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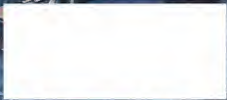
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■ COVER STORY

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TECH



TITAN QUEST



RISE & FALL



CITY LIFE



TOM VS. BRUCE

THIS MONTH
ON IUP.COM



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Hello and welcome...to the weekly CGWR Radio podcast! Crank the volume and hear what the intrepid editorial staff has to say about all things PC gaming-related.

CGW_GIZMO.1UP.COM

CGW senior nerd...er, editor Darren Gladstone has plenty to say about Prey, Titan Quest, and lots of other games he plays while ignoring deadlines.

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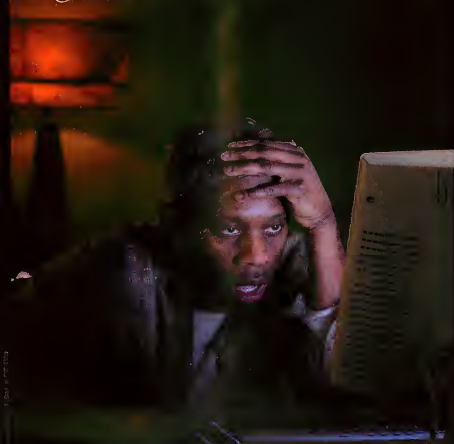
Check out this month's Hall of Fame inductees, then head on over to 1UP.com to browse a comprehensive archive of all our past entries!

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ISSUE 266

LETTERS

GIVING US
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LETTER OF THE MONTH



▲ Cute puppies make everyone forgive Mercedes Misan ads!

I just got a trial issue of your magazine (issue #264), and the first two ads let me know that women are not wanted as subscribers. If this is not the case, then please rethink what statement you're making to readers when the first ad in the magazine (Condemned: Criminal Origins) has a female mannequin with her face removed and the next ad (Hitman: Blood Money) shows a naked woman murdered in her bathtub.

Skelly

Skelly, we've been saying the same thing for months now about every single one of those awful Hitman ads. We don't control the ad content, though—we just make the magazine. Hey, at least it's better than the blatant phone sex ads that ran in CGW way back in the day, right?

BEST TEA CEREMONY EVER

I couldn't help but notice the part in July's *Spinner Cell* cover article where writer Robert Ashley mentions that he paid 15,000 RMB (renminbi) (or, as he says, \$200 USD) for a "tea ceremony." 15,000 RMB would actually convert to approximately \$2,000 USD (or less, thanks to a declining dollar). Basically the USD-to-RMB exchange rate is 1.8 (give or take). I hope Robert didn't pay 15,000 RMB for the drinks—that's a lot of party money...or money in general, for that matter.

Jason (writing from Shanghai)

Contributing editor Robert Ashley responds: "Whoops! Yes, it should have said 1,500 RMB. It only showed up on my credit card bill as U.S. dollars, but certainly

not \$2,000. I'm a sucker, but (thankfully) I can still make the rent."

MR. DO

On page 26 of the August 2006 issue, on the 26th and 27th lines of the second column of the main article, the sentence you printed read, "You can do pretty much do anything you want." This is an obvious breach of the common rules of the English language. Take out one of the iterations of the word "do" to correct this egregious error.

Wow, I get such a sense of self-satisfaction from noticing that and chastising your editing department. It's so much better than lone ansp-ing in *Battlefield 2*!

Grammar Communist

(because we aren't all Nazis, after all)

You may not all be Nazis, but you sure are all annoying. Editors who am speak bad FTW!

CONSOLITIS

I recently purchased the original *Call of Duty* and loved the game so much that I dug up my January 2006 copy of CGW to read the full review of its sequel, *Call of Duty 2*. After I saw the rating (4 stars), I bought the game...and during the setup, I noticed a few settings missing from my usual collection of look/move/shoot options. I thought nothing of it as I began playing, but gradually, over the course of the first few missions, I realized that COD2 was designed for console gamers, which explains its use as a launch title for the Xbox 360.

Consoles suck! I slowly began to hate COD2's checkpoint-style save system, its "find cover and heal" health system, and—worst of all—a

weapons system that allows two weapons with a same-key toggle. At any rate, this console-style gameplay was off-putting, but I fought through it and finished the game anyway. Where was COD2 reviewer Robert Colley's head when he wrote this article? He made no mention of these shortcomings (except for the health issue...which he touted as a benefit).

I agree that the star-rating system sucks, and I am glad you got rid of it. But you have to relay all of the needed information to us, or we will make bad decisions based on your articles. Lay out all of the details in a well-written review so we can make decisions based on the pros and cons noted in the article. But dammit, people, make sure we have all of the relevant information!

Stephen Todd

We feel your pain—senior editor Darren Gladstone even rants about it a bit in his column this month. But as curmudgeonly as we CGW folks are, even we can't deny that console influence is inevitable, especially now that the PC-and-Xbox-connecting Live Anywhere is on its way. Robert's accepted it, too—apparently more than he realizes.

HIGRE ARTE

So you drop numeric ratings in order to come closer to the True Ideal of the High Art of Computer Game Reviews... annoying to me, but acceptable. After all, the *New Yorker* doesn't give numeric ratings in its movie reviews, and I'm all for self-improvement. However, immediately following this high-minded decision, in a blatantly apparent fit of noodle-spined obsequiousness, you post numeric ratings from other sources to quell the growing ire from your outraged readers. And now you're quoting other reviewers in your own reviews. If I want to read tidbits, I'll scan the boxes at the local electronics store...and if I want to read reviews from other magazines, I'll buy those magazines. Don't tempt me!

Jason Drury



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"Where the f--- is the CGW pod...?"
—wtf10

"I feel us if a Feels/ind sp all has been cast on me."
—Alex Nikolayov

"I can't wait for a virus to spread from PCs to Xbox 360s through Live Anywhere. I think that'll be great."
—Laugh, lolzme

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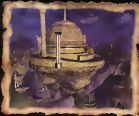




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ISSUE 266

1995-1997

Quits gigs as playwright and Paramount screenwriter to join Looking Glass Studios. Works on initial design and story concepts of *Thief: The Dark Project*.



1997

Leaves Looking Glass with Jon Chey and Rob Furrer to form Irrational Games.



1997-1999

Serves as lead designer of *System Shock 2*, still considered one of the scariest (if not the scariest) games ever made.



1999-2002

Designs critically acclaimed superhero roleplayer *Freedom Force*.



2002-2005

Becomes Irrational's creative director and general manager, with Tibbo: *Vengeance*, *Freedom Force vs. the 3rd Platoon*, and executive produces *SWAT 4*.



THE CGW INTERVIEW: KEN LEVINE

Actually quite rational BY SEAN MOLLOY



EXCLUSIVE

Age of Empires III: The WarChiefs

What does human sacrifice have to do with the AOE3 expansion's new civilization?

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Islamogaming

War games from the Middle Eastern perspective.

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PREVIEW

World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade

Shamans in the Alliance? Paladins in the Horde? WTF!

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INTERVIEW

CGW: Thief, Freedom Force, SWAT 4, Tribes: Vengeance, BioShock—you've been all over the map when it comes to genres. Obviously, something else binds these games together—what's the common thread?

Ken Levine: I think the common thread is...give the player as much freedom as possible. Let him determine how he's going to play the game. Not a single game in that list works like a traditional FPS or strategy game. They all let the player choose loadouts, characters, et cetera, and those choices define the player's tactics. Also, they all play out very differently from player to player. Of course, some games—System Shock 2, Freedom Force, BioShock—give you much more freedom than the other ones. I enjoy working on those more.

CGW: Which of those was hardest for you to wrap your head around?

KL: Tribes: Vengeance. We never found the groove on that game. The franchise doesn't allow for a huge amount of player choice in the single-player design. If I were to do it again...I don't think it's a project I should have done.

CGW: Despite the wide range of genres, we see a notable drought of Doom-style cyberdemons when we look at your body of work. Which is scarier: monsters or people?

KL: Didn't Sam Raimi say it best? "Hell is other people?" See, Mom—four years at Viscera was worth something. The reason Psycho had such a huge impact on people is because it brought horror home. Gone were the gothic castles and angry villagers. Horror was just down the street. There's a reason games like SS2 and BioShock use very "realistic" characters and believable settings. I'll take The Shining over Hellmiser any day.

CGW: Storytelling is important in your work, but, at the same time, it always seems to come back to killing something—is that the unavoidable nature of modern gamemaking?

KL: I'm a games-first man. Stories come pretty late for traditional stuff to the dismay of my producers. I don't usually have the story in line until halfway through development. In fact, if you go back and look at the first previews for BioShock, the story line and setting was very, very different. As my punishment, BioShock's listing at GameStop.com still talks about Nazis and other story elements that have been gone for well over a year.

At the end of the day, we're here to serve the player. Gameplay has to work. If you can fit story to gameplay, it's going to be a better experience.

And I've got a message for game writers who put in unskipable cut-scenes: I hate you. You suck. Go write a graphic novel and leave us gamers alone. If you look at Irrational's games, we're big believers in allowing gamers to skip whatever they want and play the parts they enjoy. My goal as a writer is for the player to want to see the cut-scenes. Earn your audience. Forcing people to sit through your glorified fanfic is the gaming equivalent of date rape.

CGW: As a story-minded individual, what keeps you in games? Why not movies, screenwriting, comic books, novels?

KL: I've worked in every field you mentioned, and honestly, games are the most challenging for a writer. Comic books are the easiest because at least you have a partner—the artist—to pick up a huge amount of the slack, and b) there are zero constraints. You can do anything you want in a comic. Every time you want something in a game, somebody has to build the damn thing, animate, program it, et cetera.

It also takes forever to see anything you create in games come to fruition. We started working on BioShock five years ago. I was in my mid-30s. I'm going to be 40 when the damn thing comes out. Who knows? Maybe one day I'll go do those other things again.

CGW: Last month, we spoke with Tim Schafer about how developers are disinclined to attempt comedy because they can't precisely control the "timing" of player-controlled situations—and comedy, naturally, depends a great deal on timing. Do similar problems come with designing horror games—especially one like BioShock, built on open-ended "emergent" ideals?

KL: In our "funny" game, Freedom Force, we solved this problem by floating the entire Freedom Force universe on a layer of satirical cotton candy. There weren't a lot of "jokes" in the game. The whole world was the joke.

Horror's quite different from comedy. Freud said that comedy is derived from unfulfilled expectations. You don't expect the rabbit to be a penguin. Horror—at least the kind we do—is all about building expectations, about creating dread. Something terrible is around the corner. And it's coming. And you can't do anything to stop it.

CGW: We've read that you felt Deus Ex: Invisible War's artificial barriers were made more obvious because of the game's realistic setting, and people intuitively know Seattle doesn't look like it did in that game...

KL: It's not about fantasy—it's about constraints. Grand Theft Auto kept things at a level where you felt you could do everything you'd reasonably be able to do in that world, everything that makes sense. How did they do that? Well, first they built a genre world that felt complete and connected. But the smarter part was the things they didn't let you do, like how choices in conversation. Dialogue trees really are the most broken thing in gaming. They're

never satisfying; they never really wrangle you to express your will. I know the BioWare guys are taking the problem head-on in [DxDx 360 RPG] Mass Effect, and if anybody can crack it, it's them.

CGW: Ayn Rand and utopian ideals often come up in interviews with you...

KL: When it comes to philosophy, I go for the breakfast-buffet approach...a little bit of this, a little bit of that. BioShock is less about objectivism and more about extremism. When any philosophy gets taken too far, trouble follows. An ideology can never admit he or she is wrong, never admit any flaw in his or her philosophy. Rand had a bunch of great ideas—brilliant ideas, even—but at the end of the day, she was an ideologue.

CGW: BioShock is System Shock 2's "spiritual successor," but what's with the actual System Shock rights?

KL: For some reason, people think I know more about this than I do. We barely had any contact with EA during Shock 2. They weren't interested in that game. They weren't interested in a sequel. As a gamer, I'd love to see a Shock 3. I just hope EA believes in it more than they did Shock 2.

CGW: As someone who's explored alternative publishing methods with Freedom Force vs. The 3rd Reich, what do you think about deals such as Stardock's new third-party publishing or for smaller, self-funded developers?

KL: I think it's great, and I wish [Stardock president] Brad [Nardoff] and his team the best. The only future for niche-y games is online distribution. The dynamics at retail are all wrong for niche games. And since many of the games I enjoy playing are niche-y, I'm desperate for this strategy to succeed.

CGW: Some industry critics look at store shelves and see endless clones of whatever happened to be hot last holiday season; others look at shelves and see this as a time of creativity and innovation—how do you see it?

KL: The beginning of a console cycle is always a good time for innovation, because publishers hate to start franchises late in a cycle. Publishers are also more willing to invest in new PC games when consoles are either at the beginning or the end of their cycles—i.e., when gamers are buying fewer console games. So I think this post-E3 was a good opportunity for innovation, and the games pretty much bore that out: Mass Effect, Assassin's Creed, Crysis, BioShock, Spore—seven wow, funky Star Wars crap that wasn't even a game yet [referring to an impressive behind-closed-doors LucasArts tech demo—Ed]. And that crap got me a thousand times more excited than the by-the-numbers Episode I games that swarmed out of the gate a few years ago.

CGW: And finally, a Freedom Force showdown: Anti-Man versus El Diablo—who wins?

KL: Hank Pym is a degenerate wife-beater. El Diablo would fly his ass /

2005-Present

Currently working on BioShock, the "spiritual successor" to System Shock 2, set in an ill-fated, underground dystopia.



The Aztec WarChief increases the bounty earned by warriors in a surrounding radius, which means that an Aztec victory feeds itself with more shipments. ▾

ALL GROWN UP

Originally a small, developer-only, exclusive studio in Glendale, Ensemble has grown to surpassing 100 employees.

AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE WARCHIEFS

Dance Dance Evolution

PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios DEVELOPER: Ensemble Studios GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: October 2005

EXCLUSIVE

ODDS ARE, BEFORE AGE OF EMPIRES

It will, so much in a twinkling in your local game shop's endcap display. Ensemble was already plotting the expansion for the same reasons you can bet Betman Boggs wasn't billed *Betman's Only Encore*. Consistently in the top five best-selling U.S. PC games (and on plenty most-wanted lists before release), *Age of Empires III* can certainly claim parity with its franchise brethren. Now with two Native American civilizations—the Iroquois and Sioux—nalled down for *The WarChiefs* expansion, about half of your message-board pundits can take a bow: That's right, most civilization names three, like the Aztecs v2.0.

Making their encore appearance after a brief stint in *Age of Empires II: The Conquerors*, these Aztecs are definitely not your papa's pre-Columbian Mesoamericans. "The version of the Aztecs we had in *The Conquerors* really had just three unusual units," admits *WarChiefs* lead designer Sandy Petersen, referring to the Eagle Warrior (cavalry), Aztec Priest (infantry), and Jaguar Warrior (infantry). "Everything else was an ordinary Old World-stylin' unit—archers, halberdiers, and so on. The Aztecs even had trebuchets. In *The WarChiefs*, every Aztec unit is unique. Instead of trying to model them after Old World civilizations, we got to treat them as Native Americans, which is, of course, what they were."

Dominating central Mexico during the European Renaissance, the Aztecs were a technologically and culturally advanced civilization

usually remembered for being subjugated by Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortés, but perhaps more judiciously for their practice of human sacrifice. With *The WarChiefs*, Ensemble is definitely aiming for greater cultural fidelity, but don't look for bloody hill jabs anytime soon. "Human sacrifice wasn't really a military or economic aspect of their society," says Petersen, pointing out that, likewise, the game doesn't have Sunday Mass for the Roman Catholic European civs. "Human sacrifice does make a sort of cameo appearance in that the A.J. for the Aztec player is pretty ferocious, and the WarChief for the Aztecs provides double bounty for the soldiers under his command, rendering the Aztecs in general a pretty bloodthirsty lot when played right."

Since the Aztecs didn't evolve along European lines or adopt European tech (as the Iroquois and Sioux did), they look mounted and gunpowder troops, but Ensemble promises a wide assortment of interesting infantry and technologies. "The Aztecs got two basic groups of units," explains Petersen. "The War Hut units are cheap, weak, and available early in the game, whereas the Nobles Hut is a unique Aztec building similar to a more powerful War Hut, or perhaps even a mini-Fort. It produces the various Aztec nobles or Knights."

War Hut units include the Mechuahuitl (an inexpensive skirmisher armed with a sling), the Coyote Runner (a fast-rabote footman who acts as a sort of cavalry substitute), and the Puma Spearman (heavy infantry with a good bonus against buildings). Nobles Hut units get the famous Jaguar Warriors (now

rebranded the Jaguar Prowl Knights), Arrow Knights (long-range archers armed with flaming arrows), and Eagle Runner Knights (fast-moving infantry armed with darts, a sort of dart-throwing device). In addition, the Aztecs get Skull Knights, elite warriors who move slowly but pack a killer punch. "You can't train Skull Knights," adds Petersen, alluding to their extra bang in a battle. "You only get them via shipments or technologies."

The Aztecs' main civilization bonus lets their priests contribute directly to Firepit ceremonies, allowing players to fire up villagers from the dances to enhance production. "The natives in general tend to have powerful early attacks," explains Petersen, adding that the Aztecs in particular are mighty late-age players. "Their warrior priests are able to dance at the Firepit and count as two settlers while doing so, which means the Aztecs have potentially the most powerful Firepit in the game." The longer the game lasts, the more important and powerful the Firepit gets.

Compared to those of the Sioux and Iroquois, your mesh challenges when retraining the Aztecs will unsurprisingly hinge on early vs. late-game timing. "The Aztecs have a strong economy but aren't as deadly in the early game as the Sioux or Iroquois," says Petersen. "But they have a very strong late game and can hold up to a fourth-age European civilization quite effectively." What's stronger than a fourth-age European civ? Your expectations. See if they hold up in a few short months. / Matt Peckham

▶ **'HUMAN SACRIFICE DOES MAKE A SORT OF COME-UPPANCE IN THAT THE AI FOR THE AZTEC PLAYER IS PRETTY FEROCIOUS.'**

—SANDY PETERSEN, LEAD DESIGNER, ENSEMBLE



— Unlike the Iroquois and Sioux, the Aztecs lived in sprawling urban areas similar to European cities. "We feature such a metropolis in the view of the Aztec 'Tribal Council,'" says Petersen. "So you don't actually see the Messenger or War Women in the city view. However, they still control which shipments you receive, and the politicians controlling your rise through the Ages."



— A number of infinitely replenishable fourth-age home-city shipments help support the Aztec bounty bonus. "You can use all the extra shipments that are generated," says Petersen, "and you don't run out of shipments in the way that some other civs tend to."



MIA: S.TALKER.

Morning after the meltdown

PUBLISHER THQ DEVELOPER GSC Game World GENRE First-Person Shooter RELEASE DATE Spring 2007

PREVIEW

BACK IN 2003, WE DISCOVERED S.TALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl and hoped some American publisher would snap up the promising shooter. THQ became that company. The only problem is, three years later, we're still waiting. Meanwhile, rumors circulate about major changes and the possibility that the project is on the chopping block. We had a candid conversation with Dean Sharpe, the producer hired to help Ukrainian developer GSC Game World finish its forever-delayed morning-after-the-mushroom-cloud thriller. **Derren Gledstone**

CGW: And so those rumors regarding S.TALKER's fate...

Dean Sharpe: The fact that THQ was willing to ship me to Kiev for a year shows the company's commitment to the title.

CGW: So what happened? Were the original plans for S.TALKER too ambitious or too time-consuming?

DS: I think that S.TALKER suffered from wanting to be too many things to too many people. Everyone on the S.TALKER team wants it to be perfect. It's just that, at some point, you have to tie up the loose ends and make it as good as it can be with the time you have available. The guys at GSC Game World could probably work on this game for another number of years and still not be satisfied that they did all they could.

CGW: So what exactly happened? What needed to be changed?

DS: When I first came on board, I asked the team where we should focus our energy for the time we had left in development. The tough part comes from asking what things to remove. They come back with things they felt were not as fun or applicable to the game as they



— Says Vasily Vasilyevich: "Chernobyl will be decontaminated by the time we deploy!"

initially thought, but every feature that makes S.TALKER what it is has remained. Sleeping and eating, for example, were removed because they didn't add to the overall experience, not because of time constraints. Then there are the vehicles. We're making calls in the coming weeks to see if they add to the experience or [if they're] just an excuse for us to say, "Hey, we have vehicles in the game." Ultimately, I think you always shoot for the sky and then pull back as needed.

CGW: Early in development, S.TALKER was a showcase for Direct 9's capabilities. Now that Direct 10 is just around the corner, are you concerned that it may not hold up?

DS: We will ship with DX8 and DX9. With that said, I believe that the DX9 renderer holds up very well with other titles releasing with DX10. I didn't see anything at E3 this year any more graphically impressive than S.TALKER.

CGW: Seriously? Not even Crysis? What about S.TALKER—aside from its appearance—stands out so much?

DS: No question, the feel of the game. When I first played S.TALKER, it took me to a place that I had never been before. If you can make someone feel like they are actually there, then I think you've really accomplished something.

CGW: Here's the most important question: Vodka serves as a medkit in S.TALKER. Is it really the cure-all for a postmeltdown Chernobyl?

DS: Are you kidding? They think that right now! People here believe that vodka can truly heal just about any ailment. I have a really bad head cold right now, and my team swears a shot of peppered vodka would cure me. If I don't get better in a few days, then it's bottoms up.

POWER OF ONE

The sweet salvos of one-handed fragging

CULTURE

IF YOU BUMP INTO BARON CALAMITY online, fair warning: He's Johnny-on-the-spot in a Battlefield scrimmage, a shark at Counter-Strike, and a Team Fortress Classic wizard. But that's not all—he's pulling it off one-handed.

Meet Rob Merritt, aka "Baron Calamity" (and sometimes "Spider Ham"): IT engineer, amateur game designer and artist, 36-year-old dad, and videogame devotee living with a moderately disabling condition known as hemiplegia.

"Basically, my right side is mostly paralyzed, my right hand is 90 percent, and my right arm and leg are about 50 percent," he explains, describing the effects of complications resulting from a surgical procedure performed soon after he was born. At six months old, Merritt was diagnosed with a rare heart defect. During surgery to address the problem, he suffered several stroke-like attacks, causing significant damage to the left side of his brain and rendering the right side of his body partially immobile.

According to a June 2004 IGDA white paper, Merritt is one of 48 million people in the U.S. who identify themselves as disabled—but don't tell him that. Just 5 years old in 1974, he was introduced to videogames via the first home console, the legendary Magnavox Odyssey (which predated the home version of Atari Pong by three years), and he's owned just about everything since—be it handheld, console, or PC. And no, he doesn't use custom hardware when he's fragging. "I'm against special adaptive items like one-handed keyboards, because they rarely work as well as

you'd hope," he says, acknowledging tryets with what he calls "crazy controllers" (they ultimately ended up in a basement bin) and other toys that ranged from "good-but-leveled ideas" to "absolutely terrible."

His current act? "A Logitech MX1000 optical with eight buttons and a wheel," says Merritt. "The buttons give me everything I need for modern FPSes and third-person action games: I use the left button to fire, the right button to go forward, the middle button to go backward, the wheel to change weapons, the top-left button for alt-fire, the bottom-left button to duck, and the three minibuttons for extras, depending on the game." And he's just able to move his right arm enough to jam the space bar for jumps.

Playing around the spectrum, the only genre Merritt avoids is real-time strategy. "I can usually beat the single-player RTS campaigns," he says, adding he sometimes drops the difficulty to easy. "But online, you have to be a 'plano player' to compete, if you know what I mean." His big wish? "A reasonably priced footpedal that'll emulate the WASD keys end take a decent pounding." /Matt Peckham



▲ The eight-button Logitech MX1000 laser mouse Merritt uses to play both first- and third-person shooters.

FURTHER READING

Rob Merritt's Website
<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/rcmerritt>

Game Accessibility
www.accessibility.nl/games/index.php?pagefile=home

Gamesutra, "Improving Game Accessibility"
www.gamesutra.com/features/2005/09/blerre_01.shtml

D-Gamer, "Gaming for People with Disabilities"
<http://d-gamer.com/index.html>

It's the first time in my life that I've felt like I actually fit in. Or at least I'm happy now that I don't. Truly **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE** dedicated video **MANIAC**

who has found true fulfillment & that means

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So you had to learn how to create long hair with those spirit effects and cloth?



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Publisher: Midway
 Developer: Epic Games
 Genre: First-Person Shooter
 Platform: PC, Xbox 360



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

SPEED KILLS.

It isn't the stray shot from an Axon Hellbender (like the one chasing our boys here in Cisco Canyon) that'll ruin your day—benders are glorified Vorons for multiplayer soccer mums. What you want are the speed and sophisticated fins of a factory-fresh hoverbike, available at your local Necris dealership early next year.

Going from zero to 60 in under a second, while still managing to get 80 parasites to the gnilon, the '07 Necris Viper hoverbikes is the most agile ground/low-altitude vehicle, period. Of course, all Vipers still come standard with a front-mounted, rapid-fire energy weapon, but

we're throwing out all the stops this time around. Safety nuts and dardevil's alike will love the ability to boost, jump, spread the Viper's wings, and glide over huge chasms.

Also new for the '07 model is a finish- and armor-determining self-destruct sequence. So, whether you're being swiped or just want to take down a tank, all you need to do is set the timer—and make sure that you're out of the blast radius before your space toboggan goes boom. (No money-back guarantees!)

Still not sure the Viper is right for you? Come on in for a test drive and you may qualify for a low-interest loan! / Darren Gladstone

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COLUMN

FREELoader

Scoring free games without that icky "pirate" aftertaste



NOOOOOO! IT HAPPENED AGAIN. I HAD THAT SAME DAMN DREAM I'VE BEEN HAVING ALL week. And now that I'm scared s***less, I may as well stare at the ceiling and count the glow-in-the-dark stars arranged to look like the Conuscut Imperial City skyline. I just can't let myself fall asleep again. So what happened in my terrifying dream?

