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NOVEMBER 1999
ISSUE 184

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

THE #1 PC GAME MAGAZINE

The Next Big Thing

5 GAMES THAT WILL CHANGE GAMING

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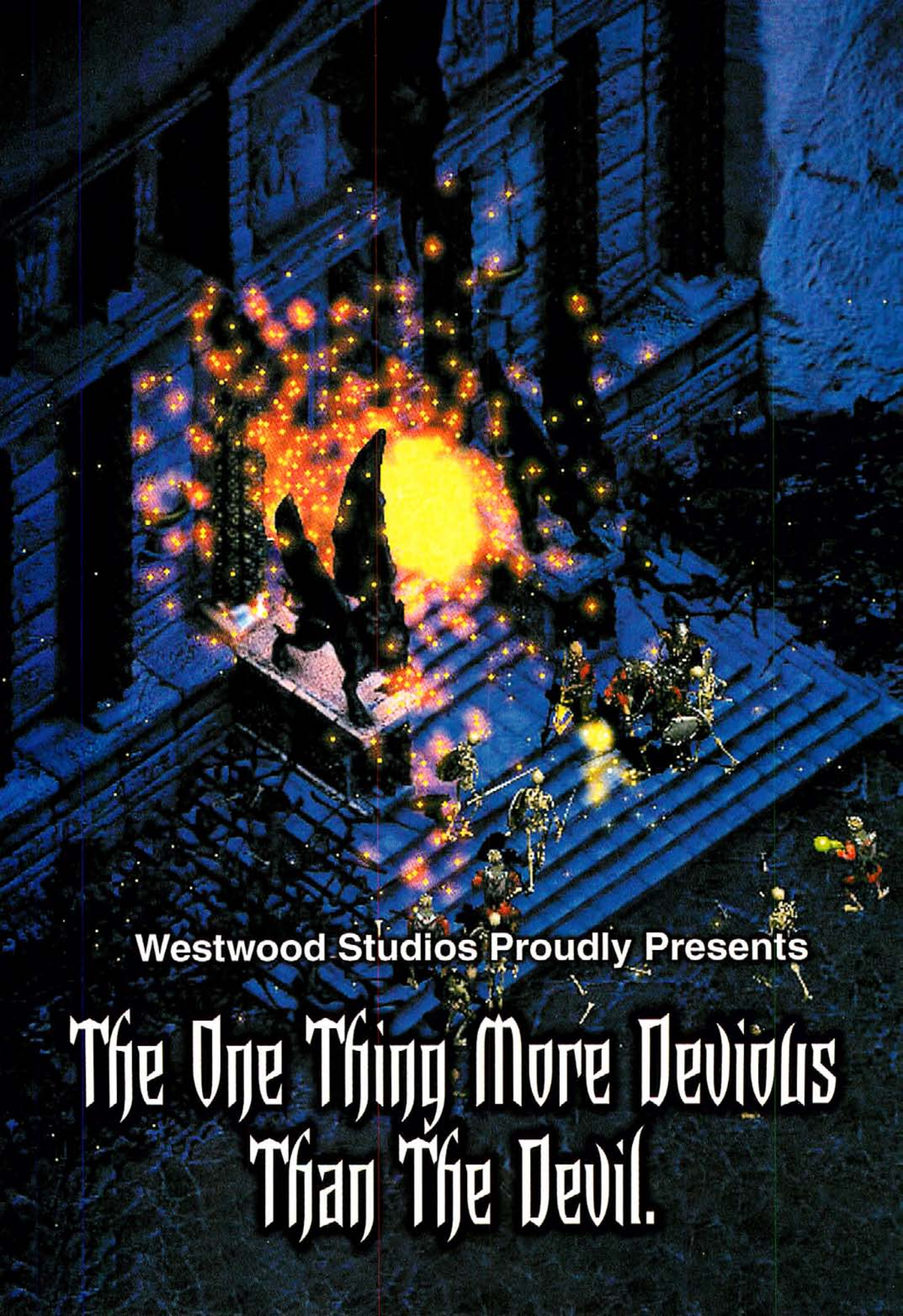
FREELANCER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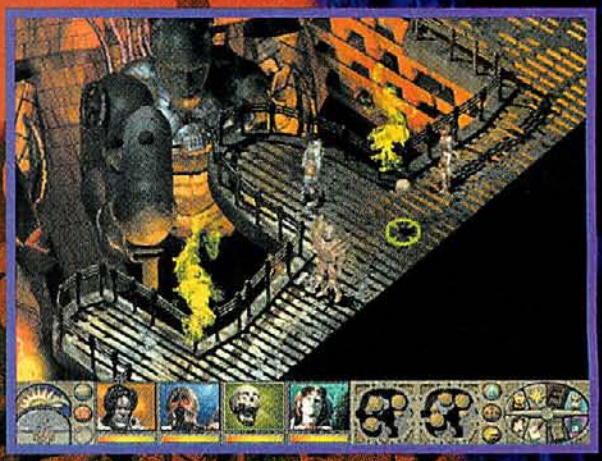

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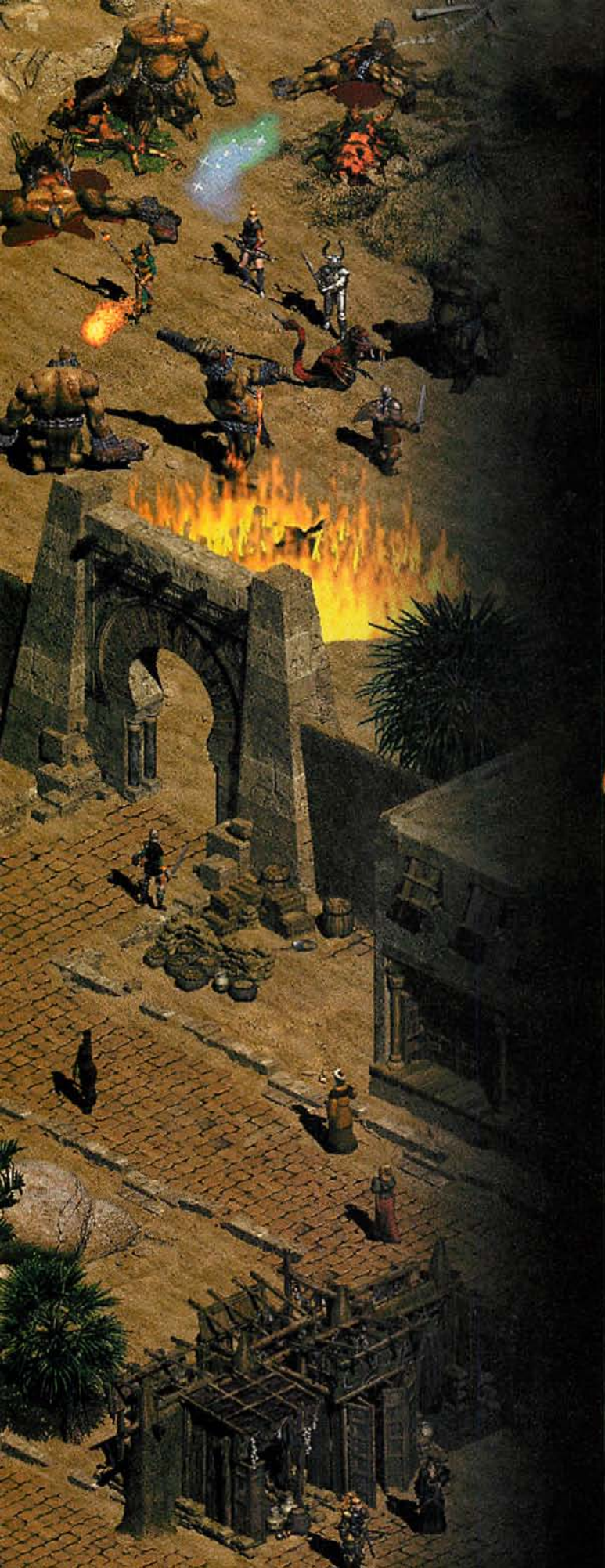

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ACTUAL GAME MODEL

Characters

- Control over 40 different organic characters.
- Your strategy depends on the characters you choose. Can a street hustler sneak into the research center? Or is a frontal assault using a cop a better solution?
- All character models have over 100,000 polygons for super high levels of detail.
- Advanced neural net AI, group dynamics, and squad tactics insures that denizens of the world will always react differently every time you play.
- Skin stretches smoothly over joints, muscles flex, and clothing drapes smoothly. No more blocky characters.
- Motion capture and hand animation blended using interpolation creates virtually thousands of movements for each character.

Weapons

- Use the right tool for the job. 20+ weapons to choose from, including rocket-propelled harpoons, needle guns, lasers, trip mines, rocket launchers, grenades, and flame throwers.
- Weapons create lasting damage to the environments. Write your initials in the walls with the needle gun.
- Pinpoint firing accuracy and laser sights make targeting enemies simple.

Technology

- Because of the revolutionary RT-DAT technology, your system is constantly pushed to the limit while never slowing down – even with dozens of characters on screen!
- Environments feature portal technology for seamless transitions between the 14 huge worlds. No more waiting to load levels!
- Streaming video, specular lighting, morphing environment, and 3D audio bring the Messiah world alive.
- Support for all major 3D video and audio cards.

MESSIAH

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Shiny Entertainment

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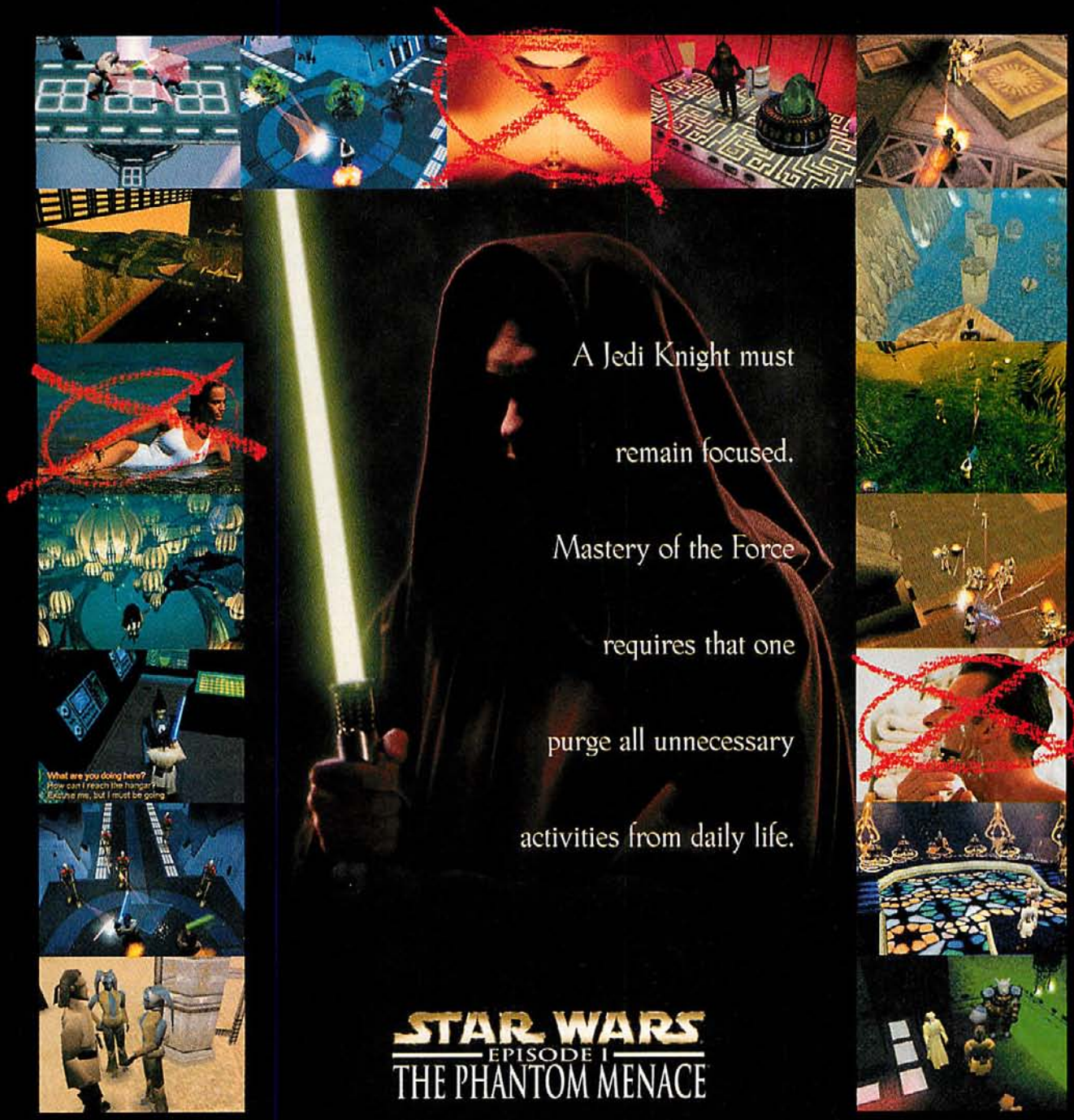

STAR WARS EPISODE I THE PHANTOM MENACE

Prepare to immerse yourself in the epic adventure that is *The Phantom Menace*. As the central character, you will journey to all the stunning locations of Episode I, where you are destined to play a decisive role in every key event. All-consuming? Yes. But then, there's no such thing as a part-time Jedi.

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

NOVEMBER 1999 • ISSUE 184

COVER STORY

Five Games That Will Change Gaming

We've seen the future of gaming, and it's beyond bright: stunning graphics, incredible storytelling, ambitious online features, and gameplay that will rewrite the book on what games can do. These are the five games every gamer absolutely must know about. **88**

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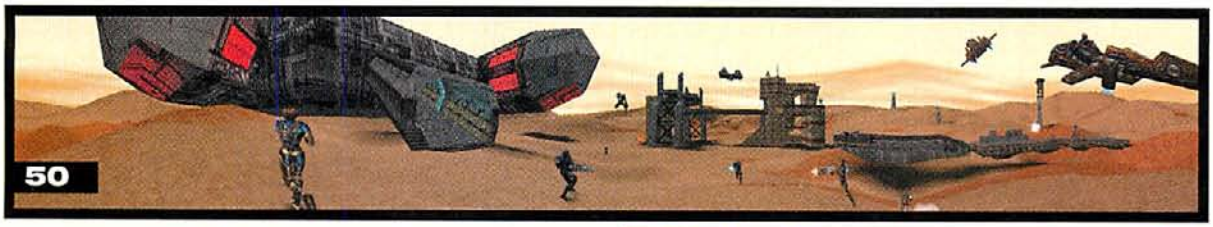
Sure, the future of gaming looks great, but we still want to play our old favorites – with 3D cards, better AI, and killer sound. So we compiled this list of 10 classic games that cry out to be remade and the people we think should do the work.



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This year's hottest online team game preps for the millennium with bigger worlds, better vehicles, and bolder gameplay 50

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Getting in touch with your inner Road Warrior, courtesy of the guy who brought you CRUSADER: NO REGRET 85

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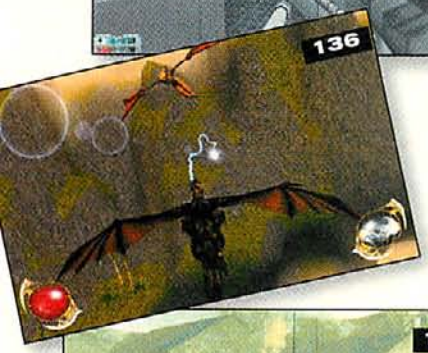

ON THE CD

A kajillion gigawops of spasm-inducing game demos!

Freespace 2
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Revenant
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- **An X-COM Play-by-Email Game?**

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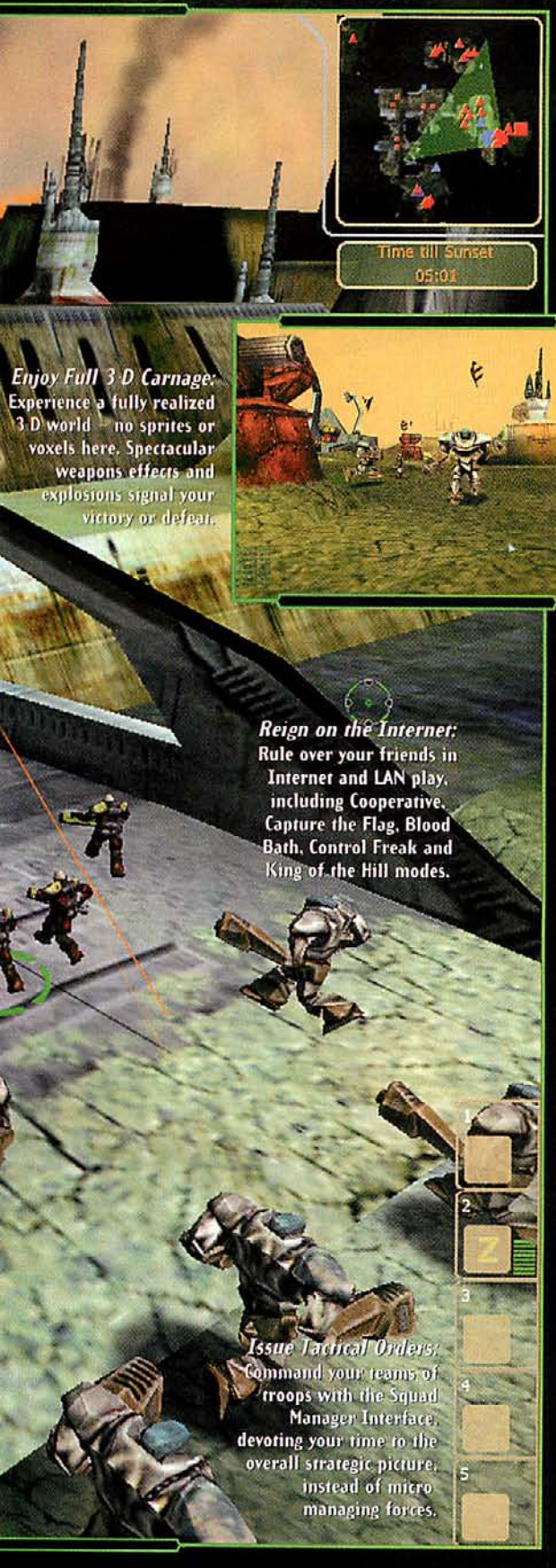

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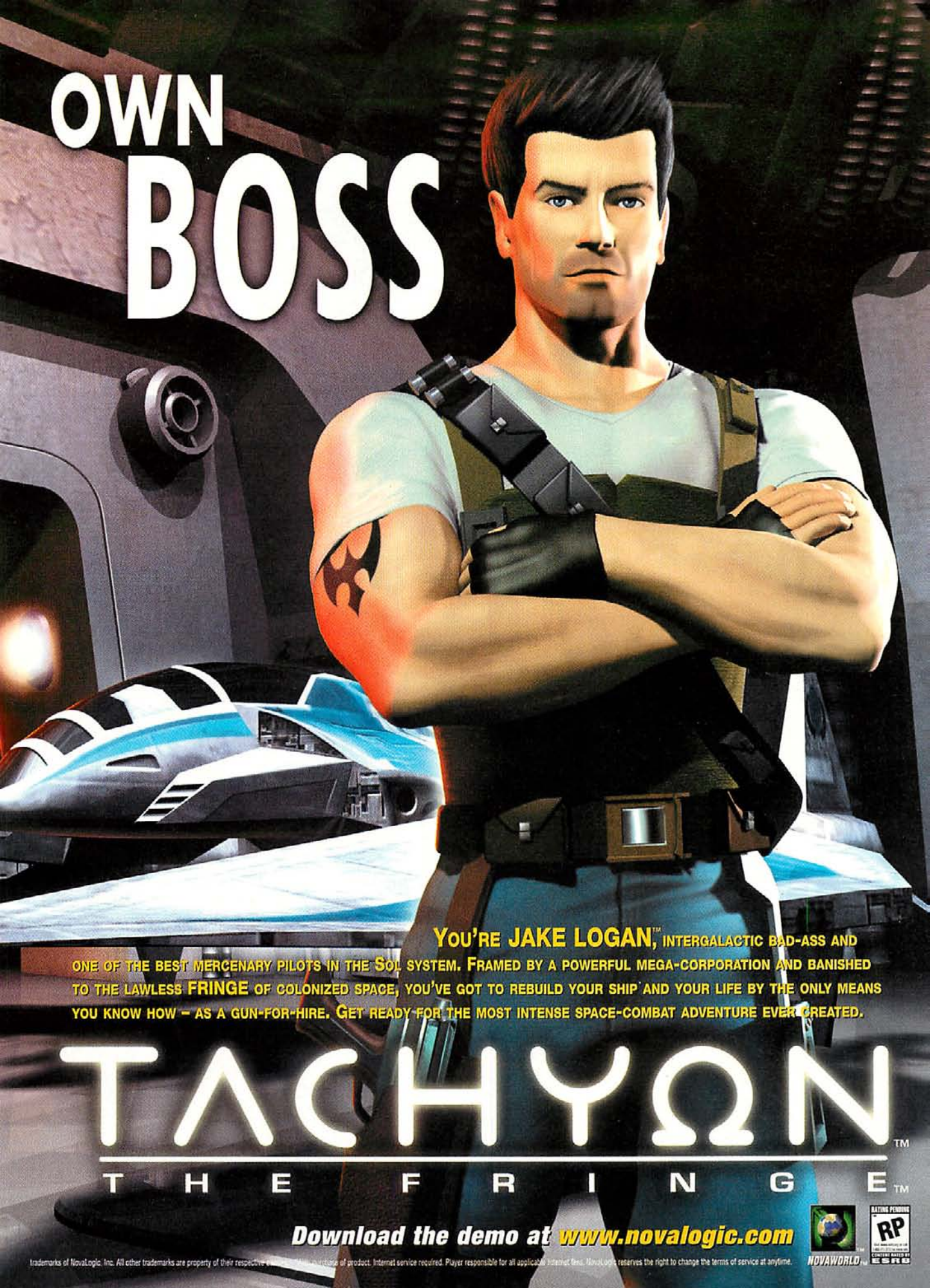
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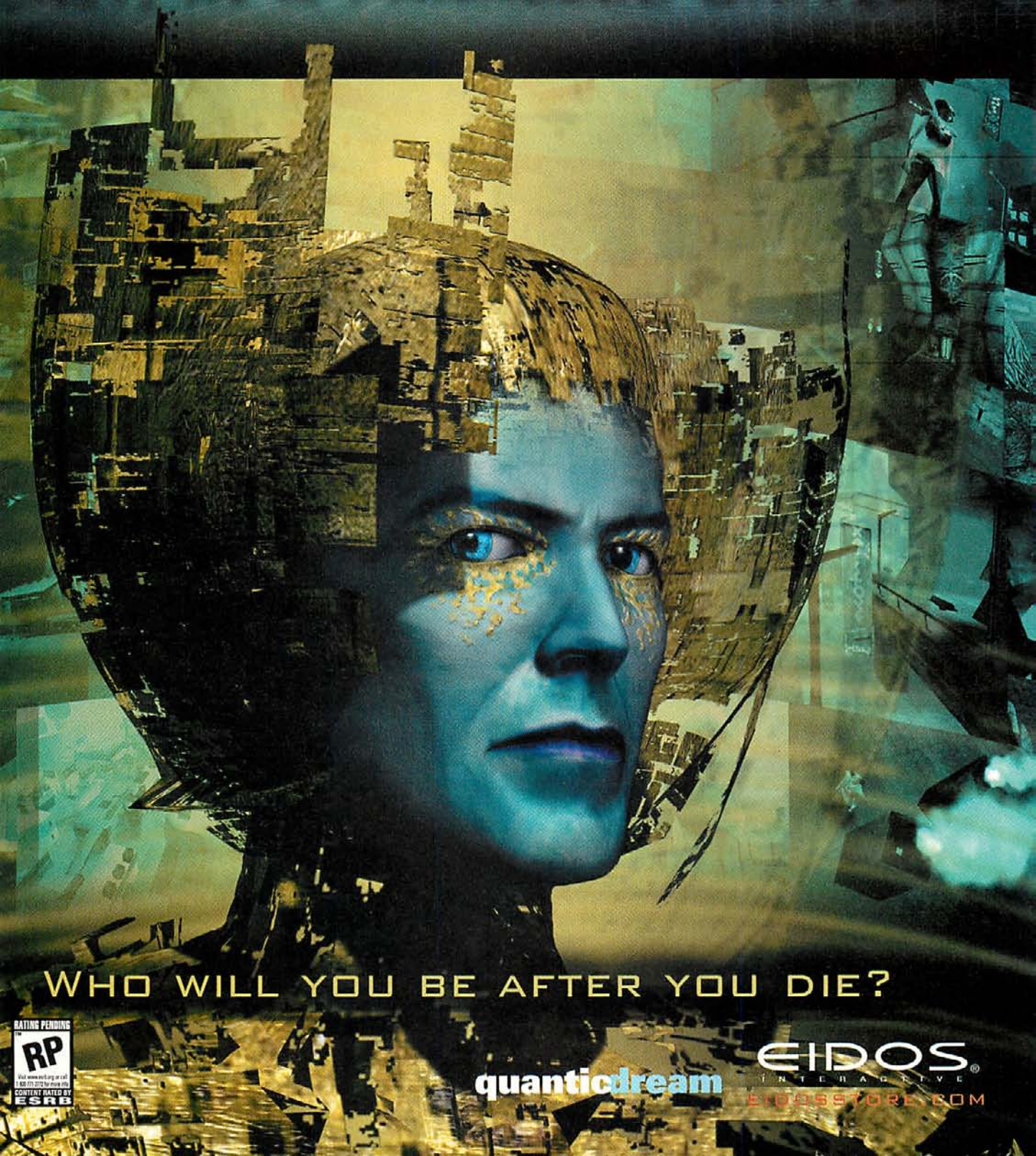

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PUBLISHER
LEE UNIACKE • lee_uniacke@zd.com

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
GEORGE JONES (SPORTS) • george_jones@zd.com
EDITOR
KEN BROWN • ken_brown@zd.com
MANAGING EDITOR
CHRIS LOMBARDI • chris_lombardi@zd.com
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
DAVE SALVATOR (HARDWARE) • dave_salvator@zd.com
SENIOR EDITOR
JEFF GREEN (ADVENTURE/RPG, NEWS) • jeff_green@zd.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
ROBERT COFFEY (ACTION, STRATEGY) • robert_coffey@zd.com
ASSISTANT EDITORS
JESSE HIATT (CD-ROM) • jesse_hiatt@zd.com
THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN (PREVIEWS) • thierry_nguyen@zd.com
TOM PRICE • tom_price@zd.com
COPY EDITOR
HOLLY FLEMING • holly_fleming@zd.com
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
CHARLES ARDAI (INTERACTIVE FICTION), LOYD CASE (HARDWARE)

ART DEPARTMENT
ART DIRECTOR
STEVE WANCZYK • steve_wanczyk@zd.com
GRAPHIC ARTIST
JASON BABLER • jason_babler@zd.com

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
CARLOS LUGO
PRODUCTION MANAGER
DENNIS FITZGERALD
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ADDRESS NON-SUBSCRIPTION RELATED QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK TO: CGW EDITORIAL, 50 BEALE ST., 12TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105. OR YOU MAY CONTACT US VIA: CGWLETTERS@ZD.COM
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ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT
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SUZANNE REIDER • suzie@zd.com • (415) 357-4915
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ SAN FRANCISCO, SOUTHERN TERRITORY
MARCI YAMAGUCHI • marciy@zd.com • (415) 357-4944
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DRU MONTGOMERY • dru_montgomery@zd.com • 415) 357-4925
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JOANN CASEY • joann_casey@zd.com • (415) 357-4920
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER
SAT SHARMA • sat_sharma@zd.com • (415) 357-4935
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR
TIPLER UUELOHDE • tipler_uuelohde@zd.com • (415) 357-4930
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EMILY OLMAN • emily_olman@zd.com • (415) 547-8783
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FOUNDER
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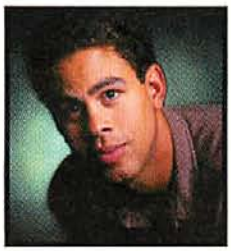
Pretty Fly for a PC Guy

"I am way too cool for this," I smugly thought to myself as I shuffled into the 1999 Classic Games Expo in Las Vegas, Nevada.

But wait a second. As I sat down and listened to panel after panel of celebrity video game designers talking about their greatest and worst moments, and as I chatted up the attendees at this decidedly non-schmoozy event, I realized the sad truth. In '84 or '89, if you had asked anyone who was into the Atari 2600 and Intellivision what they thought of gamers who played on the Vic-20 or the Commodore 64 or even the snobbish Apple II, you probably would have heard one word consistently. That word is not "cool"—it's "geek."



Regardless of platform or coolness factor, I was still amongst my kind at the Plaza hotel in downtown Las Vegas. Here, I could talk about that week when I had Tron dreams on a nightly basis to people who understood. And I could also spend some highly pleasurable time with some of the guys—like David Crane and Garry Kitchen—responsible for some of the most innovative game design the industry has ever seen.

In '84 or '89, if you asked anyone who was into the Atari 2600 and Intellivision what they thought of gamers who played on the Vic-20 or the Commodore 64 or even the snobbish Apple II, you probably would have heard one word consistently...*geek*.

Even though the Classic Gaming Expo centered mostly on video game systems and coin-op arcade games, it got the *CGW* editors thinking about the history of our little niche, and the most influential gaming experiences we've had. This month's cover story details five games we think will eventually become significant chapters in this history. And given our misty-eyed nostalgic experience in Las Vegas, we decided to turn one of our favorite lunchtime "discussions"—what classic computer games we wish someone in the gaming industry would remake—into our second feature story.

The end result of all this is a warm fuzzy issue of *Computer Gaming World* that we're all very proud of. Here's hoping you feel the love.

Want to wax nostalgic with George? Wax on, at george_jones@zd.com. CGW

George Jones

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"HOMEWORLD IS SET TO EXPLODE THE RTS GENRE LIKE A FIERY SUPERNOVA"
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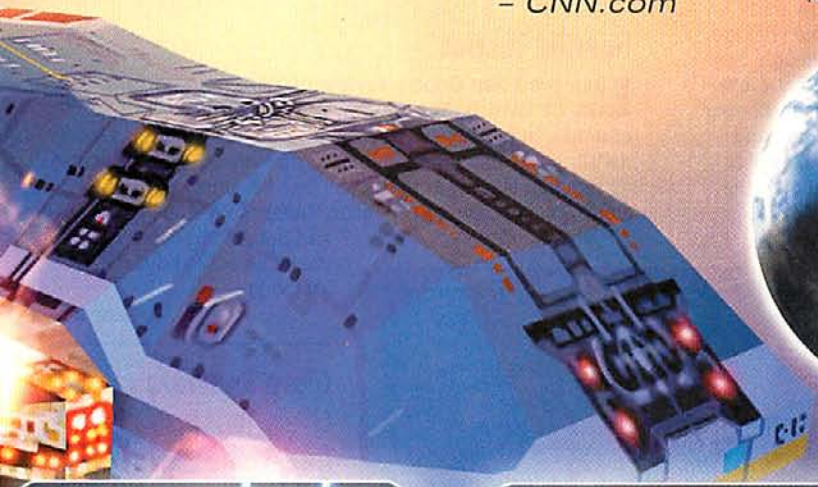

Prepare to adjust your strategy as you navigate your Armada through an infinite 3D battle-field where the enemy can attack from any point in space.

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Missing Wrath

DON'T GET SHAFTED! If you want to play the classic Romulan episode "Balance of Terror," you'll have to buy STARFLEET COMMAND from Interplay.

I recently bought a copy of STARFLEET COMMAND. On the way home I glanced through the manual at scenarios. "Cool," I noted, "The Wrath of Khan scenario. That'll be awesome!"

So I got home, eager to try myself out against Khan's "genetically engineered intellect," but when I loaded the scenarios, no Wrath of Khan. "Okay," said I, "It's probably out on their Web site." There, I find out that if you purchase the game from them, you get a disk with "Balance of Terror," the old classic Romulan episode from the first series, as well as "Wrath of Khan" and two others. Well, I called them up, ready to pay a few bucks extra to get that disk, but they told me that it was unavailable unless purchased directly from them. They also said that they would NEVER release these scenarios for the game on their Web site, or even on a future scenario disk. That means, from now until eternity, I shall never be able to play "Balance of Terror" or the "Wrath of Khan" unless I order them from Interplay.

This is now a major inconvenience, as I must return the old game to Electronics Boutique, order from them, pay more for the game than the standard market price, and pay shipping as well.

For long-time Trekkers like myself, "Wrath of Khan" and "Balance of Terror" are must-haves. I think you need to alert customers to this dirty trick on the part of Interplay, that they have no choice: they must either purchase direct from Interplay, or no "Balance of Terror" or "Wrath of Khan" from now until Judgment Day.

Dezso Janos Bartha

Kingpinheads

My father and I recently went to the computer store to purchase the newly released KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME. He was fine with the Mature rating and knew about the extreme violence that was supposedly in the game. When we got to the store the salespeople who are supposed to be selling us the game acted as though they did not want us to buy it. They told my father that there were incredibly graphic rape scenes that involved 12-year old girls. My father and I were shocked at this fact and stormed out of there. My question is: Is what the sales people were telling us all true or were they bending the truth?

Zack Epcar

Your salesperson was either moralistic or misinformed. There are no rape scenes amidst the grime and gore, but it's definitely not a game for young players.

Bot Shots

This is directed to game manufacturers' current trend of multi-player-only games. I do not want to "hone my skills" against bots before I play online. Not all of us play online, and I think some big upcoming games are screwing the single player (you know who you are—id, EA, etc.). I've enjoyed many of your games in the past, you know, when a single-player game was included.

I understand online gaming is huge. But I don't think it's fair if you want to play a certain game that you have only one choice. I'll also bet there are a lot of people out there that feel the same way. Perhaps the sales of the games will reflect this. At least currently, I'm not limited to "honing my skills against bots."

Tony Pilasiewicz

Guerilla Tactics

I just read Jim Cobb's review of THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II (September, pg. 160) and I had to chuckle. In the review he states, "And how guerrillas, no matter how feisty, can hold out against large, well-supported regulars is a mystery to me." Don't feel like you are alone. I'm sure Lyndon Johnson, General Westmoreland, and Robert McNamara felt the same way about the Vietcong.

Jeff Traylor

Target Practice

Since you have been a little hard on yourselves lately about contributing to society, just thought you should know that *Computer Gaming World* does have some social value. After I read the magazine, I let my son have it. He loves looking at it. In fact, we are using it as a potty training aid, by letting him look at it only when he sits on the potty. He is an avid computer gamer already at four.

Allen Brimm
Doha, Qatar

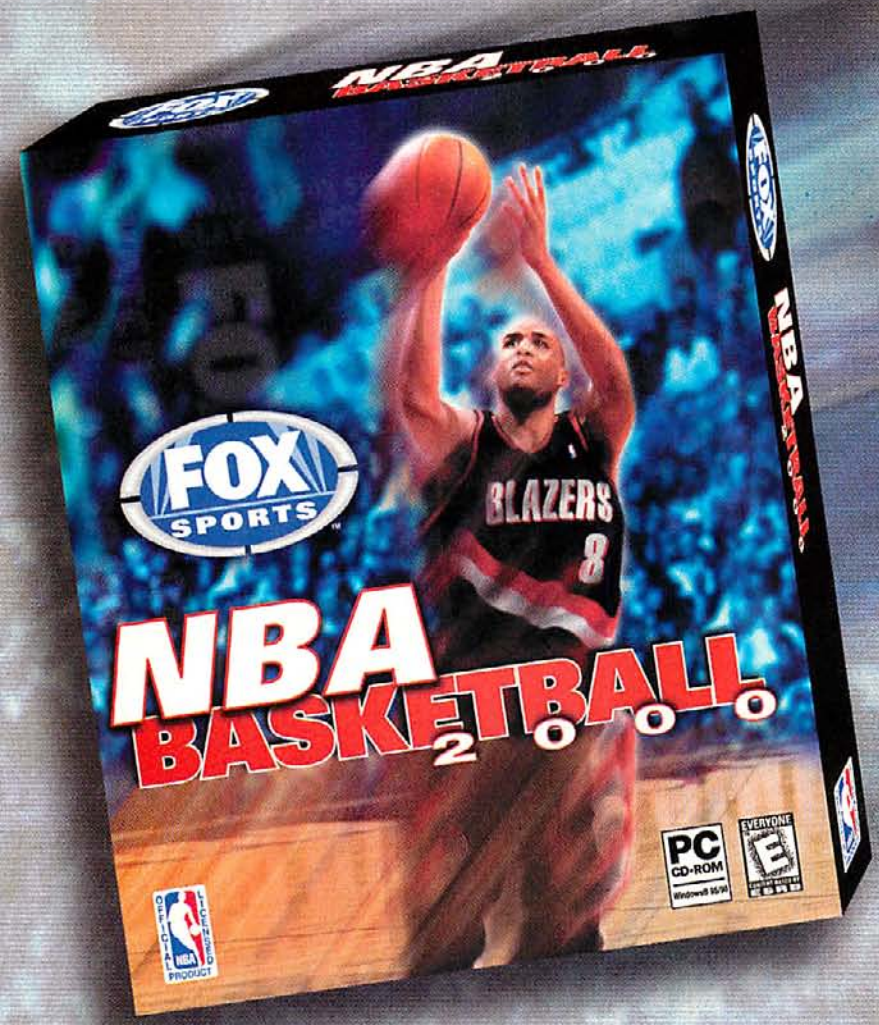
More Answers to Life's Tough Questions

Your magazine is always informative and a pleasure to read. It's also heartening to notice that you agree with me on two of the answers to life's tough decisions, namely brunettes and Guinness, which, when paired together, make for an interesting evening.... Newcastle Brown Ale will do in a pinch, but brunettes are tough to replace.

Here's to continued success and more buxom female vampire covers.

Kurt Schulz
Benton Harbor, Michigan

INTRODUCING THE NEWEST WAY TO PLAY BASKETBALL



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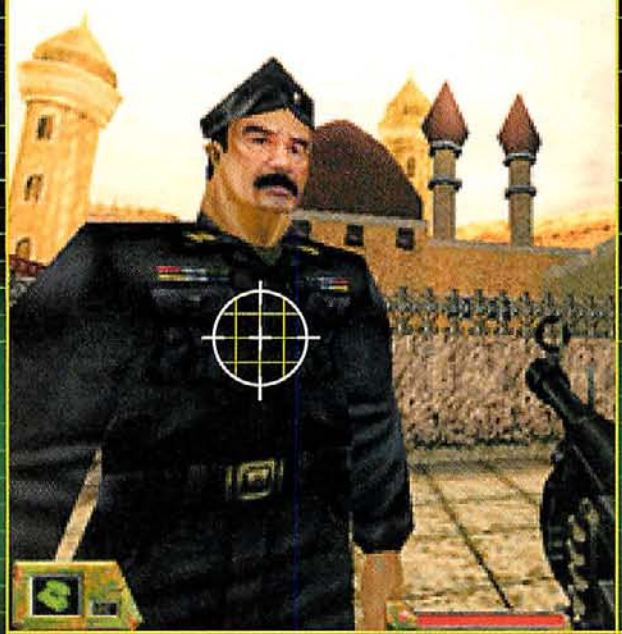
Look for Soldier of Fortune® this Holiday Season.
Screen shots courtesy of Raven Software.



THE "KILL-ZONE" AS SEEN BY A STANDARD 350 DPI MOUSE.

THE "KILL-ZONE" AS SEEN BY THE 2000 DPI RAZER™ BOOMSLANG™.

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[dead player index]

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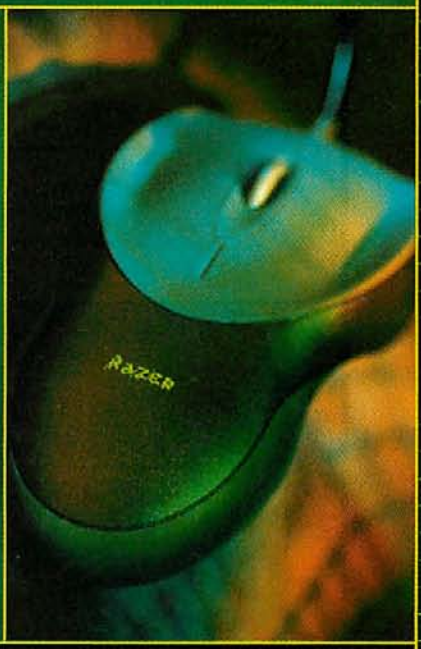

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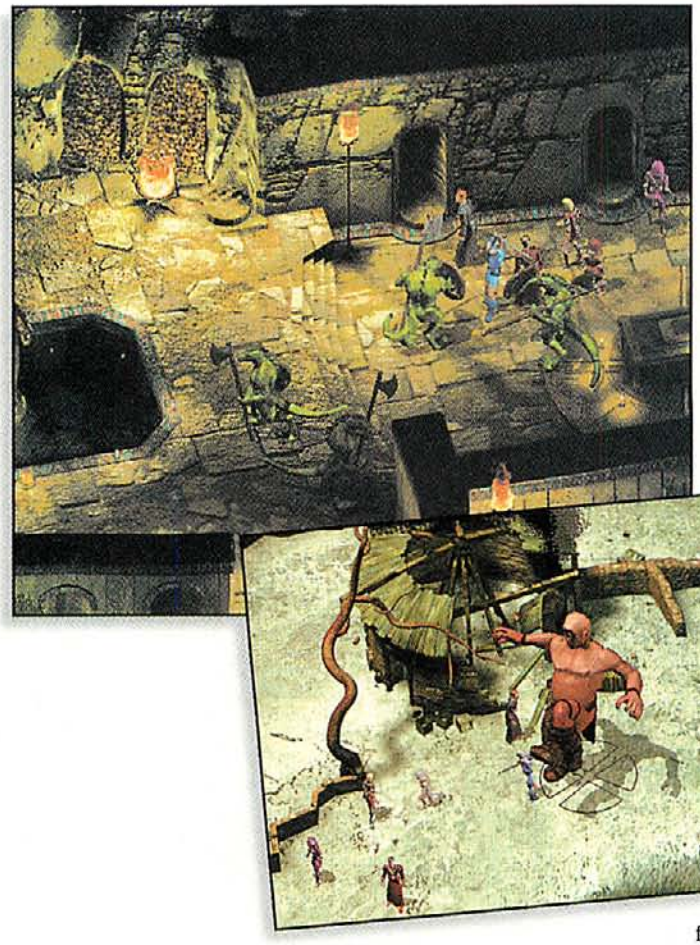
Interplay Unveils Next Fantasy RPG

ICEWIND DALE A Dungeon Romp Using BALDUR'S GATE Engine

Interplay just unveiled its plans for the next RPG set in the AD&D Forgotten Realms universe, and no, it's not BALDUR'S GATE 2 — not this time. You'll probably hear more about that sometime soon, but in the meantime, Interplay hopes to satisfy your AD&D jones with ICEWIND DALE, an action-oriented dungeon romp set in the northernmost tip of the Forgotten Realms.



Due early next year, ICEWIND DALE uses Bioware's BALDUR'S GATE engine, but is going to go heavier on the action and lighter on the plot, a la DIABLO. "We looked at what it took to make BALDUR'S GATE, and what people liked," said Chris Parker, the game's producer (and in-house producer on both BALDUR'S GATE and the TALES OF THE SWORD COAST expansion). "We thought we could probably do a very fun and exciting, more action-based RPG. Since PLANESCAPE: TORMENT (Interplay's other big AD&D RPG now in development) is a hardcore, quest- and story-based RPG, we thought it would be cool to make a lighter game that was more action-based, and we realized we could do it with the BALDUR'S GATE engine."

The game is going to take place entirely underground in a series of dungeons, with a variety of environments, including snowy nordic regions, volcanic areas, and steamy jungle. The game's monsters will be up to four times bigger than the biggest creatures (the wyverns) in BALDUR'S GATE. According to Parker, ICEWIND DALE will still feature numerous quests and subquests, but the emphasis this time will be much more on combat and character building, rather than storytelling. As such, the current plan is to let characters reach Level 12 or 13 — much higher than in the original BALDUR'S GATE.

"This will be a classic dungeon crawl," said Parker. "In fact, that was the first tentative name for the game. The main focus will be going after cool items and spells and leveling up."

One cool feature for serious role-players is that the game will be entirely party-based;

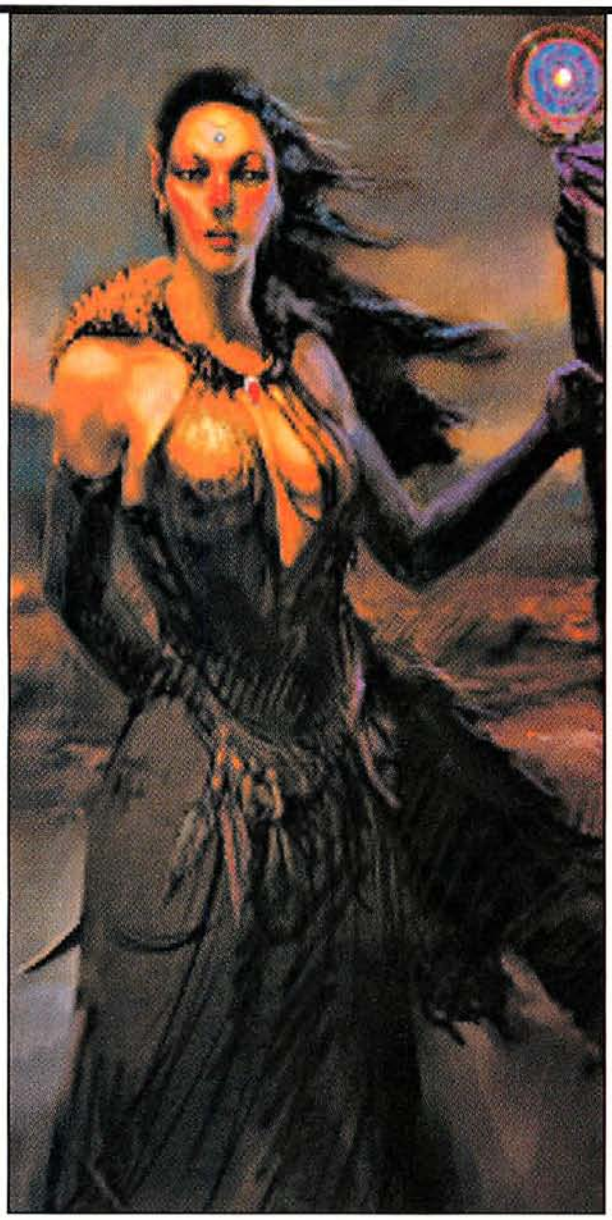
you'll be able to generate your whole party of six characters from scratch at the game's beginning. Black Isle is making minor tweaks to the game engine — such as speed improvements for character movement — but in general is not futzing with it.

"We're basically just generating content and building tons of levels," said Parker. "We're not monkeying with Bioware's engine. We're taking what we can from their wisdom." The game will incorporate the AD&D 2nd Edition rules, rather than the just-announced 3rd Edition rules, mainly due to timing.

"Rewriting the rules inside the game engine would require a gutting of the engine, and we don't want to do that," he said. "The payoff might not be enough at this point."

Finally, gamers should know that there is no overlap with BALDUR'S GATE at all in ICEWIND DALE. You won't be able to import your BG characters, nor will there be any characters from the earlier game appearing in the new game. It's a brand-new experience.

Can ICEWIND DALE compete in the ever-growing action-RPG field — especially with DIABLO 2 due to ship about the same time? With the AD&D license and the popular BALDUR'S GATE engine, it has a better chance than most. We'll bring you more on this game as it gets closer to completion. — *Jeff Green*



5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

Nov./Dec.1984

It was 15 years ago this month that *CGW* reviewed F-15 STRIKE EAGLE, a landmark game for two reasons: First, it was one of the first attempts at a serious flight sim on a personal computer; and second, it was the virgin game design voyage of a young guy named Sid Meier. Meier would leave flight sims behind for strategy games, but the mark made by F-15 would remain for years to come. So novel was the flight sim concept that our review actually spelled out the fact that you could bank, roll, dive, and even do maneuvers like a Split-S. Oooooh. And we raved over the fact that there were both air and ground targets to shoot at, even though the ground targets were colored triangles on an endless sea of green. We've come a long way, baby.

10

November 1989

Christmas came early in 1989, and what a Christmas it was. A number of huge game franchises got their start that year, including Activision's MECHWARRIOR, Sierra's HERO'S QUEST, Maxis' SIMCITY, and New World's KING'S BOUNTY (which would evolve into HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC). Also released was STARFLIGHT 2, the much-loved space opera that would spawn the STAR CONTROL series.

Reality Check

There are a lot of really great games on this month's list, as evidenced by the high number of editors' choice awards. Just to balance things out, we included BEATDOWN. Here's our roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system. • ***Yellow indicates an editors' choice game.***

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CG Strat+ (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Beatdown	1	11%	*	4	3.8	*
Descent 3	4	93%	4	9	9.0	9
Dungeon Keeper 2	4.5	89%	4.5	*	7.9	9
Heavy Gear 2	4.5	92%	3.5	7	9.0	7
Jagged Alliance 2	4.5	74%	5	*	8.8	9
Might & Magic VII	4.5	63%	4	8	8.3	7
NFS: High Stakes	5	82%	4	9	8.6	9
Outcast	4.5	90%	*	*	8.6	*
PGA Championship Golf 1999	3	90%	3.5	*	8.4	7
TA: Kingdoms	4	82%	4	5	6.6	6

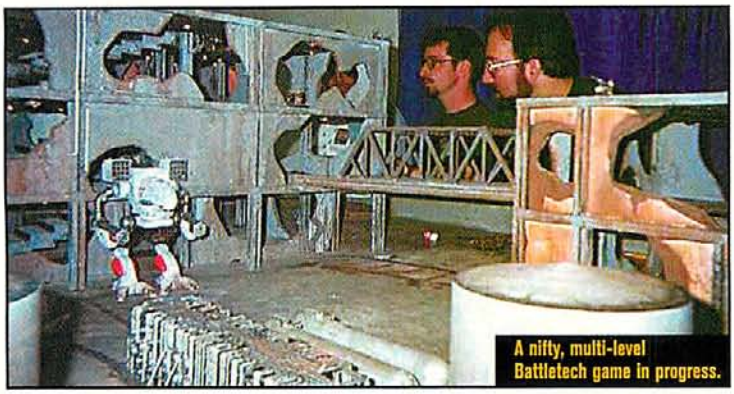
5

November 1994

The first-person action craze kicked into high gear in the Fall of '94. We were gaga over DOOM II, and aghast at the first wave of DOOM rip-offs that every game company and their cousins were madly cranking out. Among the first wave of "DOOM Toos" were pieces of trash like ISLE OF THE DEAD, OPERATION BODY COUNT, and THE FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI. But there were some winners in the bunch, like Interplay's DESCENT, LucasArts' DARK FORCES, and our pick for the best DOOM Too—HERETIC.

1999 GenCon Report

Big PC Game Presence at Annual Geekfest



A nifty, multi-level Battletech game in progress.

Were you getting jiggy with it August 5th–8th? The gaming geeks — and we include ourselves — sure were.

Over 57,000 attendees, all but three wearing black XXXL t-shirts, broke records at the four-day GenCon convention in Milwaukee, hosted by Wizards of the Coast. There were quite a few computer game companies showing their wares in addition to all of the pen-and-paper games, collectible card games, board games, and miniatures games that were on display and being played.

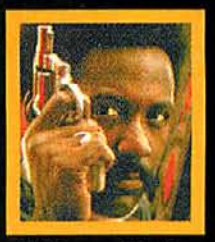
The big non-computer game announcement actually ties in to computer gaming. Wizards of the Coast and their subsidiary TSR announced that Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition rules were under development, and will be released at next year's GenCon. This led into two big computer game announcements.

First, SSI officially announced POOL OF RADIANCE 2 and showed a brief clip; it will be a single-player, party-based game. In addition, Interplay and Bioware announced and showed off NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, Bioware's next Forgotten Realms game, following their massively successful BALDUR'S GATE. This game looks like it could be huge (see our sneak preview in this issue). Both games are Q4 2000 releases and will use 3rd Edition D&D rules.

Gathering Of Game Companies

- Sony and Verant, makers of EVERQUEST, officially debuted SOVEREIGN, a massively multiplayer real-time strategy game. Games can be played with as few as four players and as many as 500. Verant was also showing off the EVERQUEST expansion, the RUINS OF KUNARK.
- Hasbro Interactive and Microprose were showing DIPLOMACY, RISK 2, and MAJESTY. We were intrigued with MAJESTY and went back to play it several times. It looks like an RTS fantasy game but plays like a god game.
- Activision was running all of their *Star Trek* games along with VAMPIRE and SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. VAMPIRE continues to look terrific, with more levels and characters since it was last shown at E3.
- Sierra was showing BABYLON 5, HOMEWORLD, PHAROAH, and GABRIEL KNIGHT 3. Jane Jensen, designer of all the GABRIEL KNIGHT games, told me that GK3 may be the last Sierra adventure game for quite some time, if not forever. Jane herself is going to concentrate on writing novels after GK3 is finished.
- Interplay had PLANESCAPE: TORMENT running along with STAR TREK NEW WORLDS. NEW WORLDS is a ground-based RTS game with no infantry — the game is all hovering, armored vehicles in a nice 3D environment. As this story was going to press, though, word started leaking that the game was in trouble, and was being pulled back for serious restructuring of the campaign levels. Don't look for it anytime soon.
- Gathering of Developers had a new build of RUNE using the UNREAL 2 engine, but it's too early to say much about it. They were also showing DARKSTONE and AGE OF WONDERS, which keeps looking better.
- Westwood was showing NOX and COMMAND AND CONQUER:

The GOOD...



RE*VOLT One of those amazingly great little games that comes from out of nowhere to blow us away, and cause us to once again miss all of our deadlines. This remote-control car racer is fun and addictive – and it looks awesome too. One sign it has taken over: Resident crank Dave Salvator has been screaming, cursing, and breaking controllers in his office all week. Face it, Dave: You suck.

PALM PILOT GAMEBOY EMULATOR According to the PalmInfoCenter Web site (www.palminfocenter.com), a developer named Maven is hard at work on a Gameboy emulator for the Palm Pilot. This must happen. Someone give this man some money. We want to play Pokemon on our Palm Pilots. No, really – we do.

the BAD...

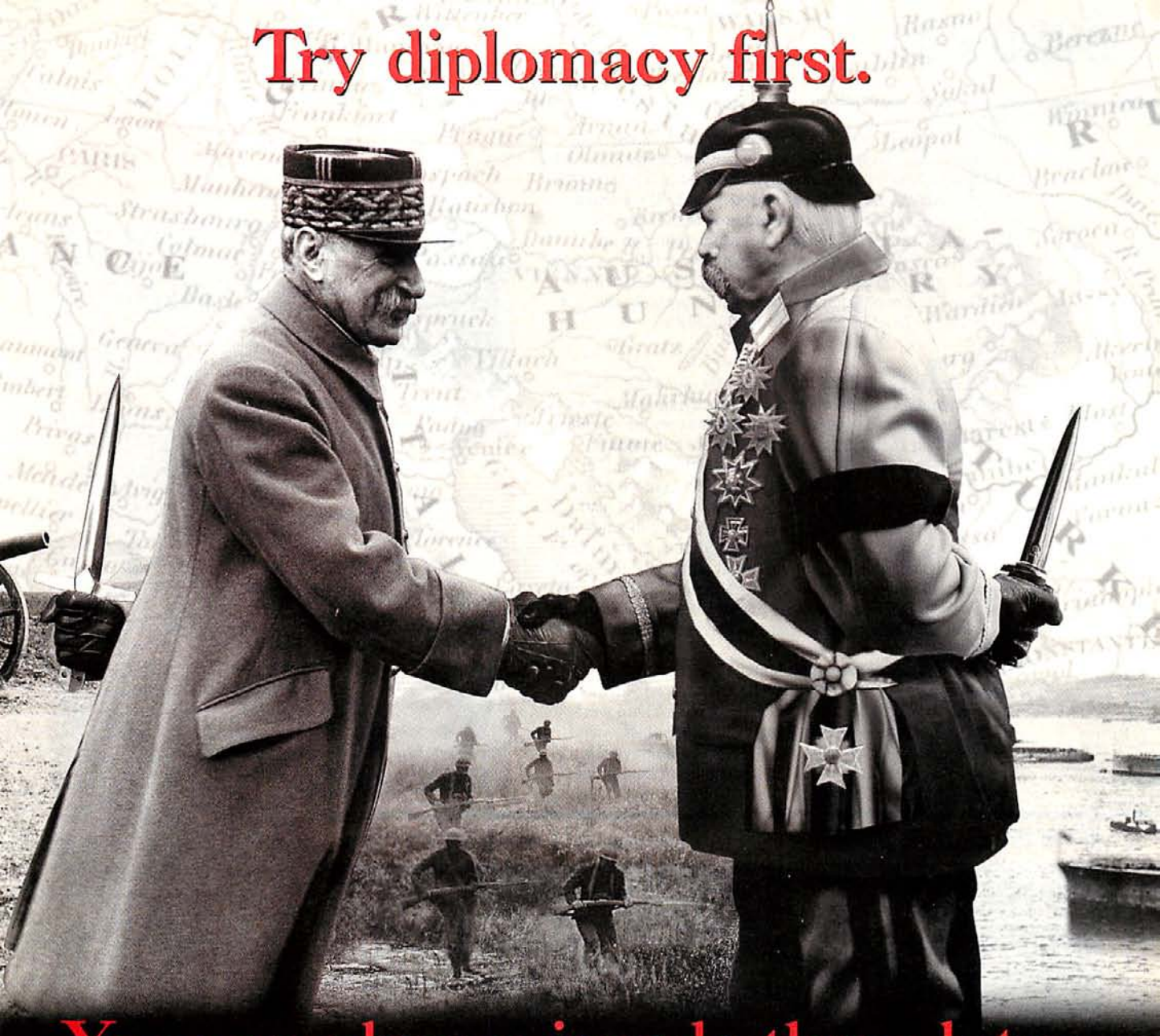
TIBERIAN SUN MULTIPLAYER LAMENESS We're enjoying the game, in general, after a few days of playing the final release, but we've had nothing but trouble trying to play a multiplayer game – it crashes constantly and drops players out without warning. This game was years in the making. Bugs are inexcusable.

IRON CHEF CANCELLED Okay, so it doesn't have anything to do with gaming. But this competitive cooking show from Japan was one of the best things on TV, and its appeal to gamers was widespread. Watching a QUAKE match isn't half as cool as watching two gourmet chefs compete, making dishes like tongue ice cream. Bring it back!

and the UGLY...

PIRACY RUNS RAMPANT Gaming software piracy seems to be getting worse and worse, with cracked games appearing on the Internet the day they ship – or before. Pirates are announcing the availability of cracked games on Usenet, and even offering reviews. Understand this: Pirating games is not funny, cool, or "rebellious." If the companies don't make money, they stop making games. Is that what you really want? Cut it out.

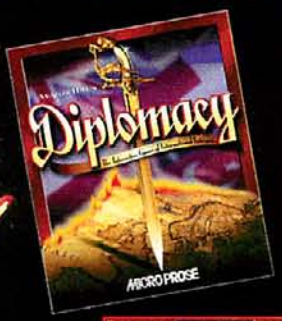
Try diplomacy first.



You can always invade them later.

AVALON HILL'S

Diplomacy



Bring out your inner dictator

May your wit be as sharp as your sword, because Avalon Hill's Diplomacy has captured the true spirit of the legendary board game. You'll start as one of the seven pre-WWI superpowers, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. These political boundaries will become your prey as you negotiate your way to the top. Beg, threaten, plead and argue your way past nations where friends become pawns and enemies become allies. You'll have to be cunning. Smooth. And deceitful. This is a game that can't be left to chance.

RATING PENDING RP

HASBRO Interactive

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MICROPROSE

www.microprose.com

TIBERIAN SUN, and that game — now on store shelves — was drawing a huge crowd of onlookers. Strategy First had CLANS and DISCIPLES on display. DISCIPLES is a HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC wannabe with deeper RPG elements and some nice spell effects. Cavedog was showing TA: KINGDOMS, and let it slip that they are working on an expansion pack for that game that will add a fifth race. New World Computing was showing the new HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC 3 expansion, minus the sci-fi scenario that got them into so much hot water with fans at E3.

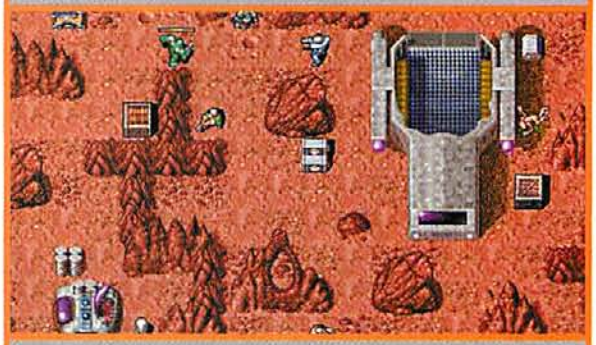
City on Fire

Gen Con is much more than computer games, of course. The convention spilled over into several buildings. It was just flat-out cool to walk around and see everyone passionately gaming their hearts out. There were hundreds of MAGIC: THE GATHERING variants on display at GenCon, including a pro wrestling card game and a beer card game. Pokemon players were in full force, and they're not just kids. Wizards was also showing a beta version of a new Magic encyclopedia CD. This includes all the cards, a deck builder, all the rules from the different editions, and even a way to play over the Internet. You can play with any deck you want to make and you will get to see the card art while you play. The only catch is that the players must enforce the rules — there is no AI.

For four days, gamers held Milwaukee captive. Hotels and restaurants were flooded with folks carrying odd-shaped dice and tackle boxes full of lead miniatures. There were also a lot of women who attended Gen Con, which was a much welcome difference from E3. Us gaming guys are always looking for an excuse to break out our best black t-shirts. *—Mark Asher*

EMAIL X-COM To Invade Your Inbox This October

The Next X-Com Game Is...Email Only!?



Wait! Don't delete that email! Instead of a "get rich quick" scheme, it might just be an invitation to play EMAIL X-COM from Hasbro Interactive. Coming this October, EMAIL X-COM will be priced at $14.95. Better yet, only one player needs a copy to play email or hotseat games. Players will be able to download a client that will allow them to join games.

The familiar, turn-based, tactical combat gameplay takes place in 25 pre-generated scenarios, and yes, you can play as the aliens – finally! There are five different settings: urban, ice, downed UFOs, X-COM base, and the alien base. The usual suspects are present, including squaddies, mutons, ethereals, chrysalids, snakemen, sectopods, and sectoids.

This is a streamlined game; the strategic overlay in the original X-COM is gone, letting you get right down to the man-on-alien action. The game's look is different, too, with everything taking place on one screen. The 24-bit color graphics are clean and crisp, but won't make you uninstall UNREAL.

