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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD September 2003 Issue #230

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

18 **Editorial**
Jeff recommends some games. Like we care.

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

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

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

Columns
46 Homebrew
50 Scott McCloud

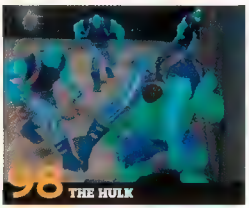
82 **Online Overload**
There are dozens of MMO games coming out to milk your wallet dry. We found five that are trying something different and–*gasp*–might actually be worth the money.

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

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

140 **Scorched Earth**
Robert hates everything–especially MMORPGs.

70 LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
Can Electronic Arts' latest offering beat the odds against good movie-based games?



Previews

60 Final Fantasy XI
64 Homeworld 2
66 Raven Shield: Athena Sword
68 Syberia II
70 Lord of the Rings: Return of the King
72 Knights Over Europe
72 Northland
72 Sacred

Reviews

88 PlanetSide
90 WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne
92 Star Trek: Elite Force II
94 Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide
95 Eve Online: The Second Genesis
96 The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon
97 F1 Challenge '99-'02
98 The Hulk
99 Big Mutha Truckers
100 X2: Wolverine's Revenge
101 Revisionist History: Rise of Nations, Tropico 2
102 Red Faction II
103 Korsun Pocket

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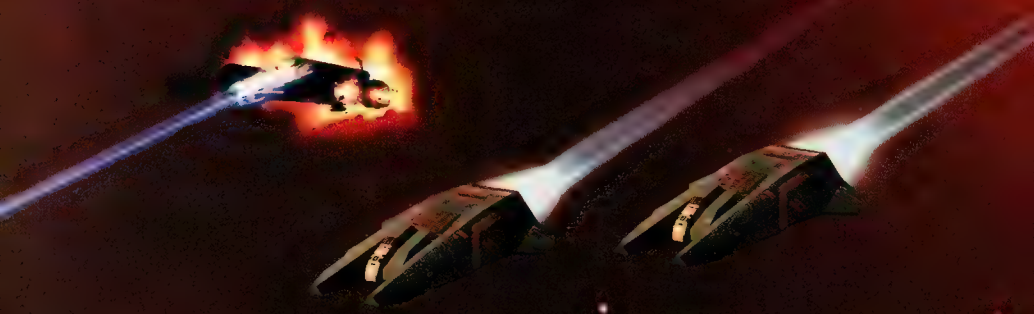

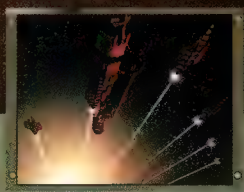

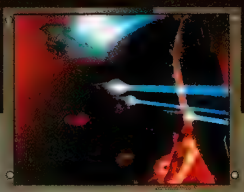

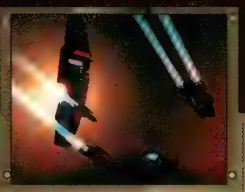

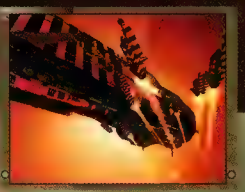

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Happy Fun Time!

It's happy time with senile old Uncle Jeff

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

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

It's not your fault our parents were monsters.

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

Rise of Nations – My favorite strategy game since *Warlords Battlecry*, *Rise of Nations* blends elements of *Age of Empires*, *Civ*, and even *Risk* into an improbably addictive stew. I'm halfway toward conquering the world and loving every minute of it.

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

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

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

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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DAVE SALVATOR

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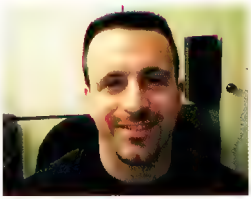
WADE HERMES

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



JONATHAN WENDEL

[illegible]

RICK SEALOCK

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

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Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Scary World of Robert Coffey

Keep Robert away from socks, pillowcases, dead squirrels, intense organs, and other such elements. We seems to make a convenient foil for pulling these kinds of things together in direct drive drivers. Kinda scary.

Brian McMahon
San Diego

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

Violence and gaming—again

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

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

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

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

CC
Cincinnati, Ohio

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

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

Harold Minkwitz

We love co-op

I want to thank Loyd for his August article, where he asks game developers to include cooperative multiplayer in their games. I'm glad I'm not the only one who enjoys co-op. My wife and I love to play games on our home LAN, and our favorites are co-op games, which are few and far between (*System Shock 2* and *Heretic 2* are classics). I echo Loyd's sentiments about the *Serious Sam* games and also find it curious about the save-game situation with *Dungeon Siege* (you should be able to save games in multiplay, not just your character—hint to Chris Taylor for *DS2*!). I'm looking forward to playing the co-op part of *NOLF2*, just haven't gotten to it yet.

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

Thanks and keep up the good work,

Gary Noel
Palm Springs, Florida

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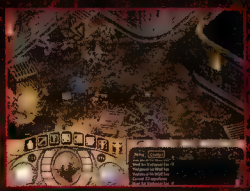

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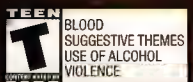

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MAIL BITES

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

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

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

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

This month's Who Does Jeff Look Like entry

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Evil Kumquat

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

Hey CGW–WTF?

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

Worst of all is Wil O'Neal's Wil Power column. I know he has something to say but his column is almost all acronyms and then his own lingo, such as "I was in fact cold chillin' in discrete 5.1 audio Nirvana." Can't tell what was going on even from context.

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

barehugg

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

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

Thanks in advance,

Sam Sturino

P.S. Robert Coffey is a dink!!!!!!!!

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

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

I'm the guy who wrote you complaining about (what I felt was) Robert Coffey's excessively dour take on the political incorrectness of *C&C: Generals* (June 2002). I just wanted to let you know that I loved the *Postal 2* review. Three words: nail, head, hit. Your review was the best *CGW* smackdown since, uh, well, since Martin Cirulis smacked Running With Scissors down for the first *Postal* game. I sense a venerable tradition in the making–especially now that 3DO is gone.

Be well.

George Heingartner

Day of DeCheat

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

I've played *DOD* since the initial release way back when and was totally addicted to the game. As time went on, the cheats became more and more prevalent. Since I am not one of those low-life bottom-feeders that likes to cheat, I gave up on the game.

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

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

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

Richard Bombardier

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

Get a life with CGW

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

Peppino

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

Dan Butler

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

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FALL 2003

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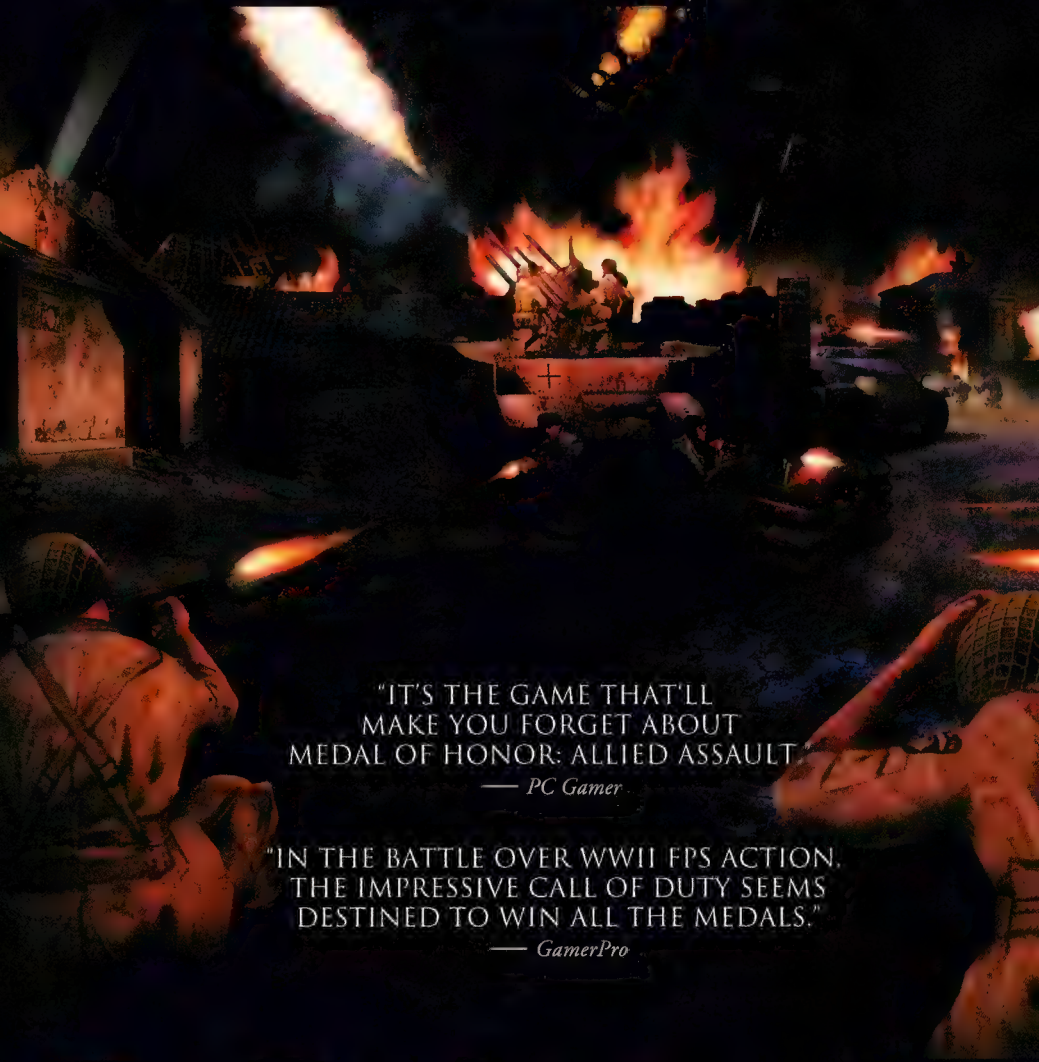
IN THE WAR THAT CHANGED THE WORLD...



"IT'S THE GAME THAT'LL MAKE YOU FORGET ABOUT MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT."
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Best PC Game
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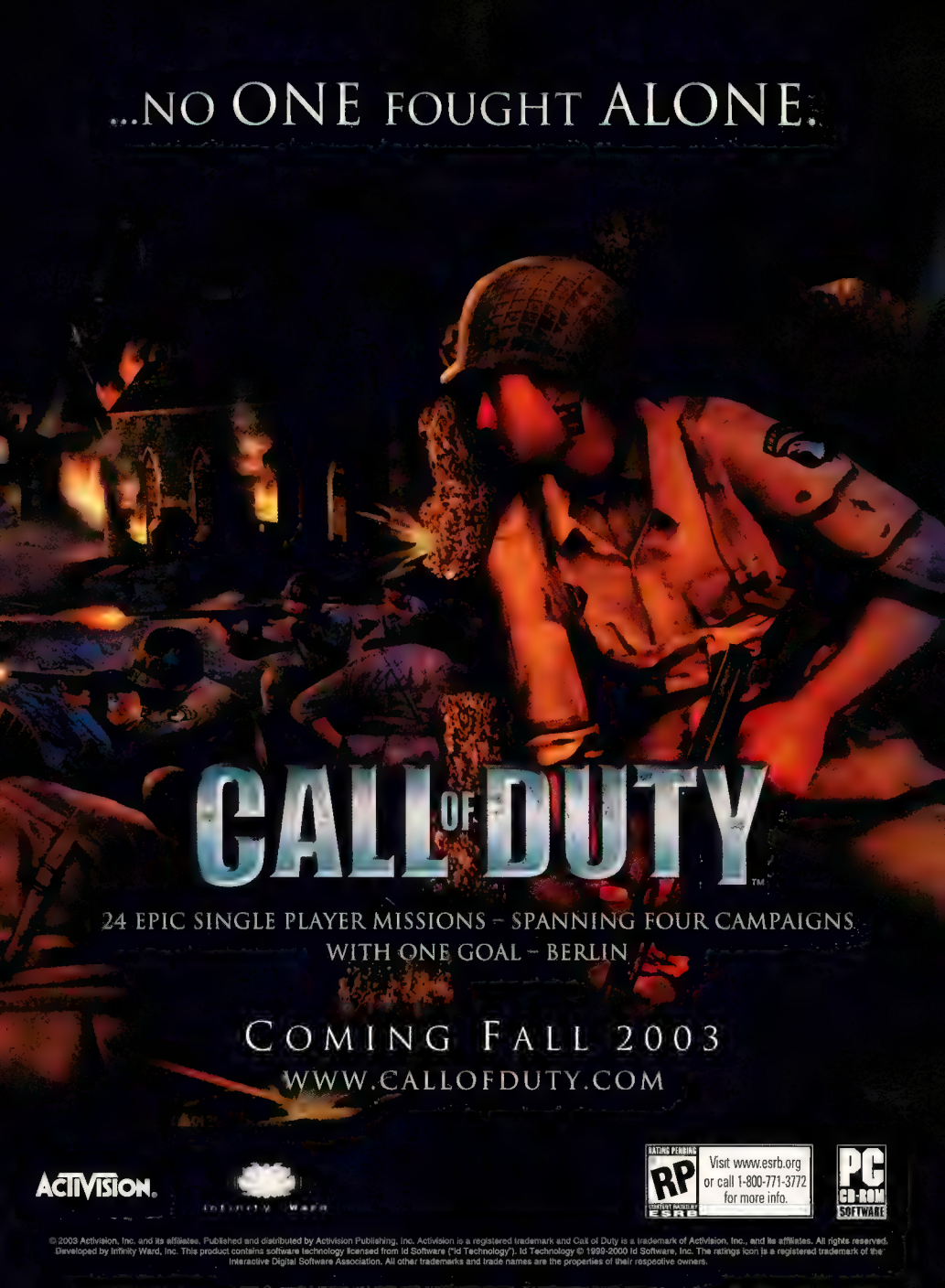
Top Games Of E3



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The 5th Panzer division punishes the US 2nd Corps in their initial assault, inflicting grievous losses.

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Take back the Pass. Fight through German lines, encountering allied and axis tanks and troops. Steal a German tank and inflict continuous casualties on unsuspecting Nazis.

May 7, 1943 Allies Take Tunisia

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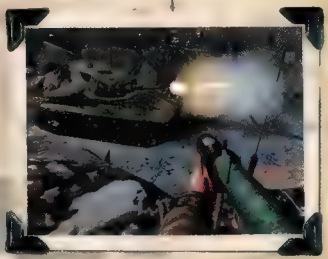
January 22, 1944 Anzio Maneuver

Destroy Germany's K5 rail guns, making the landing at Anzio safe for the Allied 3rd.

October 6, 1943 Bizerte Canal

Cross the Canal under heavy fire and hit the ground gunning. Engage the enemy in street combat to take command of the German port city.



May 17, 1944 Exiting Monte Cassino

German Panzer divisions surround you. They can't get away this time. Smash, cripple and exploit the heavy armor with the new British PIAT Anti-Tank Weapon.

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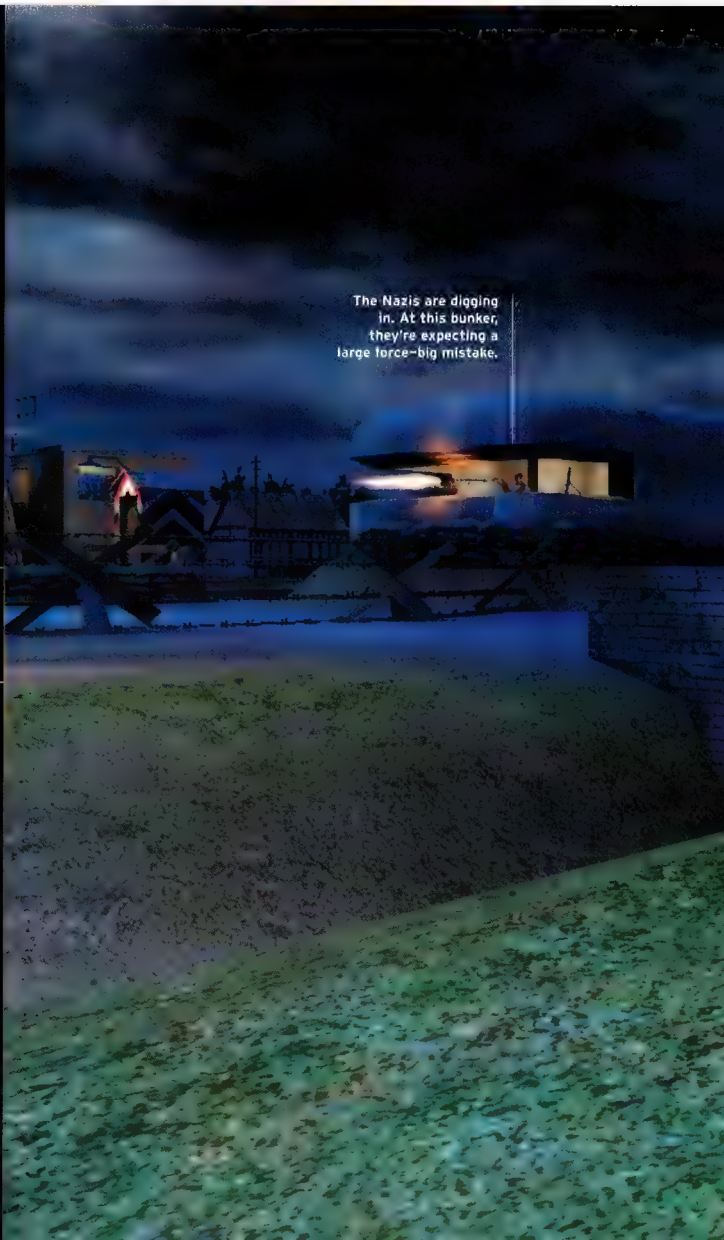
The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone



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

CALL OF DUTY

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

Here we see British commandos in the act of being sneaky. Creep, soldiers, creep!
Take potshots at Krauts while you wear a funny red cap. This sets up a distraction for the real

MIDNIGHT CLUB II

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

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

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

TEEN T
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Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8 New Units

9 New Heroes

26 New Missions

Infinite Strategy

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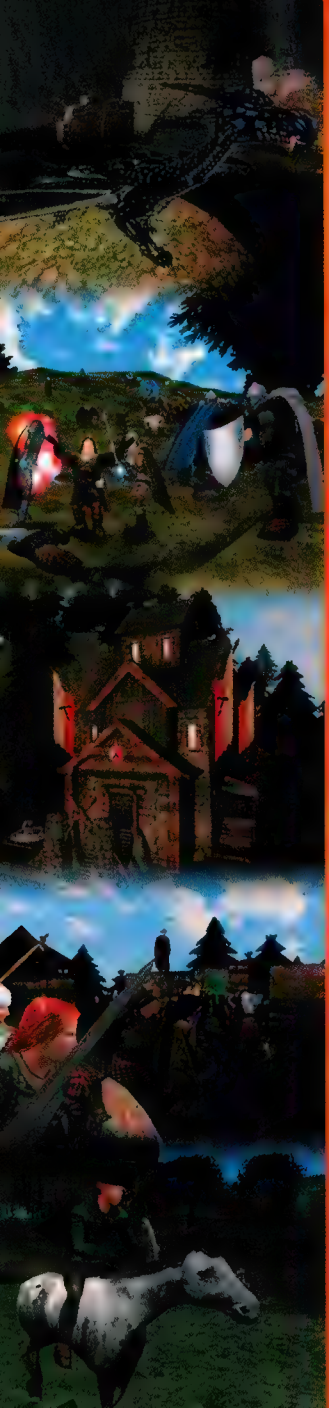

Classic Card Game
Camelot
MYTHIC
Classic Card Game
Camelot

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Read Me

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

CAFÉ SHOOTERS

Arcade 2.0

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

"This is where the serious games are," say the players at CyberGlobe in Concord, CA.

