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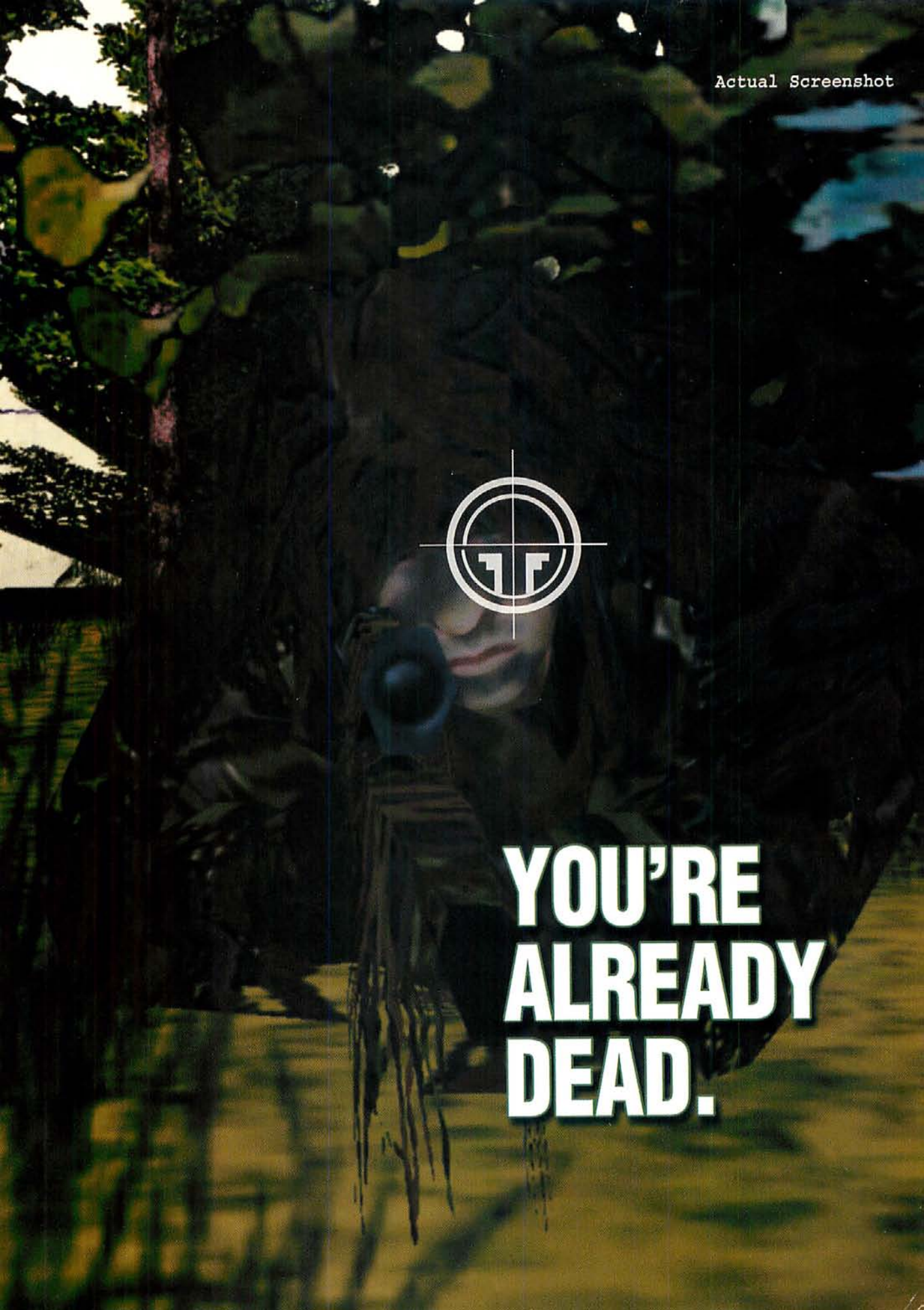
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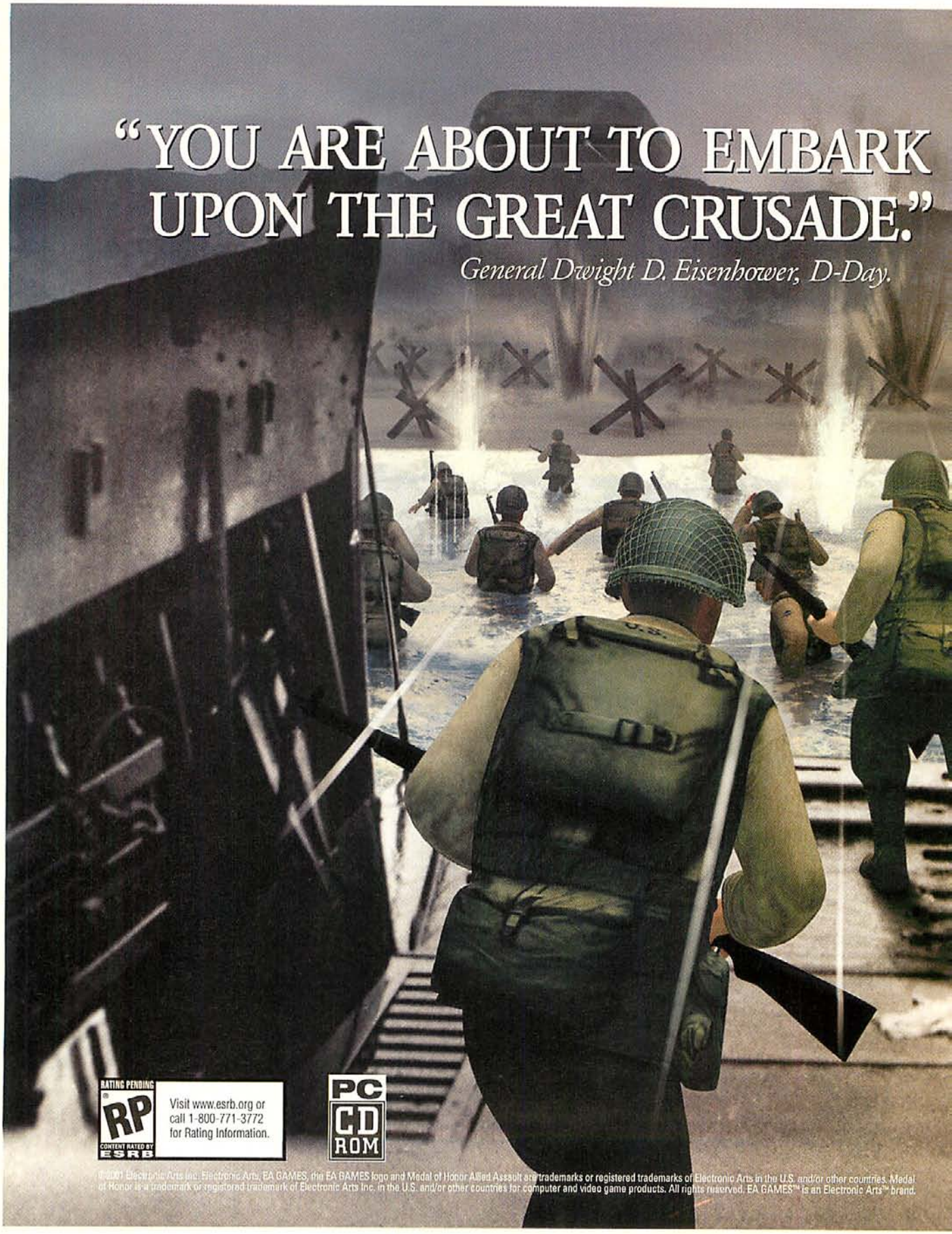

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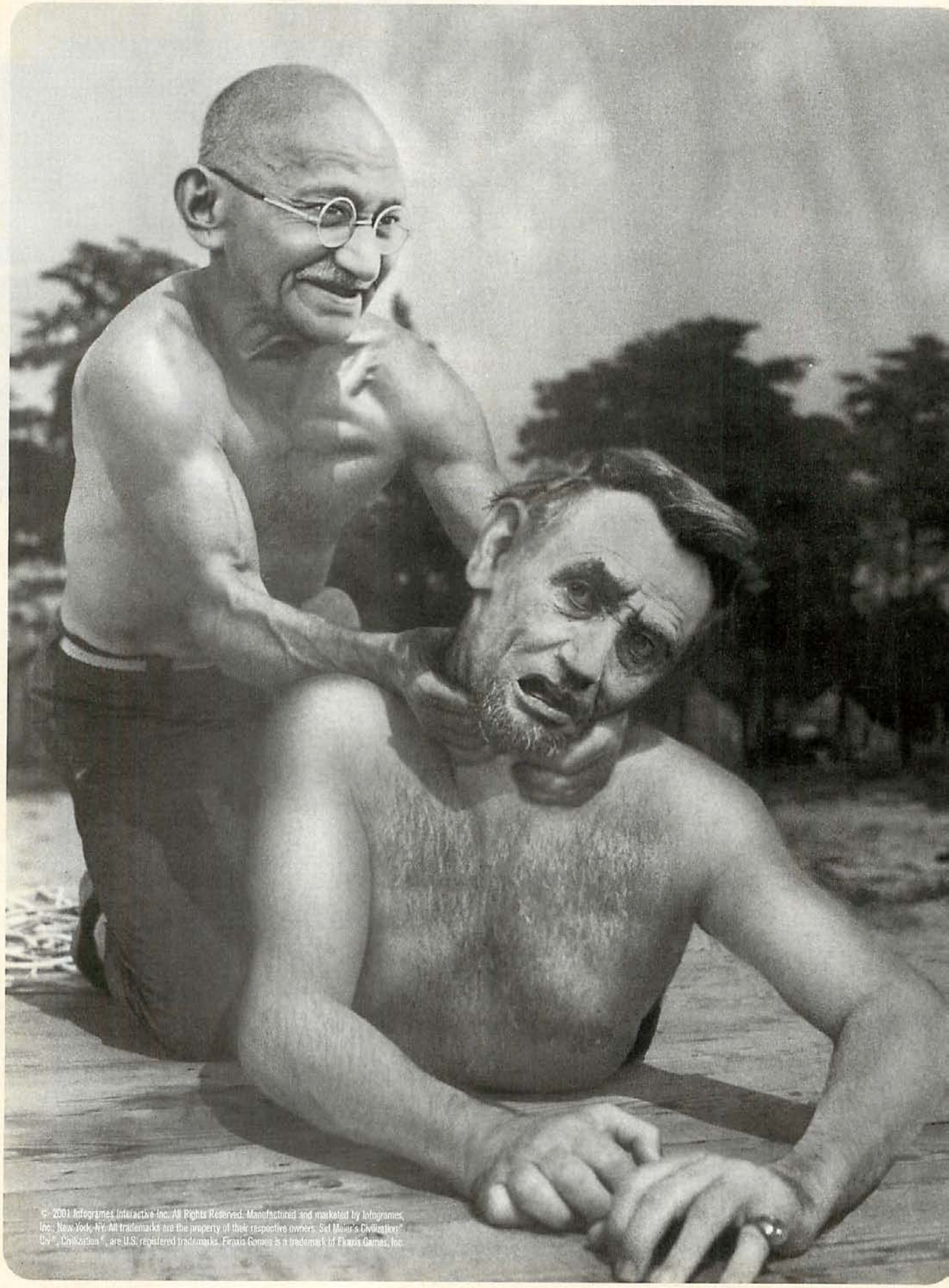

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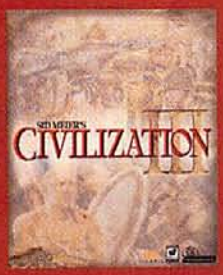

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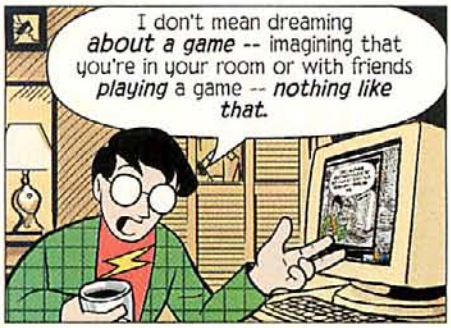

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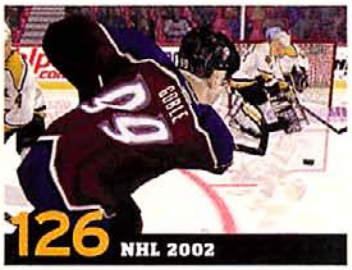

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132 THE STING
Mischievous misdemeanor mayhem.

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Gaming in the wake of tragedy.

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Made friends, made enemies, and almost died -can't wait to go back!

Me battling vile olthoi insects in Marae Lassel

My millionth pyreal coin - ah... the joy of being a monarch

- claw fr nearly los arm

Note to Self: Olthoi breed deadlier than last month

Gauze from wound on nearly lost arm

My house, Southern Osteth

Dusk lily from my 2nd trip to Marae Lassel

purchased in March

Weapons stored here: -Quiddity Sword -Pyreal Axe

My precious focusing stone - allows me to, well, focus.

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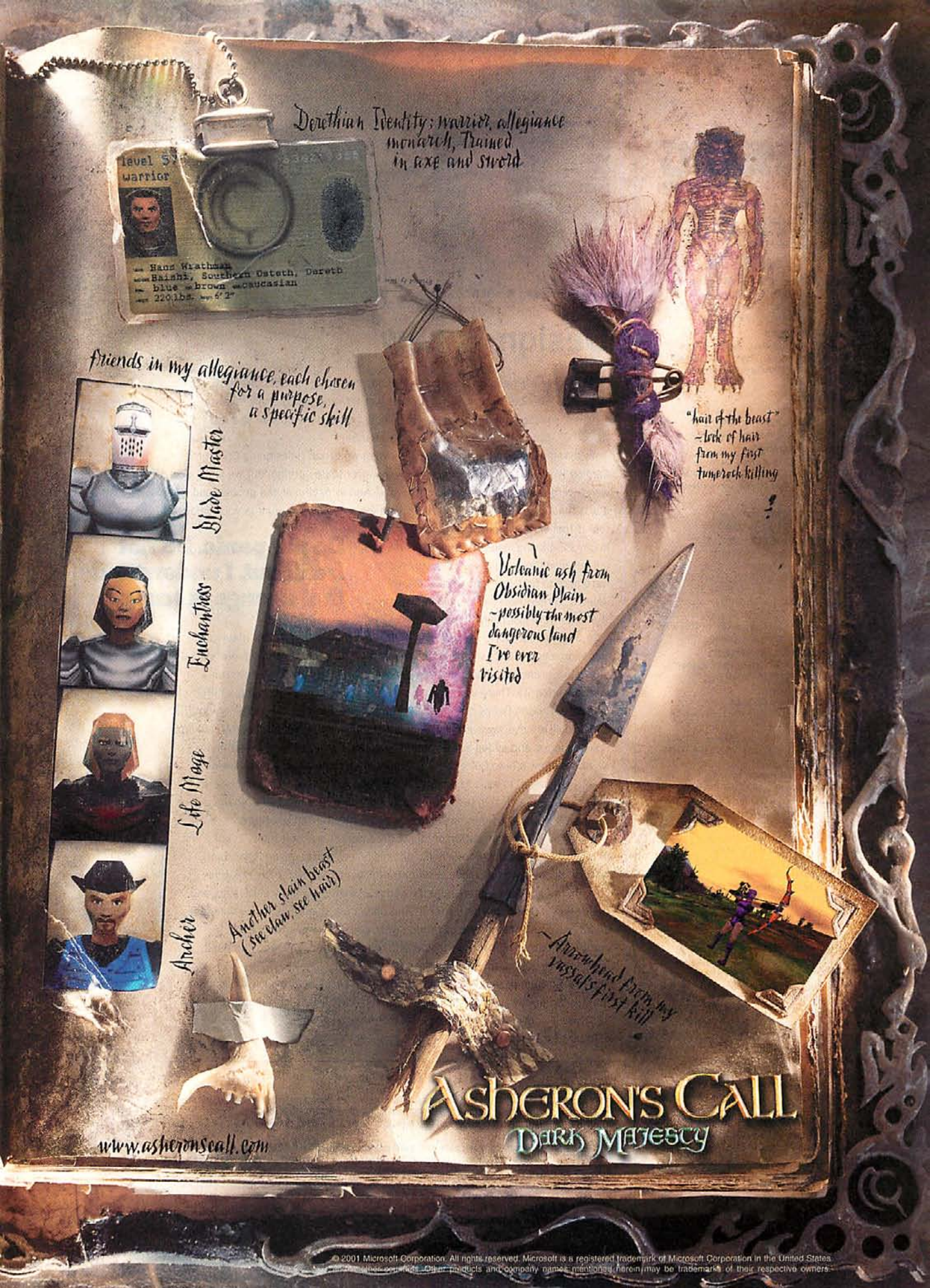

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Publisher **Lee Uniacke**

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
Editor-in-Chief **Jeff Green**
Editor **Ken Brown** (Read Me)
Managing Editor **Dana Jongewaard**
Technical Editor **Wil O'Neal** (Hardware)
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Charles Ardai, Mark Asher, T. Byrl Baker, Gordon Berg, Loyd Case, Tom Chick, Bruce Geryk, Jeff Lackey, Raphael Liberatore, Thomas McDonald

ART DEPARTMENT
Art Director **Rob Schultz**
Associate Art Director **Jason Babler**
Contributing Designer **Andrew Burwell**

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT
Manufacturing Director **Carlos Lugo**
Senior Production Manager **Anne Marie Miguel**
Assistant Production Manager **Teresa Newson**

PREMEDIA GROUP
Premedia Director **Vicki Egan**
Premedia Manager **Steve Reimers**

HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS
To contact any member of the staff: firstname_lastname@ziffdavis.com
Address non-subscription-related questions and feedback to: *CGW* Editorial, 50 Beale Street, 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. Or you may contact us via: CGWletters@ziffdavis.com; Phone: (415) 357-4900; Editorial Fax: (415) 357-4977. Website: www.computergaming.com

ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT
Group Associate Publisher **Suzanne Reider**
suzie@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4915

Regional Sales Manager/
Midwest Territory **Marc Callison**
marc_callison@ziffdavis.com (630) 382-9034

District Sales Representative/
East Coast Territory **Tallie Fishburne**
tallie_fishburne@ziffdavis.com (617) 354-0284

Account Executive/Midwest and
East Coast Territory **Emily Olman**
emily_olman@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-5226

Regional Sales Manager/Pacific Northwest
and Bay Area Peninsula **Ian Sinclair**
ian_sinclair@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4925

Account Executive/Pacific Northwest
and Bay Area Peninsula **Mary Gray**
mary_gray@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8782

Regional Sales Manager/
Southwest Territory **Karen Landon**
karen_landon@ziffdavis.com (760) 942-6277

Senior Account Executive/
Southwest Territory **Linda Philapil**
linda_philapil@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8781

Regional Sales Manager/Texas, Washington,
San Francisco Territory **Marci Yamaguchi**
marciy@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4944

Account Executive/Texas, Washington,
San Francisco Territory **Meighan O'Rourke**
meighan_orourke@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4920

Senior Marketing Manager and
Creative Director **Rey Ledda**
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8775

Marketing Coordinator **Annie Lipscomb**
annie_lipscomb@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8248

Advertising Coordinator **Tipler Ubbelohde**
tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4930

Sales Assistant **Kristeen Laut**
kristeen_laut@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8778

Sales Assistant **Cheryl Farrell**
cheryl_farrell@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8783

HOW TO CONTACT ADVERTISING & SALES
Address inquiries to: *CGW* Advertising, 50 Beale St., 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105; Phone: (415) 357-8778; Fax: (415) 357-4999.

Founder **Russell Sipe**

Design Is Law

Please, people, do not panic. Do not freak out. I understand that change is scary. I've ordered the exact same thing at my favorite restaurant in Berkeley every single time for the past 21 years. It's been great every time. So why change?

We asked ourselves this same question when we began redesigning *Computer Gaming World*. It certainly would have been easier to do nothing. But we knew we were overdue. Magazines evolve, or they die. And as painful as the process can be, it was time for us to evolve. Our take on ourselves—and we heard it in your emails too—is that we have long had the best writing in any PC gaming magazine, but it was hard to tell because the design was so lousy. Articles were hard to find. Sections weren't clearly defined. Screenshots weren't big enough. In short, we were just plain ol' *ugly*.

Do not panic. Do not freak out. I understand that change is scary.

So beginning in April, we sat down to do something about it. Our main goal was to preserve *CGW*'s strong editorial integrity but package it in a more appealing, professional, and modern design. Note what I stressed first: the editorial integrity. There was no change of focus, no attempt to reach a different audience. Though things may look different, I think once you spend time with the issue, you'll discover we haven't changed that much. We're just a lot better looking.

We changed and added a few content features. *Loading* is a new section in which we show a few choice gaming moments up close. *Read Me* has been greatly expanded to include news, previews, opinion pieces, and more—we're figuring you could live in there for awhile. And *Hardware* has been renamed *Tech* because it sounds cooler—and Wil needs all the help he can get there.

This issue is the culmination of lots of hard work—none of it mine. Thanks first to our new art director, Rob Schultz, and his fellow artists Jason Babler and Andrew Burwell, who all made essential, intelligent, and extremely creative contributions. All the editors here bitched and whined like they always do, and the design is that much better for it. And Dana Jongewaard, our new managing editor, pulled off the miracle of turning what could have been a chaotic nightmare into a shippable, readable, and organized machine—and she did it without ever getting (openly) cranky.

Is the redesign perfect? Probably not. We'll be tweaking it over the coming months. So fire away. Tell us what you like and don't like. Just remember, all the stuff you like: my idea. Everything else: the other guys'.

Thanks for reading!

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Letters

Go ahead, tell us we suck. Write us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

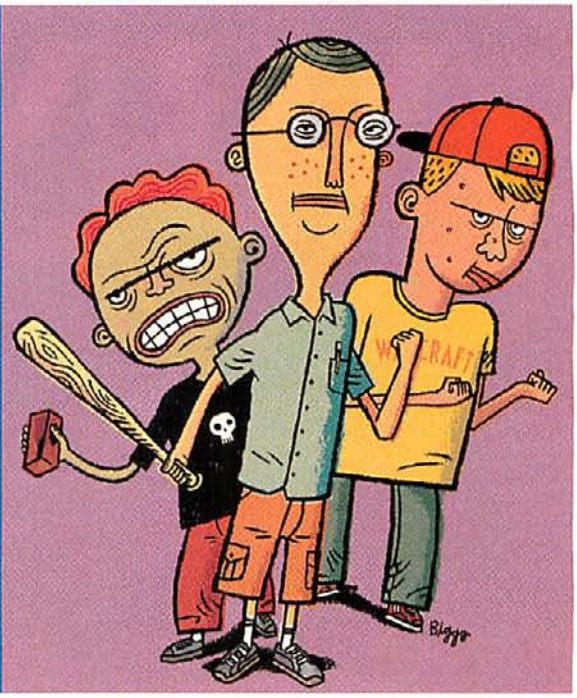
Get Off Our Lawn, Punk

In the years that I've been getting *CGW* magazine, I've noticed that countless references have been made to the "13-year-old subscribers." Many questions arise: Do they really exist? How many can there be? Are they hostile?

Well, I'm one of 'em and that proves that they exist. We're not as inferior as you make us out to be, though. In fact, we're probably smarter than half the Cheez-It eating gaming addicts that read *CGW*. I just want to say that if you want someone to pick on, stick with the Canadians, because they don't pose any threat. Us, however, you don't want to get us mad. You'd be surprised how mature we are and how fast we can revolt and form an angry mob. And believe me, the last thing you want is a pissed-off crowd of preteens.

Justin Beebe
Ledyard, Connecticut

P.S. I'd write more but my mom says it's past my bedtime.



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Real-World Violence

I am big on *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Quake 3*, and *Max Payne*. In light of recent events in New York (I live in NJ), I have not played those games in awhile. I don't feel like playing *Counter-Strike* till 2 in the morning and then having a dream where I'm a terrorist killing CTs. I don't want to play violent games anymore. Not with all the violence in the real world. I can only take so much. So I just want some games that are fun—I need more like *The Sims*, *Rollercoaster Tycoon*, even *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*. I'm not saying that violent games are bad, I just want less of them.

Patrick Murray

It's a reaction experienced by many of us, Patrick, since September 11, and quite understandable. This month's Read Me section and Jeff's *Greenspeak* column reflect on the recent tragic events.

Yeah, Like We Didn't Know This Already

I had to comment on the Hot Shots feature on *AquaNox* [October 2001]. To quote: "Vessels move through the medium of water, a 'thicker' material than that of space. Therefore, players will experience inertia when changing directions." Well I can see why this is a post-apocalyptic world—apparently it was destroyed by bad physics. Inertia is more of a problem in space than it is underwater, as the lack of a medium in space means there is nothing to reduce the inertia of the vehicle. Underwater, the inertia of the water, which is "stationary," reduces the inertia of the ship, which is in relative motion. In space you basically don't lose your inertia till you use your engines or hit something. Well at least no one is going to bill this as an educational game.

Scott Correia

Trademark This, Buddy

You are using a phrase in your Tech Medics section that is a registered trademark of Radio Shack: "You've got questions? We've got answers." Sorry guys, time to find another phrase.

JM

Okay how about this one: "Tech Medics: We Love to See You Smile."

Der Kraut Korner

Arggh! Der mann auf Computer Speilen Welt kannen nicht Deutsch sprechen! Die Deutsch rechtes worten vor *tank* ist *Panzer*, nicht *behälter*! In English: The people at *Computer Gaming World* cannot speak German! The right word for tank is *Panzer*, not *behälter*. I was appalled to read in your review of *WWII Online* that Tom McDonald wrote "Die Briten haben einen Fliegenbehälter!" He basically said the British had a flying cistern! What's up with that? I could expect that from

I don't want to play violent games anymore. I can only take so much.

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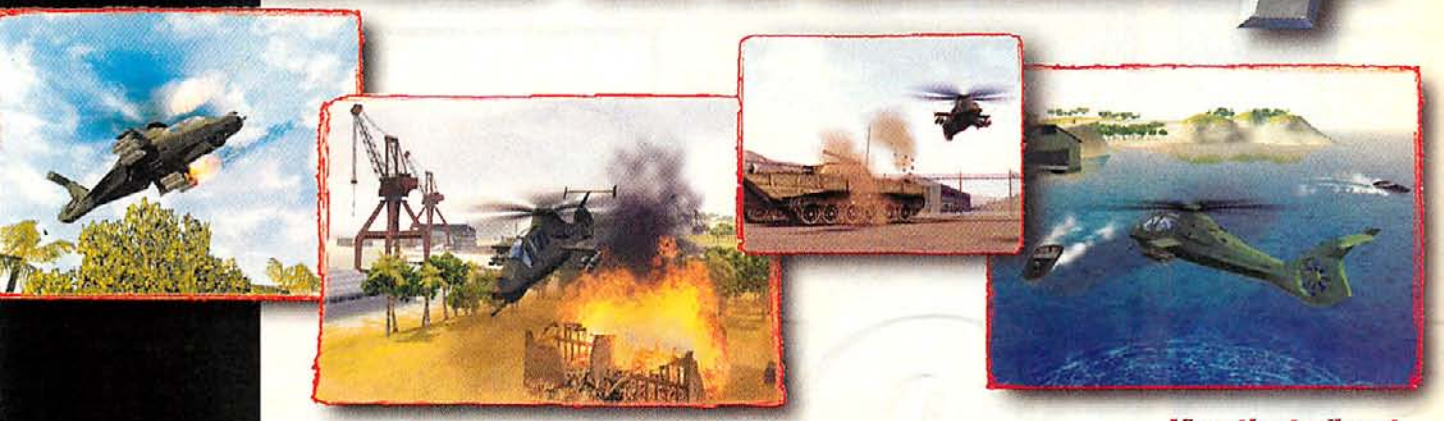

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MAIL BITES

In response to Jeff Green's latest rant on the previously unassailable bastion of quality that is Massively Multiplayer Online Gaming, I have a suggestion for next month's controversial target: airline food.
Joshua MC

In issue 207, page 66, the ad features a model whose breasts are smaller than her head. That's bold.
Jesse Berry

Why is it that your Web site–oh, how can I say it gently?–SUX BIG TIME?
Hanan Argov

Once with clarity: Camping does not exist in the real world.
Boondawg

Jeff Green, but not from the normal people at *CGW*. That little mix up could give you a valid reason to fear the Germans. Publish this and appease the Germans.

AybaraWolf

Hey dummkopf, your German is worse than ours! Ach!

CGW's Insufferably Proud Fathers

What is up with Jeff Green and William O'Neal bragging about their offspring in the two recent issues [September, October 2001]? It was not cute when Kathie Lee bragged about her child, so what makes Jeff and Wil think that stories of their offspring are any better?

Further, what is the deal with Jeff

Green asking for dates in his *Greenspeak* column? How dare he use such a highly esteemed publication as his personal dating service? And, who cares, other than his wife, that he likes to go for walks on the beach, yadda, yadda, yadda? By the way, he is supposedly a "happy" family man, and thus should not even be entertaining offers.

Jenny

Jeff Green replies: Does this mean you won't go out with me?

CGW: Fewer Ads Than *Hustler*!

I read with interest Cory's letter complaining about the number of ads in your magazine [October 2001] and your response. It made me wonder exactly how you compare to other magazines. Being an inquisitive fellow (or in my wife's terms, a nerd), I promptly went out and bought several magazines to count the ads in each, including *Rolling Stone, Cowboys and Indians, Seventeen, Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Hustler*.

What I found surprised me! You had the lowest percentage of ads of any of these magazines, with *Hustler* coming in a close second. The results were: *Rolling Stone*, 53 percent ads; *Cowboys and Indians*, 48 percent ads; *Seventeen*, 57 percent ads; *Better Homes and Gardens*, 61 percent ads; and *Hustler*, 38 percent ads. Compare these numbers to the paltry 35 percent of *CGW* dedicated to ads.

Wishing to explore this topic further, I compared the number of ad pages and a proportion of the total number of pages of the magazines using a Chi-Square analysis. The null hypothesis for the analysis was that the number of ads was proportionally the same between magazines. The critical level (alpha) was set at 0.05 with 5 degrees of freedom. The resulting Chi-Square value was 11.750, which exceeds the critical value of 11.070. An analysis of the adjusted residuals of the test indicate that *Better Homes and Gardens* had a statistically significant higher proportion of ads than other magazines, but that you and *Hustler* had a statistically lower pro-

portion of ads than other magazines. You guys have fewer ads than other rags on the newsstand, not more.

Logan V.

***Cowboys and Indians*?**

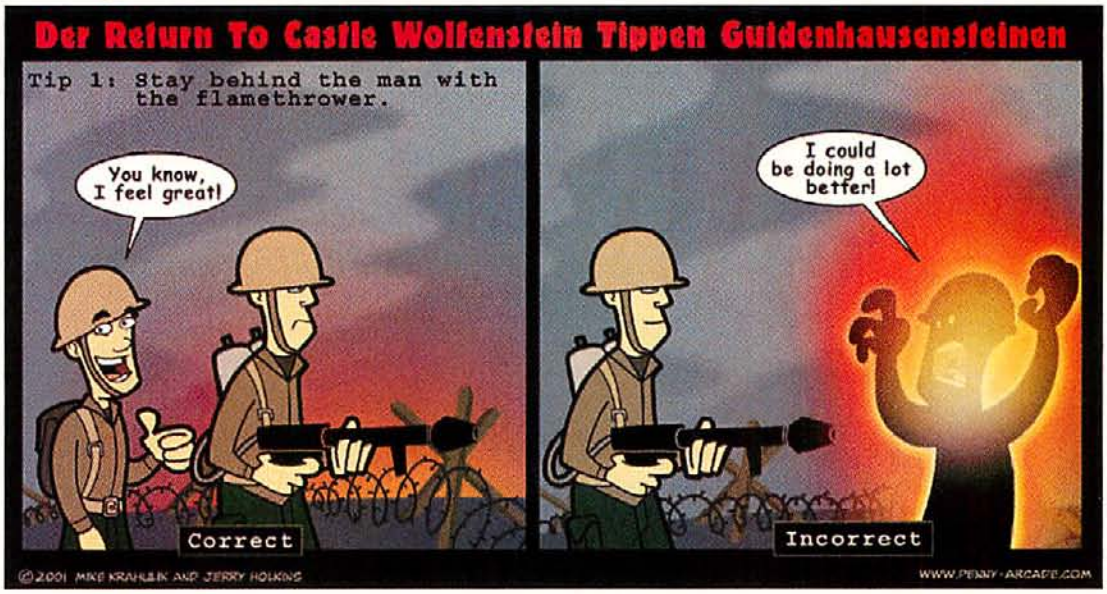
You Spelled *Vice Versa* Wrong

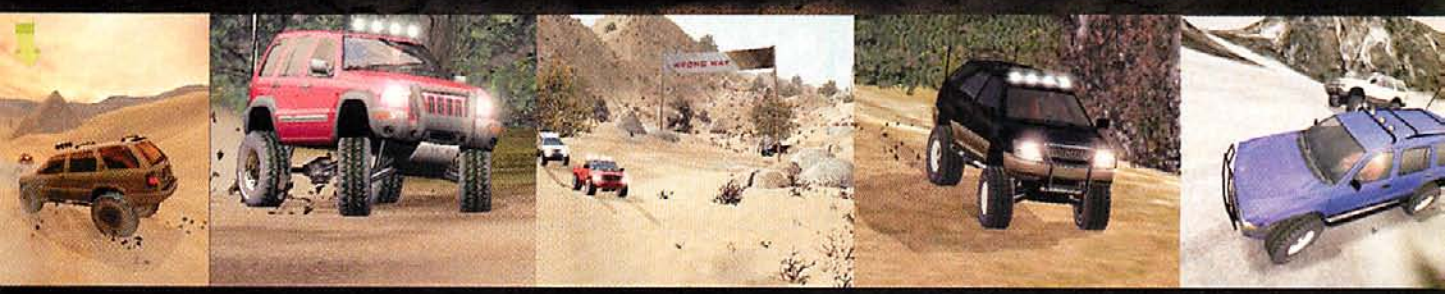
Now, I'm not usually one to complain, but there is one thing that drives me crazy: the lack of intelligence. I play *Asheron's Call* and *Counter-Strike* and see more than my share of stupidity on the part of the other gamers. For instance, I don't mind the occasional misspelling, but a guy once stood in town and asked if someone wanted to "traid" with him. After I corrected him, he argued with me for about 10 minutes. Or the people who will spam a question, and while spamming so much, they don't see the answer someone had typed for them. Or the people who'll use the word *accept* for *except*, and vise versa. Please print this to "unstupify" America. Use common sense, folks. Thanks.

Trevor Blanarik

Your welcome.

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS





4X4 EVO 2™

- Over 75 real-life Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) and 4x4s put you in control of a massive mud-eating machine, with such a realistic physics and control system, the terrain is no longer beautiful scenery, it is the enemy.
- Professional drivers get paid by winning races and so do you. In career mode, you must win races to acquire 'fast cash' to buy the enhancements and upgrades available for your base truck, taking you to the next level of racing respect.
- Plow through snow-packed roads, bust out from a wall of fog and be blinded by oncoming rain. There is no off-season for a true off-road race champion.
- Catch ALL the rip-roaring action from film-quality multiple camera angles: cockpit, chase close, chase far, dash, television camera, sides, front, ground, sliding, and even skycam views.
- Unbelievable, photo-realistic graphics, trucks look and feel exactly as they do in real life.

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PC CD ROM

TERMINAL REALITY™

GODGAMES™

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THERE'S NOTHING CONVENTIONAL ABOUT IT.

Plunge back into intense World War II combat with the most realistic tactical and strategic action game ever created. Maneuver Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite squad of soldiers deep behind enemy lines utilizing their combined expertise to set up ambushes, control troops and conduct night missions.

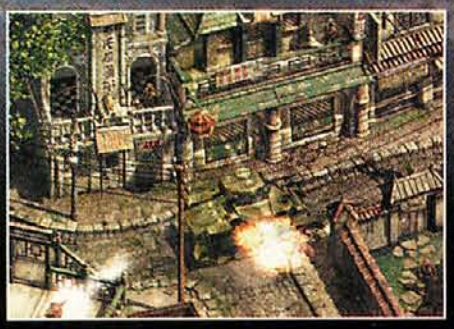
Interact like never before with detailed environments based on actual WWII locations. Go covert into the heart of the Third Reich, defend a Northern European submarine installation, and infiltrate the headquarters of the Japanese Army.

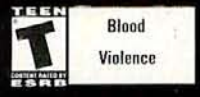
New 3D engine offers a 360° rotatable environment and seamless movement in/out of buildings, submarines, planes and under water.

Complete simultaneous control of multiple gameplay windows in real time.

New commandos include a thief, a seductress, and a dog – adding stealth, distraction and distribution strategies.

Go into battles with others in a cooperative multiplayer mode.





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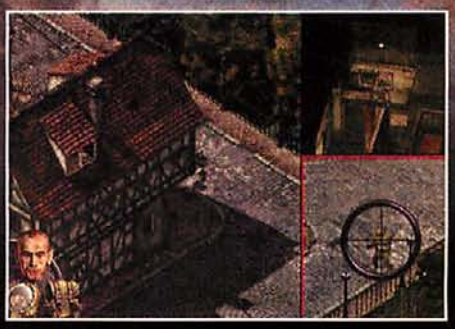
COMMANDOS 2
MEN OF COURAGE

PREPARE TO BE BLOWN AWAY.

Sergeant "Tiny" McHale
Expert in close combat & bladed weapons



PYRO STUDIOS

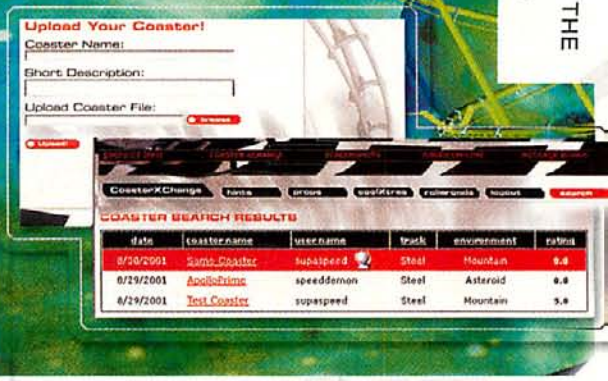
EIDOS INTERACTIVE

For more information visit:
www.commandosgame.com

I mock the laws of gravity. tangled web of fear. I

WITH THE COASTERXCHANGE, UPLOADING YOUR COASTER IS EASY. BUT MAKING IT TO THE RANK OF ROLLERGOD IS HARDER THAN TEMPERED STEEL.

SEE IF YOUR COASTER IS GOING OFF THE CHARTS — OR JUST OFF THE TRACKS.



EVERYONE THINKS THE COASTER THEY BUILT WITH THEIR ULTIMATE RIDE CD-ROM RULES. WHAT'S YOUR OPINION? RIDE THEM AND RATE THEM ON ULTIMATERIDEGAME.COM!

LOG ON WWW.ULTIMATERIDEGAME.COM/SPHERE TO LEARN HOW TO UNLOCK A NEW GAME PROP! KEYWORD: SPHERE

DISNEY IMAGINEERING

©DEI

Microsoft Windows xp Prepare to ride.

I spin a
am a Rollergod.

When I first got my Ultimate Ride PC game, I didn't know a camel-back from a corkscrew. But then I went to the CoasterXChange at ultimateridegame.com and struck gold. Well, steel, actually. I downloaded and rated all kinds of rides, scored intense props, posted messages, and really learned the ropes. Expertise didn't come easy, but soon I was building amazing rides with my CD-ROM. By the time I uploaded my coaster, I knew I was destined for ROLLERGOD status. In time, you too might ratchet your way to the top and achieve the ultimate rank. That is, if you think you've got something as wicked as my lovely, lethal WidowSpider.

Ultimate Ride

WWW.ULTIMATERIDEGAME.COM

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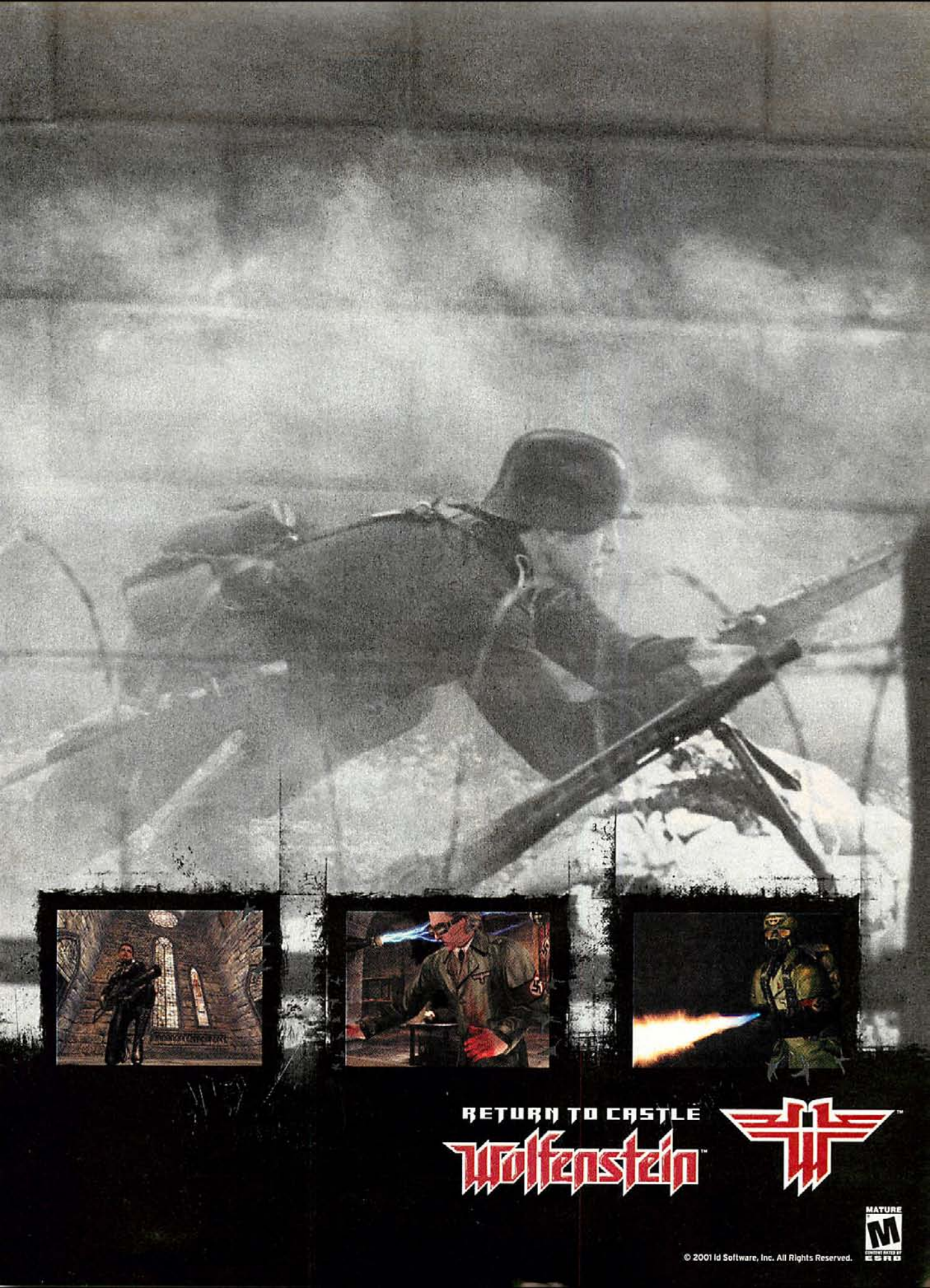
The Blitzkrieg begins this Christmas.

id Software's deadliest legend reunites you in an apocalyptic battle with all-consuming evil. From fierce single to multiplayer team-based modes, rage against Hitler's diabolical machine in a full-blown Fatherland graphically realized to Germanic perfection. Face your fear. Only you can deliver the world from evil or damn us all to hell.

id gray matter ACTIVISION.

www.castlewolfenstein.com



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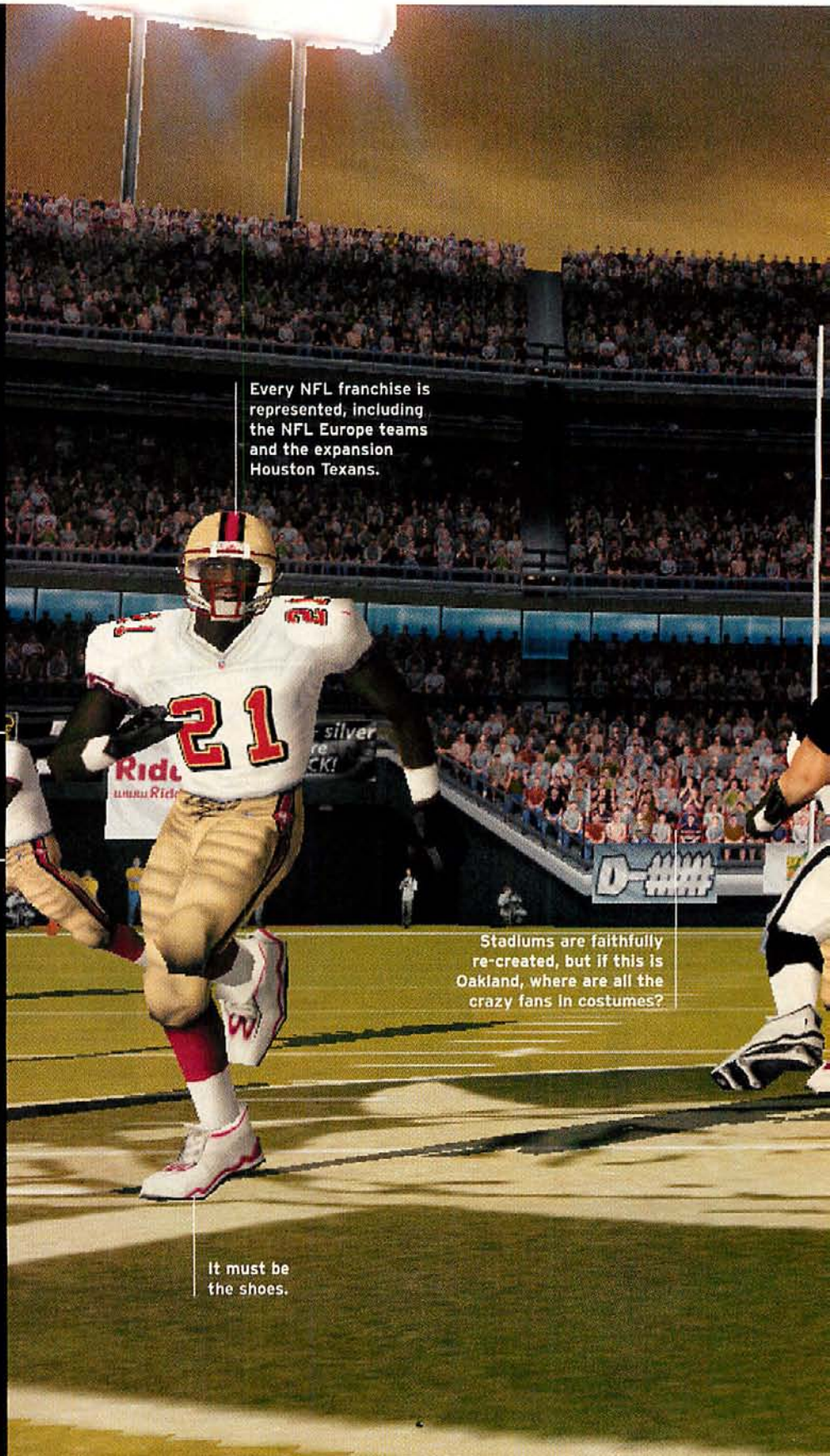
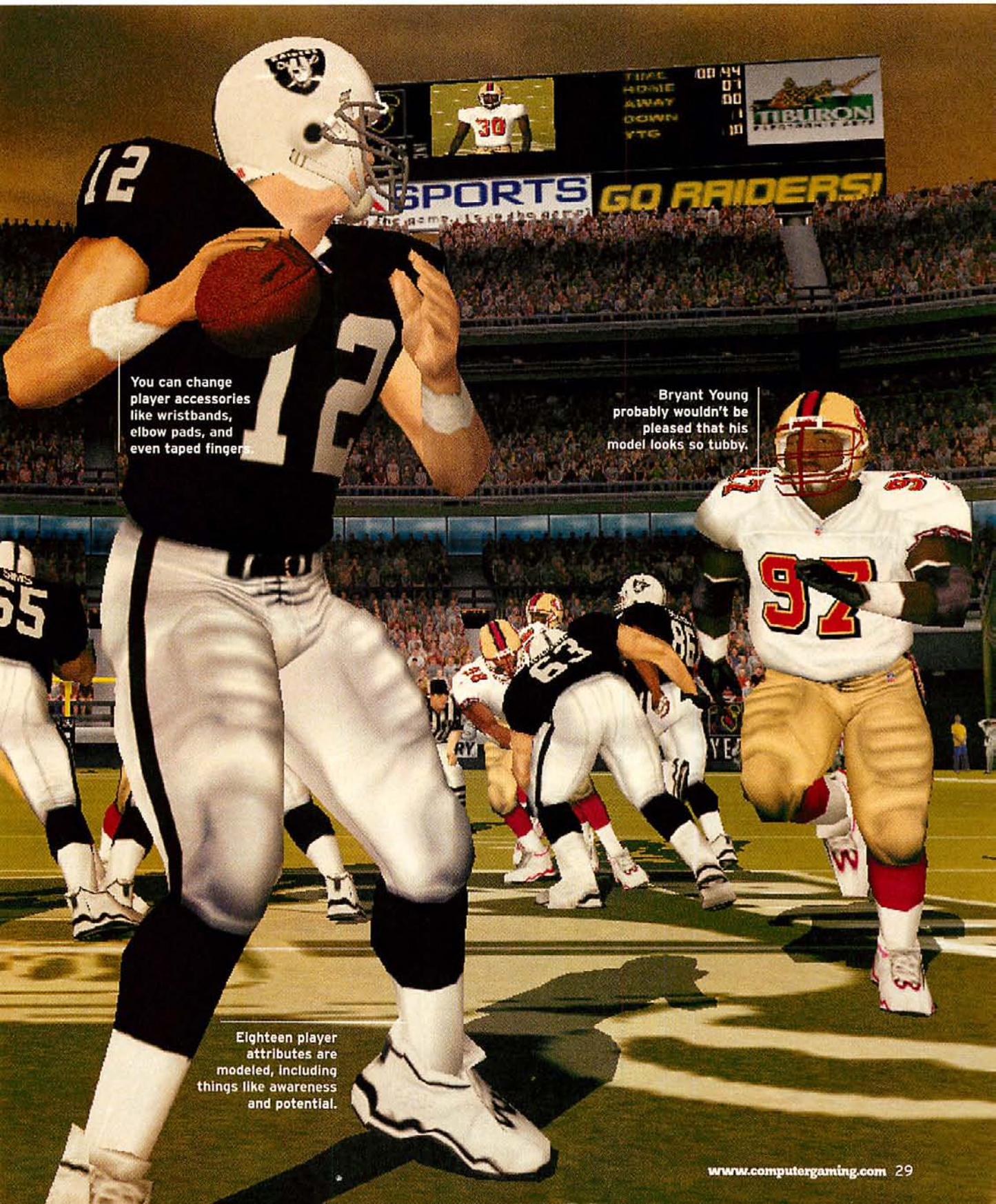
Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price

MADDEN 2002

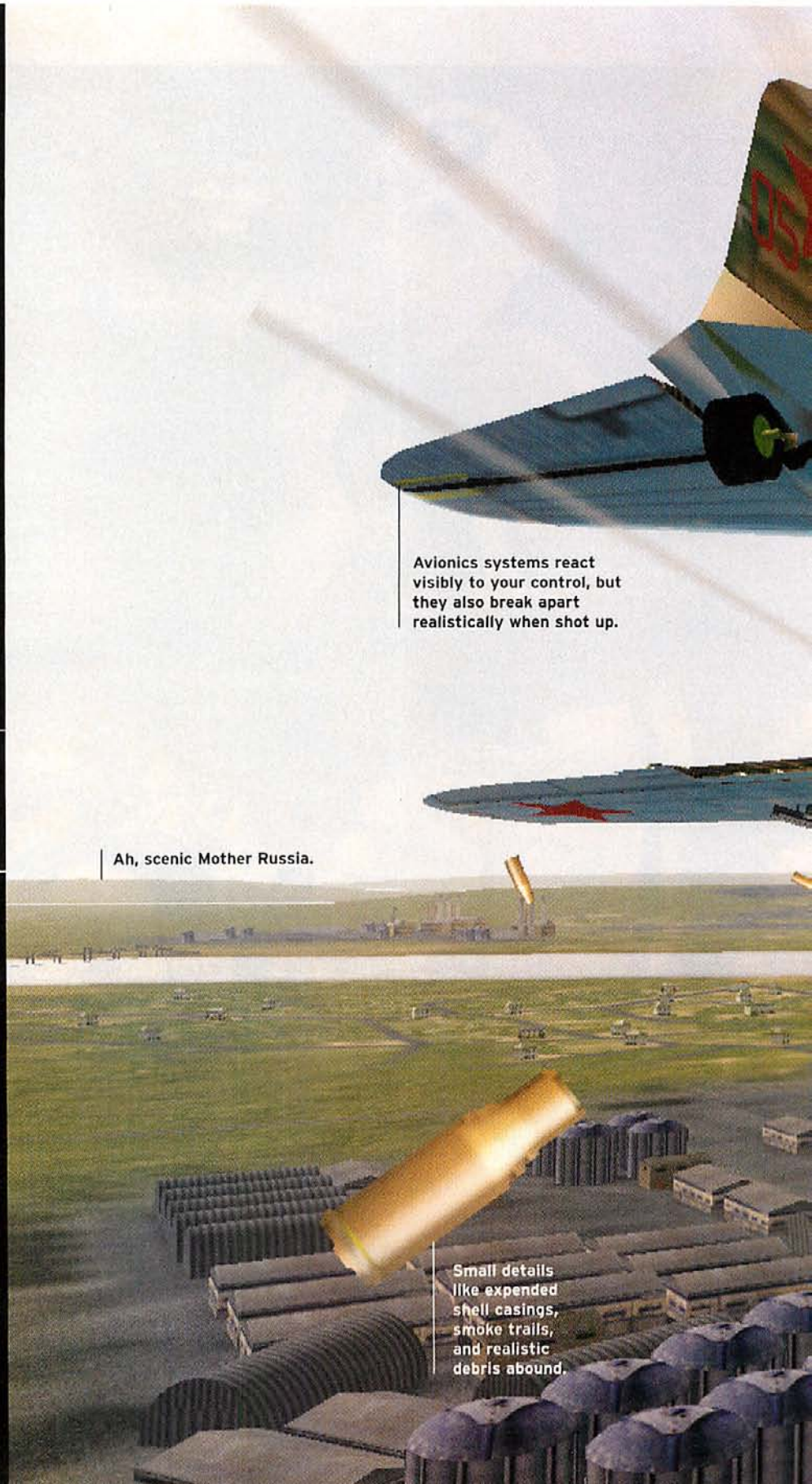
Sure is purty, ain't it? *Madden 2002* may be the only option for PC football fans—unless you're one of those hardcore stat monkeys that prefers text-based graphs and charts to bone-crunching action. We'll take it. And considering the mediocre starts our beloved Raiders and 49ers are off to, maybe we'll spend more time watching football on our monitors than on TV this year.




