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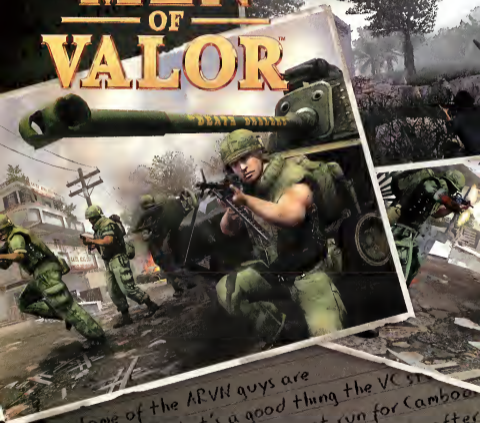
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Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided is required to play *Jump To Lightspeed*.

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You are not too cool for *The Sims 2*. Get over it.

18 Letters

How do you love us? Let us count the ways. Uh-oh. We're stuck at zero.

28 Radar

This month, we talk to an overworked game programmer who is suing his employer, we see which games-on-demand services make the grade, and we even try to hook up one of our reporters with a date. And a whole lot more (like a candid AIM chat with the man behind *Neverwinter Nights 2*) awaits you in this month's Radar section. So what are you waiting for?

48 Previews

Get ready to set sail with Sid Meier's *Pirates!* and hunker down in the trenches of *Men of Valor*. After that, it's time to play king for a day with *Empire Earth 2*, then it's off to the speedway for some high-adrenaline racing with *NASCAR 2005* and *Need for Speed Underground 2*.

76 Reviews

What happens when the biggest game of the month is our cover story? Our Reviews section is stuck with licensed letdowns such as *Spider-Man 2* and *Citizens*, that's what. Think goodness for *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* and *The Political Machine—* or we just might have gone insane.

89 Tech

In this month's Tech section, we review Voodoo's Envy M-860 laptop, Falcon Northwest's FrogBox 2, and Actiontec's 54 Mbps wireless cable/DSL router. We also show you how to install a wireless access point, and just for good measure, there's a new Creaked Case and a new Wii Power!

99 Check Out

We've got a lean, mean Killer Rip for all you budget-minded folks, along with a fresh, new A-List of hardware recommendations. We've also assembled our very own dream cast for the perfect *KOTOR* movie.

110 Tom vs. Bruce

Tom, Bruce, and Erik: the P-Troop of the PC gaming industry.

114 Scorched Earth

Owie owie owie! It burns!

COVER STORY

THE SIMS 2

The Sims 2 is finally here, and reviews editor Robert Coffey has spent countless hours nurturing the most hideously deformed *Sims* family you could possibly imagine. Does the final product live up to all the hype? Find out in our world-exclusive first review!





REVIEWS

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THIS MONTH ON 1UP.COM

CGW.1UP.COM

Doom 3 is this month's trionic chart-topper, closely followed by the ever-delayed *Half-Life 2*.

We've also got plenty of media for up-and-coming games such as *Battlefield 2*, *The Sims 2*, and *Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth*. And if you're just curious about what's going on in the industry, you'll find up-to-the-minute news about everything from the reportedly leaked *Half-Life 2* script to the recent restructuring at LucasArts.

CGW BUZZMETER	
1	<i>Doom 3</i>
2	<i>Half-Life 2</i>
3	<i>Battlefield 2</i>
4	<i>Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth</i>
5	<i>The Sims 2</i>
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7	<i>Empire Earth 2</i>
8	<i>Evil Genius</i>
9	<i>Need for Speed Underground 2</i>
10	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>

CGWJEFF.1UP.COM

On his kinda-sorta-pretty-much-updated-regularly blog, our stalwart commander has a few things to say about being on CNN, not being able to play *The Matrix Online*, and how much *Spider-Man 2* sucks (that's the game, not the movie). Oh, and his interests include "Angela Jolie." We'll let you draw your own conclusions on that one.



BOARDS.1UP.COM

This month on the soap opera that is the CGW Magazine Comments message board, plenty of our readers are raving about *Doom 3*, while others are up in arms over the technical terror that is Windows XP Service Pack 2. After you're done with that, hop over to the Gaming Discussion board, where you can vote on our monthly Sound Off poll and drown in a sea of videocard advice threads.



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>THE BEST GAME COVERAGE

The screenshot shows the 1UP.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'NEW PLAYERS', 'PAGES', 'SERIES', 'RELEASES', 'NEWS', 'EVENTS', and 'TOPICS'. Below that is a search bar and a 'WELCOME TO 1UP' message. The main content area features a large article for 'Half-Life 2' with a 'Half-Life 2' icon and a 'Half-Life 2' title. The article text is partially visible, mentioning 'Half-Life 2' and 'Half-Life 2'. To the right of the article, there's a sidebar with 'PEOPLE WHO OWN THIS GAME' and a list of user avatars and names. At the bottom of the page, there are several small icons representing different game categories.

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Welcome back, Bella

The Sims 2 is here, whether you like it or not

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Just in case the cover didn't quite give it away for you, we have a review of *The Sims 2* inside. Surprise! There was a lot of discussion about doing this cover story, by the way, amongst the normally hive-minded CGW editorial staff. Why? Because *The Sims* divides gamers that way now it didn't always, though. As some of you may remember, *The Sims* was a game we all could admit to liking at first. After awhile, however, its popularity swelled to gargantuan proportions,

becoming a massive hit amongst nongamers—always the kids of death for any gamer's geek cred (as if that matters). *The Sims'* endless reign at the top of the bestseller charts, plus the seemingly countless barrage of expansion packs, made it easy to get sick of it. What we forget, though, is the game itself—how unique it was, how funny how weird, how smart. So now, the official sequel is here at last, and I am here to tell you, friends, do not scoff. Do not be afraid. Do not let some misguided desire to be "cool" prevent you from checking this out. Because Maxis has really upped the ante this time, with a reworking of the gameplay that should surprise even the most jaded. Or, as one bleary-eyed editor put it after yet another sleepless night with this game: "This thing is digital crack!" It is. Seriously. So give in to it. You have nothing to lose but sleep.



KRISTEN SANDOZ

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: Leather pants, lack of the fish, positive, walking, white, and bright blue. Band-Aids, camera, coffee, game?



ROBERT COTTEY

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: Lush, sarong, 18, funny, 7 for video, try god damn pot back. Feet: Tye Dye, water, divas, subculture



MARLEN GLASTONE

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: 181, small, 10, use, a smile in milk, a comb, black, good, Vegas, with, Feet: London, with, inspiration, games, Roseal, Galley



WILLIAM O'NEIL

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: Five job, use, mountain, lake, Amanda, Road, a, social, Feet: New job, to, wife, parade, walkway



JONNY LU

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: 200, visually, better, evening, book, deal, Feet: Being, together, better, food, long, my, pants



FRAN SEITZ

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: That, sub, stick, use, of, the, sarong, challenge, some, good, games, to, play, Detective, Games, 181, no, editor, or, favorite, Feet: Jesters, legs, angry, it, is, so



BOB SCHMIDT

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: Good, beauty, well, 12, when, respect, Good, M3, Island, Chaperone, Feet: Food, hoodie, drink



WELPKI JENNINGS

PHOTOGRAPHY

Applications: Looking, out, my, dining, lamp, 14, lunch, Feet: Cool, hangars, sneakers, phone, bag, 10

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Nothing Compares 2 U

hey, i've been getting ur mag for the last 4 months and i love them. the previews r good to have before hand when u buy a game and the reviews r good to have to c wut other ppl think of the game. o

yeah, i've been wantin to get a new computer be'cuz my parents comp isn't cuttin' it (m 14) so i've been readin Wilk's reviews on the comps and books and i've got a pretty good idea wut kinda computer i want, but i think gettin' 1 of ur guys opinions on wut kinda comp i should get when i get money for it. i would have emailed will but i could only find ur email address (at the end of ur "I'm Al Heig" article), ok so the kinda comp i would like would be a school gaming, programming computer (m gonna be a programmer or something like that after college) that's around 3k this would be rly helpful if u could either give ur opin or some on the staff (like mayb Will). By the way, we been looking to be like a beta tester for now but i couldn't find 1 that would pay me (i need money for the computer remember), do u know of ne companys that r coming out with ne games that r paying ppl around my age and up to beta test their games. if so pls could u tell me wut games, their companies and the email address to sign up at...

Scott Garcia

We have two suggestions for you, Scott: a computer with a little feature called "spell check" and the immediate rescinding of your school's certification. Seriously, man, even Prince doesn't spell like that anymore.

Actual meaningful input!

My comment is actually in reply the letter you printed from David Kovacs [Issue #242] and his problem with getting his DOS-based version of *Crusador* to run. If his problem is just that he is running on Windows XP, which can not run DOS-based games, I suggest using a program called AbandonLoader, which, ironically, is the same program I use to run all those

Quid pro quo

Hey, you friendly guys at CGW! I was wondering if you guys had a copy of *Neverhood* lying around that you didn't want anymore (in mint condition with the box 'n' all would be awesome, but I'll take anything you got). I have been looking for this game for over two years, but anywhere I find it (eBay, Amazon, etc.) it is too expensive! So would you help me out and send me this awesome game?

Denny

Hey, you friendly reader! We were wondering if you had a 50-dollar bill lying around that you didn't want anymore. We've been looking through our wallets for two seconds but we can't find one! So could you help us out and send this awesome currency?



old adventure games. He should also get VDMSound, which, after installation, works in conjunction with AbandonLoader. Both programs are free and simple to use. AbandonLoader can be found through any common search engine and VDMSound can be found at its official page (<http://ntvdm.cjb.net>).

Ryvvn

Thanks for the tip, Ryvvn. Now where did we put our copy of *Crusador*?



No trespassing

I've been a faithful CGW subscriber for the past several years (since '98 or so). I say faithful because I'm not one of those, "I'm canceling my subscription 'cuz your review of [insert game here] SUCKED!!" No, I've never sent you any sort of correspondence, except to ask Will for some tech advice. I'm one of those people who quietly enjoys reading your magazine from cover to cover each month, getting advice, chuckling at the jokes, basing my next purchase on what your reviews say.

Anyhow, I'm writing you today to tell you that my wife and I are going to be in San Francisco. While my wife wants to do all of the "wifey" things (wine tasting in Napa Valley, shopping, taking a boat ride, shopping, fine dining, shopping, you get the picture), she has actually allowed me to set aside some time in "our" schedule to do what I want. I think Jeff knows where I'm coming from. After careful consideration, I have come up with one humble request: I was 13

Mail Bites

Shrimp and homosexuality—a strange-sounding combination.

—Samuel Silver

Review copies are now available of *Prom on Mars: Volume 1*—the webcomic chronicling the adventures of Liz and the seniors of Liberty High on their way to Mars for their senior prom.

—Anonymous e-mail

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□ wondering if my wife and I could either get the racket tour of your office or even do lunch or happy hour on one of the days we are in town. I know that you probably get requests like this all the time and you have quite a busy schedule, so I can appreciate your hesitance to grant my request. And I know that even though I have helped pay your salaries for the past five years or so, I know this only entitles me to my magazine each month. So I can only offer you this: the first round of drinks are on me. Scouts honor! I really enjoy reading your magazine each month and would like to show my gratitude in person. It would mean a lot to me. OK, enough of the guilt trip. ☺

Here's a little more info about me, just so you don't think I'm some weirdo. I'm a 31-year-old airline pilot, my wife is an accountant, and we live in Houston, TX. We make a decent living, have no kids, and live in your typical quiet suburbia. While I'm a calm, professional pilot during the day, I bring my laptop with me on my trips and frag the crap outta anyone I can online at night. My drugs, err... games of choice are *Battlefield 1942*, *Counter-Strike*, and *UT2004*. While I'm now at *UT2004*, I'd be happy to kick anyone's ass in the other two games if I come over for a visit. ☺

Anonymous

Sorry, gentle reader, ever since the Pants-Free Visitor episode of 2001, our company lawyers have set down strict guidelines. 1) No visitors. 2) In the event there are visitors, no taking their pants. 3) No taking their shirts, slipping a coolie hat on 'em, then dunking them in icy water. Man, lawyers are just no fun.

Dam that space-time continuum!

What's wrong with you guys? Now I love the mag and everything about it except one thing, the demos. I mean, they're great, but you send demos, and the game came out 2 months earlier! No one (if it's multi-player) is gonna be playing these anymore. So send it to us when they release the demo, not 2 months later! Thank you.

Spenser Staebler

We honestly do our best, Spenser, but a couple of things get in the way of our slopping timelier demos on the CD. First of all there's the whole "our best" issue—that's an effort easily matched by most third-graders. Further, our production schedule dictates that the disc is finished roughly two months prior to your getting it. When you couple that with the fact more and more developers are delivering demos after completing their games, it's hard to make sure the demos reach you home any earlier.

More demo stuff

Darren and Jeff, representing the most esteemed computer gaming magazine, schlepp all the way to Santa Monica at the whim of game-designer egos, and we didn't even rise one teeny, little level of *Doom 3* on the demo CD? What's up with that? Geez

Or am I jumping the gun? Next month—right?

Love you guys!

Cynthia B.

We were going to package the entire game with that issue, Cynthia, but then we got Spenser's e-mail and he made us realize that if we couldn't beat *Doom 3*'s release, we just shouldn't bother. Thanks to us, you've been spared the agony of playing a marginally aged product.

Coffey talk

I don't understand how on earth people could possibly write Robert Coffey hate mail. I've enjoyed *Scorched Earth* ever since *Greenspeak* took the plunge and I've enjoyed every single one of them. He's certainly a brilliant man, and I guess you need some sort of dark sense of humor to full appreciate how much he lacks ass

Regarding the last column about PC games not having the same liveness as, say, playing softball or being a LAN, I fully agree with you. Playing *UT2004* and other assorted online games has really made me realize that, while PC games can be great fun online, typically:

- 1) You'll never see those people again.
- 2) Most of these people have the intelligence of a small banana.

You are once again correct that the only way to truly enjoy PC gaming online is to LAN. I've played *UT* online so many times, but nothing is quite as satisfying as hearing my friend shout from the other side of the room "HOW THE HELL?!" Thank you for your time, you are a great man.

Joe Conti



I just wanted to start by saying I've never written to an editor of a magazine before, but when I read your article about playing games on Easy, I had to make this my first. I just wanted to say that I completely agree with what you said. I'm a 28-year-old female who loves to play games, but there are times when I just want to go in and win, and I'll go in and blow things up on Easy mode. Normal and Hard modes are

fun to play, too, but sometimes they're too much of a pain in the ass to want to worry with when you just want to jump in, kill something, and jump out. Thanks again for the article, if everything you write is done as interestingly as this article, I can't wait to see what you have to say next. Keep up the good work!

Aimee Luffman ☺



Mall Bites
☺

Either I have the wrong idea of what a review is supposed to be, or certain CGW editors suck at reviewing games.

—Rodel Rulo

Speak the words of wisdom, Robert, but please don't plant those images of Jeff in oversized foote pajamas in my brain again!

—Herneth ☺

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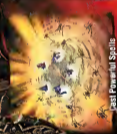
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Show me the Money!



VU Games programmer talks to the press about filing his labor suit.



After Alice
Proud to be an American? Damn straight, ho ho. McGee discusses his new games.



Demand
Do game-as-a-demand services make the grade? See for yourself in our report.



SWG
Gamers need love, too. That's why one indie reporter signed up for a little fold test.

Neil Aitken is fed up. Working as a programmer at Vivendi Universal's Knowledge Adventure division since February 2000, Aitken has dealt with a company unwilling to compensate for overtime. Management has forced him to change time cards to reflect fewer hours and even made him cross out weekend entries entirely. At least, so he claims.

Graves & Associates filed a lawsuit against VU on June 28, citing violation of the California labor codes and one business and profession code. As of press time, VU wouldn't comment. "This was a direct result of watching good friends and fellow programmers be laid off after working extraordinary amounts of overtime," says Aitken. "We were being squeezed to our limits, and those who voiced their dissatisfaction generally got cut."

OVERWORKED, UNDERPAID

That the case is being filed in California is significant, as California law specifically provides additional protection to computer programmers over federal laws. Employers have to pay their programmers at least \$45.63 an hour or a minimum salary of \$1,200 a week to avoid overtime wages. Federal laws mandate a lower rate.

The suit isn't just fighting for Aitken's overtime, either: if he's successful, all employees under similar circumstances at VU will receive back pay. "We believe that the average programmer is working between 10 and 15 hours a week of overtime. Each programmer is entitled to one-and-a-half times his hourly wage for every hour of overtime since the year 2000," says Allen Graves, Aitken's lawyer.

So, could VU be dishing out millions of dollars? "Not likely," says research analyst and former labor lawyer Michael Pachter. "The one thing that VU did poorly was define job requirements." The gist is that paying hourly wages denotes an essentially replaceable job. Programmers are skilled workers, and it would be smarter to either 1) not let them work overtime if they are hourly or 2) just make them salaried so that there is no issue of overtime pay. Well, either that or just ship jobs off to coders in India who'll work feverishly for a fraction of the price.

Many developers were surprised that Aitken had filed a lawsuit. Most felt that if the work conditions at VU really were that bad, Aitken should have gotten the hell out. As a senior programmer at Bethesda Softworks, Slave Master has felt the heat of "crunch time" but has come away only with good experiences. "If you don't like the way you're treated at work, try to find work at a company that has more reasonable expectations of its employees," says Meister.

The results of the lawsuit could draw a close eye to the videogame industry, as



Look for Neil as he models his newest fashion line: out-of-work wear.

"The bigger risk for the publishers is that they'll have to share a bigger piece of the pie. That can translate into higher costs for the game."

overtime pay, especially in this industry, is largely unregulated and remains so. Last year, President Bush increased tensions by threatening to veto a bill with an overtime pay protection guarantee.

A MATURING INDUSTRY

The upshot is that employees just want overtime handled right. In fact, in a recent "quality of life" survey by the International Game Developers Association, a surprising 46.8 percent of game developers reported that they were not compensated for overtime. Only 4.3 percent mentioned receiving cash recompense, while others got time off, royalties, or profit sharing in exchange. Pachter, however, says that this is where the lawsuit can hit the consumer

the hardest. "The bigger risk for the publishers is that if [the Aitken case] goes through, they'll have to share a bigger piece of the pie. That can translate into higher costs for a game."

The suit's mere presence is spurring discussions between developers over the nature of the industry and how its workers should be treated. "A curious thing is happening, and the Vivendi suit is a reflection of it," says Sean Hyde-Mayer, a producer at THQ. "The industry is starting to mature."

The suit was filed long before Aitken's last day at the company, August 13, and, he says, "Many people expressed their support." The trial date for Aitken's suit isn't until at least June of next year, but the case will likely be settled before then. **Patrick Klepek**



■ HE GOT GAME

Everybody's All-American

McGee talks about life after *Alice*

Is the height of hubris putting your name in a game's title? Not if you're American McGee. He worked his way up through the ranks at Id Software and helped assemble the *Doom* and *Quake* series. He created *Alice...sorely*, American McGee's *Alice*, a twisted gothic revisiting of Lewis Carroll's classic children's story. He also has some big plans for what's coming next.

OVER THE RAINBOW

After the modest success of *Alice*, McGee shopped around the idea of a dark retelling of *The Wizard of Oz*. Atari (then Infogrames) bit at the pitch. "We were ahead of schedule and Infogrames pulled out because of their financial problems [in 2003]." They had the game done, a book written, toys for sale, and a film trilogy optioned by legendary uberproducer Jerry Bruckheimer. "All of this is put on hold, in limbo, because nobody was willing to take a f---ing chance. Sad truth is, that's just the nature of the industry now."

GETTING ENLIGHTENED

Well, some people are willing to try something different. McGee was hanging out with Trevor Chin (creator of *Capitolism* and founder of

Enlight Studios) in Hong Kong when the two decided to do some work together. As the creative director of Enlight Studios, McGee is shepherding new titles and giving them his stamp of approval. Which brings us to McGee's first assignment, to help put together all the pieces for American McGee Presents *Scrapland*. "When I first saw what [Spanish developer Mercury Steam] created, I knew that I wanted to be involved." As executive producer of the title, he's already got a lot to do on a day-to-day basis. He's working on marketing and, more important, making sure the dialogue is polished and localized. The game does, in fact, show promise. So much so that McGee is already talking to Mercury Steam about working on his next twisted fairy-tale game. He says it's too early to discuss which classic tale will get turned on its ear next, but did say that there are other projects in the works.

The first is a possible MMO version of *Oz*. At press time, the only official word is that he's talking to a Korean (NCsoft? Cough! Cough!) company about the possibilities. The other is a game tentatively titled *Bad Day L.A.*, a *Medal of Honor*-style first-person shooter that's set in the modern day. Going for some complete goofball slashtick elements, it might even be a little reminiscent of *No One Lives Forever*. McGee promises something "damn funny with a really dark sense of humor." We expect no less. **Darren Gladstone**

"When I first saw [a demo of *Scrapland*], I knew that I wanted to be involved."

REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	CGM	GameSpot	IGN.com	GameSpy	JUP.com	GameRankings.com
Beyond Divinity	C	C	B	B+	B+	—	B
City of Heroes	A	A	B+	B+	B+	B+	A-
Hittman: Contracts	C	C	B	B+	D	B	B
Lineage II	D	C-	C	—	C	C+	B-
Warlords: Battlecry III	B-	B+	B-	B+	B	B	B-



NEWS
FEED

→ Say hello to my little game. VU is bringing *Scarface* back from the dead in a *GTA*-like third-person shooter sometime in 2005. Is it coming to the PC? Maybe, but we wouldn't bet a mound of cocaine on it. →



WINDOW WAGERS

Greetings from Seattle

CGW wrangles Microsoft conference to find out what the future holds for Windows gaming

For the past few years, Microsoft has held a developer-only event called MeltDown. In many ways, MeltDown is like a mini Game Developers Conference, with the exception being that its focus has always been on creating games for the Windows platform. MeltDown has also been notoriously closed to the press, but with Microsoft's next OS on the way, CGW had to sneak in the back door to Microsoft's headquarters.

If the mantra for MeltDown was "Games for Windows," then the latest version of DirectX, version 9.0c, and the next Windows OS are the keys to this change. Of course, the next OS is well off. When asked when Microsoft expects to ship it, Chris Donahue, lead technical evangelist for DirectX, stated bluntly, "On Wednesday." Which Wednesday is anyone's guess: Humor aside, according to Microsoft, gaming is one of the first few things that people do in Windows after listening to music and performing other multimedia tasks. To that end, the company touted a few of the features that highlight the next Windows OS gaming pedigree. For instance, look for a gaming folder that's similar to the My Music and My Pictures folders already in Windows XP. The next OS may also incorporate the Windows XP Game Advisor that is currently available on Microsoft's site. (It's a utility that scans your machine and lets you know if your rig is up to snuff.) Microsoft is banking on making games both more accessible and simple to use in order to lure more of the already 120 mil-

lion people who have purchased XP into the world of gaming.

Furthermore, the next Windows OS will address many issues—old ones that have plagued PC gaming since its inception, as well as new ones—that serve to make the Windows gaming experience more plug-and-play. Namely, look for parental controls that limit access to games based on things such as ESRB rating. Microsoft is also looking to include features like buddy lists for game matchmaking and Live tools for Windows that will make Windows more like the Xbox Live experience, complete with Gamertags, voice chat, and matchmaking. One of the most anticipated features that we expect to see in the next Windows OS is a game patching system similar to Windows Update through which publishers can specify download locations, games will look for patches, and users will be prompted by Windows when a patch is available for a particular game. We've confirmed rumors of "Drop-and-Play" functionality that will be in the next OS or maybe even sooner. One source says some EA games coming out as early as next year (ahem, Battlefield 2) may instantly install all the needed files (like on an Xbox), or at least let you more quickly choose where the install goes.

While a lot is still unconfirmed, at least we know that the next OS will launch on a Wednesday—at some point. We'll keep you posted. **W**illiam O'Neal with additional reporting by Darren Gladstone



Get in Touch with Your Inner Evil.



NEWS FEED **»»** Aces high. Gathering just announced that Wings of War, a WWI dog-fighting game, is on for a fall release. **»»**

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■ RISING THE GRADE

Report Card: Games on Demand

As broadband users increase, is the time finally right?

Downloading a game is nothing new—Shareware, demos, you name it. But it's been a hard sell convincing some to forgo the whole "buying the box" experience. Times are changing thanks to the proliferation of broadband, and some key players are trying their hand at making games available on demand. That's why it's high time that someone (nearly us) took a hard look at these services to see if they really are worth your hard-earned money. **—Daren Gladstone**

AMERICA ONLINE

SERVICE So what if AOL caters most of its gaming channel (keyword: Games) to soccer moms with casual puzzle and arcade fare? People still want to play 'em, right? In talking with the folks at AOL, it appears they are already taking steps in the right direction. Spokespeople say that while you can currently download demos (like you can at any number of places), you can also download full commercial games from AOL's partner site, Trymedia (www.trygames.com). The deal works like this: Download a full game. It's yours to play for a couple hours to get a feel for it, and then you're locked out. If you like your first taste, you have the option to pay for unlocking the full game. Want to burn it onto a CD for backup? Go right ahead. It's yours now. The same practice has been done forever with smaller shareware games, but seeing it employed for larger retail games is a nice change.

GAMES The games themselves, well, that's a whole other issue. Among the most notable multiplayer games offered were *Dead Man's Hand*, *Civilization III*, *Monopoly*, and *MechWarrior 3*. Obviously, AOL has its work cut out for itself, lacking any hot games from the past two years, but the company promises more compelling titles. We'll see.

COMCAST CABLE

SERVICE A relative newcomer to the gaming world is Comcast. It has recently acquired and merged G4TechTV (onto whatever the heck it plans on calling it). The next step is

Report Card		STUDENT: Games on Demand	SEMESTER: Fall 2004
PROVIDER	SERVICE GRADE	GAMES GRADE	COMMENTS
AMERICA ONLINE	B	C-	Good performer, but has trouble making friends.
COMCAST CABLE	B	B	A very eager student. Shows great signs of improvement.
YAHOO! GAMES	B+	B+	Good work, keep it up! Don't let your grades start to slip.

launching into online gaming. Unlike what AOL/Trymedia is doing with full game purchases, Comcast provides a rental service. Installing a basic applet, games are streamed to your PC. Only the basics needed for game performance are downloaded while the rest is done on the fly. Not sure how to play? The manual is available as well. After that initial download, the results onscreen are pretty impressive when playing a game. The only real downside: The games don't come with you. If you want to play on the road, you'll need a Net connection to navigate a website and choose the game you want to play.

GAMES For \$15 a month, you get unlimited use of Comcast's stable of games. While it is still early on, Comcast has already made some smart partnerships with Ubisoft and Atari for a fairly healthy collection of games. Among some of the notable ones to check out are *Spinner: Call Pandora Tomorrow*, *Ghost Recon*, *Unreal Tournament: Game of the Year Edition*, *XW*, and *Nevanwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide*.

YAHOO! GAMES

SERVICE Yahoo! has been in online gaming the longest. As a result, it has the largest selection of titles and the smartest variety of price-plan options. This is why it struck us as strange that spokespeople for Yahoo! outright refused to participate in our little competition. They assured us that there are no plans to discontinue its Games on Demand service, but it did give us pause. Undaunted, we signed up and found that it uses the same exact technology as Comcast for downloading and streaming games.

GAMES How you play dictates how much you'll spend. Only plan on trying three games at a time? It'll run you 10 bucks a month. Other options include paying \$15 a month for unlimited play or \$35 for three months at a clip. Yahoo! has a leg up because of a two-year head start. Thanks to that, you'll find a bunch of favorites, ranging from *Fresnoer and Rise of Nations* to *Oni*, *Serious Sam*, and *Rainbow Six*. But where's *UT2003* or *UT2004*?

NEWS FEED

► Psychological Tim Schafer's Xbox title *Psychonauts* has been acquired by Majesco. It's now coming to the PC as well. ► Fuller Spectrum *Warrior*. It's coming to the PC this fall with sharper graphics and two brand-new missions. ►

CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW

The AIM Game

Fluohart CGW - Instant Message

File Edit Insert People

Fluohart has entered the room.

CGW: Welcome to the party. How should I address you, François? Mister? Doctor? Esquire?

Fluohart: How about François Fluohart, CEO, Obsidian Entertainment, Inc.

CGW: Well, that's a start. Anything shorter?

Fluohart: Smooth Mister? :))

CGW: Don't DK. :-). Haha! Hahaha, can you clue us in on an Anniversary Nights 2?

Fluohart: We've been working on it for about a month now and there are some really cool! We are fleshing up the story and the list of new features, and the programmers are getting the engine ready for the new stuff.

CGW: So this is a new engine?

Fluohart: No, but it will be a heavily modified one. One of the first things we did was move it up to DirectX 9. That will give us the ability to pull in a lot of the new graphics features.

CGW: Gotta, what is the biggest change desire-wise between N&N and 2?

Fluohart: Our top focus is the single-player game. We really want to show people with a great story. Internally, we've been talking a lot about older RPGs and how RPGs have evolved. We want the world to play a role in the game again. Another top focus for N&N 2 is on the NPCs—we want the player to care about them and have them be real. So we are focusing on the key NPCs and putting a lot of time and energy behind them, to reinforce their part in the world.

CGW: Ok, so we're getting a main story this time around. What else is going to make N&N 2 stand out beyond the first game?

Fluohart: Well, that's N&N 2 : -)

CGW: Haha.

Fluohart: Seriously—I think the key is the story and to make sure it's as readable as even more so. There are some interesting ideas that we have, but we can't really talk about them right now.

CGW: Ah, okay. I promise I won't tell anyone. I swear.

Fluohart: Oh, OK. (I'm easy.) Some of the new things are going to be pulling in more of the flavor the Forgotten Realms, full support for more of the sub races. We are also going to be working on the Necromancer system. We are working on having there be a bit more role play and making it easier to control.

CGW: Really? You won't have to dig into 10 books to get it, loading routines for heretics?

Fluohart: Exactly. One of the ideas is to have them roll out to you and ask if you need help and then you just have to answer different buttons. That help will be context sensitive, so you won't have to press different buttons. It will also make a fight feel more like a fight. We are also looking at where you can ask for help and you will get out an context and then your heretics will tell you in response. That might even be based on their personality.

CGW: Sounds like a much more reasonable setup. Does that mean you're helping comrades?

Fluohart: Kind of. Our theme is that you can just yell for help and they can figure out to a limited degree what you want. There will be other ways where you can ask for specific help, like "Attack my target." If you yell for help and your hit points are low, then the cleric will help you. If you aren't wounded but your opponent is really hurt, the cleric will help you attack it.

Fluohart: Something will so in like this. We're just not sure how robust it will be.

CGW: Very cool. I'm definitely looking forward to seeing this in action.

Fluohart: We are also looking at a lot of RPG stuff right now. To see what might fit into N&N 2. Can a hunting and crafting system be interesting enough to be a part of the overall story? :))

CGW: You're looking to accommodate that end of the RPG world? Any derring-do in 3D? :))

Fluohart: Well, we haven't really ruled out anything yet, other than coming for 10 hours for the 3D permit. Again, chance. :))

CGW: I can see it on the low already, 300,000,000 hours!

Fluohart: We do want to give the player things to do that are off the main path of the story and reward them for exploring. RPGs do this very well.

CGW: Well, I don't want to hog up any more of your time—you've been awesome about this already. But I gotta keep asking. Anything you can tell us about the plot?

Fluohart: Not really, but it is rated R. :))

CGW: You know this is for an article, right?

Fluohart: Ah, I've said much worse. Besides, you can't spell that.

Fluohart: Ah, I've said much worse. Besides, you can't spell that.

Think this is the whole conversation? Think agent burner had a great time talking to François. To see the entire hour-long ramble with gaming great François Fluohart, check out archive.11.com right now.



NEWS FEED Rumors abound of takeovers. The most recent: Ubisoft is eyeballing Codemasters. It makes sense to lock up Operation Flashpoint 2. >>

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■ NERD LOVE

Single, White Gamer Seeking Girl...Any Girl

Looking for game love in all the wrong places



As a hardcore gamer, it's tough to get a date—that's the embarrassing truth. Enter matchmaker John Villafra. At 23, he's the founder of MMODating.com, the first online dating service geared specifically toward lonely keyboard jockeys. "Being a gamer, I couldn't see myself replying to someone whose interests were going out to a bar and clubbing every night," he explains.

But don't assume this new dating destination just caters to dorks. "Some people think all gamers live in their mom's basement and only come out dressed as a wood elf, casting level 2 spells on everyone," Villafra laughs. "Ninety-nine percent are absolutely average people who just love the entertainment that games provide."

With 2,300 presumably "average" people currently registered on MMODating, this single game journalist reveled in the idea of putting the service to the test via a series of three Los Angeles-centric outings. The following is an unadulterated field account. Of course, the names of the lovely ladies have been changed to protect the innocent.

DATE #1 POLLY MORPHOUS

Historically, people lie about their weight—but never so much as Polly. Trying to channel conversation topics while munching on a Cheesecake Factory sandwich, I couldn't help but wonder how her dangerously swaying arm flap equated to an "athletic and toned" descriptor. Sure, she was pir-

rectly nice, but she had an unhealthy liking of all things reality—Cops, Springer, you name it—which struck me as the perfect "chick flick" cue.

DATE #2 TOO-TALL TINA

Being 6'3", it's not often I meet a lady who can stand tall next to me—but Tina was the exception. She nearly matched my skinny-as proportions, too, making for more of an inbred brother-sister pairing than a sexy one. But that didn't hinder our talks about mods, her urges to toggle her joypads in the nude sometimes, and her adorably vicious Chihuahua (apparently, it bit a boy's crotch once but then whimpered apologetically). At some point, she slipped me her number—and some tongue.

DATE #3 LITTLE ASIAN ANNIE

I wouldn't call it a fetish, but it's certainly difficult to broom a cute Asian gal to the curb. Luckily, Annie was much more honest in her posting than Polly—even admitting to being a "bit of a perv" (let's not go there). At a quaint Italian joint in Burbank, we discussed burning G.I. Joes and Barbies as kids, dropping wads of cash in the electronic hubs of Tokyo, and a strange position called "The Stolewider." Indeed, numbers were exchanged.

After one month, MMODating has given me at least a glimmer of hope. The only real problem left is finding more women since the service is so new. **By Jon M. Gibson**

ON THE DL

Fresbies live and direct from the Web



Battlefield: Pirates

www.bfpirates.com



We've kept an eye—the one without the patch—on this mod for a while now, and with the beta 3 release it's finally worth writing about. *Battlefield: Pirates* lets *Battlefield 1942* players trade in their aircraft carriers for galleons and their BARs for flintlocks as they swashbuckle across the high seas and the higher skies. Men the cannons, use a spyglass to perform recon from a rickety balloon basket, and let the seas run red with your enemy's blood. Sell everything from barely seaworthy runabouts to towering ships-of-the-line in battles against other vessels and forts bristling with guns. It's everything a pirate's life should be, minus the scurvy, buggery, and need for peg legs.

Joining for more mods that stand *BFD342* on its head? Why not drive a heavily armed, rocket-booster car in *Battlefield: Interstate '82* (www.bf1982.com), relive the Star Wars trilogy in *Galactic Conquest* (www.galactic-conquest.net), or turn back the clock to the Great War with *Battlefield: 1918* (www.bf1918.com).

NEWS FEED

► Stuck in the '80s? A recent London concert celebrated Commodore 64 games. See for yourself at www.c64audio.com. ► Mad game. Madden 2005 sold 1.33 million copies in its first week. Believe it or not, you can already preorder for 2006. ►

■ EXPECTING PATCHES

Window Shutters

Firewall's fickle flaw targets games in XP Service Pack 2

When you install something on Windows XP, it usually works, but now there's a catalogue of programs—mostly games—that “may behave differently” if you’ve downloaded XP’s new Service Pack 2 (SP2) release. Don’t worry, the lengthy list posted on Microsoft’s Knowledge Base (article 884130 at <http://support.microsoft.com>) only mentions little games like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings*, *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield*, and *WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos*.

SP2, according to Microsoft, “introduces a number of new features that help increase performance and security.” Unfortunately, the titles listed are getting tagged by Windows’ firewall as security risks. What happens is that when you start a game, a dialogue box pops up and asks you to permit the title through the firewall. You don’t see that pop-up box because the game is playing, so when you try to go online, you get nothing. Chris Donahue, Microsoft’s lead technical evangelist for Windows gaming and graphics,



assures us that this problem is easily fixed. The obvious solution is to Alt-Tab out and answer the dialogue box if you can. Alternatively, you can go into the Security control panel applet and either permit games through the firewall prior to playing them or just customize the level of security with the slider (you can go to the point of turning off everything, but that is definitely not recommended). Don’t panic, though. Donahue says that “[our internal teams] have not seen any other issues in the huge amount of testing we have done.” **■** *Damen Gladstone*

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www.sierraentertainment.com

CONSOLE CORNER

What's worth swiping from your kid brother

■ PS2, XBOX

Burnout 3: Takedown

Better way to unwind after a hard day's work than a head-on collision? The *Burnout* series has been great but hidden in obscurity. Now that EA has acquired developer Criterion and this kick-ass title, it's getting the polish and attention it deserves. If you haven't heard of the series before, here it is in a nutshell: drive really, really fast, crash, repeat.

This blazing arcade racing game has a number of modes and conveys blistering speed better than just about anything you can find on the road. But the one mode that has everyone in the office playing long after we should be ere the ridiculous crash modes, which reward



you for creating massive pileups. We've noticed that we seem to get higher scores in this mode after a couple drinks.

ALSO CHECK OUT: Tony Hawk's *Underground 2* (GC, PS2, XB) and Sly Cooper 2: *Band of Thieves* (PS2)

NEWS FEED

► Bin Laden found in bad PC game. System 3 is set to release America's 10 Most Wanted labs in 2004. No doubt it'll be tasteful and well-polished. ►

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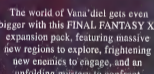


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new enemies to engage, and an
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PlayStation.2



PARENTAL CONTROL

Naked Ambition

Gaming gals pose for *Playboy*; fanboys to borrow dad's copy



While it was inevitable that a videogame heroine would someday pose for *Playboy*, we always just assumed Ms. Pac-Man would do it first, to resurrect her career. But with a layout in the magazine's October issue, such digital dames as Lulu Licious from *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Lauda* and *BloodRayne 2* babe Rayne have beaten the yellow bingle star to the punch by showing off their naughty bytes. Tastelessly, of course.

"I blame Janet Jackson for raising the bar," laughs Rayne of her topless shoot. "I still can't believe I did it. I know my outfits might indicate otherwise, but I'm actually not much of an exhibitionist." Modesty aside, the Anna Kournikova of the game industry has a lot to gain since this shoot coincides with the release of her newest game, *BloodRayne 2*, this October.

It wasn't modesty that almost stopped some from showing off their special features, though. "I really don't want to be thought of as being just some cute code," says Licious. "But I'm not going to be designed this way forever. I might as well do it now, while I've got the pixels."

Of course, like most Playmates, these interactive ingénues have more than just skin on their schedule. Take Rayne. Besides the new PC game, her life story has been optioned for a comic book and a movie, the latter of which stars *Terminator 3* vixen Kristanna Loken and has already begun shooting. On another note, there's no word from Gordon Freeman's people if he'll be doing that alleged spread in *Playgirl*. **Paul Semel**

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

News and views from the Wild West



The Good

The Sims 2

Yeah, yeah, we know it's cool to brag on *The Sims*, but *The Sims 2* is out now, whether you like it or not, and once again, whether you like it or not, Will Wright and company have proven their genius. So do yourself a favor and get over it, or risk missing out on one of the best games of the year so far. Just because your mom likes it doesn't mean it's not cool. Wait—did we really just type that?



The Bad

Windows XP Service Pack 2

As much as it's humanly possible to love an operating system without it being

creepy in a David Cronenberg sort of way, we love Windows XP. Love it. But the new, highly publicized Service Pack 2 is a bit of a nightmare for gamers, who, after installing it, are finding a whole host of games are now incapable of running. This is after Microsoft has made a big PR push to show how serious it is about PC gaming. Ye know, we're still willing to see it.



The Ugly

Star Wars not dead yet?

We don't mean the games. LucasArts has been on a nice roll for years now with

a mostly solid series of *Star Wars* games. But as we went to press, a nasty rumor started floating around the Web that Lucas is actually seriously considering making the *Episodes 7* through *9* movies now. Please, we are begging you: Stop trampling on our childhood memories. *Episodes 7* and *2* were bad enough. Let the movies die now.

NEWS FEED

» You can't keep a good girl down. Or Lara Croft. The tomb raider will be back at it again next summer with a new game by Crystal Dynamics. Croft creator Toby Gard has joined the effort. » Sega is coming back to the PC. Stay tuned. **B**

CRY HAVOK

Let's Get Physical

What exactly does the future of game physics have in store?

Anyone who has blasted a thug's legs out from under him in *Mex Payne 2* or stalked a few demons to the walls in *Paliskiller* knows that Havok physics makes games more realistic. Objects move realistically in the environment and, of course, there's the fan-favorite "rag doll" effect of the recently deceased. But this is just the beginning. We decided to see for ourselves how the magic happens and what needs improving. So, who better to visit than the engineers at Havok headquarters?



Here's a hit list with a bunch of the games currently using Havok Physics.

