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COUNTDOWN 2 TO ISSUE 200

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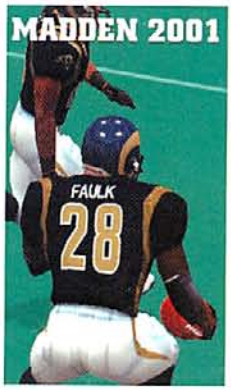

ULTIMATE BUYERS GUIDE

75 TOP GAMES, SYSTEMS, AND MORE!

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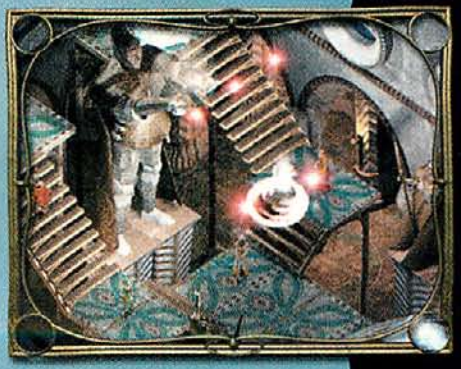
" ... Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn will be one of most important RPGs ever released. It is a beautiful epic, bringing to the field a new level of polish, detail and design. And, it's going to change everything." *- IGN*



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Animated Blood
Use of Alcohol

nVIDIA graphics

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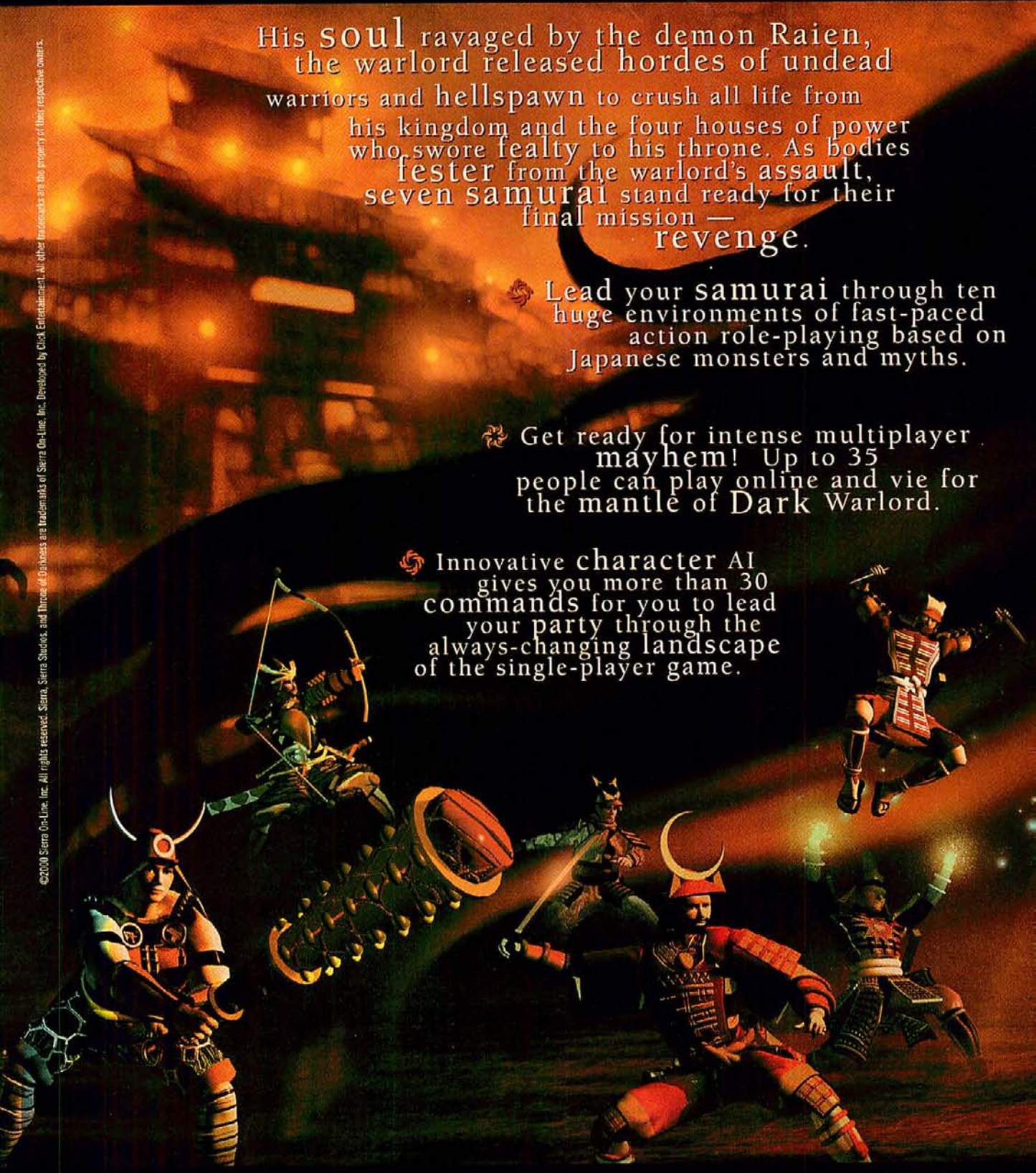

His soul ravaged by the demon Raien, the warlord released hordes of undead warriors and hellspawn to crush all life from his kingdom and the four houses of power who swore fealty to his throne. As bodies fester from the warlord's assault, seven samurai stand ready for their final mission — revenge.

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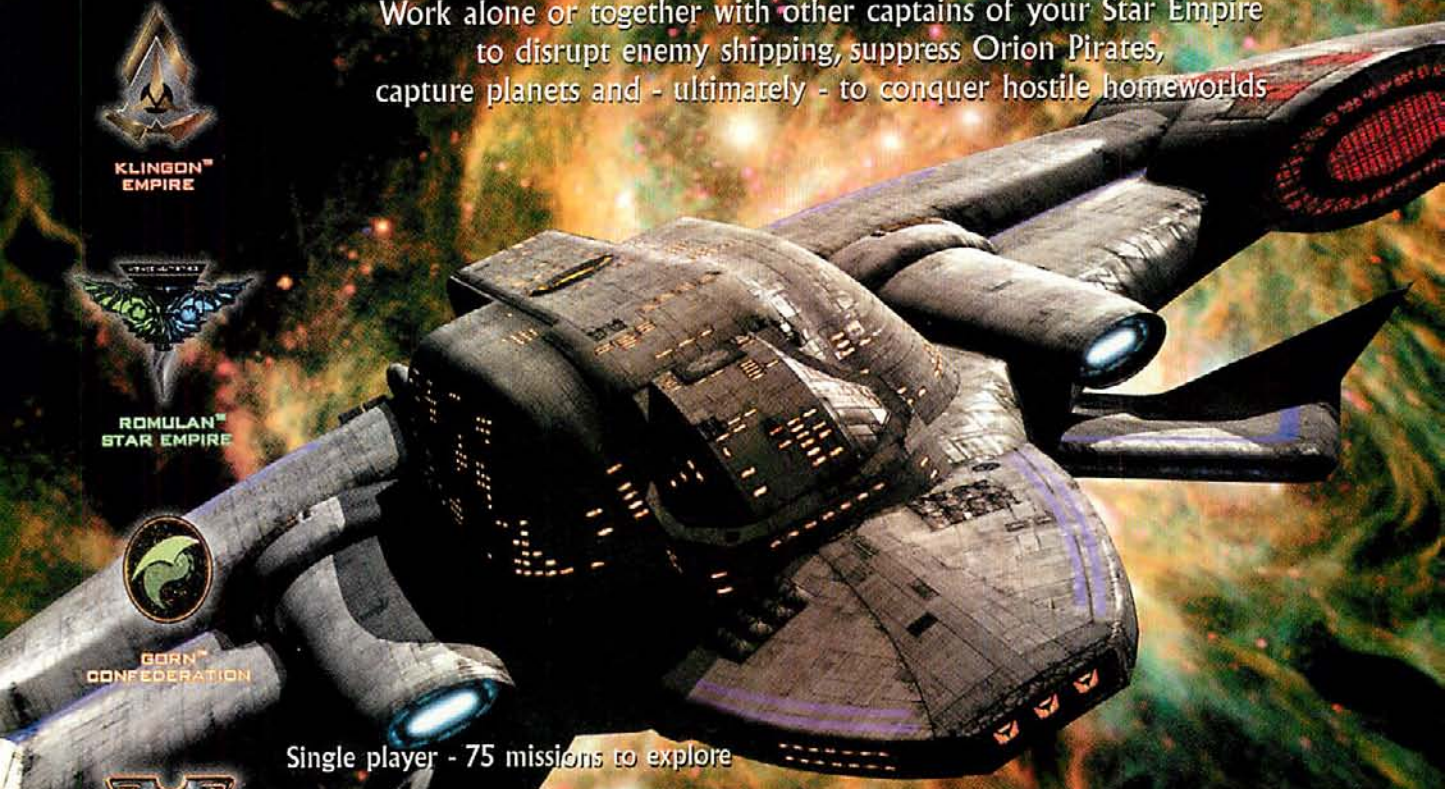

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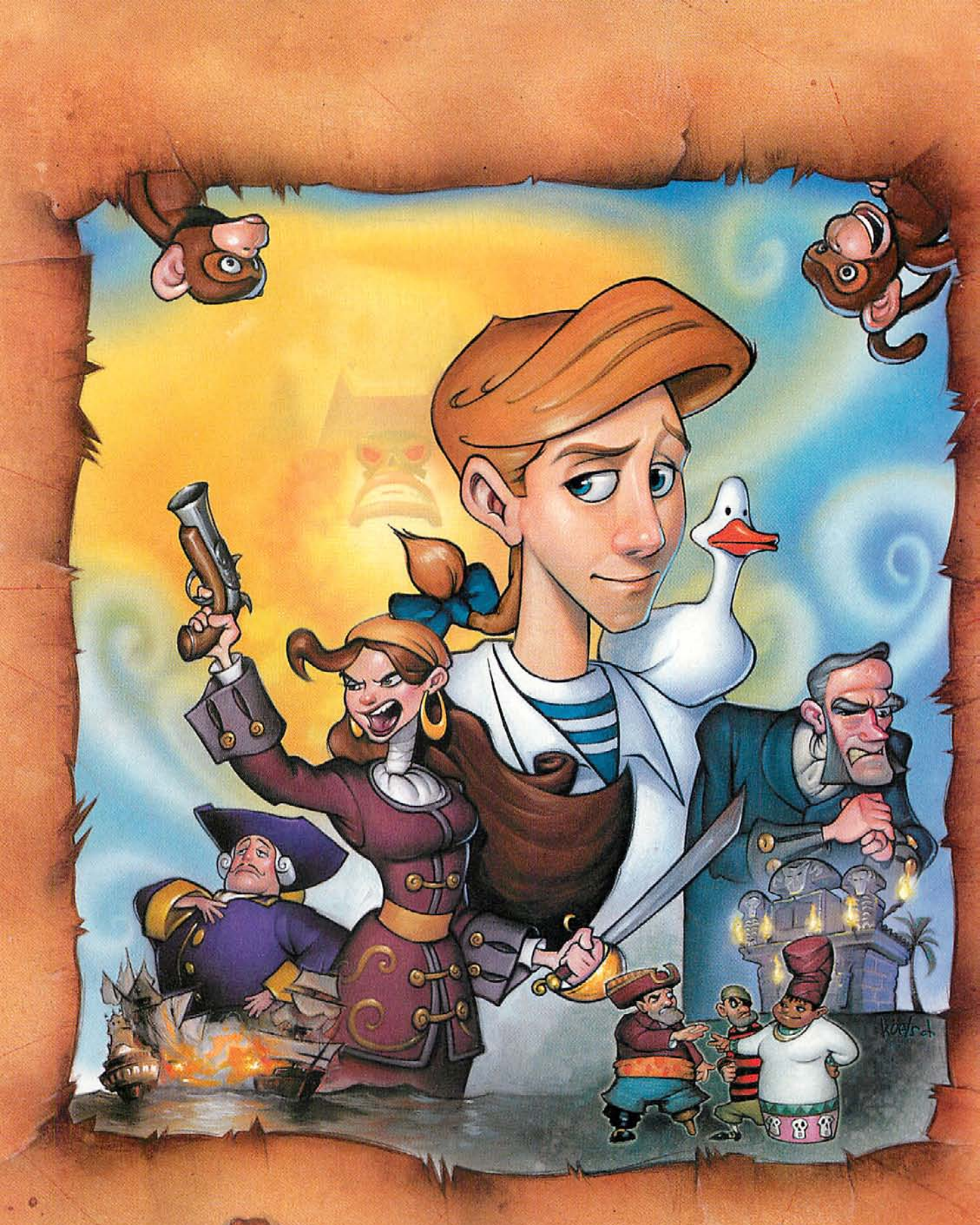

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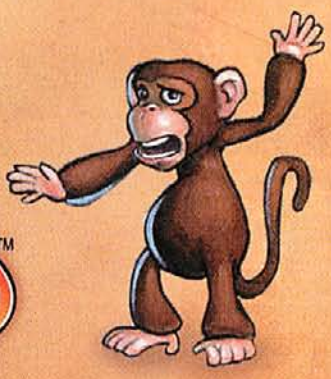

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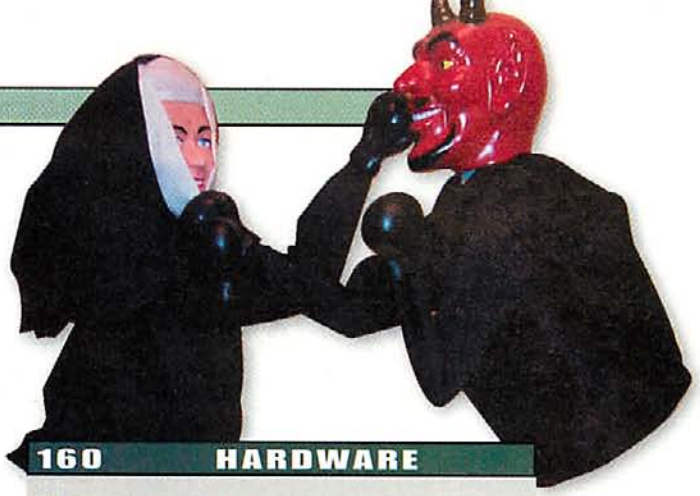

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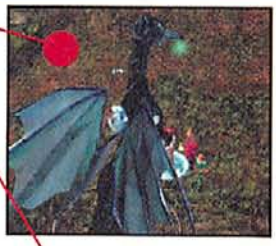

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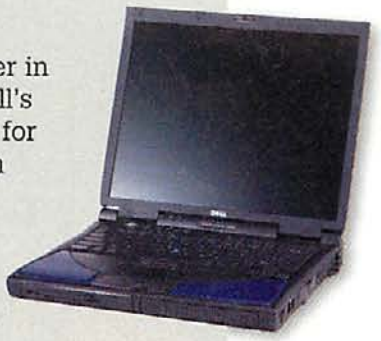

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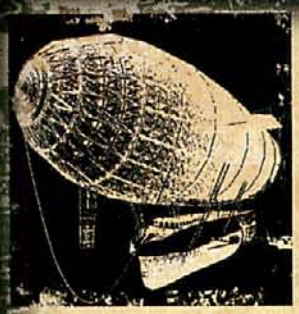

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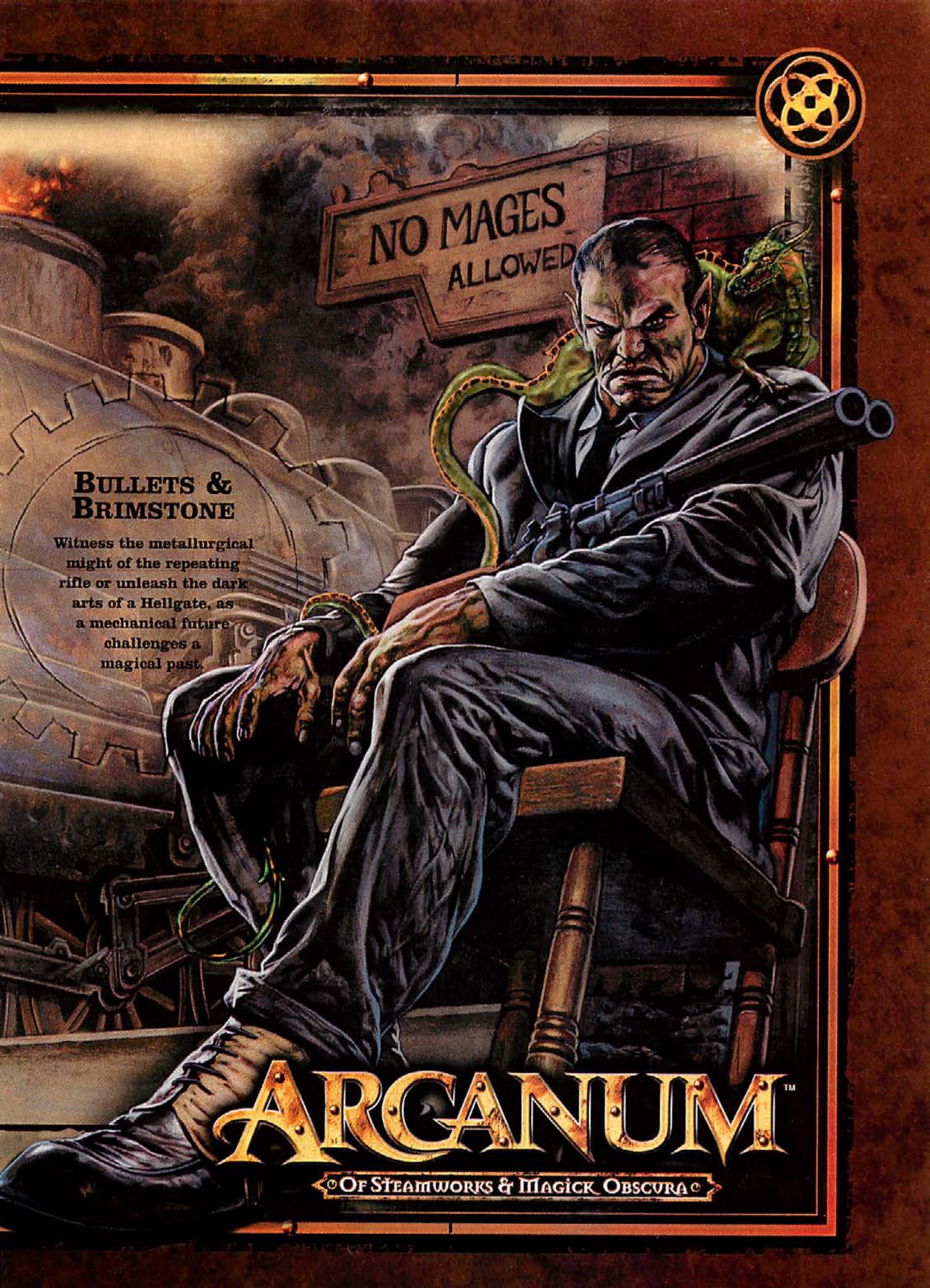
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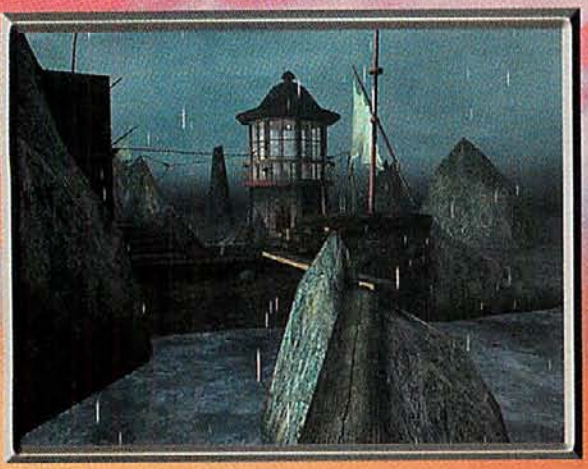

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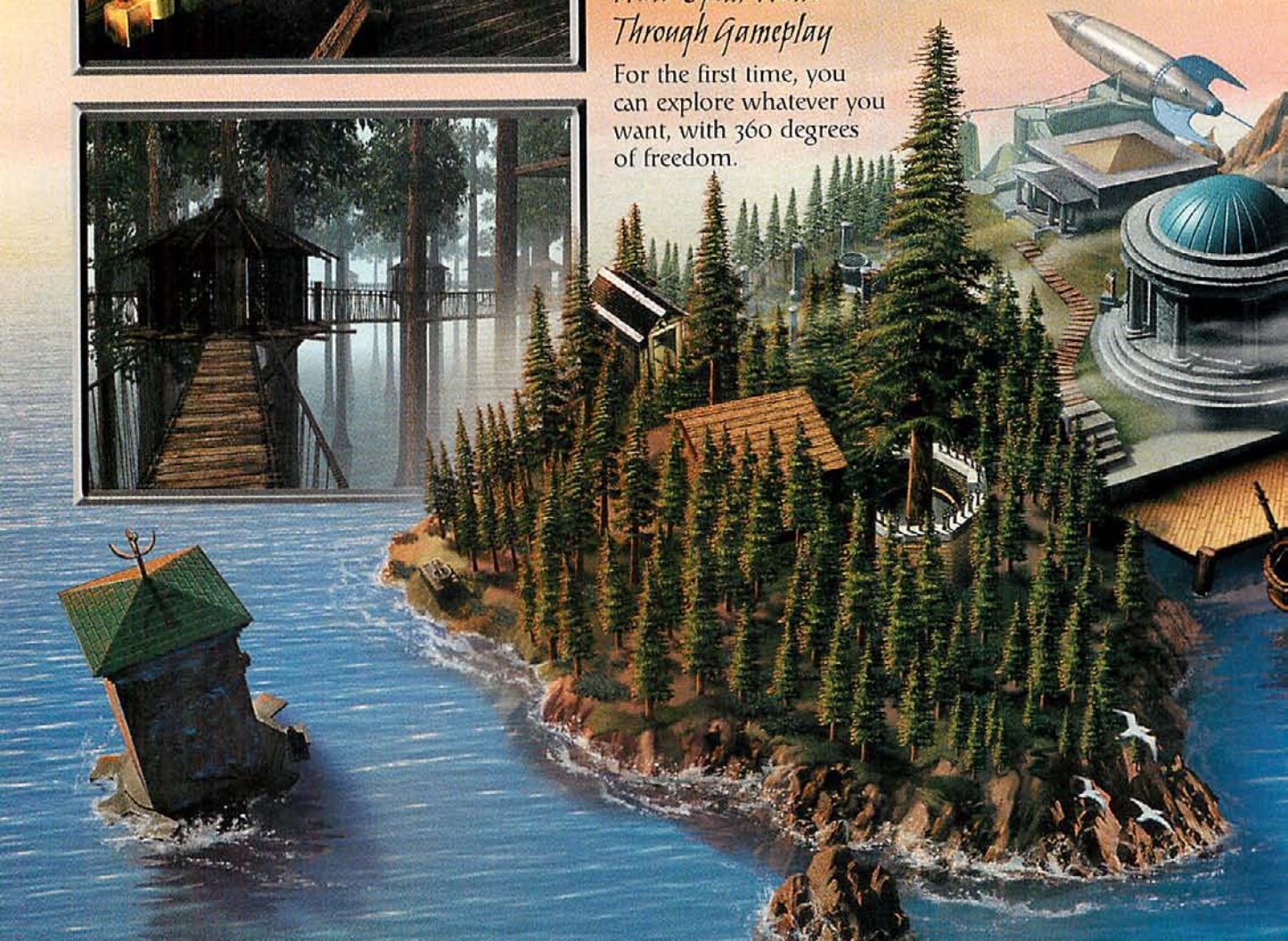

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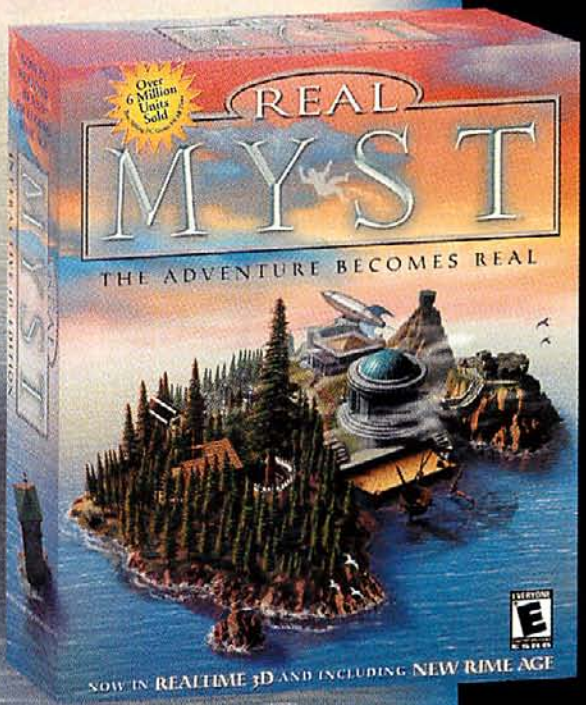

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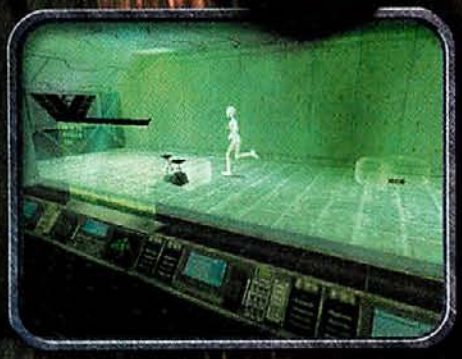

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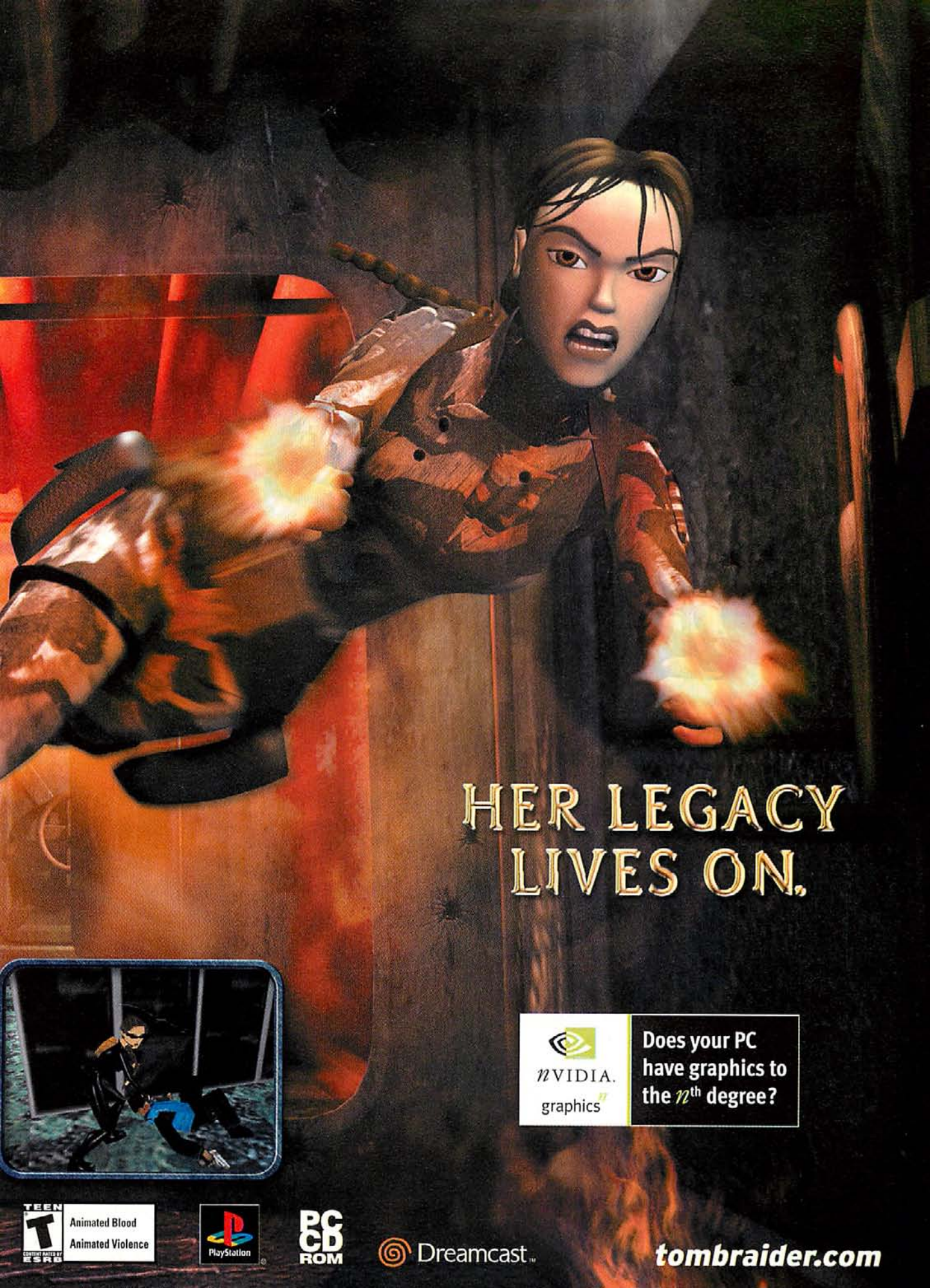
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FOUNDER ..... RUSSELL SIPE

George Jones, Game Psychic

What happened to my year? Wasn't the Fourth of July just last month?? The curse of the print magazine is that because we're consistently two months ahead of ourselves, we lead this strange, quasi-futuristic existence that keeps us ahead of the rest of the world (in our own minds, at least). So for us, it's December in October. Or something like that.

And so, seeing as I'm currently two months ahead of the rest of you, I've decided to enlighten, astound, amaze, and inform you with my predictions for 2001:

- BLACK AND WHITE will be released to rave reviews in the springtime. It will get coverage in Time, Newsweek, and CNN.
- Someone, somewhere, will release a SURVIVOR game to very un-rave reviews, but blockbuster sales.
- Nintendo will surprise everyone this year. With the Fall 2001 launch of the Game Cube, and the spring launch of the Game Boy Advance (which plugs into the Game Cube), Nintendo is going to astound us with a degree of innovation—and hopefully more mature titles—that console gamers aren't used to.
- Ditto Microsoft and the Xbox.
- On the second anniversary of the Columbine shooting, the violence in gaming issue will rear its ugly head, this time in the form of anti-violence legislation.

"Nintendo is going to astound us with a degree of innovation—and hopefully more mature titles—that console gamers aren't used to."

- DUKE NUKEM FOREVER won't ship until very late in the year.
- HALF-LIFE 2 will be announced at E3.
- You are going to see many more stories like our Korean gaming story in *Computer Gaming World*. The author—*CGW* Editor Ken Brown—is now officially my hero. He finally nailed the story we attempted to accomplish two times prior—and it's a landmark story. For a magazine that prides itself on computer game coverage, we haven't done a great job of presenting the lives and souls behind our hobby. Until now.
- You're going to see our competitors begin to copy our newfound approach to feature stories. CGW

GEORGE'S MIX

1. NO ONE LIVES FOREVER
2. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*, by Peter Biskind
3. *Bridging the Gap*, by the Black Eyed Peas (hip/hop CD)

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FROM RICK GOODMAN

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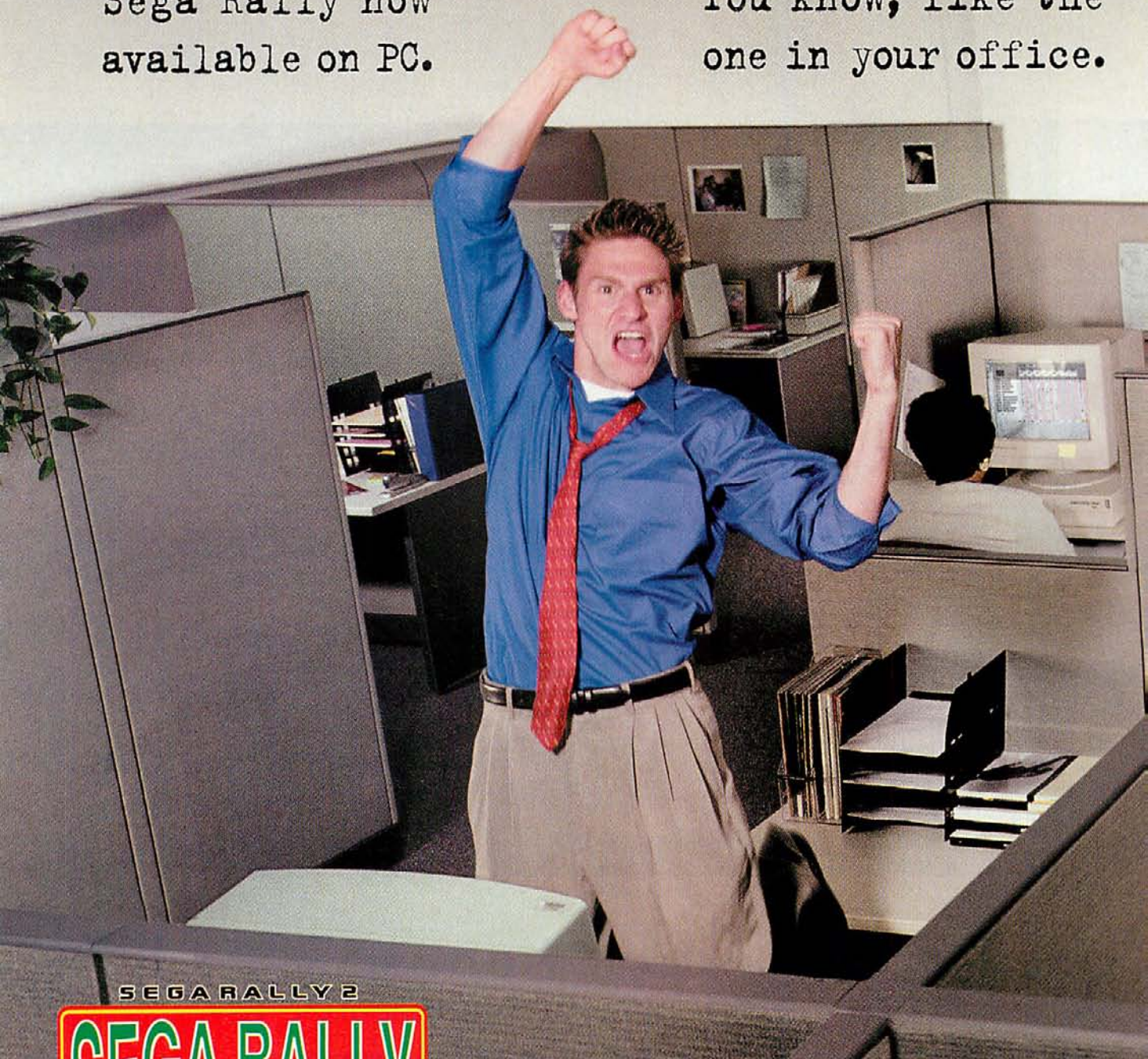

SEGA RALLY 2

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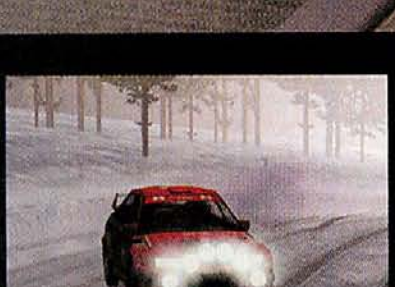

Leave the competition in the dust. Unless it's raining or snowing - then let 'em eat mud!

Tackle 21 white-knuckled courses - day or night, through all kinds of weather

EVERYONE

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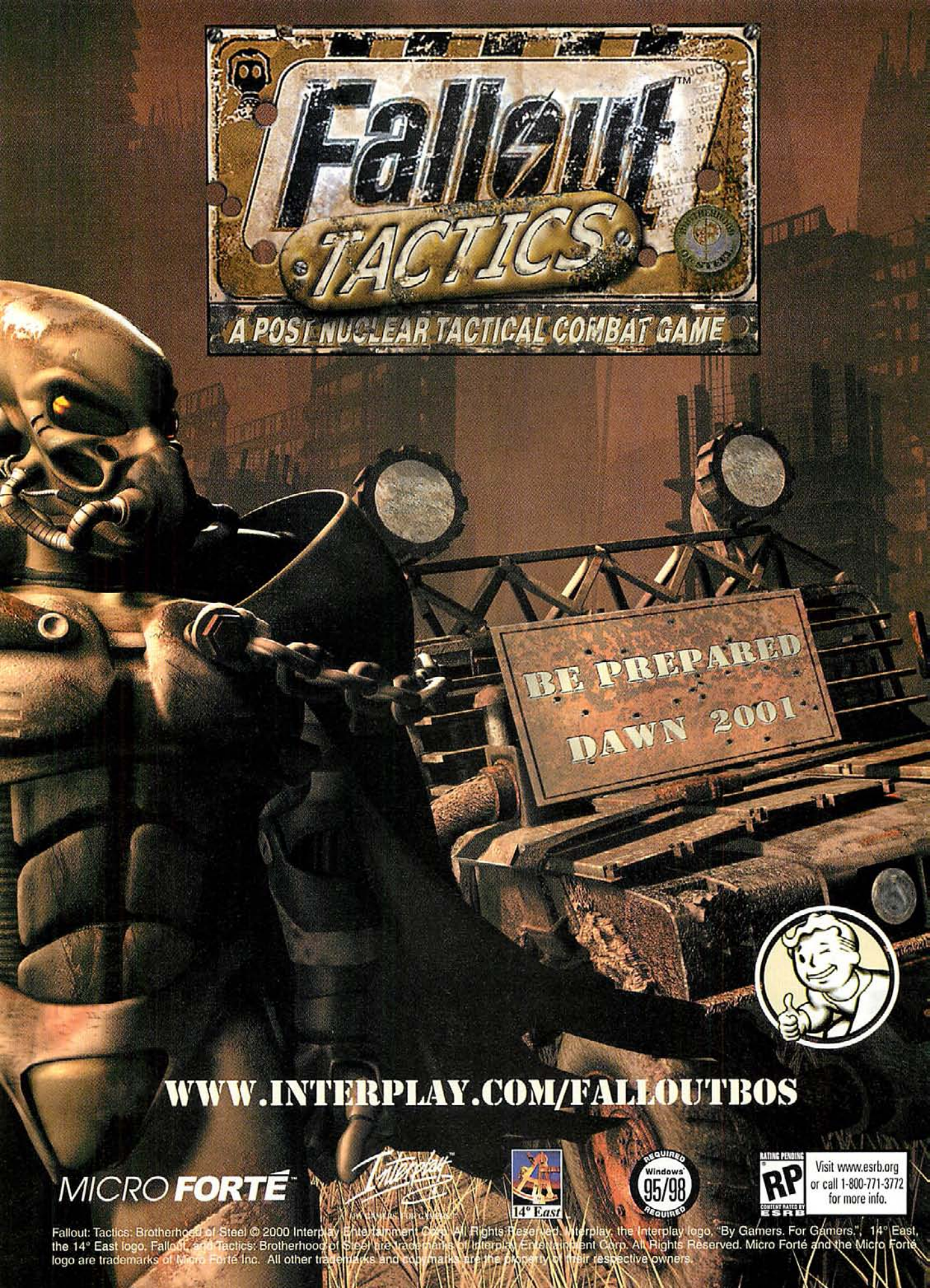

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LETTERS

Mouse-Look: Who Came First?

I really enjoyed Robert Coffey's RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN preview in the December 2000 issue. The screen shots and artwork have me especially intrigued. I'm really looking forward to experiencing WOLFENSTEIN after so many years.

While I was perusing the sidebar "You've Come a Long Way, Wolfie," I noticed that you gave QUAKE credit for being the first game with mouse-look. I do remember reading an article a while back that stated that id software took this idea from Bethesda Softworks' THE TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK. Being an old FUTURE SHOCK fan, I had to bring this to your attention.

Tony Wong

I just opened up my fresh-out-of-the-mailbox December issue of *CGW*, and rushed to read the cover story on RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN. The game will be amazing, but I have to correct a statement that you guys made. DUKE NUKEM 3D was the first game to include mouse aiming up and down – all you have to do is press the U key.

Miroslav Djuric

Contrary to your comment that DUKE was the first game to incorporate the mouse-look *[actually, we said it was QUAKE – Ed.]*, Bungie Software's MARATHON had this feature when first released back in November of 1994 (that's right, a full two years before DUKE). I can remember the glory days of the Macintosh (circa 1995 or so, when there were actual games to play) where we would watch DOOM players and ask "why can't you look around?" Nobody understood that we had been looking up and down for over a year.

Ryan Bolduan

Actually, you're all correct. All of these games had some form of "mouse-looking" available before QUAKE. So any way you slice it, we were wrong. As to who did it first amongst the three games listed here, our crack team of fact-checking monkeys has determined the following: MARATHON wins, with a release in 1994 on the Mac. THE TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK, released in 1995, wins as the first PC game with mouse-look, followed by DUKE 3D in 1996.

George Jones: Potty Mouth-in-Chief

I was appalled that George Jones chose to use an obscene word and ask his readers to "excuse our French" in his article on MAJESTIC (December 2000). For some time, I have noted with sadness how the editorial staff continues to lower their standards to that of giggling teenage boys trying to demonstrate their machismo and sound cool by sprinkling their articles with blustering profanity to describe a game. For years I have ignored the excessive use of the phrase "kicks ass" which often appears in ads and occasionally in editorial. I've ignored the constant use of "sucks," because the phrase "sucks" has a different connotation than it did when I was a teen during the 1970s. I can ignore the sometimes incessant usage of "hell" and "damn." However, I take offense at Mr. Jones' use of the word – which used to earn an "R" rating for any film. If Mr. Jones cannot communicate any better than this, it is time for a new editor. One who holds the standards of print media just a touch above the locker room banter of 7th grade boys.

Jay
Redondo Beach, California

My 8-year-old has recently discovered all the neat stuff in *CGW*, and is now usually the first one to grab it from the mail and check out the new game titles and reviews. Given that fact, I am disappointed to find the use of the "F-word" in the MAJESTIC preview. I hope this is a goof on the part of the editors. If this is a view of the future, *CGW* will need to be an example of "parents must have standards," and you will have lost a long-time subscriber. I know the kids will understand, because they have even commented on the frequent use of rough language and gross-out images the ads tend to use. Too bad. For all of us.

Larry R. Schultz
Bellevue, WA

George Jones responds: Usage of the "F-word" is never gratuitous or taken for granted in CGW. In fact, this is only the second time we've used it. (The first was in our KINGPIN review earlier this year.) My point in using it in the context of my preview of EA's MAJESTIC was two-fold: First, it was literally my reaction when I saw the bold nature of the game ("Oh f--"). Second, it was an attempt to signify that this game is most definitely not business as usual. Still, though, I apologize to anyone who took offense – just because I have a dirty mouth shouldn't mean that you have to hear it.

Look, Some Guy Likes Garfield

I just read your December 2000 issue and was SHOCKED to see that your game rating scale had Garfield the Cat at the bottom!! Some of us just happen to like him (I think). And how could you put Ren as 4 stars? He's an idiot!! Who comes up with this stuff?? I demand to see the manager!

Matt Moody

Another Egregious Mistake

I received the most recent issue of *CGW* a few days ago, and started to peruse your most excellent reviews. When I came to CRIMSON SKIES, I had to chuckle at the author's use of "egregious." I have seen this word appear in quite a few gaming magazines recently, and it must be the new "paradigm," or "obfuscation." At any rate, I believe that egregious is an adjective, not a noun; therefore, it cannot be the object of the verb as the author is using it. Mayhaps he meant to use "egregiousness" instead? Keep up the good work.

John Ponsolle

Penny Arcade by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (www.penny-arcade.com)

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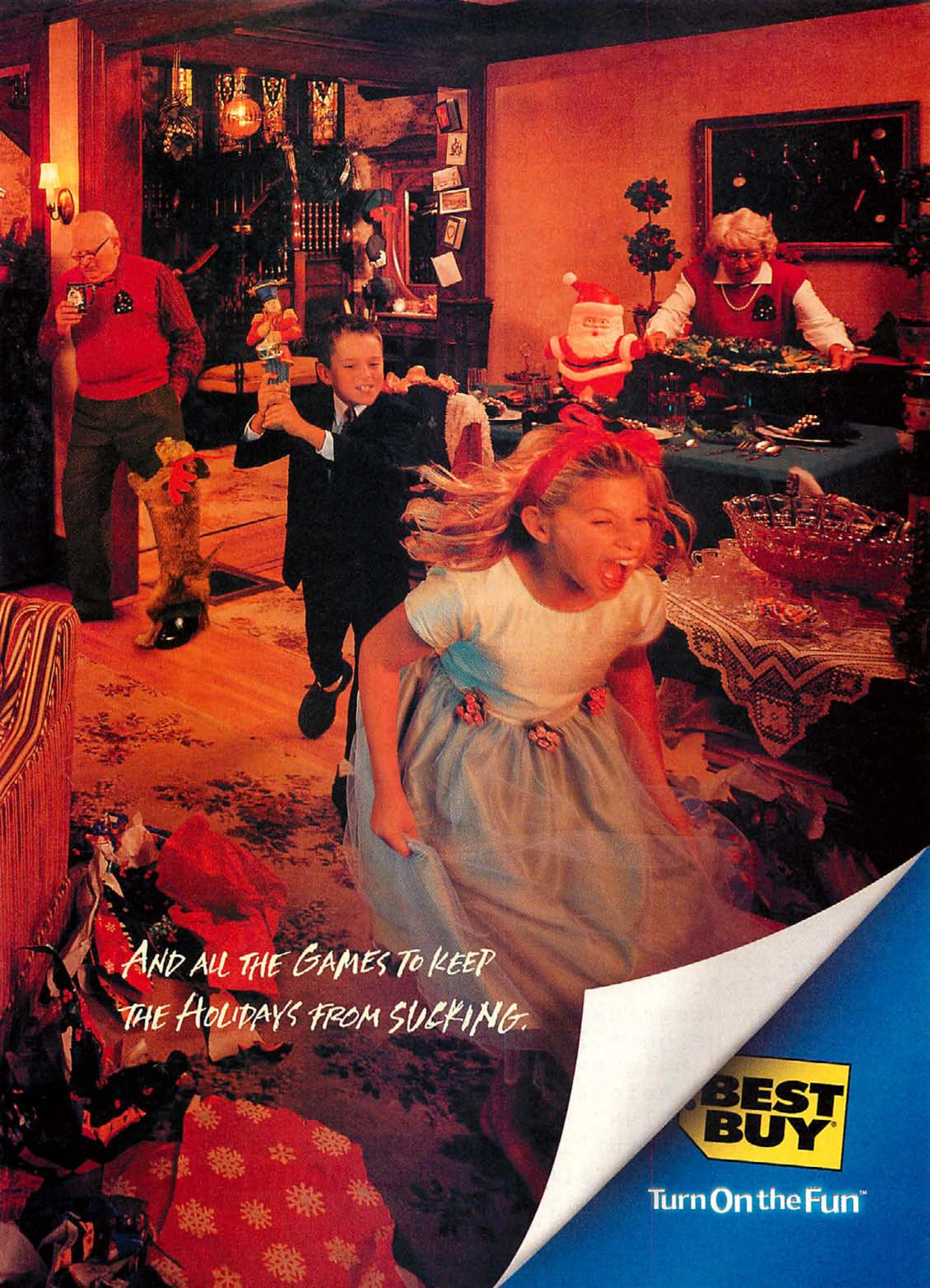
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LETTERS

John, while we appreciate the correction, we had to chuckle at your use of the word "mayhaps." Actually, "mayhap" does not have an "s" at the end. It is a singular word, derived from the phrase "it may happen." We don't mean to obfuscate the point of your letter, but such an egregious mistake could not go unmentioned, seeing as though it sets a new paradigm in irony. Thanks for writing.

Look, a Rock Star Says We're Cool

When I saw page 192 of the November *CGW*, I was half asleep and reading in bed. I jumped up and danced around the house shouting out to my wife that we (the Old 97's) were finally in a cool magazine. At least, one that I like. Thanks to Robert Coffey for putting us in his Mix.

I'm a game freak and have read *CGW* since the early 90's. It's a great magazine. Funny thing is that it's more exciting to me to see our name in a mag that I care about than stupid *Spin* or *Rolling Stone*, which totally suck.

Ken Bethea
guitar player
Old 97's

Nice Tip, Eh?

I finished perusing your December issue, and took special interest in the online purchasing article [Read.me, page 50]. It attracted me because I am Canadian, and purchasing games up here costs a lot more than down south (grrr...). Anyway, during my Internet travels, I came across a little site called drag-on.ca. They specialize in Canadian orders (their site is based in Canadian $), but also ship to the U.S. Just figured I'd point this out for the rest of us above the 40th meridian.

Kyle Zwarich

Thanks. All the moose who read our magazine will be thrilled.

COUNTDOWN 2 TO ISSUE 200

200th Edition!

Your Favorite Gaming Moment

What was your favorite gaming moment? As part of our countdown to Issue 200, we're inviting everyone to submit their wildest gaming experience in 200 words or less. We'll collect the most interesting stories and print them in a special section of the March issue. Here's your chance to be a part of gaming history. Write to us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

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WOLFENSTEIN Story: The Patch

In our December story on RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN (pps 106-107), we incorrectly identified Scott Miller as the funding source for WOLFENSTEIN 3D add-on SPEAR OF DESTINY. Actually, Id Software funded SPEAR OF DESTINY. We also reported that Todd Porter talked John Romero into forming Ion Storm. Romero strongly denies this, saying he had discussions about forming a company with Tom Hall months earlier.

The group of developers who formed Third Law Entertainment left Ion Storm in 1998, not 1988. We also wrote that Third Law's game, KISS, "shipped in one-fourth the time of DAIKATANA – and outsold it." Actually, it shipped in less than half the time (14 months vs. 36 months for DAIKATANA), and did not outsell it. DAIKATANA sold 40,351 units as of the end of September, vs. 22,725 units of KISS for the same period, according to PC Data. We sincerely apologize for the errors.

Wonderland has been cruelly corrupted by the deranged Queen of Hearts. The Mad Hatter, Jabberwock and other familiar characters have become her menacing minions. Out-run, outwit, or outfight these twisted characters and confront the sadistic Queen. Only one of you can survive. Travel through wickedly surreal landscapes wielding an arsenal of sinister toys, including rapid-fire playing cards and jack-in-the-box bombs. Designed by American McGee of Quake® and Quake II™ fame, and using an enhanced Quake III: Arena™ engine, American McGee's Alice pulls you into a fast-paced, third-person world where horrific characters and fiendish puzzles conspire to deprive you of your sanity before they take your life. Are you ready for the next chapter of Alice? Visit alice.ea.com

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ROGUE ENTERTAINMENT

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INSIDE

UO in 3D
The Year in Review
ARCANUM Getting Hot

To PC —or— Not PC

Whether 'tis **nobler** to work on PC, and **suffer** the **slings** and **arrows** of outrageous **fortune**, or **sell out** and do **console games**

■■■ With the release of the PlayStation 2, the dogs of war have been loosed. The PS2, Dreamcast, Xbox, and Game Cube aren't only battling for our hearts, minds, and wallets, but also for those of PC developers, as they consider the potential rewards of offering games on those platforms. We contacted many of the leading developers and publishers to get a peek at their plans.

Some were careful in their comments, such as Tom Byron, LucasArts' director of product marketing, who would say only that "LucasArts could be a very big player in the console market." Others, like Trip Hawkins of 3DO, are ready to thoroughly embrace the PS2: "For play, the PS2 is the future of gaming," Hawkins says. Then there were some who see the advent of the new console systems as ushering in a sea-change in the marketplace. Sierra Studios producer Jeff Pobst sees the new consoles changing the marketplace. "These new opportunities provide a sort of shake-up of the status quo. If you were the leader in the past, you need to step up and reassert yourself by making a great new game. If you were behind the leaders a bit, the new playing fields give you an opportunity to demonstrate your ability." We've already seen this with Bungie, who agreed to be acquired by Microsoft in large part so that they could be one of the leading Xbox developers.

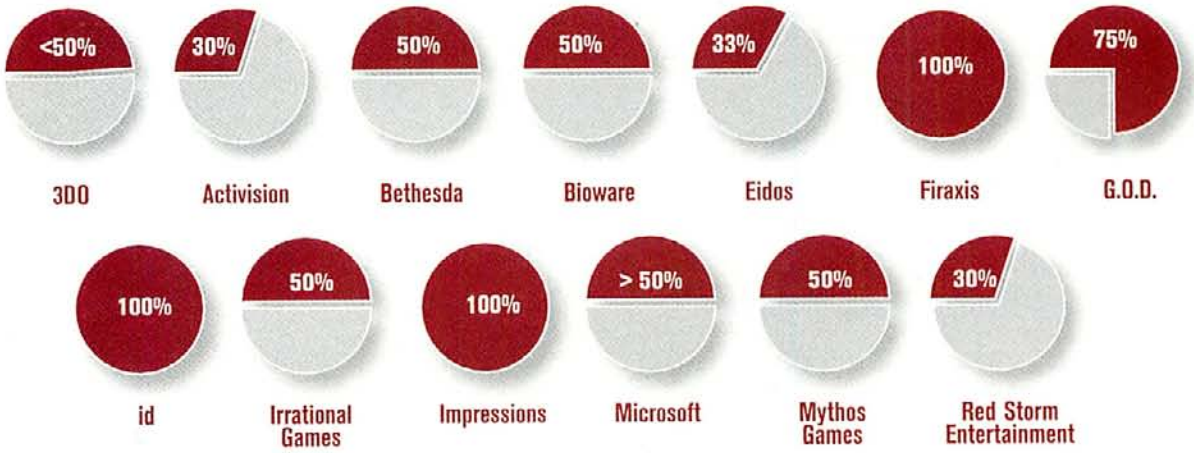
And what about the games that are designed for consoles—will we see those games ported to the PC? Todd Vaughn, director of new business at Bethesda, thinks so. "We do foresee a few 'ports' of console projects to PC, but only where it's appropriate. The PC is a different market with different expectations." Steve Ackrich, head of development for the San Jose branch of Infogrames says that the console market is bigger, but it's also tougher. "Our PC titles have more potential for financial success. Given the licensing and manufacturing costs on a console title, we need to sell nearly 50 percent more than a PC title."

Quotes from the Industry Page 37

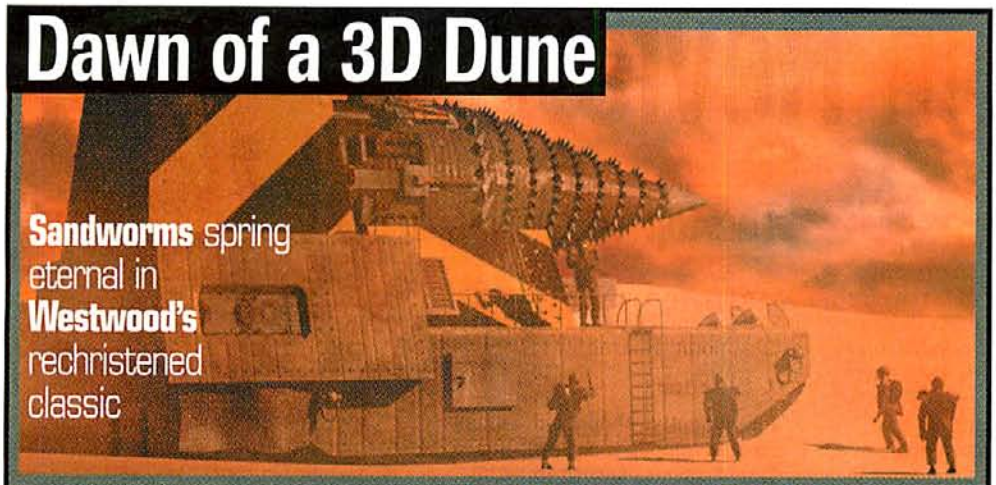
How much will the lure of the larger console market affect PC game companies? Only time will tell, but it's reassuring to see so many of our favorite developers stay committed to our favorite platform. —*Mark Asher*

Placing Their Bets

Here's the percentage of resources publishers say they're allocating to the PC (as opposed to consoles) over the next 18 months.