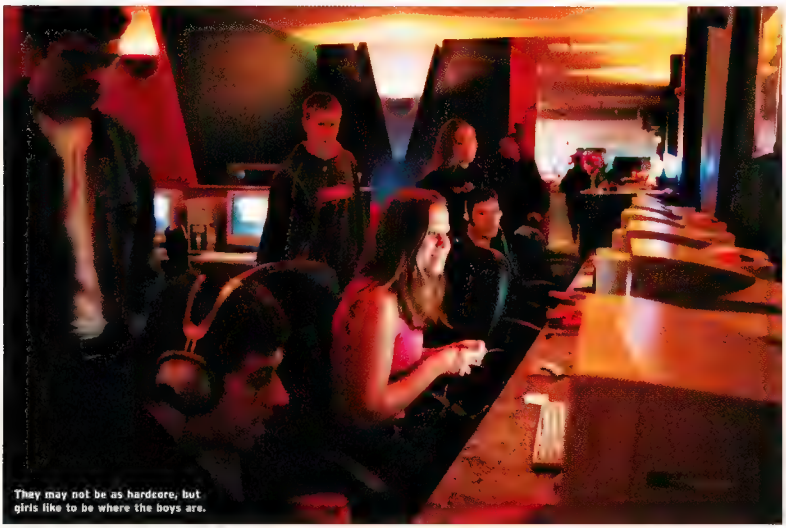
INSIDE

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

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

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

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

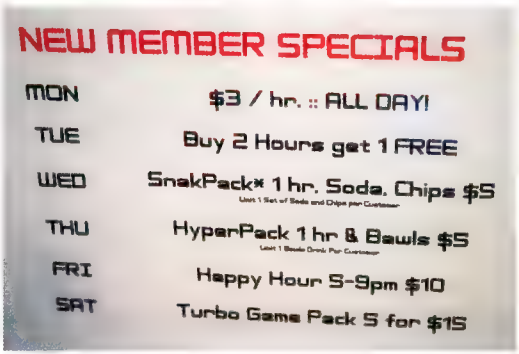


They may not be as hardcore, but girls like to be where the boys are.

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

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

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



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

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

This group of six boys and two girls come to CyberGlobe 2 a few times a week because, like most teens, they don't have anything better to do. "It's cheap, it's fun, and our parents aren't here watching over us," an 18-year-old high-school senior explains. The girls, 16-year-old twins each dressed in tiny tank tops and destroyed denim jeans, nod their heads in agreement, but they also admit that they wouldn't be here dropping five bucks for three hours of gaming if it weren't for the boys. One of the older boys—a 20-year-old with no job and no desire for college—sticks to the back of the crowd, futilely attempting to conceal a 22-ounce can of Budweiser in a paper bag.

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

GAME OVER

Like a little risk with your public Internet gaming? Try gaming in these do-or-die locales:

Garden Grove, CA
On December 30, 2002, at the PC Café in this lower-middle-class suburb south of Los Angeles, a 20-year-old is stabbed to death with a screwdriver in the club's parking lot. Antagonism fueled by *Counter-Strike* trash talking and gang rivalry is blamed. The brutal murder is one of 300 separate incidents police respond to at Garden Grove's more than 20 Internet gaming clubs.

Northridge, CA
On the same day of the Garden Grove stabbing, one teen is shot in the leg and another suffers a non-life-threatening head wound in what police call a PC game-related dispute at NetStreet, a popular gaming club on the border of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. Reports suggest that the brawl involved up to 100 combatants, all of whom were on hand to witness a *Counter-Strike* tournament. Los Angeles city councilman Dennis P. Zine immediately demands a citywide investigation by the LAPD into Internet and game cafés.

>>>

Coquitlam, British Columbia

On January 18, 2003, at the ProGamer Internet Café in suburban Vancouver, 17-year-old Christian Kwee's mastery of *Counter-Strike* ended in death. Witnesses report that after some inflammatory text messaging, three young men bum-rush the 12th grader and flee immediately after Kwee is shot. Vancouver police discount speculation that gang activity or drugs are involved.

Kwangju, South Korea

On October 9, 2002, in an Internet gaming club 150 miles southwest of Seoul, 24-year-old Kim Kyung-jae overdoses on an online RPG. After playing for 86 hours straight, the game-obsessed young man collapses in front of the store counter, recovers consciousness, and then dies moments later in the bathroom. Exhaustion is diagnosed as the cause of death.

Fengyuan, Taiwan

Almost two weeks after Kim Kyung-jae thins the evolutionary herd in South Korea, 27-year-old Lien Wen-cheng goes out the same way after a 32-hour nonstop Internet gaming binge in a game club in central Taiwan. Staff members find Lien Wen-cheng on the floor of the club's bathroom, foaming at the mouth and bleeding from the nose. He dies before he reaches the hospital.

Not many stores welcome punks with aggressive attitudes, but this one does.

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

plays *Madden 2003* by himself on the center's Xbox. Two high-school sophomores play *Counter-Strike* over the Internet in a far corner of the room; the irony of 15-year-olds freely playing M-rated games they can't even buy at stores is striking. Even more striking, however, is how dead CyberGlobe 2 seems. All the hardcore gamers, says the guy working the counter, are at the other club.

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

CyberGlobe stands in stark contrast with its newly named sister club. No girls, just dudes slumped in their high-backed black leather chairs along one side of what is essentially a 25-foot-long two-sided table, the kind of office equipment that is in large supply in the post dot-com Bay Area. The lights are off, and it smells like adrenaline-fueled young men, a scent that bears a striking resemblance to baloney.

Good place for a Stick-Up—or 10.

Hip-hop and alt-punk music blares—along with gunshots and explosions coming from the PC speakers. Unlike at CyberGlobe 2, quiet is not the desired state here.

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

REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down	B+	B	B+	C	A-	B+	B
Galactic Civilizations	A	B+	A	B+	B+	A-	B+
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	B+	B-	C	B-	B-	C+	B+
Postal 2	F	B	D	D+	C	*	C
Shadowbane	B+	B	C	B	B-	B+	B
Vietcong	B-	B-	A+	B	B-	*	B

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

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

Mark Nielsen, executive director of iGames (www.igames.org), an advocate organization that believes game centers can become more financially efficient, popular, and successful by banding together, sees no link between games like *Counter-Strike* and the violent episodes that have broken out at these clubs (see Game Over sidebar). "We have some experts who have done some very hard work in this field, and they haven't found any correlation," he explains. "I think what's important is to follow the guidelines the industry has laid down."

Violence or no violence, Nielsen expects the number of game centers in the United States to exhibit hockey-stick growth in both raw numbers and dollar signs. "What we're seeing now is the very beginning of a trend that is just beginning to explode. There are easily 1,000 legitimate centers in the United States today. I expect this number to continue to grow for years and years."

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

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

A leaderboard shows the team ranking for the club.

The regulars at CyberGlobe 2 like to kick a Hacky Sack before kicking each other's ass.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD: JANE JENSEN RETURNS

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

THE BAD: UPHEAVAL AT BLIZZARD NORTH

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

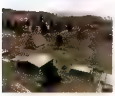
THE UGLY: GALAXIES LAUNCH

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

HANDS ON

Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons

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



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

The battlefield looks bloody good in the assault missions we played—the bullets (and, finally, blood) will fly in this new expansion, which takes full advantage of the 1.4 patch. In the snowcapped Hellendorn map, we drove amphibious vehicles and staged a secretive assault on a Nazi outpost.

Some maps are designed for stealth, using recessed waterways and other less-traveled routes, and there are many ways to execute a quick strike or to fly under the radar, including motorcycle /sidecar units, rocket-packs, and a C-47 transport plane. The rocket-pack is tough to control and shoot from, but it makes for very quick insertions. Unfortunately, however, it's also highly combustible. Once choice shot and—*blam*-o!

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

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

BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM

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

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

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

STAR TREK

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

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

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activision.com

A U.S. player blasts enemy units with advanced microwave technology.

RECON

Even bigger global war

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

With combat cycles, those sneaky GLA tunnel attacks are now even more devastating.

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

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

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

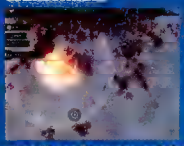
If you can defeat all of the generals, you'll unlock their armies for play in Skirmish and Online modes and earn bragging rights online with new medals for each enemy general you defeat.

HOMEBREW: SHAREWARE & FREEWARE

By T. Byrl Baker

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

Crimsonland



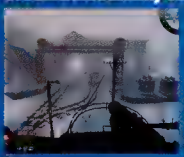
It's back, and it's badder and bloodier than ever. We featured *Crimsonland* on our cover CD last year when it was freeware, and this updated shareware version offers enough improvements to justify its $20 registration fee.

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

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

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

Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory



Return to Castle Wolfenstein was known mainly for its team-based multiplayer action, and the free *Enemy Territory* expansion pack expands on that legacy. It comes with a truckload of new gameplay modes, including a rudimentary campaign system and a team-based last-man-standing variant. Best of all, you don't even need the original game to enjoy this standalone expansion, so get downloading. Go nab it at www.splashdamage.com.

Jive Turkeys Need Not Apply

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

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Play Alone or with a Partner - One Drives and the Other Shoots!

Perform Heart-Stopping Stunts to Keep Your Audience Tuned In!

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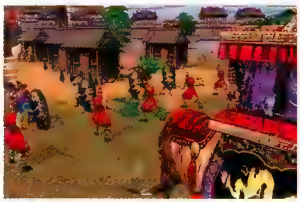


PREVIEW

Empires: Dawn of the Modern Era

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

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

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

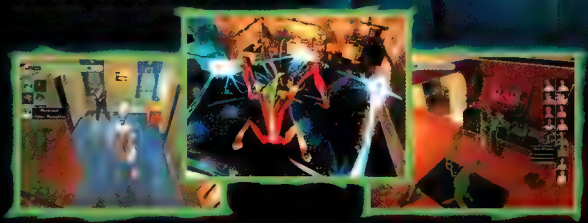
Gameplay is more massive and detailed than in *Empire Earth*. Huge maps and combined arms tactics are preferred over early tank rushes—battles rely more on tactical skill and require more finesse and manipulation of the various units' special abilities. So instead of the mass combat usually found in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

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

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

All Lurk And No Play!

There's never a dull day in Gravenville. As Ghost Master you'll command a mischievous horde of 47 different gremlins, phantoms and wraiths to stalk the sisters of the sorority house or torment the town's other citizens in 14 graphically intense scenarios based on classic movies. Rattle some chains. Lurk about. You'll be hooked in no time.



Ghost Master®

Exercise Your Demons

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

EMPIRE

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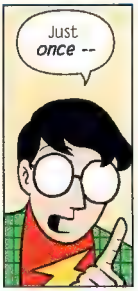
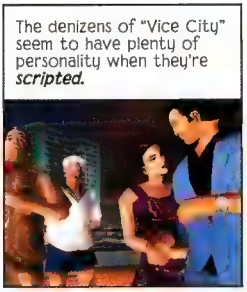
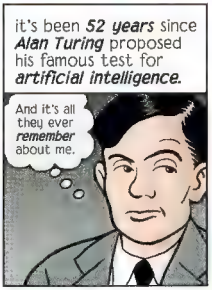
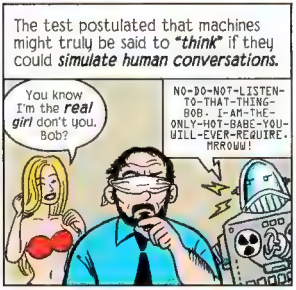
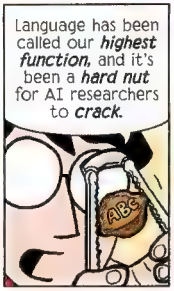
DISCOVERINGGAMES

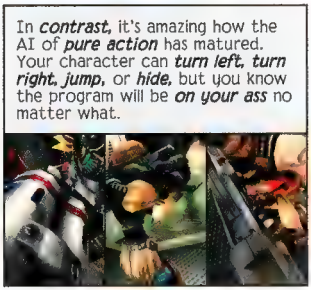


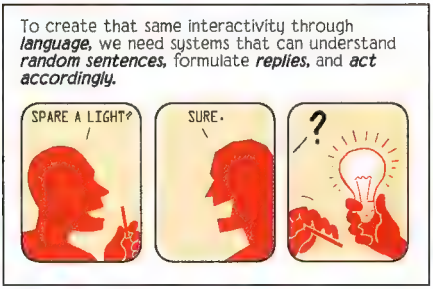


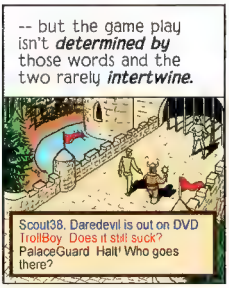


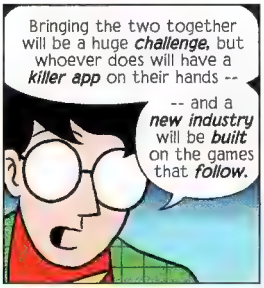












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WE COULD SHOW YOU
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BUT THEN WE WOULD
HAVE TO KILL YOU.

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- NEW SOLDIER-CLASS IDENTIFIED: BRITISH COMMANDO. GERMAN ELITE.
- 7 NEW WEAPONS. 3 FOUND: THROWABLE ONE-SHOT KILL KNIFE. SHOTGUN. GRENADE LAUNCHER
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- 16 NEW [redacted]. HELLRAISING VEHICLES.

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[redacted] FLY AND DESTROY [redacted]
[redacted] NEVER BRING A TANK TO A ROCKET PACK FIGHT.

BETTER KNOWN TO THE TEAM AS THE FLYING WING. NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE THE REST OF YOUR TEAM IS.

*Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons requires Battlefield 1942 or Battlefield 1942 Deluxe Edition to play.

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

The Way It's Meant To Be Played NVIDIA

POWERED BY: gamespy

WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
TOP SECRET
1942
BATTLEFIELD 1942
C-47 Skytrain will serve as a mobile spawn point equipped with door gunner [redacted] drop in like the unexpected angel of death.
Strumtiger. Powerful naval gun mounted on tank. Design ideal for louder explosion [redacted] more casualties.
MOTORCYCLE W/ MACHINE-GUN MOUNTED SIDECAR. LOOK STYLISH WHILE CUTTING DOWN THE INFANTRY AT THEIR KNEES.
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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No.
$ 5.00
SO SECRET, YOU DON'T KNOW THEY EXIST UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD.
ISSUED TO DIG IN.
ISSUED BY
OCT 3 1942
NOT TRANSFERABLE
VOID IF DETACHED
Now
YOU
DIE!
EA GAMES
CHALLENGE EVERYTHING

FONDLING

WarCraft Toys for Man-Boys

Fear Tichondrius, for he is mighty! By Thierry Nguyen

Beware the Dreadlord Tichondrius. For he and his mighty points of articulation (all whopping 14 of them) will warp you into a world of EVIL! And he's not alone. Prince Arthas, then-paladin-now-death knight, is available to watch Tichondrius' back. But fret not at the abundance of evil in Toycom's lineup of *WarCraft III* figures. For a sweet dosage of good, get the comely/lithe/svelte Shandris Feathermoon, a joyously articulated Night Elf archer. For a mere $12 each, you can have an epic *WarCraft* saga right on your toy chest/mantle/cubicle and a constant reminder of just how sad your adult life is. Once you've gotten over your lost pride, Toycom will be popping out another series of *WarCraft*-themed toys (as well as toys based on *StarCraft* and *Diablo*). They'll be lurking at Best Buy, GameStop, CompUSA, and other geek shops.

GET A LIFE

And maybe you can get out of mowing the lawn

Krav Maga

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

28 Days Later

"The end is extremely f***ing nigh!" Charlton Heston may have cornered the market on being the Omega Man, but when it comes to doomsday survival flicks, *28 Days Later* is no lame-ass gorefest. Unlikely director Danny Boyle has produced a gripping zombie thriller that won't leave you craving brains.

20 Questions

Computers are smart. Scary smart. We recently found this 20 Questions website and have burned way too much of our time trying to stump its eerie item-guessing genius, an A.I. that's managed to guess both "marmot" and "Hacky Sack" in the allotted set of questions. It even identified "orc." Check it out at y.20q.net:8095/btest.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, September 1998

Our cover touted 100 Hot New Games, but what really grabbed us by the seat of our pants—literally—was the Intensor chair. Basically a subwoofer planted in a very uncomfortable plastic chair, this gaming peripheral chewed up three ad pages and warranted a mention in Loyd Case's column that month—he didn't like it. Successful as a laxative, a failure as a device approaching any sort of usefulness, the Intensor chair would soon take its place in the hardware scrap heap next to 3D eyeglasses.

Ten Years Ago, September 1993

Old game journalists don't die, they go on to make games. Case in point, *CGW*'s own Alan Emrich, who coined the 4X (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate) description of games like *Masters of Orion* this month in his preview of that game. Years later, Emrich would move on to work on *MOO3* and add a new X (eXperience) to his favorite game. Sadly, *MOO3* was a disappointment, but you can't blame Emrich, since he and his promising design were scrapped before the game's release.

Fifteen Years Ago, September 1988

Our big cover story was "Politics '88," an overview of all the political-campaign games coming out that year. While we can't remember the last time one of these games was produced, 15 years ago there were three: *President Elect*, *Campaign Promises*, and *On the Campaign Trail*. Need more proof of how times have changed? The ad for the original *Might & Magic* touted the feature "flicker free."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

PREVIEW

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

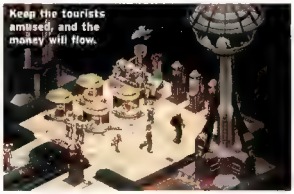
The makers of Stronghold build a space colony By Thierry Nguyen

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

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

The object of the game is not only to build structures and gather the resources needed to maintain them, but also to manage your crew's happiness so team members stay motivated and keep the colony running smoothly. Characters range from do-gooding know-it-alls to surly barflies who cause lots of trouble. Juggling these personalities will be tricky; some people will be content to have more work, while others will demand recreational items, like a zero-g chamber. Finally, when all else fails, you might have to either toss some people into the brig or assign them to psychological counseling.

Besides managing your crew, you may find yourself on a planet with a competing colony jockeying for tourists and resources. You'll deal with all of these challenges in either a linear campaign or a free-form Sandbox mode. Gamers can roleplay as an intergalactic Mr. Burns this fall.



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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

Homeworld 2 ***(Sierra)*** Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.

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

Uru: The Ages Beyond Myst ***(UBI Soft)*** Myst goes online with Uru: Ages Beyond Myst. Players will have the opportunity to explore and interact with meticulously crafted environments in, around, and beyond the newly discovered underground D'ni empire that predates human civilization.

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

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

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight ***(Microsoft)*** The next milestone in the award-winning Flight Simulator franchise. Experience history at the controls of historic aircraft, such as the Spirit of St. Louis, and the world's first successful powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer.

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided ***(LucasArts)*** A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.

Warcraft III Expansion: The Frozen Throne ***(Blizzard Entertainment)*** Following in the tradition of previous Blizzard expansion sets, this game provides gamers with a vast new chapter in the epic Warcraft saga. Revisit the war-torn world of Azeroth where a new threat has arisen throughout the land.

Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Undrentide Expansion Pack ***(Atari)*** NWN's first official expansion pack includes a new 40-hour single player campaign plus game features new to Neverwinter Nights, such as additional D&D skills, feats, classes, monsters, weapons and spells.

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

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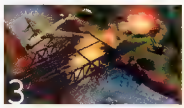
SURVEY

CGW Top 20

The best PC games, as voted by gamers

Vice City beats the crap out of everything.

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



Generals still has staying power.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
2	**Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
3	**Command & Conquer: Generals** (Electronic Arts)	★★★½
4	**Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance** (Konami)	★★½
5	**Rise of Nations** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
6	**Enter the Matrix** (Atari)	★★½
7	**Freelancer** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
8	**Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield** (Ubi Soft)	★★★★½
9	**SimCity 4** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★
10	**Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down** (NovaLogic)	★★★★
11	**Bookworm** (PopCap Games)	★★★★★
12	**Day of Defeat** (Activision)	★★★★
13	**The Sims: Superstar** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★
14	**Medieval Total War: Viking Invasion** (Activision)	★★★★½
15	**IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles** (Ubi Soft)	★★★★
16	**EverQuest: Legacy of Ykesha** (Sony Online)	★★½
17	**Impossible Creatures** (Microsoft)	★★½
18	**Vietcong** (Gathering)	★★★★
19	**Blitzkrieg** (CDV)	★★★½
20	**Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb** (LucasArts)	★★★★

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

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Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 Joystick Features:

- 16 programmable functions; 8 buttons plus 8-direction hat
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Flight Sim: $54.99
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See site for details.

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

Features:

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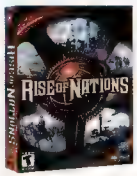
- Encounter and inter act with famous Star Wars characters
- Ally with the Rebel or Imperial sides of the Galactic Civil War, or remain neutral

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided
(LucasArts)

Regular Price: $49.99
Sale Price! $44.99



A sweeping scope of epic historical turn-based strategy games combined with the quick decision-making of real-time games. Move through the entire sweep of human culture quickly and have a satisfying game experience without playing for hours!

Features:

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

Rise of Nations
(Microsoft)

Regular Price: $49.99
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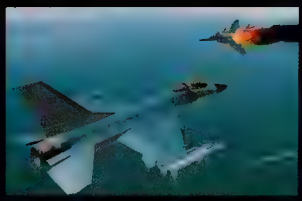
PIPELINE

The waiting is the hardest part By Di Luo

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

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

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



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

Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	Q4 2003
Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic	Gathering	Q3 2003
Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom	Q4 2003
Aquanox 2	JoWood	Q3 2003
Armed and Dangerous	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Battlecruiser: Generations	Dreamcatcher	Q4 2003
Battlefield Command	Codemasters	Q1 2004
Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts	2004
Beyond Good and Evil	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	Q2 2004
Call of Duty	Activision	Q4 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q4 2003
Contract Jack	Vivendi	Q4 2003
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q4 2003
Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware	Q3 2003
Disciples II: Servants of the Dark	Strategy First	Q3 2003
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q4 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q4 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Dungeons & Dragons: Temple of Elemental Evil	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Empire in Arms	Matrix	Q3 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Evil Genius	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Far Cry	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Final Fantasy XI	Sony	Q4 2003
Full Throttle 2: Hell on Wheels	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Galaxy Andromeda	CDV	Q4 2003
Ground Control 2	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Guild Wars	NCsoft	Q4 2004
Half-Life 2	Sierra	09/2003
Half-Life Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Valve	Q4 2003
Halo	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Q3 2003
The Hobbit	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Joan of Arc	Enlight	Q4 2003
Lineage II	NCsoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q3 2003
Lock On	Ubi Soft	09/2003
Lords of EverQuest	Sony	Q4 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Sierra	Q3 2003
Magic: The Gathering-Battlegrounds	Infogrames	Q4 2003
The Matrix Online	Ubi Soft	Q4 2004
Max Payne II	Rockstar	Q4 2003
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	Q1 2004
Men of Valor	Vivendi	2004
The Movies	Lionhead	Q1 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	Q2 2004
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of Underdark	Infogrames	Q4 2003
No One Lives Forever Expansion	Sierra	Q4 2003
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2004
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Railroad Tycoon 3	Gathering	Q3 2003
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q3 2003
Return of the King	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q4 2003
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Savage	iGames	Q3 2003
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Shade	Tri Synergy	Q1 2004
Sim City 4: Rush Hour	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Star Wars Jedi Knights: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	GSC	Q4 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q4 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tribes Vengeance	Sierra	Q4 2004
Trinity	Activision	Q1 2004
Tron 2.0	Disney	Q3 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Ultima X	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Unreal Tournament 2004	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines	Activision	2004
War in the Pacific	Matrix	Q3 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Q2 2004
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

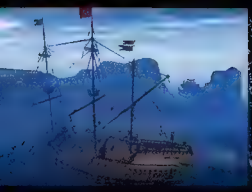
NEW UPDATE

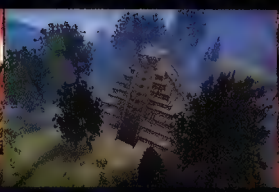
Gothic II

"Watch out Blizzard, Bioware and Black Isle! The competition is about to heat up with the release of this surprisingly remarkable sequel."
–*PC Gaming World*

"...it is the most captivating game I have played lately."
– *Computer Games*

See the world of *Gothic II* in motion at www.gothic2.com





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ATARI

EXCLUSIVE!

FINAL FANTAS

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

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

Only on the Internet can you have a serious chat with someone named "Howlingdogfish."

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

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO VANA'DIEL

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

This is the story of Vana'diel: Years after a terrible war with a great evil, a tenuous peace among the three kingdoms of Bastok, San d'Oria, and Windurst has allowed the mystical world of Vana'diel to recover. Of course, evil is tough to kill (*mwah-ha-ha*), which is where you come in. You have to choose a kingdom to side with to help stave off the forces of evil.

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

Another trademark of the *Final Fantasy* series is that the characters in the world are, well, unique. With the exception of the Hume and Elvaan races (your stereotypical human/elvish fantasy fare), the same holds true in this iteration. The other three races you choose from are a little more esoteric. The childlike Tarutaru are short, magical, and sickeningly cute in the Japanese Hello Kitty-sense, while the feline Mithra look like sex kittens and are the perfect thieves. Finally, there is the hulking, asexual Galka race, which is skilled at combat.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

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

Of course, how combat unfolds for you will depend on the role you play. *FFXI*'s career system is another one of the ways it stands apart from the MMORPG mob (beyond the gorgeous-looking graphics, that is). At the start of the game, you can select one of six career classes: warrior, monk, thief, black mage, white mage, and red mage. Later in the game, performing special quests will unlock additional careers, such as the paladin, dark knight, beast tamer, ranger, bard, summoner, samurai, ninja, and dragoon. Each class has a number of unique spells and abilities to learn, as well as a single class-specific "super ability" that can be used only once every two hours. As the limited use would imply, these are real tide turners—the black mages' super ability, for example, allows them to temporarily cast spells without using mana.

"Ahoy there! I feel jaunty!"

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

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
GENRE: MMORPG
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2003

COMMUNICATE AND CONQUER

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

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

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

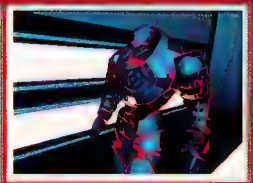
Final Fantasy XI has now been out in Japan for more than a year, so don't expect it to show off your new graphics card. Still, the engine remains solid, the world is beautifully realized, and the system specs are shockingly reasonable. Vana'diel is a world of stark contrasts, offering deserts, forests, organic catacombs, volcanic badlands, and even ethereal voids. Weather is realistically portrayed and affects everything, including monster appearance, spell strength, and item construction. Vana'diel is already huge, but according to the game's developers, they predict that the game is currently only 20 percent of its ultimate size.

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

SUMMONING 101

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

TRON 2.0



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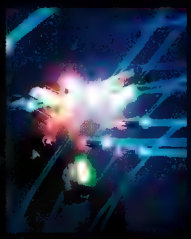
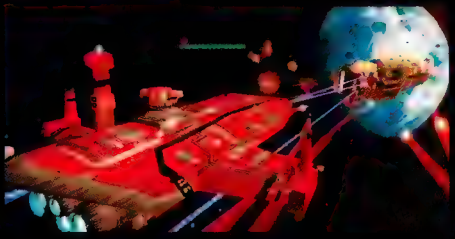
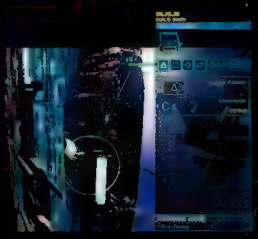
For those who miss *Battlestar Galactica*...







HOMEWORLD 2

In space, nobody can hear you make a sequel

By Di Luo

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

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

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

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

On the tactical side, fighters and corvettes are now built in squadrons, so you can have finer control over tens of units rather than hundreds. Perhaps taking the simplification too far, the intricate formations of the first game are gone. Instead of stately walls of battle, capital ships in the sequel move about like the mobs of any RTS. Due to fan demand, however, the formations might appear again in the final release.

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

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

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEVELOPER: RELIC ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2003

TRON 2.0
MERCURY
THE GAMEBOT
A light cycle champion isn't coded to feel fear.
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0
The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON!

Your squad gets even smarter in this expansion.

So much for killing 'em with kindness.

Another country, another terrorist threat.

RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD

Tho, you theena thword ath well? By Darren Gladstone

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

If there is an overarching theme for *Athena Sword*, it is the further refinement of what is already a good game. The bad guys have undergone a minor facelift, which has been retextured from the already handsome-looking *Raven Shield*, according to Ubi Soft brand manager Mike Jeffress. And in addition to the new maps (which we'll get to in a moment), Jeffress says Ubi Soft is bringing back three fan-favorite maps that take advantage of the new *Raven Shield* engine: Embassy, Subway, and Siberia.

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

The addition of three new multiplayer modes also bolsters the troops. Jeffress explains that the Adversarial Hunts play a little more like *Counter-Strike*. The Terrorist Hunt is simply team deathmatch with terrorists. The Scattered Hunt is essentially the same but has scattered start points throughout each map. Last is the peace-loving Capture the Enemy mode, where you only make arrests. According to Jeffress, those captured are handcuffed, go to a third-person view, and can't shoot. Of course, your teammates can free you.

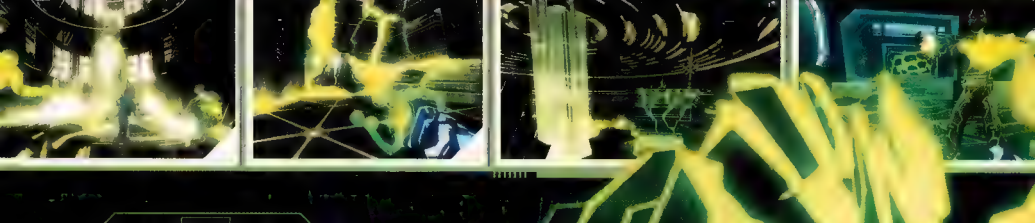
While the addition of third-party *Punkbuster* software will reduce cheaters, the addition of seven new weapons helps you mow down the competition. You have a Beretta M93R, a Spectre M4 SMG, two assault rifles (HK G3KA4 and OTs-14 Groza 9/40), the latest Benelli shotgun, the M240 light machine gun, and the HK SL8-1 sniper rifle at your disposal. So much for killing 'em with kindness.

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

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT MILAN
GENRE: TACTICAL EXPANSION
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2003

TRON 2.0



THORNE

THE CORRUPT PROGRAM

Improper digitization can turn an executive into a madman.

The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0

The 6:19 to Syberia, now boarding at Track 15.

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

SYBERIA II

The cliffhanger graphic adventure gets a conclusion

By Tom Chick

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

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

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

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

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

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

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROIDS
DEVELOPER: MICROIDS
GENRE: ADVENTURE
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 2003

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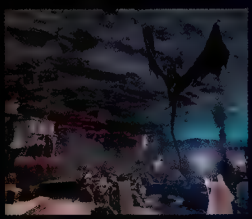
NVIDIA GeForce FX
The GPU of Tron 2.0

Gandalf gets his action on.

Orc on a pike—mmmmm, tasty.

Now that's how to make an entrance.



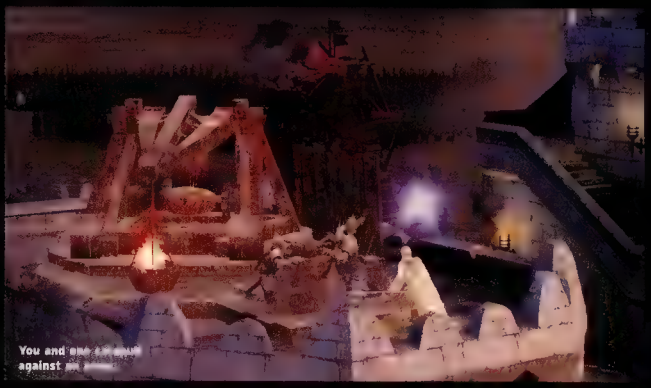
Great balls of fire!

THE RETURN O

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

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

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



You and one of your friends against an army.

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

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

A WIZARD IS NEVER LATE

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

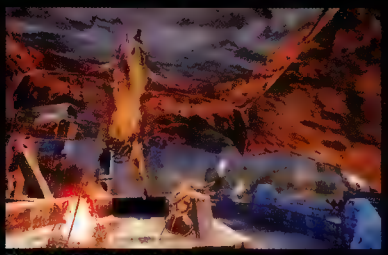
While *Two Towers* is linear, letting you play only as Aragorn, Gimli, or Legolas, the new game is divided into three distinct paths: Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas comprise one path, Gandalf another, and Frodo and Sam the third. Different levels, with different gameplay styles, will open up depending on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

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

THE WORLD IS CHANGED

The real draw for Tolkien geeks is just how well the game is integrated with the movie. The graphic design and character models are simply beautiful—especially in hi-res on the PC—and instantly evocative of the movie. All the original actors did the voiceovers for their characters, while the original stunt doubles for those actors re-created their moves. Howard Shore's emotional score plays throughout, and actual scenes from the movie blend seamlessly with the game, adding resonance and weight to the gameplay. And for true geeks, there are a host of cool rewards and Easter eggs—like interviews with the films' actors and behind-the-scenes artwork—that are unlocked as you play.

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



Stop dragon my heart around.

F THE KING

GAME STATS

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

OUTTA SIGHT

The best games you've never seen

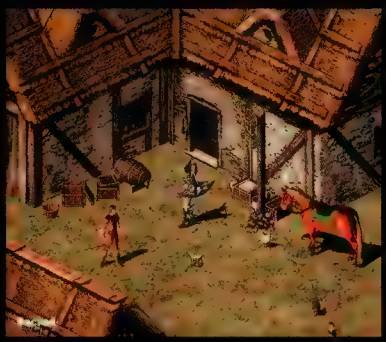
By Scott Steinberg

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

NORTHLAND

FROM: GMX MEDIA
AVAILABILITY: Q4 2003
GENRE: ADVENTURE-STRATEGY

SPREAD THE WORD: Europeans love micromanagement like they love beer and world domination. Continuing the criminally underappreciated *Cultures* series of adventure-strategy games, *Northland* pits four heroes against cheeky Norse god Loki. Pursuing an eight-mission campaign, you work to build, burn, and battle atop delightfully detailed backgrounds. Internet play, half-a-dozen multiplayer missions, and a working map editor round out the package, which is so amusingly German that it practically comes packed with free Wiener schnitzel.
BEST UNHEARD: If it weren't for the fact that Blue Byte was out of business, the company would sue—you'll notice disturbing similarities between this title and real-time strategy great *The Settlers*. Come to think of it, those similarities are also present in JoWood's *The Nations*, Interactive Magic's *Knights and Merchants*, and countless other products imported from the Fatherland. Funny, no one seems to notice that while these titles move millions of copies overseas, they barely make enough here to cover the cost of import duties.



KNIGHTS OVER EUROPE

FROM: ASPECT SIMULATIONS
AVAILABILITY: Q2 2004
GENRE: FLIGHT SIMULATION

SPREAD THE WORD: From *Falcon 3* to *Red Baron II*, members of the Aspect team cut their teeth on some serious flight sims. But enough with the heat-seeking missiles, back to the biplanes used by the boys in this promising stab at World War I–era aerial combat. Aiming for staunch realism and supreme accessibility, the dozens of accurately modeled planes this game boasts are designed for play by veterans and novices alike. Historically accurate markings and precise damage modeling are added attractions.
BEST UNHEARD: Unproven development crews are dubious. Flight simulations are a niche market. Put the two together, and it doesn't exactly spell mainstream success. Still, we had the same feeling about a similar title you might have heard of: *IL-2 Sturmovik*. Then again, 1C Maddox Games wasn't dividing its attention the way Aspect is; the company is also producing two other entertainment products and some military-grade software. Pity the poor, overworked programmers, and pray management stocked up on the Red Bull.

SACRED

FROM: ASCARON
AVAILABILITY: Q3 2003
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME

SPREAD THE WORD: Attention, jaded gamers: While this may look like yet another *Diablo* clone, at some point, somebody is bound to get it right. After choosing from six characters—such as a vampiress, a seraphim, or a battle mage—you enter into a vast story-driven world that touts more than 30 primary missions and 200 subgoals. Up to 16 players can get in on the journey, questing through a like number of regions, such as forests, mountains, and deserts that bristle with danger.
BEST UNHEARD: In its native Deutschland, Ascaron is well-known for business sims like *The Patrician* and *Anstoss*, a wildly successful soccer management series. But nowhere in the company's storied 12-year history do you find any role-playing games. Whether a firm renowned for precisely detailed products such as *Port Royale* can do justice to a lightweight game set in a fantasy realm is anyone's guess. Given the publisher's reasonable track record though, *Sacred* could very well cast its spell on us.

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KIS

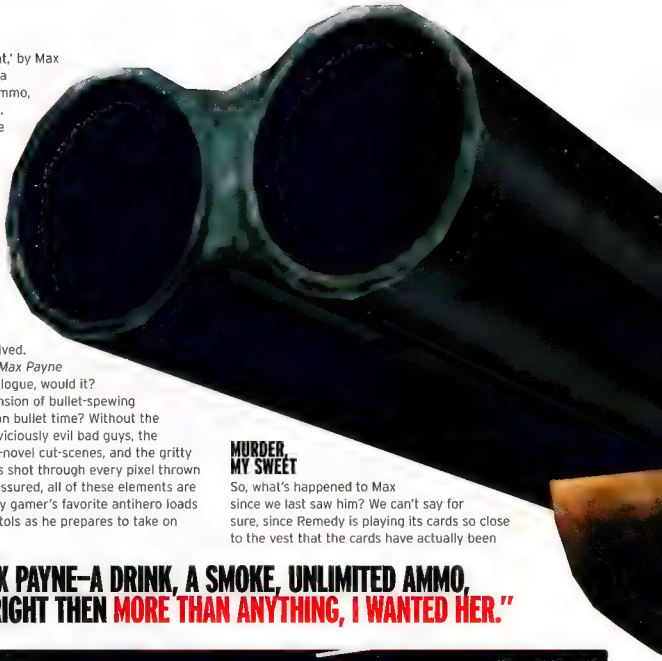
SME DEADLY

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

BY ROBERT COFFEY

GENRE: SHOOTER RELEASE DATE: 04 2003

"The Things I Want,' by Max Payne—a drink, a smoke, unlimited ammo, and a license to kill. But right then more than anything, I wanted her." And with that quote from *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*, any questions as to whether the tough-as-nails noir hero from the long on stylish action, short on playtime shooter would be speaking the same bruise-purple prose should be resolved. After all, it just wouldn't be *Max Payne* without the over-the-top dialogue, would it? Without the delicious suspension of bullet-spewing carnage in sultry slow-motion bullet time? Without the graffiti-scarred streets, the viciously evil bad guys, the delirious watercolor graphic-novel cut-scenes, and the gritty homage to classic noir that's shot through every pixel thrown across your monitor? Rest assured, all of these elements are back and then some as every gamer's favorite antihero loads his dual Ingram machine pistols as he prepares to take on *Half-Life 2* later this year.