CUTTING THE STRINGS

According to Evin Levey, one of the engineers who helps developers integrate Havok into their game's code, "We're looking at three or four ways to take us away from that bag-of-bones rag doll toward more realistic behavior. When a character gets shot, you don't want to turn on the physics immediately—unless he gets shot in the head. You want to see him put his hands to the wound, maybe fall to his knees, and then feather in the rag doll. Or when a guy gets hit in the head, he's going to have a little control, but he's dazed, so you want a blend between some type of A.I. behavior and physics behavior."

There's another problem right now with rag-dolling, though. As soon as you cap a target in current games, it's like you've just cut a marionette's strings. Joints disappear, the limbs fold in on themselves, and the illusion of reality is broken. "Biomechanics" is the key word there, and the trick is creating joint and muscle limits. This is still very much in development.

As processor power continues to increase, more detailed simulations of the real world become possible, which means more

dynamic gameplay. "How about a virtual skydive level?" muses Steve Cooper, Havok's director of marketing communications. "You transition from a chaotic free fall to a controlled freestyle dive position, and then once your chute opens, you descend to the ground, fighting side drafts using the chute's steering toggles. Finally hitting your target. It comes down to creative designers wanting to replicate more of the real world."

Levey agrees. "I think we'll begin to see games where every object has a physical model associated with it, and not just rigid models, but also all kinds of soft bodies, such as hair that flows and cloth that can drape and ripple as it moves. This will open the door to a broader range of natural interactions and more realistic environments."

Already we've seen how authentic physical simulations allow players to bring real-world experience to bear on problem solving in the game world (most notably in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*), and that trend will continue. But imagine the difference in gameplay when A.I. opponents can use similar circumstantial strategies against us. That's something to look forward to.

"Gamers have very discerning appetites," says Herman Kaiser, Havok's vice president of sales for North America. "They constantly expect the next visual leap, the next level of interaction in any sort of gameplay, so we have to continue to provide that." —Paul Byrnes

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

What we said when you were nursing



5 Years Ago, November 1999

"The best-case scenario is that we're cow ass." Ah yep, five years ago, CGW endured the infamous billing fiasco, where jerky made from bull testicles and ass was unwittingly consumed by the edit staff. The less said about that, the better. We gazed into our +5 Ball of Scrying with our cover story on the five games that would change gaming forever. Not so great, our forecasting skills—Halo became the first big Xbox game, *Freelancer* languished for years, *Bleak & White* failed to live up to its promise, and *Good & Evil* just plain died. Hey, at least we called *The Sims* right.



10 Years Ago, November 1994

Sweet sassy molasses, has it ecliped been a full decade since we reviewed *Doom II*? Time sure flies when you're gibbing the minions of hell. Not surprisingly, we loved the game, gave it 4.5 stars, and even ran a full feature on 10 "Doom Toos" (golly, we're clever with headlines). Some good games made the list: *Dark Forces*, *Descent*, *Heretic*, and *Rise of the Triad*. And so did the very lame *Isle of the Dead*. We had two surly cover boys this month: the hellclous Ben from *Full Throttle* and a really constipated-looking Patrick Stewart.



15 Years Ago, November 1989

Before classic-style games were available as free Flash-driven entertainment, we reviewed things like *Cribbage King/Gn King*—over two pages. We don't do that nowadays, though the Q4-loaded release schedule for PC games has made us consider if we should, lest we have an empty *Reviews* section. Pickings were slim 15 years ago as well, but our *Holiday Gift Guide* did hint at some helplessness with titles like *SinCity*, *MechWarrior*, *Hero's Quest*, and *It Came from the Desert* getting buy recommendations.

"[Gamers] constantly expect the next visual leap, the next level of interaction in any sort of gameplay"

■ STAR STRUCK

Field Report

The *Star Wars* game you've always wanted to play



The toughest part of killing an Ewok? Scraping its innards out from between your AT-ST's toes. During an editorial throwdown of intergalactic proportions, we got to play more of the upcoming FPS fragfest *Star Wars Battlefront*. We won—big surprise. Long live the Empire!

The long and the short of it: the game looks good and has a solid sampling of the *Star Wars* universe. We just need to see more of the single player campaign. The game played well in a number of maps—Endor, Hoth, and Coruscant—and looks like it's on target for a firm September 21 release date (that's right around the time this issue should be in your hands—so go buy the game already!).

As for the event itself: Well, a shuttle dropped us in the hot zone, one of the more Endor-like quadrants of San Francisco (the Presidio), where we were greeted by the troops. Very surreal.



DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins



Ever since the *Grand Theft Auto* series took off, countless developers have made shameless attempts to ape its success with their own crime-themed action games. The trouble is, most of them end up as little more than shallow imitations, devoid of the sophistication that makes the GTA games as great as they are. Take, for instance, Activision's recent *True Crime: Streets of L.A.* For the \$50 that this rip-off costs, you could instead get the superior *GTA3* and *Mafia*—and even have enough left over to rent *Scarface*.



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+



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=

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DOOM³

THE NERD HERO

Street geeks speak

What type of war games do you prefer: modern, historical, or futuristic? Why?



David Bauer
TROY, NY
I'm totally into the old-school warfare. The weapons had class, and the bad guys were bad guys. And as they say,

"Everyone likes killing Nazis." (I recall the distinctive ping of an M1 Garand ejecting its cartridge.)



Amy Hoskins
WATERBURY, CT
I prefer futuristic warfare games because the tools and weapons have much more variety. Games based on

older time periods are fun, but I'd miss being able to use plasma guns!



Erik Elsasser
HIGH BRIDGE, NJ
Modern and even future warfare is much more interesting. Sure, firing older weapons like an M1A is fun, but you just can't beat

cool tech like night or thermal vision and fully automatic weaponry.



Ryan Coyle
ORLANDO, FL
It depends. For multiplayer games, I prefer the good ol' days because of the slower pace, but when it comes to

playing alone, I enjoy modern warfare for the exact opposite reason.



Michael Hawash
HOUSTON, TX
Modern combat games often have to be politically correct. It's much easier and safer for developers to demonize Nazis

than your average Iraq.

Think you got what it takes to be one of the few, the proud, THE NERD? Drop us a line at cpalatters@alldevs.com and tell us how much of an opinionated nerd you are.

■ KINGS OF INDUSTRY

Music to Suck to

How Ministry saved the day, er...night, for Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines



Want to hear a bit of "Bloodlines" for yourself? Check it out on next month's CD.

Activision was screwed. The bloodsucking role-playing game *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* was due to be released, and Rob Zombie, who was going to record the game's theme song, dropped out. So Activision did the only thing it could do: The company asked Ministry's main man AJ Jourgensen to record a song. "They were very lucky," explains Jourgensen from his Texas abode, "because it just so happened that we were in the studio working on our new album, *Houses of the Holy*, when they called."

Within days, Jourgensen was on a flight to Activision's HQ, where he was promptly blown away. "The graphics and the amount of options are both pretty mind-boggling," he says. "In fact, the game made such an impression on me that I wrote the song in my head on the plane coming back, and it was recorded and

sent back to them in a week."

Unfortunately, the whole process was so last-minute that the song, "Bloodlines," didn't make it on to *Mo66*. Not that it would've been included anyway. "It really doesn't fit the gist of the album,"

Jourgensen explains. "The album is very political, and all the song titles begin with the letter 'W'—'Worthless,' 'Wrong'—and I didn't want to call the song 'Woodlines.'"

"I also wanted to make sure the album came out well before the elections in November because during our tour we are going to do a lot of voter registration in conjunction with punkvoter.com."

That isn't to say "Bloodlines" won't turn up on a Ministry album someday or that the band won't play it during their upcoming tour. After all, they'll be playing the game. "Between me and my game-addicted drummer," Jourgensen says, "I'm sure it will be a staple when we start touring." ■ Paul Semel

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DVD Star Wars Trilogy

\$41, WWW.AMAZON.COM

The George

Lucas sure

knows how to market himself and make some greenbacks in the process. A long overdue, remastered rerelease of the original trilogy comes to DVD with a Death Star's worth of extras, including behind-the-scenes featurettes, commentaries, and a sneak peek at *Star Wars Episode IV—the movie* and the game. Oh, and es if you didn't have enough things to spend money on already, the sweet-looking *Star Wars Battlefront* comes out on the same day.



MUSIC Bad Religion, The Empire Strikes First

\$12, WWW.AMAZON.COM

Speaking of empires, who better to shout out in song than those Bad Religion punks? Bang your head or use it to think as you listen to such punk-rock enthusiasms as "Los Angeles Is Burning" and "Let Them Eat Wac." These socially aware rockers have been commenting on the state of things with a driving, hard, punk-rock beat for years, and they aren't fading with age.



COMIC Ex Machina

\$3, WWW.WILDSTORM.COM

Comics don't have enough of a witness edge to them—at least not enough to satisfy our tastes. Thankfully, *Ex Machina* has come along. In it, an average Joe with superheroic aspirations gets the power to remotely control el



machinery. The interesting twist, though, is how he turns his back on his powers to become the mayor of New York City and has to deal with the everyday problems of running the Big Apple.

DVD/MUSIC Pixies

\$16, WWW.AMAZON.COM

This DVD, which coincided with the CD release of the Pixies greatest hits CD (you DO have that, right?), is a fantastic chronicle of this intense band. Well over 2 hours of footage awaits you here. There's concert footage, all of the Pixies' videos, and documentaries that show you about their life on the road. A must for fans, and a great glimpse for newbs who want to check this bend out.



person who knows that he's working for the good guys, is in a coma. The comic series, split up into "seasons," reads like a great—and tense—TV show, such as *The Wire* or *The Sopranos*.



DVD Hellboy—Director's Cut

\$20, WWW.AMAZON.COM

The movie, in case you missed it in theaters, was awesome. The DVD was equally impressive, chock-full of extra features and quality commentary tracks. Now here's the thing that cheeses us off: A director's cut version is on the way with all the bells and whistles and, word has it, 18 extra minutes restored to the film. We dug the movie, so we could be talked into buying this version. One warning to Del Toro: If you make another one after that, we ain't buying unless there are gold bricks inside.

MOVIE Guizmo: small turkey sub

\$4.50, WWW.GUZNOS.COM

Last month we declared the Rice Krispies Treat the de facto snack of CGW. Now, we're going to out ourselves as Guizmo sub fans. No, it wasn't the TV ads of creepy singing Chihuahues that lured us in (OK, maybe a little bit) or even the sub sandwiches themselves. It's because we are totally surrounded. There are at least three locations within a three-block radius. Is this the new Starbucks or something?



COMIC Sleeper

\$3, WWW.WILDSTORM.COM

Sleeper is a superpowered glance at the covert-ops world. Special agent Holden Cerver gains strange abilities in a freak accident. Now, he's infiltrating a supervillain organization as a double agent. There's a problem, though: His handler, the one

Pocket Change: \$50

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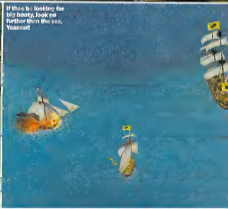


Previews

Your sword may be
swift, but my sword
odor is STRONG!
sniff *sniff*



Tactical battles work
on a turn-based
system, similar to
Advance Wars.



If there's looking for
big booty, look no
further than the sea,
Yaasaa!



50

Stronghold
 CWG has the exclusive first look at the sequel to our 1999 Strategy Game of the Year.



50a

Men of Valor
 This Vietnam-based FPS is from one of the splinter factions that created Medal of Honor: Allied Assault.



52

NASCAR 2005
 Get your motor running. Head out on the race track. Looking for adventure and a lot of left turns.

PUBLISHER Atari DEVELOPER Firaxis GENRE Pirate Sim RELEASE DATE November 2004

Sid Meier's Pirates!

Shiver me timbers!



The real ocean is also properly labeled like this.



If your country's directing you up to speed, please to be really close, yo!

At Firaxis, the mantra is: "It's all about the game!" It's almost a cliché, but when Sid Meier says it in that quiet, unassuming tone of his, it sounds more like a holy mission. The concept for his next game is simple: be a pirate. The implementation of that concept, however, is markedly complex. While the original 1987 *Pirates!* evokes imagery of assorted pirate-themed minigames, the upcoming remake is the sum of many parts that go far beyond this simple convention.

Sid Meier's Pirates! is a role-playing game in the broadest sense: You assume the role of a grog-swilling pirate and live a life of debauchery and mayhem. The statistical elements of most role-playing games are nowhere to be found, though. Sure, you can take up skills such as fencing, medicine, and dancing. Your character even ages and rises in reputation and rank as time passes—but that's where the RPG elements end.

PLAYING A ROLE

Instead, Meier and his team at Firaxis have cherry-picked the most entertaining elements of the swashbuckling, high-seas sailing genre to create a unique and multifaceted experience. At the heart of it all is, of course, your trusty pirate ship. You'll sail your mighty vessel around a sun-drenched

Caribbean, attacking other ships and plundering their booty. Sea combat is fairly simple: There is just enough detail to provide interesting choices, but it never gets overwhelmingly tactical.

There's plenty of action on good old terra firma for all you landlubbers out there, too. When you're not terrorizing the high seas, you'll be visiting taverns for information and crewmen, courting the governor's daughter, sneaking through darkened streets, and taking over cities. These elements encompass several game genres—the tavern sequences have a distinct adventure-game feel, while wooing the governor's daughter involves a timing-based music game. The sneaking segments call for some stealth action, and land battles unfold as tactical, turn-based combat sequences. You can even dabble in trading for some tycoon-style fun. Taken together, these elements form an interesting sort of gaming gestalt.

TACTICAL LAND BATTLES

Throughout most of its development cycle, *Pirates!* used Meier's *Gettysburg* and *Antietam* as models for its land-based combat: three-dimensional battlefields, complex group movements, and morale elements, all in real time. While

Meier's historical approach might have been tantalizing for fans of his previous games, he feared that dropping gamers into a comparatively complex tactical element would be jarring. "Suddenly they were in a real-time strategy game, not a pirate game," he says.

Instead of trying to keep the sinking ship afloat, Meier rewrote the land combat engine from scratch, converting it from real-time to turn-based combat. Units now spend points to move and attack, and facing, flanking, elevation, routing, ranged fire, and terrain are all key parts of the combat model. Unit selection is still being locked down, but it's expected to include a balanced assortment of pirates, swordsmen, horsemen, scouts, buccaneers, cannons, and Indians.

THE RETURN OF ECLECTICISM

All told, the overall structure and flow of the new *Pirates!* does a seemingly good job of paying homage to the original. A few jaded gamers may find that 17 years of radical shifts in game design theory has soured their appreciation for such an eclectic cross-genre experience, but the rest of us have waited long enough. It's been a good long while since we last tried to win the hand of the governor's lovely daughter, and if we have to shake our moneymakers to do it, then by the beard of Long John Silver, we will. **Tom McDonald**

The Word: ARRR!

Meier and his team have cherry-picked the most entertaining elements of the high-seas sailing genre.

PUBLISHER: Take-Two/Gathering DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games GENRE: RTS RELEASE DATE: April 2003

Stronghold 2

Lord almighty



Player: Smash! Fund

Making a sequel to a best-selling game is always a challenge. Not only must developers give people more of what they liked the first time around, but they've also got to come up with enough fresh material to justify the sequel's existence. *Stronghold: Crusader*, which was the first sequel to the medieval cast-building-and-defense sim *Stronghold*, was criticized in some circles for feeling too much like an expansion. Designers Simon Bradbury and Eric Quelette are determined not to invite such criticism this time around. "Our goal in *Stronghold 2*," says Bradbury, "has been not to reinvent the wheel, but also not just to do the same game again with new graphics."

STORMIN' THE CASTLE

Stronghold 2 lives up to its promise: remains the semi-construct dabbler, man age the economy of the surrounding town, and conduct RTS-style military campaigns—several new gameplay elements have also been added. Though your mission in the original games is to protect the lord of the castle, the lazy lord doesn't actually do much. Instead, the gameplay revolves on the peasants and foot soldiers

at his disposal. This time around, you get to go inside the eyrie itself. Chambers and manage various aspects of the royal life: feast, tournament, trial, and so forth. Conducting yourself well enough as a lord yields valuable honor, which, among other things, can be used to train elite combat knights.

The designers have also taken the opportunity to correct the shortcomings in the interface that players have been bickering about for three years. "A lot of the feedback let us know their views," says Bradbury, sounding the slightest bit weary. No longer do you have to dig mouse painstakingly while castle walls go up in an instant, and enemies can no longer bring down castle walls with their hand weapons. The old isometric perspective that occasionally hid the exploitable holes in your reinforcement has been replaced by a full 3D view that can be rotated at will.

Swapping of the 3D view, the development team has done an absolutely stunning job with the game's visuals. In place of the largely static landscape of the first game, you now have a world full of lush that sway in the breeze and water that ripples and flows. Life in your village goes on as you watch, with potentially

hundreds of tiny arm-and-leg figures going about their business: criminals skulking furtively or getting flogged, men spreading plague, and drunken priests bawling about outside the church. The level of detail is just astonishing. The same goes for combat—you can now watch swords meet in their way up spiral staircases and you see battlements or see castle

defenders hurled through the air by a hit from a lovingly animated trebuchet. The battle scenes, with their seething hordes of combatants, clearly owe something to Peter Jackson, but it's hardly a criticism to compare *Stronghold 2* to last year's Academy Award winner for Best Picture.

KING ME

Of course, all we've seen at this stage is a guided tour, not a hands-on trial—perfect conditions to eyeball the game's visuals but not an opportunity to comment on the experience of actually getting behind the keyboard. All the changes and additions certainly sound good, but we won't know how significant or successful they are until the gold master hits our mailbox.

On the other hand, if—despite Firaxis' protestations—*Stronghold 2* turns out to be largely the same game with new graphics, would that be so terrible? We think not. With graphics this good, even if nothing else changes one iota, we still expect Firaxis to have a strong game on its hands. **C** Charles Arndt

It's hardly a criticism to compare *Stronghold 2* to last year's Academy Award winner for Best Picture.

The Word **KINGMAKER**

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COMING SOON

Men of Valor

The horror, the survival horror...

It used to be that just making the somewhat risky decision to place your game in Vietnam would be more than enough to distinguish it from the pack of military shooters. Not anymore. Vietnam is fast becoming the new World War II, with more and more titles joining the conflict. With so much competition, how do you carve out your own little piece of the jungle? The answer, in *Men of Valor*, is to retain the action while ratcheting up the tension with a significant shift in tone.

If anyone can re-create the war shooter, it's this design team, one of the shards of the exploded *Medals of Honor: Allied Assault* team. The work on the game reflects 2015's continuing refinement of the combat shooter—*Men of Valor* features multiple firing modes for the weapons, a damage model that handles both "permanent" damage and quickly patched up "bleeding" damage, new multiplayer modes, including search & destroy, where teams race to assemble a mortar to destroy their opponents, and all sorts of graphical effects and buzzwords like "parallax mapping textures."

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

But the biggest innovation is going to be the one that's hardest to put your finger on—the tone of the game. Thanks to the easily despised Nazis and the clearer good vs. evil understanding of World War II, games based upon that conflict can wrap themselves in glory and classic movie-style heroism. Vietnam is a much trickier, more conflicted war, and yet *Men of Valor* is still shooting for that movie-style experience, albeit in the darker, murkier vein of *Albatross* and *Apocalypse Now*. The sense of combat in *Men of Valor* will be focused on simple survival, on enduring the sudden, brutal violence of war. 2015's landmark scripted sequences, the best shem-



The game takes you from Da Nang in 1967 through the Tet offensive.



At dawn, a firefight rages on a distant bridge.

If anyone can re-create the war shooter, it's this design team, one of the shards of the exploded *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* team.

mer of smoldering fires, and the more than 300 lines of gritty dialogue per character (all dynamically triggered based on game situations) are brought into play to create a more desperate, threatening game world than we've ever seen in a combat shooter. "Displacement mapping on foliage" sounds like just another designer catchphrase, until you see the game in action and realize that the only way you might pick up on an NVA ambush is by noticing the subtle parting of long grass in the distance. This is a game that quietly warns you it's coming to get you before it hits. **Hard**

Don't misunderstand the chief focus of the game: It will still deliver the run-and-gun thrills that you expect and want. We watched a rail-shooter portion of the game taking place during a nighttime boat patrol and were riveted. The pounding shockwaves of artillery, the wisps of fog on the water's surface, the blistering sound of the mounted machine gun, the reflected tracer fire upon the river, all of it added up to a truly gripping combat experience. **Robert Coffey**

The Word: JUNGLE FEVER



Every morning's just the same
in this poor provincial town...



Good knight.



