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CITY OF HEROES
REVIEWED!
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04

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20 Editorial

Generally, we wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have us as members. But not Jeff! He wants to be friends with everyone online! Yay!

22 Letters

Lots of people hated our *Far Cry* review. Lots of people liked our *Far Cry* review. We let both groups vent their spleens before thoughtfully mopping up.

26 Radar

As the **E3** fallout subsides, we've got some interesting stories for you. We have an inside look at **Alienware's** new PC technology, a real-world test drive of the mysterious **Phantom** game system, and the true story of a boy with leukemia who's fighting back cancer in his own videogame. All this and a surefire list of ways to blow a hundred bucks are comin' at you in this month's Radar section.

38 Previews

It's a special all-MMO previews month, complete with hands-on impressions of **EverQuest II** and **World of Warcraft**, as well as a deeper look at **The Matrix Online**, **Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed**, **Auto Assault**, and **Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia**.



It Came From E3

The year's E3 has come and gone, and we've gotten sneak peeks at some of the hottest games you'll be playing later this year. Just feast your eyes on **Splinter Cell 3**, **Auto Assault**, and **F.E.A.R.**, as well as updates on eagerly awaited games such as **Half-Life 2** and **Rome: Total War**.

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70 Reviews

Finally, we can don fights and run around without all those odd stares—*City of Heroes* has shipped, and we've got all you need to know (and then some) in our review of the best MMO of the year so far. Need more reasons to flip to the Reviews section right now? How's about *Hitman: Contracts*, *Warlords: Battlecry III*, and *Crystal Key 2*? OK, maybe not *Crystal Key 2*.

86 Tech

We'll take a look at *Vicious PC's* small form-factor rig while Dave gets comfortable with the latest graphics cards by *ATI* and *Nvidia*. Also, Joel shows you how to update your drivers, and, as always, there's a new Tech Medics, *Wi! Power*, and *Cracked Case*.

101 Check Out

We've got good news and better news. The good news: another *A-List* full of great buying recommendations and the *Rewind 100's* recap of all the recent games you should be playing. The better news? We've got some big changes in store for Check Out in the coming months—so keep an eye out!

112 Tom vs. Bruce

This month, Tom and Bruce duke it out in the new real-time-strategy expansion *Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots*.

116 Scorched Earth

Princess Sissy pants justifies his assypants-ness.



86

Meet UP @ 1UP.com

The all-new 1UP is here, and it's exploding with new features! We've still got all of that great daily content you've come to know and love, but we're now the first-ever destination for gamers to meet, play, get informed, and show off.

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TUP Yourself

Hey, computers now have the Internet!

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY VELVET ED

In my attempt to be more of a cheerleader (I love wearing those cute uniforms), I am here this month to plug our new revamped website, LUP.com. I know you're thinking that the last thing the world needs is another lame gaming website, but that's where we come in. It's not lame! In addition to the usual stuff—news, previews, reviews (including some stuff posted ahead of the magazine), there will be all sorts

of fun stuff to do. You and your favorite CGW goons can write blogs, trade games, post pics, form clubs... That's right, we can be friends online now! I'm kidding from you already? Just kidding! LUP.com will give us all a place to hang out online, because, as we know, one can never spend too much time in front of a computer. CGW's giving artistic psychosaths a home for more than 20 years! Oh, it's just a joke. We'll never really give you weblogs a home. But don't TUP.com anyway! It's free, it's easy, it's Atkins approved. But don't stop buying CGW, because there will always be stuff available only here, and, besides, it's the only home Ryan Scott has. You don't want Ryan slopping in the gutter, do you? Yeah, we do, too. But keep buying CGW anyway, and we'll keep doing our best to make it worth your while. Did I mention my cheerleader outfits?

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KRISTEN SALAZAR

MANAGING EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: HEART BOLD

Oh so brave, but not so deadly. Super High will not go down with that body of hers, which we can say has without fear of getting sued because we're talking about a fictional game character and not an emerging celeb. Oh, Kristen?



ROBERT GRAY

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: JAWBREAKER

After spending 15 years producing the *Playboy* male in the '70s, his comic booker now runs his letter shop through the streets of Peacock City. And when he runs around, you can hear his baldie cry "I can see the dead man!"



DEVLIN GLADSTONE

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: BEAST

BEAST MAN

Oh! You can't miss a reader of the mag going to that dry cleaners' stand. Using the power of uncolored beads, the *Kashie* *Quackie* good magazine is all of Peacock City's readers. You'd better have he packs over you, too, Mr. Devlin!



WILLIAM A. HILL

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: MARVA LUTHER

Peacock City's only down beat guy is the only way she knows how to slapping. If he drops, get-back! Plans may be burning, but not Peacock City, thanks to the most badass guy in the city. One up with a rock and roll!



JEREMY LIU

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: AWAKEN

AWAKEN

Sound identity? There he is, weaver! You don't look a word different when you're, Johnny Lee! Johnny's words he sees name in his eyes. Not all the world of all that to bring making everyone he always about with that they were. Is that he was?



RYAN SCOTT

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: AWAKEN

This lettering young man is the real Ryan, revealed at last! *Seneca* *Powder* *Substance*. That Ryan Scott? And a really a Gank. But that for this column because of his name power? You go, get the name go like, have the leading line.



ROB SCHULTZ

ART DIRECTOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: AWAKEN

AWAKEN

When captured by the Powers of Justice by night, the *Awaken* would be mighty force of design to paint Peacock City and you will be his, budding if you catch the mighty *Awaken* he had!



MICHAEL JENNINGS

EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: AWAKEN

AWAKEN

Captain Savage power! The streets of Peacock City is his paradise, working a word all the '70s, when the world was a center place, about without high speed internet access, the losing to "middle" by it! Custom-Savage is working for you, keep say!

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You're once, twice, eight times a loser...

I'm French, I'm short, and I'm a gamer. I just came to write about my pal Brett Alexander Smith. He lives close to me, he makes fun of me, and I'm a retard. We live in a part of Wisconsin you've probably never heard of unless you've been there. Every day our lives go on, warm or cold weather, and we see each other every day, but once he got CGW, that all changed. I was just a boy back then, and I remember the day he came to me saying he got this "sweet magazine." I thought he was going mentally insane or something, but as I looked on, I was completely brainwashed. I snatched the magazine from him and yelled for him to back off. He snatched it back and I didn't ask for it again—obviously, I'm French. The next time I went to the store, I saw CGW on the shelf and grabbed it. That's when my life ended. The magazine consumed my every thought—my mental capacity was being diminished. It sucked me and my life in, but that's also when I became a PC gamer.

Venomslay

You're French, short, a gamer, a self-described "retard," and you live in Wisconsin. No wonder you tend to refer to yourself with a lowercase "L."



Fer cries and whispers

First, I'd like to say that I've been a devoted subscriber to CGW for years and have always looked forward to your features and reviews.

Now regarding your *Fer Cry* review... I couldn't believe that you ripped into what is probably one of the best first-person shooters since *Half-Life*. My first thought was that the infamous French Olympic skating judge must be working at CGW as a reviewer. I thought you were way to harsh and put too much emphasis on the checkpoint approach to the save feature. I mean, *Halo* used a similar method and had its share of frustration, but it still went on

But soft, what wind from yonder window breaks?

Dear CGW, I prithe that thou shalt giveveth to thy an exemplar of thy fair nature for which I beseech. For art thou not to send that which has yet to be bestowed upon mine middle-class soul, a demo disc, if thou art to not send me my disc-esque delverance, I shalt march unto thy offices and ram the rolled-up form of yon magazine into your CD-sending guy, in a suppository configuration.

Eggy

Noble sir, thy jest is truly divine and your wry jepe most noble indeed. For you must knowest that should your craven heart miraculously become as leonine as great Richard himself and you dare bare thine sailow and pocked visage within our hallowed chambers in a sortie of brutal vengeance, then verily the barbed hooks upon which we snare the wriggling piscine wonders of the briny deep shall be pounded deep into thine ass.



to be the greatest Xbox title ever (not to mention a damn good PC game). I love *Fer Cry* and think it deserves top honors for both its gameplay and outstanding graphics, thanks to the *Cry* engine.

Please, for the love of the industry, try not to shoot down a lock-ass job done by a seemingly unknown bunch of developers.

Oliver Daniel

I just wanted to comment on your article in the July 2004 edition of *Computer Gaming World* in regards to the *Fer Cry* save-game system. I have to say I wholeheartedly agree with your article. To be blunt, I think the save-game system SUCKS! I hope they plan on doing something about it soon, because I have stopped playing the game because of it. I can't begin to tell you how many times I had to play the same areas over and over again due to the lame save-game system. It got old REAL QUICK!

Take care, and I always look forward to your amusing articles.

Paul Bateau

If I ever were going to consider *Fer Cry*, I would have gotten rid of that notice in a hurry after reading "Moron McStupid." Having victimized myself in the past by getting so carried away that I forgot to save when I should have and then getting killed and having to start all over, I can't imagine a game with such a lame save feature. However—as you already know—you should get ready for the onslaught of hate mail!

Granniegamer on IUP.com

Lest I end on a sour note, let me begin on a sweet one: I love CGW. I always have. Heck, I still refuse to throw away my 13-year-old issues, and it's not all just to annoy my wife. But having said that, I'll get right to the awards I've decided to hand out to two of CGW's finest and most deserving reviewers. The envelope, please...

The date is April 1999. The CGW POS Review of the Decade goes to Scorpio for her piss-poor review of one of history's truly

Mall Bites

I love the Over/Underrated section. I wish it were a monthly feature.

—Karedan on IUP.com

I hope you die of colon cancer. Good day.

—jedi_75 to Robert Coffey

Does anyone else think ATI's Ruby has a really creepy look on her face?

—LarryFromMadrid



complaints about the game's save system.

It is refreshing to find somebody who has not sold out to the game manufacturers and tells the truth. [Another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits] has some gushing kiss-ass reviewer who never mentions the save system at all but instead says, "Far Cry is, deserving of your time and your money. Go buy it right now." Why don't they

just label this "review" for what it really is—an advertisement.

And yes, the save system a game uses is important to me. I bought I'm Gang in 2 and actually liked the game except for the problem of only three saves allowed per level. I stopped playing it after a while because of this.

So, thank you for a candid, honest review. That's the kind of reporting gamers deserve!

Robert Matthews

And thus we arrive at a definitive answer regarding our Far Cry review: yes and no!



Love is all around, why don't you take it?

Imagine a brave new world where compatible people met and THEN fell in love.

There would be very little divorce.

This world is here today, go online to meet the right person for you.

Beau Paige

Thanks, Beau, but we don't need to go online to wallow in love—we've got the warm, fuzzy CGW offices to set our hearts aglow with the inner radiance that only love can create. Every Wednesday, we dress up like our favorite characters from *Steel Magnolias*, watch the special-edition DVD, and have ourselves a good cry. We are deeply in touch with our feminine side. Especially Coffey.



Overrated/ Underrated

I've wanted to do this for years:

CGW features: Overrated: Check Out. I mean, it's cool, but it's just another pile of opinions. Underrated: Tom vs. Bruce. I don't care how high it's rated, it's underrated. This is the best feature in any of the three mags I subscribe to. Nothing else captures what it's actually like to play said games.

CGW layout: Overrated: Pages are in odd colors. Underrated: Being able to read those pages with clashing colors.

CGW staff: Overrated: Robert Coffey. Switch to deaf, man. Underrated: Wil O'Neal. Always picked on, always solid. Thumbs up.

CGW features no longer there: Overrated: Greenspeak. Underrated: Loading.

CGW cover features: Overrated: The ad pasted to the cover of my June issue. What was it for again? Underrated: Being able to see the spine of my June issue of CGW after I peel the ad off.

Reasons to pick on CGW staff: Overrated: Wil O'Neal for no discernible reason. Underrated: Jeff Green because he always looks and acts stoned.

Rants about the mag: Overrated: Robert Coffey regurgitating his dictionary on the back page. Underrated: Letting Robert Coffey edit the Reviews section.

CGW features that were gone, now they're back: Overrated: Hall of Fame. Underrated: Reality Check.

Game features: Overrated: Realism. Underrated: Fun.

Lost editors: Overrated: Scooter. Underrated: Scorpio.

Darryl R. White

great games. *Baldur's Gate*—damning it with faint praise and a four-star rating. Fast-forward to June 2004. The CGW POS Review of the Decade goes to Robert Coffey for his piss-poor review of one of history's truly great games: *Far Cry*—damning it with faint praise and a three-and-a-half-star rating.

Great call there, Coffey. Your petty, vehemently snotty review of what will undoubtedly prove to be one of gaming's legends because of the admittedly irritating save-game design (which it shares with numerous other co-op PC releases) is tantamount to kicking out Brooke Burke for having a nick on her shin.

Taig Stewart

Hi, I'm James from Singapore. I have to disagree with your *Far Cry* review. I think that it's worth at least four to four-and-a-half stars. I agree with you that it has a bad save-game system, but three-and-a-half stars seems unfair. It had a wonderful graphics engine, and, most important, [it was] mostly bug free. Most games nowadays come with at least a few glitches or crash bugs, it is most refreshing to play one that is mostly bug free. That alone will at least earn it another star or a half. **James Lim**

I'd just like to say thanks for an honest evaluation of *Far Cry* and not a whitewash job as done in [another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits]. I subscribe to both magazines and received [another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits] the day before I got CGW. Having read their "review," I was about ready to go out and buy the game. I read your review the next day and then went online and found out that others had similar

Mr. Coffey, thank you for your criticism of *Far Cry*.

—Russell O'Hara

I quit my job and broke up with my girlfriend to play the FREE WEEK of *Planetside*.

—W. Guy Harbuck

I read that Attorney General A\$Scrotch is going to run a big crackdown on video and software pirates. IMO it's about time.

—Crevel on IUP.com

enough, you have an awesome preview of *KOTOR 2* and you mention *Trojan 2.0's* reformatting level as the most underrated, which I total agree with. To top it off, you mention Ken Wuhrer as the most underrated FMV actor. Even mentioning her would have been enough, but you have a picture of her as well. Perhaps to keep the magazine at such a superb level, you should use her picture for everyone on the staff page, except for Kristen, of course.

My only gripe is with the stupid *SYNC* paper cover covering the *KOTOR 2* cover. Please, no more covering the cover.

Josh Duckworth

Just finished reading your June issue, and let me say, please do not (ever again... ever) glue or fasten in any other way an advertisement for another magazine to the cover of my copy of *CGW*. I don't appreciate having to tear that off and retard my poor June issue; I can't even read the binding text because it all got torn off.

That being said, to the real meat, I set shipwrecked while you declared *Desert Combat* the most underrated mod. While I originally agreed, immedoktody I regained my composure and remembered *Natural Selection*. Come on, *Desert Combat* doesn't add nearly as much to *BF1942* in either fun or new material when compared to *NS*. *NS* created the FPS/RTS hybrid and recently added a combat mode involving assault-style play in which aliens and marines square off on small, harsh maps to gain XP and annihilate the enemy's base unit (a single alien hive and a single marine command char). It's a very different style of play, and with a decent team, it can be a heckuva good time. *SOMEBODY* needs to start publishing these guys, they have so much dedication and talent.

Second, I must heartily commend your choice for most underrated level, *Trojan 2.0's* reformatting level. That was the best time I've had in a computer game in a very long time, I laughed like a griddy little schoolgirl the whole time. Amazing concept and execution. Monolith has extraordinarily talented developers, and I've been devoted to them ever since the original *Blood*.

And on a side note, I think *WoodRayne's* Rayne beats out *NCLP's* Archer as the sexiest game character.

Aaron Hartscock

The response to our *Overrated/Underrated* feature was great, and you'll all be glad to know we plan on making it an annual

feature at the very least. So please send your own *Overrated/Underrated* items for inclusion in our next one. As for the *SYNC* wraparound on our mag, we got a big response there also, and, well, we feel your pain. If our marketing gurus decide to do this again, we promise to make them use olive loaf for the wraparound so that you can at least enjoy a tasty treat after you tear it off.



Disturbed reader of the month

Mr. Coffey...ever since the first issue of *Scorched Earth* burned and tainted my young mind, I have been waiting to tell you this: Thank you. I used to flip to the back page of every issue to read *Greenspeak* and

see what juvenile tricks Jeff would pull and unleash on the world, but now I gleefully read *Scorched Earth* and feed the evil blackness of my soul. Your writing isn't just the concentrated evil spewing out of a demonic soul that everyone takes it to be...it's something more. It's the poetic essence of hardcore gaming at its peak. No other person, sane or not, would be so infuriated over the lack of a feature like a checkpoint in *Far Cry*. Most people I know would just say, "Oh well...guess I'd better not die," but you...you attack it like a vulture descending on the rotting flesh of an eviscerated zebra in the middle of the African wilds. Your disgusting and horrific analogies are the most comical ways to relate to videogames, and I will proudly say that as long as *Scorched Earth* remains, so will I. You own my soul, Mr. Coffey—and I'll wear that badge with pride—but please try not to stain it...I was ranting at only for a short while.

Russell Cady

Put down the magazine. Walk to the phone. Call someone you love. Ask for an intervention. Everything is going to be just fine, we promise.

Mail Bites

I wouldn't doubt that some marketdroid somewhere actually considered making a *Passion of the Christ* game at some point.

—Tinman33 on IUP.com

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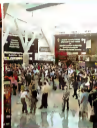


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Radars

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E3: THE





Ghost Story
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Curative Gaming
Games aren't all about killing people—they're about killing cancer cells, too.



Got Evil?
We're taking the lead of the third evil genius that you control in Elixir Studios' new game.



2 Year in Pictures

A quick look at the greatest show on Earth



As our heads finally clear up after this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, we're trying to put together the pieces of what happened and why there are hoofprints in Wil's underwear. This, however, is just a quick look at the sights that made up E3. Want the inside scoop of the best games for this year? Check out our mmmassive MMO story and the scoop on the best and biggest games for 2004.



■ HIGH TECH

Alien Technology Sighting

PC maker pushes envelope with new hardware

While everyone was buzzing about Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS at this year's E3, Miami-based boutique system builder Alienware quietly stole the show with the announcement of its new Video Array technology available in the new ALX computer line. In a move to please hardcore PC gamers and technophiles alike, Alienware's X2 motherboard enables two identical PCI-Express videocards to work in parallel to dramatically improve graphics quality. Benchmark numbers haven't been released yet, but Alienware claims that the Video Array has resulted in performance jumps of up to 50 percent. A behind-closed-doors demo backed up that claim, and we've got to say, we're impressed with both the hardware and Alienware's push beyond the status quo.

How does it work?

Alienware created software that lives in between the game and the videocard drivers, effectively "splits" the signal, and sends the split signal to each videocard. Each videocard then sends its own video signal to Alienware's proprietary video merger hub, where the individual signals are again combined into one. Because of this, the Video Array will be able to work with any two identical "off-the-shelf" graphics cards naming each card maker's standard drivers.

The X2 motherboard is based on Intel's Tiumware chipset and supports two PCI-Express cards, two Intel processors, DDR2-600 memory, SATA RAID, gigabit Ethernet, and 5.1 Dolby Digital audio.

Power to spare

Considering the awesome power of the latest batch of high-end graphics cards by both ATI and Nvidia, is Alienware's Video Array technological overkill? Brian Joyce, director of marketing for Alienware, says, "The visual experience provided by the latest games is largely hardware limited." So, will *Far Cry* and upcoming titles like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* tax even ATI's and Nvidia's high-end cards? Joyce notes that the Video Array technology will enable gamers to experience these games at incredibly high resolutions with all of the " bells and whistles " turned on. Of course, systems running the Video Array won't come cheap—they'll be at least \$4,000, thanks to two high-end PCI-Express graphics cards, water cooling, and a massive power supply. Expect these machines to begin shipping in late 2004. **■ William O'Neal**



Console Corner

Games worth grabbing from your little brother

■ XBOX

Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

Give us a second. We have to get over the shock that a game based on a Vin Diesel vehicle is actually awesome. It shows how a good movie-licensed game can be done, and here's the really scary part—out of nowhere, this game could go on to become one of the best Xbox games to date. The animation and

graphics even rival what we've seen from id's vaunted *Doom 3* on Xbox. Set as a first-person shooter, you get a gritty, up-close look at Butcher Bay. But, when you need to start jumping and climbing, the camera automatically pulls back to a third-person view. Yes folks, this is a year full of surprises, and, God help us, we may even see the movie now. **ALSO CHECK OUT:** *Red Dead Revolver* (PS2, Xbox), *Front Mission 4* (PS2)



Got Evil?

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

"THE EMERALD DRAGON"

ALIASES: THIRD EVIL GENIUS



CHARGES BROUGHT

CONSPIRACY TO KILL U.S. NATIONALS;
CONSPIRACY TO USE WEAPONS OF
MASS DESTRUCTION AGAINST U.S.
NATIONALS; CONSPIRACY TO USE
LASER OR DEATH RAYS FOR
EXTORTION PURPOSES

DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth: Unknown Height: 5' 10"
Weight: 170 pounds Build: Medium athletic
Speaks: English, Chinese
Scars and marks: Surgery scar on left temple
Hair: Bald Eyes: White Sex: Male
Complexion: Olive Citizenship: Chinese

BACKGROUND

Begin on the streets of Hong Kong as a simple pickpocket, joined a local Triad gang and quickly ascended in the organization until captured by ANVL (Asiatic Notorious Villain Incapacitation League) agents in 1986. ANVL implanted a communications chip inside Dragon's brain to spy on Triad activity, but underestimated Triad resources. Dragon rewired the chip to spy on others and build up his own criminal empire. With advance knowledge of ANVL's every move, he's untouchable.



KNOWN ASSOCIATES

ELI BARRACUDA *former FBI crime lord*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Super Headshot, Ghetto Posse

ELSA KRABB *Mason of mental institute*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Motherly Love, Electro-Shock Treatment

THE GREAT MESMERD *talented hypnotist*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Telepathic Mind Control, Willpower Drain

'RED' IVAN *former head of Russia secret police*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Grenade Jg. Mines

JUBEI *item*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Wind Walk, Evaporation

TOP HAT MAN *Unaffiliated*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Smooth Operator

DR. NORA TOXIN *highly trained scientist*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Poison Parfum pour Homme, Half-narcogenic Powder

KOKO *Anglo-Asian thief*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Feral Roar, Pound

DR. ETHAN ASIA *psychic surgeon*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Terror Tactics

PAPA JAMBALAYA *foodie priest*
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Puppetry, Mind Fog

The Nerd Herd

Street geeks speak

Microsoft is bringing PCs and consoles together with XNA. Is this a good thing?



Adrian Wing

TORONTO, ONTARIO
The whole "cross-platform controller" thing is bugging me. I don't want to be forced to play PC games with a

gamepad. Whenever I play a console game, I miss the head-shot accuracy of my trusty mouse and keyboard.



Amy Hoskins

WATERFORD, CT
This will allow all gaming geeks (console or PC) to come together—not to mention making things much easier

for the developers. This means more games for me to choose from.



Erik Elsassser

HIGH BRIDGE, NJ
This is an awful trend. For starters, this could be bad for the PC industry. After all, how many of us have proudly

upgraded just to play the latest game? Developers will no longer push technology as they cater to the lowest common denominator—consoles.

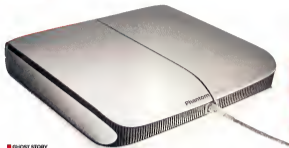


Marcus Elkenberry

PORTLAND, OR
This is a great thing. Do you want to come home after a hard day and fiddle with your PC to get

your game to work? Heck no! If we can just load PC games onto a console and play them with no configuration problems, I would buy one just for that.

Are you wondering where the heck we dig these guys up? They are real folks who write us and post messages on our boards at www.IGN.com. Think you got what it takes? Do you want to be one of the few, the proud, THE NERD? Drop us a line at cgwletters@infidivul.com or just look for the whole gang online.



■ GHOST STORY

Trick or Treat?

Infinitum Labs' Phantom PC console appears

Until now, the infamous Phantom console was looking like vaporware at best. This year's E3, though, marked the first time people could get their hands on the system. Sitting down? Good. The system actually worked and, as you can see from the picture, you won't be embarrassed to put it in your home theater.