MURDER, MY SWEET

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

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

You want insanely detailed graphics? You got it.

pushed through its body and have come out its back. Be that as it may, we do know that some time has passed since Max wreaked bloody revenge on the killers of his wife and child, and he's left the DEA to rejoin the NYPD. Oh, and he's framed for a murder. Again. This time he stands accused of the murder of his own partner. When the game begins, it's late on a rainy autumn night and, like the original, the hero's story starts as one long flashback detailing the road to hell and back he's traveled the last few days. And this time he's taking someone along for the ride: Mona Sax, a classic femme fatale who played a small part in the first game. What's her role in *The Fall of Max Payne*? You got us (that whole reluctant-to-divulge-facts Remedy thing gets in the way), but we're betting that Mona will be pivotal in the whole "Fall" part—whether that means she's tripping him up or picking him up, we don't know.

Storytelling-wise, *Max Payne 2* is strikingly similar to the first game, with some notable differences. While the game will employ the same foggy graphic-nove depictions of key story events, these will occur only between levels. This is welcome news for any gamer who was frustrated by the abrupt halt in action that happened in the first game anytime Max wandered by a telephone, radio, or television. There you'd be, charging through waves of bad guys, when suddenly an exclamation point would pop up over Max's head and the game threw on the brakes. Still, midlevel portions of the game will be peppered with quick cut-scenes, done in-engine to heighten dramatic tension, such as when Max boards an elevator to yet another bloody date with destiny or when a murder scene is first revealed.

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

THE LONG GOOD-BYE

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

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

Unlike the first game, Max will be able to keep shooting after a shoot-and-dodge dive.

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

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

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

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

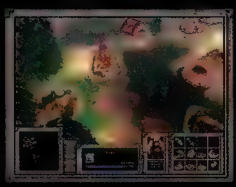
I, THE JURY

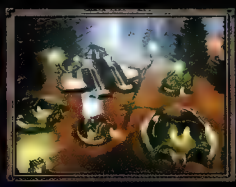
While Remedy was typically stingy demonstrating levels in the game, the bits of Max dishing out his brand of justice it did deign to show us were outstanding. Everything you'd expect to see in a *Max Payne* game is there and then some. There are showers of cascading bullet casings, rundown tenements

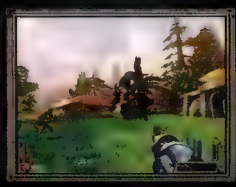
SAVAGE

The Battle for Newerth

COMING SOON







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

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

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

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

THE BIG SLEEP

The biggest change in the game has to be the beefed-up A.I. Where the first game relies heavily upon scripted enemy responses, *Max Payne 2* is letting smarter adversaries—and not programmers—provide the challenge. After two years of serious development, enemies are now vastly more self-aware and are capable of perceiving the environment.

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

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

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

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY

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

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

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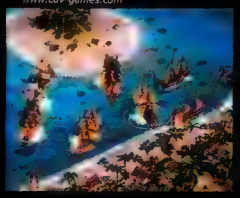

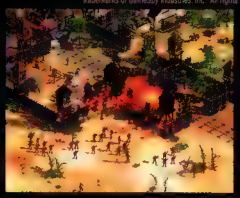

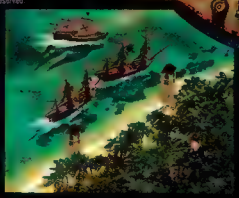

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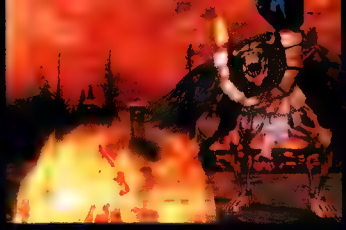


WE PICK THE BITCHIN'-EST MMORPGS AROUND

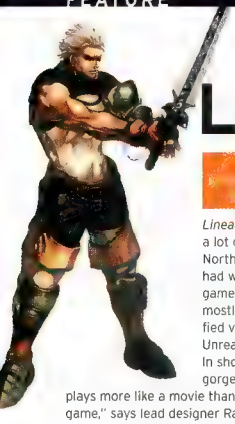
ONLINE OVER

LOAD

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

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

BY MARK ASHER



LINEAGE II

PUBLISHER: NCSOFT
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2003

Lineage II is going to fix a lot of the issues that North American players had with the original game—bad graphics mostly—by using a modified version of the Unreal graphics engine. In short, the game looks gorgeous. "[*Lineage II*] plays more like a movie than a typical MMO game," says lead designer Raoul Kim. "Not only are the environments robustly rendered, they come together seamlessly with a single load technology. Backgrounds unfold naturally, as if you were really in a forest, castle, or temple."

It wouldn't be a *Lineage* game without the politics and castle warfare, though, and that's going to be even more detailed than in the previous game. "The combat and strategies are raised to an even higher level than before," says Kim. "Now you can mount a dragon and fly over castle walls, or you can summon huge creatures to break down those walls." Blood pledges, which are similar to guilds, will battle one another for control of these castles. Several blood pledges can ally and form a nation. They will also get a message board, which web-page members can use both inside and outside of the game. It's medieval fantasy gone high-tech!

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

Rent doesn't come cheap in these medieval towers.

MYTHICA

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2003

Microsoft's *Mythica* intends to find an answer to a perplexing problem peculiar to playing MMORPGs: How can you feel like a hero when something about as dangerous as a bunny rabbit, and which might even be just a bunny rabbit, can kill your new character?

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

Mythica, like *Guild Wars*, uses private adventure areas created for individual groups. Executive producer Matthew Wilson explains, "With Private Realm technology, our focus is to bring the best of the traditional single-player RPGs to the MMORPG space. We can make them feel like they are the hero and not just another person lost in an MMO world."

YOU'LL BE PLAYING AS A NORSE IMMORTAL

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

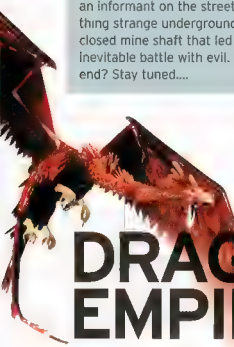
CITY OF HEROES

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

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

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

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



DRAGON EMPIRES

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

A lot of thought beyond the graphic detail has gone into this title. Once your clan captures a city, you control the city's economy. Any player can set up a shop in your city—just lay down the law, set up some harsh production taxes, and your digital Tammany Hall is well underway. "We're taking player-driven gameplay somewhere new," says Tyson. There will be more than 50 cities—split among five empires in the world—that players can battle over, and battles will be scheduled so that everyone can get in on the fights. When you're ready to raise the sword, "[*Dragon Empires*] features hundreds of combat moves and magic spells," says Tyson. There will also be plenty of quests and monster-bashing for those not interested in forming clans and battling other clans over cities. Or, if you'd rather just avoid the bloodshed, you can play as a merchant or trader, crafting items and moving around the world and selling.

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

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

GUILD WARS

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

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

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

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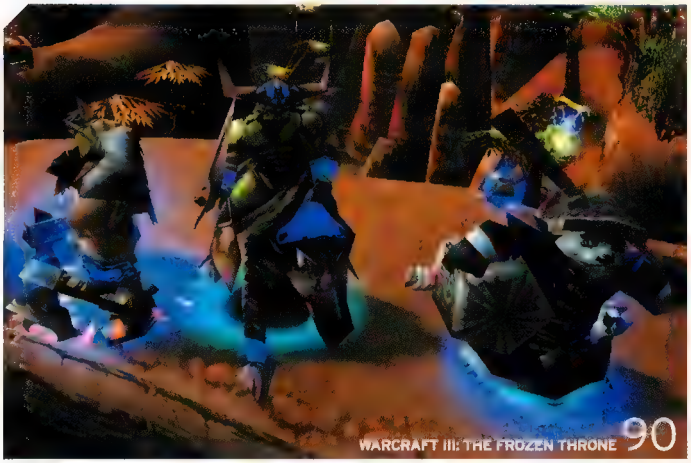
Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



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

PLANETSIDE 88

INSIDE

88	PlanetSide
90	WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne
92	Star Trek: Elite Force II
94	Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide
95	Eve Online: The Second Genesis
96	The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon
97	F1 Challenge '99-'02
98	The Hulk
99	Big Mutha Truckers
100	X2: Wolverine's Revenge
101	Revisionist History: Rise of Nations, Tropico 2
102	Red Faction II
103	Korsun Pocket

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

PlanetSide

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

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER: SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: MMOFPS
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99 + $12.99/MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM RECOMMENDED
RECOMMENDED: PENTIUM 4 1.8GHZ, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT
IT'S MASSIVE, THEY SAY

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

The war rages on and on and on

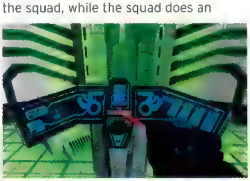
The minimal story of three factions—Terran Republic, New Conglomerate, and Vanu Sovereignty—duking it out over a massive land grab is puzzling when you first enter the game world. While graphically nice, the continents are huge and generally nondescript. Dotting the requisite jungles, deserts, and snowcapped areas are numerous identical bases (with a scant few cool-looking structures). Don't forget that every time you log off, some punk is sneaking in and squatting in the joint you fought hard to grab in the first place. It's a constant state of war with no ultimate purpose.

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

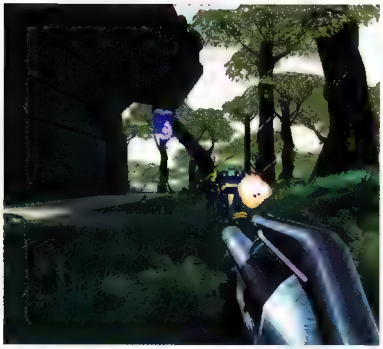
When you finally sign on with a squad, pray that the members aren't half-wits who run you over by mistake. As a friend puts it, "If you've got a problem with the A.I., blame the American educational system." You wind up playing a waiting game of gathering squadmates, hopping onto transports, and hoping the fight's not over when you finally get there.

The "A" team

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



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



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

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

A sneaky strategy is to break into an enemy base and hold down the respawn, center and equipment terminals so new bad guys can't pop in to surprise you.

A hostile takeover in progress.

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

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

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

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

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

And this brings us to my biggest beef with *PlanetSide*: technical issues. A word of advice: Don't even bother playing if you have less than the recommended system specs. Even with a 2.8GHz system and ATI Radeon 9700 Pro, the game suffered occasional graphics hiccups and more outright game crashes than I'd care to count—not to mention the fact that it's hard to press an assault when teammates go linkdead and you suddenly find the much-needed hacker has gone AWOL. Thankfully, like any online game, plentiful patches have already improved *PlanetSide*'s stability.

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

VERDICT ★★★★½

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

WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne

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

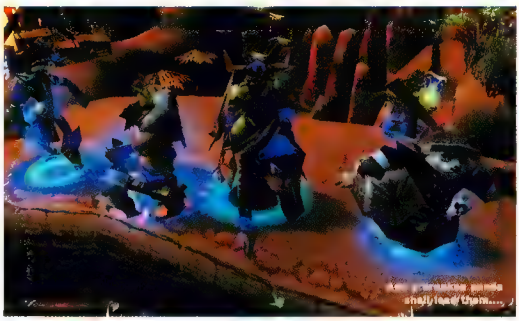
GAME STATS

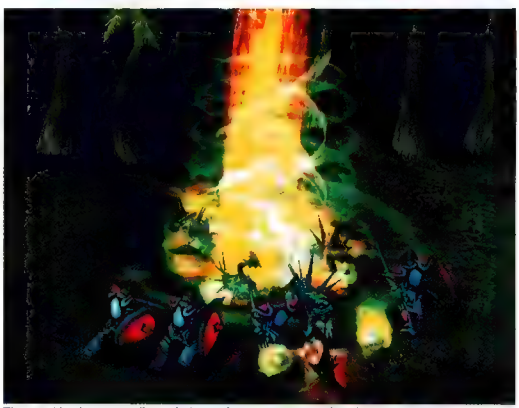
PUBLISHER: BLIZZARD
DEVELOPER: BLIZZARD
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 400, 128MB RAM, 550MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 600, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, BATTLE.NET (2-12 PLAYERS)
PRICE: $34.99

It's Blizzard's fault. It jacked up the bar for expansion packs with *Brood War* for *StarCraft* and *Lord of Destruction* for *Diablo II*. So if *Frozen Throne* for *WarCraft III* feels a bit overpriced ($35!) and underdone in comparison, the company has no one to blame but itself.

Not to say there isn't great stuff in *Frozen Throne*—because there is. You gotta love the new heroes. A huge crypt beetle that spawns baby beetles from corpses. An elven mage born under a fire sign. A Caribbean troll with good and bad juju. The new heroes give Blizzard the opportunity to mix things up and throw in more of its trademark humor. How can you resist a drunken Chinese panda bear who splits into three smaller squeaky-voiced versions of himself named Earth, Storm, and Fire? By putting most of the new heroes in a neutral building so that they're available to everyone, the game's number of combos and strategies has multiplied.

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



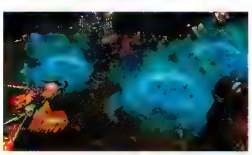


The new blood mage applies a little carefully placed heat with his Flame Strike.

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

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

Which is why the new RPG campaign is so refreshing. You play with only heroes, marching them around a hub-based set of maps to fulfill simple quests and gather magic items, complete with a stash and beasts of burden for the extra treasure. It's as easy as the main campaign is hard (in fact, you can never lose), but it's a great way to enjoy *WarCraft III*'s charms without the overbearing army-twiddling requirements. Speaking of which, there are some welcome new interface changes that Blizzard says it'll patch into the basic version of *WarCraft III*. It's about time. Now it'll be a little bit easier to deal with all the extra twiddling.



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

VERDICT ★★★½

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

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

Star Trek: Elite Force II

Make it so-so BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-64 PLAYERS)

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

They spell "team" with an "I"

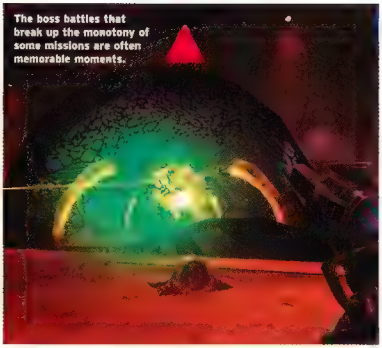
Elite Force's premise involves the *Voyager* hazard team, formed to act as a deadlier version of the standard away team. In the sequel, *Voyager* returns to the Alpha quadrant and the team is broken up by a desk jockey, only to be reassembled years later by Capt. Picard to counter another galaxy-threatening emergency.

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

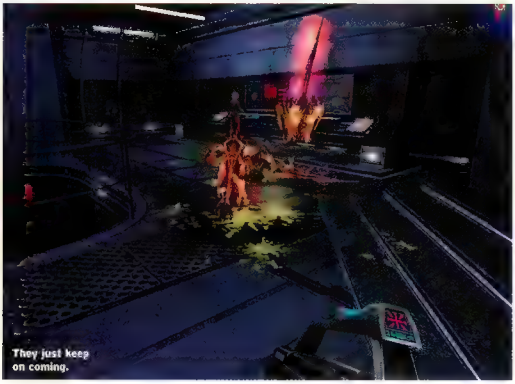
When you do have teammates, they usually get shot early, become stuck behind a wall or door, or sit around doing nothing.

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

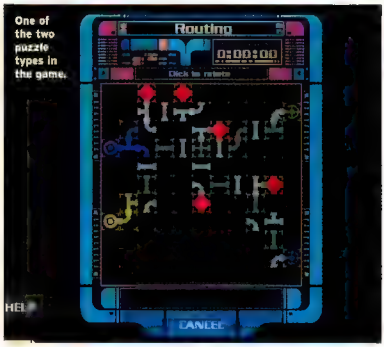
Unfortunately, this sense of repetition sets in for the action as well after the first few missions. The maps are all very linear, and you're usually just traveling down one corridor or Jefferies tube after another, with alien nasties popping out occasionally. While it's understandable that a spaceship's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


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

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


They just keep on coming.

One of your romantic interests. Why she's white and running around in a bikini while the rest of her race is brown and clad in skins is anyone's guess.



One of the two puzzle types in the game.

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

Fan service

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

The same can be said for the between-mission levels. When not fighting, you're traveling around Starfleet Academy or the *Enterprise*; you'll often be called to run from one deck to another to perform mindless FedEx tasks. It is great to walk around the *Enterprise* a bit, but how much fun can there really be in riding up a turbolift (Trekkie for "elevator") for the 20th time? The only time between-mission interactions matter is during conversations with your romantic interests. Who you end up living happily ever after with at the end depends on certain dialogue choices. In theory, this makes the single-player game replayable, but who wants to go through all those Jefferies tubes again just to see the other movie? Besides, didn't sci-fi gamers already do this in *Wing Commander 3*?

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

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

VERDICT ★★★★

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

Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide

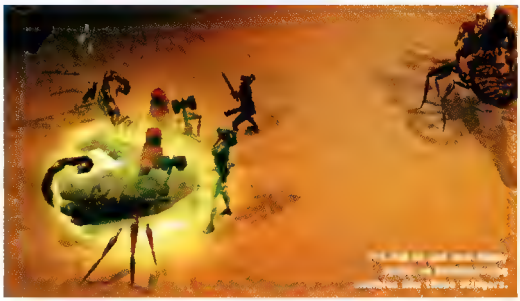
At first glance, we didn't think it said "Undrentide" either BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: BIOWARE/FLOODGATE GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
ESRB RATING: MATURE; BLOOD, VIOLENCE PRICE: $24.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-64 PLAYERS)

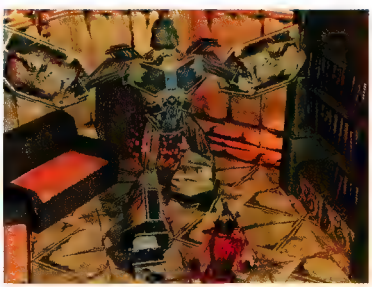
Why release a retail expansion for a game that has thousands of free mods? Well, look at it this way: Filming Jedi adventures with a mini-DV cam is nice, but seeing your porky buddy swing a fake saber around doesn't compare to a professionally made film. Thankfully, *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide*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

SOU's campaign, which is a wholly separate story from *NWN*'s campaign, appears deceptively short (two chapters and an interlude). But even the interlude is filled with three lengthy dungeons, so you'll find yourself spending anywhere between 25 and 30 total hours on this. And overall, *SOU* far betters *NWN*'s uneven single-player campaign, in which the few excellent and memorable quests and dungeons (Charwood, the Creator Ruins) were buried among more traditional *D&D* RPG fare. Here, there's a more *Fallout*-ish approach to traditional quests in that just about every quest can be solved diplomatically–utilizing intelligence or charisma–in addition to the "apply weapon to target liberally" method. Opportunities include convincing gnolls to switch sides, negotiating with hostage-taking kobolds, and brokering a trade agreement over holy wine. While *SOU* isn't flexible enough to let you finish it without ever hitting anyone, the quality of the quests and, later on, the dungeons is enough to make the *SOU* campaign more consistent and interesting than the original *NWN* campaign. You still can't control Henchman, but at least you can fiddle with their inventory and give them better battle behavior orders (like *Fallout 2*'s improvement upon *Fallout*).