"It
diminished
smoking via
be



"It was a dark
stormy nig



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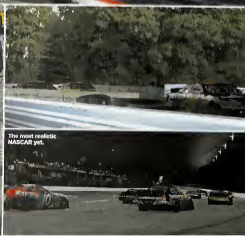
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PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon GENRE: Racing RELEASE DATE: Q1 2005

NASCAR 2005

Days of thunder



☐ You've got mail, losers!

NASCAR fans, start your engines. EA is revving up for another high-octane race to the finish. EA Tiburon, the Florida-based studio responsible for EA's Madden NFL franchise, is developing **NASCAR 2005** completely in-house, which is a first for the series. Tiburon's intention is to create a deep, realistic racing simulator—something that traditionally hasn't had much competition in the PC market. Now that EA holds the exclusive NASCAR gaming license, it's got a straight shot at the checked flag with what promises to be the most accurate and up-to-date NASCAR simulation to date.

START YOUR ENGINES

NASCAR 2005 one-ups its predecessors with completely overhauled textures, better-looking environments, and even more realistic vehicular modeling. Tiburon has done its homework when it comes to the race tracks, with the in-game tracks echoing recent real-world course revisions.

As an example of said course revision, let's look at the Homestead Miami Speedway. This racetrack was renovated just last year, with its banking maximized to 20 degrees, the highest possible. The modification was digitally duplicated into **NASCAR 2005** before the actual track's construction was even completed, giving

NASCAR champs an early opportunity to sample the revised Homestead course before starting their engines on the real thing. In fact, participation from real NASCAR drivers has been instrumental to **NASCAR 2005**'s development process—Tiburon's offices have been graced by everyone from Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt Jr., and their input has gone a long way toward making this new NASCAR game the biggest yet.

Course geography isn't the only big revision, though. **NASCAR 2005** will also reflect all the recent changes throughout the NASCAR circuit, such as the new Nextel Cup, which replaced the all-important Winston Cup in the end of 2003. This also carries with it a new playoff point system, pitting the 10 highest-scoring racers against one another in the final 10 of the 36 races that make up the series.

Besides the Nextel Cup, there are two other series that should provide even more for NASCAR junkies: the Busch Series and the Craftsman Series. The

Tiburon's offices have been graced by everyone from Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Craftsman Series is a particularly interesting choice, since it marks the first appearance of Craftsman truck racing in a PC NASCAR title. Trucks have a distinctly different feel—much heavier, yet still fast and able to plow right through the wind. All of the trucks—and cars, for that matter—will feature detailed textures, customizable color choices, and full damage modeling for all you crash-up derby fans.

SPEEDY SIMULATION

While **NASCAR 2005** doesn't have the steepest learning curve in the world, it's heavily grounded in real-world physics. For example, there seems to be a marked necessity to compensate steering even while on some straightaways in order to account for the lean in the track. In fact, it's safe to say that the PC version of **NASCAR 2005** is a decidedly different beast than its more arcade-like console cousin, **NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup**. Players with a hankering for a less-realistic racing experience might be better served elsewhere—not that it's a bad thing, but **NASCAR 2005** isn't for everyone.

The PC version of **NASCAR 2005** is scheduled to launch early next year, to coincide with the 2005 season of NASCAR racing. ☐ Johnny Liu

The Word. VROOOOM

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PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA GAMES/EA Canada GENRE: Racing RELEASE DATE: Fall 2004

Need for Speed Underground 2

A fast and furious free-for-all



Visually, *Need for Speed Underground 2* looks ready to outglam the impressive original.

Sup up your road rockets! Last year's hottest racing game is back on the road. *Need for Speed Underground 2* is well into production, and this time, you won't be forced through strictly linear courses. Instead, you drive around and pick up challenges in an open city. Indeed, *NFS:U2* aims to impress players in the tuner culture with a customized gaming experience.

"NOS" TO MEET YA

NFS:U2 is a free-roaming racer in a short format. *NFS:U2* is driven by an open-world concept. While searching for challenges, you can skip out any of the game's five main neighborhoods, which are linked together by freeways. What's more, you can choose your own battles. Not into "tag racing"? Don't bother with it. Race "rival" challenges instead.

In the Outrun challenge, you attempt to outrun your opponent's car within a set number of miles. The tough part is keeping up with your foe as he tries to evade you. The same-rear nature of the game also

means that your evasive drive may not be worth losing you. Instantly, with a sharp turn if you aren't quick enough.

Free-form gameplay gets going quickly if the racing isn't the appealing point to it. Knowing this, the development team has focused on providing choices with precision. A player's success or failure will depend on the choices made in the game's various scenarios. *NFS:U2* is the game.

Close-quarters racing is given the same attention. It's given to the same level by Brook. It's a well-tuned racing game, and it's a well-tuned racing game. Think of her as your own personal hot rods, guiding you on the path toward racing enlightenment.

FENDER BENDING

NFS:U2 will include LAN capabilities, but the development team still hasn't decided whether there will be multiplayer cross-compatibility between the PC and console versions. While the feature was offered in

Chrome tires, carbon matte hood—slimp out ride!



the original, *NFS:U2* will have a LAN multiplayer. This feature is a must for *NFS:U2* players who want to compete in a

free-roaming racing game. There's always the possibility of a LAN race. It's a good thing, though, since each of the five worlds' five neighborhoods will capture a distinctive look while maintaining that "NFS" feel. It's not as if you can't find a good car to be easy to get lost. Leaving you to roam the city's streets in search of something to do. Let's hope this one smokes some rubber some fall 2004. —Jason Allen

The Word: **TUNED UP**

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PlayStation 2



PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Infected Rising	Redneck Games	Q1 2005
Atlantic Evolution	The Adventure Company	October 2004
Auto Race 1st	HCSoft	2004
Auto 2: Atlas	Atari	Q4 2004
The 2nd 4th Tail	WMS Entertainment	2004
Battle-Id 2	Electronic Arts	Q1 2005
Check & White 3	Electronic Arts	2005
Blueway 2	Highway Games	October 2004
Archers in Arms	Ubisoft	October 2004
City of Vikings	HCSoft	May 2005
Civilization IV	Atari	2005
Coastal Vietnam	Colony	October 2004
Crusade Conflicts: The Civil Wars	Central Publishing	September 2004
Dark Age of Camelot: Cataclysm	Hylics Entertainment	December 2004
DRIVER	Atari	November 2004
Design Age	Microsoft	2004
Discover the Legend Journey January 2005	Funcom	Funcom
Dungeon Lords 2004	Deceit/Colony	October
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	Q2 2005
Dungeons & Dragons RTS 2005	Atari	Atari
Empire Earth 2	Wendell Universal	Q1 2005
EverQuest II	SOC	Next Fall
FEAR	Wendell Universal	2005
Final Fantasy vs. The Third Batch	Final Fantasy Games	2004
Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	November 2004
Gold Wars	HCSoft	February 2005
HARLON 2	Wendell Universal	2004
Heaven 4	Dots Interactive	Q2 2005
The Incredible	THQ	October 2004
Letuce Suit Lang: Nappa Cam Louie	Wendell Universal	October 2004
LOTE: The Luzzle for Hells-worth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
The Matrix Online	Sega	October 2004
Red of Valor	Wendell Universal	Q4 2004
World-warth Online	Wendell Universal	February 2005
The Phoenix 2005	Activision	March
RAICAR 2005: Chase for the Cap	Electronic Arts	February 2005
NBA Live 2005	Electronic Arts	October 2004
0	Electronic Arts	November 2004
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Q4 2004
Origin of the Species	Tri Synergy	January 2005

► New Update



WENDALL UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER: Mad Doc Software GENRE: RTS RELEASE DATE: Q1 2005

Empire Earth 2

History of the world, part two



The world can be a better place. Oh, who are we kidding? Let capitalism reign and grind the world under your boot. The world on a silver platter is yours in *Empire Earth 2*. A few months back, we broke the news about Mad Doc Software's work to improve Stainless Steel Studios' original *Empire Earth*. We've had a chance to check out the progress thus far, and we've got to say, Alexander the Great would be proud.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

As in the original game, you'll grow nations from approximately 10,000 B.C. to about A.D. 2230. This time, there are around 15 civilizations to cultivate, including Aztec, Babylonian, Greek, Incan, and Turkish. Each nation will have distinct advantages, bonuses, and military units. There's a traditional campaign traversing 15 epochs, three smaller campaigns (Ancient Korea, Germany during the Middle Ages, and modern America), and a 10-player skirmish mode. This is where the similarities to the previous game—and a lot of other RTS games—end.

"In the past five or six years, not a lot has changed when it comes to RTS games," says Mad Doc associate producer Brian Mysiny. That's the motivation that has been pushing the developers for the past year on this project. Their goal: more intelligent options and controls that are as seamless as possible.

TOTALITARIAN CONTROL

And, really, control is what these games should be all about. What impressed us most during our demo were the tools that streamline everything from warmongering to peacemaking. A citizen manager makes it a simple matter to command the teeming masses and automate the micromanagement.

The diplomacy and war managers will make or break this game. With diplomacy tools, you can set up alliances, and with a simple slider interface, you can set the terms of your peace accords. Allies can travel through your land, but while there, they won't be able to build military outposts or see what's happening in your territory. Want to declare war when your neighbor hits the fifth epoch? It's on!

The war manager is perfectly suited for multiplayer matches when you want to coordinate attack plans with allies. Call up a world map and draw out your plans, telling where and how to strike. Put the plans up for a vote and execute them. How will that translate into the single-player campaign? Conceivably, the A.I. will pick up the slack, but Mysiny didn't have a firm answer as we went to press.

While the jury is still out on whether the sequel will surpass the original, this *Empire* is yours for the taking come February 2005. **► Darren Gladstone**

The Word: TOTALITARIAN

What impressed us most during our demo were the tools that streamline everything from warmongering to peacemaking.

Are you trying to tell me I can dodge bullets?

No. I'm trying to tell you that when you are ready, you won't have to.



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PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
Prison Fightouts	Ubisoft	October 2004
● <i>Resident Evil: Outbreak</i>	Capcom	October 2004
● <i>R.I.P.</i>	Gremlin Games	February 2005
● <i>Playboy: The Mansion</i>	Arch-Diablo Software	November 2004
● <i>Planet</i>	IG Entertainment	2004
● <i>Procyon of Perse 3</i>	Ubisoft	November 2004
● <i>Psychotic</i>	CDR Software	2004
● <i>Quake IV</i>	Activision	2005
● <i>Robots</i>	Vivendi Universal	March 2005
● <i>ReaperContra: Typoos 3</i>	Alan	November 2004
● <i>Series Sam 3</i>	Gathering	2004
● <i>Throne, West of Angels</i>	Orange	October 2004
● <i>Id Pittor's Peated</i>	Alan	November 2004
● <i>Silent Hill 4: The Room</i>	Konami	Q1 2005
● <i>Silent Hunter III</i>	Ubisoft	2005
● <i>Silent Storm: Scavengers</i>	Enclave Software	2004
● <i>Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory</i>	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
● <i>STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl</i>	GIG	November 2004
● <i>Star Wars: Galactic Arena</i>	LucasArts	October 2004
● <i>Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II—The Sith Lords</i>	LucasArts	February 2005
● <i>Star Wars: Republic Commando</i>	LucasArts	February 2005
● <i>State of Emergency 3</i>	San Entertainment	Q4 2004
● <i>Stompy Troopers</i>	Capcom	Q5 2004
● <i>Succession: Power Into Power</i>	Strategy First	2004
● <i>Supreme Ruler 2000</i>	Strategy First	Q4 2004
● <i>SWAT 4</i>	Vivendi Universal	Q1 2005
● <i>Tekken Rose</i>	NiGiki	March 2005
● <i>Dark Forces 2: Overhead of Arms</i>	Vivendi Universal	2004
● <i>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2</i>	Konami	October 2004
● <i>Tony Hawk's Underground 2</i>	Activision	October 2004
● <i>Top Spin</i>	Alan	Q4 2004
● <i>Tribes: Vengeance</i>	Vivendi Universal	October 2004
● <i>Ultima Online: Sacred Empire</i>	Electronic Arts	November 2004
● <i>Unlabeled Combat: Edge to Edge</i>	GreenCatcher	November 2004
● <i>Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines</i>	Activision	October 2004
● <i>Vanguard: Saga of Heroes</i>	Microsoft	2005
● <i>World of Warcraft</i>	Blizzard Entertainment	Q4 2004
● <i>WrestleFest: Under Siege</i>	Acclaim	Q4 2004
● <i>WV: The Ark of Nightmares</i>	Konami	2005
● <i>Xna Typoos 2</i>	Microsoft	October 2004

● New Update

PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: Elixir Studios GENRE: Strategy RELEASE DATE: September 2004

Evil Genius

Throw us a frickin' bone here!



What would an evil genius be without his inner sanctum?

Being a criminal mastermind takes more work than the average Bond villain might have you believe. *Evil Genius*, Vivendi's upcoming world-domination strategy/simulator, casts you as a would-be dictator. We recently had a chance to delve into the criminal life with a late build of the game.

At first, your cavernous mountain lair consists of a simple entryway and a nearby construction room. You can order your few minions to expand your base by carving out corridors and other rooms, such as barracks, control rooms, and research areas. Your minions have statistics such as health, loyalty, and attention—which they seem prone to losing. The game is a little slow early on, since your workers tend to mill about and forget assignments.



Loyal henchmen are your front line against the forces of freedom and justice.

Fortunately, you can recruit a steady stream of followers, building an ever-growing league of workers, scientists, and social minions.

THIS IS MY NO. 2 HENCHMAN, NUMBER TWO

You've also got a henchman at your command. Unlike minions, whose actions are governed by the orders they've collectively issued, you can directly control your henchman—you can choose the lord of a swordsmen named Jubes or a big-haired *Pulp Fiction*-esque gangster named Eli. Your henchman, along with myriad traps with which to furnish your lair, are your prime defenses against the secret agents who constantly try to sabotage your operations.

Money and notoriety are gained by dispatching operatives via a world-map screen on which you can direct thievery and "acts of infamy" to raise your standing in the criminal underworld and open up new objectives. This portion of the game feels somewhat disconnected from the rest of *Evil Genius*' strategy-centric elements, but it definitely breaks the monotony of waiting around for minions to finish their jobs.

The life of a criminal mastermind is risky business. Is world domination truly worth all the hard work? Find out in next month's full review! **Ryan Scott**

The Word: **NOTORIOUS**

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DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

The best games you've never seen



FROM Third Wave Games AVAILABILITY December 2004

War World

Word on the street: Offering futuristic third-person mech combat, the first title from fledgling studio Third Wave borrows heavily from console competitors like *MechAssault*. Its delightful droid-on-droid action includes solo scenarios, minigames, and online multiplayer options in which pilots storm the sinking ledgers for bragging rights and upgrades. Available via download for less than \$20, the prospect of regular expansions has our thrusters thrumming.

Sounds kinda best: Due to inherently limited development budgets, value-priced outings typically pack limited thrills. Besides, if the PC market really wanted more mech simulators, publishers would already happily provide them. But with Heavy Gear's heyday long past and BattleTech's "stock" plummeting, opportunities for carving out a new niche do exist. Thus far, the product's creators primarily have experience designing award-winning wares for Nintendo and Sony systems—let's hope their luck holds out on the PC.

FROM DTF Games AVAILABILITY December 2004

Stalingrad

Word on the street: War is hell, unless you portray it using *Blitzkrieg's* software engine, in which case it's irresistibly attractive. Based on one of World War II's most storied battles, this strategic challenge sees players command both Russia's Red Army and Germany's Wehrmacht through two lengthy campaigns. Conflicts—captured in real time and depicted as missions modeled on historical data—sprawl across detailed maps inspired by actual aerial photography from the era. Participants don't so much play as enlist.

Sounds kinda best: "Sounds" inappropriately roden', thanks to a proposed "club metal" soundtrack by St. Petersburg band Skafandr. In terms of gameplay, the program that first inspired this package was decently received but didn't score high marks when it debuted. The technology behind the game's tactics is getting a little long in the tooth. The studio, DTF, hasn't yet proven its prowess, either. Nevertheless, if early screenshots are any indication, this is one romp you should be rooting for.



FROM GS Software with CD-ROM December 2004

Cuban Missile Crisis

Word on the street: Remember when the Commies torched America? Neither do we. The events portrayed in this politically charged RTS ruckus throw the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. into war in 1962. Framed by a turn-based tactical front end, the skirmishes feature four sides rioting for resources such as clean soil and water throughout a postapocalyptic planet Earth. The gist: beware of radioactive contaminated zones while blowing enemy units apart. Hey, works for us...

Sounds kinda best: Granted, we realize that most of the major historical conflicts have been overdone, but give us a break, the Cuban Missile Crisis? No matter how good the game is, you'll always be wondering whether it's actually thinly veiled propaganda funded by Castro. Furthermore, Russian studio GS has produced only one other title for American consumption (*Far Strike*), a mediocre game at best. Let's hope we needn't nuke their asses, too.

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PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Maxis GENRE: Simulation ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM



TAKE YOUR SIMS
FROM THE CRADLE
TO THE GRAVE IN
THE SIMS 2

**MORE
FUN
IN THE
NEW
WORLD**

BY ROBERT COFFEY

3.9GB install, 32MB video RAM, 1GB RAM RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: None

Do I like *The Sims 2* so much because it's been four years since I played the first one, so it feels fresh to me again? Has the time between *The Sims* and *The Sims 2* acted like a delicate melon sorbet and simply cleansed my palate?

Well, some, sure, but the bottom line is, there are so many new elements to the game that even the most die-hard *Sims* fans, the expansion-pack addicts who've been playing daily since they got the first game, are going to discover a game that feels both familiar and brand new. Much as each iteration of *Civilization* has leapfrogged its predecessor and rendered it obsolete, so has *The Sims 2* eclipsed the original.

THE ONCE-OVER TWICE

You can see how incredibly different *The Sims 2* is from its predecessor the moment you create your first Sim. The personalization options are virtually limitless. While there are a finite number of hairstyles, body types, skin colors, eye colors, eyeglasses, and clothing, it's in the facial construction options that you can truly make your mark. Simple-to-use tools govern everything from face length to eye size to neck-flap size. Even better, Sims who procreate will pass on their combined genetic data to their children for wholly unique yet familial new Sims. What *City of Heroes* did for costume creation, *The Sims 2* does for character creation. It's hypnotically addictive.

The end result is that you create faces that are incredibly alive—much of that due to the large number of emotive animations. Every tragedy or triumph, every seemingly mundane moment in a Sim's life has an accompanying facially expressive component. The new fully 3D world and full camera control create an environment rich in moments when you'll want to zoom in and enjoy the action, even if that action is as benign as a romantic moment shared by a long-married couple. Then again, these are the daily, moment-to-moment victories that drive the gameplay.

All that happens once the proper game is started. You've got more to do when creating your Sims this time around, even beyond the mind-boggling physical choices. In addition to adjusting each Sim's personality quirks (neatness, shyness, etc.), you must select one lifetime aspiration for your Sims (see sidebar for more details). Aspirations are an absolutely huge addition that elevate the game beyond the daily bladder maintenance of the first game—but more on that later.

IN THIS HOUSE THAT I CALL HOME

Once you've created your Sim or whole Sim family, it's time to move into one of three sprawling neighborhoods—or a custom one



Use the facial construction tools to create your own Steven Tyler or some other Aerosmith goon. Or maybe something a little more human.



Have your talented Sims paint portraits of beloved family members before they shuffle off this mortal coil.

WHAT CITY OF HEROES DID FOR COSTUME CREATION, THE SIMS 2 DOES FOR CHARACTER CREATION.

created by you, including landscapes you've created in *SimCity 4*. Building homes continues to be one of the game's countless charms, and the tools have been upgraded to make it even easier; for example, you can use a room-building tool to quickly lay out a basic four-sided room instead of laying down each wall individually. The building interface, as well as the purchasing interface, lets you sort things quickly by type or room (i.e., you can click on Flooring and open up submenus, or you can click on Bathroom and then a Flooring submenu to open a selection of appropriate choices). It's all pretty well organized, but there are some mental lapses—why aren't cribs and changing tables in the Children's Room option instead of under Miscellaneous/Kids? I had Sims abandoning babies on kitchen floors for the night and tossing dirty diapers on the floor until I stumbled across those hidden items.

There's a ton of stuff to buy and use to customize your home, and you should expect roughly a *Citizen Kane*-sized amount of user-made items, paint schemes, carpeting, clothing, and more to be available about three minutes after the first *Sims 2* box hits a store shelf. You'll have ample opportunity to play with all that stuff since *The Sims 2* essentially includes a house-building sandbox mode. You can build to your heart's content on any empty lot, the amount of building and furnishing you do setting the home's price should you decide to move a family into it later. ☐



ASPIRATIONS

FAMILY

This is the easiest aspiration for jacking up Aspiration points. The Family Sim just wants to flirt with their spouse, read to the kids, and have more kids. The constant brooding and growing family are the real challenges here: The more Sims in the house, the harder they are to manage.



