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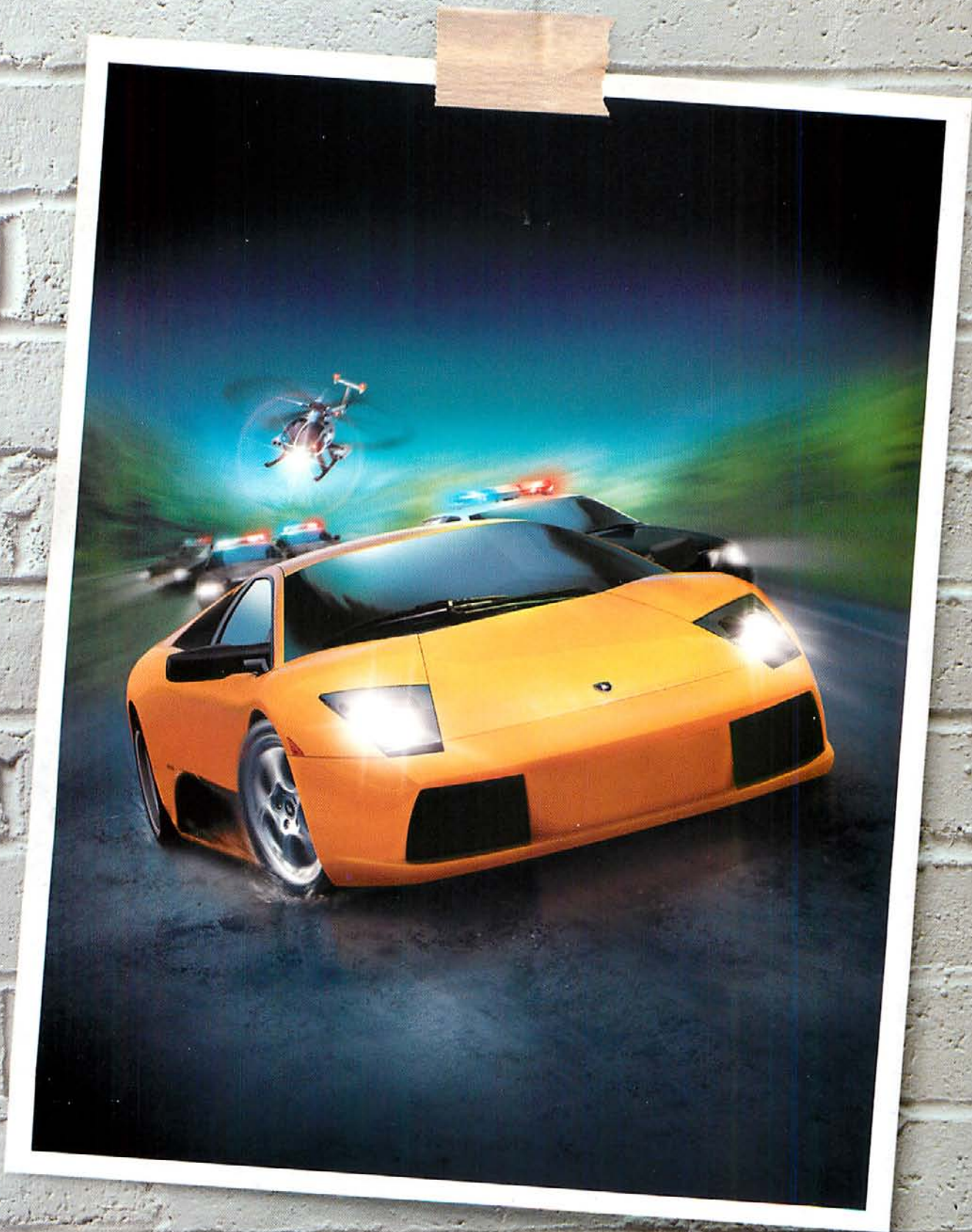
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We review: 800MHz PowerBook G4
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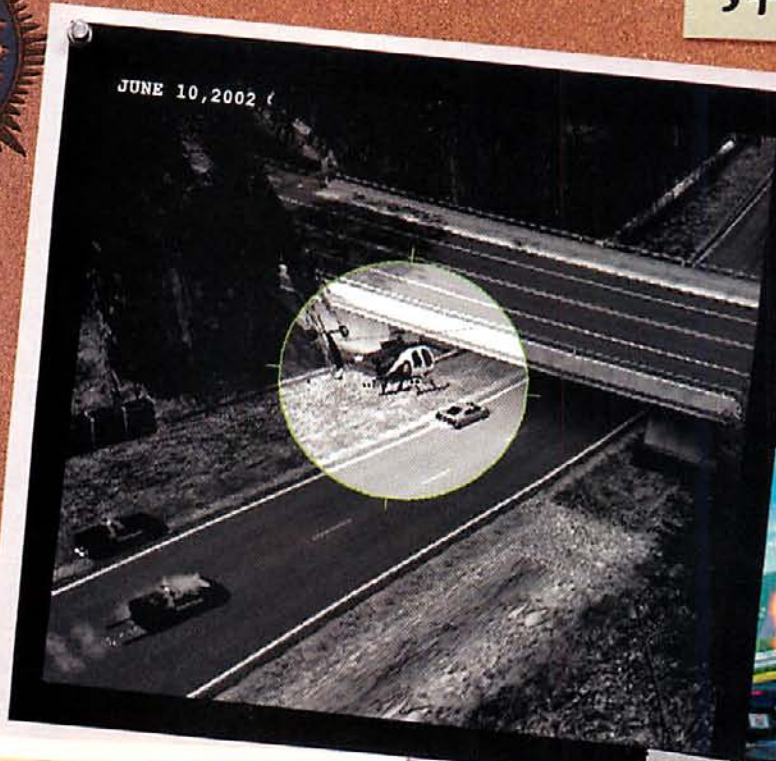






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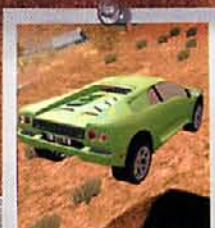
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PlayStation 2



