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Interstate '76

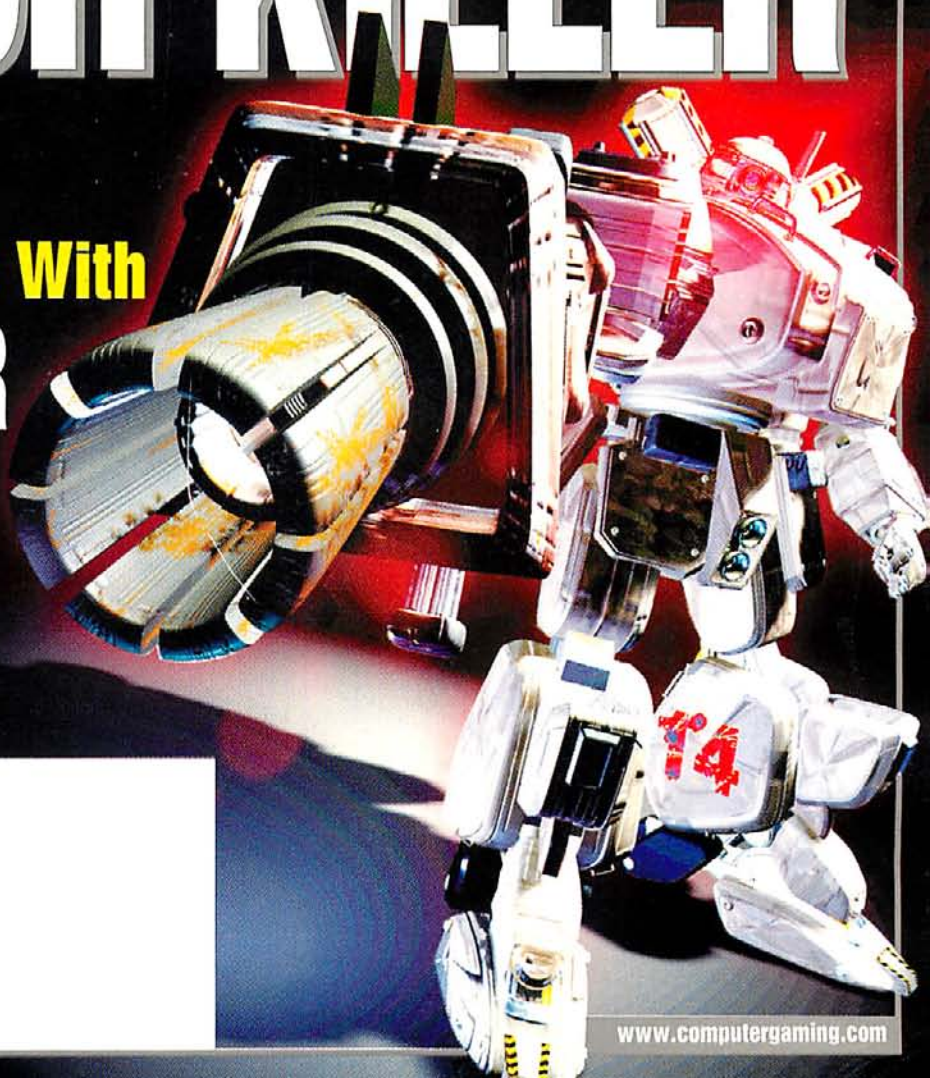
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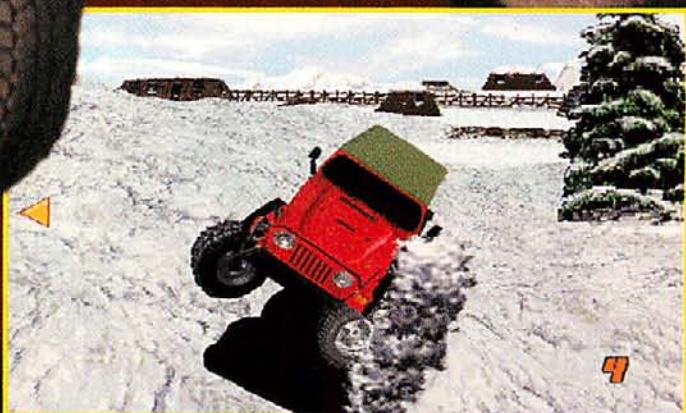
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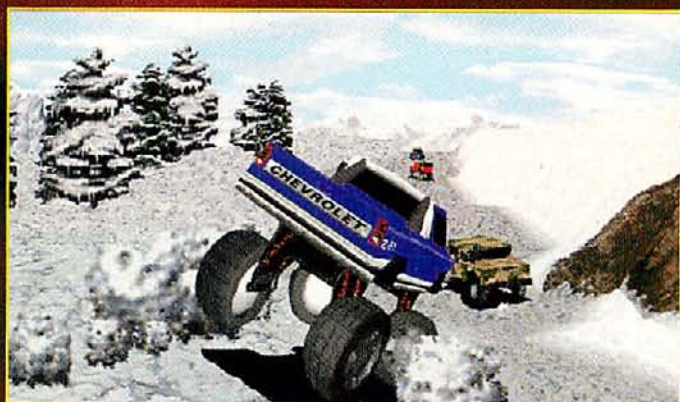


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COVER STORY

Heavy Gear

48 The makers of MECHWARRIOR 2 and MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES launch a new mega-sim. HEAVY GEAR's improved interface and realistic combat could mean trouble for FASA's upcoming MECHWARRIOR 3.



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Control Fetish

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What's On The CD?

It's fair in love and war, or so they say. On this month's disc, however, war outnumbers love by far. Our wargame lineup includes excellent products from the generals of wargaming: Avalon Hill, with *OVER THE REICH*; and TalonSoft, with *BATTLGROUND: ANTIETAM*. Other commendable soldiers in the ranks include: Interactive Magic, with *GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER*; and Sierra, with *ROBERT E. LEE: CIVIL WAR GENERAL*. Also included on the disc is a special, custom-built Vietnam scenario for *STEEL PANTHERS 2: UP A DEADLY RIVER*, developed by CGW contributor, Patrick Miller. And for those of you who prefer air combat, be sure to check out NovaLogic's *F-22 LIGHTNING II*.



On a lighter note, try rescuing the prize pig in Interplay's *REDNECK RAMPAGE*. Travel back in time to the dark, deserted, and sinister streets of 1940's Los Angeles in Cyberdreams' classic adventure game, *NOIR*. Or, you can whack a few balls in Maxis' *SIM GOLF*. And check out the *Ogden's Sign* and *The Hall of the Blind* strategies for *DIABLO*, the super-hot RPG from Blizzard. The disc includes all this, and a dozen more.

How Do I Use It?

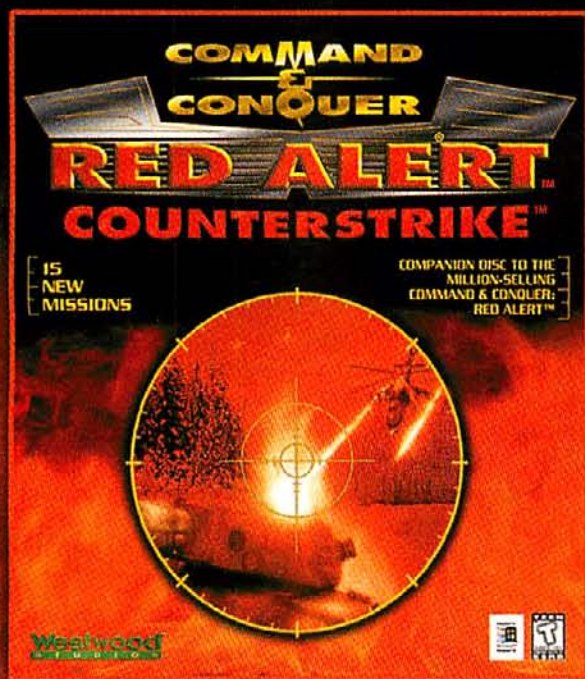
If you have Windows 95, installation is simple: The CD is Autoplay enabled—just lock-n-load. Otherwise, from Windows 3.x, select Run from the Program Manager menu, and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. Then type D:\INSTALL to create a CGW program group on your Windows desktop. If you have installed previous versions of the CG-ROM, this disc will use the program group already on your desktop.

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Last Express	WIN/DOS	EXPRESS	TRAILER.AVI
Civil War General	WIN	CIVWAR	SETUP.EXE
NetZone	95/DOS	NZDEMOWI/NZDEMODO	SETUP.EXE INSTALL.BAT
NCAA Final Four	95	NCAA	SETUP.EXE
Sim Golf	95	GOLFDemo	SETUP.EXE
Stargunner	DOS	STARGUN	INSTALL.EXE
Jam Extreme	95	JAMX	SETUP.EXE
Turok	WIN/95	TUROC	TUROC.MAG.MOV
Star Command Revolution	DOS	STARCOM	INSTALL.EXE
XS	DOS/95	XSDEMO	XSS.EXE\SET SOUND.EXE
T.E.N.	95	TEN	SETUP.EXE
Mplayer	95	MPLAYER	SETUP.EXE
F22 Lightning	DOS/95	F22DEMO	INSTALL.EXE
Noir	WIN	NOIR	INSTALL.EXE
Over the Reich	WIN and 95	OTRDEMO	OTR31/OTR95.EXE
Enemy Nations	WIN/95	ENATIONS	SETUPNET.EXE
Redneck Rampage	DOS	REDNECK	INSTALL.BAT
SubSpace	95	SUBSPACE	SPACE119.EXE
Great Battles of Alexander	95	GBOADEMO	SETUP.EXE
Battleground: Antietam	WIN/95	BGN_DEMO	SETUP.EXE
Steel Panthers 2 Scenario	N/A	SP2SCEN	N/A
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F22-Lightning II (NovaLogic)



Over The Reich (Avalon Hill)



Redneck Rampage (Interplay)



Battleground: Antietam (TalonSoft)



Noir (Cyberdreams)

How Do I Play The Demos?

To view the demos, first click on Editors' Hot Picks, Special Features, or Product Demos. Then click on the title of interest. Each demo has its own instructions for installation.

How Do I Get The Patch Files?

Click on Patches under the CGW Features, and then read the text window that has instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You can also access the patches from a DOS prompt by typing D:\PATCHES (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copying them directly to your hard drive. Back up any previously saved games before installing a patch, as this may overwrite your existing program.

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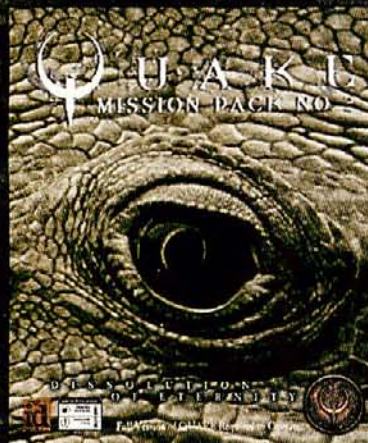
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Quake Mission Pack No. 1 and Quake Mission Pack No. 2, the only official id Software mission packs for Quake.

Nighty-night, sissy boy.

Bring Out Your Dead!

How Gamers Will Pay for Dead Game Companies

Today's computer game industry is a lot like the old geezer in *Monty Python & the Quest for the Holy Grail*

who insists that he's not dead, yet. To be sure, the list of obituaries for 1996 is fairly long: Crystal Dynamics, Digital Pictures, Intracorp, QQP, Sanctuary Woods, and Viacom to name a few. Already in 1997, GTE Entertainment has closed its doors.

In addition, 1997 layoffs at Interplay and 3DO (including serious reductions at New World Computing), as well as 1996 reductions at Acclaim, Sierra/Dynamix, and Spectrum HoloByte, have some buzzards (not to be confused with vulture capitalists) circling atop the emaciated bones of the entire industry.

Does that mean that the computer game industry is in danger of disappearing? No, the overall number of dollars being spent on computer games is growing. The entertainment software industry as a whole hit pretty near the \$1 billion mark in 1996, and more titles are hitting the 100,000 mark in sales than ever before. So, what's the problem?

There are four forces putting the squeeze on computer game publishers in 1997: MDF, development budgets, investor expectations, and

Moore's law. I'll briefly describe each one to show you how they affect publishers' financial health.

First, MDF, or Marketing Development Fund, is the price that publishers pay in cooperative advertising, catalog insertions, shelf-talkers, end-cap displays, racking fees, and the like. In order to get products on the shelf in a retail chain. Companies that want to have their games on the shelf are paying an increasingly high price to do so. Even then, products are only given a few weeks to prove themselves because there is a such a glut of titles in the retail channel. Few products are given a chance to get legs by being discovered by gamers.

Second, development budgets have skyrocketed. Some of us call this the "WING COMMANDER IV effect." Developers reasoned that if games could cost \$2, \$3, \$4, \$6, and even \$12 million, respectively, that their games should have those kinds of budgets, too. So, in a two year period, we've seen game budgets move from an average of less than \$500,000 each to a point where every developer thinks \$1 million is a puny budget. Assume that a publisher gets an average return of \$20 per unit. That means you have to sell 50,000 units to break even on a \$1 million development budget.

Third, these ever-increasing development budgets have been funded by investors who pur-

chased common stock (for public companies) and venture capitalists (for private companies) who all want a return on investment (ROI). If games are big hits at 100,000 units sold, and

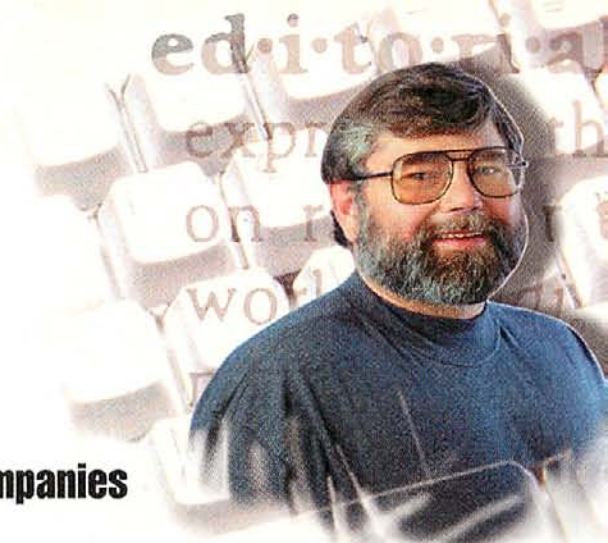
“The list of obituaries for 1996 is fairly long: Viacom, QQP, Digital Pictures, Intracorp, Crystal Dynamics and Sanctuary Woods, to name a few.”

break-even is 50,000, that ROI doesn't look very good, does it? Over the last couple of years, game publishers have essentially extended their credit to the breaking point in order to fund (over an 18-24 month period) these more aggressive budgets. Now, the loans are coming due.

Fourth, Moore's Law essentially states that computing power is doubling every year. Currently, the 18-24-month long development cycles for computer games simply cannot keep up with the pace of new systems. If a game slips radically from its scheduled release, publishers may have to sink hundreds of thousands of dollars into salvaging projects which, upon release, seem archaic and outdated. Such products can really cost publishers.

So, what's going to happen? In 1997, these pressures will close another 2-5 game companies. Another 3-4 will be merged into other game companies. The environment won't be right for new start-ups, and the total number of available titles will drop for the first time in many years.

What will that mean for gamers? First, it will mean reduced selection. Of course, judging from the sales numbers, we weren't buying too many of the lower echelon games, anyway. Second, it will mean that the industry will want to take less chances on fresh, new game concepts. Sequelitis will increase at a frenetic pace and game companies will try to build and milk franchises. Successful role-playing games will spawn combat sims and real-time strategy games, and vice versa. Third, it will mean that online will become the experimental platform that PCs used to be—



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the place to take risks and build niche markets. Fourth, it will become harder and harder to market niche products unless publishers can build a Web strategy.

The bad news is that we're seeing less and less original product. The good news is that since the industry has established some strong franchises in the last cou-

“If there is anything the Internet has taught us, it is that people don't like to pay for what they're accustomed to getting for free.”

ple of years, you can expect that once you find a product line that you like, they are likely to stick with it and build plenty of products in its image. I know that's a mixed blessing, but that's the way things look to me. It may be small comfort in a time when the industry is suffering huge layoffs and dying publishers, but it is some comfort, nonetheless.

ONLINE GAMING— DEAD OR NOT DEAD?

Ever play that game where someone shouts the name of a celebrity and everyone has to answer whether that celebrity is

“Dead” or “Not dead?” It may be a morbid game, but it conveys a truth: sometimes, people and their life's work affect us so much that they seem alive to us, even when they have physically died. Frankly, I believe that online gaming is the future. I believe online multiplayer games will be the dominant form of gaming by the year AD 2005.

Yet, when I see the circa 20,000 subscribers at Mplayer and TEN—when they need significantly more than 100,000 subscribers to make their business models work—I know why some people may be asking whether online gaming is dead or not dead. When I see multiplayer game developers suddenly gasping for cash flow because of AOL's ill-considered utopian panacea of flat-rate monthly pricing, I have to ask: dead or not dead?

After attending Mpath's 2nd Annual Online Game Developers Conference in February, I feel like online gaming is at a critical juncture. Financial models are announced and subsequently dissipate faster than some of those new elements on the periodic table.

Rumors were flying at the conference that AOL was planning to add an hourly surcharge for games. It's logical, but it could also be disastrous for them. If there is anything the Internet has taught us, it is that people don't like to pay for what they're accustomed to getting for free. So, game subscriptions for various seasons, corporate sponsorships, and old-fashioned commercials have become a vital part of the ever-evolving online gaming strategy.

Dead or not dead? It's way too early to declare online gaming as dead, but if some more viable financial models don't appear pretty soon, we may have to move it into intensive care. ☞

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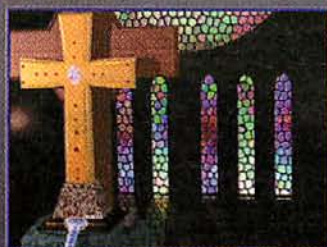


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LETTER OF THE MONTH

CRYSTAL BOWL

You guys are good! Not only do you provide us gamers with the best reviews around, but you can foresee the future also. What am I talking about? In issue #150, Jan. '97, page 236, as part of your review of NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB '97, a screenshot is displayed of the Packers' Reggie White putting the rush on the Patriots' Drew Bledsoe, thereby fulfilling your prophecy of the up-coming Super Bowl!

Wow, I only wish you could have shown a shot of the scoreboard late in the 4th Quarter. (By the way, Bledsoe completed the pass for a 36 yard TD to Terry Glen.) Keep up the good work. I look forward to your review of NBA '97, don't disappoint me now!



SNOW IN THE SUPERDOME? Well, we accurately predicted the teams, now we've just got to fine-tune the weather forecasting for next year's Super Bowl.

Joe Forlizzi
Tewksbury, MA

We'll give you a hint. It's not going to be the Vancouver Grizzlies versus the Toronto Raptors. Any further revelation would ruin the surprise.

I notice that in your reviews you state whether the CD-ROM must be in the drive for the game to work. Does that statement also mean that I must buy two games to play over the null modem? I would also like your suggestion on some games where I don't have to spend big dollars (two copies) for multiplayer action.

Bruce Stratton
via the Internet

In general, you are correct. The multiplayer situation is not uniform, however. With COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT, you get two CDs in each package to expedite multiplayer play. If you are an A-10 CUBA! player, you get one multiplayer serial number so that you can play with an opponent who doesn't have a CD and can buy additional ones for \$15 each. For F-22

LIGHTNING, you can play against an opponent who doesn't have a CD, but the opponent has to install approximately 80MB to his hard drive, and NEED FOR SPEED SE requires circa 175MB on your opponent's hard drive. We've tried to specify the approach within our reviews, but since this information is becoming increasingly important, we'll be adding it to the System Requirements box in the corner of every review. Look for it under "Multiplayer Support" starting in May.

IT'S THE STORY, STUPID

Let me respond to Mr. Cirulis' column (Feb. '97) by saying I have DUKE NUKEM 3D, QUAKE and about 15 other various



games loaded. But the other night nothing struck me. I felt something was missing. Then, I remembered the feelings I get every time I play the old Origin/Looking Glass SYSTEM SHOCK, so I reloaded that game. You know what it is about that game, the thing that id Software says *isn't* worth their time (which I personally

believe is a big "screw you" to us gamers), it's the story.

Sure the story in SYSTEM SHOCK is canned, but geez, instead of just running around killing everything, there are real reasons to push yourself. I challenge anyone

not to get unnerved when, after you finish Lev 2 of the space station, you get this desperate pleading via audio/visual message to drop everything and help some crew members three floors above you. And boy, I know it's just a game, but I always feel rage at the point where I battle to the survivors' last bastion and the computer (Shodan) tells me I'm too late; they are all dead. Finally, to hear the survivors' last pitiful email is just chilling. Maybe we will all rebel and force stories and mysteries to be told again.

Anyway thanks for your always insightful column. It makes me feel like someone is at least trying to watch the gates.

Chris Dargan
Mission Viejo, CA

MULTIPLAYER REQUIREMENTS

I've been a subscriber for several years now and I anxiously await my CGW each month. We're a multi-computer household, and my nine-year-old son and I live to play games over a null modem connection. WARCRAFT II, C&C, CIVNET and DOOM are all great multiplayer games made especially so by the fact that you don't have to buy two versions of the game to play on two computers. If only EA Sports would adopt the same policy.

KOREAN NOOKS AND CRANNIES

In a January letter to CGW, reader Brian Libby questioned how MicroProse could model a million square miles of Korean terrain, when "the combined area of North and South Korea is just under 86,000 square miles." Mr. Libby's letter elicited the following comment from another reader:

If Mr. Libby ("Letters," Jan. '97) is going to be anal-retentive in his fact checking, I would like to reply in MicroProse's defense. Imagine measuring the coastal length of an island as seen from 1,000 feet. Now, suppose you measure at ground level, with a wheel, tracing the coast's path around every nook and cranny, arriving at a greater coastal length. Coastline scale is not a set standard worldwide, and often leads to dif-



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #281



fering results, sometimes from departments of the same country. Now the same can be said of square miles when applied to a "virtual Korea," since hills and valleys add to the square footage, as do nooks and crannies. So, depending on the scale, MicroProse could conceivably model millions of square miles, depending on the hills and valleys they intend to realistically model. I suggest that now that they have made their claim, we demand they deliver every rock and tree stump.

Marco Contreras
Edmonton, Alberta CANADA

We like your reasoning, but our Stupid Question Department insists on asking the following. "If we're measuring the full height and depth of each hill and valley, wouldn't it be cubic miles instead of square miles?" Inquiring minds want to know.

ONLINE GAMING FOR NOVICES

How do I play games over the Internet? I'm not referring to the online services such as AOL and Mplayer. I am on a budget and I don't want to pay for another service. I do have access to AOL, but the games that I want to play aren't available. Is it possible to play games over the Internet without having to open my wallet?

Robert Marchal
via the Internet

Well, you definitely need an Internet Service Provider (ISP) other than CompuServe or AOL. Technically, you can use Kali over those services, but they give new meaning to the term "lag time." Once you have an ISP (usually at about the same price as AOL for an unlimited use account), you can follow the advice from the following reader.

I hear the cry of a kindred spirit in Mr. Pritchard's letter appearing in the January '97 issue of CGW. Let me try to calm your fears, though. I am in much the same situation as you are.

Since you sent your letter via the Internet, I will assume you are "connected" and thus not a totally solitary person — rather one that is a little shy and does not

always enjoy intense competition in a computer game. I say intense competition because I think the best you can get from today's AI is merely passable competition. Intense comes about when another human is after your skin.

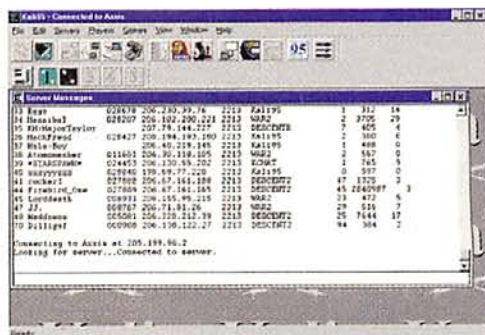
Playing a computer game solo can be relaxing and enjoyable, but until you try against another human player you'll never know just how

much fun you can have with some of the games on your shelf. Before I go any further, let me explain that I am one of those unskilled players who just about everybody can beat most of the time — so I'm not out here looking for (more) fresh meat so to speak.

I play QUAKE against a friend via the modem (too much latency for me on the Internet). He slaughters me mercilessly night after night (how about a kill ratio of 40+ to 7). Do I enjoy being fragged? No, but every once in a while I catch him, or can play a trick on him and frag his ass! Now, talk about satisfying!!! We also play HEXEN, HERETIC, WARCRAFT 2 and others over the modem — most of these he wins, but I still have a chance.

My friend and I will sometimes meet on a Kali server looking for a game of WARCRAFT 2. Now, let me explain my skill level. Suckling babes beat the tar out of me. On the ladder (Case's) I was #267, but that was only because there were only 267 people on the ladder at that time. My rank slowly fell 275...300...it's embarrassing to go on. But it was still fun. I didn't know any of those people, and got to play with folks from all over the world. Tired of losing to players, we had fun a different way using Kali. We would join a game as two independent players in a free-for-all with a third person. Secretly aligned, we would then wail the tar out of this poor sucker who was so much better than either of us. Eventually, of course, the sap would catch on, and perhaps quit the game, but we had a good time and a good laugh out of it.

What I would recommend that you do is: 1. Download the demo Kali program from



BIG GAME HUNTING It's easy to select a server with Kali95's robust interface. In many cases, you can see which games are playing on individual servers.

the Net (the Win 95 version is easy to install and use), look in www.axis.com, and hunt from there. (The unregistered version gives you 15 minutes of play for each log on. If you like it, registration costs only \$20 for unlimited play time.)

2. Pick your best game that has multi-player capability.

3. Log onto Kali (Kali St. Louis or Castlenet are a couple of good ones) and just chat with the players. (I have talked with players from as far as Mongolia, Estonia, Bulgaria, Brazil, and Australia.)

4. Get up the nerve to challenge someone to a game. Even if you lose, he, or she, won't know who you are and you'll have the time of your (computer) life.

I think you'll find that this is an exciting facet to computer gaming which, really, you don't want to miss. And you can always play by yourself when you don't feel like competition. Try it! Maybe I'll see you on the Net.

Paul Moade
via the Internet

Firing Line

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— Mac Home Journal

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #063



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LEE BROWN, CD-ROM MAGAZINE

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MARK ULYATT, PC POWER PLAY

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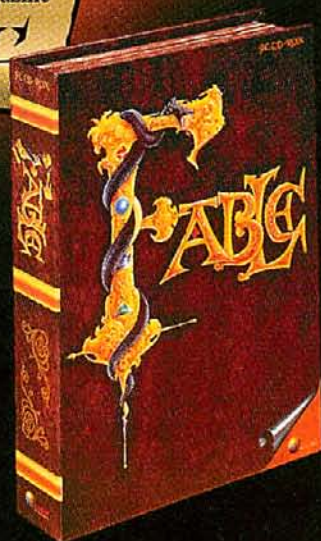
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #125

Best of the Bunch

Finalists named for CGW Premier Awards

It's that time of year again. First we're hit by the Golden Globe Awards, which are rapidly followed by the Oscar nominations. And now, CGW reveals the finalists for the ceremony you've all been waiting for: The Premier Awards, CGW's awards for the best games of the year in each genre. While our award year is almost concurrent with the calendar year, we do make an exception for those products that just missed their Christmas ship date, and landed in our offices in early January. The finalists in each category are as follows:

Adventure.

- Circle of Blood
- Obsidian
- The Pandora Directive
- RAMA
- Toonstruck
- Spycraft

RPG

- Albion
- Daggerfall
- Diablo
- Meridian 59

Action

- Quake
- Duke Nukem 3D
- Virtua Fighter PC
- Tomb Raider
- Crusader: No Regret
- Need For Speed SE

Classic/Puzzle

- Baku Baku
- Chessmaster 5000
- Monty Python and the Holy Grail
- Risk
- Scrabble!
- Smart Games Challenge #1



Sports

- Front Page Sports Football Pro 97
- Grand Prix 2
- Links LS
- NASCAR 2
- NBA Live 97
- NHL 97

Flight Sim

- AH-64D Longbow
- Flying Corps
- Hind
- Silent Hunter
- Warbirds

Space Sim

- MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
- Wing Commander IV

Strategy

- Civilization II
- Heroes of Might and Magic II



- Master of Orion II
- Red Alert
- War Wind

Wargames

- Age of Rifles
- Battleground: Shiloh
- Battleground: Waterloo
- Over the Reich

»»»Continued on pg 32

THIS JUST IN

Here are short takes on games that were released just prior to press time. Most will be reviewed next month.

OBSIDIAN

The year is 2066. You are an environmental scientist working with your partner, Max, on a project to clean the Earth's heavily toxic atmosphere. Everything's peachy until Max is sucked into a mysterious giant rock—and you go in after, to search for your friend in a series of bizarre dream-like realms. What follows is one of the most memorable surrealistic



adventures to grace the genre in a long time. Don't let comparisons to Myst scare you off: OBSIDIAN, with a compelling plot, engaging gameplay, outstanding animation, and an honest-to-goodness

THE GAME IS OUT THERE.

X-Files fans will be relieved to hear that the

much-anticipated adventure game, based on the popular TV series, sounds like it's going to be worth the wait. The script will be written by *X-Files* creator Chris Carter, and the game will star Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny as FBI agents Scully and Mulder. Some minor characters from the show will make appearances as well. The *X-Files* director of photography has also signed up to work on the project, which is being developed for Fox Interactive by Hyperbole Studios, and is slated for a December '97 release. The game will be based upon one episode from the show's second season, but original live action footage will be produced specifically for this project. Fox is keeping this project tightly under wraps and we've yet to see any actual code, but rumor has it that all will be revealed at E3 in June.—Charlotte Panther



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Intel products are not intended for use in medical, life saving, or life sustaining applications.” —Intel White Paper on MMX

sense of humor, is actually way better. In a genre riddled with mediocre clones, Rocket Science has unexpectedly created a joyful, edgy original.

—J. Green

SegaSoft, (800) SEGASOF

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 301

BANZAI BUG

Even if you hate bugs, this game might still be worth a look. Grolier Interactive is billing BANZAI BUG as a flight sim, and the whole game is played in the air from the perspective of our insectoid hero, Banzai.



The look and gameplay will remind you of a fast arcade shooter, but there is more to gameplay than just flying around and spurring venomous spittle at enemy robobugs and biggies (humans). You have to collect the pieces of a weapon called the Stinkulator, which will drive the evil Exterminator out, giving the bugs a final safe haven.

—E. Chin

Grolier

Interactive,

(203) 797-3530

Win95 CD-

ROM

Reader Service

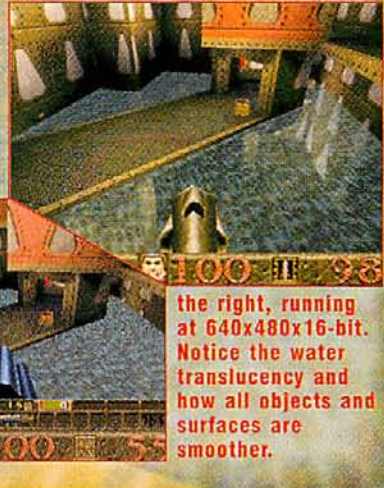
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GL Quake Unleashed

Carmack and Abrash have done it again. The *QUAKE* engine was very impressive, and *VQUAKE* showed why 3D hardware will forever change action gaming. So what do you do for an encore? Well, id Software has released *GLQUAKE* 0.9, written to the Open GL (OGL) API. This version runs on any 3D graphics board that supports OGL in Win 95, though the reference platform is 3dfx's Voodoo chipset.

On Diamond's Voodoo-based Monster 3D board, we ran *GLQuake* at 640x480x16, and were wowed by the image quality. Gone was any texture swim, but most visually stunning was the alpha blending effect on water. The translucency is striking, and when you jump in, underwater surfaces undulate to simulate refraction. These visions need some serious horsepower, though id is still optimizing *GLQUAKE* to squeeze out more performance. For 3dfx owners whose Rendition-owning friends have razzed them over not having *Quake* support, this should end that debate.—Dave Salvador

Live'n' Large: The left image is from unaccelerated *QUAKE* running at 320x200x8-bit. *GLQUAKE* is on



the right, running at 640x480x16-bit. Notice the water translucency and how all objects and surfaces are smoother.



ANIMATION HANGMAN

Is it live, or is it Memorex?

Unfortunately, this game tries to be both.

In *ANIMATION HANGMAN* the animation sequences clue you in to the mystery word, and are so obvious ("ice cream scoops" for "cone") that they sap any brainteaser potential from this

"FUTURISTIC 3-D ACTION/ADVENTURE THAT COULD SET A NEW STANDARD FOR PC GAMING."

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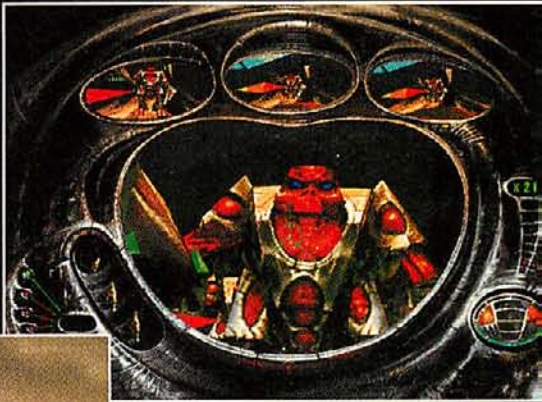


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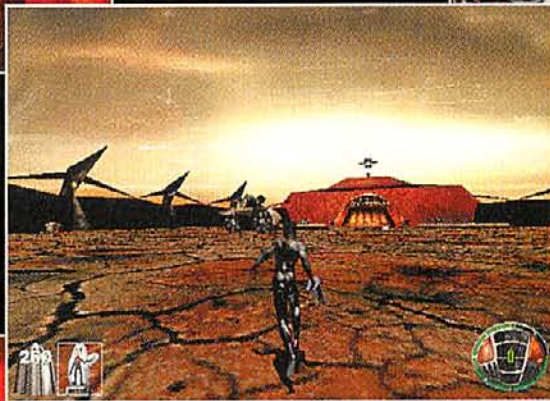
"This highly anticipated title is certainly one of the slickest games we've seen...could be the action fest to rival Quake."

- BOOT



"The ability to zoom in from a mile away within the sniper mode is remarkable."

- ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY



"It's with the unique gameplay elements that MDK will really make its mark."

- PC GAMES



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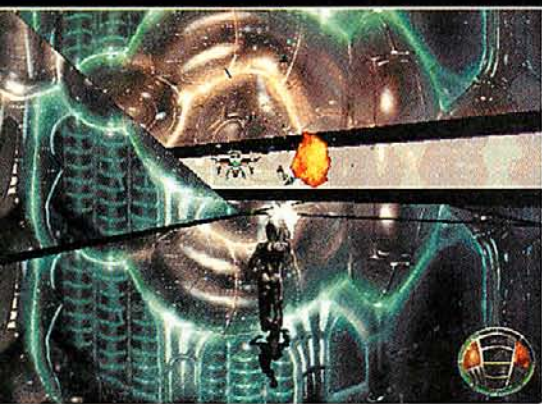
Download the demo at:

**HARRY
PUFFY**

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"MDK PROMISES 3-D TECHNOLOGY SO COOL...THAT IT WILL SEND EVERYTHING ELSE RUNNING FOR COVER."

- PC GAMER

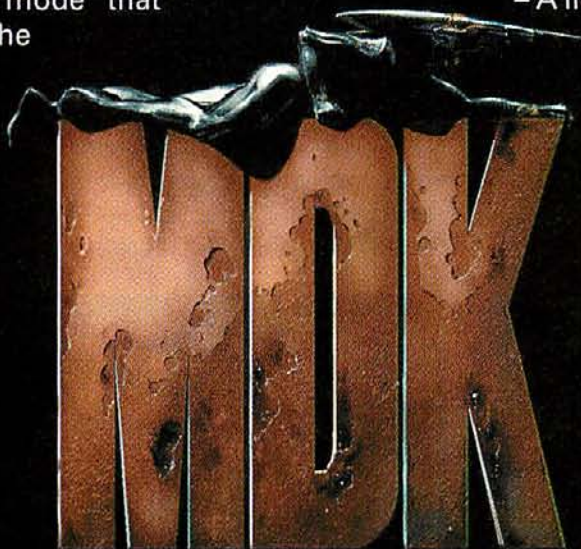


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- Never before seen "sniper mode" that allows you to zoom in on the enemy and pick it off with astounding accuracy.
- The most sophisticated artificial intelligence ever created. Fully reactive "smart enemies" think, listen, and communicate in a calculated assault on your life.
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and equipment including:

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- A high-tech reusable parachute.
- Bombs... decoys... homing sniper grenades... and many more.
- Two styles of adrenaline-pumping game dynamics featuring first and third person point of view.



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Windows '95 and DOS

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cgw premier awards nominees ...

»Continued from pg 28

- Robert E. Lee: Civil War General
- Wooden Ships & Iron Men

Best Hardware Achievement

- Canopus Total 3D
- CH Products Force FX
- Diamond Monster 3D
- Orchid Righteous 3D
- AH-64D Longbow: Flashpoint: Korea
- Civilization II Scenarios

- Duke Nukem Plutonium Pak
- Warcraft II: Dark Portal



The winners of each genre will be revealed in CGW's upcoming Premier Awards feature. We'll also announce the winners of our Special Awards for Artistic Achievement, Technical Achievement, and Online Enabling Technology, along with our choice for the overall Game of the Year.—Charlotte Panther

The H.U.B.

Be sure to check out CGW's Web site for our new department—HUB (Hacks, Utilities, and Bargains)—where you'll find an assortment of applications, tips, tools, and information to improve your gaming experience. We've gathered all sorts of useful odds and ends to support, enhance, or extend your gameplay.

What's the hot topic online? What's all the fuss about? Where can you find cool tools? What games let you create your own scenarios? What bargains are available? Head for www.computergaming.com and find out.—Jack Rodrigues



PLAYING LATELY

CGW Survey*

	Last Month	Months on Chart
1. Daggerfall (Bethesda)	7	3
2. Civilization II (MicroProse)	1	11
3. Duke Nukem 3D (3D Realms)	2	12
4. Red Alert (Virgin/Westwood)	-	1
5. Heroes II (New World Computing)	-	1
6. Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games (Sir-Tech)	-	1
7. WarCraft II (Blizzard)	3	14
8. Tomb Raider (Eidos)	-	1
9. Quake (id Software)	6	4
10. MechWarrior 2 (Activision)	5	16

* Check your mailbox: We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly-chosen subscribers each month. The results of Playing Lately indicate what games readers are blowing the most time on, as opposed to the reader's overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.

PC Data Best-Sellers**

1. Myst (Broderbund)	3
2. Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft)	1
3. Command & Conquer Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin)	2
4. Madden Football '97 (Electronic Arts)	4
5. Barbie Fashion (Mattel)	-
6. Quake (id Software)	6
7. NASCAR II (Sierra On-Line)	-
8. Duke Nukem 3D (Formgen)	7
9. NHL Hockey '97 (Electronic Arts)	13
10. Monopoly (Hasbro)	14

** This list indicates what the top-selling PC games were, as calculated by PC Data, during December, 1996

THIS JUST IN

insipid title. The animations lock up repeatedly, and gameplay is repetitive, boring, and a perfect example of why "mainstream" games really aren't. And guys, the virtual spiral notebook effect went out with EGA; Better luck with your audio tapes.—T. Coleman

N-TK/Memorex, (503) 639-6863

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service # 305

REALMS OF THE HAUNTING

Action/adventure hybrids are catching on, but few games have perfected the mix. Most attempts slump heavily onto one of the two sides. Gremlin Interactive's REALMS OF THE HAUNTING, however, manages to balance first-person 3D action with a compelling horror



story and scavenger hunt-type puzzles. Adam Randall travels to a remote Cornish village to discover what happened to his father, gather clues, and battle with demons. Players may toggle difficulty on both action and adventure elements. While not as slick as the current crop of 3D shooters, action fans looking for



some brain activity (or adventurers seeking a little adrenaline) won't be disappointed.—K. Hedstrom

Hedstrom

Interplay, (800) 468-3779

DOS/Win 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 303

MUTANT PENGUINS

Mutant alien penguins (it seems the bad guys saw a wildlife program before invading and thought penguins were the dominant life form...) threaten the planet in this original and bizarre arcade-style game, in which you enlist help from worker gremlins and good old earth penguins to save the planet. Over



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Sierra Uncovers 1997 Product Lineup

On our recent visit to Sierra, CGW spent two solid days peeking at products slated for release in upcoming months. Here's the scoop on some of the goodies you can expect to find on store shelves later this year.

Sierra will introduce the newest member of their sports lineup, **FRONT PAGE SPORTS: GOLF**, in April. Designed by **LINKS 386** designer Vance Cook, **FPS: GOLF** will let desktop duffers indulge in 12 types of play on two complete courses, the Prince, in Kauai, Hawaii; and the Pete Dye Golf Club, in Bridgeport, West Virginia. Bucking the current trend,

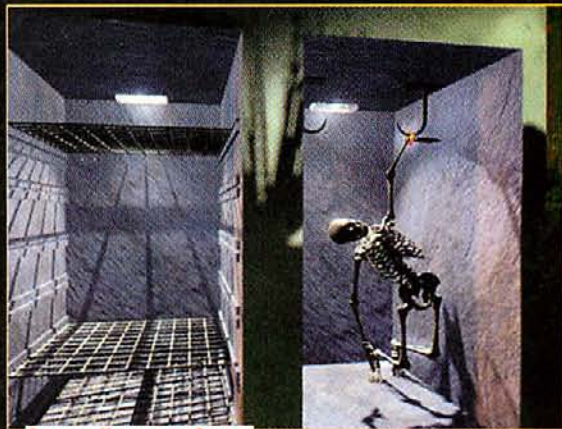
the game will use 3D graphics rather than video to represent players and will also offer an alternative to the dreaded swing meter via a new mouse swing technique.

BETRAYAL AT ANTARA

BETRAYAL AT ANTARA, Sierra's "spiritual descendant" to **BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR** (the real sequel is being published by 7th Level), is finally nearing completion after months of delay. This all-new RPG, which Sierra says is being targeted more towards the casual gamer than the hard-core role-player, takes place in the decaying and corrupt Antaran Empire, where characters will become entangled in a huge story of political intrigue and magic. The graphics, interface, and spell and combat systems all looked fan-



BETRAYAL AT ANTARA



SHIVERS: HARVEST OF SOULS

tastic—this one looks like it could be worth the wait.

SHIVERS: HARVEST OF SOULS

Sierra continue its **SHIVERS** series with **SHIVERS: HARVEST OF SOULS**, an adventure game aimed at twenty-somethings, in which you venture to the mysterious town of Cyclone to make a music video. Problem is, the other members of your band are missing, and weird things are happening in the town. You must uncover the mystery and save your friends. New features include directional

sound, and the Vision 360 panoramic engine, which allows you to move in any direction. Although the game is single-player, it will have an online chat feature for exchanging information with other players.

3D ULTRA MINIGOLF

With **3D ULTRA PINBALL** and **CREEPNIGHT** both doing well at retail and in magazine reviews (we liked them both), Sierra is hard at work on their next **3D ULTRA** title...only this time, it isn't pinball, but **3D ULTRA MINIGOLF**. This game plays

THIS JUST IN



the course of 20 levels, you drop gremlins to open chests and score the weapons inside. Good penguins fight any alien penguin they see, and also serve to balance your side of the doomscale. Set traps, find weapons, and discover special powers before the balance

favors the mutants. Fast fun.—Dawn Jepsen
GameTek, (800) GAMETEK
DOS and Win 95 CD
Reader Service #: 304

DISCWORLD II: MORTALITY BYTES!



Rejoice! Cowardly, incompetent Rincewind is back to wreak havoc in **DISCWORLD II**, the second of Psygnosis' hilarious comic adventures set in author Terry Pratchett's magical



universe. This time the plot is simple: Death has walked off the job, and it's up to Rincewind to bring him back. Monty Python alum Eric Idle once again supplies the voice of Rincewind, and he's just one of this game's numerous pleasures, providing a steady stream of laugh-out-loud jokes along with a series of challenging—yet actually solvable—puzzles.

Along with improved gameplay, **DISCWORLD II** also boasts more sophisticated 2D animation. For fans of goofy British humor, this is a must.

—J. Green

Psygnosis, (415) 655-8000

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 306

Activision's Apocalypse to star Bruce Willis

Activision recently announced that Bruce Willis has signed a multi-million dollar deal to star in their upcoming title **APOCALYPSE**, a futuristic arcade-style shooter for the Sony Playstation. The deals sets a precedent for actors who star in computer games; let's hope the prices of games don't shoot sky high as a result. Willis will be cast as the player's virtual partner and sidekick in **APOCALYPSE**, helping to restore peace to a war-torn society, thus saving humanity. Will this deal have other movie stars clamoring to take part in the digital revolution? I know a few people in this office wouldn't mind having Demi Moore as their virtual partner in a game. Strip Poker anyone?—Charlotte Panther



ICI and Interactive Magic Join Forces

Interactive Creations, Inc. (ICI), designers of the successful and critically acclaimed **WARBIRDS** Internet flight sim, announced in late January that the company is becoming a part of "Wild Bill" Stealey's fast-growing Interactive Magic. ICI will be renamed I-Magic Online.

Gamers can look forward to improved versions of **WARBIRDS** (with 3Dfx Voodoo graphics chip support) and **PLANETARY RAIDERS** (which at press time was playable in a free public beta). They'll also be treated to online versions of I-Magic games. Stealey mentioned that the upcoming **IM1A2 ABRAMS** was a candidate for multiplayer capability on I-Magic Online's "Megaplayer" network. He also alluded to eventually using the network to realize the dream of an electronic battlefield, with different types of sims fighting on the same terrain. **ABRAMS**, and the company's still-unannounced **A-10 Warthog** sim would seem to be good candidates. For more info, see <http://www.imagicgames.com/im-online.html>. —Denny Atkin



PLANETARY RAIDERS



3D ULTRA MINI GOLF

OUTPOST 2

Though the original **OUTPOST** was a dismal failure, that hasn't stopped Sierra from making a sequel:

OUTPOST 2. Sierra was smart, though, throwing out the original game code and design, and building the new game from scratch. About the only thing in common with the original is the name

and a bit of the story. Once again, you're trying to create a viable colony on a new world, but this time, all the strategic gaming is in real-time. Unlike the raft of **C&C** clones, though, the emphasis is on colony building, not on combat.

like all your favorite minigolf courses rolled into one well-produced CD title. You'll hit balls through windmills and other minigolf regulars, while being treated to the same level of atmosphere and animation found in the other 3D ULTRA titles.



OUTPOST 2



X-FIGHTERS

Flight-sim fans will recall that many of **X-FIGHTERS'** features were discussed in Denny Atkin's January column. In addition, Sierra's **X-FIGHTERS** will allow would-be aircraft designers to see how alternative aircraft designs might have fared. The WWII Sim's design module will allow you to alter armament, propulsion, fuel, armor, and other aircraft characteristics. Create a twin-pusher-prop Me-262, see how a Mustang would fare stripped of armor and other

X-FIGHTERS

weight encumbrances, or put the P-59 Airacomet into service with decent engines. An aviation buff's dream.

Look out for in-depth Sneak Previews of these products in upcoming issues of CGW, as we follow the progress of the games in development.

—Denny Atkin, Jeff Green, Elliott Chin and Charlotte Panther

Twinsen Returns

When we last saw 3D action/adventure hero Twinsen, he was collecting his

in the works

CGW award for 1995's Best Adventure of the Year, *RELENTLESS*. Created by vision-

ary French designer Frederick Raynal (*ALONE IN THE DARK*, *TIME COMMANDO*), *RELENTLESS* was a goofy, surrealistic, ahead-of-its-time romp. Now Raynal and the folks at Adeline Software are finishing the sequel, *TWINSIN'S ODYSSEY*, to be published by Activision this June.

TWINSIN'S ODYSSEY begins with the planet Twinsun in deep trouble once again, when aliens land and begin kidnapping all the magicians and children. It's up to Twinsen, of course, to set things right. With a brand-new 3D engine,



deep gameplay via multiple paths and side quests, and, most importantly, Raynal's uniquely artistic approach, *TWINSIN'S ODYSSEY* looks like one of the most promising adventure games of the coming year.—Jeff Green



Pacific General

Sailing This Summer

With the photo-realistic splendor of *PANZER GENERAL II* looming on the horizon, *PACIFIC GENERAL* is forced to stretch the original PG engine to its limits. The naval aspects, especially carrier operations, have been totally

revamped to reflect the war in the Pacific, while still retaining the simple learning curve of other games in the series. Unlike *STAR GENERAL*, campaigns are included, both for the Allied and Japanese sides.