You still get to fight lots of undead–now in the all-new snazzy ruins and desert tilesets.

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



This golem proclaims, "Would you like your homes and belongings guarded? If so, come visit the Golem Emporium on Northwest Vizier Street! We have the protection you need!"

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

In addition to improved gameplay, *SOU* uses humor to counter the story line's clichéd fantasy nature. Yes, it's still about stopping an evil foozle, but sly jokes and asides break up the monotony of the RPG quest. You need to kill golems, but who expects them to spew out tag lines advertising the Golem Emporium? Or to find a talking rat presenting a dissertation on maximum floating city altitude? *SOU* is perhaps the funniest fantasy-RPG I've played.

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

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

VERDICT ★★★★½

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

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

Eve Online: The Second Genesis

Space junk BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SIMON & SCHUSTER INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: CCP
GENRE: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99 + $12.95/MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 56K INTERNET CONNECTION
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 256MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD, BROADBAND INTERNET
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

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

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

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

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

On the positive side, and unlike other games in which your skill gains are bound to how quickly you can smelt iron or cleave trolls, *Eve Online* uses an egg timer. You mark a skill to gain, and in the passing of time, it raises to the next level. So what? Well, the cool part is that the timer doesn't stop ticking when you log out. At higher levels, you can train in a skill, go on a holiday cruise, and find yourself ready for the next level by the time you get back home. Finally, an online game that doesn't punish you for having a day job.

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

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

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

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

This Fall, it's your turn.

The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon

Morrowind gets the mark of the wolf

BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
DEVELOPER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM (256MB RAM FOR WINDOWS XP), 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

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

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

As soon as you set foot outside the fort, however, you will notice one of *Bloodmoon*'s most significant changes: There are creatures everywhere, and most of them are hostile. There are animals such as bears, boars, and wolves, as well as humanoids, including bear-hatted berserkers and the tough-to-kill spriggans. The wilds of Solstheim are significantly more difficult to traverse than those of Vvardenfell, not simply because of the number of enemies, but also because they are much stronger. Only high-level characters are advised to take the trip.

The spriggan is a tough new foe—knock it down and it just keeps getting back up.

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

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

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

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

Solstheim itself is like a smaller version of Vvardenfell, albeit covered in snow and ice. There are small outposts and dungeons everywhere, and you are free to wander and explore as you wish. If you choose to follow the main quest of the expansion, you'll eventually be attacked by a werewolf. And if you don't cure yourself, you become one yourself. Werewolves must feed every night, or they suffer a huge hit point loss the next day. You also must stay out of human areas as night approaches—if anyone sees you change, you will be hunted no matter what form you're in. The addition of werewolves is interesting, but the implementation isn't very exciting. The need to feed every night can become fairly tiresome, and because werewolves have only their claws as weapons, combat can get repetitive.

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

VERDICT ★★★★½

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

F1 Challenge '99-'02

Mean machine BY WADE HERMES

EDITORS' CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS UK
GENRE: RACING
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $37.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 128MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

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

Graphically, this game is an improvement upon *F1 2002*, EA Sports' previous title. Tracks and cars are more detailed than ever before. The racing environments are also richer, with helicopters flying the skies around the tracks and jets from nearby airports taking off. The physics model has been improved so much that if you damage your car even slightly, it will drastically affect its handling characteristics. Lose a tail fin and your car will spin out as soon as you lightly tap the brakes or try to enter a turn. The computer-controlled cars are the best yet, racing you closely and aggressively while taking pains not to ram you, as well as being smart enough to try to avoid you if you lose control of your car. Game sound has been improved by the inclusion of actual recordings from real Formula 1 races. Engines sound so realistic that they fuel the urge to crank up your speakers and put the pedal to the metal. The garage area is flexible enough, so you don't need an engineering degree to set up your car. Basic and Advanced setup screens allow everything from simple changes to more hardcore manipulation, right down to a telemetry data screen to assist you in analyzing your laps and allowing for more accurate adjustments on the car.

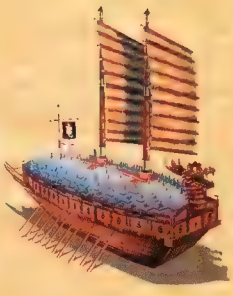
Great A.I. for the computer-controlled cars makes for some real intense racing.

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

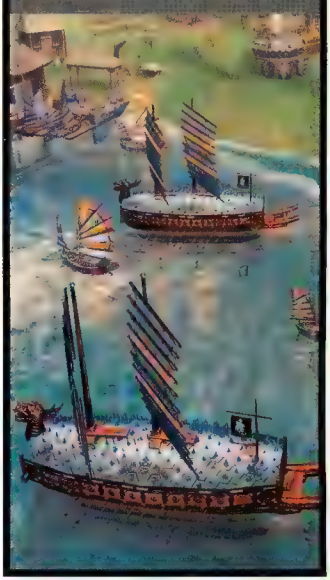
Up to this point, this game sounds perfect, and it nearly is—the only minor problem is an occasional glitch in the graphics of various horizons at each track. Overall, this game has so much more detail, realism, and flexibility than its predecessors that it effectively laps the F1 racing field.

VERDICT ★★★★½
A must-buy for Formula 1 racing fans.

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



This Fall, it's your turn.



The Hulk

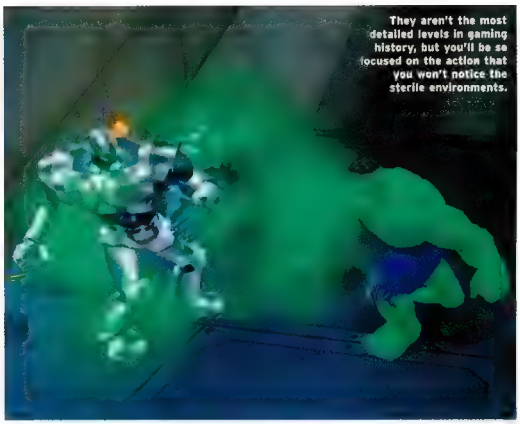
It's not easy being green BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEVELOPER: RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: ACTION
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700, 192MB RAM, 1.7GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 2.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

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

Taking place directly after the events of this summer's movie, *The Hulk* throws gamers right into the big green guy's signature hyper-muscular id with some rampaging action. The Incredible One has only a few moves available for wreaking havoc, but the point here isn't so much the combat as it is the results of that combat: watching your brutalized foes' bodies fly and twist helplessly in the air while marveling at the delicious wake of destruction you leave behind. You can swing cars like giant clubs, pounding puny humans into the ground until the automobile explodes in a thunderous fireball. You can perform gargantuan overhead ground smashes to send enemies flying, punt enormous gamma-radiated dogs, and leap into the air (and pause just long enough to savor the carnage to come) before driving your fist through another hapless enemy or grabbing him to break his back across your massive shoulders. Finally, a game that lets you club your enemies with other enemies. The action is relentless, bruising, and constantly rewarding as you pound your way through seemingly endless waves of enemies. This is the game *Slave Zero* should have been, years ago.

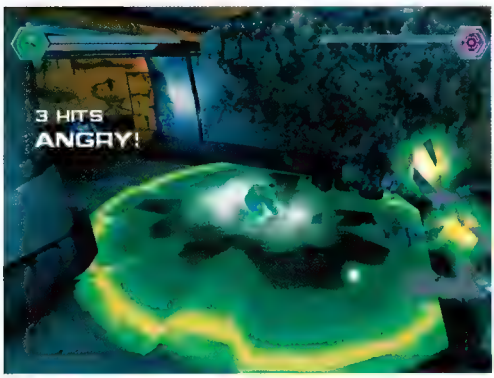


They aren't the most detailed levels in gaming history, but you'll be so focused on the action that you won't notice the sterile environments.

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

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

Like the, um, real-life Hulk, *The Hulk* has two sides to it, which translates to levels featuring Bruce Banner. As expertly as the game captures the Hulk's intoxicating power, it equally captures the essence of being a weak, scaredy-cat scientist. As a result, the *Metal Gear* wannabe Banner levels are seriously underwhelming and serve as annoying speed bumps on the way to the real reason you bought this game. Also annoying: the boss fights. Each of the boss battles in *The Hulk* is of that frustrating phased type—right when you think you've beaten Madman or Ravage or whoever, he's suddenly all powered up again and tougher as you prepare to beat him a second or third time. This can be a serious drag late in the game.



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

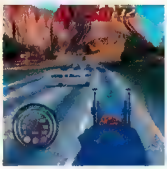
The Hulk has nicely responsive controls (you really need to play with a gamepad), and while it sports the suddenly overly popular cel-shaded look that seemingly every console-style game is adopting, its cel shading has a unique feel that does a fine job conveying the nonstop sledgehammering of the game's action. And if you haven't invested in a subwoofer yet, you may want to before playing *The Hulk*—the game sound is excellently done, and pounding your way through swarms of enemies would be seriously unsatisfying with plinky speakers.

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

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

VERDICT ★★★★½

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



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

Big Mutha Truckers

It's the Freelancer of truck-driving games

BY ERIK WOLPAW

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EMPIRE INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: EUTECHNYX
GENRE: TRUCK ADVENTURE RACING
ESRB RATING: TEEN; COMIC MISCHIEF, MILD LANGUAGE, MILD VIOLENCE, SUGGESTIVE THEMES
PRICE: $19.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 96MB RAM, 985MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 700, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

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

From *Elite* to *Freelancer*, what amounts to galactic trucking has been a staple of the space-sim genre for as long as the space-sim genre has existed. For some reason, though, nobody bothers to make games about regular terrestrial trucking. Which is weird, because trucks are the spaceships of the road—fast, powerful, cool looking, and really complicated to drive. Most of them even have crew quarters. *Big Mutha Truckers* fills a void—well, it doesn't actually fill it, but it's definitely there taking up space in the big gaping hole where there used to be nothing.

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

You play as one of four redneck siblings, each of whom has 60 days to make the most money and to win their mother's trucking business. In classic space-sim style, you earn cash by buying cargo on the cheap at one space station (rest stop) and then hauling it someplace where you can sell it high. Along the way, you can purchase upgrades such as bigger trailers and better brakes. It's a simple formula, but it works.

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

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

VERDICT ★★★★★
Surprisingly not that bad.

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

This Fall, it's your turn.

X2: Wolverine's Revenge

It's the best at what it does: sucking

BY JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: GENEPOOL SOFTWARE
GENRE: THIRD-PERSON SNIKT!-ER
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500MHZ, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1.2GHZ, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

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

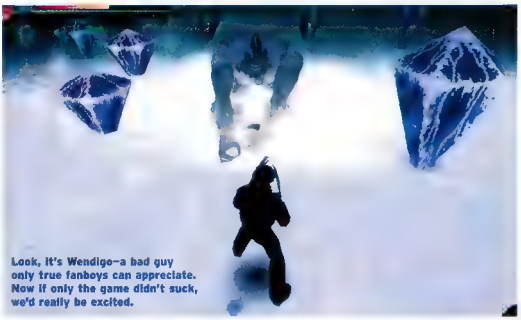
As a game, however, *Wolverine's Revenge* is a maddening, frustrating mess, made even more so by the fact that it could have been great. Or at least good. Of all the X-Men, Wolverine was the obvious choice to get his own game. With his adamantium claws, mutant healing ability, and heightened senses,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

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

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

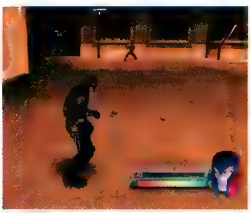
Worst of all is the game's unbelievably hostile save system, which allows saves only at the end of entire levels—not even checkpoints in between. Because some of these levels are long, multipart ordeals, you'll end up replaying certain levels over and over and over and over again, something guaranteed to kill the little good will this game engenders.

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

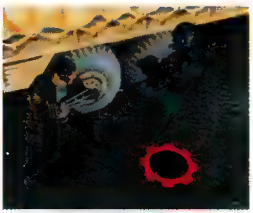


Look, it's Wendigo—a bad guy only true fanboys can appreciate. Now if only the game didn't suck, we'd really be excited.

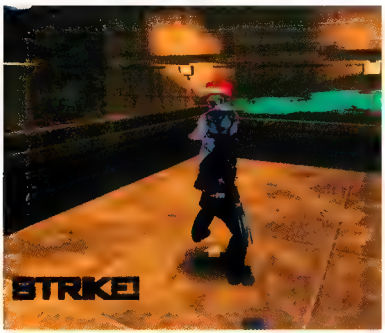
The first time you hear the *snikt!* of Wolverine's claws, you think you may be in for a good time.



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



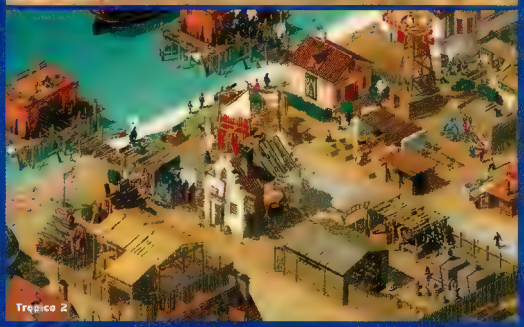
Hey bub, how'd you like an adamantium claw sandwich?



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

VERDICT ★★★★★

Rather than buying this, go see *X2* again.



Revisionist History

Rise of Nations, Tropico 2

By Thomas L. McDonald

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

A number of problems plaguing the Capture the World portion were also on the agenda. These are now largely ironed out, among them a number of hard-crash bugs, overrun problems, and gameplay issues. In addition, rivers which previously might dangle at the edges of the map will connect all the way to the edge of the world where possible. A number of cheat holes are also plugged up. All in all, this was a pretty clean game when it shipped, with the sole exception of the now-mandatory multiplayer lag issues.

***

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

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Red Faction II

Viva la devolución! BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER THQ DEVELOPER OUTRAGE GAMES & VOLITION INC. GENRE FIRST-PERSON "VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN ESPACIO!" SHOOTER ESRB RATING MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

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

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

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

Between the traditional blowing up of enemies and buildings, *RF2* inserts some vehicle action; it sounds intriguing in principle until you learn that half of the vehicular combat has the A.I. driving and you gunning. To be fair, the power armor and the submarine are fully pilotable, but they don't really make up for the fact that the tank and the airship are simple rail shooters. Besides, the levels are too constricting to really take the power armor or the sub anywhere aside from forward.

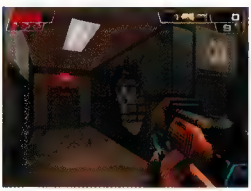
Further compounding the game into sheer mediocrity is the downward spiral of the A.I. The mind numbs whether you're up against the handicappable enemy soldiers or the nonexistent A.I. of the "processed" (futurespeak for "zombie") that populate the later levels. *RF2*'s mildly interesting combat devolves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

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

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

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

Vehicles are mostly of the rail-shooting variety.



That wall gets blown up easily, but not the door next to it.

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

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

VERDICT ★★★★★

This revolution will not be televised.

Korsun Pocket

State of the genre, state of the art

BY BRUCE GERYK

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MATRIX GAMES
DEVELOPER: STRATEGIC STUDIES GROUP
GENRE: TURN-BASED HISTORICAL WARGAME
ESRB RATING: NOT RATED
PRICE: $52
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 400MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: HOT-SEAT, PBEM (2 PLAYERS)

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

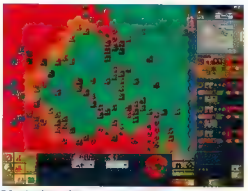
The balance between attack and counterattack makes *Korsun Pocket* a classic.

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

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

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

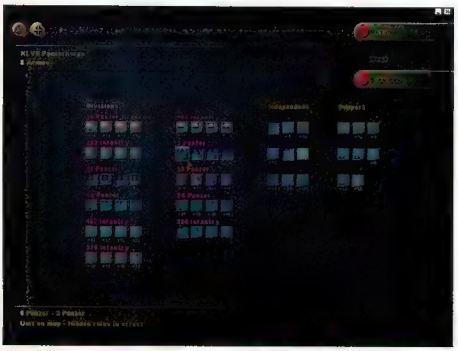
While the game sports a superb interface that should be the model for all future hex games, the entire presentation is so well done that to try and single out specific elements misses the point. Everything about the game, from the way the possible combat results are displayed along with the die rolls, to the way in which supply information, combat tables, unit information, and situational awareness are all integrated and rarely more than one mouse-click away, demonstrates an understanding of why people still play these kinds of games. Dramatic historical situations can be played out as a series of strategic decisions, with the player who makes the better choices coming out victorious. All the rest is detail.



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

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

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



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

VERDICT ★★★★★

The best hex-based computer wargame ever.

