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The image shows a close-up of a dark, heavily textured metal door. The door features intricate gothic-style patterns, including pointed arches and floral motifs. A central vertical seam runs down the middle of the door. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic sheen and the depth of the carvings. The overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

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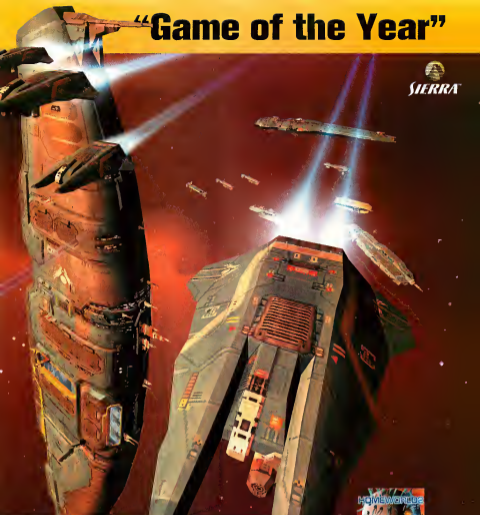
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"It's the first game to fundamentally alter the Jedi Knight formula, and the results, unfortunately, are mixed."

100

COVER STORY

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy

LucasArts is back with the fourth Jedi Knight game—does it live up to the series' great legacy?

20 Editorial

Jell wonders why we do "exclusives." We wonder why he still works here.

24 Letters

Two pages that prove we have the world's smartest readers. Just kidding.

34 Loading...

It's FPS heaven in this month's Loading section. We start by changing your lucky number to XIII, and then give you the chance to check out a **Stalker**.

46 Read Me

This month's expose on Eastern European synchronized swimming sims fell through, so we had to go to Plan B and cover some obscure games you've never heard of, like **Doom III**, **Half-Life 2**, and **Max Payne 2**. Also, check out the first look at **Ultima X: Odyssey**, the upcoming MMORPG that'll bring **Ultima** out of the dark ages. Plus, disturbing scenes from **GenCon**, a preview of **Saiper Elite**, and more.

Columns

60 Homebrew

66 Scott McCloud



114 BioWare

All these damn Xbox owners get to play one of the best RPGs around? When's our turn? Soon, and we went to BioWare to see how **Knights of the Old Republic** is looking for the PC.

120 Hall of Fame

We induct four more classic games and one brilliant game designer into our prestigious Hall of Fame.

150 Tech

Lloyd reviews Shuttle's iForce2-based case. Dave checks out some speakers by Philips, and W4 reviews a gaming rig from PCFX and takes a look at AMD's Pentium-killer.

162 Gamer's Edge

Walking around in endless circles in **Star Wars Galaxies**? Check out our guide to everything Wookiee. Plus, Bruce and Tom wrestle each other to the mat in the best wargame ever: **Korsun Pocket**.

176 Scorched Earth

It's the world's oldest profession, and the world's iciest column.



'I'm new in town—can you give me directions to your apartment?

80 NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Car mods and fast chicks in the world of underground racing.



130 MADDEN NFL 2004



144 GHOST MASTER



140 THE GREAT ESCAPE

Previews

- 80 Need for Speed: Underground
- 82 No One Lives Forever 2: Contract J.A.C.K.
- 84 Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna
- 86 Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon
- 88 Vegas: Make It Big
- 90 Lords of EverQuest
- 92 Drake
- 94 Alpha Bravo Zero: Intrepid Protocol
- 94 Singularity
- 94 Knights of Honor



46 READ ME
And we thought your roomie was ugly...

Reviews

- 126 Pirates of the Caribbean
- 128 Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic
- 129 Dark Fall: The Journal
- 130 Madden NFL 2004
- 131 Will Rock
- 134 Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader
- 136 Nexagon: Deathmatch
- 138 Europa Universalis: Crown of the North
- 138 Revisionist History: Raven Shield
- 140 The Great Escape
- 142 FIA/IB: Operation Ingal Freedom
- 142 Combat Command 2: Danger Forward
- 144 Ghost Master
- 146 Chariots of War



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Cover Me

Our *Jedi Academy* review is "first," but so what?

Review covers are weird. I'm not sure why we do them, and I'm not sure I ever want to do one again. The deal is this: A game company, like LucasArts this month, gives us the final version of its game to review, without it from our competitors (like *Field and Stream*), and in exchange for the exclusivity, we put that game on the cover of the magazine.

It sounds good in theory. But in practice, it's a bit of a nightmare. The deadlines are tight, the timing never seems to work, and even if we do manage to get the article done, the payoff of "exclusivity" is usually shot to hell before the issue even comes out because some dang website (usually in Germany) will somehow manage to beat us to the punch anyway.

But, you know—whatever it's all a bit stupid. If you ask me, it's not like we're talking about state secrets here. So we get to review *Jedi Academy* before anyone else—big deal. Like that matters. No one else who reviewed the new *Tomb Raider* movie first. The important and relevant part is that they told you it sucked. The same thing goes, or should go, for games. It's not the first reviews that should matter to you, but the ones that do the best job of criticizing the game in a manner that's meaningful to you. Maybe that means our reviews, but maybe it's someone else's. Personally, I hope you trust us more than the other guys, because the more you do, the less likely it is that I'll have to go flip burgers or empty garbage, both of which at my age would be really bad for my back.

There is one more troubling thing about review covers. What if we don't like the game? Now, we do tell the game company in advance that getting on our cover is no guarantee of a positive review (just ask the folks at Westwood Studios, who got stung by our *Command & Conquer: Generals* review). Still, let's be real here. By putting a game on our cover, we are transmitting the message that that game is important—we are hitching our star to the game, and we are giving that game free publicity. But if it turns out to be a disc full of doo-doo, what exactly is the point? Are we helping readers, by warning them off early, or are we confusing them with a mixed message? These are the kind of conundrums that keep your friendly neighborhood editor-in-chief up at night.

So, with all this said, what do we think of *Jedi Academy*? I'm not telling, you have to go read the article. Then, after reading it, ask yourself whether LucasArts is still happy it gave the game to us for the cover. I'm not sure there's an easy answer.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS
To contact any member of the staff,
firstname.lastname@ziff.com

Address: manufacturing-related questions and
feedback to CGW: 1000 West, 1012nd Street, 8th
Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103. Or you may contact
us via e-mail: cgletters@ziff.com,
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Senior Sales Associate: Kristina Selvester
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Sales Associate: Amanda Nelson
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BENNY ATKIN

By day Benny Atkin plays games, by night he contributes as editorial director of *Associated Computing Magazine* (www.ahmag.com). Before he moved to a RE-equipped (and an equipped) house (and), he was Computer Gaming World's features editor for a full decade, he's actually been reviewing games since 1987, when the most games were played using *Mosley*. Columns: 54, or there abouts and questions.

RYAN SCOTT

The new kid on the block at CGW, Ryan has inherited the grueling position of CD editor. In between listening to Wil O'Neil scream about Madden 2004 and reading some of the disturbing e-mails and web links that get forwarded around by the neighboring GMR staff, Ryan is hard at work producing CGW's monthly demo disc. He also finds time to, you know, play games sometimes too.



MARITZA REFUERZO'S DOG

My name is Cheryl C. Ref. I'm a dog, I'm a dog, four feet high. I love my birthday cake and my birthday cake. My daddy baked it for me because he's a four legged daddy. My mommy doesn't have time to bake between the works of the DDR. My daddy. One of these days, she hopes to (too time) be a high legged doggie also baker (too cakes and wishes and happy happy).

MICHAEL JENNINGS

This month marks the end of associate art director Michael Jennings' furious first year with the CGW crew. The milestone was only slightly overshadowed by the celestial celebration of Mars nearly colliding with the earth nearly 60,000 years ago. Coincidence? Who knows? Lately, however, we've noticed two things: 1) The honeymoon is officially over, and 2) we're now getting an extra serving of outer-space graphics.



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Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Eat Us

I am truly indebted to you all. Thanks to the case of your September 2003 demo CD, I was able to successfully dislodge the chunk of Baby Ruth bar stuck in my braces. Oh, and your magazine rocks and stuff like that. Yay.

John Kinney



Switch to decaf, Coffey

I always turn to the last page of CGW magazine first, eager for cynical humor. Mr. Coffey's reviews are always entertaining, but the Scorched Earth editorials seem bleaker each issue. Maybe you all could take him outside for a little sun, rent a Monty Python movie for him, or persuade him to see his doc about some Prozac. Please, keep the grim cartoonists away from his page, too. Save them for Jeff Green, who was almost a little too perky this month.

Beth Vehre

Unfortunately, Robert has welded his DVD player shut and his Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer running on a nonstop loop. If you'd like to talk to him about this personally, go ahead—don't say we didn't warn you.

Blizzard buzz

I am looking for any information on Diablo III, and you guys seem like the type to know if this is true: Is it being made, release dates, etc.? Any information would be appreciated.

Fred

Well, Fred (if that is your real name—and if it is, well, sorry, dude) we are pleased to present the first ever screenshot of Blizzard's next überhit. It's a radical rethinking of the franchise, but we're betting



gamers will love it. Keep the drool to a minimum.

Thou shalt steal

Your September 2003 issue stated (in the CGW Recommends column) that "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." The Matrix sort of invented bullet-time. How can it be a rip-off in the Matrix game if Max Payne really ripped it off from the Matrix movie? I really like your mag, but don't make comments like that if you don't know what you're talking about.

RPH

Hershey, Pennsylvania

And The Matrix ripped it off from The Great Gatsby, which blatantly stole it from Theselonians. But what we were trying to get at was that the effect has never been done as well in a game since Max Payne.

Enter the Matrix aged its own special effects about as successfully as it aped an actual game.

Bring me the head of Theory Nagooyen

I submitted two designs for the Scooter head for the E3 contest you held. I never saw a winner announced, never saw pictures of what was actually done to his head for E3, not even a comment buried somewhere in the magazine. I am curious. Am I the only shmuck that fell for a practical joke? Or did the contest not happen? Or did someone win and I just missed the info about it? Please let me know as the curiosity is killing me.

Thanks,
Chris

Sadly, Chris, none of the handful of designs we received were feasible or, frankly, all that good. However, as a consolation prize to all those who participated, we have decapitated Scooter and are carving up his noggin into handy souvenir-appropriate chunks. So if you get a human ear and a bit of scalp in the mail, don't be surprised.

So you wanna be a game developer...

I'm a big time RPG fan, and I wish the gaming companies would make more unique RPGs. I see a lot of them with the "golden path." You pick the best weapons and the best skills then slaughter everything in the fantasy world—boring. In any RPG there should be several instances where your

"We have decapitated Scooter and are carving his noggin into souvenir chunks."

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BITES

I was just thinking about how games remind me of women. They are both alluring and frustrating.

Roffraizer

I'm getting my mag, but not the CD. Not that it matters, I have broadband.

Darc Wade

Jeff, blink your eyes, wipe the tears away, and read this: GET OVER IT, DAMMIT!

Anthony

After seeing Max Payne's double-barrelled pistol-paction, is it just me, or isn't Max really a younger George W. Bush?

Eric Moore

I DID NOT ORDER THIS MAGAZINE AND I WILL NOT PAY FOR IT. YOU NOW OWE \$75 FOR MY TIME WRITING THIS REJECTION LETTER.

Tim

Brumfield

character will be stumped no matter what class or how powerful his leecher or migo. How about including monsters that are immune to slashing weapons? Also, NPC interaction needs improvement. If I'm a thief and can pickpocket NPCs, then why don't NPCs pickpocket me as well? That could make for some interesting dilemmas if an NPC took a quest item from my character.

Jodin

I have read many reviews and letters from other readers that complain about game developers that refuse to allow us to save when we want. Why do developers continue to do this? They apparently believe it makes the game more engaging or challenging or something beneficial. Some of us can't afford the time it takes to redo the same entire level because the trap at the end kills us. I believe I was Anachron (and correct me if I'm wrong) that gave you the option of saving at the predetermined save points or letting you watch to save whenever you like. Isn't this the way to go? Iah, who am I kidding, I'm also the guy that wants a co-op Doom AI

Chris Bantz

Everyone loves Loyd

Loyd Case, I want to thank you for "Friday Night Follies" in the August issue. I am lucky enough to have a great group of friends that enjoys LAN parties two or three times a month, and I've always felt the crap aspect of games has been largely ignored in computer gaming. You were correct about everything in your article: the lousy trend of games requiring one CD per person, games that hide their version numbers, problems with LAN servers, a lack of multiplayer saves, and the worst crime of all, a lack of quality co-op modes.

Every year more homes are getting more computers. Two of the friends in my LAN group have computers in every child's room, in addition to their own. Maybe if the multiplayer and cooperative modes in computer games were made with LAN situations in mind, the effect would snowball and those little "console things" would become obsolete.

Horatio Hornblower

Fresh out of Fallout

I've heard that a bunch of people (over 27,000) have signed a petition saying "We want a Fallout 3." Do you know anything we don't?

Eric Lambert

Sorry, Eric, as all regular readers of CGW can attest, we know nothing.

"To say Half-Life is the scariest game ever is absolutely inexcusable."

Pretty on the inside

I was reading my September magazine and noticed you still haven't changed Jeff Green's picture on the Editorial page. That picture is starting to give me the creeps every time I open CGW. Jeff is the scariest thing to orbit the earth. NASA needs to shoot some nukes and hit him so he burns up in our atmosphere and stops hacking satellites to post his pictures.

Ilie Orkin

Jeff did submit a photo of him and the missus at home. Does this work for you?



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Kim Ecroyd

Thank you, Ms. Ecroyd for your kind inquiry. Perhaps you can help me. I am Umbabe CGWLetters, a deposed Nigerian cabinet minister with several of millions dollars held in accounts of bank. Willing I am to split this money for your assistance. Please respond right away.

Dana Jongewaard-scaredypants

I've been reading your magazine for

almost 10 years now, and have held my tongue when you made some clearly erroneous statements in the past, but this one is inexcusable. Considering that I know people who were emotionally traumatized by System Shock 2, and the fact that I STILL get cold shivers down my spine when I think of some of those levels, I must protest the statement made about Half-Life being the scariest shooter ever. To say that Half-Life is scarier is like saying that RL, Stein is scarier than Stephen King. Sure, Mr. Stein can scare the crap out of my 9-year-old sister, and Half-Life had its moments where it made me jump a bit, but it came nowhere NEAR to how freaky and disturbing SS2 was. I never finished the game because I wanted to be able to sleep at night again. I know people that only made it to Deck 4 and stopped playing after they found the ghost of the evil doctor telling the nurse he was about to butcher that she "would be the mother of them all." Sorry guys, but if Half-Life scares Dana, then don't let her play SS2 or you might end up having to commit her.

Aaron Edmondson

While we can argue about this until the cows and/or Wii O'Neal stagger home, we'll just say we think you'll be a happier guy once you read our Hall of Fame feature on page 120.



Bad idea of the month

Do you know if any company is in the works to produce CBS' show Big Brother or ABC's show The Mole at all? I have been wondering this for a very long time and would greatly appreciate if you have any information about it.

Mikester

Considering the big pile of suck that was Survivor: The Interactive Game, we hope to God no one is thinking of making another reality show PC game. Unless it's Queer Eye for the Straight Guy—we love the Fab Five's new look for Wii.

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



XIII

The more we see of this comic-book killer, the more we want it. A new build recently showed up in the office, and despite the non-localized French text (Jeff put on a fancy beret and translated for us), we still really got into this game. The style, the sweet narratives that have you jumping back and forth in time, and all those comic book nods make this one to watch—and to play.



STALKER: OBLIVION LOST

Let's talk about the history of this one for a second. Nvidia likes *Stalker* so much, it actually went on tour to pimp the title and help it find a publisher. We liked it so much, we've already written about it a couple times. THQ liked what it saw and bought the North American distribution rights. That brings us to where we are—waiting until next May, when this FPS-style action/RPG is supposed to come out. Until then, check out a sample of what's in store for you in an irradiated, post-apocalyptic Russia.





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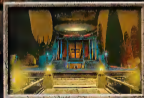
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
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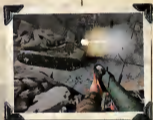
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Read Me

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

FIELD TRIP

Id Opens the Gates of Hell

Doom III terrifies us at QuakeCon
By William O'Neal

The Hellknight doesn't usually stay for small talk.

ULTIMA X

Remember Ultima Online? Well, now forget it. **Page 48**

**MAX PAYNE 2**

Max meets his match. **Page 52**

**GENCON**

Judging by the photos, we've glad we missed it. **Page 53**

**HALF-LIFE 2**

Squeezing the last drops from a tight Well. **Page 54**

The single-player experience is what we're concentrating on—that's our focus."

Anyone who has played a recent Id game, like *Quake II* or *Quake III*, will no doubt be taken aback by Todd Hollenshead's words. We sat down with Hollenshead, Id Software's CEO, and Tim Wlady, the game's designer, at this year's *DukeCon* in Dallas to get some hands-on time with the game that, along with *Half-Life 2*, marks the upswing in the seesaw life of PC gaming. And from what we saw, it appears that Id is definitely on track to create an awesome story-based game that, along with boasting some spectacular technology, may actually be fun to play—sometimes even by yourself.

Hollenshead continues, "From a single-player standpoint for *Doom III*, we pretended that *Doom I* and *Doom II* didn't happen; *Doom III* is basically a retelling of the original story." Actually,



The few missions we saw hearkened back to those frightening feelings we experienced during the original *Doom* games.

that shouldn't be hard at all, since there wasn't much of a story or plot in either game. Once again, you're a space marine who's been assigned to a security detail on Mars, where the Union Aerospace Corporation is located. Soon after you arrive, all hell breaks loose. If Id Software had a Mercury counterpart, it would be Dante. The Dallas-based company has had a long-standing obsession with the notion of hell, and *Doom IV* falls right in with that, requiring the player to battle any number of demons, zombies, and assorted other "forces of hell." Your objective: Figure out where all of these nightmarish creatures are coming from and eventually go to hell itself.

The game takes place in 2445. The object of the "Doom III experience," according to Hollenshead, "is to be very intense and terrifying." And suffice it to say, it is. On an emotional level, the few missions we saw hearkened back to the fright we experienced during the original *Doom* games—you know, when you'd hear an imp on the other side of a wall and you'd pee in your pants.

Many things combined to make the original *Doom* games so frightening, including the newness of the medium (personal computers), the originality of

the monsters, and the immersiveness of *Doom*'s first-person perspective—complete with head-bobbing action. *Doom III* will be frightening for some of the reasons that it shares with its predecessors as well as a few new ones. One, the game's story line—the idea of battling it out with the "forces of hell"—is as old as Christianity itself. And two, the tech advancements that Id has made to the first-person perspective make it even more immersive.

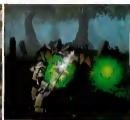
Hollenshead identifies several facets of the technology will help deliver *Doom III*'s terror. "We have a great rendering engine, we use real-time dynamic lighting and shadowing, we have a new animation system, advanced artificial intelligence, and we wrap that all up in six-channel surround sound." While this may sound like a company's CEO tooting his own horn, it all seems to be coming together quite well. A lot has been made of the game's use of *DirectX 9*, which enables all of the shadows and lighting that, in actual gameplay, are not just eye candy, but also integral to creating that frightening feel. During a multiplayer match, we were frightened by our own shadows more than once. When the original light source (like an overhead fluorescent tube) moves, the



shadow moves accordingly. We were even able to see our character loading his shotgun via the shadow, in single-player too, dynamic lighting comes into play—for example, if you cast a shadow on a wall, you'll see the shadow of a monster engulf it.

In addition to boasting striking visuals, *Doom III* will take advantage of six-channel audio. This means that while you're being blown away by all the pretty pictures, you'll also be able to hear demons coming up behind you.

Look for *Doom III* to ship sometime early next year. While Id says the game will run on a 1GHz PC with 256MB of RAM and a "decent" graphics card, the full experience will definitely require some hardware.



HANDS ON

Ultima Leaps Forward

Ultima X: Odyssey looks to be a dazzling advancement over UO By Ryan Scott

What a difference five years makes. *Ultima X: Odyssey*, the next game in Origin's pioneering series, looks absolutely nothing like *Ultima Online*. Then again, what would you expect when you base a MMORPG on the Unreal Warfare engine? In one giant leap, *Odyssey* is about to propel *Ultima* from the practical middle ages to the top tier of massively multiplayer games coming in 2004.

UO fans won't see much that's familiar in the new game. Sure, players are once again thrust into the virtual world of Britannia, assuming the roles of warriors and magic-users in the fight against evil. But the action unfolds more like a World of Warcraft or even a first-person

shooter at times (no big surprise with the Unreal engine). There is a big emphasis on the swinging of the axe and firing your magic spells as Ettins come marching in. All of the menus, hotkeys, and character management do a fantastic job of keeping you in the action.

Combat flows well, especially in groups. A handy quest system allows groups of players to undertake NPC missions. And, as is becoming a trend amongst MMOs trying to create a better single-player experience, adventures occur in private areas and dungeons.

Those craving player-versus-player combat will be able to kill through consensual duels. Taken a step further, player guilds can stage massive battles with one another in private gladiatorial arenas, where spectators can actually place bets on the outcome. UO is said to contain a PvP ladder system as well, allowing for the best of the best to make a name for themselves.

Weapons, armor, and other items

collected through adventuring can be leveled up and augmented with powers gleaned from *Ultima's* hallmark Virtues. This makes for a number of cool possibilities, allowing you to create unique items. These items can, of course, be bought, sold, and traded between players.

Several different races, including Humans, Gargoyles, Dwarves, and Elves are available for players to choose from; character abilities will be highly customizable as well, allowing for a large degree of flexibility in character design.

Though the initial release will lack features that could disappoint current *Ultima* fans (such as crafting, housing, and mounts), it is shaping up very well in its pre-beta state. The gameplay has a great flow, the visuals are clean and impressive, and the interface seems simple enough for anyone to pick up and play. We'll bring you more on this exciting new advance before its release early in 2004.



Players are once again thrust into Britannia, assuming the roles of warriors and magic-users.

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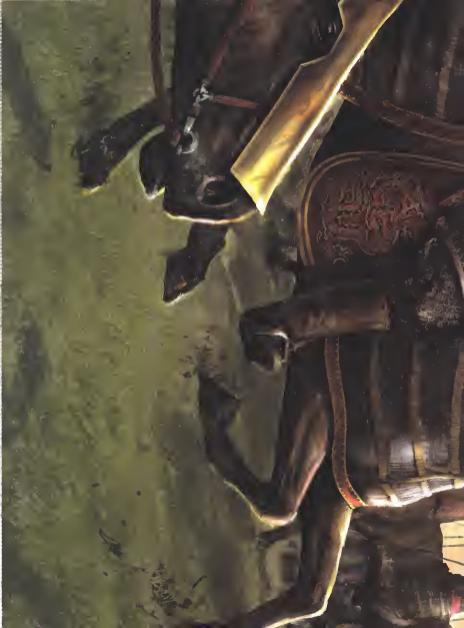
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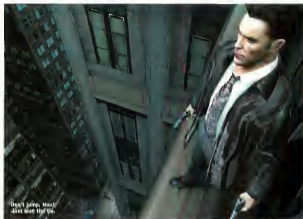


FROM R.I.C.

EMPIRE

DAWN OF THE M.C.





Don't jump, Max! Just use the 'M'.

UPDATE

Love and Death

Max Payne 2 is set to unleash a double-barreled blast of both **By Ken Brown**



Two years after Max Payne introduced us all to bullet-time and blew a bloody swath through the seedy underside of New York, Max Payne 2 is cocked and loaded to unleash more vigilante justice on the leeches that smothered away. The fall of Max Payne is nearing completion and scheduled to ship in late October, according to publisher Rockstar Games. Late-breaking details from Rockstar shine new light on the story and gameplay dynamics.

In the time period since the first game, Max has left the DEA to rejoin the NYPD where he soon becomes embroiled in an underworld arms struggle. Small-time mob captain Vinnie Gonnitti, who Max spared in the first game, has allied with a major force in the crime world and is attempting to monopolize the gun trade. A power struggle ensues with Vladimir Lem (who armed Max in the first game), and Max's partner winds up dead with Max again framed for murder. Max must settle the score, with a little help from sexy sidekick Mona Sax, which could turn Max Payne 2 into some kind of first-person smoother.

Rockstar says the game's combat has been highly polished to enhance the game's cinematic style shootouts. Enemies are said to land on objects properly, and they bend over railings when shot at or roll down the stairs like good virtual stuntmen. When Max dies, he's also within the same physical simulation, and reacts appropriately to the environment.

Physics enhancements will also make it harder for Max to hide. Weapon-fire will blow boxes to pieces, so you'll have to be careful about what you hide behind. Speaking of weapons, there will be five new ones in the game, but Rockstar wouldn't tell us what they are.

The A.I. has been improved so that enemies won't just instinctively know where you are—they'll have to hunt you down based on where you were last heard or seen. If any NPCs are in the area, they'll take cover and avoid danger (like flames and grenades).

Judging by the screenshots we've seen, Max Payne 2 should blow away more than just the bad guys when it hits the streets. Here's hoping it'll play as good as it looks.

Max Payne 2 should blow away more than just the bad guys.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

With the release of *Tron 2.0*, Monolith makes it official: It is one of the best developers in the business, with a growing lineup of consistently great games. Along with *Tron*, their previous three games are *No One Lives Forever 1 and 2*, and *Aliens vs. Predator 2*—all Editor's Choice games here at CGW. So here's a minor shout-out from us to the Monolith gang up in Seattle, Washington. Some of us are paying attention.



THE BAD CONDITION ZERO BUMPED AGAIN

Valve Software continues its 3D Realmsian policy of Never Releasing Any New Games Ever by once again delaying *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. The game, which appeared on our cover two years ago, was supposed to be out by now, but rumors of a leaky campaign has sent this thing back to the drawing board again. Valve swears up and down this won't happen with *Half-Life 2*, that it will come out September 30 as promised—and we're pretty sure we believe that. But we're not gutting any money on it yet.



THE UGLY LIONHEART

Robert Coffey does his usual job of evincingating a bad game in this month's review, but we thought we'd single *Lionheart* out for extra abuse here, since its suckiness is telling of a sad truth: Black Isle Studios, as we knew it, is done. The Interplay division responsible for a series of classic RPGs—including *Fallout*, *Planescape: Torment*, and *Icewind Dale*—has been spluttering for awhile, and the loss of Feargus Urquhart confirmed our worst fears. Now there's *Lionheart*. Ugh. Black Isle needs a saving throw right now.