Dawn of a 3D Dune



Sandworms spring eternal in **Westwood's** rechristened classic

■■■ Westwood Studios is pulling its head out of the sand while diving deep into the gritty stuff at the same time. How? By returning to its cherished *Dune* license while acknowledging that real-time strategy (RTS) games have evolved beyond the staid structure of their recent C&C titles. EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE is a fully-3D RTS and even now, a full year away from release, it's drop-dead gorgeous. The design team is moving away from linear mission-based gameplay to let players conduct a more free-form campaign, fighting for planetary sections on a map that looks almost like a *Risk* board.

Players can choose from three different races: the noble House Atreides, the evil Harkonnen, or the insidious Ordos; and make alliances with any two of five sub-houses, each with unique weapons and advantages. Each combination of house with sub-houses gives players different kinds of armies, so they can tailor their tactics for specific strategies.

Westwood is creating a large single-player game with 33 maps and more than 100 missions. Several multiplayer options are also planned, including a co-op mode for players to battle through the single-player game. Scores of brand new units promise challenging, unpredictable play. This could well be the title that reclaims Westwood's status as an innovator. —*Robert Coffey*

Quotes From the Industry

continued from page 36

In Their Words

"I don't think there will be a drop-off in quality or quantity of PC games. A few big name PC developers are focusing somewhat more on consoles, but most of the PC shops are staying with the PC."
– Phil Steinmeyer, PopTop Software

"The only prediction I'd dare to make is that the gaming scene probably isn't going to change as much or as quickly as many people would believe."
– Chris Beatrice, Director of Design and Development at Impressions

"Our belief is that the days of porting console titles to the PC are over. The vast majority of games currently in development are being built for either format, not both."
– Nick Earl, V.P. of Development at Eidos

"I am a former PC gamer who has tired of the constant revisions on the PC platform and the constant feeling of dread that the game won't work for some reason."
– Trip Hawkins, CEO 3DO

"I think the PC platform is in a bit of a recession (no kidding), but I do think it is only a temporary situation."
– Mark Dochtermann, Ritual Entertainment

"I suspect that new consoles arriving imminently will cause some PC developers to unwisely leave the PC platform, only to find out the competition isn't any easier on console."
– Greg Zeschuk, Joint CEO at Bioware

The GOOD...

SAYANARA, STARBUCKS

Our lives are suddenly worth living again with the recent advent of an engineering marvel that dispenses piping hot java or espresso, free, at the push of a button. The half-coffee, half-chocolate "Mokachino" is our new life's blood, without which you surely wouldn't be holding this magazine. Blessed caffeine, blessed coffee bean, we praise thy glory.

The BAD...

BLAIR WITCH

If you're looking for fuel to build a pyre that will cleanse the Blair Witch demons from our midst, look no further than the three Blair Witch games from the Gathering of Developers. Saddled with the same engine that made NOCTURNE such a nightmare, these games couldn't rise above awkward cinematic angles that interfere with the action. Call us crazy, but shouldn't shooters let you see where you're shooting?

and the UGLY

MATTEL MESS

Losing $4 billion dollars in 16 months for purchasing The Learning Company is ugly enough. But the fallout from having lost so much by acquiring a software company (including game developers) may have lasting implications. SSI will likely face continued uncertainty as they chart their future with new owners (see pg 44), but we hope that the worst is behind this venerable publisher.

Y2K in Review

Although fears of global catastrophe were unfounded, the year 2000 proved to be a tumultuous one for PC gamers. Industry buyouts, rumored firings of legendary game designers, and even the threat of PC gaming's number-one ally selling us out were just some of the highlights.

Despite all this, a number of quality games hit store shelves and managed to take the edge off of things...a little bit. One thing is for sure: With the upcoming console battle royale, 2001 should be another up-and-down year for PC gamers. Herewith, we revisit the Top 10 stories of the past year.

The top 10 stories of the year

10. Richard Garriot Splits With Origin

Hot on the heels of the ULTIMA ASCENSION debacle, the legendary game designer responsible for the ULTIMA series parts ways with the company he helped found. Was Lord British fired, or did he quit? And when—and with whom—will he dive back into gaming?

9. The Unwashed Masses

Replacing the Deer Hunters of the world is none other than Regis Philbin. Who wants to be a Millionaire? Disney Interactive, obviously—their PC quiz show sat at the top of the best-seller charts all year long. This begs the question—who's going to publish the Survivor game?

8. Sequels Rule the Day

One of the bright spots: The year's two biggest sequels—BALDUR'S GATE 2 and DIABLO 2—did not disappoint. Huzzah!

7. Sleeper

Just when we thought the small-time developer was dead, Big Time Software surprised us all with COMBAT MISSION, an absolutely amazing 3D war game. Meanwhile, a small, unfunded group of Croatian designers released a technology demo of SERIOUS SAM that blew gamers and game designers away.

6. Bungie Sells Out

We can only pray that the Redmond Giant's swallowing of one of the last truly great game design shops is a good thing. MicroBungie's belated announcement that HALO would ship on both Mac and PC, in addition to Xbox, helped calm many fears.

5. Chapter 11

G.O.D. sells out to Take 2 Interactive. Mattel gets sold for a song and a prayer. Looking Glass bites the dust. We must be a leading indicator for New Economy companies—the gaming industry started to shake out long before the dot-com world did.

4. Dai-, Dai-, Dai-, Dai-, DAIKATANA

John Romero's long-chronicled magnum opus is released and immediately eviscerated by the critics with a level of cruelty rarely seen. The primary culprits: excessive hype, an outdated engine, and some serious AI problems with the game's sidekicks.

3. The Two-Ton Gorilla

When CNN covered Sony's new console release, PC gamers suddenly understood why game companies have been scrambling to the video game side of the world.

2. Sim Life

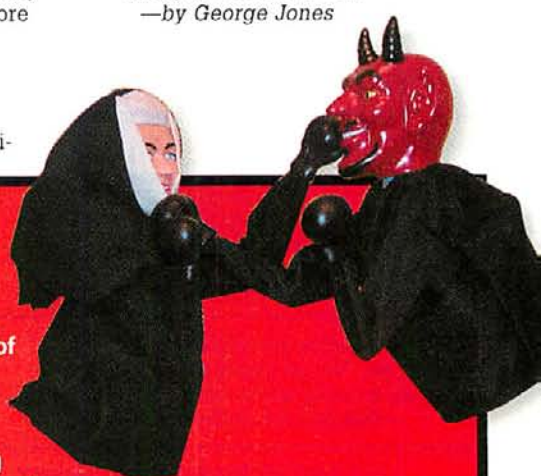
Will Wright creates a national phenomenon with THE SIMS, an instant game-of-the-year candidate that got men talking about such previously taboo issues as wallpaper and carpeting.

1. Xbox

Microsoft decides to battle Sony on their own turf. Confused PC gamers don't know whether to take this move as validation or betrayal. Time will tell.

—by George Jones

TCHOTCHKE OF THE MONTH



Do not be deceived: These are no simple puppets. They are the tangible manifestation of the soul-wracking conflict constantly thundering in the black, tarry hearts of each and every Dark Prince of Gaming that *is* the *CGW* edit staff. Thanks to TalonSoft's kind gesture, we could finally use these crude stand-ins to settle the metaphysical war waged in the core of our very beings. Would godliness prevail, at long last silencing the hot evil whispers forever ringing in our tortured minds? Would saintliness redeem our wretched souls and pull us from the bottomless pit of venomous loathing in which we have dwelled for lo these many years? Would we finally *be good*?

Oh, come on—the nun never knew what hit her.

Blinded by Science

ARCANUM's steamworks make us hot and bothered

■■■ After hacking through PLANESCAPE, ICEWIND DALE, and BALDUR'S GATE II, will role-players be ready for more in ARCANUM? They will if I'm any judge. Losing most of my waking hours to these masterpieces over the past year didn't stop me from becoming utterly obsessed with Chapter One of Sierra's upcoming RPG epic.

▲ This mage could use a few spells from the magickal water college right about now.

◀ Like its predecessor FALLOUT, ARCANUM is a character- and story-driven game.

The attention to detail in this game is incredible. Troika Games—founded by FALLOUT veterans Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky, and Jason Anderson—has crafted a world every bit as compelling as everyone's favorite post-apocalyptic planet. Pollution has gotten out of control and rusty grime covers nearly every surface. You won't find elves frolicking in the forests and halflings smoking in the shire. Ever since technology reared its ugly head, people have been abandoning magick for science. Many have set aside sorcerers' tomes for machinists' textbooks, and—just as engineering students razz art students today—a "sibling rivalry" has set in between the two groups.

Players have to choose where they stand on this issue by specializing in Technological Disciplines or Magickal Spells. Of course, you might forgo both and spend all your character creation points on different physical skills. Replayability is key here. You could go through the game as a stereotypical mage, picking incantations from the 16 spell colleges. Then, you could try your luck as a scientist trained in chemistry and explosives. Or as a riverboat gambler/gunfighter trained in gambling, haggling, and firearms.

Having what amounts to the entire spectrum of a skewed Victorian society available to role-play makes ARCANUM a unique experience that most RPG veterans will appreciate. Anyone who can tear themselves away from traditional dragons 'n' damsels fare should enjoy this twisted look at a yesterday that never was. —*Brett Todd*

EVERQUEST Reaches 300,000 Active Players

■■■ Verant Interactive has signed up 300,000 EVERQUEST players, according to Sony Online Entertainment. Since the game's launch in February 1999, EVERQUEST has broken all records previously set by an online multiplayer game.

With monthly fees of just under $10, that's $3,000,000 a month in revenue from EVERQUEST alone. The second EVERQUEST expansion pack, THE SCARS OF VELIOUS, is scheduled to come out in December of 2000.

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

January 1986

Ah, ain't he sweet. This portrait of winsome young Sid Meier appeared on a 1986 advertisement for the submarine sim SILENT SERVICE. Thus began the relentless marketing of the Sid Meier name that continues to this day. Also in this issue: the first review of Hall of Fame gaming classic, ULTIMA IV, designed by the other enduring game design personality, Richard "Lord British" Garriott.

10

January 1991

This was the year that the Grinch stole gaming's Christmas. Due to a number of factors, the most important being that game developers had to re-tool to support VGA graphics and sound cards, about 50 percent of the games expected for Christmas didn't make it. And there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. Since then, fortunately, the game industry has improved its holiday batting average (a little), and gamers have learned to regard release dates with as much skepticism as election year political promises.

5

January 1996

The knockout king of our 1996 Ultimate Game Machine feature was the Gateway P5-133XL. This baby offered a screaming 133Mhz Pentium chip, 16 MBs of RAM, and a whopping 1.6GB hard drive. All this could be yours for the low, low price of $3,500. Take a look at our Ultimate Game Machine feature in this issue to see what we'll be smirking at in five years.

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TEEN
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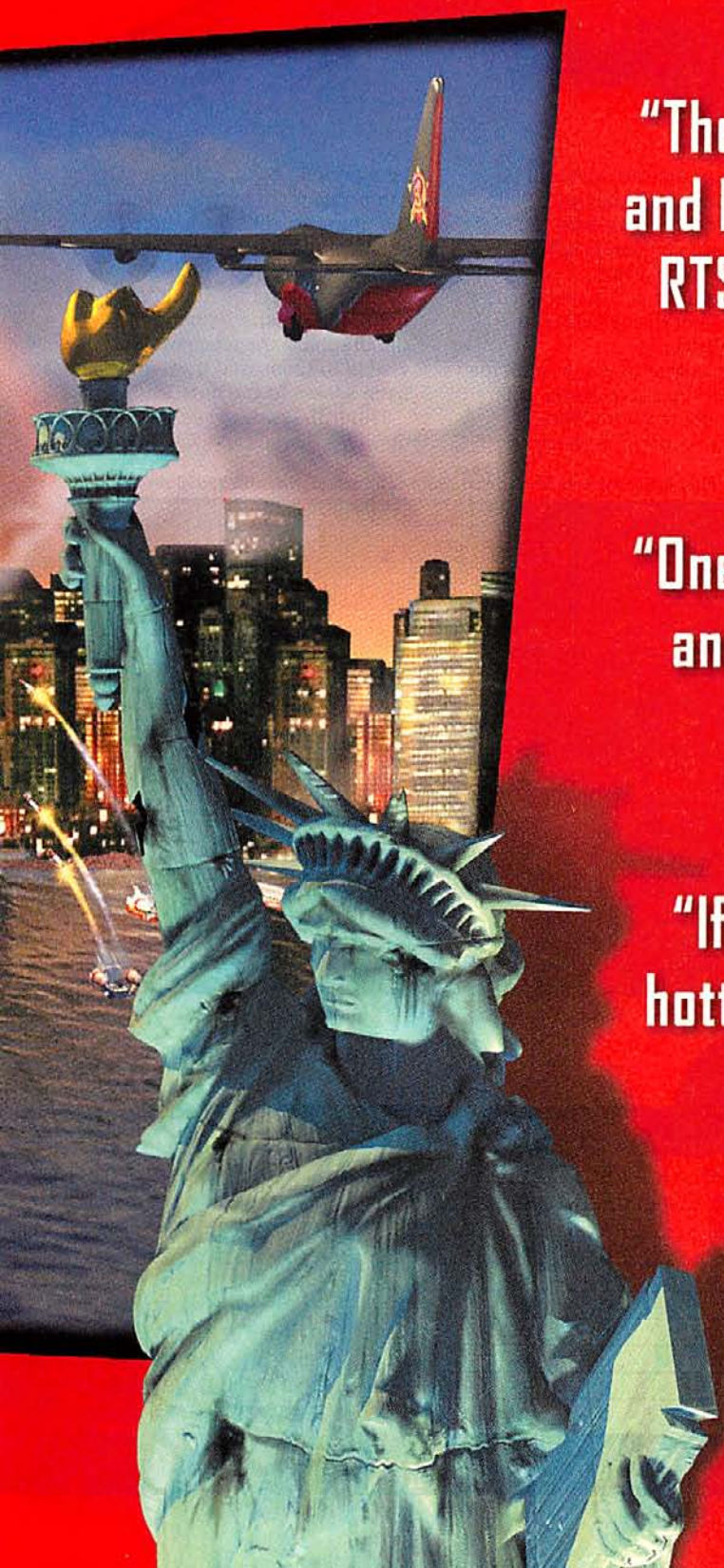
NEWS...



"9.3 out of 10"
"Go buy the game."
- IGN

"The most visceral, thrilling and heart-poundingly intense RTS experience ever seen on the PC."
- AVault.com

"One of the most enthralling and addictive RTS games we've played."
- Gamecenter

"If you're looking for the hottest RTS this year, your ship has come in."
- Gamers Depot

"Westwoods finest game to date."
- PC Zone (UK)

UO Goes 3D

$5 upgrade for existing **ULTIMA ONLINE** players

■■■ The granddaddy of massively-multiplayer, online role-playing games continues to evolve with Origin's second major upgrade: THIRD DAWN. Unlike THE SECOND AGE, which was designed to fix many of the game's early problems, THIRD DAWN is a graphics enhancement in order to bring the 2D game into the 3D generation. Although the new graphics still don't compare well with UO's popular cousin, EVERQUEST, they do help to give UO a desperately needed facelift and a bit more eye-candy for its 206,000 active users.

All the creatures and characters are going 3D, and there'll be cool new animations and special effects. There will also be a huge new area to explore: Ilshenaur will be 50 percent bigger than the Lost Lands of THE SECOND AGE. It uses the Trammel rule set, and will be adventure-only (no housing). Evil will make a difference here (for example, evil characters will be more likely to be attacked by monsters), and it will have "good" monsters (for evil characters to battle against).

If you're willing to pay a small fee to beta-test the new version, then be sure to get in on the THIRD DAWN beta program. During the beta period, existing UO customers can upgrade for only $5. After that, the upgrade price goes up, but it should still be less than the $40 boxed version.

Current players will not be required to upgrade, but none of the graphic enhancements will be visible to them, and they won't have access to the new land.

THIRD DAWN is scheduled to come up in late January. —*Ken Brown*

BAD BREATH THIRD DAWN introduces 3D characters, improved animations, and better special effects.

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamepower.com	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
Age of Empires II	B+	A	A+	A+	A-	B-	A-
Grand Prix 3	B+	B+	A	B	A-	B+	B+
Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K. 2	B-	A	B+	C	C+	A	B
Homeworld: Cataclysm	A+	A	*	A-	A-	A	A
Madden NFL 2001	A	B+	B-	A-	B-	B-	B
Sanity: Aiken's Artifact	C-	B+	C	C	C+	C	C
Sims: Livin' Large	A	A-	*	C	B+	B+	B
Soulbringer	C-	B-	B-	C-	C+	B-	C
Star Trek: ConQuest	D-	D-	D-	C	B	B-	C-
Star Trek: New Worlds	F	C	*	D-	D	D	D-

*** indicates game has not been rated**

And the Winner Is...

HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM, proof that expansions can, sometimes, outdo the very games they expand. Other noteworthy titles include another expansion (AOE2: THE CONQUERORS), and MicroProse's foray into the racing arena with GRAND PRIX 3. The *Star Trek* curse is still alive, with two *Trek* games by two different publishers festering at the bottom of the barrel.

Real Time Space Station Construction
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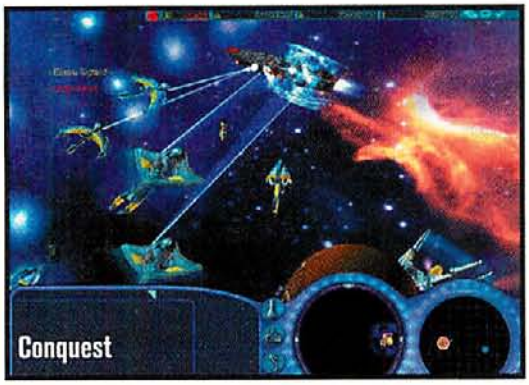
News & Notes

Microsoft Cans CONQUEST

Microsoft recently announced that it would not publish CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS, the highly unanticipated game from Chris Roberts' Digital Anvil Studios. In an official statement, Microsoft said it "had high aspirations for the game, and it simply did not progress as [we] had hoped it would."

In an interview with GameSpot, Digital Anvil's Eric Peterson said the game is basically complete, and the team is currently making minor tweaks to some of the single-player missions. They plan to finish the game before looking for another publisher, pursuing a co-branding deal, or deciding to publish the game in-house, according to Peterson.



CGW never got excited enough about CONQUEST to preview it. Our view is, if you want to play a game that features three races in a science fiction future, dust off your copy of STARCRAFT.

Sega's Dreams Dying

It appears that Sega is the first console manufacturer to abandon the high-stakes game of video game hardware. After the company's recent quarterly loss of $205 million—its fourth consecutive loss—the company has announced a strategic shift away from Dreamcast and toward developing software for multiple platforms. Sega said it would license its Dreamcast technology for use by other hardware vendors.

This leaves Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft to duke it out for video game supremacy next Christmas.

Mattel Dumps Games Division

After paying $3.5 billion for The Learning Company in 1999, Mattel recently unloaded the entire software unit for basically nothing. In late September, Mattel sold The Learning Company unit to Gores Technology. Details were not disclosed, but the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Mattel essentially gave the division away for a share of future earnings that The Learning Company might generate.

This brings to a close Mattel's disastrous foray into the software game and educational market. The company lost so much money on the software division that it lowered earnings and drove down Mattel's stock price. Earlier this year, Mattel went through some highly publicized corporate bloodletting that included the resignation of CEO Jill Barad and other senior Mattel executives.

Besides educational software, The Learning Company also consists of Mindscape and SSI.

Terry Fahn, spokesperson for the Gores Technology Group, told *CGW* that Gores is reviewing their options and looking at ways of restructuring. "They've sent people to look at the assets and are planning on operating it successfully. They plan on having it profitable within six months." Fahn said that Gores specializes in acquiring non-core businesses from large corporations and turning them around. They sell some, but they "hold onto more than 50 percent of the companies they acquire," said Fahn. Vance Diggins, President of Gores Technology, has been named the interim CEO of The Learning Company. —*Mark Asher*

ALIENX features impressive graphics and good AI.

Groove Games

Free 3d games you can **play** from your **browser**

■■■ Browser-based games are getting downright sophisticated—and surprisingly realistic. If you're looking for a quick diversion, check out some of the games you can play for free from 3D Groove. They'll work on Windows or Mac-based systems, require no 3D hardware, and can be played over dial-up or broadband connection. Five million people have already downloaded the front-end software needed to play them.

REAL POOL 3D is easy to play and features realistic physics and multiplayer options. TANK WARS is an action game set in an apocalyptic world, where players battle each other in a post-modern cityscape. Players can choose from four different tanks and a variety of weapons. Other Groove games are also up and running.

Stitch Fritz on your Internet browser in WWI ARCADE DOGFIGHTING

Several new Groove games will be coming online in 2001, including WWI ARCADE DOGFIGHTING and ALIENX. The arcade flier and 3D shooter both feature detailed graphics and low-latency gameplay, but the AI and network code is still being worked on.

Check them out at **3Dgroove.com** or **shockwave.com**.

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Land Warrior™

"...Land Warrior will be the best game in the Delta Force lineup yet."

- *GameSpot*

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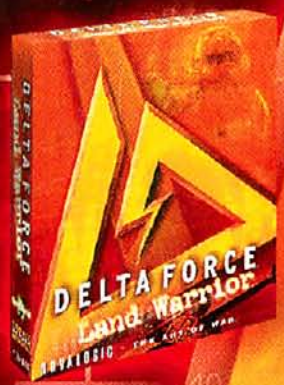
November 2000



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T TEEN ESRB
Animated Violence
Use of Alcohol

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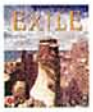
THIS MONTH'S TOP 10
PREORDERS



Myst III: Exile *(BRODERBUND)*
Follow the story of the extremely popular graphical adventure series, but from the standpoint of an embittered villain who seeks revenge against Atrus.

Black & White *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)*
Complex in detail, graphically gorgeous, with free-flowing, individualized play. Already voted one of the games that will change gaming forever.

Tribes 2 *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*
No armchair generals need apply, since the action in Tribes 2 promises to be so fast, you'll need your wits about you before you charge into the fray.

Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor *(SSI)* Not your run-of-the-mill, linear role-playing game. Has a cooperative multiplayer mode and a good deal of character environment interaction.

Clive Barker's Undying *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)*
Clive Barker acted as story consultant on this atmospheric game that is best described as a mix between Resident Evil, Half-Life, and Thief.

Monopoly Tycoon *(HASBRO)*
The family-favorite board game has been turned into a 3-D city-building sim. Practice cutthroat schemes against your opponents on the Internet or LAN.

Half-Life: Counterstrike *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*
This mod is now the newest game for Half-Life! Join a terrorist or anti-terrorist assault squad and play hostage rescue, assassination, or just blast the enemy!

Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* Imagine a place where magic and technology hold equal sway, and an adventurer might just as easily wield a flintlock pistol as a flaming sword.

Thrones of Darkness *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*
Combines the hack-and-slash gameplay of Diablo with the rich historical texture of feudal Japan. A good-looking game with interesting action-RPG twists.

MechCommander 2 *(MICROSOFT)*
Fast-paced Mech strategy game featuring 21 different skill sets and a full Mech bay to give you total control of your forces.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 10
RELEASES

Escape from Monkey Island *(LUCASARTS)*
The first Monkey Island 3D graphic adventure game, with all the humorous antics and addictive gameplay of the first three installments.

EverQuest: The Scars of Velious *(VERANT INTERACTIVE)* This 2nd expansion is designed for mid- to high-level players, and features new zones, new enemies, new treasures, and an improved interface.

Baldur's Gate 2: Shadow of Amn *(INTERPLAY)*
An ambitious role-playing game based on the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game. Stands out as one of the best RPGs available.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)* Set just a few years after the original C&C, this fast-paced, real-time strategy game focuses on quick, intense firefights on American soil.

The Longest Journey *(FUNCOM)*
Gorgeous graphics, excellent animation, and the cinematic sequences add up to a mesmerizing plot and a wonderful gaming experience.

Combat Flight Sim 2: Pacific Theater *(MICROSOFT)* A deep, involving game with excellent graphics, great sound effects, and adjustable realism settings. A dream come true for historic flight sim fans.

Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance *(MICROSOFT)*
The creators of BattleTech and the original MechWarrior game return to give MechWarrior 4 an all-new storyline and six new BattleMechs.

realMyst *(BRODERBUND)*
Solve puzzles and roam magical realms filled with archaic technology in order to solve an ancient mystery, all in a beautiful, interactive virtual world.

NHL 2001 *(EA SPORTS)*
Paste a picture of your face onto a character model and go head-to-head against 50 NHL and international teams in your living room or on the Internet.

No One Lives Forever *(FOX INTERACTIVE)*
Contend with deadly agents, evade traps, unravel mysteries, and become entangled in a cleverly constructed conspiracy that threatens the entire free world.

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Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

It's the rare game that nails a top five slot in our poll in its first month, but that's what BALDUR'S GATE II did. This future Hall of Famer is already a huge hit with gamers, and why shouldn't it be? It's deeper and more detailed than the best RPGs of all time. The only question now is, will it unseat DIABLO II for #1?

Several other new titles made a strong debut, but we were surprised to see ULTIMA ASCENSION sneak in at #40. Who left open the gates of hell? After all this time, it must finally be playable.

	This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
	1	1	**Diablo II** Havas	5
	2	2	**Half-Life** Havas	5
	3	4	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
NEW	4	-	**Baldur's Gate II** Interplay	5
	5	5	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
	6	8	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
	7	10	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
	8	13	**Age of Empires II: The Conquerors** Microsoft	4
	9	11	**Deus Ex** Eidos	3.5
	10	6	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
	11	17	**Icewind Dale** Interplay	4.5
NEW	12	-	**Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2** Westwood/EA	4
	13	12	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
	14	14	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5
	15	16	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
NEW	16	-	**Asheron's Call** Microsoft	3
	17	9	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
	18	20	**Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
	19	21	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
	20	24	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
	21	32	**Homeworld: Cataclysm** Havas	5
	22	19	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
	23	29	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** Hasbro	4
	24	37	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
NEW	25	-	**Metal Gear Solid** Microsoft	4.5
	26	27	**Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
	27	33	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
	28	-	**The Sims: Livin' Large** EA	4.5
	29	22	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
	30	39	**Caesar III** Havas	4.5
	31	34	**Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
	32	31	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
NEW	33	-	**Civilization: Call to Power** Activision	3.5
	34	40	**Shogun: Total War** Electronic Arts	4.5
	35	25	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
	36	23	**Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
	37	30	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
NEW	39	-	**Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force** Activision	4
	39	35	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
NEW	40	-	**Ultima Ascension** Origin/EA	2.5

WE WANT YOU!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

No One Lives Forever

Yeah Baby! Shagadelic Cate Archer has had us glued to our monitors playing this surprisingly good (not to mention wickedly funny) 60's-spy-movie-themed first-person shooter. Top contender for Action Game of the Year.

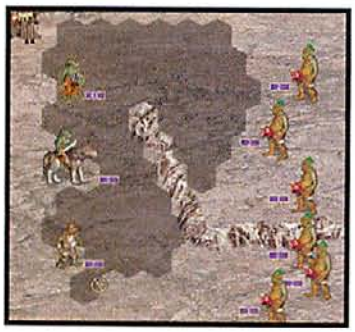
Baldur's Gate 2

Yep, we're still playing it. And we'll still be playing it this time next century. Looking back on chapter one from chapter three is like looking back on one's childhood. How young, how naïve we were then. If only we could return to chapter one and know all that we know now...

Red Alert 2

After TIBERIAN SUN caused near fist-fights around the office last year (Mutant Commandos anyone?), we were relieved to find that RED ALERT 2's multiplayer is somewhat more balanced. And it has the best single-player gameplay (not to mention hottest cut-scene babe) of any C&C game.

Heroes Chronicles



Nothing remotely new here, but for HEROES III crackheads like Jeff Green and Robert Coffey, the new self-contained single-player campaigns are a nice, cheap fix. Good, solid, turn-based comfort gaming.

pipeline

Software development is an inexact science, so pinning down release dates is like predicting Madonna's next persona. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwpipeline@ziffdavis.com.

■■■ **B-17 FLYING FORTRESS** The game is still on track, but it's been delayed. You'll only be able to get it in the U.K. by Christmas. While the mother island gets the game this year, it won't hit the colonies until sometime early next year. Maybe our British brethren are acting as surrogate beta testers?

Delta Force: Land Warrior

■■■ **DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR** Out and on shelves as you read this. We'll see if the final conversion from voxels to 3D-accelerated graphics makes a difference in gameplay.

■■■ **SACRIFICE** This god-filled slugfest went gold recently. It looked pretty slick, with eye-bleeding graphics, absorbing gameplay, and an elegant interface to carry it all. Let's hope this is more like MDK and less like MESSIAH.

Sacrifice

■■■ **POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR** With the recent sale of Mattel Interactive's gaming assets, factors such as branding, sales strategies, and even the name of the company are up in the air. Hence, the reluctant announcement that POOL OF RADIANCE is now a 2001 title instead of a Christmas title.

■■■ **AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE** Barrett Alexander, one of the bigwigs at Rogue (the developers), recently commented that they are in the home stretch, and therefore are seriously pushing to meet the mid-November ship date. Maybe this surreal vision will make it by year's end after all. Or maybe we just swallowed the blue pill, and this is all an elaborate illusion.

■■■ **JAGGED ALLIANCE 2: UNFINISHED BUSINESS** This one has a happy ending. After searching for months for a publisher, Interplay agreed to bring this expansion to market, hopefully by the time you read this.

Ground Control: Dark Conspiracy

■■■ **GROUND CONTROL: DARK CONSPIRACY** Following the path set by SWAT 3, GROUND CONTROL gamers can now snag this add-on for free. If you already have GROUND CONTROL, all you have to do is pay for the shipping. You get an entire campaign and a new faction for under five bucks. Hit up darkconspiracy.sierra.com for more details.

■■■ **STARTOPIA** We called it here first. Back in our preview, we predicted that the November ship date would not be met, due to the complexity in balancing strategic elements. Mucky Foot has delayed till spring, due to factors such as polishing the missions, balancing the game, and squashing bugs.

American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000
Anachronox Eidos	Winter 2000
Ann McCaffrey's Freedom: First Resistance Red Storm Entertainment	December 2000
Arcanum Sierra	February 2001
UPDATE B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	February 2001
Battlecruiser Millennium 3000AD Inc.	December 2000
Battle Isle: Darkspace Blue Byte	Spring 2001
Battle Of Britain Rowan Software	Winter 2000
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Summer 2001
Black & White EA	March 2001
UPDATE Clive Barker's Undying EA	February 2001
Close Combat: Utah Beach Mattel	Winter 2000
Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Winter 2000
UPDATE Commandos 2 Eidos	Winter 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Winter 2000
NEW Dark Sector Digital Extremes	Winter 2001
Destroyer Command Mattel	Winter 2000
Deus Ex 2 Eidos	Winter 2001
Diablo II Expansion Blizzard	Spring 2001
NEW Disciples II: Dark Prophecy Strategy First	Spring 2001
Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	April 2001
Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	May 2001
NEW Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Summer 2001
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	August 2001
Echelon Bethesda	Winter 2000
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Winter 2001
Empire Earth Sierra	Spring 2001
NEW Emperor: Battle For Dune Westwood	Summer 2001
Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood Of Steel Interplay	Spring 2001
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000
Freedom Force Crave	Winter 2001
Freelancer Microsoft	Fall 2001
Galactic Commander Online 3000AD Inc.	Summer 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000
Ground Control: Dark Conspiracy Sierra	Winter 2000
Halo Bungie	January 2001
Harpoon 4 SSI	Spring 2001
Hitman: Code 47 Eidos	December 2000
Icewind Dale: Heart Of Winter Interplay	Winter 2000
IL-2 Sturmovik Blue Byte	Spring 2001
I'm Going In Eidos	January 2001
NEW Independence War 2 Infogrames	February 2001
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Spring 2001
Legends Of Might & Magic 3DO	Winter 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Fall 2001
Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art Of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001
UPDATE Majestic EA	February 2001
Max Payne G.O.D.	Summer 2001
MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Summer 2001
MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Winter 2000
Motor City Online Electronic Arts	Spring 2001
Myst III Mattel	Spring 2001
NASCAR Racing 4 Sierra	Spring 2001
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Summer 2001
Oni Bungie	January 2001
NEW O.R.B. Strategy First	Spring 2001
UPDATE Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Spring 2001
Praetorians Eidos	March 2001
Republic: The Revolution Eidos	Winter 2001
Red Faction THQ	Spring 2001
UPDATE Return To Wolfenstein Activision	Spring 2001
NEW Sammy Sosa's High Heat Baseball 2001 3DO	Spring 2001
Serious Sam G.O.D.	Spring 2001
Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	August 2001
Sid Meier's Dinosaur! Firaxis	Winter 2001
Sigma Microsoft	Fall 2001
Silent Hunter II Mattel	Summer 2001
Simsville EA	Spring 2001
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Summer 2001
Squad Leader Hasbro	Winter 2000
UPDATE Startopia Eidos	Spring 2001
UPDATE Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Spring 2001
Star Wars Online Verant/LucasArts	Winter 2001
Summoner THQ	Spring 2001
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Fall 2001
The World Is Not Enough EA	Winter 2000
Thief III Eidos	Winter 2001
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Winter 2000
Tropico G.O.D.	March 2001
WarCraft III Blizzard	Summer 2001
Warlords IV Mattel Interactive	Spring 2001
Waterloo Breakaway Games	Winter 2000
X-COM: Alliance Hasbro	Spring 2001

The Future of Adventure is a Journey Into the Past

TIMELINE

Based on his latest best-selling novel, Michael Crichton, the creator of *Jurassic Park*, sends you on a story-driven journey back in time for one of the greatest adventures of your life.

Rethink What Is Possible. Fall 2000

RP Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

TIMELINE COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

For more information visit www.timelineworlds.com

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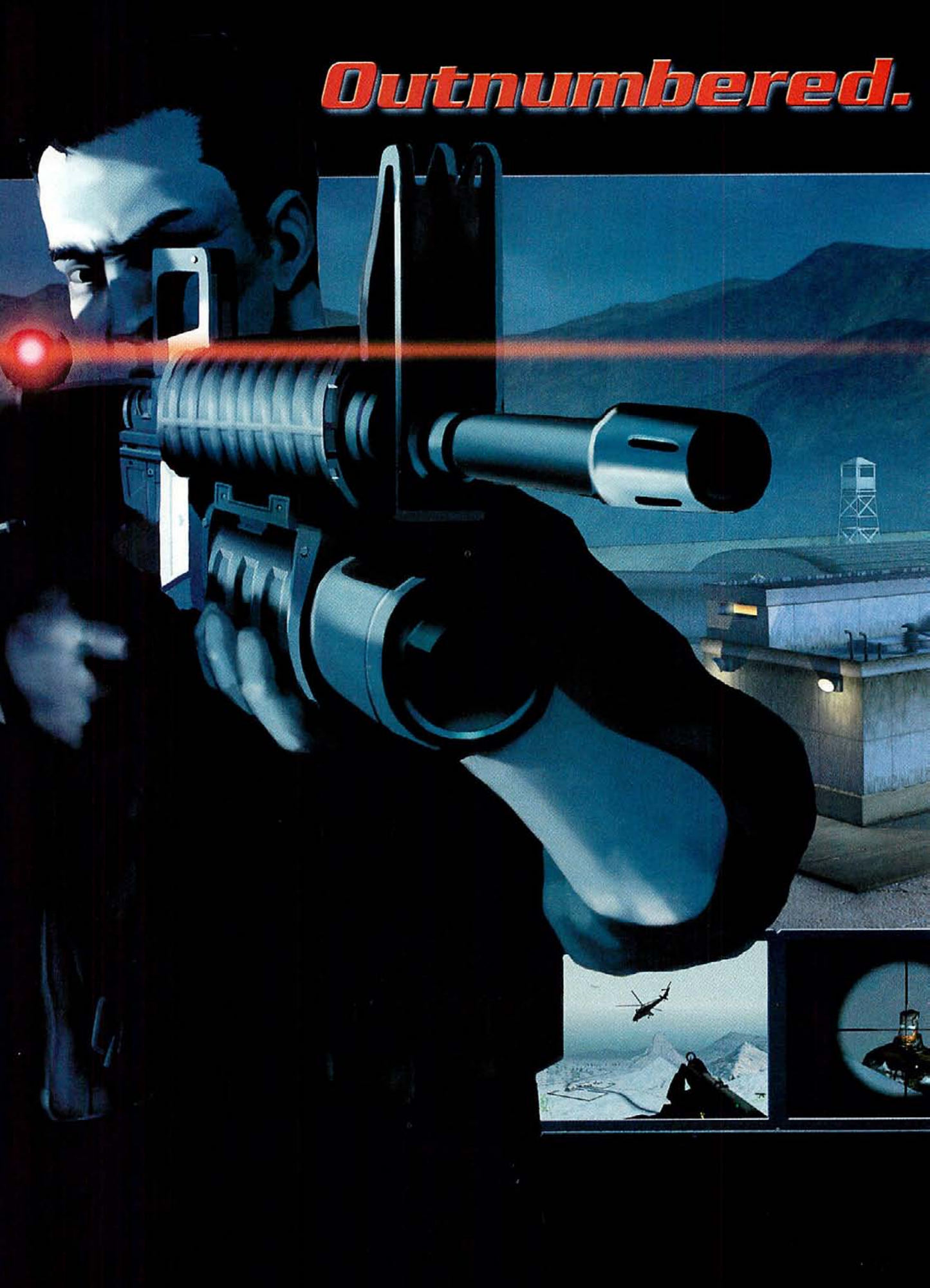
Outnumbered.

But Not Outsmarted.

Project IGI: I'm Going In is the first military stealth shooter to stress cunning and covertness over firepower.

Sent in behind enemy lines for a routine track and capture, you take on the role of Dave Llewelyn Jones, a British and US operative. Suddenly caught between greed and treason, this assignment evolves into a solo mission of stealth and retaliation.

Battle your way through Eastern Europe in pursuit of a homicidal ex-Russian Colonel bent on turning Europe into a radioactive wasteland. An adrenaline pumping plot keeps you riveted as you go behind enemy lines to save the world from nuclear terror!

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RP Rating Pending

PC CD

INNERLOOP

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Death can strike anyone.

For the right price.

You never know when death will come—unless you make a few special arrangements. Because once the Hitman takes your assignment, someone takes a bullet. It's not a righteous way of life, but we all have to make a living. Even if it means making a killing.

- Plan your assignment to account for multiple completion paths to each mission.
- Access black market weapons, decoys, traps, and personnel from an innovative currency reward system.
- Artificial intelligence that redefines the genre of the "Thinking Shooter".
- Learn how to become a more proficient hitman through a comprehensive weapons and agility training session.
- Gripping and mature plot driven by stunning cinematic visuals.

HITMAN

CODENAME 47

Io-Interactive

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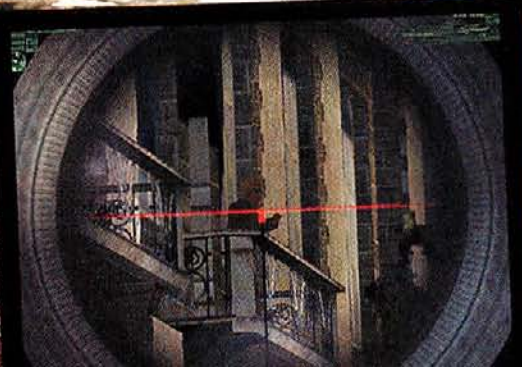

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FAMILY-STYLE DINING.

The godfather of gangster sims is back. Rule the streets of Prohibition-era America with your own brand of violence and greed as you build the perfect organized crime machine. It's terribly wrong. Of course, that's what makes it fun.

Real-time game play keeps up appearances by day while working bank vaults and brothels by night.

Command a host of new specialist characters to build your team's criminal power and experience.

In large campaign mode, you'll wreak long-term havoc across fifteen counties of the State of Temperance.

Gangsters 2 VENDETTA

It's Disturbingly Authentic

www.gangsters2.com

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The **Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)** rating system can help you decide whether a computer or video game is right for your family. The ESRB system offers both RATINGS that tell you what age the game is appropriate for, and CONTENT DESCRIPTORS that indicate whether there are particular content elements which may be of interest or concern.

RATING SYMBOLS (found on the front of the game box):

Content may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older.

Content may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older.

Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.

Content may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older.

Content suitable only for adults.

Product is awaiting final rating.

CONTENT DESCRIPTORS (found on the back of the game box):

The content descriptors tell you whether the game includes elements such as:

MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE
Contains scenes depicting cartoon/ animated/ pixilated characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations.

MILD REALISTIC VIOLENCE
Contains scenes depicting characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations in photographic detail.

COMIC MISCHIEF
Contains scenes depicting activities characterized as slapstick or gross vulgar humor.

ANIMATED VIOLENCE
Contains depictions of aggressive conflict involving cartoon/animated/pixilated characters.

REALISTIC VIOLENCE
Contains realistic or photographic-like depictions of aggressive conflict.

ANIMATED BLOOD AND GORE
Animated/pixilated or cartoon-like depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts.

REALISTIC BLOOD AND GORE
Depictions of mutilation or dismemberment of body parts in realistic or photographic-like detail.

ANIMATED BLOOD
Animated/pixilated or cartoon-like depictions of blood.

REALISTIC BLOOD
Representations of blood in realistic or photographic-like detail.

SUGGESTIVE THEMES
Mild provocative references or materials.

MATURE SEXUAL THEMES
Contains provocative material; including depiction of the human body in either animated or photographic-like formats.

STRONG SEXUAL CONTEXT
Graphic depiction of sexual behavior and/or the human form (i.e., frontal nudity) in either animated or photographic-like detail.

MILD LANGUAGE
Product contains the use of words like "damn".

STRONG LANGUAGE
Commonly referenced four-letter words.

GAMING
The depiction of betting-like behavior.

USE OF TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL
Product contains images of the use of tobacco and/or alcohol in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.

USE OF DRUGS
Product contains images of the use of drugs in a manner which condones or glorifies their use.

INFORMATIONAL
Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text.

EDUTAINMENT
Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product.

SOME ADULT ASSISTANCE MAY BE NEEDED
Early Childhood Descriptor only.

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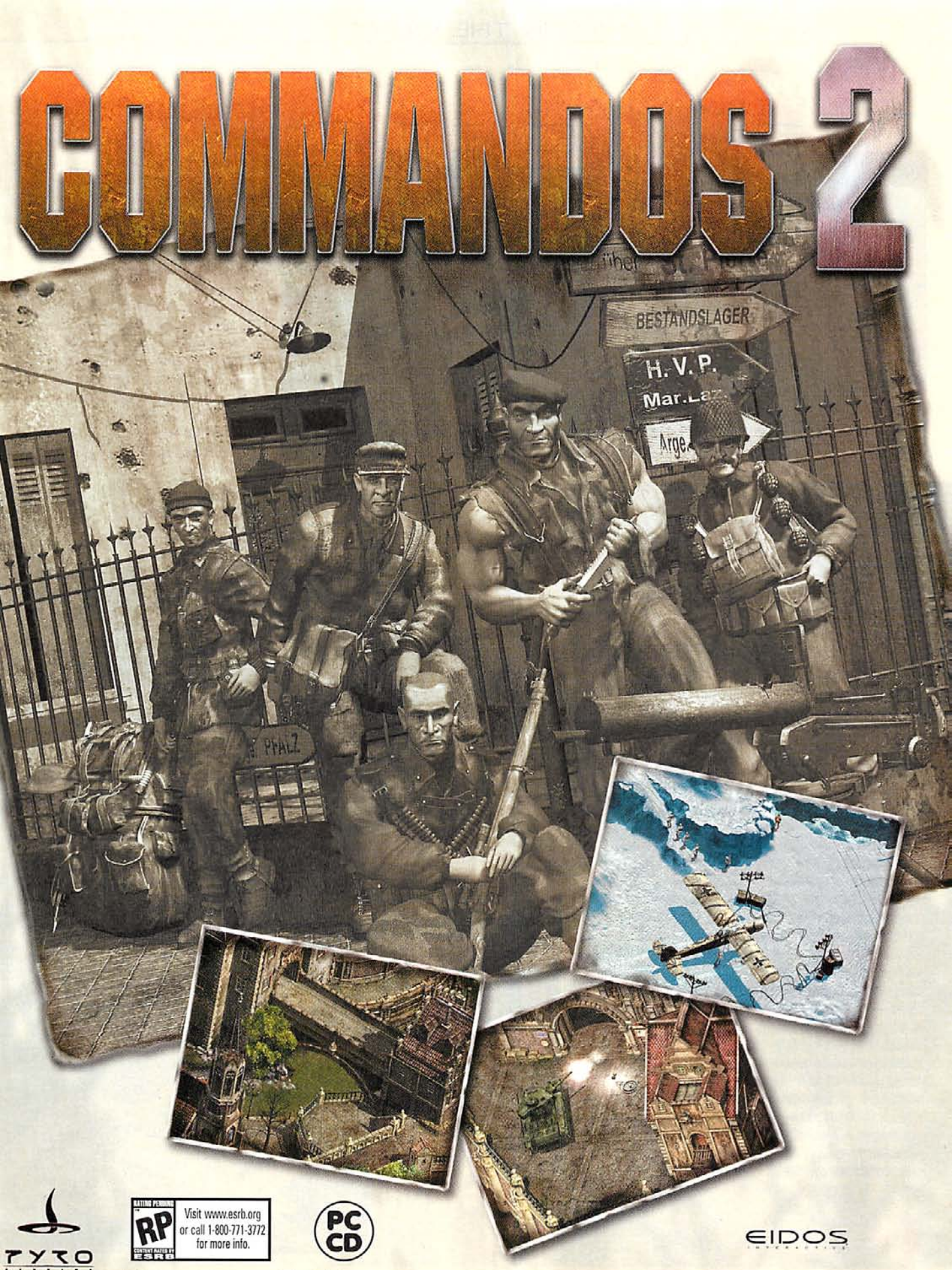
COMMANDOS 2



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PC CD

PYRO STUDIOS

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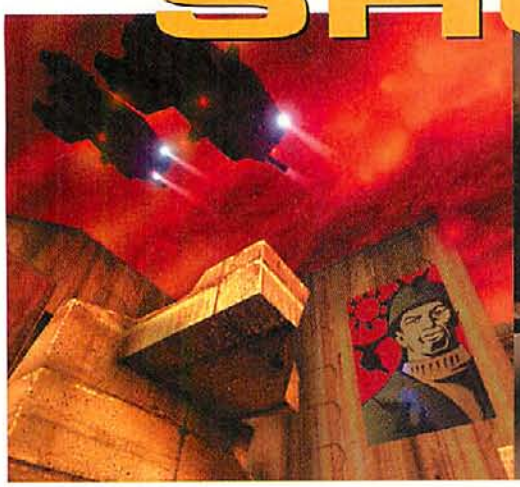
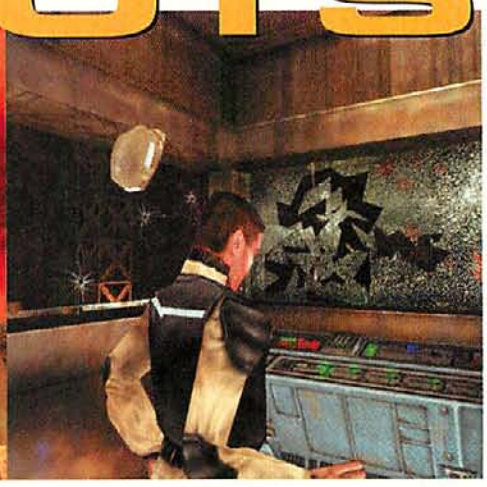
HOT SHOTS





Red Faction

■■■ RED FACTION is a great-looking first-person shooter from a developer with a pedigree. Volition is the group behind the FREESPACE and DESCENT series, and they always deliver impressive graphics and physics engines. In this case, they're building in the ability to drive six different vehicles. Their "Geo-Mod" technology lets players destroy walls, floors, and just about any other solid thing in the gaming environment. Blowing stuff up works for us.

Deformable environments could crack open new possibilities. Don't have a key to open a door? Blast it. Want to surprise a room full of enemies? Blow a hole in the ceiling and drop in. Getting hammered by small arms fire? Dig yourself a foxhole with explosives.

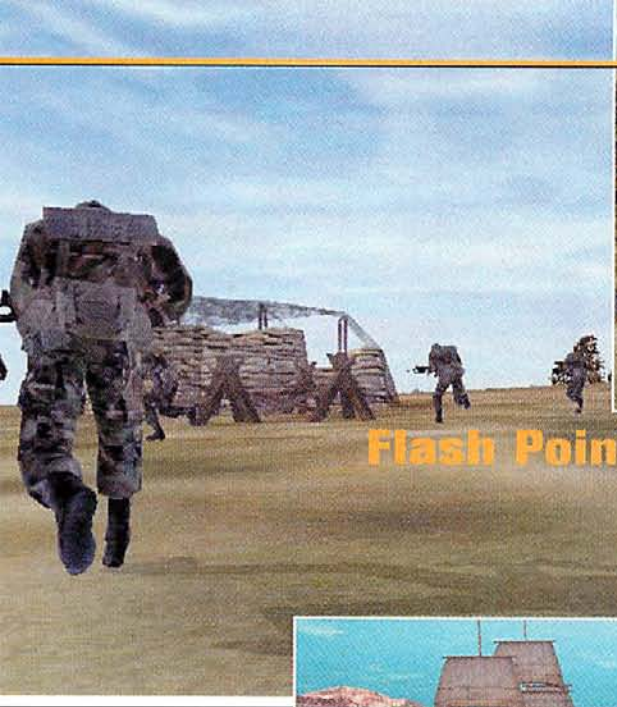
Watch for Red Faction coming from THQ this spring. **www.redfaction.com**

Star Trek: Bridge Commander

■■■ This promises to be Mr. Holland's Opus. Larry Holland, the legendary designer behind LucasArts' classic sims SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE, XWING, and TIE FIGHTER, always finds ways to involve players deeply in the action. And that's exactly what he's planning for this enormously ambitious *Star Trek* sim.

You'll take command of a Federation starship, issuing orders like a captain on the bridge of The Next Generation. While exchanging threats with adversaries on-screen, you'll jockey for position like heavyweights in a title bout. When things get ugly, spectacular special effects will show huge holes blasted through hulls with phasers and photon torpedoes, and dynamic damage models depicting actual components and systems blown to smithereens. It promises pulse-pounding, pants-filling action.

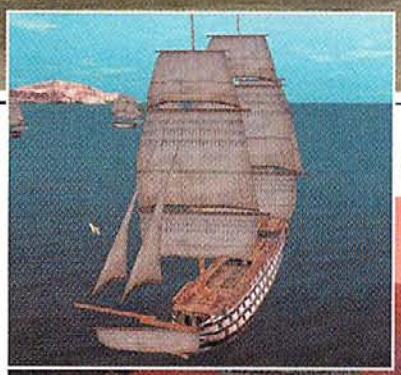
Beam aboard for the shakedown cruise this summer.
www.bridgecommander.com



Flash Point: Status Quo 1985

■■■ As war games become more action-oriented, and action games become more war-like, expect to see more games like FLASH POINT, a tactical war game similar to HIDDEN & DANGEROUS. Players control a squad of up to 12 soldiers on a Cold War battlefield, each of which operate independently when not under your guidance. Your troops will fight with anti-tank missiles, grenade launchers, and hand-held anti-aircraft missiles, while others offer support as medics, sabateurs, snipers, mine layers, and mortar carriers. Solo players can rise in rank from private to colonel in the U.S. Army, but the game will also support LAN and Internet play.

The most interesting feature is that you can control many of the vehicles, including Russian tanks, Hind Gunships, and armored troop carriers. Keep this one on your radar. It's scheduled for release in summer, 2001. **www.bohemiainteractive.com**

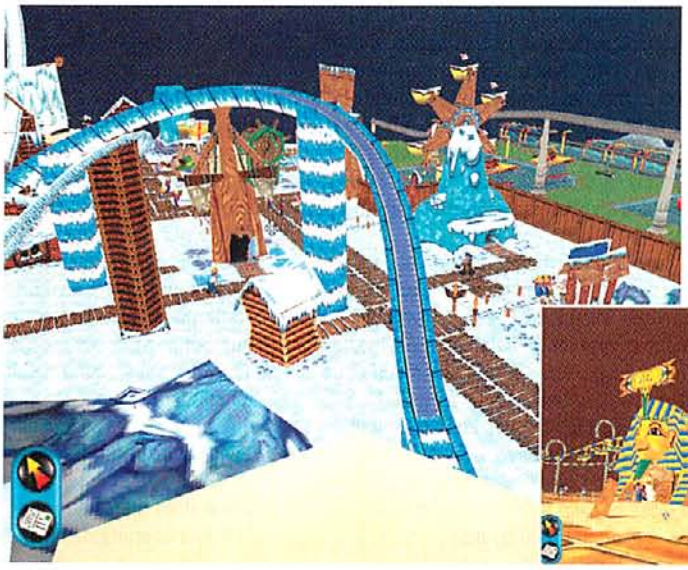


Age of Sail II

■■■ Stop playin' with yer belayin' pin and hoist the mainsel, ye mangy mongrel, it's time to put to sea. Lord Nelson commands us to engage the filthy French once more in battles from Copenhagen to Trafalgar. Keep yer wits about you, for we expect to see mighty armadas of up to 60 3D ships, in all kinds of accursed weather, with up to 32 other sea dogs via LAN or internet. Perform admirably, and you might even make admiral.

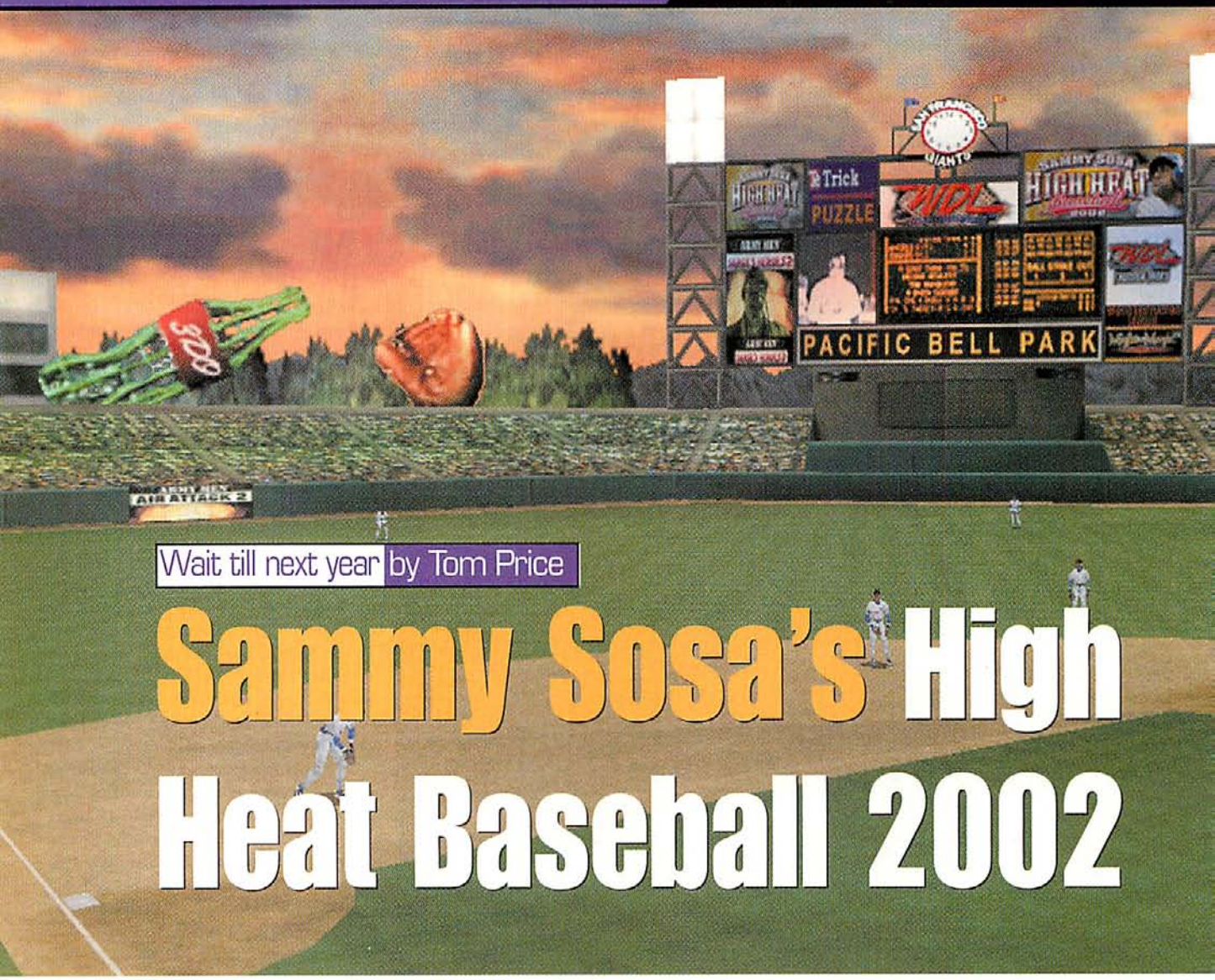
Should you defect to the rebels, they'll likely feed you to the savages. But there's a chance you can work your way to admiral in the American fleet as well. It's a great big world out there, with 2000 ship types and 100 scenarios to fight through. But if you betray Lord Nelsen, it won't matter what pretty port or 3D cove you run to hide in; we'll find you and fire a cannonball up your arse.