I've had a stupid grin plastered on my face while playing EMAIL X-COM. There's something cool about getting an X-COM email instead of the usual dreck. Now if only I could sic my mutons on those stinking spammers! *–Mark Asher*

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

Age of Empires II	Microsoft	Q4 99	Neverwinter Nights	Interplay	Q4 00
Age of Wonders	GOD	Q4 99	NHL 2000	EA Sports	Q4 99
Allegiance	Microsoft	Q2 00	Nox	Westwood	Q1 00
Anachronox	Ion Storm/Eidos	Q1 00	Oni	Bungie	Q1 00
Antietam!	Firaxis Games	Q4 99	Orcs: Rev. of the Ancient	Berkeley Systems	Q4 99
Asheron's Call	Microsoft	Q4 99	Panzer General 3D Ass.	SSI	Q4 99
Axis & Allies Expansion	Hasbro Interactive	Q4 99	Pharoah	Impressions/Sierra Studios	Q3 99
Babylon 5 Space Combat	Sierra F/X	Q1 00	Planescape: Torment	Interplay	Q3 99
Black & White	EA	Q2 00	Quake III Arena	id Software	Q4 99
Close Combat: BoB	Atomic/SSI	Q4 99	Reach for the Stars	SSG/SSI	Q4 99
Comanche 4	Novalogic	Q4 99	Revenant	Eidos	Q4 99
Comanche/Hokum	Empire	Q2 00	Risk II	Hasbro	Q3 99
Conquest: Frontier Wars	Digital Anvil/Microsoft	Q2 00	Rock	GT Interactive	Q3 00
Creatures 4	Mindscape	Q4 99	Sanity	Monolith	Q4 99
Creatures Adventures	Mindscape	Q4 99	Shadowpact	Blue Byte	Q4 99
Dark Reign II	Activision	Q4 99	Shadow Watch	Red Storm Entertainment	Q1 00
Desert Fighters	Dynamix	Q4 99	Sid Meier's Civilization III	Firaxis/MicroProse	Q4 00
Deus Ex	Ion Storm	Q2 00	Shogun: Total War	Electronic Arts	Q1 00
Diablo II	Blizzard	Q4 99	Silent Hunter II	SSI	Q4 99
Driver	GT Interactive	Q4 99	Silver	Infogrames	Q3 99
Duke Nukem Forever	3D Realms	Q2 00	SimMars	Maxis	Q3 00
F/A-18E SuperHornet	Interplay	Q4 99	The Sims	Maxis	Q1 00
Felony Pursuit	THQ	Q2 00	Sim Theme Park	Electronic Arts	Q4 99
Final Fantasy VIII	SquareEA	Q4 99	Soldier of Fortune	Raven/Activision	Q4 99
Flight Simulator 2000	Microsoft	Q3 99	Spec Ops II: Green Ber.	Ripcord Games	Q4 99
Flight Unlimited III	EA	Q3 99	Starlancer	Digital Anvil/Microsoft	Q4 99
Force Commander	LucasArts	Q4 99	Star Trek Armada	Activision	Q4 99
Freelancer	Digital Anvil/MS	Q4 00	Star Trek: Hidden Evil	Activision	Q4 99
FreeSpace 2	Interplay	Q4 99	Star Trek Voyager: Elite	Activision	Q1 00
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	Q4 99	SWAT 3: Close Quarters	Sierra Studios	Q4 99
Grand Theft Auto 2	Rockstar Games	Q4 99	Tachyon: The Fringe	Novalogic	Q4 99
Half-Life: Opposing Force	Sierra Studios	Q4 99	Team Fortress 2	Valve/Sierra	Q4 99
Halo	Bungie	Q4 00	The Sims	Maxis	Q1 00
Harpoon 4	SSI	Q2 00	Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation	Core/Eidos	Q3 99
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2	GOD	Q2 00	Tom Clancy's Rogue Spear	Red Storm Entertainment	Q4 99
Indiana Jones/Infernal	LucasArts	Q3 99	Tribes 2	Sierra Studios	Q2 00
Interstate '82	Activision	Q4 99	Ultima Ascension	Origin/EA	Q4 99
Jane's F/A-18	Jane's/EA	Q4 99	USAF	Jane's/EA	Q3 99
Joint Strike Fighter	Novalogic	Q4 99	Vampire: The Masquerade	Nihilistic/Activision	Q4 99
Loose Cannon	Microsoft	Q2 00	Warlords: Battlecry	SSG/SSI	Q1 00
Madden 2000	EA Sports	Q4 99	Werewolf	Dreamforge/ASC Games	Q4 99
MiG Alley	Empire	Q4 99	Wheel of Time	Legend/GT	Q4 99
Motorcross Madness 2	Microsoft	Q1 00	Wild, Wild West	SouthPeak	Q4 99
NBA Inside Drive 2000	Microsoft	Q4 99	You Don't Know Jack Offline	Berkeley Systems	Q3 99
Need for Speed: Motor City	Electronic Arts	Q4 99			

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Saitek

www.saitekusa.com

STEALTH MODE

The Latest Dirt From the Gaming Underground

You want the latest? We sure do. And that's why we've contacted Mr. Sneaky again. We don't know who he is, but if you see a black helicopter hovering nearby, that's him. He uses phone taps, bloodhounds, and handwriting analysis to dig up the latest. He steams open letters, hijacks Fed Ex shipments, and fondles a Ouija board to get the scoop. He even used Kato Kaelin, but that didn't help much. The guy's spooky and altogether ooky, but he dishes the real stuff...

Computer game companies are panting over the rights to base a game on the summer's hottest movie, *The Blair Witch Project* (take that Jar Jar!). Electronic Arts, Activision, G.O.D., and others are talking with the filmmakers. There was some initial confusion over who owned the game rights, but apparently Artisan, the film company, didn't bother to secure them when they bought *Blair Witch*. Rumor is that G.O.D may have the inside track.

With JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 in stores and apparently a hit, Sirtech has already started work on JAGGED ALLIANCE 3, another game switching to 3D. Impressions, those Caesar and Pharoah fans, are thinking of doing a game built around vampires.

Rumor is that Microsoft isn't happy with Digital Anvil's CONQUEST, a space strategy game. Seems that the game just isn't fun, so expect this to be pushed further back into 2000 as it's retooled. MS and DA are considering some changes, such as allowing players to control ships, a la STAR CONTROL.

BY MR. SNEAKY

Microprose is working on X-COM GENESIS, a return to the turn-based roots of the series...Xatrix, makers of KINGPIN, is rumored to be going belly-up. Interplay is trying to work out an agreement to buy them and keep them going as a studio development team.

With the cancellation of A-10, the entire Janes' Skunkworks team at Origin is no longer "wanted" at Origin and was whacked to a man. Er, I mean they were given the opportunity to "apply" for open jobs around Electronic Arts, but that would mean relocation. Even star producer Andy Hollis is looking at opportunities elsewhere in EA. Speaking of cancellations, word is that Acclaim has cancelled the RPG THRONE OF DARKNESS, and that the developers, Click Entertainment, are now shopping around for a new publisher.

From the file labeled "B" for bizarre, rumor is that Origin is working on ULTIMA ONLINE 2, which will use the ASCENSION engine. Here's the bizarre part: EA has recently increased the parental control of their on-line products, possibly so that UO2 will be able to feature consensual sex. The developers are rumored to be kicking around ideas about how to animate characters making "the beast with two backs." If implemented: Both parties will agree to the act and then go into a private room to exercise their, um, imaginations.

Heard something? Want to drop a dime on somebody? Contact Mr. Sneaky at sneaky@zd.com – confidentiality guaranteed.

CGW PROFILE

We Talk to G.O.D.'s Boss

Mike Wilson

1. Are you the Godfather of G.O.D.?
I actually founded it with Harry Miller and about 10 other partners... so, I'm not sure if I'm the Godfather or Godmother or Godchild. Harry's older than me and bald, so I think he should be the dad.

2. Who would be better at QUAKE? Gilligan or the Skipper?
Skipper. Looks like he's spent more time in a chair than Gilligan. If you ask me, though, Lovey was the true fragmaster of that group.

3. Is the ultimate game trying to land a title on the charts?
Hard to say. The "charts" these days means more and more "dumbing down." If we can put out one of the very select few games each year that makes the charts because it's a great game, like HALF-LIFE, STARCRAFT, or RAINBOW 6, we're thrilled. We'll never move the volume that Ford does, but that's because we make a Lexus.

4. G.O.D. and Third Law are doing a KISS game. What's next? A Backstreet Boys game?
Wait and see, pal, wait and see. Third Law is making a kick ass first-person shooter based on Todd McFarlane's KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS universe. If it weren't based on PSYCHO CIRCUS, it would still be the same amazing game. Check out the comics if you don't get how this can be cool... then just wait and see the game. Third Law will show the world how to do a licensed-property game right. We've seen plenty of examples of how to do it wrong.

5. Could Max Payne whip Lara Croft?
He obviously could, but that's not really his style... he likes 'em spunky like that. She's been a bad, bad, girl and could use a good spankin', though.
– Interview by Mark Asher

Tchotchke of the Month

Ted Nugent Gonzo Meat Biltong

"DID YOU EAT THE BILTONG?!?"

This was the panicked cry heard throughout the *CGW* office on one recent unforgettable afternoon.

The "biltong" was brought to our office by EA as part of a press demo for TED NUGENT: WILD HUNTING ADVENTURE. It looked like beef jerky. It said "original beef" on the package. It said "once you biltong, you'll never jerky again." How could we *not* eat it?

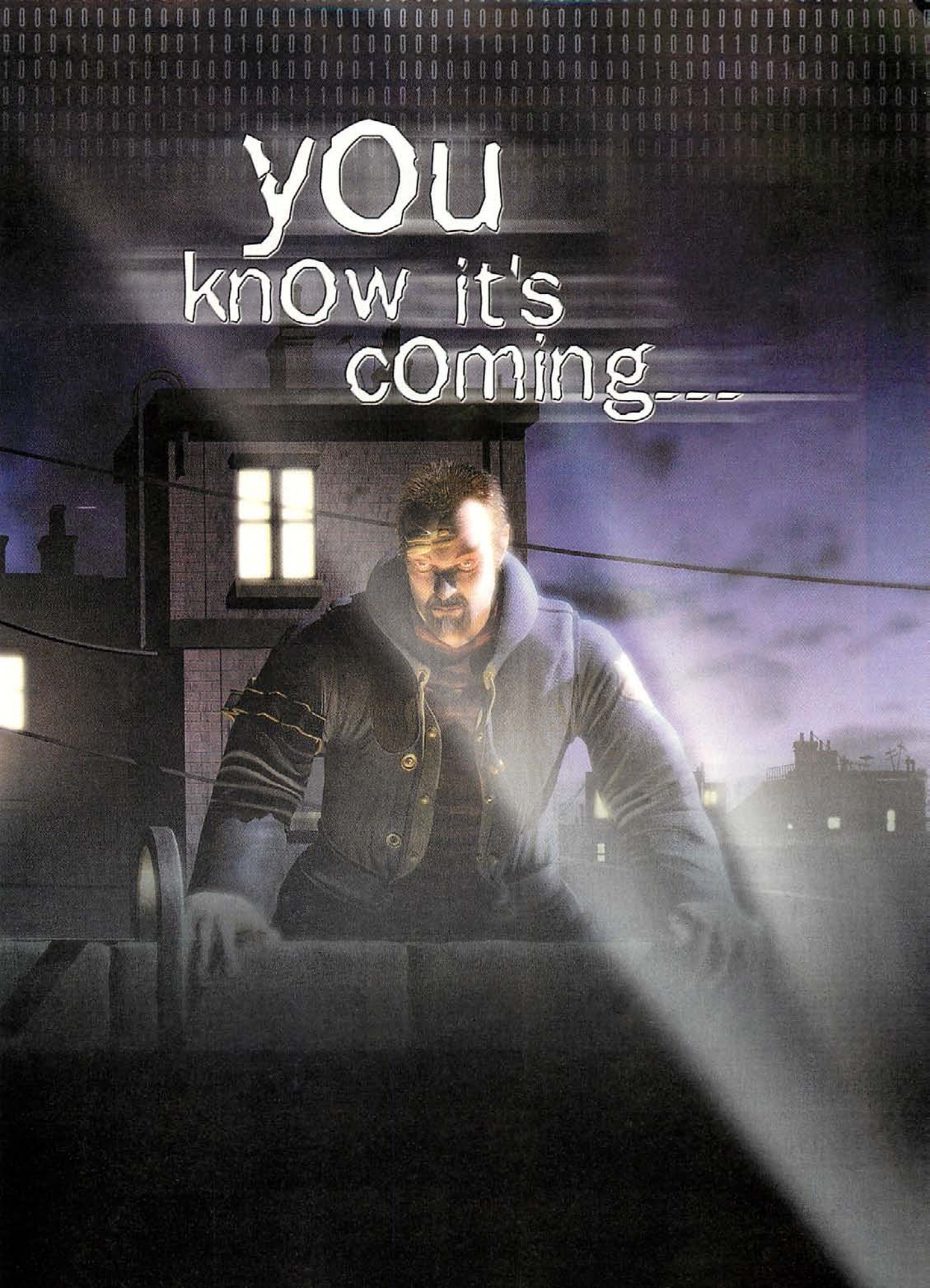
But then something terrible happened. Ever-curious Copy Editor Holly Fleming decided to look the word "biltong" up in the dictionary. And life hasn't been the same here since.

Those miserable souls who ate the biltong will have to live with this equation for the rest of their sad, tormented lives:

Bil + tong = buttocks + tongue.

Even worse, the definition also mentions the words *penis* and *testicles*. So the *best* case scenario is that we ate cow ass.

From "Cat Scratch Fever" over 20 years ago, to this. Ted Nugent is apparently determined to make us miserable *for the rest of our lives.*


you
know it's
coming...

Darkness falls over the city. Not the kind of darkness that comes with the absence of light, but rather the absence of good. And while many prepare to naively celebrate the new millennium, a small mysterious cult, known as "The Fallen", prepares to fulfill the dark promise of an evil prophecy. Yet, left standing between these "Fallen" ones is a rookie cop and a disillusioned ex-cop.

One woman...one man...one goal...survival.

Good cop or ex-cop? The choice is yours as either the youthful, hand-to-hand combat super-sleuth, Officer D'Arci, or disgruntled, street-smart weapons expert, Roper McIntyre.

Explore and interact with anything and everything, as you carry out your objectives across 27 mission-based levels, within a 200 x 200 block cityscape.

Mucky Foot

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URBAN CHAOS

Part action, part adventure - all potentially lethal, as you platform your way through five distinct sections of the city.

Brutal street fighting awaits on the Union City streets, with intense hand-to-hand martial arts combat, vehicle chases and drive by shootings, and desperate automatic gun shootouts in dark alleys.

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For a closer look go to eidos.com

You are Locke D'Averam, a once proud warrior-prince executed for failing to perform a ritual sacrifice. 10,000 years later, you've been resurrected from the dead by a prominent warlord to rescue his kidnapped daughter.

You are now part of a very special breed of warrior. You are a revenant. In order to regain full strength, you'll need to practice the problem-solving ability necessary to unlock forgotten skills.

And though there may be the whole island of Ahkuilon to explore, and more than 40 monsters to destroy, there's only one Locke D'Averam. And however you choose to live as Locke, we think you'll agree: Life is better the second time around.

- Immerse yourself in a gripping storyline involving the future of the entire world of Ur
- Enjoy explosive spell casting effects unparalleled in any other CRPG game
- Extensive NPC interaction enables you to discover who you once were
- Multiple modes of combat include stealth, hand-to-hand, bow and weapon
- Thousands of 3D animations bring the inhabitants of Ahkuilon, as well as breathtaking combat moves, to life
- Choose from 4 character classes in multi-play mode

Check out the interactive demo at www.eidos.com

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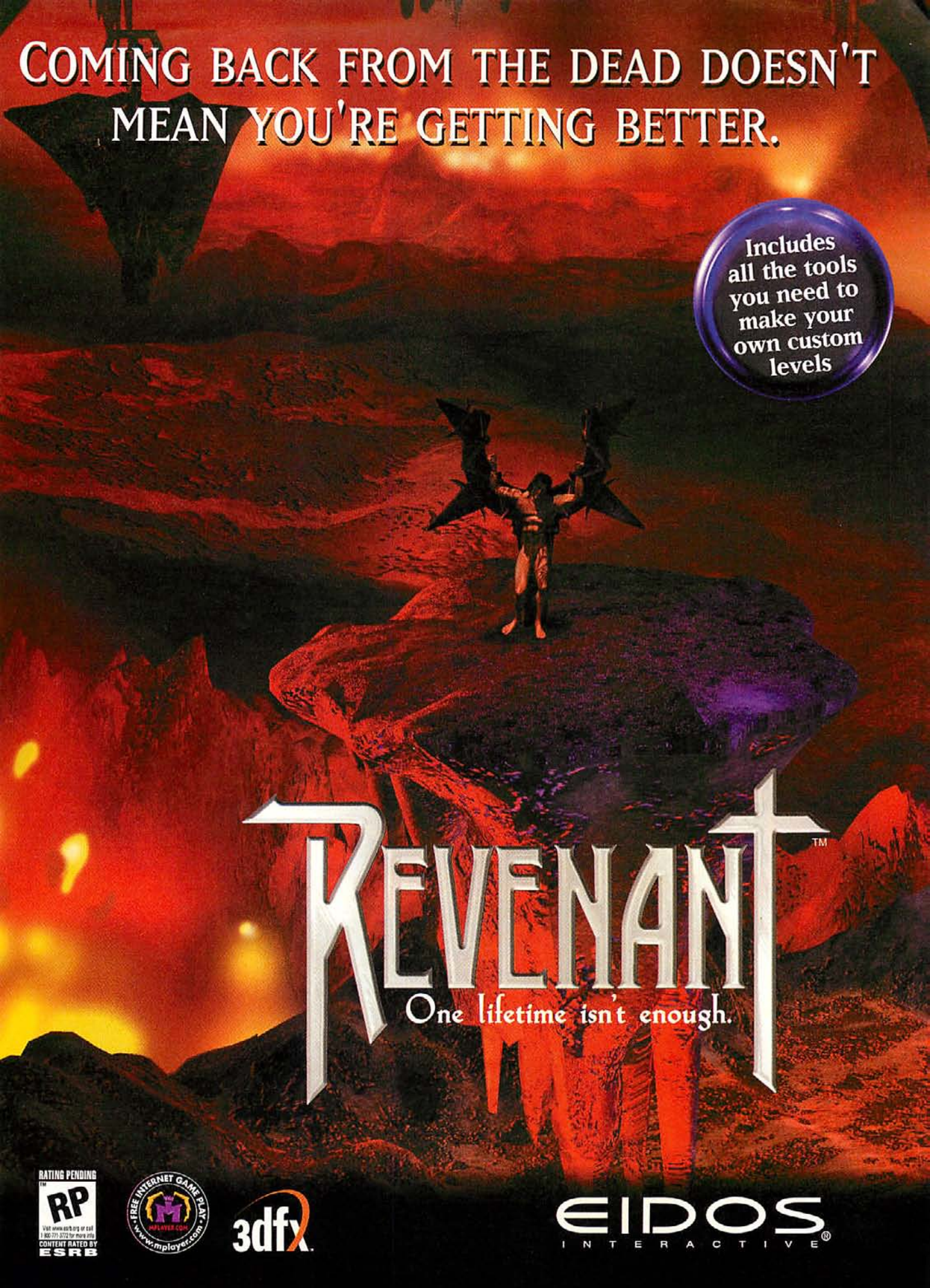
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Includes all the tools you need to make your own custom levels
REVENANT™
One lifetime isn't enough.
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SOUL REAVER

"Soul Reaver is a deep game possessed with a myriad of impressive little touches... 9/10" - VideoGames.com

"3D exploration and adventure at its finest... Game of the Month."
-Expert Gamer Magazine

"A technical achievement... Soul Reaver delivers an epic piece of vampiric literature.. 93%" - IGNPSX.com

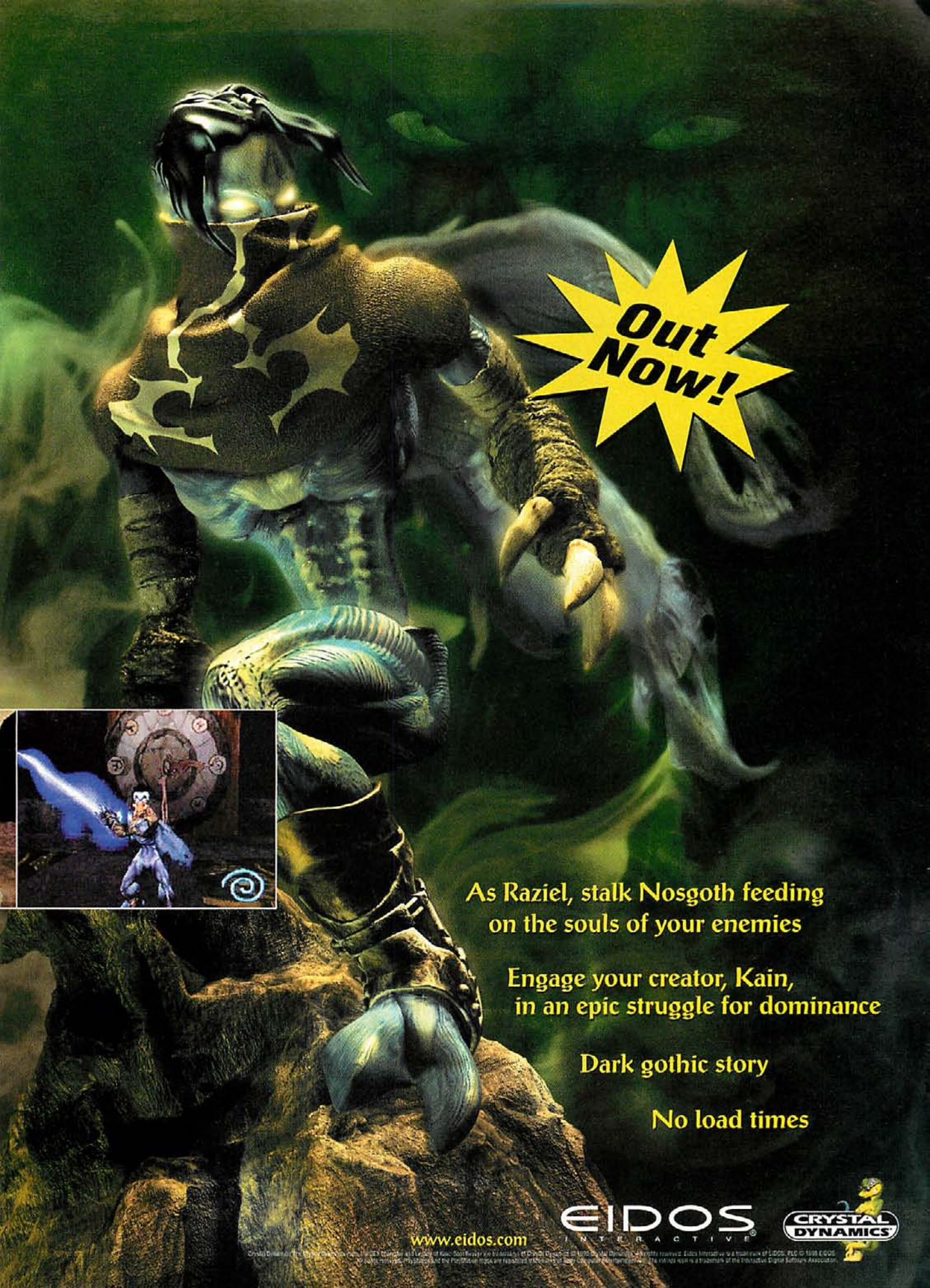
"98%" - PS Extreme Magazine

"Soul Reaver's environments are jaw dropping." - Gaming-Age.com

PlayStation

TEEN T

PC CD ROM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Engage your creator, Kain, in an epic struggle for dominance
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD ★★★★½
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PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

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Discover why thousands of gamers worldwide are silently sneaking through the darkness. Journey through night, as Garrett, a master thief, cloaked in the darkness of a sinister medieval realm where shadows are your only ally, trust is not an option, and confrontation can bring very grim results. Thief Gold takes you beyond the smash stealth hit, Thief: The Dark Project. With three treacherous new missions and fine-tuned gameplay, Thief Gold delivers breathtaking new levels of stalking, stealing and survival!

Sneak through the gambling den in the Thieves Guild.

Beware stepping into the light of the Sun Room.

A stealthy entrance is necessary to prevent alerting the guards.

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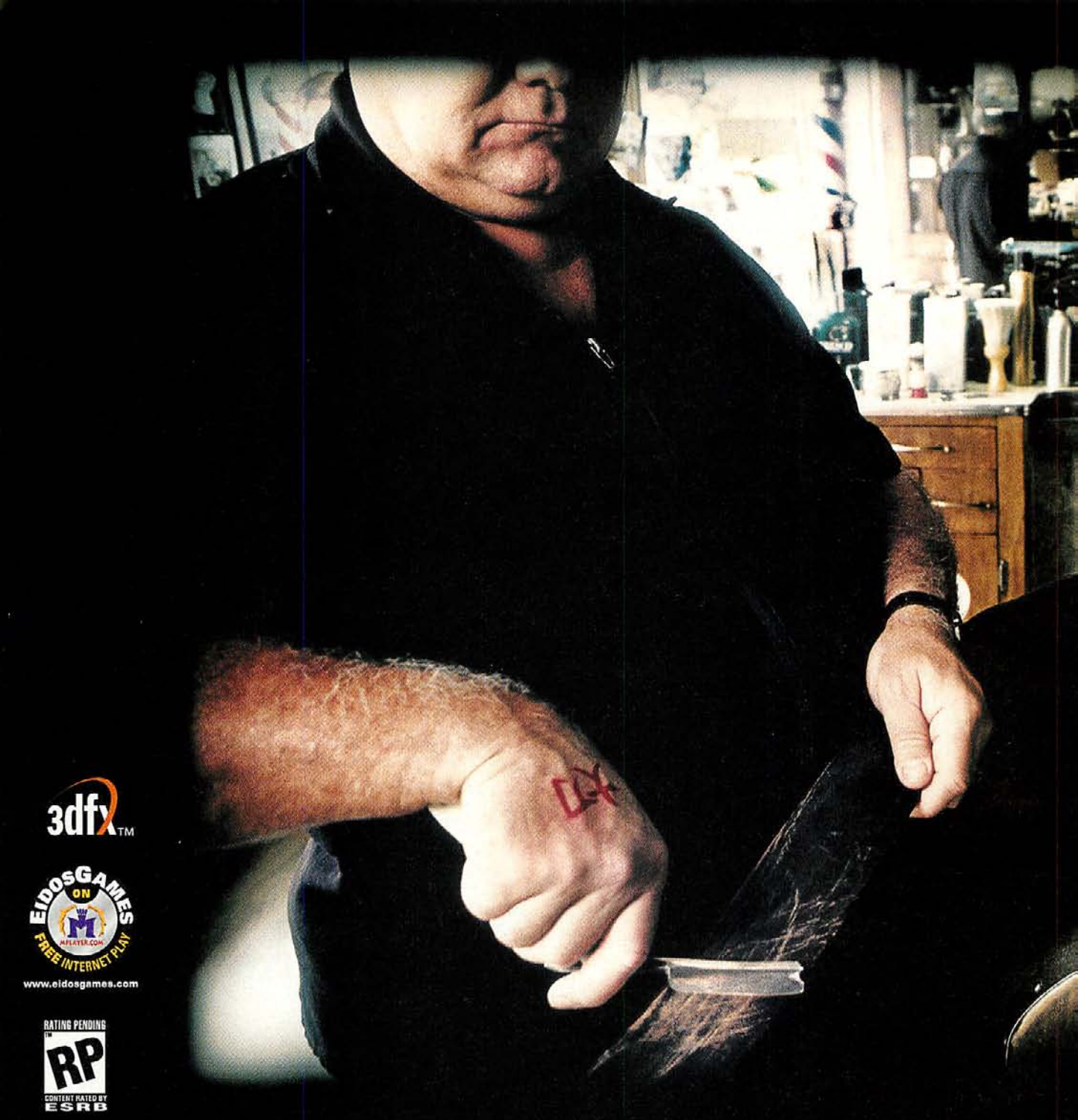

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50 enemies. 33 levels. 25 weapons. 4 time-warped worlds. 2 deadly sidekicks. Everything to feed an appetite for destruction and
So don't get too used to your weapon, your enemy or even your notion of time. Once you do, you're bound to awake in a whole,

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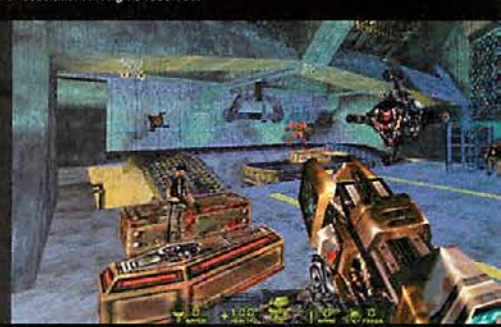

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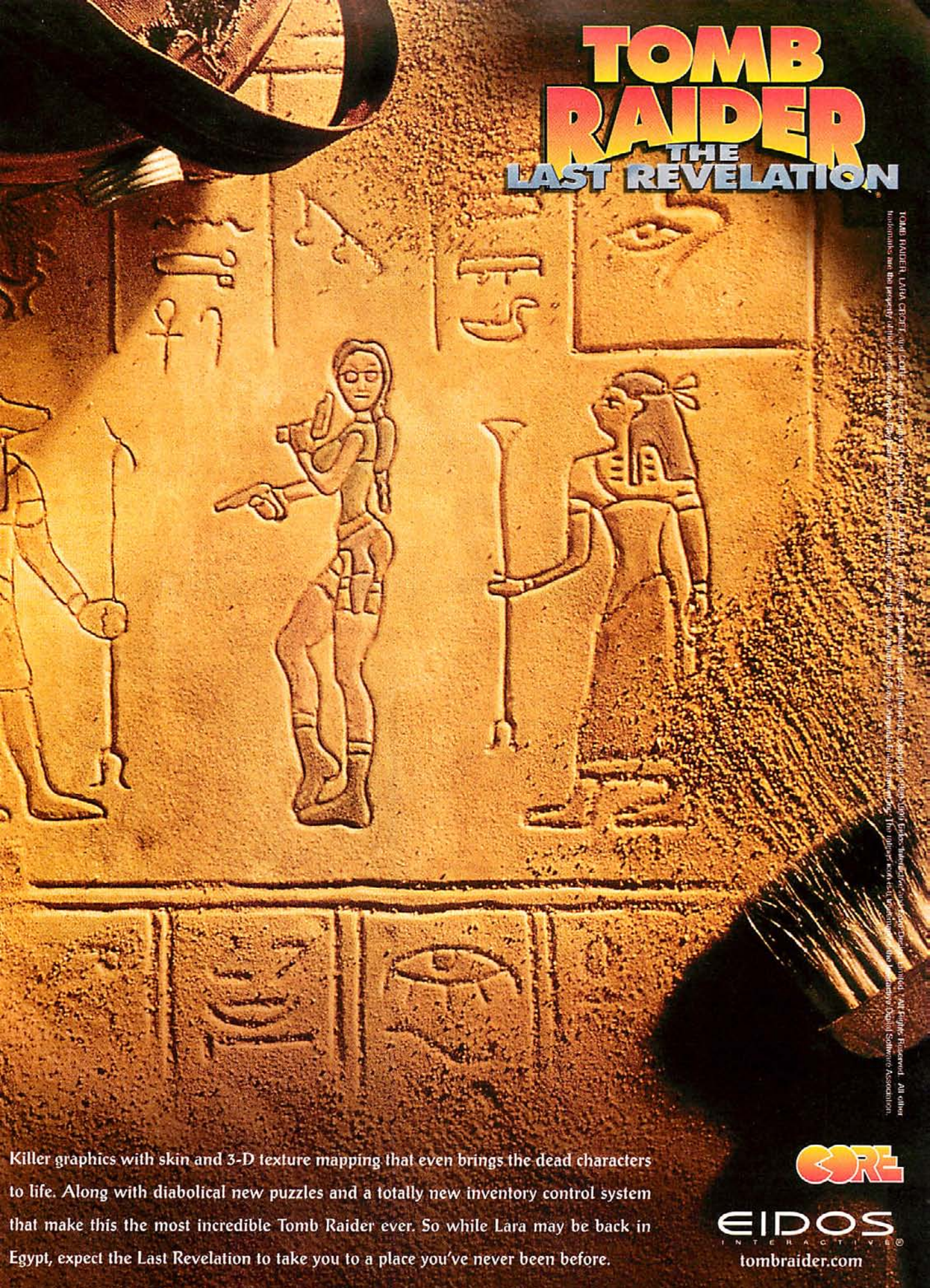
Can Lara Croft stop an ancient curse from plunging the world into madness? Get ready for Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation, the epic adventure with everything you've been asking for. Seamlessly integrated gameplay and FMV sequences for non-stop action.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THE LAST REVELATION
Killer graphics with skin and 3-D texture mapping that even brings the dead characters to life. Along with diabolical new puzzles and a totally new inventory control system that make this the most incredible Tomb Raider ever. So while Lara may be back in Egypt, expect the Last Revelation to take you to a place you've never been before.
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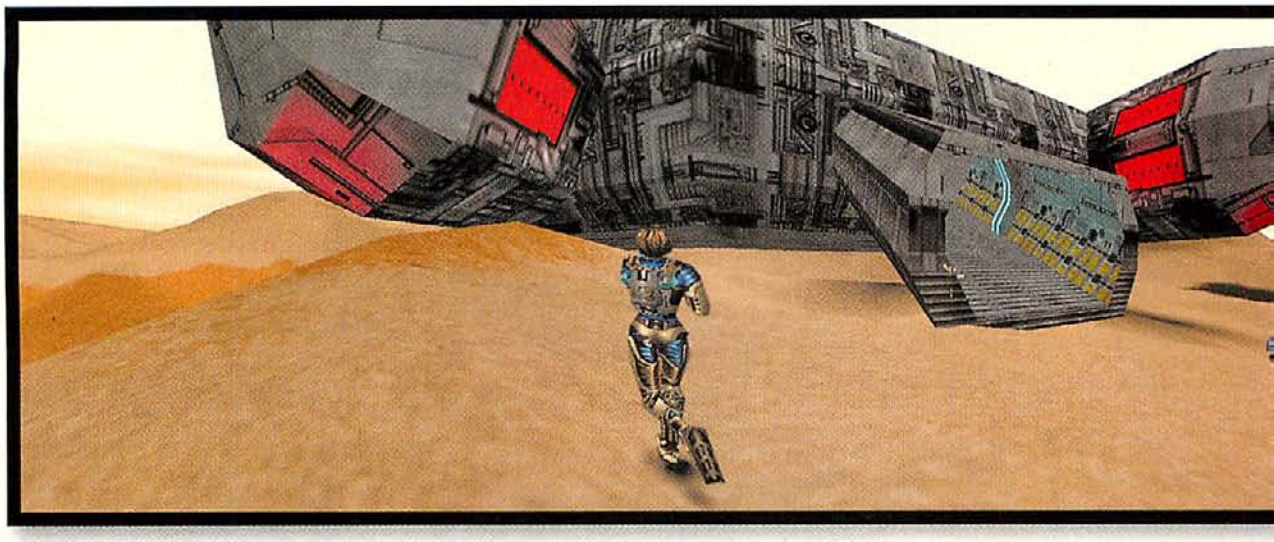


Tribes 2

The Tribes Return to a Bigger, Badder World

by Thierry Nguyen

I've heard that you can infer people's tastes from the things they create; if so, I imagine that someone who worked on TRIBES was a huge fan of Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. TRIBES has many of the elements of *Starship Troopers* that I wanted to play after seeing the film: brutal, fast-paced team action in slick powered armor; people with big guns out in the open terrain. And its multiple characters and customization options offer a huge variety of playing styles. So when I heard that TRIBES 2 was going to be even bigger and better, I had to see for myself.

TRIBES 2
GENRE: Action **RELEASE DATE:** Q2 '00
PUBLISHER: Sierra/Havas
DEVELOPER: Dynamix

The Great Outdoors

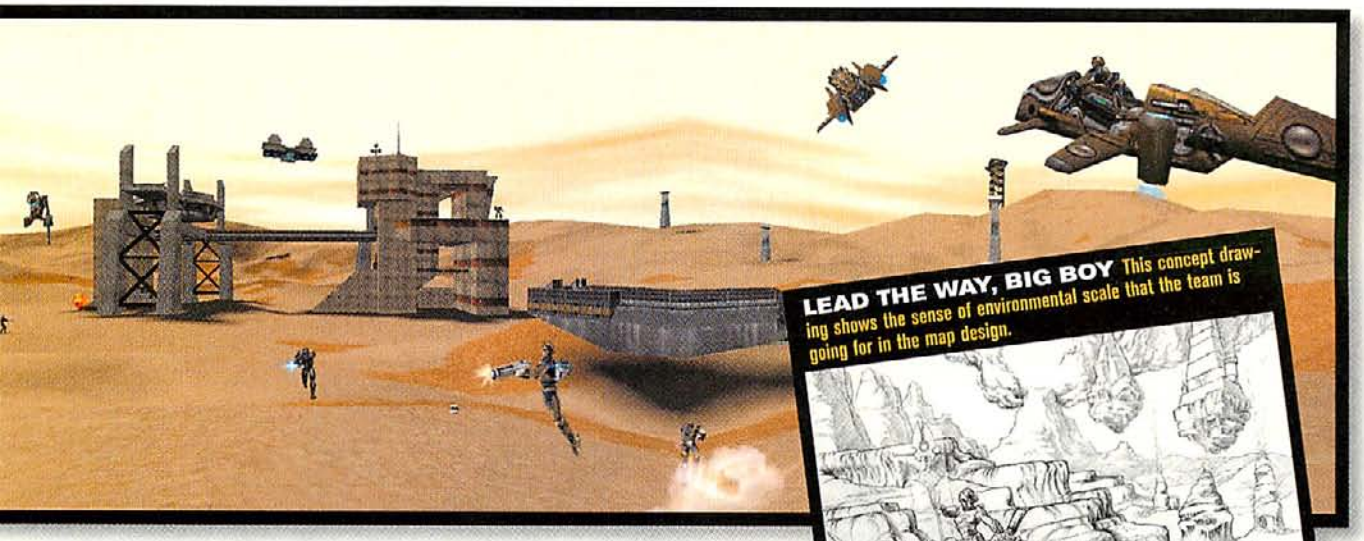
Unlike the games in this month's cover story, TRIBES 2 isn't designed to revolutionize gaming. The development team, based in Eugene, Oregon, just wants to create a great game and incorporate features that weren't possible the first time around. The goal is not to reinvent the wheel, but to make it bigger and faster.

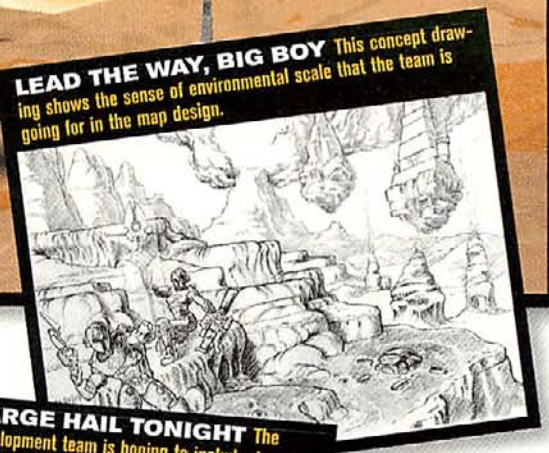
They've started with an all-new game engine. Although TRIBES' outdoor engine was good, TRIBES 2 has already eclipsed it. The ground terrain looks a lot smoother and more natural, instead of like a series of blocky polygons. Also, there are more natural shapes on the landscape; the mountains and hills have been accented with spires, arcs, and other geological formations.

Fog is a major new landscape feature, adding more to the game than just atmosphere. The development team felt that sensor-jamming packs were underutilized in the first game, so the fog now makes sensor power and visibility more important. Not only does a sensor jammer completely mask someone in the fog, it also negates the

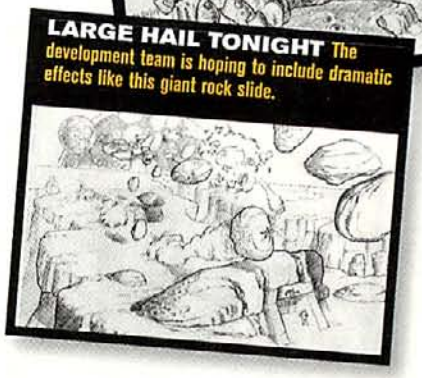
WHERE IS EVERYONE? That little Tribe fella in the lower-right corner will have a hard time finding anyone in this fog.

GET WET Water in TRIBES 2 means new places to hide and new tactics to learn.





LEAD THE WAY, BIG BOY This concept drawing shows the sense of environmental scale that the team is going for in the map design.



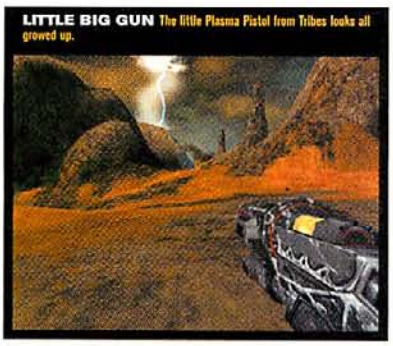
LARGE HAIL TONIGHT The development team is hoping to include dramatic effects like this giant rock slide.

power of the sniper laser, since the fog disrupts the laser beam. Don't think that using the zoom-in mode will let you see other players early; you'll only see someone when they literally jump out at you from the fog.

Along with enhancements to the game world, the characters now have a higher polygon count (around 1500, up from TRIBES' 600), and a new set of animations. If you're feeling good about the way you took someone out, you can dance like Deion Sanders to taunt your opponent. You'll also see a greater variety of death animations.

Tribal Thumping

Sure, the technology looks pretty good, but what about the game itself? There will be a new race, the Bio-Derms, but the difference between the Bio-Derms and the four human tribes are mostly cosmetic. There will be more variety between the worlds this time; the five world types at the moment are Bio-Derm, Lush, Lava, Desert, and Mud. Not only do the worlds look different, but the development team is aiming to have varying environmental effects. The lava world will have treacherous patches of lava; the lush world will be covered in fog and trees; and it'll be hard to trudge along the muddy landscape.



LITTLE BIG GUN The little Plasma Pistol from Tribes looks all growed up.

Water will also affect gameplay. While there won't be submersible vehicles, going underwater will offer certain tactical advantages. The physics will be different underwater, energy weapons aren't useful, and it adds another hiding place. The team plans to tune the water physics so that you can skip discs across it.

Many of the mission types will be derived from the previous game, combined with a variety of new ones. This time structures will have multiple entrances, reducing the stalemates that often occurred around TRIBES buildings. Another tweak to CTF will be multiple flags, adding a

TRIBES 2's Nels Bruckner also worked on RED BARON, BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, and FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL '95.

Scott Rudi, designer of TRIBES EXTREME, contributed to RED BARON II, RED BARON 3D, and THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2.

5 THINGS

Five Things The Designers Want to Include in TRIBES 2

1. Rockets that seek out and lock onto targets.
2. The ability to skip discs along the surface of water.
3. Bridges that can be destroyed and then rebuilt, and destroyed yet again.
4. Natural weather effects (rock slides, lightning strikes, etc.).
5. The Commander Interface, a la Lieutenant Gorman in Aliens.

Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
ROGUE SPEAR™

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much more strategic angle to the action.

For now, the team is concentrating on the engine and the environment. Weapons were still on the drawing board; they're brainstorming ideas for new weapons while giving the originals an overhaul. There will be more vehicles this time, with three air and four ground, up from the three air-only vehicles in the previous game. They've also tweaked the interface and the shell; there will be a built-in HTML viewer, so gamers can check TRIBES info on the Web without having to leave the game. The server listing will also have a "buddy list" tracker, so if you have a good gaming groove going with some players, you can easily find them again. They're also working on improving the station interface, so that gamers can get in, grab the necessary equipment, and pop back out without much delay. For those who've seen *Aliens*, the team plans on implementing a Command Station interface that allows a commander to view everything his teammates are doing, and give them even more direct, command-level orders.

After seeing TRIBES 2, it's clear that Dynamix knows how to improve upon their initial success. The engine already looks great, and I'm excited at the prospect of playing with the new toys in an even larger world. By next summer, I'm sure you'll be suiting up to get back into the fray. CGW

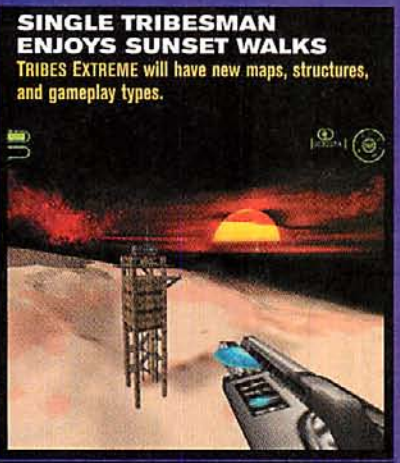
Tribes Extreme

TRIBES EXTREME is essentially TRIBES 1.5. The game, which is supposed to come out in the next few weeks, uses the existing TRIBES engine and will cost about $10 for owners of TRIBES. What good is it? It adds accessibility, enhancements, and a wide variety of mission types for TRIBES fans.

TRIBES EXTREME answers some of the criticism aimed at TRIBES by including a single-player campaign. It'll be three chapters with four missions per chapter. Add to that 12 new training missions, and you already have 24 full missions to play offline. There will be a new tribe called the Grievers, and the campaign throws you into the war between the Grievers and the four original tribes. The development team hopes that the single-player game and training missions will give newcomers a fighting chance online.

The other major improvement deals with the AI bots. You can either use them to train in the multiplayer missions, or use them as pinch-hitters for team matches. When setting up your game, you can give each bot a predefined role such as "sniper" or "turret-repair," and they'll go through their routines. Enterprising gamers can also modify the bot scripts to make custom bots.

Finally, TRIBES EXTREME will integrate a lot of mods and maps, to make a complete TRIBES package. One such mod is "Kill the Rabbit," where the Rabbit is the player with the flag and you score points by keeping hold of the flag. Or "Freeze," where instead of dying, you get frozen. Being frozen locks you into observer mode, and you only become unfrozen when your entire team is frozen, or when someone pulls the unfreezing switch. The development team put out an open call for mod developers, so expect a lot of good user-created content on top of the material provided by Dynamix.



SINGLE TRIBESMAN ENJOYS SUNSET WALKS TRIBES EXTREME will have new maps, structures, and gameplay types.

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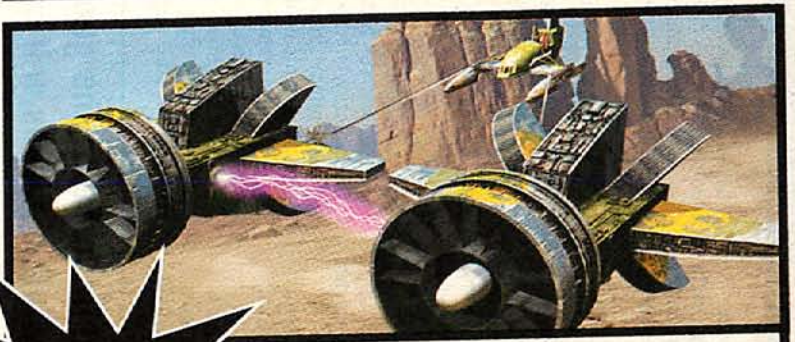

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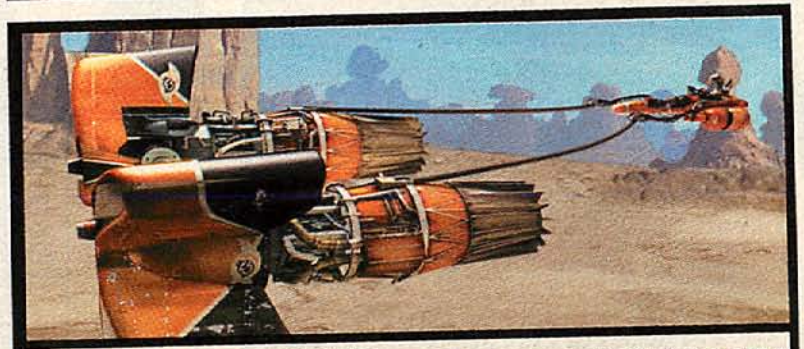

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WHERE IS EVERYONE? While these early shots show a depopulated world, Bioware is crafting NEVERWINTER NIGHTS from the start as an online, multiplayer RPG.

Neverwinter Nights

BioWare Follows up Baldur's Gate With an Even More Ambitious D&D Game

By P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki and Mark Asher

Dungeons & Dragons, the pen-and-paper role-playing system that started it all, triumphantly returned to computer gaming last year with the release of BioWare's BALDUR'S GATE. While its commercial success virtually ensured that we'll see future BALDUR'S GATE titles, BioWare and publisher Interplay Productions have for months been working on an even more ambitious D&D game, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
GENRE: Role-playing • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 '00
PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions
DEVELOPER: BioWare Corp.

Although commandeering the name used by an online-only D&D game that ran on America Online for years, this NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a completely original product that will emulate tabletop D&D's modular system. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will be released as a stand-alone single- and multiplayer game, but will also come with an editor to allow players to create their own adventures.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will allow players to host multiplayer games themselves, as opposed to relying on an online service like AOL. Gamers with the aspiration and hardware could conceivably run their servers persistently, permitting a few dozen players to perpetually adventure in a customized gaming-world module, happily devoid of the monthly charges associated with online games like EVERQUEST.

Come to My Dungeon

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will also bridge the gap between computer and tabletop RPGs by allowing one or more players to serve as a session's Dungeon Master. DMs will be able to assume control over non-player characters and creatures, moderate combat, and even the consequences of a character's death. DMs will also be the only players able to pause gameplay, which otherwise flows in real-time.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will use the upcoming 3rd Edition D&D rules, which re-establish a few 1st Edition character classes, remove xenophobic race limitations (and restore that charismatic mongrel, the half-orc, as an available character race), and merge D&D's multi-classed and dual-classed systems into one rebalanced regime.

Players control a single character, who can be conscripted from any of the races and character classes permitted by the new D&D rules. Evil alignments and chaotic behav-

"Newcomers to D&D should be lured by the game's accessible interface and attractive graphics, while veterans will be enticed by the inclusion of over 200 spells and monsters, all with traits lifted exclusively from the core D&D rules."

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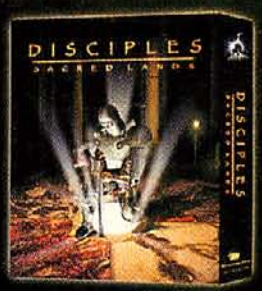

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ior are available role-playing options, but DMs will be able to establish whether or not player characters can harm each other, in order to prevent problem players from disrupting a game.

While the developers are aiming to create a computer RPG as open-ended as its tabletop counterpart, they recognize that the anonymity of online gaming invites abuse. To grant gamers some assurance that another player isn't using an artificially-enhanced character, a "character vault" will be maintained by the developers. Characters can be stored within the vault between adventures and may be removed freely to embark upon quests, but can only be restored to the vault with experience and valuables that could have reasonably been accumulated during their absence.

Ideally, the vault will grant stored characters some legitimacy, even if mischievous hackers find ways to bypass its security. BioWare hopes there'll be little incentive to do so, since gamers can opt to store characters on their own computers, and have the freedom to create modules stocked full of empowering artifacts and godly experience points.

Have it Your Way

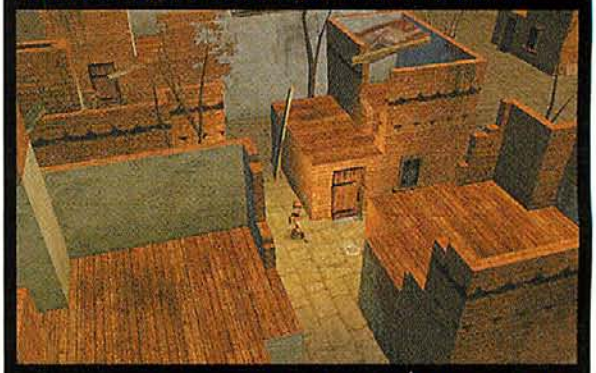
Instead of recycling the BALDUR'S GATE "Infinity" engine, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will use the "Omen" engine BioWare developed for the upcoming MDK2. The engine retains the isometric, top-down viewpoint of BALDUR'S GATE, but is fully 3D and allows players to rotate or magnify the camera's perspective. The engine is also resolution independent, permitting gamers to crank up graphical details if they have the hardware. While the hand-drawn backgrounds of BALDUR'S GATE will be missed, NEVERWINTER's tile-based system will allow the developers and creative gamers to create additional modules.

Newcomers to D&D should be lured by the game's accessible interface and attractive graphics, while veterans will be enticed by the inclusion of over 200 spells and monsters, all with traits lifted exclusively from the core D&D rules. Characters can evolve up to a demi-godish 20th level, which should appease the gamers who consider constant character advancement a role-playing game prerequisite. Characters will be able to wield two weapons simultaneously, disarm opponents, use targeted attacks, and engage in hand-to-hand combat – all in accordance with the new D&D rules.

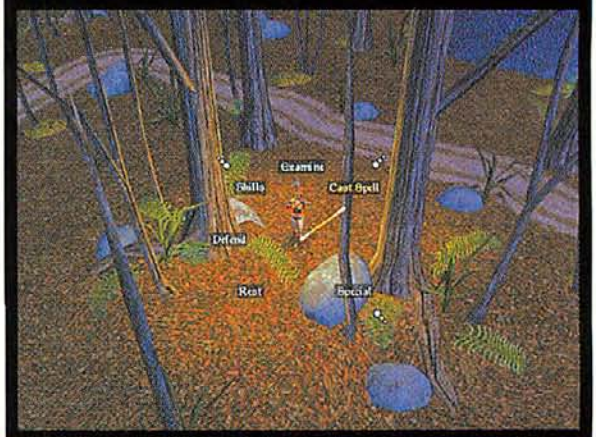
What's missing? Not much. Characters won't be able to swim, which is an experience that shouldn't be readily available to chainmail-laden adventurers in any event. The developers are bursting with so much enthusiasm over their latest project – the game's online discussion board is jammed daily with fresh commentary – that it's difficult not to anticipate a truly innovative role-playing experience from NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. CGW

WHO GOES THERE? The candles of the female warrior cast light on this forest environment in NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

GOIN' DOWNTOWN NEVERWINTER NIGHTS uses the Omen engine that BioWare developed for MDK2. The top-down viewpoint is fully 3D and allows players to rotate or magnify the camera's perspective.



LE MENU The game's radial menu system offers easy access to the main game controls without covering the screen.



Neverwinter at GenCon

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS was officially announced at the GenCon convention in Milwaukee this August (see story in Read.Me this month), and in between stuffing ourselves with bratwursts we checked the game out at Interplay's booth.

Although the game is early in its development, the basic engine is in place. What struck us about BioWare's Omen engine wasn't how pretty it was (and it was quite striking), but how smoothly it ran. Panning the camera was effortless, rotating and zooming in and out without a hiccup. The light-sourcing seemed perfect when a character launched magic missile spells or moved while carrying a torch.

One nifty new effect that the Omen engine incorporates is motion blur. Think how comic book artists draw action shots with a sword blurring as it's being swung, and you'll get an idea of what the motion blur effects look like in NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. It's a small touch, but it adds to the experience.

The interface is also striking. It uses a radial menu, which looks like a clock dial, and is invisible most of the time, appearing only when you right-click to interact with something. It's an elegant solution, leaving the screen 100% free of interface clutter 95% of the time.

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Final Fantasy VIII

Square Finally Fixes Past Problems and Brings Back the Love

by Thierry Nguyen

Love doesn't work. At least, not in computer games. Every time it's attempted, it ends up being trite, clichéd, or worse. Yet, in FINAL FANTASY VIII, SquareSoft is ready to seriously tackle the theme of love and romance, in addition to the technical problems that plagued their previous PC effort in the role-playing series.

The heart of every FINAL FANTASY game is the plot, but it's hard to talk too much about it without spoiling the game. Let's start with the protagonist: Squall. He's a student in The Garden, a premier military academy. As the game opens, Squall is attempting to pass an exam that will let him be part of an elite soldier unit known as SeeD. Once he enters SeeD, he gets involved in a massive war between the country Galbadia and the rest of the world. Looming in the background during all this is a witch known only as Idea. As in any other Square game, you can expect a healthy dose of intrigue, betrayal, and death of beloved characters.

FINAL FANTASY VIII
GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: SquareEA
DEVELOPER: SquareSoft

Deformed No More

The first immediate difference between FFVIII and FFVII is the consistent character design. Gone are the Super-Deformed characters (a Japanese art style where big heads are placed on little bodies) of FFVII—now the characters are all rendered more realistically.

Both the battle and magic systems have also been greatly overhauled. The one key change is the Draw system, which lets you extract spells and abilities from the enemies you encounter. Once you've "drawn" a spell from a target, you can either cast it immediately or store it for later. There are no magic points or spells you can permanently learn; you're always drawing spells from the enemy.

Also, there is a new twist to the summoning spells (called Guardian Forces)—experience. Each of your Guardian Forces gains XP and will earn the right to learn abilities. Some abilities strengthen the existing attack, others open up new attack methods. SquareSoft wants to create a sense of growth for your Guardians, as well as a bit of customization. Unlike FFVII, you don't get Guardians by grabbing material or whatnot; you either earn them in the course of the story, or you have to defeat the Guardian in order for it to serve you.

Another alteration to the battle system is a fighting-game influence. Some of the battles in FFVII felt like they were on autopilot, as you always used the same options over and over again. Now, you can enhance your attacks with proper timing. For example, if you tap the special attack key just

SOLE TRAIN There will be other modes of transportation this time, but some, like this train, you can't directly control.

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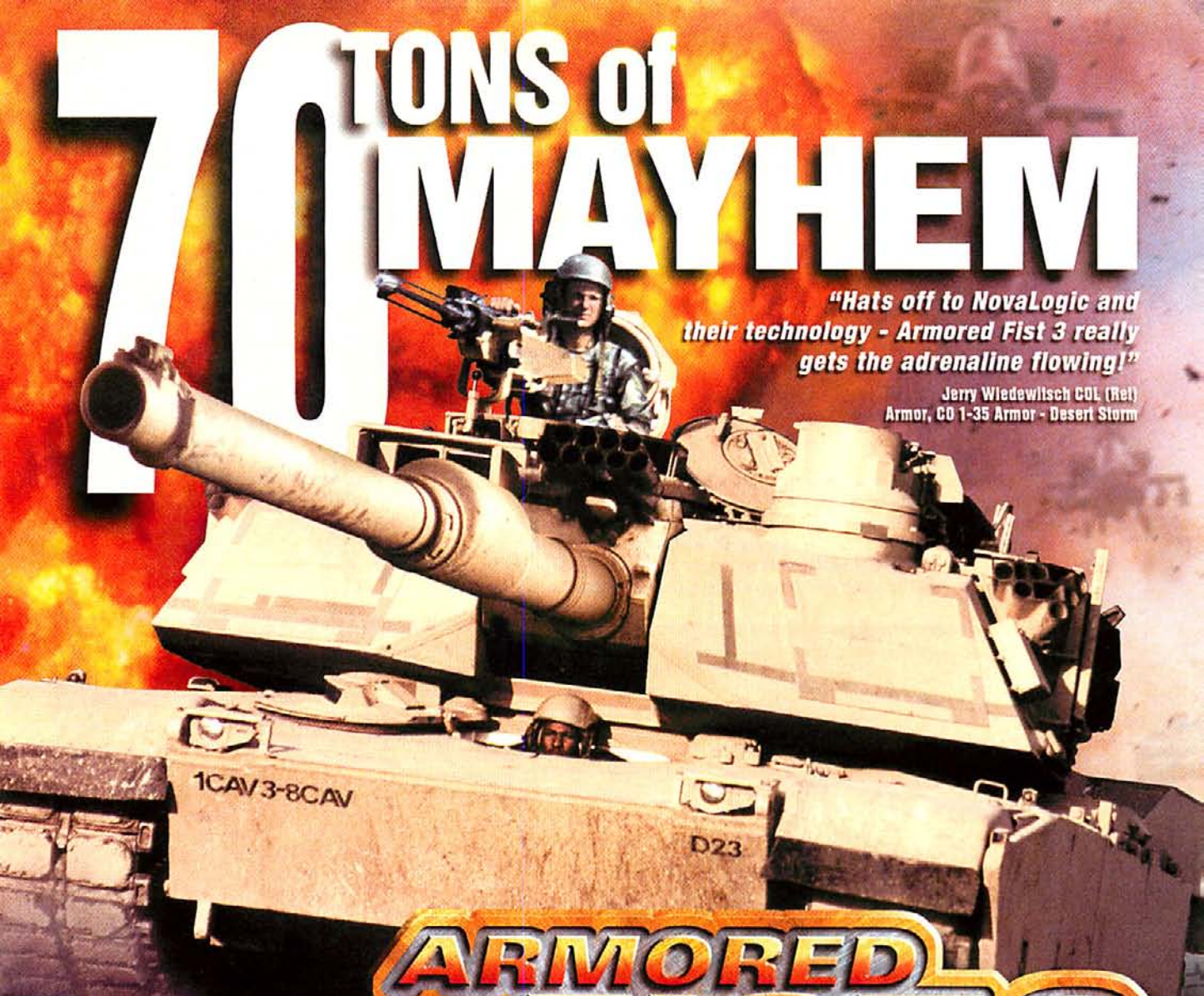

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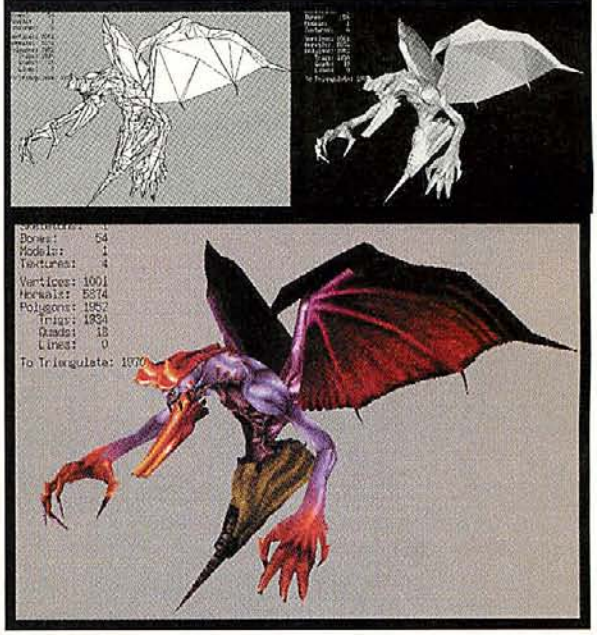
as Squall swings his Gunblade, he'll fire it in addition to swinging it. One of the characters, a martial arts expert named Zell, has several fighting-game-style combination moves that he can pull off in battle.

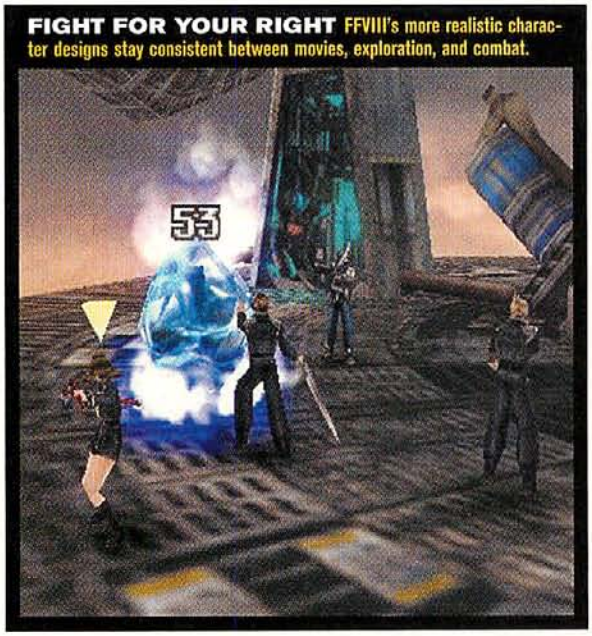
A few things remain the same from FFVII. The save-game scheme is the same (within specific dungeons and areas, there are save points, but out in the overworld, you can save anywhere), and the control interface is still geared primarily toward the gamepad crowd. For vehicles, you'll ride a Chocobo for a bit, but you'll also get to drive a rental car and an aircraft called the RagnaRok.

FROM HELL THEY CAME The FINAL FANTASY games have always had unique creatures like this one, seen as it progresses from uncolored sketch to in-game rendering.



Flash to the Past

The development team has learned their lesson from the FFVII port, and has either corrected, or worked around its technical flaws. Graphics-wise, they have more rigorous testing methods, and they're better at using Direct3D then they were last year. Also, while they can't re-render all the 2D backgrounds (this would create a huge delay), they're using special filters to make sure they don't look as fuzzy or washed out as in FFVII. Musically, they are still probably going with the software synthesizer route, but they are looking toward using the emerging Downloadable Samples (DLS) idea, since many new PCI sound cards support DLS.



FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT FFVIII's more realistic character designs stay consistent between movies, exploration, and combat.

The most visible improvements are the movies. They were formerly washed-out, stretched AVIs that lost their epic feel; now they're using a new movie format that preserves, and even enhances, the look of the original movies. Depending on your PC, the movies will play in either high- or low-resolution, but the difference between the two is hardly noticeable.

At press time, the core game was complete and playable; all it lacked were the movies and some text. The team hopes to go beta fairly soon and begin pounding out the bugs, for an anticipated release near the end of the year. Square looks like it has addressed the technical problems that plagued their previous PC release, allowing gamers who like a good story, and can appreciate console-style gameplay, to finally see what the FINAL FANTASY fuss is all about. CGW

DRAW ME A RAINBOW The new Draw system will determine which spells you can use and how often.

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Do It All in This Incredibly Ambitious Shooter

by Thierry Nguyen

Rock

REVIEWING THE TROOPS Each faction in the game sports a different look: The Corporate shock troops run heavy on the chrome, the Grunj rebels wear whatever they can get their hands on, and the stealthy DarkShyne dress so as not to be noticed.

Despite its name, SingleTrac isn't content with only one genre. Heck, they're planning to combine three genres into a single game. Normally, this is where I'd say "good luck" while rolling my eyes, but after a demonstration of their next game, ROCK, I really do wish SingleTrac luck.

EXCLUSIVE!