I got a job. Hey! What's so—knock it off! I'm being serious, man. Every September, school starts up and summer winds down. Something inside me realizes that other suckers have to work, and maybe one day, so will I. Yeah, everybody's got nightmares about shuffling TPS forms in some soul-crushing Office Space for the rest of their lives. But, dude, I can recall every line of *The Empire Strikes Back* from memory. I can play *Half-Life 2* from start to the finish of Episode One inside of one hour. I speak perfect Klingon, for christssake! I'm way overqualified for McDonald's spud patrol. Thank god it's just a dream. Skill, lying awake, I keep thinking of jobs I'd be good at: QA tester for *Lu-Z-Boy*, senior designer for *Postal 3*, Total Crap, Dobby's head speechwriter—anything's possible.

At least this explains the results of my most recent late-night freelance expedition. The good news is that the below games may actually help prepare me for my inevitable future. / The Freeloader

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THE GAME: Disaffected
FILE FRONT: [FILE FRONT](#)
100% FREE

FedEx Kinko's has one hell of a sense of humor. How else can you explain the employees? You've either got elitist college students or slack-ass potheads (where) that can't be bothered to do something more challenging than send e print order. Well, in the truest sense of parody—or, in my case, irony—this game has you shuffling papers and trying to satisfy customers at a branch of the infamous copy chain. Sounds easy, right? That's until you start dealing with your coworkers, who methodically undo all your hard work by putting job orders in the wrong place and screwing everything up. *Disaffected* plays a little like a half-baked cross between *Thumper* and *Diner Dash*. You want the truth, though? This game has given me a few ideas for my next temp job.



THE GAME: McDonald's
FILE FRONT: [FILE FRONT](#)
100% FREE

Not much of an action fan? Yeah, when I think FedEx Kinko's, I think action. What of it? Anyway, I've got a game where I'm running a multinational fast-food franchise into the ground. One thing the McDonald's game teaches is that there's more to business than a eatline clown selling chemically laced fries. This sim has you plow fields, slaughter cows, hawk burgers fresh off the assembly line, and then decide when to launch the kid-friendly campaigns to get more vict...er...customers in the front door. It's a little frantic jumping between the boardroom and the butcher, but the goofy *Plymobil* art style puts a really happy face on corporate greed and mad cow disease. And I wouldn't want it any other way.



THE GAME: Shao Lin Masters
FILE FRONT: [FILE FRONT](#)
100% FREE

I've always been pretty creative when it comes to thinking responsibly. But the Japanese, boy, those guys are Shao Lin masters of taking it to whole new levels of WTF?-ness. So here we have a game that has people using desk chairs to race around an office in fully rendered 3D. Yes, apparently the employees of the Okamoto Office Furniture Corporation kill time—and each other—and test out their products with a trippy *Mario* Office Kart racing circuit in the halls of the corporate HQ. "Honorable boss, race you and our mutant green penguin mascot to the water cooler and back! Hidden inside boxes around each "track" are little explosive mboos pit bu's that you can aim on the competition...y'know, just like in real life. Man, if offices were this awesome, I'd be a workaholic.

DEVELOPER'S DESKTOP

What games are they playing?



Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software, is a huge *World War II* buff. As we anxiously await *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, we wonder what else he'd like to reinstall on his PC...

COLOSSAL GAME ADVENTURE
"It's the first PC game I ever played and the second I learned to program and write games. *Colossal Cave Adventure's* mundane puzzles and logical maze paths forced me to dig into hex editors to discover secrets in the code. XYZZY!"

DOOM
"Doom converted me from an RPG guy to an action/shooter guy. I became a compulsive deathmatch junkie. Doom is also responsible for me giving up my silly pursuit of a career in law to chase my first love—game development."

CIVILIZATION
"I'm now partnered with one of the seven guys credited in the intro to *Civilization: Beyond Earth*. I met him when he joined *3D Realms* (the *Duke Nukem 3D* dev that helped me go pro), and on his first day, I asked: Why did he deserve to join the badass team? He started listing games he'd worked on in reverse order. By the time he got to *Civilization*, I was on the ground bowing to him."

HACK / NETHACK
"Hack is one of the founding fathers of the Rogue-like genre. I'd wish I had the bedazzled hours I spent on that game back—if I hadn't enjoyed myself so much. The earlier versions were filled with what are 'supposed to be' horrible game-design decisions, but the game stands as a classic example of how it's sometimes a good idea to ignore the 'rules' of design."

DIABLO
"There's always a better sword or a better suit of armor. The game's core interface requires no more skill than it takes to launch the game (put cursor over icon, click). That's its brilliance, I suppose."

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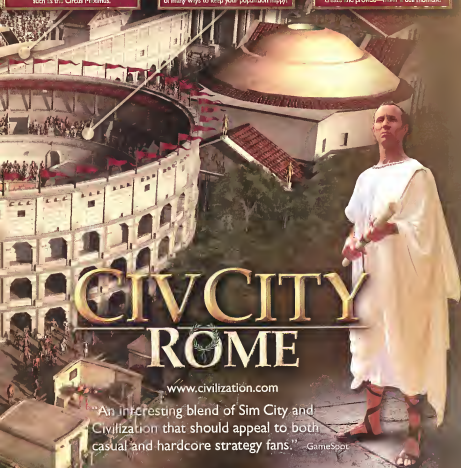
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CIVILIZATION ROME

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"An interesting blend of Sim City and Civilization that should appeal to both casual and hardcore strategy fans." GameSpot



Alcohol Reference
Mild Violence



BATTLESTATIONS!

A commander's-eye view of *Battlestations: Midway*



AIR RAID

Cripple the Japanese airfield with a couple of strafing runs. First, order your A.I.-controlled pilots to the target. Then, jump into the cockpit of one of your planes before bombing begins. Since the A.I. takes a defensive posture, you'll do more damage if you're in direct control.



IN THE NAVY

You sunk my battleship! One of the objectives in this match is to sink the IJN Fusō. Naval conflicts are obviously a huge part of *Battlestations: Midway*, and a great amount of detail went into crafting each ship (right down to the mini raucous around the boat to their stations). But this is no hardcore air/sea warfare simulator. In fact, the ship controls feel downright aceddy. Colored lights under the reticle indicate which guns are in position and ready to fire as you throttle up or down the speed. Our initial impression: It's surprisingly easy to get a handle on controlling ship-to-ship battles.

PLAYERS: Xbox DEVELOPER: Midas Games Action / Strategy RELEASE DATE: Spring 2007

IF DECEMBER 7, 1941 WAS A DAY DESTINED TO LIVE IN infamy, then June 4, 1942 was a day of reckoning. It was the beginning of the Battle of Midway, when the Japanese Empire tried to take Midway Atoll and effectively finish off the United States Pacific Fleet. But how do you re-enact that massive four-day battle, let alone the entire air/sea war of World War II's Pacific theater, within the confines of a PC game? In the case of *Battlestations: Midway*, developer Midas combined real-time tactics with the vehicular action of *Battlefield*. The game's tactical map

(below) lets players easily give orders to units and call upon new ones. After that, you're in direct control, jumping from cockpit to captain's chair in a variety of battleships, aircraft carriers, fighters, and bombers—more than 60 different vehicles in all.

Rather than dwell on the 11 missions in the single-player campaign (which ushers you from Pearl Harbor through to the war's bitter end) or the 12 additional challenge scenarios, let's instead peek at what you'll be facing in an eight-player multiplayer match. /Deren Gladstone



DEATH FROM ABOVE

The flight controls in *Battlestations: Midway* try to strike a fine balance between realism, arcade ease, and hardcore emulation. From what we've seen, taking to the air in *Battlestations* will be less punishing than trying to fly *Battlefield*'s unfriendly skies. While that may not sit well with ace sim pilots, it'll make for less frustrating multiplayer dogfights.

DEATH FROM BELOW

Sub warfare could prove to be a tense and awesome part of *Battlestations: Midway*. You'll just need to remember that playing as a sub means slow pacing: Silently creep under the enemy to punch a few holes in his hull. If your foe detects you, get ready for a game of cat-and-mouse as destroyers circle in to drop depth charges.

WARNINGS
 Even those who love *Battlestations* may find a certain immersion will let us sink the *Battlestations* once a land war.



ISLAMOGAMING

Looking for Videogames in the Muslim World

IN SUMMER 2006, AN IRANIAN POLITICAL group called the Union of Islamic Student Societies revealed that it was planning on entering the videogame business. Via the fundamentalist state's semi-official Fars news agency, a spokesperson for the group announced that its members were developing an as-yet unnamed game revolving around one infamous Commander Bahman.

In the game, American troops kidnap an Iranian nuclear engineer who is traveling through Iraq on route to a Shiite holy shrine in Karbala, and Bahman must then cross the border to battle U.S. Special Forces and rescue the scientist, thereby ensuring the success of Iran's undoubtedly peaceful nuclear energy program.

What's more, the Union announced, the untitled project would be produced in retaliation for a 2005 game called *Assault on Iran* by American "news gaming" company Kuma, whose *KumaWar* series notoriously re-creates recent and historical military events in playable minigame form, ranging from the American raid that killed Saddam Hussein's sons, Jayil and Usayb, to John Kerry's Swift boat mission in Vietnam. Rather than draw on past operations, however, *Assault on Iran* presents a speculative future premise based, Kuma's website explains, on what "our experts believe to be an extremely plausible scenario for delaying or destroying Iran's nuclear arms capabilities without kick-starting World War III." The USS presented a signed petition to Kuma to have this anti-Iran game removed, and met with no success. Now, its activist strategy has changed to a more pragmatic entrepreneurship. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Kuma, for good measure, issued a subsequent press release that they in turn will create a third game, a sequel to Bahman's adventures, to be played from the American perspective once more.

This volley of international vaporswap proposals between the Iranian group and Kuma may have merely provided a couple days' diversion for various game blogs, but it arrived around the same time as a number of other stories about gaming's tentacle realm bleeding into real-world politics. Under the influence of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez's oft-voiced theses of imminent American invasion, Venezuelan politicians denounced the upcoming *Microcasos 2: World in Flames* (PSC), which depicts the storming of Caracas by American troops, as a form of stealth propaganda from an administration that had its eyes on acting out the real thing. *Microcasos 2* developer Pandemic Studios told the Associated Press that its company has "no ties to the U.S. government"—despite the fact that Pandemic indeed worked closely on the Army's payroll to create the 2004 first-person squad trainer *Full Spectrum Warrior*. In the U.S., several states began pursuing laws banning violent and explicit videogames, perhaps to curry favor with older voters allegedly still fearful that games like *Grand Theft Auto* were teaching kids to steal and kill. As the newest form of global entertainment, videogames had once again become a political football for the publicity misersers of savvy public servants and demagogues.

Spiked with the tensions surrounding U.S.-Iran relations, the untitled Commander Bahman project is not the first Islamic videogame to appear in the Middle East. In fact, in the past half decade a number of projects have emerged from

the Muslim world, all sharing a similar goal: to subvert the typical gaming stereotype of Arabs as bad guys by replacing the typical American or European action hero with a recognizably Muslim protagonist. Like many of their American counterparts, these games often base their narratives on real-life wars and battles: While Westerners replay WWII and Vietnam, they bathe through virtual recreations of the Palestinian intifada and the 1982 Israel-Lebanon war. Though relatively small, Islamogaming is also a diverse field, ranging from amateur projects by students, untested anti-Zionist propaganda produced by an internationally recognized terrorist organization, religious games produced to teach Islam to kids, and a set of more sober games intended to explore the complex realities of Middle Eastern history.

THROW THE FIRST STONE

What is probably the first widely disseminated Muslim game appeared in 2001. Called *The Stone Throwers*, this downloadable microgame (still available from <http://www.damascus-online.com/stonethrowers>) was created by Mohammad Hamez, a Syrian medical student, and was meant as a show of solidarity with the Palestinian uprising intifada that year, known as the second intifada. The game begins with a photo of what appears to be a dead child held in a woman's arms, with text reading in English: "Dedicated to the ones... who gave their lives... for their Homeland." In the sample game—a crudely rendered but spirited affair that evokes early versions of *Street Fighter*—a figure representing a Palestinian youth must punch, kick, and throw rocks at the waves of Israeli riot police who menace him. As he kills off the cops, his score increases at the top of the screen, superimposed upon a skull decorated with the Star of David. The action takes place in front of a digital rendering of the monumental Al-Aqsa Mosque. Located in the Temple Mount complex in disputed East Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Mosque bears special significance: some point to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's con-

troversial visit there in 2000 as the starting point of the second intifada, which was subsequently nicknamed the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

Players can choose between three periodically named levels of difficulty: 1) *The Stone Child*, 2) *I Fear No Enemy*, or 3) *I Fear Not Death*. But, like old-style agitprop films, *The Stone Throwers* makes no other attempts at subtlety in conveying its message. At the conclusion, the game announces: "Game Over: Well maybe you have killed some Israeli soldiers... in the Computer world...But...," then switches to a photo of a crowd gathering a young man in a casket, draped with the Palestinian flag, reading: "...THIS IS THE REAL WORLD. Stop the killing of the innocents in Palestine...Before the game is really over." On the Yahoo! group "Damascus University," a forum for Syrian students worldwide, users recommended the game, one remarking that it's "a nice game 'cause you feel yourself as a stone thrower, killing the Arab's number one enemy, Israel. I recommend that all of you go to the website and download this game and enjoy killing the Israeli soldiers. LOL." Not surprisingly, the Simon Wiesenthal Center soon issued a press release denouncing the game as "the latest weapon in the campaign against Israel."

KORANIC KID STUFF

The Stone Throwers caused a bit of controversy, but once the War on Terror commenced, anti-Muslim paranoia made even the most innocuous children's games appear ominous to certain journalists. In 2005, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the suspects of that year's London Underground bombings had frequented a shop that sold titles by American software company IslamGames that the paper claimed "made videogames featuring apocalyptic battles between defenders of Islam and their opponents" in which "the player's goal is to seek out and destroy the disbelievers."

When *Slate* reporter Chris Siskentrop ordered IslamGames titles *Ummah Dalkusa 7*, *Ummah Defense 4*, and *Maze of Destiny*, he found them >





— Promotional material for Radwan Kasmiya's Palestinian-minded *UnderSiege*.

"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful," the website for the 2003 game reads. "One time I was walking in Beirut, the capital that 'defeated the greatest army of the world.' I stopped by one of the computer game shops dispersed widely in Beirut and most Arab cities. I saw the children playing the game of the invincible American hero, who's never out of ammunition and who continually wins. I asked one of the children, did you like the game? He replied, 'Yes, but I wish I were playing as an Arab Muslim fighting the Jews as the Islamic Resistance did in Lebanon!' [...] This is where the necessity [for the game] emerged." The goal of the game, its designers state, is to "illustrate battles executed by young men who never played an imaginary game, rather they fought real battles that humiliated the Zionist enemy...."

Created with the open source Genesis 3D game engine, its name perhaps unwittingly parallels the U.S. military's America's Army: Special Forces, released the same year. After viewing an animated title sequence of an exploding Israeli tank, players train at a Lebanese war college, firing guns and lobbing grenades at images of former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other Israeli leaders, and are awarded medals from real-life Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah upon completion. When betting Israeli forces in South Lebanon, players can honor photos of actual "martyrs" at spots of their real-life death. Israeli bad guys shout "You killed me!" in Hebrew when killed. Environments in the game are decorated with Hezbollah's martial insignia, or a blue Star of David with a hazing snake at its center.

"The military posts that are attacked in the game by the player are the exact replicas of the posts used by the 'Israelis' during their brutal occupation," the Special Force website reads. "In the game the player has to attack the military post and liberate it as [...] the Lebanese actually did. The player attacks military personal [sic] and not civilians, the attack also takes place on Lebanese soil. [...] In the game you will also find pictures of all the martyrs that died during their struggle to liberate their land so that our children may live in freedom. Special Force game will render you a partner of the resistance."

A March 2003 Reuters item reported that Hezbollah promoted *Special Force* with advertisements on Lebanese television. One Internet cafe operator promoted its release by decorating his business with plastic rifles and snibtags because "guys like that stuff" (a tactic not too far removed from the gun-*n*-camo military-site displays decorating American game boutiques around the same time). "The goal is to create an alternative to similar Western games where Arabs and Muslims are portrayed as terrorists," Hezbollah spokesman Bilal az-Zen told the reporter, while an 8-year-old interviewee said he liked *Special Force* "because it kills Israelis... I can be a resistance fighter, even though in real life I don't want to do that."

GAMES FOR AN OCCUPATION

The most ambitious set of Middle Eastern games, however, have been produced by a private Syrian company without political affiliation: the Damascus-based Alkar Media, a subsidiary of publishing company Dar El Fikr. Alkar's official company goals attest to an enlightened entrepreneurial attitude far removed from the war-mongering rhetoric of Hezbollah: "To communicate with mankind all over the world and let them breathe the peaceful lull and tolerance of our civilization, as a way to face up [to] the negative stereotypes that have been pursuing us throughout the past decades" and "to communicate with Muslims in a way that respects their colorful heritage and spiritual privacy as a way to get them out of the shell they were put in and enrich the civilization of the 21st century with a touch of justice, acceptance, and love." So far, Alkar has released three game titles in the Middle East, the first-person shooter *UnderAsh*, its sequel *UnderSiege*, and a fantasy adventure game set in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra called *Victory Castle*, and is currently developing a Civilization-style strategy game about the history of Islam called *Quraish* (and, alternately, *Al Quraish*).

Though Alkar remains the most prominent commercial game publisher in the Islamic world, Alkar's Radwan Kasmiya told *Computer Gaming World* that it hasn't been easy. "There is no legitimate game market to speak of in the Middle East," says Kasmiya. "Procy is nearly 90 percent of total sales and many Arab countries have no laws protecting intellectual property or trademark." He likes to quote how one editor of an Arabic-language gaming magazine described Alkar's difficult success: "These guys are swimming in a pool full of sharks, yet they are surviving." Since the company's beginnings in 1987, it has grown from a small team of six to a firm of nearly 40 employees, with offices in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and, soon, the United Arab Emirates.

In *UnderAsh*, the protagonist is Ahmad, a Palestinian teenager growing up under Israeli occupation during the first intifada, which began in late 1987. In the game's opening chapter, Ahmad runs through his village, throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. Later in the game, Ahmad moves from stones to guns, and shoots at Israeli settlers attempting to push out the Palestinian villagers. In a dramatic trailer for *UnderAsh*, a bulldozer destroys a Palestinian home and Israeli police storm and lock a Palestinian villager Ahmad throws a stone into a black void; it transforms into a grenade in midair.

"We started development for *UnderAsh* in 1993," Kasmiya says, "and finished it two years later. At that time most games around the world, including the Middle East, were playing *Delta Force*, *Medal of Honor*, *Counter-Strike*—the golden age of FPS games." None of these American games, of course, gave a Middle Eastern perspective. On the original website for *UnderAsh*, Alkar made its cultural position clear: "The main purpose

clunky but far from troubling. In the *Ummah* Defense series, for example, the "disbelievers" are in fact merely robots, while the boss enemy of *Maze of Destiny* is neither American nor Israeli, but rather a fantasy badgie named *Darikh* the Deceiver. Perhaps, the reporter surmised, "racial Islam dreams not only of restoring the borders of the Caliphate, but also of freezing gaming technology at the level of the old Nintendo Entertainment System."

Another Islamic educational software firm, the U.K.-based Innovative Minds, responded to similar protests about their game *The Resistance*, in which kids become real-life-believe members of Hezbollah's Islamic Resistance in Southern Lebanon; players get ammo for shooting at Israeli tanks as rewards for providing correct answers to a faith-based history quiz. "It seems that the media is silent when they, the Zionists, use their tanks to slaughter our children," the company's website retorts, "but when our children play a shoot-em-up game [...] we are accused of training terrorists and instilling hatred towards Jews! On the contrary, the questions in the game educate children not to fall for the Zionist lie that Zionism, Jewishness, and Judaism are synonymous but to understand that Zionism, a racist ideology, has nothing to do with Judaism."

HEZBOLLAH'S COUNTER-STRIKE

The conflict that raged between Israel and Lebanon within the latter country's southern regions from the 1980s to 2000 provides the basis for another game that makes no bones about its ideological position. Produced by the Hezbollah Central Internet Bureau—a branch of the militant Iranian-funded organization considered a terrorist operation by much of the international community—*Special Force* was the first 3D first-person shooter produced for Middle Eastern gamers, and it arrived with an explicit political agenda. Like many Western games at the time, *Special Force* touted its historical realism: its scenarios are based on the actual battles Hezbollah fought in 2000 that helped convince Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon and end the occupation.

A regular contributor to the *Wired* Xbox, Ed Hoffer has also written for *Arthur*, *The Believer*, *FilmMaker*, *Vice*, and many other publications. His book *From Sun Zu to Xbox: War and Video Games*, from which this article is partially adapted, was recently published by Thunder's Mouth Press. He's keeping track of recent developments about war and videogames at his blog, the aptly titled www.warandvideogames.com.

of the game was to [offer alternatives in an era] previously filled with foreign games depicting the facts and history, and playing the motto of "Sovereignty is for power and violence according to the American style." Kasriya says that the game allows Arabs to support the Palestinian cause, albeit in a virtual manner: "The Arab street is very charged. They believe they can't do anything to help their brothers in Palestine," he told the BBC in 2002. "So I think they are playing because they feel that they can feel the experience of young Palestinian people living in Jerusalem." ("Like the game," the BBC reporter concludes ruefully, "the nature of Arab support remains largely virtual.")

Kasriya says he has received some negative response to the game, but the positive response has outweighed it. "Even though I was sure of what I was doing, I was afraid that people would easily misconstrue it, especially as it deals with such a controversial concept, but wow... I didn't expect so much positive response from both the Middle East and Europe. Volunteers from all over the world stormed my mailbox with localization proposals." Beyond sales of *UnderAsh* on CD-ROM, the game's website drew more than a million downloads—an incredible number, Kasriya notes, for a region where the average modem speed is still stuck at 28.8K. In a talk given at the Barcelona game developer conference "Game as Critic as Art" in 2006, Kasriya told attendees that the Palestinian mother of a teenager who played *UnderAsh* called him to say how she had burst into tears at its conclusion, so powerfully moved at seeing her experience depicted by a game.

The game's more elaborate sequel, *UnderSiege*, is set in 2000 during the second intifada. Its narrative draws from true events experienced by Palestinian families during this time, though the release of *UnderSiege* throughout the Middle East remains stalled. Kasriya hopes eventually to release it worldwide. "I just can't wait for *UnderSiege* to be published internationally," Kasriya told an interviewer for selectpark.net, "so players can feel the difference between a history game based on lives of real people trying to survive [the] ethnic cleansing and [the] political propaganda that is trying to inject morals in [to] future nations to justify their assaults on nations far away from their homeland."

Short teaser videos for *UnderSiege* have the air of a brutal documentary. In one, after a child is gunned down in the street, an Israeli soldier jumps from his tank, apparently to rescue him. When he arrives by the child's side, the soldier appears to finish him off by pounding him with a cement block. In another teaser, a Palestinian religious service is interrupted by an Orthodox Jewish gunman, who moves down the congregation with a machine gun. The latter scenario appears to depict the 1994 attack on a Hebron mosque by Baruch Goldstein, which killed 29 and wounded 125 and has historical distinction as the bloodiest attack on Palestinians by a lone Jewish extremist.

Kasriya contrasts the aims of *UnderSiege* with American games based on real-world conflicts like *Conflict: Desert Storm* or *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*. "What is the goal of those games?" Kasriya asks. "Is it that gamers kill all the bad 'off-ferent-looking' guys, and thereby bring peace to the world? I don't know. I think such games don't provide the player with more than a couple hours of fun, plus some information about the conflict. And the feeling that he is best—that he belongs



WESTERN AND MIDDLE EASTERN GAMES SERVE ONLY TO BOLSTER PREJUDICES*

—EDDY STERN, ARTIST AND DESIGNER

to a civilization that depends on arms to solve its conflicts. In *UnderSiege*, three out of the five main characters die. We simply are telling a history of real people who are trying to live in a world full of violence. No heroes are allowed in—facts only. I believe that, through this type of game, we can reasonably balance out the one-sided views as they're written by the victors."

Producing the strategy game *Qurash*, Afkar's most ambitious game to date, has presented its own unique problems. The history game takes place during the first century of Islam's existence, and players can take on the role of a Bedouin sheik, an Arab warrior, a Persian, or a Roman. Kasriya believes the game will impart a deeper respect for the history of Islam beyond the image of "[the] Crusades, oil, and terrorism" that dominates Western media representations. However, the game has also been controversial to radical fundamentalist Muslims, who fear it might not give the version of history they endorse. "They are afraid that we can't view Islam in the right way," Kasriya says flatly, "or might make fun of spiritual characters. The topic is very sensitive in the Middle East—remember the Danish cartoon crisis [of 2005]." Kasriya says his company is "fighting on two frontiers," trying to counteract the effects of negative images from the West and attempts by Muslim "extremists" to control the public image of Islam.

Kasriya also contends that many Western countries would not allow Afkar to purchase rights to gaming engines. "What really bothers me is that they are judging us before even trying," he says. "But on the brighter side, that forced us to develop our own engine and use it for *Al Qurash*. Looking at how things are now, I think it was better for us. It made us more independent."

GAMES AS A DIALOGUE

Eddy Stern, an Israeli artist and designer who lives in California and who's becoming well known in the art world for political, sometimes prankish projects using modified or original games, is sympathetic, but a bit more skeptical, of the value of Afkar's games. One of Stern's own works, *Sheik Attack*, used footage from a variety of games to retell the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; otherwise anonymous images from *Age of Empires* or *Counter-Strike* take on a disturbingly emotional, moral weight.