Planned historical scenarios (numbering over two dozen at press time) include Manchuria in the mid-1930s, the capture of Singapore, the Coral Sea, and the battle of Midway. In classic *GENERAL* fashion, alterna-



tive scenarios and campaign pathways are also available. Brilliant victories may see the Japanese capturing Hawaii, overrunning India, or even fighting for faraway Madagascar. The Allies may end the war sooner than they did historically, or even forgo the atomic bomb and launch Operation Olympic—the never-executed invasion of the Japanese home



islands. Expect a full sneak preview as soon as we can tear ourselves away from this—forgive the pun—splashy addition to the series long enough to write it.—Terry Coleman

THIS JUST IN

APBA PRO BOXING

APBA Pro Boxing is essentially the same game released by designer Jim Trunzo's Comp-U-Sports company some 18 months ago. The new bells and whistles include a more robust tournament generator, and a few more referees and judges. Otherwise, the strong AI and quite navigable interface are intact from the earlier version. The graphics, dated over a year ago, look very primitive now. Nonetheless, Pro Boxing is the most realistic (and fast-playing) boxing simulation around, and APBA does the serious boxing fan a service by making this product widely available. Maybe the next time they'll give us hotter graphics and Internet/network play, so that we



can entice our more casual sports friends to play.—T. Coleman

APBA/Microleague, (800) 334-2722

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 307

MAX

Interplay's strategy game, MAX, is somewhat of a surprise. While similar games have taken the real-time route exclusively, MAX hasn't. As commander of the MAX force, your brain has been removed from your body and placed inside a metal one. Now, you and your assault force have been sent to a new planet to wage battle for a new homeworld for mankind. You start small, with a single unit, and build up a base,



sending out units to explore the map and look for enemy positions. MAX has multiplayer support for up to four players, and can be played in simultaneous or turn-based mode.—E. Chin

Interplay, (800) 468-3775

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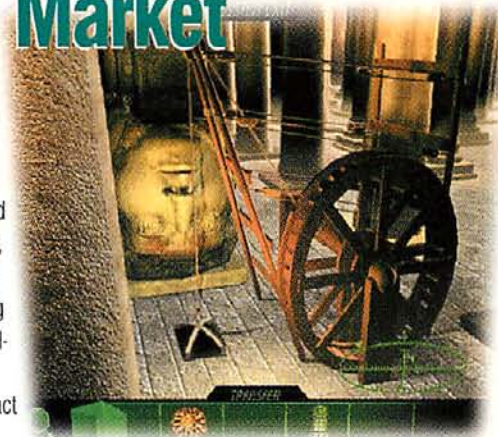


Discovery Channel Enters The Gaming Market

Discovery Channel, the name that conjures up images of vast sun-drenched landscapes, proud creatures, and outstanding cinematography, will draw upon its renowned skills and resources, as it enters the gaming market. A series of intellectually challenging games based upon cultural and historical fact may sound like an excuse for another Edutainment snooze-fest, but what we've seen so far looks promising. **EVOLUTION**, Discovery Channel MultiMedia's first real-time, multi-player strategy game, is being developed by veteran game designer, Al Roireau, (*CIVILIZATION*, *RELENTLESS*). The game will require players to evolve amphibious creatures into an intelligent life form, using resource

allocation and considering environmental factors like climate, terrain changes, and earthquakes.

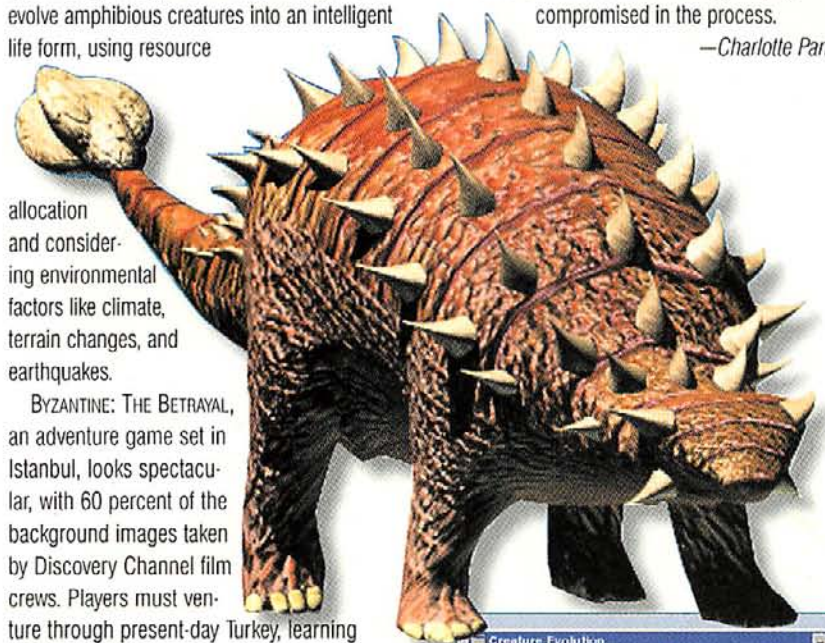
BYZANTINE: THE BETRAYAL, an adventure game set in Istanbul, looks spectacular, with 60 percent of the background images taken by Discovery Channel film crews. Players must venture through present-day Turkey, learning about the country's culture, and solving plot-based puzzles, to reveal who's responsible for selling Istanbul's antiquities on the Black Market.



BYZANTINE: THE BETRAYAL

Both products should fulfill Discovery Channel's ongoing mission: to make potentially heavy subject matter interesting. The good news for us is that it doesn't look like gameplay will be compromised in the process.

—Charlotte Panther



EVOLUTION



PIPELINE

3D Mini-Golf	Sierra	4/97
6300 2D/3D Chip Set	Tseng Labs	Summer 97
Achtung: Splitfire!	Avalon Hill	6/97
Agents of Justice	MicroProse	Spring 97
Aide De Camp 2	HPS Simulations	Summer 97
Armored Fist	NovaLogic	4/97
Battles of Alexander	Interactive Magic	Spring 97
Birthright	Sierra	4/97
Blade Runner	Virgin/Westwood	10/97
Blood	Apogee	Spring 97
Boggle	Hasbro Interactive	6/97
Buccaneer	SSI	9/97
Dark Earth	Mindscape	Spring 97
Dark Reign	Activision	Summer 97
Demon Isle	Sierra	10/97
Dominion	7th Level	Spring 97
Dungeon Keeper	EA/Bullfrog	4/97
European Air War	MicroProse	Summer 97
Fallen Haven	Interactive Magic	Spring 97
Fallout	Interplay	Spring 97
Freedom 5600 Audio Adapter	Diamond	Summer 97
Front Page Sports Golf	Sierra	4/97
Front Page Sports Baseball 97	Sierra	6/97
Front Page Sports Skiing	Sierra	10/97
Flying Saucer	EA/Any River	7/97
Grand Slam 97	Virgin	Spring 97
Hardball 6	Accolade	7/97
History of the World	Avalon Hill	4/97
iF22	Interactive Magic	Spring 97
Imperialism	SSI	9/97
Interactive Gamepad (USB)	Alps	Summer 97
Journeyman Project III	Broderbund	Fall 97
Last Express	Broderbund	4/97
Marvel	Mindscape	Spring 97
MicroLeague Baseball 6.0	MicroLeague	Spring 97
Mig Alley	Empire	Summer 97
Myst 2: Riven	Broderbund	Summer 97
Napoleon in Russia	Talonsoft	Spring 97
NFL Legends	Accolade	9/97
Quarterback Club 98	Acclaim	Fall 97
Quest for Glory 5: Dragonfire	Sierra	Christmas 97
Pacific General	SSI	7/97
Panzer General II	SSI	11/97
Pentium Pro w/MMX (Klamath)	Intel	Summer 97
Pictionary	Hasbro Interactive	9/97
Pro Pilot	Sierra	4/97
Reach for the Stars II	SSG/Microsoft	Spring 97
Rebel Moon Rising	Fennir Wolf	7/97
Red Baron II	Sierra	5/97
Redneck Rampage	Interplay/Xatrix	5/97
Return to Krondor	7th Level	Summer 97
Sabre Ace	Virgin	Spring 97
Shadows of Riva	Sir-Tech	Spring 97
Shivers 2	Sierra	4/97
Ship of the Line	SSI	Fall 97
Spider Man: Venom Factor	Byron Preiss	Spring 97
StarCraft	Blizzard	6/97
Starfleet Academy	Interplay	Spring 97
TFX: F-22 DID		4/97
Triple Play 98	EA Sports	Spring 97
Twinsen II	Activision	6/97
Ultima On-Line	Origin	Spring 97
Unreal	Epic	5/97
VR Baseball	VR Sports	Spring 97
Warlords III	SSG/Broderbund	7/97
Wes Craven... Fear	Cyberdreams	10/97
X-COM: The Apocalypse	MicroProse	Spring 97
Zork: Grand Inquisitor	Activision	Fall 97



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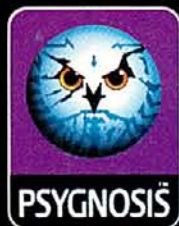


[Discworld II features the voice of Eric Idle,
former star of Monty-something-or-other.]



DISCWORLD® II

MORTALITY BYTES!

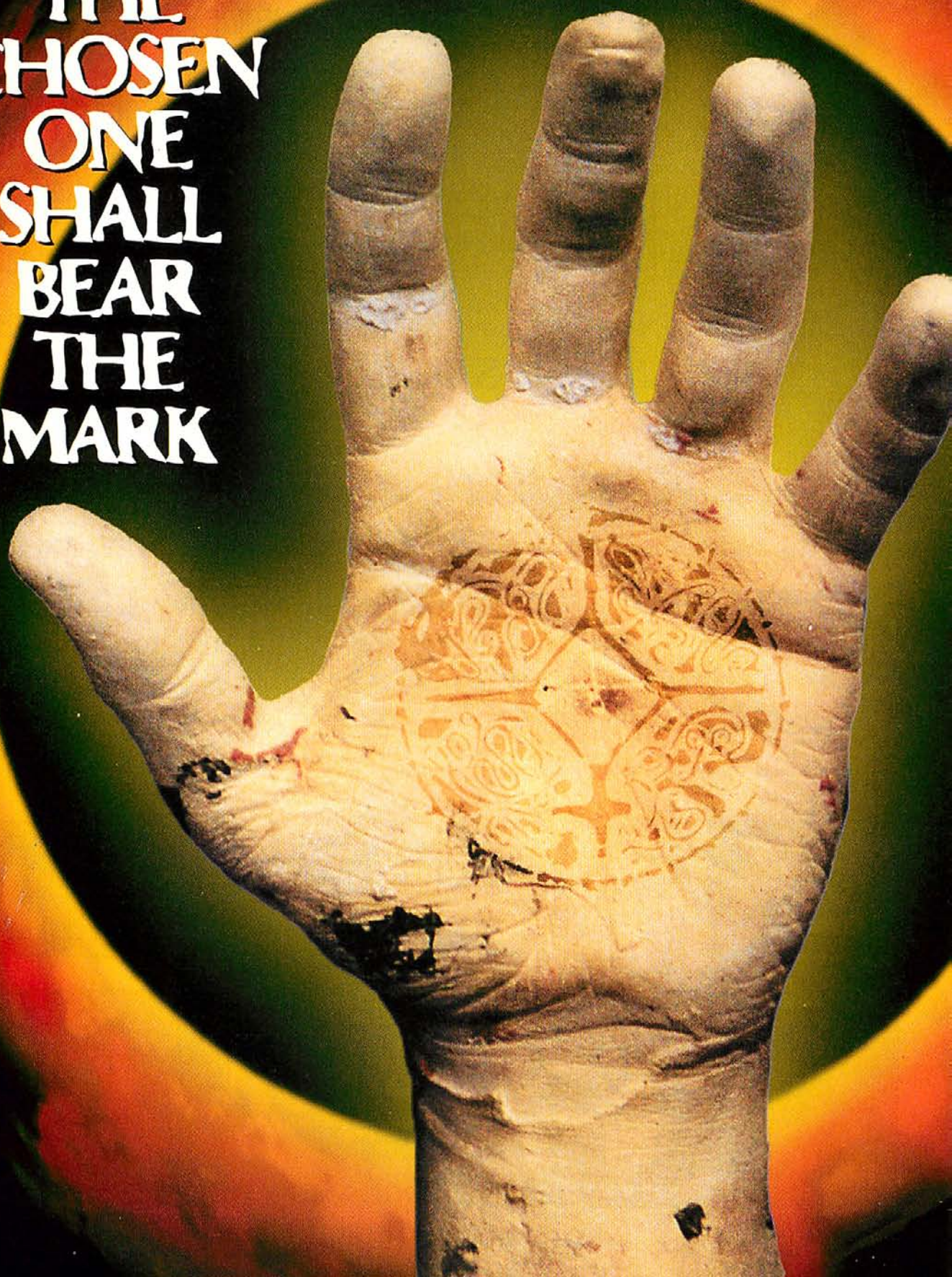


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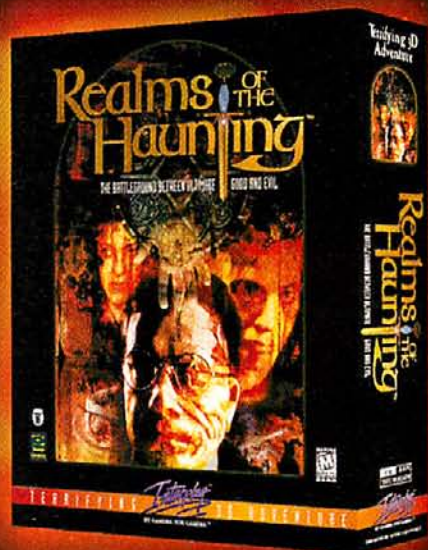


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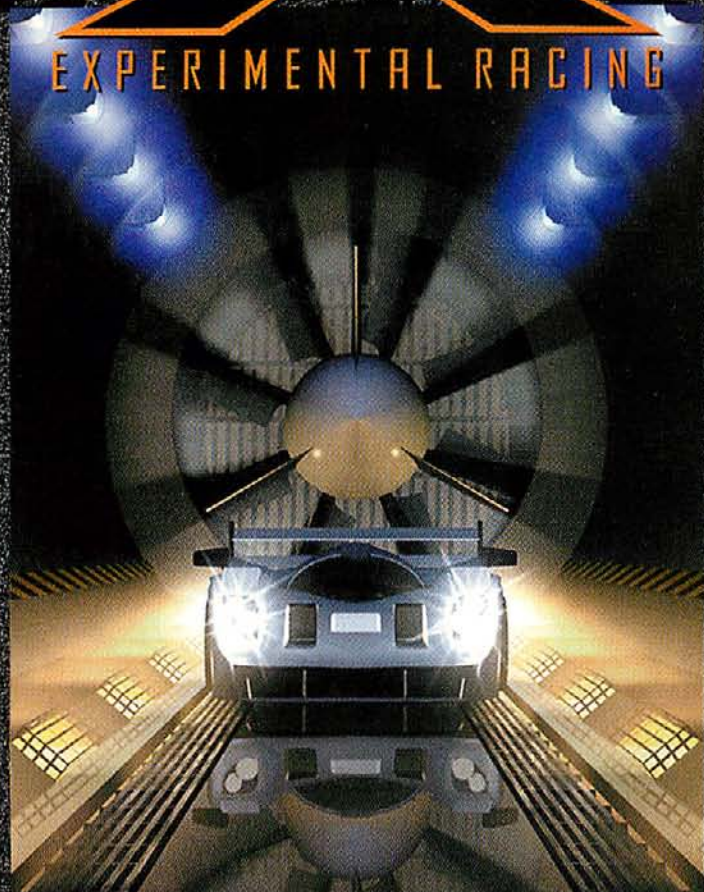


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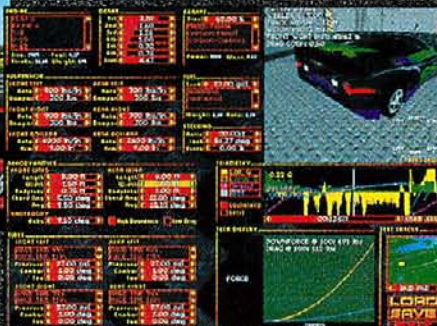
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #389

Target Release Date May, '97

Developer Nova Logic

Publisher Nova Logic

On The Warpath

Skirting the Line Between Action and Simulation, COMANCHE 3 Is on Target

by Denny Atkin

Over five years ago, NovaLogic set standards for graphic excellence with COMANCHE. This classic helicopter arcade/sim's Voxel Space graphics were so impressive that they sent many gamers scurrying to their local hardware stores to pick up bleeding-edge 25MHz 386 PCs.

When COMANCHE 3 hits software stores, the loud thump you'll hear will be the collective sound of gamers' jaws dropping all across the country. NovaLogic's Voxel Space 2 technology is astoundingly successful at creating a realistic combat environment. Get a little altitude and graphics reach the quality of intro animations.

MODEL IMPROVEMENTS

Although the original COMANCHE looked good, the play was strictly arcade. The helicopter had a low fixed ceiling, and the handling qualities were more than a bit optimistic. This time, things have gotten a bit more serious. While you can still choose to fly in an arcade mode, there's also a more realistic flight mode. The ceiling has been moved up to 2,500 feet (any higher and you'd be toast in real life, anyway), and the helicopter's handling is much more realistic. It's not going to cause any AH-64D Longbow fans to switch allegiances, but it's realistic enough so that more serious sim pilots will have little trouble suspending disbelief.

Your Comanche is equipped with a good variety of implements of death and destruc-



HIND SIGHT It's fairly easy to take out Hinds with Stinger missiles, but watch out for the highly-maneuverable Hokums—they're a much bigger challenge.

tion. In addition to rockets, Hellfire and Stinger missiles, and your 30mm chain gun, you can also direct your wingman to fire at targets, and—in some missions—call in artillery barrages. The attack envelopes of each weapon are nicely modeled. For example, rockets must be fired straight at a target, while Hellfires can



VALLEY OF THE DAMNED The hills are alive...with the sound of SAM launches. Flying through the valleys is the best way to stay intact.

be launched from behind cover. A wide variety of air and ground targets—Hinds, Hokums, SAM launchers, T-80 tanks, and more—present themselves, and blow up in spectacular fashion when hit with the proper weapon.

Only a few sample missions were in place in the beta I examined, so it's unknown how well the enemy AI will progress as you work through missions. The first COMANCHE had a bad habit of adding challenge by throwing most of the Warsaw Pact's forces at you at once. From the sample missions included with COMANCHE 3, the linear campaign missions seem more grounded in reality.

GRAPHIC EXCELLENCE

Like the original, COMANCHE 3 is a good game wrapped in a great graphics engine. You've never seen terrain in any game that looks this good. In various missions you'll encounter rolling hills, steep plateaus, flat deserts, and snow-covered tundra. You'll actually find trees in some regions, and said foliage can even be destroyed if you're not feeling particularly environmental. This is the one of the best-looking games I've ever seen without the aid of a 3D card. While it doesn't have the clean appearance of a 3D-accelerated game, it has a level of detail even those games don't yet sport. Add top-notch Dolby-enhanced sound effects—ranging from explosions to infantry calls for help—and you have an unmatched audio-visual environment. The graphics will cause a wide variety of gamers to check COMANCHE 3 out, and gameplay that's nicely balanced between action and simulation should keep most of them around for the wild ride. ☺

Target Release Date June, '97

Developer MicroProse

Publisher MicroProse

Talkin' 'Bout My Generations

Roam the Corridors of the Enterprise in This Action/Adventure Game

by Elliott Chin

Space...the final frontier. How many of us have wanted to say those words, command the *Enterprise*, and save the galaxy in the nick of time, just like our favorite starship captains? Soon, gamers and trekkers alike will be able to step into the shoes of Captain Picard and maybe even into those of the best starship commander of all time, James T. Kirk. It'll then be up to you to stop the evil scientist Soran in Spectrum Holobyte's adaptations of the successful *Star Trek: Generations* movie.

WOLF IN THE FOLD

STAR TREK: GENERATIONS is being billed as an action game, but this title plays more like a jumble of different genres, and the resulting brew isn't half bad. *GENERATIONS*, due to ship in the late second quarter of '97, is equal parts space combat and first-person action/adventure. Added to these two styles of gameplay will be a space navigation

portion, where you move from planet to planet.

Navigation takes place in stellar cartography, the interactive planetarium from the movie, where Data and Picard walk onto an observation deck that appears to be thrust into the very depths of space. From this screen, you scan for Soran, as well as enemy Romulans and Klingons, and then send away teams to various space stations and planets.

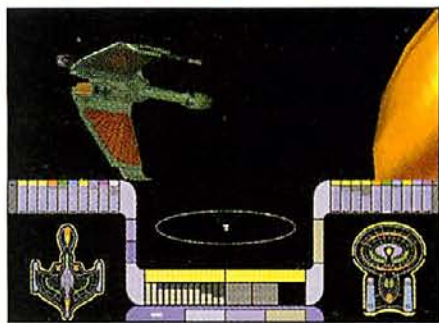


WE'RE NUMBER ONE Riker's on the receiving end of a phaser blast. The first-person gameplay does have action, but there is also a good amount of adventure elements and puzzle-solving here.

ENGAGE

Once you've identified an enemy fleet or a place of interest, you can enter space combat or the first-person action mode. Space combat is simplified, but there are such options as redirecting energy to different systems (such as shields and weapons) and targeting specific locations on enemy ships (such as engines or weapon systems).

The first-person aspect of the game looks very much like any other first-person 3D shooter. However, the gameplay isn't quite as cutthroat. As



CURSED KLINGONS You'll fight the Duras sisters and the dreaded Romulans in the arcade-style space combat sessions.

a member of the away team, you'll explore abandoned installations, derelict space stations, and planet surfaces. There will be enemies to kill, but that won't always be the thrust of your missions. Some missions will also involve puzzle solving.

MAKE IT SO

The game also features many cut-scenes lifted straight from the movie. It's exciting footage, and seeing Jean-Luc giving orders in smooth full-motion video adds to the game's enjoyment.

The pre-beta version is only playable in separate sections, and some of the gameplay still needs tweaking. I hope that the first-person mode will be playable in SVGA graphics (the VGA graphics of the early version looked dated) and that the controls for action and space combat will allow for customization. Though the decision to release a game based on a two-year old movie is perhaps dubious (*First Contact*, not *Generations*, is fresh in everyone's mind), *GENERATIONS* still has the makings of a good "Star Trek" game. I hope that Spectrum can pull all the pieces together for the ultimate "Star Trek" adventure. ☞



ANALYSIS, DATA This is the stellar cartography room from the *Generations* movie. During the game, you'll track Soran from here, and use this room to travel to different locations throughout the galaxy.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #136

Target Release Date March, 1997

Developer Activision

Publisher Activision

Groovy Wheels

Activision's New Action/Sim Takes You Back to the Days of 'Fros and 8-Tracks

by Elliott Chin

With a funky disco soundtrack and dialogue straight out of a "Starsky and Hutch" show, Activision's muscle-car action/sim *INTERSTATE '76* takes you back to the days of bell bottoms, the Bicentennial, and afros. In this alternate '70s universe, auto-vigilantes have taken the law into their own hands by adding guns and rockets to their muscle cars and wreaking havoc on criminals all across the American Southwest.

COOL, MAN

You play Groove Champion, a vigilante trying to avenge the death of his sister and stop a gang of auto-thugs from destroying America's oil reserves. You aren't alone, though. An afro-wearing hotshot driver, Taurus, drives alongside you early in the game, and will continue to help you with briefings on your missions.



LIGHTS OUT *INTERSTATE '76* is a detailed action/sim, with a realistic driving model, *MECHWARRIOR 2*-like customization options, and day and night missions.



The game's main campaign, called a TRIP (Totally Realistic Interactive Project), has over a dozen missions, broken up with plenty of cut-scenes that flesh out the game's story. Each mission plays out on a variety of terrain, such as highway, gas stations and open desert.

Although it's primarily an action game, Activision's claim that *I-'76* is a realistic simulation isn't that far off the mark. Bumping into cliff-sides will damage your car, while head-on collisions with buildings will send your vehicle up in a cloud of smoke. Your tires leave skid

marks on the desert floor, and even the suspension is realistically modeled.

As in *MECHWARRIOR 2*, *I-'76*'s action is much more detailed than a standard action game's. During missions, your car will get damaged from gunfire and from reckless driving, so between missions, you'll have to repair your vehicle. Your weapons also have limited ammo, which you will have to conserve and restock. In between missions, you can choose from 25 different vehicles, loosely modeled on '70s muscle cars, and 20 different weapons such as machine guns, flame throwers, grenades and missiles. You can even buy a few non-essential items that simply add to the atmosphere of the game (such as cup holders).

AN ACTION PARTY

INTERSTATE '76 will have multiplayer support for wild vehicular mayhem. You can play what Activision calls "Multi Melees" in over a dozen arenas that mirror the TRIP's variety of terrain. Before each melee, you will have to select your chassis and then outfit the car according to your tastes. *QUAKE* DeathMatchers who rely too heavily on the rocket launcher for their kills will be penalized if they take the same strategy in *I-'76*, as the "Multi Melee" scoring system awards more points to those skillful few who record kills with less powerful weapons. Activision hopes to add Internet play, taking advantage of the company's NetMech experience, before the game ships.

You will need at least a Pentium 90, and even then you won't be able to play at high resolution with all textures on. However, if you have the horsepower, you'll find that at its highest resolution and graphic quality, the game looks great, especially when played with the smoke and ricochet effects on. It's a truly hip gig, man. ☿



MAIN MAN These are the two main characters in the game, Taurus and Groove Champion. You play the blond, mustachioed Groove.

Win 95 is cool, but sucks with DOS games!



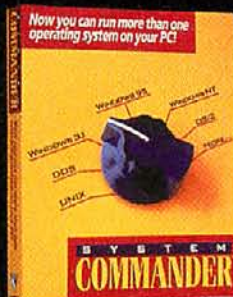
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #384

'Mech Killer



The Makers Of MECHWARRIOR 2 and MECH 2: MERCENARIES Turn Their Guns On Battletech With HEAVY GEAR. With a Richer Universe and New Weapons, HEAVY GEAR Features a Much More Realistic Combat Environment

BY JOHNNY L. WILSON

After the smash hits MECHWARRIOR 2 and MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES, Activision has decided to bite the hand that bleeds them. When FASA opted to regain control of their MechWarrior property,

Activision licensed a new game universe and abruptly turned—guns blazing—on FASA's upcoming MECHWARRIOR 3. Now, it's dueling giant robot games, with Sierra's EARTHSIEGE 3 in danger of getting nailed in the crossfire.

HEAVY GEAR uses an enhanced version of

Activision's popular MW 2 engine, but the game's universe is strikingly richer and more realistic than anything I've seen of its kind. Instead of the sparse *Battletech* universe where combat usually involves a small number of 'mechs, HEAVY GEAR's universe includes a much wider variety of military units and combat tactics. As a result, realistic military tactics for combined arms play center-stage in HEAVY GEAR's drama. He who has the biggest armored assault unit doesn't always win. It may well be that he who has the most well-placed artillery or the closest assault aircraft will win. It may also be that he who has the fastest Gear will win. However, one thing is certain, this isn't your father's *Battletech*.

Getting In Gear

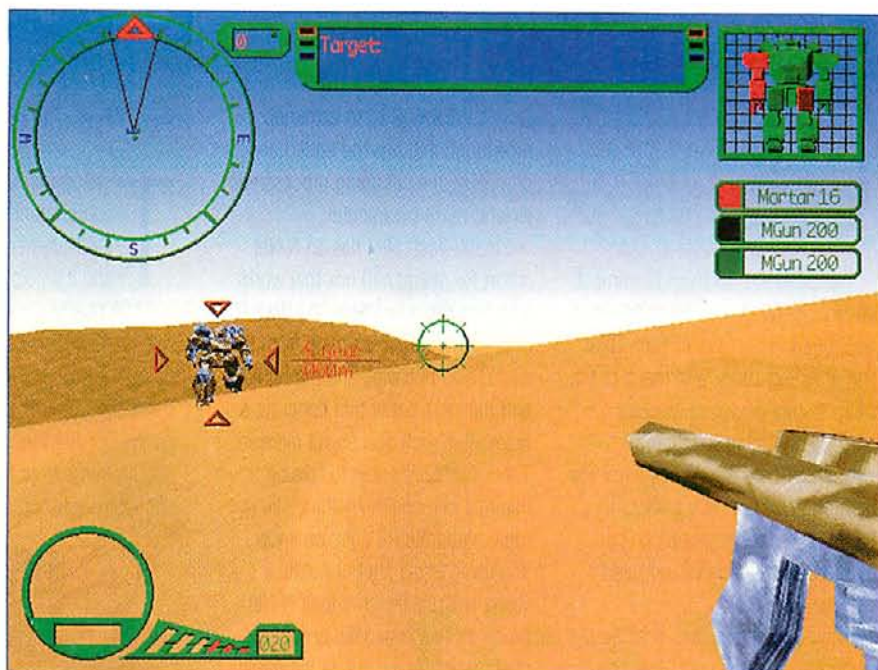
HEAVY GEAR is the future of war—hot, fast, violent, and deadly. Imagine Bosnia and Vietnam rolled into one, a civil war with guerrilla overtones in the far future. So, terrain and objectives dictate tactics in HEAVY GEAR, and one-on-one engagements between two giant robots are decidedly rare. The giant robots, or Gears, in HEAVY GEAR are not restricted to lumbering walks and jump-jet assisted aerobatics, but have secondary movement systems consisting of wheels and treads, or both. The game world posits a planet with rough terrain, so bipedal technology was the most effi-



RITE TO BEAR ARMS A Grizzly model Gear rushes down a grassy hillside in bipedal mode.

cient movement mechanism. Yet, there are some smooth surfaces on the planet, so they can move faster and use less energy by rolling. This will be depicted in the game with fluid animation for rolling Gears.

In **HEAVY GEAR**, the pilot is seated in the chest of the Gear, viewing the action from exterior sensors. The input is displayed on a laser crystal screen inside the pilot's helmet. This fictional detail has two very important effects on gameplay. First, it means that there are no cockpit struts to deal with, so the Heads Up Display is full-screen rather than broken up. This allows for easy-to-read controls like the new wrap-around radar/compass display. It also allows for new special effects like the wire-frame damage display to see how badly you've trashed your enemies. Second, it means that a damaged sensor array can force the pilot to look through a small viewing slit. Naturally, this will give you a very reduced view and add a nerve-racking challenge to gameplay.



HUD'S UP! The new Heads-Up Display used in **HEAVY GEAR** offers a less obstructed look than the constricted cockpit in **MECHWARRIOR 2**.

A COWARD AND A TRAITOR

The background story for **HEAVY GEAR** is the same as the story for the pen-and-paper game. The year is AD 6132 and Earth has experienced a second Ice Age. After migrating to equatorial regions, the survivors made space colonization a high priority. At first, the population tried to find habitable planets using generation ships, but these efforts failed. Eventually, they discovered that worm holes could lead to other star systems. Shortly after the establishment of several colonies, a war broke out on Earth and the colonies lost contact with the mother planet. On Terra Nova, the planet where all of the computer game action will take place, the colony balkanized into approximately 10 city-states. Eventually, these small city-states banded together into larger factions. The Confederated Northern City-



LT. BROCKTON



SGT. SCOTT

States (CNCS), complete with their Gears, named after carnivores like Jaguars and Grizzlies, began to fight the Allied Southern Territories (AST). The AST units fought in Gears named after reptiles, like Mambas and Iguanas.

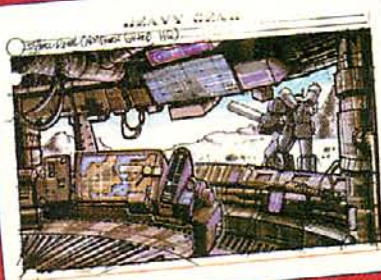
The set-up for the first computer

game seems very compelling. Your unit was captured by an enemy force. You eventually escaped, but you couldn't bring help before the rest of the unit was executed. Your character is labeled a coward and a traitor. To make matters worse, your commander's son was a member of the unit that was killed. Guess how popular

you are at your base? The only one who still believes in you—your girlfriend, who happens to be another Gear pilot—is then captured by the enemy.

Naturally, the game will feature an Instant Action

option for those who don't want to bother with the story. However, those who like to have story interwoven with their battle scenarios will enjoy the elaborately produced cut-scenes in **HEAVY GEAR**. Those who like story elements will also enjoy the fact that characters who appear in the cut-scenes will also be heard in voice-overs on the battlefield and some may die or become wounded on the battlefield, increasing the number of ethical dilemmas faced by the player.





Weapons are the heart of combat, and I particularly like the handling of weapons in *HEAVY GEAR*. Each Gear has grasping claws, and many of the weapons are designed as giant analogs of human hand-held weapons. Some heavy weaponry can be mounted on a Gear's shoulders, but most of the weapons can be picked up by the claws and used very quickly.

Analog weaponry has enabled the design team to create a Gear construction utility that is more versatile than any 'mech lab in the *MECHWARRIOR 2* products. The construction utility features "snap-on" graphics and easy database modification so that you can build robots on the fly in WYSIWIG (What You See Is What You Get). In the past, even the limited 'mech lab tools allowed you to change the functionality of a 'mech, but not necessarily the way it looks in the game. *HEAVY*

GEAR's WYSIWIG is an extremely nice touch that has the added benefit of making the salvaging process easier and more meaningful.

Finally, each pilot has an N-Net (short for neural net) box that works with him like a low-tech *Star Wars* R2 unit. The N-Net boxes learn from the pilot's own behavior, and the human and net work better and better as a team after each successful mission. The N-Net boxes start to take on a minimal personality (nothing like the more elaborate R2 units we know and love). Pilots shot out of their Gears will usually grab their N-Net boxes as they evacuate, because starting over is painful. In the game, a veteran N-Net unit will boost the pilot's control over various functions on his Gear. Consequently, players will hate losing their N-Net boxes.

New Gear Resolutions

Those who are worried that Activision is simply going to place *HEAVY GEAR* atop an unimproved *MECHWARRIOR 2* engine will be relieved to know that this is not the

LET'S MECH A DEAL

Getting Your Bearings In The 'Mech Universes

Tracing the paths of giant robot game licenses through their related companies is like trying to track a pack of Novas from a BattleMaster. So download this data into your onboard computer and it'll help you rapidly identify the combatants.

FASA practically invented the giant mechanized fighting vehicle genre with its *Battletech* game world. Since 1986, FASA has offered its *Battletech* products for role-playing fans. In July, 1987, FASA licensed the *Battletech* universe to Activision for use in the first 'mech combat game on the PC. But the first product to appear under the license was a role-playing game from Infocom, *THE CRESCENT HAWK'S INCEPTION*. It was developed by Westwood Studios, the *COMMAND & CONQUER* folks. At the same



Check out the designer notes on *MechWarrior 3* at <http://www.computergaming.com>.

time, Dynamix was defecting from EA and began building the 3Space engine.

Activision struck a deal with Dynamix to use its 3Space technology in building the first *Battletech* combat sim, now known as *MECHWARRIOR*. The game was a solid success on the PC, selling close to 100,000 units at a time when few PC games did.

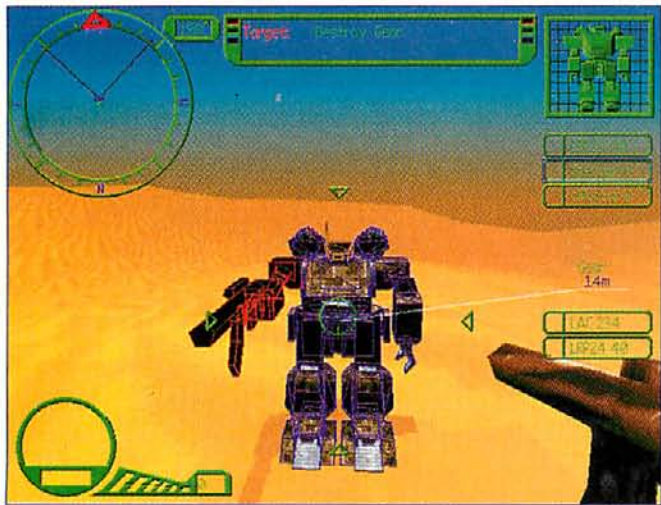
In the early '90s Activision began work on a sequel to *MECHWARRIOR*. Dynamix was now part of Sierra and, ironically, working

on the first *EARTHSIEGE*. Then, the first Activision team encountered plenty of unanticipated difficulties. After years of delays and several design team changes, the company released *MECHWARRIOR 2*, *MW 2: GHOST BEAR'S LEGACY*, and *MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES*, all of which more than doubled their ancestor's sales.

Now, FASA wants the franchise back and, just as Activision has grown to dominate the giant robot genre, the partnership is over. That means that FASA—not Activision—will release *MECHWARRIOR 3*, currently in development. FASA is adapting its *Battletech* virtual reality game (playable at Virtual World Entertainment centers) to the PC, but this will be FASA's first PC game for home users.

Without rights to the *Battletech* game universe, Activision could have opted to design its own giant robot universe from scratch, but the *MECHWARRIOR 2* design teams advised against that. The teams suggested that they would end up with a universe like Sierra's *EARTHSIEGE* series, where the technology is excellent, but the background wasn't as involving and deep as *Battletech*. The team felt this had hurt *EARTHSIEGE* and didn't want Activision to make the same choice. So Activision went out and bought the license for a new giant robot role-playing game, *Heavy Gear*, from Dream Pod 9.

Finally, to make matters even more confusing, Spectrum HoloByte has purchased a FASA license for a real-time strategy game using the *Battletech* game universe. That means that between now and next spring, we can expect four all-new, giant robot games to play out our futuristic combat fantasies.



HOT WIRED! The red wire-framed display shows this target Gear about to lose an arm. You don't have to look at a separate enemy damage display in *HEAVY GEAR*, just keep your eye on the enemy.

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Circle Reader Service #354



case. Activision isn't throwing away their successful engine, but there are a host of changes. First of all, the new engine supports 640x480 resolution and Direct 3D support out of the box. This means that you get 3D card support from the start; you don't have to wait for an enhanced version. It also means that D3D will handle the potential floating point problems with new MMX systems.

Also, **HEAVY GEAR** will feature rolling terrain, more detailed texture mapping, terrain interaction, and terrain deformation. In terrain interaction, the Gear's performance can be either impeded or improved, depending on the surface type. It also means that Gears will be able to duck and cover behind 3D objects in a dense, detailed terrain world. It's amazing what a difference it makes to have your enemies disappear behind sand dunes

and reappear over the rise or duck behind the corner of a building. Terrain deformation means that there are not only more "live" buildings that can be pockmarked and destroyed by fire, but that structures and terrain will have a campaign persistence. Destroy a building in one scenario and that building stays destroyed throughout the campaign. If that building happens to have strategic significance as a reloading center for ammo or a communications center for calling in air strikes, you could be hurting.

Gear And Loathing

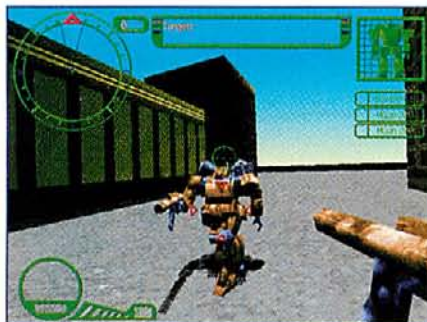
Jack Mamais, the Director of both **MECHWARRIOR 2: GHOST BEAR'S LEGACY** and **MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES**, is particularly thrilled to be working with a new universe. Currently working on the

DESERT FOX In a tactic similar to those in desert tank battles, Gears can go virtually hull-down behind sand dunes and spring an ambush at the optimal time.

HEAVY GEAR role-playing game (a '98 product to follow the combat simulation), Mamais contended, "In the past, we were constrained to tell stories that had already been told. Now, Dream Pod 9 has agreed to publish stories from the computer game in the paperback universe." He also suggested that **HEAVY GEAR**, in both its boardgame and computer game form, will benefit from its **ANIME** look (Anime is the popular Japanese animation style used in films like *Robot Carnival*, the grand animated robot battle, and made-for-television videos like *Macross*, the original title of *RoboTech*.)

High Gear

Rather than rehashing the past glories of the giant robot genre with **HEAVY GEAR**, Activision has the potential to create its future. The competition from **EARTHSIEGE 3** and **MECHWARRIOR 3** will be savage, but **HEAVY GEAR** has a great lineup. With more combat options and vehicles, increased terrain interaction, persistent terrain deformation (destruction is persistent through the campaign), cleaner HUD design, better animation, and more Anime-style story than its predecessors, **HEAVY GEAR** is likely to keep the metal fires burning into the next millennium. ☺



URBAN GUERRILLA The urban environments in **HEAVY GEAR** are denser, more detailed and more varied than those used in the **MECHWARRIOR 2** series.

HERCULEAN COMPETITION

Not content to be an "also-ran" in the Battle of the Giant Robots, Sierra's Dynamix division is pulling out all the stops for this Fall's **EARTHSIEGE 3**. Dynamix created the original **MECHWARRIOR** for Activision, and from meeting with **EARTHSIEGE 3**'s development team, it appears the group is tired of all the newcomer upstarts stealing its glory.

On a recent visit to Dynamix's offices in Eugene, Oregon, **CGW** got an early look at the engine that will power **EARTHSIEGE 3**, and we were quite impressed. An even further evolution of the updated 3Space technology that will power **RED BARON II** and **X-FIGHTERS**, the engine convincingly and smoothly rendered fully-textured 3D hills, valleys, and flatlands. In fact, the textures were so realistic and inviting (even before 3D card support) that we were surprised when Hercs were unable to travel into the water.

Missions will be of much greater scope than in earlier **EARTHSIEGE** games. Look for hovercraft, tanks, and other vehicles to play a part in the larger battles—all of which you can pilot, in addition to the 'Mech-alike Hercs. The Cybrid enemies now have a menacing, organic machinery look that should add nicely to the game's atmosphere. It's still a bit early to call the game, but with all the user suggestions Dynamix is incorporating into the game, it looks like **EARTHSIEGE 3** may have what it takes to grab the attention of even devoted **MECHWARRIOR** fans.



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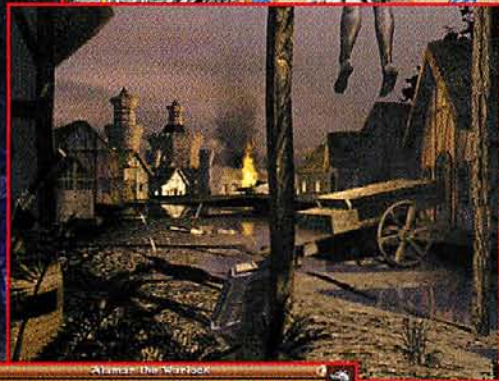


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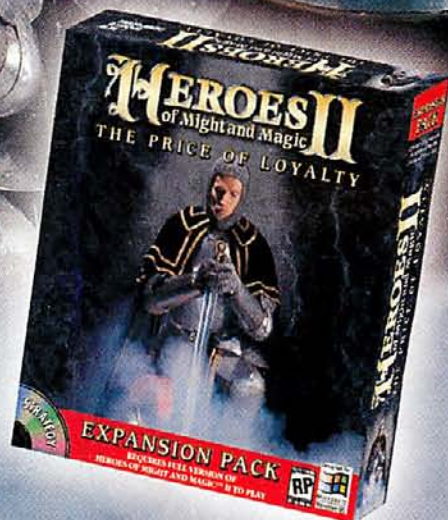
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Cracks In The Windows

Microsoft's DirectX: Promises Broken, Promises Kept



Utter the word "DirectX" in a room full of computer gamers, and you'll get a variety of reactions. Some will nod, knowing that DirectX is the collective name for the set of software interfaces used to create Windows 95 games. Others will scowl at you, some because they scowl at any mention of Microsoft, others because of the bad memories some Windows 95 games gave them over various installation headaches—especially joysticks. Some—a substantial minority—will run from the room screaming in terror, remembering how they had to completely reinstall Windows 95 and all their applications after trying to get something so prosaic as a computer game to run. And finally a few—a scant few—will smile happily,

having had wonderful experiences with easy installation and good gaming.

When Microsoft shipped the Windows 95 Game SDK featuring the DirectX Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) nearly two years ago, they were trying to deliver on a promise: a standard set of APIs that would make life easier for game developers and users alike. The DirectX APIs have delivered on that promise for developers, though DirectX3D is still something of a question mark.

But the boys in Redmond made another big, and deceptively simple, promise: All you should have had to do was slip in a CD-ROM, and the game would install and launch; no muss, no fuss.

Right.

Unfortunately, in their zeal to make life easier, they neglected to talk to very many users, or even keep up with what was going on in the world of DOS gaming. In truth, in the last 18 months, DOS games have become remarkably easy to set up and run. Several third party companies offered tools

for audio, graphics, and installation—and some were pretty solid.

By the same token, DOS itself is simple and clean—there simply aren't a lot of layers of software hidden underneath. The upside of the arcane command line prompt is uncluttered simplicity.

COMPLEXITY BEHIND THE EASE

Windows 95, on the other hand, has many layers, most hidden from users, making not only troubleshooting difficult, but also performance tuning. The penalty paid for ease of use is complex, intertwined layers of software. Don't get me wrong—I like Windows 95 a lot, but remember, I've been hanging around computers for a long time (I can even spell "UNIX").

Ironically, Windows 95 wouldn't be so painful for gamers if it weren't for DirectX. Yes, these APIs that have made life easier for developers have become a nightmare for many users. Part of the problem is the open nature of the PC, with more possible hardware configurations than driver writers

could ever dream of. In DOS you had to worry about three things: if your sound card was supported, if you had enough lower DOS memory, and if your graphics card had a VESA SVGA graphics driver.

With DirectX, you need to

“ Slip in a CD-ROM, and the game would install and launch; no muss, no fuss. Right. ”

LAB NOTES



DIRECTX 3.0A FIXES MMX AND SETUP BUGS

► If you rushed out and bought a spanking new system running the Intel P55C MMX Pentium, you probably experienced

a double whammy running DirectX (i.e., Windows 95) games. First, the MMX Direct3D driver had some display problems. Second, your new MMX system probably came with Windows 95 service release 2 (a.k.a. OSR2). When a DirectX 3.0 game was installed on a system

running Windows 95 OSR2, it would reinstall DirectX without asking every time. You can download the DirectX 3.0a update from Microsoft's Web site, www.microsoft.com/mediadev/download/isdk.htm.

worry about multiple versions of your Windows graphics drivers, plug-and-play headaches with your sound card, getting a dedicated game card to be recognized, whether or not networking conflicts with your game... the list is seemingly endless. Every time you solve one problem, another seems to pop up to confront you. The DirectX installation routine just makes things worse. Who hasn't shuddered at the message "Your video drivers are not certified for DirectX. Do you want to install new drivers?"

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T OVERWRITE IT

Of course, some game developers compound the problem. One of the really nice features of Windows 95 is CD-ROM AutoPlay. Unfortunately, in their zeal, developers have done really "friendly" things, like run the DirectX installation routine in a kind of auto-pilot mode, happily overwriting your carefully crafted, rea-

sonably stable Windows 95 configuration.

Then there's the issue of technical support. One of the promises Microsoft kept was that DirectX would help reduce technical support costs, a serious issue in the game biz. If you make a single tech support call, all the game company's profit from that game you just bought goes out the window. Fewer tech support calls means having fewer support engineers, lowered infrastructure costs, and so on—everybody's happy.

As anyone who has perused the Usenet news groups or the game forums in some of the online services knows, the volume of support problems has seemingly increased. I've had to walk several gaming buddies through the hassle of downloading and reinstalling recent drivers for their graphics card when a DirectX installation completely hosed their Windows 95 installation—even the game wouldn't run.

SEE BILL RUN

Then there's performance. Gates himself said the goal with DirectX is no more than a 10 percent performance hit in the worst case—and in the best case, you'd see performance increases. It is true that some systems using recent components actually do see performance gains running Windows 95 games, but just as many users—some with older hardware, some with new—have seen serious performance degradation. Sometimes it's due to outdated drivers, but other times it's a far more arcane problem.

Take the fact that Windows 95's TCP/IP stack can cause your system to pause every few minutes because it's polling for a Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) server, which supplies dynamic IP addresses. Some ISPs use DHCP to ration IP addresses, giving you a session-specific address in lieu of a fixed one. Two possible solutions are either to use a fixed IP address, which your ISP may not like, or to un-bind TCP/IP from the Ethernet card. Loyd Case, the gearhead, loves digging into this type of technical stuff. But why should Loyd Case, the gamer, have to spend his valuable time worrying about it?