The Phantom is optimized to work on HD sets (1080x768-pixel resolution/1080i), and we played *Unreal Tournament 2004* with solid framerates and no hang-ups. That's most likely because there's a decent computer lurking under the hood, and it only has to pump out a maximum resolution of 1080x768 for televisions. Even the unusual slanted keyboard tray and mouse combo worked surprisingly well (and this in light of our skepticism). And yes, we played it live on the Internet.

The only shaky part is the pricing plan. The hardware will set you back \$200, or you can have that fee waived if you sign a two-year contract for \$30 a month. Since you need the service to use this box anyhow, Infinitum may as well just own up to it

and say that it wants your \$720. This is when you start reaching into the realm of budget-friendly game systems (like, say, the first generation *FragBox*, which went for \$1K and is more powerful).

At least Infinitum will have games. Though final announcements are pending, spokespeople say there's going to be a solid lineup of titles available. And since the Phantom is based off an embedded version of Windows XP, you can expect most major hits (including MMOs) to be available. The basic plan entitles you to age-old *Dear Hunter*-like titles, while "premium" games will cost money to rent or buy. Final prices of games, though, will be set by publishers. Whether you want to download a quick demo and instantly play it or rent a title, the options are there.

Obviously, this console-ization of PC gaming is meant to cater to two groups of gamers: the casual and the budget-conscious. Either way, anything that expands the number of competitors online sounds good to us. We'll just have to wait and see how scary the final product is when it ships November 18. **D** *Darin Gladstone*

A Tale of Two PC Wannabes

Both upcoming options promise no-fuss PC gaming in your home theater. So what's the difference between them?

THE CONTENDERS	Phantom	Apexbook
PRICE	\$400 + \$30/month	\$470
AVAILABLE	November 18	September
INSIDE	2.5GHz AMD Athlon XP 2600+ CPU, 504MB RAM, 1024MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra video card, 4GB hard drive	3GHz AMD Athlon XP 3200+ CPU, 504MB RAM, 64MB Nvidia GeForce FX video card, 4GB hard drive
THE HOOKUP	Download all game content; no broadband connection—get more titles and extra money in real or beta (via broadband access, separate)	Uses Xbox as download mechanism to download scripts for playing your old-behaved PC games
THE EXTRAS	3DLC, splash box that has games delivered straight to the system	Fancy, sleeky box that also doubles as a title and DVD player

The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

News and views from the Wild West



The Good

NCsoft: Talk about coming out of left field! How is it that these guys, in the course of a year,

have managed to outdo the big guys in North America with some fresh new ways to do MMOs? There's *Guild Wars*, *Auto Assault*, and *Tribula Resa* all coming down the road. And then there's *City of Heroes*. The fact is, *Heroes* has had pretty much the most successful launch of any MMORPG to date, and is winning over new fans every day—including those (like us) who have been wary of the genre until now.



The Bad

Games on CDs: It's time, everyone. It's time to move on. *Myt* is a decade old, and that might have been the last and best reason ever to

put a game on a CD. Now, we have DVDs. The newest, biggest games coming out are so huge that the multiple CD-ROM installs are reminding us of the bad old days of floppy disks. Upgrade your PC. Now. Fer cryin' out loud, you can buy a DVD drive on the Web for 25 bucks! So, please join us in the 21st century—and give game publishers a reason to release ALL new games on DVDs.



The Ugly

Microsoft's E3 game lineup: No, no, we don't mean the Xbox games. Of course those looked aweso-

me. We can't wait to play *Jeds Empire*, *Hero 2*, and *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*. What we're talking about is the company's embarrassingly peppy PC game lineup, shoved into a corner of the gigantic Xbox booth like lepers. The games themselves looked fine—*Dungeon Siege 2*, *200 Yoocon 2*, *Vanguard*—so no offense. But when that's all Microsoft has to offer, along with some reassuring words about how, really, don't worry, there's more to come—well, we worry.

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

What we said when you were nursing



5 Years Ago, August 1999

Our E3 report called out some soon-to-be-famous, some soon-to-be-infamous titles: *Black & White*, *Age of Empires II*, *Shogun: Total War*, *Freelancer*, *Oni*, and a little something called *The Sims*. But arguably, the big news at E3 this year was the duck-and-cover act that some publishers were doing with their titles. In the wake of *Columbine*, *Kingpin* and *Soldier of Fortune* were shown in a tiny cubicle hidden by a black curtain and requiring a company escort for admittance. With wolf packs of big media prowling the show floor and looking for controversy, were people running scared? You betcha.



10 Years Ago, August 1994

Maybe we love *City of Heroes* so much today because it's been a freaking decade since we've really been able to roleplay as superheroes. Ten years ago, we ran a chomping-at-the-bit preview for *The Superhero League of Hoboken*, a comic RPG from Steve Meretzky. But the big news 10 years ago was a five-star chunk of digital crack known as *X-Com: UFO Defense*, which is simply one of the best PC games ever made.



15 Years Ago, August 1989

Five years ago, we had a copy of this issue. Now we can't find one. Fortunately, we started running this 5, 10, 15 column some five years ago, so we can say with some certainty that this issue featured Peter Molyneux's *Populous*, in which, as a tribe leader, the player "must direct his people on a campaign of conquest that employs a variety of man-made and natural disasters to subjugate the enemy." Then again, maybe that wasn't in the issue. We have no way of knowing. Maybe we couldn't find the issue back then and just made stuff up. We do that all the time—you don't think *Scoter* ever really existed, do you?



Ben and Ben play out what the game will be like.



It may not be *Just Lily 2*, but it's worth the download.

—ERIC JOHNSTON

Beat Cancer. Get High Score

Make-A-Wish kid deals with disease and wins

Ben Duskin needs your help fighting leukemia. Just be sure to grab the power-ups and avoid feeling victim to the rebel! monster guarding the barf shield. Not every kid gets a game made in his honor, but then again, Ben isn't like every kid.

About three and a half years ago, Ben was diagnosed with leukemia and began a hard-fought battle. Now, his leukemia in remission, he's back in the fourth grade and making a game inspired by his experience. "Videogames showed me I could do something besides sit in bed," says the precocious 9-year-old. "I wanted kids to have something to do while getting treatments and show them what the medicine is doing inside their bodies." Granted, we doubt there are cartoony characters on hoverboards shooting cancer-killing beams, but hey—we get the idea.

That's what got the Make-A-Wish Foundation's attention. "We get a lot of requests to take a trip, go to Disneyland, or meet a celebrity," says Patricia Wilson, executive director of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. "But [Ben's request] was very different because it was genuinely philanthropic."

To help make Ben's dream a reality, The Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation sent out a plea to the gaming community. Most companies responded by citing that it would take



years and millions of dollars to create a game. It was Eric Johnston, a senior software engineer at LucasArts, who has answered the call. Johnston, who has worked on such titles as *Escape from Monkey Island* and *Star Wars: Episode I Racer*, spent the next six months meeting with Ben to create *Ben's Game*. Once a week, they outlined what they wanted to do. They even spent a day in the LucasArts sound studios recording Ben yelling out "Owl!" and shouting "Yahoo!"

Since the beta version launched at www.makewish.org/ben, more than 70,000 people have downloaded the arcade shooting game. The best part, besides the fun, is that it's socially redeeming. And, according to reports, the game already has quite a few fans. One chemo patient wrote in to say that he played *Ben's Game* all night.

—Damen Gladstone

"Videogames showed me I could do something besides sit in bed."

■ NOW LOADING

Call of Duty: United Offensive

Publisher: **Activision** Release Date: **Fall 2004**

C And now, for a brief moment of historical perspective: On August 23, 1943, on its fourth and final attempt since the German invasion, the Russian army advanced and captured the city of Kursk. This ended the battle of Kursk, sending the German forces into retreat for the duration of the war. You will be quizzed on this—and expected to remember it when playing the expansion to Call of Duty.



■ FRINGE LINE

A Breed Apart

When publishers and developers collide

Publishers: Developers don't appreciate it when you change their game and then release it. That seems to be exactly what German-based CDV Software has done with the recently released shooter *Breed*.

In response to numerous criticisms about the quality of the final product (which received a 1.5-star lashing in our July issue), developer Brat Designs accused CDV of making numerous heavy-handed modifications to the game, including rewritten and rerecorded dialogue, different level scripts, and blender

textures—not to mention using an old build of the game that was several updates behind the finished product. CDV's response? "The final master that Brat Designs delivered to CDV was considerably improved by CDV," claims a CDV representative on the company's official forums. "The fact is, from CDV's point of view, we're ultimately the ones who made this game even playable. The level that was delivered by Brat was, for the most part, not playable; the balancing was practically nonexistent, and even the textures were unightly. The

voiceovers, too, had to be changed because the original files were so indecent that the USK—Germany's age-rating agency—would have intervened." Speculation is still flying as to the current and future relationship between the two companies, and Brat Designs has not yet reacted to CDV's public challenge for a full disclosure of its original textures and levels. *Breed*'s largely mediocre reception certainly isn't doing much to help matters, though. It's pretty safe to say that the game can't get much worse than it is now. **■ Ryan Scott**

■ ROAD TRIP

True Traffic Report

Just how true are the streets of L.A. in *True Crime*?

What's so "true" about *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*, anyway? As the game speeds to store shelves and we raced off to E3, we got to wondering just how accurate the 40-some-odd miles of road are in Activision's *GTA* tribute. With all that traffic (day or night!) in Los Angeles, it'll take you about an hour to get from Sunset Blvd. (where we spent our evenings) to the Staples Center (home of E3). In the game, you can clear that distance in about seven minutes.



■ MEN IN TIGHTS

Pulp Fiction

City of Heroes comic takes the online world offline

Rick Dakan, co-creator of *City of Heroes*, isn't getting much sleep these days. "Half the day I'm doing design work for the game. The other half, I'm working on the comic," he says. That's right, Blue King Studios (which Dakan formed) will be sending a free monthly comic based on the new superhero MMO to game subscribers. Don't think, though, that this is just another cheap marketing ploy to push the comic. We did at first, and Dakan set us straight: It's being used to bridge a gap between the two mediums.

Back in 2000, Rick helped form the idea that was to become the heroic MMO (see the review on page 70). But about 16 months ago he decided he wanted to focus more on the writing aspects and not day-to-day programming chores. To this day, he's still working with Cryptic Studios, creating documents about the villain groups that detail their histories, goals, minions, and so on. But now he has another way to explore that world.

Coming soon.

As we go to print, the first five issues are already mapped out. The first issue introduces readers to Paragon City and the three main characters who will anchor the



series—Horus, Apex, and War Witch. But as the series continues, there are a number of interesting ways that the comic will tie in with the game. Starting with the third issue, a new game element is introduced: roughly every two issues. It could be new villains, a new city zone, or a new major plotline.

Take, for example, issues three and four, which Dakan was nice enough to tease us with. A new enemy group is introduced: The Carnival of Shadows. Think sexy Cirque du Soleil female villains. They have a lot of influence in high society, and led by Vanessa DeVore, these high-level psychic acrobats aren't people you want to mess with. Neither are the super-powered Praetorians or the ultra-high-tech Malta Group. Besides being a vehicle for unveiling new game elements,

Dakan also hopes to garner a loyal readership that wants to follow the exploits of the main characters. Of course, some may have a vested interest since, starting with issue five, player-created heroes will make cameos in the comic. While he didn't have all the details handy, Dakan says that customer-service reps will select those who are worthy or have achieved a certain status in the game to earn representation in the comic. Also planned for every issue are eight pages earmarked for a community section. It'll include things such as player-hero profiles, tips, articles, and background stories. Will the mighty marvels of CGW ever bust heads in the comic? Stay tuned! ■ Darren Gladstone

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COMIC

Wanted

\$2.99, WWW.TOPCOW.COM

Your estranged father that you just found out that he was The Killer, one of the world's most dangerous men. This twisted take on supervillainy follows the life of Wesley Gibbons, meek loser turned villainous prodigy, as he gets deeper into a society of bad guys who secretly run the world. Too bad all the superheroes are dead.

TOY

Call of Duty: Action Figure

\$9 EACH, WWW.PLANETOYS.COM

Forget about all those wussy transforming robots and bioengineered soldiers of the future. Action figures need to get back to basics, like the highly detailed Call of Duty figures do. Series one artists six soldiers representing the American (82nd and 101st Airborne) and German (Tokentopf Division Officer, Das Reich Division, and Wiking Division) militaries.



MOVIE

Alien vs. Predator

\$10 A TICKET (IN SAN FRANCISCO), WWW.AVP-MOVIE.COM

Apparently, the aliens and predators have checked up in Antarctica for a couple millennia. So in a proper rip-off—we mean tribute—to classics like *The Thing*, a bunch of wayward humans stumble upon them. This movie screams "disaster," but you know that you're still going to run out to see it. We will. Our advice: Go for the safe bet and pick up the Governor's two-disc *Predator: Special Edition*. Instead, the remastered print looks and sounds good—perfect for hearing those memorable lines like "Stick around."

BOOKS

Maker's Mark and Coke

\$8 AT HAPPY HOUR

Ever wonder how it is we come into the office every day and not kill each other? Two words: Maker's Mark. It makes us funny and attractive to women. (Finally!) Remember, kids—If you're under 21, liquor is a bad, bad thing. Just awful Reelz! Just ask Darren after this year's ES.



DVD

Freaky and Geeks: The Complete Series

\$48, WWW.AMAZON.COM

We'll take one guess which side of the "freak" or "geek" fence you fall on when you were in high school. What we can't figure out, though, is why this amazing TV series disappeared. What, were you too busy watching creep reality shows? This boxed set collects every episode and packs it onto six discs with multiple commentary tracks and deleted scenes.



THE CURIOUS LIVES OF HUMAN CADAVERS

MARY ROACH

BOOK

Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers

\$14, WWW.WORTON.COM

No, this isn't Robert Coffey's cookbook; it's a grimly fascinating look at what happens to our bodies after we're done with them. *Stiff* traces 2,000 years of humanity's boldest scientific finds and some of the weirdest undertakings that involved the postmortem lives of people.



MUSIC

Snow Patrol, First Straws

\$10, WWW.AMAZON.COM

Those looking for a mellow round of music to chill by can find a couple catchy hooks on Snow Patrol's new CD. The fuzz-rock sound is mixed with indie Brit-pop and what you wind up with are songs like "Run" and "Glimmering Auction" that get into your head and won't leave.

Pocket Change: \$50

THIS IS NOT A THIS



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- PC GAMER, March 2004

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Previews

See 'em now, play 'em soon

Speak to the fiend:

MMORPG MMADNESS

This ain't like other magazines with their fluffy Previews. Here, we scrutinize every upcoming MMORPG, describing what looks great and calling out all the potential problems.

Beautiful modeling and texturing is employed to create the right look.



"Your sword is longer than my sword."





G The Matrix Online
Do you think this is a magazine you are holding? Silly reader, the Matrix has you.



G Tabula Rasa
Richard Garriott ponders how to be unique and special in a massively multiplayer world.



G Guild Wars
Classic Diablo-style action. No monthly charge. And strikingly beautiful. Hurrah.

BY PUBLISHER: Microsoft DEVELOPER: Sigil GAMES MMO RPG RELEASE DATE: 2005

Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

Spiritual successor

Vanguard's design team (which includes key people from throughout EverQuest's development) clearly knows its dictionary definitions: The Vanguard is the forefront, the frontrunner. And that's just the role the team is envisioning for its work: Vanguard aims to be the frontrunner among next-generation MMORPGs, a game that will lead players to new worlds of adventure.

The world

Vanguard is set in a once-magical world striving to rediscover its enchantments. The player initially views a world that looks much like our own (though populated by elves and halflings), but over time, more and more of the fantasy is revealed. For example, you might first encounter normal bears (inasmuch as it's normal to

dwarves, high elves, and the vulmans, a bipedal wolflike creature.

The hook

Keith Parkinson, the famous fantasy painter, is the art director on Vanguard. You may recognize his work on the box of the original EverQuest. His vision combines with Vanguard's technology to create a game world populated by amazing-looking environments and edifices. Huge, mountainous fortresses will look good from their topmost towers to their hidden waterways.

Expect a dearth of teleporting transport systems—the team plans to focus on making travel fun. To that end, the developers are working on enough content to create worlds they hope will last for five to 10 years, with ecosystems that make sense and smart interface design.



The development team recognizes 2004 as the year for EverQuest 2 and World of Warcraft, but a lot can happen in a year if other games take too much of a lead. It'll be harder to entice players away.

by Johnny Liu

"I've got a team here that I have to tell to go home."

encounter a bear), but as you venture forth, you begin to encounter zombie bears and undead bears. And trees with moving roots. And piranhas with feet and nervous ticks. And frogs that open wide grins to reveal huge chambers. And, perhaps most unusual of all, enemies with personality. The environments themselves offer personality, too, with continents that reflect real locales. For example, Thestra, the first continent in the game, is similar to Western Europe in its design and ecosystem.

From a technological standpoint, Vanguard uses a full range of tools and tricks to create graphically rich realms in a network-intensive MMORPG space. Scalable texture maps and the layering of different shaders make it possible to create the rocky face of a canyon, and no matter where in the game world you view an area from, the image holds up.

While the total number of races has not yet been finalized, we do know there will be seven races native to Thestra: Thestran humans, barbarians, half-giants, halflings,

the developers also plan to employ tools that ease the maintenance of these online worlds. For example, object instancing programs allow for easy manipulation and placement of an enemy inside the world, so what once took days or weeks can now be done in a few minutes.

The snare

There are no absolutes, even the most experienced bunch of professionals has its misses. Yet, Bradley McQuaid, one-time lead programmer and producer of EverQuest and now coproducer of Vanguard, reassuringly states: "I've got a team here that I have to tell to go home. This is how badly they want to put their heart and soul into this game."

Other than that, the biggest snare is the war for this game—the release date is not expected until well into 2005.

The Word THE FUTURE



PUBLISHED BY LucasArts DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment GENRE MMORPG RELEASE DATE October 2004

Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

Fly me to the moon



A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, while the original *Star Wars Galaxies* was being completed, the dual empires of LucasArts and Sony Online Entertainment already planned to implement spaceships into their online game. That time is upon us with the first *Galaxies* expansion, *Jump to Lightspeed*.

The world

As pretty much everyone over the age of 2 knows, *Star Wars* is one-third lightsabers, one-third weird Muppets, and one-third spaceships. Gross simplification, yes, but if you've ever wanted to be a giant Hasidic Woolkee (Darren) or a naughty Twi'lek dancer (the infamous Robert Coffey), *Galaxies* is the closest you can get to living in the *Star Wars* universe, outside of kidnapping George Lucas.

Thus far, there are 10 planned space zones adjacent to principal planets such as Naboo and Corellia, as well as some wild space zones. You can also look forward to large squadron-based raids on capital transport ships.

The hook

Spaceship! While a full list of all the ships

available has not been released, rest assured that all the mainstays will be in the game, including the X-wing, the Y-wing, and various TIE-fighter models, as well as the Millennium Falcon. Cockpits and ship statistics will closely match the designs and descriptions set down in the movies, and ships will feature upgradeable shields and weapons.

Having your very own spaceship also does away with one of the worst problems of the original game, the shuttle system. When you've got a ship of your own, you can jet to those faraway galaxies on a whim. Concerning these space commutes, instead of using special space fuel, the ships will degrade part by part. Simply replace worn-out components to keep your ship in tip-top shape.

The promise of real-time twitch-action space combat in the vein of the classic *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games incorporated into *Galaxies*' fully realized player economy and society is tantalizing. Plus, there are no plans for an added monthly fee to play the expansion.

The snare

We hate to bring this up again, but the original *Galaxies* did "win" our 2003

Coaster of the Year award. Yet, people do learn from their mistakes—take, for example, Cinco Barnes, lead designer of *Jump to Lightspeed*.

"Since *Star Wars Galaxies* was so many things...so massive, so successful, so lauded, and so maligned, the lessons are endless," says Barnes. "What we know now about prerelease hype, player design feedback, core-game necessities, experimental technologies, and original play mechanics is staggering. Bringing *Galaxies* to market was no walk in the park, but the experience is worth the challenge—a hundred times over."

We don't know about you, but we're certainly willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. **by Johnny Liu**

The word: FORCE-FUL



◻ Inside the cockpit.

One-third lightsabers, one-third weird Muppets, and one-third spaceships.

BY JEFF LABRECQUE, Warner Bros./Sage DEVELOPER: KUNG FU GAMES MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

The Matrix Online

Down the rabbit hole

Free your mind with a different breed of MMORPG in *The Matrix Online*. As a "red pill" newly freed and sent back into the Matrix, your allegiance is up for grabs. Do you help out the humans, the machines, or the Merovingian?

The world

What is the Matrix? It's a computer simulation of urban human life—essentially a gigantic MMORPG, except you can't log off when you want to and your naked body is floating in jelly. Specifically, the metropolitan cityscape of the Matrix is a sprawling maze of towering skyscrapers that goes a long way toward replicating a true big-city feeling.

The game takes place right after the events of *Matrix Revolutions*, but the game's director of online development, William Westwater, promises an experience more closely reflective of the first film. "In the first movie, there was still a sense of mystery," says Westwater. "That's what we're trying to bring to *The Matrix Online*."

The hook

The *Animatrix* was entertaining, thanks to its eclectic mix of tangential stories and varying artistic motifs, and *The Matrix Online* damnably follows suit in its attempt to try new ideas, including a new "leveling" system. Characters choose one of



three professions—soldier, hacker, or martial artist—and can be decked out in a full range of leather, alligator skin, and vinyl. However, instead of straight level-building, abilities can be downloaded and sampled as necessary. Permanent choices come into play only deeper in the game, after you're familiar with the system. This eliminates sitting through unknown statistics and being locked into your choices.

The Matrix Online will also be very story driven, the author of the comic book *Concrete*, Paul Chadwick, has already scripted out an advanced year-long plot. But missing crucial plot twists isn't a problem—story episodes will be available for download.

The snare

The Matrix isn't quite the powerhouse it used to be, interest in the series has steeply declined since the last two sequels were



released. Fans still hold steadfast to the original film, but the mainstream public might not be interested in a new game after playing the best-selling but poorly polished *Enter the Matrix*.

Monolith is a talented studio, but this is its first MMORPG. Even so, the company has wrangled in some excellent MMORPG talent, such as Asheron's Call lead designer Toby Repant. We're also told to expect some former *EverQuest* developers to be on board.

Because Ubisoft recently pulled out of the project, the game has endured a bit of publisher schizophrenia. We learned in a surprise announcement during E3 that Sage and Warner Brothers are now copublishing the game, which is gearing up for a Q4 release. **Johnny Liu**

It's an experience more closely reflective of the first film.



The Word: KUNG FU

BY STEPHEN DESTINATION GAMES DEVELOPER, NCsoft GERMANY MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

Tabula Rasa

A clean slate for MMORPGs

Your mom is wrong—you aren't special. There's someone out there who can run faster than you, can do longer division than you, and has a higher-level EverQuest character than you. Boo hoo.

Your math may be weak, but something about MMORPGs doesn't add up. How can you feel like a failed hero of yore when you're surrounded by countless other heroes? Enter *Tabula Rasa*, an MMORPG that promises a personal self-esteem-boosting experience.

The world

With a combination of sci-fi and fantasy aesthetics, *Tabula Rasa*'s world is a unique merger of Western fantasy and Eastern design that bears a superficial resemblance to Sega's multiconsole *Phantasy Star Online*. Much of the game is privately "instanced" for you and your adventuring comrades, with only about 5 to 10 percent of the game occurring in the open community area.

Tabula Rasa goes out of its way to create an individualized experience by featuring such bells and whistles as a house of your own that you can furnish and decorate. You can also build a friends list and invite those pals to crash your crib.

Three different mission types are available for adventurous folk. Scripted missions have clear goals, such as taking out a group of bad guys or escorting someone to safety. There are also PVP missions depicted as war games, à la capture the flag. The third mission type is a sort of open-battlefield combat.