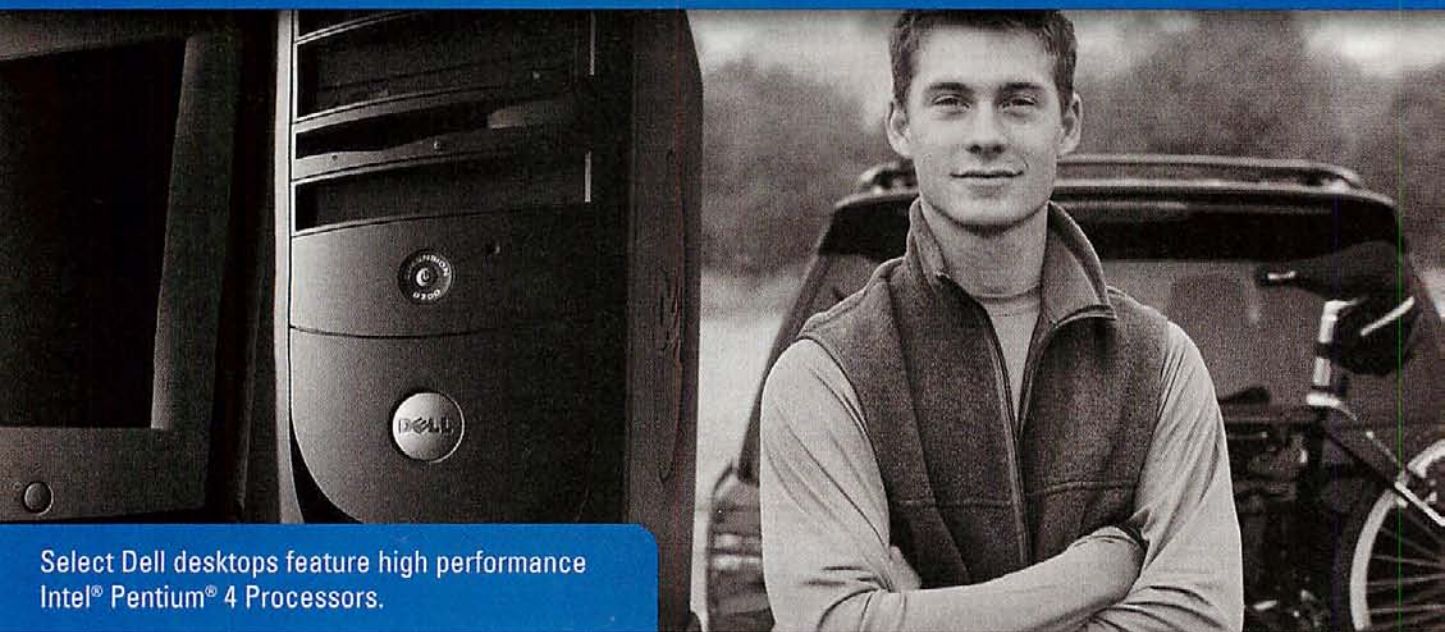
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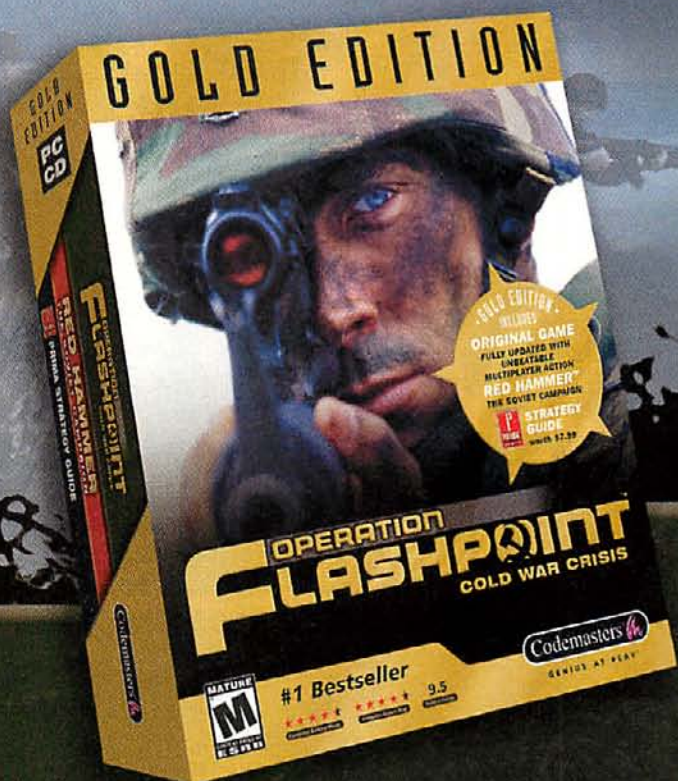
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The Sims Online is recognizable to anyone who's ever played The Sims before—but everything works differently now.

This is DJ Kauia Kilo, bringing you the latest in hip-hop luau flava!

I'm sure I'll lose my hearing at this distance, but who cares?!

Having a hot tub in a club that blasts cool tunes...best idea since sliced bread!

82

COVER STORY
The Sims Online

The best-selling PC game of all time is going online. Why should you care? 'Cause you can rip out the hearts of other players and step on 'em, that's why.

COVER IMAGE BY BOB KING AND JOHN BROWN AT MAXIS. PEOPLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAYDEN HOUSER. PRODUCT PHOTOGRAPH BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

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Pretty on the outside, ugly on the inside—must be art boy Babler.

18 Letters

Rants and raves from our core audience of major geeks, Wil O'Neal haters, and angry 12-year-olds.



32 Loading...

More retina-blistering graphical beauty from the likes of *Splinter Cell*, *Combat Flight Sim 3*, and *F1 2002*.

42 Read Me

We're back from Camp EA with a mysterious rash and a bag of useless crap. But at least we got to play *Battleground: 1942* and see all of EA's latest, including *James Bond: NightFire*, *Madden 2003*, and the upcoming *Medal of Honor* add-on. And check out our coverage of ATI's bad-ass new graphics cards, *The Lord of the Rings* for PC, and the Top 10 RPGs of All Time. Join us, won't you?

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52 Scott McCloud

66 Homebrew

118 Tech

Wil O'Neal alienates PC gamers everywhere by reviewing two Macs: the dual-processor PowerMac G4 and the PowerBook G4. But wait, aren't Macs technically PCs? Who cares anyway? Plus, Monsoon's awesome 2.1 speaker setup, HP's DVD+RW drive, and a pocket PC that lets you take your gaming with you wherever you go. Also, Tech Medics, Killer Rigs, and Wil Power.

129 Gamer's Edge

Part I of our definitive *WarCraft III* guide focuses on hero killing. Also, get tips on making great characters and fighting the last battle in *Neverwinter Nights*, watch Tom and Bruce sling spells at each other in *Age of Wonders II*, let Prima help build your first deck for *Magic: The Gathering Online*, and learn this month's really dirty trick.

144 Greenspeak

Jeff says it isn't cool to say *The Sims* isn't cool.



"I made a quick guess and then let the bombs fly."

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BATTLEFIELD: 1942

Planes, tanks, and automobiles—jump into the nearest vehicle and get ready for World War II.



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F1 2002



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MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE



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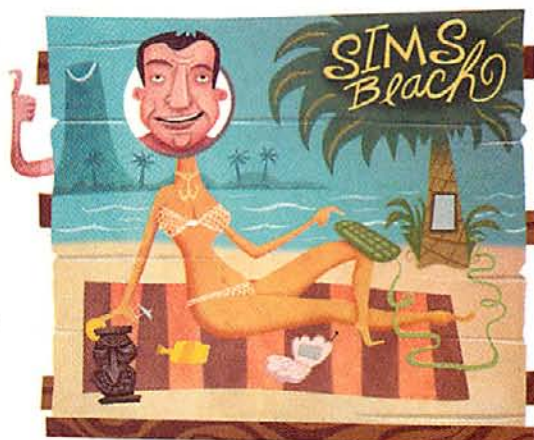
MECHWARRIOR 4: INNER SPHERE

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GREENSPEAK

Take some advice from a man who knows cool.



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TECH

What's that Mac doing in CGW?



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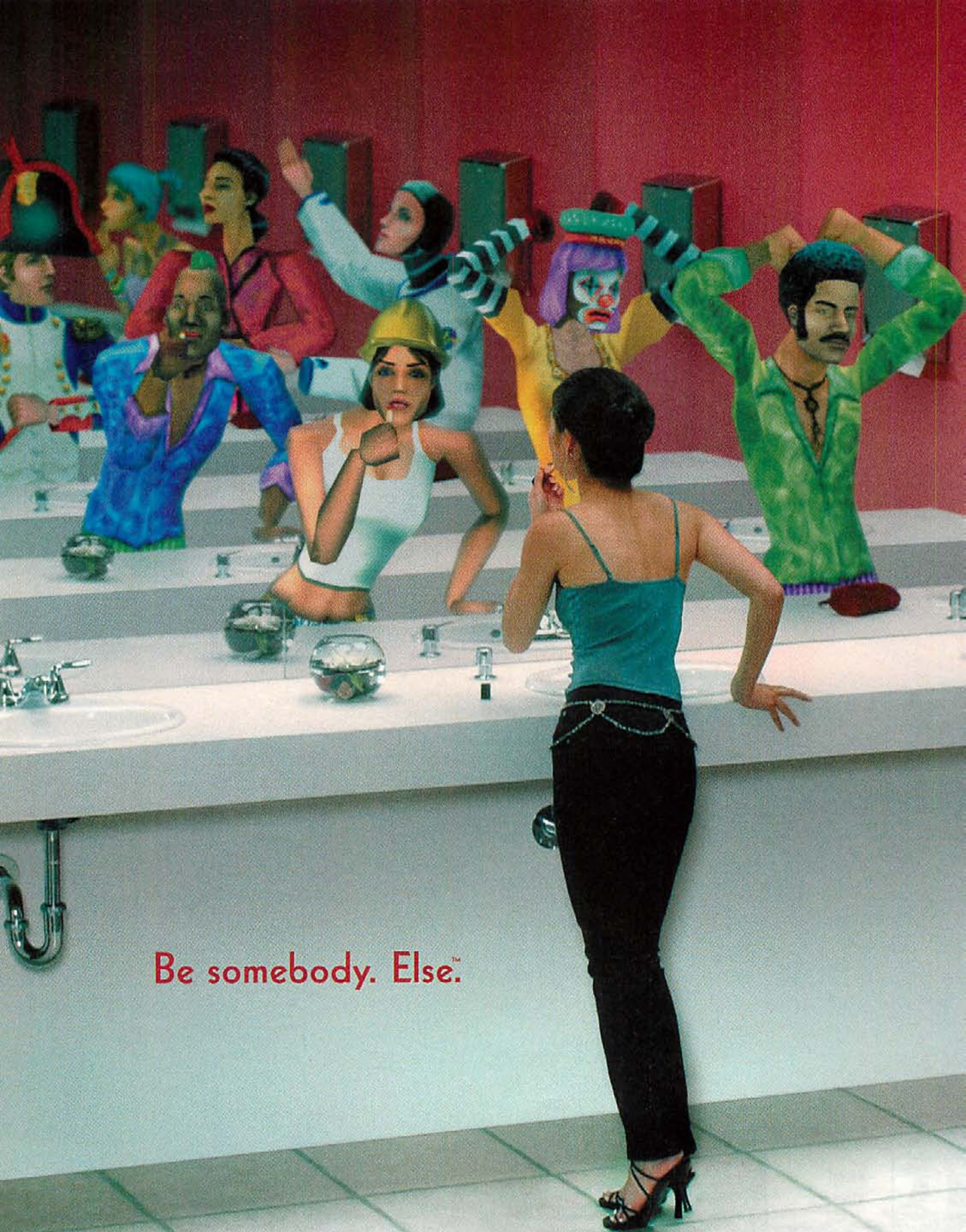


PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE



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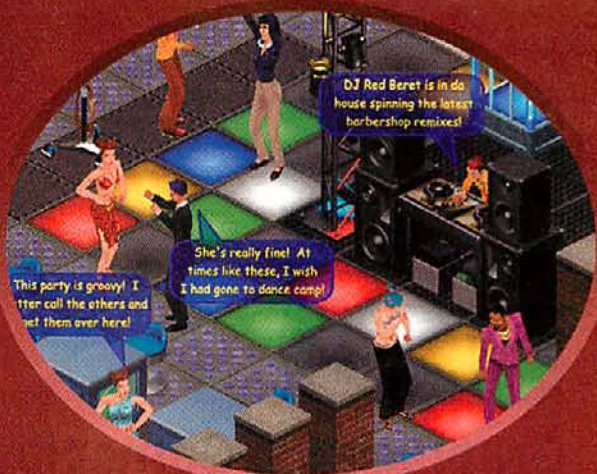


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Graphics vs. Gameplay

In last month's feature on *Unreal Tournament 2003*, we used real screenshots for the primary art in the design. A few years ago, that wouldn't have been possible because the image quality in games just wasn't that great (that's why there used to be so many 3D renders dressing up magazine layouts). Now, it's becoming commonplace to use actual game imagery in print. It's incredible how good games look these days and how quickly they are getting better. The future holds a lot of good-looking games: *Unreal II* and *Doom III* are nothing short of spectacular.

But I wonder if all of that eye-popping visual appeal comes at the expense of great gameplay. Is *Doom III* ever going to be as fun as the original, despite the fact it looks like a playable cut-scene? I don't know. *Doom* blew us away with an entirely new genre but *Doom III*, I fear, is going to blow us away just visually. Great visuals aren't a bad thing, but are we going to see any genre-busting gameplay in the next year?

We've had one of the best years in gaming already, but...we haven't had a revolutionary game come along in a while, either.

Id's recent visual leaps seen in *Castle Wolfenstein* were accompanied by a linear, ho-hum playing experience. On the flipside, *Medal of Honor* didn't blow us away graphically, but wow, what a game. *Star Wars Galaxies* is promising to be an incredibly beautiful, vast gameplay arena, but if it comes out broken like *Anarchy Online* or doesn't deliver the fun, it won't last. Even

Blizzard's looker *WarCraft III* received "only" 4 stars from us: incredibly polished and beautiful, but nothing really new in the gameplay. There are plenty of memorable games that fall in the "good-looking but disappointing" category: *Black & White*, *Ground Control*, *Throne of Darkness*, *Emperor: Battle for Dune*, *Battle Realms*, and *Quake III*. (Send your flaming emails to take_criticism_like_a_man_all_you_fanboys_who_live@home.com.)

The typical gamer is growing up, and while we upgrade our graphics cards twice a year, who's upgrading our adrenaline-pumping gaming moments? PC gaming needs to remember that now, more than ever, it has to nurture new thinkers, not just new artists. Cultivate the odd, the surreal, and the bizarre. Sure, some games will flop, like *Majestic*—but remember, that wasn't because the concept flopped, it was due to poor execution.

If a truly original game such as *The Sims* (or my favorite, *Grim Fandango*) were produced every year, one game that made people say, "Whoa," what a rich game collection we'd have. Speaking of *Grim Fandango*, will somebody please make Tim Schaefer an offer he can't refuse and bring him back to PC development? If you haven't seen what he's doing with *PsychoNauts*, check it out right now.

Jason Babler
Associate Art Director

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Charles Ardal, **Mark Asher**, **T. Byrl Baker**, **Gordon Berg**, **Loyd Case**, **Tom Chick**, **Bruce Geryk**, **John Houlihan**, **Jeff Lackey**, **Raphael Liberatore**, **Thomas L. McDonald**

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HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS

To contact any member of the staff:
firstname_lastname@ziffdavis.com
Address nonsubscription-related questions and feedback to: CGW Editorial, 50 Beale Street, 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. Or you may contact us via: CGWletters@ziffdavis.com; phone: (415) 357-4900; or editorial fax: (415) 357-4977. Website: www.computergaming.com

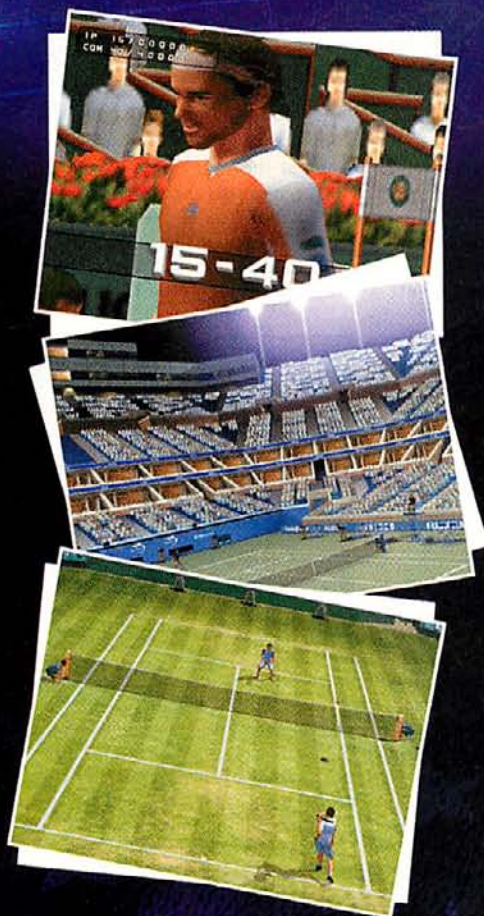
ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT

Group Publisher **Lee Uniacke**
Associate Publisher **Stan Taigen**
stan_taigen@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4915
Regional Sales Manager/Midwest and East Coast Territory **Marc Callison**
marc_callison@ziffdavis.com (630) 382-9034
Regional Sales Manager/Midwest and East Coast Territory **Ian Sinclair**
ian_sinclair@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4925
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emily_olman@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-5226
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mary_gray@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8782
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Northwest Territory **Marc Yamaguchi**
marciy@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4944
Account Executive/
Northwest Territory **Meighan O'Rourke**
meighan_orourke@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4920
Senior Marketing Manager and
Creative Director **Rey Ledda**
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8775
Marketing Coordinator **Wayne Shiu**
wayne_shiu@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8248
Advertising Coordinator **Tipler Ubbelohde**
tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4930
Sales Assistant **Kristeen Laut**
kristeen_laut@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8778
Sales Assistant **C.J. Amit**
cj_amit@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8783
HOW TO CONTACT ADVERTISING & SALES
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Letters