THEN THERE'S DIRECT3D

When Microsoft bought Rendermorphics, and with it, Reality Labs (a.k.a. Direct3D), they bought a decent tool-set for writing real-time, 3D graphics applications. In fact, Direct3D (D3D) is one of the better software renderers, meaning your system's CPU handles the chores of turning 3D geometry into images you see on the screen. Unfortunately, the world is moving to hardware 3D accelerators, where D3D's performance is spotty. Hardware vendors have expressed dismay over performance hits they've encountered (sometimes upwards of 50 percent) running on D3D as opposed to their own chip-specific APIs. The most recent release of GL_QUIKE, along with id Software's abandonment of a D3D version of their flagship 3D shooter, doesn't bode well for Microsoft's 3D API.

Another problem is that D3D offers a somewhat rigid framework for graphics hardware vendors to support. For example, D3D doesn't make use of bus-mastering direct memory access (DMA) to move data across the PCI bus, putting cards which can use DMA, such as those based on Rendition's Verité graphics chip, at a disadvantage.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Windows 95 gaming is not all that bad, and works surprisingly well most of the time. But it's far from the panacea the marketers at Microsoft promised (surprise, surprise). From many users' perspectives, DirectX-based games have simply replaced one set of headaches with a new, unfamiliar set of others.

Over time, Windows 95 will evolve into a fully 32-bit operating system—likely absorbing parts of Windows NT in the process—and the current state of DirectX will get better. But there's still a long road ahead for all of us.

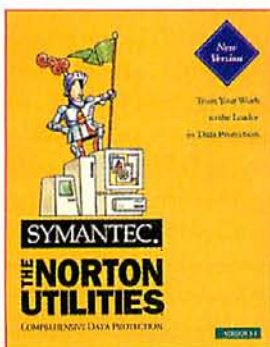
As game designers become more comfortable with the tools, and as Microsoft begins to take gamers more into account, things will get better. Until then, remember to keep your latest drivers handy, back up your Windows registry before installing a game, and invest in a good un-installer utility. ☿



DRIVER'S ED: EDITING THE REGISTRY DATABASE

► In the old days, Windows kept all information on drivers and installed software in WIN.INI and SYSTEM.INI. While those files still exist in Windows 95, the modern way is to edit the Registry database. This consists of two hidden files, USER.DAT and SYSTEM.DAT, which live in your Windows directory.

The easiest way is to make backup copies using XCOPY or some other copying method. You should do this before installing a new Windows 95 game or piece of hardware. Don't run REGEDIT, the registry editor, and use the export function. If you make some changes, then re-import the old data (it's only merged with the

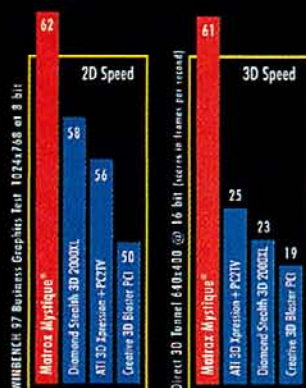


new stuff), rather than returning to the old state.

► The latest version of Norton Utilities has a registry tracker, allowing you to make multiple backups of the registry. In addition, it supports the new FAT32 file system and has some other cool features, so you might consider getting it.

If you do, don't run System Doctor by default, as it eats CPU cycles you might rather have for that demanding Windows 95 game.

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*Estimated street price for 2 MB. **Game bundle available with retail version only. All performance tests conducted by Matrox Graphics Inc. on a Dell Dimension P200 V configured with Intel P5-200 MHz, 16 MB of SDRAM and 256K cache. Matrox Mystique, Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 XL and ATI 3D Xpression + PC2TV were configured with 2 MB of memory for the PCI bus using driver release 3.30, 4.03.00.2105 and 3.0 respectively for Windows 95. Creative 3D Blaster PCI was configured with 4 MB of memory for the PCI bus using driver release 1.01 for Windows 95. Winbench 97 business test conducted at 1024 x 768 resolution with 8-bit color at 75 Hz refresh using small fonts under Windows 95. Microsoft Tunnel test run at full screen 640 x 400 resolution with 16-bit color at default manufacturer refresh rate based on Gouraud shading, perspective correct textures, point sampled and z-buffer.

Push It, Click It, Pull It, Flick It: the New Crop

of Game Controllers

Control Fetish

by Loyd Case

One of the most personal decisions gamers make is their choice of controller. Everyone has an opinion, from those who demand the utmost realism to those who want a fast, comfortable gamepad for fighting games.

A few years ago, you could find a few joysticks (of varying quality) and maybe one gamepad for the PC; if you wanted anything else, you were out of luck. Then CH Products shipped their original yoke and rudder pedals, but these seemed limited to the Microsoft FLIGHT SIMULATOR set. This began to change when Thrustmaster burst onto the scene with their original WCS—a combination analog throttle and button controller that introduced the concept of HOTAS: Hands On Throttle And Stick. Other vendors realized that there was money to be made in controllers, and the trickle became a flood. This month, we'll look at a variety of game controllers, but we'll leave the high-end, hyper-realistic flight controllers, throttles, and rudder pedals for next month.



PHOTOS BY JOHN POPPLEWELL

Gamepads

CH Gamepad

The Gamepad is CH's first shot at the gamepad market. It's a very basic, but sturdy, gamepad with a good feel and simple controls. The button presses seem very solid and the response to trigger presses seems quick. The thumb dish is pretty tightly sprung, however, which can lead to some fatigue after prolonged use. This solid, inexpensive controller is a good choice for people who only play the occasional arcade game against a computer.

Pros: It's simple, inexpensive, and has a good feel.

Cons: It's too simple for some newer games and has no multi-controller capabilities.

CH Gamepad: \$29.95
CH Products
 (617) 598-2518
www.chproducts.com



Creative Labs GamePad

Though known for their sound and graphics boards, Creative Labs offers an inexpensive, very easy-to-use digital gamepad for about \$30. The GamePad is DirectInput-compatible, and you can run two GamePads with a standard joystick Y-cable.

In terms of game-play, the GamePad is very responsive, and has two index-finger buttons that can be mapped as third and fourth buttons, or can be programmed for different

functions. A utility for programming comes with the GamePad, as does a copy of *BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN*.

The only downside is that the buttons and thumb pad both feel soft and a little flimsy, and an overzealous gamer might wear this controller out pretty quickly. But the GamePad is very comfortable for gamers with larger hands, and is very affordable. It also offers easily-configured dual user mode with two controllers. Overall, it's a fine controller for part-time arcade or sports title players.

Pros: It's inexpensive, designed for larger hands, and responsive.

Cons: Its overall feel is somewhat soft, and it may not withstand prolonged hard use.

Creative GamePad: \$29.95
Creative Labs
 (800) 998-1000
www.soundblaster.com



Gravis GriP

Gravis advertises its GriP as a gamepad system, which is a pretty accurate description.

The street price for one of the GriP kits is over \$100, but you get two gamepads and the multiport module for your money.

While the gamepads themselves are responsive and quick, the Multiport hub is the real heart of the system. Refreshingly, it only requires a single game port connection, but supports up to four GriP-compatible devices and two standard joysticks. The pads themselves support an analog mode, so any game that uses an analog joystick can use the GriP. However, when the GriP is in digital ("GriP") mode, the pad can be programmed with key-strokes using a Windows 95 utility, GriPKey. If a game supports GriP mode—many EA sports titles do—the pad is a



little more responsive than in analog emulation mode, though the action is light and fast in either mode. The combination of easy multiplayer setup, nice feel, and a high degree of flexibility makes the Gravis GriP a real winner if you can afford the entry fee.

Pros: Up to four players can use one module; it's also light, with quick response.

Cons: Pricey to get started, and there are cheaper single player solutions.

Gravis GriP: \$115.00 (two pads and multiport module)
GriP kit: \$29.95 (2 pads only; must own GriP module)
Advanced Gravis
www.gravis.com

Control
Fetish

Gamepads

Gravis Gamepad Pro

Last year, when Gravis shipped the GriP, it got a lot of attention for being a great game controller, but its high entry price put some people off. Gravis has now shipped an updated version of their venerable Gamepad, right down to the little detachable joystick handle. It looks a bit like a lite version of a Sony PlayStation controller.



This gamepad felt very nice under my hands—it was very responsive to trigger presses and pad action. The assembly felt good in my hands, too; however, those with larger hands might want to look elsewhere, as it is a bit on the small side.

A flip of a switch will turn the Gamepad Pro into a standard analog gamepad. It comes with a dual-headed connector, so you can add a second player easily, and you can plug into the GriP hub where it's fully compatible. It looks like Gravis has come up with a real winner.

Pros: Two player support (more with GriP Hub), a good feel, and quick response.

Cons: Skippy manual, and the gamepad assembly is too small for larger hands.

Gamepad Pro: \$34.95

Advanced Gravis Computer Technology
(604) 431-5020
www.gravis.com

Thrustmaster
Phazer Gamepad

As with its joysticks, Thrustmaster has put its own spin on the



gamepad, offering a fully programmable device in the Phazer. The Phazer has very light but precise action, and it actually works reasonably well as a crude driving controller. There are also switch-selectable settings for standard analog gamepad and fully programmed Phazer mode.

Unfortunately, the Phazer is a little clunky to program, and occasionally programs wouldn't take, even after downloads. Once you get it working with a game, though, you'll probably like the feel, if you can remember which control performs which function.

Pros: It's programmable, has an analog throttle, comes with many options, and has a light control action.

Cons: Expensive for a stand-alone gamepad, and its programming tools are finicky and too complex.

Phazer Gamepad: \$69.95
Thrustmaster, Inc.
(503) 615-3200
www.thrustmaster.com

Microsoft Sidewinder

At first blush, the Sidewinder looks like a killer gamepad. It feels good to the touch, too, but extensive play reveals a couple of warts. First, it's a Windows 95-only controller. It will work with DOS games, but only if they're launched directly from Windows 95. Since FX FIGHTER consistently crashed from Windows 95, we had to get a demo version of FX FIGHTER Turbo (a Windows 95 game) to test the Sidewinder. Second, the Sidewinder's action is solid and quick, but despite the seemingly ergonomic feel, my fingers grew weary after about 15 minutes. However, one nice feature is the ability to daisy-chain up to four Sidewinders for multiplayer action.



Pros: Easy setup in Windows 95, a good feel, and multiplayer support.

Cons: Can be tiring after long play, doesn't work in DOS, and is problematic with dedicated game cards

Sidewinder Gamepad: \$50
Microsoft Corp.
(206) 882-8080
www.microsoft.com

Catching the Next Bus: USB

1997 is shaping up as a year when PCs sprout several new appendages. Intel's Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) will move graphics data off the PCI bus. But perhaps a more important arrival will be the Universal Serial Bus (USB), which will most likely replace serial, parallel, keyboard, mouse, and joystick ports. With a USB hub on your desktop, you'll only have to run one USB cable down to your CPU box, a welcome change from the spaghetti mess most of us currently endure.

Why does this matter to gamers? Anyone vexed by an analog joystick whose calibration drifts after a while will welcome USB, as will any gamer with multiple game controllers for different types of games. In addition, USB gaming devices should all but eliminate the CPU overhead that current analog gaming devices create.



USB has two data rates: 1.5-Mbits/sec and 12-Mbits/sec. Game controllers will operate at the slower data rate, which is still an order of magnitude faster than current joystick ports. USB will also allow devices to be hot-swapped while your PC is on. It gets better: USB can accommodate up to 63 devices.

Many new game controllers have digital input, and USB versions of them will most likely hit store shelves later this year. Logitech, Thrustmaster, and Alps (Alps Gamepad shown at left) have already announced USB devices, and others will follow suit.

Should you wait for USB? If your system has Triton II CPU support logic, it's most likely USB-ready with a BIOS update. Some companies have USB controller cards in the works for older systems. But, Microsoft has yet to provide the key missing ingredient: Win 95 support of USB, which should come out later this year. If you want to wait for USB, save your pennies for a higher-end USB controller later this year.—Dave Salvador

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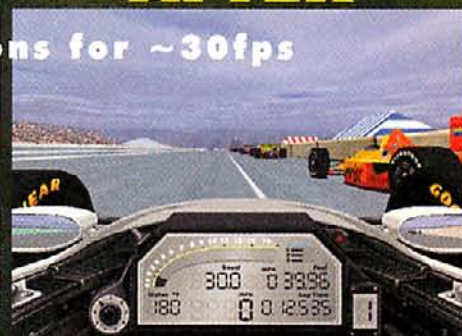
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IndyCar II with SVGA Graphics

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AFTER



IndyCar II with Intense 3D 100 Graphics

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Joysticks

There seems to be a lot happening in the joystick arena, with new sticks arriving almost daily. Since we weren't testing high-end flightsticks, we decided to play a little MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES with our joystick collection. Just for grins, though, we also took a spin in F22 LIGHTNING 2.

Eagle Max

It's nice to see a fresh face in the joystick game. At first glance, the Eagle Max seems like a clone of the Microsoft Sidewinder Pro, but closer examination reveals an interesting rocker switch on left side of the base and a better-feeling,

contoured handle. The stick has a nice action, but the potentiometers seemed a little on the jittery side. The tiny view-hat control behaved inconsistently as well. The programming tools were easy to use, and the rock-



er switch was very handy; we set it up as the reverse key for MERCENARIES, so it was very easy to switch directions in the game—this was great when used in combination with the built-in throttle wheel. Overall, the Eagle Max feels like a very solid first effort.

Pros: It has a light feel, good centering, and easy programming.

Cons: The action is a bit jittery.

Thrustmaster
X-Fighter/Top Gun

The X-Fighter and Top Gun flight sticks are the latest embodiments of the original Thrustmaster FCS. These sticks are modeled after the flight stick in the F-4 Phantom, one of the classic jet fighters of all time. Both sticks just feel good to the hand, although the X-Fighter's massive base and full-sized stick gave it the edge in our eyes—but it costs more, too.



X-FIGHTER



TOP GUN

For those with smaller hands, the Top Gun is a nice, 2/3 size incarnation of the X-Fighter, with the same features, but a smaller base and somewhat lower-cost components. Our biggest problem with either of these sticks was the seemingly variable dead zone (the area in the center of the stick that represents "no input" to the game). Also, the action of the sticks felt a bit imprecise, which made targeting in MERCENARIES a bit challenging, but in F22 I had no problems.

Pros: These are the latest versions of FCS—with lots of game support, a weighted base, and a good hat.

Cons: The action is imprecise, and the dead zone is randomly variable.

X-Fighter: \$59.95

Top Gun: \$39.95

Thrustmaster, Inc.

(503) 615-3200

www.thrustmaster.com



Gravis Blackhawk

The Gravis Blackhawk is a nice, light, low-cost 4-button joystick. It works well, has a good feel, and has a throttle wheel, though it lacks a viewpoint hat. One weakness is that it feels a bit too light, and those who are, shall we say, highly enthusiastic, might be a bit hard on this one. Overall, however, it's a solid, low-cost stick.

Pros: Good feel, inexpensive.

Cons: It's a little too light, and lacks a viewpoint hat.

Blackhawk Joystick: \$34.95
Advanced Gravis Computer Technology
(604) 431-5020
www.gravis.com



Gravis Firebird

Gravis first entered the programmable joystick market with the Phoenix, a stick that still enjoys a near-fanatical following among some game players. The Firebird was a slightly less expensive version that retained most of the features of the Phoenix except for the twist control. Gravis has updated the Firebird by adding the same contoured handle as the Blackhawk, and it feels much more comfortable to the hand than the original Firebird.

Unfortunately, there were some odd problems, mainly having to do with a lag between pressing the trigger and the associated

weapon actually firing. This is somewhat disconcerting, and caused at least one involuntary ejection from my BattleMech. The programming tools are DOS-based, but very easy to use.

Pros: Improved grip and easy programmability.

Cons: Trigger delays, and the joystick has jittery action.



Firebird 2 Programmable Joystick: \$89.95
Advanced Gravis Computer Technology
(604) 431-5020
www.gravis.com

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NEC

There are a few controllers that don't easily fit into other categories, but certainly have their place. With 3D shooters coming out of the woodwork, a new host of curious controllers have come to market providing alternatives to the traditional keyboard/mouse combination. Also, a gaggle of driving titles has helped usher in several driving controllers, bringing a little more realism to these games. Depending upon your gaming tastes and budgets, you might want to check these out.

SpaceOrb 360



At first glance, the SpaceOrb 360 looks like a gamepad with a cancerous tumor on one corner where the pad controller is. In fact, the ball that takes up a quarter of the left side of the controller offers a full six degrees of freedom—fancy language meaning that the controller works in 3D space.

The SpaceOrb takes a lot of getting used to, but if you're heavily into 3D shooters, this might be just the controller you want. My most frustrating issue with QUAKE, for example, is looking up and down while moving. SpaceOrb's QUAKE driver allows you to free-look while running in circles, jumping up and down, and shooting.

The initial learning curve is steep, though, because the ball is quite sensitive, and operates in every direction. You definitely need to develop a light touch. Until you get the hang of it, it's very easy to over-ster, which in QUAKE or DUKE 3D means a toe-tag. Another reason for developing a light touch is to prevent your left hand from getting fatigued.

There is one other problem with the SpaceOrb 360: After playing DUKE and QUAKE with the SpaceOrb for a while, it will be very, very difficult to go back to the keyboard and mouse....

Pros: It's a true 3D controller that works very well in 3D shooters.

Cons: Steep learning curve, and it needs a serial port.

SpaceOrb 360: \$99
Spacetelec IMG
(508) 970-0330
www.spacetelec.com



Powerramp

The Powerramp looks like one of those



arcade control platforms available for a number of console game units. It uses only a keyboard pass-through (no game port needed). You can program it with the keystrokes you want (as with the Eagle

max, up to 10 keystrokes per button) or you can download a preset program. It's a fun controller for games like TOMB RAIDER and other 3D shooters.

Pros: It uses only a keyboard connector, and has easy programmability.

Cons: Its keystrokes occasionally lag.

Powerramp Arcade Controller: \$59.95
Act Laboratory, Inc.
(604) 278-3650
www.actlab.com/gamegear

Grand Prix 1



Thrustmaster pioneered the concept of HOTAS for flight controllers. Now they've brought that concept into the relatively low-cost Grand Prix 1 racing wheel. All you need for most driving games is on the main base, including the wheel itself, two trigger buttons (duplicated on the wheel) and a pair of paddles vaguely reminiscent of driving aids for the disabled.

After using it, though, I would be reluctant to return to a more traditional driving wheel with foot pedals. Once you get used to the paddles for throttle and braking, the driving wheel is very easy to use. It only took about half an hour to get up to speed on INDYCAR 2, a game that has always made me feel like I needed to go back to driver's ed class. If having all the controls on the wheel doesn't bug you, then check it out. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Pros: Hands-only throttle and steering for the driving set.

Cons: It's not the most realistic driving controller.

Grand Prix 1: \$89.95
Thrustmaster, Inc.
(503) 615-3200
www.thrustmaster.com



First-Person Gaming Assassin



Another new kind of controller is First-Person Gaming's Assassin, which has been designed primarily for first-person shooter games like QUAKE, DOOM, and DUKE 3D. The Assassin resembles a track-ball, but connects to your joystick port, and is used together with your joystick, which is con-



nected to the unit. Assassin's configuration software is DOS-based, but pretty straightforward. A Windows 95 DirectInput driver was in the works at press time. Also, documentation is detailed, with setup instructions for a dozen titles.

Like Spacetelec's SpaceOrb 360, we had to get through a learning curve before the Assassin got really fun. On the upside, Assassin provides excellent free-look control, allowing minute movements in QUAKE and DUKE 3D, handy for shooting through those hard-to-reach places.

If you're a hard-core action gamer, you may want to consider the Assassin as a tool of the trade.

Pros: Allows very smooth free-look in 3D shooters.

Cons: Somewhat steep learning curve, and it requires editing of config text files for each game.

Assassin: \$49.95
First-Person Gaming
(510) 264-9577
www.fpgaming.com

Wingman Warrior



At first glance, the Wingman Warrior looks like a fairly standard flight controller, until you notice the

spin-knob. The knob is used to spin your character, which makes the Warrior suitable for 3D shooters. It was a gas firing up DUKE NUKEM 3D with the Wingman Warrior setup. The stick is configured so that side-to-side action of the stick strafes (i.e., side-steps) while the knob spins you around. This makes for some very interesting tactics, like being able to easily run in an arc while maintaining your target acquisition. Bear in mind that it does require a free serial port, but it will not interfere with a mouse on another port.

The only downside, other than the use of the serial port, is that the documentation is spotty and inaccurate in a couple of cases. If you're heavily into 3D action games, you might give this one a close look.

Pros: Innovative design for 3D shooters and easy setup software.

Cons: So-so as a flight joystick, and it requires a serial port.

Wingman Warrior: \$99.95
Logitech, Inc.
(510) 795-8500
www.logitech.com



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The Most Respected Reviews
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REVIEWS

CG Choice Games This Month:

ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY



p. 86

NBA LIVE 97



p. 104

OVER THE REICH



p. 132

READER QUOTES

DEADLOCK

Like O.J. slapping a female reporter and saying, 'How dare you ask if I ever hit Nicole,' the CG Rating for DEADLOCK was FOUR STARS (Dec. '96)! Hello! How can a game that lacks even the slightest hint of single-player entertainment be handed a four star rating? Was everyone too amused by the pretty pictures? The single player diplomatic engine is a joke that doesn't even warrant a "harrumph!"

The research pool is about the weakest I've seen. Every species has to research the exact same technologies quickly in order to get ahead. The technologies don't vary in

the slightest from species to species, which I find ridiculous. The strategic research element of game-play is basically given the finger.—*Damien Foletto, via the Internet*

ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY

I guess maybe you are a bunch of wimps when it comes to good games that are a challenge. I believe you won't touch [AD], because you're not good enough to play a game that poses this kind of challenge. The story line is excellent and certainly the graphics are pretty darn good.—*Glen Lee, Kents Hill, ME*

See our review of AD this month.—*CG Wimps*

STAR TREK: BORG

I recently purchased STAR TREK: BORG from Simon & Shuster. It failed to work properly, giving me audio only. When I called the company about this problem, I was informed that they didn't have a solution yet.—*Terry Stewart, Chino, CA*

MYST

I like MYST. Why do you guys hate MYST so much? Your contempt for the game almost seems personal, like the creators of MYST slept with your spouses or something.—*Keith Brush, Los Angeles, CA*

Is that where they went? Now we really hate them.—*Ed.*

Review Quote Of the Month

"Al Lowe outdid himself by naming a big-breasted mother/daughter country music duo 'Wydoncha and Nailme Jugg.'"

—*Charles Ardai, reviewing LEISURE SUIT LARRY 7: LOVE FOR SAIL!*

HOW DO WE RATE?

We only review finished products, not pre-release versions. The ratings are as follows:

★ ★ ★ ★ Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.

★ ★ ★ ★ Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. It may have minor problems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.

★ ★ ★ Average: A mixed bag. It can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. It can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

★ ★ Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly-conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.

★ Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, ill-conceived, or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place.



The Lust Boat

Leisure Suit Larry Takes His Salty Act to Sea, but Is the Series Sinking?

By Charles Ardai

Fans of Sierra's long-running LEISURE SUIT LARRY series will be glad to hear not only that there is a new game out—LEISURE SUIT LARRY 7—but also that it ends with a promise by the designers to deliver, in short order, LEISURE SUIT LARRY 8. Even though fresh material and ideas don't appear to be in great supply, Sierra keeps churning these games out.

Installment number seven is subtitled LOVE FOR SAIL! and is set on a cruise ship. Number eight is referred to, variously, as LUST IN SPACE and LEISURE SUIT LARRY EXPLORES URANUS, and seems likely to be set on a spaceship. By the time Sierra gets to LEISURE SUIT LARRY 10, or 20, or 30—and I have no doubt they will—good old number seven will surely be remembered only as the one on the boat.

SHIP OF FOOLS

And really, what else can you say about it? It's just the one on the boat. The story is the same as in all the other titles: A naive, balding loser struggles to score with the chicks. The themes are relentlessly sexual, but the atmosphere is more masochistic than erotic. The female characters are raunchy, busty caricatures out of an adolescent's wet dream, with *Mad* magazine names like Drew Baringmore, Annette Boning and Jamie Lee Coitus. The male characters are mostly interchangeable hunks of beef with names like Rod, Dick, and Johnson.

Characters who do stand out do so only for their outrageousness: a foul-mouthed lady pirate named Peg, whose every third word is bleeped; a swishy male purser named Peter, in whom are aggregated all the clichés about gays from the past two decades of teen sex flicks; a passenger who



pays his way by making balloon animals, all of which come out looking like phalluses; and so on.

Is it funny stuff? Sure, some of it is, though a lot of it doesn't go beyond sniggering at dirty-sounding words and juvenile gross-out humor (How do you clear a crowded casino? Eat some bean dip and let 'er rip!). Surely this sort of thing would be more at home in "Beavis and Butt-

head" than in LEISURE SUIT LARRY. But even the funny stuff is, by and large, predictable. LOVE FOR SAIL is a clever pun, and some of the character names are brilliant (Al Lowe outdid himself by naming a big-breasted mother/daughter country music duo "Wydoncha and Nailme Jugg"), but otherwise most of the jokes are the obvious ones you'd come up with if asked to imagine a Larry game set on a ship: "blow the man down," "thar she blows," "long and hard and full of sea men," "yo, ho," and on and on. Is there anyone not still in grade school who will find these jokes fresh and witty?

THE QUICKER PICKER-UPPER

All the game's action (as it were) takes place on the P.M.S. Bounty, a "Love Boat"-style cruise ship under the command of the beautiful Captain Thygh. Each week, the captain chooses a different male passenger as her consort on the basis of his athletic prowess, sexual skill, talent in the casino, culinary brilliance, and fashion sense. The winner is awarded the Thygh's



Price: \$54.95

System Requirements:

486/DX2 66 or better processor, Windows 3.1 Win 95 or MS-DOS, 8MB RAM for DOS (12MB for Windows 3.1 or Win 95), 22MB hard disk space, SVGA graphics card, 2x CD-ROM drive (4x recommended), mouse, Sound Blaster or Windows-compatible sound card.

Of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive).

Designer: Al Lowe

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

Bellevue, WA 98007

(206) 649-9800

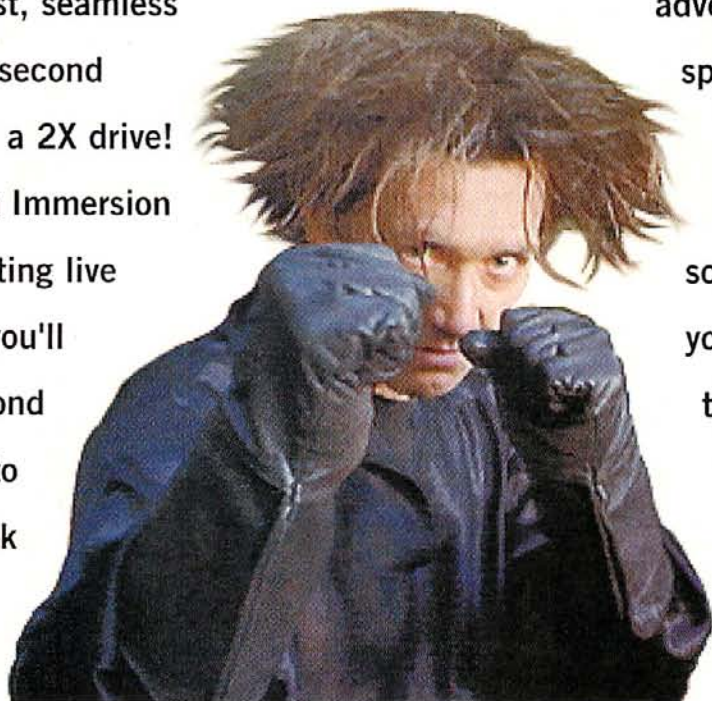
Reader Service #: 317



DOUBLE THE PLEASURE Larry has his hands full again in Al Lowe's latest R-rated joke-fest. Here we meet country/western mother-daughter duo The Juggs.

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in fur bikinis. (Unfortunately,
they want to kill you!)



These marauding kingsmen
need a hand. (Your hand!
And then they'll kill you.)



Up for a little face stomping?
(Before Geebo — yeah you
guessed it — kills you.)



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WHEN ARE THESE DUE? Among Larry's on-board tasks, he must woo the prim-and-proper ship librarian, Victorian Principles. Should he succeed, he'll be rewarded with a tour of one of the ship's more off-limits sites.

Man Tiophy. Our boy Larry wants to spend a week cruising on the captain, but he has his work cut out for him since he can't bowl, is no good at horseshoes, only *thinks* he's a great lover, throws snake eyes at the craps table, doesn't cook, and wears polyester outfits that date back to the first time John Travolta was popular.

LARRY DOES MACGYVER

That's the basis of the game's puzzles: One way or another, Larry has to win each event. This means turning the horseshoe pole into an electromagnet (so that it draws his horseshoes to it), persuading a sexually supercharged stand-in to have sex with the Lovemaster 2000 robot in his place, chemically treating the bowling ball and pins to make them more responsive to one another, making some special no-lose dice, whipping up a quiche that will drive three celebrity judges into an orgasmic frenzy, and convincing the world of *haute couture* that leisure suits are the height of high fashion.

That would be plenty to do in one game, but it's not *all* you have to do. There are also a half dozen women other than the captain, and to finish the game Larry has to make time with every one of them. There's also a mysterious woman in black, who hires you to kill her husband. In the game's most distasteful sequence you do just that, by jumping into the old man's bed and humping him to death (Larry then spends the rest of the game insisting that he's not homosexual). I certainly could have lived without that.

LOWE BROW

If you're a long-time adventure gamer, you'll recognize some familiar Al Lowe touches in the above description. Aside from the lip-smacking delight in smuttiness, there's the use of a single, fairly small environment to contain all the action (the entire ship comprises only about twenty locations) and the abundant interlocking, multi-stage puzzles.

However, the territory the game covers is familiar for other reasons as well. I already mentioned the "Beavis and Butt-head" overtones; the game also draws inspiration from earlier games such as Steve Meretzky's *SPELLCASTING 301*, *SPRING BREAK* and from TV shows like "Three's Company," which also featured a naive, bumbling loser named Larry whose sole goal was to score with chicks.

As it happens, though I don't much care for "Beavis and Butt-head," I am a big fan of both Meretzky and "Three's Company," and I'm generally fond of Al Lowe's work. So why did *LOVE FOR SAIL!* leave me a bit dissatisfied? Part of it may be the technical glitches. For instance, shipboard announcements play at random times throughout the game, often talking over important audio you're trying to hear. Another problem is the interface for using objects: The syntax always has to be "Use door with key" or "Use pot with cheese" rather than the more intuitive "Use key on door" or "Put cheese in pot."

But the bigger problem, I think, is that the series is showing its age. The graphics have never looked better and the puzzles

are fine, but how many times can you put this wretched lout through the same paces? How many times can you laugh at a relishing of the same dirty puns? Worst of all, when the designers run out of dirty jokes, they start making self-referential jokes about the earlier LARRY games ("There's nothing in the trash can," says the narrator; "But Al Lowe always hides something in the trash can!" Larry replies). It gets to the point where the writers start making jokes about how how predictable and lame their jokes are. Where can you go from there?

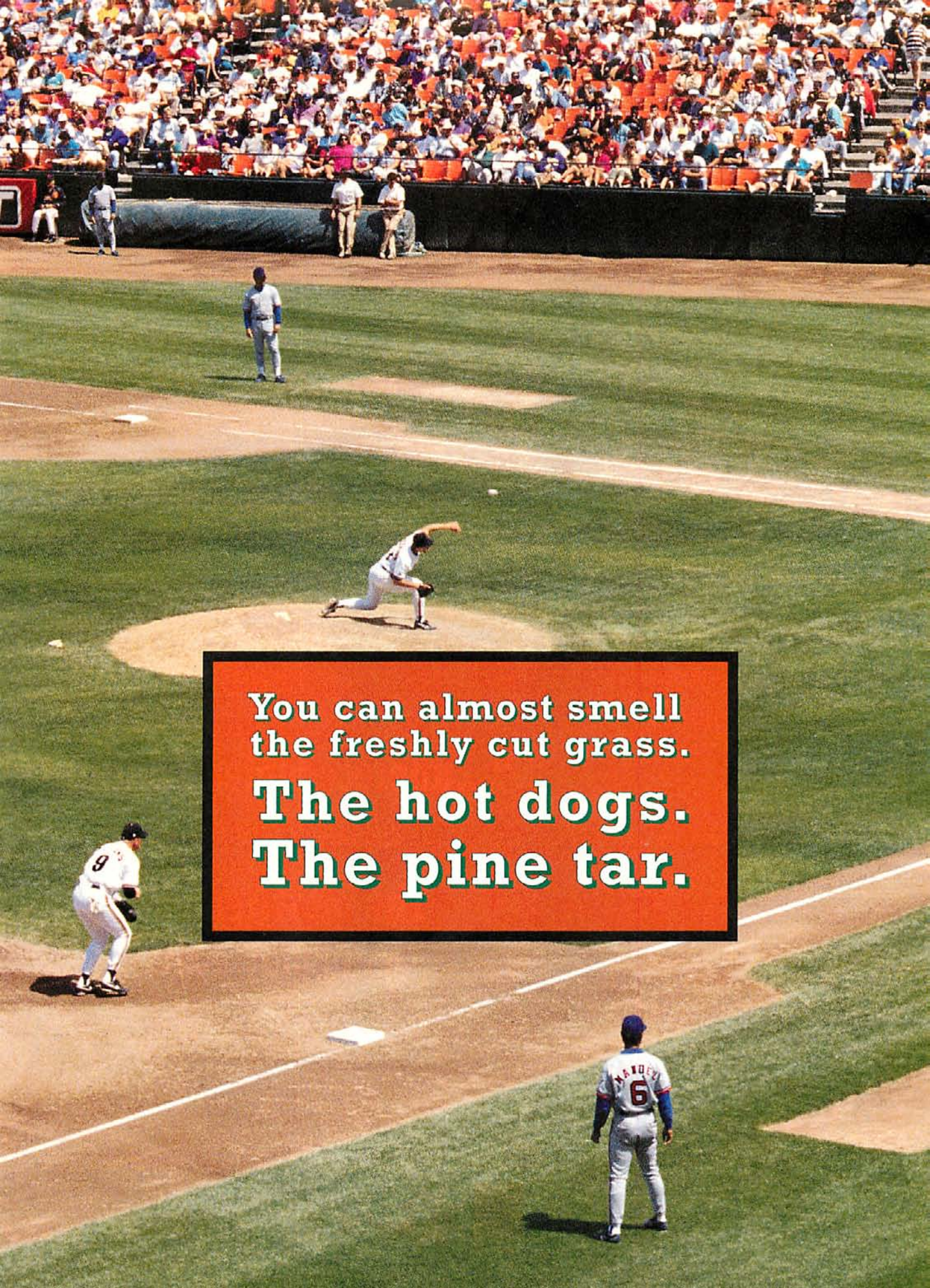
LOVE FOR SAIL! will probably sell a lot, and a year from now we'll be talking about the next sequel, but that doesn't change the fact that the whole affair is getting routine and more than a little limp. Al Lowe and his crew are having to work harder and harder to keep it up, and the effort shows. *LARRY 7* never rises above half-mast, and I have a bad feeling that number eight might not make it up even that far. ☹

APPEAL: People who enjoyed "Porky's" and "Hardbodies" in the theater and who haven't grown up much since.

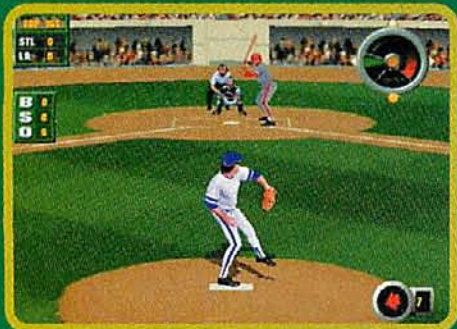
PROS: Few designers these days create puzzles as clever and well integrated as Al Lowe—no "collect the crystals" or "push the levers" here.

CONS: Relentlessly and repetitively smutty. Even smut-lovers may yawn when they can see the jokes coming from a mile away.

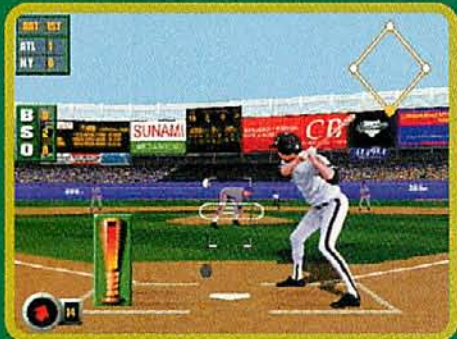




You can almost smell
the freshly cut grass.
The hot dogs.
The pine tar.



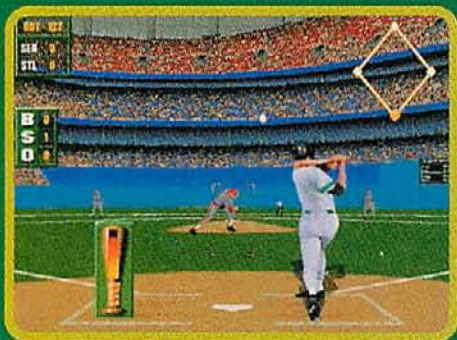
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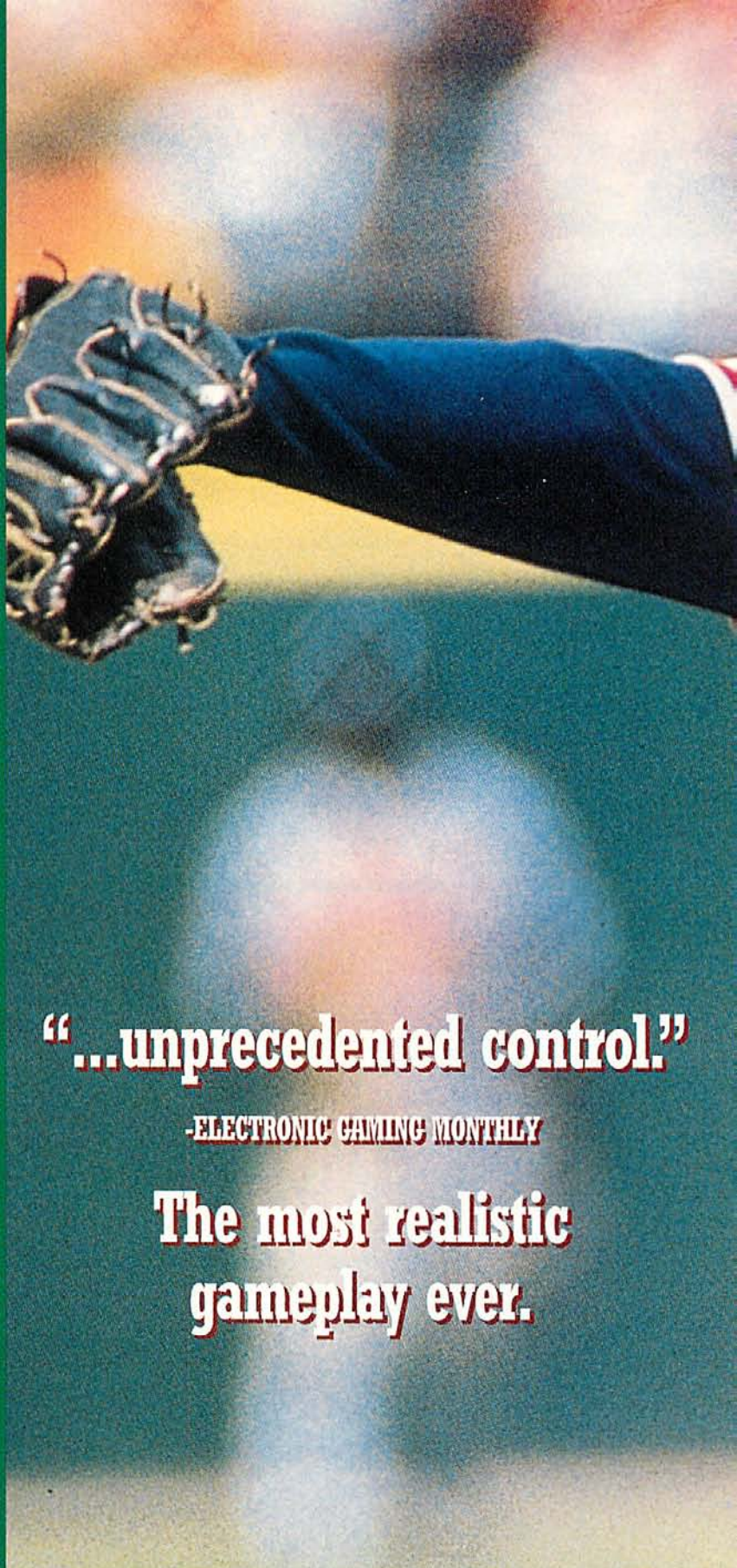
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High Spirits

AMBER: JOURNEYS BEYOND is Spooky, Fun—and Short

by Robert Coffey

With an emphasis on storytelling and spooky atmosphere, *AMBER: JOURNEYS BEYOND* succeeds where almost every other *MYST* clone fails. Sure, *AMBER* features the requisite photorealistic graphics and QuickTime video, but it stands head and shoulders above the rest of its ilk by featuring a plot which draws you in and engages your imagination. If the gameplay were the same caliber as the story, *AMBER* would be a truly fantastic game.

SPIRITS, SHADES, AND SPECTERS

AMBER begins with you receiving an email urging you to check on Roxy, a reckless ghost-chasing friend. It seems Roxy is eager to try out her new invention,

Maneuvering through *AMBER* is a snap with the game's stylish, unobtrusive mouse-driven interface. The minimalism of both interface and on-screen inventory puts the focus of the game where it belongs—on the unsettling environments.

And what environments they are. The designers wisely opted for ambient sound instead of a full musical soundtrack, and the effect is outstanding. Hushed wind, the low thrum of machinery, and pained creaking of floors make the sense of isolation and loneliness on Roxy's estate much more palpable than that awful cross of Yanni and John Tesh that plagues other *MYST*-influenced games.

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

AMBER uses quality art to add to the plot. There's detail not just in the wood grain of furniture, but in character-revealing touches that flesh out the lives of the phantasms you rescue. Detail is evident in the bigger picture as well, with the overall world of each spirit reflecting his or her personality and fate.

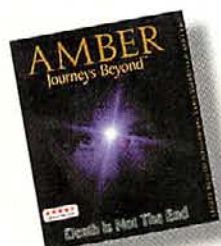
As great as these realisms are, you won't get to spend much time in them since gameplay is fairly limited. There aren't many puzzles tied into the plot, and those present are easy to figure out. While most problems involve finding and using objects that allow you to move forward, there is a slider puzzle, and an underwater rollercoaster that would be a maze if the different paths didn't all lead to the same



DIARY OF A MAD HOUSEWIFE Resolving the traumatic issues of each spirit will necessitate traveling to other dimensions, like the black-and-white 1943 world of this sad soul.

three places. An anticlimactic ending does little to help.

AMBER is a good game troubled by questions of what might have been. If gameplay were only half the quality of the rest of the game, *AMBER* would've been a real standout. Gaming novices can add a half star to this game's rating, since they are most likely to enjoy all that *AMBER* has to offer. More seasoned gamers...well, they can drop a half star or, better yet, buy *AMBER* for a newbie friend and watch over their shoulder. Odds are they'll see a personal style and vision seldom seen in the realm of *MYST*-like adventures. **E**



THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL Beautifully rendered graphics and evocative ambient sound create *AMBER*'s engagingly spooky atmosphere.

called Amber, that allows her to commune with the spirits that inhabit her Victorian home. Sure enough, you find her—in a seemingly lifeless state. It's your duty to don a spare Amber device and collect the fractured portions of her psyche, scattered across the otherworldly existences of three poltergeists, and to resolve the traumatic events that plague each spirit.

Price: \$45.00
System Requirements:
 486DX2/66 or faster processor (Pentium recommended), Windows 95, 8MB RAM (16MB RAM recommended), 25MB free hard disk space, 16-bit video card, CD-ROM drive (quad speed recommended), mouse, sound card. Macintosh version also available.
of Players: One
Copy Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Hue Forest Entertainment
Publisher: Graphic Simulations Corp.
 Dallas, TX
 (972) 386-7575
Reader Service #: 318

APPEAL: Gaming novices looking for a great introduction to adventure games; experienced gamers more interested in atmosphere than gameplay.

PROS: Outstanding synthesis of story, detail, and sound create an engrossing and wholly original game.

CONS: Puzzles unlikely to challenge even moderately experienced gamers, short playing time is disappointing.



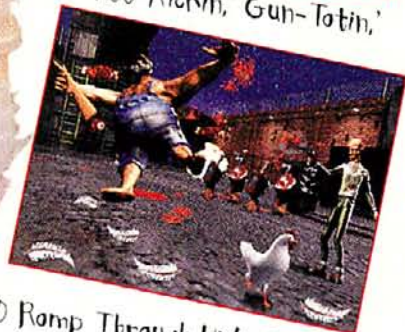
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Smooth Sailing

ARCHIMEDEAN's Deep Sea Action Blows the Competition out of the Water

by Gordon Goble

It wasn't long ago that Microsoft was busy priming us for what appeared to be the ultimate underwater adventure. An expansive marketing campaign filled our pliable minds with images and our imaginations with questions. However, as we soon discovered, the game was anything but fulfilling; in fact, it was little more than a pretty and uninspired nautical shooting gallery.

Now, hot on the heels of the debacle of DEADLY TIDE, Blue Byte Software is plunging us deep into our own oceans once again with the action/simulation/adventure game ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY. Is it another deep sea disappointment, or the product we had all hoped DEADLY TIDE would be? To this water-logged mind, DYNASTY simply blows TIDE out of the water.

war has rendered our planet's atmosphere uninhabitable—like we didn't know that was gonna happen. Fortunately, years earlier, extensive deep-sea mineral exploration left in its wake a whole slew of

oceanic hideaways—and the resources and knowledge to build more.

This new world, dubbed Aqua, became our only salvation. Those able to afford it took to the oceans, while the poor could do little but remain on the surface, presumably to wither and die in a nuclear winter wonderland. But soon we were up to our old political tricks once again with clans and power blocs, and the resulting skirmishes threatened even this final refuge. Nevertheless, common sense prevailed, and a nervous peace treaty was signed in 2650.

Eleven years have passed since that day. This is precisely when you enter the picture, in the guise of one Emerald "Deadeye" Flint, a mercenary who happens to be one hell of an underwater fighter pilot. He's also a bit of a rogue, but one with a basically good heart; the type of character you've undoubtedly controlled before. Flint, just coming off an unsuccessful assignment in escort of a sulfur transporter, is in a

quandary as the game begins, wondering why someone wanted sulfur bad enough to risk life and limb to get it.

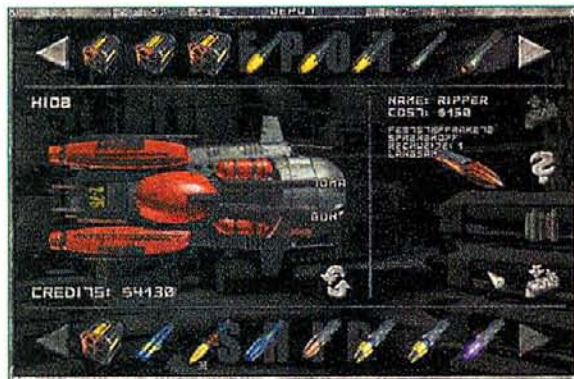
Your duty will be to guide Flint through sixty possible missions in this new world,

most of which involve deductive conversations and shipboard combat. Just how deep is this game? Well, with sixty underwater cities strewn across the globe, and a hundred characters with which to interact, the dialogue numbers are certainly up there. Then there's the progressively difficult action segments, conducted with a wide variety of upgradeable ships and weaponry, and an imposing set of controls. Let's look at a typical mission.

YOUR MISSION...

A typical mission will begin with some form of assignment, delivered in this case by Flint's game-opening bossman, the tough but respected El Topo. At this point, the interface will be a three-quarter view of Topo's Asylum, an aqua-city deep in the heart of the Argentine basin. The animation isn't quite up to that of DEADLY TIDE, but it's not that far off either, and you'll see light from tiny lamps filter through the water while ships dart about in the distance. It's dark, too, with a blue-green haze, as befits the ocean floor.

There are a number of accessible spots in the Asylum, each highlighted by a quick on-screen description. By moving the mouse over "El Topo's Office" and clicking, you'll immediately be taken to an



WEAPONS BAY In the adventure portions of the game, you'll talk to various characters, receive mission briefings, and then outfit your various craft with a dizzying array of weapons, defenses, and software.