The hook

Richard Garriott, aka Lord British and the creator of *Ultima Online*, has worked under the radar alongside a dedicated team for three long years to create *Tabula Rasa*. "We founded the online game space," Garriott says. "If anyone has online experience, we have as much as there can be."

Tabula Rasa utilizes a unique three-meter system, with characters defined by body,

mind, and spirit aspects. Enemies share this trinity as well, and different weapons are useful against different aspects. For example, music weapons can either boost or weaken the Spirit meter.

In most MMORPGs, death carries frustrating penalties. In *Tabula Rasa*, death does not bring direct punishment, but rather a reduced reward. Most missions take less than 30 minutes; the worst thing that could happen is having to replay a failed mission—far better than the dreaded EverQuest corpse run.

The snare

Large-scale MMORPGs have plenty of hurdles to overcome, but some players actually enjoy their faults. A "single-player experience but with friends" approach might not be what dyed-in-the-wool MMORPG players are looking for, but this paradigm shift sounds very appealing. —Johnny Liu

The Word: **FRESH SLATE**

"We founded the online game space."

Whatchoo looking at?



EverQuest II

Hands on with the new Evercrack

Anybody got a milk bone?



"Hi, I'm Selly Struthers! Here at the Norrath School of Smashing and Killing, you can earn your certificate in face punching, sliding off heads, phat lewt, or spam camping. GET YOUR DEGREE!"

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the original *EverQuest* is just about the most highly praised game ever created. Countless imitators, good and bad, have come out since EQ's release in 1999. *Ultima Online* may have started the MMO craze with a bang, but EQ set the mark for the vast majority of MMOs to follow. Now, five years later, the eagerly awaited sequel is almost upon us. Will it raise the bar—or will it amount to just another shallow copycat?

The world

The fantasy world of Norrath is richer and more vibrant than ever before, with even more character options to choose from. All the old favorites from the original EQ—including humans, dwarves, gnomes, trolls, iksar, and various elfen races—make their return here, along with a new rodentlike

species called the stonks. After creating your character via a thoroughly well-detailed generation process reminiscent of *Star Wars Galaxies*, you'll choose a basic profession (fighter, mage, priest, or scout) and be sent on your merry way, completing quests and defeating deadly monsters as you explore the ins and outs of the gargantuan game world.

The hook

EQ2 is an incredible-looking game on par with many of its next-generation competitors. The animations, textures, and superb lighting effects are light years ahead of its venerated airmate, and the game certainly looks more alive than ever before. Speech is another big addition—most of the game's characters now have spoken dialogue, an unprecedented step for the MMO genre. Character development progresses along a branching class system, with six advanced classes available to each of the four basic professions. Utilizing your character's talents and interacting with the game world is now easier than ever,



EQ2's critters and spell effects are top-notch.

with an intuitive control scheme and convenient, context-sensitive menus. To all appearances, EQ2 refines its predecessor's gameplay in all the ways that matter.

The snare

Aside from the obvious competition from such solid games as *City of Heroes* and *World of Warcraft*, EQ2 also has another bitter competitor, itself. With more than 400,000 EQ subscribers, EQ2 is sure to meet a great deal of resistance from die-hard EQ fans who have poured countless hours into their characters. After all, starting completely over after five years can be a real pain. Despite this, SOE hopes the two games will coexist peacefully while still allowing new players to be folded into *EverQuest 2* when the game is released this fall. **Ryan Scott**



© GMPG, I just panned that goblin. LOL!

Five years later, the eagerly awaited sequel is almost upon us.

The Word PHAT LEWT

World of Warcraft

▶ With the flight of the hip-pogryph, Night elves can hold these winged beasts in order to travel great distances. The first step is to break down a hippogryph master in a city. One thing to ponder: With a name like "hippogryph," shouldn't the creature look half hippo?

Each of WoW's different races has a different air-taxi transport system. Taurs, taurens, and orcs have wyverns, humans, dwarves, and gnomes take to the skies on gryphons. And the undead fly on vampire bats.



ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES HAMILTON; ART BY JAMES HAMILTON; MUSIC BY JAMES HAMILTON; EDITOR: JAMES HAMILTON; DESIGNER: JAMES HAMILTON; PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES HAMILTON; ON 2004

World of Warcraft

Orcs vs. humans vs. the need for sleep

World of what? Just kidding. This game has been looming large over the MMORPG landscape since it was announced, with gamers hoping for what could be, and rival game developers cringing in fear for the same reason. Because if Blizzard can apply the same kind of magic that has made its *WarCraft*, *StarCraft*, and *Diablo* games international blockbusters, then the company could easily flatten the competition. Still, Blizzard is a newcomer to the genre, and there are plenty of high-profile alternatives out now or on the way, so, unlike any game it has made before, this is far from a slam dunk. But is it really wise to bet against Blizzard?

The world

With a series of strategy games, ridiculously detailed manuals, and novels behind it, Blizzard's Azeroth was a rich, well-defined fantasy world before the company even started on *World of Warcraft*. But in the game, Azeroth is coming alive like never before, with a brilliant artistic vision that is reminiscent of the world's strategy games but also unlike anything you've ever seen before: It's a 3D cartoon wonderland, sometimes humorous, sometimes frightening, and always a marvel to behold. All of the races, creatures, lands, and cities of the *WarCraft* games are now yours to live in and be a part of—and if the so-far-successful beta test is any indication, many of you may never leave

The hook

The hook? Well, it's Blizzard. That will be reason enough for tons of gamers to check this out—even, as Blizzard hopes, gamers who've never been interested in MMORPGs before. Blizzard's goal from the start has been to make an online RPG with as much mainstream appeal as all its other games, and the ongoing beta test is proving that the company is well on its way. Gameplay is largely quest-oriented—and the quests are in grand abundance throughout the world, while the skills and crafting systems will



Hanging out with *Lordaeron*



I'M NOT A MAD COW. I'm just having a bad day. "sniff"

A feast of gaming that never leaves you a second to wonder what to do next.

have you obsessively pursuing side projects all the time. The net result? A feast of gaming that never leaves you a second to wonder what to do next.

The snare

World of Warcraft has a couple things going against it. One is expectations: Everyone expects miracles from Blizzard, and all the hype—including our own—may leave some gamers wondering what the fuss was about. Games not into a classic fantasy setting, including some right here at CGW, may find titles like *City of Heroes* to be more compelling and unique. Does anyone really need to be a dwarf or elf



"RARGH. Red Bull gave me wings!"

again? And then there's the worry of too much success: that a drove of newbies players will kill the experience for more hardcore online gamers. Still, "fear of success" is a problem that most developers would kill for. —Jeff Green

The Word: **ORCLICIOUS**

PUBLISHER: NCsoft DEVELOPER: ArenaNet GENRE: MMORPG REVEALED: Nov. 14, 2004

Guild Wars

"MMor" for less: No subscription fees!



Diablo-style real-time action mixes with Magic: The Gathering-style strategy.



A torture device that goes to "IT".

It's news to no one that most MMOs devolve into nothing more than chore simulators. What gamer hasn't committed countless hours to turning boring, weak characters into powerhouses, only to repeat the cycle over and over again? ArenaNet aims to change that; its development team, made up of the networking talent behind Battle.net and veterans of many Blizzard games, wants you to have fun from the get-go with its new title *Guild Wars*, a massively multiplayer action game in the vein of *Diablo*.

During E3, ArenaNet invited the public to play *Guild Wars* missions with E3 attendees via a free downloadable client available on the company's website. From May 12 to May 14, scores of players were online, battling other players and nonplayer characters in this new fantasy playground.

The world

Missions take you to places like the Tombs of Dracon, which features large, crumbling stone fortresses. This harsh, rocky expanse, rich with reds, browns, and purples, is a sharp contrast to the lush green jungles of the Wilds, where plant life is three times the height of any human character. Along the way, you encounter original creatures like the lightclaw griffon and fierce bone dragons composed of reptilian remains. The stunning fighting across these realms imbues the game with a sense of magic.

The hook

The game's successful pick-up-and-play quality comes from the innovative way players acquire skills. *Guild Wars'* character-enhancement system was inspired by *Magic: The Gathering*, the popular fantasy card game. There are hundreds of skills to learn, but only eight can be taken into combat. Your choices, not endless leveling up, will decide your fate. The free-fighting gameplay was modeled after *Diablo's*, except that character classes are character professions (six announced so far), and players can specialize in two of them.

Plus, playing *Guild Wars* online is free. That's a revolution everyone should follow in the future, players who want to expand their experience can purchase chapter expansions, available via download or at retail outlets. Predictive downloading will stream necessary content in as needed. The expansion will be downloaded, just waiting for a final OK from your credit card.

The snare

Although there are fresh elements among the creatures and visuals, *Guild Wars* still runs the risk of getting lost in the clutter of online fantasy games. Not too much information is available about the game's story, but what is known fits the familiar clichés inherent to the genre. While developers don't have to create a nonfantasy story to stand out, another sword-and-shield entry such as this will have to fight its way out of the crowd. **Jason Allen**

The Word: FREE-DOM!



RAIGH—watch where you put those hands!

PUBLISHER: **Microsoft** DEVELOPER: **HiDefinix** GENRE: **MMO-Action** RELEASE DATE: **TBA**

Auto Assault

Drive-by shooting

MMORPGs don't always have to be about elves, pixie dust, and other forms of...well...nonmilitarism. How about one that takes place in a postapocalyptic world? You know, *Mad Max* style, with car combat, explosions, and destruction? Thankfully, that's exactly what *Auto Assault* promises.

The world

A vast wasteland populated by humans, mutants, and biomeks, where you drive around creating mayhem or walk around communities looking for items to soup up your road rocket.

MMORPGs don't always have to be about elves and pixie dust.

The hook

The Havok physics engine allows for fully destructible environments and vehicular manslaughter that sends enemies flying through the air, rag-doll style. These physics effects are possible across a MMO because the effects are done natively on each player's computer.

The game's cars drive smoothly whether you use the keyboard or a mouse. Vehicles can also be outfitted with improved armor and weaponry. Ah, the spoils of battle.

The snare

Motor City Online, the closest thing to an MMO car game, failed dismally, but that was straight-up racing, not combat. If online worlds can blend with pure vehicular action, then *Auto Assault* will be worth "tuning up" for. **Johny Liu**

The Word: DESTRUCTION



Commuters are murder.

PUBLISHER: **Neovix** DEVELOPER: **Neovix** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **August 2004**

The Saga of Ryzom

Create and customize the details

Honestly, the word "Ryzom" sounds like either a dietary fiber or some new medicine. Yet *The Saga of Ryzom* might be the prescription against staid and tired MMORPGs. In a mix of fantasy and science fiction, players will adventure forth with swords and rifles, sorcery and technology, in a large game world.

The world

The *Saga of Ryzom* takes place on the planet Atya. You play as one of four races in the game, and Neovix says more playable races may be added after the game's release.

Expect dungeons, player housing, instanced zones, and more in the final release as well.

The hook

The developers promise huge battles involving players and creatures in a seamless game world. Perhaps the most interesting aspect however is Ryzom's robust skill- and spell-based character-building systems. You select a basic spell type, such as an icebolt. Then you add or subtract range, spell damage, and other special effects the spells might have. All of this is balanced by a cost for each addition. Want to increase the

spell's range? It will cost more in terms of casting requirements.

The snare

It remains to be seen how well this cost-customization system works in long-term play, but we are still intrigued by the dimension and strategy to character customization and growth. Yet, *Ryzom* will have to muster more moxie and buzz in its current beta period to stand up to the higher-profile releases. **Mark Asher**

The Word: CUSTOMIZE



Looks like you've got a spider problem.



Flashy, shiny lights on the planet Atya.

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WILL BE YOUR MEN.

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Blood and Violence



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PUBLISHER: Funcom DEVELOPER: Funcom GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion

End of the world as we know it

Alien invasion shakes things up for the world's first sci-fi MMORPG. Waves upon waves of extraterrestrials are attacking Rubi-Ka, a remote desert planet colonized by modern man's descendants 30,000 years in the future.

The world

The scenario is very *Dune*-like; Rubi-Ka is the only place in the known universe where a strange substance called "notum" is found, and as such, several factions vie for control of it.

The hook

Beside the vicious throngs of E.T.s, the key feature is the addition of player-run communities. With the help of craftsmen, you can build your own estates and outfit them in many ways. There are also player-run towns, complete with guild HQs, grid terminals (grids serve as rapid transit), and even guns to fight off attacking UFOs.

The snare

Anarchy Online is getting up there in years, and it's starting to show. Though it is currently the best it's ever been, the question remains whether it can still hold its head above the multitude of upcoming MMORPGs. **Miguel Lopez**

The Word: INVADED



Take me to your leader.



That's the second-biggest alien death ship I've ever seen.

PUBLISHER: Mythic Entertainment DEVELOPER: Mythic Entertainment RELEASE DATE: 2005

Imperator

Centurions and legionaries in the future

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will be *Imperator*, the futuristic MMORPG by the creators of *Dark Ages* of Camelot.

The world

What if the Roman Empire had never fallen? In *Imperator*, *Gladiator* meets *Blade Runner* in a technologically advanced futuristic world.

The hook

The alternate history concept is very intriguing. And the massive tome of concept art we've rifled through is filled with slick and clever designs. Much of the game's playable areas will be created on the fly, or "instanced," and characters will be developed through a skill-based system that is enabled through "life event" quests. Interesting detail: The major enemy of the



Roman Empire will be the Mayans.

The snare

This falls alongside *Vanguard* as a sometime in 2005 release. **Johnny Liu**

The Word: TROJAN HORSE



PUBLISHER: Mythic DEVELOPER: Mythic GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Summer 2004

Dark Age of Camelot: New Frontiers

Welcome once again to Camelot

Mythic is revamping the player-versus-player (PVP) portion of *Dark Age of Camelot*, the company's flagship game, with a new expansion, *New Frontiers*—a free download for existing customers. Current subscribers can already access the beta version.

The world

The *Dark Age of Camelot* world is divided into three realms eternally at war with one another: Albion loosely uses the mythic setting of Arthurian legend. The realm of Midgard is based on Norse tales. The third realm, Hibernia, is inspired by Celtic myth.

The hook

In *New Frontiers*, players can jump into battles more quickly via the new Realmwars map window. The teleport options and the common battlefields players fight over

have been redone and consolidated into one zone. Keeps have been redesigned and are now upgradeable, giving players more control over the castles they occupy. There will even be fast attack boats!

Camelot's Realm Abilities system is also receiving an overhaul. These important abilities, formerly earned by killing enemy players, will be rebalanced and returned.

The snare

Although still going strong, Camelot has quite a few miles on the odometer, and some players may be itching to change rides. Luckily for those feeling antsy, a second expansion, *Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs*, offers a complete graphical overhaul. Check out the sidebar for side-by-side comparisons. © Mark Asher

The Word MEDIEVAL



Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs

Soon after the release of *Dark Age of Camelot: New Frontiers*, another expansion, *Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs*, will offer a complete graphic overhaul. The character on the right is the current look; this same character on the left shows how the expansion will upgrade the visuals. No more flat faces, dopey expressions, or armor that doesn't look like armor.



Although still going strong, Camelot has quite a few miles on the odometer.

PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Advent Rising	Popcorn Games	October 2004
Age of Conan: Blood of Heroes	Turbine	Q3 2004
Age of Conan: Blood of Heroes	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Age of Conan: Blood of Heroes	The Adventure Company	November 2004
Age of Conan: Blood of Heroes	Popcorn	Q4 2004
The Bard's Tale: The Bard's Tale	Micro Management	2004
Beardland 2	Electronic Arts	Q1 2005
Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	2005
BloodRayn 2	Remedy Games	October 2004
Call of Duty: Dark Forces of the Earth	Infinity Networks	September 2004
Call of Duty: United Offensive	Activision	Q4 2004
Chocobo X	Ubisoft	2004
City of Villains	EA GAMES	2005
Construx IV	Activision	2005
Codename: Panzers	GVN Software	2004
Cyberpunk: Conflict: The Gun Wars	Empire Publishing	September 2004
Dark Age of Camelot: Conquest	Hydrus Productions	December 2004
Dark Fall: Lights Out	The Adventure Company	Q3 2004
Deem 3	Artisan	Q3 2004
Dragon Age	Hothead	2004
Dragon Emblems	Codemasters	Q4 2004
Dragonage: Stage II	Microsoft	November 2004
Warzone: Birth 2	Warzone Universal	2005
EverQuest II	SOL	September 2004
EverQuest	Warzone Universal	September 2004
The Fall: Last Days of Doom	TSA	Q1 2004
R.F.C.A.D.	Warzone Universal	2005
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Square Enix	Q4 2004
FitOut	Intique Interactive	Q2 2004
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Popcorn Games	2004
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	September 2004
Gold Worm	Hothead	November 2004
HalfLife 2	Valve Universal	2004
Heroes of the Crown	Energy Technology	Q3 2004
Jacob	Aciplex	Q3 2004
League Park Larry: Power Cuts League	Warzone Universal	October 2004
LOTH: The Battle for Middle-earth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts	August 2005
The Matrix Online	Sega	October 2004
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Men of Valor	Warzone Universal	Q4 2004
Middle-earth Online	Warzone Universal	October 2004

► New ◀ Update



PUBLISHER Square Enix DEVELOPER Square Enix GENRE MMORPG RELEASE DATE Q4 2004

Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia

There's nothing final about this fantasy



Square Enix shocked the world when it released *Final Fantasy XI* for the PC earlier this year. Who would have thought that a publisher known for epic, arguably overwrought console RPGs could produce one of the most solid and playable MMORPGs around? *Chains of Promathia*, the expansion due out this fall, promises to expand the game's rich world considerably. We're just a little skeptical as to what, exactly, the expansion will bring...



Picture: Screenshot from Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia

The world

Vana'diel, quite possibly the most aesthetically detailed world in MMORPG history, is a land beleaguered by hordes of beastmen—a catchall for various types of evil humanoid. Three rival nations have forged an uneasy peace in order to combat these threats.

The hook

Chains of Promathia will add 40 areas to *Final Fantasy XI*'s already feature-rich world. Square Enix has been tight lipped about precise details, but we do know that among these new zones will be a giant metropolis populated by goblins—FFXI's most lovable tiny terrors.

The snare

It is yet to be revealed whether there will be any new character jobs in *Chains of Promathia*. If the answer turns out to be "no," then that would make COP one of

the most half-assed expansions in MMORPG history. We don't want this to be the reality for one of our favorite massively multiplayer games ever, but we'll call 'em as we see them... **—Miguel Lopez**

The word: **DISABLING**



Koei

Square Enix isn't the only Japanese console developer hopping aboard the MMORPG train. Koei, known for a multitude of games grounded throughout Asian history, is releasing *Nobun's Ambition Online* and *Uncharted Waters Online* in Japan. Neither is currently slated for a domestic release.

PUBLISHER: **Gravity** DEVELOPER: **Gravity** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **May 2004**

Ragnarok Online

MManga Online RPG

From *StarCraft* ballads hitting the pop charts to players dying in Internet cafes, Korea is one country that loves the PC. *Ragnarok Online*, one of Korea's popular MMORPGs, has now been translated and published Stateside.

The world

Ragnarok Online is based on the fantasy comic series *Ragnarok* by Myung-Jin Lee, published in the U.S. by TokyoPop. These comics take elements of Norse mythology and blend them with classic fantasy tales and Asian design. It's an entertaining serial adventure of gods and warriors.

The world of these comics is re-created online, with 10 different lands/environments and 20 different job classes that are earned through a hierarchal chart.

The hook

Ragnarok Online claims to be one of the top MMORPGs in Korea, so it must be doing something right. Appealingly, a 15-day free trial is available in the States, but to prepare for a long download—at least the game has bite-sized split RAR files.



Thankfully, the interface system allows you to play windowed, so you can battle the beasts while writing e-mail.

The snare

Just because something is incredibly popular across the globe does not mean it will do well here. First off, the character graphics are 2D sprites with 3D backgrounds; most players will think the cutiey-poo characters and cartoon worlds look too dated. Second, the English translations are clumsy. Only extensive play will tell if there's more to this game than first meets the eye. **—Johnny Liu**

The Word: NORSE-EAST

PUBLISHER: **TBA** DEVELOPER: **Games of Fire** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **Q1 2005**

Warhammer Online

Fantasy, minus the pretty elves

If there's one thing that the 25-year-old Games Workshop is known for, it's creating fantasy worlds that are dark and raw. Last month, we checked out *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, which features a futuristic world filled with orcs and other beasts. Get rid of the "40,000" and the "futuristic" elements, and you're left with *Warhammer Online*—another Games Workshop property that embodies the outfit's dedication to creating dark, immersive worlds.

The world

All you *EverQuest* junkies can keep your rainbows and bright, sunny colors. The world of *Warhammer Online* is a dark, dreary, and thoroughly dismal hellscape.

the hook

For fans of the series and perhaps some dark-minded newcomers, *Warhammer Online* promises adventures filled with "dangerous discovery." The beasts you'll encounter don't have any visible indicators that telegraph their power levels, so consider



yourself warned if a creature looks like it can tear your limbs from limbs, it probably will.

The snare

Compared to other titles competing for a slice of the MMO pie, *Warhammer Online* looks dated. Though Games Workshop has decades of experience as a tabletop-game manufacturer, it is a relative newcomer to PC gaming. Will its RPG background allow for a smooth transition into the digital market? Only time will tell. **—Johnny Liu**

The Word: RAW

PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
The Movies	Activision	October 2004
Myth II: Renaissance	Ubisoft	September 2004
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	Electronic Arts	Mid-July 2005
NHL 2005	Electronic Arts	July 2005
Operation Flashpoint 2	Colossal Order	Q4 2004
Pacific Fighters	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Playboy The Mansion	High Entertainment	Q1 '05
Planet	3D Entertainment	2004
Prince of Persia 2 (working title)	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Project Jane-J	The Adventure Company	2004
Psychotic	LD Software	2004
Quake IV	Activision	Q3
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari	November 2004
Rome: Total War	Creative	September 2004
Stade: Wrath of Angels	Comix	2004
Shark Tale	Activision	October 2004
Old Man's Beard	Atari	November 2004
Silent Hunter II	Ubisoft	September 2004
Secret Storm: Sandbliss	Ensemble Studios	2004
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Splitter Cell 2 (working title)	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl	GSC	September 2004
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	September 2004
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	LucasArts	Q3 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—The Sith Lords	LucasArts	February 2005
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	November 2004
State of Emergency 2	Bunkai & Partners	Q1 2005
Supremacy: For Pubs to Power	Warner Bros.	2005
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategic Simulations	Q1 2004
TWAT 4	Warner Bros.	Q2 2004
Tribes 3: Blood	Microsoft	September 2004
Twins Fortress 2	Warner Bros.	December 2004
Unleashed of Aras	Warner Bros.	2004
Urban Vengeance	Warner Bros.	Q3 2004
Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Unleash the Pandemonium—Bloodhounds	Activision	December 2004
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	Herzog	2005
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	Games Workshop	September 2004
Warhammer Online	TBA	Q1 2005
Warzone: Conquest (title for Europe 2003-04)	Ubisoft	Q1 2004
World of Warcraft	Blizzard Entertainment	2004
Ys VI: Ark of Napishtim	Yanaginuma	Q4 2004
Zoo Tycoon 2	Microsoft	Q4 2004

• New • Update

DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

The past games you've never spent

FROM **Headfirst Productions** (AVAILABILITY: Summer 2005)

Deadlands



Word on the street: Cross HP Lovecraft with *High Noon*, and you'll have a good idea of what this third-person action affair entails. Based on Pinnacle Entertainment's pen-and-paper role-playing franchise, this adventure borrows heavily from both spaghetti Westerns and supernatural thrillers. Blood mixes with whiskey and sawdust when an evil spirit possesses a murdered gunslinger and sets out seeking vengeance. It'd be a turkey shoot if the outlaw's killers hadn't made a pact with evil extraplanar forces...

Sounds kinda beat: Headfirst's track record is dodgy—there's a reason Simon the Sorcerer 3D never set foot on American shores. As for *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*, we'd be less shocked to witness the Elder Gods return than actually see it ship. But let's not forget that once upon a time, these folks brought us horror classics like *Evile* and *Waxworks*. The company is at its best when it's playing with a dead man's hand.



