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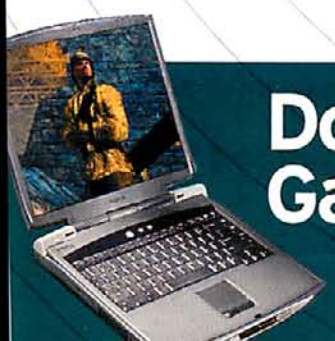

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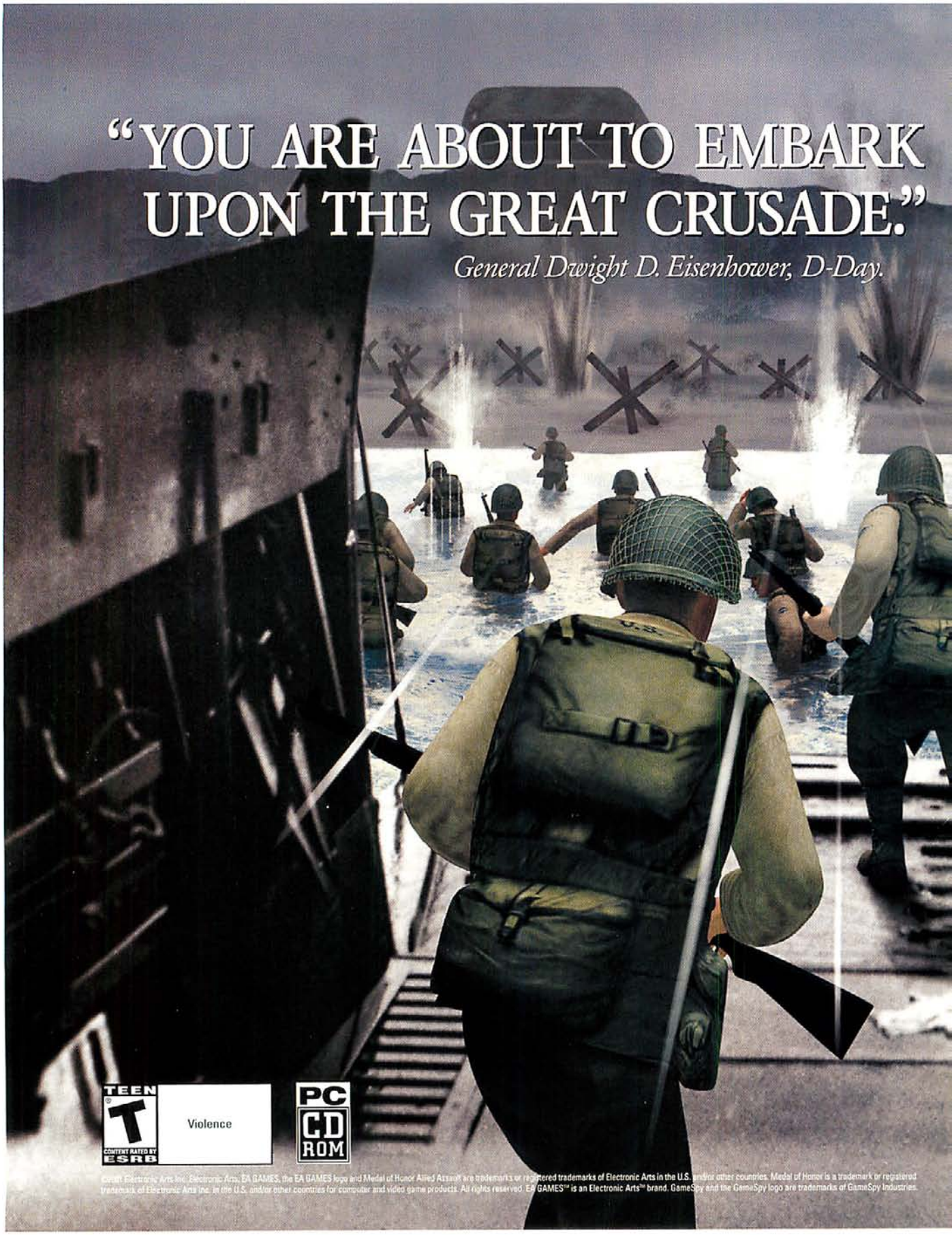

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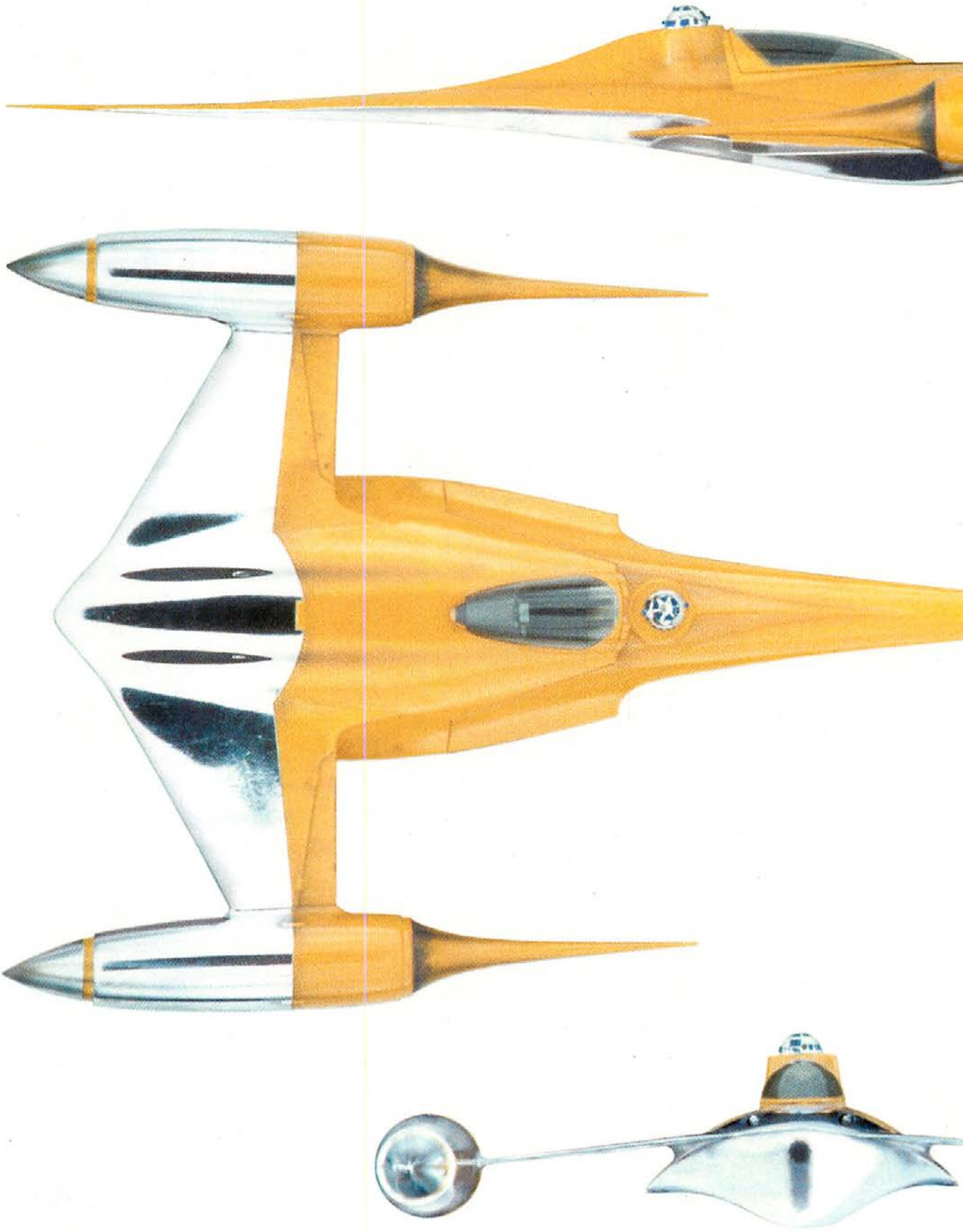

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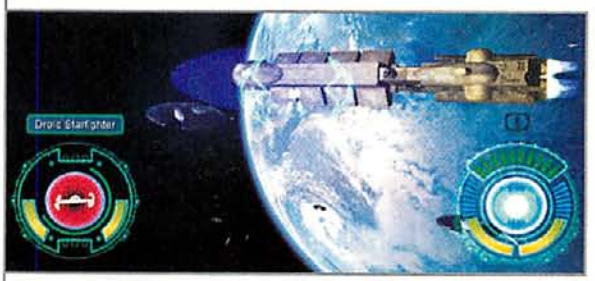

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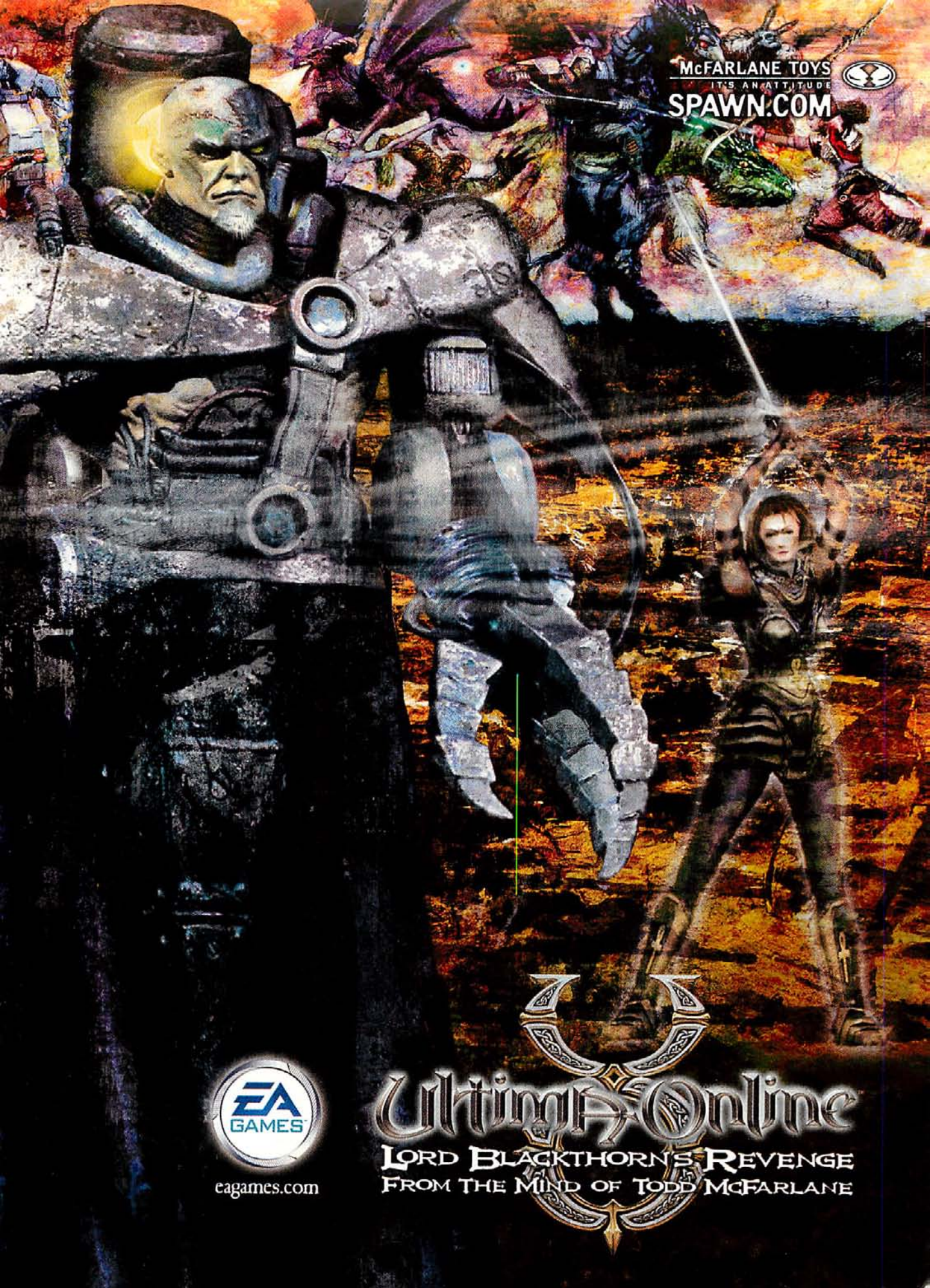
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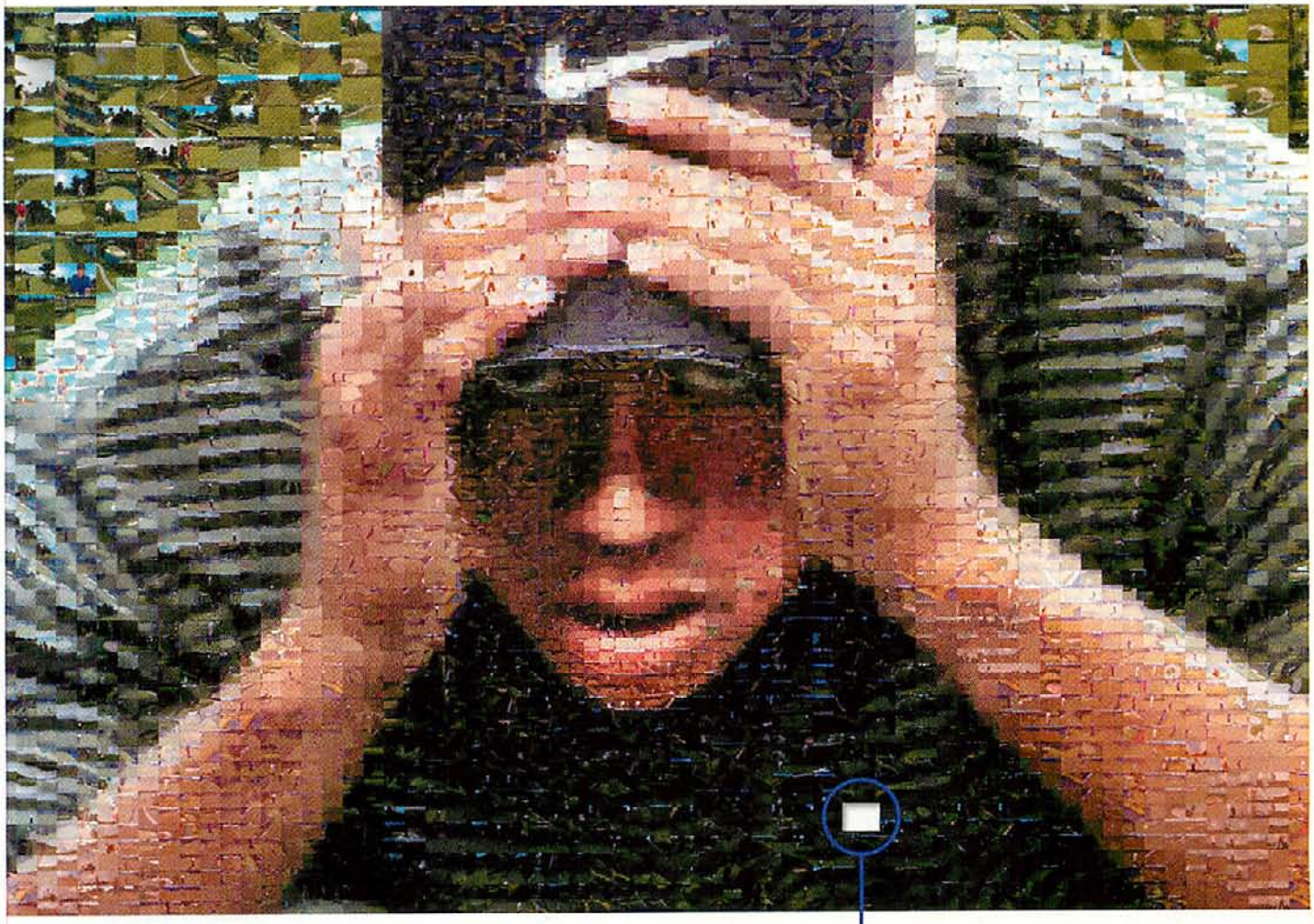

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First-Person Scooter

While watching a former Chinese-mafia enforcer entrenched in a gunfight with a genetically-enhanced assassin clown (episode #20 of *Cowboy Bebop*), I realized that the often-cried request of "story!" isn't the only thing needed to make genre-advancing action games. *Cowboy Bebop* is an amazing show in that, in addition to having substance alongside intense action, it has a sense of style that pervades the entire series. Rarely has an action game combined all of those elements, but the ones that do have branded themselves within the history of the genre.

Right now, there are still way too many first-person shooters in development, in addition to the ones bruising their way onto store shelves. A lot of these feel like uninspired, by-the-numbers formula runs: "Insert crate-filled corridor here." "Insert Super-Mega-Boss-Man here." "Throw in explosive rocket gun here." Gah.

Think about the great shooters of the past. Not only did *NOLF* introduce smart scripting and interesting gameplay elements, it simply oozed style all over. *Half-Life*, while not rivaling *Foucault's Pendulum* when it comes to plot complexity, introduced a new sense of style and design sensibility with a view to immersing the player.

Even recent games that stood out have either style or substance, if not both. *Max Payne* may have been a rehash of Punisher-meets-Charlie-Bronson, but its slick stylings saved it from mediocrity. Note how *AvP2* improved upon the style of its predecessor, and then added a dollop of good substance into the pot. Contrast those with something like *Red Faction*, which hinted at great substance only to be mired in the formula of mediocrity.

It's always been said that this genre needs a serious shot in the arm to progress.

It's always been said that this genre needs a serious shot in the arm to progress. Strides are starting to be made with titles like *Operation Flashpoint* (then again, that could be considered a sim instead of a shooter), but not since *Half-Life* or *NOLF* has a pure action game created the perfect fusion of style and substance found in *Cowboy Bebop*. Okay, maybe I need to watch fewer cartoons and more live people running around, but the synergy (ye gods, I sound like some dot-commer) of style, story, and action stand out to me. Shooters that have transcended or elevated the genre didn't just add a story on top of the action; they also added a new look and feel that completely raised the bar for how a shooter should be presented. Appropriate that I discuss this stuff in an issue with a big shooter on the cover and reviews of hot ones inside.

Which World War II shooter has the phrase "game of the year" slathered all over it? The unflinchingly old-school action romp that is *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* or the *Saving Private Ryan*-esque *Medal of Honor*? Does *Unreal II* have the style, storytelling, and relentless action that I've been babbling for? Will there be a shooter that has the amazing fusion of style and substance that the genre needs?

Well, flip the page already.

Thierry Nguyen
Strategies & Tips Editor

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Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Mr. Potty Mouth Says Hello

I just want to know one thing. Where the [redacted] do you [redacted] get your [redacted] versions of Direct X? See, almost all of my games require DX to run and I had DX5, and my games ran fine, but after I installed DX8 from your piece of [redacted] CD it [redacted] up my PC so now the only games that I can play are Minesweeper and Solitaire! Now don't [redacted] tell me that it's just my PC cuz I took the CD to my friend's and brother-in-law's PCs and it didn't work there either. The only way that I can fix this is by reformatting my hard drive and reinstalling all of my programs. So when you [redacted] stop [redacted] each other up the [redacted] wright [sic] a proper letter and I might resubscribe. And keep making fun of those damn Canadians.

Maks

P.S. I burned your magazines and play frisbee with your CDs.

Pool of Radiance Review: Feel the Love

Next time you need someone to review an RPG, try getting someone who's played more than a couple of them. This clown, Rob Smolka, who reviewed *Pool of Radiance* obviously has never played a true dungeon romp before. His review of *PoR* in the January 2002 issue (#210) sounded like he had a bad hair day or something. Sure, the game had problems out of the box, but I wouldn't call it Coaster of the Year.

Actually, I'm about to start my second time through the dungeons of *PoR*! I'd put it one step up from *Wizards & Warriors* and a step down from *Icewind Dale*. For anyone longing for the good ol' days of *Wizardry* or the original gold box games, *PoR* is a step in the right direction.

What happened to never reviewing a game until you've finished playing it? Technically, Smolka didn't finish it. The patch to fix the "save" bug has been on the Web for months. He could have put a caveat at the start of the review, downloaded the patch, and said so. Don't trash the whole game just because you're miffed about a patch!

DrJ

ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY CAMPBELL

WHY wasn't I warned earlier?? WHY?? WHY?? Last month I made the biggest mistake of my life: I purchased a copy of *Pool of Radiance*. I had been thirsty for a new game ever since *Baldur's Gate II*, and my eyes were drawn to the cleverly disguised box of *Pool of Radiance*. I wasted my $65 and hurried home to play what looked like a *Baldur's Gate* clone. Not five minutes after starting a new game, I had already realized the atrocity that I had committed. It was like waking up in *The Crying Game*.

I am ashamed that the infernal game ever sucked up space on my hard drive. Its taint has already spread across my house, infecting everything I hold dear, and it still remains. I would have played skeet with the game off my roof, but I might have missed, and some other poor fool might have picked it up off the ground and made the same mistake I did. This game isn't even coaster-worthy. It wouldn't be right to force it through the garbage disposal. This game couldn't have been any worse if it had come with a shipment of anthrax. Don't even touch it with a 40-foot pole. I'd rather wipe my ass with sandpaper for the rest of my life than play *Pool of Radiance*.

As for *CGW*, don't screw up like this again. If a game this bad hits the market again, warn us immediately! I still believe in you, and I know you weren't entirely at fault, so in the meantime please tell me the best method of exterminating *Pool of Radiance*.

Neb Yelrowh

The review of *Pool of Radiance* brings *CGW* to new levels of hypocrisy. It amazes me how everything that you fault *PoR* for, you had no problem with in *Diablo*. The first thing faulted is the "mockery" of character development. "Yes, you can pick your race, class, alignment, and name..." Well, I think that is at least three more things than could be done in *Diablo*. The caption under one picture says, "All the characters you create of a certain race and class will end up performing and looking pretty

...I had already realized the atrocity that I had committed. It was like waking up in *The Crying Game*.

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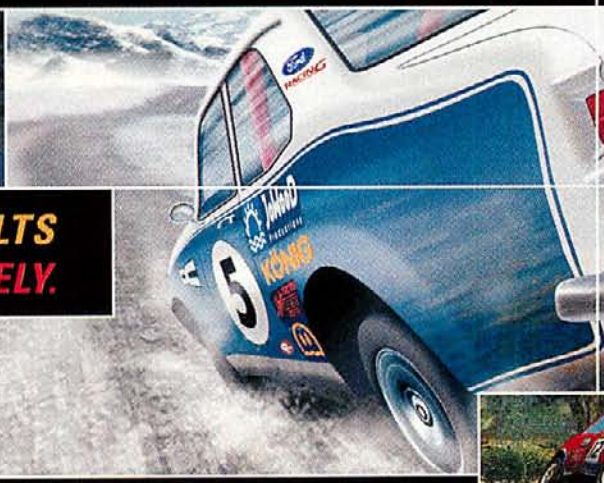

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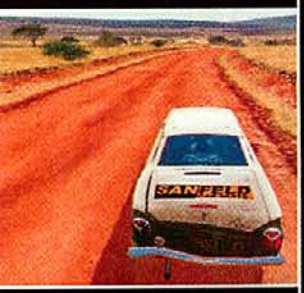

Rally Trophy Buzz

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"Great engine sound. You really get the idea you're revving one of those great 60s engines..." ..."Some of the most exciting rallying I've ever done in front of a PC." — High Gear Website

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Rally Trophy

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much alike." Well, as I recall in *Diablo*, all the characters were the same and all the characters of the same class appeared exactly the same when created. But good job at faulting *PoR* and not *Diablo*.

Both *PoR* and *Diablo* advertised themselves to be role-playing games, but neither of them are. They are fantasy action games and nothing more. I do not see how you can fault one game, calling it a Coaster of the Year candidate, and name a game that has all of the same flaws Game of the Year. But that is probably just the Blizzard bias that *CGW* has had since Blizzard came out with their first game. I hope you re-review *PoR* and this time do so objectively, without bias, and without being totally hypocritical in the process

Josh Duckworth
Allentown, Pennsylvania

Why Haven't You Reviewed....?

Why the hell haven't you done a real review of *The Sims: Hot Date* yet? Please do so, and give it a 5-star rating, or the orange chinchillas are gonna be real pissed....

Kat2055
Sword-wielding partial-neko martial artist

It's in this issue. We loved it. Call off the orange chinchillas.

What did I expect when the managing editor is having her first experience playing with her jewels and the rest of the staff is busy fighting over donuts?? Not a fricken' word about the release of *Wizardry 8*, and don't give me that bull about news of the pending release not making it out in time for this issue (it came out October 18). Not even a mention in your pending release section.

What do you do all day, argue about whether Leelee Sobieski is hotter than Lara Croft? Is anyone on the staff even interested in the best RPG to be released in ages, or are you too busy trying to imagine Wookiee nookie??

Should I excuse you all this injustice considering that most of you are probably not old enough to have a parent who played *Wizardry I* on an Apple IIc? Hell no. *Wizardry 8* even has a paid advertisement in your rag!!

Redeem yourself with a full review and cover shot of this excellent game in your next magazine or face the wrath of all of us gamers who understand that a 5-inch floppy is not an anatomical reference.

Dave Loomis
Bowie, Maryland

Mmmmm...Wookiee nookie.

Job Requests

I really need some help here. My husband (the father of my two kids) is a 30-year-old heating/air installer by day and a 12-year-old kid hooked on RPGs at night. He comes home every night to play his games and escape reality, and is ignoring us in the process. I have tried everything. He has gotten very good at fetching his computer from the dumpster. He also has a real knack for tearing his computer into really small pieces all over my living room for 13 hours while fixing a nasty virus my coworker "accidentally" sent to our e-mail. My husband is also extremely intelligent. He introduced me to *Bejeweled* with a promise to buy me *Zoo Tycoon* for my birthday. So I have decided to stop trying to sabotage the PC. But this does not fix the problem at hand.

I am writing to you—scratch that—I am begging and pleading on my hands and knees here, asking that you give my old man a job. Maybe if he enjoys his job enough and gets to play games all day, he can actually come home to us at night. What a great asset he would be to your company. He would be right there if your heater goes flat in January!!!

I need my husband back, and I'm sure you can always use someone with as much gaming experience and enthusiasm as he has. Please consider this, and one wife and mother will be very grateful.

Yours oh so truly,

Stacey Ridgell
Cleveland, Tennessee

After reading Dana Jongewaard's insightful peek into the life of a *CGW* editor [Editorial, January 2002], I've got to admit, you guys have the coolest job on earth! Playing computer games at work, and then spending your well-earned money on beer, girls, and computer upgrades—what more could one ask for? Too bad that in my country, Singapore, my chance of becoming a game magazine editor is the same as Jeff Green getting a frag in *Counter-Strike*! Would marrying Jeff Green's daughter and letting him frag me in *Counter-Strike* get me a job at *CGW*? Keep up the good work!

Jonathan Zhang
Singapore

The big mistake you people keep making is thinking that we have fun here. We don't. It's hell. This month, for example, Robert Coffey had to play the *Survivor* game, okay? So keep installing those heaters and thank the gods that you're not us.

Redesign Issues

One of the smallest, yet most amusing, parts of your magazine was when you'd match up pictures to the different levels of ratings in your reviews section (Muppets, fast food joints, *Sopranos* stars, and so on).

Why did you kill it? It didn't take up that much room but was clever and funny.

Wesley Hinkley

Yeah, we liked those too. Unfortunately, Art Director Rob Schultz is a real hard-ass about these things, and he has pictures of us with farm animals, so the chance of picture ratings coming back is slim.

Here's a big thanks to the forward-thinking editor who decided to have Scott McCloud become a regularly featured writer in *CGW*. I never read many comic books as a kid, but a few years ago, after receiving Scott McCloud's amazing book *Understanding Comics* as a Christmas gift, I began to truly understand the power of comics and media in general. Scott's ideas have helped me better understand media and how it shapes our world. It also gives greater meaning to my job as a computer/video game retailer, knowing that what I sell is not always a vapid waste of time, but the first shaky steps down the path of a new and glorious entertainment media. So keep those Scott McCloud editorials coming, it puts a sharp spin on what is already the most intelligent and thoughtful gaming publication on newsstands today. Keep up the great work.

Chris Greer
Victoria, British Columbia Canada

MAIL BITES

Profanity has no business in a gaming magazine. I'd appreciate it if future issues were less profane and more family oriented.
Sandy

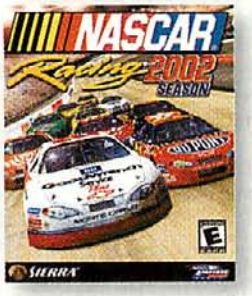
To all of you who whine and cry that a particular editor reviewed a game incorrectly and because of that, the reviewer in question sucks: Do us a favor and jump off a cliff.
Bryan Jennings

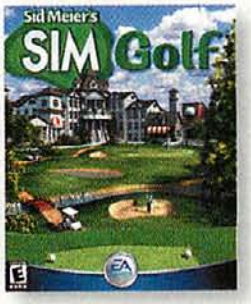
***Max Payne*'s storyline kicks ass! Maybe after you read this you will go back to school and learn something.**
JJ Sparky

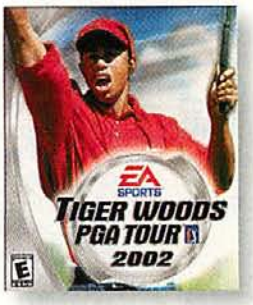
Please disregard my previous two emails. I really don't want them in your magazine.
Highwinded

Whatever your game

Mature Rating







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Maybe We Should Hire an Editor?

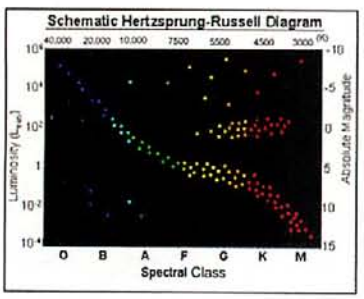
I write to you in the deepest concern for your magazine. The new layout is flawless, the articles and reviews are wonderful, and Jeff Green is as perky as ever. However, I have found a troubling flaw in your magazine. Your *CGW* Top 20 sucks. Well, not the whole thing, but the ratings that you give to some of the games on the Top 20 are...WRONG.

Through some silly, silly error, you have given *Diablo* 2.5 stars, instead of the 4.5 you guys actually gave it. In addition, *Kings Quest 8* (heck, I'm not even sure why it's on the list, since it came out like three years ago!) is listed as receiving 2 stars, when really you gave it 4 stars. And finally, you indicated *NFS: Porsche Unleashed* was given 4 stars, when it was really given 4.5.

Okay, I can hear you saying: "This guy has toooo much time on his hands," or, "Would it be wrong to commit him?" But hey, if you publish this letter, I promise to direct my trivial knowledge of *CGW* ratings to where it is needed the most: My cardboard cutout of Robert Coffey.

Edward Pullman

P.S. Of the six years I have been reading *CGW*, you have never had a bad issue!



This Month's Random Know-It-Alls

In your January '02 issue, you referred to "something called a Hertzberg-Russell diagram." The gentleman's name was Hertzsprung. He and Russell came up with a diagram that plotted the relationship between a star's luminosity (read: brightness) and its spectral type (read: color).

Everyone knows that *Star Trek* has M-type planets for Earthlike worlds, and you may have heard reference to other types of planets. This is sci-fi. No such thing exists in Real Life (TM). The H-R diagram, however, does assign letters to stars. The Sun is a G-type, firmly in the middle of the chart. It's generally believed that only stars in the center of the chart (F and G types) are suitable for having planets with life.

This is kind of important if you're planning on colonizing a planet. Having a good sun, I mean. Wouldn't want to start building only to be wiped out by a nova or something in a year!

So while this normally would only be info a geek or astronomy enthusiast would know (I majored in physics), for this game it's quite relevant.

Now someone make a *MOO3*-type *Star Wars* game!!

Robert Z.

Thanks for the info, Robert. Now give us your lunch money or we'll kick your ass.

I would like to point out the obvious, or not so obvious, fact that you guys have few natural science majors on staff. In your Holiday Buyer's Guide [January 2002], you described the battles in *Independence War 2* as having "Newtonian physics."

At first, this seemed like a compliment, until I remembered that the Newtonian equation for momentum is wholly inadequate when an object is travelling close to the speed of light. Suppose a spacecraft of mass 5000 kg were moving at 50 percent the speed of light or 1.5 x 10^6 m/s, and we use the Newtonian equation p = mv to calculate momentum. We would come up with p = 5000(1.5x 10^6) = 7.5 x 10^9 kg.m/s. Now, let's use Einstein's p = m(v/(1 - (v/c)^2)^1/2) to take relativity into account. We would end up with p = 5000(1.5x10^6/(1-.5^2)^1/2) = 1.7x10^6(5000) = 8.7 x 10^9 kg.m/s. The percent difference between these momenta is over 13 percent! I hope that the ships in *Independence War 2* travel really slowly because otherwise the crashes are not gonna be realistic.

Geoff Hollinger
Engineering major at Swarthmore College

P.S. Will you hire me when I graduate?

Sorry, we don't hire nerds.

Our Angriest Fan

Hey *CGW*! First off, I'd like to commend you guys on years and years of ratings that are almost always 100 percent on-the-dot correct. But the main reason I'm writing you is because of these nerds out in who-knows-where thinking that YOU owe THEM something. If anything, THEY owe YOU something (besides the yearly subscription rate).

Filling the Quota

Dear Jeff,
It is so nice to see that *CGW* hires minorities. Who can be more of a minority than a Hobbit? I must admit that at first I thought that maybe the whole staff went to see *The Lord of the Rings* en masse. But no, you all couldn't possibly have taken on alter egos. Wait, gamers' log-on names? I guess it is possible. Hmmmm.

This is why I subscribe to your magazine—other than the reviews, of course. (You sent me a survey, but this option was not on it.) It is great fun finding gems like this! I love the jokes!

Elaine Berdy

I mean, look at JM from the December 2001 issue: "You are using a phrase in your Tech Medic section that is a registered trademark of Radio Shack: 'You've got questions? We've got answers.' Sorry guys, time to find another phrase." Now, is it me, or does this guy have an attitude problem?? What is he—the CEO of Radio Shack? WHO THE HELL CARES IF YOU USE THEIR SLOGAN?!? All I know is, I surely don't. And another thing, Jane Mackinnon from Canada (November 2001)—WHY DON'T YOU GO F*** YOURSELF YOU FLOPPY-HEADED BEADY-EYED BASTARD!! *CGW*, you rock, your editors rock, and anyone who thinks otherwise should subscribe to another magazine, or do exactly what I've advised Jane up there to do.

Now I'd like to close with the code I live by:

From the halls of *Wolfenstein* 3D,
To the shores of *Warcraft III*,
We will fight all of our battles,
Land, air and sea,
First to fight for cash and points,
Then to gain more EXP,
We are proud to claim the title,
Of Super, Ultimate Geek!

Gammer Freek

***CGW* to "Gammer Freek": Try decaf.**

Is anyone on the staff even interested in the best RPG to be released in ages, or are you too busy trying to imagine Wookiee nookie??

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HITMAN 2

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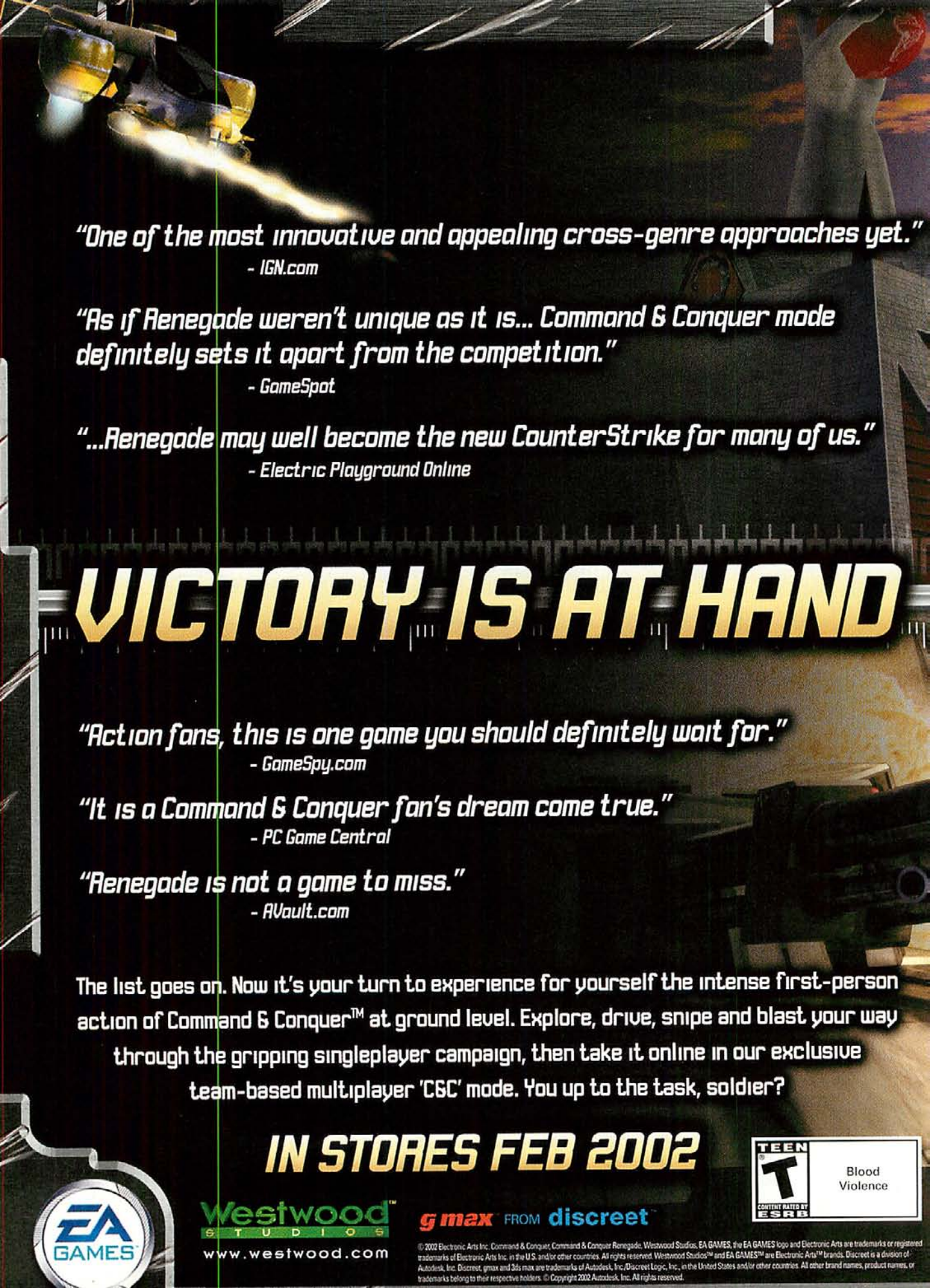
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"As if Renegade weren't unique as it is... Command & Conquer mode definitely sets it apart from the competition."
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"...Renegade may well become the new CounterStrike for many of us."
- Electric Playground Online
VICTORY IS AT HAND
"Action fans, this is one game you should definitely wait for."
- GameSpy.com
"It is a Command & Conquer fan's dream come true."
- PC Game Central
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- AVault.com
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Violence
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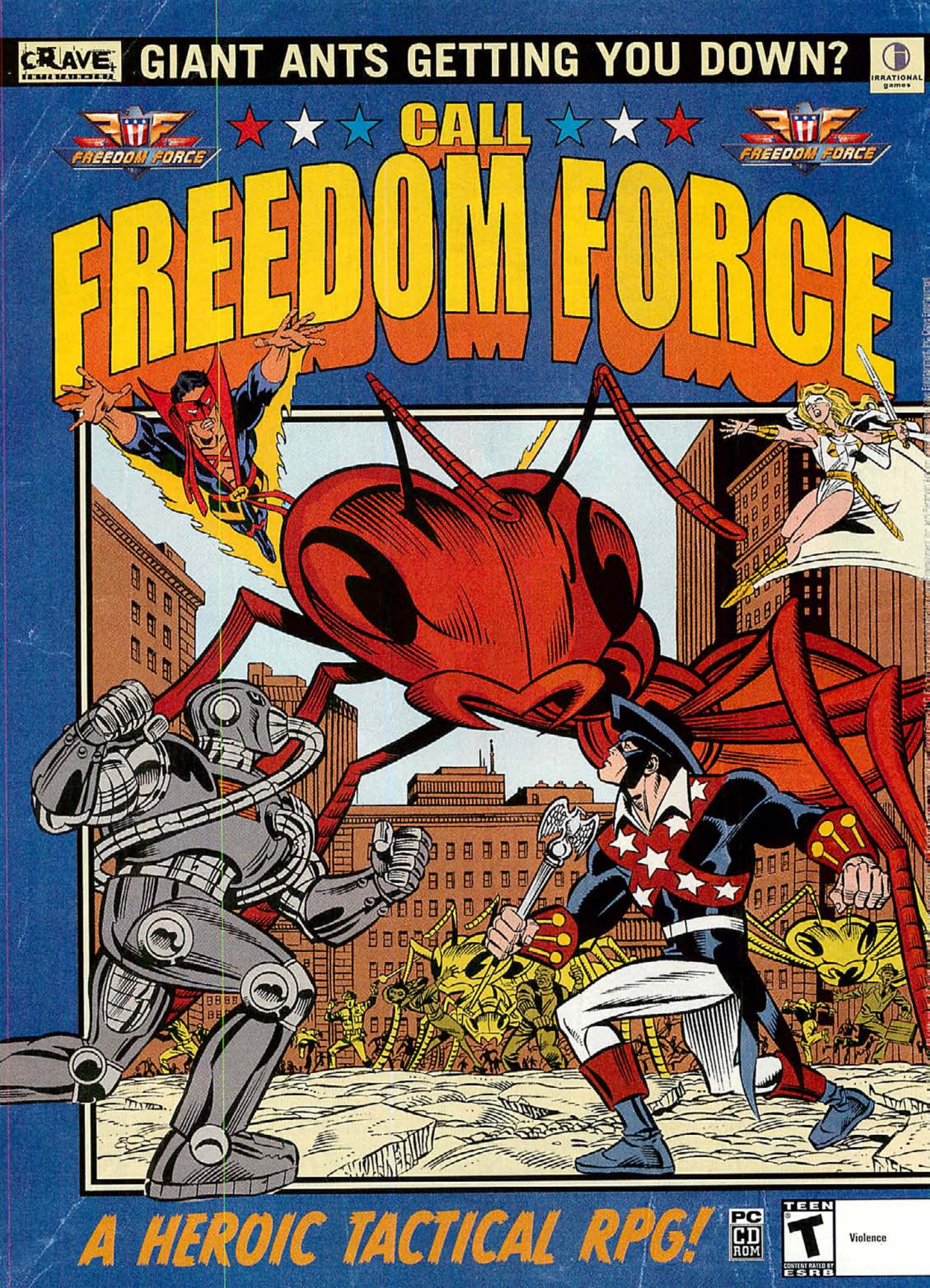
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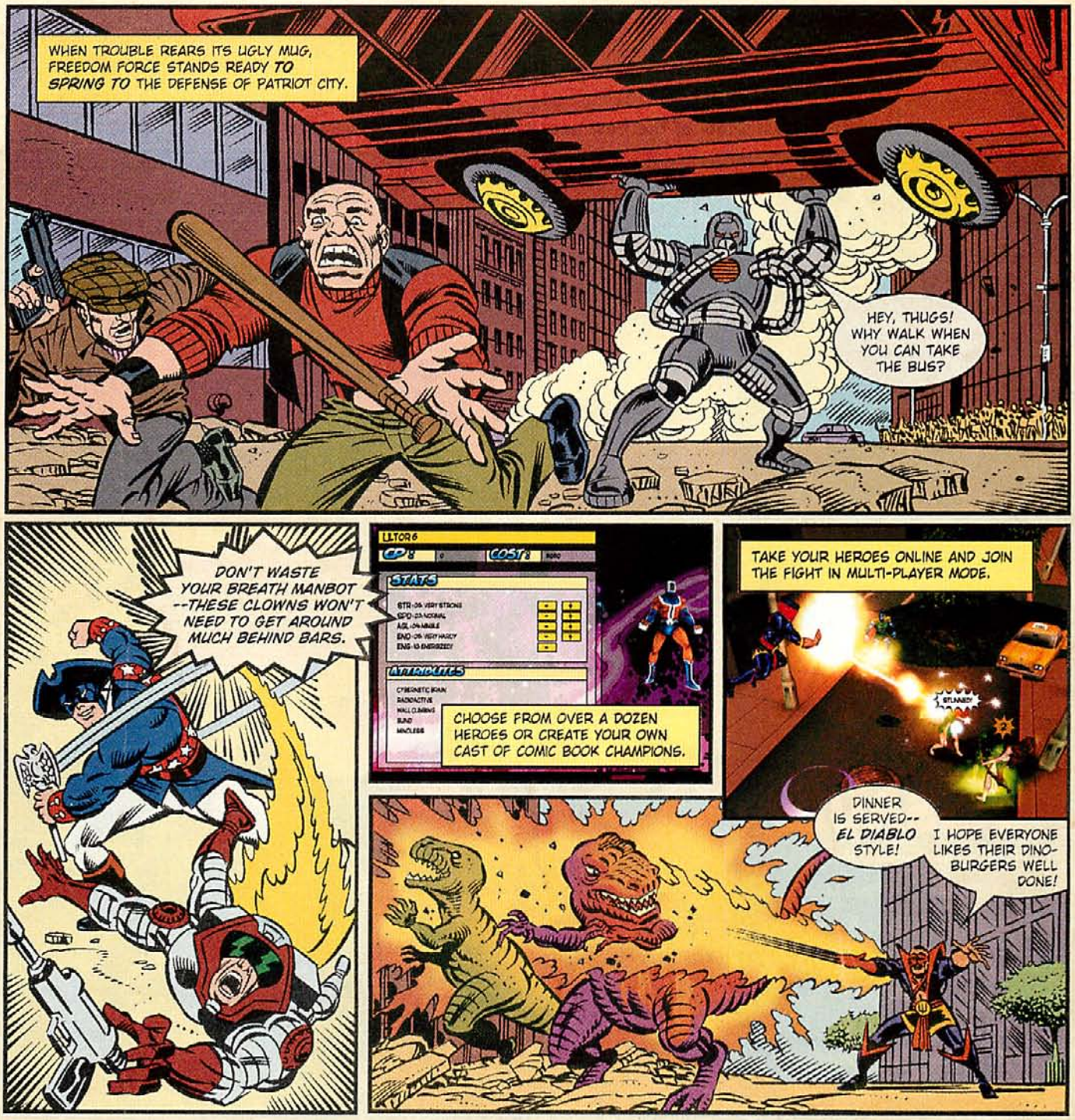
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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price