GEEKOUT

Generation GenCon

Indianapolis trembles as gamers descend By Mark Asher

Having outgrown Milwaukee, the Geek Prudefest also known as GenCon took place in Indianapolis this year. For four days in late July, the epicenter of gaming shifted to the Midwest as tens of thousands of gamers clad in black XXL T-shirts and weighed down by boxes of miniatures, bags of funny-shaped dice, and stacks of rulebooks and board games converged at the capital of Indiana. They met to play games, meet old friends, buy lots of stuff, geek out, and deplete the city of its supply of Mountain Dew and Twinkies.

Not all the games were made out of paper at GenCon, however. A number of

PC game companies were showing off the latest buds of upcoming titles. Microsoft was showing *Mythica*, the *Age of Mythology* expansion, and the *Dungeon Siege* expansion. We cited a list of complaints about *Dungeon Siege* (too easy, not enough tactical options, boring loot drops, etc.) and were told that all of these complaints were being addressed in the expansion. Alan was showing the MMO game *Horizons* and the impressive *Greyhawk: The Temple of Elemental Evil*, which uses the newly released *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5* rules. We had hands-on time with it, and it looks and plays great at this stage of development—so we're ready for a good party-based, turn-

based RPG. It's been too long.

We weren't as impressed with Vivendi's PC version of *The Hobbit*, which played like a console game. We also played a beta of its *Lord of the Rings* RTS game, though none of the story elements was in place, so gameplay was un compelling vanilla RTS stuff. We left the same after we played Sony Online's upcoming RTS game, *Lords of EverQuest*. It's not enough to step a hot license on a game—make the game hot too.

White Wolf was showing Activision's *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*, which uses the slicker-than-ogre-shot *Half-Life 2* engine. The big White Wolf news is that its *World of Darkness* series is ending—so beware to all you vampires, mages, hunters, demons, werewolves, or maybe those just wearing rented moose costumes, because your world is coming to an end. And it's got something to do with a wyrm, which is the scary way to spell "worm." Activision's *Vampire* game will contain some of the story elements of this apocalyptic ending.

For a few days this summer, "Indianapolis 500" referred to the number of people dressed as knights, vampires, and zombies who could pose for an SSM catalog. We had a great time returning to gaming roots long forgotten.

**Gamers
in black
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UPDATE

Opening the Valve

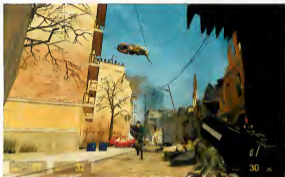
On the eve of *Half-Life 2*, scant drips of info can't slake our thirst **By Ken Brown**

Has there ever been a PC game so hotly anticipated with so little known about it? Despite the fact that Valve vows it will release on September 30, there have been no new details since E3. Valve founder Gabe Newell flatly stated that he doesn't want gamers to know any more about the game until they play it. Whether you agree with that or not, it doesn't seem to have dampened anyone's enthusiasm.

We do know *HL2* picks up after the events of the first game. *Edge* magazine reported that the sequel will have 12 chapters representing approximately 36 hours of playing time. Gordon Freeman has joined ranks with the G-Man (the guy in the suit who offered Freeman a job at the end of the first game). Freeman's attractive new sidekick, Alyx Vance, is the daughter of a Black Mesa scientist, and both become trapped in an Eastern European city (City 17) when aliens invade at the start of the sequel.

Gordon will have his trusty crowbar, shotgun, MP5, and alien weaponry, but Valve has emphasized that players will need to use their imaginations because weapons won't always solve a problem. This is where the game's impressive physics engine comes into play—you can use objects as tools (for example, to deflect bullets and knock over auto-turrets), or you can target things that cause a chain of events (dropping huge objects onto enemies). Gordon will also be able to use several land-based vehicles like jeeps and APCs.

Following the incredible success of *Counter-Strike* and *Day of Defeat*, Valve has wisely taken the mod community into account, already releasing tools so developers can start toiling away for the next big thing built from *HL2*. Unfortunately there's still so word on when or even if *Team Fortress 2* might come out—with rumors of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* running into trouble, it's clear Valve will have its hands full just shipping *HL2* and *CZ* this year. Here's hoping they live up to expectations.



REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	IGN	PC Gamer	IGN	GameSpot.com	MM.com	GameSpy	GameRankings.com
Star Wars Galaxies	C-	B	C-	B	B+	B	B
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	B+	B+	B+	A	A	A-	A
Midnight Club II	B-	A-	C-	B-	A-	A-	A-
Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide	B+	B	B-	B	B	A-	A-
PinballSIdE	B+	B+	A	B	B	n/a	B+
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	D-	D+	D	C	C-	C-	C-

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READ ME

RECOMMENDATION

The Red Menace

General Luo's top 10 games of all time **By Di Luo**



Editor's note: Our former disc editor Di Luo was known for two things: being an absolutely inviolable strategy gamer, and being just about everything. We thought it made for a good combination until he cleaned our clock in Age of Mythology. CSC's Generals, Rise of Nations...well, you get the idea. But since he was so good at strategy games, and since he hated almost all of them, we wondered: What in God's name does he like? Incredibly, he had no trouble coming up with this list.



Romance of the Three Kingdoms (1989)

This grand game of personnel management and war set in ancient China introduced me to the world of strategy games. One of the deeper challenges of the late '80s.



Civilization (1992)

What Top 10 list isn't this on? Nothing has matched the magic and grandeur first evoked by Civ. A decade later, I still remember my 400-year war with the English.



Panzer General (1994)

A great beer-and-pretzels game. It kept the strategy of wargames but also streamlined the interface and actually made the hex-based map and units look good.



Master of Orion (1994)

Conquer planets or blow them apart. Unlike bio warfare catastrophes on your foes or turn them into dust with a fleet of death stars. No AI game since this can match the original.



X-COM: UFO Defense (1995)

The first truly successful squad-based strategy game. Its mix of role-playing and strategy made me love my troops as my own children. Oh how it hurt to throw that shipload of raw recruits into the assault on Caledonia as cannon fodder for my elite troopers.



Fallout (1997)

This post-apocalyptic RPG was part Road Warrior and part D&D. For once, you could solve problems without killing people, and stats other than combat skills mattered. Bonus points for an ending that didn't adhere to the happily-ever-after cliché.



Gettysburg (1997)

This game destroyed my college career—I fell from a 4.0 GPA to a 2.7 in one semester. Gettysburg was real-time but had the pace and tactical aspects of a turn-based game. The co-op portion provided the best multiplayer gaming experience I've had.



The Operational Art of War (1998)

There are wargames that did a better job of modeling specific conflicts, but none had the scope of OAW. The scenario maker allowed for games that ranged from worldwide conflagrations to company-strength skirmishes.



Jagged Alliance 2 (1999)

Another squad-based classic. Had a nice mix of humor and role-playing with the tactical elements. Most original and entertaining character creation ever.

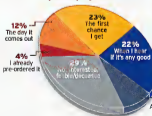


Planescape: Torment (1999)

An RPG that respected the gamer's intelligence. Some thought it wordy, but I found the story compelling and loved the fact that moral decisions affected my alignment and the game's ending.

QUICK POLL

When are you buying Half-Life 2?



Survey results from Gamers.com.



PROFILE

Bustin' Punks

Tony Ray walks tall and cracks cheaters' heads **By George Jones**

When thirty-something programmer Tony Ray got hooked on Team Fortress Classic in 1999 and subsequently found his clan, Uranium 235, consistently toting against clans using cheat scripts and aimbots, the righteous father of two decided he'd seen enough.

"We were playing one day," Ray explained. "And the cheating was just out of control. Almost every match was disputed." Ray emits a quiet, white-hot intensity when describing the rampant cheating in TFC. "I started getting so angry at these guys, and I thought to myself, 'Those little man, we're going to bust those punks!'"

A successful network and business programmer, Ray went back to his Houston home and began coding a 10,000-line program that would allow a game server to check gamers' systems for imperfections that indicate the presence of a cheat.

"Initially, only 10 servers tried it," Ray recalls. "But once the program detected the first cheat—Death Adder's aimbot—it took off like wildfire." Ray pauses, relishing that first sweet bust. "People who don't believe cheaters were out there started believing real quick." One thousand leagues kicked up PunkBuster in its first month of release.

These days, PunkBuster supports *Quake III*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, and *Soldier of Fortune II*, but Ray and his globe-spanning crew of 16 (mostly volunteers) are just beginning to capture the gaming industry's attention. "I have monumental respect for those guys," enthuses former Blizzard North cofounder Bill Roper, who witnessed firsthand the devastating effects cheating had on *Diablo*. "It's a thankless task, and it requires so much work."

Andre Roy, online producer for *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield* and a new PunkBuster devotee couldn't agree more. "Cheating kills the fun factor," Roy says. "When a few bad apples show up with their cheats, it drives the real players out."

Not anymore. PunkBuster is on the beat, and publishers that need ongoing support are even paying Ray and his group to police games. Up next: massively multiplayer online games. "We're really interested in ensuring that massively multiplayer games are fair," Ray states, getting that white-hot look again. "We kind of see ourselves as a doping commission of sorts for gaming."

With cheaters everywhere and multiplayer play increasing, it seems Ray and his avengers will definitely be busy for a while.



**"I can't stand cheating."
—Tony Ray**

5, 10, 15 YEARS
AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, November 1998

Back then we were ewash in games, some of them good (*Final Fantasy VI*, *Heart of Darkness*), but most of which stunk (JD Hunting: Trophy Whiteball, Nem, and Fox Sports Golf '99). There were so many racing games that we rounded up 16 of them for a feature. We were also ewash in blood, between our review of *Blood II*, an ad for *Carnage* 2.0, and the two-page Greivis Xtermicator ad showing a suburban home with a pool of blood running down the driveway. Nice.



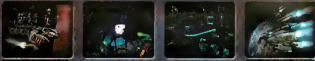
Ten Years Ago, November 1993

We weren't always so discriminatory towards console games. Ten years ago we ran a big review of EA's *Ball Winch College Football*—for the Sega Genesis. If we tried to do that today, half of our readers' heads would explode. Elsewhere, our feature on "On-Line Gaming" explained how to get started in the nonstop thrill ride of modern-to-modern play. We're just grateful that the term "jacking in" didn't stick.



Fifteen Years Ago, November 1988

Fifteen years before *Battlefield 1942*, there was *Battlehawks 1942*, a flight sim that Lucasfilm promised would have "movie quality" graphics. Sorry to glibly with *Lucasfilm*, but they looked more like a coloring book. CGW couldn't complete it the time, what with a mostly black-and-white layout that looked like a chess newsletter. It made the ads for *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Pirates* look like swimsuit models in the Sahara.



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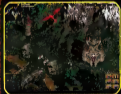


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RECORD

Sniper Elite

WWII shooter promises a tough test of marksmanship **By John Houlihan**

Breathe and squeeze, breathe and squeeze. That'll be your mantra for *Sniper Elite*, the WWII shooter scheduled to infiltrate the U.S. from Europe just in time for the holidays. The game is set in April 1945, as Berlin disintegrates during the final days of the Soviet offensive. You play a German sniper recruited by the OSS (precursor to the CIA) to perform covert ops in what will become the opening rounds of the Cold War. Drawing inspiration from movies like *Enemy of the State*, the emphasis will be on stealth, infiltration and sniping, but just as important will be using your wits to make a clean kill and an equally clean getaway.

Mixing first- and third-person action, *Sniper Elite* promises a true hardcore emphasis for players who want the ultimate test of marksmanship. The advanced sniping and aiming model includes wounding, with body- and object-specific hits—you'll even be able to shoot grenades out of enemies' hands. Developer Rebellion says its Asura engine is being used to create a dynamic, nonlinear gaming environment, and the designers are using detailed plans and historical photos to recreate authentic scenes from the period.

Can *Sniper Elite* survive a duel with *Helden & Dangerous 27*? We should know before the year is out.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrd Baker

Samurai and crash test dummies

Look, Mom, educational games! Brush up on those rusty physics skills and hone your inner samurai with one freeware gem and one shareware game.

Truck Dismount

Free

[jet.re/dismount](#)

Release your inner sadist and learn a thing or two about physics with this quirky and somewhat gruesome freeware game. Like its predecessor, *Steir Dismount*, *Truck Dismount* is all about physics. A blocky crash test dummy is placed in, on, or under a truck that's sent hurtling into a well. The more damage done to the hapless passenger, the higher your score, and the simple



interface offers countless combinations. You can make the truck go slower or faster, add or remove the windshield, and even place a ramp or two in front of the well for some serious bang time. Combine it all with an online top score list and you should never again get bored at work.

Samurai

\$6.95

[www.klear.com](#)

This excellent conversion of Reiner Knizia's out-of-print boardgame *Samurai* plays out on a hex map of Japan and involves exerting influence to capture cities—but this isn't your typical wargame. Players must use their resources to exhaust clergymen, peasants, and nobles to support their factions. To win, you need to gain more support from two of these groups than your opponents do. Focus too much on one area and you'll suffer in others, but spread your influence across too many areas and you risk losing everything.

The excellent illustrated tutorial will have you up and running in no time, but don't expect to master the game quickly. Up to four people can play *Samurai*, but right now, it's nearly impossible to find opponents for an online match. Here's hoping it gets the recognition it deserves.



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- PC Gamer



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DISCOVERINGGAMES

#20 THE LEARNING CURVE

My 8-year-old is really into Yu-Gi-Oh.

She wanted the PS2 game for her birthday and got it --

Yeah!

-- but when it came time to learn the game, the huge rambling tutorial almost did her in.

I actually want to be a more sophisticated student in which the LP O condition applies. In this scenario, the LP's brain gives a 100 points respectively. Your opponent has no LP (0 points) and the ball number is also. Moreover, the monster has a 1000 LP. When the monster is eliminated, it will cost you 500 points of damage to an enemy LP. You can use the card QUANTUM to say "I win!"

Groan!

Still, she mastered it, as I knew she could, and when we got a demo for the PC game in the latest *Shonen Jump*, she didn't need any help at all.

Arcane or complex rules can be a barrier for casual players and newcomers.

But such cognitive puzzles can engender a sense of loyalty among players with the skill to put it all together.

by Scott McCloud

If you've invested time and effort into memorizing dozens of keyboard commands --

-- or an arsenal of resource-hoarding techniques --

-- or the twists and turns of a maze like landscape --

-- your knowledge can resemble a very personal kind of power.

It can lead to a sense of fellowship with those who get it --

-- and provide one more thing to lord over those who don't.

You're asking me??

Mech -- what?

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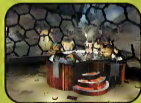
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TECH

Mobile Mojo Risin'

Laptops with upgradeable graphics make us hot **By William O'Neal**

Now that laptop graphics have finally caught up to their desktop brethren, you really do have the choice to go portable. But mobile gaming still carries a hefty cost: Gaming-capable laptops are expensive, and the lack of upgradeable graphics means that your \$3,000 investment may be obsolete in a year or two.

Voodoo PC and Alienware want to change that by offering upgradeable graphics. The two have different upgrade methods: Voodoo requires the user to send the unit back so that they can do the upgrade; Alienware offers graphics that they call "user upgradeable." The companies haven't released details on what the cost might

be, and we haven't had the chance to test Alienware's vaunted Area-51M. But we did receive Voodoo's Envy M460 and put it through its paces.

The Envy M460 boasts a 2.6GHz Pentium 4 processor and ATI's awesome 64MB Mobility Radeon 9600. We tested the Envy M460 at 1024x768 and achieved a 3DMark2003 score of 1058. The machine also averaged 45 frames per second with the suite of games comprising 3D GameGauge 3.0. While that appears low, consider that we ran the tests with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering turned up. Turning those two features down will improve performance dramatically.

If you're interested in a gaming-capable laptop but worry about obsolescence, take a closer look at these systems. You might have to pay a little more when the time comes, but it beats buying a whole new machine.

The Voodoo Envy M460 (\$3,299) includes Windows XP Pro, 2.6GHz Intel Mobile Pentium 4, 512MB DDR 333 RAM, 60GB hard drive, 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600, 16x DVD reader/24x CD burner, 15-inch SXGA monitor, two USB 2.0 ports, FireWire, and PC card port.

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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



Half-Life 2 *Electronic Arts*
Research scientist Gordon Freeman finds himself on an alien-infested Earth being picked to the bone, its resources depleted, its populace dwindling. He is thrust into the unenviable role of rescuing the world from the wrong he unleashed back at Black Mesa.



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



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic *LucasArts* This expansion will make numerous additions to the original game, including the new epic characters rules that will let players take their characters from the already high character level of 20 all the way up to 40.



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic *LucasArts* It is the Golden Age of the Republic and the Galaxy is reeling from a recent conflict with the Dark Lords, and the ongoing battle between the Jedi and the Sith rages on. Your actions will decide the outcome of this war and your destiny as a Jedi.



Myst: Ages Beyond Myst *Ageia* The most immersive and ambitious Myst experience ever created. Bigger, better, and more innovative than any of the previous Myst adventures. Players will be part of an ever-expanding world that brings more areas to explore and more mysteries to solve.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Bioshock 2 *2K*
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.



Halo: Combat Evolved *Microsoft*
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.



Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy *LucasArts* Jedi Outcast takes place about 10 years after Return of the Jedi. Kyle is an ex-jedi who travels the universe trying to make a living doing jobs for the New Republic. One day, he is sent to a moon where he discovers a secret that will change his life forever.



Halo: Combat Evolved *Microsoft*
Allied Assault Expansion Pack *Electronic Arts* You assume the role of US Army Sgt. John Baker as the Allied forces battle from North Africa up the Italian peninsula. Look forward to new campaigns, new weapons, and the new liberation map for multiplayer.



SimCity 4: Rush Hour *Electronic Arts*
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CGW Top 20

Need a good game? Look no further



Nothing beats the streets of Vice City.



Frozen Throne casts its spell on Warcraft III fans.



Metal Gear 2 sheds its skin and reveals some substance.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Rockstar)	★★★★★
2	WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne (Blizzard)	★★★★★
3	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance (Konami)	★★★★★
4	Rise of Nations (Microsoft)	★★★★★
5	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubisoft)	★★★★★
6	Midnight Club II (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
7	Star Wars Galaxies (LucasArts/Sony Online Entertainment)	★★★★★
8	Enter the Matrix (Atari)	★★★★★
9	Freelancer (Microsoft)	★★★★★
10	The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon (Bethesda)	★★★★★
11	Day of Defeat (Valve)	★★★★★
12	PlanetSide (Sony Online Entertainment)	★★★★★
13	Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)	★★★★★
14	The Sims: Superstar (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
15	Medieval Total War: Viking Expansion (Creative Assembly)	★★★★★
16	Vielcum (Gathering)	★★★★★
17	Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 (Microsoft)	★★★★★
18	Tron 2.0 (Disney Interactive)	★★★★★
19	Galactic Civilizations (Strategy First)	★★★★★
20	The Hulk (LucasArts)	★★★★★

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

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PIPELINE

Coming soon to a PC near you **By Ryan Scott**

With every holiday season comes a flood of new games, each hoping to finesse its way under more than a few Christmas trees and Hanukkah songs. A lot of this year's holiday releases look pretty good, too—here's a few you might be interested in checking out.



1 FINAL FANTASY XI The wildly popular console RPG series finally goes multi-player. We've been taking a look at the PC beta of this upcoming MMO, and it looks interesting. There are a few different player roles and classes to choose from, and the setting looks to be fairly detailed. Series purists might be put off by Final Fantasy XI's drastic departure from its predecessors, but those of you who haven't yet drowned in the MMO sea might find something to like here.



2 THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC What do you do with a game that's done everything? That's right, you add magic spells to it. EA's next expansion to its popular franchise will let your Sims cast a variety of spells to help them perform tasks, such as housecleaning, playing tricks on the neighbors, or even making people fall in love with them. EA promises this will be the last Sims expansion pack (finally)—in no small part to The Sims 2 being just around the corner.



3 LORDS OF THE REALM II If imitation is a form of flattery, then LOTW3 pays major compliments to Medieval Total War. Like the Total War series, there is a strategic map divided into resource-bearing territories and the opportunity to lead 3D troops in real-time battles. But instead of cranking units at a barracks, you assign knights to the land, which in turn creates units automatically. We're not sure LOTW3 can match Medieval's overall depth, but we're eager to find out.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	04 2003
Albion Tycoon 3	Global Star Software	04 2003
Armad & Demiguns	LucasArts	04 2003
Battlefield Command	Codemasters	02 2004
Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts	01 2004
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	04 2003
Blade	Electronic Arts	04 2003
Black & White II	Electronic Arts	01 2004
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	The Adventure Company	04 2003
Call of Duty	Activision	04 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	01 2004
Call of Duty: Covert Ops	Activision	04 2003
Contract J.J.C.C.	Visual	04 2003
Dead Dirty Apes	Cycom	04 2003
Dear Hunter 2004	Activision	04 2003
Delta Force—Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	Bohlogic	01 2004
Dead 2: Invisible War	Bidos Interactive	04 2003
Dead 3	Activision	01 2004
Driver 3	Activision	01 2004
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	Microsoft	04 2003
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	2004
Empire: Dawn of the Modern World	Activision	04 2003
EverQuest II	SOE	04 2003
Evil Genes	Visual	03 2004
Far Cry	Ubisoft	04 2003
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	04 2003
Grand Control 2: Operation Exodus	WGA Productions	04 2003
Guild Wars	NCsoft	2004
Half-Life 2	Visual	04 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	04 2003
The Hitbill	Visual	04 2003
Horizons: Empire of Ishtar	Activision	04 2003
Jesse of Arc	Enlight Software	04 2003
Jedi Operations	WotI Logic	04 2003
Larry Bird's Hoopz 4	Ubisoft	04 2003
Lingeria II: The Chaotic Chronicle	Wcoast	01 2004
Lords of the Rings	SOE	04 2003
Lords of the Rings III	Visual	04 2003
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	Electronic Arts	04 2003
The Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring	Black Label Games	04 2003
Magick: The Gathering—Battlegrounds	Activision	04 2003
Magick: The Gathering—Online 2.0	Wizards of the Coast	04 2003
The Matrix Online	Ubisoft	2004
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Rockstar	04 2003
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	01 2004
Men of Valor: Vietnam	Visual	01 2004
Middle-Earth Online	Visual	2004
The Movies	Activision	02 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	01 2004
NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	04 2003
Reverend & the Trick	Activision	04 2003
Operella Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	04 2004
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	04 2003
Return of Tycoon 3	Gathering	04 2003
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Cycom	04 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Rain: Total War	Activision	01 2004
Sam & Max: Freelance Police	LucasArts	01 2004
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	04 2003
Shadow: Wrath of Angels	Concept	2004
Silent Hill 3	Konami	04 2003
The Sims: Makin' Magic	Electronic Arts	04 2003
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	01 2004
Splinter Cell: Freedom Tomorrow	Ubisoft	01 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	04 2003
Stalker: Oblivion Lost	THQ	2004
SWAT: Urban Justice	Visual	TBA
Syberia II	Microdis	04 2003
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Visual	04 2004
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	04 2003
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	Activision	04 2003
Third II	Bidos Interactive	04 2003
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	EA Sports	04 2003
Tribes: Vengeance	Visual	04 2004
Twisted: The Shutter Effect	Activision	02 2004
Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts	2004
Unreal Tournament 2004	Activision	04 2003
Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines	Activision	01 2004
Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos	Ubisoft	04 2003
World of Warcraft	Bizzard Entertainment	02 2004
XIII	Ubisoft	04 2003

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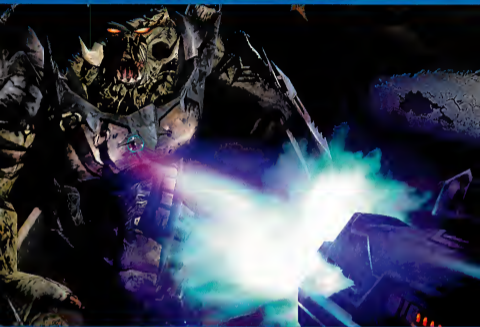
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She winks the line.



Yet another tricked-out ride in Chinatown.



Notice the HUD won't hog up the screen.

NEED FOR SPEED

A good excuse to say "skid marks" in print **By Darren Gladstone**

EAs *Need for Speed* series has been breaking speed limits since 1994. From then until now, you've been behind the wheel of exotic

supercars, racing to beat buddies or staying one step ahead of the law. Not this time, friend. Turning to the increasingly popular and now slightly less "underground" world of street racing, this *Need for Speed* has you driving tricked-out imports—and the cops are nowhere to be found.

THE FAST AND...OH, YOU KNOW

Surprisingly, Vin Diesel said it best: "I live my life a quarter mile at a time. For those 10 seconds or less, I'm free." That's the mantra behind *Need for Speed: Underground* as you blaze through rain-soaked city streets looking to earn street cred and money through drag racing, circuit racing, and high-octane street sprints in more than 100 different events. And there's still one more yet to be announced.

True to the *Need for Speed* series, *Underground* has you driving real cars, real fast. You'll find 20 licensed sets of wheels including Mitsubishi, Subaru, and Toyotas. Of course, a big part of the street racing culture is modding sold cars until they're barely recognizable, and you'll find all that customization available here. In fact, executive producer Chuck Osieja promises billions of ways to pimp out your ride. Audiolab, HKS, MOMO, Neuspaeed, Nitrous Express Inc., StreetGlow, Turbonetics—the list of modding-related manufacturers with gear here goes on and on. You can also get a custom paint and decal job done on your car. At last count, there were more than 71 billion different looks available for each car in the game.

AT THE MOVIES

While you'll be quick to notice the amazing eye candy that laces *Underground*, it's the cameras and the motion-blurring effects that'll leave your head spinning. For this, they drafted a movie special-effects wiz, Habib Zargarpour, onto the team. "As our visual effects director, he's achieved a frightening sensation of speed," says Osieja. How? Simply by adding camera shake to driving. "Other driving games



Take to the rain-soaked streets.

Executive producer Chuck Osieja promises billions of ways to pimp out your ride, including custom paint and decal jobs.

have had camera shakes in them, but there is actually a technique to implant it that allows the human brain to be "convinced" by the effect," he continues. If it's implemented correctly (which, coincidentally, it appears it has been), you can add 20mph to the "feeling" of speed without actually changing the game's framerate. Zargarpour used the same process while creating the pod racing sequence for *Star Wars Episode I*.

