, but can a city of superheroes really work?

Hey, how can it not work? Create the Legion of Colorful Underwear Wonders and protect Paragon City from space aliens, giant sea monsters, and a secret organization of leftover Nazis from WWII. "There will be no rat or snake hunting," says producer Michael Lewis. "Heroes are unmistakably powerful, and a newly created hero can make short work of a gang of thugs."

Lewis promises that making a new hero will be simple. There are tens of thousands of body and costume combinations, and the character types are surprisingly similar to those of traditional fantasy games, with tank types, ruder types, and so on. You'll further customize each character by picking individual powers and developing them as you grow your hero.

City of Heroes will let players fight random battles in the bad sections of Paragon City, but it will also offer private adventure areas for players. We watched a small band of heroes visit an informant on the street, get word of something strange underground, and discover a closed mine shaft that led to a lost city and the inevitable battle with evil. Will you visit the one? Stay tuned...



That's what we call a team! It's a good-looking group. That'll teach those attackers.



In-game screenshot or postcard? In a game this good-looking, it's hard to tell.

50 cities—split among five empires in the world that players can battle over, and battles will be scheduled so that everyone can get in on the fights. When you're ready to raise the sword, "[*Dragon Empires*] features hundreds of combat moves and magic spells," says Tyson. There will also be plenty of quests and monster-bashing for those not interested in forming clans and battling other clans over cities. Or, if you'd rather just avoid the bloodshed, you can play as a merchant or trader, crafting items and moving around the world and selling.

More dynamic combat, a player-driven economy, battles to control cities, noncombat merchant roles, and postcard-pretty graphics all add up to something promising.

GUILD WARS

DEVELOPER
GUILD WARS STUDIOS
WAS: \$19.99

Guild Wars standout feature isn't even a gameplay feature. How about no monthly fees to play? Arena.net was founded by some of the ex-Blizzard employees who developed *Battle.net*. The idea is to sell an optional expansion every six to nine months to generate revenue to support the game.

Guild Wars has more than a unique business model; it also supports many styles of play. "Players can go on single-player missions, cooperative group quests, team combat, and large head-to-head guild battles," says cofounder Michael O'Brien. "Guild Wars has been designed to support competition so that battles are won by the teams with the most skill, not simply by the teams that have spent the most time advancing their characters." The experience will be streamlined and action-oriented. For example, players can transport to a quest area immediately instead of jogging for 10 minutes through empty wilderness to find action.

Guild Wars also allows players to have private adventures. The game world will spawn a private area for the player and group to go on a quest so that players don't feel like they're waiting in line. Which is a good thing.



How'd you do that, *Empire*? *Guild Wars*, with its low back-and-slash MMO/RPG.

DRAGON EMPIRES

DEVELOPER
GUILD WARS STUDIOS
WAS: \$19.99

"Detail" is the key word for *Dragon Empires*, with some of the best-looking, most detailed graphics yet seen in a massively multiplayer game. "I am convinced screenshots for *Dragon Empires* would make excellent holiday postcards," jokes community liaison manager Peter Tyson.

A lot of thought beyond the graphic detail has gone into this title. Once your clan captures a city, you control the city's economy. Any player can set up a shop in your city—just lay down the lev, set up some harsh production taxes, and your digital Tammany Hall is well underway. "We're taking player-driven gameplay somewhere new," says Tyson. There will be more than

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE 90



98
THE HULK



102
RED FACTION II

If you have a problem with the A.I., then blame the American educational system.

PLANETSIDE 88



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Two "Elites" (Terrian Republic soldiers) try setting up an ambush to take out strays. The joke's on them.

PlanetSide

Interstellar war—good God y'all, what is it good for? BY DARREN GLADSTONE

GAME STATS

PLATFORMS: XBOX 360 ONLINE
ENTERTAINMENT
 RELEASED: SOFIA ONLINE
 ENTERTAINMENT
 TYPE: MMOFPS
 CONTENT: TITIC VIOLENCE
 RICE: \$49.99 + \$2.99/MONTH
 REQUIREMENTS: PC/MINIMUM: 1GB RAM, 256MB RAM, 128MB RAM
 RECOMMENDS: PC/MINIMUM: 4 GB RAM, 2GB RAM, 1GB RAM
 3D CARD RECOMMEND: 1GB RAM
 IT'S MASSIVE, Y'KEY SAY...

You'd think I was a church-going man, considering the number of times I shouted out Jesus' name while playing PlanetSide. If it wasn't prompted by overwhelming forces sweeping over me as I tried to hold the line at a Kyoji gun tower, it was because of idiot squadmates, seriously choppy lag, or the odd system crash. Touted as the first massively multiplayer first-person shooter, PlanetSide is neither EverQuest nor Battlefield 1942, so don't bother comparing this game to them. In fact, PlanetSide is really Tribes done better—no coincidence, since some of the folks behind Tribes are dropping you into this sci-fi world at war. The real surprise is that, despite the aforementioned glaring issues, Sony Online Entertainment is successfully bringing twitch gamers into the MMO fold.

The war rages on and on and on

The minimal story of three factions—Terrian Republic, New Conglomerate, and Venu Sovereignty—duking it out over a massive land grab is puzzling when you

first enter the game world. While graphically nice, the continents are huge and generally nondescript. Dotted the requisite jungles, deserts, and snowcapped areas are numerous identical bases (with a scant few cool-looking structures). Don't forget that every time you log off, some punk is sneaking in and squatting in the joint you fought hard to grab in the first place. It's a constant state of war with no ultimate purpose.

This, of course, sounds like a dream come true for actionmongers. The problem arises when you need to haul ass to hot zones. Allow me to draw from painful personal experience to illustrate the point. As a child, I sat in the playground, huddled with friends, hoping I wasn't the last person picked for teams in kickball. Here, as a PlanetSide rookie, I spent close to an hour trying variations of "looking for squads" that fell just shy of offering money.

When you finally sign on with a squad, pray that the members aren't half-wits who run you over by mistake. As a friend

puts it, "If you've got a problem with the A.J., blame the American educational system." You wind up playing a waiting game of gathering squadmates, hopping onto transports, and hoping the fight's not over when you finally get there.

The "A" team

With a good squad, though, PlanetSide transforms into an incredible experience. The squad leader barks out orders (well, they sound like barks—I had trouble getting the Voice-Over-IP support to work properly) and sets waypoints for the squad, while the squad does as



The whole point of this game is taking over enemy bases, which is why you need a leader in your squad.



When you see a man in a big armored suit, try to get some cover.



An advance mobile station is your home away from home. It serves as a mobile respawn point and is key to winning.



A sneaky character? Do a sneak look: an enemy won't hold down the mouse button and you won't need binoculars so your red eyes can't pop in to surprise you.



A hostile takeover in progress.

equally good job of sticking together and following said orders. You need teamwork, because even the most buffed-up character in the toughest armor will get torn apart trying to go in Lone Wolf McQuade-style.

Teamwork is key, and so is specializing your character. Unlike *Battlefield 1942*, in which you can instantly hop into any vehicle and choose any character class, here you must earn certification points (similar to earning a level in a traditional RPG). You spend these points to get certified in the skills required to use various armor types, weapons, and vehicles, and to learn such valuable skills as hacking. Those crawling pure action will get ticked off pretty quickly when they can't grab the weapon they want or—as I experienced—when they pick a skill they don't like. While virtual training gives a good taste of each skill set, you don't feel how truly sluggish a Max suit is or how weak an infiltration suit is until you're in the field. That's when you're stuck waiting a full 24 hours to unlock a certification and choose differently. Overall, though,

there's a fantastic variety of weaponry, vehicles, and ways to play once you earn enough certification points.

Earning these points by gaining XP is fairly steady once you're in the heat of combat, and the "grief" system does a decent job of balancing play (and, more important, staying off same-side killers). Of course, the action slows to a crawl when a bajillion members of your faction have to stake out a base and wait 15 minutes for the hack to complete before they gain the experience from the hostile takeover.

And this brings us to my biggest beef with *PlanetSide*: technical issues. A word of advice: Don't even bother playing if you have less than the recommended system specs. Even with a 2 GHz system and ATI Radeon 9700 Pro, the game suffered occasional graphics hiccups and more outright game crashes

than I'd care to count—not to mention the fact that it's hard to press an assault when teammates go MIA and you suddenly find the much-needed hacker has gone AWOL. Thankfully, like any online game, plentiful patches have already improved *PlanetSide*'s stability.

At the end of the day, I still feel a compulsion to log on and play *PlanetSide*. My character is moving up in rank, I've signed on with a good outfit, and the game is getting more solid every day. There are even promises of additions like new vehicles. Just do me one favor: Go easy on *DominionDenson* until I get him up to a high enough level. Thanks.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If a never-ending battle with crazy system requirements sounds good to you, then sign up for duty.

If you've got a problem with the A.I., blame the American educational system.

WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne

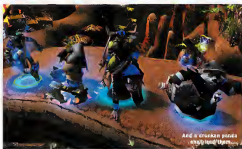
A panda, a Haitian troll, and a giant bug walk into an expansion pack... BY TOM CHICK

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: BLIZZARD
 PUBLISHER: BLIZZARD
 DISTRIBUTOR: GIGAWATT
 VIOLENCE
 PLATFORMS: PC
 RELEASE DATE: MARCH 11, 2003
 PRICE: \$49.99
 ESRB RATING: M
 SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 OS: WINDOWS 9X/NT
 CPU: PENTIUM III 400
 RAM: 64MB
 VIDEO: VGA 640x480
 SOUND: 16BIT 48Khz
 HARDWARE: CD-ROM DRIVE
 NETWORK: INTERNET
 MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 OS: WINDOWS 9X/NT
 CPU: PENTIUM III 300
 RAM: 64MB
 VIDEO: VGA 640x480
 SOUND: 16BIT 48Khz
 HARDWARE: CD-ROM DRIVE

It's Blizzard's fault, it jockeyed up the bar for expansion packs with *Brood War* for *StarCraft* and *Lord of Destruction* for *Diablo II*. So *II Frozen Throne* for *WarCraft III* feels a bit overpriced (\$35) and underdone in comparison, the company has no one to blame but itself. Not to say there isn't great stuff in *Frozen Throne*—because there is. You gotta love the new heroes. A huge crypt beetle that spawns baby beetles from corpses. An elven mage born under a fire sign. A Caribbean troll with good and bad juju. The new heroes give Blizzard the opportunity to mix things up and throw in more of its trademark humor. How can you resist a drunken Chinese panda bear who splits into three smaller squeaky-voiced versions of himself named Earth, Storm, and Fire? By putting most of the new heroes in a neutral building so that they're available to everyone, the game's number of combos and strategies has multiplied.

But there are only minimal changes to the broader strokes of gameplay. Each side gets a couple of new upgrades and units, but there aren't many substantial changes otherwise. The Night Elves finally get a potent melee brawler (and, boy, is he potent), and the Undead now have an easy-to-use source of healing. The Humans' new dragonhawk riders, with the ability to shut down defensive towers, are a great alternative to slow siege engines. But most of the new units are geared toward hardcore players who will get in there and twiddle around, doing stuff such as directly countering spells, managing mana, and popping off inventory items in the heat of battle. *Frozen Throne* adds a lot more twiddling to an already twiddle-intensive game.



And a drunken panda who's had 'em...



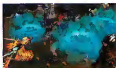
The new blood mage applies a little carefully placed heat with his Flame Strike.

Frozen Throne adds a lot more twiddling to an already twiddle-intensive game.

The new campaign is a saga of the continuing adventures of characters from the last game. The convoluted plot steers them through betrayal and bickering and even more backstory, all in the pursuit of some all-powerful doodad that, in the final analysis, doesn't seem to do much but give the victor a place to sit. Many of the scenarios are hard because they require your attention in multiple places: "You must build two bases at once while simultaneously guiding your hero through a dungeon crawl that involves getting on and off transport ships while being harried by

flying creatures as a timer counts down!" Note to Blizzard: The average gamer has fewer than three hands.

Which is why the new RPG campaign is so refreshing. You play with only heroes, marching them around a hub-based set of maps to fulfill simple quests and gather magic items, complete with a stash and beasts of burden for the extra treasure. It's as easy as the main campaign is hard (in fact, you can never lose), but it's a great way to enjoy *WarCraft III*'s charms without the overbearing army-tiddling requirements. Speaking of which, there are



The dragonhawk's Cloud puts a stop to pesky trolls.

some welcome new interface changes that Blizzard says it'll patch into the basic version of *WarCraft III*. It's about time. Now it'll be a little bit easier to deal with all the extra twiddling.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Some nice new stuff—even if there's a micromanagement cost.



Yes, that's Picard, and you, you're defending the Enterprise at his side. Great inspiration for some slash fan-fic, don't you think?

Star Trek: Elite Force II

Make it so! BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

GENRE: ACTION/SHOOTER

DEVELOPER: RITUAL

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

EDITED BY: TERRY, #1200, #486

TOP GEAR: TERRY, #1200, #486

GENRE: VIOLENCE

PRICE: \$49.99

RECOMMENDATION: FORTUNON #100, #20486

EDITORIAL: #100, #20486

DRIVE: #100, #20486

RECOMMENDATION: FORTUNON #100, #20486

EDITORIAL: #100, #20486

RECOMMENDATION: FORTUNON #100, #20486

EDITORIAL: #100, #20486

The first *Elite Force* game broke the truism that a good *Star Trek* game cannot exist. With a blend of a good plot, intense action, and a team of sidekicks that actually work, the original is a great (if brief) shooter enhanced by the atmosphere of the *Star Trek* universe. *Elite Force II*, developed by Ritual Entertainment instead of Raven, tries to duplicate everything that made the original good, but somehow ends up with a final product that is just competent, not compelling.

They spell "team" with an "I"
Elite Force's premise involves the *Voyager* hazard team, formed to act as a deadlier version of the standard away team. In the sequel, *Voyager*

returns to the Alpha quadrant and the team is broken up by a desk jockey, only to be reassembled years later by Capt. Picard to counter another galaxy-threatening emergency.

One of the original's charms is that your team fights alongside you, and there is always the illusion that they are doing their share—even if you do most of the dirty work. Unfortunately, most missions in *Elite Force II* are of the solo variety. When you do have teammates, they usually get shot early, become stuck behind a wall or door, or merely sit around doing nothing. This results in some ridiculous situations, such as your techie telling you to use your tricorder to get various readings instead of doing it himself. At one point, as you're about to run off solo again, one of your

comrades—tired of waiting around—even asks, "Why do you always go alone?" "Because Ritual was too lazy to script the teammates" is my guess.

Despite the annoying lack of helpful teammates, however, most of the missions aren't bad. There are moments of anticipation and dread as you first discover hostile aliens on a derelict ship. These baddies skirt around corners or hide in ambush, and when they come, they attack in seemingly endless waves of claws and spitting acid. The moments of intense action are interspersed by puzzles that are interesting at first, but soon get repetitive since they're all variations of the same theme and not very challenging.

Unfortunately, this sense of repetition sets in for the action as well after the first few missions. The maps are all very linear, and you're usually just traveling down one corridor or *Jefferies tube* after another, with alien nasties popping out occasionally. While it's understandable that a spaceship's architecture is supposed to look the same through-

When you do have teammates, they usually get shot early, become stuck behind a wall or door, or sit around doing nothing.

The boss battles that break up the monotony of some missions are often memorable moments.



The many varied types of alien big bugs, medium bugs, and small bugs.



They just keep on coming.

the entire ship, there is never a "low" factor with the maps. Enemies are also too similar; none of them prove particularly memorable except for the occasional boss battle. The 20 or so hours of the single-player game never drag, but rarely will you feel the need for "just one more level."

Fan service

Being a *Star Trek* game, *Elite Force II* tries to squeeze in as much of the TV shows as possible. It stars Patrick Stewart (Picard) and Tim Russ (Lieutenant Tuvok), and the developers contrive many a situation where you have to interact with them—there's even a rather silly scene where you have to toss Picard a rifle during a firefight. Interacting with these characters could have added a lot of atmosphere, but instead it often feels forced.

The same can be said for the between-mission levels. When not fighting, you're traveling around Starfleet Academy or the *Enterprise*; you'll often be called to run from one deck to another to

perform mindless Fed's tasks, it is great to walk around the *Enterprise* a bit, but how much fun can there really be in riding up a turbolift (Trekize for "elevator") for the 20th time? The only time between-mission interactions matter is during conversations with your romantic interests. Who you end up living happily ever after with at the end depends on certain dialogue choices, in theory, this makes the single-player game replayable, but who wants to go through all those Jefferies tubes again just to see the other movie? Besides, didn't sci-fi gamers already do this in *Wing Commander 3D*?

The weapons are shoehorned into the *Star Trek* universe through the use of some pseudoscientific names, but they're really just dressed up assault rifles, shotguns, and rocket launchers. This makes the Deathmatch, CTF, and other multiplayer modes pretty much the same as any other FPS, and there are far better choices out there for a good multiplayer experience.

In the end, everything from gameplay

Go of your romantic interests. Why else's while and running around in a bikini while the rest of her race is brown and clad in alien is anyone's guess.