Now get crackin', we set sail in January. **www.talonsoft.com**



SimCoaster

■■■ Grab your mop and wipe up the vomit! Slated for an early 2001 release, SIMCOASTER is the sequel to last year's SIMTHEME PARK. While the focus is still on building and managing amusement parks, SIMCOASTER moves away from the "software toy" sandbox play of the previous title to a challenging, objective-based style of gameplay as you work to gain a controlling interest in a huge corporation. The interface has been reworked, with a bigger zoom, more detailed reports, and an offline coaster designer. CGW



Wait till next year by Tom Price

Sammy Sosa's High Heat Baseball 2002

A BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR A BALL GAME So far, the developers have finished only Pac Bell park (it is relatively near 3DO's studios, so "research" trips are easy to make), but all current major league parks and plenty of classic fields will ship with the final version.

I had some serious baseball fever this year. Partly because my beloved San Francisco Giants kicked off their inaugural season at beautiful new Pac Bell park with an NL West division crown (which was squandered in their embarrassing first-round playoff loss to the Mets, but I don't want to talk about that). But also because of HIGH HEAT 2001, which I've played relentlessly throughout the season, both with custom leagues and teams, as well as with the real-life season.

It's been fun to follow my digital players' real-world exploits, and marvel at how well they've been scouted and recreated by the HIGH HEAT team at 3DO. Jeff Kent had a breakout year for the Giants in real life, just as he did on my custom team. Darryl Kile proved to be a diamond in the rough in both worlds as well. No doubt about it, the HIGH HEAT guys know baseball (jeez, how many times do we have to say it?), so of course I'm gnashing sunflower seeds with anticipation for next year's edition, even if I should be sick of baseball (and those damn Mets) by now.

The last two HIGH HEAT games were two of the best PC baseball games ever, thanks to their superb gameplay and attention to detail. HIGH HEAT 2002—which should be rolling out sometime during spring training for the 2001 season—changes nothing fundamental to the series, and only adds to and enhances the game. So while we can't predict how good HIGH HEAT 2002 will be when it's released, the building blocks for excellence are there—and they're looking pretty sweet.

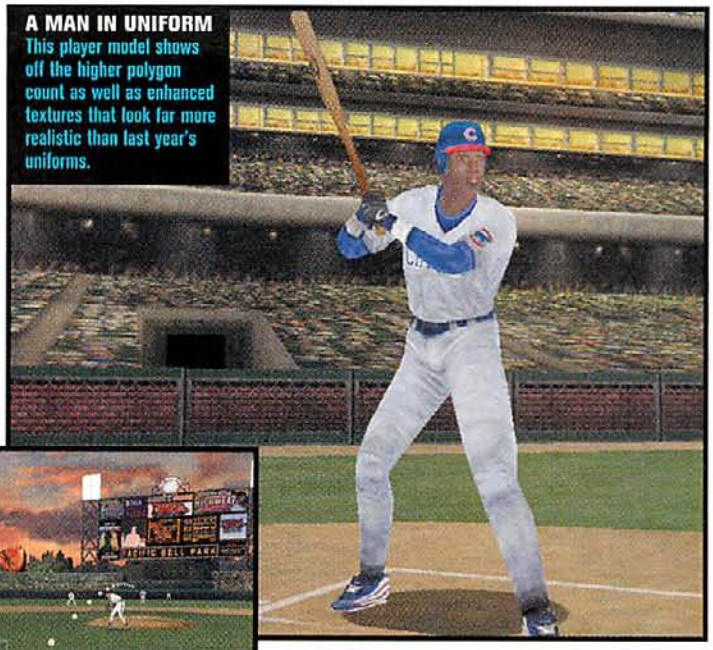
So what's new, you ask? Right off the bat (no pun intended) gamers will notice the improved graphics, with higher polygon counts for both the players and stadiums. In fact, improving the graphics is the number-one priority for the HIGH HEAT team this year. The added resolution results in player models that look much more realistic than last year's, and stadiums that are much more spectacular and full of minute details. Even the user-interface screens got a facelift.

Generating Runs

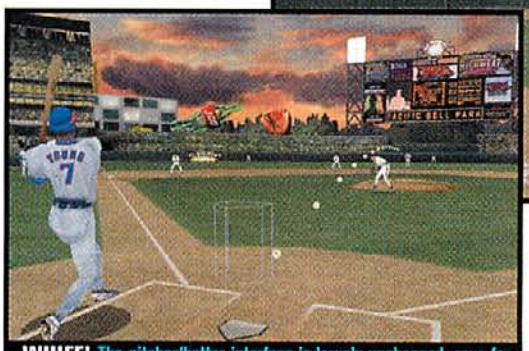
Player animations have increased as well, with more

SAMMY SOSA'S HIGH HEAT 2002
GENRE: Sports • RELEASE DATE: Spring 2001
PUBLISHER/ DEVELOPER: 3DO • CONTACT: www.3DO.com

signature moves included. One new animation comes in the form of a hitherto ignored—yet highly important—member of a baseball team who regularly takes the field. I'm talking about base coaches. They're in this year, and not only will they be animated, but their animations will be smart as well. Base coaches will give you tips on whether to run or not by waving players around, telling them to hold, or motioning for them to slide. Now, when you've got a guy rounding third on a base hit, you can get some help from your base coach just as you would in real life. On the other side of the ball, you'll be able to activate your cutoff man on plays at home from the outfield throws (the cutoff man works the infield; as opposed to the relay man who's an infielder, who runs partway into the outfield to relay a long throw).



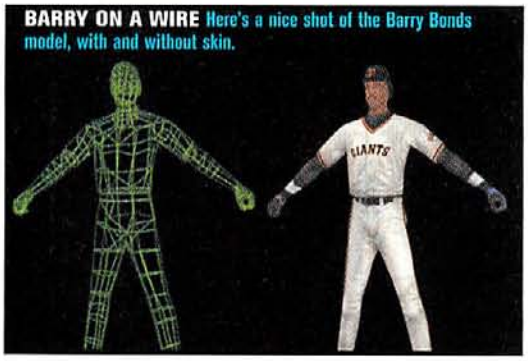
A MAN IN UNIFORM This player model shows off the higher polygon count as well as enhanced textures that look far more realistic than last year's uniforms.



WHIFF! The pitcher/batter interface is largely unchanged, save for the pitchers' new ability to throw from different parts of the rubber.

Base coaches aren't the only members of your coaching staff who will make an appearance in HH2002. Like in the classic EARL WEAVER BASEBALL, you can now call mound conferences and your pitching coach will come out and talk to the pitcher. The main function of this will be to stall for time while your bullpen gets warmed up. To what extent your pitcher will be affected by these visits (Will it settle him down? Will he feel more pressured?) is still up in the air.

Another new animation could also have a serious effect on gameplay. This year, you'll have the ability to make your catcher snap throw to a base after the pitch, in an effort to catch a slow-to-get-back baserunner. It looks like baserunning (which was one of the few weakpoints of HH2000, but was corrected in HH2001) will become even more key to winning games, just as in real life. Catchers will also occasionally drop third strikes, so that throw to first becomes even more important.



BARRY ON A WIRE Here's a nice shot of the Barry Bonds model, with and without skin.

The Numbers Game

Of course, the heart of any good baseball game lies in its stats modeling, and the HIGH HEAT series has always been tops in offering a great gameplay experience for those who prefer manage-only mode. As if they didn't have enough stats tracked already, HH2002 will now track streaks, and assess team and player match-ups based on history. And for everyone running online leagues, HH2002 will allow you to export stats in HTML format to make posting them on the Web easier.

Custom-league players will also be happy to hear that expanded rosters will now be in effect once your team gets into the final stretch of a season. So you'll have to do plenty of scouting in your minor leagues to bring up the best prospects—something made easier by the ability to use minor leaguers in batting practice, and the all-new pitching practice mode.

Sure, HIGH HEAT 2002 is months away from even being near completion, but if I could buy stock in it, I would. I'm that sure it's going to be a winner. With all the new features being layered on top of what is already (in my not-so-humble opinion) the greatest sports game ever, how can you lose? Well, if you're the Giants, let me tell you: First, Dusty never should have... CGW

IT'S U I LOVE The user interface (UI) screens have been polished a bit, and a few new features – like an Undo command for when you change your mind about the pitcher you've brought in – really improve the overall look of the game.

Think you're having a bad day? Try waking up from a 3000 year nap to find meddling humans pillaging your crypt. Resurrecting the hit movie, The Mummy brings the horror of death back to life. And as the hero, it's your duty to fight any scarabs, spirits and undead you meet while exploring the uncharted tombs of the pyramid. Sure, you'll be loaded with weapons and special moves. But beware. After sleeping that long, it just might be his morning breath that kills you.

T Animated Violence Animated Blood

Dreamcast. GAME BOY COLOR PlayStation PC CD ROM REBELLION

UNIVERSAL UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE STUDIOS www.universalstudios.com

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season

All we want for Christmas is 50 great games. And a blazing fast graphics card. Oh, what the hell, how about a new 1GHz system to boot? In a boom-time economy, is that too much to ask?

Hell no! Have a look at the great gaming to be found in our annual holiday wish list, and you'll see why our consumer covetousness index is at an all-time high. This year more than ever, the problem won't be in finding good games, it's finding the time to play them all.

ACTION BY ROBERT COFFEY 68

Crimson Skies
Giants: Citizen Kabuto
MDK2
Metal Gear Solid
No One Lives Forever
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

RPG & ADVENTURE BY JEFF GREEN 70

Baldur's Gate II
Diablo II
Deus Ex
Escape From Monkey Island
Icewind Dale
The Longest Journey

STRATEGY BY ROBERT COFFEY 74

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edings!

action

The action games of 2000 were all over the map, and for that we should be grateful. While past years have featured scores of virtually identical games, the class of 2000 brings real originality to the party in the shape of wicked humor, creative premises, and fresh spins on standard gameplay. Their unique personalities make each of these games must-haves for the action fan.

1. No One Lives Forever

Monolith, www.foxinteractive.com

■■■ It's setting may be a retro swinging '60's London, complete with a go-go booted, big-haired heroine, but there's nothing backwards-looking about NO ONE LIVES FOREVER—this spy thriller has its eyes firmly fixed on moving the shooter genre forward, and it succeeds in spades. It's the most enjoyable single player shooter of the year.

NOLF indulges in its campy *Avengers*-style action with relish, giving gamers loads of useful gadgets (poisoned hair barrettes and acid-spraying perfume atomizers), inspired villains including a demented opera diva and a belligerent, kilted Scotsman, and some of the funniest incidental dialogue ever burned onto a CD.

But ultimately it's the outstanding variety of missions that make NOLF a winner. Many of the missions are stealth-based, forcing you to elude security cameras, searchlights, guard dogs, and some of the smartest bad guys to be found in any game. Don't worry—there's still plenty of action, it's just that NOLF delivers may of its thrills in unexpected ways: on a sinking ship buckling from water pressure; on a space station bombarded by meteors; or freefalling from a doomed aircraft as you fend off enemies while desperately trying to procure a parachute.

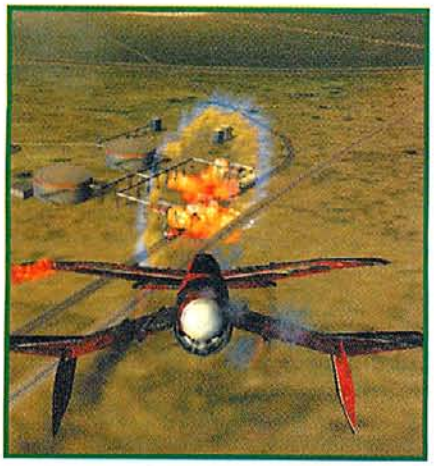
NO ONE LIVES FOREVER is a definite contender for Action Game of the Year and a game that any action fan absolutely has to play.

2. Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Activision, www.activision.com

■■■ The first outstanding game based on the delectable QUAKE III engine, ELITE FORCE boldly takes you where other *Star Trek* action games have never gone—deep into the spirit of the source material. Frankly, we can't think of any licensed product that has so faithfully recreated the essence of its inspiration. ELITE FORCE plays and feels just like an episode of the TV show, from the surprise twist of the game's opening sequence, to the desperate battles that jeopardize your mission towards the end of the game.

ELITE FORCE serves up a steady stream of action, punctuated by scripted scenes that capture that *Trek* feel while propelling the game's story. The levels are amazing, particularly the sterile claustrophobia of the Borg cube. While the brevity of the game is kind of a letdown, it's a great ride while it lasts, sure to please both hardcore and casual gamers.



3. Crimson Skies

Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/games/crimsonskies

■■■ Chockful of the swaggering derring-do of a classic pulp serial, CRIMSON SKIES is one of the most entertaining action titles of the year. The tongue-in-cheek fiction of the gameworld casts you as Nathan Zachary, a cocky "air pirate" in an alternate 1930's America, where the union has fractured into a number of campy new countries (think the Nation of Hollywood and Republic of Texas). While the mission-based gameplay has you flying a number of fancifully designed planes, CRIMSON SKIES shouldn't be confused with a flight sim—this is an air-based shooter, pure and simple, loaded with desperate dogfights, harrowing stunt-flying, and white-knuckle bombing runs. How forgiving is the flight model? Well, the ground will actually *push* you back up into the air, unless you flat-out dive into it.

With an outstanding blend of action and personality, CRIMSON SKIES has one of the broadest appeals of any action game.

4. Giants: Citizen Kabuto

Interplay, www.interplay.com

■■■ This is easily the most wildly imaginative action game of the year. Set in a beautifully rendered island paradise, GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO chronicles the struggles between the gun-toting Meccaryns, the spell-casting Sea Reapers, and the eponymous behemoth of the game, Kabuto. Blending some light real-time-strategy elements, GIANTS deftly combines three different styles of action play with a smart-alecky sense of humor (the Meccaryns camouflage themselves as tiny shrubberies that dart about in a classic cartoon manner). Multiplayer options let you fight as any of the three races: Will you opt for the combined forces of the Mecca, the powerful landscape-altering magic of the Sea Reapers, or the raw brute force of Kabuto?

5. MDK2

Interplay, www.interplay.com

■■■ What other game lets you fight as a crazed scientist, defusing bombs and blasting flatulent fig-shaped aliens with radioactive toast? What other game features a cigar-chomping, jet-pack-flying dog packing an Uzi in each of his four arms as he hovers over a pool of toxic waste fighting hordes of nasty ET's? What other game lets you don a special sniping helmet so you can shoot an enemy in the eye from about a mile away, before a frantic interlude of frenzied precision-shooting against a skyscraper-sized hepcat alien bastard?

MDK2 is beautiful and hysterically funny. It's three games in one, and every action gamer should be playing it.

6. Metal Gear Solid

Microsoft, www.mgspc.com

■■■ Okay. Wow. Console gamers have been crowing about the supposed brilliance of METAL GEAR SOLID for the last couple years, but we never knew what they were talking about. Until now. Microsoft's port of Konami's critically acclaimed PlayStation game is easily one of the best action games released for the PC this year. METAL GEAR SOLID is the HALF-LIFE of the console world—a compelling, atmospheric, beautifully-paced blend of storytelling and action that presents a new challenge around every corner and keeps you riveted to the screen throughout. Part shooter, part platform game, part THIEF-like stealth game—and all totally addictive. It's an instant classic; don't miss it.

■■■ If you somehow missed out on last year's Game of the Year, there's good news: UNREAL TOURNAMENT is being re-released in a bonus-packed "Game of the Year" edition. The holidays will also see a new HALF-LIFE package as well as QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA, a team-based multiplayer add-on for QUAKE III ARENA. Tactical sim aficionados need to have the ROGUE SPEAR: URBAN OPERATIONS expansion as well as SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION, which adds new missions and multiplayer functionality (owners of SWAT 3 can simply download the new material for free at www.sierra.com). Just because they're over a year old doesn't mean these games don't have plenty to offer.

role-playing and adventure

We are never happy. In previous holiday issues, we complained about the dearth of RPGs. Now, there are too many. There's absolutely no way you can play every cool RPG out right now and still maintain an actual life. Our suggestion? Abandon reality. Fail your classes. Call in sick. Do whatever it takes, but don't miss out on the best crop of RPGs in years. And check out our adventure game recommendations too. No really, we have some!

1. Baldur's Gate II

Interplay
www.blackisle.com

■■■ There's a new God-Emperor of RPGs, and its name is BALDUR'S GATE II. Take everything you knew about the original BALDUR'S GATE—or the *AD&D* rules in general—and thrust that knowledge into the hands of wildly-imaginative Canadian madmen, and you'll start to get a good grasp of what BALDUR'S GATE II is like.

"Epic" doesn't quite do this game justice. It brilliantly mixes elements like dragons, soul-seeking mages, the war between the drow and the "good" elves, guild politics, and children of angry gods into a cohesive and intriguing story. It allows your characters to progress from adventuring champions to the level of demi-gods. It consistently throws surprises at you, ranging from simple pleasures such as seeing two NPCs in your party become drinking buddies, to witnessing the awe-inspiring power of a level-17 mage. All this portrayed by an updated engine with beautiful high-res art and first-class voice-acting and sound.

Bioware has really outdone themselves with BALDUR'S GATE II. If you have any hankering for *AD&D*, if you've ever read and enjoyed *The Lord Of The Rings*, or if you just want to play one of the best PC games of the year, you owe it to yourself to check out this epic.

2. Escape From Monkey Island

LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com

■■■ How can we say this without sounding like over-anxious kids? Answer: We can't. The fact is, ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND is not just an adventure game, it is a bona fide event—the next chapter in one of the best, most beloved computer game series of all time. If you've played the previous games, you already know you want this. But if you've never experienced the comic misadventures of Guybrush Threepwood, Elaine, and Chuck LeChuck, now is the time to jump aboard. ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND marks the series' big transition to 3D graphics (featuring a modified version of the GRIM FANDANGO engine), and the game was written and designed by Mike Stemmle and Sean Clark, the comedic geniuses who made the classic SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD years ago. It's been a while since we've had a good, funny story to sink our teeth into, and boy, does this industry need it. Hail Guybrush, and hail LucasArts for bringing him back one more time.

3. Diablo II

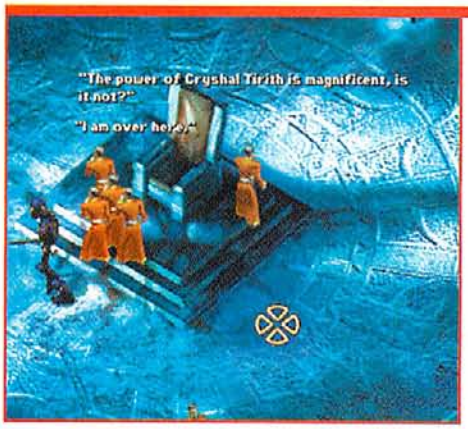
Blizzard Entertainment, www.blizzard.com

■■■ We know it's fashionable amongst the cynical gaming elite to dis DIABLO II now, but we stand by our original opinions: This is as addictive and fun as the original game, and will keep most gamers happily glued to the screen for a long time. No, it's not a particularly deep role-playing experience (it could easily be in our Action section), but it's a hack-and-slash game of the highest order. And semantics aside, it's just flat out a lot of fun to play. With five character classes and a large, craftily designed tree of skills to choose from, DIABLO II sucks you in on an almost primal level, sending you on an endless, obsessive loop of monster bashing and treasure hunting. Blizzard didn't break any real ground this time—which accounts for some of the current backlash—but the fact remains, DIABLO II is one of the most mindlessly fun and accessible games of the year. And there's nothing wrong with that...

4. Deus Ex

Eidos, www.deusex.com

■■■ Imagine the varied gameplay of the SYSTEM SHOCK games mixed in with some *X-Files* conspiracy theory and "they're-out-to-get-me" paranoia. That's DEUS EX. Largely action-based, DEUS EX is considered to be an RPG. Its gameplay is open-ended, with numerous solutions to each puzzle. If you spot some evil Men In Black, you can just plain shoot them, sneak around them, or figure out a contrived—yet brainy—way to disable them. We were bothered by AI problems and system slowdowns when we originally reviewed this game, but, at year's end, DEUS EX stands out for its originality, ambition, and depth. Well worth a look.



5. Icewind Dale

Interplay, www.blackisle.com

■■■ If BALDUR'S GATE II is the massive two-handed sword of RPGs, then ICEWIND DALE is the scalpel; it's smaller, tighter, and more focused. It hearkens back to ye olde days of *AD&D* yore, where you roll up six random yahoos and have them perform acts of daring fortitude and outright lunacy, hither and thither. Think of it as the old-school, combat-fix RPG. Dungeons strewn all over the Spine Of The World. Characters of your own devising, slaying frost giants and grabbing +4 loot left and right. Tactical combat that rivals the likes of X-COM. Straightforward, combat-intensive, *AD&D* fun from those wizards at Black Isle.

6. The Longest Journey

Funcom, www.longestjourney.com

■■■ THE LONGEST JOURNEY is the best adventure game that you couldn't get your hands on—until now, that is. Previously obtainable to North Americans only through overseas mail order, the game is now available in the United States, just in time for the holiday season. This is certainly one opportunity you don't want to miss, because THE LONGEST JOURNEY features a strong female protagonist, top-notch graphics, and an enthralling story with excellent supporting dialogue, characters, and puzzles. For more information, be sure to read the review in this issue.

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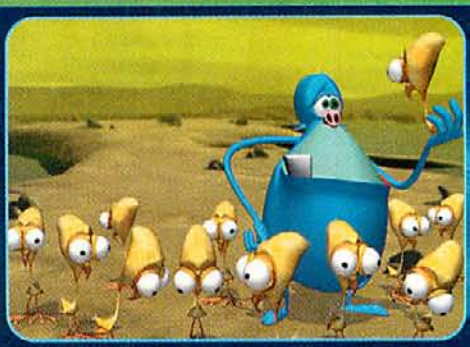


"A visual dynamo that could best be described as Monkey Island on some weird alien crack..." *IGN.com*

TEEN
T
Mild Animated Violence
Comic Mischief
Mild Language
Having mastered the forces of inertia, mass, and gravity, they *still* have absolutely no idea how to get off the planet.
STUPID INVADERS
crash landing
01 . 2001
Spiraling through the Cosmos, five aliens have crashed on our fair planet Earth. Their intent? World domination? Enslave our women? Steal our bodily fluids? No, they'd just like to leave. For they are trapped between the clutches of the evil Dr. Sakarin and his deadly hitman. You must help them fashion solutions from strange and savage surroundings. Arm them with bathroom products, used undergarments, and cow dung to get them home. It's the greatest adventure you and five space idiots could possibly imagine.
CD-ROM PC
Dreamcast.
Ubi Soft
www.ubisoft.com

strategy

As mere meat cogs in the cold steely machine of human civilization, we live our lives as powerless automatons, forever dancing to please the godless whims of The Man so we can keep roofs over our heads. Thank God for strategy games, which give us a sense of control and authority lacking in our everyday lives. Behold the games we think will best diminish the existential hum afflicting our withering brains.

1. The Sims

Electronic Arts
www.thesims.ea.com

■■■ Who would have thought that telling someone when to pee could be so much fun? The breakout title of the year, THE SIMS is an absolutely addictive game that allows you to exercise complete control over a population of virtual people that you create. Every aspect of their lives is jerked and twisted by you, their digital puppetmaster, telling them when to cook, when to sleep, who to flirt with, what friends to have, what career to pursue, and, yes, when to shake the dew off their pixelated lily.

Okay, odds are you go to the bathroom and buy lamps in your own life, but the true appeal of THE SIMS lies not in what the game throws on your monitor, but in what it stirs in your subconscious. From the moments you spend designing your first Sim's home, until that home is haunted by the ghosts of dead roommates, the game triggers your story-telling gene and your mind starts weaving involved and involving narratives. That self-made soap opera is what keeps you glued to your computer—just check out the epics created by the game's scrapbook feature and posted on the Web site if you need further proof. Make sure you pick up the expansion pack LIVIN' LARGE to enjoy even more ways to torment/reward your little computer people.

2. Homeworld: Cataclysm

Sierra Studios • homeworld.sierra.com

■■■ Don't confuse HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM for a HOMEWORLD sequel—it doesn't push the franchise forward so much as it fulfills its promise, becoming an even better game in the process. CATACLYSM features the same true 3D, deep-space gameplay as in the first game; but it succeeds with better mission balance, a number of interface and engine tweaks, and even deeper, subtler strategy. A large part of the game's success is due to an entirely new set of units, most with alternate attacks and abilities that you can research.

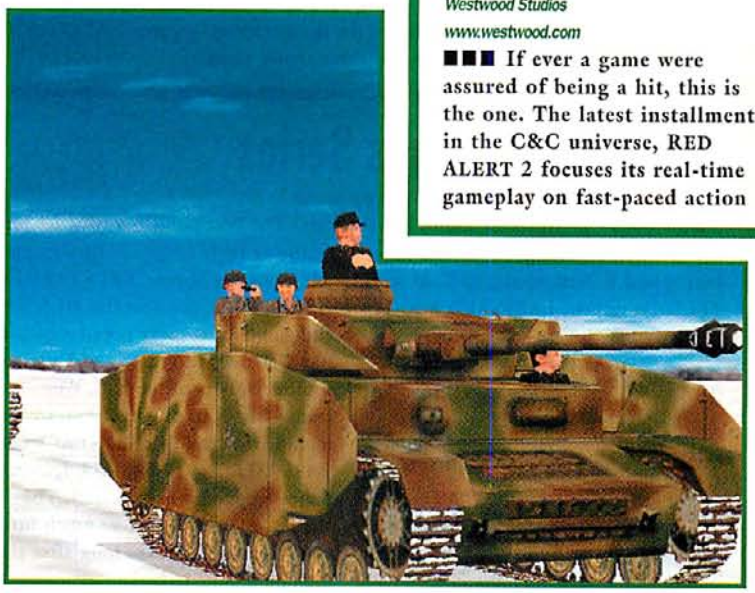
A new unit limit prevents the "Usurp and Destroy" tactic of the first game—no more taking over enemy ships to build a gargantuan fleet; on the contrary, you'll be battling a new adversary, the Beast, a techno-organic race that will take over *your* vessels if you're not careful. CATACLYSM's challenging gameplay tells a great story and engages not only your tactical mind, but your imagination as well.

3. Combat Mission

Big Time Software
www.battlefront.com

■■■ Do you fear the wargame? The cold, lifeless abstractions? The plodding pace? The hard number crunchiness?

Time to set your assumptions aside and check out COMBAT MISSION, a game that has set the sleepy wargame genre on fire. What's the big deal? That would be the 3D graphics. Gone is the flat hex-grid and lifeless units common to wargames. This simulation of WWII tactical combat drops you right down into the little villages and dense woodlands of Western Europe that hosted the Allied offensive following D-Day. The action plays out in realtime with pauses every minute for orders, creating a tense balance between the player's control and the chaos of the battlefield. Underneath the 3D graphics is a sophisticated artificial intelligence, and a physics engine that will pose reasonably challenging tactical problems, and provide all the historically accurate detail a war buff could hope for. It includes dozens of scenarios, and a dozen more can be found online—thanks to the included scenario editor and a dedicated fan-base. Only available online at battlefront.com.



4. Shogun: Total War

Electronic Arts
www.ea.com

■■■ With beauty and grandeur worthy of a Kurosawa epic, and the demanding large-scale tactical combat of the deepest war game, SHOGUN brings the ancient art of warfare vividly to life. A sweeping campaign game charges players to raise and maintain an army as they seek to seize total control of ancient Japan. While the overall campaign is engaging, it's the real-time tactical battles that are the highlight here, as literally thousands of warriors battle on foggy hills and rainswept battlefields, all brought to life through the game's muscular 3D engine. SHOGUN is an obvious choice, not just for wargamers but for strategy fans tired of the same old RTS.

5. Majesty

Microprose
www.majestyquest.com

■■■ Much of MAJESTY's magic is created by what the game doesn't give you—direct control over the units responsible for protecting your kingdom. MAJESTY is a fantasy kingdom sim that bravely defies the "churn out armies" mold of most real-time strategy titles, instead asking you to create an environment to support the heroes your various guilds produce. You can't command your forces where and how to attack, but you can offer financial incentives to get them to do your bidding. Easy to learn, full of depth, and remarkably quick-paced in spite of the lack of hands-on unit control, MAJESTY is one of the freshest, most enjoyable games of the past year.

6. Red Alert 2

Westwood Studios
www.westwood.com

■■■ If ever a game were assured of being a hit, this is the one. The latest installment in the C&C universe, RED ALERT 2 focuses its real-time gameplay on fast-paced action and constant conflict. Loads of imaginative new units—like mind-controlled giant squids and demolitionists that can strap bombs to anything, including cows—should liven up this RTS stalwart's traditional play. With an enormous, rabidly solid fan base, RED ALERT 2 is the obvious choice for gamers looking to test their mettle online—you'll never go wanting for an opponent.

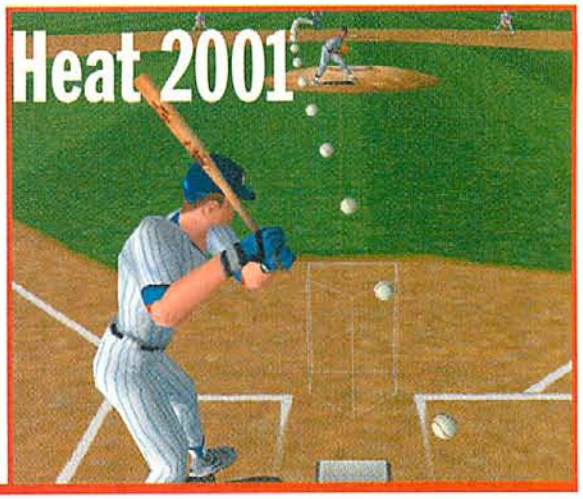
sports

It may seem like dark days for PC sports gaming—what with former powerhouses Microsoft and Sierra essentially killing off their sports lines, and stalwart EA Sports dedicating more time and resources to their PlayStation2 products over the PC versions. What's a desk chair quarterback to do? Fear not. There are still some essential sports titles out there that should tide us over until next season.

1. Sammy Sosa's High Heat 2001

3DO • www.3do.com

■■■ Sure, baseball season is over, and both Bay Area teams lie in a smoldering pile of wreckage, but that can't stymie our love of the game of baseball, and its best representation ever on the PC, SAMMY SOSA'S HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001. HIGH HEAT has been an unbreakable addiction around the *CGW* offices for the last year and a half, and there's no sign of it letting up anytime soon. Blame it on the sophisticated stat engine, or the sublime pitcher/batter interface, or the realistically modeled attributes of the players. HIGH HEAT is nothing less than the closest thing to actual baseball, outside of stepping up to the plate for real. If you love baseball, you must have HIGH HEAT 2001.



2. Madden 2001

EA Sports, www.easports.com

■■■ It may be the only football game for the PC in town (unless the text-based FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL makes an appearance this year), but it's still a doozy. One of the finest graphics engines in sports games brings out every last detail: from the laces on the ball, to the refelection of the stadium lights on helmets—MADDEN 2001 is a beautiful game. But backing that up is an improved play-calling system that draws on unique playbooks for each NFL coach, loads of new animations, and a cool challenge mode that'll have you playing the final quarters of famous games. Don't bother flipping a coin—go get it.

3. NHL 2001

EA Sports • www.easports.com

■■■EA Sports' NHL franchise is one of the strongest and most popular perennial sports titles, thanks in part to professional hockey's established-yet-growing popularity in the U.S., but also to the fact that the NHL line has been consistently solid. Year after year, EA's NHL products have ranked at the top of *CGW* reader polls (well, we *do* have a lot of Canadian readers). This year's edition continues to improve upon the series, with an enhanced graphics engine and a system of sliders for finely tuning opponent AI. Now, if they could just tweak the particle system to show flying teeth...

4. Backyard Sports Series

Humongous Entertainment • www.humongoussports.com

■■■What's Christmas all about, but the kids? The best publisher of titles for the pre-teen set, Humongous Entertainment, continues their output of quality games that appeal to both young and old with its Humongous Sports' BACKYARD line. The latest release, BACKYARD SOCCER MLS EDITION, features the MLS license and some of its more popular players like Carlos Valderrama and Cobi Jones; some members of the U.S. Women's team—like Brandi Chastain—are also included. Other titles like BACKYARD BASEBALL and FOOTBALL feature major league licenses as well. The BACKYARD games are so much fun, you'll be playing them long after the kids have gone to bed.

driving

Driving and racing games have nearly universal appeal. Even if you're not a NASCAR fan or a Formula One devotee, anyone who has ever been behind the wheel of a car has dreamed about taking that sucker out on the open road and pushing it to its limits. The beauty of racing on the PC is that you can drive any car as crazy as you want to—without the repercussions. Here are a few games that should appeal to any racing fan, be they grease monkeys or little old ladies from Pasadena.

1. Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed

Electronic Arts

www.needforspeed.com

■■■ Before its release, some (including this game journalist) thought this latest NFS title might be hampered by its focus on a solitary automaker. How wrong could we have been? NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED continues to improve upon the venerable NFS line with a sharply realistic graphics engine and a variety of excellent single- and multiplayer modes that will have you appreciating the historic Porsche line like never before. You'll learn everything you ever wanted to know about Porsches, from the uber-stylish Boxster to the classic 356 roadster, via the background archival footage included in the car showcases. The slick Factory Driver mode—putting you into the role of test driver at the German manufacturers' hallowed test site—is alone worth the price of admission.

2. Motocross Madness 2

Microsoft

www.microsoft.com/Games/motocross2/

■■■ If your kid is begging for a dirtbike this Christmas, save on medical bills and instead buy them the best off-road motorcycling game out there. MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 is guaranteed to be a hit with everyone in your house, courtesy of its Dramamine-inducing jumps and spectacular huevos-crushing spills. It doesn't matter if you prefer the extreme big-air stunts of supercross or a nice cross-country run through lushly rendered landscapes, MCM2 has it all for the motorcycle enthusiast in all of us. Buy this game. Your kid's neurologist will thank you.

3. Grand Prix 3

Hasbro

www.grandprixgames.com

■■■ With its dedication to hardcore simulation-level car physics, GP3 stands head and shoulders above the rest of the Formula One PC game field. Designed by Geoff Crammond—the programming guru behind Microprose's genre-leading GRAND PRIX series—GRAND PRIX 3 takes the genre to the next level, with even more realistic car physics, and more highly-detailed graphics to give you the sensation of being behind the wheel of a lightning-fast, open-wheel race car. The meticulously recreated tracks are something to see as well. This may be the closest you'll ever get to Monaco, unless your name is Princess Stephanie.

4. NASCAR Heat

■■■ Sporting a crystal-clean graphics engine and sturdy physics, backed up by a design team riddled with ex-Papyrus staffers, NASCAR HEAT is the only NASCAR game really worth buying this Christmas. Of course, if you're shopping for a serious hardcore NASCAR enthusiast (the kind who takes their force-feedback wheel to bed with them), you might want to wait until after the beginning of the year for NASCAR RACING 4. Still, NASCAR HEAT offers quite a bit in the way of an innovative single-player experience with its mission-based "Beat The Heat" mode. Beer belly and oil-stained t-shirt not included.

Hasbro

www.hasbro-interactive.com

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THE ASSAULT BEGINS NOV. 2000 • WWW.MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/MW4

TEEN T Animated Violence

FASA CORPORATION

Zone.com

Microsoft

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simulations/space sims

One of the ironies of the "hard times" to befall the simulations genre is that the fewer sim games that do get made have all been at least competent, and most have been very solid. One fortunate trend in simulations this year has been a better balance between the hardcore sim and the purely-fun factor. These are games after all. The following are titles that virtual pilots would definitely appreciate seeing under their holiday apparatus of choice.

1. Enemy Engaged: Commanche vs. Hokum

Empire Interactive

www.empire-us.com

■■■ Without a doubt, EECH is one of the breakthrough titles this year in any genre, revisiting the neglected arena of helicopter simulations. Not since Jane's Longbow 2 has a game set a new standard in chopper sims. But in addition to its good flight models, beautiful graphics, and impressive dynamic-campaign engine, EECH does an excellent job of striking that precarious balance between realism and fun—not that the two are mutually exclusive. But in the simulations world, this balance is crucial to make these games both accessible to newbies and fun for the grizzled vets.

EECH's excellent dynamic-campaign engine is not at all player-centric. In other words, there's a conflict going on all around you; and while you can pick and choose which sorties to fly, don't expect to just enjoy the scenery if you wander off course—you may stumble into enemy AAA or an unexpected division of tanks. The flight models are somewhat simplified, again in pursuit of the fun/realism balance, but this isn't just yank and bank. You'll need to learn chopper strategies, whose main demand is the effective use of stealth in order to stay off enemy radar. So strap yourself in, and get into the action. Just remember to take a few breaks for food, drink, and general hygiene.

2. Allegiance

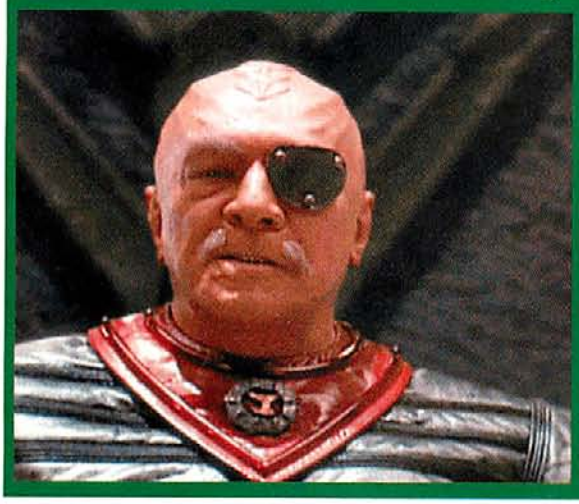
Microsoft

www.microsoft.com

■■■ While the wild blue yonder holds allure for some pilots, others pine for bigger spaces, as in outer spaces. Microsoft's ALLEGIANCE puts you into the driver's seat of a space fighter, but you'll have to do more than just turn and burn. At its core, ALLEGIANCE's gameplay is akin to that of a space-based, real-time-strategy skirmish map: A "commander" looks at the overall system map, and starts clicking around on the units on his team. He decides where to send miners to harvest resources, where to build stations in order to create more ships, and which interceptors should be dispatching of the incoming enemy-bomber horde. All this in order to wipe out the other teams and control all the sectors in the map.

The twist is, with the exception of miners, every unit is being controlled by an honest-to-blood gamer. Gamers not only pilot fighter-craft, they can control the turrets of bombers and gunships, or take the helm of a mighty capital ship. In short, we're talking a fully-functional gaming universe, where gamers' command decisions ultimately turn the tide or seal the fate of a team.

3. Klingon Academy

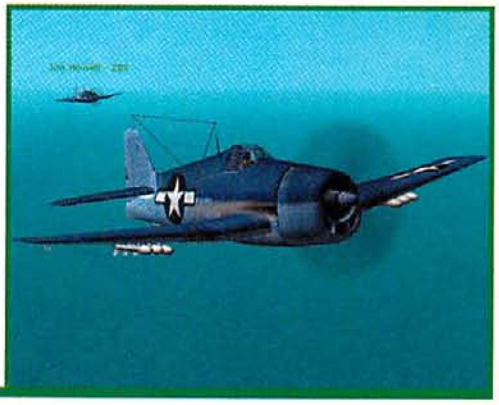


Interplay
www.interplay.com

■■■ Some of this year's pleasant surprises were several *Star Trek* games that didn't take that license for yet another traipse through the mud. Among them was InterPlay's KLINGON ACADEMY, a capital ship strategy game set in the *Star Trek* universe. Naturally, you play as the Klingons in the scripted mission, but there are also plenty of Federation, Romulan, Thoilian, Gorn, and Sha'kurian vessels, objects, and stations. In the narrative game, you start with a small ship and move up, but in the quick-game menu, any ship or combination of ships can be configured for a custom encounter.

Essentially a prequel to *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, KLINGON ACADEMY uses Christopher Plummer to great effect as the Shakespeare-spouting General Chang, one of the few interesting Klingon characters. If you're shopping for a Trekkie (they prefer to be called Trekkers, but whatever), then KLINGON ACADEMY should make the list.

4. Combat Flight Simulator 2



Microsoft
www.microsoft.com/games

■■■ This year has seen a dearth of WWII prop-sims, compared to last year's bumper crop. In fact, Microsoft's new COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 (CFS2), is just about the only stand-alone simulation that will ship this year. Fortunately, the CFS2 crew has cranked out a winner, both for visual panache and engaging gameplay. CFS2 focuses on the Pacific Theatre of operations, and the planes involved are mostly carrier-based, such as the F4F-4 Wildcat, the F6F-3 Hellcat, and the imposing F4U-1A Corsair. Japanese planes include two Zero models, and the Shiden-kai.

5. Jane's F/A-18

Electronic Arts
www.ea.com

■■■ Though this game may be the swan song from this august development house, JANE'S F/A-18 is an outstanding jet sim that will thrill all pilots who want to feel the rush of getting catapulted off a carrier deck. JANE's painstaking flight models hold up very well, and do a very good job of modeling the F/A-18E's flight characteristics, including its tendency to bleed speed, but to recover it with afterburners.

6. Rogue Spear: Covert Ops Essentials

Red Storm
www.redstorm.com

■■■ A sim of a different stripe, tactical sims take you inside the world of counter-terrorist squads and SWAT teams. The latest installment in the ROGUE SPEAR series, COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS, provides nine new missions in a variety of settings. But also included is a second CD with extensive training exercises and background information, and interviews with actual counter-terrorist specialists. This is a stand-alone game, and doesn't require that you own any previous version of ROGUE SPEAR.

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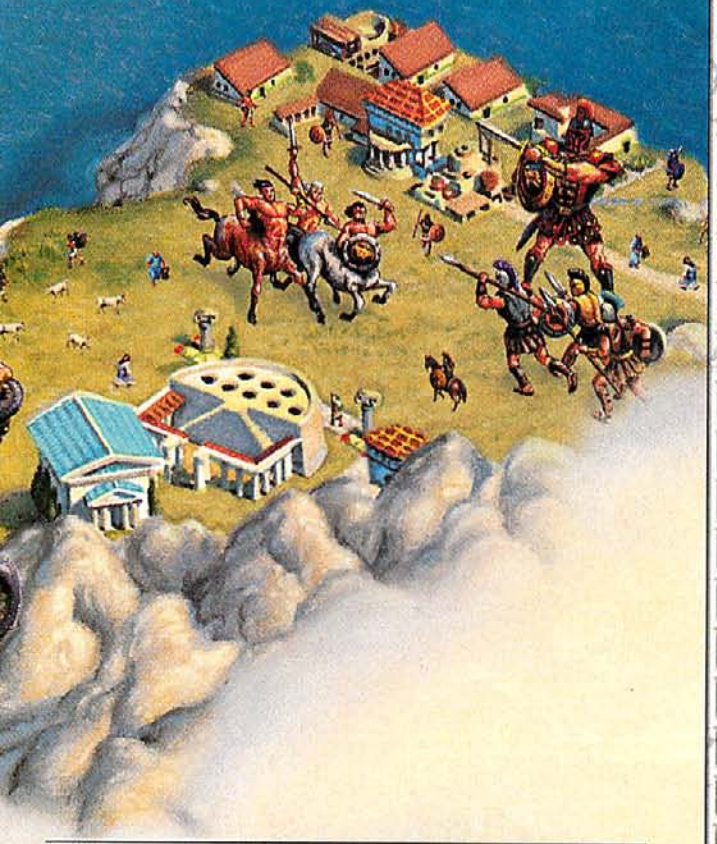

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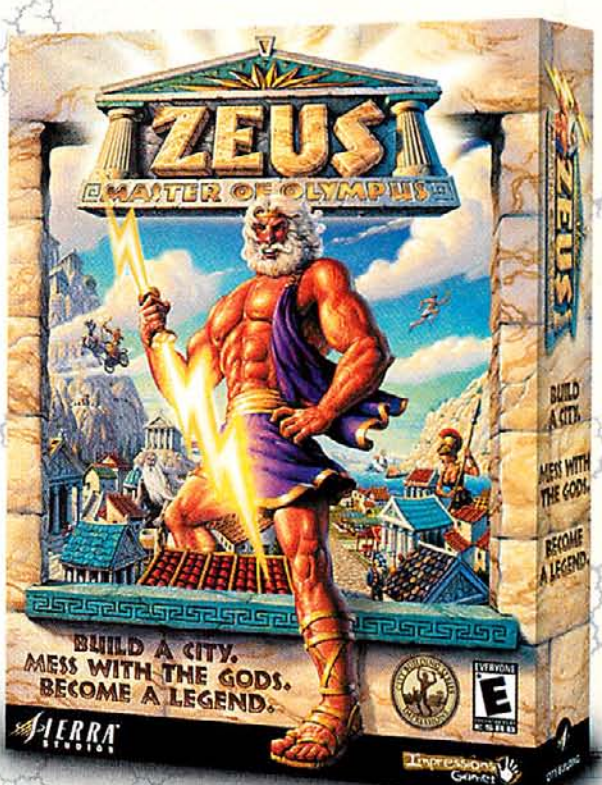

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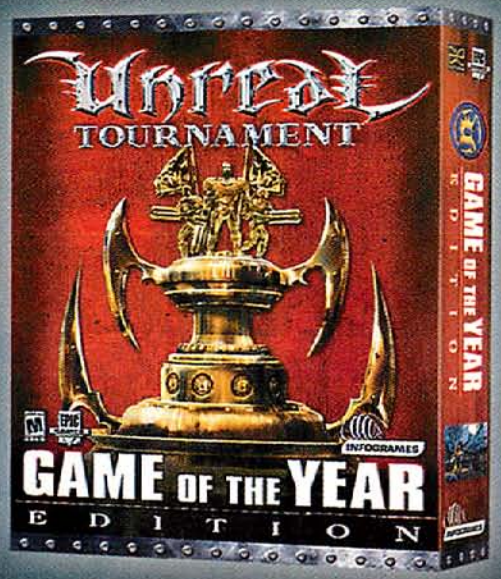

MATURE M — Animated Violence, Animated Blood and Gore

PC CD ROM

EPIC GAMES

INFOGRAMES

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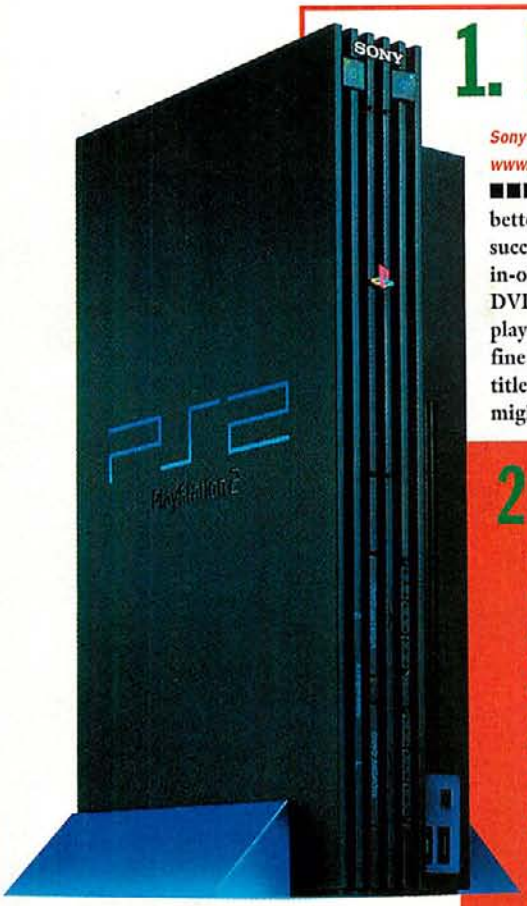
consoles

One videogaming console or another will be at the top of many a kid's (and possibly even more adults') list for Santa this year. We're in the midst of yet another evolution of living-room-centric game machines (if one more person asks me if PC gaming is dead, I'll be naughty—not nice), so there's some pretty exciting stuff coming out of Japan these days. And no, we're not talking about Hello Kitty sex toys.



1. PlayStation 2

Sony Computer Entertainment
www.playstation.com

■■■ If you've never heard of the PlayStation 2, we hope you're feeling better after your coma. The followup to one of the most unexpectedly successful videogame consoles ever, the PlayStation 2 aims to be an all-in-one home entertainment center, thanks to its high-end graphics and DVD-movie playback capabilities. Add backward compatibility (i.e., you can play your original PlayStation games on it) to the mix, and you've got one fine piece of consumer electronics, despite the $300 price tag. The launch titles, including MADDEN 2001, ARMORED CORE 2, and KESSEN look mighty impressive. The only problem is getting your hands on one.

2. Jet Grind Radio

Sega Entertainment
www.sega.com

■■■ Okay, so maybe a game that involves street kids doing helmet-less, in-line skating tricks while spray-painting graffiti and battling cops (did we mention they were in gangs?) may not sound like the best influence on the youth of America, but that doesn't have to stop you from having a good time with JET GRIND RADIO, new for the Sega Dreamcast. What's most noticeable isn't its potent fun factor, but the cool "cel shading" technique applied to the graphics that gives you the illusion of playing a cartoon.

3. Spider-Man

Activision
www.activision.com
PSX, N64, GBC.

■■■ Let's face it. Most superhero games haven't been much more than crass attempts to cash-in on popular merchandising licenses. But the new SPIDER-MAN game from Activision and developer Neversoft succeeds in giving fans about as much web-spinning, wall-crawler fun that can be had without wearing Spider-Man underoos. The expansive cityscapes are just the right setting for Spidey, and you'll have a blast swinging from rooftop to rooftop, battling your favorite supervillains. Our Spidey-sense is tingling.

4. Shenmue

Sega Entertainment

www.sega.com

■■■ SHENMUE is the long-awaited masterpiece from Sega design-god Yu Suzuki that blends role-playing, adventure, and action. You'll guide your hero Ryo through a living world full of interactivity; almost everything in the world is open to your exploration, but you'll especially want to check out the video arcade. There, you'll be able to play emulated versions of classic Sega games. This one of those games you don't play so much as live.

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family & kids

Picking out four kids' games to recommend for holiday gifts isn't an easy task, especially when there are so many available. But of the dozens we looked through, we found the following four to be games that we would purchase ourselves. Hopefully, this category will help guide parents in their quest for quality games. Enjoy!

FOR ALL AGES

1. Hoyle Kids Games

Sierra Attractions, www.hoylegames.com

■■■ HOYLE KIDS GAMES has something for everyone; it's a collection of 12 classic games for all ages. Keep a snowman from melting as you play Hangman, watch the tropical fish swim by during a game of Go Fish, or laugh at the flushing frogs in a game of Checkers. There's also Memory Match, Chinese Checkers, Snakes & Ladders, Old Maid, War, Crazy 8s, and our personal favorite, Battling Ships. There're also a couple of racing games and a face-maker that you can use to personalize your character's portrait. Graphics are pretty good, and computer opponents are entertaining with their snappy banter. Most of the games have adjustable skill levels, and game rules and help are readily available on every screen. Several of the games have multiplayer modes as well. Age recommendation: 5-12

FOR OLDER KIDS

2. Search & Solve Adventures

The Learning Company, www.learningco.com

■■■ SEARCH & SOLVE ADVENTURES is an adventure game for slightly older kids, filled with puzzles that require a bit of brainpower to solve. The goal is to help the four ClueFinders find out who is sending SOS signals from a haunted amusement park and figure out what's going on there. Puzzles of deductive reasoning and pattern recognition abound, but there's enough adventure included so that kids won't mind actually learning something along the way. The puzzles are challenging but not so difficult as to be frustrating. Also comes with a "Real World Adventure Kit" with six additional activities.

Age recommendation: 9-12+

3. Barbie Magic Genie Bottle

Mattel Interactive, www.mattelinteractive.com

■■■ BARBIE MAGIC GENIE BOTTLE is an adventure game; it comes with a clever "magic genie bottle" that plugs into the joystick port and acts as a controller for some of the game functions. Pull out the stopper, and the Barbie genie comes out to assist you with hints and instructions. Rub the bottle with your hand to lift items into the air so you can get what's behind them, or to use your magic carpet to fly to another town. Collect clues and solve puzzles in order to find the five missing power gems, and save the kingdom from the Evil Sultan!

Age recommendation: 5 and up

4. Hot Wheels Stunt Track Driver

Mattel Interactive, www.mattelmedia.com/hotwheels/stunt_track/

■■■ HOT WHEELS STUNT TRACK DRIVER is the best Hot Wheels game we've seen, particularly for the younger crowd. In addition to the tracks that are provided, you can create and save up to four of your own. You can also unlock new tracks by winning the trophy races, and you'll unlock a new car the first time you successfully complete each track. Cars are rated according to speed, traction, and handling, and the tracks have a variety of flips, turns, and loops. Players can perform various acrobatics while flying through the air during jumps. Easy enough for a 5 year old to enjoy for hours.

Age recommendation: 5 and up

hardware

To the gamer who is reading this: Stop now and hand the magazine over to your significant other. If you keep reading, it will ruin the surprise. You do like surprises, don't you? If you don't want yet another tie, belt, pair of mittens, or John Tesh CD, hand it over to your spouse now and no one gets hurt...

To the spouse of aforementioned gamer: Are they gone? Good. Finally, we can talk freely. No matter what your significant other says he/she wants for the holidays, here's the stuff they really want. Of course, the only downside is that this gear will pretty much pour gasoline onto the fire that is their gaming jones, but hey, it'll keep them at home.

1. Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra

$500, www.hercules.com

■■■ If there's one thing gamers continually quest and lust after, it's more 3D performance. This year's king of the hill is nVidia's GeForce 2 Ultra chipset, which adorns Hercules' 3D Prophet II Ultra. This card packs 64MB of very fast DDR SDRAM, and shreds every benchmark test we can throw at it. The card offers second-generation accelerated T&L, has one of the most complete sets of Direct3D rendering features, and lets games run beautifully at high resolutions. At $500, it's a pricey bugger, and if that's just a little more than you were looking to spend, consider the 3D Prophet II MX, which for around $120, is a solid price/performance offering.