MEDAL OF HONOR ALLIED ASSAULT

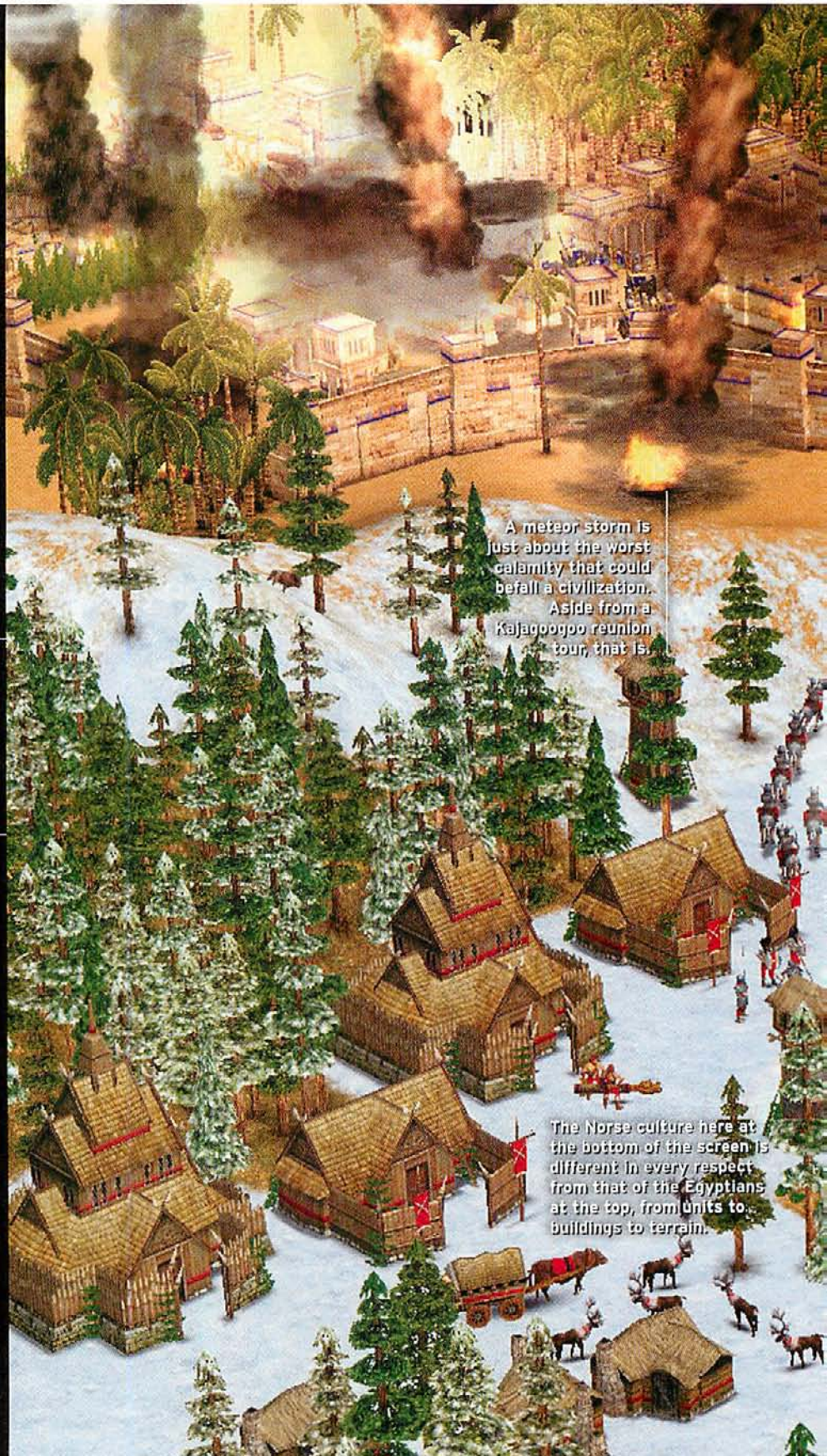
Be jealous, be very jealous. The final code for *Medal of Honor Allied Assault* arrived in the *CGW* offices a few days ago–just in time for us to squeeze the review in on page 68–and we've been riveted by its gritty battle scenes and varied gameplay ever since. The invasion of Normandy level pictured here is just as harrowing and scary as it was in *Saving Private Ryan*, perhaps even more so since you're controlling the action. Hope you saved some of that Xmas money, 'cause *MoH* should be on shelves now.

Keeping your head down is your only chance of survival.

This level has that same grittiness that made the *Saving Private Ryan* beach scene so amazing.
Through the haze, you can just barely see the tank traps and barbed wire of Omaha Beach and your impending doom.
This guy got caught out in the open.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

It's beginning to look a lot like an *Age* game. *Age of Mythology*, the hot new real-time strategy game from *Age of Empires* makers Ensemble Software, is shaping up to be our most anticipated strategy game of 2002. Far from being a sequel to the *Age of Empires* line, *Age of Mythology* takes all the great RTS elements of that series and gives them a fantasy twist, with mythological creatures, magical heroes, and spectacular spells.



A meteor storm is just about the worst calamity that could befall a civilization. Aside from a Kajagoogoo reunion tour, that is.

The Norse culture here at the bottom of the screen is different in every respect from that of the Egyptians at the top, from units to buildings to terrain.

Not all magic spells are about destruction. This rain spell will water your crops and give you a pretty rainbow to look at, too.
Don't call the Anubites "dog-faced." Those are jackal heads.
This big daddy is a Mountain Giant, and he's one of the mythical creatures of the Norse culture.

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

The sprawling world of *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* has been tightened down for this new installment; you'll feel relieved to travel around 30 towns as opposed to the 300 of the previous game. Other new features—like a hyperlinked journal, a refined combat system, and an even deeper character generation system—get us closer to a revival of the RPG genre (and this franchise). Jump back to Tamriel sometime this spring.

Silt Striders are giant bugs that have been captured and are used for fast travel throughout the huge world of Morrowind, like insectoid Yellow cabs.

This guard is wearing traditional Bonemold Armor, divided into nine pieces, each of which can be removed individually.

New clouds rolling in. Morrowind has fog, rain, and ash storms, as well as day and night cycles.

All of the items you see in the world, like the wares for sale in this market stand, can be picked up, rearranged, or bought and sold.

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Read Me

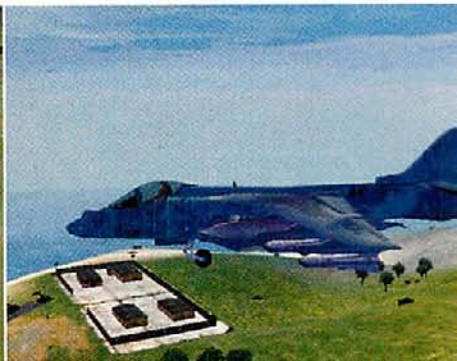
A smorgasbord of news, opinion, and random stuff Edited by Ken Brown

VBS-1 is a custom version of *Operation Flashpoint* with Marine Corps vehicles, uniforms, and enhanced fire support.

FRONTLINE

War Without Tears

21st century soldiers will train with the same games you play By Raphael Liberatore



INSIDE

THE NOMINEES
Which worthy candidate will walk away with Game of the Year? **PAGE 37**

MAGIC NOMADS
CDV cooks up a fantastical blend of action and strategy. **PAGE 38**

SCOTT McCLOUD
Should the game tell the story or should you? **PAGE 40**

POST-MORTEM
Nobody likes role-playing in role-playing games. **PAGE 42**

Developed in cooperation with the Army, CS-12 will let players command 120 soldiers facing unconventional threats in urban environments.

All those years spent playing computer games might pay off for the next generation of combat troops. Gamers who honed their skills on games like *Quake III*, *Rogue Spear*, and *Ghost Recon* may one day play customized versions of those games as part of their training. Meanwhile, the officers in charge of the big picture will rehearse missions by playing wargames derived from commercially-available real-time strategy games. Clearly, games and military simulations have entered a new phase in which they will soon be nearly indistinguishable.

The Department of Defense has been recruiting the games industry for years, mostly to keep development costs down. Now there are several projects under way involving *Operation Flashpoint*, *Rogue Spear*, *Delta Force 2*, and a joint project between the Army and Quicksilver Software (developers of the upcoming *Master of Orion III*).

The Marine Corps is evaluating a version of *Operation Flashpoint* called VBS-1 (Virtual Battlefield Simulator). If the project is successful, the Marines hope to deploy 2,600 PCs running VBS-1 for all of its forward fire teams.

The idea is to have networks of laptops on ships operating with Marine Expeditionary Units so the Marines can practice their skills at sea. One day they may be able to prepare for specific missions by incorporating terrain information from satellites or other intelligence sources.

"The point is not to give soldiers a game, but to teach them something."

"That's the whole point of this system: not to give Marines a game, but to teach them something," says the project's manager, Michael Woodman. Woodman, a former Marine himself, is a program manager at Coalescent Technologies, which is working with Bohemia Interactive to bring VBS-1 to fruition. Woodman says Coalescent chose *Operation Flashpoint* for its ability to handle troop transport, use ground vehicles and aircraft for fire support, call in air strikes and artillery, and simulate very large outdoor environments.

Bohemia modified *Flashpoint* by adding several Marine Corps vehicles, including the AV-8B Harrier, Amphibious Assault Vehicle, and Light Armored Vehicle. They also enhanced each squad's ability to call in fire support from aircraft and artillery. Coalescent rolled out a demo for the Marines in November that was so successful the commander insisted that Woodman leave his demo PCs for the Marines to continue training.

The soldiers seemed sold as well. Among their comments:

"The graphics were exceptional and it simulated everything you could do in combat. Overall I was quite impressed."

"I think this system would be great on ship. It would turn a lot of dead time into something constructive."

"It made me think as if I were in a real situation."

Woodman says other branches of the armed forces are also interested in *Flashpoint*/VBS-1, including the Army, the Navy, the Coast Guard, and even the Secret Service.

"The beauty of *Operation Flashpoint* is

The DoD adapted the *Rogue Spear* engine to train small units on preparing for missions and dealing with unexpected situations.

The tank sim *Steel Beasts* is so realistic that the Military Academy at West Point bought 1,000 copies for cadet training.

that it's so flexible," Woodman says. "We want the Marines to be able to use it for riot control, embassy protection, peacekeeping missions—various nonlethal missions. In the real world, things go from nonlethal to lethal very quickly—and then back again. It's very hard for soldiers to develop the skill to know when to switch back from lethal to nonlethal, and this program helps them learn when to do that."

Urban Ops

Another branch of the military is working on a custom version of *Rainbow Six Rogue Spear*. Defense contractor LB&B Associates adapted the game for a project known as METTsim (Military Element Tactical Trainer). METTsim's engine helps train military personnel on conducting operations in urban environments. It won't be used for weapons training; instead, it'll be used to help hone decision-making skills at the small-unit level. The engine will be modified to conform to the maps and scenarios requested by the DoD.

The Army is using *Delta Force 2: Land Warrior* for training. A subsidiary of NovaLogic is collaborating with the Army's Training and Doctrine Command Analysis Center to modify *Delta Force 2* as a training tool for as many as 35 simultaneous users. TRAC wanted soldiers to experience the vast outdoor terrain in *Land Warrior* under varied weather conditions, while utilizing map displays, night vision, a large array of real-world weapons, and a full-featured mission editor.

Strategic Sims

In addition to infantry sims, the Army also uses a number of strategy games to help train officers. While not as high profile, these games are also available to the general public. The Joint Readiness Training Center uses a strategy game called *Brigade Combat Team*. Designed by U.S. artillery officer Captain Patrick Proctor, *BCT* is based on a battalion/brigade-level tactical simulator known as JANUS, which was designed to train army commanders.

Military academies have also used a variation of the strategy game *Real War* published by Simon and Schuster. *Real War* was a spin-off of a Virginia-based defense contractor program from OC Inc., called Joint Force Employment.

The Army recently announced a new project with the Institute of Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California to develop a game for training military commanders. The game, CS-12, is already in development at Quicksilver Software. CS-12 will serve as a training tool for Army commanders and it will be sold to consumers in a modified form.

"America's armed forces are facing unprecedented challenges now and in the coming decades," says Quicksilver's president, William C. Fisher. "We are not facing conventional confrontations with conventional equipment and tactics. We need to develop and refine new skills suited to urban environments, and adapt to opponents who are not bound by traditional thinking, who do not operate in traditional modes, and who are not organized as traditional military units."

As the DoD moves into the 21st century, it's a sure bet its relationship with game developers will grow, and we'll see more and more computer games making their way into a variety of military training regimens and schools.

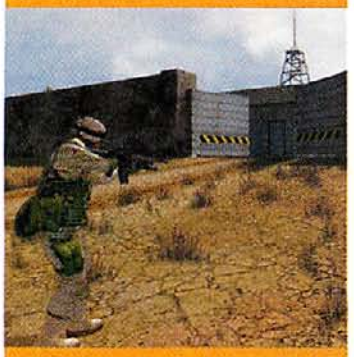
REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot	IGN	GameRankings.com
Dark Age of Camelot	A	A	A	A	A	A
Ghost Recon	B-	A	*	B-	A	A-
Microsoft Flight Sim 2002	A	A	*	A	A	A-
Myth III: The Wolf Age	B+	C	*	B+	A-	B+
Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds	B-	B	*	B+	B+	B+
Stronghold	A	B+	B-	B	A-	B+
Zoo Tycoon	B-	D+	A	B-	C+	B-

* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

NEWS FEED



The Ghosts Head to Africa

■ A new add-on for *Ghost Recon* will include eight new single-player missions set in North Africa. *Ghost Recon Mission Pack*, coming in March, will feature a new desert environment with new enemies, uniforms, weapons, and vehicles. New multiplayer maps set in the North African desert will also be included.

007 Game Revealed

■ Our spies have uncovered a new James Bond game in development at Gearbox Software. The multi-platform shooter from EA will not be based on *Agent Under Fire*—it has a new storyline, new engine, and new Bond babes to ogle. It's being designed as a "thinking man's action game" with stealth, puzzle-solving, high-tech gadgetry, and robust multiplayer options. Stay tuned for more.

Playnet Bankrupt

■ Playnet Software has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Playnet owns Cornered Rat Software, developers of *World War II Online*. CEO Jim Mesteller said Playnet's strategic plan will ensure the company's survival so that it can continue to support and improve *WWII Online*.

EA Sues Hebrew University

■ The *San Francisco Chronicle* reports that Electronic Arts filed suit against Hebrew University for the right to use Albert Einstein's name and likeness in its *Command & Conquer* games. The University, based in Jerusalem, asked EA to pay a licensing fee, since it owns Einstein's intellectual property rights. EA claims that using Einstein as a historical character is protected under the First Amendment and California law.

AWARDS SEASON

Best Games of 2001

And the nominees for Games of the Year are...*Civilization III*, *Flashpoint*, and *Bejeweled*? By Robert Coffey

2001 was a weird year for PC gaming. On one hand, we had old friends like Sid Meier's *Civilization III*, *Wizardry 8*, and *High Heat Baseball* getting gussied up in new finery and kicking the same amount of ass they always have. On the other hand, we had big high-profile games like *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor* and *Tribes 2* seriously disappointing and squandering their names, their pedigree, and the good will of gamers.

Fortunately, there were some diamonds among the detritus. *Civilization III* has quite possibly devoured more of our time than any game since, well, *Civilization II*. Two other games that reworked their source material are also contenders for the strategy crown: *Fallout Tactics* and *Monopoly Tycoon*. Who would have thought *Monopoly* could work as such an addictive and deep city simulation? Who would have thought a great RPG like *Fallout* could find new life as a hardcore tactical combat game?

With strategy such a strong genre in 2001, it's tempting to assume that the Game of the Year will come from there, but there are great candidates in several other genres. The WWII flight sim *IL-2 Sturmovik* is being widely hailed as the best World War II flight sim ever. *Dark Age of Camelot* did so much to improve on online games that it may dethrone *EverQuest* as the massively multiplayer RPG of choice. But the competition from action games will be fierce, with *Operation Flashpoint*, *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, *Max Payne*, and the sadly overlooked Clive Barker's *Undying* all shooting, stabbing, biting, and bombing for recognition.

And then there's *Bejeweled*. Yeah, it's a silly little puzzler, but if we don't uninstall it right now we're never going to be able to tear ourselves away long enough to make a decision. Check next month's issue to see if we succeeded.

Choosing among last year's best action and strategy games will be tough.

FIRST LOOK

Islands in the Screen

Jules Verne meets high magic in upcoming real-time strategy game *Project Nomads* By John Houlihan

The game casts you in the role of a flying wizard in charge of an island in the sky.

German game publisher CDV has an answer to the nattering naybobs who say there's not enough innovation in PC gaming. Their *Project Nomads* is built on a unique strategy design that casts you in the role of a flying wizard-engineer in charge of an island in the sky.

While decidedly different, that hasn't stopped *Project Nomads* from winning converts, as it was voted PC game of the show at last year's European ECTS. Seamlessly mixing high magic with Jules Verne-style steam punk technology, *Nomads* is stunning to look at, but it's the unique combination of action and strategic gameplay that makes it interesting.

Launch yourself into *Nomads'* moody twilight skies and you'll find your wizard acts like a kind of floating base commander, flitting about your island and using arcane powers and artifacts to raise buildings, factories, power plants, and defenses. Should you come under attack from enemy dreadnoughts and Zeppelins, you can hop into gun emplacements to teach them a lesson. When the dust settles, you can get some payback by soaring off in your biplane to pillage resources from other islands, leaving your AI to run things at home.

Nomads uses the open source Nebula Device game engine, which does a great job of bringing the rather surreal gameworld to life. Spectacular magic effects, ambient wildlife, wind and weather, day-night cycles, and a huge environment with seamless transitions mean it's a truly beautiful and almost endless world to explore. Although *Nomads* won't be finished until late this year, from what we've seen, its beard-stroking strategic gameplay, streamlined interface, and unique world composed of Victoriana should succeed in opening up new vistas in strategy gaming.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD
LORD OF THE RINGS MOVIE

Forget "good." Try freakin' GREAT. If you still haven't seen it, we should probably cancel your subscription as punishment. Just drop this now and go. Forget *Harry Potter*. This is the best fantasy movie ever made. Frodo lives!

THE BAD
NO LOTR GAMES

Gee, how bad did they whiff this one? EA had the *Lord of the Rings* movie rights, and Sierra (Vivendi Universal now) had the rights to the books, and neither managed to get a game out to coincide with the movie's release. We still have our door-size posters for Sierra's Middle Earth MMORPG, announced three years ago. What a waste.

THE UGLY
SO LONG, SIR-TECH

Like our mommies always told us, sometimes you don't appreciate things until they're gone. With the release of the awesome *Wizardry 8*, Sir-tech's departure from the gaming biz is more tragic than we first realized. The game is a fantastic swan song, but dammit, now we want *Wizardry 9*!

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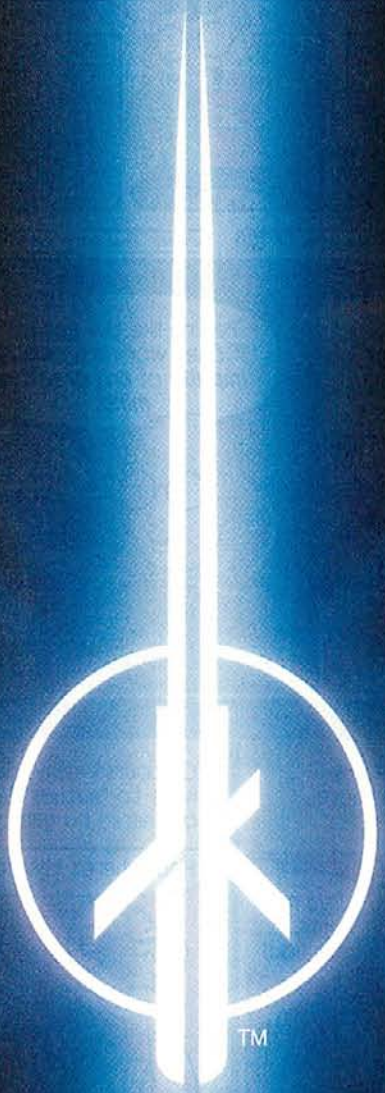

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RAVEN SOFTWARE

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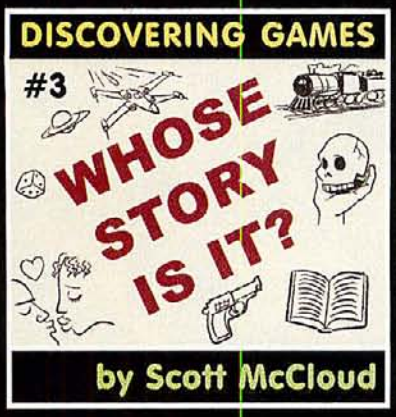
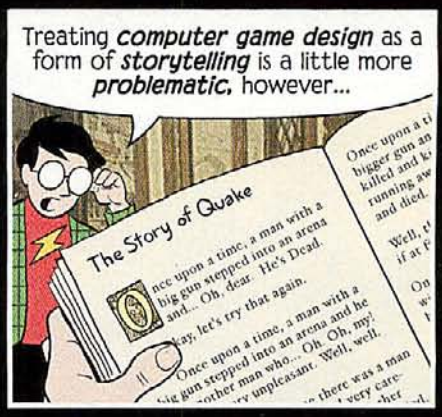
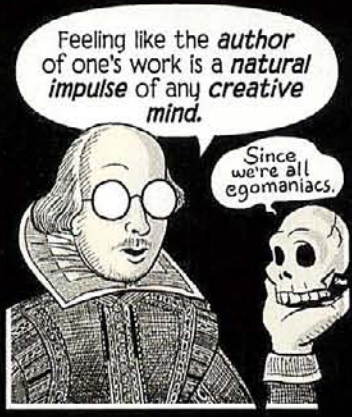
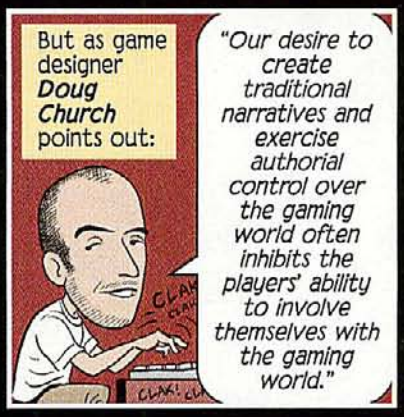
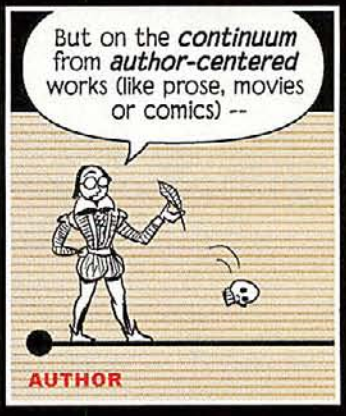
DISCOVERINGGAMES

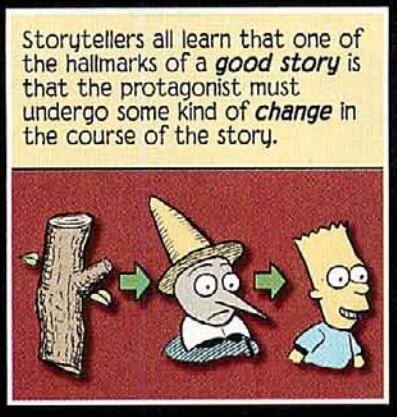












EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Take Off with Add-Ons for Flight Simulator 2002

So, you've flown all 12 aircraft in *Flight Simulator 2002* and now you think you've seen it all? You've barely scratched the surface, Captain Yankenbank. There are hundreds of mods and add-ons created for previous versions that are compatible with *FS 2002*. Planes from *Flight Simulator 2000* and *2001* are being ported on a daily basis. Try one of these for a spin.

TLK-39C Pilot Training Device

www.web-captain.com

It doesn't get much more realistic than this. Not only is the exterior modeled in perfect detail, but nearly every switch, dial, and button on the photorealistic panel is interactive. The flight model is much more refined than those of the planes in the retail version.

TLK-39C Pilot Training Device

Throw in a detailed Russian airbase, a multimedia CD detailing life in a Russian fighter pilot school, and extra versions of the plane for *Combat Flight Simulator 2* and *FS 2000*; $29 for the complete package on CD, including plane and scenery.

Schleicher ASW-20 BL Delta 2

www.flightsim.com

Those who prefer to fly on a wing and a prayer should download Ronald Stuck's Schleicher ASW-20 BL sailplane. It's not the prettiest plane around, but the flight model is the stuff of legends. Stuck owns and flies a real-life version of this glider and he's reproduced it in exacting detail, right down to a working water ballast system. In fact,

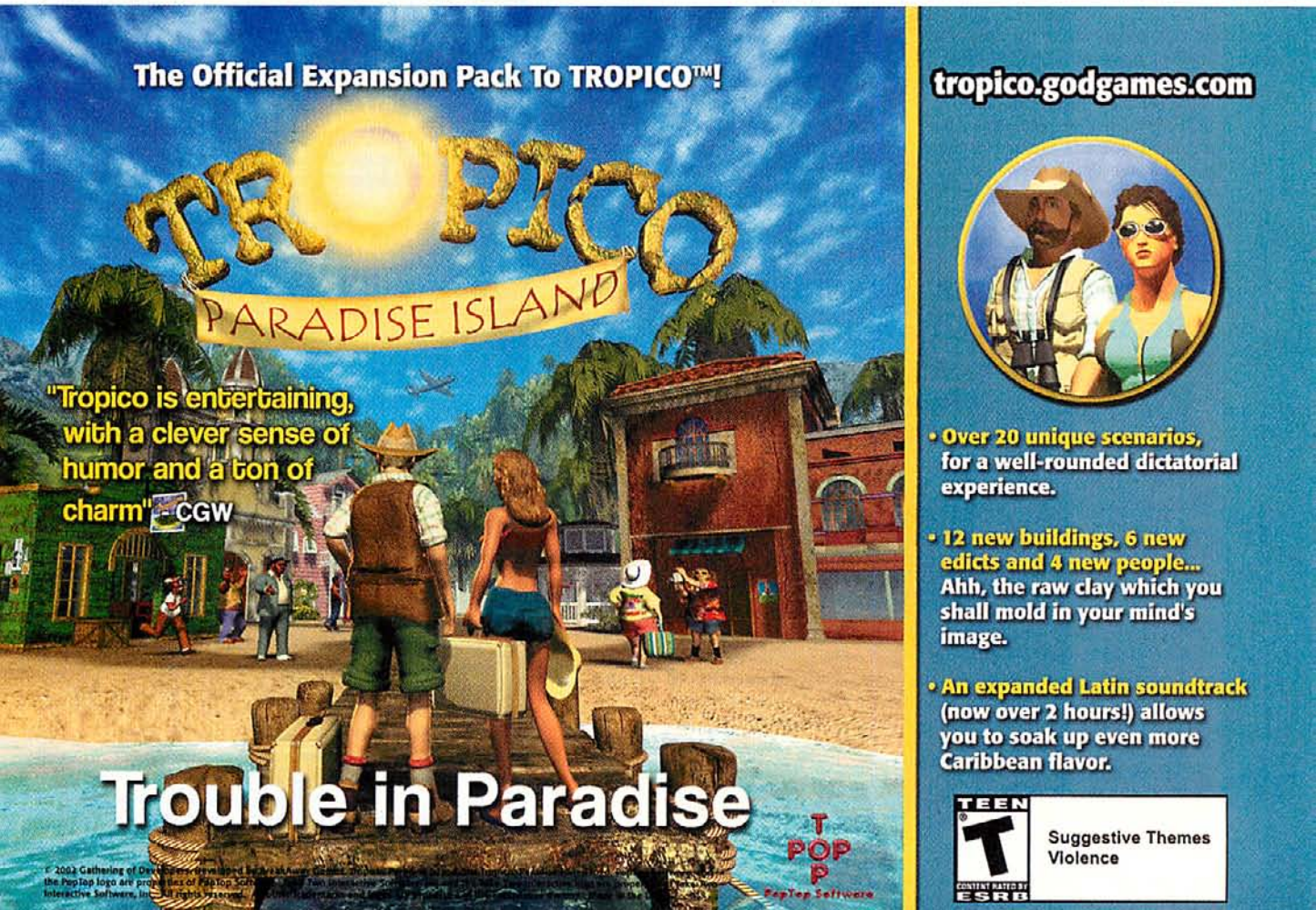
Schleicher ASW-20 BL Delta 2

designers suggest downloading user manuals for the actual instruments to learn how they operate. Search for asw20v5.zip and the asw20v5p.zip *FS 2002* patch file.

Yakolev 130

www.flightsim.com

If all that realism has you pining for more flight and less simulator, grab prolific designer Chuck Dome's Yakolev 130. The cockpit of the fully modern jet trainer has an enormous GPS that makes it easy to find your way. The jet itself scoots along at a decent pace, boasts terrific climb and roll rates, and has an enormous canopy that allows for some breathtaking vistas. Search for yak130.zip.



PREVIEW

Here Be Dragons

Massively multiplayer *Dragon Empires* to focus on clan rivalry and player-vs.-player warfare By John Houlihan

Does the world need another MMORPG? Maybe not, but what should distinguish *Dragon Empires* is its focus on empire building. Behind the standard fantasy class- and skill-based system, players will find a unique social structure and status as a member of one of five clans, each competing to control up to 50 cities across the virtual world.

The game mechanic is designed to promote intense interclan rivalry, but a dynamic economy also means there will be a premium on trading and controlling resources. Combat will be group-focused, but forget the usual business of leveling up against dumb AI monsters. *Dragon Empires* is about player-versus-player warfare, with the spoils going to the winner and losers facing a virtual wheel of fortune to decide their post-mortem fate.

The gameworld will be split into dozens of small islands, and future plans include travel by ship and fighting at sea. The dragons will be formidable, AI-driven NPCs who act as peacekeepers and police the game. Too bad—storming an enemy city atop a fire-breathing behemoth sounds like it could be fun.

FORGOTTEN CLASSICS

DEVO Presents: Adventures of the Smart Patrol (1996)

By Jeff Green

Remember DEVO? That band back in the '80s that wore flower pots on their heads and sang songs about potatoes? We called it "new wave." But you had to be there.

Anyway, in 1996, their music career long dead, DEVO had the brilliant idea of soaking its aging fan base one last time. The result: *DEVO Presents: Adventures of the Smart Patrol*, a game that must be seen to be believed. *Smart Patrol* is apparently a social satire, with references to stuff like "Big Media" and fundamentalism, and a flying genetic mutation called "Turkey Monkey." I say "apparently" because I'm not as smart and clever as DEVO, and, frankly, you're probably not either. But *somebody*, I'm sure, appreciates this game as the cutting-edge laugh-riot that it must be.

Us stupid people can just marvel at the potato phone and the potato gun; the tiny, out-of-sync QuickTime video; the bits of racial stereotyping; and the rather bold innovation of not including an actual "game." That's what artistes like DEVO call "irony!" Be the hippest guy on your block. Buy *Smart Patrol* today. Remember—DEVO is laughing *with* you!

PERSPECTIVE: POST-MORTEM

By Bruce Geryk

Player Killed for Role-Playing in Role-Playing Game

With so many people talking about how great *Dark Age of Camelot* is, I decided to try it for myself.

I macroed about 20 phrases in RP-speak for a variety of common situations, such as whether I want to join a group ("Yea, verily I shall join your brave band, for there is much evil to smite!"), as well as simple affirmations ("I say, thou speakest the truthe!"). Because the macro buttons all look the same, I lost track of which was which at times, but I mostly stayed in character without doing a lot of typing.

Eventually I joined a group, and we went off to fight monsters. We found a decent spot to camp and talking ensued, though I didn't have any appropriate phrases macroed so I just kept quiet. Then someone asked me what color this bogman conned to me. It was red, so I said something like, "I fear that alone such beaste would trouble me overmuch, but the aid of our noble band would ensure its demise!" I figured this was clear: I can't solo it, but our group can take it. But it must not have been so clear, because the next three messages in the group window were "WTF?" Then came "Dude, what's your problem?" and "It's ok, Mythic doesn't make you RP in the chat window." Well, Mythic doesn't make me play *Dark Age of Camelot*, either, but if I'm on the role-playing server, I sure as hell am going to role-play. So I said, "If thou sought interlocutors of a contemporary sort, thine choice of servers has gone amiss!" After that people kind of stopped talking to me. Then I noticed the cleric wasn't healing me when we fought, even though my hit points often went pretty low because of my Avalonian constitution. Eventually, this lack of courtesy caused me to die. We were too low-level for our cleric to have a rez, but it was pretty clear that (a) if he had, he still wouldn't have used it, and (b) this was a very anti-role-playing group of adventurers. Fine—I'm anti-role-playing, myself. But I don't get on an RP server if I'm not planning on role-playing. To show my displeasure I said, "Ye auld blackguards ye are, and thy treachery shall not be forgot!" and then I released and disbanded.

Later a friend told me that a lot of people don't know that they're playing on role-playing servers. This friend also got mad because he says that private messages can and should be out of character, and I was not obeying this (apparently unwritten) rule. So while he'll talk to me on the phone, he won't answer my /tells on that server. The lesson here is that in this massively multiplayer online ROLE-PLAYING game, you had better not role-play. You might just be killed for it.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

Hot Date makes it to home plate, proving even sim sex sells

Who wouldn't buy a *Hot Date*? Just don't tell the family...

Coinciding with the movie, *Harry Potter* sold faster than the Nimbus 2000.

Take *The Sims* plunge– the water's great.

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	–	**The Sims: Hot Date Expansion Pack** ($27, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
2	–	**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
3	3	**The Sims** ($40, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
4	–	**Backyard Basketball** ($18, Infogrames)	NR
5	5	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** ($21, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
6	4	**Sid Meier's Civilization III** ($45, Infogrames)	★★★★★
7	14	**Zoo Tycoon** ($28, Microsoft)	★★★½☆
8	–	**Backyard Football 2002** ($18, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
9	–	**Bob the Builder: Can We Fix It** ($16, THQ)	NR
10	–	**Survivor: The Interactive Game** ($18, Infogrames)	★☆☆☆☆
11	–	**Return to Castle Wolfenstein** ($57, Activision)	★★★½☆
12	8	**The Sims: House Party Expansion Pack** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
13	9	**The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion Pack** ($27, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
14	–	**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon** ($43, Ubi Soft)	★★★½☆
15	–	**Empire Earth** ($48, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
16	–	**Roller Coaster Tycoon Loopy Landscapes Expansion Pack** ($35, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
17	13	**Sim Theme Park** ($19, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
18	–	**Backyard Baseball 2001** ($19, Infogrames)	★★★★½
19	6	**Diablo II Expansion: Lord of Destruction** ($32, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
20	–	**Thomas Playset** ($39, Infogrames)	NR

NOVEMBER RETAIL SALES RESULTS BY NPD INTELECT.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"One of the most inept pieces of drek ever to be pawned off as a computer game."
–Gamespot, condemning *Survivor* as 2001's worst PC game

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, March 1997

Okay, we blew it. If you ran out and bought this steaming pile of dino dung because *CGW* would never put utter crap on the cover, well, we apologize. At the time, the snazzy graphics and complex physics dazzled us and clouded our minds. Little did we know *Trespasser* would be an excruciating crate-stacking sim that was about as fun as eating leeches. Hey, even Einstein had his off days.

Ten Years Ago, March 1992

Our big CES story acknowledged that some of the previous year's biggest games still hadn't shipped: *Strike Commander, Ultima VII, Populous II, Champions,* and more. Somehow games built to run on a 386 with 4MB of RAM and *lacking speech* were too complicated to complete on time. This year we'll replace those names with *Duke Nukem Forever, Sovereign, Freelancer, Halo,* and *Bonestorm,* and we'll have our E3 story half finished.

Fifteen Years Ago, March 1987

Next time you complain about coughing up $40 for a game, keep this in mind: Games back in the olden days like *Grand Slam Bridge, Warship,* and *APBA Baseball* were $60. Adjusted for inflation, that's more than $75. It gets worse: You could blow $70 on EA's *Business Simulator* (about $90 today) and an incredible $100 for *NFL Challenge* ($125 today). All that for VGA graphics and bleeps and bloops and text. Holy smokes.

UPDATE

The New Galactic Chic

Aliens sporting Earth tones, hip holsters, and cinnamon roll hairdos to set the trend in *Star Wars Galaxies* By Thierry Nguyen

Forget the runways in Paris and Milan, the hottest fashions this fall are going to be in *Star Wars Galaxies*. Fancy yourself a svelte Twi'Lek dancer, entertaining at Jabba the Hutt's palace? Or maybe you'd rather be a red and black Zabrak bounty hunter with a tattoo of your Wookiee girlfriend on your chest. Whatever you feel like playing, *Star Wars Galaxies* will offer a number of ways to make that character your own.