One of the two puzzle types in the game.



to graphics to multiplayer in *Elite Force II* is slightly above average. It will keep you entertained, and if you're a big *Star Trek* fan, it will give you a good dose of Picard, Klingons, and Romulans. If you're not a big fan, well, there are worse ways to fill the time before *Half-Life 2*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

No matter how much it tries to knock, your socks won't be coming off.

Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide

At first glance, we didn't think it said "Undrentide" either by THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

DESIGNER: ATROD

DEVELOPER: BUNGIE/

PUBLISHER: GIGAWATT

PLAYING GAME

801 DASH, 10000 BLOOD,

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

10000000000000000000

Why release a retail expansion for a game that has thousands of free mods?

Well, look at it this way. Framing Jedi adventures with a mini-DV cam is nice, but seeing your parky buddy swing a fake saber around doesn't compare to a professionally made film. Thankfully, *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide* is a well-made expansion with a single-player campaign that's actually better than the original's (NWN's oft-cited major flaw).

SOU's campaign, which is a wholly separate story from NWN's campaign, appears deceptively short (two chapters and an interlude). But even the interlude is filled with three lengthy dungeons, so you'll find yourself spending anywhere between 25 and 30 total hours on this. And overall, SOU far better than NWN's uneven single-player campaign, in which the few excellent and memorable quests and dungeons (Charwood, the Creator Ruins) were buried among more traditional OGD RPG fare. Here, there's a more *Fallout*-ish approach to traditional quests in that just about every quest can be solved diplomatically—utilizing intelligence or charisma—in addition to the “apply weapon to target liberally” method. Opportunities include convincing gnolls to switch sides, negotiating with hostage-taking kobolds, and brokering a trade agreement over holy wine. While SOU isn't flexible enough to let you finish it without ever hitting anyone, the quality of the quests and, later on, the dungeons is enough to make the SOU campaign more



It's not so easy now. Every space an unappetizing crawler like these sting.



You still got to fight lots of undead now in the other new crazy rules and short classes.

consistent and interesting than the original NWN campaign. You still can't control Henchman, but at least you can fiddle with their inventory and give them better battle behavior orders (like *Fallout* 2's improvement upon *Fallout*).

Unfortunately, the Henchman changes aren't retroactive to the original NWN campaign.

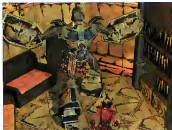
In addition to improved gameplay, SOU uses humor to counter the story line's clichéd fantasy nature. Yes, it's still about stopping an evil loazik, but sly jokes and asides break up the monotony of the RPG quest. You need to kill golems, but who expects them to spew out bag lines advertising the Golem Emporium? Or to find a taking rat presenting a

dissertation on maximum floating city altitude? SOU is perhaps the funniest fantasy RPG I've played.

The prestige classes provide cool ways to develop your characters, but I do have a quibble: Why does the blackguard, a supervillain fighter, require the Hide skill? I also question the presence of the harper scout, a prestige class used mainly to enhance frealvin' bards. (Oh, maybe some gamers enjoy playing the Lute of Life.) New classes include the requisite desert, snow, and ruins, and they provide more areas for module-makers to play with. The smattering of new critters, feats, and spells are also utilitarian for module-makers and entertaining for players.

SOU is one of those expansions that make the original game pale a bit in comparison. It's still hack-and-slash, and you're still frustrated by lack of direct control over your Henchman, but the quality of the writing and the quests make it a significant improvement upon the original campaign.

SOU is perhaps the funniest fantasy-RPG I've ever played.



This golem protests, "Would You like your hance and belongings guarded? If so, come visit the Golem Emporium on Northwest Vicer Street! We have the protection you need!"

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's NWN with a better single-player campaign.



You will spend almost all of your time looking at scenes like these, so we hope you like what you see.

Eve Online: The Second Genesis

Space junk BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: SINGULAR SOFTWARE
 INTERACTIVE
 RELEASED: CCP
 GENRE: MASSIVELY
 MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
 CONTENT: TOEN, VIOLENCE
 FULL: \$49.99+
 SETTING: SCIENCE FI
 AGE: 12 AND UP, 16+ RATED
 DEVICE: SINGLE, SHM
 INTERNET CONNECTION:
 BROADBAND RECOMMENDED
 256MB RAM, 1GB HD
 CARD: NVIDIA
 INTERNET
 REQUIRES SUPPORT: MASSIVELY
 MULTIPLAYER

Eve Online comes so close to being a great game. It is absolutely stunning to look at, and it has one of the best collections of in-game music I have ever heard. Unfortunately, this stunning mood is crushed by an interface that has all the charm and convenience of a TPS report.

Your screen is a collection of pop-ups, and you spend lots of time performing click-and-drag operations. For example, after mining minerals from asteroids, you must dock at a station, open your ship window, open your station window, and then click and drag your ore from one to the other before you can process it.

If by some heroic measure of tolerance you are able to mow past



This robust character-creation system is based on in-game portraits that size of postage stamps.

a live voice at the other end.

On the positive side, and unlike other games in which your skill gains are bound to how quickly you can smelt iron or cleave trolls, Eve Online uses an egg timer. You mark a skill to gain, and in the passing of time, it

This stunning mood is crushed by an interface that has all the charm and convenience of a TPS report.

that, you'll discover that the game is not ready for prime time. Bug fixes are bolted onto it, only to be removed when the remedy turns out to be worse than the disease, making servers too frequently unavailable for a game that wants you to pay a monthly access fee. If that weren't bad enough, the support website has all the synergy of post-Cold War Russia, where every feature operates as an independent nation-state. The online support database, the support forums, the "ask a question" e-mail interface—each requires its own login ID and password. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but for \$13 a month, I expect a toll-free phone number with

raises to the next level. So what? Well, the cool part is that the timer doesn't stop ticking when you log out. At higher levels, you can train a skill, go on a holiday cruise, and find yourself ready for the next level by the time you get back home. Finally, an online game that doesn't punish you for having a day job.

The bottom line? The game is not entirely unfair to play, but if you're looking for a fast-paced interstellar shooter, then keep looking.

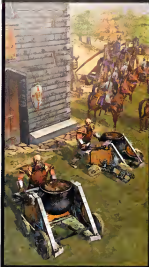
VERDICT ★★★★★

Looks and sounds great, but there's no game here.

Hastings, 1066: English oil smithies incinerated invading forces with vats of flaming pitch.



This Fall, it's your turn.



The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon

Morrowind gets the mark of the wolf BY RON BULIN

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY BETHESDA

DEVELOPERS

BETHESDA BETHESDA

SETTIMORE

OS: PC/PS2/XBOX

CONTENT: TEEN, BLOOD

NOVEMBER

RETAIL \$29.99

RECOMMENDED PROCESSOR

PIII 500MHz/300MHz

RAM FOR WINDOWS XP, 1GB

HARD DRIVE SPACE

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

PC: 1024x768, 1280x800

PC: 64MB 3D CARD

RECOMMENDED SOUND

Tribunal, the first expansion for Bethesda's *Morrowind*, took players to a distant city, isolated from the game's main continent. It was a fine addition to *Morrowind*'s massive world, but it seemed a bit remote and unrelated. *Bloodmoon*, on the other hand, is a more literal expansion, adding a fairly large island, Solstheim, just off the northwest corner of Vvardenfell. The empire is attempting to colonize Solstheim, and with that attempt comes new challenges—not the least of which is finding a cure for lycanthropy.

Though Solstheim is only a fraction of the size of Vvardenfell, it is still a sizable chunk of territory. When you first arrive on the island, you will find yourself at a newly established fort. As in *Tribunal*, most of the primary characters will have odd jobs for you to perform. There is also a lengthy primary quest, which involves an attack on the fort and requires you to learn the customs of the animal-worshipping Skaal, the natives of Solstheim, who are none too pleased with the empire's recent expansion.

As soon as you set foot outside the fort, however, you will notice one of *Bloodmoon*'s most significant changes: There are creatures everywhere, and most of them are hostile. There are animals such as bears, boars, and wolves, as well as humanoid, including bear-baited berserkers and the tough-to-kill spriggens. The wilds of Solstheim are significantly more difficult to



New monsters and (especially) animals abound in *Bloodmoon*.

The addition of werewolves is interesting, but the implementation isn't very exciting.

traverse than those of Vvardenfell, not simply because of the number of enemies, but also because they are much stronger. Only high-level characters are advised to take the trip.

While the enhanced number and variety of enemies is definitely welcome

(*Morrowind* lacks both), it magnifies one of the game's lingering weaknesses: Combat is still simplistic. Still, the fact that you will now be attacked by large groups of enemies makes things, if nothing else, more exciting. Being surrounded by a gang of boar-baiting goblins is definitely more interesting than fighting one or two cliff racers.

Solstheim itself is like a smaller version of Vvardenfell, albeit covered in snow and ice. There are small outposts and dungeons everywhere, and you are free to wander and explore as you wish. If you choose to follow the main quest of the expansion, you'll eventually be attacked by a werewolf. And if you don't cure yourself, you become one yourself. Werewolves must feed every night, or they suffer a huge hit point loss the next day. You also must stay out of human

areas as night approaches—if anyone sees you change, you will be hunted no matter what form you're in. The addition of werewolves is interesting, but the implementation isn't very exciting. The need to feed every night can become fairly tiresome, and because werewolves have only their claws as weapons, combat can get repetitive.

Still, it's an interesting path to take, and *Bloodmoon* is all about options. It's a little disappointing that quests never require you to leave the island (the modular nature of *Morrowind* seems perfectly suited for an expansion with gamewide effects). Apart from its somewhat self-contained nature, *Bloodmoon* is an excellent addition to *Morrowind* and highly recommended for those with high-level characters seeking new adventures.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Another few score hours of high-quality gameplay for high-level *Morrowind* characters.



Werewolves must feed once a night or suffer serious consequences—and even feeding can bring about dire consequences.



F1 Challenge '99-'02

Mean machine BY WADE HERSH



GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPED BY ELECTRONIC ARTS
ARTS FOR PC, PS2, XBOX
GENRE RACING
PRICE \$29.99
REQUIRES PENTIUM III 450,
16MB RAM, 500 MB HD
DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT
PENTIUM III 500, 512MB
RAM 64MB HARD DRIVE
SPACE 500MB CD-ROM
REQUIRES CONTROL GAME
INTEREST 2/4 PLAYERS

Formula 1 racing games for the computer have been around for so long, the genre is like a well-oiled, finely tuned machine with little room left for improvements. *F1 Challenge '99-'02* makes an attempt to raise the bar higher by providing four complete seasons to include 14 different teams, 34 drivers, and 17 of the most famous circuits configured as they were for each season in 1999 to 2002. The graphics, A.I., and physics model have all been tweaked to a point unrivaled by those of any prior Formula 1 game.

Graphically, this game is an improvement upon *F1 2002*. EA Sports' previous title. Tracks and cars are more detailed than ever before. The racing environments are also richer, with helicopters flying



Great A.I. for the computer-controlled cars makes for some real intense racing.

from real Formula 1 races. Engines sound so realistic that they fuel the urge to crank up your speakers and put the pedal to the metal. The garage area is flexible enough, so you don't need an engineering degree to set up your car; Basic and Advanced setup screens allow everything from simple changes to more hardcore manipulation, right down to a telemetry data screen to

Lose a tail fin and your car will become so unstable, it'll spin out as soon as you tap the brakes.

assist you in analyzing your laps and allowing for more accurate adjustments on the car. Up to this point, this game sounds perfect, and it nearly is—the only minor problem is an occasional glitch in the graphics of various horizons at each track. Overall, this game has so much more detail, realism, and flexibility than its predecessors that it effectively laps the F1 racing field.

the skies around the tracks and jets from nearby airports taking off. The physics model has been improved so much that if you damage your car even slightly, it will drastically affect its handling characteristics. Lose a tail fin and your car will spin out as soon as you tightly tap the brakes or try to enter a turn. The computer-controlled cars are the best yet, racing you closely and aggressively while taking pains not to ram you, as well as being smart enough to try to avoid you if you lose control of your car. Game sound has been improved by the inclusion of actual recordings

assist you in analyzing your laps and allowing for more accurate adjustments on the car. Up to this point, this game sounds perfect, and it nearly is—the only minor problem is an occasional glitch in the graphics of various horizons at each track. Overall, this game has so much more detail, realism, and flexibility than its predecessors that it effectively laps the F1 racing field.

VERDICT ★★★★★
 A must-buy for Formula 1 racing fans.

Yellow Sea, 1597:
 Koreans smashed
 enemy flotillas
 with ironclad
 turtle boats.



**This Fall,
 it's your turn.**



The Hulk

It's not easy being green BY ROBERT COPPEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UNIVERSAL

GENRE: FANTASY

ENTERTAINMENT

TYPE: ACTION

ESRB RATING: TEEN, VIOLENCE

PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIRES: PENTON III 700

RAM: 8MB, 1750 HARD

DISK SPACE: 32MB 3D

CARD: ECHOMARK 60MB/60

PENTON III (SMB) 250MB

RAM: 2.5GB HARD DRIVE

SPACE: 64MB 2D CARD

NEEDLE: SUPPLY NONE

And the award for Biggest Waste of Paper 2003 goes to... *The Hulk's* skimpy 21-page manual. Seriously, Vivendi Universal could have saved a whole lot of money by simply dropping a sheet of paper into the game box with just two words printed on it in 40-point type: *Hulk Smash!* And that simple, single-minded focus for the vast majority of the gameplay is what makes this game such a blast to play. *The Hulk* is easily the best implementation of a major comic book character in a game yet.

Taking place directly after the events of this summer's movie, *The Hulk* thrusts gamers right into the big green guy's signature hyper-muscular id with some



They aren't the most detailed levels in gaming history, but you'd be so focused on the action that you won't notice the sterile environments.

Finally, a game that lets you club your enemies with other enemies.

rampaging action. The Incredible One has only a few moves available for wreaking havoc, but the point here isn't so much the combat as it is the results of that combat: watching your brutalized foes' bodies fly and twist helplessly in the air while marveling at the delicious wake of destruction you leave behind. You can swing cars like giant clubs, pounding puny humans into the ground until the automobile explodes in a thunderous fireball. You can perform gargantuan overhead ground smashes to send enemies flying, punt enormous gamma-radiated dogs, and leap into the air (and pause just long enough to savor the carnage to come) before driving

your fist through another hapless enemy or grabbing him to break his back across your massive shoulders. Finally, a game that lets you club your enemies with other enemies. The action is relentless, bruising, and consistently rewarding as you pound your way through seemingly endless waves of enemies. This is the game *Star Zero* should have been, years ago.

Like the, um, real-life Hulk, *The Hulk* has two sides to it, which translates to levels featuring Bruce Banner. As expertly as the game captures the Hulk's intoxicating power, it equally captures the essence of being a weak, scaredy-cat scientist. As a result, the *Mirai Gear*



When the best part of playing the Bruce Banner levels centers on code breaking in a limited amount of time, you know the levels are lame.

winnable Banner levels are seriously underwhelming and serve as annoying speed bumps on the way to the real reason you bought this game. Also annoying: the boss fights. Each of the boss battles in *The Hulk* is of that frustrating phased type—right when you think you've beaten *Nadman* or *Ravage* or whoever, he's suddenly all powered up again and tougher as you prepare to beat him a second or third time. This can be a serious drag late in the game.

The Hulk has nice responsive controls (you really need to play with a gamepad), and while it sports the suddenly overly popular cel-shaded look that seemingly every console-style game is adopting, its cel shading has a unique feel that does a fine job conveying the nonstop sledgehammering of the game's action.

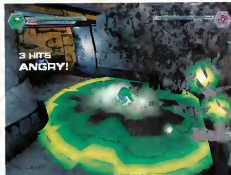
And if you haven't invested in a subwoofer yet, you may want to before playing *The Hulk*—the game sound is excellently done, and pounding your way through swarms of enemies would be seriously unsatisfying with pinky speakers.

Like the console versions of *The Hulk*, you'll unlock some minigames and special features, the best of which is the *Hulk Smash* challenge, during which you try to destroy as much as you can in an allotted amount of time.

Like the Hulk himself, *The Hulk* game is pretty mindless. But it's a blast to play, the PC version costs \$20 less than any console version, and you can run it at a higher resolution. What's not to like?

VERDICT ★★★★★

The last comic-book game not named *Freedom Force* you can buy.



When the Rage meter fills up, the Hulk does more damage. The overhead smash is particularly effective.

winnable Banner levels are seriously underwhelming and serve as annoying speed bumps on the way to the real reason you bought this game. Also annoying: the boss fights. Each of the boss battles in *The Hulk* is of that frustrating phased type—right when you think you've beaten *Nadman* or *Ravage* or whoever, he's suddenly all powered up again and tougher as you prepare to beat him a second or third time. This can be a serious drag late in the game.

The Hulk has nice



Breaking bikers on the road is like shooting pirates in space.