You can change player accessories like wristbands, elbow pads, and even taped fingers.
Bryant Young probably wouldn't be pleased that his model looks so tubby.
Eighteen player attributes are modeled, including things like awareness and potential.
SPORTS
GO RAIDERS!
TIBURON
97

IL-2 STURMOVIK

Among the few flight simulations in the pipeline right now, *IL-2 Sturmovik* really stands out and might be the game that simmers have been waiting for to revitalize the genre. Set in Russia's Great Patriotic War (WWII to the rest of us), *Sturmovik* puts you behind the stick of the Soviet Union's most notorious tank buster as you defend Mother Russia against the Nazis and their ferocious Panzers.



Avionics systems react visibly to your control, but they also break apart realistically when shot up.

Ah, scenic Mother Russia.

Small details like expended shell casings, smoke trails, and realistic debris abound.

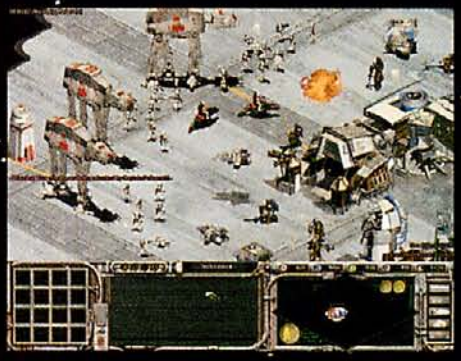
While the game's namesake is pictured here, about 40 aircraft will share the skies in the final game.

A fully interactive ground war and detailed ground objects add to the realism.

All the dark legions are at his command.
And you control his destiny.

STAR WARS® GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS™

Real-time strategy on a galactic scale.



Will he annihilate? Or will Rebel forces dominate? The ultimate outcome is up to you, as *Star Wars* Galactic Battlegrounds thrusts you into explosive real-time strategy conflicts spanning the entire *Star Wars* saga. With gameplay based on an enhanced Age Of Empires® engine, you're in control as six different civilizations clash in epic land, sea and air battles. You'll command legions of troops in single and multi-player missions. Or design your own with the extensive campaign editor. You can even choose which side you'll fight for in this epic galactic struggle. Just remember, whether good or evil, there is only one true commander — you.

For your pre-battle briefing, report to www.swgalacticbattlegrounds.com

PC CD ROM

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LUCAS Arts

Official *Star Wars* Web Site
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THE SIMS: HOT DATE

Forget those sappy romantic comedies starring Richard Gere this Christmas—instead, stay home and play *The Sims: Hot Date*. More than just some new lamps and a new career or two, *Hot Date* lets you do something no other *Sims* game does (and something some of you pastier gamers should consider): Leave the house. Incorporating numerous new behaviors, items, and settings, *Hot Date* expands the *Sims* universe while focusing on its most important component: interpersonal relationships.

More than 40 new moves, like this dip, are available to woo her.
For the lovers who aren't party animals, quiet diversions abound.
If the conversation wanes, you can change the subject.

EVERY WARRIOR HAS A NAME...

UNIT ALCHEMY

The mark of a great warrior is the fusion of body and mind. This takes rigorous and focused training. The unit alchemy system allows the warriors to grow, so even a common peasant can be elevated to a powerful samurai warrior.

LIVING RTS REALM

Battlefields come alive with weather and wildlife. Combat will change as the elements shift. Use these resources from the land to survive.

GROWTH ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Battles can be won, but the war rages on. Noble acts during combat earn you Zen points for warriors to improve their weapons and magic. This will make you and your forces stronger the next time you meet the enemy.

UNIQUE CHARACTERS

Build an army one warrior at a time. Choose them wisely and manage each unit carefully. Train and develop every unique member of your battle forces, for they are the life-blood and protectors of your clan.

13 major awards and nominations including *"Best PC strategy game of E3."* -IGN.COM

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AND THEY WILL ALL DIE FOR YOU.

• 65 UNIT TYPES WITH UP TO 50 DIFFERENT ANIMATIONS.

• BEAUTIFUL & STUNNING ENVIRONMENTS.

• THE STRATEGY IS ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

BATTLE REALMS™

LiQUiD ENTERTAINMENT

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CRAVE

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www.ubisoft.com

TEEN T

Violence

Blood and Gore

In dark, troubled times, a man will rise up to change the fate of an empire.

That man, is you.

Embark on a timeless adventure in Gothic, a brilliantly woven action-RPG of epic proportions. In the dark land of Myrtana, a rebellious insurrection has begun, isolating the people in an un-penetrable barrier. Meanwhile, the armies of evil are mounting in the neighboring lands, ready to take the Kingdom by storm. You are the one warrior who can unite the land again, and save Myrtana from total destruction.

"Gothic doesn't just look remarkably good, it also provides an exciting and amazingly complex fantasy world." -Gamestar

"Role-Playing Gamers' dreams come true!" -PC Action

Winner of numerous awards, including:

PC ACTION GOLD

GOLD PLAYER PC PLAYER 87

88% GameStar Gothic

GOTHIC

Rich, 3rd person action-RPG environment

Deep, twisting storyline with 50+ hours

Seamlessly detailed cities and landscapes

Get medieval on the world, go Gothic. Coming this winter.

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XICAT INTERACTIVE

PIRANHA BYTES

RP

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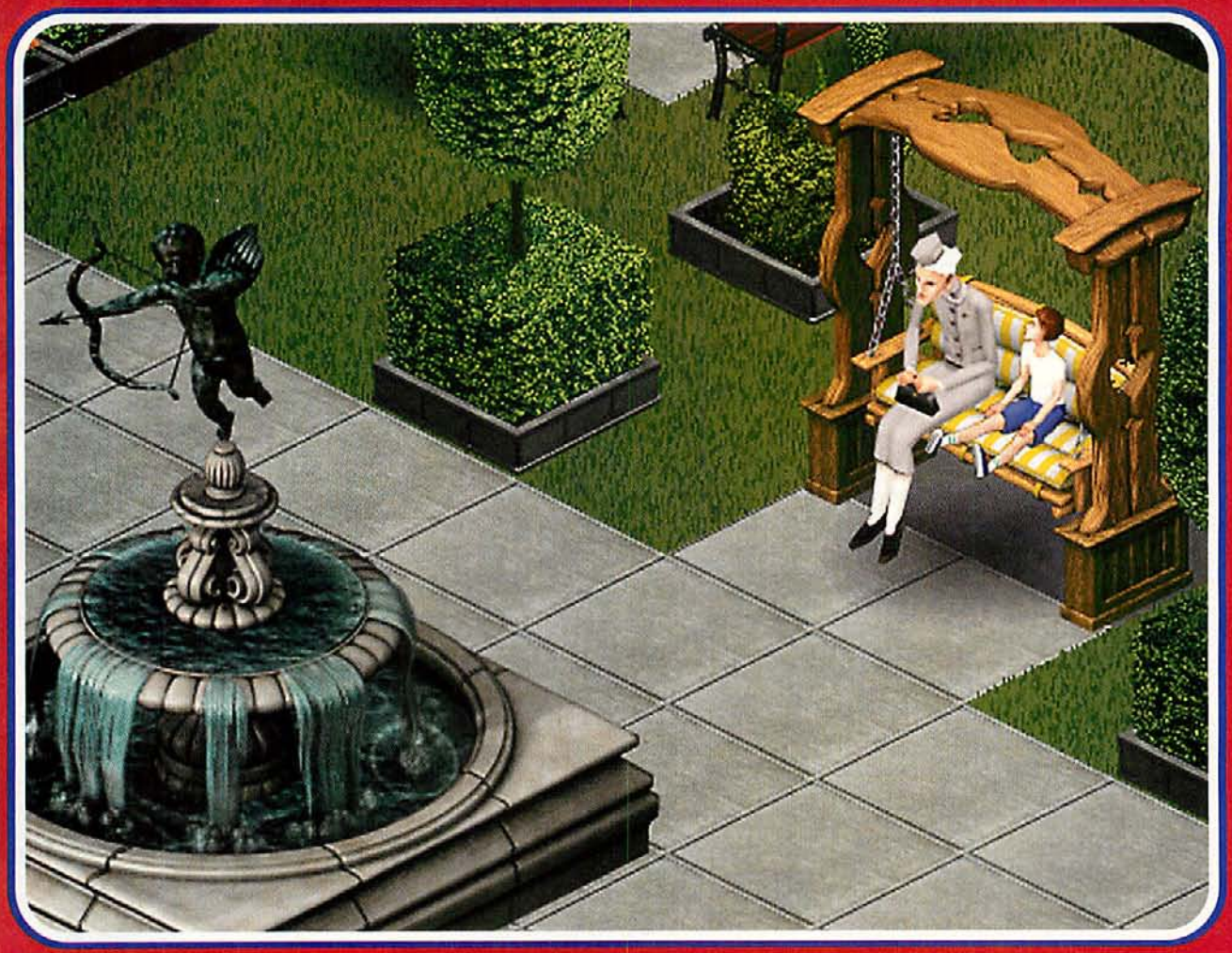
Swingers



Will romance be a walk in the park? Or will things heat up after dark? With The Sims Hot Date expansion pack, you get to be the matchmaker and watch as sparks fly or fizzle. Set up a secret rendezvous with a special friend or neighbor in the new downtown area filled with customizable shops, restaurants, bars and parks. Fulfill a dating fantasy with

EA GAMES

PC CD ROM

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Swingers

hot new characters like the buxom Blonde Bombshell or the virile Jock. Set the mood with romantic new objects like the Cuddle Couch or the Love Tub. Then make your move by blowing kisses, playing footsie or playing hard to get. You might just get lucky. Or you may just get a drink in the face. But it's not a hot date until you turn up the heat.

The SIMS™
hot date
EXPANSION PACK

www.TheSims.com

www.eagames.com

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Read Me

A front-row seat to the best of PC gaming **Edited by Ken Brown**

DISASTER FALLOUT

Changing the Game

A tragedy yanks an escapist hobby back to reality By Mark Asher

INSIDE

THE THING
You know, The Thing. No, not just some thing, THE THING. **PAGE 46**

SW GALAXIES
Tatooine: cool things you can do in a hive of scum and villainy. **PAGE 48**

GAME CULTURE
Microsoft Flight Simulator: a new whipping boy for the Age of Fear. **PAGE 50**

DEATHMATCH
Our critic takes on Funcom over the launch of *Anarchy Online*. **PAGE 58**

Spider-Man 2 was delayed to make changes to its NYC setting.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, an industry that has remained largely unaffected by "real world issues" was suddenly faced with difficult questions about the appropriateness of its content and packaging. While execs in the entertainment industry canceled projects and postponed new releases, game publishers scrambled to reevaluate hundreds of games to make content changes deemed necessary, and, in some instances, pull new releases from store shelves.

With many games depicting violence and mass destruction, it's easy to understand the concern. Some games fell under immediate scrutiny, like Sierra's *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*, based on the Bruce Willis movie about terrorists who threaten to blow up a high-rise building. In other games, the issue wasn't content, it was the box art: *Red Alert 2* was recalled to replace cover depictions showing the World Trade Center aflame. Ubi Soft postponed *Rogue Spear: Black Thorn* to change missions involving terrorist hijackings.

Microsoft found itself under scrutiny following media speculation that the terrorists could have trained with Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* program. (For more on this, see "Game Art Culture," page 50.) As of this writing, no evidence has been found to support such a claim. Microsoft was quick to say that concerns about terrorists using the game to train were unwarranted. Spokesperson Matt Pilla said, "As a pilot who has used *Flight Simulator* since it first appeared on the Apple II, I certainly didn't learn how to fly a plane from it. It takes much more training than you can get in this game."

Pilla acknowledged that players can crash into objects in *Flight Simulator*

"The tragedy is horrifying, and we all want to do the right thing."

THE BIN LADEN MOD

Drew Baye felt the same anger and sadness many experienced in the aftermath of the attacks, but Baye did something about it. Baye and another *Rogue Spear* fan created a mod with the mission goal being to go into Afghanistan and eliminate Osama bin Laden.

"The very night of the attacks, a lot of fans started talking about making a mod," Baye told us. "So that's what we did."

The mod made quite a splash, with hundreds of immediate downloads. *The New York Times* interviewed Baye and mentioned the mod in an article.

Baye has since taken the mod down to create a better one using photos of real Afghan villages.

And the mission goal? "It's still the same: to get Osama bin Laden." See www.baye.com/teamshadow.

AFFECTED GAMES

1 RED ALERT 2 Recalled from stores to replace cover depictions of New York City under attack. None of the missions will be changed, including one in which the Pentagon is attacked.

2 RED ALERT 2: YURI'S REVENGE The expansion's release was delayed so box art could be changed.

3 MAJESTIC Suspended for several days after the attacks, but now running again. Trudy Muller, corporate communications manager for EA told us that they were concerned about "people waiting for calls to find out if friends or relatives were safe," who might also get an alarming recorded call from the *Majestic* game.

4 SPIDER-MAN 2 Content related to the WTC is being taken out.

5 CIVILIZATION III Firaxis removed an option to plant diseases as a spy measure.

6 ROGUE SPEAR: BLACK THORN Delayed so content can be modified. The game centers on a terrorist group that's recreating famous terrorist attacks of the past, including some involving airplanes.

7 MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002 version is delayed for removal of WTC towers. A patch will remove the towers in the current version.

8 BEAM BREAKERS Futuristic racing game from Fishtank delayed so WTC towers can be removed.

9 WORLD WAR III: BLACK GOLD Suspended indefinitely due to subject matter—a third World War that starts over oil in the Middle East.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"What was acceptable on September 10 may not be acceptable ever again."
–Doug Lowenstein, president of Interactive Digital Software Association

EA pulled *Red Alert 2* to change its now-eerie box art.

2001, including buildings, but the crashes are not graphic and the objects aren't damaged. "It's not exactly the height of drama," he said.

Despite this, *Flight Simulator 2002* was delayed so Microsoft could remove the WTC towers, and the company said that it would offer a patch to remove the towers in *Flight Sim 2001*. Pilla said there's been no discussion about removing commercial jetliners from the simulation. He added that the experience has been a jarring one. "The whole flight sim team is trying to get their arms around this. The tragedy is horrifying and we all want to do the right thing."

moviegoers, understand the difference between entertainment and reality."

David Perry of Shiny Games echoed that sentiment. "In general I don't think censoring video games every time something happens is a long-term, good strategy. We'll end up with no kinds of games," Perry said. He added that the development of Shiny's game based on *The Matrix 2* wouldn't be affected.

Game Companies Reach Out

Some companies did more than just reevaluate their products. Microsoft pledged $10 million toward charities related to the attacks. EA pledged

There doesn't appear to be any connection to the games industry.

Knowing the Difference

Electronic Arts was also concerned about the content in its games. The world's largest games publisher reviewed its entire lineup. Company spokesperson Jeff Brown explained, "Game developers are going to be very sensitive about the tragedy of September 11. However, if history serves, the public will probably not turn away from the war and action-adventure genres in books, movies, and games.

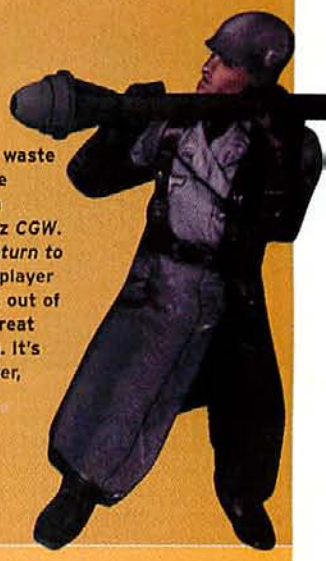
"I can assure you that EA will not be making games based on this tragedy, and I doubt very much any other legitimate studio would consider it," Brown said. "Having said that, EA believes that war and action-adventure are two legitimate and popular game genres. Gamers, like book readers and

$1 million in aid and has said they'll also match employee contributions. Sierra pulled its *SWAT 3* ad campaign and donated that $50,000 to charities as well. Even small publishers got in on the act—Shrapnel Games donated 5 percent of its sales to relief agencies.

As sad and tragic as the events of September 11 were, there still doesn't appear to be any connection to the games industry or its products. Scott Miller of 3Drealms said, "I'm shaking my head at the absurd political correctness of this topic. It's crazy for game companies to alter content because of a tragic event—they're just games, and no one in their right mind would make an unjust connection between a game and a terrorist attack. Right?"

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

THE GOOD: WOLFENSTEIN MULTIPLAYER TEST



For an office full of dummkopfs who used to waste days (or weeks) at a time deathmatching, it's been awfully quiet of late Chez *CGW*. But the arrival of the *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* multiplayer beta test finally woke us out of our stupor and signals great tidings for the real thing. It's all about the flamethrower, Schultzie.

THE BAD: BAD MAGAZINE HYPE

CGW: guilty as charged. We've recently seen the release of a few games that utterly failed to live up to prerelease hype—much of it from our own mouths. *Majestic*, *Red Faction*, and *Arcanum* are all games we couldn't praise enough in previews—but the finals just didn't deliver what the developers promised. The moral? Don't believe everything you read. And always wait for the review.

THE UGLY: FALLOUT FROM REALITY

We all know what the real Ugly is this month, and we discuss it elsewhere in this issue. The only thing we'll say here is that, to add to the depressing atmosphere, we've had to fend off emails and phone calls from mainstream press vultures wanting to discuss computer gaming's culpability in all this. To which we say: Get real. Please.

D2P

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COMING SOON

The Thing

It's difficult to see, hard to evade, and can assume almost any form. Now go kill it **By Thierry Nguyen**

Shivering in the chill of the Antarctic while some looming, shape-shifting monstrosity is practicing parlor tricks–like making a decapitated head sprout legs and dance around–you'd think you were seeing another installment of the *Resident Evil* series. Nope, this is a scene from *The Thing*, a new game that picks up where the creepy John Carpenter horror flick (1982) leaves off. Developed by Computer Artworks (the same crew that brought you the squamous look in *Evolva*), *The Thing* casts you as Blake, a squad leader of military personnel investigating what happened to the original Antarctic research base crew. As you delve deeper and deeper, you'll meet the very Thing that went after Kurt Russell and his band of scientists. Expect the gameplay to be a mix of horror and squad-assault action; you'll be leading heavily armed soldiers into the fray. You'll also run into plenty of NPCs who exhibit a variety of psychological reactions, from fear to trust; their reactions will determine if and how they will help you. After all, they have no reason to believe you're you and not just another manifestation of the Thing, and they may not trust you at all until you treat them very nicely. Look for more details on this 2002 title soon. Then pack your flamethrower and an extra pair of underwear.

Are you really you and not just another manifestation of the Thing?

GAME STATS

GENRE: **Action**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1, 2002**
PUBLISHER: **Universal Studios**
DEVELOPER: **Computer Artworks**
CONTACT: **www.universalstudios.com**

ZOO TYCOON™
ON "NUTRITION"

"HEY MOM THE LIONS ATE GRANDPA MILTON."

Build improper cages, and your guests will be pounced upon in the new PC game, Zoo Tycoon™. As operating manager you are responsible for over 40 species, constructing their habitats and keeping them healthy. Hire zookeepers who will gladly clean their cages. Your animals will be happy, and your guests will be too. Especially when all their limbs are left intact.

RIBEYE, T-BONE, FILET MIGNON. A LION WILL EAT THEM ALL.

The safest and most cost-efficient way to feed carnivores is to have zookeepers serve them raw meat. But for some excitement, you can feed the lions other live animals. *Ba-bye gazelles.*

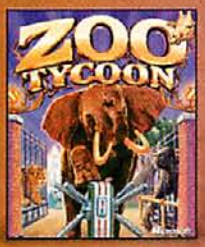
YOU TRY SWALLOWING A WHOLE MOUSE.

The House of Reptiles is just one of the buildings you place in your operation. There are also petting zoos, bathrooms, and gift shops selling overpriced African Warthogs. The kids love 'em, and your profit margin will too.

ALL SHE NEEDS IS A GOOD SALAD BAR.

The herbivores in Zoo Tycoon need habitats that resemble their native lands. Design them properly and your animals will be happy and fat. Rain forest animals need rain forest trees. Desert animals need desert vegetation. You get the drift.

Nutrition is only one part of Zoo Tycoon. For more info on other facets of the game, go to microsoft.com/games/zootycoon



EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MILD VIOLENCE

BLUE FANG GAMES

Microsoft microsoft.com/games/zootycoon

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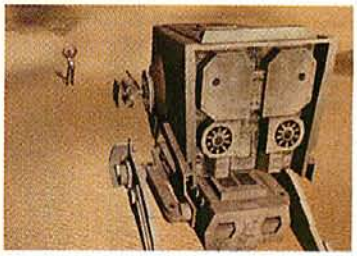
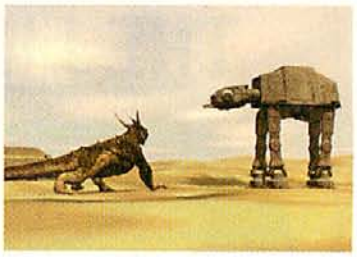




UPDATE

Star Wars Galaxies

Jabber with Jabba and kill a krayt dragon—cool things you can do on Tatooine **By Ken Brown**

Tatooine could become the next major galactic battleground.

Following up on our October preview, *CGW* is bringing you a monthly update on what you can expect when this massively multiplayer game goes live sometime late next year. The game, which is being developed by Verant in conjunction with LucasArts, will launch with several worlds, including Tatooine. As you know, both Anakin and Luke hailed from Tatooine. It's also where Jabba has his hut, and it appears in three of the four films. There should be plenty to do in this desert world, including:

Barter with Jawas. The diminutive humanoids sell everything from salvaged scrap metal to stolen astromech droids.

Visit the Mos Eisley Cantina. Located in the heart of Tatooine's most notorious hive of scum and villainy, the Mos Eisley Cantina will be filled with a variety of NPCs, from the surly bartender Wuher to the members of the house band, the Modal Nodes. Criminals and aliens of every stripe will occupy the bar, providing missions and information to courageous players.

Kill a krayt dragon. Like many worlds, Tatooine will be populated by a variety of creatures, none more fearsome than the giant krayt dragon. A huge beast with a voracious appetite, the krayt stalks the deserts of Tatooine looking for food—it will eat anything from banthas to wayward explorers.

Explore Jabba's palace. Perched on the edge of the Dune Sea, Jabba's palace offers explorers the opportunity to accept criminal missions for the obese Hutt.

Shoot it out with stormtroopers. Tatooine is home to Imperial garrisons, and the highly trained stormtroopers will prove dangerous to Rebels and their allies. Tatooine could easily become the site of the next great battle in the Galactic Civil War.

Build a moisture farm. Survival on Tatooine hinges on water access, making moisture farming one of the most common pursuits on the dry, hot world.

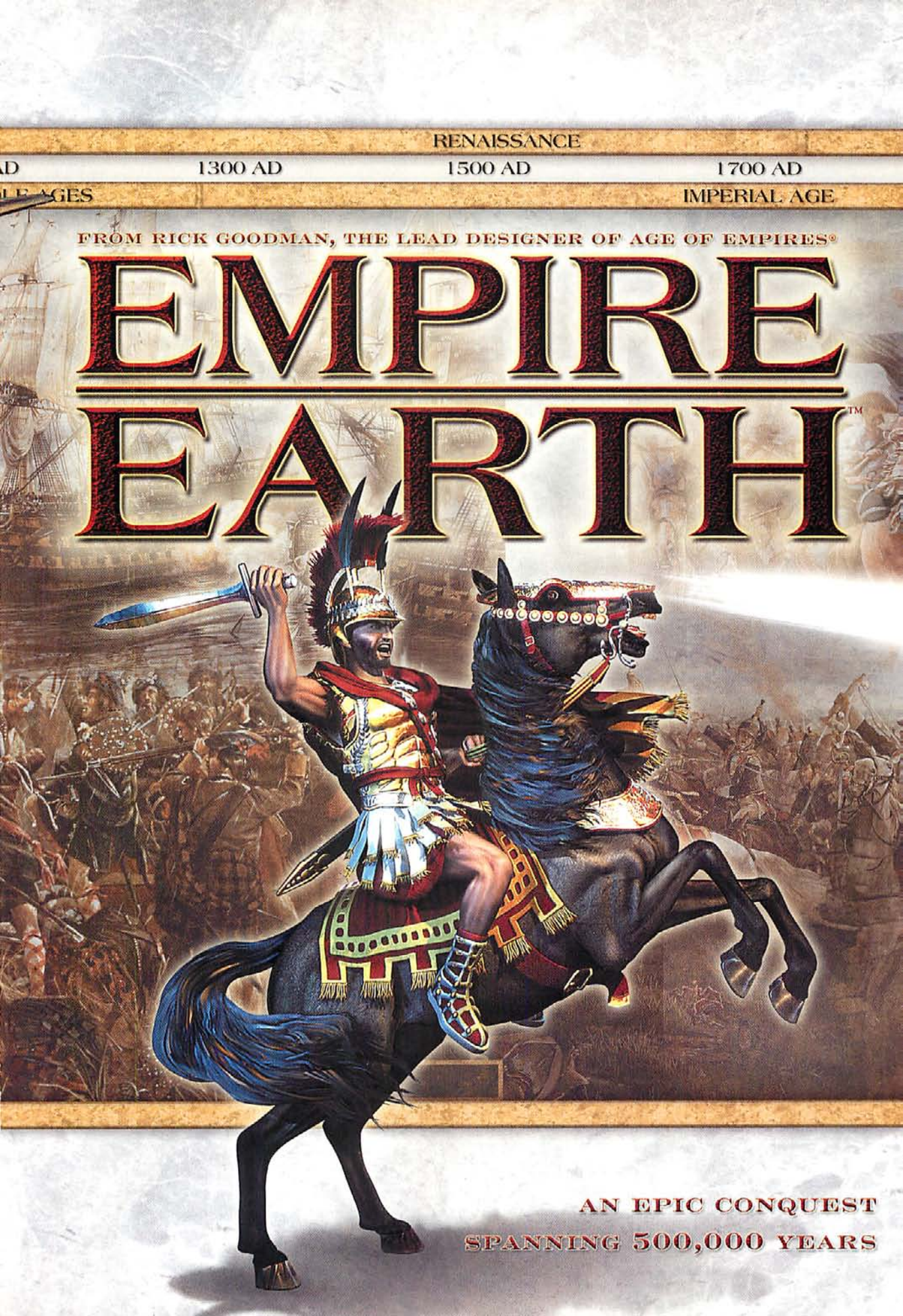
Brave Tusken Raiders and other dangers. From sandstorms to giant womp rats, Tatooine offers a host of threats. The Tusken Raiders, masked bandits who roam the deserts as nomads, are a violent species who kill hundreds each year.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares select media ratings with those on GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title. If you can't figure out what's worth playing from this list, check into rehab.

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot	IGN	GameRankings.com
Black & White	A+	A+	C	A	A+	A-
Conquest: Frontier Wars	B+	B	*	B+	A-	B+
Emperor: Battle for Dune	C-	A-	D	B+	B+	B+
Empire of the Ants	B-	C	D	C	C	C
Fallout Tactics	A	A-	B-	B+	B+	B+
Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns	B+	A-	A+	A-	A-	A-
Operation Flashpoint	A	B-	*	A-	A-	A-
Serious Sam	A	B	B+	A-	A	A-
Tribes 2	D	A-	B+	A-	A-	A-
Tropico	B-	B	B+	A-	A-	B+

* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME


RENAISSANCE
AD
1300 AD
1500 AD
1700 AD
AGES
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500,000 YEARS

PREHISTORY: 500,000 - 50,000 BC

Early man lived in a hostile world, and gathered in small, nomadic tribes, following the migrations of the animals they hunted. Conflict arose when diverse groups had to compete for scarce resources.

HOUSE

CITIZEN

PRIEST

CITIZEN

PROPHET

STABLE

BATTLESHIP

COPPER AGE: 5000 - 2000 BC

Farming and the domestication of animals resulted in the world's first permanent settlement in Mesopotamia. Copper-headed maces were first cast there in the 3rd millennium BC, but arrowheads were still made of stone.

PREHISTORIC AGE — COPPER AGE

500,000 BC — 25,000 BC — 5000 BC — 20

STONE AGE

TRANSPORT

CLUBMAN

WAR RAFT

SAMPSON

STONE AGE: 50,000 - 5000 BC

Human societies began to diversify, with different people filling different roles, and a need for organized leadership emerged. An important innovation was the practice of "hafting" - the attachment of a handle to an existing tool, such as a stone blade. Spears made in this way were used for fishing, hunting, and warfare.

BRONZE AGE: 2000 BC - 0 AD

The Bronze Age marked the appearance of the sword and the phalanx –a block formation of armored infantrymen favored by Alexander the Great. Fortified cities spurred the invention of siege equipment such as battering rams, siege towers, and stone throwers.

JAVELIN

WAR ELEPHANT

CATAPULT

SIEGE TOWER

14 Epochs

Dark Ages: 0 - 900 AD

The fall of the Roman Empire at the hands of Visigoths in 410 AD ushered in the Dark Ages. The Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire continued to thrive for a thousand more years.

Capitol

Caesar

Moorish Cavalry

Renaissance: 1300 - 1500 AD

The Renaissance began in Italy and gradually spread to the rest of the continent, stimulating technological innovation and new ways of thinking. The Black Death, the invention of the printing press, and the increasing use of gunpowder were all part of this time.

Henry Grâce à Dieu

Arquebus

Carabineer

Royal Cuirassier

Dark Age

3C 500 BC 0 AD 900 AD

Bronze Age Middle Ages

Knight

Trebuchet

Town Center

Middle Ages: 900 - 1300 AD

The Middle Ages saw the reemergence of centralized authority–notably feudalism in Europe. This was also the age of castles, cathedrals, mounted knights, and the Crusades.

Imperial Age: 1500 - 1700 AD

The appearance of ships capable of circumnavigating the globe heralded the beginning of the Imperial Age. Nations battled for access to new, resource-rich lands. Muzzle-loading cannons, flintlock muskets and the bayonet were introduced at this time.

Settlement

Hospital

Musketeer

Halberdier

OVER 200 UNITS

INDUSTRIAL AGE: 1700 - 1900 AD

The Scientific Revolution was the driving force of the Industrial Age. The steam engine, pasteurization, Darwin's Theory of Evolution, the practical application of electricity, and the invention of the telegraph, telephone, and incandescent light bulbs ushered in the 20th century.

NAPOLEON

GRENADIER

BRONZE CANNON

VICTORY

B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

BISMARCK

CORSAIR

WORLD WAR II

The Battle of Britain, fought entirely in the air, demonstrated how much air power had changed between the two world wars. The atomic bomb closed the horrific story of the Second World War.

RENAISSANCE

INDUSTRIAL

1300 AD

1500 AD

1700 AD

1900

IMPERIAL AGE

A7V TANK

DREADNOUGHT BATTLESHIP

ALBATROS

WORLD WAR I

Over 8 million soldiers were killed in this first truly global conflict. Steel warships, U-boats, and the new airplane all made advancements in modern warfare.

MODERN

In the latter half of the 20th Century, the Cold War dominated the international policies of many countries. When the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, nations struggled to redefine how best to use the arsenals they had amassed. The Gulf War and conflicts in former Yugoslavia became showcases for some of the world's latest weapons.

ENTERPRISE

LEOPARD TANK

F-117 FIGHTER

GO BEYOND THE AGES

DIGITAL AGE: 2000 - 2100 AD

In the New World Order, warfare reverted to localized conflicts involving regional powers. Military hardware needed to be highly mobile, versatile and reliable. The Digital Age was notable for the advent of advanced military robots.

TRIDENT SUBMARINE

CYCLOPS

SENTINELS

ROBOTIC FACTORY

APOLLO

CENTURION TANK

LEVIATHAN

NANO AGE: 2100 - 2200 AD

Miniaturization achieved its ultimate objective with the creation of "nanomachines," with sizes measured in billionths of a meter, which could build anything, atom-by-atom, including copies of themselves. Humans learned to synthesize "negative matter," which eventually led to the advent of time travel and teleportation.

AGE — DIGITAL AGE

AD — 2000 AD — 2100 AD — 2300 AD

ATOMIC AGE — NANO AGE

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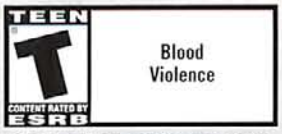

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25,000 BC
5000 BC
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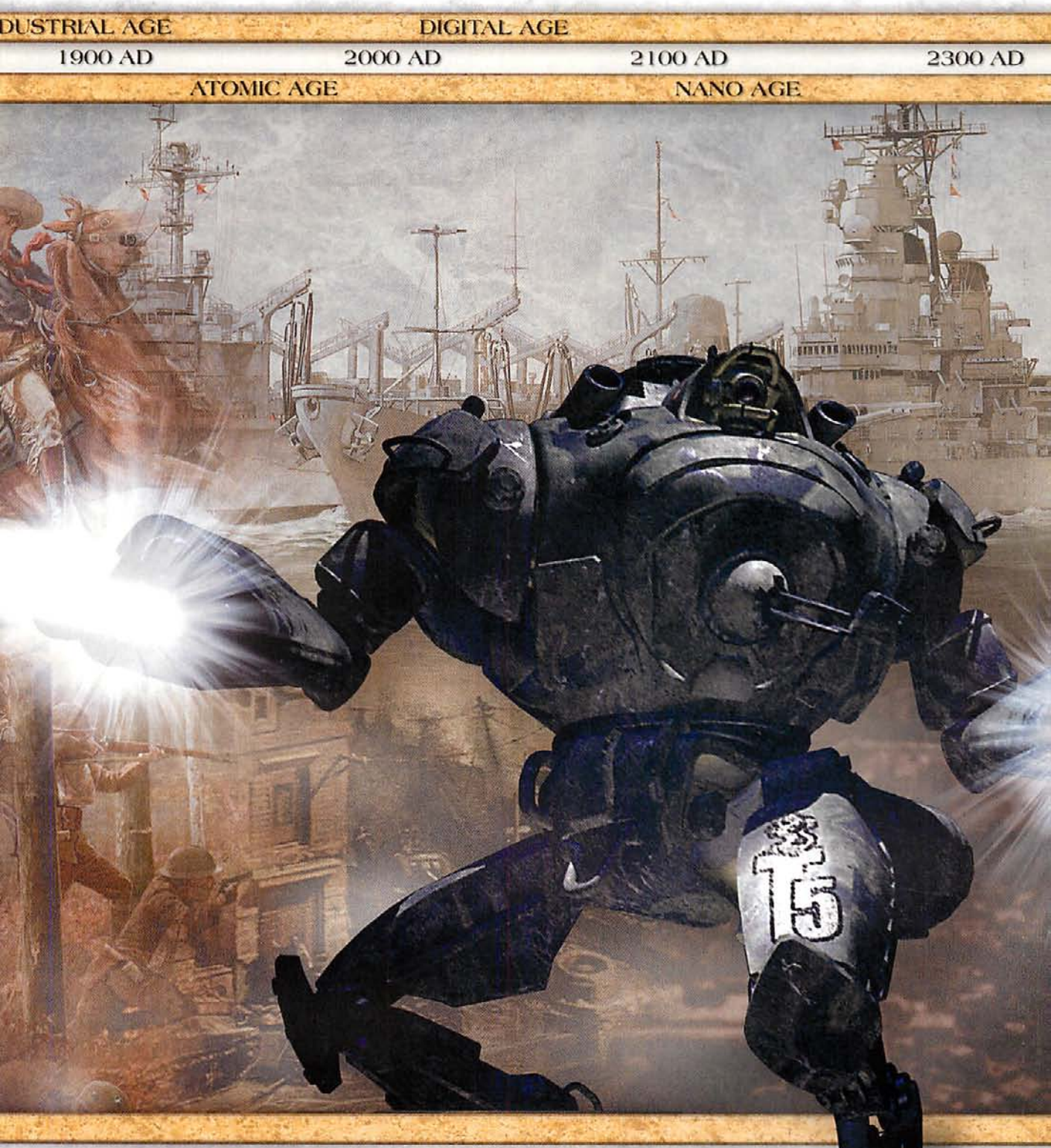
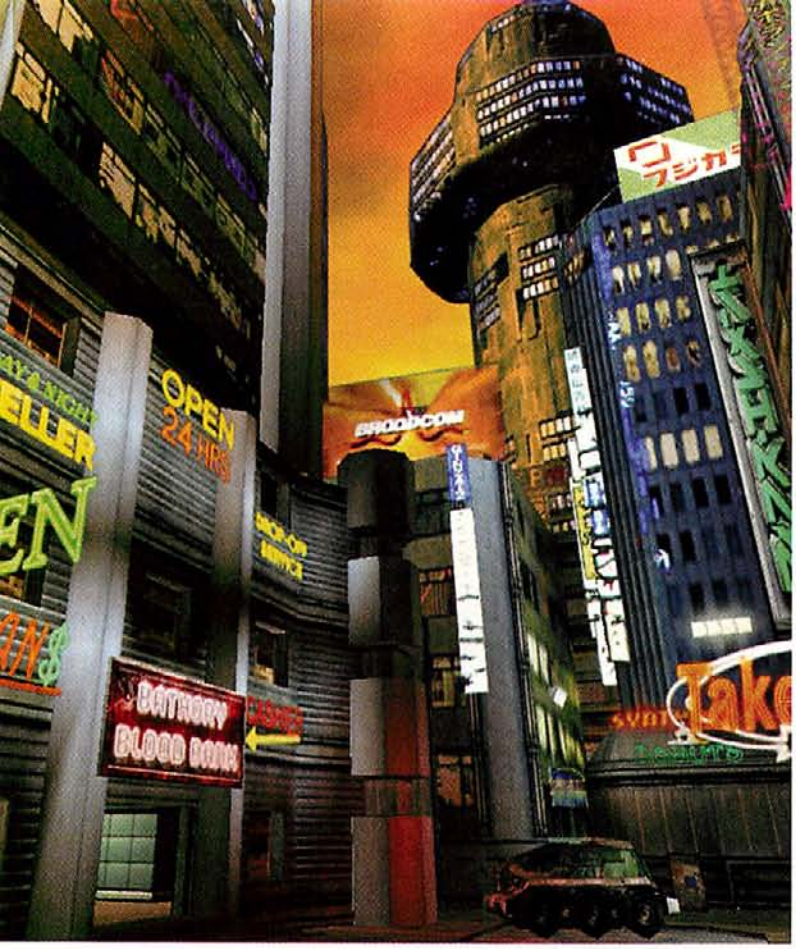
– PC GAMER

"Goodman does it again. Another stellar creation."
– Computer Games

"Never before has real-time strategy spanned the ages as it does in Empire Earth"
– Computer Gaming World





SNAPSHOT

Judge Dredd

Hard-ass law man to dispense shotgun justice in comic book-style shooter **By John Houlihan**

Mere mention of the name *Judge Dredd* probably conjures images of Sylvester Stallone bellowing, "I am the lurgh!" in the 1995 movie. Rest assured, this game is not based on that movie. The big-screen flop was based on one of the better comics featured in the British sci-fi comic anthology *2000AD* (launch pad of some of the best writers in the comic industry). The comic itself has developed a cult following after more than 20 years of dispensing justice in a wicked, futuristic megalopolis.

It turns out that the biggest fans of the comic book worked for British game development studio Rebellion, home of the original *Aliens vs. Predator*. Rebellion liked the *Judge* so much, they up and bought him, along with the *2000AD* comic franchise, garish motorcycles and all. Their first game based on the comic is *Judge Dredd vs. Judge Death*, an FPS set in the metropolis of Mega City One. Stemming a tide of lawlessness are the Judges, highly trained lawmen fond of dispensing shotgun justice sans jury, pardon, or appeal. Dredd is the toughest of them all, and the game will revolve around his epic confrontation with archnemesis Judge Death, a dark judge from an alternate dimension, where life itself is considered a crime.

Rebellion has tried to preserve the comic book flavor with a gritty, urban look, and original *Dredd* creators like John Wagner have been drafted to preserve the dark, satirical humor of the strip. The action will be story driven and mission based, with players stepping into the Judge's size-12 boots to confront the criminals and crazies. Authentic Justice Department equipment like Dredd's Lawgiver pistol, Lawrod rifle, and even Lawmaster bike should provide plenty of firepower. A powerful graphics engine, Rebellion's talent, and a unique sci-fi universe means shooter fans can look forward to laying down some serious law of their own next holiday season.

Rebellion preserves the *Dredd* comic book flavor with a gritty, urban look.

PERSPECTIVE: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Diablo II, *Half-Life* Mods

I'm beginning to wonder if gamers will ever need to buy new games, given the steady stream of mods for *Diablo II* and *Half-Life*. Here are the latest ones worthy of your attention.

Hell on Earth for *Diablo II* and *Lord of Destruction*

www.planetdiablo.com/hellonearth

Hell on Earth's Magic Box blows away *Diablo*'s Horadric Cube.

While only in beta at the time of this writing, *Hell on Earth* is shaping up to be one of the best mods available for *Diablo II*. The design team has managed to change nearly every aspect of the game without disturbing the overall balance, adding tons of items (including incredible class-specific stuff), a revamped skills tree with no prerequisites, and tougher monsters that drop better equipment. You'll need the expanded inventory and stash space to store the dozens of new miscellaneous items like gold and iron ore, all of which can be combined into spectacular new items using Isla's Magic Box, which makes the Horadric Cube look like a Tinkertoy.

Wanted for *Half-Life*

www.wantedhl.com

Wanted for *Half-Life* could be as close as we ever get to an *Outlaws* sequel.

Fans of *Outlaws* should check out *Wanted*, a mod that takes *Half-Life* to the Wild West. Headcrabs are replaced by scorpions and rattlesnakes, and that bear trap you pick up early in the single-player game isn't just for looks. Weapons are also from an earlier age, with everything from Bowie knives and six-shooters to lever-action Winchesters and bows and arrows. The drama in the single-player storyline is heightened by some decent voice acting, and the combination of a chronic ammo shortage and weapons that don't hold many shots adds to the tension. Several multiplayer modes are available, with full "Cow-bot" support so you can practice before playing cowboys and Indians online. This is a hefty download, but well worth it if the theme interests you.