2. KDS Avitron AV-17TF

$230, www.kdsusa.com

■ And, of course, the fastest 3D card in the world leaves an awful lot to the imagination without a good monitor with which to see the pretty pictures. KDS' latest Avitron offerings will make any gamer's face light up. Using Sony's Trinitron picture tube, the Avitron series of monitors delivers beautiful color saturation and sharp images that will make your TV nervous, as in very nervous. And all this Technicolor goodness comes to you for around $230. Considering what you get for this price, the KDS biz guys should have their heads examined.

3. Sound Blaster Live X-Gamer 5.1

$99, www.soundblaster.com

■■■ Great images need great sound to round out the mix, and Creative's latest Sound Blaster, the Live X-Gamer 5.1, is this year's hot ticket. In some ways, there's not much that's new about the card. But what makes it interesting is that the X-Gamer 5.1 can translate any incoming audio—music CDs, MP3s, or two- or four-channel game audio—into a 5.1 output, and send that to your Dolby Digital decoder, bathing your beloved gamer in a sea of sound. And given the game bundle—UNREAL TOURNAMENT, MDK 2, DEUS EX, and THIEF II: THE METAL AGE—you could buy them this product, throw out the sound card, and still save yourself money. All told, it's a great deal.

4. Logitech WheelMan USB

$60, www.logitech.com,

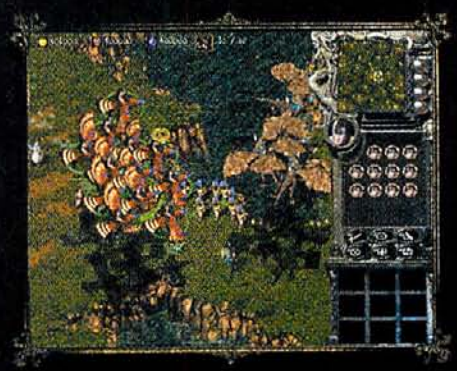
■■■ Despite the myriad options out there for game controllers, the fact of the matter is that you still drive most PC games with your keyboard and mouse. Logitech's WheelMan series of mice were the first to employ a canted design that made them more comfortable for extended use, and the latest WheelMan is the heir apparent in this line. This alluring rodent is of the USB species, and uses optical technology to replace the old ball/sensor mechanism that mice have used for 20 years. The result is a comfortable ride and smooth gameplay, and that comfort extends over to mousing through the Web and biz apps too.

IN STORES NOW

"The ultimate game that combines the fantasies of RTS and RPG fans alike." —3dActionPlanet.com

"Extremely fluid animations and a rock-solid storyline" —AdrenalineVault.com

"The game looks spectacular and could be one of the best looking 2D games ever." —PCign.com



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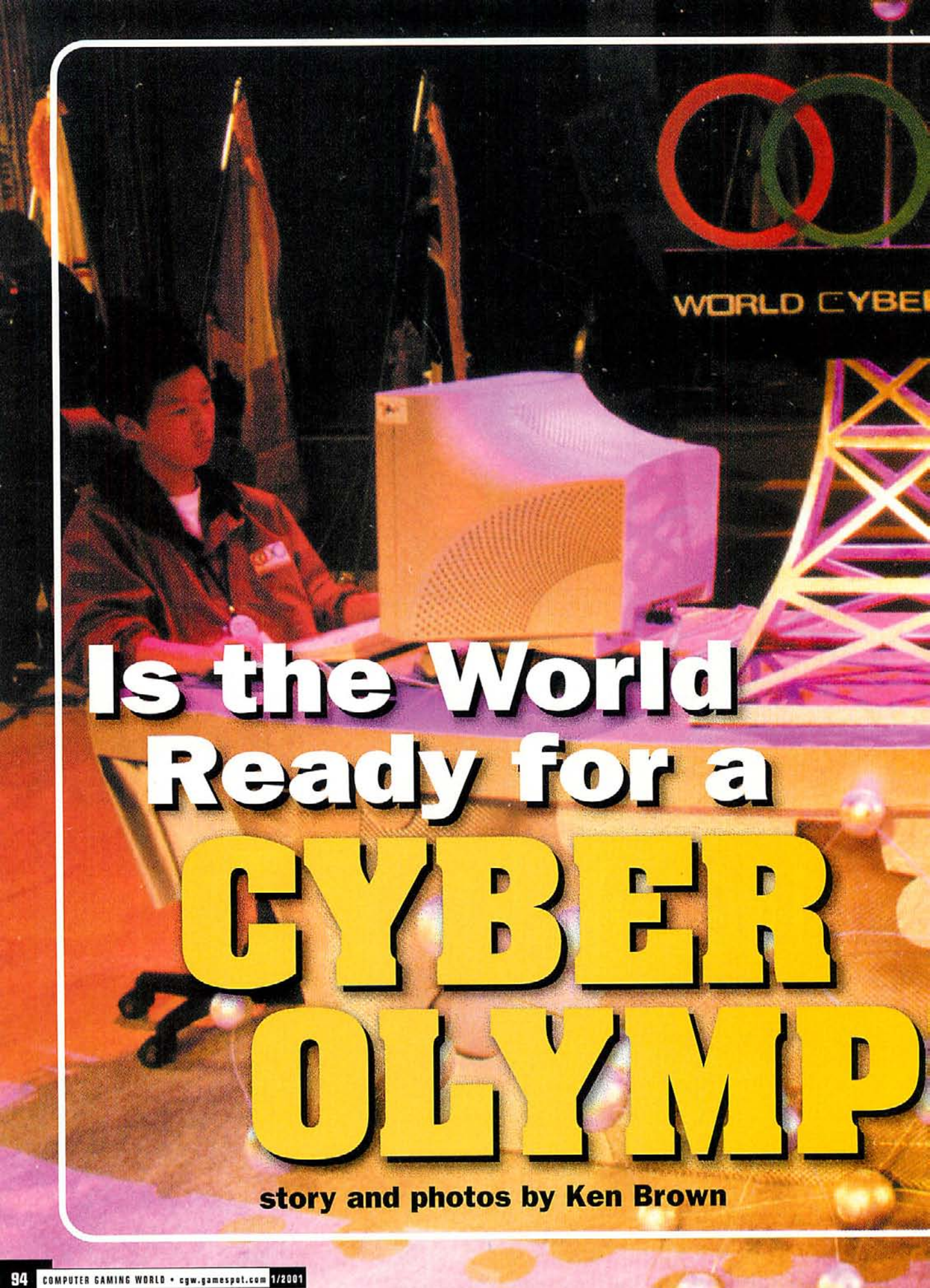
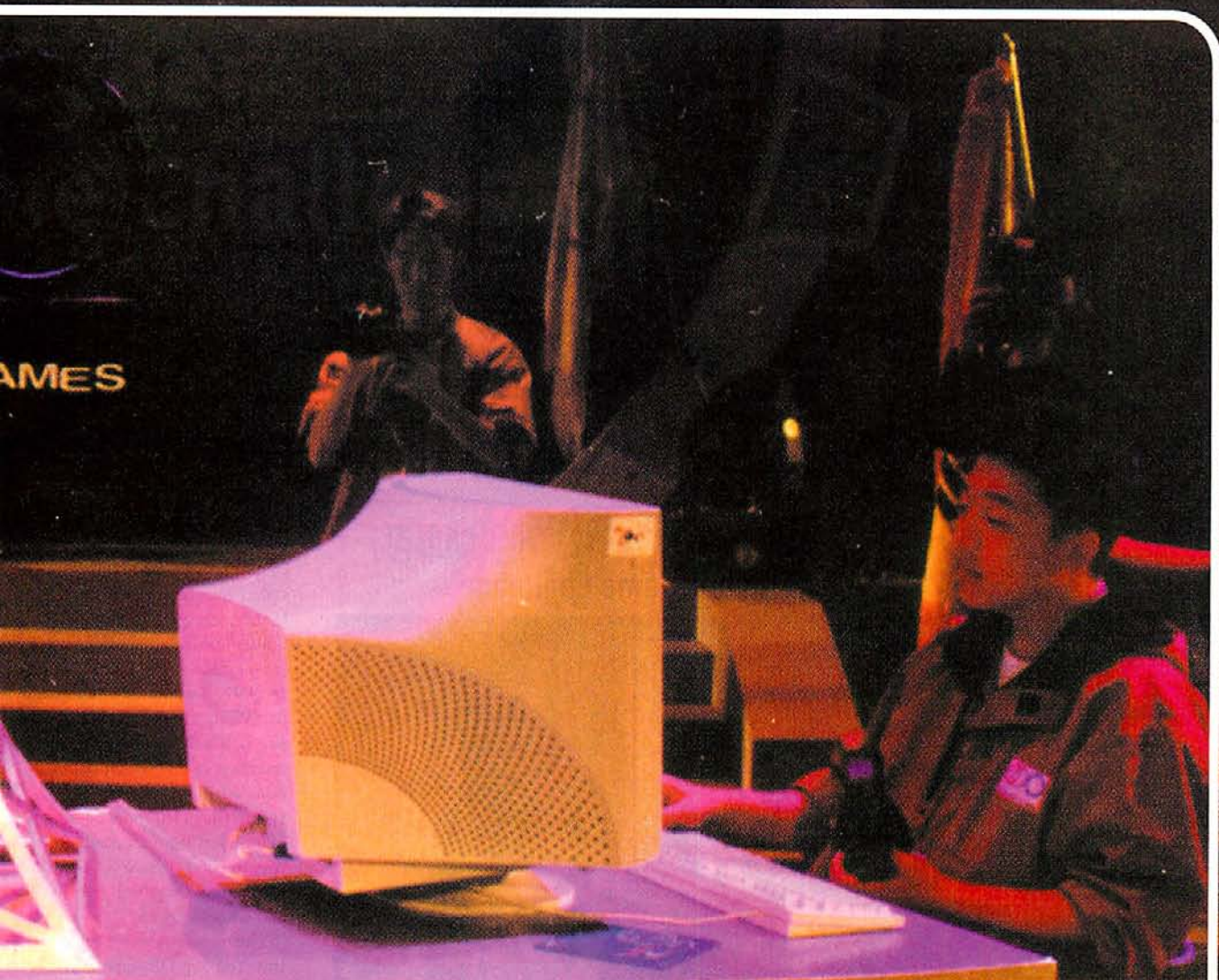


Is the World Ready for a CYBER OLYMP

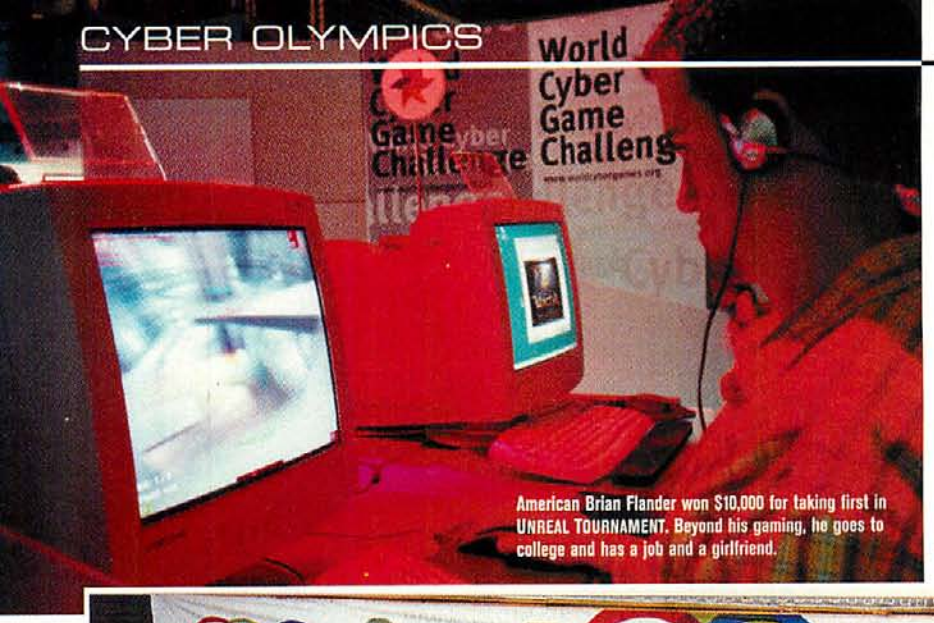
story and photos by Ken Brown



It's the closing ceremony and the world's top athletes are about to receive their awards. With "The Stars & Stripes" blaring, a rapt audience watches two Americans and two Swedes mount the platforms. The winner, clutching a stuffed tiger, bends for an officiant to drape a gold medal around his neck. His blond hair looks nearly ablaze in the stage lights, the TV cameras, and the flashes from a dozen international photographers. Shifting the tiger and beaming broadly, the winner lofts an oversized check for $25,000.

CS?

Sydney? Uh-uh. These athletes don't look much like Olympians. Instead of tight bodies and athletic grace, we're talking gangly teenagers who could use some sun. Most probably couldn't clear a hurdle.



American Brian Flander won $10,000 for taking first in UNREAL TOURNAMENT. Beyond his gaming, he goes to college and has a job and a girlfriend.

But what they *can* do is hunt you down and frag your ass faster and more relentlessly than anyone in the world at QUAKE III ARENA. Their reflexes and visual acuity have grown robotic through months of practice, eight hours a day, seven days a week. Some even hired gaming coaches.

They're all here, 166 "cyber athletes" from 17 countries, at an amusement park an hour's drive from Seoul, Korea, competing for $200,000 in prizes. Outside the awards ceremony, costumed space characters wander through a crowd munching on roasted squid and grooving to a band braying *"Livin' La Vida Loca."* I check the sky to see if the clouds are alpha-blended, half-expecting that I'm dreaming about HEAVY METAL FAKK 2.

Dancers, hawker babes, and balloon folders on stilts helped draw spectators to the playoffs.

But it's real. A Korean organization, in partnership with several companies and guided by a large committee of government ministers, university members, and media leaders, has spent five million dollars hosting an event that is essentially a warm-up act. In 2001, they will host the first World Cyber Games in Korea, which they have every intention of turning into a bona fide, Olympic-style event. They plan to invite 400 players from 25 countries to compete in 6-8 events, including both PC and console games.

The man responsible for all this, Yoo Sup Oh, appears neither visionary nor mad. Gregarious and energetic, Mr. Oh appears to be a combination of savvy promoter and games enthusiast. One of the first things he tells the press is how strongly he believes "games are a universal language and a way to exchange culture. I think if we are successful in creating a Cyber-Olympics, then that is a contribution we can make to the worldwide games industry."

All of which raises some fairly startling questions: Why Korea? Can they pull this off? And, does anyone really want to watch gaming tournaments on TV?

The main competition took place on a stage before a live audience, with huge monitors and an announcer covering the action.

Why Korea?

For Americans weaned on *M.A.S.H.*, it may come as some surprise that there aren't any tent camps in Seoul with boys named Ho-john who come to do your laundry. It's a metropolis of 15 million, with high-rise apartment buildings that stretch for miles in every direction. Traffic clogs the city 24 hours a day; the normal work week is six days, 12 hours a day; for fun, families go shopping at midnight. "It's like *Blade Runner*," was one journalist's description of a bustling shopping district at 3a.m.

Competitive, hard-working people need ways to blow off steam. But the government's ban on Japanese-language software made it difficult to get video games; until recently, PlayStations were also unavailable. (Japan occupied Korea from 1910-1945, leaving a legacy of cold trade relations.)

All of these factors contributed to the emergence of computer gaming as a popular pastime. In the last two years, that pastime has grown into a national obsession with STARCRAFT (see sidebar). Koreans have snapped up 1.8 million copies of STARCRAFT and its add-on, BROOD WAR—more than a third of worldwide sales. Many of those copies are for Korea's "PC *Bang*," Internet cafes where gamers can play multiplayer games, eat, drink,

and compare their standings. The PC *Bang* (literally, "PC room") now number nearly 20,000, generating $4 billion last year alone in rental revenue. Many Koreans point to STARCRAFT and PC *Bang* as the main factors behind the country's rapid adoption of the Internet. A recent book, *Starconomics*, goes ever further, explaining how STARCRAFT has had a fundamental affect on Korea's economy.

There are now weekly STARCRAFT tournaments that give away thousands of dollars, and some companies are giving top players $30,000 or more per year in sponsorships. Player leagues and ranking services have become extremely popular. Given what's going on there, Mr. Oh's dream of a "Cyber-Olympics" starts to make sense.

"Korea has very few natural resources," Mr. Oh points out. "So our government has put an emphasis on bringing out the gaming industry as a core business. But most Korean game companies are very small, and they aren't organized. I think our World Cyber Games can help organize [the Korean games industry] and make it internationally well-known."

Welcome to Korea, Enjoy Your Stay on the Floor

After preliminary competitions in 17 countries, the organizing committee for the World Cyber Games Challenge invited the top players to come to Korea for two weeks, all expenses paid. Nineteen players came from the U.S. to compete in four official events: QUAKE III, STARCRAFT, FIFA 2000, and AGE OF EMPIRES II, plus an exhibition event for UNREAL TOURNAMENT.

The players didn't expect rooms at the Ritz, but neither were they prepared for what they found: rooms with bare floors, an end table, and a desk. Brian Power, a 21-year old UT player from Toronto, Canada, had a bad first impression. "No one told us about the mattresses and pillows in the closets, so we curled up with our heads on our suitcases and slept on the bare floor," he says. "And we didn't know how to turn the floor on either, so we were *furious* after our first night. And then they told us we had mattresses and pillows and a heated floor. And we thought, 'that's not so bad.'"

"The first night I thought I was going to be a cripple," says Gordon Evans of Succasunna, N.J., who accompanied his 15-year-old son Jeremy to the event. "But you get used to it. I'm walking around."

There were other problems, including low turnout for many of the events. But most of the players seemed pleased with the way the events were organized and judged, and they were happy to compete for such lucrative prizes.

Power observed, "It's their first attempt at this competition, and there were some minor bugs. But as a whole, they threw a lot of money into it, gave the players a great time, and made it a competition that people could watch and enjoy even if they weren't playing."

With North America's preference for first-person shooters, the Americans and Canadians generally did well in QIII and UT. However, no one from the western hemisphere even made it into the semi-finals in STARCRAFT, FIFA, or AGE OF KINGS. The Koreans did so well in FIFA it embarrassed the hosts: The top four finishers were all Korean, and no Korean lost to a non-Korean. Then again, soccer is the country's most popular "non-cyber" sport.

The top four finishers in QUAKE III walked away with $50,000. Don't expect to see them on a box of Wheaties anytime soon.

Cyberathleticism isn't exactly photogenic, but these guys rule in AGE OF KINGS.

"Mom, I'm Going Pro"

■■■ In five years' time, die-hard game junkies have gone from the stereotype of nerdy slugs to international stars. What a difference money can make. Johnathan Wendel, a.k.a. Fatality, has become something of a celebrity in gaming circles for his QUAKE III prowess—and his winnings.

"I'm very popular in a lot of countries: Bulgaria, Denmark, everywhere in Europe, Asia, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mexico, Canada. I'm popular among cyber athletes in general, and especially among those who play QUAKE. It's really an honor to be known worldwide and have that many fans."

Wendel, 19, is among an elite few who will make more than $100,000 this year in winnings alone. He also has sponsorships from mouse maker Razor Boomslang and gaming Web site STOMPED.

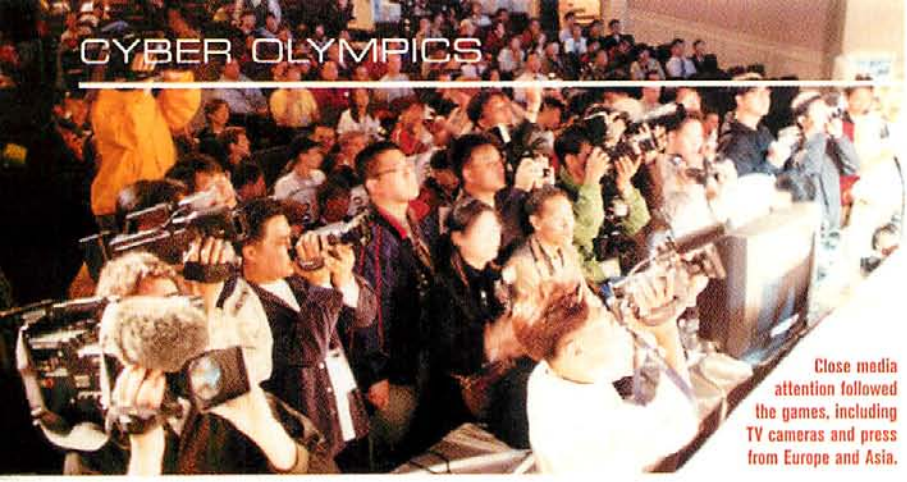
Wendel says he practices two to six hours a day. If a tournament is coming up, he practices at least eight hours a day. "It's just like any other professional sport," he says. "You've got to play, play, practice, practice."

Parents rarely endorse the idea, until they see the money. Wendel had to move out of his mother's house before he could dedicate himself to his sport. His father wasn't very supportive either, until Wendel took 3rd place in his first tournament and won $4,000. "After that, they were really happy," he says.

Other players have gone even farther. Several top players have moved to Korea to compete in more tournaments and earn lucrative sponsorships that enable them to practice full-time.

If you're interested in registering for a tournament, visit the following sites:

www.battletop.com, www.thecpl.com, www.worldcybergames.org



Close media attention followed the games, including TV cameras and press from Europe and Asia.

Has Anyone at ESPN Stopped Laughing Yet?

It's one thing to host a gaming competition, it's quite another to think gaming will become a big sport, and it's a huge leap to think it could become Olympic material someday. There are plenty of skeptics, but you won't find many among the players and organizers.

"I think the sport will grow," says player dad Evans. "I just hope that all the projections I'm hearing aren't overly optimistic. All these kids are great kids here. If they can make money at it, either full-time or part-time, I think it's great for everybody."

Canadian player Power thinks games will grow more popular as the graphics improve. "Games still look sort of cartoony, they still look like a computer game. In two years, they're going to look as real as watching a hockey game on TV."

Brian Flander (a.k.a. Destruct), 18-year-old winner of UNREAL TOURNAMENT from Becker, Minnesota, thinks "People are going to have to open up their minds and not be so stubborn about it" for the sport to grow. "It could get huge, like it is in Korea," he says. "I mean, Korea can't shape the world when it comes to gaming, but it's just going to have to take off from here."

Actually, the World Cyber Games isn't the only game in town. In the U.S., the Cyberathlete Professional League has been holding tournaments since 1997, and has recently expanded into other countries. Founder Angel Munoz has his sights on the future, but he doesn't agree that the Korean organizers have the right way to get there.

"We look at Korea as a phenomenon that cannot be replicated elsewhere very easily," says Munoz. "Korea has its own agenda, but we think it's sort of laughable. They think the sport is at level 50, we think it's at level 10."

But don't spectator sports usually require some visible action on the part of the players?

"Every sport had humble beginnings," he replies. "Does [gaming] offer the same spectacle as football? No. But is it more interesting than bass fishing? Gaming is an incredible multi-billion dollar industry. Is it that crazy to think that 10-15 years from now, gaming tournaments could be as big as some other sports?"

Not if you're Korean. CGW

STARCRAFT Goes Supernova in Korea

■■■ Like most Asian cultures, Koreans are quick to hop on trends, but not even the mass weddings of Rev. Sun Myung Moon could foretell the national fixation over STARCRAFT. The country of 45 million people has bought more copies of STARCRAFT than any other country in the world. 40,000 copies are still sold each month, according to Blizzard. That's more copies than HALF-LIFE sold each month in 1999 in the U.S.—a population five times larger than Korea.

Blizzard estimates that at least 70 percent of the population has played STARCRAFT. The ferver has lead to STARCRAFT-packaged snack foods, STARCRAFT TV shows, music CDs based on the game, and, of course, the profusion of game rooms throughout the country.

The game's popularity in Korea amazes its creators. Blizzard's Susan Wooley and Bill Roper readily admit that Korea has become an extremely important market, but say they struggle with the need to serve Koreans without exploiting them. Blizzard's partners clamor for more STARCRAFT specialty items than they will allow. The latest request: STARCRAFT clothing. Roper says, "They wanted to know if we thought military style, hip hop, or casual clothes would be more apropriate. How do you decide what style STARCRAFT clothes should be? And do we even want to do that?"

Another company has requested Blizzard's blessing for a STARCRAFT-themed restaurant, a la Planet Hollywood.

While some of the requests leave them shaking their heads, Roper says he is always humbled when he travels there. "We almost feel guilty that we're not serving them more sometimes," he says. "It's now almost half our market."

The Cyber Games Challenge also included exhibits of sculpture and international gaming software. Amateur artists created amazingly detailed STARCRAFT art for national competition.

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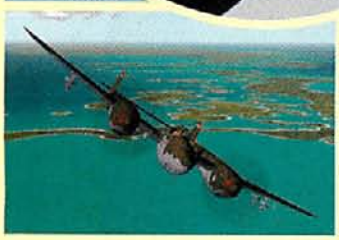

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Go Baby Go

ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE PART 2

7 top-of-the-line systems shatter the Gigahertz barrier and shred the road

Technolust is an expensive jones. If you want the best of everything in your gaming rig, you might as well put a revolving door on the side of your PC case. This year's contestants in our Burn, Baby, Burn roundup have CPUs and 3D cards whose clock rates are twice as fast as last year's best, a testament to the relentless rate of increase in processing horsepower. As we saw last month, an awful lot of power can be stuffed into a sub-$1,700 box. But if you don't want to add that tag line "it's a great performer...for the money," and you want the fastest thing on the planet, then strap in and hold onto something bolted down. Because things are going to move fast. As in, insanely fast.

Story by
Dave Salvator
▪▪▪
Photos by
Hayden Hauser
▪▪▪
Photo illustration by
Jason Babler

The Winners

Two systems made it to the winner's circle this year for one simple reason: They're the fastest damned systems we've ever tested. Each scored important performance wins, but neither dominated overall. They roared to life out of the box, and shredded every test we could throw at them.

This year marks the first time that both winners were AMD-powered. What's even more interesting is that they prove that a 1.2GHz AMD system tuned for gaming can beat a 1.5GHz Pentium 4 system, given comparable 3D cards. Both of these rigs come from companies that specialize in high-end PCs for gamers, Alienware and Falcon Northwest. You pay more for the performance that a boutique shop can give you, but you do get something for your money.

Alienware Area 51 Aurora

★★★★½

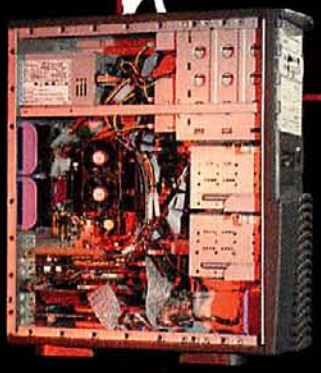
The fastest 3D GameGauge performer includes many bells and whistles, including Creative's LiveDrive for making fast audio connections a snap. Also included is a third and seemingly unneeded CD-ROM drive.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Once unpacked, Alienware's Aurora system casts an imposing shadow. The Aurora's full tower case has eight, yes, eight cooling fans in it. Strap a pair of wings and some landing gear on this sucker and it's airborne. Fortunately, the fans are all quiet, so it won't be like having an air conditioning unit on your desk.

This system lead the pack in 3D GameGauge performance. It also tied for the top spot in 3D WinBench testing, and had wins in the 2D graphics and CD-ROM tests. Alienware achieved this by running its system hot: The CPU was clocked at 1.248GHz, 4 percent faster than the standard 1.2GHz chip. They also warmed up the 3D card, by overclocking the engine and memory by 6 percent and 4.3 percent faster than spec, respectively.

Despite the overclock, the Aurora never crashed on a benchmark run. And even left running for days on end, the Aurora always snapped back to attention with the move of a mouse. It's a stable system.



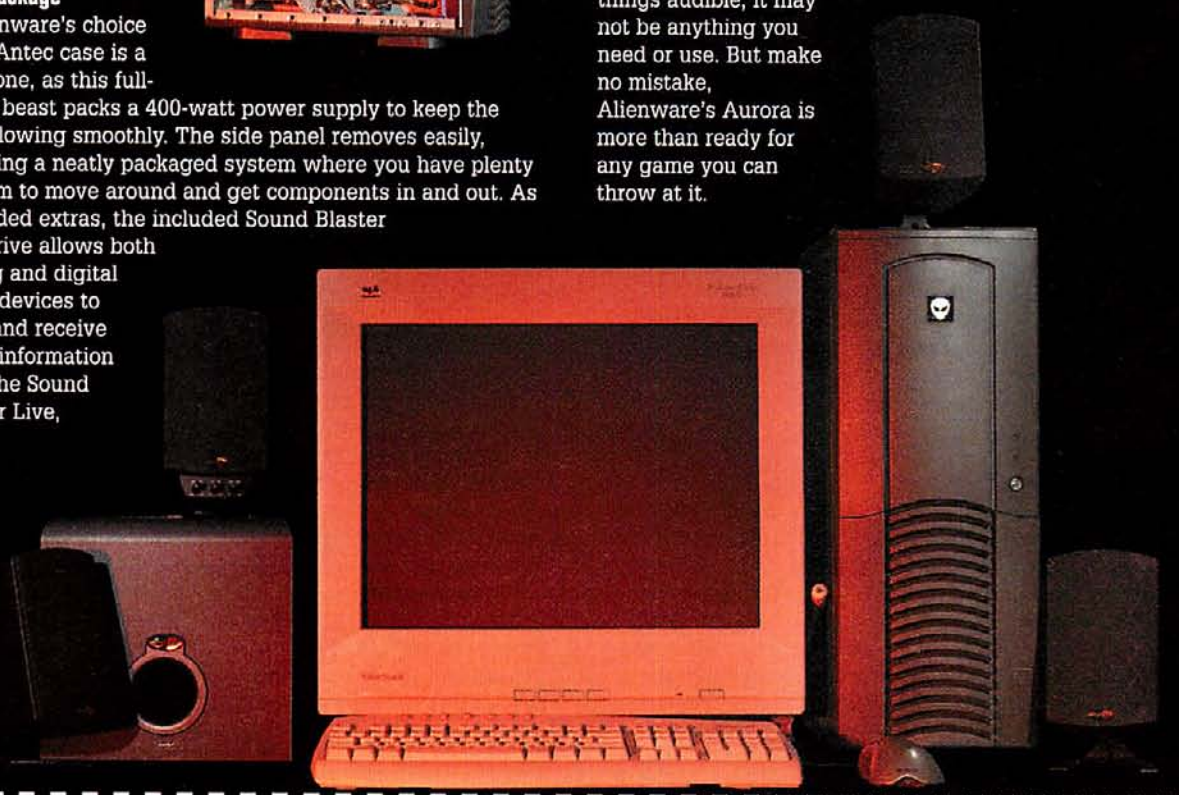
Nice Package

Alienware's choice of an Antec case is a good one, as this full-tower beast packs a 400-watt power supply to keep the juice flowing smoothly. The side panel removes easily, exposing a neatly packaged system where you have plenty of room to move around and get components in and out. As for added extras, the included Sound Blaster LiveDrive allows both analog and digital audio devices to send and receive audio information from the Sound Blaster Live, and there are MIDI in and out connections for budding musical geniuses. The LiveDrive also includes a pretty slick remote that lets you drive both the SB Live itself, as well as drive transport controls in the Live's bundled media player. And all this audio love finds voice through Klipsch's mighty ProMedia V.2-400 4.1 speaker setup.

Alienware includes a recovery CD to bring the system back to its factory drive image, which can be a real lifesaver when things go terribly, terribly wrong. All the documentation for the installed components are included, along with individual driver disks. Buyers also receive a Windows ME CD.

This may seem trivial, but some system makers no longer send the actual CD, only a recovery CD. You paid for the damn OS, you should get the CD; make sure any system you buy comes with it.

When push comes to shove, both Alienware and Falcon are the high-performance champs, though Alienware had a slight edge in 3D GameGauge testing. Alienware's inclusion of some audio extras struck a chord with me, owing to my own sonic jones. If you don't dabble much in things audible, it may not be anything you need or use. But make no mistake, Alienware's Aurora is more than ready for any game you can throw at it.



Falcon NW Mach V

★★★★½

The Mach V is one of two Athlon systems to outclass Pentium 4 on 3D GameGauge testing. Its placid exterior belies the performance beast that dwells within.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Falcon Northwest is no stranger to the winner's circle. Their Mach V system is usually as good as it gets for gamers, routinely trouncing the competition in pure gaming performance. Although Falcon shares top honors this year with Alienware, both of these systems were able to outgun a Pentium 4 in nearly all 3D game testing, a considerable feat given Pentium 4's ostensible clock- and system-memory bandwidth advantage. Chalk it up to years of tuning rigs specifically for gaming.

Although some PCs are finally discovering that the visible color spectrum extends beyond beige, Falcon stuck with their usual beige case. Despite a lack of visual panache, the case is nonetheless excellent and easy to open sans tools, thanks to twin thumb-screws. Once inside, the Mach V is smartly appointed with top-shelf components and plenty of knuckle room for getting hands in and out of the box scrape-free.

Nitrous Injector

Falcon runs its system very close to spec clock rates, though the 3D card is slightly juiced, with the engine and memory clocks running at 260MHz and 490MHz, respectively. Also in the mix are Falcon's now standard-issue Klipsch ProMedia V.2-400 speakers, as well as Logitech's very solid optical-sensor mouse. And though the rest of the Mach V's components aren't really eye-grabbers, they're still very solid gaming iron that will keep you cruising smoothly.

If the look is somewhat banal, the performance is anything but. On 3D GameGauge, Falcon outpaced all systems except one (Alienware's Aurora). Although Falcon didn't score the highest 3D GameGauge score, it did tie Alienware on 3D WinBench, had faster CPU performance than Alienware, and came in first running 3D WinBench at the very high resolution of 1600x1200x32. In fact, Falcon was just a fraction behind the 1.5GHz Pentium 4-toting Dell.

Sweating the Details

Falcon was one of the originators of "the world's most detailed documentation," creating a "paper registry" with the amount of system detail supplied in their docs. In addition, Falcon includes docs for all the installed components, an actual Windows ME CD, and a system recovery CD. Another little extra is Logitech's latest WheelMan mouse, a USB rodent sans ball that uses an optical sensor similar to those found on the newest Microsoft mice. To my hand, this is actually a more comfortable mouse than Microsoft's, though mouse preference is highly subjective. But all-told, Falcon once again shows its stripes as a top-drawer gaming PC maker, and this Mach V will bring high-performance joy to any gamer.

Dell Dimension 8100

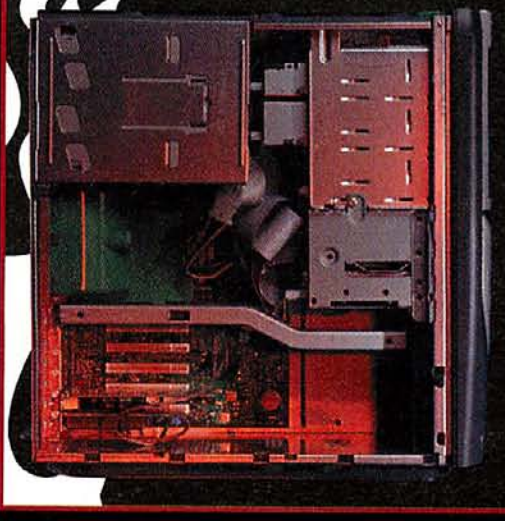
★★★★½

Dell got a makeover this year, finally offering consumers a color other than beige.

The Dimension 8100 is a Pentium 4-packin' performer that combines high performance with rock-solid stability. The machine's performance comes at a fairly low price as nutbar systems go, a mere three large. But included in this system is a 4.1 set of Altec-Lansing speakers that can "ghost" a center channel for 5.1 Dolby Digital playback, as well as handle two- and four-channel audio coming from the sound card—which is Turtle Beach's solid Santa Cruz board.

Dell's new case leans more towards form than function, though it does a pretty good job in both departments. Getting in is easy enough; pushing a button on the front panel pops the side panel, making for a tool-less entry. But once in, space is pretty scarce, owing to a large wind tunnel over the Pentium 4 CPU. Like something out of the Austin Powers gadget shop, the power supply unlatches and flips up to allow access to the motherboard power cable connector and RDRAM slots. It's a pretty cool thing to look at, though the release latch doesn't work that smoothly, and there are some sharp edges to be avoided so as not to make an inadvertent blood donation. The hard-drive cage detaches with a single screw, and adding a device in the one free 5-1/4" device bay is pretty easy, thanks to the slide-in trays that release sans tools.

A Pentium 4-powered beast with a beautiful Trinitron monitor. The new case is a welcome change, but isn't as easy to open and close as it should be. Jammin' audio, thanks to the bundled 4.1 Altec-Lansing 880s.



Intel's New Gladiator

Despite the recent rash of Intel gaffs, Dell has remained an Intel-only shop, and is in some sense the Pentium 4 flag-bearer. Pentium 4 tests well versus Athlon, but fails to score a knockout punch, especially given the fact that the P-4 is currently tethered to RAMBUS. But having said that, Dell placed a very respectable third in 3D GameGauge testing, trailing only Falcon and Alienware. The Pentium 4 performed well in 3D WinBench's Processor test, which tests the CPU's ability to handle transform and lighting (T&L) data from Direct3D, though it only edged out Falcon's 1.2GHz Athlon CPU. These numbers suggest that once Athlon hits 1.5GHz clock rates—and that should be sometime in the first half of 2001—Athlon may beat Pentium 4 clock for clock. And that, my friends, would mean a crushing defeat for the Intel crowd.

If the pressure doesn't

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Gateway Select 1200

★★★★★

A competent mid-pack performer whose most noteworthy feature is an "easy-open, tool-less entry" case that's anything but. The speakers sound great, but are a bit underpowered.

Gateway has become a two-CPU system maker, offering both Intel- and AMD-based boxes.

Their 1.2GHz Athlon box turned in good—though not great—performance, but despite this somewhat unremarkable performance, it was stable throughout testing. This mediocre performance comes despite having what looks on paper to be a very hot system: a KT-133-based motherboard, 1.2GHz Athlon CPU, and a 64MB GeForce Ultra-based 3D card.

Gateway deserves credit for putting two USB ports and a 1394/FireWire port on the front of their system, but that's where the good news ends. In a botched attempt to create a tool-less entry, Gateway instead created a box that requires an extra set of hands to actually open it. Two spring-loaded release handles have to be held while the side panel is removed. A daunting, and unnecessarily complicated task.

As for performance, Gateway's 3D GameGauge performance was a little below the average of all systems tested, which seemed odd considering this rig's components. Gateway was running Detonator 3 drivers, and the 3D card was running in AGP 4X mode as reported by PowerStrip, and yet, they failed to excel. Which is not to say that this Gateway was crashing left and right. Hardly. The box was stable, and always came back to life after being asleep, even after being left on for a week.

The Boston Acoustic BA-7500s included with this rig sound teriffic, though they come up a little quiet in the volume department. All in all, a competent offering with good USB-port location, and lousy case-access design. For your large gaming dollars, you can do better.

Hypersonic Sonic Boom AV

★★★★★

Good performance and generally competent choices are to be found here. Looks like Hypersonic and Alienware have both discovered Antec cases, judging from the former's case, which features a slide-down front panel that exposes the drive bays.

Hypersonic's entry this year represents a kind of snapshot in time, and Hypersonic will likely be shipping a 1.2GHz Athlon by the time you're reading this. But the faster processor won't shore up their 3D GameGauge performance that much, where Hypersonic finished just north of this year's slowpoke, Compaq. This box was well-behaved and crash-free, but its performance across the board, despite this stability, was unremarkable.

Notable features include a Card Cooler dual-fan cooling unit to keep the 3D card happy and humming. Hypersonic curiously decided not to send a GeForce 2 Ultra-based 3D card, but rather a 64MB GeForce 2 GTS card with the memory clock gunned up to 400MHz, which is an aggressive 20% overclock over the spec'd 333MHz clock rate for the GTS' memory. At this higher speed, though, the system was well-heeled, didn't crash, and came back to life from sleep mode even after running for a week.

Opting not to follow the Klipsch herd, Hypersonic instead sent VideoLogic's new CrossFire 4.1 speakers, which sound good, if a bit under-powered. But these speakers have a separate amp that accomodates three inputs, and a headphone jack. Like Alienware, Hypersonic loads this box out with Creative's LiveDrive, which allows analog and digital audio, as well as MIDI connections, to be made without having to futz behind your system. For music audio/enthusiasts, this is useful, though most gamers probably won't make much use of it.

By the time you read this, Hypersonic will probably upgrade the CPU from 1GHz to 1.2GHz. With a GeForce 2 Ultra-based card, Hypersonic's performance outlook would improve somewhat, though it remains to be seen if they can catch Falcon and Alienware.

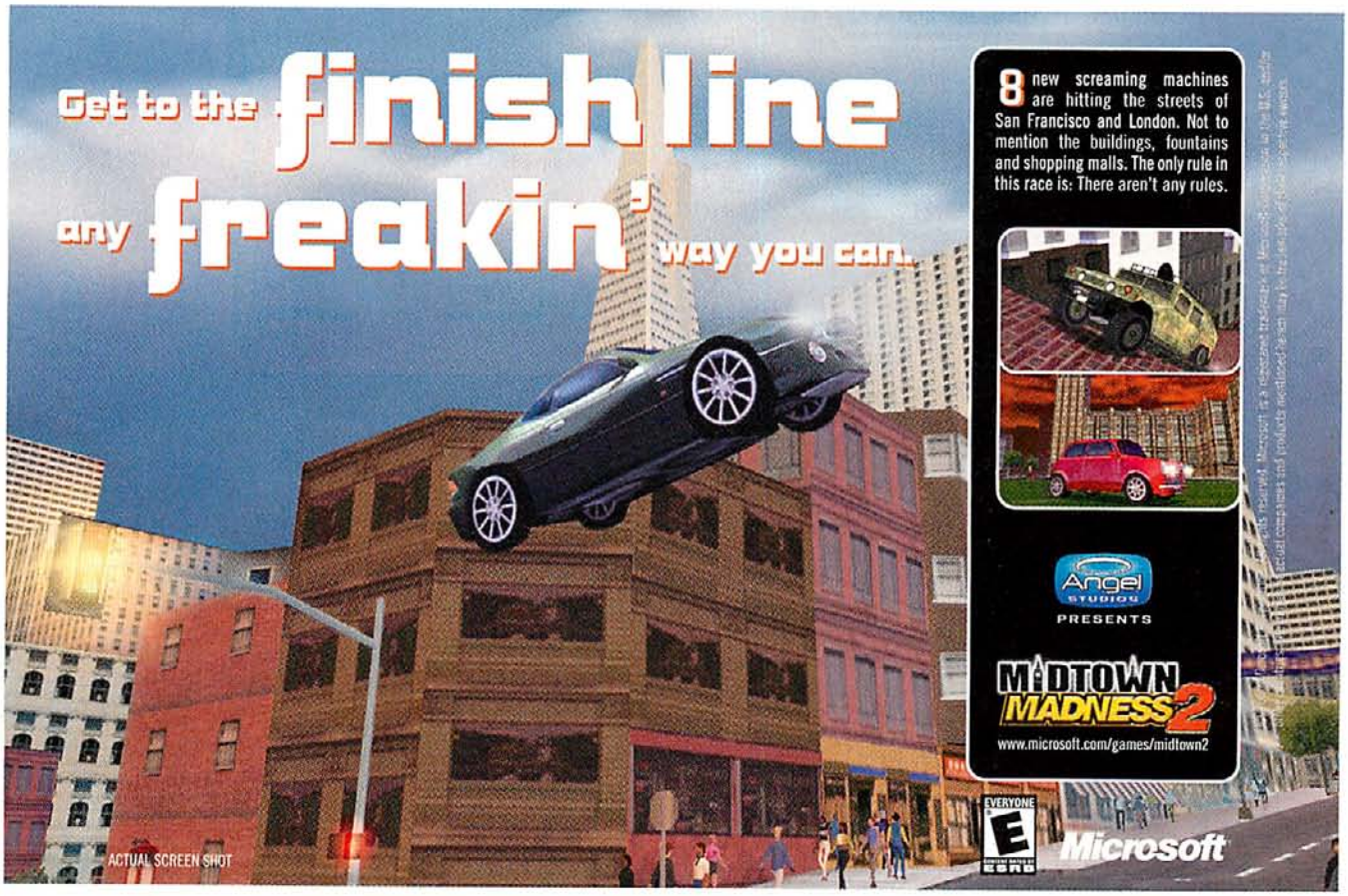
How We Tested/What the Numbers Mean

Though Alienware is out in front, Falcon and Dell are hot on its heels. Next are Gateway and VoodooPC running mid-pack, and Hypersonic not far behind. Compaq ran dead last, despite having a 1.5GHz Pentium 4 CPU and a 64MB DDR GeForce 2 board. The average score was 84.6.

	Alienware Lean and Mean Rig	Alienware	Compaq	Dell Dimension	Falcon NW	Gateway	Hypersonic	VoodooPC
Graphics Chipset	Intel 815e	64MB GF2 Ultra	64MB GF2GTS BR	64MB GF2 Ultra	64MB GF2 Ultra	64MB GF2 Ultra	64MB GF2FTS	GF2 GTS, 64MB
3D Card Engine Clock/ Memory Clock	212/365	265/480	250/458	250/458	260.6/490.4	250/460	200/400	221/393
% Graphics Chipset Overclock (if any)	6/10	6/4.3	none	none	4.2/6.6	none	0/20	10.5/18
CPU	Pentium-III 866MHz	Athlon 1.25GHz	Pentium 4 1.5GHz	Pentium 4 1.5GHz	Athlon 1.2GHz	Athlon 1.2GHz	Athlon 1GHz	Athlon 1.2GHz
3D GameGauge Score	74.2	93.1	76.3	86.9	88.4	84.1	80.3	83.1
3D WinBench 2000 (1280x1024x32)	84.7	111	DNR*	103	111	107	85.7	69.7
3D WinBench 2000 (1600x1200x32)	DNR*	76.6	DNR*	72.5	80.7	74	59.4	51.6
3D WinBench 2000 Processor Test	1.73	1.94	1.53	2.49	2.45	2.03	1.82	1.98
QUAKE 3 (1600x1200x32)	DNR*	61.8	DNR*	58.3	67.4	59.9	50.4	44.1
3D GameGauge 3 Preview Tests (1280x1024x32)								
QUAKE 3	33.7	42.6	DNR*	50.6	42.5	40.1	37.9	40.3
MDK 2	69.76	87.9	DNR*	78.16	92.97	59.35	76.9	61.02
UNREAL TOURNAMENT	58.6	71.5	DNR*	58.88	70.01	78.83	62.15	CRASH
WinBench Tests								
High-End Graphics WinMark	1040	1610	985	951	1580	1490	1380	1480
High-End Disk WinMark	20000	23000	18900	12600	31000	20200	24400	26900
CD WinBench	1700	1720	1570	934	1230	1280	1510	1720

*DNR=did not run. Tests couldn't run because the monitor could not display test resolution.

To shake these systems down, we hammered them with our own cruel cocktail of tests that include a healthy dose of Ziff-Davis' benchmarks, 3D WinBench, WinBench, and Audio and CD WinBench. Then we unleashed our own 3D GameGauge, a collection of six Direct3D games (RE*VOLT, EXPENDABLE, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, JANE'S USAF, PANZER ELITE, and NFL FEVER), and one OpenGL game, QUAKE 3 ARENA. These tests are run at 1024x768 with a mix of both 16-bit and 32-bit color settings. We also used three tests from our upcoming version of 3D GameGauge (3.0), which you'll soon be seeing as our primary testing tool. In these tests, we crank the test resolution up to 1280x1024x32 for every game tested. As a final bit o' torture, we take the systems for a spin through QUAKE 3 ARENA at 1600x1200x32, with all the graphics love turned up. We also ran the simple "burn" test of leaving the systems on for over a week, letting them "go to sleep" and making sure they'd wake up uneventfully.



VoodooPC Monsoon XS

★★★½★

The polished metal case looks cool, but this AMD-powered system looks better than it performs, thanks to dated 3D drivers.

Like its name suggests, VoodooPC's Monsoon XS didn't leave anything out of this rig. Three hard drives, a 1.1GHz Athlon CPU, and a CPU cooling fan that would make Igor Sikorsky envious. VoodooPC (no affiliation with 3Dfx) is a Canadian gaming PC maker who's looking to take on the big boys to the south. Their XS offering does a good job, but would have been faster with newer Detonator 3 drivers for the GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card. The result is a great-looking box that performs stably, but squarely midpack.

VoodooPC scores points for one of the coolest cases in this roundup. A brushed aluminum finish adorns this box, along with a ventilation fan on the top of the machine. Inside is a frickin' huge CPU cooling fan which can be removed by unscrewing three thumb screws. The side pan is only two thumb screws away from being off. The icing on the cake is two front-mounted USB ports, although they're very low on the front panel.

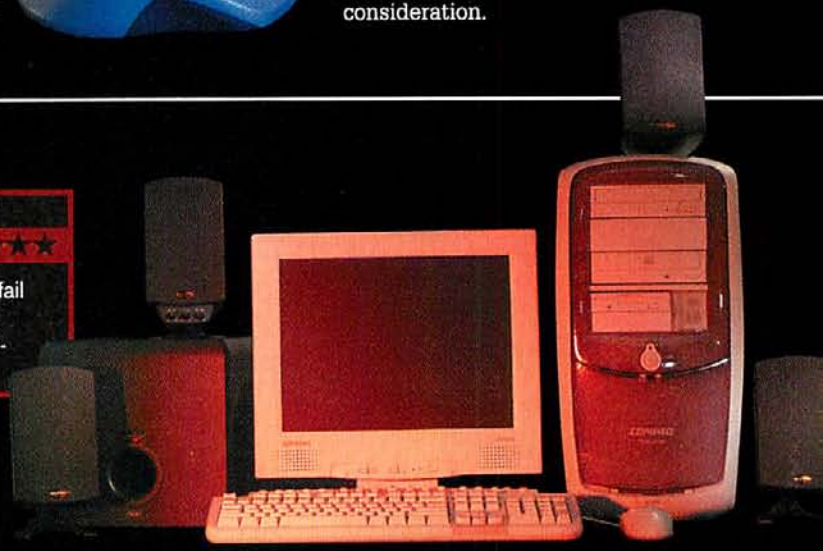
We've seen several systems in this roundup running Promise EIDE RAID (redundant array of inexpensive disks) to increase disk performance, and the proof is in the XS' disk performance numbers. Promise RAID arrays were sometimes unstable in the past, but the bugs appear to have been killed dead.

What a difference drivers can make. If the XS had the 6.32 version of nVidia's Detonator 3 drivers, it would probably finish closer to the front of the pack, and since that would be a "free upgrade," the VoodooPC deserves your consideration.

Compaq Presario 7000T

★★½★★

It's got the right ingredients, but they fail to combine into a winning recipe. Still uses an analog flat panel, whose maximum resolution is 1024x768.



Compaq has been trending positively in our roundups over the last several years. However, Compaq tends to over-engineer where it's not needed, resulting in systems like this one that underperform despite their high-end components. This system features the same top-of-the-line components as Dell, a 1.5GHz Pentium 4, and a 64MB GeForce 2 GTS 3D card, and yet it significantly trails the latter in performance, which managed a respectable third-place finish behind Falcon and Alienware.

Although Compaq has transitioned toward using more third-party components, it still seems hell-bent on laying out its own motherboards. Given that the similarly-equipped Dell ran circles around this rig, we suspect Compaq's proprietary motherboard is partly to blame. The system was stable, but stability alone at this price point doesn't cut it.

Compaq was the only company to send a flat-panel display device, but it was a dated 15" analog panel whose maximum resolution is 1024x768. Given the arrival of the DVI standard, and the subsequent arrival of digital flat panels, this is now older technology that has no place in a gamer's dream system. We also believe that gamers should have the option of going to 1600x1200. (Compaq does offer CRTs in a variety of sizes that can be substituted for this aging flat-panel.) This monitor hurt the Compaq's score, due to its inability to complete some of our 3D tests that are run at higher resolutions.

This system would make a fine multimedia/Web browsing/productivity box, but its game performance still has a ways to go before we'd recommend it for your next gaming system.

VAPORIZE THY NEIGHBOR.

(LEST THY NEIGHBOR INCINERATE THEE.)

Millennia MAX XP
1200MHz AMD Athlon processor
128MB DDR memory
64MB Nvidia NV15 Geforce 256 AGP graphics
17" Micron™ monitor 700EX (16" viewable, .26 mm dp)
Sound Blaster Live! sound card
Altec ATP3 speakers with subwoofer
40GB◊ hard drive (7200 rpm)
1.44MB 3.5" floppy
DVD drive
8x4x32 CD-RW drive
56K* PCI modem
104-key keyboard
Logitech wheel mouse
Microsoft® Windows® ME
MS® Works Suite Basic 2000
Free Lexmark Z12 printer**
Norton AntiVirus CD
$1999

With the ultra-fast, mega-powerful 1200MHz AMD Athlon™ processor, the Millennia® MAX XP helps you impale more crypt dragons, torch more Stuka divebombers and outwit more twisted necromancers than you ever thought possible. *PC World*† calls the AMD Athlon architecturally superior to Intel's Pentium® III. And *The Register*†† reports it will hold its own against the forthcoming Pentium IV. Get your hands on the insanely powerful, feature-packed Millennia MAX XP. Annihilation has never been this much exhilaration.

AMD

Athlon PROCESSOR

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Includes Windows® Millennium Edition – the home version of the world's favorite software.

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FEATURE ROUNDUP

	Alienware	Compaq	Dell	Falcon NW	Gateway	Hypersonic	VoodooPC
Model	Area 51 Aurora	Presario 7000T	Dimension 8100	Mach V	Select 1200	Sonic Boom AV	Monsoon XS
Rating	4.5 stars	2.5 stars	4 stars	4.5 stars	3 stars	3 stars	3.5 stars
Price as configured	$4,399	$3,150	$3,029	$5,995	$3,984	$3,999	$4,900
3D GameGauge Score	93.1	76.3	86.9	88.4	84.1	80.3	83.1
CPU	AMD Athlon, 1.248GHz	Pentium 4, 1.5GHz	Pentium 4, 1.5GHz	AMD Athlon, 1.2GHz	AMD Athlon, 1.2GHz	AMD Athlon, 1GHz	AMD Athlon, 1.1GHz
Memory	128MB VC133 SDRAM	128MB RDRAM	128MB RDRAM	128MB PC150 SDRAM	512MB PC133 SDRAM	128MB PC133 SDRAM	256MB PC133 SDRAM
Motherboard	ASUS A7V	Compaq	Intel	ASUS A7V	ASUS A7V	ASUS A7V	ASUS A7V
System Chipset	Via KT-133	Intel 850	Intel 850	Via KT-133	Via KT-133	Via KT-133	Via KT-133
3D Card	nVidia GeForce 2 Ultra, 64MB DDR	nVidia GeForce 2 GTS, 64MB DDR	nVidia GeForce 2 Ultra, 64MB DDR	nVidia GeForce 2 Ultra, 64MB DDR (Hercules 3D Prophet II)	nVidia GeForce 2 Ultra, 64MB DDR	Hercules Prophet GeForce2 GTS Pro (64MB DDR)	Hercules Prophet 3D GeForce2 GTS Pro (64MB DDR)
Monitor	ViewSonic PF815 (22")	Compaq Analog Flat Panel (15")	Dell UltraScan P991 (19")	Optiquest Q115 (21")	Mitsubishi Diamondtron VX 1120 (20")	Mitsubishi DiamondPlus 200 (22")	Samsung SyncMaster 955DF (19")
Hard Drive Controller	Adaptec 29160N Ultra160	Onboard EIDE	Onboard EIDE	Fasstrak 100ATA 2-Channel RAID	Onboard UltraATA	Promise onboard EIDE RAID controller	Promise Fasttrack ATA100 RAID
Hard Drive	Seagate Cheetah, 18GB	IBM DeskStar 70GB Ultra100 40GB EIDE	Two IBM 75GXP 75GB Ultra100	60GB Ultra100	IBM DeskStar 45GB Ultra100	Two 40.9GB	Maxtor Diamondmax 7200RPM
DVD/CD-ROM drive	Pioneer 16X DVD drive, Plextor 40X CD-ROM drive	Compaq DVD-115	12X DVD-ROM	Toshiba 48X CD-ROM	16X/40X DVD-ROM	Toshiba 12X DVD/40X CD-ROM	Pioneer Trayless DVD-ROM drive
Removable Storage	Plextor PlexWriter 12/4/32 CD-R/W	LG CD-800808	12/4/32X CD-R/W	Plextor PlexWriter 21/10/32	8X/4X/32X CD-R/W	Plextor PlexWriter 10/12/32	Plextor PlexWriter 12/10/32
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 2.V-400	Klipsch ProMedia 2.V-400	Altec-Lansing ADA-885	Klipsch ProMedia 2.V-400	Boston Acoustics BA-7500	VideoLogic Scirocco Crossfire	Klipsch ProMedia 2.V-400
Sound Card	Creative Sound Blaster Live 5.1 Platinum w/LiveDrive	Sound Blaster Live	Turtle Beach Santa Cruz	Sound Blaster Live Value	Sound Blaster Live Value	Creative Sound Blaster Live Platinum	Creative Sound Blaster Live MP3
Game Controller(s)	Microsoft Sidewinder FFB steering wheel and FFB joystick	none	Microsoft SideWinder Dual Strike	none	Sidewinder FFB wheel, FFB joystick	none	none
Other Miscellany	Additional cooling fans, EverGlide Mouse Surface	none	Game Pack (five games)	3 extra USB ports, EverGlide mouse surface	FireWire inputs (front and back)	RealMagic DVD decoder card	Extra cooling, EverGlide mouse surface

sacrifice
TO WHICH GOD WILL YOU
MAKE YOURS?