Body type: Options include slim as a Trade Federation Droid, blubberful like Jabba, lean and muscular like Darth Maul, or just average, like that annoying Luke guy.

Skin color: It doesn't matter if you're black or white! Or green, blue, purple, what-have-you. All species will have a variety of colors, and humanoids will have the colors you already see here on Earth.

Faces: Much cheaper and easier than plastic surgery, you can stretch the nose, chin, and even antennae. Welcome to *Star Wars Facial Simulator*.

Species differentiation: Some species have unique traits. Zabraks (husky fellows à la Darth Maul), for instance, can fiddle with their horn and tattoo patterns.

Wearables: Clothing can be three layers deep, for those long nights on Hoth without a tauntaun to crawl into. You also have a choice between practical and formal wear, and if you bother investing in any clothing skills, you can mess around with the colors.

Hairstyles: Yes, you can style your hair like a pastry, or mane it all out; you can customize the color as well. Some styles will be available in character generation, and others will require you to find a player who invested in hairstyling skills. Also, manly men can fiddle with facial hair in addition to top-hair.

Watch for another Star Wars Galaxies *update next month, as we approach the game's open beta sometime this summer.*

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PIPELINE

Our latest guesses about when those games are finally shipping

1

2

3

4

Estimating software release dates is like trying to predict Joan Collins' next husband. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send us your updates at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

1 DUKE NUKEM FOREVER George Broussard has surfaced from his *DNF* bunker to offer the first update in eons about *DNF*'s development. Broussard confirmed that bot support is in *DNF*, and that it's working "very well in fact." Stating that it was one of the last hurdles to be overcome for the multiplayer plans, Broussard expected that the bots would be fully proficient with handling weapons by this past December. With this milestone apparently complete, *DNF* might become reality. Someday.

2 UFO: FREEDOM RIDGE A press release announced that ALTAR Interactive, the developers of an RTS game called *Original War*, is set to revive development of Mythos' *Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge*. Aiming for a Christmas release, ALTAR is planning to make several "changes and improvements" to the original design. They stress that they value the work of Julian Gollop and his crew at Mythos, and that Gollop himself will be serving as a consultant to make sure the game vision is consistent. Hopefully, our 3D version of *X-COM* will make it this time.

3 DISCIPLES II At press time, the game is "a hair away from beta." This sequel to one of Jeff Green's favorite games boasts several new features, such as higher resolutions (800x600 max) and new combat options. Also, an interesting side note: Producer Pro Sotos said that hotseat play was added by players' request. The team didn't think anyone would want hotseat play, but the great hue and cry of gamers on their forum convinced them otherwise, so hot-seat is in.

4 MASTER OF ORION III Cory Nelson, producer of *MOO3* over at Quicksilver, recently said, "It's coming along nicely, though we're a little behind schedule at the moment. We still need a few things integrated from the design and art departments. Huge chunks of code with the various engines are being dropped in, and the game is getting closer to serious testing all the time." We'll give those boys at Quicksilver a bit of slack; at least they're not horrendously behind like other developers.

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	Spring 2002
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne	Take Two	Spring 2002
Arx Fatalis	Fishtank Interactive	Spring 2002
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Winter 2002
Black & White: Creature Isles	EA	Spring 2002
Bonestorm	Okama	Summer 2006
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time Software	Spring 2002
Command & Conquer: Renegade	EA/Westwood	February 2002
Commander Jill	Stardock	Spring 2002
Conseal	JoWood	Spring 2002
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Spring 2002
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	Spring 2002
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	April 2002
Earth and Beyond	Westwood	Spring 2002
The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind	Bethesda	Summer 2002
Far West	JoWood	Spring 2002
Freedom Force	Crave	Spring 2002
Galactic Civilizations	Stardock	Fall 2002
GI Combat	Freedom Games Inc.	February 2002
Global Operations	Crave	Spring 2002
Halo	Microsoft	Summer 2002
Heroes of Might and Magic IV	3DO	March 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Take Two	Spring 2002
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Spring 2002
Hotel Tycoon	JoWood	Spring 2002
Imperium Galactica 3: Genesis	CDV	Spring 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Summer 2002
Industry Tycoon 2	JoWood	Spring 2002
Legends of Loch Ness	Dreamcatcher	Spring 2002
Lineage 2	Destination Games	Spring 2003
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft	February 2002
Master of Orion III	Infogrames	Spring 2002
Medieval: Total War	Activision	Summer 2002
Midgard	Funcom	On hold
Might and Magic IX: Writ of Fate	3DO	Summer 2002
Natural Resistance	JoWood	Spring 2002
Neocron	CDV	Spring 2002
Neverwinter Nights	No publisher	Whenever
Nexagon: The Pit	Strategy First	Spring 2002
Outcast II: The Lost Paradise	No publisher yet	Winter 2002
Planetside	Sony Online Entertainment	Fall 2002
Project IGI 2	Codemasters	Summer 2002
Quake IV	Activision	Someday
Reality Deathmatch	JoWood	Spring 2002
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Summer 2002
Serious Sam: The Second Encounter	Take Two	Spring 2002
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Spring 2002
Sims Online	EA	Summer 2002
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	Activision	Spring 2002
Sovereign	Sony Online Entertainment	Someday
Spring Break	Eidos	Spring 2002
Star Trek: Bridge Commander	Activision	March 2002
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 Games	Summer 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Spring 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Summer 2002
UFO: Freedom Ridge	Virgin Interactive	December 2002
Unreal II	Infogrames	Spring 2002
WarCraft III	Blizzard	Spring 2002
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Summer 2002
Warlords Battlecry II	Ubi Soft	March 2002
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Eventually

NEW UPDATE

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mafia.godgames.com

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- GameSpot

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Blood
Violence

All screenshots from PC version.

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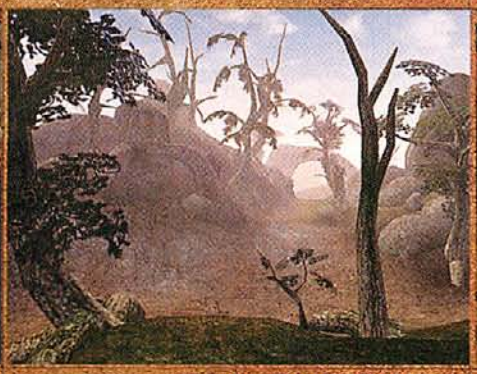
-Gamesmania



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Teleporters like this are a handy way to move troops across the map.

When dwarves attack!

An enemy airship crosses your border.

AGE OF WON

Explore a magical world of wonder, enchantment, and strange and marvelous creature

DERS II: THE WIZARD'S THRONE

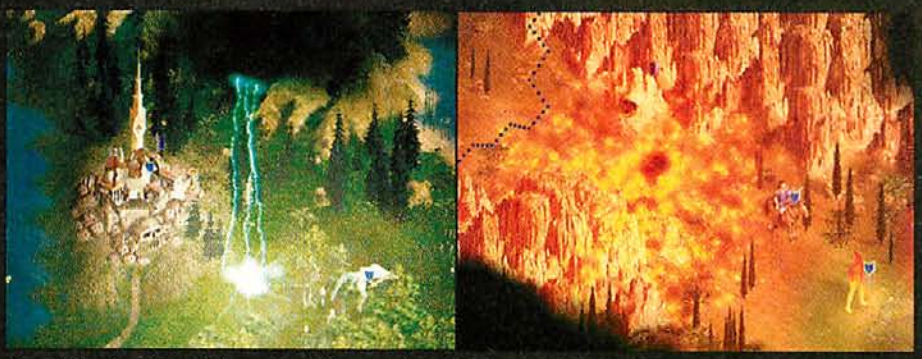
then kill everything! By Robert Coffey

When game historians of the future look back at 2002, they'll notice that it was a very bad year to be an elf. With no fewer than three turn-based fantasy strategy games slated for release this year, elves (and orcs, dragons, and gorgons) will be getting slaughtered by the boatload. So what's going to make the second iteration of *Age of Wonders II* stand out from the fourth installments of seasoned elf-bashers like the *Heroes of Might and Magic* and *Warlords* series?

For starters, designers Triumph Studios aren't really focusing on the "Might" or "War" aspects of those other games. There'll be mighty heroes waging war all right, but this game is squarely set on magic, casting you as the most famous spellcaster of all time: Merlin. By setting the game hundreds of years before King Arthur, *AoW2* avoids Merlin's embarrassing parlor trickster/valet phase and tells the epic story of how he restored balance to the world by mastering all the spheres of magic and vanquishing a lot of bad guys and basically becoming King of All Wizards by claiming the Wizard's Throne.

And you really are going to have to master all sorts of magic—six mini-campaigns limit you to using just one sort of magic (Death, Air, Life, Water, Fire, or Earth) before you take everything you know into the climactic magic war that ends the game. Each of these campaigns comprises just three maps, but don't fret: These maps are enormous, littered with resources and creatures and dense with scripted story events that can change the terrain or grant quests. Some events just launch into other weird scenes—ignore an NPC's directive to tiptoe around his rose garden, and you'll be teleported to an arena to square off against a group of punishing monsters. Ideally, the maps in *AoW2* will exist somewhere between your standard strategy map and an RPG gameworld.

The new 3D terrain engine delivers a wide variety of land types.



Age of Wonders II's particle system delivers cool effects for any kind of spell.

Ideally, the maps in *Age of Wonders II* will exist somewhere between your standard strategy map and an RPG gameworld.

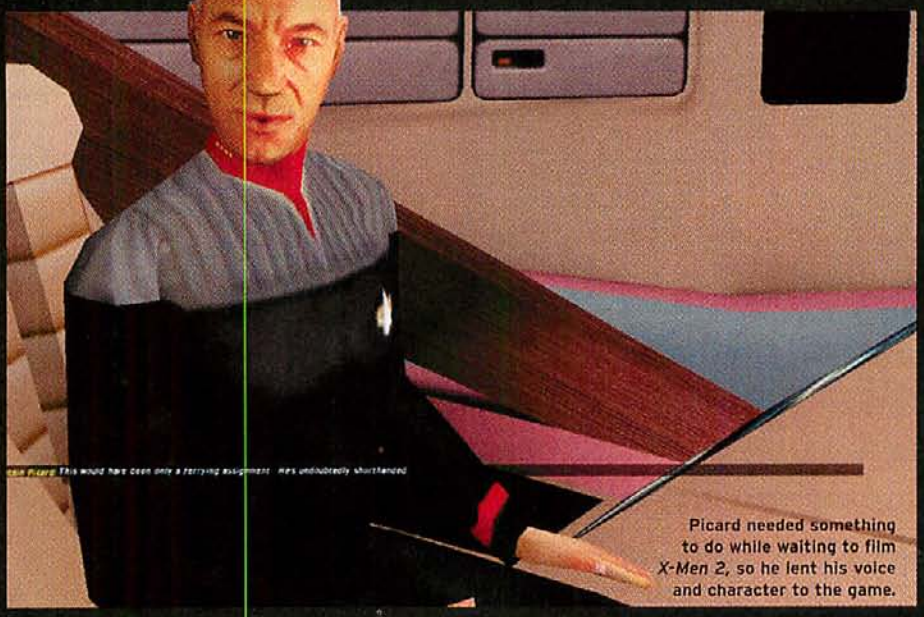
In addition to the strong concentration on using magic, *AoW2* is altering its gameplay in other ways. There will be a greater emphasis on empire building, with town development being managed more by players. Instead of having your towns just crap out random units, you'll build structures that will determine what kind of warriors fight alongside your heroes. Build a barracks so you can generate crossbowmen or infantry or upgrade your Wizard's Tower to produce a force field that will protect your town.

Those Wizard's Towers, new to the game, are crucial because they basically create your magical power grid. Within the borders generated by the Wizard's Towers, young Merlin will be able to cast his spells. But beyond those borders, he'll have no magical influence except in the immediate vicinity of an invading hero, i.e. during combat. The grid adds another layer of strategy and empire-building to the game, and it also makes players treat the map as a world to be held and nurtured, not just as an abstract representation of game pieces to be grabbed and used. And there's nothing abstract about those "game pieces"—the terrain being created with a new 3D engine, the more than 100 spells being created with a new particle system, and the lovingly rendered 2D units are all gorgeous.

With a random map generator, a powerful set of editing tools that will allow gamers to create their own missions and campaigns, and multiplayer choices that include a very appropriate play-by-email option, *Age of Wonders II* should have plenty to interest gamers. Will it have enough to stand out from the established heavyweights? We'll know this spring.

GAME STATS

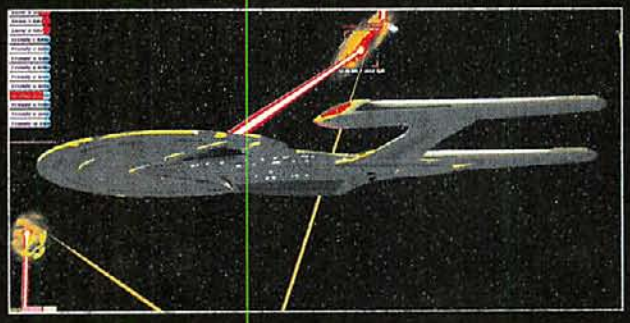
PUBLISHER: Take 2 Interactive DEVELOPER: Triumph Studios RELEASE DATE: Q2 2002
CONTACT: www.ageofwonders.com



Picard needed something to do while waiting to film *X-Men 2*, so he lent his voice and character to the game.

You can just sit back and let your tactical officer take care of that pesky combat...

...or switch to tactical view and take matters into your own hands.



Both single-player and multiplayer skirmishes allow for multiple ships on each side, making for a big, hectic, intership brouhaha in space.

Oh lordy, lordy, another *Trek* game on the horizon. But this one looks like it could be good. We got our hands on a build of *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*—complete with multiplayer reintroduced—and took it for a spin in our own *CGW* Bridge (read: an unoccupied office filled with an Xbox, a TV, a coupla PCs, and a strange odor of week-old Philly cheesesteak).

What impressed us most about the game was its flexibility. A total newbie can have fun commanding everyone around, while the hardcore gamer can go in and take complete control of everything. On the simplest level, you can issue commands to your various officers and let them manage on their own. Just click on an officer and select a menu item, which can range from going into red alert to getting a damage report. When engaged in combat, target the ship you want to attack, and tell the tactical officer whether you want him to destroy, disable, evade, or end combat with the target. Your tactical officer's AI is pretty good, so if you check with the engineer every so often to adjust energy levels and whatnot, your officer can dispatch most ships by himself.

Or you can switch to the hands-on mode and manually pilot the ship yourself. The game uses the traditional WSAD setup, but don't expect a nimble fight: You are in charge of a massive ship, so treat it more like naval vessel combat rather than fighter aircraft dogfights. In tactical mode, you have control of how the ship is oriented (direction matters), which weapons are charged up, where your shields are allocated, and so forth.

We fiddled with some of the eight episodes and the quick combat to get a feel for the game. The episodes have missions spanning from diplomacy runs to scientific exploration, and the quick battle sets up combat between Federation, Klingon, Ferengi, Romulan, and Cardassian vessels. Unfortunately, the Borg have been removed from the game.

All in all, *Bridge Commander* is shaping up nicely—we liked having the choice of jumping in and shooting away or taking a more relaxed tone and letting your lackeys do all the work.

STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER

Be an armchair Kirk or start shooting at Klingons By Thierry Nguyen

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Totally Games
URL: www.bridgecommander.com
RELEASE DATE: March 2002

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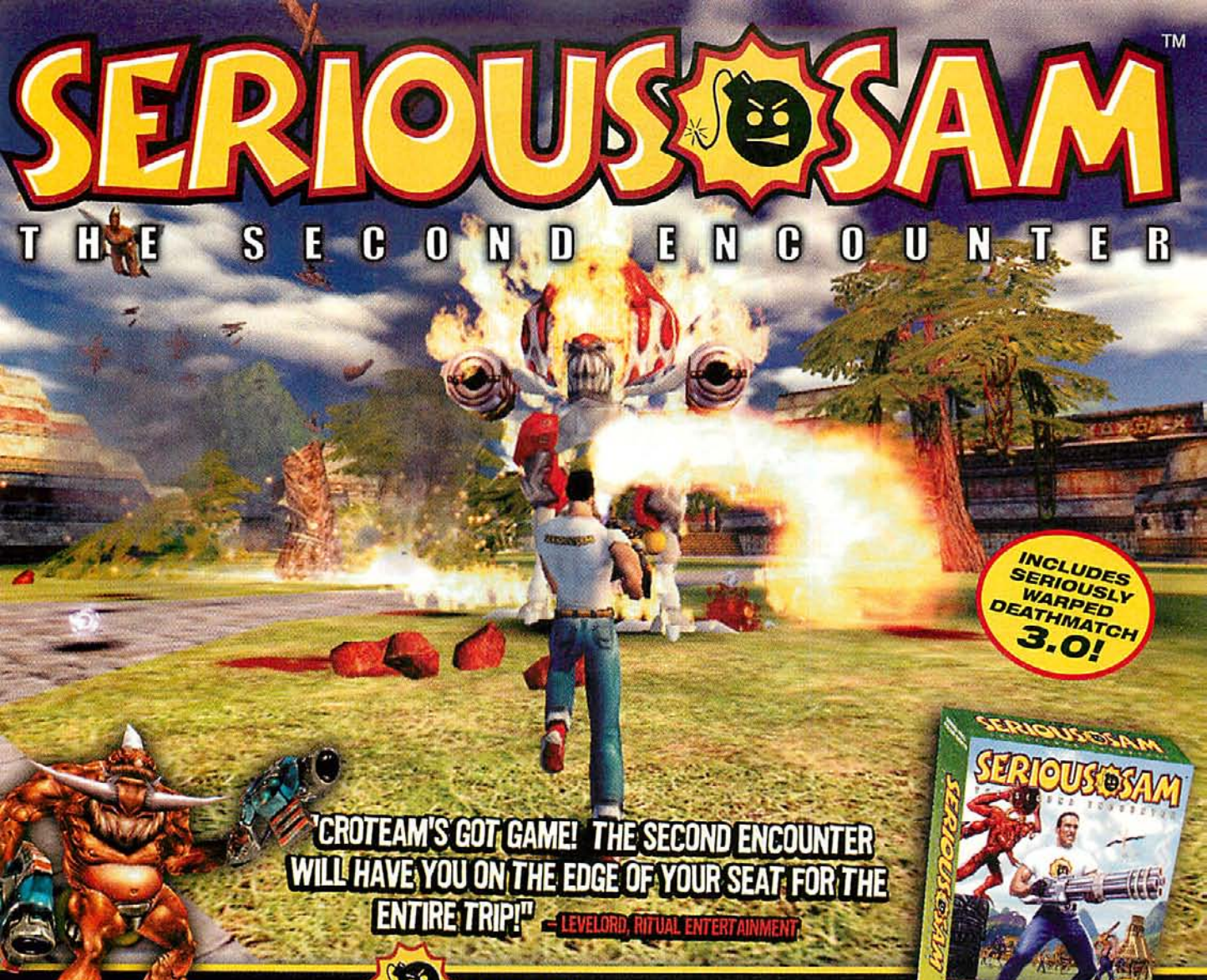
THE SECOND ENCOUNTER



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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore Violence

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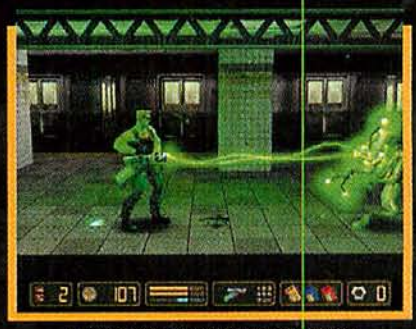

7 AWESOME NEW WEAPONS MAKE DUKE UNSTOPPABLE

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Mutant freaks, enjoy your last days. Duke's on a red-eye to the city that never sleeps.

In Stores Spring 2002

Produced by: *3D Realms Entertainment*
www.3drealms.com

Developed By: *Sunstorm Interactive*
www.sunstorm.net

Published By: *ARUSH Entertainment*
www.arushgames.com

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I'M TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT IT: how PC games are dead and all the really good games are only coming out on the next-generation consoles. How *Halo* is the end-all, be-all *Half-Life* killer we thought it would be when we first saw it three years ago, before the Xbox was even a glimmer in Bill Gates' eye. Day after day, I have to listen to the *Electronic Gaming Monthly* editors that we share office space with trash-talk about how there are no shooters on the PC that look as good as *Halo* or have such a rich single-player experience or such impressive AI or blah blah blah. You know what, console boys? Get ready, 'cause *Unreal II* is coming, we've actually played it, and it's gonna knock your Pokémon socks off and save PC gaming as we know it.

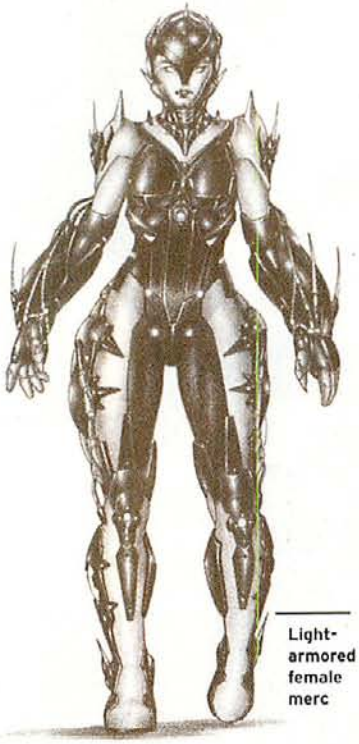
UNREAL II

THE SAVIOR OF PC GAMING IS ON THE WAY... AND WE'VE ALREADY PLAYED IT

BY TOM PRICE

Marines and mercenaries come in different levels of armor suits depending on their class. This is a light-armored marine.

Unreal II will have its share of old-school run-and-gun.



Light-armored female merc

Those of you who've never played *Unreal* or its quasi-follow-up, *Unreal Tournament* (*CGW*'s 1999 Game of the Year) have missed out on two of the defining games of the shooter genre. *Unreal*, released in 1998, was a technological marvel, using newfangled 3D cards to their fullest to create graphics that regularly dropped the jaws of its gazers. Then in 1999 *Unreal Tournament* took multiplayer gaming to the next level and further enhanced the much-appropriated *Unreal* engine. *Unreal II* intends to go back to the single-player roots of the original *Unreal*, while still providing the exciting multiplayer gameplay that *UT* fans expect. It will technologically be the most impressive-looking game on the PC, but the developers at Legend are far more concerned with giving players a great gaming experience.

You Are the Law

Currently in development by Legend Entertainment, *Unreal II* takes place in the same universe as *Unreal*. But instead of a convict trying to get off one world, you're The Man journeying through multiple planets, each with unique terrain and enemies. You play as a marshal for the Terran Colonial Authority, patrolling the frontier of a newly colonized bit of space that's sort of a backwater. You're on your own, with minimal support and resources. The Civil Government, based on Earth, is your overseer, but it is weak in the face of both the Terran military and the corporations that really run things (like the Liandry Corporation in *UT*).

Home is an outdated corvette called the Atlantis, where all the between-mission action will take place. You'll be free to roam about the ship and talk to your crew while in transit between worlds and missions. In fact, your conversations will affect your relationship with each character, and how you treat each character subsequently makes getting information from them harder or easier. The conversation system is straight out of an adventure game: Just walk up, hit Use, and when the time comes, choose from among several dialogues. You're not locked into one, though, so when you want to stop yapping, you can start walking. (See sidebar on page 62 for details about each crewmember.) You can even bypass all of this by sleeping in your captain's quarters to accelerate time and go straight to the action.

And the action is what it's really all about. Each mission should provide a different style of gameplay through varying conditions. Being an interstellar sheriff gives you missions using traditional run-and-gun, others involving squad combat, and further ones involving hostage negotiation. Over the course of 13 wild-and-woolly combat missions, you uncover an overarching storyline that has all the twists, turns, and dramatic flavor that you would want out of a space opera. The gist of the story is this: A big battle between various factions (military, corporations, mercs, and aliens) breaks out in your jurisdiction; you

Medium-armored marine.

end the conflict and subsequently discover the impetus behind it.

Enough Idle Chatter–Play On!

When we visited Legend Entertainment in late November, we got an in-depth, hands-on look at some of the nearly completed levels in what was a pre-alpha build. (They were expecting the final version of the engine from Epic and were still transferring some of the game content from the concept phase to actual 3D models and textures.) What we saw and played left us thoroughly impressed and thirsty for more.

They let us play an entire mission start to end, and it not only gave us a good idea of how the gameplay mechanics will work, it also confirmed our hopes that the game would be fast-paced and fun, while still as deeply satisfying as the *Unreal* games always have been.

It's a two-part mission. In part one, you land in a dropship near a small, lightly guarded military installation. Fighting your way past the guards is easy enough, but when you gain control of the base is when part two–and the real fun–starts.

First, some reinforcements show up to help you protect the objective. They're a mix of lightly armored snipers and heavily armored grunts with rocket launchers. You command them in much the same way you commanded bots in *UT* to guard certain doors, follow you, or whatever. Then wave upon wave of baddies shows up, and you and your boys have to drive them off. The weapons available were all very cool, from the flamethrower (which still had placeholder flames–but we know it will be ultra-cool when it's done) to the rocket launcher that shot a spiral barrage of four rockets as its alternate fire. Combat was wild and woolly, yet profoundly entertaining.

THE WEAPONS

The *Unreal* games have always been known for their unique armories, and *Unreal II* should be no different. Expect the usual FPS stuff like sniper rifle, machine gun, shotgun, and so on (with the explanation that these are standard Terran arms) but with the addition of some truly diabolical weapons. Legend kept most of these under wraps, but we did get to see a few, including:

GRENADE LAUNCHER With five grenade types for your exploding pleasure: Explosive–boom; Smoke–it gets in your eyes; Toxic Gas–pull my finger; Stasis–slows everything down Matrix-style; EMP–good against the killer robots (did we tell you about the killer robots?).

IZARIAN TRIDENT A big fork-like thing these creepy guys pack. It's based on the ASMD rifle from *UT*, but this one can either have flechettes that stick into flesh and explode or deliver a devastating rail gun blast.

ALIEN LEECH GUN It shoots leeches. If you don't know what a leech does, go look it up. The reloading animation is squirmingly gross and completely cool.

ALIEN SPIDER GUN THINGIE Another cool reloading animation we saw involved jamming a spider into the breech. Not sure yet what this gun does, but it's some sort of laser rifle.

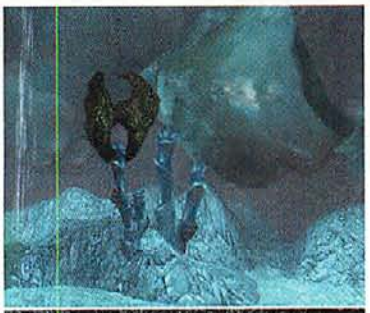
TAKKRA: A HUNTER-SEEKER DRONE In offensive mode, it will circle a target and fire lasers at it. In defensive mode, it will circle you and shoot down incoming projectiles.

MIND CLAW A psionic rifle that saps your target's energy as long as you keep them in your sights. If you lose them, then the joke's on you–your energy drains instead.

THE CREW

Aida Shen (above) is both your first officer and intelligence officer on the Atlantis. She'll conduct all pre-mission briefings as well as give in-mission help over the radio. Because of her past in military intelligence, Aida has connections in the spook world that allow her to contact mercenary companies for reinforcements. Her insights are as indispensable as that little top she wears. Your ship's engineer, armorer, and research scientist, **Isaak** is assigned to the Atlantis because he figured it would be low-stress compared to his old job as an engineering tech on a major capital ship. If you find some cool alien weapon planet-side, you'll need to bring it to the ship and have Isaak bang on it before it'll work. **Ne'Ban** is the only one who doesn't realize the Atlantis is a crap assignment. Part of an officer exchange program between the TCA and a newly discovered alien race, he thinks it's an honor to serve on the Atlantis. Ne'Ban scoots the ship around from mission to mission.

The dome in the background is a giant laboratory facility where we rescued hostages.



This underwater level scene sports 100 times more polygons than in *Unreal Tournament*—all running on a GeForce2.

Mein Eyes! They Cannot Handle the Graphicness!

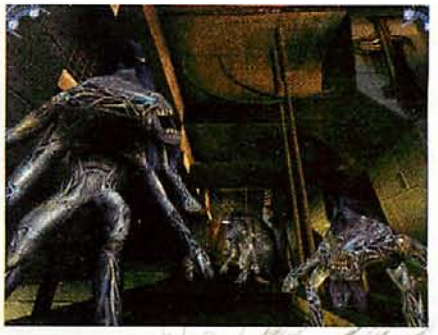
Legend also let us take a spin in a few incomplete levels just to get a feel for the scope of the game. One mission involved finding the stranded crew of a crashed ship in an alien swampland. The mission starts out under the headlights of your dropship, parked on top of a grassy hill. It's nighttime and raining, but the lights on your ship illuminate the falling drops of rain and can barely penetrate the gloom. You set out into the morass in search of a beacon dropped by the marooned space marines. Once you find the crash site, you have to escort the marines safely back to your dropship for evacuation. An ambush by some Izarians (see sidebar on page 63) hampers your easy exit, and you must fight them off while searching in the dark for your escape route. It's a straightforward mission, but the gloomy atmosphere is rendered perfectly and creates a tense scene.

Another level in the game that shows the easy transitions between huge outdoor environments and complex indoor ones has you landing on a planet that is covered by one huge organism. You arrive on the surface, which looks like rolling countryside, to find some privateer baddies trying to exploit the natural resources of the planet-sized alien. A fight ensues and you chase them down into a horn-lined orifice (think the Sarlaac Pit from *Return of the Jedi*) that opens into inner caves that are really the internal cavities of the beast. The flesh caves practically reek with moisture and are filled with tiny bioluminescent insects that gently float and dance around your head.

They also showed us a couple of levels that were remarkable just for the stunning art direction that went into them. The interior of a humongous alien ship is filled with weird buttresses and moldings that out-Giger even the *Alien* movies. Additionally, these buttresses weren't

WHAT ABOUT MULTIPLAYER??

Of course it wouldn't be an *Unreal* game without a robust multiplayer mode (although at this point in development, the designers at Legend are far more concerned with building a compelling single-player experience). *Unreal II* will boast most of the same game styles as *UT*: deathmatch, capture the flag, domination, and assault. In addition, they are planning a new mode tentatively called XMP (extended multiplayer) that is a class-based, team-based MP mode that requires a heavy dose of strategy to overcome opponents. Details are a bit sketchy (Legend is still working on it), but the basic idea is this: Each team has a weapon replicator—or a big gun-vending machine, if you will—that spits out whatever weapons you want it to. Advancement on the tech tree (moving up from flamethowers to rocket launchers, for example) and rate of production is based on the number of control points your team can hold. It sounds like a pretty interesting idea, mixing various elements of *Team Fortress*-style gameplay with aspects you might find in an RTS. We'll keep you updated as we find out more about XMP.



A NEW FOE

The Izarians are just one of the brand-new races being introduced to the *Unreal* universe in *Unreal II*. These lumbering, multilimbed beasties don't have much going on upstairs (they're basically vicious space-age monkeys that attack in packs), but they're smart enough to wield a weapon. They're so dumb that instead of strapping armor on their bodies for protection, they jam it right into their skin and let their bodies meld with it (you'll often see blood dripping from their armor-skin spots). I guess Velcro hasn't made its way to their end of the galaxy yet.

merely neat textures slapped on a wall as in other games; they were 3D structures placed within the level itself. Another mission takes place on an all-water planet housing huge underwater cities that were obviously influenced by the imaginings of Jules Verne. We were again shown the great outdoors in a mission taking place in front of a religious artifact guarded by an impenetrable force field; we alternated between gawking at the structure and its shimmering shield and at the many dropships depositing enemy marines nearby. Even the interior of the Atlantis is impressive with its jumbles of wires and missing panels. It evokes the ragtag, decaying glory of the Millennium Falcon.

Under the Hood

The level of detail and the number of polygons used to render said detail is astounding. Polygon counts for environments in *Unreal II* are 100 times higher than in *Unreal Tournament*, and 10 times higher for character models. And the brand-new particle system being employed by Legend (which gets those little bugs to fly around so believably) is impressive as well. In a separate technology demo, they showed us a plume of smoke lit by colored, dynamic lights at varying angles that looked incredibly real. The crowning touch was the rocket fired through the smoke, which reacted with appropriate turbulence and wake. It was the coolest smoke demo I've ever seen. And the lighting system creates perfectly appropriate moods and tension.

Of course the aliens, mercs, and marines that fill out these levels are just as impressive. Most of the familiar groups like space marines, corporate mercenaries, and Skaarj (did you know it's properly pronounced "scar"?) come in multiple sizes thanks to light, medium, and heavy armor classes. In addition to those familiar foes, there are also aliens such as the aforementioned Izarians; a giant arachnid race; a robotic race; the telepathic, underwater-dwelling Shians; and even more. There are variations on almost every other alien race in the game, too, which add up to more than 25 new aliens in all. The programmers at Legend developed a character animation development tool called GOLEM to handle all these different creatures and put the power back in the hands of the artists as well as members of the *Unreal* mod community. GOLEM offers a simplified, plug-in-type interface that lets artists create realistic animations on the fly and opens up their possibilities when it comes to skinning models. One of the impressive new details in the game, made possible by a little plug-in for GOLEM, is the way characters track objects with eye and head movements. It's subtle, but very effective in making believable characters.

When Does This Become Real?

By the time you read this, Epic should have delivered the final version of the game engine. Then it's just a matter of Legend finishing all the details and tuning the game for release, which should be sometime in the late spring or early summer. Legend has a ways to go before this game starts to look like a finished product, but what we saw and played has us confident that this game will be the technological and gaming masterpiece that *Unreal* fans have been waiting for. Oh yeah, and it's gonna save PC gaming as we know it.

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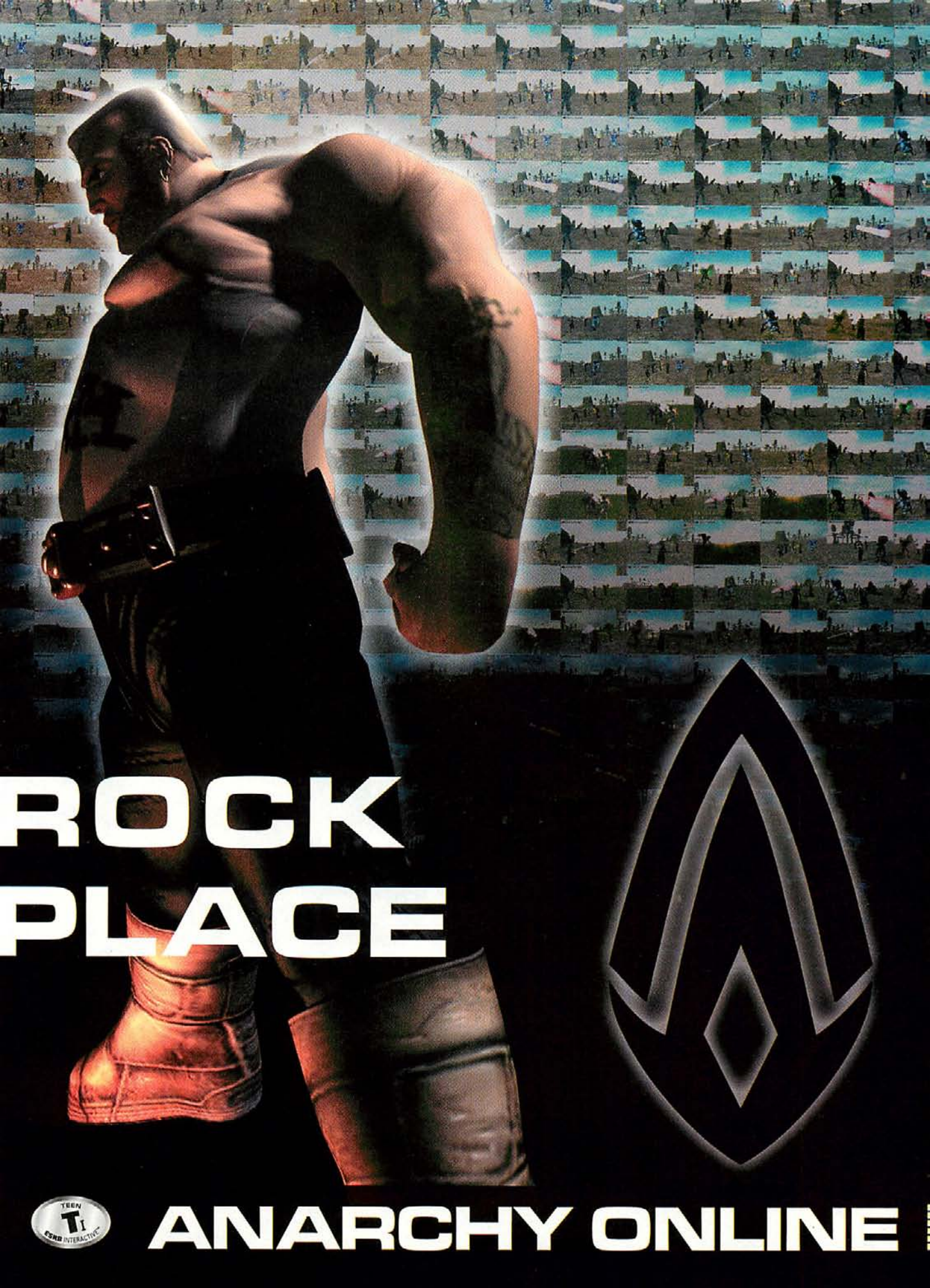
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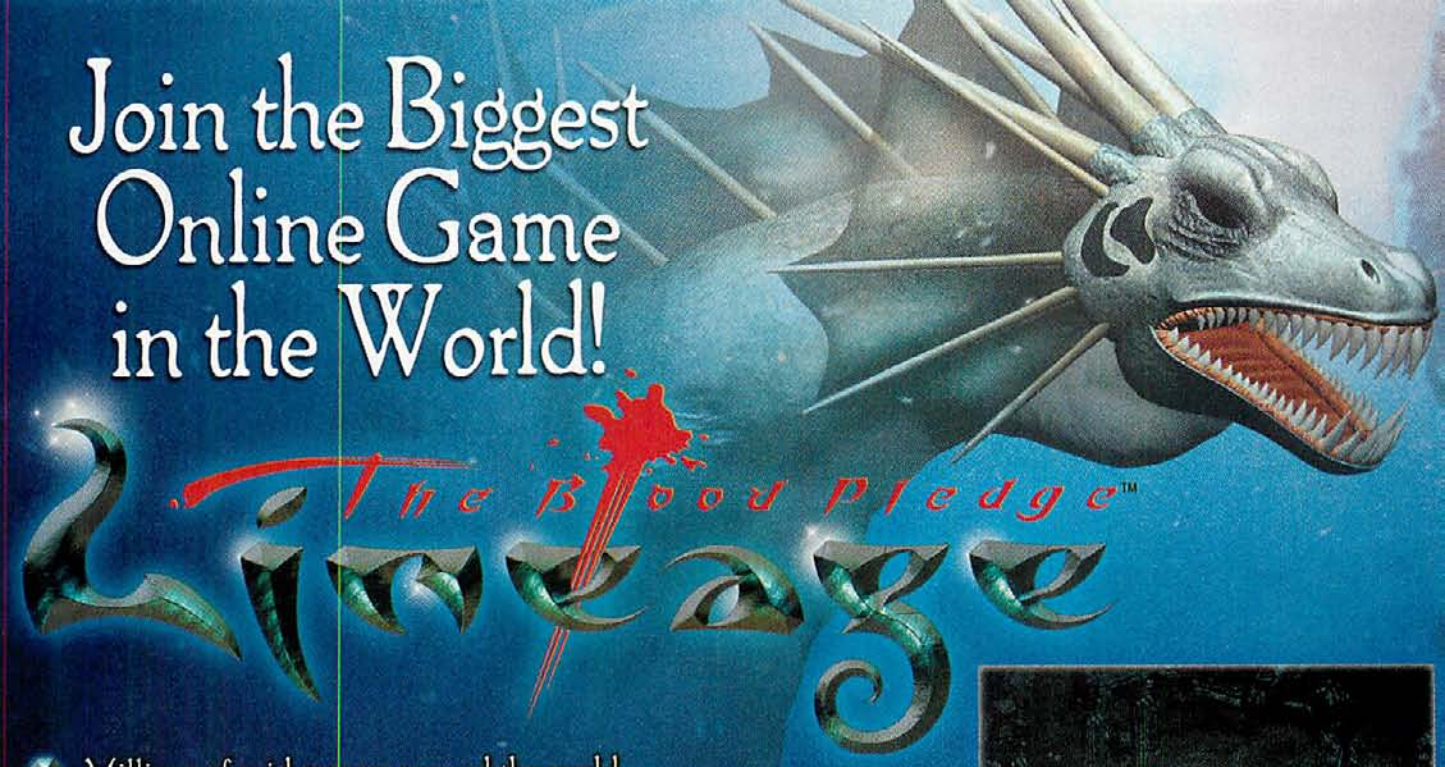

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Reviews

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

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Medal of Honor Allied Assault

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.

From your first leap into the water and across the artillery-pocked beach, every step of the Omaha Beach D-Day mission is packed with drama and tension.