ICON BY COLIN ADAMS

Do realistic simulations teach gamers to kill?

Games and Terrorism

BY CHARLES ARDAI

We have a long history in this country of blaming genuine problems on imaginary causes. Various forms of entertainment are the most commonly cited culprits. Every new type of popular music, from ragtime to rap, has been credited with inciting depraved misbehavior; in the '50s, comic books were famously accused of "seducing the innocent." Violence in cartoons, movies, and television shows has been blamed for acts of violence in real life; and since the days of Pac-Man, video games have been blamed for everything from juvenile delinquency to murder. There is never substantiation for these claims, and they always seem foolish a decade after the fact—no one is afraid of Elvis' swiveling hips today. But when the claims are made, they're taken seriously. Often this is because they are made in an atmosphere of panic, when people are desperate to latch onto something, anything, to explain a turn of events that horrifies them.

We should not be surprised then that, in the aftermath of the truly horrifying destruction that took place on September 11 in New York and Washington, anxious citizens have begun casting about for someone to blame. Nor should we be surprised that computer games are catching some of the heat. What is a surprise is the type of game that's coming under fire this time: not blood-thirsty, trigger-happy combat games, but ordinary flight simulators.

According to newspapers, a number of British retailers, including Woolworths and Virgin Megastores, removed copies of Microsoft's Flight Simulator within days of the attack on the World Trade Center. And some U.S. journalists are nodding in agreement. "The difference between what anyone can learn from the Microsoft game and the education provided by the commercial trainers the terrorists actually used is not as great as you might think," writes David Coursey of ZDNet.

Mind-Boggling Fallacy

You can appreciate the motives here—we all want to live in a world safe from the threat of terrorism—but the fundamental fallacy is mind-boggling. Removing flight simulators from stores will not prevent terrorists from learning how to fly. Even if it would, preventing terrorists from learning how to fly would not prevent terrorism. There are too many other ways to deliver a bomb or otherwise wreak havoc.

What removing flight simulators from stores does do is say to the general public that we don't trust them to possess such software, presumably because possessing it will give them either the idea or the skills to use airplanes to commit terrorist acts. Of course, no one who has been awake at any time since September 11 needs any help in thinking up the idea of using a plane in this way. So it must be the ability to fly that we're afraid to give our citizens. Even if you set aside the question of whether *Flight Simulator* can really teach someone to fly a commercial jet (World Spirit's *1-2-3*

Several shootings have been blamed on *Doom*. No connection was ever proved.

ILLUSTRATION BY COLLIN ADAMS

In their anger and desperation, some people thought Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* may have taught the terrorists to fly.

Dance has yet to turn me into Fred Astaire), assuming it could, wouldn't it be a good thing if more of our citizens knew how to fly? If we assume that the percentage of Americans with terrorist leanings is exceedingly small, wouldn't widespread use of flight simulators leave us with a population better able to land a hijacked airplane if, God forbid, they ever find themselves wresting control of one from a terrorist?

What you're really saying by banning flight simulators is not only that they are professional-quality training tools (a dubious claim to begin with) but also that the average American is so likely to be a terrorist in the making that they can't be trusted with such dangerous material. This is an outrageous insult, unmatched anywhere else in our society. People stab each other with knives, but they don't lock up the cutlery at Wal-Mart. Hell, we haven't even stopped selling box cutters.

At some point we will be at peace again, and this overreaction will seem remote and quaint.

We also haven't stopped flying airplanes or started requiring passengers to fly in handcuffs and leg irons, which is what you'd really want to do if you thought that the American public were just riddled with would-be hijackers. So why stop selling flight simulator software?

It's desperation, nothing more. We aren't sure how to attack the terrorists but feel we have to do something, so instead we attack ourselves. But we are not the enemy, and neither are these innocent computer games. At some point in the future, we will be at peace again, and this particular overreaction will seem as remote and quaint as renaming sauerkraut "victory cabbage" during World War I. But not all overreactions are quaint—just ask any Japanese American who's 60 or older. And this is only the first overreaction in what might be a very long conflict. I pray that before this is all over we don't find ourselves doing real harm in the name of safety.

Charles Ardai has written for CGW for 15 years. He resides in New York.

D&D was faulted for numerous ills in the 1980s, from drug use to murder.

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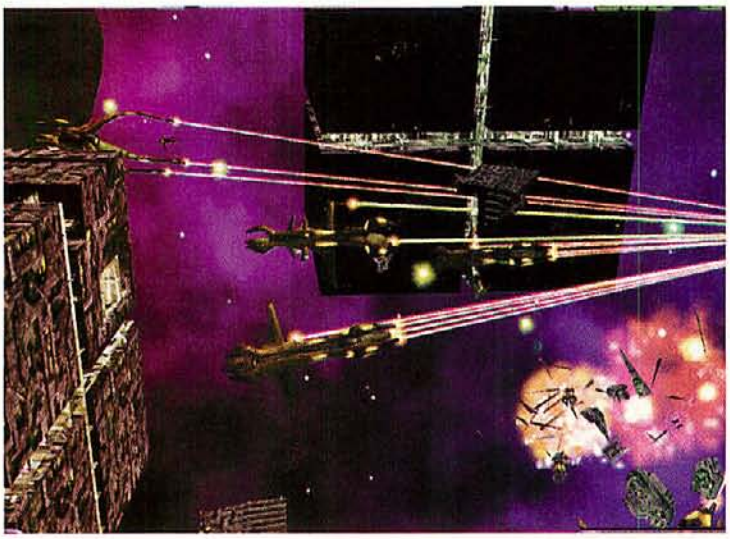

PREVIEW

Trek Goes Supernova

***Star Trek: Armada II* is truer to the *Trek* mythos and its battles are more engaging** By Denny Atkin

Star Trek: Armada II is to the original as *Wrath of Khan* was to *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Its storyline is truer to the *Trek* mythos, the battles are more engaging, and the special effects are more dramatic. The original *Armada* was a decent game, but in most ways it was a stock RTS set in the *Trek* universe. *Armada II* adds new races, battle tactics. Not only are there unique weapons and sensor-based spying tools, but some ships can combine to form superweapons. The immense Borg Fusion Cube, for instance, is made up of eight Borg Cubes combined—*intimidating* doesn't begin to describe it.

In multiplayer and instant-action modes, you can play as the Federation, Klingons, Romulans, Cardassians, Borg, or Species 8472. Introduced in *Voyager*, Species 8472 is a race that hails from fluidic space, manning organic ships that can evolve new capabilities. Three 10-mission campaigns let you play the Federation, Borg, and Klingons.

A large variety of ship classes means each race can have its own tactics.

ships, and resource elements that make for more original gameplay.

Perhaps most striking is the differentiation among the races. In the original game, most ships had an equal. Here, a wider variety of ship classes (almost 100, compared to the original's 40) and some very interesting custom weapons offer a *StarCraft*-like originality to each race's

Large assaults are most effectively managed from the overhead view.

The original *Armada* featured a 3D view option, but you could really only manage battles from the standard RTS overhead view. *Armada II* enhances the 3D view to make it easier to manage battle. It's not as intuitive as *Homeworld*'s 3D view, and I still found the game easier to play from the overhead view. You can record missions, though, and watching the playback in 3D when you're not worried about commanding your fleets is a blast.

We'll know for sure if the intriguing design and unique race abilities of *Armada II* will produce a winner when the game ships around the holidays.

PERSPECTIVE: POST-MORTEM

By Bruce Geryk

MechCommander 2

You may have read previously in this magazine that *MechCommander 2* is a good game. What you probably didn't read is that, using science, it is possible to prove that no real-time strategy game can ever properly depict the *BattleTech* universe. That's either a paradox or part of the dialectics of gaming. There's not enough room here for mathematical equations or Hegel, so I'll try to explain it in English.

The reason *MechWarrior* sims succeed so well is that they focus your attention on the elements that matter. If you have some weapons on your arm and your arm gets blown off, you can no longer use those weapons. Every time you think about how great it would be to fire your Gauss rifle, you are reminded that you can't, because it's not there anymore. This then pisses you off, or makes you sad, depending on how much of a wuss you are in real life. But it focuses your attention on that mech at that exact moment. And this focus is what makes the game.

Fans of the original *BattleTech* boardgame can tell you that keeping track of what gets destroyed on a mech can be complicated. Having to pay this kind of attention to your units, though, means that at some point, you have to decide each individual unit's fate. Even the most insignificant mech gets your attention for one minute. You notice its damage, and you either decide to save it or forget it. But you have to think about it.

In *MechCommander 2*, you're simply aware that a mech is "pretty beat up." Sometimes mechs will be dead for five minutes before you notice. This lack of focus leads to homogenization. A Mad Cat is a Mad Cat, even if one has a super-ace pilot. In the boardgame, you look forward to the die roll bonus you get from that pilot every turn. In a turn-based PC game, you anticipate a hit just before hitting the Fire button because you know you have that extra edge. In *MC 2*, the other guy would have already fired five times while you looked for your other Shadow Cat.

Computer games aren't only about the outcome. It's what happens during the game that determines whether it will be memorable. *MechCommander 2*'s real-time events mean that your most important memories are of some vague stuff happening. Remember when you had one missile salvo left and it crippled that Atlas and saved the game? Neither do I, because I was clicking on something else when this happened. As Tom Chick once said, the best games let you write your own stories, but *MC 2*'s stories are all about some guys doing some thing, and then it all blows up. The end.

As exciting as this big battle may seem...

...it can't compare to the urgency you feel piloting a Sunder with a blown-off arm.

Post-Mortem is Bruce's monthly analysis of a previously reviewed game.

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NEWS FLASH

City of Heroes

Crime and villainy will have a new foe in this massively multiplayer online game **By Ken Brown**

Players can design their own costumes and create heroes.

Massively multiplayer appears to be the genre du jour, but fortunately not all the new role-playing games are about dwarves and fairies. A new online game coming next year will let gamers create their own superheroes and band together with others to fight evil, build their own headquarters, and try to become the dominant do-gooders in the city.

Players can design their own costumes and create heroes, choosing from hundreds of different powers, abilities, and items. Arrayed against them will be a host of super-villains, aliens, madmen, monsters, criminals, and other nefarious foes. By successfully stomping out crime, players can acquire power, wealth, and fame, not to mention free dry-cleaning for their capes.

Set in Paragon City, the game will feature the usual skyscrapers, slums, sewers, and streets of a sprawling metropolis teeming with ill-tempered types. Cryptic Studios of San Jose, California, plans to release *City of Heroes* in the summer of 2002. For more on the game, check out www.cityofheroes.com

FORGOTTEN CLASSICS
ALLEY CATS (1995)

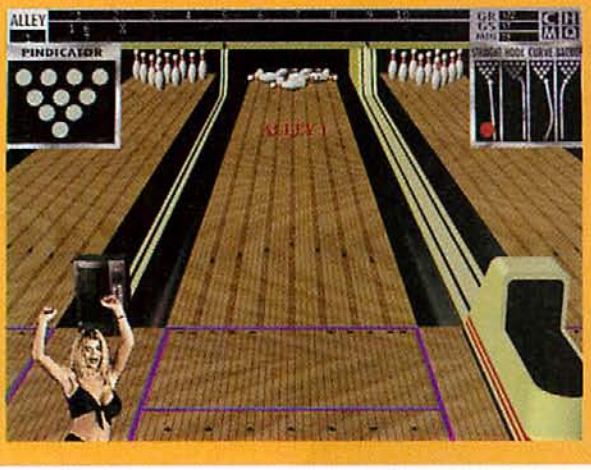
By Robert Coffey

Even with six years of hindsight, it's hard to see why this Quicktime-powered sport-smut masterpiece, *Alley Cats: The Strip Bowling Game for Fast Lane Players*, hasn't garnered the acclaim it so richly deserves.

A pants-tugging nerd in the rich comedy tradition of French national treasure farceur Jerry Lewis hosts this tantalizing tour de force of tenpins and titillation.

This noble guide is a study in pathos and irony, for even as he eagerly leads us to the exotic entertainment that is the deserved reward of a player who has proved his masculine worthiness on the waxed hardwood lanes, he is forever denied the pleasure waiting just beyond the Pin-Ups Club door.

Alley Cats spins its spell of love and longing through three elegantly simple lanes and the Club—could this quartet be a brilliant, subdued metaphor for the four chambers of the human heart, aching eternally for love?



As Candy, the Lane 1 companion, so poignantly notes, "2, 4, 6, 8, big boobs make you bowl great!" Yes, Candy, yes, they most certainly do. And maybe, just maybe, big boobs can break your heart.

"Forgotten Classics" is CGW's occasional look at the rough around the diamonds of our beloved hobby.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, Dec. 1996

Action gaming editor Elliott Chin wrote a big news story this month about a major trend: real-time gaming. Citing the "phenomenal success" of *WarCraft II* and *Command & Conquer*, Chin described 10 upcoming RT titles, including *StarCraft, Rebellion, MechCommander, X-COM Apocalypse, War Wind, Dark Reign, M.A.X.*, and *C&C: Tiberian Sun*. His article missed the mark on only one count: He predicted that *WarCraft III* would be out in 1998.

Ten Years Ago, Dec. 1991

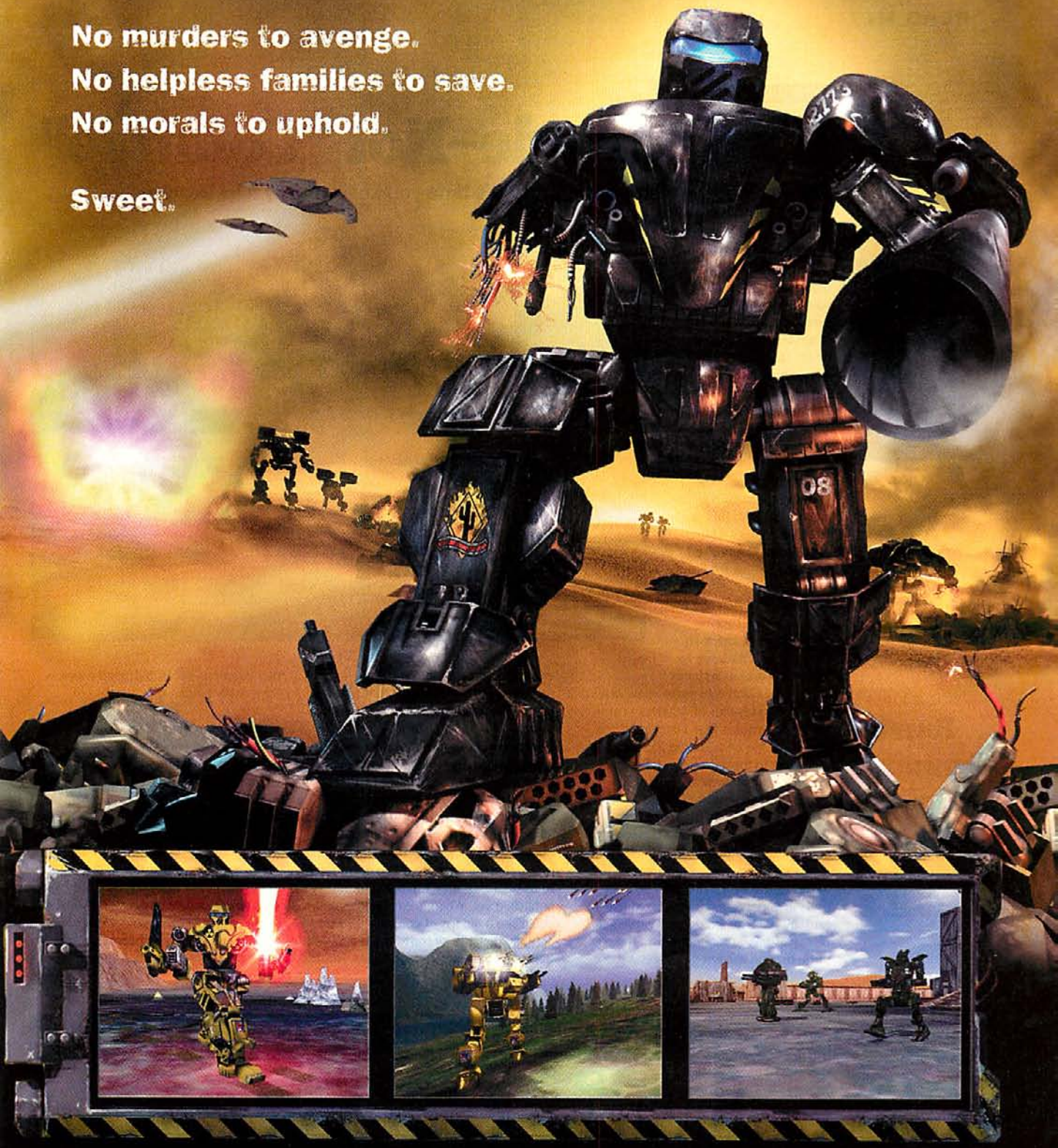
This issue featured our preview of a little game you may have heard of: *Civilization*. Alan Emrich (then a mere editorial peon, now the lead designer of *Master of Orion III*) wrote: "A new Olympian in the genre of god games has truly emerged, and *Sid Meier's Civilization* is likely to prove itself the greatest discovery in computer entertainment since, well...the wheel!" He wasn't kiddin'.

Fifteen Years Ago, Dec. 1986

It was around this time that Infocom released the game with the best title ever: *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*. The classic text adventure challenged you to escape from the clutches of the Leather Goddesses, who were performing bizarre experiments on you to find a way of subjugating Earth and turning it into their pleasure grounds. Eeek! Of course, it wasn't as racy as it sounded (even in lewd mode), but it was the best textual intercourse around in the days before chat rooms.

No murders to avenge.
No helpless families to save.
No morals to uphold.

Sweet.



You're the Black Knight and you've got better things to do. Like lead an infamous legion of rogue mercenaries into battle, trade weapons on the black market, even fight for the ruthless House Steiner. All while piloting the most badass 'Mechs ever. Welcome to the darker side of MechWarrior... Black Knight. Where it's good to be bad.

MECHWARRIOR 4
BLACK KNIGHT

TEEN T VIOLENCE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Zone.com TWIZKIDS Microsoft

microsoft.com/games/mw4_blackknight

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INTERVIEW

It's Comrade–Not "Commie"

The Russians are now our pals, so it's time you knew one **By John Houlihan**

WWII veterans from Russia, Germany, and the U.S. all contributed to *IL-2*

You probably don't know many game designers in Moscow. But if you're into WWII flight sims, you ought to know this one. Oleg Maddox heads up his own game design studio, which is building a sim based on the legendary Russian "Flying Tank," the IL-2 Sturmovik. With its raw beauty (see screenshot in "Loading," page 30) and heavy emphasis on air-to-ground combat, this sim will give gamers a bird's-eye view of the bruised and bloody Eastern Front.

A true propeller-head, Oleg Maddox owns and flies a Yak 52.

We thought everyone in Russia was either starving or in the mob. How did you manage to become a game designer?
Well, first I wanted to make some fast money as a reseller of American cars–Fords. But after a year I decided it wasn't for me because I'm a creative guy; I like to make things. So I created Maddox Games. Now it's part of the largest software house in Russia.

Why did you choose the Sturmovik as the basis for your sim?
It was the most mass-produced aircraft in the world, with more than 36,000 units in service, and it was loved like a hero by the Russian people. We've seen plenty of fighter simulations in the past, but a ground assault aircraft is a more interesting proposition. No game had really tackled the Eastern Front before, so that was also new territory to explore.

How accurate is *IL-2*'s simulation?
Well, I had access to contemporary WWII documents and secret test data from German, Soviet, and even captured American planes. My home library consists of over a thousand books on aviation, and there are some research documents that I've permission to use but that aren't allowed to be published yet. When *IL-2* is released, you'll see a big list of consultants who actually flew the aircraft for the Russian, German, and American air forces. Not many famous pilots, but good people–they really helped us.

Is aviation in your blood?
I'm an aviation engineer. I graduated from the Moscow Aviation Institute and then I worked for military research institutes for 11 years. I also built radio-controlled aircraft and was champion of the Soviet Union many years ago.

What games are popular in Russia?
Strategy games and shooters, but flight sims also. Because of piracy, everything is cheap and everyone plays. Computers are cheap–any student can build one. In Russia, PCs are highly distributed.

GET A LIFE

There's more to life than games–no, really, there is

Actual Physical Exercise
We've been called heartless bastards so many times, we had to find out if it was true. So we started exercising. And guess what? Our hearts were beating! We felt so good we ran right out and ate bacon cheeseburgers.

Morpheus
We mourned Napster's demise but have healed thanks to Morpheus, which lets us trade all types of media files and beats Napster's download and search times. Go to www.musiccity.com. Just don't tell Metallica.

Lone Wolf and Cub
The best new comic series is a 30-year-old Japanese re-release of a brilliant, brutal, sad samurai epic about an assassin wandering the land with his 3-year-old son. Released at one 300-page volume a month–for 28 months.

The Simpsons DVDs
Starting from the humble days of being a short on *The Tracy Ullman Show*, this DVD set has the entire first season and two discs of extras (including commentary by Groening for each episode). Best TV show...ever!

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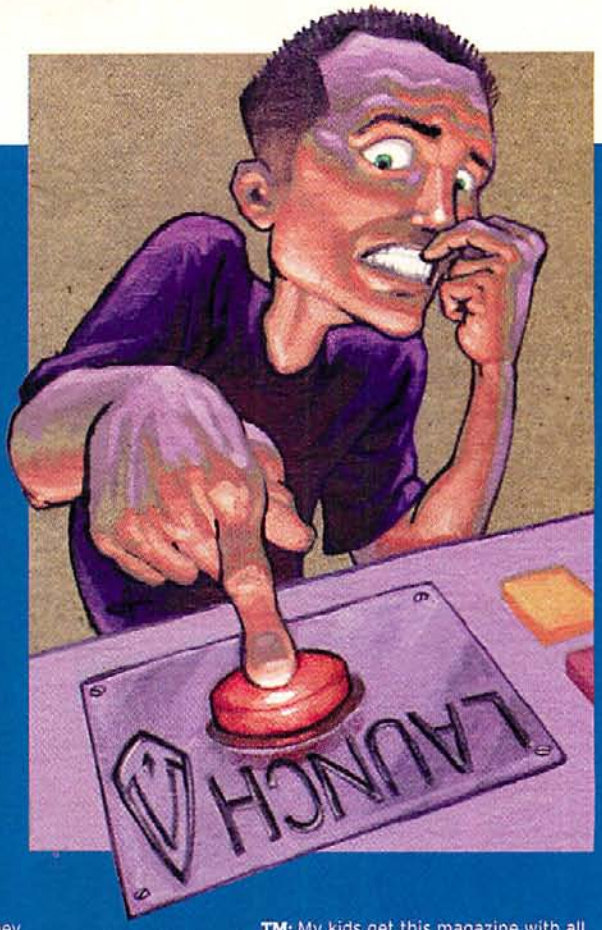
PERSPECTIVE:
CGW DEATHMATCH

Was *Anarchy Online* released too soon?



Welcome to our new monthly debate forum, "CGW Deathmatch." This month, Tom McDonald squares off against Funcom's Henning Solberg. McDonald reviewed Anarchy Online *in our November issue, where the game received three stars. Solberg is AO's Live Manager. Gentlemen, you may begin.*

TM: We all played *Anarchy* in beta and saw it at E3. It lagged, the combat didn't always work right, and it ran like a three-legged dog. What on earth were you thinking when you released this to the public? It was so *very* obvious this was not ready yet.

HS: The problems we experienced at launch time almost killed the game even before we got started. In retrospect, we look back and think, "Boy, was that a bad launch!" and, yes, maybe we should have waited longer before releasing this game. With the knowledge we have today, we could have fixed a lot of the issues before launch. We learned the hard way. We had too many players online too quickly and an organization that was not able to handle it as professionally as we wanted. But releasing online games is totally different than releasing traditional PC games. Things that might appear to be unfinished to you are only a matter of minor adjustments on our end—and those things are impossible to simulate through the beta period. Now we're through the worst phase and have started to focus on the good stuff.

TM: Your answer seems both evasive *and* defensive. It's pretty clear what's going on here. You set an arbitrary ship date and decided it was going out the door, ready or not. People expect and deserve finished product when they buy something. Just because a game is online doesn't mean developers can ship broken and fix later. When I buy a car, they don't ask me to come back in a month to pick up the brakes.

HS: Defensive? Sure, if that is how you view the fact that I try to give honest answers to your questions. Evasive? Tell me what you believe I have evaded, and I will jump right back in and address it.

The development of *Anarchy Online* took us about five years. We put everything we had into the game. We worked day and night. We believed in the ship date, and when the day arrived, we believed the game was ready.

I agree with you that games should not be shipped broken—but online games are different. The size of the game makes it virtually impossible to test every aspect properly, and some problems will not be found before the game ships. You can get that confirmed by other online developers. We must have done something right because there are thousands of people who enjoy playing *Anarchy Online* every day. They wouldn't be there if they weren't having fun.

TM: One of the problems seemed to be that you published more than 100,000 copies of the game but had the capacity to handle only a fraction of that. Preorders alone should have given you an idea of the high degree of interest. Plus, not all of the problems were linked to rollout and volume. For instance, my first thought upon entering Rubi-Ka was, "What an extraordinary world!" But when I went on a cave mission, I found some pretty rough textures and environments. It seems pretty strange that the outside world is so incredible, while the cave missions appear to have been made using *DoomEd*, as though the mission areas—indeed, the mission structure itself—was not given enough attention.

"Games should not be shipped broken—but online games are different."

HS: We made our launch plans based on the most optimistic sales scenarios. Not even in our wildest dreams did we expect the game to sell faster than that, but it did.

I have to agree with you that some of the indoor mission styles do not look as good as the outside world, but we have some really good-looking indoor areas under development and plan to add these at regular intervals.

TM: My kids get this magazine with all kinds of little stories and puzzles and pictures to color. The publisher says it's "Fun With a Purpose," and it costs only $2.00 a month. My *UO* and *EQ* accounts cost only $9.95, and they also come with a purpose, even though that purpose appears to be shoemaking. I don't really see where Funcom gets off charging $12.95 a month for *AO*. I don't feel like I'm getting $3.00 more in entertainment a month.

HS: When people subscribe to *CGW*, you send them a copy of the magazine each month. You do not wait until December and give them all the issues for that year in one big chunk. Online games work the same way. We provide people with entertainment. To do this properly we need to add content on a regular basis. An online game will never be finished. The fact that online games change and evolve is a major part of what makes them so much more fun to play than ordinary games.

It costs a lot of money to run an online game. Our price tag has been set based on these costs. The subscription fee our customers pay provides us with the income we need to keep the game running—$12.95 is a small fee to pay for a full month of entertainment, especially when you take into consideration that most of our subscribers play the game several hours each day.

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CREATIVE

PREVIEW

Williams Pinball Classics

All this sim needs is a set of flippers **By Robert Coffey**

It's almost as if they burned the lounge of your old dorm onto a CD—the only thing the tables in *Williams Pinball Classics* need to complete the illusion are a few cigarette burns and an annoying guy plopping down a quarter on the glass to claim the next game.

Sure, the beta we've been playing is still a little rough, but we were happily surprised by the strong physics model of this budget title, as well as by the fidelity to the real-world tables that provide the playing fields. Four immediately recognizable tables will be included in this November release: the old-school Lost World; the sound-effect-crazy Arabian Nights; the pirate-themed Black Rose; and the ramp-happy Creature From the Black Lagoon. At only $20, *Williams Pinball Classics* could be just the thing to break your *Bejeweled* habit.

NEWS FEED

SimsVille Shuttered

■ Maxis has cancelled their small-town simulator *SimsVille* after deciding it didn't live up to the company's standards. Ironically, the decision to cancel the game was in part a response to one of Maxis' own products, the upcoming *Hot Date* expansion for *The Sims*. The primary goal of *SimsVille* was to allow Sims to leave their homes, which *Hot Date* accomplishes better.

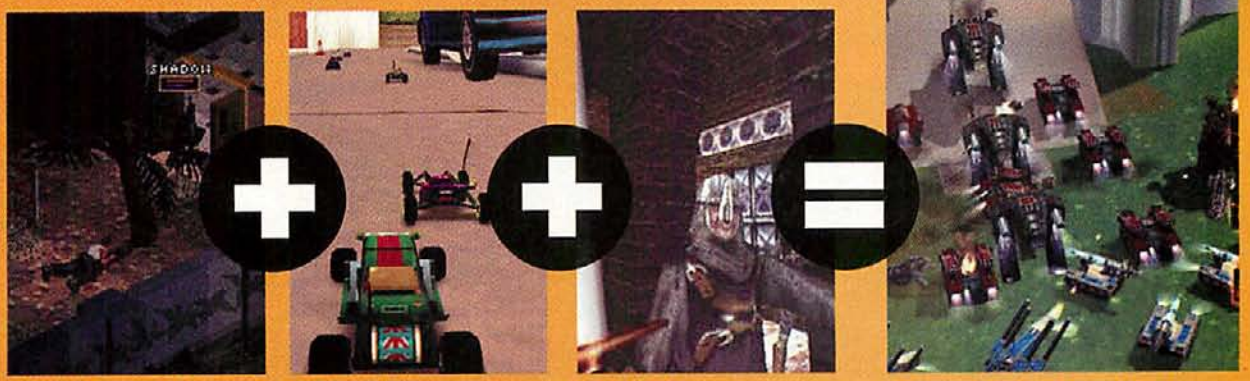
Flashpoint Expansion

■ Codemasters has announced a Russian add-on for its critically acclaimed combat sim *Operation Flashpoint. Red Hammer: The Soviet Campaign*, coming this December, reportedly offers a new campaign with 20 new missions, a new lead character, Russian-accent voices, and new cut-scenes. Players will need to use guerilla tactics to harass U.S. forces, scavenge equipment, steal a helicopter, and return to Everon.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins **By Thierry Nguyen**

For less than the cost of a tired, formulaic RTS, you can get one of the best turn-based strategy games, one of the most unique and interesting first-person games of the last few years, and a great little arcade racer—with enough left over for a meatball sub and a six-pack.



Jagged Alliance 2 ($8) **Re-Volt ($8)** **Thief ($10)** **Emperor: Battle for Dune ($40)**

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RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

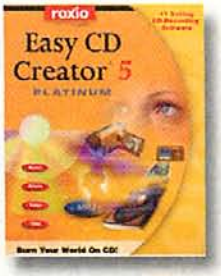
Diablo II is still out front, but *Max Payne* seems to be gunning for it

Lord of Destruction is easily the best *Diablo* yet.

Max Payne leaps ahead with cinematic action and bad-ass 'tude.

Are we playing **The Sims**, or are they playing us?

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	1	**Diablo II Expansion: Lord of Destruction** ($34, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
2	8	**Max Payne** ($43, GodGames)	★★★★½
3	2	**The Sims** ($42, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
4	6	**MS Flight Simulator 2000** ($29, Microsoft)	★★★★☆
5	3	**The Sims: House Party** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
6	--	**The Sims: Livin' Large** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
7	4	**Diablo II** ($40, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
8	5	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** ($27, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
9	--	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** ($44, Microsoft)	★★★★★
10	--	**Kings Quest VIII: Mask of Eternity** ($18, Vivendi Universal)	★★☆☆☆
11	14	**Roller Coaster Tycoon Loopy Landscapes** ($28, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
12	10	**Half-Life: Blue Shift** ($29, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
13	16	**Sim Theme Park** ($20, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
14	11	**Black & White** ($42, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
15	15	**Myst III Exile** ($43, Ubi Soft)	★★☆☆☆
16	20	**Sim City 3000** ($18, Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
17	13	**MechCommander 2** ($43, Microsoft)	★★★½☆
18	--	**Age of Empires II: Conquerors Expansion** ($30, Microsoft)	★★★★½
19	--	**MS Train Simulator** ($47, Microsoft)	★★★½☆
20	13	**Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal** ($29, Interplay)	★★★★½



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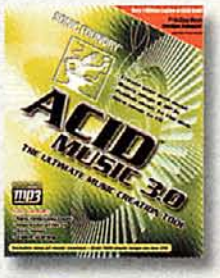

Want

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PIPELINE

Our latest guesses about when those games are finally shipping

1 ASHERON'S CALL: DARK MAJESTY
This expansion should be available for a measly 20 bucks by the time you read this. Besides adding the entirely new continent and critter AI enhancements, the team at Turbine is also making massive changes to quests. Hardcore AC gamers need know only this: Some quests are even bigger than the Frore quest. Also, player housing will be introduced; selecting from a pool of 1,000 items, players can decorate their house and store valuables in it. It's a good deal for the AC faithful.

2 BLACK & WHITE: CREATURE ISLES
Finally, what gamers have been waiting for: virtual mating. In this follow-up, a new Creature (the Crocodile) and you will compete for the chance to mate with an unspecified female Creature and therefore preserve your lineage for at least another generation. The new guide will be Tyke, a chickenlike Creature who will assist you in raising your offspring. There will also be more subgames and tweaks to the AI of both the Creatures and the Villagers. Here's a chance to practice creating gamer spawn, we guess.

3 WARLORDS BATTLECRY 2
Just announced alongside *Warlords IV, Battlecry 2* will add a bunch of new things along with numerous tweaks the fans have been clamoring for. New sides include daemons, dark dwarves, and the fey; the new hero classes will be Deathknight, Ice Mage, Shaman, and Merchant. Each side also gets either a new army or a building, and the campaign will be an actual military campaign rather than a fantasy narrative. You get more buildings, better art, and new interactions with the landscape—in short, a new experience. Look for an in-depth preview down the line.

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Age of Mythology	Ensemble	Spring 2002
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne	GodGames	Spring 2002
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Monolith	Winter 2001
Arx Fatalis	Fishtank Int.	January 2002
Asheron's Call: Dark Majesty	Microsoft	Winter 2001
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Winter 2002
Black & White: Creature Isles	EA	February 2002
Comanche 4	NovaLogic	Winter 2001
Combat Mission 2	Big Time Softw.	Winter 2001
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Spring 2002
Dark Age of Camelot	Sierra	Winter 2001
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Summer 2002
Disciples II: Dark Prophecy	Strategy First	January 2002
DOOM 3	id software	Eventually
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Spring 2002
Dragon's Lair 3D	Blue Byte	On hold
Duke Nukem Forever	3D Realms	January 2002
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	January 2002
Earth & Beyond	Westwood	Winter 2001
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind	Bethesda	Fall 2002
Etherlords	Strategy First	November 2001
Europa Universalis II	Strategy First	Winter 2001

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Flight Simulator 2002	Microsoft	Winter 2001
Freedom Force	Crave	Christmas 2001
Galactic Civilizations	Stardock	Fall 2002
Global Operations	Crave	Winter 2001
Halo	Microsoft	Spring 2002
Heroes of Might and Magic IV	3DO	Spring 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GodGames	Winter 2001
Hitman 2	Eidos	Spring 2002
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubi Soft	November 2001
Lineage 2	Destination Gam.	Spring 2003
Imperium Galactica 3: Genesis	CDV	Spring 2002
Master of Orion 3	Infogrames	Spring 2002
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	EA	February 2002
Midgard	Funcom	Summer 2002
Might and Magic IX: Writ of Fate	3DO	Spring 2002
Motor City Online	Electronic Arts	Winter 2001
Myth III: The Wolf Age	GodGames	Winter 2001
Neverwinter Nights	Interplay	Winter 2001
Nexagon: The Pit	Strategy First	Spring 2002
O.R.B.	Strategy First	November 2001
Planetside	Sony Online Ent.	Summer 2002
Quake IV	Activision	Someday
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Summer 2002

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Return to Wolfenstein	Activision	Winter 2001
Serious Sam sequel	Take Two	December 2001
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Spring 2002
Sid Meier's SimGolf	EA	Winter 2001
Simsville	EA	Spring 2002
Sims Online	EA	Summer 2002
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	Activision	Winter 2001
Sovereign	Sony Online Ent.	Someday
Star Trek: Borg Assimilator	Activision	Winter 2001
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	Winter 2002
Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II	LucasArts	Spring 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Fall 2002
Tabula Rasa	Destination Gam.	Summer 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Spring 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Summer 2002
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	Spring 2002
Unreal II	Infogrames	Spring 2002
WarCraft III	Blizzard	Spring 2002
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Summer 2002
Warlords Battlecry 2	Ubi Soft	Spring 2002
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Eventually
Zoo Tycoon	Microsoft	Winter 2001

NEW UPDATE These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

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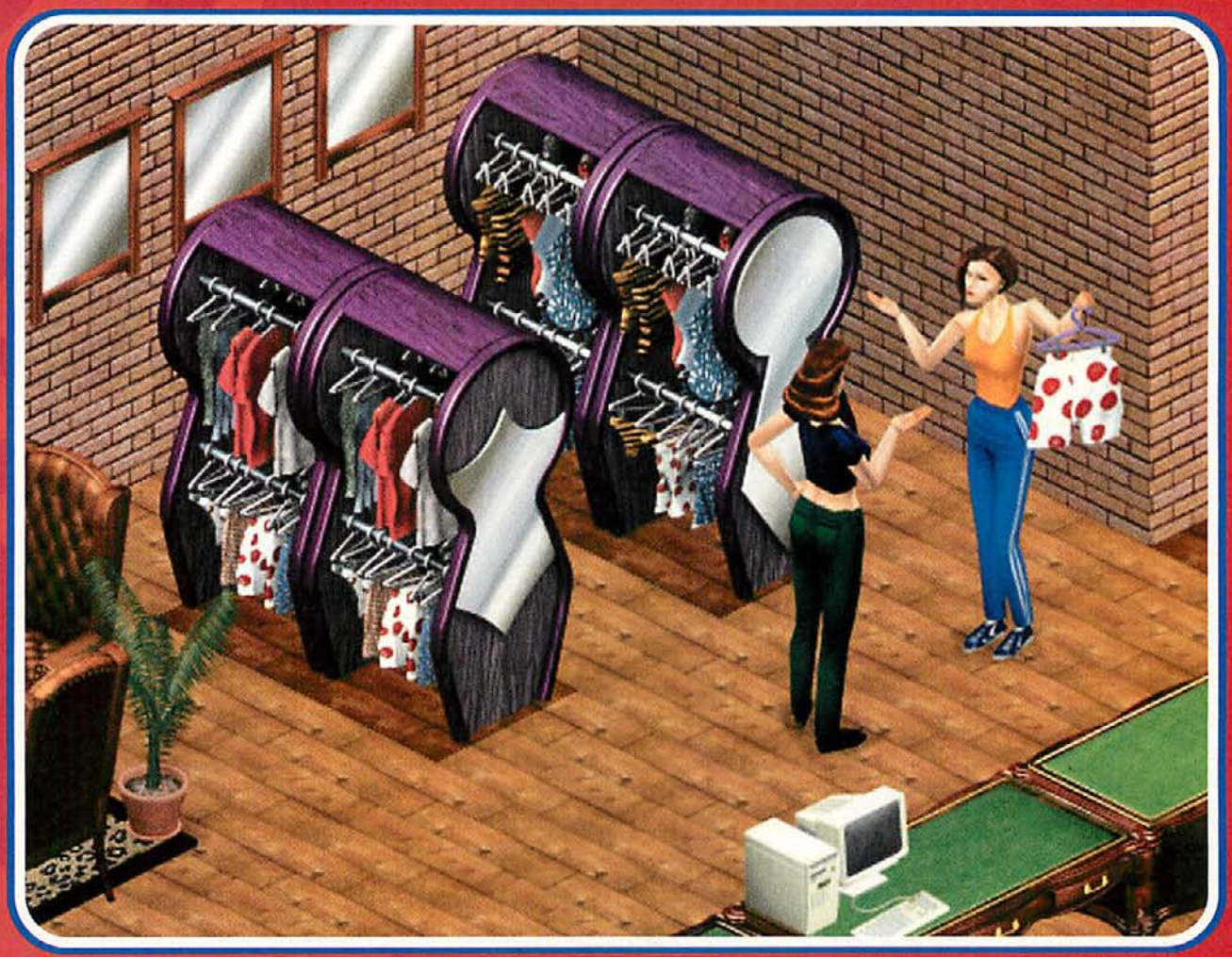
Mall



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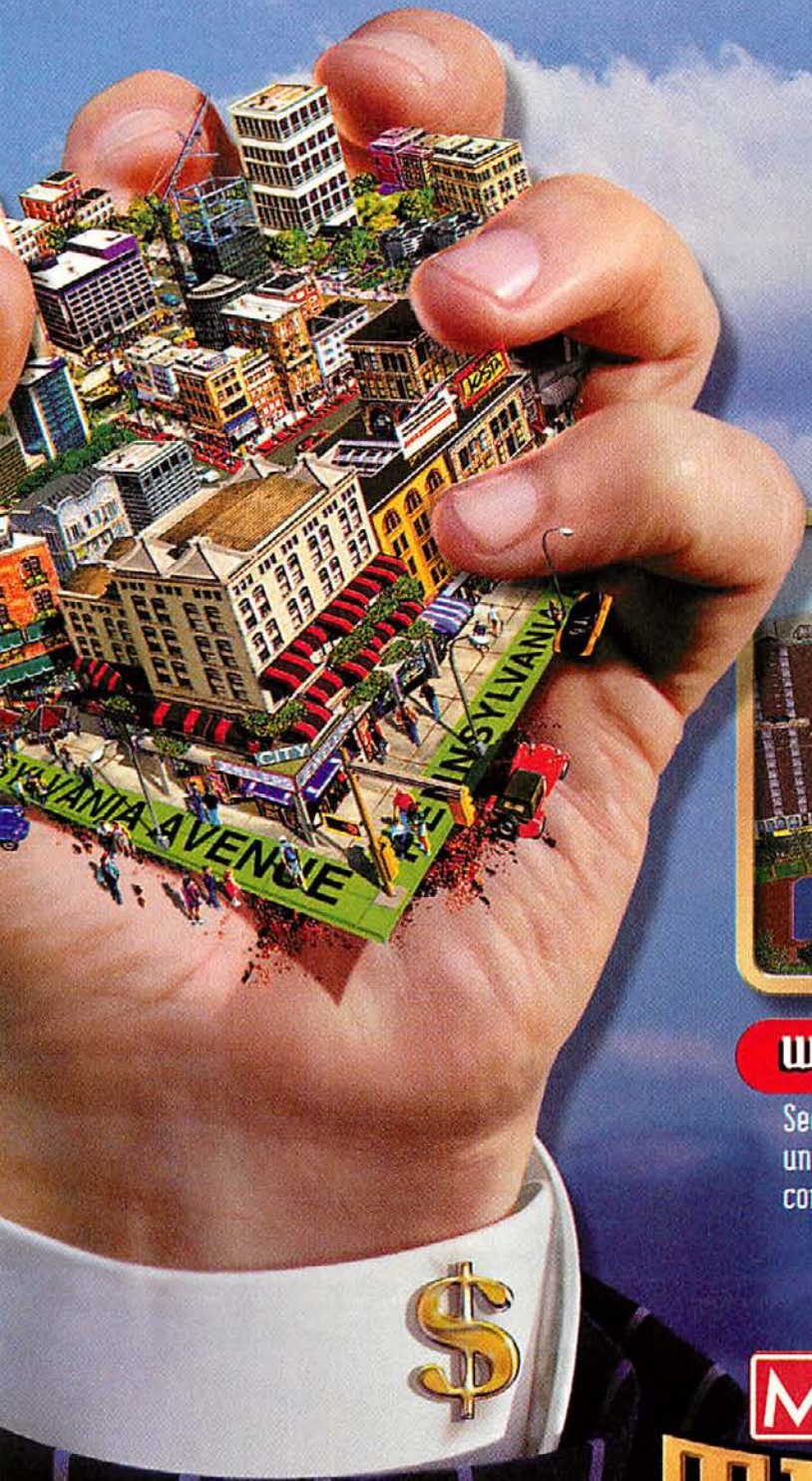

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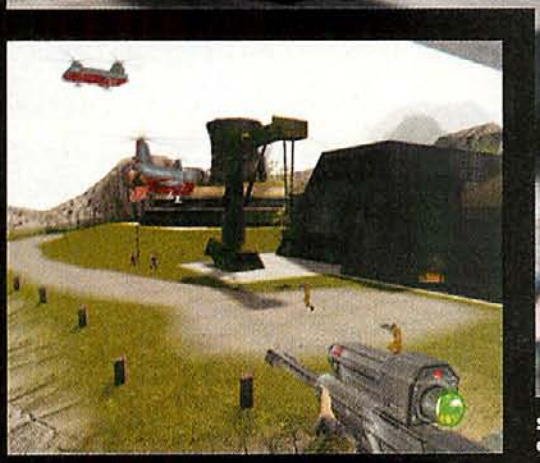


Some bases will be small outposts like this one (left), while others will be sprawling encampments with power plants, tiberium refineries, and unit creation facilities.

COMMAND & CONQUER:

Westwood pulls you away from the bird's-eye view and puts you in the thick

RENEGADE

of the action in the next C&C game

By Thierry Nguyen

Let me stress one thing vehemently: *C&C: Renegade* is not attempting to shoot its way into the part of your brain that will compare it to *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* or *Red Faction*. Yes, it is a first-person shooter; yes, it does have its share of pyrotechnics, exotic guns, and legions of halfwits to shoot. But it's actually trying to be different. It's more akin to the *Battlezone* or *Uprising* franchises in that it plants you firmly down on the ground inside a single unit in a real-time strategy. "We're aiming to show C&C players what it's like to run around on your feet. We want the game to feel like you're playing a C&C match, but instead of viewing it from way up above, you're seeing it right there at ground level," says producer Daniel Cermak.

The game will ship with the requisite deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture-the-flag modes that any FPS would have, but it's in the RTS-themed C&C Mode where the whole C&C feel is truly captured. There is a bit of old-school FPS fun in the single-player mode, with missions ranging from infiltrating a base to providing fire support for a GDI base assault, but C&C Mode is where it's at.

True to the RTS Spirit

C&C Mode treats you exactly the way a Nod or GDI minigunner gets treated in the RTS titles: You're an expendable nugget of flesh that gets easily replaced with a mere click on either the GDI Barracks or the Hand of Nod. When you die, instead of having you respawn, the game has the aforementioned structures create another unit. Ever noticed how in C&C those minigunners get pumped out of their facilities rather quickly after you click on the Create Unit button? You run out of the base in *Renegade* in the exact same way.

Of course, being doomed to a reincarnation-laden lifecycle as a mere minigunner isn't conducive to having fun. That's why you start purchasing upgrades. As your base earns money, you can choose to convert to units of flamethrower soldiers, chem-warriors, engineers, and named mercenaries (elite-level units lifted from the single-player campaign).

You can also purchase a vehicle. The choices range from Nod Buggies/GDI Humvees to Harvesters and the Mammoth Tank—you can hop in *any* of the ground vehicles from the original C&C franchise. In fact, true to the RTS spirit, vehicles will be either produced and wheeled in from the factory or flown in via cargo plane. Even approaching the vehicles yields the little three-arrows icon that RTS titles use to indicate vehicles you can enter.

The cash for these purchases comes from two things: taking out the enemy and their structures, and having your Harvester working in the background. Harvesters automatically grab tiberium in the area, so that sum is added to whatever you get for destroying players and structures. Destroying a Harvester, of course, slows down income flow; purchasing a Harvester increases income. Destroying structures also affects gameplay: Taking down a power plant makes things more expensive, destroying radar stations screws up the minimap on your HUD, and taking out the unit-creation buildings obviously screws up the other team in a major way. The match is won either when one side destroys all of the other side's facilities, or when one player plants a beacon (GDI Ion Cannon/Nod Nuclear Missile) in the central facility of the opposing side.

C&C Mode makes this game look like a contender.

There's quite a bit of other stuff that makes *C&C: Renegade* more than a mere franchise-milker, but this game's real promise is the C&C Mode. *Renegade* will probably be out by the time you read this. While our formal review is to come, C&C Mode makes the game look like a contender.

The ultimate way to achieve victory in a match is to lay down a beacon for your side's superweapon, and watch it decimate your opponent's base.

In *C&C: Renegade* every ground vehicle, from Mammoth tank to Nod bike, included in the original C&C title will be pilotable.

You can choose to upgrade yourself to any of the ground troops, from mere minigunner to a flamethrower like this guy.

GAME STATS

GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Westwood
URL: westwood.ea.com/games/ccuniverse/renegade
RELEASE DATE: November 2001

Heroes with magic abilities show off their health status (green bar) as well as mana status (blue bar). This warlock, Aksemsed, is another well-rendered hero.