Big Mutha Truckers

It's the Freelancer of truck-driving games BY ERIK WALFOW

GAME STATS

PIRATES EMPIRE
INTERACTIVE
STRATEGY/ADVENTURE
THE TRUCK ADVENTURE
MAKING COINTEGRITY TECH
COMING WISDOM: MILD
LAUGHING, MILD VIOLENCE
SUBSEQUENT FINES
THE SHIP
RECOVERING PUNISHMENT BY
THE TRUCK BARR, TRUCKS
HAVE DRIVE SPACE
RECOVERED REVENUE
PUNISHMENT THE LOBBY BARR
RECOVERED REVENUE

Big Mutha Truckers is both a budget-priced title and a game about driving trucks. Neither category has produced a lot of real winners, so you've got plenty of reason to be skeptical. But surprisingly, this is not a bad game. It's ambitious, fast-paced, reasonably polished, and generally pretty enjoyable. True to its bargain-bin truck-driving provenance, it does have some problems. But what the hell: If you're interested in adventure-driving games about the lives of trucks, you're probably willing to take whatever you can get.

From *Elite* to *Freelancer*, what amounts to galactic trucking has been a staple of the space-sim genre for as long as the space-sim genre

has existed. In classic space-sim style, you earn cash by buying cargo on the cheap at one space station (great stop) and then hauling it somewhere where you can sell it high. Along the way, you can purchase upgrades such as bigger trailers and better brakes. It's a simple formula, but it works.

While the economic and carrot-and-stick upgrade reward systems are almost flawless, the driving isn't. The physics model and controls have been simplified to the point of absurdity. Your truck has only two gears, and the steering is a little too loose. The arcade-style physics model is too simple to be really challenging, but not unrealistically crazy enough to produce many thrills. It gets the

Trucks are the spaceships of the road—fast, powerful, cool looking, and really complicated to drive.

job done, but just barely. At one point during a truck tug-of-war mission, *Big Mutha Truckers* strips truck driving—and gaming—down to its depressing bare essentials: hitting a single key as fast as you can for two wrist-cracking minutes. But that's as bad as the game gets; other than that, it's never outright terrible. Which qualifies *Big Mutha Truckers* for some kind of best-in-breed award.

You play as one of four redneck siblings, each of whom has 60 days to make the most money and to win

job done, but just barely.

At one point during a truck tug-of-war mission, *Big Mutha Truckers* strips truck driving—and gaming—down to its depressing bare essentials: hitting a single key as fast as you can for two wrist-cracking minutes. But that's as bad as the game gets; other than that, it's never outright terrible. Which qualifies *Big Mutha Truckers* for some kind of best-in-breed award.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆
Surprisingly not that bad.

London, 1915:
Germans rained
destruction on
English foes
from Zeppelins.



This Fall,
it's your turn.



X2: Wolverine's Revenge

It's the best at what it does: sucking by JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

PLAYER ACTIVATION

WEAPON GENIUS

SOFTWARE

ONE THIRD-PERSON

SMART-OR-TOO-SMART FEEL

BLOOD VIOLENCE TOOL

STORY-DRIVEN PLOT

IS SOUND? USUAL BAN

USG BANG DRIVE SPACE

ROMANTIC ELEMENT

PERFORM 4 LEGAL, 2000

BAM REVEALS BYOT NONE

X2: Wolverine's Revenge—a shoddy port of a mediocre console game—has exactly one good thing going for it, a nice respect for the lore and history of the comic-book character. As a grown man who, sadly, still buys three X-Men comic books a month, I know way more about Wolverine than I should admit, and I'll grant that the story, background info, and character quirks all follow the continuity with great reverence. It's got Wendigo, Wolverine's first bad guy ever! Comic Book Guy would be proud.

As a game, however, Wolverine's Revenge is a maddening, frustrating mess, made even more so by the fact that it could have been great. Or at least good. Of all the X-Men, Wolverine was the obvious choice to get his own game. With his adamantium claws, mutant healing ability, and heightened senses, Wolverine was practically made to be a videogame character. He can fight, heal, and sneak around all at once. This is what the game lets you do, and the first time you hear the *snikt!* of his claws, you think you may be in for a good time.

But the problems, especially on the PC version, quickly make themselves evident. First, the keyboard and mouse controls are all but unusable; unless you have a gamepad with dual analog sticks, don't even bother with this game, period. It was not meant for keyboard/mouse, and simply putting in the code to let gamers play that way doesn't actually solve the problem of making those controls work. I played this on GameCube as well, and while it's still not a good game, it's at least playable.

Second, the joy of killing bad guys with your adamantium claws wears out extremely quickly once you realize that



Look, it's Wendigo—a bad guy only true fanboys can appreciate. Now if only the game didn't suck, we'd really be excited.

The first time you hear the *snikt!* of Wolverine's claws, you think you may be in for a good time.



Wolverine's Sense mode lets you sneak around undetected by bad guys.



Hey, but, how'd you like an adamantium claw sniktlet?

the enemy AI is laughably horrid, with enemies unable to track you for longer than a second or two. I eliminated most of the game's bad guys by simply hopping over them once and killing them from behind while they stood there, still facing forward and shooting into empty air. The combat is disappointingly lifeless and repetitive—it's just the same battle repeated endlessly. Yes, you do get special strike moves, but you can't even get to perform these moves yourself. You just hit a button whenever "Strike!" appears onscreen to trigger a cutscene of the move being performed automatically. Hi, Activation? We're gamers and we like to actually play our games! X, bye!

Worst of all is the game's unbeknowingly hostile save system, which allows saves only at the end of entire levels—not even checkpoints in between. Because some of these levels are long, multi-part affairs, you'll end up replaying certain levels over and over and over and over

again, something guaranteed to kill the little good will this game engenders.

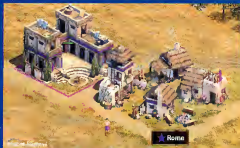
For what it's worth, Wolverine's Revenge has decent production values, good voice talent (including Mark Hamill as Wolverine and Patrick Stewart reprising his movie role as Professor X), and good cameos from various characters in the X-universe. But it's all window dressing on a tattered skin. With the X-Men franchise hotter than ever, thanks to the movies and reinvigorated comic books, Wolverine's Revenge had a real opportunity to shine, but the gameplay, already unimpressed and annoying on the consoles, is an uncontrollable mess on PC and not even worth it for fanboys. Retract those claws and move along, bub. Nothing to see here.



Strike moves look cool—too bad the game performs them for you.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Rather than buying this, go see X2 ng.in.



Revisionist History

Rise of Nations, Tropico 2

By Thomas L. McDonald

The big question looming over *Rise of Nations* version 1.02 is whether it deals with the multiplayer lag issues. The answer is yes, and it even remains stable behind routers. Also of note, the rating system (which was useless) has been reset. Everyone loses their ratings, which, while irritating, doesn't matter much since they weren't an accurate reflection of a player's standing. GameSpy matchmaking problems have been sorted out, including game settings that can be lockable or unlockable, numerous setupwin and interface problems, and various other issues. The online auto-patching system now works better, allowing players to check for updates without using GameSpy.

A number of problems plaguing the *Capture the World* portion were also on the agenda. These are now largely ironed out, among them a number of hard-crash bugs, overrun problems, and gameplay issues. In addition, rivers which

previously might die at the edges of the map will connect all the way to the edge of the world where possible. A number of cheat holes are also plugged up. All in all, this was a pretty clean game when it shipped, with the sole exception of the now-mandatory multiplayer lag issues.

Tropico 2 version 1.2 fixes a few crash bugs (like at the beginning of a game or when loading maps in the map editor) and tweaks a number of features. Developer Frog City has added the option to rename your pirate king, improved ship routines so that returning ships look for a properly supplied dock to re-equip, capped black-market purchase prices (which were becoming exorbitant late in the game), allowed scuttled ships to transfer their cargo to the dock, and implemented similar improvements. Persistent bugs, problems with individual missions, phantom "build" graphics, and other rough spots have also been addressed.

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Red Faction II

Viva la revolución! BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: THQ
 DEVELOPER: GIGAWATT GAMES & ENTERTAINMENT
 PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX, PS2
 PEGI: "VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN ESPASOL"
 SUGGESTED AGE: 16+
 RELEASE DATE: AUG 2006
 PRICE: \$49.99
 FEATURES: POINT-AND-CLICK, 2D/3D VIEW, A.I. CONTROL, DRIVE SPACE
 CONTROLS: CONTROLLER
 PLATFORM: IN HOME, STAND-ALONE
 RISK: NOT RECOMMENDED

Red Faction II swaggers onto your hard drive with a bluster, shouting at the top of its lungs about revolution, destructible environments, vehicles, and guns that can shoot through walls. Rather than seeing these revolutionary ideas through like some space-aged Che Guevara, you soon realize that some fascist developers lock you into a linear—and barely competent—first-person shooter.

RF2's "story" is over-the-top Schwarzenegger-caliber action melodrama at its most clichéd. It usually just ignores all the silly cut-scenes, but every level is punctuated with voluminous radio chatter, which itself is filled with much moral indignation, gnashing of teeth, and unquestioned rhetoric concerning the death of yet another dictator. You want to just blow things up, but you end up being choked by all the plot-related jargon. It doesn't help that the story is so by-the-numbers because the "plot twist" halfway through is met with resignation rather than surprise. The voices of Lance Henriksen and Jason Stratham add to the overall cheese factor of the storytelling.

The geomod technology from the previous game—in which you can purportedly destroy most of the landscape—should have made RF2 more interesting, but it's still too limited in terms of what blows up and what doesn't. So you run into a lot of weird situations in which walls can get shredded by grenades, but windows and chainlink fences stand firm at the face of multiple rockets. Right.

Between the traditional blowing up of enemies and buildings, RF2 inserts some vehicle action; it sounds intriguing in principle until you learn that half of the vehicular combat has the A.I. driving and you gunning. To be fair, the power armor and the submarine are fully pilotable, but they don't really make up for the



You can hop inside this robot, but narrow corridors don't really give you much freedom.

You run into a lot of situations in which walls get shredded by grenades, but windows stand firm after multiple rockets. Right.



Vehicles are mostly of the roll-shooting variety.

fact that the tank and the airship are simple rail shooters. Besides, the levels are too constricting to really take the power armor or the sub anywhere aside from forward.

Further compounding the game into sheer mediocrity is the downward spiral of the A.I. The mind numbs whether you're up against the handicapped enemy soldiers or the nonexistent A.I. of the "processed" (futurespeak for "zombie") that populate the later levels. RF2's mildly interesting combat devolves into dreadfully boring combat by the endgame.

To add more pain, RF2 doesn't give true multiplayer; you're limited to Botmatch. Even though the previous game and the PS2 version had multiplayer, RF2 resigns you to fighting digitized dumbasses. You also have to unlock new levels by completing the storyline, and the game uses cartoonish icons to display items on the ground, making multiplayer matches look cheap and childish.



This wall gets blown up easily, but not the deer next to it.

RF2 also features quite possibly the most useless save-game option in all of gaming. Clicking "save your progress" will save everything up until the last checkpoint you crossed. But since the game already saves at every checkpoint, "save your progress" merely repeats the last auto-save—with no difference. So, uh, rather than program in some Net code, the developers programmed an option that repeats what the game was already doing.

The fact that the weapons and sounds are nice doesn't overcome the loam-the-line nature of RF2. It's sad to see the developers of the great *FreeSpace 2* slumming with such an uninspired game. At best, it's a mildly entertaining, goofy sci-fi shooter, and at its worst, it's ground-indenting mediocrity.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This revolution will not be televised.



The latter half of the game replaces the Miss Acidz with even dumber "zombie" enemies.

Korsun Pocket

State of the genre, state of the art

BY BRUCE GERYK



GAME STATS

PERIOD: WWII GAMES

DEVELOPER: STRATEGIC

STATUS: GROUP

TYPE: TURN-BASED

HISTORICAL WARGAME

OFFERING: NOT RATED

PRICE: \$32

DEVELOPER: PORTMAN & ASSOC.

STATUS: B&N, DOS, MAC, LINUX

GENRE: STRATEGY

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: NONE

RECOMMENDED SUPPORT: NONE

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2

Hex-based wargames are really a relic of the days when personal computers were glorified adding machines. Unfortunately, computer wargame designers over the years have become so seduced by the ability to perform complex calculations that many so-called wargames on the computer are little more than tedious abstract mathematical exercises. Not so SSG's latest opus. Somehow, *Korsun Pocket* manages to capture everything that's compelling about historical wargaming, exclude the tedious, and present it as a tremendous game. It's quite an

Somehow, *Korsun Pocket* manages to capture everything that's compelling about historical wargaming and present it as a tremendous game.

accomplishment.

Korsun Pocket is actually two games. The *Ardennes Offensive* was a regimental-level game of the Battle of the Bulge which was originally released by SSG in 1998; that game introduced the game system that developed into *Korsun Pocket*. Five years later, SSG has updated the Bulge game and packaged it with a new Russian front offering, which uses the same system. Alone, either one of these games would be tremendous value for the money. Packaged together, they're an essential purchase for any wargamer.

Korsun Pocket is one of the few computer games that manages to take

advantage of the computer's strengths while retaining the conventions that too often can hamper board wargaming. To do this, SSG has embraced a central design tenet, which is that nothing should ever be hidden from the player. How far can this unit move? That far. Who is in supply? Everyone behind that line. Who is eligible for this attack? Those guys, but not that guy. How much fun am I having? A lot.

While the game sports a superb interface that should be the model for all future hex games, the entire presentation is so well done that to try and single out specific elements misses the point. Everything about the game,

from the way the possible combat results are displayed along with the die rolls, to the way in which supply information, combat tables, unit information, and situational awareness are all integrated and rarely more than one mouse-click away, demonstrates an understanding of why people still play these kinds of games. Dramatic historical situations can be played out as a series of strategic decisions, with the player who makes the better choices coming out victorious. At the rest is detail.

Would be generals won't be starved for choices. The regimental scale is perfectly



The balance between attack and counterattack makes *Korsun Pocket* a classic.



Displaying different kinds of information on the map focuses your decision making.

suit to both games and gives players plenty of interesting decisions to make without drowning them in superfluous units or extraneous rules. *Korsun Pocket* sees overwhelming Soviet forces pitted against depleted but still dangerous German panzers, while *The Ardennes Offensive* puts the panzers on the attack until the Allies can stem the tide. Both sides in both games have ample opportunities to attack and defend, and the legendary Roger Keating/Ian Trout A.I. doesn't disappoint. The shortcomings of the original *Ardennes Offensive* PBEM system have been addressed, making the games a breeze to play by e-mail.

With *Korsun Pocket*, SSG has put two decades of lessons learned into a textbook example of outstanding game design. It's the best hex-based computer wargame ever made. Period.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The best hex-based computer wargame ever.



There is a ton of information available in the game, including a very well done order of battle.

REVIEW INDEX

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

GAME	SCORE	VERDICT	SCORE
IGGG A.D.: The New World	4/10	The game's depth keeps things interesting, if not addictive	★★★☆☆
Damned: Phobos Rising	8/10	Fun FPS dressed up in racing game's clothes	★★★★☆
Black Hawk Down	6/10	This surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics	★★★★☆
BloodRayne	7/10	Wildly distracting, fairly generic, totally lachrymose	★★★☆☆
Battlecry	8/10	Sturdy RTS war game that even manages some realism	★★★★☆
Bookworm Deluxe	6/10	More addictive than crack and better for your brain, too	★★★★☆
Casino Inc.	7/10	Here they, those that business men with hookers	★★★☆☆
Championship Manager 4	7/10	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★☆
CSI	6/10	Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes	★★★☆☆
Day of Defeat	6/10	A great squad-based game ruined only by age	★★★☆☆
Devastation	7/10	Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release	★★★☆☆
Empire of Magic	6/10	This odd RPG both entertains and annoys	★★★☆☆
Enclave	7/10	20 to 30 hours of gameplay, not one of them worth a damn	★★★☆☆
Enter the Matrix	8/10	Play it for the movie, don't play it for the play	★★★★☆
Europa 1400: The Guild	5/10	There are three or four games lurking here, all of them enjoyable	★★★★☆
Freelancer	5/10	The finest space sim since <i>FreeSpace 2</i> and <i>Privateer</i>	★★★★☆
Galactic Civilizations	6/10	Examples where <i>MOO3</i> fails—the best 4X space game in years	★★★★☆
The Gladiator: Galactic Circus Games	6/10	Run-of-the-mill blood sport	★★★☆☆
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	6/10	CGW's 2002 Game of the Year gets some '80s style clothes	★★★★☆
Grues	7/10	This pulpy kiddie Jesus game is hamstrung by horrible controls	★★★☆☆
Heroes of Might & Magic 4: Winds of War	6/10	The degeneration continues	★★★☆☆
High Heat 2004	6/10	A great franchise goes in the wrong direction	★★★☆☆
HL 2: Covert Strike	7/10	This tactical snuff shooter is more special-ed than <i>Special Forces</i>	★★★☆☆
HL 2: Steamwork: Forgotten Battles	6/10	The passage of time blights this	★★★☆☆
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/10	It may look a little fuzzy, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★☆
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	6/10	A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bonus of a Free editing people	★★★★☆
Laser Squad Nemesis	6/10	Increasingly addictive play by e-mail tactical strategy	★★★★☆
Line of Sight: Vietnam	7/10	Keep this lovely shooter out of your sights	★★★★☆
Madness: Total War-Viking Invasion	6/10	This expansion is a must for Total War fans	★★★★☆
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8/10	Criminally sloppy port of a great console game	★★★★☆
MVP Baseball 2003	4/10	This is the PC baseball game to buy this year	★★★★☆
New World Order	7/10	Just about the loudest shooter ever	★★★★☆
The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II	8/10	Decent archaeological adventure game	★★★★☆
Port Royale	6/10	After a slow start, a quality pirate game emerges	★★★★☆
Postal 2	7/10	No	★★★★☆
Postal Maroon	6/10	Fireside story unfolds by live-star dialogue	★★★★☆
Pro Rac Driver	7/10	The self-proclaimed "CarPG" is utterly lame	★★★☆☆
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/10	Surpasses the earlier <i>R6</i> games in every way to become the definitive tact-sim	★★★★☆
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	7/10	Decent console port with tricky camera control	★★★★☆
Restaurant Empire	6/10	Forget those champagne waders and caviar dreams	★★★★☆
Revolution	6/10	Too say you want a revolution? Not the one you don't	★★★☆☆
Rise of Nations	8/10	The latest, greatest historical RTS	★★★★☆
Sailor-Casualer Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds	8/10	Lists the baseline requirements for an add-on for an already dated game	★★★★☆
Shadowbane	7/10	A big focus on PvP and city building sets this MMORPG apart	★★★★☆
The Sims: Superstar	8/10	Another solid addition to the planet's best-selling genre	★★★★☆
A Tale in the Desert	7/10	The MMORPG is perfect for the social gamer rewarded by combat	★★★★☆
Empire 2: Private Wars	7/10	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★★★☆
Uplink: Hacker Elite	8/10	Intriguing premise and quality execution make this a winner	★★★★☆
Vietcong	7/10	Vietnam shooters finally come of age in this solid title	★★★★☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



Half-Life

★★★★★

Once you've been playing this, and if the stories coming from her office are any indication, this is still the scariest shooter ever made. Five years after its release, *Half-Life* still holds up. Even better, you can pick up the most important shooter of the last millennium in a bergin bin near you.