FROM **Lesta Studios** (AVAILABILITY: Q1 2005)

Pacific Storm

Word on the street: World War II real-time-strategy romps are more common than bullet holes in a B-17 Flying Fortress. But ones that could also double as hardcore simulations or thorough tactical engagements? Not so much. Commanding American or Japanese forces, you re-create all the major sea battles of history's greatest armed conflict using battleships, destroyers, submarines, antiaircraft guns, and more. Take control over vessels in first-person mode if desired, but be warned...with visuals this photorealistic, flashbacks are unavoidable.

Sounds kinda beat: Lesta Studios hasn't proven itself with one worthy contender; so far, it has given the Western world a single lockluster offering in WW2: *The Great War*. Suspicion runs wild whenever an independent development house promises an ambitious product. The firm is claiming complete historical accuracy, which is always a contestable sales point; count on armchair generals to apply the strictest of scrutiny to this puppy when it ships.



FROM **DeJargon Games** (AVAILABILITY: Q3 2004)

Inago Rage

Word on the street: Design a cityscape, then bound through it blasting everything that moves. There's a high concept if ever we've heard one. Play involves chasing swarms of mechanized enemies around 52 official urban environments or custom-built levels composed from over 100 building blocks such as skyscrapers and catwalks. Despite a cheesy story line (the action follows heroine Ise "Inago" Asahi as she competes in a futuristic gladiatorial sport), the title should offer exhilarating arcade-style entertainment for all.

Sounds kinda beat: Been there, done that. Run-and-gun affairs just don't carry much weight this side of 1990. Nor do products in which the female lead's cup size rests somewhere between Dixie and shot glass...hey, that's just the market. Then again, with the recent explosion in the popularity of mods, the program could enjoy cult renown if amateur craftsmen latch onto it. Tankers in training should keep their eyes peeled for the game's impending release.



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IT CAME FROM E3!

CGW'S MONSTER
FALL PREVIEW

Nope, we're not Xbox Gaming World just yet, folks. If 2003 was the year that calmed everyone down about the supposed death of PC gaming, with more great PC games than you can shake skinny CGW editor Ryan Scott at, 2004 is the year that proves PC gaming is here to stay, with a ton of promising new titles that you'll find only on the PC. Not that we're being defensive. There's no need for that—not anymore. At this year's E3 (Electronic Entertainment Exposition)—gaming's annual coming out party for the year's upcoming titles—PC gaming was as strong as ever. Just look through the following pages and you'll see what the real problem is. There are too many cool games coming up. But as far as problems go, we'll take it. So check 'em out and start saving or stealing your brother's pennies now. You're gonna need them.

ILLUSTRATION BY TAVIS COBURN



Zoo Tycoon 2

Publisher: Microsoft, Developer: Lionhead
 Platform: PC Release Date: Fall 2004

THEY SAY: There will be new ways to build your dream zoos, new first-person and zookeeper modes that let you experience and care for animals firsthand, deeper gameplay, and a new sandbox mode.
WE SAY: Whatever

Black & White 2

Publisher: Electronic Arts, Developer: Lionhead
 Platform: PC Release Date: Q4 2004

THEY SAY: City-building and honest-to-god RTS combat fulfill the promise of this wannabe gaming revolutionary.



WE SAY: The first game let us down, but Lionhead is promising better creature

training and pacing. We're keeping our fingers crossed that this time, this moral Rorschach test will succeed and blow us away like the original should have.



Tabula Rasa

Publisher: NCsoft, Developer: Destination Games
 Release Date: 2005

THEY SAY: An all-new, original fictional fantasy



Rome: Total War

Publisher: Activision, Developer: The Creative Assembly, Release Date: Q4 2004

fighting onscreen in real time. A few years ago, this kind of thing wouldn't have been possible even in cut-scenes, let alone in a running game engine. But let's get down to what really matters here: flaming pigs. You can release flaming pigs at your enemy. That's Game of the Year material right there.

THEY SAY: The Creative Assembly's acclaimed strategy series moves to ancient Rome, where you take on the likes of Julius Caesar and Hannibal to become the most successful Roman emperor since Derek Jacobi. As in the previous games, you'll play on the battlefield, with tens of thousands of units at your disposal, and on a *Risk*-style strategic map, where you'll make your political decisions.

WE SAY: This game looks awesome, with thousands of units

MMO by gaming pioneer Richard Garriott. **WEIR:** Garriott and company pretty much created the graphical MMO with *Ultima Online*, with mixed results. With the lessons learned from that experience and ambitious design goals including real-time combat, voice-over-IP support, and some gameplay innovations, this is a game to watch.



Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

WEIR: Publisher: Electronic Arts; Developer: EA G.A. Studios; Release Date: Q1 2005



WEIR: *Pacific Assault* will knock *CGW 2003* Action Game of the Year *Call of Duty* off its pedestal with squad-supported FPS combat in a graphically rich WWII setting. **WEIR:** The last *Medal of Honor* PC game was a legit Game of the Year candidate. *Pacific Assault* looked great at E3, and we're betting it will at the very least be another outstanding entry in the series.



Star Wars Galaxies Jump to Lightspeed

WEIR: Publisher: LucasArts; Developer: Sony Online Entertainment; Release Date: Q2 2004

WEIR: It's a groundbreaking expansion pack for a groundbreaking MMORPG. **WEIR:** They may actually be right. Real-time ship-to-ship space combat should redeem the letdown we felt over *Galaxies*. It's gorgeous, it's exciting, and we can't wait.

F.E.A.R.

WEIR: Publisher: Vivendi Universal Games; Developer: Monolith Productions; Release Date: Q2 2005

WEIR: Monolith describes this first-person shooter as "*The Matrix* meets *The Ring*," and that's not too far off for what was one of the creepiest and best-looking games of E3. *F.E.A.R.* is about an elite top-secret strike team (First Encounter Assault and Recon) that takes on paranormal threats. Monolith has been quietly working on this for a while, using a brand-new game engine (not LithTech) and promising the game equivalent of a "blockbuster action movie."

WEIR: As we declared a couple issues back, Monolith is the most underrated developer in the business, with a string of awesome games under its belt (*No One Lives Forever*, *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, *Tron 2.0*)—but not one breakout hit among them. It's due, and this dark, scary game (miles away from the light humor of *NOLF*) could be the one. The creepy little girl at the heart of the mystery makes us want our mommies.





Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich

Publisher: EA **Developer:** Irrational Games **Release Date:** 2005 (we hope)

THEY SAID: The game that made us believe in superhero games again is back—or at least it will be as soon as Irrational Games lines up a publisher. Like the original *Freedom Force*, *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* is a squad-based tactical-strategy game set in a hilarious, brilliant parody of a comic-book universe, with larger-than-life heroes and villains who live and die by the cliché. This time around, our heroes travel back in time to comics' Golden Age to take on everyone's favorite villains, the Nazis.

WE SAID: We're suckers for the first game. It doesn't hurt that Irrational Games is a brilliant development house (remember *System Shock 2*?), but this franchise speaks directly to our geeky, comic-book-lovin' hearts. How can you not love a game with an Italian bad guy named Fortissimo who blasts people with deadly opera singing? For freedom! Again!



Missing

Publisher: Ocean/Orbiter Interactive **Developer:** Lion Nuzenz **Release Date:** July 2004

THEY SAID: *Silence of the Lambs* in an Internet-centric horror/suspense adventure game. **WE SAID:** The last Internet-centric game we played was *Majestic*, and it sucked. *Missing* could be better because it looks genuinely creepy, it uses both real and made-up Internet content, the FMV doesn't look bad, and you can play at your own pace.

Kohan II: Kings of War

Publisher: Gathering Storm **Developer:** Timestrike **Release Date:** August 2004

THEY SAID: Same innovative *Kohan* gameplay



that won the original a CGW Strategy Game of the Year award, only fully 3D and in a more living, breathing world.

WEIR: We loved the first Kohan (duh), and we have faith in TimeGate, but with the game so close to release, why isn't Gathering trying to generate hype? Should we be worried?



Dungeon Siege 2

Publisher: Microsoft **Game Studio:** Developer: Gas Powered Games **Release Date:** Q4 2004



WEIR: This is a big overhaul of what people like about the original *Dungeon Siege*. More items, the ability to craft your own goods, branching skill trees like in *Diablo*

it, and, apparently, an honest-to-god plot this time around are all on the plate of juicy new offerings.

WEIR: Wow. What happened? Even with all these improvements, this game still needs an exorcism.

Dragon Age

Publisher: TBA **Developer:** BioWare **Release Date:** 2005

WEIR: Don't think that BioWare forgot its roots. Combining what it learned in *Baldur's Gate* and *KOTOR*, the team is working on a new epic RPG.



WEIR: We officially did a spit-take in a behind-closed-doors look at the game. When BioWare is ready to show more and announce a publisher, we'll be the first ones there.

The Movies

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Universal Studios **Release Date:** Q3 2004

WEIR: This isn't your typical tycoon game. Not only can you run your movie studio into the ground, but you can also create the world's worst movies and upload them to the Web.



Games for Windows?

Who makes PC games? Apparently not the maker of the primary PC operating system. Microsoft's sprawling E3 setup was all about Xbox.

The three PC titles it showed were underwhelming at best: *Zoo Tycoon 2* (nice enough, but c'mon),

Dungeon Siege 2 (not much different from the first game), and

Vanguard, an MMO that, as of E3, was pretty much just an architecture program, what with the developers refusing to reveal any features

beyond the supercool and realistic buildings their game engine can build. (We've learned a little more about it since then—check out the preview on page 38.)



Brothers in Arms

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Gearbox Software **Release Date:** Q4 2004

WEIR: The only first-person WWII tactical shooter, *Brothers in Arms* will feature real military tactics supported by revolutionary A.I. In telling the true story of a squad of 101st Airborne paratroopers that included two Medal of Honor winners, Gearbox is bending over backward for realism, using aerial recon imagery to help create the game maps and putting real-life squad members into the game as the characters you command and fight alongside.

WEIR: Remember when we named Gearbox the most overrated game developer? We may have to revise that. The demo we saw was gripping, with the squad splitting into two teams, one laying down suppressing fire, the other flanking and assaulting an entrenched German position. If the entire game is this cool, then Gearbox will have created a legit Game of the Year candidate.

Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines

Publisher: Activision Developer: Trion Games Release Date: Q4 2004

THEY SAID: This is not the hack-n-slash RPG poser that was the first Vampire game. *Bloodlines* details a deep story line that is actually being folded into the official pen-and-paper game's fiction. Playing as one of seven radically different vampire clans, players will make their way through a nocturnal world, solving story-driven quests and fighting all sorts of nightmarish beasts. And sucking blood. Sucking lots and lots of blood.

WE SAID: Last year we said *Bloodlines* "just looked plain sad." Well, we take that back now. In a weird, bloodsucky way, this may be the next *System Shock*, an action-RPG in which detailed character development is just as vital as gripping first-person combat. The game features multiple solutions to challenges, different paths and experi-

ences depending upon which clan your character belongs to, the ability to use both persuasion and combat to succeed, and the muscular beauty that is Valve's Source technology powering it all. What's not to like?



WE SAID: We were very skeptical at first, but after seeing it, we see ourselves in pictures.



Ghost Recon 2

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Red Storm Release Date: Q4 2004

THEY SAID: An updated graphics engine, smarter A.I., and a whole different feel (the ability to switch into third-person

mode and voice commands) make this the next step in squad-based warfare.

WE SAID: Too many gimmicks or the console-ization of the tactical shooter? Who cares? So long as it's fun!

Advent Rising

Publisher: Majesco Games Developer: Glyphs Release Date: Q3 2004



THEY SAID: Advent is trying to take what's worked from a bunch of different shooters and bend it together into an epic story that spans three games.

WE SAID: The concept could be really good if the bugs are removed—and if the game ever gets finished. Hey, you guys at Majesco, stop reading this and get back to work!



Star Wars Republic Commando

►► Publisher: LucasArts Developer: LucasArts Release Date: Q3 2004



WISN: Take characters from Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six and suit them up as Clone Wars troopers. Lead a squad of elite soldiers behind enemy lines in the Star Wars universe.

WISN: The context-sensitive interface seems a little too console-ish, but it looks pretty and we're still optimistic. It all boils down to how tight your squadmates' A.I. is.



Tribes: Vengeance

►► Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: Improbable Games Release Date: Q4 2004



WISN: A complete overhaul of everyone's favorite jetpack-oriented multiplayer.



►► Star Wars Battlefront

►► Publisher: LucasArts Developer: Pandemic Release Date: Q3 2004

THEY SAY: How can you not like the idea of *Battlefield 1942* set in the Star Wars universe? The bean counters at LucasArts sure do. While mod-makers have been trying to pull off this feat with mixed results, *Battlefront* actually promises a whole lot more than just a few vehicles and soldier types in a galaxy far, far away. Most notable is the unique slant on the multiplayer campaign with Galactic Conquest. While vying for control of different planets, you can gain advantages and A.I.-controlled allies like Darth Vader to watch your back. With the classic and new trilogies represented—not to mention the fact that you finally get the opportunity to stomp a few Ewoks on Endor—this could be the Star Wars game action junkies have been waiting for.

WISN: Up until *KOTOR* came out last year, we'd been Star Wars cynics. No longer. *Battlefront* is looking good. Producer Jim Tso confirmed that 64 players are locked down for multiplayer mode, and we're ready to declare war on you all online.

► The Sims 2

► Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Maxis Release Date: September 2004

THE SIMS: *The Sims 2* becomes even more of a sim: Every Sim in this sequel is blessed/damned with a very human mortality. Every Sim will have lifelong goals, dreams, fears, and worries that you'll achieve or frustrate at your whim. With the new finite life span, Maxis has made the Sims better able to address their base needs (you won't have to dictate every potty break) so that you can focus on the big life moments. A new home-movie feature will let players capture in-game footage, then cut and score it in any movie-maker program before uploading it to share with the world.

PC: The best-selling PC game of all time should become the best-selling sequel of all time just before it's followed by five years' worth of the best-selling expansion packs of all time. Resistance is futile—once again, *The Sims* will redefine gaming addiction. It looks simply brilliant.

► shooter franchise

WEAP: Looks like some pretty good level design, as well as a lot of refreshing and somewhat quirky new gameplay concepts. Like—wait for it—a meaningful single-player game.



EverQuest II

► Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment Developer: Sony Online Entertainment Release Date: September 2004



WEAP: The sequel to the most popular massively multiplayer game ever created.

WEAP: Even EQ2 will get a run for its money from games such as *City of Heroes* and *World of Warcraft*.



The Matrix Online

► Publisher: Sega Developer: Monolith Productions Release Date: October 2004

WEAP: A massively multiplayer experience that takes players into the world of the *Matrix* film trilogy.

WEAP: Despite Monolith's excellent pedigree, we can't help being a bit skeptical after those last two movies and the increasingly crowded MMO space.

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

► Publisher: Warner Bros. Developer: High Voltage Software Release Date: October 2004



WEAP: A new Larry, new gameplay, and the same brand of raucous adult humor that made the classic *Larry* games, well, classic.

WEAP: Drop-dead hilarious. We're eager to get our hands on this one.



Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

► Publisher: THQ Developer: Relic Software Release Date: September 2004

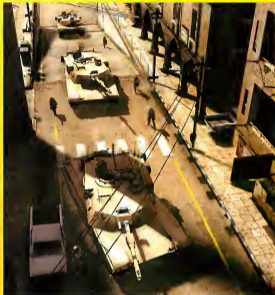


WEAP: An RTS with rocking action and animation, like a giant orc puppy snatching up enemies in its mouth and crunching away *WEAP:* The game has personality, but only the final will tell if it has the "play" to match. ►



»» Activision Rulez

Activision has veered more toward console games in the last couple of years, so it was a pleasant surprise to see the company with such an amazingly strong PC game lineup at E3 this year—probably the best of any major publisher at the show. *Rome: Total War*, *The Movies*, *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*, and *Call of Duty: United Offensive* all looked great. Now if we just could have seen that little game from Id Software...



»» Battlefield 2

»» Publisher: Electronic Arts; Developer: Digital Illusions CE; Release Date: Q2 2005

THEY SAID: War continues to be hell within the *Battlefield* franchise, and EA promises a whole lot more of what made the first game great. Of course, you'll get better graphics and more detailed cities in which to wage modern warfare, more people to fight online (100 per match), and more vehicles to pilot (30). But just about everybody out there is trying to ape *Battlefield*'s magic formula. How do you make it stand out? You make a sequel with a greater sense of community and teamwork and a proper chain of command. The highest-ranked players—not just in the matches, but in the community—earn the right to be commanders in the field, getting an aerial view of the action and the ability to call in air strikes.

WE SAID: Good thing EA finally announced the sequel...we couldn't stomach another expansion. Are we excited about this game? Did you read last month's cover story? We're already picking sides in the inevitable medic matches (defibrillators only, please) to come.



Call of Duty: United Offensive

►► Publisher: Activision Developer: Gray Matter
Release: Q4 2004

THESE: Fight once more in the military campaigns against the Axis. Plus, new on-rail-style stages.

WEAR: It'll follow the footsteps of the original Call of Duty, but will that be enough



against the slew of new military titles? Probably.



RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

►► Publisher: Atari Developer: Frontier Developments
Release: November 2004

THESE: All the amusement-park high jinks and more of the original, but now in full 3D.

Pariah

►► Publisher: Genesis Games Developer: Digital Extremes Release Date: 2005

THESE: A new story-driven FPS from the good folks who brought us Unreal.

WEAR: It's really too early to tell. The environments aren't quite there, and the enemies were oddly sidestepping. The visual warping effects did look sharp, though.



Auto Assault

►► Publisher: NCsoft Developer: IronDevil Release Date: 2005

landmarks spread across barren wastelands splintering into pieces. Think of pedestrians sailing like rag dolls through the sky. Hey, it's the end of the world—you might as well go for a drive.

WEAR: The basic action part of the game was playable at E3, and we really enjoyed it. Add in upgradeable weaponry and armor and there should be a side of meaty depth. We're predicting *Auto Assault* will be a deliciously destructive joyride when it ships next year, but we have one question: How much will gas cost in the future?

THESE: Mankind has fought back from the brink of extinction with science! Science, of course, meaning big monster cars iced with rockets and machine guns. Join *Auto Assault*, a massively multiplayer online car-combat game in which men, mutants, and biomeks vie for dominance. Utilizing the Havok physics engine, nearly everything in the postapocalyptic environments can be explosively destroyed. Imagine houses and



Publisher: THQ **Developer:** GSC **Genre:** World **Release:** September 2004

THESE In the wake of a second Chernobyl disaster, mercenary soldiers known as "stalkers" have surfaced to recover the artifacts and anomalies of the fallout. As a stalker, you compete against or cooperate with other free-roaming AI stalkers while battling a bunch of deadly mutants. Your competitors could easily complete a primary game objective before you do. This kind of open gameplay promises an end to linearity, allowing the game to wrap up in one of eight completely different endings.

WE *STALKER* looks good and has a game engine as sharp as *Half-Life 2*'s. Our worry: The "free" gameplay could just mean "unsatisfyingly random." The right tweaks are needed so that any experience you wander into will still be fun. Since this game is story driven, much of the final verdict rests on how the narrative and plot play out. And just what the hell does that *STALKER* acronym stand for, anyway?

NEWS It looks like fun, but we play these Tycoon-style games endlessly. Will this Tycoon be as fresh as the original?



Guild Wars

Publisher: NCSoft **Developer:** AeriaSoft **Release:** July 2004



NEWS From the people who designed Blizzard's network back end, Battle.net, comes this MMORPG *Diablo*-style game with a dose of strategy.

WE It looks great and has no monthly charge. If only all MMORPGs offered this kind of "free" dam.



Evil Genius

Publisher: Vivendi **Developer:** Elixir Studios **Release:** September 2004

THESE Be a classic villain in the Bond mold, control your evil island empire, and take over the world! Maa-ha-ha!

WE Chaining traps together to kill secret agents is wicked, but here's hoping the simulation-management core of *Evil Genius* will be fun, not work. We'd feel better if you were constantly building **B**

Console Devs in PC Space

A year or so ago, it seemed every PC developer was fleeing for consoles. Now, the tables are slowly turning, as longtime console developers expand into the PC space. Sega is copublishing *The Matrix Online*. Namco has bought into PC development with Flagship Studios. Square Enix will be handling *EverQuest II*'s launch and community in Japan, as well as continuing the growth of its PC *Final Fantasy Online*. And Koel is developing PC MMORPGs *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Uncharted Waters*.

Splinter Cell 3

Publisher: Ubisoft | Developer: Ubisoft | Release Date: Q4 2004

THE GAME: Professional spy Sam Fisher is off to Korea to stop a group of terrorists from starting the next world war. The follow-up to *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* features better enemy AI, more weapons, a new cooperative multiplayer mode, and a purportedly nonlinear level-design structure.

THE SET: From the recent *Splinter Cell 3* video demo we saw, the most obvious improvement is to the game's visuals, which are drastically better than those in the mostly-the-same-looking *Pandora Tomorrow*. Some of the new stealth options look pretty cool as well, such as Sam's ability to grab guards from below and throw them off ledges. You'll also have a knife this time around, which you can use to quietly cut through certain types of materials—not to mention bad guys' throats. The co-op mode seems like a lot of fun, too; we just hope the oh-so-kick-ass versus mode makes a return appearance.

THE SET: fresh bases à la *Dungeon Keeper* instead of being stuck with one ever-growing base for the whole game.



World of Warcraft

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment | Developer: Blizzard Entertainment | Release Date: Q4 2004



THE GAME: Blizzard takes its flagship strategy-game franchise into the crowded realm of online RPGs, hoping to apply its magic touch to a genre that has yet to win over mainstream gamers.

THE SET: The ongoing beta test has shown this to be as fun, slick, and addictive as Blizzard fans had hoped. But *City of Heroes* is out now—and it rules. Orcs versus superheroes? Tough call.



The Witcher

Publisher: CD Projekt | Developer: CD Projekt | Release Date: 2005

THE GAME: Straight outta Poland, *The Witcher* is an action-RPG based on the works of fantasy writer Andrzej Sapkowski, using BioWare's *Aurora* (*Neverwinter Nights*) engine.

THE SET: This game is about a monster slayer, so you get to slay lots of monsters. Yay! Scary-looking and pretty, it was one of the nicest surprises at E3. Now all it needs is a publisher.

Half-Life 2

Publisher: Vivendi Universal **Developer:** Valve Software **Release Date:** Summer 2004 or so they claim

THE SAY: Though *Half-Life 2* certainly needs no introduction at this point, the never-ending hype continues to build as it nears its summer release. The adventures of Gordon Freeman continue in a beautifully detailed game world, replete with hauntingly realistic physics and highly emotive character models. Plenty of new weapons are available, including the gravity gun, which can be used to turn any number of innocuous items into instruments of death. Players can also look forward to a slew of drivable buggies and other vehicles.

THE SAY: We saw it, we played it. It's a lot of fun, and we're pretty eager actually to get our mitts on the finished product and dive in. Valve marketing guru Doug Lombardi is promising a 2004 release, but at this point, we'll believe it when we see it. Our only question is: By the time it's actually in our hands, will it really be all that revolutionary?



The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA GAMES **Release Date:** Q4 2004

THE SAY: *The Lord of the Rings* goes RTS, courtesy of the folks behind *Command & Conquer: Generals*. Stunning graphics evoke Peter Jackson's triumphant trilogy.

THE SAY: The E3 demo was awesome—but suspiciously canned. Sure, it's pretty as hell and features that great movie music, but how will it really play?

Sid Meier's Pirates!

Publisher: Atari **Developer:** Firaxis Games **Release Date:** Q4 2004



THE SAY: This remake of Sid Meier's classic 1987 game is a genre-bending collision of strategy, combat, adventure, and more while you sail the high seas as a 17th-century pirate captain in the Caribbean.

THE SAY: Who knew "courtly dancing" ranked so highly among pirates' antics? That alone makes this game look a bit more swash-buckly than swashbuckly, but it's Sid Meier we're talking about, so keep hope alive.