Gib-o-rama

MYTH III:

Everyone's favorite real-time tactical strateg

TOP OF PAGE: In the top screen, a dwarf torches a suspicious pile of gibs by using his special ability with the flamethrower. ABOVE: Our hero Connacht leads a group of Barbarians in hand-to-hand melee combat. Most characters in the game are rendered with 350 polygons, but heroes like Connacht are in a decidedly higher resolution at 800 polys.

Myth III looks to do right by the fine franchise created by Bungie.

You must be doing something right when your game's name is dropped every time someone describes a certain style of gameplay. During almost every demo I've seen for real-time strategy games that eschew resource harvesting for tactical combat, I've heard the utterance "Y'know, like *Myth*." If you're a developer, it's pretty nice to have a game franchise like that under your belt. If you're a developer who just inherited a game franchise like that from one of the most respected names in game design—well, then you have some awfully big expectations to live up to.

So lies the situation for new development house Mumbo Jumbo, spun off from Ritual Entertainment and loaded with experienced developers: to make a *Myth* installment worthy of the venerable lineage begun by Bungie. So what's the first step of that daunting task? Don't mess with the gameplay.

Myth III: The Wolf Age will play much the same way as *Myth: The Fallen Lords* and *Myth II: Soulblighter*. It's real-time tactical strategy, controlled from a movable overhead-camera point-of-view with a plot-based single-player campaign bolstered by a robust multiplayer mode. A lot of your favorite units are back, like the bomb-flinging dwarves, infested wights, and spooky-ass ghouls. This time, however, each unit has multiple classes. Various races like the Trow, those big mamma-jammas that smash the hell out of everything, come in a variety of flavors from Trow Priest to Trow Iron Warrior. Some units will have special abilities as well. The dwarves, devastating in ranged units but pretty weak in a melee, now have a flamethrower to protect themselves if the combat gets too close. Another special feature that some dwarves now have is called the Savage Windream, which essentially creates an all-consuming whirlwind when the dwarf dies. It's a really cool effect.

The Days of Old

The story takes place 1,000 years before that of *Myth: The Fallen Lords*. The Lords have not yet fallen, so you will play as and encounter them as heroes in the game. The main hero you play is Connacht the Wolf. With the help of the Champions of the Light (the Fallen Lords before they fell), you'll progress through the 25 levels of the game playing through the classic battles that set up the stories of *Myth* and *Myth II*.

Aside from the new prequel storyline and added units (42 unique units in all), the biggest change brought to the *Myth* franchise by *The Wolf Age* is a brand-new, fully 3D engine. In the first two games, units were represented by 2D sprites on 3D terrain. Now everything is 3D, allowing for much greater detail in the character modeling and animation. The new engine enhances the camera controls and allows you to zoom in very closely on the figures to enjoy their exacting detail. The designers enhanced the terrain as well by utilizing mesh textures and doing other technical mumbo-jumbo things that we don't really understand. All we know is that the gently swaying grass and trees makes us feel strangely calm and secure in a gameworld full of monsters and ghouls.

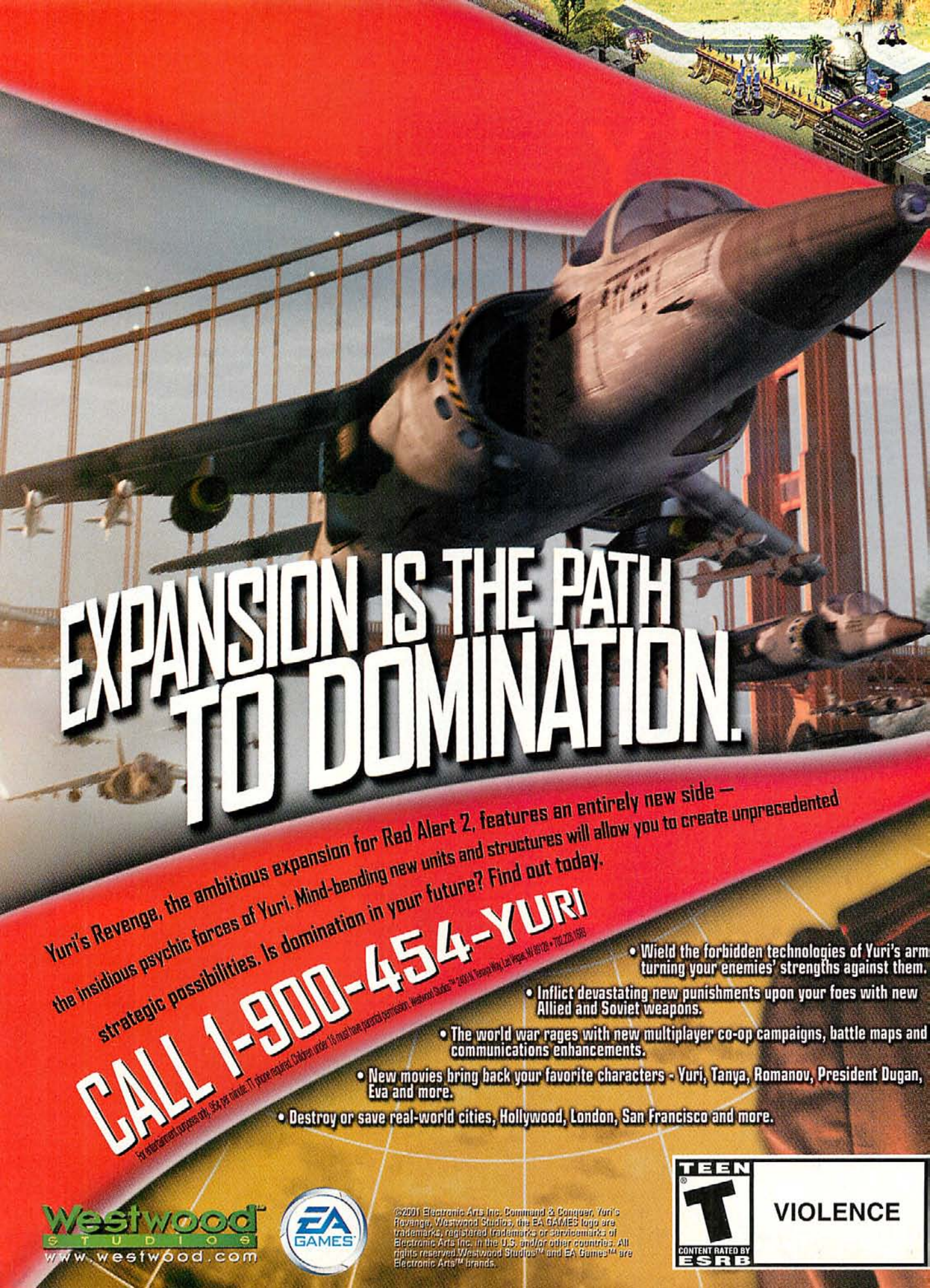
To be honest, when we saw this game at E3, we were unimpressed. It didn't really look worthy of the *Myth* name. But the game has obviously come a long way in the last few months, and you can mark us down in the excited column now. Mumbo Jumbo's *Myth III* looks to do right by the fine franchise created by Bungie, if not surpass its classic predecessors. Hell, they're even still doing a Mac version.

GAME STATS

GENRE: Strategy
PUBLISHER: Take 2
DEVELOPER: Mumbo Jumbo
URL: myth3.godgames.com
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2001

THE WOLF AGE

game is back—and it looks worthy of the *Myth* name By Tom Price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YURI'S REVENGE
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Shadows of Luclin

By Mark Asher

With *Shadows of Luclin*, Verant takes *EQ* players to a whole new world

How do you satisfy 400,000 manic players all jostling and jiving to trade their wares, kill monsters, and get married, all through digital circuitry? Do you just slap on a new continent, populate it with monsters shaded with a slightly different paint scheme, and bilk an additional 30 bucks from your customers?

Nope. You add an entire planet. At least, that's what Sony Online is doing with *Shadows of Luclin*.

Shadows is as big as the *Kunark* expansion in terms of size but exceeds it in scope with the addition of a new playable race, the Vah Shir, and a new character class, the Beastlord. And there's plenty more, too, like horses you can ride, familiars for wizards, a selling bazaar, new spells, treasures, quests, monsters, and improved artwork for all character models.

Heck, it's a whole new *EverQuest* planet! A moon where the good and evil cat-people keep on fighting their old war; where vampyres prey on all races; where vacuum worms, fungal fiends, and rockhoppers lurk. It may not be *EQ 2.0*, but "expansion" hardly seems to do it justice either—this is a massive game overhaul.

Shissar Guards

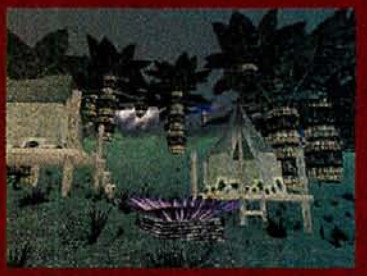
The guards of the Shissar are both strong and quick. When you run into the guards, they can be Warriors, Shadow Knights, and sometimes even Assassins. Of course there are other Shissar to worry about besides the guards. (For you *EQ* historians out there, Sony at one time toyed with the idea of making the Shissar a playable race.)

Not Just a Hunk of Green Cheese

When we went to see *Luclin* at Sony Online's San Diego offices, Associate Producer Gordon Wrinn began by showing us the new artwork for all the character models. You saw what the gnomes looked like in our first preview (June 2001); now apply that sense of animation and detail to everyone else. Trolls now look more menacing, barbarians look hulkier, and elves are even more svelte. In addition, anything the player can shape-change into is also getting new art.

Luclin is the moon of Norrath, though it's lush and not barren. "Think moon of Endor," Wrinn kept telling us. They're shooting for about 24 new zones, though they may exceed that number. The zones will be large, but not quite as large as the Dreadlands in Kunark (to

Models for all player characters in *Luclin* are detailed and expressive.



give you longtime players a reference point). Instead of day and night cycles, *Luclin* goes for regional lighting; part of it is always dark, part is always light, and a small portion is always in twilight. We asked Wrinn to describe the new zones.

"Both sides [light and dark] can be characterized by the types of fauna present," said Wrinn. "For instance, on the dark side and in underground areas, you'll find NPCs that are suited for that type of environment—big eyes (if they have eyes at all), pale skin, etc. I wouldn't say that everything on one side or the other has any particular thing in common besides that. The exception is that the most intelligent creatures—the good ones—reside in the dark and the evil in the light."

What about the neutral zone? "The neutral area, or the Twilight as we call it, represents balance, though not in the sense of the two sides canceling each other out as much as in both sides combining in power," said Wrinn.

To the Moon, Alice!

But wait, basic science teaches us that there's a whole lot of space between a moon and its home planet. How the heck will you get to Luclin when people still use swords? Well, look to those huge spires sprinkled throughout Norrath: Those are the transports. You'll need an item in your possession—yet to be determined, but Wrinn assured us it would be easy for all players to get. The good news is that you won't have to ride some dang gnome-driven rocket ship to reach Luclin. The bad news is that—as with the current game's boats—you'll still have to wait. The teleport activates periodically, so you need to be there ahead of time.

How the heck will you get to Luclin? Look to those huge spires sprinkled throughout Norrath: Those are the transports.

Upon being teleported, you'll arrive in the Nexus, a part of a zone in the Twilight region. From here you can head toward either more Twilight zones or zones in the Light and Dark areas of Luclin. It's not set up in a linear manner as it was in Velious.

If you play on a player-versus-player server, you may be wondering how civility between rival races will be enforced. Guards. Lots and lots of guards. This is *EverQuest*, police-state style. There will be guards in the Nexus who will attack anyone who picks a fight, so it's likely that even the highest level characters won't be able to fight and remain alive while in the Nexus.

Leveling the Playing Field

Wrinn told us that *Luclin* is designed to be playable for character levels 1 through 60, but there's more. "We're adding alternative ways of advancing your character that aren't level-based, though this only starts at level 50. Players can choose to have their experience points go toward the alternative advancement."

Think of it as a way of honing new abilities or improving existing ones, giving high-level players something to do other than kill for the sake of killing. Wrinn gave us some examples, such as a Paladin improving his Lay on Hands ability to make a complete heal, or a Bard temporarily improving his musical skills.

Wrinn told us that there will be class-specific skills and abilities that high-level players can get, and there will be some general, usually passive, abilities that are open to most classes. For example, you might funnel experience points toward getting decreased casting time, probably with three levels attainable, such as a 3, 6, or 9 percent boost in casting speed. Players may also be able to increase inherent stats, like strength and intelligence.

Here Kitty Kitty

You've seen the new playable race of cat-people (the Vah Shir) before, and are probably wondering: Who are they and

Owlbear

You'll find these strange bears with the head and wings of an owl in Hollowshade Moor. The Moor is also where their young hunt. The older owlbears roam to the northern forests to hunt grimlings. Shown here is a mature owlbear—fast, resistant to magic, and very dangerous.

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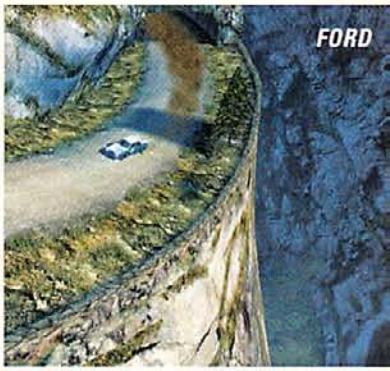

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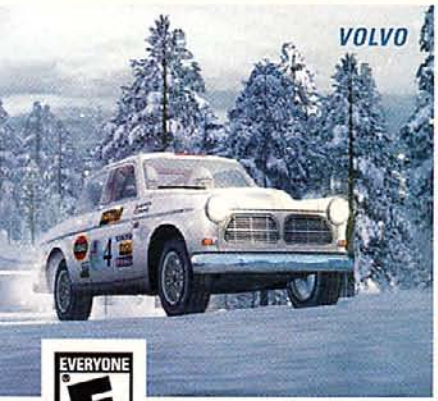

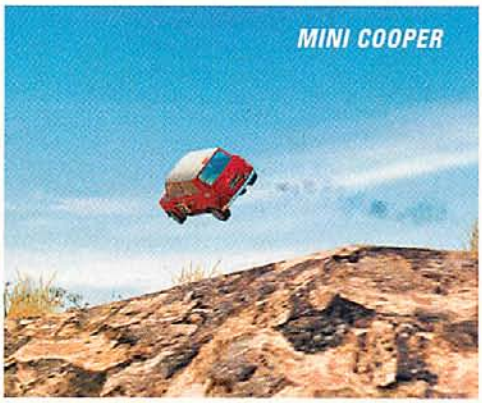

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These are some of the new areas in Luclin. Cities are now open-ended and less claustrophobic—no more winding through narrow, high-walled passages.

how did they end up on the moon? They're an offshoot of the catlike Kerrans you've seen on Kerra Isle. As to why they're on Luclin in the first place, well, it's complicated, but essentially the Erudites and the Kerrans both attacked the Erudite Heretics and something went awry. A large chunk of Norrath containing the Kerrans was blasted to the moon, and the region now known as the Hole was left behind. It was kind of a wizardly version of an atomic bomb.

The Vah Shir most closely resemble the Barbarians of Norrath, being strong, burly folk with a lot of fur. Their shamanistic approach to life makes them ideal as Beastlords, while they're not exactly brainiacs like the Erudites.

Sony Online is still fiddling with the abilities that the Vah Shir will get, but it looks like you can expect them to have Infravision, Sneak, and Safe-Fall (take less damage from falling) as native abilities.

Besides being a Beastlord, a Vah Shir player can also choose to be a Rogue, Warrior, Shaman, or Bard. The starting city is Shar Vahl, a large marble-walled city that lies in the center of a large crater formed by the impact of the chunk of Norrath that crashed into Luclin.

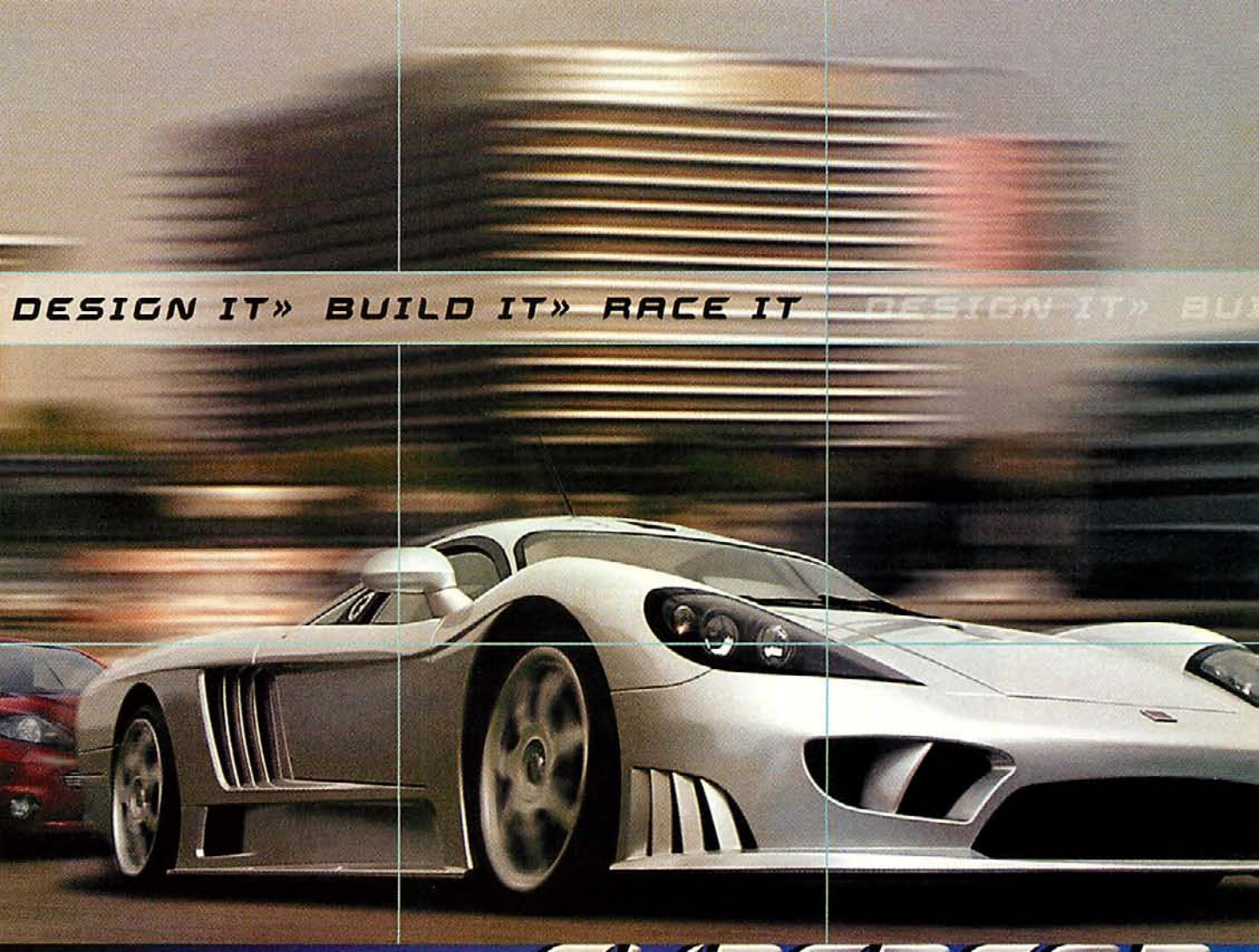
The Horse Whistler

Yep—all the talk is true. Horses are on the way with the *Luclin* expansion. You can summon 'em and ride 'em and you never have to feed them or clean up after them. Such a deal!

For those of you new to the game or starting new characters, you won't be able to get your hands on one for a long time, unless you know generous people who give gifts to newbies. The baseline model will go for about 15,000 platinum, which in *EverQuest* is a fortune that only high-level players can afford. Again, that's just the baseline; better horses will cost even more.

When you purchase a horse, you'll get a whistle that will summon the horse when you want to ride. Horses will be usable only in outdoor zones (no city or dungeon zones). When you dismount, the horse will be unsummoned.

Also, the horse whistle itself will be soulbound to your character, which means if you get knocked off by a monster, you'll reappear with the whistle in your possession. Handy for that corpse run, eh?



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This race is at war with the Shissar—he's wearing the skin of the enemy.

What will horses do for you? They'll let you travel faster than you could if you were to run, though probably a bit slower than a high-level Spirit of Wolf spell—in fact, pet classes may find that their pets have trouble keeping up. Horses are really a luxury item, a symbol of prestige. In a way they're superfluous because players can buy magical boots that are almost as speedy as travelling by horseback but cost less than a horse. It's really just that being on a horse is cool. You're gonna want one just to fill your *EQ* buddies with jealousy.

So far, Sony Online plans to let you keep on fighting and casting spells while on horseback. Abilities like kicking and bashing are still up in the air, but Sony Online hopes to work those in. The problem is the animation. How does a monk do a flying kick while on horseback? (Quick answer: Very carefully!)

If you do choose to fight while on horseback, you can do so only while the horse is not running. There will be no Apache-style bow fights while riding. Horses will also model inertia to some extent; it'll take you a few seconds to reach top speed and a few seconds to slow down and stop.

Horses themselves can't be attacked. They're for show and go, not target practice for angry monsters. Players won't be able to cast spells upon horses either. Spells that would normally affect a player's ability to move, like the Root spell, will still hamper players on horseback. Horses can swim, but they probably won't be able to swim underwater. This game is Tolkienesque high fantasy, not Dalíesque weirdness, after all.

Finally, a couple of classes may get spells to summon horses. Appropriate classes like Paladins and Shadow Knights may get a Summon Warhorse spell.

Familiar Sights

Another cool change in the *Luclin* expansion is aimed at wizards, who will be able to summon familiars—non-controllable pets that follow the wizard around. They won't fight, even to defend themselves. Instead, they confer bonuses and special abilities on the wizard, such as boosting magic resistances.

Shadows of Luclin will have two kinds of familiar spells. Everything in this aspect of the game is still being tested and balanced, but it's likely that the first spell will be available to wizards near level 30. This summons an imp familiar that gives the wizard a bonus in magic resistances. The next increase will be a tougher imp that gives the wizard an extra bonus in addition to the resistance boost. The final two imp spells will create drake pets, with each incremental increase conferring

Newbies won't be able to get their hands on horses for a long time—the baseline model will go for about 15,000 platinum pieces.

Vampyre

With the arrival of the Combine races to Luclin, vampirism also arrived to take up residence on the permanently dark side of the moon. You'll find small coteries of vampyres in the Tenebrous Peaks, though they will sometimes raid Katta Castellum for young men and women to feed upon and keep as slaves. The vampyres have managed to recruit members from all of the races of the Combine Empire.

Underbulk

The large, powerful underbulks are armored with an exoskeleton, have pincers for hands and a larger pincer for a maw. Strong but slow, you'll find them mostly in the Deep Shade, though some have been enslaved by the Thought Horrors and will be found with them. (Interestingly, the underbulk was designed by an artist who had never seen an umberhulk before, but had one described to him. This was the result.)

The catlike Vah Shir in combat. The new player race most closely resembles Barbarians in terms of stats and has strong shamanistic abilities.

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Players will be able to fight while on horseback—but not while running.

Thought Horror

The alien-looking Thought Horrors are powerful creatures found in the Deep Shade. Though Horrors can sometimes charm enemies, they still possess great physical strength if that doesn't work.

Tegi

The Tegi, a small humanoid race, are native to Luclin and can be found throughout the moon. They have usually attuned themselves to an elemental spirit. Normally, the abilities of each Tegi are aligned with the kind of elemental spirit they have bonded with.

a new ability upon the wizard. Familiars come with a big catch: If one is killed, the wizard will be instantly damaged. The amount of damage the wizard suffers is reached through some combination of the wizard's mana supply and familiar hit points, so it's possible that the death of a familiar can result in the death of the wizard, too. The familiars will zone with the wizards and will also appear when the wizard logs back into the game.

New Engine for Trade

The developers are retooling the quests for *Luclin*. *Velious* being a high-level expansion, its quests were designed for large groups. In *Luclin* the focus is on single groups and two to three groups working in concert.

Sony Online is also catering to all those players who like to trade. There will be a bazaar on Luclin with extended trading functions, like an automated auction system that will allow players to buy from one another without even discussing the trade or manually opening the trade windows. So you can log into the bazaar, turn your character into a vendor, and then get up from your computer and do something else for awhile, while other players can continue to trade with your character.

In addition to the new monsters we've profiled here, you'll see stone-grabbers, scarlet cheetahs, shriekers, mutant humanoids, and many more. Every class will receive new spells, Bards will get new songs, and there will be lots of new magic items. The magic items will be more situational than in the past, according to Wrinn. "We'll have items that give you a faction boost while wearing them and other things like a fire sword that's useful against an ice-based creature, but not a fire monster, for example."

Frogloks Go Home!

So what's not in *Luclin*, we wondered. "Frogloks," said Wrinn. "For some reason everyone wants to know if there will be frogloks in *Luclin*."

What you will find is an expansive new world to adventure in. The marketing slogan for *EverQuest* is "You're in our world now." With the *Shadows of Luclin*, that world is getting bigger and better.

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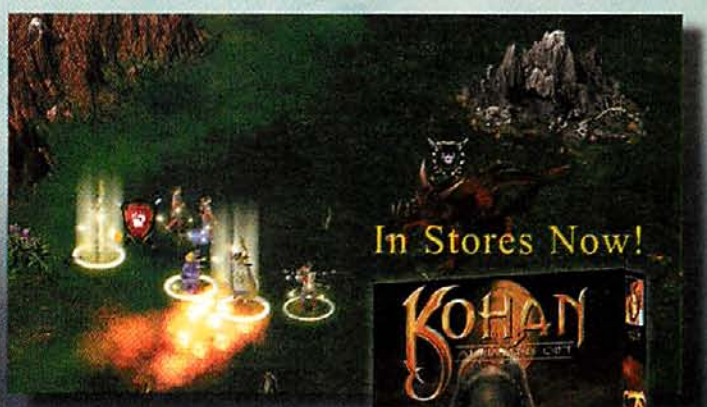

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Action gamers, get ready for a MMOFPS–finally!

The persistent online world seems to be exclusive to role-playing dorks who don't mind typing esoteric phrases like *lvl 17 monk lfg*. With *Shadows of Luclin* and other MMORPGs on the horizon, RPGers now have tons of choices for playing "dress up and kill" with their online buddies. But while there are a great number of action gamers playing online, they are stuck playing in a series of matches that ultimately don't matter.

Think about it. It may feel great to know that you fragged "Dorkalicious" repeatedly using a knife on de_dust2, but it doesn't actually matter in the long run. Sure, you might have a record of such skill when you're playing in a tournament, but that's in the realm of sports play; your multiple fragging doesn't have a persistent, online effect in the game itself. It was a flash-in-the-pan experience, and only the super-attentive who bother capturing demos of game matches will ever remember it afterwards.

So leave it to the MMORPG wunderkinds at Sony Online Entertainment to find a way to make a great-looking MMOFPS, *Planetside*.

When we first heard about it, it sounded too weird and impossible to achieve. How the heck do you make anything matter in an online action game? Will people be willing to pay for what might possibly amount to a graphical chat room with guns? RPGs are designed with social relations in mind, so it's not entirely unusual for *EverQuest* to be described as a chat room with Orcs. But will that formula work for an action game? How do you encourage social interaction when

Planetside

By Thierry Nguyen

These fine femmes fatales are part of the Terran Republic, which is basically The Man in the galaxy. The Terran Republic likes to shoot fast and ask questions a lot later.

so much as a how-do-you-do. You'll enter your home city first, the impenetrable operations center of your chosen empire. It's here that you'll read up on events, store some nice swag, and even hold cocktail parties at your apartment. Being the designated social area, your apartment is where you gab all you want with your wartime buddies, abbreviated phrases and all.

What about you as a person? Consider this: You have persistent character attributes and stats, but not equipment. You will not have to work for six months to buy a super rifle that hits everyone between the eyes and cleans your armor only to get clipped by a lucky fool with an even nastier gun and see your prize taken away from you in an instant. Instead, you'll gain rank, implants, and skills as you participate in the campaign. Rank will show everyone else just how important you really are, and the abilities will be mostly of the passive sort—nothing as cheaply overpowering as "better aim," but more along the lines of "can carry more stuff" or "really good at healing others."

These soldiers are part of the New Conglomerate, the ragtag band of rebels that seceded from the Terran Republic. They like guns that pack a punch.

How do you encourage social interaction when traditionally the primary goal has been to liquidate anyone you run into?

traditionally the primary goal has been to liquidate anyone you run into? It's questions like these that I, being a cynical journalist, pelted at the *Planetside* team, and by golly, their responses actually sounded reasonable.

Like *Quake*, With More Chatting

How do you attempt to fuse the fast, FPS-style of gameplay from *Quake* or *Tribes* or *Counter-Strike* with enough online hooks to create a compelling reason for gamers to pay money for *Planetside*? How does Sony plan to justify hitting your wallet as well as your Internet connection? By dropping players into a vast battlefield and providing enough tools and goodies for them to want to band together in battle and coordinate attacks. By focusing on elements that work in other online shooters and streamlining the features of other MMOs that would detract from the gameplay.

An example of a massively multiplayer convention that's been tweaked to fit action gaming is the newbie zone. *Planetside* is about the war between the New Conglomerate, the Terran Republic, and the Vanu Sovereignty. The Terran Republic and the New Conglomerate play the traditional old-empire-versus-young-upstarts, but they both have to contend with attacks by the Vanu Sovereignty, who worship the ancient Vanu race (and hence are influenced by Vanu aesthetics in their armor design). But your little newbie soldier won't be just dropped onto a battlefield without

Ahhh, Newbies in the Morning

So *Planetside* will let you throw toga parties at home, but what about when you get out in the field? That's where the FPS mode, with some MMO-style trappings, steps in. At your home city, you can view a snapshot of all the active continents and skirmishes and pick which one you want to zone into. You'll then appear at your empire's home base on said continent.

Weapons will be doled out in a fashion reminiscent of *Tribes* and *Counter-Strike*: You need to purchase your gear from terminals at your home base. You get your money from both frags out in the field and for accomplishing mission objectives, such as capturing or destroying structures. Weapons range from traditional ballistics such as MP5s to exotic energy rifles and antivehicle armaments (such as a LAW-style rocket launcher). The plan is to have 24 base weapons, each one upgradable in some capacity, along with each empire's unique weaponry. The Vanu Sovereignty will focus on energy-based weapons, the Terran Republic will lean toward rapid-firing ballistics, and the New Conglomerate is for players who like big, slow, powerful guns. Since weapons aren't a unique commodity as they are in *EverQuest*, you can always just purchase new ones when you need to, such as when you die (though you can still loot your equipment off your corpse).

Another feature is power armor, a la *Tribes* but with a bit of a twist. While there are the requisite Light, Medium, and Heavy armors, there is also Stealth armor. Stealth uses light-refraction (think *Predator*), but you can carry only a knife into the fray while wearing it. Hence, Stealth will mostly be used for reconnaissance runs and perhaps daring infiltration or assassination missions. Light armor gives you the mobility to pilot any of the multitude of vehicles, while Medium will be the workhorse armor for assaults and offensive maneuvers. When you want to pummel the enemy absolutely and positively, use Heavy armor, but be sure to secure a ride because your movements become painfully slow.

There will be enough trees and foliage in *Planetside* so that even a Jeep can sneak up on a Heavy.

Halo promised us a Jeep where a guy could drive and another could be shotgun. *Planetside* will actually deliver.

Of course, if you merely want to get where you're going, you can just hop on a quick little motorbike and zoom zoom away.

I Believe I Can Fly!

What really makes *Planetside* stand out are the 14 vehicles–that's 14 base vehicles, not counting the turrets that can be outfitted on each, so you'll really get about 45 battle vehicles. Vehicles range from personal motorbikes and Quad-assault mopeds to Jeeps that sport a driver and a machine-gunner. Then there are the tanks, such as the modest one-man Lightning or the Vanguard, which has a driver and a gunner. If you're up for a hurtful assault, take the burly Prowler tank, a three-person monstrosity that houses a driver and two turret gunners who can each use a different massive gun. If you want to fly, hop into a light gunship and zip around the battlefield, peppering it with machine gun fire. Players who want a support role can go for a Mosquito, a scout hovercraft that can perform field repairs as well.

Players who get together for an assault can hop into an APC, drive it deep into the enemy territory, and hop back out, guns blazing. The truly ambitious could take a dropship instead. Sporting a pilot and several gun turrets, the dropship can carry about 20 Heavies or a couple tanks. Just fly that sucker in and drop the cavalry. Anyone disappointed by the *Starship Troopers* films and games will welcome the dropship.

A less exciting, yet vitally important, vehicle will be the advanced mobile station, which serves as a supply depot and roving spawn point. As in *EQ*, players can choose to bind themselves to it, and will hence respawn in the field rather than at their home base. The station will also house purchasing terminals and medical supplies. While these may seem tempting targets, remember that you can use a jacking kit to break in and take them over for your side.

As mentioned earlier, you can indeed respawn after death. When you die, you lose all equipment on your body and respawn in a location determined by several factors: whether you bound yourself to a mobile station, whether said station is captured, and which bases (other than your home base) on the continent are under your faction's control. The more successful you and your empire are in a particular skirmish, the closer to the field you respawn. All bodies will be lootable by anyone now; so you can grab guns off your latest frag, and (if you're lucky) you can snag the armament from your corpse if you can beat your killer to the punch. Any equipment you snag from the field can be sold back at the base terminals. Also, when you're unfortunate enough to be broke and unarmed, there will be a low-level, standard field-issue armament available free of charge.

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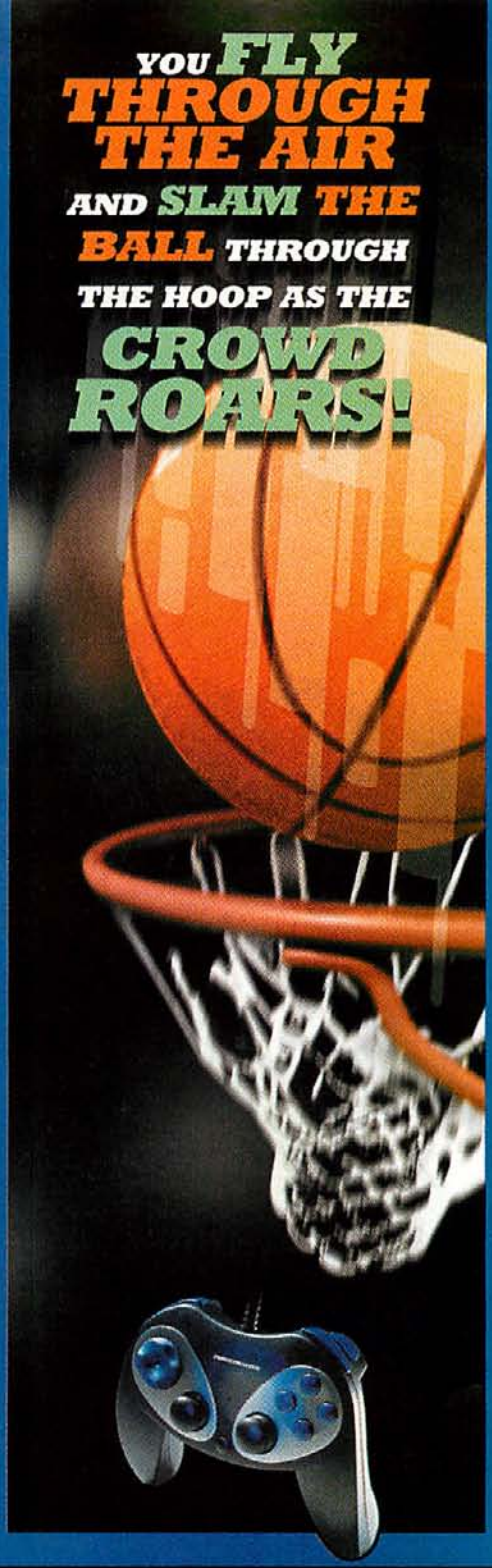

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Whether indoors or outdoors, expect heated firefights—and you won't be zoning when you decide to run into the base from the outside, either.

These tanks are just two examples of the wide array of vehicles you'll see pummeling the sheet metal off each other out in the field.

If you're up for a hurtful assault, take the burly Prowler tank, a three-person monstrosity that houses a driver and two turret gunners...

Electronically Enlisting

True, all of these elements help make the gameplay compelling, but what about the central design itself? How can you make a chat room work with a bunch of trigger-happy goons? By putting them together in a virtual war for the aggressive acquisition of territory.

Since anyone who gets killed will be respawned, simply killing the enemy isn't enough. You'll have to either bring down enemy structures outright (no way to completely destroy them, but you can disable them by blowing enough stuff up), or capture them to gain a new incursion point for your empire. All continents will have a main base for each side and about five clusters, with each cluster having five to seven facilities (such as a field base, a radar station, or a cryostation). Each facility, besides being a symbol of claimed territory, also has gameplay advantages. For example, a cryostation can serve as another respawn point.

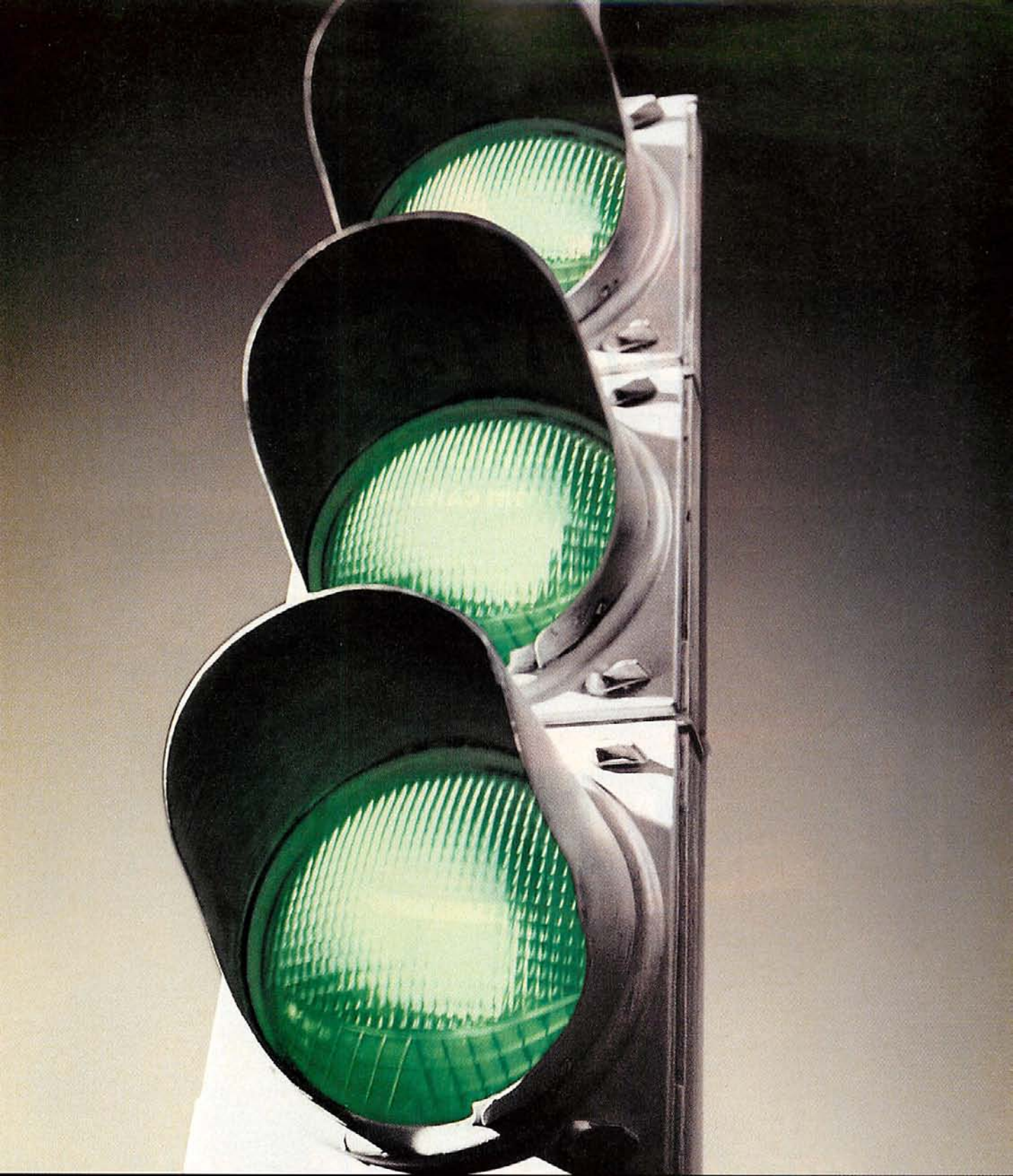
Continents can be up to 64 square kilometers in size, will have weather effects, and will come from a pool of terrain/climate types such as temperate, desert, or arctic. These continents will not have any zoning, either.

A lot of the social interaction is military in style. Where in *EverQuest* you'd join a temporary party, in *Planetside* you'll be joining a squad. Squadmates can then band together and coordinate an assault. Players who want to form a more long-term bond, similar to clans or guilds, will join an Outfit. Like those other social systems, Outfits have rankings and subrankings, can be given specific missions based on the leader's discretion, and usually mean you have a core group of people to play with.

Sony will unveil additional social factors later on, and I was put on the "kill me if I tell" list, so you'll just have to watch *CGW* for the next big *Planetside* scoop.

Can Sony pull it off? Let's say that I am definitely less cynical than I was before. After seeing how Sony is fiddling with both the FPS and MMO formulas, carefully preserving what works and getting rid of what doesn't in each, I'm inclined to want to play *Planetside* when it's done sometime next year. So the next time I frag Mr. Dorktacular, I'll be doing it for my empire and my outfit, and not just for the short-lived glory of a fragfest.

A sampling of the various armor types for just one of the three sides—and this doesn't show rank designations or the Stealth armor options.



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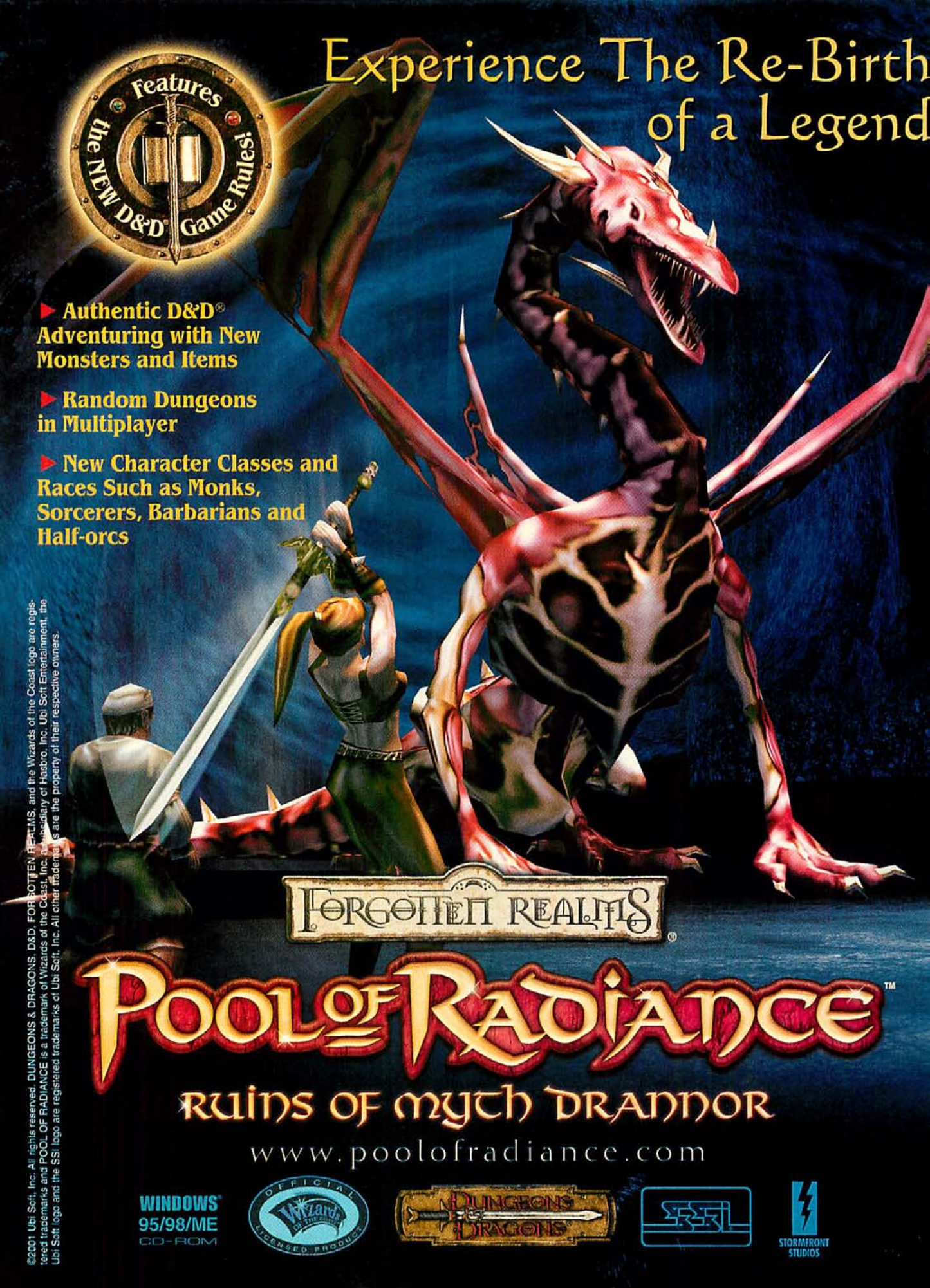
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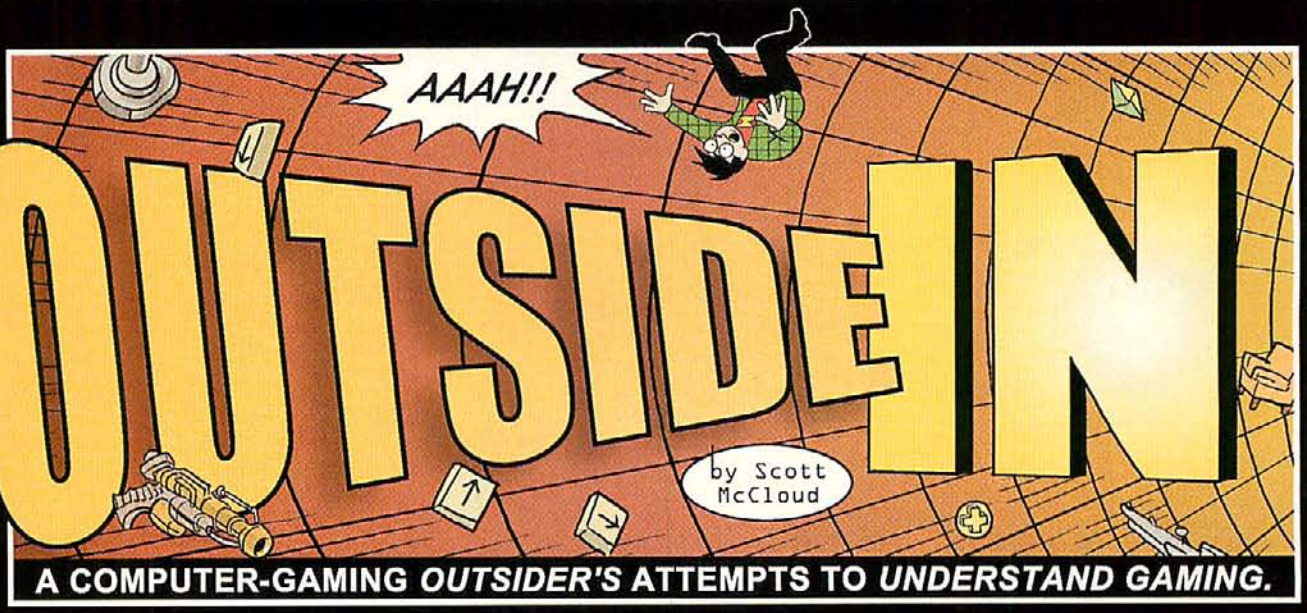
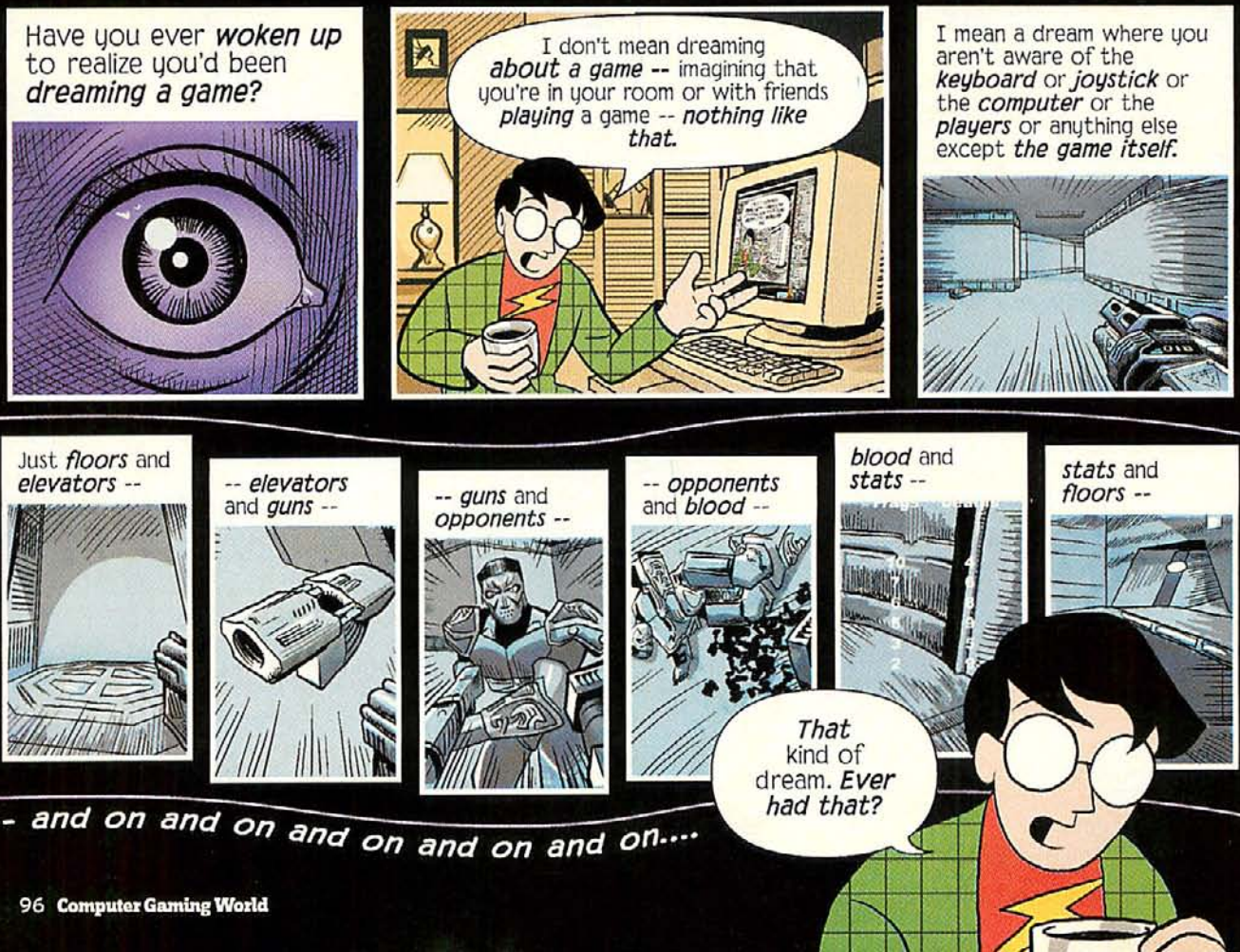
Editor's Note: We first met comic book genius Scott McCloud at last year's Game Developers' Conference in San Jose, California, where he spoke to an enthralled crowd about the links between comics and gaming. It was love at first sight. Actually, we already loved him from afar. McCloud's widely praised book *Understanding Comics* (1993), is a classic, brilliant analysis of the medium, and a must-have for anyone interested in the visual arts. His new book, *Reinventing Comics*, explores comics' potential in digital environments, and no less an authority than *Sims* creator Will Wright recommends that "anyone involved in interactive entertainment should read this book." For those of us who have been fans since the first issue of *Zot!* (1984), having Scott McCloud create a comic about gaming exclusively for *CGW* is the fulfillment of a dream.