REVIEWINDEX

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

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
1503 A.D.: The New World	6/03	The game's depth keep things interesting, if not addictive	★★★½☆
Bandits: Phoenix Rising	8/03	Fun FPS dressed up in racing game's clothes	★★★½☆
Black Hawk Down	6/03	This surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics	★★★★☆
BloodRayne	7/03	Mildly distracting, fairly generic, totally tasteless	★★☆☆☆
Blitzkrieg	8/03	Sturdy RTS war game that even manages some realism	★★★½☆
Bookworm Deluxe	6/03	More addictive than crack and better for your brain, too	★★★★★
Casino Inc.	7/03	Been there, done that business sim with hookers	★★☆☆☆
Championship Manager 4	7/03	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★½
CSI	8/03	Finally, a game for mentally challenged couch potatoes	★★☆☆☆
Day of Defeat	8/03	A great squad-based game marred only by age	★★★★☆
Devastation	7/03	Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release	★½☆☆☆
Empire of Magic	8/03	This odd RPG both entertains and annoys	★★★☆☆
Enclave	7/03	20 to 30 hours of gameplay, not one of them worth a damn	★½☆☆☆
Enter the Matrix	8/03	Play it for the movie, don't play it for the play	★★½☆☆
Europa 1400: The Guild	5/03	There are three or four games lurking here, all of them enjoyable	★★★★☆
Freelancer	5/03	The finest space sim since *FreeSpace 2* and *Privateer*	★★★★½
Galactic Civilizations	6/03	Triumphs where *MOO3* fails—the best 4X space game in years	★★★★½
The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games	6/03	Run-of-the-mill blood sport	★★½☆☆
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	8/03	*CGW*'s 2002 Game of the Year gets some '80s-style clothes	★★★★★
Grom	7/03	This pallid *Indiana Jones* clone is hamstrung by horrible controls	★½☆☆☆
Heroes of Might & Magic 4: Winds of War	8/03	The degeneration continues	★½☆☆☆
High Heat 2004	6/03	A great franchise goes in the wrong direction	★★½☆☆
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7/03	This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces	★★☆☆☆
IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles	6/03	The paragon of WWII flight sims	★★★★☆
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/03	It may look a little funky, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★☆
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	6/03	A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bonus of a T-rex eating people	★★★½☆
Laser Squad Nemesis	6/03	Incredibly addictive play-by-e-mail tactical strategy	★★★★½
Line of Sight: Vietnam	7/03	Keep this lousy shooter out of your sights	★½☆☆☆
Medieval: Total War—Viking Invasion	8/03	This expansion is a must for *Total War* fans	★★★★½
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8/03	Criminally sloppy port of a great console game	★★½☆☆
MVP Baseball 2003	6/03	This is the PC baseball game to buy this year	★★★½☆
New World Order	7/03	Just about the lousiest shooter ever	★☆☆☆☆
The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II	8/03	Decent archaeological adventure game	★★★☆☆
Port Royale	8/03	After a slow start, a quality pirate game emerges	★★★½☆
Postal 2	7/03	No	☆☆☆☆☆
Post Mortem	6/03	Five-star story undone by two-star dialogue	★★★☆☆
Pro Race Driver	7/03	The self-proclaimed "CarPG" is utterly lame	★½☆☆☆
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/03	Surpasses the earlier *R6* games in every way to become the definitive tac-sim	★★★★½
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	7/03	Decent console port with finicky camera control	★★★☆☆
Restaurant Empire	6/03	Forget those champagne wishes and caviar dreams	★★★☆☆
Revolution	6/03	You say you want a revolution? Not this one you don't	★½☆☆☆
Rise of Nations	8/03	The latest, greatest historical RTS	★★★★☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds	8/03	Delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on for an already dated game	★★½☆☆
Shadowbane	7/03	A big focus on PvP and city building sets this MMORPG apart	★★★★☆
The Sims: Superstar	8/03	Another solid addition to the planet's best-selling game	★★★★☆
A Tale in the Desert	7/03	This MMORPG is perfect for the social gamer exhausted by combat	★★★½☆
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	7/03	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★★☆☆
Uplink: Hacker Elite	8/03	Intriguing premise and quality execution make this a winner	★★★★☆
Vietcong	7/03	Vietnam shooters finally come of age in this solid title	★★★½☆

CGW RECOMMENDS

Half-Life

★★★★★

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

Max Payne

★★★★★

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

Jedi Knight

★★★★½

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

DEFINING A CULTURE, CREATING A NATION

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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL SUPPLEMENT WWW.WGAMER.COM

NIKKI AND
PANDEMONIUM RETURNS
ON NOKIA'S N-GAGE

THE AUTHORITY ON CELL PHONE GAMING!

MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES
BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER
MGS KARTING

REVIEWS
BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER
CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE
TWO CITIES

FEATURE:
NOKIA'S N-GAGE X-POSED
CELL PHONE, GAME DECK, AUDIO LOVE MACHINE

PLUS:
MORE N-GAGE TITLES TO LOOK FORWARD TO:
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- **SUPER MONKEY BALL**
- BAKU BAKU
- **GROUNDER POUNDER**
- SIBERIAN STRIKE
- **MGS KARTING**
- SIBERIAN STRIKE
- **THE ITALIAN JOB**
- DURATRAX MOBILE RC
- **Q*BERT**
- SCOOBY-DOO

AND MORE!

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

THE BIRTH OF MULTIPLAYER MOBILE GAMES

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

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

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

Bejeweled Multiplayer from DemiVision/JAMDAT is the first game to fulfill the multiplayer mobile promise. You can read about it in this issue, but at press time it was only available for the Sanyo 8100 handset on Sprint. Other multiplayer options include Entelepon's *Tanks* (promised for the LG 4400 on Verizon), Noumena's *MGS Karting* (via Bluetooth), several upcoming N-GAGE games that will support both Bluetooth and GPRS multiplayer, Dwango's U.S. import of *Samurai Romanesque* (!), and games for mobile devices from Tapwave and TTPCom.

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

MATTHEW BELLOWS
PUBLISHER
WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT

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TOP PHONES FOR GAMES

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

VERIZON WIRELESS

LG VX4400

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

Why: Everquest: Hero's Call
http://wgamer.com/game-925
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/verizon

SPRINT PCS

SANYO SCP-8100

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

Why: Bejeweled Multiplayer
http://wgamer.com/game-1346
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/sprint

AT&T WIRELESS

NEC 515

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

Why: Star Diversion
http://wgamer.com/game-1543
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/att

T-MOBILE

NOKIA 3650

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

Why: MGS Karting
http://wgamer.com/game-1318
How: http://wgamer.com/howto/tmobile

CINGULAR

NOKIA 3300

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

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

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Multiplayer network gameplay and data transmission speeds dependent upon operator network capabilities and other conditions. Copyright (c) 2003 Nokia. All rights reserved. Nokia and N-Gage are trademarks or registered trademarks of Nokia Corporation. Bluetooth is a registered trademark of Bluetooth SIG, Inc. The Nokia N-Gage mobile game deck supports Bluetooth Specification 1.1 ("Handsfree Audio" and "Object Push Data") profiles. Contact the manufacturer of each Bluetooth device for information on compatibility. Other company names mentioned herein may be trademarks or trade names of their respective owners.

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

QUALITY TIME WITH NOKIA'S N-GAGE

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

FOR MORE ON THE N-GAGE
CHECK OUT
HTTP://WGAMER.COM/PHONE-67

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

How the Device Fares:

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

As a Cell Phone

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

As a Gaming Machine

The N-Gage sports a big, bright screen, and its vertical orientation doesn't bug me as much as I thought it would. Its fairly responsive and well-situated buttons support chording, with the "5" and "7" keys beveled a bit above the rest of the keypad for easy pressing. Surprisingly, after a little play, I didn't miss the shoulder buttons as dearly as I thought I would. However, the method for changing game cartridges is probably the N-Gage's biggest design flaw (see sidebar). You have to turn off the phone, open the back, pop out the battery, depress a little plastic tab, and slide in the cartridge. It's like having to change your PC's RAM every time you want to play another game. This type of oversight is an example of Nokia's newcomer status in the console manufacturing world.

As an Audio Love Machine

Using MMC cards as flash memory, the N-Gage can store and play MP3 files (transferred via the N-Gage's USB port) and record music directly from the built-in FM radio, a welcome bonus. Lack of an external antenna doesn't hurt phone reception, but it does seem to limit the N-Gage's RF reception. You can compose music using a built-in midi sequencer and write real sheet music, though only in the treble clef and only in preprogrammed time signatures. The music editor does, however, support thirds and staccato notes.

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

Conclusion

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

BY AVERY SCORE

THE N-GAGE UNCOVERED

The outside-the-box N-Gage.

There's the cartridge.

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

Unclip here to remove the cart.

N-GAGE PREVIEWS

PANDEMONIUM

DEVELOPER: IDEAWORKS 3D PUBLISHER: EIDOS

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

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

Unlike a lot of mobile games, *Pandemonium* feels like it was heavily play-tested. It is more polished than virtually any other mobile title. One level uses powerful gusts of air to boost jumps. The gusts had great animation and convincing sound and were just barely high enough to allow me to reach my goal. Even in an early alpha release, I could tell that the jumps were designed to test the limits of my skills without requiring innumerable attempts. Some of this ease comes from *Pandemonium's* PSX legacy. But Crystal Dynamics and Ideaworks 3D have demonstrated admirable attention to detail in bringing this title to N-Gage.

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

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

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

SUPER MONKEY BALL

DEVELOPER/ PUBLISHER: SEGA

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

For those unfamiliar with the probably inhumane yet wonderfully enjoyable practice of rolling primates around in little glass balls, *Monkey Ball* is a variation on the old game of skill in which a player tilts a maze in various directions to move a steel ball through it. In Sega's version, the steel ball is replaced by four monkeys inside balls who roll with varying degrees of speed and balance through treacherous levels. Each level has a time limit, so *Monkey Ball* (played solely with the directional pad) forces you to find a happy medium between speed and cautiousness.

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

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

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

For more on *Super Monkey Ball*, visit: http://wgamer.com/game-1315

OTHER N-GAGE GAMES WORTH NOTING

RED FACTION II

(MONKEYSTONE/THQ)

John Romero's *Red Faction* is the shooter to watch.

http://wgamer.com/[illegible]

SONIC N

(SEGA)

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

http://wga[illegible]

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

(NEVERSOFT /ACTIVISION)

Not liking this game would be harder than a 540-degree fakey pop shovit to indie impossible! Check it.

http://wga[illegible]

WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

WGAMER REVIEWS

WGAMER RATING:

BEJEWELED MULTIPLAYER

■ **PUBLISHER:** Jamdat ■ **DEVELOPER:** DemiVision
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1346**

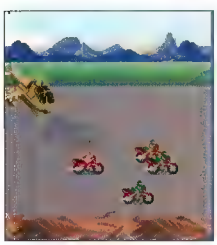
The basic rules are the same. Switch adjacent gems to create runs of three or more identical stones. With each switch, the string of identical gems disappears, the ones above the string drop down, and matching continues. Play lasts as long as your timer does, successful matches earn more time.

DemiVision and JAMDAT add three new wrinkles: It's multiplayer, it has bombs, and it lets you play anywhere.

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

About those bombs: By placing special gems in strings, you earn Freeze, Zero-G, Crazy Keys, Cascade, and other bombs, each of which affects your opponent (and you) in different, disconcerting ways. The five-second aftermath feels longer because you can see your opponent clearing gems while you recover.

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



WGAMER RATING:

CHARLIE'S ANGELS: ROAD CYCLONE

■ **PUBLISHER:** Centerscore ■ **DEVELOPER:** Sony Pictures
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1345**

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

The baddies are not very smart. They're also wimpy, and they're bad drivers. But there are a lot of them, and their bosses lurk at the end of each level. Also, you must destroy a strafing helicopter and a monster 18-wheeler by knocking enemy motorcycles into them.

Gameplay is consistently smart and augmented by several unique elements. You can use the bikers' wreckage to crash other thugs. Or bump them into ramps and knock them off their bikes. Best of all, recharge your health by jumping onto an unoccupied motorcycle—just like in real life!

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

WGAMER RATING:

TWO CITIES

■ **PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:** Sony Online
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT **HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAME-1319**

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

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

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

Two Cities would lend itself well to multiplayer. The amount of strategy involved can be intense, and a well-planned attack is immensely gratifying. A game can take 25 minutes to complete, and playing against the computer gets boring. The two-player mode involves swapping one handset back and forth, but it is unlikely that most of your buddies would be willing to put up with that for long. "Come on, man! Press, press, pass! You're screwing up the rotation."

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

GREAT GAMES FROM YOUR CARRIER

SPRINT

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

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

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

CINGULAR

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

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

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

VERIZON

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

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

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

AT&T

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

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

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

ABOUT WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

In August 2001, we started this lovefest, which is completely dedicated to mobile games and mobile game devices. Now, through a partnership with Ziff Davis, we're able to bring the biggest, coolest gamer audience information about our main addiction. Let us know what you think! E-mail any of us at the addresses below.

MATTHEW BELLOWS: Woven from the golden dross of a giant spider, Matthew helped start *WGR* after playing nGame's DataClash.
r...@wirelessgamingreview

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

AVERY SCORE: With the looks of Camui Gackt, this self-proclaimed otaku has no trouble getting a seat at the local food court.
...@wirele...

AMY MONAGHAN: There are no other Christmas tree decorating parties like hers, and to Amy, Independence Day is a week-long bacchanalia.
...@wirelessgamingrevi...

Tech

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

Multimedia Monster

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

MANUFACTURER: TOSHIBA PRICE: $2,699

Being an early adopter has its advantages—sort of. For instance, let's say you're the first guy on the block with a DVD player. There you are, wowing your friends with this newfangled technology, only to have newer, better, and less-expensive technology that shows off the imperfections in your box come out shortly after you jumped on board. That's how I feel about Toshiba's implementation of Windows' Media Center capabilities in the latest Satellite, the 5205-S705: It's cool and everything, but I think the next shot at it will be closer to perfect than the current one.

But enough about that. Since this laptop is—for our concerns—primarily a gaming box, we'll talk about those capabilities before we jump into the Media Center stuff. This is the first laptop I've received that includes Nvidia's 64MB GeForce FX 5600 Go graphics option, and I am most definitely pleased. In previous laptop stories, I've tested the units at 1024x768 with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering off, but since Nvidia likes to talk about how badass the GeForce FX Go is, I decided to test the Toshiba the same way I test desktop graphics cards—with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. Nvidia's boasts aren't empty: This machine can handle most games at 1024x768 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on, achieving a 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 37 frames per second at that resolution. Compare that to the 83 frames per second that my Power Rig achieved at those settings. You might think 37 frames per second is bad, but remember, I was taxing the hell out of that graphics chip.

By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

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

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

In addition to the graphics processor, the Satellite 5205-S705 ships with a display Toshiba calls UXGA CASV (Clear Advanced Super View) Active Matrix. Because it's a UXGA display, its native resolution is 1600x1200, and the CASV addition makes this the absolutely sharpest and most clear LCD we've seen. *Serious Sam: TSE* looked amazing, with absolutely none of the ghosting often present when gaming on LCDs. And DVDs looked incredible, too. The built-in Harman/Kardon speakers with subwoofer are superloud—in fact, they're possibly the loudest laptop speakers I've heard. And while they tend to distort at higher volumes, it's still nice to be able to listen to music or watch a movie without headphones. Any way you want to look at it, this machine is a multimedia monster.

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

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

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	TOSHIBA SATELLITE 5205-S705
Price	$2,699
Operating system	Windows XP Media Center Edition
Processor	2.4GHz Mobile Pentium 4 (400MHz)
Memory	512MB SDRAM
Hard drive	60GB, 5,400 RPM
Graphics processor	64MB GeForce FX 5600 Go
Optical drive	DVD-Multi (16x CD-R/8x CD-RW/24x CD-ROM/8x DVD-ROM/4x DVD-R/4x DVD-RW/2x DVD-RAM)
Display	15-inch UXGA CASV Active Matrix
Speakers	Built-in Harman/Kardon speakers with subwoofer
Pointing device	TouchPad
Weight	7.9lbs
Miscellaneous	Windows Media Center Edition Remote Control; TV-Tuner; three USB 2.0 ports; i.LINK 1394 FireWire port; SD slot; PCMCIA slot; S/PDIF digital audio out; built-in 802.11b wireless ethernet
Speed (Performance)	3.5
Price	4
Stability	3.5
Support	4
SCORE	4

VERDICT ★★★★☆

A great gaming laptop with awesome sound and good peripherals.

WIL POWER

SprintPCS Wins 2003 "Best Freebie of E3" Award

The Electronics Entertainment Expo is about a few specific things: seeing the latest that game developers and hardware vendors have to offer; eating, drinking, and partying on someone else's dime; and getting free stuff. While I knew what to expect regarding the first two things, I had no idea what SprintPCS had in mind for us. On the first day of the show *GMR*'s James Mielke told me to come to a SprintPCS event with him where he heard they were going to be giving away free cell phones. I showed up and realized that all I had to do was meet with six of SprintPCS' gaming partners to hear about titles that you could play on their PCS Vision phones, and you'd walk away with a Sanyo 8100 camera phone with two months of activation. I pulled out a stack of my business cards and went about checking out versions of *Bejeweled* and *Pac-Man* being played on cell phones, before grabbing lunch and picking up my new phone.

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

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

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

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

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- INSIDE THE GAME
- DOWNHILL DOMINATION
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- WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED
- FEATURING SHAUN MURRAY

EXTRAS
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Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

A Pair of Aces

Motherboard madness **BY LOYD CASE**

TECH STATS

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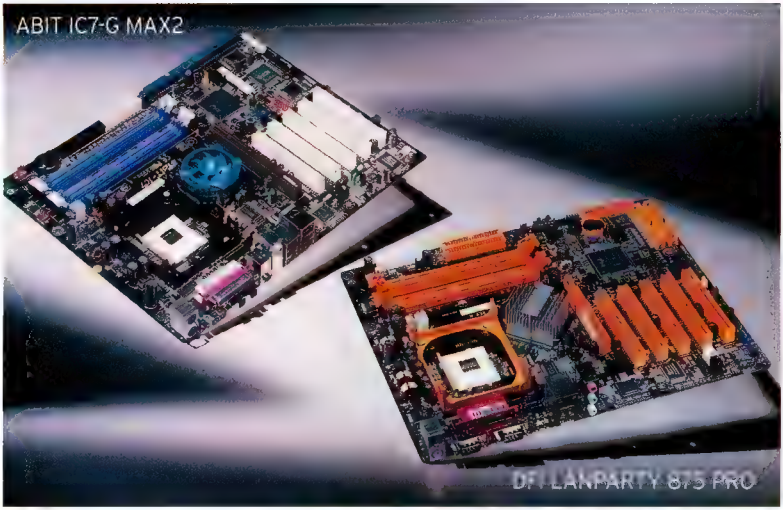
ABIT IC7-G MAX2
MANUFACTURER: ABIT
PRICE: $199

DFI LANPARTY 875PRO
MANUFACTURER: DFI
PRICE: $200



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

With the release of the 875P chipset and a slew of 800MHz frontside bus Pentium 4 processors, options for gamers who want to build killer gaming rigs using Intel CPUs has become very interesting. The huge memory bandwidth—6.4GB per second—is just the ticket for texture-heavy 3D games. With 800MHz FSB CPUs ranging from less than $200 for the 2.4C model to under $420 for the 3.0GHz processor, prices are about as reasonable as they've been in a long time.

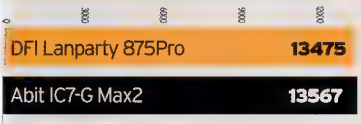
In this issue, we take a look at a pair of 875P boards. The DFI Lanparty 875Pro is targeted directly at the community of DIY gamers who go to LAN parties (in case you couldn't figure that out from the name) with modded cases and cold cathode UV lights. The orange expansion slots, memory sockets, and IDE connectors all glow in the dark when exposed to UV light, making sure you'll be the life of any party—well, any party that falls into the category "LAN." The DFI board also ships with a nifty set of accessories, including a front-panel expansion bay with two USB ports, rounded drive cables (that also glow in the dark), and the pièce de résistance: a carrying harness for your modded case. It's just the accessory for lugging your rad system to the local LAN party.

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

Out of the box, both boards perform well, but the Abit board offers slightly better untweaked performance. While both motherboards offer a rich array of tweaks for overclockers, the Abit BIOS setup program is more accessible, while the DFI BIOS setup is somewhat confusing. Both boards were reasonably stable, although we did see a crash attributed to the Radeon 9700 graphics card with the DFI board during the benchmarking process.

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

3DMark2001SE 1280x960x32



VERDICT ★★★★☆

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

VERDICT ★★★★½

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

No Longer the Least Expensive Kid on the Block

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

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER ABS
PRICE $2,799

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

That said, the Ultimate M5 is about as potent an AMD rig as you can find. It rocks an Athlon XP 3200+ processor, 1GB of Corsair DDR400 PC3200 RAM, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card, all built around ASUS' A7N8X-Deluxe (Nforce2) motherboard. There's no question that these are great components; however, it's certainly possible to build a machine with these parts for well below $2,000. So, why does this machine cost almost $3,000? For starters, there's that RAID. While it no doubt improves performance and gives you plenty of storage capacity, it also knocks the price up. The same can also be said about the NEC DVD+RW drive. While it's a nice inclusion, it may be overkill.