A driving game, though, is nothing without background scenery to blow past. There are no real cities in this game, but the scenery is inspired by real-world locations. While it looks like a city on the surface, Osieja says, *Underground* is really a race track under a city's skin. "This way, you don't have to worry about driving too many 90-degree corners you can't do successfully at over 100mph."

Another departure from reality is the utter lack of Johnny Law. Why is that? Programming A.I. logic for the 5-0 requires a lot of extra time, but even more important, Osieja says, he didn't want this game to feel like *NFS: Hot Pursuit 2.5*—instead, the emphasis is on the racers. He went on to hint that



while this game is all about urban street racing, the white-knuckle cop chases present in *Hot Pursuit 2* will be back in another game down the road.

We've also heard that you'll be able to challenge other PC or PS2 racers over the internet. Combine that with the span-ended customizability, and you can be the proud owner of some serious online bragging rights for the player with the best ride. And at least we'll be able to burn out sooner rather than later. Originally slated for a Q1 2004 release, the EA Black Box team has been firing on all cylinders and—gasp—the game is coming out ahead of schedule. Your pink slip is on the line just in time for the holidays.

One of many custom paint jobs you can choose.

UNDERGROUND

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PUBLISHER: EA BLACK BOX
TYPE: RACING
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2003



Minimum, that's bad guy!



The heck with stealth—this time, it's all about the shooting.



With Cate out of action, it's a battle of supervillains.

Warning to the Cate Archer fan club: While *Contract J.A.C.K.* is a prequel to *No One Lives Forever 2*, you do not get to play as your favorite femme fatale. Cate makes only a brief appearance as an NPC—so if she's your only interest in the series, move along.

To tell the story of what happened between *NOLF 1* and *2*, Monolith is trying something completely different, if for no other reason than to keep themselves interested. This time, you get to play as a bad guy—John Jack, a contract killer for H.A.R.M. The plot? A third-rate Italian criminal organization, Danger Denzel, is trying to take H.A.R.M. down—and you're hired to stop them.

The single-player game is comprised of 10 missions in three settings and

almost completely forsakes *NOLF's* stealth gameplay for a more straight run-and-gun approach. Don't be surprised when you find yourself blasting away bodder bad guys on the

aim as you ride.

Multiplayer has been enhanced as well, with 15 new maps and a great new team mode called *Demolition*. In *Demolition* mode, one team must set

Monolith has upgraded the arsenal, trading spy gadgets for firepower.

off three bomb targets while the other team defends. Our hands-on with the *Demolition* maps was a blast—though maybe not enough to make you stop playing *Butterfald 1942*.

Contract *J.A.C.K.* still gets by on the series' great humor, though this time it's heavier on the *Pulp Fiction* than the *Austin Powers*. Will it make Cate's fans happy? We'll find out this winter.

Monolith has seriously upgraded the arsenal, trading in Cate's spy gadgets for all sorts of firepower, including a laser cannon, a crossbow with explosive projectiles, a Tommy gun, a shotgun, an AK-47, and incendiary grenades that light enemies on fire. You'll also have two vehicles—a Vespa scooter and the snowmobile—equipped with weapons that will auto-

aim as you ride.

GAME STATS
 FUTURE RELEASED
 DEVELOPER MONOLITH
 FULL ACTION
 RELEASED NOVEMBER 2009

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

Because you can't be Cate Archer forever **By Jeff Green**

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Graptically brilliant, action-packed, and sporting a slow and a half of interface and gameplay tweaks that most RPG creators are still trying to catch up to, *Dungeon Siege* was, if not exactly a breath of fresh air, at least a breath of really, really good clean air. Still, some gamers complained that this party-based real-time slush fest tended to play itself more than it let you play it. If you felt that way, then the *Legends of Aranna* expansion might just be the solution: If you didn't, well, you'll just unconditionally love this add-on.

Aranna features a brand-new single-player campaign starring you as the orphaned child of two brave adventurers who sallied forth to fight evil and never returned. Twenty years later, you're all grown up and that pesky Ancient Evil and its requisite Powerful Artifact have reared their ugly heads again. You guessed it, it's up to you to stop the madness.

As *Dungeon Siege* is to traditional action-RPG gameplay, so is *Legends of Aranna* to *Dungeon Siege*: The focus is on enhancement, enhancement, enhancement. The game's lost-toting peck animals are back, but in a better form called a frag, a kinda rhino-dino that can fight back much more effectively than the mules from the first game. To avoid blind suicidal charges when directing characters to attack fast-moving critters, a simple Shift + Click will tell your party members to attack creatures in a general area. A new Redistributes Potions inventory button will instantly move the majority of mana potions to your spellcasters and health potions to your splinters and health potions to your splinters—no more tedious potion transfer in the inventory screens. Similar interface tweaks are being added to give more flexibility in spell selection as well.

Of course, *Aranna* has to fulfill the primary mandate of all expansions: more stuff. To that end there are new spells, new character races, and new areas to explore, but this new stuff is being built with the same focus on enhancing play as opposed to just



Your new pack mule, the dog, takes no guff.

You are the orphaned child of two brave adventurers who sallied off to fight evil.

giving you some way to tread water while you wait for *Dungeon Siege 2* to come out next year. For example, a whole new set of Drb spells has been added to let magic users more fully participate and benefit from battles. In the original game, casters were often relegated to casting heal spells on the bruisers in the party, thus robbing themselves of the experience they need to advance. No longer. Drb spells create circling balls of magic that keep the mages in the experience-gathering pool by slaying out fire or electrical or whatever damage to monsters while frazzling the caster to focus on keeping up party members' hit points. New glyph spells will let magic users drop various magical landmarks



Here, you're rearing out firing justice.

prior to combat, again letting them both fight and heal.

You can expect *Aranna*'s difficulty to exceed *Dungeon Siege*'s, and the game includes a ton of new loot, including expansive matched sets that grow more powerful when used all together. While all the new content won't be available in the original single-player game, all the interface enhancements and new spells will be. What is *Legends of Aranna*'s last consideration: improvement? It ships this fall, with the full version of *Dungeon Siege* in the box, for a reasonable \$35.

GAME STATS

FRONT MESSIAH

GAME ENGINE

FRONT MESSIAH SOFTWARE

2002 ACTION RPG

RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2003

DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA

Not to be confused with the Segal classic *Under Siege* **By Robert Coffey**

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I got further with Lara
than anyone else.

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Not surprisingly, they also lost George's luggage.

This assassin isn't so happy to see you.

There's plenty of globe-trotting to be had here.

"Hey, big boy, care to let me in?"

BROKEN SWORD SLEEPING DRAGON

A new 3D stab at graphic adventures **By Darren Gladstone**

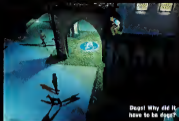
Adventure games are a dying breed here in the United States; just a handful come out each year, and fewer still are any good. Why? To be blunt, point-and-click graphic adventures just don't work anymore. Ask Charles Cecil, the managing director behind Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon. "Robert Williams started using [point-and-click] in her games well over a decade ago and they worked fine back then. It just doesn't translate well into a three-dimensional world." We have to agree, but after sitting through a fairly impressive demo of this new take on the adventure game, we think The Sleeping Dragon might breathe a little life back into the genre.

As other classic adventure series have attempted, the Broken Sword series is now making a transition to 3D. Those who remember the original games will first notice that this isn't a hand-drawn 2D cartoon world you're exploring—there are detailed environments, but there's a whole lot more to this game than simply looking for clickable hotspots on the environment. As George Stobart, the patent lawyer from the first game, and Nico Collard, the sassy French reporter from the second game, you interact with objects in a 3D world to solve a conspiracy that'll have you globe-trotting to seven different parts of the world.

Besides concentrating on the highly polished CG graphics, the Dragon development team is very focused on how it wants to tell this story. "We drew a lot of inspiration from movies because they best lend themselves to the adventure genre," says Cecil. Pointing to such films as Raiders of the Lost Ark as examples, he explains the desire to create dramatic tension. One way that's been achieved in the game is through cut-scenes, which normally hog up a couple minutes worth of time and interrupt the game flow, but here provide little bits of narrative that

don't take you out of the game for more than a few seconds.

A big pet peeve that's plagued fans of the older games: locked camera angles. It sure looks nice, but it's damn annoying to navigate. Here, the elegant solution is panning the camera through the 3D world. "Talking with a director at Pinewood Studios, we got input on camera angles and it's helped us a great deal," says Cecil. "The director taught us a few tricks that allowed us to create a much more cinematic experience." Whether simply lifting the camera angle or tracking around a room as you move,



Don't. Why did it have to be deep?



Take that, Tomb Raider!

"We drew a lot of inspiration from movies because they best lend themselves to the adventure genre."

those tricks are working.

Broken Sword 3 also incorporates simple action elements without forgetting its roots. Take one of Nico's early scenes in the game: An assassin surprises her and aims a gun at her head. To fight the assassin off, you must hit a context-sensitive button at just the right time—get the timing wrong and you die. But rather than penalize you for poor motor skills, the scene restarts and gives you another go. You'll also find jumping puzzles—sort of. But, Cecil says (quick to take a cheap shot at Tomb Raider...which we salute, by the way), "you won't fall off a ledge for walking too close." The whole



It's a beautiful life.

point is to find where you need to go, not to penalize you for missing a jump by inches.

At press time, Cecil and company are working out the final bugs and ensuring Dragon is neither too easy nor too hard. The game seems a little linear, but what the heck—the whole point is to tell a story, and after playing a few levels ourselves, we think it looks like an interesting one. We figure you'll probably be living the adventure for 20 to 30 hours when The Sleeping Dragon awakens this November.

GAME STATS

DESIGNED BY THE ADVENTURE COMPANY
DEVELOPED BY REVOLUTION GAMES
ONLINE ADVENTURE
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2003

**THE
DRAGON**

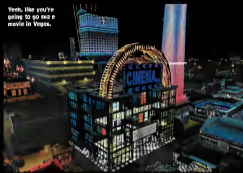
When you get tired of running the railroad and building the next Disneyland, you'll need a break. Where're you gonna go? Vegas, baby! In Vegas: Make It Big, you're charged with running the king of all business ventures: the infamous Las Vegas Strip. As is the norm in tycoon-style sim games, you'll start with little more than a grimy two-bit casino, which—with a bit of wheeling and dealing—will evolve into a vast multiresort empire. That's right, instead of boring, old buildings, you'll be making Sin City what it is today: trademark thematics, tourist attractions, and all the enamel trappings that come with them.

Developed by U.K.-based Deep Red (which was responsible for 2001's excellent Monopoly Tycoon), Vegas aims to immerse players in a detailed Las Vegas business simulation. It presents a wide range of features and options for the growth of your cash cow—attractions, shops, restaurants, gaming tables, slot machines, and security are but a few of the aspects placed under your control. Want to book a horse race or boxing match? How about a roller coaster atop your hotel to keep the kiddies happy? Need to hire more pit bosses to deal with your no-good, cheating guests? You can do it all.

As you construct your gambling megaresort, you'll need to make careful decisions about what types of clientele you'd like to attract. A variety of guest types, ranging from vacationing families to corporate high rollers, are out there just willing to be lured into your personal playground. Each guest has varying tastes—while an exotic dance club might attract the big spenders and poor losers, Mom and Dad aren't likely to take the kids out for an evening of hip dances (well, not your parents, anyway). Guests will leave feedback detailing their impressions and desires, and it's your job to keep them happy, which could mean anything from booking a magic act for the kids to hiring some charismatic card dealers in order to keep the money flowing out of your hapless customers' pockets.

The game is presented in full 3D, with quite a few character and building models. True to the tenacious that

Yeah, like you're going to go see a movie in Vegas.



Build all the attractions, from movie and casinos to bars and strip clubs.



permeates Las Vegas Boulevard, 10 visual themes are available, including a Greek temple, a neon-heavy space station, and a medieval Japanese palace. Though none of the Strip's real-world resorts are present, the game's handy built-in editor should provide plenty of opportunity for creative minds to whip up their own familiar themes and environments.

Most any type of entertainment venue you could imagine is available for construction, with several unlockable buildings as well. Add several gameplay modes (single-player campaign, mission, and sandbox play) and factors such as competing casinos, special events, and full daylight cycles, and you've got what could vary well be a dynamic and

Instead of boring, old buildings, you'll be making Sin City what it is today.

well-rounded simulation of the life of a Vegas magnate. When the game is released in October, will it creep out or be a high roller in sim circles? Our bookie says odds are sim fans will get a kick out of this one.

GAME STATS

PRODUCED BY EMPIRE INTERACTIVE
 DEVELOPER: DEEP RED
 TITLE: VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
 RELEASE DATE: Q4 2003

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

Sim City goes to Sin City **By Ryan Scott**

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Sony Online Entertainment has invaded our offices no fewer than four times to show us every new morsel developed for the upcoming RTS based in the EverQuest world. After seeing a recent build, we're happy to report that the game is finely shaping up in its effort to take on the likes of *WarCraft*. We figured this would be the best time to give you a little heads-on update before the game ships this November.

Formed by a bunch of New World Computing refugees, Rapid Eye Entertainment has finalized the code, wrapped up the single-player campaign, and is now tweaking the finishing touches of the title. This translates into a whole lot of game to wrap your meaty little hands around. The single-player campaign is destined to absorb 75 hours of your life by allowing you to control more than 60 different unit types. Your enemies and heroes—the "lords," that is—can gain experience and wield hundreds of different types of items and artifacts. And that's not even mentioning the 125-plus spells and special abilities that your troops can earn along the way.

Smacking down people on the Internet, though, is where the fun really starts. The free Battle.net-like peer-to-peer matchmaking service will find you suitable competition, and 12-player games and a 50-person population cap per side can lead to some messy 600-unit melees. Won't it be impossible to get a handle on all that action at the same time? Not really—SOE is making extra efforts to include shortcuts to function keys for special abilities, so you won't need to fumble through panels to order up a fighting bolt.

Those unfamiliar with the whole EverQuest lore won't be left out. Since the game takes place 10,000 years before the events of the online megafanchise, there's plenty of freedom to be had in terms of story. Of course, those who can identify the three different factions you can control (the Eddard Alliance, the Shadowrealm, and the Dawn Brotherhood) will get a kick out of all the effort and details that have gone into creating units.

No better piece shows that detail than the world itself, which can be



Most real-time strategy games don't look this good.



Control legions from the Shadowrealm.



"Take a hike, scaly—you aren't my type!"

cranked up to a 1600x1200 resolution with the help of a beefy 3D card. Any players are able to fully scale and zoom through the environment. In the build we recently knocked around, there are lots of nice environmental touches that flesh out the maps. Rocky terrain, the edges of forests, and small structures and cabins are littered throughout. You can even reduce the number of items onscreen menus, letting you resize or even remove panels to see more of the game world. What a thoughtful touch.

This game has the potential for 600-unit melees.



GAME STATS

PLATFORM: SOE ONLINE
 ENTERTAINMENT
 PUBLISHER: MOTO EYE
 ENTERTAINMENT
 DEV: SES
 RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2003

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

An RTS with some serious pedigree **By Darren Gladstone**

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The dead just don't know when to stay dead. Whether it's in countless sequels of *The Crow* or here in *Drake*, someone is always back for revenge, not to get one last "animal style" In-and-Out burger. In this artsy, trigger-happy, story-driven shooter, you're an undead assassin out for blood (well, technically for souls, but we'll get to that in a second). So, gothic-comic-book action dorks, rejoice—and read on.

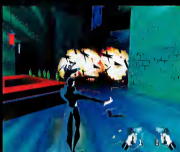
What makes this game immediately jump out at you is its art. The goofy moniker "neon-gothic" accurately describes the game's style—a cross between the *Batman Animated Adventures* and *Samurai Jack*. In fact, those who've already seen *XIII* and *The Hulk* have an idea of what the developers at *Idol* are working on. Their blend of "rimlight" texturing and environmental mapping does a pretty convincing job of conveying a unique comic-book feel.

The character and gameplay are a blend of various things you've already seen. A little bit of *Max Payne* here, a hint of *MDK2: Armageddon* there—and the results look nice so far. You can choose a weapon for each hand (we were privy to just a few in our demo:

MPS, AK-47, Colt, Magnum, and a grenade launcher) and blast away at the baddies in a number of physics-defying ways. You have the ability to do that oh-so-fashionable slow motion bullet-time dance around the room. It's used to full effect when you try jumping through a glass window and then backflipping off some walls, run along others, and mow down the bad guys. Other abilities include summoning an ethereal dragon to fight alongside you and sending the souls of fallen enemies to attack on your behalf.

This game is also the springboard for a comic-book series that *Idol* is looking to launch around the same time the game will be released, so there seems to be a pretty deep backstory pushing you through the game. As undead assassins go, Drake has a heart of gold. He starts out on a quest to avenge his master's (and his own) death, but upon uncovering a larger plot that threatens the world, he heroically steps up to the plate.

As of press time, there is potential for Drake to emerge as a decent action title, but we ran into a couple issues that need to be squared away before *Idol* reaches the November launch date. Right now, the auto-targeting and camera system are less than optimized



The goofy moniker "neon-gothic" accurately describes the game's style.



Drake is trying to rise above comics' code level of violence.

when you're heading into heated indoor firefights. With the camera pulling back to strange places, you'll find yourself missing jumps or taking potshots at things you can't see around a corner. But it's pretty safe to say these will be changed. Done properly, Drake could become a good end stylish, if slightly mindless, shooter.

GAME STATS

DEVELOPER: *Idol*
 PUBLISHER: *Idol*
 ESRB: MATURE 17+
 ACTION
 RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2005

DRAKE

What is it about the undead and handguns? **By Darren Gladstone**

WAR! AGE OF IMPERIALISM

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Alpha Bravo Zero: Intrepid Protocol

Sci-fi shooters are good. Cyberpunk RPGs? We dare say they're even better. Medieval strategy games scratch that proverbial itch, too. Maybe one or two observant publishers will hear our pleas and latch onto a few of these potential hits. They win, we win.

ALPHA BRAVO ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL

THE QUAKES
SHO. ACTION
AUGUST 26 2004

SPREAD THE WORD: In Z366, it seems that terrorists still plague humanity. But Kyle Harlow and the Alpha Black Zero unit don't take guff from nobody. Unfortunately, the preceptors stand accused of crimes they didn't commit—hence the novel flashback sequence that details their third-person team-based adventures throughout the galaxy. In this striking tactical blaster, you'll lead five specialists into some sticky situations...and hopefully gather enough evidence to clear their name before the single-player campaign is through.

BEST UNHEARD: Despite its promising setup (we dig custom outfitting wingmen with grenade launchers and machine guns), the title is hardly original. Like CDV's *Breed*, it doesn't attempt to raise the bar, but it does push that bad boy to the breaking point. Innovation is always welcome,

assassination attempt and embark upon a sprawling third-person role-playing adventure brimming with story-driven sequences. Dismal by design, the game does sport one feature that makes us smile: an emphasis on belt-out action.

BEST UNHEARD: Observe the company's principals. Their résumé includes such (ahem) gems as *Wizards and Warriors* and *Family Game Pack Royals*. While we're all for newcomers making a splash, a proven track record still counts for something these days. Although White Knuckle has put forth a startlingly solid effort thus far, only time will tell if the company can bring everything together before the ship dats. Recent omens—and product demonstrations—bode well for the fledgling developer. We'll bring you more updates in coming months.

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

THE SIMULATORS
REAL-TIME STRATEGY
AUGUST 26 2004

SPREAD THE WORD: Real-time sieges. Hero management. Peasant uprisings. Fusing empire-building with titanic battles, *Knights of Honor* plays like a cross between *Civilization* and *Medieval: Total War*. Players erect structures and maintain a thriving economy, and must be able to defend their homeland from the potential attacks from more than 100 other



Knights of Honor

OUTTA SIGHT

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



Knights of Honor

but some truly original features would give the program a better chance of standing out amidst the holiday rush. Then again, so would a publisher with a marketing budget and an American distribution deal.

SINGULARITY

THE NEXT-KNUCKLE GAMES
3D. REAL-TIME STRATEGY
AUGUST 26 2004

SPREAD THE WORD: In the not-so-distant future, megacorporations rule. War is constant. The Internet is omnipresent. For mercenaries looking to score a quick buck, life don't get any better. Enter hacker Tall Cases and gang leader Dameon Gage. Swept up in friend conspiracies, they survive an

rearms. From maintaining diplomatic relations to plotting troop formations, virtually all elements of medieval rule are accounted for. Like they say, it's good to be king.

BEST UNHEARD: As with many German outfits, Sunflowers is big on micromanagement...witness *Anno 1503*. Though it's popular with European audiences, that convention doesn't seem to be much appreciated by American gamers. While the team's newest unveiling seems like a fantastic concept, we fear that with so many subsystems simulated in one fell swoop, the risk of an epic design bogged down in minutiae is significant. Here's hoping our bravest—and beer-loving friends don't lay siege to their own sales.

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ES DOWN A BIT TOO EASY BY JEFF GREEN

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Having done one guy with riding a sautakon on Hoth. No, you don't split one open and use its guts for warmth. Ooo.



OK, let's cut to the chase about the new Star Wars movies: They blow. The most remarkable thing about *Episode III*, in fact, is that it actually manages to be worse than *Episode I*—which, after the debacle of *Jar Jar Binks*, is quite a feat indeed.

The truth is, over the years, it's really been the games that have kept our interest in the Force alive—by tapping into the spirit of the original trilogy (or better: than the bloated new movies). Along with classics like *X-Wing* and, more recently, *BioWare's* stunning *Knights of*

on the sheer joy of wielding that lightsaber and mowing down bad guys.

31 FLAVORS—ALL VANILLA

As in the previous games, *Jedi Academy* takes place post-*Return of the Jedi*, with the Empire destroyed and Luke Skywalker now playing McChips to eager young Jedi wannabes at the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4. Unlike previous *Jedi Knight* games, however, you are, surprisingly, no longer playing Rebel Alliance agent Kyle Katarn, the series' signature protagonist. Kyle, like Luke, has been reduced to the role of an

ONE OF THE TOUGHER SHOOTERS AROUND IS LIGHTER AND EASIER THIS TIME.

the Old Republic (see page 114), LucasArts' *Jedi Knight* series, beginning with *Dark Forces* in 1994, has done a fantastic job of plunging gamers into the heart of the Star Wars universe, with great storytelling matched by equally first-rate gameplay.

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy is the fourth entry in the series, and it's the first game to fundamentally alter the formula. The results, unfortunately, are mixed. I'm not sure if it's a result of trying to appeal to Xbox gamers or more casual players in general, but what used to be one of the tougher shooters around has been made much easier and lighter this time. But, though it is certainly the weakest *Jedi Knight* game so far, I still had a good time all the way through it. Lacking in ambition and inspiration, *Jedi Academy* nonetheless gets by

NPC, giving you advice along the way and occasionally fighting alongside you.

So, if you're not Kyle Katarn, who are you? Good question. When you first boot up the game, you're taken to a character creation screen, which may make you believe that you are, well, creating your own character. Not so. Yes, you have a few race and gender choices (Rodian male, Human male or female, Kel Dor male, Twi'lek female, Zabrak male), but the fact is, no matter what you pick, you are going to be the exact same character in the same linear, scripted story line: the cleverly gender-neutral-sounding Jedi Korr, a young Jedi newbie.

Other choices you make here, like your clothing and the hit and color of your lightsaber, are equally superficial—these are aesthetic decisions that have nothing to do



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ATARI

The graphics, while far from state-of-the-art, still offer nice moments on certain levels.



Skywalker and Katara tell that feeling: *Head over heels about the master of the Disciples of Peace.*

with gameplay. What would have been nice (if the developers had wanted players to feel their decisions actually mattered), would be to offer advantages and disadvantages based on the race you choose—an extra Force power or weapon or capability of some kind. It's a little silly to go through the motions of offering players "choices" when those choices don't really mean anything. If we're all just going to play Jaden Korr, then just say so, create the character for us and don't waste our time.

RAISING THE DEAD

Once the game actually begins, it begins well enough, with your ship crash-landing near a Massassi temple on Yavin 4. The opening level serves as a basic tutorial and sets the story line in motion, which, to sum up quickly, has Imperial remnant troops siphoning Force powers from around the galaxy in an attempt to resurrect Meris Ragnok, a Sith Lord who died 5,000 years earlier. As far as Star Wars stories go, there've been worse—at least there's no talk of mid-chorions here.

Where Jedi Academy differs from its



Light Saber battles with Dark Jedi are the heart of Jedi Academy—everyone else is just cannon fodder.

predecessors is in the structure of the game after the opening level. While pieces of the bigger story, and your role in it, emerge and become more critical as you proceed through the game, a huge chunk of Jedi Academy involves being sent on a series of smaller, often unrelated missions in order to test your skills and prove yourself as a new Jedi. At each stage of the game, you'll be given a list of five missions; you must complete four, in any order, before you'll trigger the next act. (You can also go ahead and finish the fifth mission, too—which is what all but the laziest of players will do.)

The mission-based structure is smart and

TEN YEARS OF STAR WARS PC GAMES

Well, pull my lightsaber, Chewie! They've been making Star Wars PC games for 10 years now. Where the heck did the time go?

Here's a full list of all the Star Wars games for PC, minus some compilations, re-releases, and kiddie stuff we don't care about. The original CGR ratings and issue numbers are also included; note that before 1994 we didn't include numeric ratings because back then our readers knew how to read words and judge for themselves. Just kidding. We love you guys.



1993

X-WING (1/6, #137) Outstanding Star Wars space sim. The original classic.



REBEL ASSAULT (1/6, #15) Short, fun shooter—one of the best must-have CDs.



X-WING: IMPERIAL PURSUIT (1/6, #152) The first X-Wing expansion.

X-WING: B-WING (1/6, #155) The better X-Wing expansion.



STAR WARS CHESS (1/6, #15) It's just like chess, except Luke is your king. Yay!



TIE FIGHTER (1/6, #121) X-Wing's superior sequel. A classic.

TIE FIGHTER: DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE (1/6) More TIE Fighter goodness.



DARK FORCES (1/6, #103) X-Wing's superior sequel. A tough but great.



REBEL ASSAULT II: THE HIDDEN EMPIRE (1/6, #139) Short action, but with flashy (if the force) effects.



YOGA STORIES (1/6, #150, #154) Makes sitting in, or death, look like a good time.

X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER (1/6, #151) Good multiplayer, but poor solo play.