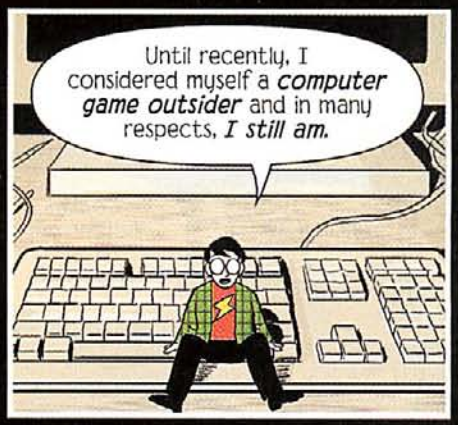
Okay, maybe I'm just ***weird,*** but that's what happened to ***me*** after playing too much ***Unreal Tournament*** late into the night several days running.

The last time I had dreams like that was when I was ***14 years-old*** and playing way too much ***chess.***

When I start having ***dreams*** about something like that, I take it as a sign that my brain is being ***"rewired"*** in some way.

But why would some dopey ***first-person shooter*** -- no matter how ***artfully produced*** -- get ***under my skin*** like that?

Until recently, I considered myself a ***computer game outsider*** and in many respects, ***I still am.***



But I've also known for years that I was a ***potential addict*** as well.

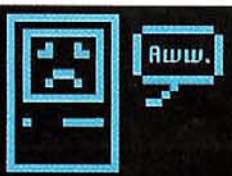
I got to play one of the ***first computer games ever*** at an ***M.I.T. Open House*** when I was a little kid, and they could barely ***pry me away*** from the thing.

By the ***80s,*** I was already deep into ***comics*** and was afraid of anything that might ***suck up*** too much of my ***time.***

I liked ***arcade games*** but was afraid of the enormous ***time*** and ***money drain*** involved.

And by the time ***console games*** took off I was making comics ***full-time.***

As a ***graphic artist,*** I was ***duty-bound*** to use a ***Mac,*** so my ***game selection*** was safely ***limited*** in the ***mid-90s...***

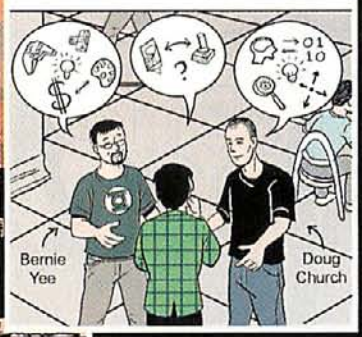


Some games were just too ***compelling*** (or well-marketed) to ***ignore,*** but for the most part I'd succeeded in keeping a ***healthy distance*** between ***gaming*** and ***my work.***

At least, until ***gaming*** found ***me.***

In *1999*, I was at a conference in *New York* when a couple of *game guys* told me that my book *Understanding Comics* had been on the shelves of a lot of *developers* they knew.

As we talked about *gaming*, I realized they were as *dissatisfied* with the *status quo* in *their industry* as I was with the *status quo* in *mine*.

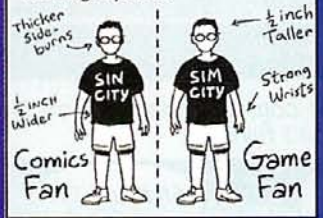


At the time, I was trying to unlock the *"DNA"* of *comics* and I asked if there were similar efforts in *gaming*.

Doug introduced me to the idea of the *"abdication of authorship"* -- how game players feel like the *authors of their own experiences* -- which I found *fascinating*.

By the time I was asked to speak at the *Game Developers Conference* in *March of 2001*, I'd come to recognize that *comics* and *games* have a lot of *similarities*.

We have similar *"user demographics"* --



-- similar preoccupations with *power fantasies* --

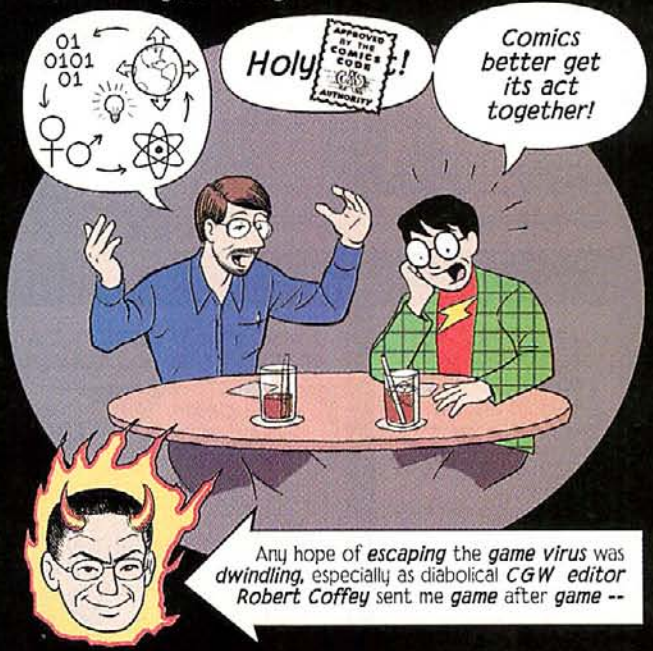
-- similarly bizarre *female anatomical features* --

-- a history of nasty *public relations problems* --

-- an often toxic *love affair* with *Hollywood* --

-- and an ongoing *bloody battle* for *shelf-space*.

Gaming had its *visionaries* too. Talking to *Will Wright* about his *expansive ideas* for the *future* made it clear to me that all gaming *to date* could be just the *tip* of the *iceberg* if the *underlying technologies* continue to *gain strength*.



Any hope of *escaping* the *game virus* was *dwindling*, especially as diabolical *CGW editor Robert Coffey* sent me *game* after *game* --

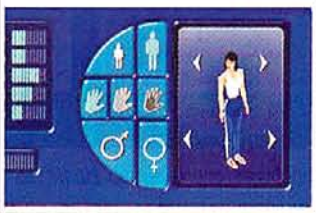
-- and drew me into his *evil web!*

The packages I got from Mr. C. were necessarily *limited* by my *platform** and by what was lying around the office, but it gave me at least some sense of the *landscape.*

*Still haven't played *"Black and White"* for example.

Each type of game seems to be defined by what the user *does* with it -- as if each could be summed up in a single *verb conjunction.*

I can see how *innovative work* has been done *within* those venues --



-- yet I wonder if the proliferation of *wildly different genres* in *other cultures* points up the *arbitrariness* of such categories --

-- and makes me *wonder* if there are wholly *unexplored genres* still *laying in wait.*

When comics faced a *similar challenge* I tried to address it by defining comics using Will Eisner's term *"sequential art"* -- a definition which left the door open to any *style* or *approach.*

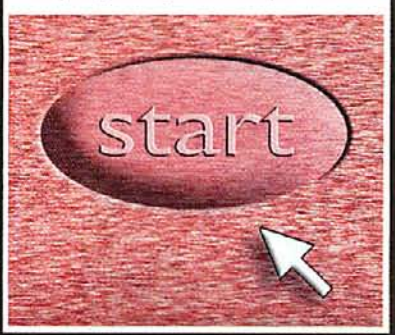
Is there an *equally simple idea* at the heart of all *games* -- both *old* and *new* -- that could help transcend our *assumptions* about games and help map gaming's *unexplored territory* as well?

If there *is,* and it hasn't been found yet, I'd suggest it might be worth *looking for!*

Meanwhile, whatever games *are,* they clearly exert a *strong grip* on our *imaginations.*

Can gaming *"rewire"* us in some way?

And is there some *sensation,* some *deeper experience* that only a *good game* can *provide?*

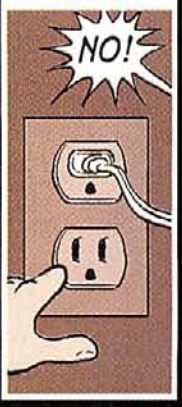


As I see it, life is, in large part, a continuous process of ***"learning the rules."***

The ***first rules*** we learn are the ***laws of physics*** --

-- how and when to respond to the ***needs*** of our ***bodies*** --

-- where ***danger*** lies --



-- and how to ***score points*** with our ***judges.***

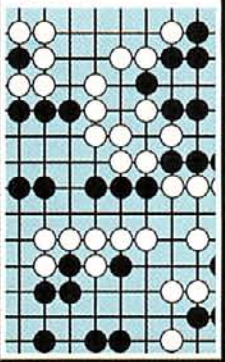
Each ***new rule builds*** on the ***last,*** and no rules are ever so ***basic*** as the ones we learn in those ***first few years.***

And despite one or two ***revisions*** in our ***understanding of the world*** along the way --

-- the ***basic rules*** of the world ***weigh heavily*** on our minds and become ***hard-wired*** to our ***view of the world.***

if you play any game ***long enough,*** I wonder if it's possible that your mind may begin to ***reconsider*** those rules, ***secretly questioning*** the ***way*** the ***world works.***

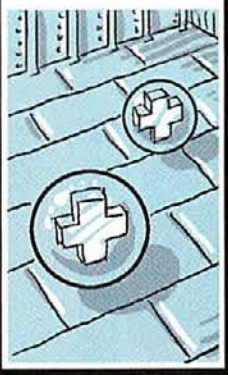
Maybe there are only ***two dimensions*** after all.



Maybe survival isn't a ***year-to-year*** challenge but a ***second-to-second*** challenge.

Maybe ***one person*** can act as ***many.***

Maybe to ***run through*** something is to ***have it.***



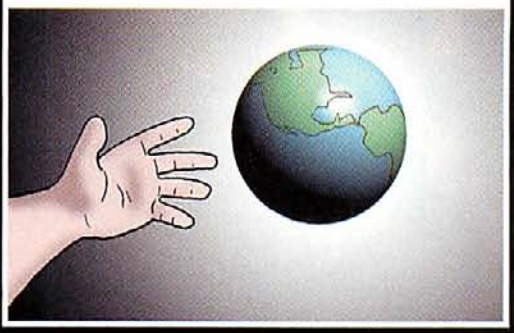
Maybe there will ***always*** be a ***second chance.***

Maybe ***gravity*** doesn't work quite the way we ***thought*** it did.

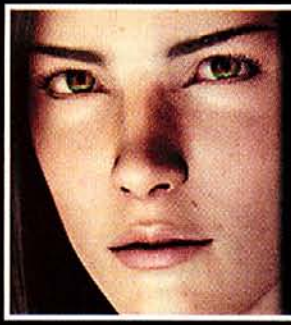
Maybe ***life*** can be ***created*** -- in more ways than ***one!***

In ***"real life"*** our most important rules are ***set in stone*** at an ***early age.***

But maybe our ***best games*** can return us to that ***childlike state*** where even the most basic tenets of ***"how the world works"*** are a ***brand new challenge.***



Here in the ***limited technological climate*** of ***2001,*** the gap between ***real life*** and ***gaming*** is still ***wide.***



But as Hollywood-level ***rendering*** and ***complexity*** enters computer gaming's arsenal and the ***devices*** we access games through continue to ***improve,*** that gap may continue to ***narrow.***

At that point, it's easy to see the line between ***games*** and ***life*** beginning to ***blur.***

I first encountered the term ***"possibility spaces"*** when talking to Will Wright. It's a great way to describe games, but could it also describe ***life itself?*** Isn't life one huge possibility space -- albeit without a fixed set of ***goals*** or ***boundaries?***

Would life seem more like a game if we had a clear sense of the ***goal?***

Or if we knew in advance just ***how long*** the game would last?

Or if only we could take all that we'd learned through our ***victories*** and ***defeats*** and ***loves*** and ***losses*** and ***hard-won experience --***

-- and just ***keep on going*** 'til we ***get it right?***

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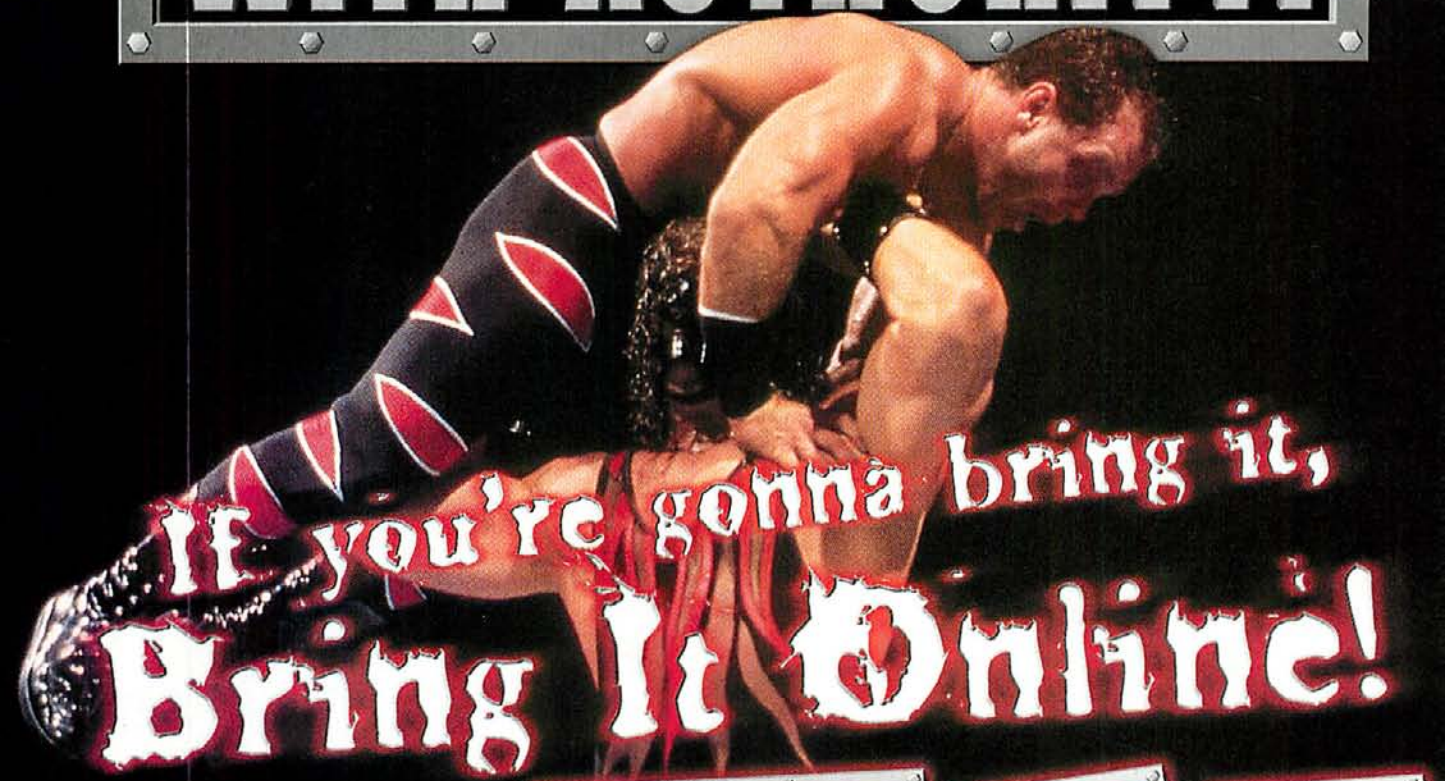

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games **Edited by Robert Coffey**

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How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games–no betas, no patches

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

★★★★★ **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 drawbacks.

★★★½★ **AVERAGE** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★½★★ **WEAK** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★½★★★ **ABYSMAL** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

Tank battles can get very hairy, and at first the controls seem like a hindrance. With a little practice, however, you'll be armor-busting in no time.

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

It's three, three, three simulators in one **By Tom Price**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

PUBLISHER: **Codemasters** DEVELOPER: **Bohemia Interactive** URL: **codemastersusa.com/flashpoint/** ESRB RATING: **Mature; blood, violence**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 450MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)** PRICE: **$39.99**

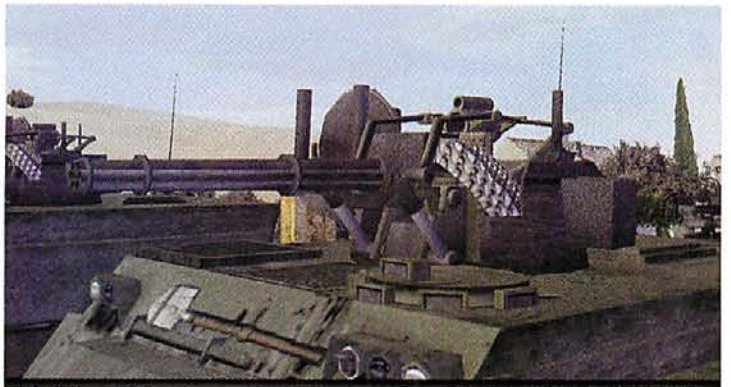
There's a recipe for great computer games that *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* follows almost perfectly. *Flashpoint* does so much more than just present the gamer with a dry re-creation of life in fatigues. It does everything a great game should do: It entertains, dramatizes, excites, and most important, compels you to play it again and again and again. On top of that, it offers an amazingly powerful mission editor and multiplayer options that keep the game fresh.

First you start out with a strong foundation: *Flashpoint* is a combat simulator in the strictest sense, focusing on what it's like to be a lowly combat infantryman, a stealthy Black Ops commando, a versatile pilot, or a fledgling tank commander. As far as sims go, it does an amazing job of being hardcore and believable—things like ballistics seem spot-on—while at the same time intuitive and easy to use. In soldier mode, you start out as a private taking orders from your squad leader, but later on you become a squad leader yourself. The interface for commanding your troops is well done and far easier to understand than a system like *Rogue Spear*'s. The interface carries over to missions in which you're commanding vehicles, and it's just as easy to use there. I did have problems occasionally with pathfinding. Units sometimes got confused or hung up on an object when I told them to go somewhere. These occurrences were uncommon but frustrating nonetheless.

The actions feel right: Soldiers run at realistic speeds and can sprint at times, but they quickly tire out. Getting down on the ground and up again takes a realistic amount of time, too. This is key, because you'll spend most of your time ducking and running for cover or finding other ways to avoid getting hit by incoming bullets. Controlling vehicles can feel awkward at first but becomes tolerable with practice.

As in any good wargame, sight lines are one of the most important tactical elements and the terrain in the game looks and acts realistic, even if other graphical elements look a little dated. All aspects of the game are highly functional, if not the sweetest pieces of eye candy.

Operation Flashpoint is a combat simulator in the strictest sense.



Not all the vehicles are your standard wargame fare. This Vulcan-mounted APC is the centerpiece of one of the game's most exciting missions.

Cut-scenes are done in-engine, are well directed, and show off an acute cinematic vision.

The next important ingredient in the great gaming soufflé is fun. I know, what's fun about war? Maybe the word I'm looking for here is *compulsion*. A game, whether serious or silly, should compel you to keep playing it. *Flashpoint* does that by designing some of the most varied and entertaining missions I've seen in a long time. On the soldier sim side, for example, you do everything from ambushing squads to laying traps for armor convoys, assassinating officers, and attacking or defending entire towns.

Campaign mode offers a compelling, believable storyline and is the real core of the game. There are also some nicely crafted single missions for those of you who want to jump straight into a vehicle as soon as you finish installing. And another nice superficial touch shows up whenever you die. As the camera sweeps around your broken body, a quote, either about war or something famous from the time period, shows up. These range from insightful sound bites from people like MacArthur and Sun Tzu to laugh-out-loud snippets from Woody Allen and Nancy Reagan.

The developers have crafted a labor of love, and it shows. *Flashpoint*'s ambition and acute detail speak volumes about their dedication to this game, even if there are some flaws and rough edges. The inclusion of the robust mission editor is one sign that they want to share the love. It's also the final ingredient in what is destined to be one of the best games of the year, hands down.

VERDICT ★★★★½

It's about as close as you can get to really being in the Army, without the potato peeling.

This through-the-sights view allows for more accuracy when you're shooting rifles, but it's not your only targeting option.

MANY PATHS TO VICTORY

One of the most memorable missions begins with you, alone and confused, deep in enemy territory with half a Russian battalion between you and the last evac chopper three clicks away. The beauty is, there's no right way to finish this (or any other) mission. Once I did it by meticulously moving bush to bush, avoiding patrols. Another time, I picked off the patrols one at a time and rearmed myself with their weapons. Yet another time, I found a civilian's car in a nearby town and drove myself to the evac point. I doubt that I succeeded at any mission on the first attempt, but failure felt like a challenge, and I often found myself up until the wee hours playing a mission over and over again.

The vehicle sim aspect in the game is substantial, not merely tacked on. All the instruments in this Apache attack chopper work accurately.

Battles can get complex pretty fast, but they don't require the micromanagement of *Homeworld*.

Conquest: Frontier Wars

Making the RTS interesting again **By Thomas L. McDonald**

PUBLISHER: **Ubi Soft**
DEVELOPER: **Fever Pitch**
URL: **www.ubisoft.com**
ESRB RATING: **Teen; mild language, mild violence**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space, 3D card**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, 450MB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**
PRICE: **$39.99**

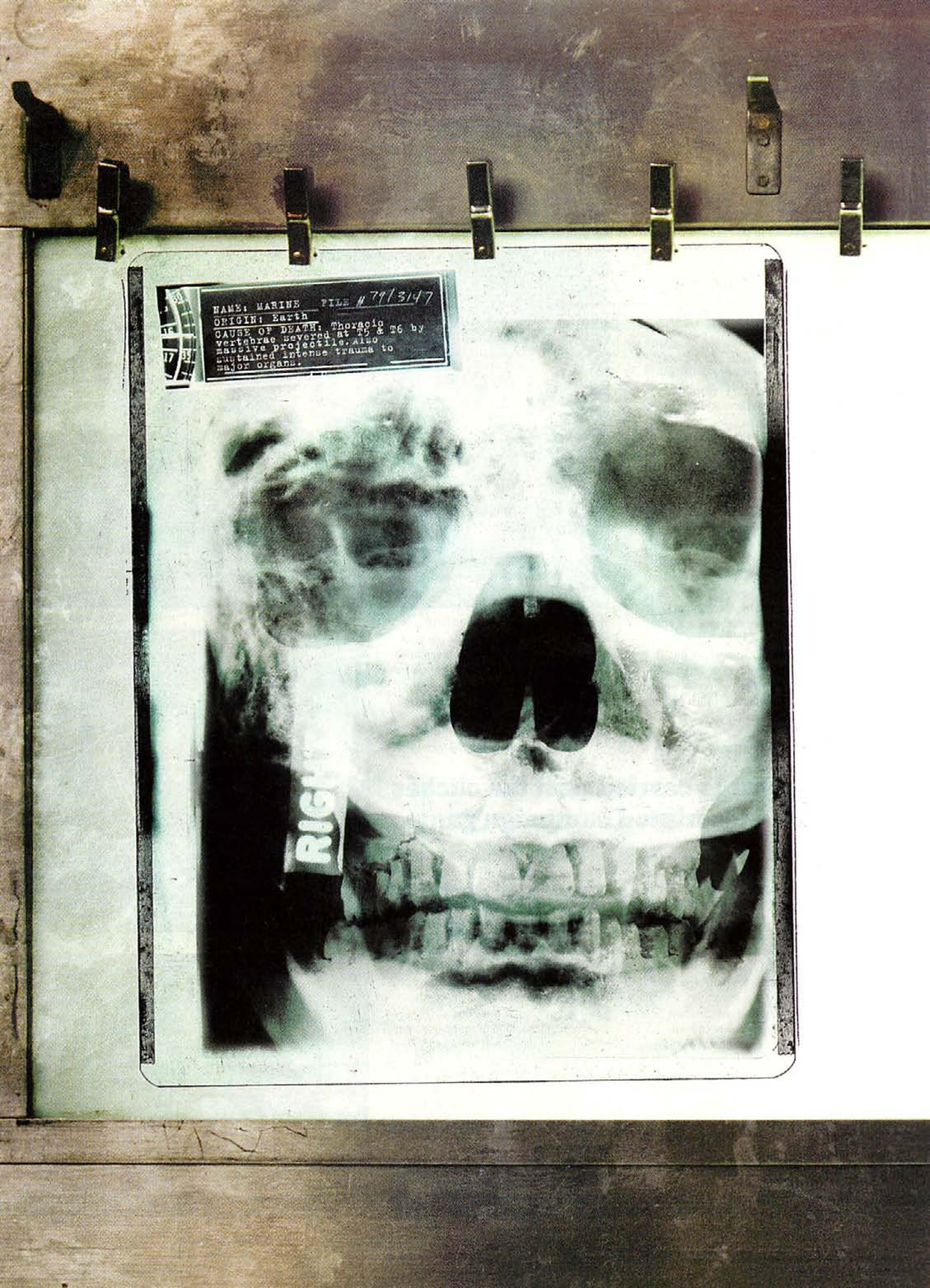
Slipping into the marketplace like it had something to hide, *Conquest: Frontier Wars* had a whiff of doom about it. On the surface *Conquest* appears to be a rote space-faring RTS akin to *Star Trek: Armada*, and once installed it does its level best to make gamers ambivalent by taking its sweet time to get up to speed and then hiding one of its finest features in the skirmish mode. But deeper play reveals a game that carves out a comfortable niche between traditional real-time strategy elements and the more full-bodied strategic conquest of *Master of Orion* or *Reach for the Stars*.

Though the narrative setup and trio of races are tepid and familiar, they work well enough to keep the gaming jogging along. It's 200 years in the future, and humankind (now known as Terrans) is madly hopping through recently discovered wormholes looking for a fight.

Structures are built in a belt around planets. No matter the size or type of planet, each has the same number of build slots.

They find a pair of races who (coincidentally, of course) have all the same kinds of military units and structures, just with different "alieny" names. These two races are the Celareons, a highly evolved race of pure energy, and the Mantis, an insectoid race. (One day someone will make a sci-fi game that doesn't resort to this hoary triumvirate of human/insect/superevolved races.)

Conquest is carried past these clichés by a long, very well-scripted campaign

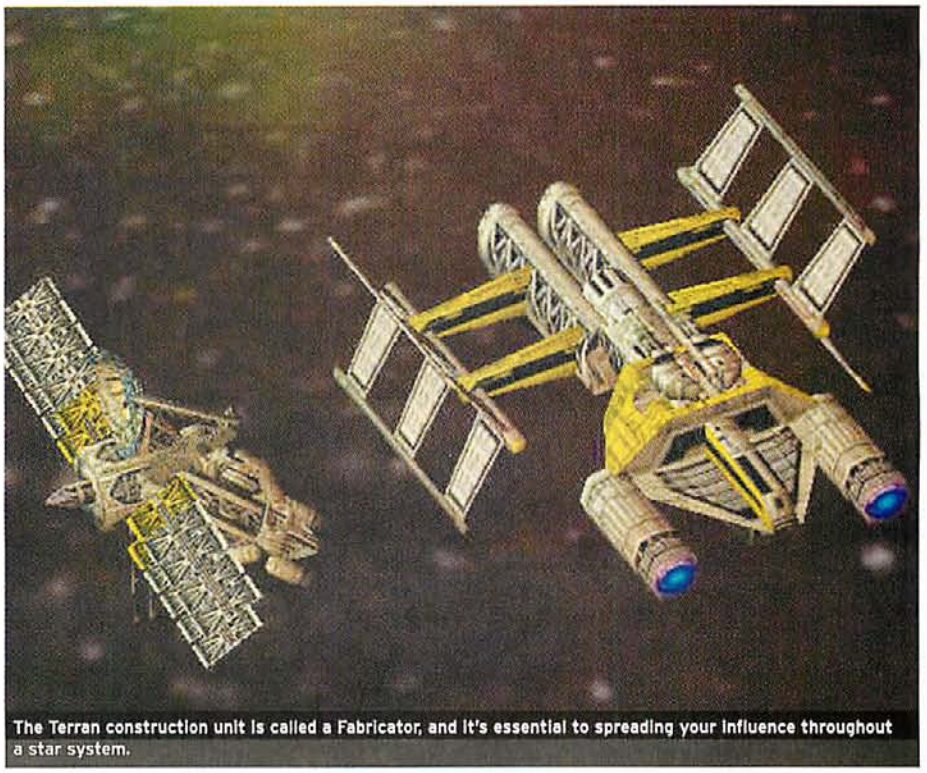

NAME: MARINE FILE #791347
ORIGIN: Earth
CAUSE OF DEATH: Thoracic vertebrae severed at T5 & T6 by massive projectile. Also sustained intense trauma to major organs.

game that allows you to play as each race at certain points. Missions are complex, with myriad goals and triggers for in-game plot developments and new objectives. A few missions are annoying or contrived, using time limits or making you take out two targets simultaneously, but overall they're well done. Planned for release a year ago, the game looks quite good, offering clean, clear 3D units on a 2D, zoomable, rotating map.

The Wormhole Connection

Missions begin in a single, often unexplored star system, complete with planets, asteroid fields, and nebulae. Base structures perform the usual RTS functions of processing resources, building units, and conducting research and are built in belts around a planet's equator. The tech web is basic but effective, requiring a series of structures to get to the really good technology, most of it related to military units.

There are only a few planets per system, but each system also contains one or more wormholes. These wormholes pass into other systems to form a chain. Wormholes can be "owned" by building a jumpgate, which appears in both systems and becomes a constant target for the enemy. More important, wormholes connect systems in a continuous chain of supply. Supply is *Conquest*'s central innovation, and it affects all offensive and defensive operations. Units can run out of ammo during a fight and must return for more or be tended by a supply ship. If you lose control of a jumpgate, the entire system can be cut from the supply chain to the home system and left to wither and die.



The Terran construction unit is called a Fabricator, and it's essential to spreading your influence throughout a star system.

Conquest is carried past the clichés by a well-scripted campaign game.

Another more challenging element is the use of command points, which limit the number and type of military units that you can build. You must carefully choose offensive forces and defensive emplacements. This focuses the game on essential units rather than allowing for the rapid buildup of expendable "rush" forces. Unit design plays into this as well, since there are few units that become obsolete. There is a pervasive, finely balanced emphasis on combined forces combat. The bigger capital ships can't wade into battle without the wee corvette, since the long, heavy guns of the big ships are useless against tighter swarms of close-in fighters.

This focus on combined forces calls to mind *Kohan*, but *Conquest* takes the idea further with the inclusion of Admirals. Each of these command units has unique characteristics that it can impart to its units. When grouped into a fleet, all the units move as a whole, with the Admiral imparting a number of benefits, such as +10% to shields and so on. The problem? It's not in the campaign game. Inexplicably, you cannot group units into a fleet under an Admiral in the campaign, where they merely act as superunits. You may use this feature only in custom skirmish games. Fever Pitch came up with a great idea, implemented it perfectly, and then left it out of half the game.

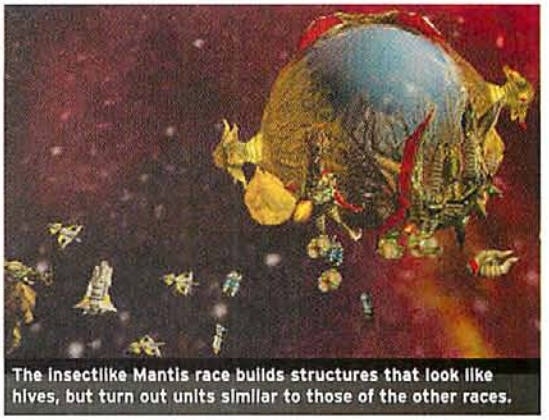
There's a lot to like in *Conquest*. AI is strong and unpredictable. Subtle design decisions become apparent only with play: Units can advance through five levels of experience, and different types of nebulae have different effects. A bit too much of the screen is taken up by the framework, but you can toggle it off and play the game with an impressive array of hot-keys. A few bugs, such as graphical glitches and grouped units not moving as groups, need to be addressed, but it's a largely stable title.

The good recent RTS games have used the familiar format and done one or two interesting things with it. *Conquest* can be added to that short list.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Gameplay innovations and tons of gameplay value triumph over some really puzzling design decisions.

The missile cruiser is available early, and its swarms of hard-hitting missiles are required throughout the entire game.



The insectlike Mantis race builds structures that look like hives, but turn out units similar to those of the other races.

NAME: PREDATOR FILE#6925791
CAUSE OF DEATH: Massive blood
loss due to decapitation. Acid
burns noted on torso.

Spider-Man

Does almost everything a spider can **By Thierry Nguyen**

PUBLISHER: **Activision**
DEVELOPER: **LTI Gray Matter**
URL: **www.activision.com/games/spiderman/**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone; animated violence**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 266; 64MB RAM; 200MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 300, 128MB RAM, 450MB hard drive space** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None** PRICE: **$29.99**

Wacky bits, like this amusing "Amazing Bag-Man" incident, are just some of the Easter eggs that come as rewards for replaying.

Listen up, True Believer! There's an honest-to-god decent game based on a comic-book property. Ignore the myriad fighting games and horrid platformers that slap a costume on poor gameplay and run away with your money. While *Spider-Man* isn't perfect, it does a fine job of capturing the spirit, drive, and flamboyance of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's creation. At its worst, it's a short 3D-platformer with graphical shortcomings, and at its best, it provides an amazing simulation of, well, Spider-Man.

This is *Tomb Raider* done Spidey-style. In third-person perspective, you swing across (or climb through) cityscapes, run around locations such as secret laboratories or the pressroom of the *Daily Bugle*, and beat the bejeezus out of thugs. Villains range from the (still) incredibly lame Rhino to more recent rogues like Carnage; these boss matches utilize action-based puzzles rather than traditional "beat on the boss repeatedly" design. Finally, Spidey can do just about anything you saw him do in the comics. He swings, wall-crawls, encases in web fluid, and pulls out many other web-based motions from his spider-sack. He even has his spider-sense!

The villain list includes Mysterio (who is a lot tougher than he usually is), Rhino, Scorpion, Carnage, and Venom.

The camera keeps Spidey in view, even at weird angles. There's also a helpful aim mode for web-slinging.

Amazingly, since Spidey can freely swing and crawl anywhere within the game, the camera manages to keep track of him despite the constant movement and perspective changes. Walls and ceilings fade away appropriately as Spidey crawls on them, and the camera generally maintains the same perspective when you need it to. It can get confused at times, though, either swinging around too widely during a brawl or messing with your perspective if you climb onto a wall at an awkward angle.

Alas, this is a straight-up port of a console game, and it shows.

Alas, this is a straight-up port of a console game, and it shows. Yes, there are higher resolutions available, but they mostly make things look a bit cleaner. The textures still look low-res compared to other titles, and, most noticeably in the cityscapes, the fogging distance remains unchanged. The PC could have been used as a reason to beef up the cities and make it look like you're swinging through the packed skylines of New York—instead you see about three buildings at a time with mysterious fog below.

Like the console version, this is a brutally short game. The first time I played it on a DreamCast, it took about three play sessions of a few hours each to finish. Some players can finish it in one night of rental. If you're any good at platformers, this might be a short swing. Still, there are enough Easter eggs to encourage replaying: more costumes with different powers, hidden cameos from other superheroes, and a "What If?" mode with changes that make the story even more over-the-top.

Treat this as a straight-console port of a good game, with all the caveats. You're gonna need a gamepad (no mouselook) to enjoy this. It's the exact same game, so the problems you've heard about the original (camera quirks, playtime) are still here. Yet it so eloquently captures the spirit of *Spider-Man* that it does deserve the title of best comic-book-based game out there. 'Nuff said.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

An above-average port of a fine, if short, superhero action game.

Recognize your mortality.

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FOX INTERACTIVE

SIERRA

MATURE M

Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

Majestic

Forget the shadow government—your main enemy is boredom

By Charles Ardai

PUBLISHER: EA.com
DEVELOPER: Synthetic
URL: www.majestic thegame.com ESRB RATING: Mature; adult language, violence, scary phone calls

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 3MB hard drive space, 56K Internet connection
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II, high-speed Internet connection
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None
PRICE: $9.99/month (after free pilot episode)

Ingenious use of both mundane and paranoid Websites gives *Majestic* that gripping "browsing the Web aimlessly" feel.

Playing *Majestic* is the biggest disappointment I've had since seeing *Star Wars Episode I*. It's not just that the game is bad—it's that it ought to have been so good.

The designers deserve credit for the originality of their vision: They make you the main character of the game and have you play by communicating with other characters through email and instant messaging, just as if they were real people. They then embroil you in an "is it fiction or is it real?" storyline: The designers of an *X-Files*-style online game called *Majestic* call on one of their subscribers (you) for help after their offices are bombed by members of a shadow government, an organization intent on preventing *Majestic* from revealing the truth about their clandestine activities. On the run from the men in black, the game designers ask you to help them gather information, break into the bad guys' computers, and generally strike back against a conspiracy touching on everything from the Kennedy assassination to the Roswell aliens to the hiding of Nazis after World War II.

It's not a bad idea, especially when you add in the sinister phone calls and faxes that the game uses to interrupt your day. If done right, *Majestic* could be immersive and frightening, or at least intriguing. That it is none of these things is entirely the fault of the designers, who turn these great ingredients into a thin, unfulfilling gruel. A typical day of playing *Majestic* consists of receiving an email or instant message, clicking on a link it contains, reading the Web page it takes you to, and then turning off your computer until the next day. Each day, you're allowed to do only so much—and "so much" is very, very little. You might play for five minutes, you might play for 10, but when you've used up your day's allotment, you enter Standby mode and literally can't do anything till the next day. When you've used up your month's allotment (which typically happens about two weeks into a month), you can't do anything till the start of the next month.

Majestic turns great ingredients into a thin, unfulfilling gruel.

Fresh from *Disasterpiece Theater*, the cast of *Majestic*.

This would be bad enough if the 10 minutes of gameplay you get each day were actually fun, but in practice it's going too far even to call it "gameplay." You read Web pages; you engage in IM dialogues that basically amount to typing "Okay" and "Yes" over and over; you watch occasional video clips in which whiny, incompetent actors emote to each other about how frightened or angry they are. The writing is dreadful, the story is tired, and you have nothing to do except watch this tired, dreadful plot unfold oh-so-slowly with essentially no input from you. Even when you're asked to do something—steer a satellite, help an ally break into a building—the outcome is predetermined (the satellite crashes, the ally gets caught), and the gameplay is as basic and crude as can be.

The designers, hearing of players' dissatisfaction, have responded with a combination of denial (one email from EA about Standby mode said with a straight face, "We all know how much some of you love the suspense of waiting") and promises that the game will improve in future months. But I've now slogged through three episodes and that's enough.

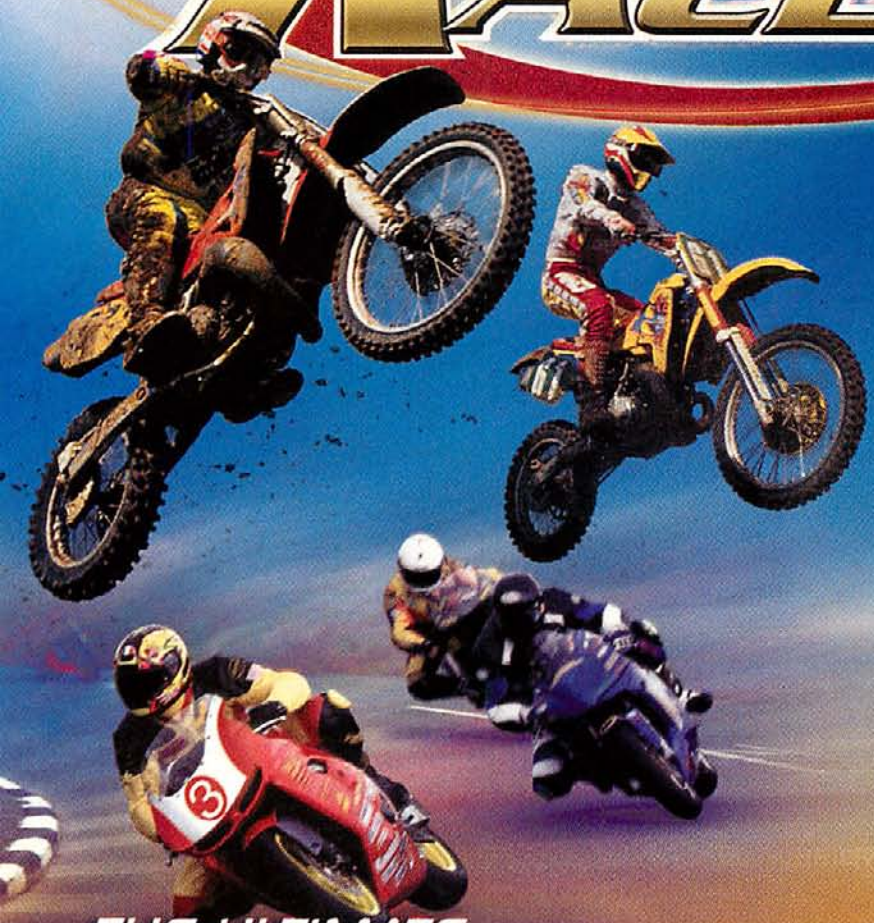
Maybe EA is aware that *Majestic* isn't exactly hooking players. At the end of the last episode, one character sent me a video in which he plaintively begged, "Don't go disappearing on me, okay?"

Sorry, man. I've got better things to do with my time.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

If paying $10 a month to be led through a poorly paced, wretchedly written, horribly acted, utterly linear storyline is your idea of fun, then *Majestic* is for you!

MOTO RACER 3™



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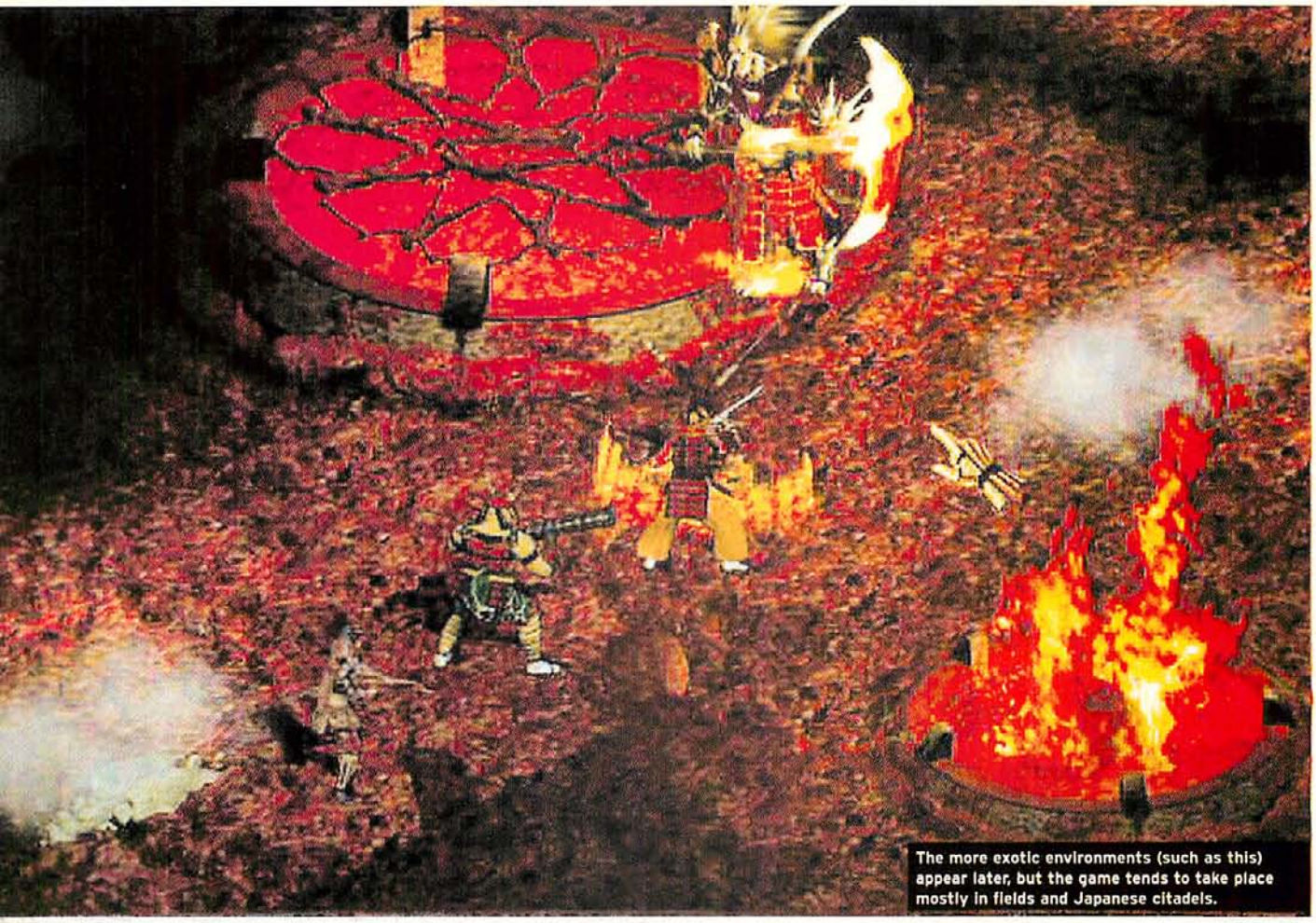


The more exotic environments (such as this) appear later, but the game tends to take place mostly in fields and Japanese citadels.