ROCK's most impressive ambition is the unprecedented freedom it will give gamers, allowing them to go easily from piloting a spacecraft, to manning a huge Mech-like assault robot, to running and gunning in a standard first-person shooter style. This game could set a new standard in FPS action gaming, especially in the multiplayer arena.

Pick Your Poison

ROCK takes place in a post-apocalyptic future, with evil corporations, ragtag forces, evil mutants, yadda yadda yadda, blah blah blah. Okay, so it's pretty obvious SingleTrac isn't breaking new ground in the story-telling department, but we haven't exactly reached a point where people expect The Gulag Archipelago when they install the latest shooter. Besides, it's not the story that has the potential to hook gamers, it's the gameplay. Imagine a game where you can jump into a starfighter, dogfight your way to a Martian plain, hop out, toss a grenade in a Mech to kill the pilot so you can claim the assault robot for yourself, rampage across a warzone in your new weapons platform, and finally jump out and enter a building, killing some guards before you plant explosives to level it – all of this without any load screens to stall the action.

ROCK
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q3 '00
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive Software
DEVELOPER: SingleTrac
CONTACT: www.singletrac.com

While players are encouraged to take part in all the flying, meching, shooting fun, there will be three distinct sides with an emphasis on one of the three game types. The shooters among you will want to be playing as part of the ragtag Grunj Alliance, since soldiering is their forte. Those who prefer mechanized mayhem Mechwarrior-style will want to be a member of the meticulously-classy Imperial Directorate, who love their Robotic Assault Vehicles (RAVes). Finally, if you're just really sneaky and you love Top Gun, then you're a candidate for the DarkShyne Technocracy, a mutant race who like stealth and air power.

Each organization has a 10-mission single-player campaign where you'll have command of up to eight AI squadmates. These squadmates all have defined roles (i.e., sniper, RAVe pilot, aviator, demolitions), and better yet, they all gain experience from mission to mission. Take the same team with you from mission to mission, and it will grow increasingly deadly. This ragtag band will also have a total of 19 units (RAVes and spacecraft) to choose from. In fact, the AI even divides itself up into commanders and soldiers. For example, an AI commander can pilot a RAVe and be in charge of the three footsoldiers tasked with escorting it.

PLAYING FIELD The game environments in ROCK will be enormous. Not only will this platform accommodate both foot soldiers and RAVes, there's a ton of airspace for the spacecraft to fight in. There's even a tunnel that goes into the asteroid over by the neon sign.

HIVE ALIVE Under attack from a swarm of stinger missiles, the red team scrambles to man some anti-air turrets.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Sometimes to find inner peace, You must wage outer war.

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PC CD-ROM

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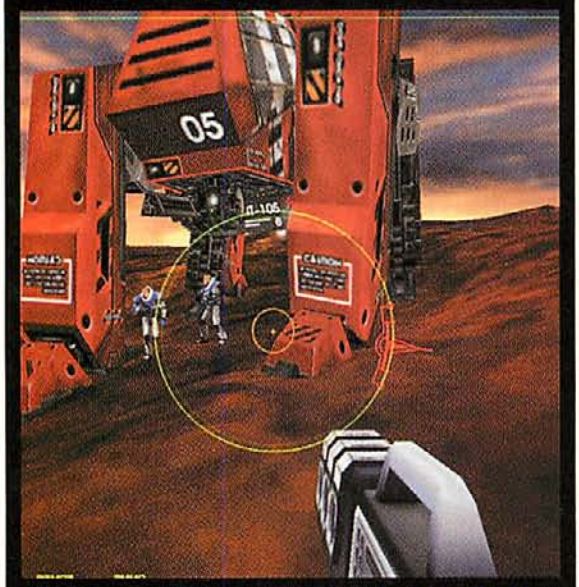
RONIN

ripcord

IT'S A SPACE COMBAT SIM... Skilled pilots will be needed to take out enemy air support whenever you launch an assault.



IT'S A MECH SIM... One man is no match for a lumbering RAVe assault vehicle, but a team of infantry can pop the hatch, take out the crew, and claim the giant robot for themselves.

AND IT'S A SHOOTER, TOO Single-player missions are focused on achieving specific goals, like taking out this power core.

The missions range from a simple base assault to a grand battle between two massive carriers. How SingleTrac is able to make an engine that renders spacecraft dogfights, mechanized slugfests, foot soldier shootouts, and epic space carriers all at once is beyond me. Without getting into acronym-laden technobabble, let's just say it all works. The environment is quite detailed and accurate; carriers have functional (and usable) launch bays, turret stations, and barracks, while every building on the landscape can be demolished under enough firepower (no more hiding in buildings). All of this will be happening on a backdrop that ranges from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter to the planet surfaces themselves.

Communal Catastrophe

Teamplay is even more important than in other games. Let's say you have a team of five. Within a single dropship, you can be the pilot, two teammates can be turret gunners, and the last two are the payload – fired out of the dropship in a special torpedo they can guide themselves, plunging into a breach point to invade the enemy. Also, different player types will have different items; with the distinct player types and the various spacecraft and RAVes, balance will be a very important thing.

All the campaign missions can be played co-operatively; other multiplayer plans include free-for-alls and a "Hunted" scenario, where one team must survive while the other tries to assassinate a specific target on the opposing team.

One balance-detail we immediately liked was demolitions. A demolition expert can lay down an explosive charge that can take down buildings. If you're the victim of the attempted sabotage, and you have the right equipment, you can defuse the bomb. Just break out the wire clippers, point your crosshair at the wire you want to cut, and pray. Cut the wrong wire the first time, and the timer speed doubles. Cut another wrong wire, and, well, consider enlisting elsewhere. If that wasn't enough pressure, the concussive force of a nearby blast can knock off your wire-clipping aim.

SingleTrac is also giving the gamers all the tools needed for creating cut scenes and missions. Enterprising designers can make entirely new maps and mission objectives, while aspiring film directors can create their own cut scenes, complete with voices.

SingleTrac is embarking on what could be called a kitchen-sink game. Normally, I'd be on the apprehensive side, but when I got to actually see the whole act of flying, bailing out, stealing a RAVe, wreaking havoc, then getting back on foot to blow up a building, I lost all apprehension. It's still a long way off, but ROCK looks like it can do it all without losing the focus on gameplay. CGW

5 THINGS

Five Nasty Tricks to Pull in ROCK

1. Crush your friends under your RAVe's foot.
2. Level an enemy building while they're still in it, and watch their bodies fly from the wreckage.
3. Wait for someone to try to defuse a bomb, and drop a small grenade nearby to disrupt his concentration.
4. Snipe the pilot of a troop transport just to see the passengers try to bail out before it crashes.
5. Use the DarkShyne Scout to laser-designate a player (instead of a building) for a heavy ordinance Banshee strike.

Target sited 600 meters out
wind – 5 knots
out of the west
2 rounds left in
the MAGAZINE
If the 1st one misses,
the 2nd one WON'T

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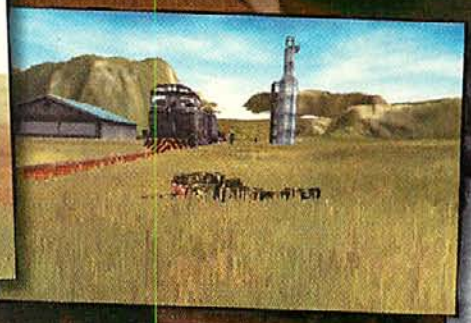

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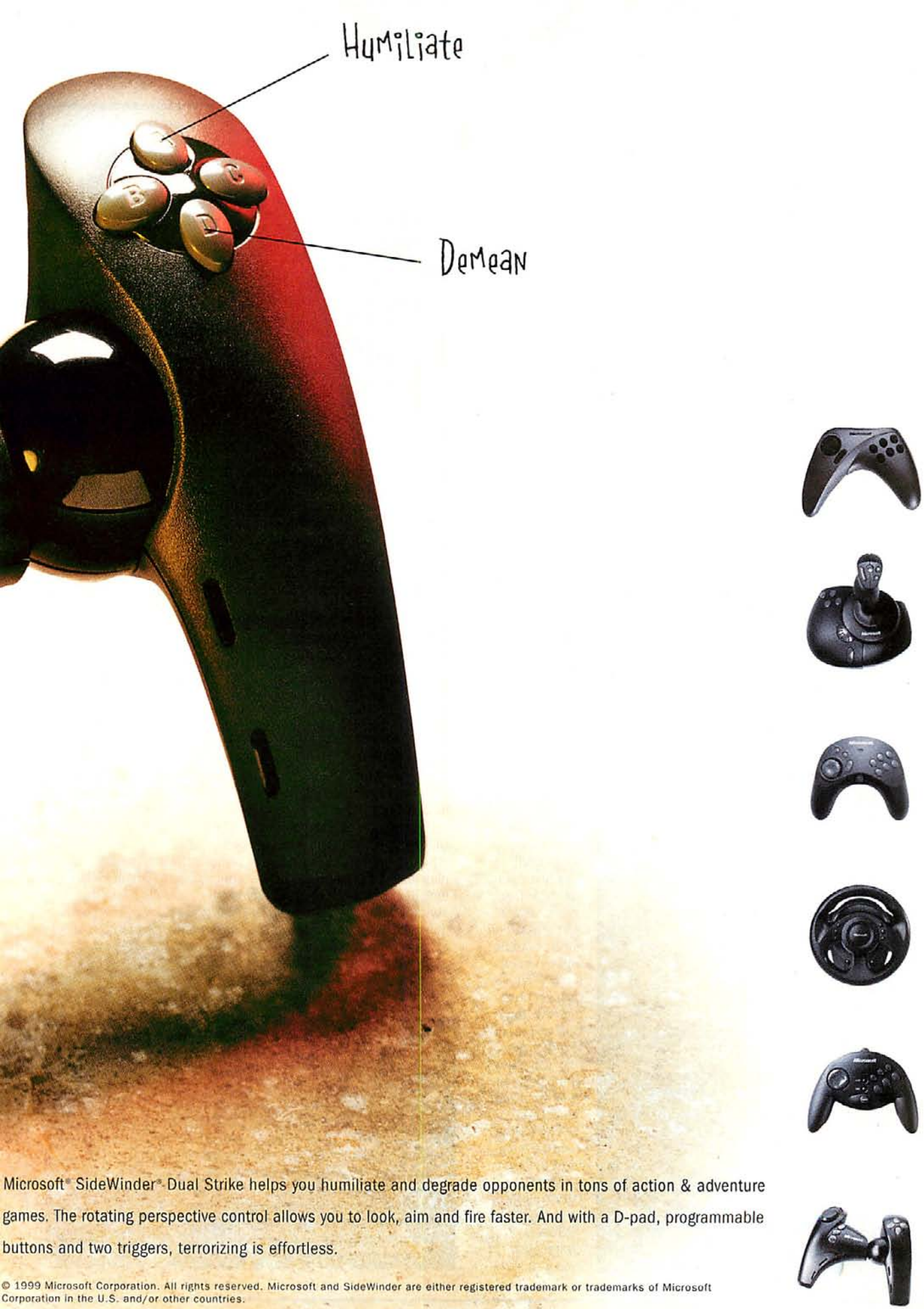

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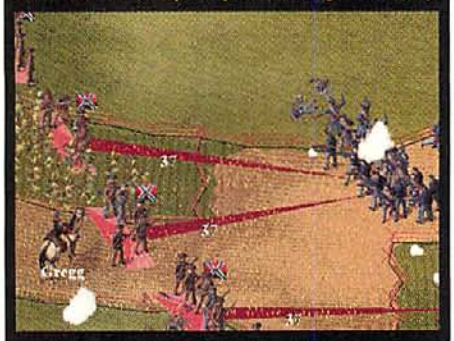
Firaxis Recreates the Bloodiest Day of the American Civil War

by Marc Dultz

Sid Meier's Antietam!

Although American forces sustained grievous casualties at Omaha Beach, Iwo Jima, and the Ardennes during WWII, it was some 80 years prior – at the Battle of Antietam – that the nation suffered its greatest losses for a single day of combat, 11,000 men. Now Firaxis Games, with the aid of newly created Breakaway Games, plans on portraying the epic battle of the Republic using a refined version of their popular SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG! game engine and a little help from the dead.

FIRE! The red streaks and numerical fire indicators show how much fire power you're directing at the enemy.



CITIZEN SOLDIER Unlike GETTYSBURG!, each unit will be dressed in historically accurate garb.

SET IN STONE The interface has been improved with a stone wall across the bottom and simplified command bars on the left.

According to Joe Balkoski, noted Civil War historian and historical consultant on ANTIETAM!, all sorts of subtle improvements have been incorporated into the game that will greatly affect the way the battle will be fought. "For one thing, the terrain in ANTIETAM! is very different from the type depicted in GETTYSBURG!" he says. "While Gettysburg was a relatively open battlefield, Antietam had very unique terrain, which we mapped meticulously – from the creeks and bridges to the cornfields and infamous sunken road." Other enhancements include new unit classifications, and detailed uniforms for every regiment that took part at the battle.

The interface has also been upgraded. The command bars have been reworked with fire effectiveness indicators, which will show players how their units are performing in battle.

SID MEIER'S ANTIETAM
GENRE: Wargame • RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Firaxis Games
DEVELOPER: Breakaway Games

ANTIETAM! will also feature a beefed-up AI as well as added realism effects. For instance, artillery will now be able to fire into tree lines or at units on the move, and can be ordered to hold fire until the enemy is within canister range.

ANTIETAM! will include the previously unpublished manuscript of Ezra Carman, commander of the 13th New Jersey Volunteer infantry, which vividly recounts every aspect of the battle as seen through the eyes of a Civil War veteran. With his help, Firaxis was able to establish the exact location of each individual unit and the circumstances leading up to the fateful Union attack along the sunken road.

Finally, players will be able to re-fight the entire battle, or play any of the 20-plus scenarios in the game, which will include several full and half-day battles as well as a wide variety of historical variants. ANTIETAM! will also ship with a random scenario generator that will select one of four types of engagement based partially on the player's track record.

So, while it's still a couple of months off, ANTIETAM! is shaping up to become a fine wargame, and a fitting testament to the bloodiest battle America has ever fought. CGW

5 THINGS

You Should Know About Antietam!

1. ANTIETAM! is being developed by Breakaway Games in association with Firaxis, the same folks who created GETTYSBURG!
2. This game won't require GETTYSBURG! to play it.
3. Joe Balkoski, author of "Beyond the Beachhead" and designer of LEE VS. GRANT, is serving as a historical consultant.
4. Unlike GETTYSBURG!, players will be able to re-fight the entire Battle of Antietam from start to finish.
5. ANTIETAM! will only be sold on Firaxis' Web site: www.firaxis.com.

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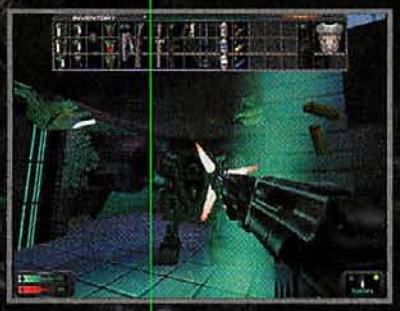


Frightening 3-D realism gives you an all-too-real first-person perspective. In fact, the environment is so true-to-life, your enemies are even sensitive to light and sound.

Intriguing character generation lets you choose from three distinct personalities, each with their own special weapons and abilities.

You wake aboard the Von Braun with a mind-altering implant in your brain and no memory of recent events. As you wander the dark, eerie decks of the derelict spacecraft, you discover an alien material is slowly taking over the ship — feeding upon the flesh of your former comrades, leaving zombies and corpses in its wake. Behind the engulfing terror, you sense the presence of the evil cyber-being, SHODAN. She is seductive and sinister. And she pulls all the strings in the most chilling role playing game ever. Enter Shodan's terrifying world to discover her ultimate plan — or die trying. For all the gory details, visit www.lglass.com

LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS

Jane's F/A-18

Jane's Gettin' Serious... About Being Easy

By Gordon Berg

Third wire. Call the ball. Bolter, bolter, bolter! Utter these phrases to flight sim enthusiasts and you just might see them drool. After all, these words mean only one thing... Carrier Ops. The same team that produced last year's highly acclaimed JANE'S F-15 has now developed an in-depth naval aviation simulation. This holiday season, you'll get a chance to fly the plane that will be the cornerstone of the Navy's defense policy well into the 21st century: the F/A-18E Superhornet.

Producer Greg Kreafle's team has had over a year to incorporate all of F-15's strengths while trying to eliminate its weaknesses. "Think of it as F-15 Plus," Kreafle says. "In F-15, we have pilots flying realistically in a non-accelerated time mode for a half hour to an hour, just to get to their first way point. Well, that wasn't any fun. With F/A-18, flying them off the carrier means they'll be closer to the action." He adds, "The key word is accessibility. We've applied that to every part of the game."

JANE'S F/A-18
GENRE: Simulation • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts, Hunt Valley

Indeed, the real F/A-18E is a far more user-friendly aircraft than the F-15, so accurate plane modeling alone makes the sim accessible to a wider audience. For example, the avionics are greatly simplified, making it easier to operate the weapon systems. As Kreafle says, "It has a simpler interface because the state of the art has advanced over the past 25 years since the F-15 was designed, so we get all the benefit of that by trying to recreate it as realistically as possible."

Many simulations, F-15 included, offer a casual flight model as well as an authentic one. With the Superhornet, there's no need: The real aircraft is that much easier to fly. The plane has greater "dogfighting" capabilities than the F-15, and it also has some built-in constraints to ensure the pilot won't lose control. "You can't over-G the airplane," explains Kreafle. "You'd be lucky to pull 7-1/2 Gs. Beyond that, the system relinquishes control authority. You can't depart flight with it, either." That's true. In the beta I tested, I was unable to put the plane into a spin, managing only a brief stall that quickly corrected itself.

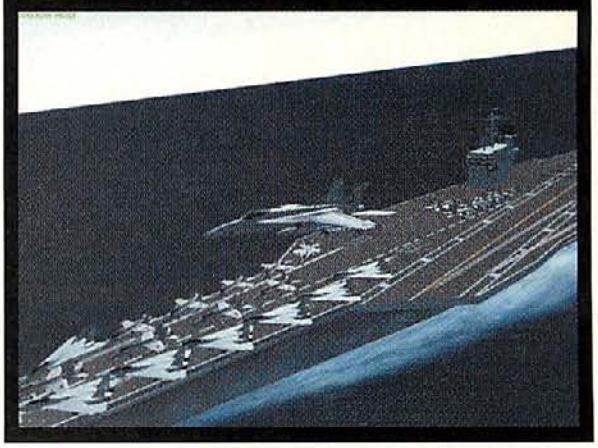
As far as the campaign goes, there is much greater emphasis on player immersion. The missions you fly are interspersed with video clips about 15 seconds in length, which indicate your progress via positive or negative feedback. The end result is a story that unfolds to truly involve the player in the action.

Yes, the number of F-18 simulations in the marketplace are starting to rival those of the F-22, but we're talking classic Jane's stuff here. I, for one, can't wait. CGW

5 THINGS You Should Know About Jane's F/A-18

1. The hefty Jane's manual is back, and it will be easier to read. Look for over 400 pages!
2. Over 2.5 million square kilometers will be modeled, based on U.S.G.S. data.
3. Fly one giant campaign, or jump into the action at three separate phases.
4. The Superhornet is no speed demon. The F-15 is actually faster, but the F/A-18 is more maneuverable.
5. The cancellation of JANE'S A-10 has no bearing whatsoever on JANE'S F/A-18.

Eject, Eject! A MiG driver is left flying by the seat of his pants as his ride corkscrews to the sea.



BOLTER You'll soon get your chance to land the Navy's best jet on a target the size of a football field.

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Volition Puts Even More Gloss on Their Polished Space Sim Franchise by Thierry Nguyen

FreeSpace 2

The first FREESPACE was the best space sim to come around in a long time. It was extremely well polished and had great production designs, but ultimately it felt derivative. Once I got a version of FREESPACE 2 and saw what the designers were up to, I was delighted to find much that may set the sequel apart from the pack.

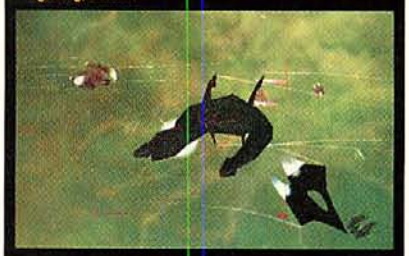
FREESPACE 2
GENRE: Space Sim
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '99
PUBLISHER: Interplay
DEVELOPER: Volition

The plot this time is the return of the Shivans during a period of, oh, let's say "civil unrest." While the Terrans and the Vasudans allied in the previous game, some rogue Terrans decide to backtrack and go back to war with the Vasudans. In the first few missions, the gamer is expected to wonder about the morals behind his missions. Volition is going for a deeper story this time around, rather than the straightforward "big bad aliens invade, mayhem ensues" plot.

AND THEN HE SMOTE THEM The capital ships have much more impressive weaponry – such as a beam that outright annihilates enemy cruisers.

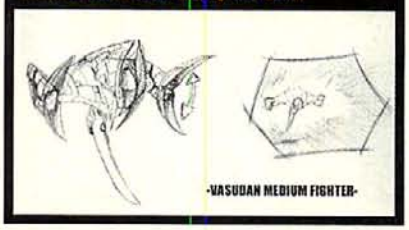
At first, the graphics look the same. Things soon change when you run into one of the games' features, the nebulae.

Like nebulae in just about every other game, they'll mess around with your electrical system and make targeting enemy spacecraft difficult. Fortunately, in order to counter these nebulae effects, you can either call upon a special AWAC-style ship, or use special hardware to keep a radar lock on enemies.



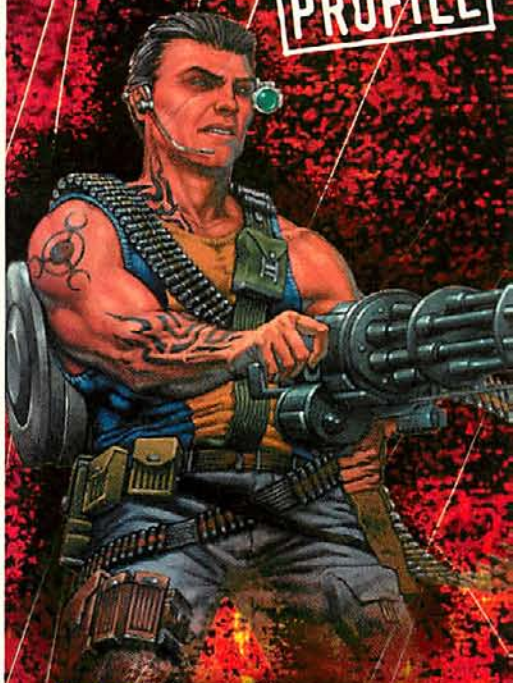
GOING INTO THE GREEN The Shivans will have even more menacing ships than this. The nebulae doesn't really help when dogfighting, either.

Speaking of the ships, the other big improvement is the capital ship design. The big ships have been beefed up significantly, so that it's nearly impossible for a little fighter to take one out. Also, these capital ships have much more powerful weaponry – typically a few anti-fighter turrets backed up by one huge energy cannon. The development team wanted to make the prospect of destroying a capital ship a challenging thing, rather than the "line up torpedo and fire" from the previous game.

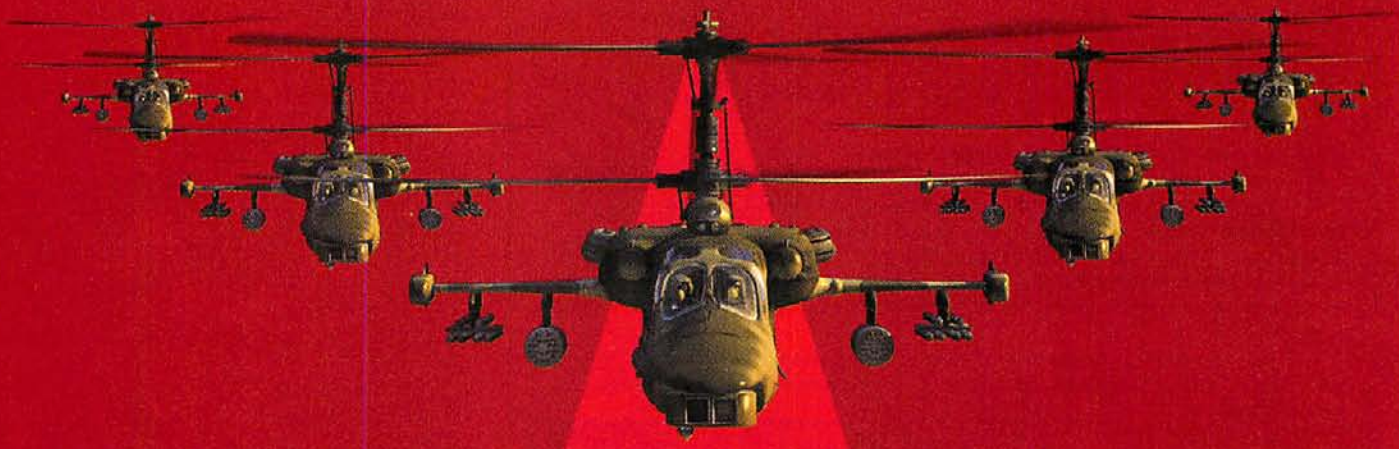


INTERGALACTIC TUNE-UP The Volition team is working on both overhauling ships from FREESPACE and adding new ones.

FREESPACE 2 looks like it will have the story, the spatial effects, and the ship design to set it further apart from the original game and the rest of the space sim pack. If Volition puts a spit shine on FREESPACE 2, gamers may just see the creation of another viable space sim franchise, giving LucasArts and Origin some competition. CGW

ABOMINATION
PROFILE

Name: Karl Wagner
Call Sign: Creepy
Skill: Camouflage
Personal Details: Recruited by Project Nemesis in 1998, Karl is the son of a German Diplomat living in London. Karl joined the army and then moved into the SAS in 1993. He was transferred to a special attachment unit and seconded to a SEAL unit out of Kinmore Field in 1997. Karl's entry into Project Nemesis was a result of his never ending quest for adventure; he volunteered for assignment to the project.
Download the demo:
eidos.com

FROM RUSSIA WITH STEALTH



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Our Prayers Are Answered. Autoduel Has Risen | by George Jones

Loose Cannon

LOOSE CANNON
GENRE: Genre: Action/Adventure
RELEASE DATE: Q3 '99
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Digital Anvil

A robed editor sits in his office in the lotus position, hands outstretched before a bamboo altar, upon which is laid a sacred 5.25" floppy disk. The editor softly chants the name on this floppy, with the hope that in the same way dolphins hear Aqua Man's desperate pleas for companionship, some game designer will sense the editor's need and redesign a classic role-playing driving game.

Autoduel...Autoduel...Autoduel...Auto——

It's finally happened. Someone has picked up the vibe. That person – Tony Zurovec of CRUSADER: NO REMORSE fame – freely admits that his upcoming title, LOOSE CANNON, is a spiritual successor of sorts to AUTODUEL, the computer version of the CAR WARS pen-and-paper RPG released by Origin in the 80s.

With LOOSE CANNON, Zurovec is shooting for that elusive balance between story, driving, and on-foot missions. In this way, the game appears to be a cross between AUTODUEL, METAL GEAR SOLID, and THIEF than to previous games in this genre, such as INTERSTATE 82 or REDLINE.

JUST SAY NO No time for a three-martini lunch; you've got to be on call for the cops. They could call on your services at any time.

HEY, DOLLFACE Interacting with other characters will be an important part of gameplay, not just filler between missions.

ON THE ROAD You'll be traveling cross-country in LOOSE CANNON, from big west coast cities to midwest farmlands. Plenty of time to recite beat poetry.

You begin LOOSE CANNON as a bounty hunter in a west coast city, and over the course of the story you make your way through the midwest to the east coast. Law and order has broken down across the nation due to a serious economic downturn. Lacking the funds to buy essential items like guns, the police call on freelancers to bring violent ends to criminal acts.

To earn money to improve your car, you cruise the city streets. Periodically, the boys in blue will request your help over the radio. Accept their offer, and you'll experience the glory of LOOSE CANNON's combat engine, which offers realistic driving physics and emphasizes speed and cool weapons.

You'll also encounter combat when you're asked to courier packages between the major cities. Since the countryside has no protection whatsoever, piracy reigns on these roads. At your disposal is an arsenal that would make any L.A. commuter drool: guns, rocket-launchers, and rear-mounted flame-throwers.

You eventually tap into a more detailed story with missions that will challenge you in different ways. In a mission that requires you to infiltrate an enemy base, for instance, you will have to sneak around an encampment, blowing away the tires on the enemy cars. This way, when you make your way into the base, steal the technology you need, and make your escape, the bad guys won't be able to follow.

Zurovec firmly believes that paying closer attention to detail and developing a more interesting story, when combined with more open gameplay, will make LOOSE CANNON succeed where similar titles have failed. CGW

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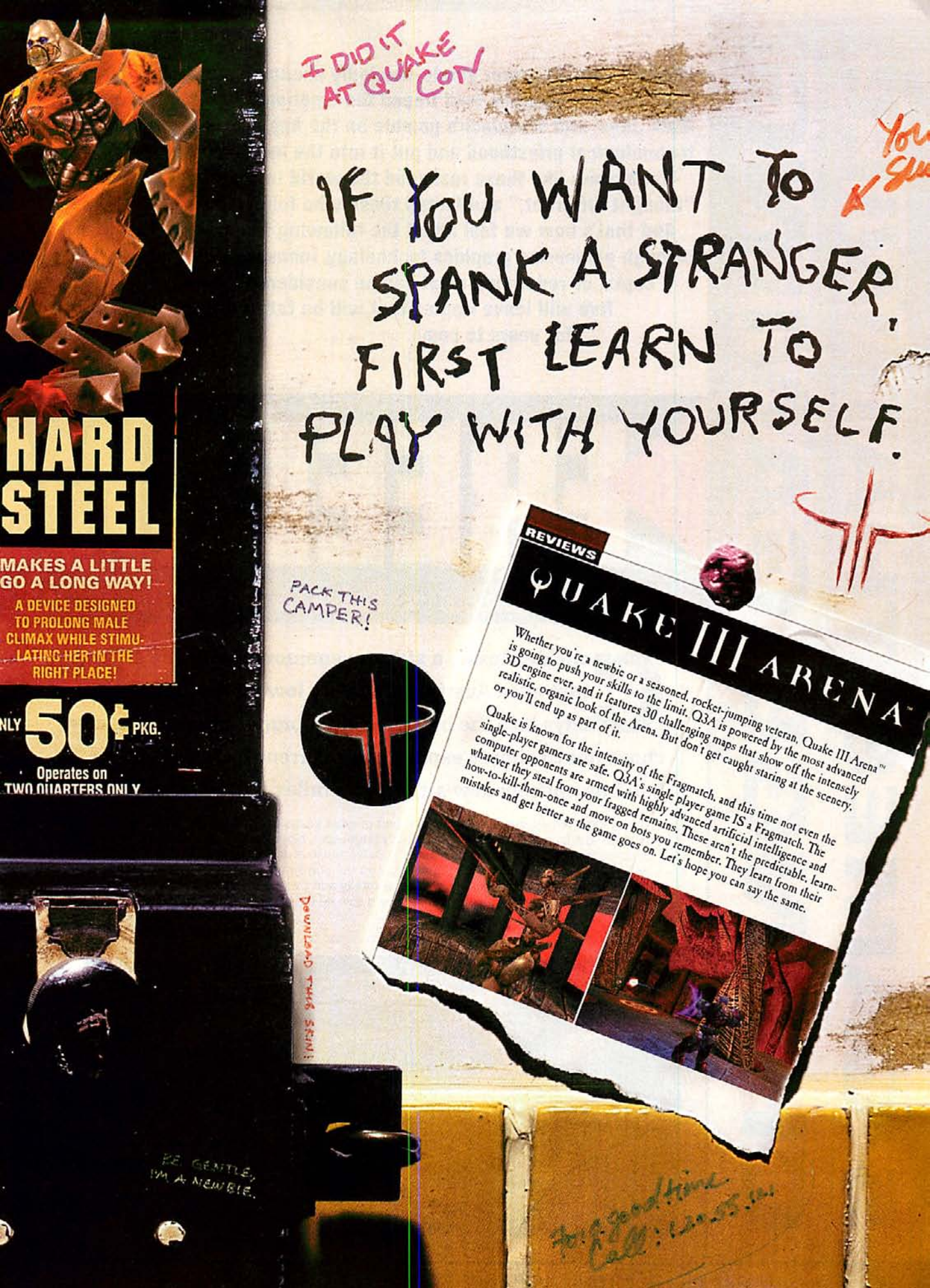
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REVIEWS
QUAKE III ARENA
Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensely realistic, organic look of the Arena. But don't get caught staring at the scenery, or you'll end up as part of it.
Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player gamers are safe. Q3A's single player game IS a Fragmatch. The computer opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and whatever they steal from your fragged remains. These aren't the predictable, learn-how-to-kill-them-once and move on bots you remember. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let's hope you can say the same.
BE GENTLE, I'M A NEWBIE.

5 GAMES THAT WILL CHANGE GAMING

Babe Ruth's power single-handedly changed baseball. Janis Joplin's banshee wail tipped the emotional balance of rock. And Jobs' and Wozniack's gamble on the Apple took computing from a technological priesthood and put it into the hands of the people.

Trailblazers like these reshaped the world in their image. They "thought different," and forced those who followed to do the same.

And that's how we feel about the following five games. Whether through pioneering graphics technology, innovative new design concepts, or redefining what can be considered a game at all, these five will leave ripples that will be felt throughout the industry for years to come.

1 FREELANC

Chris Roberts Sets His Sights on the Big One by George

Consider Texas, a state so enamored with the enormous that even Austin, a city very low on the Texas-ometer, buys into the big. Wanting a bigger airport, this city chose not to simply expand their current facilities, but to build an entirely new airport five miles down the road.

This bigger-is-better mentality must be part of what keeps Chris Roberts in Austin. After all, it's a good fit—his favorite games are enormously large, epic, big-splash titles with high production values, envelope-pushing technologies, and a massive sense of scale. Games like FREELANCER.

In FREELANCER, Roberts is setting his sites on the holy grail of computer games: A game with unparalleled visual and cinematic style that is totally and completely open-ended, but also features a compelling central story. And, oh yeah, it should also be fun and accessible to the masses.

CONCENTRATED ATTACK FREELANCER shucks the joystick in favor of a mouse-drive mode of play that emphasizes the fun aspects of space combat.

A FLYING START

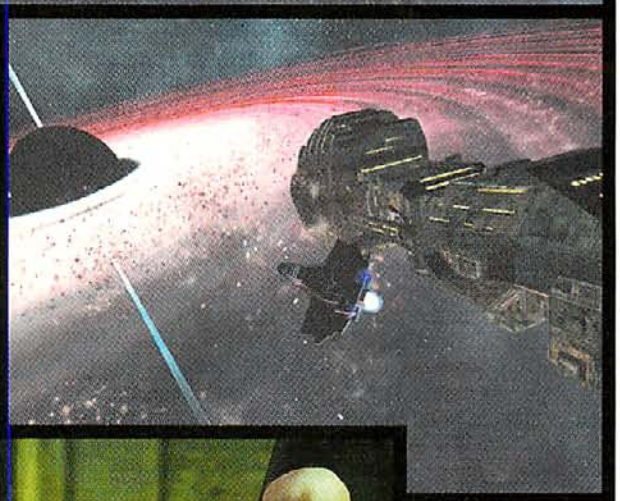
FREELANCER's tone and visual power are illustrated simply and powerfully. The very first scene Roberts showed us—an overhead view of a bustling space port—emphasized the fact that, although this space sim uses plot and gameplay elements that have existed since ELITE, Digital Anvil's take on the genre will be something special.

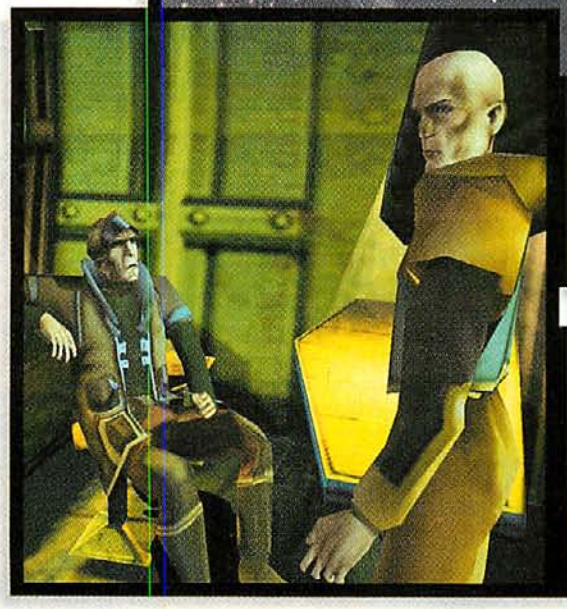
The spaceport, from which you assign yourself missions, outfit your ship with new weapons, trade goods, and peel away layers of the story, resembles nothing you've ever seen...in a computer game, at least. The sun sets and rises, ships

ER

Jones

SIMPLY MASSIVE
Exploring space in FREELANCER makes you feel very, very small.





WE'RE APPROACHING OUR FINAL DESTINATION
Space never felt so roomy...or looked so...stellar!

I'VE SEEN BETTER DAYS
Once you've made a name for yourself, more shady characters start popping up. Digital Anvil is considering letting you answer questions by moving your mouse up-and-down for yes, or right-to-left for no.

fly between skyscrapers or landing platforms, and the cities themselves are very stylistically and dramatically represented. More reminiscent of *Star Wars* than even the LucasArts' *Star Wars* games, this one scene conveys the scope of what Roberts is trying to accomplish here—a detailed, dynamic, living world.

You begin play as a lowly mercenary, indentured to the House Liberty, the all-American good-guy clan in the game. Getting hooked up with this clan at the start means that you'll have plenty of protection in your early missions, at least until the plot gives you the chance to join up with other houses. As part of your indentured servitude, House Liberty supplies you with your first spacecraft—the futuristic equivalent of a 1979 Pinto. It gets the job done, but you're going to be very excited to earn enough money to put yourself into something a bit fancier.

NOW THAT'S FANCY

FREELANCER's sense of grandeur is reinforced the moment you fly through the massive metallic accelerator that boosts you out of planetary space into an outer space so colorful and dramatic, it looks like it was photographed by the Hubble telescope.

Digital Anvil's version of space incorpo-

DOWNTOWN...WHERE THE ACTION IS
Every port of call in FREELANCER features unique, detailed scenery that would make Las Vegas jealous.

rates a sense of scale and attention to detail that will most likely set a new standard for virtual worlds. At one point, we flew around and through an enormous research station that seemed about 100 times the size of our ship. We also flew through a gorgeous, purplish gassy, lightening-strewn nebula that created a particularly eerie effect. And in a scene that illustrated the amount of detail being put into the game, we flew past a fully operational ore-mining unit. As we flew up close, you could see the ship doing its ore-crunching—the large pincer hands breaking off chunks of ore, which were then sucked into the craw of the ship.

Eventually your lovely little sight-seeing excursion is going to get interrupted by space pirates or a rival house. Then you'll see another part of FREELANCER, one that takes a sharp turn from normal space combat. Roberts and company are throwing out the joystick as a controller and focusing on making the game playable with a unique mouse-and-keyboard interface. This fits in squarely with the FREELANCER design team's mission of focusing on the purely fun parts of space combat, which means avoiding the constant 180-degree turning battles so common in space sims, where you line up a bogey, pass them after narrowly avoiding a head-on collision, and repeat.

FREELANCER completely avoids this by placing the fundamental ship maneuvering and navigation under the control of your Neuronet. You move your mouse around to target and fire on enemy ships, select your weapons, and fine-tune your position and velocity. Holding down the Shift key allows you to freelook with your mouse and fire on anything you see. Holding down the Control key allows you to take over the controls and maneuver your ship in any direction.

The wildcard in all this is the Neuronet—part interface manager, part onboard computer, and part pilot. It serves as your navigational aid, allowing you to plot coordinates for travel and check on your cargo. More crucially, it performs critical maneuvers during combat and can be upgraded with a variety of increasingly effective tactics to make it more combat-ready.

Space fights consist of you blasting away with your mouse and ordering your ship into various maneuvers via the Neuronet. Want to get on a bogie's tail and blast him into dust? Select the *Trail* command, which will order your ship to attempt to get on the bogie's six. Getting pounded? Order your ship to *Evade*, and, depending on the quality of your Neuronet, you will alleviate the pain.

Most interesting about this new take on ship-to-ship combat is the almost DIABLO-style element of play FREELANCER sets up. As you gain more money, prestige, and power, you'll be able to power-up your Neuronet with new or upgraded maneuvers. Or buy entirely new Neuronets that are more advanced. Maybe you'll even discover amazingly sophisticated upgrades left behind by the ancient space-faring race who inhabited the area before you. You'll also be able to trade these maneuvers to your friends in the multiplayer game.

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

FREELANCER's multiplayer game, which will be sold separately from the main game, will be a massively multiplayer universe where thousands of players will be able to fly around and interact with each other in a variety of capacities. Digital Anvil envisions a dynamic, socially-oriented game that features the single-player game's politics and clans as a backdrop. This multiplayer game will also permit you to be allied with one of the main houses in the game, or to go it alone.

Digital Anvil is committed to maintaining a meta story that will keep the game more focused. At one point, you might log in and hear about a big war between the Kusari and House Liberty. This could mean several different things to you; you might want to join in the war effort as a paid mercenary. Or you might deduce that war around certain planets means that certain goods might command top dollar on that planet, and you'll hire some of your friends to escort you on a money-making trade mission.

Perhaps the coolest potential feature in multiplayer is the ability to own your own base. The game will feature a finite number of bases that can be taken over and controlled by human factions.

The most unfortunate aspect of FREELANCER is the fact that we'll have to wait until late 2001 to play it. CGW

CHRIS ROBERTS

"Sure, the latest 3D shooters look pretty, but what new gameplay do they offer? Where are they taking the genre beyond having prettier rooms and more detailed characters? Too many of the game publishers seem to be going with safe bets: the latest sequel; a sports game with the latest team stats; an RTS game with a few different kinds of units; or another first-person shooter that differs only in its look. I've been far more impressed with the game design that's been going on in the console market. Games like METAL GEAR SOLID and ZELDA 64 have really blown me away by their design and the way the technical gee-whiz factors are used to enhance gameplay. There have been a few exceptions in the PC biz: GRIM FANDANGO and HALF-LIFE stood out last year."

CHRIS ROBERT'S GAMEOGRAPHY

Times of Lore
Strike Commander
Wing Commander I – IV

Genre: Action
Release Date: Q4 '01
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil

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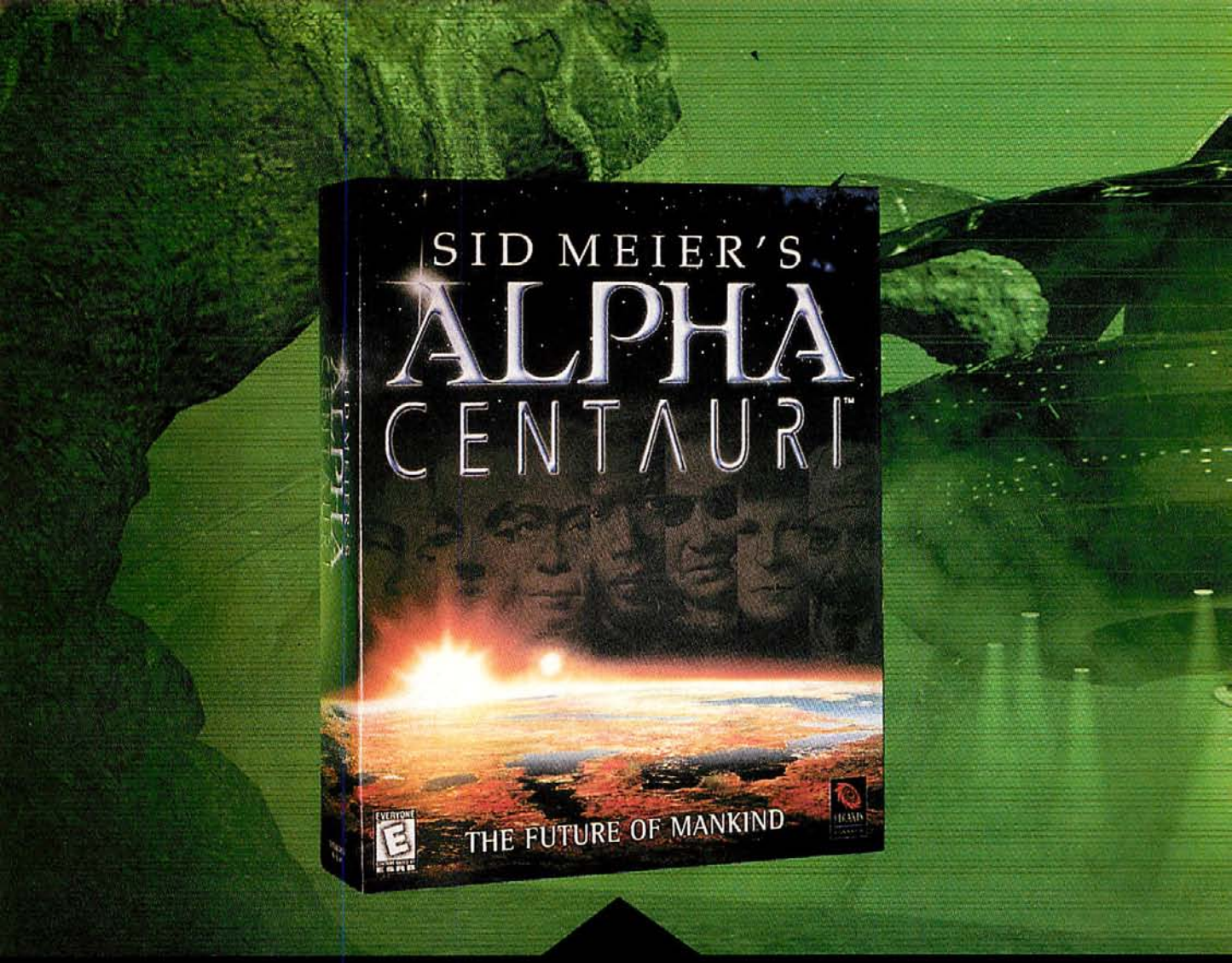

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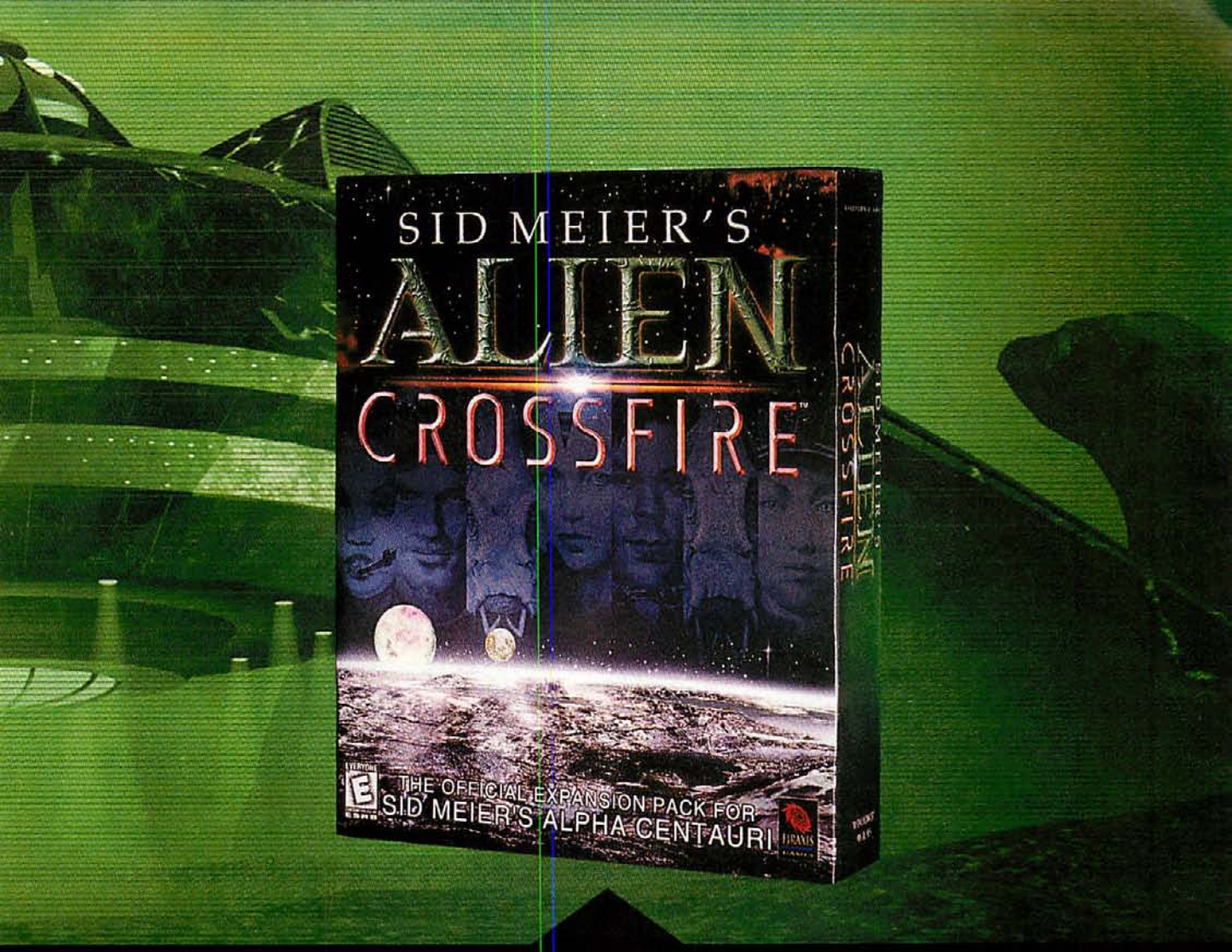
★★★★★–Computer Gaming World
(5 out of 5)

"98%" (Highest review score ever awarded) –PC Gamer

"Meier has again set the gold standard for strategy."–Newsweek

XXXXX–Cnet Gamecenter
(5 out of 5)



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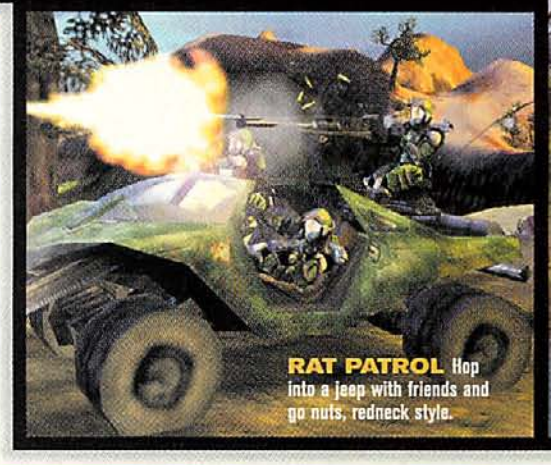
2

SAM I AM The surface-to-air missile is spectacular looking (and handy too). The smoke trails actually dissipate in the wind.



RAT PATROL Hop into a jeep with friends and go nuts, redneck style.

HALO's indoor environments are spectacular enough. Colored lighting pours in through stained glass windows; computer displays reflect off polished floors. The building's curved surfaces and seamless textures eradicate any semblance of the Lego-style architecture we've grown accustomed to in 90-degree-heavy 3D games.

And then you step outside...

...where smooth, rolling green hills dominate the landscape, interspersed with cliff-walled canyons in the nadirs of watersheds. Trees sway in the breeze. A waterfall plunges into a sparkling river. You can't make out a straight line anywhere, and the lush scenery seems to go on for miles.

HALO challenges the current conception of how beautiful a computer game can be. It could, in fact, redefine your conception of computer games. Why? Because this third-person-perspective action game features the finest 3D-game engine, character animation, and physics modeling we've ever seen. Such technology in the hands of a company long known for making fewer games at higher-than-normal quality levels is practically unfair.

WANT A JOINT?

Not satisfied with simply stunning terrain, Jason Jones – creator of MARATHON and MYTH and the visionary and lead programmer for HALO – also aims to revolutionize the art of character animation and physics modeling. Even at this early state in the game's development, his effort shines. Not only do vehicles and characters reflect light and cast dynamic shadows, they actually appear iridescent. Even more impressive is the life-like way in which the models move.

In almost every game you've played before, the character animations are pre-canned – they're animated before you ever play the game. What you see when you walk forward or jump is actually a series of slightly different models, rapidly painted one after another, much like a three-dimensional flip book. Not so in HALO; Jones found a way to implement inverse kinematics, a technique for modeling human motion, in real time. Game models actually have a skeleton inside them with properties governing the movement of each joint. If your character is riding in a jeep and the driver hits the brakes, the inertia jolts his skeleton forward in the seat, moving the character right along with it. At the same time, his

HALO

The **Closest** Thing to the **Real Thing**

by Jesse Hiatt

POSTCARD MATERIAL Don't get so distracted looking at the groovy scenery that you get yourself smoked.

ATTACK! There will probably be a lot of good reasons to use combined arms.

arm could be reacting naturally to the recoil of his pistol, and his head could be turning to track an enemy. This kind of dynamic, fluid movement and attention to detail is unheralded on many levels. The effects are mind-blowing.

And then there are the vehicles themselves. Driving around in the game's jeep could practically qualify as a game in itself, due to the extremely-detailed physics model (think GRAND PRIX LEGENDS off-road). The vehicles' tires kick up pebbles and dust that change color depending on the terrain you're driving over. Bungie also displayed an iridescent flying vehicle and hover tank that were equally impressive.

As one final demonstration of the engine's power, Jones zoomed the map way out so that the marine appeared as just a speck in the distance. Then he smoothly zoomed in, close enough that I could read an indicator on the side of the soldier's rifle that showed how much ammo remained.

The standard soldier's weapons are a pistol with a built-in laser for painting targets, an assault rifle with an attached grenade launcher, and a machete for desperate situations. We also saw a cool zooming sniper rifle, a rocket launcher that leaves realistic smoke trails behind it that dissipate into the wind, a surface-to-air missile, a spear gun, and a funky-looking defoliator weapon. The aliens pretty much have an equivalent weapon for each purpose, but they shoot blue energy beams instead of familiar, earthly ordinance.

RING AROUND THE WORLD

Bungie's game design process is three-fold. First they fin-

ish their engine, then they play the hell out of the multiplayer game, and finally they move on to the single-player experience. Since the game recently began moving into phase two, much of the game's story has yet to be realized. But to be perfectly honest, the HALO engine is so amazing that Bungie could let us just run around the map banging two rocks together, and that would still entertain us for a while.

The setup for the game goes something like this. A space-faring transport vessel carrying about 1,800 humans, 800 of them marines, crash lands on a huge ring-world that orbits a distant star. A theoretically feasible science-fiction construct, a ring-world is a thin ring of planetary mass thousands of miles across, with an inner surface coated with desirable life-supporting essences like an atmosphere, dirt, trees, and water. Because of the ring-world's unique halo orbit at the Lagrange Point between a gas giant and one of its moons, this freakish world actually spins in place, with the resultant inertia creating an effect similar to gravity (remember the space station in *2001*?).

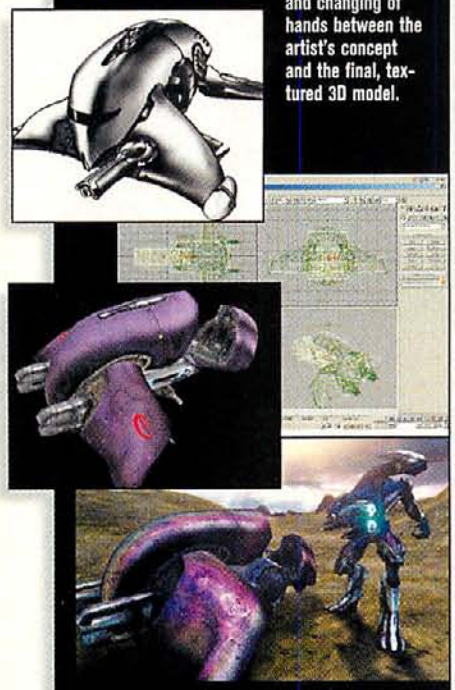
An impressive artifact of tremendous significance, the ring appears to have been mysteriously abandoned by the time your ship crash lands on the surface. But much like a leftover slice of pizza at the *CGW* offices, this kind of phenomenon fails to go unnoticed for long.

An alien race called the Covenant soon pops up. Technologically superior to humans, these humanoids show up in great numbers to pilfer what they can from the ring. As you might guess, a full-scale war erupts between the humans and the Covenant.

Since the humans are ill-equipped to face the Covenant head on, their only hope is to use guerrilla tactics. Given this fact, at times you'll be able to use all of the aliens' weapons and vehicles against them. The other big problem you'll face in the early parts of the game is that all your mates and gear got spread out all over the ringworld in the chaos preceding the crash.

IN YER FACE OR FAR AWAY Character models scale from 200–2000 polygons depending on how far away they are from the viewer. Note menacing mini-gun.

FLYING CONTRAPTION This is the Covenant's neat-o purple flying unit. Luckily you will be able to commandeer any vehicle (by force of course).



FROM NAPKIN TO HAPPENIN' There are a lot of steps and changing of hands between the artist's concept and the final, textured 3D model.

STEVE JOBS LOVES HALO

HALO makes quite an impression the first time around, but it isn't exactly a surprise that something so revolutionary would come from Bungie. After all, these guys are known for being different. They do their own publishing; they have always supported the Mac platform (HALO is no exception — Steve Jobs unveiled the game in his keynote speech at the recent MacWorld Expo); and they tend to make fewer and more innovative games than the rest of the pack.

Although only in the nascent stages of development, it is readily apparent that HALO is a very big deal. With a solid record of setting high standards for their games, it is unlikely that Bungie will screw this one up. Which is why, of the five games we've selected, we feel HALO has the surest shot at changing gaming. It just looks too damn good. CGW

Genre: Action
Release Date: Q4 2000
Publisher: Bungie
Developer: Bungie

BUNGIE'S GAMEOGRAPHY

- MINOTAUR: THE LABYRINTHS OF CRETE
- PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS
- MARATHON
- MARATHON 2: DURANDAL
- MARATHON: INFINITI
- MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS
- MYTH 2

JASON JONES

"There is a common saying among programmers, 'Don't try and reinvent the wheel.' Well, we try and reinvent the wheel because hey, the guy who invented the wheel was really psyched. We typically throw away all our code when we start a new project. I am much more likely to start from scratch. If you don't understand what you're doing at the most basic level, you'll never be able to innovate.

"Ever since QUAKE came out, similar first-person shooters were all over the place. You could hardly tell them apart. You won't be able to mistake HALO for anything else. The reason that we do this is because just like users get bored of recycled ideas, we get bored the same way. We didn't want to do another first-person shooter or another real-time strategy game. We're also not really big on analyzing the market or saying game x is really cool. We do what we think is cool because we love it."

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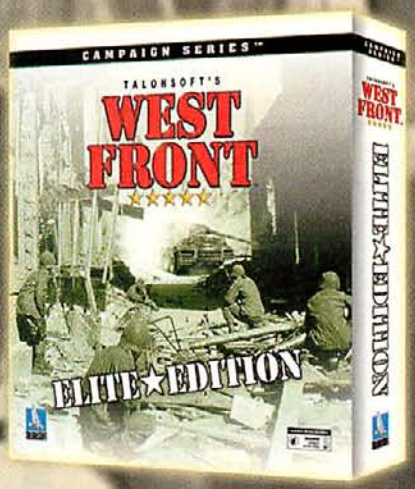
THROUGH THE EYES OF A SOLDIER



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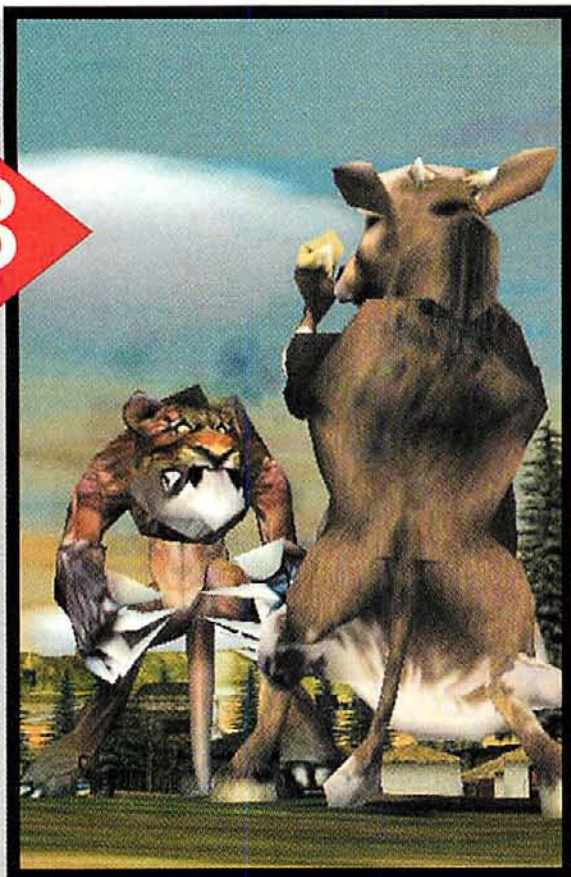
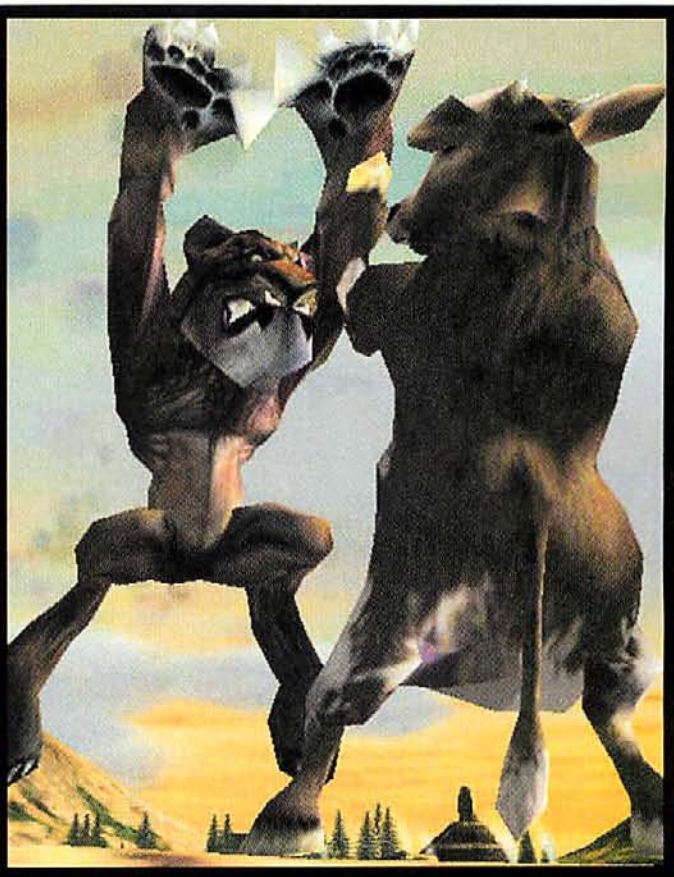




BLACK & WHITE

Creating **God** in Your **Own Image**

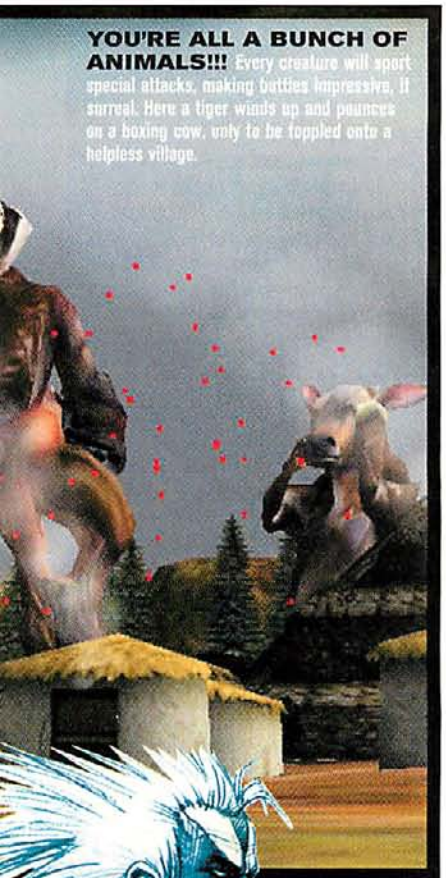
by Robert Coffey

Peter Molyneux wants you to know something. He wants you to know that no matter what you've heard, BLACK & WHITE is not another "god game." BLACK & WHITE is a role-playing game.

It just so happens that the role you're playing is God.