A sacrifice to Persephone GODDESS OF LIFE

would be good for your soul...

We are Persephone, we are the essence of life, the great healer who mends the ills of the flesh and cleanses the impurity of the soul. Our vision is one of peace, our path of mercy. We shall guide you down the true path and you shall possess power overwhelming, and our covenant with you shall be as simple and strong as it is pure.

-- Persephone, Goddess of Life

sacrifice

Declare war against other disciples in intense multiplayer action.

The souls of the fallen await redemption! Reincarnate them into *your* service!

Please the Gods...
Make your Sacrifice.

The false temples of other Gods await destruction!
Your God will be pleased, very pleased...

A sacrifice to Charnel GOD OF DEATH

offers the power of destruction and carnage.

I am Charnel, the God of Strife, Lord of Slaughter, Master of Death. Where there is pain, I am. Where there is suffering, I flourish. Without conflict, without struggle, without me to hate, who would have cause to call themselves just? Only a fool would seek contentment in peace and tranquility.

-- Charnel, God of Death

sacrifice

Your creatures need you! Cast deadly spells to aid them.

Make a Sacrifice, secure your victory, your God feeds well.

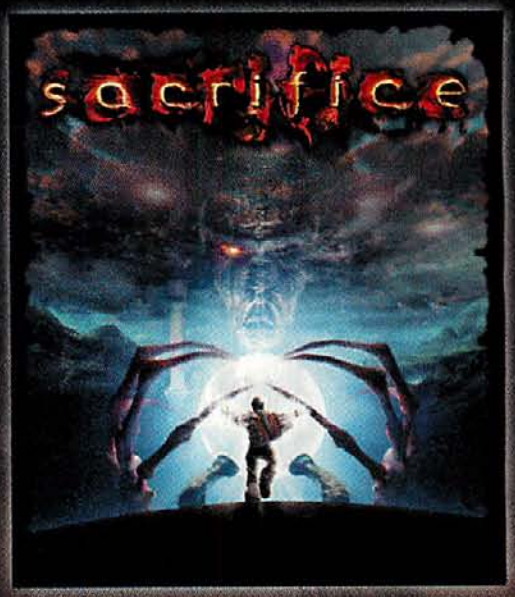
Choose a God...
Make your Sacrifice.

The dark beauty of Charnel's world awaits...

NO GREATER sacrifice

SACRIFICE

GENRE : REAL-TIME STRATEGY
DEVELOPER: SHINY ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT CORP.
FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.INTERPLAY.COM



- Choose one of five gods and challenge up to four players over the Internet or LAN on a dynamic, ever -changing battlefield.
- Multiple paths and decisions throughout Sacrifice's single player campaign makes each time through a unique storytelling experience.
- Crush your foes using fearsome monsters and powerful magic.
- Over 50 spells and 50 creatures await your every command.
- Beauty on an unprecedented scale, over 100,000 frames of handcrafted animation.
- Colossal worlds are yours to explore.

"Best PC Game of the Show."
- ECTS 2000

COMING THIS FALL

"Sacrifice is a fantastic, visually stunning union of art and technology that sets the standard or others to follow."
-NVIDIA Corp.

"The game is drop dead gorgeous."
-Daily Radar.com

"It appears to us that Shiny's entry into the RPG/RTS area is going to be very, very impressive."
-FiringSquad.com

"Sacrifice will rip your imagination wide open and change your impression of real time strategy games."
-Tucows.com

"With its striking visuals, addictive game play, and offbeat humor, Sacrifice is definitely going to turn a few gamers' heads."
-Gameproworld.com

"Sacrifice seems to have it all: Gorgeous graphics, unique yet cohesive visual design, and the company's distinctive sense of humor."
-Next Generation

"Sacrifice is showing signs of pushing the creative boundaries for the RTS genre."
-Gamespy.com

"Interplay's best PC game, Sacrifice will be!"
-GameFan.com

"Sacrifice is shaping up to be one of the best looking games of the year."
-Voodooextreme.com

Interplay™
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

nVIDIA graphics

MATURE M Animated Blood and Gore Animated Violence

www.sacrifice.net

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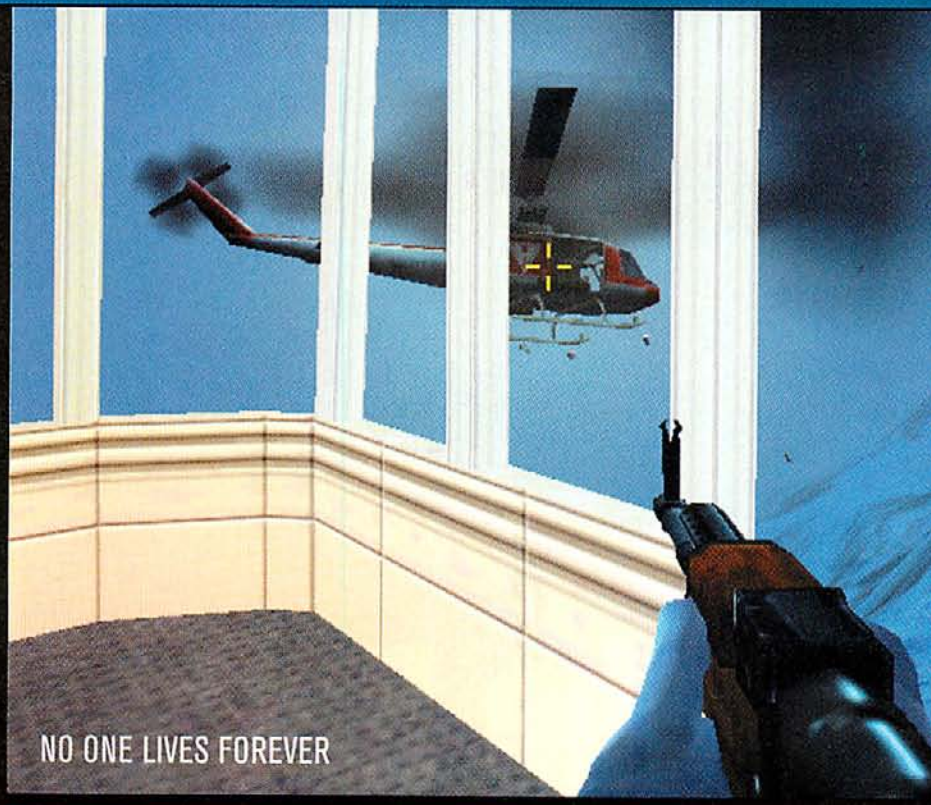
JANUARY REVIEWS



As unique forms of entertainment, computer games have come a long way. While games don't have quite the mass-market appeal of movies yet, their designers have done more to infuse them with plot and narrative. One way they've done this is by including more cut-scenes. Done right, cut-scenes can progress the plot, add to the drama, and develop characters. Done wrong, they can stop a game's momentum faster than a brick wall at the Indy 5000.

Take, for example, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, reviewed this month. Awesome game, with some really cool level design, beautiful application of the LithTech 2 engine, and a great sense of humor. But those static cut-scenes go on for freakin' ever! And the people just stand there and talk and talk and talk... the facial animations are pretty nice, but really, the cut-scenes drag the otherwise kicky pace down to a complete crawl.

For a game that did cut-scenes right, look to STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE. Some ran a little long, but the cinematic camera direction evoked the look of the show. It was like watching an actual episode. Or what about good old HALF-LIFE? The opening sequence was carefully scripted and somewhat cinematic; at least you could move around that tram car. It was limited, but it gave you the chance to get a feel for the control, and to look around at whatever you wanted to. As the game went on, the plot advanced through conversations you initiated with NPC's – not long, extended scenes of talking heads blathering.

Game designers take heed. Don't ruin your game's pace with long exposition. Don't let us get bored. And maybe take a film class down at your local community college and learn a few things about camera angles and direction. Who knows...one of these days, you might be compared to guys like Scorcese or Kurasowa. Some of you already deserve to be. –*Tom Price*

JANUARY REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Baldur's Gate 2	★★★★★
Blair Witch Volume 1: Rustin Parr	★★★★★
Close Combat: Invasion Normandy	★★★★★
Combat Flight Simulator 2	★★★★★
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2	★★★★★
The Longest Journey	★★★★½
Metal Gear Solid	★★★★½
Midtown Madness 2	★★★★★
NHL 2001	★★★★½
No One Lives Forever	★★★★½
Rune	★★★★★
Superbike 2001	★★★★★
SWAT 3: Elite Force	★★★★½

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games—no betas, no patches.

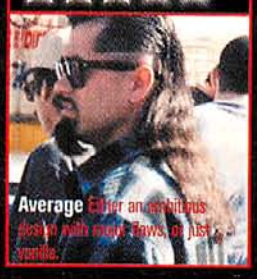
★★★★★

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

★★★★½

Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are flaws.

★★★½

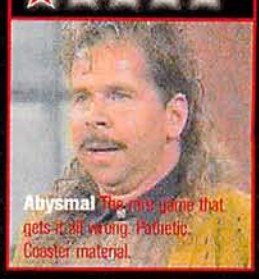


Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★

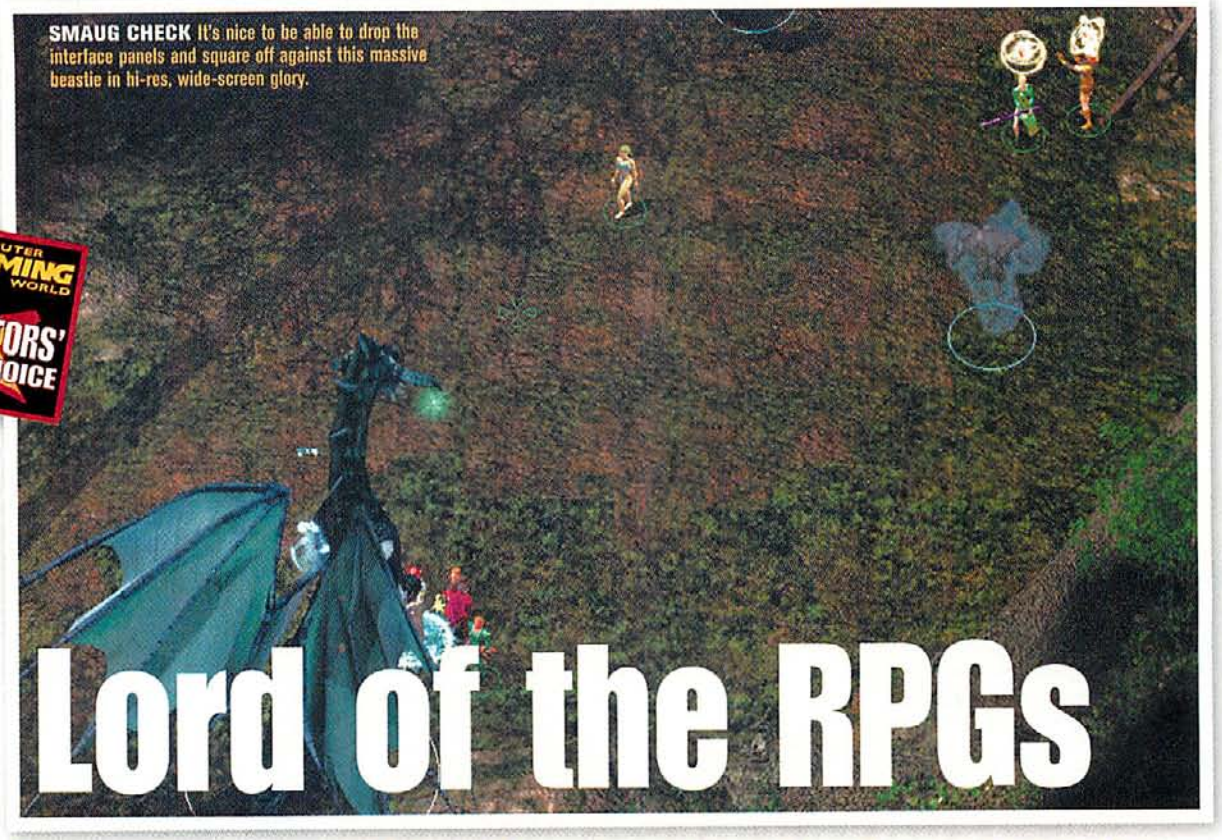
Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★



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

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: BALDUR'S GATE II



SMAUG CHECK It's nice to be able to drop the interface panels and square off against this massive beastie in hi-res, wide-screen glory.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Lord of the RPGs

Bioware gives us an epic filled with mad—yet beautiful—ideas and gameplay

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

In the spirit of our upcoming 200th issue, allow me to add a new "great gaming moment": destroying a floating skull in BALDUR'S GATE 2.

In a game full of massive threats, both traditional (dragons) and bizarre (mind-flayers), a floating skull sounds, well, dinky. That is, until you realize it's a *demilich* – something usually slain by "Astral Mages" only or other uber-powerful individuals that you read about, but never get to play as, in your *Dungeons and Dragons* sessions. A *demilich* is so powerful, it doesn't even need a body; it kills by merely looking at you.

In my several battles against this damn skull, I alternated between a fanatical "must-kill" mentality, and hate-filled resignation. I played, I died, I reloaded, I strategized, and I died some more. I watched my party get hit by Imprisonment and Wail Of The Banshee repeatedly. But one night, I finally made good use of my spells. After flinging around Lower Resistances and Spellstrikes, and using "hit-it-with-my-swords" tactics, I finally put that skull down. I got a nifty ring, a bunch of experience points, and the satisfaction of destroying some unfair figment of *D&D* creator Gary Gygax's imagination.

BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN (BG2) is filled with moments like that. It pushes the limits of high-end *AD&D* gaming; it constantly throws surprises at you; it forces you to think and strategize. When it's all over, when you realize that you just overcame what is essentially a force of nature, you feel great. And it delivers these great gaming moments with style and polish.

Idioteque

Immediately after starting up the game, you'll notice the first real improvement Bioware made: the story. While I can't even remember the first three-quarters of the previous game, BG2 grabs you right from the beginning. Although you were revealed as a Child Of Bhaal (the God Of Murder) at the end of BG1, that didn't stop a powerful mage from kidnapping and experimenting on you. Circumstances fit together to allow you to escape from his laboratory into the humongous city of Athlatka, and you're off.

If anything, the plot style is reminiscent of *The Lord Of The Rings*; it's a story with a simple center, but with political intrigue, warfare, moral ambiguity, and lots of dark overtones surrounding that center. Each chapter in BG2 has a pointed, focused, and interesting goal, which immediately takes care of the "where am I going, and why?" aspect of the previous game. While it doesn't have the emotional or philosophical resonance of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, it isn't the light-adventure fare of ICEWIND DALE either. It's a dark fantasy epic.

CGW RATED

PROS

It's the massive, widescreen, AD&D epic everyone's been waiting for...

CONS

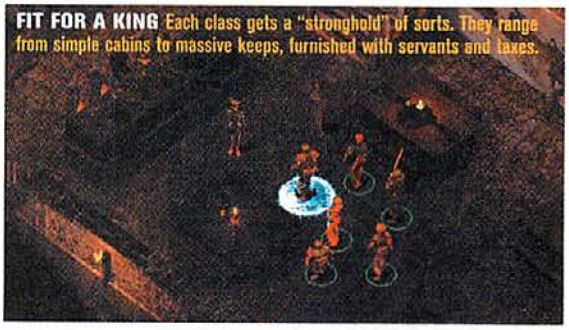
...with some goofy design/technical quirks.

Requirements: Pentium-II 233, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 750MB hard drive space, DirectX-compatible video and sound cards.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 450, 64MB RAM, 1200MB hard drive space, 8x CD-ROM, 3D card.
3D Support: OpenGL **Multiplayer Support:** 1-6 players (TCP/IP).

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Bioware • $44 • www.interplay.com
ESRB Rating: Teen (13+); animated blood and violence, use of alcohol.

NOVEMBER RAIN Combat suddenly becomes mage competitions, with meteors smashing themselves into the fray and demons ripping their way into our dimension.

MAXIMUS! MAXIMUS! Gladiatorial combat against a beholder. Just another day in the Underdark.



FIT FOR A KING Each class gets a "stronghold" of sorts. They range from simple cabins to massive keeps, furnished with servants and taxes.

To progress through the story, you'll go forth on quests. This is where most RPGs degenerate into annoying tasks along the line of "deliver mine Idol Of Buggery to Shagadelic Elf, and ye will receive three-pence and twenty points of experience." I cringed early on when some stuffy noble told me to go kill some ogres that were loitering on his property. Thinking I was going to play a glorified weedwhacker/FedEx man, I went to his property and, well, things were not what they seemed at all. A simple, run-of-the-mill, "go kill this now!" quest, through a series of twists and turns, became a neat little mini-adventure, one that probably would have been used as a major quest in another game. BG2 is full of quests like this that take our expectations about the genre and turn them sideways.

Of the game's seven chapters, the bulk of these quests lie within Chapter Two. Be warned: Once you progress along the main plot to Chapter Three, you're pretty much locked on-course until Chapter Six. So while this doesn't have the massive, outright freedom of say, DAGGERFALL or even TORMENT, I think it ultimately makes for a nice compromise. You can do as you will in Chapter Two, then follow the focused story for a couple chapters, finish off any loose ends, and plow your way to the end.

MAPQUEST, AD&D-STYLE
Thank the gaming gods that maps of large cities now come filled and annotated.

Fitter Happier

Such an epic plot and quests require larger-than-life heroes. Bioware pumped up the experience-point cap to nearly three million, resulting in characters that average between levels 15 to 19 (for comparison's sake, the overly-famous Drizzt Do'Urden is a level-15 ranger). You'll have literally ground-shaking fighters who crush ogres with their bare hands, mages who can banish their enemies to other dimensions, and priests who can channel the wrath of their god with but a whisper. Combine this raw power with some of the equipment you'll be running into (Holy Avenger, Dragonscale Armor, Staff Of The Magi, Crom Faeyr), and your group suddenly evolves from mere adventuring party to pantheon.

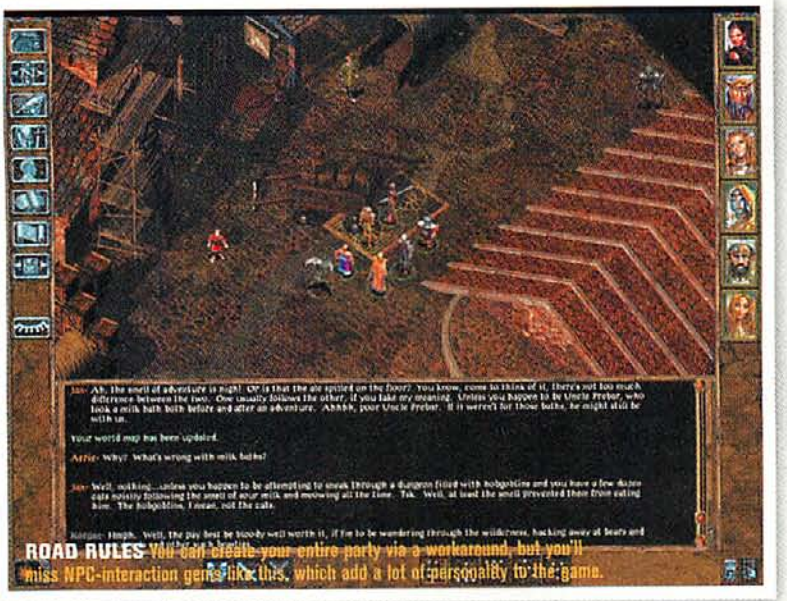
With such powerful characters, Bioware spiced up the overly-formulaic *AD&D* character-creation system. The traditional classes now have "kits," which are subclasses with various advantages and disadvantages. When I imported my ranger from BG1, I could either keep him as he was, or choose to turn him into an archer (deals death-from-afar), a stalker (sneaky and backstabbing), or a beastmaster (he, uh, gets an "animal companion").

Bioware also worked in three classes from the new *Third Edition AD&D* rules: the hulky barbarian, the versatile sorceress, and the "my-hands-are-registered-lethal-weapons" monk. The net result is that there's a lot more flexibility and choice when it comes to character creation. Gamers have already started discovering insane power combinations, like kensai/mages or swashbuckler/fighters.

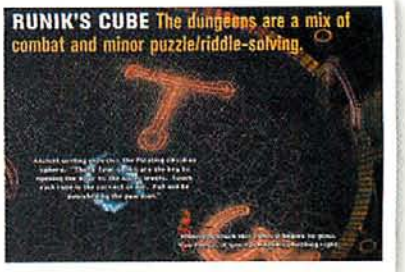
As in BG1, you only roll up your main character; the other five slots in your party will be filled by various NPCs you'll encounter. The stats and class choices that Bioware made for these NPCs aren't for power-gamers, they're for gamers who care about character. While BG1 had only a few scant lines of dialogue, the NPCs now have their own stories, rivalries, and personal ambitions. They will argue with each other, flirt, run off on their own quests, ask for help, give you advice, or simply hit each other. You can even choose to get romantically involved with an NPC; I was amused to see Jaheira and Aerie have a massive jealous argument over my stalker, Scooteris.

How To Disappear Completely

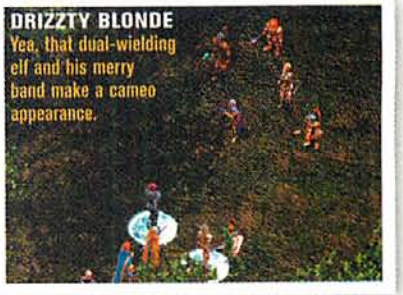
Since you now have a party of demi-gods, the bulk of your combat is no longer puny enemies such as goblins or orcs; you'll mostly face off against enemies you've only *heard* about. Vampires suddenly become *normal* enemies. Gigantic iron golems are everywhere, beholders start popping up frequently; and don't be surprised when you stumble onto packs of mind flayers (who can



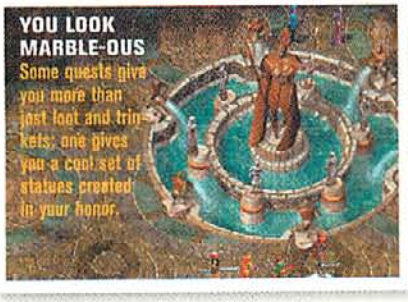
ROAD RULES You can create your entire party via a workaround, but you'll miss NPC-interaction gems like this, which add a lot of personality to the game.



RUNIK'S CUBE The dungeons are a mix of combat and minor puzzle/riddle-solving.



DRIZZTY BLONDE Yea, that dual-wielding elf and his merry band make a cameo appearance.



YOU LOOK MARBLE-OUS Some quests give you more than just loot and trinkets; one gives you a cool set of statues created in your honor.

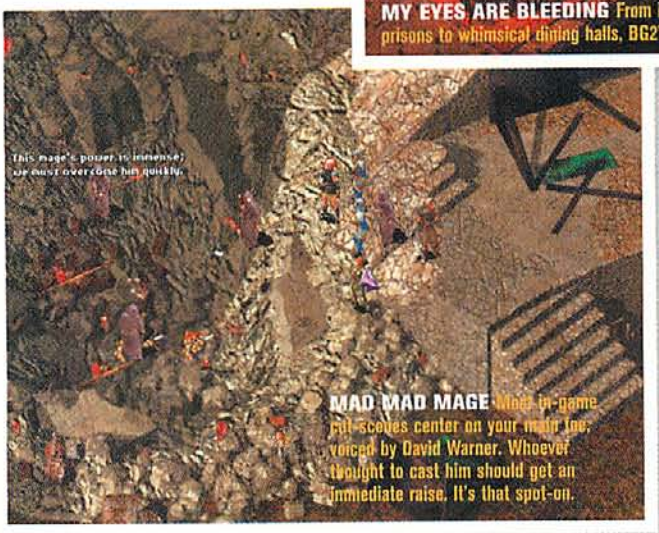
kill you in about two turns) just sitting around, devouring brains. You'll see first-hand why liches are so troublesome, and you'll meet more than one dragon.

And I haven't even gotten to the mages yet.

If anything, BG2 shows you why high-level mages are very powerful enemies. They don't just cast Magic Missile, they buff themselves up with spells like Stoneskin and Fireshield, then start hitting your party with Confusion, and *then* they might cast some offensive spells. Don't get me started on the really smart mages who have Chain Contingencies set up to cast Time Stop, and then throw several Globes of Invulnerability or Protection From Magical Weapons. The lich is the worst. Accidentally walking in on a lich and watching him do his work is, well, in a word, awesome.

Combat *used* to boil down to this: Mages cast Fireball, fighters walk in and hit things, and priests heal. Not anymore. With the more powerful monsters and the insanely-devious mages, high-level combat becomes much more tactical. You'll need to learn how to juggle ranged vs. melee weaponry, split up your forces, use summoned creatures properly, and what spells to cast when. Traditional, mindless combat is rare; you'll definitely put more thought into preparing and executing your battle plan.

MY EYES ARE BLEEDING From interdimensional prisons to whimsical dining halls, BG2's art is elaborate.



MAD MAD MAGE Most in-game cut-scenes center on your main foe, voiced by David Warner. Whoever thought to cast him should get an immediate raise. It's that spot-on.

The "see what you're up against, and then reload to win" scenario does pop up more often, but it makes major victories even more satisfying.

Everything in Its Right Place

Just now, all I've been talking about is combat, character, and questing. I haven't even touched on other improvements in both design and technology. Higher resolutions, annotated maps and journals, scalable difficulty – these things are nice, but all I can think about are the vast improvements, and resultant gameplay, in those earlier details.

There are some minor issues that hurt the game. Like how the AI sometimes cheats (thieves blinking in and out of existence?), occasional quest bugs or random crashes, still-quirky pathfinding, some choices regarding the massive manual (great for spell descriptions, but light on character and/or enemy info), and sloooow battles despite 3D-acceleration.

But the good far outweighs the bad here. BALDUR'S GATE II creates the same sense of agitation and insomnia that other great games have inflicted on me. Even though I think of this as Game Of The Year or even Hall Of Fame material, I won't trap myself with the "best RPG ever" phrase. But it certainly ranks up there with greats like FALLOUT, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR.

Unless some other game manages to top the idea of *AD&D* demi-gods rampaging through a *Lord Of The Rings*-style story, or you're just not a fan of the Infinity Engine, BALDUR'S GATE II is the best role-playing game you can buy today. CGW

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RED ALERT 2 offers retro Soviet-bashing action for diehard RTS fans

The Russians Are Coming!

Once upon a time, a little company called Westwood released a game called COMMAND & CONQUER that, along with Blizzard's WARCRAFT, more or less kick-started the real-time strategy genre. The sequel, RED ALERT, refined the formula. And then things started to slide. Seemingly oblivious to the advances being made in the RTS field by games like WARCRAFT 2 and TOTAL ANNIHILATION, Westwood began to release a series of crummy add-ons, mini-sequels, spin-offs, and "gold editions," culminating in the online fiasco SOLE SURVIVOR. The long-awaited C&C sequel, TIBERIAN SUN, was a small step in the right direction but way too little, way too late.

And now, as a wave of fully-3D titles like GROUND CONTROL and DARK REIGN 2 have all but supplanted "old school" real-time strategy, comes the belated sequel to the sequel, RED ALERT 2, sporting – that's right – a *simplified*, toned-down version of the 2D TIBERIAN SUN engine. It's a strange decision...since when have gamers asked for *less* fancy graphics as time goes on? Is there a method to this madness?

BLOWED UP GOOD RA2 may have a dated 2D engine, but the game makes up for it with a whole lotta explosions.

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 2

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

Retroactive Russkies

Despite the odd engine choice, the multimedia package surrounding RA2 is as polished and overblown as C&C fans have come to expect. Whomping techno-rock assaults you from the instant the install program comes up. Full-motion video may be officially dead, but nobody's told Westwood – RA2 is chock-full of slumming Hollywood actors in bad costumes spouting laughable dialogue.

The retro feel doesn't end there. When's the last time someone cast Soviets as the bad guys? RA2 continues with the original's alternate history, in which time-travel meddling prevented Hitler's rise to power – but allowed Stalin's Red Army to march across Europe instead. Now, Stalin's successor Romanov – armed with weird-science gizmos and psychic commandos – has launched a full-scale invasion of the United States, in a tip of the hat to that 80's Patrick Swayze classic, *Red Dawn*.

Unleash the Squids!

RA2's convoluted backstory certainly wins points for recombinant silliness and sheer cheesy audacity. Among the forces arrayed against the U.S. are assault blimps, mentally-controlled giant squids, and bald psychics named Yuri. The Americans have developed some unconventional gadgets themselves, ranging from time-traveling troopers to weather-control attacks to dolphins with sonic cannons. As for the actors who grace the frequent cut-scenes, most notable are Kari Wuhrer, supplying the requisite T&A as tank-topped agent Tanya; and B-movie regular Udo Kier, sporting his usual unrecognizable accent and penetrating stare as the Rasputin-like Russian psychic.

The two campaigns – one Soviet, one Allied – play out about how you'd expect, in scenarios of mounting difficulty, with the more esoteric units and

DEATH FROM ABOVE A flight of Harriers delivers a piping-hot welcome to Soviet invaders.

CGW RATED

PROS

Nicely polished; lots of bizarrely imaginative units; still has that C&C multiplayer magic.

CONS

2D engine is getting pretty tired; offers nothing you haven't seen a zillion times before.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space, 56K modem for Internet play. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN, or Westwood Chat (2-8 players).

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Westwood Studios • $45 • www.westwood.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

FMV LIVES! Slightly embarrassed Hollywood actors advance RA2's convoluted storyline.

RADIATION HAZARD A nuclear attack renders this section of real estate uninhabitable.

structures introduced gradually. They're well-designed if you like this sort of thing, featuring lots of recognizable cities and landmarks (the initial Soviet scenario requires you to level the Pentagon). However, they're often handicapped by the "puzzle game" nature of most single-player RTS scenarios, particularly in the stages that require you to guide a small group of commandos through a maze-like map, seeking the one specific path or tactic that will allow you to beat vastly superior forces.

GET ME THE JOINT CHIEFS A massive Soviet assault on the Pentagon. The White House can also be toasted for bonus points.

Ah, but the Play's the Thing

As for the gameplay, it can't come as much of a shock to hear that it's fundamentally the same as TIBERIAN SUN or RED ALERT. Tiberium, er, "minerals" are still gathered by harvesters; barracks still produce fragile but cheap infantry; tanks still rush. The "simplified" engine concept mostly means that the multi-level terrain of TIBERIAN SUN has been toned down to make room for more special effects and explosions. This works pretty well; for sheer carnage, RA2 is hard to beat, often filling the screen with more units, shrapnel, lightning bolts, lasers, and assorted debris than you can shake a yelping attack dog at.

The interface is essentially the same as in previous games, with a number of welcome reforms. Chief among them is the use of tabs to quickly switch between buildings, defenses, troops, and vehicles – eliminating the frantic scroll-fest of earlier C&C titles. Also gone, mercifully, is TIBERIAN SUN's stillborn waypoint system, replaced here with a much more intuitive hotkey system similar to TOTAL ANNIHILATION's. The unit-experience system introduced in TIBERIAN SUN has also been tweaked, to the point where it's now occasionally useful. Production queuing and rally points are cleanly implemented, but anyone expecting fancier features like AGE OF KINGS-style formations will be disappointed – RA2 is still very much a "mob 'em" experience rather than an exercise in small unit tactics.

And Now the Good News

So far, so blah. The big surprise in RA2 is the unit mix. Where TIBERIAN SUN stuck to a conservative mix of tanks and troopers with one or two side-specific specialist units, RA2 chucks in everything but the kitchen sink. Yes, your engineers are still here, along with some returning units like super-commando Tanya, but practically everything else is new.

Not only do the two sides feature almost completely different unit mixes, but in multiplayer and skirmish mode you can select from one of eight countries, each with a different specialty unit – such as the British Sniper or the Iraqi Desolator. These can make quite a difference, as you'll learn the first time an atom-bomb-packing suicide van from Libya cruises into your base.

The sheer variety and imagination of the new units (see sidebar) go a long way towards making up for the dated engine. Even versus the computer skirmish opponent, it's a blast playing around with new and exotic tactics. Perhaps a Chrono Legionnaire rush will succeed in erasing your opponent's base from history? Or maybe a wave of mind-controlling commandos can turn your opponent's own troops against him? Only time will tell how finely balanced the units are in multiplayer, but I can honestly say I haven't had this much good old-fashioned fun with an RTS in a long time.

We Will Bury You

In the final analysis, RA2 certainly doesn't do much to advance the state of the art, and if you've tired of the real-time strategy genre, it probably won't renew your interest. But the nicely-tuned interface and flamboyant units make it an engaging blast from the past for gamers who can overlook the engine. For C&C fans, this is unquestionably the best title in the series; it's the game TIBERIAN SUN should have been. CGW

Red Alert 2's New Units

SOVIET FORCES

Crazy Ivan

This demolitions expert can attach a ticking time-bomb to pretty much anything: passing harvesters, enemy buildings, even wandering civilians or cows.

Yuri

These psychic troopers can take control of any one enemy unit, directing its actions until killed.

Desolator

The special unit for Iraq is equipped with a massive nuclear cannon. His special ability allows him to bathe a vast swath of land in deadly radiation.

Terror Drone

This spider-like robot can savage enemy infantry, but its main task is to disable vehicles by leaping inside and tearing them apart from within.

ALLIED FORCES

Chrono Legionnaire

These elite troops can teleport anywhere on the map instantly. Their attack simply erases a unit or building out of time.

Spy

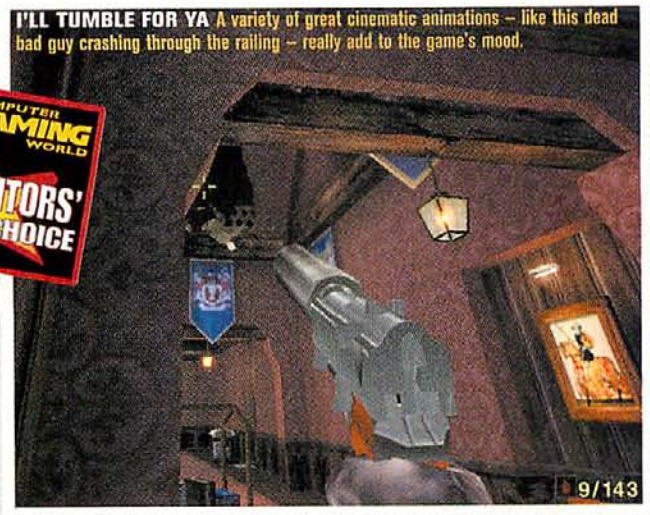
These masters of disguise can give you a variety of bonuses, depending on the building they infiltrate. For instance, sneaking into a Tech Base will allow you to build a new super-unit, while hitting a radar station will erase your opponent's map.

Mirage Tank

Capable of disguising itself as a tree, this stealth unit can make for some strange Macbeth-like scenarios as a high-caliber forest advances on you.

Prism Tower

The Allied response to the Soviet Tesla Coil, Prism Towers multiply their firepower by the number of towers in the 'network,' that is, within range of each other.



I'LL TUMBLE FOR YA A variety of great cinematic animations – like this dead bad guy crashing through the railing – really add to the game's mood.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

GETTING' MEDI-EVEL KNIEVEL ON YOU A few useable vehicles in the game means you'll have the chance to save bullets by running over bad guys on your motorcycle.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER goes undercover and over the top

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

reviewed by Robert Coffey

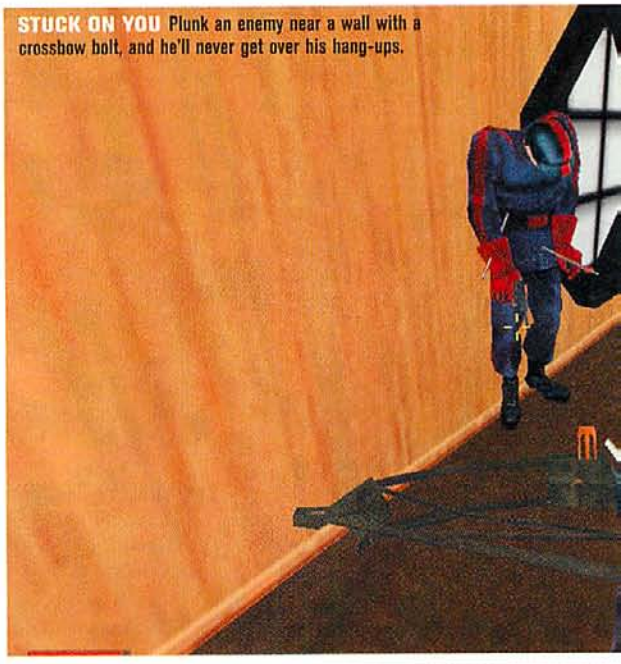
The glamorous and deadly world of jet-set spies is the ultimate old-boys network, with every rakish covert operative armed with a sly wit, a silenced pistol, and a great big sloppy Y chromosome. Breaking through the bulletproof glass ceiling would appear an impossible task, a challenge requiring ingenuity, energy, and a daring approach to a seemingly invulnerable obstacle. Breaking through the humdrum design of the average first-person shooter is no less daunting a task, yet NO ONE LIVES FOREVER shatters the barriers of convention with irreverent humor, inventive missions, and tense, gripping action.

Kitten With a Whip

You play as Cate Archer, a paragon of bravado and confidence sheathed in a skin-tight, psychedelic, leatherette catsuit. A reformed thief and neophyte secret agent for UNITY – a clandestine law and order organization operating for Her Royal Highness – Cate must not only save the world from the evil machinations of HARM, but prove to her superiors and colleagues that an agent can succeed with a metaphorical rather than literal set of big brass thunderballs.

By setting itself in swinging 60's London, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER (NOLF) immediately sets itself apart from other shooters not only in terms of timeframe, but in its attitude as well. With liberal doses of the campy spy fare of the era, NOLF is as much an homage to *Get Smart*, *In Like Flint*, and *The Avengers* as it is classic 007. The cheeky, playful sense of humor that infuses almost every aspect of the game is one of the principal reasons NOLF is such a pleasure to play. While your arsenal is primarily realistic, most of your special-use gadgets are as tongue-in-cheek jokey as they are useful: cat's eye sunglasses that can scan for mines or lasers, exploding lipsticks, a wind-up mechanical poodle for distracting guard dogs, and an enormous mod belt buckle that does double duty as a zipline.

But your inventory pales in comparison to the brilliantly funny dialogue. Much of the humor plays out as straight-faced, classic two-



STUCK ON YOU Plunk an enemy near a wall with a crossbow bolt, and he'll never get over his hang-ups.

CGW RATED

PROS
Fresh, funny, and challenging—what more do you need?

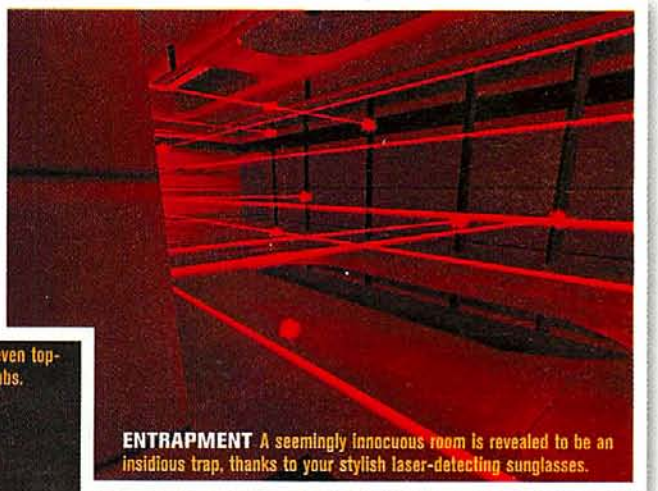
CONS
Cut-scenes are in need of some serious trimming.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 325MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium III, 128 MB RAM, 900MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet via Gamespy (2-16 players).

Publisher: Fox Interactive • Developer: Monolith • $45 • www.foxinteractive.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence, comic mischief, mild language.

person comedy routines, with one NPC acting as the other's straight man. Many of these exchanges take place as overheard dialogue while you sneak through various HARM installations; whether it's two scientists offering each other relaxing massages, a cruel guard taunting another about how his eyeballs will be scooped out, or a foot soldier discovering a slain comrade and flatly stating, "This does not look good here – dead person," the one constant is that it's funny. Even the exchanges you have with various deep-cover contacts are funny: A series of sexually suggestive codephrases leads to your colleagues lamenting the demeaning nature of their remarks, speculating as to how big a loser the cryptographer is, and observing, "These codephrases have a rather confessional nature, don't you think?" Appropriately cartoonish voice-acting and clever dialogue make it all work.

SPACE JUNK A meteor shower during a space station mission forces you to race for an escape pod, or die trying.



ENTRAPMENT A seemingly innocuous room is revealed to be an insidious trap, thanks to your stylish laser-detecting sunglasses.

FEELING GROOVY In the swinging '60's, even top-secret evil space stations have groovy nightclubs.

PUPPET GOVERNMENT Meet the brains behind the global force for evil that is HARM – a hand puppet.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the frequently interminable cut-scenes. While the game successfully plays as an interactive spy movie, the in-engine cut-scenes often as not bring the action to a grinding halt. Yes, they do a good job of pushing the engaging twists and turns of the story forward, but they go off on so many lengthy and unrelated tangents that you are likely to find yourself slapping the space bar to skip them, and thus forfeiting plot elements that set up the following mission.

Spy Hard

NOLF is broken up into 15 episodes, each mission-based, each with several levels, each with a variety of objectives that are likely to change mid-mission. And many of those missions, especially in the latter half of the game, are hard.

But the inventiveness and variety make even the toughest of the missions compelling. The tip-off that these won't be your ordinary shooter levels comes with your very first assignment: Charged with protecting a thick-headed diplomat, you set up in a hotel room and snipe at a slew of would-be assassins. This shooting gallery mission is a far cry from the typical run-and-gun. And the missions just keep getting better: You'll have to escape a sinking ship, battle attack copters from an Alpine tram, and sneak past scores of surveillance cameras to stow away on a spaceship. You'll even free-fall from a crashing plane – whizzing past flocks of geese, shooting at pursuing skydivers – all while you plummet towards a bad guy in order to commandeer his parachute. It's thrilling, it's challenging, and it's incredible fun.

Even the more straightforward missions reflect the same care and attention to detail that make them stand above the average shooter. The walls of that sinking ship groan and buckle as it collapses under water pressure, harpoons from your speargun will pin enemy scuba divers to walls, and your adventures aboard a space station are interrupted by a catastrophic meteor storm. And when you face off against a boss, most of the time it defies the usual "fire rocket launcher *ad nauseum*" prototype: In one boss encounter, you have one frenzied minute to herd innocent civilians off the streets; in another, you are charged with the best mission objective ever – "Kick Armstrong's Arse."

Kiss Me Deadly

As fanciful as much of NOLF is, a lot of the game's rewards come as a result of its real-world elements. The nerve-wracking stealth missions ramp up tension, thanks to surveillance cameras that set off alarms when they pass over dead bodies, guards that not only hear you but pursue you, and the very logical fact that shooting out security cameras will alert security personnel that something is not as it should be. As in ROGUE SPEAR (and real life), you're much more accurate firing your weapon when standing still – but you're an easier target if you do.

And don't let the general buffoonery of your enemies fool you – these are some tough adversaries. The AI will run and alert other guards, fan out and take cover when attacking you in packs, exploit higher ground when possible, and trigger alarms if threatened. But they don't cheat. They have the same weapons as you and the same vulnerability, there's just more of them.

Real-world weapons such as a .38 revolver or a 9mm submachine gun form the bulk of your arsenal, though there is a rocket-launcher disguised as a briefcase. What really makes a difference in damage are your bullets: Dum-dum bullets pound enemy flesh, phosphorous rounds keep burning after they hit, and cyanide-tipped bullets slowly poison (and will make you hallucinate a floating flock of bleating goats). There are no traditional power-ups in the game, so while you'll be able to pick up new body armor during a mission, you generally won't be able to repair health damage. And forget about an invisibility or quad damage boost.

NOLF pretty much hits every nail square on the head. Except for the painfully long cut-scenes and an inability to review the intelligence item you pick up during a mission, the designers have created a slyly funny game that deftly combines bullet-spraying action, THIEF-style sneaking, and imaginative storytelling. NO ONE LIVES FOREVER is the best single-player shooter of the year. CGW

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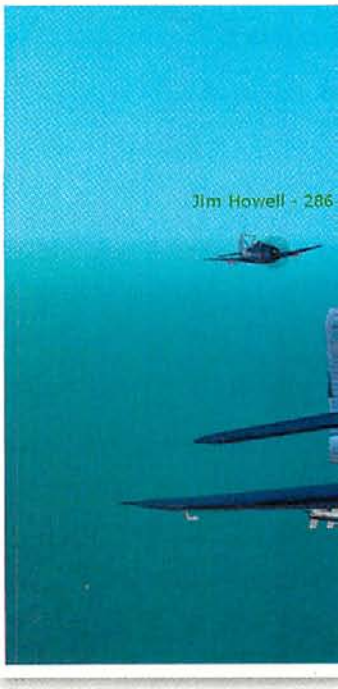
CFS2 revisits the South Pacific, and keeps it fun

Beyond Midway



COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2: WAR IN THE PACIFIC

reviewed by Loyd Case

When I was a kid, I used to hang out at the army base where my dad worked, and read the U.S. Army Field Manuals. Back then, a lot of content in those manuals was in comic book format, and was surprisingly well done. The 300-plus page COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 (CFS2) manual reminds me of those old army manuals, with a slightly updated, edgier style. The in-game cut-scenes and interface screens use the same comic style as well.

This style provides some real atmosphere – the kind that's missing in many sims. It's also a testament to the attention to detail in CFS2. The flight combat adheres to the same level of detail, though some other areas are lacking a bit.

Naval Gazing

CFS2 focuses on naval aviation, for the most part. While there are nods to the American and Japanese army fliers, the two campaigns focus on these nations' navies. In either case, you'll play a fighter pilot flying carrier-based aircraft, though you will sometimes fly from ground-based strips. While the campaigns are scripted, they differ considerably from the first game in this series; there are more missions, and the campaign structure allows for branching. The missions are consistent, so your default aircraft makes sense in their contexts. You can start a pilot's career at any number of key times during the war, usually at the point of a major battle.

There are some oddities. Despite being an ensign, you are always in command of a flight. And if you start later in the war, everyone in your squadron is still a rookie. These are clearly gameplay-balancing enhancements, and didn't detract from the overall historical feel (for me, anyway). More odd, however, was the ability to change the default aircraft to planes that simply didn't make sense – allowing a P-38 to be chosen for a carrier mission, or letting a Japanese pilot pick an F6F Hellcat.

During a career, there are a series of fairly generic missions, punctuated by major real battles. For example, when flying as a Japanese pilot, there were a number of bomber intercept missions while based in New Guinea, followed by the Battle of the Coral Sea. In fact, the generic missions are often fairly easy, whereas the historical missions can be pretty tough.

Take to the Sky

CFS2's manual gives some performance specs for all the planes in the game – flyable and non-flyable – but missing are some crucial speeds and feeds like Vne (velocity never exceed, the plane's safest maximum speed), corner velocity (speed at which the plane can turn the tightest), and approach speed (speed at which you land). The CFS2 team researched deeper performance specs of the game's planes, but found conflicting data, and for this reason decided to omit these specs. Still, giving some idea as to what these speeds are for each plane would have been awfully helpful.

The flight models seem a bit forgiving, but they do behave properly. It's fairly easy to get yourself into a spin if you're not paying attention, but spin recovery is pretty straightforward, even in a twitchy plane like the F4U-1A Corsair. Torque seems to be properly modeled, and at the highest settings, you have to manage your energy properly in order to be successful. In fact, energy management is the name of the game, because the AI has been programmed to manage energy much like human pilots. The overall AI is considerably improved over the previous CFS; I didn't see any undamaged AI planes auger in, though I did witness two dimwits collide with each other on takeoff. At the highest settings, the AI pilots seem to take advantage of the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of their individual aircraft. Hellcat pilots will try "boom and zoom" tactics, whereas Zero pilots will try to engage you in a "knife fight" or turning battle. Note that whatever your flight model settings, the AI will always use the most realistic flight model.

Where CFS2 excels is in the ability to make you feel like you're flying World War II

FOREIGN RELATIONS A Hellcat sends its warmest regards to a Japanese base.

CGW RATED

PROS

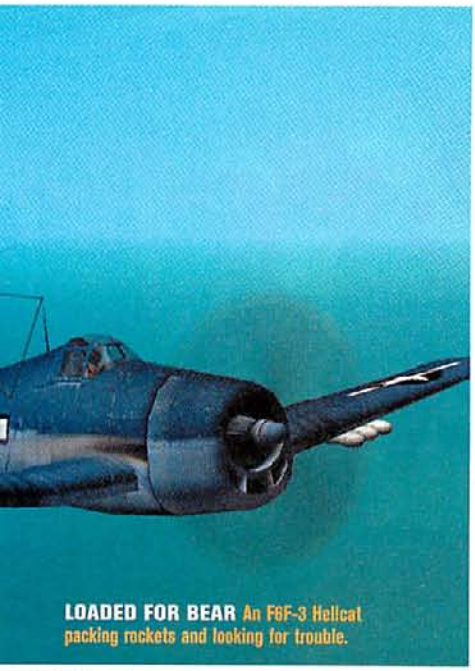
Great visuals; excellent combat feel and atmosphere; accessible; highly expandable.

CONS

The world outside the aircraft seems sparse; limited multiplayer options.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz, 32MB RAM, 4MB graphics card, 350MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM.
3D Support: DirectX **Multiplayer Support:** Modem, TCP/IP, the Zone.

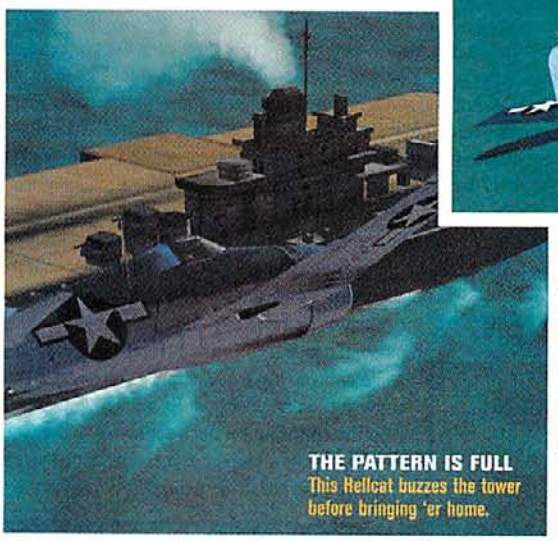
Publisher: Microsoft • **$40** • **www.microsoft.com/games**
ESRB Rating: Everyone



LOADED FOR BEAR An F6F-3 Hellcat packing rockets and looking for trouble.

TERROR FROM ABOVE
A Zero prepares to strafe these U.S. carriers.

FLYING SHOTGUN
A Hellcat flies escort for a B-24 on a bombing run.



THE PATTERN IS FULL
This Hellcat buzzes the tower before bringing 'er home.

ON FINAL The LSO is your best friend during carrier traps.

birds over the Pacific. The scale of some of the missions is enormous, and fuel management becomes critical. The aircraft models themselves are highly detailed, with moving control surfaces (even cowl flaps), fully-functional cockpit controls, and even retractable canopies. CFS2's career (campaign) mode avoids the "re-fly to get it right" syndrome; you can actually fail to achieve mission goals for several consecutive missions before getting the boot. But if your pilot actually dies, you either have to re-fly the mission or be willing to start a new career.

In addition to career mode, there are training missions and a number of stand-alone missions based on actual historical flights by Pacific War aces on both sides. Some of the stand-alone missions have a lot of aircraft in the sky, and even a fast system can bog down a bit. There's also a quick random-mission creator for instant action buffs. Multiplayer is limited to flying against other humans (no AI aircraft or co-op modes), but you can fly on teams.

Flight and Fight

Combat in the air is a pure joy, even when you're outnumbered or outgunned. Control response is crisp, and CFS2 supports multiple controllers, much like its civil aviation cousin; force-feedback is also supported. I flew with rudder, throttle, and stick – all of which behaved just like you'd expect. The padlock system works well if you're in virtual cockpit mode, and the view system is uniformly excellent. Near the ground, the level of detail starts to fall a bit. You have ample opportunity for close air support – during one mission, I flew right along the front lines between U.S. Marines and the Imperial Japanese Army. But you never see any activity on the ground; vehicles don't seem to move, nor are there human figures dashing across the landscape. Naval missions seem a little more robust – if two enemy vessels encounter each other, they'll fight, but carrier operations seem sterile. When attacking enemy carriers, I never caught them with planes on the deck, which happened on a number of occasions during the war in the Pacific.

Clearly, Microsoft put the lion's share of its efforts into the fighter pilot experience. Even the choice of flyable aircraft is limited to fighters; you can't fly torpedo- or dive-bombers. However, like CFS1 and FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000, CFS2 boasts an open architecture. Already, flyable versions of American carrier attack aircraft have appeared on fan sites (see **thehangar.dogfighter.com** for some examples). The sim feels and looks best when you're in the air-to-air furballs.

Room to Grow

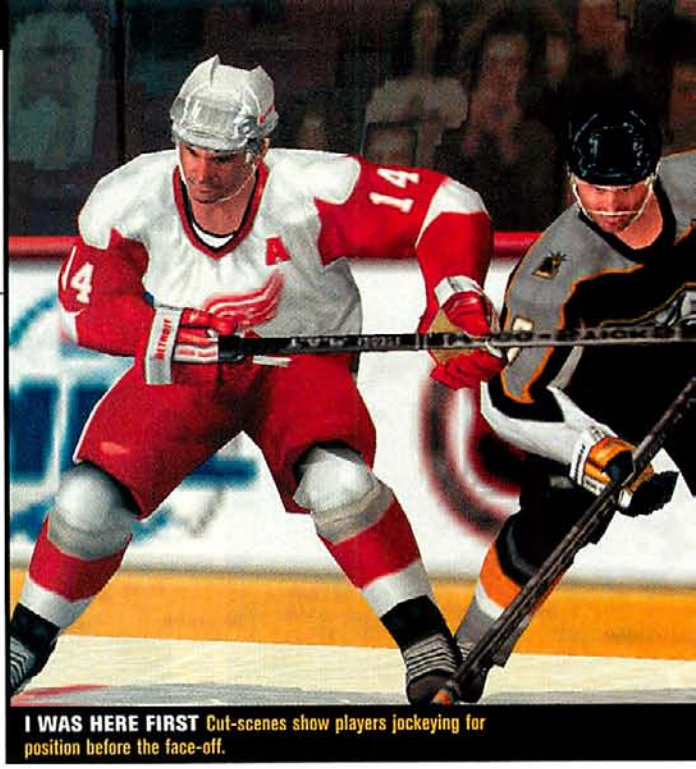
As noted above, CFS2 has an open architecture, so the cottage industry of add-on makers for CFS1 is busy working on add-ons for CFS2. However, owners of the game have some terrific options as well. Microsoft shipped a mission creator in the box. The mission builder is a sophisticated tool that allows you to build missions with multiple triggers, scripted events, and semi-random encounters. You can even create your own campaigns, though that means learning the file format for the campaign files, which are simply text files.