Max Payne

★★★★★

And while you're digging around the bergin bin, you might just be able to find a copy of the original version of 2003's other highly anticipated shooter sequel. *Max Payne* may be short, but there's a ton of fiction packed into its 10 or so hours. *Max*'s signature bullet-time effect is still one of the coolest things never successfully ripped off in gaming—not even by the *Matrix* game.



Jedi Knight

★★★★★

This outstanding FPS comes with the month's bergin bin tiffect. Pretty much everything that made *Jedi Knight II* awesome was already in *Jedi Knight*. Force powers, ineffectual boss duels, and one of the best shooter levels ever (*The Falling Ship*) helped *JK* earn CGW's 1998 Game of the Year award, and we hope *Jedi Academy* can live up to *JK*'s legacy.

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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL SUPPLEMENT WWW.WGAMER.COM

NIKKI AND

PANDEMONIUM RETURNS

ON NOKIA'S N-GAGE

MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES

BEJWELED MULTIPLAYER
MGS KARTING

REVIEWS

BEJWELED MULTIPLAYER
CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE
TWO CITIES

THE
AUTHORITY
ON
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AND MORE!

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW



THE BIRTH OF MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES

Like piano moving, drinking, construction, and sex, playing computer games is always better when you're doing it with someone else. Since the beginning, the promise of mobile games has been that they run on a networked device, so when you play, you can compete with other people. The universal hope was that you'd happily trade a smaller screen and limited sound for portability and multiplayer.

Some early WAP games were multiplayer, but they were also slow, expensive, and hard to enjoy. So, the promise was deferred until downloadable multiplayer games were available. Now they finally are.

Some of the currently available multiplayer mobile games are Java/WAP hybrids like Mobles' Jumble. Some only use the network for refreshing the content, like Wheel of Fortune from Sony Pictures, or for posting high scores, like Hisao's Lemonade Tycoon. But scores of mobile developers are building head-to-head or multiplayer contests that you'll see on your handset soon enough.

Bjeweled Multiplayer from Demovision/JAMDAT is the first game to fulfill the multiplayer mobile promise. You can read about it in this issue, but at press time it was only available for the Sanyo 8100 handset on Sprint. Other multiplayer options include Entelnet's Avax (promised for the LG 4400 on Verizon), Naumen's MG5 Karing (via Bluetooth), several upcoming N-GAGE games that will support both Bluetooth and GPRS multiplayer, Dwingo's U.S. import of Samuraï Renaissance (iL and

games for mobile devices from Tapwave and TFCOM.

For game developers, there are real costs in making mobile games: multiplayer Operators have been hesitant to add the complexity of multiplayer to their networks and their marketing. But since our last issue (June 2003), momentum has definitely built behind multiplayer mobile games. By the time you read this, you could be playing one. And by the time our December supplement goes to print, your man will be playing, too.

MATTHEW BELLOWS
PUBLISHER
WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT

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TOP PHONES FOR GAMES

So, you're down with the phone gaming thing but don't know where to start? Here's a cheat sheet of the best phones for games, with one great game for each one to get you started.

VERIZON WIRELESS

LG VX4400

The VX4400 is popular with developers for its speed and responsiveness, but most important, it's the first phone on Verizon's Get It Now service to support simultaneous key presses—don't strafe without it! <http://wgamer.com/phone-89>

Why: Everquest, Hero's Call
http://wgamer.com/game-625
How: <http://wgamer.com/howto/verizon>



SPRINT PCS

SANYO SCP-8100

It's new, small, and slinky, and it packs all the stuff you hope for in a cutting-edge phone: a big screen, vibrant color and sound, a built-in camera, and a host of other goodies. Java games run fast and smooth, and the WAP browser is the best we've seen. <http://wgamer.com/phone-137>

Why: Jeweled Multiplayer
http://wgamer.com/game-1346
How: <http://wgamer.com/howto/sprint>



AT&T WIRELESS

NEC 515

Yes, it's true—Japan gets all the good game gear first. Finally, the NEC 515 gives the West a taste of Japanese Java. With a second processor just for running downloaded apps, the 515 makes games scream, while the hi-res screen keeps them crispy. <http://wgamer.com/phone-91>

Why: Star Division
http://wgamer.com/game-1543
How: <http://wgamer.com/howto/att>



T-MOBILE

NOKIA 3650

T-Mobile hasn't launched its game service as of press time, but that won't stop you from playing on the 3650. You can load games via WAP, infrared, or even Bluetooth, and there are some very impressive ones available from Handango (<http://handango.com>) and elsewhere. <http://wgamer.com/phone-52>

Why: MG5 Karing
http://wgamer.com/game-1318
How: <http://wgamer.com/howto/tmobile>



CINGULAR NOKIA 3300

It looks odd, but the 3300's oblong case packs in an MP3 player, FM radio, full QWERTY thumbboard, and Nokia's Series 40 UI and Java engine. A removable MMC memory card lets you store up to 64 MB of tunes and games. <http://wgamer.com/phone-124>

Why: Charlie's Angels: Road Cyclone <http://wgamer.com/game-1345>
How: <http://wgamer.com/howto/cingular>



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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

QUALITY TIME WITH NOKIA'S N-GAGE

Somewhere between listening to its FM radio and piloting my primate in Super Monkey Ball, I fell in love with Nokia's N-Gage. An ambitious tele handset, N-Gage ups the ante for mobile gaming and music, connectivity, and organization. Everyone from the young gaming nut to the business executive could benefit from this all-in-one device.

How the Device Feels:

The design philosophy behind the N-Gage is sound. The handset's look and feel is modeled after Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, which currently dominates the handheld market. The N-Gage's minor problems stem from Nokia's failure to achieve a balance between the needs of a mobile phone and a gaming platform.

As a Cell Phone

It's physically awkward to talk on the N-Gage unless you use Nokia's proprietary dual-input headset or its amazing two-way Bluetooth headset. The microphone and speaker are located on the side of the device, rather than on the back. Forget about cradling the thing between your head and your shoulder—it juts out at an odd angle from your ear.

As a Gaming Machine

The N-Gage sports a big, bright screen, and its vertical orientation doesn't bug me as much as I thought it would. Its fairly responsive and well-matted buttons support chording, with the

"5" and "7" keys levelled a bit above the rest of the keypad for easy pressing. Surprisingly, after a little play, I didn't miss the shoulder buttons as dearly as I thought I would. However, the method for changing game cartridges is probably the N-Gage's biggest design flaw (see sidebar). You have to turn off the phone, open the back, pop out the battery, depress a little plastic tab, and slide in the cartridge. It's like having to change your PC's RAM every time you want to play another game. This type of oversight is an example of Nokia's newcomer status in the console manufacturing world.

As an Audio Love Machine

Using MMC cards as flash memory, the N-Gage can store and play MP3 files (transferred via the N-Gage's USB port) and record music directly from the

built-in FM radio, a welcome bonus. Lack of an external antenna doesn't hurt phone reception, but it does seem to limit the N-Gage's RF reception. You can compose music using a built-in midi sequencer and write real sheet music, though only in the treble clef and only in preprogrammed time signatures. The music editor does, however, support thirds and staccato notes.

Instead of a standard 1/8th-inch headphone jack, the N-Gage uses two 2.5mm jacks—one for the phone headset and the other for stereo audio. While the device comes with a decent pair of earbuds and an attached omnidirectional microphone, sticking to the standard jack would have let me keep my Sony MDR-7506s, and



Nokia's Wireless Gaming Review
www.wgamer.com

Nokia's N-Gage will go on sale for \$299 (MSRP) on October 7 at retailers including Gamestop, Electronics Boutique, Circuit City, Target, and Best Buy.

FOR MORE ON THE N-GAGE
CHECK OUT
[HTTP://WWW.WGAMER.COM/N-GAGE](http://www.wgamer.com/n-gage)

would have avoided the annoyance of plugging the headset into the wrong jack.

Conclusion

The N-Gage has met with a toner of skepticism from the same people who claim to be die-hard mobile gaming fans. This outcry may be a reaction to the intense hype, but it's unwarranted. The N-Gage is a first-generation device. Early adopters will have to deal with some mild annoyance, but the emphasis is on mild. With all that N-Gage offers, it's worth a serious look.

BY AVERY SCORE

THE N-GAGE UNCOVERED



The outside-the-box N-Gage.



There's the cartridge.



...must...pull out...battery



Unclip here to remove the cart.

N-GAGE PREVIEWS



PANDEMONIUM

DEVELOPER: IDEAWORKS 3D PUBLISHER: EIOGS

In a world of complex cross-game titles, *Pandemonium* is a pure platformer. There are no stats to tweak, no options to toggle. The emphasis is on speed, not combat, even though the beautiful graphics might cause you to linger. Power-ups allow protagonist Nikki to shoot energy bursts, but you can either shoot or jump atop the unsuspecting heads of carnivorous plants and insects with relative ease. It's also possible to complete levels by developing the ability to float on moving rainbows, bound across chasms, and bounce on clouds.

Although *Pandemonium*'s gameplay is decidedly 2D, its graphics are polygonal. *Pandemonium* would lose its fast-twitch appeal if you were constantly adjusting its fixed perspective. Besides, with destructible objects, colorful textures, and Nikki's good looks, *Pandemonium* doesn't lack visual appeal.

Unlike a lot of mobile games, *Pandemonium* feels like it was heavily play-tested. It is more polished than virtually any other mobile title. One level uses powerful gusts of air to boost



jump. The gusts had great animation and convincing sound and were just barely high enough to allow me to reach my goal. Even in an early alpha release, I could tell that the jumps were designed to test the limits of my skills without requiring insurmountable attempts. Some of this ease comes from *Pandemonium*'s PSX legacy. But Crystal Dynamics and Ideaworks 3D have demonstrated admirable attention to detail in bringing this title to N-Gage.

Pandemonium for N-Gage is not a perfect port from the PSX original. I was dismayed by the lack of BGM tracks and by the absence of Nikki's sidekick Fergus. Hopefully, these features will resurface in the final build.

Pandemonium's brilliant, highly varied level design, its fast-paced, thoroughly enjoyable game mechanics, and its sublime simplicity make it one of the best games on mobile. Well before its N-Gage launch date, *Pandemonium* feels streamlined and silky smooth.

For more on *Pandemonium*, visit <http://wgamer.com/game-1301>



SUPER MONKEY BALL

DEVELOPER/ PUBLISHER: SEGA

In 2001, Sega's *Super Monkey Ball* for GameCube took the world by storm. Its simple yet appealing gameplay and lovable ball-dwelling simian stars made it an instant classic. Fans have since been treated to a Cube sequel and several mobile iterations.

For those unfamiliar with the probably inhumane yet wonderfully enjoyable practice of rolling primates around in little glass balls, *Monkey Ball* is a variation on the old game of skill in which a player tilts a maze in various directions to move a steel ball through it. In Sega's version, the steel ball is replaced by four monkeys inside balls who roll with varying degrees of speed

and balance through treacherous levels. Each level has a time limit, so *Monkey Ball* (played solely with the directional pad) forces you to find a happy medium between speed and cautiousness.

Of all mobile versions of *Monkey Ball*, N-Gage's comes closest to matching the riveting original. It's graphically closer to its GameCube roots, pushin' polys and throwin' texels like it just don't care. With the addition of 3D, puzzles now peek depth to rival the console version. But improvements don't stop at graphics. When hooting up *Monkey Ball*, my N-Gage pumped out hot breakfast. Dismember, can we get the reward?

The alpha version of *Monkey Ball* needs some work. Only the beginning mode (the first 10 levels) is playable, and the game crashes after you get through about eight levels. Also, the save feature doesn't work. These problems don't seem die when you consider that Sega has till October 7 to fix them. Here's hoping it does.

Super Monkey Ball is a universally appealing game, and this is the best version yet. You'd have to be a member of the ASPCA to dislike it.

For more on *Super Monkey Ball*, visit <http://wgamer.com/game-535>

OTHER N-GAGE GAMES WORTH NOTING

RED FACTION II

(MONKEYSTONZ/THQ)

John Romero's *Red Faction* is the shooter to watch. <http://wgamer.com/game-1255>

SONIC N

(SEGA)

The blue man returns. Have a field for speed? Grab some rings and let Robotnik's goons eat

your dust.

<http://wgamer.com/game-1307>

TONY HAWK'S PRO

SKATER

(NEVERSOFT/ACTIVISION)

Not liking this game would be harder than a 540-degree heely pop shove-it to indie impossible! Check it. <http://wgamer.com/game-1310>

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

WGAMER REVIEWS



WGAMER
RATING:



BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER

■ PUBLISHER: Jamdat ■ DEVELOPER: Demivision
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT [HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1346](http://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1346)

The basic rules are the same: Switch adjacent gems to create runs of three or more identical gems. With each switch, the string of identical gems disappears, the ones above the string drop down, and matching continues. Play lasts as long as your timer does; successful matches earn more time.

Demivision and JAMDAT add three new wrinkles: Its multiplayer, its bombs, and it lets you play anywhere.

In the two-player game, you challenge another player or take the

first available opponent. You can play against the computer while you wait. Before you begin, you see your opponent's skill level and win/loss record. Your opponent's game appears in the right corner of your board. The timer shows both games remaining.

About those bombs: By placing special gems in strings, you earn Freeze, Zero-G, Crazy Keys, Cascade, and other bombs, each of which affects your opponent (and you) in different, disconcerting ways. The five-

second aftermath feels longer because you can see your opponent cloning gems while you recover.

The tremendous novelty and variety of the bombs essentially the kind of innovation that mobile gaming needs. While it could be easier to differentiate gems, Bejeweled Multiplayer is closer to realizing the gaming potential of the mobile phone than any other title available. You will be amazed at what a mobile phone can do.



WGAMER
RATING:



CHARLIE'S ANGELS: ROAD CYCLONE

■ PUBLISHER: Centricore ■ DEVELOPER: Sony Pictures
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT [HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1345](http://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1345)

Charlie's Angels: Road Cyclone, like its namesake, is a guilty pleasure. You are a motorcycle-riding Angel on a horizontally scrolling highway. Sandra is the fastest, Mia the most agile, and Hope the toughest. Biker thugs try to kill you. Angels rely on wits and luck, not firepower, so you dodge grenades and get bikers to shoot each other while using ramps to jump over and on top of them.

The badies are not very smart.

They're also wimpy, and they're bad drivers. But there are a lot of them, and their bosses lurk at the end of each level. Also, you must destroy a strafing helicopter and a monster 18-wheeler by knocking enemy motorcycles into them.

Gameplay is consistently smart and augmented by several unique elements. You can use the bikers' wreckage to crash other thugs. Or bump them into ramps and knock

them off their bikes. Best of all, recharge your health by jumping onto an unoccupied motorcycle—just like in real life!

This driving game has it all: action, sass, sex, absurdity, and several twists. Unfortunately, CARC is short, and it would be nice to see more bosses, smarter enemies, and crazier maneuvers in additional levels. But that's the way it goes in summer movie tie-ins.