SEA COMMANDER BlueByte's ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY is the best underwater action game out yet. It has excellent gameplay and fantastic aquatic realism, making it more similar to WING COMMANDER IV than DEADLY TIDE.

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Price: \$59.95

System Requirements: 486/100 or better, 8MB RAM, 35MB hard drive, VESA or PCI Bus graphics card, 2x CD-ROM, DOS 5.0 or higher, or Windows 95.

of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Massive Developments

Publisher: Blue Byte Software

Schaumburg, IL

(847) 534-7950

Reader Service #: 319

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CHARGING THE DEPTHS The action in *DYNASTY* is fun and fast, but also realistic. As you glide through the water, underwater currents could push your ship around.

audience with the big cheese himself. Dialogues are sometimes linear, but often take the form of multiple choice, so you had best put some thought into your responses, because *DYNASTY* won't give you any second chances. Generally speaking though, getting off on the wrong foot with somebody won't result in your demise—it'll just set you back.

Following your conversation with El Topo, you may want to hang out at some other spots on the base to find who's yappy and who's not. As Flint is pretty well-known in these parts, you'll have to deal with some pre-conceived notions. Following some astute gleaning, it might be a good time to check out your personal notebook, a wonderful portable contraption that you'll return to over and over.

In your notebook you can set game

preferences, such as sound; and a multitude of graphic options, including switching between Goraud- and flat-shading and having the ability to turn perspective correction on and off. You'll choose your control method (joystick/key-board combo is best) and difficulty level, save games, and turn cut-scene animation on or off.

With but a click of the mouse, your notebook will also reveal a world map with political lines drawn, a second map of the immediate zone, and all the conversational hints you've gathered, along with current tasks and missions.

Before heading out, there's the little matter of supplying your ship. *DYNASTY* pilots are offered a ton of weaponry, performance upgrades, and defense systems; it's all detailed in a separate and admirably illustrated weapons manual.

At first, the weapons manual is a lot to digest, with nearly two dozen torpedoes, a dozen guns, various types of shielding, and a bunch of other devices. But remember to monitor your spending habits when fitting your ship, because you won't take in more money until the successful completion of the next mission.

UNDER THE SEA

Once you're hunkered down in the cockpit, it's time for *DYNASTY* to switch to action mode. It'll take some time to figure out what does what inside your fighter, but flight sim junkies should find themselves right at home—with the added luxury of reverse thrust. Oh yeah, don't forget that you'll be flitting about in water, not air, with currents that at times may move your ship about involuntarily.

In battle, *DYNASTY* is simply an awesome achievement. Unlike *DEADLY TIDE*, you'll have full control over vehicle movement as you move from waypoint to waypoint and repel assaults from any manner of adversary. Your choice of armament is critical here, as some weapons work well with certain craft but not well with others. Tossing out decoys, drawing fire from your

ship with an array of moves, and hiding behind man-made structures or natural obstacles in the ocean floor are essential as the game proceeds and enemies become more able.

Being summoned unexpectedly from crisis to crisis in the midst of a mission is commonplace, so it'll take both quick reflexes and situational awareness to survive. If you do succumb to a particularly devastating attack, your floating, lifeless body will be on display for all to see; but the sporting nature of *DYNASTY* will offer another chance at that particular scenario.

With witty and intelligent banter, an ocean of playability, sim-like vehicular controls, and a convincing submerged environment, *ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY* is a winner on most every count. I did experience some problems when running the game through a Win 95 box, but with a straight DOS load and operation, it smoothed right out. This the the real underwater action game that the sci-fi sim/action crowd has been waiting for. **C**



THIS AIN'T SEA QUEST Though the graphics won't remind anyone of "Sea Quest DSW", the plot might. Earth's surface is ruined and the future of the world is now held underwater in oceanic cities that you must save from an unknown evil.

Liquid Assets

A RCHIMEDEAN *DYNASTY* scores on all fronts as a realistic and fun underwater action game. But to make sure the enemies don't score on you, use these cheats and turn them into shark bait. To enable cheats, hold down both Ctrl keys and type the appropriate number:

- Ctrl-Ctrl-0—Automatically completes current mission
- Ctrl-Ctrl-1—Makes your craft invincible
- Ctrl-Ctrl-2—Gives you unlimited torpedoes
- Ctrl-Ctrl-3—Gives you unlimited cannon shots

For more extensive tips and a walkthrough, point your Web browsers to Blue Byte's Web site at www.bluebyte.com. It's a PDF file, and you'll need Adobe Acrobat to read it.

APPEAL: Flight and space simmers itching for new worlds, action gamers who crave less gore and more action, and anyone who wanted to love Microsoft's *DEADLY TIDE*.

PROS: Realistic aquatic setting, in-depth weaponry and controls, witty dialogue, lots of conceptual imagination on display throughout.

CONS: Possible operational hassles in Win 95.



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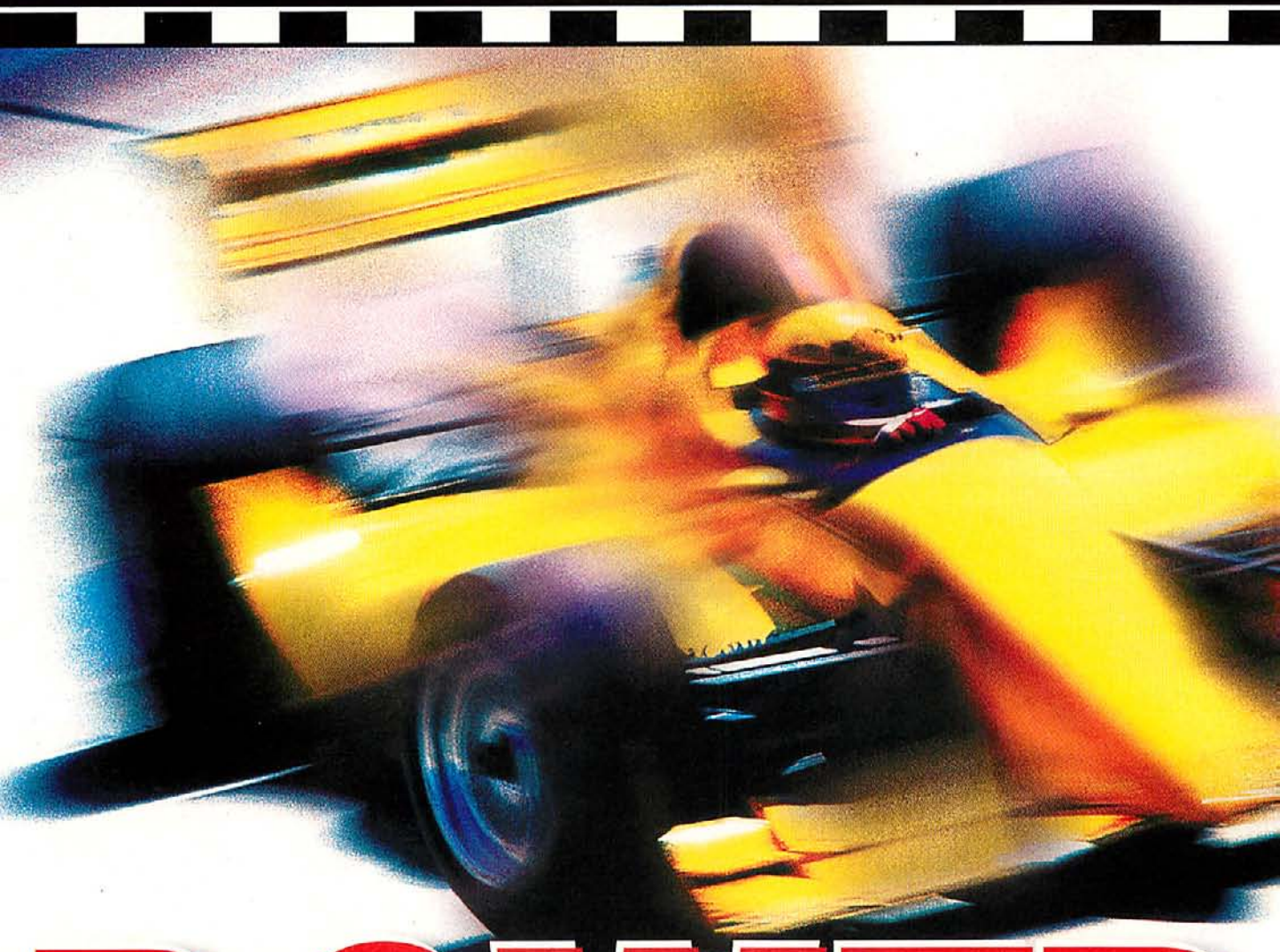
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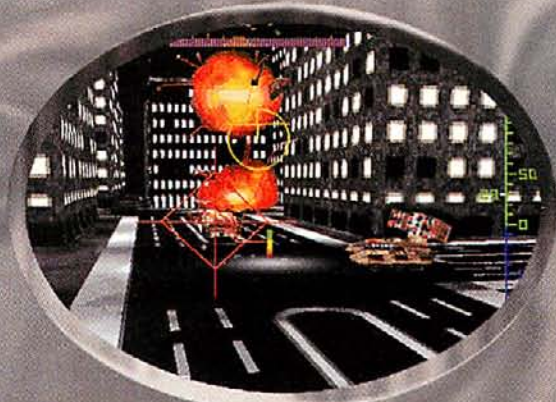
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Scorched Gameplay

Virgin Delivers a Good-Looking Shooter, but Leaves Out All the Fun

by Craig Wessel

It seems like SCORCHED PLANET, the new futuristic first-person shooter from Criterion Studios and Virgin Interactive, has received plenty of favorable press in recent months. Based on Virgin's hype over its "spectacular on-the-fly, real-time 3D environments," and its 3D acceleration via the Voodoo 3Dfx chip and other 3D cards; this game would appear to be the holy grail of sci-fi blast-em-ups. Unfortunately, it's not.

RESCUE 911

In SCORCHED PLANET, you are the lone ship at outpost planet Dator 5 when a distress call comes from the planet. You must rescue the civilians on Dator 5 from the Voraxian I hordes assaulting them. Once on the planet's surface, your job is to round everyone up and transport them through the spacegate to safety. Criterion admits that the game's concept itself is not original, citing DEFENDER as a primary influence; though it reminded me more of STELLAR 7 or SPECTRE VR.

Your rescue vehicle alternates between a tank-like vehicle that rocks across the rugged terrain (usually making it difficult to line up your shots), and a compact fighter-style aircraft with really sluggish controls. On the ground, visibility from a first-person perspective is limited—I found myself resorting to the game's other views in order to see the action.

The tank can't aim upward as smoothly as it should, which seems rather silly, since most of the attacks come primarily from the air. The terrain isn't your friend, either. Every

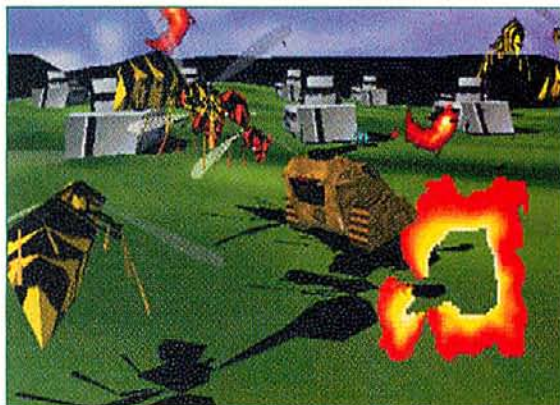
hill results in your tank tilting or being jostled, which would be all right if you had more vertical aiming ability when you fire; but as it is, I was repeatedly frustrated when trying to get my tank into a usable firing position.

The fighter performs better than

the tank, but still reacts slowly. Tracking targets is easier from the air than from the ground, but just about the time you have routed yet another pterodactyl attack, you run out of fuel and morph back into a tank. If you don't land easily, you will roll for what seems like forever, tumbling until your fighter-turned-tank finally rights itself.

SWARMS OF ENEMIES

The enemies in the game attack in endless swarms, relentlessly dropping ordnance on the cities. But, they aren't that difficult to wipe out. And, civilians don't



TO BEE OR NOT TO BEE You'll fight some pretty (funny) looking foes in SCORCHED PLANET, but the 3D accelerated graphics won't hide the shallow gameplay. It's your standard 3D shooter.

just stand around waiting to be rescued; they will search for you and man gun-towers to defend their cities.

Network play includes two variations: Killmatch, where you win by achieving a certain number of kills, and Savematch, where you win by having the most points when the last human is rescued.

The strategic aspects of the game (including organizing and manipulating the population to help you), as well as decent graphics, keep SCORCHED PLANET from being a complete loss. It would be nice, though, if Criterion had focused less on slick graphics and more on gameplay. SCORCHED PLANET is yet another shooter with too much flash and too little substance. **C**



START THE FIREWORKS There are two types of gameplay: ground action from a tank, or shooting from an aircraft.



Price: \$34.99

System Requirements: Pentium 60 or better, 8MB RAM, 55MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, Windows 95; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-8

Protection: None (CD must be in drive to play)

Designer: Criterion Studios

Publisher: Virgin

Irvine, CA

(800) 874-4607

Reader Service #: 320

APPEAL: STELLAR 7 fans.

PROS: Third person views are well done; good graphics.

CONS: Sub-standard gameplay, poor control in the tank.



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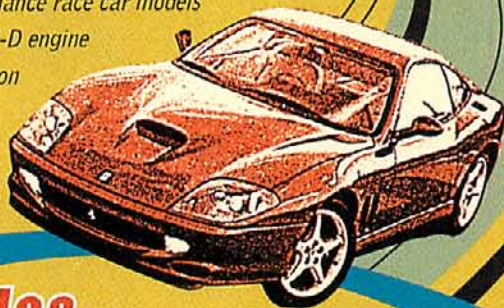
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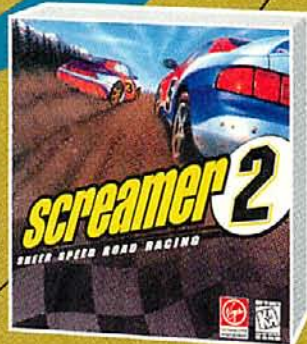


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Ride This Rocket

ROCKET JOCKEY Blasts Off With Nitro-Burning, Bone-Crunching Fun

by Robert Coffey

After a few misfires, Rocket Science has finally gotten it right with the addictive missile-riding mayhem of *ROCKET JOCKEY*. It's *Buck Rogers-meets-Rollerball* as gamers mount flame-spewing rocket bikes to crash and burn through three simple but challenging games in over 50 different 3D arenas. Gameplay is tough to master, requiring strategy as well as skill.

CRASH COURSE

As you'd imagine, riding a warhead isn't the easiest thing in the world to do. Rocket cycles are fast, but not too maneuverable. To make tight turns, you shoot mooring cables from your ride to snag pylons and fences; not to mention the other jockeys' cycles and throats. Even so,



ROBERTO ALOMAR STRIKES AGAIN Drag the fez-wearing refs by the neck in Rocket Ball so the nasty little zebras won't knock you down and kick you to death.

expect to spend a lot of time listening to the jockeys' pained grunts as they ricochet off walls or shoot violently off their cycles.

To avoid having your jockey corner the tortured groan market, you'll need to master the use of the cables and control of your cycle. To do that, you're going to want a gamepad. Although the controls are fairly simple, the keyboard and joystick just don't cut it.

ROCKET JOCKEY could have been another repetitive vehicular romp were it not for the variety of competition it offers. There's Rocket Race, an obstacle course emphasizing piloting skills; Rocket War, a

gladiatorial free-for-all; and Rocket Ball, a demented soccer game where jockeys use their cables to hurl various balls into goals. Tight time limits and point spreads ensure that gameplay never drops below an appropriate level of mayhem.

Along with dizzying speed and gleeful brutality, this game sports some devious arena design, with one new twist or obstacle in each successive arena. For example, just when you've gotten the hang of flinging tires and wrecking balls in Rocket Ball, Proximity Park asks you to score goals with cycle-blasting proximity bombs. And one Rocket War arena makes getting, and bashing, your opponents particularly daunting by carving up the playing area in quarters with only narrow passageways between them.

If there's a knock against the gameplay in *ROCKET JOCKEY*, it's that some of the arenas can be very unforgiving. Failure to score within the first 30 seconds of some Rocket Ball stadiums can doom you to failure, while some Rocket Race courses demand nothing less than cycle-piloting perfection.

There is something else about *ROCKET JOCKEY*: It has the coolest music in a game ever, featuring the fat-stringed sound of surf guitar legend Dick Dale



STUCK PIG Plenty of obstacles, like this cluster of jockey-spearing harpoons, keep *ROCKET JOCKEY* from being a rocket-riding cakewalk.

(he's the *Pulp Fiction* guy). The psychotic Toreador riffs and manic drums complement the action perfectly.

NO MAN'S LAN

ROCKET JOCKEY seems a natural for multiplayer clashes. But despite the box's promise of LAN skirmishes, the initial shipment hit shelves without LAN support. Rocket Science promises a patch in March on their Web site.

There's little not to like about *ROCKET JOCKEY*. It looks good, it sounds great, and it's certainly the most enjoyable way to sustain a concussion. In the end, *ROCKET JOCKEY* is simply a blast. **C**



Price: \$49.95

System Requirements: Pentium 90 or higher, 16MB RAM, 55MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM drive, Windows 95, 16-bit sound card; supports 8-button gamepad and joystick.
Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in drive)
Designer: Rocket Science
Publisher: SegaSoft
Redwood City, CA
1-888-SEGASOFT
Reader Service #: 321

APPEAL: Gamers looking for a non-stop frenzy of unique, challenging action; anyone wondering what riding a giant bullet would be like.

PROS: Fast, bruising action; well-designed arenas consistently offer unique challenges; gameplay rewards strategy as well as reflexes; soundtrack that actually merits play on your stereo.

CONS: Steep learning curve, some arenas can seem impossible to beat, multiplayer missing.



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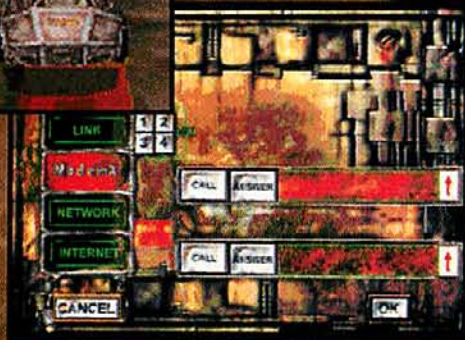
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #271



Nothing But Net

EA Sports Blows the Competition Away With the Best NBA Live Game Yet

by Jeff Green

Barring any more unforeseen acts of stupidity from resident dork and human time bomb Dennis Rodman, the Chicago Bulls seem poised, once again, to take the NBA championship. Rodman,

Scottie Pippen, and cologne salesman Michael Jordan form a trinity of such dominance that even great players like Barkley and Ewing must heave a heavy sigh before lumbering onto the court against them.

A similar feeling of doom must also grip the game designers who attempt to take on NBA LIVE, EA Sports' wildly successful basketball simulation. With flash, exciting action-oriented gameplay, and all the licensing that money can buy, this series has simply been unbeatable in the past couple of years. However, though NBA LIVE was CGW's 1996 sports game of the year, this was beginning to look like the year it faced some real competition. Both Microsoft's FULL COURT PRESS and GTE's NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL were decent, innovative games that had me openly wondering about the continuing dominance of EA's franchise.



GO ON, KICK ME Shawn Kemp risks permanent injury as he flies over bad boy Dennis Rodman in glorious 3D.

Now that NBA LIVE 97 is here, I can tell you: Never mind—the dynasty is secure. You may now safely delete all other PC basketball games from your hard disk. With new graphics and sound, better AI, and (finally!) modem and network support, NBA LIVE 97 is an incredible sequel, a quantum leap over the previous version, and a game that, once again, redefines the entire genre.

IN THE PAINT

For the '97 version, EA Sports has completely redone the interface to give it a more jazzy, street feel. Also, it's still a model of elegant simplicity that lets you quickly set up a game and get onto the court without any grief. The more important graphical change, however, as in EA's other '97 releases, is the on-court shift from 2D sprites to 3D polygonal players. Whereas the sprites in previous versions tended to merge into an amorphous blob, the new 3D players are sharp and dis-

tinct—with names and numbers crystal-clear on the players' jerseys—which makes the on-court action much easier to watch.

Although the players don't always resemble actual humans (think *QUAKE*), the motion-captured moves from Mitch Richmond, Tyus Edney, and others provide incredibly realistic action—everything from quick bounce passes, to reverse slams, to belly flops on the parquet floor—that helps offset the athletes' robotic look.

The new arena announcer adds to the game's ambiance. He intones player names differently for the home and visiting teams, credits both shots and assists, announces fouls and substitutions, and calls "for two" or "for three" on borderline shots. The game also posts a graphic note onscreen, at just the right moments, when a team is on a run—or on a cold streak. These are the kind of small touches that may not seem like a big deal, but when they're done right (as they are here), they really draw you into the game.

BRICK HOUSE

You can play exhibition games, playoffs, or a full season (but, alas, not multiple sea-



FOR THREE! Mitch Richmond, the NBA star who, in real life, provided a bulk of the game's motion-captured moves, shoots from behind the arc.



Price: \$45

System Requirements:

Pentium 75 processor (Pentium 133 or higher recommended), MS-DOS 5.0 or higher or Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 30MB free hard disk space (80MB recommended), 16-bit SVGA video card, 2x CD-ROM drive (4x recommended), Microsoft-compatible mouse. Supports Sound Blaster-compatible and other major sound cards, joysticks, Gravis GriP. Network interface card or Hayes-compatible 9600bps or higher modem needed for multiplayer.

of Players: 1-8

Copy Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in drive)

Developer/Publisher:

EA Sports

San Mateo, CA

(800) 245-4525

Reader Service #: 322

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #116



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? Two previously unknown NBA stars in a recent CGW multiplayer game. Mr. Green won (*Editor's note: we pasted in the photos*).

sons) in three levels of difficulty: rookie, starter, or all-star.

You can also choose between arcade and simulation styles of play. Though arcade mode doesn't resemble basketball as we know it on this planet, simulation mode offers an impressively realistic feel. For one thing, the play balance of the teams feels right. It's much different to control the Knicks or Sonics than it is to control, say, the Timberwolves. Because I like to suffer, I played an entire season as the Golden State Warriors in all-star mode, and while I didn't suck quite as badly as the real team, I did have a tough going—only definitively beating other lottery-bound losers like the Clippers.

The individual athletes' stats are also quite credible. Shaq will dominate inside, throwing down monstrous dunks, but don't expect him to help you from outside or from the free throw line (the free throw meter for Shaq is hilariously impossible—as it should be).

If you get tired of playing with the real players, you can create your own. I created future NBA-footnote Jeff Green (complete with real, laughably unimpressive stats), had him join the Lakers in a game against Houston, and then watched him throw up bricks and air balls until he was tossed from the game (now that's realism!). I joke, but the truth is, it's an incredible thrill to see yourself on the basketball court (complete with your name texture-mapped name on the back of your jersey) taking it to the hole against real NBA players.

Perhaps the greatest news is that you can now play NBA LIVE over a modem or

LAN. Setup is a breeze, and gameplay is phenomenally entertaining. Once I began triumphantly schooling fellow Editor Dave "Brickholio" Salvatore over the office LAN, I never wanted to play the computer again.

ARTIFICIAL WHAT?

As in previous versions, NBA LIVE 97's AI is not perfect. Sometimes, due to clumsy defense on my part, an opposing ball carrier would go to the hoop completely unguarded, but instead of taking the wide-open shot, he would inexplicably box it back out. I don't mind getting the break, but when I play poorly, I expect the opponent to take advantage. More annoying is when computer-controlled players on your own team mess up. Once, with 1.8 seconds left and a one-point lead, a computer-controlled player on my team fouled the opposing ball carrier (David Robinson, of all people) who promptly sank the two free throws and won the game.

Foul calls and penalties are erratic at best. They're dead-on for the most obvious violations, such as out-of-bounds or back-court penalties, but I couldn't get a three-second violation—even when standing still in the paint and counting out loud. Finally, the game seems annoyingly center-biased at times. Centers will regularly take over a game to an unrealistic extreme, scoring half or more of the team's points.

The most disappointing aspect of the game, however, is the rudimentary player controls, which often make you feel like you're watching more than you're playing. Most heinous is the lack of a reach-in/steal key. You have to just get close to the ballhandler and hope the computer decides to go for the steal. NBA LIVE offers perfect compatibility for the Gravis GriP, Sidewinder, and other gamepads; so why not take advantage and give the player more control? Console gamers have long been able to make dunks, steals, and fade-away jumpers; surely it must be possible on the PC as well.

Tim Tschirner—Web All-Star

#	name	pos.	height	weight	years pro
15	Larry Bird	c	7' 2"	205 lbs	5
31	Magic Johnson	pf	6' 6"	210 lbs	10
32	Jerry West	pf	6' 7"	225 lbs	9
33	Pete Maravich	pf	6' 6"	185 lbs	11
34	Kerry Mitchell	pf	6' 5"	180 lbs	8
7	Karl Malone	pf	6' 11"	230 lbs	3
34	Wendell Carter	c	7' 0"	260 lbs	9
30	Patrick Ewing	c	7' 1"	244 lbs	20
1	John Stockton	pg	6' 3"	170 lbs	5
35	Cedric Cebal	pf	6' 8"	257 lbs	1
20	Isiah Thomas	pf	6' 6"	220 lbs	6
8	Sam Perkins	pf	6' 10"	248 lbs	2

Although NBA LIVE 97 offers the complete '97 rosters for all 29 NBA teams as of September, 1996; EA could not include Michael Jordan or Charles Barkley, due to licensing issues. Nor could they let you alter the real players' stats or provide updated rosters. Fortunately, super-fan Tim Tschirner has an indispensable Web site that fills in where EA is not allowed to tread. Tschirner (who is not affiliated with EA) updates all team rosters and stats with remarkable frequency and makes them available on a downloadable patch. The patch also includes Jordan and Barkley, and adds a number of old legends. It's free, and it integrates seamlessly with EA's program while not touching the original executable file. If you're a serious hoops fan, you *must* have this patch.

Tim Tschirner's NBA LIVE 97 Page is at www.users.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/~timl/nba97.html.

TRIPLE DOUBLE

Still, we're just quibbling. The appeal of this game is simply undeniable. It's not perfect (not yet, anyway), but NBA LIVE 97 is still an outstanding achievement—the best version yet of the best graphically oriented PC basketball game on the planet. It's flashy, immersive, and totally addicting. I highly recommend it. **C**

APPEAL: Basketball fans of all types, anyone who thinks sports games on the PC aren't as good as console games.

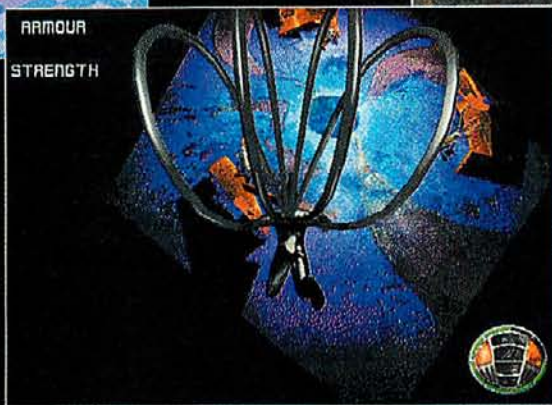
PROS: The best NBA Live yet, with amazing 3D graphics, outstanding gameplay, and great multiplayer action.

CONS: The AI occasionally gets stupid, limited controls, still doesn't have multiple seasons.





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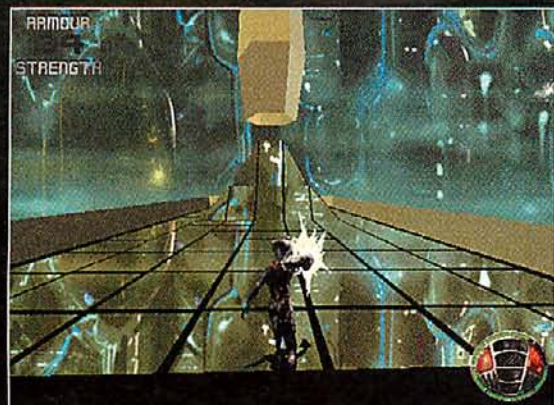


Actual screen shots

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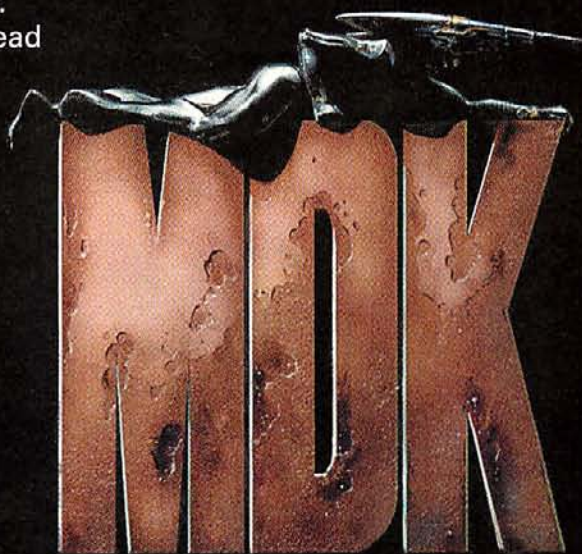
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MICROSOFT GOLF 3.0 Levels the Field for Win 95 Golfers

By Scott A. May

Arguably the best golf game for Windows just got a 32-bit facelift with the release of MICROSOFT GOLF 3.0 for Windows 95 and Windows NT. This new version, designed by Access Software, is based on their popular LINKS series, and is exceptionally smooth and fast. If LINKS LS is currently the best golf game on the planet, MS GOLF 3.0 is a welcome, less-demanding alternative for Windows users.

The game offers several major improvements over previous incarnations. The most readily apparent is its intuitive, context-rich interface, which uses the same model as Microsoft's other recent sports titles, FULL COURT PRESS and SOCCER. Microsoft continues to refine the functionality of its online help, although like many players, I still prefer a printed manual.

THE HOLE TRUTH

In addition to practice mode, quick start, and standard stroke play, GOLF 3.0 now features match play, skins (pro or amateur), and team best-ball. Up to eight players—human or computer-controlled—can compete and, as in LINKS, you can play against previously recorded

rounds. This feature is especially nice if you're playing solitaire.

By far the most significant improvement is the new 32-bit game engine, which produces crisper, more fluid play. Screen redraws are now almost instantaneous, which is remarkable considering the incredible detail of the photo-realistic terrain. The graphics are top-notch, though still not quite as nice as LINKS LS or Accolade's new JACK NICKLAUS 4.

Included with the game are two standard-issue courses: Alberta's Banff Springs and South Carolina's Harbour Town. Microsoft sells two add-on courses—North Carolina's Pinehurst and Hawaii's Mauna Kea—but GOLF 3.0 also allows you to import greens from the vast collection of Access' LINKS CHAMPIONSHIP COURSES. A separate, built-in converter automatically updates old courses to GOLF 3.0's high-res format.

Other goodies include video fly-bys of each hole (with narrated strategies), pro tips, and stroke information displayed directly on the main window. The computer players' AI has also been nicely tweaked, making them more aggressive as your own play improves. Little has changed regarding the swing meter, however, which is bad news for those who'd like to toss that dreadful apparatus into the nearest pond. It's still uncalibrated, so judging the power of your swing remains more a question of luck than precision clicking.



I AM TIGER WOODS MS GOLF 3 features vastly improved speed, graphics, and interface design. Note that the swing meter can now be moved anywhere on the screen.

TEE FOR EIGHT

Microsoft's Internet support is impressive, offering dozens of playing tips and additional courses. Although the game was designed with Internet play in mind, the product shipped before that feature was installed. However, you can download the multiplayer patch from Microsoft (www.microsoft.com/games) for free. It's a whopping 7.5MB file, so brew some coffee while you wait. This Internet patch is not compatible with Windows NT.

Overall, despite a few shortcomings (inherent to all golf sims), GOLF 3.0 is another quality effort from Microsoft's burgeoning sports team. For Windows desktop duffers, it's a gimme. ☺

APPEAL: Win 95 golfers of all skill levels.

PROS: Ultra-clean design and smooth, quick performance; modem, LAN, and Internet play a big plus; ability to import and update old low-res courses adds to longevity.

CONS: Enough with the online manuals! The Internet patch is free, but is a huge download.



Price: \$44.95

System Requirements: 486/66 MHz or higher processor (Pentium recommended), Windows 95 or Windows NT v3.51 or higher, 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), 25MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, 256-color SVGA graphics display, mouse; supports all Win 95-compatible sound cards; modem or LAN required for remote play.

of Players: 1-8

Protection: None

Designers: Access Software

Publisher: Microsoft

Redmond, WA

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Reader Service #: 324




PARTY TIME Among the host of pre-game options are new match, skins, and team best-ball play.

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A close-up photograph of a man's face, showing his eyes and forehead. He has a frustrated expression, with his eyebrows furrowed and his eyes looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid red color.

Get Your Kicks

EA's FIFA SOCCER 97 and MICROSOFT SOCCER Go Toe-To-Toe in CGW's World Cup

By Scott A. May

Following years of near-silence—not counting Euro imports—PC arenas are finally filled with those annoying chants from the world's most popular sport: soccer. What used to be a wasteland for soccer fans has suddenly become an oasis of footie sims. Both EA Sports' FIFA SOCCER 97 and Microsoft's MICROSOFT SOCCER are taking aim at the burgeoning U.S. soccer audience; but are they worthy competitors, or merely products pushed to market to fill this conspicuous void? We took both games onto the field and let 'em each take their best shot.

FIFA SOCCER 97

You can usually bank on the EA Sports machine to deliver the best play value—regardless of category—before even breaking the shrink-wrap on the box. The company's 1997 crop, however, has been more uneven than usual, running the gamut from astounding (NHL 97) to mediocre (MADDEN 97). Falling somewhere in between is FIFA SOCCER 97, a game that is far from perfect, but, despite its faults, retains the crown for best soccer sim in the field.

FIFA 97 navigates much like MADDEN

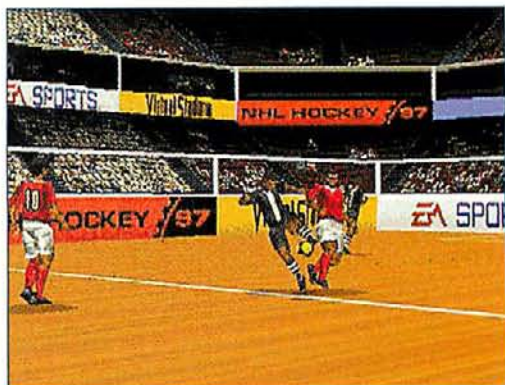
97 and NBA LIVE 97, utilizing multiple selection screens that can be steered either forward or backward. Three play modes—arcade, action, and simulation—let you compete in single games, tournament play, and both league and playoff competition. The game also supports modem and network multiplayer gaming for up to eight players.

FIFA's roster of 255 teams, in 12 international leagues, is among the largest in the field. You can transfer players, but you can't edit their attributes or create your own from scratch. Also, don't look for much in the way of coaching options beyond player substitutions and formation changes, although you can create one-time custom formations.

In the goodies department, FIFA outshines the competition with multiple camera views, highlight reels (automatically chosen by the computer), and instant replays. FIFA's biggest advantage is its option to play in indoor arenas, a feature few other soccer sims offer. Indoor soccer is an entirely different animal, both in terms of game speed and offensive strategies: The field of play is much smaller, sidelines don't exist (they're replaced by walls), the surface is hard and fast, and—thanks to enclosed goal designs—the games are generally higher scoring. If you've never experienced indoor soccer, you're in for a real treat.

SHUT UP AND PELE

Like hockey, soccer is a true team sport, where controlled passing is even more critical to success than



INDOOR FIREWORKS FIFA SOCCER 97 is one of the few PC footie sims to offer indoor court play, which dramatically changes the look and feel of the game.

pinpoint goal kicks. In this area, FIFA still rules, offering two control set options: simple and complex. The latter features passback mode, which allows you to control an offensive player other than the ball handler. Incredibly, EA's sparse documentation doesn't describe *how* or *when* to execute these moves, so it's basically up to you to figure them out. It's frustrating, but if you manage to master these ambiguous control schemes, the fluid ball handling FIFA affords is impressive.

EA's 55-page printed manual, by the way, is far too shallow; it describes only the control schemes and program architecture, while providing absolutely no game strategies or play tactics.

Aesthetically, FIFA's new polygon-based characters are well animated (they



ZOMBIES! FIFA's polygon-based characters are well-animated, but look downright scary when viewed up-close. Gimme the lightning gun!

APPEAL: Experienced footie game enthusiasts. Rookies need not apply.

PROS: Its virtual stadiums and multiple views are dazzling, it's one of the few soccer games to feature indoor arenas, remote play is a blast.

CONS: Excessive hardware requirements, motion-captured player animations give action a detached feel, documentation is incredibly weak.



Price: \$54.95

System

Requirements:

Pentium 75 or better processor (Pentium 133 recommended), Windows 95 or MS-DOS, 8MB RAM (16MB for Win 95) minimum 3MB free hard drive space (15MB for Win 95), 256-color SVGA PCI/VLB video card, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse. Supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards and most joysticks and gamepads. Modem or network card required for remote play.

of Players: 1-4

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Extended Play Productions

Publisher: EA Sports

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use motion-capture technology) but they also have a slightly dirty look and tend to jumble together when clustered. Up close, FIFA players are quite hideous, looking somewhat like mutant *QUAKE* rejects. The best way to avoid the heebie-jeebies is to play the game from a wide-angle, overhead view.

The biggest disappointment, and one that will come as no surprise to many of today's frustrated gamers, is the game's killer system requirements. Even if you satisfy its recommended conditions—a Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, and a 1MB PCI video card—many details of the game must be dumbed down to achieve smooth gameplay. Those with less-than-stellar systems shouldn't even consider buying this game, because clipped frame rates and sluggish control response render it virtually unplayable. Solutions include reducing the graphic detail, which makes it downright ugly, and decreasing the screen size; neither of which are satisfactory options.

Overall, FIFA SOCCER 97 holds a slight advantage over its competition, with fluid gameplay, a variety of play modes, better roster size, and multiplayer capabilities—but be sure you have the hardware muscle to power it.

MICROSOFT SOCCER

Boasting "action so real, it hurts," Bill Gates and company lumber onto the pitch with MICROSOFT SOCCER, the first native Windows 95 soccer game. Unrealistic action, however, is why this soccer sim hurts. An odd mixture of bad and good makes this game the epitome of polished mediocrity.

MS SOCCER follows the same clean design as Microsoft's other recent sports games, MS GOLF 3.0 and NBA FULL COURT PRESS, by using clickable tabs to progress through pre-game setups. But EA wins the battle of multiplayer gaming, allowing twice as many networked opponents as Microsoft's four. Plus MS SOCCER's roster offers only 102 teams in four leagues—plenty, it would seem, but still less than half of FIFA SOCCER 97's 225 teams in 12 leagues. However, MS



NOW I GET IT Microsoft Soccer provides a large online database of play tips and procedures. Now bring back the written manual, dam it!

SOCCER makes up for its limited roster with a full-fledged player editor with 14 adjustable attributes, as well as the ability to create entirely new teams; features lacking in EA's game.

You can set player control for keyboard, mouse, or joystick input, and you can also program keys or buttons to perform specific moves. As expected, this game loves the Microsoft SideWinder gamepad, but it also works well with all other brands tested, including gamepads from Gravis, Suncom, and CH Products.

User-defined options include multiple skill-levels, referee styles, and types of penalties. Otherwise, the number of game goodies is surprisingly sparse, with no replay abilities and a choice of only two screen resolutions (640x480 and 800x600). However, MS SOCCER does have a zoom mode, programmed into a function key, to provide a close-up view of the action. But because soccer is a think-ahead sport, where a broad vista works to your best advantage, the zoom mode is essentially eye candy that's counter-productive to effective field strategies.

KICK ME

Aesthetically, MS SOCCER is remarkably smooth and clean. This is a sport that begs for clear, uncluttered definition of its onfield players, especially when they're clustered in tight groups. Granted, the characters are generically drawn and look like animated department store mannequins, but the game makes up for this shortcoming with realistic motion-captured animation. Microsoft's stadiums aren't elaborate, but their use of digitized

spectators gives the backdrops a certain elegance.

The core dilemma in MS SOCCER, however, isn't visual presentation, but the unrealistic way computer-controlled players anticipate every kick. Rarely do errant kicks land in an open field. Another big annoyance is how your computer teammates react to the ball. Sometimes

they pass, dribble, or shoot with little or no provocation. At other times, they just stand there, motionless. In most cases, their dim-witted response negates your unfolding strategy. The onfield action of MS SOCCER is smooth, but the interaction between players isn't as seamless as FIFA's.

MICROSOFT SOCCER has a commendable design, hampered by slightly anemic gameplay. If you long to bounce the checkered ball around the Windows 95 desktop, this is your best bet, though considering the current slate of PC soccer sims, that's faint praise at best. **C**



GOTCHA! Although it sports a questionable computer AI, MICROSOFT SOCCER boasts much cleaner graphics than its competition.

APPEAL: Soccer fans of all ages and skill levels.

PROS: Excellent interface and simple, but clean, graphics; nice assortment of specialty moves; remote play a breeze to set up.

CONS: Computer AI ranges from merciful to idiotic; gameplay tends to be sluggish, even at minimum hardware requirements.

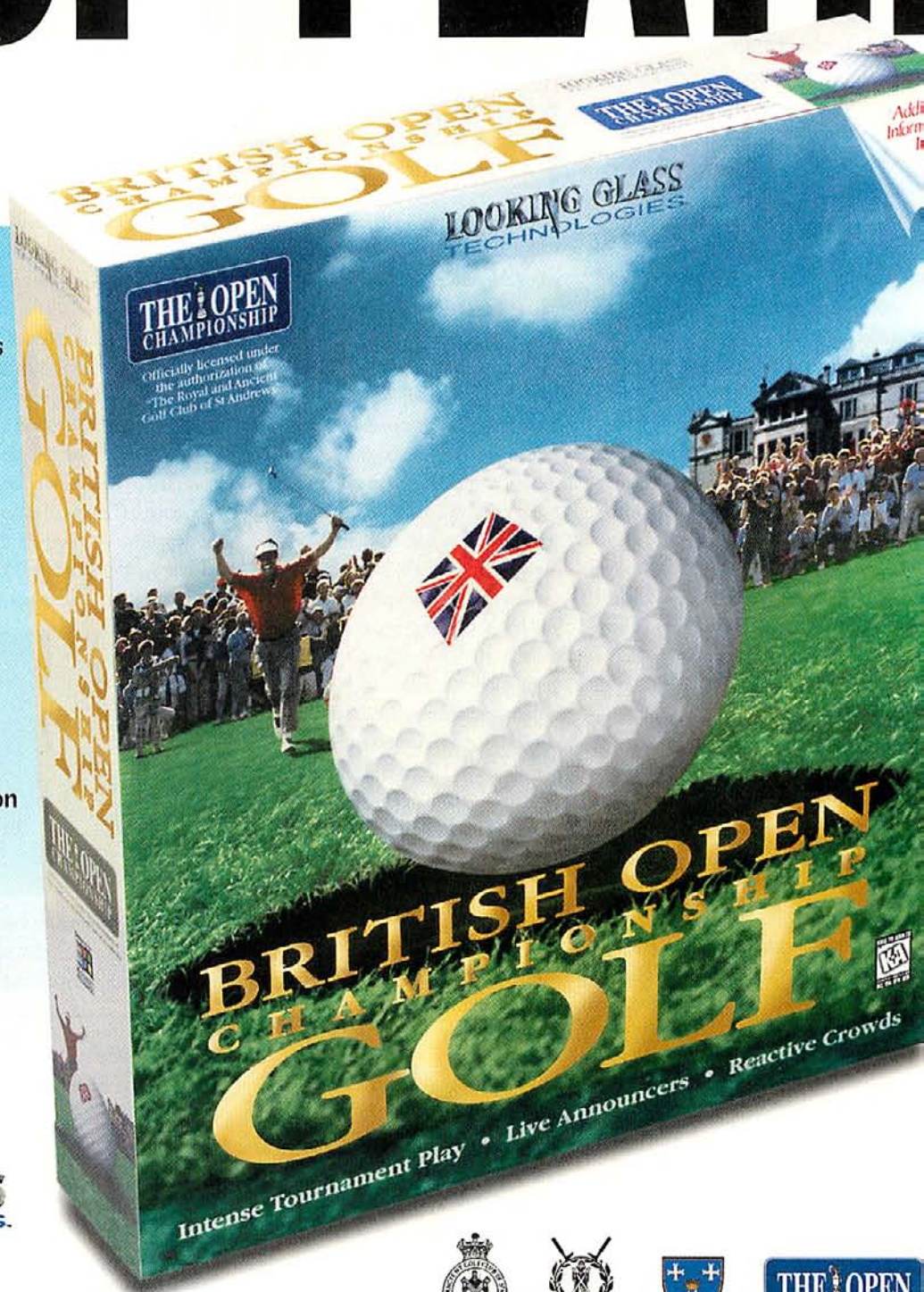


Price: \$44.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486/66 or better processor (Pentium 75 recommended), Windows 95, 8MB RAM (12MB recommended), 20MB free hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, 256-color SVGA video card with 1MB VRAM (2MB recommended), mouse. Supports all Win 95-compatible sound cards, joysticks, and gamepads. Modem or network card required for remote play.
of Players: 1-4
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: Dino Dini
Publisher: Microsoft
 Redmond, WA
 (206) 882-8080
 Reader Service # 323

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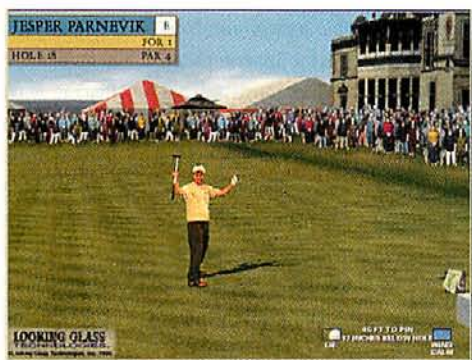
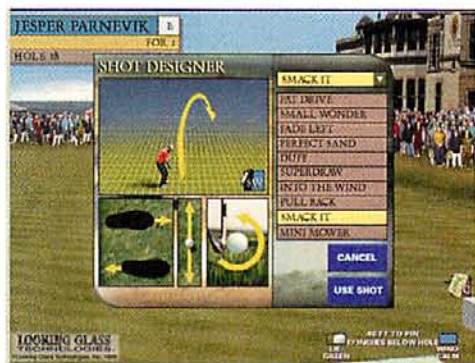
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Brains, Not Brawn

MICROLEAGUE PRO FOOTBALL 97 Is the Thinking Man's Pro Bowl Choice

by Dennis McCauley

Pro football sims come and go these days, often delivering much less than their hyperbolic, trash-talking ads promise. One game that won't disappoint, however (if you know what you're getting into), is *MICROLEAGUE PRO FOOTBALL 97*. What you see is what you get with this game, which must be rated the sim of choice for hardcore NFL fans who'd rather work the nuances of their game plan than the buttons of their game pad.

MICROLEAGUE PRO FOOTBALL 97 (MPF) is the latest incarnation of the long-running *PRO LEAGUE FOOTBALL* series. With the acquisition of MicroSports in late 1996, MicroLeague added *PRO LEAGUE FOOTBALL* and veteran designer Dave Holt to their expanding sports gaming stable. This has to rate as one of the best free agent signings of the year, particularly since the game's opening drive under the MicroLeague label marks its best showing to date.



PERSONAL SEAT LICENSE Variable viewing angles let computer coaches view the action from wherever they desire.



PRELUDE TO A BLITZ Boomer Esiason checks the Cowboy defense. Is it zone or man?

Somewhat of a niche product, MPF eschews the state-of-the-art graphics and high-tempo arcade action found in games like *MADDEN FOOTBALL 97* and *FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO*. Relying on a dead-on statistical model, MPF allows would-be Mike Holmgrens to simulate NFL games with uncanny accuracy.

The '97 release includes five past seasons (1991-95) on the CD-ROM.

Additional NFL campaigns are expected to be made available as an extra download charge on MicroLeague's Web site, but were not available at press time. Nor was the just-completed 1996 season, which has left some gamers scratching their heads, since virtually every competing product included '96 rosters in the box.

The relatively small

number of past seasons may also disappoint buyers of last year's *PRO LEAGUE FOOTBALL*, which included every team from 1961 on. Ambitious players can create their own teams, however, using the team-editing utility. In keeping with the game's philosophy, the editor is stat-based. Numbers such as yards-per-carry for running backs, and completion and INT percentages for quarterbacks are key to this game, rather than the subjective qualities like speed, strength, and agility that drive the *FRONT PAGE* series.