If you want to experience CFS2 in all its simulation goodness, there's a price to pay. The system requirements are pretty steep if you want to turn on all the features. But Microsoft's newest combat sim is such a tremendous improvement over the original, sim buffs owe it to themselves to check it out. CGW

NHL 2001 shoots and scores

Shot on Goal

EA Sports' NHL series has consistently sold a bazillion copies and thrilled arcade hockey gamers with hyper-kinetic action and enough eye and ear candy to make Dreamworks jealous. But the game frustrated those who were looking for a truly realistic NHL simulation. When Fox dropped production of the only other PC hockey simulation (NHL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000), the oh-so-wise pundits predicted that – with no competition to drive significant realism improvements – NHL 2001 would just be more of the same. We were wrong. Good gosh almighty, we were wrong. If you don't like NHL 2001, then you don't like PC hockey games. Or PC sports games. You probably don't even like to have fun. You may be dead.



I WAS HERE FIRST Cut-scenes show players jockeying for position before the face-off.

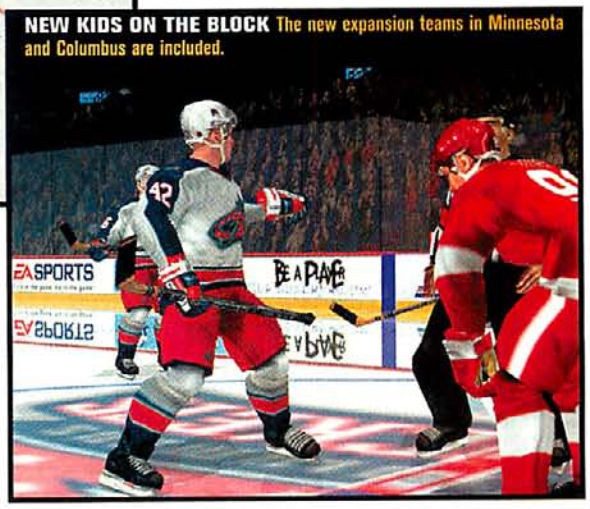
NHL 2001
reviewed by Jeff Lackey

Have It Your Way

All of the jaw-dropping graphics and special effects are back in spades. This is one area that EA Sports has always nailed in this series, with nearly photo-realistic recreations of every rink in the NHL, players that actually look like their real-life counterparts, cut-scenes between plays that display players chatting with teammates and coaches giving advice on the bench, and much more. The background music, the crowd chanting, the reverberation of missed slap shots banging into the boards – everything here pulls you into the game in a way that is unsurpassed by any sports game on any platform. If you have a speedy machine and a good 3D video card, turn your speakers up to 11, crank this baby up, and show it to your buddy when he brags about his super console games. But you already knew that NHL 2001 would be a superstar in the sound and graphics departments. So what makes NHL 2001 such a revolutionary step in this franchise?

It's the sliders. The glorious, miraculous sliders. In a burst of inspired genius, the designers of NHL 2001 must have scratched their heads and said "Instead of trying to determine the perfect gameplay settings, why not just let the gamers configure that for themselves?" And thus was born the first hockey sim that can please everyone from the wild-eyed action gamer who wants a rock'em-sock'em arcade-fest, to the hardcore NHL realism aficionado. You can adjust 17 facets of gameplay, such as game speed, aggressiveness, hitting power, frequency of injuries, frequency of penalties, goalie skills, shot accuracy, and much more. EA, in effect, lets you program the game to play it the way you like it. Think that the passing is too accurate? Bump the passing-accuracy slider down a notch or two, and say goodbye to end-to-end pinpoint passes. You say you're still learning the game and you like everything, but you just can't score yet? Keep your goalie's skill level up and drop the opposing keeper's slider down, until you have competitive games. You complain that you've measured the elasticity of the pucks used in the

3 ON 2 A nice pass to the open player results in a goal.



NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK The new expansion teams in Minnesota and Columbus are included.

CGW RATED

PROS

All the eye and ear candy you'd expect from an EA Sports game; the ability to tailor almost every aspect of gameplay.

CONS

The computer scores far too frequently from the blue line and beyond; defensive AI is still a peg short of ideal; online play is spotty.

Requirements: Pentium 200 MHz or AMD K6/K7, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, supported 4MB or higher 3D card with D3D or Glide driver, 4X CDROM.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 500 MHz, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, 8X CDROM. **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide.
Multiplayer Support: 2-8 players over LAN, modem to modem, or Internet via EA server or TCP/IP.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** EA Canada • $40 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

NHL at rink temperatures and they bounce too much in NHL 2001? Get a life. Then, lower the puck-elasticity slider until the game meets your scholarly ideals.

The result is a hockey game that is a lot of fun and a real challenge for every taste. In addition, some of the other bugbears of previous games in the franchise have either been eliminated or severely reduced. No longer are there super-goalies that stop every shot, save a few from specific sweet spots. Goals in NHL 2001 are generally satisfying. While some of the AI goals will be quick "where did THAT come from?" slap shots (and these occur in the real NHL), many are the result of pretty plays on the computer's part and/or mistakes on your part. Goals from your team are usually the result of nice one-timers, deflections, rebounds, and even the occasional blast from the point. Unfortunately, all is not perfection: Your AI foes will often fire a shot from halfway across the ice that slides right past your goalie, far more frequently than occurs in real life. (Note: EA has released a patch that is supposed to help alleviate this problem.)

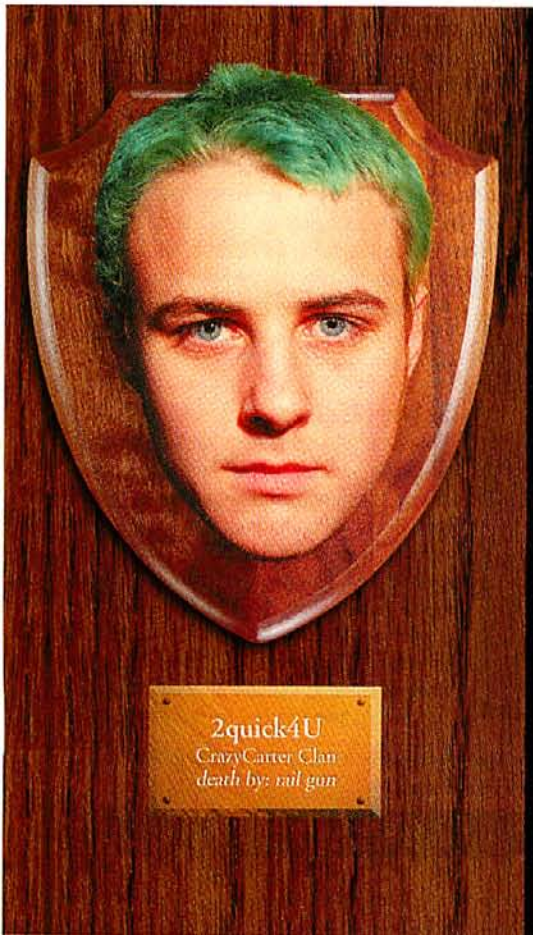
IT WAS A BANANA PEEL, REF
A little hooking action behind the play.

In the Net

While the configuration sliders are the key to the paradigm shift in NHL 2001, there are other improvements of note. A momentum meter displays the shift in that intangible factor, with big plays, big hits, and goals contributing to a team's gain in momentum and the resulting boost in play. The franchise mode, while still limited to 10 years, features AI general managers who are quite a bit smarter than last year. As for fighting: It's lame. Turn it off. Get a Dreamcast and ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHALLENGE if you want a fighting game.

There are a couple of other areas that still need improvment. Defenders often stand and watch a forward blow by them before they decide to turn and give chase. The computer doesn't exactly strike terror in your heart when they get a power play. And online play appears to be very spotty right now. But even with those minor flaws – as well as the more significant frequent long-range AI scoring problem – NHL 2001 is a gem. By setting the new standard in user configurability, the designers of NHL 2001 have completely disproved the old saying that "the surest way to failure is to try to please everybody." NHL 2001 is the game that hockey fans have been waiting for. CGW

LISTEN UP! Coaches give their players a little sideline encouragement.



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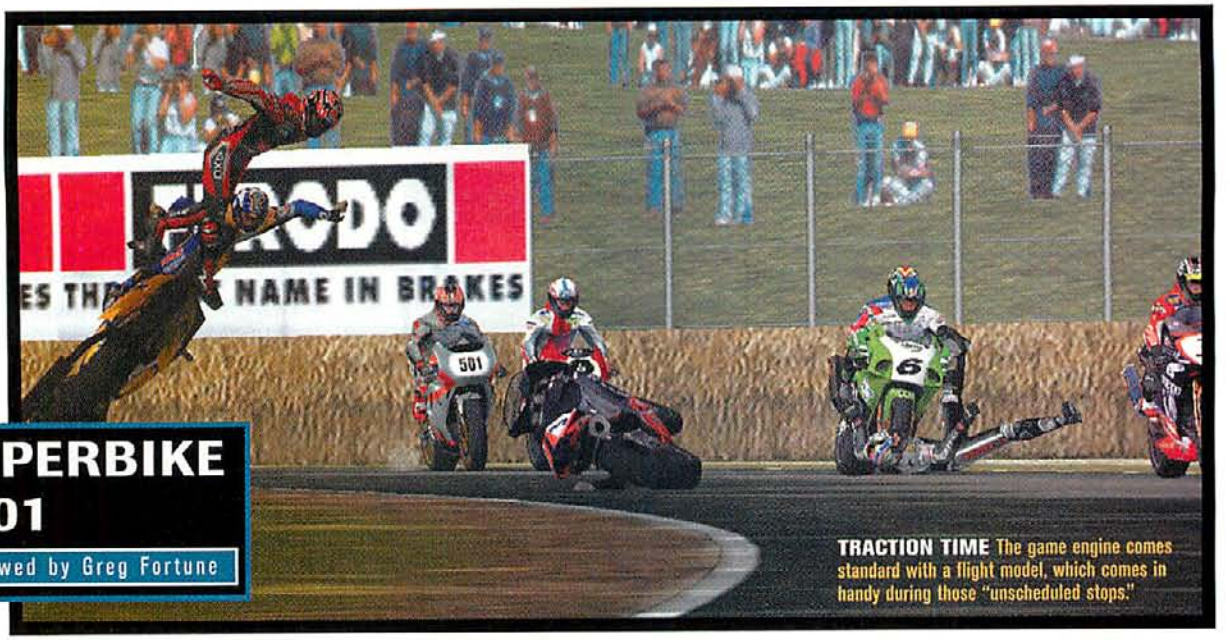


TRACTION TIME The game engine comes standard with a flight model, which comes in handy during those "unscheduled stops."

SUPERBIKE 2001

reviewed by Greg Fortune

Superbike 2001 earns the right to wear boots and a cape

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's...

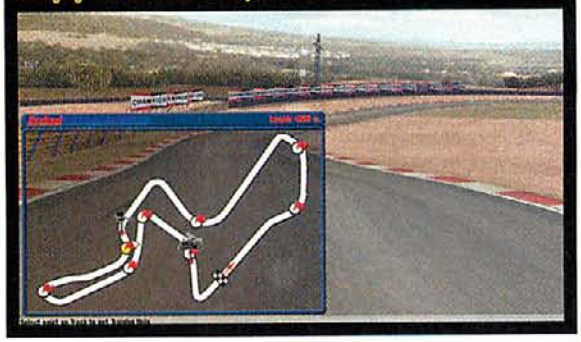
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Some activities are reserved for Supermen, no matter how badly we mere mortals wish this were not the case. Piloting jet fighters. Performing black ops missions. Driving Indy cars, dragsters, or production race bikes. These are professions so overdosed on intensity and adrenaline that some of us can't help but wish we could take part in them just once. The goal of a simulation should be to give the player a small taste of what an experience like that might be like, without the nasty "give up everything else in your life" side effects that usually go along with it. To that end, SUPERBIKE 2001 is an outstanding sim.

Time to Get Schooled!

The courses are incredibly detailed and a joy to ride. Every twist and turn of each track is faithfully reproduced, all the way down to the little dips, bumps, and rough patches that add character to a course. Three new courses have been added since last year's offering – bringing the total number of tracks up to 15 – and they make great additions to the game. In order to race competitively on any of these tracks, you have to know the track you're riding in detail. You've got to know where to pass, where to stay cool, which corners are longer than you think and what gear to take the second chicane in. While other games may leave this all for you to figure out, SUPERBIKE 2001 provides you with a corner-by-corner tutorial of each track. Let me tell you, this is a great feature! In fact, after running through the tutorials for a couple of the tracks, I eagerly switched to manual transmission mode so I could be sure to use the proper gearing for each turn. I really appreciated the fact that the help system gave me information that allowed me to be more in control of the bike on a higher-difficulty setting, rather than just restating the obvious. Also new this year is a practice mode, so you can now get the hang of the tracks riding solo before having to worry about traffic. These two new features alone make this a worthy successor to SUPERBIKE 2001.

HOW'S THAT AGAIN? The nicely-detailed tutorial walks you through the course visually and verbally, with lots of tips about optimal gearing and changing road surfaces. Would you like fries with that?



The Way I See It

The external racing views and the replay system remain relatively unchanged since last year, which is fine, given just how good these already were. Helmet cams, however, have been greatly improved. Now, rather than having your helmet remain directly over the handlebars, your point-of-view actually shifts off axis from the bike, just as your head would if you were actually leaning into a turn. At first, this shift in POV is quite disorienting, but after a couple of laps I forgot all about racing from the third-person viewpoint.

CGW RATED

PROS

The best road racing game out there, for arcade- and sim-racers alike; a complete lack of game crashes, bugs, and other annoyances.

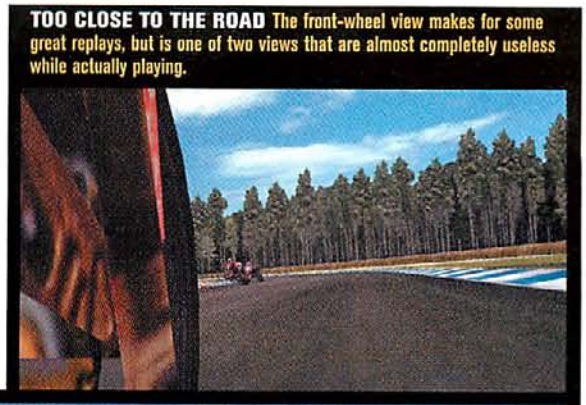
CONS

There's only so much time in the day...

Requirements: Pentium or K6 266 MHz, 32 MB RAM, 400 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II or K7 300 MHz, 64 MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-6 players over Internet or TCP/IP; 2 player split-screen mode.

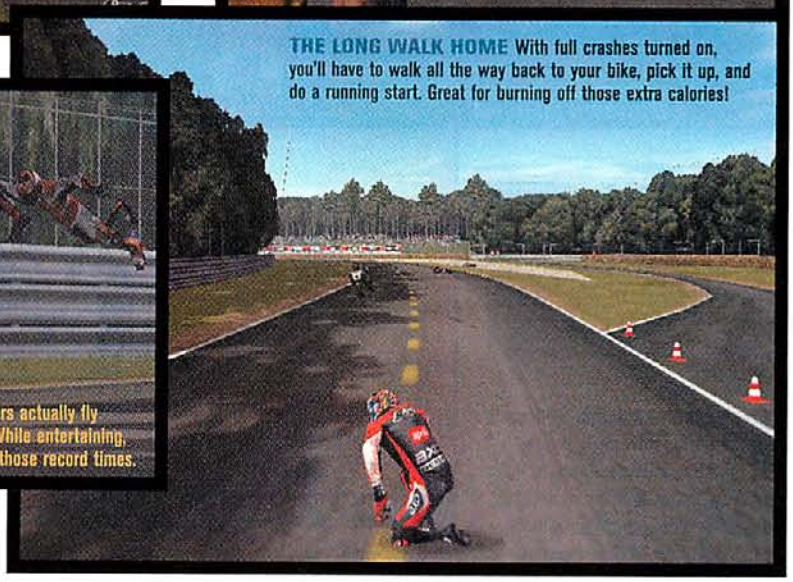
Publisher: EA Sports • Developer: EA Sports • $40 • www.easports.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

JUST HANGIN' OUT Here's a helmet-cam view heading into a chicane. Notice how your point of view is not directly over the bars, adding to the impression of the leaning bike.



TOO CLOSE TO THE ROAD The front-wheel view makes for some great replays, but is one of two views that are almost completely useless while actually playing.

LOOK, MA, NO BIKE! The motion-captured riders actually fly through the air with flailing arms and kicking legs. While entertaining, these maneuvers aren't recommended for turning in those record times.



THE LONG WALK HOME With full crashes turned on, you'll have to walk all the way back to your bike, pick it up, and do a running start. Great for burning off those extra calories!

The new helmet-cam view is not only completely usable, but from my experience, preferable. It's definitely one of those little things that make a huge difference. I went back and played SUPERBIKE 2000 a while to see if I was over-reacting, and I don't think I am. The head motion actually helps you get into that zone where disbelief is suspended and you forget that you're playing a video game, not riding a bike. When accelerating out of a turn at full throttle, you can almost sense the asphalt sliding away mere inches from your knee.

Bike setup is a breeze, and the effects of each setup decision are nicely explained right there in the interface. Oddly, you must actually get onto the track and enter the pits before you can tweak your bike; but you can do that in any mode, including training mode. Once you have the bike dialed in the way you like it, you can save your configuration for use later. In fact, you can create a different bike setup for each track in training mode, then load and unload the settings when you decide to race. On a level track with long straights, you'll want stiffer springs and a higher top end. On a course with lots of tight corners and short straight sections, that setup would be disastrous! The ability to get your bike completely dialed in for each course and to save your configurations for a run at the championship is an extremely nice feature that will be appreciated by anyone looking to compete on the higher difficulty levels.

Multiplayer options in SUPERBIKE 2001 are pretty standard, with the game supporting LAN and Internet games over IP. The manual claims that the game can support up to eight players, but strongly recommends that you restrict yourself to six or fewer players for performance reasons. If you are going to max-out the engine, you'd better be sure you're running it on some pretty fast iron. There's also a split-screen option that is surprisingly playable, though you'll have to be content with the third-person viewpoint in this mode. Since there's no persistent online community for SUPERBIKE 2001, you'll need to know the IP address of the machine hosting the game in order to connect across the network. For those looking for a modem-to-modem connection, you unfortunately won't find it here.

SPLIT PERSONALITY The split-screen mode allows you to race pretty effectively against another rider on one machine. You will, however, lose the first-person views.

Here They Come Down the Back Straight...

After spending many hours playing SUPERBIKE 2001, I can honestly say it is the best motorcycle road racing game I have ever played. It's smooth, fast, stable, and a whole lot of fun. With lots of difficulty options, you should have no trouble finding a setup that works with your skill level. If you are a racing sim enthusiast, this is one game that is well worth the price of admission. CGW

MIDTOWN MADNESS The world of Stark in all its technological glory.

THE LONGEST JOURNEY is one of the year's best adventures

Fantastic Voyage

DO YOU PLAY *D&D*? What would the magical realm of Arcadia be without a few dragons?

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

reviewed by Audrey Wells

THE LONGEST JOURNEY, Funcom's stunning adventure game, finally made available to U.S. audiences after months of delays, deals with the age-old notions of the conflicts between science and magic, rationality and irrationality, reality and fantasy. In THE LONGEST JOURNEY, the world has been divided in two: There is Stark, a bleak technological wasteland; and Arcadia, a whimsical but stagnant world of magic. They were separated from each other long ago to prevent humankind from mindlessly destroying their world and themselves.

A force called the Balance – watched over by a Guardian – sustains the separation. The two worlds have been divided for so long, that it would be catastrophic for them to be reunited if the moment wasn't right. Unfortunately, the moment is *not* right and the Guardian is nowhere to be found. The Balance is collapsing and the magical world of Arcadia is leaking into Stark, causing all kinds of disorder. There's only one person who can thwart the impending destruction.

So, Who's the Lucky Heroine?

The fate of both of the worlds rests on the young shoulders of April Ryan, who happens to have an intricate destiny laid out for her and a knack for traveling between these two parallel worlds – though she doesn't know it just yet. At first, the 18-year-old appears to be leading an unremarkable life in Stark. She recently left home to escape a suppressive family and to pursue an art degree. Her only major troubles in life were dealing with the jerk across the hall and meeting her art competition deadlines. She has a small but supportive circle of friends, a job at the local café, and a room to herself. What more could a girl want?

It all begins with April's strange dreams of fantastic creatures and ethereal places during the night, a growing source of anxiety for the budding artist. All is not well when the delicate Balance begins to collapse – the dreams are no longer confined to sleep. Soon, otherworldly creatures and scenes begin appearing from out of thin air, to the astonishment of April and other Stark citizens. With the help of an enigmatic and shadowy man, April learns of Stark's sister-world, the Balance, the missing Guardian, and her unique talent for "shifting" or traveling between the worlds. As a Shifter, April has a duty to help restore the Balance before it's too late.

COLOR ME OVERWHELMED April Ryan, burgeoning artist and the savior of not one, but two large worlds.

CGW RATED

PROS

Superb graphics; unparalleled depth of storyline, characters, and dialogue.

CONS

Dialogue may be too lengthy for some.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32 MB RAM, 16bit video card with 2 MB RAM, 300 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II 266MHz, 64 MB RAM, 1 GB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Tri Synergy • **Developer:** Funcom • **$40** • **www.longestjourney.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Mature

And We Do Mean "Longest"

THE LONGEST JOURNEY does not skimp on gameplay, unfolding over 13 lengthy, gorgeously rendered chapters. Over the course of the game's intricate plot, you will encounter a delightful assortment of characters, puzzles, and locales. There's a lot to accomplish before it's all over, making for a thoroughly satisfying gaming experience.

The game often revolves around lengthy conversations between April and other characters, fundamental to understanding the story. The length of the conversations is usually a treat rather than a nuisance because the voice-acting is superb, the script is well written, and the characters are all unique and interesting. Subtitles are available, and it's a simple matter to ESCape your way through dialogue after reading it if you find it tedious to listen (but I don't recommend this).

The characters in THE LONGEST JOURNEY are truly a motley group, ranging from profanity-spouting neighbors and openly homosexual landladies in Stark, to blue-skinned women and strange creatures who "flow with time" (rather than living in the present) in Arcadia. Profanity is used maturely and is never gratuitous, but makes the game unsuitable for younger children. The game also has an underlying sense of humor, providing welcome moments of comic reprieve. April and a few other characters impart some truly witty comments and perform some actions – like challenging an evil alchemist to a game of hopscotch – that will make you laugh despite the game's serious subject matter.

Puzzles in THE LONGEST JOURNEY are very well orchestrated.

ART SCHOOL THE LONGEST JOURNEY features some of the best rendered art and cut-scenes in any game this year.

WE INTERRUPT THIS EPIC... One of the funny moments: April challenges an evil alchemist to a game of hopscotch.

Many of them are straightforward and relatively simple, which help keep the focus on the story, but there are a few really clever stumpers that present a hearty challenge for even the most seasoned of adventure gamers. All of the puzzles can be solved with a good dose of logical thinking and perseverance. None are so ridiculous or unfair to the point that you'll need hints to get past them.

A Real Gem

The game's interface is blissfully uncomplicated, sticking to the standard adventure game point-and-click formula. Pressing the 'X' key helps beginners by indicating the available exits on screen. A conversation log keeps track of all the game's dialogue for future reference, and April's diary gives an ongoing, absorbing account of the story from April's point of view (and provides a few clues as well). You can also replay any of the dazzling video cut-scenes. Features such as these make THE LONGEST JOURNEY easily approachable whether you're an adventure gaming novice or aficionado, and add much to the overall quality.

The excellent storyline, medley of interesting characters, well-written dialogue, challenging puzzles, and wonderfully cinematic musical score will leave an impression on you for quite some time. And perhaps best of all, the game's graphics are absolutely stunning; without a doubt, this is some of the best artwork I have ever seen in a game. As is true in all the best games, it's quite clear that the designers, artists, musicians, and programmers of THE LONGEST JOURNEY poured their hearts and souls into this game, and what emerges is not just a great game but a work of art. CGW

SO, ABOUT THAT RENT CHECK... April chats with her free-spirited landlady, one of the game's many rich, complex characters.

METAL GEAR SOLID is the best console port ever

High Gear

METAL GEAR SOLID
reviewed by Alex Handy

Adventure games aren't dead; they've moved to the consoles and discovered guns.

Our brothers-in-arms at *Electronic Gaming Monthly* gave METAL GEAR SOLID (MGS) a full set of 10's, making it one of only a handful of perfect games and – therefore – one of the best console games ever made. It's not the greatest PC game ever, but MGS is still a top-notch game that offers the best espionage/action/adventure blend out there.

While the gameplay and graphics are top-notch, the plot and dialogue in MGS have lost a little something in the translation from Japanese to English. As a result, the game feels like a cross between a James Bond movie and a soap opera, punctuating the phenomenal action sequences with stilted speeches stuffed with failed sexual innuendo. And, unfortunately, there's more dialogue here than there is in most movies. At times, you may feel like you're listening to a book on tape.

ROLL OUT THE BARREL While most of the guards in the game are dirt-stupid, you'll still have to sneak around and avoid confrontation.

WORK IT, GIRLS In the VR Missions, you can do photo shoots with virtual girls from the game.

Psychic Enemy Network

METAL GEAR SOLID brings some of the most viscerally fun gameplay there is to the PC. While there are several frenzied action sequences, it's MGS's nerve-wrackingly tense stealth missions that set it apart. Quietly snapping a guard's neck while trying not to be seen by surveillance cameras just doesn't get old. And even when it does start to get repetitive, MGS will surprise you with something new and unexpected at every turn. For example, after half an hour of sneaking around the main building, you exit and are faced with a tank, a minefield, and no place to hide. This game also features the only sniper vs. sniper combat I've seen in a game, and it's gripping. Some scenes may feel contrived, but you'll still be hooked from start to finish.

HIND QUARTERS One of many cut-scenes reveals this bad boy that will come after you later in the game. Better find those stinger missiles.

The main reason MGS was considered perfect on the PlayStation-side is that it was designed with that console in mind. For instance, during Snake's confrontation with Psycho Mantis – an elite psychic bad guy – there are three separate occasions when the game uses PlayStation hardware to drive points home: reading your memory cards; rumbling your controller; and even, at one point, forcing you to move your controller from the player-one slot into the player-two slot to avoid your enemy's psychic probes. This is pretty much lost on the PC, and with it goes some of the game's creepy charm.

The PC port makes up for some of METAL GEAR SOLID's shortcomings by including the entire VR Missions disc that was sold as a separate game for the PlayStation. Thus, MGS can't be considered to be too short or too one-sided, since VR Missions add hours of extra gameplay. The extra missions are a welcome bonus, since the variety of gameplay in MGS will keep you glued for long stretches. If you've got the time, you may even beat the game in one or two sittings.

Say What?

The constantly changing and morphing storyline will keep you interested and in stitches (unintentionally). The dialogue is rife with sexual suggestion, as Snake is constantly hitting on any female who appears on his comlink. While in Japan, the game's sexual tension and symbolism were well received and made perfect sense; in the U.S., it's a bit like watching a *Godzilla* movie: The action's great, but the characters can get annoying and laughable.

That doesn't necessarily make MGS any less of a game. In some cases, it makes it more enjoyable, much the same way the original RESIDENT EVIL was loved for its B-movie-style cut-scenes. If you can get past some of the preachier moments, there really is a decent message behind the MGS script. It remains to be seen, however, if gamers will accept videogames with a moral to their stories. Fortunately, with a great game like METAL GEAR SOLID leading the way, we may soon see more social awareness and poetic storytelling in our games. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Fast, funny, innovative gameplay with added bonus of VR Missions.

CONS
Some of the Godzilla-caliber, PlayStation-specific dialogue hasn't changed.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** OpenGL, Direct 3D. **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Konami • **$40** • www.mgspc.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence, mature sexual themes.

EVIL DEAD
HAIL TO THE KING

GROOVY

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AND DEADITES, OH MY!

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PlayStation

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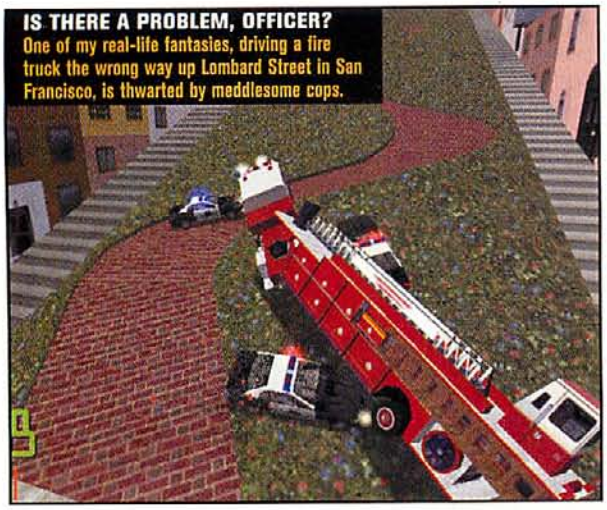
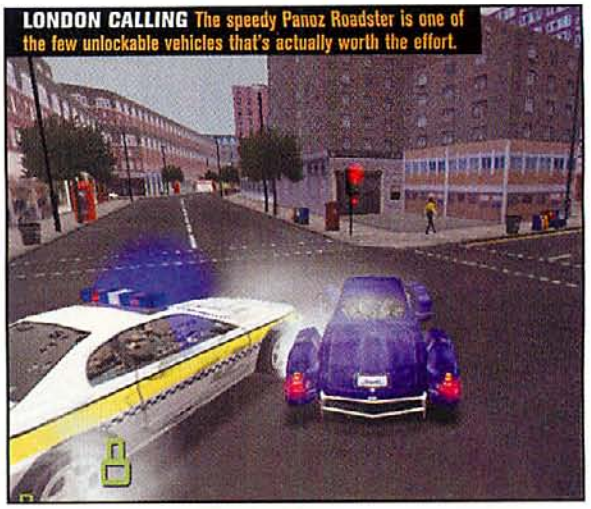


IS THERE A PROBLEM, OFFICER? One of my real-life fantasies, driving a fire truck the wrong way up Lombard Street in San Francisco, is thwarted by meddlesome cops.



LONDON CALLING The speedy Panoz Roadster is one of the few unlockable vehicles that's actually worth the effort.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 is great fun, but needs a tune-up

Get Thee to a Jiffy Lube!

If for nothing else, MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 may be remembered as the only racing game ever to feature a bad Michael Caine impersonator loudly paraphrasing Shakespeare as you drive. Sometimes it's hilarious, sometimes it's insufferable – and that just about perfectly describes the game itself. Microsoft's arcade-style urban racer offers lots of cheap thrills and easy-on-the-brain racing action. But keep your expectations low, make sure you have a robust system, and don't expect any semblance of realism – or you're liable to do what I did: break a brand-new joystick in a fit of rage.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

reviewed by
Jeff "Can't Drive 35" Green

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 gets immediate points because its concept is cool, and one that frazzled urban dwellers cannot help but appreciate. As in the first game (set in Chicago), Microsoft and developer Angel Studios have made vehicular playgrounds out of two cities – San Francisco and London – that are nightmares for drivers in real life, and thus a total blast on the computer where anything goes. It's a great idea, but the execution is flawed.

CGW RATED

PROS

Cool, semi-realistic depictions of San Francisco and London; great new Crash Course mode.

CONS

Some performance problems; blocky graphics; weak physics engine; lousy rewards system.

Double Nickels on the Dime

Both cities are remarkably rendered. Though the game obviously omits many details, it does a great job of capturing each city's basic feel and getting in the crucial streets and landmarks. Numerous smaller details – like the weird sculpture at S.F.'s Justin Herman Plaza – show that the developers did their homework. That said, though, the game gets a *major* demerit for failing to include San Francisco's new Pac Bell ballpark – only the coolest, most important new landmark in the city in decades. The ballpark's been a known fact for years – there's no excuse for its omission.

All the race modes from the first game are back (Checkpoint, Circuit, Blitz, and Cruise), along with the entertaining new Crash Course "career" mode, which tests you in a series of increasingly difficult moves in each city. In San Francisco, you're training to be a movie stunt driver, and on the other side of the pond, you're learning your way around London by driving a cab. Each Crash Course lesson is short, with a specific goal – like making you pop a 180 and hit a checkpoint in just a few seconds. I like the idea a lot, but the problem is just that it could have been *way* better. And that's the problem with MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 in general. It's an underachiever.

First of all, the selection of vehicles is dull, and the way in which new cars are "unlocked" as you win races – in the Crash Course and elsewhere – is unrewarding. Half the vehicles are simply retreads from the first game. And while some of the new ones (like the Audi TT and Beetle RSI) are fast and responsive, others, like the fire truck, are just ridiculous. Yes, it's fun to drive the fire truck once as a novelty, but then you'll just go back to the same three or four cars you can actually use to win races. It's a problem repeated throughout the game: lousy rewards (like new paint jobs) for winning tough races.

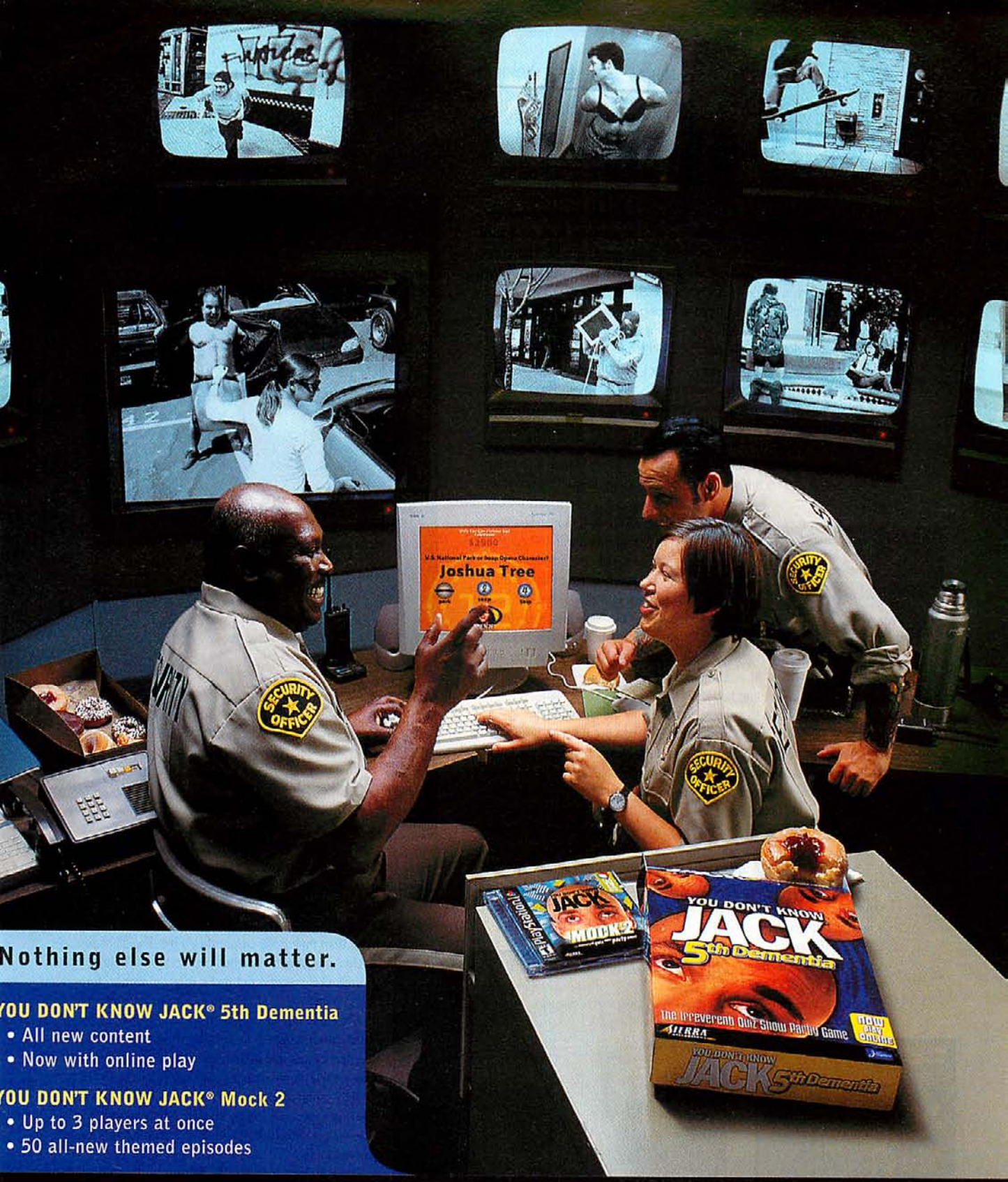
The game's physics engine and damage model are also weak. Cars can take repeated head-on collisions with no apparent damage, only to fall apart completely on the very next hit. The opponent AI seems to have two settings: brain dead and unstoppable. I won many races by laughably large margins, but others I could never beat (thus the broken joystick). Worst of all were the numerous frame-rate slowdowns and lockups. Even with the graphics on my P-II 266 dumbed down to 640x480 and most details turned off, I often found myself lurching along at an unplayable rate. And the graphics don't look that great to begin with – not nearly as good as the last two NEED FOR SPEED games.

Ragin', Full On

Still, though, MIDTOWN MADNESS 2 has an undeniable charm. Scattering pedestrians, ramming police cars, mowing down parking meters: This is quality gaming. For a pure racing game, you can do much better (again, see the NEED FOR SPEED series), but MM2 scores points for humor, city design, and good road-rage catharsis. A little more time in the shop, and Microsoft would have had a great game here. CGW

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** 8MB 3D card, 400MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Modem, LAN, or Internet via MSN Gaming Zone.

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Angel Studios • $45 • www.microsoft.com/games/midtown2/
ESRB Rating: Everyone



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RUNE falls short of delivering the Viking goods

Half-Axed

RUNE
reviewed by
Joe "Biter" Bailey

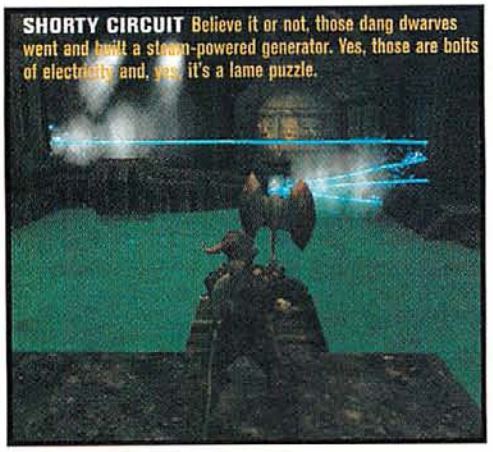
Agreeing to review a game is a lot like agreeing to go on a blind date. There is excitement, anticipation, and a hesitant hope that this could be "the one." After spending many nights with RUNE, I can assure you that it is not "the one." Sure, it's easy on the eyes, and it will definitely get your blood racing at times, but it has some unpleasant personality traits that are impossible to ignore.

Like many dates, RUNE starts off with some small talk (delivered via cut-scene). You then proceed to "get acquainted" with your surroundings before having to, quite literally, sink or swim. This is where you get your first clue that your epic adventure might not be so epic. The first several levels are spent exploring, with very little combat. During this exploration, you start to realize that you can put your can of Viking whoop-ass back in the fridge for a while. In fact, if you play on the easy setting and die from combat before the 39th level, your license to buy whoop-ass should be revoked. And therein lies the biggest problem with this game: Any sense of epic adventure is lost in the overuse of tired gaming devices, including – but not limited to – pressure plates, switch hunts, lava, falling rocks, hidden traps, and way, way, *way* too many jumping scenarios. At least there is only minimal use of the omnipresent crates and barrels.

Some may argue that those are precisely the types of gaming devices that define an action game. Perhaps, but this is a *Viking* action game. Game styling that works for an archaeologist like Lara Croft seems a little flat for an epic warrior. RUNE is most enjoyable when you are busting down doors and dishing out carnage. Its many scripted events and cut-scenes add depth and enhance the overall gaming experience. But for those gamers who have had it up to here with cut-scenes, a skip-scene option would have been nice.

If you are patient enough to make it to the serious fighting, you will find a lot to like. Character animations are well done, and include different stances and fighting moves for each weapon class (lop, cleave, and bash). Enemies are varied, the most enjoyable being the Dark Vikings (although you will have to kill loads of less-inspired enemies, and wait nearly half the game for them). Enemy AI is pretty good, and will change tactics from offensive to defensive based on circumstance. They can lose a shield – or arm, for that matter – and continue to fight. Some enemies, in fact, will actually require you to liberate their head from their body before they'll die. The all-hackin', all-slashin' melee action carries over to the multiplayer game as well. Call me sick, but that's what I'm looking for in a Viking game.

BEST OF TIMES, WORST OF TIMES The fun, sword-swinging mayhem portions of the game are unfortunately overshadowed by the humdrum jumping-puzzle/climb-a-rope-portions of the game.



SHORTY CIRCUIT Believe it or not, those dang dwarves went and built a steam-powered generator. Yes, those are bolts of electricity and, yes, it's a lame puzzle.

What am I not looking for in a Viking game? Bugs. While RUNE never crashed, three different levels failed to run scripted events that were necessary for progression through the game. One bug actually required a hack to the level to continue. Um, that's not good. There were also a few minor issues involving sound and health status. Hopefully a patch will remedy these problems by the time you read this.

RUNE is more for those who enjoy the journey rather than the fighting along the way. In the end, an evening with RUNE is like a date with someone who is "just a friend"; it can be enjoyable at times, but it leaves you longing for something more. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
It looks great, and who wouldn't want to play a Viking?

CONS
More clichés than action; a few major bugs.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450, 128MB RAM, 3D card, 650MB hard drive space.
3D Support: D3D, Glide, OpenGL, S3. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-16 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • **Developer:** Human Head Studios • **$40** • **www.godgames.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

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- Online Multiplayer Game
- Associate with others in your virtual world
Requirements:
- Internet Access Required
- Window 95/98/NT4
- CPU of Pentium 120 Mhz or greater
- 32 MB memory or greater
- 108 MB disk space or greater
- Modem 28.8 or greater
5 Stars Rating from ZDNet
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Wild Discovery
Stunning Magic
Variety In Career
Last Kingdom is a large-scale fantasy role-playing game with hundreds of monsters, items and a wide variety of magical spells, you can become one of four characters and take their roles in a land of virtual reality. Last Kingdom is enormous and can be explored for hundreds of hours by visiting mystical lands through magical portals. Once you start playing, you will realize just how little you really know about the world of Last Kingdom--and how much there is for you to discover. You can embark even further into the game-playing experience by talking, trading, and exploring with other people over the Internet. Can you save the only kingdom left from the ravaging powers of darkness? We dare you to challenge! Visit www.netamin.com today.
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SWAT 3 joins ROGUE SPEAR as an essential tactical sim

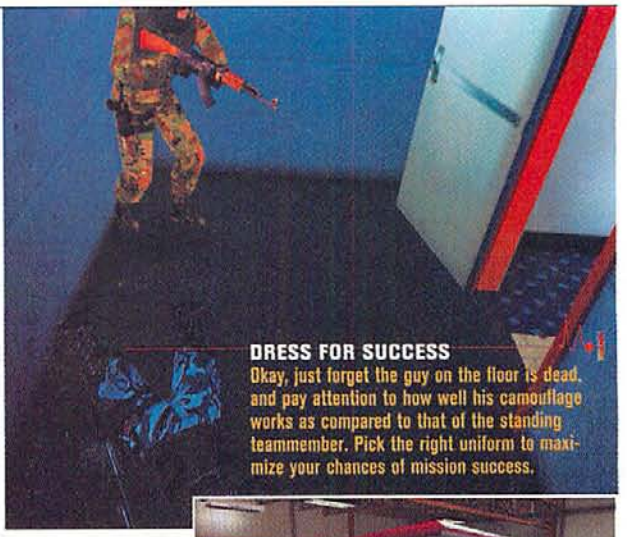
There's a New Sheriff in Town

Almost a year after its initial release, SWAT 3 has fulfilled its promise as a must-have tactical simulation. SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION finally adds a multiplayer component, some gameplay tweaks, and robust editing tools to make the game a worthy rival of the tac sim standard, ROGUE SPEAR. Better yet, all this new stuff is a free download for SWAT 3 owners.

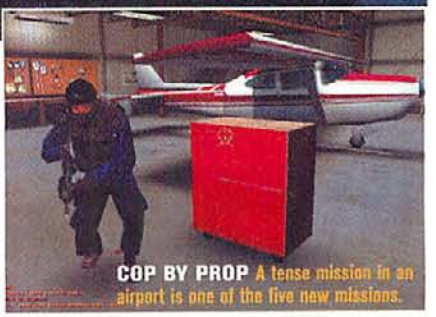
All of ELITE EDITION's enhancements, tweaks, and modifications are welcome additions for the tense, fast-paced action of the multiplayer games. The AI and interface see the biggest improvements, with Takedown Studios adding over 60 AI personalities for hostages and suspects, as well as a number of SWAT team traits – like Raider, Assaulter, and Enforcer. Smarter suspects will hide if overwhelmed, or come after you if they have a high aggression rating. Controls and keyboard functions have been modified so that you can now easily map keyboard commands. There're three new quick-access stances for close-quarters battle (CQB) operations (crouch, lean, and stand), and a new feature for rapid deployment of CS, flashbangs, and lightsticks, so you can quickly toss them using a one-key command instead of holding down the mouse button while waiting for the desired toss strength.

There's also a host of new weapons for SWAT teammembers to choose from, including M4s, M1As, and HKG36Ks – all with regular or advanced optics, suppressors, and drum-magazine configurations. Weapons now have improved encumbrance, inertia, and ballistic values for better game balance: This means that running around taking shots with a decked-out M1 isn't as good a choice as the M1911 pistol or MP5 submachine gun; their light encumbrance are better suited for shoot and recovery. A new line of SWAT camouflage uniforms also plays a large factor in surviving each perilous mission – choose wisely.

The best additions, though, are the deathmatch or co-op multiplayer modes for up to five players. Five new kick-ass multiplayer missions include protecting dignitaries at Chang's Chinese Theater, saving L.A. from deadly anthrax gas at the Whitman Airport, and stopping domestic terrorists from killing patients at a hospital. When you've finished those, you can tackle all 16 original single-player maps in a variety of deathmatch modes or in co-op as well.



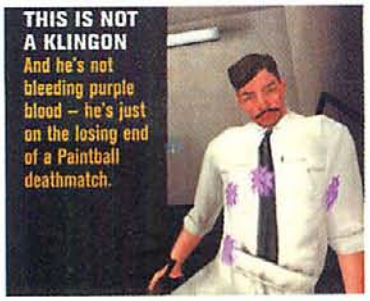
DRESS FOR SUCCESS Okay, just forget the guy on the floor is dead, and pay attention to how well his camouflage works as compared to that of the standing teammember. Pick the right uniform to maximize your chances of mission success.



COP BY PROP A tense mission in an airport is one of the five new missions.

SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION

reviewed by Raphael Liberatore



THIS IS NOT A KLINGON And he's not bleeding purple blood – he's just on the losing end of a Paintball deathmatch.

Takedown has added visual and audio aids to help out with the multiplayer commands – Navigation Lines, Quick Compliance modes, Command tags, and chat commands, among others. Also useful is being able to see through the eyes of various element members via the optiwand and teammember screens. You can even add your own audio file to the chat menu. The only drawback is that multiplayer games can currently only manage a handful of players, but rumor has it that Takedown is working to add more online players per game.

If you're into customizing levels, tweaking scenarios, or adding mods and meshes to a game, ELITE EDITION's scenario editors are what you've been waiting for. You can easily add cool mods like the Tracers Mod or fast-paced Hysteria Mod, available at the SWAT 3 Web site. ELITE EDITION also includes templates for those of us who want to modify existing scenarios.

Other than the stingy player limit per multiplayer game, and the inability to finish a game without post-game chat, SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION is CQB gaming at its finest. With realistic ballistics, tactics, editing tools, and added multiplayer game features, SWAT 3 challenges ROGUE SPEAR as the definitive tactical simulation game. So beg, borrow, or buy this game... just don't steal it, or you're liable to be on the wrong end of yet another SWAT sortie. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Makes you feel like playing the good guy all over again.

CONS
Only five players max per multiplayer game.

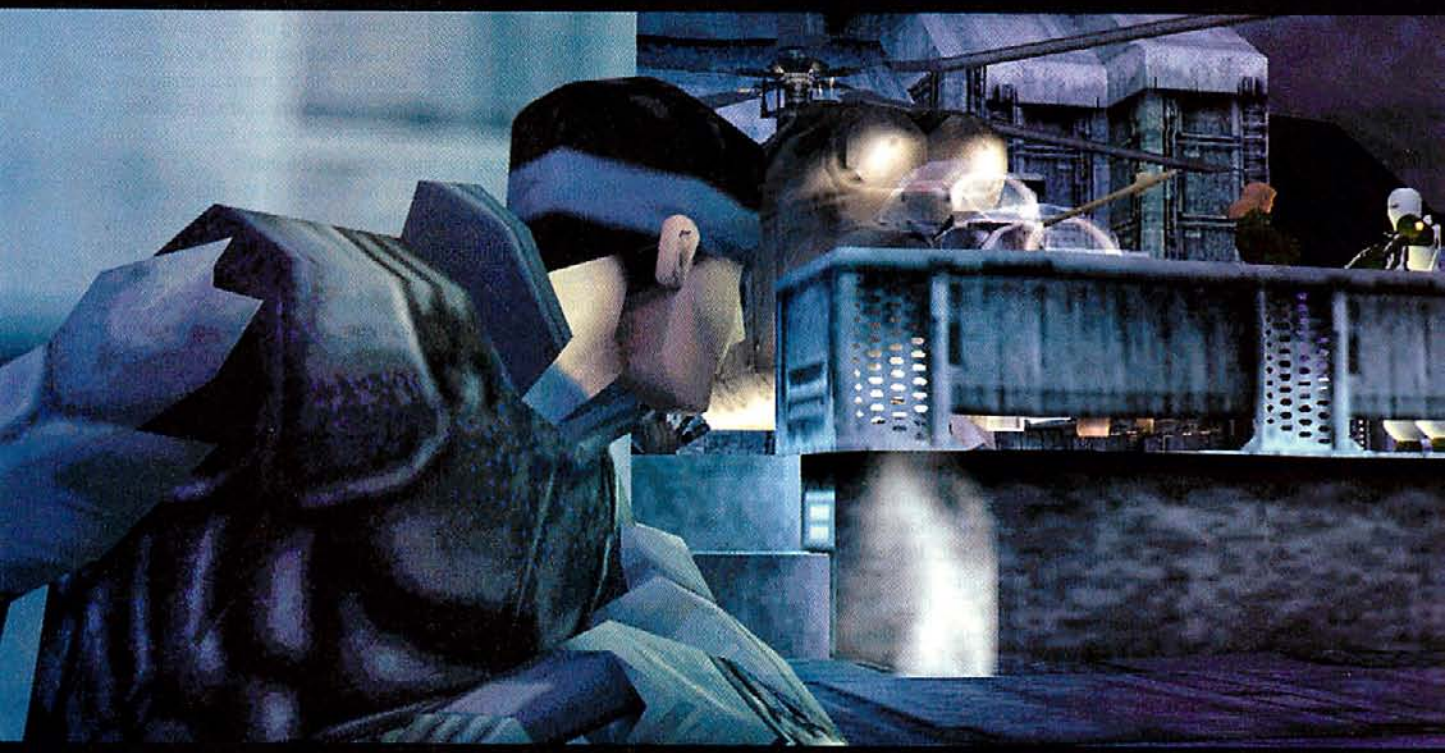
THIS OLD KILLHOUSE
The easy-to-use editor and mod tools let you totally build and customize your own missions. Expect to find loads of custom missions online for months to come.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-5 players).

Publisher: Sierra Studios • **Developer:** Takedown Studios • **$45** • **www.sierra.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.

A TRANQUIL ALASKAN NIGHT.

SO QUIET, YOU CAN BARELY HEAR A NECK SNAP.



TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

METAL GEAR SOLID

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INCLUDES VR MISSIONS

MATURE M — Animated Violence, Animated Blood and Gore, Mature Sexual Themes — ESRB

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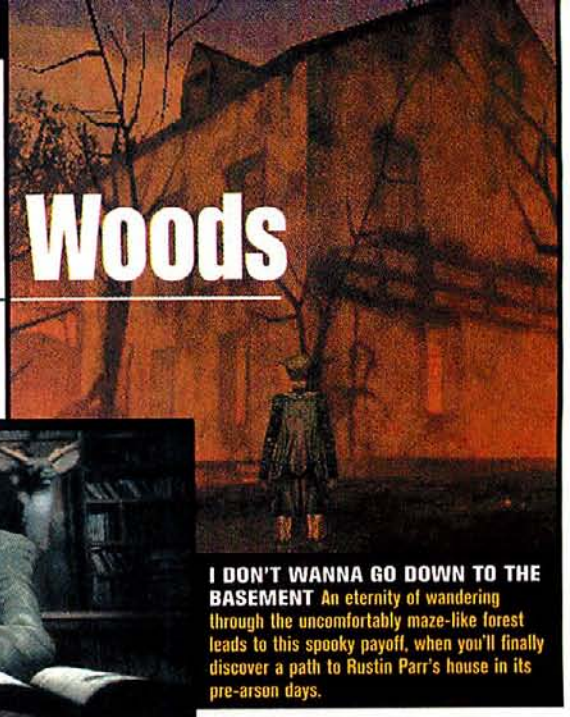
The first Blair Witch title is frightfully bad

Don't Go Into the Woods



I DON'T WANNA GO DOWN TO THE BASEMENT An eternity of wandering through the uncomfortably maze-like forest leads to this spooky payoff, when you'll finally discover a path to Rustin Parr's house in its pre-arson days.

Some people don't get *The Blair Witch Project.* They see nothing more than self-absorbed college students and shaky camera work. As a huge fan who still shudders when recalling Heather's screams of "What the f-k is that?!," I've never been able to empathize.

I can now. Thanks to Terminal Reality's BLAIR WITCH VOLUME I: RUSTIN PARR, I now grasp how some movie-goers associate tedium and nausea with that funky stick-figure logo.

CAN WE TALK? Most of the game consists of lengthy conversations with the Burkittsville townies. Expect a lot of repetition, especially if you already know something about the movie and backstory.

"I Don't Need To Go There"

This isn't surprising considering the game's lineage. RUSTIN PARR is a sequel of sorts to last year's NOCTURNE, which hampered supernatural settings with horrific control- and camera-systems. Many characters from the previous game are back, and this time the "Spookhouse" agency is investigating the Blair Witch. The legendary figure was apparently involved in a series of child murders committed by a hermit named Rustin Parr near Burkittsville, Maryland. You take the role of Elspeth "Doc" Holliday, a medical specialist seen in a supporting role in NOCTURNE. You must determine if anything supernatural was involved.