The truth is, no one can cram all that is BLACK & WHITE into one neat, limiting genre specification. The ambition that is the soul of this game is far too unwieldy and immense to be confined by some arbitrary term; stuffed into a routine, user-friendly definition, BLACK & WHITE can't help but resist, bursting loose from whatever elaborately-fashioned pigeon holes we game journalists can construct.

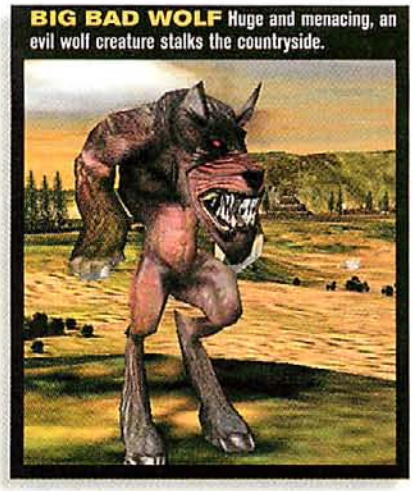
So what is BLACK & WHITE? It is, as Molyneux insists, a role-playing game. But it also happens to be 1) a god game; 2) an experiment in artificial life; 3) a strategy game; 4) the world's most surreal online-chat program; and 5) an experience that evolves into an expression of who you are. If BLACK & WHITE can be summed up as one thing, it is in the way creator Peter Molyneux sees it: "BLACK & WHITE is the closest I have ever come to what was in my imagination."



YOU'RE ALL A BUNCH OF ANIMALS!!! Every creature will sport special attacks, making battles impressive, if surreal. Here a tiger winds up and pounces on a boxing cow, only to be toppled onto a helpless village.

IN THE BEGINNING

The game opens with an idyllic world, a tiny island practically glowing with lush vegetation. Your goal is simple: Get the whole world to believe in you and worship you as their god. You the player are manifested as an elegantly simple, all-powerful hand hovering above the earth. Not wanting to break the illusion of the gameworld with buttons, tabs, and menu screens, the designers have made the hand the entirety of your interface. You'll grab spells from your citadel and cast them with a wave, and you'll move through the world by "grabbing" parts of the landscape and "pulling" the world until your destination reaches you.



BIG BAD WOLF Huge and menacing, an evil wolf creature stalks the countryside.

While you cannot interact directly with the primitive tribes peppering the landscape, you can influence their lives indirectly. Spells allow you to rain down literal manna from heaven to feed starving tribes or to rip their fragile villages with vicious ribbons of lightning. Either approach will convince the tribesmen that there is something greater out there, and they will begin to worship you, either out of fear or out of adoration, and therein lies the heart of the game. Do you model yourself after Kali, the Indian black goddess who ate her own children, or the more benevolent, Christian New Testament God?

It's the sort of decision games have rarely addressed. Just as every moral choice you make in your life shapes and molds your existence, so will it in BLACK & WHITE. Live a life of callous evil and the gameworld becomes a blighted environment, scarred with volcanic fissures, while your place of power becomes an increasingly forbidding place. Nurture and care for your worshippers and the world flourishes, your palace growing to resemble a fairytale ideal.

CHILD OF GOD

The most obvious expression of your morality comes in the form of your creature, the only living being over which you can exert any direct control. After you've successfully won over your first village and have started to amass some power, you'll discover three non-human entities: a passive cow, a neutral ape, or an aggressive tiger. After choosing one of these creatures, it is your responsibility to teach it. An enormous bundle of unchecked id, your creature is entirely dependent upon your direction to learn how

CLANSMEN All of the villages and potential worshippers are designed around specific tribal themes such as Native Americans, Aztecs, or these Celts.

TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT This series of shots shows the range every creature can display simply in terms of its good or evil nature. The first tiger is ferociously evil, the second is more balanced, while the last tiger is a shimmering example of beatific purity.

to live in the world. Reward and punishment are the tools you'll use to shape your developing avatar; for example, should your hungry creature consume a villager, you can smack it to let it know your displeasure. That won't be the end of it, however, because you'll need to tickle its belly and pet it when it later picks up a villager, considers eating it, then lets your worshipper free. Of course, you could do the opposite, training your creature to eat everyone it sees. As the creature balances its desires with what you teach it, a personality begins to emerge.

The creature is a marvel of AI programming, learning not only through the application of your firm hand but by observation as well. It watches you, learning to use your favorite spells. As the creature adopts your beliefs, it becomes capable of acting in your stead. Capable of making its own observations, your creature can travel to a new village, realize the people are starving, then start casting food spells. Moreover, your creature may then entertain the populace, playing with them or teaching them to dance, all without direction from you. Even more remarkably, the creature is able to form opinions based on your tutelage – you can teach him not to destroy life by sparing fisherman when faced with hostile tribes but by actively seeking out the leaders.

Just as your philosophy is painted across the landscape, so is it reflected in your creature. Evil creatures take on menacing forms, all tooth and claw, literally smoldering with malice. Good creatures glow with saintly goodness. With creatures growing fat or skinny, weak or strong, no two creatures should look the same, especially considering a damage system that models every every cut and gash, leaving a scar that lasts the lifetime of your creature.

THE HIGH ROAD OR THE LOW ROAD?

While the struggle between good and evil molds your creature and shapes the world, so does it direct gameplay. The game constantly confronts you with decisions as well as gauging your behavior across 11 sliding scales, rating you in terms of adventurousness, aggressiveness, curiosity, and more. For example, a more benevolent deity may be faced with the task of rescuing a villager who's become lost, while a more punishing god will have opportunities to seize things by force.

Players will have the chance to share their experiences in some of the most original online play devised. Budding deities can compete in a more traditional strategy game, pitting their spell set and creatures against each other. What is interesting here is that you use the creature from your saved game online; anything that happens to it will be carried back to your ongoing solo campaign.

Even more remarkable is Molyneux's plan for BLACK & WHITE's online community, where players will be able to take their creatures online to interact with each other in a primarily non-combative setting. The creatures will learn from each other – they could pick up bad habits, or they might learn a new, special attack. Again, this new knowledge will be carried back to the single-player game where you'll have to deal with their slightly-altered personality.

BLACK & WHITE should simply be like no other game, ever. Yes, it's graphically gorgeous, but it's the free-flowing, individualized play that is most tantalizing. It's an awful lot of ambition to shoehorn onto one CD-ROM, but if anyone can do it, Molyneux and Lionhead Studios can. CGW

PETER MOLYNEUX

"After I had started the design of BLACK & WHITE, we all got together and thought about the things we would need to create this game. We looked at each other and thought that we could never achieve those goals. But the number of cool features already in BLACK & WHITE show how high we have managed to push the technology envelope – the AI, the interface, the 3D engine, and the sound engine.

THE BLACK & WHITE TEAM

Still, I absolutely don't consider this to be the definitive word on "god games." All genres have much more in them yet to be discovered. While the complexity of the level of detail in BLACK & WHITE marks a big step forward, it still could be improved upon.

"I hope to foster a huge online community. There will simply be no other experience like BLACK & WHITE GATHERING, because of the diversity and individuality of all the creatures. At the moment my creature is bordering on the very evil side, but my excuse for this is that I have to abuse him and the world around him to test the game.

In the end, this is the scariest project I have ever undertaken in my life."

PETER MOLYNEUX

MOLYNEUX GAMEOGRAPHY

- POPULOUS
- POWERMONGER
- MAGIC CARPET
- SYNDICATE
- MAGIC CARPET 2
- THEME PARK
- DUNGEON KEEPER

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Q2 '00
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Lionhead Studios

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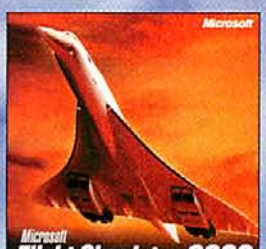

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What is the appeal of the Skinner box that is the home? Security, tranquility, the sense of wholeness that can only come by surrounding yourself with those you love? Nah.

I think it's more along the lines of an old Steve Martin routine in which he entertained thoughts of raising a child and teaching said offspring all the wrong words for everything. He relished the thought of a child raising his hand the first day of school and asking, "May I moo dog-face to the banana patch?" This is the appeal of THE SIMS, the ultimate expression of the entire SIM franchise, a game where you can run amok with the lives of people, without running the risk of jail for child abuse through enforced idioglossia. Maxis, the company that practically created the so-called "software toy" genre with SIMCITY, is now preparing to deliver the ultimate toy – human lives.

THE SIMS

Social **Darwinism** Made **Easy**

by Robert Coffey

BIRTH OF AN ARTIFICIAL NATION

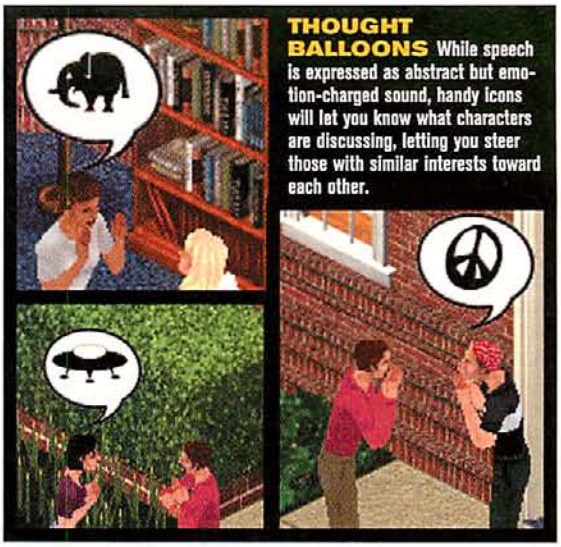
Seven years ago, Maxis founder Will Wright was toying with an architectural sim, a nice little program that would let people create their own virtual dream homes. But other products (most notably SIMCITY 2000) distracted Wright and the rest of his team until about two and a half years ago. When production once again resumed on what Maxis had been calling SIM DOLLHOUSE it was with one significant change – the focus of the game had moved from the aluminum siding of the homes to the lives of the dolls within.

Anyone who's played any of the SIMCITY games knows just how pesky the virtual people inhabiting those digital metropolises can be; whether moaning about taxes or whining for a sports stadium, the "Sims" were a difficult

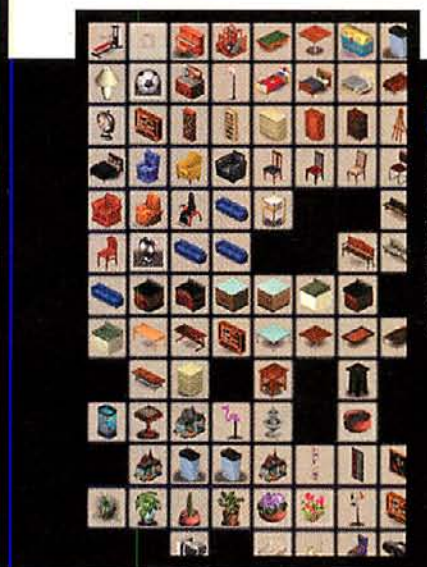
BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE Random events like burglaries and fires will add more life events for your Sims to deal with.

EVERYTHING BUT A PIÑATA A variety of recreational objects will facilitate social intercourse and help you entertain your friends. You'll even be able to select the music you play on the stereo.

BETTER HOMES & GARDENS A simple, intuitive interface makes home creation a snap, with floor design, door and window placement, and surface textures readily applied with the click of a mouse.



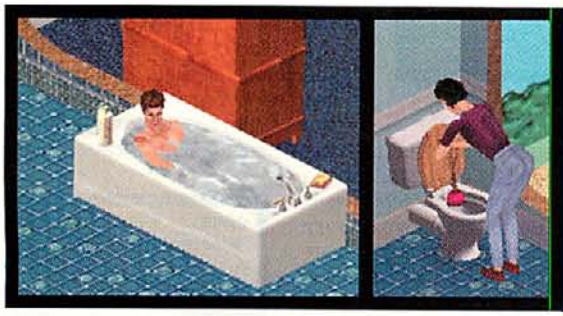
THOUGHT BALLOONS While speech is expressed as abstract but emotion-charged sound, handy icons will let you know what characters are discussing, letting you steer those with similar interests toward each other.



LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD
Every object in THE SIMS is programmed with behaviors, mood modifiers, and even animations for your Sims. Eventually, players will be able to add their own objects to the game.

bunch to manage. Happily, they remain just as challenging in THE SIMS, thriving only when players tend to the minutest details of their lives. One of the most remarkable things about the game is how the design team has distilled gameplay to three basic functions – building, buying, and living – and yet managed to pack so much of the real world into those seemingly limiting specifications.

Every game starts with the creation of a new, single Sim, and deciding his or her sex, skin, and basic appearance before dividing points among basic character qualities: neatness, outgoing-ness, activity level, playfulness, and how nice you are. After that you dive right into the building portion of the game. Since you start with a set amount of money, you can either immediately purchase a model home or create your own. Designing your own home is a remarkably intuitive process, using a simple click-and-drag interface to plop down floors, walls, windows, doors, and anything else you feel your home needs. Gamers will have to resist the temptation to blow all their money on the biggest house they can afford right off the bat, since they'll have to furnish it as well; forget to set aside enough money for a toilet and shower and life will get very Appalachian very fast.



PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE
Bathing and keeping your toilets in working order may sound trivial, but ignore them and your Sims will suffer the same way an unwashed, bladder-bloated you would.

YOU *CAN* BUY HAPPINESS

Keeping your Sims content is the primary challenge. While big rooms and lots of windows will make them happy, the chief purveyor of pleasure comes in the form of material goods. Comfy chairs, aquariums, stereo equipment, hot tubs, and state-of-the-art kitchens are just a smattering of the objects that

fill up your Sims' living space.

All the objects are programmed with attributes affecting both your Sims' mood and their behavior; this means that as you accumulate more stuff, you also acquire more options in terms of things to do. Entertainment objects facilitate social interaction, giving visitors something to do when they drop by, while quality-of-life improvements such as plants just make your Sims happier. Of course, you'll have to maintain all these things – fail to water your plants and they'll die, bumming out your Sim. This amount of micro-management could be daunting, so you'll be able to hire gardeners to care for your lawn, while maids will tidy up the house.

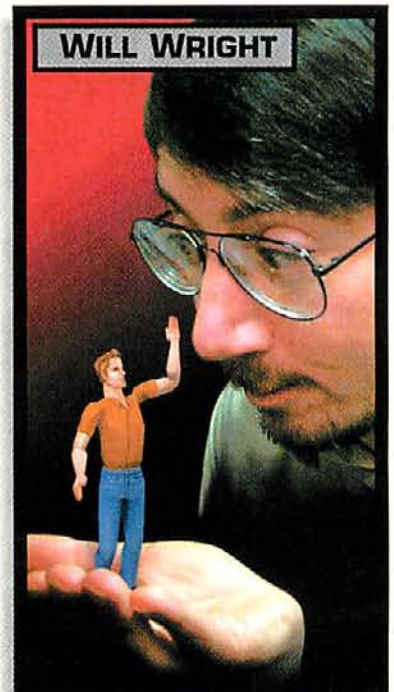
Beyond this, objects can also affect *who* your Sim is: purchase an easel and your Sim will start painting, improving their creativity and opening up new life paths, primarily in terms of employment advancement. As Will Wright explains, The gist of this "behavioral architecture" is that the intelligence is a function not only of the people in the houses, but also of the environment you've provided for them.

That's right, you'll have to get a job. The game will include 10 career tracks, each with 10 jobs that will take budding actors from a meager waiter job to superstardom, or guide enlisted army personnel to a high-profile life as an astronaut.

LIFE OF THE PARTY

The living part of the game is probably the most important – it's undoubtedly the most fascinating, especially when it comes to Sims interacting with their neighbors. Other people will eventually drop by, and it's your job to forge relationships with them all. Ideally, you'd like warm relationships, since you'll need to make friends and influence people in order to reach the higher career tracks – not to mention start a family. It would be easier if you could control the neighbors, but even though they're from families you've created in other parts of the neighborhood, you can't control them once they leave their own home.

While parties, hot tub get-togethers, and conversations about aliens and other common interests will help you get and keep your friends, you'll really have to work to get a spouse. You'll have to woo someone with backrubs, compliments, hugs, and kisses before you pop the question. Just as in life, one miscue could foul the whole deal up. Once you do wed, you'll then gain direct control of your new partner and can start a family, growing to a maximum of eight – perfect for a very Brady Christmas.



"This game started out more focused on the architectural aspects, but I realized that I needed to stimulate people in the house to really evaluate the designs that the player constructed. So at that point, Jamie Doornbos and I spent about a year and a half getting the Sims to act intelligently. When they started living plausible lives in this world, the whole direction of the project shifted more in their direction.

"For me THE SIMS represents the most personal of the Sim games. I like to put my house and my family into it and play my life. So in this sense it's a kind of strange, surreal mirror. At this point I've invested as much time on it as all of my work on the SIMCITY series."

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD All of your simmed families are represented in this main menu screen, letting you simply click on a home to start managing that household.

FAMILY ALBUM

Early playtesters are responsible for the creation of one of THE SIMS' coolest features – a built-in screen capture utility that lets you string together and annotate a series of shots. What Maxis discovered when people played the game was that they instinctively constructed stories around the squabbles, job promotions, and untimely deaths of their pet people. These photo albums can be saved in a very tidy web page format and posted online, allowing people to share the stories of their virtual families.

Even better, the families in your neighborhoods are saved in a web page format as well. This means that the SIMS' community can go beyond the scrapbooks to actual hands-on experimentation with the populace of other players' communities by downloading the families directly into their games, and letting them interact with the families already there.

In an odd way, THE SIMS shares the same enormous potential for self-expression that BLACK & WHITE does, allowing players to play the game the way they want, with results that can't be tidily predicted. Maxis is embracing the game's potential for delightful unpredictability, with no better example of this than the proposed Genetic Face Generator. This generator would be used to create the faces of Sim kids, blending the features of their parents to create a unique individual. When you consider that people can use their own faces and/or any 3D skin for their game characters, the possibilities are infinite. In fact, virtually every aspect of the game can be customized: skins, faces, objects, surface tiles, careers – you name it. While Maxis will release new items and careers after the game ships, we expect the user-created material to be the most inventive.

THE SIMS is pretty much a simple stroke of genius, the sort of idea that makes you slap yourself on the forehead and ask, "Why didn't anyone think of this before?" What's not to love about toying with the infinite possibilities inherent in the lives of people? With such an immediately understandable premise, THE SIMS seems destined to have an even broader appeal and marketability than the rest of the SIM franchise. CGW

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Q1 2000
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Maxis

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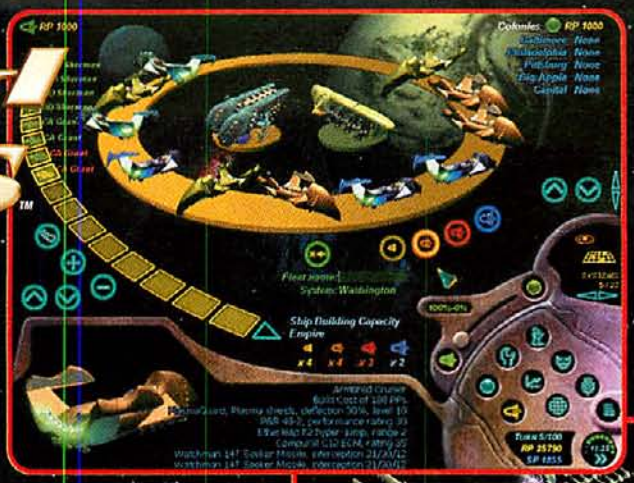

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5 GOOD & EVIL

Ron Gilbert Returns for an Epic, Comic RPG by Jeff Green

Ron Gilbert has a story to tell us. It is an epic story of heroes and villains, of good and evil. It is a story of a town in trouble, of a mighty warrior who comes to save the day.

If anyone else were telling this story, we know what would happen next. We've all heard it many times before. Too many times. But this is a story by Ron Gilbert, a man who has created some of the funniest and best-loved computer games ever. So what happens next, in his story, is this: the warrior arrives in town, trips over a drainage ditch, impales himself on his own sword, and dies. Now they need a new hero.

This is about all we're going to spill of the plot of GOOD AND EVIL, Ron Gilbert's new RPG/adventure, because to tell more would spoil things. All you really need to know is that one of gaming's best designers has something new up his sleeve, and if everything goes his way, it's going to change the way we think about role-playing games.

FATHER OF SCUMM

Gilbert's goals are high, but fortunately for him, he has a career-long habit of setting new standards whenever he invents a game. At LucasArts in the mid-'80s, he created hilarious comic masterpieces like MANIAC MANSION and MONKEY ISLAND 1 AND 2, and in the process essentially invented the point-and-click adventure (with his legendary SCUMM engine) as well as the cut-scene. Later, as cofounder of Humongous Entertainment, Gilbert completely redefined kids' games with the mega-popular PUTT-PUTT, FREDDI FISH, and PAJAMA SAM franchises, which offer brilliantly scaled-down adventure games for young kids. Most recently, Gilbert helped start up Humongous' Cavedog subdivision, whose first title was the wildly popular TOTAL ANNIHILATION.

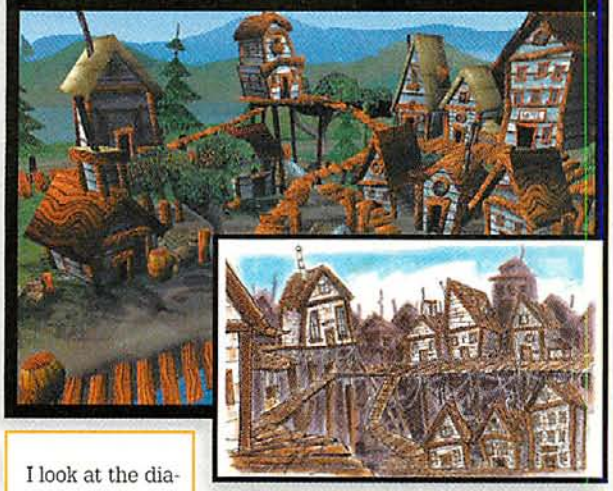
Now Gilbert is again working on what his many fans have craved for years—a new comic story to savor. But it's not an adventure game, it's a role-playing game with a classic fantasy setting, with a plot and environments that will veer wildly as Gilbert unravels his involving story.

And it is *his* story, not yours. There is no pretending that you are the main character. "You're just not," says Gilbert. "He has a personality, and it's not your personality. But the choices you make are going to help shape him, and shape the experience of the game."

The focus on a specific character, with a distinct personality, is rooted in Gilbert's belief that story evolves from character and not the other way around. "In a lot of the RPGs, it doesn't seem to matter which character I pick—they all say the same thing. I look at the character on screen, and I look at the dialog, and I think, 'why would this person ever say this?'

LOONY TUNES As to be expected from a game by Ron Gilbert, GOOD AND EVIL will be populated by an assortment of ridiculous characters.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD For GOOD AND EVIL's look, Gilbert is striving to create a 3D world that is appropriate both for the game's comic sensibility and its role-playing underpinnings.



I look at the dialog, and I think, 'why would this person ever say this?' Characters just become 'the thief' or 'the archer' but don't have real personalities."

I'M FUNNY HOW?

As you'd expect from the MONKEY ISLAND creator, GOOD AND EVIL is going to use lots of humor—much of it directed at role-playing conventions. Characters will talk amongst themselves about "leveling up," for example, while the plentiful dialog and ridiculous characters, like an evil crow, will retain Gilbert's absurdist bent. But alongside the humor is going to be a serious role-playing game. As he put it, "If I just do a funny story but it's not a good RPG....I'm dead. So all the things you're used to seeing, they're there. They're all taken very seriously."

Largely inspired by LEGEND OF ZELDA, Gilbert is designing a large, fully-3D world to be played in third-person perspective; it will be open enough for gamers to explore on their own, in a non-linear fashion, while simultaneously keeping things story-based. Depending on the choices you make, and on how much you choose to explore, gamers will have different experiences while still receiving the same major plot points.

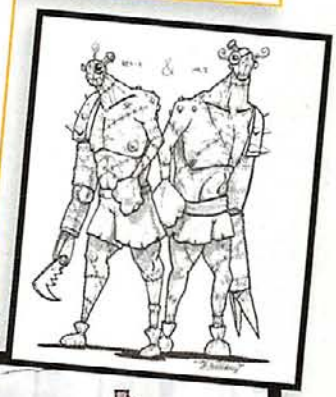
"To me, the perfect game is like you kinda get through it and are done in a few hours,but then you can go back and play it over and over and always pull something new out of it. To me, that's a lot more interesting than slogging through 150 hours of gameplay just to get to the end of a story. The ultimate goal is to tell a cohesive story while still providing enough randomness and diversity to keep gamers coming back for more—unlike the finality of most adventures and RPGs."

The game will be combat-intensive, and you will die if you fail, unlike in Gilbert's previous games. It's going to be a relatively simple system, not dependent on the learning of fancy combo moves; it will be dependent largely on how well your character was equipped and skilled before going into battle.

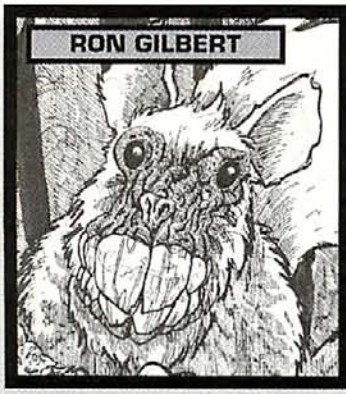
THE END

GOOD AND EVIL is still a good year away, and a lot may change, including the title. But we confidently included it here because of Gilbert's incredible Midas touch, which makes anything he creates a must-play experience. We'll let him have the last word.

"Why did I make this game? There are things about adventure games that I really love, and I wanted to put those things into another type of game. What I hope this will do is completely raise the bar as to what story and dialog have to be in a role-playing game. My big fantasy dream is that once you've played an RPG with a great story and well-written dialog, you'll never want to go back again." CGW



Genre: RPG
Release Date: Q3 2000
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Cavedog



RON GILBERT

"To me, one of the most important things in the world is stories. Telling a story within a game is kind of a lost art. A lot of times, Act I is in the manual, and then you get to the action. I'm saying, let's just do all three acts in the game itself. When you boot up a game, you shouldn't have to know anything – no more than you know when you walk into a movie for the first time."

GILBERT'S GAMEOGRAPHY

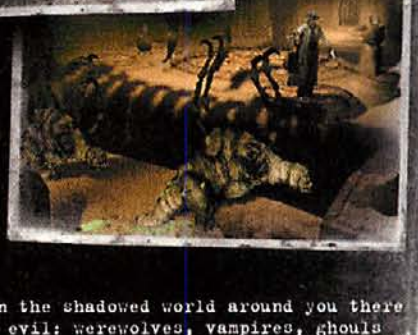
- KORONIS RIFT
- MANIAC MANSION
- INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE
- THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
- MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE
- PUTT PUTT JOINS THE PARADE (AND MANY OTHER HUMONGOUS ENTERTAINMENT TITLES)

"...the ghouls overwhelmed the hero, clubbing him with their own severed limbs before feasting on his guts. And that was right about the time we knew we couldn't wait to play Nocturne. This game will be causing some hellacious nightmares later this year."

- Computer Gaming World

"It is unforgettable, astonishing, and teeming with riveting visual realism. Yet behind the rich lighting and gossamer fog is a timeless sense of adventure. This is gaming at its best."

- Adrenaline Vault



It is 1933, and in the shadowed world around you there exists an ungodly evil: werewolves, vampires, ghouls and flesh-eating zombies that wait just outside the light's unlocked door to feed upon innocence. There also exist guardians of the good and just, tireless vigilantes capable of tracking down this evil and turning it upon itself. You are one of them. And you hunt, as your vile quarry does, by night.

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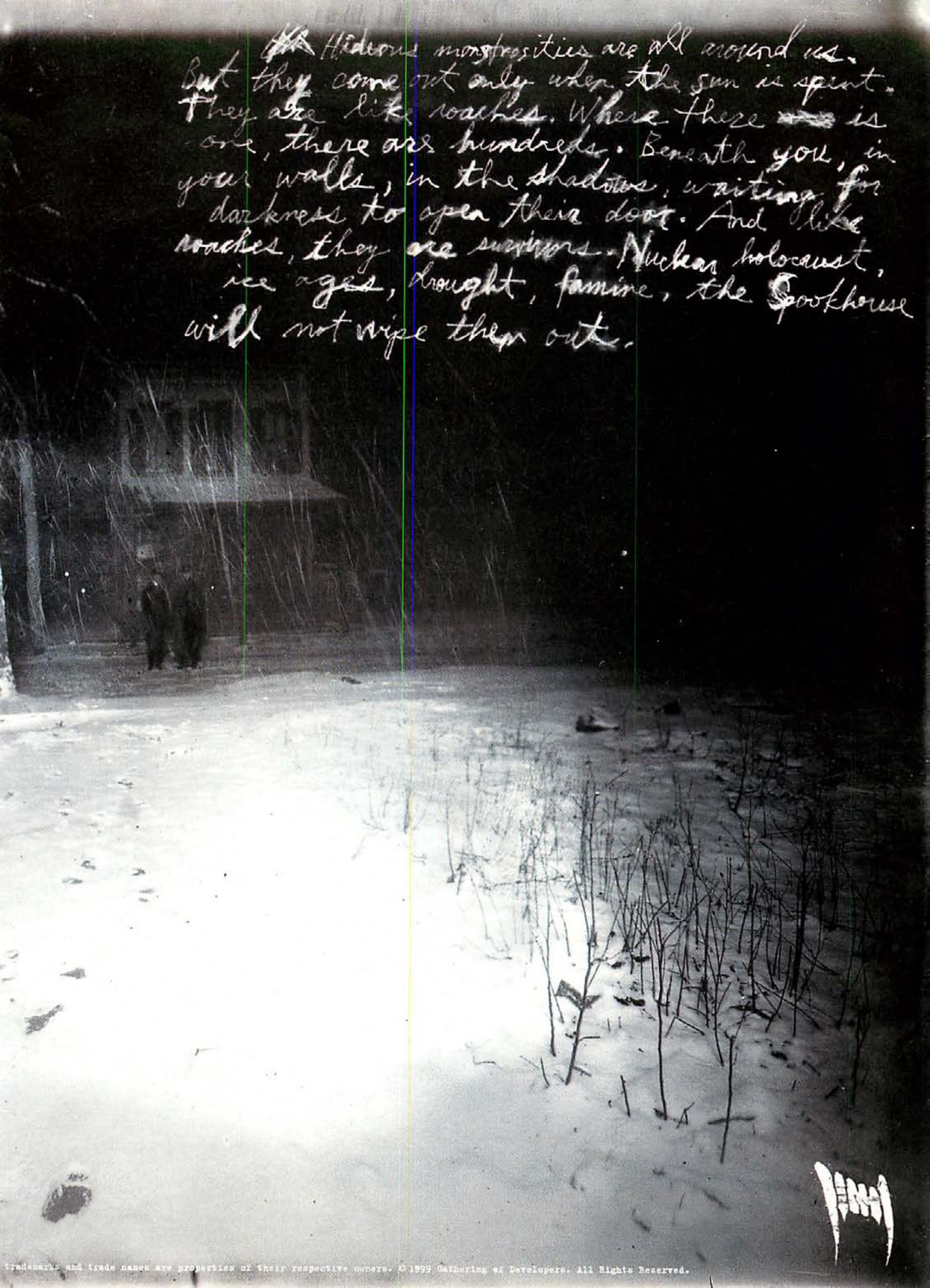

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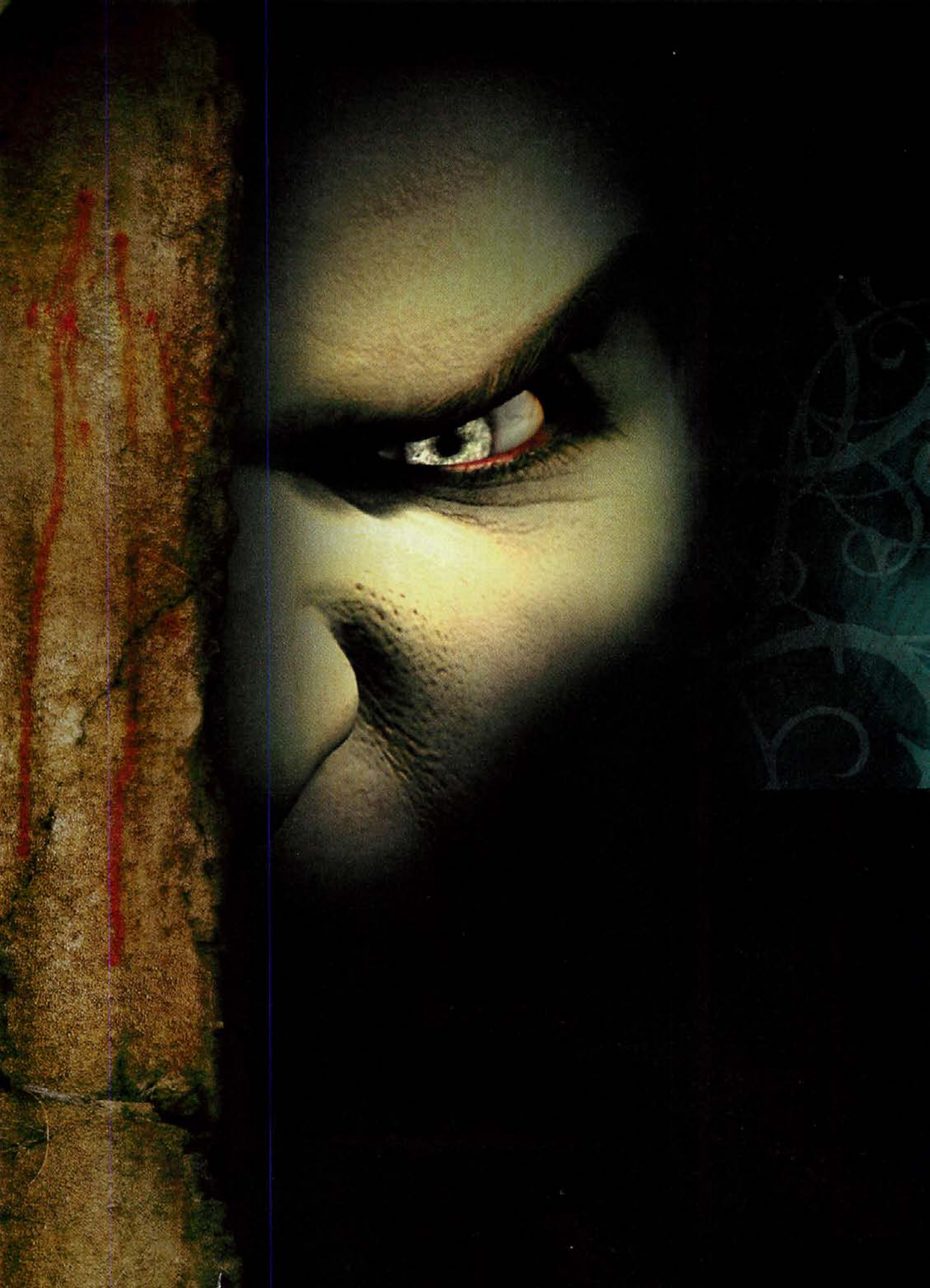

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BLASTS FROM THE PAST

10 GAMES THAT NEED TO BE REMADE

AND THE PEOPLE WHO DESERVE TO MAKE THEM

By Chris Lombardi and the CGW Staff

Hate to break it to you like this, but good games don't go to heaven when they die. Nope, there's no eternal bliss for the greats of gaming's classic age, no angelic host of perfect and eternal players; there's just a sort of fading purgatory of fond memories in the minds of aging gamers.

It's a damn shame. Although most games from days gone by deserve their increasing obscurity, there are a bunch of gems in the rubbish pile that, with a bit of graphics polish and some tweaks to design, could shine in all their former glory.

Bring back the love, we say! Let the classics live again! We rummaged through our memories–the few that have survived the senile dementia–and came up with this list of oldies but goodies that we think deserve another chance. We've also picked some contemporary game designers and development houses who we think have the stuff to do right by these classics.

RACING DESTRUCTION SET

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1986

RACING DESTRUCTION SET was one game in a series of Construction Sets released by Electronic Arts in their 80s heyday. We'd love to see the concept of do-it-yourself games make a comeback. But we'd be happy with the racing game for starters.

In RACING CONSTRUCTION SET, you built a slot-car racing track from scratch. You designed the track; placed jumps, mines, and oil slicks; designed your cars; and even adjusted the physics of the world. Then you'd take your slot cars for a spin.

For the remake, we'd pick the hottest car game group on the planet, the Electronic Art group responsible for the latest NEED FOR SPEED. Our demands are simple: We want a detailed and easy-to-use track editor with all the bells—jumps, loops, banks, and a bag of obstacles to sprinkle around. We want a car editor that lets us build a car from tires to trans. We want to be able to screw with the physics. Then, we want to be able to hop into a car and make a wreck of it. And we want a movie editor. Tomorrow. That's all.

2 SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD

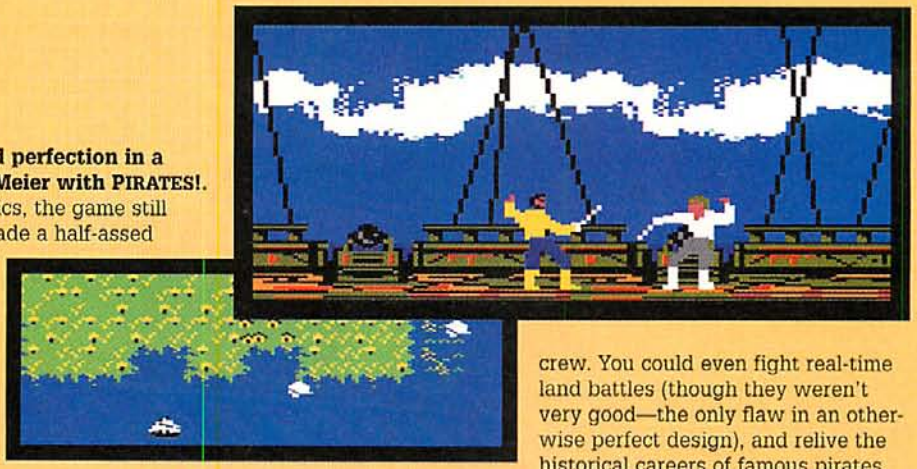
ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD was the game that changed a few of us at *CGW* from boys to gamers. A tiny ship. A handful of terrified men. And an entire hemisphere to discover. It was a great setup and brilliantly executed for its time. As cheesy as the graphics were, and as simplistic as the design was, SEVEN CITIES worked. It made exploring a map fun. And it was brilliantly paced. The long periods of peaceful exploration were punctuated by tense interactions with natives.

This remake is a natural for Ensemble Studios, the creators of AGE OF EMPIRE.S And they've got a ready-made name: Age of Exploration. Let us explore a huge, beautiful map on the same scale of the AOE games. Let us establish settlements in the RTS-base building style, but don't force us to micromanage the settlements; give us a good settlement-management AI. There needs to be some competition, too: Rival nations with explorers and conquistadors racing to find the new natural wonders and resources randomly but realistically spread across the world. But we don't want the game to turn into yet another RTS game. Exploration is the focus. Get it right, guys, or we'll hammer you mercilessly in the review.

3 PIRATES!

MICROPROSE, 1987



If anyone has approached perfection in a game design it was Sid Meier with PIRATES!. Even with its dated graphics, the game still holds up today. MicroProse made a half-assed attempt at an update in the early 90s, but they only marginally improved the graphics and didn't touch the gameplay. The game and gamers deserve a visual revamping, and some of the weaker game elements could benefit from recent advances in RTS design.

PIRATES! had it all—action, strategy, adventure game elements, real time wargaming, history. In the course of living through the career of a pirate on the Spanish Main, you fought ship-to-ship cannon battles, clashed swords with enemy captains, searched for treasure and the members of your scattered family, married the daughters of goverors, and managed the logistics of maintaining a crew. You could even fight real-time land battles (though they weren't very good—the only flaw in an otherwise perfect design), and relive the historical careers of famous pirates.

For our remake dream-team we'd pick Blizzard as the main design group, since they're so good at real-time games and do a great job of creating rich universes around them. We'd bring in the PRINCE OF PERSIA team to develop the sword-fighting sequences. We'd have Ensemble's Bruce Shelley, gaming's Mr. Peabody, consult on the historical details and manual. And maybe we could find something for that Sid guy to do.

4 M.U.L.E.

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

Talk to any wheezing gaming geezer and he'll probably drone on and on about M.U.L.E., a brilliant little multiplayer game a decade ahead of its time. M.U.L.E. was essentially a family board game set on an undeveloped planet. Players bid on land parcels, developed those parcels to produce the game's resources, and then moved those resources around the game board using their M.U.L.E., a Multiple Use Labor Element. The design was tight and the opportunities to screw other players were plentiful.

New World Computing is the perfect choice for a remake. They've got boardgaming roots and the right sense of humor. We'd skip the boxed version and single-player game and go directly to Internet. And while they're in the right frame of mind, New World can bring back their hilarious multiplayer board game, NUCLEAR WAR.

5 PLANETFALL

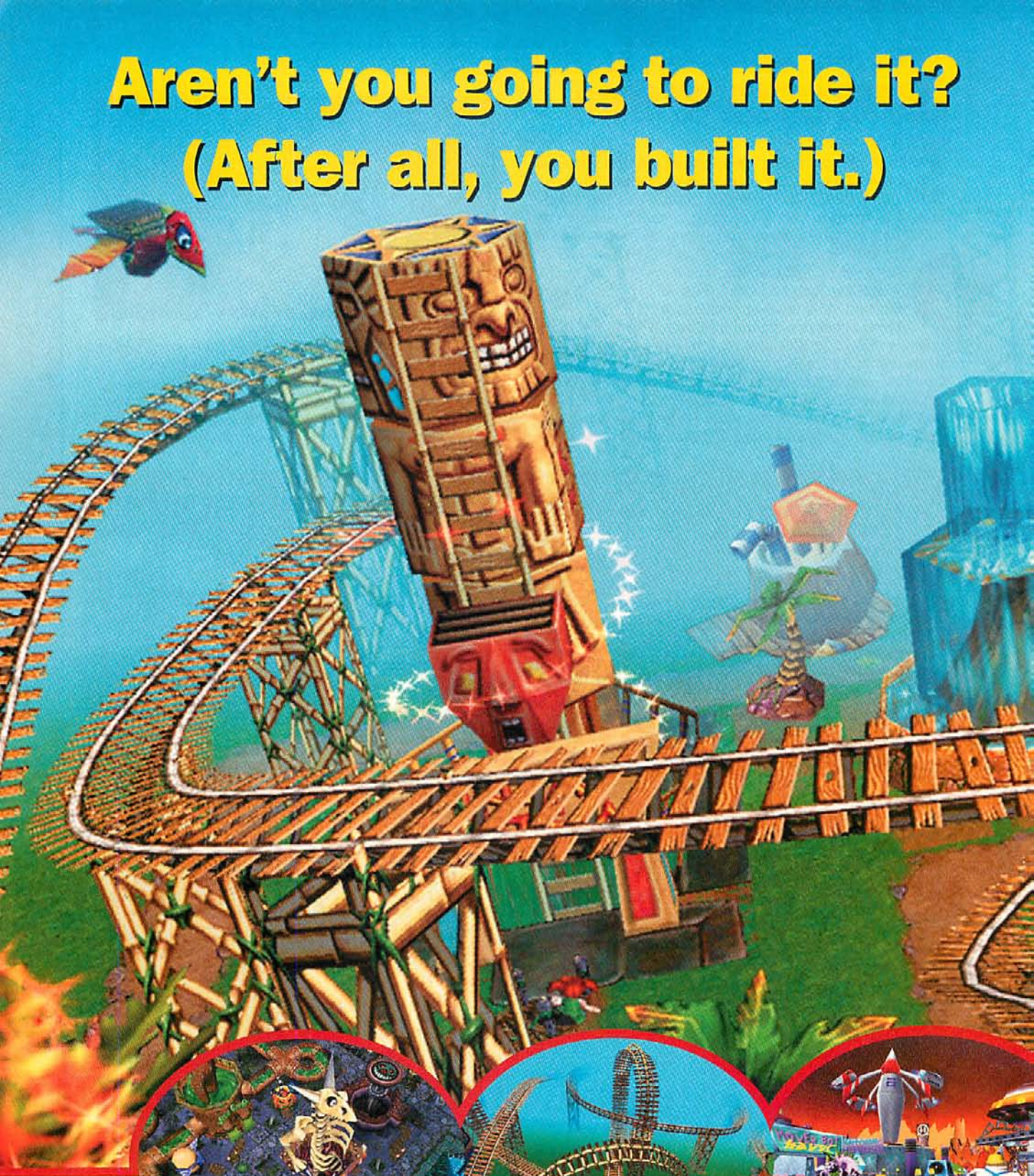
INFOCOM, 1984

Of all the Infocom text adventures that could be revived, we choose PLANETFALL because it was one of the most popular. But we don't really care which ones gets remade—THE LURKING HORROR, TRINITY, MIND FOREVER VOYAGING—all we care about is a good story, great writing, and mature themes.

All they had was text, so the Infocom authors did text very well. We miss their writing; boy, do we miss it.

For our Infocom remake we'd team up the two current masters of storytelling, Tim Shaefer of LucasArts and Ron Gilbert of Cavedog. We'll take the LucasArts artists, too. Throw them in the basement for a year and prepare to hear a tale.

Aren't you going to ride it? (After all, you built it.)



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CHAMPIONS AND INDESTRUCTIBLES

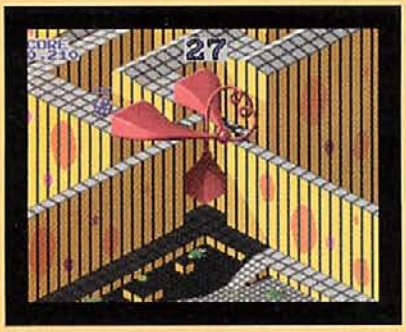
CHAMPIONS and THE INDESTRUCTIBLES aren't games that need to be remade – they need to be finished. We want, no, *need* a super-hero game, and we need it now! The concept is a no-brainer, a natural, but no one has ever been able to pull it off.

We're going to give Peter Molyneax another shot at the INDESTRUCTIBLES. But this time, Peter, dump the first-person action game idea. Rather, think SYNDICATE and isometric perspective. We want a nice character creation and development system that will let us pick and choose super-hero traits and personalities. We want a butt-load of cool animations of super-hero powers and environmental effects. We want to play multiplayer over the Net. We want to prance around in pretty underwear, shouting "Zoiks and away!" Is that so wrong?

7 MARBLE MADNESS

ATARI, 1984

A million arcade games could be remade, but we choose MARBLE MADNESS because it was so original, and the concept could easily be expanded. The basic idea for you youngsters: You played a marble who rolled around a weird 3D world full of traps and puzzles and "bad" marbles that would bump you off the world and into oblivion. It was different, it was challenging, it was fun.



We give the redesign task to the master of arcade weirdness and funness: Shigeru Miyamoto, designer of DONKEY KONG, MARIO BROS., ZELDA, and other classics. We can't wait to see the bizarre maps, characters, and traps with which he'd litter the little marble's world. And he'd probably figure out a way to turn a lifeless sphere into a character worthy of lunch boxes and a cartoon series. We'd also commission a special rolling-ball controller from CH Products to completely recreate the feel of the original.

8 ARCHON

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

Chess and the arcade game. Who'd a thunk. ARCHON blended this unlikely pair into a brilliant hybrid of action and strategy. The strategic portion was a very slight variant on chess: two rows of characters faced-off on an alternating black and white grid. But when the characters met on a square, they dropped into an arcade battle.

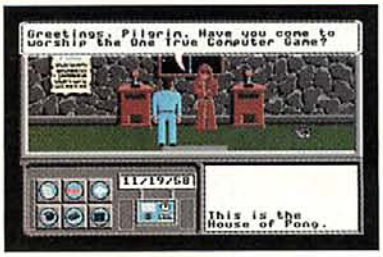
For the remake, we'd keep the strategic game the same—spruced up graphically, BATTLECHESS-style. But for the character-on-character battles, we'd use the latest QUAKE engine to create the 3D battlefields. The kicker is the online play. We'd love to see a setup whereby people could play different roles: You'd have your strategians playing the chess game, while twitch gamers fought gladiator duels in a first-person action mode.

As for design, we're going to keep this one for ourselves. We're currently working on the technology to transfer our cocktail napkin "design docs" into digital form. And we've still to convince Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen to change his major from English to computer science. But these are minor issues. With Jeff Green as project director, we're confident we'll have this one online for Christmas '23.

9 NEUROMANCER

INTERPLAY, 1988

Interplay did a great job with William Gibson's novel in their game adaptation. They captured many of the seminal scenes, designed clever puzzles, and did a decent job with the difficult task of making battles with computer AIs interesting. But the Apple II just couldn't deliver the gritty visuals suggested by the novel, and the adaptation of Gibson's dialogue for the game left something to be desired. The game was just far too cartoony.



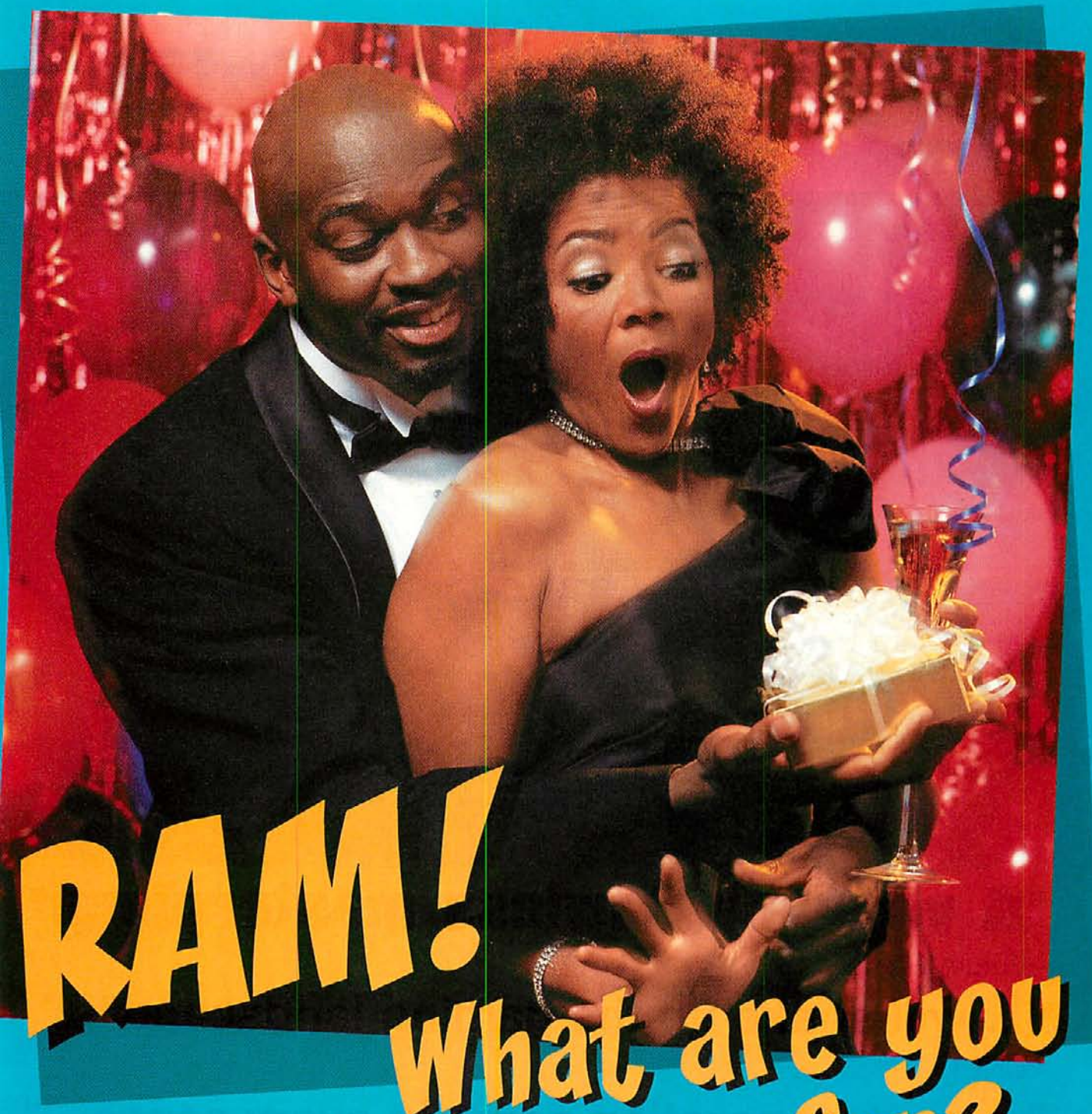
For the remake, we give the job to DreamForge, in particular, to the team that put together the award winning SANITARIUM. They've proven that they can do dark and moody, and they have a rare gift among game developers—an ear for dialogue and compelling narrative. Go at it guys. We want to be walking the streets of Chiba by summertime.

10 MAGIC CARPET

BULLFROG, 1994

The sensation of flight on a magic carpet was so good it could, literally, make you puke. And the visual effects of the spells, like the Earthquake spell that could rip a continent in two before your eyes, were stupefying. MAGIC CARPET deserves another flight through the gaming world with the benefits of 3D acceleration.

There are a lot of groups that could take this project on. But having just seen the 3D engine of HALO, we think Bungie deserves the draw. The HALO engine is capable of everything the MAGIC CARPET engine pulled off and a whole lot more. So finish up HALO real-quick like, guys, and take us on another MAGIC CARPET ride. CGW



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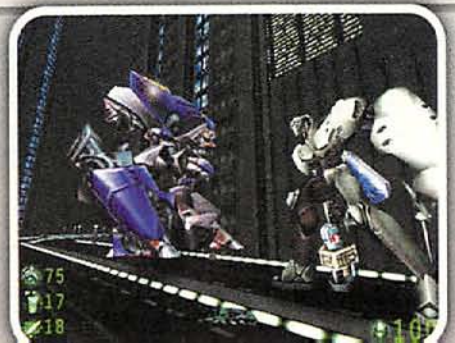

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NOVEMBER REVIEWS

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

GAME	RATING	PAGE
Combat: Operation Victory	2.5	176
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Force 21	1.5	176
Gulf War	3	176
Hidden & Dangerous	4	162
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MechCommander Gold	4	176
Outcast	4.5	158
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Shadowman	3	144
Starfleet Command	4.5	166
System Shock 2	4.5	133

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"...The cars' engines sound authentic – which means they all sound pretty much like power screwdrivers – except "Aquacar," which sounds like an electric bong...."

Mark Clarkson, reviewing Re*Volt"

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

FORCE 21

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2

HOW DO WE RATE?

We Review Only Finished Games—No Betas, No Patches.

★★★★★ **Outstanding** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★☆ **Very Good** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆ **Average** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★☆☆☆ **Weak** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★☆☆☆☆ **Abysmal** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

☆☆☆☆☆ Does Not Rate

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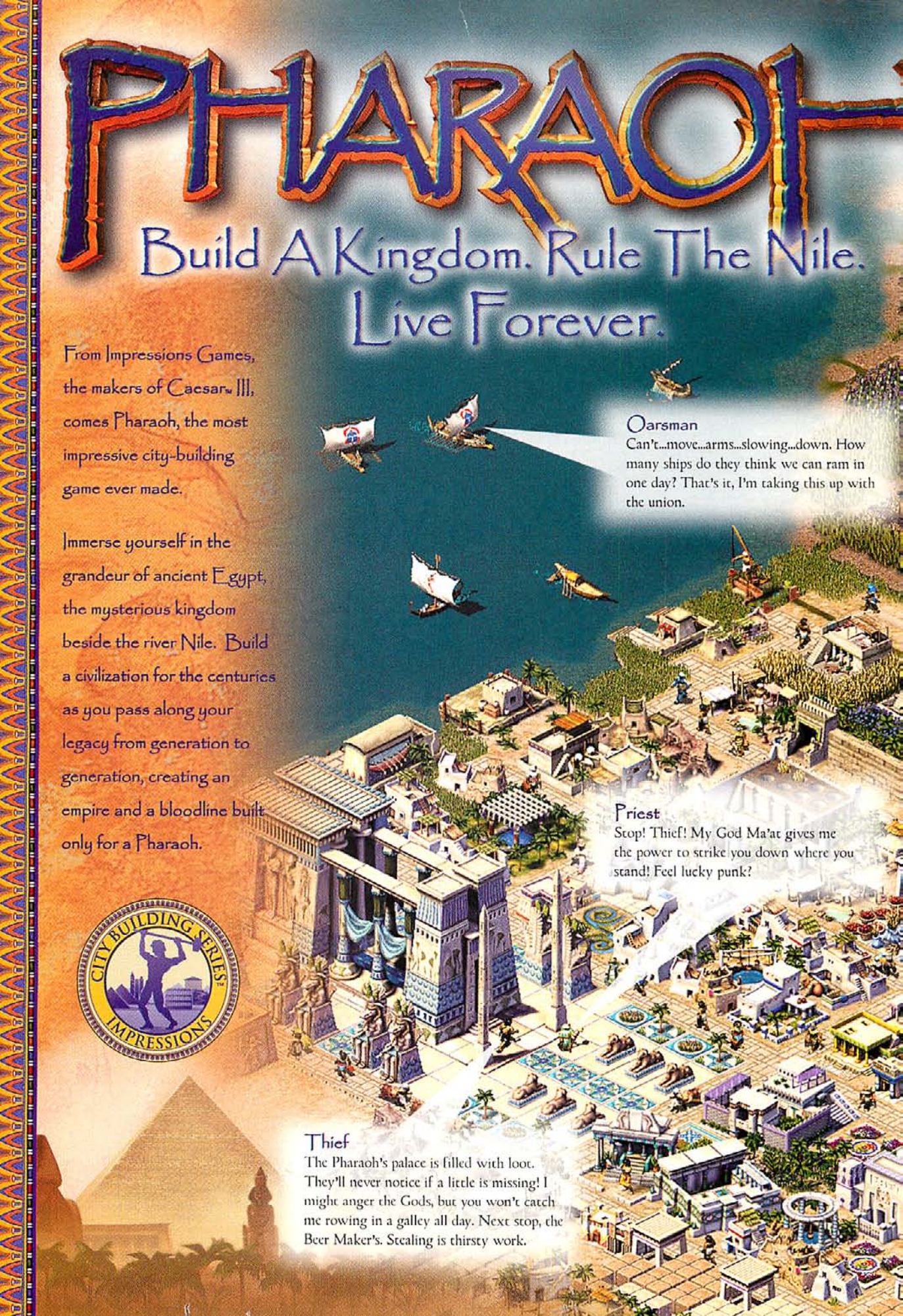

CITY BUILDING SERIES
IMPRESSIONS

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Watch the largest monuments ever made assembled brick-by-brick. Never has a city-building game been so beautiful!
Adjust the difficulty – from easy to expert – and use the same point and click interface as Caesar III.
Nile Farmer
Nobody told me that when the Nile floods I have to work on the pyramids. Why didn't I go to embalming school like Mom wanted?
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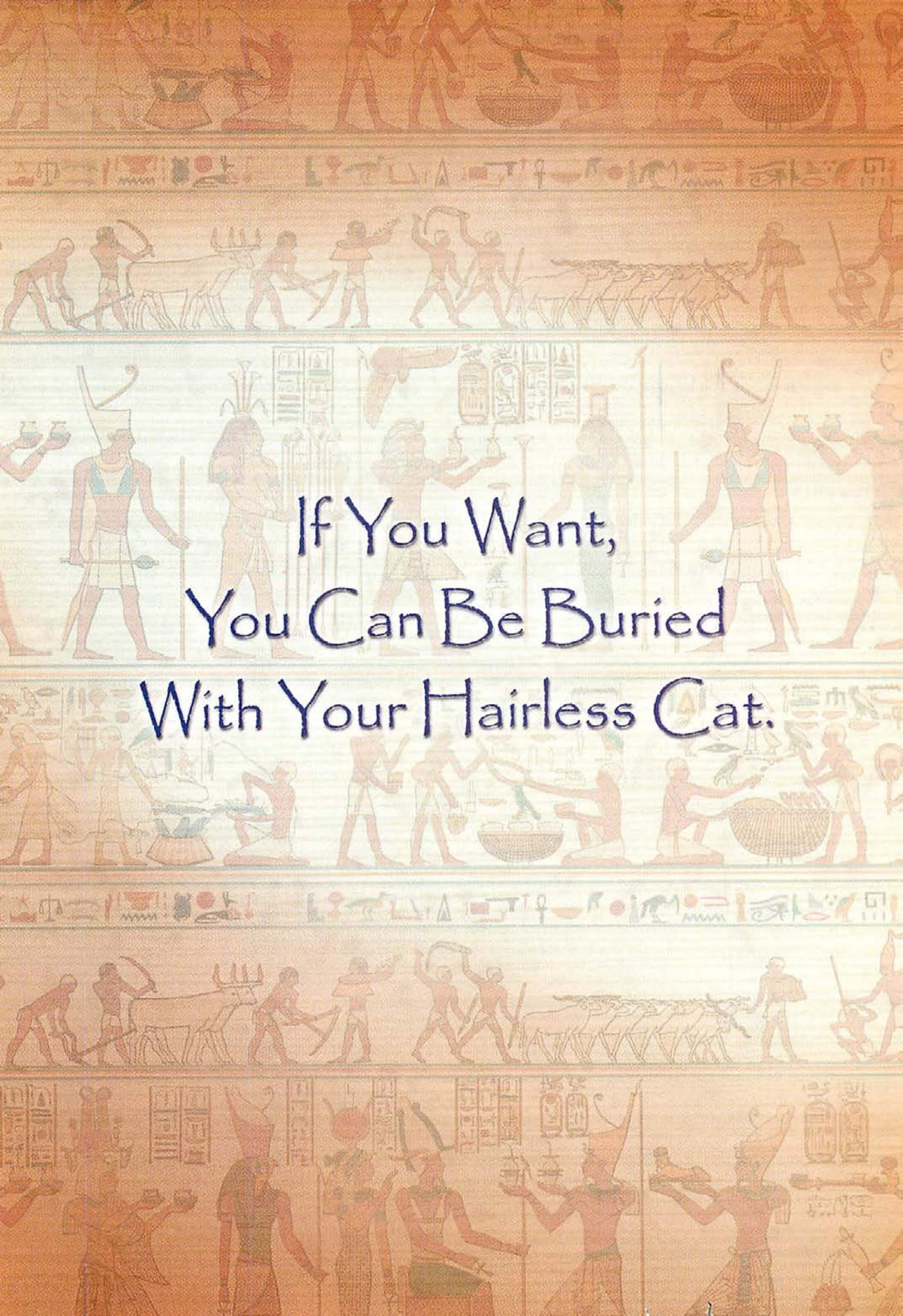

If You Want,
You Can Be Buried
With Your Hairless Cat.

Irrational Games Make Big Noise With Sequel to Quiet Classic

Successful Shock

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Contrary to popular gaming lore, the original SYSTEM SHOCK sold over 170,000 copies and was not a commercial failure. But it is true that when initially released in 1994, Looking Glass's ground-breaking game was overlooked by a lot of gamers, although greeted with favorable reviews. Some gamers erroneously dismissed it as a DOOM clone, even though it was actually the offspring of a line of games that preceded any of id Software's first-person shooters.

SYSTEM SHOCK defied pigeon-hole classification because it borrowed elements from a variety of genres. Yet it is precisely because of its creative design that it is now commonly, belatedly, regarded as one of the better games ever made.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

reviewed by P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki

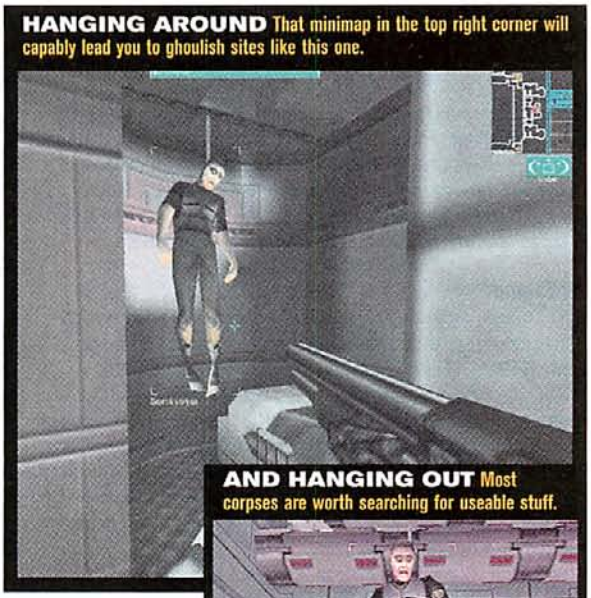
Irrational Games was given the task of creating a worthy successor to the cult classic original, but the good news is that they responded by delivering a game that both retains the best attributes of SYSTEM SHOCK while providing a fresh gaming experience.