Throne of Darkness

The elegance of Miyamoto Musashi is thwarted by Godzilla-size distractions **By Thierry Nguyen**

PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios
DEVELOPER: Click Entertainment
URL: www.sierrastudios.com/games/throneofdarkness/
ESRB RATING: Mature (17+); blood and gore, violence

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 266, 32MB RAM, 700MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2-35 players)
PRICE: $49.95

To dispense the requisite Japanese culture reference up front, playing *Throne of Darkness* is often like trying to watch three Kurosawa films at the same time. Yes, it can be an enriching experience, but it sometimes throws so much at you that your brain gets overwhelmed by the wash of aesthetics. Unfortunately, despite its high ambition and bouts of sheer joy, *TOD* often winds up pounding your brain into a stupor with its excess.

The game does a great job of taking the cliché dark fantasy setting so popularized by *Diablo* and its ilk and covering it with a smattering of Japanese mythology. Fighting kappa, oni, neanderskulls, and dark samurai on horseback is a wholly welcome change from thinly disguised riffs on the devil, or—God forbid—another orc. Plus there is a little thrill in finding *naginatas* and *wakizashis* instead of yet more freakin' broadswords and plate armor.

In addition to the refreshing changes of setting and fauna, *TOD* offers a few design elements that made me step back and cry, "Where has this been in other RPGs!?" For example, cursed items: Instead of accidentally equipping one, casting Remove Curse just to get it off of you, and then tossing it away, you can purify the item for a cost, thereby making it useful. Also, the inventory has a working auto-sorter. No more rearranging the four concentric squares in your inventory to accommodate new swag—if the space is available, the game shifts your stuff around for you.

The item customization and creation is by far the coolest aspect of the game. For me, it even eclipses most of the random items you'll find on the ground. Usually, I madly scrambled to give found weapons to my blacksmith. This went on until either I had given him enough materials to forge a powerful base weapon or I'd simply found a good base weapon. And then I just went crazy stuffing said weapon with different gems and components. *Throne of Darkness* goes beyond *Diablo II*'s own gem system because it not only offers different

I tended to find myself thinking, "What just happened?"

items and degrees of effect, it also gives you components that amplify the effects of the items. I was able to plan strategically how I was going to upgrade weapons of my different party members.

Confusion Reigns

Yet it's this aspect of planning for my party members that reveals the flaws of the game. It's the best example of the sheer information overload that can pound on your brain and make you either lost or frustrated. In spirit, using four guys at a time from a pool of seven seems like it would add a layer of tactical depth. Mixing and matching them out in the field, managing their statistical growth—these should make the game deeper than a mere clickfest, correct? In practice, it just becomes a *confusing* clickfest.

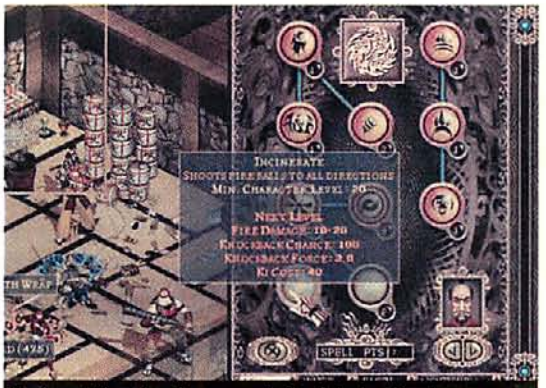
When you control one party member at a time, the others act on a basic AI script determined by current formation and party role (both factors can be edited in a Tactics editor, which isn't hard to use). But the action happens so damn fast that it's hard to react appropriately; often you'll approach a new area, and all the critters seem to die before you've even had a chance to spot them.

It's almost too hands-off. Maybe the game should either allow for options to pause and consider your maneuvers or give you absolute control of everyone simultaneously. With neither a way to pause and issue orders nor to lasso the entire group and designate specific targets, the designers' noble intentions are hindered. Sure, sometimes the tactics and the characters all meld together, and the battles are exhilarating melee affairs, but I often found myself thinking either "What just happened?" or "I wish I could have handled that better."

The clean 800x600 resolution, the lighting, and the spell effects do manage to make the game look pretty despite the rampant confusion.

Even character management is too much. I have no problem with managing the growth of all the members of my *Baldur's Gate* or *Might and Magic* parties, but dealing with the levels and spell trees of seven guys is way too much. The dizzying amount of menu-loading and button-clicking made me opt to focus instead on just using four guys the whole time, rather than swap the entire seven around as the design seemed to want me to.

It's this sense of information overload (plus a few other slight design flaws) that really detracts from *TOD*. It's an ambitious, fun, and fast-paced *Diablo* clone with a refreshing setting and some great ideas. Reality, however, had to come in and punch the game in the face a couple of times to prove that not all ideas pan out when executed.



Each spell tree has its own set of points to allocate, so even with just four guys, I have figure out 16 sets of point allocation, which felt like overkill.

As in *Diablo II*, the spells range from passive boosts to cool offensive ones.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

An elegant *Diablo* clone with many great additions, but information overload makes it hard to play.

Shogun: Total War Warlord Edition

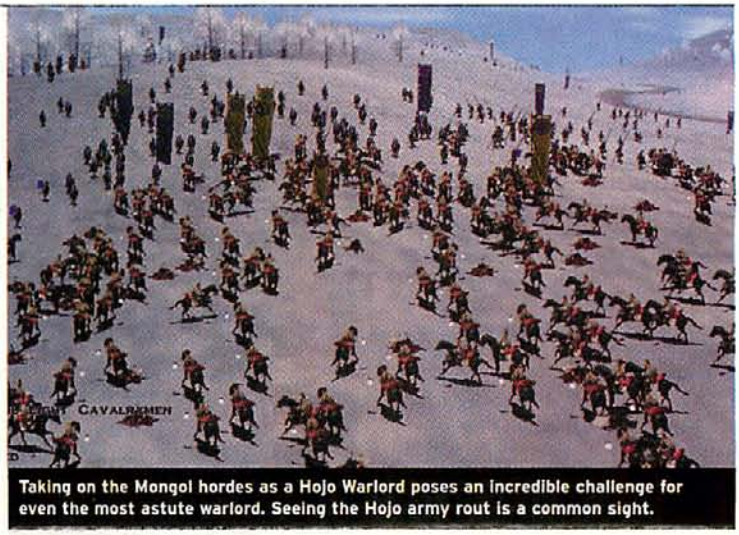
Shock a Khan **By Raphael Liberatore**

PUBLISHER: EA.com DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly
URL: www.ea.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; animated violence

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 233 MMX or AMD K6, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB hard drive space
MULTIPLAYER: LAN (2-8 players), Internet (2-4 players) PRICE: $40

A masterfully designed strategy/wargame set in Japan's tumultuous warring states of the 16th century, *Shogun: Total War* was a breakthrough game. The *Warlord Edition* is an expansion that's sure to please fans, with enhancements for both multiplayer and 3D combat, a streamlined tech tree, new units, and two new campaign modes.

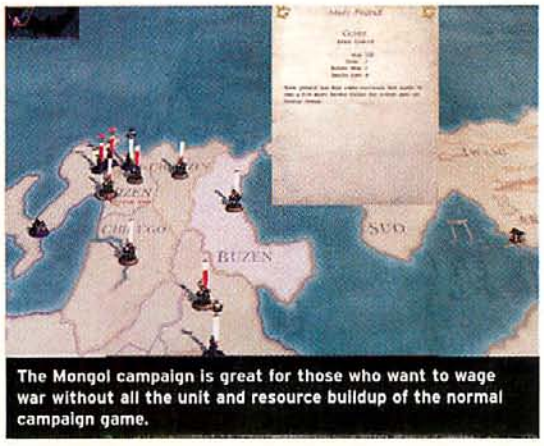
Warlord Edition's most prominent feature is the Mongol invasion expansion (the other new campaign is the Three Unifiers), which takes you back to the 13th century during Kublai Khan's disastrous attempt to invade Japan. However, the campaign game allows players to succeed where Khan failed, as they pit Mongols against the Hojo clan forces or vice versa. The Mongol campaign is really a series of connected battles, minus the features of building and training your armies. On one hand, the Mongol campaign is fast and furious play; on the other, it lacks the depth of a normal campaign. *Warlord Edition* introduces new units in the Mongols, including the quick and deadly Mongol light cavalry, ferocious heavy cavalry, and supporting Korean allies.



Taking on the Mongol hordes as a Hojo Warlord poses an incredible challenge for even the most astute warlord. Seeing the Hojo army rout is a common sight.

Warlord offers an excellent 3D real-time tactical combat game. There are more battlefield maps and an improved interface for more fluidity during combat. You can now drag army reinforcements and drop them on depleted forces in order to bolster their numbers. The game also increases forces from 2,500 samurai to 5,000 samurai—a big jump. Units receive beefed-up weapons and armor ratings to complement the game's more traditional morale and skills values. Tactical combat still takes place on a variety of wonderfully rendered 3D terrain maps. Though Creative Assembly is trumpeting an improved graphics engine, the changes seem minor.

An improved interface makes controlling all these warriors easier than ever.



The Mongol campaign is great for those who want to wage war without all the unit and resource buildup of the normal campaign game.

A less minor change can be seen in the normal campaign's technology tree. It's now straightforward: Research and building are more manageable. Play seems more fluid, and provinces are easier to control. Waypoint mapping takes the tedium out of moving armies from province to province. Markers and flags make units easier to distinguish, and there are a variety of victory conditions for those seeking other goals of conquest.

Multiplayer options have increased, with several game types to choose from. There's King of the Hill, Halve the Enemy, Assassinate the General, Survive the Siege, and Capture the Honjin—types reminiscent of Bungie's *Myth* games. My biggest gripe is over the lack of a turn-based campaign version for multiplayer gaming.

As good as *Shogun* is, it is not perfect.

Warlord Edition offers an excellent 3D real-time tactical combat game.

There is some question as to how useful the Drill Dojo is—why spend *koku* building your army's discipline (to prevent routing) when you can spend it on improving their skills, weapons, and armor ratings? Aside from the Mongol forces, the *Warlord Edition* also tosses in a few questionable new units, such as the Battlefield Ninja, Kensai Sword Saints, and Korean Thunder Bombers, which toss grenades and seem more fantasy than reality. Unfortunately, these units not only take away from the authenticity of *Shogun*'s combat, they also introduce game imbalances.

Despite this, the *Warlord Edition* is an impressive sequel. Fans of the original and historical strategy buffs should strap on their *do*, powder their *katana*, and meet the Mongol invaders head on.

VERDICT ★★★★½

An almost perfect follow-up to one of last year's best strategic war games.

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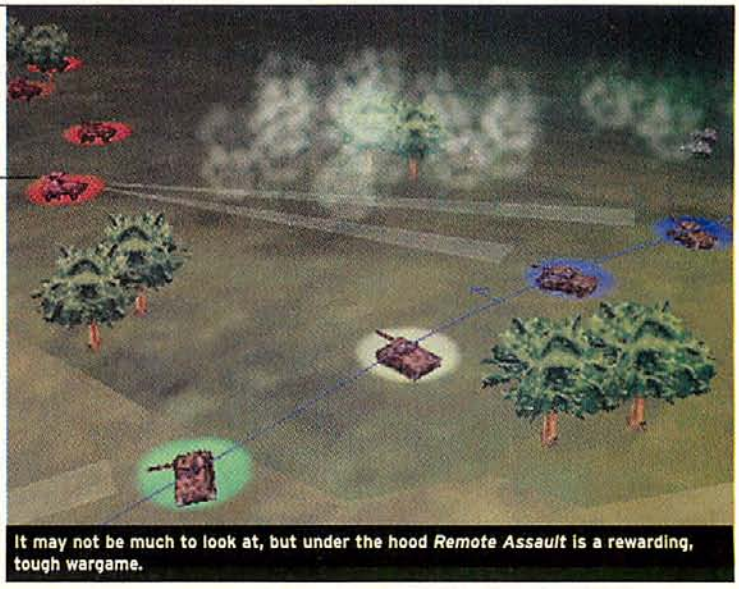
Remote Assault

Hard as steel **By Raphael Liberatore**



It may not be much to look at, but under the hood *Remote Assault* is a rewarding, tough wargame.

PUBLISHER: **Shrapnel Games** DEVELOPER: **One Games** URL: **www.shrapnel-games.com** ESRB RATING: **None**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 85MB hard drive space.** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **3D accelerator** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet (2 players)** PRICE: **$40**

Rarely does an RTS game focusing on the futuristic world of 3D mechanized combat look so vanilla yet provide such engaging, tactical depth. At first glance, *Remote Assault* seems rudimentary due to its straightforward gameplay, simple interface, bland maps, basic unit types, archaic graphics, and paltry sound. Presentation is a notch below that of *WarZone 2100* (which isn't saying much for a game more than three years old). But lurking underneath a basic chassis is a highly detailed game emphasizing the important elements of strategy and tactics. So much so that *Remote Assault* comes off more like a wargame in disguise, and only the most diehard tank commanders will find the elaborate system of battle orders and squad-level combat entertaining.

With more than 30 missions split among two campaigns and 10 separate skirmishes, your ultimate job as company commander is to create offensive juggernauts by using a variety of tactical modes and unit dispositions. Under your command is a balance of tanks (light, medium, and heavy), APVs, RAB infantry, helicopters, artillery, and MLRS units. Failing to understand your objectives, unit behaviors, mission time constraints, resupply and logistics, or map terrain will turn your mechanized squads into heaps of iron rubble. Managing such depth can be a daunting task during the heat of battle, and many gamers will shy away from the numerous command and control windows, unit behaviors, weapons systems, logistics, camera angles, damage models, and dynamic objectives. There's so much detail that even a unit's damage modeling is divided into front, rear, and side values. Yet, the easy-to-navigate menus, customizable group configurations, and chain-of-command programming allow battles to remain fluid with a little effort. Players will also enjoy the decent array of AI, unit pathfinding, and fog-of-war features. And if things get too dicey, you can adjust game speed so battles are easier to manage. There's also a multiplayer game for testing one's tactical mettle against live opponents head-to-head via Internet or LAN.

Remote Assault comes off more like a wargame in disguise.

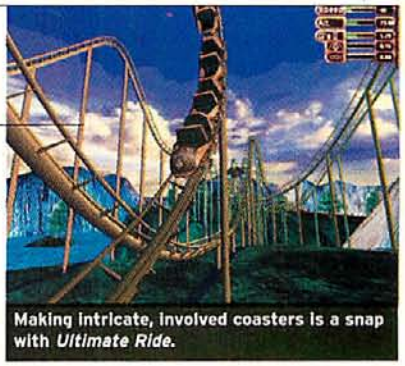
Even without the bells and whistles of current RTS games, and at a hefty $40, *Remote Assault* is still worthwhile. But because of its wargame-like depth, only armchair tacticians jonesing for mechanized combat should add it to their collection.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A challenging, hardcore wargame dressed up in mech drag.

Ultimate Ride

All the tools, few of the thrills **By Loyd Case**



Making intricate, involved coasters is a snap with *Ultimate Ride*.

PUBLISHER: **Disney Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Disney Interactive** URL: **www.disneyinteractive.com** ESRB RATING: **Everyone**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 333MHz, 32MB RAM, DirectX 8.0, 70MB install** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 500MHz, 64MB, 170MB install** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None** PRICE: **$25**

Face it: You never really wanted to run a theme park—you only want to design roller coasters. *Ultimate Ride* is just the game for people who don't give a damn how many sodas they sell or whether the customers are happy. A theme park is about the rides, and the king of the rides is the roller coaster. *Ultimate Ride* is Disney's take on a roller coaster design sim—both glitzy and bland simultaneously.

It's very easy to get in and start plunking down track in *Ultimate Ride*. The feedback is limited, and it's simple to design coasters that would turn human bodies into pulp. The Sandbox mode allows you to design impossible coasters, but you never get the right feel from them—the cars never fly off the track, even at 60 Gs!

The Imagineering mode offers more of a challenge, putting you through a series of missions to complete increasingly complex designs. You can't progress until you finish the challenge. You can save your masterpieces and trade them on Disney's Website. There are four environments, though one is nothing but a bare grid (think of the holodeck turned off). You can add animated props to make it more interesting, but the environments (a cave, a mountain, and an asteroid) still look pretty vanilla.

However, sitting around the PC with your kids designing rides makes for great fun; my 7-year-old daughter loves this sim. But I found myself wishing for just a bit more: more environments, more depth, and more coaster launching.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

This ride is more Toon Town jolly trolley than Space Mountain.

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Madden 2002

When you're the only game in town, it's easy to be the best

By William O'Neal

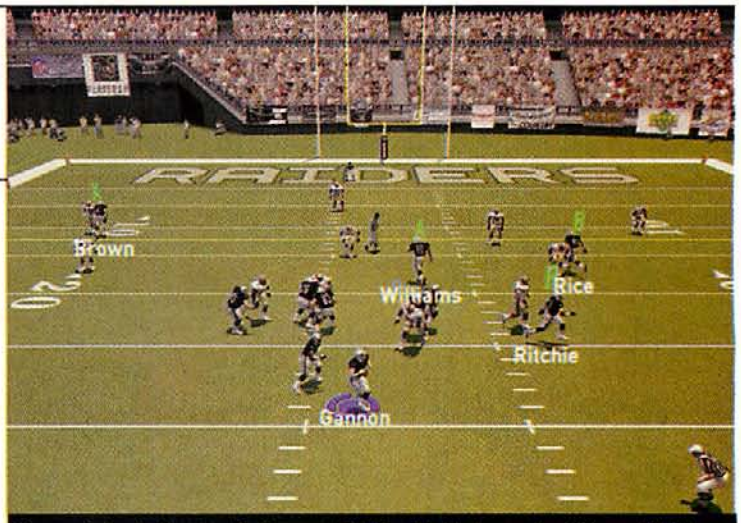
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: EA Sports
URL: madden2002.ea.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II or AMD K6-2, 64MB RAM, 40MB free hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 600MHz or faster Pentium III or AMD K7 Athlon, 128MB RAM, 450MB free hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (up to 4 players on one machine) PRICE: $39.99

When it comes to sports games, being a PC gamer has always carried with it some cruel ironies. The rapid advancement of PC hardware (compared to that of console hardware) has meant that PC game developers have had the best technology at their disposal. But because sports games sell better on consoles, publishers produce sports games for consoles hand over fist, often ignoring the PC market entirely. One exception, of course, is EA Sports' *Madden* series.

This brings us to *Madden 2002*, a game that represents so much of what's wrong with sports games on the PC. Don't get us wrong, *Madden 2002* is easily the best football game that you can play on a PC. The joke is, of course, that it's the only football game that's recently been released for the PC. The cruel ironies don't end there. EA Sports recently released *Madden 2002* for the PlayStation 2, a game that has received more than a fair share of accolades. So guess what EA Sports did for *Madden 2002* on the PC? They based it not on *Madden 2002* for the PS2, but on *Madden 2001* for the PS2—last year's version. Huh?

Despite the fact that it's just a port of a year-old console port, it's still a lot of fun and includes at least one feature—online play—not available on the console versions. Everything else that you'd expect from a *Madden* game is present: John Madden and Pat Summerall provide the oft-annoying commentary, there are a plethora of play modes (including season, franchise, exhibition, practice, and great game), and there are more camera angles than anyone will ever use.



Gannon fades back and waits for one of his formidable teammates (Brown, Ritchie, Williams, or some guy named Rice) to get open.

Furthermore, defending against pass plays was basically hit-or-miss on both sides of the ball. Quite often, I'd convert simple crossing patterns into 80-yard touchdowns, with 75 of those yards coming after the catch. The same held true when I was on defense, too. This became increasingly frustrating because I lost well-played games this way.

This rather bizarre AI problem is the reason why playing against human opponents was so much more fun. People are more likely than the computer to play the game the way it is meant to be played. And thanks to the game's online play capabilities, finding a human opponent is—in theory—always possible. The thing is, though, playing *Madden* online is difficult because the games last so long. Quite often online opponents just bailed in the middle of a game, and that's frustrating. At least when someone is sitting next to you, you can browbeat him into continuing a losing effort.

Madden 2002 is easily the best football game that you can play on a PC.

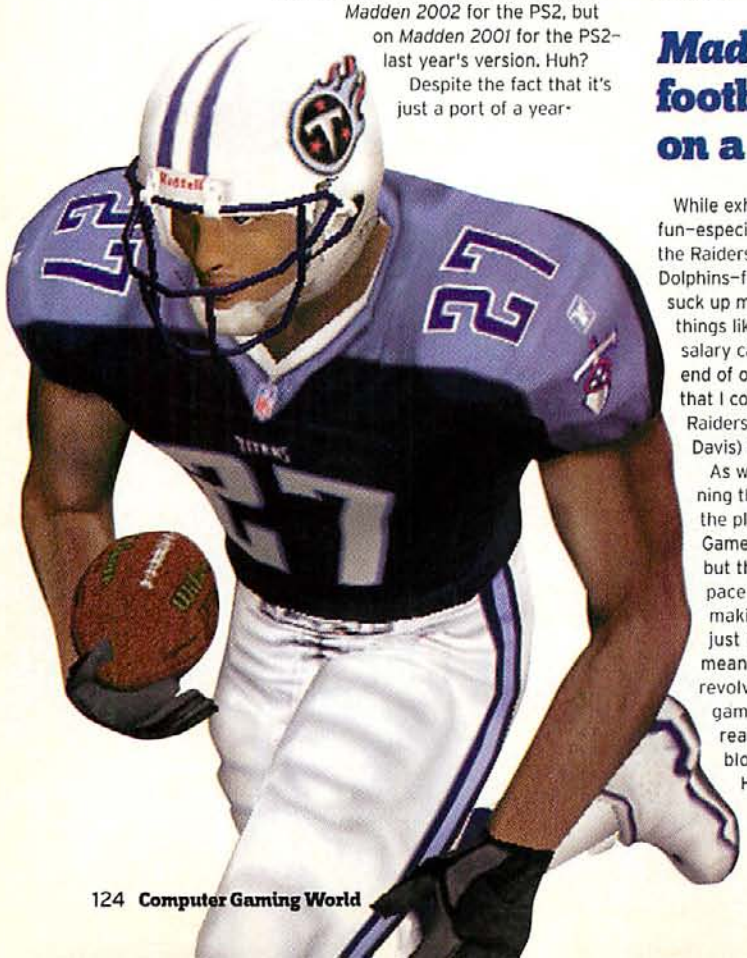
While exhibition games are tons of fun—especially when I was captaining the Raiders against my best friend's Dolphins—franchise mode seemed to suck up more time than any other. With things like trade deadlines, drafts, and salary caps to worry about, by the end of one season I was confident that I could take control of the Raiders when the devil incarnate (Al Davis) finally keels over.

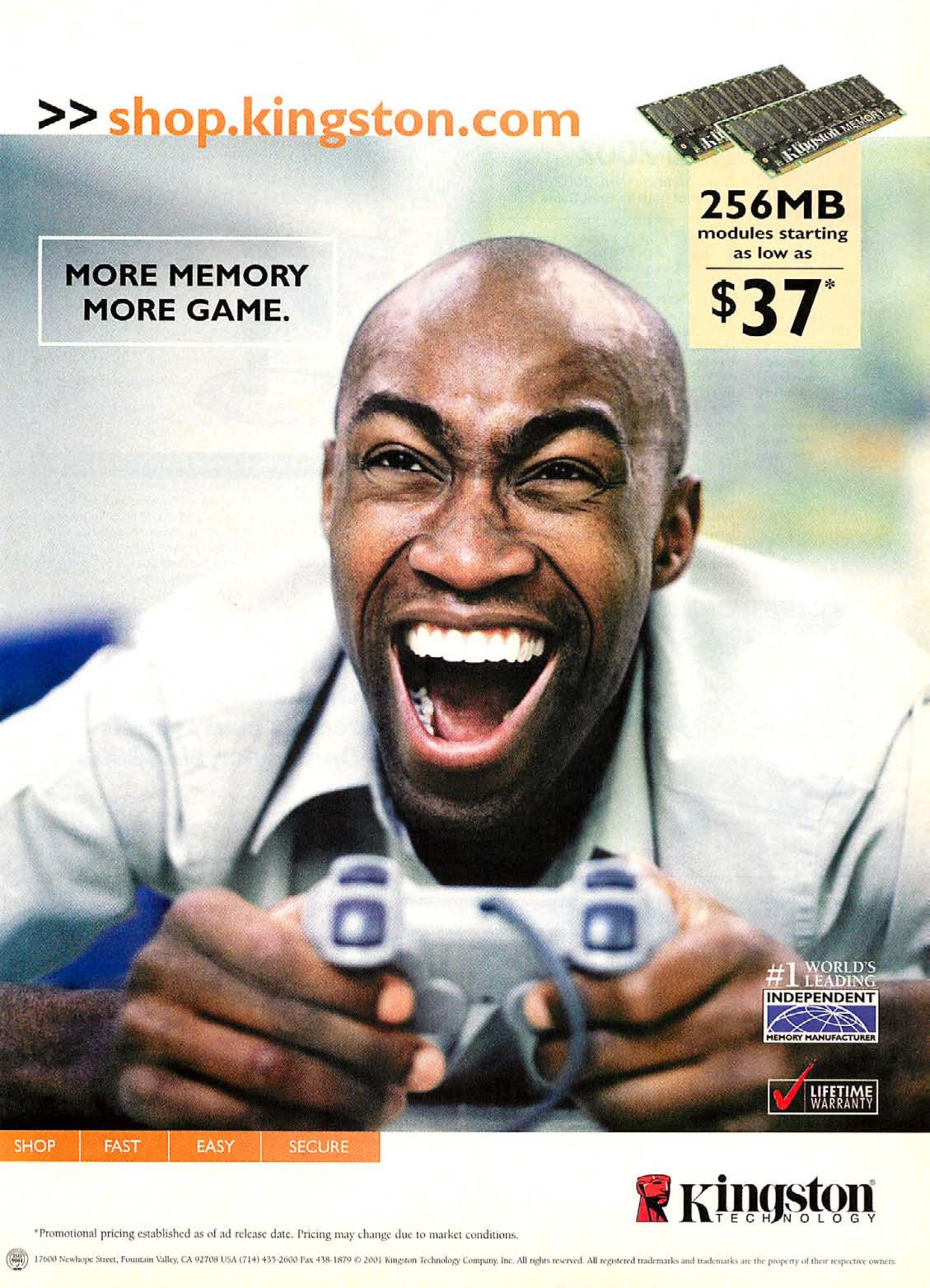
As with all *Madden* games, running the ball is difficult. Controlling the players with a Microsoft GamePad USB was easy enough, but the game moved at a slower pace than I like. In other words, making Barry Sanders-like cuts just isn't going to happen. This meant that all of my matchups revolved around the passing game. While this is in no way realistic, it made for a more blown-open and fun game. Hardcore sport sim fans should consider themselves warned, though.

I should point out that, in spite of *Madden 2002*'s shortcomings, I'm still playing the game nearly every day. And when friends come over, it's one of the first games that we crank up. This says two things: 1) Madden 2002 is a really fun football game, and 2) for PC gamers, it's the only show in town.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Beggars really can't be choosers, can they?





*Promotional pricing established as of ad release date. Pricing may change due to market conditions.

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NHL 2002

Fact or fantasy—*NHL 2002* is a bit of both **By Gord Goble**

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports**
DEVELOPER: **EA Sports**
URL: **www.easports.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 300, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER: **2-12 players on up to 8 computers via LAN, Internet**
PRICE: **$39.99**

EA Sports achieved its goal of total PC hockey domination a few years back and has fought to appease both the button-mashing action fan and the hardcore simulation enthusiast ever since. The latest iteration of its vaunted *NHL* franchise, *NHL 2002*, moves even further toward those extremes. Though EA has incorporated hidden cheats and other "arcade" amenities, it has also smartly taken *NHL*'s core gameplay to a more subdued, realistic level and in the process addressed some—but not all—of the game's trouble spots.

It starts with an uncharacteristically bland introductory sequence, so series veterans will quickly realize this is a different *NHL*. Players move more humanly now, shuffling the puck from skate to stick, turning their little heads to follow the action, and intelligently clogging the defensive slot to force pinpoint passing. Breakaway, rebound, and manual deke goals are rightfully more frequent, shot and final score totals more realistic, and difficulty levels far less reliant on supersonic speed and ludicrously bouncy body checks.

Mark Recchi gives flying lessons to a suddenly airborne Belarus counterpart.

The game no longer restricts any of its 24 Create a Player attributes and for the first time offers optional unlockable power-ups and taunting celebratory animations for those who complete preset sequences of gameplay tasks. The single-click give-and-go is replaced by a nifty and authentic aerial "saucer" flip pass, and fatigue is now so prominent that perfectly executed manual line changes are essential. New breakaway and highlight cameras are unfortunately as impractical and repetitive as they are dramatic.

Most serious *NHL* players will continue to prefer wide-angle camera perspectives.

NHL 2002 sounds different, too. Newly recruited Canadian broadcaster Don Taylor pairs with returning play-by-play man Jim Hughson, and together they to deliver a torrent of seemingly impromptu two-way dialogue. Peppered with remarks such as "He's hitting like some kind of hitting machine that rose up and overpowered his mad scientist creator," Taylor's banter can be juvenile but more often is both funny and remarkably perceptive.

Sadly, some of *NHL*'s past indiscretions crop up here. Goaltenders in particular remain a flaky bunch, stopping everything in sight during some flurries and morphing into zombie-like sieves the next. Fighting and post-game star selections are as nonsensical as ever, and none of the game's plentiful user options seems to change the fact that AI teams sometimes win thanks to predetermined programming and fluke goals rather than superior play. Losing 1-0 after dominating the shot clock 70-11 and the offensive zone by a 3-1 ratio just ain't hockey.

"He's hitting like some kind of hitting machine that rose up and overpowered his mad scientist creator." –Don Taylor, *NHL 2002*

While *NHL 2002* is in many ways the most downright enjoyable and realistic version to date, it once again has not fully exorcised its demons and does not offer distinct arcade and simulation modes. Some may therefore feel disenchanted, but most of us will eat it up and ask for seconds.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

While progress has been made toward pleasing both the newbies and the hardcore gamers, *NHL*'s perennial weak points continue to disappoint.

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UNITED WAY

The Mystery of the Druids

Who were they? And what were they doing? By Robert Coffey

And, oh, how they danced, the little druids . . .

PUBLISHER: CDV Software Entertainment USA
DEVELOPER: House of Tales URL: www.cdv.de
ESRB RATING: Teen; animated blood, violence, cannibalism

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None PRICE: $40

Here's a sample of *Druids* gameplay: As a Scotland Yard detective investigating a series of ritual murders, you need to talk to a professor at Oxford's anthropology museum. But it's closed. You try to call from a phone booth, but you don't have any money. So you talk to a homeless guy, take his empty bottle, go back to Scotland Yard where no one will let you use a phone or loan you change. You wipe the bottles in the police lab clean, con the lab guy into giving you a cup full of potentially fatal pure medical alcohol, pass out for 20 minutes, dust the bottles with fingerprint powder to find the one with the alcohol, pour alcohol into the beggar's bottle, add apple juice, return to the museum and poison the homeless guy—I mean, give him the bottle and tell him it's "apple schnapps"—then steal his few coins when he slips into a coma so you can call the professor from the booth containing what is apparently the only working phone in all of England. It rivals the infamous "cat moustache" puzzle of *Gabriel Knight 3* in its convoluted, illogical stupidity.

Don't buy this game—don't even look at it.

And the game gets worse. Horrible character models, incongruous music, a godawful maze, bad cut-scenes with worse voice acting, *five* puzzles requiring you to lure someone away from somewhere, a crappy interface, virtually invisible items you have to click on, and—the biggest innovation—real-time waiting. Ever wonder how long it took a medieval blacksmith to make a key? You'll know after you kill 10 real-world minutes waiting for the *Druids* smithy to deign to allow you to proceed in the game.

Don't buy this game, don't even look at it—there are some things humankind wasn't meant to see.

The most compelling mystery in *Druids* is how this woman holds down a job with a broken neck and deadly elbows.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆☆

Here's a real mystery for you: Why did they even make this game?

The Legend of the Prophet & the Assassin

Looks good, plays bad By Rob Smolka

PUBLISHER: Dreamcatcher Interactive
DEVELOPER: Arxel Tribe URL: www.dreamcatchergames.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; suggestive themes, violence

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200 MMX, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None PRICE: $19.99

The Legend of the Prophet & the Assassin breaks nearly all the rules that have been established over the years for what makes an adventure game worth playing: The interface is dreadful, the puzzles infuriating, the voice acting comical, and the possibility of sudden death rampant. Its only saving graces are the story's setting and a good portion of the artwork.

Cast as As-Sayf, you are a former Frankish knight who has made a name for himself among the desert people (kind of like a 13th century Lawrence of Arabia). When the ways of war grow wearisome, you decide to hang up your scimitar in search of Jebus, a utopian city founded by the prophet Simon de Lancrois. After three years of searching, you find the city in ruins. Disgusted that you've wasted all this time, you vow to kill de Lancrois. Logical? No, but it's a good excuse to send you romping off through the desert in search of the man.

And here's where things go wrong (and sadly, where the actual game begins). You can look around in any direction while you're standing still, but movement is of the slide-show variety. Interacting with objects requires you to be in a certain slide, so it's easy to overlook items or think they're of no consequence, as many are. Some of the puzzles are logical (combine A with B and use on C), but a majority of them depend on trial-and-error—with death as your frequent reward for failure—and provide little or no clue as to their solution.

This game is like an overweight knight in tarnished armor riding in on a crippled old nag. DreamCatcher Interactive's latest attempt to reinvigorate the wilted adventure genre is just another painful sword thrust to the midsection.

Puzzles look nice enough but too many depend on trial-and-error over reasoning.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆☆

Even at $20 this budget title is overpriced.

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Regardless of distance, a sniper rifle is one of the best ways to shove a bullet into the medulla oblongata.

Red Faction

A brief, bad case of tunnel-vision **By Jason Babler**

PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **Volition**
URL: **www.redfaction.com**
ESRB RATING: **Mature (17+); blood and gore, violence**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 1.02GB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **128MB RAM, 1.12GB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (1-32 players)**
PRICE: **$40**

Apparently there was a secret Action Designer Cabal Meeting where they made the following decree: "All new shooters will have an amazing hook but take less time to finish than watching the entire *Police Academy* franchise." That's why *Max Payne* has "bullet-time" and *Red Faction* lets you tear holes in walls. Both are compelling hooks that make any FPS fan want to boot up and start firing away, yet each of these games can be finished in less than 12 hours.

Sure, 12 hours of mind-numbing, pointless gameplay is too much, while 12 hours of amazing cinematic action is perfect. *Red Faction* manages to dig itself firmly into the middle—and for a game that held the possibility of being so much more, that's about as bad as it gets.

The game is fun in spots, but alas, Volition's spotless track record (*Descent*, *Firespace*) has been blemished. If you've been following this game's development, you'll have heard about the Geo-Mod Engine that allows you to blow holes in stuff. Let's run a quick reality check: When their ad copy says "alter and destroy the environment in real-time" and "destroy everything in sight," they really mean "we couldn't come through on our promises" and "we're lying through our teeth."

With its premise of having players imagine different paths to take, it's amazing how linear an experience *Red Faction* was. The Geo-Mod feature isn't put to good use in the game—blowing holes in rock just for the sake of seeing a hole loses its appeal after the first few times. There are only a few places that make you blow up a wall to advance, and let's be honest: That's not ingenious.

Red Faction manages only to dig itself firmly into the middle.

The problem is that *Red Faction* sold itself based on Geo-Mod but wastes the feature for most of the game. Why, for example, don't the huge stalactites hanging in caverns open up the next level? What about having a rockslide cover a bunker so laser cannons don't vaporize you? Or why can't you cause a cave-in to protect yourself from mercs and then blast another hole to escape?

All you ultimately get is the ability to take out a bridge so a tank can fall down into a chasm. The ability to change the flow of lava—promised earlier by Volition—didn't make it in, and that's a shame. In fact, it's easier to ignore the Geo-Mod in

Hop in this jeep to man the gun and then take it for a short spin later on.

Levels get quite huge, like this ship bay. Too bad all you do is shoot guard after guard after guard...

most areas that suggest using it. For example, you can try to outmaneuver snipers on a rock bridge by launching a barrage of missiles to drop a stalactite on them, which might kill one when the bridge falls. Or you can use three sniper bullets in 10 seconds to insure a kill.

So what are the missiles, grenades, and satchel charges good for? Taking out groups of guards, right? Wrong. Apparently, Martian physics dictate that splash damage exists only to hurt you. Guards constantly zigzag erratically, so taking the time to fire a missile is not the best tactic in this game. Sure, you can attach satchel charges to the lesser-armored guards, but if you're that close, why not plant a bullet in his skull? And you'll avoid splash damage to boot.

There are some real gems among the guns. The rail gun can track infrared targets and fire through walls, but its success also hinges on idiotic AI. Guards still stand there while insanely fast bullets punch their way through walls and armor and into their buddies. You can easily clear out an entire room this way, but that doesn't make it fun.

The five vehicles you can drive are also wasted in this game. There's a jeep, a driller that can't drill much, a one-man sub with torpedoes, a flying fighter, and an armored personnel carrier: When the driving happens, it's fun but oh-so-brief.

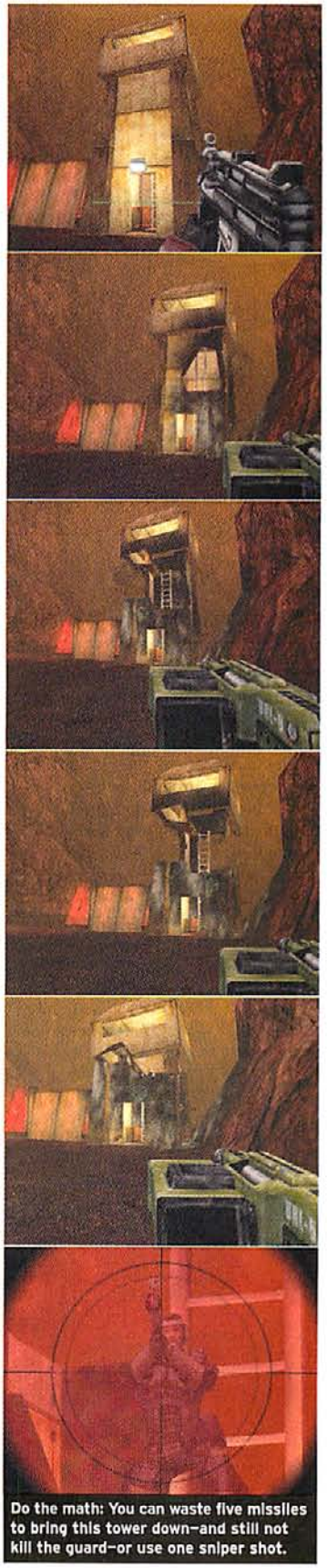
Gameplay isn't going to set any new standards, either. There are two small stealth missions that require you to don a lab coat and go undetected, but again, nothing new. Brainless puzzles, guard clones, and insanely easy bosses make it all anticlimactic, standard shooter fare with little to distinguish it.

There were even clipping problems that forced me to reload levels when the boss I was fighting got stuck in a wall. And although the game has some of the best music I've heard, the spoken words rarely went with the action or the speaker.

If you're like me, a mediocre review of an FPS won't dissuade you from picking it up—there aren't enough shooters out there. *Red Faction* has its moments, but when the dust has settled, you'll wish it had delivered the ride it promised.

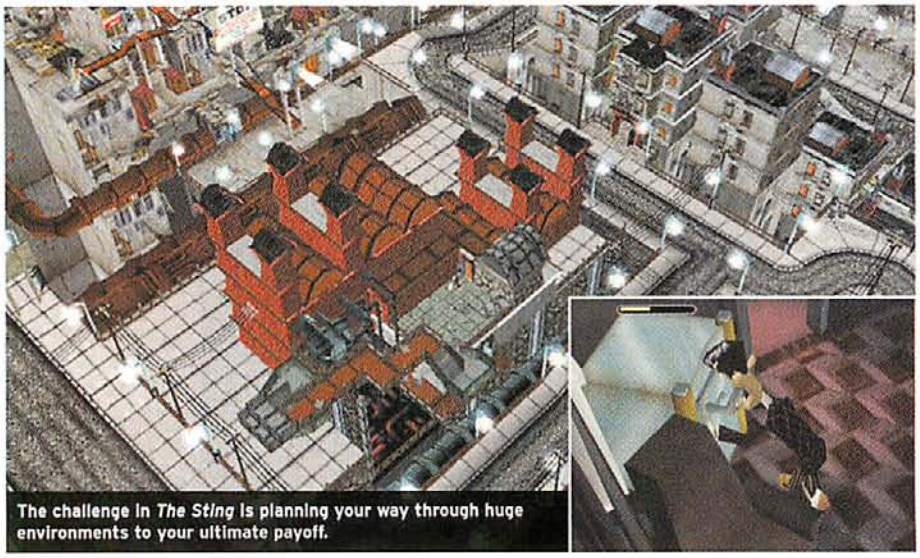
VERDICT ★★★☆☆

The amazing potential of this incredibly brief game was overhyped, overshadowing a few good spots.



Do the math: You can waste five missiles to bring this tower down—and still not kill the guard—or use one sniper shot.

Brainless puzzles, guard clones, and easy bosses make the game anti-climactic.



The challenge in *The Sting* is planning your way through huge environments to your ultimate payoff.

The Sting

A European import that's a real entertainer **By Charles Ardai**

PUBLISHER: JoWooD Productions DEVELOPER: neoSoftware URL: www.thestingthegame.com ESRB RATING: Everyone

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None PRICE: $29.99

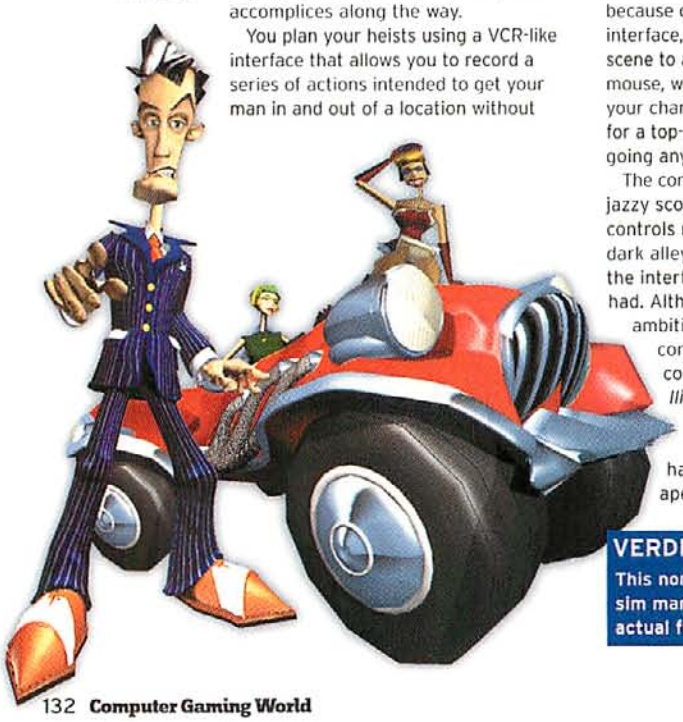
The Sting is a quirky, below-the-radar European import that's full of surprises—the first being that it has nothing to do with the classic movie of the same name, and the second being that it's quite good.

You play an aspiring burglar who starts by robbing the neighborhood gas station, using only a crowbar to jimmy a window and a cash register. Over the course of the game, you work your way up to a complex raid on the headquarters of the Ministry of Light, picking up tools, vehicles, and accomplices along the way.

You plan your heists using a VCR-like interface that allows you to record a series of actions intended to get your man in and out of a location without tripping alarms, catching the eye of the cop on the beat, or otherwise landing in hot water. When you're happy with your recorded plan, you press Play to see if it works. If not, you try again.

The heists are fun, in a minor sort of way—they're basically spatial/timing puzzles of the sort you might find in a game like *Lemmings* or *The Incredible Machine*. But the real fun of *The Sting* comes from the portion of the game in which you walk around the city casing joints and chatting up your allies. This is shockingly enjoyable, largely because of the game's outstanding 3D interface, which allows you to rotate the scene to any angle with a twitch of the mouse, while zooming in to watch over your character's shoulder, zooming out for a top-down god's-eye perspective, or going anywhere in between.

The combination of appealing graphics, jazzy score, and smooth, super-intuitive controls makes just walking down a dark alley exhilarating. Frankly, this is the interface *Black & White* wishes it had. Although *The Sting* is far less ambitious and impressive—comparing the two would be like comparing a limerick to *The Iliad*—I have to say I had more fun moving my silly little burglar around than I ever had controlling Mr. Molyneux's apes, cows, and tigers.



VERDICT ★★★☆☆

This none-too-ambitious burglar sim manages to surprise you with actual fun.

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Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less Edited by Thierry Nguyen

RED FACTION

Lead the revolution with this guide to heavy weapons By Jason Babler

Most of the explosives in *Red Faction* don't do as much damage as you'd think they would—splash damage is usually nonexistent, and blowing holes in rock and walls generally isn't worth the time. But instead of stockpiling your larger weapons, let's put them to good use in specific circumstances.

Grenade

To use this weapon effectively, you need to be precise when you aim. Just lobbing one of these into a crowd of guards isn't going to take out more than one or two at a time. Instead, save up your grenades, use the primary trigger that explodes it on contact, and with a well-placed throw take out automatic sentry guns and those annoying ceiling turrets. Here's one instance when getting close enough to the target is good enough. Strafe, throw, and get the hell out of the way.

Remote Mining Charge

Oh boy, these are fun! Stick one on a guard, watch him run away screaming his head off, and then detonate it. Too bad these things usually won't take out a guard even if you booby-trap an entrance. You're better off keeping grenades so you can blow up a wall or use them as a last line of defense.

Tactical Rocket Launcher

Get ready for a love-hate relationship with this puppy. Sure, it can see through walls and lets you blow up things in a big way, but it's frustrating to use. Using the primary fire to shoot missiles at a guard is wasteful—the bad guys zip around almost constantly, so you're sure to miss. The rocket launcher's strength is in its secondary fire, if you have the patience and your strafing fingers are in shape. Set your targeting reticule on a guard and hold it down. After an audible warning, the reticule turns red, turning the missile you fire into a heat-seeker. You don't have much leeway with this weapon, but it can be put to good use in certain situations.

Fusion Rocket Launcher

Red Faction's BFG is the Fusion Rocket Launcher. When you arm yourself with this thing, you'll know it. Save it for the larger bosses (ammo is incredibly scarce); or in a pinch you can take out a large group of mercs.

INSIDE

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, WARLORD EDITION
Learn all about the units and changes to the original game. **PAGE 134**

TIPS
Dirty Tricks and tips for the *Diablo II* expansion and *Arcanum*, plus Easter eggs and cheats. **PAGE 138**

EVERQUEST
For those readers who just got the game, a complete reprint of our Newbie Guide. **PAGE 140**

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS
How to build a unique fleet that rises to the challenge every time. **PAGE 146**

SHOGUN: WARLORD EDITION

Many of the additions in the *Shogun* expansion are obvious: the new campaign, the new battles, and the new units, for instance. Yet there are so many changes to the overall playing strategy that merely covering the new stuff isn't enough. ••• Many of the changes aren't well documented, such as those in retraining or using bribery. Here's a rundown of what's different and how to cope with it. Also, you'll learn how to be the most dominant warlord when playing online.

For cheap scouting, hide Yari Ashigaru in forests.

With the new morale model, this message isn't quite so devastating.

Send Your Samurai Back to School

Retraining is one of the most important modifications to the campaign game in *Shogun*, but you'd never know this from reading the manual or playing the game.

By using retraining you can streamline your army, replenishing decimated units without diluting their hard-won honor with new recruits. When you right-click on a unit to bring up its detailed information, you'll notice a new piece of information, Cost of Retraining. This is the amount of *koku* you'll spend to bring a unit up to full strength. You can do this in any province where you can build that type of unit; for instance, you can only retrain archers in a province with an archery dojo.

You can also retrain units to give them bonuses from a particular province, free of cost and regardless of the type of dojo present. For example, if the province has an inherent bonus (such as Shinano's cavalry bonus), or if you have things such as a Swordsmith, an Armory, a Famous or Legendary Dojo, or a Drill Dojo, then retraining a unit will give it the appropriate bonus of armor, weapons, honor, or morale.

The retraining interface isn't exactly intuitive. Click on the province's Train Units button to bring up the Unit Training window. Next, click on the map to choose the stack with the unit you want to retrain. Then click on the specific unit in the window at the bottom of the screen and drag it into the first available slot in the Unit Training window. Next season the unit will be new, improved, and waiting in the castle.

Crazy About *Koku*

Emissaries now have the ability to spend *koku* to bribe an enemy general (and the units under his command) to join your side.