GLADIATOR

SWORD OF VENGEANCE



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PlayStation 2



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pretty cool. In general, giving players a small bit of nonlinearity and decision making, while allowing the developers to zoom players all over the galaxy in a variety of settings and mission types. The missions run the gamut quaffilywise, with some being more fun and inspired than others. While huge chunks of the game are devoted to standard (and not overly thrilling) FPS run-and-gun, the more memorable missions try to mix it up a bit. In one, you have to rescue prisoners of a Hutt crime lord while evading a giant mech. Other missions will put you on the back of a tauntaun, behind the wheel of a swoop racer and in a brutal duel against the galaxy's most notorious bounty hunter.

Nothing brilliant, but a nice change of pace from running around corridors and jumping on crates—and some good, classic (if overly obvious) Star Wars-y references. For some, especially casual gamers, that's going to make the game good enough.

HEY, DUMMY, I'M OVER HERE

The big problem, for me, is that the game is just too easy—and I normally stink at shooters like this. I beat the game on the Normal setting without ever being significantly challenged once, even during the few boss battles. Though many people complained about the lack of a lightsaber during the first half of Jedi Knight II, here we have the opposite problem. By giving us the lightsaber from

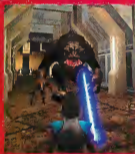


You're running a gauntlet of cut lightsaber battles after another—often against multiple opponents.

the first minute of the game, certain enemies, like the myriad stormtroopers, Imperial officers, and Tuskan raiders, are nothing more than cannon fodder right from the start.

In addition, though the game makes a pretense of letting you choose your weapons at the beginning of each mission, this decision proves to be about as meaningful as the "character creation": a few minutes into most missions, you'll have all your weapons anyway. In one mission, you are imprisoned and lose all your weapons, including your lightsaber. The bad guy, out of boredom, challenges you to escape. It's a great beginning, but then they blow it: Two minutes into your escape, you already have a blaster rifle. How much better and more challenging would it have been to make you play the entire level with no weapon, forcing you to use your wits instead? It's just too easy.

It doesn't help matters that the AI is weak, too. Enemies that are easy to mow down even when alert are made even less challenging when they fail to acknowledge your existence or can't come close to aiming their weapons at you. With a disruptor rifle or other long-range



One of the game's better missions has you rescuing prisoners while evading a giant mech.



Head up, Star Wars-style.

10 YEARS OF STAR WARS PC GAMES

DAY WARD FROM PHOTOGRAPHY PRESS



JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II (★★★★) #101
Weapons, character, mechs, the galaxy as best Star Wars game so far



SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE (★★★★) #167
Fun, fast, fairly sort of popular NES game.



MONOPOLY: STAR WARS EDITION (★★★☆☆) #150
Monopoly + Star Wars = who cares.



X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER: BALANCE OF POWER (★★★★) #102
Adds the single-player to the original game.



JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH (★★★★) #150
Good, not great, expansion.



REBELLION (★★★★) #168
Miscellaneous-heavy hardcore war game. Just what the family wanted.



ROGUE SQUADRON (★★★★) #171
Another NES arcade shooter. Who has



X-WING ALLIANCE (★★★★) #100
Great story and missions, but bugs knock it down.



EPISODE II: THE PHANTOM MENACE (★★★☆☆) #102
About as good as the movie.



EPISODE I: RACER (★★★★) #101
Surprisingly strong racer.

FORCE COMMANDER (★★★☆☆) #110
A Star Wars RTS great idea marred by bad execution.

BATTLE FOR NABOO (★★★★) #102
OK NES port with weak graphics and AI.

GALACTIC BATTLEFIELDS (★★★★) #102
Star Wars meets Age of Empires.

STARFIGHTER (★★★★) #24
Decent console port, but can't hold a candle to X-Wing.

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST (★★★★) #115
Another great, old game, but Green overdid it by 'n a star.

GALACTIC BATTLEFIELDS: CLONE CAMPAIGN (★★★★) #121
A good expansion that improves the original.

GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED (★★★☆☆) #130
Robert Coffey role-plays lap dancer.

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Suggestive Themes
Violence



PlayStation 2



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Chewbacca makes a special guest appearance, fighting alongside you in one of the game's early missions.



Yeah, sure, see a jetpack. Way to cheat.

the game, and they are present in abundance. The last few levels of the game are essentially a gauntlet run through a series of lightsaber duels with Dark Jedi, and unlike the other bad guys, these guys will actually offer you a challenge. Later in the game, you'll get to upgrade to either two lightsabers or a double-sided saber, and the battles become even more intense, as you'll often find yourself accepted by multiple enemies at once.

Adding to the fun are the Force powers, which you can choose to level up as you proceed through the game. As with other parts of Jedi Academy, the "choices" are a bit disappointing. Each power has only three levels, so you'll max most of them out pretty quickly. In addition, though they separate the powers into light and dark sides, these powers have no bearing on your character's morality: You can pick all dark powers, level them all up,

and things fresh and exciting diminishes with every game. Reven and LucasArts get some points for not just rehashing the same game again and trying to mix things up a little with the mission structure and new character. But they could have (and should have) taken it much further, offering us real decision making and moral choices along with the FPS action.

As it is, what they've created here is Jedi Lite—an easy game, totally digestible by casual fans, with tons of references to the movies' more popular characters and locales. Is that a bad thing? Well, hardcore gamers and longtime fans of the series will most certainly be disappointed. But what are you gonna do? LucasArts went for a populist, crowd-pleasing entertainment this time around. And given the painful boredom and portentousness of the recent movies (as well as the impenetrable Star Wars Geekspeak), who can blame them? There are worse ways to spend

RAVEN AND LUCASARTS GET SOME POINTS FOR NOT JUST REHASHING THE SAME GAME AGAIN.

weapon, you can sometimes pick enemies off without them even reacting—they'll just stand there, stupidly, taking shots until they die. Even the end boss, which takes the form of two rounds, was able to beel headily by exploiting flaws in the A.I. All I had to do was jump to a perch that it didn't even try to reach, and then hammer on it, undisturbed, with Force Lightning until it died. Not the climactic battle I was looking for.

SO WHAT DID I LIKE?

This all sounds negative, but the odd thing is, despite all this, I still found the game entertaining throughout. Two things save Jedi Academy: the lightsaber and the Force powers. As in the previous Jedi Knight games, they are implemented beautifully. If this is what you mostly care about, the game delivers. Lightsaber battles remain the highlight of

and it really means nothing. Late in the game, when you get a choice to pursue a light or dark path, it has nothing to do with how you've been applying the Force—which makes you wonder why you bothered in the first place.

Still, the Force powers are a blast to use. Force Pushing an enemy off a cliff still remains one of the most satisfying kills in any shooter, with Force Grip coming in a close second. I also like Force Sense, a new power used during some of the game's puzzles to see hidden markings, but also valuable during combat to scope out lurking enemies or to check on an opponent's remaining health.

LESS IS LESS

One only has to look as far as Lara Croft to see what happens to a gaming franchise that outstays its welcome. Four games into my series is a long time, and the chances of keep-

your time then slicing bad guys in half with lightsabers. (Like, say, standing in line for Episode III.) If this is all you demand from your Star Wars games, then may the Force be with you. But given what we've seen BioWare do with Knights of the Old Republic, it's clear this franchise can be so much more.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The last inspired Jedi Knight game yet still is some thrill.

GOthic II

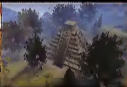
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BIOWARE BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO STAR WARS

MASTERS THE



OF UNIVERSE

BY GEORGE JONES

Right now, someone is playing *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, and all we can do is wait. And wait. And wait. That's the worst part: knowing that Xbox owners—Xbox owners—have spent the second half of this past summer celebrating one of the greatest games of all time while being left out. (Damn you, Microsoft!)

Does this mean BioWare has forgotten its PC roots? Hell, no. The Edmonton-based developer is feverishly working to make the PC version of *KOTOR* even more impressive and ready for release this fall. "We're excited about the PC version,"

confesses BioWare co-founder and co-CEO Dr. Greg Zeschuk, who shares BioWare's CEO position with longtime friend and fellow physician Rey Muzyka. "There, we'll be able to do things the Xbox simply can't." Obviously, it's going to look a whole lot better on a PC, at a whopping 1600x1200

resolution. New side quests, which they couldn't fit into the Xbox version, will be available. And, to be honest, Ray and Greg were a little gun-shy about mentioning other improvements. After all, who wants to make all these promises and then have to yank them out for one reason or another? All they want to do is make a great game.

"We don't tend to dwell on our success here," Zeschuk continues, trying to explain why it was important BioWare moved past the back patting so quickly. "If you focus on how great something is or was, you get left behind." Serious and calmly confident, the two CEOs, who founded BioWare

after practicing medicine for a number of years, occasionally joke that between the two of them, they have half a brain. But in conversing with BioWare's bigwigs, the truth emerges: These guys have a fundamental grasp of the professionalism necessary to become a top-tier game developer. Baldur's Gate and *Star Wars* make up part of that path.

A MILESTONE RPG

In July 2000, LucasArts president Simon Jeffery announced a partnership with BioWare for a *Star Wars* RPG set 4,000 years before *Star Wars* Episode I. The collaboration represented LucasArts' long-term strategy of building relationships with the world's top game developers. "Together," Jeffery explained in the press release, "we aim to create a milestone role-playing game set within a unique and largely unexplored area of the *Star Wars* universe."

Mission accomplished, Simon—and then some, immediately upon its midsummer debut, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* blew up like a Death Star, selling an astonishing 250,000 Xbox copies in its first four days en route to becoming the fastest-selling Xbox game ever. None of CGW's sister publications at Ziff Davis have rated it below a nine out of 10.

The magnitude of *KOTOR*'s success appeared to stun even LucasArts, a publisher that is accustomed to reeking up impressive sales numbers. But LucasArts producer Mike Gallo coped a buzz the moment he began working with BioWare four years ago. "These guys know how to make role-playing games, and they really know how to build epic stories...Every decision they make is

made along the lines of, "Will this make for a better game?" That makes for a high level of quality."

Nothing embodies this decision-making process more than the game's combat system, but early on, it didn't work so well. "A year ago, the game was almost entirely playable, but we just weren't happy with the

combat model," Muzyka admits. In response, the *KOTOR* team scheduled two one-hour meetings that rapidly turned into eight two-hour sessions, resulting in months of extra development. Now, *Knights of the Old Republic* successfully combines the intuitiveness and power of turn-based combat with the visual appeal of swooping 3D camera angles and the frenzied straggling of real time.

"I THINK WE CREATED ONE OF THOSE KEY GAMING MOMENTS THAT GIVES YOU A CHILL DOWN YOUR SPINE."



"I can't read all the numbers on the royalty check—can you?" Dr. Greg Zeschuk (left) to Dr. Rey Muzyka (right).



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NONSTOP ACTION

Knights of the Old Republic begins in epic Star Wars fashion, with your custom-designed character narrowly escaping a devastating space attack by a Sith fleet and central villain Darth Malak by ejecting via escape pod. While the overarching meta-goal—in one version of the story, at least—revolves around saving the galaxy from the Sith, the joy lies not in the end results, but in a widely open-ended journey that will leave even the crustiest gamers breathless.

The nonlinear missions, quests, character subplots, minigames, weapon load-outs, character improvements, and space battles would fill every single page of this magazine, so here's the short version: From completing seemingly inconsequential tasks that loop back around later in the game to gleefully wading through the Cialdo-essue slew of weapons, items, upgrades, and armor there's more game in KOTOR than you can wrap your mind around. At least the first time through. Strong character development amplifies this feel-good sensation. Like protagonists in a good screenplay or novel, each of your traveling party's nine main characters transforms as the game progresses. The outcast Wookiee Zaalbar returns to his home world Kashyyyk and confronts his personal demons and the widespread slavery of his race. The insecure Republic soldier Carth must learn to trust his companions. These relationships develop even more in the PC version—BioWare is incorporating new side conversations between your party members.

More important than the characters, the quests, or the look are the nonjudgmental, flexibly powerful notions of light and dark, which force gamers to make some difficult

moral decisions. "The dark side is more than being rude to the secretary," Zeschuk laughs. "Everything you do reflects upon your character's standing in the force,

which affects how the KOTOR universe—and your own companions—responds to you." "Good and evil," Muzyka explains, "make up a less than nearly every element of the game gets focused through."

Even BioWare expressed surprise at the amount of complexity the moral ambiguity adds. "Early on," Muzyka remembers, choosing his words carefully, "we made a conscious decision that every single conversation had to have valid choices...good, neutral, evil, and sometimes funny." As a result, KOTOR has more than 14,000 lines of dialogue—and the PC version promises to have even more conversational choices. But what the designers found was more interesting than they were able to imagine. "Somehow, the assembly of all these lines became greater than the sum of the parts. The world—as well as the light and dark themes—really came alive through all these character relationships."

Galle seconds the notion. "One of the greatest comments I heard was from a guy who was playing as a dark Jedi and began getting some really evil options that were starting to affect his party members. He was really starting to feel bad about it!"

TWISTS AND TURNS

Near the halfway point of the game, your character can choose to become an ad hoc lawyer in a murder trial with a presumably innocent man's life at stake, a sequence that is meticulously played out, from your opening argument to your closing statement. Gamers who lose the trial—it's no cakewalk—will be hard-pressed to not respond emotionally when the accused is sentenced to death...or to prison for the rest of his life. It's a powerful moment in gaming that's amplified by one thought: *Knights of the Old Republic has many more surprises in store.*

For example, BioWare revealed that players will encounter a major plot twist, one that, according to Muzyka, the entire KOTOR team feels is the most elegant they've ever created. "You know those key gaming moments that give you a chill down your spine? I think we created one of those." We, on the other hand, think it's one of those moments that transcends games and is just damn good storytelling.



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PlayStation 2



Violence

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System Shock 2

Take a good look at the other games in our Hall of Fame and you'll mostly see titles that have been recognized for being the sort of groundbreakers that inspire a hundred inferior clones. Not so for System Shock 2, and that's probably just as well, since we seriously doubt anyone could come close to matching the overwhelming sense of dread and fear this singular sci-fi FPS/RPG hybrid pumps out. Featuring the scariest sound design since Doom, this is a shooter where the focus isn't on killing enemies but just surviving them, generally by the skin of your teeth. If you aren't hiding behind crates in the game (or under your desk at home), you can confront the daunting story-driven challenges in SS2 through three very different character classes, each providing a gaming experience where the only similarity is relentlessly gripping tension. Not enough gamers played this game when it came out, but those who did will never forget the experience.

We welcome four classic games and a scooter-riding nerd to the fold.

Hallof

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

It's hard to imagine now, but not too long ago, role-playing games—especially Dungeons & Dragons games—were considered dead. But in 1998 the genre was jolted back to life by two medical doctors who came from out of nowhere to release the brilliant Baldur's Gate—and the genre has been thriving ever since. But for Drs. Ray Murray and Greg Zeschka and their geeky compadres at BioWare, that was just a warm-up act. Baldur's Gate II, released in 2000, takes everything that is great about the original BG—the smart, liberate storytelling, the complex but addictive combat, the nonlinear, sprawling quest structure—and multiplies it to the nth degree. We loved BG2 at the time, but with three years' perspective, it is clearly emerging as one of the great RPGs of all time—brilliantly executed, this is one of the most ambitious games ever created. Those now drooling over Knights of the Old Republic—this is where BioWare's genius began.



The Sims

Any hall-wit with too much free time can beat a lumbering boss monster, but how many people can reach the pinnacle of their career without shortchanging their family, friends, and growing financial responsibilities? The game that eclipsed *Myth* as the biggest PC title ever has endured the inevitable "hardcore gamer" backlash, but the simple truth is, *The Sims* was and is an involved-to-the-b marrow hardcore gamer's game. Resource management, character development, level design, NPC interaction, personalized reward systems—it's all in there, and, utterly unlike any other game, virtually every element is entirely in the player's hands. Yes, the biblical-sized flood of expansions has diluted the core game with too much whimsy, but what other game presents as many unique stories, situations, challenges, defeats, and victories? More than any other title, *The Sims* focuses on and triumphantly delivers PLAY to the gaming experience—and really, isn't that what it's all about?



Will Wright

What more can be said about Will Wright? The man was guaranteed a spot on this list more than a decade before he created what would turn out to be the best-selling game of all time, *The Sims*. In fact, at one time, *The Sims* was considered to be just a wacky side project (with little chance of success) by the man primarily known for 1987's landmark *SimCity* (and other *Sims* offshoots) at Maxis. As much a scientist and theoretician as a game designer, Wright pulls his gaming ideas from the most disparate of sources and puts them together to study, with glee, the effect they have on us, the willing lab rats who are his audience. No one comes up with game ideas like Will Wright, and no one executes them with half his intelligence and, crucially, sense of humor. Keep experimenting on us Will—we are only here to serve.



Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within

One of the best adventure games ever made, *Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within* has slipped off the radar in recent years because of its full-motion video, a once "cutting-edge" idea that has become so discredited and out of fashion that it's almost embarrassing to bring up. "Interactive movies"—yeah, right. But *Jane Jensen's* masterful adventure rises above the limitations and conventions of the format and remains the one FMV game still worth hunting down and playing. *Jensen's* storytelling skills, which combine psychological and supernatural horror, are far more literate and sophisticated than those of most game developers, and, when meshed with the game's brutally tough puzzles, make for one of the most engaging games for adults ever created. The series lost it with an unfortunately inferior third entry, but *Gabriel Knight 2* remains a landmark in computer gaming—the rare game we can seriously consider to be a work of art.

Frame

THE CG WHALLOFFAME

PEOPLE

Dani Buxton Berry, Game Designer
John Carmack, Programmer
Ron Gilbert, Programmer, Game Designer
Sid Meier, Game Designer
Roberta Williams, Game Designer

GAMES

Alone in the Dark (3DO, 1992)
The Bard's Tale (3A, 1992)
Battle Chess (Amiga, 1992)
Battleground series (Amiga), 1992-present
Betrayer et Kronder (Amiga, 1992)
Chessmaster (Silicon Graphics, 1992)
Civilization (Macintosh, 1992)
Command & Conquer (Virgin/Digital Studios, 1992)
Counter-Strike (3rd, 1992)
Crossed: No Remorse (Amiga, 1992)
Dark Forces et Jedi Knight (Quake, 1992)
Day of the Tentacle (Amiga, 1992)

Diablo (Illiac, 1992)
Deacon (3D Software, 1992)
Dungeons Master (Ill Software, 1992)
Eart Weaver Baseball (3A, 1992)
Empire (Amiga), 1992
EverQuest (3D, 1992)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (Macintosh, 1992)
Racon 2.0 (Silicon Graphics, 1992)
Relout (Amiga), 1992
Front Page Sports:
Football Pro (Amiga, 1992)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (3A, 1992)
Grim Fandango (Amiga), 1992
Gunshe (Macintosh, 1992)
Half-Life (3D Software, 1992)
Harpoon (3D, 1992)
Heroes of Might and Magic II (New World Computing, 1992)
High Heat Baseball 2000 (3A, 1992)
Kempfergruppe (3A, 1992)

King's Quest V (3D Software, 1992)
Lemmings (Amiga), 1992
Links 366 Pro (3D Software, 1992)
M-1 Tank Platoon (Macintosh, 1992)
Master of Magic (Macintosh, 1992)
Master of Orion (Macintosh, 1992)
Mech Brigade (3A, 1992)
MechWarrior 2 (Amiga), 1992
Might and Magic
(New World Computing, 1992)
M.U.L.E. (3A, 1992)
Myth (Amiga), 1992
Penzer General (3A, 1992)
Pirates (Macintosh, 1992)
Quake (3D Software, 1992)
Reborn Tycoon (Macintosh, 1992)
Red Baron (Amiga), 1992
The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1992)
SimCity (Amiga, 1992)
StarCraft (Amiga, 1992)

Sterflight (3A, 1992)
Tetra (3D Software, 1992)
Their Fleeth Hour (Amiga), 1992
TIE Fighter (Amiga), 1992
Tomb Raider (3A), 1992
Ultima III (Amiga System, 1992)
Ultima IV (Amiga System, 1992)
Ultima VI (Amiga System, 1992)
Ultima Underworld (Amiga System, 1992)
War in Russia (3A, 1992)
WarCraft II (Amiga), 1992
Wasteland (Amiga), 1992
Wing Commander (Amiga System, 1992)
Wing Commander II (Amiga System, 1992)
Wing Commander III (Amiga System, 1992)
Wizardry (3A), 1992
Wolfenstein 3-D (3D Software, 1992)
X-CDM (Macintosh, 1992)
You Don't Know Jack (Amiga System, 1992)
Zork (Amiga), 1992

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CREATING A NATION



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RATING PENDING

Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

This message is brought to you by the Editors of:

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GAME GROUP

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MAGAZINE

PlayStation

**COMPUTER
GAMING**
MAGAZINE

GAME
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**POCKET
GAMES**

GAMERS
GUILD

Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



This game takes aggravation to a whole new level—blind apes could design better balanced levels than these.

LIONHEART 134



INSIDE

- 126 Pirates of the Caribbean
- 128 Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic
- 129 Dark Felt: The Journal
- 130 Madden NFL 2004
- 131 Will Rock
- 134 Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader
- 136 Nexagon: Deathmatch
- 138 Europa Universalis: Crown of the North
- 138 Revisionist History—Raven Shield
- 140 The Great Escape
- 142 F/A-18: Operation Iraqi Freedom
- 142 Combat Command 2: Danger Forward
- 144 Ghost Master
- 146 Chariots of War



On the high seas, the game adds fireworks, with realistic water and background reflections.

Pirates of the Caribbean

Yo ho ho and a bottle of dumb BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

GENRES: ACTION
SOFTWARES:
REVELO ARELLA
EYES: ROLE-PLAYING
EAT DRINK: TYPIC VIOLENCE,
CAMELING, USE OF ALCOHOL,
PLOT, SAVED TROOPINGS
PUNISH IN BOO: TONGUE TALK,
1,900 HARD DRINK SPACE,
3,000 3D CARD
TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:
PENDING IN U.S. ONLY, 256MB
RAM, 4,000 3D CARD
WEATHERED SUPER HOLE

Pirates of the Caribbean has a terrific interface, some serious bugs, and only a tenuous connection to the film it's named after. It's two and a half games in one: part role-playing game and part Age of Sail combat simulator, with a slumpy trading game thrown in for no good reason. With so much stacked against it, it's surprising that the good parts almost make trudging through the problems a worthwhile endeavor.

Rudderless

The worst problem is the interface. Not only is it unambiguous and cumbersome, but it's also inconsistent. Occasionally, the key to execute a command is the space bar. Other times, it's the Enter key. The arrow keys are used to scroll through menus, while the Page Down key is used to scroll through dialogue boxes (which feature a font so massive that you might think you accidentally purchased the large-print edition of the game). Neither the manual nor the included oddsmen makes any reference to many

of the keyboard functions, so your only chance of finding important features is through trial and error or clumsy fingers.

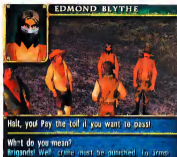
Another problem is the camera. On land, the camera swings around like a drunken monkey on a chandelier. You can switch to a first-person view, rather than the default third-person, but it's worse: Nathaniel Hawk, the game's hero, has a swagger even when he's standing still. POTC is the first buccaneering game that might induce seasickness. But if you can find your sea legs and

acclimate to the game's utterly bizarre controls, you'll find that both the RPG and sea-combat elements are decent enough to hold your interest. The role-playing aspect is definitely the lesser of the two, with a strange, meandering story that completely falls apart near the end. Some of your assignments are illogical, such as being required to destroy a fort and capture a whole town to free a prisoner, though you are free to stroll around town and even walk into the prison itself unopposed. And while



As you gain levels, you can assign points to various abilities and stats.





Bandits pose a threat when you're starting out, but you can just leave the area and come back to make them disappear.



Ship-to-ship combat can be handled from your deck in a first-person view.



A fleet with battleships can make a significant profit by capturing smaller ships and selling them in port.



Boarding a ship requires you to fight alongside your crew. Bigger ships require you to fight through several decks.

there are a few nonessential missions to be found, many of them are broken.

The main story missions eventually lead to the game's only tangible connection to the movie, though you'll hear rumors of a ship called the Black Pearl early on. The connection feels tacked on and most likely was, considering the game began its development as a sequel to Akella's *Sea Dogs*. And the story elements that tie the game to the film make little sense in either setting.

A long walk on a short plank

PD7C is open-ended, letting you progress through the story at your own pace. But its world is big and empty, with random encounters that are too difficult at the beginning and boring by the end. You can go many places, but if you aren't sticking to the plot, you won't find much to do other than attack ships and trade goods.

Ship-to-ship combat can be great, especially when you have powerful vessels in your fleet. There are two combat settings, arcade and realistic, but

those wanting a hardcore Age of Sail-style sim won't find it here. You even character abilities that allow you to execute quick turns in battleships or board from greater distances, and while these may seem silly for those who want to act out their Patrick O'Brian fantasies, they add diversity to what would otherwise

just be slowly turning and firing. Since *Sea Dogs*, boarding has been improved a great deal. *Sea Dogs'* abstract fighting model is replaced with one that allows you to board an opponent's ship with a few members of your crew and fight through a series of decks until the ship is yours. Though sword fighting is extremely simple, working your way through a ship and watching your crew fight alongside you can be rewarding. Once you start capturing ships, you'll have no need for the simple commerce

model, which allows you to buy goods in one town and sell them in another. Each town imports and exports certain goods, and the economy is stable—capturing a town or sinking merchant ships has no effect on supply or demand.

Plagues of the Caribbean has a few great moments, but it seems like an incomplete

It has a few great moments, but it seems like an incomplete collection of half-finished ideas.

collection of half-finished ideas. If RPG elements were fleshed out or the commerce model improved, the open-endedness would be more effective and the world more exciting to explore. As it is, it's just three simple sections that, in sequence, provide slightly enjoyable distractions from one another.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Two half-good games don't equal one good one.

Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic

Towers above the rest BY JONAH JACKSON



GAME STATS

FRONT COVERING

800.950.7648

100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

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100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

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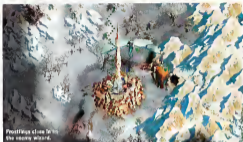
100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

100% TACTICAL STRATEGY

Fans of *Master of Magic* have been waiting for the *Age of Wonders* series to pull all the aspects of a great turn-based strategy game together, and *Shadow Magic* does it. With the inclusion of a highly customizable random-map generator, three new playable races, and small but significant gameplay additions, developer Triumph Studios has addressed just about every player request and criticism. The latest *Age of Wonders* game is a huge amount of fun and a great choice for any turn-based strategy fanatic.