Medal of Honor Allied Assault

Going above and beyond the call of duty **By Robert Coffey**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts**
DEVELOPER: **2015 Inc.**
URL: **www.ea.com**
ESRB RATING: **Teen; violence**
PRICE: **$49.95**

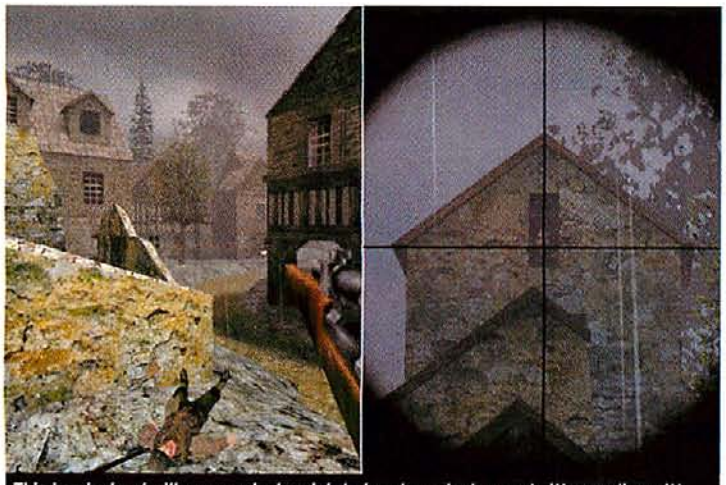
REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 700, 256MB RAM, 32MB video card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-32 players)**

If *Medal of Honor Allied Assault* had hit shelves in December instead of January, odds are you'd be reading about this game getting *CGW*'s Action Game of the Year award next issue. It's just that good.

In fact, *MoH* gets so much right that it's hard to know where to begin. So let's start in the middle, with the incomparable D-Day invasion at Omaha Beach. This sequence of mini-levels adds up to an experience gamers will be fondly (and passionately) reminiscing about years later. From the moment you lurch off the Higgins boat, you're assaulted by a vicious barrage of machine-gun fire. Wading past bobbing corpses in the water, you hunker and cower behind obstacles, terrified to push on, terrified to stay. Even after you reach the beach, there's no respite—artillery gouges craters in the sand and blasts fellow infantry high in the air, snipers pick off squadmates, and deadly mines kill men running to safety. It all works so incredibly well because all of these aspects come together to create an overwhelming whole—the sound of bullets zipping into the water and clanging violently off tank traps, the blinding sprays of sand from shells exploding perilously close to you, the outstanding voice acting from the medic caring for a fatally wounded soldier, the determined resolve in every order barked by your commanding officer.

That the game doesn't immediately deflate and disappoint, following what would be the thunderous conclusion of any other game, only underscores *MoH*'s overall strength. A lot of that strength comes from the absorbing mission design. You'll sneak into weapons installations, free POWs, destroy U-boats, clear a bombed-out town of nigh-infinite snipers, steal a German tank prototype, and more. Scripted events abound, from the very first mission in which your squad raids a North African town only to be ambushed by Germans, to the hapless squadmate being cut down by sniper fire before your eyes.

The gameplay remains fresh by mixing in what amount to mini-games focused on simple tasks. You'll man a



This bombed-out village may look quiet, but a closer look reveals it's crawling with lethal snipers.

jeep-mounted machine gun to destroy enemy planes at an airfield; using your sniper rifle, you'll desperately pick off Germans trying to destroy a crucial bridge; squatting in a bombed-out building, you'll call in air strikes on collapsing entire buildings on enemy snipers. All this, taken together with some of the most blistering gunfights in recent memory, and you've got a game that vividly creates the sense of playing through a classic World War II movie.

MoH gets so much right it's hard to know where to begin.

enemy tanks while frantically taking out hordes of enemies rushing up to stop you; and you'll snipe a steady procession of guards in towers as you provide protection during a daring raid on a POW camp. It even tasks you to drive a stolen tank, taking out enemy tanks and

Just about everything in this game feels *right*, sometimes almost in spite of itself. The models and textures in *MoH* may not be as rich or detailed as in other *Quake III*-powered games, but the roughness somehow enhances the game's gritty feel. The enemy AI tends to run right at you; that said, Nazis in *MoH* will reach over desks to fire at you, effectively use grenades to flush you out, and still manage to fire off a couple of shots right before they die when your guard is down.

The game isn't without shortcomings. Fellow GIs will at times block you with occasionally fatal results. There are some graphical glitches as well, chiefly in the floating corpses. But the game's biggest drawback is the difficulty of the Sniper Town level two-thirds of the way through. Sniper Town is the one spot where *MoH* doesn't play fair, and the difficulty of the level is such that you could practically classify it as a game-killing bug. We cheated past it; gamers without the cheat code will just feel suckered and uninstall the game.

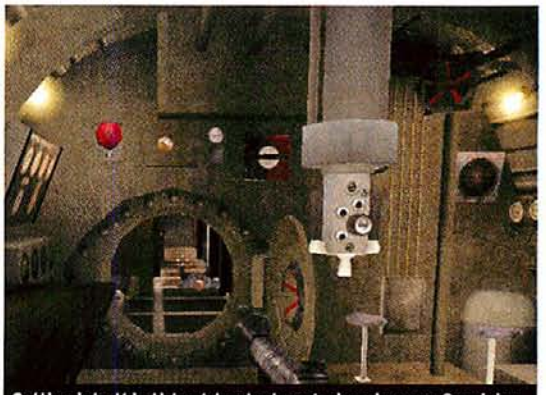
It's the one letdown in an otherwise stellar 20-odd hours of gameplay. Nevertheless, *Medal of Honor Allied Assault* is the first must-have title of 2002 and an instant classic.

MIKE POWELL VS. B.J. BLAZCOWICZ

Realism isn't what makes *MoH* a better WWII action game than its sibling *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: RtCW*'s zombies and other supernatural creatures are no more realistic than *MoH*'s magical bullet-wound healing canteens and first-aid kits. The difference lies in gameplay: *MoH* does a far better job of keeping you racing along the razor's edge between victory and death, sprinkling just enough health and ammo so that you never really need to slow down to win. Its skirmishes don't feel unfair, unlike the vigorously stacked deck of ambushes *RtCW* throws at you, forcing you to die repeatedly just to find the enemies and defeat them on your second or third attempt. Finally, *MoH* plays it straight, creating challenges in the form of increasingly desperate situations instead of increasingly invincible enemies and godlike boss monsters.

VERDICT ★★★★½

***Medal of Honor Allied Assault* is a riveting, visceral experience that no gamer should miss.**



Getting into this U-boat to plant explosives is easy. Surviving your escape is a different matter.

You'll have to wear a gas mask when you infiltrate a mustard gas factory. The restricted field of vision makes combat even more challenging.

While not the brainiest Nazis around, they will still take cover and fire over nearby obstacles.

Not much beats the satisfaction of dropping a building on top of a sniper with your own tank.

It's a good idea to bring along two demolitionists sporting M136s in missions like Zebra Straw and White Razor. If one is taken out, you still have another. Duh.

Ghost Recon

Mission accomplished, but with friendly-fire casualties By Raphael Liberatore

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
URL: www.redstorm.com
ESRB RATING: Mature; blood and gore, violence
PRICE: $49.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 600
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet, LAN (2-36 players)

Ghost Recon takes the intensity of small-unit combat from the room-clearing counterterrorist ops of *Rainbow Six* and *Rogue Spear* to the great outdoors, where infantry tactics reign supreme. *Ghost Recon* offers a number of enhancements over *Rainbow Six*, including a streamlined version of *R6*'s convoluted interface and an improved game engine and graphics, all while introducing RPG elements to the series. Unfortunately, *Ghost Recon*'s AI is little improved over the ugly *R6* original, and the RPG element is given lip service at most. Add a handful of familiar *R6* bugs, and you have a potential blockbuster game marginalized.

Ghost Recon's infantry tactics are a natural evolution from *R6*'s close-quarters action. On the plus side, the game sports a more robust, user-friendly interface and ditches the overly complicated mission-planning phase of the *R6* series. The Briefing and Platoon setup menus are easy to navigate, so launching missions is that much quicker.

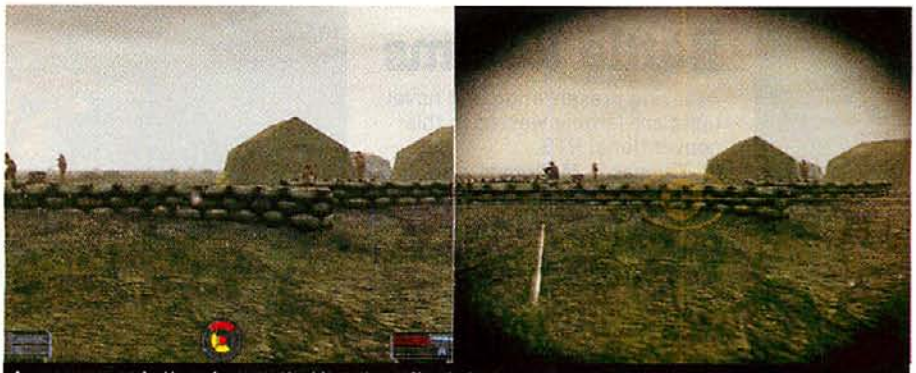
As in *Rainbow Six*, the real challenge lies in coordinating teams throughout 15 real-world missions. Players form fireteams of up to six soldiers from a pool of riflemen, support, demolitionists, snipers, and other specialists for combat. Key commands are now much simpler to use, and the Command Map allows for easier control of soldier's waypoints, rules of engagement, firing arcs, and other tactical coordination commands. Fans of *Rainbow Six* and *Rogue Spear* will not be disappointed in weapons, equipment, and ballistic modeling either, which includes the new OICW rifle. The real beauty of *Ghost Recon*, however, lies in its great graphics and sound. Trees sway, brooks babble, buildings look dingy, and weather effects seem real. Even the Russian uniforms show a nice attention to detail. Red Storm is known for quality sound, so there's no surprise in hearing gritty firefights in surround sound.

Special Forces Wannabes

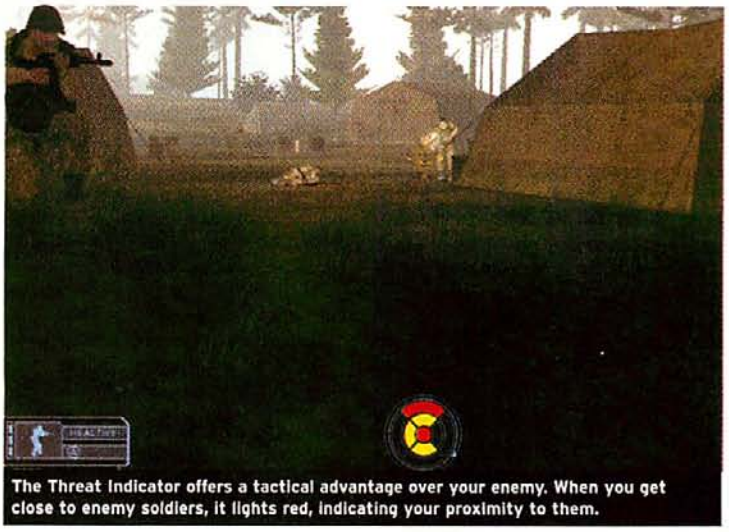
The RPG element comes across as trivial, especially because team members are supposed to be Green Berets, the ultra-

Red Storm has operatives acting more like raw cherries fresh out of basic training than elite Special Forces soldiers.

The soldier screen is where you assign points to your soldier's statistics in weapons, stealth, endurance, and leadership. It is also where you view medals and change kits for weapons and equipment. The server setup menu is quite detailed, offering plenty of options for online players.



As you can see in these images, the binoculars offer limited zooming capability compared to normal weapon zooming. My advice: Leave the binoculars at home and use the slot for extra ammo.



The Threat Indicator offers a tactical advantage over your enemy. When you get close to enemy soldiers, it lights red, indicating your proximity to them.

elite U.S. Army Special Ops unit. Essentially, your troops lack the skills and experience of real-world Special Forces soldiers. Later in the game, various specialists get unlocked after completing certain missions, but they don't always enhance your team's value. Sometimes specialists actually have lower statistics in critical skills than your regular forces. If your current sniper has a better stealth-skill rating than the specialist, use the sniper so you don't alert the enemy.

Not only do your teammates lack skill, their AI also falls short. Your "elite" teammates require constant babysitting and multitasking during simple combat operations like guarding a position or taking out a lone enemy soldier. Another frustration is having to pump too many bullets into nasty foes to bring them down, or else face their super sniper skills. Add some game-crashing bugs, sluggish frame rates, and buggy multiplayer performance that causes players to get dumped from games, and you have *Rainbow Six*'s flaws redux.

Despite the random boot bug, *Ghost Recon*'s major highlight is its multiplayer. You can choose from several options, including solo, search and rescue, king of the hill, team, and co-op missions with up to 36 players on LAN, TCP/IP, or Ubi Soft's own servers. Those familiar with the *R6* series should feel right at home. The only catch is a need for broadband.

With more attention to detail, better character skill development, improved AI, and no bugs, *Ghost Recon* could have been this year's best tactical sim. Don't get me wrong—this game is enjoyable, especially for tactical combat nuts. It just doesn't fulfill its awesome potential.

NO LONGER A REALISTIC TRAINING TOOL

It's unfortunate that a company with Red Storm's reputation for military accuracy à la Tom Clancy would make so many simple mistakes concerning U.S. Army Special Forces doctrine and skills. Behind the marketing hype, Red Storm has operatives acting more like raw cherries fresh out of basic training than elite Special Forces soldiers. In the real world, SF soldiers have a 50-year history of cross-training in several occupational specialties, and they are taught to carry on the mission despite losses. But in *Ghost Recon*, for example, only demolitions experts can fire M136 antitank weapons and detonate explosives. Lose the demolitionist during combat, and the mission abruptly ends. Sadly, they also use inaccurate terms like Group 5, riflemen, support, and platoon (sorry, but there are no infantry platoons in the Green Berets). Minor inaccuracies, maybe. But they leave the true tactical sim aficionado wanting, while ignoring the entire elite concept behind Special Forces. Red Storm got Special Operations right in the *Rainbow Six* series, so why sacrifice realism for gameplay in *Ghost Recon*? It would have been more realistic if they had used conventional forces such as the 24th ID, rather than their Special Forces model.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Despite soldiers that behave like raw recruits, some bugs, and questionable AI, *Ghost Recon* still makes a nice addition to the tac sim genre.

Battle Realms

Amazing presentation and novel units are largely wasted in this conventional RTS

By Thomas L. McDonald

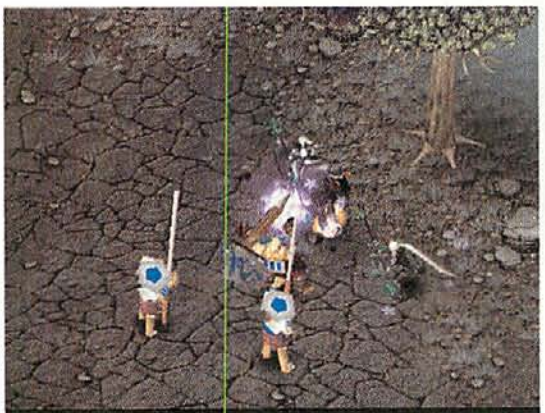
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: Liquid Entertainment
URL: battlerealms.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; blood and gore, violence
PRICE: $49.99

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

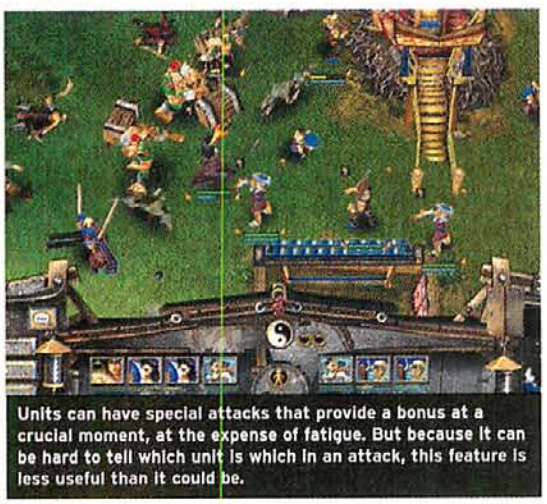
There's no denying that *Battle Realms* has a wealth of invention in many of its particulars, but scratch away the chrome and you'll find a shockingly rudimentary RTS game. It balances an equal number of frustrating and appealing elements to create a love-it or hate-it experience.

The most striking thing about *Battle Realms* is its look and feel: a sumptuous treat of lush environments and imaginative factions set in a mythical Japanese/Chinese milieu. Remarkable movement animations create leaping, flailing, blasting units with a wide range of actions and motions. Its looks are certainly its best part, but even here there are problems. For a 3D game, it seems rather odd that you can only move the viewing angle a teeny bit up or down. This is particularly troublesome since even on high resolutions the viewing area simply isn't big enough. A major battle will usually dribble right off the screen.

Once you send a group of units into battle, mass confusion takes over until someone emerges as victor, but it sure is purty-lookin' confusion.



The map design in *Battle Realms* is uniformly excellent, with a good variety of terrain types and some interesting placement of obstacles and resources.



Units can have special attacks that provide a bonus at a crucial moment, at the expense of fatigue. But because it can be hard to tell which unit is which in an attack, this feature is less useful than it could be.

The four clans offer a very good mix of units, each playing quite differently. Unit creation is one of the most appealing things about *Battle Realms*. Instead of building units, you build huts and breed peasants. Peasants can then be trained at a variety of schools to create different types of units. For example, sending a peasant to a tavern produces a swordsman. Send him to the sharpshooter's guild to make a bandit, and to the alchemist hut to make a ronin. You can field a very interesting combined force this way, including a range of fighters and magic users. Untrained peasants collect rice and water, the two resources in the game. They can also round up wild horses to be used by any other unit. Mounted units move faster and the horses take the brunt of the initial attack, although riders seem to get unseated fairly quickly.

There is certainly no shortage of gameplay in *Battle Realms*: It offers a custom skirmish mode, a lengthy branching campaign, and stable multiplayer through Gamespy. The campaign allows you to make rudimentary choices about which territory to advance into next and whether to follow a good or evil path.

Despite these touches, the campaign remains a rather languid affair, offering one sluggish, fuzzy, in-game narrative sequence after another, finally proving that the notion of a narrative RTS should be squashed for good. Campaign missions are also poorly paced, often forcing you into a protracted buildup stage.

The most egregious problem with *Battle Realms*, however, is control. For a game that has such complex unit training and design, it offers zero in the way of control. Forces are deliberately kept small to keep the combat more intimate, but you still wind up merely massing a big force and sending it out all at once. Units can move, guard, stand, group, or attack—period. Once a unit is engaged, good luck getting it disengaged and moved to another target. For all the fancy buildup, the combat is simply mass confusion with no tactical finesse at all.

Battle Realms is a sumptuous treat of lush environments and imaginative factions set in a mythical Japanese/Chinese milieu.

It's easy to be smitten by the dazzle of *Battle Realms'* presentation, but after you've waded through its limited unit control and confusing battles, that love can turn sour fast. This is a clicker's paradise, but gamers who expect actual *strategy* in an RTS should look elsewhere.

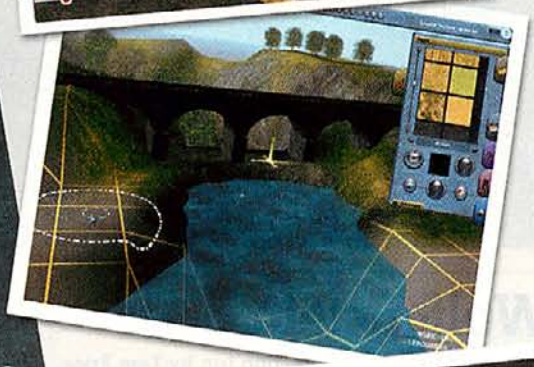
VERDICT ★★★½☆

The most hotly anticipated RTS of the year is a dazzling package wrapped around an empty shell.

TRAINZ

COLLECT

Trainz allows you to view your collected locomotives and rolling stock in 3D. An integrated mouse rollover system and history button allows you to display context sensitive information about the components and the heritage of your model.



CREATE

Trainz `s powerful, easy to use editor allows you to create your own track layout. Shape mountains, canyons and valleys, all in a matter of seconds. Flexible curves make complex track plans easy. Bore tunnels, construct bridges and position a multitude of scenery objects.

CONTROL

Choose from the engineer's view and use the 3D realistic in-cab controls with 360° vision, or "train-spotter" view and use the virtual DCC controller. With Trainz you can climb into the cab of any of your locomotives, start them up, and ride the rails.

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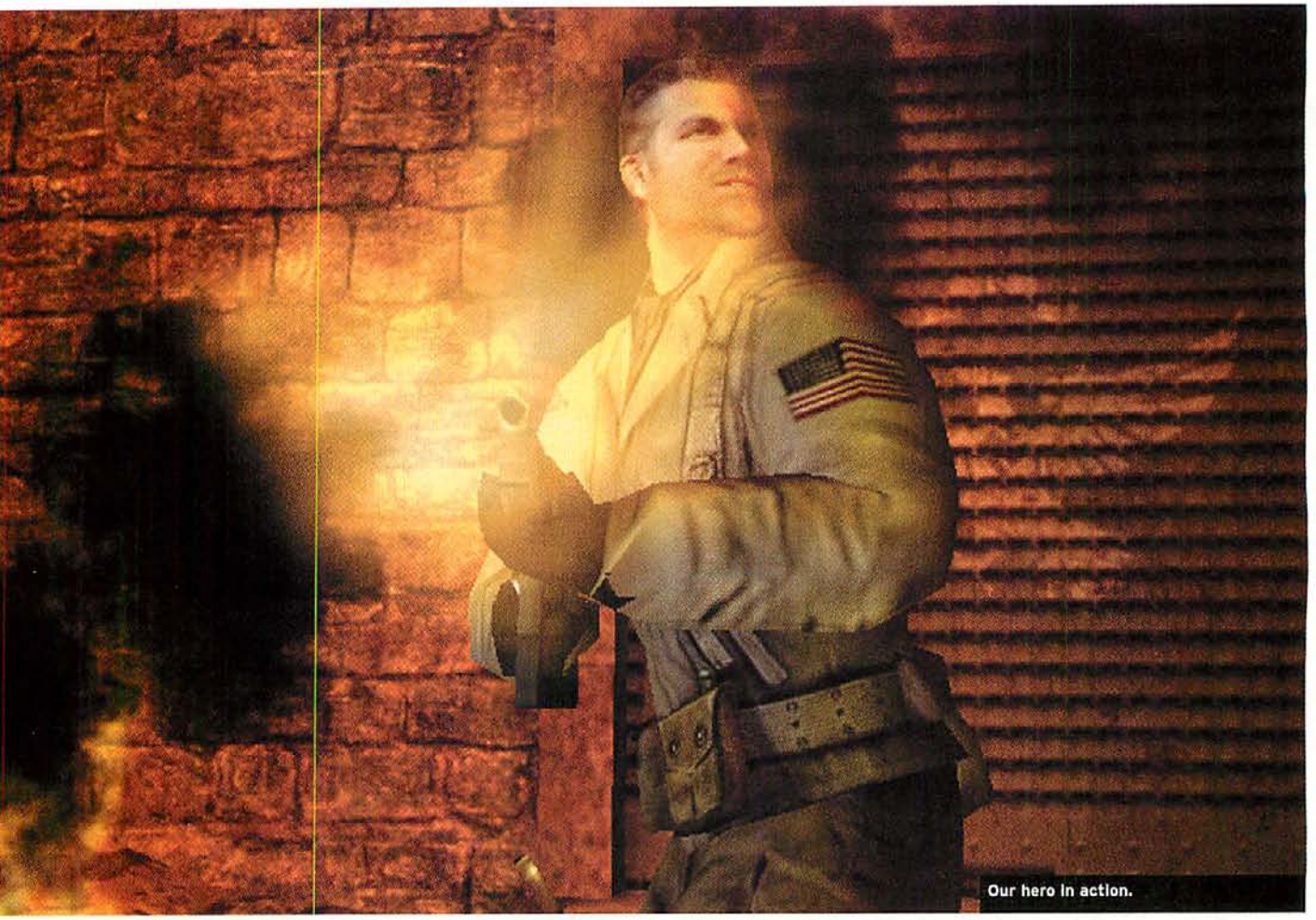


Our hero in action.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Far from groundbreaking, *Wolf* still manages to be full of Nazi-blasting fun **By Tom Price**

PUBLISHER: **Activision**
DEVELOPER: **Grey Matter/ Nerve/id Software**
URL: **www .castlewolfenstein.com**
ESRB RATING: **Mature; blood and gore, violence**
PRICE: **$55.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 1.1GB hard drive space, 16MB 3D video card**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 1.1GB hard drive space, 32MB 3D video card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet, LAN (2-32 players)**

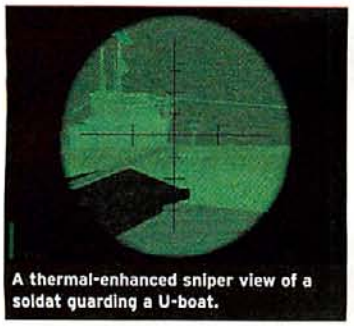
Return to Castle Wolfenstein should have been an important moment in PC gaming history. A kind of bookend to its genre-originating grandpa, *RtCW* should have shown us not only how far we have come, but how far we will go and why we'll always leave the consoles a step behind. But for all its technological wizardry, *RtCW* brings almost nothing new to the table gameplay-wise. I think that's a shame, and if you're the kind of gamer who plays every first-person shooter that comes out and are waiting for something to top classics such as *Half-Life* and *No One Lives Forever*, it'll seem a shame to you too. All the ingredients are there for *RtCW* to have been a much better game.

I'm not saying that *RtCW*'s single-player experience is a bad one, it's just pretty standard fare. Of course, once again you are tough-as-nails U.S. Army Sergeant B.J. Blazcowicz. Your mission is to sneak into Castle Wolfenstein and put an end to the nefarious supernatural plans of Heinrich Himmler and his SS Paranormal Division. The game begins after you've been captured, your fellow spy tortured to death, and a lowly guard dispatched to bring you to the torture chamber. Your escape from the cell is clever but it's told only through a cut-scene, so once you have control of the action you're already alone and armed. It would have been nice if I had had to figure out my escape for myself, but there's almost no puzzle-solving throughout *RtCW*. The few minor puzzles that there are involve getting into secret areas, and those aren't necessary to finish the game.

The experience of getting through the levels themselves can range from frustrating to excessively easy. Some missions unfortunately devolve into rote button-hunts, while others are so linear that they seem over before they begin. Granted, the *Quake III*-powered levels are drop-dead beautiful, depicting the icy wastes of Norway, ancient cathedrals, and clean, polished laboratories. The art direction never disappoints.

The game is also filled with a nice variety of enemies, including a whole host of accurately uniformed Nazi soldiers and officers—everything from

All the ingredients are there for *Castle Wolfenstein* to have been a much better game.



A thermal-enhanced sniper view of a soldat guarding a U-boat.

The deadly X creatures are one of the finer touches in the game.

In addition to every flavor of Nazi bastard imaginable, there's also the undead to deal with.

Wolf's multiplayer class system is extremely well balanced—it doesn't just force people to play the traditionally boring roles of medic or engineer, though it does actually make these roles fun.

Someone at Grey Matter has a serious domination fetish—not that there's anything wrong with that!

SS to paratroopers to Gestapo—plus rotting zombies, half-human X creatures, and last but not least, a bevy of leather-clad, SMG-wielding dominatrices.

Unfortunately, the AI doesn't quite impress. When you get into a firefight, your enemies dodge, take cover, and show good avoidance skills, but that old not-noticing-my-sniper-bullet-just-took-out-the-guard-next-to-you routine shows up in this game. And as the game progresses, enemy difficulty increases along with size and hit points of the bad guys. There are a few exceptions, like the electrified Lopers, but big enemies like the Über-Soldats can really only be beat by hammering them with powerful weapons.

And speaking of weapons, the game hosts a very nice array, from WWII-era guns like the Mauser rifle and Thompson submachine gun to the more exotic and fictional (I hope) Tesla Gun and Venom heavy machine gun. The best-looking and most satisfying weapon in the game is still the flamethrower. Although I don't quite understand why, it's okay to watch human beings (albeit Nazis) burn to death and listen to their agonized screams, but attack dogs had to be taken out of the game because killing them would have somehow been cruel.

Unfortunately, not all the weapons made it into the multiplayer, but only because the designers at Nerve (as opposed to Grey Matter, who did the single-player) seriously retuned the game for class-based teamplay. As a result, the multiplayer feels incredibly fresh and new, incorporating some of the better elements of games like *Team Fortress Classic* and *Counter-Strike* while at the same time being highly original. Some of the maps and their respective objectives are a little on the big and confusing side, but all in all the multiplayer goes a long way toward redeeming *RtCW* for me. If you were to buy the game only for its multiplayer, you wouldn't be wasting your money.

High expectations can be a critic's biggest pitfall. Often, a product's finer points or understated qualities can be completely missed by a reviewer who's looking for a game/movie/album/whatever to be the much-needed shot in the arm for the sagging genre they cover. Unfortunately, I fell into this pitfall a bit while playing and reviewing *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. But after careful examination, multiple rounds through the single-player campaign, and numerous hours playing multiplayer online, I still feel the game is flat. If all you want to do is blast your way through countless Nazis and zombies, then this game is probably for you. But if you want a deep, engaging storyline with surprising twists and turns, this probably isn't your cup o' tea.

For strategy tips on Return to Castle Wolfenstein, *go to page 110.*

VERDICT ★★★½☆

You have to decide: Do you want a compelling experience or do you just want to kill stuff? Or are you just in it for the multiplayer?

Motor City Online

Motor City misses the mark by missing the point **By George Jones**

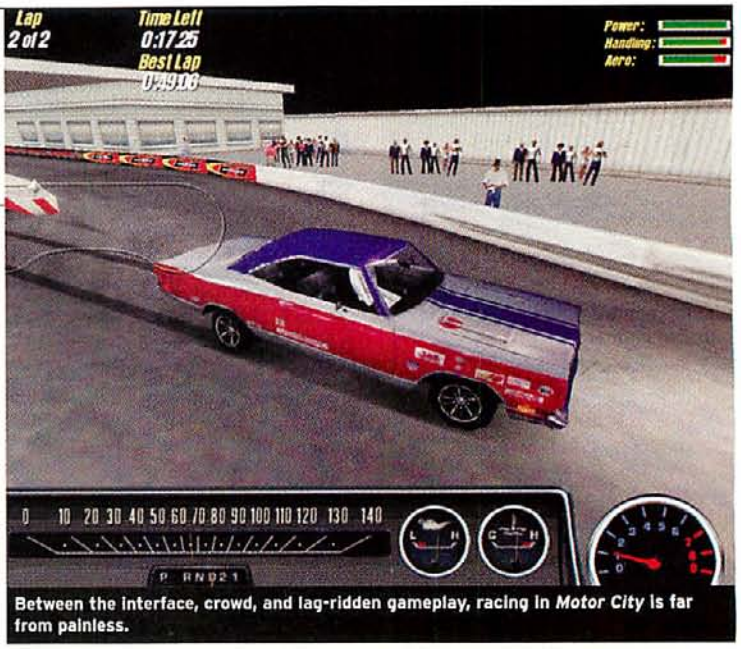
PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts**
DEVELOPER: **Electronic Arts**
URL: **mco.ea.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone; violence, mild language**
PRICE: **$39.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space, Internet connection**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, high-bandwidth Internet connection, 16MB Direct3D video card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet**

I came to *Motor City* to race. I left feeling as confused and defeated as a one-legged man at an ass-kicking contest: What exactly was I supposed to be doing there? And why? It's unfortunate, but the experience—at least for now—is awkward, plodding, and, worst of all, inconsistent.

In Electronic Arts' defense, *Motor City* could eventually find its way and become a top-notch experience. But it's going to take a complete retooling of the fundamental concepts and principles upon which this, the world's first massively multiplayer racing game, is founded.

That's how badly EA missed the mark here. Persistent online role-playing games like *EverQuest* succeed because they take the notion of a particular style of gameplay and extend that genre's familiar themes into the wide-open realm of social, simultaneous play by tens of thousands of players. At the risk of sounding redundant, the point of an online racing game in which you build your own cars and race them is, well, to build your own cars and race them.



Between the interface, crowd, and lag-ridden gameplay, racing in *Motor City* is far from painless.

You might as well be racing single-player-style on your PC.

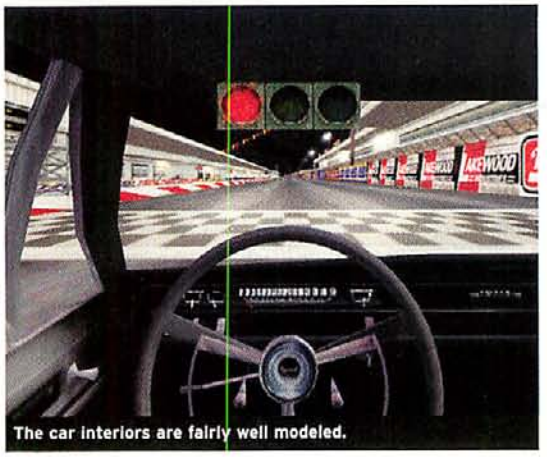
Online RPGs allow you to quickly start adventuring. *Motor City* should allow or perhaps even force its residents to race as soon as possible. Instead we're left to amble through the GUI, selecting different race types—oval races, drag races, and street races—until we find one that accepts us. And far too often, when we find a race, it's a sponsored race, which means that we have to use a sponsor car and not our own. That's contradictory and shouldn't even be possible. If EA wants a passionate, personal experience, every single element and decision should be made with ownership in mind.

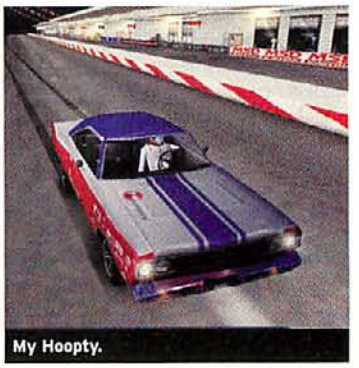
Maybe it's because Electronic Arts underestimated the social needs and overestimated the community needs of the online racer. Granted, all kinds of gamers enjoy talking and making friends. We want to chat within the context and fiction of *Motor City*, but instead we are limited to connecting with other players solely through the game's chat screens—we might as well be using Instant Messenger in our Windows desktop. In *EverQuest*, you don't make your friends in the chat rooms surrounding the gameworld; you're social in the chat room that *is* the gameworld. Anything else feels wrong and fails to connect the imaginary dots.

Unfortunately, once you find a suitable race, *Motor City* gets more disappointing. Even on a lightning-fast 2GHz machine with a T3 Internet connection, frame rates and lag are abysmal. Crashes occur often, so drivers quit midrace all the time. Ugh—you might as well be racing single-player-style on your PC. And on top of all this, the game environment is rather empty.

As with almost every other high-profile online game launch, you'll leave the *Motor City* environs feeling more like a temporary beta tester than a full-fledged resident. At this rate, maybe early adopters of online-only games should consider unionizing; it may be the only way we can prevent ourselves from getting screwed every time a new title comes out.

Wading through *MCO*'s configuration screens is torture.


The car interiors are fairly well modeled.


My Hoopty.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Apparently, what racing fans really want out of their online gaming experience is a chat room.

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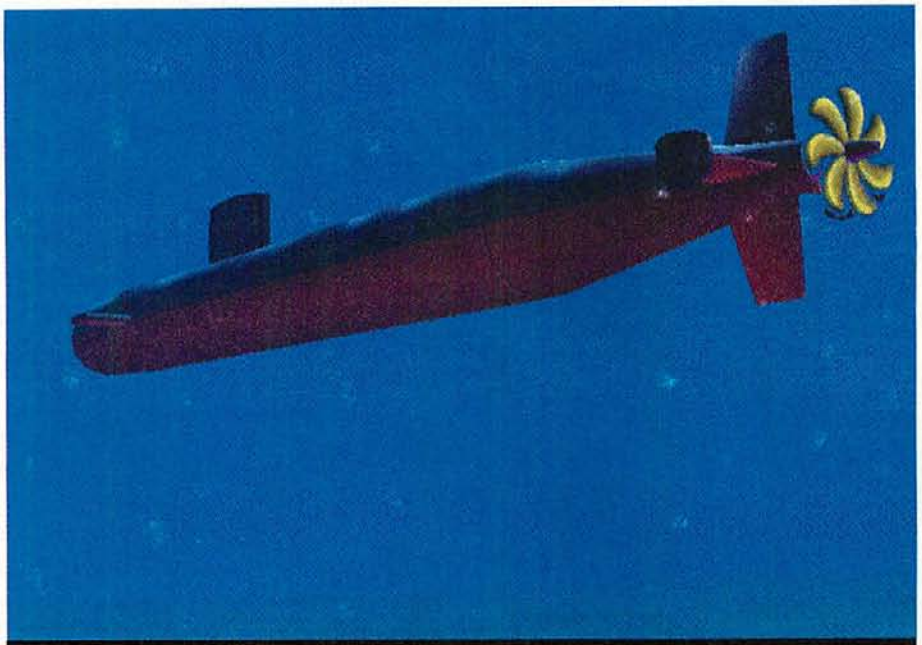
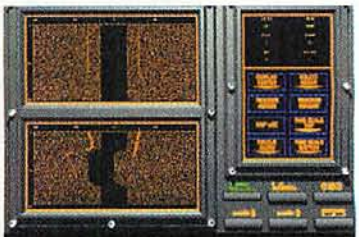
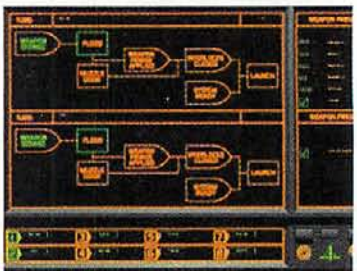


A Los Angeles 688I looking for trouble.

This Russian carrier is a juicy target, but sure to be well defended.



These cryptic screens of static are your windows on the underwater world.



Launching weapons is a lot more complicated than simply hitting a Fire button.

Sub Command

Deep water excitement for those willing to work for their thrills **By Jeff Lackey**

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts**
DEVELOPER: **Sonalysts Inc.**
URL: **www.subcommandea.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$39.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium MMX 233, 64MB RAM, 590MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **96MB RAM, 16MB Direct3D-compatible video card, 850MB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**

Dark. Quiet. Slow. Not exactly the words that come to mind when you think of today's most popular games. But *Sub Command* is a game that breaks a lot of rules. Like the rule that says hardcore simulations are dead or the other rule that says the key to gaming excitement is nonstop action and jaw-dropping graphics. *Sub Command* thumbs its nose at such conventions: This is a complex, super-hardcore simulation that requires you to stare at slow-moving screens filled with static for most of the game. What's remarkable is how tense and exciting staring at those screens can be.

Sub Command is an intricate simulation of modern submarine combat, putting you in command of the U.S. 688i Los Angeles class, the Seawolf class, and the Russian Akula class subs. Forget everything you learned about submarine warfare from old WWII movies: You'll almost never line up a target using your periscope. Today's silent service warriors stare at broadband sonar panels filled with electronic noise, seeking the slightest irregularity, which indicates something is out there, and then identifying the contact with a combination of tools such as narrowband sonar signatures and DEMON propeller speed analyses. These provide a series of lines and dots on an infernal screen termed Target Motion Analysis, in effect a diabolical puzzle whose solution is the precise location, course, and speed of your target. The problem is that there are seemingly numerous solutions to the puzzle, but only one is accurate—and getting it wrong can result in your death.

Sound complicated? It is. This is a realistic simulation, unashamedly difficult to master, but offering the kind of satisfaction that only comes from conquering a difficult challenge. Unfortunately, the most significant weakness of the game is the manual. Issue one is that this is the kind of game that just begs for a thick, spiral-bound manual (think of some of the old EA *Jane's* manuals), but what you get is an Adobe Acrobat file of more than 200 pages. Plan on using up a printer cartridge or the better part of a $20 bill at your local Office Max getting it printed. Issue two is that, as large as the manual is, it doesn't provide the information you really need to get the most out of the game. You'll need to supplement your reading with external sources (such as the tips and forums at www.subsim.com/ and the reference manual at subcommandhq.100megs4.com/).

This is a super-hardcore simulation that requires you to stare at slow-moving screens filled with static for most of the game.

Without a doubt, *Sub Command* isn't for those who like to get their thrills in quick and mindless portions. But if you like the thought of playing a game of cat and mouse with a lethal foe—desperately trying to find him before he finds you, racing to acquire a firing solution in time to be the first to launch a weapon, striking from out of the blue, being surprised by a strike from nowhere—if you're willing to earn your gaming excitement, you can't do better than *Sub Command*.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

An unashamedly complex simulation, *Sub Command* rewards your hard work with sweat-inducing tension.

Aquanox

The shallow end of the deep blue sea **By Robert Coffey**

PUBLISHER: **Fishtank Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Massive Development** URL: **www.fishtankgames.com** ESRB RATING: **Teen; violence** PRICE: **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, GeForce3 video card** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**

One of the few noninterchangeable weapons is the EMPactor, which disables enemy ships.

Late in the game, giant squids and fish join the hordes of enemy factions.

Blowing things up never looked so good. But can you really have a fireball underwater?

Interface issues, too much crappy dialogue, bad control schemes—these leaden design flaws aren't enough to sink the deep sea action of *Aquanox*, but their combined weight is enough to keep the aft end of this submarine dogfighting game skipping along the bottom of the ocean.

Aquanox plants you in an underwater future, courtesy of catastrophic global warming. As mercenary Emerald "Dead Eye" Flint, you sell your ace submarine pilot skills to the highest bidder, performing rescues, salvage missions, and good ol' search-and-destroy sorties as you accumulate credits to purchase new weapons and ship upgrades. It's your standard space pirate game, only underwater and with small maneuverable subs taking the place of X-wings or Excaliburs. And it lacks the depth of those other games.