ALL GUSSIED UP

Although MPF's on-screen look can't compete with its flashier competitors, veterans of the series will be pleased to learn that the game has made some strides in its graphic presentation. Players now display jersey numbers, and size differences are apparent between backs and linemen. Variable camera angles allow complete 360-degree horizontal rotation, and you can pan, tilt, zoom, and watch instant replays. Of course, the top graphics-



Price: \$49.95

System

Requirements: IBM-

compatible Pentium 60, or better, processor; Windows 95 or MS-DOS 6.0, or higher; 16MB RAM, 2MB hard disk space; 2x CD-ROM; SVGA video card; Microsoft-compatible mouse. Supports Sound Blaster-compatible and other major sound cards.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Developer: Dave Holt

Publishers:

MicroLeague

Multimedia Inc.

Lancaster, PA

(717)-872-6567

Reader Service #: 325



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WETWARE The graphics may not be as pretty as those in FPS: FOOTBALL 97, but at least the rain actually looks real, and you don't have to worry about black rain inside domes.

oriented sims have had variable camera angles and replay for several years, but marrying these features to the MPF game engine is a major advance for gamers interested in stat-based NFL simulation.

On the down side, players still lack the size, crisp definition, and fluid movements of the graphics-oriented sims, and the turf frequently gives the appearance of shifting as you scroll along the field. Players and yard lines remain in place, but the grass seems to slide along beneath them. In a product that otherwise does an outstanding job of immersing you in the action, this is one flaw that reminds you that it's only a computer simulation. Also, while the game's animations are the best yet in the series, a few glitches remain—such as the occasional phantom tackle. While I was coaching Denver, I called a screen pass to Terrell Davis. With the speedy back yards ahead of the nearest Oakland defender, what looked like a big gain suddenly evaporated when a tackler closed the distance as though he had just been jet fueled.

MPF's play-calling interface is quite easy to use. Coaches can opt for a default play book of offensive and defensive plays, or they can point-and-click to design a play on the fly. Using stock formations like the pro-set, three-wide-receiver, and I-formation on offense, coaches select their

runner or receiver, and hole or pass route. On defense, virtual defensive coordinators select their formation, coverage, keys, and double teams. Once both sides have made their calls, the animated players carry out the action.

Of course, there's no joysticking allowed—MPF is a pure coaching sim. And be prepared for a challenging game when taking on the computer opponent. While the AI isn't perfect, it's pretty darn good. One improvement that needs further tweaking, however, is the recognition of secondary receivers. In past editions, QBs never looked off the primary receiver. In the new version it does happen, but it's so infrequent it's barely noticeable.

For gamers interested in tackling live opponents, MPF features modem play right out of the box. Internet play via TCP/IP is also projected, but wasn't available at press time. Gamers may want to visit the MicroLeague Web site (<http://www.mmi.com>) to check on the availability of this anticipated patch.

AL DAVIS, C'EST MOI

MPF's league management utilities are robust. You can release all pro players into a pool and restock teams, or conduct a college draft (there is no career mode, however). You can also manually conduct trades and waivers—no trade AI controls

the other teams' negotiations. While MicroLeague has licensed the names of NFL players, they did not obtain rights to the team names or logos. Be prepared to invest a few minutes manually editing team names unless you don't mind watching the Philadelphia Hawks play the Dallas Rangers.

Although this game system has been around for years, there are still a few warts. It's a liability not to know which unit your opponent has on the field, particularly on defense. On forth-and-one, for example, are they going for it or punting? Should you call a punt return or a short-yardage defense? MPF keeps you guessing. Did your opponent send in his three-wide-receiver formation? Should you bring in your nickel package? Again, you just don't know. This lack of insight can badly burn you, especially against a human opponent. Also, while the game thrives on stats, their presentation could be better. For instance, the rushing and receiving stats are lumped together in one table. There are, however, excellent drive summaries and play-by-play charts.

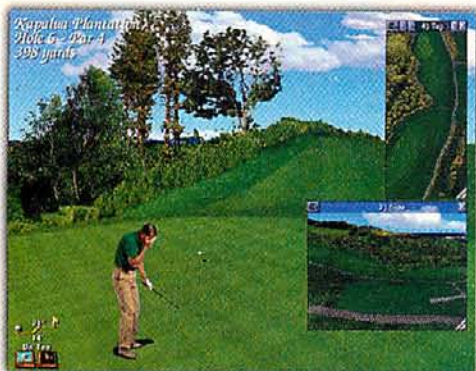
The bottom line is that MICROLEAGUE PRO FOOTBALL 97 offers a refined game engine loaded with realistic NFL flavor. The new version takes a big leap graphically over its predecessors, and will please hardcore pigskin fans with a solid AI and multiplayer options. It's not going to win over the gamepad crowd, but those who appreciate the more cerebral aspects of this most physical of sports should have a ball playing MICROLEAGUE PRO FOOTBALL 97. **C**

APPEAL: Stat freaks and NFL junkies will love the authentic feel of this coaching sim.

PROS: Refined game system makes play calling and stat management easy. Improved graphics and challenging AI make this an enjoyable solo game, while modem play provides head-to-head action.

CONS: Graphics don't measure up to other leading games, no arcade options, limited seasons, some AI warts.





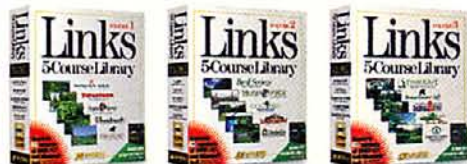
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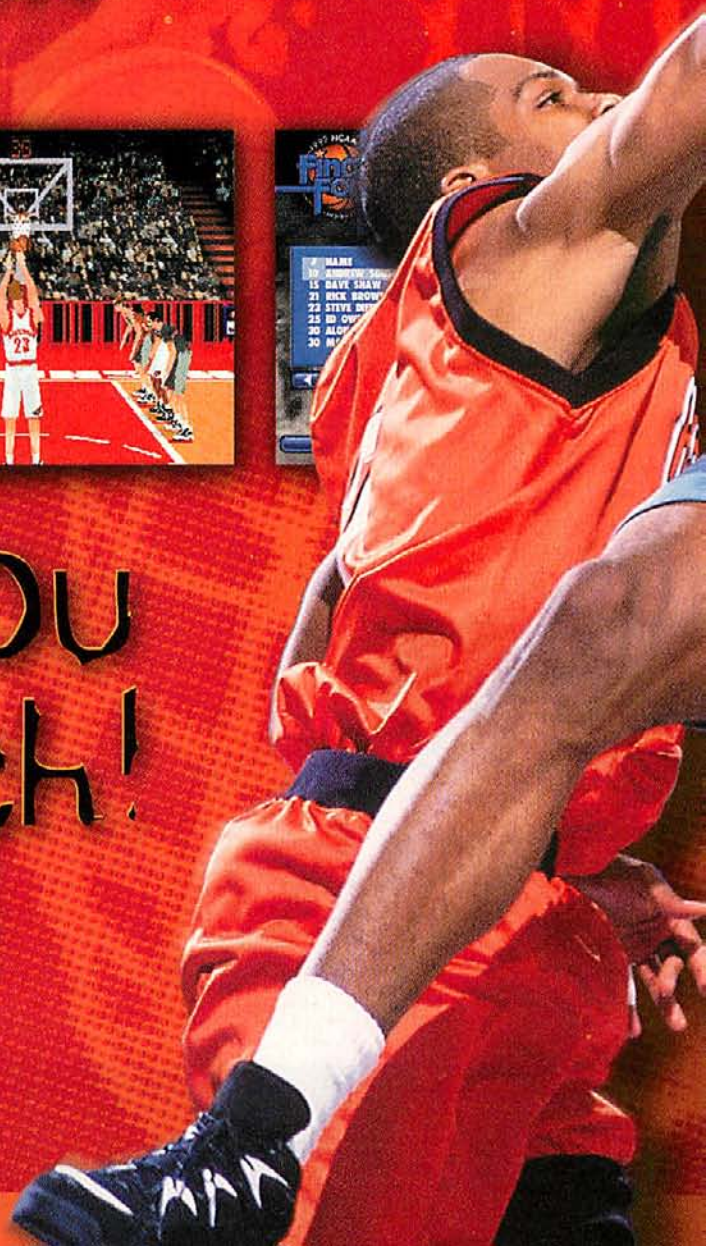
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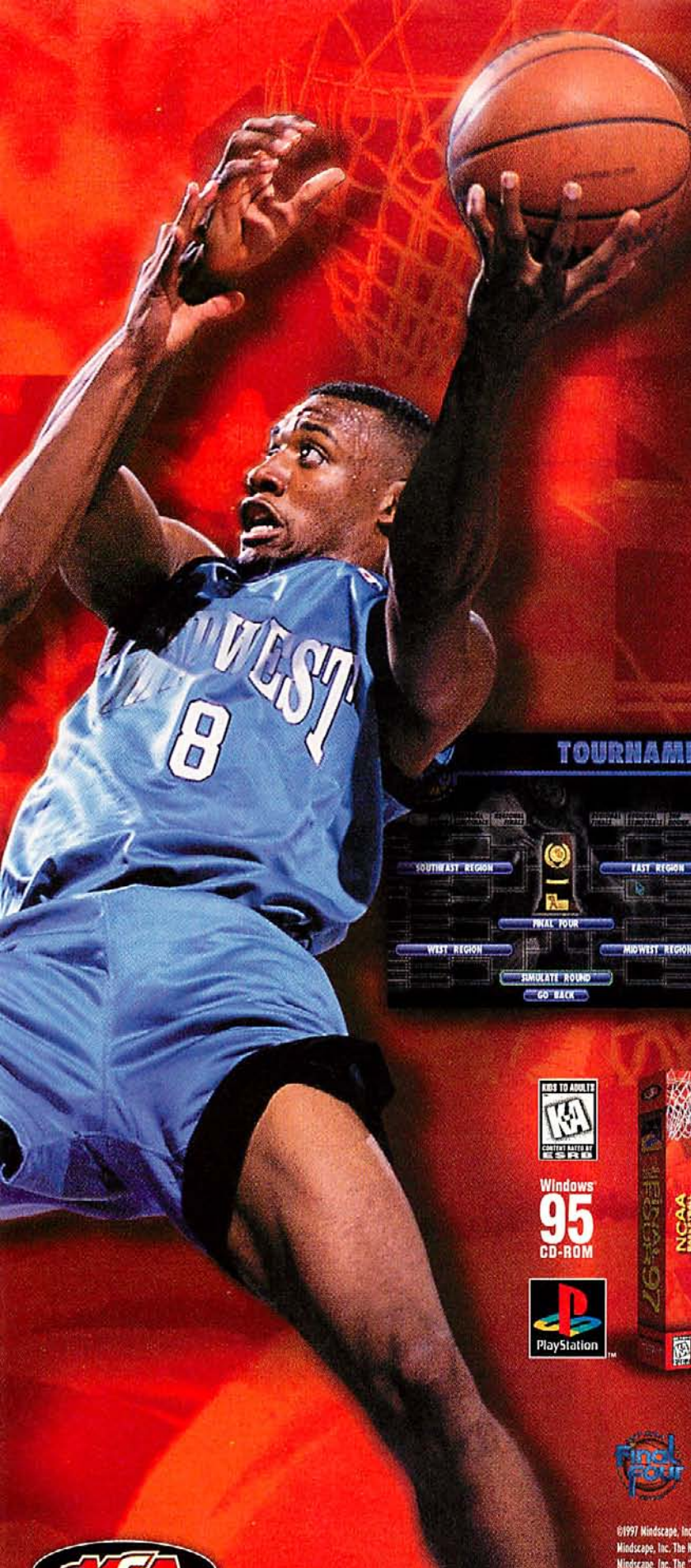


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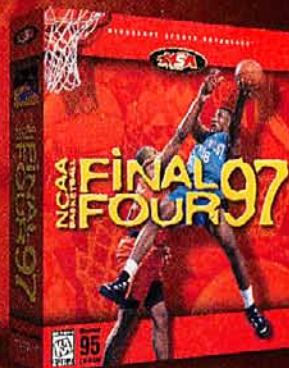
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MINDSCAPE SPORTS ADVANTAGE™ CIRCLE READER SERVICE #133



Interactive Mishmash

PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING Has a Great Interactive Movie, But the Game Beneath Disappoints

by Martin E. Cirulis

Origin's *PRIVATEER* gave us a look at the capitalistic side of life in the Wing Commander universe, where you could make a fortune as a merchant or gunship for hire, while trying to solve the riddle of an ancient artifact. Now, in the full cinematic tradition of *WING COMMANDER III* and *IV*, Origin brings us another tale of the working class: *PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING*. Without a doubt, *PRIVATEER 2* is the best interactive movie yet. It's too bad the rest of the game sometimes feels like an afterthought.

OUT OF MEMORY

PRIVATEER 2's story begins with terror and chaos, and is so well done that you're hardly bothered by the fact that you've wandered into yet another game where your character is struck with amnesia. After witnessing a devastating starship crash in a crowded urban area, you dis-



MOVIE MADNESS The quality of the script and acting makes this game's interactive movie sequences its biggest appeal.

cover you're Ser Arris, the only survivor from the starship and a very special man.

It seems that the only reason you survived to see the hospital is that you were frozen in a heavily armored cryogenics pod, and were revived after rescuers found it in the rubble. Unfortunately, either the crash or the hibernation has robbed you of your memory, and all you know is the name written on the pod, and the fact that you have a fair chunk of change (conveniently, just enough to purchase and outfit a light fighter and begin your business).

But before you can get more help in the hospital, two darkly-dressed guys with very large-bore energy weapons arrive to confiscate you. After a firefight between these thugs and a small starship, the hospital wall and much of the hospital staff are no more, and you barely escape. Now a bitter man with a little money, some piloting skills, and plenty of mysteries to solve, you have to find a way to survive while you hunt for answers.

As the game progresses, a series of clues eventually reveals that you

are far from being your average brain-addled Space Joe. Every time you encounter a fellow citizen of the future, a video sequence is triggered and you will usually have an opportunity to choose between a couple of key replies that affect the course of the video clip.

While this is not the most original plot in the universe, there's an almost complete lack of those occasional excruciating lines that made hams out of good actors in Origin's previous offerings. Your character is played extremely well and delivers his tight, bitter dialogue with the utter conviction that only an actor who is happy with his script can convey.

Between having an actual writer, Diane Duane, prepare the screenplay, and filming in England, a locale where acting has always traditionally compensated for budget; this is the most entertaining, satisfying, adult interactive movie I have seen so far.

ENGINE TROUBLES

The bad news is that the movie portion of *PRIVATEER 2* was about all that I found really satisfying in this game.

The first disappointment to veteran



Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

Pentium 75 (P120 recommended), 8MB RAM, 40MB hard drive space, DOS 5 or better, SVGA graphics, 3x CD-ROM, mouse; Sound Blaster or compatible, Ensoniq SoundScape, Gravis Ultrasound, or General MIDI sound card; joystick with throttle recommended.

of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Erin Roberts

Publisher: Origin

Systems

Austin, TX

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Reader Service #: 326



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Crash and Burn

PPRIVATEER 2 is unusually unstable for a WING COMMANDER-series game. Among the program's unpatched (at press time) bugs are numerous potential crashes during video sequences and transitions, as well as incompatibility with some rendition-based video cards (3D Blaster owners may find relief in the latest BIOS update on Creative Labs' Web site, www.creaf.com). In addition, this DOS game requires you to reboot Windows 95 in exclusive MS-DOS mode—it's getting a little late in the game not to support running in a DOS box.

Until the inevitable patch is released, save often; especially before and after accepting any mission, or when leaving a planet. If the game crashes when you try to land on certain worlds, try making sure that CD number one is inserted before you touch down.

Confederation fliers is that this story takes place so far from the beaten track that it may as well be in another dimension. It bears no resemblance in technol-

ogy, look, or plot devices to the Kilrathi-ravaged sectors we have seen evolve and grow elsewhere.

PRIVATEER 2 continues the slow deterioration of flight models that we've seen since the advent of the movie technology. While WC4 allowed a choice of a slightly realistic inertial flight model (that felt a little like flying), or a simple arcade mode (that was more like driving a space-truck); PRIVATEER 2 only lets you drive the truck. The combat portion would be much more exciting if your ship didn't go from flat-out to dead-stop faster than my old car. The graphics are truly beautiful, but the movement makes them seem sterile and unrealistic.

The flight AI for your opponents is weak. Apart from a few distinct maneuvers for some of the ships, they all fly straight in at you, guns blazing, and then turn aimlessly trying to pick you up again. As long as you stay moving, you can win

any fight by simply refusing to go head-to-head with another ship. Freighters and capital ships also all possess blatant blind-spots, and once you find them you can basically pull up, match speeds in a slow crawl, and blaze away until they immolate without even trying to roll themselves over and bring a turret to bear.

No longer are you the brave freighter captain trying to make a buck with strange and exotic cargoes. Now you're a fighter pilot who hires freighters to haul goods. While this might have been an interesting option from the first PRIVATEER, which made you choose between fighters or freighters as a career, taking the freighter almost completely out of the loop takes much of the flavor out of the non-video part of this game.

Even if I am expected to believe, despite my contrary experience from the first PRIVATEER, that these big freighters can make a living from the paltry sums I

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SPACEY PILOTS Space combat sequences deliver stunning visuals, but don't look for particularly innovative maneuvers from enemy ships.

pay to rent them, any sense of realism is undermined as soon as a military ship calmly informs you that your cargo is clean while you are in the middle of a ferocious firefight with pirate raiders.

As it stands, it's really a mistake to bill *PRIVATEER 2* as a space-trader game. You should only go for this one if fighter combat is what you were after in the first place.

MIXED IMPRESSIONS

Despite my misgivings on the superficiality of the simulation involved here, I have to admit that I enjoyed *PRIVATEER 2* a great deal. The gritty, dark SF movie made it possible to play a game riddled with omissions and questionable design decisions. It's not to say that there weren't a few interesting takes on a space sim; I think the ability to hire ships to work with you

was an excellent idea as an option (but perhaps not as your main strategy), and with a little bit more vision, *PRIVATEER 2* could have allowed you to put together real-time trade and convoy them to some truly dangerous, esoteric star systems.

If the thought of exploring an excellent science fiction action/mystery movie with some arcade-style combat thrown in

doesn't sound like enough mileage for your gaming buck, then you should probably pass on *PRIVATEER 2*. I truly doubt that there will be many people playing this one far past the storyline's conclusion. The sad truth is that even though the game is open-ended, once you get to the bottom of things, the trading and sim portions are just too weak to keep an experienced gamer happy for an extended period of time. **C**

APPEAL: For fans of gritty SF, good acting and space sims that concentrate on blasting things.

PROS: Come for the movie, sit through the game.

CONS: Thin and erroneous documentation. A number of video-related crash bugs. Shallow game mechanics make for a weak sim and trade game.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #234



Turn-Based Ace

FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 Goes WWII

by Robin Kim

Crossing a traditional PC wargame with a flight sim would seem like mixing oil and water: Flight sims offer a visceral first person experience where dexterity is as important as tactical smarts; but for wargames, strategy is everything. Are wargamers interested in exploring the

three dimensional complexities of air combat maneuvering? Can a diehard joystick jockey also find happiness in a turn-based dogfight? *OVER THE REICH* is a tactical-level air combat game, set in Europe during the latter half of World War II, that tries to appeal to fans of both genres.

Battles are fought from an overhead view just like the board wargame on which it is based, but the realism of the underlying flight model rivals that of many conventional flight sims.

Movement is conducted one aircraft at a time during the course of each four-second turn. The order in which planes move is governed by an elaborate initiative system that tries to account for both positional advantages and pilot experience. This works pretty well considering the fluidity of real air combat, but awkward cases occasionally arise that force you to predict what a bandit's going to do when you might feel you should be able to react to his actions instead.

The slick interface makes it easy to get a plane to do whatever it and its pilot are capable of. All turns, climbs, dives, skids, and even snap rolls are instantly and automatically boiled down into a final position, altitude, speed, and attitude by the program. Hard maneuvers



DOGFIGHTS TO ORDER The included mission builder gives you everything from one-on-one dogfights to enormous melees of 72 planes.

bleed airspeed, so proper energy management is essential, just as in a good flight simulation. Concepts familiar to sim veterans such as G limits (structural and physiological), high and low yo-yos, and lead and lag pursuit all apply directly to OTR's aerial battlefield. The only real flaw in the flight modeling is its treatment of vertical maneuvering. Though the energy loss from tight limmelmans and pullouts from steep dives seems about right, acceleration factors are miscalculated, so G effects aren't applied when they should be.

For those desiring less complexity,

OTR lets you simplify the rules, trading detail for ease of play. Unfortunately, the only selection that models altitude is the one that has everything; the others are strictly two-dimensional, and therefore bear little resemblance to true air combat.

SITUATION OMNISCIENCE

Controlling multiple aircraft simultaneously from a God's-eye view necessitates compromises which, though they may be familiar to wargamers, are completely foreign to flight sim players. Cockpit visibility does vary between aircraft types, but it is as if all pilots on a given side can communicate telepathically: Anything one pilot sees, all pilots can see. Situation awareness is thus too easy to come by; giving more freedom to maneuver than an actual pilot, whose life depended on keeping constant sight of his opponent, would have had. Centralized control also permits coordination levels beyond what's possible in real life.

Despite these problems, combat maneuvering remains realistic enough that intelligent multi-plane tactics—defensive splits, drags, and bracket attacks, for example—are all but required to pre-



IN THE MOOD The digitized speech and vintage film footage played during cut-scenes create an atmosphere that's sure to draw you in.

Price: \$45

System Requirements:

IBM compatibles: 486 or Pentium processor, 8MB RAM, 5MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1 or better, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, mouse.

Macintosh: 68040 or Power PC processor, 8MB RAM, 1.5MB hard drive space, System 7.1 or higher, 2x CD-ROM drive, color monitor.

of Players: 1-8

(Hotseat, Internet)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Big Time

Software (Charlie

Moylan) with

J. D. Webster

Publisher: The Avalon

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The hardy P-47 Thunderbolt is the game's toughest fighter, with impressive firepower to match. High altitude engagements are its bread and butter, since it is less affected by the thinner air than most other aircraft. If the fight turns sour, the Jug's ability to dive like a brick means escape is generally a viable option.



Almost an exact opposite of the P-47, the Spitfire's sustained turning ability is unsurpassed. Chaotic furballs expose the Spitfire's biggest failings: an inability to absorb damage and a meager ammo supply. Your best bet is in tight turning fights that leave German fighters struggling to stay in the air.



Intended primarily to intercept bombers, the Focke-Wulf 190A is nevertheless a dangerous opponent in a dogfight due to the awesome firepower of its four 20mm cannon. Though handicapped by a very poor turn rate, its lightning-quick roll rate often allows it to elude more maneuverable adversaries.

vail against the outstanding computer AI. OTR's dogfights provide a good testbed for experimenting with modern tactical doctrines that weren't formalized until after the war, such as loose deuce, where one plane ties a bandit down while the other goes for a blind-side kill.

Between movement phases, planes in firing positions have their targets highlighted with approximate hit probabilities to help you decide whether to pull the trigger or wait for a better opportunity. Firing options include picking which weapons to use and setting gun burst length (long bursts do more damage, but tend to cause jams). Armament types are historically accurate, ranging from cannon and machine guns of various caliber to rockets and bombs. Damage modeling is quite detailed, with a host of possible system failures. Excellent sound effects and animations make every solid hit or kill a gratifying experience.

If a single engagement drags on for long enough, random reinforcements may arrive for either side. The frequency with which they appear can get ridiculous at times, leading to battles that seem to grow without end. Fortunately, a patch is available from Big Time's web site, www.bigtimesoftware.com, which tones reinforcements down to believable levels

and makes several other significant improvements to gameplay.

THREE WAYS TO PLAY

Scenarios include the following: canned or player-designed dogfights; over 100 historical missions containing a mix of fighter sweep, intercept, bomber escort, and air-to-ground action; even a tour of duty option that has you manage a squadron of fighter pilots through a series of sorties, possibly changing the outcome of the war in the process. This latter role playing element is very well done, accounting for increasing experience, fatigue, casualties, and special attributes like keen eyesight.

You may opt to fly for the USAAF, RAF, or Luftwaffe, and all feature a large assortment of aircraft from which to choose. Each is unique, and demands a different fighting style for maximum effectiveness. Two players hot-seating on one PC, and Internet play with multiple participants per side are both supported, but only for dogfight missions.

Non-combat flying is done over a large scale map so you can speed through the boring parts. From here, you can set your cruising altitude and decide whether to send some or all aircraft home if they're too battered to continue. When enemy

aircraft are encountered, spotting, surprise, escape opportunities, and maneuvering for advantage are all handled abstractly. This operational aspect of the game works well, condensing the tedium of pre-engagement positioning into a concise list of options.

As a turn-based game, there's no way OTR can possibly capture the immediacy of a conventional first person flight sim. Nonetheless, serious students of air combat who aren't hopelessly addicted to adrenaline-pumping action should find the varied tactical challenges it presents to be both fun and educational. **E**

APPEAL: Flight sim players who enjoy experimenting with multi-aircraft tactics. Wargamers holding any interest at all in WWII air combat. FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 fans looking for a prop-plane fix.

PROS: Detailed and accurate simulation of flight, weapons, and damage; excellent AI; nice graphics, sound, and period feel; great interface; very manageable learning curve

CONS: Some limitations inherent in a traditional boardgame format, and the order in which planes move occasionally cause strange results.





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Vanilla General

All the Flash, Little of the Gameplay

by Tim Carter

Ideally, a sequel ought to build on the successful elements of the original, while still sporting enough originality to make the sequel a unique game on its own. And in an age when many companies appear content merely to add scenarios or situations to an existing game engine without actually changing the basic design (think X-COM 2), SSI has earned praise for its innovative—and incredibly fun—line of games that began with PANZER GENERAL.

At first glance, STAR GENERAL would seem to do for science-fiction gaming what its sibling, FANTASY GENERAL, did for orcs and trolls. But while STAR GENERAL is different enough that no one could claim they were buying a made-over PANZER GENERAL, the designers seem to have lost track of what made the original a classic. Other than the distinctively clean and elegant interface, there is little to mark this game as a GENERAL-style affair. In fact, the two most compelling aspects of the GENERAL series, the campaign system and the wonderfully varied designs of the different scenarios, are noticeably absent from STAR GENERAL.

CAMPAIGN DROUGHT

There are no campaigns in STAR GENERAL, and while there are a wide range of scenarios to choose from—along with ample opportunity for generic creations—the game tends to become repetitive far too easily, with none of the unique challenges or compelling situations that made earlier GENERAL games so interesting.

The war option, in which a flexible number of races are set against one another in a generic universe, doesn't make up for the lack of a coherent story-based campaign that actually encourages you on to the next chapter.

To compensate for the lack of a campaign, you must now build resource generating structures and research complexes to buy new units and increase your generic tech level. This doesn't work nearly as well as the progressive structure of a campaign game. Worse, the game is supposedly based on the *Fleet* series of novels by David Drake, yet little of the martial flavor and tension found in Drake's exciting tales of interstellar conflict finds its way into STAR GENERAL.

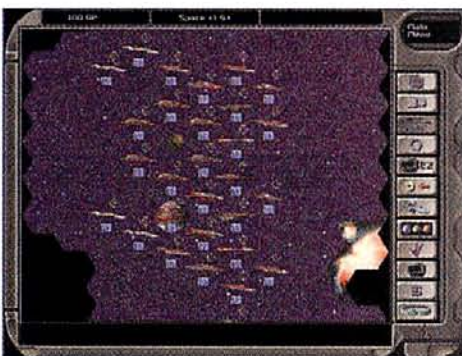
The biggest fundamental change from the earlier GENERAL games lies, of course, in the division between space and planetary combat. Players now control fleets of spacecraft, which do



WHERE'S MY FIX? While gameplay is clean and simple, STAR GENERAL has few of the addictive qualities of PANZER GENERAL or FANTASY GENERAL, particularly in the ground combat sequences.

battle in the surprisingly cluttered vastness of space. Once you have control of the area around a planet, you may send in your ground troops to fight it out on the surface. Typically, each turn of space combat will be followed by 10 turns of ground combat, to reflect the difference in traveling times. I found this system to work well, and to offer some interesting strategic challenges with respect to taking, holding, and reinforcing planets.

But that's where the excitement ends. Sadly, ground combat is repetitive and offers little opportunity for creative action. Part of the problem is the generic and rather square nature of most planetary combat. The terrain is simply not distinctive enough to be interesting, and in a large game ground fighting can become a real grind. Plus, the computer makes poor use of its ground units, buying far



TRAFFIC JAM The gorgeous graphics have a drawback: You must move the cursor over many of the ships to determine their class before planning your move. It's tough to get much useful information from a quick glance at the map.



Price: \$54.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible Pentium 90 or better processor, 16MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space, DOS 6 (or better) or Windows 95, 1MB SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM (4x or better recommended), mouse; supports Sound Blaster and compatibles, plus all Windows 95-compatible sound cards.
of Players: 1-7 (hot-seat, direct connect through TCP/IP, network play via IPX)
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Catware
Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Sunnyvale, CA (800) 245-4525
Reader Service#: 328

Tactics in Space

Because of the computer's emphasis on weak units for ground combat, you should build a smaller, but better-equipped, force capable of operating a unified command. Use long range units to soften up the enemy defenses, and armor for the kill.

The AI seems to keep a hefty reserve of resource points, so don't overextend yourself early in the battle. Be prepared for large numbers of enemy reinforcements the first time the computer gets the chance. It is often a good idea to have reserves yourself, or at least to be prepared for a protracted fight.

In space, employ the two principles which have shown success in earlier GENERAL games: Deploy combined forces to destroy isolated enemy units; and use a carefully planned assault to unlock large enemy fleets.

Reconnaissance is crucial, as you need to be able to see as much of the enemy's forces as possible before planning an



SPACE DUST GETS IN YOUR EYES Particularly around nebulae and other space terrain, recon units are a must.

attack. Use your missile ships to weaken key defenders, then move your heavy ships to the front line to do as much damage as possible while ending their turn on squares covered by your missile forces.

too much infantry and being very passive on defense. This is surprising, given the AI's predilection for sneaky counterattacks in both PANZER GENERAL and FANTASY GENERAL.

ALIEN DU JOUR

The real meat of the game is in its modeling of space-based naval combat. There are a vast number of ships from a dizzying array of alien races. Along with the usual battleship-cruiser-escort classes, there are some interesting hybrids, including a powerful cruiser-transport that is quite useful for quick system raids.

Depending on whom you ask, the graphics for space combat are either really nifty, or really annoying. Personally, I favor function over form, and thus found the graphics to be something of a problem. As you might expect, each race has a completely different set of ships, and, correspondingly, a different set of ship icons. The problem is, it takes a long time to identify which icon represents which type of ship. Mistaking a battleship for a transport can throw a wrench into even the best laid plans, so this becomes a real gameplay

issue, rather than a matter of taste.

Combat is simple and quite clean. Each unit has a strength value, as in the earlier games, and takes hits during an attack until its strength equals zero, when it dies. This doesn't work as well in recreating space combat, as it is reasonable to suppose that the different races might have both more weapon types (only beam and missiles are available), and more innovative means of attack.

More than anything, space combat reminds me of the naval combat in QQP's venerable THE GRANDEST FLEET. Which is not to say that it isn't fun, just that, as in TGF, it seems to lack a greater purpose.

Also, the initial release of STAR GENERAL contains some glaring flaws in the strategic AI. The computer won't manage its economy well or expand to neutral planets, making many scenarios and generic wargames completely pointless. Not only does this make you question the depth to which the game was playtested, you'll probably find—even after installing the very necessary patch—that STAR GENERAL functions better as a

piece of software than as a game.

All of this is a puzzle, given that SSI designers generally know why their series games are successful. Somehow, the development of STAR GENERAL left it bereft of the most attractive elements of the GENERAL line, with naught but a slick and meaningless operational space wargame in its place.

If you feel a burning desire to fight endless space battles with relatively little thought, STAR GENERAL is for you. Otherwise, I suggest dividing your time between MOO 2 and a dusted off version of PANZER GENERAL, which remains the strongest game in the series. **E**

APPEAL: Only for those craving a scoop of vanilla-flavored operational space combat.

PROS: Clean interface, simple learning curve, with some fun moments in space fleet actions.

CONS: So generic and lacking in flavor that it generates little of the suspense needed to make a truly addictive strategy game.



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Dark Side Of The MOO

Battle Beneath the Dirt in AH's Murky CAVEWARS

by Mark Clarkson

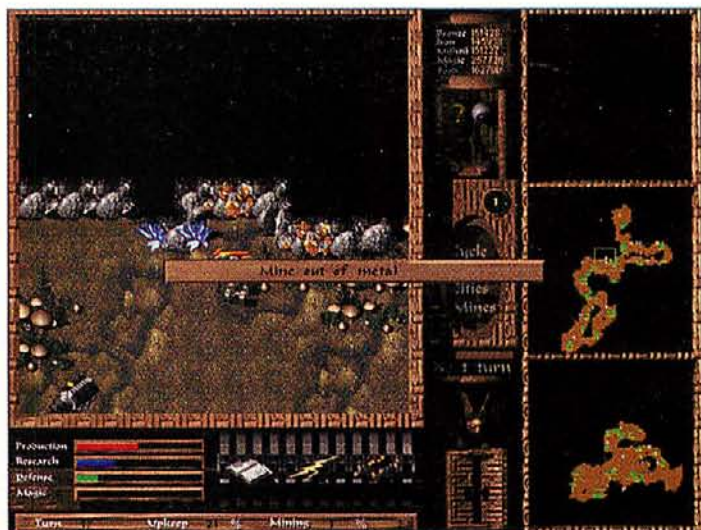
It has been years since our race was banished to the dim caverns beneath the surface of the world, to dine on mushrooms and contemplate our shame. Worse, we are forced to share these dreary caverns with other races, each more loathsome than the last: the ever-copulating Tarchons; the slug-like Advari, who leave foul, slimy trails in the dirt; and the humans...don't get me started.

But our time of shame is at an end. The finest brains of our kind are researching new weapons, more potent magic, and new technologies of all kinds. The time has come to raise up vast armies, to purge the caverns of Ibido of the other foul races, and to forge an invincible empire here in the dark. And then let those who hold the surface beware!

SPELUNKING WARS

Welcome to Ibido, the world of Avalon Hill's new strategy wargame, CAVEWARS. Think of it as MOO played in a big hole in the ground. Gameplay takes place on five levels, with holes leading up and down to connect them. You must explore all levels of the vast caverns, locate food and minable metals, and conquer all the enemy races within. There are also a sprinkling of neutral cities throughout the caves, although these needn't be defeated in order to win.

There are eight different races to choose from, their basic characteristics defined by population growth, combat abilities, strategic movement, and research ability. Research ability is further divided into four specific areas: weapons, transport, cave technology, and magic; and



MINING FOR MITHRIL You'll find that the random maps may leave you in a mineral-poor area, where it's often better to pack up and move on, unlike in Civ II or MOO.

finally, magic is subdivided into the following types: earth, summoning, transport, and viewing. Each race has a unique combination of abilities. Some are incredible with weapons but terrible with magic, and vice versa. Each race (except humans) also has a special ability. The Bergbui eat rocks instead of food, trolls carry out blitzkrieg attacks, the Cakkar are mass murderers...all in all, an appealing lot.

You can play either on the Ibido standard map, the Ibido map with random starting locations, or a randomly generated map where you control the densities of metal, food, and open space.

At the start of the game, the entire map is blacked out except for the area within one space of your initial city. Intelligence is the name of the game: First, you need to know where the enemy is. Second, you need to know where the metal and food are—and how to get them. You can either employ magical spells to reveal new parts of the map, or send units there on foot, in

a tank, or mounted on a giant toad.

The caves are maze-like and filled with tiny, cramped passageways. Units can only see a space away from them, and you cannot send a unit into non-revealed territory, so movement at the beginning of the game is rather tedious.

You'll need metal for most things you build, and it's an exhaustible resource. Metal comes in three flavors: bronze, iron, and mithril; each better than the last. A mithril tank will drive farther and hit harder than a bronze tank, for example.

To mine metal, you'll need engineers. You can use engineers to bore mines or new tunnels up and down to adjacent levels of the cave or through the cave walls. Engineers can also build new cities.

When you start the game you're able to build only the most rudimentary weapons: spears, bronze swords, and the like. To win you'll need to research more and better weapons—flintlocks, machine guns, mobile artillery, and more.

Price: 39.95

System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486DX or better, 8MB RAM, 20MB hard drive space, DOS 5 or better, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Sound Blaster and 100% compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-5 (hotseat only)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Broken Arrow Entertainment

Publisher: The Avalon Hill Game Company
Baltimore, MD
(800) 999-3222

Reader Service #: 329



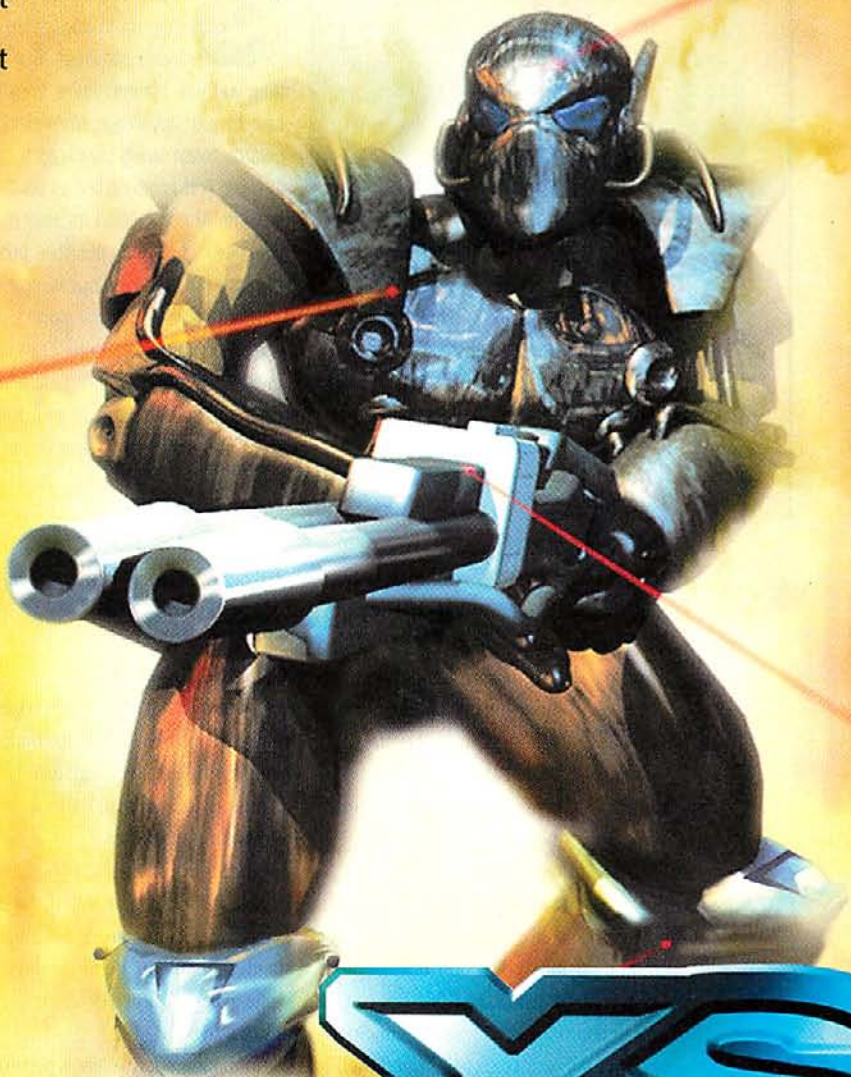
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CORPS OF ENGINEERS Think in three dimensions. It is often shorter to move to an adjacent level and then back again than to move from place to place within a level. If not, have an engineer bore some more holes so that it is shorter.

Start with a randomly generated map, rather than the standard Ibido map, then set the map up to have more caverns and fewer twisty passages. But regardless of which map you use, it's imperative to use the layout of the cave to your advantage. Immediately search for, and control, those twisty passages that lead to your cities.

Next, find enemy cities as early as possible. If you leave an AI unmolested for very many turns, it will eat you alive. As soon as possible, build mounts to increase the range of your explorers.

Don't be fooled by the game's leisurely pace. There is a lot going on each turn. Dwarves will be driving up to your city walls in tanks before you know it. It takes careful management of all your resources to prevent them from rolling right over you in a few dozen turns.

Better weapons rely on other technologies. To extract and work iron and mithril, for example, you need better cave technology; and you must master transport technology before you can build tanks. The different kinds of magic also provide weapons (earthquake), defenses (teleport enemy), and invaluable aids (map an area or transport troops) once you've researched them.

You control the amount of energy you put into research (as opposed to the amount put into production, defense, and magic) with sliders, à la MOO. You can further control which areas of technology or magic you want to research, and each city's resources can be individually distrib-

uted between production, research, defense, and magic.

TWISTING CAVERNS

CAVEWARS has a few rough edges. First of all, it's dark. Really dark. Too dark. Some of the controls are well nigh invisible. Also, it's more of a chore than it should be to manage multiple cities.

Once I selected a unit, I could find no reliable way, other than hitting the escape key, to deselect it again. As a result, I constantly sent units in the wrong direction while trying to select a different unit or city or mine.

Animation, such as it is, is perfunctory. In battle, the units slide up to each other

and red Xs appear over the dead units. Attacks with ranged weapons are shown with simple dashed lines and the like. You have no control over the battle; it resolves itself, automatically. The computer rolls some virtual dice off in RAM somewhere and reports the results. The whole process takes about 10 seconds.

The battle itself does make sense, in that the units array themselves in a logical

way; for example, ranged weapons fire at the appropriate distance. The battle usually seems to go to the side it ought to. Still, I expect many gamers to find this aspect of CAVEWARS disappointing. After feasting on the rich graphics and total tactical control offered by games like LORDS OF THE REALM II, I found CAVEWARS' battles a little flat. But to be fair, battlefield tactics aren't the point of CAVEWARS.

Abbreviated battles notwithstanding, CAVEWARS is a long game, similar in feel to MOO or CIVILIZATION.

Even veteran wargamers are in for a long, hard micro-managed battle, with lots of time spent poring over tables of hit points and defensive strengths. And unlike MOO or CIV II, the highs of CAVEWARS don't quite justify the time investment, at least in solo play.

You can vie for dominance of Ibido against multiple human players, computer AIs, or a combination of the two, up to a total of five. However, CAVEWARS supports only hot seat for multi-player gaming—no modem, LAN, direct-connect, Internet, or even play-by-email—a real shame, since a brisk multi-player option might have saved CAVEWARS from being mired in mediocrity. **C**



IT GROWS LIKE MAGIC Despite the Tolkienesque references and other fantasy trappings, CAVEWARS plays more like MOO II than HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC II.

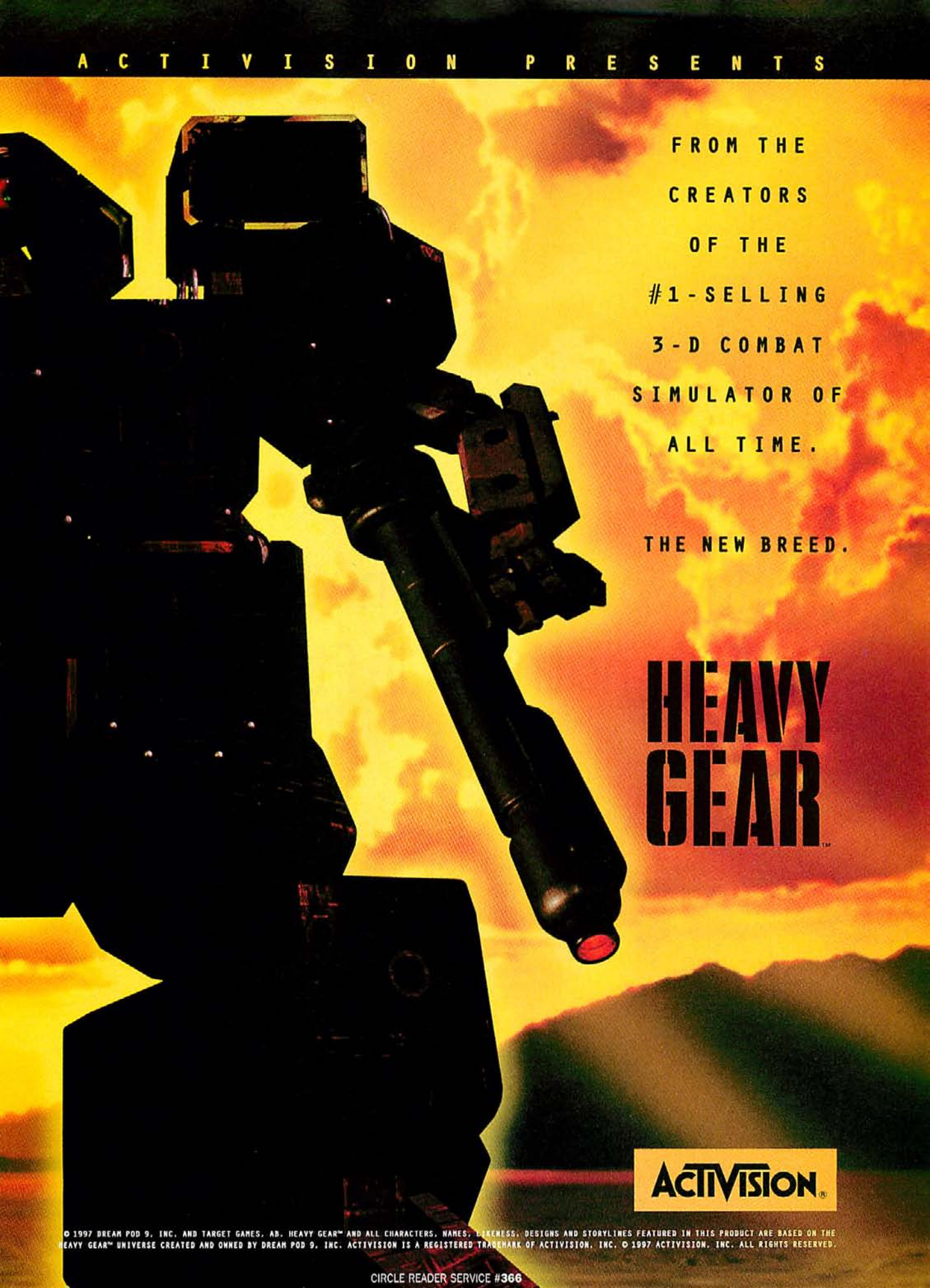
APPEAL: Fans of turn-based games who value gameplay over graphics. Agoraphobics who want to play MOO, but just can't.

PROS: Solid AI, challenging gameplay at times. Nice mix of races to go with random maps.

CONS: A depressingly dark interface. Disappointing graphics and animation. No LAN, modem, play-by-email, or Internet play. Could have been a true alternative to MOO or Civ II, but falls well short.



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Ship-Shape

Harpoon's Latest Refit Makes the Game Better and Adds New Features

by Jim Cobb

HARPOON is the Iowa class battleship of serious naval games. The underlying structure is so solid that it's worth any number of patches and add-ons to keep it around. This latest refit not only polishes the model and centralizes the many battlesets, but also adds features that enhance the original. Interactive Magic correctly chose HARPOON CLASSIC as a base, avoiding the multimedia excesses of HARPOON II. The click-and-drag interface is well suited to Windows 95, making the setting of sensor, movement, and weapon parameters; sizing; opening and closing of windows; and designation of waypoints and targets much easier than before. The updated data base, including over 119 entries, utilizes Windows 95's graphics to great effect. The geography in the group map now has textured color graphics; Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean never looked so good. Combat action uses animation instead of movie clips, showing the relative position of weapons and targets, and retains the tension of anticipating hits and misses in one of the first real-time games.

Gameplay is left unchanged from the



TRIPLE-DECKER SUB The Win 95 interface lets you keep an eye on the fleet and the movement of enemy vessels while you maneuver individual units.

original. You command task forces of varying sizes and objectives, with different combinations of air, surface, and submarine assets (now including marines and minefield operations). Orders are given at the operational level through a set of prompts, and unit micro-management is not absolutely necessary to win. Rather, you must develop a feel for time, space, and the capabilities of assets.

NOT JUST A GAME, IT'S AN ADVENTURE

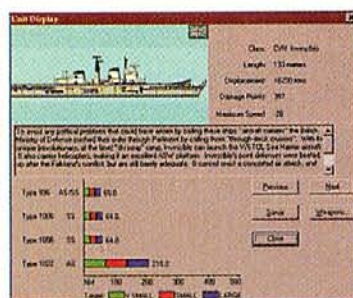
The interface and graphics allow ready access to an enjoyable and tense simulation. Proficiency, however, requires some study of naval technology. And while the AI is better than most, especially given the complexity of the game, it is still somewhat predictable. A nice plus, then, is a module allowing HARPOON 97 play on AOL versus other human admirals (an offer for ten free hours of AOL is included).