The new campaign, in which each player controls five wizards through a series of loosely related scenarios, is somewhat formulaic but still enjoyable. Fifteen additional pre-created maps showcase some of the changes, most notably the strange new Shadowland, which provides maps with a third level that already includes surface and underground locations. Shadowland is home to the evil Shadow Demons and their long-suffering enemies, the Syrons. The terrain, which serves as a backdrop for the campaign story, is harmful to non-native races, although the effect can be countered by spells and unit abilities.

The real meat of *Shadow Magic*, however, is its random-map generator. Players can choose from five general templates, each geared toward a different playing experience, or delve into the dozens of configuration options. Random scenarios range from small, combat-intensive maps to vastly epic games of exploration. Some of the largest maps, which have three different levels of land, can provide dozens of hours of gameplay. When using the advanced settings, players can restrict terrain types and races, select the



Protectors close in on the fleeing wizard.



Shadow Magic retains *Age of Wonders*'s rich and beautiful maps.

frequency of various map locations, and choose which spheres of magic are playable. For players not satisfied with random maps, *Shadow Magic* includes a fully featured editor for creating custom scenarios and campaigns.

Shadow Magic adds new spells to every sphere of magic (including a whole new category of unit-enhancement

spells), new units to every playable race, and three new races. There are also city upgrades, including an item forge, which gives players the ability to craft their own magical items for hero units.

Shadow Magic's changes make the game superior to its predecessors, even without the new graphics or radical redesign of a traditional sequel.

There is, arguably, one area needing improvement. Even at 200 pages (including the sections available only on the CD), the manual is still the game's weak spot. There is too much detail to fit into any printed manual, but there are some frustrating omissions in the existing text. The description of spell effects remains strangely vague in many cases, and some key tables of statistics are simply missing. This complaint is a minor one, though, and really the only blemish on an otherwise fantastic title that will satisfy *AOW* veterans and newcomers alike.



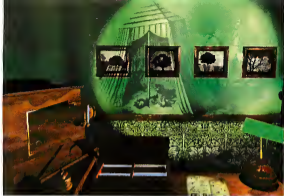
While the tactical combats can be explored, you'll get better results if you defeat them yourself.



The scenario generator features many advanced options.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great strategy game that's worth purchasing for the random-map generator alone.



Spirits haunting the hotel leave clues about their untimely demise for you to find.

Dark Fall: The Journal

Frightful is delightful by **DEMICK COOK**

GAME STATS

FORGIVE THE ADVENTURE

COMPANY (SINGLE) BOX

PRODUCTIONS

OS: WINDOWS

OS: LINUX, XBOX, N64

ESSENTIAL PLAY \$19.99

ESSENTIALS: PENDING \$35

ESSENTIALS: \$29.99 (XBOX)

ESSENTIALS: \$29.99 (N64)

ESSENTIALS: \$49.99 (XBOX)

ESSENTIALS: \$49.99 (N64)

ESSENTIALS: \$49.99 (XBOX)

ESSENTIALS: \$49.99 (N64)

With some of the bigger developers abandoning adventure games for other genres, amateur independents have stepped forward to fill the gap—Jonathan Boakes, *Dark Fall: The Journal's* sole creator, is one talented example. This game's perpetually unnering ambience, interesting puzzles, and unique ghost story may very well help you forgive its graphical flaws.

Your brother, Peter, is an architect remodeling a long-abandoned train station and its adjoining hotel. He takes residence there alongside two ghost hunters who are conducting a research project to discover why 12 people vanished from the area one night before the station's 1947 shutdown. After a frantic phone call from Peter, you rush to the site yourself, only to find it abandoned once more.

You catch glimpses of both the

You'll need one extra bag at this hotel: a paper bag to breathe into.

tormented souls who were the Station Hotel's past inhabitants and the ancient cause of their torture. Antique phones ring up fearful whispers, and rotted floorboards creak as shadows pass. The departed guests' belongings and journals remain for your perusal, and deserted ghost-analyzing equipment is yours to use in solving *Dark Fall's* mysteries. You capture images of spectral wraiths, dissecting them with computer-assisted precision. You also don ghost-sensitive goggles, which not only reveal hidden messages, but also enable you to view rooms as

they existed when the so-called *Dark Fall* entity's victims disappeared.

There are no onerous adventure-game devices here like mazes, sliding tiles, timed sequences, or insane plot hunts. Instead, the puzzles encompass the hobbies and lives of those who stayed at the Station Hotel. An astronomer's telescope hints at otherworldly discoveries, and an artist disguises his fearful findings at the hotel within his artwork. Some of the puzzles involve information that's been stowed away by the hotel's frightened guests, but even the safes and locked boxes grow naturally from the story.

The simple 90-degree turns of *Dark Fall's* slide-show navigation may feel tremendously dated, but the restricted movement underscores the feeling that you can't outrun the *Dark Fall* entity. You come to realize you'll need one extra bag at this hotel: a

paper bag to breathe into.

The rustiest nail in *Dark Fall's* coffin is its 540x480 resolution visuals, which, although portraying startlingly gore-free antiquated run with an anxiety-inducing aplomb, are about as cutting edge as a 1940s butter knife. However, despite the grainy graphics, this eerie adventure will fit the chill bill nicely.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The only thing missing from this eerie gem's box is a change of underwear.

YOU'VE EXPLORED
THE LAND...





Watch out—these minotaurs have rocket launchers.

Will Rock

You can't be serious BY DARREN GLADSTONE

GAME STATS

HOSTILE UBI SAFT
 COLLECTIBLES: SARGES
 INTERACTIVE
 ONE-TO-ONE: DRIFT-AND-G
 ONE-TO-ONE: INFANTRY, BLOOD
 AND GEAR, VIOLENCE: FIVE
 ONE-TO-ONE: PENTON
 IN: SCORING, SCORE: BANA,
 TIGHT: HARD DRIVE SPACE,
 ZERO-TO-CARD: TECHNIQUE
 REWARDS: PENTON IN
 BONUS, ZERO: BANA,
 GEAR-TO-CARD
 REWARDS: BONUS: LAR,
 HOSTILE: BONUS: LAR,
 HOSTILE: BONUS: LAR

Serious Sam came out of nowhere. It's mindless, it's fun, and, most surprising of all, it's cheap. Twenty clams buys you a manic, action-packed, frenzied FPS with a surprisingly crisp graphics engine. Why mention all this when I'm supposed to be reviewing *Will Rock*? Because Ubi Soft's new FPS is a flat-out copycat. Bargain-basement price, throwaway plot, gorgeous graphics—the bellwethers of the burgeoning cheap-shooter genre are all here. The problem: I've played *Serious Sam*. I've seen *Serious Sam*. And this, sir, is no *Serious Sam*.

The dulcet tones of Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock" and the visual of a cyclops chewing its cud on the menu screen do not adequately prepare you for *Will Rock*. Well, maybe they do. The disposable plot casts you as *Will Rock*, wiseass boyfriend of some archeologist's daughter. Terrorists grab the girl in order to sacrifice her to Zeus. Granted power by Prometheus, you must grid your loins for an all-out rumble with the Greco gods of old.

But who the hell cares about all that? Don't even bother trying to explain why the gods would stagger around with shotguns, machine guns, and acid-launching rifles in coliseums. This is all about mindless fun as you blast apart beetles straight outta *Clash of the Titans*. Countless well-animated creatures of legend are here and coming at you from all directions. I was particularly impressed with end-level bosses like the cyclops. And then there are the statues that come to life and hurt around globes, discs, and versus beams of light—and crumble into

stone piles when they're decimated.

So, at what point does *Will Rock* stop rock? Well, while those creatures look nice, there's a certain lack of creativity here. Where *Sam* employs harpies, charging bull creatures, and my favorite—beheaded kamikazes that run straight at you and explode, *Will Rock*'s foes are just maffing it in, copying what's already been done. Eagles drop fireballs, satyrs snipe with bows, skeleton centurions charge at you... and I couldn't care less. But I give credit where it's due: This game did make me crack open my dusty ancient-civilization textbooks to find out if a killed minotaur could spit, and reform like *Terminator 2*, Judgment Day's liquid-metal T1000.

Another big knock against *Will Rock* is the jumping puzzles. In my humble opinion, jumping puzzles shouldn't be in FPS games—so few are actually done right (like *Half-Life*, for example). *Will Rock* is littered with tired jump-over-the-gap puzzles. Multiplayer partially redeems the game with some well-paced maps, a co-op mode, and a treasure-hunt match that has you racing and fragging around maps as you look for loot.

I know *Will Rock* isn't gunning for the likes of *Half-Life 2*. But what this game boils down to is the good ol' reliable FPS formula: Move into an area, maim, kill, find lever or key to open door, save, loiter, rinse, and repeat. While it looks good, the beauty is only skin deep.

VERDICT ★★★★★
 To quote a Twisted Sister classic: We're not gonna take it!

NOW EXPLORE
THE SEA
 AND BEYOND





Dark Age of Camelot TRIALS of ATLANTIS

Trials of Atlantis: the latest expansion to the award winning online roleplaying game: Dark Age of Camelot. Explore the ancient ruined civilization, find powerful magical treasure, and discover the Atlantean lore.

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LET THE TRIALS BEGIN



www.trialsatlantis.com/cguj



Violence

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Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader

Fighting the bad fight BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PLATFORMS: WINDOWS

GENRES: CRUSADER

STYLING: REFLEXIVE

DEVELOPER: ENTERTAINMENT

DATE: 8/20/99

PRICE: \$49.95

ESSENTIAL: PENDING

ESSENTIAL: PENDING

ESSENTIAL: PENDING

ESSENTIAL: PENDING

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What can you say about *Lionheart*? You could say it's set in an alternate 16th century Europe where magic and mauls are a very real presence. You could say it uses the much-loved SPECIAL role-playing system that was introduced in the even-more-loved *Fallout* series. You could say it features beautifully rendered game maps and lovely (if sporadic) music.

Or you could just say it's a really lousy game. That's a lot more honest and much easier to say than "*Lionheart* is an aggressively unpleasant, schizophrenic experience that steadfastly ignores every significant interface advance of the last half decade while serving up a steaming helping of repetitive, unbalanced, uninspired aggravation in masquerading as play." Yep, that's something else you could say.

Fair rennaissance

What *Lionheart* does do right is the setting. Those beautifully rendered game maps really are beautiful—well, at least in the cities and towns. Anywhere, really, where there are buildings. From the streets of Barcelona to the secret Druid sanctuary, every brick and flickering torch seem to have been placed just so. Not so for the wilderness or dungeon areas—and there are tons of them—which are as generic as generic can be, albeit with some pretty nice pine trees. So if you're into digitized coniferous vegetation, you'll find lots of evergreens to like here.

The setting filters over to the story in *Lionheart*, with lots of superstar cameos from the likes of Miguel de Cervantes, Nostradamus, Shakespeare, Joan of Arc, and Leonardo da Vinci. The roles of these historical NPCs include providing

simple quests, fighting alongside you, and playing major roles in the game's story. About that story—you'd think given the pains the developers took with the setting that they'd leverage this in the plot. But they don't. Not really. Instead, you're given the same kind of Ancient Evil Threat of most every other game, only with the Knights Templar and the Spanish Inquisition wedged in there. Instead of Crystals of Power, you're tracking down holy relics in between boss fights against demons.

No one expects the Spanish Inquisition...to suck

All this would seem to make *Lionheart* just a pretty average and maybe dull kind of game. But it's worse than that. This is a pretty bad game, and it gets bad in a number of ways.

The initial large portion of the game is spent in and around Barcelona as you receive quests galore. At this point, at least, *Lionheart* seems like it will live up to the Black Isle pedigree as you juggle at least a dozen different quests, join a

If you're into digitized coniferous vegetation, you'll find lots to like here.



faction, and generally get the lay of the game's land. Then, it all pretty much stops and becomes a tunnel-vision linear exercise in monumental hack-and-slash frustration. *Lionheart* can't decide what kind of game it wants to be, and in the end, it doesn't deliver much of anything. It's not a rich quest-driven game because that all ends pretty early, and it's not an action RPG because it's so horribly unbalanced.

Seriously, this game takes aggravation to a brand-new level. Once the game devolves into rigidly linear hack-and-slash, it overcompensates for its lack of depth by overpowering the monsters and underpowering your character and your weaponry and armor, as well as leaving useful power-ups almost entirely out of the picture. Blind apes could design better balanced levels than these.

So instead of the nah-being tension and frenzy à la *Diablo* II, you're left with all the bad parts of *EverQuest*—trying to draw single enemies away from the massive groups that would overwhelm you, barely beating them, then enduring

interminable waits as your character heels up again in real-time because you can't waste the two health potions you have (since you'll need them for the inevitable looted boss battle).

But you'll still die. A lot. And the Quick Load key seems to work only during the middle part of the game. But hey, at least you're fighting exciting new creatures such as undead and, um, Englishmen. And they all move at the speed of light, so you can't even target them, even when the game is paused.

Just to hammer home the frustration, *Lionheart* has assiduously and perversely ignored a few things that gamers have started to expect as a given in their RPGs. Like an innotable map. *Lionheart* features big, sprawling levels, yet the automap won't let you mark where on the woefully underlit smear of goo the friggin' exit is. Or where on the incredibly intricate city map the backsector you met 15 hours of playing time ago is located. The game also craves out for a loot highlight key, since the busy character art obscures

SKILLS

Character Level: 25
Experience Points: 314434 (level 325000)
Skill points gained per level: 20
Skill Points: 0

304 177 73 251 5

39 136 13 43

126 112 67 47

Skill points you get when leveling are applied to various skill branches in this real-time SPECIAL feature.

RICOCHET EXTREME

The good news: The *Lionheart* CDs are not a complete waste of precious natural resources. During installation, unlucky purchasers of *Lionheart* will have the option to install *Ricochet Extreme*, a nifty little *Arkanoid* clone that, though simple and derivative, is infinitely more entertaining than *Reflexive*'s RPG. If you're interested, save your money and download the trial version of *Ricochet Extreme* from the company website, www.reflexive.net.

the equally busy (with the bonus of busy item art

Frankly, that's just the large blunt tip of a world-record-sized iceberg of programming incompetence. I could go on about party-member A.I. that lets your companions get stuck in corners or ignores your commands of "Stay where you are!" by erasing the area and drawing enemies to you. I could wax poetic about the limp spell effects, boring combat, and virtually nonexistent sound. Or the way it resets certain settings every time you reload. Or even the frequent crashes to my desktop (when I had the audacity to exit a building or open my inventory).

But I've run out of space here, so I'll just say this: Whatever hope of pleasure *Lionheart* once had has been cruelly and efficiently suffocated.

VERDICT

Unfunless, hollow, buggy, and lacking in imagination—and those are its good points.

Nexagon: Deathmatch

The future of arena combat looks bleak BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

GAME STATS

MOBILITY STRATEGY FIRST
STRATEGY STRATEGY FIRST
VERY REAL TIME STRATEGY
UP TO 16 TEAM PLAYERS
VIOLENCE: PG-13
REQUIRES PERFORMER'S NRG
GAME GEN. ACTION/RPG
DRIVE SPACE: 1400 MB
CARD: E3/2001
ESSENTIALS PERFORMER 19
ADD. CREDIT: BAK, GORDON
HAIR DRIVE SPACE:
VERSION 2.30 CARD
REQUIRES LAN, INTERNET
12 PLAYERS

Sometime in the future, combat arenas will feed our lust for carnage. Or so we hope.

In the meantime, Strategy First decided to strum up their own version with Nexagon: Deathmatch, which takes the arena combat of games like *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament* and adds a real-time strategy approach. In theory, this should provide an interesting twist on the original concept. Unfortunately, what really separates Nexagon from *Quake* and *UT* is its uninspiring gameplay, interface quirks, bugs, and mediocre graphics engine.

Nexagon's strategy focuses on managing a small horde of "thrall" (genetically engineered robots pooled from a handful of futuristic races), in matches fought inside arenas known as pits. The primary goal is simple: Crush computer or online opponents by breaching their heavily fortified inner sanctum, and destroying a glowing



Defending the Nexosphere can get tedious. Upgrading the inner sanctum with turrets, traps, and walls does offer some form of protection against the horde...until they demolish it.

Your enemies will admire your design sense as they beat you to a bloody pulp.

sphere known as the Nexosphere (white, of course, defending your own).

Successfully destroying a Nexos, defeating enemy thrall, seizing battleboards, and collecting bonus rewards nets your horde money and crowd prestige, which in turn, allows for additional inner sanctum defensive upgrades. Upgrading the inner sanctum with heavy walls, ramps, traps and various other components such as med

kits, bombs, and weapons dispensers is all part of securing your sanctuary. And for your inner Martha Stewart, you may also decorate sanctuaries with potted plants, radar towers and lampposts. No, they offer no gaming value whatsoever, but your enemies will admire your design sense as they beat you to a bloody pulp. That's gotta be worth something, right?

Nexagon's combat system is pitifully

blend. Every time one of your thralls comes in contact with the enemy, the game pauses. This gets real annoying, real fast, especially since implementing commands is so basic, with a command set containing only attack, defend, and facing orders. Similarly, though your thrall gain levels over time, this does not seem to equate to better skills and attributes. No matter how much my thrall leveled up, they always seemed to be the ones getting knocked down in combat. All of this is made worse by the



Thralls come from one of four hordes: tabboo, stroner, ghedros, or ultran. Each horde possesses a somewhat unique selection style.

thrall's lousy pathfinding (most of the time, they simply don't follow your orders, or lag badly when doing so), sluggish and clunky camera controls, a non-intuitive interface, and a shabby manual and uninformative tutorial, forcing players who don't immediately uninstall the game to learn things on the fly. And the final icing on this rather rancid cake is a nonexistent online community, which means even the most diehard RTS fan playing this game out of desperation will lack for a more challenging human opponent.

The concept wasn't bad, but Nexagon: Deathmatch's uninspiring execution and lack of depth make for a forgettable gaming experience. If this is what the distant future holds, then I'm glad I won't be around to see it.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Rock/paper/scissors is a more challenging strategy game.



One form of Nexosux ducts with taking thrall. But don't sell too many or you'll limit your ability to rest injured, or replace dead thrall.

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Europa Universalis: Crown of the North

Europa Universalis: The Phantom Menace by **DI LUO**

GAME STATS

ALSO SEE STRATEGY FIRST
IDEAS: PARADOX
GENRE: STRATEGY
TYPE: STRATEGY
ESTIMATED EXPENSE:
MSRP: \$29.99
RECOMMENDED PC MINIMUM:
3GB RAM, 500GB HARD
DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED SYSTEMS:
PC/OS: WINDOWS 7, 8, 10, 11
RECOMMENDED SYSTEMS:
PC/OS: WINDOWS 7, 8, 10, 11
NUMBER OF PLAYERS:
1-8



Note the outrageous balance on the upper right. Getting a positive balance takes an effort.

In the gaming world, few things exemplify corporate greed as well as poorly made expansion packs. Europa Universalis: Crown of the North falls squarely into this category. From start to finish, it is a poorly conceived, ill-executed, and time-wasting piece of cohesiveness designed to suck money away from both fans of the much-lauded series and unsuspecting newcomers.

The centerpiece of Crown is a six-faction struggle for Sweden during the 13th century. Instead of EU's imperial policies and the conflict of world religions, you have counties that you can upgrade one building at a time. You can also make decisions on earth-shattering matters—for example, you can control the way your nobles react to sea-monster sightings.

The scaled-down game proves to be as mundane and repetitive as watching cows graze. Your thousand-strong armies are created 25 men at a time, each of the 10 levels of development in a province's six buildings must be done one at a time, and the same multiple-choice policy decisions are repeated ad nauseam throughout a campaign game.

The interface makes it worse. Many essential actions require you to hunt out hotkeys due to the lack of onscreen buttons. There is also no repeat button, so you'll have to race from one county to the other, giving the same commands over and over. It's as if the designers wanted to create a finger exercising tool to reduce repetitive stress disorders (and

thus get some worker's comp).

The tedium would be tolerable if there were actually a game here. The full campaign can be finished in less than three hours, even if you play the "weakest" factions on the Hard difficulty level. What passes for AI will upgrade its provinces in peace but rolls over like the French before a German advance during war. The economy also poses no challenge. With a core of three or four fully upgraded counties (which can be easily achieved), you can support as many armies as your weary fingers can build and still come away with huge surpluses. The lack of strategic challenges simply exacerbates the limitations imposed by the confined geography of Sweden.

Crown is almost redeemed by its value. For \$29.99, you'll also get the original game and three user-created mods. Unfortunately, corporate greed is evident here as well. The paper-thin manual does nothing to explain the game to new players, and all the mods, including the Sweden campaign, have been given so little attention that misspellings are rampant—even the game's read-me file has a disclaimer about it.

This glorified screen saver will no doubt disappoint EU's fans and drive newbies away from trying its far-superior predecessor.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This disaster of an expansion is less repetitive than Tetris.

GAME PATCHES



Revisionist History

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield

By Thomas L. McDonald

Based upon the well-tested tactical technology, *Rainbow Six 2: Bravo Shield* was blessed with a fairly clean rollout. Still, those niggling little nuisances do crop up, and Ubi's latest attempt to stamp them out in version 1.4.

One of the more noticeable problems with the original rollout was the poor behavior of silenced weapons, which made them too weak to be consistently useful. Silenced weapons now do at least 30 percent of the damage of unsilenced weapons. The silenced SP9 pistol is also more truly silent in this version.

Synchronization problems among firing animation, sound effects, and muzzle flash is now better synchronized with trigger pull.

A couple of grenade-related issues are also on the fixed list for version 1.4. Instances that let players get stuck after throwing a grenade are partly dealt with here and will continue to be dealt with if the developers find more. Here, handily, when gamers throw their last grenade, they now automatically switch to the primary weapon.

Aside from getting stuck during grenade tosses, some players also became stuck in the environment while climbing ladders. Ubi is still sorting out those particular problems. Occasional lockups related to certain message boxes, however, have been fixed.

To improve multiplayer performance, the network code has been streamlined to send less information with each shot fired, which adds a slight performance boost when a lot of lead is in the air. Another performance-enhancing change involves sound: When sound is set to zero, the sounds stop processing, rather than simply being silenced. This helps reclaim some cycles for games with slower computers who are willing to give up sound for performance. In a game like *Raven Shield* which almost demands awareness of environmental sounds, this seems fairly absurd, but it's nice they took the time to fix it.

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The Great Escape

Make that The Fair to Mediocre Escape BY RYAN SCOTT

GAME STATS

PICTURE QUALITY: GAMES

PLAYERS: PLAYING GAMES

REAL STEALTH: ACTION

IGNORING HISTORY: BLOOD

WOLFGANG PETERSEN IS

SCORING: TERRY O'NEIL, SAOR

THAT DRIVE SPACE: 32MB

3D CARD RECOMMEND:

RECOMMEND: JOHNNY WALK

GAME BY CREAT

WOLFGANG PETERSEN IS

While you can argue the merits of movie-licensed games ad infinitum, at least you can understand the rationale behind trying to take advantage of a hot movie property. But capitalizing on a 40-year-old, albeit classic, WWII ensemble piece starring a cast of middle-aged men who are now almost all dead and probably known to gamers under the age of 35 only as *The Rockford Files Guy*, *The Field Doctor From Halloween Guy*, and *That Sheryl Crow Song Guy* doesn't really lend cachet to a mediocre stealth-action game, now does it?

The Great Escape makes a good attempt at remaining faithful to the movie. Plenty of familiar characters pop up throughout, and several level names (such as *Captain Hill's* debut mission, *The Cooler King*) echo themes from the



Though the game contains some gunplay, much of your time is spent slinking around in the shadows.

film. You play as a variety of characters from the movie, progressing through a number of objective-based levels as you work toward escaping a German POW camp. Goals typically involve meeting with various individuals, finding a particular item, or reaching a certain location. Objectives are tracked in your notebook, which contains an area map that considerably points you toward your next target.

Though the game contains some gunplay, much of your time is spent slinking around in the shadows. You have to be quick and use the environment to your advantage, hiding and skulking about as you narrowly evade



Several badly controlled motorcycle chases populate the later levels.

the enemy. Stealing a guard uniform or two will give you some occasional breathing room you'll appreciate, since guards are very unforgiving once they spot you. Engaging in combat is generally pointless, and getting caught forces you to restart the entire level or from your most recent save.

And that's the game's biggest annoyance—the finite number of saves allowed during each mission. Much of *The Great Escape*'s challenge/frustration comes from inconsistent A.I.; guards occasionally spot you out of the blue and just as often develop acute blindness as you stand in plain sight. You'll routinely make trial-and-error runs, which is made problematic by the limited number of saves you're given. Some of these levels are long, too.

The game tries to liven things up with a few motorcycle chases toward the end, but the vehicle controls are meant-for-console-not-PC awkward and ruin the experience. The game's graphics also fall



The bad in this game isn't as cool as the real Steve McQueen.

to help the excitement factor. Although the overall aesthetic design fills the source material pretty well, the textures and character models are just plain bad. Conversely, the game's sound is actually one of its highlights, utilizing plenty of music from the film. The voice acting is a double-edged sword—most of it sounds decent, but you'll hear a lot of the same samples over and over.

In the end, *The Great Escape* provides a passable stealth-gaming experience. Casual fans are advised to steer clear, while the most hardcore stealth-action aficionados might find something to like here. Emphasis on "might." Whoever your tastes, just keep in mind that this is no *Spinkier Cell*—but then, it's no *Tomb Raider*, *The Angel of Darkness*, either.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Not quite as bad as a month in the cooler, but not much better either.

Stealth plays a central role in this game.



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F/A-18: Operation Iraqi Freedom

Protecting the skies and exploiting the war BY DENNY ATKIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ADAM
DEVELOPER: GRAPHIC
SIMULATIONS:
GENRE: FLIGHT SIMULATION
ESRB RATING: ESRB: MATURE
RESOLUTION:
PRICE: \$29.95
RECOMMENDED PERFORM BY:
MIN: 1,200MHz HARD DRIVE
SPACE: 20GB/10GB
RECOMMENDED PERFORM BY:
SPACE: 40GB/10GB
OS: WINDOWS
LAN: INTERNET
CD/DVD: PLAYERS

Fly: Operation Iraqi Freedom opens with President George W. Bush's announcement that operations to "dismantle Iraq" have begun. How do you quickly create a flight sim based on a conflict in which the shooting hasn't stopped? It helps if you've had the game engine lying around since late 1997.