Which isn't to say that *Aquanox* comes up short actionwise—there's a ton of it. From the very first mission, you'll be blasting multiple enemies and defenses. The action is fast, explosive, and keeps you on your toes. If you've got a GeForce3 card, well, this is the game you should show to your spouse to assist in the ongoing rationalization effort, since *Aquanox* is incredibly gorgeous, with great lighting effects, tremendous fireballs, and textures and models so richly detailed you can practically touch them. The shifting columns of light stabbing through the ocean surface and dappling the sea floor is remarkable enough that you'll want to just hover awhile and gawk.

Despite the professionalism of the graphics, a number of almost amateurish touches detract from the overall game. You'll notice it in the very first menu: You're forced to navigate with arrow keys—there's absolutely no way to use your mouse to load games, change options, or load out your ship. You'll really notice it if you try to play with a joystick, and realize that setting the joystick to On doesn't do anything—you have to dig deeper into the menu and manually assign movement and view options to your joystick's X and Y axes.

In playing with the default FPS-style mouse-and-keyboard controls, you're certain to notice it when you have to endure the hideously written and terribly voice-acted NPC interactions—cartoonishly drawn character heads appear beside endless and generally worthless dialogue concerning too many tangled plotlines with too many villains. Just what is gained by forcing players to click through three dozen meaningless and painfully prolonged exchanges between Flint and various bartenders over assorted fictional cocktails?

Failing to deliver the depth of sci-fi sims like your *MechWarriors* and *Wing Commanders* keeps *Aquanox* from succeeding as anything more than a fun-but-shallow shooter. You can't control your wingmen, and there's no killboard to record your achievements. Enemy AI is woeful: Giant squids coming right at you are understandable, but don't you expect more from rogue military pilots? Little meaningful differentiation moots ship and weapon selection. Even though you're a mercenary, you never decide which missions to take—the entire process is linear and predetermined.

Yet if you know that going in, and you're looking for a quick-fix action game with incredible visuals, then *Aquanox* will deliver the goods, and then some.

Aquanox is gorgeous, with great lighting effects, tremendous fireballs, and richly detailed models.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

More *Quake* than a watery *Privateer*, *Aquanox* is a fun-and very pretty-shooter.

Even more fun for gamers who loved building dream homes in *The Sims*—build your own downtown with restaurants, bars, and shops.

Hand-kissing is just one of scads of new animations and interactions added with *Hot Date*.

The Sims: Hot Date

It's a whole new, hideously addictive game **By Elizabeth McAdams**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

PUBLISHER: **EA Games**
DEVELOPER: **Maxis**
URL: **www.thesims.com**
ESRB RATING: **Teen; comic mischief, mature sexual themes, mild violence**
PRICE: **$29.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None**

I'm not just your average *Sims* fan. I'm an addict. I have been known to greet my boyfriend in Sims talk ("Kam in Snella?"), and have taken it personally when various Sims in the neighborhood snub my Sim version of me. And here's the truly sick part: I have bought multiple boxes of *The Sims, Livin' Large*, and *House Party* because I've misplaced older copies in the vortex that is my computer desk. So when the latest *Sims* expansion, *Hot Date*, finally arrived, I knew I'd have to put the real world on hold—at least for a couple weeks.

Of all the add-ons that have come out for *The Sims* thus far, *Hot Date* is the most creative expansion yet. Although the new features of *Hot Date* mesh into the original, there's enough going on to actually make it feel like a new *Sims* game. Exploring the newly added downtown area and the tricky nuances of dating alone can consume hours of playing time. There are also a ton of new objects, floors, walls, and actions that'll suck up plenty of time for any fan of the series. And typical of the *Sims* Internet community, we're already seeing downloadable user-designed lots for downtown.

New environments and social interactions make navigating the fickle Sim heart trickier and more involving.

Maxis has made *Hot Date* more challenging by having Sims' interests play a larger role. Interests determine how well you will get along with another Sim and whether there will be any fireworks between you. Regular actions like greeting other Sims have also been enlarged to include more variation. Depending on the nature of your long-term relationship with someone, new options will pop up for you to choose from. To make matters even more interesting, you can now buy your friends' undying devotion with expensive gifts purchased from downtown.

Just as in real life, the dating game can be a bitch. After hours of desperate mouse clicks, I still can't get anyone to come home with me from downtown (maybe I need a shower?), let alone establish a wild and crazy love connection. I have plenty of friends already, but none of them are interested in taking the relationship to the next level, no matter how many fancy dinners I buy them! But also as in real life, the thrill of the chase is what makes this expansion truly addictive.

This is the add-on Maxis should have released long ago.

This is the add-on Maxis should have released long ago, taking *The Sims* to an entirely different level. Even if you have played the hell out of *The Sims*, *Hot Date* will rekindle your love for the franchise.

VERDICT ★★★★½

***Hot Date* makes last year's *CGW* Game of the Year even more of a masterpiece.**

THE SIMS...ONLINE

If you haven't downloaded the nude patch yet, go and grab it off the Web right now. *Hot Date*, like most things, is better with a little nudity! Also, if you are like me and have more than 2 gigs of homebrew *Sims* downloads installed in your game, be warned: Expansions do not like downloads and you may experience difficulty when installing *Hot Date*. I had to remove most of my custom textures and objects so that *Hot Date* would run smoothly.

Soul Reaver 2

Gaming to propel your mind **By Wen Laws**

PUBLISHER: **Eidos Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **Crystal Dynamics**
URL: **www.legacyofkain.com**
ESRB RATING: **Mature; blood, violence**
PRICE: **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 850MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 700, 1GB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None**

Being an immortal reaper of souls like Raziel, the main character, is fun but repetitive at times. *Soul Reaver 2* is interesting in that it's a platformer with a storyline that seems more appropriate for a thought-provoking movie rather than a PC game.

The dialogue gets verbose; phrases like "a paradox to derail" and "my map of fate redrawn" come from a soul who questions every action. One can't help but marvel at the philosophical emphasis. Is fate truly an unalterable design, or can free will affect the course of events? Fatalism aside, you probably want to hear about the gameplay.

Since it's a console port, you should have a gamepad; it's quite annoying to dodge, target, and attack an enemy using the keyboard. Despite that, the controls are fluid and easily learned. Most of your action skills will be focused on tasks such as floating across or up to ledges, because fights are mostly inconsequential and bosses aren't present.

For a console port, the graphics look good enough to have been made for a PC.

You could take these guys on, or you can just run off. Fighting, overall, seems to be on the optional side.

The only real payoffs from fighting anyone in this game are the various and satisfying fatal blows (usually impaling someone with whatever weapon is at hand). After 30 minutes of maiming, I avoided contact with most of the other enemies—not a problem considering that NPCs just shout at you as you pass and give no pursuit. And while bosses in other games will fight you to the death, in *Soul Reaver 2* they just distract you with words and then run off to the next episode.

The plot twists are nothing compared to the twists found while walking from one area to the next. There is no teleportation between areas, so Raziel often retraces his steps, jumping over the respawned enemies. In the game's defense, the plot is very much about the journey, so it may have been a deliberate decision to make the player roam.

Graphics are a plus, and I was surprised to hear some editors giving their props—that doesn't happen with most console ports. The details are artistic and nice to look at, which is important because a good chunk of time is spent skulking around in first-person mode. It was easy to tell if Raziel was headed in the right direction because multiple cut-scenes would load on the way, for better or worse.

Soul Reaver 2 might stop you from using monosyllabic words, but I wouldn't recommend picking it up for an action-packed gaming session.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

Quality storytelling and puzzles but repetitive action.

Schizm

My brain hurts a lot **By Rob Smolka**

PUBLISHER: **DreamCatcher Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **LK Avalon**
URL: **www.dreamcatchergames.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$29.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 333, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 2X DVD-ROM drive**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 10X DVD-ROM drive**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None**

Have you ever known someone that you really respected but hated spending time with because they made you feel incredibly stupid? This is how I feel about *Schizm*, an incredibly *Myst*-like adventure game that only an engineer could love.

The story is straight out of a *Star Trek* episode: A new planet is found, but the locals seem to have vanished while sipping their morning coffee. A group of scientists were sent to find out what's going on but they have also disappeared. Now it's up to our hero and heroine to solve the mystery.

The world you explore is truly alien, and the puzzles reflect this.

This is an interesting twist that factors into the gameplay, but it's a tight battle for worst actor award.

The majority of the puzzles are beautifully incorporated into the game-world, but you practically need degrees in mathematics and linguistics to solve most of them. The world you explore is truly alien, and the puzzles reflect this, making them even tougher.

The double-sided DVD (a shorter CD-ROM version is available but not recommended) is loaded with gorgeous visuals, a smart interface, and a decent story (marred by some pretty bad acting). With patience—trial and error will get you nowhere—things will start to make some sense, but a hint book is necessary for all but the most hardy adventurers.

You'll get a ride in this—if you can solve the mind-bending puzzle that gets it airborne.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

***Schizm* is beautiful, but the puzzles are very difficult; pick up the strategy guide when you buy the game.**

Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds

The third time's the charm for *Star Wars* strategy **By Elliott Chin**

PUBLISHER: LucasArts Entertainment
DEVELOPER: LucasArts Entertainment
URL: www.swgalacticbattlegrounds.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; violence
PRICE: $44.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 233, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet, serial connection (2-8 players)

The promise of reliving all your favorite *Star Wars* moments from the commander's chair is finally realized in LucasArts' latest game, *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds*. Unlike previous *Star Wars* strategy games, *Galactic Battlegrounds* is good, and it delivers sweeping battles as exciting and epic as the famous skirmishes depicted in the movie.

Spanning the time period from *The Phantom Menace* to just after *Return of the Jedi*, *Galactic Battlegrounds* does a good job of representing every major event in the films. There are six campaigns, including the tutorial, and each has a good variety of missions, such as search and destroy, item retrieval, and city sieges. The campaigns are quite enjoyable, and you'll love controlling your favorite *Star Wars* characters, like Chewbacca and Darth Maul, while replaying classic battles from the movies.

Each of the six civilizations featured in the game (Empire, Gungans, Rebels, Royal Naboo, Trade Federation, and Wookiees) has its own look, unique technologies, and civilization bonuses. While not as differentiated as in *StarCraft* or even *Red Alert 2*, the civilizations do manage to feel different when you play them. And they're all fun to play...even the Gungans.

Battlegrounds is based on the *Age of Kings* engine, and it shows. All the conventions of *AOK* have gotten a facelift and a new name. There are tech levels instead of ages, ore instead of stone, carbon instead of wood, monuments instead of wonders, and so on. The good news is the game is familiar and thus easy to play. The bad news is it doesn't do anything truly innovative or revolutionary. Then again, *Battlegrounds* doesn't promise to be groundbreaking. It's an iterative follow-up to *Age*, but with enough *Star Wars* flavor to make it interesting and new.

The awesome might of the Empire has been captured in a strategy game that lets you marshal your forces, breach defenses, and destroy those upstart Rebels.

Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds is based on the Age of Kings engine, and it shows.

New features, like air units and Jedi, will demand your attention, as they substantially alter the traditional *Age*-style gameplay.

Air units are the most obvious new feature in *Battlegrounds*, and they give a liberating new option for combat that didn't exist in *Age*. They're the fastest units and (if you catch your foe by surprise) the easiest means of winning the game. But they are nicely balanced, as anti-air troops are easy to come by and counter the air units well. Jedi are the other big feature. They're based on the Priest model in *AOK*, but in addition to being able to convert enemy units, they're also the game's strongest melee units and can wreak havoc in the ranks if you don't have some bounty hunters around to counter them.

The fact that nearly all units have ranged attacks also changes the gameplay somewhat from the *AOK* games; walls are less daunting and melee units a rarity to be used intelligently. The sound is excellent in the game, and with rare exception, characters' voice-overs provide a good match to their onscreen counterparts.

The graphics are dated and the game isn't particularly innovative. But most reservations get thrown out the window once you start playing. This game is fun, pure and simple. And it does a nice job of recreating all the glorious conflict and warfare of the *Star Wars* saga.

For strategy tips on Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds, *go to page 116.*

VERDICT ★★★½☆

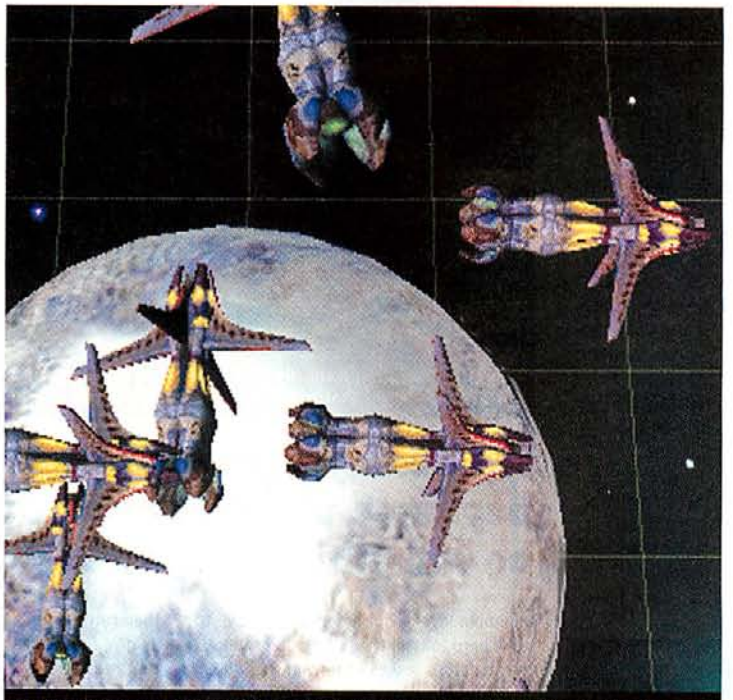
***Star Wars* fans will probably love it.**

Star Trek: Armada II

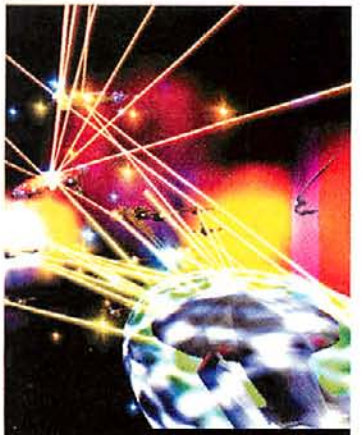
Boldly going where they've gone before By Tom Chick

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Mad Dog
URL: gaming.startrek.com/games/armada2/
ESRB RATING: Everyone; violence PRICE: $49.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 1.3GB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2-8 players)



Tank rush, Species 8472 style—a swarm of destroyers hatched from embryos.



The Federation's Corbomite Reflector returns damaging beams to sender.

The new Borg Fusion Cube is formed by joining multiple cubes together.

The Cardassians are all new, as is Species...umm, hold on, let me look it up...Species 8472.

On one hand, the developers at Mad Dog Software know just what *Armada* needs, and have used new resources and races to add strategic depth to the sequel to last year's *Star Trek* real-time strategy game. On the other hand, in terms of polish and usability, they seem more than a little lost.

In *Armada II*, you don't just suck dilithium from small blue moons—you also beam metal up from planets and scoop gobs of yellow latinum out of nebulae. You'll spread out across the map to secure resources or trade with the Ferengi to even out your stockpiles. With new rules for warp speed travel, gravity wells, planetary colonization, and new styles of nebulae (including one race that can build nebula walls), there's a lot of interaction with terrain in this game. Even more than the first game, *Armada II* presents space as a richly interactive environment rather than a vacuum. And this time, you can even play on randomly generated maps.

There are some changes to the returning races, particularly the Borg with their bigger, meaner cubes, their new technology assimilation capability, and their special resource gathering abilities. The Cardassians are all new, as is Species...umm, hold on, let me look it up...Species 8472, the Zerg-like space monsters who break down their resources into biomatter and evolve their ships from embryos. If you're enough of a *Star Trek* geek that you knew 8472 from any other four-digit number, then you'll probably be willing to forgive *Armada II* its flaws and enjoy the sight of familiar Klingon and Federation ships pummeling each other. However, if you're looking for a rock-solid space combat game, you won't find it here.

The graphics engine has the thick, slow feeling of dragging through syrup, and the interface looks surprisingly chintzy, as if it were licensed cheap from some Eastern European country. The map lets you move ships and place buildings vertically, but the presentation is confusing and of questionable value. The 3D cinematic view is, as usual, pretty and pretty useless. The default speed encourages fast action and disposable ships, but this style of play flies in the face of *Armada*'s tactical detail, not to mention *Star Trek*'s tradition of stately combat between capital ships. In the single-player campaign, narrated by a tired and bored-sounding Patrick Stewart, the Federation finds a transwarp portal in a Borg colony and goes through to discover Strange New Things, one mission at a time. In other words: canned and linear. Fortunately, the skirmishes are wide open to different options and the AI is up to par even on the hardest level. There's an amazingly thorough logging system that tracks every ship, building, and battle and stores the log in a text file.

There's no denying that *Armada II* has some good ideas, and Mad Dog seems to know just what the sequel needed. But these facts just make it all the more disappointing that, instead of a polished AAA presentation, this game has the look and feel of something cobbled together on a shoestring budget. In that regard, *Armada II* is like a return to the production values of the original *Star Trek*.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

Some great ideas without the quality execution they deserve.

Jumpgate

Good things come to those who wait **By Elliott Chin**

PUBLISHER: **3DO**
DEVELOPER: **NetDevil**
URL: **www.jossh.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$19.95; $9.95 monthly fee**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 350, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet**

Space sims have finally made the jump to the world of persistent online gaming in 3DO's *Jumpgate*, a game that combines the best elements of RPGs and *Privateer*.

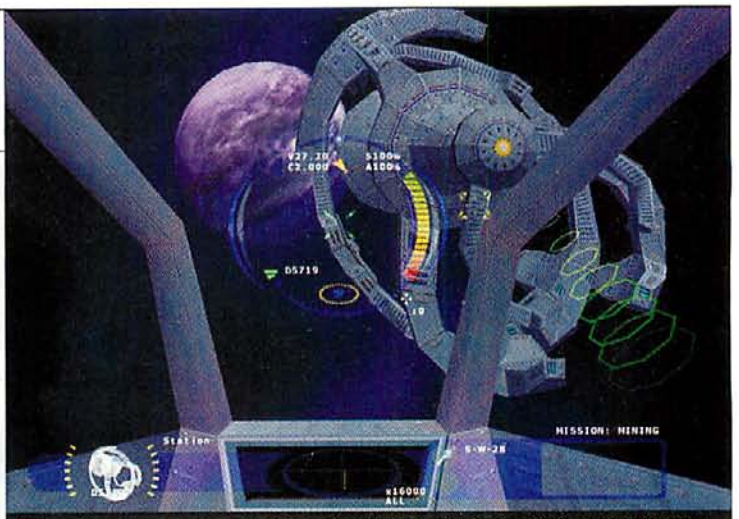
In *Jumpgate*, five rival factions govern the galaxy in general peace, although occasional hostilities do occur. As pilots for three of the five factions, you and other players run missions to either keep the galactic economy running or alter territorial control within the region. All the while, aliens called the Conflux threaten everyone and provide fodder for those who don't want to kill other players. Although the backstory is extensive, there's more of it on the Website than in the game itself.

Once you get in, you'll find that it's a deep game with detailed RPG elements. You start as a raw recruit, earning experience and money via missions for your faction. Levels are important because many of the cooler items have minimum level requirements. You have to work hard to gain the real goodies, but the structure makes achieving the higher levels and hardware that much sweeter. It also eliminates "twinking," where first-level players snag super equipment thanks to a level-50 guild buddy. As in the best online RPGs, the community is great; there is always someone nearby willing to help you, as well as friendly guilds (called squadrons) ready to take new players under their wings.

There's a true diversity of missions, including patrol, mining, cargo hauling, and pure fighting. Whether you're advanced or beginner, violent or not, there will be something for you to do. Some are simple, such as patrol missions in which you jump to different systems, fly through a beacon at each one, and then return home. Then there are more involved ones, like rare faction missions that require you to fly to contested territory to battle enemy pilots for control of a system. In addition, wherever you go there is always a chance to encounter AI-controlled Conflux, which you can kill for experience, target practice, and medals. Newbies are pretty safe, thanks to a penalty for higher-level players that shoot them down. However, in unregulated space, everyone is fair game.

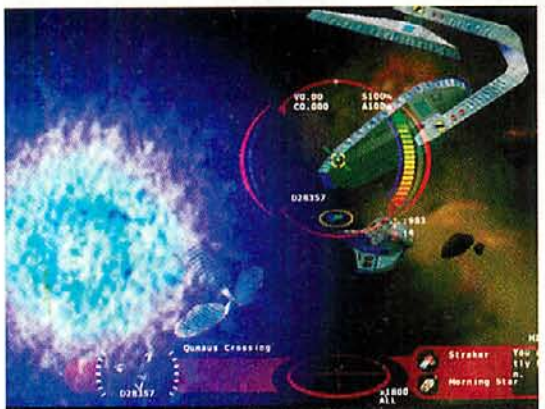
The action sounds great, but unfortunately, you have to sit through hours of boredom before you can get to it. When you first start playing, you'll be flying cargo, mining, and patrol missions, because you lack the experience or equipment to undertake the exciting missions. Before you can comfortably fight other pilots or Conflux, you'll need to languish in cargo-hauling purgatory for at least 10 hours when you start out (unless you like commerce missions, in which case you'll be in heaven).

Overall, though, *Jumpgate* is a good game because of its extensive role-playing elements, the accumulation of wealth and equipment, and the variety of missions that support different play styles. It has its flaws, most notably unimpressive graphics and an agonizingly slow start, but it has everything that made *Privateer* great, and then some.



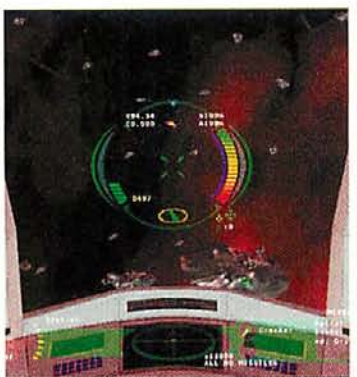
Jumpgate makes you manually dock every time you land at a station, a frustrating and stupid endeavor that will whip your butt before you master it.

Whether you're advanced or beginner, violent or not, there will be something for you to do.



The universe of *Jumpgate* is gigantic, with more than a hundred sectors. Access to the universe is gained via jumpgates.

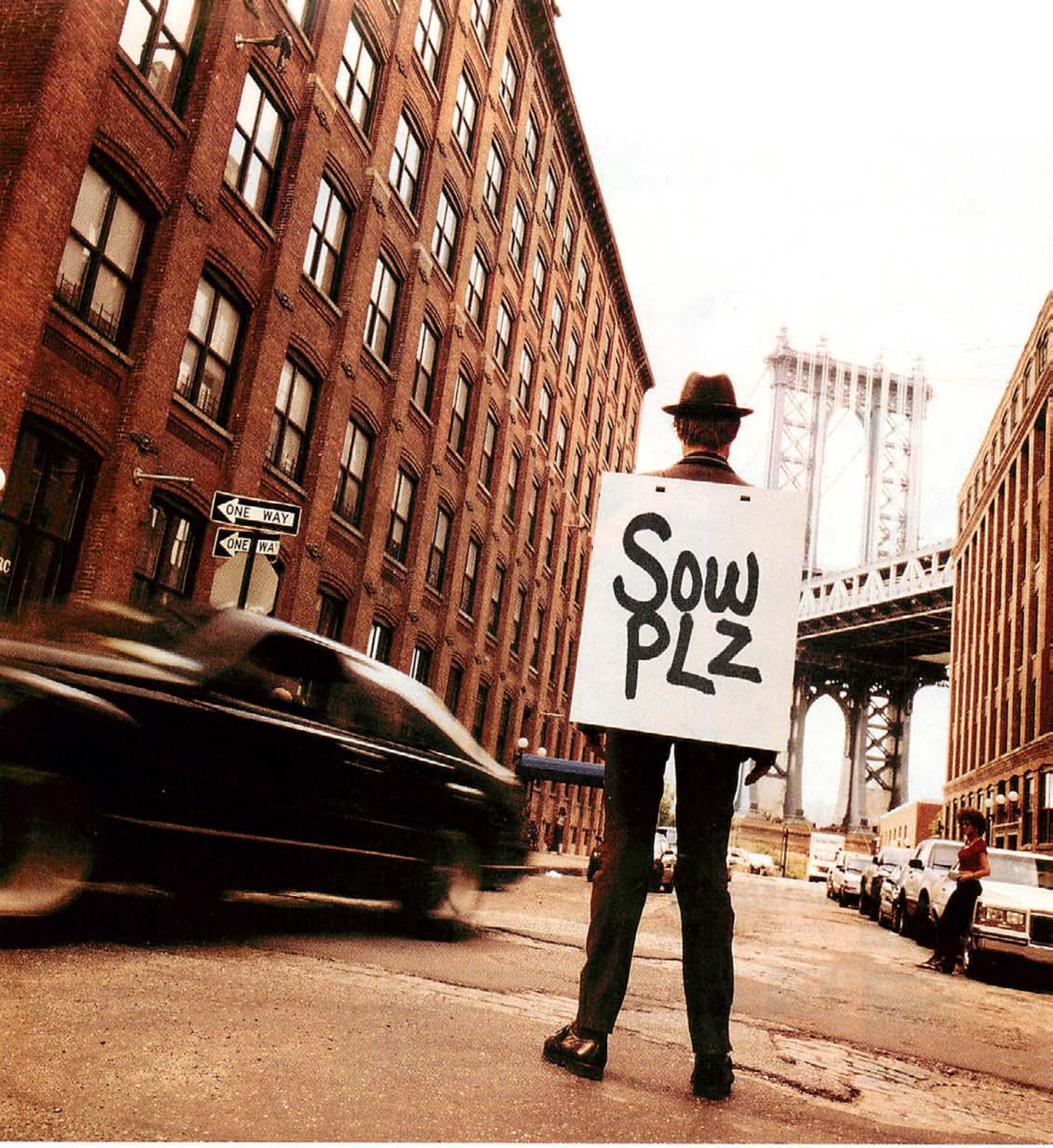
Alien Conflux and other rival factions provide plenty of opportunity for gamers to practice their fighting skills.



The game's graphics are very ordinary, and in truth, the vast expanse of space all ends up looking the same.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

If you can handle the boring start, *Jumpgate* has the goods to reward every type of gamer.



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Humorous asides from your party members and lighthearted spell animations like this Insanity spell add to the fun.

Wizardry 8

Sometimes the old ways are the best ways **By Arcadian Del Sol**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

PUBLISHER: **Sir-tech Canada**
DEVELOPER: **Sir-tech Canada**
URL: **www.wizardry8.com** ESRB RATING: **Teen; blood and gore, violence**
PRICE: **$49.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 350, 128MB RAM, 32MB video card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None**

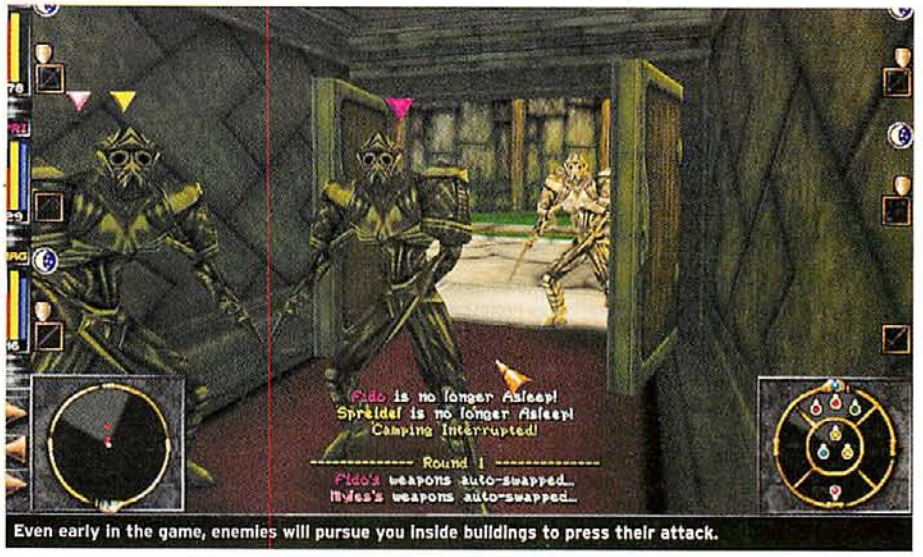
There are times I do not understand this industry. Games not even close to being done are boxed and sold with a wink and a nod by developers who know full well they are still months away from having any semblance of a working product. Yet they seem to have no trouble finding a publisher to pour rocks and sand into a cardboard sleeve and charge 50 bucks. Then along comes a game like *Wizardry 8* that emerges from the ashes of what once was Sir-tech Canada, and it actually manages to work. It even manages to be fun, provided you are able to find a copy. After failing to secure a mainstream publisher, *Wizardry 8* was picked up as an exclusive release by retail giant Electronics Boutique. If you don't have a store in your local shopping mall, you'll have to order online or wait until the full retail distribution. The good news is that your wait will be worth it. *Wizardry 8* lives up to the legacy built by seven games spanning two decades.

From the moment you begin building characters, you get the feeling that this game is vast. With 11 races, 15 character classes, 40 skills, and 100 spells, you could easily spend hours just creating your party. In a refreshingly minimalist cut-scene drawn in storyboard format, the epic history of the *Dark Savant* story arc is encapsulated, detailed enough to empower players embarking upon their first *Wizardry*, and cursory enough to serve as a nostalgic flashback for players familiar with the many sub-plots. As a welcome, you are dumped into a monastery and invited to kick and claw your way out. Oh, and then save the entire universe, please.

If It Works...

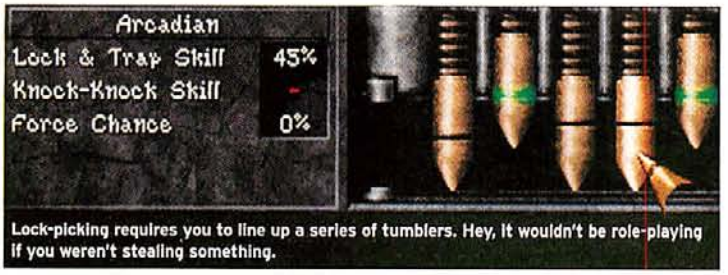
While the words "real-time strategy" continue to buzz their way around the gaming industry, Sir-tech stuck to the familiar turn-based combat model that has worked for decades. Not to shun 20 years of design and technology, though, *Wizardry 8* unveils an all-new, 3D-enhanced Dominus to explore, built on an engine that moves as smoothly as wet ice on hot glass. *Ultima* fans burned by *Ascension* are no doubt looking at *Wizardry 8* with cautious eyes. They've witnessed what can happen when a developer attempts to radically redesign the time-honored traditions of a game franchise. Sir-tech Canada made use of contemporary developments in video and sound to improve upon the *Wizardry* license, but rest assured that this final installment is a true *Wizardry* title. Fans of the series will be happy to discover that in spite of all the new artwork and polygons, there is a story. There is a plot. And it is a good one. Best of all, it doesn't take you by the hand and drag you from quest to quest in numerical sequence. The quest that does send you from place to place is a product of the choices you make in the game. Rather

A simple but effective tool lets you set up your party formation exactly the way you want it.



Even early in the game, enemies will pursue you inside buildings to press their attack.

Hearts and souls have been poured into *Wizardry 8*, and it shows.



Lock-picking requires you to line up a series of tumblers. Hey, it wouldn't be role-playing if you weren't stealing something.

How deep is *Wizardry 8*? Every character has four screens of data for you to track, tweak, and twiddle.

There are lots of detailed NPC interactions, including that RPG staple, the busty, big-eyed innkeeper.

than ask you to think like it wants you to, *Wizardry 8* does its best to learn and react to what *you* think. The story might require that you make your way to point A, but how you get there and what your purpose is for going are up to you. All this in a game that couldn't find a publisher.

I wish I could say my experiences were entirely bug free, but I did encounter exactly four bugs during my review, the worst being one particular game-stopper that forced me to start the game over. No game should ever release with a bug that potentially forces the player to scrap their game. It should be a Law of Game Design or something.

Other players encountered a few similarly irritating errors, but despite having to lay off nearly its entire staff as it prepared to close the doors for good, Sir-tech has maintained a support crew whose first patch has addressed issues already raised by the players. Hearts and souls have been poured into *Wizardry 8*, and it shows.

ANOTHER SAD GOODBYE

If *Ultima* was the father of the computer role-playing game, then the *Wizardry* series was its great-grandfather. *Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord* was released in 1981, when programming in 12 colors was something developers fantasized about. Much of the standard operating procedures of computer RPGs were designed and perfected with each release in the series.

Incredibly, *Wizardry 1* was once considered cutting-edge technology.

With this release, we say our goodbye to this franchise. With the programming team for *Wizardry 9* having gone on to other companies, we will never know what greater, grander adventures might have come. *Wizardry 8* is the farewell tour for this once-dominant studio, which has finished the same way it started 20 years ago: with a really great game.

VERDICT ★★★★★

***Wizardry 8* is a great ending for a great series.**

Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone

Sorcery for kids

By Jeff and Sarah Green

As in the movie, the Quidditch scenes are a highlight of the game. In addition to the main game matches, you can engage in a separate Quidditch tournament.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Amaze
URL: www.ea.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone; comic mischief, mild violence
PRICE: $29.95

REQUIREMENTS: 266MHz Pentium II or AMD K6-2, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 400MHz Pentium II, 128MB RAM, 32MB Direct3D video card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None

You'd have to be as cold-hearted as Professor Snape not to appreciate the Harry Potter franchise. Sure, we've hit media overkill, but credit author J.K. Rowling with creating some real-life magic: She's made reading cool again for an entire generation of kids (and many adults too).

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, the PC game, is an action-adventure/platformer that roughly follows the storyline of the first book, with lots of references to the movie. It's a fun little game, faithful to the spirit of the series, and if you're a diehard fan, you might as well fork over the cash—it's worth it.

I played this game with the most hardcore Potter-head I know—my 7-year-old daughter Sarah—and we had a good time from start to finish, mostly. The game's structure is clever. You play as Harry, entering Hogwarts as a first-year wizard to attend classes where you learn new spells and abilities. You then use those spells and abilities to get through the next levels of the game, in which you, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger solve the mystery of the Sorcerer's Stone.

Thanks to the *Unreal* engine, the levels and spell effects in *Harry Potter* are beautifully rendered.

It's easy stuff, but for fans, it's quite engaging. The people, places, and items from Rowling's world are well integrated and make sense gamewise. Spells come straight from the text, for example, and are beautifully rendered. The game looks fantastic, thanks to the *Unreal* engine, and the level design of Hogwarts is rich in detail, with lots of secret areas to discover.

The gripes? Sarah was very disappointed in Ron Weasley's appearance, noting that Ron Weasley is *not* Ron Weasley without a lot of freckles. We both could have used more save points, especially late in the game, when we had to repeat levels over and over—and watch the tedious cut-scenes over and over, too. We were also annoyed with the abundance of jumping puzzles, until we found the autojump command that did them for us.

If you're a Harry Potter fan, this is a surprisingly fun title. The 7-year-old gives *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* four stars. I give it three and a half. Since I'm older and bigger, I win.

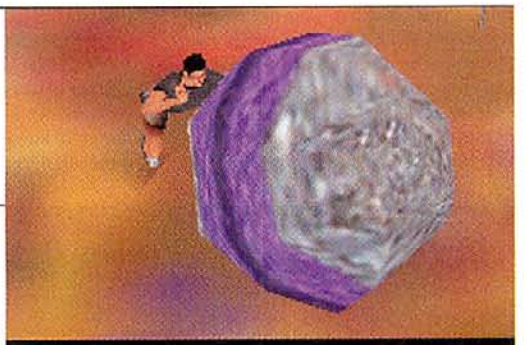
VERDICT ★★★½☆

Great looks, cool sound, and decent level design make this a game that will keep kids and parents up late.

Survivor: The Interactive Game

The most botched licensed product in world history

By Robert Coffey



A badly drawn character pushes a crappy-looking boulder up an unbelievably ugly hill—very, very slowly. I'd rather do this in real life than play *Survivor*.

PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Magic Lantern
URL: www.us.infogrames.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: $19.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 333, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: A strong predisposition toward self-flagellation and loathing
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Totally not worth the effort

The only thing that could save this game is the digital scrambling they used on Richard's ass crack in Season One. Even a screensaver of Richard's flabby ass crack is preferable to this. Talk about colossally missed opportunities.

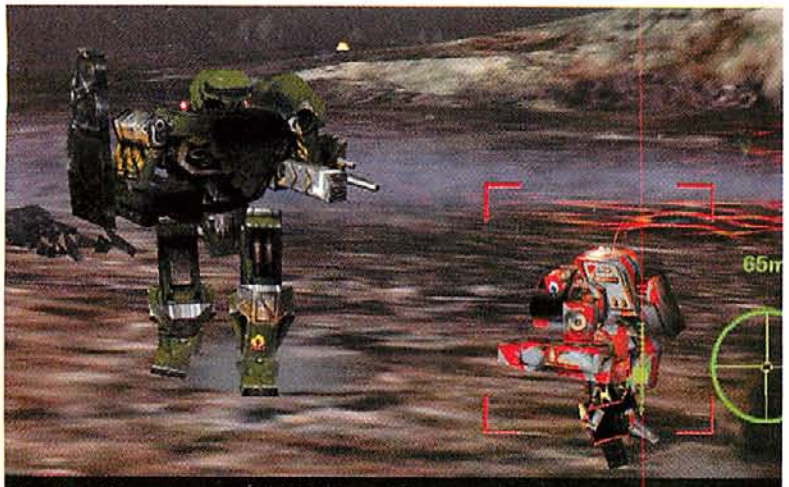
Gameplay follows a vicious cycle of tedium: a Survival Period in which you click your way through meaningless dialog trees with fellow castaways for three excruciating minutes; a Reward Challenge in which you engage in a horribly executed, pitiful game; another salt-in-the-wound Survival Period; the Immunity Challenge that is frequently a crippled shooter; and the wet-blanket anticlimax that is the Tribal Council.

Only as an impetus to suicide does this game succeed. Forget the crashes and the broken challenge that sent my character beyond the edge of the world for eternity—where are the true signatures of *Survivor*? Why isn't Richard getting naked and freaking everyone out? Why isn't Susan having some sort of bitter mental breakdown? Why can't you custom-create a tribe from the two seasons' worth of contestants? (I wanted to see how long it took a tribe of Colleen-like waifs to waste away.)

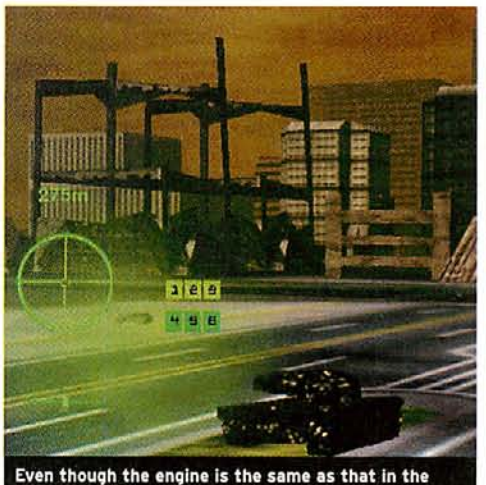
And why, when I'm voted off, doesn't the game just tell me who eventually won? Then again, maybe that's just a clever metaphor for the game—no one who plays this game is going to feel like a winner.

VERDICT ☆☆☆☆☆

Insert your own "voted off the island" joke here—this game is terrible.



Here two of the new mechs, Black Knight and Uller, are duking it out on the lava planet (which messes up your heat, by the way).



Even though the engine is the same as that in the original *MechWarrior 4*, the new terrain, like this ruined city, is quite aesthetically pleasing.

MechWarrior 4: Black Knight

Cyberlore's expansion earns its cold, hard cash **By Thierry Nguyen**

PUBLISHER: **Microsoft**
DEVELOPER: **Cyberlore Studios**
URL: **www.microsoft.com/games/mw4_blackknight**
ESRB RATING: **Teen; violence**
PRICE: **$29.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-16 players)**

Fighting for one's honor or social causes is nice, but *MechWarrior* fans always want a game that lets you fight for money. Back in the days of yore, *MechWarrior 2* was lauded as a great *BattleTech* game, but everyone went even more nuts for the *Mercenaries* follow-up. *Black Knight* is not a full-fledged sequel or stand-alone product, but it is a nice add-on for last year's solid *MechWarrior 4: Vengeance*. Enter Cyberlore, those expansion wunderkinds, with both the *WarCraft II* and *Heroes of Might and Magic II* expansions under their belts.

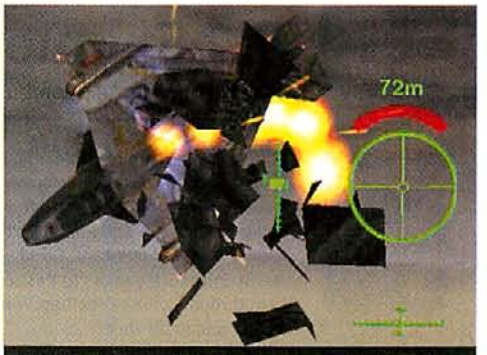
Like any Cyberlore expansion, *Black Knight* gives you more, more, and more. Five mechs, eight weapons, and 20 missions are added to the single-player campaign. Cyberlore also added five new multiplayer modes to make a nice $30 package for the *MechWarrior 4* fan.