Yay! We got mail! Send us more at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com. Yay!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

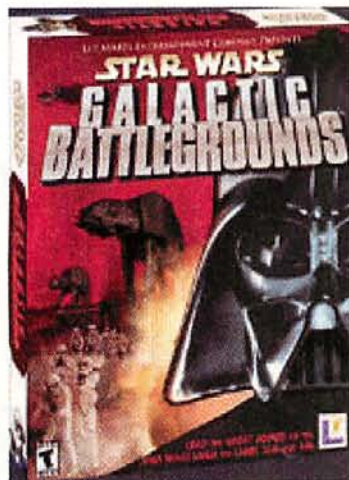
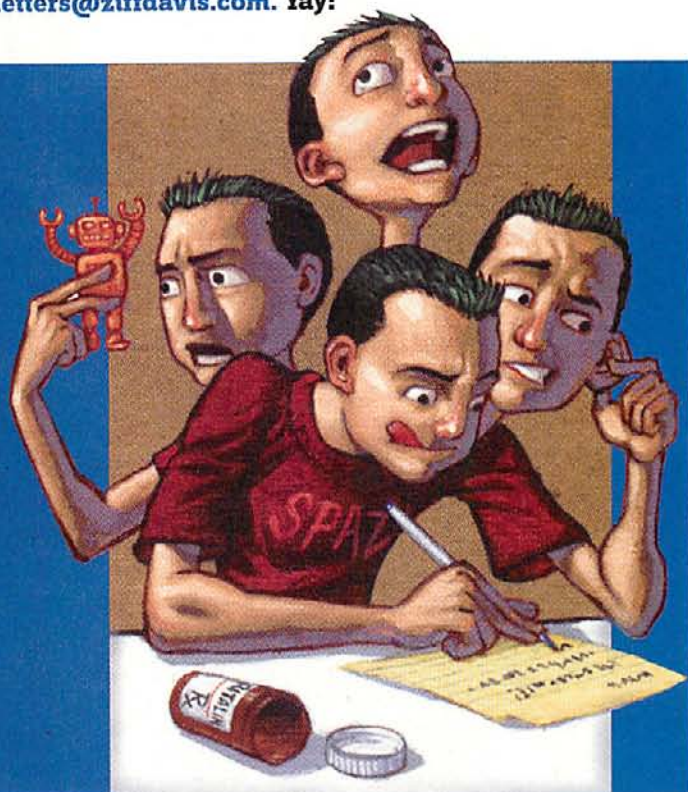
Spend That \$20 on Some Ritalin Instead...

I am a 12-year-old gamer! I love your 'zine! It rules!!! Scooter has great reviews!!! He told gamers about a kick-ass show—Cowboy Bebop rules! I bought *Black & White*—I think it deserves 3 stars!!!! I am buying *Serious Sam* off the Internet for \$20—is it a good deal?!? I can't wait until *Doom III* comes out!!

Sincerely,

madcat12pc

P.S. Was Jeff Green thrown off a cliff when he was a baby?



...And Then Share Some With This Kid

Hey CGW!! I'm 12 years old and an avid reader of your magazine. First, I'd like to say that *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds* is the best damn game EVER!! Now then, with that said, I would also like to say that all of *The Sims* games really suck!!! I mean, why would anyone wanna play a game with people who say stuff like "abaHOOCHya" and "mooki-hooki"? It's not even interesting. I mean, you should be able to have your Sims buy guns and go around shooting other people!!!! My idea of hell is having to

play *The Sims* forever. Well, that's pretty much all I have to say, except screw the person who said *Galactic Battlegrounds* sucked (August 2002).

Peace out, CGW.

Jango Fett

Why You Should Never Skip an Issue of CGW

Operation Flashpoint, I believe, is the best game that I have ever come across! However I am disappointed that your magazine did not give it enough credit for being a great game. In your May 2002 issue, in Gamer's Edge you had a play-by-play game between Bruce and Tom that was about three pages long. What the hell was that? You could have taken the time to appreciate the game with a full review and screenshots. A great game like *OFP* was developed by talented designers, but you did not give it enough credit—what the hell is wrong with your magazine?! I demand that your magazine crew find a way to acknowledge the greatness of such a beautiful game!

Garrett Neubauer

P.S. If you don't publish this I will NEVER forgive you.

Let's see, we gave it 4.5 stars and an Editors' Choice award (December 2001), and then we gave it our

Game of the Year award (April 2002), and this month we have a two-page review of the *Operation Flashpoint* expansion (page 100). So we're kinda thinking that we gave the game enough credit.



And We Were Like, Yeah, You're Wrong

Hey, I'm a fan of your mag—it rocks! But I have a complaint about a review. You gave *Freedom Force* 5 stars and an Editors' Choice award (June 2002). It looked cool, so I went to Wal-Mart and bought it and came home and played it—and it sucked! For a while I was in denial cuz I was like, "This doesn't suck. It can't. I paid 40 bucks and my favorite mag liked it." But the truth settled in: it sucked. I guess it wasn't your fault, but I think it just didn't register with me or something—I don't know. I think I'll trade it for a copy of *Half-Life* to my dumb

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"If you put Wil O'Neal's brains in a gnat's butt, it would look like a BB in a boxcar."

friends or something. (No, I don't have Half-Life.)

Tyler "Lunchbox" Thompson



Don't Question Our Authority, Motherf***er!

Hello to you at the magazine that is CGW. I have to say that I thoroughly enjoy your magazine; however, I would like to point out an error in the August 2002 review of *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*, by Tom Price. Mr. Price states that *Die Hard* has the "dubious distinction" [of being the first] to utter the phrase that begins with "mother" and ends with "ucker." While I can excuse the error, I would like to point out that, to my knowledge, it was the infinitely better *Fallout 2* (released almost four years ago) which first uses the phrase. I suppose this is a useless letter, but hey, at least it's another reason why you shouldn't buy *Nakatomi Plaza*.

Zetura Dracos

Please don't try to out-geek us. We are the übergeeks. Yes, technically, *Fallout 2* did use the word first, but only in text dialogues. *Die Hard* is the first game to repeatedly use the word out loud. That's what we meant.

Wil O'Neal: The Man, The Myth, The Retard

I am writing again to vent my displeasure at the Tech section of your magazine. Having been a subscriber for about three years and a reader for many more, I have found lately the Tech section SUCKS. Why are we forced to read the views of a small-minded editor (if you put his brains in a gnat's butt, it would look like a BB in a boxcar) who cannot find anything to review unless you jam headphones in his ears? I know that I did not subscribe to *Computer AUDIO World*.

Anyone seen Loyd Case?

Rocky Ramon

Why do half of this magazine's readers choose to write nasty things about Wil O'Neal? I'm pretty sure this (great) magazine's sole purpose is to keep its readers updated on games and what to play them on. Everything in CGW is great, except for the unneeded reviews of CD players, and we have to thank Wil for a lot of our enjoyment that comes from this mag. He can be a retard at times, but I'm sure he knows that by now. So fellow readers, quit taking up space in the Letters section!

Garrett

Free Computers for Every Reader!

I was recently reading the Tech section in your July issue. Wil O'Neal had an article that compared six computers, and I was wondering, what do you do with all the hardware that you get to test? Perhaps you have a greater plan for it all, perhaps you give it back when you're done, or, heck, for all I know you take it outside so you can test your M-79s on it. Whatever it is, I was thinking maybe you should give it to those who are truly needy...us, your readers. Maybe you could give it out as a prize in a random drawing for your subscribers.

Anyway, love your mag, keep up the good work. Hope this makes it into your Letters section, with all that other crap everyone puts in these letters. (I do truly enjoy reading your magazine, though.)

Charles Guthrie

While your idea is an interesting one, and would certainly generate good will among you, our readers, whom we love, we're unfortunately going to have to say no to this one. We do have lots of free equipment lying around, but Wil says he needs to keep it all—he sells it on eBay for big money in order to pay for his retard medication.

Free Warcraft for Every Reader!

You guys rock, even though it seems like your readers think the magazine has begun to deteriorate in the past few issues. I just wanted to know if you could

Penny Arcade

BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS



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MAIL BITES

Is it just me or does Jeff Green's whole motorcycle thing just scream mid-life crisis?