QF isn't really a new game. Rather, it's a slightly updated version of the nearly 6-year-old F/A-18 Hornet: Korea, with new missions, Iraq terrain, and an upgrade to OpenGL 3D from the original's 3Dfx Glide support. The core game remains the same: a campaign composed of pre-scripted single missions, simple radar and weapon systems, and the same allied and enemy aircraft.

Though you'll encounter target names familiar from recent CNN reports, the missions are fictional. This is necessary for gameplay purposes and is admittedly in better taste also, given the freshness of the event. If you want to fly historical missions, you can create your own with the included editor.

The new Iraq terrain is the biggest enhancement over Hornet: Korea. Based on satellite data, it looks superb from high altitudes. At low levels, though, it's a muddy mess. Cities are flat textures with no buildings—down town Baghdad is visible only from above 5,000 feet, so forget about that impromptu attack on Saddam's palace.



The F/A-18's new load textures actually look pretty good, considering the age of the engine.

Other enhancements include detailed textures on the F/A-18, a new 3D cockpit, improved view keys, and user-modifiable missions. Much of QF still screams "1997," though. Aircraft show no visual damage, and A-1 plane textures are extremely basic. The flight model is relatively simple, as is the enemy A.I.

Despite these problems, QF is an entertaining, accessible simulation. Its basic flight model (and simple radar menu) new pilots can pick up the game easily without memorizing the detailed PDF manual or enlisting in Navy flight school. While eye candy doesn't dazzle, you're not likely to be counting polygons when avoiding SAMs and dogfighting

flankers. And the polygon-light engine runs smoothly even on older systems.

In the end, Hornet: Korea players will find QF to be more of the same in a new setting. If you want to relive an old favorite, this is a decent sim that brings nothing new (or even recent) to the party. Hardcore flight sim players will want to take a pass, as they'll find the game mostly useful as something new to complain about in online forums.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Nothing really new here, but worth a look if you need a new sim for a slow system.

Combat Command 2: Danger Forward

I love a man in a hex-based uniform BY BI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: BARRI GAMES
GENRE: RTS
ESRB RATING:
PRICE: \$29.95
RECOMMENDED PERFORM BY:
MIN: 256MB RAM, 2GB+ HARD DRIVE
SPACE: 10GB/10GB
RECOMMENDED PERFORM BY:
PERFORM BY: 2GB, 4GB+ RAM
RECOMMENDED PERFORM BY:
INTERNET: NONE
CD/DVD: PLAYERS

Combat Command 2 came out a few months too late for its own good. Even though it has AA that can occasionally find its ass with both hands in small battles, a good construction kit, and a wealth of scenarios, its polish and gameplay pales against recent giants like *Korsun Pocket* and *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin*.

CC2's company-level phrase-based combat engine is awkward but serviceable. The two-hour turns are divided into phases for reinforcements, movement, defensive fire, and assaults. While this works OK, the phases break up the game's rhythm, making it difficult for newbies to get into. The byzantine interface further compounds the problem by hiding info with small fonts, unmanageable windows, and

confusing combat-resolution tables. It requires too many clicks to control large formations in combat, and the simple inclusion of an Undo button would have been greatly appreciated.

Still, CC2 offers a lot to war gamers who can look past its faults. The scenario editor proves quite flexible, although it's limited to Europe's Western Front. The gameplay is original since it focuses on command and control factors that are rarely the prime concern of other games. The battles are at manageable scales and are playable in hours rather than the weeks it takes for John Tiller's massstratsies. The manual is also well done, explaining many of the system's intricacies that are not easily evident onscreen.

If you can look past the warts, you'll find a lot to sink your teeth into. How-



The scenario creator allows users to make more obscure battles—if you're into that. Even with competitors like *Korsun Pocket* out there, only the most dedicated gringos should consider this title.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great scenario editor can't lift this average grand-tactical war game above *Korsun Pocket*.

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Ghost Master

Abbott & Costello meet The Sims BY CHARLES ARDAI

GAME STATE

DESIGN: VIVENDI

DEVELOPER: VIVENDI

PLATFORMS: PC

INTERACTIVE

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DESIGNER: POSITION IN

900, 10000, 10000, 10000

FILE HARD DRIVE SPACE

10000, 10000

DESIGNER: POSITION IN

900, 10000, 10000, 10000

FILE HARD DRIVE SPACE

10000, 10000

DESIGNER: POSITION IN

900, 10000, 10000, 10000

If you've ever watched Psycho and felt more empathy for Anthony Perkins than for Janet Leigh, you're probably the sort of person who will enjoy Ghost Master. No, you don't get to stab anyone in the shower, but as the unseen master of an army of chain rattlers, you do get to scare the bejesus out of a bevy of towel-clad coeds in the hope of driving them, screaming, into the streets. And that's just for starters.

Like Peter Molyneux's *Dungeon Keeper*, which puts you in control of all the monsters infesting a dungeon, *Ghost Master* lets you choose from a wide range of creatures, each with distinct powers and limitations, and then place them in strategic locations where innocent souls are bound to stumble across them. You can tether a gremlin to a TV set and instruct him to make it go on the fritz, you can plant a poltergeist in a cluttered room and have him hurl objects through the air, or you can take a hulking, hook-handed horror out of Clive Barker's nightmares and make him split his own head in two for the entertainment of the groundlings.

Each time one of your beasties scares scores one of the game's Sim-like mortals, your stock of plasm goes up, permitting you to wield even scarier powers. Clear one of the game's dozen levels, and you earn gold plasm, points you can use to train your foot soldiers in new techniques. On each level, you also come across restless spirits who will join your happy band if you find a way to free them from their shackles, as well as a few other puzzles that give you something to do other than run around going "Boo!"

It's well thought out, inventive, and quite a lot of fun—though it would be more fun if it were just a little easier to play. Keeping track of a half-dozen ghosts and perhaps a dozen mortals in



You do get to scare the bejesus out of a bevy of towel-clad coeds.



All 15 mortals have been scared off, thanks to Wendel and his pals.



Depth is good, but this is too much to keep track of.

every room of a four-story building can be a chore. The controls allow you to pan, tilt, rotate, and zoom the view, but for all that, I constantly found myself readjusting things to get a better angle. Generate too few scares per minute, and your plasm level drops, causing an annoying alarm to sound and a vicious cycle to begin: less plasm, fewer scares; fewer scares, less plasm.

Then there's the problem of the visuals. They're fantastic. You can get a cinematic close-up view of any character at any time. You can even peep at the coeds on the toilet to satisfy your inner Norman Bates. But you really can't do

that and play the game at the same time—while you're enjoying the great visuals, you're not issuing orders, harvesting plasm, and so on.

Ghost Master is, unfortunately, better in concept than in execution and more fun to watch than to play. But for anyone with a perverse streak and a taste for well-curled blood, it still makes for a good way to pass a dark and stormy night.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This game is clever, stylish, and fun to watch, but it's a little too hard to control.

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THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY



Legions of diplomats and warriors stay out in the hands-off hands of the king of the desert.

Chariots of War

As wide as the ocean, as shallow as a urinal BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

GAME STATS

POSITIVE STRATEGY

NEGATIVE WORK

ENTERTAINMENT

EFFICIENT SUPERHERO

SOFTWARE

GAME STRATEGY

CRASHING TEEN BLOOD

VOLENCE TOO SHARP

DISORDERLY PENTAGON 300

GAME PLAN: ROBERT KARD

DAVE SPACE ECONOMY

DISORDERLY NAME

VOLENCE MORE

During ancient civilization's violent dawn, the Middle East was the world's center of commerce, technology, and of course, warfare. Hundreds of factions continuously struggled to gain precious resources and to expand, and as civilizations grew, each vied for dominance over its neighbors. In order to capture this tumultuous story, the maker of the turn-based strategy game Legion has coughed up *Chariots of War*. The Legion engine has been improved a little, resulting in a handful of minor game upgrades, and the game's historical breadth and scope are noteworthy. These features, however, are the only notable aspects of the game.

Turn-based combat is the game's primary focus, and resource collection, building construction, and tech-tree management are the vital keys for empire expansion. The game offers two single-player campaigns and four smaller region-specific games. Except in the region-specific maps, players may choose among 10 ethnic groups to play, with a total of 64 factions on the map.

This kind of breadth in a game usually gets both historians and strategy gamers excited, but such tactonnet unit and burling lacks distinction from race to race, which gives the game a generic

feel. Developer Slitherine provides only a handful of unique unit types, like the Sea People's warband and midrange camels. Throw in bland, outdated graphics and poor sound and you've got flat, uninspiring gameplay.

Trade and diplomacy features are superficial at best. For example, expanding empires are penalized for conquering neighbors, which, by the way, is the whole point of this game. Warring factions must buy goods at escalated market values, while peaceful factions receive discounts on the open market. For a game in which military conquest is the only way to expand, this feature misses the point. Diplomats are also ineffectual, unable to negotiate peace treaties or alliances—why even bother?

Chariots of War's focus on warfare is severely hampered by a turn-based system divided into two phases: predeployment and combat. Predeployment involves choosing from a simplified assortment of formations and tactics



Diplomats are little more than glorified scouts, capable of only assessing basic information about your enemy and incapable of doing anything like, oh, say, diplomacy.

and then utilizing orders like advance, hold fire, and charge. Surprisingly, there's no battlefield commanding once combat begins. You're forced to watch your army carry out overly simplified movements until the battle is over. Victory is based solely on your predeployment choices, rather than your leadership during the fray.

Unless you're a die-hard fan of Legion, Chariots of War's lack of any depth is certain to leave you disappointed. These chariots are doomed to run in endless frustrating circles.

The game's historical breadth and scope are about all that's noteworthy.

VERDICT ★★★★★

As dry and leveling as the Arabian Desert.

If you bought all these games, it would cost about **\$395.**

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REVIEWINDEX

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

GAME	ISSUE	REDACT	SCORE
Beasts: Frenzied Riding	8/03	Fun FPS dressed up as a racing game's clothes	★★★★☆
Big Mutha Truckers	9/03	This big-city game is better than it has any right to be	★★★★☆
Championship Manager 4	7/03	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★☆
CSI	8/03	Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes	★★★★☆
Gay of Defeat	8/03	A great squad-based game marred only by age	★★★★☆
Disciples II: Guardians of the Light/Servants of the Dark	10/03	More cartoonish goodness (and evil) at a bargain price	★★★★☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon	9/03	This solid expansion effectively increases the landmass of Morrowind to exceed that of Earth	★★★★☆
Empire of Magic	8/03	This odd RPG both entertains and annoys	★★★★☆
Endless Ages	10/03	Something new in the massively multiplayer field that's worth a look	★★★★☆
Enter the Matrix	8/03	Play it for the movie, don't play it for the play	★★★★☆
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	9/03	We'd hate to see the first genesis of this MMO space game	★★★★☆
F1 Challenge '99-DZ	9/03	A must-buy for Formula 1 racing fans	★★★★☆
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	8/03	CGW's 2002 Game of the Year gets same '80s-style clothes in this sequel	★★★★☆
Heroses of Might & Magic 4: Winds of War	8/03	The degeneration continues	★★★☆☆
The Hulk	8/03	Best comic-book game—not named <i>Freedom Force</i> —you can buy	★★★★☆
Kerbal Pocket	9/03	It sounds like a microwaveable snack, but it's the best beer-based wargame ever	★★★★☆
Legacy Online	10/03	A tedious exercise at best	★★★☆☆
Medieval: Total War—Viking Invasion	8/03	This expansion is a must for Total War fans	★★★★☆
Metall Gear Solid 2: Subsistence	8/03	Criminally sloppy part of a great console game	★★★★☆
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004	10/03	The most fun you can have in a plane without guns	★★★★☆
Midnight Club II	10/03	What it lacks in multiplayer, it more than makes up for in fun	★★★★☆
Newsnight Nights: The Shadows of Underworld	9/03	A much better single-player game than the original game	★★★★☆
The Omega Stone: Ridda of the Sphinx II	8/03	Recent archaeological adventure game	★★★★☆
PlanetSide	9/03	PlanetSide's first persistent world MMO shooter is surprisingly good	★★★★☆
Pill of Royce	8/03	After a slow start, a quality pirate game emerges	★★★★☆
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	10/03	Decent console part with funky camera control	★★★★☆
Red Faction II	9/03	Edged out only by <i>Homefront</i> as worst console part so far this year	★★★☆☆
Rise of Nations	8/03	The latest, greatest historical RTS	★★★★☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Mucky Moments	8/03	Delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on for an already dated game	★★★★☆
Shadowbane	7/03	A big focus on PvP and city building sets this MMO/RPG apart	★★★★☆
The Sims: Superstar	8/03	Another solid addition to the planet's best-selling game	★★★★☆
Star Trek: Elite Force II	9/03	Like playing one of the best compelling TV episodes	★★★★☆
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided	10/03	Might get a whole lot better	★★★☆☆
Team Rascal: The Angel of Darkness	10/03	Not as bad as the movie-in hell, yet it is	★★★☆☆
Tron 2.0	10/03	Best movie-licensed game so far this year	★★★★☆
Tropics 2: Pirate Cove	7/03	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★★☆☆
Uplink: Hacker Elite	8/03	Intriguing premise and quality execution make this a winner	★★★★☆
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	9/03	Some nice new stuff, but you pay in micromanagement	★★★★☆
World War II: Frontline Command	10/03	Bad interface, boring missions, and no realism, but the documentary footage is OK	★★★☆☆
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	9/03	Save your money and buy the forthcoming X-Men 2 DVD instead	★★★☆☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

★★★★☆

This critically acclaimed follow-up to *Grand Theft Auto III* puts you in control of tough-as-nails gangster Tommy Vercetti and his blossoming criminal empire. An excellent part of the PS2 version, *Vice City* features ultra-sharp visuals, as well as several helpings of rockin' '80s music. There's also quite a compelling story to augment all the crackling, foot-copping, bitch-slapping fun!



The Hulk

★★★★☆

First the movie, now the game. Funny how that works, isn't it? Unlike most movie-licensed games, *The Hulk* is actually pretty good. Rest assured, the green guy has got plenty of ways to smash, crush, and pulverize his unfortunates enemies into little red stains. Even if the Bruce Banner levels are a bit lame, everything else adds up to a satisfying gaming experience.



Tron 2.0

★★★★☆

Twenty years has provided plenty of time for an upgrade, and this TRON sequel delivers. *Tron 2.0* boasts equal amounts of action and a good assortment of levels and items. Shooter fans should find a lot to like about this one—as long as you don't attempt jumping puzzles the way Derren does.

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Tech

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

Who Says Bigger Is Better?

Shuttle's small form-factor PCs are taking the industry by storm **By Lloyd Case**



The Shuttle is an elegant, relatively quiet system that's perfectly suited for LAN parties.



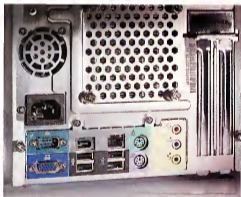
TECH STATS

MINI-TOWER SHUTTLE
 P.O. BOX 142000, IRVING, TEXAS
 CASE, POWER SUPPLY

Shuttle PC has made quite a name for itself with its line of sleek, quasi-cubical small PCs dubbed XPCs. They've spawned a host of imitators, including Falcon Northwest's FrogBox, which we reviewed in last month's issue. But Shuttle still is the leader, and for good reason, its elegant heat-pipe solution for CPU cooling maximizes cooling efficiency while minimizing fan noise, for example.

We recently got our hands on a Shuttle SM5G, a classic Shuttle aluminum cube that uses Nvidia's Nforce2 Ultra-400 chipset. This is Shuttle's first XPC without integrated graphics, and it fully supports DDR 400 memory. As with all XPCs, assembling the final product is an exercise in patience and careful handling, due to the cramped quarters inside the case. Each XPC comes with a plethora of I/O options, including multiple USB 2.0 ports (front and back), multiple FireWire ports, and the usual keyboard and audio connectors. The SM5G packs an audio wallet, too, since it uses Nvidia's MCP-T, complete with real-time, DSP-accelerated Dolby Digital encoding.

Although the internal quarters are tight, access is easy: since the whole affair is fastened with thumbscrews. Even the highly polished heat-pipe assembly screws down into the motherboard with spring-loaded screws, so you won't have to fear gouging the motherboard with an errant screwdriver



when assembling the heat sink.

If there's an Achilles' heel, though, it's the machine's 200-watt power supply. While that amount is perfectly adequate for most processor/video-card combinations, we did encounter instability while using a Radeon 9800 Pro and an Athlon XP 3200+. When we built a less ambitious system using an Athlon XP 2500+, the whole affair ran smooth as silk. The SM5G also proves to be a bit finicky about some earlier

Kingston HyperX memory we have, but later versions ran fine.

In the end, the Shuttle XPC is an elegant, relatively quiet system that's perfectly suited for those LAN parties. Just be careful about how you load it up.

VERDICT ★★★★★
 It's compact, lightweight, and fairly silent, if a bit limited by the power supply.



Philips Acoustic Fusion 610

Philips' PC speakers still have quite a bit of work to do **BY DAVE SALVATOR**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER PHILIPS
MSRP \$200

Philips has been a key contributor in propelling technology forward in consumer-electronics products. Its PC audio hardware, however, has had a rather spotty track record. Sure, the Acoustic Edge soundbar is a solid offering, but Philips' PC speakers have left us unimpressed in the past; in particular, its MMS-306s are a sonic train wreck. The main culprit: Philips' NXT flat-panel technology.

Rather than walk away from its flat-panel technology, Philips has improved it, and a second-generation implementation (NXT's SurfaceSound flat-panel technology) is featured in the AF610s. While the NXT panels in this speaker set are a marked improvement upon those in older Philips speakers, these improvements may not be enough to turn Philips' fortunes in the PC speaker market.

The AF610s do pretty well at reasonable volume levels, but the NXT-based satellites lack the necessary headroom to maintain clear output at higher volumes. There is a noticeable hole in the midrange frequencies, and the result is an overall hollow sound that lacks body. More minute sonic details, such as guitar picking and strumming and the sounds of some percussion instruments, are fine. Low-end response is generally solid, and here, the AF610s turned in their strongest performance. On more percussive material, like a Road

Hot Chili Peppers album, the unit's subwoofer does a good job of reproducing kick drums and bass lines, and the speakers never seem to be lacking bass response.

During DVD movie playback, dialogue sounds good in the center channel, and the NXT panels' clarity is fine at both low- and high-volume levels, since this material generally doesn't suffer from the dynamic range compression we heard while playing explosive and percussive tracks. Furthermore, low-end response is generally very solid, and we got good rumble from our Twister test scene. That said, film soundtracks exhibit many of the same qualities we heard in our music-listening tests and sounded good until we began pushing the volume levels.

Despite the considerable progress made in improving the NXT-panel performance, we cannot recommend these speakers. There are just too many other good 5.1 speakers out there for the same or less money. Creative's \$80 Inspire 5200s and Monsoon's \$150 MH-505s both represent better values, and the audio quality of Monsoon's satellite speakers is clearly superior to that of the Acoustic Fusion 610s.

VERDICT ★★½

A decent set of speakers, but Philips' NXT panel technology still isn't ready for prime time.



**WIL
POWER**

By William O'Real

Laptops with upgradeable graphics?!

I remember years ago when laptop manufacturers began shipping machines equipped with ATI's RAGE Rage Mobility graphics chip. As a hardcore mobile guy, I was ecstatic—I was finally able to play *Quake II* on a laptop, albeit at 640x480 and achieving gothicly low framerates in the high teens and low twenties.

Years later, when Nvidia released the GeForce2 Go and ATI released the Mobility Radeon, true laptop gaming was born. Yes, the Haddon, PITA, and Linkz series could run on laptops equipped with lesser chips, but we wanted to play *Quake III*, *Half-Life*, and *Unreal Tournament*. However, something was still missing: upgradeability, the eternal problem of PC gaming. Everyone knows today's flagship desktop graphics card will be run-of-the-mill in six months, and we—reluctantly—accept that. But dropping \$3,000 on a gaming laptop only to know that six months down the road you'll be dying for more graphics power is not only a better pill to swallow, but a big one, too. Which brings us to the next inevitability: laptops with upgradeable graphics capabilities.

Upgradeability is a great thing for laptop users. But there are bound to be some bumps along the way as manufacturers figure out how best to implement it. As it stands, in order to replace the graphics chip in the Voodoo Envy profiled in Read He, you have to return the unit to Voodoo and pay up serious coin. The graphics die in the Alienware Aero-510 is—per Alienware—"user replaceable," but the Voodoo option, it ain't cheap.

Laptops, unlike desktops, are pretty complicated, and serious steps must be taken in order to make all that stuff work in that hot little box. What happens when ATI or Nvidia comes out with a powerful chip that, while it may fit into your machine, needs more power? Will you also need to replace the power supply? Only time will tell.

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PCFX's Leviathan III is one fast newbie **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS

MINI-ITX PCFX
\$32,549



BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	PCFX LEVIATHAN III
Price	\$3,469
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 (300MHz FSB)
Motherboard	ABIT-IB7 i865PE (1200MHz FSB)
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX dual-channel DDR-400 PC3200
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda 7200.6FM drives in a 30GBB RAID-0 configuration
Graphics processor	256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra
Soundcard	Creative Labs Audigy 2 & 1
Primary drive	Lite-On 16x DVD-RM drive
Secondary drive	Lite-On 52x CD-RW drive
Monitor	Brack Viewonic EV61-58
Speakers	Creative MusePortis G1 TX-900W
Keyboard	Logitech Clear Track keyboard
Mouse	Logitech M300 cordless mouse
Miscellaneous	Eight USB 2.0 ports, two DM FireWire ports
Speed	3
Price	3.5
Stability	3.5
Support	3.5
Upgradeability	5
SCORE	4.1

Just when you think it's safe to make a computer purchase, some new company arrives on the scene and complicates things. "Damn," you mutter. "It took me months to get comfortable with outfits such as AIB, iVclassPC, and iBuypower. Now I have to figure out if PCFX knows what it's doing." OK, so maybe you didn't actually have that conversation with yourself; maybe it's just me.

The Leviathan III is a seriously stacked machine housing a top-notch list of parts: a 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB Kingston HyperX dual-channel DDR, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra, all built around an ABIT-IB7 i865PE motherboard. It is one thing simply to put the parts together—but the magic, so to speak, can be found in how well the parts work together. In the case of the Leviathan III, they work really well. Rocking with dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda hard drives in a 240GB RAID-0 configuration, the Leviathan III outperformed the iBuypower Titanium XP we tested in October. Of course, the PCFX machine costs nearly \$15,000 more than the similarly configured iBuypower rig.

I ran the standard suite of tests on the Leviathan III, including 3DMark2003 and

3D GameGauge 3.0, at 1280x960 with 4x anisotiling and 8x antialiasing filtering turned on, and the numbers are impressive: Its 3DMark2003 score of 3115 is awesome, as is its 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 80 frames per second. At those settings, the Leviathan III achieved speeds up to 100fps in Dungeon Siege and 110fps in Serious Sam. TSE.

A major issue that often befalls top-of-the-line machines is heat, and PCFX uses a pretty innovative case design to solve that problem: An air duct (or vent) above the CPU fan pulls hot air directly from the CPU fan and blows it out the side panel. This keeps the temperature inside the case down, since it isn't trapping that hot air from the CPU. Lower temperatures typically mean a more stable machine, though Serious Sam: TSE and 3DMark2003 hesitated a few frames during testing. The tests, nonetheless, completed successfully without any intervention on my part.

The Leviathan III is a bit pricey for a rig from a small company, but it's plenty fast and the components are awesome. All in all, it's a good machine.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This machine is a screamer, but at \$3,469, it's a tad pricey.

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AMD Jumps the 64-bit Gun

Is the Athlon 64 FX-51 ahead of its time? BY WILLIAM O'NEAL

TECH STATS

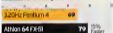
MEMORY AND
HD TEST

AMD is in a tough position. On one hand, it's in a no-holds-barred battle to the death with Intel for the lucrative title of Fastest Desktop Processor. On the other, it's trying to downplay the significance of megahertz (or clock speed) altogether. "Debunking the megahertz myth" is how AMD refers to it. And it's this apparent schizophrenia that serves as the backdrop to what may prove to be the Sunnyvale, California-based company's biggest release yet: the Athlon 64 processor.

Depending on whom you talk to, AMD is either sending out mixed messages or simply trying to point out the multiple

selling points of the Athlon 64 FX-51 processor. It's a bona fide 64-bit processor, but AMD is quick to point out it also displays excellent

3D GameGauge 3.0



performance in the 32-bit productivity applications and games. You see, AMD needs a leg up on Intel, and being first to market with a 64-bit processor that's able to take full advantage of the next Windows OS (which is codenamed Longhorn) when it comes out could be a big deal.

While that's all well and good, it's not clear whether Longhorn will ship in the second half of 2004 or sometime in 2005. And when pressed for a more specific release window, Microsoft didn't have much to say. In other words, the Athlon 64's 64-bit designation may be moot for some time. Which is why AMD is quick to point out that the 64 FX-51 displays awesome 32-bit performance as well—a claim our tests supported.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	ATHLON 64 FX-51	3.2GHz PENTIUM 4
3DMark2003 Pro	1,320	2,910
3DMark2001 SE Pro	1,074	1,901
3D GameGauge 3.0	79	69
Quake III: Arena (1280x1024)	236	217
Cowatch 4 (1280x1024)	16	15
Series Sam: TSE	11	10
Geogon Slope	14	11
It-2 StormWk	59	59
MASCAT 2002	40	39
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	110	115
UT2003 Rebirth	80	67

DISCLAIMER: ALL TESTS ARE RUN AT 1280x1024 WITH 64 GB AND 64 AT 1280x1024



AMD is in a battle to the death for the title of Fastest Desktop Processor.

We tested an AMD Athlon 64 FX-51 reference system against our 3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 Power Rig. The Athlon system featured the 64 FX-51 processor, ASUS 5K8N nForce3 motherboard, 1GB PC3200 registered memory, and a 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. The Power Rig has an Intel D875PBZ motherboard, 1GB PC3500 memory, and a 256MB GeForce FX 5000 Ultra.