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

All criticisms aside, the Ultimate M5 is a great gaming PC. It tested quite well at 1280x960 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. It scored 992 at 3DMark2001SE, and its *UT2003* Botmatch score of 65 is right up there with the more powerful Pentium 4–based machines. In addition to performance, this baby is infinitely upgradeable, and I also really like the case—you may remember that Voodoo submitted a machine in the same type of case for this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine story.

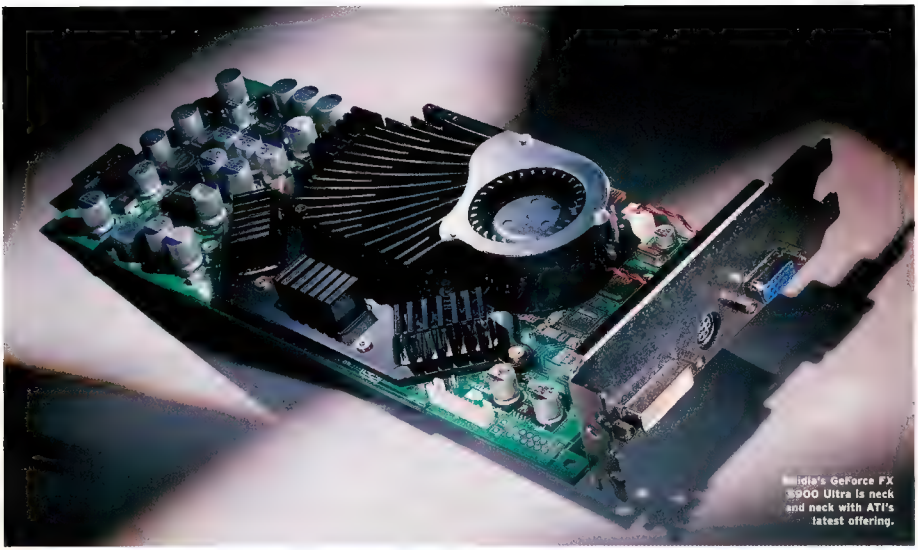
When all is said and done, anyone who gets this rig will be pleased with its performance. However, I'd opt for a single 80GB hard drive and a standard CD-RW drive, which will keep the price closer to what you should pay for an Athlon XP 3200+

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	ABS ULTIMATE M5	3GHZ PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG
Price	$2,799	$3,810
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ (400MHz FSB)	3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (nForce2)	Intel D875PBZ with Intel 875P chipset
Memory	1GB Corsair DDR-400 PC3200 (two modules)	1GB Kingston HyperX KHX3500 PC3500 DDR
Hard drive	Dual 80GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 160GB RAID configuration	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 240GB RAID configuration
Soundcard	Onboard 6 Channel nForce2 Audio	Creative Labs Audigy 2 Ex Platinum
Primary drive	Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM drive	Plextor PlexCombo 20x/10x/40x-12A DVD/CD-RW combo drive
Secondary drive	NEC DVD+RW 12x/4x/2.4x CD-RW 40x/16x/10x	N/A
Monitor	19-inch Samsung 955DF-black	22-inch NEC MultiSync FE211SB
Speakers	Logitech THX Z-680 5.1	Cambridge MegaWorks 610D
Keyboard	Microsoft Wireless Optical Keyboard	Microsoft Wireless Optical Keyboard
Mouse	Microsoft Wireless Optical Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0
Speed (Performance)	4	N/A
Price	3.5	N/A
Stability	4.5	N/A
Support	4	N/A
Upgradeability	5	N/A
SCORE	4.20	N/A

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

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


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

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

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

TECH STATS

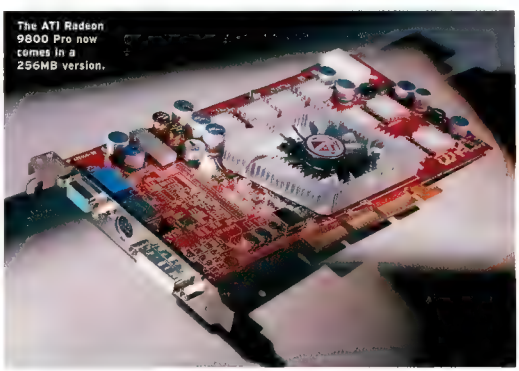
MANUFACTURER NVIDIA

PRICE $499

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

For its part, ATI hasn't rested on the success of the Radeon 9700 Pro and has since shipped a "kicker" product called the Radeon 9800 Pro, and a 256MB version of this card with a slightly faster memory clock should be available now. So, Nvidia came into this round with its work cut out for it, and to the company's credit, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (formerly codenamed NV35) addresses the shortcomings of its predecessor, the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra (NV30). However, Nvidia's latest GPU doesn't thunder past ATI's current top-end GPU. In fact, the two companies' flagship products have probably never been more evenly matched.

Nvidia has grown rather accustomed to the taste of success.


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

Speeds, feeds, and such

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

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

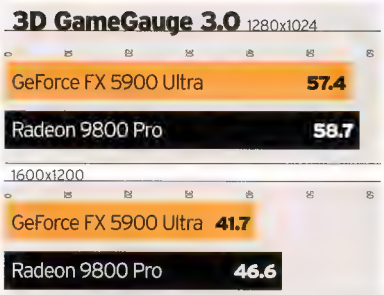
Interestingly, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra's GPU core clock is 10 percent slower than its predecessor's. Because of the reduction in clock speed, Nvidia was able to implement a much quieter thermal solution to keep things cool for GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. Gone is the excessively loud "Dustbuster" fan. In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

Rubber, meet road

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

Using our own 3D GameGauge 3.0, a collection of eight games (four Direct3D, four OpenGL), we found that the two cards run even at a 1280x1024 test resolution, with ATI holding the narrowest of margins. At the more grueling 1600x1200 test resolution, we expected the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra to pull ahead (as we've seen in previous contests), but the opposite happened. Instead, the Radeon 9800 Pro took a 12 percent performance lead. Bear in mind that we tested both resolutions with 4X AA and 8X AF enabled to really give the GPUs a workout. We attribute ATI's performance lead to a more efficient memory controller, since this very high resolution, coupled with the additional memory traffic that 4X AA and 8X AF generate, really hammers a GPU's memory subsystem.

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



VERDICT ★★★★☆

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

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

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

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

File-Sharing:
It's Music to our Ears

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

Loyd's Cracked Case

The memory train

By Loyd Case

Recently, Intel released its 875P Canterwood and 865PE Springdale chipsets, along with some Pentium 4 processors that support an 800MHz effective frontside bus (FSB) clock. The 875P supports dual-channel DDR400 memory. The new Pentium 4s clock at 2.4GHz, 2.6GHz, 2.8GHz, and 3.0GHz, with the 3.2GHz not too far off as I write this. AMD has countered with the Athlon XP 3200+, which supports a 400MHz effective frontside bus. Nvidia's nForce2 Ultra 400 chipset also supports DDR-400.

Intel 865PE Springdale Chipset

Intel 875P Canterwood Chipset

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

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

Of course, the processor and memory controller (the northbridge or memory controller hub) also come into play, as does the CPU. For example, the Pentium 4 is probably more effective at handling gobs of data thrown at it than the Athlon XP is. In both CPUs, the actual frontside bus clock rate is 200MHz, but the P4 can accept four data samples per clock cycle, while the Athlon XP can handle only two. This gives the P4 a peak data rate of 6.4GB/second, nicely matching the capabilities of the 875P chipset. The Athlon XP tops out at 3.2GB/second.

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

All of this can eat into available memory bandwidth. However, the fact that the Intel CPUs support 6.4GB/sec versus the Athlon XP's 3.2GB of bandwidth doesn't paint a complete picture. After all, the memory controller has to arbitrate AGP, PCI, and disk controller traffic, as well as handle data transfers between memory and the CPU. Remember, the nForce2 memory controller can handle up to 6.4GB/sec. At first blush, this seems like overkill, but factor in AGP 8x traffic (2.1GB/sec), hard drive accesses, and PCI bus traffic, and all of a sudden, the system is now moving well over 5GB/sec.

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

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

The new chipsets and faster memory also alleviate (though don't eliminate) the memory bandwidth bottleneck. We've always felt that dropping a 3.06GHz CPU onto a system using the 845PE chipset was fairly pointless—the beefy CPU was often running idle, waiting for data. In fact, the 3.0GHz P4, which actually runs 66MHz slower than the 3.06GHz CPU, runs most 3D games faster because of improvements in memory throughput.

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

Tech Medics

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

Time for an overhaul

I have a 600MHz computer running on 320MB of RAM, and I have a 64MB Radeon 9000 videocard. I have about a $400 budget and I need some upgrading fast. My questions are 1) What processor and motherboard should I get, and 2) should I keep the card I have or save up and buy another one?

Stacy Adams

While that 64MB Radeon 9000 isn't the current pick of the litter, I'd suggest getting a new motherboard, CPU, and RAM before upgrading your graphics card. You can get a new Antec case, an ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe motherboard, Athlon XP 2200+ CPU, and 512MB of RAM for less than $400.

nForce2 audio does rock

In the June 2003 issue, Loyd Case writes that the nForce2 chipset can be an acceptable audio solution for gaming if it's paired with a motherboard that has an MCP-D Southbridge, but cautions against selecting a board with MCP-T audio, which he says offloads audio processing onto the CPU. I just bought an ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe motherboard, and the user manual says the board includes an MCP-T, not an MCP-D. Taking Loyd's warning to heart, I still have my Creative Live 5.1 card installed, but poking around on the Internet, I can't find an nForce board with an MCP-D Southbridge that supports an FSB of more than 266MHz. It looks like the MCP-D is the original nForce Southbridge with an integrated APU, the MCP-T is the updated nForce2 version, and the basic (non-T) southbridge is the one to avoid if you want to use integrated audio. Is that correct? Did Loyd send *CGW* readers looking to upgrade in search of a nonexistent motherboard? Or is Loyd right, and Will's current Lean Machine has to lean on its Athlon XP 2200+ every time it breaks out the EAX 2 effects?

Charles Robinson

Actually, the MCP-T southbridge audio that ships with nForce2 motherboards like the ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe do offload the audio processing off the CPU. So it's not that Loyd was wrong—he was simply less right than he usually is.

Time to flash that BIOS

I recently purchased an Athlon XP 2200+ and an MSI KT4 Ultra motherboard. However, I don't know what bus speed and multiplier to use to make it run at 1.8GHz. I have two questions: 1) If the motherboard says it has an FSB speed of 266, would 266x7 work? 2) If the motherboard frequency can be 266MHz, why do all the overclockers run this chip at 166x12?

Nick the Animal

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

Is this International nForce month or something?

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

Falcon

Basically, nForce2 is the second generation of nVidia's nForce chipset. The chipset is a set of chips that perform various functions like controlling the memory, the PCI bridge, the EIDE controller, the keyboard and mouse, and other assorted things that most normal people don't really think and/or care about. There are nForce2 motherboards with onboard graphics, but I'd shy away from those. Check out ASUS' A7N8X-Deluxe—it's an awesome Athlon XP board.

We like retards here at CGW

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

Mike, the Avid Reader

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

ILLUSTRAT ON BY SUPERCORN

Killer Rigs

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

Decisions, decisions. For all those people who've been accusing me of being in ATI's pocket, let me point out that in spite of having plenty of reasons—other than raw speed—to choose the 256MB Radeon 9800 Pro over the 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra, I stuck to my guns and included the embattled GeForce FX. Nvidia's been in some seriously hot water lately, particularly with its 3DMark2003 driver issues. (For more on that, check out Extremetech.com and read Dave Salvator's story on Nvidia's driver "irregularities.") While accusations have been flying about whether or not the Santa Clara–based company was consciously cheating on 3DMark2003, it's been easy to overlook the more pressing issue: In some game tests, the GeForce FX *is* a little bit faster than the Radeon 9800 Pro. And that is why I'm including it in my Power Rig.

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

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

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

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	$300
Processor	Intel 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	$500
Case	Antec PlusView 1000AMG	$100
Power supply	480-watt Antec True Blue 480	$100
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ (Bonanza) with Intel 875P Chipset	$180
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX KHX3500 PC3500 DDR	$350
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA drives in a 240GB RAID 0 configuration	$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Ex Platinum	$250
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo 20/10/40-12A DVD/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE211SB	$600
Speakers	Cambridge MegaWorks 610D	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	$55
TOTAL		$3,810

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	$100
Case	Antec Lanboy	$100
Power supply	300-watt SmartBlue power supply	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (nForce2)	$140
Memory	512MB Corsair XMS PC-3200 DDR	$150
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9600	$200
Soundcard	Onboard nForce2 5.1 Audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sony DVD-ROM Drive	$40
Monitor	19" ViewSonic E90fb	$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire 2.1 2500	$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	$45
TOTAL		$1,350

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TOSEJO

Gamer's Edge

Helping you back here
Edited by Dana Jongewaard

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Push up those blazer sleeves

PAGE 12[illegible]

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

[illegible]

WIN

[illegible]

GTA: VICE CITY

Stealin' cars and stylin' large

By Chet Faliszek & Erik Wolpaw

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

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

Paramedic In this series of missions, you have to drive an ambulance around, picking up patients and then dropping them off at a hospital. There are 12 levels total. To pass each level, you need to pick up and drop off as many patients as there are on the level you're on (that makes 78 patients in all). The ambulance is fast and tough, but it's also top-heavy and pretty tippy. If you master driving this wobbling tank of mercy early on, driving every other vehicle in the game will be a breeze.

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

STARTING OFF

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

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

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

Pizza Delivery This mission is pretty straightforward: Deliver pizzas from the back of a Pizza Boy, a red Faggio modified to carry cargo. Pizza Boy vehicles can generally be found behind any of Vice City's three pizza parlors. There's one on the east side called Well-Stacked Pizzas, which is a block south of the police department. If you complete 10 levels, your base health will rise to 150! Note that while visiting a prostitute usually raises your health to 125, once you get the Pizza Boy bonus, it actually *lowers* your health to 125. This is primarily a tip/trick for *Grand Theft Auto*'s many critics, who often miss this subtle but firm disapproval of prostitution.

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

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

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

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

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

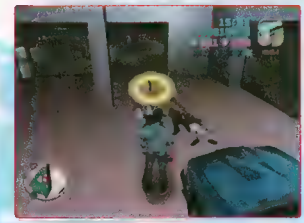
The perfect spot for an armed robbery: A store right next to a Pay 'N' Spray.

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

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

Mission: Sir, Yes, Sir!
Character: Colonel Juan Cortez
Cortez wants you to steal a piece of military hardware. Unfortunately, that piece of military hardware is a tank being paraded down the

SPARE CASH

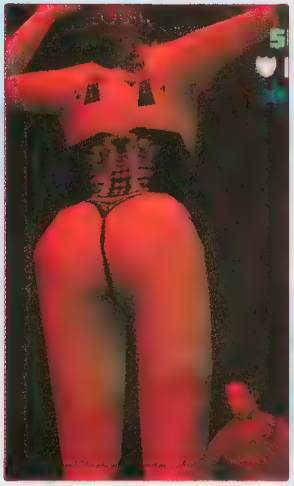


One of *Vice City*'s cool, new engine features is the bloody tire track.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

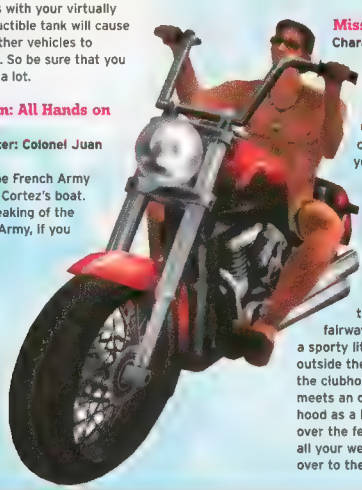
You can collect multiple brands or just start a big collection of one type of car.

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

Mission: All Hands on Deck

Character: Colonel Juan Cortez

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



Mission: Four Iron

Character: Avery Carrington

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

Mission: Demolition Man

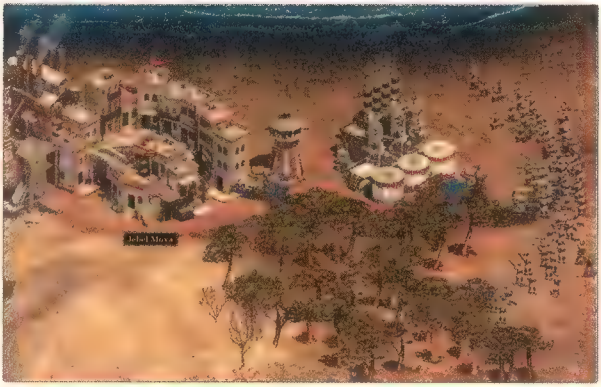
Character: Avery Carrington

This mission—in which you destroy a building by flying a remote-control helicopter around it and dropping explosives in four key locations—sucks. It kind of sucked on PS2, but a PC's keyboard controls manage to re-engineer its suck-bearing capacity so that it can cram in an extra 10-ton payload of sucking. Drastically remapping the keyboard is the only viable technique for completing this awful mission without losing your mind. Unless you're some kind of typing savant, the default keyboard configuration makes it impossible to control the tiny helicopter. Map the helicopter's forward and reverse keys to your normal car's forward and reverse keys, rotate the left and right keys to the car's left and right keys, and then gain and lose altitude keys to the left and right mouse button, respectively. Map the "fire" (drop explosives) key to the space bar. Finally, ignore the strafe left and right keys—they're more trouble than they're worth. Before you attempt the mission for real, take a trial run in order to learn the layout of the four explosive drop zones. When you know the layout of the building and have more or less a good handle on flying the miserable little chopper, start with the lowest drop spot and move your way to the highest. You can kill the pissed-off workers who inhabit the building by flying into them, but don't. Avoiding them altogether and focusing on the task at hand is the best strategy. Once you're done, set the controls back to normal and go save. GO SAVE! What a pain in the ass.

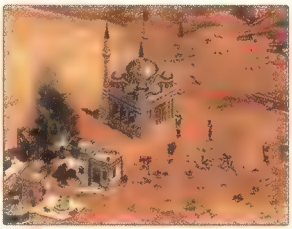
RISE OF NATIONS

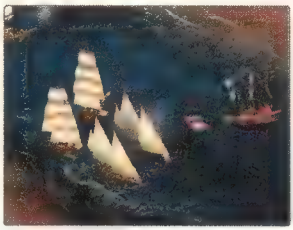
Everybody wants to rule the world **By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk**

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



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


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


Bruce's zero-sum fireship strategy in action.

0:03, Bruce

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

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

0:07, Tom

OK, I'm the Nubians—not exactly the sexiest nation, and vulnerable to taunts about being n00bs. They're notable for their income boost with the extra caravan, and 150 percent merchant efficiency. By using their market price bonus, they can parlay this into a considerable amount of flexibility when it comes to resources. I've really lucked out by having bison near my capital. I start out with a free market in my capital city, so I can immediately exploit the bison for a whopping +30 food bonus, which is the equivalent of three free farms. Buffalo burgers for all the citizens of Nubia!

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

1:34, Bruce

With my insta-build Chinese citizens, I've quickly sown farms, assigned more woodcutters, and researched science and civics. Now I babysit my scout so I can get a bearing on Tom's location. I send him to Tom's end of the map. Once I've reconned Tom's starting area, I hit Ctrl+E and let the little scoutmaster do what he does best.