Sean Hester

I love your mag. It blows all other gaming mags outta the water. I would bathe in your mag if I had it my way!

RankSoldier3

Believe it! You have a secret admirer! Just click to www.SomeoneLikesYou.com to find out who! Email address: cgwletters@ziff-davis.com.

Evil Spam Site That We Hate

How about a copy of *Unreal Tournament 2003* when it comes out to ensure my renewal slip comes back to you????????????

John

"I hate piracy and what it stands for, so my guilty conscience will haunt me every time I try to play my illegal copy of *WarCraft III*"



solve my problem. I would die for a copy of *WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos* Collector's Edition, but there is no way I could buy it considering I'm a minor and all my financial aid comes out of my parents' wallets. So I am thinking of other ways to get the game. The two other choices I have are asking someone nicely for it (that's where the CGW crew comes in) or downloading a pirated copy of the game. The only problem is that I hate piracy and what it stands for, so my guilty conscience will haunt me every time I try to play the game. So will you please...PLEASE try to send me a copy of *WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos* Collector's Edition?

Alan "cheeto" Shultz

P.S. Love the Get a Life column and worship your Tech section. Best hardware section in any magazine I've seen.

Wil would've sent you his *WarCraft III*, but he already sold it on eBay to buy some...oh, OK, enough already.

Too Bad He Loses All Credibility With No. 2

Hello. This is my first time writing in, but let's get to the point.

1. My June issue fell apart as soon as I turned the first page.
2. *Star Wars Episode II* was great (especially at the end).
3. Y'all's reviews are usually off target.
4. The star rating stinks.
5. I hate Wil O'Neal. He doesn't let his son play games that are actually fun. That must suck. I was playing *Duke Nukem* when I was 4.
6. I like two things, Jeff and Scooter.

Darin
Arkansas

Or Call Him "Dumbass" Like Everyone Else

I have been a subscriber for a long time now, and I still have the same question since I bought my first issue in 1994. How do you pronounce "Thierry Nguyen"? I've read that you sometimes

refer to him as "Scooter," and I can understand why. Researching pronunciations, I have found so far:

1. Theory en-gu-yen
2. Terry Nwen
3. Twee Nuyen

Which is it already?!!

Nick the Greek

How many times do we need to tell you people?! The correct pronunciation is: first name "Scoo," last name "ter."

Rating the Ratings System

First, I really enjoy your magazine. I read it cover to cover and find your reviews accurate and informative, for the most part. But I've got an idea for a

new ratings system that I think would be good for you guys. Not that there's anything wrong with what you have now: the normal 5-star ratings system is good and simple and to the point, but it needs something to add more variety, specifically to the 5-star games. I've noticed that a good number of games end up getting 5 stars, up to two in each issue. So to better compare among the games that get 5 stars, I thought it would be a good idea to add a bronze, silver, or gold star thing. When a game gets 5 stars, you then decide: is it a bronze, silver, or gold 5 stars? It's just an idea, and I think it would give a game better value. Keep up the good work.

Ivan Pate



Winner! Geek of the Month!

After reading Greenspeak in the August issue, I am left with one lingering, burning* question: which Gollum imitation?

1. The Brother Theodore version from the Rankin-Bass cartoons,
 2. The Andy Serkis version from the Peter Jackson films, or
 3. The Gail Chugg version from the *Mind's Eye* Public Radio version?
- Not that it matters much, I suppose, since all of the above sound pretty much alike (a gallon of spit gurgling in the back of the throat, which wasn't so much of a challenge for Brother Theodore, unless you consider that he had to swallow 4 gallons of the stuff already back there so he could be at least vaguely understandable).

Evil Kumquat
Angola, Indiana

P.S. I'm aware of the BBC version, separate from the above, but I just never found a copy for sale, or for stealing either.

P.P.S. I am also struck by the irony that, as I type this, my girlfriend is staring at me, waiting for me to come to bed.

*No longer burning after applying some calamine lotion—now just a minor itchy feeling

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What We Really Need Is More Angry Canadians

I suggest using better discretion in the Letters section. I do not subscribe to read rants like Jason C. Kessler's "Enough With the Xbox" [August 2002]. CGW editors have a right to print content that they feel is suitable. However, CGW editors must have sound judgment in keeping gross, misinformed commentary off the paper. Please tell me there are better letters to choose for print than Kessler's.

Cordially,

Ryan Ernst

Unfortunately, unless we print letters like the one you objected to, we're stuck filling this section with even lamer ones, like those complaining about other people's letters.

PC Buying Angst

With great games like *Jedi Outcast*, *WarCraft III*, and *Neverwinter Nights* all released recently, I decided to look into buying a gaming PC. What I found shocked me. The minimum I would have to spend for a machine that would last into 2003 would be \$1,600. I may be naive, but I wasn't prepared for that kind of investment after seeing television commercials that advertised \$700 "fully-loaded" PCs.

I quickly recovered and was still willing to fork over that kind of cash until I started reading customer reviews for these PCs on CNet and other Websites. Perhaps a much larger percentage of people with bad experiences leave feedback than those with good experiences; but according to what I found, anywhere from 25 percent to 55 percent of the big-name PCs (think dudes and cows) have major problems right out of the box. Many of the unfortunate purchasers of these PCs had to go through technical support nightmares to get any kind of assistance. Smaller companies had better feedback, for the most part, but the price for the same system jumped drastically. Did I decide to forego gaming and find another hobby? Nope—*Halo* is awesome!!!

A Disappointed Gamer

And Now a Word From the President of Mensa

I scrubbed to this offal mag thinking that its reviews rocked well I was in for a real shocker they sucked there were a few exceptions and the demons were crapy nothing was up to my goals it would be ok for a nimrod but that would be an average person like every person that works at cgw the ganators would probabaly give better rating than yall did.

pcqgamer

Remember when they used to say that computers would make people illiterate? Like that could ever happen!

Arcadian Del Suck?

One more useless review from "Arcadian Del Sol" and my subscription is toast.

Once again he gives us a "review" (*Underlight*, August 2002), wherein he regales us with magical tales of his over-arching "old-school-ness," while telling us NOTHING of substance about the game in question except that he didn't like it. Oh, and that the graphics suck—I did at least get that.

I would imagine that someone, somewhere cares that this idiot is "gamier-than-thou," but who is proving his work? Who actually thinks that this moron's past experience is worthy of aggrandizement? Who imagines that we care? "Arcadian" obviously does (and that's another thing—why allow him this virtual byline? Does it say this on his birth certificate? I doubt it), because he shoves it in our faces time and time again, and never fails to not say anything of substance about the games reviewed. WHO IS SIGNING OFF ON THIS TRIPE??

Kevin (I'm only VeeKaChu ONLINE, DAMMIT) Dafler

Actually, it's the guy in the letter right above this one who signs off on Arcadian's articles.

Look Here, Kids! A Contest! Win Your Choice of a Fabulous PC Speaker System or a Palm Pilot!



We want your opinions about **Computer Gaming World** magazine.