Veterans will enjoy not only the complete collection of HARPOON battlesets, covering the Cold War and the period after 1990, but also a new calculus for conflict with the EC2000 battleset. Its paradigm is that an European Union, free of NATO, challenges the economic interests of the U.S. Ensuing trade wars heat up into a series of small conflicts involving the latest deadly toys. How would the U.S.

fare, in limited actions, against traditional allies who were backed by Russia? The Scenario Editor is a pleasure for players who'll want to create their own battles.

A few familiar bugs still exist. The automation of defensive assets doesn't work quite right, and in-flight fueling remains a problem. Experts will find some discrepancies in the unit depictions, and synchronizing attacks on the same target from different bases requires more work than seems necessary. However, Interactive Magic continues to correct these with patches.

In a nutshell, HARPOON 97 continues a tradition of elegant and enjoyable, if admittedly complex, gaming. The open-endedness and continuing improvement of this series make it one of gaming's jewels, and it's well worth the purchase for any naval enthusiast. **C**



HARDWARE HEAVEN HARPOON 97 is worth owning just for Larry Bond's exhaustive data on naval platforms.



Price: \$49.95

System Requirements:

486DX-50 or better processor (Pentium 90 or better recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), Windows 3.1 or better, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Larry Bond, Alliance Software

Publisher: Interactive Magic Research Triangle Park, NC (800) 789-1534

Reader Service #: 330

APPEAL: Serious naval enthusiasts, or anyone who wants some depth with their real-time gaming.

PROS: Gameplay and graphics of this proven system are enhanced by the Windows 95 interface. Still the most realistic experience this side of the Naval War College.

CONS: Minor bugs, some problems with synchronizing attacks mar an otherwise excellent product.





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Actual scene from the game.

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RATING PENDING



"A top 10 game pick for 1997, a visual treat."

— PC Games Magazine

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #264

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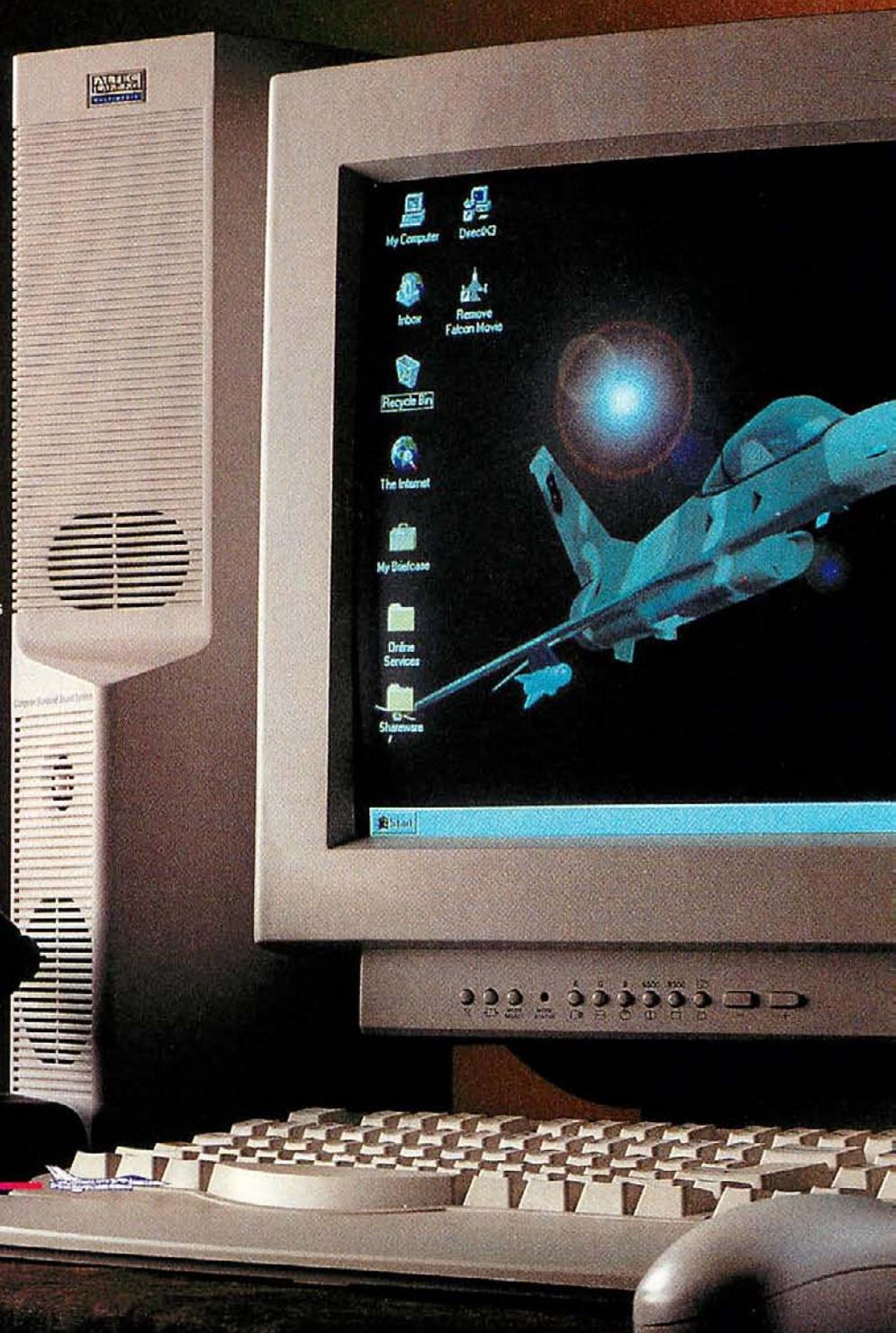
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- **Computer Gaming World**



"A welcome by-product of the component choices is the MACH V's excellent business-application performance." "The MACH V's Winstone 32 score [beat 8 other 166 MHz machines, and even a Pentium 200] for first place. The Falcon beat out its 166MHz Pentium competitors on hard drive and graphics performance as well."

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Jagged Defiance

Engaging Tactical Combat, but Where's the Game?

by Loyd Case

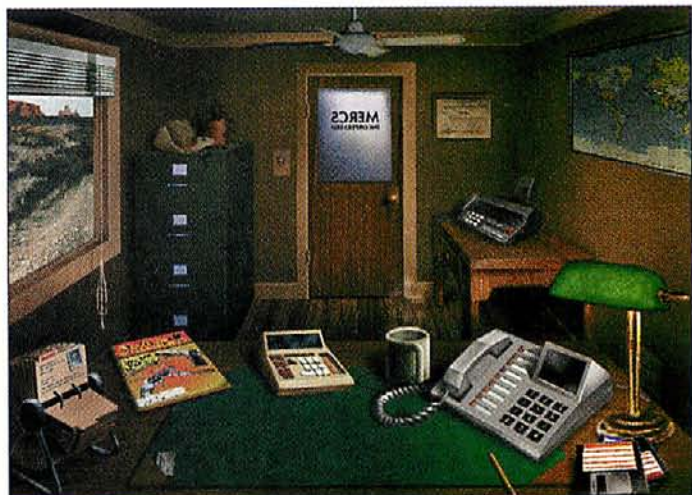
Imagine the life of a real mercenary commander. You search out customers, negotiate contracts, hire mercenaries, and send them off on missions; repeat ad infinitum. There's no illusion of saving the world, just an endless cycle of assignments for anonymous clients. It's probably a pretty pointless existence, when you get right down to it, and pointless pretty much describes *WAGES OF WAR*, the tactical combat game from New World Computing.

PLAIN WHITE BOX

WAGES OF WAR is a turn-based simulation of squad-level, tactical combat. There are only infantry squads to command (no vehicles or aircraft), although mortars occasionally supply light artillery fire. Each soldier has action points, which are used to move, shoot, reload, search an area, or blow things up. From the beginning, *WAGES OF WAR* has a very generic feel to it. The main interface screen looks like a run-down office, and the drill for the entire game is pretty simple and repetitive.

First, the videophone rings and a client calls you about an assignment. You get several faxes: some to negotiate prices, bonuses, and deadlines; and one from your accountant to evaluate each job. Then you get reports on your mission, which may or may not be accurate, depending on how much you pay for the intelligence. Next, you flip through the rolodex to pick your generic-looking mercenary team.

After picking your team, you lease weapons from one of several catalogs.



LET'S TALK BUSINESS Every *WAGES* scenario starts out in your office, where you screen clients, pick missions, and make calls for mercenaries and weapons. Then it's off to battle.

That's right, you *lease* weapons. Now, I've never been a soldier of fortune, but I suspect the average shady weapons dealer would just as soon never see the stuff again once it's unloaded. Your accountant calls one more time, to fax you travel costs. You pick the best travel option and your team arrives, along with a crate of weapons and gear. You equip your soldiers-for-hire and, time willing, send them off for a little training. Then off they go to

fight it out and return victorious. Finally, you get a mission status from your accountant.

In the next mission, your phone rings again. It's a potential client, who sends you more faxes...and so it goes. There's no overall story and no cutscenes—about the only pretense of a story is one recurring, shady character, Salvatore, that you assassinate in the final mission. There's no pretense of suspense during the campaign; it's just some playable scenarios strung together, with a score at the end.

FORCE RECON

The saving grace is the tactical combat system, which is a good tactical engine in search of a game. One interesting feature in the combat is that movement is initiative-based. People with better initiative move first—probably more realistic, though irritating when trying to move a team of mixed speed through a narrow door. According to the manual, the weapons damage done when a combatant takes a hit is modeled realistically, making both your side and the other guy's



Price: \$39.95

System Requirements: 486/66 or better, 8MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM Drive, Windows 95, mouse; supports all major sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Random Games

Publisher: New World Computing

Woodland Hills, CA (800) 325-8898

Reader Service #: 331



BLOWN 'EM UP GOOD The tactical combat engine in *WAGES* is good, with a nice initiative-based movement system. Intelligent tactics are rewarded in the system, and realism is well-maintained.

If you want to
fly like an
ace,
you'll have to
know what
buttons
to push.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #190



FIRE IN THE HALL *WAGES* suffers from quite a few problems. For one, the enemy AI appears to cheat at times, having better accuracy and vision. It also doesn't help that there's no compelling story to drive you along the campaign.

much more vulnerable than in, say, *JAGGED ALLIANCE*.

There's an excessive amount of mouse clicking for any action. For example, to

move, you click on the movement icon (crawl, walk, run) and click on the destination, rather than dragging out the movement line. You click another button to crouch or drop prone. In *JAGGED*

ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES, the right button was very handy, allowing you to easily change the facing of a merc. In *WAGES OF WAR*, changing facing is a pain, requiring a movement order. Actions like picking up objects are particularly tedious. Worse, finding the

egress point in some missions becomes an exercise in hunt the pixel.

The movement AI seems to be one of the stupidest I've seen in a long time. I

would click on a piece of clear terrain only a few steps from my merc, only to be punished with a "sorry, cannot comply" message. As for getting them to run out of an open door with a single command—forget it. You have to issue multiple commands—run to the door, run through the door, then run to the final destination. There must be a lot of static on that radio. By the way, the voice messages from your mercenaries only adds to the generic feel of the game, as there are only two voices—one female and one male—once you get into combat. It's a huge contrast from the wide variety of characters available in *JAGGED ALLIANCE*.

On the other hand, the combat system seems to work well, even though the enemy has the suspicious ability to hit you with small arms fire at extreme range with greater accuracy than you, and also seems to have the best night vision this side of a cat. On the realistic side, proper small unit tactics are rewarded with relatively light casualties and greater chances of mission success. The number of enemies you face is pretty realistic, too: It's not you against the world.

WHERE'S THE GAME?

Despite its warts, the combat engine in *WAGES OF WAR* is mostly enjoyable. The rest of the game, though, leaves a lot to be desired. Just a little more custom artwork and a bit more personality in each mercenary would have helped a lot; adding an overarching storyline would have been icing on the cake. If you want to practice small unit tactics, then *WAGES OF WAR* is worth checking out. If you're looking for an immersive gaming experience that ties it all together, though, take a look at the *JAGGED ALLIANCE* games or the quintessential squad-level strategy game: *X-COM*. **C**

CRACK COMMANDOS

One of the more annoying user interface quirks in *WoW* is assigning weapons and gear to your mercenaries before a mission. Check and double check what you order from the catalogs, because once you place the order, you can't return to order more stuff later. Also, when actually handing out goodies to your team, make sure to allocate all the gear—once you leave the weapons loadout screen, you can't go back, and leftover gear is gone.

Note any special gear that may be required in a mission. Attempting to rappel from a helicopter without rappelling gear means you've hosed the mission. On the other hand, some government assignments already come with special gear, so don't burn up dollars duplicating equipment.

Watch the dates at the bottom of the screen when ordering intelligence summaries, planning travel, or sending your unit out for training. Exceeding the completion date is an automatic mission failure. A few missions also have time limits once you launch, so keep an eye on the mission clock.

Stance in this game is critically important. Go prone whenever possible—you're much harder to spot and hit. Click the AP Saver button, which reserves action points for opportunity fire. You can exceed an action point limit, but it's made up in the next turn, so watch those negative numbers. Understand the movement order of your team. Since movement order is based on initiative, make sure you don't block a vital door with a late-moving character, or else your high initiative shooters will get stuck.

Unlike *JAGGED ALLIANCE*, there is hilly terrain, which you can take advantage of for defensive bonuses. The enemy AI never seems to take advantage of hillsides, although they will take cover behind obstacles and go prone.



SUIT UP When outfitting your team, make sure you do it right. You only get one chance to order weapons and equip teams. Also keep in mind that certain missions might require certain special equipment.

APPEAL: For gamers who like turn-based, tactical squad-level combat.

PROS: Solid, turn-based tactical combat engine, good graphics.

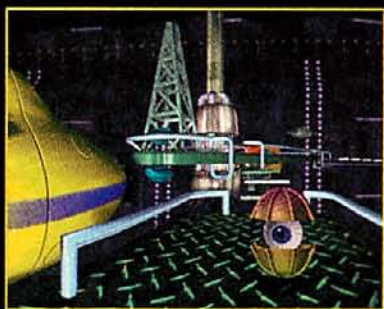
CONS: Engine without a game; awkward interface, generic feel.



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SURFACE WEAPONS:

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- 25mm GAU-90 4 barrels rotary cannon
- 1" Stiletto salvo rockets

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- 3" EXT Disruptor sonic torpedo
- 6" Piranha heavy swarm torpedo
- 6" Mark-60 Thresher torpedo
- 6" Mark-65 Moray torpedo
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #363

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To The Stars...

The Most Comprehensive Spaceploitation Game Ever Has Finally Landed on Retail Shelves

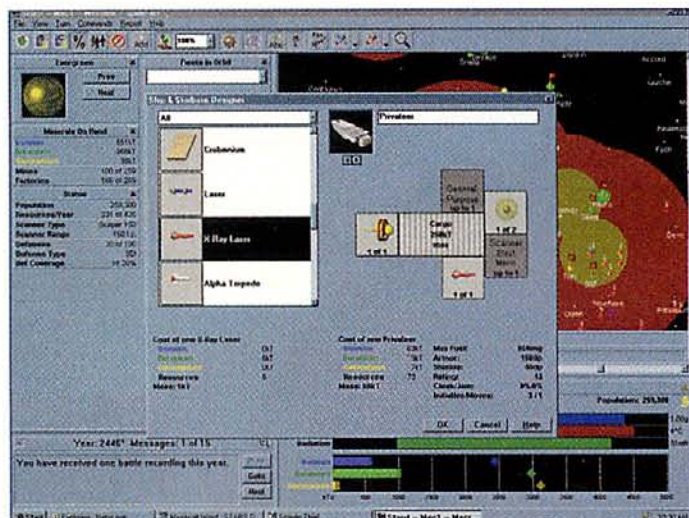
by Martin E. Cirulis

Is MASTER OF ORION 2 too easy and flashy for the Vader within? Is STAR GENERAL too limited for your strategic desires? Is SPACEWARD HO! 4.0 just too darn silly for you? Then hang onto your command helmets, boys and girls, because STARS!, from Empire, puts the blood, sweat, and tears back into stellar conquest. STARS! lacks almost every shortcoming found in the recent crop of Spaceploitation games: The universe is huge and relatively realistic; the number of players, both computer and human, is large (16); ship design is varied and nicely open-ended; and the strategic options are wide-open, with a marked absence of the single right-answer strategy seen so often of late in SF games that involve research and design.

Of course, as with all things in life, strategic joy does not come without a price, and here it is a fairly steep one in terms of complexity, lack of chrome, and sheer information overload.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Long ago (at least in computer gaming time), I stumbled across a great little shareware Spaceploitation game called VGA PLANETS, where up to 11 players could choose from races of questionable originality to clash across the depths of space. It wasn't pretty, but it did offer a myriad of strategic and tactical decisions if you were willing to put a little time and effort into it. The real novelty though, was that



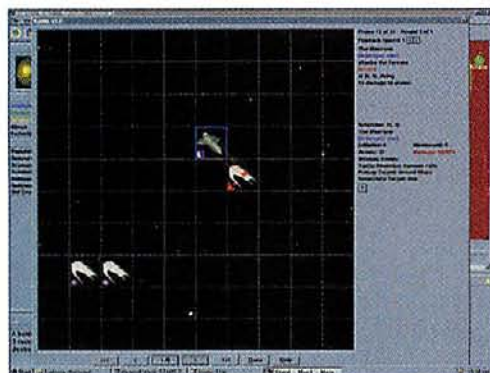
DRY DOCK In this cluttered screenshot, we're building a ship. Don't let the overflow of information put you off, though. Once you get past the learning curve, STARS! reveals a lot more depth than nearly every other space game.

the whole thing could be played via a BBS in a kind of ultimate play-by-email setup, which rivaled many of the professional pay-by-turn PBEM games that were out at the time.

Now, about four years later, we witness the birth of another game, STARS!, obvi-

ously trying to do much the same thing, only doing it better. While some loyal fans of the original VGA PLANETS may debate STARS! success, none can deny that it seeks to cover much of the same ground, and has achieved what VGA PLANETS did not—a Win 95 facelift and shelf sales through a major distributor; in this case, Empire.

STARS! is as much about the real guts of spaceploitation—resource gathering, exploration, and production of weapons of war—as it is about combat itself. Here, knowing how to create and protect mineral convoys is as crucial a skill as putting together an invasion fleet. In fact, it's probably safe to say that combat, while detailed, is actually the least interesting part of this game, and in large multiplayer games, the show of force and the use of clever diplomacy brings more gains than actually blowing anything up. But regardless of your style of play, STARS! is wide open enough to handle it, and then some.



RULE THE 2D GALAXY Combat certainly isn't as fancy as that in MOO2 or DEADLOCK. Fortunately in STARS!, combat takes a backseat in importance to diplomacy and production. You don't win wars by force alone.



Price: \$39.99 (\$19.95 for registered STARS! players)

System Requirements: 386 or better, 4MB RAM, 2MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, VGA graphics, Windows 3.1 or Win 95, mouse, Windows-compatible sound card.

of Players: 1-16

Protection: None

Designer: Jeff McBride and Jeff Johnson

Publisher: Empire Interactive

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Reader Service #: 332

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #191



STAR-GAZING This is the official STARS! website, where you can look for all the BBS sites offering STARS! games, as well as check out the FAQ, get support, and read up on the latest updates.

The Stellar Community

The best value in STARS! is that you aren't just purchasing a CD-ROM in a big box; you're buying your way into a huge community of dedicated STARS! players, who are all out there just waiting for fresh meat.

If you don't already have friends playing STARS!, then I strongly recommend you get onto the main STARS! Web site at <http://www.webmap.com/stars!>. If you are as yet undecided about whether this game is for you, this excellent Web page will be very useful in helping you decide if this is the type of game you want to play. In addition to a large FAQ file and endless playing tips, there is a comprehensive list of links to other sites where STARS! games are being played, and the numbers of various BBSs that have file areas specifically for this game.

STARS! owners with AOL accounts can send email to ogfstars@aol.com and register as players in order to join games and special tournaments to be held in the future. And if all this connectivity isn't enough for you, subscribe to the STARS! newsgroup at REC.GAMES.COMPUTER.STARS.

Once you get the hang of the game, it is fun to be involved in two or three separate games at a time—as long as you can keep your save turn files straight and you pick games with complimentary schedules. Until then, though, I recommend going in search of games clearly marked for beginners—at least in your first couple of forays—as there is nothing like being crushed by pros to really ruin your day.

Unfortunately, part of all this flexibility is information, and there is a vast sea of it in STARS! that could easily drown players weaned on flashier, less-dense fare. There are literally dozens of things that can require your attention here: from population and environmental conditions on every world, to the speed and distance of incoming ships. The designers have been careful to give you a very powerful interface with which to handle all this detail, but sometimes it feels like you're running a new operating system as opposed to a game. After some effort, you'll get the hang of automating most of the micro-management of your empire so you can concentrate on bigger decisions, but the average player may need a little convincing that, in the end, it will be worth all the trouble.

Fortunately, there is an extensive tutorial that takes you through the first 80 turns of the game and shows you how to make the interface work for you instead of against you. Make good use of the tutorial, because there is a lot of game here, but it won't be much fun until you become familiar with the intricacies of the system.

HITS AND MISSILES

While I found the depth of this game to be a refreshing change from these days of wargame over-simplification, I can't really say that I will be spending much time playing it in single-player mode. It's just a little too much work for too little reward when playing against the varied,

but eventually predictable, computer opponents. While chrome and presentation should not be the priority in a strategy title, they do go far in making a lengthy game enjoyable and interesting to play. If STARS! at least had a combat resolution as visually satisfying as the one in the old VGA PLANETS, I would have less hesitation in recommending it to the lone gamer—but as it is, this title feels a little too "shareware" for most solitary gamers.

On the other hand, STARS! does deserve full points for providing an affordable and truly epic PBEM space strategy game that can provide literally months of entertainment—and it's all as close as the nearest BBS with a file utility, or even your own email account, should you decide to organize your own game.

If you are the type of wargamer who likes their strategy games huge and chrome-free, then STARS! could be the brightest star in your future for a long time to come. **E**



LEARNING CURVE While the galaxy waits in the background, you're determining the course of the Empire's research. There are myriad choices and an extensive technology tree.

APPEAL: A must have for any wargamer with a yen for epic PBEM struggles.

PROS: Possibly the largest, most in-depth Spaceploitation game of all time. Perfectly designed for extended PBEM play.

CONS: A learning curve as long as the special effects are sparse. Probably a little thick and dry for the casual, solitary gamer.



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Blood Without The Magic

This Real-Time Version of AD&D's Forgotten Realms is Forgettable

by Arinn Dembo

Here's an odd combination for you: a strategy title set in the Forgotten Realms of *Advanced D&D*. It seems like a strange idea at first but, actually, the idea is a natural. In the collected manuals owned by TSR there are literally hundreds of units and characters, all of which have their statistics and special abilities made to order. A strategy game which made good use of this creative backlog would blow *HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC* and *WARCRAFT* out of the water like so much flotsam.

But alas, before anyone gets too excited, I should tell you that *BLOOD & MAGIC* doesn't blow anyone out of the water. Despite some classic *D&D* monsters on the unit list, this game of real-time tactical combat comes across as a poor man's *WARCRAFT*—and mind you, I'm comparing it to the original, not the sequel. Although real-time wargames are currently the rage, virtually everything else about this title is at least two or three years out of date. It's a game that I might have reviewed enthusiastically in 1991—but nowadays, it just won't cut the mustard.

GO-GO-GADJET-GOLEM!

For those of you hoping that there is a lot of Forgotten Realms material in the game, I'm sorry to say that there's very little role-playing involved here. There's a little bit of plot material in the pre-combat animations, but it's all just filler, and has little to do with the game itself. As we begin the game, we are introduced to the Blood Forge, a new technology which has



MUD AS HELL The basics of gameplay all boil down to the basal golems, who can collect mana as little obelisks or become troops in their golem form. Use them to form buildings and upgrade them to other unit types.

radically changed the face of war, much like the Tiberium plant in *COMMAND & CONQUER*. In this case, the McCuffin is a raw, glowing pit in the ground which can collect up to 300 points of magical energy—mana—at once.

In the hands of a strong mage, a Blood Forge will also produce a near-endless supply of magical slaves called basal golems. They are the elemental stuff of all your magical armies—the troops, the resource base, and the economy all at once. They will obey any command and can be shaped into virtually any form you desire, so long as you have a facility available and the stored mana to affect the transformation.

It takes forty points of mana for the Blood Forge to produce one golem. In its active state, the golem is a little man which walks, fights, and picks up objects on command. At rest, the golem reverts back to an obelisk of mud. As it meditates in obelisk form, the golem collects mana—like a

solar cell, I suppose—and transfers it automatically back to the Forge.

Put four golems together on the naked foundation of a mystical site, and they will join to make a building. Order them to transform out in the open and they'll become a wall of stone—and the more golems added to the wall, the stronger it becomes. Once you've raised a troop building, you can send fresh golems to the vicinity to transform them into fighting units. And, if your fighting units get too badly beaten up out in the field, you can send them back to the Blood Forge, which will transform them back into basal golems with full hit points.

Now this is an interesting notion without any doubt, but it sounds a lot better on paper than it works in practice. Veteran war-gamers have probably spotted the problem already: The system is just too powerful. Logistics is an important factor in real warfare; in *BLOOD & MAGIC*, it has been completely eliminated. At the begin-



Price: \$39.99

System Requirements: 486/66 or better, 8MB RAM, 25MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, Microsoft compatible mouse, DOS 5.0 or Win 95, IPX or NET-BIOS for 2-player games, 16550 UART for direct link.

of Players: 1-2

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Tachyon Studios

Publisher: Interplay Irvine, CA (800) 468-3775

Reader Service: 333

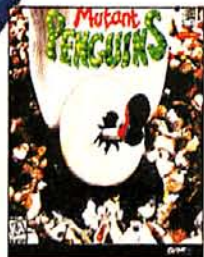
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PC-CD ROM
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DOS



BRIDGE THIS GAP One of the problems with the game is a horrible unit pathfinding AI. Your troops will bump into each other and even lose their way. And even if you cross this bridge, your units won't act any smarter.

ning of any map, while you're trying to strike a balance between working troops and mana collection, there are a few tense minutes when your golems can be killed and harassed, which prevents you from building up a power base. But once you have a little forest of snoozing obelisks vegetating away in your backfield, there isn't much more to the game than building up a devastating army and swamping the enemy under your units. There's no hunting for resources, and only your buildings need to be defended; the Blood Forge itself is completely indestructible.

BRASS TACKS

BLOOD & MAGIC has three major problems, any one of which would be enough to sink the game in 1997's highly competitive strategy market. The first problem, and the least significant one, is that it's just plain primitive. The graphics, the sound, and the animation are all substandard and ancient. Since the game runs properly from a DOS box, I wouldn't have been so critical of this, except for one thing—the game designers have the gall to recommend a 486DX-100 to run it. It's like using a Porsche as a golf cart.

The second problem is that there just isn't enough gameplay for your gaming dollar here. B&M is divided into five stories—small campaigns which are associated with the five realms on the map—and each story has three scenarios. There are only 15 maps. You can play both sides,

of course, but the victory conditions for the two sides are never really interesting enough to warrant the effort.

Once you complete the 15 original scenarios, you can start your own character and play a random campaign, which will throw the same 15 maps at you in random order, and give you an overall score at the end—It tells you whether you were good or evil, chaotic or lawful, and how many victory points you earned.

But why play the random campaign, since it's just a reshuffle of the proper one?

The game's best feature is the list of units, which is small but intriguing. There are five buildings in the game, and each of them produces four units, ranging from a basic 25-hit-point goon, to creatures of great power and many subtle uses. All of these beasties are taken straight from the *Advanced D&D* monster manuals, and using them in tactical combat was a real hoot. There's nothing like sending five wraiths into a knot of 30 or 40 enemy units and cutting loose with 50 manas' worth of Fear—which drives everyone but the paladins a distance of five squares away. Talk about a gorgeous rout!

AI (ABSENCE OF INTELLIGENCE)

Sigh. Alas, the occasional pleasure of using skiffy units is not enough compensation for the incredibly repetitive gameplay of this title. Which brings me to the final point: Although the interface is intuitive and easy to use, with the usual click-and-drag grouping of units, the movement AI for your troops is so bad that units traveling together will actually bump into each other and stop in confusion; these mud creatures aren't very bright. They'll also attack each other if you acci-

dentally click on your own units instead of the enemy's. You can't get too quick and dirty with the mouse.

And if I thought my own units were stupid, they were geniuses in comparison to the computer opponent. It has the attention span of a gnat and is so timid that a player who sets two or three units to guard a building will rarely face any opposition. On several occasions, the computer had me on the ropes—no golems left and only one or two crippled units left to defend a vital structure—and it would just wander away, rather than finish the job. I like winning as much as the next person, but it shouldn't be so easy!

Overall, I can't recommend this game. Fascinating as some of its ideas are, there's not enough here to justify the purchase for strategy gamers or role-players—unless you *really* want the free paperback from J. Robert King that comes in the box. **E**



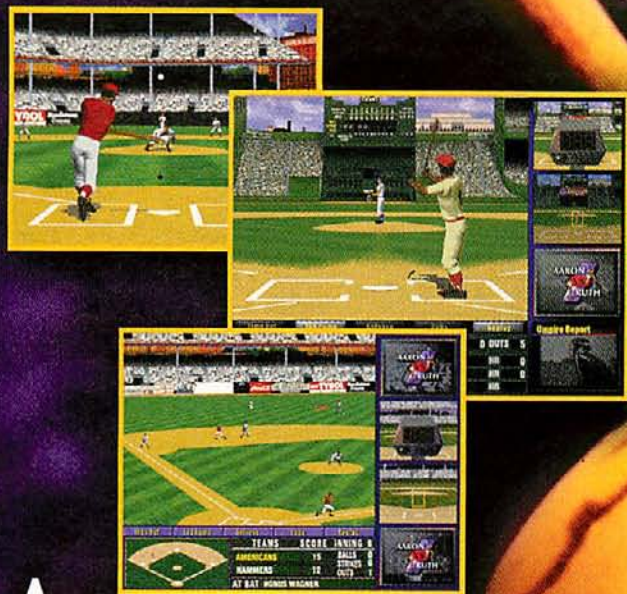
ARBORETUM About the only thing going for B&M are the cool creatures. Use basal golems to create buildings, like this Arbor Lodge, and then upgrade them into druids, griffons or other creatures specific to the structure.

APPEAL: D&D fans or those who just need to play one more real-time fantasy strategy game.

PROS: Some cool units and an interesting magic system.

CONS: Virtually everything else. Primitive graphics, bad sound and music, ancient animations, abysmal AI for your own units and the computer opponent, not enough maps, and no resources to fight over.





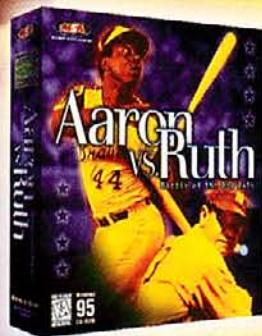
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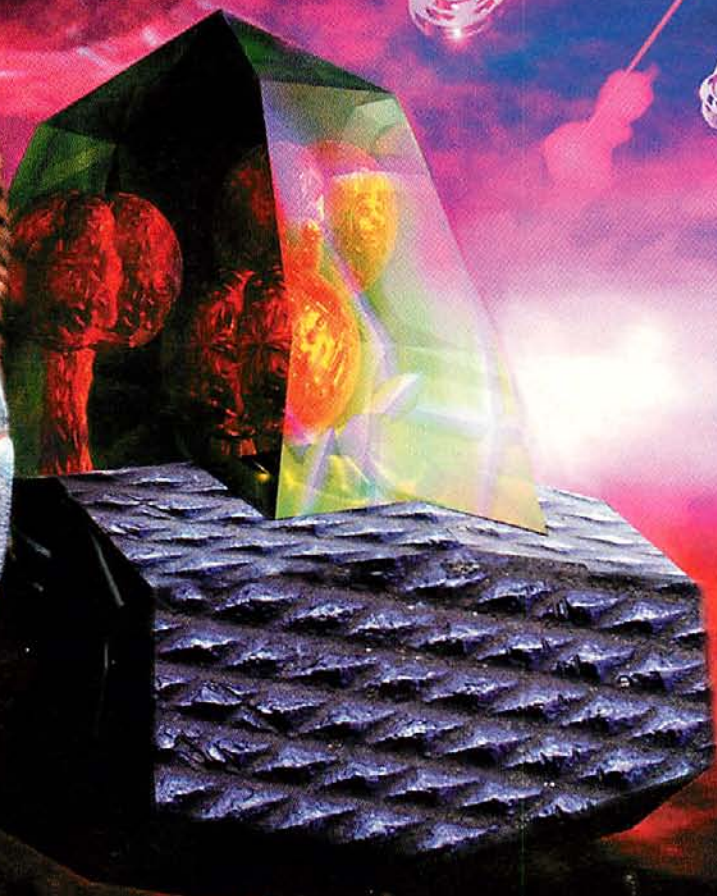


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #72

Hold Your Oysters

Sir-Tech's Light, Comic Adventure FABLE Is A Fun Adventure, But It's Going Back to the Shop for a New Ending



The world of Sir-Tech's *FABLE* is in bad shape. An ancient cataclysm split it into four separate lands, each ruled

over by a demon. As might be expected, life is a little tough for the people who live there, and a hero is needed; in this case, our boy Quickthorpe. His mission is this: travel to each of the four realms (the Frozen Lands, the Land of Mists, the Engulfed Fortress, and the Land of Shadows), kill the demons, and recover a special jewel from land that will set things right again. Along the way, Quickthorpe will face a variety of obstacles—from ogres, to lizard guards, to perilous sirens beneath the sea—who will attempt to stop him in his tracks. It's a typical adventure game setup.

I FEEL FUNNY

Since *FABLE* is a comic adventure, things are naturally somewhat on the bizarre side, but not unduly so. Much of

the humor in the game comes from Quickthorpe's conversations with other characters or remarks about objects, rather than from slapstick situations or

given situation. Still, this is not hunt the pixel; overlooked objects are usually in obscure locations, rather than being invisible onscreen.



Take the chilli-peppers

FROZEN TUNDRA Quickthorpe's adventures begin in the Frozen Lands, where he must kill the evil Ice Giant. Once you dispel the ghost inhabiting this house, you can collect all sorts of goodies inside to get you on your way.

odd gameplay.

Puzzle solving, for example, is a pretty straightforward matter, more so than in most games of this type (like *TOONSTRUCK* or *DISCWORLD*). You are more likely to have trouble because you missed an item somewhere than for not being able to figure out what to do in a

FABLE's interface is simple to learn and easy to use. The right mouse button cycles among the functions of examining, taking, giving, and using objects; as well as starting conversations and moving. The left button performs the actual task.

Quickthorpe's inventory seems to be bottomless; he can haul around an amazing number of items. The inventory screen can be brought up any time by looking at Quickthorpe, or by hitting the space bar. The inventory box is actually a window that can be moved around the screen or resized as needed—a very handy feature.

To use an item, you just pick it up and click where you want to use it, either onscreen or on another item. If it can't be used in a particular situation, nothing bad happens; Quickthorpe merely says "That's not a good idea," or something similar. Also, there is no way to drop objects on the

“ Since you'll never play *FABLE*'s original ending, I'll ruin it for you.... ”

►Step inside, wayward adventurer. This month, your gaming soothsayer has visions of a game that should warm the cockles of serious RPG fans' hearts. Interplay has begun work on *IRON THRONE*, a real-time AD&D role-playing game that will be set in TSR's *Forgotten Realms* world. The game is being developed by Bioware, the team responsible for Interplay's *MECHWARRIOR*-lite

game, *SHATTERED STEEL*, and, in theory anyway, *IRON THRONE* promises to meld the real-time action of *DIABLO* with more robust, traditional AD&D role-playing. Look for it toward the end of '97.

►In the bad news department, rumblings from Sierra indicate that they're beginning to lose faith in standard adventure games. The first game to get the axe: *CLOAK*.



Price: \$49.95

System Requirements:

IBM-compatible 486 or better processor, Windows 95 or MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, 8MB RAM, 2MB hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM, SVGA video card, Microsoft-compatible mouse. Supports SoundBlaster-compatible and other major sound cards.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Developers: Telstar Electronics Studios Ltd.

Publishers: Sir-Tech Ogdensburg, New York (315) 393-6451

Reader Service #: 334

ground, so you can experiment without worry; an item won't be used unless it's meant to be used.

Conversations are started by clicking the mouth icon on a person. Usually, Quickthorpe will have several possible responses, which are shown in the dialog box. Click on the one you want him to use. In certain situations, he may also say something on his own, depending on the responses you initially choose. A very nice feature of the game is the ability to turn on subtitles, so you can have text of all conversations. You can also turn the speech and sound effects on or off.

TOON STRUCK

Unlike many games today that go for an elaborate production with live actors and video, FABLE is entirely hand drawn. While this makes for a certain cartoony feel—which fits in well with the game's humor—the



NICE OYSTERS On your way to the Engulfed Fortress, you'll encounter a beautiful, but dangerous, siren. The smart adventurer will ignore her and search for oysters instead.

renderings are very pretty (especially the backgrounds), and add an interesting otherworldly touch to the game.

Locations in FABLE are small: You can't really get lost here. Mapping isn't generally needed, except in one place where you have to go through a maze. Happily, the maze isn't too large, and since it's logically constructed, it's easy to map out. The game also includes its own map. In three of

the lands, an overall view of the area appears when Quickthorpe exits certain screens. When you move the cursor around, the map lights up areas you can travel to, and clicking on one sends Quickthorpe that way.

You can save and restore games any time outside of conversations. Eight positions are available, and they come with thumbnail pictures of the current location. Titles are a little



What you get to do: Shoot with gun, shoot with D-pad, shoot with D-pad and partner, shoot with gun and part

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cramped, though, and the save names are restricted to a maximum of 10 characters.

The only technical problem I experienced was the game's tendency to lock up on occasion when changing screens. This could happen any time Quickthorpe moved from one place to another. I finally got around this problem by using a boot disk that loaded EMM386, instead of my usual QEMM. Other than this one glitch, however, the game ran flawlessly.

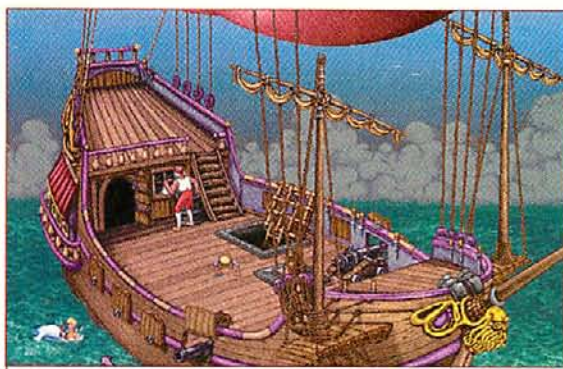
I HAD A DREAM

The game ran flawlessly up to the end, that is—and here I have an interesting story to tell. We are all familiar (too familiar) with game companies releasing patches to fix bugs in their games, but it is unusual (unheard of in my experience) for a game to receive a major revision after it's in the box when it has no real technical problems to speak of.

But that is exactly what has happened here. FABLE's original ending—the one I

played—was highly unsatisfactory; and the first, and unpublished, version of this review was highly critical of the whole game because of it. Since you'll never play it this way, I'll ruin it for you: The whole adventure is imaginary, taking place entirely in the mind of a murderous nutcase behind bars. Obviously such a conclusion wouldn't go over well with serious gamers, and I made no bones about saying so. You have to wonder about designers who forget that gaming is supposed to be a *rewarding* experience—not a build-up to a total letdown.

However, after I submitted the review (but before this issue went to press), Sir-Tech contacted us to let us know that they had persuaded FABLE's designers to create a more acceptable ending. I have not yet seen this new ending, but it has been described to me, and it definitely sounds



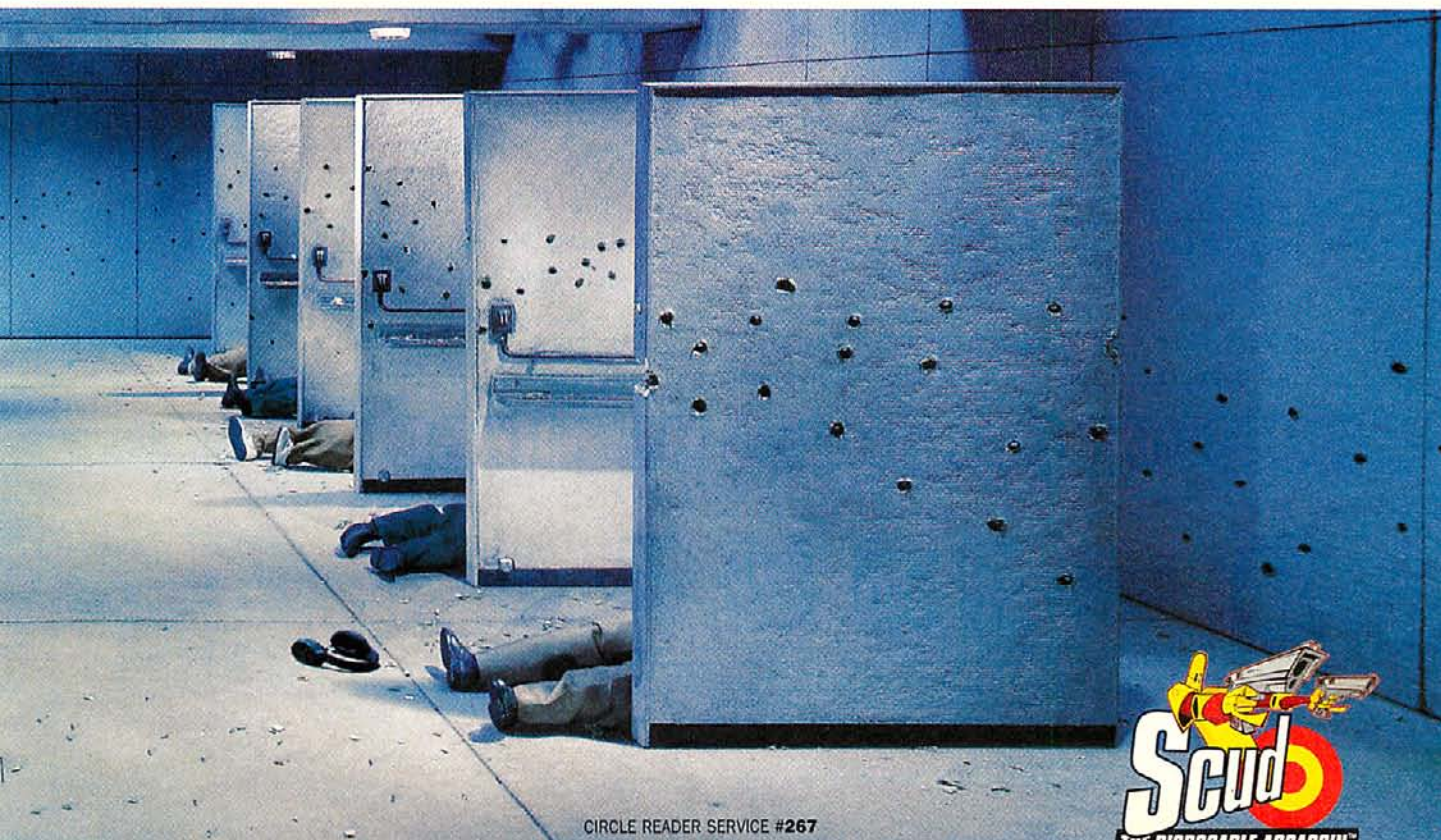
SHIP HAPPENS Quickthorpe's search for four precious stones will take him above, and beneath, the sea in FABLE.

much better than the first one I was unfortunate enough to play.

In the next issue I will do a quick update on my experience with the new finale. In the meantime, however, I can tell you that FABLE is a fun, but simple, game; and I recommend it as either a good beginner's adventure or a pleasant afternoon's diversion for the veteran gamer. ☿

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Hasbro Overactive

Do We Really Need Computer YAHTZEE?



A

game becomes a classic because it is loved by large numbers of people over long periods of time, and

usually over multiple generations. So it makes sense for computer game companies to look to the classics for inspiration. After all, these are the games that pleased Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones' father, and his father before him; maybe they've got what it takes to please Jones, Jr., too—even if Jones, Jr. spends all his leisure time in front of a computer.

The logic is impeccable; and yet the conclusion is flawed, or at least the decisions the conclusion leads game companies to make are. Hasbro, for example, has received a lot of publicity for its recent CD-ROM versions of games like *Risk*, *Monopoly*, *Clue*, and *Scrabble*; and deservedly so. One might ask whether the

world needs another computer version of *MONOPOLY* or *SCRABBLE*, but not whether the world ought to have at least one *really good* version of it. And Hasbro's versions *are* really good.

But these aren't the only classic games on the Hasbro backlist, and they're not the only ones that Hasbro, in a spurt of adaptive zeal, has brought to the computer screen. Most recently, there's *TRIVIAL PURSUIT* and *YAHTZEE*.

Now, no serious gamer would question whether *Yahtzee* is a classic game, and despite its relative youth, few would argue about *Trivial Pursuit*. But *Tic-Tac-Toe* is a classic game, too, and so is *Charades*—that doesn't mean that making computer games out of them is a good idea.

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

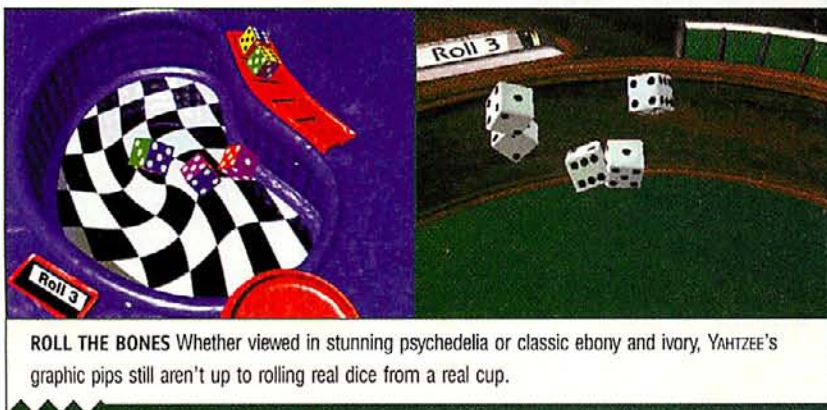
Why not? Well, for one thing, while computers are better than humans at some tasks (such as instantly tallying up points according to arcane rules or moving large numbers of little pieces at once), they are much worse at others. Games that have a lot of features that can

be improved by the use of computer technology are the ones you want to turn into computer games. Games that don't—or worse, ones which adapt only clumsily and unnaturally to life on the computer—are the ones you want to leave the way they are.

Take *TRIVIAL PURSUIT*. Like every other trivia game attempted on a computer, this game runs into the barrier of natural language processing. The computer asks a question, and the player has to answer it. But how? Computers are notoriously bad at parsing English, and variant forms (for example, is the song called "The Camptown Races," "Camptown Races," or "Camp Town Races?") are a nightmare. Hasbro's solution is to duck the issue entirely: it displays a trivia question onscreen and then instructs the player to "say your answer out loud." Next, you're supposed to click on the "answer" button to display the correct answer. If the answer you spoke out loud matches the computer's, you click "right" to let the machine know you got the question right. If not, you click "wrong."

Forgive me, but this is the most brain-dead game design I've ever seen in a trivia game. The computer isn't helping you or in any way making the gaming experience better. The old-fashioned system, with cards you can turn over at your own pace, was easier and better. The designers tried to find other ways to justify the existence of their project, such as by including sporadic multimedia elements in

“ When reviving classic games, some common sense is required. ”



ROLL THE BONES Whether viewed in stunning psychedelia or classic ebony and ivory, *YAHTZEE*'s graphic pips still aren't up to rolling real dice from a real cup.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #228



the questions (a few are read aloud, others contain tiny animations), but these are paltry and desperate attempts, especially since the animations rarely run to completion before locking up.

YAHITZEE, on the other hand, has somewhat more involved rules and scoring than your typical parlor game, and unlike TRIVIAL PURSUIT, YAHITZEE does provide a simulated opponent. The problem here is that, despite some very rational and useful computer input (it calculates the odds for you before, and suggests plays to you after, each dice throw) and some stunning 3D animation for the dice, YAHITZEE definitely bumps up against the "who cares?" problem.