Myst IV Revelation

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft **Release Date:** Q4 2004

THE SAY: The fourth entry in the Godzilla of adventure-game franchises promises to finally reveal the fate of the brothers Sinus and Achenar, imprisoned by their dad way back in the first game. Also, you'll get to pull lots of levers.

THE SAY: We've bagged on the *Myst* games a lot because we're mean that way, but *Myst IV* looks like it goes a long way toward fixing some of our main complaints. Like making puzzles we can actually solve.



Reviews

We hate them so you don't have to!



PUBLISHER: NCsoft DEVELOPER: Cryptic Studios **GENRE:** MMO/RPG **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 3GB install, 56K internet connection **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard, broadband internet connection **MULTIPLAYER:** Massivel

City of Heroes

Take me down to the Paragon City





Lineage II
NCSOFT tries to strike gold twice in the same month and comes up short.



Warlords: Battlecry III
Once again, your heart will soar and your spirit will sing with magical delight—or something like that.



Hitman: Contracts
Too much filler, not enough killer?



City of Heroes is something that everyone instantly gets. You're a superhero. Ever since you raced through the schoolyard screaming that you were The Flash, you dreamed this day would come. I did. Here's the really refreshing part: Unlike nearly every other MMO out there, this game is accessible and—dare I say it—fun from the very start. Even with the few bugs and flaws we encountered while defending Paragon City from evildoers, *City of Heroes* blows a superpowered gust of fresh air into an increasingly stale sword-and-sorcery MMO world. But is it worth the \$15-a-month toll? Read on, true believers.

Secret origins

As soon as you kick off the character-creation process, you know that you're about to create a genuinely unique persona. Male or female, human, alien, or robotic, there's lots of variety. With all the colors, body types, sizes, body parts, accessories, and bits of clothing, you'll be hard-pressed to find two characters in the entire online universe that look identical. If you want to be a bright blue, busty, half-robot, half-alien babe who chomps on cigars and wears a combat helmet, go for it. Just make sure you like it because you'll be stuck with that initial costume design. The only thing that's missing is a cape. Superman without a flowing red cape is just wrong! Before I start sounding too much like the comic book guy from *The Simpsons*, though, changes are already on the way. Typical for MMOs, at press time we learned that capes and costume modifications are coming in the June update.

Considering that you can create up to eight characters on each world server (eight characters multiplied by 10 world servers equals 80 potential characters), you're going to spend a lot of time unleashing your creativity. When you're not busting heads, waltz down Main Street and enjoy the makeshift beauty contest going on. People are re-creating well-known superheroes, movie stars, cartoon characters, and some damn crazy combinations of all three. A couple favorites the CGW crew has come across include Bart Simpson, Bat Manuul, and Saturday Night Live's Ambiguously Gay Duo.

With great power...

But you aren't here just to play dress-up. You've got to choose your origin and superpowers, and then get out there. The five basic archetypes flesh out the types of powers you can develop: tanker (they take one for the team), scrappers (awe-



Go get 'em, Head Case! Here, she's messing with yet another guy's mind.

some fighters), blasters (ranged specialists that can't take a punch), controllers (they control weather, mess with minds), and defenders (healers).

The powers themselves are varied, interesting, and visually satisfying with many different effects. You'll start out on the basics (enhanced punches, blasts, and so on), but when you see your character summon a refrigerator to lift and throw at enemies, you know that you've got something special. Every archetype has a laundry list of powers that makes sense in context, and, after level six, you get access to a general power pool. Over time, you can gain superspeed, flight, leadership abilities, or—a personal favorite—teleportation.

Now here's where this game takes a left turn and catches old-school RPG players off guard. There isn't a conventional inventory system in this game. No +5 swords and such. You have slots for stashing inspirations (the superhero equivalent of magic potions), you can find enhancements to your superpowers, and the coin of the realm is influence. So, while your character's appearance won't dramatically change throughout the course of the game, the different ways you amplify your

We're all still playing this game night and day, long after the review is over.

The CGW Wrecking Crüe*

*Names have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent



EL MAS MACHO

Don't think that because he's a big goon, he isn't a smart guy. This former UC Berkeley nuclear physics student stumbled over some stray plutonium and gained amazing powers.

HEAD CASE

The mistress of messing with your head. You've dated her, she's broken up with you, she's calls you at 4 a.m. to tell you how much she misses you.



THE DONKEY

Winch A. master of the mystical marliner art SuckaPunch, he sneaks up on foes and clobbers 'em upside the back of the head when they least expect it.



THE GOZMO

He's the guy you hate. Name a gadget, and this lucky punk already has it. Using hot technology, he takes down foes from a distance.

HOSES ICEBERG

The Hebraic hero Throat, Iceberg, tries to fight the good fight—and honor the Sabbath. Criminals shiver in fear as they hear from a distance: "Oy! So cold!"

SMALL BUSINESS

This spunky little lady is always trying to cover everyone's bottom line. That's why she uses her healing powers to keep the Crüe alive.



powers will

Fortunately, each of these powers and their enhancements is succinctly described. The downside is that there's no way to test a power beforehand. You're stuck with whatever choices you make. Don't like the enhancement you plugged in? Just replace it with another one. That last superpower you picked not to your liking? Well, you're stuck. Sorry about that. At least you can pick additional powers every other level. And really, there are no "wrong" choices because more often than not, you'll be in a group with others whose powers will complement your own.

Meanwhile...

Enough talk—it's time to battle for what's right. The tutorial—though monotonous after your fourth character—is a quick and very helpful introduction to the play mechanics in this game. Once you're on the streets, you start off feeling like a superhero. Sure, you've got those starter-level missions, but you're not some feeble who'll wither away if a rat coughs on you. You're fighting thugs and fascists, zombies and robots, and the list just goes on from there. From level one, you feel like you have the strength of 10 men. Just don't try fighting (solo) those 10 men at the same time. You will get swarmed. Sure, your level 15 scrapper will make quick work of the level 3 thugs later on, but you'll get no rewards for doing so—save for stress relief and simply knowing you saved another digitized denizen of Paragon City.

And to Cryptic Studios' credit, the characters you're fighting are not only inventive and largely original looking, but also intelligent. If one's health gets too low or the tide of the battle is turning, they make a run for it, since criminals are a naturally cowardly lot. The one tactic that pokes some holes in their intelligence, though, is pulling foes. Have someone imperil the bad guy furthest removed from the pack, and most of the time, the pack won't follow in pursuit. The detection radius of enemies seems a little off.

Other than that, the battles themselves are fast-paced and don't feel like your standard sit-hit-attack-and-walk-away fare. Cue up one attack, dart in and out of range—it almost feels like more of an action game than it really is.

But where do you find the action? As you explore the huge city zones and uncover more contacts, more plotlines unfold and more complex missions become available. You can also feel free to stop random crime in the streets, but criminals don't just wander around, begging to be taken in. They gather in logical areas: alleys, parks, industrial complexes—you get the idea. Of course, there are pocket-universe missions that'll take you underground, into factories, and to countless other locations to track down mini-



© .mmmm..brain

bosses and the like. There is just too much ground to cover. At least Cryptic built an ingenious mass-transit system to get you all over the city in a flash and to keep crowding to a minimum. Additional city zone servers pop up when needed so that all heroes are amply spread out.

The untrained player may get a little turned off, thinking that this is a simple, but fun, leveling treadmill. That's what we were inclined to think until we started experimenting with task-force missions. This is the equivalent of those epic comic book stories that span several issues. Wrought with twists and turns, you turn back alleys and larger world-domination plots.

Crisis on infinite servers

Sadly, there's a necessary evil that we accept to a degree when it comes to MMOs—server crashes. Fortunately, over the course of months since the game launched, we've had only a handful of crashes. But we were always back up and running shortly after getting kicked off the crowded servers. It's just a shame that there are a couple of world servers that everyone has crowded onto, while others are basically empty. If only you could transfer characters between worlds, it happens all the times in comics, after all.

Speaking of "it happens all the time in comics," how come there's no player-versus-player combat? Eventually, the *City of Villains* expansion will address this, but *Marvel Heroes* always deal out fast-cut therapy on one another, only to eventually reach some truce to team up and fight a bigger, badder menace. Personally, I just wish I could've physically beaten down all the ill stealers that roam the early areas such as Atlas Park and Galaxy City. Who are we to complain, though? We're all still playing this game night and day, long after the review is over. We love it, and sadly, we don't have much of a life outside of it. Thank God there aren't more MMOs like this one. **Damen Gladstone**

Verdict ★★★★★
I hate MMOs; if I see another one, I'll scream—but I love *City of Heroes*.

PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive **DEVELOPER:** IO Interactive **GENRE:** Action-Adventure **TYPE/RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium 4 3.0GHz, 1GB RAM (Win64), 2GB RAM (Win32) **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 3.5GHz, 2GB RAM, 4GB RAM **MULTIPLAYER:** None

Hitman: Contracts

A blast from 47's past

O can really appreciate a man who neatly folds his clothes when he takes them off instead of dumping them in a heap on the floor. But is Agent 47 of *Hitman: Contracts* really that obsessive-compulsive in his dead-side manner? For all his stealthy services as a professional "cleaner" and his tidy costume changing, this walk down a killer's memory lane gives players an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

Previously on Hitman...

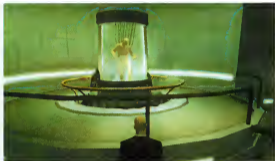
Contracts begins right where the original *Hitman* ends: Agent 47 must break out of the asylum, aka cloning facility, he was created in. The second level, set at a warped fetish party in a meat-packing plant, combines a rescue mission with some creative contract hits. But after this nice, twisted intro into the game, déjà vu sets in with the later levels.

Contracts starts off with a deliciously nightmarish bang and has its moments of excitement, but it eventually can't help but feel like an expansion pack—if only because about half of its levels are from the original *Hitman*. Sure, these missions have been graphically overhauled, have some new details, and include the classic peace-conference-bombers level and the Red Dragon Tradi's four-level gang war. Yes, the original *Hitman*'s wonky controls and camera are history, and you can actually save limited times during missions on two out of three difficulty settings, just like in *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*. Still, *Contracts*' premise of a wounded Agent 47 being holed up in a hotel while having flashbacks about past jobs would have hit closer to the mark if the game consisted of 12 brand-new levels.

Death be not loud

And if you're trying to unlock *Contracts*' 12 bonus weapons by completing every level with a "Silent Assassin" rating, for which you can't alert or show aggression toward anyone except for the targets you quietly eliminate, a little frustration can set in as well. There are multiple ways to play out missions, but the stealthiest choices require precise timing. You may miss opportunities to strangle victims from behind, hide makeshift weapons, use the new syringe, or exploit chemicals if you don't speed into place at just the right moment.

You won't really need the bonus weapons if you continue playing as a Silent Assassin,



Contracts begins at the asylum, aka cloning facility, where the first *Hitman* leaves off.



Lee Hong and his Red Dragon Triad are the focus of four levels in *Contracts*. Unfortunately, they're basically the same four levels that debuted with the original *Hitman: Codename 47* game, only prettier.

either, and getting them into your inventory after you've unlocked them requires convoluted game-menu hopping. Other challenges include the sparseness of information you're given about missions and the amount of reconnaissance required, although these are trademarks of the *Hitman* series.

Thanks to enemy A.I. from the run-straight-at-you school, shooting your way through the game with collected enemy weapons is simpler, except on Professional difficulty. There, Agent 47 takes a lot of damage from attacks, the safe saves are at each level's start, and the only people shown on the map are you and your intended target.

All in all, despite the patient sneaking this game encourages, *Contracts* seems a little rushed. Besides all the refurbished missions,

Despite the patient sneaking this game encourages, *Contracts* seems a little rushed.



The bloated Meat King can be eliminated stealthily with the unlikely help of baked chicken, as long as you time your visit to the kitchen right.

various RedEye cards have encountered crashing cut-scenes, black screens, and missing closing credits. A patch is now available, but it's too bad IO Interactive didn't just wait and release *Contracts* with 12 all-new levels. **D** **Denico Cook**

Verdict ★★★★★

It's a flashback expansion pack that could have been more.

PUBLISHER: NCsoft **DEVELOPER:** NCsoft **GENRE:** RPG **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, 2.7GB install, 32MB videocard, 56K internet connection **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium III 1.0GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, broadband internet connection **MULTIPLAYER:** Massively

Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicles

A better-looking treadmill



Though they are nicely detailed, there isn't much variety in the characters.



▣ The Unreal engine makes *Lineage II* look great, even if it plays a bit too much like the original.

The original *Lineage* was so successful in Korea that it remains one of the most popular MMORPGs ever released, even though it looks pretty awful and plays about the same. If nothing else, NCsoft addressed the first issue with this sequel. The graphics, powered by the Unreal engine, look great—it's almost enough to keep you mindlessly impressed as you murder your hundredth wolf.

And 100 wolves would be a low estimate. In the early portion of the game, most of the quests you're offered require you to kill some ridiculous quantity of a single monster. An NPC will ask you to bring her 50 goblin heads, and you will comply—over and over again—

because repeatedly completing newbie quests is one of the best ways to make money.

I needa adena

Money seems to be everyone's primary motivation in the game. This widespread greed makes sense, since items are expensive, as is upgrading your guild. Like characters, guilds can increase in level, but doing so requires a significant investment. (Guild benefits will apparently become clear after castle sieges, still in testing at the time of this review, become available.) Money is such a driving force that a good many of the characters you meet will be bots run by macros, designed entirely to gather adena, the game's currency. Many



☐ Gaining levels often requires you to fight the same creatures over and over again.

Player versus Player

Lineage II players are generally nice, helpful...and also one of the most vocally bigoted groups of people online (or at least a very vocal minority is giving the wrong impression). Almost all of the much-hated bots are allegedly being run by Asian players, and so the hate-speak tends to get feirly ugly. It can be a disheartening experience to hear a litany of anti-Asian vitriol simply because someone got his magic ring stolen out from under him. As of this writing, NCsoft seems to be doing nothing about either the bots or the rampant abuse on the chat channels, both of which will hopefully be remedied in the not-too-distant future.

There isn't much variety in character appearance, which is disappointing, since other games are offering an incredible amount of customizability.

players tell stories about being killed by these bots, though I luckily escaped such a frustrating fate.

Killing players is possible but somewhat discouraged through a system of karma that makes your character unwelcome in towns and announces your status to other players until the karma is worked off. Players can attack others anywhere, and it's especially a problem when you're sitting down waiting for your health to regenerate, and someone kills you with a single hit for no reason. The community does a good job of policing itself, and groups of vigilantes will hunt down known player-killers and make sure their names are besmeared on the game's busy chat channel.

The chat channel is also a good way to get advice from other players, who are generally helpful. If you've ever played a MMORPG before, though, you likely won't need any help. *Lineage II* is as straightforward as the genre gets, taking the formula to its most repetitive. There are only two basic character classes at first (fighter and mystic), although you can choose specialty classes at higher levels. There is one interesting mechanic, however. As you kill monsters, you earn both skill points and experience points. The former are used to purchase new skills, allowing you to choose which spells or abilities you want to use. Though you can eventually

afford most of your classes' abilities, the skill points system offers a bit of customizability in a game otherwise lacking in it.

It looks good. It looks the same.

There isn't much variety in the equipment, and with a few exceptions, your character at level 10 will have approximately the same stuff as any other character of your race and class at level 10. There also isn't much variety in character appearance, which is somewhat disappointing, since other games (such as NCsoft's own *City of Heroes*) are offering an incredible amount of customizability.

This is especially disappointing because *Lineage II* looks so good. The characters are highly detailed and at extreme close-ups almost look like cel-shaded animation. The spell effects are particularly impressive, with your character drawing dramatic glyphs in the air. The combat animations look great as well, with monsters doing jumping attacks and animals attacking with vicious jabs and snarls. And so it's a shame there isn't more variety.

It's easy to play solo in *Lineage II*, which is good because groups are difficult to come by. When you can find a group, organization is difficult because you can't see other players' levels or even get an approximation of their relative level. More



☐ Several monster models are recycled, such as this creature, which reappears in other regions as an boss.



☐ Towns allow you to buy items from NPCs from character "stores," which are basically characters who just camp in the town center.

important, the lack of variety in character classes at the sub-20 level makes playing in league groups a bit boring.

If you aren't a fan of the basic MMORPG formula, you'll likely find the whole game a bit boring. It's only a slightly refined version of the genre's most basic concepts—like a slightly improved *EverQuest*—without enough variety to at least mask the repetition. **Ron Duke**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆
A lovelier version of *Lineage*.

PUBLISHER: Dribble **DEVELOPER:** Infinite Interactive **GENRE:** Real-time Strategy **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive
RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-6 players)

Warlords Battlecry III

Bigger? Yes. Better? Mostly

Looks like another bug hunt.



The Warlords Battlecry series is a veritable toy box of a real-time strategy game. It's crammed with a colorful collection of stuff that you can throw together and play with in a hundred different ways. The gameplay isn't about careful balance so much as it's about sheer variety, an inviting sea of strengths and weaknesses and different tactics that may or may not work depending on who else is playing. Did the slow, stolid dwarves beat the stuffing out of your frail foe? Next time, try rushing them with the swarms or an early army of buffed-up Plaguelord ghouls. Are you sick of Dark Elven spiders poisoning your hearty knight cavalry? Boost their armor earlier or bring along a healer hero. For every tactic, there are a dozen counter-tactics worth trying.

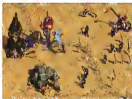
You do the math

In *Battlecry III*, the toy box is considerably bigger. With 16 sides that can be led by a hero of any of the 16 races combined with

any of the 28 classes, the total number of permutations is, hold on a sec, six times six, carry the three, multiply by 28... well, it's a really big number that you're not likely to exhaust any time this century.

Even through the graphics are still unapologetically 2D and a lot of the artwork is recycled, don't let anyone tell you this is a warmed-over *Battlecry II*. There are five new races, a new hero system, and an

entirely new kind of single-player campaign. Some changes were obviously inspired by *WarCraft III*: Heroes now level up during a game, carry potions, can buy items at a shop, and can fight creeps to find more magic items. None of these changes, however, are as substantial as the way the underlying mechanics have been reworked. The races have been changed to balance them out without



❑ A titan backed by an army of floating swords.



❑ These guys are here to show that ghouls just want to have fun.



❑ The Plaguelords' disease-ridden base isn't a very tidy place.



❑ In the campaign, you'll travel to faraway places, meet interesting monsters, and kill them.



❑ Not just more choices, but more meaningful ones.



❑ When T-Rexes attack!

simply homogenizing them. The units themselves are also better balanced, with more importance put on factors such as unit experience, armor, and attack types. Forget what you learned in previous games, because it won't apply here. There is not only more to do, but also more meaningful things to do, many of which you couldn't do before.

The new campaign veers away from *Battlecry II*'s open-ended map crawl in favor of a more restricted story-driven adventure. You can still play skirmishes if you just want to level up your heroes, but the new campaign offers more of a sense of exploration and accomplishment. You unlock new areas of the map, figure out quests, ally with races, and fill your stash with magic items to sell or swap out for a particular mission. It's a great way to make *Battlecry* more appealing to players who might want a little more storytelling and scripting in their single-player game.

Self-inflicted wounds

Unfortunately, *Battlecry III* is going to be a lot less appealing to new players because of some critical fumbling on its way to the

retail shelves. At press time, Enlight's multiplayer matching service still wasn't working, and the networking code made it hard to get games with more than two players going, even on a LAN. Factor in some disappointing bugs and a tendency to crash to the desktop, and you can imagine a lot of people opting just to stick with *WarCraft*. Then there's the issue of the incomplete documentation. Significant info missing from the manual (what does weather do? How does armor work?

What's this morale thing that seems to be so important?), and important reference files were left off the CD and still aren't available online. Infinite Interactive (nee 55G) used to be known for conscientious customer support and thorough documentation. If it's not careful with releases like these, the company is going to be known for making sure its excellent games never achieve the sort of success they deserve. **—Tom Chick**

Verdict ★★★★★
A whole lotta RTS gain' on—and some bugs.



Don't Call Me Dumbo!

My favorite new race in *Battlecry III* is the Empire, with its grab bag of foreign mercenaries and spells. It's an RTS race of chocolate! But the Empire really strikes back once it starts building elephants' midgame. These big fellas stomp little units for double damage, hitting with all the power of lets-game dragons or even titans. Although they're blind as bats, slow to move, and even slower to build, they're inexpensive and they have hit points to spare. Get a couple of elephants out early enough, and you can plow right through another player's base, towers be damned.

And it's about time real-time-strategy games gave the pachyderms their due. The Indians and Persians get powerful elephants in *Rise of Nations*; *Thrones & Patriots* expansion. Their elephants are perfect for knocking over infantry and buildings. And then there is the dramatic appearance of elephants in Creative Assembly's upcoming *Rome: Total War* and the Oilphaunts in Electronic Arts' upcoming *Battle for Middle-earth*. Who needs dragons anymore? To paraphrase Richard III, "An elephant, an elephant, my kingdom for an elephant!"

Forget what you learned in previous games, because it won't apply here.

PUBLISHER: Hip Games **DEVELOPER:** Larion Studios **GENRE:** RPG **ESRB RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 600MHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 2GB install
RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** None

Beyond Divinity

The pale *Beyond*

Let's talk about first impressions. The original *Divine Divinity* made a bad one, starting with a title that could have sounded good only to someone whose knowledge of English came from a Michelin phrase book. The sequel, *Beyond Divinity*, makes a better one. The title's not quite so god-awful, for one thing, and the designers have added multicharacter parties, fixing one of the original game's shortcomings.

Same old story

But what's said about first impressions is true. They can be deceiving. What makes the original game so good is the storytelling. The graphics may be dated and the play mechanics a bit clunky, but the story is rich and full of the sort of character-driven quests that made old-time role-playing games like the *Ultima* series so much fun. *Divine Divinity* surprises you by successfully reviving an old style of gaming, and if the look and feel of the game is also a bit old-fashioned, well, that's part of the package.

Beyond Divinity is fine, but it's not as good as its predecessor. In spite of any

In spite of any number of small improvements, the new game feels more stale and by-the-numbers than the first one.

number of small improvements, the new game feels more stale and by-the-numbers than the first one. The interface is, if possible, clunkier than before—especially when it comes to switching among the multiple characters you now control—and the storytelling feels less inspired and more routine.

The odd couple

The basic premise isn't bad: A crusading good guy and an evil death-knight have been captured by a demon and, as punishment, "soul forged" to one another. They can't leave each other, and if one dies, the other dies, too. As much as they despise one another, they have to work together to get themselves unshackled.

But instead of the sort of dramatic Frodo/Gollum relationship you might be imagining, the scenario plays out through charmless banter that reminds you of a



They're not using phasers—at least, I don't think so.

So many skeletons, so little interest.



Exciting combat?

Die-hard RPG fans will still find some enjoyment here, but I have to say, if I didn't have to review the game, I'd have quit playing after the first few hours. **Charles Ardai**

Verdict ★★★☆☆

Disappointing graphics, voice acting, and interface outweigh the few sparks of creativity.

PUBLISHER: Atari **DEVELOPER:** Hoxon Head Studios **GENRE:** Shooter **OS/RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2GB install
RECOMMENDED: A lightweight street machine and a good 12-gauge shotgun **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-6 players)

Dead Man's Hand

Sorriest Western shooter in tarnation

It's a shame that in the sadly overlooked "Western shooter" category, the latest entry is so dad-gum bad. The problem is that *Dead Man's Hand* was designed for Xbox, so it's not the kind of shooter most PC players really want. Playing it is like shooting pop-up targets at a carnival, with extra points and loud noises awarded for head shots. Yee-haw, kids! Shoot a target and win a prize!

You play a Mexican vigilante in the Old West who was wronged by the nasty Gang of Nine. You take down the Nine, and hundreds of gravely throated gunfighters, in more than 20 missions that take place in mines, ghost towns, brothels, and other Western-themed locales. There are a variety of rifles, shotguns, and pistols; thrown weapons like dynamite sticks and crude Molotov cocktails; and even some Gatling guns and cannons to play with.