The most interesting additions to the single-player are trade and the dynamic campaign. While trade doesn't approach the economic model of *Mercenaries* (you don't earn any money during the sorties), you can still barter for any parts or mechs you want on the black market. It's a nice compromise between a free-economy model and the restricted, linear material-acquisition model from the previous game.

While it doesn't provide a true dynamic campaign, Cyberlore puts a nice twist in the original's campaign format. The dynamic aspect manifests as secondary objectives and the ability to select the order of missions. If you choose to destroy the airfield early on, for example, enemy air support is cut off for later missions. Secondary objectives involve helping out a rebel faction; while helping them now might make the current mission more difficult, you can look forward to their help in later missions. But if you don't help, be prepared for a lack of reinforcements later on.

Cyberlore designed the missions to feel more like actual wars. Many missions have heavy use of ground and air vehicles and mechs.

Cyberlore designed the missions to feel more like actual wars. Many missions have heavy use of ground and air vehicles and mechs, all to good effect. One mission involved escorting a convoy, during which the skies were filled with helicopters and bombers, while various tank ambushes attempted to tear everyone apart. One of the new terrain types is a ruined city, and fighting tanks, mechs, and static defenses made a typical search-and-destroy mission feel more like guerrilla warfare. The other new terrains, like the volcano planet or the crystal moon, add visual interest and tactical considerations to the game.



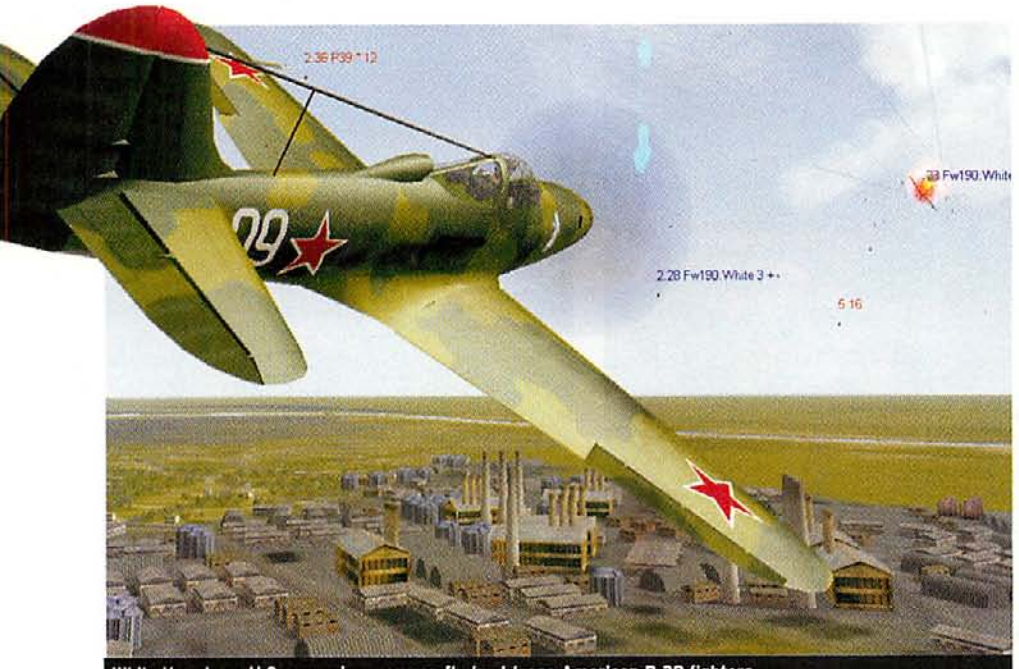
Aircraft, tanks, and big, bad firepower all add up to make *Black Knight* missions feel more like wars than mech matches.

The new multiplayer types are essentially tweaks to what was in *MechWarrior 4*, but they feel like separate games. Standouts include the Siege Assaults and the Clan-versus-Inner Sphere modes. Again, these are a simple matter of more stuff being crammed onto a solid game.

The game's only bad points are its good points, meaning that this is more of the same. Sure, the black market and the dynamic campaigns are cool, but if you're a loyalist who disliked the previous mechlab, you still won't be satisfied. It's a very solid add-on for fans—Cyberlore did a good job of adding a nice mercenary slant to *MechWarrior 4*—but it won't convert anyone new.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

***MechWarrior 4* with a black market, a dynamic campaign, and some other neat stuff. Good if you're a fan, more of the same if you aren't.**



While there's no U.S. campaign, you can fly lend-lease American P-39 fighters.

A Focke-Wulf 190 meets an untimely demise. Effects in *IL-2* are impressive.

Each plane features a detailed 3D virtual cockpit.

IL-2 Sturmovik

The next level of air combat, Russian-style **By Denny Atkin**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

PUBLISHER: **Ubi Soft**
DEVELOPER: **Maddox Games**
URL: **www.il2sturmovik.com**
ESRB RATING: **Teen**
PRICE: **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 3D card with 16MB RAM**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, 32-bit 3D card with 32MB or more RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet, LAN (32 players dogfight, 16 players cooperative)**

Despite its pivotal importance to the outcome of World War II, the eastern-front war between Germany and Russia isn't well known to most Americans. So what better way to introduce gamers to this conflict than through, oh, say, the best World War II flight simulator ever?

The name *IL-2 Sturmovik* belies the scope of this simulation. While the aforementioned "flying tank" attack plane is the centerpiece of the Russian campaigns, there are actually 32 flyable aircraft models here (variations on 11 primary types), in addition to dozens of computer-controlled craft. Planes are modeled with extreme accuracy in both the visual and flight model departments, with minor differences between models properly represented and full 3D virtual cockpits for each craft. Despite this realism, the prop-aircraft nature of the sim means it won't intimidate novices, and this accessibility is aided by a variety of realism toggles.

Damage is represented both visually and with handling difficulties.

The combat environment is stunning. Just when you've gotten over being impressed by the detail of the terrain modeling, the harsh Russian winter rolls around and suddenly everything is blanketed in white—including your planes, which get a new coat of camouflage. Explosions, tracers, and road dust are recreated with Hollywood aplomb. The clouds are the best I've seen yet, and the AI can actually lose track of you in the soup. The ground seems alive as well—tanks engage in combat with each other, ships bombard factories on the shoreline, and pilots run from ditched aircraft. Top-notch audio adds to the immersion.

The best World War II flight simulator ever!

The AI does a good job of taking advantage of the performance capabilities of its aircraft without doing insane maneuvers like rolling a bomber. Air combat is extremely challenging, with ace pilots flying like they're fighting for their lives. The only real AI complaint is that pilots often fight to the death, milking a crippled plane when any sane person would head back to the airbase and hope to fight another day. An excellent replay feature lets you relive your combat successes and create playbacks to share with others.

Combat takes place in single missions, pilot careers, and a quick-mission instant action mode. While purists may complain about the lack of a dynamic campaign, the game boasts a superb mission builder, and there's already a freeware campaign generator available at campaigns.il2center.com. The first-rate multiplayer support is extremely reliable, allowing both dogfights and cooperative missions.

Some gamers might shy away from this sim due to its unusual subject matter and lack of an American campaign, which would be a real shame. Only *Falcon 4.0* comes close to recreating aerial combat as well as *IL-2*, and this sim actually works well right out of the box. When the only general gripe we can come up with is that one padlock view is too hardcore, making tracking enemies more difficult than in real life, you know we have a future classic on our hands.

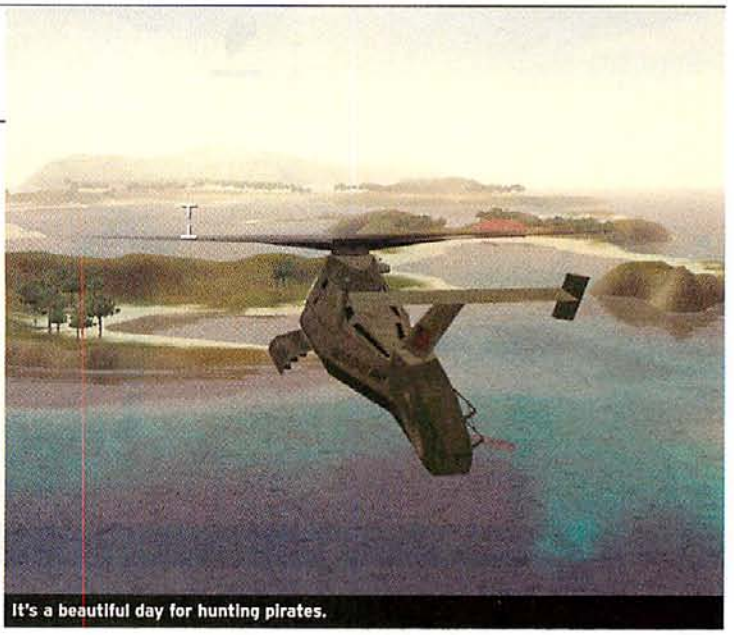
VERDICT ★★★★★
The first "classic" sim of the century.

Comanche 4

Rambo in a chopper By Jeff Lackey

PUBLISHER: Novalogic
DEVELOPER: Novalogic
URL: www.novalogic.com/games/Comanche4/
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: $39.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 450, 16MB Direct3D-compatible video card, 128MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 750, 32MB Direct3D-compatible video card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2-16 players)



It's a beautiful day for hunting pirates.

First things first: Yeah, you "fly" a helicopter in *Comanche 4*, but this is no more a flight simulator than *Grand Theft Auto* is a serious automobile simulator. This is an action game through and through. But classifying *Comanche 4* as an action game isn't meant as a criticism; indeed, it's refreshingly honest that the game has dropped all pretense of being even a "lite" sim.

Commands are kept appropriately simple, and with the keyboard overlay you can be up in the air and shooting things within minutes of installation. Altitude is selected from one of three presets, with the space bar serving as a pop-up key. You can fly from a first- or third-person perspective in 30 missions broken up into six campaigns. The

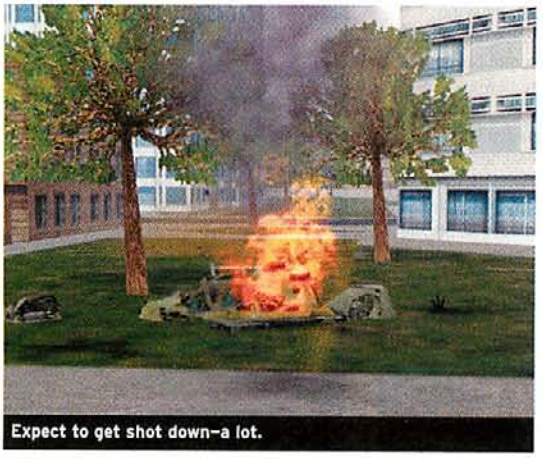
While it sounds like a pretty mindless shooter, *Comanche 4* can be a lot of fun.

missions are interesting and varied, and they include escorting a foreign dignitary into a city, following a small plane until it leads you to a hidden objective and then destroying the objective, clearing an airport of terrorist antiaircraft forces in order to allow special forces to be dropped in, and so on. There's also a nice diversity of terrain, including mountains, jungles, snow-covered forests, and cityscapes (playing combat hide-and-seek between skyscrapers is a hoot). While some missions require an initial stealth component, they all ultimately boil down to the same thing: Fly until enemy forces start shooting at you, try to kill them before they kill you, fly farther until you find more enemy forces, and keep shooting until either you eliminate the enemy hordes, or they eliminate you.

And hordes they are, huge masses of enemy units, from foot soldiers with shoulder-mounted SAMs to jeeps to tanks to dedicated antiaircraft units. And every single one of them graduated tops in their class in antichopper gunnery school: If they can see you, they will hit you. *Comanche 4*'s challenge isn't cunning enemy counters to your attack plan or clever coordinated attacks or traps. Nor is it staring at a SITREP map and plotting waypoints for you and your forces' ingress and egress (there's no pre-mission planning). No, the challenge is just lots and lots and lots of bad guys with unerring aim. The enemy locations are the same each time you fly a mission, so if you have three helicopters jump you when you come over a ridge, they'll be there the next time you play the mission. That may seem like a drawback, but most missions will require replaying several times to succeed, as you try out different angles and approaches until you find one that works.

After you finish the missions in the game, you can make and trade your own operations with the included mission builder.

While it sounds like a pretty mindless shooter, *Comanche 4* can be a lot of fun. The graphics are what you would expect from Novalogic—quite good overall. The missions are interesting and, let's face it, every once in a while, it's a cathartic blast to wade into the middle of swarms of bad guys and teach them the folly of opposing truth, justice, and the American way.



Expect to get shot down—a lot.

This gorge provides a great way to sneak up to your objective.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A standard but well-done shoot-'em-up action/arcade game.

All the hardware in the world won't keep *CZ* from crashing.

Conflict Zone

A better title would've been *Hardware Conflict* By John Fletcher

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: MASA Group
URL: www.ubisoft.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; violence
PRICE: $19.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 400, 128MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2-4 players)

I'm an average guy with an average computer; I know enough to manage my resources and optimize my system. I prefer to spend my time playing games on my average computer, not getting them to run. If that also describes you, stay away from *Conflict Zone*.

I loaded *CZ* on three different systems. One refused to install it, claiming that the Windows 98 OS did not meet minimum requirements. The second, a Windows ME system, did a partial load with no text or unit icons and blown-out video levels, effectively rendering the game unplayable. The third, another Win 98 system, loaded successfully but tended to crash. A lot. For no particular reason. *CZ* is as apt to crash during the tutorial as during the most hectic, CPU-in-overdrive battle sequence. Disabling all background apps helped, but it did not eliminate the problem. Worse than the crashes, the game contains corrupted files. I couldn't play the bad guy campaign because a corrupt file at the end of the first scenario locked the game at the same point each and every time, preventing me from progressing. That problem combined with some extremely long periods within the scenarios when you're waiting to accumulate enough points to build your next wave of units make *CZ* too often a frustrating, downtime-laden experience.

All of that said, *CZ*'s battle sequences are pretty darned good. When you're in the heat of combat, using the 3D camera to zoom around as bodies fly and smoke from exploding tanks billows upward, you *almost* forget about all the bugs and boredom you've endured. Forget tactics. Things like mixing weapon types, seizing high ground, or assigning units combat postures get overwhelmed by the massive battles, but who cares? The game revels in its arcade style, and the gorgeous sky and terrain textures enhance the experience. The AI, while not overly aggressive, executes enough probing and pincer attacks to keep you on your toes, and there is an emphasis on saving civilians that provides a nice moral touch all too often lacking in computer games. Oh yeah, the credits play flawlessly every single time. Go figure.

As the game has been available in Europe since May, the crashes and system conflicts I experienced are inexcusable. For the umpteenth time: If it doesn't work, don't release it! Maybe Ubi Soft figured that in exchange for the cheap price, people would put up with the headaches. They won't.

Battles feature lots of bangs and require little brains.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆

***Conflict Zone* is a great game for a computer without an OS and a gamer without a shred of self-worth.**

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

CGW looks at patches

By Thomas L. McDonald

Civilization III

***Civ III* carries the series into the 21st century quite ably, but it also shipped in a remarkably buggy state. The bugs didn't gather in one place to peck at the corpse piecemeal, but were scattered across the game, affecting almost every aspect of design and functionality. Major problems include stability, aesthetics, core gameplay elements, and game balance. Firaxis got a patch out so fast that there is almost no question they'd begun work on it as soon as they had mastered.**

Version 1.16f (www.civ3.com) swats down a vast swarm of bugs and should appease those on the message boards crying for blood. You say you were driven from the game in horror because of the punctuation error in the disembark pop-up? Voila! Fixed! Unfortunately, if you couldn't play because you had a Via chipset in your system, well, um, have you tried *The Sims* yet? They're just so damn cute.

Most of the biggest problems, such as corrupted save games and the broken precision bombing and air superiority elements, are fixed. It's good to see the effects of corruption reduced and have the maximum city limit bounced from 256 to 512, but who asked for the already sluggish research to be further slowed by an increase in the maximum number of turns for an advance from 32 to 40?

The fixes would run to two pages if we listed them all, but by and large they help to balance the game and shore up the weakest areas. There are still hardware compatibility issues, but the worst crashes and visual glitches seem to have been tamed.

Etherlords

Heroes of Might and Magic: The Gathering **By Jason Kapalka**

PUBLISHER: **Fishtank Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Nival** URL: **www.etherlords.com** ESRB RATING: **Teen; blood, violence** PRICE: **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, AGP video card with 3D acceleration, 1.2GB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 550, 128MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2 players)**

Etherlords' strategic map ain't pretty, it just looks that way.

The best *Magic* rip-off ever done for a PC, handily beating out the official game from a couple years back.

On one hand, *Etherlords* is brilliant and inventive, adapting the mechanics of collectible-card games like *Magic: The Gathering* in a manner so elegant and exciting it's hard to understand why no one's done it before. But on the other paw, it's derivative in content and incompetent in execution, joylessly soldering plagiarized systems together to form a whole that is less than the sum of its parts.

If *Etherlords'* first influence is *Magic*, which its tactical combat blatantly copies, its other inspiration is clearly *Heroes of Might and Magic*, which its main strategic game duplicates. You move heroes around a big map, fighting monsters and gathering treasure and experience until you can find and destroy the enemy castles. Each scenario is loosely linked into a grand campaign, but sadly, practically nothing carries over from one scenario to the next.

This is disappointing, but the bigger problem is that the strategic game sucks. The attractive 3D map adds nothing, and in fact makes it easy to get confused by obscuring important sites behind flashy animated waterfalls. You must gather no fewer than eight resources to purchase your spells, and there is no easy way to determine in advance which resources are needed for each spell. On top of that, each spell requires runes, which also need assorted amounts of the eight resources.

Global spells can lay waste to the entire battlefield.

Most of the scenarios are puzzlelike in construction with one specific path to victory and/or an invisible time limit; after hours of play, you might abruptly lose because somewhere offscreen an enemy has conquered some ally's castle.

When you get into combat, the view switches to a 3D battlefield with the two rival wizards on either side. At this point, the gameplay reverts to that of *Magic: The Gathering*, complete with decks, random card draws, tapping, blocking, and so on.

The surprise, given the unplayability of the strategic game, is that this is easily the best *Magic* rip-off ever done for a PC, handily beating the official game from a couple years back. Why? Although the mechanics of *Magic* have been copied, some small changes streamline play immensely, primarily by eliminating the assorted interrupt effects that make for such an unwieldy mess of rule arbitrations. More importantly, though, instead of just showing pictures of cards arrayed against each other, *Etherlords* presents every creature as a fully animated 3D beastie and every spell as a spectacular special effect. Cast Fire Wave, and your mage gestures and stomps before unleashing a flaming wall of destruction that sweeps out over the foe's creatures. Yes, the effect is still "Card deals 1 damage to all enemy units," but it sure seems a helluva lot cooler when you see it like this.

Is it worth playing the horrid strategy game for the cool battles? Barely. You can set up matches against the AI with assorted custom decks for a quick five-minute battle. Similarly, you can play online, but without *Magic*'s meta-game of collecting the actual cards and engaging in tournaments, it all seems pointless.

Hopefully the awesome combat system will be adopted by other, more successful games, perhaps even *Magic* itself. But as it stands, *Etherlords* maroons its one excellent feature in a sea of failures.

Creatures you can summon run the gamut from giant rats to exotic biomechanical beasts.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

Best (unofficial) adaptation yet of *Magic: The Gathering*, but sabotaged by terrible strategy game.

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gamespy Best Of 2001 PC Game of the Year

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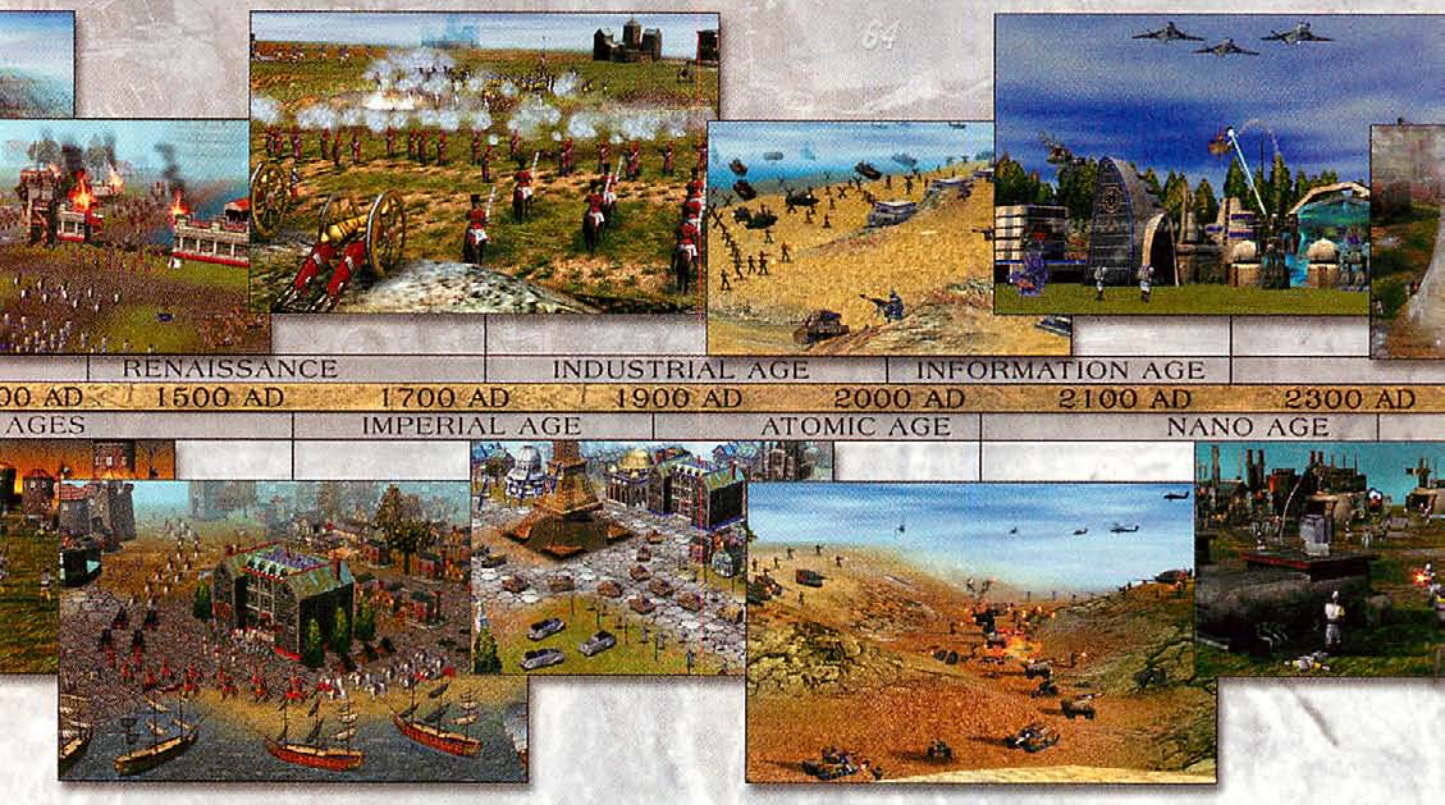

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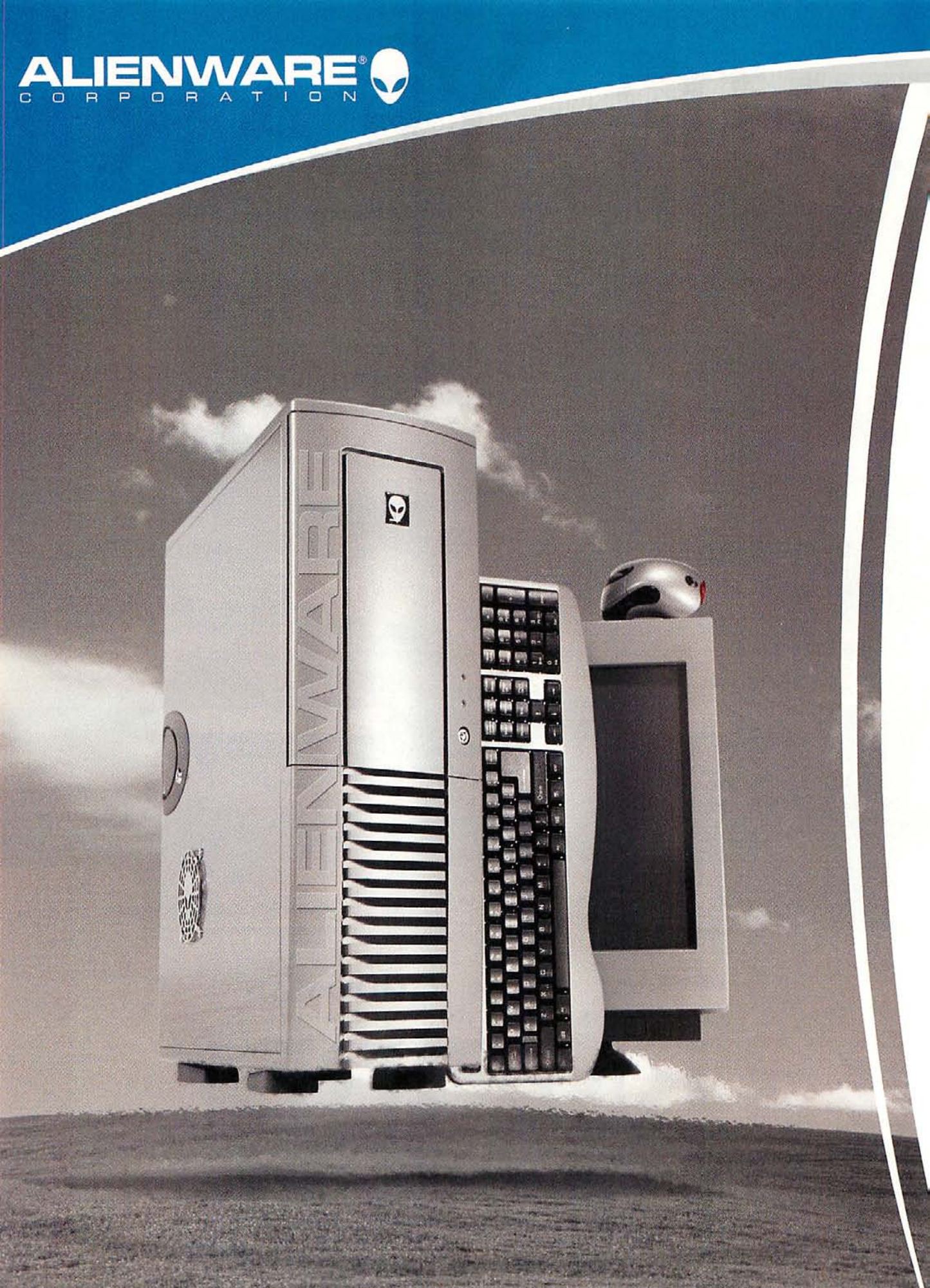

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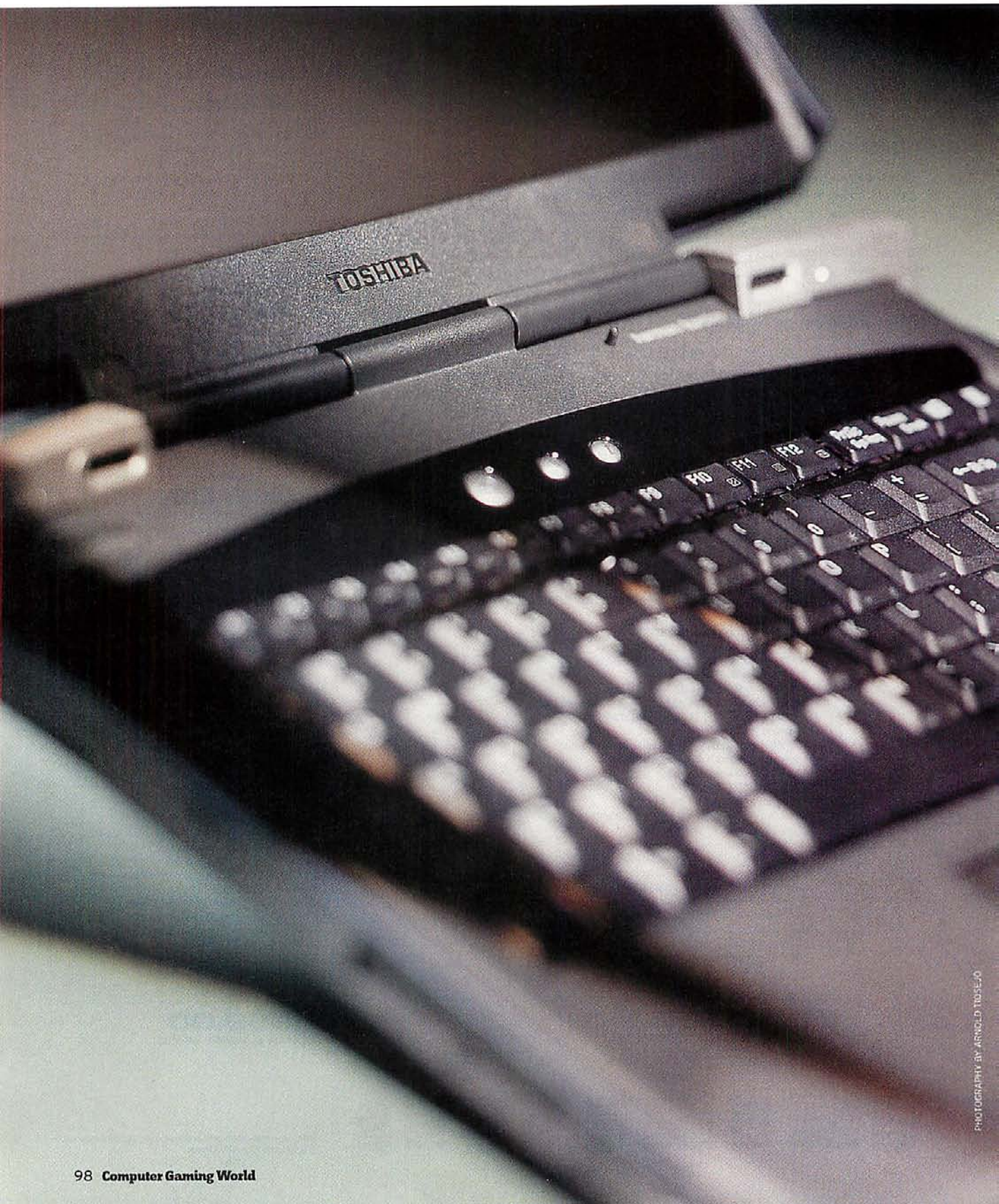
Tech

Machines make your games go 'round Edited by William O'Neal



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TOSTADO

Our Tech Guy, $15,000 Worth of Laptops, & Not a Felony in Sight!

If you can front the cheddar, gaming on a laptop doesn't have to be about compromises **By William O'Neal**

What would you do if someone sent you five kick-ass laptops and told you to beat 'em within an inch of their digital lives? You'd do what we did: Play tons of *Counter-Strike* and *Max Payne*, watch a bunch of DVDs, listen to music, and try to keep your coworkers from stealing them, all in the name of giving good advice. And after living with these five laptops for weeks, we've come to the conclusion that nearly all of them are worth their salt. With the exception of the Compaq Presario–which ships with two batteries–they all boast two and a half to three hours of battery life, at least 1GHz Pentium III CPUs, tons of memory, and big ol' hard drives. And what's more, they're all capable gaming machines. If space is a premium, or if you fancy the idea of whiling away traveling hours playing your favorite game, then read on, you might learn something.

DELL INSPIRON 4100

Keep Your Bells and Whistles–We Want Power

Dell's Inspiron 4100 shocked us. With a price of only $2,108 we fully expected it to get creamed by the competition. Shows you what we know. Sporting Nvidia's venerable 32MB GeForce2Go chipset and a 1GHz Pentium III processor, this guy may be little, but underneath that diminutive cover beats the heart of a monster.

However, while this machine kicks ass, it puts us reviewers in a rather tight spot. Sure, it's fast as hell, but it also has the smallest screen of all the laptops in this review, and aside from raw speed, the thing boasts absolutely none of the bells and whistles that the others deliver. That's right, no IEEE 1394 FireWire ports, SmartMedia slots, or built-in 802.11B wireless connectivity. It even has a small hard drive, at only 20GB. But when it

DELL INSPIRON 8100

GATEWAY SOLO 9550 XL

TOSHIBA SATELLITE 5505-S505

comes time to take one of these babies on a business trip, no doubt the *CGW* editors will be clamoring to take the Inspiron 4100. It gets the job done and is the lightest rig we tested. The numbers that the Inspiron 4100 put up are truly impressive. It achieved *Quake III: Arena* frame rates of 72 fps and *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* rates of 49 fps at 1024x768x16, and its 3DMark2001 score of 2088 is the best we've seen in a laptop.

VERDICT: Fast and light, this laptop has what you need to get your game on, whether you're sitting on your couch or waiting for a flight. If you don't mind the small screen and lack of extras, you'll love this baby. ★★★★½

Respect Your Elders

Not pleased to sit on their laurels, Dell is now shipping their venerable Inspiron 8100 with a plethora of video options, including the 32MB GeForce2Go or the 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon like the one that we just received. In addition to the 64MB graphics card, our test unit also comes strapped with 256MB of SDRAM, and a 1.2GHz Pentium III CPU.

Considering the advancements that have been made in mobile computing technology, the 8100's 20MB hard drive may seem small, but how many stolen MP3s do you need? Like the Gateway, Compaq, and Toshiba, the 8100 ships with a 15-inch TFT active-matrix (UXGA as opposed to SXGA) screen and the combination CD-RW/DVD-ROM is easily one of the dopest inventions ever. The ATI-powered Inspiron is a smoker; *Quake III: Arena* hovered around 100 fps at 1024x768 in both 16- and 32-bit modes, and its 3DMark2001 score of 3216 is out of this world for a laptop. ATI has been criticized lately for sacrificing image quality in *Quake III* to achieve better frame rates, but the game in 32-bit mode looked good to us.

VERDICT: Big and powerful, the Inspiron 8100 is the granddaddy of gaming laptops. But that power comes with a price—namely the hernia operation you'll need after lugging the thing around. ★★★★½

The New Big Kid on the Block

Months ago we said, "If Shaq were a laptop, he'd be the Dell Inspiron 8100." As change seems to be the only constant, it's no surprise to us that the new big guy on the block isn't sporting a Dell logo. Gateway's Solo 9550 XL puts to rest any fears that a gamer may have about replacing their desktop with a notebook computer. While many of the rigs tested for this story sport some bells and whistles, this thing loudly boasts every bell and whistle. Lurking inside of this 8-pound monster is a 32MB Nvidia GeForce2Go graphics processor, a 1.2GHz Pentium III CPU, 512MB of SDRAM, a 15.7-inch SXGA TFT active-matrix screen (the largest in this roundup), a 30GB Ultra ATA hard drive, a CD-RW/DVD-ROM combination drive, 802.11B wireless connectivity, an IEEE 1394 FireWire port, and—get this—an AC-3 optical port for Dolby Digital Output! Gateway's Solo 9550 XL is no joke f'sho! While its performance numbers weren't as high as the two Dells', they were good enough that with all of its other perks, it easily earned five stars. If we were in the market for a true desktop replacement, this would be a good choice. Sure, its *Quake III: Arena* score of 71 fps is a whole point lower than the Dell Inspiron 4100's, but who really cares? And any laptop that gets a 3DMark2001 score of 2007 is a winner in our book.

VERDICT: Gateway's Solo 9550 XL puts to rest any fears about compromises. With a 1.2GHz Pentium III and all the expansion ports and extras you could possibly want, it's safe to say that your desktop may soon be put out to pasture. ★★★★★

The Crossroads

It's said that blues guitarist Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads in order to obtain his incredible talent. While we don't wish to imply that the people in Toshiba's R&D department went to such drastic measures to create the Satellite 5505-S505, we have to say that they did do a great job of blending form and function. Easily the sexiest of all the machines we tested, the Satellite is sure to turn the heads of other geeky technophiles. Even though the Satellite is the only machine we tested to ship with the 16MB version of Nvidia's GeForce2Go chipset, that

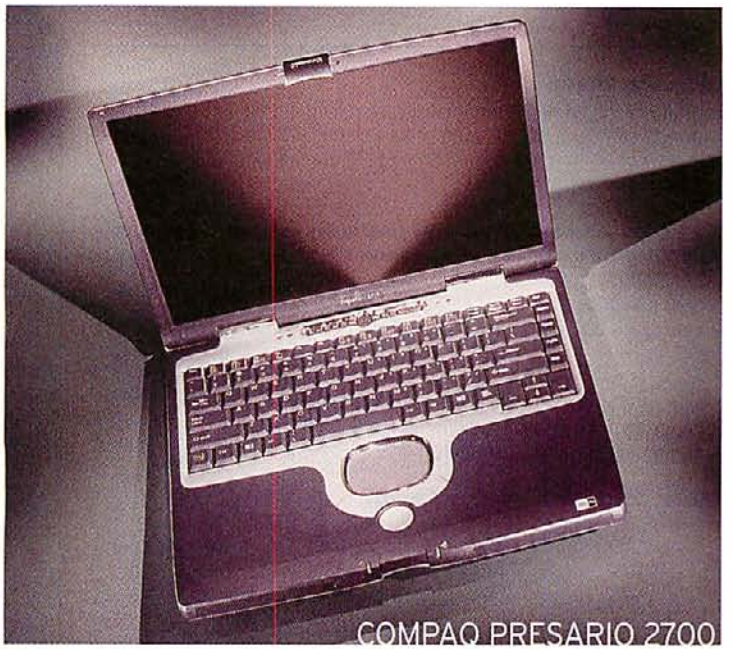
missing 16MB of video memory doesn't hurt the Satellite much. While its lack of power is apparent at higher resolutions with all the graphics options turned on, it still managed to earn the second-highest score in Ziff Davis' 3DWinMark2000. One major drawback to the Satellite's coming with only 16MB of video memory is how well it will run future games. The Satellite we tested ships with a 1.1GHz Pentium III, 512MB of SDRAM, a 15-inch SXGA TFT active-matrix screen, a 30GB Ultra ATA hard drive, and one of those CD-RW/DVD-ROM combination drives we love so much. It's also the only rig in this round-up to ship with SmartMedia and SD slots, which are handy for transferring files from MP3 players and digital cameras. Laptops consistently rank beneath desktops in sound, but the Satellite ships with a built-in Harmon/Kardon system that is the loudest—and clearest—we've ever heard from a laptop.

VERDICT: It's not the fastest laptop we tested, but there's something about it. Maybe it's the shiny blue paint job. Or the Harmon/Kardon sound system. Or maybe it's the price tag. Regardless, we'd be hard-pressed to turn this one down. But more games are starting to ship that "recommend" having at least 32MB of video memory; in the future, the Satellite's 16 megs could be a problem. ★★★★½

Competition Is What America Is All About

A few months ago, ATI came to town and showed off a Dell Inspiron 8100 with a 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon graphics card. We couldn't wait to get our hands on a laptop with this graphics card. Well, when we found out that Compaq would be shipping its Presario 2700 with the Radeon, we were stoked. Imagine our surprise when the machine we received showed up with the 16MB version. We know you're thinking, "How big a difference could 48MB possibly make?" That's a joke—*CGW* readers are savvy enough to know that 48MB of video memory makes all the difference in the world. So much so that the Compaq, in spite of its 1.1GHz Pentium III CPU and 512MB of SDRAM, was by far the slowest laptop that we tested for this story. The Compaq scored a sad 1543 on MadOnion's 3DMark2001—nearly 500 points less than the competition. In the Presario's defense, it was the only machine to ship with dual batteries, and its five-plus hours of battery life are enough to keep you DVDing all the way through that nonstop flight from Compton to Atlanta.

VERDICT: If the Presario 2700 had shipped with a faster graphics card, it would've easily been a contender, what with that killer battery life. But the fact remains that frame rate is king. ★★★☆☆



COMPAQ PRESARIO 2700

Manufacturer/ Model	Dell Inspiron 4100	Dell Inspiron 8100	Gateway Solo 9550 XL	Compaq Presario 2700	Toshiba Satellite 5505-S505
Price	$2,108	$2,216	$2,800	$1,999	$1,999
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
CPU	1GHz Pentium III	1.2GHz Pentium III	1.2GHz Pentium III	1GHz Pentium III	1.1GHz Pentium III
Memory	256MB SDRAM	256MB SDRAM	256MB SDRAM	512MB SDRAM	512MB SDRAM
Graphics Card	32MB 4x AGP Nvidia GeForce2Go	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon	32MB 4x AGP Nvidia GeForce2Go	16MB ATI Mobility Radeon	16MB 4x AGP Nvidia GeForce2Go
Screen	14" SXGA TFT active matrix	15" UXGA TFT active matrix	15.7" SXGA TFT active matrix	15" SXGA TFT active matrix	15" SXGA TFT active matrix
Hard Drive	20GB Ultra ATA hard drive	20GB Ultra ATA hard drive	30GB Ultra ATA hard drive	30GB Ultra ATA hard drive	30GB Ultra ATA hard drive
CD-ROM/CD-RW/ DVD-ROM	CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo	CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo	CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo	CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo	CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo
Expansion Slots	Two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card slot	Two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card slot	Two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card slot	One PCMCIA Type II slot	Two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card slot
Battery	One high-capacity lithium-ion battery	One high-capacity lithium-ion battery	One high-capacity lithium-ion battery	Two high-capacity lithium-ion batteries	One high-capacity lithium-ion battery
FireWire Ports	N/A	Integrated IEEE 1394 port	Integrated IEEE 1394 port	Integrated IEEE 1394 port	Integrated IEEE 1394 port
Misc. Ports	S-video out	S-video out	AC-3 optical port for Dolby Digital output	N/A	SD and SmartMedia slots
Weight	6.1 pounds	8 pounds	8 pounds	7.9 pounds	7 pounds
Quake III 16-bit	72	101	71	37	75
Quake III 32-bit	54	97	51	36	60
Unreal Tournament 16-bit	49	32	50	27	40
Expendable 16-bit	90	72	88	37	75
Re-Volt 16-bit	134	151	128	73	125
3D GameGauge 2.5	65	69	64	39	59
3DWinMark2000	69	109	66	49	70
3DMark2001	2088	3216	2007	1543	2345
FINAL SCORE	741	1131	712	544	825

TECH MEDIC

Surround Sound on the Cheap

I finally got a Dolby 5.1-capable sound card. Now I'm looking for some speakers to go with it. While the Klipsch 5.1s and 4.1s are pretty sweet, I can't choke up the $300 to $400. Can you recommend a good set of 4.1 or 5.1 speakers in the $100-to-$150 price range?