True *Yahzee* enthusiasts will play it with real dice, and if no opponent is around, then they'll play without one (*Yahzee* is, at heart, a kind of solitaire, only using dice instead of cards). The whole concept of a virtual dice cup that uses a precise simulation of the physics of dice throwing—YAHITZEE's main attraction—borders on the obscene. Simulating brain surgery, driving a race car, or building a city makes sense. Simulating a dice cup is preposterous. It's a brilliant simulation, but why in the world would you buy a computer game that brilliantly simulates throwing dice?

SANITY CHECK

To answer this question, the designers throw in extras, such as a version featuring tetrahedral dice, a version with multicolored dice, a battle version in which you can knock your opponent's dice off his rack with your throw, and some especially nice boxtops. There's also a slick, pounding soundtrack, a la TRIVIAL PURSUIT.

In the end it comes to the same thing whether the game is as well made as YAHITZEE or as poorly made as TRIVIAL PURSUIT. Neither has a reason for existing, and if Hasbro sells any copies at all it will be purely from trading on the popularity of their brand names and consumers' sheer curiosity.

Someone, I hear, has produced a multimedia version of *Hangman*. It won't be very long before somebody does an

extravagant multimedia simulation of *Tic-Tac-Toe*. Personally, I'm holding out for the CD-ROM virtual touchscreen version of *Pattycake*. ☿

TRULY TRIVIAL The multimedia "enhancements" of TRIVIAL PURSUIT can't touch those of MONOPOLY, much less *You Don't Know Jack*. Stick with the boardgame version.



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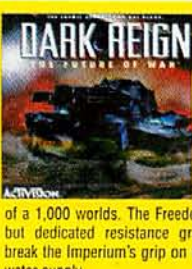
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Birth Of A Flight Sim

*A-10 CUBA!'*s Designer Describes the Creation of His Next Sim



It's hard to imagine a software product more difficult to create than a combat flight sim. A successful sim incorporates the historical and technical background that you'd find in the most hard-core wargame, and it has to simulate real-world physics in a convincing manner. The designer must, however, balance realism and historical accuracy in order to provide a fun gaming experience. To be immersive and commercially successful, a sim needs graphics and sounds to rival the best action games. And while not a total necessity, an adventure game-quality background story can do much for drawing in gamers who aren't aviation buffs. Gee, and you thought designing sims was all fun and games....

To get a better idea of some of the issues designers face when creating a game, I talked to Parsoft's Eric "Hellcats" Parker, creator of *HELLCATS OVER THE*



PACIFIC and *A-10 ATTACK* for the Macintosh, and *A-10 CUBA!* for the Mac and Win 95. Parker's next simulation looks to up the ante in the graphics department and to add some unique enhancements to his already impressive physics model. As of this initial look, Parker is still developing the game's underlying engine; specific aircraft, missions, and other details are still in the planning stage. Throughout the year, we'll follow this project—from initial design, through development, to final

release—to see the kinds of decisions a game designer is faced with as a new project progresses.

EUROPEAN AIR WAR

This sim will focus on the Western Front during World War II. The primary aspect of the game will be dogfighting, although there will be some ground-attack operations as well. Parker shelved the original plan of doing a Gulf War A-10 simulation next (that project may still appear in the future) due to overwhelm-

“ In two years, we'll be able to do sims that are almost like virtual realities—based on real physics. **”**

—Eric Parker



How does Parker make an A-10 fly? Check out www.computergaming.com for the full scoop!

ON THE RADAR

SSI's still mum on the top-secret features of *Su-27 FLANKER 2.0*, the sequel—which is due out around year's end—to their acclaimed hard-core flight sim.



Su-27 FLANKER 1.5 will sport Gouraud-shaded aircraft.

But the company is about to lift the veil on an unexpected bonus: *Su-27 FLANKER 1.5*. This mission disk will sport 150 new missions, a new random mission generator, and 16-player head-to-head combat. The game's mission editor has been extended to allow designers to create mission files that last over a period of days, or even weeks. Direct 3D support means that 3D card owners will be treated to ultra-smooth, Gouraud-shaded (but not texture-mapped) graphics. A thorough training manual will be included, designed to get even novice players ready to battle *FLANKER 1.5*'s improved enemy AI.

DENNY ATKIN



POLY WANT A TEXTURE A-10 Cuba! used flat-shaded polygons to get smooth performance; Parker's next sim should have fully texture-mapped objects.

ing demand in the market for products in the long-ignored WWII category.

One of Parker's big concerns is to make the game as accessible as possible to less expert fliers, although not at the expense of authenticity. "As a World War II sim it's more accessible off the bat," Parker says, "as it's easier in terms of controls and instruments."

The sim will have a fairly flat user interface,

feels the development resources would be better spent on actual gameplay.

Parker does want to please the players who want to set up excruciatingly detailed missions, however. "We're toying with some ideas," he says, "such as hidden editing features that are documented in the manual, or going ahead and publishing specifications for some of the file formats and the AI language."

with fewer dialog boxes than the A-10 series, in order to allow pilots to get in the air faster. One of the tougher decisions centers on mission-planner capability. The current plan is to offer a basic capability that will allow users to set up simple mission parameters—with more detail than the mission generators in the ACES series or CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT—but not to allow micromanagement of every detail. The reasoning here is two-fold. First, a complex mission planner is likely to intimidate less hard-core players. Second, Parker

If Parsoft does publish the file formats, gamers would be able to look forward to a wealth of user-created mission editors, probably with features Parker never imagined.

OPEN SKIES

Creating realistic aircraft models is another area that requires much development effort. The developer must make tough decisions to create a small list of planes wanted by the largest groups of gamers. Thus, sim pilots end up getting a lot of time in Mustangs, Corsairs, Zeroes, and Focke-Wulfs; while fans of Brewster Buffaloes, Yak-3s, and Fiats are left grounded.

Parker hopes to provide unprecedented flexibility, and to make a lot of aviation buffs happy with what he calls the "Open Plane Interface," which will allow third parties to create new aircraft (FLIGHT SHOP for Microsoft's FLIGHT SIMULATOR offers a similar capability, but it's difficult or impossible to properly model the flight characteristics of many types of aircraft using the FLIGHT SIMULATOR engine).

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INTERACTIVE

Programmers will be able to create their own aircraft, complete with accurate 3D models and realistic physics. "Since we're doing physics, not programmed motions, planes should come apart realistically," Parker says. Other companies could take advantage of the "Open Plane Interface" to create a universal API that would let planes be shared between sims.

"With the Open Plane Interface, designers can bypass my physics," Parker says, "so real aircraft designers could bypass my physics, supply their own, and just use the collision detection in the sim. They could take up simulated new designs, fly around the pattern, and shoot landings to test them."

GRAPHIC VIOLENCE

Camers will see a big improvement over the A-10 series in the graphics department. "It's designed to take advantage of 3D accelerators which have a Z buffer," Parker says. He goes on to add, "If you have that kind of hardware, you're going to have a very high-

end looking simulation."

Parker plans to take advantage of a variety of 3D cards, but he didn't want to tie the engine too closely to the first- and second-generation cards currently on the market. "We built a sort of software emulator for 3D cards," Parker explains. "We didn't want to design an engine that would only have a life span of a year, so we built a version of the game that simulates the most important aspects of a 3D card, such as the Z buffer and perspective-corrected texture mapping." Parker says the emulation is fast enough that those without 3D cards will still find the game smooth enough to be playable.

Parker thinks that the current technology will let him make sims that are much cooler than in the past; but what really excites him is a market a couple of years down the road — when he can assume the gamer has a 3D card. Parker says that freeing up all the processing power that's normally used just to draw the screen will open amazing new possibilities. "We'll be able to do stuff that's almost like virtual reality — not with goggles, but based on real

physics. At that point you've got a world where there's as much to do as in the real world; you could take boxes, stack them on top of each other, and put a gun on top of them to build a defensive position." In other words, with real physics, you'd be able to perform actions other than the ones programmers anticipated.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Parker went on to talk about how physics are implemented in his current sims, and how he's able to work around the limitations of current PC hardware to create exacting flight models. We also discussed one of A-10 CUBA's most enticing features, and one that came as a bit of a surprise to the game's developer — smooth Internet play using Jay Cotton's KALI. We're out of space here, though, so check out our Web page at <http://www.computergaming.com> for the scoop on Parsoft's flight model and physics development, and watch this column next month for more on the future of multiplayer gaming as seen by Parker and other top developers. **E**

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GAMER'S EDGE

Your Source for Ruthless Strategies, Tips, Cheats, and Hacks

STRATEGY & TIPS

Diablo

Return to Hell for the Second Part of Our Diablo Strategy Guide

by Elliott Chin and Greg Fortune

In the devastated town of Tristram, the townsfolk await salvation from the hideous denizens of the dungeons below the cathedral. Little do they know, though, that the horrors in those halls are but a prelude to a greater evil that lurks in the catacombs and caves beyond.

This month's strategy guide looks at the best strategies for using each character class in *DIABLO*, in addition to uncovering a few more single-player quests. The lower levels are much harder than the dungeons, so you'll definitely need to understand the strengths of your character, and master his strategies, lest your first journey into the catacombs be your last. This article discusses strategies for the warrior and sorcerer classes. For rogue strategies, visit our Web site at www.computergaming.com.

Fighting with Class

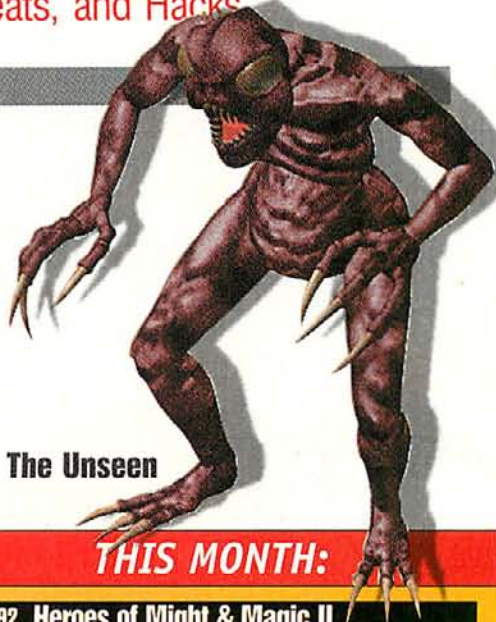
Warrior

The warrior is the first character type most novices try, and remains the favorite for many skilled veterans. Let's briefly talk about making the most of this rugged powerhouse.

BUILDING A FREIGHT TRAIN

When adding experience points to a warrior, put an emphasis on strength; we suggest adding two-to-four points per level up. What's left can be fairly evenly distributed, with more emphasis on vitality than magic or dexterity. Once your warrior's strength hits the 65 mark, be more aggressive about adding points to the other attributes.

OH, THE HORROR Rather than be surrounded, fight enemies from just outside doorways. This way, you only need to deal with one enemy at a time as they stream out to fight you.



The Unseen

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CROWD CONTROL

Despite his power, a warrior must be careful when approaching new areas. Marching into rooms and fighting creatures on all sides will lead to serious trouble in the lower levels. If you enter an area and notice that you've attracted a lot of attention, retreat. This will string out your enemies and allow you to fight fewer at a time as you work your way back. Also, keep your eyes open for doorways, narrow passages, barrels, or anything else that keeps your enemies from flanking you. Last tip—use the shift key when fighting in doorways. It'll keep you from stepping forward into the room after killing the monster in front of you.



Check out our CG-ROM and Web site for even more *DIABLO* strategies, tips and tactics for the rogue and a few more quest walkthroughs.

Quests Galore

This month we'll reveal five quests: two on the CG-ROM, and three in this article. Ogden's Sign and The Hall of the Blind are on the CD; and Griswold's Magic Rock, Arkaine's Valor, and The Chamber of Bone are here.

Quest: Magic Rock

What is the object? To find a meteorite fragment for Griswold that fell to earth and was stolen by the demons of the catacombs.

Where will I find the Magic Rock? The

Magic Rock is on a pedestal located on level five. It will be in a non-descript room or hallway, but you'll notice it as a rock on a table.

What level should I be to recover it?

There is no minimum level requirement for recovering the Magic



Griswold

Rock. If you can already survive level five, then you can recover the Rock. It's only a matter of wandering around and finding it.

What will I face there?

Typically, glooms and blinks will be hovering around the hallways near the Magic Rock, but as with all DIABLO games, the monsters you encounter will be random. You could face overlords or goatmen, or even Horned Demons. Just deal with them like you do any other monster in the catacombs and you'll have the Rock.

What do I get? Once you take the Rock to Griswold, he will fashion the Empyrean Band for you.

Quest: Arkaine's Valor

What is the object? To retrieve the legendary armor of the warrior Arkaine from its chamber in the catacombs.



YOU WANT A ROCK? This is the Magic Rock that Griswold covets. Nothing special, but if you bring it back, he'll give you a magic ring.

Where will I find Valor? Valor can be found on the sixth level below the cathedral.

What level should I be to find it? Your character should be strong enough to kill Horned Demons fairly easily, as you will have to face several of them at once to complete this quest.

What will I face there?

Horned Demons guard Arkaine's Valor.

How do I get it? On level six you

YOU GOT AXE FOR ME?

While having a shield handy to block attacks is nice, nothing beats the crushing power of a good axe. While it's slower to swing than a sword or mace, many times you only need one good hit with the axe instead of several hits with other weapons. It also has a much better chance of hitting scavengers, zombies, devil kin, and their kind. Once you get to the lower levels of the dungeon, you might consider switching to a one-handed weapon and a shield. The faster attack rate coupled with the ability to block and the extra AC come in handy against the tougher opponents you'll find there.

Sorcerer

The sorcerer initially seems like the weakest of all classes, but can grow to become the most deadly of all characters. The first thing to remember with the sorcerer is to not be afraid to waste mana. You can't wander the catacombs and fire off firebolts at a cautious pace.

A MACHINE GUN WITH SPELLS

Always click as fast as you can, because you can fire off magic spells as quickly as a warrior can swing a blade. In the dungeons, you can clear a room full of undead and fallen ones by rapid-firing your charged bolt spell, which blankets the room with a sheet of lightning balls.

In the lower levels, when more powerful opponents (such as night clan goatmen and mudmen) surround you, you'll need to click away furiously and keep your fingers ready over the number keys to replenish your mana when you dip below the 25 percent mark.

DON'T BOTHER WITH MELEE

Another idea to dispense with immediately is fighting in melee. Don't bother adding too many points to strength; you're a sorcerer, not a warrior. The sooner you realize this, the better off you are. You would do better to add two-to-three points to magic every level, and one point to every other attribute. Avoid melee at all costs, and when



A SHOCKING DISCOVERY Never hesitate to fire off your spells at rapid-fire pace. This sorcerer has cleared the room with multiple charged bolt spells.

Quests Galore

will find a long chamber with two doors on the south side. Inside are four Horned Demons and a book about Arkaine. After killing the Demons and reading the book, go through the door at the back of the room. Here you will find the Pedestal of Blood and a bloodstone. Pick up the bloodstone and click on the Pedestal to place the stone there. That will open a passage in the west side of the structure, which was previously all stone. Enter



Horned Demon



OUTTA MY WAY, UGLY On the automap you'll see the chamber that holds Valor. Find the bloodstones, open the secret doors and claim Valor...after defeating the Horned Demons.

there (go out and to the left) to find two Horned Demons and a second bloodstone. Place it on the Pedestal and another passage will open in the stone wall on the east side. Inside are two more Horned Demons and the last bloodstone. Place it on the Pedestal, and the wall behind the Pedestal of Blood will disappear. Walk past the torches, kill five Horned Demons, and pick up Arkaine's Valor.

What do I get? Arkaine's Valor is magical armor that has an armor class of 25, adds +10 to vitality, -3 damage from enemies, and bestows fastest hit recovery.

Quest: The Chamber of Bone

What is the object: To survive passage through The Chamber of Bone and gain the knowledge that lies inside.

Where will I find the Chamber of Bone? The entrance to The Chamber of Bone can be found on level seven.

What level should I be? Your character should be strong enough to dispatch unseen, Horned Demons, and horror captains with relative ease. Sorcerers should be aware that horror captains resist lightning and are immune to magic.

How do I get it? First, read the mythical book on level six. It will remove the walls surrounding the stairs leading to The

Chamber of Bone. Walk down The Chamber and you'll see a main door for a large room, and hallways on your left and right. At the end of each hallway are two Horned Demons, one unseen, and a lever that opens a secret door on the right wall of The Chamber. Once you deal with the Horned Demons and unseen in both hallways, open the main door in the middle of The Chamber. You will find 45 horror captains and five unseen. Kill them, and proceed to the room beyond. There will be a few more unseen and a couple of Horned Demons to kill here. In this room you will find a spell book.

What do I get? Read the book and you will learn the guardian spell, which causes three dragon heads to burst from the ground and attack any enemies nearby with firebolts.



MAGIC CANNONS At the end of The Chamber of Bone lies your treasure: a book of the guardian spell.

facing a horde, employ hit and run tactics like the rogue.

WHICH SPELLS TO USE

It's a good idea to always ready at least one electrical attack, one fire attack, one area effect, and one defensive spell with your hotkeys. In the lower levels of the dungeons, you'll face off against a collection of monsters, some of whom will resist fire, and others who'll resist lightning. So always be ready to switch from fireball to lightning with your hotkeys. Also, flash is a good spell to have if you know you'll be swarmed in the lower levels. Holy bolt is only good in the first six levels of the game because it harms undead, but it is useless against all other creatures.

Lightning should be your spell of choice. It can deal multiple hits to a target as the entire lightning bolt courses through an enemy's body; and it continues un-interrupted, so use it to destroy a whole line of creatures.

The other major attack spell to have ready is fireball, which is a much better version of firebolt that erupts in a blast that harms any

creatures close to the explosion.

Another good spell is wall of fire, which you should always have ready before you open any rooms in the catacombs. As soon as you open the door, lay down two rows of fire walls inside the room, to prevent any monsters from attacking you, and to roast any creatures stupid enough to walk through the roaring blaze to come to you.

MORE HIT POINTS FOR SORCERERS

Since the sorcerer has low hit points and high mana, he should always cast the mana shield spell in each level. With this spell, you'll lose mana points when creatures attack instead of hit points, allowing you to endure more damage than usual. You also eliminate the need to switch between drinking healing potions and mana potions, and can instead fill your belt with eight full mana potions; every time you replenish your mana for spells, you'll also be replenishing your hit points. ☞

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STRATEGY & TIPS

Heroes of Might and Magic II

Ultimate Strategies and Tactics for Winning the War of Succession

by Gavin Wasserman

So the first day dawns and your hero isn't looking very heroic, with an army far from mighty and little or no magic at hand. At least you've got a castle; though right now, it's looking pretty sparse. You have a small cache to start off with, but it won't be enough to get you anywhere. You've got to move...and fast.

EXPLORE OR DIE

Rapid exploration is the key to speedy development and

victory. On the first day, hire another hero and spread out quickly in all available directions to gather unguarded resources and treasure chests, and claim poorly guarded mines and lumber mills. You need those mines and lumber mills to build your castle dwellings as quickly as possible. Those dwellings will provide you with a solid troop base. You should also purchase a statue immediately to increase daily income,

and a mage guild to acquire spells



This strategy guide has general strategies and excellent tactical tips for winning in Heroes

II. For tips on how to best use each character class, visit our website at www.zdnet.com/gaming. There you'll find a strengths and weaknesses strategy guide for each Heroes II class.

and increase the damage done by your castle defenses. Striking out early will also let you build a reserve of gold or resources. With a vast range of resources, not only is it less likely for an enemy hero to quickly



FOOLS RUSH IN Don't rush forward to the full extent of your unit's movement—within range of enemy melee attacks—without attacking first. This cavalry stack, which moved to its maximum range, is now exposed to two iron golem attacks. It should have stopped just outside the golems' range so the cavalry could attack in the next round.

Tactical Tips: How To Crush Enemies In Battle

Exploration and development give you the resources to conquer your enemies on the battlefield. Maneuvering on the map sets you up to strike. Here are a few tips on how to bring the hammer down on your enemies:

In general, don't engage slow land units. If you have elves, don't march dwarves out against the slow and plodding iron golems. Let your missile units whittle them down before you engage them. Early in the game, relatively weak forces may defeat powerful, but slow, resources guardians by inflicting damage from a distance.

If you know the enemy has powerful and fast missile units, you might want to send in flying, fast, or sturdy ground troops instead. A cavalry unit or a pack of ogre lords is a good match against guardian elves, because they can withstand heavy damage and move in quickly. However, if you send in rangers to fight the elves, they'll only trade shots, and you'll lose your valuable

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ranged troops (if you have to lose one or the other, it's better to lose the ground troops).

Besides being used to deliver the coup de grâce to the last of an enemy force, flying units can be used to negate missile units by engaging them in melee, a particularly helpful tactic in laying siege to castles with missile defenders. An unconventional tactic is preempting enemy flying units with your own flying units when you are certain they will attack your missile troops. The beneficial effects are two-fold: When the enemy flies across to attack your units, they will already have suffered losses or damage; and, any units remaining in your original formation may strike without fear of retaliation (one exception to this rule is griffons). The drawback to using flying units this way is that you expose your preempting units to attack by enemy ground units. However, if you can use a flying unit for a preemptive attack while negating a missile unit's ranged attack, it's worth the sacrifice.

While not as flexible as fliers, slow units have tactical advantages, too. Powerful, but dismally slow, units like hydras and ogres may serve as bodyguards for missile units, which tend to be targets for quick land and flying units. When in a melee and prevented from using their missiles, such units shouldn't attack at all because of melee penalties. Instead, your slow units can lumber forward to the rescue. If the enemy unit is extremely powerful, such as one containing a few dragons or a horde of gargoyles, you might decide to sacrifice your missile units by attacking in a melee. This prevents retaliation



BLUDGEONS AND DRAGONS Flying units are excellent troops for disabling missile units. Here, the gargoyles and dragons have prevented three ranged stacks from firing their bows, thus allowing the slower ground troops to move forward.

tion against your following attack, which uses your slow, but more deadly, melee units (again griffons retain retaliation privileges; which is why they are such excellent units, despite indifferent hit points). In most cases, just pass and allow your slow guardians

to rescue your missile units.

Besides taking out those powerful melee monsters, those precious missile units you've been protecting often duel with other ranged attack creatures. It's essential to upgrade your units, not just because their attacks become more powerful, but because they tend to speed up. In a duel of missiles, whoever is quicker on the draw may very well be the last one standing.

cripple your production, but also, in a pinch, you can sell off resource reserves for gold to raise armies or to exchange for other resources at the marketplace. The exchange rate is better with more marketplaces and though you may feel initially gouged, if you need gems, and all you have is a lot of coal, you'd better take the loss and move forward.

Exploration of the map also creates a warning zone—a buffer between the time enemy armies become visible on the map and when they are in position to attack your holdings. You can track their movements, learn how far a given hero travels per day, and also, with the help of a Thieves' Guild, get a fair idea of their troop strength.

Sometimes, a powerful group of monsters appears to block your access to important

resources. Try to look for another way around them. If you can't find one, you'll just have to quickly build up a force sufficient to remove them. On the bright side, these monsters can buffer you from the enemy while you develop your forces; however, this works both ways, and your opponent may develop forces free from your interference as well. It's likely that enemies will have access to many more resources and castles, so you still need to press onward. If you wait until you have a very powerful army before exploring, you'll probably find a lot of resources, artifacts, and mines already claimed by the enemy.

RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!

It may be hard to accept, but a true hero of might and magic has no qualms about



BOLDLY GO... The first thing to do is explore the map. You need to capture mines and treasure chests, and free resources as soon as possible in order to recruit troops and build dwellings. Exploration will also reveal magic sites, such as these standing stones, which boost your basic skills.

The Sword Is Mightier Than The Pen

Primary skills are no-brainers, but choosing secondary skills can be confusing, so I'll rate their usefulness for you. Skills are rated as excellent, good, average, and useless.

Archery: Excellent. Especially if you plan to have missile troops or have sorceresses, barbarians, and wizard castles, or a combination of the three. This skill is especially deadly if combined with a hero's high attack skill.

Ballista: Good. Excellent if you plan to attack castles. Speeds the destruction of castle walls. Higher ballista skill also helps you destroy castle towers more quickly.

Diplomacy: Useless. And, if you pick it and refuse to buy up neutral armies, they always attack in anger. At least without this skill, neutral armies sometimes retreat without a fight.

Eagle Eye: Good, if you're a spellcaster (provided it is upgraded to expert use). However, it is nearly useless for barbarians and knights, who need a high wisdom first.

Estates: Good, or excellent if you don't have many castles or gold mines. Extra gold always helps in recruiting troops.

Leadership: Good, and excellent if you plan to have multiple troop types. The higher the skill, the more likely you are to get extra movements or attacks.

Logistics: Excellent. It increases land movement, meaning you can cover more ground, visit sites and mines earlier, flee faster, hurry reinforcements to the front lines, and catch up to fleeing enemies.

Luck: Excellent. It increases your chances of delivering maximum damage in combat.

Mysticism: Excellent, if your hero casts spells in combat. It allows you to recover mana points so you won't be mana depleted after many battles.

Navigation: Practically useless, unless you are in a water-intensive scenario, when it's a good skill to have.



ABSOLUTELY USELESS When given a choice of secondary skills, never pick diplomacy, it is useless. Eagle eye, on the other hand, is a good skill for a spellcaster, provided it is upgraded to expert use.

Necromancy: Excellent for necromancers, but useless for everyone else. When you're attacking many weak troops, you can create a throng of skeletons, which are a powerful force. It's not good for other characters because pesky skeletons will disrupt morale. If you do get this skill, you must upgrade it or it's as good as useless.

Pathfinding: Excellent. It cuts down on movement penalties in rough terrain and grants the same benefits as logistics.

Scouting: Average. It increases range of sight for exploration, which is helpful in the beginning for spotting sites and mines, but useless in the end game.

Wisdom: Excellent. It is absolutely critical, since no wisdom equals no spells above second level. Plus, upgrades are a must to achieve fourth and fifth level spells.

beating feet in the face of a superior force. You can rehire a retreating hero for 2,500 gold, but a defeated one, and all of his artifacts, might soon resurface on the other side. It's better to flee, then simply rehire your hero and keep the artifacts. You have to preserve the *option* to flee. This means paying close attention to enemy forces and spell power. If the enemy can kill your forces before you get a chance to move a unit, then you've lost that hero. However, if you keep at least one fast or very

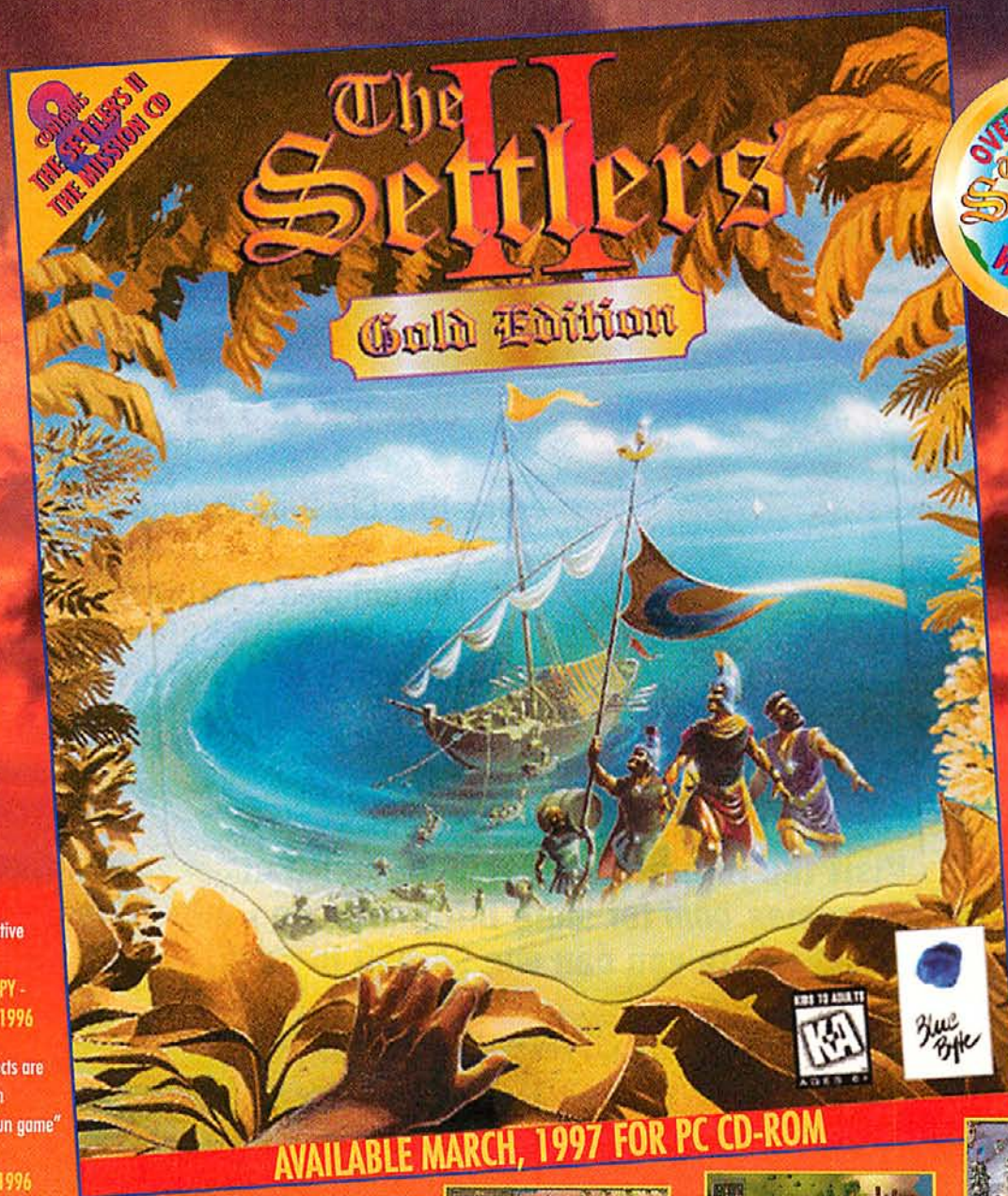
fast unit remaining in your army, you have a better chance of moving first and fleeing. Don't forget to use an offensive spell before you go; determine which units you can destroy (not merely wound) with the spell, use it, and then flee.

HIT AND RUN YOUR WAY TO VICTORY

A rehired hero appears in the castle of your choosing, free to acquire new spells and load up on troops. Thus, retreat can serve an

important *tactical* purpose, in addition to simple hero and artifact preservation. Attack a powerful enemy force with two armies. With your lesser army, get their spellcaster to expend as much power as possible. Attack flying units, missile units, and any powerful creatures you can slay. Retreat before you lose your hero; then, bring in the second army and finish off your foe. This tactic can only be supported by the resources accumulated through expansion; it costs a lot in gold and troops, but if you

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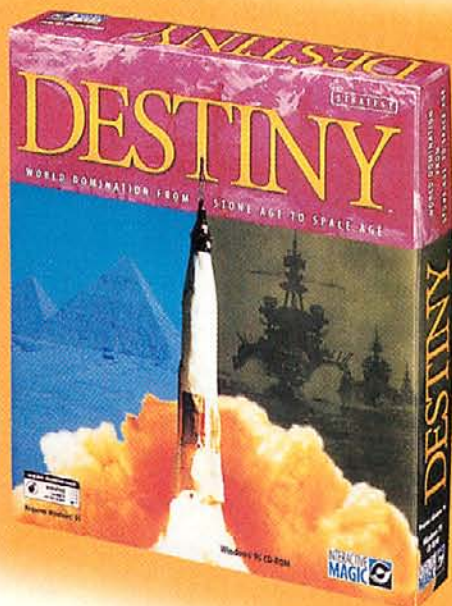
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The Destiny Academy is up and running on the I-Magic Web site! The Destiny Academy was created by and for gamers. It is a special place on the I-Magic Web site where gamers share hints, tips and ideas about Destiny. Visit the Destiny Academy at www.imagicgames.com for daily hints and tips on game play and to leave messages!

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BAIT AND TRAP To lure an enemy hero, recruit all your castle's troops, then march them away with a strong hero and leave a small garrison behind to entice the enemy. Inflict a few casualties as he takes your castle, then kill him and take back the castle with your strong hero.

decimate your foe, your army will stand alone on the field to press forward and seize more holdings.

BAIT AND TRAP ENEMY HEROES

Heroes garrisoning a castle or town are not allowed to retreat (although they can surrender). In defense, a hero might want to surrender a castle and live to fight another day, rather than get caught in a death trap. On offense, this tactic suggests another forced attrition tactic. Let's assume an enemy hero, well experienced and probably laden with artifacts, has a powerful army near one of your castles; if you are sure of victory, but equally sure that if you attack, the hero will flee, then you may use the castle as both bait and trap. Buy all the units in the castle and lightly garrison it. Then, move your army away, but stay close enough to attack the next day. In all likelihood, the enemy will sense the weakness of the castle forces and strike. This is a battle you expect to lose, but inflict as much damage as possible in the defense, and force the enemy hero to expend as much magic as possible. He will then take control of the castle and either leave a garrison and move on with a vastly divided force, or stay to defend the castle.

If the enemy's entire army stays to defend the castle, they can't retreat. Move in with your army and attack the

enemy's spell-depleted and battered forces.

Destroy them and collect a hefty amount of experience and, possibly, artifacts. If the enemy's army splits up, the hero won't have gotten far and you can probably attack both enemy forces in the same day. Attack

the hero first, and hope that the division of forces has weakened him enough for a quick kill before he escapes (use powerful area-effect magic and fast, flying, or missile units). Even if he escapes, you've expelled him from your territory, crushed his army, and suckered him into wasting 2,500 gold.

Continue these tactics long enough to amass a reserve force while whittling away at your opponent's armies and gold, and you'll soon be ready to deliver the final strike into the enemy's heartland. With enough might and magic at your disposal, the crown will soon be yours. ♣



HOLY ARTIFACTS, BATMAN! Early scouting is good because your hero may accumulate artifacts and experience while unveiling new territory. Bonuses from artifacts enhance the performance and survivability of the hero's armies, making each purchased unit more effective.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #184

STRATEGY & TIPS

Red Alert

The Soviets Strike Back

by Martin E. Cirulis

So you thought that mastering Allied strategies from WWII would give you an ace in Warfare 101 here at the GDI Academy? Well think again, you misbegotten bunch of second lounie wannabe's. Look out the window and tell me what you see on the parade ground...that's right, tanks! And lots of them! Do you recall seeing any heavy armor on your side during your Allied simulations? No, because there wasn't any. Big surprise, kids. The entire backbone of today's



GDI heavy armor—the only real big advantage we've got over those little NOD weasels—is all based on Soviet designs and tactics; an idea you better get real familiar with, real fast, if you want to pass this course. So listen to a few tips from this ol' relic from the Soviet War and then try and apply them in the sims. Who knows, maybe if any of this sticks, you'll get to see the ghost of that crazy bastard Stalin come out of the grave

to scream at you for not being born early enough to win his war for him.

General Tactics

Since Soviet weapon systems are mainly based on hitting fast, hard, and often; Soviet tactical doctrine, especially on offense, tends to lack subtlety. Which is not to say it isn't terrifyingly effective in the right hands. Ambushes

UNIT BRIEFING

AP Minelayer: Since most Soviet tactical responses fixate on offense, the anti-personnel minelayer is of very limited use, and should only be employed if there is an avenue of attack to your base that you wish sealed against infantry rushes. Even then, history shows the money is usually best spent elsewhere.

Attack Dogs: These canine wonders are an incredibly cost effective way to devastate Allied troops, as long as you use them sensibly. As they are extremely vulnerable, you can only have them rush into a fire-fight once all the enemy units have selected targets. Then, as the riflemen and rocket troops

blaze away at more durable targets, send in your dogs to rip out the throats of a half dozen troops in as many seconds. As for defending your base, keep a handful of them on guard status near anything important, or in spaces large enough for chinooks to land or APCs to sneak in.

Flame Troops: These expensive, high-tech terror soldiers are



GOIN' DOWN The Soviet Yaks are especially vulnerable to even the slightest defenses. To get the most out of them before they go down, mass them in groups of three to four and target infantry and rocketeers.

more trouble than they're worth. If you expect high concentrations of enemy infantry along a certain route, then post one or two flame units ahead of your force. In general, though, they are too dangerous to your own troops to employ in a larger force, and far too vulnerable to Allied mobile artillery to participate in assaults on their own.

Grenadiers: The only drawback to these troops is that they tend to explode when they die—so don't bunch them up. Their main job should to exterminate

Allied rocketeers before they get the chance to harm your armor.

Heavy Tank: The backbone of the red dream of conquest, these tanks alone are superior to anything the Allies can field, due to the fact that they carry two main cannons. Apart from their use in the dreaded Tank Rush, in pairs they are ideal for scouting or guarding ore

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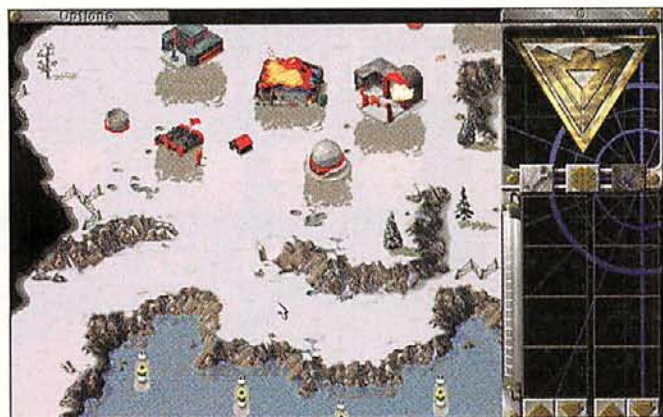
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SHORE LEAVE To neutralize the Allies' potent naval assets, position V2 launchers near the shore. With their good range and damage, they will prevent all but the heaviest cruisers from unloading their devastating shells.

and misdirection on the part of a Soviet commander are usually a waste of time when compared to the benefits gained with a quick, direct assault. Russian forces contain the two heaviest pieces of armor on the battlefield, and in large numbers, their punch can devastate even the most intricately-laid Allied defenses, as long as

should make the war factory a priority in their initial construction goals and begin churning out heavy tanks as quickly as possible, making every third or fourth vehicle a V2 launcher for fire support.

On defense, the Soviets are not as well off as you would think. Though the tesla coil is a ter-

rifying weapon, it is relatively fragile and, if left unsupported, can be easily overwhelmed by Allied artillery and light armor strikes. They are also completely vulnerable to chopper attacks. Successful base defense is an expensive prospect for the Russians, as it means multiple tesla coils surrounded by extensive SAM sights with overlapping fields of fire—at least three



TELL IT TO TESLA The Soviets, despite having the very cool tesla coils, are at a disadvantage in base defense. To complement the tesla coil defense, set up SAM sites near them, and position V2 vehicles nearby as well, for good measure.

UNIT BRIEFING

trucks in dangerous territory, and a few should be scattered around your base perimeter for added defense, or as a tactical reserve, should anything happen to go wrong.

Hind Helicopter: Again, another weapon system dedicated to the Soviet obsession with the anti-personnel role, Hinds are very expensive for their relatively limited uses. If you must use them, employ them in ship-harassment and rocketeer-neutralization roles.

Mammoth Tank: The most familiar weapon system to CDI students, this monster takes on an even more vital role in Soviet missions due to its anti-aircraft missiles, which provide the only mobile air-defense in the entire Soviet arsenal. If possible, any Tank Rush or amphibious assault should include at least three Mammoths, employed in close formation in order to concentrate their anti-air and anti-personnel assets, and to serve as a lure for Allied firepower while the heavy tanks mop up. They should also be used to immediately destroy the Allied shroud, even at the expense of defensive fire. Soviet bases should hold at least one Mammoth in reserve.

MiG Ground Attack Aircraft: While slightly less vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire, these jets can be useful if you have the money to employ them in groups of three or more. Even against heavier Allied base defenses, they are swift enough to take out AA guns in crucial positions while only losing one of their own. After neutralizing Allied air defenses, your MiGs should give priority to destroying helipads. MiGs are especially useful for striking Allied ships and for hunting down ore trucks.

Submarines: Your single naval units, they serve only to deprive the Allies of their vaunted naval assets. Use their long-range torpedoes to cut up enemy destroyers and gunboats before they can close to depth charge range. Avoid engagements close to enemy bases, as various shore guns can damage your sub while it is surfaced. To maximize their effectiveness, submarines should be deployed in multiple wolf-packs of three subs each.

V2-Launcher: These missile launchers are slow, have long reload times, and are extremely vulnerable to any Allied unit which gets in range. Despite this, it is your only artillery piece and its extremely long range means it will serve you invaluable in multiple roles. Foremost, it is a defense cracker. Before your tanks roll in, at least four V2s should demolish the turrets and pillboxes in the assault path. Its second most important role is as a shore battery; a few V2s positioned along vulnerable shore areas can discourage bombardments from all but the heaviest cruisers. V2s should also back up tesla coils, and be set up to interdict valuable ore fields. Because of their vulnerability, they should always travel with armor, and should be escorted by at least two grenadiers at all times to guard against infantry attacks.

Yak Ground Attack Aircraft: The Yak is useful only in the field, as even minimal Allied air defenses can ravage a flight of Yaks in seconds. Employ Yaks in attack groups of two or three, to break up infantry groups in the field and to harass any Allied formations that sit still for even a moment. Always be sure to target rocket troops for immediate destruction.

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The Great Tank Debate



RED AND BLUE DEATH The Soviets have an enormous advantage with their heavy and Mammoth tanks. In fact, rushing the enemy with a massive force of these tanks is usually enough to lay waste to even the toughest of bases.

The Soviet Tank Rush is so devastating a tactic that there is much debate amongst RED ALERT players whether it represents a severe imbalance in the game design, especially in multiplayer mode. While die-hard students of base defense, myself included, stridently claim that there is no thrust that cannot be deflected by careful base construction—which makes the path to your construction yard a path of quick and certain death—there is little doubt that the

Tank Rush is a problem for the Allies, and a near-sure bet for the Soviets. Russian commanders in multiplayer games should try and put together an armor assault as quickly as possible, before their Allied opponents have time to sufficiently defend themselves. Then drive for the construction yard, so that even if the assault fails to eradicate your opponent, it will at least cripple them.

per coil. This line of death should be supported by a few scattered V2s in order to break up Allied infantry making sacrifice plays. The Soviet commander's second-best friend is concrete. Concrete walls are crucial for protecting tesla coils and power plants from direct assault, and should be used liberally.

While Soviet armor rules the land, their extreme vulnerability to air- and sea-based attacks make long campaigns difficult and dangerous. The Russians have the edge in striking power from the air, but are desperately short on air defense themselves, lacking any sort of mobile anti-air assets except the rocket

launchers on the very expensive Mammoth. The only real counter to this problem is to gather your strike force under your SAM umbrella and then move fast and often when it is time to attack. Longbows are deadly, but require a near-stationary target to do their worst damage.

Long-range bombardments from the sea are the bane of any Soviet base, and so it is very important to neutralize Allied naval assets as quickly and efficiently as possible, before they become a threat. Just two cruisers can take out a construction yard in a few seconds, all the while staying safely out of coil range. A combination of sub wolfpacks to handle destroyers, and a pair of Hinds to harass and hunt gunboats and cruisers, is the most painless way to keep your shores safe for the greater glory of Stalin.

STUDY HALL

This primer should be enough to get you hamsters through the Soviet portion of the tactical history exam. I haven't bothered covering free assets such as the spy plane and the Badger bomber, but their uses are obvious enough for even a cadet to grasp. So take what you've learned and employ it in the RED ALERT simulator. And remember, if it takes a few tries to get it right, just be mindful of the fact that you have it easier than your Soviet counterparts. They had to get it right the first time, or else face a .45-caliber demotion from Stalin himself. ☞



SAVE YOUR MONEY Guarding your ore trucks is vital; if you lose them, you lose your means of making money. Guard them with at least one heavy tank and two grenadiers.



TAKE IT TO 'EM A Soviet commander shouldn't waste his time on subtle maneuvers and ambushes. Direct firepower often pays bigger dividends, especially when a rush of heavy tanks and V2 launchers is used in fast and furious offensives.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #153

STRATEGY

Tomb Raider

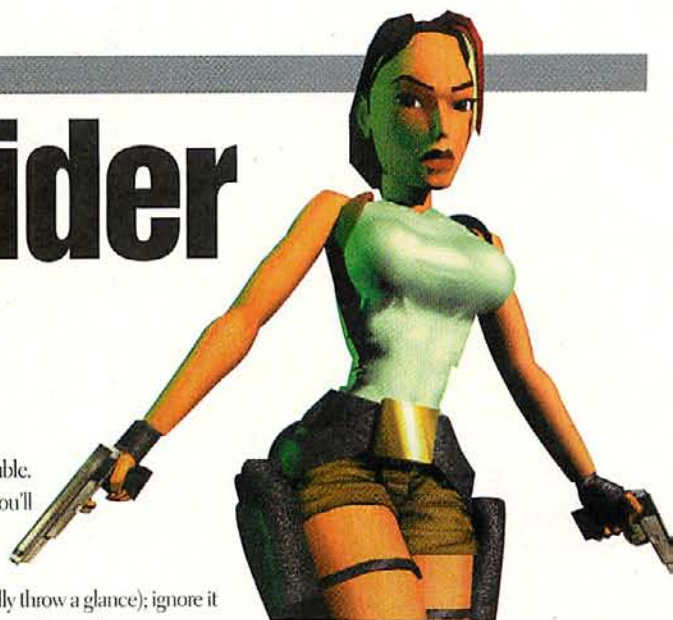
Ace the Caves of Peru on Your Way to Retrieving the Legendary Scion

by Thierry Nguyen

Welcome to Jonesian Archaeology 101. Here, you'll learn, in detail, how to pass through the caves of Peru with all rocks overturned and all secrets revealed. I hope that skills learned here will help you in the later levels of **TOMB RAIDER**.

shooters without trouble. After the dart guns, you'll be near a ledge (towards which Lara will automatically throw a glance); ignore it for now, and continue on forward.

Soon you'll see a room, which is located on another ledge across from a rock formation near Lara. This ledge is too high to reach, so



and flip the switch to open the door there, where another bat awaits.

Bridge The Gap



In this bridge room, shoot the wolves lurking on the platform below before proceeding. Then, for a shortcut, rather than running in a long arc from the left and onto the bridge, just drop down into the valley, take a running jump'n'grab onto the bridge, and climb up.

CAVE EXPLORIN'

After shooting a pack of wolves in the opening cut-scene, enter the caves. Run forward, and you will come to a hall lined with dart shooters. Either proceed slowly down the hall, being careful to avoid the darts, or simply make a run for it, as your speed should enable you to clear the

climb up the rock formation, jump across, and then grab onto the ledge. Once inside the room, you'll discover the first secret: a medikit.

Now go back to the first ledge (that Lara looked at earlier). Just use "action" to climb up, and at the top, get your guns ready. Advance forward and gun down the three bats that await. After killing the three bats, put your guns away and head left to the dead-end. Directly above the dead-end is another ledge. Inch as close to the corner as possible, and then use the action key. You should be able to vault up to the top of the ledge (be sure to view the edge straight, not at an angle). At the top of this second secret area, kill the bat and pick up another medikit.

Now go back down, and continue the way you were originally heading. Take a left turn and continue on to a large, grass-covered area. Make your way down to the bottom,

BRIDGE HOPPING

The bamboo door you see next may look tempting, but your destination is the hole in the roof. Climb up into it, and go into a large room containing two bridges and a platform. There are two wolves near the platform. You should be able to take them by surprise and shoot them from your vantage point on the platform, minimizing the danger. After killing the wolves, you have one of two choices: Take the slow, easy way and simply work your way around the platform and bridges to the doorway on the other side; or, take a faster, but slightly harder, route. Instead of walking across the platform and bridges, try jumping down onto the lower level, and running to where the second bridge is. There should be a



WHAT'S UP CROFT? Though it's a bit hard to see, this first secret area is accessible by using the nearby rock formation for a boost to grab onto the ledge.

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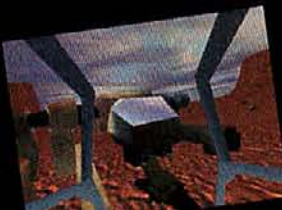
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small raised area near the second bridge. To cut down on time and distance, get onto this small area and, with the action key held down, jump onto one side of the bridge, and then climb up and run the rest of the way (this maneuver—jumping and then grabbing onto something—is called the “jump’n’grab”).

THAT AIN'T YOGI BEAR DOWN THERE...

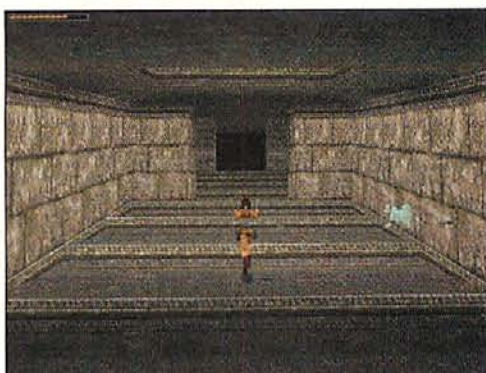
Now you'll be in a room with a chasm in the middle. Rather than simply jump across the gap and move on, take a small pit stop. First, get as close to the edge of the gap as possible and, with guns armed, look down. There is a nasty bear wandering about below, and it would be in your best interest to snipe him from above.