Of course, spooky stuff a'plenty is going on in the Black Hills that surround Burkittsville. To the designers' credit, they do a great job of communicating an eerie atmosphere through both audio and video. Unseen children can be heard laughing and crying, a creepy musical score will build at opportune moments, and exploring Parr's lonely house of horror is nearly as chilling as the final scenes in the movie.

But there isn't really a game here. Much of the threatening air is dispelled by the knowledge that you can gun down the unearthly enemies. Poor camera angles during combat turn fear into frustration. And while the plot would make a fascinating novella, it doesn't lend itself to gaming. The story progresses on rails, moving inexorably along an A-B-C line to the conclusion. There is no room for deviation, and the game actually prevents you from wandering off. Elspeth will simply wheel away from forbidden territory and announce something like "I don't need to go there." Better than the invisible walls that restrained the characters in NOCTURNE, but hardly satisfying.

This fixed path is made even more irritating by obvious padding. Most of the game takes place in a maze-like section of forest that must be navigated from one end to the other at least half-a-dozen times. The good 60 minutes or so of run-shoot-explore gameplay has been stuffed with hours of insipid dialogue. This bulks up the game's completion time to a respectable 10 to 15 hours, but does nothing to improve the quality of that time.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME I: RUSTIN PARR

reviewed by Brett Todd

Well, It Doesn't Look Like a Coffin

RUSTIN PARR is also marked by a lack of polish. Buttons are often unresponsive, and you simply can't move in the ways that the game demands. Dialogue text is filled with grammatical errors and misspellings. I was often forced to wait at least three minutes for a saved game to load. Hard crashes led to a number of system reboots. I got stuck on objects in the game a number of times as well. In all, this supposedly finished product seems more like a beta.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME I: RUSTIN PARR is an inauspicious way to begin the *Blair Witch* trilogy of games. Serious gamers will be put off by the lack of interaction and poor controls, while movie fans who are casual gamers will have a tough time with high system requirements. There doesn't seem to be much of a built-in audience for this one. That may be a good thing, given its dubious quality. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Great atmosphere and an intriguing storyline complement the Blair Witch mythos.

CONS

Poor design and controls will make you wish you'd been with Heather, Mike, and Josh.

DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS You'll run into some old friends from NOCTURNE every now and again. Be nice, and your old pal the Stranger might give you a hand with the Blair Witch.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz or AMD K6-2, 64MB RAM (96MB required for video hardware acceleration), 650MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-III 500MHz, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • Developer: Terminal Reality • $20 • www.godgames.com • ESRB Rating: Mature

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RP Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

The CLOSE COMBAT series returns to its roots

Once More, Into the Beach

When CLOSE COMBAT was released in 1995, it got a lot of attention because of its accurate portrayal of the most crucial element of combat: the men who fight. Unlike traditional real-time strategy games in which units mindlessly fought until destroyed, CLOSE COMBAT applied a wargame sensibility to a then-new genre and came up aces. The realistic responses of infantry units to the stresses of combat – combined with the vivid sound effects – created a wargame experience unlike anything before it.

CLOSE COMBAT: INVASION NORMANDY is the fifth game in this long-running series, and has come full-circle to the setting of the original game. Not only do the two games share a historical topic, they also share a focus on infantry as the major player on the battlefield, and this becomes a significant factor in differentiating INVASION NORMANDY from the preceding three games.

CLOSE COMBAT: INVASION NORMANDY

reviewed by Bruce Geryk

BEACH BLANKET BLOODSHED You can't do Normandy without a beach assault.

The CLOSE COMBAT system has always been best at modeling infantry combat, but previous forays into the eastern front and the Battle of the Bulge necessitated large numbers of armored vehicles and the de-emphasis of infantry. The result was somewhat uneven; the vehicles got in the way. The vehicle AI here is pretty awful and is constantly getting stuck, or reporting "no clear path" when all that's ahead is an open road.

The reason this bad AI doesn't ruin INVASION NORMANDY the way it nearly ruined BATTLE OF THE BULGE is that this game is all about the grunts. Armored vehicles are there for support, but if you're going to survive Normandy's hedgerows, beaches, and bunker complexes, you're going to have to do it with good infantry tactics. The force-mix reflects this, and you'll often wish you had one more BAR squad rather than one more bazooka team. This is as it should be. The AI in general, though, leaves a lot to be desired, and experienced players will quickly find ways to exploit it.

CLOSE COMBAT IV introduced a welcome strategic layer to the series, but it had flaws, not all of which have been fixed in INVASION NORMANDY. Battle groups can now be drawn from a force pool to allow more flexibility in achieving objectives, but the restriction on one battle group per-map-space, per-side, remains. It robs the game of more wide-open tactical engagements, where skillful maneuvering would allow an attacker to enter from two map edges at once. This restriction is probably for play balance, but makes the strategic game feel artificial; there isn't much continuity between the strategic and tactical elements. The tactical game is gripping, the strategic one is not.

HEDGEROW HELL Constricted terrain can make for a painfully-slow rate of advance.

Move Out!

INVASION NORMANDY is a good game with nothing new. Its solid system is basically unchanged since the first release, and those hoping for more than new maps and objectives will be disappointed. With the battles that remain unexplored by the series (the Pacific, Korea, Vietnam...), it's puzzling that Atomic is revisiting past glories. Let's hope they aim a bit higher next time. CGW

MINI-OVERLORD Rather than covering the entire invasion, the strategic map restricts itself to Utah Beach and its environs.

CGW RATED

PROS

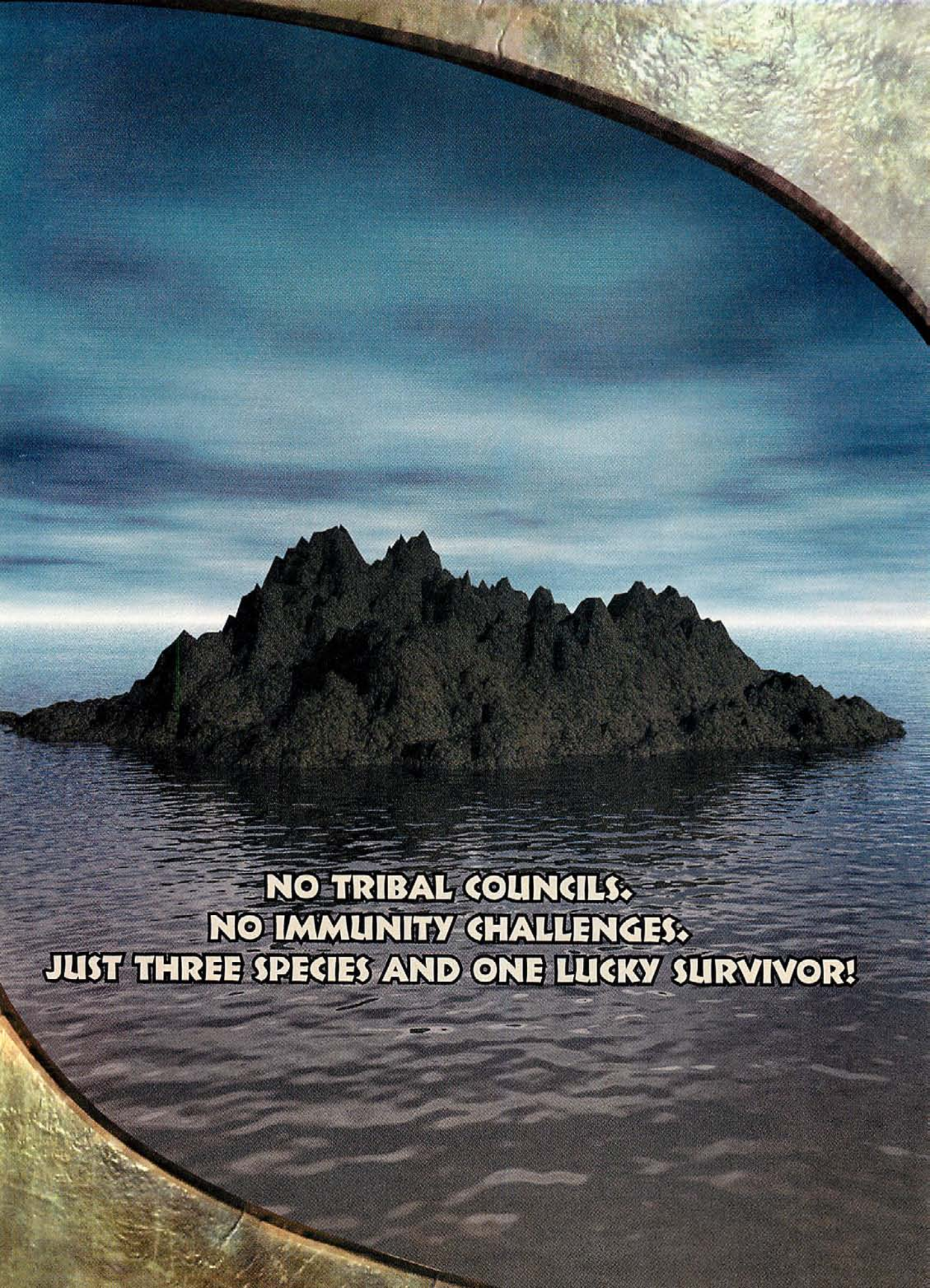
As tense and fast-paced as ever.

CONS

Adds nothing really new to the series.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 4MB SVGA video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Runs acceptably on minimum system.
3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN (2-8 players), serial, modem, MSN Game Zone, and Mplayer; one CD per player.

Publisher: Mattel/SSI • **Developer:** Atomic Games • **$45** • **www.ssionline.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.


NO TRIBAL COUNCILS.
NO IMMUNITY CHALLENGES.
JUST THREE SPECIES AND ONE LUCKY SURVIVOR!

HI TECH
GIANTS
CITIZEN KABUTO

MASTERS OF DESTRUCTION

MECCS:

Ship damaged beyond repair, the Meccaryn squad is stranded on the island with enough firepower to destroy a small planet. Armed to the teeth with rocket launchers, grenades, milliennium mortar, and sniper rifles; Baz, Tel, Reg, Gorden and Bennett are hi-tech damage dealing masters of destruction. With guns blazing the Meccs are fast on their feet and quicker in the air with jet packs as they scout the island traveling in packs and moving in formation.

The poor bastards don't stand a chance.

Armor up with sniper rifles, machine guns, and pop-up bombs.

Rule the sky with the Mecc-copter and hi-tech jet pack.

Battle alien creatures in teams with up to 10 players in multiplay.

"I was blown away by this game ... One of the must have games of the fall... An instant classic of huge proportions." -- Gamer's Pulse.com

EXOTIC
GIANTS
CITIZEN KABUTO

RULERS OF THE SEA

DELPHI THE SEA REAPER:

Driven from their island home to the deepest reaches of the ocean, the Sea Reapers live in exile beyond the reach of the island's brutal number one resident. Commanding the elements of earth, air, sea and fire, the ethereal females wage war with magic spells, lightning bows, and an indestructible scimitar of steel. Calling upon years of rage, Delphi summons all the powers of the sea in the form of a wall of fire, suffocating vortex and dangerous sea creatures in her mission to return home.

As Beautiful and Dangerous as the Sea itself.

"The game's excellent character designs, impressive visual style, and real-time strategy and action elements blend together incredibly well, making Giants: Citizen Kabuto a breath of fresh air in a market glutted with clones." .. Gamespot.com

Driven into the sea by Kabuto, the ethereal Reapers command devastating powers.

Lightning bows, spells and the Scimitar are a Reaper's best defense.

Mecc technology vs Reaper magic...Delphi summons deadly sea monsters and tornadoes.

MATURE M
Animated Blood and Gore
Animated Violence
ESRB

GIANTS
CITIZEN KABUTO

LUMBERING MOUNTAIN

KABUTO:
Summond by the Sea Reapers to defend the island, this giant ferocious beast is simply too brutal to exist with any other creature. Ten times the height of anything on the island, Kabuto is a uniquely nasty creature. Pray he swallows you whole rather than making a fashion statement by wearing a struggling you on his razor sharp spikes, keeping his hands free to crush the rest of your team with an elbow smash. You'll need every ounce of firepower to take down this fang-filled eating machine.

"He can't wait to eat...er...meet you!"

"With a complex story and beautifully crafted 3-D graphics, the single-player game offers the kind of depth that's been sorely lacking in action games lately." -- Rolling Stone

OF PAIN

Eat, crush, and destroy anything in your path as Kabuto.

Through the fangs of Kabuto is the only way off the island.

Defeat this massive monster or end up an appetizer.

MATURE M Animated Blood and Gore Animated Violence

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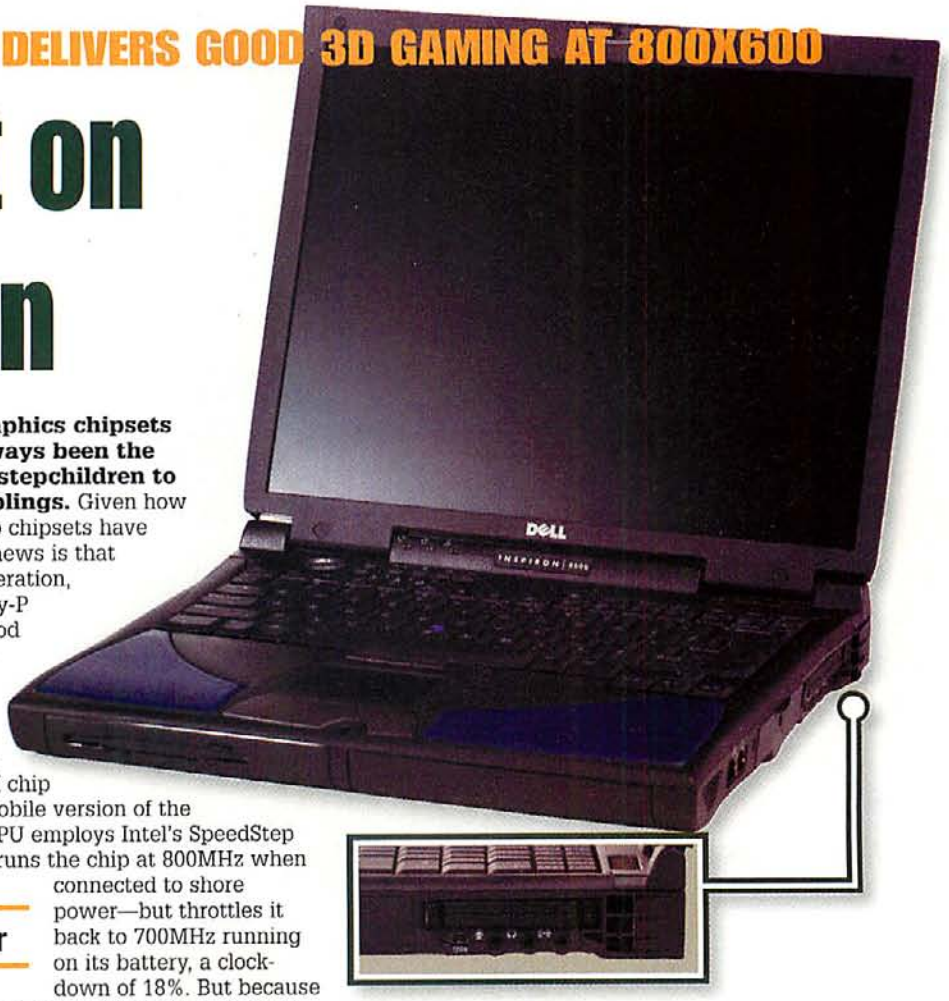
DELL'S LATEST DELIVERS GOOD 3D GAMING AT 800X600

Take it on the Run



Mobile graphics chipsets have always been the bastard stepchildren to their desktop siblings. Given how bloody fast desktop chipsets have become, the good news is that even trailing a generation, ATI's latest Mobility-P chipset delivers good performance—provided you keep your resolution at 800x600. Dell's latest Inspiron, the 800, mates this ATI chip with an 850MHz mobile version of the Pentium-III. This CPU employs Intel's SpeedStep technology, which runs the chip at 800MHz when connected to shore power—but throttles it back to 700MHz running on its battery, a clock-down of 18%. But because the 3D chipset isn't being throttled, SpeedStep's impact on 3D gaming is pretty small. Other notables include a DVD-ROM drive, a larger 15" TFT display, and, Dell seems to have brought in the Style Police and mandated that bland boxes be gone.

by Dave Salvator

This latest Inspiron weighs in at a trim 7.2 pounds, and is adorned with two USB ports, as well as a side-mounted 1394/FireWire port—great for connecting video camcorders and hard drives.

Numbers at a Glance

Here's a case where the numbers tell a somewhat misleading story. Compared head-to-head to last month's Lean Machine roundup winner, Alienware's Grey rig, the Inspiron trails badly. Its TFT display can display 1280x1024, our current test resolution, but this chipset wasn't really intended to run 3D games at that resolution. Even at 1024x768x32, UT still stuttered a lot. 800x600 seems to be its sweet-spot resolution where 3D games became smooth; though again, it doesn't show up in the performance tests as much as it does in actual gaming. At 800x600, the Inspiron scored a woeful 45.5 versus the Alienware's 74.2, running at 1024x768 on the 3D WinBench 2000 WinMark test. Admittedly, the deck is stacked against Inspiron in this comparison, but given how laptops are always being billed as "desktop replacements," the comparison does make some sense. However, as mobile performance goes, this Inspiron is about as good is gets for the mobile set, and at 800x600, it gets it done.

As for battery performance, it was able to get me through a screening of *The Fifth Element*, but by the end of the film, the battery was pretty much done. Running through a typical pair of WalkMan headphones, the Inspiron did an admirable job of conveying the sonic richness of this movie. One troubling thing here was that after watching the movie, I removed the DVD and it was very hot to the touch, not exactly the way DVD discs like to be. This Inspiron has a thermostat-controlled fan that kicks in when a certain inside temperature is exceeded, and it's surprisingly noisy.

PROS
Good mobile-gaming performance; supports 1280x1024 resolution, FireWire too.

CONS
DVD-ROM drive runs hot; still considerably trails desktop performance; noisy cooling fan.

Price: $3,317, as configured
Manufacturer: Dell
Contact: www.dell.com

★★★½

Gaming on a laptop still doesn't stack up very well against traditional desktop gaming, but being able to break out a laptop and two gamepads and to challenge the goober who sits two cubicles down to a "friendly" game of MADDEN 2001 does have its appeal. So if you spend a lot of time airborne traversing the continent, this Inspiron will let you get your gaming fix far from home. CGW

Laptop Performance	Dell Laptop-Shore Power	Dell Laptop-Battery	Alienware Grey
CPU Speed	Pentium-III 850MHz	Pentium-III 700MHz	Pentium-III 866MHz
3D GameGauge Score	34.2	32.5	74.2
3D WinBench 2000 WinMark (1280x1024x32, Triple-buffered, 24-bit Z)	16.4	16.2	84.7
3D WinBench 2000 Processor Test	1.6	1.4	1.73
WinBench High-End Graphics WinMark	885	758	1040
WinBench High-End Disk WinMark	10100	9470	20000

SYSTEM CHIPSET SLAP-DOWN

Got Pipes?

RAMBUS NOT NECESSARILY THE WAY TO GO

When Intel debuted RAMBUS last year, it seemed like the heir apparent for high-performance system memory, and something that gamers would be lusting after.

In retrospect, it was more a case of right-place-right-time. Yes, RAMBUS' 1.6GB/sec peak data-rate is the fastest on paper, but RAMBUS-equipped systems excelled for other reasons, specifically the 820 chipset's early support for AGP 4X, and the fact that alternative chipsets weren't quite ready for prime-time. The AMD chipsets have since matured, now offering AGP 4X, support for PC133 SDRAM, and UltraATA hard drives. And AMD's Thunderbird CPU—still marketed as Athlon—teamed up with Via's latest KT-133 chipset delivers very fast gaming performance compared not only to Pentium-III, but to the new Pentium-4. Intel, meanwhile, has been dogged by a string of miscues that have compelled all but one major system maker (Dell) to now offer at least some AMD-based systems. To take a reading as to who's got the best chipset going, we pitted Via's KT-133 against Intel's two Pentium-III chipsets, the 815e and the 820e, and also against Intel's latest 850 chipset for the Pentium-4.

Intel's 815e and 820e are more alike than different, with the principal difference being which type of memory they support. 815e uses PC133 SDRAM, whereas 820e uses RAMBUS. Via's KT-133 chipset has a similar feature set to the 815e.

My, What Big Pipes You Have

To figure out who the top-dog is here, I built three 1GHz systems with 64MB DDR GeForce 2 Ultra cards running on Windows ME with 128MB of system memory. The idea was to put very fast processors at either end of the system chipset, and look at the differences in performance attributable to the chipset. Why, you ask, does the system chipset matter so much? The system chipset is the central plumbing of your PC, and this chipset acts as the primary "traffic cop," directing data, memory access, and file I/O. The best of CPUs is only as good as its system chipset, since a fast CPU will be "data-starved" if the chipset can't keep it fed and happy. Same holds true at the other end of the 3D pipeline—your 3D card.

What I found is that Intel's Pentium-III chipsets, 815e and 820e, run about even on 3D GameGauge testing, trading wins from test to test. But hot on their heels is the AMD/KT-133 combination, trailing by a mere 4fps (take a look at the charts). And the 815e and 820e boxes were only about 7fps off of the new 850/Pentium-4 setup Dell sent us for this month's Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup. What becomes apparent is that while the 820e/RAMBUS system is no slower than the PC133-equipped 815e, it also isn't any faster. And despite some recent price drops on RAMBUS memory, it still remains pricey versus PC133 SDRAM. Also, the difference between the slowest and fastest system on many of these tests is under 10%, a pretty negligible difference.

On more CPU-focused tests—including 3D WinBench 2000's Processor Test, as well as the 3D WinMark and several game tests run at 640x480x16 to get the 3D card "out of the way"—again, the differences were there, but small. So the good news is that it's hard to make a bad choice; but this data doesn't make a compelling case for RAMBUS.

The Take-Away

If you're working with a tight budget, an AMD-based system using the KT-133 chipset will net the most performance for the least dollars, which is why we recommend the T-Bird Athlon/KT-133 combination in our Lean Machine Killer Rig. As for the Intel platforms, the 815e chipset proves itself to be a very solid performer, standing toe-to-toe with the RAMBUS-encumbered 820e. So if you're going to build an Intel-based box, look for a system using the 815e chipset, which is a solid PC133-based gaming platform. —*Dave Salvator*

Test Results	Pentium-III on 815e	Pentium-III on 820e	T-Bird on KT-133	Falcon NW 1.2GHz T-Bird	Dell P-IV Preview Box
3D GameGauge Score	80.7	81.2	76.9	88.4	86.9
3D WinBench 2000 (1280x1024x32, Triple-buffered, 24-bit Z)	98.9	106	103	111	103
3D WinBench WinMark (640x480x16, CPU test)	258	260	241	220	230
3D WinBench 2000 Processor Test	1.98	1.95	1.78	67.4	2.49
CGW UNREAL TOURNAMENT Test (1280x1024x32)	61.5	63.9	56	70.01	58.88
WinBench High-End Graphics WinMark (1024x768x32)	1170	1190	1140	1580	951

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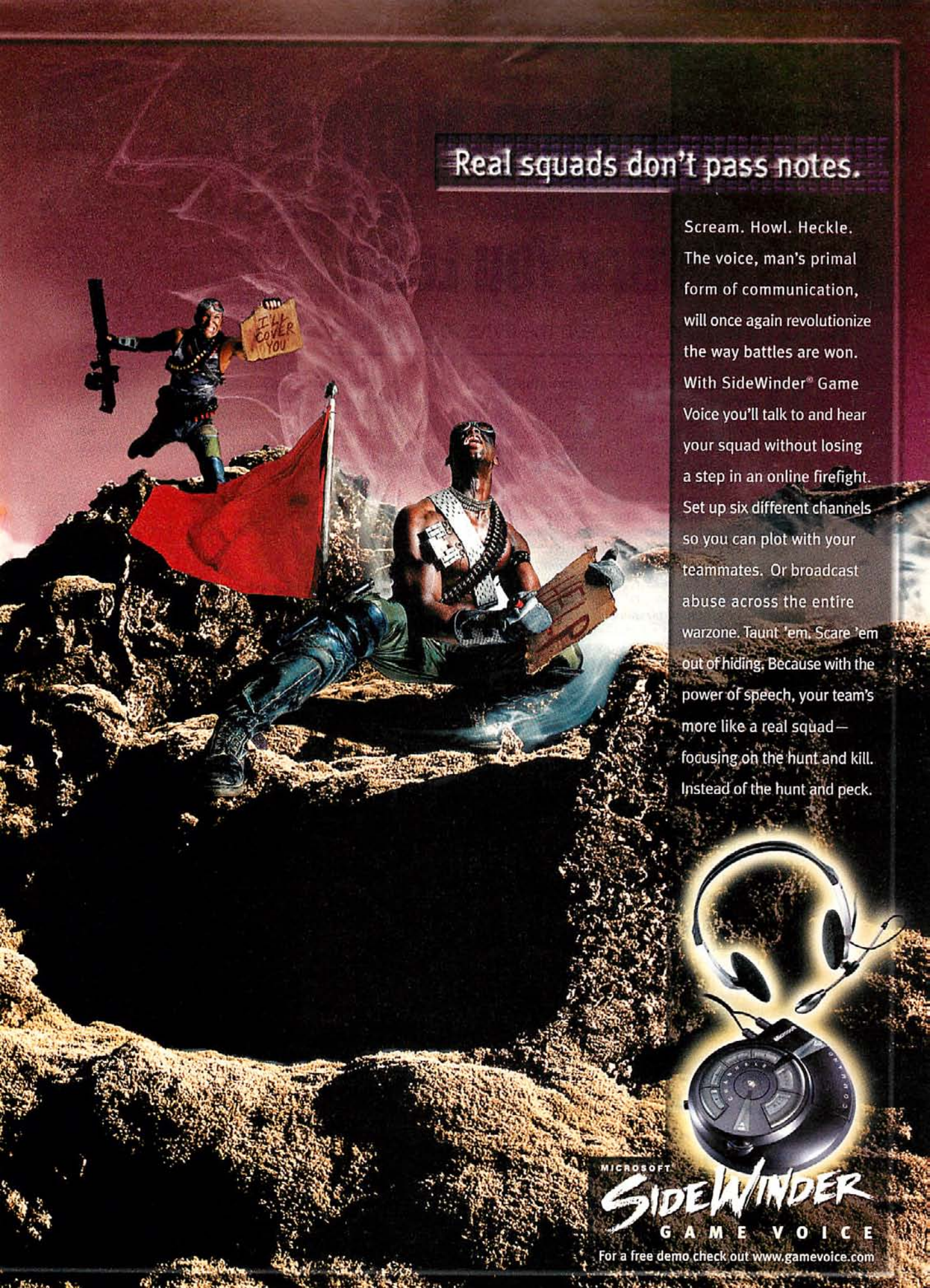
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Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR

Look Before You Leap

Things to know before you make the move to broadband

DSL changed my life. Well, my online life anyway. Suddenly that third "w" in "www" no longer stood for "wait." Now, it's more like "whoosh." Then, a few TCP/IP tweaks later, it got even better. Downloads routinely screamed in at 1 megabit per second, nearly 30 times faster than the typical 56K modem. How sweet it is.

While I've heard horror stories-o-plenty about installation miscues and delays, mine was wonderfully uneventful. I went with MindSpring as my ISP—since I've logged four years of good dial-up service with them—and got one of those free install/free gear/non-oppressive contract deals.

So it was all going so well, until I started looking at my ping times: 60 milliseconds on the first hop?! What?! OK, that's nearly twice as fast as a 56K modem, but still pretty slow compared to other people's DSL connections. I *thought* DSL was supposed to be super-fast *and* have really low latency. The lesson learned is: Not all DSL is created equal. So make sure you've found an ISP that really understands the importance of low latency in a gamer's life.

Devil in the Details

A number of factors come into play here. But the first thing to know is that the first network hop your DSL line makes from your PC to your ISP is key in determining your overall latency performance. Some DSL services piggyback onto a Baby Bell network before hitting the Internet, and there can be multiple—and somewhat excessive—hops inside that network before you're on the Internet.

Another problem comes from "line interleaving," a process which makes your connection less vulnerable to noise that can slow down performance and cause dropped connections. This line stability comes at the cost of increased latency. The good news here is that often you can call your ISP and have them make a request to the Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) to turn interleaving off and reprovision your line—where they basically turn off interleaving, and then reset your connection. Some users have reported dramatic ping-time decreases after their connection was reprovisioned, with ping times to gateway dropping into the low teens.

Just a Flesh Wound

Now don't go cancelling your DSL service contract and eating some early termination fee because you don't have a super low ping time. The thing to do is to tune your connection for its best possible performance, and if your line has interleaving turned on, see if your ISP can have it turned off, as that may improve your latency. There's a terrific Web site I mentioned last month called **www.dslreports.com**, and they've got two utilities you're going to want. One's called DoctorPing, which will give you a good idea of how your latency performance stacks up versus many other users' DSL connections. The other utility is a freeware app they call DoctorTCP, which lets you tweak your IP settings without having to plow through your Registry using RegEdit. This site also offers an easy step-by-step guide to getting your line tweaked for optimal line-speed performance.

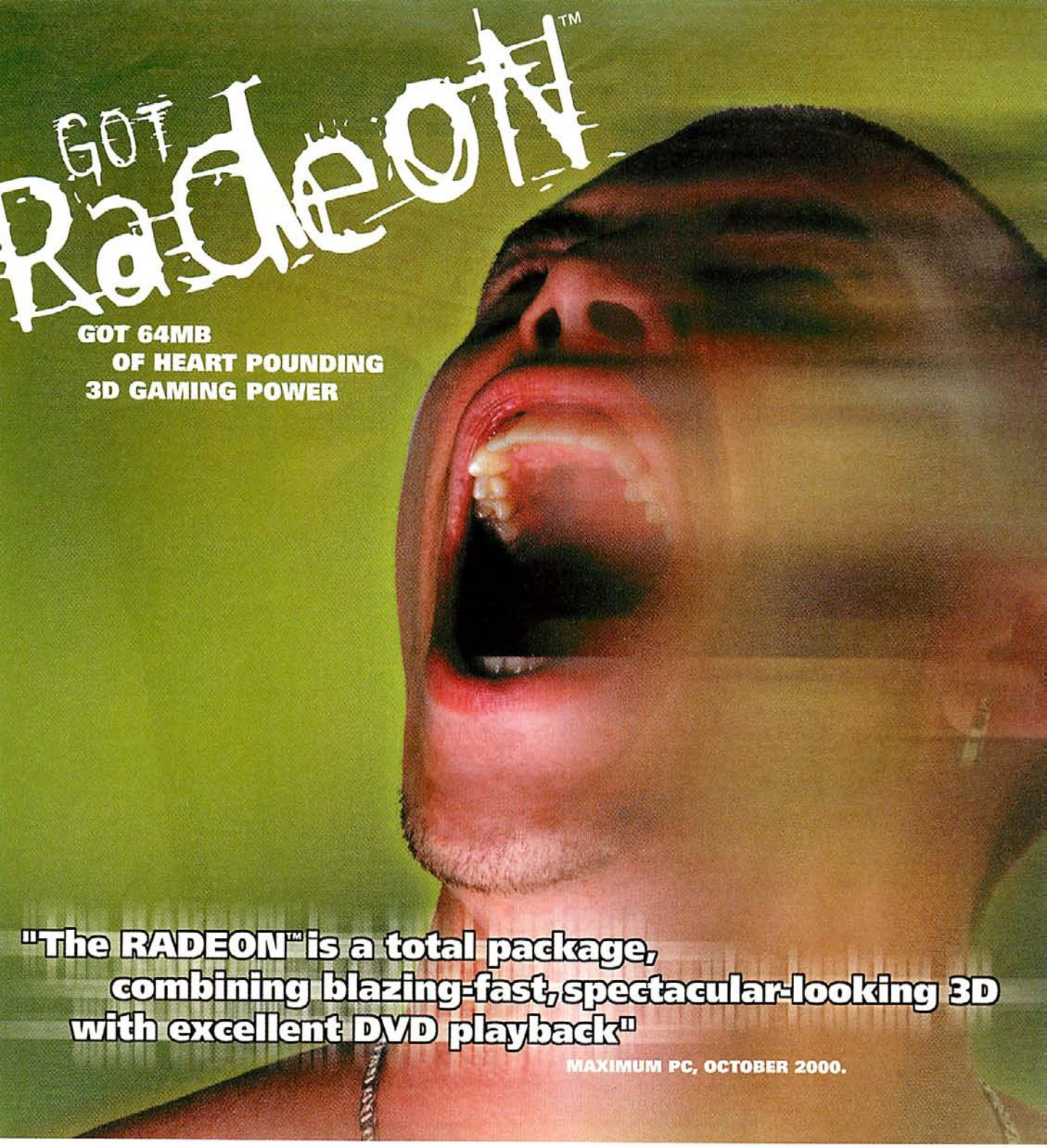
So now I have to include a bit of a CYA (cover your arse) disclaimer here. My experience with MindSpring and the relatively high latency is ONE user's experience. Your mileage will vary. And to MindSpring's credit, my connection is generally very stable, I've never had a service blackout, and connection drops are very rare. And post-TCP/IP stack tweaks, both my downstream (to my PC) and upstream (from my PC) line speed is plenty fast. And, if I play on West Coast game servers I still have good ping times, but it does kind of limit which servers I can get to with acceptable ping times. The next chapter in Dave's DSL Saga will be to see if I can get MindSpring to get line interleaving turned off on my connection and see what that does for my ping times.

Not all DSL is created equal. Make sure you've found an ISP that really understands the importance of low latency in a gamer's life.

Epilogue

So do as I say, and not as I do. Before signing the dotted line with any ISP for xDSL service, have a good idea of what kind of latency you can look forward to. And be clear in telling any would-be ISP that your ping time to gateway has to be under 30 milliseconds. Also, find out if this ISP piggy-backs onto a Baby Bell's network as its means of connecting you to the Internet. And, see if you can get a line without interleaving (yes, it is worth sacrificing 100Kbits/sec of download speed if your ping times will drop to sub-20ms to gateway—because it will make your online gaming much more enjoyable). If you've already got a DSL line, have a ways to go on a service contract, and then discover—as I did—that your latency is "sub-optimal," tune the connection as best you can, and ride the contract out unless you've got other compelling reasons to dump that ISP.

Got a DSL horror story to tell? Rant to cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com. CGW



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Pioneer 16X/40X DVD Player
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Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com.

Me and Mouses Jones

I have two mice, a Logitech Trackman Marble Wheel Mouse, and a Logitech Cordless Mouse. The Trackman is USB and the Cordless is Serial/PS2. Is there a way I can plug both of them in and make them work?

Since one is PS/2 and the other USB, you can run them both, and both mice will be active pointing devices. Sounds like a good test for the ambidextrous.

Leveling Up

I have a relatively old system: a Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB of RAM, an ATI Xpert 128 3D card, and an old 440 LX motherboard. I'd like to upgrade, but what should I upgrade first? Would more RAM be a quick fix? A better video card? If I do the motherboard/CPU route, I'm considering a Duron CPU. Would I need new RAM as well?

Well, the problem is that when you upgrade any one of these components, the new iron will be held back somewhat by your existing system. This unfortunately holds true for any one of these components – CPU/mobo/RAM or the 3D card. And yes, you'll need new memory when you make the move to a new CPU/mobo, since your current memory is running at 66MHz. But, given where you are, even a Duron 600MHz would be a substantial step up. Here's a shopping list. The ASUS A7V mobo, $140; Duron 600MHz CPU, $50; 128MB PC133 SDRAM, $100; Hercules Prophet II MX, $120. Being able to play your games smoothly: Priceless. That comes to a little over $400 bucks for a serious system face-lift. Another upside here is that when you're ready to upgrade your CPU, that mobo will run a 1.2GHz T-Bird. But if you have to pick and choose, look at replacing your 3D card first, followed by the CPU/mobo/RAM.

Memory Tricks

I've been reading about people tweaking their memory timings to squeeze more performance out of their machines before biting the upgrade bullet. How do you do this, and does it really help that much?

While your machine is powering up, hit Escape, then F2. This takes you into the BIOS. If your BIOS allows it, and not all do, you can tweak three key memory-timing settings. They are Column Address Strobe (CAS), Row Address Strobe to Column Address Strobe (RAS to CAS), and Row Address Strobe (RAS). The setting you can tweak is the number of clock cycles to wait while these various memory functions operate, before the system tries to access memory. Set them too low, or beyond what your memory can handle, and your system will become very unstable. But properly tweaked, playing with these settings will buy you a bit of real-world performance – though not a huge amount, since generally speaking, video memory is your bottleneck. But every little bit helps. Usually these three settings are set to 3:3:3. Try dialing them down to 3:2:2. But make sure, if you're set to 3:3:3, that you dial the first two settings down one at a time, and bring your system back up and play some games. Or, if you've got QUAKE 3 (retail or demo), use it as a quick system test after each change you make and see if you've gained any speed. But if your system destabilizes, undo the last latency tweak, and the system should resume normal operation.

Ultra-Confused

I'm starting to get very confused from all the changes happening with graphics cards these days. I'm looking to upgrade to a GeForce 2. Is there any difference between the Ultra, and one without the "Ultra"? I like being able to game at 1600x1200.

Yes, there are several important differences, starting with about $200. The GeForce 2 Ultra chipset runs at a higher clock rate, both for the chip and its memory. The Ultra runs with a core clock of 250MHz, while the memory is run at an effective clock of 460MHz (230MHz DDR memory). The "standard' GeForce 2 is clocked at 200MHz for the core, and 333MHz (166MHz DDR memory) for the memory. The extra horsepower found in the Ultra will make gaming at 1600x1200 a smoother affair.

TECHTIP Home Theatre Overdrive

If you're thinking about hooking up the digital output from your Sound Blaster Live to your Dolby Digital home-theater rig, think again. The digital output of the SB Live puts out 2.0V, whereas the S/PDIF standard weighs in at 500mv. On top of that, the SB Live output isn't impedance matched to the 75 ohms of the standard. Feeding that signal to your home-theater receiver could wreak havoc with the circuitry in your theater rig. Hoontech (www.hoontech.com) makes an adapter board that converts the signal properly. *–Loyd Case*

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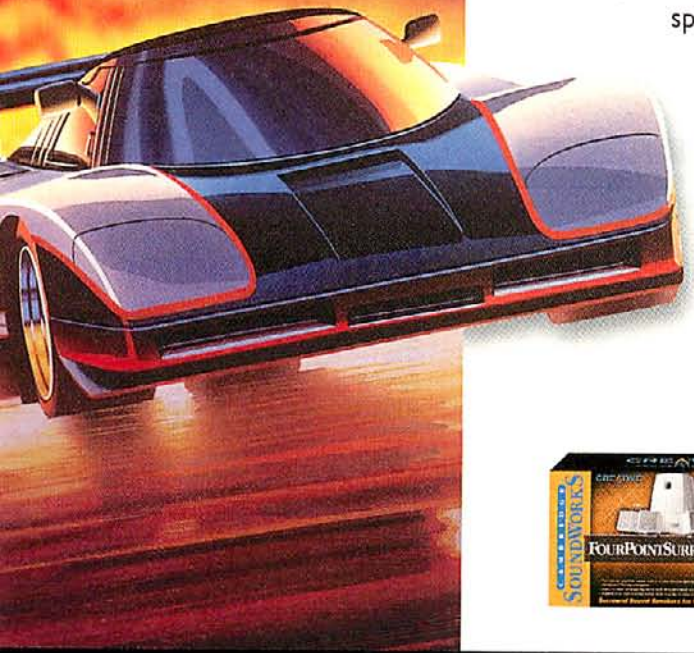

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Killer Rigs

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Case	Antec SX-830	$213	300 watts, 8 bays, plenty of cooling
NEW Motherboard	ASUS A7V	$140	Via KT-133, AGP 4X, Solid mobo
NEW CPU	AMD Athlon 1.2GHz	$530	Hail to the King, baby
NEW Memory	384MB of PC133 SDRAM	$300	Quantity has a quality all its own
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet II Ultra 64MB	$500	Can you say gigapixel?
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160 Ultra 160 SCSI	$190	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k – II (Ultra SCSI)	$850	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$270	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD-304S	$170	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
NEW Monitor	KDS AV-21TF 21"	$700	Trinitron tube, perfectly flat, beautiful color
NEW Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live X-Gamer 5.1	$99	Your sonic world in 5.1, four- or two-channel
NEW Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia V.2-400	$250	Loud, clean, uncolored, and kickin'
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$40	Reach out and frag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$95	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	Natural in, Newtouch out
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech MouseMan Optical	$49	It just feels better
USB Hub	Logitech WingMan 7-port USB Hub	$70	Get them USB ports upstairs
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$4,545
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	Onboard throttle. It just feels right.
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
		Total	$5,710

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**. Lists compiled by Dave Salvator.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Case	Antec Gemstone Case
Motherboard	ASUS A7V
CPU	Athlon 900 w/cooling fan
Memory	128MB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Guillemot Prophet II 32MB DDR
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus 20.4GB dri
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-105S
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Value
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you:

For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo 5 5500 PCI board ($280). The V5 5500 delivers solid performance and has very good full-screen anti-aliasing (FSAA) compatibility. And, when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo 5 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules' 3D Prophet II Ultra, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS Ultra chipset. With 64MB of DDR SDRAM, this board will blast games at 1600x1200 – if your monitor can handle it. If $500 is too steep, look at Hercules' 3D Prophet II, using the GeForce 2 GTS chipset; the 32MB version comes in at just under $300.

GIVING RAMBUS THE BOOT...

It hasn't been a banner year for Intel. First, they shipped a faulty Camino chipset (dubbed Camino-gate), which was part of the 820 chipset. Then, there was a defect in Intel's 1.13GHz Pentium-III CPU. Most recently, an 850 chipset problem forced Intel to hold up shipments of Pentium-4. Intel has announced that it's phasing RAMBUS out next year. And there has been mounting evidence that RAMBUS doesn't outperform PC133 SDRAM in consumer application performance, including 3D games.

Following my tests (see story on page 160), I've decided to replace RAMBUS in the Power Rig with the same motherboard I've recommended for the Lean Machine: ASUS' A7V. The Power Rig now has 384MB of PC133 SDRAM for about the price of 256MB of RDRAM. Intel-based systems using that company's 820e and 815e chipsets are still very solid performers, and of the two, the 815e is your better option, since you don't incur the extra cost of RAMBUS. But AMD has now jumped out 200MHz ahead of Intel in the clock-speed war, and unlike Intel's high-speed parts, Athlons are quite readily available.

Price	The Skinny
$100	In black, of course
$140	Solid, stable, Socket-A Athlon motherboard
$265	Supersonic Thunderbird
$100	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$290	Screamin' GeForce 2 GTS card
$20	Still gotta have it
$135	Fast and cheap
$120	Slot-drive DVD
$300	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$45	R.I.P. Aureal
$60	Good highs for bottom dollar
$70	Solid performance, good price
$20	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$25	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Very solid 3D joystick with USB
Total	**$1,729**

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Reviews

KDS Avitron AV-195-TF

SideWinder Force Feedback 2

Klipsch ProMedia 2.1 Speakers

Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

KDS AVITRON AV-195-TF

Price: 17-inch, $230; 19-inch, $410; 21-inch, $710 (street prices).
Manufacturer: KDS
Contact: www.kdsusa.com

KDS has been known as a maker of competent, fairly unremarkable monitors. That story has changed with the arrival of their Avitron line of monitors, which come in 17", 19", and 21". All three are powered by a Sony Trinitron tube, and deliver stellar image quality with beautiful color saturation and hue; and KDS' onscreen display (OSD) controls are easy to navigate. The kicker: They're priced to move. At press time, the 17" version had a street price of $230, which – for its image quality – is a hell of a deal.

We ran the Avitron through standard video test patterns that test contrast ratio, convergence, focus, and color. It tested well, the only wart being the two very thin horizontal lines that are typically seen on Trinitron tubes. But they weren't noticeable during a tear through UNREAL TOURNAMENT, and the color definition was gorgeous on all of our 1024x768 test photos.

Another cool feature on the 19" and 21" models is the auto-calibration, which automatically adjusts your image's position and size after a resolution change. This feature is found on other monitors, but hasn't worked well. On the Avitron, it did.

Given their image quality (and price), you'd be doing your eyes a favor to get one of these Avitrons. Get one before the KDS accountants come to their senses. *–Dave Salvator*

SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2

Requirements: Windows 9x, Windows 2000, DirectX 7.0.
Price: $100
Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.microsoft.com/hardware

Force feedback controllers never achieved widespread adoption. The problems: They were big, expensive, and required a massive power brick. On top of that, not many games supported them.

Microsoft aims to change all that with their new SideWinder Force Feedback 2. Coming in at $100, it's still a high-end stick, but considerably cheaper than the original. It doesn't need a power brick, either – the power cord plugs directly into the base of the unit. Finally, it's more compact and better balanced. I was able to hold the whole affair comfortably in my lap while playing CRIMSON SKIES and MECHWARRIOR 3, just like a normal joystick. The throttle is now a more traditional lever, much to my preference. The buttons themselves have embossed numbers – you no longer have to stab randomly to determine which button is 3 or 4.

The SideWinder's new software is much improved, particularly the interface for remapping the buttons. Assigning keystroke combinations to individual buttons is pretty easy now, and the entire interface is integrated into the joystick control panel; you don't have to run a separate program.

In the end, this refined evolution of the force feedback stick is more affordable and simply works better. *–Loyd Case*

KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 2.1 SPEAKERS

Price: $200
Manufacturer: Klipsch
Contact: www.klipsch.com

Klipsch ProMedia V.2-400 speakers brought a new level of amplification to PC audio, as in 400 watts RMS of THX-certified power. What did Klipsch do for an encore? Took their great 4.1 speaker system and brought out a 2.1 version with 200 watts of THX-certified power. The ProMedia 2.1s resemble the 4.1s in many ways, including huge tracts of clean sound and thorax-rattling low-end response. But at $200, with half the amplifier, these ProMedias aren't the insanely great deal that the ProMedia 4.1s are at $250.

The 2.1s arrive with a 200-watt B.A.S.H. amplifier, which is split 50 watts per satellite, and 100 watts for the subwoofer. Audio runs serious bass through these things, and the subwoofer pushes so much air it almost seems like a fan. As an added feature, the ProMedia 2.1s now have a line-level input on the right satellite, where you can connect a DiscMan or MP3 player. But there's only a tone control for the subwoofer, and given these speakers' bass-ish tendencies, a control to dial up treble frequencies would be useful.

As for the overall sound, the 2.1s are great; both audio CDs and games are loud and clear, though they can be boomy unless you dial the subwoofer back. But if you close your eyes, you could almost swear you were listening to high-end stereo speakers for your living room.

If you're considering Klipsch, you'd do well to spend the extra $50 bucks and get the 4.1 rig. *–Dave Salvatore*

DEEP RAIDER

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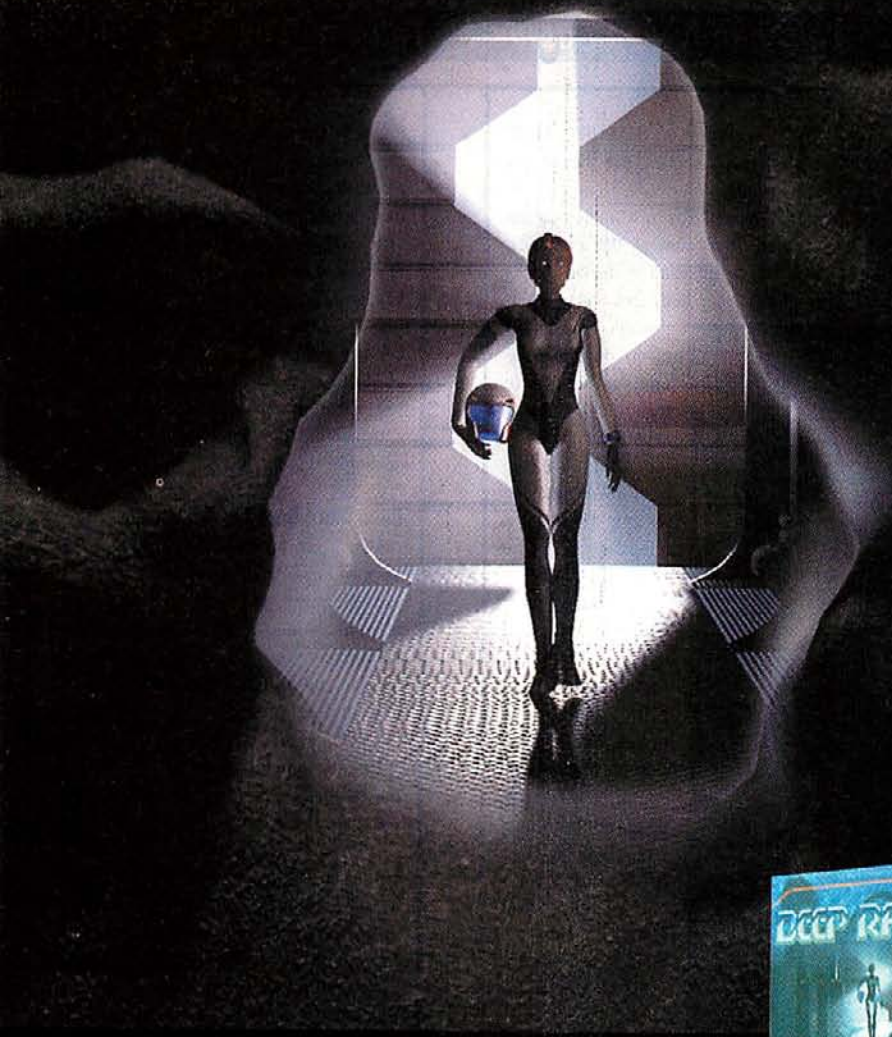

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Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn

Outmagic Merlin with this handy spell guide by Thierry Nguyen

NASTY NISHRUU When the enemy summons nishruu, hit the nishruu fast to protect your mages from losing spells and items.

BALLISTIC MAGIC MISSILE A Minor Sequencer firing two Magic Missiles translates into ten projectiles, flinging themselves toward your target all at once.

The mages in BALDUR'S GATE II may be mad, but they're not stupid.

BG2 mages play by a whole new set of rules. They know all the loopholes, and they're schooled in devious tricks to shatter your body and ego. Luckily, through many deaths of my own, I've figured out a few of their wily tactics and impart them here, if only to save you the grief of seeing some wimp-in-a-robe disintegrate you for the umpteenth time.

First things first: Go to your gameplay options, then to "auto-pause," and then check the option for "End of turn." While you could easily get away without doing this in both the original BALDUR'S GATE and even ICEWIND DALE, this is absolutely essential in BG2. This option allows for maximum efficiency, because if you interrupt a character during a round, you're resetting his or her internal clock, which results in losing precious time. Since every spell can be cast within a round, you can be absolutely sure you're not interrupting or mucking with the timing of your own spellcasting, just by waiting for the round to be over. Sure, the battles become even more turn-based, but the ability to efficiently cast your spells – rather than to haphazardly click around and accidentally interrupt your own casting – is worth it.

Once More Unto the Breach

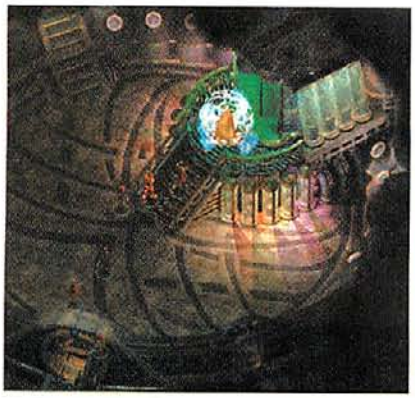
Mages are no longer content to sit back and cast Fireball at you. They see you, and moments later, elaborate sets of spheres and shields are created before they even think about doing anything to *you*. You just have to learn how to peel away those defenses to show those mages who's boss.

Before you attempt to dispel the defenses, you'll want to make sure you can see them in the first place. Cast your highest level "invisibility disruptor" (True Sight, Oracle, etc.), just to make sure you can actually target the mages when it comes time to shatter their defenses.

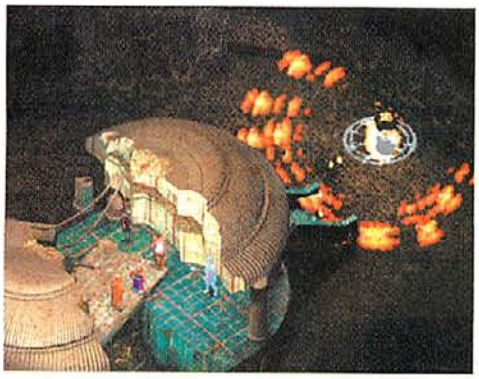
Follow that with a generalized spell-protection-disabler. These are spells ranging from Secret Word to Pierce Magic, or Khelben's Warding Whip. These will insure that any anti-spell globes or spheres are broken, and in some cases, will lower the target's magic resistance. When casting Level-Seven spells, I prefer to use Khelben's Warding Whip, since it will continue to peel away at other spell protections after impact (instead

SATANIC SMAUG If you need some extra firepower, use elementals. If the situation looks dire, and you have the protection, it's time to use Gate.

SHIELDS UP! This is how most battles start. Hit your target with Breach, then let your fighters thwack away.



FIRE-AND-FORGET Here's a cheap trick: Scout out an area, then move back and cast a Fireball or two into the "fog of war." Be even cheaper by casting Cloudkill instead.



MAGIC IN THE STREETS If you're in Athlatka, you may want to bribe a Council Of Six official into giving you a magic license. Visit the main government building, and prepare to pay 5000 gold.

of only taking out one), making your target even more vulnerable.

Finally, cast Breach itself. Just about any mage you recruit will invariably be able to cast Level-Five spells, so have him or her scribe Breach into their spellbooks ASAP. Breach literally tears through any spell with the word "Protection" in the title. Additionally, it even punches through and breaks effects like Absolute Immunity or Stoneskin. Whatever measure of protection the mage had will be shattered by the time you've breached them. Follow all that with some Lower Resistances, and you'll soon have a mage vulnerable to both physical weaponry and magical spells.

Have at least one mage dedicated to memorizing all of these protection-disabling spells, and for backup purposes, have the other mage memorize a Breach or two. With proper coordination and timing, one mage could concentrate on shattering defenses, and the other mage could immediately follow up with offensive spells to prevent the enemy from recasting their protections.

A Shower of Sequences

Done properly, you can be just like those other mages who somehow set up elaborate defenses, or seem to cast a few spells way too fast. Take the time to fiddle with spells like Minor Sequencer, Spell Sequencer, and Spell Trigger.

For each of these spells, one basic rule is in effect: Any two or three spells within a certain level range are cast simultaneously. That means that in the time it takes to cast one Magic Missile, you can have three spells going on at the same time. Minor Sequencer can be used for a basic two-for-one Magic Missile combo, or to make your mage hard to hit via Mirror Image and Blur together.

Spell Sequencer gets even better, since you can string three spells together, as long as they're level-four or lower. You can do an instant-protection sequence with Stoneskin and both Fireshields at once, or rain down death with three castings of Melf's Minute Meteors.

Spell Trigger lets you cast three spells that are level-six or lower. Use this to create an instant spell-defense-shattering kit, with True Seeing, Pierce Magic, and Breach strung together. Or flood the room with three castings of Chain Lightning. An unshielded – but highly magic-resistant – enemy can be weakened by slamming it with three Lower Resistances in a row, making it ripe for a thrashing via Magic Missile.

These are just a few examples of the devious things you can pull off with the proper sequences. Experiment with other combinations, and you'll see for yourself just how powerful mages are.

Group Hug

When you know you're about to have a major encounter (such as, oh, seeing a dragon at the other side of the cave, or noticing the giant sarcophagus), you should be prepared to protect the group. Make sure to cast the following spells before a major encounter, and you should have a significantly easier time winning the battle.

Haste: Everyone gets hopped up and ready to inflict pain.

Defensive Harmony: Everyone gets a free AC boost, which always helps.