The game tries some new things, like letting you play poker to get extra ammo and health before a mission. There's also a bit of shooting from horseback that's entertaining when you see wounded opponents dragged by their horses. But those real segments have none of the



Most of the game looks like a horse's ass, although not always so literally.

thrills found in games like *Call of Duty*.

Mostly, *Dead Man's Hand* is a long exercise in target practice, with lifeless enemies in dull levels. There's no saving during a mission, the graphics are weak, and there's no team-based action. What's worse, there's just no depth, artistry, or

genuine thrills to be had. This roundup ain't worth the saddle sores. Move along, little doggie. **Ken Brown**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆
 A five-card dud.

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** 20th Interactive **GENRE:** Adventure **OS/RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 240MB RAM, 64MB install
RECOMMENDED: 512MB RAM, 32MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** None

CSI: Dark Motives

An adventure game without any adventure

What do you get when you combine one of the hottest franchises on television, a successful game publisher, and a quality development studio? If you've never purchased a *Star Trek* or *X-Files* game, I'll tell you: a tiny box of disappointment.

CSI is one of the best shows on television because it has clever writing, brilliant cinematography, and quality acting. *CSI: Dark Motives* carefully avoids all three of these. I used to really love adventure games, but after playing this one, I can't

remember why. The game episodes are clever but poorly scripted. In each, there's a point at which the game and reality part company. Each time I had a suspect brought in for questioning, a seemingly reasonable question like "Why did you leave a bloody bar at the crime scene?" is not one of the options available. You find a suspect's bat covered with the victim's blood at a crime scene, and you're told you can't get a warrant to search his home because you haven't linked him to the crime scene yet.



Put this game in there and cover it back up.

I lost four hours of my life pixel hunting for evidence when I could have been doing something fun—like watching the first-season DVDs of *CSI* as a far better option. **Arceles Del Sol**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆
 Fun if you're already a fan-of-boredom.

I used to really love adventure games, but after playing this one, I can't remember why.

PUBLISHER Strategy First **DEVELOPER** Paradox **GENRE** Strategy **EXPERIENCE** T **REQUIRED** Pentium III 450, 32MB RAM, 500MB install **RECOMMENDED** None
MULTIPLAYER Internet, LAN (2-8 players)

Crusader Kings

The Fair to Middlin' Ages

War and conflict dominated the Middle Ages for a multitude of reasons, including ambition, greed, vengeance, and adventure. Even during the absence of war, rulers were constantly confronted with such challenges as royal succession, imperial or feudal governing, territorial hegemony, and ecclesiastical authority. All of that and then some can be found in *Crusader Kings*, a challenging strategy game/feudal-kingdom simulation from the maker of *Europa Universalis 2*.

The Reformation

Crusader Kings spans 400 years of medieval history, with players ruling one of the 20-plus historical dynasties of Christendom. The ultimate goal is to amass as much wealth, prestige, and piety as possible in the course of building an empire. Players must enact laws at the Court of Justice; build universities, cathedrals, and castles; set taxes; appoint nobles; deal with the Church; and form alliances with neighboring kingdoms in order to expand. Chivalric deeds, such as joining a crusade or appointing a bishop to a courtly rank, also influence your rule.

This is a big game that lets you reenact the Crusades, defend against the Mongol onslaught, and form feudal nation-states across Europe, Northern Africa, Persia, and



□ The light-red guy is surrounded by the white guy who's fighting the surrounding gray guys. Meanwhile, the deep-red guy in the center quietly weeps.

Palestine. Also included are historical elements, such as dealing with the Black Plague, forming trade alliances with the wealthy Hanseatic League, and supporting the influential Knights Templar Order; monarchs must master those challenges or lose precious prestige points.

The real challenge of empire building, however, comes from the jealous dukes, cantankerous lords, treacherous bishops, and scores of courtiers and nobles who rule the various provinces within your domain, each of whom possess unique personality traits (master theologian, hopeless spender, etc.) that affect play.

Serfs up

Crusader Kings' plausible real-time Advance system for researching technology and improvements lessens micromanagement and separates the game from other resource-strategy titles (like the *Europa* series). Advance benefits—such as castle

construction, improved weapons, flourishing guilds, and more-loyal serfs—are limited to the duchy that researched them before they can spread to other parts of your kingdom. This reflects the time period well since most technological advances came about by trial and error rather than some sort of sporadic methodology. Unfortunately, this can take quite some time depending upon the advance's level (1 to 5), with level 5 taking more than 50 years.

Multplayer contests let up to eight players battle for prestige and piety across a LAN or the Internet. Essentially, it's the big-picture multiplayer system we longed for in *Medieval Total War*. In fact, this game is very similar to *Medieval*, only even less accessible and without the big real-time battles. *Crusader Kings* supports mods and, in a rather unique feature, allows you to export your finished kingdom into *Europa Universalis 2*.

Crusader Kings is a good game, but its convoluted interface, some minor bugs, and lack of a detailed manual make it a tedious and frustrating game to learn for both old-school *Europa* fans and newbies alike. There are rewards to be had here—but you're going to need to put in some time to reap them. □ **Raphael Liberator**



□ Every NPC in the game has personality traits that affect your strategy and progress. It can be overwhelming at times.

Crusader Kings spans 400 years of medieval history, with players ruling one of the 20-plus historical dynasties of Christendom.

Verdict ★★★★★
 Big sweeping game, but too unwieldy even for seasoned players.

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PUBLISHER: The Adventure Company **DEVELOPER:** Earthlight **GENRE:** Adventure **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Pcs: 1GB RAM, 512MB videocard, 1.5GB install **RECOMMENDED:** None **MULTIPLAYER:** None

Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm

Unlocking the door to a world without logic

I don't know about you, but whenever I'm trying to pull a really heavy lever that just won't budge, I always like to capture a huge insect inside a cage and then hang it from the offending lever. That gets it moving every time. If this is the sort of logic that runs through your mind, you'll love *Crystal Key 2*. You should also seek professional help.

This first-person adventure follows the story of a man named Coll, the only unscathed inhabitant of a planet whose population has been turned into a mass of mindless automatons. After an encounter with a mysterious girl, Coll winds up in an alternate world with a similar problem, and it's your job to guide him on his journey and figure out what exactly is going on. This largely consists of wandering through bland environments, conversing with characters who look and sound like they belong in a budget *Lord of the Rings* remake, sorting through a number of clichéd sci-fi plot points, and deciphering a baffling assort-



❑ Does this look like someone you'd want to rescue?

ment of inventory-based puzzles.

Along with the puzzle described above, you'll find yourself carrying other fun-filled tasks, such as "throw the algae and the bacteria in the pool to open the portal" and "spray the fruit juice into the tunnel so that a bunch of fireflies swarm in and light the way." *Crystal Key 2* does have one great thing, though: a flying squirrel. Maybe you can use him to fly far, far away from this game. **By Ryan Scott**



❑ GIVESSSS HE THE PRECCCCCCCCIOUS!

Verdict ★★☆☆☆

A stunning example of why adventure games aren't as popular as they once were.

PUBLISHER: Strategy First **DEVELOPER:** Legend Studios **GENRE:** RTS/War **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Pcs: 2GB RAM, 512MB videocard, 1GB install **RECOMMENDED:** Pcs: 4.5GB RAM, 512MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet (2-14 players)

War Times

Even worse than the rest

World War II RTS games are a dime a dozen these days, and *War Times* is a standout: it's even more mediocre than the rest. Created by a Spanish development team, *War Times* is a badly translated, ugly, and unoriginal game.

Gameplay is reminiscent of the simplest RTS from the last century: Collect two resources, build a few labs for research, get an army, and then mow the enemy. There are four playable sides: Germans, Americans, Brits, and Soviets (one wonders about the absence of Italians and Japanese to balance the sides). Units, which include the standard armor, artillery, and infantry, are very generic and add little to the historical flavor of the game besides their names. One small positive is that a bit more emphasis is placed on air forces, which include fighters, bombers, and even transports for paratroops. This adds a third dimension to battles that many other WWII games ignore. Unfortunately, the poorly implemented

interface makes controlling air units difficult, diminishing one of the game's few highlights.

The two campaigns (one Allied, one German) are divided into 10 or so missions each and are much like the control scheme—slow and awkward. They are, at best, "inspired" by history and usually have little to do with the battles on which they're supposedly based. An early Battle of Britain scenario, for example, has German troops occupying southern England, a feat Hitler could only dream about. None of the scenarios are particularly challenging, either, since the AI is incapable of mounting coordinated attacks or responding to threats. Most of the action is scripted, and missions often feel like puzzles as you try to figure out how not to trigger enemy forces that overwhelmingly outnumber you. Terrain also feels very artificial and usually acts only as a funnel to lead you toward scripted events.

The action is frustratingly slow, due to the dawdling resource system and awkward



❑ German siege artillery provides assistance in a river crossing.

control scheme. Bad pathfinding dooms your units to an existence stuck behind rough terrain unless you pay minute attention to their movements. The blandness continues in the multi-player modes—though there are many maps, few stand out or show any character whatsoever.

With a poor presentation and poor gameplay, *War Times* feels like an over-priced piece of budgetware that's designed to languish in bargain bins until its desiccated corpse turns to powder and is blown from our memory. **By Dan Lao**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆

Like mayonnaise just starting to spoil, *War Times* is blandly bad.

PUBLISHER Capcom **DEVELOPER** Capcom **GENRE** Action-Adventure **EVRG RATING** T **REQUIRED** Pentium III 600MHz, 64MB videocard, 32MB RAM, 720MB install
RECOMMENDED Pentium 4 2GHz, 128MB videocard, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB install **MULTIPLAYER** None

Chaos Legion

Surviving the horror of this survival-horror

The PC port of Capcom's PS2 survival-horror game *Chaos Legion* has an interesting feature: It installs in nine languages. Unfortunately, if you got the game at release, the only thing this enabled you to do was say "dead on arrival" nine different ways.

The first run contained dual CDs that installed and then produced a "wrong disk inserted" error instead of starting the game. There are working CDs finally available now, but I've birthed children in less time than it takes them to fire up. Still, they're speedy compared with the time it took Capcom to ship them. I got the original, nonfunctional PC version in early January, but Capcom's website took until February to post replacement information. Even complying ASAP, I didn't receive new discs until the end of March. The initial problem was widespread, and the need for a third-party exe hack was documented in *Chaos Legion* PC reviews from major gaming websites and magazines, as well as on Capcom's own forums. Members there were downloading cracks to get the disks to run, although those no-CD patches were not supported by Capcom. Supposedly, a copy-protection issue was behind the trouble, making it ironic that using an illegal crack was the only way to bypass these game-killing flaws. If that were indeed the case, perhaps it's time for publishers to start routinely testing their games after the copy protection is added.

After all that, is it worth playing?

Not really. Here's the lowdown on *Chaos Legion*: You're a sword-wielding hero having a bad hair day who's hunting down a miscreant intent on destroying Earth. To catch this miscreant, you must first slash through repetitive stages of demonic enemies among bland backdrops of inaccessible stone buildings. Despite their insipid settings, the largest bosses do impress graphically, but the battles are long, and you can't save anywhere in *Chaos Legion* except between stages.

On a positive note, you are able to summon upgradeable creatures called legions to battle alongside you, although doing so lessens your own attack power. The different legions slice, smack, explode on, or shoot arrows at enemies, and they acquire



❑ The bosses in *Chaos Legion* are larger than life and visually impressive, but it's tedious to take them down without a save-anywhere feature.

special attacks as they gain experience. Things would've been better if the most powerful legion didn't get blown up five minutes into the game, though. Besides not portending well for the futures of the other, lesser legions, this one's vanquishment forces you to collect his scattered remains from various stages before you can use him again. You also lose all the legions during the most boring stage, in which you become a sidekick chick who jumps around and fires pistols while marching like she's got gum stuck to the soles of her shoes.

Capcom has an arsenal of high-quality survival-horror console games such as *Daw May Cry* and the *Onimusha* series from which to create PC ports; why the company chose to port *Chaos Legion* instead is mystifying, but gamers might have been better off if its discs had stayed forever unplayable. **Dennis Cook**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆

Capcom's army of fine survival-horror titles doesn't include this Legion.



❑ Arlec, the female sidekick, is apparently just as sick of seeing the same monsters that you'll be by the time you finish *Chaos Legion*.



❑ If hero Sieg doesn't summon legions, then his attacks are more powerful, but he's vulnerable when surrounded.

I've birthed children in less time than it takes the game CDs to fire up.



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Vicious PC's ME

Vicious PC's small form-factor rig has all the bells and whistles

Now that the small form-factor secret is out of the bag, it seems that every boutique system builder is coming out with one. Of course, this means that each manufacturer will have to take some unique steps to separate itself from the fray. Falcon's FragBox, for instance, boasts that unique handle, cool-looking Lucite case, and Falcon's own cooling techniques. Voodoo PC's Doll rocks an awesome paint job and all the power those wacky Canadians could get into a tiny box. Vicious PC's answer is more about merging the gaming PC with your typical home-entertainment setup, all thanks to its decision to build its machine around

MSI's MEGA 865 chassis. Behold, the "home theater PC."

Less Vicious, more MSI

This machine is less about Vicious than it is about the MSI MEGA 865. As it stands, the box itself is the story. The MEGA 865 is an Intel i865G-based motherboard with a bunch of goodies included. The machine has instant-on for CD and MP3 playback, as well as built-in Wi-Fi (something that I've been decrying most media center PCs for lacking), onboard 5.1 surround sound audio, and a six-in-one media card reader/writer.

Where Vicious comes into play is in building the machine for you. Anyone can buy the MEGA 865 box for around \$350, but it would be up to you to compile the rest of the parts—GPU, graphics card, memory, hard drive, optical drive, etc.—and put it all together. That said, Vicious has put its machine together with some top-notch parts: an Intel 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor, a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card, and 1GB PC-3200 DDR400 memory. Vicious adds to the package by shipping the machine with Aitec Lansing speakers and ViewSonic's awesome VP201s 20.1-inch LCD.

I put the machine through my standard suite of tests and it performed really well. Its 3DMark2003 (v.3.40) score of 2,344 at 1024x1024 with 4x AA and 8X AF turned on is right in line with the \$2,500 midrange machines I reviewed in June. Furthermore, its AquaMark 2003 and 3DGameGauge 3.5 scores were similarly competitive.

One consistent issue with small form-factor PCs is upgradeability, and the MEGA 865 is no different. It has a small 250W power supply, so don't expect a GeForce 6800 to work in it. But for the time being, it's a great little machine that'll work well in a media-center environment. **© William O'Neal**
Photography by Arnold Tasejo

Verdict ★★★★★
A somewhat pricey machine with some unique touches.



By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER/ MODEL	Value PC MEGA 865
PRICE	\$3,299
OPERATING SYSTEM	Windows XP Professional Edition
PROCESSOR	3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4
MEMORY	512MB PC2-5400
VIDEO CARD	ATI Radeon 9800 XT 256MB (ATI)
GRAPHICS PERFORMANCE	3DMark 2003 (AF 4x AA) 2,344
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POWER SUPPLY	ViewSonic VP201s 20.1" LCD
KEYBOARD	Logitech Cordless Action Mouse Optical
MOUSE	Logitech Cordless Mouse Optical
CONNECTOR	Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound
CASE	MSI MEGA 865
POWER CONSUMPTION	250W power supply
WARRANTY	1-yr on-site/next-business-day

Benchmarks



Note: All tests run with the MS Benchmarking and Data Collection (Benchmark) tool as the reference test.





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Battle of the Titans!

Dave beats up on ATI's and Nvidia's top-of-the-line graphics cards.



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Woe In Loyd

In this month's Cracked Case, Loyd laments the upcoming major system upgrades.



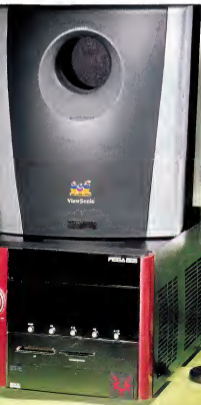
98

How to...

Joel Durham Jr. gives you some tips on keeping your drivers updated and in good condition.

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MANUFACTURER ATI URL www.ati.com PRICE Radeon X800 XT \$499, Radeon X800 Pro \$399 (certified retail prices)

ATI Delivers More of a Good Thing

ATI's Radeon X800 XT and Pro show that the Canadian company is on track

ATI surprised everyone, including itself, with the Radeon 9700 Pro, the first OX9 GPU to hit store shelves. ATI's impressive showing came at the same time that Nvidia's competitive answer, the NV30 (GeForce FX 5800 Ultra), was late to the market and lacking in performance. As ATI brings out its next GPU, the Radeon X800 XT, the question is, can the company deliver a repeat performance? The answer would seem to be, "Hell yes."

The plumbing, examined

ATI unveiled two new GPUs, the Radeon X800 XT—the company's 16-pipe flagship GPU, which will be offered in a \$500 3D card—and the X800 Pro, a 12-pipe version of the XT, which will retail for around \$400. Both ATI's Radeon X800 XT and

Nvidia's newest architecture, the GeForce 6800 Ultra, employ 16-pipe designs in which those pipes are ganged into four groups of four. Both architectures also have six vertex processing units. At this basic level, the architectures are more similar than they are different. However, there are important differences.

ATI elected not to support DirectX's Shader Model 3.0, whereas Nvidia did. Currently, only a handful of games use Shader Model 3.0, so while Nvidia does hold an advantage here, how much of an advantage this is remains to be seen.

The X800 XT has 360 million transistors versus the 222 million that the GeForce 6800 Ultra packs. Because ATI is driving 28 percent fewer transistors, it's able to run the X800 XT's clock rate higher than even Nvidia's high-end 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU. What's impressive is that ATI can run at higher clock rates while drawing much lower peak

power than the 6800 Ultra. As a result, the X800 XT needs only a single power connector and internal slot, whereas the 6800 Ultra needs two of each.

The X800 XT's engine is clocked at 520MHz, giving it a considerable 30 percent advantage over the 6800 Ultra. Nvidia's 6800 Ultra Extreme cuts into that advantage, but even here, ATI has an 18 percent advantage. We expected these clock advantages to allow ATI to open up a performance lead, and it did in places, but to Nvidia's credit, the overall races wound up being very close.

The numbers, on fire

ATI starts off roughly even with Nvidia's new 3D Iron on 3DMark03, however, ATI is able to best even the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme on AquaMark3. As we head into our 3D GameGauge testing, the X800 XT again clings to a slight lead at the 1600x1200 test resolution versus the 6800 Ultra. Nvidia does pull ahead with its 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU at 1600x1200, although the performance lead is only about 5 percent. ATI's lower-priced X800 Pro doesn't fare so well versus the 6800 GT, and Nvidia holds leads at all three test resolutions. However, at 1600x1200, the X800 Pro closes the gap considerably, trailing Nvidia by about three points.

The race is almost too close to call. Nvidia holds the lead in the battle of the \$400 price point, whereas ATI holds a slight lead in the \$500 contest.

Nvidia has the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU, which will ship in limited quantities and likely be priced over \$600. This technically gives Nvidia the performance crown, though not by much. In the \$500 race, we give the edge to ATI for its slight performance lead, smaller space requirements, and lower power draw. But either GPU will let you get your game on now and have you well prepared for Doom 3, Half-Life 2, and the next generation of demanding 3D titles. **By Dave Salvatore**

We expected these clock advantages to allow ATI to open up a performance lead, and it did in places, but to Nvidia's credit, the overall races wound up being very close.

Verdict ★★★★★

ATI keeps up the momentum from the Radeon 9700/9800, but this race with Nvidia is almost too close to call.



▶ **MINI-REVIEW TALKER** Nvidia LRL www.nvidia.com PRICE: Scams based on the GPUs are expected to be priced at: GeForce Ultra 6800: \$455, GeForce 6800 GT: \$395. Prices for cards using the Ultra Extreme will likely be over \$600.

Nvidia Comes Out Swinging and Connects

Nvidia's GeForce 6800 Ultra packs a serious punch

Nvidia is used to success. However, its NV3x family of GPUs arrived late and have overwhelmed performance-wise. Meanwhile, ATI delivered a killer GPU in the Radeon 9700 Pro and gained mind share. Nvidia knew this time around it needed to score big to regain lost ground. Well, Nvidia has done this with a new GPU that significantly outperforms its predecessor, sometimes by a better than 2X margin.

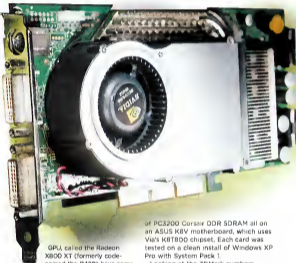
Under the hood and screaming

Nvidia's mantra for the NV40 architecture, now called the GeForce 6800 Ultra, is "under a better." To that end, the new GPU has four times as many pixel pipes (16) as the NV30 and twice as many vertex processing units (six). Nvidia clocks standard GeForce 6800 Ultra's engine at 400MHz and its GDR-3 memory at 550MHz (1GHz effective). The new GeForce 6800 Ultra actually has a slower engine clock than the current-generation GeForce FX 5950 Ultra, but don't let the lesser clock speed fool you. This part screams. Big time.

Nvidia has also unveiled two more GPUs, the GeForce 6800 GT and a "golden sample" version of the Ultra, which for now Nvidia has dubbed the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme. The 6800 GT is clocked at 350MHz for the engine and 500MHz (1GHz effective) for the GDR-3 memory. The Ultra Extreme GPU's engine clock will depend on how aggressive the add-in card maker's thermal solution is, but we tested a card with a 400MHz engine clock and 550MHz (1GHz effective) for the memory.

The GeForce 6800 Ultra and ATI's latest

The Ultra Extreme represents the best gaming GPU money can buy, but be prepared to shell out over \$600 to lay your hands on one.



GPU, called the Radeon X800 XT (formerly code-named the R420) have some striking similarities in their architectures. Both have 16 pixel pipes and six vertex processing units. And both have four-way crossbar memory controllers and are currently using 550MHz DDR-3 memory.

A noteworthy difference, however, is that GeForce 6800 Ultra supports DirectX's Shader Model 3.0, whereas ATI's newest GPU does not. Currently, only a small handful of games are using Shader Model 3.0, since only the GeForce 6800 Ultra supports it. More games will support SM3.0 over time, but they'll all have fallback rendering options for non-6800 hardware. So while Nvidia does hold an advantage here, how much of an advantage it is remains to be seen.

Impressive performance numbers

Our test system was outfitted with a 2.2GHz Athlon 64 3400+ CPU and 2GB

of PC3200 Corsair DDR SDRAM all on an ASUS K8V motherboard, which uses Via's K8T800 chipset. Each card was tested on a clean install of Windows XP Pro with System Pack 1.

Looking at the 3DMark numbers, Nvidia jumps out to an early lead, especially with its Ultra Extreme edition of the 6800 Ultra. However, on AquaMark, even the Ultra Extreme trails ATI's X800 XT. This same part does allow Nvidia to claim victory in the 3D GameGauge test results, though a look at the standard GeForce 6800 Ultra results shows Nvidia trailing a bit, notably at 1600x1200.

The Ultra Extreme represents the best gaming GPU money can buy, but be prepared to shell out over \$600 to lay your hands on one. And appreciate that Nvidia's lead, even with the Ultra Extreme, is slight and that this GPU will require a 480-watt power supply. **By Dave Salvatore**

Verdict ★★★★★

A new 3D screamer that'll keep almost any game cruising smoothly at high resolutions with lots of eye candy.



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Lloyd's Cracked Case

Upgrades...again

Here I am again, sitting in the basement (which is where much of my testing goes down) contemplating another system upgrade. You see, here in the basement I have a "production system" that I call Dumbdore, and this system remains pristine and untouched. This is the system on which I do a lot of my writing and on which much of my actual work data is stored.

Currently, the production system is a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 with 3GB of RAM and three hard drives. It's running on an Abit IC7-G motherboard, which uses the 875P chipset. Two of the hard drives are 120GB Seagate SATA drives, configured as a RAID 1 redundant array. The boot drive is an Ultra ATA 100 Western Digital WD2500JB. The 250GB boot drive also houses my digital music files, which have been ripped to the hard drive from my CD collection in WMA 9 lossless format.