Back to the Future

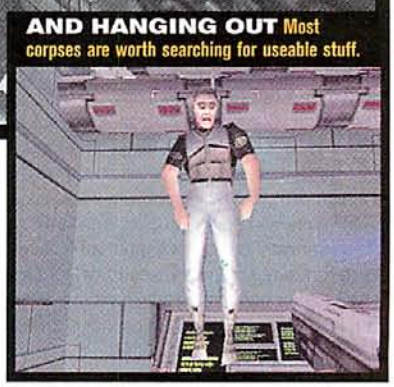
Even though it's a sequel, SYSTEM SHOCK 2 feels extremely original due to its science-fiction setting – rare for an RPG. The game's world offers a rich combination of psionic powers, contemporary and futuristic weaponry, and cyberpunkish implants and technical skills.

Here's the backstory: Prompted by the near destruction of Earth by the malevolent artificial intelligence, SHODAN, Earth's previously ineffectual governments formed the Unified National Nominate and imposed constraints on the power of mega-conglomerates. But after inventing faster-than-light technology, representatives of the corporate creator of SHODAN, TriOptimum Corporation, convinced the UNN to engage in a cooperative expedition to unexplored space.

Your character awakens in a crisis, as the ship that undertook the journey has apparently become infested by some form of alien life. Suffering from everyone's favorite plot device, amnesia, your character has received illegal cybernetic implants that grant superhuman abilities, and are just the kind of endowments needed in order to survive in SYSTEM SHOCK 2.



HANGING AROUND That minimap in the top right corner will capably lead you to ghoulish sites like this one.

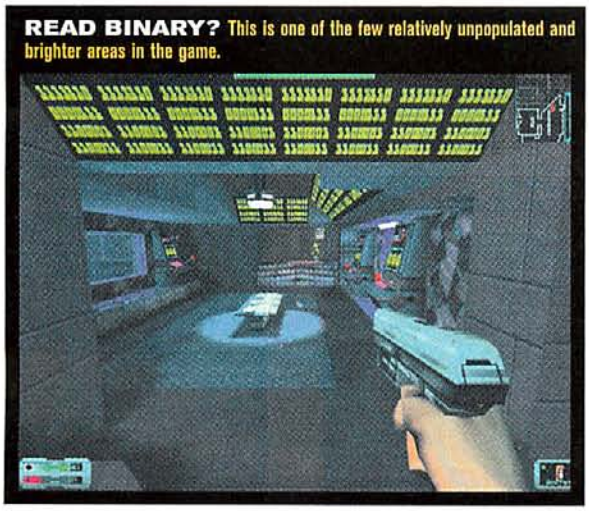


AND HANGING OUT Most corpses are worth searching for useable stuff.

After an effective introduction and a few early cut-scenes (more disruptive than interesting), the plot is conveyed primarily by listening to email and message logs. While the convenient placement of dozens of logs throughout the otherwise realistic environments is a bit contrived, the messages are engaging and gradually expand upon the fates of the storyline's key figures.

Unfortunately, since the settings have been abandoned by friendlies, the logs replace more significant interaction with non-player characters. There are also a handful of scripted scenes crafted using the game engine, and frequent and interesting ghostly re-enactments of recent events. Collectively, these methods convey intrigue and generate an eerie atmosphere that make SYSTEM SHOCK 2 feel unique.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2 isn't easily characterized. The role-playing



READ BINARY? This is one of the few relatively unpopulated and brighter areas in the game.

CGW RATED

PROS

Novel setting; good mix of action and RPG elements; immersive sound; an excellent interface; good thrills.

CONS

Gameplay too reliant on key hunts; characters are unbalanced at the beginning; blocky creatures.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 200MB free hard drive space, 32MB RAM, 4MB Direct 3D video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct 3D, and most major 3D cards. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Looking Glass/Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Irrational Games • **$40** • **www.shock2.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated violence, blood, and gore.

game elements are deeper than in the first game, as you're able to personalize your character's initial attributes and abilities and subsequently update them. The game looks and generally feels like a first-person shooter, but the RPG elements and detailed environments give gameplay more depth. Unlike a shooter, you'll find it hard to be successful in SYSTEM SHOCK 2 if you storm into every room, guns blazing. For good portions of the game the ammunition is scarce, forcing players to warily advance through dark hallways and lean around corners to look for resources and opportunities to dispatch foes.

Even solitary enemies can be dangerous opponents, especially early in the game, and travel through the genuinely creepy surroundings often slows to a crawl as a result of the need for caution. Carelessly trekking into an unscouted room can alert a security camera and result in your character's quick death, courtesy of a legion of enemies or a well-positioned laser turret. Hackers beware.

Sly Engine

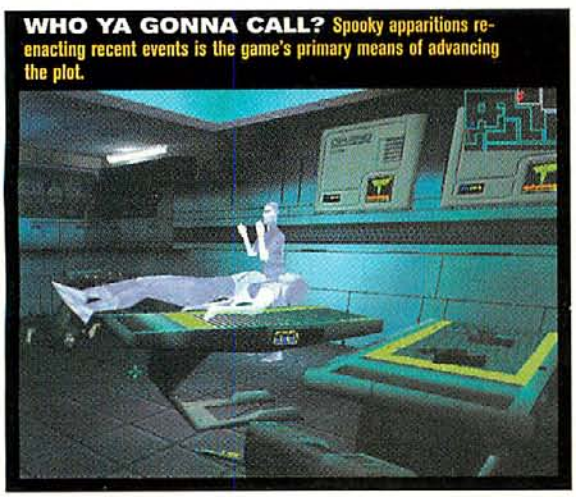
SYSTEM SHOCK 2's engine is well equipped for such stealthy maneuvering, consisting essentially of an enhanced version of Looking Glass's Dark Engine, created for THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT, combined with some of the better interface features and controls of the original SYSTEM SHOCK. The engine's 3D-accelerated graphics are capable of producing plausible, futuristic environments, and its fogging and lighting effects look particularly good. The engine seems less capable of depicting characters, as humanoid figures look crafted from a fusion of rudimentary polygonal shapes, masked by a decent texture map.

Since there's plot justifications for irregularly-shaped beings, and since most of the game's settings are extremely dark, the relatively simplistic character models work fine, even if they're not as detailed as action gamers now expect. The music is appropriately atmospheric but the game's crisp sound effects deserve particular praise.

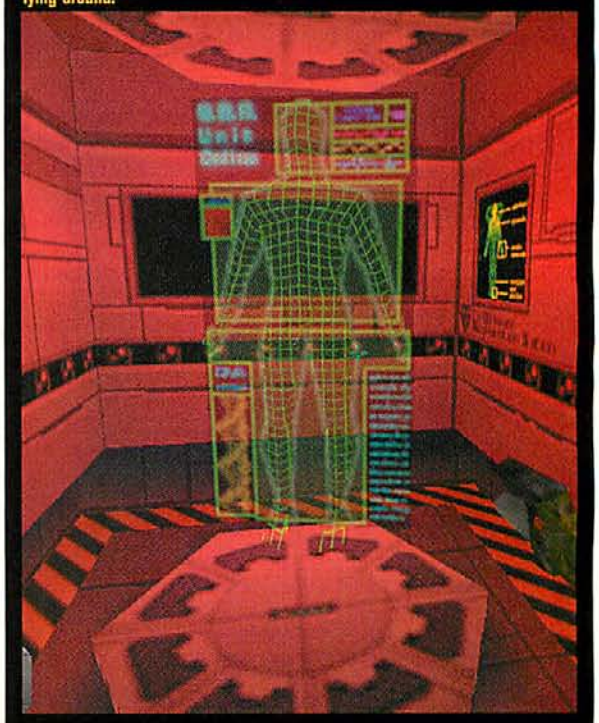
Environmental audio is a supported feature that's used to great effect. Straining in the darkness to detect the distant whirring noise of a security camera, the haunting drone of a hybrid, or the misleading banter of a protocol droid becomes an essential tactic. It's great stuff, and contributes significantly to the tense overall mood.

One of the best aspects of THIEF's engine was that it tracked how noisy and how visible (based upon surrounding lighting) your character was, and ensured that enemy AI responded accordingly. Those details have been ported intact to SYSTEM SHOCK 2. Stomping haphazardly through a well-lit area while blasting a shotgun will attract considerably more attention than in an action shooter – or in downtown L.A., for that matter.

Don't expect to be able to open the door to one room, deal with its inhabitants, and then calmly open the next door to do likewise. If any creatures are within earshot of combat, they'll try to join the fun, making it important to choose your fights carefully. The enemy AI is very



WHO YA GONNA CALL? Spooky apparitions re-enacting recent events is the game's primary means of advancing the plot.



A BRAND NEW ME Should you do the unthinkable and die, you may be able to bio-reconstruct yourself, if you have enough nanites lying around.

I WIN! A nice Vegas moment in an otherwise very spooky environment.

MR. SNEAKY Stealth is your friend. Move carefully, and you can sneak behind enemies and clobber 'em before they have time to react.

good, as even basic grunts charge after you instead of haplessly lumbering in pursuit, while certain deadly opponents will try to stick to shadows, where they'll launch barely visible rapid-fire attacks.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2's interface is very well designed, with a simple click of the mouse allowing you to switch between the game's two modes – Shoot mode, used for moving and engaging enemies; and Use mode, which freezes your view as in an adventure game, where you can explore the environment, use inventory items, and access your PDA. To help you navigate, you can superimpose semi-transparent compass directions over your viewing window, pull up an automap, or maintain a miniature version of it onscreen. Since your character is supposed to be grafted with a variety of cybernetic implants, there's a reasonable explanation for your character's ability to pull up HUD information, such as the digital compass or an assessment of an enemy's hit points. Thus, the interface actually contributes to the gaming world's ambiance, instead of detracting from it.

TOYS R US You'll have a battery of goodies at your disposal, including the usual pile of weaponry and a PDA that logs your mission goals.

Character Difficulties

Your character is initially trained in one of three branches of the UNN, acquiring the skills and attributes of either an officer of the OSA (emphasizing psionic powers), marines (weapon skills), or the navy (a combination of weapon skills, hacking, and other technical abilities). The professions don't add as much depth as you might otherwise suspect, since during the course of the game you can develop any skills or attributes regardless of your initial profession.

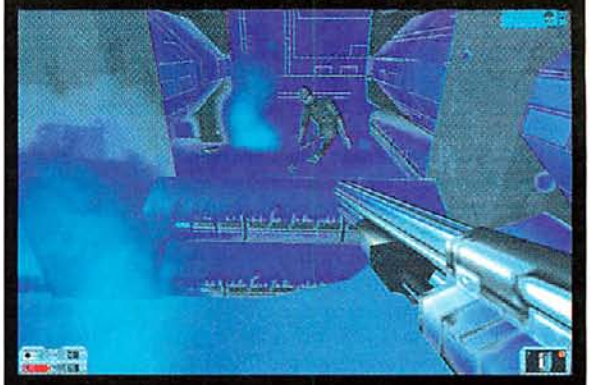
The professions are very unbalanced, especially at the beginning of the game when the cybermodules used to upgrade your character are extremely rare. It's almost impossible to survive without picking up at least a smattering of weapon and technical skills, and since navy characters start the game with those abilities, they have a huge advantage. Marines are essentially navy characters that have been stripped of technical skills. OSI characters are Luddites that lack both weapons and technical skills and are initially extremely fragile; there are very few items that allow them to replenish their psionic powers.

I suspect almost all players will develop characters with a mix of PSI, technical, and weapons skills, so that instead of adding meaningful depth, your initial character election is essentially just a hidden additional difficulty setting. During the course of the game you can develop truly different characters who are capable of successfully completing the game, but the initial selection between professions isn't relevant in the manner it was intended.

Lastly, even though the game features a novel setting and contains significant RPG elements, gameplay doesn't evolve significantly beyond that of recent first-person shooters. You'll spend much of your time firing at enemies around corners, opening crates, and engaging in key hunts that demand meticulous exploration.

But the realistic environments, intriguing plot, and creepy atmosphere make SYSTEM SHOCK 2 compelling throughout. A patch is planned to add a cooperative multiplayer mode to give the game additional longevity. Like the original classic, this is a hybrid game that effectively blends a variety of genres into a thoroughly enjoyable, accessible package. CGW

WINTER WONDERLAND Don't lie down in a pile of snow. Those shiny baubles to the left of the body are pretty valuable.



COME ON IN, THE RADIATION'S FINE! The graphic engine is capable of some good fogging and lighting effects.

SPANKING THE MONKEY These happy fellows may surprise you when you first meet them.

Cool Links

www.ttlg.com
Well-designed Looking Glass fan site.
www.shock2.com
The official site.

DRAKAN is a Genre-Crossing Blockbuster

Flight and Magic

There's a fine line between tribute and rip-off in any artistic endeavor. That thin median fades to non-existence in the gaming world, where tomorrow always looks a heckuva lot like yesterday. Is that ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON or THEME PARK? BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION or MASTER OF ORION? HALF-LIFE or – hey, wait a second...

The latest entrant to blur the lines is the Psygnosis-published, Surreal Software-developed DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME. Equal parts TOMB RAIDER, MAGIC CARPET, and traditional adventure, this game has one confusing family tree. So does it rip off the classics or pay homage to them? Hell, I don't know. I'll have to let the great minds of our generation ponder that one. All a Coors-guzzling deadbeat like me can say is that DRAKAN is a whole lotta fun to play. It's a truly inspired example of gaming artistry that makes both the publisher and developer two companies to watch in the future.

DRAKAN
reviewed by Brett Todd

DRAKAN is the story of a girl and her dragon. Rynn is an athletic young lady (which in the gaming universe means that she possesses both spectacular breasts and an aerobicized behind) who becomes bound to the legendary dragon Arokh as both friend and rider, while attempting to rescue her brother Delon. As a Dragon Rider, her mission becomes even more perilous. Rynn and Arokh soon find themselves fighting to save both her brother and the very world of DRAKAN from the forces of darkness. Hey, what were you expecting? Poetry?

Despite the routine storyline, DRAKAN captured my imagination from the moment I started playing. Much of this was due to the simple yet elegant design. The game unfolds like an adventure, with initial goals soon branching off into others. You might begin one of the 11 campaign maps by searching for a specific location, but then meet up with a character who will give you another quest. Some quests are routine "give me this and I'll give you that" tasks, while others advance the main plot. These missions will lead through diverse worlds with landscapes that encompass everything from a volcanic hell to verdant forests.

Everything about the game is combat-intensive. While you will converse with the odd person, you're more apt to kill anyone you run into. When Rynn is on the ground (think TOMB RAIDER mode), she has to wade through hordes of enemies. When Arokh soars through the sky (think MAGIC CARPET mode), he doesn't do so alone. The engine handles all this fairly well, using either a configurable keyboard and mouse setup or a joystick/gamepad for control input. The third-person vantage point will occasionally hiccup, though. Your viewing angle will sometimes be obscured by trees, cavern walls, or the like. I can't recall ever losing a battle because of this, however.

Multiplayer is fully supported over the net. Ten maps are included for three different games: Dragon Match (players choose dragons and take to the sky, deathmatch-style), Melee Deathmatch (ground combat only), and Master of the Dragon (players start on the ground and compete for the mastery of a dragon). While I didn't get the opportunity to test multiplayer out, these varied modes promise a lot of replay value as long as

FREUDIAN SLASH If Sigmund were alive today, I'm sure he'd have something to say about the male game designers who created luscious Rynn and her great big sword.

CAN WE STILL CALL THIS A FURBALL? Aerial combat in DRAKAN can be both exciting and frustrating. While fighting airborne enemies like the Succubus is a nice twist on the hack-n-slash norm, the controls could use refinement.

CGW RATED

PROS
Engaging and multifaceted gameplay; beautiful visuals and sound effects; inspired level design; diverse multiplayer modes.

CONS
Engine can't always keep up in combat; Arokh flies like a pig.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator video card, 400 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 233MHz.
3D Support: Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to eight players via Internet or LAN.

Publisher: Psygnosis • Developer: Surreal Software • $40 • www.psygnosis.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, violence

the obvious technical issues have been addressed.

All the standard adventure/role-playing conventions make an appearance in solo play. Magic potions will restore your health, make you invisible, and so on. Special crystals also add to your destructive arsenal. More than 50 weapons are included for Rynn, from rusty axes to magical swords. She will also find various suits of armor during the course of her travels. Arokh starts out with the expected fiery breath, but soon finds different runes that allow him to increase his power. By the time you're through, Arokh will have belched gas, lightning, ice, and lava.

STAFF CUTS, MEDIEVAL STYLE Rynn comes to the rescue of this poor victim of old-fashioned "downsizing."

DRAKAN features a good range of villains upon which to test your murderous prowess. The troll-like Wartoks can both slash and head-butt you into submission. Orcs are irritating little guys with a tendency to duck your best blows. Giant spiders and the Lovecraftian Scavengers both kill and creep you out.

More challenging enemies such as the demonic Succubus and evil dragons turn up later in the game. Unfortunately, many are by turns cunning foes and mouth-breathing morons. I've had some flee in the midst of a beating and others simply stop on the verge of beating me into a bloody pulp.

BURNIN' FOR YOU Rynn makes sure that this Wartok carries a torch for her. Secondary attack mode with her nifty flame blade is as beautiful as it is deadly.

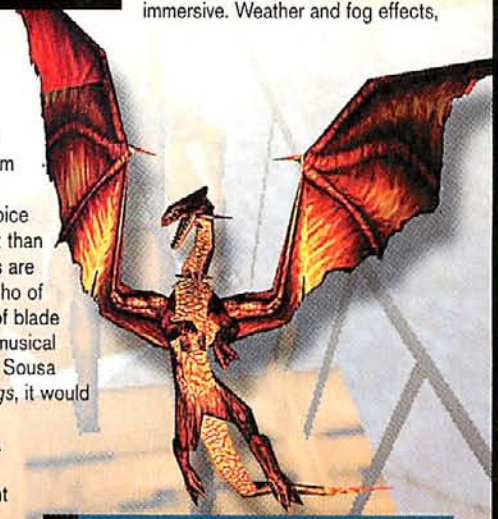
My lone major annoyance with gameplay is aerial combat. For a legendary dragon who fought many a battle in his day, Arokh lumbers about with all the agility of a hedgehog in a hang glider. Any serious opposition in the skies always takes me out a good seven or eight times before I get in a few lucky shots. This can be a serious drag in some stages of the game, and I doubt that I would enjoy dragon vs. dragon multiplayer for this reason.

The Surreal 3D engine does yeoman work with the visuals. Each environment is lovingly depicted and fully immersive. Weather and fog effects, along with some fantastic colored lighting, complete the illusion.

Character animations are equally good. Rynn moves like the lithe warrior she's supposed to be, and the Wartoks stomp around like they just emerged from under a fairytale bridge.

With the exception of the atrocious voice acting (Rynn sounds more like a mall rat than a noble Dragon Rider), the audio effects are similarly fantastic. Rushing water, the echo of every movement in a cavern, the clang of blade on blade – all is wholly believable. The musical score is similarly inspiring; if John Philip Sousa scored a film version of *Lord of the Rings*, it would sound like this.

DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME is a must-play for anyone who experienced the TOMB RAIDER rush (and subsequent letdowns of the mediocre sequels) and loved it. It renews third-person gaming with so many intriguing new twists, that even those burned out by TOMB RAIDER clones will still find something to enjoy here. CGW



Cool Links

www.planetdrakan.com
Killer DRAKAN site on the GameSpy Network.

drakan.telefragged.com
Another monster fan site.

Now, That's One Fine Axe!

THE RACES ARE ALIGNING.

THE ARMIES ARE GATHERING.

THE APOCALYPSE IS APPROACHING.

AND PEACE IS CURLED UP IN THE FETAL POSITION, WHIMPERING.

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"INCREDIBLY DETAILED GRAPHICS MAKE THIS THE MOST LIKELY CONTENDER TO THE FANTASY TURN-BASED CROWN." - PC ACCELERATOR

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It's No Revolution, but Jagged Alliance 2 Is a Tough Strategy Gem

¡Viva Arulco!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2

reviewed by Jeff Green

She is evil. A driven bitch. She is Deidranna Reitman, the self-proclaimed "queen for life" of Arulco, a small third-world nation now suffering under its 10th year of ruthless oppression. She has killed her father-in-law, framed her husband for the crime, beaten down her own citizens, and is now bleeding the country's resources dry. Your mission, in Sir-Tech's long-awaited, finally-released JAGGED ALLIANCE 2, is to take this evil bitch down.

And as you hire your mercenaries, assemble your squads, and attack the land sector by bloody sector, you will experience the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you are not only doing the right thing for Freedom and Justice, but you're also knee-deep in one of the toughest, most entertaining, and flat-out best strategy games of the year.

It's not easy – and that may turn off more casual gamers – but then, who ever said that taking down military dictatorship was easy?

HARD FOUGHT JA2's tactical battles – complete with varying stances, obstacles, a battery of weapons, and more – can be long, slow, difficult affairs. You'll earn every sector you take.

Party for Your Right to Fight

Like Sir-Tech's original game of a few years back, JA2 takes a standard strategy-game framework and livens it up with some role-playing elements. The game begins, actually, in standard RPG fashion: You create a custom character, with ten standard RPG stats (though I can't honestly say I looked at many of them beyond Marksmanship). After creating your own character, you go on an online shopping spree to hire your first group of mercenaries.

All of the hiring, equipment-buying, and much of the information you receive in the game is handled through a clever interface that emulates the laptop computer you're supposedly packing next to your assault rifle and canteen. To hire mercenaries, you log onto the Web and go to a merc-hiring Web site. To order weapons and ammo, you link to an online depot. Throughout the game, you'll receive messages and files over email, while a history file constantly updates your current missions and quests. It's a great idea that Sir-Tech executes perfectly, complete with a "You've got mail" alert and cheesy banner ads on the Web pages.

MURDER.COM All of your mercenary hiring takes place over the Web, which we all know can be a source of great evil.

Gameplay from here on out is divided mainly between two screens. On the Map screen, you take care of all the strategic macro-management. Here, you'll organize mercs into squads, arrange specialized assignments (such as healing other mercs and training local militias), negotiating merc contracts, and monitoring your finances as well as your squads' progression through the game's 200+ sectors.

Keeping a constant eye on all of this – and there is a lot – is key to your success in JAGGED ALLIANCE 2. Spend your money too fast or too loosely, and you'll find yourself with no resources for needed equipment or fresh, experienced mercs when you need them. Fail to rest or heal your mercs properly, or neglect to train the local militias, and Deidranna's forces will eat you for lunch. You must perform a tricky balancing act of moving forward as quickly as possible, while being efficient and patient enough to keep your squads healthy, well-equipped, and well-positioned. It is impossible to win this game by just blundering forward without a plan.

Bring the Noise

The other half of the game takes place on the Tactical screen, where sectors are rendered in isometric, 2D fashion *ala* FALLOUT or BALDUR'S GATE. The artwork is not stunning, but it gets the job done, with enough variety in terrain, structures, and obstacles to keep things interesting. Those looking for flashy 3D eye candy, however, should look elsewhere.

When you enter a sector occupied by the enemy, a pop-up screen allows you to retreat, have the computer auto-resolve the combat, or enter the sector yourself to play out the combat. Your squad moves through the sector in real time until you encounter the enemy, when the game switches into turn-based mode.

For each turn, each merc has a certain number of points that can

CGW RATED

PROS

Deep, complex gameplay; tough computer opponents; clever interface; enough open-ended, addictive strategy gaming.

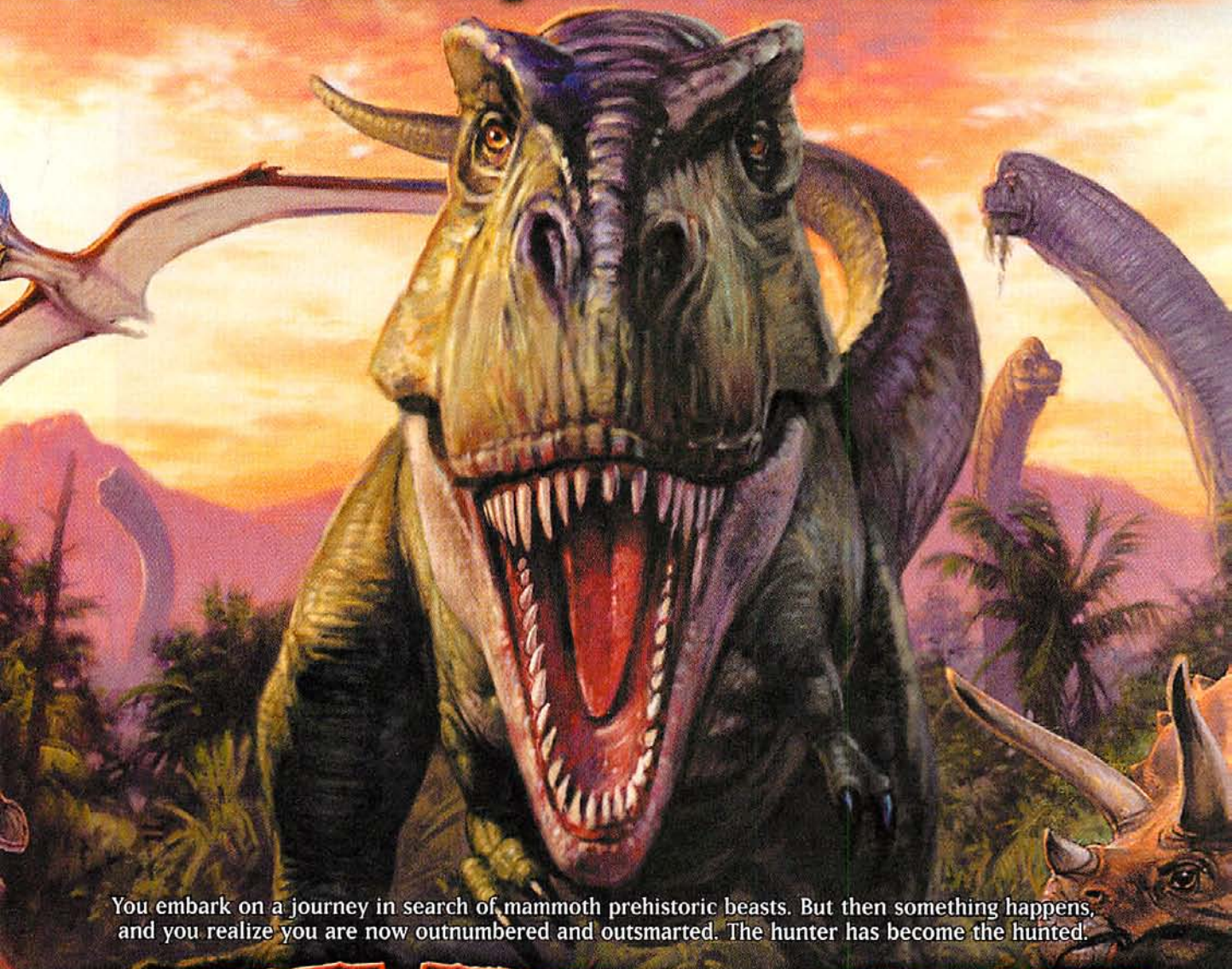
CONS

May be too slow-paced for some; battles can be extremely hard and tedious.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, 32MB RAM, 373MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 166MHz, 64MB RAM, 854 hard drive space.
3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: TalonSoft • **Designer:** Sir-Tech Canada • **$50** • **www.sir-tech.com**
RSAC Rating: Violence 4 (of 4); Sex 3; Language 4

It's Not Just The Technology Breaking New Ground, It's The Footsteps Of A 10-Ton T-Rex!



You embark on a journey in search of mammoth prehistoric beasts. But then something happens, and you realize you are now outnumbered and outsmarted. The hunter has become the hunted.

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Action Forms

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

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be used to move, change position (prone, sitting, or standing), fire a weapon, use items, or reload weapons. Position really makes a difference, as does weapon range. Each turn presents you with numerous options, and requires careful planning – especially since, early in the game, the enemy almost invariably has better, longer-range weapons than you.

As you progress, your weaponry and skills get better, but the fighting, if anything, gets harder, with more enemies per sector with even more brutal weaponry. Battles, in general, can be slow, demanding affairs – I'd often spend hours trying to beat a single sector on the game's lowest difficulty level – and as such might wear on some gamers' patience, especially those craving instant gratification.

About the AI, well, I've played worse. During some battles, you'll swear it's cheating, as it seems to miraculously score a hit every turn, no matter the obstacle, while you miss constantly. At other times it's absolutely brain dead, sending troops practically running into your arms in plain sight. Overall, however, it feels right. Deliberate, strategic thinking is usually rewarded, while barreling forward with guns blazing will earn you a trip to the Load Game screen every time.

DUELIN' BANJOS The game's many NPCs, such as this family of hillbillies east of Cambria, provide a constant source of entertaining dialog.

DOOFUS FOR HIRE Creating your own custom merc allows you to put yourself in the game. The squad would be nothing without me.

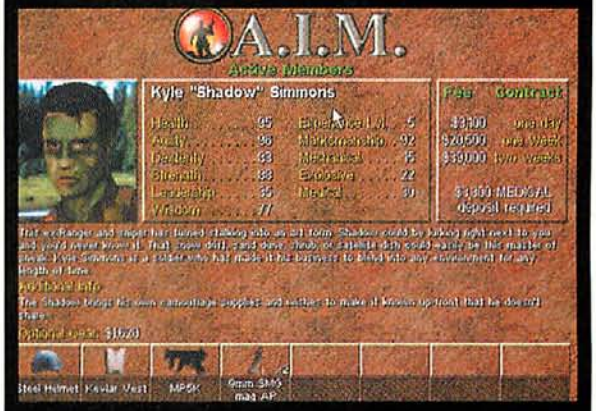
Louder Than a Bomb

JA2's trump card is the mercenaries themselves. There are dozens of them to choose from in the game, each with his or her own distinct personality. Each has a huge number of sound bites sprinkled liberally throughout the game, and while some can get awfully repetitive, others are hilarious, and succeed greatly in providing the game with a constant source of comic relief in what might otherwise be a rather dour experience.

It's not just ear candy, either, but is tied directly into gameplay. Mercs will tell you when they're tired, or when their contracts are up. Some refuse to work with one another. Once they've attained a certain level of experience, they'll even up their fees on you. As in an RPG, I found myself getting oddly attached to them (even, or maybe especially, the moronic Steroid), and ended up reloading the game whenever one of them would die.

While the game only has one long single-player campaign and no multiplayer, much of the replay value comes from trying different mercs, or combinations of mercs. I played two games at once – one at home and one at work – and they were completely different experiences. The game's structure is totally non-linear (though you are warned which sectors to avoid early in the game), so there is endless opportunity to devise new strategies to try to whittle your winning time down. Random side quests will also keep you busy, as will experimenting with the game's many found objects, which, though undocumented, will often combine into useful new weapons and tools.

NICE PERSONALITY JAGGED ALLIANCE 2's mercenaries aren't just generic stick figures, but a randy assortment of lowlifes, psychopaths, and fun-loving killing machines.



THE BIG PICTURE Use the map view to keep an eye on your progress through Arulco, make assignments, and negotiate with your mercs.

I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM Random encounters with NPCs can be fortuitious. Here you gain not only another merc, but a truck to tool around in as well.

Finally, about the lack of multiplayer: thank goodness. I loved this game, but I can't imagine anything more boring than playing it, turn by turn, with a friend. JAGGED ALLIANCE 2's joy comes from your interaction with the mercs. Other humans aren't needed here.

Countdown to Armageddon

Ultimately, JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is probably too tough and too slow-paced for the casual gamer, and the somewhat crude graphics may leave newer gamers wondering what the fuss is all about. But hardcore gamers looking for a serious challenge may not find a more satisfying, entertaining, turn-based strategy game this year. CGW

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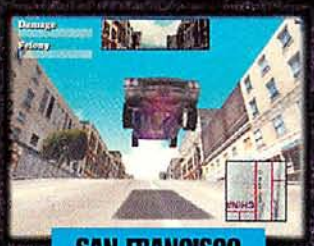

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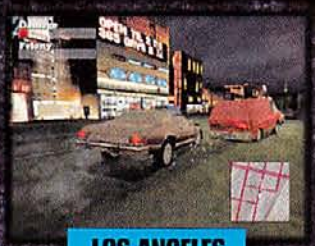

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REFLECTIONS

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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www.gtgames.com

Acclaim Almost Delivers Comic Book Justice

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

SHADOWMAN
reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

The comic book license seems almost inherently doomed. Discounting the Marvel characters in Capcom fighting games, can you think of any good comic book games? The last comic-book based game I had any fun with was SPIDERMAN for the Atari 2600. So imagine my surprise, and sigh of relief, when I found that Acclaim went and made a pretty good game out of a comic book: SHADOWMAN. It's not a great one, but leagues ahead of the trash from other licenses.

For those familiar with the comic series, the game takes place around the first story arc of the series' relaunch. For everyone else: You play Mike LeRoi, who is essentially a combination hitman/shaman when he becomes Shadowman. The backstory is that Legion (from Mark 5:9) has recruited five serial killers and plans to bring about the Apocalypse. What Shadowman must do is travel into Deadside (the place where the dead rest), and acquire the Dark Souls before Legion and his Five do. Once Shadowman has acquired all the Dark Souls, he can defeat Legion.

Just Me and My Shadowman

At its heart, SHADOWMAN is another third-person perspective action game, but with a lot more action than the TOMB RAIDER series. Shadowman isn't here to explore; he's here to violently exorcise some souls. Inbetween the gun/voodoo shootouts, you have a wee bit of puzzle solving, mainly finding special keys or deactivating gigantic machines.

IT'S THE 60'S ALL OVER AGAIN The cutscenes are rendered by the in-game engine, so there's none of that goofy FMV inbetween levels.

Graphically, the game is beautiful and is probably the slickest looking third-person title out there right now. The levels look great, especially Deadside, which alternates between the surreal imagery of a Bosch painting and the harsh, gritty darkness of David Fincher's *Seven*. Also, the levels are nonlinear; while there is an overall set path, you go through the game and open up different areas at different times, and you can travel between them at any time. If you're stuck in one place, you can go back to a location unlocked earlier to see if there is more to explore.

The controls are more TOMB RAIDER than HERETIC II, slanted toward keyboard or gamepad control. While the mouse can be used, it's not nearly as well implemented as HERETIC II's mouselook.

Stick a Pin in Me

While SHADOWMAN looks like a great start, some things bog it down. The enemy AI isn't stellar. Once I started using the strafe keys, I literally ran circles around the enemy while firing. Also, the game can feel very repetitive. I have no trouble running and gunning incessantly in other games, but after a session of doing so in SHADOWMAN, I feel like moving on to something else. There didn't seem to be enough puzzle elements to balance out the relentless action.

TWO-FISTED TALES Shadowman is ambidextrous, so if you're good, you can put a gun in each hand and take on bad guys John Woo-style.

LIVE AND LET LIVE Liveside doesn't look as good as Deadside, as you can see on this exterior level without Acclaim's usual heavy fog.

The save-game system has a bad case of console-itis. Yes, you can save and load at any time, but why is there a quick-save command but no complementary quick-load? If the quick-load was going to be omitted, then the game should at least automatically restore from your last save, not from the beginning of the level.

SHADOWMAN is a good start, both for Acclaim and for the industry. It shows that a decent game can be made from a comic license. For third-person action fans who don't mind jumping and gunning a lot, it's a reasonable buy. Let's hope that Acclaim uses this as a springboard for some really good comic-book based projects. (Note to Acclaim: either do an X-O Manowar game, or have Christopher Priest write the next Shadowman game.)
CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful graphics engine; good-looking Deadside levels; nonlinear design.

CONS
Repetitive; not enough puzzle elements; ineffective mouse-control; incomplete save-game system.

Cool Links

www.turokcave.com/shadowman/
Site specifically for SHADOWMAN the game.

www.comicbookresources.com
A great site for comics in general.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, DirectX6.1-compatible sound and video cards, 20MB hard drive space, 3D-accelerator card. **Recommended** **Requirements:** Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 620MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment • **Developer:** Acclaim Studios Teeside • **$40** • **www.acclaim.net**

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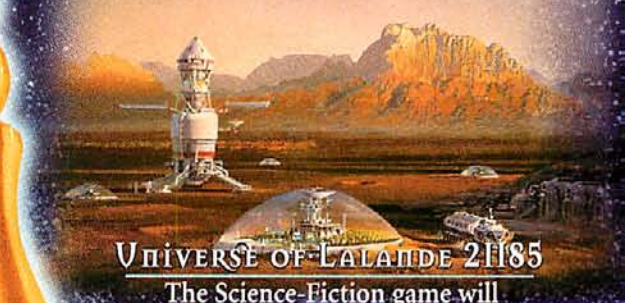

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93%
Editors' Choice Award

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

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Strategy Game of the Year Runner-Up
PC Gamer

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Warhammer 40,000 Meets Panzer General II

Respect Your Eldars

Have you ever played a science-fiction computer game and come away with the feeling that the gaming universe was so cheesy and shallow, it must have been thrown together by a bunch of weary, caffeine-high programmers locked in a room until they could finally come up with something? Good news: RITES OF WAR avoids that problem, using as its setting the highly developed Warhammer 40,000 tabletop gaming system. Combining aspects of that universe with the PANZER GENERAL II gaming engine results in a thoroughly engrossing, turn-based strategy game.

RITES OF WAR
reviewed by Jeff Lackey

Lictors and Gargoyles and Genestealers, Oh My!

In RITES OF WAR, you assume the role of the Eldars, a race human-like in appearance but far-advanced in capabilities. A victim of their own advanced mental abilities, they've destroyed their home world and travel in living spacecraft called Craftworlds. Your Craftworld stumbles upon a planet that was genetically designed long ago – an Eldar utopia called Davinuus. Scouting parties have been met with unexpected attacks from human Imperial forces. Outnumbered and outgunned, you know an all-out war with the human Imperials is a losing proposition; however, there are ancient Eldar artifacts on this planet, items of power far too great to fall into inferior human hands. You must therefore send localized war parties to retrieve these heirlooms before the humans can find them. You soon realize that something very strange is happening on Davinuus, something involving the Alien-like Tyranids.

The campaign plot doesn't sound remarkably different from that of a dozen other science fiction computer games, but in RITES OF WAR, the Warhammer 40,000 environment makes all the difference. There are literally volumes dedicated to the description of the Eldar, Imperial, and Tyranid races, and the depth of this development is obvious when examining the Encyclopedia included in RITES OF WAR.

Unit variety is the game's spice, with 33 types of Eldars, 18 each of the Imperial Forces, and the Tyranids. Unit types include Infantry, Scouts, Assault, Aerial, Devastator, War Machines, Artillery and "Psykers" (psychic power specialists). The visuals of the squads are detailed and tantalizing, from the huge Eldar War Walkers to the terrifying Tyranid Carnifex. The drawback of the detailed graphics is that the units are very large, and not scaled to each other or to the terrain. So a Space Marine infantry icon is the same size as a huge War Walker, and both icons dwarf the surrounding mountains and forests.

BAD TO THE BONE The Encyclopedia describes each unit in great detail, such as this Genestealer.

The game interface is very smooth and point-and-click simple. Icons have a "strength plate" that displays the strength, remaining movement and attacks, and psychic influence all at a glance.

This Land Is My Land

Not surprisingly, RITES OF WAR plays like a lot like a game of PANZER GENERAL II. There's a deliberate "rock/scissors/paper" feel to it, with every unit having specific strengths and weaknesses. The

WALK THIS WAY A War Walker catches a lone Imperial war machine in the open.

CGW RATED

PROS
A great gaming universe using the great PANZER GENERAL II engine; interesting campaign; versatile scenario editor.

CONS
Only one campaign from one race's point of view.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** None. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-4 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment • **Developer:** SSI • $50 • www.ssionline.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

Lands of Asheron

INSIDE:

Follow thousands through the portal

A slice of the Dereth bestiary

Orienteering the vast Isle of Dereth

Asheron's Call™

Asheron Beckons You to

Encounter three cultures, thousands of adventurers, and countless monster

A rogue and a sorceress

A blademaster and a life mage

Aluvian Realm

As the first people to answer Asheron's call and venture to Dereth, the Aluvians brought with them a strong sense of justice and right. Many an Aluvian would rather go penniless and hungry, and be on the right side of the law, than be wealthy, powerful, and thriving on the misery of others. Even decades later, their utilitarian architecture reflects these traits. Unfortunately, these cultural tendencies often lead them to rebellious and warlike ways. The most famous of the Aluvians on Dereth are the heroes Thorsten Cragstone and Elysa Strathelar. Their Aluvian values proved priceless when they led the human slaves to revolt against their insectlike Olthoi oppressors.

Gharu'ndim Domain

Descended from powerful magicians, gifted poets, and intrepid traders, many Gharu'ndim follow the belief that knowledge is power. Those lured to Dereth soon discovered they could not return home, but found the next best thing in the A'mun Desert. The famed noble Musansayn led the newly arrived to these comforting sand dunes. Here, they established towns and cities and followed the *Ghayaraqa Yadina* (the poem also known as *The Dozen Roads*). Skilled Gharu'ndim smiths have set up shop in many settlements and some have even started crafting their coveted scalemail armor. One such smith is Maqura al-Waryah in the settlement of Tufa.

Dereth.

s. Or just come for the gold.

An archer and a warrior

Sho Nation

Trained from youth for unarmed combat, a Sho is never defenseless. The elders use martial arts as a foundation for instilling the four principles called the Stones of Jojii: discipline, detachment, compassion, and humility. This philosophy is embodied in the meticulously crafted weapon, the tachi—a blade now forged in Derethian villages such as Baishi and Sawato. Although known to be reclusive, even the Sho on the homeworld of Ispar are beginning to trade with the distant Gharu'ndim and Milantan kingdoms. Certainly, for the Sho culture on Dereth to survive, they, as well as the other humans, must start working together.

A glimpse of the Denizens of Dereth

The Reed Shark
Terror of the Swamp

The crests of these man-sized, three-legged creatures emerging from the foliage may be the only warning of an impending attack. Often traveling in packs, these distant cousins of the aquatic Shallows Shark and tundra-dwelling Mattekar have been domesticated by the Tumeroks. Recent arrivals, however, should avoid them at all costs.

The Virindi
Masked Enigma of the Badlands

Wielding wicked-edged sickles, these floating, mystical beings strike fear into most sensible adventurers. Those who don't know about their staggering magical powers will soon find out. Travelers should always try to take on Virindi en masse. Lurking on the Obsidian Plain, these apparitions mask, cloak, and conceal both their physical appearance and their intentions on Dereth.

The Lugian
Giant from the Highlands

Among the mightiest of Dereth's monsters, these massive mountain-dwelling titans dwarf humans with their sheer size. Their strongholds are found across Southern Osteth, in the highlands of the Linvak Range. Even the lowest of their castes—the Laigus—can effortlessly dispatch an inexperienced explorer.

The Olthoi
Scourge of the Land

The bane of the Empyrean civilization, these vile, hulking insects once enslaved all of Dereth's humans. Today, they have been vanquished to the deepest subterranean reaches. Although Derethians want nothing more than to see these abominations extinct, the hard truth remains that Dereth still needs heroes—adventurers strong and brave enough to travel into the shadowy hives and survive what horror and bounty await within.

swamps, this broad expanse lacks safe havens for the weak and weary. Newcomers are advised to steer clear of these parts. Even Fort Tethana, the rumored human bastion in the northern reaches, lies amid throngs of fierce Tumeroks. It is far safer for unseasoned adventurers to stay in Osteth. On that side of the island, near the edge of human settlements, they can hone their skills by hunting lesser creatures with others of like experience.

fungus farms like this were a common sight in the Direlands.

Ringed by mountains, the Sho outpost of Wai Jhou sits in relative safety.

Overshadowed by Empyrean ruins, a Gromnie protects its lair from a blademaster.

DIRELANDS

INNER SEA

A Gharu'ndim town sun sets on another

Obsidian Plain

Sprawling across much of the lower Direlands is this ominous magical wasteland. Strange crystals, seeded long ago by magic gone awry, jut from a sea of volcanic glass. Neophytes can expect a swift death at the hands of the cloaked Virindi or other fiendish creatures that roam these parts. The few veteran adventurers returning safely from here claim some Virindi carry special gems that skilled jewelers can turn into powerful magical artifacts.

An enchanter hurls a deadly volley of lightning against a goldenback Tusker.

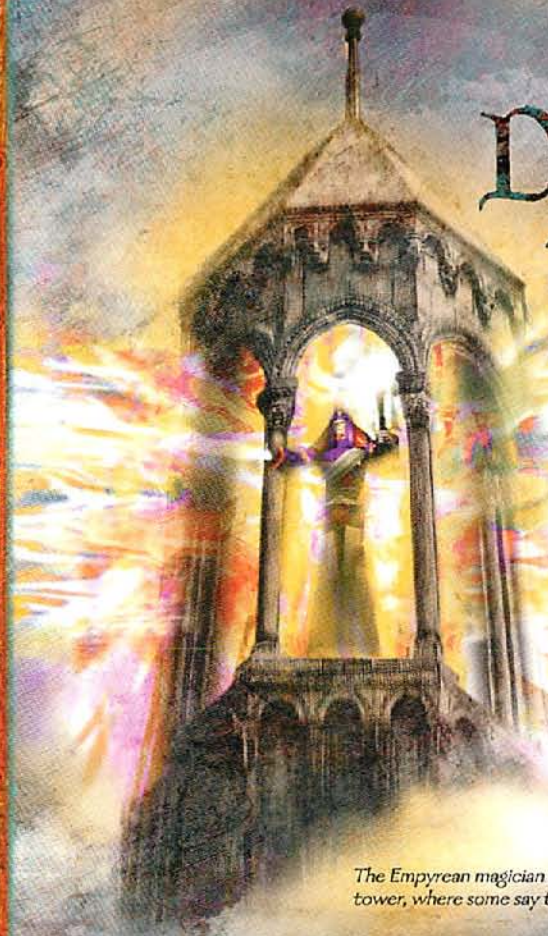
An adventurer feels the wrath of menacing Virindi on the Obsidian Plain.

OBSIDIAN PLAIN

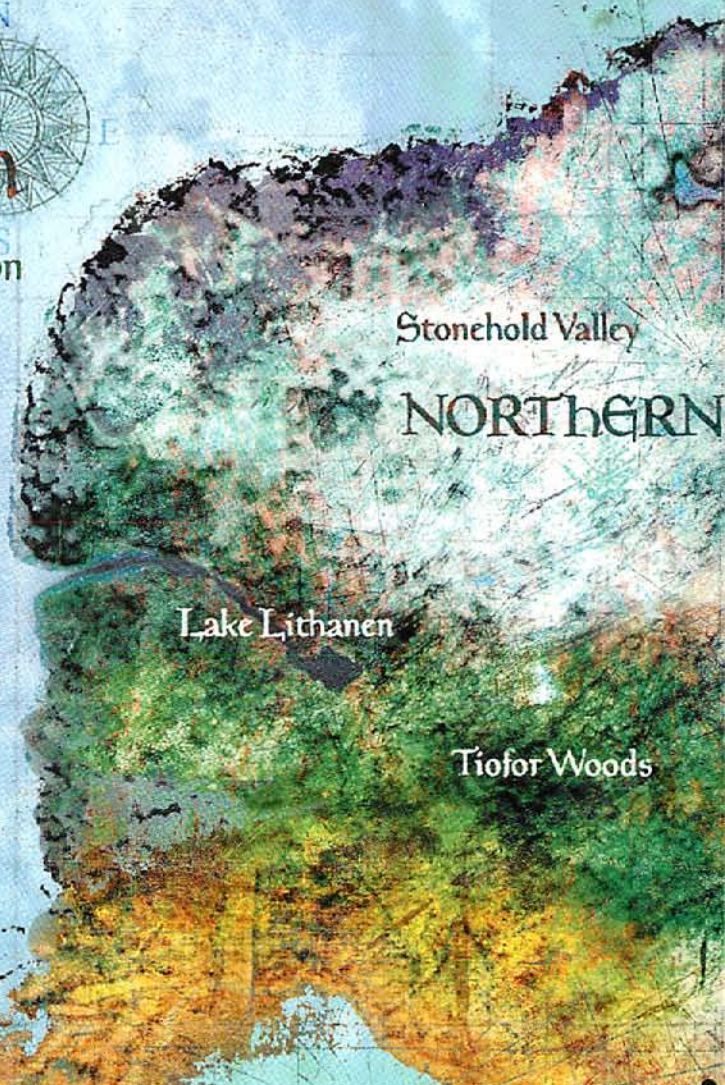
Discover Dereth

The Mysterious World of Asheron

Welcome explorers, to the mystical island of Dereth. Once called Ireth Lassal by the Empyrean many millennia ago, it is a land so vast that adventurers can travel a lifetime without seeing all its wonders. Along the way, observant travelers may discover traces of the long-lost Empyrean civilization. Even today, the call of the legendary Empyrean sorcerer Asheron lures outsiders by the thousands with promises of heroic deeds and epic quests.



The Empyrean magician Asheron in his hidden tower, where some say to this day he remains.



Direlands

Harsh, barren, and riddled with jagged mountains and sinister

Before the Founding, Aluvian slaves toiling in under-

Samsur

River Prosper

Dryreach

A'mun Desert

Yanshi

Tufa

raq

Blackmire Swamp

Sawato

Uziz

Al-Arqas

Shoushi

Yushad Ridge

Hebian-To

SOUTHERN OSTETH

Baishi

Nanto

glows as the Derethian day.

Linvak Range

Qalaba'r

Tensions flare as a standoff in the Linvak Range reaches a boiling point.

where some say his tomb now rests amid lairs of vicious Mosswarts.

Victory comes at a heavy cost: The rebel leader, Elysa Strathelar, suffers the loss of her beloved Thorsten Cragstone.

On a descent into the Grievous Vault, warriors face a fearsome Mu-miyah.

In the Aluvian town of Arwic, vassals await their patron.

A proud adventuring party returns with a Mattekar that has been ravaging the outskirts of Qalaba'r.

Southern Osteth

Site of the Armoredillo-ravaged A'mun Desert, Mosswart-infested Blackmire Swamp, and Mattekar-plagued Linvak Mountains, this region is also filled with numerous labyrinthine dungeons. In Qalaba'r, the scribe can direct adventurers to a nearby Lugian outpost. More experienced explorers should visit the Scribe Brother Gonun of Shoushi. He knows the path to an extremely treacherous descent, where Sho artifacts await the intrepid. It is best to form a fellowship of friends before attempting this perilous quest. First, though, you must step through the portal and answer Asheron's call yourself.

Asheron's Call™

A brave fellowship of Sho, Aluvians, and Gharu'ndims listen to their patron at the ancient Holtburg Menhir.

Northern Osteth

The great Mount Esper towers over the Derethian landscape, beckoning both thrillseekers and sightseers alike. Bring a companion to the spectacular snowy summit, where the dormant volcano now holds a placid blue lake. But be warned: Some have reported mysterious and deadly creatures in this area. To the southwest, cradled between the mountain ranges, the Tiofor Woods are home to tribes of bloodthirsty Banderlings and Tuskers. To the southeast lies the Aluvian town of Glenden Wood. There, near the Lifestone, a small shop carries an excellent assortment of bows and arrows. Just ask for the merchant Peldin Yewbender.

A Naqib trespasses into a Mattekar-inhabited area of the Lost Wish Range.

By Cragstone Falls, a courageous party gathers to hear tales of gallantry.

Middle Osteth

All three human heritages possess footholds in this immense, fertile plain. At the mouth of the River Prosper, the new Sho community Hebian-to has erected the Laughing Kirin Hall and the Shining Shield Tavern to give would-be vassals a place to seek out suitable patrons. To the north, the Isle of Tears rises in the midst of Lake Blessed. This island is the legendary site of the Underground City, where the hero Thorsten Cragstone dwelt

Allegiance System

Strength in Numbers

Starting out in Dereth can be daunting. You'll lack funds, lore, weapons, and armor. Fortunately, powerful nobles are always in search of new vassals. But choose your patron wisely. The right one will not only help you on your way, but can be a valued companion. Remember, though, when you become a patron yourself, you'll rise among the nobles only as long as you put the happiness of your charges ahead of your lust for power.

Magic System

An Incentive for Secrecy

Even with hundreds of spells in the hands of adventurers, there are hundreds more waiting to be discovered. In the ever-evolving world of Dereth, wizards are constantly vying to be the first to learn new methods of sorcery. For while a spell can be extremely powerful as long as its formula is kept to a few people, its strength will be fleeting once too many discover and use it. Wise magic users guard their spells, knowing those who control the most knowledge wield the most power.

Character Creation

An Identity All Your Own

With distinct heritage groups, nearly limitless facial features, and an array of clothing to choose from, the powerful character creation system makes it very unlikely you'll encounter two adventurers who look exactly alike. What's more, you'll select from a mix of skills and attributes from a myriad of options—all the way from the martial disciplines befitting a blademaster to the mystical arts of the sorcerer. In both appearance and talents, you'll be as unique in Dereth as you are in the world where you now reside.

Asheron's Call™

Answer the Call

TURBINE

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

msn Gaming ZONE
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Microsoft

www.microsoft.com/games/asheronscall

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key to success is discovering which squads are effective against and which are vulnerable to other squad types. Like any good strategy game, if you simply throw all of your cool-looking warriors at the enemy, you'll end up as reptile food.

Winning requires using effective combinations of your resources; for example, using stand-off weapons to weaken the enemy before closing in for melee combat, and keeping support fire close enough to contribute to tough battles. Additionally, "Strategies" are available for purchase before a scenario – the equivalent of Strategy cards in the miniatures game. These can turn the tide of a battle; for instance, using a Sabotage strategy on an enemy artillery unit will cause it to explode when it fires.

Another immersing aspect of RITES OF WAR is an RPG component. You can name your units and watch them grow up to 10 levels in experience. A basic Eldar unit may eventually gain enough experience to reach Exarch status, an extremely formidable foe. It's easy to become attached to a squad that you've named and has proven itself in numerous battles, advancing in skills and effectiveness. However, it's also quite difficult to keep your guys alive long enough to bond with them. Most scenarios are very evenly matched, as the AI examines your army before battle and adjusts the its forces to match your army's level and composition. Frequently the result is battles of attrition, with you winning by the skin of your teeth and leaving the battlefield with considerably fewer units than when you began.

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW The army management screen allows you to recruit new units and train experienced ones.

Give Me More

While there are a couple of mini-campaigns (three scenarios each) from the viewpoint of the Imperials and the Tyranids, the heart of the game is the 24-scenario full campaign covering the Eldar's attempts to right the wrongs on Davinuus. Beyond the absorbing story, the campaign maintains interest by offering a wide range of victory conditions, such as assassinating a key enemy leader, rescuing fellow warriors, finding and recovering a key artifact, and search and destroy missions.The problem is that there is only one full campaign, albeit a campaign that is fairly difficult to complete. True, you can replay the game and try out different army compositions, but the surprises originally presented in the plot will be gone. There is a scenario editor that will hopefully result in a wealth of battles appearing on the Internet. Still, one longs for a campaign involving the Imperials and the Tyranids that has the same plot quality of the Eldar campaign.

However, it is a tribute to the engrossing qualities of RITES OF WAR that the player finishes the campaign longing for more. If you have any interest in science fiction and strategy gaming, RITES OF WAR is a must. CGW

HOLDING THE FORT A pitched battle over a Tyranid fortress.

YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY Dealing with terrain is part of the challenge. Here, a valley forces your army to fight a narrow front.

Tabletop vs. Computer

If you're a tabletop Warhammer 40,000 fan interested in RITES OF WAR, or if you've played RITES OF WAR and are curious about its miniatures origin, you may be wondering what the key differences are. The first obvious difference is that in the tabletop game, a unit represents a single entity, while in RITES OF WAR each icon represents a squad. This results in a significant difference in the scale and tactics of battle. Additionally, strengths and weaknesses of units have been modified to avoid dominating, invincible units and to ensure balance. Finally, RITES OF WAR presents a very small subset of the vast Warhammer 40,000 universe, as a visit to any Warhammer 40,000 web site will demonstrate. Check out some of the sites below.

Cool Links

www.portent.net
www.thewarp.net/whammer
www.games-workshop.com/Warhammer40k/40kintro.html

How a Funky-Walking Girly-Man Saved the Universe

The Fonz as Savior

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

OUTCAST
reviewed by Jesse Hiatt

Imagine a typical American action film, made by Belgians and then translated back into English. The plot: a Homeric epic somewhere between the Bible and *Stargate*. The hero: part Fox Mulder, part Jesus, part The Fonz; a burly U.S. Navy Seal who walks like a runway model with a wedgie. Add to the mix a truly great music score, worthy of any blockbuster movie, performed by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. A strange mish-mash of elements to be sure, but the result is an extremely entertaining bit of interactive theatre. And what a refreshing change it is to have an experience on your computer that gives you the satisfaction you would normally only receive from a good book or mini-series.

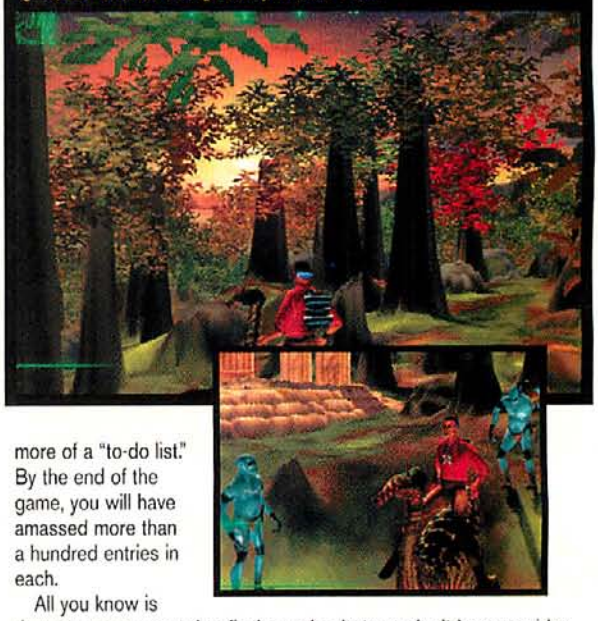
A well done 20-minute trailer opens up the game and sets up the story. You play Cutter Slade (an American name only Europeans could think of), one of the United States' best soldiers. Some kooky scientists were fiddling around and found a way to send a probe to a parallel universe, but got in over their heads. Basically, they screwed up so bad that the whole planet will get sucked into a void unless someone travels through to the other side and fixes up the probe. Of course, you're the poor sod stuck with the job, scientists tagging along.

You wake up in this strange parallel world with no gear, and no idea where the others are. Luckily, the creatures that found you are friendly and somehow speak some broken English. At this point, the game begins.

Stranger in a Strange Land

There is so much to learn about this new universe that you feel like a tourist dropped into a foreign land. You can't really understand what people are talking about half of the time. You don't know where to go, who to talk to, or what to do. The process of learning about this new place is made easier, though, by the use of your notepad and lexicon. Every time you learn the meaning of a new word, you automatically put an entry into your lexicon so you can look it up later. Your notepad works the same way, but is more of a "to-do list." By the end of the game, you will have amassed more than a hundred entries in each.

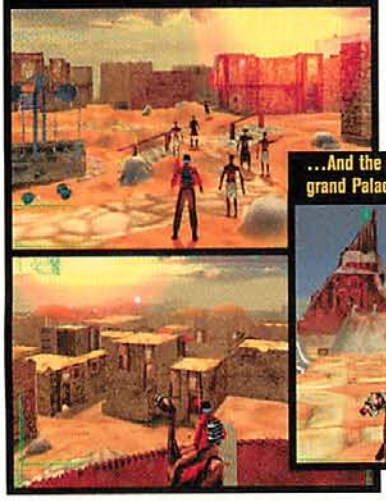
FOREST THROUGH THE TREES? Voxels do leaves good, no? Note the strange blue primitives I met.



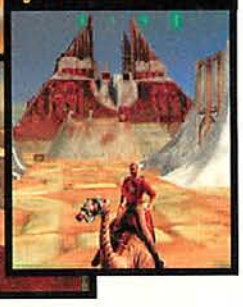
All you know is that you are supposed to fix the probe, but you don't have any idea where it is. The locals, as it turns out, think you were sent down by the gods to save them. This complicates matters, because they are all willing to help you but also expect you to act as their prophesied savior. This means you have to run around doing favors for everyone before they will have faith in you and help you on your mission. The wise-ass Cutter Slade makes an unlikely savior indeed, but ultimately, you'll fulfill the prophecy in spite of yourself and save both worlds from destruction.

I'm not going to tell you any other specifics about what happens, because the whole fun is experiencing it yourself for the first time. I will say that there is everything you could ask for in a good plot here: greed, love, corruption, faith, trust, oppression, and revolution. Of course, there are also cool weapons, plentiful ammo, and lots of stuff to kill. Occasionally you will find it fairly predictable, and the dialogue is only so-so at times, but hey, you try writing a screenplay for a movie that's 50 hours long.

DOWNTOWN The city of Okriana is the capital and center of the economy.



...And the location of the grand Palace Fae.



The Undiscovered Country

Once your adventure begins, you will find that you are not restricted by traditional levels with doors between them. There are a couple of very cool boss-like characters, but you can deal with them at your leisure. You are pretty much free to go where you please and do whatever you wish. The developers have used some subtle (and not so subtle) ways of corralling you into the plot, however. You can't kill too many innocents, because your reputation will go through the floor and make it impossible to progress. I also ran into a couple instances where my playing style conflicted with

CGW RATED

PROS
Extremely cinematic gameplay; very open and dynamic; good story and endearing characters.

CONS
Despite claims, looks and plays like crap on slow machines; can't look up or down.

Requirements: Pentium-II 200 MMX, 500MB free hard drive space, 32MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300, 64Mb RAM, 8X CD ROM drive.
3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Infogrames • Designer: Appeal • $40 • www.infogrames.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence; strong language

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Designed and developed in Germany by Wings Simulations, Panzer Elite™ is poised to take the high ground as the most realistic platoon-based WWII tank simulation yet seen for your PC.

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Germans Do Interfaces
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Germans Do Network Play
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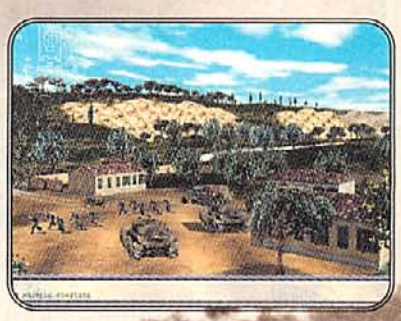

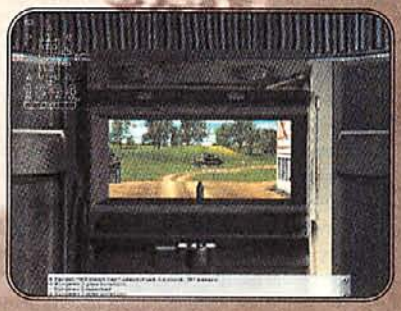

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WINGS

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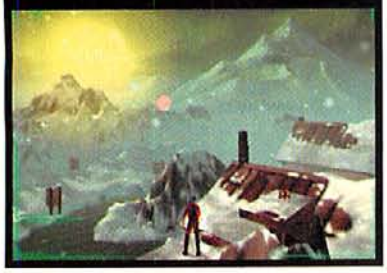
HARD ROCK CAFÉ The desert world of Motazar is full of miners and their nifty machines.

...And some token platform jumping.

WATERWORLD The region of Okasankar is a fisherman's paradise, but it is also home to some dangerous critters.

THE TRUMAN SHOW Collision detection problems allowed me this view "behind the curtain."

LET IT SNOW This is where you wake up and go through your little tutorial.



PUT MY FOOT IN HIS MOUTH I'm showing this guy who's boss.

the expectations of the scripting engine, but this was more of an annoyance, as nothing game-stopping occurred.

Outcast uses a voxel-based engine, which is useful for making large, open outdoor environments, but the downside is that it doesn't support 3D accelerators. Infogrames will tell you that this is a feature, making the game playable on practically any machine, but this is rubbish. In truth, it still looks like crap on slow machines, just in its own special way. I played it on a Celeron 300A at home (not overclocked) and it ran pretty well, but it would bog down when there was a lot of on screen action. On a PII 450, it ran great. Just like any system-hogging flight sim though, once you've seen it on a good rig, you won't want to play it on anything else.

My one real beef with the game relates to the camera control and weapon aiming. Probably due to the limitations of the engine, you can't look up or down very far. This totally bites when there is someone shooting at you from above, and you can't even look up far enough to see them. The auto-aiming function will latch on to these targets, but only some of the time. Invariably it will fail you at the worst possible moment. There is a first-person mode, but this is made almost entirely useless by the fact that when you try to aim up or down, your gun will annoyingly "bounce" back to the center.