Even games like *UnderAsh* or *UnderSiege*, Stern thinks, might merely be "tit for tat"—replacing the typical Arab enemy with an Israeli one. "When consumed by their target audience," Stern says, both Western and Middle Eastern games "serve only to bolster prejudices and preconceptions. What's probably more useful is the moment when gamers are exposed to both sets of games and perhaps feel empathy, or at least start to see how absurdly propagandistic and intolerant these games are. But again, these moral questions are so slippery since the Palestinians most often see themselves as victims in an asymmetrical political situation—as do many Israelis. And the idea of an end justifying the means extends from political and military choices to some of the game design choices made in *UnderAsh*—a familiar strategy of overt stereotyping of the game villains, Israeli soldiers, and settlers in this case."

Still, by moving beyond the first-person shooter and into more complex strategy gaming with *Al Qurash*, Afkar appears to be pushing Middle Eastern games to the next level of sophistication. As the company states on the *Al Qurash* website, "There must be somebody to do it, and if not us, nobody will care!" / Ed Hailer



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GUNS AND ROSES

Antiwar activists
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CULTURE

JOSEPH DELAPPE IS COUNTING UP TO A NUMBER HE CAN'T NAIL down. Each week's the same. He sits in front of his computer, carefully taps a few dozen keys, hits Enter, and then does it again—770 times since March 2005. If you didn't know better, you'd think he was playing an old text adventure ("take the bridge," "open the panel") or maybe just chatting with spooky symmetry. You probably wouldn't guess he's playing one of the most popular first-person action games on the market. Plugged into the government-run online military simulation *America's Army* as a gun- and grenade-toting private, Delappe's terse single lines aren't squad orders or flashy macros—sporting the provocative handle "dead-in-iraq," he's broadcasting the name of every U.S. soldier killed in the war to date.

"I'd been thinking about this memorial project for almost a year," explains Delappe, an associate professor of art at the University of Nevada-Reno. When he says "memorial," he's referring to keying the names of the confirmed U.S. military dead in Iraq—2,545 at press time—into AA's general chat channel. He says the idea developed as he watched civilian casualties mount in Iraq. "I find it offensive that we've taken the 'War on Terror' abroad to a country where, as a result, between 30,000 and 50,000 innocents have died. All, as some would say, so we won't need to fight it

here at home. I think that's immoral." Agree or not, DeLappe is emblematic of a new breed of activist, taking nonviolent notions of "interventionist art" online. But is it peaceable freedom of speech or simply disruptive?

ENTERTAINMENT VS. "MILITAINMENT"

Billed as "The Official U.S. Army Game" and fashioned from successively newer versions of the celebrated Unreal engine, America's Army draws players on all sides of the debate in droves. Its total registered base is pushing 7.3 million (take that, World of Warcraft), and July 2005 alone looks to snag an additional 100,000 draftees. (Compare that with the actual Army's 57,000 recruits for the first four months of 2006 altogether.) Its allure? Fidelity-focused, squad-oriented skirmishing using real combat roles, weapons, and a scoring system designed to reflect Army values ("honor, duty, and integrity"), but, moreover, its bottom line—it's free.

Not to make, of course. Debuting in 2002 at an estimated total cost of \$7.5 million (and millions more in subsequent annual additions), its critics call it a tax-funded propaganda tool, using labels like "militainment" or "sovereign." DeLappe agrees. "America's Army is the contemporary equivalent of the Duck and Cover films from the 1950s," he says, referring to a legacy of government shorts that suggested you could survive a nuclear attack by crawling under a desk. "AA is much more than just a game. The military has taken advantage of [this and is] helping to define the use of the Internet. Imagine a TV sitcom produced by the U.S. military, and you'll start to understand the curious nature of their 'game.'"

Of course, the vast majority of AA's supporters would disagree, as they view the game as an uncharacteristically thoughtful and realistic depiction of combat (compared to gonzo series like Battlefield or Call of Duty), and, some argue, more representative of the dangers inherent to joining up than simply chatting in an office with a recruiter. DeLappe responds by labeling AA a "complete fantasy." "No blood, no civilian casualties, magical resurrection... it's designed to get young people to sign up for its military services," he argues. "Think about actual combat—is it simplistic, visually engaging, and just for fun?"

PROTEST OR PROVOCATION?

Scan the official AA forums, and you'll be hard-pressed to find well-wishes for DeLappe. "This, at the surface level, seems to be nothing more than a stunt done in bad taste," begins a post by an official AA forum moderator. "Quite frankly, clogging up the servers with this nonsense is hardly a valid use of one's First Amendment rights. Let's not give this attention-grabber any more coverage. Thread closed." Players in the game put it less politely, telling DeLappe to "Shut the f--- up!" as he works.

"The response in the game has been predictably negative," admits DeLappe—noting, however, that responses on external message boards have been more varied, with positions ranging from support and indifference to pragmatic outrage. "When you protest something like war, you usually either end up preaching to the choir or screaming at deaf ears." starts one post from a user named "Theory?" on gamepolitics.com. >



Velvet Strike spray "Cake" by Pau Weidner.

VELVET STRIKE

Though not formally connected, artist and activist Anne-Marie Schleiener attended the same graduate art school as Joseph DeLappe (San Jose State University in California). "I met him in Sutterport, Garmany—we both went to CADRE (Computers in Art, Design, Research, and Education) at San Jose. It was one of the earliest programs to focus on computers and digital stuff from a conceptual and artistic perspective—not just technically."

Schleiener runs opencore.net, billed as a "smart feminist analysis of games and game theory." Like DeLappe, she's always conjuring new ways to meld her art with activism. An accomplished writer with theory tendencies, she's perhaps best known in game circles for opencore.net's subtitle "Velvet Strike," a collection of antiwar "sprays" with soldiers finged in heart shapes or no-punches-pulled well posters with text like: "If god says to you to kill people, kill god." Visitors can download the sprays for free and use them as graffiti on walls, ceilings, and floors in the popular Half-Life mod Counter-Strike.

"Velvet Strike has been both my most popular and unpopular project," admits Schleiener. "It's a cheap website, but it's been able to reach a large audience and generate lots of feedback. You might say it's an example of how the Internet can have a 'flattening effect,' allowing small fries to get a message out there that subverts the interests of big files, like the right-wing powers behind U.S. war efforts in the Middle East."

The site goes beyond just sprays and includes a special section of "Intervention Recipes." Feeling especially noble? Try the "Recipe for Salvation": Enter a Counter-Strike server running a hostage scenario as a member of the terrorist team, then rescue the hostages you're supposed to be guarding. Or how about a little martyrdom? The "Recipe for Martyrdom" recommends joining a busy server with your friends, then during the battle, telling everyone you're martyrs for peace and jumping off the tallest structure in the level.

Schleiener's next project? "The second iteration of O.U.T. (Operation Urban Terrain), protesting the police brutality in France and Spain against African and Arabo immigrants," she says (the first occurred in August 2004 during the Republican National Convention in New York City). "I've been collecting brutality testimonials and creating a kind of makeshift police dance/musical using a PlayStation 2 game called NARC and the game MechWarrior." In short, Schleiener and pals plan to strap on rollerblades, game systems, and head-mounted miniprojectors before hitting the streets to project their videos on building sides and into the general public's line of sight. "We just hope we won't be a 'civil menace' on our roller skates," jokes Schleiener. "We still have some practicing to do."

SPORTING THE PROVOCATIVE HANDLE DEAD-IN-IRAQI, HE'S BROADCASTING THE NAME OF EVERY U.S. SOLDIER KILLED IN THE WAR TO DATE.

"His idea is unique, but...[A4's] a game with slots and server space, and it's not fair to people who just want to play the stupid game if their slot is taken up by some spammer."

Curiously, DeLappe says the bulk of complaints are, in fact, not from offended military or war proponents, but from players like Theory?, miffed that he's interrupting their game time.

"To them, I'm a gamer heretic, which is a bit of a surprise," DeLappe muses, adding that it only served to deepen his commitment to the project. "In addition to the memorial, my intention is to get people to think about escapism entertainment. You can't separate a game like A4 from our ongoing slide into militarism and unilateral behavior on the world stage."

Logging onto random servers for a few minutes each, DeLappe's approach is simple: He joins a side, then stands in place and types until he's hit his 20-name goal...or gets the boot. "I haven't been banned, but I get kicked quite often," he says, noting the Army is fully aware of what he's doing. "I don't interact in any capacity beyond typing the names. No conversations—my communication is simple and direct."

Asked for comment, the Army's Pentagon spokesperson Paul Boyce declined, offering the same response given other media outlets: "The Army does not limit participation unless there is negative impact on other players' experiences... as such, unless an individual uses foul or insensitive language, or is otherwise ruining gameplay for others, the management of America's Army takes no action."

UNTIL IT'S OVER

You might argue DeLappe's activities aren't entirely without precedent. On April 30, 2004, broadcast vet Ted Koppel read over 500 names of deceased U.S. soldiers on ABC's *Nightline*. The show's executive producer cited as inspiration a June 1969 issue of *Life* which presented photos of men killed during a single week in Vietnam. Of course, that broadcast had its share of critics as well, with pundits such as *The Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol suggesting it wasn't a memorial at all, but rather "... a statement with a capital S, and... a stupid statement."

"Memorial" or "statement" is, of course, a matter of where you stand—unless you're a family member of the fallen, that is, in which case the dichotomy can sound simplistic or even arbitrary. "It's my main concern," admits DeLappe, noting that he actually received an e-mail from the brother of a fallen soldier asking him to exclude his sibling's name. "I respectfully replied that I'd already entered the name and tried to explain why doing nothing wasn't an option, but rather an invitation to apathy and inaction. I didn't hear back from him." Still, adds DeLappe, he intends no malice. "Think of me as a participant in the game, only I'm choosing to be a conscientious objector."

Whatever the stakes, DeLappe says he'll stop when the war ends and he's entered the final casualties. "By noting names, we briefly bring people back," he reasons. "Remembrance, do not forget, to pay tribute. Every war memorial should also be considered a protest—a cautionary environment for thought and consideration regarding the cost of war." / Matt Peckham

THE WEATHER ONLINE

"It's rude. Regardless of your opinions on Iraq or on protesting, most servers have a limited number of slots open for players at any given time. By occupying one of those slots, [DeLappe] is disrupting play and possibly unbalancing teams in order to spread his personal message. In other words, he's just another spammer, no different from someone logging on to spam the chat with porn or warez sites."

—Brrr, *GamePolitics.com*

"Have we moved past the legitimacy of using virtual spaces for art or political protest, I wonder? While people may have very different views about this protest and different assumptions about its purpose, does anyone think that using the medium of a videogame is misplaced?"

—Ren Reynolds, *Terranova.blogs.com*

"The casualties of the Iraq War aren't just Americans. You've also got the multinational forces who've suffered losses, and people on the opposing side who've lost lives. Then, most tragically, you've got the Iraq civilians who inevitably got caught in the crossfire. All this focus on the loss of American life reeks of ethnocentrism."

—Sleyemih, *LiveJournal.com*

"As far as I am concerned, he is just doing what he thinks is right, and it isn't hurting anyone, so let the new players use him for target practice. Everyone wins."

—Archgbe, *GamePolitics.com*

"A protest is not a memorial. A memorial honors the sacrifices of those who have died. A protest spits on their cause."

—Booger, *WomenGamers.com*

"If Cindy Sheehan had protested on her own front lawn instead of Dubya's, would anyone have cared one way or the other?"

—Jabrweck, *GamePolitics.com*

"If it really is the case that the game is developed with taxpayer money, then I think that this is a perfectly valid piece of protest—by virtue of the fact that it's publicly funded, it provides a public space."

—Jorman, *Gameblog (Guardian Unlimited)*

"The existence of his website, and the presence of articles...referred to from his page, emails like publicity to me. Don't be surprised if there's a book deal in this. My Noble Online Protest, by Joseph 'surrender-monkey' DeLappe, coming soon to a B&N near you."

—Steve, *Terranova.blogs.com*



The Velvet Strike "heart" spray by Anne-Marie Schleiner.



"Responses range from inquisitive to negative," says Joseph DeLappe.

"THINK OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT... ONLY IM CHOOSING TO BE A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR"

—JOSEPH DELAPPE, IN-GAME ACTIVIST



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ALLIANCE: THE SILENT WAR

Harvard students take gaming to gun school



→ The WarStudio has an insane amount of data for each gun—and it factors into the game.



→ "Despite I slipped on that shell casing, Man, I'm sure glad you're not taking a coresnashot."

PUBLISHER: TBD DEVELOPER: Windward Mark Interactive COVER: First Person Shooter RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREVIEW

IT WAS MAY 2003, AND ASI LANG WAS best. After days of meetings and relentless game-industry schmoozing, he grabbed his bags and hopped on a red-eye back to Boston. By morning, he'd be racing across town to take a final exam.

His game, *Alliance: The Silent War*, started as nothing more than a pipe dream, really—the byproduct of one too many all-nighters for Harvard students Lang and Eric Tufts. While studying for yet another horrific computer-theory class project, they asked each other: "Wouldn't it be great if someone could do for guns what *Gran Turismo* did for cars?" As military-history buffs and sports obsessives, Lang and Tufts began pulling together a concept: Take every detail of firearm data, a complete survey of weaponry used in the 20th century, and pour it into a single FPS game. After all, most conventional warfare games default to the same 20 to 30 weapons (depending on whether you're killing Nazis or terrorists). But then the Harvard duo got back to studying. It wasn't until the following summer that they started taking the idea seriously.

GUN TURISMO

"When we first conceived the game, we focused on making it multiplayer-only," confides Lang, "because you rarely find a game that does single-player and multiplayer really well." Enter the WarStudio, a concept that could become the Holy Grail for gaming gun nuts. This backbone of *Alliance* is a "What If?" scenario generator. What if a squad of WWI Czech riflemen fought a SEAL team during the Bay of Pigs invasion? With a century of history and three continents to mull over, you've got a ludicrous number of possible scenarios right off the bat.

The 100-plus firearms in the game's database, though, are the real stars here. Beyond super-realistic accurate graphics, data feeds, and historical data, weapons have real ranges—not laser-beam bullets that can sail into infinity. You

have to know that the Belgian-made 1903 FN FAL assault rifle starts losing kill effectiveness by the 1,200-meter mark.

SOLID SINGLE-PLAYER

This team hit upon an original way to put together a single-player game. "We wanted to open all of the interesting conflicts of the 20th century, but not do something hokey like time travel," says Lang. Instead, you follow three generations of a Russian family fighting a secret, silent war.

Starting in the European trenches of WWI, you stumble upon a secret society that's pulling the strings of global politics. You have to stop them—and with each passing generation in your family, the task gets handed down to the next of kin. Slowly, the game reveals just how deep the rabbit hole goes. Ultimately, according to Lang, the game lays out how the major conflicts of the 20th century are all connected—a little something for all you historical conspiracy-theory buffs out there.

AND THEIR OWN GRAPHICS ENGINE

So, which graphics-engine technology are they licensing and modifying to make the game? None. Remember that computer-theory class? While everyone else was taking mathematical concepts, the five founders of Windward Mark (Lang, Tufts, Christopher Colost, Brad Kittenbrink, and Palmer Trivisono, all friends from college) worked on shadier technologies. One of the projects, their proprietary WindLight technology, captures the essence of natural lighting conditions in real time (or, if you grow sick, these patent-pending algorithms render photo-realistic images using a scene's preexisting models and textures). What this means for *Alliance* is a believable image with fully dynamic universal lighting, clouds, and weather, with a lot less strain on the PC trying to get the job done. Feel like an underachiever yet? Yeah, come here.

/Derren Gladstone

STORM WRACKED

We dive headlong into *Maelstrom*

PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: KD Vialon GENE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: October 2008

PREVIEW

PICTURE THIS: AN RTS COMBINING THE unique transforming mechanics—and game engine—from 2004's freaky-deaky RTS *Perimeter* (but with a story that actually makes sense) and three divergent factions (eerily akin to StarCraft's Terrans, Protoss, and Zerg. As great as that mixture does sound, we have to call out the upcoming *Maelstrom*'s lack of forward movement: We've seen it all before. Don't believe us? Let's run down the roster. **Ryan Scott**



THE ASCENSION

While the Remnant embraces hardcore guerrilla warfare, *Maelstrom*'s other human side—the Ascension (Protoss in StarCraft terms)—models itself on modern-day CEO-controlled megacorporations. Expect some high-tech stuff from this side, to the fans of clone armies and the RTS equivalent of Transformers. Ever wanted to control a tank that jumps into a giant robot? The Ascension's got you covered...so long as you're down with the idea of rebuilding the world in a fascist, squeaky-clean image. Oh, and dispensing with anyone who doesn't think that's such a hot idea.



THE REMNANT

Maelstrom's first human faction (and Terrain stand-in) serves as the best entry point into the game's setting. The Remnant features all the trappings of your typical U.S. military-guy RTS team—with a postapocalyptic edge. Led by ex-U.S. Navy SEAL James Buchanan, they tear out of the base armed with pseudofuturistic weaponry, tactical nukes, artillery, and all the heavily armored vehicles you expect from America's armed forces.

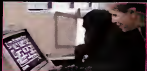


THE HAI-GENTI

This aquatic alien race doesn't care about banding humanity to its will but rather wiping us all out and turning Earth into Waterworld. Instead of focusing on heavy-duty units like vehicles, the organic-breeded Hai-Genti flood the map with aquatic nukes that transform the target area and generally ruin everyone else's day. Fortunately, the humans muster a few defenses against the Hai-Genti's flooding tactics: The Remnant may upgrade its units with isolation devices, and the Ascension possesses the technology to freeze water. Zerg, anyone?

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CHIMP PLAYS MS. PAC-MAN

A chest-thumping primatologist trains chimps to play *Ms. Pac-Man*. So what if they suck at it? Anything's a Darwinian stride over dookie wrens.



BROKEN PIXELS EPISODE 4

Dippy guys lampoon dorky games. This round: Don King hair meets Ron Jeremy hair in Nintendo boxer Ring King.



STONEWALL

Battlefield 2 spaz confuses drag-queen flick Stonewall with Civil War curmudgeon Stonewall Jackson. Something like hilarity ensues.

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WORLD OF WAR THE BURNING CRUSADE

Blizzard fans the flames with big new changes



► Oh no! They ruined WOW! A Horde-ish Blood Elf paladin, daring you to mock her. And, no, we don't think it's ruined. We kid, kids.



► Fighting made in the Nagrand zone in Outland. Nagrand is the original, indigenous Orc homeland, still green after all these years.

PUBLISHER: Blizzard DEVELOPER: Blizzard GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Only Blood Elves

UPDATE

WHILE MOST OF THE CATS ARE OUT of the bag already regarding The Burning Crusade, Blizzard's highly anticipated expansion to the gazillion-selling World of Warcraft, the design team still managed to drop a couple small bombs recently with new details that got the message-board flame wars raging all over again, as they do every time a change is announced.

HORDE PALADIN? ALLIANCE SHAMAN?

The biggest and most controversial news to current players was the announcement that each of the new player races—Draenei for the Alliance, Blood Elves for the Horde—can now choose to play the opposite side's faction-specific class. In other words, Draenei players can be shamans, while Blood Elves can be paladins.

In the big picture, this means that both Horde and Alliance groups finally have access to every single character class. This was done in part to calm down some of the incessant bitching about PVP imbalance between the

two sides, which, in turn, will allow the developers to finally be free of having to constantly nerf paladins and shamans in a never-ending attempt to fix the supposed cross-faction imbalance.

"It's been unfortunate," says lead designer Jeff Kaplan, "because we weren't able to realize the true essence of those two classes. We had to keep pushing them closer and closer toward each other. This is exciting to us because we can finally do things we've never had a chance to do before with those classes." Specifically, Blizzard will be strengthening each class beyond just defensive support: Paladins will be made more viable as tanks, while shamans will have more offensive casting abilities. "Finally we can make each class cool on its own," he says, "rather than [have] to constantly balance one side to the other—which is not an interesting way to design."

Longtime players can also now play a class they may never have tried before because of their allegiance to just one side. "A lot of people are in really tight with their guilds," says Kaplan, "and don't want to have to reroll a new character on a different server to try

the other side. This way, if they're already loyal to the Alliance, now they can try out the shaman class by playing a Draenei. The same goes for the Horde. Players can roll up Blood Elf paladins to finally try that class."

Speaking of which: Blood Elf paladins? WTF? How can a supposedly "bad" race play as righteous paladins?

"Blood Elf paladins are not shiny, noble, light-loving paladins like the dwarves and humans," says Kaplan. "Blood Elves see the light as another form of magical power they can use toward their own greedy ends."

In fact, the Blood Elf paladins don't consider themselves paladins at all—they call themselves Blood Knights. The paladin title remains for players though, because, as loremeister Chris Metzen says, "You're pushing all the same buttons. We're not trying to fool anyone into calling this a new class, which would create the wrong expectations. We want you to feel heroic and epic, but also that this is kinda wrong. You'll see where your power is coming from, and you may have a moral problem with it."

Here's where it's coming from: The Blood Elves have captured one of the noble, angelic,

CRAFT:



Despite the subtle looks, something sinister's brewing beneath the Blood Elves' Silvermoon City.



Inside the Hellfire Citadel, the first major dungeon in Outland. All the new dungeons in the expansion have two difficulty levels.



light-loving beings known as the Naaru and imprisoned him underneath the paladin guild in Silvermoon City, where they perform experiments to figure out and feed on the source of his power.

Or, as Metzzen more colorfully puts it: "The Blood Elves are punking his bitch ass down and stealing his mojo. No disrespect to the Naaru, since there's nothing 'bitch' about them. They're benevolent and powerful creatures. And the odds of the Blood Elves even beating one of these guys—let alone parking him in the garage and using him as a battery—are pretty horrific."

Blizzard has a similarly involved story to justify why the Draenei can be shamans, but the bottom line for Kaplan is how the decision changes gameplay for all players: "It'll expand what players get to do in the game. They'll be able to group with classes they've never grouped with before, and handle encounters in new and different ways. Each side has extra healers and tanks to pull from now."

DUNGEON MASTERS

The other big bomb Blizzard dropped was that all the new dungeons in *The Burning Crusade* will have two levels of difficulty, which group leaders can set before entering, similar

to botting options. You'll have your level-appropriate regular setting and a much more difficult max-level setting with better loot rewards. And no, you can't switch on the fly.

The dungeons won't look or feel drastically different between the two settings. "It's truly just a skill check," says Kaplan. "The creatures hit harder and have more hit points or maybe an extra spell or ability. It's not like there are new creatures inside. We're just notching up the difficulty while retaining the flavor of the original dungeon."

The example they showed us during a recent visit was the Hellfire Citadel dungeon, the first that level 60 players will encounter when they rush into Outland, the expansion's new continent. The creatures in the first two wings will be roughly levels 60 to 63 in the regular setting. On the harder setting, they'll all be level 70, with loot relevant to level 70 players. In the third wing, a level 70 wing, the higher difficulty will be max plus, with monsters higher than level 70. (The fourth wing, a raid wing, will just have the one difficulty—as will all raid dungeons.)

For current max-level WOW players, the appeal of this should be obvious. "At max level, when you've capped out your XP in *Burning Crusade*, all of the new dungeon

wings will be viable options in your nightly menu of choices," says Kaplan. It will also fix something that bums Blizzard out in the original game. "If you're a max-level player," says Kaplan, "and you're there instead of reolling a new character, you never get to go back and revisit all the content you really liked at a lower level. It's almost a waste of some of the coolest content in the game, like the Scarlet Monastery. It just sits there dormant and unused after a while."

And what about the chances of Blizzard retrofitting the old dungeons with two difficulties? No comment.

We saw much more on our visit, including the Blood Elf city, Silvermoon, complete with two banks and two auction houses (j); the Draenei mounts, called elekkis, which are indigenous Outland beasts similar to the Tauren kodos; the gigantic Tempest Keep dungeon; the Naga-infested Coilfang Reservoir; and the beautiful Nagrand zone in Outland, the original, traditional homeland of the Orcs back when they were simple hunter-gatherers—and where it's quite possible that Thrall's grandfather might still be alive.

"How amazing would that be?" asks Metzzen. Just finish the expansion, guys, and maybe we'll be able to tell you. // Jeff Green

COLUMN

GLADSTONED

LORD OF THE DINGS

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT. MY HEIGHT-ened Jaded Gamer Sense™ is tingling—but—what's that? A copy of *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth II* just showed up for the Xbox 360? Ah, that explains it! Considering my day job at, ya know, a PC gaming magazine, this is the part where I'm supposed to work into a frothy rage, yelling, "Oh, hell no! Nobody dumbme down an RTS game on my watch!" Give me a sec to work up to that. Honestly, though, I don't really care.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Here's my dilemma: Do I play the PC version of *BFME2* in a desk chair slightly less comfortable than anti-encrusted, lemon-juice-coated stool w/e? Or is it time to fire up the 360 hooked into the garbale-compensatingly huge HDTV in front

of my comfy new couch? Lol me tum to the ref for a sec. The ruling: my eye wins!

The game looks all right on my HDTV. Not PC-monitor good, of course, but it works. At first, it's a little unnerving to a PC gamer's resolve that a detailed RTS can look and run reasonably well on a 360—but try panning across the screen during a big battle, and watch the game slow to a crawl. Also, thanks to the TV's inferior resolution (yes, even a high-def TV), the text is harder to read than a DMV eye chart, so don't even bother if you're pecking less than 30 inches of HD.

So you have a home theater that'd make Roger Ebert weep? Good. Now for the real battle: getting used to the controls. More times than not, I found myself wishing I could just draw a box onscreen to create a battle group—I was about two minutes away from drawing the damn boxes myself with a Sharpie. *BFME2* counters this by turning just about every button into a shortcut

key: it's a nice trick, making good use of all the Xbox 360 controller's buttons...but it ain't perfect.