Bribery is an excellent tool when used deep in a clan's territory, and it can be devastating when used in the lightly guarded provinces away from a defended border. Once you bribe the army, you can rampage through the enemy's rich farmlands and mines.

However, it takes a turn *after* accepting the bribe before the enemy stack comes under your control, so you won't always be able to just seize the province and avoid combat; if your opponent has adjacent armies, he'll likely move them into the province with the newly bribed general before his stack comes under your control and you can claim the province. When your turn then comes around, *Shogun* proceeds as if you'd just moved an army in to attack the province. This means bribery is rarely effective as a bloodless end run around combat in hotly contested areas. If you were planning on simply bribing your way around a well-guarded river province, think again. Besides, the most tempting candidates for bribery are probably commanded by higher-honor *taishos*, who are more difficult to bribe. Finally, this isn't a cost-effective way to get new units, as the *koku* you'll spend on a bribe will be greater than the cost of simply training the same number of units.

However, bribery is an excellent tool when used deep in a clan's territory, and it can be devastating when used in the lightly guarded provinces away from a defended border. Once you've accumulated about 20,000 spare *koku*, send your emissaries into the far areas of a clan's territory to find someplace to strike. Ideally, you'll find a stack of units near a few rich or important provinces. Scout the area to make sure there are no large reinforcements nearby. After you bribe the army (it might take a few attempts), you can rampage through the enemy's rich farmlands and mines. Your opponent will divert troops from his borders to chase down the rampaging traitor, and his income will plummet as you dismantle his improved farmlands and mines with the handy new Destroy Selected Building button. Alternatively, if you think you can hold out long enough, capture a province with a dojo, train units, and open a second front.

Not Your Father's Jidai Warriors

The *Warlord Edition* of *Shogun* adds three new units to the default Sengoku Jidai campaign. The Naginata Cavalry, who have the same attack value as Warrior Monks, are better at head-to-head melee than the Yari and Heavy Cavalry, which are better suited to scouting, flank attacks, and chasing down fleeing enemies. But Naginata Cavalry are slower than other mounted troops and not nearly as effective at charging. In battle, use them as a faster version of the No-Dachi to break enemy lines, or run down those pesky missile units set to skirmish. (Note

Exploit these undocumented features to drive your enemies away like whipped dogs By Tom Chick

Retraining units returns them to full strength, keeps their honor high, and arms them better.

Naginata Cavalry are great for running down isolated reinforcements while they're crossing the map.

Position hidden Battlefield Ninja on either side and lure the enemy into a killing zone.

that the No-Dachi attack value has been increased in the *Warlord Edition*, making them the most effective offensive melee units other than the Kensai and Battlefield Ninja.)

The Battlefield Ninja have superlative attack values and can move almost as fast as cavalry, but they come in small packages of 12 men. Their missile attacks are like short-range bows that do slightly more damage than arrows. But they're unique for their stealth ability. Note that when they're moving, Battlefield Ninja are visible if they're within any enemy unit's sighting range. However, they don't display a standard, and they won't show up on the minimap. In multiplayer games, this means your opponent won't see them unless they have the camera aimed in the right direction. Therefore, if you sneak a unit of Battlefield Ninja behind an enemy formation, they'll probably go undetected while moving and (if your opponent isn't alert) while attacking. Battlefield Ninja are ideal for ambushes when you're defending. Move them into position before the attacker arrives. Once his main force has moved past their concealed position, the ninja can move in and strike his unsuspecting rear-echelon units.

Use bribery in isolated provinces away from military buildups.

The Kensai, or Sword Saint, is a controversial unit because it takes *Shogun* even further into the realm of fantasy than the pajama-clad ninja. The Kensai is expensive and vulnerable, but he's also fast and powerful. It's tempting to use him to lead pursuing enemies away from their ranks, and then turn on them when they're alone. But resist the temptation to run your Kensai around willy-nilly, as he's most vulnerable when his fatigue rises. Also, a lone Kensai is a tempting target, since he's vulnerable to being mobbed. Instead, use him with your other units as a reinforcement. In multiplayer battles, your opponent might not notice your Kensai has joined a clash until it's too late.

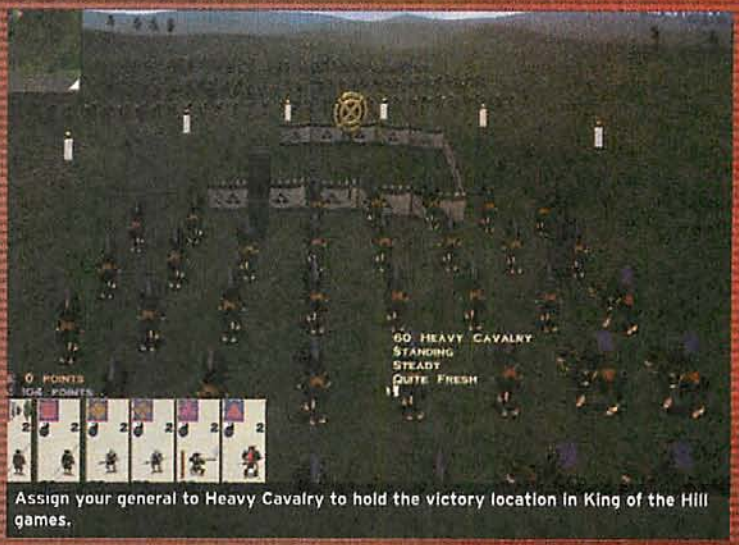
Your Kensai work best with a little help from their friends.

Warlord-a-Warlord

Although most players on EA's servers are still playing Last Man Standing, the new multiplayer options give *Shogun* considerable variety and encourage new army combos. For instance, in Halve the Enemy games, you'll want to inflict casualties with impunity by using missile units. Cavalry Archers are perfect for Halve the Enemy because you can harry your opponent's slower units from long range, weakening them until you're ready to close. No-Dachi are good for their hard-hitting melee ability, but you should max out their armor levels to increase their survival.

King of the Hill games are all about getting your general to the scoring area (the "hill") and holding it. You'll want your general in a fast-moving unit that can take a beating, so it's a given that he'll be riding with Heavy Cavalry. Make sure you have high defense units like Naginata to hold their ground; beef up their armor even more so they last longer. The new Naginata Cavalry are perfect for King of the Hill because they can interdict your opponent's support units as they work their way to the scoring area. They can also patrol for incoming reinforcements as units regenerate and enter from the map edge.

Ninja are *de rigueur* in Assassinate the General games. Now that generals blink as white dots on the minimap, you won't have any trouble locating them once you find the enemy army. Put your own general in a cavalry unit to keep the unit out of trouble. Alternatively, put him in an armored Naginata unit to draw your opponent in to attack you. Place Battlefield Ninja in front of your flanks, and move slightly backward as the enemy approaches. Assuming their general isn't stashed on some far corner of



Assign your general to Heavy Cavalry to hold the victory location in King of the Hill games.

the map, this will leave your ninja in perfect striking position.

Capture the Honjin games are best with more than two players. Unlike any other multiplayer games, Capture the Honjin matches are about reconnaissance and movement. Bring along cavalry to scout enemy movements. Be on the lookout for two players fighting (and thus weakening) each other. Note when someone has left a honjin poorly defended. If you know where your opponent is, you won't have to split your army up to defend the honjin you've already captured. Concealed Battlefield Ninja are good for keeping an eye on important areas of the map, but they're expensive. If the map has enough forests, it's more cost effective to buy cheap disposable troops (Yari Ashigaru with zero honor) and conceal them in the trees. In the later stages of a match, these can then be used to occupy honjin without having to split up your army.

Note that the morale model has changed in the expansion. All units have increased morale so they're less likely to rout. This means you'll see more casualties as more units fight to the death. It also means Ashigaru units are more useful since they don't tend to run away as easily. Conversely, Warrior Monks aren't as effective at intimidation, and there's less payoff for executing morale-shattering flank and rear attacks, or killing generals. Players who prefer the older morale model can visit www.totalwar.org and download a small program called stats10.bat to toggle between the original morale values and the *Warlord Edition*'s revised values.

UNIT	WALK SPEED	RUN SPEED	MELEE ATTACK	DEFENSE	ARMOR	MORALE	COST (HONOR2)	MISSILE RANGE	MISSILE ACCURACY	MISSILE POWER
YARI ASHIGARU	7	12	-1	-1	2	-4	100	N/A	N/A	N/A
YARI SAMURAI	6	10	0	2	2	2	200	N/A	N/A	N/A
WARRIOR MONKS	7	12	5	2	1	8	500	N/A	N/A	N/A
NAGINATA	4	8	0	6	5	4	425	N/A	N/A	N/A
NO-DACHI	7	12	6	-2	1	8	300	N/A	N/A	N/A
SAMURAI ARCHERS	6	10	0	-1	1	0	300	5000	0.6	0.5
ARQUEBUSIERS	7	12	-6	-3	2	-4	100	4000	0.07	16.0
MUSKETEERS	7	12	-6	-3	2	-4	175	5000	0.12	16.0
CAVALRY ARCHERS	8	20	1	2	3	0	450	5000	0.4	0.5
YARI CAVALRY	10	24	2	3	3	2	475	N/A	N/A	N/A
HEAVY CAVALRY	8	20	2	6	5	4	600	N/A	N/A	N/A
NAGINATA CAVALRY	8	16	5	2	4	8	450	N/A	N/A	N/A
BATTLEFIELD NINJA	8	18	8	4	4	8	600	1200	0.5	1.0
KENSAI	10	16	18	2	8	8	600	N/A	N/A	N/A
MONGOL LIGHT CAVALRY	10	26	2	2	4	4	500	5000	0.4	0.5
MONGOL HEAVY CAVALRY	10	20	4	4	5	8	600	N/A	N/A	N/A
KOREAN SKIRMISHERS	7	12	0	0	5	0	375	1500	0.15	2.0
KOREAN SPEARMEN	6	10	0	1	2	-1	200	N/A	N/A	N/A
KOREAN GUARDSMEN	5	8	2	4	4	0	350	N/A	N/A	N/A
THUNDER BOMBERS	8	10	-6	-3	2	4	400	1300	0.03	6.0
ASHIGARU CROSSBOWMEN	7	12	-6	-3	1	-5	100	4000	0.15	3.0

Source: Troopstats.txt and Projectiles.txt files from Warlord Expansion v1.00

Dirtiest Trick o' the Month

Aye-yi-yi! Just when we finally started seeing some variety in your Dirty Tricks, you're back to boring us with the same *Red Alert 2/Counter-Strike/Team Fortress Classic* tricks over and over again. Yeesh! This month, the Dirtiest Trick of the Month (the only one that wasn't a rehash of every dirty trick from those three games) came from the oldest MMORPG out there: *Ultima Online*.

We know you're playing games other than these. We know you're being sneaky out there in plenty of other games. Use that sneakiness to score a free copy of *Arcanum* next month. C'mon, people! We don't want to read about more smoke grenades and bomb planting in *CS*. Please.

Arcane Thievery

I have some tips for thieving in *Arcanum*:

1. The best background for a magic thief is "sold your soul." For a technologist thief, the best background is "sickly." The technologist thief's best schematics are Pure Ore, Balanced Sword, and then anything else you want (I suggest Explosives for extra firepower). The best spells for a magic thief are Disarm, Unlocking Cantrip, Charm, Stun, and Strength of Earth. The best overall race is Elf.

2. Get a lot of experience for improving these different spells or schematics. The higher the level, the easier thieving becomes. The risk of getting killed or injured by the shopkeeper you were stealing from is so high that it's good to take the time to build up all that experience.

3. Save before you steal *anything* because the victim might find out and kill you suddenly.

Well that's all I have for now. Try them out... they work and could get you a lot of gold.

Nate

Still Falling Out

In issues #203 and #204 you gave great tips for *Fallout Tactics*! (Kudos to Chris and Raphael.) However, I have discovered a few tricks of my own for surviving in the hostile wastelands.

1. **Less is more:** One problem that plagues many gamers is managing multiple soldiers. Often, soldiers stray from positions and engage suicidal numbers of enemies. The solution? Simple: Recruit only the minimum number of soldiers needed for a mission. A few heavily armed, specialized soldiers are more efficient than a whole squad of wildly firing grunts.

2. **Double the snipers, double the fun:** When building a squad, most players recruit a heavy weapons expert, a medic, a sniper, and a few all-purpose grunts. But if you want a true death squad, recruit a second (or even third) sniper. If outfitted with the latest weapons and armor, two snipers can mow down clusters of enemies.

3. **"V" for Victory:** When engaging enemies, an inverted "V" formation can yield great results. The tip of the "V" should be a heavily armored assaulter with an assault rifle or minigun. Behind and to the sides of this assaulter should be two snipers. With this formation, the snipers can pick at the enemy from a distance, while the assaulter soaks damage and keeps the enemies from charging in close.

4. **Sweep a room:** When opening a door, employ the same "V" formation. Position the assaulter directly in front of the door, with the snipers on either side of him. When the door is opened, have the assaulter engage targets directly in front and direct the snipers to move slightly ahead of the assaulter. Then, have the snipers shoot at opposite sides of the interior of the house. This allows you to cover the whole interior of a house through just a door frame.

5. **Minimize the target:** Surprisingly, many players fail to utilize crouching and cover. If a superior enemy force attacks your soldiers, direct them to lie down and move behind a barrel or other feature. If the soldier is close to the edge of the feature, they can trade fire with the enemy while being shielded from most fire.

6. **Watch the time:** When you ignore the time while traveling to a mission, you give a big advantage to the enemy. If you're assaulting a base, start just before dawn so you can take out heavily armed guards in the dark (when you can sneak better and enemies can't aim as well). When daylight breaks, you can mop up remaining enemies in the better light conditions. But if you're defending a base, start the mission just after light has broken, so enemies will not be able to use the cover of darkness to sneak into the base.

7. **Reload on the run:** Right before and after you engage an enemy, hit the Reload button. If you remember to do this, and you waste much less time reloading during combat (especially important when playing in ITB or STB modes).

Peter Sherman

WINNING TRICK

One thing I loved about *Ultima Online* was the ability to terrorize large groups of players with my thief. When I ran across a large guild in town, I would select a victim with a high-value weapon as my target. Then I would steal said item and run offscreen. This would normally send the guild into a frenzy of spellcasting trying to reveal me. After about two minutes, I would reveal myself and run through the guild. This would draw a lot of attention toward me, and normally three or four characters would attack me. I'd let the guild chase after me a little bit, and then go log off at a nearby inn. (Key point: They don't see me log out.) After this was done, I would log my other thief character in and run back through the guild. This would elicit the same reaction most of the time, and when my "innocent" thief got attacked, the guards would then do all the killing for me. In the ensuing chaos, I'd loot most of the players' magical items and reagents. Great for making money in a pinch! Enjoy! *–Michael Gunnett*

And with that, Michael snags* Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising. *Way to pull the ol' switcheroo there. Next time, a new game. Please. Work with us here.

Lording Over *Diablo II: LOD*

A minor correction to your *Diablo II: Lords of Destruction* guide: In the battle at Arreat Summit, you *can't* portal out during the battle. Any portals open before the battle starts will be closed when battle begins. Opening a portal will end the battle immediately, but you'll have to start over.

In single-player you must do exactly as it says and defeat them in a single battle. In multiplayer there is a loophole, though the battle will continue so long as anyone is on the plateau. Open a portal (ideally two) *before* entering the summit–because the portal is not on the summit, it won't be closed. If you die you are resurrected in town right where the portals emerge. Step through one, reopen it if necessary, and step through to the summit to rejoin the battle in progress. Also, because you can't leave the plateau, it's a good idea to drop extra potions on the ground before the battle starts. Scooping them off the ground is a lot easier than getting them out of inventory.

Loren Pechtel

Easter Eggs:

GAME: EVERQUEST: SCARS OF VELIOUS

Are you willing to see an *EverQuest* programmer's response to dorks constantly searching for more "phat lewt"? If you have the *Scars of Velious* expansion and a character of sufficient level to enter the Plane of Growth in Velious, and you are willing to risk your "life," then keep reading:

First, go to the Plane of Growth and seek out Prince Thirneg (if you run into Lithiniath at the Plane of Mischief, she will suggest finding Thirneg).

Target him, and use the /hail command. He'll respond by saying, "Salutations, [insert your name and race here]! I am the Prince of the Tunarean Court! What brings you to this most sacred of all Tunare's blessed creations?"

Now, take a deep breath, and answer him by saying, "I have come here for Phat Lewts."

Just be careful when you say that. Don't say we didn't warn you.

DVD: SNATCH

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment put a lot of Easter eggs on their release of *Snatch*. Here's a guide to all of them.

Insert the first disc and go to Audio Setup on the main menu. Highlight the Play Movie button, and then press the up arrow on your remote twice. This should highlight a musical note icon. Press Enter to access the screen with ring tone setup, so you can set your cell phone to the same melody that Doug the Head is using.

The rest of the Easter eggs are on the second disc. Highlight the right arrow key on the screen, and then press the up arrow, followed by the right arrow key. This should highlight an exclamation mark on the screen, and hitting Enter gets you to a new section. After answering the question "Are you easily offended?" you'll be treated to a 90-second montage of gunplay and swearing clips from the film, either uncensored or bleeped-out.

Now, go back to the main menu and use the right arrow on the screen, which takes you to the second page of the main menu. Here, press the up arrow key, followed by the left arrow key to highlight a 1 on the screen. After pressing Enter, you will have the chance to see a 70-second montage of some of the best quotes from the movie.

There's more to be found in the Filmographies section. Go there and select Guy Ritchie's filmography; then press up and left to highlight another 1, which takes you to more interview footage with the director.

In Brad Pitt's filmography, hit the up and right arrow buttons to highlight another 1, which will take you to some additional interview footage with Ritchie, talking about the actor.

In Vinnie Jones' filmography, hit the up button twice, and you'll get to see Ritchie talking about working with the lovable brute.

Cheats

SPIDER-MAN

Type any of these codes in under Cheat Codes after going to the Special menu.

Unlock everything .....LEANEST
Invulnerability .....ADMNTIUM
Unlimited webbing.....GLANDS
Unlock all characters in gallery .....RGSGLLRY
Unlock all levels.....MME WEB
Unlock all comic books.....FANBOY

These codes will unlock the various costumes:
Amazing Bagman.....KICK ME
Ben Reilly.....CLUBNOIR
Captain Universe .....TRISNTNL
Peter Parker.....MRWATSON
Quick Change Spidey .....SM LVIII
Scarlet Spider .....XILRTRNS
SpiderMan 2099 .....MIGUELOH
Spiderman Unlimited ....SYNOPTIC
Symbiote .....SECRTWAR

EVERQUEST

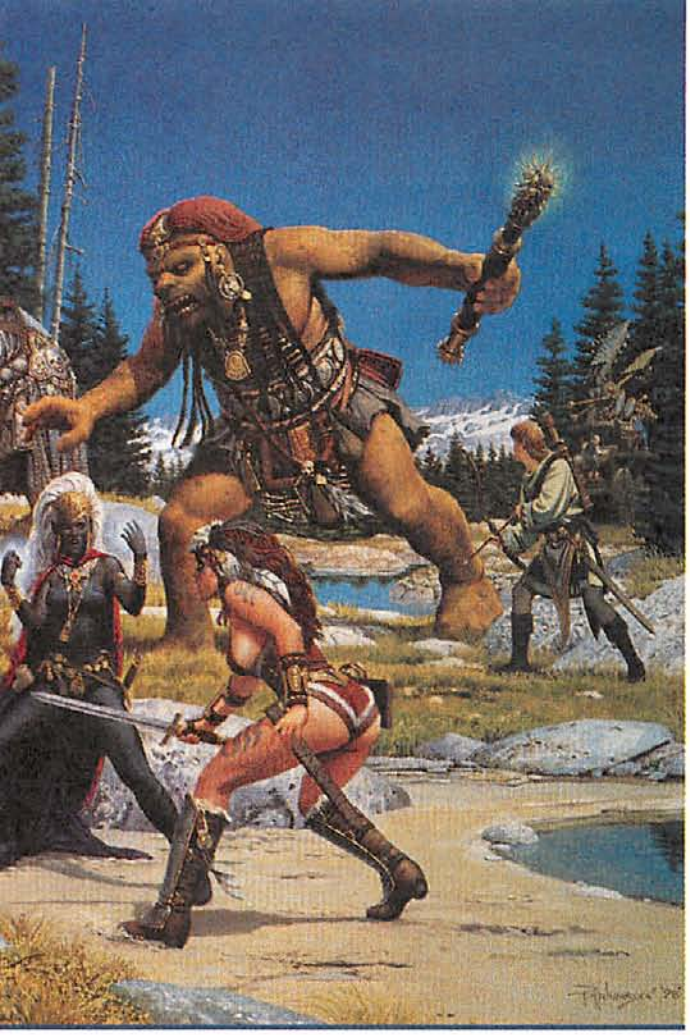
If you're about to take the plunge, get your bearings here By Mark Asher

Smoke 'em if you got 'em, soldiers. No, scratch that. The Wizard General has said they're bad for your health—lowers your hit points or something like that. So you're here because you want to be a hero in the world of Norrath? Get in line. You may think it's easy slapping on a scabbard and helmet and going out to slay rats and snakes, but it ain't. You're green and you don't even know the business end of a rusty longsword yet. That's okay, though. We'll get you shipshape in no time. Before you know it, you'll be killing giant wasps, and then Orcs, and then someday, if you work hard and keep your wits about you, maybe even a ghoul or two. Just follow these instructions, and you'll zoom from level 1 to 10 in no time.

Picking a Character

EverQuest is a game that requires an enormous amount of time to play if you intend to advance your character to the higher levels. As such, it's doubly, nay, triply important that you choose your character wisely. There are really just two types of characters: casters and tanks. The casters primarily attack or help out in battle by casting offensive,

TIP: You get a nice experience point boost for every few belts (or shoulder pads) you give Canloe, and to boot he gives you some money and a piece of armor.



defensive, and healing spells. The tanks are the melee characters that fight and soak up damage for the group.

There are some class types that do a little of both, such as Druids, Shamans, Paladins, Shadow Knights, and others, but as you reach the high levels, you'll find that you're really either a caster or a tank. The hybrid classes that are better casters, like the Druids, end up being quite ineffective in melee, whereas the hybrid classes that are better fighters–like Rangers–are poor spellcasters in the heat of battle.

So, keep that in mind when you select a character. If you're in for the long haul with *EverQuest*, eventually your character will be either a caster or a tank in battle. Choose a character that will allow you to play in a style you enjoy.

Soloing Versus Grouping

EverQuest has been bashed for being a game that's impossible to play without grouping with other players. First, grouping is fun, so it's worthwhile to look for groups. It's safer, and you'll level up faster if you play in groups. Second, you can solo in *EverQuest*, but admittedly it does get harder and harder as you reach higher and higher levels.

You should also carefully select your character type if you expect to solo quite a bit. There are some that really aren't suited very well for soloing, namely the Wizard, Fighter, and Monk. You're eventually going to be frustrated for a variety of reasons if you pick those classes and play alone most of the time. These really are group characters.

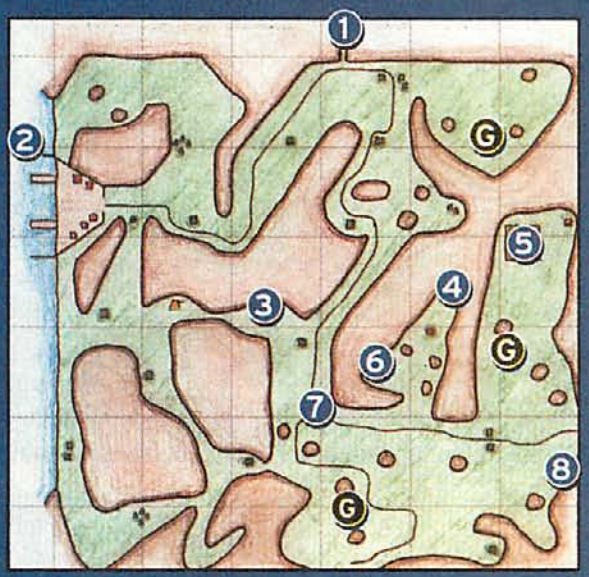
There are some classes that are quite good at soloing, however. Both the Magician and Necromancer classes get pet spells that allow them to summon an elemental or skeleton, respectively. In effect, they create their own small group. The pet is the fighter, staying back to cast spells and then knocking the monster on the noggin with its stave.

The Druid and Shaman classes are also quite handy for soloing. They eventually get a nice combination of spells that allow them to run faster (Spirit of Wolf), cause their opponents to run slower (Snare), and damage their opponent over time. They also have instant damage spells and nice shield spells, and can melee fairly well at the lower levels. The other classes can solo to some extent, but these four are the champs.

EVERQUEST MAPS

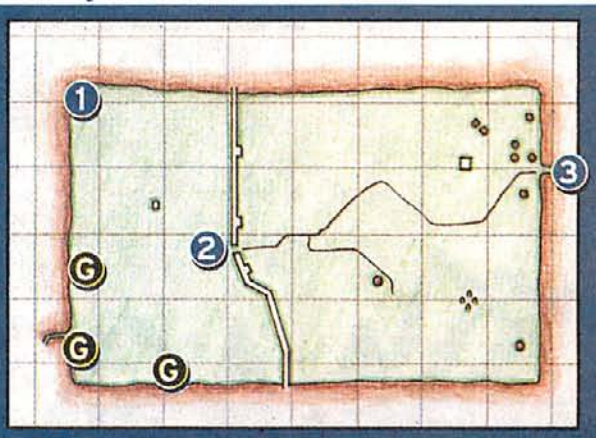
NOW YOU CAN FIND YOUR BODY

Butcherblock Mountains

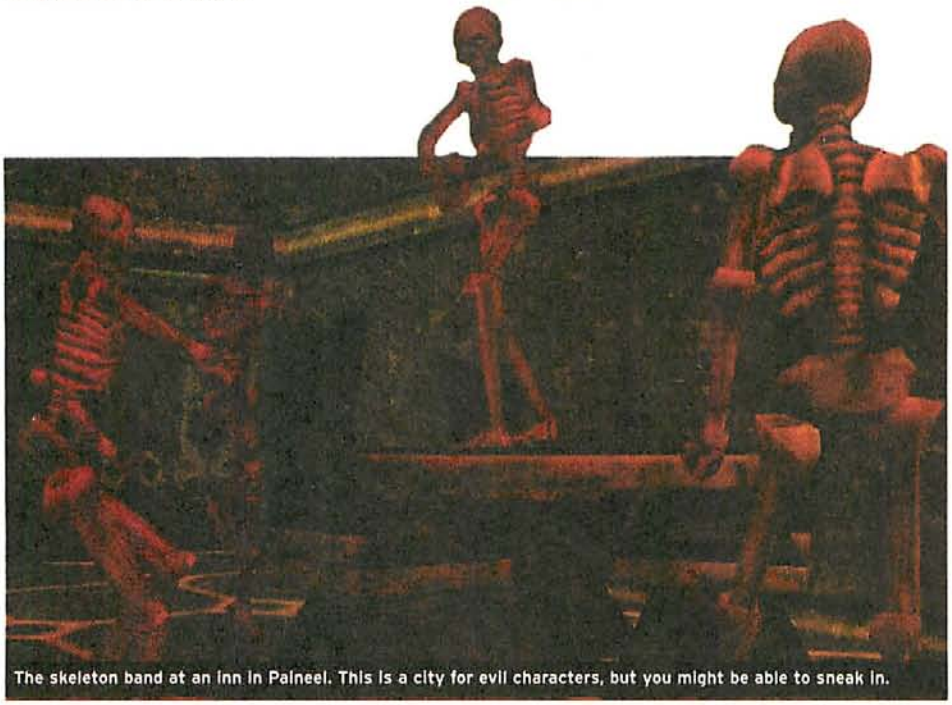


G: Goblin Camp
1. Kaladim
2. Boat to Freeport
3. Goblin Warrior camp
4. Stone pillar protected by Orcs
5. The Chessboard
6. Bandit Camp
7. The crossroads
8. Greater Faydark

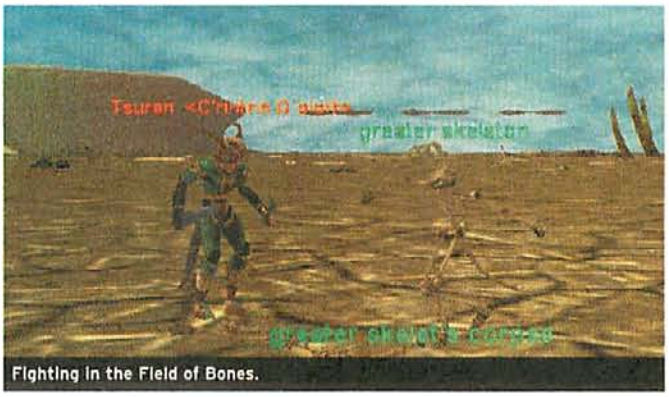
Misty Thicket



G: Goblin Camp
1. Orc Camp
2. Gate through the wall
3. To Rivervale



The skeleton band at an inn in Palneel. This is a city for evil characters, but you might be able to sneak in.



Fighting in the Field of Bones.

Getting Started

No matter which character type and class you choose to play, there are a few things you should do before you take your first step.

First, think about remapping your keyboard. I like to remap the movement keys to the familiar WASD first-person-shooter movement keys. You may be happy using the arrow keys for movement, but the one key you should definitely remap is the attack key. The default is for the "A" key to start an attack. If you have clicked on an NPC vendor to buy or sell something and accidentally hit the "A" key, you'll attack the vendor. You'll also be dead in about one second as the NPCs attack back with a fury. Change the attack key to something else that you won't easily hit.

The other thing you'll want to do is check your inventory and outfit your character. You'll have a weapon in there. You'll also have a scroll that contains your first quest, which involves finding your guild master and delivering the scroll to him or her. You want to do this; you'll earn a nice little experience point boost as well as an item. You can also use some training points to start your important skills. Put one point in each of your class-specific skills, such as one-hand slash or bash for fighter types, for example, and skill points into the various magic schools, such as evocation. Now, here are some tips for getting a quick start with some selected race/class combinations.

Halfling Druid

You'll love playing as a Halfling Druid. Not only are you as cute and lovable as a Disney character, you'll eventually get one of the game's most coveted spells, Spirit of Wolf. (If you play a Druid and then start a new character that doesn't get this spell, you'll be amazed how anyone can play without it.) You'll be everyone's friend, and you'll be able to solo pretty well for a long time. You can also forage for food, so you'll rarely be hungry.

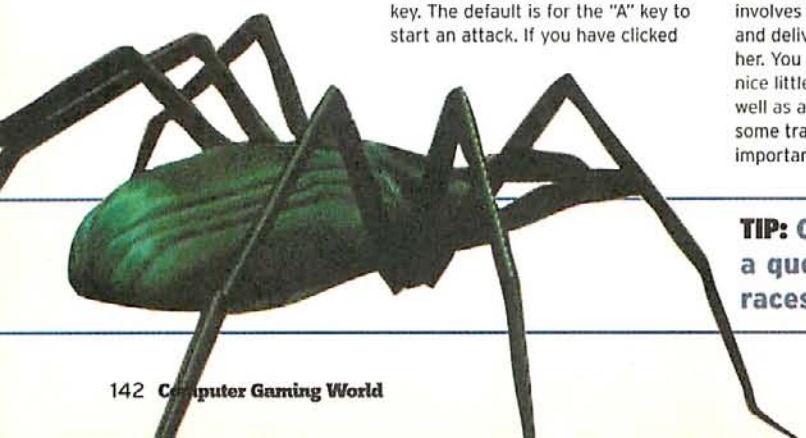
Playing a Halfling Druid is also nice because your newbie zone, Misty Thicket, is one of the best in the game. It's well-balanced, protected by guards you can run to when you get in trouble, and even has a vendor or two in the little houses where you can sell your booty if you don't feel like zoning into Rivervale.

To start, you'll want to explore the area of Misty Thicket right outside the entrance to Rivervale. There you'll fight bats, rats, fire beetles, snakes, bixies, and goblin whelps until you get no experience for them, which will be at about level 5. Then you'll move past the guards onto the further areas of Misty Thicket, where you'll fight giant wasps, tree snakes, large and giant bats, as well as a couple of goblin camps and one Orc camp. The Orcs will be too difficult, but the goblins should be within your reach as you get near level 10.

In general, there are two creatures to watch out for. In the newbie area, the queen fire beetle is deadly. In the more advanced area, a goblin wizard named Mooto roams around and can be a problem.

A good fighting strategy is to cast Snare on the creature so you can outrun it if things go bad, and then alternately use your Burst Of spell, Flamelick, and your melee attack to battle the thing.

Good quests for young Druids include the Bug Collector quest that you'll get from Blixxin Entopop. Talk to him, and he will tell you about his bug collection. If you ask him about



TIP: Giant scarabs yield pristine shells that are a quest component for armor for the short races of Halflings, Dwarves, and Gnomes.

Orc Hill is great for levels 5 through 10. You'll get experience, Crushbone belts, and shoulder pads.

Outside Cabilis, near the guards, where you can sell to merchants.

it, he'll give you the list of things that go in the bug collection: fire beetle eye, spiderling eye, spiderling leg, giant fire beetle leg, giant wasp wing, and giant scarab egg sac. Put all six in the Bug Collection Box, press Combine to complete Bug Collection, and then give it to Blixxin for a reward and experience points.

Another good quest is the delivery to Deputy Tagil. Go to Uner Gnarltrunk at the druid farm and talk to him. He'll give you a note to take to Deputy Tagil at the Misty Thicket/Rivervale entrance. Give the note to Tagil, who pays you, and then return the payment to Uner. You'll get experience points, money, and a minor item.

Finally, when you fight goblins, you'll often get Runnyeye warbeads. Save these to give to Sheriff Roglio in town and you'll get some experience points. Eventually, after you give him hundreds (literally) of warbeads, you can visit Marshal Ghobber and ask him if you're part of the "Wall." If you are, he'll give you a nice magic ring.

Another good Druid race is the Wood Elf. Also, the Shaman class is very similar to the Druid class; good Shaman classes include the Barbarians, Trolls, and Ogres.

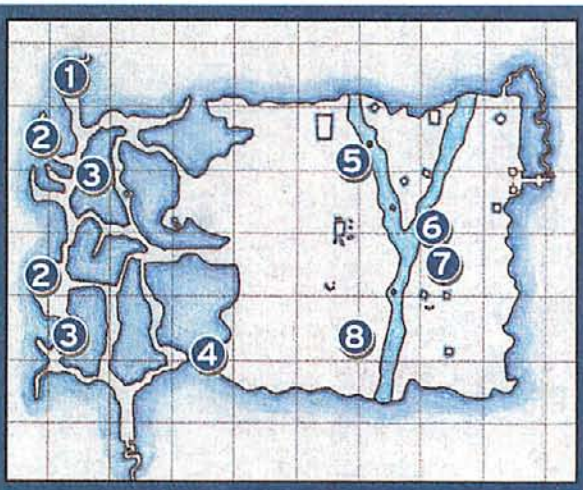
Wood Elf Ranger

If you want to be a master of the forest, this class is top shelf. The Ranger class is primarily a melee class, but you do get some spells, so it's a bit more interesting than just wading in with a sword. What's nice about the Wood Elf is that you get the Hide and Track abilities right away. Use Track to find creatures right then instead of running around blindly like the other classes, and use Hide when you have to rest. Only Undead creatures can see you when you're hidden.

The Wood Elf starts in Kelethin, the tree city. Don't fall off the bridges! You'll do your fighting in Greater Faydark up until level 10 or so. You'll fight wasps, bats, decaying skeletons, and Orc pawns early on. Always know where the lifts are that will get you up in the trees, because those are where the guards are.

Once you get to about level 6, go to Orc Hill near the Orc lift. Ask other players—everyone knows where it is. Here you'll fight Orc oracles and centurions. Not only are these fights great for getting experience points, they will often give you nice treasure, like leather armor parts. Also, Orcs and centurions sometimes drop Crushbone

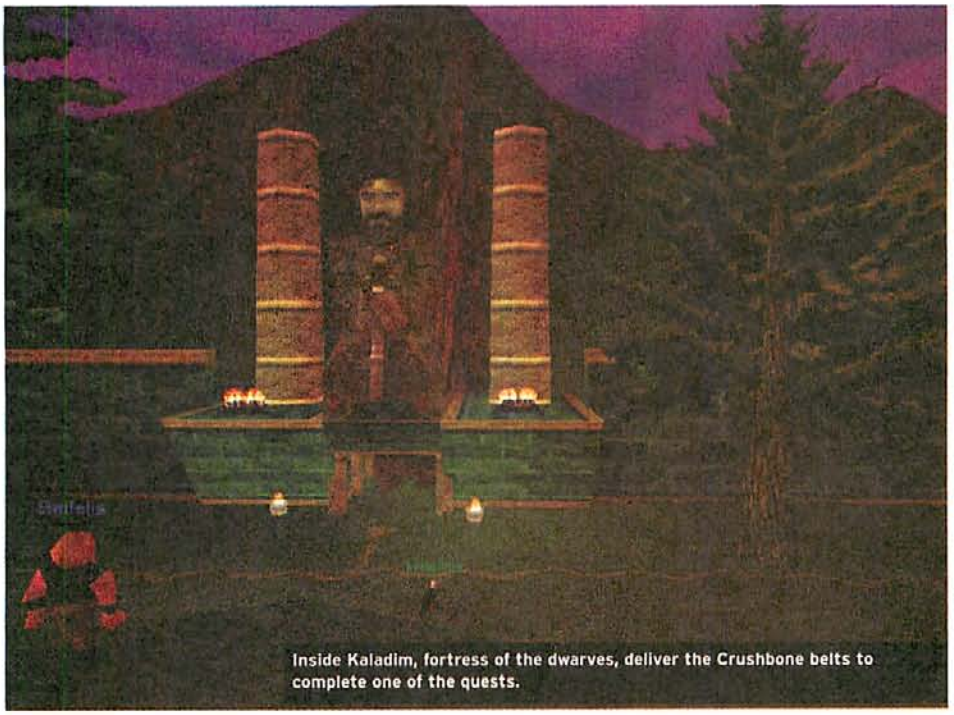
Everfrost



1. Merchants selling supplies and goods
2. Ice goblin igloos with low-level spawns
3. Ice goblin igloos
4. Ice goblin igloos with mid-level spawns
5. North tower or Megan's tower
6. Temple inhabited by icy Orcs and redwind
7. Stone giant statue
8. South tower

The Field of Bone

1. Island with the tangrin
2. Pass through the cliffs
3. The Pit
4. To East Cabilis



Inside Kaladim, fortress of the dwarves, deliver the Crushbone belts to complete one of the quests.

The High Elves are the haughty, nose-stuck-up-in-the-air race...and their princess is featured on the *EverQuest* box.

There are some evil NPC necromancers in Toxxulia Forest.

Kelethin is the city of the Wood Elves. Your first step's a big one.

belts; save these! Take them to Canloe Nusback in the warriors' guild in the dwarven city of Kaladim. This is one of the best young character quests in the game: You get a nice experience point boost for every few belts (or shoulder pads) you give Canloe, and to boot he gives you some money and a piece of armor. You can wear the armor or sell it. This quest is so helpful and will boost you up in levels so fast, that every young player on Faydwer (Gnomes, Dwarves, and High Elves) should do it. Just get yourself bound to the Orc lift.

The fighting style of the Wood Elf Ranger is pretty simple. Use one-handed weapons because at level 17 you will get dual wield, so you might as well get good at one-handed attacks. You don't get any spells until level 9, so until then you're a melee class. Use Tracking to find the creatures you can beat without taking too much damage, and remember to sit when you heal. When you can, group after level 4.

Other good Ranger races include Humans and Half Elves.

High Elf Magician

The high elves are the haughty, nose-stuck-up-in-the-air race, but for good reason. Tall and graceful, they live in one of the prettiest cities in the game, Felwithe, and their princess is featured on the *EverQuest* box. That will give you a swelled head. The Magician class is a pet class like the Necromancer, but you don't get your pet until level 4. Magicians do get food and water summoning spells, so you'll never go hungry. Eventually you'll be able to summon magic weapons, too, which is great for fighting monsters that are immune to normal attacks, like ghouls.

The Magicians should fight right outside the Felwithe gates at first. Wasps, bats, decaying skeletons, and Orc pawns abound. You're a weak fighter, but you can still do some damage with your dagger. For the first three levels, all you can really do is cast a Shielding on yourself, and use Burst of Flame and your dagger to attack enemies. Once you get to level 4 you get new spells, including your pet spell!

You can summon one of four types of elementals: earth, air, water, and fire. Air is probably the weakest. Fire is also weak, but every time it's hit, it does burn damage. Water and earth elementals are good choices. You also get your Gate spell, which transports you back to your bind spot. This is your escape hatch for when things go wrong—gate away from trouble.

Your fighting strategy with a pet is simple: Let it do most of the work. What you want to do is cast a Burn spell on the monster, and then have your pet attack it. Hotkey your pet commands—attack, back off, and so on. Keep casting Burn as your pet attacks, and when your pet's health is low, step in and melee so the monster will attack you instead of your pet.

Again, the best young quest is the Crushbone belt quest as discussed in the Wood Elf section. Other good magician races include Gnomes and Humans.

Iksar Necromancer

The lizardlike Iksar are a hated race, so you'll have problems in other cities if you venture off the continent of Kunark. The good news is that you don't ever really have to leave Kunark if you don't want to. The Iksar have a natural regeneration ability, so you'll gain hit points back faster as you rest, which is invaluable.

What I like about playing an Iksar Necromancer is that you get a spell, Dark Pact, that slowly drains your hit points and puts them into your mana pool. The Iksar's regeneration ability means that you can sit and actually regain hit points while under the influence of this spell, so you get a much faster mana-regeneration rate as a result.

The Necromancer is really one of most entertaining classes to play. You get a skeleton pet that laughs maniacally and praises you when you give it a command. You also get more spells than you can really afford: defensive spells, spells to boost your abilities, spells to drain health from your enemies and transfer it to you, direct damage spells, spells that weaken your enemy, and more. You have a wide variety of tactical choices in combat with your spell arsenal.

As an Iksar, you'll start in the city of Cabilis. You'll fight outside East Cabilis initially, battling decaying

skeletons and scaled wolf pups.

Then, at about levels 5 and 6, you'll want to start venturing into the Field of Bones. You'll battle a wide range of skeletons—Iksar bandits, brigands and marauders, various beetles, scaled wolves, scaled wolf hunters, and bonecrawlers.

One of the better newbie quests in the game is the Curscale Armor quest. Find Klok Mugrok in the Haggle Baron store in Cabilis next to the Court of Pain. Tell him you'll perform a small service. He'll then give you a pack to fill with eight scaled cur hides you'll snag off dead scaled wolf pups. Fill it, press Combine, bring it back to Klok, and he'll give you a random piece of curscale armor and good experience. One of the nice things about this quest is that you'll find a lot of dead cubs that you can loot because players kill them for experience points and don't bother with the hides.

The other good races for Necromancers are the Dark Elves (a lot of fun, too), the Gnomes, and the Erudites.

Erudite Wizard

There's something appealing about playing a Wizard in *EverQuest*. It's not the most popular class, and it gets harder and harder to solo as you advance, but you get the most powerful offensive spells in the game at high levels—you can really blast away.

The Erudins have the highest natural intelligence of all the races; you can have a higher intelligence rating as an Erudite Wizard than as another race. Intelligence equals mana, so you can cast more spells before resting to replenish your mana. This is the sole advantage to playing an Erudite. If you're willing to get by with a little less mana, try a Dark Elf Wizard.

Your starting city is Erudin. Complete your initial quest, and then venture out into Toxxulia Forest. The great drawback to playing an Erudite Wizard will become apparent as night falls: You can't see worth a damn. You'll need a source of light, or you'll get lost if you stray too far from the entrance to Erudin where the guards are. Sphere of Light is the spell you want for your light source.

The initial creatures you'll battle are snakes, widow hatchlings, and kobold runts. A good strategy for a young wizard is to stand as far away as you can from your quarry and cast Shock of Frost. Make sure you have your Shielding spell on as well. As the creature charges, hit your attack key so you automatically melee with the creature when it closes, and begin to cast another Shock of Frost. Keep attacking, trying to cast the Shock spell until one of you is dead. At level 4, you'll still be adventuring in the same area, but you get new spells. Root and Shock of Fire are your staples now. Cast Root and it will hold the creature in place while you repeatedly cast Shock on it. The problem with Root is that it's unpredictable. Sometimes it won't work but will still anger the creature. Sometimes it will hold the creature for only a few seconds. Okiels Radiation is another nice spell at level 4. It puts a minor damage shield on your Wizard, and every time a monster hits you, the monster takes two points of damage.

You also get Fade and Gate at level 4. Fade is a short, random transport. Try to get it off when you're in trouble, and you may get far enough away to cast a Root on your enemy. Gate will transport you back to your bind spot.

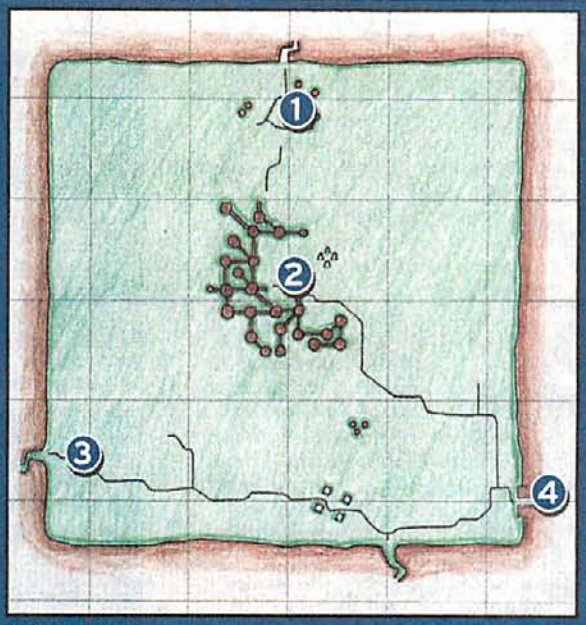
At level 8, you continue to get more powerful versions of the shield and shock spells. You'll have graduated to skeletons and larger kobolds. You'll probably want to group as much as possible, too. You can solo, but you'll die a bit more often than some classes when your Root spell doesn't work.

Your fighting strategy with a pet is simple: Let it do most of the work.

The best quest for your Erudin Wizards is the skeleton chips quest. Talk to the priest in the Temple of Quellious in Erudin, and tell her you want to battle the undead. She'll give you a box that you then fill with six bone chips from skeletons or decaying skeletons and return. You'll get experience points and a random item that's often nice. Another easy quest is to kill the poachers and return their heads to the Paladin guard outside the gate.

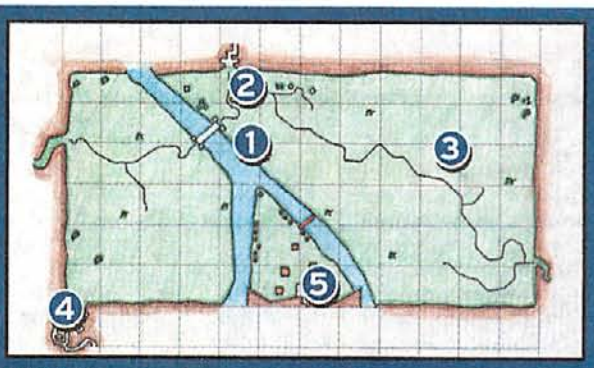
EVERQUEST MAPS (CONTINUED)

Greater Faydark



1. Orc camps
2. Kelethin
3. To Butcherblock Mountains
4. To Felwithe

The Feerott



1. Lizard-man camp
2. Half-moon-shaped altar
3. Druid ring surrounded by spiders
4. Spectres and hidden Lair of Enchantress
5. Island region of ruined temples to Cazic-Thule; has entrance to the temple of Cazic-Thule

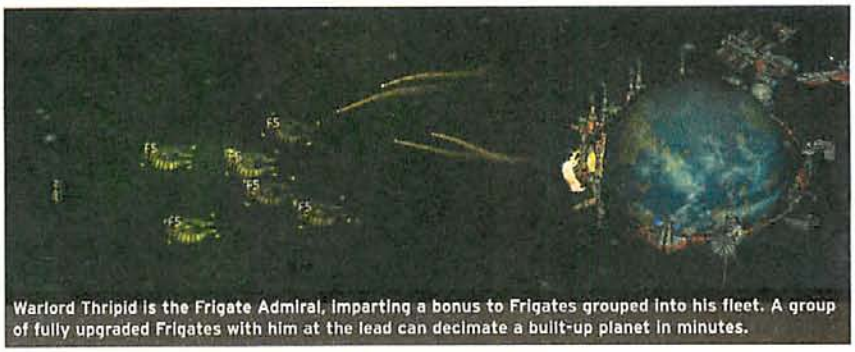
Special thanks to muse over at EQAtlas for helping us with our maps. To see even more detailed maps of every region in the game, hit up www.eqatlas.com.