The Athlon machine bested the Pentium in nearly every test, slowing down only to tie it in IL-2: Sturmovik and Comanche 4. In other words, it seems that the Athlon 64 FX-51 is the fastest CPU for gaming. However, where AMD has always been the leader in low costs and upgradeability, there definitely remain the questions of how much the CPU will cost and how much longer AMD plans to support the 940-pin socket that the Athlon 64 FX-51 uses, as well as the 754-pin socket that its little brother, the Athlon 64 (non-FX), will use.

So, do you run out now and plunk down the plastic so you can have the fastest processor even though there's no assurance that your motherboard will be usable when the next Athlon 64 FX is released? If Microsoft's new OS, Longhorn (a 64-bit OS), were coming out tomorrow, then the decision would be a no-brainer. However, if we're just talking about 30 more frames per second in 32-bit games, then the cost and risk are more significant.

If anything, with the Athlon 64 FX-51, it's good to see the underdog finally go the distance for a round. Not only does this processor outperform the 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor in many tests, benchmarks, and games, but it also shows, running at a scant 2.2GHz, that there's more to power than megahertz, something that Apple's been telling us for years. But it's definitely early, and the jury, as far as we're concerned, is still out.

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Loyd's Cracked Case

Shady pixels By Loyd Case

Graphics technology has certainly come a long way from gaming's infancy. And even in comparison with the first true 3D games like *Quake* and *Tomb Raider*, graphics have made spectacular leaps, especially in the last few years. However, next-generation 3D shooters like *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2* still won't have the same level of detail as 3D movies like *Shrek* do.

Why not? In 3D-rendered movies like *Shrek*, almost all of the 3D is done with the use of sophisticated programs called shaders. Post shaders can operate on either individual pixels or groups of pixels, while vertex-shader programs operate on the underlying geometry.

Some of these shader programs may be thousands of lines long and take minutes or hours to render on high-performance workstations or servers.

The reason you don't see shading technology of this level of sophistication in games is that the hardware isn't quite capable of handling it yet. A GeForce FX 5900 Ultra can, through some clever programming, run shader code that is hundreds and hundreds of lines long, but there's no way that it can run that code at 60 frames per second. The good old general-purpose CPU will have to be faster, too, since 3D game elements like collision detection still live in the CPU's domain.

The modern desktop graphics



In 3D-rendered movies, like *Shrek*, the 3D is done with sophisticated programs called shaders.

processor, starting with the GeForce3 line, is programmable. While earlier GPUs certainly had some limited ability to change content (e.g., pixels or polygons), it was the GeForce3 that really brought the idea of programmable graphics hardware to the personal gaming desktop.

Unfortunately, the majority of today's games don't exactly take the fullest advantage of shader technology. Part of the issue is simply that the programmers haven't really caught up yet. The design cycle of games is roughly 18 to 24 months, so it's only recently that we've begun to see more common use of shaders. Most of these shaders are used for effects, like the translucent, shiny water you see in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*. But most games—even games that make some use of shader technology—still use older techniques, such as multipass texture mapping, fixed-function transform, and lighting pipelines.

If we envision a future in which shaders are arbitrarily long and still enable frame rates of 60FPS, interesting new ways of building games can occur. For example, instead of texture maps—those enormous graphics files that can eat up hundreds of megabytes of disc space—you can use synthetic programs

to generate textures. A synthetically generated texture is called a procedural texture. If a game could use nothing but procedural textures, then it would need a lot less hard-drive space, since all that texture data would be calculated on the fly. Also, you'd never see huge pixels when zooming in very close to the virtual object, since the detail of the texture is one element of the calculation. So instead of MIP maps or other level-of-detail tricks, the shader would be able to calculate the right detail on the fly.

As you might imagine, this sort of thing is extremely computer intensive, and even the fastest graphics card/CPU combination can't come close to doing it in real time. However, some limited procedural texture is done in some games to create certain effects like realistic flame or smoke. Still, for the most part, today's games are stuck using large texture maps.

So the graphics and CPU race is by no means over. Shaders are still in their infancy, at least when it comes to real-time applications on your PC. Expect to see future generations of graphics cards that can generate procedural textures on the fly and create virtual environments with extraordinarily detailed environments. But don't expect to see it for at least a few more years.



Morrowind's beautiful water effects were created in part with pixel shaders.

Tech Medics

Our tech guy likes girls By William O'Neal

Where, oh where do all the speakers go?

I'm considering upgrading to a 5.1 speaker set, but where do I put all the speakers? Most desks aren't designed to support surround sound. Have you seen any creative solutions or products on the market to address this issue?

Matt

Creative makes speaker stands that allow you to place speakers behind you. They're called the MT-1100s, and they cost around \$50 for two. You could also mount the speakers on the walls around you.

Taking sides in the GHz war

I was wondering how the AMD XP series of processors stack up in comparison with Intel's 3GHz 800MHz FSB processors. Are there any processors from the XP series that can keep up with the new Intels? More important, what will I need in order to play Half-Life 2?

Ryan

AMD's Athlon XP 3200+ (which runs at 2.2GHz) is pretty fast, but it's not as fast as Intel's 3.2GHz Pentium 4. Also, while the Athlon supports only a 400MHz frontside bus (FSB), the Pentium supports an 800MHz FSB. These CPU differences are less important if your machine has 1GB of memory, as well as a 128MB or 256MB graphics card like ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. Machines with either of these CPUs will be able to run Half-Life 2 if you also have a capable DirectX 9 graphics card.

You know, Vederman is from Canada, too...eh?

In your May 2003 issue, you said one could find a Radeon 9700 Pro for about \$220 at some sites. Would you please tell me which sites these are, as I'm sorta short on funding for my upgrade? (In Canada, everyone's trying to rip you off) Oh, and a question: RAID is cheaper than faster drives, so why does anyone buy

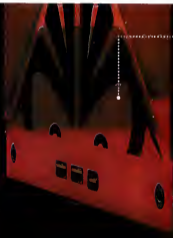


15,000rpm drives or 10,000s when one can RAID two 7200s and get more speed?

Ferrell

That Radeon price was a typo. My bad. But Pricegrabber.com is a good place to get good prices. The thing about RAID is that it's risky. If you have two drives in a RAID-0 config and one of the drives dies, then all of your data is fooked. Two drives double the likelihood of losing your data if something bad happens.

ILLUSTRATION BY MARISSA CHAMBERLAIN



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Killer Rigs

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

A lot of interesting things are happening right now in hardware, most notably the recent release of AMD's Athlon 64 FX-51 processor. I recently received a reference machine from AMD, and while I'm truly impressed with its 32-bit performance, I decided to keep my Power Rig running a 3.2GHz Pentium 4. Even though my tests showed that the Athlon 64 FX-51 averages about 10 more frames per second than the 3.2GHz Pentium, I'm not sure those 10 extra frames are enough to warrant a motherboard and memory change. That said, my Power Rig is the same as last month's.

In the Lean Machine, however, I did make some changes. I upgraded the processor to an 2.1GHz AMD Athlon XP 3000+, and I'm sticking with the 128MB GeForce FX 5600 Ultra. I'm super-pleased with my Lean Machine, and it's still a great gaming rig for any titles that are out now. I'm also sure that it will be able to handle titles like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III* once they're released.

I tested my Lean Machine with the same settings I used for the Power Rig (280x160 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on). Because of the limitations of the graphics card, I'd recommend that you crank down some of those settings during actual gameplay.



My Lean Machine should be able to handle titles like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III* once they're released.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	\$250
Case	Antec FluxRiser 100BMD	\$150
Power supply	Kulic True420W power supply	\$120
Processor	3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 (620MHz FSB)	\$750
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ (Cedarwood RICHM) P3B	\$175
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX dual channel DDR 400 PC3200	\$300
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda 7200RPM serial ATA drives in a 2x30GB RAID-1 config	\$250
Graphics processor	256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	\$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs Audigy 2 5.1 Platinum EX	\$299
DVD-ROM drive	Plextor FlexCombo DVD/CD-RW drive	\$200
Monitor	23-inch NEC MultiSync P2301E	\$680
Keyboard and mouse	Microsoft Comfort Desktop Optical	\$85
Speakers	Creative Megaporks 61 TEK 40W	\$400
TOTAL		\$3,960

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Case	Antec Leaky	\$100
Power supply	Onboard Antec 350W power supply	N/A
Processor	2.1GHz AMD Athlon XP 3000+	\$275
Motherboard	ASUS K7N01 Deluxe (nForce2 chipset)	\$125
Memory	512MB Corsair PC3200 DDR	\$125
Hard drive	40GB IBM Deskstar 7200RPM hard drive	\$75
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra	\$200
Soundcard	Onboard 6-channel audio	N/A
DVD-ROM drive	Sony DV-DVD-ROM drive	\$40
Monitor	19-inch BenQ FP900	\$225
Keyboard and mouse	Microsoft Comfort Desktop Optical	\$85
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 5200 2.1	\$70
TOTAL		\$1,420

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Jordan

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Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less Edited by Dawn Jongsomwut

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

It's time to take the edge back to the Warriors in the *Proton Storms*.

Pick the Orcs as your race. First, upgrade your great skill to "stronghold." Next, train four or five spirit walkers (make sure they are fully upgraded) and four taurens. With the spirit walker's ability, Ancestral Spirit, one can resurrect a dead tauren's tauren. You therefore have an everlasting tauren army that will decimate enemy land units. Make sure to leave the spirit walkers in ethereal form so they can't die.

- Derek Rickard 9/05

Thanks, Derek! You've won a copy of *Tron 2.0*. If you'd like a free copy of *Tron 2.0*, send your dirtiest trick for a recent multiplayer game to contest@ziffdavis.com.



STAR WARS GALAXIES

From Prima's Official Strategy Guide



City life

Cities in *Star Wars Galaxies* share many features. The amenities that a city offers are vital to your health, advancement, and financial success.

Some are controlled by and dependent on the game programming, so you could use them even if you were the only player in the galaxy. Mission terminals, for instance, can be used by a solo player without input from another real-life player. Other services are usable only with the cooperation of other human players. The auction system of the bazaar terminals depends on players putting up materials and goods for sale and other players who put up credits to buy those items.

Not all settlements and towns have every feature (there's no shuttle port in Tatooine's Wayfar, for example), so check city maps when entering a metropolis to see what is offered and where it is located.

GETTING AROUND



Most features can be found in a city either on your in-game map or with the *Find* command. Press **Ctrl+M** to get an overlay map of the city you're in. Major buildings are labeled; use **Ctrl+Mousewheel** to zoom in on the overlay map. The *Find* command is also useful. To find a building in a city, type *Find [NAME OF BUILDING]* in your chat line and press **enter**. A waypoint is placed at the nearest location. You also can use the *Find* command to find **trainers**.



Wandering into the wild unprepared could get you killed by this beast.

Training

Professions in *Star Wars Galaxies* are like jobs. You have a set of skills that you perform, and as you use those skills, you gain experience. Gain enough experience and you can boost your skills, acquire bonuses to existing skills and commands, and get new commands.

To advance your skills, no matter what profession you choose, you need to have credits and the correct number of the right type of experience points. If you have both of those, then you're ready to find someone wiser and more experienced than you are to train you in the skills you want to acquire.

One option is for your character to find an NPC (nonplayer character) trainer—a computer-controlled character whose sole purpose is to teach players new skills. NPCs are profession specific and can be found in and around cities and towns. Many can be found wandering outside, usually around other trainers. You can also locate them in the different guild houses that are in the larger cities. The Combat Guild, for example, usually houses brawlers and marksmen.

The other way to acquire skills is to hook up with a more experienced player. Someone who already has the skill you want to learn can train you. The advantage to this is you can probably get the training for a much cheaper price than what the NPC trainers charge. The disadvantage is that it may be difficult to find a player with the specific skill you want to learn.

If you reach the exalted profession of bounty hunter, you can take on the lucrative missions offered by the bounty-hunter mission terminals. The big difference between these and the regular missions is that you don't get a convenient waypoint. You'll need to buy a droid to track down your target, and once it finds the mark, it will send you a waypoint. However, there's always the possibility that the target moves before you get there.

NPCs

NPCs populate many of the areas in *Star Wars Galaxies*. These characters, which are controlled by the game program, wander around to give the cities a lived-in feel and to provide some



This brawler trainer can't teach artisans. But if you want to pound something, he's your guy.

services for players. We've already talked about NPC trainers, but you should be aware of other NPCs.

Several individuals parade around the metropolises. Some are in a hurry, others are strolling or patrolling the neighborhood. These NPCs aren't very interesting. They may say hello or bark an order at you, but on the whole, they just mind their own business and won't hold a conversation with you. Other NPCs don't move from their spot. You always find them waiting or gadding in the same area.

You also may encounter other types of NPCs, like nobles, who stick around. Try using the Radial menu to strike up a conversation with some of them. It may not always work, but now and again, you'll find a character (a noble, perhaps) who needs something done. They give you missions similar to those you'll find at the mission terminals. Other stationary NPCs are recruiters for different factions. Take the time to get to know the inhabitants of the cities you frequent—often, these interesting beings will offer you the chance to make some extra money or develop new connections.

HOW TO HIRE AN NPC TRAINER

1 Approach an NPC trainer and use the radial menu. Choose the **Converse** command and start a conversation.

2 You get three choices: 1) "What skills can I learn right now?" 2) "What skills do you teach?" and 3) "Stop conversing." Choose "What skills can I learn right now?"

3 You will get a list of the skills you can learn from that trainer. Sometimes it might then say, "If you make a mistake, let me choose." "Can we start again?"

4 Click on the skill you want. Provides you have the cash in your bank account, you are trained instantly. Just like that, you've gained a new skill and all the bonuses that come along with it.



When teaching a skill to another player, select Teach from the Radial menu and you'll see this list. It shows which skills your student is ready to learn.



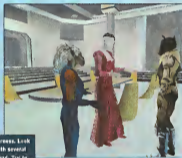
QUICK TIP Since NPCs are found in the wilderness, look for camps and other structures with several nonplayer characters hanging around. Try to begin a conversation with them to see if they need anything done. Sometimes these wisecracks will earn you a badge.

Banking

Credits make the user systems spin, plus it's nice to have a safe place to put things. Banks are your repositories for cash and items that you don't want to lug around on your character's body. When you finish a mission, your reward is deposited directly into your bank account. Then, when you pay for services like cloning, the price is deducted directly from your account.

The banking terminals can be found either in a bank structure (in larger cities) or simply hanging around against a wall (in smaller settlements). Approach one and target it with the radial menu. You can then choose from a menu of services covering withdrawals, deposits, or the safety deposit box feature.

The safety deposit box can hold items that you don't want to keep in your personal inventory, like extra weapons, minerals, or clothing. One thing to remember, however—if you join a bank on one planet, you can't access your safety deposit box on a different planet. You can still deposit and withdraw credits, but



You can improve your skills by hiring one of the NPC trainers inhabiting the cities.

to get to your box, you need to be on the planet where you joined the bank.

Travel

The name of the game is *Star Wars Galaxies*—emphasis on galaxies. That's a lot of ground to cover, and you can't do it all on foot. Luckily, a pretty reliable system of shuttles can take you from city to city and planet to planet.

There are two types of travel centers, the shuttle port and the spaceport. They aren't found in every city. Smaller towns may have only a shuttle port and the smallest settlements won't have either, so you have to reach them by vigorous jogging. The shuttle port is for on-planet travel, while the spaceport is used for travel between planets. Of course, this isn't a free service. You need to spend a bit of credit to hop around the galaxy. Prices vary, but expect to pay 750 credits for a trip to another planet and 200 credits for a city-to-city ticket.

To use the shuttle service, first find a shuttle port or spaceport. Within the spaceports (and on one side of the shuttle port), you will see the travel terminal. Use the Radial menu to access the terminal and you'll see a screen with a map



Hey look, everyone, it's Lando Calrissian!



Yes, another batch of NPCs standing around, waiting for your help.



Miscellaneous terminals offer a chance to earn credits.

shuttle arrives. When your ride shows up, use the radial menu again to board the shuttle. You also can go to your inventory and use the ticket to get on. One loading screen later and you'll be at your destination.

Cloning facilities

Accidents happen and mistakes are made. Chances are your character will be blasted in combat at some point—probably several times.

However, with cloning technology being as good as it is in *Star Wars Galaxies*, death's sting has been pulled. When you die, you can respawn at a cloning facility. You control which facility you spawn at and what equipment your clone has when it spawns. If you have a favorite city, a place you want to go after you die, head to that

of the planet and all its available shuttle locations. Under that map is a button that toggles between the planetary maps (which are for the planet you're on) and the galactic maps (which are for all the planets you can travel to). Under that are two pull-down windows.

The first one is for destination planet. Click on it and choose which planet you'll be traveling to. If you're going to another city on the same planet, choose the name of the planet you're on. Next is the destination city. You can choose from all the available shuttle stops.

You may need to make a layover on your journey. If you're on Corellia and you want to get to Naboo's moon, Rori, you can't get a direct flight. You have to buy a ticket to Naboo, then buy a second ticket to Rori. It's expensive, so plan ahead. If you want to buy a roundtrip ticket, check the Roundtrip box. This makes the ticket more expensive, but not as expensive as two one-way tickets. Once you've made all the right choices, click on the Purchase Ticket button. Wait for a message that indicates you've successfully bought your ticket, then press Exit.

Now you have a shuttle to catch. Find the ticket collector, a silver protocol droid who lets you know when the next shuttle is arriving and takes your ticket when it's time. At the shuttle ports, the ticket collector is to the left of the travel terminal. In the spaceports, you have to walk deeper into the complex, through a long hallway, until you come to the outdoor launchpad. You find the ticket collector there.

Use the Radial menu to get the shuttle status. The droid tells you how long until the next

SPACEPORT ROUTES

Departing From	Possible Destinations
Corellia	Dantooine, Dathomir, Endor, Naboo, Tatooine, Yavin 4
Dantooine	Corellia
Dathomir	Corellia, Naboo
Endor	Naboo, Tatooine
Lok	Corellia, Endor, Lok, Rori, Tatooine
Naboo	Naboo
Rori	Corellia
Tatooine	Corellia, Lok, Naboo
Yavin 4	Corellia





The smaller service port is used for getting from one city to another on the same planet.



This handy-dandy terminal is where you can buy tickets for interplanetary travel.

city's cloning facility and find the cloning terminal. Store clone data at that specific facility, which costs 100 credits.

The second service available at the cloning facility is insurance. It may sound like a racket, but it'll save some headaches as you play. Approach the insurance terminal and target it with your Radial menu. You see two choices, Insure All and Insurance Menu.

Choose Insurance Menu and you'll see a list of your current inventory with numbers next to each item. Those numbers are what it costs, in credits, to insure that particular item. If you choose Insure All, you simply insure everything your character is carrying; the price for that service will be hefty.

We suggest insuring just those items that help you get back to your corpse. Your best weapons and armor are at the top of that list. If you do die, you can run back immediately after being cloned and loot the items that you left behind.

The healing process

There are three forms of injury in Star Wars Galaxies. The first two are represented in your HAM bars. When you're in perfect health, your HAM bars are filled with red, green, and blue. If you're in a fight and take attribute damage, then the color drains out of one or more of your HAM bars, leaving it white. Attribute damage regenerates on its own, so you don't need anyone's help to fix it. How fast it regenerates depends on your constitution, stamina, and willpower attributes.

If you're hit hard, you get wounded. A wound shows one or more of your HAM bars down, leaving it black. This black damage does not regenerate and needs medical attention to be healed. A wound lowers that attribute. If you have a 500 health attribute and take a 50-point health wound, you now have a 450 health attribute—at least until you get it treated.

The third form of damage that you can take is battle fatigue. When you've been in a nasty fight, your character can be traumatized. The horrors of battle or the stress of struggle can rattle the sanest mind. After a few encounters, press Ctrl+C to bring up your character sheet. Near the top, you'll see a

QUICK TIP To cut time on less speed running from one town to the next, use the warstrom ability (default FS key). Your foot speed doubles briefly, so you can cover distance much faster. However, the burst-run ability uses some HAM-bar energy and doesn't recharge for another 10 minutes.

battle-fatigue indicator with yellow numbers inside. That's the amount of trauma your character has suffered. The more battle fatigue you have, the less effective treatment will be for attribute damage and wounds. What can you do about it?

The way that you can treat battle fatigue is by relaxing. Walk into a cantina and you'll see knots of NPCs talking, chairs for sitting, a bar, and a few player characters dancing and playing music. Pick an entertainer and use your Radial menu on him or her; if she's playing music, select Listen. If he's dancing, select Watch. Then relax and enjoy the show.

Check your character sheet periodically to see whether your battle fatigue has dried up. When it hits zero, you're ready for phase two, the hospital. Before you go (and if you have the means), tip the Entertainers who helped you



A healthy HAM bar is filled with color.



Attribute damage takes a toll. Notice the white areas at the right end of the HAM bars.



Wounds pile up. The black area at the right end of these HAM bars represent damage that needs professional care.



Inside the more advanced spaceport, you can catch a ride to another planet.

out. Type /tip [CHARACTER'S FIRST NAME] [AMOUNT] to tip them a few credits. They've done you a service, so show your appreciation. The hospital isn't a pretty place, but it's very necessary. Once you've cleared away any battle fatigue, find the nearest hospital and have a seat. Often, there are many players clamoring for the attention of the player-character medics and doctors.

You could take on novice medic skills, buy your own medpacks from the medicine dispenser, then heal yourself. If not, you'll have to wait in line. However, you can do three things to jump ahead in that line. First, you can buy medpacks for yourself at the bazaar and offer



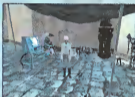
The smaller terminals in a cloning facility allow you to store clone data. The bigger terminals are for insurance purposes.



If you look really closely, you can see Robert Coffey shaking his skinny Twi'lek ass in the background.



Crowds can be thick in a hospital—you have to find a way to stand out.



For a little extra cash, try selling off your garage to this guy.

QUICK TIP If you stop into a cantina that is new to your character, you may not be out of luck. Have a seat and wait. Just being in the cantina feels like you're an adult very slowly. Do something else for a while as your character waits.

find weapons, armor, and items crafted by master artisans. Or, if you're an artisan yourself, you can find components or material for your own creations. The bazaar terminals link all the planets together in a virtual marketplace where goods can be traded and bought. All you need are credits.

When you're an artisan with low skills, the generic crafting tool is enough to build your items. When you gain more skill and earn more complicated schematics, you'll find that your abilities have outstripped the small machine. At that point, you must turn to the large crafting stations to produce your objects. The public crafting stations found in most cities give you the power you need. They are not generic, so you have to find a weapons-crafting station for weapons, a furniture-crafting station for making furniture, and so on.

When you're roaming about the wilds, you'll run into hostile NPCs. Looting their bodies once you've defeated them often yields broken bits of equipment. This stuff is useless to you, but someone may need the parts. Keep broken items you find and visit the junk dealer when you get back to town. This character will buy your trash. It may not be a big payoff, but it's better than lugging around garbage.

them to a medic in return for immediate healing. This is a bit crass, so the medics and doctors often just make their own. Your second option is to simply shout that you'll pay an exorbitant fee to any medic who starts healing you right away. Again, this is crude, but it gets the job done. The most elegant way to get preferential treatment is to offer organic material to the medics. If you have scout skills and have been diligently extracting resources from your kills, then you should have a large amount of hide, meat, and bone. Medical professionals use this material to make medicine and gain experience points, but they don't go hunting very often. So, trade them organs for healing and you'll make a friend. Of course, you could simply wait your turn.

As with the entertainers, before you go (and if you have the means), tip the medic or doctor who helped you out. Type /tip [CHARACTER'S FIRST NAME] [AMOUNT] to give them a financial boost.

Buy and sell

Star Wars Galaxies conveniently includes an eBay-like auction house through which anyone can submit items or bid on them. Use bazaar terminals to sell items or bid on items that other players want to sell. This is a great way to



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO STAR WARS GALAXIES

By Ron Dulin

Starting out in Star Wars Galaxies can be daunting. This guide will help you make some basic professional decisions and will also outline some helpful commands and features that make playing the game both less repetitive and more rewarding.

The solo artist

For those who shun social interaction, it is possible to create an almost entirely self-sufficient character. Even if you don't want to solo all the time, having a wide array of skills will make it easier when you can't find a group.

The ideal solo character will specialize in a combat skill (either marion or brawler), and complement his fighting specialization with scout and medic skills. Scout skills will let

you set up camps and create traps, making both resting and hunting much easier. Medic skills will allow you to heal yourself at those camps. The only time you'll need to go back to town is when your battle fatigue gets too high.

If you take scout, you may as well take artisan as a fourth skill. All the traps and camps you create will give you crafting experience, which will quickly move you up the ranks of engineering. Eventually, you'll be able to make your own weapons and armor.

You don't have much to lose by learning the basics of a new profession—it costs only 100 credits, the experience doesn't translate to other professions, and you can always get your skill points back later by surrendering the skill. The one area this doesn't apply to is combat experience.



Command shortcuts

Almost any action can be performed by typing the / key and then the action. This can be very helpful when lag is high. For instance, if you want to invite someone to a group, just target the player and type /invite. Open the action window (Ctrl+A) and click on any of your actions—in most cases, the slash command will be listed in the description. Alternatively, type // (that's "slash slash") for a list of slash commands.

Here are some very useful commands that can make surviving, or just running around, that much easier. (Note that variable information is designated with brackets. These brackets should not be included in the actual command.)

/assist When fighting tough opponents, nothing is worse than a group in which everyone is fighting different creatures—and getting slaughtered as a result. The solution is the /assist command. Use it by targeting the "puller" (i.e. the person who is in charge of luring enemies back to the group), and then typing /assist.

/ahangedance [dance name] or /ahengemusic [song name] Entertainers can instantly switch styles with either of these commands. This command can be used in conjunction with /fourish [H] or /fo [E] to instantly add a flourish to your performance.

/corpse This command allows you to loot a corpse from a



In most cases, you'll lose only a few credits by trying out a new skill.



If you select "Join Back" from the "Use Back," you'll have access to a solo-deposit box. Note that items can be accessed only in the city where they are deposited.



Basic scouting and medic skills will let you set up camps and heal yourself after a tough battle.

Missions made easier

Can't find a group, but having trouble completing destroy missions on your own? There's an easy solution: Equip a weapon that you aren't proficient with and then accept a mission terminal. Mission difficulty is based on your equipped weapon, so by doing this, your assignments will be much, much easier (though you'll earn fewer credits as well). Just don't forget to equip your weapon of choice once you have the missions.



distance. The corpse must be within visual range.