9:12, Tom

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

18:02, Bruce

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

If you can afford to spend the wealth, it pays off in the long run to have a fully staffed university in every city. And if you can afford to ease up on the other categories, it also pays off in the long run to research science first, thereby reducing the cost of the other technologies. Science is also important in order to boom your economy because it unlocks resource bonus techs like agriculture and carpentry. Being a scientist myself, I'm happy that science gets so much credit for helping win wars. Then I get worried that that isn't very manly, and I feel I should be more excited about driving tanks. In the end, I'm kind of happy but mostly nervous.

27:58, Tom

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

31:08, Tom

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

his civics level because he's pushing my borders back. I'm down to 63 percent of the map and my borders are maxed out. I'm building the Temple of Tikal to boost my temples' border effects, but even with that, the prospects for an early territory victory are dim.

33:54, Bruce

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

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

34:02, Tom

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

34:15, Bruce

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

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

40:00, Tom

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

44:29, Bruce

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

45:41, Tom

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

47:00, Bruce

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

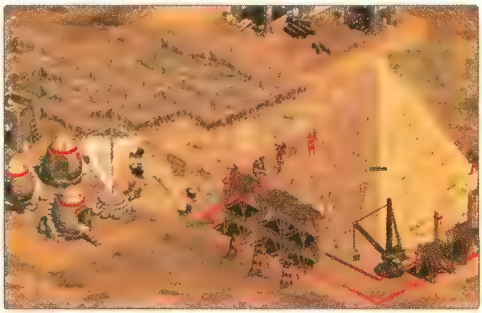
48:12, Tom

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

50:00, Tom

I've got Senna back, but Bruce has dreadnoughts

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



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

with submarine escorts prowling the straits between my army and Jebel Moya. I have to send my troop transports around the long way.

51:03, Bruce
It seems Tom isn't contesting my navy anymore. I've sent a few subs out to watch the areas near his docks. If he's backing off the naval front, that'll give me a lot of flexibility to determine when and where I attack his cities.

51:17, Tom
My army is decimated, due in part to Bruce making use of his spies. What was it I said earlier about scouts? Jebel Moya has fallen, so I build mines elsewhere while trying to keep his army engaged. Luckily, I have Angkor Wat to boost my metal production and make up for the lost mines. I've hit the Modern Age at great cost, leaving me with limited resources to build my military forces back up. But the good news is that my oil income is maxed out and I've got a ready supply of knowledge. And in the Modern Age, that can only mean one thing: missiles.

56:18, Bruce
I'm in a pretty good position at this point. I can hit Tom on multiple fronts, and while I'm not yet making permanent headway, I'm controlling the tempo of the land war. I also completely control the seas. Unfortunately, Tom has those cultural icons or whatnot. Time to take advantage of the long-range firepower of my dreadnoughts.

57:00, Tom
He keeps hitting Senna and Jebel Moya. I can barely hold onto them and it's draining my metal supply, even though I'm still an age above him.

57:53, Tom
Is there any phrase sweeter than "We have developed nuclear weapons"? Shft+Alt+9 brings up the wonder display. I have 8 wonder points, which would be enough for a victory, were it not for Bruce's 5 wonder points. But I also have four silos around the outskirts of Lalibela in the center of the main continent, capable of reaching anywhere on the map. Each is constructing its own lovely little nuclear missile.

1:01:43, Tom
Fire one. Goodbye, Colossus.

1:02:31, Tom
Fire two. Goodbye, Terra Cotta Army.

1:02:45, Tom
It takes two nukes, but goodbye Porcelain Tower. Hello, wonder victory timer.

1:02:53, Bruce
For anyone who, for some reason, still might not be rooting for me, it should be pretty obvious by this point that Tom is a madman who must be stopped. Who would use nuclear weapons against a Porcelain Tower?

1:06:28, Tom
At 32 seconds, Bruce stops the timer by shelling the Pyramids with battleships. What a low move—and low tech.

There goes the first of Tom's nukes.

1:07:12, Bruce
I hate navies, but in this case, mine is saving my ass. While I was spending all those resources on my military, Tom was locked in his library reading books about physics. Now, Mr. Egghead can lob missiles all over the place. A missile gap is a big disadvantage, as my ex-wonders amply demonstrate. Time for nukes of my own.

1:08:31, Tom
He's destroyed the Coliseum with his battleships, so I'm building the Taj Mahal, which will restart the wonder timer as long as I can keep at least one of my two remaining wonders alive.

1:09:30, Tom
Bruce just researched nukes. Time to stock up on V2 rockets to take out any of his missile silos I can find. I just have to make sure he doesn't get any nukes actually built. You can see the silo doors open as a missile is being constructed, so I send fighters out for recon over his territory and follow up with V2 rockets, picking off silos as I find them. The problem is that he's got a rampant navy scouring the map, smashing my missile silos and jockeying for position on my wonders. I don't have any good way of stopping his battleships.

1:10:15, Tom
The completion of the Taj Mahal has doubled the hit points of all my buildings and, more important, the wonder timer starts back up at 1:13.

1:11:21, Bruce
Let the record show that Tom Chick won this game by building a 17th-century Indian white marble palace. He has out-Frenched me. Bastard!

1:11:28, Tom
I would like to announce that I have surgically nuked Bruce Geryk into cultural irrelevancy. Viva Nubia!

And there goes the last of Bruce's wonders. In the immortal words of Vera Lynn at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, "We'll meet again."

FATALITY'S UNREAL TOURNMENT 2003

How do you become the best? Lots and lots of practice **By Jonnathon Wendel**

Unreal Tournament 2003 is making its mark around the world lately, and it's time to sharpen up those skills. I'm going to talk a lot about timing items, controlling the map, which weapons to use, and key ways to keep your opponent's frag count down. These tips and tricks will surely improve your game and take you to the next level.

Timing items

On this map, DM-Compressed, your main goal is to keep the 100 Armor Room locked down while at the same time getting the Double Damage. If you succeed at this, you can typically win a match with ease.

The key to winning at any level of the game is being able to time your armor and power-ups

QUICK TIP

You can check the current time on the map by hitting F1 to check the scoreboard. However, if you reprogram the scoreboard key to an easier button to hit, it becomes easier to effectively time the items throughout the whole game.

KEY ROOMS

KILLER MOVE

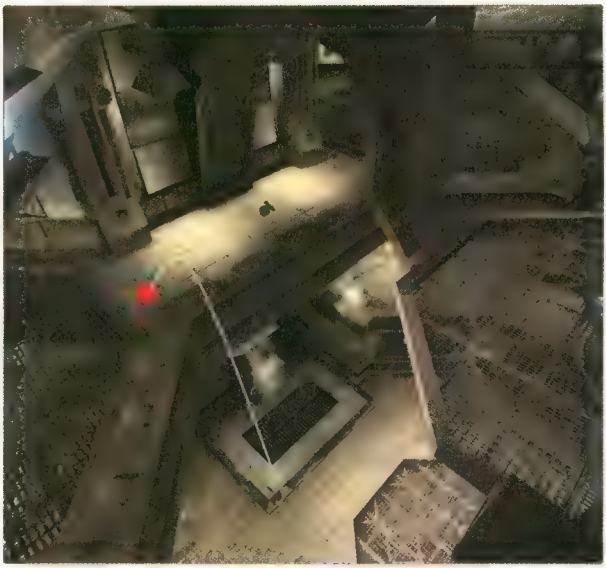
efficiently. Here are the respawn times for the weapons, health packs, armors, and double damage.

Weapons:	**27 seconds**
Health Packs:	**27 seconds**
50 Armor:	**27 seconds**
100 Armor:	**54 seconds**
Double Damage:	**81 seconds**

While you're waiting for the 100 Armor, you should be picking up health shards around the map and occasionally the 50 Armor. At the same time, you have to manage to get the Double Damage while not getting attacked and not losing the timing on the 100 Armor. So let's set up an example. This example assumes you're

QUICK TIP Whenever you feel you have a little time to spare, you should go check on the 50 Armor since it spawns so frequently. Very often you'll notice it's just sitting there waiting for someone to come pick it up.

QUICK TIP Arriving at the Double Damage about 10 to 15 seconds before it spawns is always a great move. Just make sure you're not letting the enemy get the 100 Armor for the trade. I personally would take the 100 Armor over the Double Damage any day because it's so easy to run away from the opponents with your shield cannon.



GET THERE FIRST There are two ways to get to the 100 Armor first. Use the lift to propel you toward the top level. If you hit jump when the lift is halfway up, you will be propelled into the air toward higher levels (above). Use this to reach the top level and grab the 100 Armor before your enemy does. If you can perfect this jump, you can actually jump straight to the 100 Armor. However, this method is risky. The safer plan? Go up the lift and walk around by the Health Pack and Shock Rifle to get the 100 Armor (below).

QUICK TIP
When you're making your way to the 100 Armor room, it's best to have a lightning gun or a shock rifle for long range attacks.

playing the default *UT2003* game with no server modifications.

In this scenario, I'm going to try to maximize your chances of getting each item to the second. Let's say you picked up the following items at the following times:

50 Armor: 0:10 mark
100 Armor: 0:15 mark
Double Damage: 0:20 mark

Since you just picked up the Double Damage at the 0:20 mark, you now know it will spawn at the 1:41 mark by adding 81 seconds to the current time. First, focus on getting the 50 Armor, which will spawn in the next 17 seconds.

After picking up the 50 Armor with your Double Damage, you will most likely come into a situation where your enemy might be camping around the 100 Armor Room waiting for you to show up so he can get a good shot on you. Be careful going into the 100 Armor Room after picking up the 50 armor, but also remember you're on a very short time scale and have to get to the 100 Armor before the enemy does.

After you've picked up the 100 Armor, it will probably be around the 1:00 mark or later. If it's not too late, you might have time to run down below to pick up 50 Armor again before the Double Damage spawns at the 1:41 mark.

Now that you've picked up the Double Damage again, you'll notice since the last 100 Armor was picked up at the 1:09 mark, it should spawn at the 2:03 mark. Make your way to the 100 Armor Room and set up a trap for the enemy (see page 138).

In control

While you're in control of the map, you need to focus on a few things.

- Try to have a very diverse gun selection so if you get in a certain situation, you have the right type of gun for that key shot.
- Always load up on ammo! Pay close attention to the shock core ammo on the top level. Always pick these up since the shock rifle is one of the fastest and most powerful guns in the game.
- After killing an opponent, realize the map is symmetrical and the enemy will spawn on the other half of the map. Use this knowledge to your advantage to get another quick kill on your opponent.
- Always keep control of the Armors and pick up as many health shards as possible.

QUICK TIP
A lot of times you might notice your enemy camps on the lower level when you're in control. Use a wall dodge to surprise him and get a quick frag. Also, you can use a wall dodge by hitting the opposite direction you're looking while your body is flush with the wall. This is a great way to improve your view when you actually land on the lower level so you can be more prepared for the fight that is coming up.

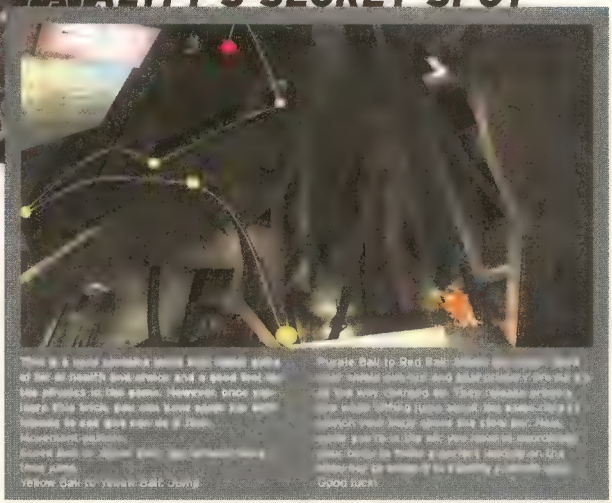
Out of control

If you lose control of the map, be very careful and think about everything that is going on.

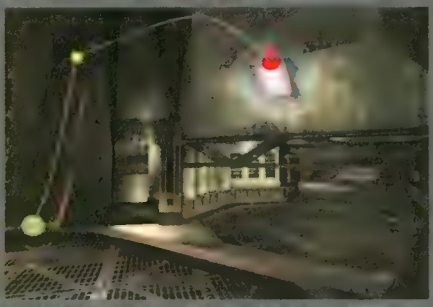
- Never make a move until you know exactly where the enemy is so you can plan a successful runaway.
- Learn how to use the shield cannon to protect yourself from getting spawn fragged. (To be spawn fragged is to be fragged within seconds of spawning back into the game after being fragged.)
- Learn how to move backward just as fast as you do forward. With the shield cannon, you can put up the shield to block the enemy attacks while running backward. If you can perfect this, you should be able to hold your opponent to a very low score.
- Grab 50 Armors and health shards whenever you safely can! When you think you're about ready to fight, plan to pick up the Double Damage and make your way to the 100 Armor room to take control back.

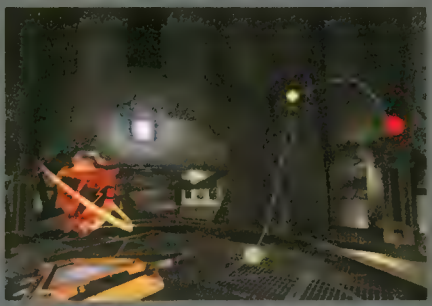
QUICK TIP
If you have Double Damage, use the lightning gun as it will kill the enemy in one shot, then run to the other side of the map to get another kill. If you perfect this move, keep repeating it until the Double Damage wears out.

FATAL1TY'S SECRET SPOT



HOW TO...





COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

ABS Computers **ABS Ultimate Game Machine** 73

Activision **Call of Duty** 26-27

Activision **Empires** 95, 97, 99, 101

Activision **Star Trek: Elite Force II** 45

Amazon.com **Amazon.com Top Sellers** 56, 57

Atari, Inc. **Gothic II** 59

Buena Vista Games **Tron 2.0** 63, 65, 67, 69

CDV Software Entertainment **Breed** 21

CDV Software Entertainment **No Man's Land** 81

Creative Labs **Audigy/6.1** 142

Dell Computer Corp. **Dimension XPS** 14-15

Earthlink **Earthlink (demo)** ..... demo

Eidos Interactive, Inc **Commandos 3** 8-9

Electronic Arts **Battlefield 1942 SW** 51-53

Electronic Arts **Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Breakthrough** 28-29

Electronic Arts **Medal of Honor: Breakthrough** 2-5

Electronic Frontier Foundation **EFF Membership Campaign** 121

Full Sail Real World **Full Sail Real World Education** 48

iBuyPower **iBuyPower.com** 91

iGames Publishing **Savage** 79

Mythic Entertainment **Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis** 38-39

Newegg.com **Best Value** 141

Sony Online Entertainment **Lords of Everquest** 19

Sony Online Entertainment **Lost Dungeons II** 25

Sony Online Entertainment **The Planetside** 10-11

Take 2 Interactive Software **Starsky & Hutch** 47

University of Advancing Computer Tech **Rock the Tech World** 55

VUG - Blizzard Entertainment **WarCraft III** 36-37

VUG - PPG **Ghost Master** 49

VUG - PPG **Lionheart** 23

VUG - Sierra Entertainment **Counter-Strike: Condition Zero** 30-31

VUG - Sierra Entertainment **Homeworld 2** 16-17

Wizards of the Coast **Magic 8th Acquisition** 6-7

CGW'S HANDY-DANDY GAMING GLOSSARY

[illegible] dry your weepy eyes—below is our guide to gamer-speak. [illegible]

[illegible]

Scorched Earth

Game Journalism for Dummies

Lesson one: redundant headlines **By Robert Coffey** robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Like a brave little salmon swimming upstream to spawn, every week an e-mail wriggles its way through the relentless torrent of refinancing and herbal Viagra spam and finds a safe little spot in the *CGW* Letters mailbox. And when these letters aren't from petulant bladder control-challenged sports mascot fetishists pursuing puerile vendettas (a big zero-star shout-out to Vince and the boys! Woo-woo!), they invariably ask one question: How can I get your job? And while the obvious answer is to kill me, peel my head, and wear my bloody face skin over yours and then park your ass in my cubicle and grumble all day, there are other means—after all, even two really skinny guys can't share just one putrefying mask of human tissue. Here are a few pointers to help you clear the woefully low bar between you and the painfully pathetic form of self-delusion that passes for game journalism success.

An expensive college education This is absolutely crucial. Without spending in excess of 60K on higher education, your parents will never be sufficiently disappointed enough to disown you completely. Anything less and you'll only find yourself consigned to the children's table at family gatherings, and while your mother will exhibit the kind of warmth that won Louise Fletcher an Academy Award in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, she will still talk to you. In between crying jags. And dumping cans of Sterno on you and trying to light you on fire while you sleep. Not that I'd know anything about that.

Learn the difference between "you're" and "your" And then ignore it at every opportunity. Judging by our reader mail, many of you have mastered this already.

Grab readers' attention Since a late Roger Moore-era *James Bond* movie featuring a theme song by Duran Duran and costarring box office powerhouse Grace Jones is the epitome of quality and hep-catness, make sure "A View to a (fill in the blank)" is the clever concept behind every other headline you write. Alternate your headlines with "Not Your Father's RTS" (do not be dissuaded by the fact that to your pension-drawing sire, RTS means "roast tongue sandwich").

...kill me, peel my head, and wear my bloody face skin over yours...

Ask the hard questions A game journalist is an information shark, swimming through vast oceans of gaming delights, forever consuming the slimy chum of knowledge. These questions will get you through the rough times: "What do you mean it's a cash bar?" "Where are the free messenger bags?" "That booth babe is checking me out, isn't she?" "When's lunch?" "You call this a paycheck?" "Where're my lucky underpants?" "Does this black T-shirt with a dragon on it make me look fat? What about this one with the robot?"

Wallow in the soup of personal despair But do it with style. Just because you're an underpaid, unappreciated entertainment expert doesn't mean you can't pretend it lends you some sort of ineffable cool cachet. Reinforce your standing with your misfit brethren by peppering your discourse with knowing inside jokes. Time for lunch? Then announce, "Lenny needs food badly" and bask in the glory that is your just due.

The holy trinity of game journalism Ctrl+C, Ctrl+V, and a freshly e-mailed press release.

Champion an obscure game to reinforce your maverick genius Any half-wit with a hard drive and a mouse can love *Half-Life* and *X-Com*. But to be a truly edgy envelope-pusher, you need to seize upon a game no one else is playing and pump it up relentlessly. Some suggestions: *Flying Heroes, Runesword, Rails Across America*, and *SimTower*. I hitched my star to *Hollywood Mogul* years ago and have never looked back. For extra cred, champion a cell phone-only game.

Belittle a popular game to reinforce your maverick genius Just as important as loving an unloved game is disparaging a much-loved game. Refer to *Deus Ex* as that game where you looked for air ducts. Tell everyone you loved *Half-Life* the first time you played it...(pause for emphasis)...when it was called *Marathon*. Denigrate *The Sims* as an over-hyped dollhouse whose mass appeal only reinforces its inherent mediocrity, and you can start collecting high fives from the gaming cognoscenti. (Note: Should it ever come to light that you sleep on your kitchen floor in order to devote the entirety of your bedroom to an elaborate *Battlestar Galactica* versus *Star Trek* action figure battle royale, then whatever little bit of credibility you've mustered will be squandered, so be careful.)

There you have it, your off and running. I wish you success. As game journalists, we are the keepers of the flame, the true believers, the chosen few brave enough to keep the moron in oxymoron.

ILLUSTRATION BY RICK SEALOCK

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