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Thanks,
ZD Research Staff

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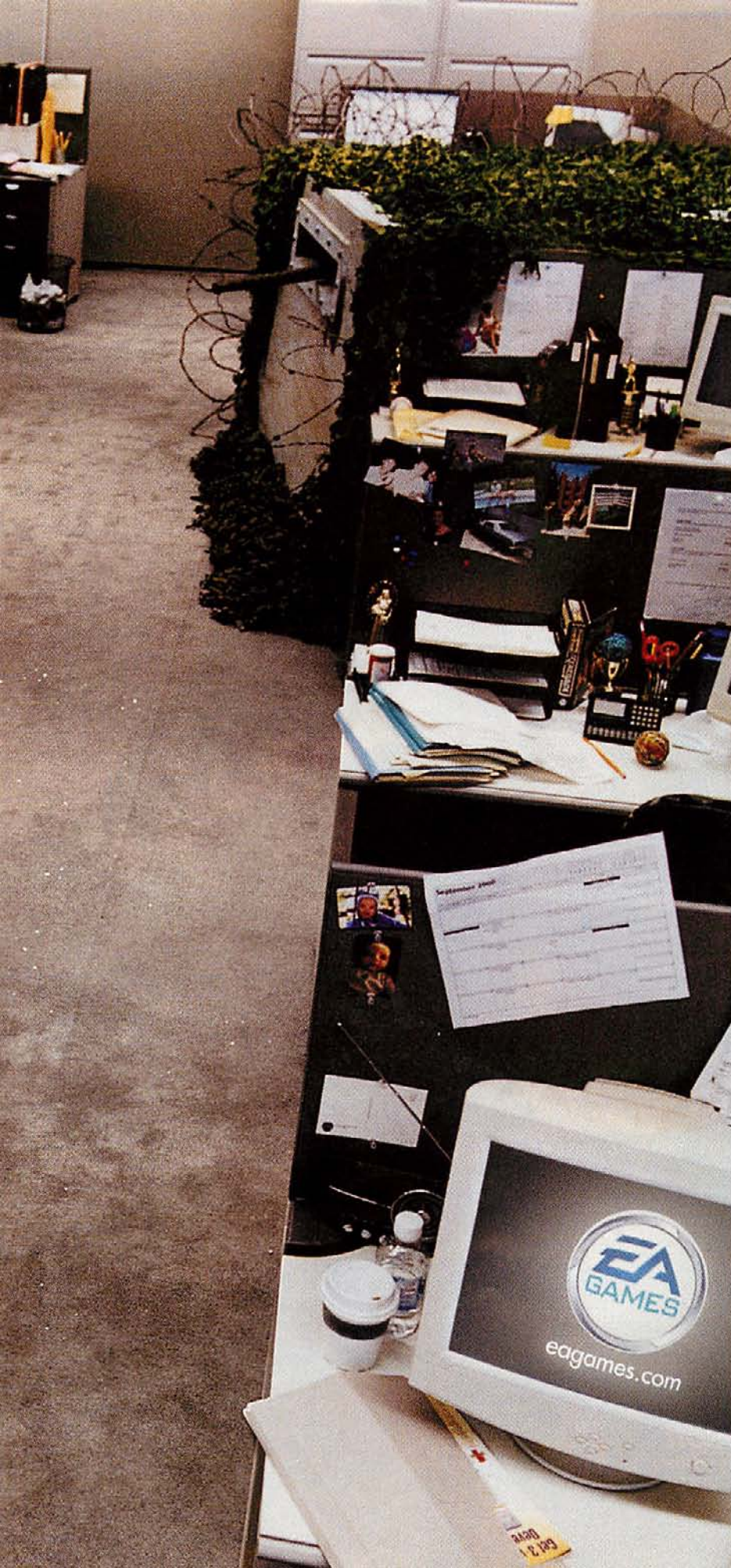
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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

Don't make the silly mistake of thinking, "Oh, a Tom Clancy game, I probably end up controlling a team of counter-terrorists in various adventures of the hostage-rescuing sort." In fact, not only is *Splinter Cell* not a counterterrorism sim, it's not even a first-person shooter. Think of it as a black ops simulator, meant to dethrone console darling *Metal Gear Solid*. As Sam Fisher, a solo operative for the supersecret Third Echelon department ("splinter cell" refers to his lone wolf status), you'll have your fair share of third-person sneaking and killing. Watch this game slink into stores soon after its Xbox debut.

Pull off top-secret moves, such as straddling beams and, mayhap, firing a round or two into this goon's skull.

Shadows are your friends; you'll often want to hide in them.

A screenshot from the video game Splinter Cell. The character Sam Fisher is shown from the waist up, wearing a purple and black camouflage uniform and black tactical gloves. He is holding a black submachine gun with both hands. He is standing in a warehouse or storage area, surrounded by tall stacks of cardboard boxes. The boxes are labeled with 'X-122' and have various papers and tape attached to them. The lighting is dim, with some light coming from the left, creating a sense of being in a hidden or industrial space.

Sam Fisher has plenty of neat toys besides these night-vision goggles—like fiber-optic cameras, thermal-vision goggles, security-camera jammers, and even the odd canister of nerve gas.

You can choose to swoop down, kill this dork, grab his gun, and engage in gun-toting mayhem, or you can leave him alone, sneak around, and not kill a single person. We prefer bloodshed.

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3

No, it's not an oil painting or a rendered cut-scene. This is an actual game screen in a playable resolution—unretouched—of a game coming soon to your PC (eat your hearts out, console boys). The game's stunning graphics are courtesy of a new engine designed for rendering low-altitude combat. When you're coming in for that strafing run, enemy units nestled in the European countryside won't look like plywood dummies anymore. So dig your joystick out of the closet and get that new video card, because when this baby takes to the skies, you don't want your P47 to handle like a B17.

Aircraft are detailed right down to the rivets. Reflective textures add to the realism.





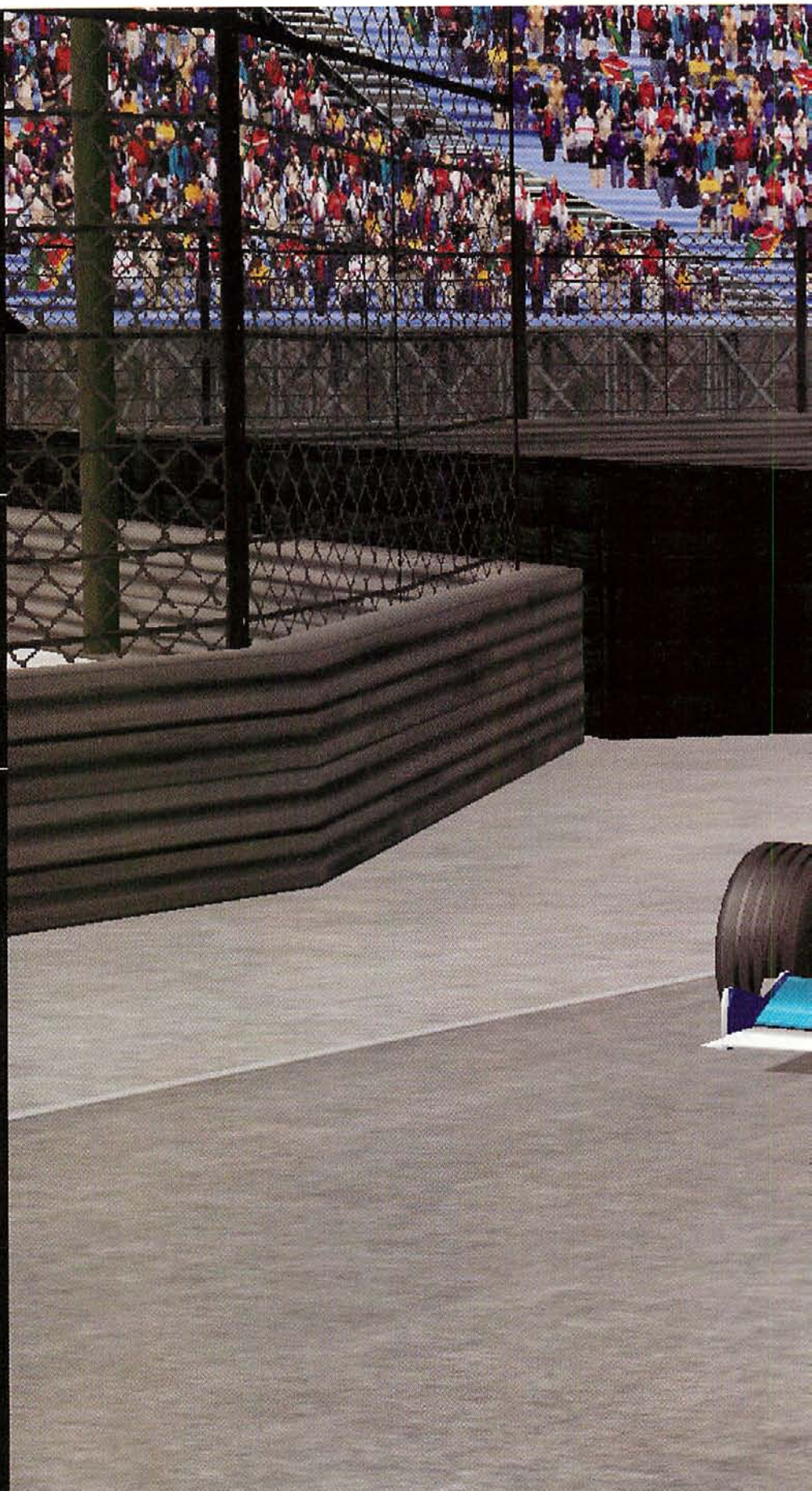
The game's 18 flyable aircraft include medium bombers and early jet fighters. Bomber pilots can also man the gun turrets and bombardier station.