FORTUNE

These money-grubbers need to develop their skills fully in order to rise to the top of their careers so they can buy all the high-end stuff they crave. Pair a Fortune Sim with a Family Sim: One works while the other stays home and maintains the social network needed for career advancement. Just a little quality time every night will keep the Family Sim happy so the Fortune Sim can spend off-hours developing skills.



POPULARITY

This one's tough—keeping up friendships in *The Sims 2* is tough enough without basing all your gameplay around it. Still, if you master throwing parties, you'll succeed and can rise to the top of the lucrative Athletics or Politics career tracks.



ROMANCE

One high-end Romance want is to have "woo-hoo" with three different Sims—this is the aspiration to take if you're looking for lots of drama because jealousy, heartbreak, and rage walk hand-in-hand with all that canoodling. Pair a Romance Sim with a Family one and watch the SimKiddies get emotionally scarred from all the fighting and breakups.



KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge Sims have the weirdest want in the game: They want to be saved from death. The burning desire for self-improvement forces these Sims to study all the time, thus making it hard to fulfill their other basic needs. Thankfully, items like the chestboard or telescope let these Sims improve skills while enhancing their social or fun needs.



Flabby and Flappy Artwacke, America's original fun couple, get down. Soon they will be making babies.





Ingrid Sigmond nice Ingrid Plinth is so happy to give birth, that'll change real soon.

SEX AND DYING IN HIGH SOCIETY

Obviously, you can play with a single Sim, but the focus in *The Sims 2* is squarely on the family, and you'd really be cheating yourself if you never explored that dynamic: The Bladder, Social, Hunger, and other needs of the first game have been dramatically rebalanced this time, so they require far less attention, freeing you to play with the daily drama of your Sim's life. Further, the auto-management AI is much better as well, so you can focus on one or two Sims in a household with relative confidence that no one else will let themselves starve to death.

There really aren't words—or enough pages in this magazine—to describe how captivating the complexities of family life are in this game. In a dramatic break from the stagnant time stream of the first game, every Sim in *The Sims 2* ages and matures, pissing from baby to toddler to teenager to adult

to elder to a nice little urn full of ashes. While there are some ways to cheat Father Time, the finite life span of every Sim makes each of your decisions crucial, especially since every event or action in the game has an emotional consequence that will affect and shape your Sims. Families have to operate as a unit to thrive: If someone isn't serving dinner to everyone, if someone isn't housebreaking the toddler, if someone isn't getting enough rest to succeed at work, everyone suffers. The children grow up angry and unhappy, parental relationships fief, and so begins a cycle of misery that's really tough to break.

WE'RE HAVING MUCH MORE FUN

As tough as that may sound, it's not all that hard to get the hang of it, and there are plenty of rewards you can treat both yourself and your Sims to. About those aspirations—each Sim's life aspiration generates a frequently changing list of four wants and three fears. Meeting

REAL CHILD OF HELL

Having a baby in *The Sims 2* is a lot like having one in real life. Too much like having one in real life, in fact. Forget the tiredness, nagging hunger, and open-house constant urination of a *Sims 2* pregnancy; it's when those little brats pop into the world in a wholly misleading shower of confetti and fireworks (which makes it look like a celebration of ed things) that life nosedives right into the crepper. As infants, SimBabies are unknowable ceterweuling hellspawn. Are they hungry? Do they need attention? Maybe a fresh diaper? Maybe, or maybe they're just hateful brats. At any rate, they will utterly destroy the sleep patterns and daily routines of the Sims you've so lovingly managed up to that point. Dead tired, your Sims will see their friendships deteriorate from lack of attention, their careers stall (if they're lucky enough to avoid demotion), and their persistently red Fun meters glow angrily. Sadly, just like in the original *Sims*, your virtual creations cannot stick their heads in the oven, no matter how desperately they want to.

As babies mature into speed-crawling toddlers, your strategies, again as in real life, focus on containment. Small and too quick to easily click on, toddlers will make a beeline to the bathroom for a bit of toilet clogging—if they're not eating gerbage or thinking about playing with the stove. When the Arbutic twins, Filmy and Floppy, made toilet destruction their daily ritual, I made moving the toy chest to block off the bathroom mine. And while an iron maiden would've been nice, the crib and high chair serve as suitable baby imprisonment devices. My advice? Never teach 'em to walk. What's so bad about a teenager that crawls everywhere anyway?

THE SIMS 2 IS HUGE, AND YET IT IS COMPOSED OF THOUSANDS OF LITTLE MOMENTS AND DELICATE TOUCHES.



The Sigmond family cheers as the law wrestles with a burglar.



Why is Audrey Delfino so happy? Because she just got a job promotion, that's why.



An old lady plays pibid in her underwear. Does it get any sweeter than that?



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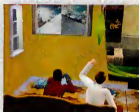
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17 In *The Sims 2*, Sims don't just play videogames—they play EA's own *SSX 2*. 18 Offspring in *The Sims 2* carry their parents' DNA—so pity the poor Arbuckle twins, Flopsy and Filmy, and pity the nanny as well—she has to look at these freaks all day. 19 Oh, dear God, no!



EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD COMES WITH COMMUNITY LOTS WHERE YOUR SIMS CAN GO ON DATES, BUY NEW CLOTHES, PLAY VIDEOGAMES, OR EVEN VISIT A WATER PARK.

20 these wants—having a baby for a Family Sim or buying a really expensive statue for a Fortune Sim—drives up an Aspiration meter and garners Aspiration points. These points can be spent on things like the Thinking Cap (for faster learning), the Money Tree (for faster earning), or the Elixir of Life (to reverse aging). There's a variety of these items, all whimsical, all worth trying at least once, all with potential drawbacks.

Unlike the first game's endless seven-day workweek, *The Sims 2*'s workweek has two days off scheduled for every job in every career track, as well as a pool of accruing vacation days. These times off are great opportunities to shore up legging needs, fulfill a bunch of wants, or just take a trip downtown. That's right, every neighborhood comes with community lots where your Sims can go on dates, buy new clothes, play videogames, or even visit a water park.

SEE HOW WE ARE

Recognizing the overwhelming desire of die-hard players to share their experiences, the game offers two different types of photo albums for creating stories. In fact, players can set up a number of predetermined camera positions within a home in order to capture those magic moments at just the right angle. Even better, up to 30 seconds of video can be captured during the game—perfect for preserving a Sim's first kiss or fiery death. The game isn't without its rough edges.

Loots can take a long time on slower machines, the framerate can drop at times, and occasionally comments in your queue vanish, which is aggravating. The most frustrating thing I encountered was the obsessive A.I. navel-gazing that constantly drove my Sims to write in a diary instead of doing other things like, oh, feeding their screaming baby. I don't understand why the A.I. renders an adult incapable of serving dinner to his family, instead opting to feed only himself. Since Serve Meal is a selectable menu option, why can't Sims select it on their own? And with such a game-wide emphasis on customization, why can't you choose the default clothing for your Sims' kids?

These concerns, while not minor, are overwhelmed by all that is great in a game that may well be the definitive "just one more turn" title. *The Sims 2* is huge, and yet it is composed of thousands of little moments and delicate touches, like the actual chess games Sims play against each other, the slovenly, splayfooted gait and poor posture of untidy Sims, the nighttime spooning of a slumbering couple, the brilliantly animated cops-and-robbers games kids play, the stolen moments of warmth between parents besieged by rampaging toddlers. *The Sims 2* is as big as life and as consuming. At heart, and with heart, it is a masterpiece. 21

IS IT EVEN A GAME?

"Can you win?" the detractors self, as if the lack of an end boss made *The Sims* ineligible for gemedon and their intellectual consideration. These small-minded snobs argued themselves right out of appreciating the most innovative game of the last decade. While developers espouse the allegedly "open-ended" gameplay of *Grand Theft Auto*, *The Sims* games have delivered gameplay in which the player determines not only the methods to success, but the goals as well. Satisfying a goal is at the heart of every game, whether it's defending an alien base or killing a giant monster. Goals, long-term and short, constantly present themselves in *The Sims* series, and meeting those shifting demands is a nonstop challenge. Where failure in most every other game results in restarting a mission or reloading a save, failure in *The Sims 2* effects the entirety of each character's personal existence/game and can ripple throughout the game world to alter the games of other characters. If that's not a game—if that's not an amazing game—then I don't know what is.

Verdict ★★★★★
 Won't change the minds of Sims hebers, but for fans, it's a triumph.

Gary Grigsby's WORLD AT WAR™

"This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by eleven o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you that no such understanding has been received and that consequently this country is at war with Germany." -British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, 3 September 1939

KEY FEATURES

- Four full-length scenarios (Spring '40, Summer '41, Spring '42, Summer '43) lasting to the end of the war
- Over 350 areas on a sprawling world map
- Five playable forces (Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, the Western Allies, and China) and 38 different countries
- Command fifteen different combat units in the air, on the land, and at sea, as well as infrastructure and supply units
- Each unit has up to 14 attributes, most of which can be improved through research and development
- Rules that cover strategic movement, forts, cold weather zones, airborne attack, amphibious invasions, partisans, militia, and many other features
- Fog of War rules that hide enemy units and production
- Supply rules that can be set to provide a common pool for all units to draw from, or the creation of field units that must accompany the armies
- PBEM playability for two to five players
- Challenging AI that offers a unique gaming experience
- Ability to automate either or both the Production and Research functions
- An in-depth tutorial that smoothly integrates the player with the game

Not even one year before these words were uttered, Chamberlain himself returned from Munich and uttered the words, "I believe it is peace in our time." As German panzers and aircraft poured across the border into Poland, slicing a sovereign nation into a digestible conquest, Chamberlain was forced to acquiesce to the inevitable and declare war. France followed soon after, and World War II began.

Inevitably, the mighty Axis armies eventually bit off more than they could chew, and soon were bowing under the enormous pressure applied to them by the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. China, despite being at war with Japan for almost 14 years by 1945, proved to be too big a challenge for the Japanese; combined with increasing Allied pressure throughout the Pacific, the Japanese soon followed the Germans into defeat in the summer of 1945.

But with Gary Grigsby's World at War™, things may turn out different. The Western Allies may be conquered by Germany, or Japan may defeat China. With you at the controls, leading the fates of nations and alliances, anything is possible in this new strategic offering from Matrix Games and 2 by 3 Games.

Lead your armies to victory by honing their abilities in research and development, creating a more powerful force than any other on the planet. Build with foresight, however; the bigger and more expensive units take longer to build and are invested in over time rather than being an instant purchase. Players will then have to plan several game turns in advance, tinkering far-reaching strategies to fit the current strategic situation.

Take command in this dynamic turn-based game and test strategies that long-past generals and world leaders could only dream of: make it happen in World at War.



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Reviews

Making the world safe for mouth-breathing loners one month at a time



Odds are often ridiculously against you. Here, I've got a single captured panzer to stop all these enemy tanks and troops from holding the town.

PUBLISHER Codemasters **DEVELOPER** Best Way, IC Company **GENRE** Small-Squad Tactical Combat **ESRB RATING** T **REQUIRED** Pentium III 90MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2GB install, broadband internet for multiplayer **RECOMMENDED** Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER** Internet, LAN (2-4 players)

Soldiers: Heroes of World War II

So much better than the last *Commandos* game



One of my Shermans keeps this Tiger occupied while the other moves into position to decimate him.



Use of commandeered enemy ordnance is key: My boys repaired and rearmed this captured Tiger for the cause.



When my lone T-34 breaks through this defensive line, it's going to RULE!



Spider-Man 2
Generally, we tend to highlight the good games here. Except right now.

80



Catwoman
There's more than one way to skin a cat, and they're all more fun than this.

81



Political Machine
More fun than a swift boat full of monkeys!

84

There are two kinds of difficulty in electronic games: "good difficulty" (which is challenging) and "bad difficulty" (which leads you to snap the CD in half in frustration and curse the developers' misbegotten offspring). *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* has both. But when the good difficulty of *Soldiers* becomes bad, it's not exactly the gameplay that's at fault—it's what's missing from it.

What is there, however, is outstanding. There are more than 30 missions commanding Soviets, Brits, Americans, and Germans—each side with its own faithfully modeled equipment, from mobile artillery to hand grenades (although you might want to grab a 1944 edition of *Guns & Ammo* because the woefully slim manual lacks any descriptions). The game engine is awesome, allowing you to destroy virtually anything, and despite some framerate problems, it looks just gorgeous. Plus, while *Soldiers* is fundamentally a small-squad RTS à la *Commandos*, the designers added a nifty "direct control" system that permits manual takeover of any unit at any time. This gives the game a visceral element often lacking in the genre.

HARD TIMES

But while direct control works great for handling a single unit (tanks and gun emplacements, in particular, are outrageously fun to get your hands on), you'll frequently be commanding more than just one, and that's where the problems begin. There aren't enough hotkeys (not even quicksave) for managing the task load. Worse, your troops will commonly be spread throughout big, elaborate maps, but there's no way of knowing if they're under attack unless you're looking right at them. There's nothing quite as maddening as painstakingly sneaking a soldier past an enemy defensive perimeter only to scroll back and find that the rest of his squad has been silently annihilated. All this is compounded by the fact that there's no way to issue orders or even select different units with the game paused, a feature that should be standard in this genre. There is a "slow-motion" function (which makes for some awesomely onematic sequences), but even slowed down, war is fricken' fast; switching back and forth between units in the middle of a firefight ain't easy and can become really annoying really quickly.

However, the most frequent frustration is that *Soldiers* tends to be rather, oh, circumspect in letting you know what you're supposed to do next, or more often, how in the hell you're supposed to do it. One mission objective essentially reads, "Find some way to signal the rescue plane." Now, I appreciate the figure-it-out-yourself angle, but I could have used a neighborly hand start into the extended ritual necessary to hail that damn pilot.



Q The game engine does a great job of rendering both idyllic scenery and the devastation of war.

When all cylinders are firing, *Soldiers* is an absolute blast.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

If the all sounds like I'm coming down rather hard on *Soldiers*, it's only because these problems are the clay feet of an otherwise golden statue. Make no mistake: When all cylinders are firing, *Soldiers* is an absolute blast; if you're a stickler for detail, get ready to be blown away. From the lifelike rumbling of the various tanks' engines to the way you can shoot off (and then pick up and put on) enemy soldiers' helmets, it's apparent that the designers sweat the small stuff.

Enemy A.I. is solid, making good use of cover, combined arms, and its perpetual numbers advantage. The missions, while hard, are always well constructed; the sometimes ridiculous odds the game puts you up against make it all the more satisfying when you grind your muddy Rick James boots into the enemy's new suede couch. Even the supplemental features are well done: The enjoyable original score differs in style depending on which country you're playing, and the faux History

Channel mission briefings give the whole experience a sense of authenticity.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Adding to the fun is a cooperative multiplayer mode that allows up to four buddies to give one another a hand against the A.I. This addition could have been even cooler if the game offered a simple matching service. So if you, like me, have no friends, you'll be reduced to soliciting partners on the forum boards. Also, there's no saving in multiplayer, which tends to amp up the frustration.

Still, *Soldiers* is full of that "good difficulty." While it lacks the polish of releases from major studios, it's a great game, unforgiving, unspolitic, and just fun.

—Eric Neigher

Verdict ★★★★★

A little rough around the edges, but if you like a challenge, you'll love it.

THE ART OF WAR

Destructible environments are big these days, and *Soldiers* more than holds its own in that regard, but what's so impressive about the game's design is that it doesn't necessarily encourage you to take a scorched earth approach. Sure, you could put a grip of bazooka rounds into that artillery piece and oodle gleefully at the pretty orange mushrooms. On the other hand, you could sneak in a sniper, pick off the artillery crew, then use the piece yourself and lay waste to the enemy pillbox across the map. Part of why *Soldiers* is so cool is that, while you can swing a broadsword, you're generally rewarded for using the reaper instead.



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PUBLISHER: Activision **DEVELOPER:** Fitz Factory/Amaze Entertainment **GENRE:** Action-Adventure **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 600MHz, 128MB RAM, 827MB Instst, 1GBD videocard **RECOMMENDED:** None **MULTIPLAYER:** None

Spider-Man 2

With a great license comes great disappointment

Remember back in the old days, like last month, when we complained that we didn't want to play ports of console games? Well, we take that back. If the original PC games are going to be as bad as this one, then please, give us the ports instead. Because this game just feels like an insult. Or maybe a practical joke.

To coincide with the Spider-Man 2 movie, Activision has simultaneously published two Spider-Man 2 games: one for the consoles and one for PC. The console game is a big-budget, smartly designed action-adventure with GTA-style openness and freedom. The PC version, though cleverly (or, some might say, deceptively) packaged in a nearly identical box, is actually a totally different game, from a different developer. Why? Because those who would play a Spider-Man game on the PC, in Activision's mushroom-fueled world view, must be little kids. So what we have here is a kiddie version of Spider-Man 2, with dumbed-down controls and simplified gameplay.

Not that there's anything wrong with kids' games. Some of us have kids. Some of us still are kids. But a kids' game that sucks? A kids' game that takes, at best, six hours to finish? That just makes us mad.

SPIDER BITES

You know you're in for a bad time right away, since the game opens with a spectacularly slapdash, poorly rendered cut-scene that essentially begins in mid-scene and then ends in mid-scene, as if they forgot to finish it or maybe didn't care. It's also from a point about an hour into the movie, with none of the characters introduced or explained—so unless you've



❑ No ally free-roaming owing to PC Spider-Man? We get web targets!

This game just feels like an insult. Or maybe a practical joke.



❑ Here Puma, he's fierce, get used to it.

seen the film, you won't have any clue what's going on.

Anyway, it doesn't really matter, because you are immediately transported away to an unrelated tutorial area, where the basic controls are starkly explained by Bruce Campbell, who, even for him, is seriously slumming here. Not that you'll need a tutorial. Can you click your mouse buttons? Congratulations! You are now a PC Spider-Man 2 expert.

Unlike the console game, which features a robust set of upgradeable combat and web-slinging moves, the PC version offers only rudimentary controls from start to finish. Combat is limited to a punch and a jump kick, with a couple of basic long-range web attacks. All of which is more than enough for the game's brain-dead enemies, none of whom pose any challenge whatsoever. Web-slinging, so awesome on the consoles, has been stripped bare here. You can swing

only to designated targets onscreen.

The game's few levels, before it's all mercifully over, offer a listless assortment of easy combat and easy jumping puzzles, as well as a few easy boss battles with random Spider-Man villains that have nothing to do with the movie, including the ever-popular Puma, who appears to have been watching lots of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

My "favorite" boss battle, however, was with Mystone, because I got to throw rocks at him. And, you know, that's what I always dreamed of doing as Spider-Man, ever since I was a little boy. Throwing rocks at bad guys.

Are we done here? ❑ Jeff Green

Verdict ★★☆☆☆

The consoles get the cool Spider-Man game. We get the lame kids' version.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER** Electronic Arts **GENRE** Action **ESRB RATING** T **REQUIRED** Pentium II 800, 256MB RAM, 1.5MB install, 64MB videocard
RECOMMENDED Gamepad, some sort of mental disorder **MULTIPLAYER** None

Catwoman

Nine lives too many

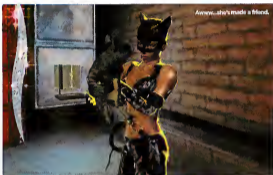
A prolific DC Comics writer once shared an amusing anecdote on a message board I frequent. DC, as many of you probably know, is the comic book division of Warner Bros. Studios. One day, the writer in question was introducing himself to one of the suits from the studio's film division; upon being asked what he did at Warner Bros., the writer replied that he wrote for DC Comics. The suit came back at him with a puzzled "Oh, we still publish comics?" This, sadly, is the type of person who makes the movie decisions at WB. The studio's films, naturally, lead to tie-in games, and that's how we get crap like *Catwoman*, an epic disaster of a game derived from a movie that simply shouldn't exist in the first place.

KITTY LITTER

Like the movie that spawned it, *Catwoman* has nothing to do with *Catwomen*. The sultry Selina Kyle, occasional love interest of Batman and prostitute-turned-high-society-cleatante-turned-cat-burglar, is nowhere to be found here. Instead, we're stuck with the unimpaired Patience Phillips, who returns from the dead as a vengeance-seeking leather fetishist after being murdered by her colleagues for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. She enacts said vengeance by running around the city, falling off buildings, stealing stuff, and kicking people into Dumpsters when they start glowing yellow. If there's more of a story to it than that, somebody forgot to include it.

You'll wander around a dozen or so badly lit areas, including a jewelry store, a nightclub, and a factory, as you progress through the game. And you'll do it without the benefit of a decent camera, since the developers apparently abandoned that along with the story. Aside from a slightly helpful first-person-view mode, you're stuck with camera angles that are often awkward and frustrating, and are made even worse by the game's perpetually dark scenery and thoroughly confusing level layouts.