Greg M.

Check out the Inspire 5.1 5300s from Creative. While they're not the most powerful 5.1 speakers around, their $99 price tag won't hurt your wallet.

Which Case Should I Buy?

If you were getting a new case today, would it still be the Antec SX-635 from your column?

Ted

If I were going with a no-frills setup that cost less than $100, then yes. If I were going for something fancy, then I'd go with a CoolerMaster case like the one at www.coolermaster.com/products/atc/atc500.html.

Does Anyone Know What He's Talking About?

Wil, do you have codes for *Aliens vs. Predator 2*?

Renate Cole

No.

Which Video Card Should I Buy?

I recently got a new computer, and I was wondering if I will be able to play some of the new games that are going to come out in the next few months (*Neverwinter Nights*, *Battle Realms*, etc.). My system is a 1.2GHz Athlon with 128MB of RAM and a 16MB TNT2 video card. I know that the TNT2 is not the best video card, so if I wanted to upgrade it, which card would you recommend (for preferably less than $150)?

M. Yamada

I don't see any reason why you wouldn't be able to play those games. But with a better graphics card, the games will run a lot faster. Check out VisionTek's XTASY 5864. It's based on Nvidia's GeForce2Ti graphics chip, it's super fast, and it costs $150. You might also want to put in an additional 128MB of RAM.

What's *Incite*?

Hey, you are the coolest guy ever! You were a cool guy at *incite* and you are a cool guy now. You are a hero. Your reviews are truthful and use the language that a review needs. Help me ban mullets. They cause violence more than anything.

Hello Foker

Thanks, but you should know that I'm the cool guy everywhere. As for *incite*, my employment contract with Ziff Davis forbids me from commenting on all things Computec Media–especially the Loading section that *CGW* stole from *incite*.

We're on the Information Superhighway

So I threw away the copy of *CGW* with your breakdown of the GeForce3 card benchmarks. I'm thinking, "Okay, I'll go to your site and probably find it there." Guess I'm a dumb-ass because I can't seem to get past your main page. Can you point me in the direction I need to go so I can find out which company's video card I should get? I want the best and...heh heh, cough...money is no object (as long as the wife doesn't find out).

Mark

You're no dumb-ass. When you checked our site, we hadn't launched yet. But we're live now–check us out at Gamers.com. If you're not afraid of being overwhelmed by benchmark numbers, then check out Dave Salvator and Loyd Case's site, extremetech.com.

Letter to Intel: We Take Graft

I was reading your Killer Rigs section and don't see why the Power Rig has a 2GHz P4 over an AMD XP1800+ or XP1900+ Athlon processor, especially when you consider price versus performance. I hope Intel is not influencing you guys too much.

POLLUX

I've been sending not-so-subtle hints to Intel letting them know that we can be influenced, but alas, my hints are falling upon deaf ears. Last time I went down to visit them, the only kickbacks I received were a couple cans of soda and two Krispy Kremes.

WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

I Want to Play, but the Cost of Entry's a Bitch!

I'm really starting to worry about the future of PC gaming. Sitting on a plane headed to Seattle to cover a Microsoft-sponsored *Age of Empires II* tournament (with a total purse of $100,000), it dawned on me that I haven't actually purchased a computer–like with my own money and stuff–since 1995! That's right; the last computer that I actually paid for was a Dell Pentium 90 with 4MB of RAM and a 540MB hard drive. And it cost $2,500. Don't get me wrong, I was super stoked about my purchase, and as bizarre as it sounds in 2002, that was a pretty small price to pay in order to guarantee that *Doom II* looked as good as it possibly could and that *Dark Forces* would work right out of the box.

But this realization has me thinking about PC gaming's biggest problem. Bigger than compatibility and driver issues is the price of entry. If a new PC gamer–a person that is sorely needed if this platform is to succeed–wants to play *Max Payne*, then that person will need to have at least a 600MHz Pentium III with 128MB of RAM and a damn good graphics card, which will run you at least $800. While that may not seem like much to some of you, if you're a 16-year-old kid who's just trying his hardest to make it through the 11th grade, that's a huge deal.

To a 16-year-old kid in 11th grade, coming up with the $800 to buy a decent PC is a big deal.

In the past, PC games looked so much better than console games that anyone who demanded the best-looking titles had no choice but to play PC games. Now, however, with affordable systems like the PS2, GameCube, and Xbox, that same 16-year-old need only work a part-time job for a month before they're playing awesome titles like *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Halo*.

Every month I get dozens of letters from teenage boys lamenting the fact that, while they're totally excited to play the latest PC games, their now-dilapidated PCs just don't have the needed juice.

So what's a kid to do? Unfortunately I don't have the answer. But if you do, drop me a line and I'll be more than happy to share your answer with the world.

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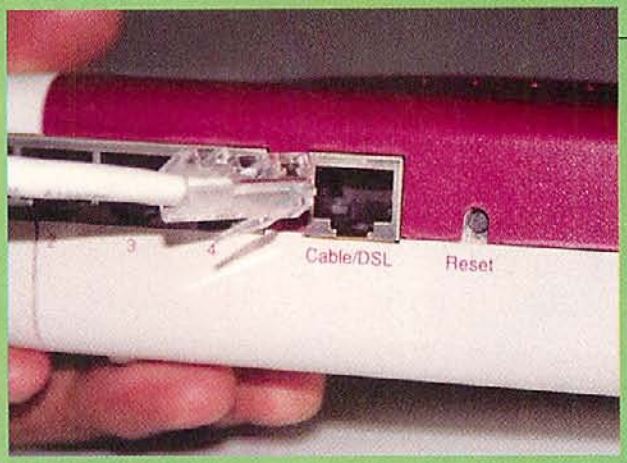
How To: Install a Router

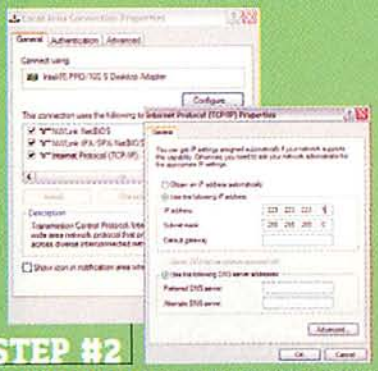
You finally got that new machine you've been drooling over—here's how to set up a broadband router **By Ken Feinstein**

Considering the big bucks you're paying for that broadband connection, it's wasteful to use it on only one PC. Sure, it's possible to use Microsoft's Internet Connection Sharing with a simple ethernet hub, but that puts a load on the router PC and means you need to keep it on all the time. A stand-alone router offers a more flexible and robust solution and even makes it easy to set up a wireless network.



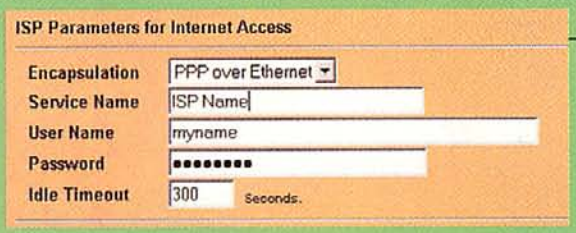
STEP #1

CONNECT THE CABLES Locate the network cable that goes from your PC to your cable or DSL modem. Disconnect it from the PC and connect it to the port labeled "Internet" or "Broadband" on your router. Then, using a separate ethernet cable, connect your PC to one of the other ports on the router.



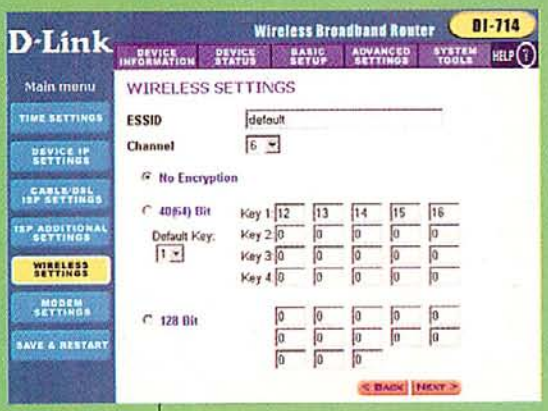
STEP #2

PREPARE THE PC Open the network control panel on your PC. Select Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) and click on Properties. Write down the current IP address setting and domain name; you may need it when configuring your router. Routers generally use DHCP to assign your PC its TCP/IP address. Set your PC to "obtain an IP address automatically," and consult the router's manual for any other recommended settings. When you're finished, click OK and restart.



STEP #3

CONFIGURE YOUR ROUTER For most routers, all you need to do is type the router's IP address (probably 192.168.0.1) into your browser. You may also need to type in a user name and password (once again, check the manual). Follow the onscreen instructions to configure the router for your Internet connection. If you have DSL, you'll need to enter your user name and password. Cable modems generally don't require this, but you may need to assign to the router the IP address and/or name your computer used to use. Check the manual and the router manufacturer's Website for configuration for your particular provider.

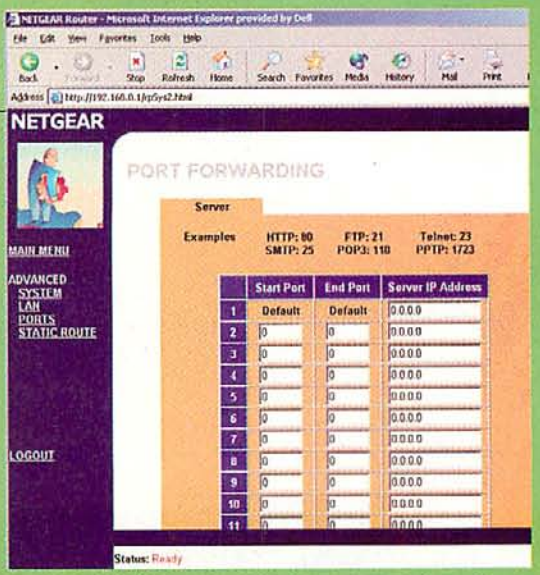


STEP #4

SECURITY CHECK! First, change the password used to control administrator access to your router. Don't leave the default password. Second, if you have a wireless router, turn on encryption. This is extremely important. Otherwise, anyone can tap into your network and wreak all manner of mayhem.

STEP #5

GET YOUR GAME ON With your PC and router configured, you should be able to browse the Web. Many network games will also work. First, check the router manufacturer's Website for firmware upgrades. Second, your router's configuration utility should have a port-forwarding section; check each game's documentation for the port it uses for Net play and add the port to the list.



Yamaha External FireWire CD-RW Drive

Fast enough to get the job done, but is it worth the hefty price tag? By Ken Feinstein

MANUFACTURER: Yamaha
URL: www.yamaha.com
PRICE: $329.99

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
300MHz or faster Pentium II or AMD processor, Windows 98 SE/ME/2000/XP, 64MB RAM, IEEE 1394 port

Yamaha's CRW2200SZ external FireWire CD-RW drive may not be small and it may not be cheap, but it sure is fast and easy to install and use. This flexible drive, which works on both a PC and a Mac, shows just what an external CD-RW drive can do.

Just as we'd expect from a FireWire drive, the Yamaha installed easily. We connected it to the FireWire port, and Windows XP Home Edition detected it and automatically installed the necessary drivers. Compare that to the hassle of opening a PC, dealing with jumpers, and futzing with cables to hook up an internal CD-RW drive. Of course, to get the easy installation, you need a PC with either built-in FireWire support or a FireWire PCI card, which will set you back less than $100.

Unlike USB, which maxes out at about 4X write speed, FireWire has more than enough headroom for the Yamaha's 20X speed when writing to CD-Rs. In our testing, it took about five minutes to burn a 650MB disc—very fast indeed. It delivers a speed of only 10X on CD-RWs, but offers very fast CD ripping times; we were able to rip a whole CD in only six minutes. The drive is also very stable: There were no buffer under-runs or other errors in testing.

Unfortunately, with this drive, external doesn't really translate into portable. Measuring 6.5 inches by 2.25 inches by 10.5 inches, you might have trouble finding a place for it on your desk. The drive has a standard complement of inputs and outputs. The front of the drive sports a headphone jack with volume control, while the back has left and right RCA stereo jacks. There are also two FireWire ports, which lets you daisy-chain a second FireWire device to the back of the drive.

Yamaha includes Ahead's Nero CD-burning software and InCD for working with CD-RWs. As a bonus, you also get Adobe PhotoDeluxe, an easy-to-use photo editor, and MusicMatch Jukebox for ripping CDs and creating playlists.

This is a solid and very fast external CD-RW drive. The real question, though, is whether it's worth $330 compared to $200 for a comparable internal EIDE drive. If you don't like mucking around inside your PC or if you can use this drive on more than one system, it makes sense. Otherwise, save your money and go internal. You'll need the cash to upgrade to that spiffy new DVD-RW drive you'll be dying for in a year or two.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

This drive is fast and solid, but is it worth $330 when you can get a comparable internal EIDE drive for

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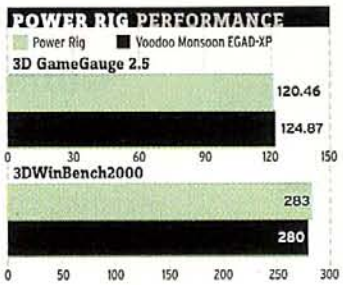
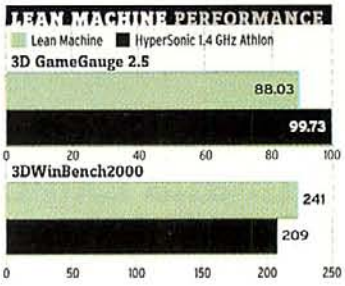


Power Rig $3,247
Voodoo Monsoon EGAD-XP $4,000

I recently got a call from Intel telling me about their 2.2GHz Pentium 4 CPU and their DDR-based motherboards. Buh-bye Rambus! I begged Intel to send units my way. After receiving the motherboard and CPU, I set to work putting together my latest obsession, and here you have it. This machine is a screamer. The hard drive is pretty small at only 30GB, but am I really going to use 100GB of storage space? I don't think so. I also went back to the Klipsch ProMedia 4.1 speakers 'cause they bump.

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Case	Antec SX-635	$100
Motherboard	Intel D845BG	$150
CPU	2.2GHz Pentium 4/400MHz FSB	$562
Memory	512MB Crucial PC2100 DDR-RAM	$150
Graphics Card	VisionTek XTASY 6469 (GeForce3Ti 500)	$320
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	30GB IBM Deskstar 7200 rpm	$150
CD-RW Drive	Plextor PlexWriter 24/10/40A	$175
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba SD M1612	$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	$700
Sound Card	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy Gamer	$100
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.1	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	$40
Mouse	Wireless Intellimouse Optical	$65
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder GamePad USB	$25
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
TOTAL		$3,247

LEAN MACHINE

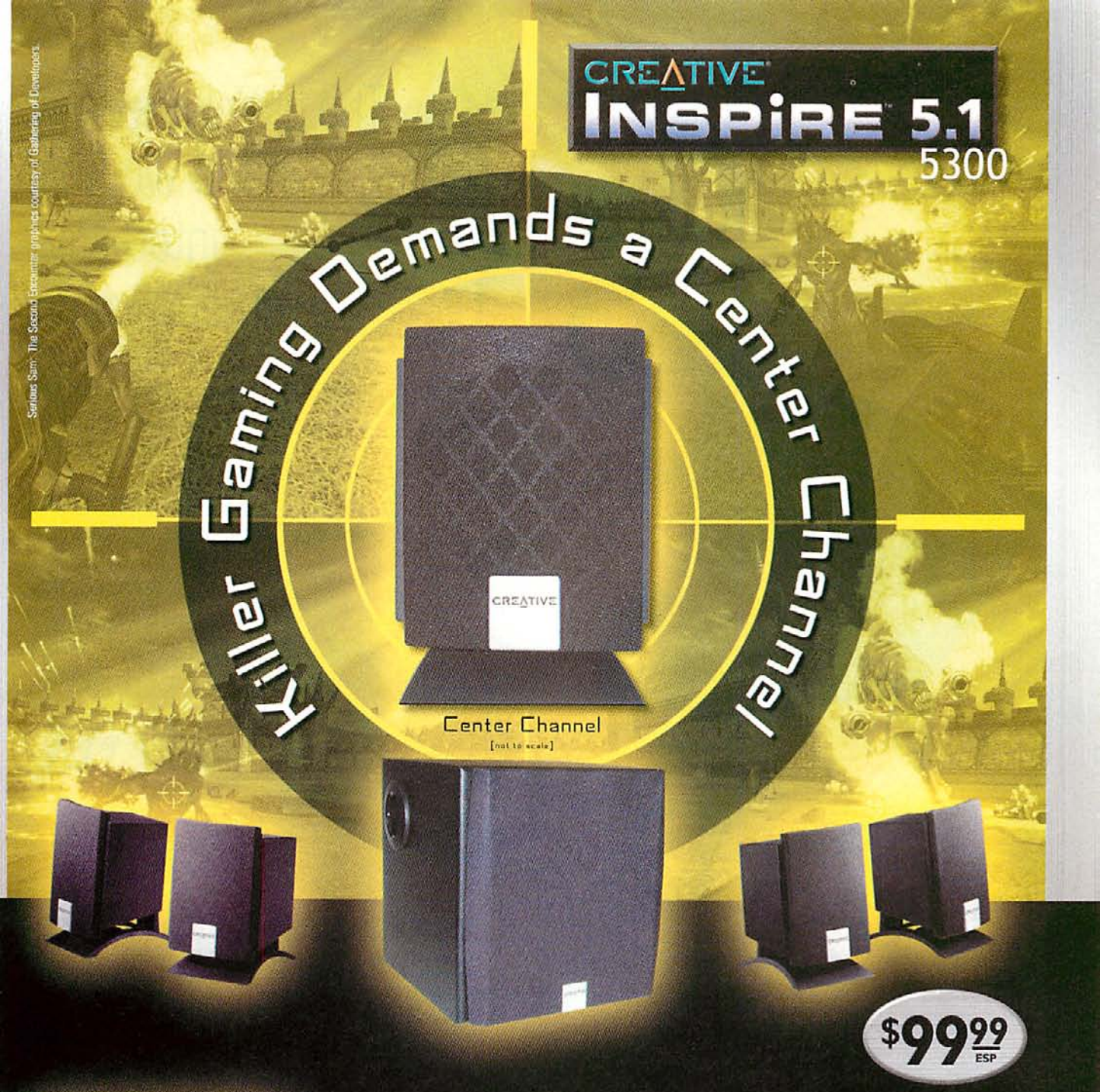


Lean Machine $1,555
HyperSonic Sonic Fury 1.4GHz Athlon $1,400

The only thing to happen to my Lean Machine recently are some crazy-ass price drops. While I'm sure that you could put this same rig together for less, think of my prices as guidelines. You could easily swap the GeForce3Ti 500 card for a GeForce3Ti 200 card, and you'd still have an awesome machine. You'll also notice that I'm now using NEC monitors. Why, you ask? Because they're black like me.

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Case	Antec SX-635	$100
Motherboard	ASUS A7A266	$130
CPU	1.4GHz AMD Athlon	$140
Memory	512MB Crucial PC800 DDR-RAM	$100
Graphics Card	VisionTek XTASY 6469 (GeForce3Ti 500)	$320
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax 40GB EIDE	$100
CD-RW Drive	Plextor PlexWriter 8/4/32	$80
DVD-ROM Drive	N/A	N/A
Monitor	17" NEC AccuSync 70	$150
Sound Card	I/O Magic Hurricane Extreme	$50
Speakers	Logitech Z-340	$50
Keyboard	N/A	
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro w/ Intellimouse Optical	$50
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder GamePad USB	$25
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
TOTAL		$1,555

The hard drive is pretty small at 30GB, but am I really going to use 100GB of storage? I don't think so.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Center Channel
[not to scale]
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Serious Sam: The Second Encounter graphics courtesy of Gathering of Developers.

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Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Thierry Nguyen

DIRTY TRICK O' THE MONTH

DIABLO II

During the Dirty Trick drought, we came across an extremely evil trick for *Diablo II*. Yes, it's older than we'd like, but it's so messed up, we couldn't pass up recognizing its evility. Anyhow, after this, try to stick to tricks for games at least made in the past year.

Here's a little-known dirty trick (or truly evil strat, depending on how you use it) for *Diablo II*.

It involves a very rare variant of the Paladin class known as the Convertadin (he uses the Convert skill). To build him, place points in Convert (about 10) and Thorns (max 20). That's about all you need. A side note: This strategy will kill only melee characters, but since four out of the seven characters are melee anyway, that's a good number.

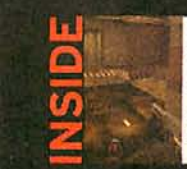
The way Convertadins kill things is by using the Convert skill to convert monsters to their side for a time, while using the Thorns aura. In effect, they make their own mini-army and provide them with Thorns, and enemies end up killing themselves by hitting your little zoo. After a while, your "friends" will unconvert and revert back to enemies. The key to the whole thing is that the Thorns aura stays on them for three to four seconds after this, meaning not only could you be careless and kill yourself like an idiot, your party members can, too, and they won't even know about this trick (at least the melee ones). Normally melee characters blindly swing at everything in reach, and because Convertadins are so rare, no one knows about this little "feature." In normal PVP, the Thorns damage return percentage is divided by 10 for balance. And usually monsters can't get the Thorns aura. But with this, there is no PVP reduction on the Thorns, and a maxed-out Thorns will kill *any* melee character in one hit (1,000 percent damage returned!).

This is the sneakiest way to kill people in *Diablo II*. Not only will the game not show you as hostile, it will tell your opponents the monster killed them, and 99.9 percent of people won't figure it out. If they do, they'll think it was an accident.

This trick can be merely dirty if you use it in softcore. But it is truly evil when you use it in hardcore at high levels, wiping out their whole character. No melee char can survive, and they'll never know what hit them. *–Unmeel Banerjea*

For that display of good converted to evil, a free *Ghost Recon* to you! Keep on the sneakiness!

INSIDE



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PLUS Myth III: The Wolf Age

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Return to Castle Wolfenstein
MULTIPLAYER MAP STRATEGIES

Be better than Blazcowicz with these multiplayer team tactics

Depot

Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Destroy the antiaircraft gun.
- **Objective 2:** Defend the field operations.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Do not let the Axis advance past the west gate.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Destroy the east gate for forward deployment.
- **Secondary Objective 3:** Take the forward deployment area.

OBJECTIVE 1: Depot is a unique map because both teams must balance offensive and defensive strategies. You must destroy the antiaircraft gun while simultaneously protecting the field operations.

To destroy the AAG, a large contingent of men from mixed classes should advance together in a coordinated assault. They should move through the warehouse (near the field operations) and down the elevator shaft. Once underground, continue past the first ladder up, as it will dump you right in the sights of an Axis MG42. Instead, all your men should climb the second ladder at the end of the tunnel.

When you jump off the ladder, one or two soldiers should crawl under the half-closed door and move out into the Axis courtyard. There they can engage any enemies at the foot of the rocky path and draw attention away from the AAG.

The rest should climb the stairs until they reach the next landing. An engineer and a few supporters should jump onto the boxes in the open elevator car and climb into the Axis air ducts. The air duct ends above the Axis spawn point and around the corner from the AAG. The engineer should wait in the duct until his supporters clear the immediate vicinity.

The rest of the contingent should continue up the stairs and exit the building next to the AAG. If all went well, you will engage the confused Axis on three fronts. You will flank their defenses and pave the way for the waiting engineer to drop out of the air duct and plant the charge.

OBJECTIVE 2: You can't win if you don't have a strong defense. Have one soldier man the MG42 sitting in the boxcar near the field operations. From there he can slaughter any Axis troops who emerge from the trains. A sniper and a Lieutenant should take up a position on the rooftops overlooking the train yard. Take the ladder in the elevator shaft to the top and fall onto the elevator. Jump down and follow the corridors until you reach the rooftops. You have a great shot at any Axis foe who ventures into your territory.

A few other soldiers should guard the elevator shaft, ensuring that no enemies emerge from below.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Defend the antiaircraft gun.
- **Objective 2:** Destroy the Allied field operations.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Destroy the west gate for forward deployment.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Do not let the Allies advance past the east gate.
- **Secondary Objective 3:** Take the forward deployment area.

OBJECTIVE 1: Knowing where the Allies will emerge is all the edge you need to successfully defend the AAG. A few soldiers should patrol the area surrounding the gun. They should set their sights on two places in particular. The first is the door adjacent to the gun. The second is the small vent on the wall outside of your spawn point.

Protect the Allied operations at all costs. Be aware of the Axis troops exiting the train and the warehouse to the left.

Find this elevator shaft in the warehouse near the field operations. It leads to an underground tunnel that gives you multiple ways to enter the Axis base.

Next, defend your coal yard. Grab the MG42 to cover the first underground exit (near the base of the stairs) and guard the cargo bay exit at the base of the rock path. The final

BY MARIO DE GOVIA, DONATO TICA, DAMIEN WAPLES AND JEFF BARTON

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

point to watch is the train garage. If all these points are covered, you'll have no problem defending the gun.

OBJECTIVE 2: To take the Allied field operations, control the rooftops overlooking their train yard. Get a Mauser-toting soldier, a Lieutenant, and a medic up there to have a huge advantage. Keep the medic out of harm's way in case the sniper needs to be healed or revived. The Lieutenant can feed ammo to the sniper and call for artillery bombardments if the Allies overwhelm them.

Detonate the gate and capture the flag to allow forward troop deployment.

Camping in this area allows you to inflict massive damage upon the Allied forces. Get here by taking the tunnel to the elevator shaft and climbing the ladder to the top. Turn and simultaneously jump away from the ladder to land on an elevator car. Fall through the roof and take the path until you reach the rooftops.

Village

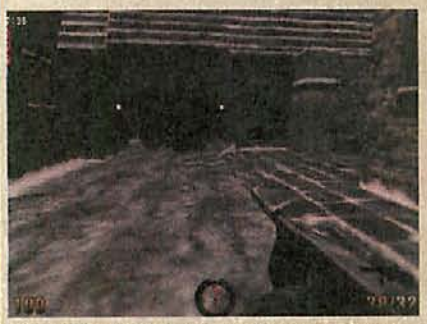
Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Gain access to the gold inside the cemetery's crypt.
- **Objective 2:** Steal the gold from inside the crypt.
- **Objective 3:** Escape with the gold to the waiting truck in the village.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Capture the northwest courtyard.

OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2: There are different paths to get to the cemetery's crypt, but the key is to capture and hold the northwest courtyard. To capture the northwest courtyard, go through the west courtyard guarded by an MG42. Assault and capture the west courtyard to access the tavern. After this area is secure, you will have access to the tavern, the cottage, and the northwest courtyard flag. The tavern is connected to the cottage as well as the northwest courtyard. After you establish this, the wine cellar in the cottage has two access points to the cemetery area. This allows you to circumvent the entrance of the cemetery that is guarded by two MG42s.

A frontal assault is an effective diversion. Go to the central bridge and go through the tunnel. This may be heavily guarded, but you can go around the tunnel by going through the central courtyard and coming from behind. There are two ways to go from here. Either go through the destroyed cottage or go through the Axis deployment area. This will lead you to the cemetery. Watch out for fire from the rooftops and the MG42s guarding the entrance to the cemetery.

OBJECTIVE 3: A quick way to the Allied truck is to go through the Axis deployment area and back to the central bridge. Go through the tunnel and head left through the south tower. Going through the wine cellar, tavern, and cottage to get to the southwest courtyard and then to the south tower is a convoluted path, but it is effective in losing pursuers.



This is the truck you must return to after you steal the gold.

Descend this stairway and head through the wine cellar to take the back door into the cemetery.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Defend the gold within the cemetery's crypt.
- **Objective 2:** Prevent the Allies from stealing the gold.
- **Objective 3:** Stop the Allies from escaping to the waiting truck in the village.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Hold the northwest courtyard.

OBJECTIVE 1: Holding the northwest courtyard will ensure that Allied soldiers come through the west courtyard. There is an MG42 positioned at the only entrance. Stock this area with fellow comrades to block access to the tavern. The tavern is connected to the cottage, the northwest courtyard, and the wine cellar. The wine cellar in the cottage has two access points to the cemetery area. If the west courtyard is secure, the Allied soldiers will not take the northwest courtyard, and they will have to go another way.

The central bridge and courtyard is another way for the Allied soldiers to get in. Position soldiers in the central courtyard area. They can come from the southwest courtyard entrance or the central bridge. There is a door that allows you to see if Allied soldiers are near the central bridge. Ventilate any you see. Watch the tunnel. Look to the left to see a gold door. Watch for any soldiers that pass by and send them a greeting.

Climbing the drainpipe in this courtyard gives you a nice sniping position.

This tunnel is one way to get in. At the left is a gold door; mow down any Allied solider who passes by it. Behind you is a hallway to the central courtyard. Covering these areas closes off that side of the level.

OBJECTIVE 2: If the Allies capture the northwest courtyard, secure the wine cellar. This allows you to block the two access points to the cemetery. If you must fall back, position soldiers over both access points to contain the enemy in the wine cellar.

At the Axis deployment area, position soldiers on the rooftops and in the destroyed cottage. Camping in the Axis spawn spots allows you to see if the enemy has penetrated the Axis deployment area. There is an MG42 guarding the outside entrance of the cemetery. Use it. Be careful because enemy fire from the rooftops can kill you in this position.

The last line of defense for the Axis is the cemetery. If everything is going to hell, position men at the access points from the wine cellar and keep sustained fire from the MG42 and from behind the wall near the crypt.

OBJECTIVE 3: If the Allies get the gold, get soldiers to the south tower and the Allied truck area. Position some soldiers at the top of the tower to seal the area. Allied soldiers may go through the tavern and the west courtyard, so have soldiers in the southwest courtyard. Guarding the tunnel at the central bridge as well as the central courtyard makes it difficult for Allied soldiers to return.

Das Boot

Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Destroy the Axis submarine with dynamite.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Clear the quick path to the submarine.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Capture the central access room.

OBJECTIVE 1: The quickest way to the submarine is through the filtration door. But you should heavily guard that hall, so instead, head to the storage door and through the air ducts. From the air ducts, you can circumvent the storage door and do one of two things: You can exit the ducts and take the central access room, or you can head down the ladder and swim to a room close to the submarine (Pool Chamber 3). Like the filtration door, however, Pool Chamber 3 will be well defended.

Therefore, take the flag in the central access room. Send a few men deeper into the air duct and up the ladder at the end. They come out above the flag and can drop grenades at the Axis below. Simultaneously, exit the duct on the other side of the storage door and directly take on the Axis.

When you have captured the flag, it is time for a massive attack on the sub. Have a group of men jump over the small bridge and swim to the underbelly of the sub. The rest should push forth and confront any resistance in the rooms closest to the sub. This two-pronged attack divides the German forces and should ensure your victory.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Defend the Axis submarine.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Do not let the Allies advance.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Hold the central access room.

OBJECTIVE 1: Split your men and defend the filtration door and the air duct. Controlling both cuts off all paths to your sub. If the Allies destroy the storage door, pull your men from the vent and have them guard the waterway exit in Pool Chamber 3 and the central access room. Control of the central access room is critical, so place the majority of your men there.

Circumvent the storage door by entering the air duct shown here. However, if the Axis controls the duct, detonate the door to create another path to the central access room.

Descending the ladder in the air duct allows you to swim to this point (Pool Chamber 3), one room away from the Axis submarine.

Defend the central access room, or the Allies have a forward spawning point.

Communiqué

Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Destroy the north radar controls.
- **Objective 2:** Destroy the south radar controls.

NOTE: Destroy the radar controls in reverse order, taking the south first.

Allies

OBJECTIVE 2: Move through the warehouse and into the inner compound. Take a right at the first fork and ascend the staircase. You emerge next to the south radar tower. Guard the stairs and the door to your right while the engineer does his thing.

OBJECTIVE 1: When the south radar controls are history, move through the open door and continue through the hallways until you reach the north radar, marked with the number 1. Defend the engineer while he arms the explosives.

This tunnel is the more direct route to the Axis towers. If you choose this route, a barrage of enemy gunfire and explosives may cut you down.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Defend the north radar controls.
- **Objective 2:** Defend the south radar controls.

OBJECTIVE 1: The north radar controls become vulnerable if the Allies make it through the tunnel. Plant some soldiers on the bridge near the radar. Atop the bridge, they have an outstanding view down the length of the tunnel through which they can watch for Allied forces. Snipers should take a crouching position behind the large fuel truck near the tunnel exit. Don't move past that point, though, or an Allied MG42 will cut you down.

OBJECTIVE 2: Soldiers carrying Panzerfausts and flamethrowers should guard the door that leads to the Allied warehouse. It is next to the south radar. If anything emerges from the doorway, unleash hell.

All of your remaining forces should stay and guard the lower warehouse door beneath the radar array.

This is the reason the tunnel is an Allied death trap. You have a superior position above the exit from which to rain lead on the heads of any appearing enemy.

Taking a defensive position here ensures that no Allies make it out of the door on their way to the south radar.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Assault

Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Defend the communications tower.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Do not let the Axis advance.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Prevent the Axis from breaching the gate hatch.
- **Secondary Objective 3:** Hold the gate area.

OBJECTIVE 1: At the outset, send all of your men to the gate area. Protect the hatch and your gate at all costs. Call in air strikes if needed. Don't amass too many people in the tower, where an Axis Panzerfaust could eliminate them.

If they succeed in entering the hatch, send a group of men to guard the warehouse door. The Axis must destroy the door to enter your base from underground. If they rush through the front gate, operate the MG42 on the communications platform to cut them down. Basically, guard against a direct frontal assault and a sneaky underground infiltration.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Destroy the communications tower.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Destroy the door to the warehouse for quick access.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Breach the gate hatch to create another passage to the communications tower.
- **Secondary Objective 3:** Capture the gate area.

OBJECTIVE 1: Your first battle is to take the gate area and raise the Axis flag for forward deployment. Assuming you'll face fierce resistance, bring in the big guns. A Panzerfaust or two will be of great assistance in your attack on the gate.

When the gate area is under your control, you have the option to attack the communications tower from above or below the ground.

If you proceed through the gate hatch, you need an engineer to blow up the warehouse door in order to gain access to the Allied base and the tower.

After the door is blown, you'll face resistance all the way to the objective.

If you opt for an overland attack, you face heavy fire from an Allied MG42 as soon as you step through the gate. Grab a sniper rifle and attack the soldier from behind the gate. After the gunner is gone, rush the tower with as many men as possible.

The small alcove in this communications tower is what you must protect.

Use this MG42 if the Axis rush through the front gate.

Castle

Allied Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Blow up the coffin in the northeast courtyard with dynamite.
- **Objective 2:** Steal the Sacred Obelisk from inside the crypt.
- **Objective 3:** Escape with the Obelisk through the escape tunnel in the southern crypts.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Destroy the west gate for fast access to the courtyard.
- **Secondary Objective 2:** Destroy the hallway gate for faster access to the courtyard.

OBJECTIVES 1, 2, AND 3: This is a tough one for the Allies. The Axis will have all of their men guarding the coffin's perimeter, so gaining entry will be difficult. First, send a few soldiers up both ladders and onto the rubble above the west courtyard. From there they should be able to maintain control of the courtyard. An engineer should then destroy the west gate, allowing your men to meet up and make a coordinated assault. When both the west courtyard and the west access room are under your control, constant pressure from all sides of the northeast courtyard should buckle the Axis defenses. Get an engineer to destroy the coffin and reveal the Obelisk. Grab the Obelisk from the rubble and hightail it back to the tunnel near your spawn point.

Axis Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Prevent Allies from destroying the coffin in the northeast courtyard.
- **Objective 2:** Prevent the Allies from stealing the Sacred Obelisk.
- **Objective 3:** Stop the Allies from escaping through the tunnel in the southern crypts.
- **Secondary Objective 1:** Do not let the Allies advance.

OBJECTIVE 1: Take control of the west courtyard and defend the central hallway, and the Allies will be unable to advance to the coffin. If your defenses fall, pull back into the northeast courtyard and cover the entry points.

Because of the large number of combatants in such a confined space, the Allies are at a disadvantage. After all, it is difficult to stay alive long enough to set and arm a charge. Have an engineer or two ready to diffuse a charge just in case.

OBJECTIVES 2 AND 3: If the Allies steal the Obelisk, it will be a race to the Allied tunnels. Get there first and kill the carrier to return the treasure.

These ladders lead to the west courtyard. The first landing leads to the central hallway and the coffin in the northeast courtyard. The second allows you to perch high above the west courtyard and fire at any enemies who enter.

Destroy this gate for direct access into the crypt. Take the stairs to wipe out any Axis forces guarding its perimeter.

Destruction

- **Objective:** Control all six flags.

General Tactics

Both teams should get to the courtyard as soon as possible. At that point, the Axis should control the northern, eastern, and western courtyard flags while the Allies should control the southern, western, and eastern courtyard flags.

The courtyard is the major hot spot, and whichever side takes it will obtain the majority of the flags. That team should reinforce their positions and hold the lead until the time expires. If they opt to take the rest of the flags, they must split their forces. It's a gutsy but unwise strategy.

Key Points

- The Allies should take this corridor and get to the courtyard as quickly as possible.
- The Axis should take this alleyway and get to the courtyard fast.
- Take the high ground in the courtyard and call in air strikes to wipe out your enemies.

Silent Hunter II

Run silent, run deep By Thomas L. McDonald

At 250 meters below the surface of a rolling sea, with four or five destroyers dropping fiendishly accurate depth charges, being inside of a German submarine is akin to being an egg on the turf at a football game. Given German submariner fatality rates in WWII, your chances of surviving are about one in five. To be that one who makes it requires patience and planning. It's best to break the mission down into three stages: approach, attack, and evasion.

Approach

Contrary to the popular image of the sub commander who attacks submerged while looking through a periscope, the majority of WWII sub attacks were night surface attacks. A surfaced ship is more maneuverable, moves faster, and can see better. A German U-boat has a low visual profile, making it hard to see on a moonless night, and not even all that easy with a full moon. (The calendar in the captain's quarters lists lunar cycles to help planning.)

On the other hand, destroyers seem to have an uncanny ability to spot the periscope of a submerged boat in daylight even at 4,000 meters. Periscope depth is a mere 10 to 12 meters, which places you dangerously close to the surface. There are certainly times when you'll attack while submerged, particularly early in the game when you have a weak boat. But in a fast boat, the night approach is preferable.

For example, Type II boats have three bow torpedo tubes and no stern; each tube gets one reload, for a total of six possible shots. These boats average 13 knots surfaced and 7 submerged. Even surfaced, 13 knots is not enough to catch most destroyers traveling at full speed. This means you need to watch intelligence and contact reports, and try to position yourself ahead of the target (across their path). Since you have no stern tubes in a Type II, you won't be able to fire at a pursuing vessel while fleeing, which means you may decide not to hold a shot in reserve for self-defense.

Therefore, a submerged periscope attack would be a valid approach in a Type II boat. On the other hand, a Type IX boat could be more aggressive. With a top surface speed of 18 knots, it can use a more far-ranging search pattern when looking for targets. Once located, a target can be shadowed on a parallel course by a surfaced sub. When night falls, you can close the distance for a surface attack.

Attack

We'll get to how to evade destroyers in the next section, but you should know when to attack them. Not often, as it turns out. You really want to avoid destroyers as much as possible unless they are a primary goal. Missions have a specific purpose, such as sinking 10,000 tons of merchant shipping or killing a high-value target. If you have only six fish (or as the civvies say, torpedoes), you'll want to use them all on the primary targets and simply evade the destroyers. But if you have more fish, you might try a preemptive attack on the destroyer escort to weaken its counterattack and *then* hit the primary target. This usually has negligible results—the combination of good enemy sonar, high torpedo failure rates, and the destroyer's ability to evade make it hard to surprise and even harder to kill. So either don't hit them at all (preferable) or hit them first. Don't fire on a merchant ship thinking you'll take on the escort when it responds unless you want a close-up view of the bottom of the Atlantic.

The proper use of torpedoes varies based on situation and target type, but there are general things to keep in mind. Let's return to the Type II and Type IX examples. Type II has limited attack options: Fire each of the three tubes at different targets, or use two torps on one target and the last on another. Crash dive, evade, surface when the tubes reload approximately one hour (in game time) later, and fire off the rest. Evade again, and—if you're still alive—head back to base. In a Type IX boat, you can fire two-fish spreads at two bow targets, then submerge, turn 180 degrees, and either fire off the two stern tubes at a third target or save them for a pursuing destroyer. Whenever possible, fire two at a time, and use even more for large targets like carriers.

The first thing you should do when you enter a mission is check out the model of torpedoes you've been given. A T-I is more dangerous to use than T-II, because it produces a trail of bubbles that the enemy can follow right back to your boat, while the T-II does not. But the T-I is a more versatile fish because it has three speeds: fast for close targets (5,000 meters), medium for average targets (less than 7,500 meters), and slow for distant targets (12,000 meters or less). Slower settings naturally yield higher failure rates: The farther a fish has to swim, the more likely it is to be evaded or go off target.