Look, I don't live in a bubble. About six years ago, *StarCraft* and *Command & Conquer* made their way to the Nintendo 64. Both were nice, quick RTS fixes on the big screen, but it was no contest: Without a PC's horsepower or an HD set, no way was anyone going to cram the full RTS experience onto some puny cartridge. But what those games proved is that you can—theoretically—control an RTS with a gamepad. Taking advantage of a beefy next-gen system, *BFME2* is just the next game to show that the PC/console gap ain't getting any wider. In fact, now—more than ever—it just demonstrates that a good interface trumps everything. I don't doubt that EA's setting the stage for a *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* console cameo, and gamers who crave the Fisher-Price "My First RTS" experience probably won't notice a thing. But you and I...we know better. / Derren Gladstone

➤ ARGUE ABOUT RTS GAMES ON THE 360 ALL YOU WANT. *BFME2* JUST DEMONSTRATES THAT INTERFACE TRUMPS EVERYTHING.



Dude! That picture of Derren's photobogged head is really cranking me out! Enjoy the dumbest of derren. gl@abandonbeta.com

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY SEPTEMBER 2006



THE GOOD TEAM FORTRESS 2

In a surprise announcement, Valve Software's *Geoco Newell* revealed to the world that perennial vaporware

Team Fortress 2 is real once again—and shipping alongside *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*. But here's the crazy part: This art style is very cartoony, reminiscent of the tiny action figures we all played with as tykes. Also arriving alongside *Episode Two*: A crazy, physics-defying shooter/puzzle thingy called *Portal*.



THE BAD AEGIA PHYSX

We gamers are a tickle bunch. You tell us about some crazy new technology and we get psyched for the potential.

Then you try milking the public for a \$300 cred that barely works and has no game support? Look, we know that it's early and you've got some more games on the way (along with Unreal Engine 3 support), but you'd better hurry up. Well, that or start changing your home phone numbers, guys.



THE UGLY AUTO ASSAULT

Noroft's massively multiplayer car-combat game needs AAA—or more players. Auto Assault's poor retail performance

isn't just that it has all EB Games with the purchase of *Guild Wars: Factions Collector's Edition* allegedly played a key role in a host of layoffs. With news of the recent server collapse (down from four servers to one) and an abysmal player count (roughly 11,000, according to mmogchart.com), we fear Auto Assault's caught a flat.

Sound
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SAYONARA STARFORCE?

In a recent poll of GalCiv II players, over 2,000 said that not having CD copy protection advanced their purchase.

GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II: DARK AVATAR

Putting the "might as well be a sequel" in "expansion"

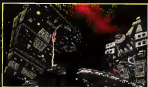
PUBLISHED: Stardock Entertainment DEVELOPER: Stardock Entertainment GENRE: Turn-Based Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Fall 2006 (digital distribution only)

BETTING AGAINST DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION these days is like putting tin foil in front of a train. With services like Steam and Stardock carving tributaries of cash off the discless Infobahn, forget way-out pundit predictions—it's here and, what's more, you're thrilled about it, or roughly half of you are. Point of fact: Turn-based sci-fi strategy nonpareil *Galactic Civilizations II* was one of the best-selling PC games of 2006 at retail, but nearly half its revenue came from online sales via TotalGaming.net. Moreover (pirates of the world, cover your eyes!), it shipped without copy protection. Oy vey...are these Stardock guys plain nuts?

"At this point we feel confident saying that not having CD copy protection has helped our sales tremendously," says Stardock president and CEO Brad Wardell. "We ran a poll of registered users on GalCiv2.com and thousands of people said that not having

CD copy protection helped make the difference in purchasing the game." Well, roll over StarForce (and other copy-thwarting tools from parts unknown). Stardock now plans to ship its first expansion to GalCiv II online-only later this year and, you guessed it, sans copy protection. So how now for the strategy tour de force that finally out-MOO'd MOO? (That's Master of Orion for those of you too young to remember, care, or gnash your teeth with Viking rage over the utter force that was MOO3.) How's about eaving the universe by dominating it?

"In *Dark Avatar*, the player takes on the role of the leader of a Dreglin Empire clan," says Wardell, describing the new minicampaign that picks up where GalCiv II left off. "The Dreglin, not a very nice race, have conquered the galaxy, but a rival clan known as the Korath wants to completely exterminate all races everywhere, so your job is to save



▶ One of the tricks will be for players to figure out which existing race gets its comeuppance.



▶ The A.I. writes "notes" to itself rather than allow a certain tactic to work repeatedly.



the galaxy from extermination—in order to enslave it.” (An evil...such a fine line between “pretty damned degenerate” and “utterly reprehensible.”)

The story’s just hors d’oeuvres, however, and Wardell thinks most players will probably head straight for the sandbox mode’s

randomized galaxies toinker with the many other new features. “In GalCiv II, each opponent was randomly given one of several different strategy types and adopted accordingly,” he says, highlighting one of the bullet-point changes in Dark Aether: custom enemy races. “Players can now design opponents, including how they look and speak, and map those same strategies, from turtling, rushing, and strangling to

hit-and-run, manouevring others, at others.” Add asteroid fields (they slow ships and yield resources), diplomatic treaties for money or research swaps, two new races (the Korath and the rogulsh Zrim), extra ship parts (they’re mostly for looks, for all you screenshot pimps), graphically enhanced ship-to-ship

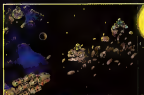
battles, and (hello Jennifer-Garner-messe-E.T.) espionage agents.

“Agents are literally units you can place on planetary tiles,” explains Wardell. “So if a player builds a Technology Capital, which doubles the research of that planet, an opponent could put an agent there to nullify the effects of that superproject.” Counter if you like by sticking your own agents on the same tile, but, as always, with an eye toward your budget.

Other enhancements include new environment types designed to prevent colony-rushing by forcing players to expend more asymmetrically, and the Epic Generator, an XML-derivative syntax cruncher that converts your game sessions into text-based yarns. Even the oft-praised A.I.’s getting a makeover. “Computer A.I. has always been my focus,” says Wardell, noting that A.I. development is always a trade-off between sophistication and time. “In Dark Aether, we allow users to really tweak just how smart the computer players will be, including the option to let the A.I. use additional CPU time for more advanced algorithms.” Whatever the end result, let no one excuse Wardell and crew of resting on their derrières. /Matt Peckham

▶▶ YOUR JOB IS TO SAVE THE GALAXY FROM EXTERMINATION—IN ORDER TO ENSLAVE IT.

—BRAD WARDELL, CEO, STARDOCK



STARDOCKING ACROSS THE PUBLISH-VERSE

Plenty of folks think Stardock was first to market with direct-to-download apps, but those in the know were pulling down games and wonky Windows apps via Stardock well before Valve swiped the spotlight with *Half-Life 2*. Now the company that put OS/2 on the gaming map is taking another notable step: third-party publishing. The idea? Give self-funded developers with high-quality projects access to the same markets and sales channels as the franchise big boys.

“We’re offering a two-tiered publishing system,” explains Stardock Entertainment publishing director Brian Clair. “For the first tier, we’ll be selecting up to two triple-A games per year to publish at retail and online. Games that fall into the second tier will only be published online, with both tiers selling through our TotalGaming.net service.”

The deals would include “full-scale marketing and distribution,” which, according to Clair, might incorporate both print and online advertising. “We plan to focus our marketing efforts on a title-by-title basis, creating ad campaigns that will maximize exposure,” he explains, adding that keeping the number of games the company brings to retail each year low should allow them to focus on making those games a success.

What about risky niche games that might not have mass-market appeal? Clair says that’s where online distribution could factor big. “If someone came to us with a really clever niche game that we thought people would enjoy, it might not justify the expense of sending it to retail, but we would certainly consider putting it on TotalGaming.net.”



▲ **Extraction Point** heads out of the office and into the construction site of a future office.



▲ The minigun is **Extraction Point's** main new weapon—but TimeGate says there's one more it's not talking about.



▲ **TimeGate's** tweaking **F.E.A.R.'s** cover-sucking, barrier-hopping A.I., hoping players will be surprised by familiar enemies' tricks.



FREE GAMES!
 Everyone loves 'em. Everyone loves 'em. And apparently realize this and is releasing the original F.E.A.R.'s hot multiplayer mode for free public consumption in August.

F.E.A.R. EXTRACTION POINT

Warning: This preview contains tense, confusing situations

PUBLISHER Vivendi Games DEVELOPER TimeGate Studios GENRE First-Person Shooter RELEASE DATE October 2006

HANDS-ON PREVIEW

A MERE 30 SECONDS SEPARATE THE explosive ending of *F.E.A.R.* and the back-from-black beginning of its first expansion, *Extraction Point*, but in that short time, big events have transpired outside the bounds of the game box. In 2004, original *F.E.A.R.* developer Monolith (after being purchased by Warner Bros.) divorced publisher Vivendi Universal Games and split the FPS estate as follows: Vivendi keeps the acronym name; Monolith keeps the IP (intellectual property), including the characters, story, and right to make games in the universe it created. *Extraction Point* is the last anomalous vestige of the prenuptial agreement—a VUG-published expansion pack agreed upon before the breakup that uses every asset except Monolith. The new developer? A house called TimeGate (known primarily for strategy games such as *Axis & Allies* and *Kohan*), constructing this expansion with Monolith's guidance and story approval. Bizare, no?

But it might explain why *Extraction Point* follows the letter of expansion-pack law to a T. New weapons. New areas. New monsters. Check, check, check. For those who couldn't get enough of *F.E.A.R.'s* dodgy, camouflaged assassins, *Extraction Point* brings you shadow creatures. "They're like poltergeists," says producer Tim Hill. "They're created by [seris paranormal grr-villain] Alma's increasingly unstable mind. They have a penchant for pulling people apart limb by limb. The only warning the player will get is to catch a glimpse of a shadow out of the corner of his eye...and the only way to combat the shadow creatures is to use slow-mo." For those who quickly tired of *F.E.A.R.'s* endless cubicles and office spaces, TimeGate offers up a few new canvases to paint with bullet holes: a subway, some sewerlike catcombs, a stately church (and its cheaply decorated rectory), and an outdoor construction site if you're O.L.A.U.S.T.R.O.P.H.O.B.I.C.

In all of these locations, the key word is "destructible"—doubly so with EP's new mini-

gun, carried by *Extraction Point's* new heavy soldiers. Not exactly the most novel weapon, but in practice, it's ideal for *F.E.A.R.'s* trademark scenery-chewing firefights—TimeGate packs its levels with plenty of suspiciously placed plate glass windows, loose books, and canisters to shred to pieces. The A.I. is up to its old honor-roll standards, too—and then some, according to Hill. "The units are more aware of their environments than ever before, and they do everything in their power to make sure they utilize those environments." We spotted more than a few soldiers knocking down crates for cover. And if you don't blow up that steel support beam yourself, there's a good chance the giant missile-firing mechaoid will do it for you.

Given the behind-the-scenes circumstances, it seems natural that *Extraction Point* would play it safe—don't mess with the darling original, give players a little bit more, and save the big, huge leaps for the honest-to-goodness sequel, whatever its name may be. A textbook setup for wherever Monolith, Alma, the acronym, and the IP go next. / Sean Malloy



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GOTHIC 3

Nach Vergessenheit

PUBLISHER: AVALON DEVELOPER: PIRASCA BYRON GENRE: CRPG PLATFORMS: September 2009

▶ WHEN THERE ARE NO OBLIVION GATES LEFT TO CLOSE AND YOU CAN'T BE BOTHERED WITH those pesky "other people" in MMOs, where's a roleplayer to turn next for his free-form fix? The hardcore RPG cognoscenti have their palates fixed on German-born Gothic 3, heir apparent to Oblivion and cult-favorite series among the Illuminated. But how does this third iteration stack up to The Elder Scrolls? Producer Michael Paock helps us count the ways. / *Sean Matky*

+3 PERCEPTION SKILL

GMV skulders around
 Mithras, jakes CEO Puy
 Mithras, creating it about
 of Gordan spore, at
 Old jakes's Barometric
 Entertainment East



▶ Bugged that Lord Fomige the Spideviler, boss monster from your favorite MMO, seems to have infinite heads to turn in? In single-player RPGs, actions can have real, world-changing consequences.



▶ Previous Gothic games were huge hits in their native Germany but tanked in the U.S. Paock attributes that to poor localization and general market differences.

▶▶ A DRAGONFLY FLAPS ITS WINGS IN THE DESERT, AND AN UPRISING FAILS IN NORDMAR.



THE WAY OF THE WILL

While Oblivion's "Radiant" A.I. boasted NPCs with needs and goals, most players never saw much more than folks strolling around town with little determination. "Although the NPCs in Oblivion follow a daily routine," says Paack, "most of them just stand around or walk from Point A to B." Gothic 3's A.I. purports to go beyond mere Radiance: "We believe that the variety of the daily tasks that NPCs perform in Gothic 3 is much higher—from smiths creating weapons, selling items, and sharpening their swords to tavern owners sweeping the floor and serving guests, among other things."

But the A.I. does in more than just individual motivation—it also covers pack communication. If you act like a foot-climbing, peasant-slaughtering fool in one town, expect word of your actions

to spread to the next. Paack describes the RPG equivalent of chain theory: "You get into a fight with a drunken barbarian and knock him down. As a consequence, his friends seek you out later to discuss the matter, and you teach them a lesson. Much later, you travel north and come to a village, which turns out to be the drunken barbarian's hometown. People there realize that you're the guy who knocked down their cousin, because news of the incident traveled. They probably won't like you, and they may be afraid of you. On the other hand, you gained the respect of this village's local chieftain, who exiled this particular troublemaker long ago. Had you taken different actions with this barbarian, the interaction with the villagers would likely be different." A dragonfly flaps its wings in the desert, in other words, and an uprising falls in the mountains of Nordmar.



THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

As in Oblivion, combat is action-oriented; unlike those in Oblivion, Gothic's battles are designed to be fought from third-person with soft-lock targeting. The left and right mouse buttons control a variety of attack types (quick, normal, heavy, jump, stab), while hotkeys switch among spells, ranged weapons, and melee configurations.

Freedom is the watchword for character development; players don't choose a class, but rather develop based on play style. "Our system supports players who want to focus only on being a pure, weaponless mage, pure fighter, pure thief, or those who want to be well-rounded," says Paack. "The hero can also learn how to sneak into houses and pick locks or how to sneak near animals to become the perfect hunter. The catch is that the player must find the right trainers and convince them that he's worthy."



THE WAY OF THE WORLD

As anyone who's hoofed it across Cyrodill will tell you, the landscape of Oblivion isn't mottled with intense variety—gray medieval towns, blue elven ruins, green forests, repeat. Gothic 3's world is smaller and cozier, but it's divided into three distinct regions, each with its own visual and gameplay nuances.

The Middle Realm

Lush forests, narrow passages, torrential downpours, and a little bit of magic define the Middle Realm. "Each of the three regions contains new tribes and factions with their own philosophies and goals," says Paack. There are no clearly "good" or "evil" factions in Gothic 3's world—just parties with different views.

Verant

"The wide-open spaces of the desert emphasize a sense of isolation as you're searching for the next town or oasis," says Paack of Gothic 3's Arabian-influenced southern realm, ruled by the Hashishin tribe. Players can pick up certain skills only in specific areas of the world. Only the Hashishin, for example, can teach how to fight with two swords.

Nordmar

Harsh mountain terrain, cliffs, and heavy snowfall mark the Nordic-inspired country to the north. "There are only a few small paths leading through the mountains of Nordmar," says Paack. "Thus there are no ways to avoid your opponents—you have to face them. But of course, it's easier to push enemies over the edge of a cliff."

THE HOT SHEET

TEN THINGS THAT ROCK CGW'S WORLD



1 L33T SCRABBLE
Do you r00b? Prove it with an offline game of Scrabble. Thinkquik.com is selling a satin pouch containing 103 colored tiles that let you square off against the non-l33t and snag the triple-world score for "w00t!"



2 NERD RAP!
Finally, a band that recognizes the musical significance of World of Warcraft, the social impact of Back to the Future, and the need to get those motherf***ing snakes off that motherf***ing planet! Go to www.futuristicserobotz.com.



3 DEFLEXION
Laser—the best tool in the known universe for killing alien, removing unwanted body hair, and making obnoxious red dots on movie screens. Now, in a board game available at thinkook.com, you can harness the secret and terrifying power of the laser. Move pieces around, deflect your beam against mirrors, and win.



4 TOMMY
Prey is a fun game for a couple of reasons. Yeah, we could talk about gravity portals, blah, blah, blah. The real reason we like this: the return of the chatty action hero, Nothing against you, Gordon, buddy, but you need to speak up a little.



5 THE VENTURE BROS.
Imagine watching the most stressed-up episode of Jerry Quest. Then you started sniffing glue. Season one of the Venture brothers' adventures are on DVD, and a new season is currently airing on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim.

6 SILENT CARTOGRAPHERS
Where in the world is Eggbart? If you ever find yourself lost in Azaroth, consult mapwow.com. Unleash the same technology as Google Maps; you have instant access to the entire world of Warcraft.



7 JACK OF ALL TRADES
We're fans of just about all things Bruce Campbell. If you sneezed (like we did) and missed this gemball series about a Napoleonic-era "superspy," you need to check out the box set that collects all of Jack's adventures.

8 HOLLYWOOD, GAME-STYLE
Ever want to play Space Remnants (the game from the movie Tron)? The guys at equallyspicy.com aren't just into obscure games—they're also into re-creating ones that only existed in TV shows and movies.



9 THE RACOUNTERS
Forget that White Stripes mole half Jack Black lends his talents to the Racounters. The first thing you think after hearing the debut disc, Broken Day Soldiers, is "Huh, kinda Beatles-esque." The simple, addictive guitar hooks of '60s Brit rock extend well beyond the opening song, "Steady as She Goes."



10 MARVEL'S CIVIL WAR
The government has just enacted a superhero registration act. Battle lines are drawn between heroes: Captain America goes underground, while Spidey goes public. We've not usually one to fall prey to "earthshaking" comic-book events, but this is a great read.

PIPELINE

Save some money for these upcoming games!

AUGUST 2006	PUBLISHER
Bad Day L.A.	Aspyr
Dungeon Siege II: Broken World	3K Games
DJ Madstar	Strategy First
FutDun 2	Wired Games
Fall	QueenOfHearts
Hockey NFL 07	Electronic Arts
Mage Knight: Apocalypse	Nemex Games
UFO: Extraterrestrial	T3 Synergy
SEPTEMBER 2006	
ArchLord: The Legend of Chuntz	Codemasters
The Aura 2: Sacred Rings	QueenOfHearts
Coscar IV	Wired Games
Out of Jaws	Ubisoft
Company of Heroes	THQ
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic	Ubisoft
Feeds of War	Ubisoft
Just Cause	Games Interactive
Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	LucasArts
Madstream	Codemasters
NBA Live 07	Electronic Arts
Neverwinter Nights 2	Aspyr
NHL 07	Electronic Arts
Open Season	Ubisoft
Reservoir Dogs	Eden Interactive
Scotland: The World in Years	Wired Games
Roughland Legends	3K Games
TimeCrack	VU Games
OCTOBER 2006	
Age of Empires III: The WarChiefs	Microsoft
Enterfield 2142	Electronic Arts
E.C.A.P. Extracurricular Pursuit	Wired Games
Gothic 3	Aspyr
Left Behind: Eternal Forces	Left Behind Games
Mixing 2: Evidence	QueenOfHearts
Phantasy Star Universe	Sega
Reas & Miss: Spikedeo One	Ubisoft Games
RJ Meter's Reflected	2K Games
Rise of the Guardians	Electronic Arts
San Diego Unlimited	Aspyr
Zoo Tycoon 3: Marine Mania	Microsoft
FALL/WINTER 2006	
Evolution in Arms: Hell's Highway	Ubisoft
Microsoft Flight Simulator X	Microsoft
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STAR CONTROL II

The best way to deal with waves of Ur-Quan fighters? A couple of well-timed BUTT shots. Yes, the Spathi's Backwards Utilizing Tracking Torpedo was one of many memorable bits from the classic spacefarer *Star Control II*, a game that tied up story-driven space exploration, a wide-open universe, diplomacy, interstellar trade, and ship-to-ship combat into one quirky package. What made *Star Control II* stand out, though, was the incredible amount of backstory and interaction with all the alien species. Hours of dialogue—and offbeat humor—brought each race you encountered to life. Miss those glory days? Just download the freeware version, *The Ur-Quan Masters* (<http://sc2.sourceforge.net>), released with the blessings of *Star Control II* cocreators Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III.



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RELEASE DATE 1997

ULTIMA ONLINE

An amusing bit of trivia about *Ultima Online*, the world's first "mainstream" MMORPG: Every now and then, slime monsters (usually labeled "a slime") randomly spawn with the name "a jwelson"—a bitter jab at former CGW editor-in-chief Johnny Wilson for handing *UO 1997's* Coaster of the Year "award." Yes, the game was a mess at launch...but *UO* hit its stride by the *Second Age* expansion in 1996—and, eight years later, it's still going strong. It's the game that turned both gamers and developers on to MMOs, proving it could be done—and, in so doing, it changed the face of PC gaming forever. From Coaster of the Year to Hall of Fame... now that's what we'd call an epic quest.



{THE CGW HALL OF FAME}

PEOPLE

Dani Barton Berry, Game Designer
John Carmack, Programmer
Richard Gottwald, Game Designer
Pan Gilbert, Programmer and Game Designer
Sid Meier, Game Designer
Ray Muzyka, Game Designer
Tim Schafer, Game Designer
Jon Van Caneghem, Game Designer
Roberto Williams, Game Designer
Will Wright, Game Designer
Greg Zeschak, Game Designer

GAMES

AD&D "Gold Box" Games (late '90s and early '00s)
Alone in the Dark (J-Motion, 1992)
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn (Interplay, 2001)
Battlefield 1942 (Electronic Arts, 2002)
Bejeweled (PopCap, 2002)
The Berd's Tale (EA, 1985)
Battle Chess (Interplay, 1993)
Ballground series (Talesoft, 1996-present)
Betrayer at Kronor (Dynamix, 1993)
Chromaster (Software Toolworks, 1993)
Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)

Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995)
Counter-Strike (Mod, 1999)
Crusader No Remorse (Origin, 1995)
Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight (LucasArts, 1997)
Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993)
Diablo (Blizzard, 1997)
 Doom 3 (id Software, 1993)
Dungeons Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1995)
Empire (Hazeul, 1987)
EverQuest (Sony Online, 1998)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
Football (Interplay, 1997)
Front Page Sports: Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993)
Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within (Sierra, 1996)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1993)
Grim Fandango (LucasArts, 1998)
Gunshep (MicroProse, 1986)
Half-Life (Valve Software, 1998)
Harpoon (360 Pacific, 1983)
Heroes of Might and Magic II (New World Computing, 1997)
High Heat Baseball 2000 (3DO, 1999)
Interstate '76 (Activision, 1997)

John Madden NFL Football Series (3DO, 1998)
Kampfgruppe (SSI, 1965)
King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
Lemmings (Prologix, 1991)
Link's 88 Pro (Access Software, 1992)
MI Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989)
Master of Magic (MicroProse, 1994)
Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1983)
Medieval: Total War (Activision, 2002)
Mesh Gridade (SSI, 1965)
MeshWarrior 2 (Activision, 1995)
Might and Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (EA, 1983)
Myth (Bangin, 1997)
No One Lives Forever (Fox Interactive, 2000)
Panzer General (SSI, 1984)
PlanetCopter Torment (Interplay, 1992)
Pinball (MicroProse, 1987)
Prince of Persia (Broderbund, 1989)
Quake (id Software, 1996)
Raided Tycoon (MicroProse, 1990)
Red Baron (Dynamix, 1993)
The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)
Sam & Max Hit the Road (LucasArts, 1993)
SimCity (Maxis, 1989)
The Sims (Maxis, 2000)
Spinner Call Baseball (2003)
StarCraft (Blizzard, 1998)
Starflight (Electronic Arts, 1988)
System Shock 2 (Electronic Arts, 1998)
Tetra (Spectrum HoloByte, 1988)
They Must Have Loved LucasArts (1998)
THE Fighter (LucasArts, 1984)
Tom's Raider (Eidos, 1996)
Ultima I (Origin Systems, 1983)
Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1986)
Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)
Unreal Tournament (Epic Games, 1999)
War in Russia (SSI, 1994)
WarCraft II (Blizzard, 1995)
Wasteland (Interplay, 1988)
Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1990)
Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)
Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)
Wizardry (Sirtech, 1981)
Wolfsenstein 3D (id Software, 1992)
X-CDM (MicroProse, 1994)
You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1995)
Zork (Infocom, 1981)



PUBLISHER: Sierra
DEVELOPER: Sierra
RELEASE DATE: 1988

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE

Sierra made more than just graphic adventures and Hoyle games in the mid-'80s, including one of our all-time favorites, the Rube Goldberg-inspired *The Incredible Machine*. Our minds boggled at *TM*'s various contraption-based puzzles. The idea: Assemble the bucket-load of cranks, pulleys, and other whatsits in order to get from point A to point B. And though we probably didn't realize it at the time, these conundrums even taught us some useful logic skills in the process. Yes, most longtime PC gamers fondly remember Sierra for its countless contributions to the adventure-game canon—but we reserve a special place for *TM*. Now if someone like...oh, say, PopCap) would just make a modern-day version...



PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
RELEASE DATE: 2002

FREEDOM FORCE

The long drought of good superhero games on the PC came to an end in 2002 with the release of Irrational Games' awesome *Freedom Force*, a strategy-RPG that put you in charge of a team of superheroes tasked with...what else?—keeping America safe from comic rat finks! While the gameplay itself was first-rate—with excellent missions, challenging tactical combat, and RPG-like character-building decisions—the game's brilliant re-creation of Silver Age comic books makes this one a classic. Irrational Games gets it all right—the supremely righteous heroes, the überbad villains, the colorful Jack Kirby-esque art style, the over-the-top dialogue. Even if you've never read a comic book, *Freedom Force* was one LOL moment after another, with a great game on top of it. For Freedom!