When you do manage to figure out what's going on, you'll spend most of your time climbing up walls, hanging on to poles, swinging around on your whip, and probably falling down and starting



Yes, you'll use your whip to "f---em guys?"

This is what you're paying 40 bucks for, folks.

An epic disaster of a game derived from a movie that simply shouldn't exist in the first place.

the process all over again—it's like *Prince of Persia* gone bad. Every now and then, a few thugs will show up and attack you. After you fail about at them with the horrendously implemented combat controls, they will thoughtfully throw themselves into the nearest Dumpster, since they obviously know you're going to have a hard time doing it yourself. A word of advice: If you're going to subject yourself to this, at least use a gamepad.

Catwoman is one of the worst games you are ever likely to play. When you aren't falling to your death or spending your

hard-earned loot on special moves that do absolutely nothing, you'll be enjoying such Halle Berry-voiced wisecracks as "I'll claw my way to the top!" and "What's that my cat eye sees?" Fortunately (more like sadly), you can treat yourself to a bunch of cheesy T&A close-up poses by leaving your controller idle for a few moments—that is, if you haven't thrown it through the screen. **Ryan Scott**

Verdict ★★★★★

It gets a star only because it actually runs when you install it.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Koei/Wonder Studio/Konoe Entertainment **GENRE:** Action-Adventure **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Peripherals: 1100, 256MB RAM, 850MB install, 32MB videomem. **RECOMMENDED:** None

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Not very *Harry*, but still pretty fun

If you haven't read *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* or seen the movie, this game is not the place to learn what it's all about. That doesn't mean it's bad. It's actually pretty fun. It's just not very *Harry*.

NO FANCY BOOK LEARNIN'

For *Harry Potter* sticklers who tolerate no changes from JK Rowling's books, there is a lot to complain about here. The entire first part of the book is missing (starting on the Hogwarts Express rather than at the Dursleys' house), Hogsmeade is missing, and many of the major characters, including Sirius Black, the prisoner in the story's title, are barely explained at all. You probably won't understand what's going on if you don't know the story already.

But the game isn't really about the story, and if you can get over that, you can have a good time. It's more about exploring Hogwarts, collecting goodies and finding secret areas, and beating a series of challenges and minigames. Both Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley follow Harry around this time, and at different parts of the game, you will play as each of them, sometimes using all three at once to cast spells.

Spellcasting is fun and easy. Almost all of the spells were taken from the books, and some, like *Rictusempra* (used for defeating small enemies) and *Depulso* (which pushes and pulls things), are not the popular spells that everyone knows, which shows that the game makers really did read the book. Other spells, like



Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover a secret passageway in Hogwarts.

We're not sure what playing as a rabbit has to do with *Harry Potter*, but we liked it anyway.

Draconifors and *Lapfors*, which make small statues turn into temporary live beings that you control, were not from the books at all but were still cool. We're not sure what playing as a rabbit has to do with *Harry Potter*, but we liked it anyway.

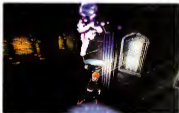
I'M JUST MILD ABOUT HARRY

Overall the spellcasting is fun but really too easy. Any time you needed to cast a spell, the right one was automatically chosen for you. It would have been more challenging and interesting if you could have experimented and tried to figure out the right one to use yourself.

This is actually true of the whole game. It's very easy, and if you beat everything on the first try (which Dad here failed to do), the game would be very short. It's only from

repeating things that the game takes any time at all. And the only part that we really got stuck at was trying to ride Buckbeak, the hippogriff, through a series of hoops, which almost had Dad break his keyboard in half out of frustration. Or, to let the younger half of this review team speak directly in her own words: "It probably isn't hard for most people, but for losers like my dad, it was very hard." Yeah. Thanks a lot. Go to your room.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban looks great, does a nice job of re-creating Hogwarts, and is fun if you like exploring and finding secret areas. It's a good game, just not a good *Harry Potter* story. If you want to know about *Harry Potter*, read the book instead. **Sarah (age 10) and Jeff (age 42) Green**



Poor Ron Weasley dangles in midair. Can he panic now?

Verdict ★★☆☆

For casual gamers and casual *Harry Potter* fans—diehards may be let down.

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- > Comfortable adjustable wrist rest
- > Quiet responsive keys



PUBLISHER Ubisoft **DEVELOPER** Stardock Entertainment **GENRE** Political strategy **ESRB RATING** T **REQUIRED** 1GHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 700MB install, broadband internet connection **RECOMMENDED** 3GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER** Internet (2 players)

The Political Machine

You don't vote for king



While a game about a presidential election is undoubtedly more interesting three months before the fact as opposed to three years, these kinds of games are usually either abstract strategy exercises with no basis in reality or dull political simulators interesting only to C-SPAN-watching insomniacs. The fact that *The Political Machine* manages to be both a reasonable facsimile of a presidential campaign and an absolutely absorbing strategy game that will keep you coming back for beating after beating is a testament to the design skills of a small developer called Stardock Entertainment, also responsible for last year's excellent *Galactic Civilizations*.

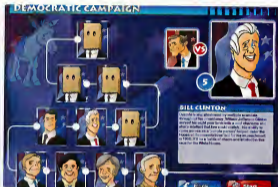
SOLIDIFYING THE BASE

The Political Machine succeeds primarily because it concentrates on being a good strategy game rather than a strict political simulator. The game gives you the freedom to choose how to run your campaign, using an elegant game system that provides you with a lot of options while ensuring that you'll never be able to take advantage of them all—the basis of a successful strategy game.

Each campaign is divided into 41 turns, each representing a week. Candidates travel from state to state giving speeches, building organizations (headquarters), running radio, television, and print ads, and gaining endorsements from special-interest groups. The key is to frame the debate around issues where you agree with state or national opinion, while restricting the focus on areas where you're weak. For example, in a state where your opponent is soft on crime, you might give speeches about fighting crime to raise awareness on this topic. If you're weak on foreign-policy issues, you can get an endorsement from a foreign-policy think tank to bolster your position. While you're doing this, though, you won't be running ads or raising funds, because you only have so many action points to spend per week, and the choices are stark.

CHARACTERISTICS

Candidates are rated in a number of characteristics, such as integrity, compassion, experience, credibility, and stamina. Some of these are easy to understand (stamina determines how many action points you'll have



The campaign pits you against a series of 10 opponents whom you unlock for solo or multiplayer.

A political campaign would be nothing without dirty tricks, and *The Political Machine* gives you a whole arsenal of them.

each week), while some are more nebulous (such as media bias). Unfortunately, the character-creation system is a bit broken due to several characteristics (stamina, experience, and fund-raising ability—and to a lesser extent, starting money) being much more important than others. So creating your own characters for multiplayer isn't as interesting as it could be, since the choices there are pretty obvious.

A political campaign would be nothing without dirty tricks, and *The Political Machine* gives you a whole arsenal of them. You can hire smear merchants to lower an opponent's ratings in a state or use hecklers to increase their stamina cost—effectively giving them fewer actions in a turn. Some of the game's random events give you advantages (which occasionally prove unbalancing), like less costly ads or celebrity support to help raise your awareness in different states.

EXIT POLLS			
MICHIGAN		MISSISSIPPI	
CANDIDATE	STAMINA	CANDIDATE	STAMINA
ALVIN GALT	369	DAVE FORD	149
WING BERRY	318	WING BERRY	111
WING BERRY	318	WING BERRY	111
TRICKS	STAMINA	STAMINA	STAMINA
Theater on TV	98%	64%	7%
Char. Performance	94%	27%	27%
Tax Code	82%	84%	7%
Fighting Crime	80%	67%	17%
More Ads	8%	0%	47%
Frequency of speech	8%	7%	2%
Advertise for Politics	7%	1%	80%
Special Events	6%	1%	20%
The War on Iraq	6%	6%	0%

You can examine the exit polls to see how you did on each issue.

While the timeliness of the topic definitely enhances the game's appeal, the fundamental system would be interesting even if it were set on Mars. That's the mark of a good design and a worthy purchase. **Bruce Geryk**

Verdict ★★★★★
A great strategy game, even if you never watch the news.

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PUBLISHER COV Software **DEVELOPER** Stormerline **GENRE** RTS **ESRB RATING** T **REQUIRED** Pentium III 500MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2.5GB install **RECOMMENDED** Pentium 4 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 3GB install **MULTIPLAYER** Internet (2-6 players)

Codename: Panzers

Suddenly, my humvee looks like a sissy car

Some games are all about the story, and some games are all about the pulse-pounding action. *Panzers* falls squarely into the latter camp. It's WWII—that's all you need to know. The story will fall to compel you, and the spoken dialogue will never seem quite right. The best writing in the game (and the only information worth paying attention to) comes in the form of the commander's journal, which you get to look at between missions. Make no mistake: *Panzers* does no favors for the spoken word. But what it lacks in story, it compensates for with missions that make you want to trade in your beat-up Chevy for an M36 Slugger.

First things first: This game is all about tanks. Lots of tanks. As you blast through the German, Russian, and Allied campaigns, you will constantly be swallowed up by the sights and sounds of battle as your armored units thunder across the landscape, churning up dust. Earthshaking explosions bombard you in each chapter, engulfing your senses in the chaos and fire of war. These war machines shudder when hit by enemy fire and rock from the recoil of their massive guns. The graphics engine wonderfully renders detailed landscapes, from wide-open plains to navigated cities with claustrophobic avenues, putting you in some of the most epic battles to grace a PC game.

REMEMBER THE LITTLE PEOPLE

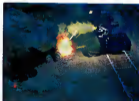
Though tanks are the main thrust of your army's might, your infantry units are invaluable when used correctly. In each level, they heighten the war-movie atmosphere, whether they are running alongside the tanks or lying in wait to snipe the enemy. They may be fragile in comparison to the armored behemoths, but foot soldiers can hole up in abandoned buildings or bunkers, shoot from cover, and take great advantage of the terrain. The various units also have different detection ranges and stealth abilities, making teamwork both rewarding and necessary. Snipers, for instance, can creep up close enough to put an enemy in their line of sight, making an excellent advance pair of eyes for your artillery, mortars, and tanks further away.

Troops cannot be replaced midmission, so you have to take care of them. You are either assigned your infantry, armored units, artillery, and support vehicles or forced to "buy" these units using prestige earned in previous missions. And that's pretty much it—no reinforcements until the

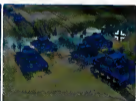


☐ Pedestrians DO NOT have the right of way in Mother Russia.

Codename: Panzers is all about tanks. Lots of tanks.



☐ Why invade Russia with two tanks? Because the rest are in a five-panzer pileup on I-90.



☐ When the Germans come to play, they invite all their friends.

next mission. In more challenging modes of play, fallen troops aren't replaced at all.

As great as *Panzers*'s action is, some pretty wacky pathfinding issues mar the experience. Controlling large groups of vehicles tends to create armored traffic jams; this is a particularly frustrating problem in city environments, where myriad obstacles and buildings complicate the pathfinding problems even more.

If you're patient, don't really care whether the story is engaging, and just want to crank up the speakers and blow stuff up, you could do a lot worse than *Codename: Panzers*. **—Stephen F. Cochrane**

Verdict ★★★★★

The pathfinding problems suck a lot of the joy out of this WWII tankfest.

PUBLISHER: Hatrix Games **DEVELOPER:** 2by3 Games **GENRE:** Turn-based Strategic War Game **ESRB RATING:** None **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 600, 32MB RAM, 100MB Install **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER:** Hotseat, PBM (2 players)

War in the Pacific

Don't make any plans for the rest of this year

War in the Pacific is the long-awaited update to Gary Grigsby's landmark Pacific War, released in 1992. Two years ago, war gamers were treated to a preview with Uncommon Velocity, a smaller-scale game depicting the battle for the Solomon Islands that used essentially the same game system. Preview or not, there is nothing that really could have prepared you for this.

The premise of the game is nothing less than being able to refight the battles of the Pacific theater of WWII in single-day turns, using just about every ship, plane, and ground formation that fought there. The map stretches from India to the west coast of North America, and units of battalion strength are rated for number and size of individual guns. Each turn cycles through numerous subphases, and you can find detail down to the individual commander level, with inspiration and leadership ratings for squadron commanders and ship captains. It even keeps track of kills on an individual pilot basis. The whole thing screams one design philosophy: detail über alles.

The problem with the game as a game is that while the important decisions are generally metastrategy (which bases to build up, how to construct your logistics network, etc.), the game also plunges you into a lot of detail that is unavoidable unless you turn entire sectors over to the AI. That's not necessarily a problem if you see this more as a self-contained virtual world where you can completely immerse yourself in WWII's Pacific theater. Even so, because strategy takes game-years to



The game suffers from a lack of intermediate map views.



Do you want suffocating detail? You got it.

take shape, you can expect to get hundreds of turns into a game only to find you're doing it all wrong. It's an unforgiving game that demands dedication unlike anything seen before.

GRUNT WORK

War in the Pacific isn't really so much a game as it is a project. The longest campaign scenario lasts almost 1,500 turns, and before you're anywhere near ready to handle that, you're well advised to spend time with several of the smaller scenarios. It will take you more time to read and absorb the material in the manual than it would to complete some other games. The familiar Grigsby interface is back—and comes up short time after time—but in a game of this scope that's almost irrelevant if you make the decision to learn the game, you're going to have a lot more to

overcome than just nonmodal windows and inconsistently placed Exit buttons.

This title is essentially an MMO game for dedicated, hardcore war gamers, not in the massively multiplayer online sense, but simply because it lends itself to complete

immersion on a time-sink scale similar to EverQuest's. To dismiss it as an impenetrable chore is to miss the point. The \$70 price tag is a clear warning sign: Casual players need not apply. For war gamers, the game requires total commitment: If you invest enough, you'll be amply rewarded. **Bruce Geryk**

Verdict ★★★★★

War in the Pacific answers the prayers of hardcore Pacific war reenactors.

WAR COLLEGE

If you're serious about getting into the game, don't just read the 62-page tutorial (50 pages of which are devoted to describing just two turns). You can find additional help, including an intro from producer and codesigner Joel Billings, in the unofficial WITP Strategy Guide at methubert.free.fr/witp_files/witp_tips.doc



The AI can be set by sector, so you can concentrate on your favorite part of the war.

This title is essentially an MMO game for dedicated, hardcore war gamers.



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YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

The days of huge desktop PCs and birds' nests of Ethernet cables are fading



Watch any science-fiction movie and you'll notice that many of the items featured are simply smaller, sleeker versions of everyday products we already use.

With the exception of *Blade Runner*, it seems that CRTs have gone extinct, their place having been taken by supersleek flat-panel monitors like those seen in *Minority Report* and *I, Robot*. Of course, these are movies that take place decades in the future. Just a few years ago, however, going "small" meant giving up performance, and as gamers, well, that's just not acceptable. Thankfully, there's a new movement afoot, and we're being treated to cool products that are both small and powerful. Whether it's VoodooPC's wickedly fast Envy M:860 laptop or Falcon's awesome new small form-factor rig, the FragBox 2, gamers are learning that we can take it with us—and it won't kill us, either.



Inside



FALCON FRAGBOX 2 84



ACTIGATE ROUTER 86



ATI GRAPHICS CHIP 87

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELO

MANUFACTURER: Voodoo PC (P.O.) \$3,500

VOODOO'S AWESOME DESKTOP REPLACEMENT

Voodoo Envy M:860



From its pure white paint job to its glowing blue power button, you can tell right away that this amazing notebook from VoodooPC is going to be something special. For those who question the logic behind notebook gaming, this powerful beast should silence all objections; there's no reason for high-performance, high-quality multimedia to be left to the realm of the desktop PC. The Envy M:860 will live up to its name, turning heads wherever you unleash its awesome might.

Every tick in its spec sheet is impressive. The Envy is fitted with an Athlon 64 3400+ processor and an ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 graphics chip, which together should run just about any game on the market. Before you ask, we don't know how the Envy stacks up against Doom 3—the deadline for this article came before we got our dirty little hands on a copy of Id's long-awaited title.

The heavy laptop (it weighs in at about 8 pounds) has a huge and wonderful 15.4-inch widescreen display that's crisp and sparklingly clear in Windows and while displaying games at any resolution. The touchpad, which has a handy scroll pad on the right side, matches the display's aspect ratio. One of our few complaints concerns mousing: Even with the mouse motion set to maximum, the mouse cursor was sluggish, requiring repeated drags of our fingers on the touchpad to get that damn arrow across the screen. Of course, any gamer worth a damn will attach a USB mouse to this puppy, which is exactly what we did.

Otherwise, the ergonomics are stellar. The keyboard is snappy and responsive,

with good tactile feedback. In a cool twist, the LEDs for things such as Num Lock and Caps Lock are a cool, icy blue rather than the mundane pale green used by most PC manufacturers.

If you're away from an electrical outlet, you'll get about an hour and a half of high-performance gaming out of the Envy before the battery sputters to a halt. That's not bad, and it translates to at least two hours of battery life doing more mundane stuff such as e-mail and word processing.

If you plan on using the Envy for LAN fests, you'll be happy to know that it's network ready, with both wired and wireless Ethernet controllers built right in. Of course, besides convenience at a gaming gathering, you'll command bragging rights. This notebook is as close to a modder's dream as a notebook can be—complete with symbol-laden graphics on the top cover.

The Envy did a terrific job crunching system hops such as *Far Cry*, *Halo*, and *Spiner Cell*. The Mobility Radeon 9700 may not be an X800, but it can certainly hold its own when it comes to gaming prowess. WASD warriors will get a charge out of its smooth frames, and it's even powerful enough to bump up antialiasing and anisotropic filtering to match the quality of the rendering to the awesome LCD display.

If you choose to purchase a gaming laptop, be warned: Most laptops aren't upgradeable. Fortunately, Voodoo offers graphics card upgrades for the Envy. The Voodoo Envy M:860 is easily one of the snarliest gaming laptops on the market.

—Joel Durham Jr.

SCORE: ★★★★★

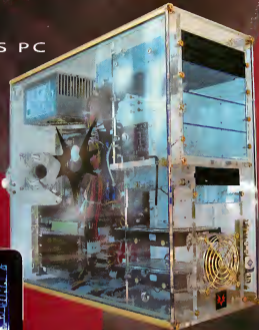


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MANUFACTURER: Falcon Northwest PROL \$4,300

FALCON'S ALL NEW FRAGBOX 2

Falcon Northwest starts from the ground up and builds an awesome "transportable"



In talking to Kelt Reeves (the outspoken owner of Falcon Northwest), I've come to realize that the original FragBox was in many ways an experiment. As with any experiment, one begins with a question. From there, you form a hypothesis before reaching a conclusion. The question with the FragBox may have been something like: "Can you play games (even demanding ones) with the current generation of small form-factor technology?" The hypothesis may then have been: "With enough power, can you expect to play games (even demanding ones) with a small form-factor rig?" And the conclusion probably sounded something like this: "The power supplies that ship with the current generation of small



form-factor boxes are not robust enough to handle the power needs that hardcore Windows gamers demand." The experiment concluded, and Reeves decided that the only way to go about this small form-factor trend was to start from the ground up. Enter the FragBox 2.

Rocking a 520-watt power supply and Intel's 0925XBC PCIe/Socket T micro-ATX motherboard, the FragBox 2 isn't so much a small form-factor PC as it is a standard PC, only smaller. Where its predecessor lacked upgradeability, Falcon boasts that "the FragBox 2 now has the power to run any graphics card and processor combination possible." And this is a blessing to Windows gamers. In fact, the FragBox 2 is about as fast as a similarly configured Mach V.

In addition to a real power supply and superfast motherboard, the FragBox 2 boasts an Intel 3.6GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of Corsair DDR2 memory, dual 74GB Western Digital hard drives in a 150GB RAID 0 configuration, a Sony DVD/RW drive, a four-type media-card writer/reader, and, most important, a 256MB Nvidia GeForce 6800 Ultra PCI Express graphics card.

We put the FragBox 2 through our standard barrage of benchmarks, and boy, were we impressed. We tested it at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and Bx AF turned on. Its 3DMark 2003 score of 5,999 is one of the highest we've seen. Furthermore, none of the games we threw at the machine challenged it. Hell, the FragBox 2 scored Doom 3 framerates of more than

62 frames per second at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and Bx AF.

Of course, at more than \$4,000 (as tested), the FragBox 2 is exponentially more expensive than the original \$1,000 FragBox (the FragBox 2 starts at around \$2,600). That said, this little rig pulls no punches. Boasting the fastest graphics card and processor available, a RAID configuration, and a ton of memory, the FragBox 2 is a no-brainer for the gamer who wants a small machine that you can take with you. Oh yeah, it also comes with a pound of really good coffee.

By William O'Neil

SCORE: ★★★★★

We put the FragBox 2 through our standard barrage of benchmarks, and boy, were we impressed. None of the games that we threw at this machine challenged it.