/find This useful command, when used in cities, will create a waypoint to the nearest location you specify and even present you

with a handy line to follow to your destination. For instance, **/find cantina** will lead you to the nearest cantina (use **/find** with no destination for a list of viable locations). You can also find basic trainers—simply use **/find**

trainer_[profession] die. **/find** **trainer_scout**. Finally, when you reach your destination, type **/find** clear to delete the waypoint. The **/find** command can also be used in the wilderness to create a waypoint back to the city.

/harvest hide and **/harvest bone** Quickly harvest resources from a corpse without having to use the radial menu.

/healdamage and **/healwound** These commands allow you to quickly heal damage and wounds without accessing your stimpack, though it will still use a stimpack. As a macro, they will save you the trouble of constantly having to replace the stimpacks in your toolbar. You can also use them on yourself (**/healdamage self** or **/healwound self**).

/logout This is a better way to quit than **/quit**, because you won't leave yourself in potential danger. You must be sitting in order to use **/logout**.

/mood [mood] Changing your mood adds color to your chat. See the action window (Ctrl+A) for a list of moods. To clear your mood, type **/mood none**.

/tendamage and **/tendwound** These commands are similar to the **/healdamage** and **/healwound** commands, but they use the Tend skill instead.



The world map can be brought up with **Ctrl+V**. It will let you set waypoints to any location or basic trainer on the planet.



Tipping entertainers, medics, and teachers is just the polite thing to do.



The **/find** command will provide you with a route to the destination you choose.

/tip [amount] Easier to use than the Trade screen, **/tip** allows you to give someone money instantly. Just target the player and use the command. Use it with entertainers or medics after they've healed you or with players who teach you new skills. Being stripped for petty cash is no excuse. You can use **/tip [amount]** bank, though a 5 percent surcharge will apply.

/unstuck Use this to get yourself to a safe location when you find yourself physically trapped in the environment.

/waypoint Creates a waypoint to coordinates you specify. Type **/waypoint [x y]** (with **x** and **y** being the actual number coordinates). Alternately, targeting something and using **/waypoint** will automatically create a waypoint to your target (if you have no target, the command will create a waypoint where you're standing). This is useful for finding a group that you've been separated from or for finding a shop in the wild. It is also great for recording the locations of special mission terminals in cities. These commands can be renamed and even e-mailed to other players.

Window dragging

In the chat window, you can't see combat messages. In the combat window, you can't see chat messages. While it's possible to create your own chat window preferences, there's a much easier solution. Simply click on the tab for the combat window, and then drag it away from the main chat window. It will remain in its own window, allowing you to have both visible simultaneously.

It is also possible to expand your toolbar slots in a similar way. Move the cursor over the bottom of your toolbar and then drag down. This will open an additional set of twelve slots, which can be activated by pressing **Shift+F1-F12**.



Making macros

Macros are the single best way to ease the frustration of repetitive actions. Every profession can benefit from taking the time to set up a few useful macros. More advanced macros will allow you to execute a complex series of actions with a single command or keystroke.

To set up a macro, open the action window (Ctrl+A) and click

on the Macros tab. Choose "new macro" and select a one-word name and an icon. Then type the slash commands you want to include in the macro, separated by a semicolon and then a space, or with line breaks.

Here are some useful commands for creating complex macros:

/pause [#] This will pause the macro for the number of seconds



A well-crafted macro will let you perform several unrelated actions in sequence.

you designate. Note that the number doesn't always translate into real-world seconds, and it seems to vary from computer to computer. You'll need to play around with the /pause command to figure out how it translates for you.

toolbarPane[##] One of the two most useful commands in setting up macros, this command will switch your toolbar to the appropriate panel. It must be used with the /ui action command. It is important to note that the toolbars are numbered starting with 00, so if you want the macro to open toolbar five, you'll use /ui action toolbarPane04.

toolbarSlot[##] This is the other most useful command, and it also must be used with /ui action. This command designates which toolbar slot will be activated. These slots are numbered starting with 00 (and can go up to 23 if you have expanded your toolbars). If you want the macro to throw a trap and you have that trap set to slot five, use the command /ui action toolbarSlot04.

/t This designates your target as the subject, which is good for emote and spoken macros. For instance, using /cheer /t while a player named Joe is targeted will result in your character cheering at Joe.



The example error macro isn't particularly useful, but it will give you an idea of how to string the commands together.

Consumer alert

Familiarize yourself with what differentiates an excellent version of an item from a merely average one and always be sure to examine an item closely when purchasing it. This is especially true of dreads. All dreads look the same, and they can be returned, so some scam artists will try to pass off worthless ones as valuable. Read the description carefully to make sure the medium house you're buying isn't actually a small hervester.



Note the conviction of 'the hervester' over 'the crew.' Well, I realize it's a good dreading, it would be a terrible deal.



Ali action: This command designates that you are executing a user interface command. You can see a list of the possible subcommands by typing `Ali`, but the two most important uses are outlined above.

A basic macro

Once you have a basic grasp of creating macros, it's time to put them to work for you. We'll create a macro that stands you up, equips two pieces of armor, opens the toolbar with your combat commands (for purposes of this exercise, we'll say that's toolbar two), and then sits you down. First, switch to toolbar five. Then drag your chosen armor pieces up to the first two slots. Now open the

Macro menu. Choose "new macro," and select a name and an icon. In the text box, type the following: `/stand /ai action toolbarPine04; /ai action toolbarSlot00; /ai action toolbarSlot01; /ai action toolbarPine01; /sit`. Once the macro is finished, drag the icon to one of your toolbar slots, and it's ready to go.

Aliases

An alias is a means of creating a macro that is executed with a slash command. The formula is `/alias [name] [command]; [command]`. So, for a simple example, you could create a greeting alias to automatically bow and say hello to someone. To do this, you'd type `/alias greet /bow; Hello %TE`. After creating the alias, type `/(name)` to execute it (so, for the example given here, you'd type `/(greet)`). To remove an unwanted alias, use `/unalias [name]`.

Loading aliases

Things get more complex here. Not only can you create aliases in-game, you can also do so outside of the game. These macros will allow you to create very long strings of actions, allowing you to dance all night without touching a key or perform all of your combat moves with a single command. Open a text editor and simply type `(name);`

`[command]; [command]`, and then save the file to your Star Wars Galaxies main directory as `(name).txt` (or whatever you'll remember). To use the alias, type `/load (name).txt`, then type `/(name)`. Using the `/load` command, you can call up other aliases from within command sequences, though you should know that the game has a built-in filter that prevents you from looping these.

As an example, go ahead and create a text file named `boogie.txt`. The file should consist of the following text: `boogie; /dance; /pause 100; /smile; /dance; /pause 100; /applaud; /sit`. Next, create a text file called `discoball.txt`. The text will be `discoball; /dance; /pause 100; /cheer; /dance; /pause 100; /load boogie.txt; /boogie`. In the game, type `/load discoball.txt`, then `/discoball` to execute the two files.



More bang for your buck

Slicing and power-ups can significantly improve weapon and armor performance. Slicing can only be performed by smugglers, and if the attempt fails, you won't be able to slice the item again. Power-ups can be purchased, but can't be removed until they are used up. Both slicing and power-ups will cause an item to degrade more quickly.



Power-ups can improve your armor performance significantly.



KORSUN POCKET

Hex-based wargames have met their match

By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk



Tom, pregame: Good help! I've been chafing to try a wargame by Bruce Geryk, who is forcing me to play a wargame, something I haven't done since there were cassette tapes in my

car—think of Beagles cassette tapes. Just this was a war with a elegant fighter that wasn't there to charge off planes. It ran on spreadsheet fuel. You get the job done. I know what you're thinking: "Oh, a wargame? I guess I'll just fly in it like Colley's e-mails." But please don't leave me here. Bruce is really into this whole retro-wargaming thing, so you and I have to honor him until I can free myself. With any luck, I'll even beat him in the process.

The wargame is SSG's *Korsun Pocket*. We're playing the full campaign scenario by e-mail. The manual is more than 100 pages long. The title page reads "*Korsun Pocket Manual*," which prompted my friend Dave to say, "If that's just the pocket manual, I'd hate to see the real thing." But *Korsun Pocket* is actually a relatively simple and accessible wargame. The name refers to the battle that took place around the town of Korsun, where the Soviets were able to cut off and surround a pocket of elite German troops, most of whom became casualties of war. So when Bruce asked which side I wanted to play, I figured I might as well have history on my side by choosing the Soviet armies.

That's the deal: I have considerable force to the east and west of Korsun. My best bet is to follow the course of history and bring these together south of Korsun, probably around a town called *Trojanogora*. A dedicated advance up north can get into trouble around the town of *Gorodishko* due to a lack of coverings over the *Boles-Inky* River.

Furthermore, a northern drive will neglect all these Victory points (VP) for southern towns. In *Korsun Pocket*, what's important is not just what you capture, but also when you capture it. Chasing the Victory-point calendar for a sick location can provide a sort of road map. While my main effort will be in the southeast, I can't ignore a couple of northern objectives. *Bozostanovka* and *Smala* are each worth 20 VP. I can take them by turn 5. *Bulake* is worth the same amount, but it needs to be taken by turn 2. So, here we go...



Bruce, pregame: I chose the Axis because it will force Tom to eat the tempo of the attack while I take my time and hit him with well-coordinated counterattacks. Even though the Soviets see on

the strategic offensive throughout the game, the German process will push a lot of ground. This, then, will be a time to see that in full extent. A skillful retreat coupled with counterattacks at the appropriate time will win me the game.

Tom, Turn 1

The way to attack in this game is not with massive frontal assaults. Instead, I pick out weak points using the Combat Advisor. (Bless you, SSG, for including this wonderful tool!) Once I've pushed ahead with overruns, it's time to start beating up on stronger units. Since losses are incurred against the strongest units and lined replacements can easily undo any progress you make if you don't outright destroy your target, this is all about hitting one place as many times as you can in one turn. Soviet artillery, which Stalin called the "god of war" is an invaluable asset here.

But before I can make any sort of meaningful advance, I have to clear out all these confounded forts. The Germans have a line of forts set up, which means I'm wasting most of my early efforts knocking down walls instead of killing infantry and smashing tanks. I also need to keep my armored units close to the front line, ready to exploit any breakthrough—but without being so close that Bruce can see them and anticipate my advance.

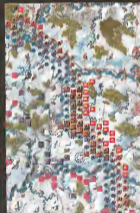
Bruce, Turn 1

As expected, my fortifications took up the bulk of Tom's attacks, and my dug-in units watch as Mr. Znuov-wannabe starts poking his divisions through my front lines. I have no hope of stopping him on this line and can slow him down only at the cost of sacrificing the bulk of my army, so my strategy for this turn is simply to run like hell.

It's especially important to save the 3rd Panzer Division, since once it's rebuilt, it will form the core of my early counterattack capability. I use my precious armored replacements for these guys this turn, since several units are down to one line, making them vulnerable to elimination. Destroyed units are worth substantial Victory points (right-click on any unit in the KIA display to



Three axes of attack require a lot of units. Fortunately, the Soviets have them.



Pace preservation is the name of the game early on for the Axis.

show its value), and to mention the effects of having fewer units to attack (or defend) with.

Tom, Turn 2

It's going very well. It must be pretty discouraging for Bruce to see his units so handily knocked back. I'm making fine progress from the west with the 5th Guard Tank Corps. The 5th Mechanized Corps just showed up for the party. However, without more infantry, these guys are like a massive fist on a screwy arm, so I'm using my motor

pool to move some infantry from the north to soak up the damage while I push ahead.

At the same time, I need to keep Bruce's defenses spread out, so I'm using two airborne divisions in the north to push toward Orlovets. If he shows signs of weakening up here, I'll be ready to wheel my tanks corps around like a right hook, working my way behind his defenses. It's all about shuffling your units around on the line.

Bruce, Turn 6

After quickly bringing the rest of the 5th SS ("Wiking") Division down from its starting position far to the north, I have a couple of powerful formations that can give Tom a bloody nose if he isn't careful with his units. Good candidates for attack are those in clear terrain, infantry units without any armor or anti-air protection, and cavalry units or independent tank brigades that have only two steps. If you can get an overrun against a two-step unit and reduce it, you have a good chance of eliminating it with a subsequent attack. I've already taken out a couple of independent tank brigades, which Tom got a little too aggressive with.

Tom, Turn 9

OK, I knew things would slow down as the Germans started to regroup and form new defensive lines, so I shouldn't be too discouraged. One of the problems I'm starting to have is keeping my artillery up with other units as I charge ahead. It's even harder to keep the fast-moving Soviet rocket artillery in place because it has such a short range. Bruce already surprised me by taking out some of my rocket artillery when I least expected it. He's supposed to be retreating anyway.

As I take losses, I realize that where to put replacements is a tough decision. One thing I'm keeping in mind is the divisional integrity bonus, which adds a percentage bonus to a coherent division. Therefore, adding replacements that boost combat value to a unit with a higher divisional-integrity bonus translates directly to more points on the combat-result tables. Yeah, it's very dry and mathematical, but that's part of how you win wargames.

Bruce, Turn 12

Don't be afraid to use the Combat Advisor to identify likely candidates for attack. The Advisor can't tell you if an attack is a good idea overall, but it can help you gain a sense for which enemy units are exposed. This is a bit more useful for the Germans, who are more likely to make isolated high-odds attacks in order to disrupt the Soviet flow and to gain VP. Just make sure that a 10-to-1 odds attack doesn't leave your troops open to encirclement the next turn. Of course, if you've turned the Advisor off when you started, you won't have access to this information. But neither will your opponent!

Tom, Turn 15

At this point, Bruce is ahead by 397 Victory points. That's still technically a draw, but I'm



When the snow falls, everything looks dirty. As does the Russian position, which has not reached Sibel.

way behind schedule as far as taking major cities for large capture bonuses. My airborne divisions didn't reach Orlovets before turn 12 (much less turn 6 when it's still worth 100 Victory points). I'm starting to think I should have concentrated everything down south. The drive to Orlovets was just a casualty sink with almost no Victory-point return for me.

Bruce, Turn 20

The arrival of the 23rd Panzer, 24th Panzer, and the leading elements of 1st SS Panzer divisions gives me a lot of flexibility. Historically, these forces were sent to relieve the pocket. Since the pocket hasn't even formed in our game yet, I'm free to use these powerful forces to counterattack. Tom is having some trouble in the west, so that's where I'll commit my fresh units. I'll also use my available replacements to build these units up as they approach the front, since taking a replacement step uses up a unit's combat capability for the turn.

Tom, Turn 21

Since we're playing with hidden units, it's a bad idea to rush your armor forward to reveal enemy forces; until it's revealed, a stack of four full-strength panzer units looks just like a supply track. And once you realize what you're



Sibelopol is the key to opening up the eastern corridor to Zvenigorovo.

up against, you probably don't have a lot of movement leftover for a retreat. The solution is to move the slower infantry units first, even though they may not be able to reach enemy units, they may get close enough to tell whether you're facing a panzer division or just a construction-engineer battalion. Once you

know this, you can commit armor. I hope I remember this in the future so that I don't keep stranding my armor in front of Bruce's advancing panzer divisions. Where did he get all those things, anyway?

Bruce, Turn 23

Detachments are something I don't see many players use, yet they can be incredibly useful. They don't weaken the unit that leaves them, and they have a couple of effects. The first is the penalty to enemy movement. The more important one, though, is that units attacking from a hex containing an enemy detachment contribute no tactical shifts to combat, which has an enormous effect on combat results. This makes detachments great for protecting an exposed line of units, since attacking from multiple hexes is an easy way to gain combat shifts. If all those hexes contain detachments, that negates the bonus. A combination of detachments and interdiction by aircraft can drastically slow the Soviets' progress. When combined with the right weather, those things can bring an Allied assault to a temporary standstill.

Tom, Turn 25

At this point, I should probably be grabbing all these towns way down south—the ones below my advance. They have the same low capture bonus no matter when I take them, and the Germans start getting Victory points for them on turn 26. So they're presumably secondary objectives since I've closed off Bruce's troops. But there's the small matter of not having closed off Bruce's troops. The Korsun pocket isn't really a pocket yet; it's more of a great big German party where they're drinking beer and flipping me the bird. In typical Soviet style, this should be about the time I start purging my officers.

Bruce, Turn 30

I made a colossal dumb mistake: in trying to keep up the pressure on Tom's western pincer and 5th Guards Tank Army, I let four mechanized units, including three from my powerful 1st SS Panzer Division, get caught on a single-hex spur of land on the river just south of Merezny. Unfortunately, I wasn't watching the weather carefully enough and forgot that it was about to turn to Thaw, which trapped the panzers against the river with no way out. The 1st SS units are each worth 50 VP, and unless I rescue them, I'm sure Tom will destroy them all. There is also a recon unit from the 17th Panzer Division trapped with them, giving Marshal Chibrikov more than 200 VP for wiping out these unfortunate soldiers. That's more than you get in capture bonus for the most important cities!

Tom, Turn 34

I was enjoying some mild successes with the weather keeping Bruce's unit bogged down, but now it's back to Freeze, which lets him easily skate across rivers and such, zipping his forces back and forth in his little area, quickly moving reinforcements where he needs them. The irony of driving back the German line is

that both of his fronts get closer to each other and he can shuffle his units around more easily, a luxury I don't really have. And where is he getting all this full-strength armor?

Bruce, Turn 40

At one point in this game, I think I was leading by as many as 2,000 VP. No matter how big a lead the Axis player builds, however, he'll eventually control only a handful of objectives and the Soviet player will be making up ground each turn. The trick is to build such a lead that he won't be able to make the ground up by turn 48. I'm currently 1,400 VP to the good.

Tom, Turn 46

Well, two turns out and I've pushed Bruce back about as far as I can. My lines are ragged, my advances are stalled, and my troops are depleted. If Bruce would do me the kindness of leaving out some stray units, I could pound on them for a few extra Victory points. But that's the luxury of being the defender: You don't have to move your lines around all the time.

GAME END

Bruce (Axis): 5,066 VP;
Tom (Allies): 3,927 VP
Result: Axis win by 1,139 VP (Decisive Victory).

Tom's postgame

OK, this whole idea of pushing in the north and south was misguided. Plus, there was all that stuff about rushing ahead with my armor and basically handing it to

Bruce. "Here, have some Victory points," I might as well have said. The burden of skill is heaviest on the attacker, which put me at a disadvantage that I should have anticipated. All this is basically a fancy way of saying that I think I suck at wargames.

Bruce's postgame

The German player in Korsun Pocket needs to fight like a lightweight boxer: He has to connect with his punches while making sure he immediately backs off, lest he get caught in close after delivering his blows. In this game, I was able to keep Tom off balance by inflicting damage on his mobile units. This meant they were less effective. Except for the debacle with the 1st SS Panzer Division, I was able to keep my mobile formations from being surrounded after they counterattacked. As long as the Axis player has an army, he has a chance.



The pocket has a lot of full-strength German armor, which has a costly effect.



The final position.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

ABS Computer Technologies, Inc. <i>Ultimate Game Machine</i>	95	Electronic Arts <i>Medal of Honor: Allied Assault</i>	44-45
Acclaim Entertainment <i>Gladiator</i>	105	Electronic Arts <i>Siege City 4</i>	76-77
ACTIVISION <i>Call of Duty</i>	8-9	Electronic Arts <i>Tiger</i>	32-33
ACTIVISION <i>Empires</i>	52a-h	Electronic Frontier Foundation <i>EFF Membership Campaign</i>	68
Airwave Corp. <i>Area-51m Mobile Gaming System</i>	21	Enlight Interactive, Inc. <i>X2: The Threat</i>	59
Amazon.com <i>Amazon.com Top Sellers</i>	70, 71	Falcon Northwest <i>Falcon Cosmic PCs</i>	55
Atari, Inc. <i>Galactic II</i>	109	FlexyPower <i>FlexyPower Computer</i>	87
Atari, Inc. <i>Herboms</i>	96-97	Kenesis America <i>Silent Hill 3</i>	117
Atari, Inc. <i>Magic the Gathering</i>	141	Kenesis America <i>Yu-Gi-Oh! Power of Chaos</i>	137
Atari, Inc. <i>T3: War of the Machines</i>	28-29	LucasArts Entertainment <i>Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy</i>	25
Atari, Inc. <i>Ultima Tournament 2K4</i>	64-65	Microsoft <i>Age of Mythology: The Titans</i>	39-39
Capcom USA, Inc. <i>Reso Hoshi: Defender of the Crown</i>	103	Microsoft <i>Halo PC</i>	30-31
Creative Labs <i>Audigy 2</i>	178	Mythic Entertainment <i>Dark Age of Camelot</i>	129, 130, 132-133
Creative Labs <i>Goldenworks Speakers</i>	153	NewsCram <i>Best Value Always</i>	377
Cyberpower <i>Systems PC</i>	149	Nokia Telecommunications <i>N-Gage</i>	81, 85
Dell Computer Corp. <i>Dimension & Inspiron Systems</i>	70-79	Riverdog, Inc. <i>Kasparov Chessmate</i>	164
Disney Interactive Games <i>Tron 2.0</i>	21	Sattek Industries LTD, Inc. <i>Joystick Fixerly</i>	355
Eagle Games, Inc. <i>Age of Mythology board games</i>	91	Sony Online Entertainment <i>Lois of Everquest</i>	73-75
Eagle Games, Inc. <i>War! Age of Imperialism PC game</i>	93	Sony Online Entertainment <i>Lost Dungeons</i>	16-17
EarthLink <i>Earthlink (demo)</i>	Demo	Sony Online Entertainment <i>PlanetSide: Exp. Pac. 01-Nybble</i>	110-111
Eidos Interactive, Inc. <i>Command & Conquer 3</i>	61-63	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE <i>Max Payne 2</i>	42-43
Eidos Interactive, Inc. <i>Deus Ex 2: Invisible War</i>	67	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE <i>Space Colony</i>	67
Electronic Arts <i>Battlefield 1942 SW</i>	49-51	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE <i>Stansky & Hatch</i>	179
Electronic Arts <i>Command & Conquer Generals</i>	98-99	Technic, Inc. <i>Zodiac</i>	139
Electronic Arts <i>Lord of the Rings: Return of the King</i>	2-5	THQ Inc. <i>Warhammer 40K: Fire Warrior</i>	187-189
		Ubi Soft Entertainment <i>Warlords IV</i>	40-41
		Ubi Soft Entertainment <i>Warlords IV</i>	143
		Ubi Soft Entertainment <i>XIII</i>	10-11
		Wizards Universal Games <i>Great Master</i>	89
		Wizards Universal Games <i>Homeworld 2</i>	57
		Wizards Universal Games <i>The Hobbit</i>	12-15
		Wizards Universal Games <i>War of the Ring</i>	56
		Woodco Computers <i>Woodco Computers</i>	159
		Words of the Coast <i>Magic 8th Acquisi8ion</i>	27

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Scorched Earth

Is That a Light Saber in Your Pocket...

...or are you just happy to see me? By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@stiffdavis.com

Hey, baby, are you having a good time? How'd you like to have a "great" time, daddy? #uzzle Let me give you a private dance, baby, c'mon, baby, don't you like what you see? "Giggle!" You're naughty! /pet /just Yeah, that's it, sugar, flick you just sit down and let me do all the work, let me make you feel all good inside and out, daddy, all of this is just for you, baby, just for you...and don't forget to slip a tip in my g'string when we're done. Just a tip, you bad boy, "giggle" not your whole hand!

Yeah—I'm a whore. And, man, olives, am I ever good at it. I probably have more credits than any other dancer in Star Wars Galaxies, so I've got that going for me. But I've paid a price. I feel so dirty a steel wool toothbrush couldn't get all the kink off. And I'm tired, oh so very tired from servicing the endless stream of men, all those men and their ceaseless demands.

My life of online debauchery began innocently—and professionally—enough. I decided to try out the dancer profession just to see if the Galaxies designers had found a way to make such a dull-sounding class interesting to play. Almost immediately I discovered two things: No, they didn't, and no, they didn't. But these online games are all about making your own fun, right? So I decided to make my own fun by providing fun. Less than an hour into the game I was aggressively soliciting every male character that entered the casino for "private dances." And once I assured them that I was indeed a woman, a 23-year-old waitress at a Black Angus who used to work at a Hoologers but had moved after a bad break-up with my boyfriend Mike, they started lining up and—presto!—the Moesia cantina became my own gentlemen's club complete with horny smugglers rustling to withdraw more money for just one more dance.

At first my rates were modest, but the beauty of a player-created economy is that the players decide what they want to spend, and I was happily surprised to discover most players wanted to spend more than I was asking. Lots more. So I stopped asking—just reminding them gently for tips—and was soon raking in thousands of credits an hour. Within moments of logging on every night, regular customers would send me tips that they were catching shuttles from



Ever suck a Tusken's wang?

across the galaxy to come visit me. They'd arrive at the cantina and beeline to a back room where, with no prompting, they'd take off their pants, sit down, and start typing /lick over and over as I snoots my Twi'les money-maker for them.

While the other entertainers in the cantina were desperately begging for tips, I was being phed with jewelry, fine droids, and expensive clothing by regular suitors convinced I was a lonely busty steak-slinging co-ed and not a married father of two with Tourette's syndrome and a Gary Gilmore haircut. Oh, they tried to win my heart, but I am a savvy carotene lass, chary of giving her heart to any pistoleer no matter how much he pays me for the privilege of stripping to his skivvies while I sit in his lap cooing "Oh, baby, that's so nice" while he types /lick over and over and over again.

Now, after a month of squaddily-cuddling every Mon Calamari with a few thousand credits to blow on virtual lipdancing, I think the time has come for me to hang

up my gold bikini top and hot pants. Why? Well, for being able to use phrases like "my gold bikini top and hot pants" for starters. For the infinite braev-busting implications (symbolically inherent and wrong on about every single conceivable plane of existence) in the chilling inquiry "Ever suck a Tusken's wang?" For that uncomfortable moment of clarity the other day at lunch when I caught myself in all seriousness lauding the generosity of "my two favorite boyfriends." All that and a general nitching up of suspiciously misspelled dirty talk has inexorably led to the retirement of Paris Beldar, pleasure dancer supreme.

But don't let my misgivings dissuade you from the very profitable life as a private dancer. Here's a little tip, free of charge: If someone is reluctant to accept your solicitations, just start calling him "daddy" and he'll cave. And if he's a Wookiee, call him "fuzzy-wuzzy bear" when you write on his digitized tip, and you'll double your tips. Trust me.

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