Look at Warren Spector's résumé and beneath his editor-in-chiefdom at Steve Jackson Games you'll see a parade of PC titles that have consumed far too much of our free time: *Ultima Underworld*, *Theat*, *Deus Ex*, *System Shock*, just to name a few. And even when his games don't completely succeed at what they set out to do (as many critics argue happened with *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*), it's still easy to spot moments of real brilliance and creativity—a tough thing to pull off in an industry where creative output, now more than ever, seems crafted by committee. That's because Spector is more than just a game maker; he's a game-shaper, one of the industry's great thinkers, theorists, and outspoken philosophers. The Epicurus of emergence. The Socrates of the sandbox. And while you're busy exploring the virtual worlds PC games offer, Spector is out exploring the boundaries of player choice and pondering what it truly means to be free. Heady stuff for a field that's supposed to be "fun"—but we're more than happy that he's dedicated to the task. /

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UNLEASH THE BARRAGE
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CRYISIS

Designing *Crysis* to defy convention **BY SHAWN ELLIOTT**

EXCLUSIVE

PALM FRONDS AND OTHER FLASH-FROZEN TAHITIAN FLORA tinkle like large-leaved chandeliers. Breadfruit trees, cycads, and ice—interesting imagery developer Crytek has made much of in its gambit to sell gamers on unofficial *Far Cry* follow-up *Crysis*. It arrests, it evokes: environmental pressure outpacing evolution or another exotic someplace to crunch through?

"From the beginning," says Crytek founder and CEO Cevat Yerli, "our questions were always, 'What sights haven't been seen? What experiences haven't been experienced?' So I told our illustrator to

refrigerate a rain forest. I saw it and said, 'Fantastic.' Hot became cold, color became monotone, albeit bright. 'Different' and 'difficult' are our criteria. Dark design isn't obnoxious. Shadow bluffs and conceals. You work with shape, whereas saturated color demands careful contrast. Anyway, for us, innovation is opposition: Vague becomes vivid, closed corridors become open space, linear becomes nonlinear, and scripted becomes systemic." He'd hit on something—"Think of it as an ice pineapple"—as captivating as it is emblematic of his company's contrarian way of working. >

VAGUE BECOMES VIVID

With the where decided, Yeri next needed a how and why. "We couldn't have a natural catastrophic cause it," he says, shaking his head at meteorology-minded *The Day After Tomorrow* and its climate-change didactic. Enter the extraterrestrials, geming's oft-used bugbears, except—once again—Crytek's otherworlders would have to be, well, unlike the others (we weigh the evidence elsewhere in this story).

For return CGW readers, what follows is familiar: What seems to be an asteroid crashes off the coast of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. In full spin cycle, the Pentagon claims to have jostled the object's trajectory, sparing population centers from a code-red Torino Scale collision. Meanwhile, newly minted superpower North Korea investigates with guns—an overt move the public-opinion-nascent United States covertly answers. Shortly thereafter, the hulk splits, generating a dome of supercooled air that shock-freezes everything in the vicinity.

"Oh, we work out our differences," explains level designer Alex Werner, looking up from his monitor when we ask if he's helping the North Koreans in the hangar he's in. "They're splitting a stockpile of secretly researched incendiary ammunition, illegal under international law, though wondrous against aliens," he adds. So if North Korea as U.S. badfellow shakes the stereotype, what of humanity setting aside cultural differences for common cause? "Well, we're back to blows in multiplayer," says lead designer Jack Memala, "when the alien threat isn't an immediate issue." See? It's an obsession.

Still at the airstrip, awelling the arrival of an American C-17 cargo aircraft, Werner shows off Crytek's scale—not Oblivion big, but big nonetheless. "No skyboxes," he comments, referring to the memory-shaving slant of hand that, in other shooters, projects horizons as flat and fraudulent as that hedging *The Truman Show*'s built-for-Jim-Carrey Potemkin village. Why? So clouds pass and you pass through clouds. So the sun and moon rise and sink; so day turns dusk, night, dawn, and back again. Cen-do Yeri insists his crew scotchs et convention end works through well-known impediments. Crytek's programmers orange and come around, ultimately collecting interest on the investment. "Good god, the arguments we've had over this stuff," says Memala.


"I insisted that it's always, always better to use skyboxes," says art director Michael Khalmson, "but this way we can put clouds on an end between mountains...."

"Compare it to Quake IV's painted city. I saw it and almost stopped playing outright. I really ran back inside so I couldn't see it anymore. Like, 'Let me in!'"

Naturalism is its own reward—or so their thinking says—and only plausibly impassable terrain hems Crytek's play spaces—shear cliffs and open ocean, as opposed to key cards and housing corridors. In fact, even water doesn't act as a wall. Instead, it's the sharks in it, against which boundary probing becomes a game within a game where—duh-duh, duh-duh—the blood of one great white attracts three more. >

"Any real change in your action elicits a different reaction," says lead designer Jack Memala. "And we're not talking either hopping a fence or crawling under a cabinet."

Motion blur With a winter release, Crytek is on schedule to ship prior to the DirectX 10 tech that the game's next-gen graphics draw upon. Solution: Full DX9 support out of the box and the ability to upgrade performance for DX10 at the push of a button.



Overseer alert! According to Mamata, "Shrewd players can access and control an alien vehicle. It'll be extremely challenging and extremely entertaining."

The huge alien "hunter" above gets grabby with trees, VTOLs—you name it. Try exploiting its tendencies with Trojan-horse tricks (e.g., attaching C4 to a tank).

SCRIPTED BECOMES SYSTEMIC

Werner isn't startled when aliens shear the top off his hanger—they're supposed to. It's as they pull out, North Korean commandos in pursuit, that he turns to us: "That's a first. They're taking them outside. That's systemic, not planned programming." Over the tarmac, where armored fighting and anti-air vehicles rim the runway, the aliens (actually alien craft protecting unseen pilots) swap white heat for Korean white phosphorus. Showing as he tells, Werner links a tank and confirms that trucks, VTOLs—you name it—bustle your trek from intro to finale. "OK," he says, "you have to see this."

Into hounds will recognize what Werner invites we see as "that big, bad thing" that demolished a carrier flight deck in a demo of this spring's Electronic Entertainment Expo and forever after on Google Video. What the clips don't indicate, though, is that 1) the tentacle "hunter's" bad behavior isn't scripted elsewhere as it was in that showcase, and 2) far from a one-off boss battle, the things stalk through warehouses/forests/whatever, toothpicking trees; nimbly lopping through fallen timber; and freezing and shattering matter so that the shards fly your way. At Werner's approach, this one stops skewering and tossing soldiers to upend the tank—and that, it turns out, is the designer's must-see. "We weren't expecting this response, either," he explains, "but obviously we had to encourage it once we'd seen

it. Now they grab at anything in the game."

A.I. designer Mikko Mononen shares him up: "I start simple... well, insofar as the initial behavior itself is simple but allows for more complex application. In this case, the command was 'If something is threatening, then throw it'... only I had nothing further than infantry in mind. Another technique interrupts core A.I. behavior to add new abilities to all the characters and creatures, and that way, the enemy can adapt to changing situations with increasing complexity." For instance, the A.I. recognizes now cover as it's created (say, toppled trees and collapsed sheds), sees lifeless bodies as signs of likely peril, and swishing ferns as evidence worth investigating.

Sometimes seeing is not understanding, as Mononen found when testers weren't aware of what enemies were doing until enemies started saying what they were doing. "Because the people playing missed the flanking maneuvers, it seemed as though enemies materialized beside or behind them," he says. "We inserted audio saying 'Flank him' or something and suddenly everyone is shouting, 'See that? They're flanking!'" And so Crytek's challenge is in communicating intelligent behavior as well as coding for it—to indicate that suspicious scouts inspect blood left on icees or fan out to find concealed players, and that support troops stick to their guns according to their respective roles. >

WE HATE SET-UP-AND-STAGED EXPERIENCES, YOU KNOW, WHERE EVERY TIME THIS GUY IS GONNA BE HERE, AND HE'S GONNA TURN AND SAY THE SAME THING TO THIS OTHER GUY.

—TACK MAMAS, LEAD DESIGNER, CRYTEK



HYPERACUSIS

Crysis' E.T.s, who show signs of increasing intelligence as the game goes on, begin monitoring human combat capability before your first encounter. That high-pitched humming now and then? Heard-but-not-seen aliens spying from the sidelines. Armed with this knowledge, Yerli says, you can actually attack and kill the interlopers prior to "official" first contact.



- "I told the team that two things aren't happening," says Memela. "No gravity guns and no bullet time."



- As Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli puts it, "FPS is the most challenging, the most problematic, and the most prestigious genre in gaming."



"Most weapons are modular," Mameis says. "For instance, you can swap scopes between the sub-machine gun and the rifle. In addition, some weapons include incendiary and high explosive, plus tactical rounds that players can program to sleep or explode."

OUT-REACTING BECOMES OUTSMARTING

"Where closed becomes open, and linear becomes nonlinear, and scripted becomes systemic," says Yerli, once more championing of the dichotomy bit. "In *Crysis*, out-reacting becomes outsmarting. Scrutinizing is important. We want to put it in the player's mind that observation and inference matter more than hot-trigger fingers. Yes, yep, yick come, see, and conquer. The question, then, is how can we enable players to express intelligence? And so our bodysuit was born." The suit, which allows hero Jake Dunn to subvert in inhospitable cold, also offers convertible speed, cloaking, strength, and shield parameters. Although such powers lend themselves to logic puzzles, Yerli insists that these must never impede progress, that design never demands suit manipulation. Instead, attributes are yours to lean on or neglect, although your "yes" or "no" can carry consequences as loaded as saved lives.

To Yerli's reckoning, forcing a restart when players fail at some task other than self-preservation is negative reinforcement, another no-no. He's opting for incentive: say, channeling power to obstruct an entryway with objects, halving enemy presence, or liberating eyes trapped beneath a beam. In the latter case, survivors might offer useful, if nonessential, items, supply you with a piece to one of *Crysis*'s interpersonal side stories,

or simply pop up much later, meaning an outpost or otherwise proving a better boon alive than dead.

Ideally, combat itself replaces puzzle solving, and, similar to his suit, Jake's modular SCAR and trick ammunition permit clever play. State-of-the-Spinter-Cel-art tactical bullets silently attach themselves to targets and either administer sleeping agents, activate trackers, or emit beeping sounds at the push of one of three buttons. Simple application is as self-evident as attracting curious troops to a Humvee with sound prior to plugging the combustible fuel can attached to its trunk. Preparation can put a helicopter pilot's lights out after he's lifted off with a full crew—Yerli's example, not ours. Add access to any visible vehicle, along with maps made to underscore possibility while downplaying path-following, and the vibe—so is the case in Warner's airfield mission—is more battlefield than single-player FPS.

"It's your game," says Mameis. "Go wild with weapons or slither your way from start to finish. We hate set-up-and-staged experiences, you know, where every time this guy's gonna be here, and he's gonna turn and say the same thing to this other guy, and then that guy's gonna call the helicopter. Maybe our AI calls for help, maybe not. Maybe a Humvee, maybe a helicopter...."

THE VIBE IS MORE BATTLEFIELD THAN SINGLE-PLAYER FPS.

DETA NEW

A-yup, *Crysis* appeared on *OGW*'s March 2006 cover, too. *Crytek* artist Michael Khaimzon, however, isn't sure who at publisher EA provided the images that he calls "Charlie Sheen with a leaf blower" and insists it's better he not know: "I'm going to kill this artist if I find him."



KNOWN BECOMES UNKNOWN

Quake IV's spoiled-in-a-demo plot twist could be the culprit. Either way, Crytek is reluctant to tattle and refuses to reveal Crysis' fourth-quarter shocker: Inside the tented exosuits are aliens they insist are unlike any we've ever encountered.

"Aliens are always a pain in the ass," says art director Khalimzon in accented English. "Teenagers are already taught three things: Allen, Predator, and The Matrix. They're in every teen's mind now, more than women, I think. So every time they do a slight similarity, they'll underscore it. Always. No matter what you do. It's inevitable." If Half-Life's headcrabs are facehuggers, and Halo's crab-faced, cloaking elite stand in for the twin-clawed Predator... "Our troopers and scouts have tentacles, so everyone immediately says 'Sentinels,'" Khalimzon says. "What, are you f---ing crazy? They look nothing like it. It's like comparing a BMW and a Lamborghini. Yes, they have wheels. Our aliens are definitely different; they're closer to sea life, so 'squelch' if someone insists on putting a word on it, even though they aren't in water."

In fact, Crysis uses in-the-ocean scenarios to condition players, insofar as is possible, for forthcoming close encounters within the aliens' mile-high HQ. "Although the situations are far from the same, it helps," says Mamalis. "Having evolved in a space-like setting—and yes, the game explains how that happens—these guys are used to low gravity and the interior of their ship supports that sort of environment. To succeed, you have to adapt your actions to that habitat, and you'll have tools to help. The nanosuit, for instance, can generate its own gravity field and give you, you know, 1 G. In other words, you can create earth conditions on command and still take off and fly in a split second."

So much so say "alien" in Crytek's offices and the same curious smile, lurching to blurb all and yet still preserve the surprise in a statement of precariously conflicting inclinations, appears on programmer, artist, and producer alike. Where Far Cry scouted smart, trouble-in-paradise play with idiot monkeymen in an underground facility, the smile suggests Crysis' secret is far more mesmerizing than even the frozen timber preceding it. Just don't think Escher-esque up-down inversions. "It's not Prey, where you're still in a standard first-person shooter, only walking on the ceiling," Mamalis says. "You're flying. You're actually airborne, and there's torque—so when you shoot, you're spinning. It's equal and opposite action-reaction physics, and it hasn't happened elsewhere. And these are cool creatures. They navigate and completely understand negative space, it's their, and they use it against you, to ambush you, and so on. And we could easily craft an outer-space life—you know, spacewalking and ship-to-ship combat among the stars."

As hard as it is to say if that's a hint or out-loud thinking, head honcho Yefi insists that his company is plotting beyond Crysis' closing credits. "First contact is with an expeditionary force. More—many, many more—ships are enroute." For now, the team faces the immediate future. "One thing never changes," Khalimzon says. "You ship a game, and the second that somebody says it's going gold; you second-guess. You start off saying, 'Oh, this is good, this is great. Let's ship it.' Then, it's 'Holy s---! How did I miss that? I should've done this, should've done that,' and it's too late, and then you make the next thing. We see the project every day, and that's the problem. All the same, I want to play this. I really, really want to play this."

"I wish I weren't working on Crysis," adds Mamalis. "I'd be bonkers for it." >

CANCER

NO ATTACHEMENT

FLASHLIGHT

NO ATTACHEMENT

GRENADE LAUNCHER

NO ATTACHEMENT

TRAPPED UNDER ICE

Inside, the ice dome (think: arctic greenhouse) under cracked glass, the sea sticks in vast sheets that dynamically fracture and float when struck. And so while boblink physics work for you when you take the Popoia's plunge, the same water hazards bedevil you, too. "Furthermore," adds Mamalis, "some weapons and vehicles won't function in the intense cold, forcing players to improvise and use the environment along with the aliens' own arsenal."



"Trashed vehicles either explode or smolder for some time," says Mamais. "We want wrecks to create cover."

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THREE-DECK USE UNAPPROVED

» "AS SOON AS I ORDER A SHIP, IT'S MY SHIP, AND NO ONE ELSE CAN TAKE IT."

—JACK MAMAS



The idea is for insignia to indicate a player's rank (and net worth) in campaign mode's kill-for-cash economy.

SINGLE-PLAYER BECOMES MULTIPLAYER

"It's *Team Fortress 2*," says lead designer Jack Mamasle. *Civ's* Notes summary: He's invoking vaponware, not knowing that Valve would announce *Tf2* only two weeks later, but the statement is no less ballsy: *Crysis*' economy-jacked, gas-whiz multiplayer mode is a kind of *Second Coming*. After initially joining forces, the Korean-American alliance founders and the bigger-than-the-bath-of-us threat becomes opportunity to make one side much bigger than the other, provided someone secures exclusive access to the alien spoils. Each side starts from a near-impregnable HQ, an offshore submarine or inland base armed with automated missiles and turrets (buh-bye, base camping). Each player sets off with only a pistol. Everything else costs credits—and most every meaningful act costs 'em.

Instead of capture zones, all alike in ell but location, total war factories, similar to RTS structures in their specificity of output, function as waypoint and objective. "Take this harbor, for instance," Mamasle says. "Hold its office, and the port is yours. It begins producing inflatable Zodiacs; email, sort of Boston Whalers; hovercrafts; and better-armed

patrol boats." Other sites include motorworks that make trucks, jeeps, and light transportation; tracked vehicle factories for APCs and mobile AA, as well as tanks; and airfields, which fabricate the obvious. Says Mamasle: "I pull out my PDA, and, depending upon conditions, different options open up. As soon as I order a ship, it's my ship, and no one else can take it. It's as if I have the key or code to it. We want to create a sense of ownership, as opposed to other FPSes, in which vehicles are throwaway things—blow up and respawn, blow up and respawn. Here, they're an investment, and although I can donate mins to a needy ally, I can only field one active vehicle at a time."

Lacked vehicles limit grand-lift hardware though never rule it out; for-purchase lock picks let you lift what you can't afford. If and when you find it. "And a less direct option," Mamasle laughs, "is to tag an opponent with a [taoist] bullet before he's behind the wheel, and then put him to sleep and pull him out again after he's behind it." And bouncing over him as he comes to, or having a teammate in a second truck work with you to slam him between the bumpers? "Of course," he says. "We encourage high fives and chest bumps."



In addition to its campaign mode, Crysis also offers themed deathmatch and tactical CTF. "We're not taking too out-there, though," Kamale says. "With DM, people just want to jump in, try weapons, and do their thing."





Not shown: *Crysis 3* gives teams access to freeze cannons and other alien gizmos—try for falling a full-occupancy Jeep as it hits a Hazmat County-style jump.



CREATE YOUR OWN CLASSES AS YOU GO THROUGH THE GAME

—RICK MARAIS

The setup also solves one of the *Battlefield* series' bigger snafus: 16 goons on a runway ready to throw themselves on the tarmac, forcing tanklike on the guy who gets the one and only plane. Our concern, though, is pro players making the most money, buying the best tech, and obliterating nonguns still in the pistol-only Stone Age. "Yeah, but better players have higher point values on their heads, too," Mamalis reassures. "I can frag one of them and buy better equipment, so it balances out. We're leveling the economy like that. In *Battlefield*, if a guy is good enough, he's going to fly forever. In our game, he has to land and buy bombs. He can't cruise over the runway to reload. And then vehicles aren't impervious. You can mess up a chopper's rotors so it flies crappy."

Windows break, fenders warp, fuel cans catch fire, and engines quit working. Superficial damage decays, although it's possible to patch assets back into operability with engineering equipment. "No fixed classes," says Mamalis, "but you can buy and carry a couple of pieces of equipment. With a long-range rifle and welder's torch, you can snipe and repair stuff. Or you can be a medic with stealth options, creating your own classes as you go through the game. And the more you use

something, the more plug-ins you can buy for it, and the more proficient you become with it." In fact, the plan is for *Crysis* to wrap even the power to communicate within its credit-economy and proficiency-through-use systems. At match start, team chatter carries from mouth to ear and no further (avoiding enemy notwithstanding); would-be collaborators can then shop for range-expanding wireless comets. "Communication," Mamalis adds, "is vital when collecting alien cores."

Cores—extraterrestrial technology ripe for reverse engineering—rest in crash sites. Once obtained via extraction equipment, they allow a team to retrofit its arsenal with out-of-this-world weapons, crack the Korean (or American) HQ's automated turrets, and claim total victory. Says Mamalis: "When you recover a core, everybody on either team sees it, and your position becomes getting it back to base—even though the whole world knows where you're going. We want to encourage convoys and counterconvoys. We want to see you start a match at sundown and end it under the stars, scouring crash sites with flashlights and [breakable] high beams," he says, riffing on *Crysis*' dynamic daylight cycles. "We're trying to make the best multiplayer mode, bar none." **F**



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THE 1UP
SHOW!

1UP
NETWORK

PREY

Heap good time!



▲ Spirit walking is not good for your posture.



▲ Oops, we put a Doom 3 shot here. Oh snap!



▲ They call it a portal, I call it a door.

PLATFORM: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios GENRE: First-Person Shooter AVAILABILITY: Retail Box, Download (introducing) COST: \$49.99 MSRP
 REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 3.2GB hard-disk space, NVIDIA GeForce 2.4GHz GPU, 1GB RAM, 16MB VRAM, Windows XP/XP SP2, 3-4 players



CRITICAL
 CHOICE
 GAMES

FILE THIS ONE UNDER "PLEASANT Surprises." Actually no—that doesn't do it justice. File it, instead, under "Holy Crap, I Guess Pigs Really Can Fly, Because No Way in Hell Did This Game Really Come Out and Actually Turn Out This Good." OK, that's more like it, because what we have here is a stunning comeback for a game that languished in development limbo since 1995 (one year before Quake!), joining the notorious Duke Nukem Forever as perennial message-board laughingstock.

But here we are, 11 years later...and, whadd'ya know, *Prey* returns from the dead—and it's good. Very good. Credit both 3D Realms for not giving up on its beleaguered baby and Human Head Studios for sticking over the development, adding a unique spin to it, and turning 1995 vaporware into one of 2006's best shooters.

INJUN TROUBLE

Just make sure you make it past the first five minutes: The opening scene—one of the most in memory—introduces you to your role as Tommy, a Cherokee unhappy with his current life on a reservation, despite the presence of a hot girlfriend who runs a bar (with gambling machines), and a wise grandfather who wares Indian garb out of a 1950s western and speaks in ponderous ephorisms while getting drunk. Nothing short of Cleveland Indians mascot Chief Wahoo welding in and doing a rain dance would make the scene any more stereotypical (on the other hand, *Game Informer* praised *Prey*'s "obvious" Joseph Campbell allusions, conveniently bullet-pointed on 2K Games' press release for the game).

Happily, that nonsense ends soon, as aliens arrive (to Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper," no less) and beam everyone aboard

their gigantic spaceship, where you get to spend the next eight or so hours solving puzzles and blowing up stuff. *Prey* uses id Software's Doom 3 engine, and if you played that game (or Quake 4), you may initially think you're in for more of the same, as *Prey* looks practically identical to both games in terms of lighting and architecture.

Yet *Prey* quickly proves itself in one crucial area of gameplay: level design. Human Head Studios did a fantastic job of letting imaginations run wild to create some of the most inventive environments seen in a shooter. The designers mess with both gravity and space to create surreal, Escher-like rooms that leave you constantly wondering which way is up. A floor you're standing on one minute may be the ceiling the next, with dead enemies "falling up." It's a dizzying effect—and for me, personally, it made *Prey* the first game since *Descent* to actually provoke nausea as I played...and I'm not complaining. How often do 3D games ever really make you feel like you're in a 3D space?

And it's not the only trick up Human Head's sleeves (or thinking caps...or...whatever).

YOU WILL BEAT EVERY ENEMY, INCLUDING BOSSES, BY SIMPLE ATTRITION, EVEN IF YOU COMPLETELY SUCK.



▲ The leech gun's lightning ammo makes quick work of foes.



▲ I see dead people on the ceiling. Or is it the floor? Help me memory!



▲ A monster throws a barrel at me. I die!



▲ Great. Now they're shooting at me in space.



▲ Blood and dead bodies. Play it with your kids!

Shortly into the game, you learn how to "spirit walk," leaving your physical body and wandering in spirit form (the graphics turn black-and-white during these sequences). Spirit walking is crucial to solving many of the game's puzzles, getting you past areas blocked to your physical form...but also allowing you to be (in a way) in two places at once. You can leave your physical body on an elevator platform, for example, and then drift off in spirit form in search of a switch to get the elevator moving.

Finally, portals (the big feature touted way back in 1993) appear in unexpected places to transport you (and your enemies) elsewhere. Even though these portals amount to nothing more than fancy-looking doors most of the time, in the best cases the game uses them to mess with your mind, creating—in a couple memorable spots—a hall-of-mirrors effect that finds you chasing yourself down corridors.

DESIGN BY CRONENBERG

Prey's combat is a little more down-to-earth, though. Although my pal (and CGW contributor) Tom Chick, in his review for Yahoo! Games, called the monsters "memorable," to me they

seemed straight out of...well, *Doom 3* or *Quake 4* (but then again, I may have just been too dizzy). And while the weapons look cool—all leky, weird, alien things with living parts on them—the action ultimately boils down, functionwise, to your standard FPS arsenal: sniper gun, grenade launcher, RPG, and so on. The battles themselves are better than average, thanks to the level design tricks (and this also goes for multiplayer deathmatches). Enemies pop unexpectedly out of portals, or appear upside-down or sideways on walls, forcing you to truly consider all the space around you.

The game's death mechanics mitigate any combat difficulty, however: Essentially, you never die. When your health hits zero, rather than present a Game Over screen and force a reload, Prey sends you to a "spirit world" for a few moments before plugging you right back where you were, with enemies still in whatever state of damage you left them. You can't lose—you'll beat every enemy (including bosses) by simple attrition, even if you completely suck. Some critics and fans feel this constitutes a form of cheating...but, hey, if

you're good, you won't die anyway, so what do you care? Meanwhile, the rest of us can play without getting frustrated.

Prey's easy difficulty probably contributed heavily to its 85 percent average score at GameRankings.com (our own 1UP.com reviewer, Gamatt Lee, scored it an 8/10—in line with that average). That's a good number...but not as good, in my mind, as it should be. When a game—even one with easy combat and some dubious cultural references—features level design as creative and original as that in *Prey*, it's serious reason to cheer. / Jeff Green

COMPUTER GAMING VERDICT

11-year-old vaporware returns...and it's actually good. Apparently, pigs can fly.

REALITY CHECK

1UP NETWORK	8/10
GAMESTOP	7.5/10
GAMESPY	3.5/5
IGN	9/10



► The MEC ground assault plane reduces Operation Road Rage's overpass to mush.



► An excellent time to abandon your ride.

BATTLEFIELD 2: ARMORED FURY

v1.3 patch woes...but still good tanks

REQUIREMENTS: Electronic Arts (EA) and DICE (EA's First Person Shooter developer). Download: www.battlefield.com (100 MB free; then \$10; patch: 1.70GB CPU: 512MB RAM, 4GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard, Internet connection, Battlefield 2 (2005) (2GB, 2.4GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 32GB+ videocard, 3.5-inch SATA drive).