Photo: Falcon Northwest
is served with every FragBox 2 purchase.



MANUFACTURER: Actiontec. PRICE: 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router \$100, 54 Mbps Wireless PC Card \$60

LOOK MA, NO WIRES!

Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router works like a charm



So you've finally purchased that killer gaming laptop or you've set up a small form-factor rig in another part of your house. Searing as it's 2004, any machine, regardless of how "badass" it may be, is nothing if it's not connected to your broadband network. Of course, there are a lot of ways to connect a machine to a network. But the \$100 question is, "How do you do it?" Well, you could run Ethernet cable all over your house by drilling holes in the floor and finally finding out what's in that crawlspace beneath your home, but whose wife is gonna allow that? The myriad CGW wives, for instance, ain't. The simplest solution is to set up a wireless network.

When it comes to broadband routers, most products (whether they're from D-Link, Belkin, Linksys, or Actiontec) are pretty similar. That said, there are differences in areas such as software bundles, security features, and ease of use. To that end, Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router turned out to be a great solution. Lately, I've been torn between Belkin and Actiontec products. Both companies offer similar items that

are simple to set up and afford. In fact, of course, there are differences. While Belkin's 54Mbps wireless router connects to your existing DSL modem, Actiontec's product replaces it. At first, I was reluctant to replace my DSL modem (it has served me well for some time) with something new, but Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Router was simple to set up and has yet to let me down.

Setup was extremely simple. I connected the router to my DSL line, plugged it in, and then logged on to the router via the supplied IP address. I found Actiontec's Web-based setup utility (the "installation buddy") to be a bit more difficult to figure out than Belkin's, but this is a learning curve issue that's easily overcome by...uh...reading the manual.

Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router is 802.11g compliant, and it's also backward compatible to 802.11b. The great thing about 802.11g products is that they'll even support older 802.11a items. In addition to its wireless features, the router also supports the 64-bit and 128-bit WEP encryption that's needed to ensure that your wireless network is good and secure. At around \$100, Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router is a great base with which to build a wireless network. © William O'Neil

SCORE: ★★★★★

At first, I was reluctant to replace my DSL modem (it has served me well for some time) with a new product, but Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Router was simple to set up and has yet to let me down.



HOW TO INSTALL A WIRELESS ACCESS POINT

Internet access untethered

You've heard about all this wireless networking stuff, but you think that setting up your own network will be too tough? Wrong! Setting up a wireless network is super-easy, and we'll show you how to do it. For this How To, we used Belkin's 802.11g Wireless Access Point, or WAP (around \$100), but setup should be nearly the same for any manufacturer's access point.



LOG IN TO YOUR WAP

STEP 2 Each manufacturer's WAP will require a different IP address in order to access the device's Web-based user interface that you'll use to configure the WAP. In my case, I entered "192.168.2.254." Once you do this, you'll be able to set up those all-important security features. You don't want that e-hole down the street to use your bandwidth.

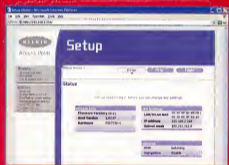


WIRELESS IS ALL ABOUT ENCRYPTION

STEP 3 Without encryption enabled, anyone can tap into your network and wreak all manner of mayhem. In the Setup screen, click on Encryption and use 128 bit. You'll be asked to enter a password that will be used to generate a WEP security key. Once your WEP key is created, be sure to record this information in a place where only you can retrieve it. Lose this information and you're screwed.

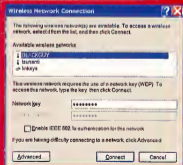
CONNECT THE CABLES

STEP 1 Locate an Ethernet port on the back of your broadband router and connect an Ethernet cable from that port to the one labeled either Ethernet or LAN on the back of your WAP. If the Ethernet port is "live," all the lights on your WAP should light up. Check your documentation to figure out what the various lights indicate.



CONNECT TO YOUR NOW-SECURE NETWORK

STEP 4 Right-click on the Wireless Network icon in the system tray and choose 'View Available Wireless Networks.' Choose your wireless network, mine is called BLACKGUY, and enter that ridiculous long WEP key that was generated with your password and hit Connect. Restart your machine and, barring any technical issues, you should be up and connected to your very own wireless network.



MANUFACTURER: ATI PRICE: \$399 (price charged by Dell to install card is now Inspiron XPS)

ATI'S LATEST MOBILE CHIP HANDLES DOOM 3

The promise of upgradeable mobile graphics pays off

Anyone who has been following CGW's Tech section knows that I have a thing for laptop manufacturers that offer graphics-card upgrades for their machines—Alienware, Voodoo, and Dell come to mind. While most people agree that many of the so-called gaming laptops on the market are powerful enough to handle most games, there was always a big question regarding the two biggies: Doom 3 and Half-Life 2. Now that Doom 3 is out, we can answer part of that question.

We took the 128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9700-powered Dell Inspiron XPS that we reviewed in the September issue and pitted it against Doom 3 to see how it would fare. "Not too well" is the answer. Now keep in mind this machine is a beast with a 3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor and 1GB of DDR memory. Only by knocking Doom 3's settings down to 640x480 and turning off every single visual detail were we able to achieve a benchmark score of 65 frames per second. This may sound OK, but remember, at these settings, the game is hideous. And this is where upgradeable mobile graphics come into play.

ATI recently released its 256MB Mobility Radeon 9800 graphics chip, and we had one installed in our Dell Inspiron XPS. Sweet Jesus! Not only did this card fly in our benchmark and game tests, but most important, we were able to play Doom 3 at 640x480 with most of the visual details turned on at 65 frames per second, as well as at 800x600 at 45 frames per second. How does the Mobility Radeon 9800 do this? In addition to an

Only by knocking Doom 3's settings down to 640x480 and turning off every single visual detail were we able to achieve a benchmark score of 65 frames per second.

additional 128MB of memory, it rocks eight pixel pipelines (instead of four like its predecessor) and runs at an even higher clock speed. **William O'Neil**

BY THE NUMBERS

Graphics Processor	128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9700	256MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9800
3DMark2003 Pro v. 340	3,352	6,454
AquaMark 2003	31	45
3DGameGauge 3.5	60	71
Comanche 4	60	61
Serious Sam: TSE	57	15
Dungeon Siege	100	100
UT2003 Botmatch	80	79

ATI: ATI; DELL: DELL; INTEL: INTEL; NVIDIA: NVIDIA



Will Power
His monthly spew of fluff

Is there a ghost in the machine?

Being a hardware enthusiast as well as a journalist means I have for things shiny and new with the skepticism that I'm supposed to levy on the same shiny and new objects—case in point, small form-factor PCs.

When I first began to look at these machines, I was so impressed that I was quick to overlook many of their shortcomings. In my reviews, I mentioned that their weak power supplies meant that you were severely limited in your upgrade options. "But so what," I thought, "they're still just so damn cool."

In my excitement to play with something new, I overlooked a critical aspect of these machines. Outfits like Voodoo and Felcon are known for building gaming machines from the ground up. After doing a ton of research, they pick the best components and put them together in machines that they stroke and nurture like brand-new babies. Building a machine based on a Shuttle XPC box means that you're going with Shuttle's case, power supply, and motherboard. While Voodoo and Felcon do their best to squeeze as much as possible from these boxes, either way, you're getting Shuttle's or FIC's case, power supply, and motherboard.

I suppose these first attempts were more of a test of the small form-factor market. However, whether from dead power supplies or other hardware incompatibilities, these machines are, at best, "quirky." Having sold a ton of FragBoxes, though, Felcon has now designed its own box from the ground up. For the FragBox 2, the company designed the case and chose the motherboard and power supply. If you bought an early small form-factor machine, you may be wondering if there's a ghost in the machine. I'm happy to say that what you're experiencing with that little baby is nothing more than old-fashioned growing pains. **William O'Neil**

Lloyd's Cracked Case

Small is beautiful

We recently reviewed VoodooPC's F50 "silent" PC that weighs 65 pounds. My back hasn't been the same since unpacking it from its box.

If you've ever moved a Dell XPS, the muscles in your back probably went on strike, too. Sure, you need a big chassis if you're an overclocker, but we want something sweet that still runs *Far Cry* or *Doom 3* with wicked fast framerates.

"WTF? Sweet?" I can hear you cry. "Case has finally become a high-tech wimp, too old to lift a real man's PC!"

Next time you load that huge freakin' PC into your car for the local LAN party, I'll show up with an entire clan's worth of high-performance PCs. The small form-factor revolution is upon us.

IS THAT A SHOEBOX IN YOUR...UH...BACKPACK?

I'm not talking about some pizza box piece o' crap with integrated graphics, I'm talking about those sleek, tiny cube-shaped PCs that have become all the rage. Taiwanese manufacturer Shuttle built the first cube-shaped PC, which the company has since dubbed "the XPC." But other companies have weighed in with their versions of small form-factor systems. The salient feature of these PCs is performance in a tiny package. Most of these machines can accept the fastest CPUs.

The cramped quarters inside the small cases are not always friendly to high-end graphics cards, however. Double-wide cards, like Nvidia's GeForce 6800 Ultra, don't fit into many of these systems. Even if they do, they consume an additional slot space, which eliminates the possibility of having a PCI sound card. But you can still build them with really fast graphics cards—just not the two-slot behemoths.

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And they're, well, cute. You can trick them out with different skins, get carrying cases for them, and the case modders have begun working their magic. Around the Case house, we have three of these babies humming along, doing the yeoman's duties for my oldest daughter as well as fueling two of the gaming systems for the Friday Night Folks LAN parties. All of them are equipped with substantial graphics cards, ranging from Nvidia's 5700 Ultra to ATI's Radeon 9800 XT. The slowest of them sports a 2.8GHz P4. Performance is not an issue. Toss in an LCD flat panel with a sub-firms response time and you've got a sweet, semiportable gaming system.

AH, THE WIRELESS REVOLUTION

Many of these systems are being loaded up with wireless networking, too. Now all you need for a LAN party is a wireless router that connects to the Internet. Provided all the PCs are in close proximity,

latency and lag are not issues. Imagine a LAN party where you no longer have to lug miles of Ethernet cable and an Ethernet switch per table. You do have to be careful about performance, though. Some low-cost routers can theoretically handle 255 users, but if you try to actually have that many people connect, then it's lag city.

But what if you want to go even smaller? Wouldn't a laptop suffice? The answer is yes, sort of. You'll find that a machine that doesn't wrench your shoulder out of its socket when you pick it up will deliver only ho-hum graphics performance. However, the recent release of ATI's Mobility 9800 is a precursor of what's to come. Currently available only in "desktop replacements," we may see this type of performance in more mainstream laptops in a year or so as chip-manufacturing processes improve.

So dump those massive desktop PCs and heavy CRTs. You have nothing to lose but your chiropractor bills. **By Lloyd Case**



Check Out

FAST FORWARD

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KILLER RIG

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REWIND 100

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Inside

What videocard should you buy for your next awesome computer? Who would play Darth Malak in a *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* movie? What's our favorite TUP.com club this month? What the hell did we rate *Fox Romana*, anyway? These and other pressing questions are answered in this month's Check Out pages.

Killer Rig

For the gamer on a budget!

While last month's supersexy Power Rig was designed with the hardcore gamer in mind, this month's Lean Machine is designed for gamers on a budget. I know what you're saying: "How is a \$1,660 machine a budget rig?" Well, if you look at the tower alone—without the LCD and speakers—you'll see that this thing is *med* affordable.

A month or so ago I reviewed an iBuypower.com machine that was \$1,000. That machine shipped with a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700LE. While that card sucked, the 128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700 Ultra that I included in this machine is great for less-demanding games. For instance, iBuypower's machine scored around 13 frames per second in *Halo* at 1280x1024, while my machine scored 26 frames per second at the same resolution. Of course, if you want to play *Doom 3* or *Half-Life 2*, you'll have to drop some serious coin on a more robust graphics card.

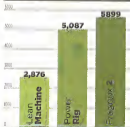
I debated making this machine an Athlon 64-based rig and decided to go the Intel route, since right now you can get these sub-3GHz Pentium 4 processors for next to nothing. And since most games rely mainly on the graphics card anyway, the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 is a great place to start when you're looking to build an affordable gaming rig. And that Intel D805PBZ motherboard is as solid as a rock. **William O'Neil**

If you want to play *Doom 3* or *Half-Life 2*, you'll have to drop some serious coin on a more robust graphics card.

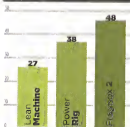


Antec
Lanboy case

3DMark03 Pro



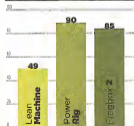
AquaMark 2003



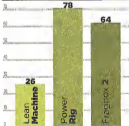
ALL TESTS RUN WITH 6X AX CAPTALAMING; A-D BY ALL ANTI-ALIASING FILTERING TURNED OFF; A-FS ON; V-Sync NOTED

Viewsonic
18-inch LCD monitorLogitech
Z-2200 2.1
speakers

3D GameGauge 3.5



Halo - Shader 1.0



The Guts

MODEL	LEAN MACHINE	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$190
Case	Antec Lanbox	\$100
Processor (CPU)	Intel 2.6GHz Pentium 4	\$200
Motherboard	Intel D83782	\$100
Memory	2GB Kingston PC-3200 DDR	\$100
Hard drive	40GB Maxtor	\$40
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5700 Ultra	\$150
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	\$40
Optical drive	Sony DVD-ROM	\$30
Monitor	Viewsonic 18-inch LCD	\$400
Keyboard/mouse	Microsoft Multimedia Keyboard	\$30
Speakers	Logitech Z-2200	\$100
TOTAL COST		\$1,660

A-List

Our picks



With the recent and upcoming releases of hot games like *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2*, *The Sims 2*,

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Star Wars Battlefront*, *Knights of the Old Republic II*, and *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, plenty of you are probably wondering whether you should upgrade your not-quite-awesome-but-still-gets-the-job-done computer. We're here to tell you: do it! Sure, these games look and play fine on a midrange rig, but let's face it—*Half-Life 2* is the kind of game you really want to upgrade your system for. And with the holidays practically right around the corner, you've got the perfect excuse to buy that attractive new videocard.



COMPUTERS

If you're still on the fence about upgrading that old system of yours, you might want to take a look at recent prices—there are actually some decent, affordable rigs out there.

Intel-Based systems



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

Generation 3 Dimension XPS
\$3,699 (E-Value code 6V411-XPS3REK)
Dell

BUDGET PICK

Back to School PC
\$1,000
iBuyPower

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While Dell's first PCI Express-based machine isn't the fastest around, it's hard not to recommend it. With 1GB of DDR2 memory, 500GB of storage space, 5.1 speakers, and a killer 20.1-inch LCD, you're getting plenty of good stuff here.

This rig ships with a powerful processor (3GHz Intel Pentium 4) and a weak graphics card (256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700LE), but since iBuyPower is a "build to order" outfit, you can easily tweak that configuration.

Lanboy system



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

FragBox 2
\$4,000
Falcon Northwest

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Say hello to Falcon Northwest's FragBox 2. This box rocks a 520-watt power supply and a standard Micro-ATX Intel 925X-based motherboard—which means it doesn't suffer from the same upgrade limitations as its predecessor.



PERIPHERALS

Speaking of Doom 3, it has some pretty eerie Dolby 5.1-enhanced audio effects. Make sure your speakers are up to par, it's well worth the cost.

Speakers



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

HIGH-END PICK

- ▶ **Creative GigaWorks 5750 with DTS-100 Decoder**
 \$375
 Creative

Creative's GigaWorks 5750 speakers are simply awesome. The only catch is that they're specifically designed to go with a PC. Well, add the DTS-100 Decoder to the mix and you have the ultimate home entertainment setup. With a ton of connection options, you can easily hook them up to your PC, consoles, and standalone DVD player.

MID-RANGE PICK

- ▶ **Creative MegaWorks 2.1 2500**
 \$150
 Creative

Good speakers are a must-have. The thing is, you may not want to compromise quality in order to get a surround-sound setup. In any case, the MegaWorks 2.1 2500s are great. They are THX certified; plus, the subwoofer kicks.

BUDGET PICK

- ▶ **Logitech Z-640**
 \$80
 Logitech

If you absolutely have to have a surround-sound setup, then you'll like the Z-640s. They lack all of the connections that the Z-680s boast, but you'll still be pleased with the sound.

Gadget



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

OUR PICK

- ▶ **Creative Zen Touch**
 \$270
 Creative Labs

Creative's development model seems to be "wait for Apple to do something, then do it better." Hey, that's fine with us. The Zen Touch has a 10GB hard drive, 24 hours of battery life, USB 2.0 support, and plays both MP3 and WMA files.



COMPONENTS

Ever see the inside of a computer case that hasn't been dusted out in five years? Let's just say that it isn't a pretty sight.

Case



PRODUCT

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

TOWER PICK

- ▶ **TAC-T01-ETC**
 \$150
 Cooler Master

This case is still our favorite, but because it's pretty heavy, it's not the best choice for the LAN-party crowd. Either way, though, its industrial design looks plenty cool.

ALTERNATIVE POWER SOURCE

- ▶ **Shuttle SB81P**
 \$300
 Shuttle

Wimpy power supplies are a major problem for small form-factor cases. Shuttle hopes to fix this with the SB81P. Designed for what Shuttle calls "high voltage" computing, the SB81P boasts Intel's latest: the 915 chipset.

Fast Forward

Welcome to Fast Forward, our monthly catch-all hodgepodge of PC-gaming randomness. This month: our dream cast for *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* and more!


CASTING COUCH

We cast the *KOTOR* movie!


Oh boy—*Star Wars Episode III* has a name now! *Revenge of the Sith*! We're so not excited! While once upon a time this news might have made our geeky little hearts leap with joy, now, after suffering through two abominable movies, we just kind of want to curl up into a ball and cry. That's why we're here at CGW: we're casting our own *Star Wars* movie: *Knights of the Old Republic*. As we and everyone else has said numerous times, BioWare's awesome *Star Wars* RPG—CGW's 2003 Game of the Year—told the best *Star Wars* story since the original movie trilogy. So here's how we'd cast the *KOTOR* movie. Do you have better ideas? Let us know!




Justin Theroux as Carth Onasi
Calm and composed, Carth Onasi is a career soldier and skilled pilot determined to take down the Sith threat. Justin Theroux isn't a household name, but he does the brooding thing well, most recently on *Six Feet Under*. *Alien* *Billboard* is just too old now.



Kate Beckinsale as Bastila Shan
Bastila is an incredibly gifted but impulsive and brash Jedi who exudes strength and authority with a bit of a dark edge. British actress Kate Beckinsale, who almost redeemed *Underworld* as a hot vampire warrior, definitely gets the nod here.



Kurt Russell as Canderous Ordo
Every *Star Wars* movie needs its roguish tough guy, and Canderous Ordo is the one in *KOTOR*—he's a Mandalorian mercenary with lots of blood on his hands. So this role goes to Kurt Russell, who will forever owe us, thanks to his godlike turn as Snake Pliskens in *Escape From New York*.



Larry David as Jolee Bindo
Jolee Bindo is the cranky old man of the Jedi order, a cunning man who has gone into exile because, well, he hates everyone. Which leads us directly to *Curse Your Soul* star Larry David—America's newest villain hero.

Wii's PICKS 



Madden NFL 2005
The best videogame franchise ever just keeps on getting

better, and lately, I can't get enough of the nearly gold version of *Madden NFL 2005*. What more can I say?



Call of Duty
I loved this game when it first came out, and I still can't get enough of it. While the

multiplayer leaves a lot to be desired (it feels like a sniperfest), the single-player experience is still compelling.



Ghost Recon
I know *Ghost Recon 2* is about to come out. But until then, I'll

make do with the original. This game is infinitely replayable. Think you're a badass? Try completing the entire game solo.

Rewind 100

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

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
<i>Across the Deep</i>	04/04	★★★☆☆
<i>American Army: Special Forces v3.0</i>	03/04	★★★★★
<i>Armed and Dangerous</i>	01/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Azura: Fate of the Ages</i>	10/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Battle Engine Aquila</i>	04/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Battlefield Vietnam</i>	06/04	★★★★★
<i>Beaeger</i>	09/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Beyond Divinity</i>	08/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Beyond Good & Evil</i>	03/04	★★★★★
<i>Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre</i>	04/04	★★★★★
<i>Blade and Sword</i>	04/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Broad</i>	01/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Chaos Legion</i>	08/04	★★★☆☆



<i>City of Heroes</i>	08/04	★★★★★
<i>Crusader Kings II: Conquests</i>	04/04	★★★★★
<i>Combat Missions: Africa Corps</i>	04/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Conspicuous</i>	05/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Counter-Strike: Condition Zero</i>	03/04	★★★★★
<i>Crusader Kings</i>	08/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm</i>	08/04	★★☆☆☆
<i>CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Motives</i>	08/04	★★★★★
<i>Dead Man's Hand</i>	08/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Dead to Rights</i>	04/04	★★★☆☆
<i>Desert Bots vs. Africa Corps</i>	02/04	★★★★★
<i>Devil May Cry 2: Invisible War</i>	03/04	★★★☆☆



Steve Buscemi as HK-47
HK-47 is a thin, wiry badass of a droid, a take-no-guff robot with attitude. For us, there's only one choice here: Steve Buscemi, the *Reservoir Dogs/Sopranos/Fargo* star, who could call humans "meatbags" with the appropriate sneer and disgust.