If you then decide to descend into the chasm, be sure to execute a safety drop, since a full drop will hurt you. When you touch down on the ground, get up, arm your guns, and proceed into the doorway. Two bats will appear and annoy you; shoot them down. After killing the bats, follow the corridor and you will find a medikit tucked into an alcove, as well as a floor plate that opens a secret door that leads back to the room with the bridges.

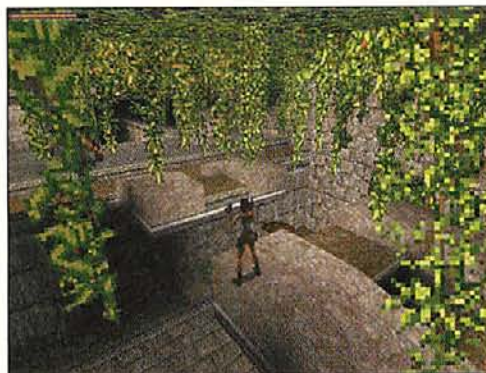
Go back to the room with the chasm in the middle and jump across the chasm. When you see a staircase, go down, but have your guns ready. There will be two wolves waiting to attack, so be prepared. After taking care of the two wolves, you should see two large platforms with a small platform in between. The switch on the first large platform activates the door on the other large platform.

Ignore the switch and door for now, and make your way to the platform where the door is. To get there, jump onto the small platform between the two larger ones, and then jump’n’grab the platform that holds the door.

Once onto this platform, start walking to the left. Walk all the way to the tiny plank that juts out from the platform. Look carefully, and you'll see that there



DART AWAY You can either keep running ahead and watch the darts shoot out of the walls in your wake, or you can inch forward slowly and trigger the darts before each move.



LARA'S LONG JUMP This gap in the room leads to a secret area with a medikit, but you need to take out the bear from your sniping point before you descend below.



IN THE JUNGLE The third secret area is cleverly hidden behind the foliage. A simple jump’n’grab will get you there.

is another platform and doorway cleverly hidden in the vegetation. Jump onto the hidden platform, and walk into this last secret area to find another medikit.

JUST FLIP THE SWITCH...

Okay, back to the door on the large platform. Simply flip the switch and open the door. Easy enough, right? There is one slight problem, however: It's a timed door. To time your jumps and get to the door, use the small platform as a boost. Jump onto the small platform and then do a jump’n’grab onto the platform where the door is. This should enable you to reach the door in time.

Beyond the door is a large staircase. Don't take a leisurely walk to admire the architecture; keep on running. This staircase is lined up with dart launchers, and only by running will you avoid them all. Also, get your guns ready, as a lone wolf lurks about at the top of the stairs. Taking him out should be relatively easy, as the element of surprise will be on your side.

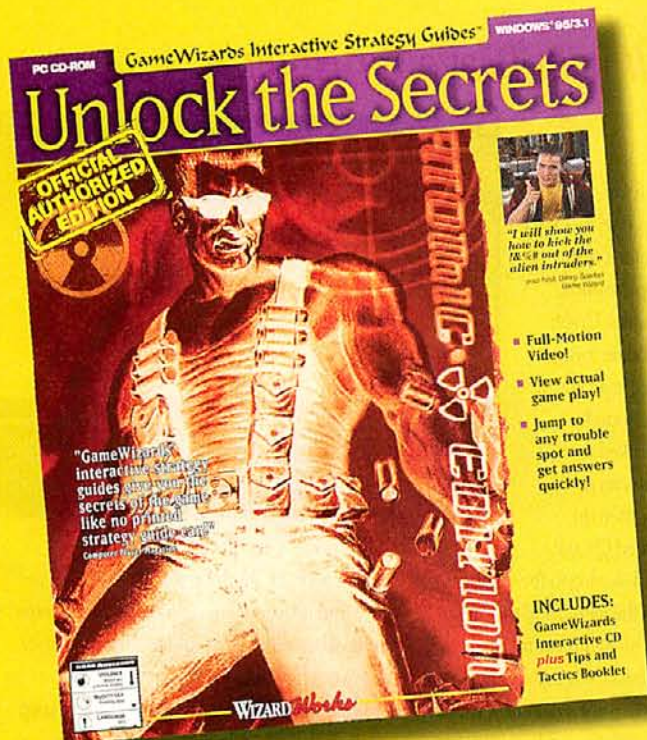
Okay, it's almost over at last. Now, walk to those funny-looking tiles on the floor, and let them break under you. However, do *not* drop down to the nearby hallway yet; there are more dart launchers down there. Instead, go along the passage you're currently in until reaching a gap. Jump or jump’n’grab across the gap, and walk on.

Get your guns ready, as the last wolf will be bearing down on you near the medikit at the passageway's end. Pick up the medikit, go into the small room, and flip the switch there. Once you flip the switch, execute a safety drop from a nearby ledge, to bypass the dart launchers. Walk into the open doors, and finish the level.

DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS

This level should get you acquainted with some of the necessary skills a good Tomb Raider needs to survive and prosper. It's a tough virtual world, so be careful out there, especially in St. Francis' Folly and Natla's Mines. But, be persistent, and the Scion will be yours. ☞

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HACKS

Quake

The Great Cornholio Squares Off with Brave Sir Robin

by Dave Salvator

I think the first game I ever hacked into was MAELSTROM, a Mac-based ASTEROIDS knock-off. Using ResEdit, I swapped in a bunch of sounds from different movies, cartoon characters, and the like. Surprisingly, changing just the sounds really changed the overall feel of the game, especially since the original sounds took themselves a bit too seriously.

QUAKE's engine, with its modular design, uses PAK files to store all resources: character models, level maps, and sounds. If you look in your \QUAKE\MIDI subdirectory, you'll see PAK0.PAK if you've got the shareware version, and also PAK1.PAK if you've got the full retail version. Sites like Stomped and Blues News have uploads from Quake-heads all 'round the Web, including new sets of sounds, new models, and even new levels. Among the possible hacks, tweaking sounds is pretty much the easiest, but first you've got to hack the PAK.

There are several utilities useful for digging

work with the copy there.

Winpack unpacks PAK files into a directory tree structure, with a subdirectory for maps, sounds, graphics, and characters. Under Sound, there are subdirectories for each of the monsters, level items, weapons, and player sounds (Figure 2). The unpacked sounds are Wave files, so you can easily audition and modify them in Windows. Experienced QUAKE players will know by listening to these sounds where they occur in the game, and the original file names are pretty straightforward, like pain1.wav, or death2.wav. When in doubt, guess.

You're also going to want a decent wave file editor, because Win 95's Sound Recorder just doesn't cut it. Your sound card's bundled wave editor will probably do. For more serious editing check out CoolEdit 95, a shareware editor that's easy to use and has some cool effects.

Now the fun begins: putting your own acoustic flare into QUAKE. Event-driven and ambient sounds set much of the mood of any game. Who can forget the infamous "Three Stooges" DOOM WAD? You can either add sounds from your own library, or comb the Web, where there are a bajillion sound effects and clips from movies, TV shows, and cartoons. My favorite is a collection of hilarious "Beavis and Butthead" sounds you can download from Stomped (bnbdms3.zip). Unzip the file into a scratch directory and edit the batch file so that the source and target directories match those on your hard drive. Then, run the batch file, which swaps in the new sounds, and finally repack the tree (as described below).

If you are using your own sounds, bring them into your editor and make sure their resolution is correct. QUAKE will only play 11KHz,

8-bit mono PCM wave files.

I find it's fun to take QUAKE's original sound and either add your sound to the end of it, or mix your new sound in with it, though you can completely replace it just as easily. Also, keep sounds short; no longer than two or three seconds. Once you're finished, save the wave file into your PAK directory structure under the correct sound subdirectory, using the name of the wave file you want to replace. When prompted, select "yes" to overwrite the old file.

After you've added your embellishments, use Winpack to repack the directory tree into a PAK file by selecting Build PAK. Next, rename your original PAK1.PAK file to PAK1.ORG, copy the new PAK file into the MIDI subdirectory, and rename it to PAK1.PAK; now you're all set. If you want to go back to QUAKE's original sounds, rename your hacked PAK file, and rename PAK1.ORG to PAK1.PAK.

That's it. Simple, fun, and somewhat surprising for DeathMatches. Hack away. ☿

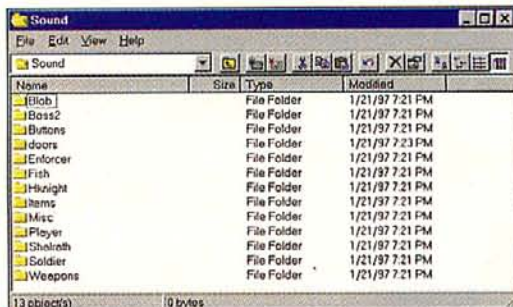


FIGURE 2 QUAKE's sound events are stored in different folders, and are named pretty intuitively.

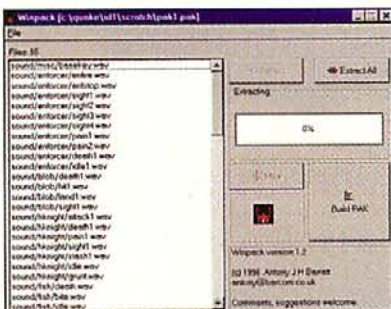


FIGURE 1 Winpack makes packing and unpacking QUAKE's PAK files effortless.

into QUAKE's PAK files, but Anthony Barratt's Windows-based Winpack is the easiest (Figure 1). Just make sure you work on a copy of your original PAK file, and not the PAK file itself. Copy the PAK file into a scratch directory and

Web Sources

Download Winpack at:
www.stomped.com/files.edit.html
 Download CoolEdit 95 at:
www.hallucinet.com:80/cyberden/MIDI_Hell/Edit_Conv/

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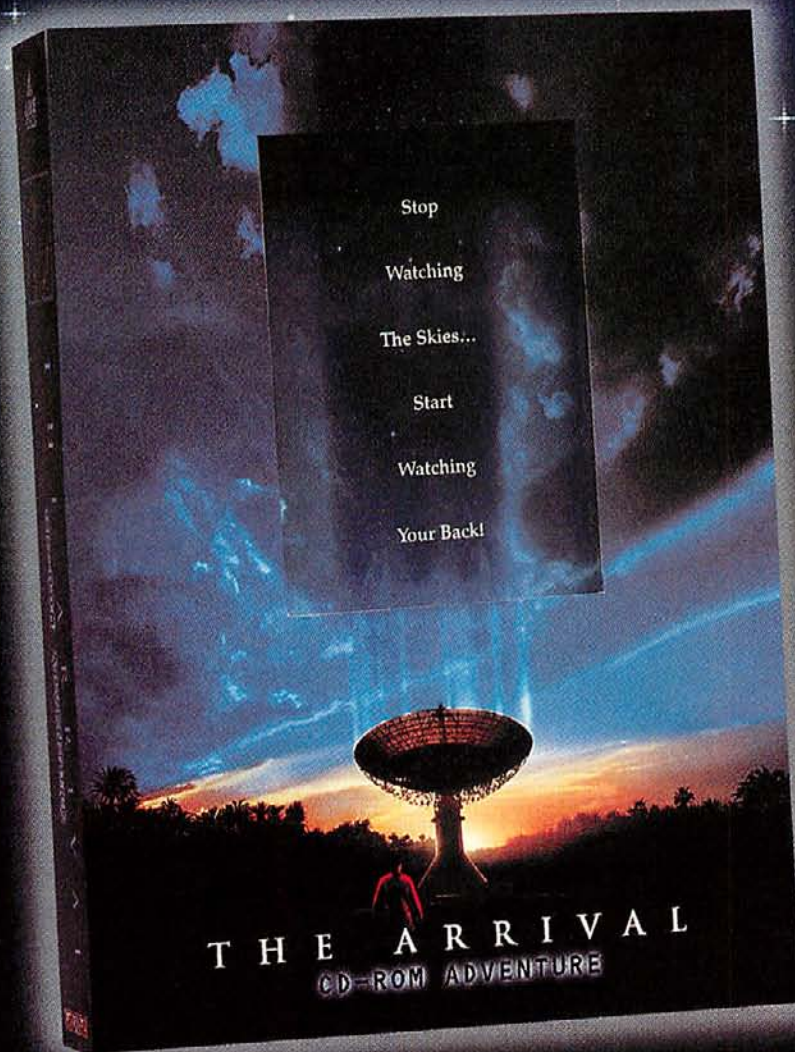
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SCORPIA'S MAIL

Hinting Around

Trapped in a Dungeon? Lost in a Maze? Have No Fear, Scorpia Is Here.

So here we are, chugging out of winter into spring. Of course, this being the magazine biz, we do things way ahead of time, and it's really January as I write this, so spring is still a bit in the future. Somehow, it always seems to get here sooner than I prefer anyway.

The Christmas season was somewhat disappointing this year. A number of products made it to market, but little was really noteworthy. This was reflected in the mail I received. By far, the most inquiries came in about DAGGERFALL. After that, interestingly enough, the questions were mainly about older games, not newer ones. Either the new games are really easy, or gamers are going back to the old classics. Game designers ought to take note of that. But enough philosophy—on to the mail!

Daggerfall:

Well, we have another update or two here. First, in my original review, I said if you maxed a primary or major skill at 100 percent, you would stop gaining levels. Then in the followup, I said this was an error, and you could continue to gain levels with a skill at 100 percent. It now turns out that I was both right and wrong (this could only happen to me...). In the original, unpatched release, you will stop gaining levels when a skill hits 100 percent. However, that was changed with the very first patch, which removed the 100 percent-level cap.

Speaking of patches, the most recent one has put in some restrictions regarding guilds. It

is no longer possible to join everything in sight, especially temples. You will have to be careful and more selective about which organizations you join now. Finally, quite a few people are having trouble getting out of Privateer's Hold. The exit is in the room with the bat, rat, and imp; it's the black alcove with skull on one of the walls. Simply click on the alcove to leave (this, by the way, is the standard exit from all dungeons).

Crusaders Of The Dark Savant:

Some adventurers can't quite get into the Rattkin Ruins. A bit of prep work is needed for this. For example, you need the bonsai tree from Murkatos' Inner Sanctum. Then you have to find the right place to plant it (no easy task, either). After all that, you'll be able to enter the Ruins. And if you haven't come across the Sanctum yet, you need to pay a visit to the Ore castle.

Eye Of The Beholder II:

It's always interesting to see how older games suddenly regain gamers' attention, thanks to the miracle of shovelware. It's also interesting to note that the new gamers tend to get stuck in the same places we did. There must be some unwritten law of gaming at work here. Anyway, a popular obstacle in this game is the area with the floor plates and the somewhat misleading sign that says, "Leave many things behind." Here's a big hint: Do *not* put something on every plate. This is a mistake which you would have to X out and do again. 'Nuff said.

The Pandora Directive:

A number of gamers have asked me how to reach the Mission Street ending. Alas, in my two times through the game, I never made it

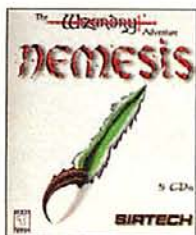
there myself. I do know that, aside from always being a good guy in the game, you have to go to the Flamingo without Chelsea. This means handling the conversation at her apartment very carefully; if you do it wrong, you can end up at the club getting drunk, which is not what you want.



Wizardry Nemesis:

A lot of folks are having trouble with the jaw traps on Hargani Underworld Level 3. I don't blame them for being frustrated; this one isn't all that easy. You need to have the bone on the left side of the jaw, roughly about one tooth in from the end. Then start clicking, but don't click wildly or you'll just put it in and take it out again. Lots of patience and some timing will eventually do the job (twice, since there are two traps to pass; but don't worry, it's only this one time, as there is another way out of here later).

That's it for this look into the mailbag. Happy adventuring! ☺



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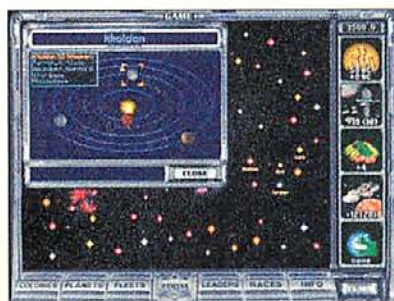
Strategy/Wargames

Master Of Orion II



An exploding ship is often the best missile defense, particularly if you don't have anti-missile shields. If facing a massive missile attack, you may want to target a less valuable enemy ship to be sure that it will be destroyed before the missiles move, thus wiping many of them out when it explodes.

Always remember to take out ships with enemy leaders on them as early as possible,



since many of their bonuses will apply to the entire fleet.

For most of the game, it can be very useful to immediately refit a newly constructed ship. If your technology has progressed significantly while the ship was in construction—which is likely to happen when building large ships during the early and mid games—you may be able to add additional weapons, entirely new systems, and better shields for minimal cost (three to five turns). Also, this means that you won't have to refit the ship again for some time, which makes fleet organization and maintenance easier and more efficient.

If you are a democracy and cannot annihilate conquered races, you can get rid of them by shipping them off to a world which has already reached its population maximum. The colonists will try to land, fail, and die in the atmosphere. It's a dirty trick, but who said democratic leaders were always ethical?

Action



CyberGladiators

Enter these codes at the fighter selection screen. You must press the button sequences fairly rapidly, just as you would when entering a sequence of buttons for a special move. If entered successfully, you will hear an explosion sound.

Unlimited Continues: (for joystick) U D U D U D L R L; (on keyboard for player one) W S W S W S A D A

Disco Mode: (for joystick) U D P K-SK;

(on keyboard for player one) W D J-L

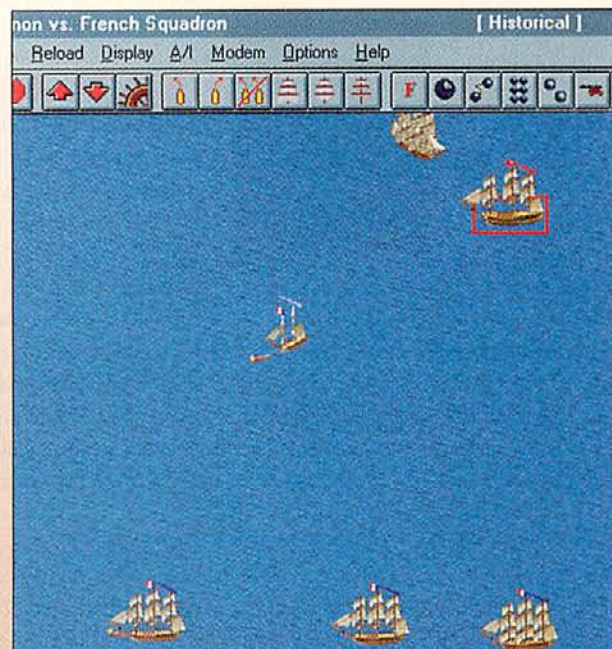
Limb Loss: (for joystick) U+L U D D+R; (on keyboard for player one) W+A W S S+D

Fight as Shrapp: Highlight Psyclopps and enter P K P P S K P P; (on keyboard for player one) J I L I

Fight as Carnigore: Highlight Carnigore and enter S K P P P K; (on keyboard for player one) L I J

Age of Sail

In scenario 22, the Agamemnon (a British 64-gunner), is up against five smaller French ships. The mismatch isn't what you think: Her Majesty's vessel has the edge, since she can hover about 600 yards off and blast away with no return fire from the AI. Don't try this versus a human admiral, though!



Simulation/Space

Privateer 2: The Darkening

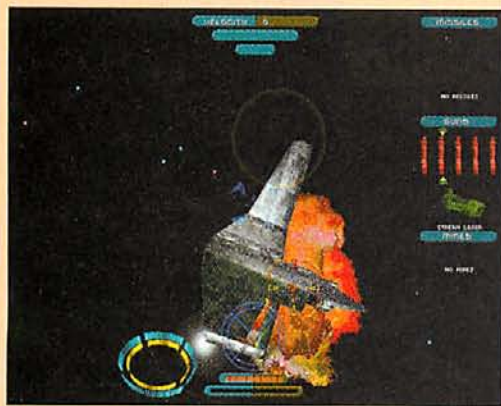
Are you getting killed more often by bugs in the program than space pirates? If so, we have a few tips to keep you in orbit while you await the inevitable patch.

To prevent many potential lockups, copy the file SETS.IFF from CD 1 to the hard

drive directory where you installed PRIVATEER 2. In addition, make sure the FILES= and BUFFERS= values in your CONFIG.SYS file are set to at least 50.

If the game is crashing when you land on a particular planet, turn off Animated Transitions and Video Sequences until after you've safely put down.

Finally, avoid the cheat files and hex-editing tips flying around the net that allow you to maximize your money—at least until you get very good at flying. PRIVATEER 2's artificial intelligence gets progressively more challenging as you become more successful, and if you max out your money, you'll face waves of the toughest pirates in the game.



Over The Reich

If you're having trouble winning as the Germans, take the Focke-Wulf upgrade when it's offered. FW190s are best flown

using a series of high speed slashing attacks, which minimize the importance of turning ability.

Firing opportunities won't appear as often as with the Me-109, but the FW190's devastating armament will make the most of any that come along. One good burst is usually

enough to cripple most Allied fighters.

When you're first learning the game, don't overlook the powerful database. The ability to compare two aircraft's statistics side by side is especially useful.

Unless the enemy catches you completely by surprise, you'll be given the chance to decide whether discretion really is the better part of valor. While the choices you make from long-range recon are hardly conclusive, keep your mission objectives in mind. As a rule, don't go hunting for glory against enemy fighter groups; conserve your pilots for the more lucrative bomber groups.



Sports

NBA Live 97



If you're playing particularly well with an offensive or defensive player, that player will become On Fire—meaning he'll receive a temporary boost in skills. When you're controlling a player who's become On Fire, the control circle will fade from the default color to black and back again. An offensive player can turn On Fire after shooting consecutive baskets, and will receive a boost in his shoot-



ing, jumping, and dunking skills. A defensive player will get On Fire after consecutive blocks and steals, and will receive a boost in those two abilities.

By the way, when you turn the Fatigue option on, you can determine your players' current fatigue status by the color of the control circle. The darker the color, the more tired the player. This can help you decide when to make substitutions.

If you are using Tim Tschimer's NBA LIVE 97 editor (not approved by EA Sports, but we love it; check out our NBA LIVE 97 review elsewhere in this issue), it's tough to properly rate older teams, such as the great Celtic squads of the 1960s. A good rule of thumb is to slightly downgrade their scoring capability, and increase their rebounding by 8 to 10 percent.

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 02. ☐ Plan to buy (6 months)

5. How often do you usually buy computer games?

- (Check one only)
 01. ☐ Once a week
 02. ☐ Once every two to three weeks
 03. ☐ Once a month
 04. ☐ Once every two to three months
 05. ☐ Once every four to six months
 06. ☐ Once a year

6. Where are you most likely to purchase games?

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 01. ☐ Independent computer store
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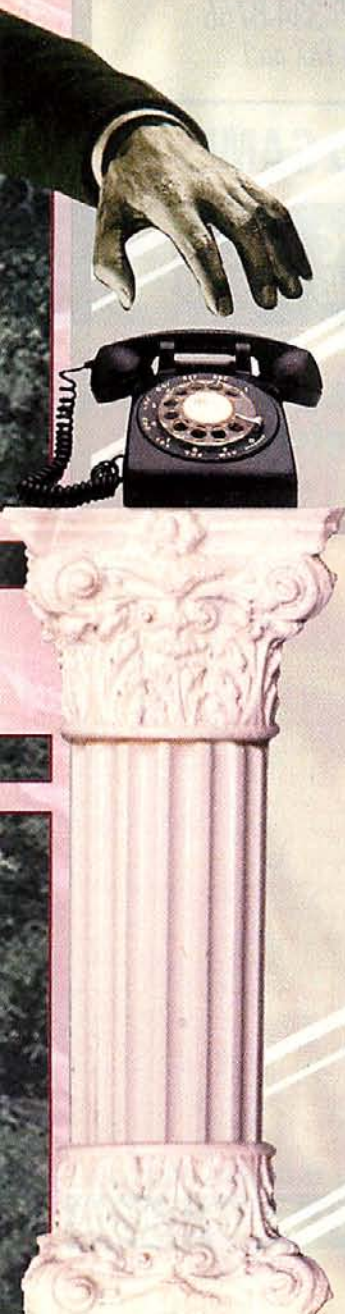
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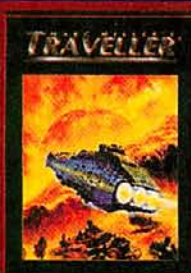
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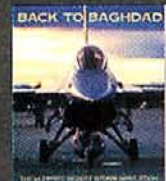
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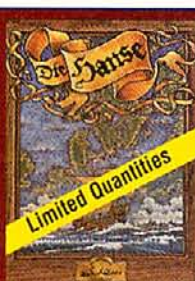
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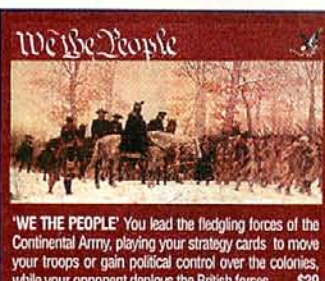
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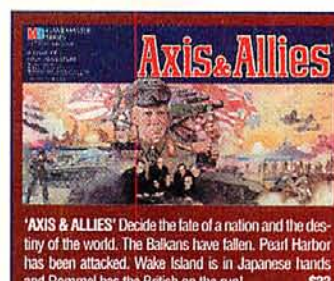
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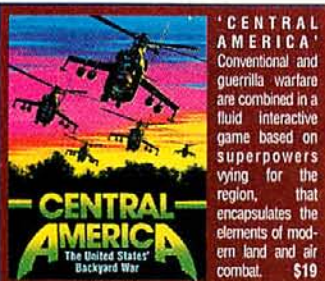
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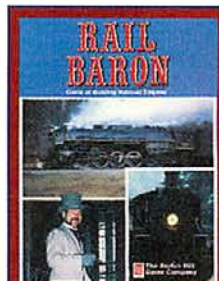
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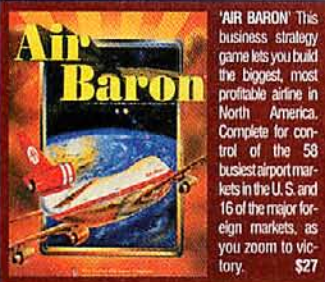
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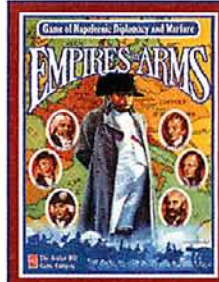
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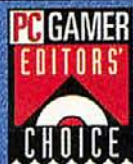
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Welcome to the Cooperstown of computer games. Here you'll find, raised upon pedestals to commemorate their achieve-

ments, the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for untold hours.

HIGHLIGHTS

Harpoon

360 Pacific, 1989

When miniatures gaming was king, there was no game that could quite match the balance of realism and compelling game-

play—not to mention complexity—in HARPOON. When Tom Clancy needed the best in declassified naval data for his book *The Hunt for Red October*, he turned to Larry Bond's gaming masterpiece (Clancy and Bond later met and used HARPOON to work out all the battles for the best-selling novel *Red Storm Rising*, as well).

When this epic finally made it to the computer, it was widely hailed by gamers to be just as accurate as the tabletop version—with a thorough and accessible database to boot. Bond's experience as a retired naval officer and NATO wargames referee was reflected in the quality of play, which was more intense and involving than anything this side of the Naval War College.

HARPOON was proof that hard-core wargames could still sell in big numbers, and that real-time games could have plenty of depth and still be accessible enough to be fun.

Rumors persist that Larry Bond is considering a HARPOON III design. But in the meantime, we recommend that you check out HARPOON CLASSIC 97 by Alliance and Interactive Magic, which features an exhaustive HARPOON package folded into a welcome Windows 95 interface.



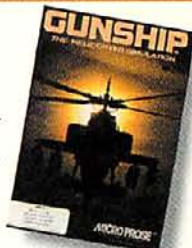
Gunship

MicroProse, 1989

For many years, MicroProse was the undisputed champion of computer simulations, and it was games like GUNSHIP that got them there. GUNSHIP was designed to be an accurate simulation, and the design team didn't skimp on the sim's look and feel. The polygon-filled graphics moved quickly, considering that the game debuted on the 8-bit Commodore 64. Sim pilots found the distinctive handling capabilities of the Apache a refreshing change from the reflex-intensive jet simulations of the day. The game also included a useful keyboard overlay that greatly simplified the controls.

Obviously, newer simulations have passed GUNSHIP by from a graphics standpoint, but few of them have modeled more high-tech toys—inertial navigation systems, anti-torque tail rotors, 30mm chain guns, flare decoys, radar jammers, and a treasure trove of rockets and missiles were only some of the fun stuff included in GUNSHIP.

GUNSHIP was the first combat flight sim to offer character continuity through a linked series of missions, with such nice touches as R&R for fatigued pilots, and the option to pass on hazardous missions by taking sick leave. Although GUNSHIP spawned a host of imitators, it's significant that it took seven years to finally surpass it: Andy Hollis (GUNSHIP's co-designer) and Arnold Hendrick finally outdid GUNSHIP with last year's AH64D LONGBOW.



Inductees Prior To 1989

BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)
EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)
EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)
GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)
SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)
STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)
ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)
WIZARDRY (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

ALONE IN THE DARK
(I-Motion, 1992)

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR
(Dynamix, 1993)

DAY OF THE TENTACLE
(LucasArts, 1993)

DOOM
(id Software, 1993)

FALCON 3.0
(Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO
(Dynamix, 1993)

GUNSHIP
(MicroProse, 1989)

HARPOON
(360 Pacific, 1989)

KING'S QUEST V
(Sierra On-Line, 1990)

LEMMINGS
(Psygnosis, 1991)

LINKS 386 PRO
(Access Software, 1992)

M-1 TANK PLATOON
(MicroProse, 1989)

MASTER OF ORION
(MicroProse, 1993)

RAILROAD TYCOON
(MicroProse, 1990)

RED BARON
(Dynamix, 1990)

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION
(MicroProse, 1991)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
(LucasArts, 1990)

THEIR FINEST HOUR
(LucasArts, 1989)

TIE FIGHTER
(LucasArts, 1994)

ULTIMA VI
(Origin Systems, 1990)

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD
(Origin Systems, 1992)

WING COMMANDER I & II
(Origin Systems, 1990-91)

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D
(id Software, 1992)

X-COM
(MicroProse, 1994)

Computer game programs have grown so massive, and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge, that glitches are frustratingly common. Software patches to fix

buggy programs have become a necessary evil that we'll just have to live with until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. New patches are in **red**.

A-10 Cuba: Upgrade 1.01 allows you to reverse the rudder settings, press Enter or Esc without problems, and even center your joystick. What's more, the original A-10 Cuba serial numbers now work.

American Civil War V1.21: Many of the speed problems with the game on 8MB machines, or Windows 3.1, or both, are fixed, and the AI is also improved.

Baldies DirectX3 Patch: Fixes lock-up and sound problems in Baldies. Download the patch from www.baldies.com, or receive the patch on disc by calling Panasonic Interactive Media Technical Support at (408) 653-1889.

Battlecruiser 3000 AD Release 3C: The latest patch—release 3C—in this ongoing saga fixes a host of bugs, but don't go in with lofty expectations.

Battleground Antietam: Even cautious General McClellan would be more at ease with this newest battle plan from Talonsoft.

Civilization II V2.42: This prevents crashes with auto-settlers, help, and Civlopedia screens; in addition to other tweaks. If you have V2.41, the only addition is that heralds will now animate if you are using 32-bit video for Windows.

F-22 Lightning V1.01.00.18: This strangely-numbered file adds chat mode, additional look views, and more native joystick support to NovaLogic's sim. Also, secret missions have been unlocked, and VESA compatibility issues, static sounds, and high IRQs for modems are properly enabled.

FPS: Baseball '96: It's a season's worth of general manager AI & roster management. Take this inside fastball at your own risk.

FPS: Football Pro '97: This contains the problem with the "Ready-Break!" button not staying pushed in, blitzes the lack of weather info, and adds digitized sound support for AdLib and Pro Audio Spectrum cards.

Heroes of Might & Magic II: (DOS and Win 95 Versions) This powerful patch spell adds a random map generator in the World Editor, fixes numerous small bugs, and clears up anomalies from the documentation.

Jagged Alliance Deadly Games: Cleans up your mercenary mayhem: no more "No Turn Limit" problems, or rare speech crashes. It also includes a fix for the final mission of the main campaign and mission 34 of infinite campaigns, plus all the new turn limit options.

Lighthouse Patch: The light does shine more brightly. Palette thrashing is fixed, lock-ups in dark domain are banished, and the error opening resource 65535/v56 in submarine cavern is corrected. The dark side is that you have to start the game over.

Links LS V 1.30: Tee off without worrying about the ball flight bug, sound script bug, or match play bug. Use *only* if you have V 1.0—this patch is *not* for the European version!

Lords of the Realm II: Milord, with this patched sword, you may slay the Internet Explorer scourge, without re-installing yon Microsoft application.

MechWarrior Mercenaries V1.05: All clans will benefit from this latest upgrade from Activision, which repairs a number of Mech deficiencies.

MechWarrior 2 Windows 95: From Direct X difficulties to terrible torso twists and sinking Mech syndrome, this patch corrects a host of errors. Regardless of your clan affiliation, don't pilot your Mech without it!

Leisure Suit Larry 7: Don't put up with flatulence lockup! This patch will also eliminate saved game problems, along with miscellaneous general protection faults and illegal operations messages. Be warned: it will invalidate existing saved games.

MOO II V 1.2: Just when you thought Antares was safe to conquer, intelligent aliens arrive bearing this patch, which promises many fixes.

NHL Hockey Win 95 V1.1: Only for Win 95 versions, this has a number of fixes and enhancements. Don't try modern play unless both you and your opponent are patched, or you may suffer a lockup penalty.

Over the Reich V1.01: Gameplay hits a higher ceiling, with several adjustments to bomber defensive fire, frequency of reinforcements, angle of interceptions, high-G maneuvers, and banking.

Third Reich V1.21: Mein Herr, we need concern ourselves with neither the Russian deselect unit bug, nor the freeze-up in Win 95. Answer "ja" to any prompts to overwrite.

Total Mayhem Patch: Improved walking in groups, revised map layouts, and a new settings.exe file make for more mayhem, less frustration.



► Check for new patches on the demo disc.

ZDNet

These patches can usually be downloaded from online networks such as CompuServe and ZDNet, from CGW's Web site (www.computergaming.com), or from individual software publishers' Web sites.

Publisher Web Sites

Many patches are available directly from the publishers, at the following sites:

Accolade: www.accolade.com
Activision: www.activision.com
Apogee/3d Realms: www.apogee1.com
Avalon Hill: www.avalonhill.com
Bethesda: www.bethsoft.com
Blizzard: www.blizzard.com
Bullfrog: www.ea.com/bullfrog.html
Domark: www.domark.com
EA: www.ea.com
EA Sports: www.easports.com
Epic MegaGames: www.epicgames.com
id Software: www.idsoftware.com
Interactive Magic: www.imagicgames.com
Interplay: www.interplay.com
LucasArts: www.lucasarts.com
MicroProse/Spectrum HoloByte: www.microprose.com
Microsoft: www.microsoft.com
New World Computing: www.nwc.com
Ocean: www.ef2000.com
Origin: www.ea.com/origin
Papyrus: www.sierra.com/papyrus
Panasonic Interactive Media: www.panasonic.com/cool
Philips: www.aimla.com/games
Sierra On-Line: www.sierra.com
Spectrum HoloByte: www.microprose.com
SSI: www.ssionline.com
Take 2: www.take2games.com/main.html
Talonsoft: www.talonsoft.com
Virgin: www.vie.com

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF CGW SUBSCRIBERS

Each month, 2,000 CGW subscribers are selected at random to rate 100 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your experience.

TOP ACTION GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms/Apogee	8.57
2 Tomb Raider	Eidos	8.52
3 Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	8.25
4 The Need For Speed SE	EA	8.19
5 Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	8.07
6 Quake	id Software	8.04
7 The Need For Speed	EA	7.65
8 Descent II	Interplay	7.39
9 Syndicate Wars	EA/Bullfrog	7.37
10 Hexen	Raven/id	7.23

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Pandora Directive	Access	8.41
2 Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	8.34
3 Larry 7	Sierra	8.11
4 Lighthouse	Sierra	7.84
5 Spycraft	Activision	7.71
6 Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.56
7 Zork Nemesis	Activision	7.35
8 Under A Killing Moon	Access	7.33
9 Star Control 3	Accolade	7.26
10 Phantasmagoria	Sierra	7.20

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	8.19
2 Incredible Toons	Sierra	7.27
3 Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	7.11
4 Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	6.84
5 Scrabble	Hasbro	6.75
6 Risk	Hasbro	6.47
7 —		
8 —		
9 —		
10 —		

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8.54
2 Mechwarrior 2	Activision	8.31
3 AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	8.18
4 EF2000	Ocean	7.96
5 U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.91
6 Silent Hunter	SSI	7.90
7 Lightning F-22	Novalogic	7.79
8 Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	7.69
9 U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	7.60
10 Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	7.15

TOP SPORTS GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Links LS	Access	8.76
2 NASCAR 2	Sierra	8.71
3 Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	8.38
4 NHL '97	EA Sports	8.32
5 FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	8.25
6 Tripleplay '97	EA Sports	7.74
7 NASCAR Racing	Sierra	7.74
8 FPS Football Pro '96	Sierra	7.72
9 NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	7.68
10 NBA Live '96	EA Sports	7.59

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	9.06
2 Warcraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	9.04
3 Warcraft II	Blizzard	8.93
4 Civilization II	MicroProse	8.82
5 Heroes of M&M II	New World Computing	8.75
6 C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.52
7 Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8.42
8 Heroes Of Might & Magic	New World Computing	7.99
9 Lords Of The Realm II	Sierra	7.94
10 Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Sir-Tech	7.84

TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Diablo	Blizzard	8.80
2 Daggerfall	Bethesda	7.71
3 Anvil Of Dawn	New World Computing	7.33
4 Stonekeep	Interplay	6.97
5 Albion	Blue Byte	6.23
6 —		
7 —		
8 —		
9 —		
10 —		

TOP WARGAMES

GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	8.62
2 Steel Panthers	SSI	8.51
3 Panzer General	SSI	8.34
4 Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	8.19
5 Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	8.04
6 Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	7.83
7 Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	7.73
8 Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	7.49
9 Third Reich	Avalon Hill	6.73
10 Wooden Ships And Iron Men	Avalon Hill	6.04

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	ST	9.06
2	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	ST	9.04
3	WarCraft II	Blizzard	ST	8.93
4	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.82
★ 5	Diablo	Blizzard	RP	8.80
★ 6	Links LS	Access	SP	8.76
7	Heroes of M&M II	New World Computing	ST	8.75
8	NASCAR 2	Sierra	SP	8.71
★ 9	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.62
★ 10	Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms/Apogee	AC	8.57
★ 11	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.54
12	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.52
	Tomb Raider	Eidos	AC	8.52
14	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	8.51
15	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.42
★ 16	Pandora Directive	Access	AD	8.41
17	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	SP	8.38
18	Panzer General	SSI	WG	8.34
	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.34
20	NHL '97	EA Sports	SP	8.32
21	Mechwarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.31
22	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	SP	8.25
	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.25
24	The Need For Speed SE	EA	AC	8.19
	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	WG	8.19
★	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.19
27	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.18
28	Larry 7	Sierra	AD	8.11
29	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	AC	8.07
30	Quake	id Software	AC	8.04
	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	WG	8.04
32	Heroes Of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	7.99
33	EF2000	Ocean	SI	7.96
34	Lords Of The Realm II	Sierra	ST	7.94
35	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.91
36	Silent Hunter	SSI	SI	7.90
37	Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Sir-Tech	ST	7.84
	Lighthouse	Sierra	AD	7.84
39	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.83
40	Lightning F-22	Novalogic	SI	7.79
41	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	ST	7.75
42	Tripleplay '97	EA Sports	SP	7.74
	NASCAR Racing	Sierra	SP	7.74
44	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	ST	7.73
	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	WG	7.73
46	WarCraft	Blizzard	ST	7.72
	FPS Football Pro '96	Sierra	SP	7.72
48	Daggerfall	Bethesda	RP	7.71
	Spycraft	Activision	AD	7.71
50	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA/Origin	SI	7.69

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
51	NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	SP	7.68
52	The Need For Speed	EA	AC	7.65
53	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.60
54	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	SP	7.59
55	Fantasy General	SSI	ST	7.57
56	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.56
57	NBA Live '95	EA Sports	SP	7.55
58	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	7.53
59	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.49
	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	WG	7.49
61	Madden '97	EA Sports	SP	7.46
62	Missionforce Cyberstorm	Sierra	ST	7.45
63	FPS Football '95	Sierra	SP	7.41
64	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.39
65	Syndicate Wars	EA/Bullfrog	AC	7.37
66	Tony Larussa 3 '96	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.36
67	Zork Nemesis	Activision	AD	7.35
68	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	7.33
	Anvil Of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	7.33
70	Sim City CD-ROM	Maxis	ST	7.31
71	Incredible Toons	Sierra	CP	7.27
72	Star Control 3	Accolade	AD	7.26
73	Hexen	Raven/id	AC	7.23
74	Magic Carpet 2	EA/Bullfrog	AC	7.22
75	Road Rash	EA	AC	7.20
	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	7.20
77	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.19
	NHL Powerplay	Interplay	SP	7.19
79	Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri	Looking Glass	AC	7.17
80	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	7.15
81	Relentless	EA	AD	7.13
82	Destruction Derby 2	Psygnosis	AC	7.12
	Shattered Steel	Interplay	SI	7.12
84	Virtua Fighter PC	Sega	AC	7.11
	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	7.11
86	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum Holobyte	AD	7.08
87	System Shock	EA/Origin	AC/AD	7.06
88	Caesar II	Sierra	ST	7.04
	Hyper 3D Pinball	Virgin	AC	7.04
	EWJ 1&2: Whole Can O' Worms	Playmates	AC	7.04
91	Legends Of Kyrandia 3	Virgin/Westwood	AD	7.01
92	Hardball 5	Accolade	SP	6.99
93	The Dig	LucasArts	AD	6.98
94	Stonekeep	Interplay	RP	6.97
95	Heretic	Raven/id	AC	6.93
	Aces Of The Deep	Sierra	SI	6.93
97	Daytona USA	Sega	SP	6.90
98	Hind	Interactive Magic	SI	6.88
99	3D Ultra Pinball: Creepnight	Sierra	AC	6.87
100	Time Commando	Activision	AC	6.81

Games on unnumbered lines are tied with game on line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game. AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing, SI = Simulation/Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

How To Play Games With Women



Unless you are an utter "Married with Children"-watching goober, most computer gaming guys would rather be sharing our slightly geeky hobby with our significant others, rather than hearing that distant sigh as they shuffle off to bed without us. Lately, especially after the reminiscing I did in my 15th Anniversary column, I've received a few inquiries asking what's the secret of couples' gaming. Benedict and the boys down in the Lab even suggested that I devote a whole column to it.

The absolutely dismal ratio of men to women in computer gaming is evident by this mag's demographics—or any trip to a gaming convention—and it tends to make life difficult for those of us who have moved out of our parents' basements and are attempting actual adult relationships. While some choose to interpret the rarity of female gamers as an indication that women just don't enjoy games, I tend to think this disparity has more to do with the fact that the past couple thousand years have not exactly encouraged martial skills in women. The fact that women aren't much interested in strategic conflict probably has more to do with the fact

that the last successful western military commander of a female persuasion was burned at the stake (a couple of revisionists are now trying to make us believe she was actually a guy with some odd equipment problems), rather than a nebulous difference in brain structure. Despite the endless drivel about women being from Venus and men being from Mars, and the even more half-baked

“Women are just as competitive and vicious as men, given the chance.”

studies showing that “girls want to build and boys want to wreck stuff” (which frankly seems a little too much based on that whole “snails and puppy dog tails” theory), I have found women to be just as smart, competitive, and vicious as men, if given half the chance. My 5-year-old daughter is a hell of a *DIABLO* player, and is great at yelling “Shoot! Shoot!” while I try and play *NHL '97*. Maybe I've just surrounded myself with

“odd” women, but on the other hand, I can also find a hell of a lot more guys who think games are stupid than guys who don't. I think this whole “boys game, girls don't” rationale is a cultural red herring.

Given that that women don't get much of a chance to indulge the “gaming” side of their natures, I think couples gaming is less of a “What games will a woman play?” issue than it is a simple issue of “How to introduce computer games to a non-gamer.” The first thing is to try and find some subject that interests the light of your life. It doesn't matter how easy *SPACEWARD HO!* is—if silly science fiction isn't her thing, then she's not going to have fun, no matter how simple it is. If your S.O. is a history fan, then you are better off trying something like *MACHIAVELLI* than *RISK*.

The current wisdom in getting women to game seems to be dumping them in front of an adventure game or role-playing game and saying “Call me when you're done,” because it seems that the adventure/RPG genre has higher female demographics than the rest of the industry. Even worse is the assumption that because you've managed to dig up a game that has a female protagonist, your scheming is done and you will have a two-gamer household. Here's a news flash: neither the Barbie-voice of *LAURA BOW* nor the make-up escapades of

PHANTASMAGORIA are going to convince most women that the bells of equality are ringing through computer gaming. Instead of inflicting a self-consciously “girly” game on your mate, you should try working your way through complex games like the *ULTIMAS* or the *GABRIEL KNIGHTS* together, trading screen control and note-taking duties while you argue about which characters you can trust.

If you want to enter the world of conflict and mayhem with the light of your life, pick a game where both of you can pound on the computer player first. Creeping nervously through *QUAKE*'s gothic halls as a couple, or hunting the AI opponents together in *HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC 2*, is a perfect way of showing what you find so cool about computer gaming. Blizzard should get some sort of an award from the American Marriage Association for *DIABLO*. Now you can turn to your mate and say, “Holy Cow, it's dawn!” instead of just muttering it to yourself as you lurch off to bed.

Once the experience gap has closed, you can move into actual competition—but that's secondary to just sharing what is so fun about the whole thing, and showing her why you play these things every night.

If you can do that, you can look forward to increased harmony and a household where nothing ever gets done because there's just one more discovery to make in *NetCiv*. ☿

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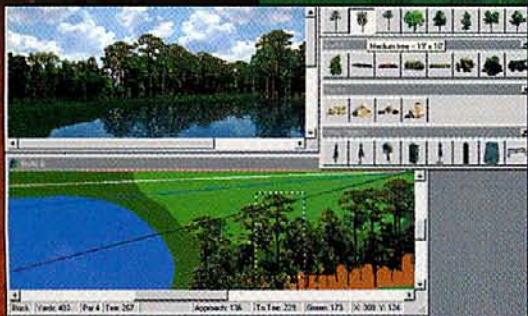
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Click and drag on its shape

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The result: a new bunker

"Is it live or is it...?" Our Course Designer is so true-to-life, it's hard to tell the difference!

This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.



The Hole View of the new bunker.

From Tee to Green

The Tee Shot

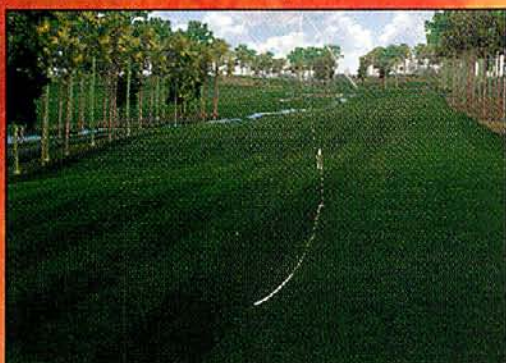
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Pop-up displays are optional—leave them off for the purest golfing experience.



New "Intensity Control™" reproduces the dynamics that shape the shot. "Club up and swing easy" for control or a low trajectory; "swing hard" when you want spin and distance.



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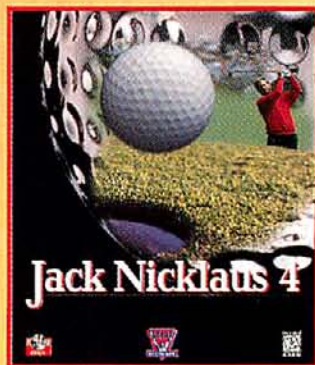


For enhanced gameplay, this optional grid floats down and drapes itself over the green, clearly showing all high and low spots.

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