There were also numerous times when I was in a confined space between two walls, and the camera – confused while looking for a good spot – would suddenly fly up to the roof two stories up. This wouldn't be so bad if it didn't drag me along with it. Of course, I was never meant to be up there, so like Wyle E. Coyote, after looking around for a moment, I would fall through the roof, down two stories, and lose half my health. Thanks a lot!

GUNSMOKE The machine pistol is the most handy all-around weapon you possess.

BIG GUN The grenade launcher is cool too, but don't blow up the good guys, or yourself.

Fantastic Voyage

Despite some minor annoyances, I felt a real sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after I finished OUTCAST. I really got attached to all the funny characters and the universe in which I had spent about 60 hours. Whenever I got bored, or thought something was too obnoxious, the game would be right there making fun of itself and throwing me a change-up. There were also some jokes and surprises at the very end that were so hilarious that they left me with a very positive feeling about the whole experience. There are lots of elements borrowed from RPG and adventure games here that should make this game familiar and enjoyable to gamers who dig those genres. But OUTCAST is such an accessible game that everyone who enjoys a good story should give it a try. CGW

Cool Links

www.outcastcentral.com The unofficial site
www.outcast-thegame.com And the official site

the secret hides.
the truth consumes.

odium™

n. def. - hate coupled with disgust

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TalonSoft Covertly Jumps into the Tactical Sim Genre

Hidden Agenda

Focusing on small-unit commando action during the second World War, HIDDEN & DANGEROUS (H&D) is wargaming veteran TalonSoft's entry into the growing tactical sim genre. Can a title without the high-tech razzle-dazzle of a game like RAINBOW SIX compete in this burgeoning sub-genre? Oh, yes. Yes indeed.

HOME WRECKERS Game interiors like this baroque beauty only add to the sense of operating in Europe circa WWII.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS
reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Who Dares, Wins

H&D's operations are spread across 23 real-world commando missions, letting you lead your elite team of British SAS troopers (from both first and third-person perspectives) behind enemy positions to rescue downed allied pilots, disrupt German communications, kidnap German high officials, or destroy enemy strongholds. The six linear campaigns range in location from Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, and Norway to the North Sea and Czechoslovakia.

Your four-man team is formed by choosing from a pool of 40 SAS operatives. Each soldier possesses five readily applicable abilities – shooting, reaction, stealth, strength, and endurance. Missions are won or lost depending on the operatives' skills and how aptly they're applied. For instance, your snipers should have the highest shooting skill while your bazooka gunner should possess the highest endurance and strength. Picking the right combination of men for each mission makes a crucial difference, so you'll really need to think before entering a mission.

Outfitting your team is another enjoyable part of the overall strategy; choosing weapons and equipment tailor-made for missions is essential. Arms include lightweight submachine guns like the Sten, sniper-rifles like the Lee Enfield .303, and heavy arms like the Bren machine gun. And there's plenty of equipment to boot: binoculars, cameras, decoders, combat knives, grenades, anti-tank mines, and TNT. If you run out of ammo or equipment, your troopers can pick up weapons and supplies off dead enemy soldiers – a nice, realistic touch. Of course, some gamers won't want to bother with all this planning, so H&D has a handy auto-setup feature that outfits your team so you can head right into the mission.

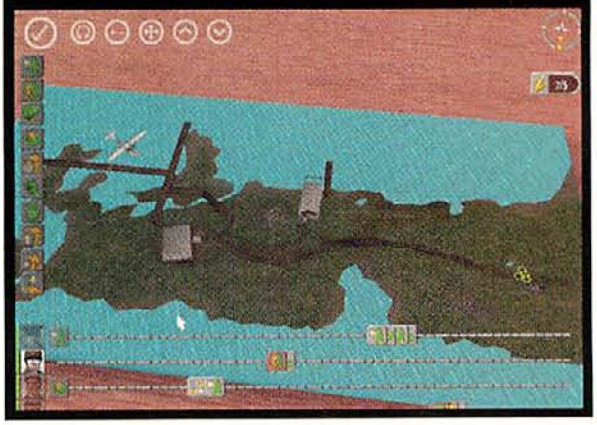
H&D excellently balances action and strategy. Like most tactical sims, the game requires a deft combination of shooter skills and tactical savvy. However, the design takes it one step further by implementing a readily available, real-time strategy screen for hot seat planning. This map screen can be activated any time to quickly coordinate and control operatives. Move one commando up a hill to snipe at enemy soldiers while ordering another to blow up a tank, then move to take out a guard tower. The strategy screen is your best mate, because it's where you'll regroup when the going gets tough. Voice command keys also come in handy if you need quick support.

Other interface components could have used more tweaking. Even though there is a save feature, there's no way to restart the mission without having to toggle back through a slew of set-up screens.

Hard as the Rock of Gibraltar

H&D is an extremely challenging game even at the easiest of settings. Engaging the enemy without a meticulous plan will kill you faster than you can pull a pin from a grenade. German soldiers don't sit around while your commandos haphazardly flounce around a mission. They actually sneak up or flank you during the middle of a fire-

TOOLS OF THE TRADE The strategy map is an invaluable asset for planning tactical assaults or for regrouping when the going gets tough.



CGW RATED

PROS
Challenging missions; realistic environments; sniper mode; a hot seat strategy map for planning.

CONS
Challenging missions; questionable ballistics; clipping problems and bugs.

Requirements: Pentium 166 MMX, 16MB RAM, 10MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 266 MMX, 32MB RAM, 160MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Serial, modem connection (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-4 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: TalonSoft • **Developer:** Illusion Softworkds • **$50** • **www.talonsoft.com**
RSAC Rating: Violence 3 (of 4); blood and gore.

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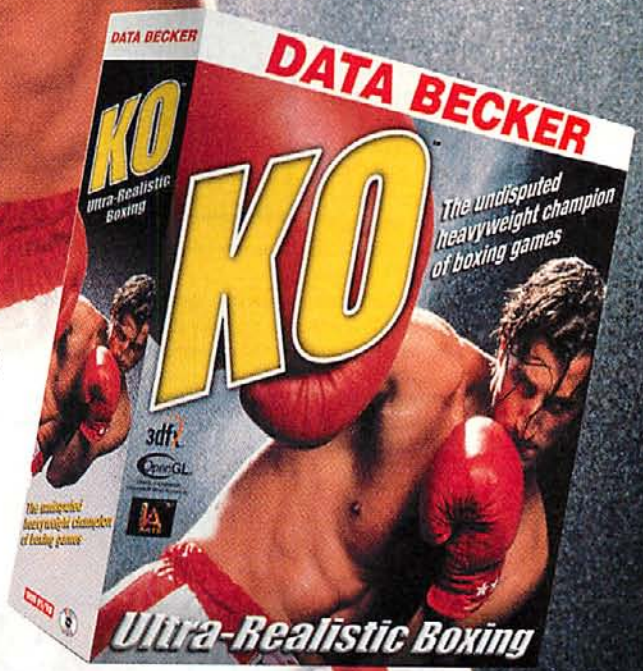

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Sniper Strategies

When picking your snipers, always select operatives with exceptional shooting abilities. Each mission should include a sniper in the plans, with a backup just in case. Pack your sniper with ample amounts of ammo, since you'll be using him to take down the majority of enemies.

Study the strategy map in order to identify favorable terrain for sniper positioning. Support your marksman with another operative when you move him to optimal high ground – a machine gunner with a high reaction score is great for this, especially in wide-open terrain. A machine gunner's high rate of fire and decent range compliments the sniper perfectly, making them a lethal combination of target interdiction and suppression fire.

Make sure you crouch or lie down before your sniper fires. This will decrease your chances of getting hit. Aim for the head when shooting, since a direct hit will kill your enemy most of the time.

When using snipers to assault buildings and enclosed areas, use caution. Their low rate of fire can hinder them if there's more than one enemy blazing away at your sniper.

HE'S THE MAN Your sniper is your primary tool in taking out the enemy. Make sure he's got adequate support and loads of ammo.

fight. But the toughness of the missions only heightens the great sense of fun. HIDDEN & DANGEROUS plays like being in a great WWII movie – intensely suspenseful, heart-pounding action where danger lurks around every corner, behind every fallen tree, inside every trench. Weather effects, buildings, and terrain create an eerie war-torn atmosphere. This is commendable, considering the limitations of the graphics and the fact that the game features only two types of enemy soldiers –officers and grunts.

The AI is downright nasty. Germans shoot with pinpoint accuracy and they always seem to know when you're coming. My advice: shoot first or die. Still, the AI isn't perfect. Germans will stroll over dead comrades' bodies without blinking, and your own team members may shoot you in the back.

H&D's ballistics suffer from a lack of realism. Shoot a German soldier a few times in the arm and he'll quickly die, but shooting him squarely in the chest only pisses him off. Headshots are the only one-shot, one-kill wonders. Also, it feels as if all rounds – from a high-caliber machine gun to a pistol – have the same impact on a target.

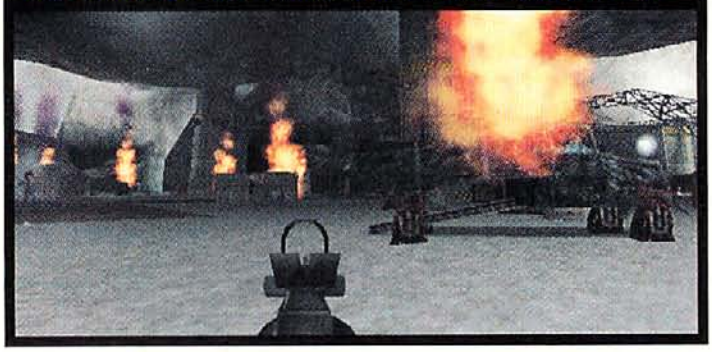
H&D also offers a cooperative multiplayer feature. You join forces with up to three players to take on the computer in single-player campaign missions.

With no re-spawning, team communication is truly vital, since you'll need to work effectively as a group to beat the challenging AI. One bad decision may cost you the entire mission.

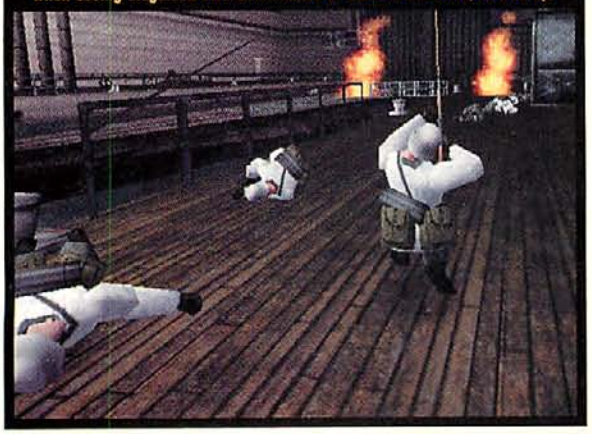
Unfortunately, a few bugs do crop up. If you're unlucky, you can slip down the side of an escarpment and die, sniper reticules can disappear, or your commandos might die by walking through walls.

But HIDDEN & DANGEROUS' small unit tactics and taut action eventually win out over the bugs, freaky ballistics, and AI quirks. The strategic depth and riveting action should please armchair generals and shooters alike, while WWII buffs will appreciate its realistic depiction of elite force operations. Addictive, entertaining...what more do you need? CGW

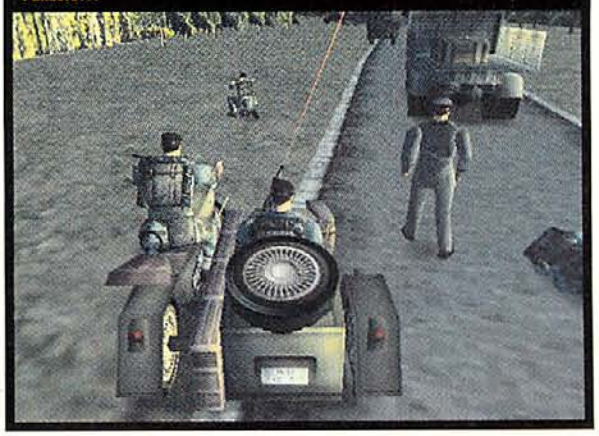
FIRE IN THE HOLE As if enemy infantry weren't bad enough, you'll have to contend with explosions and shrapnel as well. And don't even think about taking cover behind those gasoline barrels during a firefight.



TRADING PLACES Not only can you filch weapons from fallen enemies, you can snag their uniforms as well. German soldiers hesitate when seeing disguised SAS Commandos in German uniforms, so suit up.



ALL ABOARD One of the game's best features is the ability to interact with and use a variety of enemy vehicles. Just watch out for the Panzers...



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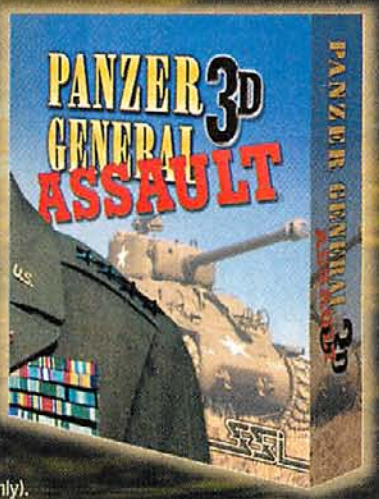

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RATING PENDING RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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SSI
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Finally, a Star Trek Game for the Kirk—and Klingon—in All of Us

True Trek At Last!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

With STARFLEET COMMAND the curious and not wholly ignoble history of *Star Trek* computer games finally has a product worthy of Kirk, Spock, and the rest of the classic crew.

Based on the STARFLEET BATTLES board game and perhaps benefiting from BATTLES' breadth and depth of experience, here at last the interactive universe feels like *Star Trek*. And that universe overlays a plot that is very much in keeping with the classic Trek universe, a dangerous place.

Despite Trek's innate emphasis on the Federation, to play only from the Federation's point of view would overlook the richness of the game's campaign sequence. The campaign structure fairly quickly reveals itself to be much more than just a straightforward progression through ranks and increasingly complex assignments. Without giving too much away, be aware that the campaign sequences should be played from each of the game's empires.

STARFLEET COMMAND
reviewed by Keith Ferrel

In the best tradition of Trek, the campaign reveals that not just the political balance of power is threatened, but in some ways the whole fabric of the universe. The size of the threat becomes larger with each successfully completed mission.

Ultimately, the campaign sequence comes to feel almost like a movie or multi-part episode; in some ways closest to a *Star Trek* novel. It's gratifying to see plot taken as seriously as playability – and STARFLEET COMMAND succeeds at both.

Care has been taken throughout the game to communicate the flavor of each race. Effective use of color and graphics establish the fundamental differences among the various races. While the basic interface remains similar enough race to race to be relatively intuitive, the differences in design and appearance serve to remind you that the goals (and tactics/weapons systems) of, say, the Lyrans differ from those of the Klingons.

This is very much a game of multiple systems and systems management, requiring players to coordinate helm, security, science, defense and offense, communications, and more, all of it in the heat of battle. Fortunately, the command screens and sub-screens are thoughtfully laid-out. Tutorials and random non-campaign missions also help.

The essentially mercantile approach to rising through the game's ranks might trouble purists. You earn points for missions successfully accomplished, and use those points to upgrade and refit your ships. The library of available ships with increasingly powerful systems is an additional spur up the career ladder. Remember, though, you can only buy tools – you must learn the skills to use them well.

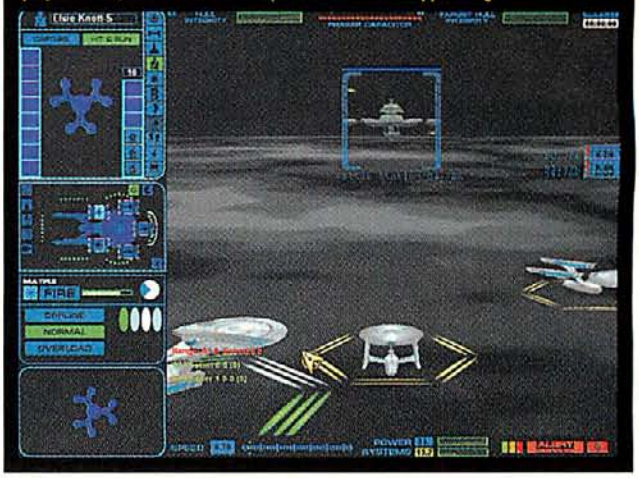
Space scenes look great, with various ships, starbases, and planets well rendered. One large weakness of the game, though, is its 2D combat plane. Combat takes place along an axis rather than throughout a globe, which is the game's only major drawback.

The game contains a variety of riches that add to replayability. The political universe comprised of the game's races evolves and changes with your success or failure at various missions. The campaign sequence introduces familiar figures that further contribute to the Trek-ish verisimilitude.

Unfortunately, some of that universe's most familiar icons and scenarios appear to be available only on discs purchased directly from Interplay. This is a shame, because everyone ought to be able to take on the challenge of "Balance of Terror" or rest in the heart of a nebula when facing Khan.

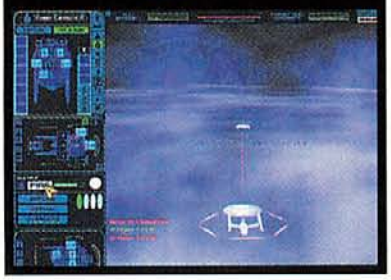
Bogus marketing schemes aside, this is a terrific game. Trek fans have waited a long time for a computer game that captures the richness of the *Star Trek* universe. STARFLEET COMMAND is that game, and it is rich and deep enough to keep most of those fans busy until the next time the universe is endangered. CGW

PLANE OLD BATTLE While coordinating multiple ships as well as ship systems is one of the challenges of STARFLEET COMMAND, having to play in a flat, two-dimensional space is a little disappointing.



INSIDE INFORMATION A library of ship types and comprehensive vessel information gives you the chance to explore the technologies of species you may face in space.

MAIL ORDER MADNESS
Unfortunately, only players who buy the game directly from Interplay can face Khan's wrath.



CGW RATED

PROS
Feels like classic Trek ought to feel; deep replayability.

CONS
Lots of information to manage; 2D space battles; Khan only avilable in direct-order versions of game.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space. • **Recommended Requirements:** 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator. **3D Support:** Direct 3D • **Multiplayer Support:** Modem, Serial connection (2 Players), LAN, Internet (2-6 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** 14 Degrees East and Quicksilver Software, Inc. • **$50** • **www.interplay.com**
ESRB Rating: Everyone.

Focus on Omikron:

A quick chat with Phillip Campbell, Senior Designer at Eidos Interactive, who has worked closely with the Quantic Dream team over the last two years.....

Omikron: The Nomad Soul - What is it?!?!?!!?

Omikron: The Nomad Soul is a futuristic real-time adventure that is being developed by a talented development group in Paris, Quantic Dream. The game's ambitious storyline and gameplay elements transcend the narrow confines of traditional gaming genres, combining a deep game plot with adventure, exploration, action, combat and role-playing elements in order to fully immerse gamers into the **Omikron** world.

What is your title and role for Omikron?

I'm the Senior Designer for Eidos Interactive (USA), and have been walking the streets of **Omikron** for over two years "maintaining Eidos Interactive's commitment to design." Basically that means a bit of everything! Concept and level design, additional story, voice-talent wrangling, translations, integrating the "Bowie" aspects of the game.... Of course I'm always in total agreement with my two producers, Herve Albertazzi in the UK and shadow producer Tom Marx in the US. Almost always...

If possible, put Omikron's story in a "nutshell."

The game of **Omikron** is essentially a trap. From the moment you walk into your local shop and see the **Omikron** box on the shelves you're playing the game, being lured into the trap. Imagine a device similar to the Hellraiser cube, it's a compelling and beautiful object that you MUST explore. **Omikron** is a parallel universe, existing in real-time alongside Earth, and once your soul is projected into its dark streets there is no turning back until you succeed, or fail. You arrive in **Omikron** in possession of a body you do not know, for reasons you cannot fathom. From this point on you will have to talk, investigate, fight, drive, shoot, ride and explore your way to the conclusion of the game - and gain deliverance from this strange dimension.

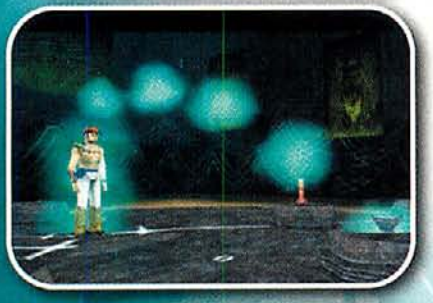
David Cage, the boss of Quantic Dream, has spent over three years creating his singular, unique vision of **Omikron** - it's all we can do to keep up with his flights of imagination!

How many characters can you possess (upon death)? Is there a limit? Are they all fleshed out in this 'world city'?

There are about 40 characters that you can "incarnate." This may be as a result of death or by your own choice. One of the skills you develop is

Continued over page

Omikron™ The Nomad Soul



the ability to freely choose who you will be next. Death is by no means "The End." In **Omikron**, the player never has to "Quit," simply, the next person that arrives at the scene of your demise becomes you.

Once you gain the ability to incarnate other characters, the only limit is the strength of your skill. You may happen upon a body you are particularly keen on, say outside the Arena, or in the local Pharmacy. Then, it's a matter of your mana strength as to whether you can project your soul into that character or not. Each character you can play has many traits, everything from a name to a unique skill set. Some characters even have apartments, jobs, or family. Some are better at certain skills than others, you may find it easier to fight if you are in possession of a strong, fast character, or you may find it easier to sneak through a forbidden installation in the guise of a Guard. One of the pleasures of the game occurs when you take on a new character as you pick up some of the threads of THEIR life. You may find yourself diverted from your main purpose to, for example, spend more time "interacting" with your new wife, or helping Jorg to become "Master of the Arena." Incarnate as a Taar Monk, and you will not only gain access to the secret fighting techniques of the Taar, but also may feel a spiritual need to "walk the planet," misquoting religious tracts and writing bad poetry!

Death is by no means "The End" in Omikron

Tell us about the engine capabilities.

Phew! Of course it's not just about technical capabilities, glossy special effects and variety of big guns, the measure of Quantic's success lies in whether they've succeeded in making an immensely playable and REAL world to experience. Here's some of what you get!

- A full-featured first-person shooter engine, with mouse control, intelligent enemies and interactive, cinematic interludes.
- A totally 3D fighting engine, with combos, special moves, each fighter and opponent with unique styles.
- A revolutionary 'learning' system - not only can you research and learn the rudiments of good investigation technique (adventuring, if you will) but fighting and shooting skills can be constantly improved. In shooting, players can learn their skills and practice different weapons at the many virtual shooting galleries throughout the city. You may even get some insight into guerrilla tactics from Krill, the resident weaponry expert. For fighting, most characters have access to virtual training centers, where they fight holographic enemies, and later, masters of the fighting art will demonstrate and teach the player new moves, combos etc. And, of course, if you're brave enough, there's always the Arena...
- The ability to explore many diverse zones of the city surrounded by hundreds of passers-by and vehicles. Every door has something behind it, adding to the richness of the story. Add to this over 40 possible reincarnations and over a hundred speaking characters...
- Full body and facial motion capture for the first time ever in a game, coupled with hours of dialogue. In **Omikron**, conversations are never static!
- Realistic day/night cycles, random snow and rain.
- Virtual concerts and a fully cinematic "game-track" of original music.
- A cohesive and dynamic story, in the mould of the classic adventure games of the past, with a scenario that starts perhaps reminiscent of the Blade Runner genre, but develops into something altogether more magical...
- Oh, ok then....DAZZLING special effects and REALLY BIG GUNS!!!

Here's Omikron in figures:

- More than 400 different sets in four huge cities
- More than 140 types of characters in 3D real-time
- More than 300 objects that can be manipulated
- Hundreds of passers-by and vehicles move about in the streets
- Two years to write the scenario
- 3.9 kilos of game design
- Thousands of sketches in the graphical design
- Four hours of dialogues with more than 1200 responses
- 693 moves in motion capture
- 35 people working over three years, including 11 programmers
- 489 pizzas, 302 hamburgers, 71 chicken pineapples with Cantonese rice, 894 litres of Coke
- 411 taxi bills

Equals - one realistic world, complete gaming freedom, who will you be next?

Everyone, hard-core gamers, and novices alike, all start from the same place – alone, confused, scared. It's up to you and your soul to decide what to do next. Take advantage of the training, or just pile straight in? Go shopping, or go shoot something? Talk or fight? Follow the noble cause and save **Omikron**, or just hang about your apartment listening to cool music - it's all up to you...

Q and A courtesy of C/Net's Gamecenter.com

02 Andar 7216

- The clattering of an endless stream of Sliders woke me for my morning patrol. Telis is not her normal self, must pick her up something from the pharmacy. Bah! Two cycles of rain already - someone must have screwed up over at the weather center again. The Center for Random Meteorology had announced the triggering of a 15 minute shower at 10 - now it's coming down so thick I can't even see the top of the dome...maybe they've shifted OUR weather over to Qualisar - I'll check it out.

14 Xenep 7216

- Ah, Qualisar! Zone of broken dreams. While busting a couple of flagrant Yuki offenders, I saw that dancer again - man! Now I can understand what Boog sees in her! Don't get me wrong - there is no one for me but Telis, but walking the Qualisar beat is sure to put the heat on anyone! Those monkeys writing propaganda for Reshev must be running dry, here's their latest -"Don't think. We know what is good for you." Sure. I'd ignore it if it wasn't plastered up all over the place. Not since Reshev's "We LOVE you all" campaign have I felt so....motivated...

23 Xenep 7216

Still in Qualisar. Fighting clubs springing up all over the place again. It'll be a busy day for me, keeping tabs on these out-of-town bruisers. Broke up a "disagreement" in Harvey's this morning, guy from the back-streets of Jaunpur just COULDN'T keep his hands off the girls. At times like this, a quiet sham steak with Telis in our favorite restaurant in Lahoreh, overlooking the peaceful water, well, it just seems a million miles away...

Almost forgot about the malfunctioning Mechaguard - there's ten citizens who won't be bothering the Sterilizer again. On that note, IX has decreed a change in the Code of Omikronian Laws, Article 24937, today. The target age for reproduction has been lowered again, to 30 - must get my act together, and soon!

04 Nadim 7216

Today in Jaunpur, a bomb exploded in front of the Tetra Trust building. Now, I'm as wary of Trust manipulation as the next man, but citizens are being injured, and nobody seems to know for what? Even my boss, Commandant Gandar seemed unconcerned, and was more interested in us finding those with non-conformist ideas and getting them promptly to the Thought Controllers. He produced a poster for an illegal concert - every time I try to track one of those down, it's over. Hey, it's probably just some lowlifes having a good time - but don't tell the glorious Reshev I said that!...

Kay'l

quantic dream

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TOMB RAIDER THE LAST REVELATION

And SET sayeth: 'I am the shadow across the sun; I am the bringer of plagues. My wrath will consume all lands and shall be ceaseless.

Egypt. Land of mythology, mystery, pharaohs... and the most complex tombs known to man. Tombs littered with mazes, puzzles and traps, designed to drive even the most persistent raiders to distraction... or death. Enter: Lara Croft. Based entirely in Egyptian locations, The Last Revelation's plot revolves around ancient mythology and the alignment of the stars at the millennium. Finding herself in a serious predicament, Lara's objective is clear from the outset - she must escape a terrifying destiny and rectify a situation that threatens to destroy humanity.

The story is unveiled seamlessly through gameplay action driven by advanced engine technology. New programming routines allow levels to dissolve into cinematic cut-scenes and full motion video (FMV). Loading screens are eliminated, making the adventure a continuous, focused experience. Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation's redesigned inventory system replaces traditional inventory rings with an easier-to-use interface allowing items to be combined, collected and stored. The new inventory also features Lara's diary, which includes her personal notes from each adventure and a location map that players can access for hints and tips. Application of the transformed system will give new life to puzzle elements – a key feature of Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation. Clear objectives and smaller locations will result in less time spent traveling between areas. Individual environments are more reminiscent of the original game - tightly focused and puzzle-oriented, but with higher levels of detail and a greater number of objects than seen before.

The atmosphere will also be more akin to the original due to the emphasis on ancient locations and tombs. To further the atmospheric detail, the lighting system features spotlighting. New environment mapping allows a variety of surfaces and objects to reflect and react to light sources. Lara herself will have a new remodeled look – fully skinned and more detailed. A range of new moves, both simple and complex, provides an assortment of brand new puzzle and trap mechanisms for Lara to negotiate. The puzzles are based on Egyptian mythology and will operate like complex board games right at the player's fingertips.

Interview with Adrian Smith of Core Design

So what's the plot this time?

We've made the basis of the story a lot simpler this time around - the player is given a very clear objective from the outset. The plot will twist and turn as Lara progresses, but the ultimate goal always remains in sight.

Very basically, Lara inadvertently releases something rather nasty whilst breaking into an ancient tomb... and of course she's the only one who can put things right. The path of true adventure never runs smooth so Lara will have various tasks to complete before she's able to face a final confrontation.

Do you fear a backlash against this title since it is the 4th in the series?

Despite any number of new features and improvements, the game is still, in essence, "Tomb Raider" - an adventure game featuring Lara Croft. What we have done this time is completely re-address a number of key elements. This will immediately distinguish Last Revelation from its predecessors and bring fresh life to the title. The on-screen format is completely new - gone are the old inventory rings, loading screens etc. It's always been our intention to make the fourth game as accessible to as many people (both old fans and new users) as possible. We've focused on simpler gameplay so the game will be easier that TRIII in terms of direction and objectives. Players will know exactly what to do, and where they have to do it. The difficulty lies in solving the puzzles that will enable players to complete objectives - so it's very much like the original game in that respect. A very clear storyline and single location means that a lot less time is wasted covering vast distances.

In some ways Last Revelation is a prequel to the trilogy, but the technical advances will make it far more detailed and atmospheric. If you've never played a Tomb Raider game, this is the one that we'll be recommending!

Can you tell us about any of the new enemies that Lara will face?

We're concentrating on highly detailed enemies - there may be fewer of these but they will certainly be more purposeful than those seen in previous titles. Since we're dealing with Egypt, our artists and animators have really been able to let their imaginations go so we've got mythological baddies as well as natives and generics. Due to the nature of the plot, you'll find a lot of rather strange things happening and don't be surprised if you find that your are pitting your skill against an adversary through the adventure.

Will there be another game in the Tomb Raider series?

Well you know what they say... You just can't keep a good girl down...!

CORE EIDOS INTERACTIVE

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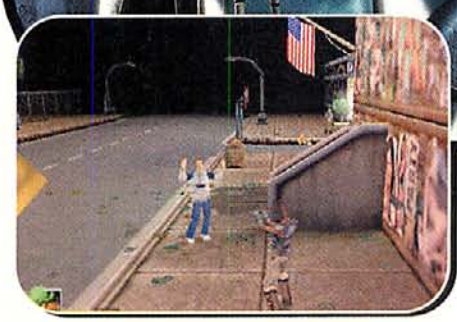
Welcome to Union City,

a city where turmoil and madness are rampant and only two unlikely heroes can end the chaos.

As the Millennium draws to an end, forbidding events are unraveling in the once peaceful and prosperous Union City. A brutal crime wave led by gang punks and hardened criminals threatens to undermine the peace and to plunge the city into chaos and death. As the police haplessly reel under the weight of corruption and violence, a discredited rookie cop, D'arci Stern, fights to clear her name and restore order for her citizens. As she patrols her beat, the evidence quickly gathers that the gangs are now organized with nefarious intentions. However, there is an ally in the shadows – Roper McIntyre a grizzled ex-special force now converted into evangelist again a demonic cult hidden somewhere Union City and the force behind the crime wave and maybe.... the destruction of man.



URBAN CHAOS™

In Urban Chaos, Mucky Foot and Eidos Interactive present a city in trouble.

You play either D'arci or Roper in 30 compelling missions that each take place in a unique location of Union City. The player is rewarded with information, supplies, and secret paths if they explore the district. Several types of weapons and close combat are offered to complete goals when persuasion is not successful, but be careful, the streets are alive with the riff-raff that do not fear the police.

Urban Chaos starts out with D'arci investigating various crimes from simple assaults to bank bombings. Every district she visits has its own unique look in layout, architecture, and population. Interaction via text is available for all citizens. Besides a propriety 3D engine that allows for bump mapping, volumetric fogging, and true reflections, there is also 3D audio available via EAX and A3D protocols. D'arci will eventually meet up with Roper who quickly becomes like a father to her. Roper is the sole surviving member of a religious group that aims to prevent the 'Fallen' (a demonic cult) from resurrecting an abomination (from Nostrodamus's predictions) to incarcerate the earth at the turn of the millennium. His forte is heavy weapons and explosives. He is slower than D'arci but packs a powerful punch. Exploration is another gameplay element that is stressed, for as D'arci explores Union City either via foot or automobile, she can explore locations that will yield not only supplies and weapons, but secret entrances into locations where she must complete a mission. There is also a reward system in place that offers bonuses for collection.

To quickly teach the user how to operate in the Urban Chaos 3rd person world, Mucky Foot has created a training academy complete with a foot and vehicle obstacle course and a shooting range. But, all in all, combat is often your only recourse in dealing with the gangs. Urban Chaos not only offers close martial art combat, but has a realistic weapon combat engine including firearms, knives, grenades, and baseball bats! Nasty incidents like drive-by shootings and gangland rumbles often take place in the bad parts of town.

Coming to the PC and PlayStation, Urban Chaos stands out for its graphically impressive representation of big city life with the chaos of crime and demonic rumblings. Coupled with identifiable characters and a pumping Urban soundtrack, it literally comes alive for your enjoyment.

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mucky Foot

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Out Now!

An interview with Amy Hennig, Director of Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver™

How would you describe Legacy of Kain? What type of game is it? What kind of experience can players expect?

Our goal from the beginning was to provide a seamless, immersive game experience – an epic adventure set in a relatively non-linear game world, that rewards players' exploration and problem-solving skills. Soul Reaver is an action-adventure game with an intuitive set of player mechanics, an innovative combat system, lush visuals, and RPG-type elements like character growth, ability acquisition, and story progression.

What are the most compelling aspects of the game?

The first thing that comes to mind is the data-streaming technology – this allows us to provide a seamless, interconnected game experience, eliminating artificial divisions of the game world (and the annoyance of load times). Once the player begins a game, we never want to disrupt the immersion of the game experience, or pull them out of their willing suspension of disbelief.

Besides providing a seamless experience, this technology also allows us a greater variety of creatures, sounds, music, and environments in a much smaller area. Most games have to keep an entire level resident in memory (thus the load times, and the often apparent lack of graphic variety in levels); by streaming the data off the CD, we only have to keep a very small, localized area in memory at any one time. Run down a hallway in Soul Reaver, and the environment can change drastically – without the player ever having been aware that data was being dumped and loaded.

Second, our world-morphing technology provides something players have never seen before. As Nosgoth's first "angel of death," Raziel can shift at will (more or less) between the spirit realm and the physical world; when he loses all his energy in the material plane, he is automatically forced back into the spectral realm. In the game, these two realms exist simultaneously, the spectral plane being an eerie, expressionistic, "twilight" version of the physical world. During these plane-shifting events, the entire environment morphs in front of the player's eyes – the architecture twists and distorts, the lighting changes, and the denizens of the area fade in or out, depending on their planar affiliation.

Third, Soul Reaver offers an innovative combat system, which allows players to easily interact with enemies in a full-freedom 3D environment. By holding down the "autoface" button, the player can engage with and maneuver easily around enemies, sidestepping around them while planning an attack, and dodging and lunging easily to evade or launch attacks. Because Raziel's primary foes are vampires – and therefore only destroyable by impaling, sunlight, fire, or water -- the game also requires the player to formulate a plan of attack, to find weapons or use potentially-fatal elements in the environment to his advantage.

Finally, behind all the action is a complex storyline, conveyed primarily through in-game cinematic events and voice-over. I think players will be impressed by the quality of the script and the voice-acting in Soul Reaver – the voices are all provided by talented, experienced actors (most of whom are reprising their roles from the first game), and the voice direction and casting were provided by highly-respected industry veterans.

How big is the game? How long will it take players to finish it?

Geographically, the game is huge – but Raziel moves at a pretty good clip, and the placement of Warp Gates allows the player to teleport across the game world fairly easily.

In terms of hours of gameplay, it will depend on how a player approaches the game. Players who proceed from one major goal to the next, without revisiting previously-explored areas to find bonus levels, will probably get 35-40 hours out of the game. For players who take the time to find all the bonus items and hidden glyph spell levels, the game should provide over 65 hours of gameplay.

Any tips for playing the game? Secrets or hints?

Mainly, players should remember that the game is all about freedom of exploration – each time Raziel receives a new ability, the player should explore areas previously visited to discover power-ups, spells, etc. The player can charge right to Raziel's next goal, if desired – none of these bonus areas are required to finish the game – but the player will have a richer (and longer!) gaming experience if they revisit previously-explored areas with new abilities.

So keep your eye out for locations that seem suspicious, and areas that you can't get to yet – make a mental note of these, so you can return later when Raziel earns a new ability. Each of the new abilities opens up previously-inaccessible areas – so if there's a gate you can't get through, an unreachable opening high up in a wall, a suspicious-looking window, an area you can't reach without swimming, or some odd apparatus that you can't operate yet, it probably means there's a bonus item, or a new area to be unlocked, nearby.

Secondly, don't forget to autoface those enemies! Soul Reaver's combat is built around the autoface system – you can fight enemies without using it, but the experience is much richer if you take full advantage of the autoface button.

And finally – when in doubt, shift into spectral. If you think you're stuck, the twisted architecture of the spectral realm may provide the clue that you need to progress.

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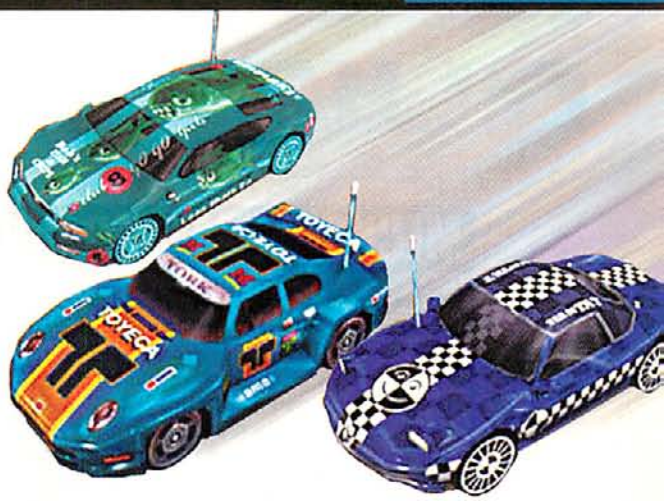
Radio-Control Racing Without the Batteries

Drive Me Faster, Tiny Racer



RE*VOLT
reviewed by Mark Clarkson

Remember when you were a kid (or, if you're like me, last week) when you and your friends would spend summer afternoons racing remote control cars up and down the street in front of your house, darting beneath your neighbor's pickup truck, barreling through drainage culverts, and jumping the curb at the end of the driveway? RE*VOLT captures the Lilliputian racing fun of RC cars and trucks, and offers some advantages over doing it for real. If your car flips over, you can right it with a touch of a button; better yet, you can zip through supermarkets, museums, and toy stores – all the places you'd be kicked out of in real life. But perhaps best of all, you can go along for the ride instead of just standing at the curb.

Mad Max Meets Mini-Me

Gameplay in RE*VOLT is reminiscent of other first-person arcade racers like ROLLCAGE and WIPEOUT XL: insanely fast-paced racing action, replete with missiles and whatnot for smacking other racers around. Power-ups scattered along the way arm you with bottle rockets, water balloons, oil slicks, and more. A few are "power-downs," turning your car into a time bomb, or just blowing you up on the spot.

Power-ups aside, RE*VOLT feels very realistic, especially on the simulation setting, when the cars are over-powered and squirrelly as hell. The cars are a little too stable on very long jumps – a little too likely to land, cat-like, on their wheels – but this fudging is necessary to allow the maps to include insanely large jumps in the first place, so it's forgivable.

You can race a variety of cars, rated according to speed, acceleration, and weight, although other factors such as a high center of gravity come into play as you drive. Cars may be front-wheel, rear-wheel, or four-wheel drive; some do better on long flat tracks, while others excel at climbing hills or accelerating out of turns.

RADIO SHACKS Whether racing in a museum or across garden bridges, RE*VOLT's race environments are beautiful to look at.

ZAPPED! A powered-up four-by drains another car of precious electricity as they race through a drainage culvert.

As you progress, new and faster cars become available. Similarly, you begin the game with only four tracks unlocked; you must win a championship comprising all four to unlock new tracks.

RE*VOLT looks very sweet. The cars boast shiny highlights; polished floors reflect the action; bottle rockets send out trails of sparks and leave lingering clouds of smoke when they explode. On a Pentium II 266 with a Voodoo 2 accelerator, the game ran smoothly at 800 x 600 with seven AI cars running, the rear-view mirror activated, and all the graphics options (except anti-aliasing, which didn't work) turned on.

Land of the Giants

RE*VOLT's environments are nicely filled in with enormous parked cars, loose basketballs, looming dino skeletons, towering stacks of toys and what-have-you. You can hear dogs barking behind fences, and birds chirping in the trees. The cars' engines sound authentic, which means they all sound pretty much like power screwdrivers, except "Aquacar," which sounds like an electric bong.

RE*VOLT includes a track editor so you can make your own tracks, in theory at least. In reality, the editor is cheesy and surprisingly sluggish, especially considering the game's good performance. Worse, the maps I created came out white on white, making the track impossible to see. If there's a way to apply textures, I never found it.

Crappy editor notwithstanding, RE-VOLT does a great job of putting RC racing on your desktop. And when you're tired of dueling RE*VOLT's excellent AI racers, it's time to collect your friends together for some virtual RC action over LAN, modem, or the Internet. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Realistic physics; beautiful graphics; well-realized environments; fun!

CONS
Sucky map editor.

Cool Links

www.revolthq.com
Fan site with custom cars, hints, tips, discussion boards.

www.mardave.demon.co.uk
A great UK site for getting real RC cars.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 360MB hard drive space, 3D-accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D card.
3D Support: Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN (2-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment • **Developer:** Acclaim Studios London • **$40** • **www.acclaim.net**
ESRB Rating: Everyone

QUICK HITS

MECHCOMMANDER GOLD

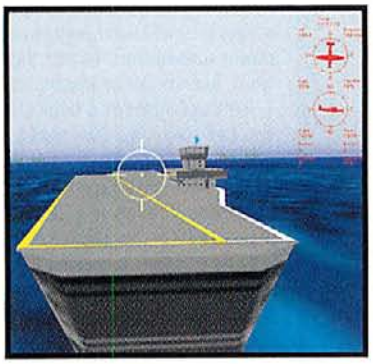
Tactical, squad-level mechanized combat made MECHCOMMANDER a solid real-time strategy title. MECHCOMMANDER GOLD adds some nice touches to the original game, such as unit waypoints that allow you to specify not just the direction of movement, but the type of movement your units use, like running, jumping, and even mine laying. This means you can now give your Minelayer a complex set of instructions to mine multiple areas, without having to micromanage each task. In addition to the game tweaks, MECH GOLD adds new Mechs and weapons, and a brand new campaign. Owners of the original game can get a rebate from Microprose, which makes for some inexpensive gameplay; and if you never played, here's a great opportunity to see the more tactical side of the real-time strategy genre. – *Greg Fortune*

★★★★☆

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Hasbro • Developer: Microprose
$40 • www.microprose.com • ESRB Rating: Teen

COMBAT: OPERATION VICTORY

Genre: Simulation • Publisher: GT Interactive • Developer: WizardWorks • $20 • www.wizworks.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



COMBAT: OPERATION VICTORY adds 30 missions and one adventure to MICROSOFT COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR. The adventure is interesting (glide behind German lines, wreak havoc in a stolen fighter, then escape) and the missions take place in a variety of locations, but there are no new planes (although there are a couple of new bugs). With new missions, planes, and campaigns available for free on the Internet, there's just not enough that's new or different here to give this package high marks. – *Jeff Lackey*

★★½☆☆

GULF WAR: OPERATION DESERT HAMMER

Genre: Action • Publisher: 3DO • Developer: 3DO • $30 • www.3do.com

No need for fancy keyboard overlays in GULF WAR: OPERATION DESERT HAMMER. It's one of those so-called "action simulation" games that allow you to light things up like the 4th of July. As you drive the advanced prototype M12 Hammer deep into Iraq's interior and strike at good old Saddam – always willing to serve as the straight man to your missiles – you'll enjoy Gulf War's fast-paced, enjoyable arcade action. Blow away tanks, APCs, missiles, and helicopters. Call in artillery and air strikes against the more stubborn targets, or against your friends. Killing for oil hasn't been this much fun since 1991. – *Lance A. Larka*

★★★☆☆

FORCE 21

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • $50 • www.redstorm.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

Force 21 is a 21st Century wargame that pits the US against China in 15 campaign missions. You play a tactical commander of armored cavalry style forces that are split up into "platoon" like elements for command and control purposes.

★½☆☆☆

The missions don't follow your progress like they do in PANZER GENERAL or M1 TANK PLATOON II, since you cannot carry over units from scenario to scenario. Instead, you get whatever your supply officer has scrounged up that day, which is completely scripted and never varies. You do get to decide who leads the platoons, but even though the commanders have different specialties and abilities, they don't improve with time or seem to have any effect during the missions whatsoever.

Your operation and intelligence briefings are just as lackluster, as the directives boil down to "Kill all the enemy" or "Get to this location." Intelligence is anything but, with no reports of what the enemy forces consist of or even where they are, leaving you to figure it out on your own and usually necessitating a replay of the mission. The enemy AI is about as dumb as can be; its battle plans are hard coded and consist mainly of pre-planned movement and reactionary triggers.

There's no joy when you actually drop into the missions, either. You run your platoons with a third person perspective that is locked to the unit you've selected. So you are not free to move your view around the 3D terrain to achieve fine control of your units. Also, the platoon that you are currently locked on will not take any initiative in firing. You must engage in a click-fest to target each and every enemy, making any actions quite difficult. As a result, you're forced to spend the majority of the game using the strategic screen where the controls are better, but where you can't see the fireworks. – *Lance A. Larka*

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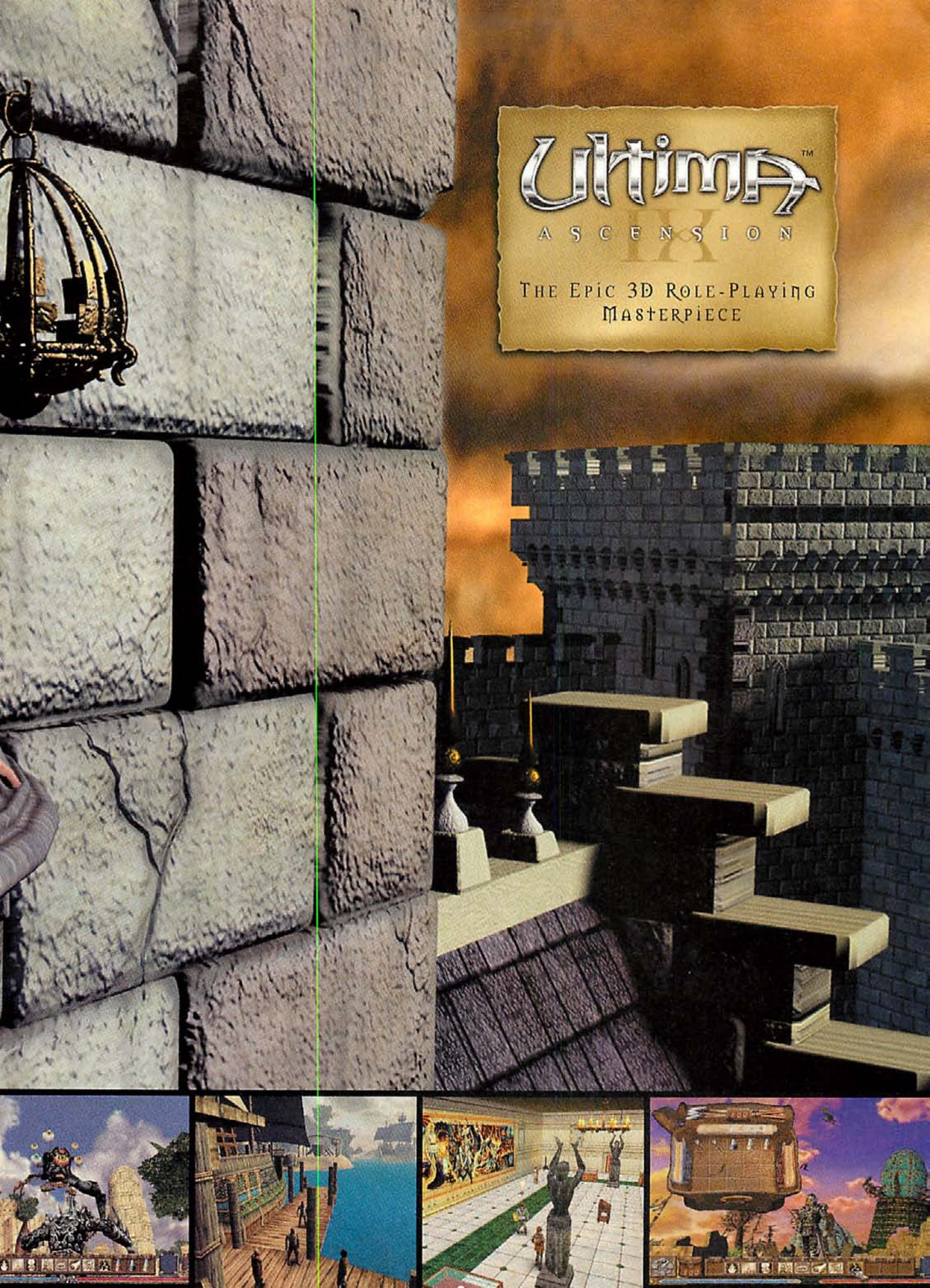
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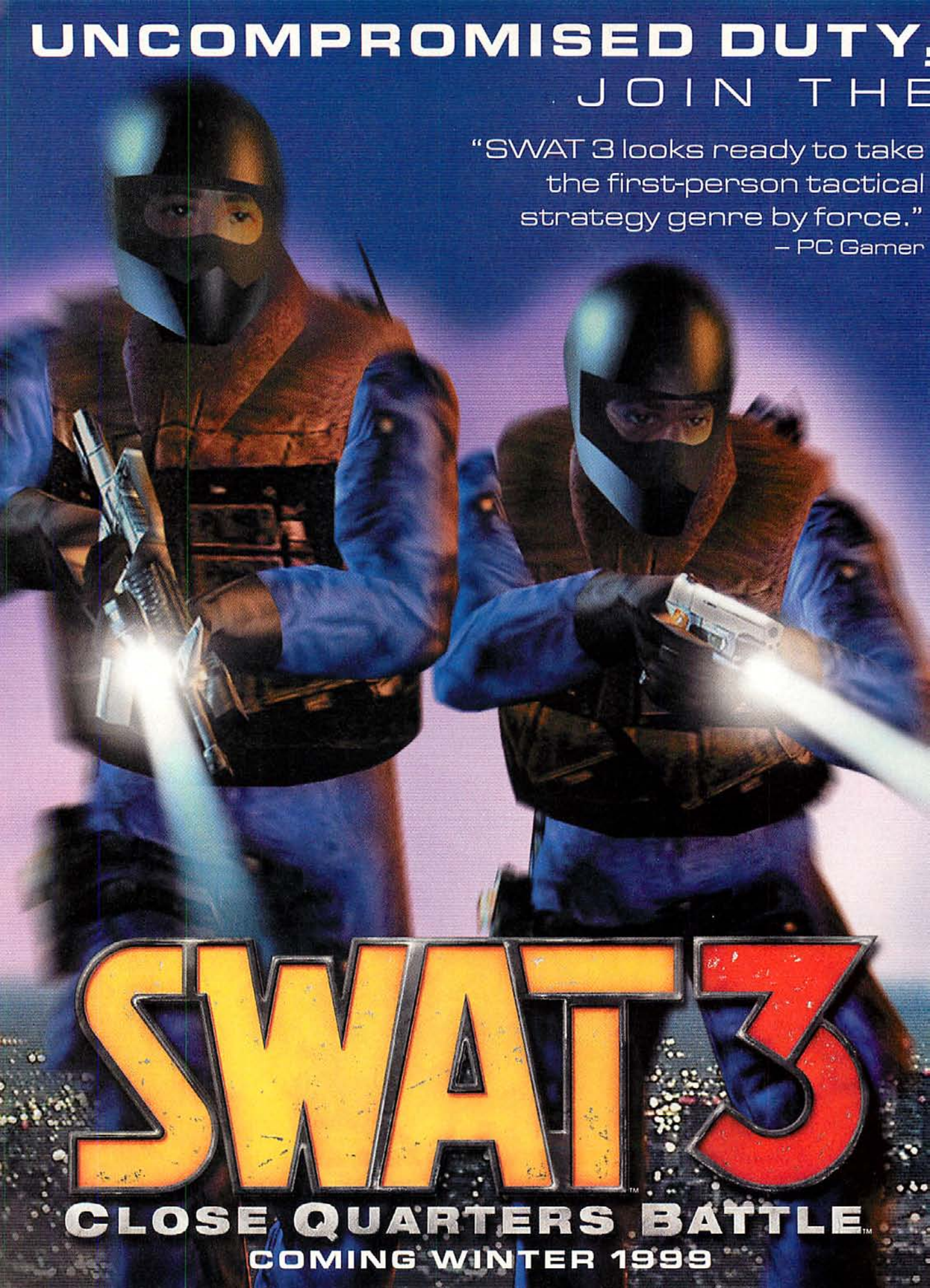
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"SWAT 3 looks ready to take the first-person tactical strategy genre by force."
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VOODOO3 3500 VS. FALCON SE XENTOR

Graphics Card Showdown

Suped-up TNT2 Ultra Beats Voodoo3 3500

It's been a pitched battle between 3dfx and nVidia as to who's the current 3D king. Voodoo3 is fast to be sure, but in most testing, it's been defeated by TNT2 Ultra. Couple that with the TNT2 Ultra's more complete rendering feature set, not to mention 32-bit rendering, and the edge goes to TNT2 Ultra.

by Dave Salvator

So now we move to Round 2, which pits Voodoo3 3500 – clocked at 183MHz and loaded with TV/video capture features – against the latest tricked-out TNT2 Ultra-based board from the dynamic duo of Guillemot and gaming system maker Falcon Northwest. Dubbed the Falcon SE Xentor, this board is over-clocked to 195MHz, while its 32MB of memory runs at a hurtling 235MHz. These two boards squeeze as much horsepower as anyone is going to get out of this generation of chips. So who's got the goods? For pure speed, Falcon SE Xentor wins the day, but the Voodoo3 3500 is no performance slouch, and still offers Glide compatibility as well as decent TV/video features.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

★★★★½

PROS
Top-flight 3D performance; Glide support.

CONS
Expensive; cooling contraptions make card bulky.

Requirements: AGP slot, Windows 95 / OSR2 or Windows 98, 32MB RAM.

Price: $350

Manufacturer: Falcon Northwest
www.falcon-nw.com

FALCON SE XENTOR

Speed Demon

If traffic cops gave out speeding tickets to video cards, the SE Xentor would have its license revoked. And if its blazing performance out of the box isn't enough to satiate the hard-core gamer's appetite, Guillemot has bundled an over-clocking slider that will push the internal clock speed beyond the coveted 200MHz barrier.

Like Guillemot's mainstream Xentor32, the SE Xentor ships with a pared-down OEM version of KINGPIN. Unlike the Xentor32, however, this card will set you back $350. Ouch. Falcon Northwest customers get $30 off the list price, though. While the SE Xentor clearly isn't for everyone, die-hard gaming enthusiasts might want to drop one of these into their AGP slots.

The first thing you notice is the active heat sink/fan combo. It's pretty large. In its current configuration, the card will eat the PCI slot adjacent to the AGP slot. The shipping fan will be less deep but may still obstruct a bulky PCI card. Each pair of SDRAM chips also has a small heat sink attached. The card we checked out had 4.3ns SDRAM onboard, and the card will ship at a default clock rate of 195MHz for the TNT2 Ultra chip and 235MHz for the memory clock. There will also be a special over-clocking utility shipped with the card, but Guillemot and Falcon Northwest are guaranteeing 195/235.

One of the issues with highly-clocked TNT2 Ultra boards has been motherboard support. A number of motherboards do not deliver the 6 amps current at 3.3 volts to the AGP slot, as called for in the AGP hardware spec. Guillemot mitigates this somewhat by powering the cooling fan through the power supply with a standard connector like those found on hard drives. That should reduce the current draw a bit, but be aware that it could be an issue.

Pistols at Dawn

We tested both cards on a 500MHz Pentium III. With the sole exception of games that use the 3dfx mini-GL DRIVER (HALF-LIFE and QUAKE II), the Falcon SE Xentor bests the Voodoo3 3500. In some sense, this is not entirely an "apples to apples" comparison, as the 3500 also has TV and video capture capabilities. But TV aside, the 3500 is still 3dfx's highest-clocked offering.

The Falcon SE Xentor generated the highest-ever 3D GameGauge score on our test bed, at 51.5, compared to Voodoo3 3500's 49.5. Falcon SE Xentor's 32-bit scores at 1024x768 were also quite good. And this is where TNT2 Ultra pulls ahead of Voodoo3, both in rendering feature set, as well as 32-bit rendering support.
We also took a look at the Falcon SE Xentor on a Pentium III/600, where its 3D GameGauge score was upped to an impressive 57.38 (an 11% gain with the 20% increase of CPU speed).

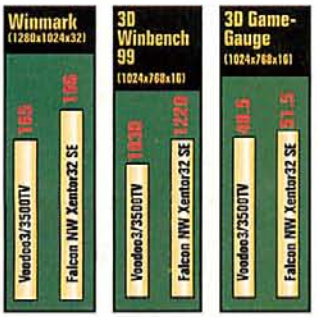
On 2D performance, Falcon SE Xentor again squarely outguns Voodoo 3 3500, whose 2D performance is actually slower than that of a Voodoo 3 3000.

Convergence, or Lack Thereof...

First, let's dispense with the 3D question. The Voodoo3 3500 is quite fast for 3D games. It's not the fastest card we've seen in 3D GameGauge, but it's way up there. And, of course, it supports Glide, 3dfx's proprietary legacy API. If that's what you're looking for in a 3D graphics card, then this may be the card for you. So on the merits of its raw 3D performance, Voodoo 3 3500 is a contender.

TEST RESULTS

Clock Speeds	Core / Mem
Voodoo3/3500TV	183/183
Falcon NW Xentor32 SE	195/234



We tested both cards on a system with a Pentium-III 500MHz, Intel SE440BX2 motherboard, 128MB SDRAM, Windows 98, DirectX 6.1, and EIDE storage components.

But the 3500 is supposed to be more than that. It's 3dfx's shot at making a convergence product, with onboard TV tuner, video capture, and TV display functions. It's in these key areas that 3dfx fails to deliver.

The 3500 has an onboard TV tuner made by electronics giant Philips, and also serves as an FM tuner. This part works very well, and the on-screen "remote" works well, though it lacks keyboard equivalents for all the buttons. However, the channel auto-scan only picked up about half my good cable channels; I had to manually activate the rest. Video and audio connections are made through a small, slick looking breakout box.

The TV-out is abysmal. More often than not, you get a garbled picture. Heaven help you if you try to use the TV and your computer monitor at the same time – you risk making the monitor unusable, and booting with just the TV connected is the only way to fix the problem.

If you do get it to work, the monitor refresh rate is an ugly 60Hz, and you can't run higher than 800x600. 3dfx is aware of these problems, but chose to ship the card anyway.

If you have a hankering to output video to a VCR, look for a different solution. Voodoo3 3500's poor video output quality is mitigated somewhat by the ability to capture to a hard drive, and 3dfx automates time shifting of program recording to the hard drive in its control panel. But the capture quality is quite poor. If you try to use the MPEG-2 capture capability, you're limited to 320x240, and you will drop frames at that resolution (and this was on a 500MHz Pentium III). The WinDVD software DVD player does a decent job of playback on the PIII/500, however.

All in all, if you want the fastest available Voodoo3 card around, then this is it. The convergence features – with the exception of simple TV-watching on screen – still need a lot of work. The whole thing feels like a product that was shipped too early. You'd do better to get a Voodoo3/3000 and an ATI TV Wonder PCI card, if you have the free PCI slot. CGW

★★★☆☆

PROS

Excellent 3D performance; Glide support; cool TV tuner.

CONS

TV-out is abysmal; MPEG-2 capture very limited; 2D performance is sub-par.

Requirements: AGP slot, Windows 95 / OSR2 or Windows 98, 32MB RAM

Price: $220

Manufacturer: 3dfx Interactive

www.3dfx.com

voodoo3 3500

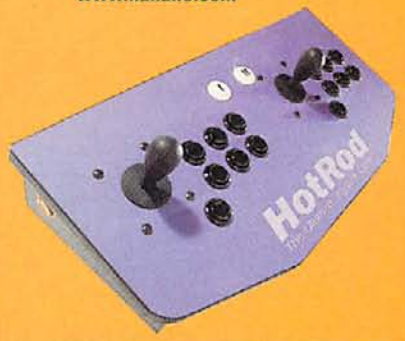
GADGETS FOR GAMERS

The Hot Rod Joystick

If you came to PC gaming from the arcade world, maybe you still pine for the controls found on those upright consoles. What if you could go to your local arcade, rip the control console out of one of those units, bring it home, and plug it into your PC? With HanaHo Games' new HotRod joystick, you can do just that. The unit connects via your keyboard port, and has a pass-through connector for your keyboard.

This can be just the ticket for playing the old stand-up arcade games using the MACE emulator, and it'll even do pretty well with newer sports titles, too. NFL BLITZ, anyone? At $200 bucks, it ain't cheap, but if you want to indulge your arcade jones at home, then give this guy a look. – *Dave Salvator*

Hotrod Joystick, $200, www.hanaho.com



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Saitek P120 Gamepad
Abit BE-6 Motherboard
ActionTec 56K PCI modem

BOO.

Welcome to the element of surprise. Joystick and proportional programmable functions for unfair control of any game.

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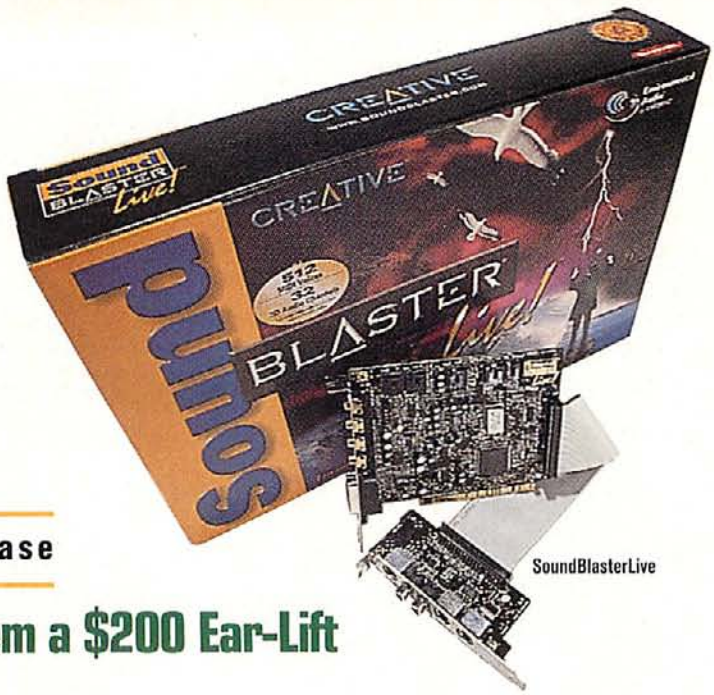
Audio Update

The Art of Noise



SoundBlasterLive

by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

Give Your Audio Sub-System a $200 Ear-Lift

Things on the PC noisemaker front have been, well, kind of quiet. We've heard some great new speakers that have shipped this year from some unlikely places. But most of the progress has been on existing sound cards and sound chipsets, as well as in more new games that are using these 3D audio technologies, some to very fine effect. All of this begs the question: Do I need to upgrade my audio gear to get ready for this holiday season's offerings? Well, like all things computer-related, it depends.

If you're still running that old Sound Blaster 16 ISA card, it's high time you made the move to PCI. Even Creative's AWE-64, a very good sound card in its day, is now long-in-the-tooth. And if you've been putting off upgrading those Dixie Cup speakers that shipped with your PC, then it's time to think about making that move as well. The great news is that there are some very good speakers to be had for under $100 bucks.

Even if you've got a solid PCI sound card and a set of speakers you like, there's one other piece of gear you may want to consider if you do a lot of online gaming and use voice-over-IP applications like Roger Wilco – and that's a good PC headset. We'll take a look at a few headsets, as well as your best choices for sound cards and speakers. That said, let's have at it.