ARMORED FURY, EA'S SECOND DOWNLOADABLE Battlefield 2 booster pack, provides a reasonable amount of content for its \$10 price tag—but it's tough to care when the game won't stop crashing. Yes, Fury's new maps and vehicle classes (light helicopters and ground assault planes) put some clever twists on BF2's gameplay and make for a nice change of pace that doesn't veer too far from BF2's back-and-forth of guns, planes, and tanks...but these additions had the misfortune of hitting the market immediately after the disaster known as the v1.3 patch.

The first rumblings of the patch's problems met with derision from BF2's true believers upon its May release. Responding to an early complaint about technical issues on the EA forums, user Wingman1515 got in the very first iteration of "I knew it would not take long for someone to start crying about the patch." Presumably, he was first in line to exit crow, as the following weeks showed the depth of the problems with v1.3. A couple of prime examples: The commander's ability to airstop vehicles is used as "artillery" so often as not, and EA's apparent decision to disallow unlockable features on unranked servers made plenty of players angry. And, as bad as that sounds,

the gameplay changes pale compared to the brutal instability that v1.3 introduces to the game, with a woefully slow server browser and frequent crashes to the desktop (if not total lockups) when e map loads. The patch actually makes things worse—as if loading up a game of BF2 doesn't already take long enough.

EA's response: an official community update in mid-June that stated "We recognize that this has been a very trying time for everyone who enjoys Battlefield 2," confirming that the publisher recognized v1.3's massive issues. With *Battlefield 2142* on its way, it's hard to imagine a worse time for people to get frustrated with the franchise. On EA's forums, d4rtan1an laid it out: "Battlefield 2142? Pfff. To get the same troubles?" The upcoming v1.4 patch (still in beta as of this writing) will hopefully fix these grievances.

RAGE AND FURY

Enough bellyaching about EA's terrible patching habits, though—*Armored Fury* itself rises above all of that. Despite the v1.3 issues and the split in the player base between *Fury* haves and have-nots, the booster pack's managed to spawn a reasonable number of servers, thanks to its somewhat unique spin. It amounts to \$3 worth of maps and vehicles and \$5 worth of ex-

cess, due to the new maps' U.S. settings. While the Alaskan *Midnight Sun* map doesn't make a big show of it, *Operation Road Rage* and *Operation Harvest* both scream "American set piece."

That partially explains why *Midnight Sun* seems—at first—like the weakest of the three new maps; *Road Rage*'s massive knot of freeways and its center overpass create an incredibly overpowering situation for air and armor, while *Operation Harvest* doesn't even feature the expansion's new planes. *Midnight Sun* is the least exotic, but its mixed terrain and integration of all of the new vehicles make it the best of the three. The bombing-obsessed new planes and infantry-hunting light helicopters don't necessarily fix any of the BF2 balance issues, but neither are they as vicious as those in the base game. Combined with the tons of armor on the map, though, they introduce fun changes to the air/armor/infantry dance, making *Fury* well worth your \$10. / Patrick Jaynt

THE GAMING VERDICT

v1.3 patch: Sucks the life from BF2 before you can get started. *Armored Fury*: A great, cheap way to indulge in your armor and air fantasies.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	7/10
GAMESPOT	7.5/10
GAMESPY	—
IGN	8/10

WHILE THE ALASKAN MIDNIGHT SUN MAP DOESN'T MAKE A BIG SHOW OF IT, OPERATION ROAD RAGE AND OPERATION HARVEST BOTH SCREAM "AMERICAN SET PIECE"

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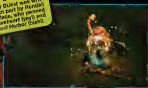
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TITAN

SCRIPT DOCTOR

Four Quetz was written in part by Randall Winkles, who penned *Greatheart* (2003) and *Great Harbor* (2010).



Oh, it's the Scorpion King, bitch!



Appropriately, the base of the labyrinth level is a gigantic minotaur—and his tele-shooting-type thingies.

NOT LONG AGO, I MET UP WITH SOME buddies for an old-school, halcyon, nights-allowed get-together. We FPS'd over a LAN and C&C'd with the BYOB till we were all Tango Uniform. Now, most of these guys are connected—one way or another—to the gaming industry, and the conversation eventually turned to my recent 1UP.com review of THQ's new action-RPG, *Titan Quest*. The general consensus: The *Quest*-of-10 I gave it was too low for a game that put so many things right, including gorgeous graphics, an engaging story, a bevy of monsters, and smoothly integrated multiplayer. "How?" they pleaded. "How could you give it a 7?" By the time they finished scratching their nails on the blackboard of my ego, I went heavily into my 45 Dwarven AEs of Bitchlessness. I knew I had no choice but to make a pilgrimage to the one true voice of the people:

1UP.com's user-reviews section. The forums mostly agreed with me in numerical score but defended the game in their commentary. User Outfitoftheinob, for example, gave the game a perfect 10, asking: "Don't you think it's time to stop labeling everything like this a *Diablo* clone?" Another poster conceded *Titan Quest*'s similarity to Blizzard's famous action-RPG, but said he couldn't blame developer Iron Lore for copying it, given how successful the formula was. BigSavageMike even called the game a "home run" and said he couldn't wait for *Titan Quest 2*, just one day after the original hit shelves. I was starting to feel like a Red Sox fan at Yankee Stadium.

NON OBSTANTE VEREDICTO

So I threw the DVD back into the tray, let my GPU to "liquify," and booted up *Titan Quest* for another go-round—just to make certain.

Sure enough, everything those guys said rang true: The game does have a highly addictive, carrot-on-a-stick game/day mechanic. The engine does allow for lush, beautifully laid out environments with little to no loading. And the subtle manner in which classical history and mythology shape the quests, items, and characters is often clever and sometimes (especially for a Latin speaker like mine) thrilling. Maybe it's time to set aside my original verdict? Nah.

See, for all of *Titan Quest*'s good points, it lacks one crucial factor: heart. Now, I don't mean to say that the developers didn't put their hearts into the game—I'm referring to the human element. *Titan Quest* lacks that core factor that elevates the experience beyond merely an exercise for your mouse hand. From *Civilization IV*, to truly great games ultimately challenge your decision-making process. Whether it's the visceral, on-your-toes choices of *Unreal Tournament* or the meticulous planning of *Panzer General*, the very best games always emphasize that crucial human element.

Although *Titan Quest*'s story is interesting and well crafted, it's also highly linear. What pass

FOR ALL OF *TITAN QUEST*'S GOOD POINTS, IT LACKS ONE CRUCIAL FACTOR: HEART.

QUEST

Insert corny *Clash of the Titans* joke here



It's the little things that stand out in *Titan Quest*, like the floating sparks that populate the screen when you traverse a burning vineyard.



Ah, yes—the famous episode from Greek mythology in which the hero fights a red dragon, floating, sky-blue blob called a telchine.



Here in the co-op mode, my buddy's life-giving aura buffs me, while my zantundred cure protects him.



for side quests feel more like “stops along the way” than the honest-to-goodness, do-them-in-any-order excursions you get in other action-RPGs... and while the enemies vary more than, say, those in *Diablo II*, their A.I. only knows two speeds—Idle and “Hassan Chop!” This means you dispatch all enemies in the same manner: Mash the left mouse button until they’re crossing the river Styx.

The “fight monsters to get better items so you can fight better monsters and get even better items” formula makes *Titan Quest* feel less like a game and more like a hamster wheel. “But what about MMORPGs?” you inquire ever so politely. Sure, a game like *World of Warcraft* makes use of the same incentive system. The difference: That system isn’t the only thing driving the gameplay. WOW—and others of its ilk—require careful planning and fluid teamwork, especially at the higher levels. The carrot’s there...but it’s just a reward to keep the goobers interested. The real reward, for real gamers, is the challenge of using more of your brain than the three synapses necessary to bend your index finger.

ASPIRAT PRIMO FORTUNA LAGORI

Again, it’s worth noting that *Titan Quest* is a 7-out-of-10 game, and that still means a lot more good than bad—even if the basic mechanic is thinner than herdsman chio. It doesn’t mean folks won’t like it. In spite of the simplicity, getting that legendary helmet really is fun. It provides a sense of accomplishment and makes you want to keep playing.

If nothing else, *Titan Quest* at least indicates that Iron Lore understands how to create a game with a top-notch surface. Not bad for a first effort. Now, if *Titan Quest 2* adds that elusive human element, it’ll fly off the shelves like winged Hermes. /Eric Neigher

CONSUMER GAMING VERDICT

All the trimmings, but not much steak.

REALITY CHECK

TUP NETWORK	7/10
GAMESPOT	7.8/10
GAMESPY	3.5/5
IGN	8.1/10

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Titan Quest developer Iron Lore, following in the footsteps of Valve and other homebrew-friendly developers, suspiciously included a deep, powerful map and level editor with the game. Even better, Iron Lore supports the mod community with advice and Q&A via the official *Titan Quest* forums. As of this writing, more than half a dozen new maps and modules have cropped up on *Titan Quest* community site titanquesthul.com, with countless more to follow.

The editor itself is really the best since we’ve seen in *Civilization IV*, allowing for drag-and-drop simplicity—but powerful enough to let players create their own magic items and missions and even write their own dialogue. Whatever *Titan Quest*’s shortcomings, it showcases an exceedingly solid game engine. Who knows? Letting the kids in the hall mess around with it might just take the sucker up to Mount Olympus level.

RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

Requiem for a developer



▶ This screenshot looks better than the game.



▶ Hi, I want to have a bad cut-scene with me?

ILLUSTRATION: MIDWAY GAMES; "RISE & FALL" SCREENSHOT: STRATEGY FIRST; "RISE & FALL" SCREENSHOT: STRATEGY FIRST; "RISE & FALL" SCREENSHOT: STRATEGY FIRST

"SING, O GODDESS, THE ANGER OF Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades..." In *Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War*, Achilles and crew can probably bring a couple hundred ills in a single game.

Dropping down into Achilles' sandals for a third-person view to hack-n-slash your way through enemy armies is impressive, even if it does feel like a two-bit PC port of *Dynasty Warriors*. But the game has a...visceral quality about it that a lot of reviewers, including yours truly, like.

The most enthusiastic response to *Rise & Fall* (mind the emperand) comes from GameRader U.K. reviewer Tim Stone, who thinks all RTS games will copy this concoct. "Once punters have seen what a dollop of third-person action can do, they're going to insist on similar dollops," he says in his 9-out-of-10 review. "With [this] relatively simple innovation, Stainless Steel Studios make[s]

the weary RTS genre seem fresh and exciting again. They've realized [sic] that most of us never wanted our strategy games to be more like RPGs or TV history documentaries," he writes, apparently unaware that you can get a similar view—if you're so inclined—in games like *Dawn of War*, *Rome: Total War*, or even *WarCraft III*. And those are just the ones with the word war in the title. The difference: Those games don't make you click-click-click in order for your hero to attack, which is exactly what you do in *Rise & Fall* to represent the anger of Achilles.

"All we really craved," Stone concludes, "was the chance to shrink like Alice and wander about among the silicon souls that slave and soldier." Never mind the prose. What strikes me is that Mr. Stone's reading of the genre ("weary") and those of us who play it (we want to "shrink like Alice") misses the mark considerably...hence the widespread poor review for this, erstwhile developer Stainless Steel Studios' least and worst game.

ONE MAN'S JUNK

With *Rise & Fall*, I present for your consideration the concept of "noble junk." The principle: Underneath some games exists a solid design that could have improved the genre or introduced some cool innovation or just made for a memorable game. But somewhere along the way, for whatever reason, the actual design process hit a snag—or two, or three, or 30—finally resulting in junk.

I see *Rise & Fall* as particularly "noble" because it coincides with the demise of its development studio. It's never a good thing when a developer folds...and Stainless Steel had promise. The studio started with a slightly ameteurish bang (*Empire Earth*), burgeoned to a remarkable "Beng!" (*Empire: Dawn of the Modern World*), and ended with a whimper that wasn't even finished before the doors closed. The publisher, Midway, took the incomplete *Rise & Fall*, finished it internally, and released it. Whether Midway released it for its love of the game or to get a return on its investment is beside the point—it's here, it's underwhelming, and it's the last game out of Stainless Steel.

▶▶ THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING.
NOT THE RECIPE.



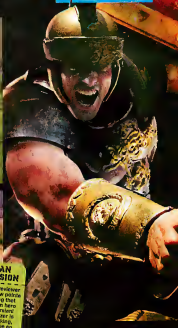
→ A hero's-eye view of razing and pillaging. Well, razing, at any rate.



→ Naval combat that isn't as bad as it is in some other games!

PERSIAN SUBVERSION

GameRader reviewer Tony Goodnow picked out on his blog that neither Persian hero is actually Persian: Nabonidus is a Babylonian king, and Sargon is an Assyrian king. D'oh!



BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A 7 OUT OF 10?

Even the less enthusiastic reviewers focused on the "noble," taking a far-too-forgiving attitude toward the "junk." Yes, being a hero was a neat idea (it usually is). Yes, the naval combat had promise. Yes, Rise & Fall was built for siege warfare and burling, tactics you don't often see in RTS games anymore. But when you consider these great ideas in the context of the rest of the game—which is poorly paced, technically unstable, and a royal pain in the ass to manage—they don't count for a whole lot. And when you consider them next to the absolutely superlative strategy titles released in the last two years, you have no reason to play Rise & Fall. Three solid ideas in a poorly executed game do not merit a good, or even mediocre, review. The proof is in the pudding, not the recipe.

I've met Stainless Steel cofounder Rick Goodman on a few occasions; he's always keenly remembered the unkind things I've said about his games, yet consistently remained friendly and eager to talk. Physically, he's a small guy who constantly buzzes with the energy of three men—energy fiercely focused on really wanting to make a good RTS. I can only imagine what it

must be like for him to struggle so hard while his brother, Tony Goodman, chums out hit after hit at Ensemble Studios. You can't help but sense something almost Greek-isily tragic about him; wherever he ends up after Rise & Fall, I wish him well, and I hope he can follow up on the fine work he did on Empires: Dawn of the Modern World. That game had even more good ideas than Rise & Fall, and it was well done to boot. Frankly, I'd much rather remember Goodman's company for the clever and sadly overlooked game, because—quite simply—no one has any reason to concern themselves with a piece of junk like Rise & Fall, whether it's noble or otherwise. / Tom Chick

ORIGIN
GAMING

VERDICT

Not worth your time, money, or attention.

REALITY CHECK

RUP NETWORK	5/10
GAMESPOT	6.6/10
GAMESPY	2.6/5
IGN	6/10

*Harris, The Aard



→ Now with new Ramming Action™!



→ Attacking a tower from the down-low view...



→ ...and the same scene from the up-high view.

COLUMN

CRISIS ON INFINITE SERVERS

A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD OF AN MMORPG ADDICT

STORMIN' THE CASTLE

OF ALL THE BALLYHOOSY NEW FEATURES that publisher-developer Square Enix added to the recent *Final Fantasy XI: Treasures of Aht Uihgan* expansion, the most controversial is easily Besieged, the mode that lets players gather 'round the parapets of Al Zahbi to cooperatively protect the inner city of Aht Uihgan Whitegate from Mamool Ja savages, troll mercenaries, and undead swarms. It's a dash of *Lord of the Rings*-style mayhem that's supposed to rally FFXI's typically self-centered players around a common cause.

Bold in concept—and when sampled at the FFXI Fan Festival in Santa Monica, CA a few months ago, actually quite exciting—Besieged creates an entertaining reversal of endgame raids on CPU-controlled areas (with the enemy raiding player areas). But in actual practice, an live servers—when the zone fills with over 500 people and mobs—it's basically unplayable. Not just on the badly aging PlayStation 2, on which FFXI originally launched, but also on the Xbox 360—and, more importantly, on high-end gaming PCs.

Even if you have 2GB of RAM in your machine—a fairly extreme leap (not to mention a demanding system requirement for an MMO) from what a PS2 or even Xbox 360 offers—performance

is still choppy, with monsters and players popping in and out of existence. This makes for a pretty raw deal when your character dies from an "in-a-of-a-fact" attack that you can't even see coming. At least you don't lose experience points if you die during Besieged (it's still possible to level down, thanks to FFXI's death penalties), but that's a small mercy for a supposedly fun gameplay feature. Besieged started out painfully easy; then Square Enix pumped up the strength of the monsters, thus demanding dozens of players to take them down and making the mode nigh unplayable. Worse than the increasingly poor Besieged feature itself, the development team's smug response toward the situation.

JUST A LITTLE SLOWDOWN

During a 1UP.com interview with the FFXI team, I posed the "What do you plan to do about Besieged?" question, mentioning that no game engine can possibly manage loading the 500-plus character models in the cramped zone with any semblance of success. Treasures of Aht Uihgan director Kokihiro Ogawa responded by describing the processing bottleneck as "a little slowdown" and saying that "we wouldn't want to deprive our players of this experience due to a reason such as processing ability." Hmm... Peaky of processing ability—always getting in the way of a good time.

OK, sarcasm aside, what kind of dilemma is that? It's like saying, "People love the slowdown and unplayability that Besieged brings to them. So we wouldn't want to compromise that." Considering that FFXI originally debuted on a console with 4MB of video RAM (and a mandatory hard drive), you'd think that the team would've restricted things in the design stage before letting them get out of hand on live servers. Remember the massive server loads when *World of Warcraft* first launched? It's kind of like that.

When I suggested adding new Besieged areas in upcoming patch updates, the team replied, "Besieged was originally designed to be held in a single area, and we had not considered having the bestmen assault multiple locations at once. If spreading the battles out over numerous different areas led to a significant reduction in the number of players participating in the same battle, then that would defeat Besieged's original intended purpose." This, of course, suggests that the zone of Al Zahbi is the only one worth occupying in the expansion—and that the dev team would be hard-pressed to offer reasons for players to branch out to other neighboring allied cities. While the team acknowledges that it's working on ways to fix Besieged, the current half-arsed implementation makes for a big black mark on an otherwise excellent MMO expansion. **James Melke**

WORSE THAN THE POOR BESIEGED FEATURE ITSELF: THE DEVELOPMENT TEAMS SMUG RESPONSE TOWARD THE SITUATION



1UP.com executive editor James Melke spends every free minute of his free time playing online games. He needs help—badly.



Let's hear it for slowdown!



FFXI's Besieged mode works well on paper. Not so well in actual practice, though.



These guys look summa. Maybe it's because the Besieged feature sucks.

NIGHT WATCH

Mo'adder blues



LOVE IT OR HATE IT?

Rate the game on a scale of 1 to 5. If you love it, give it a 5. If you hate it, give it a 1. If you're on the fence, give it a 3. If you're not sure, give it a 2. If you're not sure, give it a 3. If you're not sure, give it a 3.

— No one expects the Inquisition!



— Red globules attack green blobs, dodging a white lump in an endless sea of muddy blue.



— Confirming, once again, that Nazis enjoy both big boobies in tight leather and raising the dead.

PC/PS3/360: DVD Software DEVELOPER: Nival Interactive SYSTEMS: Desktop: PENTIUM 4/5/CORE 2/4 CPU, 512MB RAM, 3GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: 3GHz CPU, 812MB RAM, 32GB+ videocard MULTIPAYER: None

WHAT ARE NIGHT WATCH PLAYERS talking about online? Not much, principally because not too many people care. And, really, considering how underwhelming this game is, that's no surprise. Ridiculously overpowered final boss aside, the game doesn't encourage a lot of discussion topics, except maybe how to eradicate the insidious StarForce copy protection that ships with the game.

Fortunately, you can easily solve the StarForce problem (see sidebar). Unfortunately, Night Watch is beset by other problems not so easily solved. Developer Nival Interactive struck this tactical RPG from the Silent Storm mold (it's powered by the implodily, ungracefully aging Silent Storm game engine) and based it on a series of Russian books and films that compensate for what they lack in lucidity with bold stylistic flourishes. The game...well, not so much with the boldness and style. Ironically it's the very source material—a centuries-old battle between good and evil taking place in a dystopian present-day Russia—that heinrichs much of the gameplay.

BLUE MEANIES

The game's fiction relies heavily on an alternate dimension called "The Gloom," where the warring factions tend to battle. Most of the game's action takes place in The Gloom, and it's excruciating—Nival slaps a blurry, blue-gray filter on the graphics, resulting in equal parts eyesore and eyestrain. Combine this with overlong and unbearably dull spell and attack animations, and what might have

been gripping tactical action reduces itself to drudgery rendered in dull slate-hued mud.

Then again, maybe that's a blessing—this is a game world where the forces of light battle vampires, werewolves, and evil mages with flashlights and magical fluorescent bulbs. No, really—they do. Again, it may work in a book...but in a fuzzily rendered PC game, it's simply silly and sucks a fair amount of zest from the lum-based combat.

BATTLE WEARY

As does Night Watch's very limited selection of character classes. Again, the game fiction restricts players, offering only three classes of traditional archetypes (a healer, a mage, and a warrior). At least you can choose from a generous number of skills and spells every time a character levels up (which they do with satisfying frequency). Unfortunately, an emphasis on hand-to-hand combat and restrictive range limitations render tense, challenging battles into "you go, I go" bouts of Whack-A-Mole.

For all its shortcomings (don't get me started on the hideous voice acting and awful writing), what Night Watch really fails at is delivering the combat—you know, the actual "game" part. But I can't blame that on the fiction; rather, it's shoddy design and an unfathomably dumbed-down version of the Silent Storm engine that inhibit any meaningful strategizing, thus facilitating the most boring and irrelevant vampire-slaying game in memory. / Robert Coffey

KILL BUGS DEAD

"Should you install Night Watch, you'll need to eventually uninstall StarForce. We told you how in issue #261, but just in case you didn't keep (and frame) that gem, here's the lowdown:

- 01 Remove the StarForce device drivers, using the Device Manager within the Windows Control Panel (make sure you look for StarForce entries in the hidden devices).
- 02 Delete all "sfdrv," "sfhlp," and "sfsvc" system files from your `C:\Windows\system32\drivers` folder.
- 03 Run "regedit" from the Windows Start menu's Run dialog. Use the Find option to locate and delete all registry keys containing the phrases "sfdrv," "sfhlp," and "sfsvc." Be careful with this last step!

IGN.COM
GAMING
REVIEW

VERDICT

Put a stake in it...this vampire's done.

REALITY CHECK

NUP NETWORK	4/10
GAMESPOT	5.4/10
GAMESPY	---
IGN	6/10

NIVAL SLAPS A BLURRY, BLUE-GRAY FILTER ON THE GRAPHICS, RESULTING IN EQUAL PARTS EYECORE AND EYESTRAIN.

LINE OF ATTACK

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HARDCORE WAR-GAMING

INNOVATION WARS

HOW MUCH IS A LEGEND WORTHY? IN 1987, Australia's Strategic Studies Group (SSG) released *Battlefront*, a corps-level system that spawned such classic titles as *Rommel: Battle for North Africa* and *Hells of Mozambique*. Eleven years later, Norm Koger's *The Operational Art of War* brought construct-your-own war-gaming into the "modern" era, with a variable scale that made it possible—at least in theory—to recreate just about any battle in history. This summer, both of these legends return. The question is: What's the right balance between innovation and reverence for the past?

The *Battlefront* redux introduces a totally new battalion-level game system from Roger Keating, Ian Trout, and Gregor Whaley—the legendary names at SSG. It's probably not entirely fair to compare it to *The Operational Art of War II*, which amounts to a tweaked and fine-tuned version of a game system whose multiple releases introduced only slight changes, prompting some war gamers to accuse then-developer TalonSoft (now defunct) of milking the brand. Matrix Games publishes the new versions of these titles...but both games

cover well-trodden ground, leading some (myself included) to ponder the opportunity cost.

If, as I said last month, part of the war-gaming hobby is about chasing improbable-yet-exciting new projects, then another part is about staying in touch with its history. Some classic war games remain the definitive statement on their respective topics (*Camels at War*, *Utah Beach*), and imagining remakes of these old favorites is almost as popular (and vomit-inducing) as envisioning PC conversions of classic board games. With so few developers still working in this space, though, to whom does this leave the real innovation? Paradigm shifts like *Combat Mission* happen when designers abandon old assumptions and their attendant safety nets. Are our best designers too reluctant to let go of their intellectual life preservers?

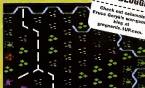
You can decide for yourself by getting the details (and the games) from Matrix Games' website at matrixgames.com. / **Bruce Geryk**



Langrim: CGW contributor Bruce Geryk can probably kick your ass at any board game, any day of the week.

WAR-BLOGGER!

Check out columnist Bruce Geryk's war-gaming blog at grymork.1UP.com.



► Strategic Studies Group's *Battlefront*, in its 1987 incarnation.



► Not much to look at today...but its landmark gameplay revolutionized the genre.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY. TOTAL CONTROL



[X52]

- Non-contact technology on X & Y axes. 3D Rudder twist.
- Adjustable ergonomic grip system.
- 200+ Advanced programmable commands.
- Illuminated buttons and MFD.



[PRO FLIGHT RUDDER PEDALS]

- Precision rudder axis control.
- Adjustable pedals with integrated toe brakes.
- Adjustable resistance for rudder feel.
- Strong, stable base.

Advanced mechanics in every detail. Unrivaled abilities in every feature. This is what you can expect from our new **Pro Flight Rudder Pedals** and **X52 Flight Control System**. Both truly magnificent works of modern technology that give you superior performance at the highest level. And while you may appreciate their fine looks and distinguished design, it is their phenomenal handling and higher intelligence that will have you smiling at the speed of sound.

Saitek™

CITY LIFE

Can you keep the melting pot from boiling over?

MAKE YOUR OWN BUILDINGS. BUT ONLY IF YOU'RE AN ELITE

After the game came out, *Elite* was a surprise success for its developers. To add to the surprise, however, you need some experience with high-end 3D software for out of the box look and technical reach of most consumers.