WGAMER
RATING:



TWO CITIES

■ PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Sony Online
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT [HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1319](http://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1319)

Two Cities puts you in your dream role: tactical commander. Everything is yours to command, unless the ruler of the neighboring city destroys it.

Shoot cannons to obliterate your opponent's resources while protecting your own. Improve your chances of scoring by scouting enemy territory. If an infantry member is hit, heal him in your infirmary. Losing healing ability puts you at a disadvantage, so eliminate your rival's infirmary early

while protecting your own as long as possible.

It can take several hits to take a unit down, during this time, your owl can heal or move the unit. You must spend a turn to "update" your map to find out.

Two Cities would kill itself well to multiplayer. The amount of strategy involved can be intense, and a well-planned attack is immensely gratifying. A game can take 25 minutes to

complete, and playing against the computer gets boring. The two-player mode involves swapping one handoff back and forth, but it is unlikely that most of your buddies would be willing to put up with that for long. "Come on, man! Press, press, press!" You're screwing up the rotation.

Playing against the AI is a pleasure; it's just not riveting-inducing. Had multiplayer been an option, Two Cities would have received a top score.

GREAT GAMES FROM YOUR CARRIER

SPRINT



■ **Ground Pounder (Cybiko)**
If you like shooting machine guns and throwing grenades at tanks and enemy troops (and, really, who doesn't?), you'll love Ground Pounder. Intelligent level design and dead-on gameplay mechanics make this title a winner.

■ **Baku Baku (Sega)**
A beestal Puyo Puyo, Baku Baku puts you in the role of Piggie, a gal who aspires to be the royal zookeeper. Pair animals with their favorite foods as they fall from the top of your screen. Compete against a CPU opponent who is trying to do the same: if you clear two or more blocks at once or clear many blocks through a chain reaction, you drop blocks on your opponent. A terrific title.

■ **Pengo (Sega)**
True to its arcade heritage, mobile Pengo is clever and challenging. There's no music, but it's worth a download.

CINGULAR



■ **Siberian Strike (GameLoft)**
Hop into your fighter plane to take out the evil Stalnik Corp., a Russian vodka manufacturer bent on world domination. Stalin-bot, their "drunk on power" robot, has created vodka that destroys the ability to resist communist control. Intense graphics make this game worth a second mention.

■ **MGS Karting (Noumena Productions)**
It's Mario Kart, but with better graphics and Bluetooth support! While the concept might be old hat, the great presentation and multiplayer support is novel.

■ **The Italian Job (Miforma)**
Finally, a licensed game that doesn't suck. Drive around GTA style, blowing up cars and ferrying gold bouillon to the train station. It's short—but challenging and fun while it lasts.

VERIZON



■ **Duratrax Mobile RC (Sorvent)**
The graphically rich remote-controlled car racing simulation features great collision detection and damage modeling. The problem is the unbalanced car options. Different cars represent difficulty levels, not different play styles.

■ **Charisma Lee (Midream / Jambot)**
It may be whack-a-mole in a petty package, but its strange dialogue and oddball charm wins it a place in our hearts.

■ **Q*Bert (Centerscore/Sony Pictures)**
One of the best titles of the retro rush. For the uninitiated, Q*Bert is a game of skill in which you must hop from block to block, changing each of their respective colors as you go. The challenge is to avoid falling off the edge or hitting the baddies.

AT&T



■ **Prince of Persia (GameLoft)**
Action! Platforming! Oriental despotism! You are fighting to save seven hot honeys from the head hunch's harem. This night, the sultan's babes have been kidnapped. Get his girls back before his pimp hand atrophies.

■ **Gulo's Tale (GameLoft)**
What's a platform without a platformer? Gulo's tale melds basic action with stunning visuals. Guide Gulo on fruit-gathering missions, dodge enemies, and occasionally dispatch them with Gulo's bubble-blowing technique.

■ **Scooby-Doo: Jeepers Creepers (JOMG/Digital Bridges)**
It's a survival-horror title! No, it's a driving sim! Hide from a ghost in a haunted mansion and uncover clues. Guess the identity of the perp, then hit the highways for a fast-paced chase! Scooby-Doo! Snack!

ABOUT WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

In August 2007, we started the lowest, which is completely dedicated to mobile games and mobile game devices. Now, through a partnership with Ziff Davis, we're able to bring the biggest, cost-free gamer audience information about our main addiction. Let us know what you think! E-mail any of us at the addresses below.

MATTHEW BELLOW: Woven from the golden dross of a giant spider, Matthew helped start WGR after playing nGame's DataClash.
matthew@weblogsgamingreview.com



CASHMAN ANDRUS: When he codes, the gods call lightning from the sky. Cashman started WGR with Matthew instead of learning to a life of crime.
cashman@weblogsgamingreview.com



AVERY SCORE: With the looks of Carnal Gack!, the self-proclaimed otaku has no trouble getting a seat at the local food court.
avery@weblogsgamingreview.com



AMY MORAGHANE: There are no other Christmas tree decorating parties like here, and to Amy, Independence Day is a week-long boochanaka.
amy@weblogsgamingreview.com



Tech

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

Multimedia Monster

Toshiba's Media Center Laptop isn't quite a home run, but it's still a good at-bat



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOSHIBA/STC © 1999



Being an early adopter has its advantages—sort of. For instance, let's say you're the first guy on the block with a DVD player. There you are, wowing your friends with this newfangled technology, only to have newer, better, and less-expensive technology show off the imperfections in your box come out shortly after you jumped on board. That's how I feel about Toshiba's implementation of Windows' Media Center capabilities in the latest Satellite, the 5205-S705: It's cool and everything, but I think the next shot at it will be closer to perfect than the current one. But enough about that. Since this laptop is—for our concerns—primarily a gaming box, we'll talk about those capabilities before we jump into the Media Center stuff. This is the first laptop I've received that includes Nvidia's 64MB GeForce FX 5600 Go graphics option, and I am most definitely pleased. In previous laptop stories, I've tested the units at 1024x768 with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering off, but since Nvidia likes to talk about how badass the GeForce FX Go is, I decided to test the Toshiba the same way I test desktop graphics cards—with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. Nvidia's boasts aren't empty: This machine can handle most games at 1024x768 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on, achieving a 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 37 frames per second at that resolution. Compare that to the 83 frames per second that my Power Rig achieved at those settings. You might think 37 frames per second is bad, but remember, I was taxing the hell out of that graphics chip.

By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

Anyone who picks this baby up will no doubt be in for some good times.



I tested this machine at a resolution of 1280x960, but since NASCAR 2002 couldn't run at that resolution, I wasn't able to get a complete GameGauge score. Also, the machine was unable to run games at 1600x1200 with the best settings. Of course, if you decrease the settings or turn AA and AF off altogether, you'll easily be able to run games at higher resolutions.

In addition to the graphics processor, the Satellite 5205-S705 ships with a display Toshiba calls UXGA CASV (Clear Advanced Super View) Active Matrix. Because it's a UXGA display, its native resolution is 1600x1200, and the CASV option makes this the absolutely sharpest and

most clear LCD we've seen. Serious Sam: TSE looked amazing, with absolutely none of the ghosting often present when gaming on LCDs. And DVDs looked incredible, too. The built-in Harman/ardon speakers with subwoofer are superloud—in fact, they're possibly the loudest laptop speakers I've heard. And while they tend to distort at higher volumes, it's still nice to be able to listen to music or watch a movie without headphones. Any way you want to look at it, this machine is a multimedia monster.

Adding to the Satellite 5205-S705's media functionality is its built-in TV tuner, which allows you to both watch and record TV shows. Windows XP Media Center Edition also comes with the Windows Media remote control. When Toshiba demoed this machine for me, this feature is what excited me the most. I love watching *The Ali G Show*, *The Dave Chappelle Show*, and *SNL*, but I'm getting old—I simply can't stay up that late anymore. Setting up Media Center to work with my cable setup was pretty simple: The laptop's built-in 802.11b wireless connectivity easily talked to my Belkin 54g setup, which is essential, since Media Center has to download TV program data from the internet. I plugged the laptop into my coaxial cable prior to hitting the sack, and the next morning, I had gigs of TV shows to watch. I chose to record the shows on the highest-quality settings available, but you shouldn't expect television-quality viewing. That said, it's still pretty awesome to be able to watch *Ali G* on the bus.

I've always been torn between Dell and Toshiba laptops for gaming. Right now, the Satellite 5205-S705 is at the top of my list. With its myriad features, good gaming performance, and awesome sound, anyone who picks this baby up will no doubt be in for some good times.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great gaming laptop with awesome sound and good peripherals.



**WIL
POWER**

By William O'Neil

SprintPCS Wins 2003 "Best Freebie of E3" Award

The Electronics Entertainment Expo is about a few specific things: seeing the latest that game developers and hardware vendors have to offer; eating, drinking, and partying on someone else's dime; and getting free stuff. While I knew what to expect regarding the first two things, I had no idea what SprintPCS had in mind for us. On the first day of the show GMP's James Mizke told me to come to a SprintPCS event with him where he heard they were going to be giving away free cell phones. I showed up and realized that all I had to do was meet with six of SprintPCS' gaming partners to hear about titles that you could play on their PCS Vision phones, and you'd walk away with a Sanyo B100 camera phone with two months of activation. I pulled out a stack of my business cards and went about checking out versions of *Bejeweled* and *Pac-Man* being played on cell phones, before grabbing lunch and picking up my new phone.

I first checked out Sprint's PCS Vision stuff last year when they released the Samsung A500 phone, so the idea of playing games on my phone isn't new. This camera stuff, on the other hand, is off the hook. I always thought that taking pictures with your phone and sending them to your friends was something that Japanese girls did. That was, until I and a dozen of my closest friends got camera phones. These things have taken over our lives. Now everywhere we go, we're snapping pictures of passersby and sending them to each other.

Ultimately, though, it comes down to games, and while cell phone games represent anything out the height of gaming technology, they're additive as hell. And while I can safely say that my marriage survived this E3, I'm not sure if it will survive multiplayer *Bejeweled* played on my cell phone.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	TOSHIBA SATELLITE 5205-S705
Price	\$1,099
Operating system	Windows XP Media Center Edition
Processor	2.4GHz Mobile Pentium 4 (900MHz)
Memory	512MB SDRAM
Hard drive	60GB 5,400 RPM
Graphics processor	64MB GeForce FX 5600 Go
Optical drive	DVD-RW (16x CD-R/8x CD-RW/6x CD-RW/8x DVD-RW/6x DVD-RM/6x DVD-RM/6x DVD-RAM DVD 180GB DVD RAM)
Display	15-inch UXGA CASV Active Matrix
Speakers	80W/6 Harmon/ardon speakers with subwoofer
Pointing device	TouchPad
Weight	7.96lb
Miscellaneous	Windows Media Center Edition Remote Control, TV Tuner, three USB 2.0 ports, LUKA 100M Ethernet port, SD slot, PCMCIA slot, S/PDIF digital audio out, built-in 802.11b wireless ethernet
Speed (Performance)	35
Price	4
Stability	35
Support	5
SCORE	4

If you bought all these games, it would cost about **\$186.**



Why not try them all first in the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine for less than **\$10?**



PLAYABLE DEMOS

- MLB 2004
- NBA STREET VOL. 2
- DYNASTY WARRIORS 4
- FREAKY FLYERS

REPLAY

- GUNGRAVE
- WWE SMACKDOWN! SHUT YOUR MOUTH
- SLY COOPER AND THE THIEVIUS RACCOONUS
- STAR WARS CLONE WARS
- TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003
- TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE
- MINORITY REPORT

INSIDE THE GAME

- INSIDE THE GAME
- DOWNHILL DOMINATION
- LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER-ANGEL OF DARKNESS
- WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED
- FEATURING SHAUN MURRAY

EXTRAS

- DEV 101: GAME DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

VIDEOS

- SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN
- FINDING NEMO
- GLADIUS
- HUNTER: THE RECKONING-WAYWARD

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 **PlayStation**

A Pair of Aces

Motherboard madness **BY LOYO CASE**

TECH STATS



ABIT IC7-G MAX2
 WHOLESALE AIB
 Priced \$199

DFI LANPARTY 875 PRO
 WHOLESALE DFI
 Priced \$200



With the release of the B75P chipset and a slew of 800MHz frontside bus Pentium 4 processors, options for gamers who want to build killer gaming rigs using Intel CPUs has become very interesting. The huge memory bandwidth—5.4GB per second—is just the ticket for texture-heavy 3D games. With 800MHz FSB CPUs ranging from less than \$200 for the 2.4C model to under \$420 for the 3.0GHz processor, prices are about as reasonable as they've been in a long time.

In this issue, we take a look at a pair of B75P boards. The DFI Lanparty 875Pro is targeted directly at the community of DIY gamers who go to LAN parties (in case you couldn't figure that out from the name) with modded cases and cold cathode UV lights. The orange expansion slots, memory sockets, and IDE connectors all glow in the dark when

The DFI Lanparty is targeted directly at DIY gamers who go to LAN parties.

exposed to UV light, making sure you'll be the life of any party—well, any party that falls into the category “LAN.” The DFI board also ships with a nifty set of accessories, including a front-panel expansion bay with two USB ports, rounded drive cables (that also glow in the dark), and the piece de résistance: a carrying harness for your modded case. It's just the accessory for lugging your rael system to the local LAN party.

The Abit IC7-G Max2 is almost staid by comparison, at least in terms of appearance, inside the box, however, is a complete package, including not one, but two serial ATA power-adaptor cables for that SATA RAID array you plan to build. The board is also compatible with the company's Media XP front expansion bay, which includes additional USB 2.0 ports and readers for various memory cards.

Out of the box, both boards perform well, but the Abit board offers slightly better unweaked performance. While both motherboards offer a rich array of tweaks for overclockers, the Abit BIOS setup program is more accessible, while the DFI BIOS setup is somewhat confusing. Both boards were reasonably

stable, although we did see a crash attributed to the Radeon 9700 graphics card with the DFI board during the benchmarking process.

All in all, these are both great boards. The Abit IC7-G will appeal more to the overclocker, with its accessible BIOS settings and easy recovery from oversteering. The DFI Lanparty 875Pro will appeal to those of you who like a little flash with your substance.

VERDICT ★★★★★

DFI LANPARTY 875PRO It has a unique appearance and a great set of accessories, but a slightly slower out-of-the-box experience and a confusing BIOS setup.

VERDICT ★★★★★

ABIT IC7-G MAX2 Delivers a complete kit for setting up a system, good performance out of the box, and accessible BIOS. However, it's nowhere near as edgy as the DFI board.

3DMark2001SE 1280x960x32

DFI Lanparty 875Pro **13475**

Abit IC7-G Max2 **13567**

No Longer the Least Expensive Kid on the Block

ABS' Ultimate M5 gets a facelift and a major bump in price **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS

MINI-TOWER ABS
MSRP \$2,799

In the years since I've been at CGW, I've consistently lauded ABS for building machines that represent the near-perfect marriage of performance and low cost. What's not to like about a \$1,500 machine that plays games just as well as a PC that's twice as expensive? While its latest Barton-based Ultimate M5 is plenty quick, the inclusion of a few components bumps up the price toward what I'd expect to pay a for slightly more powerful Pentium 4-based machine.

That said, the Ultimate M5 is about as potent an AMD rig as you can find. It rocks an Athlon XP 3200+ processor, 1GB of Corsair DDR400 PC3200 RAM, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9600 Pro graphics card, all built around ASUS' A7N8X- Deluxe (M0rc2) motherboard. There's no question that these are great components; however, it's certainly possible to build a machine with these

parts for well below \$2,000. So, why does this machine cost almost \$3,000? For starters, there's that RAID. While it no doubt improves performance and gives you plenty of storage capacity, it also knocks the price up. The same can



The Ultimate M5 is about as potent an AMD rig as you can find.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	ABS ULTIMATE M5	3GHz PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG
Price	\$2,799	\$1,800
Graphics processor	ATI Radeon 9600 Pro	256MB GeForce FX 5600 Ultra
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ (4000MHz FSB)	3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (M0rc2)	Intel DP9652 with Intel E79 chipset
Memory	1GB Corsair DDR-400 PC3200 (two modules)	1GB Kingston Raptor RKC500 PC3500 (one)
Hard drive	Two 80GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a RAID configuration	One 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drive in a 240GB RAID configuration
Soundcard	Onboard 6 Channel audio/Audio	Creative Labs Audigy 2 E-Platinum
Primary drive	Pioneer HL-DT018 DVD drive	Pioneer PleXCombo 20x/16x/10x DVD/DL/CD-RW combo drive
Secondary drive	NEC DVD-RW DL2602 4x CD-RW 41x/16x/20x J/R	N/A
Monitor	19-inch Samsung 950P-1600	22-inch NEC MultiSync FL2020
Speakers	Logitech 100.2-600 5.1	Cambridge MegaWorks 800
Keyboard	Microsoft Wireless Optical Keyboard	Microsoft Wireless Optical Keyboard
Mouse	Microsoft Wireless Optical Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0
Speed (Performance)	4	N/A
Price	15	N/A
Stability	15	N/A
Support	4	N/A
Upgradeability	5	N/A
SCORE	4.20	N/A

also be said about the NEC DVD+RW drive. While it's a nice inclusion, it may be overkill.