Listen Up: Vortex 2-based cards like Turtle Beach's Montego II Quadzilla do a better job with 3D audio in two speakers, but if you've got a four-speaker setup, then it's practically a coin-toss between Vortex 2-based boards and Creative's Sound Blaster Live cards. The SB Live cards do feature a better wavetable synthesizer than Vortex 2-based cards, so if you're a part-time musician, then you may want to lean that way.

Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla

Sound Cards

Sound card choices are more limited than in the past, but the choices that do exist have more features and better performance than ever. PCI is now the interface of choice; no major new ISA sound cards have shipped in the last year, and it's unlikely we'll see any in the near future (sound of cheering in the background).

There are a number of key features to look for in a sound card, and their order of importance depends on what you're looking for. The first thing to look at, as with graphics cards, is the chipset. The two most prominent audio chipsets are the EMU10k from Creative Labs, used in the Sound Blaster Live line, and Aureal's Vortex2 chip, used in the Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla and numerous other cards. The new kid on the block is ESS's Canyon3D, which promises more sophisticated positional audio through the use of Sensaura's MultiDrive technology. MultiDrive supports active 3D audio through all four speakers if you have a four-speaker setup. That is, HRTF (head-related transfer functions), which alter the audio stream to fool the ear into assigning a direction to a given sound, is calculated for all four speakers, not just the front pair. Avoid, if possible, any card that only supports the AC97 CODEC – it will eat CPU cycles and kill your game performance. Do look for a card that supports four speakers, though, even if you don't

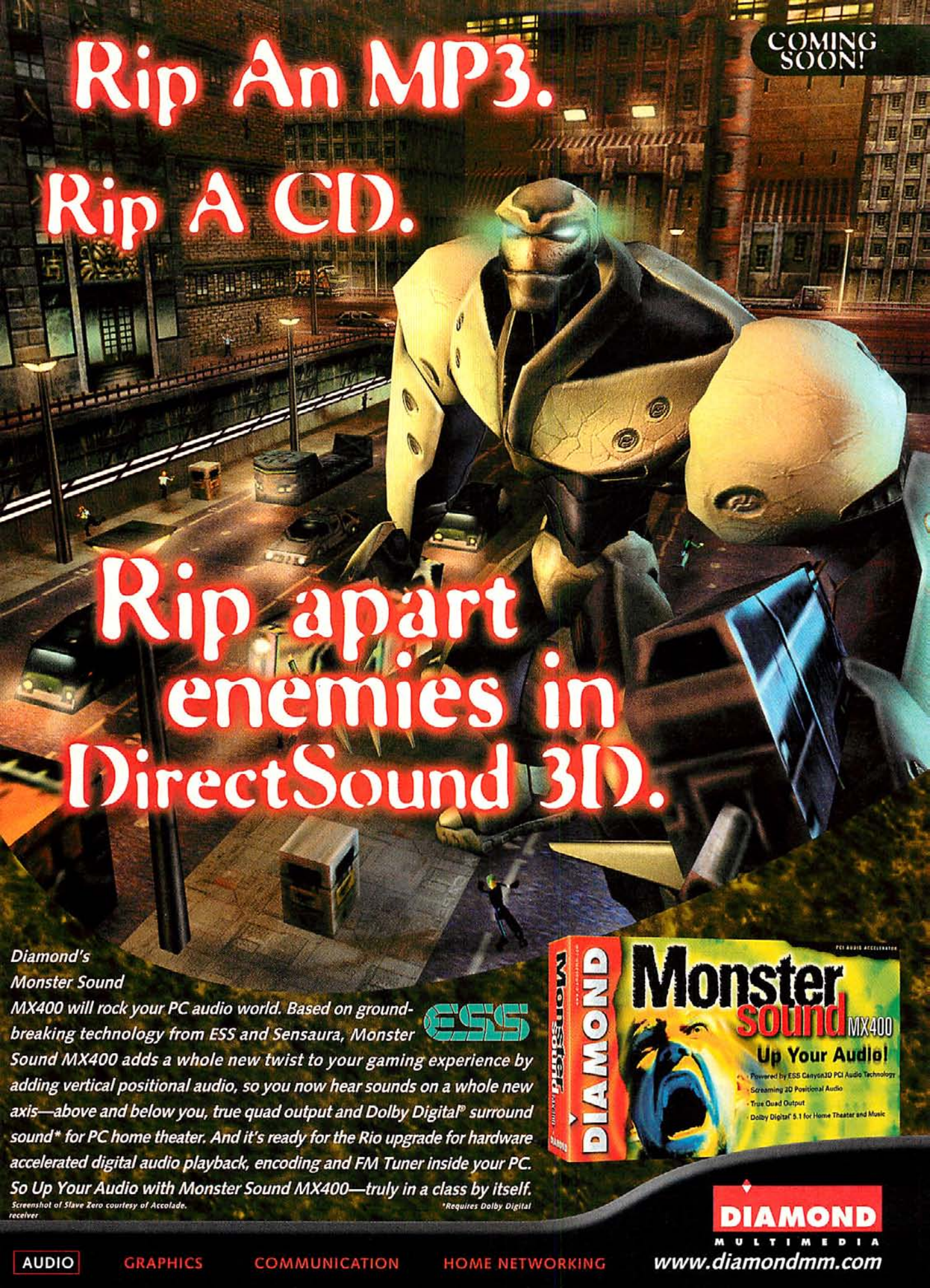
Preview

Vortex 2, Revision B

We had a chance to preview the latest version of Aureal's revision B Vortex 2 chip. It's the same architecture as the original, but Aureal has streamlined the chip and improved performance dramatically. At 22KHz, 8-bit audio with 16 streams, Audio WinBench reported 0% CPU utilization. That's right, 0%.

At 44.1KHz, 16-bit audio, the performance hit crept up to 2.32%, but that's hardly a problem in any game. Note that any game that makes heavy use of A3D 2.0's occlusion and wave-tracing may still show some performance hit, but Aureal's rev B silicon should help a lot. Note that you'd probably still want a Sound Blaster Live if you're a dabbling musician or recording hobbyist, as CPU utilization does spike up with 32 voices. And while MIDI sounds much better with revision B than the older Vortex 2, it's still not quite up to the Sound Blaster Live sample set. But the new Aureal chip should alleviate any concerns about CPU utilization in games.

Cards using the new Aureal chip will be distributed under the Aureal brand by IOMagic: www.iomagic.com. Pricing had not been set at press time. – *Loyd Case*


COMING SOON!
Rip An MP3.
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Diamond's Monster Sound MX400 will rock your PC audio world. Based on ground-breaking technology from ESS and Sensaura, Monster Sound MX400 adds a whole new twist to your gaming experience by adding vertical positional audio, so you now hear sounds on a whole new axis—above and below you, true quad output and Dolby Digital® surround sound* for PC home theater. And it's ready for the Rio upgrade for hardware accelerated digital audio playback, encoding and FM Tuner inside your PC. So Up Your Audio with Monster Sound MX400—truly in a class by itself.
Screenshot of Slave Zero courtesy of Accolade.
*Requires Dolby Digital receiver
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Monster Sound MX400
Up Your Audio!
Powered by ESS Canyon3D PCI Audio Technology
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plan on using that feature right away.

How Is "Faster" Audio Good?

Performance is a key feature. You don't want your cool 3D audio to cause the frame rate of the game to tank. We can test CPU utilization with Audio WinBench 99, which gives us a good indication of performance. The performance champ is Creative's Sound Blaster Live – its CPU utilization stays under 3% with 8 and 16 streams of audio, and barely creeps up to 4% with 32 streams. Very few games support more than eight streams, however. The Sound Blaster Live also has a superb MIDI sample set, while Aureal's can only be described as adequate (MIDI isn't much of a factor in most games today, though). The Vortex 2, running the newer 2035 reference drivers, stays fairly low with eight 3D audio streams at 22KHz, but spikes up to just over 5% with 16 voices at 44.1KHz. That's still pretty low if you have a fairly fast CPU (the next revision of the Vortex 2 will perform better – see sidebar). The Canyon3D's performance was disappointing at both resolutions. Given that the Vortex 2 performance steadily improved with new driver releases, we can only hope that the same will be true with the new ESS chip. The Canyon3D came mounted on a Terratec sound card that supports digital (S/PDIF) audio in and out, an optional FM tuner, and wavetable add-on connector. The quality of the 3D audio was good, as were the MIDI samples, but the performance penalty is too great for most of today's demanding games. However, the DMX control panel should serve as a model for a good audio-control panel.

Terratec DMX

Xitel Storm Platinum

That brings us to the Sound Blaster Live versus Vortex2 debate. Our take on it is choose a good Vortex2 board, like the Xitel Storm or Turtle Beach Montego II, if you've only two speakers. If you have a four-speaker rig, flip a coin. The four-speaker positional audio is slightly better in our Audio WinBench listening tests with the Sound Blaster Live, but A3D tends to sound better in real games; in either case, the differences are relatively small. The Xitel Platinum comes with a pair of headphones that have "force feedback" (read: they vibrate). We found this to be a worthless gimmick and turned it off, but the headphones themselves sound fine, and the whole bundle is $99. If we had to pick one card, though, it would be the Montego II, with its cool diagnostic tools and useful control panel. The Sound Blaster Live full version comes in a close second – especially if you're an audio hobbyist as well as a gamer – but it will cost you a bit more.

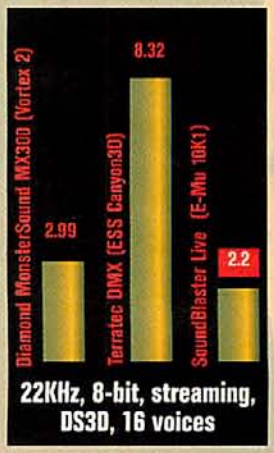
How We Tested

Most of our testing of this audio gear was subjective listening. For the sound cards, we ran Audio WinBench's CPU usage tests, which measure how much of the CPU gets eaten when playing multiple wave files through both DirectSound and DirectSound3D. We also ran a number of MIDI sequences through the cards' wavetable synthesizers to evaluate the quality of their General MIDI patch set. What we found is that Vortex 2-based and SB Live cards do a good job of keeping CPU usage low, though Terratec's new Canyon3D-based card suffered from higher CPU usage.

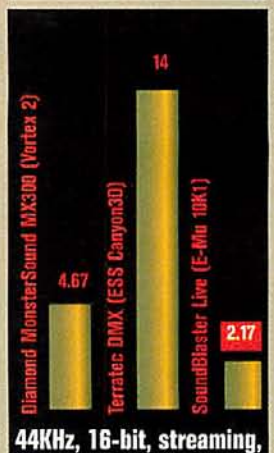
For speakers, our testing involved a lot of listening tests – both of CD audio music as well as gaming audio. For musical material, we used a wide variety of music, ranging from Bruce Springsteen to the woofer-punishing Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*, which brought a number of the speakers we tested to their knees. We were listening for tonal clarity (solid bass and clean, uncolored mids and highs). We also did our dreaded RFL (really, um, frickin' loud) test, where we ran the speakers up as loud as they would go without going into distortion. For gaming audio, we played the opening trailer for MECHCOMMANDER, as well as QUAKE 3: ARENA. Again, we were listening for good sound reproduction across the spectrum, and because the best way to have one's gaming audio is loud (as in very), we again did the RFL test. – *Dave Salvator*

How They Stack Up

Audio WinBench Test Results for Soundcards



22KHz, 8-bit, streaming, DS3D, 16 voices



44KHz, 16-bit, streaming, DS3D, 16 voices

NOTE: At 32 voices, SB live is still under 4%; we only list results for the Diamond Vortex 2-based card because the other cards based on that chip turned in essentially identical performances.

Audio Score Card

$100 street price for all sound cards

Manufacturer	Rating	The Skinny
Diamond MonsterSound MX300	★★★★½	Best-sounding two-channel output for 3D audio effects; works well in four-channel also.
Terratec DMX	★★★½	Does a good job in two-channel, but is better with four-channel output.
SB Live Value	★★★★½	Good four-channel output; best-sounding wavetable synth.
Xitel Storm Platinum	★★★★	Best-sounding two-channel output for 3D audio effects; works well in four-channel also; comes with "force-feedback" headphones.
Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla	★★★★½	Best-sounding two-channel output for 3D audio effects; works well in four-channel also.

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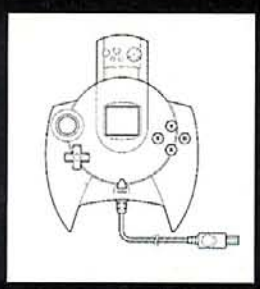
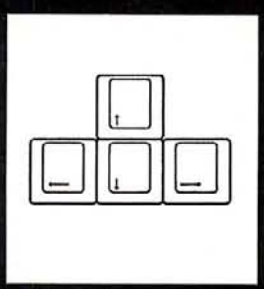

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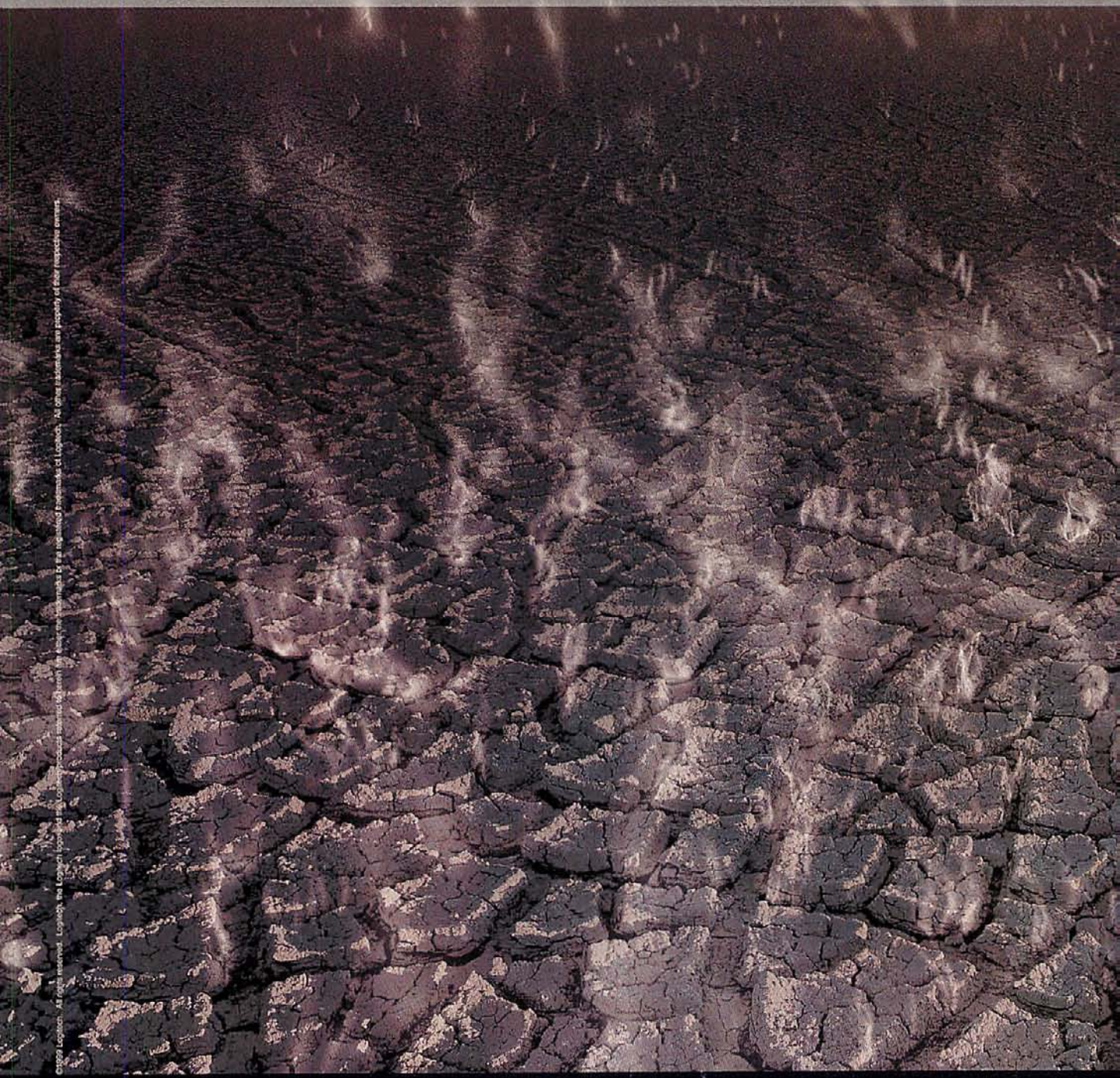

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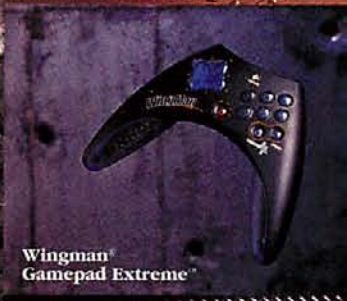

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Speakers

Developments on the speaker front this year have basically consisted of new, cheap offerings for companies looking to pay in the sub-$100 speaker range, where the great bulk of PC speakers are sold. There are, however, several noteworthy offerings that come in around $150. There is one primary consideration to factor into a speaker-buying decision, and that's of course the sound. Doesn't matter how cool they look, or what type of technology they use (cone driver, flat panel, dipole radiator, etc.); if they don't sound good to your ears, and cleanly deliver the volume level you're looking for, then they're not for you.

Philips 370

Secondary considerations include an integrated power supply, or at the very least a Soap-on-a-Rope-style power supply. In this day and age, wall-warts simply don't cut it. Also, look for speakers that have a headphone jack "upstairs," that is, on one of the satellite speakers. This is a very handy feature late at night when you're looking to make with the mayhem and don't want to wake up the whole house. If they've got the headphone jack "downstairs" (on the woofer), then that's better than nothing. So really, the main thing to do when buying a set of speakers is to make sure that the store you buy from has a good return policy. That way, you can take home that prized new set of speakers and put them through their paces in your office, hovel, cave, etc., and make sure that they sound good to your ears. Because taste in speakers is a little like taste in wine, and not everyone is going to agree on which speakers are the "best." That said, here are our recommendations, which we've broken into two categories: best overall and best value.

Labtec 2414

Best Overall: Yamaha YST-M55

Yamaha YST-M55

Yamaha is a longtime denizen of the audio world, making everything from pro audio gear, to home A/V components, to PC speakers. In our listening tests, the Yamahas simply delivered the best sound quality, both for music and gaming audio. There was plenty of low-end, and mids and highs were also well defined. These speakers excel as well in the RFL test (see sidebar), developing serious volume without distortion, thanks to 80 watts of amplification. In fact, in gaming audio tests, our ears said "uncle" before these speakers did.

AIWA SC-UC78

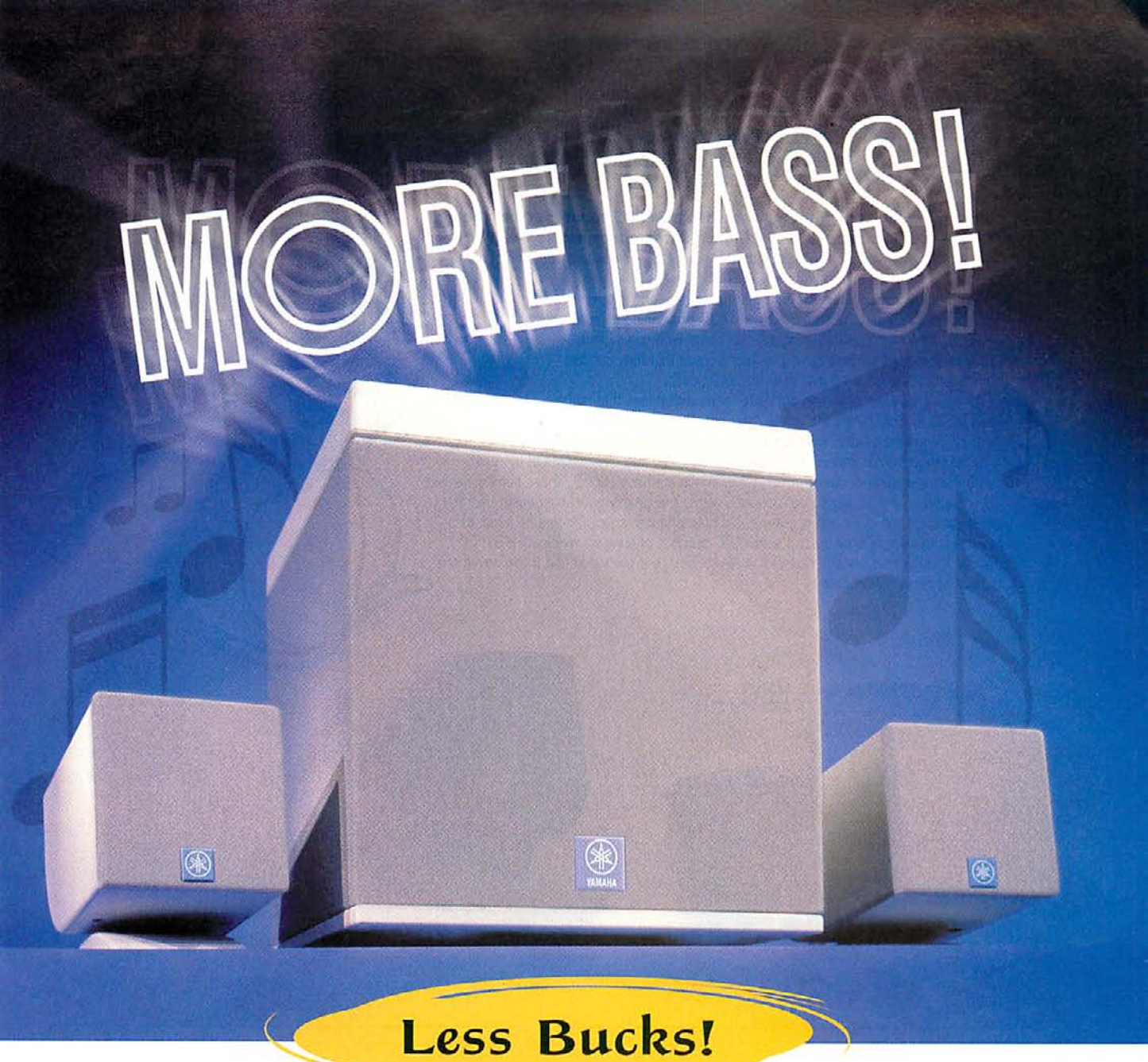
They do come with USB functionality that frankly doesn't add much for gamers. In fact, we'd counsel you to avoid USB audio altogether, particularly on games that use 3D audio via DirectSound3D. As a feature on speakers, don't even bother looking for it.

Honorable mention goes to Philips' 370s. These speakers have more bass than should be allowed by law. They also emit very loud volume without distortion, and have good imaging, though Yamaha's offering still sounded better to our ears. Also worth a look are Labtec's 5820 units, which also delivered lots of volume and sounded very solid across the spectrum, both on music and gaming audio. They didn't quite have Yamaha's smoothness, which is why the latter gets the nod.

Best Value: Altec-Lansing ACS54

Altec-Lansing's low-cost, four-channel offering impressed us for its general sound in music audio, but more so in gaming audio, where they produced good volume without distortion. And because they're four-channel, they'll certainly help make 3D audio more, well, 3D. About the only thing missing is a headphone jack, though the power supply is integrated into the woofer. Honorable mention goes to Labtec, whose 2414s sound good, and develop decent volume levels before clipping becomes apparent. But the 2414s deliver what they do for about a $40 street price. They lack a headphone jack, and suffer from wall-wartitis, but based on the merits of their overall sound, they're definitely worth a listen.

Altec-Lansing ACS-54



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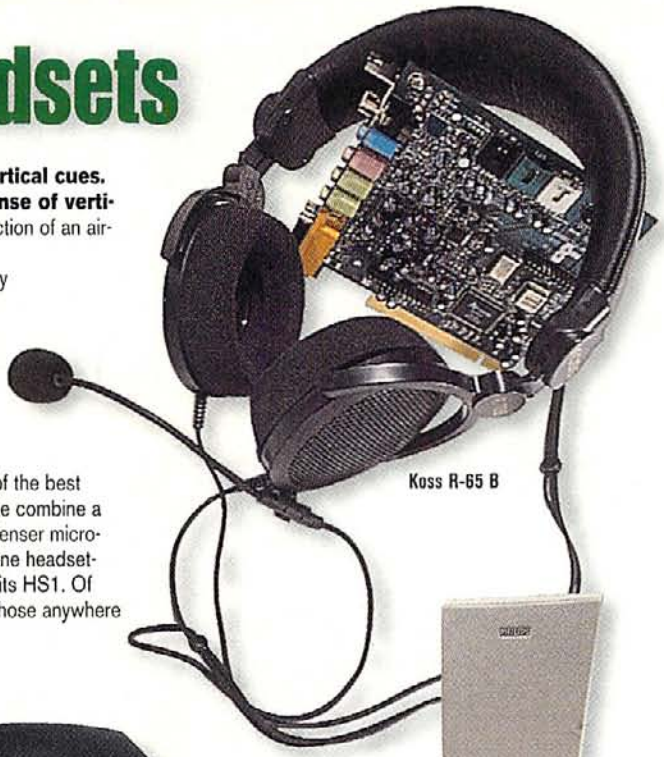
Headphones/Headsets

There's a problem with speakers when using 3D sound: vertical cues. Even with four speakers, it's difficult to reproduce any sense of vertical position. For example, it's difficult to discern the position and direction of an aircraft circling overhead in a game.

Headphones bring those HRTFs right up to your ears, and remove any problems with cross-talk. So the horizontal 3D positioning is much better, and even vertical cues can now be heard with some clarity – though it's still not perfect. So it's to Xitel's credit that they bundle some kind of headphones with their Vortex 2 board.

There is a gigantic selection of headphones with prices that range from $0.99 to $500. And the adage "you get what you pay for" doesn't always hold true. There are some very good headphones in the $30-60 range from companies like Sennheiser, Koss, and others. One of the best microphone/headset combinations I've run into is the Koss R-65B. These combine a great sounding pair of stereo headphones with a reasonably good condenser microphone (though the mounting bracket could be a bit more solid). Telephone headset-maker Plantronics is now making a solid PC headset offering as well in its HS1. Of course, I still like my ancient Koss Pro4 AAA's best, but you won't find those anywhere outside of Ebay.– *Loyd Case*


Koss R-65 B

Logitech SoundMan X2

Labtec 5820

Philips 330

Photos by Michael Falconer

Speakers

$100 street price for all sound cards

Manufacturer	Rating	Street Price	How They Sound	Power Supply	Headphone Jack	Wattage Rating
AIWA SC-UC78	★★★	$80	Generally good sound for music/game audio, though low-end and max volume level is lacking.	Integrated	Upstairs	14w woofer, 7w/side satellite
Altec-Lansing ACS-54	★★★★	$80	Fare better on game audio than music, particularly for clean output at high volume. Solid four-channel output in games.	Integrated	None	20w woofer, 10w each satellite
Labtec 2414	★★★★	$40	Sound field isn't very wide when playing music; able to play loud and clean better with music than with game audio; max volume on game audio not all it could be, but good given the low price.	Wall-Wart	None	15w woofer, 10w/side satellite
Labtec 5820	★★★★	$150	Very full sound, and high max volume levels for game audio and music, though not quite as smooth as the Yamahas. Has four different "surround sound" modes.	Integrated	Upstairs	44w woofer, 13w/side satellite
Logitech SoundMan X2	★★	$65	Bright, with weak low-end response; broke up badly at any volume level with game audio.	Integrated	Downstairs	24w woofer, 8w/side satellite
Philips 330	★★★	$100	Generally good sound for music with a fairly wide sound stage, and ample bass response; very good volume for game audio.	Integrated	None	25w woofer, 12.5/side satellite
Philips 370	★★★★	$140	Good sound stage; a ton of bass, almost too much at times; plenty of volume for game audio, but not as much as Yamaha.	Soap-on-a-Rope	None	30w woofer, 15w/side satellite
Yamaha YST-M55	★★★★½	$150	Great response across the board; sound stage is a little tight, but still good; developed huge amounts of volume for music and game audio; made us say "uncle" before they did.	Integrated	Upstairs	40w woofer, 20w/side satellite

NOTE: For headphone jack, "upstairs" means the jack is on one of the satellites, whereas "downstairs" means the jack is on the bass unit.

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— *RPGXtreme*

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Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

Gear Hunter

Making Sense of Online Hardware Shopping

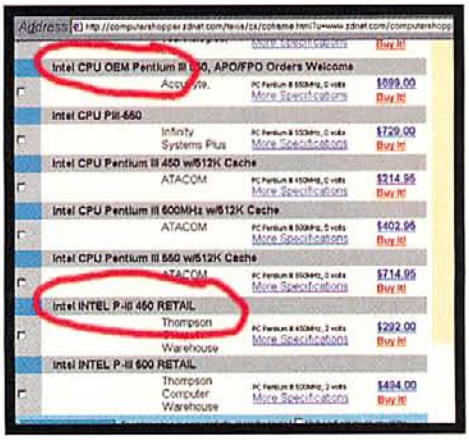
In my years of building PCs, upgrading systems, and writing about it all, I've bought a lot of computer gear. In the process, I've learned a lot about shopping. There's a whole world of jargon to hardware shopping that you learn as you become an experienced buyer.

Like all jargon, the language can be strange and confusing. It's not intended to confuse buyers (call me an optimist), but it often does nonetheless. So I thought we'd spend some time doing a little shopping and clear up some confusion along the way.

Let's start by paying a visit to www.computershopper.com, one of many good Web resources for direct buyers. In our virtual shopping experience, let's first go looking for a CPU.

OEM: No, It's Not a Mantra

There are a couple of things to note in the screen shot. Note the top, circled entry: "Intel CPU OEM Pentium III." Then, check out the second circled entry: "Intel P-III 450 Retail." What's the difference? They're both Pentium IIIs, right?



Well, yes, but ignoring the speed difference, there's almost always a price differential between the OEM and retail version. OEM stands for "original equipment manufacturer." OEM products are for resellers to use in complete systems.

In the past, that requirement was adhered to more strictly than in today's Internet shopping environment. You will often see the terms "OEM," "white box," and "tray" used interchangeably. You'll also see "retail," "boxed," and "retail boxed" CPUs – they all mean the same thing. Why is that? Are you really just paying for a printed box?

Well, no, not entirely. The retail, boxed version of any Intel CPU comes with a three-year warranty and an attached cooling fan and heat sink.

The OEM version comes, if you're lucky, in an anti-static bag. You have to buy the cooling fan separately. You're also at the mercy of the reseller when it comes to warranty; Intel supplies only a 30-day warranty to the dealer. There's no difference in performance, however. OEM products can be a great deal, but are often stripped-down.

It may be something as simple as selling in a plain box without the software bundle, or something more complex like removing actual hardware features. It's common, for example, for OEM graphics cards to leave off the TV output that is common on retail versions.

But it can be even worse than that. One graphics card company once sold an OEM product to one of the larger computer vendors with a slower RAMDAC than the retail product. Both the graphics card company and the system dealer got into hot water with buyers for that bit of cost reduction. So, pay close attention to what features are listed for a card, and make sure you're getting what you think you're paying for.

Windows Shopping

Okay, now let's head out on our shopping tour again and find a copy of the Windows 98SE operating system.

In this brave new world of e-commerce, there are still some online shops that are, let's just say, less than scrupulous...

This time, we'll visit another shopping service called Price Watch (www.pricewatch.com). Price Watch is a good site because you get prices from a wide variety of Web dealers, sorted by lowest price to highest.

There are a number of ways to buy the Windows software. First, you can get the standard retail version, in either a full or upgrade model. Or, you can buy the OEM version, which is typically a full install version, but slightly different.

For one thing, the OEM version doesn't give you the goofy "This is for computers without Windows" message you get with the full retail install version. More important is the licensing agreement. The OEM version of Windows states that it must only be sold with a full system. Many resellers get around this with fine print, such as the line "must be bought with HD or CPU & motherboard."

However, a little careful shopping will reveal that you can buy the OEM version without even that minimal requirement, provided you're a known customer.

In this brave new world of e-commerce, there are still some online shops that are, let's just say, less than scrupulous, and could spawn some other e-terms like e-fraud, e-scam, or e-swindle.

So paying a few extra bucks to do business with an outfit that a friend has recommended—or a shop that has a better return policy—may well be worth it. CGW

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Killer Rigs

When you're ready to put your dream rig together, check out www.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop5/index.html for Loyd's step-by-step guide to getting your Ultimate Gaming Machine up and running.

YOUR SEARCH FOR THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE BEGINS HERE!!!

Throttle Thrustmaster TQS • $115 • More control than anyone needs.

Keyboard Logitech Newtouch • $45 • In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural.

Monitor Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u • $1,300 • Perfectly flat; good USB support.

Optiquest V95 • $405 • Solid 19" monitor at a budget price.

CD-ROM Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD • $180 • New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD.

Pioneer DVD-103 • $130 • Slot drive DVD.

Case In-Win Q500 full tower ATX • $115 • New improved model.

Elan Vital T10-AB • $82 • The case for upgraders.

Speakers LFT-11 • $500 • Beautiful imaging, clean sound.

Boston Acoustics BA-635 • $99 • Went back to our favorites.

Joystick Thrustmaster F22 Pro • $129.00 • It just feels right.

CH Gamestick 3D • $55 • Very nice little symmetric stick.

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F	$135	Back to the future.
CPU	Pentium III/600	$800	It's the top of the heap, for now.
Memory	256MB of PC133 certified HSDRAM	$398	Just think, a quarter-gigabyte.
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940u2w	$349	80 megabytes per second.
Primary Graphics	Falcon SE Xentor NEW!	$350	Fastest TNT2 card around.
Secondary Graphics	3dfx Voodoo2/1000	$99	Single Voodoo2 for Glide compatibility.
3.5" floppy drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one.
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$825	A little warmer than the Fujitsu, but much faster.
Backup	Iomega Jaz 2	$300	2 gigs of backup.
Hard Drive cooler	PC Power and Cooling Bay-Cool	$49	Keep that Atlas 10k cool!
Primary Audio	Turtle Beach Montego II Quadzilla	$99	For four speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX.
Rear channel speakers	Jamo CS-5	$420	Ultimate rear-channel-powered speakers.
Modem	Copper Rocket DSL modem	$400	DSL at last.
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$70	For fragging my buddies.
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support.
Power Supply	Turbocool 300	$129	More power, Scotty!
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Mouseman Plus	$49	Off the leash.
Action Game Controller	Gravis Gamepad Pro USB	$29	Get two.
Rudder Pedals	Thrustmaster Elite RCS	$79	Nearly perfect foot placement.
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,129	For the serious (and rich) sim driver.
		Total	$8,283.00

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. Compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Aopen AX6BC Pro
CPU	Pentium III/450
Memory	128MB Corsair PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Guillemot Xenter 32 NEW!
Floppy drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Western Digital Expert 9.1
Primary Audio	Diamond Monster Sound MX300
Modem	Diamond Supra 56e
D-Link 10/100 Ethernet	D-Link
Power Supply	Built-in, 235W
Keyboard	Logitech Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech PS/2 Wheel Mouse

"Which 3D Card Should I Buy?"

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So—you asked for it, you got it.

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. We have two recommendations for you:

Choice A: If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo2 1000 board. At about $100, it will do a very good job with current games, and a pretty good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo2 board to the new setup.

Choice B: If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Guillemot Xentor 32, which is currently the fastest 3D gun in the West. At about $350 street price for the 32MB version, this card is pretty pricey, but it is the fastest (see this month's review on page 209). Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU you can migrate the card into your new setup, and it's got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate it with. If your budget can't deal with a $350 price tag, TNT2 Ultra-based boards from Guillemot (Xentor 32), Diamond (Viper 770), and Creative Labs (3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra) will also do a good job without breaking the bank.

Product Watch

Where's Athlon?

After last month's CPU shoot-out, you may be asking yourself, "So if AMD's Athlon CPU is so damn fast, why isn't it in the Power Rig yet?" A fine question. The reason? At press time, we couldn't buy an Athlon anywhere. They weren't shipping yet. And because we don't want to recommend anything that you can't actually buy, we're holding off for a month. When Athlon ships, you'll see it in the Power Rig and maybe even in the Lean Machine as well.

In other CPU news, Intel is readying their next-generation chipset, code-named Camino. Now rechristened the 820, this new chipset brings several welcome additions, including faster memory, a faster hard drive controller, and AGP 4X. The 820 will support a 133MHz interface between the CPU and the North bridge, as well as a new memory type called RAMBUS, the speed of which will be somewhere between 1.2GB/sec and 1.6GB/sec, a serious speed bump from the current 800MB/sec that the 440BX chipset delivers. The 820 will also support SDRAM, since RAMBUS memory may be in relatively short supply as the 820 debuts this fall. In addition, the AGP pipe will get much faster, going from 528MB/sec peak throughput to 1.1GB/sec. The 820 will also support the UltraATA-66 specification, so hard drives using that standard should see a performance increase. As soon as we can filch one of these motherboards, we'll let you know how it fares versus 440BX. CGW

e Skinny	
CI slots, Softmenu, 440BX, ready for Pentium III.	
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MB at last.	
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I gotta have it.	
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) and clean audio for under a C-note.	
id performance, good price.	
ech out and frag someone.	
y-in with power.	
vith the new, out with the Natural.	
ter than the "gaming" mouse.	
Total	**$1,999.00**

NEED A KILLER RIG?

The Ultimate Gaming Machine

Next month in Hardware, ***CGW* sets out** on its **annual quest** to find the **Ultimate Gaming Machine.** We'll review **15 complete computer systems** from mouse to monitor and tell you **which have the power** you need.

ON SALE NOV. 2

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Tech Medics

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

We get mail. Lots of mail. Huge quantities... well, you get the idea. Readers send us all kinds of intriguing techie questions. We answer as many as we can directly, but because we find that you're often asking similar questions, we figured we'd answer the most frequently asked ones here. If you've got a hardware headache, send us mail at cgw_hardware@zd.com.

What does IDE mean? What is a DVD drive good for? Is there a DVD drive that also has a CD-ROM drive built in?

IDE stands for "integrated device electronics" and is the interface used to connect most hard drives in your computer. Current generation motherboards all come with built-in IDE ports that support the UltraDMA/33 standard. DVD drives are mainly for watching DVD movies, though there are a few DVD games out there. Most DVD games were originally released on CD-ROM, and have now been re-released with higher quality video for cut scenes on DVD. All DVD drives will read CD-ROM discs, though the very first DVD drives would not read recordable media (CD-R).

Q **I can never seem to get the full capacity of hard drives after performing an fdisk. A 9.1 GB hard drive yields only 8.6 GB, and a 6.4 GB hard disk only yields 6.1 GB. Has it got anything to do with the BIOS setting? I'm currently using Win 98 and ABIT BX-6 R2 motherboard.**

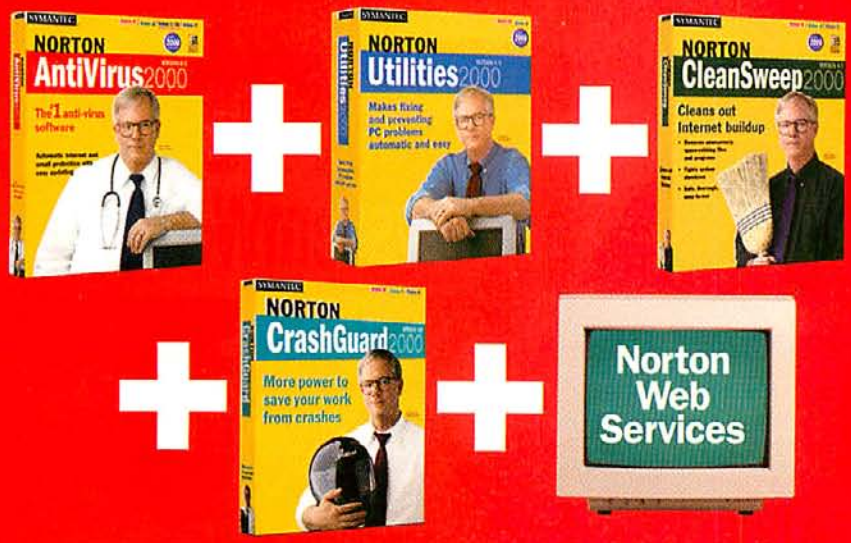
A It's probably not your BIOS. While older BIOS chips could not properly detect hard drives larger than 8.4GB, the ABIT BX-6 rev 2.0 isn't that old. What you're seeing is the difference between how the hard drive companies view the universe and how the rest of us look at it. Hard drive companies believe that one megabyte is 1,000,000 bytes. However, most computers and operating systems believe that one megabyte is 1,048,576 bytes.

Q **What's this I hear about TNT2 Ultra cards not working in some motherboards?**

A A few cards don't work properly with some motherboards. A number of earlier motherboards that used the Intel 440LX chipset didn't deliver adequate power to the AGP slot. At least one, the Asus P2L97 revision 1.05 or earlier, is way out of spec, and will fail with most TNT2 Ultra cards. Others miss the rated current spec (6 amps at 3.3 volts) by a smidgen. But a highly clocked card, like the Guillemot Xentor 32 or the Hercules Dynamite TNT2 Ultra that has an onboard fan, needs the full 6 amps of power. Guillemot has done a lot of testing on this, and you can find a list of problem motherboards at their site, www.guillemot.com. At least one board, the Asus P2B-F, is fixed by simply updating the BIOS to the current revision.

Q **I had Win98 and Red Hat 5.2 on a LILO dual boot. Being the idiot that I am I used Partition Magic to just delete the Linux partitions. Simple enough, right? I figured LILO would ask which operating system I wanted to boot as usual, only "Linux" would be a "dead link" and I could fix that later. Well now it's messed up. The usual LILO boot usually looks like "LILO Boot:", but now it just says "LI" and freezes up. I try to boot from a floppy, I get to DOS, I can browse my C: and newly created D: drives all I like. But when I type "WIN" it starts to load Windows and then I get two errors. One says that the registry files are unavailable (or something like that) then it passes by that and the BSOD comes up saying "A device or resource required by VFAT is not present or unavailable. VFAT cannot continue loading. System halted." Is there any way of fixing this?**

A There are several possible solutions, in order of increasing severity. The easiest one to try is to boot normally. You'll end up at the DOS prompt. Go to "\windows\command" and type: "sys c:". This will make the hard drive a DOS bootable drive. But it won't work if the master boot record has been altered by the Linux install. If that's the case, try: "fdisk /mbr". Do NOT do this if you are using some kind of disk manager, like OnTrack or MaxBlast. Given that you were using Linux, though, this probably isn't an issue. The third thing to try is to get a copy of the latest version of Partition Magic, which understands Linux partitions, and can help in deleting Linux native partitions. Another cool utility is Symantec's Gdisk, which comes with their Ghost partition package. But Gdisk is command line driven and can be very dangerous, so use with caution. CGW



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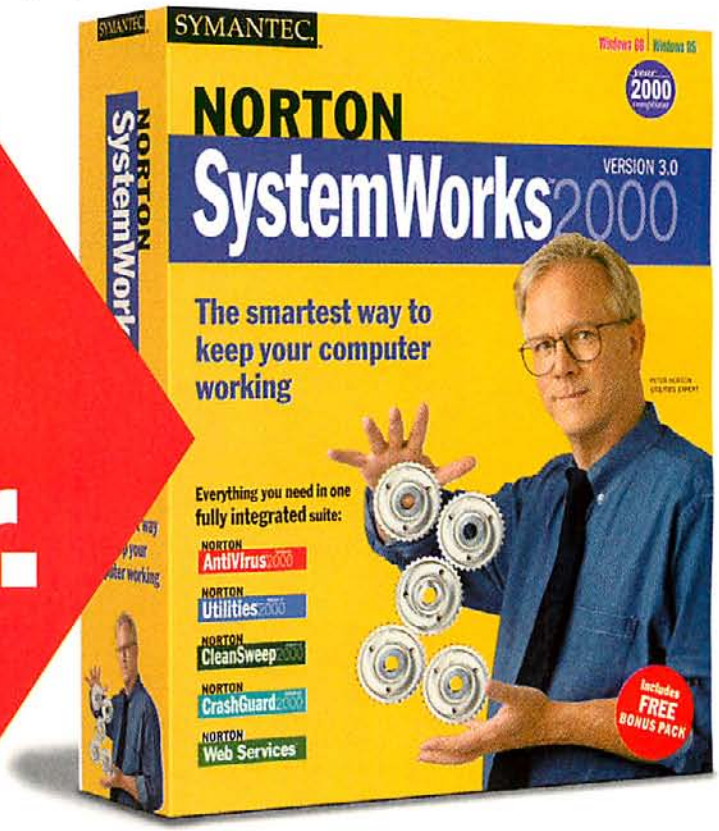

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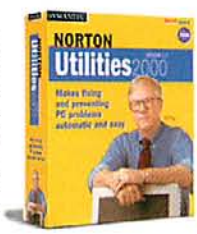
"If you want the best defense against system problems, turn to the granddaddy of all utility packages, Norton Utilities." Smart Computing, 3/98



Vaccinate A Virus On Tuesday.

It looked like such a friendly, innocent little e-mail.

But by reading it, you opened up a Pandora's box of corrosive code. In the blink of an eye, it

could have wiped away a year's worth of work. It could have screwed up your data. It could have tucked its deadly digital infection deep inside your hard drive. It could have, and would have…but you had Norton AntiVirus.™

"The 1999 Software Product Of The Year!" Windows Magazine, 7/99

We've inoculated more computers than any anti-virus software ever invented.

And our new 2000 version packs even stronger antidotes. It automatically scans all incoming e-mail attachments. It stops ActiveX and Java code assaults. It even updates itself without having to restart your system. With 100,000,000 computers on the Internet, it's a big, contagious, wired world out there. To keep your PC in the pink, fight infection with Norton protection.

Clean Up The Clutter On Wednesday.

Sure you bought the biggest, baddest hard drive in the store.

But that was before everyone you ever met e-mailed you.

Before whiz-bang plug-ins so you could visit one site…once.

Before MP3.

Before video grabs and digital photos.

Before the hottest Sim game needed 8 CDs. Isn't it time to throw open the window, and toss out all that clutter!?

"Our first choice in its field" PC Magazine, 5/99

Sweep away your unneeded files, unused programs, and unnecessary junk. With the #1 choice for hard drive clean up… Norton CleanSweep.™

Catch A Crash On Thursday.

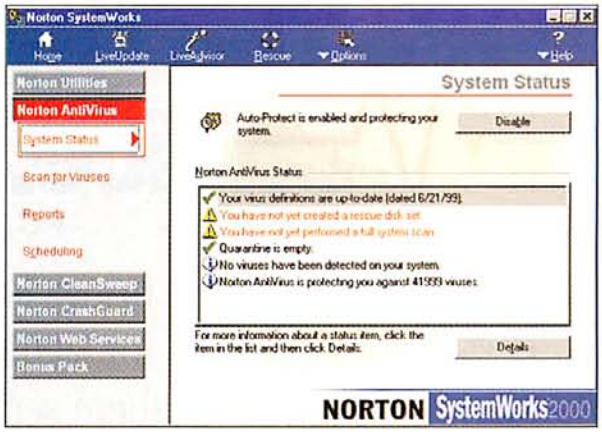
Tick…tick…tick…tick.

Like some technological timebomb, all computers are doomed to blow up. Only you can't predict when yours will crash. Or why it will freeze. The only thing you know for sure is that it happens to everyone.

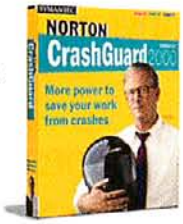
And generally it happens when you can least afford it. Like when you haven't saved your work for over an hour. Or just after you've entered the last address in a 385-person mailing list. Or the final numbers into a tedious spreadsheet.

We think the best defense is a stronger offensive. That's why Norton CrashGuard™ jumps right into the path of an oncoming crash. It protects your work first, even creating a SafeOriginal,™ then guides you step-by-step through recovery.

Crashes happen. Just make sure you're not crushed by the next one.



Start any or all of Norton SystemWorks from one screen. No rebooting!



"Superb….it informed us of problems we did not previously know about." InternetWeek, 3/99

Call For An Instant Update On Friday.

Has another week flown by already?

In this high-tech world, a thousand things can change in only five days. There are new software updates, system patches, bug fixes, hardware drivers, and virus definitions. Luckily, you've got a six-month subscription to Norton Web Services.™ It's the most comprehensive PC resource center on the Internet.

Like a Yellow Pages for computer support, it's the one place to turn for all current system maintenance information and downloads.

Internet "operators" are even standing by. Our Norton support staff is there, online, to assist you in real time. And if you'd like, we'll even notify you about the latest developments, by e-mail.

Take A Break On Saturday With Our Free Bonus Pack.

As if owning "the best utility suite" (*Windows Magazine, 3/99*) wasn't reward enough, we're sweetening the deal. We've added a special Bonus Pack that includes Zip-It!™ which shrinks any files you want to archive, or makes them faster to e-mail.

You'll get Norton 2000™ Bios Test & Fix. If you want to go to sleep this New Year's Eve without waking up to a nightmare on New Year's morning, check your PC *now*!

You'll be able to send and receive faxes directly from your computer with your bonus copy of WinFax™ Basic Edition. There's also Symantec Visual Page™ for building and managing your own personal Web page. Even encryption software to safeguard your private files from prying Internet eyes.

Is Sunday A Day Of Rest? …Hardly!

You can snooze as late as you want, because Norton SystemWorks is awake and alert to any potential PC problems.

Our award-winning programs are protecting your computer, automatically, 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

So surf the Web. Play a game. Or, don't even touch your computer.

"Like a lifesaver bobbing on a turbulent sea, Norton SystemWorks will keep you afloat." (*InternetWeek, 3/99*)

"It's The Obvious Choice."

–PC Magazine

"Norton SystemWorks brings together several best-of-breed utilities for significantly less than you'd pay to get them separately. For one-stop shopping for system utilities, it's the obvious choice."

— PC Magazine, 5/99

What's the secret of our success?... Norton Symmetry!

In May, when PC Magazine bestowed it's prestigious Editors' Choice Award on Norton SystemWorks, they said, "...the real advantage lies in SystemWorks' integration."

We think our integration technology is so special, we've given it a special name: Norton Symmetry. It's our exclusive method to insure our programs look, act, and work alike.

(Okay, that might sound simplistic to you, but our competition is still baffled how we accomplished it!)

In short, we've made a powerful software suite

"...does even more to help Windows users deal with the headaches of system crashes, missing or corrupted files, computer viruses, and other facts of Windows life."

—PC Week 4/99

"...a seamlessly integrated suite of utility and antivirus software...an exceptional value."

—InternetWeek 3/99

"...other programs offer similar features but fall far short of what Norton has."

—Knight Ridder Newspapers 1/99

PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE 1999™

WINLIST Windows Magazine 1998

PCComputing 1998

PC WORLD WORLD CLASS

Put new Norton SystemWorks 2000 to work today.

To buy it online, or find your nearest Norton software dealer, please visit our website.

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SYMANTEC.™

Reviews

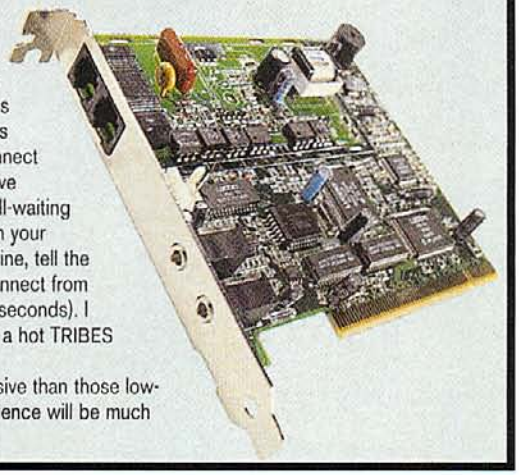
ACTIONTEC 56K PCI CALL WAITING MODEM

Requirements: Free PCI slot. **Price:** $105 **Manufacturer:** Actiontec
Contact: www.actiontec.com

Hold the Phones

I've steered people away from PCI modems in general, because most of them are "soft" modems – little more than an excuse to sell more powerful CPUs. Actiontec has finally shipped a modem that's the exception to that rule. Soft or "Winmodems" use your CPU to process most of the modem chores. They're terrible for online games, and often cause unacceptably high lag times. More traditional modems have their own controller chip that takes the burden off the CPU. The Actiontec PCI modem also has its own dedicated controller, so you don't get that severe CPU hit. When playing with TRIBES or Q3TEST 1.08, I saw server ping times as low as 120ms, and game play was smooth and lag-free on servers with less than 250ms pings. I was able to connect to a local ISP at data rates regularly above 44kbps (usually around 48kbps). The call-waiting is handy, too, if you've got that feature on your phone. I was able to take a call while online, tell the person I'd call back, hang up, then disconnect from the Net gracefully (you have about 7-10 seconds). I wouldn't want to do this in the middle of a hot TRIBES session, though...

★★★★☆



At $105, the Actiontec is more expensive than those low-ball Winmodems, but your gaming experience will be much better for the extra dough. *–Loyd Case*

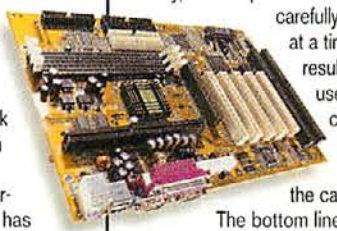
ABIT BE-6 SLOT ONE MOTHERBOARD

Requirements: ATX chassis, Pentium II or better, and an UltraATA hard drive for maximum performance. **Price:** $130
Manufacturer: Abit
Contact: www.abit-usa.com

Ultra-Frustrating

Abit has developed a well-deserved reputation for offering motherboards that cater to users who love to tweak their systems and play around with over-clocking. The new Abit BE-6 motherboard has an onboard UltraATA/66 hard drive controller, which is the latest version of the EIDE hard drive connection standard, and is faster than most current EIDE controllers on motherboards. The board uses an HPT366 controller chip to handle the UltraATA/66 chores. There are four IDE connectors on the motherboard, and you can have up to eight IDE devices attached. Abit even supplies an 80-conductor UltraATA cable for more reliable performance.

★★½☆☆



Despite the thoughtful inclusion of the better quality cable, UltraATA/66 on the BE-6 wasn't very reliable in UltraATA/66 mode. I attached a pair of Western Digital Expert hard drives. The system frequently locked up during WinBench 99 disk WinMark testing when attached to the ATA/66 connectors. Switching to ATA/33, the hard drives ran perfectly, with no problems. In the end, I had to carefully run each test, one at a time, to get the final results. During normal use, the system did crash several times a day, though it was hard to pin down the cause.

The bottom line is that if you desperately need an UltraATA/66 controller, you may be better off with another motherboard and a PCI controller card. Even then, the testing shows almost zero difference between UltraATA/66 and UltraATA/33, even on the fast Expert series hard drives. While Abit gets come credit for trying to push the performance envelope in general, this time they may have pushed it a little too hard. *–Loyd Case*

SAITEK P120 GAMEPAD

Requirements: Joystick port. **Price:** $9.99
Manufacturer: Saitek Industries
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

Such a Deal

Most of the news about gamepads has been about the herd migrating to USB. But Saitek has focused on making a very inexpensive gamepad that can be found for 10 bucks. That's right, 10 bucks. Now, you may be thinking that you'll get what you pay for, but Saitek's P120 gamepad is a generally competent gamepad that works well for sports titles, and is competent for driving titles.

Installation is easy enough: Connect the P120 to your joystick port (no USB connectivity), bring up the Game Controllers control panel, and configure a Custom controller with three axes and four buttons. A quick calibration and you're good to go. The P120 has a D-pad mini-joystick that can be stored in the body of the gamepad when not in use. I do have a couple of design gripes. The third axis is controlled by two index-finger buttons, but the buttons are essentially digital, so that the "axis" only has three discrete positions (center, hard-left, hard-right). This "axis" might as well have been two extra buttons. Also, the four-button layout is essentially a "two-row" design, rather than a circular 1-2-3-4 design like the Gravis Gamepad.

★★★★☆

I took the P120 for a spin through HIGH HEAT 2000 and NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES. In HIGH HEAT, the controller was fine and allowed me to control all aspects of gameplay – it could be a good substitute for the Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad. In NEED FOR SPEED, I configured the third axis to control acceleration/braking, and here the controller did the job. But because the "third axis" is essentially digital (on/off), it made controlling the car more difficult.

For ten bucks, the P120 is a very solid controller. Its no-frills design gets the job done, though you can't daisy-chain multiple controllers, or connect it via USB. But if you're an occasional gamepad user, then the P120 is worth a look. *–Dave Salvator*

Photos: Michael Falconer

GT Interactive Software
www.gtgames.com

PC CD ROM

TEEN T

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Silver - Begin the quest, become the hero...

Marvel at vivid special effects, powerful magical spells, and the mighty weaponry that you'll acquire on your journey

Travel through hundreds of beautiful locations, rich in detail...and packed with danger

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AVAILABLE AT MAJOR SOFTWARE RETAILERS
OCTOBER 1999

Download the Demo
www.silvergame.com

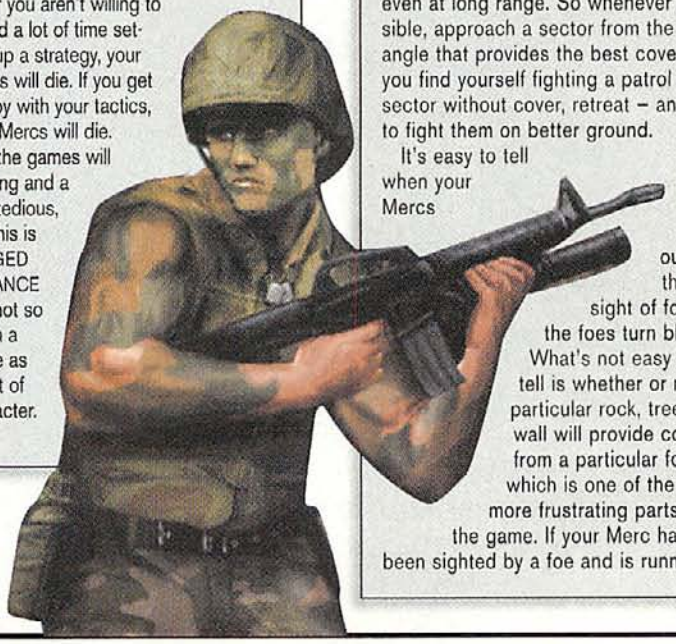
THE EIGHT HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL MERCS | BY CHRIS LOMBARDI

Jagged Alliance 2

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is one of the toughest assignments a gamer will ever get. Even at the lowest level of difficulty, the supposed "newbie" level, this game can kick your tail from here til Sunday. There are no quick paths to success here, no kick-ass-quick schemes. Success requires the disciplined development of a number of sound tactical habits.

1 WAIT FOR IT!

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 is such a difficult game because it requires traits rarely rewarded in gaming – patience and restraint. If you go into this game guns a'blazing, your Mercs will die. If you aren't willing to spend a lot of time setting up a strategy, your Mercs will die. If you get sloppy with your tactics, your Mercs will die. Yes, the games will be long and a little tedious, but this is JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 – not so much a game as a test of character.



2 COVER OFTEN, COVER WELL

Cover is everything. Cover is life. If you try to fight toe-to-toe with your foes without adequate cover, your Mercs will die. Your opponents have god-like aim, even with pistols, even at long range. So whenever possible, approach a sector from the angle that provides the best cover. If you find yourself fighting a patrol in a sector without cover, retreat – and try to fight them on better ground.

It's easy to tell when your Mercs are out of the sight of foes – the foes turn black. What's not easy to tell is whether or not a particular rock, tree, or wall will provide cover from a particular foe, which is one of the more frustrating parts of the game. If your Merc has been sighted by a foe and is running for cover, leave yourself extra movement points so that you can experiment with various positions and postures. It may take some futzing around before your Merc is safe.

Once in adequate cover, the most common tactic is to pop up to take a shot and drop back down. Always leave yourself enough movement points to duck down again, or else – that's right – your Mercs will die.

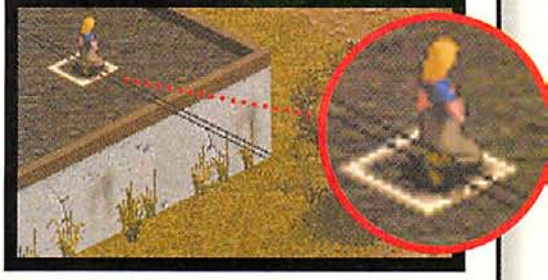
That said, you must be very cautious with the Pop Goes The Weasel strategy. If your foes get set up in firing positions around your hiding spot, there's a very high likelihood that they will get interrupt shots when you pop back up.

And a quick note on sighting: just because an enemy has turned black doesn't mean you can't hit him. If your line-of-sight is not blocked, you have a chance (although greatly reduced) of hitting a foe who's "in the black." Sometimes these long shots are worth the ammo if the targeted foe is threatening your favorite Merc.

3 FLANKING

One way to alleviate the enemy-interrupt problem is to use the most important tactic in JA2 – flanking. Whenever possible, try to position your Mercs so that they have firing positions on the enemy from different angles. Flanking combined with the Pop Goes The Weasel strategy is very effective. A Merc can pop up from one position and fire, thus drawing the attention of your foes. Then another Merc can pop up from another angle. Since the foes are facing in another direction, they are much less likely to get an interrupt on the second Merc, and they must also change their facing to fire on the second Merc, burning valuable movement points. If you alternate between Mercs, you can keep your foes' heads spinning.

UP ON THE HOUSETOP, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK Roofs are great for sniping and scouting. Projectiles also have a great range from up high.



4 HIT-AND-RUN

Another useful tactic, especially when outgunned or outnumbered on a night operation, is the hit-and-run. Creep up on an enemy, take a nice shot, and then retreat. Have other Mercs positioned behind the first Merc so that they have a chance of interrupt shots on the pursuing foe. Fire, fall back, set up more potential interrupts. Repeat.

Whenever possible, try to completely disengage from the enemy and return to real-time mode when using the hit-and-run; the reason being that when you encounter the enemy again and drop into turn mode, all of your Mercs will have their full allotment of movement points.

5 DIVERSIONARY TACTICS

Your foes will run toward the sound of gunfire. You can use this fact to set up nice ambushes. Send your stealthy night ops Merc to one end of the map and fire off a couple rounds. Wait until the enemy has moved toward that Merc, then slink away. You can then, carefully, bring the rest of your Mercs to the side or rear of the waiting foes. They will be facing in the direction of the gunfire, giving you a chance to sneak up and take some nice shots at their backs.

6 FIGHT AT NIGHT

Night ops are especially effective early in the game when you don't have long-range weapons and your enemy does, as the shorter range of view at night eliminates the enemy's advantage. Of course, the tables are turned later in the game when *you've* got the fire power.

7 A.I.M. HIGH, FIRE LOW

When targeting enemies, you can increase the accuracy of your shots by clicking the right mouse button. Do this, always. Your chances of hitting increase greatly.

Most players tend to fire for heads and torsos, thinking they are the most vulnerable areas of a foe. But don't forget about leg shots. Leg shots very often can make a foe collapse. When they collapse, they lose all of their current movement (making leg shots especially valuable during interrupts) and sometimes they will lose a second turn of movement as well. At the very least, the Merc will have to spend movement points to get back up. And incapacitated foes seem to take more damage from subsequent shots.

8 PASS THE BUCKSHOT

Got a Merc on the front line in need of a grenade? Throw it to him! Your Mercs are quite good at tossing and catching stuff. A needed item like a grenade or an ammo clip or a first aid kit can be tossed from the rear to the front in a single turn, with movement points to spare. (Note: If you're tossing a grenade, make sure you take the grenade from the inventory. If the grenade is in a Mercs "hand slot" when you toss it, it is live and your Mercs will die). You can also do this with weapons. Have only one high-powered rifle? Take two shots, pass it to a neighboring Merc and take two more. If you plan it right, the entire squad could use the rifle in one turn.

Time to Pump You Up

Improving your Mercs' stats is both rewarding and essential. How to improve stats is obvious in most cases, but here are some not-so-obvious – and some very cheesy – ways to pump Mercs stats.

Agility: The fastest way to improve agility is to sneak around in stealth mode with enemies nearby. It's a risky operation for a clumsy Merc, but it will improve agility very quickly.

Dexterity: The vultures that prey on dead bodies are great for target practice. Throw knives at them to pump up your dex.

Health: One of the more difficult attributes to improve. Try marching around Arulco with extremely heavy inventory loads and you might pick up a few health points.

Explosives: Obviously, handling explosives will improve this stat. If you find a land mine, pick it up, then plant it again, and dig it up again. Repeat and watch your explosive stats soar. Fumble, and watch your Merc's disembodied head soar.

Leadership: Train militia and this stat will climb through the roof.

Strength: Prying open crates and punching things will give you a good workout. Use stun grenades to knock out enemies and then pummel them with your fists. There are also a few inanimate objects that can be used as punching bags.