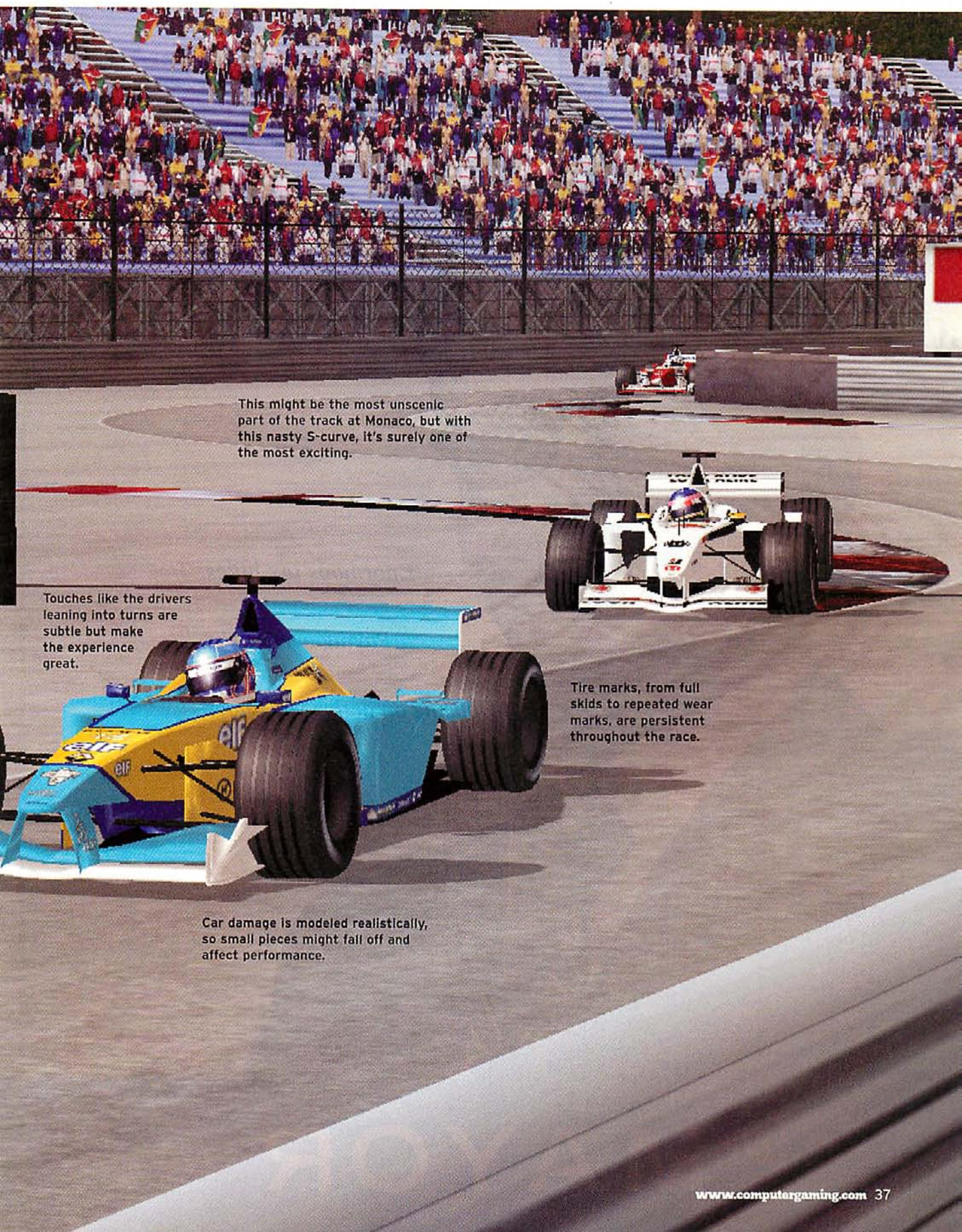
Check out the particle effects on that explosion. Maybe Fritz here should have skipped the bratwurst and hefeweizen before today's mission.

New higher resolution terrain looks like video footage. It's also topographically correct.

F1 2002

We know the Loading section is usually reserved for games that are yet to come out, but we just want you to take one more look at EA Sports' *F1 2002* before you turn to page 102 and read the review. The game's graphics are just too amazingly realistic to pass up giving you another peek. Hardcore racing simulations just seem more and more like reality, but without all that pesky life-threatening danger. Once someone figures out how to pump the smell of burning rubber out of your PC, we will have truly arrived.





This might be the most unscenic part of the track at Monaco, but with this nasty S-curve, it's surely one of the most exciting.

Touches like the drivers leaning into turns are subtle but make the experience great.

Tire marks, from full skids to repeated wear marks, are persistent throughout the race.

Car damage is modeled realistically, so small pieces might fall off and affect performance.



TOOLE

Enormous tax hikes. *Yes* ☒

Paving over parks. *Yes* ☒

Housing on active volcanoes. *Yes* ☒

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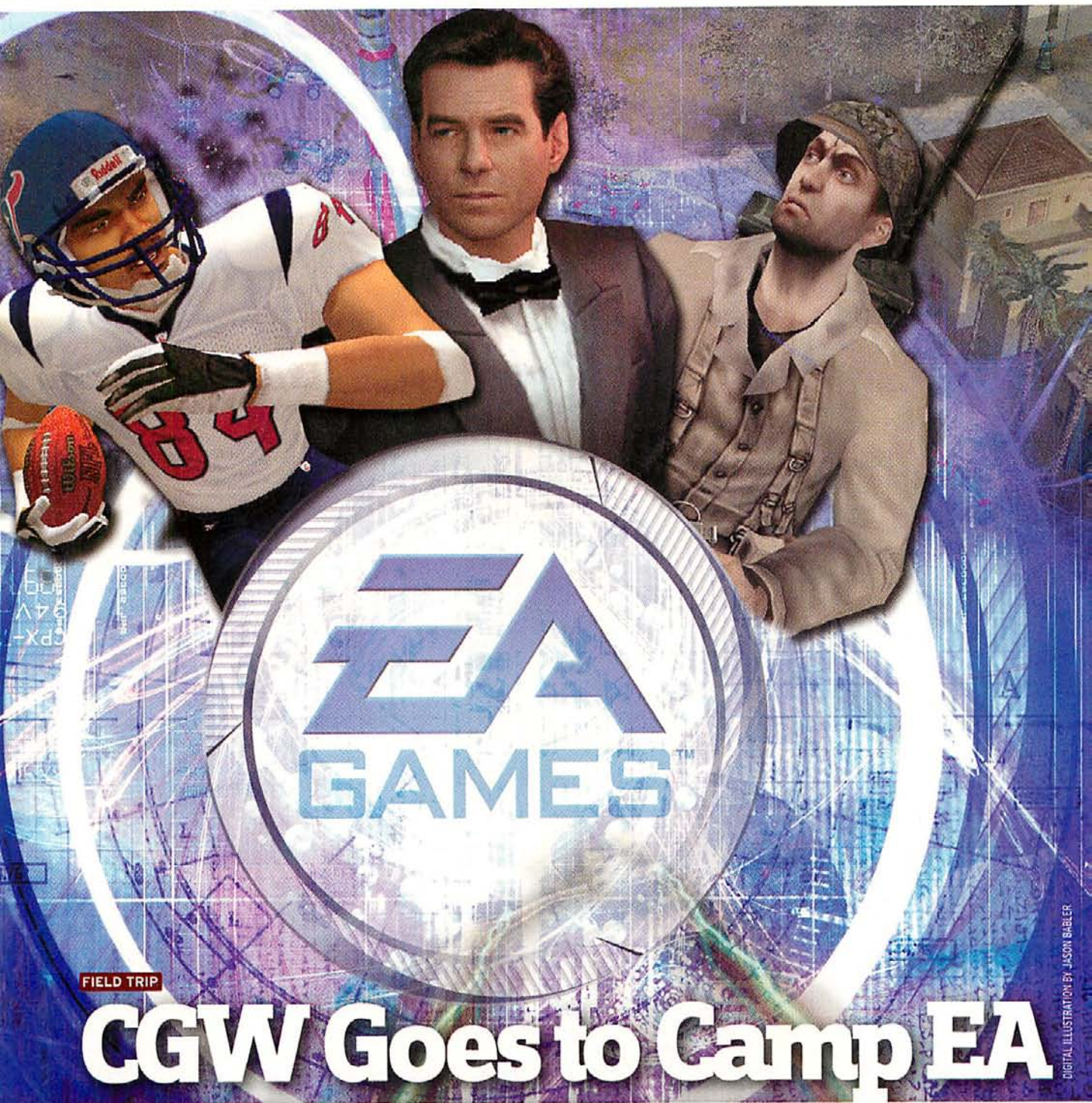