All criticisms aside, the Ultimate M5 is a great gaming PC. It tested quite well at 1280x960 with 4x AA and 6x AF turned on. It scored 9927 at 3DMark2001SE, and its UT2003 botmatch score of 65 is right up there with the more powerful Pentium 4-based machines. In addition to performance, this baby is infinitely upgradeable, and I also really like the case—you may remember that Voodoo submitted a machine in the same type of case for this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine story.

When all is said and done, anyone who gets this rig will be pleased with its performance. However, I'd opt for a single 80GB hard drive and a standard CD-RW drive, which will keep the price closer to what you should pay for an Athlon XP 3200+.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great machine, but I'd opt for fewer expensive components.



Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra is neck and neck with ATI's latest offering.

Nvidia Scores a Draw With Its 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra

Very fast, but not necessarily the very fastest **BY DAVE SALVATOR**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURED BY: NVIDIA
MSRP: \$199

Nvidia has grown accustomed to the taste of success and spent quite some time atop the 3D graphics food chain. But then along came a little something called the Radeon 9700 Pro, right about the time Nvidia was late getting its next GPU (NV30) to market, and things in Nvidialand were suddenly stood on their head. Finding itself in the somewhat unknown position of challenger rather than incumbent, Nvidia was seeking to regain the 3D performance crown. ATI wrestled away with the Radeon 9700 Pro.

For its part, ATI hasn't rested on the success of the Radeon 9700 Pro and has since shipped a "kicker" product called the Radeon 9800 Pro, and a 256MB version of this card with a slightly faster memory clock should be available now. So, Nvidia came into this

round with its work cut out for it, and to the company's credit, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (formerly codenamed NV35) addresses the shortcomings of its predecessor, the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra (NV30). However, Nvidia's latest GPU doesn't blunder past ATI's current top-

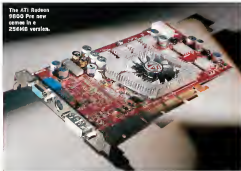
end GPU. In fact, the two companies' flagship products have probably never been more evenly matched.

Speeds, feeds, and such

To answer the most pressing question, yes, it does have a 256-bit wide memory

Nvidia has grown rather accustomed to the taste of success.

The ATI Radeon 9800 Pro new comes in a 256MB version.



interface, addressing one of its predecessor's principal shortcomings. There is still some debate as to whether this GPU has eight or four pixel pipes, and the answer is, it depends on the kind of work the GPU is doing. In some instances, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra can crank out four pixels per clock, and in others, it can output eight pixels.

Interestingly, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra's GPU core clock is 10 percent slower than its predecessor's. Because of the reduction in clock speed, Nvidia was able to implement a much quieter thermal solution to keep things cool for GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. Gone is the excessively loud "Dustbuster" fan. In fact, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra's fan is barely audible, even during the most intense 3D tests.

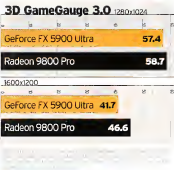
Rubber, meet road

For gamers, what matters most is performance, and in that department, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra is one fast ride. But, despite the new power plant, Nvidia finds itself running even, and in some cases even trailing ATi's latest and greatest.

Using our own 3D GameGauge 3.0, a collection of eight games (four DirectX9,

four OpenGL), we found that the two cards run even at a 1280x1024 test resolution, with ATi holding the narrowest of margins. At the more grueling 1600x1200 test resolution, we expected the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra to pull ahead (as we've seen in previous contests), but the opposite happened. Instead, the Radeon 9800 Pro took a 12 percent performance lead. Bear in mind that we tested both resolutions with 4X AA and 8X AF enabled to really give the GPUs a workout. We attribute ATi's performance lead to a more efficient memory controller, since this very high resolution, coupled with the additional memory traffic that 4X AA and 8X AF generate, really hammers a GPU's memory subsystem.

Is the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra something you'll want powering your gaming rig? Yes, if you can handle the lofty price tag. That said, the Radeon 9800 Pro has shown its staying power and can be found for a lower street price, since it's been on the market a while longer. So, while the 5900 Ultra has proven its mettle, it doesn't clearly dominate ATi as past GPUs have. From here on, Nvidia's got a real fight on its hands.



VERDICT ★★★★★

Fast, as in very fast, and thankfully, the noisy fan is a thing of the past. That said, this baby's expensive, and it's not the clear-cut performance leader. We also found the 1600x1200 tests disappointing.

Tired of being treated like a criminal for sharing music online?



You're in good company. Over 60 million other music fans use peer-to-peer programs like Kazaa and Morpheus to share their favorite tunes. Yet the record labels are bullying ISPs and hunting down college kids in an effort to shut down file sharing.

Isn't it time for a new approach? The Electronic Frontier Foundation thinks so. We believe the answer lies in a model that fairly compensates artists while supporting music lovers. Join EFF today so the music can play on.

File-Sharing:
It's Music to our Ears



Stand up for your right to share the music you love!
Join EFF today at www.eff.org/share/cgw

Loyd's Cracked Case

The memory train By Loyd Case

Recently, Intel released its B75P Centerwood and B65PE Springdale chipsets, along with some Pentium 4 processors that support an 800MHz effective frontside bus (FSB) clock. The B75P supports dual-channel DDR400 memory. The new Pentium 4s clock at 2.4GHz, 2.6GHz, 2.8GHz, and 3.0GHz, with the 3.2GHz not too far off as I write this. AMD has countered with the Athlon XP 3200+, which supports a 400MHz effective frontside bus. Nvidia's nForce2 Ultra 400 chipset also supports DDR-400.



Intel B65PE Springdale Chipset

In a typical PC, several operations can be happening at once.

4 is probably more effective at handling gobs of data thrown at it than the Athlon XP is. In both CPUs, the actual frontside bus clock rate is 200MHz, but the P4 can accept four data samples per clock cycle, while the Athlon XP can handle only two. This gives the P4

a peak data rate of 6.4GB/second, nicely matching the capabilities of the B75P chipset. The Athlon XP tops out at 3.2GB/second.

In a typical PC, several operations can be happening at once. Data may be moved from main memory to the CPU, while other data is being transferred to the graphics card over the AGP port. Meanwhile, disk transfers are occurring and your soundcard is generating PCI traffic. And if you're on a multiplayer game, network traffic is also chewing up bandwidth.

All of this can eat into available memory bandwidth. However, the fact that the Intel CPUs support 6.4GB/sec versus the Athlon XP's 3.2GB of bandwidth doesn't paint a complete picture. After all, the memory controller has to arbitrate AGP, PCI, and disk controller traffic, as well as handle data transfers between memory and the CPU.

Remember, the nForce2 memory controller can handle up to 6.4GB/sec. At first blush, this seems like overkill, but factor in AGP bus traffic (2 GB/sec), hard drive accesses, and PCI bus traffic, and all of a sudden, the system is now moving well over 5GB/sec.

OK, we've determined that there's a lot of data moving around inside a new PC using newer technology CPUs and chipsets. What does it mean for your PC games?

If you're mostly playing Diablo II or Counter-Strike, it means nothing. If you're already getting good performance, then upgrading won't help you much, if at all. However, current generation 3D game titles move gobs of data in and out of memory. The faster the data transfers, the better the performance. Of course, memory bandwidth is only one factor, but it can be an important one in some game titles. And it's only going to get worse as titles using modern game engines, like Valve's Source engine or the Doom III engine, hit the street.

The new chipsets and faster memory also alleviate (though don't eliminate) the memory bandwidth bottleneck. We've always felt that dropping a B45PE chipset onto a system using the B45PE chipset was fairly pointless—the beefy CPU was often running idle, waiting for data. In fact, the 3.0GHz P4, which actually runs 66MHz slower than the 3.06GHz CPU, runs most 3D games faster because of improvements in memory throughput.

The bottom line: if you plan on playing some of the games coming out later this year and you have an older system using single channel memory, you might just consider upgrading. You'll likely be pleasantly surprised at the result.



Intel B75P Centerwood Chipset

The faster frontside bus is interesting, but you need faster memory to support it. Although there's no officially blessed standard yet, most memory makers are now shipping DDR-400 memory. This is RAM that clocks at 200MHz but moves two data samples per clock cycle. Both the nForce2 chipset and the new Intel chipsets support dual-channel DDR-400. If you properly install two identical memory modules, you'll get twice the memory throughput of a single module. Dual-channel DDR-400 memory is theoretically capable of moving 6.4GB per second of data.

Of course, the processor and memory controller, the northbridge or memory controller hub also come into play, as does the CPU. For example, the Pentium

Tech Medics

You've got questions; most of my answers are wrong By William O'Neal

Time for an overhaul

I have a 630MHz computer running on 320MB of RAM, and I have a 64MB Radeon 9000 videocard. I have about a \$400 budget and I need some upgrading fast. My questions are 1) What processor and motherboard should I get, and 2) should I keep the card I have or save up and buy another one?

Stacy Adams

While that 64MB Radeon 9000 isn't the current pick of the litter, I'd suggest getting a new motherboard, CPU, and RAM before upgrading your graphics card. You can get a new Antec case, an ASUS A7NBX-Deluxe motherboard, Athlon XP 2200+ CPU, and 512MB of RAM for less than \$400.

nForce2 audio does rock!

In the June 2003 issue, Loyd Case writes that the nForce2 chipset can be an acceptable audio solution for gaming if it's paired with a motherboard that has an MCP-D Southbridge, but cautions against selecting a board with MCP-T audio, which he says offloads audio processing onto the CPU. I just bought an ASUS A7NBX-Deluxe motherboard, and the user manual says the board includes an MCP-T, not an MCP-D. Taking Loyd's warning to heart, I still have my Creative Live 51-card installed, but poking around on the Internet, I can't find an nForce board with an MCP-D Southbridge that supports an FSB of more than 266MHz: It looks like the MCP-D is the original nForce Southbridge with an integrated APU, the MCP-T is the updated nForce2 version, and the basic (non-T) southbridge is the one to avoid if you want to use integrated audio. Is that correct? Did Loyd send CGW readers looking to upgrade in search of a nonexistent motherboard? Or is Loyd right, and WIT's current Lean Machine has to lean on its Athlon XP 2200+ every time it breaks out the EAX 2 effects?

Charles Robinson

Actually, the MCP-T southbridge audio that ships with nForce2 motherboards like the ASUS A7NBX-Deluxe do offload the audio processing off the CPU. So it's not that Loyd was wrong—he was simply less right than he usually is.

Time to flash that BIOS

I recently purchased an Athlon XP 2200+ and an MSI KT4 Ultra motherboard. However, I don't know what bus



speed and multiplier to use to make it run at 1.0GHz. I have two questions: 1) If the motherboard says it has an FSB speed of 266, would 266x7 work? 2) If the motherboard frequency can be 266MHz, why do all the overclockers run this chip at 166x7?

Nick the Animal

Well, this motherboard supports a maximum FSB of 333MHz, and your CPU rocks a 266MHz FSB. If I were in your shoes, I'd reset the BIOS to the default settings; go to www.msi.com /fw and download a new BIOS. Chances are that if you flash the BIOS with the latest MSI has for your motherboard, a simple reboot should suffice.

Is this international nForce month or something?

I'm considering buying a new nForce2 Athlon XP motherboard. But what does "nForce2" mean? Does it come with some cool videocard built in?

Falcon

Basically, nForce2 is the second generation of nVidia's nForce chipset. The chipset is a set of chips that perform various functions like controlling the memory, the PCI bridge, the EIDE controller, the keyboard and

mouse, and other assorted things that most normal people don't really think and/or care about. There are nForce2 motherboards with onboard graphics, but I'd shy away from those. Check out ASUS' A7NBX-Deluxe—it's an awesome Athlon XP board.

We like refunds here at CGW!

I don't want to sound like a retard when it comes to videocards, but the truth is, I am one! I just assume that the higher the test numbers, the better the card. Anyway, I am waiting not very patiently for the release of EverQuest 2. I wanted to know what you think would be the best card to run a game that boasts of its superior graphics and runs DirectX 9.0. I'm buying a computer setup that's a 3GHz Pentium 4 with a 120GB hard drive, 2GB RAM, and the best of everything!

Nike, the Avid Reader

It feels like they come out with new cards every month, and it's annoying as hell, as well as confusing. Since you're buying the best of everything, I'd say to get the most powerful graphics card available. I'm torn between ATX's 256MB Radeon 9800 Pro and nVidia's 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. They're comparable, and they're both around \$500.

Killer Rigs

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

Deisions, decisions. For all those people who've been accusing me of being in ATX's pocket, let me point out that in spite of having plenty of reasons—other than raw speed—to choose the 256MB Radeon 9600 Pro over the 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra, I stuck to my guns and included the embattled GeForce FX. Nvidia's been in some seriously hot water lately, particularly with its 3DMark2003 driver issues. (For more on that, check out Extremetech.com and read Dave Salivator's story on Nvidia's driver "irregularities.") While accusations have been flying about whether or not the Santa Clara-based company was consciously cheating on 3DMark2003, it's been easy to overlook the more pressing issue: In some game tests, the GeForce FX is a little bit faster than the Radeon 9600 Pro. And that is why I'm including it in my Power Rig.

While this month's Killer Rigs are almost the same as last month's, you'll notice that I'm now testing all my machines with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on, reporting only the 1280x960 results. As for the Lean Machine, I replaced the 128MB GeForce FX 5600 Ultra with the 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 Pro. They're similar in price, and the ATI part performs a little better.

In addition to the graphics card updates I also went ahead and swapped the corded Microsoft keyboard and mouse that I was using with my Power Rig with Microsoft's Wireless Optical Keyboard and Mouse.



Nvidia's been in some seriously hot water lately, particularly with its 3DMark2003 driver issues.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	\$300
Processor	Intel Pentium 4 (800MHz) F80	\$500
Case	Antec P180W 1000MM	\$100
Power supply	480-watt Antec True Blue 480	\$100
Motherboard	Intel D87PEZ (Bonnaroo) with Intel G/SP Chipset	\$150
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX 800MHz PC2000 DDR	\$350
Hard drive	Dual 100GB Seagate Barracuda SATA drives in a 2x8GB RAID 0 configuration	\$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	\$200
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 E2 Platinum	\$250
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor ProCombo 7475M4 12x DVD/CD-RW combo drive	\$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync PL212S	\$600
Speakers	Creative Inspire Megawatts 800	\$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	\$55
TOTAL		\$3,510

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$290
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	\$100
Case	Antec Lanbox	\$100
Power supply	300-watt SmartEco power supply	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS A1N80 Deluxe (nForce2)	\$140
Memory	512MB Corsair CMS PC-2000 DDR	\$150
Hard drive	40GB 3M Deskstar 7200 RPM	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9600	\$200
Soundcard	Onboard nForce2 5.1 Audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sony DVD ROM Drive	\$40
Monitor	19" ViewSonic 1905	\$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire Z1 2000	\$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	\$45
TOTAL		\$1,390

Gamer's Edge

Helping you geek less
Edited by Dawn Jungwants

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Push up those blazer sleeves

PAGE 126

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's Dirty Trick is for *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*.

Start as an engineer. Then take a jeep (Allied or Auto) and stick all of your dynamite in the center of the front seat so it doesn't fall out. Equip yourself with the detonator, then get in and drive toward an enemy tank. While still

moving, jump out and wait for the jeep to get right next to the tank. Then detonate the dynamite. No more tank...it's a cheap and effective trick if you are no good with a bazooka.

—Josh Smith



Congratulations, Jash—you are the proud recipient of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. If you'd like to win a free copy of *Vice City*, send your nastiest cheat for multiplayer in a recent game to cqw_letters@ziffdavis.com with a subject line of "Dirty Trick."



GTA: VICE CITY

Stealin' cars and stylin' large By Chet Faliszek & Erik Wolpaw

It's certainly possible to play all of Vice City's story missions straight through without any premeditated cock stacking. That plan, however, is too reckless. Your best bet is to complete as many side tasks as possible before tackling the missions. This a circumlocution wonk will not only familiarize you with the outside and general layout of the city itself, the east side, at least, but it'll also reward you with a bunch of bonuses, which give you an unfair advantage whenever you decide to attempt the story.

Until you play some missions and open Vice City's west side, only a little more than 40 packages are accessible. That's enough to give you a big head start, however. Detailing where and how to get all the packages is way beyond the scope of this little guide. Luckily for all of us, someone has already created a great online interactive map of Vice City, and this includes details on all the packages. You can find it at www.cddweb.net/gta4/index.asp.

Once you've grabbed 40 packages, it's time to complete some vehicle bonus missions. You can complete these in any order, and each one gives you a really useful reward.

Paramedic In this series of missions, you

have to drive an ambulance around, picking up patients and then dropping them off at a hospital. There are 12 levels total. To pass each level, you need to pick up and drop off as many patients as there are on the level you're on (that makes 76 patients in all). The ambulance is fast and tough, but it's also top-heavy and pretty tipsy. If you master driving this wobbling tank of mercy early on, driving every other vehicle in the game will be a breeze.