The architecture isn't certain, but, someone.



Quick look at pollution—guess where the Heve Nots live.

PUBLISHER: CDV Software DEVELOPER: Neodym Creative GAMES: Simulation and Quality Total Sea Lion Studios, Germany
 MSRP: \$49.99, \$39.99 (PC) \$59.99 (PS3) \$59.99 (XBOX 360) \$59.99 (WII) \$59.99 (3DS) \$59.99 (PS4) \$59.99 (XBOX ONE) \$59.99 (SWITCH)

MUNICIPAL SIMULATOR CITY LIFE has a tough act to follow. Not because genre standard *SimCity* got everything perfect—it didn't—but because developers can only simulate water service or garbage collection in so many ways. Most modern city sims content themselves with jazzing up some core element, offering a simpler, more accessible experience, or transplanting the production to an unconventional setting. Still, it's an uphill battle, with seemingly no organ of the civic organism left unharvested.

City Life puts forth the disarming obvious notion that a city's most intriguing complexities lie not in the bloodless minutiae of infrastructure or tax rates but rather in its people. Unfortunately, the people constitute an extremely class-conscious lot, happy only living near others of the same (or similar) wealth and status, but dependent on other classes to fulfill their needs and wants. So, Elites hate Heve Nots and love parks, but parks don't function without Heve Nots to pick up the trash. The trick: Design a city that's divided enough to keep each group away from its enemies, but connected enough so all groups can reach jobs in each others' neighborhoods. The game ramps up the challenge with stuff like topography and pollution that make balkanizing the classes more difficult.

This disorienting shift in emphasis from familiar city-sim conventions isn't until you realize certain facts...like, say, the reason you can't change tax rates is because your citizens don't care about taxes. They care that some snooty rich folks live next door or that they don't have any organic bistro within walking distance.

WHAT DID WE BUILD THIS CITY ON, AGAIN?

Despite its oddities and rough edges, the game's critical consensus remains positive, with most ratings hovering around *1UP*'s strong 8 out of 10. Even some positive reviewers don't entirely get it, though; *GameSpot*'s reviewer liked the game but curiously missed its point completely, raving about it as a conventional simulation and merely mentioning the omnipresent class-warfare dynamic.

Thoughtfully designed, a bit obtuse, and lauded by most reviewers, *City Life* emerges, at first glance, to have the makings of a cult hit. But repeated play exposes its most damning flaw: Getting the city big and solvent enough to bring in the upper classes makes for a stimulating climb, but everything goes downhill from there. One poster to publisher CDV's forum crystallizes it: "It's got a real clean-and-jerk feel to it. It's easy to pick the weight up, easy to hold it over your head, but bringing it from your knees to your neck is grueling."

Once you do manage to get the weight over your head the first time, you can employ the same basic strategy on every map, at every difficulty. Sure, terrain and other impediments require a bit more ingenuity, but the thrill quickly wears off. *City Life* is half of a great game, a must-buy—but only from the bargain bin. Like a Rubik's Cube, once you get it right a few times, you just don't have much reason to pick it up again. **Greg Kramer**

COLOR-CODING

City Life bases itself on a potentially controversial social view: Different classes need each other, but they can only coexist if separated. Though this is a certainly valid subject matter for a game, some may take offense at its implications. The decision, then, to color-code the top-of-the-heap Elites white and the bottom-rung Heve Nots black is ill-considered at best—and appealingly insensitive at worst.

CRITICAL GAMING

VERDICT

This deceptively simple and initially brilliant city sim has a social agenda... but not much replayability.

REALITY CHECK

<i>1UP</i> NETWORK	8/10
GAMESTOP	7.8/10
GAMESPY	3/5
IGN	—

YOUR CITIZENS DON'T CARE ABOUT TAXES. THEY CARE THAT SOME SNOOTY RICH FOLKS LIVE NEXT DOOR.

ESSENTIAL

FALLING PIECES

OUR FAVORITE
WAYS TO WASTE
SPARE TIME

CASUAL CENTRAL

Looking for a great
casual game to play? We
recommend *Bang! Howdy* over
in RealArcade at
www.realarcade.com.

HEY THERE, COWBOY

The WORLD OF CASUAL GAMING is filled with quick-hit injections of fun—hundreds upon hundreds of games designed for players to enjoy in short bursts. But casual games built for the long haul? Good luck finding one of those.

Actually, you don't need luck so much as this URL: www.banghowdy.com. *Bang! Howdy* is an Old West strategy-MMO from Three Rings, the same casual-gaming big brains behind Yahoo! *Puzzle Pirates*. *Bang! Howdy* revolves around classic casual-gaming tenets: It's easy to learn, the actual game portions go quickly, and the strategic gameplay contains a deceptive amount of depth.

After you create your adorable it's cowboy avatar, you're off to an Old West frontier town to battle other players. You direct a team of four to five units on a small map in each of the three current game types, racing to brand cattle, collect gold nuggets, or steal nuggets from your

opponents. These challenging controls take you with managing the different initiative rates of your units and employing combined arms in order to succeed. And don't forget the whole "other players trying to kill your guys" thing.

You receive in-game money based upon where you finish, which you may then cash in on new units, avatar upgrades, and power-up cards. Or you could just spend real money on in-game cash and get the same thing—and Three Rings is banking on this microtransaction model (proven successful in *Aste*) to profit on this essentially free game. *Bang! Howdy* might still be in beta as you read this...good news for current players, since they get to keep their beta earnings (including a generous amount of gold that all new players receive up front).

—Robert Coffey



OGW alum Robert Coffey blames his inability to get anything done on "column research." He's really just playing word games online.



The current state of your unit's initiative is tracked on the right side of the screen, helping you plan your moves.

Take a look at our new mice, ~~PADS~~

P - 990 Dual Analog



P - 2600 Rumble



P - 2900 Wireless

It's all about performance. It's all about power. And that's exactly what you get with our new range of PC Gamepads. All featuring mouse look ability, each pad now lets you dive into any FPS game and look around or take aim with the tip of your thumb. So you never have to touch a mouse or take your hands off the game, giving you better control and more comfort. As always, engineered with superior technology, sculpted for spectacular styling and most importantly packed with powerful features for control that is simply lethal. Available in dual analog, rumble or wireless we know you'll love what you see. Any way you look at it.

TOM vs. BRUCE

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS

Conquering China like Genghis Khan

LAST MONTH...

Tom and Bruce joined forces and engaged in a war to see who would be the next Star of Legends.

GENGHIS KHAN
KHAN OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE
1152-1227

THE GREAT MONGOL EMPIRE
1206-1368

PUBLISHER: DC Games DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games AVAILABILITY: Retail Box Game, Turn-Based Strategy
ESTIMATED EVERYONE 10+ RATED 1.0GB+ C- U, 550MB RAM, 550MB+ hard drive space, Civilization IV
RECOMMENDED: 1.0GB+ C- U, 512MB+ RAM, 12GB+ videocard MULTIPUR: 2-12 players

TOM: THE NEW CIVILIZATION IV: Warlords expansion features plenty of cool scenarios. Many of them, such as Alexander the Great and the Peloponnesian War, aren't obscure enough for Bruce and me. Bruce was reading Thucydides just the other day, and I was reading Plutarch, and we were talking about how people make so many movies and games about Greeks. Like My Big Fat Greek Wedding and Titan Quest. Enough with the Greeks! Instead, we're going with Chinese Unification, which also happens to be the best scenario in Warlords. So, with a tip of those wide-brimmed cookie hats to the scenario's creators—Jon Shafer and Glenn Carson—we're off to ancient China.

BRUCE: I can't remember what happened the last time I played Civilization IV against Tom. Oh wait, yes I can—I got run over by French elephants halfway through the game and Tom ended up playing the rest by himself, shamelessly ruting up his score on his hapless computer opponents. Embarrassing. So I suspect Tom's last-minute suggestion of the Warlords expansion—"Hey Bruce, it just came out and I'm sure we can finish a game in time!"—was a well-planned sneak attack.

TOM: I'm going to do my best to keep all the names straight and regard them with the reverence due anything that's over 2,000 years old. So I pick the Han dynasty because it sounds like Han Solo.

BRUCE, 450 BC: I'm the Yan dynasty, which means my color is dark blue and I start at the north edge of the map. I'm playing a Financial civ, so I get an extra gold on every square that already produces two. This means coastal squares will be quite lucrative...but because coastal squares produce only one food, I need to get a Lighthouse to make them provide more. That obviously means I need to make a beeline for the Sailing tech.

TOM, 450 BC: While Bruce tries to figure out the tech tree, I'd like to point out that a lot of stuff in this scenario is different from regular old vanilla non-Chinese Civilization IV. The tech tree and civics are entirely reworked; for instance,

Mohsian gives all your cities a 33 percent tech bonus. That's worth any kind of haircut.

BRUCE, 449 BC: I'm not sure what mohair has to do with China, either, but whatever. It looks like I have some nice stone near my capital, which I can use to double some production. Quarries require Bronze Working, so that's second on the list behind Sailing. It's nice to have some sort of strategy mapped out at this point.

TOM, 421 BC: Bruce has stone, but I have marble—and therefore a head start on the Great Library. This gets me Philosophy when I finish it, which gets me started on a World Wonder called Sun Tzu's Art of War, which is also a book used by businessmen interested in managerial strategies such as, "Those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him." That's a real Sun Tzu quote, which I think translates to normal English as "buy low, sell high."



→ A Great Prophet of Bruce joins the Yan pantheon.



→ Most of Bruce's National Wall faces north, where there are no other players.

TWO GAMERS
ENTER, ONE
GAMER WINS

PLAYERS



▶ Tom Chick

In addition to being one of the videogame industry's most prolific freelance journalists, Tom also runs the popular website QuarterToThree.com.



▶ Bruce Geryk

Longtime GDW contributor Bruce Geryk has written about videogames for over 20 years; he loves war games like most people love oxygen.



▶ The unsuspecting Zhao tend their fields, which are adjacent to Bruce.

I also have cotton, citrus, and tea, but I had to learn *Fall Al* Play before I could build plantations to harvest them. "It takes an obedient farmer to raise an oolong plant." That's from me, by the way, not Sun Tzu.

BRUCE, 403 BC: The religion mechanic in this scenario has been renamed Family Bloodline, which is just a way of making religion a two-word concept without changing anything but the letters. It sure makes diplomacy hard, because the A.I. doesn't like anyone without the same Family Bloodline, and every side has a different one. So in an effort to get on the good side of my neighbors, I "convert" to Zhao, which I guess means someone marries a Zhao princess. I hope she's hot!

TOM, 386 BC: Since ancient China wouldn't be ancient China without a few wies to provide a little action for the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* games, I start scouting out my southern neighbor for prospective conquest. His name is Chu Mi Lu. I imagine the words are spelled "Chew Me, Lou" as a way to remember who I'm fighting. While scouting, my chieftan comes across a barbarian city on the coast and manages to capture it. Excellent. It's a port, and it has access to salt, which I can use with my lemons in case we ever invent tequila.

BRUCE, 379 BC: After more than 20 turns, my conversion doesn't seem to have gained me anything, and I've lost some happy citizens due to the lack of Zhao bloodlines in several of my cities. End of experiment—time to switch back.

TOM, 366 BC: While Bruce ping-pongs from Family Bloodline to Family Bloodline—and that can't be good for the gene pool—I'm consolidating religions, which are part of the Civics track in this scenario. Since many of my cities are in forested areas, I've chosen Daoism, which adds happiness for every forested tile within a city's radius. The Han people are officially tree huggers, but we're gearing up to invade "Bina Me, Costello" so we can hug its trees as well.

BRUCE, 364 BC: Tom seems to be winning the Wonder battle. Since this scenario offers so few World Wonders to build, I think gaining some territory (and population points) is in order. Like the Schiefelin Plan, my order of battle calls for a strong right wing (well, it does if you face south), pointed straight at the light blue of Zhao. He has two cities

Tom discovers a handy salt mine on the coast, which doubles as a place to send people for hard labor. ▶



▶ I PICK THE HAN DYNASTY BECAUSE IT SOUNDS LIKE HAN SOLO.

exposed. Leling on my border, and Yunzhong in the desert to the west. I plan to capture those and then converge on Jinyang, his larger city to the south.

TOM, 361 BC: "Masochize Mei, Gehng!" just declared war on me and saved me the trouble of declaring war on him. I implement Feudal Levy, which allocates all of a city's food to military production. Sorry, citizens—but this bread is for the soldiers. Now go hug a tree and be happy. You can eat after the war is over.

BRUCE, 344 BC: It's time to unleash the invasion force. The first city, Yunzhong, falls easily—but Leling is another story. Tom after Tom, my sacrdotism and cavalry break on his two lousy fortified archers. Even reducing his defenses to zero with catapult bombardment doesn't appreciably change the calculus. What's worse, the purple Wei hordes take up the cudgel in defense of Zhao, meaning I'm fighting two civs at once.

TOM, 338 BC: Sometimes firing is everything. Just as I begin construction of the Underground Tomb, a Great Engineer arrives. "Hi! Need me for anything in particular?" "Why, yes! What lovely timing. Why don't you head over to Luoyang and finish that Tomb we just started? Thanks!"



▶ These farmers are working to feed soldiers. Everyone else can eat chon leather.

BRUCE, 337 BC: After seven turns, I finally capture Leling, but my army is severely depleted and unable to press south in force. Now purple is starting to show up with cavalry and chariots, making it impossible for me to make further headway. All of my cities have switched to military production, which will cost me later. I should have listened to the scenario introduction when it said war wasn't easy in this game!

TOM, 331 BC: Hmm... Bruce is pulling ahead. His wars must be going better than mine. I've just conquered a Chew Me Lou city that gives me claims and tea, which is niceeasing to think about, really. The only thing worse would be claims and tomato juice. I think I'm gonna be sick either way.

BRUCE, 330 BC: I get a Great Artist in my capital and use him to set off a Culture Bomb in Yunzhong. That greatly expands my territory in the west, and the cultural borders give me two turns' worth of winning, should a counterattack come from there. And, in any case, all he has down there is a puny level 2 city with a couple archers.

TOM, 320 BC: So I'm bopping along, minding my own business by conquering a neighbor, when the neighbor on my other side ▶



▶ Qi is to the left of me, Zhao to the right...here I am, stuck in the middle as Yan.

declares war on me. The nerve! I should have attacked him in the first place, since he doesn't have nearly as much rough terrain for me to deal with, which is partly what's slowing my war against Chu Mi Lu to the south. So I make peace with Chewie (as I affectionately dub him, being called Han myself) and start shifting my units to my northern border to conquer Qi Jiang Shiang. Try as I might, I can't come up with a mnemonic to remember his name.

BRUCE, 320 BC: It's a disaster of cataclysmic proportions. With only one turn of warning, a huge force of purple cavalry appears out of the west, thanks to the open borders treaty between Wei and Zhao. Before I can shift the Jinyang force to meet it, Yunzhang is gone, and with it the efforts of my Great Artist. What irreplaceable works of art were plundered? All of a sudden my offensive lies in pieces; fortunately, the newly independent Zhao and its ally Wei both offer me peace on the next turn, leaving me one city with reduced borders to show for my Twenty-Eight Years' War. Worse, the score is now 1,500-1,463 to Tom. My five-point lead is now a 40-point deficit.

TOM, 314 BC: You know how you can look back at history and see the one moment when you knew it? Like, say, attacking Russia in the winter, bombing Pearl Harbor, or invading Iraq? I just had one of those moments when I left only a single archer in my best city. The city was Luoyang, a sprawling size-16 metropolis replete with Wonders and a ton of tech research at every turn. I hadn't bothered building walls, since I stubbed Wei, a family with whom I've been friendly. But apparently, Wei's also friendly with Qi Jiang, since he just permitted Qi Jiang to march a huge army through his territory and right up to Luoyang, and promptly conquer it. And I was about seven turns away from constructing the Emperor's Council, which would have given me a huge boost in score and started regular Council votes towards my diplomatic victory. I take the city back and start the Emperor's Council from the beginning again. But still, that hurt—even more than the city Bruce was winning about before I started whining.

BRUCE, 306 BC: I built the United Nations. I mean Emperor's Council. I even got a Forbidden Palace built in another city on the same turn. My lead jumps from 52 points to 163—it's still a very narrow margin, but it gives me some hope that Tom isn't going to run away with this after all.

TOM, 305 BC: Noooo! The Emperor's Council should have been mine! Damn you, Bruce Geryk and Qi Jiang Shiang!

BRUCE, 301 BC: With 51 turns left, I have a moderate Tech lead and not much else. I'm not too worried about an amphibious invasion, so I've moved most of my military to the west to defend Leling. My interior cities are all finishing up science improvements, like the University and Observatory, and with Educated Elites and Mohsen I can crank out one future Tech every two turns while only at 60 percent Science. This allows me to build up a lot of cash, which I'm saving in case I need to start an emergency military building program.

TOM, 299 BC: Bruce's lead keeps widening and I have 49 turns before the scenario ends, so I devise and implement my 49-Turn Plan for Victory. This basically involves sucking up to the most powerful families and completely retooling my economy to conquer Chu Mi Lu, which I should



“If Sun Tzu didn't say ‘Good walls make good neighbors,’ he should have.”

have done 50 years ago. I convert to Wei's blood-line, hand out tea, cotton, and claims to everyone like they're candy, and change my Civics to the most warlike options I can find. Then I set every city to start building military units.

BRUCE, 295 BC: I sent a heavy cavalry force and a chariot to cross the Great Western Desert probably 20 turns ago. Now they're at the western edge of the map but down to the south, having skirted the Zhao and Wei positions. They're so far west, they're basically in Pakistan, if that's been inverted yet. Way out there, through a gap in the mountains, is a small barbarian city. They take it.

TOM, 292 BC: They like me—they really like me! I have been elected the ancient Chinese equivalent of the U.N. Secretary General!

BRUCE, 276 BC: I drop my second Culture Bomb, this time on Leling. It single-handedly evicts no fewer than four workers from the area around Yunzhang and presses my cultural borders up against a small Zhao city I hadn't noticed before. The game won't last long enough for me to culturally assimilate it, but the expanded borders give me more breathing room.

TOM, 275 BC: Emperor's Council Resolution No. 1 is for Cultural Nonproliferation. Bruce Geryk cannot be treated with Culture Bombs. Meanwhile, my war against Chu Mi Lu goes well; I should have done this before. If I've learned one thing from Civilization—and one thing I keep forgetting every damn time I play Civ IV—it's that you can't halfheartedly fight a war. It's all or nothing. Unfortunately, I might have waited too long to opt

for “all.” I'm slowly catching up to Bruce's score as I take Chu's cities, but I need more time.

BRUCE, 275 BC: My Western Desert Force is about to collect its third barbarian city, giving me a few points here and there to maintain my lead on Tom. With Nationalism, I'm using my huge cash surplus to buy cultural improvements in these cities, and then setting them to produce culture in the hopes of expanding their borders a bit before the game ends. I may end up founding Pakistan myself.

TOM, 265 BC: While I'm quietly conquering, three of the other families suddenly declare war on me! It's not far. Qi Jiang and my old friend Wei from the north, along with Qin from the west, attack while my army is tied up in the south. The only one to refrain is the ocean state to my east. My undefended cities start collapsing as the other families—who I had been giving tea and cotton and claims, dammit!—start tearing apart my empire like the pack of lithe dogs they are. So much for my reverence for things over 2,000 years old.

BRUCE, 256 BC: I'm going to finish the game by going out in a Golden Age, even though I only have six turns left, and a Golden Age lasts eight. Somewhere on the Internet, two turns of Yan Chinese Golden Age bounce forever among the electrons. /

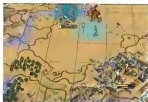
FINAL SCORE

BRUCE 4,183
TOM 2,793

I HAVE 49 TURNS BEFORE THE SCENARIO ENDS, SO I DEVISE AND IMPLEMENT MY 49-TURN PLAN FOR VICTORY.



At the end, Bruce's capital is the best!



Bruce's soldiers back in their victory.

REALITY CHECK

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO WHAT WE SAY—AND WHAT THEY SAY—ABOUT THE LATEST IN PC GAMING.



GLORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

We say: "If you've learned the virtue of patience, *Glory* isn't all bad. However, for those of us who don't find enjoyment in watching paint dry, building a city in real time is too laborious to be fun."

—Di Luo, IUP.com (6/10)

They say: "It's an ultimately flavorless [game] that leaves us hoping the upcoming *CivCity: Rome* and *Caesar IV* peck a bit more of a Roman punch."

—GameSpy (3/5)



MOSCOW TO BERLIN: RED SIEGE

We say: "In the ancient days of computer gaming, it would've been refreshing to get the occasional RTS without resource management—but this formula's now staler than the aroma of a public latrine."

—Di Luo, IUP.com (5/10)

They say: "Despite having a few notable strengths, *Moscow to Berlin* suffers in comparison to the other WWII RTS games that have crossed our desks in the last year or so."

—IGN (6.2/10)



NFL HEAD COACH

We say: "NFL Head Coach manages to combine the unrealistic aspects of an arcade game with mind-numbingly boring features intended (unsuccessfully) to create the feel of a meticulous sports management sim."

—Jeff Lackey, IUP.com (5/10)

They say: "While *Head Coach* is ultimately an imperfect football-management simulation, it is, alas, almost in spite of itself, a frequently fun one."

—GameSpot (7.2/10)



ROME: TOTAL WAR—ALEXANDER

We say: "Not too bad for the \$14.95 price tag, but still disappointing compared to [the previous expansion]. With the abundance of free mode out on the Net, [Alexander] just isn't great enough to be a 'must-buy.'"

—Di Luo, IUP.com (7/10)

They say: "I'm always glad for an excuse to revisit [developer] Creative Assembly's *Total War* series and the Alexander expansion is definitely a welcome addition."

—IGN (8/10)



RUSH FOR BERLIN

We say: "The A.I. rolls over on anything less than Hard, and getting units into tactically feasible formations can be like herding drunken snails. But for hardcore tactical WWII fans, this is everything [the Codename: Panzers series did—only better, and with bolts on.]"

—Matt Peckham, IUP.com (7/10)

They say: "If any game is capable of convincing genre veterans of shivering their way through the *Battle of the Bulge* one more time, it's this one."

—GameSpot (7.8/10)



STACKED WITH DANIEL NEGREANU

We say: "For poker beginners who are too shy to jump into the online fray, *Stacked* is a good way to get acquainted with the game in all its forms, from low-limit cash tables to no-limit multitable tournaments."

—Damien Linn, IUP.com (5/10)

They say: "Unless you're not old enough to play competitive poker on an online gambling site (most of which offer free games as well), it's hard to justify picking this one up."

—GameSpy (2.5/5)

SCORECARD On store shelves now

GAME	RELEASE	IUP NETWORK	BRIDESPOT	BRIDESPY	IGN
Cossacks II: Battle for Europe	June 2006	6/10	6.9/10	—	—
Deep Sea Tycoon: Diver's Paradise	June 2006	5/10	—	—	—
Glory of the Roman Empire	July 2006	6/10	5.6/10	3/5	7.8/10
Moscow to Berlin: Red Siege	June 2006	5/10	4.8/10	—	6.2/10
NFL Head Coach	June 2006	5/10	7.2/10	3/5	7.2/10
Rome: Total War—Alexander	June 2006	7/10	8.5/10	3/5	8/10
Rush for Berlin	June 2006	7/10	7.8/10	—	8/10
The Ship Online	July 2006	7/10	—	—	—
Stacked with Daniel Negreanu	May 2006	5/10	7.7/10	2.5/5	4.8/10
Zoo Tycoon 2: African Adventure	May 2006	3/10	—	—	—

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IUP NETWORK

For more thorough reviews on the latest PC games, point your web browser to cgw.iup.com today!



UNWIRING 101

YOUR HOME COMPUTER IS YOUR TECHNO-castle. A castle that, unfortunately, is looking more and more like a Jitsons family garage sale every day. You've been thinking for months about untangling the wry kraaken that got loose under your desk, maybe with a cheap pack of cable ties from RadioShack and an hour's worth of scuffling around on knee pads. Or maybe, just maybe... with a wireless network.

But wait. Doesn't a wireless network open you up to hackers (or just invite freeloading neighbors to leech bandwidth)? Didn't you hear somewhere that wireless would screw up your cordless phone's reception? Or mutate babies? Don't you need a degree in computer science to install one correctly? Is it even as fast as a wired network?

Relax! Today on *This Old Home Network*, we're going to walk you through all the basics of networking tech. We'll tell you which—wired or wireless—works best with different apps, de-jargonize the lingo, and show you how to convert your wireless home network into a hack-averse security bunker.

WELCOME TO THE 21ST CENTURY

Walk into any Starbucks or Borders and what do you see? A gaggle of urban hipsters and corporate raiders on their CrackBerrys, listening to their iPods and surfing the Web as they drink cappuccino soy mocha lattes. Here's something even they don't know: Those java huts are some of the most unsafe places to surf on the planet. Any hacker worth his weight in 01001 can crack coffeehouse wireless security like an egg and grab personal info in five minutes flat. But there's no need to rely on those unsecured wireless access points (APs)—in fact, it's never been easier to set up your own. Installing a wireless home network is as simple as programming your TiVo. All you need is knowledge of a few key terms and the courage of your cable-free convictions.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Q: Wi-Fi? Is that, like, my stereo or something?
A: Wireless, known to the terminally trendy as "Wi-Fi" (for "wireless fidelity"), is simply a way to get your electronic equipment (handhelds, computers, printers, and so on) talking to a network (or other devices) without physical cables. Unlike wired setups, a wireless signal travels through the air using radio waves. The upsides of going wireless are pretty obvious: no need to wire your house for Ethernet or sling cables across a room, and the option to hop online anywhere within range of your wireless AP.



Freedom! Ah, yes, this is what it's all about. Grab a notebook and camp out on your favorite couch.

Your wireless access point is where it all starts. You've got your broadband source plod straight into this "sexy" box.

INSTANT EXPERT: WIF

So you finally want to cut the cord?