All work and no fun make Dumbdore a dull boy, so a boatload of games are installed, as well as the usual office applications. In other words, upgrading the system will be no easy chore. Since the production system remains fairly static for a year or more, I'm probably going to wait until the next generation of chipsets comes out. I'd like to drop in a PCI Express graphics card and convert entirely to SATA hard drives. Then I'll need to make several decisions.

First, do I stick with Intel or move to an AMD 64 chip? Both CPU types have pros and cons, and I haven't actually decided yet. It may ultimately depend on which processor brand gets a stable PCI Express infrastructure first, not on the merits of the CPUs themselves. In the past, that would have meant almost certainly sticking with Intel, but core logic for Athlon 64s has become pretty solid in the past year.

Behold, a new standard

PCI Express is the salient feature. It's a serial, point-to-point connection. Graphics cards will be built on a "16-lane" PCI Express connector, offering bidirectional bandwidth of 4.2GB per second—double that of today's AGP 3.0. But the new chipsets will offer more than two SATA ports. Of course, they'll also have the traditional PCI slots as well.

Along with the new chipsets comes a

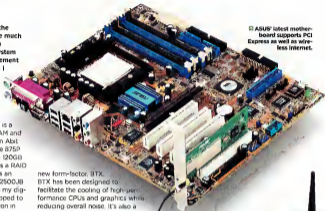
new form-factor, BTX.

BTX has been designed to facilitate the cooling of high-performance CPUs and graphics while reducing overall noise. It's also a more flexible standard, allowing for small and large form-factors. However, you'll probably see ATX-based motherboards using PCI Express chipsets as well, so you won't immediately have to toss out that shiny aluminum case.

One feature I'm also searching for is a quieter PC. My current system lives in a Super Flower aluminum tower case. The internal fans, plus the power-supply fans, are pretty noisy. I like the internal design of the case quite a bit, but it is a bit of an echo chamber. I'll have to move to a new case anyway when the BTX form-factor motherboards come out. I figure if I have to do such a major upgrade, I might as well transition to BTX as well.

The graphics decision won't be easy, but I'm leaning toward Nvidia's new NV40 (or NV45, as the native PCI Express variant will be known). It's looking like ATI's new X800 XT GPUs will offer performance parity—which is a good thing—but not spiffy new features like Shader Model

ASUS' latest motherboard supports PCI Express as well as wireless internet.



3.0 support. But it's not a done deal yet. I want to see shipping cards and what shape the actual release drivers are in. Like AMD and Intel, the horse race between Nvidia and ATI is still pretty close.

So stick around as we contemplate upgrades over the next few months: it's going to be a wider ride than it has been in a few years. And once I make my choice, I have to move all my data and applications over. And you thought purgatory only existed in *Painkiller*... **— Lloyd Case**

And you thought purgatory only existed in *Painkiller*...



Of course, in *Painkiller*, purgatory ain't so bad.

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- Integrated IEEE-1394 (rear + internal front header)
- Supports up to 8 USB ports
- ATX form factor
- Comprehensive software stack including Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2004

- Supports AMD™ Athlon™ 64, Socket 754 processors
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- Integrated 6-channel audio
- Integrated Gigabit Ethernet 10/100/1000 controller (Realtek)
- Integrated IEEE-1394 (VIA, rear + front header)
- Supports up to 8 USB ports
- ATX form factor
- Comprehensive software stack including Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2004

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Athlon™ 64 3400+
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 64-bit Processor
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\$416.00



Athlon™ 64 3200+
 1MB L2 Cache
 64-bit Processor
 Model# ADA3200BOX

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Athlon™ 64 3000+
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 64-bit Processor
 Model# ADA3000BOX

\$223.00



Athlon™ 64 2800+
 512MB L2 Cache
 64-bit Processor
 Model# ADA2800BOX

\$185.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 150
 1MB L2 Cache
 64-bit Processor
 Model# QSA150BOX

\$731.00

Battlefield Vietnam



\$31.99

Far Cry



\$32.99

Halo



\$33.00

Unreal Tournament 2004



\$29.99

Speakers

Logitech Z-5300 5.1 THX Certified Speaker System

\$147.99



Memory



Simple Tech 184-Pin 512MB DDR PC-3500
 Model# SMC3500C3512
 DIMM33 Unbuffered
 3.2GB/S Bandwidth

Video Cards



\$380.00

Sapphire ATI Radeon X800 Pro 256MB GDDR3 256-Bit 8x AGP OEM



\$95.00

Rosewill ATI Radeon 9600LE 256MB DDR 128-Bit 8x AGP

Belkin Nostromo Speedpad NS2 USB



\$32.00

Plextor PX-712A 12x DVD-RW Drive 8MB Buffer



\$179.00

Plantronics DSP-500 PC Headset w/ Microphone Boom & Digital Signal Processing



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Ridata 4x DVD-R DRD-474-RDCB50 4.7GB - OEM



\$37.99



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Athlon™ 64 FX-53
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADAFX53BOX



AMD Opteron™ Model 244
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA244BOX

\$327.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 246
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA246BOX

\$461.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 248
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA248BOX

\$689.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 250
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA250BOX

\$845.00

City Of Heroes



\$44.99

World of Warcraft



GoldenEye: Source Wars



Painkiller



\$31.99

Monitor

ViewSonic P95F+B 19"
UltraBrite™ PerfectFlat
CRT 2048x1536 @ 68Hz



\$276.00

Case

Cooler Master Centurion 5
Mid-Tower ATX Case
w/ 350 Watt Power Supply
Model# CAC-T05-LW



\$99.00

Fan & Cooler



Thermaltake
Silent Boost KB for
AMD Opteron &
Athlon 64 All Copper

\$27.99



\$29.99
Speeze Model# FU310
3.5" USB 2.0 External
Hard Drive Enclosure

Logitech
Cordless Desktop
MX for Bluetooth



\$139.00

Razer Viper
Optical Mouse




\$45.00



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How to Keep Your Drivers Up to Date

It isn't as easy as you may think  **and**  **but**  **it**  **is**  **not**  **as**  **easy**  **as**  **you**  **may**  **think**

Is your software up to date? We're not talking about Windows; of course you run Windows Update on a regular basis. We're not talking about games, either; you habitually download the latest patches for your favorite titles, right? No, we mean your device drivers, those hunks of code that tell Windows how to use your hardware.

Keeping your drivers up to date ensures compatibility between your hardware and the latest software. Sometimes, newer device drivers can increase your system's performance, especially in the case of your PC's graphics card. Occasionally, new device drivers can enable new features. For example, updating your Sound Blaster Audigy 2 can make it compatible with EAX 4. Here's a simple, step-by-step procedure for keeping your Windows XP drivers current.

Check for new drivers as often as you can; you should do it at least once a month, but once a week is optimal.

STEP #2

Create a Windows XP restore point

Windows XP lets you create restore points in case a new driver or program causes your system to choke. Click the Start button and then click Help and Support. Next, click on the Restore link. Click the Create a Restore Point radio button and then click Next. Type in a description such as "Before Driver Update" and click Create. If the new drivers cause problems, use this wizard to restore your system to the point you've just created.



STEP #3

Download the latest drivers

Head to the websites of the companies that manufactured your stuff. For Nvidia-based graphics cards, go to nvidia.com, and for ATI-based cards, nvidia.com. If you bought (instead of built) your computer and you're not sure what make and model the motherboard is, go to the PC manufacturer's website. Look in the Support or Download areas to find the latest drivers.



STEP #1

Make a list

Decide which components you need to keep up to date. Your list should include its main board (including its main drive and drivers for the hard-drive controller and USB hub), your graphics card, your soundcard or onboard audio device, your network interface, and your modem. Some components don't use drivers or use Windows native drivers and don't need to be updated; these items include your CPU, your hard drives, your optical drive, and your floppy drive, among others.



STEP #4

Install the new drivers

Most drivers come as compressed executables or, if they're Zip files, as Setup.exe programs. Run the appropriate file to install the drivers. If the drivers don't come with a setup program, you'll have to install them manually. To do that, decompress them into a folder whose location you'll remember and follow this procedure:

1. Open Control Panel and launch the System applet.
2. Click the Hardware tab and click Device Manager.
3. Find the category of the device you're working on and click the "+" sign next to it.
4. Find the device you're upgrading. Right-click on it and then click Properties.
5. Click the Driver tab and click Update Driver.
6. Click Install From a List or Specific Location and then click Next.
7. Uncheck Search Removable Media and fill in the check box next to "include this location in the search."
8. Browse to the location of the new driver and click OK.
9. Follow the prompts to complete the driver installation.



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Tech Medics

You've got questions, Jeff Green is an undercover playboy

RAMBUS sucks

I have a Dell Dimension with 256MB of PC-800 RDRAM. I want to add another 512MB RAM. Can I add a single 512MB module and use a second "dummy" module to fill the second slot, or do I have to use two modules, each one 256MB?

Eric

You can populate RDRAM (RAMBUS) modules only in patched pairs. Because of this, you'll have to use two 256MB modules.

Save your money

I've got a Gigabyte 7VTX0+ mobo with an Athlon XP 2000+ and 768MB RAM. I just upgraded my GeForce4 Ti 4400 to a Sapphire Radeon 9800 Pro 512MB. The max my mobo can go is an Athlon XP 2500+, and I'll be upgrading to that soon as well. At the point I upgrade my CPU, I've pretty much dead-ended this machine's upgrade cycle. I've got an available DIMM slot, and I could purchase another 256MB, 512MB, or 1GB DIMM, but is it cost effective? Will it improve game performance enough to warrant the purchase? Also, will this RAM be usable in a newer motherboard later? Do the motherboards for the Athlon 64 and Athlon FX accept this speed RAM (PC-1600/2100 at 2.5v)?

Scott

Those are great questions. If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't upgrade that machine anymore. 768MB of RAM is plenty, and with that Radeon 9800 Pro, you're gonna get about as much as you can expect out of that machine. Rather than dropping \$50 to \$125 on more memory, save that money for a mobo and CPU upgrade down the line. Also, the Athlon 64s need registered memory, so if you go that route, you'll have to replace the memory, too.

Alienware or Voodoo?

I am about to spend \$3,000 or more on a gaming laptop and was wondering if you think I should go with Alienware or Voodoo. Of these two, which do you think is better? Also, should I get a

machine with an AMD Athlon 64 processor or a Pentium 4?

(Another) Eric

That's a tough one. Lately I've been recommending laptops by both Alienware and Voodoo. Both companies, along with Dell, offer graphics card upgrades, which means your machine won't be obsolete in a year. At this point, I'd suggest going to Alienware's and Voodoo's sites to see which company will give you the most computer for your money. Chances are, it'll be Alienware. As for the AMD-versus-Intel question, I'd go with the Athlon 64 when possible.

Logitech Dual Action Controller-POS

Being a Madden Football® gamer, I've burned through enough cheapie generic gamepads that I finally decided to get something decent. So, based mostly on your recommendation in the Check Out section, I got a Logitech Dual Action pad. My first thought was that it was rather drab, but I figured I'd get used to that, which I did. My second thought was that it seemed to be a really decent little pad that would work just dandy for my many hours of Madden mashing. After about a month, it all went to hell: I started having calibration issues with the left analog stick. I would have to replug the controller to get a recalibration. I got a USB hub to make sure this was not a PC problem. No dice. So I did a Yahoo search for "Logitech Dual Action calibration problem." Holy shiz! Turns out this is a pretty common problem with this gamepad. Numerous complaints about my exact issue. Seems Logitech has a lemon on its hands.

Logitech's response? "There is no problem, so unplug your gamepad and then plug it back in, and it will be recalibrated." Ummmm. bite me. Right now, I have to unplug a game of Madden, I have to unplug the stupid thing every 10 minutes or so, which sometimes results in having to save the game and restart it, too. I reckon that I am off to get a Thrustmaster controller now. Maybe you might consider recommending a gamepad that doesn't have such a glaring quality issue and isn't manufactured by a company that refuses to correct it.

Date

Uh...thanks for the feedback. The thing is, I've had plenty of those gamepads and I've never had one go bad on me. But I will look into it.



Will Power
His monthly scoop of fun

Will a good game always be considered good?

Recently, I was cleaning things up in my garage. With my son when he came across a box of "old" PC games. You should've seen the look on this 9-year-old's face. You'd have thought he had caught a leprechaun and was about to liberate him from his pot of gold.

This box had games, both brand-new and opened, that, combined, probably ate up several years of my life. I let him take end install a few of the games, thinking that a kid who was raised on PS2, Xbox, and his own 3GHz Pentium 4 machine with a Radeon 9800 Pro in his room would quickly grow bored with the lackluster graphics and complexity of older titles such as *Age of Empires*, *Dark Forces*, and *Jane's Loveboat*.

What occurred was amazing! Games that were good back in the day are still good. My son and his friends are bona fide *Age of Empires* addicts. One Friday night, I woke up around midnight to hear the clanging of sword on shield coming from my son's room. I walked into his room and asked him, "What in the hell are you doing?" He looked at me and, without picking up on the fact that what I really wanted to know was why he was on a computer at midnight, said, "I'm defending my fortress from the English."

Age of Empires is nearly 5 years old, yet it still holds up. While game developers go nuts about antislaing, impressive water and smoke effects, and destructible environments, they need to remember that the best things don't make a game great. It all comes down to gameplay. I see the day my son gets his hands on the nearly 6-year-old *Half-Life*. *William O'Neal*

Games that were good back in the day are still good.

Buy this graphics card

This one's a toss-up. Both ATI's X600 XT and Nvidia's GeForce 6600 Ultra are awesome. Of course, if you don't have a monster power supply, go with ATI.



Check Out



Inside

It's another month, and that means yet another round of solid *CGW* recommendations on everything from software to hardware. Yeah, we've been busy with E3 (and the post-E3 recovery) recently, but we've still managed to provide you with more gadgets, gizmos, and games on which to spend your moola, as well as Tom and Bruce's recent battle in *Rise of Nations*.

A-List

Our picks

Well, E3 2004 has come and gone, and as the dust clears, there are plenty of new games to get excited about. With stuff like *Spinter Cell 3*, *Prince of Persia 2*, *FEAR*, *City of Villains*, and *Dragon Age* coming at you over the next year or so, it certainly won't hurt to have a screaming-fast rig ready to play them on. And the A-List has plenty of advice on how to build such things. You might even call them...killer rigs. Hey, what ever happened to our Killer Rigs section, anyway? We just might have to do something about that...



COMPUTERS

AMD, Intel. AMD, Intel. That's all we ever hear about. Anyone remember good old Cyrix? Actually, Cyrix wasn't all that good. In fact, the mere thought is enough to give us nightmares.

Intel-based system



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

710G Gamer
\$2,160
Gateway

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Gateway has found the sweet spot between being a major OEM and a boutique system maker. Its 710G Gamer uses the same parts the small guys use, and it is damn near as fast. This machine is so sweet, in fact, that it won last month's desktop roundup. While it isn't necessarily as "fast" as machines by Voodoo and Falcon, its 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card, combined with a bevy of awesome accessories, has us sold.

AMD-based system



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

Hexx c355
\$2,500
VoodooPC

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While Gateway's 710G Gamer is like the Swiss Army knife of computers, VoodooPC's Hexx is an awesome balance of speed and style. AMD's Athlon 64 3000+ CPU, in combination with a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card and 1GB of Corsair memory, makes this rig plenty fast—but it's the Hexx's unique styling that really has us hooked. Who said PCs have to be ugly?

LAN-boy rig



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

- **FragBox Pro**
\$1795
Falcon Northwest

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Dave Salvador doesn't like anything, which is why we were surprised that he wanted to give Falcon's FragBox Pro an Editors' Choice award. Of course, one look at the thing and you can see why it's so cool. Inside that little box lurks an Intel Pentium 4 2.80GHz CPU, a 120GB hard drive, 1GB of memory, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5050 Ultra graphics card. Not all small form-factor PCs can pack that kind of power, but Falcon worked some serious "cooling magic" to get all that to work together.



PERIPHERALS

Have you ever wanted a giant subwoofer that transfers sound waves into your body so that you FEEL the sound? Yeah, neither have we. But they apparently do exist.

Speakers



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

- **GigaWorks 5750**
\$500
Creative Labs

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While some may scoff at a 7.1 speaker setup, who would turn down 700 watts of awesome audio power? With two rear and two side satellites, the 5750 will turn your home sound setup into a movie theater.

MID-RANGE PICK

- **Z-5300**
\$300
Logitech

Logitech's Z-5300 system earned an Editors' Choice award in our February issue. This setup boasts incredible power, quality, and bass all at a decent price. Take note, though—these speakers lack digital inputs.

BUDGET PICK

- **Z-3**
\$100
Logitech

If you're on a budget, we suggest you forgo a cheap set of 4.1 or 5.1 speakers and opt for a good set of 2.1 speakers instead. Logitech's Z-3s sound great and look even better.

Keyboard



PRODUCT

WIRED PICK

- **Multimedia Keyboard**
\$30
Microsoft

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

You can't go wrong with this handy keyboard. The buttons at the top allow you to perform common functions like launching a Web browser, opening folders, and controlling multimedia apps such as Media Player.

WIRELESS PICK

- **Wireless Optical Desktop Elite**
\$100
Microsoft

Microsoft's latest desktop set sports the company's new tilt wheel technology that allows you to scroll horizontally through documents. The keyboard is highly customizable, and its cushioned palm rest is more comfortable than a standard plastic one.

Gamepad



PRODUCT

ONE PICK

- **Dual Action USB**
\$20
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Ever since we put the Dual Action USB in the A-List, we've received complaints about it. Hey, it may look like a PS2 DualShock controller, but the fact is, if you're playing sports games on a PC, this is the pad to use.

A-LIST PERIPHERALS

Mouse



PRODUCT

WIRELESS PICK

IntelliMouse Explorer 4.0
\$50
Microsoft

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Microsoft's latest IntelliMouse Explorer boasts the company's new tilt-wheel technology, but more important, it's very comfortable and rocks plenty of customizable buttons. It can also be connected to either a standard PS/2 port or a USB port.

WIRELESS PICK

IntelliMouse Explorer 2.0
\$60
Microsoft

Microsoft's Wireless IntelliMouse Explorer 2.0 is essentially the wireless version of the IntelliMouse Explorer 4.0. While it comes in several colors, we prefer the leather-bound version.

Headset



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

PC155
\$70
Sennheiser

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Not necessarily a radical change, the Sennheiser PC155 is more of an update to the company's PC150 headset that Darren Gladstone loves so much. That said, if you're playing any online games with voice support, you'll like the PC155

Joystick



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

Extreme 3D Pro
\$35
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While they aren't as popular as they once were, there are still some pretty good flight sims out there. Whether you're a hardcore or casual flight-sim fan, Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro will help you get the job done.

Racing wheel



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

MOMO Racing Wheel
\$100
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

The entry-level MOMO wheel is an awesome peripheral. What's not to love about feeling like you're actually behind the wheel? It's just the kind of thing that'll get your motor in gear for some *Need for Speed Underground*.



DISPLAYS

Our E! press room had a bunch of iMacs with really cool-looking LCD monitors—which we used for e-mail and Word. Now why don't we have some of those lying around the office?

CRT monitor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

22-inch MultiSync FE215B
\$600
NEC

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

When it comes to gaming, CRTs can't be beat—and NEC's MultiSync has been the favorite of many of the boutiques for years. With a huge viewable area and a great price, this is definitely a recommended buy.

BUDGET PICK

19-inch E906b
\$225
ViewSonic

For gamers on a budget, ViewSonic's 19-inch E906b is a fantastic CRT display. While 14-inch monitors used to be entry-level displays, there's no reason to go below 19 inches with prices like this.

LCD monitor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK
UltraSharp 2001FP
 \$1000
 Dell

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Dell's UltraSharp 2001FP is often packaged with the company's XPS gaming system. With a slick design and a response time of 16ms, this display makes gaming a real treat. It also pivots 90 degrees for vertical document viewing.

BUDGET PICK

CML175B
 \$500
 Hitachi

Hitachi's update to last year's CML1748 model, the CML175B boasts a native resolution of 1280x1024 (great for gaming) and a 16ms response time. In other words, a great gaming LCD just got more...uh...greater(er).



COMPONENTS

Remember back when people measured hard-drive space in "megabytes"? Yeah, well, we do. Now we feel really old. Damned kids these days with their 250GB hard drives and DVD-RAMs...

Processor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK
Athlon 64 FX-53
 \$800
 AMD

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Among gaming processors, the Athlon 64 FX-53 is at the top of the heap. Even though the 64 bits aren't being exploited, the 32-bit applications run almost as fast as Darren can talk. We said almost.

BUDGET PICK

Pentium 4 2.8GHz
 \$200
 Intel

While the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 chip is not as king of the road as an 800MHz frontside-bus 3.4GHz model, it is still one zippy little core. Plus, with an Intel mobo, you'll be ready for the eventual upgrade.

Motherboard



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK
SK8V
 \$300
 Asus

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Designed for AMD's Athlon 64 FX line of processors, the SK8V sports the 64-bit chipset of choice—the VIA K8T800. This motherboard also boasts a 400MHz frontside bus, as well as support for DDR400 RAM.

BUDGET PICK

D875PBZ
 \$150
 Intel

Intel's D875PBZ isn't so much "low end" as it is flexible. Constructed around the i875P chipset, it has built-in SATA RAID support and makes a great backbone for an affordable Pentium 4 system.

Soundcard



PRODUCT


OUR PICK
Audigy 2 ZS
 \$200
 Creative Labs

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT


You haven't experienced surround until you've heard an awesome 7.1 system. In conjunction with Creative's GigaWorks 5750 7.1 speakers, the Audigy 2 ZS is awesome. Serious audiophiles can upgrade to the Platinum or Platinum Pro models for even more power.

A-LIST COMPONENTS


Video card

	PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
	HIGH-END PICK 256MB Radeon 9800 XT \$350 ATI	The Radeon XT was originally supposed to come packaged with <i>Half-Life 2</i> . Unfortunately, the game's release date slipped, but many of these cards are still being packaged with a coupon for the game when it is eventually released.
	MID-RANGE PICK 128MB Radeon 9600 XT \$175 ATI	ATI's midrange part is plenty fast enough to handle any game you're currently playing. Sure, it may not be as fancy as a 256MB 9800 XT card, but it's definitely easier on the wallet.
	BUDGET PICK 128MB GeForce FX 5200 Ultra \$90 Nvidia	Stay behind a generation of graphics cards to save some money. The Nvidia GeForce FX 5200 clocks in at about \$80, which is quite a bargain. Just make sure you don't buy the cheaper, non-Ultra version.


Hard drive

	PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
	HIGH-END PICK Deskstar 7K250 250GB \$250 Hitachi	A single 250GB Hitachi Deskstar hard drive provides more than enough disk space for 99 percent of the world's population. If you're in that rare 1 percent that needs more, double them up for a monstrous RAID array.
	BUDGET PICK DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB \$100 Maxtor	At a little more than \$1 per GB, Maxtor's 7,200 rpm DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB drive is a great option for a single-drive rig.

Optical drive

	PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
	HIGH-END PICK DVR-A07U \$200 Pioneer	This drive is not for the faint of heart—or light of wallet. Pioneer's latest combo drive does everything you need: You can create your own DVD movies, burn music CDs, or just back up your data.
	BUDGET PICK DDU/S21 16x DVD-ROM \$30 Sony	Judging by the responses to our first-ever DVD, many of you have yet to adopt this technology. At around \$30 for a basic 16x drive, there's no reason to wait—and Sony's 16x DVD-ROM is a great choice.

Case

	PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
	TOWER PICK TAC-T01-E1C \$150 Cooler Master	Cooler Master's TAC-T01 is big, heavy, and not necessarily cheap, but it's a great case for building that rig of your dreams. It's solid and shiny, and there's a metal monolith inset on the case's face. What is that thing for, anyway?
	ALTERNATE FORM PICK SNBSG4 \$300 Shuttle	Shuttle's Nforce3 150-based setup is the perfect option for building an Athlon 64 FX-based shuttle box. The motherboard supports DDR400 and rocks Realtek's 6-channel audio. Plus, it's much more portable than a bulky tower.