You can find ambulances at either of the two east side hospitals. The Shady Palms hospital in the northeast section of the city is the best place to jack ambulances. Other than the fact

STARTING OFF

Like in *Grand Theft Auto III*, there are 100 packages scattered throughout the city. A secret bonus is unlocked for every 10 you collect. These bonuses (all appear at your Ocean View Hotel, Starfish Island Mansion, and Hyman Condo properties) will be awarded to you as follows.

10 packages: Body armor
20 packages: Chainsaw
30 packages: Python pistol
40 packages: Flamethrower
50 packages: P05-1 sniper rifle
60 packages: Minigun
70 packages: Rocket launcher
80 packages: Plane called the Sea Sparrow is delivered to the helipad at the Starfish Island mansion
90 packages: Rhino tank appears at Port Baxter Air base in west Vice City
100 packages: The almost hilariously, unbelievably awesome Hunter attack chopper appears at the Port Baxter Air base



that we simply like this part of the city a lot, ambulance missions originating here generally have patients who need to be picked up on the beach. Driving in the sand is kind of a pain, but the beach is blissfully free of obstructions such as poles, buildings, and other cars. Once you've successfully delivered 78 patients, you'll no longer get tired while running—which is your reward. You'll also have a nice starting stake of more than \$50,000.

Pizza Delivery This mission is pretty straightforward: Deliver pizzas from the back of a Pizza Boy, a red Faggio modified to carry cargo. Pizza Boy vehicles can generally be found behind any of Vice City's three pizza parlors. There's one on the east side called Well-Stacked Pizzas, which is a block south of the police department. If you complete 30 levels, your base health will rise to 150! Note that while visiting a prostitute usually raises your health to 125, once you get the Pizza Boy bonus, it actually lowers your health to 125. This is primarily a tip/trick for *Grand Theft Auto's* many critics, who often miss this subtle but firm disapproval of prostitution.

Firefighter Grab a fire truck and drive around extinguishing flaming cars and their burning passengers. Unfortunately, the only fire truck is at the fire station in west Vice City, which is locked in the beginning of the game. Fortunately, you should have a flamethrower from picking up 40 packages. Use it to set a car on fire, wait until the fire department arrives, and then steal their truck. Listen for the hissing sound of steam—this means your stream of water is actually hitting flames. Once you reach firefighter level 12, you'll become fire retardant. This means you can walk into a crowd of people, drop a Molotov cocktail at your feet, and walk away unscathed.

Other There are also taxi missions and vigilante missions. The taxi missions are good for working on your driving skills, but after completing 100 fares, the reward (taxicabs that can jump like the Mach 5) isn't that useful. It's cool, though. For completing the vigilante missions, your maximum armor will increase to 150. Unlike the hopping taxi, this is useful, but these missions are best tackled using the Hunter copter, which isn't available until you get all 100 packages. Feel free to ignore our advice and complete these as well. If you want to solve the game with a 100 percent-completion rating, you'll have to do them eventually.



Hooker ten by the airport in west Vice City is a great place to pick up a free rocket launcher.



If you're on a killing spree, hiding out in the police station is not a good strategy.



This screenshot has no strategic significance, but we're proud of it anyway.



The perfect spot for an armed robbery: A store right next to a Pey 'N' Spray.



Why spend money for guns when there's a bunch you're already paying for with tax dollars? A nice, heavy truck is good for running over military personnel—that way, you can grab their dropped weapons.

Mission: Riot**Character:** Ken Rosenberg

You're supposed to get a uniform and then start a riot by punching some unhappy workers milling around the SpandEx corporate office. Once the riot breaks out, security will open the parking lot gates, giving you access to three SpandEx delivery trucks, which you need to destroy in order to complete the mission. If you've followed our advice, grabbed 40 packages, and find yourself armed with a flamethrower, you can bypass the uniform-fetching and worker-punching steps and proceed right to the truck-destroying phase of the operation. Just walk up to the locked gate and then torch the vehicles from a safe distance (or as unsafe distance, since you should now be fireproof as well). Mission accomplished. You're welcome.

Mission: Sir, Yes, Sir!**Character:** Colonel Juan Cortez

Cortez wants you to steal a piece of military hardware. Unfortunately, that piece of military hardware is a tank being paraded down the

**SPARE CASH**

Unlike in *Grand Theft Auto III*, money is actually pretty important in *Vice City*, especially early on. You'll need it mainly to purchase the hideouts and later, businesses scattered throughout the city.

The easiest way to rick some quick cash is to complete a few firefighter missions. After you douse a burning car, its flaming occupants will flee on foot. Once you put them out, it is entirely acceptable to run them over and then help yourself to any money they might have been carrying. Be careful: If you run them over while they're still aflame, the firefighter mission will end. It makes no sense to us, since ramming them puts out the fire—but whatever.

Another good source of income is armed robbery. Scattered around the city are 15 stores, which are prime targets for a stickup. Get a gun that can auto-target (for instance, the Uzi). Then simply walk into a store and target the shopkeeper. He'll start piling pieces of money on the counter—after four picks (a thousand bucks), he'll be tapped out. At this point, you'll have three stars, so plan an escape route. You need to hit all 15 stores in order to complete the game with 100 percent. Note that you can't rob food stores, which is frustrating. However, it's not against the law to shoot the clerk at the food store—unless a policeman sees you. Also note that the amulet-wearing proprietor will shoot back.



Once you buy a property, your henchmen are a good source of extra ammo and money. Unfortunately, they tend to not drop anything if simply shot.



Threaten a shopkeeper into fleeing with a gun will often cause them to cough up some loot.



One of *Vice City's* cool, new engine features is the bloody tire track.



If you jack a motorcycle from this angle, you'll kick the owner off his bike. We mean your bike.



Every time you clear this list, you get \$1,500 more a day from your car lot. Plus, you get a better car in the showroom.



If you want to kill gang members but don't feel like landing your chopper, just angle the rotor blade down and start shredding.



Wearing a Jason-esque jumpsuit and hockey mask to the strip club guarantees an uncomfortable time for everyone.

street by a large contingent of army trucks and armed soldiers. You can tough it out and try to take them head on. And probably die. Or you can follow along peacefully beside the convoy. After a while, you'll see the line of trucks stop, hear someone say something about getting a donut, and watch the tank driver exit his vehicle. At this point, all you need to do is walk over to the now-unlocked tank and hop in. Then drive like hell to the drop-off spot. Remember: Running into other vehicles with your virtually indestructible tank will cause those other vehicles to explode. So be sure that you do that a lot.

Mission: All Hands on Deck

Character: Colonel Juan Cortez

Here, the French Army attacks Cortez's boat. And speaking of the French Army, if you



Once a rampage is finished, stick around. Often, the bored cops will start a gang war leaving you to collect the booty.



Paramedics will always try to resurrect your victims. Unfortunately, paramedics don't carry cash.



The Colt Python can kill a driver with one shot through the windshield, which makes for a stylish way to flag down a cab.



You can collect multiple brands or just start a big collection of one type of car.

don't have the rocket launcher for this difficult mission, you'll probably feel like surrendering. By the time you get here, you'll have already unlocked western Vice City. If you grabbed all 100 of the packages, you should have a rocket launcher at your hideout. If you haven't grabbed them all, you should. If you still haven't grabbed the damn packages, there's a rocket launcher at Hooker Inn, north of Sunshine Autos at Escobar International Airport.

Mission: Four Iron

Character: Avery Carrington

Your goal here is to assassinate one of Avery's rivals, who is at the driving range of the Leaf Leaks Country Club. If you enter the club through the front door, you'll be stripped of all your weapons, forcing you to go through the time-consuming process of chasing the golfer down and then beating him to death with an actual golf club—or the poor man's golf club, your fists and feet. Luckily, there's another trickier entrance to the fairway. Drive a car (there's usually a sporty little number parked right outside the clubhouse) just to the left of the clubhouse, where a picket fence meets an outgoing ramp. Use the car's hood as a launching pad for a quick leap over the fence, and you'll be inside with all your weapons intact. Simply stroll over to the driving range and shoot,

flamethrow, or explode the bastard from a very safe distance.

Mission: Demolition Man

Character: Avery Carrington

This mission—in which you destroy a building by flying a remote-control helicopter around it and dropping explosives in four key locations—sucks. It kind of sucked on PS2, but a PC's keyboard controls manage to re-engineer its suck-bearing capacity so that it can cram in an extra 10-ton payload of sucking. Drastically remapping the keyboard is the only viable technique for completing this awful mission without losing your mind. Unless you're some kind of typing savant, the default keyboard configuration makes it impossible to control the tiny helicopter. Map the helicopter's forward and reverse keys to your normal car's forward and reverse keys, rotate the left and right keys to the car's left and right keys, and then gain and lose altitude keys to the left and right mouse buttons, respectively. Map the "Fire" (drop explosives) key to the space bar. Finally, ignore the strafe left and right keys—they're more trouble than they're worth.

Before you attempt the mission for real, take a little run in order to learn the layout of the four explosive drop zones. When you know the layout of the building and have more or less a good handle on flying the miserable little chopper, start with the lowest drop spot and move your way to the highest. You can kill the pissed-off workers who inhabit the building by flying into them, but don't. Avoiding them altogether and focusing on the task at hand is the best strategy. Once you're done, set the controls back to normal and go save. GO SAVE! What a pain in the ass.





RISE OF NATIONS

Everybody wants to rule the world By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk

The players are Tom and Bruce. The stage is history. The game is *Age of Nations*. The map and nations are randomly selected. All the other settings are default with the exception of technology, which is set to "expensive and slow." We "Use the way it draws out the progression of the ages a little more. We find that if you set it to "very expensive," it gives to a bunch of an edge to some national powers. Like the Chinese and Greek, who get an automatic bonus in research.



The fell of Jebel Moya, Tom's main source of metal.



I get by with a little help from my air support.



Bruce's zero-sum fireship strategy in action.

0:03, Bruce

As luck would have it, the Chinese advantages are suited to my style of play. China's initial large cities have more hit points and—more important—add hit points to buildings in their radius. This is helpful because your cities are less vulnerable to enemy raids. An "enhanced" barracks can stay alive long enough to churn out sufficient soldiers to turn back most early rushes. Although Tom isn't usually a rusher, this advantage makes me more confident about pushing my borders aggressively. The trick is to know the difference between aggression and overextension.

On the downside, we're playing on a map with significant water. I hate building navies—they seem incongruous in this game, and their movement rates relative to ground units mean they reach their destinations much faster. It's easy to take a slow-witted guy like me by surprise with a couple of boats. I've thought of pasting a note above my monitor that reads "It's the water, stupid!" to remind myself to watch out for at least one inch-on-style invasion from Tom per game. You can't just build up a big navy as a defense and forget about it, because it's too easily sunk. But we'll get to that later.

0:07, Tom

OK, I'm the Nubians—not exactly the sexiest nation, and vulnerable to taunts about being no0bs. They're notable for their income boost with the extra caravan, and 150 percent merchant efficiency. By using their market price bonus, they can parlay this into a considerable amount of flexibility when it comes to resources. I've really lucked out by having bases near my capital city, so I can immediately exploit the bison for a whopping +30 food bonus, which is the equivalent of three free farms. Buffalo burgers for all the citizens of Nubia!

The map is Warring Nations, which is one of my favorites for its combination of land, sea, and air combat, as well as enough land for a border struggle. Bruce and I will be situated at either end of a long continent, and we'll each have one mountain for mining. There will be at least two islands around us, presumably with additional mountains. So for a healthy metal income, which ensures a healthy military, we'll need to set up overseas cities.

1:34, Bruce

With my instabuild Chinese citizens, I've quickly sown farms, assigned more woodcutters, and researched science and civics. Now I babysit my

scout so I can get a bearing on Tom's location. I send him to Tom's end of the map. Once I've reconnoitered Tom's starting area, I hit Ctrl+C and let the little scoutmaster do what he does best.

9:12, Tom

I've pushed up the island with my third city, Lullibel, which is also my favorite Eric Clapton song. I've got a balanced economy going, so it's time for a wonder. Right now, I really want that extra city you get with the Pyramids. That way, I can use my fourth city to grab one of the islands near Bruce, who is probably going to build his third city on an island. An extra city will make it easier for me to corner his island city and limit his iron supply while I hold the bulk of the central continent.

18:02, Bruce

Other than the Industrial Age, the most important age to reach before your opponent is Gunpowder, which gives most of your units devastating ranged attacks. I wanted to hoard my knowledge and go for a quick Gunpowder Age, but now I'm in a triple bottleneck: population limit and commerce limits on food and timber. There goes my store of knowledge.

If you can afford to spend the wealth, it pays off in the long run to have a fully staffed university in every city. And if you can afford to ease up on the other categories, it also pays off in the long run to research science first, thereby

reducing the cost of the other technologies. Science is also important in order to boom your economy because it unlocks resource bonuses like the agriculture and carpentry. Being a scientist myself, I'm happy that science gets so much credit for helping win wars. Then I get worried that that isn't very manly, and I feel I should be more excited about driving tanks. In the end, I'm kind of happy but mostly nervous.

27:58, Tom

OK, I have six cities and have taken all the islands but one. Bruce is limited to a third of the main continent and one island in the southern corner of the map. All my cities are "templd" for extra border power, and I've just finished the Coliseum for another border boost. The lines have been drawn. I have 66 percent of the map under my control, and I could bump it to 70 percent and go for an early territory win by throwing up a couple castles. The problem is that, due in part to the time and resources I've spent on wonders, Bruce just hit the Gunpowder Age while I'm still mucking around in medieval times. Even worse, my hidden explorer at our border can see a considerable gathering of Bruce's artillery. This is usually a sign of a pending invasion, so I need to spend my metal on building an army.

31:08, Tom

Now he's harassing me with a navy, forcing me to use metal to build ships. He must be bumping

his civics level because he's pushing my borders back. I'm down to 63 percent of the map and my borders are maxed out. I'm building the Temple of T'ai to boost my temples' border effects, but even with that, the prospects for an early territory victory are dim.

33:54, Bruce

My ships build 50 percent faster with my Porcelain Tower, since I control whales, the ships also get a 20 percent increase in movement speed. I sent out fishermen early on to grab all the whales I could find. It really helps on a map like this because whales provide metal income that makes up for the scarcity of mountains.

And here comes Tom's navy. Fortunately, I'm ready for him. At this point in the game (frigates and corvettes), it's easy to take a nihilist approach to naval warfare and decide that nobody is going to have one; you simply sink all your opponent's vessels with fireships. Tom bottled up the straits between two of our islands, but I just queued up eight fireships and let them do their work. Although it's satisfying to watch his boats sink, it's a zero-sum strategy.

34:02, Tom

The way to counter someone's navy is to set your dock's rally point internally, then accumulate a bunch of ships in safety before unleashing them en masse on an unsuspecting opponent. But it doesn't take long for someone like Bruce to just ruin everything with those stupid suicide ships. Until the Gunpowder Age, users in bomb vessels that can wreak havoc on land, the naval game in *Rise of Nations* is often an invitation to pointlessly squander timber and metal, which is exactly what Bruce has forced me to do with his annoying frickin' fireships. It's time to get serious. I unleash some serious cussing in the chat window. That'll show him.

34:15, Bruce

Somebody must have changed our game to *Rise of Museums*, because Tom is suddenly busy building nonviolent historical artifacts. Amassing a bunch of wonders can theoretically win you the game, but it's also like announcing to the other player that you're too cultured to build an army. While this may score points in some pieces, like France, to me it just says that



liberating Tom's territory won't result in many casualties for my freedom-loving troops. I guess this means everybody wins, if you count me as everybody and don't count Tom.

40:00, Tom

I hit the Industrial Age first, but Bruce was right behind me. Unfortunately, he's got plenty of oil crammed onto his end of the map. To blunt any planned offensive he might have with that mass of artillery at our border, I send in a half dozen spies and have them each bribe one of the cannons. The result is a lot of dead artillery, and my spies get away scot-free. The moral of this story is to keep a scout unit with your army; he'll detect any spies and they'll be shot before they can bribe. Thankfully, Bruce didn't think of this.

44:29, Bruce

For quite some time, I was working on assembling a pretty sizeable force near Tianjin, the central city on the main continent closest to Tom's border. However, every time I built a new artillery piece, Tom sent me chat messages describing them in sociological terms, so he obviously had an explorer somewhere keeping an eye on me. His code of spies just trashed most of my work on that force, but I'm hoping that kept him busy enough so he didn't notice the smaller armies I've built on islands to the north and south.

45:41, Tom

Fat lotta good that artillery sabotage raid did me. It turns out Bruce was amassing troops on one of my islands—I didn't even know he had a city there. A swarm of Manchu riflemen swam in and took the city of Sena in the north. I was able to thin their ranks with the help of a nearby airfield, while a few ships covered a naval crossing as my army from the main continent rushed to help.

47:00, Bruce

If you select a force that contains both artillery and non-artillery units and then Alt+right-click on a target, your force arranges itself so that the artillery attacks and other units protect it. The residents of Jebel Moya are finding this out now.