Order of Battle

When conquering towns, there's no set path you must take. Here's one suggestion, which roughly orders the towns by difficulty.

Omerta
Drassen
San Mona
Chitzena
Cambria
Alma
Grumm
Estoni
Balime
Orta
Meduna

Item Combinations

There are a ton of items in Arulco that can be combined into very useful objects. Here's just a few.

String + Soda Can = Alarm
Attach to doors as a guard against sneak attacks

Aluminum Rod + Spring = AP Enhancer
Increases a gun's firing rate

Steel Pipe + Glue + Tape = Barrel Extension
Increases a gun's range

X-Ray Tube + Gum + Fumblepack = X-Ray Unit
Part for X-Ray Detector

Copper Wire + Lameboy = LCD Display
Part for X-Ray Detector

LCD Display + X-Ray Unit = X-Ray Detector
Ah, we've given enough away, haven't we?

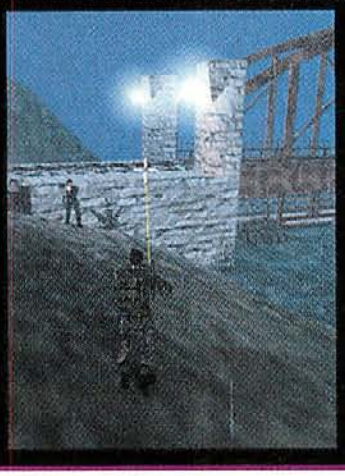
CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

Hidden & Dangerous

Codes Type "iwillcheat" at any opening screen or menu. Then enter the following codes during gameplay.

Code	Effect
Cantdie	God-mode
Goodhealth	Full Health
Openalldoor	Opens all doors
Allloot	All items available
Killthemall	Kills all enemies
Showtheend	Shows end movie
Gamedone	Completes current mission
Gamefail	Fails current mission
Resurrect	Brings team back to life
Funnyhead	Big-head-mode
Enemyf	View enemy
Debugdrawwire	Wire-mode
Playercoords	Shows your position
Laracroft	Alternate uniforms

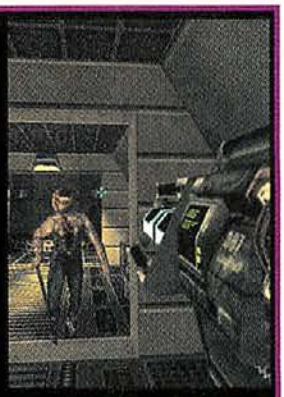


System Shock 2

Tip In the game hit [Shift]+[;], and then type "summon_obj [item]", where items can be: medical kit, psi amp, wrench, pistol, shotgun, assault rifle, laser pistol, EMP Rifle, Electro Shock, Gren Launcher, Stasis Field Generator, Fusion Cannon, Crystal Shard, Viral Prolif, Worm Launcher.

Codes These other codes also work:

Code	Effect
psi_full	Fully restores psi points
ubermensch	Pumps up all of your stats and skills



Descent 3

Enter the following as your player name to unlock the respective cheat:

Code	Effect
IveGotIt	All weapons, energy, shield
BurgerGod	God-mode
TreeSquid	Full map
MoreClang	Level jump
DeadOfNight	Destroys all bots
Testicus	Cloak
FrameLength	FPS display
ByeByeMonkey	Chase view

CODES

BATTLEZONE

Unlimited Shields: Hold [Shift] and [Control] and type: BZBODY
Unlimited Pilots and Recourses: Hold [Shift] and [Control] and type: BZFREE
Full Map: Hold [Shift] and [Control] and type: BZRADAR
Unlimited Ammo: Hold [Shift] and [Control] and type: BZTNT

INTERSTATE '76

Use the names below to drive these secret vehicles.

Code	Effect
POCILEH	Helicopter
KNAT	Tank
HOTAIR	Hot-Air Balloon
THETRUTHISHERE	UFO

WARZONE 2100

Press [T], type the code and hit [ENTER].

Code	Effect
time toggle	Stops and starts the mission timer
get off my land	Kills all enemy units on the map
show me the power	Gives 1000 extra power
whale fin	Gives 1000 extra power
hallo mein schatz	Skips to next mission
work harder	Completes all currently active research topics
double up	All of your units are twice as tough
kill selected	Kills the presently selected units
john kettley	Toggle weather: snow, rain, clear
biffer baker	Units almost indestructible
sparkle green	Stronger units

MECHCOMMANDER

Create a new file named "buymechcommander.2" in the directory where MECHCOMMANDER is installed. No need to actually put anything here, just make sure the file exists.

Then type in these codes during a game:

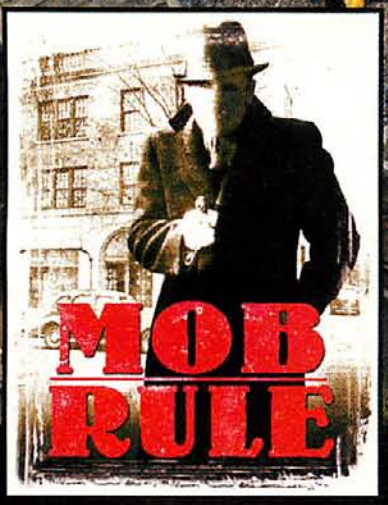
Code	Effect
lorrie	replenish ammo
osmiu	toggle God mode on/off
mineeyeshaveseentheglory	reveals the map
poundofflesh	more money
rockandrollpeople	unlimited drop weight

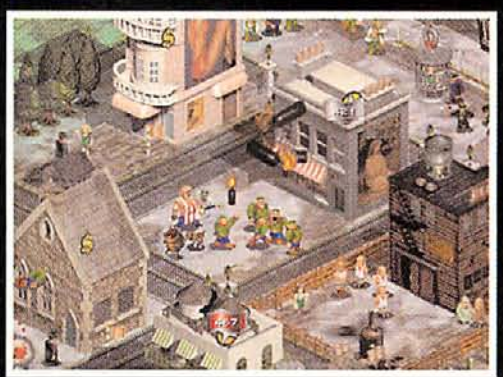
Type Lordbunny and then press b and left click on the target to hit it with unlimited artillery.

"The Godfather Meets Sim® City—What more could an aspiring street thug ask for?"—Antagonist/www.aol.com

"Extortion has never been so much fun!"
—PC Gamer

MOB RULE





Wildly hysterical strategy game set in the American underworld circa 1933. You're the Boss; use your street smarts and an army of willing thugs and enforcers to take control—slip-up and you sleep with the fishes!

STUDIO 3

MACMILLAN DIGITAL PUBLISHING USA

BRADYGAMES
TAKE YOUR GAME FURTHER

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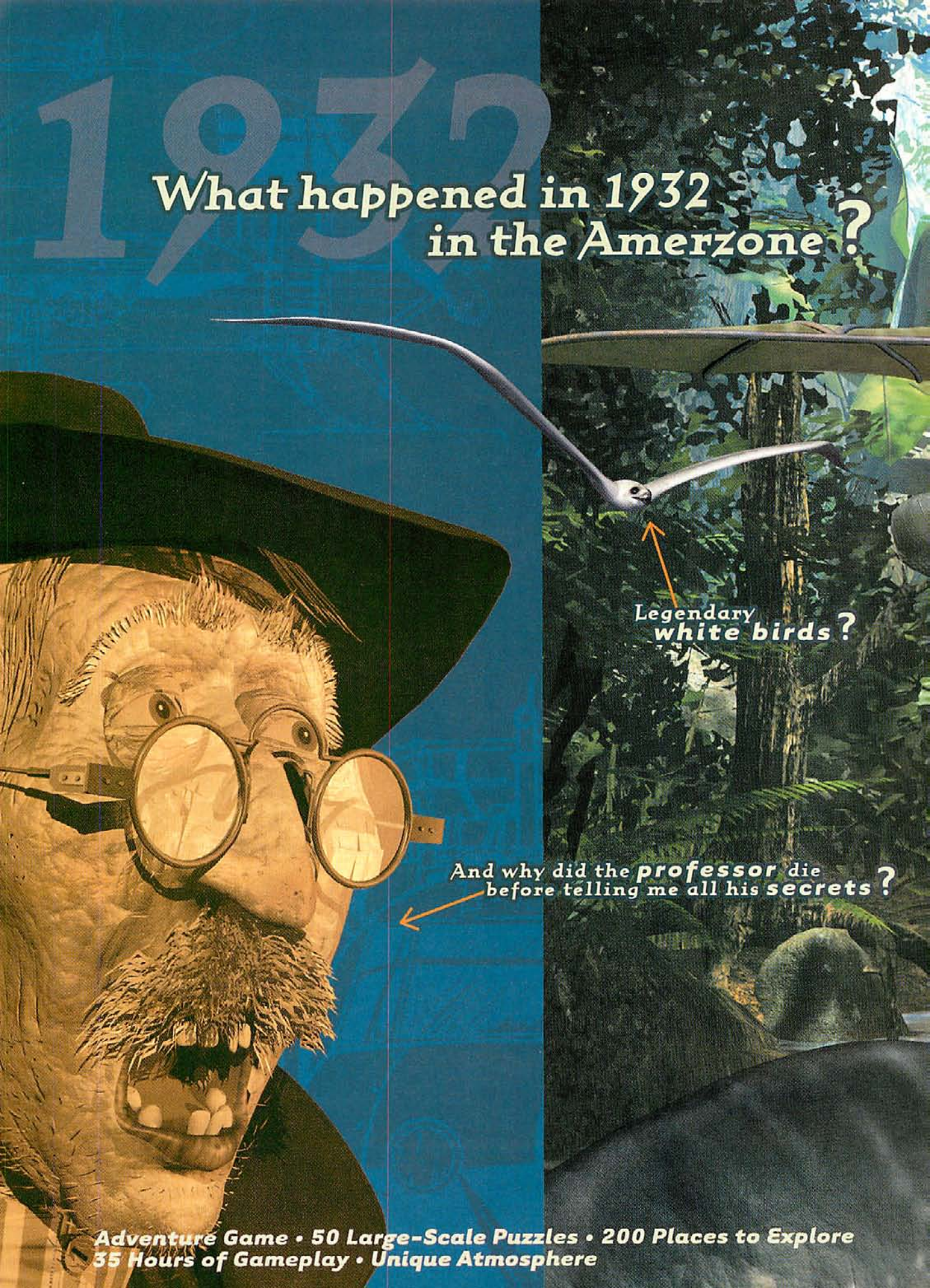
1932
What happened in 1932 in the Amerzone ?
Legendary white birds ?
And why did the professor die before telling me all his secrets ?
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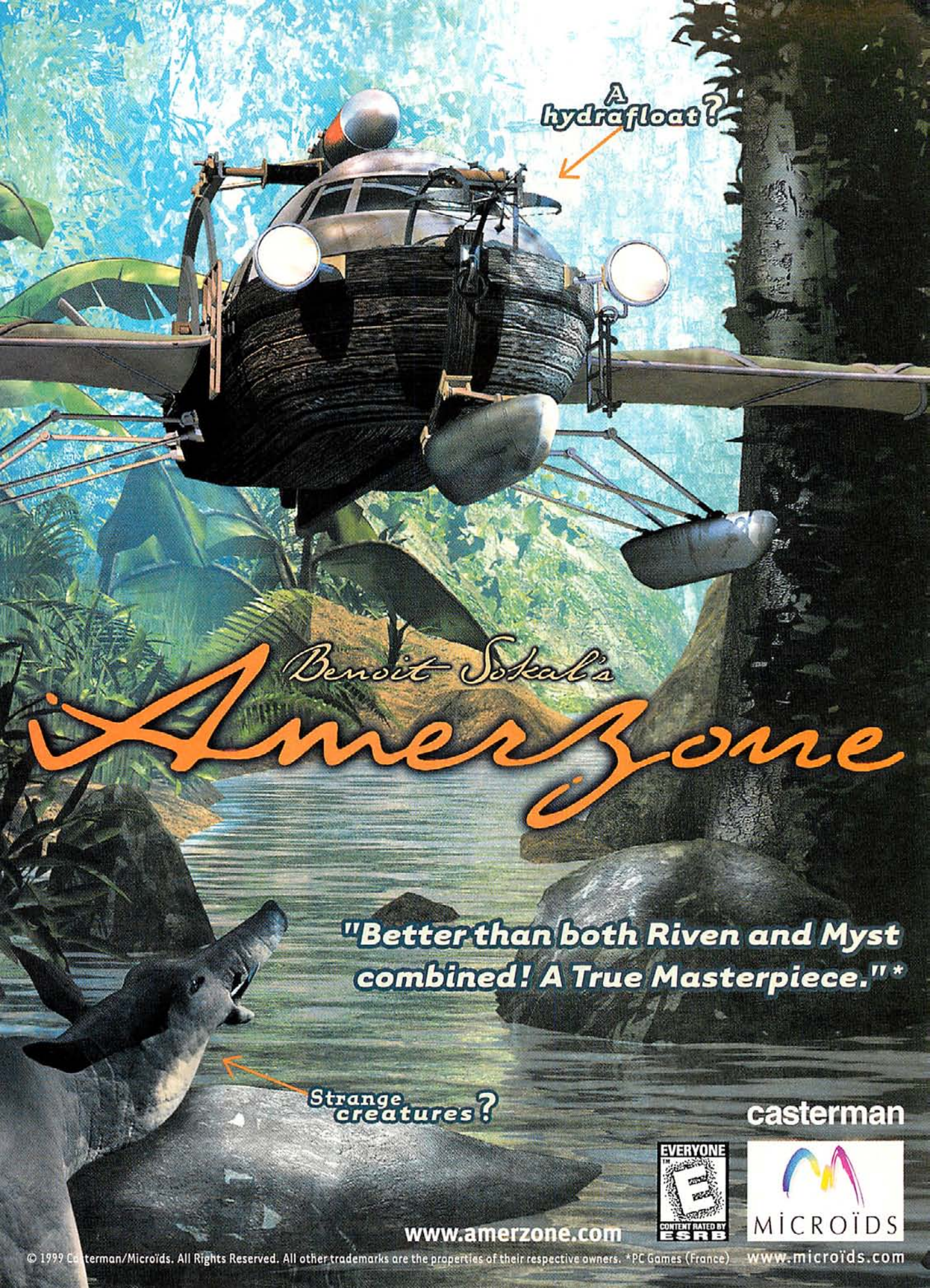

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Dungeon Keeper 2

Codes During gameplay, just type [ctrl+alt+c] at any time. If you did this right, you will hear the sound of a door opening. Then type the following codes.

Code	Effect
show me the money	Gives money
now the rain has gone	Shows map
feel the power	Upgrades all monster's skill to 10
this is my church	Provides all rooms
fit the best	Provides all rooms and traps
i believe its magic	Provides all spells
do not fear the reaper	Win level

Total Annihilation: Kingdoms

Codes After starting a skirmish game or multiplayer mode, press [Enter] to bring up the message box. Press [+] then enter a code and press [Enter] to activate it. Enter a code again to deactivate it.

Code	Effect
Atm	Fill mana
Doubleshot	Weapons do double damage
halfshot	Weapons do half damage
Infrared	Fog of war on/off
Nowisee	Full map
Zipper	Faster unit building

Rainbow Six

To activate cheats, press [`] while in the game and then type:

Code	Effect
TEAMGOD	Team god-mode
AVATARGOD	Player god-mode
STUMPY	Stumpy-mode
CLODHOPPER	Enlarges player's feet and hands
MEGANOGGIN	Mega head mode
BIGNOGGIN	Big head mode
5FINGERDISCOUNT	Refill ammo
NOBRAINER	Turns AI off
DEBUGKEYS	Debug keys enabled
TURNPUNCHKICK	Changes players from 3D to 2D
EXPLORE	Victory conditions on/off

Recoil

During playing hit [CTRL]+[X] to enter cheat mode, then type:

Code	Effect
Cavalry	Invincible
Hemmit	All weapons enabled
Medic	Shields full strength

Test Drive 5

Go to the first Options menu and type:

Code	Effect
cup of choice	Unlocks all cup races
that takes me back	Enables backwards mode
i have the key	Unlocks all cars and tracks
i carry a badge	Drive police cars
lone crusader in a dangerous world	Press horn for nitro
remote braking	Press horn to freeze opponents

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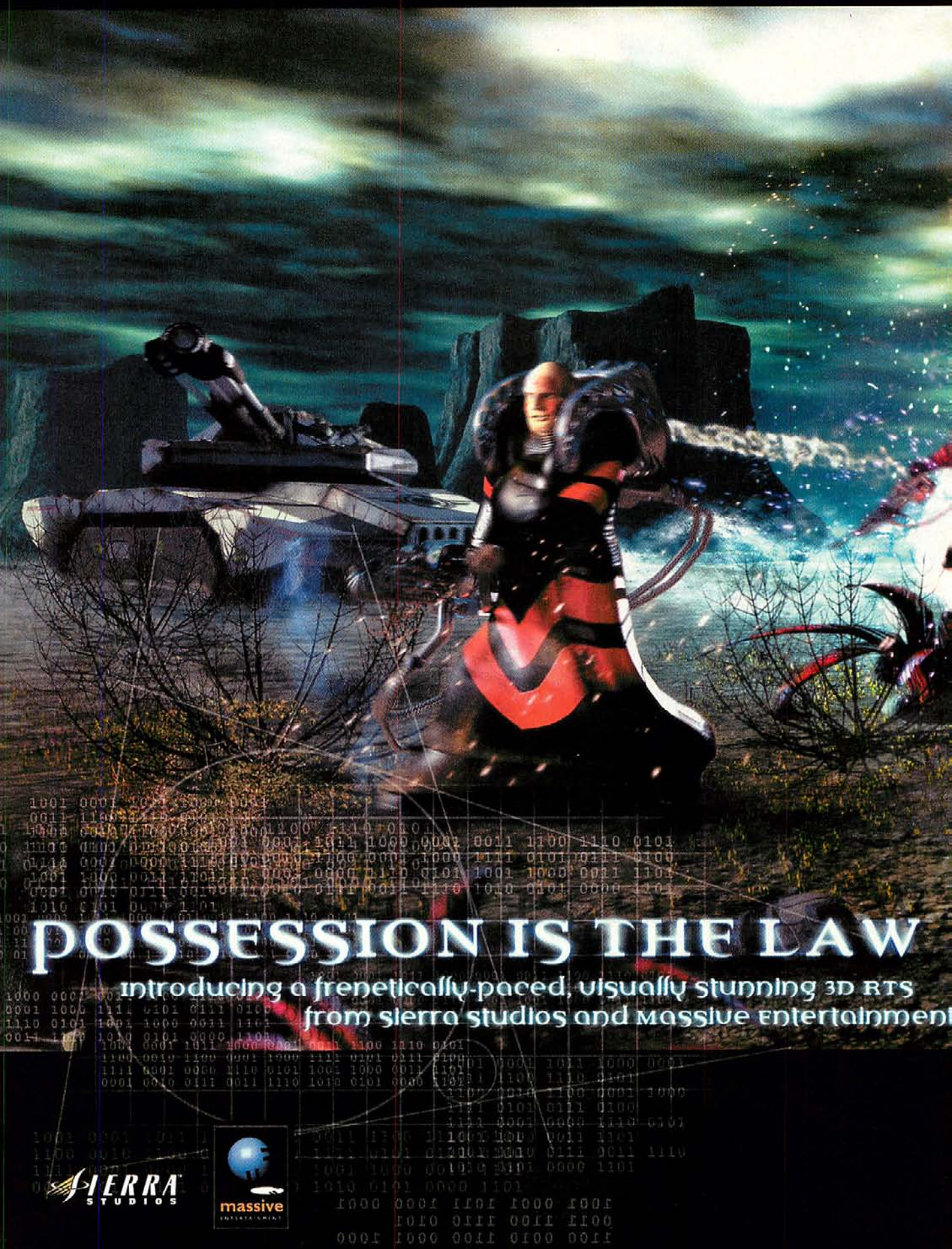
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INSIDE
ACTION

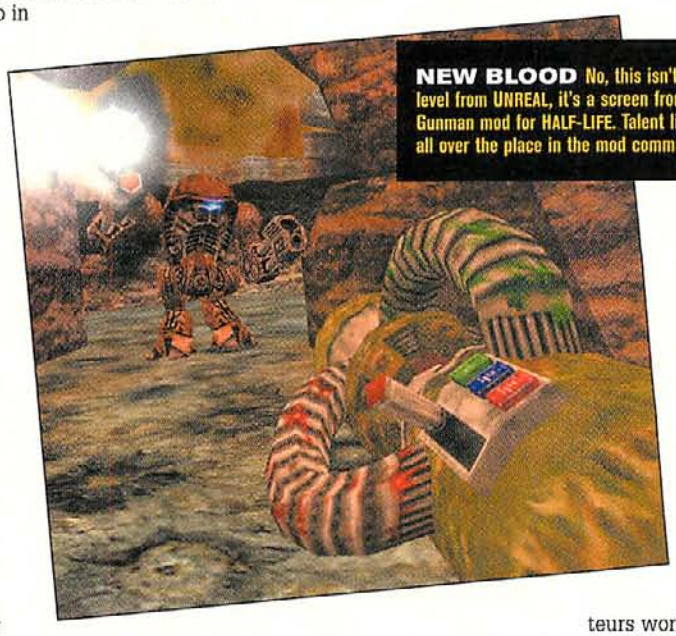
by Thierry Nguyen

The Mod Squad

Consider Valve Software the Medicis of modern action gaming. They're serving as "patrons" to amateur mod (user-made game modifications) designers by eyeing talented people—such as the ACTION HALF-LIFE team—and either hiring or helping them. Valve not only hosted the recent HALF-LIFE Mod Expo in San Francisco, but they also provide extended and ongoing support for mod authors.

Developers Need to Support Amateur Designers in Order to Last

Harry Teasley, artist/designer and mod guru at Valve, says, "My support role is best characterized as 'being there for mod teams.' Since the SDK was released, the job of mod team support has largely been one of answering technical questions, or if I can't, funneling the questions to someone who can. Teams may also have artistic questions, or marketing and legal questions regarding their mod, and I answer those as well."



NEW BLOOD No, this isn't a secret level from UNREAL, it's a screen from the Gunman mod for HALF-LIFE. Talent like this is all over the place in the mod community.

This treatment is a contrast to times past, where mods were handled with a more laissez-faire attitude. John Carmack would eventually release the source code for his various engines, and let the user community do whatever it wanted to with his work. But the source code was unsupported, and people had to learn from each other, rather than from the masters.

Thierry's Playlist

1. System Shock 2
2. Heavy Gear II
3. Dungeon Keeper II
4. Homeworld
5. Quake III

Justin Fisher, creator of the Aliens-TC for DOOM (widely considered the best user-mod ever made for an action game), remembers the early days of mod-making. "It was sometimes a real grind to have to rapidly master a huge and unending series of often incomplete, buggy, unrelated, or incompatible software tools," he said. "More help from id would have been a very good thing in most respects."

Ending the End-User Support

The problem is that this level of support for the mod community takes resources away from the developers. Not every development team can afford to have even one person – let alone two or more – dedicated to working with mod designers. Also, from the designer's standpoint, there is a danger of having a creative vision hampered. Fisher is optimistic, though, "as long as the support can be used as a platform to help launch us in our own directions, rather than as a guide which leads us and narrows where we can go."

Handled carefully, official mod support can be a way for a company to last. Valve knows this, and so does Epic (who is hosting an UNREAL-Mod contest with $150,000 in prizes, and making UNREAL TOURNAMENT mod-friendly); it builds brand loyalty, and breathes new life into titles which may otherwise be considered passé (ACTION HALF-LIFE and GUNMAN convinced the *CGW* editors to load up HALF-LIFE again).

More people are encouraged to try their creative hand; with official support, these new creations will get good exposure. Carmack and Romero had their start as amateurs working out of a garage. The next Carmack is probably out there too, waiting for a studio to notice him or her and become their patron. CGW

An Alien Resurrection

I tracked down Justin Fisher of ALIENS DOOM fame, and asked him what he's been up to lately. "I'm currently helping a friend set up a Web-design company," he said, "but the longer I spend away from making new worlds and games, the stronger their pull becomes. It's been several months now and I'm reaching the point where I'm going to put down what I'm doing and go for a good job or offer that comes my way." (Note to any development teams looking for designers!)

I also asked him if he had any advice for budding mod designers out there. "Probably the biggest pitfall I fell into, and one that many people still fall into, is making the most important parts of the game first. You need to know whether your plans are feasible, so you see if you can make the core elements work. But during the project, your tools get better, your skills improve, and you acquire new techniques. In short, the parts that you do near the end of the project (except for deadline rush) are going to be far better than the earlier work. So do as much peripheral stuff as you can at the beginning, and as much of the important stuff when at the height of your abilities and tools."

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INSIDE
STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

Robert_Coffey@zd.com

Gaming Outside the Lines

The days of cut-and-dried strategy genres are numbered. Yes, there's always going to be a place for pure real-time strat in the COMMAND & CONQUER mold, an audience for Sid Meier CIV-style grand strategy, and a home for hardcore wargames, but they're being whittled down by gamers' love of anything new, and the growing audience of casual gamers looking for games that cast a broader net.

Strategy's Future Lies in Genre-Blending

You'd think these disparate influences would work against each other, but surprisingly enough, the most interesting and enjoyable games on the horizon have something for both groups, and they're accomplishing it by blurring genre lines.

Role-playing influences are cropping up everywhere. While this trend began with the troop training portion of X-COM and MYTH's experience-gaining veteran troops, it's really coming to the fore in games like Sir-tech's JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 and Red Storm's upcoming SHADOW WATCH, which charges players with developing their individual units in over 70 skills and abilities. While this has an obvious effect on the strategic portion of the game, it gives strategy gamers a reward heretofore reserved primarily for MIGHT & MAGIC or BALDUR'S GATE fans—that sense of accomplishment that comes only from watching your characters grow under your guidance. Need more examples? What about WARLORDS: BATTLECRY and its very traditional fantasy RPG heroes, or METAL FATIGUE's experience-gaining 'mech crews?

Robert's Playlist

1. Might and Magic VII
2. High Heat Baseball 2000
3. System Shock 2
4. Jagged Alliance 2
5. Niggle, a Palm Pilot Scrabble-alike

Action and strategy hybrids are becoming so numerous, they'd form their own genre if they weren't such a diverse lot. The first BATTLEZONE game proved the two apparently incompatible genres were a natural fit, and the sequel is taking it even farther, allowing gamers to all but forgo the action side of the mix to focus on base-building and unit commanding. Games like ROGUE SPEAR and SWAT 3 may look like first-person shooters, but their heavy emphasis on planning and tactics make them stand out from the QUAKE-alikes, and let sound strategists succeed even if their shooting skills aren't the best. For the ultimate in shooter/strategy hybridization we'll have to wait for next year's TEAM FORTRESS 2, where gamers will be able to play a pivotal role as a team commander and never have to fire a shot.

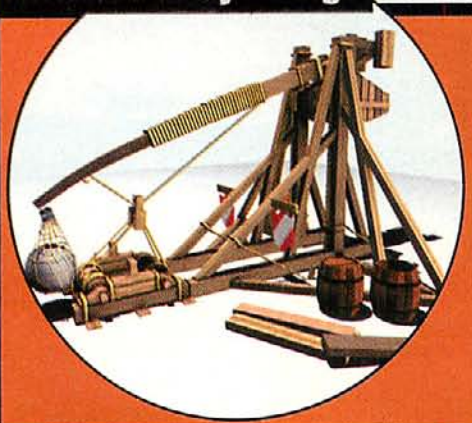
Does this genre-bending harm titles? On the contrary, I think it lies at the center of AGE OF EMPIRES' incredible success. By giving gamers the ability to win by building Wonders and not destroying their enemies, Ensemble Studios created a game that can appeal both to grand strategists and to real-time vets. With even more ways to win in the sequel, the AGE OF EMPIRES franchise should only attract and addict more fans. Appealing to different sets of gamers might be what draws many to IMPERIUM GALACTICA II, with its blend of grand strategy, real-time combat, and a game engine that lets you pause the real-time combat to issue orders to your ships.

So does all this mean that more traditional titles are dead? Not at all—Sid Meier could probably buy a private island with what he'll make from the upcoming CIV III, and a new WARCRAFT game from Blizzard is a guaranteed bestseller. But if the genre as a whole simply stuck its head in the sand and refused to change, it could find itself under a headstone—right next to the murdered-by-clones adventure genre. CGW

Keep 'Em Coming Back for More

The only letdown with the best games inevitably comes at the end – when the fun stops. That's why we're so happy that Bullfrog is making a commitment to providing fans of DUNGEON KEEPER 2 with new content and upgrades. Over the next few months, the designers intend to post new game features, new maps, unique units, mini-campaigns, and eventually even the editing tools every week on their web site, www.dungeonkeeper.com. They hope to do this through November, or longer if sales of the game warrant it. With luck, this will be a huge success and will encourage other companies to do the same.

All You Pretty Things



Strategy titles have been using 3D acceleration for some time now, but it's just starting to really pay off in the eye candy department. BLACK & WHITE should set a new standard for imaginatively-rendered game environments, while DARK REIGN 2's weapon effects, night-and-day cycling, and dazzling environments threaten to doom gamers to failure as they neglect fighting and just soak up the gameworld. And while gamers have been oohing and aahing over gorgeous screenshots of HOMEWORLD's space fleet battles, IMPERIUM GALACTICA II's 3D-accelerated space wars flat-out tops them, with incredibly dynamic combat highlighted by brilliant ship-rending lasers and beautiful, twitching lightning guns.

But the most impressive thing we've seen lately in a strategy title doesn't even use hardware acceleration: AGE OF EMPIRE II's trebuchet. A paragon of unit design and animation, we've been churning these babies out in multiplayer games just to drink in their muscular grace as they lob their payloads at enemy walls and buildings.

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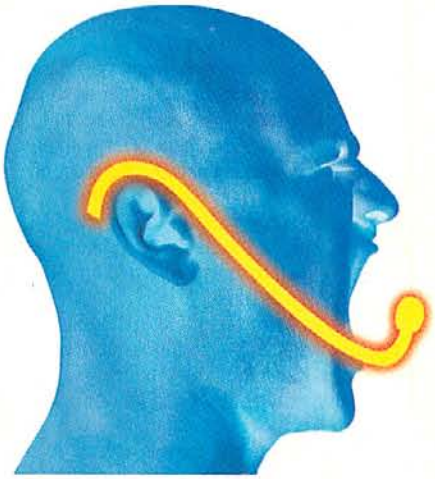

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TOP PICK
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INSIDE
RPG / ADVENTURE

by Desslock
desslock@dessslock.com

The Case Against Elves

When role-playing games were a near-dead genre in the mid-1990s, many gamers questioned why one of computer gaming's oldest genres suddenly became so unpopular. Almost all RPGs featured a pseudo-medieval swords-and-sorcery gaming world full of goblins, fireball spells, and giant rats. The lack of originality was so pervasive that new gamers were led to believe that elves and swords were RPG prerequisites. Strategy games with fantasy settings, such as MASTER OF MAGIC, were erroneously classified as RPGs. The horror!

How did the genre become so stagnant? RPGs are not about Tolkienesque settings. RPGs are about being able to assume a role in an open-ended, meaningful way. Through character creation and development, or just through choices made during the game, players individualize their pixelated alter-egos and ultimately their experiences. The setting of the virtual world is irrelevant in characterizing a game's genre.

Role-Playing Games Need to Branch out Beyond Tolkien

Ironically, although the inspiration for their computer counterparts, tabletop RPGs have featured a larger variety of settings, including science fiction (GAMMA WORLD, TRAVELER), western (BOOT HILL), comics (MARVEL SUPERHEROES) and horror (VAMPIRE, WEREWOLF). Several of the original tabletop RPGs, such as DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and TUNNELS AND TROLLS, were swords-and-sorcery games, but there's never been a shortage of paper RPGs set in other environments. Yet with a few notable exceptions, most of which were released in the 1980s, computer RPGs have focused exclusively on chopping up orcs and wielding +4 battle-axes.

Deus Ex

With the genre in full resurgence, I hope it doesn't doom itself again by producing increasingly derivative games and ignoring innovative settings. The immediate future still looks promising. Interplay's FALLOUT games garnered both critical and commercial success at least in part due to their milieu's stylish amalgamation of futuristic post-apocalyptic and '50s Americana. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 is a sequel but still seems highly original, because it includes relatively novel science-fiction elements such as cybernetic implants and psionic powers. Add to the mix a development team (led by Ken Levine) experienced in making innovative products, an enhanced version of the THIEF 3D engine, and some strong first-person shooter elements, and it's easy to see why the title garnered good advance buzz.

Desslock's Playlist

1. System Shock 2
2. Half-Life
3. Jagged Alliance 2
4. Independence War
5. Wing Commander 3

Helmed by industry veteran Tom Hall, ANACHRONOX's development team seeks to combine truly original science-fiction environments and the same sort of action/RPG hybrid gameplay offered successfully by several console RPGs. DEUS EX merges elements of James Bond's adventures and the *X-Files*. With the impressive UNREAL engine, DEUS EX's development team has created some of the most realistic-looking, immersive environments yet seen in a role-playing game. The team is led by Warren Spector and Harvey Smith, who helped create the original SYSTEM SHOCK, ULTIMA UNDERWORLD, and other critically acclaimed RPGs. Promising games are also in the works based upon White Wolf's VAMPIRE and WEREWOLF milieus, although the game based upon the latter will emphasize action over RPG elements.

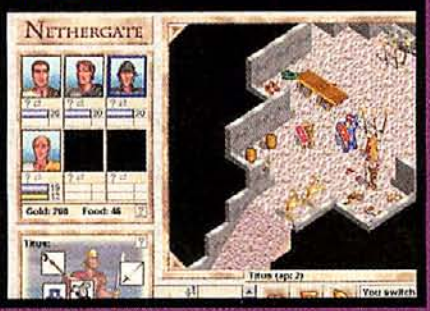
Even with the gradual expansion of computer RPGs into science-fiction and horror settings, it still seems as though developers are artificially narrowing the scope of what really is gaming's broadest genre. How come we have yet to see computer RPGs set during the world wars? *Saving Private Ryan*'s band of soldiers are a suitable model for a WWII RPG party. The Wild West? Outlaw legends provide ample fodder for compelling RPGs. Those intuitive settings have been consistently ignored by developers, as have others. How about a Viking RPG featuring the gods of that mythos? What about ancient Egypt, medieval Japan, or imperial Rome? Unless RPGs innovate and evolve into new settings, the renaissance RPGs are enjoying will quickly end. So many possibilities, yet such little innovation shown to date. CGW

Who dares ignore the elves? For comments from the creators of DEUS EX, FALLOUT, and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 on this column's topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

Food for the Celtic Gods?

Complex gaming worlds and compelling storylines are features that many RPG fans would gladly choose over the latest graphical bells and whistles. Such fans should check out NETHERGATE, a game set in 60 A.D. Britain during the conflict between the Roman Empire and the Celts. Created by Jeff Vogel, author of the acclaimed EXILE series, NETHERGATE blends historical and mythological elements and allows players to create either a Roman or Celtic adventuring party, with gameplay varying depending upon a party's allegiance. A portion of the game is free at www.spidweb.com. Next up: AVERNUM, a more traditional fantasy RPG that will use an enhanced version of the NETHERGATE engine.

WHEN IN ROME NETHERGATE extends Jeff Vogel's fine series of traditional RPGs that favor complex gaming over graphical gimmickry. This one's set in 60 A.D. Britain.



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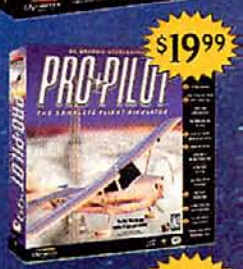

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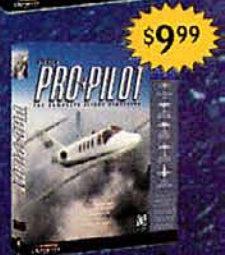

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INSIDE
SIMULATION & SPACE

by Gordon Berg
grognard@concentric.net

Labor of Love

It's a shame (and a crime), but almost every computer product released these days seems to require a patch. And while most companies will allocate some time and resources toward a game after it ships, many games don't achieve their full potential even after a patch or two. Such was the case with two recent flight sims. The companies released an intended "final" patch, but both games still needed more work. Fortunately for us, a grassroots effort prevailed in both cases—a dedicated handful of people were willing to produce further revisions in their spare time. The newest patches should be available by press time.

Patching Your Favorite Flight Sims, 24–7

European Air War

Two people are currently hard at work on EUROPEAN AIR WAR. EAW may be a gaming media darling, but it still has its problems, especially in the multiplayer department. After the version 1.1 patch shipped, Brandon Gamblin and Chris Coon of MicroProse kept close tabs on the reaction in the Internet newsgroups. Says Gamblin, "We heard about the troubles that EAW was having on the Internet. So, a few of us started working on the Internet problem in our spare time, still devoting full-time effort to our main projects. That was how the 'unofficial' patch got started."

Gordon's Playlist

1. Warbirds
2. Jagged Alliance 2
3. Baldur's Gate: TOTSC
4. European Air War (with v1.2 patch)
5. MechWarrior 3

Hasbro/MicroProse were supportive of the process. "There was never any difficulty with them," said Gamblin. "Once it looked like we had sufficient cause and substance for a patch, we told Hasbro/MicroProse about it and they started giving us support for it (QA, artists, etc.). It was always understood, however, that this was not part of our main work. This was always an extracurricular patch."

Although this patch focuses on multiplay, it also adds some new features and a few more bug fixes. In addition, an "unsupported" art kit has been made available, allowing players to alter their own planes and virtual cockpits, as well as the terrain. For more information, go to support.microprose.com/eawupdate.htm.

Screamin' Demons

ParSoft's Michael Harrison had to travel a different road with SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE. Although version 1.5 essentially turned SDOE into an altogether different flight sim, it still wasn't enough, especially when it came to the flight modeling. "Unfortunately, we were only given two weeks to work on the patch, so that naturally limited what we were able to fix or add," explains Harrison. "Activision didn't want to invest more time on the game, but there were elements that needed modification. Rather than leave the users in the lurch, I decided to take on future mods and fixes. Given that a personal goal of mine was that we try to build a community around OpenPlane so that we could continue to improve upon it, this struck me as the right thing to do rather than to treat each game as an independent island."

These are admirable goals to be sure, but Activision was hesitant to approve any additional patches. "Some people there weren't too keen on the potential tech support calls and confusion that unsupported patches might cause. After what I assume was much debate, they decided to allow me to produce patches unsupported by Activision."

Harrison is primarily focusing his efforts on the flight model, but he's also adding new features. "The modified aircraft won't be wholesale replacements of the aircraft that shipped with the game, since generally those aircraft were sound. There were some changes made to them prior to shipping that made them easier to fly. I'm undoing those changes as well as tightening up some of the center of gravity and weight distribution data."

The challenge has been in getting everyone to agree on what the final flight model should be. "I've found that many people have their idea of what makes a WWII aircraft," he says, "and I'm attempting to attain a balance between realistic simulation and playability. As to what will become the 'default,' that will largely depend on the users themselves. Regardless, there's plenty of room in the OpenPlane world for both hard-core flight simmers as well as for those who just want to get up into the air."

For more information on ParSoft and OpenPlane, check out www.openplane.org. CGW

Another FALCON Patch

Speaking of patches, the 1.07 patch for FALCON 4 has arrived. Five months in the making, this latest effort goes a long way in fixing various avionics, campaign, AI, multiplayer and crash-to-desktop issues (see the patch on this month's demo disk). Although 1.07 is indeed a major leap forward for FALCON, this sim is still in need of some further work – if reaction in the newsgroups is any indication. Given FALCON 4's immense scope, this is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, HI/MicroProse is hoping the next patch will be the last one, thus freeing them up to finally work on some add-on products.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

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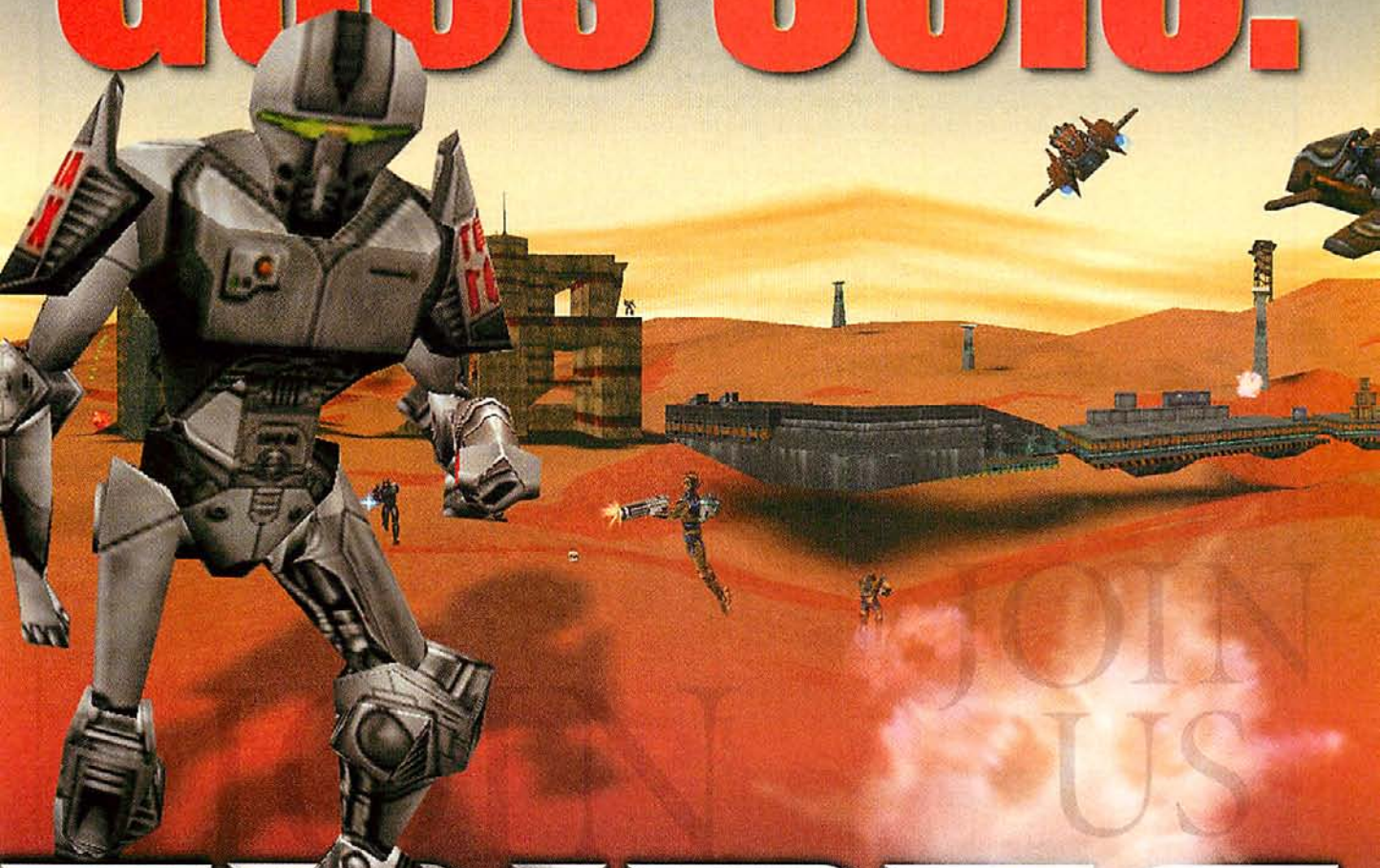

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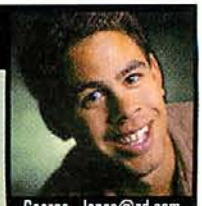
INSIDE
SPORTS

by George Jones



George_Jones@zd.com

Let's Get it On!

Microsoft vs. EA Sports

I saw the early dominance of Microsoft firsthand when I worked at *PC Week* magazine, one of *Computer Gaming World*'s boring older brothers. Remember WordPerfect? Or how about Lotus 1-2-3?

Six years later, having seen Microsoft Internet Explorer reel Netscape in like a little cod, I'm wondering if EA Sports is picking up on the fact that Microsoft has them square in its targeting reticle. To be sure, EA has witnessed many a competitor, from VR Sports to Sierra Sports, trying to move in on their turf. And to their credit, they've repelled all challengers in practically every major sports category with their unique blend of attitude and action gameplay.

But now Microsoft is here, using the same tactics they've used to dominate other markets. Tactic number one: They've taken their time with their products. Both NFL FEVER 2000 and NBA INSIDE DRIVE have been in development for a long time. Tactic number two: Not having to worry so much about profits this time around, they're releasing their products at a much-lower-than-normal price: $19.99.

Battle of the Network Stars

But the gaming market is a little different. Since Microsoft doesn't have as many advantages in the gaming arena as they have in the browser or productivity arenas, a lot of this issue boils down to one question: Who has the better games? Here's a breakdown.

George's Playlist

1. High Heat 2000
2. Age of Empires 2 (beta)
3. Madden 2000
4. NFL Fever 2000
5. Quake III

Hockey

EA Sports has this one so locked up that Microsoft isn't even competing right now. (Side note: NHL 2000, which should be coming out soon, takes the game back to its early, faster-paced, shoot-it-out roots.)

Advantage: EA Sports

Football

Football is a closer contest than I originally thought, given the MADDEN series' noble lineage. MADDEN 2000 definitely has the bells and whistles—like the totally unique Great Moments mini-game, and 32-season career modes. It also has years of development behind it, which means you'll see unparalleled defensive play. To Microsoft's credit, they didn't just reverse-engineer MADDEN; the design team really put forth their own vision of digital football. It shows. NFL FEVER 2000 looks and plays more realistically, and incorporates a layer of graphical detail I've yet to see anywhere else. If you're into faster action and attitude, choose MADDEN. If you're more into realism, it's NFL FEVER.

Advantage: Tie

Hoops

NBA LIVE 2000 has better graphics, and two of the coolest features I've seen in a basketball game. You can play with players from the NBA's past, including Chamberlain, Magic, and Bird, and you can play with any of these legends—or any other NBA player—in a one-on-one schoolyard mode. Although Microsoft's NBA INSIDE DRIVE does play more like the real-life sport it simulates, the game lacks some visual appeal—as well as the classic players, free-agent salary negotiations, and the flavor of the game.

Advantage: EA Sports

Baseball

Nolo contendere. The competition here isn't even close. TRIPLE PLAY dominates MICROSOFT BASEBALL. But TRIPLE PLAY isn't the finest baseball game around anymore. That title belongs to HIGH HEAT 2000.

Advantage: 3DO

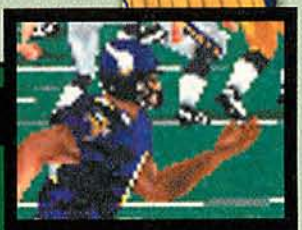
The frightening thing about all this for EA Sports is that Microsoft, unlike the VR Sports of the world, will keep plugging away until they figure out the formula for success. It's up to Electronic Arts to determine what happens—it's their battle to lose. If EA maintains an aggressive focus on balancing fun versus realism, and doesn't develop conservatively, Microsoft may find itself unable to easily dominate the sports arena.

And for PC gamers, a competitive genre is much more fun. PlayStation owners know what I'm talking about—PSX football games got much better when NFL GAMEDAY came out. CGW

Life vs. Computers

One of the high points in my life involves the cherished autumnal ritual of running the year's batch of football titles through a full-season simulation. This year, I picked MADDEN 2000 and NFL FEVER 2000 as the officially-licensed prediction makers.

Unless the two games know something we don't, the regular season featured surprises in both cases. In addition to predicting that the 49ers wouldn't even make the playoffs, and that the surprising Tennessee Titans would win the AFC Central, NFL FEVER 2000 predicted that the Vikings and the Broncos would make the Super Bowl with the Broncos running away with it, 27–14.



Could be the Vikings' year.

MADDEN 2000 saw things a little differently in one regard. The Broncos went out in the first round of the playoffs in this season sim, and the Jaguars somehow played their way into the Super Bowl against the Minnesota Vikings.

Something that worried us is that MADDEN 2000 also saw the 49ers fail to make the playoffs. Here's a word to the wise: If this actually happens, the resulting depression here in the Bay Area might trigger the big Internet stock crash everyone's been expecting.

Once again, we will try to convince the magazine's publisher to buy us a satellite dish so that we can "keep track" of how well these games model the real NFL season, and we'll let you know how the two games fare over the course of the next four months.

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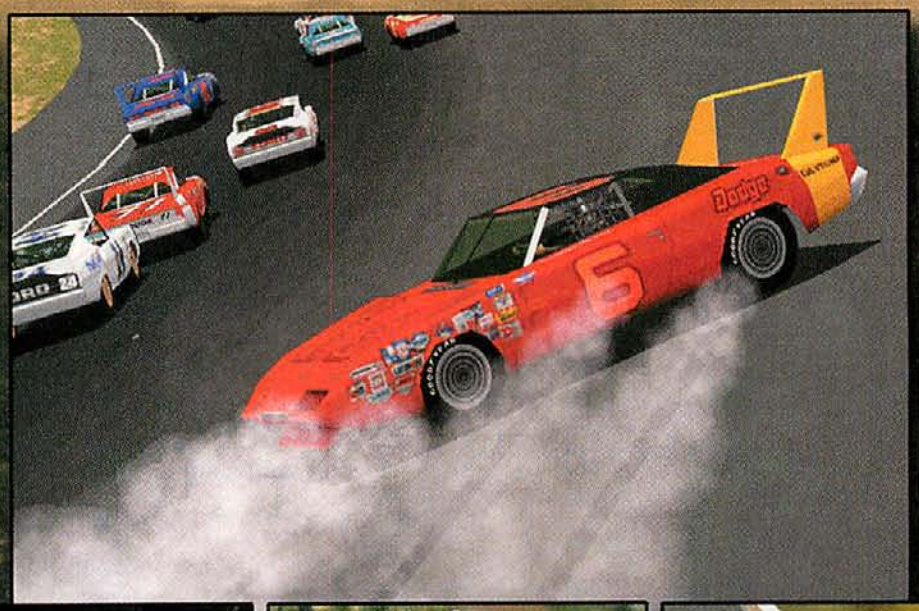

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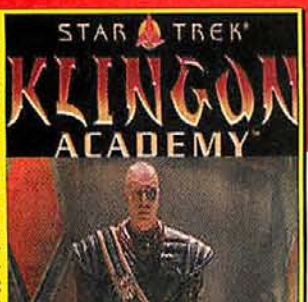

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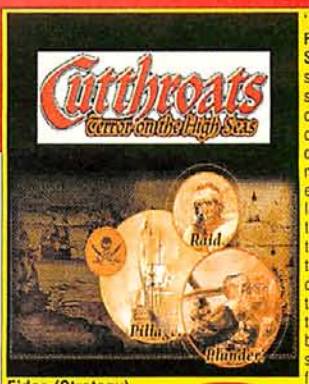

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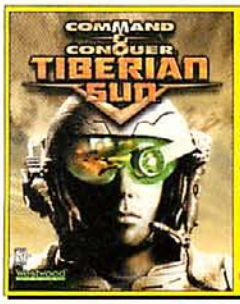

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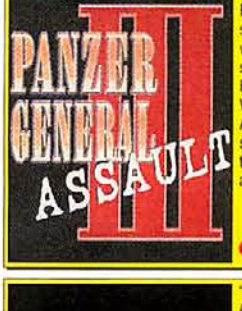

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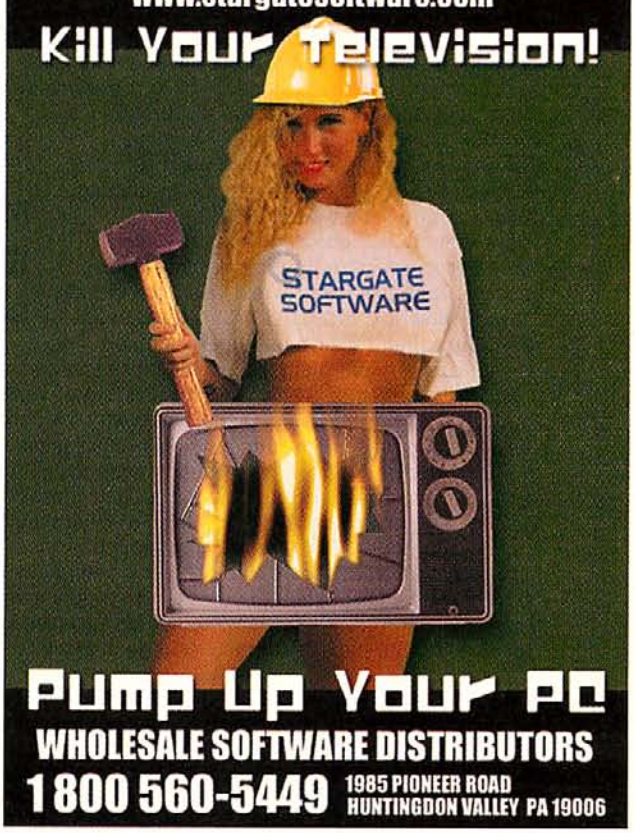

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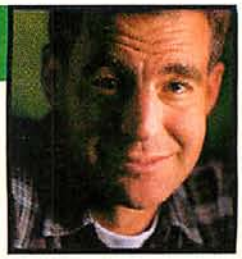

Johnny Levels Up

The King is Gone, but He's not Forgotten

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
–William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1921)

How do you begin a column about Johnny Wilson? With a joke, perhaps, to pay tribute to his unrepentantly raunchy sense of humor? With a memorable anecdote from times past, to acknowledge his 15-plus years at *Computer Gaming World*? Or how about with some kind of erudite, literary quote to set the tone and establish a conceptual framework – the kind of thing Johnny always did in these pages?

The problem, unfortunately, is that whichever way you choose to begin, you're almost certainly doomed to failure. Because nothing you could write in one page could possibly do justice to a man who has been so closely identified with, and done so much for, this magazine. So you might as well go for the literary one. It'll make you look smart for the chicks – and Johnny could always appreciate that, too.

▪ ▪ ▪

As it turns out, this Yeats guy knew what he was talking about. The center cannot hold forever, even at a computer gaming magazine. Johnny Wilson, *CGW*'s longtime editor-in-chief and patron saint, has moved on. And why should you care? Because you wouldn't be holding this magazine in your hands right now were it not for his extraordinary, near two-decade long career here.

Way back in 1982, when Johnny first started working for *CGW*, gaming was still a young, humble, hobbyist's medium; a subculture of a subculture. Gaming was far from mainstream entertainment – it was the arcane, funky new refuge of chess club and *Dungeons and Dragons* veterans. Guys like Richard Garriott and John Romero were not yet celebrity superstars, just geeky programming guys writing code late into the night.

The early *CGW* reflected this: amateurish, pamphlet-sized, with ugly black-and-white artwork. Johnny's first review was for a game called HORSE RACING CLASSIC for the Apple, which he called "a darn good party game."

From such humble beginnings, Johnny ascended the ladder from writer to Associate Editor to Editor, and eventually to Editor-in-Chief. Along the way, he helped shepherd the magazine from an underground geekfest to a mainstream international publication with hundreds of thousands of readers. He saw the industry grow and mutate into something radically different from what it was, and he took *CGW* through this same process – heroically struggling to straddle the line between satisfying older readers, while giving newer readers something they could relate to. Maybe he didn't succeed all the time, but he damn sure never stopped trying.

▪ ▪ ▪

What is important about Johnny Wilson is this: He taught the entire industry that though computer games may be, in the grand scheme of things, a rather frivolous business, that doesn't mean we can't think about them and write about them with intelligence, and passion, and a strong sense of integrity.

It was Johnny Wilson who insisted that all reviewers finish a game completely before writing a review. To him, anything less was half-assed and irresponsible – the equivalent of writing a movie review after walking out halfway through. It was Johnny who for years refused to preview a game unless we had playable code. Long after *CGW*'s competition began escalating the war to grab "exclusive" previews, Johnny stuck to his guns – over the protests of his own staff and superiors – not wanting to participate in what he saw as empty cheerleading for games that might ultimately suck.

Johnny Wilson obsessed over every page of every issue that he ever worked on. I've never met anyone who took his job more seriously. He could not bear to see us print something that was incorrect. He'd fret in his office for days, with the door closed, if he perceived that we had blown it somehow. It was sometimes painful to watch.

Market realities forced *CGW* to evolve over the years, but Johnny always fought to ensure that that evolution never took place at the expense of the magazine's integrity. He was a warrior and a visionary. He worked ceaselessly. He never gave up, even when he wanted to.

He also did the best Elmer Fudd I've ever heard.

▪ ▪ ▪

Johnny Wilson is alive and well. Actually, with a new wife, home, and job, he's probably more alive and more well than he's been in at least five years. So don't feel sorry for him. Feel sorry for his new bosses instead, because, unless he's undergone a radical personality change, he's going to start giving them all hell before they know what hit them.

...you wouldn't be holding this magazine in your hands right now were it not for Johnny Wilson's extraordinary, near two-decade long career...

Don't feel sorry for *Computer Gaming World*, either. Because the thing is, Johnny Wilson hasn't really left at all. His heart and soul are infused on every page of this magazine. He taught us all everything we know. He was, and is, The Man.

Thanks, Johnny.

What Jeff does realize is that if it weren't for Johnny, he'd still be reviewing networking cards for Macintosh magazines. Jeff thanks Johnny for that, too. Send email to jeff_green@zd.com. CGW

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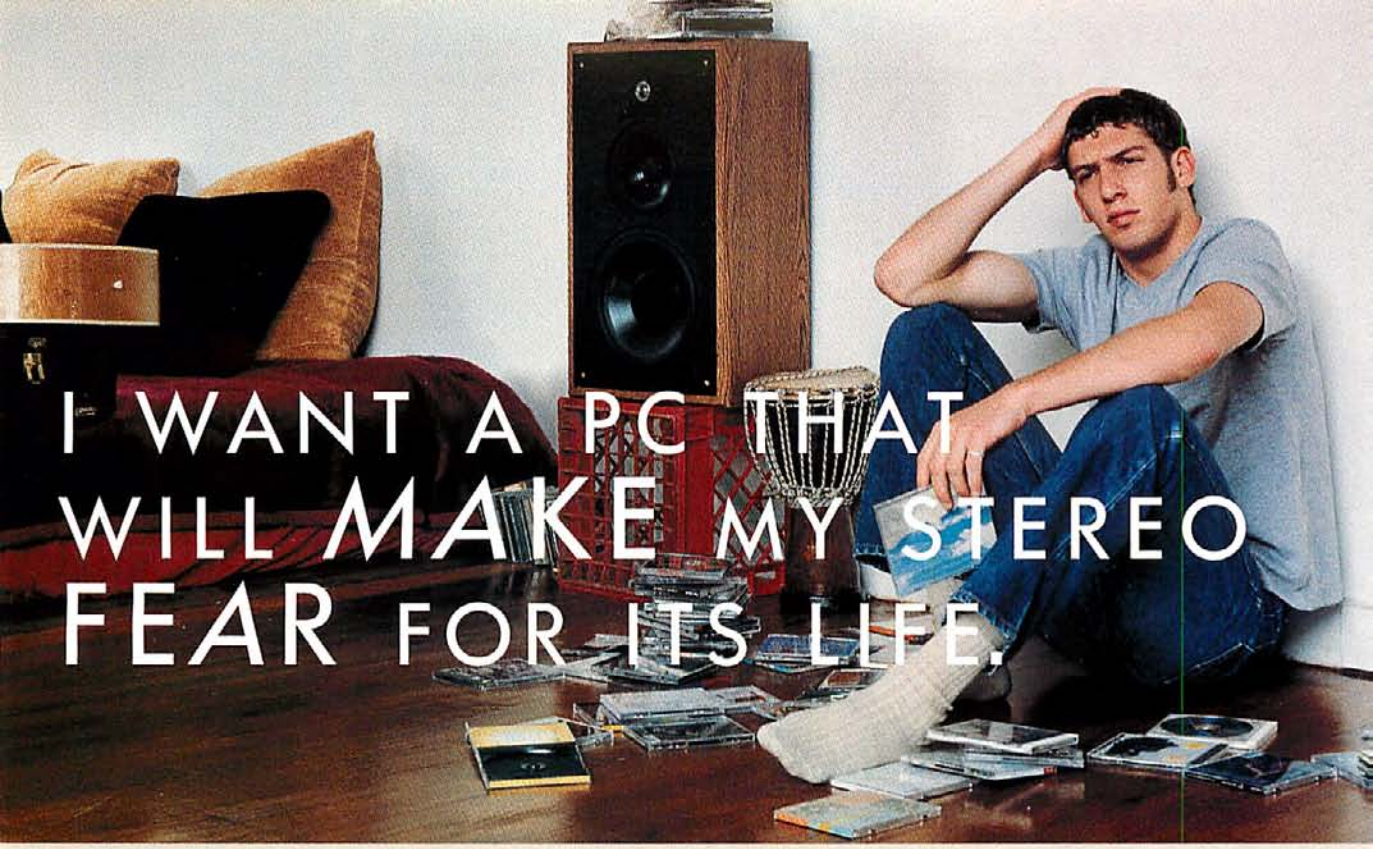

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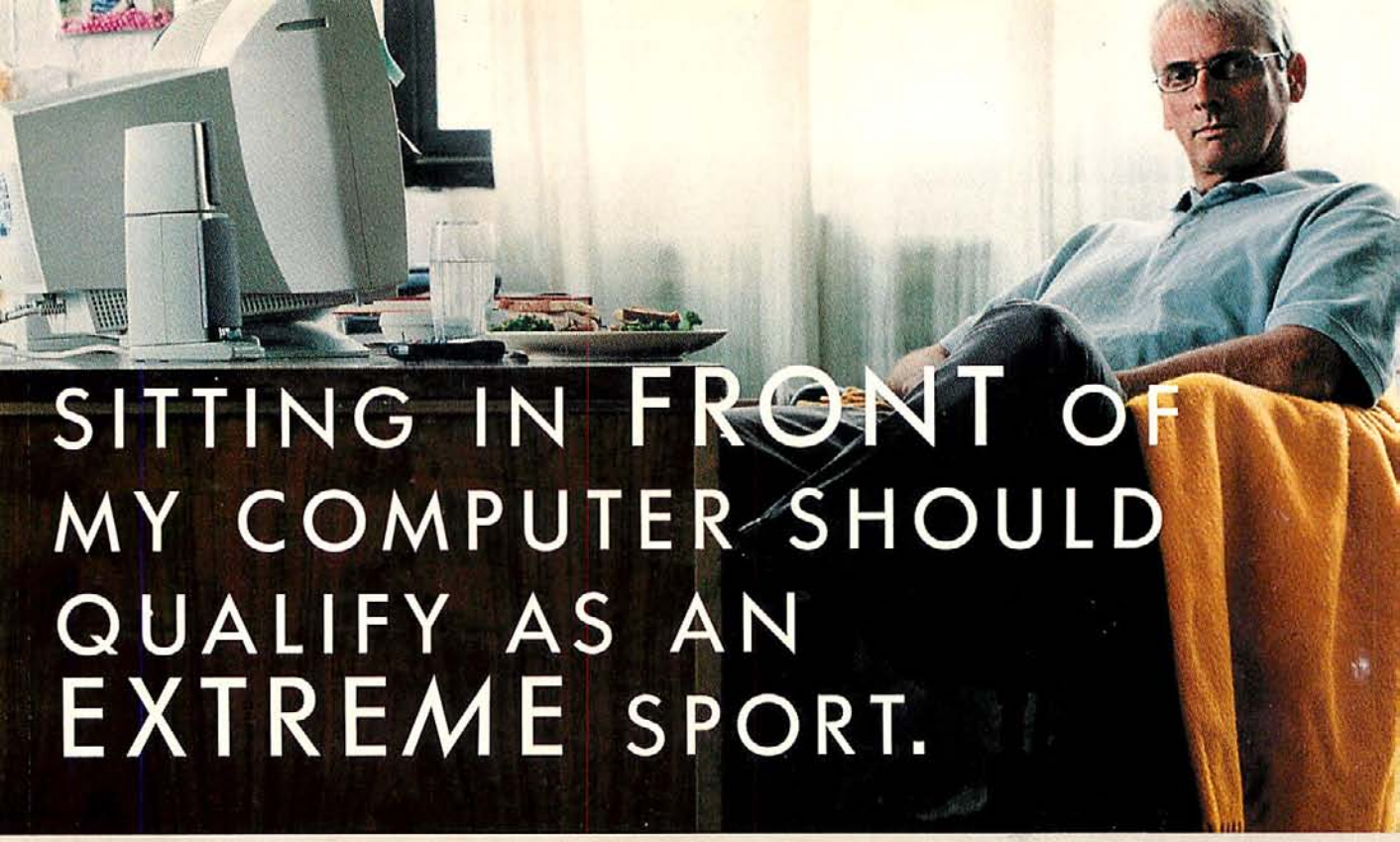

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