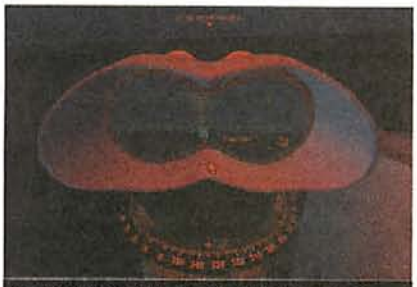
Fish that run the FaT pattern are a little trickier to use. These run a leg of a certain distance and then turn 180 degrees and run another leg and another until they acquire a target. It's best to fire these within the range of a primary target. Set the initial run length to 100 meters beyond that target so if it misses the primary target, it will turn and run another leg of the pattern to find a new target. Don't simply fire them into a convoy and hope they'll pick out a target unless you're submerged and firing blind. A T-V is a better blind-fire fish for when you're deep—its acoustic seeker will look for a surface contact while leaving you safe. Firing without visibility on the target is not recommended, but if your sub is damaged, under heavy attack, or facing overwhelming odds, it can be attempted.

Evasion

Any escorted target or target group will fall on your position like a pack of hyenas and start depth-charging their little hearts out. This is why there is the crash dive (C key). Evasion tactics in a submarine should be pretty clear: Go as low as possible, as fast as possible. Once at depth, rig for silent running. Travel at silent running for a minute or two and then go to full (*not* flank) speed and make a sharp (full-rudder) 90-degree turn. When the turn is complete, go back down to silent running speed, repeating these legs at irregular intervals. It's also not a bad idea to turn into the path of approaching ships. By using the sonar station, you can determine their bearing relative to you, and then turn right toward their bow. This presents a narrower profile for enemy sonar.

Subs are neither strong, fast, nor well-armed. They have only one asset: their ability to appear and disappear at will. Surprise and evasion are the core of submarine tactics. Approach a target unseen, fire before you are detected, and go as low as you can as fast as you can.

Water depth is a vital tactical consideration, as this soon-to-be-dead U-boat in 20 meters of water will attest. Maneuver so you're in water that's at least 50 meters deep, or risk a speedy death at the hands of an escort.



The nighttime surface attack is the core of U-boat tactics. A sub can linger on the surface, concealed by dark, and move much more freely to set up an attack position.

The AA gun is mainly used when you're surprised by a patrol while on the surface. Deck guns can't take out aircraft, but an AA gun has a fair bet, particularly if you hold fire until the target is within 1,000 meters.

Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds

How I learned to stop worrying and love the Gungans

By Tom Chick

One of the central rules of combat in *Galactic Battlegrounds* appears as a small tip on page 13 of the manual: "No unit may move and attack at the same time." There is no attack move in *Galactic Battlegrounds*, so a unit with movement orders will keep moving until it reaches its destination or dies. When moving units come under attack, immediately select them and hit the S key to order them to stop moving (make sure they aren't set to Stand Ground or No Attack Stance). Unless you do this, they won't defend themselves.

This means defenders have the advantage, assuming both sides have the same weapon ranges. By the time an attacking force comes into range and stops to attack, the defenders will have already gotten off their first volley. All things being equal, the defenders will win every time. Therefore, range advantages are important. At your Troop Center, you can increase the range of your troops by researching Macrobinoculars, Portable Scanners, and Integrated Rangefinders for a total bonus of +4. At your War Center, you can increase the range of your turrets and mechs by researching Elevation Tracking, External Sensor Pods, and Targeting Sensor for a total bonus of +3. **(FIG 1)**

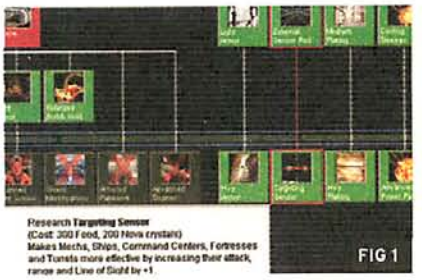


FIG 1

FIG 2

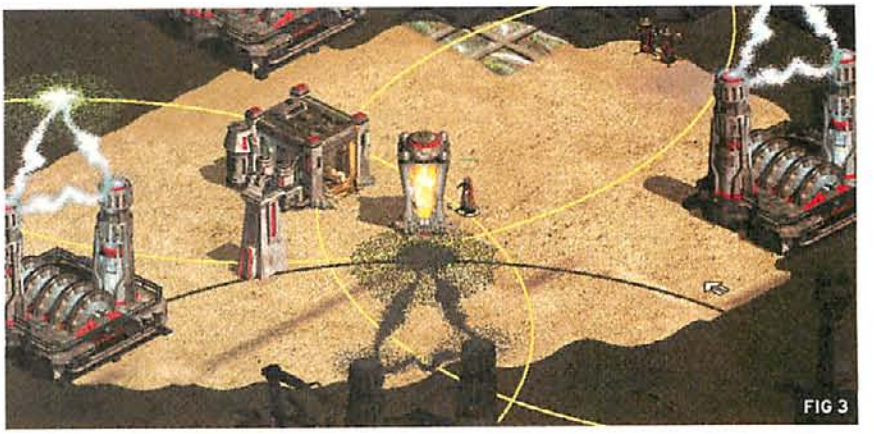


FIG 3

What You Can't See Can Hurt You

But here's where unique technologies come into play and can swing otherwise balanced situations to one side's advantage. Instead of Integrated Rangefinders, Gungans get the more powerful FarSeeIn Binoculars, so their total bonus comes to +5. Only Wookiees can research Forest Vision, which gives their heavy weapons +2 range. Artillery with that much more reach is a significant advantage. Just as important are the technologies each civilization *can't* research. The Trade Federation and Royal Naboo can't research Integrated Rangefinders, so their Battle Droids and Royal Troopers are limited to a +3 range bonus and will be at a disadvantage during tech level 4. The Rebel Alliance can't research Heavy Weapons Engineers, so they're bound to lose late game cannon and artillery duels.

The Rebels are the most effective civilization for establishing air superiority early on and using it to control the map. Their farming efficiency bonus (it must be all those moisture farmers) lets you hit tech levels 2 and 3 quicker. Take advantage of an early arrival at tech level 3 by chasing your enemies away from important areas of the map with Airspeeders and Z-95 fighters. **(FIG 2)**

The Force Is Strong

Only the Rebel Alliance and Royal Naboo can learn the Jedi/Sith Mind Trick, which makes their Jedi invisible. This is perfect for scouting without alerting your opponent. Be aware that invisible Jedi will be spotted by Scouts, Mounted Troopers, Sentry Posts, and any Jedi/Sith that have researched Jedi/Sith Perception (not available to Gungans and Wookiees). Also note that if an invisible Jedi targets an opponent to be attacked, he will immediately become visible. Set your Jedi to No Attack Stance (hotkey O), or he'll blow his cover as soon as he sees an enemy unit.

When combined with Jedi/Sith Concentration, which allows buildings to be converted, invisible Jedi can conduct the equivalent of surgical strikes. Sneak into the enemy's base and convert a key building, such as the power core that powers a shield generator. **(FIG 3)**

Be careful about converting buildings that have nearby defenders; as soon as a Jedi starts converting, it becomes the equivalent of an attack order and he'll immediately become visible. Walk your Jedi up to the base of a building before giving the convert order. In a multiplayer game, stand behind the building where a human player will be less likely to see the Jedi. Note that a Jedi standing at the base of a turret can't be attacked unless that civilization has researched tech level 3 Rotation Bearings, so you can walk your Jedi right up to an isolated turret and give the conversion order without ever exposing him to an attack.

The Naboo That You Do

The Naboo enjoy a substantial economic bonus with their increased nova collection rate and Taxation, the tech level 4 advance that reduces the cost of all units. This gives them a helpful leg up in the later stages of the game when nova crystals become a bottleneck for other civilizations. Without Heavy Armor for troops and Heavy Plating for mechs, Naboo ground units will take more damage, so be sure to compensate for the lack of defense by keeping up on firepower and range advantage technology. The Naboo don't have a Heavy Mech Destroyer to counter opponents' mechs, but Naboo Royal Crusaders fill the gap nicely, serving as antimech cavalry. With Battle Armor to increase their hit points and Shielding to give them personal shields, they're a formidable force. However, the real strength of the Naboo is their aircraft. The only civilization that can challenge Naboo for air superiority is the Rebel Alliance. Once Naboo have researched Advanced Aircraft, their N-1 Starfighters are the fastest units in the game. Use them to do an end run around opponents' defenses or lure enemies into harm's way. **(FIG 4)**

Fear—and Mechs—Keep Them in Line

The Galactic Empire's naval units are weak, and it can't build some of the advanced ships. Imperial air units are not only weak, they're also more expensive and they're never eligible for Shield Modifications or Armored Platework, which means they're easy to knock out of the sky. In fact, aircraft are arguably just a big resource sink for the Empire. Without ships and aircraft, mobility is not the Empire's strong point. Your best bet is to attack overland, knocking down walls and powering through defenses. On asteroid maps or planets with lots of water, you're especially vulnerable when transporting units between land masses. Since Imperial mechs and heavy weapons are more

FIG 4

FIG 5

FIG 6

FIG 7

effective than other races' similar units, assemble a force of artillery accompanied by AT-ATs, AT-STs, and AT-PTs, taking advantage of the Imperial discount on heavy mechs. With Walker Research, AT-ATs can defend themselves better. But don't rely on unescorted mechs, which will be vulnerable to enemy airpower and mech destroyers. Instead of TIE Fighter escorts to counter airpower, build a complement of antiair Troopers and AT-AAs. **(FIG 5)**

The Imperial Dark Trooper is a cheaper and more powerful alternative to the AT-PT, the Empire's strike mech, and it rounds out Imperial forces that might otherwise be mech heavy and vulnerable to Grenade Troopers.

Letting Wookiees Win

Wookiees have the advantage when it comes to troops, especially once they've researched the Self Regeneration that gives troopers boosted armor, extra hit points, and automatic healing. This gives Bowcasters and Dragon Troopers unparalleled power to push forward and recover between battles without having to wait on a medic to make the rounds. In battles, be sure to have your Wookiee Berserkers target enemy strike mechs, which will decimate your troopers. **(FIG 6)**

Keep a healthy complement of your hearty Agr fighters for air cover.

Roger Roger, Even Stephen

The Trade Federation's slow carbon collection seems like a big disadvantage, especially since it can't research Heavy Duty Carbon Extraction. However, it helps that the Federation doesn't have to build Prefab Shelters (which also makes Battle Droid rushes a tempting tactic during tech level 2, when everyone else's army size is limited by the number of shelters they've built). **(FIG 7)**

The key to offsetting carbon deficiency is to immediately build a spaceport when you reach tech level 2 and then research Neimoidian Endorsement to reduce building costs. **(FIG 8)**

As soon as you reach tech level 3, immediately research Market Insider Trading to reduce the cost of research. Finally, at tech level 4, the Trade Federation's Market Control lets you trade resources with only supply and demand considerations affecting the price. This makes it easier not only to buy up carbon, but also to drive up the price of rare resources by playing the market: Sell plentiful resources and buy up rare ones. Regular scouting of the map should give you an indication of which players are hurting for which resources.

Meesa All Wet

Gungans rule the seas. Their navies are strong, stealthy (frigates are invisible), and quickly built once they research Faster Growth Chambers. The Gungans can also use their Underwater Prefab Shelters as cheap and invisible sentry towers. These are hidden from all ships but frigates, and they don't cost any ore. Build them around an ocean and you'll see all enemy fleets that come into their line

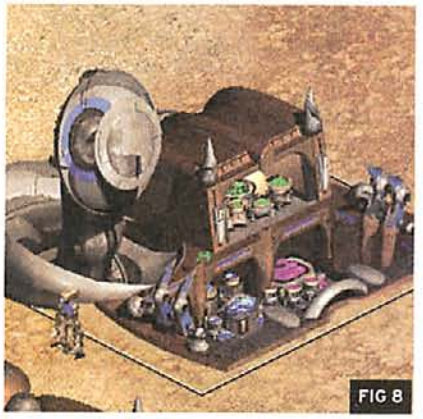


FIG 8

of sight. Note that many of *Galactic Battlegrounds'* maps have structures you can control that don't seem to impart any bonus, such as mines on Kessel and Massassi temples on Yavin IV; however, these buildings give you a line of sight on the map and will alert you to enemy movements.

Although it can be difficult to use, the Gungans' Fambaa Shield Generator is one of the game's most effective unique units, especially when grouped with troopers. Because of its small size, you can fit more troopers, and therefore more firepower, around a Fambaa. Make sure to take advantage of your FarSeeIn Binoculars' range bonus so Gungan troopers can more effectively attack from within the safety of the Fambaa's radius.

Build houses and a hospital near your front lines, and you'll ensure your troops are fighting at almost double efficiency.

Empire Earth

Have your empires last for epochs and epochs with this guide By Elliott Chin

Stainless Steel Studios' *Empire Earth* is a deep, sophisticated, and very rewarding game. It takes a lot of time to understand and master the nuances of *Empire Earth*, but while you're learning, keep these tips and strategies in mind so you don't get blindsided by your foes during your education.

General Tips

Many of the traditional real-time strategy tactics still have value in *Empire Earth*. For example, scouting is still key to finding your enemy's location (and hence, civilization) and picking an appropriate counter civ. If they're Italy with its priest and cavalry bonuses, you might want to be Austria, which gets a 50 percent conversion-resistance bonus and stronger spearmen. Stake your claim to resource sites with a tower or military unit. At least if the enemy takes the site, you'll know about it so you can plan accordingly.

Remember to continually harass your foe. Send small waves of troops to the enemy camp; don't hit the town center—go for the resource sites. Get in, kill some citizens, and get out before they can react. Continue to stage these raids as long as they leave themselves vulnerable. Defend your own town and resource areas so that doesn't happen to you. After building a tower near your resource site, assemble a small defensive force. Also, upgrade your resource settlements to town centers and then build houses near your original center and resource sites to give your units a morale bonus, making them tougher to kill.

When gearing up for war, don't just build one of each building. Build up three or four military buildings (barracks, tank factories, and so on) and churn units out. That way, you can rebuild or change strategies quickly when you get the hurt put on you.

Upgrade all of your units as soon as you possibly can. A unit with full upgrades will beat an un-upgraded counterpart hands-down and can sometimes gain the upper hand against units it otherwise would have lost to. Citizen upgrades also boost your resource gathering significantly, so don't neglect them.

Resource Gathering

Resources are vital to your success. The most important resource is food, needed for cranking out citizens, advancing through the epochs, and building most units. After food, wood is important for buildings. But if you are going for a strong military in the later epochs, iron and gold become more important than wood. Stone is of course used for defenses and towers, and isn't as important as the other resources.

When gathering food in the first two epochs, hunting is quicker than foraging. If your settlement or town center is close enough to animals, hunt to gather food faster.

Tailor your resource needs to your strategy. If you find that towers are killing your spearmen raiders, you need to build sampsons, which cost wood and gold. It would be a good idea then to reallocate your citizens, taking them off stone or iron to work on accelerating your wood and gold production. Resource gathering isn't a static endeavor; it has to change and evolve with your strategies.

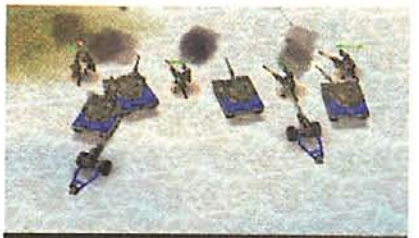
Spend. *Don't* save—100 iron and 100 food in your stockpile is one less tank that could be out on the battlefield. Resources are always a means to an end, so don't just hoard them: Apply them to your goal as soon as you get them.

Houses and Morale

Empire Earth contends that when people fight to protect their homes, they do so with unmatched vigor. This is modeled through morale, which units gain when they fight within the vicinity of houses and a town center or capitol. On their own, neither town centers nor houses confer a morale bonus, but when they're built close together, the morale bonus kicks in for all your units in the area of effect of the center. Each house confers one morale. A town center can support a maximum of two houses for morale, so if you build more than two houses within a town center radius, you'll just be wasting the extra houses. A capitol supports a maximum of four houses.

Each point of morale reduces damage suffered by 10 percent, up to a maximum of 40 percent with four houses. This becomes a huge bonus in later epochs. In Epoch XIII, if an enemy paladin cannon is hitting your sentinel infantry, those four houses reduce the cannon's damage from 425 to 255. Two exceptions are air units and cybers, which don't benefit from morale. In general, morale

If you're desperate for a counterunit, look to your barracks. The bazooka, for instance, makes a credible antitank unit while you wait for your tank factory to finish.



A balanced tank force, with antitank guns and infantry escorts, is a must. In Epochs X to XII, use armor-piercing tanks, not the inferior high explosive ones.

Hunting is a faster way to gather food than foraging.

Bombers are very effective, but make sure you clear their pathway of any stationary antiair guns. Also maintain a wing of fighters to counter enemy bombers.

The Versatile Barracks

Sometimes you're caught unawares by a powerful unit, like bombers, and don't have the necessary building for the right counter, in this case the tank factory. At such times, you can turn to the barracks. For example, you might not have a siege factory to build antitank guns to fend off incoming Panzers, but you definitely have a barracks, where you can build bazookas. They're even cheaper and faster to build than AT guns, and do double damage against tanks. If you face Fokker fighter/bombers but have no airport, you can build partisans at the barracks. They're not as effective as air superiority fighters, but at least they're readily available at barracks and cost half the price of a fighter. When facing a conventional army of musketeers (in Epoch VIII), doughboys (in Epoch X), or marines (in Epoch XI), your counterunits are again at the barracks: snipers and machine gunners. The barracks even has siege units (sampsons and flamethrowers) if you need them while waiting for your siege factory to build. Don't overlook the barracks when fancier units come along. You'll still want to make infantry a part of any army, and you can usually find a fairly effective counter here in a pinch.

is a defensive bonus. But when on the offensive, a warrior hero can also confer a morale bonus to nearby troops, although the bonus is only one.

Note that morale bonuses do not stack, so a hero and two houses don't give your units three morale; they get only two morale from the houses. Also, keep track of the radius of effect of your town centers. Upgrade your settlements to town centers and build plenty of houses so that your morale zone covers your entire base.

Hospitals

These buildings, available in Epoch III, are another great defensive structure, automatically healing all nearby friendly units. Upgrade them through the epochs so their healing radius grows. Build them next to areas where you suspect you'll do a lot of fighting: at bottlenecks into your camp, by your town center, or near resource sites. That way, your units will last longer as they get healed in combat. If you also build town centers and houses near these choke points, they'll combine with the hospital to make your units twice as effective as normal. You can also build a hospital near your enemy's camp so that you can heal your troops quickly on the front lines.

Raiders, Tanks, and Atomic Bombers

There are several units that are perfect for skirmishing or raiding: cavalry, partisans, and helicopters. Shock cavalry are fast, do a lot of damage, and should form a large portion of your army. Their only vulnerable unit is pikemen, which are easily dealt with if you assign a contingent of archers as escort. A team of shock cavalry and cavalry archers should be an effective force for much of the early epochs. In Epochs IX to XI, the partisan is a perfect raider because it can walk through trees, appearing where enemy players least expect. People assume trees are like walls, but partisans pass right through them. In later epochs, helicopters are excellent raiders as well. They're airborne, and thus vulnerable to only a few units. But unlike airplanes, they can stay aloft indefinitely and can attack anywhere with great speed, maneuvering around AA towers.

When tanks become available in WWI, you should adopt them as the mainstay of your fighting force. However, they are obviously vulnerable to antitank guns and antitank infantry. Supplement your tank force with some machine gunners to take care of any antitank infantry. And bring along a few AT guns of your own, like the 57mm AT gun in Epoch X or the 120mm AT gun in Epoch XII. An army of half a dozen tanks, guarded by three AT guns and six machine gunners, will wreak havoc on the battlefield. Add two or three siege weapons, and you can roll through enemy bases with impunity.

When you enter Epoch XI, atomic bombers are the ultimate weapon for demolishing buildings and land troops. Be sure to clear away AA defenses with the tank force described above. Otherwise, all the money you sink into them will go to waste. However, with a clear path, these bombers will obliterate the enemy.

The Best Counters

In most epochs, gamers tend to stick to using a handful of units; here are the most effective counters for the popular units.

Cavalry Counter: Pierce Infantry (Barracks)
Use pierce infantry, such as spearmen, until you hit Epoch VIII, when halberdiers (the best anticavalry unit) become available.

Siege Counter: Cavalry (Stables)/Antitank Guns (Siege Factory)
Use fast and siege-resistant cavalry until you get AT guns (the best antisiege/artillery unit).

Tank Counter: AT Guns
AT guns, such as the 57mm in Epoch X, are the best way to take out tanks.

Battleship Counter: Galleys (Dock)/Subs (Naval Yard)/Siege Weapons
Early on, use the galley, and switch to submarines in later epochs. From shore, use siege weapons (catapults and howitzers) or carrier fighters and bombers.

Air Unit Counter: AA units (Tank Factory, Barracks)/Air Superiority Fighters (Airport)
Use units like the flak halftrack (Epoch X) or stinger missiles (Epoch XII) until around Epoch XI; then switch to the much more damaging air-superiority fighters. Also use AA units against the flying Apollo and Ares cybers.

Cyber Counter: Antitank Guns (Siege Factory)
Use antitank guns rather than the costlier Zeus cyber (despite what the manual says). The Zeus itself is resistant to AT guns, so you're better off with a regular tank instead.

Myth III: The Wolf Age

Destroy Moagim and his dark army with these successful battle plans By Raphael Liberatore

Once again, it's time to draw your swords, string your bows, prime your cocktails, and prepare your spells, because we're gathering around the *Myth III* war table to discuss mission tactics. Battling Wights, Myrkridian, Soulless, Iron Trow warriors, and Ghols in single-player *Myth III* is no easy task. Make no bones about it: *Myth III* is a fast-paced RTS loaded with carnage and blood. Victory depends on your ability to make quick tactical decisions, utilize fine-tuned skills, and employ sure-fire strategies, while utilizing the right mix of formations and units. Applying the essential tactics at a moment's notice will set you apart from the Forces of Dark, and ultimately lead to victory. Of course, it's fair to warn you about the spoilers in these mission walkthroughs.

Tactical Sense

If you're not prepared for a fight or just need a moment to regroup, don't be afraid to hit F1 during battle. This will slow the game speed by half and allow you to manipulate your troops better. Always keep an eye on the overhead map; it'll save your butt. Don't forget to use Llancarfan archer's flaming arrows. They work best when there's a bunched-up enemy group heading your way. Aim for the lead element, so that most enemy units will walk into the fire's path.

FIG 1: Use a line formation similar to this one on the hill. Make sure archers and demolitionists have a clear line of sight to the enemy.

FIG 2: Concentrate one or two fully healed Heron guards on the Pack-Mage, while fighting his remaining forces with the rest of your troops.

Mission Walkthroughs

Mission 4: The Pack-Mage

Objective: Find and destroy the Myrkridian Pack-Mage. **Forces of Light:** Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, Heron guards, and Warlocks. **Forces of Dark:** Myrkridian hunters, Soulless, Thrall, Wights, and Myrkridian Pack-Mage.

Battle plans: This mission is tough for a number of reasons. Not only do you have to fight scores of dark forces, you also must locate and then kill a fleeing Pack-Mage. The Pack-Mage is located in the northeast corner of the map, across a river. There are multiple ways to get there, but the direct route is the most efficient. After setting your formation (soldiers and Heron guards in the middle, archers behind, warlocks to the flanks), make a bead to the northeast from your starting point. Along the way, your forces will encounter Soulless stationed on the hilltops. Constantly check your overhead map during the trip. Use your archers and warlocks to take them out at their flanks, while using Heron guards to heal troopers in need. When your forces have covered more than half the distance, a large group of Dark Forces will attempt to intercept your troops. Immediately secure the top of a nearby hill, and place your archers at ridge, while keeping your soldiers and Heron nearby for the counter-attack. Array warlocks at the flanks. Try to deplete Dark troopers with missile and fireball attacks before sending in the melee force for cleanup duty.

After healing your forces, move to the river and search for a crossing. Then position your archers and warlocks in front of your troops facing the other side of the river. Keep one to two archers on the flanks of the warlocks so they intercept Wight stragglers attacking from behind. Send a lone Heron guard to cross the river and draw the enemy from the other side. Attack with missiles and fireballs as they cross. When this force has been destroyed, immediately cross the river and head toward the barren hill. You'll find a large contingent of Thrall, Soulless, and Myrkridian awaiting orders. Attack and destroy them. Next, position your forces near the hill. To the northeast, you'll see the Pack-Mage. Don't rush him yet. He's planning to conjure a host of undead to aid his escape. Position your forces around the hill, with archers and warlocks in the front. Move the Heron guards to the right flank and head toward the Pack-Mage. When he sees your forces, he'll conjure his undead and try to escape. Immediately, have the Heron go after him while concentrating your missiles and fireballs on the undead. Kill the Pack-Mage and the battle is won. **(FIGS 1, 2)**

Mission 5: Flight from the Dark

Objective: Keep warlocks alive and destroy the archway located at the southeast corner of the map. **Forces of Light:** Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, Heron guards, and warlocks. **Forces of Dark:** Myrkridian hunters, Soulless, Thrall, Iron Trow warriors, and Oghre slaves.

Battle plans: This mission introduces one of the most feared units in the game, the Iron Trow warrior. You begin with the enemy in front of and behind you. Avoid fighting the army approaching from the north, for they contain two of the dreaded Iron Trow. Instead, head toward the natural bridge to the south where you combat a few Soulless and Thrall attempting to stop your forces long enough for their northern compatriots to arrive. Use arrows and fireballs to take out the enemy. Have one of your veteran warlocks concentrate his fireball at one of the groups of Soulless. Engage the Thrall with your melee.

When the battle is over, avoid lingering and move along to the next bridge to the south. Here your forces will encounter a big battle of Soulless and Thrall, along with additional reinforcements, so make it quick–the Iron Trow are hard on your heels. Position your forces along the bridge–archers in the middle with warlocks flanking them, and melee lined in the back. As soon as reinforcements arrive, select them and have them fall back to your current position near the bridge. At the same time, cast fireballs on the Thrall, while directing archers to take out both Soulless and Thrall. As the Thrall approach, charge with your melee. Hopefully, this time your reinforcements arrive to pinch the enemy on the field. When the battle is over, keep moving in a

FIG 3: Stay far away from this dreaded group of Iron Trow warriors and their Oghre slaves.

FIG 5: Concentrate warlock spells by clicking "T" (default) at the base of these archways.

FIG 4: Battle the Thrall with everything you've got. Make sure you pepper them with arrows, fireballs, and cocktails before sending in the melee for mop up.

FIG 6: Guard the main gate with axe warriors. Avoid the magic of Ghol priests. As you can see here, the axe warriors are too bunched up so they got caught in the ferocious spell. Ouch.

southerly direction. Because your warlocks are slow, there is a good chance that the pursuing Trow will catch up and destroy your troops. If this looks inevitable, position your archers in a line and concentrate on firing all arrows at one Trow at a time by double-clicking on it. Have your warlocks use fireballs to take out the Oghre slaves. When the Trow is close, have your melee forces attack and move the archers to a safe distance but keep them firing. Make sure your warlocks are fireballing Oghre slaves. Your forces will probably take some losses at this point. Just make sure you keep your warlocks alive for the end task.

Make for the canyon in the southeast. Along the way, try to take out lingering Wights with your archers. When you find the canyon, add more reinforcement troops. Concentrate on destroying the legs of the arch with your Warlocks' powerful fireball attacks. A couple of attacks on each side of the arch should take out the bridge. **(FIGS 3, 4, 5)**

Mission 9: The Gates of Myrgard

Objective: Repel Ghol attacks while defending the gates of Myrgard. **Forces of Light:** Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, Heron guards, Dwarven demolitionists, and Dwarven axe warriors. **Forces of Dark:** Ghol, Ghol brutes, Ghol priests, and Wights.

Battle plans: This is a tricky level simply because you begin in a precarious position, away from the gates of Myrgard, which must be defended. At first glance, you'll see both your Dwarven parties separated and cut off from one another as large groups of Ghols descend upon them. But despair not, because the demolitionists and their heavily clad, axe-wielding compatriots will have the opportunity to move into positions before the gates, after they defend against this initial onslaught. After this, fall back to the east at Myrgard and prepare for more attacks. Right away place 10 axe warriors at the entrance outside the interior wall in loose formation, and put four more in reserve on the other side. Place one to two demolitionists on each of the four castle ramparts, the ones jutting out from the side of Myrgard's walls.

The key is to have the axe warriors deny entry to Ghols and Ghol brutes while the demolitionists toss cocktails from the walls at the Ghols and Wights that get past Dwarven melee fighters. During melee, keep Ghol priests from casting their savage wind spells (if they do, loose axe warrior formations should keep the damage minimal). Regroup after each attack wave.

At some point in the mission, reinforcements of Llancarfan warriors, archers, and Heron guards will arrive to help stem the tide of attacks. Once the enemy's attack on Myrgard is contained, it's time to move into desert in order to chase down the remaining Myrkridian foe. It's best to keep one Heron guard, a demolitionist, and four axe warriors behind to protect Myrgard. Form your hunting party into one big unit with archers and demolitionists in the forefront and flanks, protecting the main force. When the Myrkridian have been spotted, pepper their forces with missiles and demolitions before making the final assault. The last Myrkridian destroyed means the end of the mission. **(FIG 6)**

Mission 10: Imprisonment

Objective: Enter Thalor's Fortress and reach the Black Spire. Connacht must survive. **Forces of Light:** Connacht, Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, and Dwarven demolitionists. **Forces of Dark:** Myrkridian hunters, Myrkridian warriors, Myrkridian giants, Soulless, and Wights.

Battle plans: Imprisonment can get tough because when you're trying to reach Thalor's Fortress, which is only the first leg of the treacherous mission, roving bands of Myrkridian and Soulless are sent to stop you. Remember, Connacht holds the magical Tain, so don't be afraid to use it. Begin the journey by moving southeast until hitting an east-west trail. Position archers and demolitionists toward the west path and dispatching Connacht in this direction in order to lure the waiting Myrkridian to the main body of troops. After you've launched a deadly volley of arrows and Dwarven cocktails, have Connacht use the Tain to capture the bulk of the enemy wandering about the map. Send your warriors to mop up all the remaining Myrkridian lurking about.

Now head down the eastern path and take the northeast fork where you'll find more Soulless and Myrkridian. Once again, have Connacht use the Tain. Backtrack to the fork and continue east along the path. This is Wight country, so be careful. Have your archers protect your flanks. You'll soon meet up with another group of hunting Myrkridian–use the Tain on them, and kill those remaining with your archers and warriors. Now cautiously approach the dark forest just past the two ponds. There are more Myrkridian in here. Keep your archers in the flanks and rear looking for Wights since their arrows will do no good in the forest against the Myrkridian. Attack with Connacht's Tain and mop up the remaining Myrkridian with your warriors. After the battle, head southeast until your forces reach a clearing where a dozen Myrkridian and two giants await the party. Quickly, have Connacht use the Tain on them, and then head east.

Search for wooden stakes. These mark the outer walls to Thalor's Fortress. Walk west along the wall until you come to a pass between two large boulders, while directing your archers to fire on any Soulless perched on the rocks. Move your force past the boulders–you have now entered Thalor's Fortress where the Tain is no longer useful. Carefully move your force

FIG 7: Make sure your formation has archers and demolitionists positioned in the center, with warriors in the rear. Concentrate missiles and cocktails on the Myrkridian giant and then quickly mop up with your melee forces.

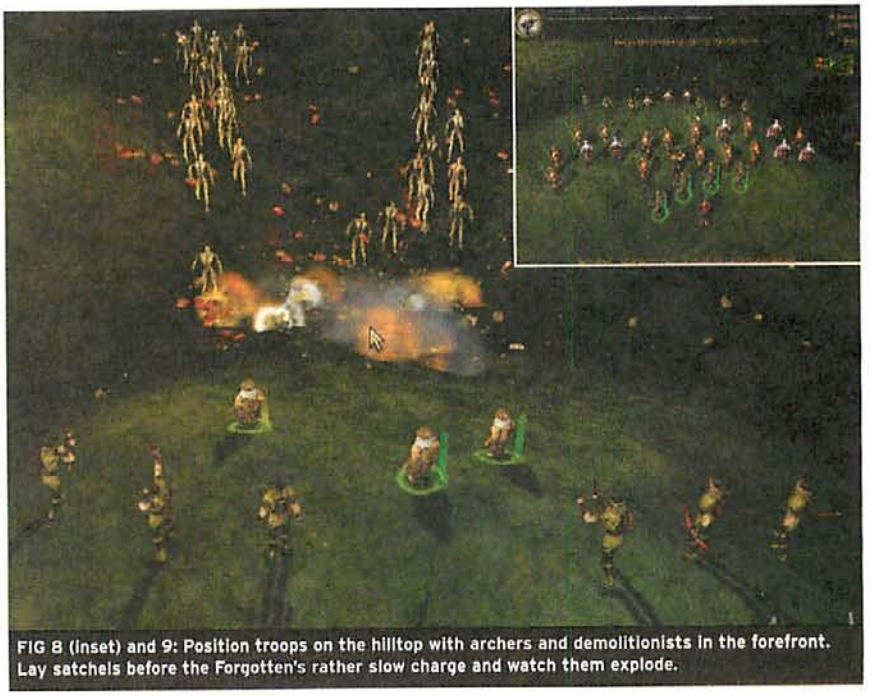


FIG 8 (inset) and 9: Position troops on the hilltop with archers and demolitionists in the forefront. Lay satchels before the Forgotten's rather slow charge and watch them explode.

toward the southeast corner of the map, where a sizable force of Myrkridian giants, warriors and Soulless block entry into the Black Spire. Position archers and demolitionists to the flanks and have them concentrate their attacks on the giants, while using your melee to take out the warriors and Soulless. Once you've done away with the giants, make sure you utilize their flaming arrows. Use all of your remaining archers against the Soulless. The mission ends when your forces reach the Black Spire. **(FIG 7)**

Mission 22: Dream Duel

Objective: Keep Myrdred alive so he can duel The Watcher. **Forces of Light:** Myrdred, Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, Dwarven demolitionists, and 12 Dun Berserks. **Forces of Dark:** Forgotten, Soulless, Thrall, Wights, The Watcher.

Battle plans: The mission starts out in a scripted melee in which three groups of Llancarfan soldiers are battling the Forces of Dark. Your only concern is the middle contingent—the other forces are not under your control and will be slain by The Watcher's undead. Form your troops with the archers in the forefront, demolitionists to the flanks, and melee at the center behind the archers. Move west.

Concentrate your attacks by using archers and demolitionists on the Thrall, and melee on the Forgotten. The terrain is hilly with a spattering of trees, so seek high ground during battle in order to maximize your archer and demolitionist attacks. As you move west, Myrdred and a few Llancarfan soldiers will join your force. Keep Myrdred at the rear of your forces, since losing him loses the mission. Continue west, and then move north while defeating bands of undead. Be on the lookout for Wights and nail them with your archers before they draw too close. Remember to heal your troops with Heron guards after each battle.

After this part of the map has been cleared, it's time to move east for the final showdown with The Watcher. Once you gain the hilltop to the east of his position, array your troops in the fashion described above. But spread them out, because The Watcher's powerful Unlife Dream magic can kill anyone within the casting area. Bait The Watcher's Forgotten to your position by sending a lone Heron guard to them. When the Forgotten give chase, concentrate archers and demolitionists on Thrall while directing melee on Forgotten. Make sure to keep Myrdred safe.

After most of the enemy has been cleared out, it's time to send Myrdred forward. The Watcher will try to destroy Myrdred with his powerful magic. Keep your melee and archers close behind. The Watcher will summon more Thrall and Forgotten. Send melee and archers against them. Use Myrdred's Dispersal Dream against The Watcher. This will immediately kill The Watcher and end the mission. **(FIGS 8 and 9)**

Mission 25: The Traitor

Objective: Kill the traitor Mjarin and his forces. Connacht must survive in order to slay Mjarin. **Forces of Light:** Connacht, Llancarfan archers, Heron guards, 12 Dun Berserks, and Dwarven demolitionists. **Forces of Dark:** Llancarfan soldiers, Llancarfan archers, warlocks, and Mjarin.

Battle plans: This final mission pits brother against brother, and it is quite challenging because Mjarin's magic is almost unstoppable. The mission begins with a skirmish against a troop of Mjarin's Llancarfan soldiers. Connacht is the best fighter in your group, so keep him at the front lines alongside your melee units. Have the archers concentrate their fire on the right flank, while taking out the enemy with your melee. Head northeast until your force reaches a pass divided into three sections. A good number of Mjarin's forces are guarding the passes. At the eastern pass, the warlocks are your biggest worry and you should deal with them first. Spread out your archers while distracting the warlocks with Connacht—he can afford one warlock attack. Quickly, take the warlocks out with archers. When the warlocks are dead, quickly heal Connacht and destroy the enemy forces at each pass one by one. Keep an eye on the overhead map just in case enemy troops from the other pass decide to launch a counterattack. Heal and move past the hills and turn south. Here, you'll find another pass guarded by a powerful warlock and more traitorous Llancarfan. Concentrate your archers on the warlock while sending your melee troops after his warriors. Heal and reassemble for the final rush to the southeast on a plateau.

Now for the tough part: Mjarin casts a powerful fire spell, which roars across the map like a giant ocean wave. Anything caught in this spell's path is dead, including the hero Connacht. Study the terrain. You'll quickly notice three passages with ramps that will take you to the plateau where Mjarin and his forces lie in wait. Carefully sneak a handful of melee troops to each passage, avoiding the fire magic and using the sheer cliffs for protection. The cliffs will protect troops hunkering close to them. When all troops are in position, select all of them and make a bead for Mjarin. Make sure you control Connacht and avoid the fire magic. You are bound to lose troops during the rush, but the key is for Connacht to reach Mjarin intact. Once Connacht reaches Mjarin, have him attack, ignoring all other attacks. Victory is yours as Connacht soon becomes a legendary hero and crowned emperor.

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Stop Making Games

Jeff's heart is heavy cuz his hard drive is full **By Jeff Green**

I have a theory. Actually, I have many theories, being something of a Renaissance man, but most of them–such as how Leelee Sobieski could be used as a flotation device–are beyond the scope of this magazine.

This theory, by the way, is no mere conjecture, for those naysayers who have dismissed this page as being less than a serious source of gaming information in the past. No, this theory is the culmination of literally minutes of research, painstakingly conducted by me personally while eating Ding-Dongs earlier this afternoon. So those of you inclined to doubt my professionalism can just shut the hell up.

***

Actually, like most great theories, mine came about by accident. While consuming Ding-Dong #2, and before making little animal sculptures with the foil, I decided it was high time for me, a serious gaming journalist, to install *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* on my hard drive. Sure, I had plenty of other things to do, but it was my duty to the gaming community to take this on as well. Others may get to sit back and smell the sweet, sweet roses of life, but I'm a journalist. I have a job to do.

Why was I installing another game when I hadn't finished *StarCraft* yet?

But there was a problem. Halfway through the *Wolfenstein* installation, a dialog box appeared informing me that my hard drive was full. Surely this was a mistake. Surely I could not have filled up a 20-gig drive, even with all those Ricky Martin JPEGs. A quick scan of the drive revealed the source of the trouble: My PC was completely loaded down with games I had yet to finish.

Here, in all its glory, is a complete list of the games now on my PC: *Age of Empires II, Aliens vs. Predator 2, Baldur's Gate I* and *II, Civilization III, Dark Age of Camelot, Deus Ex, Diablo II, EverQuest, Giants, Half-Life, Kohan, Operation Flashpoint, Planescape: Torment, Rogue Spear, The Sims, StarCraft, Stronghold, Undying, Unreal Tournament*, and *X-Wing*. (Note to self: Omit Barbie games in final draft of column.)

Some of these games, like *Civ III* and *Dark Age of Camelot*, I was still heavily playing, so no surprises there. But most of them, like *Undying, Giants*, and *Rogue Spear*, I had completely forgotten I'd ever installed. If I did remember, as with *Baldur's Gate* and *Deus Ex*, I no longer had any idea where I was in the game.

As I gazed in wonder at this 20-gigabyte pile of half-finished games, I had to ask: What was I doing? Why was I installing another game when I hadn't even finished freakin' *StarCraft* yet? And that's when my theory came to me.

My theory is this: The longer a game stays on your hard drive, the less likely it is that you will ever finish it. It will stay there, like an albatross, making you feel guilty and inadequate. Every time you see it, you'll think of the time you put into it already and promise yourself "you'll get back to it someday." Except, with the rare exception, you won't. Because you're too busy with newer games. Because there is always a *Wolfenstein* to distract you.

The secret truth for most of us is that we don't need any more new games, ever. There are just too many of them already and not enough time to play 'em. Right? I mean, obviously we're not going to admit this to our families or anything–no point in going overboard. But we don't *need* that new game at all–we just *want* it. And that's not a bad thing. Without that irrational, irresponsible desire to buy every cool new thing that comes our way, what, really, would be the point of living?

***

So, there I was, Ding-Dong crumbs on my face, stuck with the choice of either deleting one of my games unfinished or not installing *Wolfenstein*. I chose the only reasonable course of action: I zoomed to the store and bought another hard drive.

To delete an unfinished game is to write off all those hours you put into it way back when. I look at it this way: If we take it as a given that playing games is a waste of time, then what could be worse than wasting the time spent wasting time? So take it from me. Don't let the hard drive full of games discourage you. If you're a real gamer, you'll go ahead and buy more anyway. Anything less is unthinkable.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the ability to finish games is directly related to one's skill at being able to play them. Give him hell for his 20 gigs worth of failure at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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