48:12, Tom

Now he's attacking me at the island on the other end of the map, taking my secondary iron source at Jebel Moya. Damn. Maybe all that artillery was a ruse, because it sure didn't stop him from going on the offensive on two completely different fronts. This is bad news. An important part of *Rise of Nations* is arranging it so that battles are fought on your terms. And right now, Bruce is dictating the terms.

50:00, Tom

I've got Sena back, but Bruce has dreadnoughts



An industrial-strength age difference lifts the battle in Tom's favor.



Tom gets a head start on wonder building with the world-famous Nubian Pyramids.

with submarine escorts prowling the straits between my army and Jebel Moya. I have to send my troop transports around the long way.

11:03, Bruce

It seems Tom isn't contesting my navy anymore. I've sent a few subs out to watch the areas near his docks. If he's backing off the naval front, that'll give me a lot of flexibility to determine when and where I attack his cities.

11:17, Tom

My army is decimated, due in part to Bruce making use of his spies. What was it I said earlier about scouts? Jebel Moya has fallen, so I build mines elsewhere while trying to keep his army engaged. Luckily, I have Angkor Wat to boost my metal production and make up for the lost mines. I've hit the Modern Age at great cost, leaving me with limited resources to build my military forces back up. But the good news is that my oil income is maxed out and I've got a ready supply of knowledge. And in the Modern Age, that can only mean one thing: missiles.

16:18, Bruce

It's a pretty good position at this point. I can hit Tom on multiple fronts, and while I'm not yet making permanent headway, I'm controlling the tempo of the land war. I also completely control the seas. Unfortunately, Tom has those cultural icons or whatnot. Time to take advantage of the long-range firepower of my dreadnoughts.

17:00, Tom

He keeps hitting Senna and Jebel Moya. I can barely hold onto them and I'm draining my metal supply, even though I'm still in age above him.

17:53, Tom

Is there any phrase sweeter than "We have developed nuclear weapons"? Shift+Alt+9 brings up the wonder display. I have 8 wonder points, which would be enough for a victory, were it not for Bruce's 5 wonder points. But I also have four silos around the outskirts of Lilibela in the center of the main continent, capable of reaching anywhere on the map. Each is constructing its own lovely little nuclear missile.

1:01:43, Tom

Fire one. Goodbye, Colossus.

1:02:31, Tom

Fire two. Goodbye, Terra Cotta Army.

1:02:45, Tom

It takes two nukes, but goodbye Porcelain Tower. Hello, wonder victory timer.

1:02:53, Bruce

For anyone who, for some reason, still might not be rooting for me, it should be pretty obvious by this point that Tom is a madman who must be stopped. Who would use nuclear weapons against a Porcelain Tower?

1:06:28, Tom

At 32 seconds, Bruce stops the timer by shelling the Pyramids with battleships. What a low move—and low tech.



There goes the first of Tom's nukes.

1:07:12, Bruce

I hate nukes, but in this case, mine is saving my ass. While I was spending all those resources on my military, Tom was locked in his library reading books about physics. Now, Mr Egghead can lob missiles all over the place. A missile gap is a big disadvantage, as my ex-wonders imply demonstrate. Time for nukes of my own.

1:08:31, Tom

He's destroyed the Coliseum with his battleships, so I'm building the Taj Mahal, which will restart the wonder timer as long as I can keep at least one of my two remaining wonders alive.

1:09:30, Tom

Bruce just researched nukes. Time to stock up on V2 rockets to take out any of his missile silos I can find. I just have to make sure he doesn't get any nukes actually built. You can see the silo doors open as a missile is being constructed, so I

send fighters out for recon over his territory and follow up with V2 rockets, picking off silos as I find them. The problem is that he's got a rampant navy scouring the map, smashing my missile silos and jockeying for position on my wonders. I don't have any good way of stopping his battleships.

1:10:15, Tom

The completion of the Taj Mahal has doubled the hit points of all my buildings and, more important, the wonder timer starts back up at 1:13.

1:11:21, Bruce

Let the record show that Tom Chick won this game by building a 17th-century Indian white marble palace. He has out-Frenched me, Bastard!

1:11:28, Tom

I would like to announce that I have surgically nuked Bruce Geryk into cultural irrelevance. Vrak Nabih!



And there goes the last of Bruce's wonders, in the immortal words of Vera Lynn at the end of Dr. Strangelove, "We'll meet again."



FATALITY'S

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

2003

How do you become the best? Lots and lots of practice **By Johnathon Wendel**

Jason "Ward" Ward, aka "Faciity," is the world's No. 1 competitive player of first-person shooter games. Last year alone, he made more than \$500,000 in prize money from over 100 FPS tournaments. How does he do it? By playing games for eight hours a day and memorizing every detail of every map. Here, he offers you his tips for the DM-Compressed map of *Unreal Tournament 2003* and gives you a taste of the amount of information he retains to remain at the top of his game.

Unreal Tournament 2003 is making its mark around the world lately, and it's time to sharpen up those skills. I'm going to talk a lot about timing items, controlling the map, which weapons to use, and key ways to keep your opponent's frag count down. These tips and tricks will surely improve your game and take you to the next level.

Timing items

On this map, DM-Compressed, your main goal is to keep the 100 Armor Room locked down while at the same time getting the Double Damage. If you succeed at this, you can typically win a match with ease.

The key to winning at any level of the game is being able to time your armor and power-ups.

KEY ROOMS



100 Armor Room



Lightning Gun Room



Double Damage room



50 Armor Room

KILLER MOVE

A well-timed wall dodge will take your opponent by surprise—showing a key element of victory in *UT2003*. This is how to do a wall dodge from the L3 level to the lower level.



While on the top level, face the elevator shaft.



Now move to walk toward the one side.



As soon as your body touches the wall, tap backward twice quickly. You can make it all the way to the lower level without taking a hit or making any noise. Use this to get down to the lower level by the flank cannon and flak gun fast!

QUICK TIP

You can check the current time on the map by hitting F3 to check the scoreboard. However, if you respawn the scoreboard key in an earlier battle to hit, it becomes easier to effectively time the items throughout the whole game.



efficiently. Here are the respawn times for the weapons, health packs, armor, and double damage.

Weapons:	27 seconds
Health Packs:	27 seconds
50 Armor:	27 seconds
100 Armor:	54 seconds
Double Damage:	81 seconds

While you're waiting for the 100 Armor, you should be picking up health shards around the map and occasionally the 50 Armor. At the same time, you have to manage to get the Double Damage while not getting attacked and not losing the timing on the 100 Armor. So let's set up an example. This example assumes you're

QUICK TIP Whenever you feel you have a little time to spare, you should go back to the 50 Armor since it spawns so frequently. Very often, you'll notice it's just sitting there waiting for someone to come pick it up.



QUICK TIP Arriving at the Double Damage about 10 to 15 seconds before it spawns is always a great move. Just make sure you're not letting the enemy get the 100 Armor for the trade. I personally would take the 100 Armor over the Double Damage any day because it's so easy to run away from the opponents with your shield on.



GET THERE FIRST There are two ways to get to the 100 Armor first. Use the lift to propel you toward the top level. If you hit jump when the lift is halfway up, you will be propelled into the air toward higher levels (above). Use this to reach the top level and grab the 100 Armor before your enemy does. If you can perfect this jump, you can actually jump straight to the 100 Armor. However, this method is risky. The safer plan? Go up the lift and walk around by the Health Pack and Shock Rifle to get the 100 Armor (below).





show up so he can get a good shot on you. Be careful going into the 100 Armor Room after picking up the 50 armor, but also remember you're on a very short time scale and have to get to the 100 Armor before the enemy does.

After you've picked up the 100 Armor, it will probably be around the 100 mark or later; if it's not too late, you might have time to run down below to pick up 50 Armor again before the Double Damage spawns at the 64 mark.

Now that you've picked up the Double Damage again, you'll notice since the last 100 Armor was picked up at the 109 mark, it should spawn at the 203 mark. Make your way to the 100 Armor Room and set up a trap for the enemy (see page 138).

In control

While you're in control of the map, you need to focus on a few things.

- ➔ Try to have a very diverse gun selection so if you get in a certain situation, you have the right type of gun for that key shot
- ➔ Always load up on ammo! Pay close attention to the shock core ammo on the top level. Always pick these up since the shock rifle is one of the fastest and most powerful guns in the game.
- ➔ After killing an opponent, realize the map is symmetrical and the enemy will spawn on the other half of the map. Use this knowledge to your advantage to get another quick kill on your opponent.
- ➔ Always keep control of the Armors and pick up as many health shards as possible.

QUICK TIP

A lot of times you'll hit enemies your enemy camps on the lower level when you're in control. Use a wall ledge to see who has and get a quick frag. Also, you can see a wall ledge by adding the appropriate direction you're looking while your body is flush with the wall. This is a great way to see more your view when you're actually lined on the lower level so you can be more prepared for the fight that is coming up.

Out of control

If you lose control of the map, be very careful and think about everything that is going on.

- ➔ Never make a move until you know exactly where the enemy is so you can plan a successful runaway.
- ➔ Learn how to use the shield cannon to protect yourself from getting spwan fragged. (To be spwan fragged is to be fragged within seconds of spawning back into the game after being fragged.)
- ➔ Learn how to move backward just as fast as you do forward. With the shield cannon, you can put up the shield to block the enemy attacks while running backward. If you can't perfect this, you should be able to hold your opponent to a very low score.
- ➔ Grab 50 Armors and health shards whenever you safely can! When you think you're about ready to fight, plan to pick up the Double Damage and make your way to the 100 Armor room to take control back.

QUICK TIP

If you have Double Damage, use the lightning gun as it will kill the enemy in one shot, then run to the other side of the map to get another kill. If you perfect this move, keep recalling it until the Double Damage wears out.

QUICK TIP When you're making your way to the 100 Armor room, it's best to have a lightning gun or a shock rifle for long range attacks.

FATALITY'S SECRET SPOT



playing the default UT2003 game with no server modifications.

In this scenario, I'm going to try to maximize your chances of getting each item to the second. Let's say you picked up the following items at the following times:

50 Armor: 0:10 mark
100 Armor: 0:15 mark
Double Damage: 0:20 mark

Since you just picked up the Double Damage at the 0:20 mark, you now know it will spawn at the 1:41 mark by adding 81 seconds to the current time. First, focus on getting the 50 Armor which will spawn in the next 17 seconds.

After picking up the 50 Armor with your Double Damage, you will most likely come into a situation where your enemy might be camping around the 100 Armor Room waiting for you to

This is a very cool, its Jump that takes 0.15 of hit of health and armor and a good few for the physics in the game. However, once you learn this trick, you can have some fun with friends to see who can do it first.

Movement pattern:
 Green Ball to Yellow Ball: Tip forward before this jump
 Yellow Ball to Yellow Ball: Jump

Push the bar to the back, shoot your gun, jump up the shield gun out and hold primary fire on it as it's the very charged up. Then release primary fire while JUMPING! Jump about the same time to launch your body above the steel bar. Now, while you're in the air, you have to coordinate your body to make a perfect landing on the steel bar to make it to Fatality's secret spot. Good luck!

HOW TO...

If you go to the 100 Armor Room, it's easy to set up a trap to take out the enemy when he comes to try and pick up the 100 Armor. Below are three possibilities for you to use the next time you want to give someone an unpleasant surprise.



To get in position for the 100 Armor shot, you set up the enemy as follows: To get from the green ball to the red ball, tap to wind, to wind, and then jump to get from the yellow ball to the red ball, jump, B, jump, A, Effect, A, drum.



The shock rifle combo that pictured in the left will end... by way, diving, to your opponent. To get into position, move from the green ball to the yellow ball by tapping forward, forward, and then jumping; move from the yellow ball to the red ball by jumping.



If you take the shock rifle combo shot from the top level, it will keep your enemy off the 100 Armor platform. From the green ball to the yellow ball, tap forward, forward, then jump; from the yellow ball to the yellow ball, jump; and from the yellow ball to the red ball, walk.



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CGW'S HANDY-DANDY GAMING GLOSSARY

All those obnoxious acronyms getting you down? Well, dry your weepy eyes—below is our guide to gamer-speak. Soon you'll be as geeky as the rest of us.

4X	A type of empire strategy emphasizing "winning, exploit, explore, exterminate"
AA	Anti-aliasing
AD&D	Advanced Dungeons & Dragons; a classic pen-and-paper RPG system
AF	Anisotropic filtering
BFG	Big f*cking gun; a collision uber-weapon in FPS games
CPU	Central processing unit
DDR	Double data rate
DNF	Duke Nukem Forever; vaporware
ED	EverQuest
FSB	Front side bus
FPS	First-person shooter; frames per second
GBA	GameBoy Advance
GHz	Gigahertz
MHz	Megahertz
MMORPG	Massively multiplayer online role-playing game
NPC	Non-player character
PBEM	"Play by email"
PK	Player killer
PvP	Player versus player
RPG	Role-playing game
RFTM	Read the f*cking manual
RTS	Real-time strategy
TFR	Trojan Fortress 2; vaporware
TK-	Team killer
USB	Universal serial bus
WASD	Refers to the "WASD" letter keys to control movement in an FPS
WTF	What the f*ck??
XP	Experience points

Scorched Earth

Game Journalism for Dummies

Lesson one: redundant headlines By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@siffdavis.com

Like a brave little salmon swimming upstream to spawn, every week an e-mail wriggles its way through the relentless torrent of refinancing and herbal Viagra spam and finds a safe little spot in the CGW Letters mailbox. And when these letters aren't from pehulant bladder control-challenged sports mascot fetishists pursuing puerile venettas (a big zero-star shout-out to Vince and the boys! Woodwool), they invariably ask one question: How can I get your job? And while the obvious answer is to kill me, peel my head, and wear my bloody face skin over yours and then park your ass in my cubicle and grumble all day, there are other means—after all, even two really stinky guys can't share just one putrefying mess of human tissue. Here are a few pointers to help you clear the woefully low bar between you and the painfully pathetic form of self-delusion that passes for game journalism success.

An expensive college education

This is absolutely crucial. Without spending in excess of 60K on higher education, your parents will never be sufficiently disappointed enough to disown you completely. Anything less and you'll only find yourself consigned to the children's table at family gatherings, and while your mother will exhibit the kind of warmth that won Louise Fletcher an Academy Award in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, she will still talk to you in between crying jags. And dumping cans of Slemo on you and trying to light you on fire while you sleep. Not that I'd know anything about that.

Learn the difference between "you're" and "your!" And then ignore it at every opportunity. Judging by our reader mail, many of you have mastered this already.

Grab readers' attention Since a late Roger Moore-era James Bond movie featuring a theme song by Duran Duran and costarring box office powerhouse and Coles's in the epitome of quality and hip cateness, make sure "A View to the Top in the Blank" is the clever concept behind every other headline you write. Alternate



...Kill me, peel my head, and wear my bloody face skin over yours...

your headlines with "Not Your Father's RTS" (do not be dissuaded by the fact that to your pension-drawing sire, RTS means "roast tongue sandwich").

Ask the hard questions A game journalist is an information shark, swimming through vast oceans of gaming delights, forever consuming the slimy chum of knowledge. These questions will get you through the rough times: "What do you mean it's a cash bar?" "Where are the free messenger bags?" "That booth babe is checking me out, isn't she?" "When's lunch?" "You call this a paycheck?" "Where're my lucky underpants?" "Does this black T-shirt with a dragon on it make me look fat?"

What about this one with the robot?"

Wallow in the soup of personal despair

But do it with style. Just because you're an underpaid, unappreciated entertainment expert doesn't mean you can't pretend it lends you some sort of inebriable cool cachet. Reinforce your standing with your misfit brethren by peppering your discourse with knowing inside jokes. Time for lunch? Then announce, "Lenny needs food biddy" and bask in the glory that is your just due.

The holy trinity of game journalism Ciri+C, Ciri+C, and a freshly e-mailed press release.

Champion an obscure game to reinforce your maverick genius

Any half-wit with a hard drive and a mouse can love Half-Life and X-Com. But to be a truly edgy envelope-pusher, you need to seize upon a game no one else is playing and pump it up relentlessly. Some suggestions: *Flying Heroes*, *Bonesword*, *Rails Across America*, and *Sim Tower*. I hatched my star to Hollywood Mogul years ago and have never looked back. For extra cred, champion a cell phone-only game.

Belittle a popular game to reinforce your maverick genius

Just as important as loving an untapped game is disparaging a much-loved game. Refer to Deus Ex as that game where you looked for air ducts. Tell everyone you loved Half-Life the first time you played it...pause for emphasis...when it was called *Marathon*. Derogate *The Sims* as an over-hyped delinquent whose mass appeal only reinforces its inherent mediocrity, and you can start collecting high fives from the gaming cognoscenti. (Note: Should it ever come to light that you sleep on your kitchen floor in order to devote the entirety of your bedroom to an elaborate *Batfreak* Galactica versus Star Trek action figure battle royale, then whatever little bit of credibility you've managed will be squandered, so be careful.)

There you have it, your oil and running I wish you success. As game journalists, we are the keepers of the flame, the true believers, the chosen few brave enough to keep the meron in oxymoron.

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