Bless and **Chant:** These raise your various attack and saving throws, while lowering the enemy's own attack and saving throws. Let them stack on top of each other, even though they're very similar.

Protection From Evil 10' Radius: Gives a nice, immediate knockdown to any enemy creatures. It's also useful for those times when you feel like conjuring any sort of Demon.

Court Summons

When it comes to summoning, leave it mostly up to the priest or druid in the group – their elementals don't require the "taming period" that mages have. For mages, opt to summon either nishruus or hakeashars, mostly because those are anti-mage creatures. Conversely, target nishruu first, so that they don't cripple your mages.

Priests can summon animals and undead to serve as pure cannon fodder and to save their elementals for serious, actual hitting power. Druids, in particular, get Call Woodland Being, which is extremely useful because you essentially get another free healer. Also, at high levels, the clerics can pull off a casting of Gate (be sure to cast Protection From Evil 10' Radius first); then let the resultant pit fiend tear its way through your opposition.

Next month, I'll focus on strategies against certain kinds of enemies (think mind-flayers or liches). CGW

BREACHIN' IN THE RAIN Whether you're fighting mages in chapter two or seven, they will all falter beneath a mage who specializes in breaching their defenses.

Unreal Tournament: Game Of The Year Edition

Get on top of the new maps

by Thomas L. McDonald

Whether you're just joining the ranks of UT gamers via this new edition, or you've snagged these maps online and are trying them out, look here first. I spent some time putting these maps through their paces to find out what makes the best ones work, and how you can use their features to your advantage.

Cybrosis II

■■■ The intricate layout alone of Cybrosis II would make it a strong DM map, but a few unusual touches make it one of the best. Almost every place someone might be tempted to camp has a blind spot. The most tempting trap is the "Danger" switch, which triggers a matrix of beams that cause instant death; the bait is the Quad damage in the killing zone. One odd thing you might notice is that the real trap is the switch itself, which even seasoned players seem to linger at longer than they should. Approached from the glass tunnel, this area makes a prime hunting ground for players tempted by either the quad damage or the switch itself. Do yourself a favor and forget about the death beams.

■ The real threat is to those who would linger at the switch hoping to vaporize an enemy, rather than watch their own backs.

Facing Worlds II

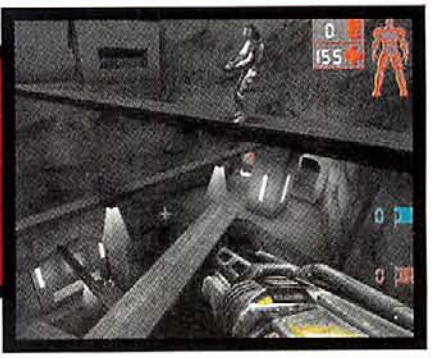
■■■ Inoxx designed this sequel to his landmark UT level as a sniper's paradise. Each tower is loaded with sniper rifles and sniper nests. On the main level there are two sniper rifles, a pulse gun, and rocket launcher, as well as two medkits, armor, and a shield belt. On the upper level, there is another sniper rifle and a pair of jump boots. The design of this upper tower is perfectly matched to the items. One of the high walls is shorter than the others, and reachable with the jump boots. The highest point on the map is then a short jump away. In this perch, a sniper has total dominance of the no man's land and the other sniper nests. Snipers in this spot are unexpected, and can go undetected for a long time, racking up those mighty "heeeaaad-shoooots"!

■ See those red lights on the top of the opposing tower? That's where the sniper needs to go.

Noxion 16

■■■ An oddly-neglected map on the servers, Noxion 16 only really comes to life with large numbers of players. It also rewards good team tactics in CTF more than most maps. This is due to a three-tiered no-man's land, spanned by wooden planks and flanked by sniper nests. A four-person defense in this kill zone can effectively slow (and a six-person defense can utterly stop) an opposing team from accessing the flag. A player on the top-most planks with a rocket launcher can sweep the center area clean, while snipers in the nests can provide additional stopping power. Effective ownership of this zone is ownership of the map.

■ Spray the area with rockets from above, and stash other teammates in the sniper nests to dominate Noxion 16.



Healpod

■■■ Attempts to dominate the healpod itself are bound to fail. A glowing green cylinder at the center of the map, the pod heals you as long as you stand in it, but if someone walks over one of the numerous switches, it means instant death to whomever is in the pod. The temptation is to wait for someone to enter the pod and then to jump on the switch, but the odd timing and short duration of the killing mode mean too much time is spent waiting and too little time spent hunting. Forget about this trap: It's only there to prevent camping and is useless for racking up kills. Use the healpod sparingly, quickly, and only after a recon of the switches. Of course, people still flock to it like flies to light, so the upper levels are prime stalking grounds and good locations to rack up kills.

■ Sure, it's fun to slam down the healpod trap on an unsuspecting camper, but it's a pointless kill, and wastes time better spent on the move.

Game Commander 2

Voice Control for Games & Simulations

Experience The Next Generation of Award-Winning Voice Control

No more fumbling with hard to remember keystrokes. The original Game Commander, released in 1998, won numerous awards for bringing the power of voice control to games including "Editor's Choice" from PC Gamer, Computer Gaming World and CNET Gamecenter. Now, Game Commander 2 breaks new ground with lightning fast command response and even more control over your games. You can even run Game Commander 2 along with popular voice chat programs such as TeamSound™, Roger Wilco™, and BattleCom™. And it works as hard as it plays. Take command of Windows 95, 98, Me and 2000 applications too.

Voice commands with no training
Put the power of speaker independent voice control to work immediately without tedious voice training.

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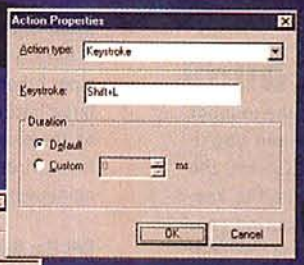
Assign your own sounds and recorded speech to hear your commands being acknowledged and enhance the gaming experience.

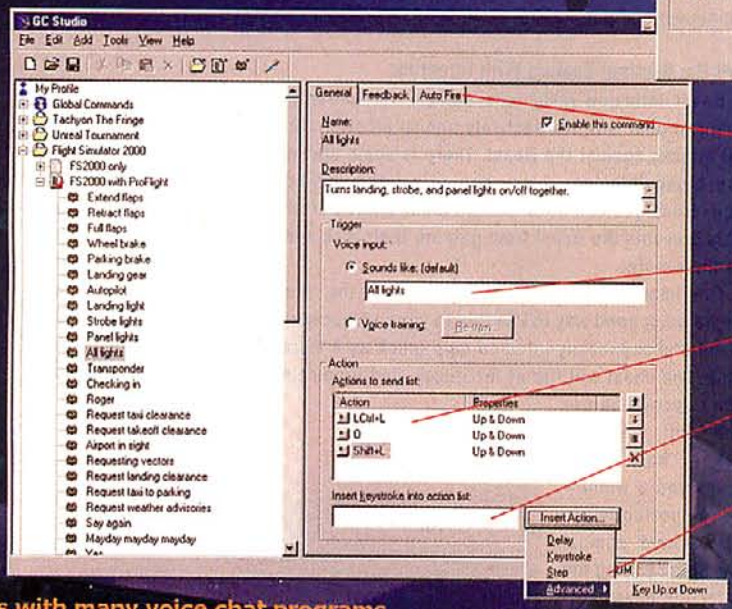
Global commands
Common commands are available across all Windows applications.

Automatic command file loading
The right commands are always ready as soon as you need them. No need to fuss with files while you work and play. Or lock one in place and use it everywhere.

Powerful command editing
The Game Commander Studio gives you full access to all your commands and supports cut, copy and paste operations to make editing a snap.



Adjustable actions
Fine tune any keystroke or action for maximum control!



Multi-channel auto fire
Say a command and have it repeated continuously until you tell it to stop. Issue more commands while auto fire runs, including more auto fire commands!

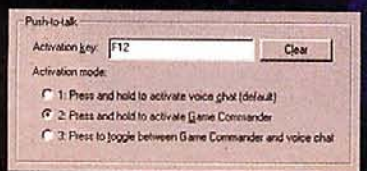
No voice training required
Just type in what you want to say and you're ready.

Massive macro capabilities
Unleash up to 256 keystrokes per voice command.

Easy keystroke entry
Just press the key as you would in the game. Many special Windows keys and combinations are also supported.

Extended actions
Configurable delay, key up, and key down actions, and step sequencing add more control capabilities than ever before.

Works with many voice chat programs
Use push-to-talk to switch between Game Commander and popular voice chat programs (Windows 9x & Me only). Or use push-to-talk alone to enable command recognition.



Available voice training
For special cases, strong accents or non-English commands, voice training takes only three utterances.

Free Trial Download
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Sontage Interactive
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Tel: 408-467-0457
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gcsales@gamecommander.com

Windows 95,98,Me 2000

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CGTips

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line). We'll publish one submission each month. Please send genuine tips or strategies instead of cheat codes cut-and-pasted from the Internet. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!

READER TIP

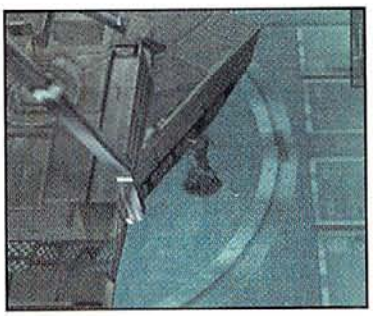
Homeworld: Cataclysm

■■■ A good tactic with leeches is to use them as a distraction against Beast-heavy cruisers. The Beast can research heavy cruisers and put them into action long before the Somtaaw can answer with dreadnoughts, and a good Beast player will use this to his/her advantage, pressing the Somtaaw's mothership with heavy cruisers early in the game. Fortunately, a Somtaaw mothership is faster than a heavy cruiser; once its engines are upgraded, it can flee. Guard your mothership with a destroyer or two, as well as a sentinel shield, and as you run away from the heavy cruisers, produce a stream of leeches with which to harass them. The heavy cruisers will have to stop attacking in order to remove the leeches; at this point, *you* can attack with your destroyers, and pull them back into the mothership's defense screens when they begin to take damage. This will give you enough time to finish researching and building dreadnoughts. Once you have two or three dreadnoughts, a Beast fleet won't stand a chance. *–Mark Laramore*

For writing a couple of good tips on HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM, we're giving Mark a copy of DOGS OF WAR, a STARFLEET COMMAND 2 pin, and a SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT shirt. Enjoy!

Metal Gear Solid

■■■ Here're a few hints for the tougher areas of the game. First, when you're being tortured by Revolver Ocelot, the easiest way to resist is to use the keyboard. We recommend configuring your keys so that your space bar regains your strength. It's the easiest key to smack repeatedly, and using it will help insure that you save Meryl. The keyboard will also come in handy when you're fighting Psycho Mantis. If you've been using a gamepad to play up to this point, you'll need to ditch it in favor of the keyboard. Mantis can predict your movements if you're using a gamepad, but if you use the keyboard, he's vulnerable. Finally, keep an eye out for cardboard boxes. You can use them to warp around the Alaskan warhead-disposal complex. Simply hop into a truck and hide in your box. A guard will come by and drive you and the truck to wherever the box is addressed.



Multi-Squad Tactics

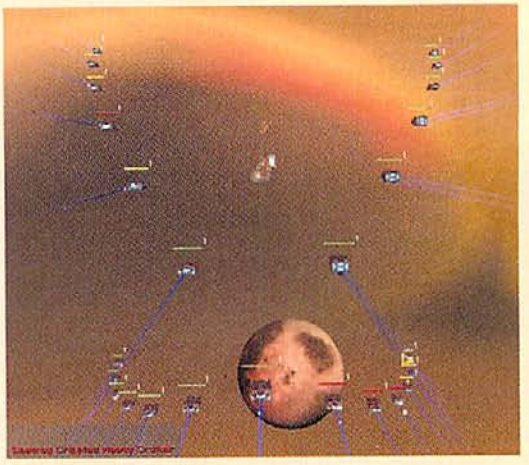
Sure, a gigantic mass of ships in Claw formation is a mighty punch, but consider breaking your strike fleets into two or even three smaller groups. In any large battle, you will have major targets that require concentrated fire, as well as the smaller, faster defenders of those targets. By allowing one squad to focus fire on the large targets, you can let a second or even third squad maneuver and defend them.

Get the Bactine! Dealing With Infection

Beast infection raises the stakes considerably in CATACLYSM. You must learn to deal with it effectively and to incorporate these considerations into all attacks against the Beast. There is some advance notice when your ships are being infected. If you can select the individual units (not the whole squadron), you can often scuttle these ships before you lose control of them. This prevents the Beast from gaining their tech and from adding another ship to their roster.

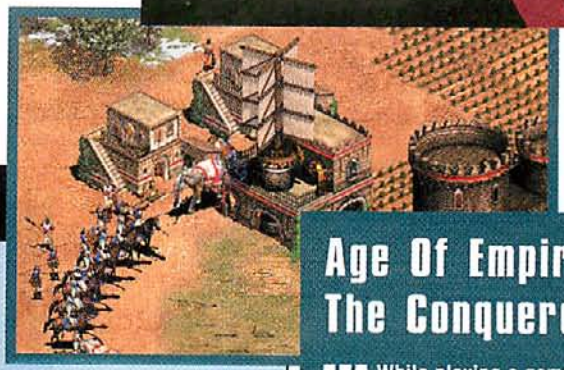
One important fact to remember is that the infection beam needs time to recharge. A good way to use this to your advantage is to stay just out of range. Send a cheap, easily-infected ship (such as a Recon) towards the Beast cap ship. The beam will fire at the decoy, and if you time it right, you can scuttle the decoy before the full infection takes hold. This gives you a window of opportunity to strike hard against the ship carrying the infection beam.

Finally, don't ever use a ship that will touch a Beast ship, such as the ram, the worker, or the leech.



Crimson Skies

Highlight the microphone on the left side of the main menu in the campaign. Press the right mouse button, then type "idaho." A new drop-down menu that allows any level to be selected will appear at the top-right of the screen.



Age Of Empires II: The Conquerors

■■■ While playing a game, press [Enter], then type one of the following codes to activate the corresponding cheat function:

RESULT	CHEAT CODE
1000 food	cheese steak jimmy's
1000 gold	robin hood
1000 stone	rock on
1000 wood	lumberjack
Cobra car	how do you turn this on
Control nature	natural wonders
Destroy all opponents	black death
Fast building	aegis
Flying dogs	woof woof
Full map	marco
Instant victory	i r winner
Little monkey	furious the monkey boy
No fog of war	polo

Icewind Dale

■■■ You'll need to have patched your copy to version 1.05. You'll also need to edit a text file; create a backup copy just to be safe. Use a text editor to edit the "icewind.ini" file in the game directory. Add the line "Cheats=1" anywhere under the "[Game Options]" section.

Start the game and press [Ctrl]+[Tab] to display the console window. Type "CHEATERSDOPROSPER:EnableCheatKeys()" to enable cheat mode. Then, enter one of the following codes while playing a game to activate the corresponding cheat function.

RESULT	CHEAT CODE
Move selected characters to pointer position	Ctrl + J
Heal or resurrect the selected character or portrait	Ctrl + R
Kill selected monster or NPC with no EXP	Ctrl + Y
Display trigger polygons (shows traps)	Ctrl + 4

ADDITIONAL CHEATS

You can also bring up the console again ([Ctrl]+[Tab]) and type in one of these additional codes:

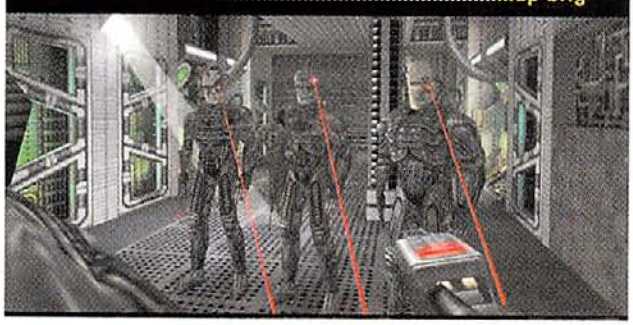
RESULT	CHEAT CODE
Full map	CHEATERSDOPROSPER:ExploreArea()
Teleport party to pointer	CHEATERSDOPROSPER:Hans()
Give selected characters indicated EXP	CHEATERSDOPROSPER:SetCurrentXP([number])
Add indicated gold to party total	CHEATERSDOPROSPER:AddGold([number])

Add 5 healing potions, 5 antidotes, and 1 scroll of Stone To Flesh
CHEATERSDOPROSPER:FirstAid()

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

■■■ Press ~ to display the console, then enter one of the following codes to activate the corresponding cheat function. Cheats cannot be enabled in multiplayer mode.

RESULT	CHEAT CODE
Toggle God mode	god
All weapons	give weapons
999 health and armor	undying
No clipping	noclip
Invisibility	notarget
Third-person view enabled	cg_thirdperson 1
Third-person view disabled	cg_thirdperson 0
Hidden level	map brig



INSIDE MULTIPLAYER

BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Banned!

EVERQUEST PLAYER-BANNING RAISES SERIOUS ROLE-PLAYING QUESTIONS

Player-banning is an extremely controversial issue in massively multiplayer online games, primarily because it's a clear case of a company defining limits on a realm they actively hype as "unlimited." Online role-playing games only succeed thanks to the creativity of the gamers, with the game itself being merely a tool to stimulate interaction. Sometimes, players cross the line in the name of "creativity" and ruin the experience for others with various forms of harassment. Considering the size and scope of games like ULTIMA ONLINE, EVERQUEST, and ASHERON'S CALL, these instances are surprisingly rare, but always controversial.

Two cases of player-banning stand in sharp contrast to each other. The first is an older story concerning the MDK (Murder Death Kill) guild, banned from ULTIMA ONLINE earlier this year. This guild was dedicated to being disruptive, and they preyed on a player named Angel Storm who wasn't going to put up with it. They had a little macro that displayed "Ass Rape" on the screen as they stood over corpses, and would take pictures of these screens and post them to their Web site. So not only were they hunting other players, they were being crass dillweeds about it. Origin got fed up, and banned the entire guild, proving that if you're a jerk long enough, someone will simply pull the plug.

The Mystere Controversy

On the other side of this issue is a more recent case of player-banning, this one from EVERQUEST. A gamer named Mystere, whose character is a dark elf, posted a story to an unofficial message board. Though it was a very graphic tale of torture, the story was completely in character and in the tone of the game. Remember: This is a gameworld sprinkled with dismembered corpses and heads on pikes. The story was clearly fictional and not a threat—implied or direct—to another gamer. It was not on a Sony or Verant board. Verant was alerted to the story by a hysterical parent, who saw it and began to madly contact parental boardwatch sites and services to get EVERQUEST sites flagged for pornographic content. Verant may indeed have found the content offensive, but moreover, they saw looming bad PR and decided to make a point.

I was unable to reach Mystere (all emails bounced), but I was able to read the story in question before it vanished from the boards. It was a Sadean account of torture written in-character, and seemed perfectly in keeping with the EVERQUEST gameworld. Yes, it was explicit, not to mention rather overwrought and pretty poorly written. But it was merely the textual equivalent of all those corpses seen in the game. Why is it fine when sprites are shown cutting each other to pieces, but when someone writes a story that describes the same thing, it suddenly becomes verboten?

Of course, any company has the right to ban whomever they want, whenever they want to. It's right there in the EULA you don't bother to read in your rush to click the "I Accept These Terms" button and get to playing the game. In the case of Sony/Verant, they clearly had visions of a nightly news story about some teen stalking and killing another with the incident used as proof of intent.

In a bizarre twist of anti-logic, however, General Counsel for Sony Online Entertainment Andrew S. Zaffron claimed that the player-banning was actually in response to the author's use of "our intellectual property—without license—to create what the law calls a 'derivative work.'" This must mean that all writers of EQ fan-fiction (which Verant encourages, by the way) can expect a cease-and-desist letter.

Smedley Speaks

"The simple fact," observed Verant CEO John Smedley in a statement to the press, "is that it's easy for folks to point at that story, point at EVERQUEST and link the two. It becomes our business, because it threatens our business by making us a huge target for all the folks out there that think we all are all a bunch of violent video-game players. This just gives them fuel for the fire."

While acknowledging that they handled the situation badly and apologizing for that, Smedley makes it abundantly clear that it was handled in that manner for PR reasons. He seems

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS... BETTER THAN EVER? page 184

ONLY THE LONELY CAN PLAY page 186

EVERQUEST You're in our world, now.

like a reasonable guy and was quick to try to mend fences with the community, but he's also unapologetic and remains vague about setting clear standards for behavior outside the actual game.

He understands what he calls the "big question: "Where's the line? And what right do we have to draw it outside the game? The answer is complicated and extremely subjective, so I'll just have to be honest and say we'll know it when it's over the line. We're going to discuss it in the upcoming few weeks and see if we can make it more clear, but I can't honestly say if we'll get anywhere, because none of us wants to stop people from writing awesome fanfiction about EQ. But we aren't going to be looking at every fan site and becoming the Thought Police. We have neither the time nor the inclination to do that. However, we need to protect EVERQUEST'S good image as best we can."

Protect it from whom? The people who enjoy it and make it work, such as Mystere? It seems to me that Smedley should be protecting it from the people who want to bring it down. Verant is fighting the wrong enemy, but then RPGers only number in the thousands, while lazy parents are found on every block.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD...

SegaNet Going Strong

The barbarians are at the gates. Or, in this case, it's the console gamers.

Now don't get me wrong. I am a console gamer. I love my Dreamcast and will gladly marry it once Vermont gets around to legalizing every conceivable form of marriage. However, console gamers and PC gamers are oil and water, and Sega is about to try to get them to mix.

SegaNet launched this past September to bring select Dreamcast games to the Internet, with their awe-inspiring NFL2K1 as the flagship product. Considering that the DC unit only packs a measly 56.6K modem, they've actually done quite a nice job with resolving latency issues. Sure, the launch got off to a rocky start with disconnects and the usual sluggish responses, but the kinks are getting hammered out pretty quickly, paving the way for QUAKE 3 ARENA and UNREAL TOURNAMENT multiplayer support via Dreamcast.

That thought must send shivers down the spines of the hardcore PC gamers who populate the game servers, as they imagine rampaging hordes of 13-year-old console doodz joining sessions from their living room. Rest easy, fraggers: There is no chance that PC-to-console gaming will happen any time soon. As of now, there is really no way to work out the complex latency and connectivity issues that would enable someone on a Dreamcast unit to challenge someone on a PC.

However, cross-platform gaming is being worked on in some very dark and dank cubbyholes, and Sega has placed itself at the crossroads with SegaNet. This online service is not only the sole portal for Dreamcast gamers to hook up, but they also launched as a full ISP and have now rolled out PC servers for titles like QUAKE 3 ARENA, UT, AGE OF EMPIRES, KINGPIN, and MOTOCROSS MADNESS. As for speed and stability, the PC servers are about comparable to the Heat.net service (which is pretty much exactly like MPlayer) because, well, it *is* Heat.net. Sega folded Heat into SegaNet and is bringing Heat's original RTS/conquest game 10SIX to the service for a free trial period with all new accounts. This might give the deeply flawed but still-promising 10SIX some of the attention it's been sorely lacking.

Sega is angling hard to be all things to all gamers, and aren't doing too shabby a job. Their console support is working out better than expected. Their PC support is fine, but without the hooks needed to lure people away from the other services. Reports on the ISP show that it performs well. With an exclusive title or two and a better version of 10SIX to anchor the service, it might become another Zone or Mplayer. That's certainly their hope.

10SIX New life on SegaNet?

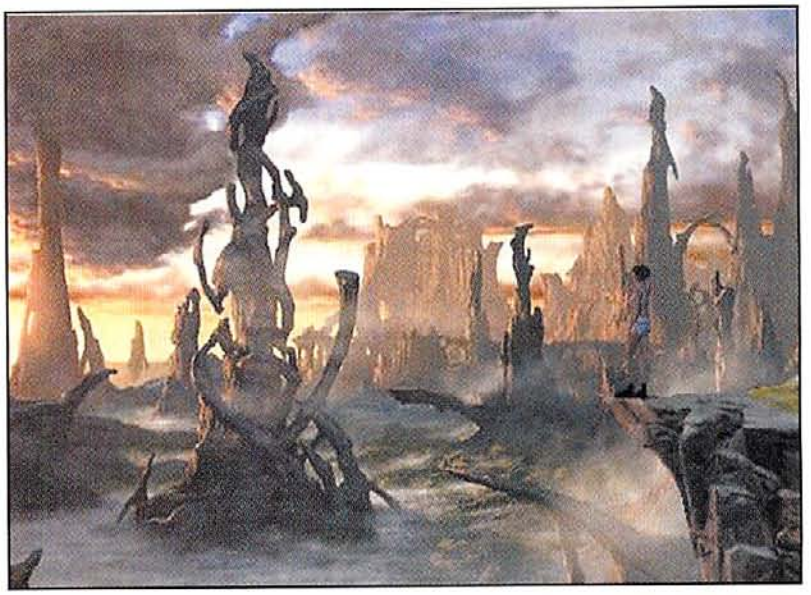
BY AUDREY WELLS gamedame@gddomain.com

They're...Alive! ALIVE!

THE TRUTH IS, ADVENTURE GAMES WERE NEVER DEAD TO BEGIN WITH

Who says the adventure genre is dead? You can just obliterate that clichéd phrase from your mind. In spite of the mainstream gaming media consistently bemoaning the death of adventure games, the genre is actually bustling with life. With this fact in mind, I recently wrote to *CGW* to criticize their latest "adventures are dead" shtick – only to be offered a column in return. As a result, you are now the privileged reader of the brand-new Inside Adventure Gaming page. See where complaining gets you?

I thought the best way to start my first column was to debunk the myth, and then to prattle on about all the new adventure games coming from developers around the world. This new group of games, along with a few older gems, makes for a nice, diverse range to suit the tastes of all breeds of adventure gamers – whether you're a diehard third-person gamer, first-person gamer, or somewhere in between. Whether you're buying for yourself or someone else this holiday season, these games are a surefire way to satisfy all adventure game cravings.



A Fantastic Journey

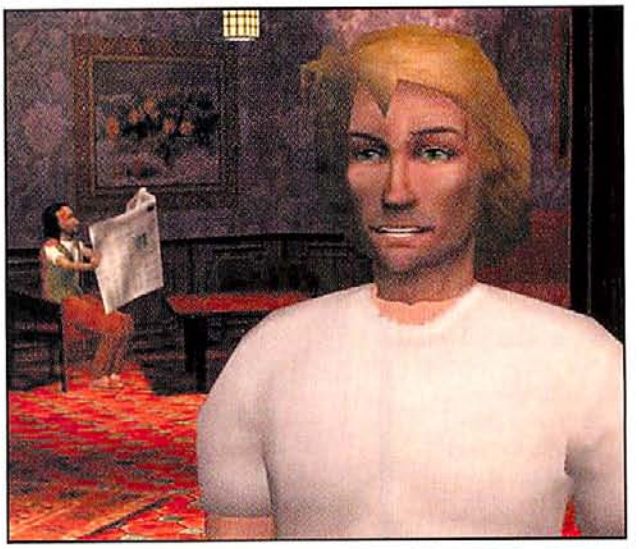
THE LONGEST JOURNEY's designer Ragnar Tørnquist and his team at Funcom have produced an absolute masterpiece of adventure gaming, about the caliber of a Jane Jensen or Tim Schafer game. Over a span of thirteen chapters, THE LONGEST JOURNEY tells an inspiring tale of an eighteen-year-old girl named April Ryan and her quest to unravel the questions surrounding her own destiny and two breathtaking parallel worlds of magic and science. The game features spectacular visuals, a beautiful musical score, and one of the best stories I have seen, played, or heard in a long time. It is certainly a must for any self-respecting adventure gamer—it's one of those treasured games that finds a privileged spot on your shelf to be remembered and replayed for all time. See the full review elsewhere in this issue.

For more information: **www.longestjourney.com**

Wanna Be a Shadow Hunter?

Jane Jensen's award-winning GABRIEL KNIGHT series is one of the greatest adventure game series of all time, beginning with the 2D animated SINS OF THE FATHERS in 1993 and the full-motion video THE BEAST WITHIN two years later. In 1999, a third masterpiece was added to the collection, BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED—this time in 3D. It is an exciting tale of intrigue, conspiracy, and ancient secrets that begins when good ol' Gabe travels to France on assignment as Schattenjäger, or Shadow Hunter. Over the course of the game, the dynamic duo of Gabriel and Grace (Gabe's assistant) begins to uncover and unravel the sinister plot and mind-boggling enigmas surrounding the French village of Rennes-le-Chateau. This is one adventure game that you shouldn't overlook; despite *CGW*'s ruthlessly harsh review [April 2000], it is a personal favorite of mine and tells a *damn* good story.

For more information: **www.sierrastudios.com/games/gk3/**



Swashbuckling Pirates, Ahoy!

LucasArts' upcoming ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND is the fourth in an adventure series that began over a decade ago with the classic THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND. In this episode, you'll again play as Guybrush Threepwood, wanna-be pirate extraordinaire, as he sets off on a whole new buccaneering adventure chock-full of sidesplitting wittiness, insult arm wrestling, pink pirate ships, and oodles of shrieking monkeys. This time around, the game will be in 3D and controlled by keyboard (using an improved version of the GRIM FANDANGO engine). This game is sure to be full of laughs and a treat for new and old MONKEY ISLAND fans alike.

For more information: **www.lucasarts.com/products/monkey4/**

It's the Day of the Dead

Though Tim Schafer's GRIM FANDANGO was released in 1998, it's one of the best adventures ever made and is still available in bargain bins. You play as Manny Calavera, "travel agent" in the Land of the Dead (a world inspired by Mexican folklore) and seller of travel packages to souls on their way to eternal rest. When Manny manages to steal the perfect client from his rival, a chain of events is unleashed, sending him on a wild film-noirish ride to unravel crime and corruption. The graphics and animated cut-scenes are phenomenal, the plot is wonderfully whimsical, and the characters and their respective voice actors are captivating. If you missed this one before, find it and buy it now.

For more information: **www.lucasarts.com/products/grim/**

Enchanting Worlds

MYST-lovers will enjoy this beautiful sequel to ATLANTIS: THE LOST TALES. You play as Ten, descendent of Seth (the star of the first game) and the Bearer of Light, as he embarks on a journey to defy the Dark. Jam-packed with mysteries and puzzles to solve, BEYOND ATLANTIS will enchant you with its brilliant graphics, imaginative soundtrack, and breathtaking worlds. Ten will travel to places ranging from Mayan temples to an Irish monastery, solve complex puzzles, and meet enigmatic characters. Steer clear if you're not a fan of developer Cryo's work, but if you like immersing yourself in a beautiful world and solving puzzles, BEYOND ATLANTIS is for you.

For more information: **www.dreamcatchergames.com/products/atlantis.htm**

Espionage Galore

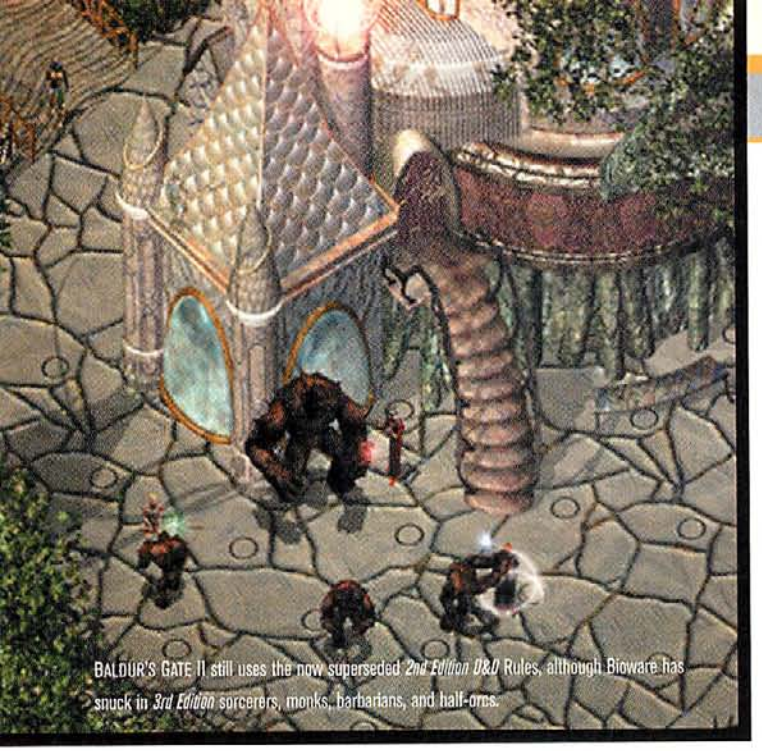
In DayDream Software's TRAITOR'S GATE, you play an American spy sent to infiltrate the Tower of London and replace the precious crown jewels with replicas in order to thwart an expected theft by a traitor. To top it off, you're not to let the British know what is going on! What could be more fun than sneaking around, slinking past guards and alarms, and using all kinds of sophisticated, high-tech spy gadgets? TRAITOR'S GATE features a beautifully recreated Tower of London and realistic puzzles. A difficult maze in one portion of the game makes it more suitable for experienced gamers, but it's certainly a refreshing change of pace for all gamers due to the unusual spy theme.

For more information: **www.traitorsgate.com.**

Until Next Time...

Enjoy adventure gaming at its finest. Prove *CGW* wrong. Buy every adventure game known to humankind. And send your comments and criticisms to me at gamedame@gddomain.com.

BY STEPHEN "DESSLOCK" JANICKI desslock@desslock.com



BALDUR'S GATE II still uses the now superseded *2nd Edition D&D* Rules, although Bioware has snuck in *3rd Edition* sorcerers, monks, barbarians, and half-orcs.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS—BETTER THAN EVER?

Enter the 3rd Edition

Brutish half-orcs are back. So are those more-violent-than-meditative monks. Accompanying them are dwarven paladins, armor-wearing mages, and brutish barbarians. Wizards of the Coast has finally unveiled the third iteration of the most popular RPG of them all, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and this edition radically revises the core rules and leaves very little unchanged. In spite of all the changes, the new version has been widely praised by tabletop gamers and should be a significantly better *D&D* system for computer RPG adaptations as well.

While *D&D* computer games have consistently been popular, the actual gameplay system has been derided as outdated, unbalanced, and unintuitive. Many RPG systems created specifically for computer games are better balanced, more accessible, and allow players additional opportunities to personalize their experiences. As if in answer to this, the *D&D 3rd Edition* rationalizes the existing rules, removes arbitrary and illogical gameplay restrictions, and allows players to create and develop characters that more accurately reflect the personalities they wish to roleplay.

Core Distinctions

D&D characters are rated in six core attributes, but in previous editions, some of those attributes—charisma, wisdom, and intelligence—were completely useless for most classes. While some non-*D&D* computer RPGs (like FALLOUT) forced players to make difficult choices about which attributes to emphasize, *D&D* has historically made those choices almost meaningless.

Computer adaptations of *D&D* have also, generally (with the notable exception of PLANESCAPE), made no attempt to make higher attribute scores affect anything other than combat effectiveness. That should change with the *3rd Edition*, as the under-utilized attributes are given increased importance to certain classes, and more opportunities to influence the outcome of events.

While computer RPGs like the MIGHT AND MAGIC series permitted, and required, characters to significantly enhance their core attributes during the course of their experiences, attributes in *D&D* have always been kept relatively static. Under the new *D&D* system, attributes continue to increase, which more effectively rewards players for accomplishments. Even more significantly, characters now acquire additional skills and feat abilities as they gain experience, and all of the discriminatory class and race limitations have been eliminated. If you really want to role-play a mage character that is capable of wearing armor while casting spells, or dual-class a halfling thief into a ranger, you can now develop your character in that fashion. Different classes and races are still better suited to certain roles and activities, but determined players are no longer absolutely prohibited from roleplaying their creations in the manner of their choosing.

The *3rd Edition* designers extensively play-tested and capably tweaked the new system to both address all of *D&D*'s perceived flaws, and to ensure that no elements that players strongly identified with *D&D* were removed or modified beyond recognition. For example, *D&D* has traditionally required mages to pre-select and memorize spells—an onerous requirement that significantly limits the utility of spell-casters. It's annoying to be stuck with a granite statue as a party member, just because your spell-casters didn't anticipate that they'd need to memorize stone-to-flesh spells.

RPG systems created during the past ten years have almost universally adopted more flexible point-based systems that allow characters to choose their spells at the time of casting, instead of in advance. But completely abandoning *D&D*'s spell-casting system—even if it was widely regarded as cumbersome and outdated—might have alienated veteran players. Instead, the *3rd Edition* designers introduced a new character class, the sorcerer, who isn't required to memorize spells in advance; and they have permitted priests to gain access to unmemorized spells as well. A great design compromise.

Die, Monster, Die!

There are also a ton of logistical changes introduced by the *3rd Edition*, such as an increased emphasis on using a 20-sided die to determine the results of actions. Since computer *D&D* games already sorted through attack modifiers, saving throws, and other complexities in a manner largely transparent to players, those sorts of rationalizations may have a more noticeable impact on tabletop *D&D* than computer game adaptations. But *D&D*'s old rules were often difficult to understand and unintuitive, as anyone who has tried to explain *D&D*'s armor class system would appreciate. Collectively, the rule simplifications should make *D&D* easier to comprehend and enjoy.

Computer RPGs inherently have less role-playing flexibility than their tabletop counterparts, and *D&D* adaptations have been additionally burdened by an archaic, unbalanced system. But now, with the *3rd Edition* rules, *D&D* computer gaming experiences should be much closer to *real* roleplaying.

Any system that gives players additional opportunities to personalize the experiences of their demented, gnome-barbarian alter-egos is a step in the right direction for the genre. CGW

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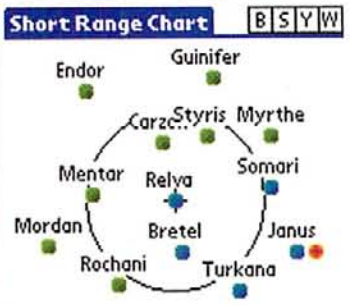
ELITE Lite

SPACE TRADER FOR THE PALM OS



Each ship in SPACE TRADER has a maximum range, meaning that you'll have to plan your trade routes carefully.

■■■ My Game Boy Color is laying idle in some dark corner of my basement, sitting right next to my NEO-GEO Pocket Color. They've both been temporarily replaced by my Visor, thanks to a little gem of a freeware game called SPACE TRADER. You begin by assigning skill points in several areas, depending on what you want to specialize in; and then warp around an enormous galaxy buying low, selling high, and upgrading your ship. SPACE TRADER is a game of consequences. Kill innocent cargo ships or smuggle contraband, and your police record will suffer. Hunt pirates as a bounty hunter and pass random cargo inspections, and your record will improve. The game mechanics are somewhat simplistic – fighting ships is reduced to tapping Attack, Flee, or Surrender buttons, for example – but these decisions serve to streamline gameplay, rather than hurt it.

There is actually an ELITE clone for the Palm OS called VOID (**www.pdabusiness.com**), but the flight and combat sequences are annoying due to less-than-ideal controls, and you need a color Palm IIIc to get the most out of it. SPACE TRADER is more fun in many ways, because the text-based interface is better suited for the Palm OS, and the pacing is flawless. It had me tapping away into the wee hours of the morning for over a week, and even my wife is addicted (well, she was addicted until she accidentally picked up a box full of Tribbles from a shady dealer). Pick up the latest version at the Space Trader Centre (go.to/spacetrader).

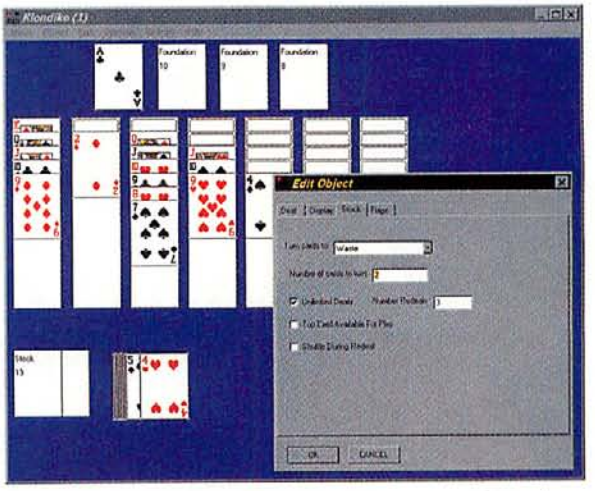
BY T. BYRL BAKER tbyrlbaker@msn.com

Solo Mio

THE JOY OF SOLITAIRE AND OTHER SMALL GAMES

After a month's hiatus you'd think I'd reappear with something amazing, but I'm here to talk about Solitaire. You remember, that card game you used to play before you bought a computer? I recently had the urge to play some of my favorite old Solitaire games on the computer, but couldn't find a single package that used the house rules I was accustomed to. After much searching, I stumbled upon Dan Reed's SOLO (**members.home.com/kenguru**), a beautiful freeware program that makes everything from customizing rules to creating entirely new Solitaire games incredibly easy.

SOLO is nowhere near as flashy or feature-rich as the best freeware and shareware Solitaire games on the market. It won't automatically move cards around if you double click them, and there aren't any fancy graphics. Its real strength is the editing capabilities, which let users make any changes they want to a game without requiring any programming skills at all.



Say, for example, you play Klondike, and two cards are turned over from the stock pile at a time instead of three, and you also want to only be able to see the last card you turned over (not the other card that was peeled off along with it). Making those changes takes all of ten seconds, once you spend the fifteen minutes or so it takes to get familiar with the editor's basic options. Creating a new game takes some planning, but that same simple editor interface lets you create foundations, tableaus, and other piles; place them on the table by dragging them around; and establish rules, using a fill-in-the-blanks interface. SOLO comes with more than 67 games to get you started.

MOD-MAKERS GETTIN' PAID

Huzzah, Shrapnel Games!

■■■ Tip o' the hat to Shrapnel Games for initiating a program that rewards the top mod authors with publishing deals. I'm used to seeing companies draw on the best stuff from the mod communities to pad out expansion packs, but the mod authors are rarely rewarded with anything beyond a T-shirt and a free copy of the game.

Shrapnel's new program not only gives mod authors a cut of the proceeds from the sales of their mods, but also highlights the author at their site, and goes the extra mile to credit these talented designers for their hard work.

The first person to take advantage of the deal is Ed Marshall, with his Tour of Duty '44 mod for WDK 2K. This new addition models the D-Day landings and the first few days of fighting that took place during this historic battle. You can learn more about it and order the mod at www.shrapnel-games.com. CGW

BY BRUCE GERYK ceremony@net66.com

(above) You can play old favorites by e-mail using AIDE DE CAMP 2. (left) Yes, PACIFIC WAR was a great game.

GET ESTABLISHED DESIGNERS OFF THE SIDELINES AND INTO THE GAME

Wasted Talents

Wargamers are a nostalgic bunch. How else to explain our joy at the recent re-release – for free download – of Gary Grigsby's PACIFIC WAR, by Matrix Games? (**www.matrixgames.com**) Long a favorite among hardcore armchair generals, this eight-year-old classic is one of the only computer games ever released to model the Pacific Theatre of World War II in significant detail. In fact, the level of detail is such that gamers not familiar with serious military simulations could be forgiven for mistaking the game for some kind of military spreadsheet.

Wargaming With Microsoft Excel

This spreadsheet feeling isn't restricted to PACIFIC WAR. While computer wargaming grew out of its boardgaming counterpart, computer wargame designers quickly found that they had a tool unavailable to their colleagues who worked with paper-and-cardboard: unparalleled computational power. While board wargame designers always had to worry about how much record-keeping they were imposing on players, the computer lifted this restriction completely for those who designed on a digital canvas. Grigsby's PACIFIC WAR and WAR IN RUSSIA (1993) did the most comprehensive job of harnessing computer power in the name of pure simulation. Why settle for an 8-7 *panzerkorps* unit when you can know exactly how many tanks, guns, men, and aircraft each one has, and make every single one of them have an impact on the battle? This approach reached its logical conclusion with the 1998 release of Norm Koger's THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR.

An Insurmountable Barrier?

What strikes me about this situation is that computer game designers eventually did run into the same problem that faced their boardgame counterparts, but in a different form: Increasing size and sophistication makes it difficult to play these games as *games*, where you use the game mechanics to outsmart your opponent. The physical limit on the amount of information a player can effectively process is still there, but if this limit is exceeded, it no longer makes the game unplayable: It simply means that the game will proceed on its way with less and less player control. Once you lose control of the game mechanics, you're not really playing the game; the game is playing itself.

Not all boardgame designers tried to push the simulation barrier. Games like Courtney Allen's and Don Greenwood's impulse series (STORM OVER ARNHEM through BREAKOUT: NORMANDY) combined historical accuracy with simple mechanics and tense face-to-face gameplay. Kevin Zucker's long line of Napoleonic designs struck a perfect balance between modeling Napoleonic warfare and putting players in a position to intelligently make all the crucial game decisions, without being snowed under by statistics.

Simply porting these games to the computer is not the answer, because the level of detail would seem simplistic in a computer game context. The single die rolls that resolved huge battles in NAPOLEON AT BAY would seem out of place in a medium where WARGAMER: NAPOLEON 1813-1814 recently simulated the same thing with a detailed real-time tactical engine. Computer games and boardgames try to achieve different things and require different approaches. At the same time, they surely have enough in common to allow accomplished boardgame designers to make their mark in the electronic medium.

Get 'Em off the Sidelines!

I don't understand why some enterprising wargame company hasn't already tapped the wargame design talent pool in this manner. Specifically, I can't believe that no one has approached Kevin Zucker to lend his expertise to a massive Napoleonic wars project, since this seems to be the "great neglected topic" that so many wargamers want to see in a game.

I spoke with Kevin at Origins '98 and asked him when we'd see a version of one of his games done for the computer. He said that if his company could find investors for this sort of project, he'd love to hire a programmer to work on it. This is absolutely backwards. It's as though instead of drafting Peyton Manning, the NFL waited to find someone who would fund an expansion team, and *then* made him the quarterback.

There are several accomplished boardgame designers who would certainly benefit any future computer wargaming project. Instead of constantly tweaking or re-using old games and concepts, let's get some real innovation into computer wargame design. Team these guys up with established computer wargame designers and programmers, and see what they can dream up. It wouldn't have to be expensive. Just revolutionary. CGW

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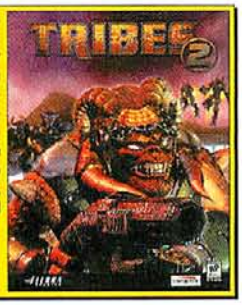

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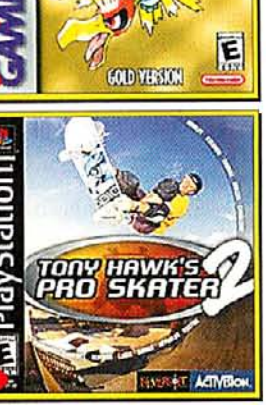

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Westwood (Strategy)
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Strategic (Strategy)
Release: NOW
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$39.95

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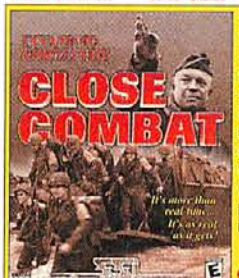

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Shrapnel (Strategy)
Release: NOW
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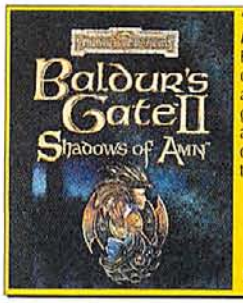

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$42.95

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EA (Strategy)
Release: 02/01
PC CD
$44.95

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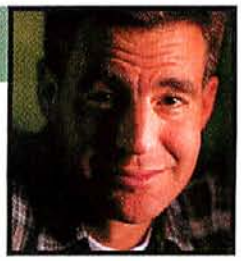

Third Annual Greenspeak Awards

Let's laugh and cry together as we look back on Y2K

Ay caramba! Have I been doing this for *three years* already? Where does the time go, I ask you? How did I get here? Why, it seems like it was just yesterday that I was crawling around on the floor, in rubber pants, eating baby food and getting spanked. Wait a minute—that *was* yesterday. Apologies to the wife for sharing our "special time" in public.

In any event, welcome, fellow gaming brethren, to the Annual Greenspeak Awards—that magical moment each year when we look back and sing a song of ourselves, like the great poet Walt Whitman once did many years ago before croaking. While other gaming awards may have more so-called "prestige," the Greenspeak Award is still the one that gives most of us that special tingle deep inside. I know it does me.

But, hey, enough of my yakking already. Let's pass out some awards!

Marketing Morons of the Year

Whomever designed and approved the box for MESSIAH, one of the most phenomenally awful boxes ever. Here we have a game hyped for years as some kind of cutting-edge graphics extravaganza. So what do they do? They put it in a butt-ugly *solid grey* box, with the game name unreadable from two feet away. Bravo. I'm thinking that maybe they just didn't want people to know they were buying MESSIAH, in which case, change this award to Marketing Geniuses of the Year.

Real Gaming God of the Year

Richard, "Machiabelly," the "fat gay guy" from CBS' *Survivor*. Our own Robert Coffey called it from week one: Richard was the *only* guy who took the show for what it was, a game, and then played it like a great gamer would, week after week. He was smart, cunning, conniving, and ruthless—all the qualities that we, as computer gamers, strive for and admire in our digital domain. Sure he was unlikeable. When's the last time you liked the guy who beat you in QUAKE?

Scariest Game of the Year

THE SIMS. When played seriously, this was just way too frightening and close-to-home for me. My first Sim, the cleverly-named Jeff Green, lost his first job almost immediately because he stayed home playing computer games. From here, it was a steady progression into full-fledged Loserdom, as he ended up flat-broke, friendless, and so depressed that he just sat on the couch in the dark all day, crying. Ultimately, I just had to delete the poor guy. I'm sorry—I thought I played games to *escape* reality.

Whiny Babies of the Year

All the pissy game company dweebs who closed their message boards, pulled their ads, and wrote cranky letters this year in response to negative publicity or bad press about their games. I'm not going to name names, because we (and they) know who they are. But, man—grow some huevos and learn how to take criticism with some shred of dignity and humility. Learn that it might help you to listen to it. And, most importantly, learn that blaming the press—or the poor gamers who wasted their money on you—for the failure of *your* products will only make it worse. Just shut up, take your lumps, and prove us wrong the next time out.

Imperialists of the Year

Microsoft. Gee, with the way this company is growing in the gaming industry, you'd think they were ambitious or something. A host of A-level releases (AGE OF EMPIRES 2, MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2, the great port of METAL GEAR SOLID, the upcoming MECHWARRIOR 4, and more), the acquisition of major game developers like Bungie, and the announcement of the Xbox console were all major events this year, furthering Microsoft's rapid and scary transformation from gaming weakling to dominant powerhouse. That Bill Gates—he'll go far. Mark my words!

While other gaming awards may have more so-called "prestige," the Greenspeak Award is still the one that gives most of us that special tingle deep inside. I know it does me.

Best Game Titles of the Year

Tie: ABOMINATION and ODIUM. Game publishers, do yourselves a favor: Don't make it this easy for us. Make us work for it. In case you're unsure, here're a few sample titles you should probably stay away from in 2001: ABYSMAL, GODAWFUL, UNPLAYABLE, and SUCKFEST 2001.

Bummer of the Year

The closing of Looking Glass Studios. Game companies come and go—it's business. But this one hurt. This one mattered. This one made it feel like nothing is sacred. Looking Glass didn't make the best-selling games, but they made the *smartest* games, like SYSTEM SHOCK and THIEF, that overflowed with creativity and originality, and reinvigorated entire genres. Here's one last salute to a great company, and my best wishes to all the alumni. Keep making games, guys. We need you.

Reality Check of the Year

The *CGW* staff's real-world softball team—the ill-fated, odious abomination known as Los Chupacabras. How many did we win, guys? One game? Against the blind guys? All I know is that I personally learned my lesson: The real world is a scary, brutal place, where bad things happen. Next year, I'm staying on the computer, playing computer games, as much as I possibly can. That's my promise to you. CGW

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the one game we won is the one he sat out. You figure it out, and email him at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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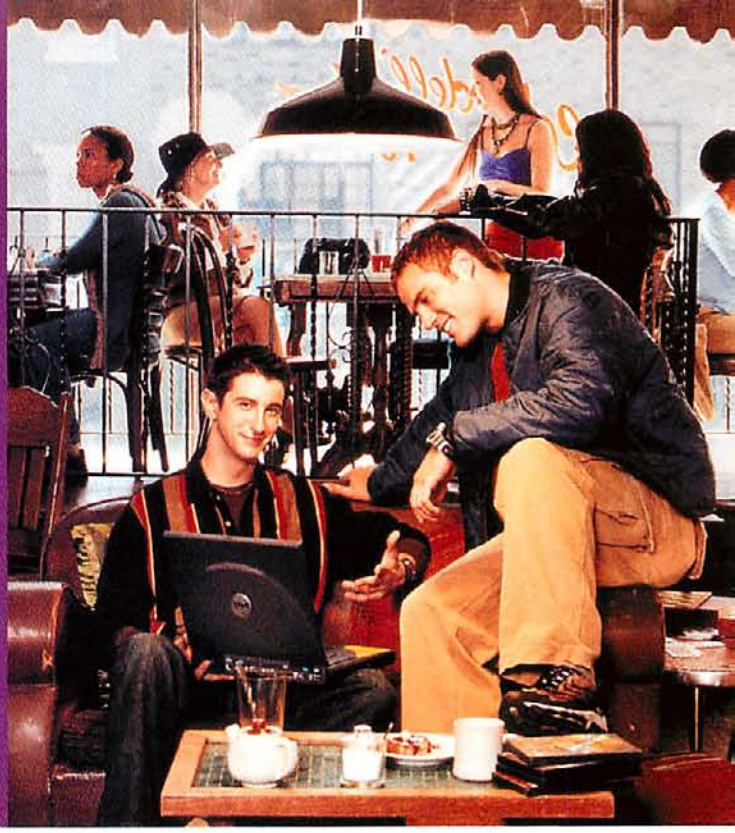

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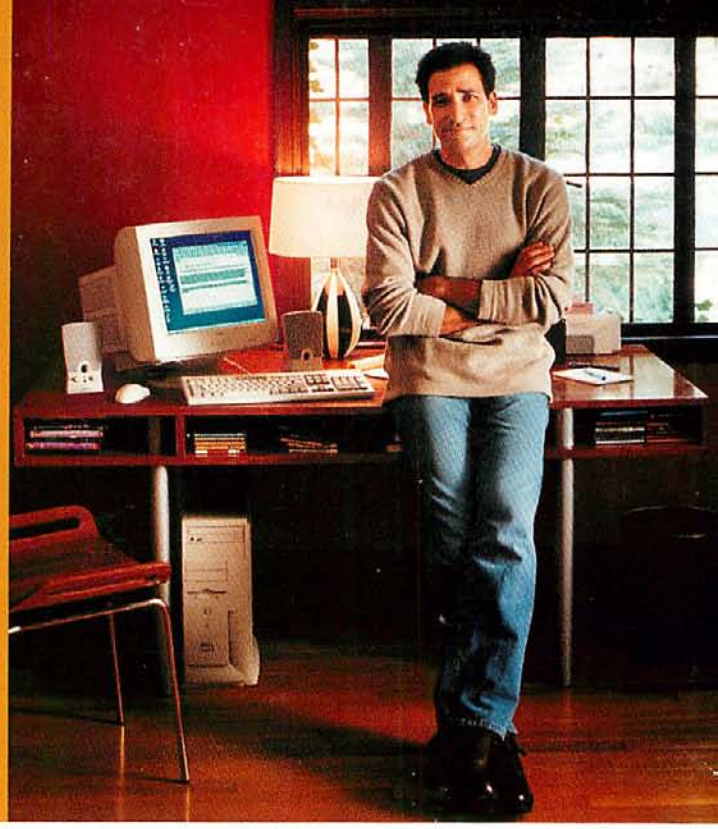

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