Another site you'll want to check in on is EQAtlas' companion site, AllaKhazam's Magical Realm at everquest.allakhazam.com. It has all sorts of info on quests, items, classes, and spells.

Conquest: Frontier Wars

Building a fleet that can't be beat By Thomas L. McDonald

Think of *Conquest: Frontier Wars* as World War II fleet combat in space, complete with combined forces, island-hopping campaigns, and a variety of play styles. You must create a fleet that's balanced to meet the qualities of each race, and you need to put an admiral in charge for the maximum effect. While the races have similar base units and structures, special weapons and little differences let each play in a unique style.



Warlord Thripid is the Frigate Admiral, imparting a bonus to Frigates grouped into his fleet. A group of fully upgraded Frigates with him at the lead can decimate a built-up planet in minutes.

Jump gates and wormholes are the main points of contention in *Conquest*. This configuration shows a heavily defended gate. It's flanked by four Plasma Spitters and is heavily mined.

Terran Fleet Tactics

Think of the Terrans as the Americans in WWII. They're a balanced race who can field a good mixture of forces in a short time. Their forces work like WWII-era battle groups based on a core of capital ships. The best formations use several heavy ships (Battleship, Dreadnought, Lancer Cruiser) at the center, and these are flanked by a solid array of improved Missile Cruisers. Corvettes then form the screen, keeping the small, fast fighters off the fleet. Despite what you might think, the Carrier isn't the core unit (it doesn't have a heavy punch); its best role seems to be as cover for the big guns.

The Missile Cruiser is one of your most useful units. Fully upgraded Missile Cruisers can cloak and fire large salvos–plus, they're fairly cheap. A large contingent of these can slip in and obliterate a base in a hurry. Missile Cruisers expend supplies quickly, so they shouldn't go into battle without a supply ship as backup.

Mantis Fleet Tactics

The Mantis are like the Japanese, with a touch of Soviet reliance on vast numbers of men. They would have trouble simply wading into a system and applying overwhelming force. Their units take a bit longer to build, and the formations rely heavily on carrier-based combat. They also require a larger number of crew members, as one of their central weapons is the Khamir, a kamikaze ship. Keep this high demand for crew in mind when taking over new planets. The highest crew resources are on swamp planets.

Mantis tend to use quick strikes. These hit-and-run tactics can be effective, because you can warp into a system, pick off some ships or defenses with Khamir, and fall back quickly. The result is a war of attrition. Another good tactic is to group a mass of Frigates around Warlord Thripid, because Thripid gets a substantial bonus when working with Frigates (a Warlord is the Mantis version of the fleet Admiral).

Celareon Fleet Tactics

If you like to use blitzkrieg tactics like the Germans, pick the Celareons. After they build their base economy and do some research, they can field impressive blitz tactics. Speed and surprise are their hallmarks. Their big guns do some serious damage, but it's their portal ability that makes for ugly surprises. This portal can open a wormhole to *anywhere* and let a whole fleet pour right through.

Celareons become almost unstoppable late in the game, thanks in part to their increasing shield power. This power can be maximized by the Celareon Monolith, which has the strongest shields in the whole game. Building a fleet of Monoliths grouped with Magistrate Vivac will impart a shield bonus to the Monoliths and a Monolith bonus to Vivac. If you upgrade shields at the Helion Veil, you'll have a hard-to-damage fleet. Celareons gain a lot of strength late in the game, so they should secure the home system with heavy wormhole defenses, build and research like crazy, and then hit hard all at once.

Unexpected Planetary Benefits

You may have noticed that your resources go up on certain planets even when you're not actively collecting. This is because each planet has a base amount of resources. These can be tapped by building a refinery on the planet. For the Mantis, the collector gathers all three resources, while Terrans and Celareons need a crew collector and a refinery to collect them all. After these are fully tapped, they will slowly regenerate. Here are the different benefits for each planet:

Earth: 2,500 ore; 2,500 gas; 3,500 crew
Moon: 10,000 ore only
Gas Giants: 10,000 gas only
Swamp: 5,000 crew only

Thanks to Producer Eric Peterson for swapping secrets and strategies.

The troopship can be tough to use because it's so fragile. Given an escort, however, it can be effective for taking over enemy structures–we recommend using it to take over their defensive structures and turn their own guns against them.

A Strong Military.

High-Level Diplomacy.

And a Trip to the Shopping Mall.

They are all weapons in the fight against terrorism.

We have been grieving our innocent dead in the wake of vicious terrorist atrocity. We have waved our flags in a proud show of unity and patriotism. Many of us have donated blood. Others have given money to disaster relief. Now, as we begin each new day, we must be courageous in the face of fear.

We all know that consumer confidence is down. The way to change that course is for each of us to begin to act with confidence. If we act with confidence, we will become confident again.

Of course, terrorism seeks to destroy confidence. The World Trade Center was one of the targets because it symbolizes the center of the world's greatest economy—the United States of America.

We need to demonstrate by our actions that we will not abide vicious attack. Our leaders are moving forward with confidence, and we support them. Now, each one of us needs to take a leading role, by playing our part in strengthening our economy.

Here's how:

Walk out your door and go to the movies. Patronize your neighborhood hardware store. Take your family out to dinner. Buy a few shares of stock. Go to the mall. If your refrigerator needs replacing, replace it. And don't put off that visit to a loved one—buy a ticket and fly.

If we are to maintain our free and open society, one thing we must do is open our wallets. Every act in support of the American economy, is the act of a soldier in our country's war on terrorism.

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Tech

Gadgets and gewgaws for game geeks Edited by William O'Neal

Force RS Leads the Pack

★★★★½ **The Force RS racing system provides both quality and performance for console or computer racers.** Act Labs' drivers made setup easy, and the force feedback performed well—especially in sims like *NASCAR 4*. The components are fine-tuned, and the wheel sports simulated leather, which makes it extremely comfortable. The Force RS' only drawback, albeit a slight one, is that it has flipper shifters instead of a stick. That said, Act Labs provides an excellent stick shift accessory for anyone who's looking for some serious realism. With its rock-solid pedal base, the Force RS is an excellent rig for beginners and hardcore racers alike.

REQUIREMENTS 486MHz or higher, Windows 95/98, joystick or USB port, DirectX 5 or higher; console and Mac compatible PRICE $140, $190 with the RS Shifter MANUFACTURER Act Labs URL www.act-labs.com

Start Your Engines

With more than 50 hours of track time, we've got the skinny on which of these seven racing wheels will take you to the Winston Cup By Raphael Liberatore and Wade "Sensei" Hermes

In a Class by Itself

★★★★½ **The crème de la crème of racing rigs.** Even though the TSW2 Cup is the most expensive wheel in this round-up, you definitely get what you pay for: high quality and lasting durability. The wheel base—easily the best of this bunch—weighs in at a hefty 15 pounds, and the TSW2 Cup sports a firm 13-inch steering wheel. While the TSW2 Cup requires some assembly and lacks force feedback, the precision and control of this wheel are the best of any tested. But this rig loses a precious half star due to woefully short wiring, a rather flimsy shifter, and lack of USB support. Overall, this wheel is for serious racing fanatics with high-performance wallets.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95/98, joystick port PRICE $415
MANUFACTURER Thomas Enterprises URL www.thomas-superwheel.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAYDEN HOUSER

Start Your Engines

Continued from previous page

A Stiff Racer

★★★½☆ **Thomas Enterprises' TSW2 Stock racing controller is their base model.** The racing wheel has the same basic features as its more expensive brother, but it has a smaller steering wheel and lacks rubberized pedals. The pedal platform weighs 12 pounds, so it stays put even under heavy use. The wheel components feel stiffer than those of the TSW2 Cup, but driving is still smooth and precise. There is a stick shift for convenient shifting, but as on the TSW2 Cup, it feels flimsy. Like the more expensive version, the TSW2 Stock is designed for serious racers.

REQUIREMENTS: **Windows 95/98, joystick port.** PRICE: **$225** MANUFACTURER: **Thomas Enterprises** URL: **www.thomas-superwheel.com**

Racing for the Masses

★★★½☆ **Logitech's Wingman Formula Force RGP is for racers who want force feedback at a reasonable price.** Driver software setup is easy, and there's a quick clamping system that keeps the wheel solidly in place. Despite being small, the wheel is very comfortable. However, we experienced noticeable force feedback lag that translated into lack of precision on some tracks. The Wingman shifter buttons are also rather flimsy, so shifting gears is unintuitive, especially for one-handed drivers. As with most of the racing wheels, the pedal platform is too lightweight and small. But this wheel is still a great choice for entry-level or casual racers.

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 166MHz or higher, Windows 98/2000, USB port, 32MB RAM, 20MB hard drive space, CD-ROM drive, DirectX 7 or higher** PRICE: **$100** MANUFACTURER: **Logitech** URL: **www.logitech.com**

Crash and Burn

★½☆☆☆ **Saitek usually makes quality controllers at a decent price, but the R100 completely misses the mark.** Designed for compact spaces, the R100 is just too darn small to be effective. Though setup is simple and the clamping system is better than that of most wheels, the R100 is cheap in more ways than one. Due to its compact design, control and precision are nowhere to be found. Worse still, the tiny pedal base slipped all over the floor during a rousing game of *Driver*. Recommended only for long flights or 5-year-olds.

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 166MHz or higher, Windows 95/98/ME, joystick port, 32MB RAM** PRICE: **$40** MANUFACTURER: **Saitek** URL: **www.saitek.com**

Feeling the Road

★★★★☆ **Though Microsoft's Sidewinder Pro Force is the most expensive force feedback wheel of the bunch, its construction, force feedback implementation, and clamping system are well worth the price.** The Sidewinder's noteworthy force feedback driver support made this rig the most precise and balanced of the group. However, its clunky shift buttons make shifting cumbersome for one-handed drivers, and hardcore racers will complain about the lightweight pedal platform. Overall, the Sidewinder's quality design and force feedback implementation make this a great wheel for beginner and intermediate drivers.

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 166MHz or higher, Windows 98/ME/2000, USB port, 16MB RAM, 10MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, DirectX 7 or higher** PRICE: **$159** MANUFACTURER: **Microsoft** URL: **www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/**

Forced Feedback

★★½☆☆ **The NASCAR Pro Force Feedback wheel is Thrustmaster's high-end rig; too bad it feels like a low-end one.** Though the wheel offers a standard slapstick shift lever, the clamping system lacks the sturdiness of other rigs. As if that weren't enough, the pedal platform is too lightweight and slipped during aggressive racing. While the driver setup was easy, the force feedback effects were unbalanced and overbearing. Even after adjusting it to the lowest setting, there was still an undesirable wobble at the wheel's centerline dead spot. Poor force feedback implementation makes this wheel hard to recommend even for the casual racer.

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 166MHz or higher, Windows 98/2000, USB port, 32MB RAM, 15MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, DirectX 8 compatibility** PRICE: **$129.95** MANUFACTURER: **Thrustmaster** URL: **www.thrustmaster.com**

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- 56k V.90 FaxModem
- Pioneer 16x DVD
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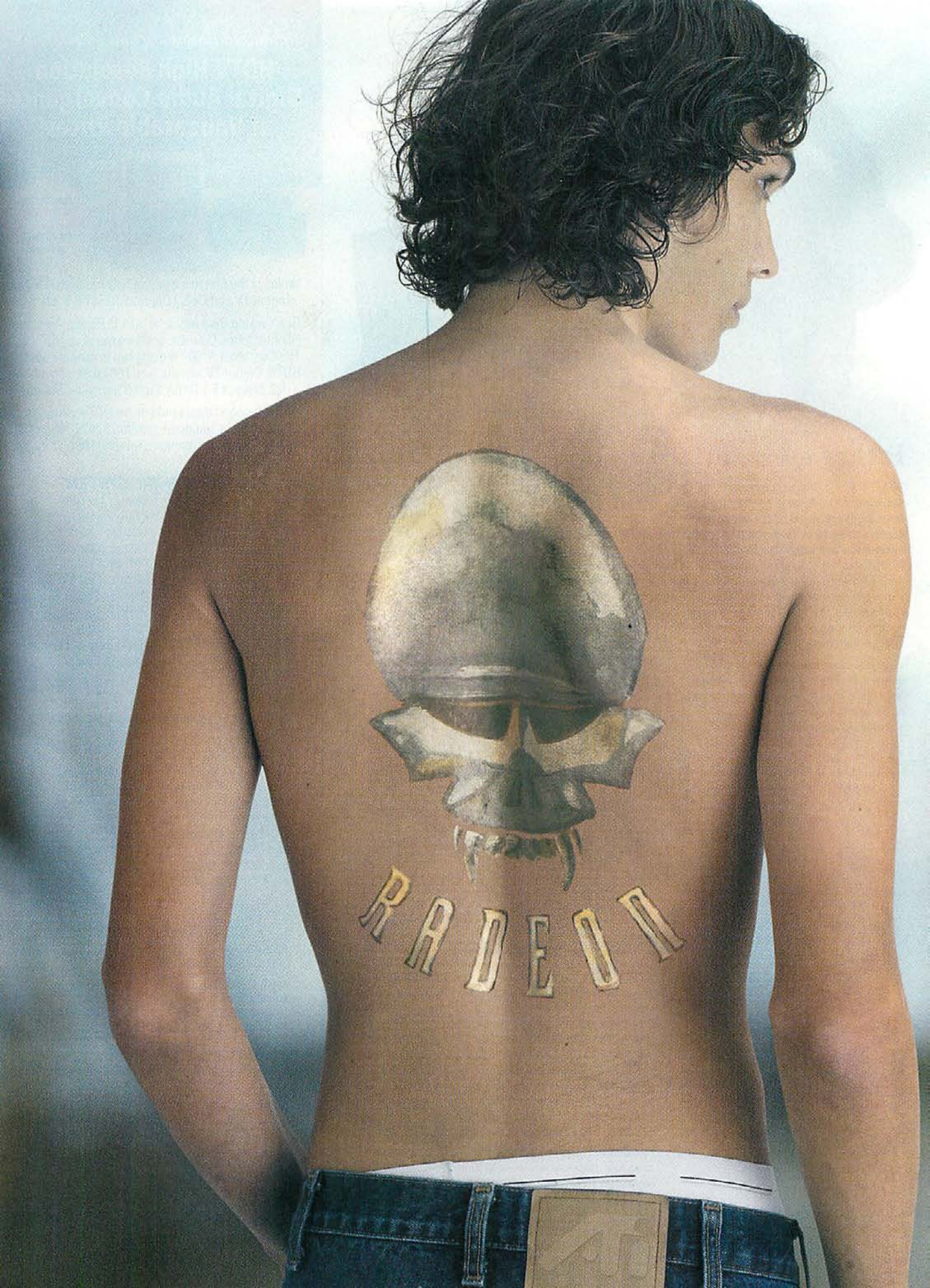
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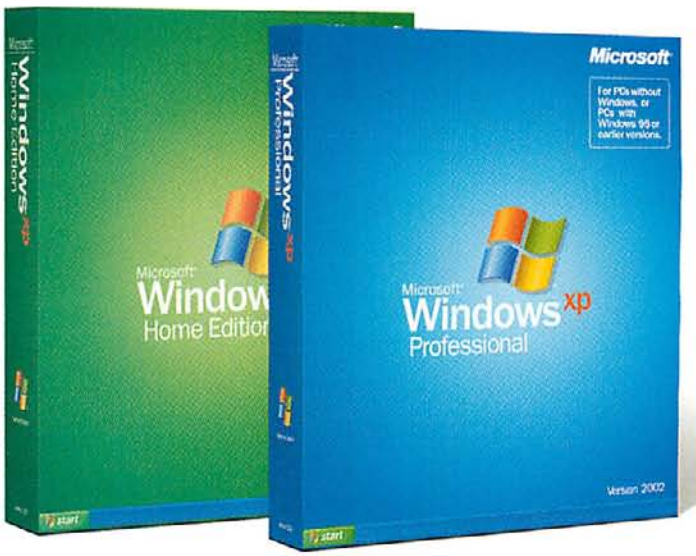
All-New Windows

Can Microsoft finally deliver on its promise of rock-solid stability? By Ken Feinstein

PUBLISHER Microsoft
URL www.microsoft.com/windowsxp//

REQUIREMENTS 300MHz (or higher) PC; Intel Pentium or Celeron; AMD K6, Duron, or Athlon; 128MB RAM; 1.5GB of available hard disk space; CD-ROM drive PRICE Windows XP Home Edition Upgrade, $99; Windows XP Professional Edition Upgrade, $199

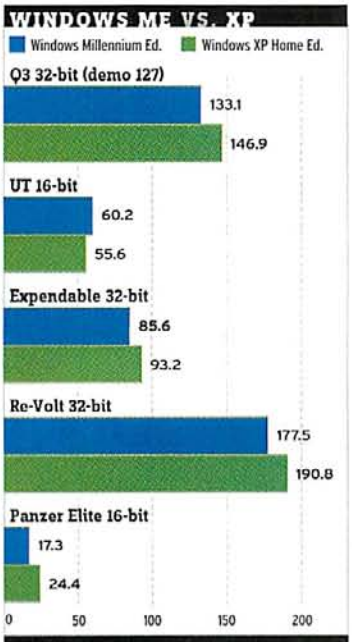
Could it be that Windows has finally grown up? With Windows XP about to appear on store shelves, Microsoft is hoping at long last to provide home users with a robust operating system and a stable platform for everything from productivity applications to gaming. That's right, it may be time to say goodbye to system crashes, constant reboots, and the blue screen of death. On top of that, Microsoft claims that XP will actually run many games *faster* than its predecessors. While upgrading to XP is bound to bring some hardware and software compatibility issues, the folks in Redmond are hoping that when you're done you'll never look back. Well, we're just as excited as everyone else, so we installed Microsoft's latest attempt at world domination on a few of our machines just to see if the promise lives up to all the hype. Sit back, you might be surprised.



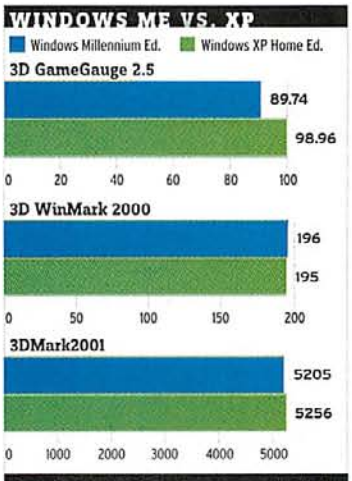
An All-New Pedigree

XP marks a complete break from the Windows 98/ME paradigm. Microsoft based XP on the business operating system Windows 2000. This means that in addition to improved stability, users can also expect heightened security. The break from Windows 98 also means there are bound to be software applications and utilities that will need to be upgraded to work correctly. That goes for hardware as well. XP comes with drivers for the most common hardware, but if you have an older PC, you're either using hardware from a company that is no longer in business (think 3dfx), or you're using brand-spanking-new peripherals for which there may not be drivers optimized for XP use. Before proceeding with an upgrade, be sure to download the compatibility checker from Microsoft's Website to find out whether your system is up to the task.

Actually installing XP takes more than an hour on most PCs, and you need more than 1GB of free disk space (Microsoft recommends allotting 1.5GB). After you install XP, you have 30 days to activate the product. During activation, XP contacts Microsoft and transmits a code based on your key hardware components, like the network card and CPU. If you install XP on a new system or change too many components on your current system (Microsoft won't say exactly how many or which ones), you need to call a toll-free number to get reactivated.



As these frame-rate tests show, on our 1.4GHz Athlon-based machine, Windows XP bested Windows ME in everything but *Unreal Tournament*.

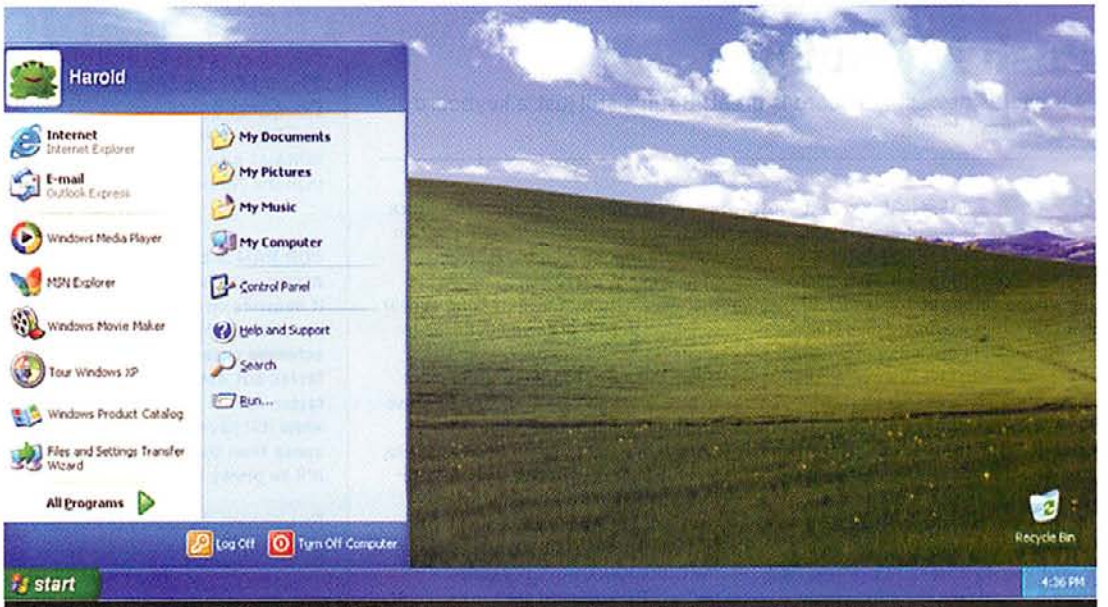


XP's 3DMark2001 score shows that on a well-equipped machine, the new OS's high system demands don't result in a performance hit.

Quick and Stable

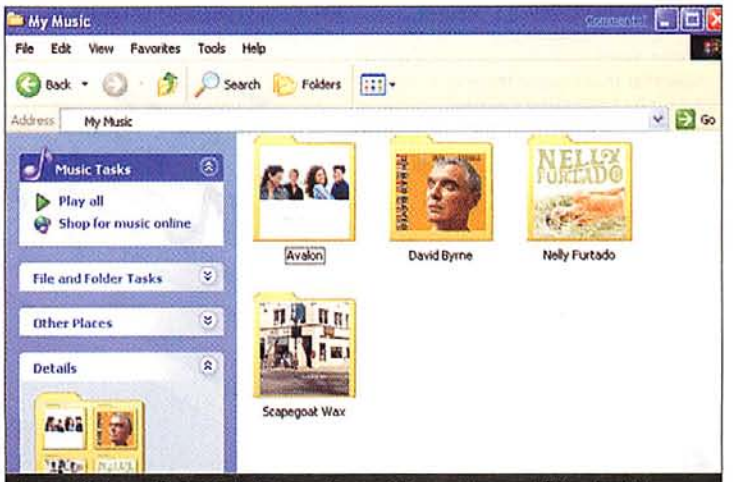
Once XP is up and running, it's a pleasure to use. Boot times are very fast, and we found it to be stable—even if one application crashed, it didn't bring down the entire system. The colorful new interface takes some getting used to, but it bears the same basic structure familiar to Windows users. New wizards simplify many tasks, like setting up a home network or sharing a single Internet connection among several PCs. XP also makes it easy to give each user a customized environment, which can be private if you convert your hard drive to the NT file system. You can even switch users almost instantaneously without having to close running applications.

XP doesn't offer many game-specific enhancements, but it does offer some



The new interface, while similar to that of other Windows operating systems, will take users some time to adjust to.

Windows XP's new control panel aims to simplify things by lumping tasks into "convenient" subgroups.



Among XP's new features is the easy-to-use CD recording capability: Just drag a folder onto the icon for your CD-RW drive to burn it to CD.

new features that gamers will appreciate. For instance, CD recording is integrated right into Windows Explorer: Just drag a folder onto the icon for your CD-RW drive to burn it to CD. There's also a built-in Internet firewall to protect your PC from hackers. The new version of Windows Media Player does a good job of managing and playing digital music and video (including DVDs), though you'll need to purchase a plug-in for about $10 if you want to use it to rip MP3s from your CDs.

Game Performance

Forget your conspiracy theories about another bloated Microsoft OS designed to sell faster and more expensive hardware. XP consistently outperformed Windows ME in our suite of game tests, accelerating frame-rates by more than 10 percent. Keep in mind, however, that XP does require more memory than ME; Microsoft recommends at least 128MB, and at least a 300MHz CPU.

Our test machine had a 1.4GHz Athlon chip, 256MB SDRAM, and a 64MB GeForce3 card, all built around an ASUS A7A266 motherboard: Windows XP outperformed Windows ME in everything from 3DMark2001 (scoring 5256 compared to Windows ME's 5205) to our very own 3D GameGauge (scoring 99.25fps to Windows ME's 89.74fps). Scores were consistent in Ziff-Davis' 3D WinMark 2000, with Windows XP scoring 195 and Windows ME getting 196. But more important to us, Windows XP achieved *Quake III: Arena* frame-rates of 148fps, while Windows ME scored 133fps.

In our testing, we found that the great majority of Windows-based games, and even many DOS-based games, worked flawlessly on XP. In some cases, we had to set a game to Windows 98 compatibility mode to get it to run, though XP has an internal list of applications that will automatically run many games in compatibility mode. The rule of thumb for game compatibility is, the newer and more popular a game is, the more likely it is to work with XP. If you have a collection of old, obscure game titles, you should expect some glitches trying to get them to run on XP.

Windows XP comes in two flavors, XP Home Edition (which is what we tested) with an upgrade price of $99 and XP Professional with an upgrade price of $199. The Pro version offers multiprocessor support and some advanced security and file/user permission capabilities.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Offers better stability and performance, but you may want to wait until there are more stable drivers for peripherals.

Should You Buy It?

PROS

- The same machine (a 1.4GHz Athlon) ran games an average of 10 frames per second faster in Windows XP than in Windows ME.
- Windows XP Home Edition is easier to install than previous versions of Windows. The installation utility also makes powerful tasks like partitioning hard drives and reformatting disks easy.
- The ability to create multiple users means that you can keep your kids from mucking with important files, as well as keep the wife away from your bookmarks.

CONS

- Being a new OS, XP will no doubt present early adopters with myriad hardware- and software-compatibility hurdles.
- While Windows XP will run with 128MB of memory, you'll need at least 256MB RAM to experience XP properly.
- XP's new interface is confusing at first.

Push My Buttons

Microsoft's newest keyboard is great! But it's still just a keyboard

By William O'Neal

MANUFACTURER: Microsoft
URL: www.microsoft.com

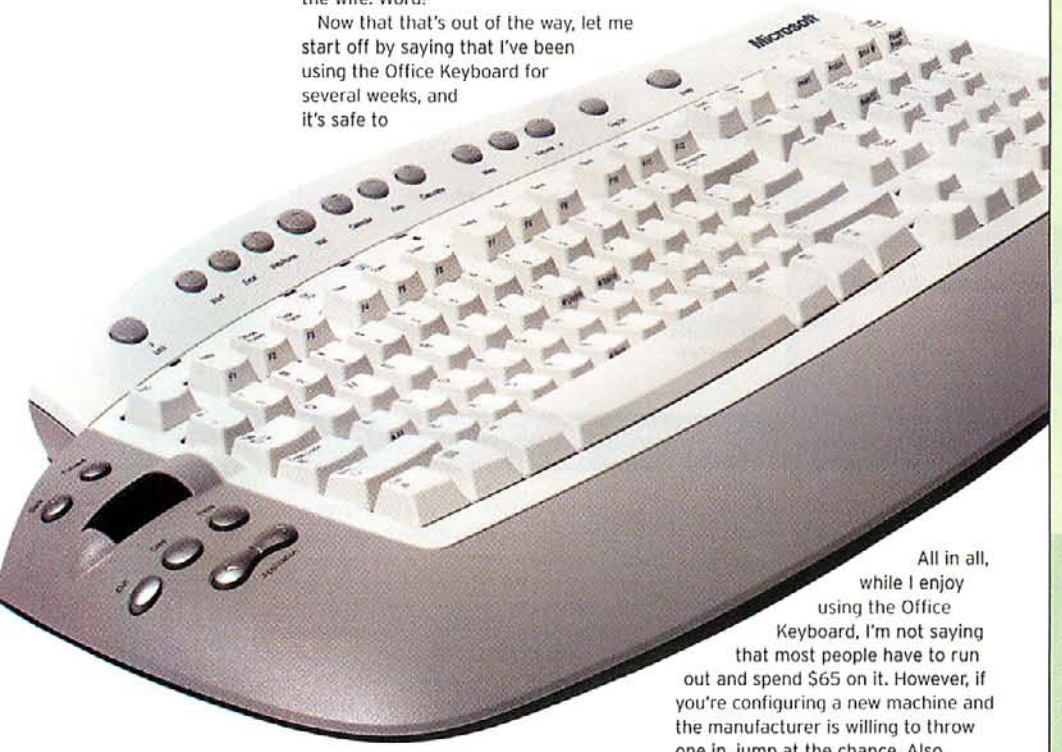
REQUIREMENTS: PC: Office 97, Windows 95 or higher MAC: Office 98, OS 8.6 or higher (excluding OS X or later); PS/2 or USB port, 32MB RAM
PRICE: $65

Realizing that new keyboards are about as sexy as Estelle Getty sliding down a greased pole at the Gold Club, Microsoft decided to spruce up the launch of their flagship Office Keyboard by including the following quote in the attendant press materials: "We discovered that most computer users touch their keyboards more than their partners or spouses each day. . . . When you touch something that much every day, it's important that it be a comfortable, highly productive experience."

While the preceding quote has little–if anything–to do with this review, I did think it would be a titillating way to begin. 'Cause the fact remains that while the Office Keyboard is one of the nicest input devices I've used, it's nowhere near as nice as putting your hands on the wife. Word!

Now that that's out of the way, let me start off by saying that I've been using the Office Keyboard for several weeks, and it's safe to say that I won't be going back to less capable keyboards. The Microsoft Office Keyboard is designed to simplify the most common computer functions. The keyboard boasts 19 new keys that make controlling multimedia functions; launching programs like Internet Explorer, Word, and Excel; scrolling through documents, Web pages, and menus; and shutting down your system as easy as pushing a button. The Office Keyboard also ships with configuration software that enables users to customize nearly every button. While at first glance these functions don't appear to be worth $65, once you get used to them, it's hard to go back.

The Office Keyboard also turned out to be a great gaming keyboard. Because it's solidly built, it didn't slide around when things got rough in *Counter-Strike*, and the built-in wrist-rest is more comfortable than most after-market ones, and because it's attached to the keyboard, it stays put. Accolades aside, the Office Keyboard isn't exactly perfect. The keyboard itself feels slightly smaller than its less impressive little brother, Microsoft's Internet Keyboard, and unlike the Internet Keyboard, it lacks two additional USB ports.



All in all, while I enjoy using the Office Keyboard, I'm not saying that most people have to run out and spend $65 on it. However, if you're configuring a new machine and the manufacturer is willing to throw one in, jump at the chance. Also, seeing that the holidays (Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa) are nigh upon us, the Office Keyboard could make a nifty gift.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

A truly great keyboard that boasts a plethora of cool features. Costlier than most, but worth it.

TECH MEDIC

The AMD vs. Intel Debate Continues

Which is better, DDR RAM or RDRAM? Also, is the Athlon better than the Pentium 4?

Terrance Hope

DDR RAM is better. As for the Athlon versus Pentium 4 debate, it depends on whom you ask. At press time, the Pentium 4–having achieved speeds of 2GHz–is faster, but AMD will release a faster Athlon pretty soon. And while it'll have a lower clock speed than the 2GHz Pentium 4, it'll be plenty fast.

Everyone *Doesn't* Hate Me

I love you.

Big Figua Pimp

I love you too.

Benchmarks and Motherboards

I've been reading your magazine for a few years now and finally have the dough to buy a decent system. I just got an Athlon 1.2 with 256 DDR RAM and a GeForce2MX400 card, and I was wondering which programs you use for benchmarking. Also, my motherboard is an ASUS A7M266. Have you heard of or experienced any problems with it?

Mark Jess

Visit MadOnion.com and download 3DMark2001. It's a good benchmarking utility, and you can easily get a bead on how well your system is performing relative to others. The ASUS A7M266 motherboard is used by top-notch system builders like Voodoo, Falcon, and Alienware, and we've never had any problems with it.

Altered States of Consciousness?

On my High Heat bulletin board, someone asked, "How do you get prepared to play?" Some used sunflower seeds or beer. My prerequisite was smoking a ganja hogsleg. It is right and good for you and *CGW* to recognize the occasional pleasure of computer games played in altered states of consciousness. (As others have theorized, maybe sleep deprivation exacerbates "game binges.") Your medium must both reflect and define our culture. Peace.

Jesse Berry

Uh...yeah.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAYDEN HOUSER

Saitek X45

A classic controller goes USB By Denny Atkin

MANUFACTURER: Saitek
URL: www.saitek.com

REQUIREMENTS: PC: Windows 98/98SE/ME/2000, or XP PC with USB port
MAC: OS9 with InputSprockets
PRICE: $80

Whether you like this combination joystick/throttle or not, you have to admit that the device's price-performance curve is headed in the right direction. Three years ago the original X36 was $150, and it offered capabilities found in products costing twice as much. Last year's X36 USB model offered more reliable performance at the reduced price of $100. It's now 2001 and the design has been tweaked and released as the X45—and for a mere $80.

Like its predecessor, the X45 consists of a joystick (which oddly looks a bit like the hilt of a scimitar) and a separate throttle controller. The throttle connects to the joystick, and the joystick plugs into a USB port, allowing games that recognize only a single DirectInput device to work with all the stick's axes.

A wealth of switches and knobs spans the two controllers: eight fire buttons, three directional hats, two dials, a rudder rocker, two slider switches, and a TrackPoint-like pointing stick. In newer games, these buttons can all be assigned directly within the simulation itself. To take full advantage of the stick, load up the Saitek Gaming Extensions, which let you set up profiles for each game. The programmability is superb—you can program DirectInput buttons, mouse buttons, and key presses, as well as sequences of keys and buttons. A three-way mode switch triples programming options by letting each button sport three functions. USB communication makes this much more reliable than with the original X36's joystick/keyboard port interface.

Some improvements over the X36 are welcome, others are goofy. The rubberized grips are very comfortable, and the improved joystick gimbal offers better control. An extension on the pinky switch accommodates small hands, but the switch is still too easily activated if you have big paws. The flip-cover for the center fire button is just annoying, and the lit-up fire buttons border on cheesy.

Despite its shortcomings, this enhanced controller for a mere $80 is still a winner.

Despite its shortcomings, a much-enhanced controller for half the price of the original is still a winner. Just be prepared to tape the fire button cover open.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

A solidly built joystick that flight-sim junkies and mech freaks alike will welcome.

WILL POWER

By William O'Neal

"A Benz without the rims is still a Benz!"

I recently saw *Diary: Shaquille O'Neal*, one of those (usually horrible) MTV reality shows where the network grabs its cameras, chooses a famous person, and follows him or her through some portion of an "exciting" life.

In this particular episode we were privy to the life of Shaquille O'Neal, rings and all. Before I begin, let me state that Shaq is The Man. He has a world-class chef who probably makes $100,000 a year just to make the big fella macaroni and cheese and fried chicken. Shaq owns more fly whips than Foster's Freeze, and fortunately for us he's often given a mouthpiece to spout some seriously dope witticisms.

When the cameras followed him into his what-looked-like-a-hundred car garage, Shaq showed us a veritable what's what of top-notch whips: Bentleys, Escalades, and Mercedes-Benzes galore. Then he offered up some words of wisdom, which proved to me why, if Tim Duncan is called "the Big Fundamental," Shaq calls himself "the Big Aristotle." Commenting on a Benz in his quiver that has 18-inch rims instead of 22-inch ones, Shaq said, "I still need to get rims for this one. But you know, a Benz without the rims is still a Benz."

"My god, that's brilliant!" I blurted out. Because the same principle also applies to computer hardware. This month's Power Rig sports a 2GHz Pentium 4 built on an Intel DM850MD motherboard. The computer was damn fast, but invariably people will jump down my throat for using a motherboard based on an Intel chipset. The fact remains that replacing the Intel DM850MD motherboard with, say, an ASUS will probably speed things up. But the benchmarks show that, just as a Benz with 18-inch rims is still a Benz, a 2GHz Pentium 4 built on an Intel DM850MD motherboard is still a 2GHz Pentium 4. Thanks Shaq! Lemme know if you need a tech geek who knows how to wash cars.

How To: Install Windows XP

It's not as hard as you think, usually **By William O'Neal**

With the recent release of Windows XP, there's no doubt that many of you are considering taking the plunge. That said, the prospect can seem pretty daunting for those who've never installed an OS. The thing is, installing a new OS isn't as difficult as it seems. But before doing anything, be sure to back up all important data on either a second drive (or partition) or other storage medium.

STEP #1

Bring up your system's BIOS to make sure that your CD-ROM drive is the first bootable drive. (On most systems, you access the BIOS menu by pressing F2 or Delete while the system is booting.) Next, put the Windows XP CD in the CD-ROM drive and then reboot. When prompted, choose to boot from the CD. The Windows XP CD will then load all of the needed setup software.

STEP #2

On the partition screen, be sure to choose to install Windows XP on the correct partition. If you install it on the wrong partition (like the one that you backed up all of your data on), you'll lose whatever was being stored there. Also, be sure to format the partition using the NTFS file system. This will enable the individual users to keep their data private.

STEP #3

From this point choose to install the most Common Components. If you're not sure which network settings to install, start with the Basic Network settings (these can be changed later).

STEP #4

When creating users, it's best to create the computer's administrator first. This person will have the ability to create and remove other users as well as assign passwords. If you decide to create a password at this time, be sure that it's one you can remember. Forgetting your password with Windows XP can be disastrous.

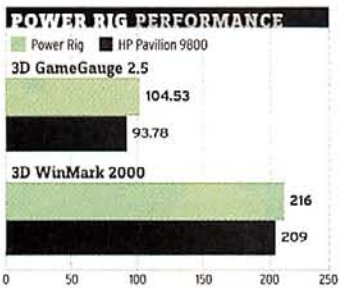
STEP #5

When the OS is running, launch the Control Panel and do the necessary tweaking (you may not need to do any, depending on your configuration). This is also the best time to add any hardware that wasn't originally detected. Graphics are in a folder called WindowsXP Images.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine **By William O'Neal**

POWER RIG



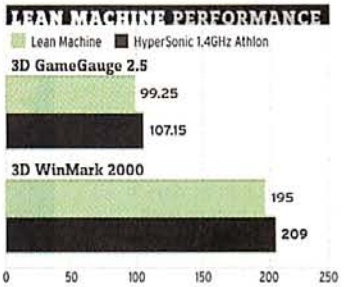
Power Rig $2,982
HP Pavilion 9800 $2,909

My Power Rig was nearly $100 more than the 1.7GHz HP Pavilion Pentium 4 that we reviewed in November, so it damn well better outperform it. Both machines sport 256MB of RDRAM and 19-inch monitors, but my Power Rig boasts Klipsch's hot new Promedia 5.1 speakers, 10 more gigs of storage, a faster CD-RW drive, and Creative Labs' SoundBlaster Audigy.

Due to the 2GHz Pentium 4's new CPU footprint, I had to go with Intel's D850MD motherboard as opposed to the ASUS P4T that's in the HP Pavilion.

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Case	Antec SX-635	$90
Motherboard	Intel D850MD	$150
CPU	2GHz Pentium 4/400MHz FSB	$562
Memory	Kingston 256MB PC800 RDRAM	$125
Graphics Card	Elsa Gladiac 920	$375
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax 80GB EIDE	$200
CD-RW Drive	Plextor PlexWriter 24/10/40A	$250
DVD-ROM Drive	Creative PC-DVD Encore 12x	$150
Monitor	Samsung SyncMaster 955DF 19"	$280
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy	$250
Speakers	Klipsch Promedia 5.1	$350
Modem	Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem	$40
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro w/ Intellimouse Optical	$75
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder GamePad USB	$25
TOTAL		$2,982

LEAN MACHINE



Lean Machine $1,435
HyperSonic Sonic Fury SE $1,499

I'm sure by now you've noticed that what was once the Power Rig is now the Lean Machine. In the world of technology, that's the way it works. I realize that at more than $1,400 the Lean Machine still costs a pretty penny. But the thing is, if you swap out that GeForce3 card for something less hardcore, you can easily drop $200 from the overall price. You'll also notice that I went with rather expensive CD-RW and hard drives. Why, you ask? Because I can.

What was once the Power Rig is now the Lean Machine. That's how it works in technology.

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Case	Antec SX-635	$90
Motherboard	ASUS A7A266	$130
CPU	1.4GHz AMD Athlon	$150
Memory	256MB Crucial SDRAM	$50
Graphics Card	Elsa Gladiac 920	$375
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax 40GB EIDE	$100
CD-RW Drive	Plextor PlexWriter 8/4/32	$100
DVD-ROM Drive	N/A	N/A
Monitor	Samsung SyncMaster 753 DF 17"	$175
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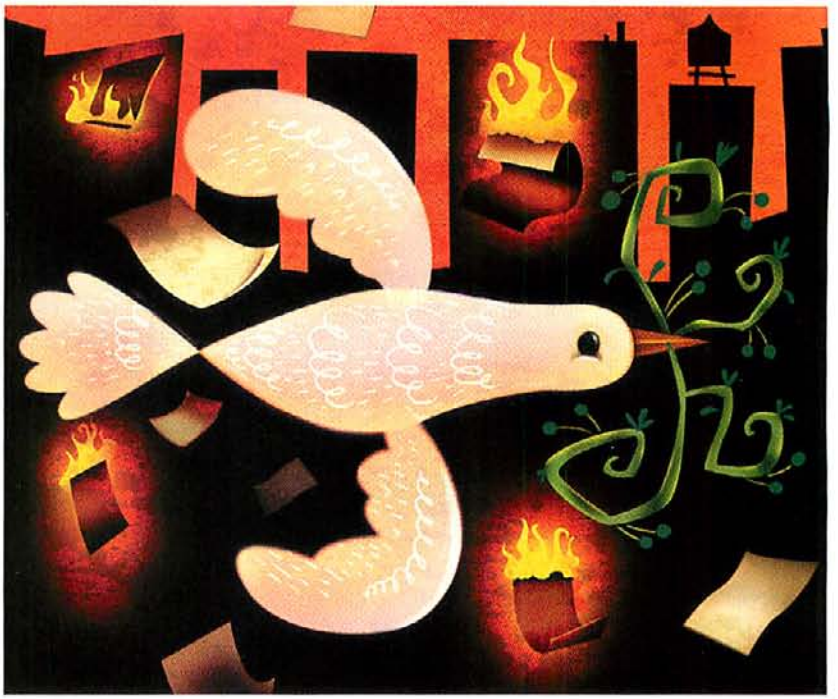
Speakers	Altec Lansing ACS95W	$25
Modem	Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem	$40
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro w/ Intellimouse Optical	$75
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder GamePad USB	$25
TOTAL		$1,435

Greenspeak

Game Paused

On grief, horror, and the pursuit of trivial pursuits **By Jeff Green**



For the second time in the three-plus years that I've been writing this column, I have had the wind completely knocked out of me. Two years ago, at the time of the June 1999 issue, my beloved cousin Suzy died of cancer at age 36. At that point, I couldn't fathom writing a column about something as dumb and trivial as computer games. And now, I am sorry to say, it is happening again.

I am writing this particular column on September 12, 2001—one day after one of the most horrific days in American history. Until yesterday, I had two other columns in progress—both of them ridiculous, dumbass columns about nothing, with no purpose other than making you laugh.

And as much as I feel that making people laugh is still a worthy pursuit—maybe now more than ever—today I just don't have it in me. I need to pause from the regularly scheduled inanity for one month. Because in the face of this unfathomable horror, computer gaming seems even more dumb and trivial than ever.

In the face of this horror, gaming seems more trivial than ever.

***

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty or ashamed about your favorite hobby. That's what your parents and spouses are for. And goodness knows I won't lecture you or try to offer any words of wisdom, because I don't have any. The ideal column this month, really, would be a blank page—either that, or a string of expletives, in really large type. But maybe I'll save those ideas for the next time Blizzard announces a delay in *WarCraft III*—you know, the kind of thing that usually riles us up around here.

It's amazing, really, how fast and with such overwhelming force the world can get knocked into perspective for those of us who devote our time and energy to gaming. Not a day goes by when most of us don't inwardly realize that what we're doing is, in the grand scheme of things, a bit silly. But still, it's easy to get lost in it. It's easy to make *your* world the center of the world, so that suddenly things like, oh, I dunno, the latest screenshots of *Halo* or the rampant cheating in *Counter-Strike* actually assume some level of "importance" to us.

Not today. I'm writing this column from a skyscraper in San Francisco, and today all I can think about is this: It could have been me. It could have been me in one of those buildings, or in one of those planes. It could have been any of us. So if you're reading this column: congratulations. You made it another day. Let's all stop for a moment, and ponder, and give thanks for such a beautiful, enormous miracle.

***

And after we take our time out to think and grieve for the dead and pray for the wounded, we can toggle off that Pause button and get back to our games, and we can do so without guilt.

The reason we need dumb, trivial pursuits like computer gaming is because of events like those of September 11, 2001. Life is hard. Life is scary. Life is fleeting. By all means, do what you can to be a good citizen. But don't feel bad, either, for that slightly less noble urge to retreat, for sanity's sake, into the comfort of your favorite hobby.

I don't know when my time is coming. I don't know if I'll be ready or not. But if there's one thing I do know, it's that, along with ensuring that my family and friends are safe and sound, I suddenly feel more committed than ever to finally finishing Chapter Two of *Baldur's Gate II*.

You think I'm kidding? I wish I were. But this month, friends, I'm fresh out of jokes.

Send email to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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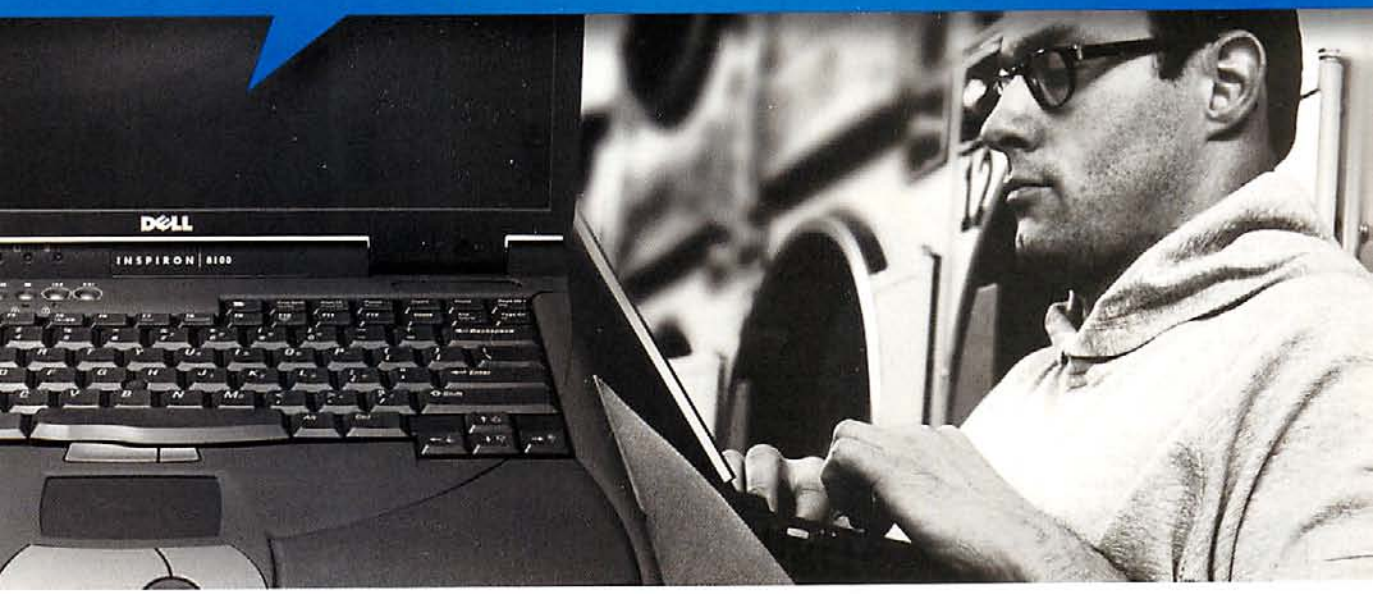

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