MOBILITY

Resident CGW newshound Darren Gladstone already has his finger on the pulse of the new N-Gage cell phone, which seems to be free of the sidetalking phenomenon that plagued the original model.

Laptop



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

HIGH-END PICK

M675

\$2,600

Gateway

With a 128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics card and a 17-inch display, Gateway's M675 is doper than most desktop PCs. Plus, it can be difficult to put a desktop PC in your backpack.

BUDGET PICK

M6807

\$1,549 (after \$100 mail-in rebate)

eMachines

eMachines' M6807 ships with a 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics chip, but in many tests, it outperforms machines with 128MB graphics options. That said, at only \$1,549, you'll be deemed happy with this Athlon 64-based laptop.

LIGHTWEIGHT PICK

Inspiron 300m

\$2,000

Dell

The 300m is the perfect traveling companion. The docking station's extra battery space means more than five hours of life, and additional speakers give added rockability. Just don't expect to do much gaming on it.

Phone



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

FLIP-PHONE PICK

V1660

\$199 (\$49 with a two-year contract)

Samsung

Of the current crop of gaming-enabled phones, this one is the slickest, most game-friendly of the bunch. With the addition of the \$39 PCS Game Pad (a GBA-like docking station), it's much easier to control the action.

NON-FLIP-PHONE PICK

3660

\$200

Nokia

Thanks to a new federal policy that allows you to keep your phone number when switching cell providers, negotiating and pinning down a really good deal on a phone is much easier. For a normal-sized phone, this model works great.

PDA



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

PALM OS PICK

Zodiac 2

\$400

Tapwave

For the moment, you aren't gonna find another PDA with this kind of juice for the price that Tapwave is asking. With it, you can bust out some grinds in *Tony Hawk*, juggle your contact manager (yay!), listen to music, and watch *The Simpsons*.

POCKETPE PICK

e805

\$540

Toshiba

This PDA sits at the top of Toshiba's food chain. It's built especially for the power-hungry PocketPC user, and its bells and whistles far surpass the 400MHz processor and 128MB of free RAM. What better way to run *NAPE* and countless games?

Gadget



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

OUR PICK

DSC-T1 Cyber-shot

\$850

Sony

Holy crap! Your wallet is probably bigger than this 5-megapixel digital camera. Sony's DSC-T1 is tiny, but it has a large LCD screen and 3x optical zoom. Poor battery life is the only price you'll be paying for high style.

Rewind 100

What should you play today? Names in **red** indicate Editors' Choice games



GAME	GRADE	VERDICT	SCORE
Across the Deep	A/D	Amplified, single-scene Kieran-Parker odd-on. Best work for Disney.	★★★★☆
Age of Mythology: The Titans Expansion	V/A	More bells, more whistles, same game.	★★★★☆
American Conquest: Fight Back	V/A	Fight fascism and environmentalism by shooting the hell out of it.	★★★☆☆
Aventur's Army: Special Forces vs. B	V/A	Secret Forces is the best of its kind.	★★★★★
Axrod & Kangaroo	V/A	A thought-provoking roller coaster with great rail scenes.	★★★★☆
Battle Engine Aquila	V/A	Genre-defying and fun. Absolutist-style action, but not deep or demanding.	★★★★☆
Ballistic Wreckers	V/A	Score, tougher, and prettier than <i>Overkill's</i> <i>Outrage</i> .	★★★★☆
Beyond Good & Evil	V/A	Empress, sleek, and wholly original. An action-adventure in a genre.	★★★★★
Black Hawk Down: Invasion	V/A	An entertaining ride on that beats up the genre—and the player's game. Not a bad job.	★★★★☆
The Black Mirror	V/A	The Black Mirror's genre-based design makes it a real gem.	★★★★☆
Blade and Sword	V/A	A laser. Double down that might be too interesting for you.	★★★★☆
Blind	V/A	The blind wants the player? Let's have it.	★★★★☆
Broken Seas 3: The Sleeping Dragon	V/A	Dragon-fantasy breaks out of the box set despite a little too much.	★★★★☆



GAME	GRADE	VERDICT	SCORE
Call of Duty	V/A	Call of Duty is good and so much fun that you'll undoubtedly wish it were longer.	★★★★★
Celestia: Deathlands	V/A	Save your money by just throwing beer cans at the television.	★★★☆☆
Chaser	V/A	A good-looking shooter that's fun only for the first few hours.	★★★☆☆
Chase	V/A	A stunning sci-fi-themed shooter that makes life look better.	★★★★★
Civilization II: Conquests	V/A	A possible refined new version of <i>Civ II</i> with multiplayer that truly works.	★★★★★



Civilization III: Conquests	V/A	<i>Civilization III</i>	★★★★☆
Overlanders 3	V/A	Maybe the toughest game ever, and not in a good way.	★★★★☆
Conquest: Desert Storm II: Back Baghdad	V/A	All times engaging, but not quite all it can be.	★★★★☆
Conquistador	V/A	Chases the best of the best. Good fun.	★★★★☆
Contract: J.A.C.K.	V/A	No formula shows forever—J.A.C.K. is the first glimpse on the <i>ACU</i> series.	★★★★☆
Crossfire: Strike: Godlike Zero	V/A	This game was good when it was first for <i>PS2</i> , it's just good.	★★★★☆
Dark Eye of Genesis: Trial of Atlantis	V/A	Good expansion for veteran players, but not much for new players.	★★★★☆
Dead to Rights	V/A	It's the highlight of an odd, creative, repetitive shooter. Has a death on demand.	★★★★☆
Desert Ball vs. Akira Corps	V/A	A good fusion of RTS, strategic, and some puzzle-like items.	★★★★☆

Game Bliss

Adventure



Day of the Tentacle

N/A

This off-kilter sequel to *Maniac Mansion* sees Bernard, the original's übergeek hero, fumbling through time in an effort to foil the nefarious Purple Tentacle's world-domination plot.



Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire

N/A

Arguably the best game in the series, *Trial by Fire* takes players on an *Ambion Nights*-inspired quest to protect the desert kingdom of Shaper from an evil sorcerer's elemental threats.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Devil's 3: Invisible War	3/04	The sequel to Devil's 2 is both dumbed down and limited up	★★★☆☆
Dominion II	3/04	The real gameplay of any 4D game available anywhere	★★★★☆
Dungeons Siege: Legends of Asmodeus	3/04	Good stuff for fans of the original	★★★☆☆
Empire: Dawn of the Modern Age	2/04	A solid entry into the burgeoning historical real-time strategy subgenre	★★★★☆

FIFA 2004	2/04	It might be a rough console port, but it's still the best soccer game on any platform	★★★★☆
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Go City	6/04	There's a good, snappy outboxing game lurking underneath all the fluffiness. Good luck getting at it	★★★☆☆
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Final Fantasy XI	2/04	A rock-solid MMORPG item one of the most unlikely sources	★★★★☆
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FortHeroes	6/04	A harder than Gear Minder	★★★☆☆
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Freedom Fighters	1/04	Got of gameplay tactics, but the PC version drew the short stick	★★★★☆
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Grandland	6/04	A lot of possibilities and potential, but the mix of unremovable add-ons makes it hard to enjoy	★★★☆☆
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Godzilla	2/04	Better than the first, but still a little too wacky and foreign to be a detour	★★★★☆
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Hobbit & Daughters 2	3/04	A really good game hampered by the same pesky bugs and problematic AI as the original	★★★☆☆
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Hogwarts in the Field	1/04	An excellent update gets better	★★★★☆
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Homebrew 2	10/05	It's one Collector's-E's not even Homebrew!	★★★★☆
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Heroic: Empire of Britain	5/04	More of the same, with droppers	★★★☆☆
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Jack the Ripper	5/04	A good Ripper story buttressed by bugs, little puzzles, and a bad ending	★★★☆☆
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Jedipedia II	3/04	A nice combination of tradition and bonkers	★★★☆☆
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JD Judo: Break It and Own It	1/04	Good! Bull! and whatever!	★★★☆☆
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Kevin: Invasion of the Mind	4/04	A nice attempt at a Commodore clone in a fresh setting, with handle AI	★★★☆☆
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Knights of the Old Republic	2/04	A total masterpiece from BioWare and possibly the best Star Wars game ever made	★★★★☆
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Lock-On Modern Air Combat	6/04	A fairly brief but shining jet-suit fest, even without the dynamic campaign	★★★★☆
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Lord of the Rings	6/04	A fairly good attempt at capturing an already well-told story (I don't do combat)	★★★☆☆
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Q2: Levels of the Underworld	1/04	A funny, snappy ending combo of soul fare and strategy	★★★☆☆
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WFF: The British of the King	2/04	Check your Brits at the door for this rapid-swapping, spell-slinging quester	★★★★☆
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Wings: The Gathering	4/04	A painful fighting game in which you don't fight unless you're dark. Run away	★★★☆☆
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Yoda's Revenge	1/04	A funny, snappy ending combo of soul fare and strategy	★★★☆☆
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Johnny's Picks

CGW staff loves



Sam & Max Hit the Road
This early CD-ROM adventure recalls the

amusing misadventures of a canine shamus and a hyperkinetic rabbitry thing. It was one of my favorite games growing up, as well as one of LucasArts' best adventure titles. The song in there about edutainment—hilarious!



No One Lives Forever
Yes, Half-Life and other FPS games have a special

place in my heart, but the exploits of superspy Cate Archer in the original No One Lives Forever just combined action, stealth, and humor so well. What can I say? I like 'teh funny.'



Unreal Tournament 2004
Tourney 2003 is missing a certain spark the original game has, but 2004 does a

great job of recapturing it. Darren broke his mouse over this game—smashed it into splinters (funny). Maybe I shot him in the back too often.



Search for the King

N/A
Accolade's shameless attempt at copying Sierra's popular Leisure Suit Larry series actually turned out pretty good. Circus performers, rock stars, and a guy named Les Manley—how much goofier can a game get?



Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

★★★★☆
The third chapter in the Broken Sword series follows an American lawyer and a French journalist as they investigate a series of events that lead to a source of unspeakable darkness.

Ladies of E3

Our booth babes of the year



Tera Patrick

Sides may not have had a Lisa Croft look-alike at this year's E3, but we certainly won't hold that against them—instead, adult film actress Tera Patrick was on hand to sign autographs. Oh, and she was promoting some game, too. What were we talking about again?



BloodRayne

Another hot, gothic BloodRayne look-alike was on hand at the Majesco booth to help promote the upcoming *BloodRayne 2*. Check out the details on her costume. And those authentic blades! And her cubs...nose... Yeah, right.



Vampire Chick

This young lady was at Activision's booth promoting *Vampires: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*. Ryan really seemed to dig her, which is apparent from the 47 pictures he took of her. Sorry to burst your bubble, Ryan, but she's just smiling at you because she's being paid to.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
<i>WWE Thunder 2004</i>	3/04	Not bad, but we expected more.	★★★☆☆
<i>NHL Live 2004</i>	3/04	One of the best 5-on-5 games for any platform.	★★★★☆
<i>Need for Speed Underground</i>	3/04	Being doesn't get much better—unless you're in a real car.	★★★★☆
<i>Neighbors from Hell</i>	3/04	A fun way to spend a couple afternoons.	★★★☆☆



<i>Champions of the Eastern Empire</i>	3/04	Really intrigues to make history, from battle, and it's a great RTS game.	★★★★☆
<i>Reverend Night: Heresy of the Eastside</i>	3/04	A fun-to-use expression solely unique to this.	★★★★☆
<i>NHL 2004</i>	3/04	The best NHL experience on virtual ice.	★★★★☆
<i>No Man's Land</i>	3/04	Another before-the-worldends RTS.	★★★★☆
<i>WrestleMania</i>	3/04	Well, at least it sounds spicy.	★★★★☆
<i>Once Upon a Knight</i>	3/04	A decent enough RTS lagged down for a little RPG and the medieval battles that make it better.	★★★★☆
<i>The Mad Fall: Fallgradients</i>	3/04	If we're into this person tagging games with robots, knock yourself out.	★★★☆☆



<i>Q1 Publisher</i>	3/04	Overrated!	★★★★☆
<i>Potential II</i>	3/04	Little more than a glorified Activision patch.	★★★★☆
<i>Pro Battle</i>	3/04	A decent game for Xbox, but not worth the price.	★★★★☆
<i>PowerSide: Coc Control</i>	3/04	A decent role of its own, but not worth the price.	★★★★☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
<i>Redeem (Xbox)</i>	3/04	Needn't have to love trains to enjoy the historical and economic challenges here—but a little train fan won't hurt.	★★★★☆
<i>Redeem So It Means Something</i>	3/04	There's no excuse for this game to have the same silly bugs and lame AI that plagued the original.	★★★★☆
<i>Rebel Price Buge</i>	3/04	So get a copy of <i>Commander 2</i> instead.	★★★☆☆



<i>Circle of Nations: Heroes & Patriots</i>	3/04	Almost perfect, and then it crashes.	★★★★☆
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<i>Q1 Secret</i>	3/04	Secrets! It improves upon and diminishes the <i>Q1</i> model.	★★★★☆
<i>Senryu</i>	3/04	A potential blockbuster weapon led by its own delivery.	★★★★☆
<i>Secret Weapons Over Normandy</i>	3/04	If the camera isn't stuck, it might have been better, over the top too.	★★★★☆
<i>Shadowbane: Rise of Oles</i>	3/04	A sharp cut on that's barely enough to satisfy that <i>Shadowbane</i> junkies.	★★★★☆
<i>Silent Hill 3</i>	3/04	In <i>SH3</i> , the only thing that goes wrong is the right and <i>Mutiny</i> machines.	★★★★☆
<i>Silent Storm</i>	3/04	Use a gorgeous <i>WW2</i> and in the <i>World War II</i> game recommended.	★★★★☆
<i>Sin City 4: Bush Law</i>	3/04	The new focus on <i>San Antonio</i> and support will be an already market game experience.	★★★★☆

Game Blues

Adventure



King's Quest VII

N/A

A blemish on what is an otherwise fantastic series, *KQ7*'s beautiful visuals and storybook-like charm were undercut by its horrible interface and a staggering number of critical game-ending bugs.



Gabriel Knight 3

★★★★☆

Despite hiring original *Gabriel Knight* voice actor Tim Curry back to the title role for this third monster-hunting outing, Sierra managed to wreck the series with a thoroughly asinine attempt at moving it into the 3D realm.



Tom
Last month:
Tom caught lots of fish in the World of Warcraft beta.



Bruce
Last month:
Bruce watched Tom catch lots of fish in the World of Warcraft beta.



paused by Bruce" but I just kept denying it. I wonder if he believed me the way he probably believes Benin Seven about the oil-for-food "misunderstanding."

Tom 2:15 Remember, that's Computer Gaming World, c/o Ziff Davis Media, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Bruce 4:54 My first city is up and running. I'm overproducing wood. Cool. Tom is probably inventing videogames.

Tom 6:20 There's a large mountain in the center of the map. In the poetic/obvious style of the Iroquois, I'll call it Big Mountain in the Middle. The rest of the map is dotted with smaller mountains that'll only support three or four miners, but this big guy is prime real estate for a city with a foundry. I suspect this fact isn't lost on Bruce, so I foresee an extended and bloody battle for Big Mountain in the Middle.

Bruce 7:49 I just aged up, which would be great except that Tom did this like a thousand hours ago. It feels like a thousand hours. Is this game over yet? I wanted to age up, too, but I had to research the money thing so I could raise my wood cap, and then I had to research the military thing for some reason, and the whole time I was just like, man, how did Tom age up so fast? I still have more territory than Tom does, which sounds good but really isn't, because he always fixes that about halfway through the game.

Tom 7:55 Being a huge fan of the Iroquois' Mohawk spearman, my free senate building chooses despotism, a form of government that gives me cheaper infantry.

Bruce 8:09 I can always tell what kind of game it's going to be. If Tom changes his government to despotism, it means he's coming after me right away. If he changes to republic, he is going to wait to kill me until later. Either way, getting that message always reminds me to start building the government house, because I totally forgot about it.

Tom 8:58 I've built Seneca at the end of a

valley formed by Big Mountain in the Middle and Smaller Mountain Off to One Side of It. This valley will make a perfect killing zone, so I call it the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die.

Bruce 10:30 I'm building my third city—Jefferson City—right across a narrow mountain pass from one of Tom's cities. One thing I've learned is that it really pisses Tom off when you build close to him and then start throwing soldiers at him. Until he wins, of course. But pissing him off is just about all I have to look forward to in this game.

Death to Bruce!

Tom 10:51 Jefferson City just interrupted my control of Big Mountain in the Middle. The fighting is probably going to start much earlier than I expected, and this area won't be safe for metal mining. I'll need lots of metal, so I top some of the smaller mountains and send out whaling ships. I start gathering Mohawk spearmen at the mouth of the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die, where I build a tower to keep the pesky Americans at bay.

Bruce 10:59 With Jefferson City up, it's time to build some towers, a couple barracks, and a stable. While I do this, Tom starts on his own towers. I'm ahead of the curve! I'm winning! I'm winning!

Tom 13:58 I've supplemented my resources with furs and wool, which go great with all my peacock feathers. My people win the award for best dressed. We celebrate by building the world-renowned Pyramids of Onondaga.

Bruce 12:37 Commerce limits again. This time it's both food and wood. There are about a million things I need to research besides commerce, yet now I have to add this to the list. While I'm not interested in having the United Nations manage really anything, I'd be open to the idea of maybe, just possibly, having them manage stuff like this. I mean, how much harm could they do?

Tom 13:20 My Iroquois scouts are called Tekohs. Yeah, ha ha, like "tacos." It's really funny until you realize that they're invisible sooner than other scouts, so I can spy on enemies undetected. Unfortunately, Bruce has figured this out and he keeps counterscouts sitting around. Not only does this shut down my intel-gathering efforts, but it means Bruce has scouts hanging around who can see my armies (one of the Iroquois' most significant advantages is that their armies are invisible when sitting in friendly territory). So I hide my troops inside Seneca. In the meantime, I'm trying to maneuver tacos around to keep an eye on what Bruce is doing.

Bruce 16:40 It's almost time for Tom to get a nasty surprise. My first catapult! He'll never know what hit him! I mean, besides a catapult.

Tom 16:45 My taco can see your catapult, Geryk! We're way too close to each other for me to abide siege engines, so it's time for a preemptive strike through the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die. A side benefit of this is that my despot will gather raiding resources during the attack. ☐



☐ Tom changes the faculty at Bruce's university.

I just aged up, which would be great except that Tom did this like a thousand hours ago.

He pops off some decoy troops and leads my troops across the border. I smash the catapult with my Mohawk spearmen and use javelinners to cover their backs. It's over pretty quickly and I pull back, having done enough damage for the time being. My men retreat into Seneca to hide and heal up.

Bruce 15:32 If one of you reading this right now was responsible for secretly watching me play and phoning it in to Tom Chick, you're on my list that I am sending to Ashcroft. Somehow Tom figured out that right now would be the perfect time to attack me with a bigger army than I have. I wonder how he knew that. Now Tom is attacking me with more guys led by one of those general guys. Imagine my surprise when I went to find my own general and realized I don't have one because I still haven't built the government thingy. And I wonder why I lose these games.

Tom 15:55 The Americans are a defensive nation because they get an economic bonus for every infantry unit they have standing around. So when Bruce loses his army in a battle, his losses are compounded by the fact that he's also reducing his income. The American army works best as a peacetime deterrent. Which is why it's in my interest to wipe it out even if I sustain heavy casualties.

Bruce 17:50 I aged up to Medieval, but Tom did that like last week. I also notice that he has a merchant collecting a resource right next to one of my cities, and he's not taking any damage. Did I forget to research that attrition thing?

Tom 18:05 Bruce has another catapult. Time for a quick war party. It's the oh' inoquus hit and fade.

Bruce 18:05 Every time I'm just about to get a real army together, that guy calls Tom and tells him what I'm doing, and he attacks me with a bigger one. This is one of those times.

Tom 21:50 Now I'm building the world-famous Hanging Gardens of Toronto. I love the new wonder, so it gives you a leg up on knowledge income and makes your economic research much cheaper. Plus, it looks like it would be a great place to build

a roller coaster.

Bruce 22:03 The Americans build their first wonder inajantly, as long as no one else has started it. I finally put my first one down: Terra Cotta Army. This will keep cranking out military units for me while I manage more important things, like how many two-by-fours my peasants can load onto their carts and take to market. Meanwhile, Tom is laughing at me from orbit.

Tom 22:30 Our territory limits have neatly divided the island in half. Although the fighting is focused between Seneca and Jefferson City in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die, I build a few observation posts along the outer reaches of our border. These posts and my tactics will keep an eye on what Bruce is doing elsewhere.

Bruce 22:45 I start bombarding Tom's tower on our border, which once again draws Tom's army in. This time, I kill all his guys. Then I manage to knock the tower down and, for good measure, head for Tom's city.

Tom 23:00 My Mohawk spearmen are the perfect counters for Bruce's new knights. But what I didn't count on were the half-dozen squads of crossbowmen he kept off to one side. As he moves in on Seneca, I hunker down and wait for reinforcements.

Bruce 25:20 Things don't go too badly here, although I'm not sure how Tom cranks out military units so fast. I finally pull back behind my border, only to watch Tom age up to Gunpowder and me hit the commerce cap again with food, wood, and gold. It's a trifecta. I once again need to research a bazillion things.

Tom 25:30 I have the edge over Bruce when it comes to unit management. I'm reminded of this when his trebuchet rolls up next to my city and just sits there like it's waiting for a parking space.

Bruce 27:00 It's just back-and-forth over Seneca now. I had three trebuchets going at once, but Tom destroyed two, but I killed most of his guys, but then... I think you get the idea.

Tom 27:12 That was close. My warriors drove back the American aggressors and now I have arquebusiers firing at Bruce from across the border while my sexy little Hiawatha spies lure his units over to my side.

Bruce 32:01 As he usually does when things aren't going his way, Tom resorts to bribery. It's not like the crossbowmen he bribed make that much difference, but it's the principle of the thing. I'm starting to lose the back-and-forth here. Time to think about moving the battle elsewhere.

Tom 32:06 How'd he get Gunpowder? Age that quickly? Now his arquebusiers are firing back at me. This is way too close for comfort. I need to secure the Valley Where Lots of



Q The Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die lives up to its name.

Bruce's Troops Will Die, so I start a miniature Maginot Line.

Bruce 34:36 Tom has built three towers on the border near Jefferson City, making it hard for me to mass my troops. Fortunately, I have a surprise attack brewing way to the west: it's kind of a backdoor plan. But when I try to sneak around to his capital, I find a little tower, way out in the middle of nowhere. Now he knows I'm coming.

Tom 35:13 There's nothing like a well-placed observation post. I see Bruce making a thrust for my capital on my far left flank. Nice try, but it's a fairly simple matter for me to pull my army back from the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die.

Bruce 36:06 My knights are rampaging through the fields of Tom's capital, Onondaga. The only problem is that they could use some support. If Tom moves his army from Seneca to engage them, I have my Jefferson City force ready to sweep in.

Tom 36:30 I hit his attack from the side, quickly taking out his lone supply wagon. This leaves his cannons helpless and his troops hungry. With the help of attrition, it doesn't take long to mop up the rest of his forces while my men enjoy a hearty meal of bean burgers and peacock pie.

Bruce 37:07 With the failure of my attack on Onondaga, I push on Seneca from Jefferson City, but it looks like Herr Chick still has a pretty powerful force there. I knock down one of his towers, but we're soon bogged down in this go-nowhere warfare.

Tom 37:10 Bruce has banged the remainder of his army up against Seneca's defenses in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die. As I'm moving my forces back up from Onondaga, I easily sweep over what used to be a hotly contested border. Taking almost no losses, I quickly capture Jefferson City, which opens a straight path to Washington. Soon, I'm laying siege to the American capital. Bruce sues for peace and I move all his people onto reservations where I allow them to open casinos. I build a theme park in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die and erect a roller coaster on the Hanging Gardens of Toronto. ■



As he usually does when things aren't going his way, Tom resorts to bribery.

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