Hilary Duff as Mission Vao
Mission is a perky, quick-witted Twi'lek girl—street-smart and charming in that yappy, girly way. Hilary Duff has the kind of teeny-bopper spunk that this role needs, and she'll still look pretty cute, even with the blue makeup and freaky head.



Vin Diesel as Dark Maul
Dark Maul is a bald, brutal, arrogant former Jedi, now a Sith lord intent on conquering the galaxy. Vin Diesel gets the nod here, not just for the perfect resemblance, but also because he has the kind of geek cred that a movie with Lerry David is going to need.



Ron Perlman as Zaalbar

Mission: Impossible's best friend is an 8-foot-tall lumbering Wookiee by the name of Zaalbar. This hairy beast does your basic *Star Wars* double duty as muscle and furry cuddle toy. The role belongs to Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*), basically because he now gets every beast role ever until he dies. Just look at the guy.



Jennifer Garner as Jynara
Hot-tempered and passionate, Jynara battles Sith bad guys as well as her own inner demons. Jennifer Garner brings the same kind of fiery angst to her role as Ailee, but she gets the role only if we can get her to wear leather. Hey, it's our movie. We make the rules.



LISTMANIA!

Four publishers to keep an eye on

EA wasn't always the EA we know today. Like everybody else, they started somewhere. These four publishers may not have the same level of name recognition, but they're worth your time and money every bit as much as the big guys are.



1. NovoLogic

www.novologic.com

NovoLogic is quickly developing a reputation for high-quality tactical action games. It recently made a big splash with *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*, and its recent *Black Hawk Down* efforts (notably, *Team Sabre*) have been pretty solid as well.



2. Tri Synergy

www.trisynergy.com

You may not know the name, but that's not surprising, since Tri-Synergy takes a low-key approach to publishing in an effort to yield most of the limelight to its games' developers. The company has been responsible for such bites as *The Longest Journey* and *Port Royale*.



3. Bethesda Softworks

www.bethsoft.com

Best known for its *Elder Scrolls* franchise of role-playing games, Bethesda also holds the license for the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired *Call of Cthulhu* series, and the company recently announced that it is developing and publishing the eagerly anticipated *Fallout 3*.



4. Shrapnel Games

www.shrapnelgames.com

Shrapnel Games is the kind of publisher that appeals to a certain type of gamer—that is, the hardest of the hardcore strategy-game fans. Fans like freelancer Bruce Geryk, who wrote an entire tutorial for *Dominions II* because it is so damned complicated.

CGW GAME DESIGN 101

Medieval Lords of Tennis

In the somewhat world that is CGW, we tend to see quite a bit of bizarre things on our Microsoft Outlook appointment calendars from time to time. Case in point: A few months ago, we were shown back-to-back press demos of indie creator's Medieval Lords: Build, Defend, Survive and G1 Entertainment's World Championship Tennis. Somehow, this meeting made its way onto our calendar as Medieval Lords of Tennis. The more we think about it, the better it sounds.

Picture this: Four armored knights run around on a medieval tennis court, leading severed heads perched on their heads. The game's head might not get the same degree of respect as the usually possessed head, but the angled wheelcut from that crucial joystick has obviously makes it drop at a steeper angle. Think of the strategy involved here.

Then there are all the little bits and wrinkles, such as the heavy physics-issue announce, the variable game levels, and as the hot dancers cheering you on from the stands. And it's not forget the obligatory career mode, where you compete to become the Tennis King. Hey, it'll not be Wimbledon, but it sure beats nothing.



Rewind100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	04/04	★★☆☆
Painkiller	07/04	★★★★
Pat Romanzo	03/04	★★★★
Parasector	02/04	★★★☆☆
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	03/04	★★★★
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	05/04	★★★☆☆
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	03/04	★★★★
Sacred	03/04	★★★☆☆
Secret Wars: Over the Border	05/04	★★★☆☆
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	04/04	★★★☆☆
Sirek 2	06/04	★★★★
Sirek Hell 3	05/04	★★☆☆
Slant Storm	04/04	★★★☆☆
Slingshot: Pilot Up Your Life	03/04	★★★☆☆



Slingshot: Secret Wars	10/04	★★☆☆
Splitter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	06/04	★★★★
Squad Assault: Western Front	03/04	★★★☆☆
Star Chamber	05/04	★★★★
Syberia II	05/04	★★★★
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	05/04	★★★☆☆
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	04/04	★★★☆☆



The Suffering	10/04	★★★☆☆
Thief: Deadly Shadows	05/04	★★★★
Title Beat Championship Boxing	05/04	★★★★



Rewind100

GAME ISSUE RATING



TrackMania	10/04	★★★★
Tropez 2004	04/04	★★★★
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	09/04	★★★½



Universal Combat	10/04	★★★★
Live! Tournament 2004	06/04	★★★★
Vegas Tycoon	04/04	★★★★
Victory	05/04	★★★½
Virtual Skipper 3	10/04	★★★★
War Times	06/04	★★★½
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	07/04	★★★½
Warlords: Battlecry III	09/04	★★★★
Wet & Worry: Jom of Arc	05/04	★★★½



World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International	10/04	★★★★
Worms 3D	06/04	★★★½
X2: The Threat	03/04	★★★★
X-Plane 7.00	04/04	★★★★
You Don't Know Jack—The Last Gold	06/04	★★★½

HIGH SCORE

Our favorite things at IUP.com

Hey guys! Check out our ever-expanding gaming community at IUP.com, where you can create a journal, track your game collection, build a network of friends, and chat with other CGW readers. You can even join our club at cgwfans.IUP.com/club and let us know which clubs, blogs, and goofy pictures you'd like to see on this page each month.

FEATURED BLOG

Zoe Flower
"Zoe's Corner"Randy Larkins
Current Poster: 12795
Serial Poster: 22795Zoe Flower
<http://zoefflower.IUP.com/>

Zoe Flower is an accomplished writer, producer, Web designer, and television personality, as well as a frequent contributor to our sister magazine, GPM. She's also got one of the most entertaining blogs on IUP.com.

CLUB OF THE MONTH

Unicorn Club <http://unicom.IUP.com/club/>

Club founder and *X&Y* managing editor Cindy Lum describes it best: "Um, we...talk about unicorns, and post pictures of unicorns, and write about our unicorn sightings. You should join!"

STUPID
PICTURE
OF THE
MONTH

THIS IS WHAT'S CURRENTLY LISTED AS "ROBERT COFFEY'S DESKTOP PICTURE" AND THAT'S ALL WE'VE GOT TO SAY ABOUT THAT!

"So now that I'm a member of the CGW Fans United club, when can I get my CGW: FU! T-shirt?"
—ARCADIAN DEL SOL

WHAT'S UP WITH IUP?

A few words from IUP.com's editor-in-chief

By now, many of you have started your own pages on IUP, and if you have, there's a good likelihood I've run across them. You see, I try to make it a habit to explore the many user pages of IUP for at least a good hour or so each day—not only to get a sense of what people like or dislike about the site, but also to see what sorts of gamers we're attracting. I've actually been pretty amazed so far. Yeah, for the most part, I'll come across 18- to 24-year-old gamers who are into *Battlefield*, *Final Fantasy XI*, *Family Guy*, and *The Simpsons*. No big surprise there. But then there are those users who totally catch me off guard. For example, there's Ravi Hienand (flower.IUP.com) from Hong Kong, who actually took the time to document a whole series of virtual soccer games on his blog, following his Liverpool FC team in *Winning Eleven*. Or Raychal Moore (raychal.IUP.com), a hot 23-year-old model who loves using her page to chat about games she's been testing...and to show off her sexy pics. And then there's Bev McClain (gamelegamer.IUP.com), a 58-year-old CGW reader who's as hardcore about games as you or I. Who knew? Certainly not me—but it's folks like these that have really made the new IUP that much more fun to visit. Sam Kennedy <http://capnsmack.IUP.com/>



SOUND OFF

CGW's readers speak up

Think you're clever? Got some good game suggestions? Just want to share your two cents? Give us a holler, and you just might show up in the pages of a future Sound Off.



CAPTION CONTEST

Do our captions suck? Think you can come up with something wittier? E-mail your caption for this *City of Heroes* screenshot to cgwletters@ziffdevs.com with the subject "November Caption Contest," and you just might win a brand-new copy of *Doom 3*!

POLL OF THE MONTH

Hit up our forums at <http://boards.1UP.com> and vote in our monthly poll.

They're both great!

20%

Nvidia:
40%

ATI
40%

Nvidia or ATI?

DESERT ISLAND GAMES

You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...which ones? E-mail us at cgwletters@ziffdevs.com with the subject "Desert Island Games" and let us know which games you'd choose and why.



Ultima Online (pre-Renaissance expansion): UO was one of those games that made me shun the outside world. I could play this forever.



SimCity 4: Only thing better than living in civilization? Building your own!



Final Fantasy XI: My current MMO obsession. With a great expansion and another one on the way, this game could keep a person busy for quite a long time.



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic: The game can be played over and over again—there's just so much to do in it.



Tetris: A minute to learn, a lifetime (on a deserted island) to master.

Ryan Higgins
Sunnyvale, CA

Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins



Bruce's strategy: The optimal strategy is to build a cheese candidate with mixed-out stamina, experience, and fundraising. But Tom wanted to roleplay, so we agreed to limit those stats. I'm not going to kid myself. Regardless of who wins, I don't expect to last 30 minutes past the closing of the polls. Like his hero Joseph Stalin, Tom is already cranking up the boxcars that will be sending political dissidents to Alaska. My job is not so much to win or lose, but to make a statement to the world, which the UN will ignore because I haven't paid them any money. At least I was able to successfully reject Tom's call for UN election monitors.

Tom's strategy: Having actually played a reporter on *The West Wing*, I think I have an enormous advantage in the media, so I boost my media bias to 90. This is helpful for swaying independents who might think, "Hey, I've seen that guy in the White House before! He must belong there!" Conversely, being a dorky white guy, I lower my minority appeal to 3. Unfortunately, Bruce is from Michigan, a state with 17 electoral votes, while I'm from Arkansas, a state with only six electoral votes. But if Clinton can do it, so can I.

Bruce, week 1: My strategy will be to use

the war on terror as a key issue. This means an early grab for the National Foreign Policy Committee endorsement, which requires sitting in one place for a while to gather the necessary political capital.

Tom, week 3: In the first weeks of the campaign, I spend most of my starting money building big, fancy headquarters in lots of states that I would love dearly, even if they didn't have lots of electoral college votes. Honest!

BRUCE GERYK SUPPORTS THE WAR IN IRAQ.



Bruce, week 4: The foreign policy endorsement boosts my stance on war. Most states start with the war on terror and the war in Iraq among their primary issues. Since everyone supports the war on terror, and since Republicans and most independents support the war in Iraq, my



Bruce at home in the Great Lakes state.

job will be to keep these issues in the public eye.

Tom, week 7: Just as it's important to get my awareness levels up, it's also important to squelch Bruce's lies about how he'd make a better president than me. To this end, I gather enough political capital to hire a squad of three intimidators, who do less-than-savory things to lower your opponent's awareness in a state. Imagine a group of thugs coming to your door to persuade you that you've never heard of Bruce Geryk. That's what these guys do.

Bruce, week 8: Tom's going to do his intimidator trick again. Time to shift some operatives around to preempt them.



Tom

This month, Tom and Bruce vie for the U.S. presidency, creating themselves as candidates in Starbuck's *The Political Machine*. Heaven help us all.

Bruce



Build these babies early to spread the word and bring in the Benjamins.

Tom, week 12: I'm all for the war on terror—as are most Americans, since the issue is ranked as No. 1 among voters, 83 percent of whom think Bruce would manage it better. But I need to remind everyone that there are other important things going on. Like, say, let's take a look at the national polls...crime. So my first TV ad explains that I favor fighting crime, which catapults it to the No. 1 spot. I fly to Pennsylvania—whose 21 electoral votes are a very shiny bauble for a presidential candidate—to give a speech on the subject. Now two out of three voters think that I'm a better crime fighter than Bruce Geryk. I take to wearing a cape at my campaign appearances.

Bruce, week 13: Tom has brought his own war hero to Virginia to match the one I already have there. Unfortunately for him, mine served honorably in WWII and Korea, while his was part of Gen. Vlasov's army. Due to the game not taking into account what happens if your war hero is also a war criminal, our heroes cancel each other out.



Special interests come calling!

Tom, week 14: You're going to be hearing a lot more of this stuff about how I'm a Soviet, which is evidence that Bruce sees no difference between a Democrat and a Communist. I don't know how he smooth-

talked the ladies at the National Association of Women into endorsing him, but I need to immediately counter it with an endorsement of my own. So I hang out for two turns, gathering the political capital to bring the National Union Action Network to my side. This pro-labor stance helps me in all those Great Lakes states where Bruce's Republican propaganda is giving him a lead among the blue-collar set.

Bruce, week 17: Now I get the ACLU endorsement. This helps me on freedom of speech but hurts me on prayer in schools, which seems completely contradictory. But whatever, it's another endorsement Tom can't get. Not that there would be any freedom of speech in Tom Chuck's gulags anyway.

Tom, week 18: I have a disastrous appearance on the O'Malley Scenario. In coming out against reparations to slaves and in favor of women in the military, I somehow manage to alienate independent voters. What's up with those people? Didn't they see me on *The West Wing*?

Bruce, week 20: Tom's O'Malley Scenario appearance is causing major problems for him. In it, he answers a question wholly in Russian, and at another point, one of his advisors is seen threatening the show's host with a Kalashnikov. Because this is simply how Tom's political heroes do business, he can't figure out why he alienated anyone. It doesn't matter, though—anyone he alienated will eventually be working in Alaskan labor camps.



Tom, week 22: I've recently grabbed the National Gun Owners Association and Christian Confederation endorsements, which is kind of backward. Bruce and I are straying from our political bases, but it's Bruce's fault for grabbing the endorsements. I wanted Far my VP. I chose Edwards to shore up support in North Carolina. While I'm fighting for Texas and Florida, I send him off to campaign in the Midwest, partly because I need more support there, but also because he creeps me out. He looks like Sam Neill in *Omen III*.

Bruce, week 22: I choose Dick Cheney as my running mate. I'm not abandoning him just because some wackos irrationally hate Haliburton. He'll start spreading awareness in Wyoming and the adjacent

states, which players tend to ignore until late because they are worth so few electoral votes.

Tom, week 24: I hire a smear merchant to spread rumors about Bruce wearing spandex pants and hating puppies. Meanwhile, I'm using Texas as the home base for my TV ad campaign, where I've saved up almost \$2 million while waiting to see what issues Bruce wants to push. He's clearly chosen the war on terror and the lack of jobs as his talking points; they're ranked No. 1 and No. 2 among voters, and he's got a healthy lead in both issues. Time to fix that with four TV ads in one turn: I favor the war on terror, Bruce opposes the war on terror; I favor more jobs, Bruce opposes more jobs. Bam, bam, bam, bam! The next turn, I pass him on his own talking points and shoot up in the polls, with 434 projected electoral votes to Bruce's 304. But I need to keep my lead without ignoring the other issues. For instance, he's still me on "fighting crime," which is still lingering in the top five issues. I hand over my cape.



Home of the Democratic media machine!

Bruce, week 25: I get a heckler and put him in Texas, which seems to be Tom's base of operations for everything. Interestingly, Tom's headquarters in that state is based in Moscow, Texas.



When you want to send a webmaster home, this guy is the go-to man.

Tom, week 29: With a moneyman I found in Montana, I hold two consecutive fundraisers in California, which gets me over a half a million dollars. I fly back to Texas to place more ads, but Bruce's heckler is making my ad placement difficult. Since this is a cornerstone of my

strategy, I can't have that annoying little guy here. So I bring in a fixer to make the heckler "disappear."

Bruce, week 30: Two can play the fixer game. Tom has hired a webmaster in Texas to keep the cost of his ads down and to oversee the conversion of campaign contributions from rubles to dollars. I send my own fixer to gently persuade the webmaster to go back to work making Doom 3 mods. This should increase Tom's fixed costs significantly and require him to fly in another plane-load of currency from Shermatyevu.



Florida. Can't live with it...can't kill it.

Tom, week 32: I can't afford to pay the full price for ad maintenance in Texas, and Bruce can't afford to leave it alone, so we're hiring dueling sets of replacement webmasters taken out by fixers. I can do this as long as he wants, because I'm ahead in Florida and Pennsylvania by two points. California and Texas are dead heats, but I should be OK on the West Coast if I can offset Bruce's lying pro-environment ads.

Bruce, week 33: The essential late-game strategy is to recruit political operatives to toe the balance in the toss-up states, so I finally give up trying to sabotage Tom's



webmasters. Instead, I start spending political capital on spin doctors and smear merchants—since they can be moved around for free. I micromanage the situation for optimal placement.

Tom, week 34: As evidence of the occasional incompetence that mars any political campaign, I build a campaign headquarters in North Carolina. (But somehow, a headquarters is accidentally built in Oklahoma. I immediately fire my campaign manager. Seeing as how I am both

the campaign manager and the candidate, I immediately retire myself.



Bruce, week 34: I go for the Florida TV double whammy on Social Security: I love it, Tom hates it. The problem with negative ads is that they work more slowly than positive ads, so they're best placed early on. Right now, though, with the game so close, I need to do whatever I can to knock Tom down in Florida.

Tom, week 35: Nationally, I'm leading as the candidate most in favor of the environment. But Bruce has misinformed California so egregiously that they support him as the pro-environment candidate. It's sheer lunacy. He doesn't even drive a hybrid!

Bruce, week 36: Tom just gave a speech in California about the importance of the environment, which ends up helping me since I've advertised so effectively. That's 55 electoral votes closer to being mine. With so much of the Midwest also on my side, it's going to be close.



Tom, week 38: I just won a lot of support on the O'Malley Scenario by taking on Bruce's nonsense about the liberal media and Hollywood political activists. But I'm out of money, and my advertising maintenance is eating up all of my income. A spin doctor in California gives me a four-point lead.

Bruce, week 40: Tom's smear merchant in Florida knocks me down to 39 percent. He has 41 percent.

Tom, week 41: I place a last-minute newspaper ad in Pennsylvania saying that Bruce wants to outsource everyone's jobs. Then I settle in to watch the returns.

This just in: Tom Chick has narrowly defeated Bruce Geryk in the presidential



election, winning 297 electoral votes to Geryk's 241. In the popular vote, Chick led with 52,444,000 votes to Geryk's 48,890,000 votes. Geryk's campaign spent \$21.99 million to Chick's \$17.66 million, but Chick was the clear leader in gathering political favors, hiring operatives, and winning endorsements, using 76 points of political capital to Geryk's 42.

Among the results, Chick carried Texas in a landslide, while Geryk edged out a surprise win in California by three percentage points. Chick won Florida 56 percent to 43 percent, but Geryk won the latter fighting in Pennsylvania at 57 percent to 42 percent.

GERTY POLLS			
	CHICK	GERYK	DIFF
Electoral College	297	241	+56
Popular Vote	52,444,000	48,890,000	+3,554,000
California	52%	48%	+4%
Florida	56%	43%	+13%
Illinois	51%	49%	+2%
Michigan	50%	50%	0%
Minnesota	50%	50%	0%
North Carolina	49%	51%	-2%
Ohio	48%	52%	-4%
Pennsylvania	57%	43%	+14%
Texas	56%	43%	+13%
Virginia	50%	50%	0%
Washington	50%	50%	0%
Wisconsin	50%	50%	0%

Exit polls showed voters' top issues were, in order of importance, the war on terror (56 percent of voters favored Chick), more jobs (51 percent favored Chick), fighting crime (61 percent favored Geryk), and the environment (83 percent favored Chick).

Bruce's concession speech: Tom Chick is a Communist. There may not be another Tom vs. Bruce article once Tom's terror machine gets rolling.

Tom's victory speech: Thank you, America, for not believing Bruce Geryk. I will now appoint my three intimators to cabinet-level positions. California, since you have betrayed me, I present you as a gift to Mexico. Pennsylvania also betrayed me, so effective immediately, its new name will be The State of Dingleberry. Finally, since Bruce has to get up early to go to work in the morning, our victory party will be held at his house. Thank you and good night. ☺



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PHASE ONE

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