EXTREME TECH

Looking for more tech? Submit! Head over to ExtremeTech.com, where tech experts like Greg Cote and Jason Oros tackle the mysteries of tech networking.

SUPPORT



Tech Medic

This month:

Is it time for one reader to suck it up and buy a new system? Sadly, yes. Not that the answer comes as a surprise.

ALL ABOUT THE 802.11

PROTOCOL	FREQUENCY	SPEED (THEORETICAL)	SPEED (ACTUAL)	RANGE (FEET)	NOTES
802.11b	2.4 GHz	11 Mbps	4-5 Mbps	150	The original standard
802.11a	5 GHz	54 Mbps	27 Mbps	100	Incompatible with b; shorter range
802.11g	2.4 GHz	54 Mbps	20-25 Mbps	150	The sweet spot; compatible with b.
802.11n	2.4 GHz	540 Mbps	200 Mbps	150	Mach 200, baby... speed and distance

Frequencies 2.4 GHz wins the popularity contest among Wi-Fi manufacturers—but it also happens to be the same frequency that baby monitors, Bluetooth devices, certain cordless telephones, and microwaves use, which can cause interference (translation: performance degradation). The simple fix? Change channels. U.S. wireless APs have 11 FCC-approved channels, changed with the click of a button in the usually browser-based configuration panel. But the chances are almost zero that you'll ever notice or have a problem with interference.

Speeds Like your car's miles-per-gallon (mpg) rating, the truth lies somewhere between the lines. Practically speaking, you'll only manage slightly less than 50 percent of the rated speed of an 802.11 connection. The upside? Very few consumer broadband services even approach the practical 4 to 5 Mbps speed of the slowest and rapidly aging protocol, 802.11b. So all those myths of wired networks being faster? Don't believe the hype.

Range When dealing with the maximum connection range of the wireless AP, it's important to remember that as your signal gets weaker (within the range) the speed drops, potentially all the way down to a poky 1 Mbps. The numbers listed are "effective" ranges—assuming, of course, that you don't live in a metal shed. Also, if you're somewhere big and multistoried, a single AP's probably not going to cut it if you're aiming for total coverage. Add a wireless repeater or second wireless AP and you can effectively double your coverage radius.

802.11n Plan to see plenty of vendors hawking 802.11n compatibility with existing hardware in the months ahead, but, as with similar past promises, caveat emptor: Critics are already slamming early 802.11n products from overzealous vendors, citing limited-range issues and legacy Wi-Fi compatibility snafus. Your best bet? Wait for the IEEE to ratify 802.11n (in early 2007), when official products should arrive. And don't let this future protocol prevent you from buying an 802.11g network now—It's going to be some time before wide-area Internet connections climb out of the basement to match even today's local-area wireless speeds, much less 200 Mbps.

TIP: Wireless runs in one of two modes: Infrastructure or ad hoc. If you plan on connecting to the Internet, you'll need to run in infrastructure mode and have an AP, but if you'd rather just link local devices (run Ethernet cables between two computers, for example) for LAN gaming, you can put your wireless devices in ad hoc mode (peer-to-peer) and skip the wireless access point altogether.

DOESN'T A WIRELESS NETWORK INVITE HACKERS AND FREELADING NEIGHBORS?

Q: 802.11? Is that a zip code in Beverly Hills?
A: Like Life Savers, wireless networks come in as many different flavors. Some of these favors mix; others don't. 802.11 (without any modifying letters) is the numerical code name for the "Wi-Fi" standard.* Basically, some committee got together and assigned Wi-Fi a special Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)*



Got a big pad or a lot of ground to cover? Some people buy repeaters to extend Wi-Fi range. Or you can buy a second wireless access point.

The computer? What's that for again? Oh, right. Avoiding reality.

WIRELESS NETWORKING

catalog number. Said committee then started tacking letters after the 802.11 to distinguish between different modulation techniques (which is just a fancy way of saying how fast it goes). The only number you'll want to concern yourself with if you're buying in 2006 is 802.11g, which is nearly as fast as high-speed 802.11a, yet fully compatible with the original, megapopular (but not as speedy) 802.11b. Sound like alphabet soup? Just remember, when it comes to compatibility, "g" is for "good"; everything else equals "bad."

TIP: It's a safe bet that the latest wireless adopters all have 802.11g devices, but what do you do if your gaming buddy brings his 3-year-old laptop over and wants to connect to your new g-based network? Chances are he's running an older 802.11b adapter, in which case—savvy planner that you are—your g network will let him party just fine.

Q: Break it down for me. What do I need?

A: All you need is a wireless adapter for a device with an integrated wireless chip and a wireless

AP tethered to your Internet connection (your cable modem, DSL, or router). For a simple configuration, run the wall cables to your ISP-provided box or modem, run an Ethernet cable from the ISP box to your wireless AP, run the vendor-supplied configuration tool, and you're done.

TIP: Wireless adapters today come in all shapes and sizes: PCI cards for desktops, PCMCIA cards for laptops, and USB sticks for either (most look like chunky little flash-memory keys). If you want to keep from cracking a desktop case, reduce the heat generated by a PCMCIA card in a laptop, or have an easy standby to get a visitor's computer on your network, consider a USB wireless card. The downside? It'll steal a USB slot (sometimes crowding a second) and protrude awkwardly from the back or side of a laptop. Then again, so do memory keys.

ALL YOU NEED IS A WIRELESS ADAPTER AND WIRELESS ACCESS POINT TO BE READY FOR WIRELESS WORLD.

THE WIRELESS SHOPPING LIST

THE SHOPPING LIST

Whether you're on a tight budget or looking to create the most hardcore home wireless network ever, we've crafted a shopping list to suit your needs. The **BUDGET**-conscious who just want to play games, hit the Net, and share a printer or two need to worry about the basics. Most **MAINSTREAM** gamers have a little more in mind—not only do they want to play online, they want to host the occasional match and not have to sweat multistream media viewing. And **HARDCORE** users can't be content with anything but the best throughout—they even want to set up multiple dedicated game servers on top of everything else. Once you've figured out where you fall in the spectrum, grab the following gear.

DESCRIPTION	BUDGET	MAINSTREAM	HARDCORE
Wireless adapter The "client" hardware your devices require to connect	 <p>Linksys Wireless-G USB Adapter (WUSB4GC) \$40-\$60</p>	 <p>Linksys Wireless-G USB Adapter with Wi-Fi Finder (WUSB54G) \$70-\$90</p>	 <p>D-Link Wireless USB Adapter (DWL-G122) \$45-\$80</p>
Wireless access point The wireless "server" to which your "client" adapters connect	 <p>Linksys Wireless-G Broadband Router (WRT54G) \$60-80</p>	 <p>Linksys Wireless-G Broadband Router (WRT54GX) \$125-\$150</p>	 <p>D-Link Wireless 108G Gaming Router (DGL-4300) \$130-\$260</p>
Additional gear for multimedia Bonus goodies that go beyond the basic functionality	<p>N/A</p> 	<p>Windows XP (with Windows Media Connect software, free via download)</p> <p>Xbox 360 \$400</p> 	<p>Media Center PC (with Windows Media Connect software, free via download)</p> <p>Xbox 360 \$400</p> <p>Second D-Link DGL-4300 (for additional range) \$130-\$260</p>

TIP: Wireless APs generally come as either stand-alone boxes or as part of full-blown routers. If you prefer to control things such as your firewall on your computer, consider a slightly cheaper stand-alone AP. If you'd rather have your access point double as your firewall, or if you want to plug in additional devices (desktop PCs, Ethernet printers, and so on) that don't have wireless cards, consider the AP/router angle—most come with built-in hubs. And be sure to check your DSL or cable-modem box if you subscribe to broadband—the newest ones come with wireless AP/routers fully integrated, potentially saving you a whole bundle of boogie.

Q: So I've "arrived" and put the whole shebang together—I'm officially cable-free and surfing off my balcony. What else can I do?

A: Plenty! The easiest way to answer "What else can I do with wireless?" is "What couldn't you do before because of cable restrictions?" How about stuff like the following?

File and Printer Sharing. It works the same as it did from a wired network, except that you can easily move files between devices without memory keys or cables—or send that essay you just typed upstairs in bed to the printer down in the basement

for easy retrieval the next morning. If you don't have a stand-alone computer into which you can plug your printer, pick up a wireless print server, but be sure your printer can handle USB—yesterday's print servers provided parallel ports for connecting, but today's connect almost exclusively through USB. If you're in the market for a new printer, look for models that come equipped with built-in wireless. They're a deal for just a bit more cash than spec-comparable models sans wireless.

LAN Gaming Unplugged. Throw a party, invite your friends, break out the booze...and forget the clunky hubs and trip-hazard Ethernet cables. As with a wired network, everyone frags at near-zero ping on a local area wireless network, and you can get your buds up in any room you like.

Streaming Music, Pictures, and Video.

Two words: Xbox 360. Pair a 360 connected to a stereo system with a Windows XP host, and you can use the free Windows Media Connect (or for video, Media Center Extender) tool to stream all your MP3s over the wireless network. Imagine having instant access to your 5,000-song library and family photos with the click of a remote. If you want to stream video to your game console, you'll need a Media Center PC. /

HOME LAN SECURITY

Protect your network

If you fire up your wireless software's AP settings, chances are you'll find at least two out of every dozen APs in an area running the manufacturer-default SSID ("Secure Set Identifier," the name used to identify your wireless AP to the world). And while wireless APs aren't rocket science, they're not TVs either. You'd never want to plug in one and forget about it—that just invites all sorts of trouble. To be fair, wireless manufacturers really need to improve their products by setting some kind of default security and providing more intuitive setup wizards that get folks quickly from powered on to securely plugged in. Until that happens, follow these essential rules. Ignore them at your peril.

Change the Default SSID. Popular AP vendor Linksys sets its SSID to—you guessed it—"linksys." Change this to something that doesn't broadcast exactly what hardware you're using. Hackers know every model's default settings (all it takes is a quick Google search). Don't make it a cakewalk for them.

Disable SSID Broadcasting. This option is disabled by default and puts your AP's name out there for anyone with a nearby wireless device to see. You know your AP's name and how to connect to it. No one else needs to.

Enable WPA or WPA2 Encryption. An unsecured wireless AP churns your data freely through the air for anyone to see. Enabling encryption is arguably the most important thing you can do. Don't even think about using WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy), unless your wireless devices are too old to use the newer WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) or WPA2 (completely overhauled to provide virtually

adequate data protection). WEP was barely a decent half a decade ago, and it's anything but "wired equivalent" nowadays.

Disable Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP). It's convenient to let your wireless AP issue IP addresses as you add and remove devices, but put the lock on who gets what and be better prepped to isolate suspicious activity. Always use static IPs with MAC address filtering (the IP addresses are specifically assigned to each device uniquely).

Enable the AP's Firewall. That's right—even if you're already running one on your computer. Pay attention to special port-forwarding or filtering tools, which may (but usually don't) require special tweaks if you intend to host direct games (in which case you may want to consider setting up a DMZ, or "demilitarized zone," for said game server to operate in its own walled-off "safe" area).

Position Your APs Centrally. Set them up away from exterior walls and windows if you can. The average range of an unobstructed wireless signal is 100 feet. By placing it in a central position, you can reduce the ability of nearby hackers, next-door neighbors, or "wardrivers" to "see" your network. ("Wardriving," named in homage to "wardriving" from the movie *WarGames*, is the art of finding and marking APs—originally near the AP's location with chalk, as in "wardracking," but more recently using GPS coordinates to identify precise locations and post them online. Don't want that, now do you?)

Password-Protect Your Web-Config Tool. (And don't make it "password.")

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HARD NEWS

The bleeding edge of tech



SOUNDING BOARD

SOME REMEMBER THE GOOD OL' DAYS, when gamers had to deal with multiple soundcards, codecs, and compatibility issues if they wanted to have any fun. You can thank Creative Labs for coming in and single-handedly cleaning house with its now-industry-standard Sound Blaster audio cards. In 2005, Creative raised the stakes again with its X-Fi high-fidelity audio. These days, computer gamers usually just ask themselves whether to buy an X-Fi card or just stick with onboard audio.

Enter peripheral maker Razer, which has dropped a ton of cash to challenge the reigning audio champ with its Barracuda Integrated Audio System. The IAS consists of a High-end Gaming Audio Card (the AC-1) and Gaming Headphones (the HP-1).

The dedicated soundcard promises audio dynamite in the form of 7.1-channel output, 24-bit digital-to-audio signal conversion, and 117dB SNR output. Not too shabby, right? Also keep

your ears peeled for some sound-enhancing tech (including something Razer calls Enhanced Sonic Perception) and 3D positional audio. The AC-1 pipes its sound through two optical Toslink ports and one DVI-ish jack (Digital Visual Interface for audio? Insanity!).

As for the second half of the IAS, the HP-1 headphones actually feel both substantial and comfortable on the head. Even the detachable boom mic feels sturdy. When coupled, the AC-1 and HP-1 promise to form a Volttron of audio delirium. The headphones connect to the AC-1 through the DVI port we just mentioned, which should make for absurdly high data-transfer speeds.

But how does it sound? Great question! While we have the soundcard and the headphones in our hands, we don't have any drivers! So you'll have to wait 30 days to see how this technological tease turns out. Stay tuned for our in-depth look at PC audio next month.

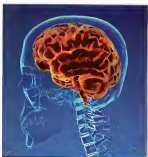
GEEKEY

Just when you think you're sportin' the slickest tech this side of Star Trek, something has to come along to de-L337 you. The latest something: The Optimus mini three v1.5 keypad, a tiny peripheral with three touch-sensitive OLED displays. The background image of each button



changes depending on the application/shortcut/whatever you assign it. A couple of ho-hum preconfigured functions tell the weather, stock prices, and CPU usage, but we're sure you can come up with some pretty out-there functions, say, for in-game Half-Life 2 use or special p0rn shortcuts.

So how much will the mini three run you? A mere 4,310.85 rubles (or, if you don't have that, about 160 bucks). Buy it now at <http://store-artlebedev.com>, or wait until later this year for the even-L337R full-keyboard Optimus loaded with only OLED keys. Don't ask how much that one'll cost.



MAN BITES BORG

Resistance was futile for a paralyzed Londoner who recently got Borgified. The Brit's cranium now houses a smaller-than-penny-sized controller chip called the BrainGate that lets him "move a computer cursor open e-mail, and control a robotic device simply by thinking about doing it," according to a team of scientists speaking to Reuters.

Massachusetts-based Cyberkinetics Neurotechnology Systems, inventor of the device, says that the sensor's first clinical trial is off to a good start. Obviously, the chip is intended to aid the paralyzed and infirm, but we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't dream up ways it could improve our performance in *Starfield 2*. Or enslave the rest of the human race.

HARDWARE WARS

Just as Intel prepares to announce the launch of its Core 2 Duo CPU, AMD has to once again stomp Intel's thunder. The latest blow in the hardware wars: AMD just bought graphics-card maker ATI for about \$5.4 billion. (Apparently our \$12.50 and some pocket lint wasn't enough.) According to the press release, "In 2008 and beyond, AMD aims to move beyond current technological configurations to transform processing technologies, with silicon-specific platforms that integrate microprocessors and graphics processors to address the growing need for general-purpose, media-centric, data-centric, and graphic-centric performance." Does this mean we'll finally see integrated graphics boards that actually kick ass? Crazy talk!

EXTREME TECH

TECH MEDICS

A shot from ExtremeTech's Jason Cross should clear that right up

Q: I THINK THAT MY TWO-YEAR-OLD system is getting a little long in the tooth. I have a HP Pavilion a600n Athlon XP 2800+, 80GB hard drive, Radeon 9250 video-card, 250W power supply, and 1,024MB of PC3200 RAM. I'm not a heavy gamer, but enjoy playing WOW (like half the planet at this point) and Call of Duty 2. That's not enough, though. I want to get Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter and Rise of Legends, but I'm worried my computer won't support them. I know my graphics card is under-powered—that's a given—but what else should I upgrade? Or is it time to suck it up and invest in a brand new system?

Cory Gunn

A: I hate to be the bearer of bad news, Cory, but your trusty ol' PC might be ready for retirement. While your aging rig was functional two years ago, you're getting to the point where it'll be hard to do a meaningful upgrade. You could put in a faster AGP graphics card, like a GeForce 7600 GS, but you might need to upgrade that power supply to do so. Even then, all the cool graphics cards are PCI Express. Plus, your CPU is a little on the slower side for modern games, and while a gigabyte of RAM is good, you don't have particularly fast RAM.

Let me put it this way: "You don't buy computers; you rent them." We're not suggesting you enter into a monthly payment plan on your next computer—just realize that even the best PCs last for only a couple of years. Upgrades are great, but at some point, you're just putting expensive Band-Aids on a PC that isn't getting any younger. I think you may have reached that point. The good news is that if you have the room, you can turn your current PC into a nice file server or something.

Q: I have a basic Dell Inspiron 5160 with 512MB of RAM. Simply stated, I want to run Phantasy Star Online: Blue Burst. According to the system recommendations, I should be OK, but the game still runs slowly. I think it might have something to do with the RAM in my laptop—does it sound to you like the game is running slowly because of that? If I need to upgrade, what's the most cost-effective RAM chip to go with?

Sean Tiffin

A: Your basic Inspiron 5160 has a pitifully slow GeForce FX Go5200 videocard, and that's probably the cause of your slow PSO performance. While your machine technically meets the minimum system requirements, there's a world of difference between minimum requirements and recommended requirements. Most game publishers are, shall we say, "optimistic," even with the recommended specs. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do about it. Most notebooks, including yours, don't have upgradeable videocards. You can try more RAM, and the Dell website will sell you a RAM upgrade that will work well with your system (you can install it yourself pretty easily), but I honestly don't think it'll make much of a difference.

Q: When I see pictures of PCI Express slots, they show several long slots and several short slots. What's the difference between them? Also, what are the advantages to having memory and hard drive coolers in your system?

Matthew Armstrong

A: Most PCIe motherboards include both PCIe slots and PCI slots, since most expansion cards still come as PCI cards. Note that

PCI and PCIe are not compatible—aside from the name, they don't share much of anything in common. Anyway, the long PCIe slot is the graphics slot. Sometimes there are two, in SLI or Crossfire motherboards, for dual-graphics systems. Short PCIe slots are usually PCIe x1 slots (single-lane PCIe, as opposed to the 16-lane slots commonly used for graphics cards). These x1 slots offer less bandwidth than the graphics-card slot and are generally used for expansion cards such as TV tuners and network-interface cards.

As for the memory and hard drive coolers—well, they keep your memory and hard drive cool. Generally, you don't need a cooler on your memory (aside from the heat spreaders already on the modules), but cooling can be handy if you decide to overclock your RAM. Now, hard drives can get hot. And those 10,000-rpm models? We're talking The China Syndrome if you constantly use your drive. Cooling high-rvving hard drives may prolong life and keep your whole system cool—but, again, you typically don't need specialized cooling for your hard drives. Good airflow through your case is usually enough.

Got questions? Send them to tech_medics@extremetech.com



THE AGE-OLD QUESTION: IS IT TIME TO SUCK IT UP AND INVEST IN A BRAND NEW SYSTEM?



FileFront

Computer Gaming World has joined forces with FileFront.com to bring you the best possible PC-gaming editorial and access to the top gaming downloads, including demos, mods, drivers, and more. Of course, if you need a nudge as to what to grab, we'll happily point you in the right direction within these pages. Check out these hot picks from the FileFront editors, then head to cgw.filefront.com to download them.

DARKSTAR ONE

This space adventure spans 300 star systems and offers six alien races. Get a feel for combat and hacking by playing through this tutorial demo.

TERRA WARS: NY INVASION

What happens when aliens try to take Manhattan? Sample four single-player missions and one multiplayer map of this sci-fi shooter.

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TITAN QUEST

Read our take on this Diablo-style action-RPG on pg. 90, and then try the two-mission demo. Advance your character to level 6 and learn these skills.

NIGHT WATCH

Night Watch is a tactical RPG based on the Russian horror film of the same name. Check out three levels of this supernatural title.

LAND OF LEGENDS

Try out this turn-based fantasy strategy game, in which eight races vie for supremacy using a combination of cold steel and blazing magic.

HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH PRO CLIENT V1.7 (PATCH)

The latest Half-Life 2 deathmatch patch balances the weapon system and provides a new Inventory HUD. The bonus? A new map to play.

PREY—THE PORTAL WRENCH (MOD)

Dying to generate rifts in space, but can't wait for Valve's Portal? This Prey mod gives Tommy's wrench a portal-dropping all-fire capability, allowing you to set up your own in and out points.

BATTLEFIELD 2: ALLIED INTENT V0.2 CLIENT (MOD)

This mod for Battlefield 2 includes nine custom maps along with 10 remade Battlefield 2 maps, all playable in single-player, co-op, and multiplayer modes.

CIVILIZATION IV: NEXT LEVEL (MOD)

This huge mod adds more than 20 civilizations to your game, including Argentina, Australia, Benin, Brazil, Canada, Bulgaria, Israel, and Ireland.

DISAFFECTED (SHAREWARE)

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CHAIR CHASERS (SHAREWARE)

All you need to know about this twisted Office Space-inspired homage to Mario Kart is that you race around your office in chairs. Just like in real life.

MCDONALD'S VIDEOGAME (SHAREWARE)

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INTERVIEW WITH A PRO GAMER

Look out, Fatal1ty...here comes D3thf4rt!

IT'S A LIFE THAT MOST OF US ONLY DREAM ABOUT: GETTING paid to play games. Yes, the pastime that my mother once foolishly denounced as a "waste of time" and "something that only monkey-brained morons do" has now become a legitimate path to success for the best and the brightest of us. I speak, of course, of the new breed of pro gamers, like Fatal1ty, who not only have found financial success and fame through gaming, but have also done so while having cool names that have numbers in the middle of them.

And even though professional gamers still haven't gained the same level of respect and mainstream acknowledgment as, say, professional athletes, change is in the air. Now kids want to be them, advertisers want to woo them, and hot female groupies want to pursue them and tear off their clothing. They have become the rock stars of the new millennium.

We had a chance to sit down with one of these new rock stars, Stanley "D3thf4rt" Lipschitz, 36, as he prepared to enter the qualifying rounds of the first annual Counter-Strike tourney hosted at Ben's Comix and Cards shop in downtown Milpitas, CA. Dressed in his trademark baggy shorts, "I Frag N00bz" T-shirt, and valour sweatband, Lipschitz talked to us with the swagger and confidence of a man standing on the precipice—the very edge—of greatness.

CGW: How are you doing, Stanley?

Lipschitz: Call me "D3thf4rt."

CGW: OK, "D3thf4rt." How'd you come up with your handle?

D3thf4rt: Well, it goes back to college. It's something my roommate used to call me. I hated that dude 'cuz he always smelled like ass, so it was kinda ironic that he was calling me on it. Like, hi—pot, kettle, right? But when I turned pro, I knew I needed a really badass name, 'cuz it intimidates n00bz, who will disconnect just when they see me show up. And I'm like, "Dye—take that weebusace home." It's also an awesome name for the endorsements.

CGW: How are the endorsements going, by the way?

D3thf4rt: Pretty rad, I'm working on one sweet deal right now with this company out of Texas that makes rubber mouse pads in the shape of breasts. I'm trying to get the D3thf4rt logo onto those. That'd be sick.

CGW: That sounds promising.

D3thf4rt: Yeah. The bummer is that the female mouse pads already have an endorsement, so mine would just be the male breasts. But I figure that with my logo on them, most dudes will be all over them.

CGW: I'm sure for most readers, the burning question here is how you got your start, and what they might do to follow in your footsteps.

D3thf4rt: You just gotta have confidence in your game. Play all the time. If you're a kid and your mom says to study or whatever, you just gotta call her on that. You tell her, "Mom, D3thf4rt says algebra is 'for losers.'" You don't see dudes driving around in Garmers because they know that the six sides of a pentagon are all equal or whatever. I'm gonna make some mad money here, and that speaks for itself. And if I can do it, you can, too.

CGW: So what's been your most memorable victory so far?

D3thf4rt: People put too much emphasis on winning, in my mind. Man, if that's all it was about, I'd be on top already.



CGW: Tell us about your most recent tourney, then. How'd that go?

D3thf4rt: I owned. It was a Cusko 4 LAN party at the local Motel 6. I totally won, but in the end they gave the victory to some assclown 10-year-old kid. It was weak. And I was like, "Yeah, if you wanna just look at frag counts, fine." If all I did was wander around the level and kill dudes, I'd have the most frags, too. But you gotta look at the whole package, is what I'm saying.

CGW: Some people reading this might see that you're 36 and think that you're too old for this. How do you react to that?

D3thf4rt: Yeah, that's the same kinda 'tude my wife had.

CGW: But now she supports you?

D3thf4rt: Pretty much. After I quit my day job at Krinko's so that I could do this full time, she was a little put out. Like, "Dude, how are the kids gonna eat?" [Laughs] Weak. So I moved back into my mom's place so I could focus without that kind of noise, and I think she's coming around. Have you seen my kids, by the way? If you could tell the little dudes I miss them, that'd be cool.

CGW: It'd be our pleasure. It seems like you've sacrificed a lot to get to where you are. Do you see yourself as an inspiration to other gamers?

D3thf4rt: Totally. It's partially why I do this, you know? To give back to the gaming community. I'm hoping gamers can look at me, my life, what I did to get here, and say, "Man, if I just game all the time, that could be me."

CGW: Finally, we need to ask you...how do you feel about Fatal1ty at this point in your career? Think you could take him?

D3thf4rt: Take him? I'd own him blindfolded. You can print that. I've seen him play, and I'm all, like, you're kidding, right? Try "Lamelat1ty." My grandma brings more game than that. And she's dead.

CGW: Thanks for your time, D3thf4rt, and good luck in the tourney! And Fatal1ty, if you're reading this, look out! D3thf4rt is coming! / Jeff Green



What Jeff doesn't realize is that D3thf4rt puns spawncamps like him for breakfast. Frag his weasy ass at jw_green@attol.com.

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