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Read Me

Postcards from our journey to the holodeck **Edited by Ken Brown**



FIELD TRIP

CGW Goes to Camp EA

No canoeing or horseback riding, but plenty of food, lots of good games, and a renewed focus on PC titles **By Tom Price and Jeff Green**

LORD OF THE RINGS

Step Into the hairy feet of your favorite Halfling. **Page 45**

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

Princess Daphne seems strangely alluring. **Page 50**

SCOTT MCCLOUD

He's back, with part 2 of his Superhero series! **Page 52**

TOP 10 RPGs

Our favorite fairy games of all time. **Page 58**



The PC version of *Madden Football 2003* will have improved graphics and more realistic animations.

Electronic Arts, the undisputed king of computer and video game publishing, sure knows how to make us gaming editors happy. Feed us, give us some T-shirts and cheap tchotchkes, and condense your current lineup of games in late development into one place where we can stroll about and get quick demos from the producers themselves. Hell, Will Wright even mixed us all piña coladas. Now that's good media relations.

This year's Camp EA was a great chance for us to catch up with some of their biggest titles in development and find out how they're coming along. We also learned that EA is recommitting itself to the PC platform, which was definitely great to hear.

Taking the lead on the PC were all the *Sims* games—not surprising, because they generate so much cash. In addition to the devilishly weird *Sims Online*, Maxis was on hand to show off *The Sims Deluxe*, a superexpansion that includes *Live'n' Large*, new clothing and objects, as well as the powerful new *Sims Creator*, which allows you to map your own face onto your Sims. And the latest iteration of the game that started

Will Wright even mixed us all piña coladas. Now that's good media relations.

it all, *SimCity 4*, looked impressive—it's a significant leap from *SimCity 3000*. You can read about the new *Sims* games in more detail in this month's cover story.

As for the EA Sports line, we're happy to report that *NBA Live* is returning to the platform, and EA is continuing to enhance its *NHL* and *Madden* games. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003* looks fantastic thanks to a new 3D engine.

On the action front, *James Bond 007: NightFire* will finally bring some good Bond action to the PC. We weren't able to play it, but we'll bring you a full, hands-on preview of this stylish FPS next month. We spent a lot of time playing *Battlefield: 1942*, which totally charmed us and earned a spot on our can't-wait-to-play list (see a full preview on page 76). We also got some play time with the new multiplayer maps included in the *Medal of Honor* expansion pack (as yet untitled). EA was showing a couple of strategy games, too: the increasingly

impressive *C&C: Generals* as well as *1503 A.D.*, an RTS/empire building hybrid set in the age of the conquistadores. There were even a couple of racing titles on display: *Drome Racers*, a fast-paced arcade-type racer based on the LEGO license, and *Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 2*,



James Bond 007: NightFire—the first Bond game to come to the PC—has cool levels with richly decorated interiors.

Maxis expects *The Sims Online* to have 1 million subscribers within a year of its launch

the follow-up to one of the best racing games ever to grace the PC. And let's not forget about EA's return to NASCAR PC games with *NASCAR Thunder 2003*. Now that's something to be excited about.

Massively Multiplayer

Now that the embarrassing disaster of *Majestic* is behind them, EA developers are focusing on massively multiplayer games that will actually appeal to gamers.

Their biggest and most-likely-to-succeed game is, of course, *The Sims Online*. If you don't think this game is for you, that's because you haven't played it yet. Its ingenious design means that it could appeal to both hardcore and casual players. It clearly bears the best hope yet of a massively multiplayer game that will break through to the mass market. (Maxis expects to have 1 million subscribers within a year of the game's launch.) But even though you can't kill anyone, there's more to the game than just chatting with neighbors

and decorating your house (see our feature story on page 82).

Earth and Beyond, Westwood's massively multiplayer RPG set in outer space that is not-repeat, NOT-a space sim continues to impress with great graphics and compelling gameplay that's like a weird amalgamation of *EverQuest* and *Privateer* (but remember, it's not a space sim). Without a recognizable franchise name and with the specter of *Star Wars Galaxies* looming, *Earth and Beyond* has to fight a bit of an uphill battle, but this is a smart game made by smart people—so keep your eyes on this one. As we went to press, EA officially announced a ship date of September 17.

Finally, there's *Ultima Online*. It's amazing, but this September marks the five-year anniversary of the game that essentially paved the way for the entire massively multiplayer genre. EA showed us some concept drawings for the next expansion, *Age of Shadows*, which will be released in 2003. The big deal this time around is the addition of two character classes, as well as a tool that will let players design their own homes. CGW was notoriously hard on *UO* when it first shipped, but with the five-year anniversary approaching, we're going to take a close look at the groundbreaking title in a special feature next month.



Earth and Beyond is an addictive RPG that looks like a space sim.

CAMP EA HIGHLIGHTS



Medal of Honor Add-On

It's no small feat that *Medal of Honor* has stood out as one of the best first-person shooters this year. It's done that thanks to superior gameplay, and fans will now get to enjoy more of that gameplay in nine new single-player levels—taking you through historical events like the Battle of the Bulge and the fall of Berlin—as well as 12 new multiplayer levels, including one for Arnhem Bridge. There will be new multiplayer modes and new weapons to go along with new skins of British and Russian soldiers.

Madden Football 2003

EA Sports recognizes that the console versions of *Madden* have been far better than the PC counterparts for a couple of seasons now. Developers will try to lend the PC version of *Madden 2003* some parity by adding improved graphics, more realistic animations, better control, and a generally more polished appearance, especially in the Franchise mode—something of key importance to simulation freaks. A new suite of online gaming options should also help to make the PC version the one to buy this year.



NASCAR Thunder 2003

After having it on blocks the last couple of years, EA is getting ready to roll out a new and improved *NASCAR Thunder*. It's going to be big: you can race in 43-car fields on all 23 Winston Cup tracks, racing against AI versions of more than 60 NASCAR drivers. A new engine will deliver a much greater sense of realism and more accurate damage modeling. New special effects include flying car fragments, sparks, and track debris that can actually damage your car. Geared for the hardcore, though even newbies will be able to ramp up thanks to a host of driver assists.



Gandalf has a word with Frodo about shaving his feet.

HANDS ON

The Lord of the Rings

The Tolkien adventure we've all been craving or just another game with Orcs and Fairies? **By John Houlihan**

It's based on the book trilogy, not the movie, so there's no virtual Liv Tyler (sigh).

The Lord of the Rings is the great granddaddy of them all—you can blame it for every tree-hugging Elf, surly Dwarf, and mysterious wizard who's ever stalked an RPG. It's surprising that there've been so few decent LOTR games, but with Peter Jackson's spectacular trilogy reviving interest at the movies, you can prepare for a whole wave of Tolkien-inspired titles.

Unfortunately, the only one that's coming out on the PC this fall is LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring, from Seattle-based Surreal Software. Although FOTR would seem like a prime candidate for the full RPG treatment, Surreal has instead opted for an action-oriented, third-person adventure—which isn't such a shock given their Drakan heritage. You'll play as three members from the Fellowship, each of whom has his

own distinctive style: Frodo's skills make him a natural for stealth but he's balanced by the power and burden of the ring; Aragorn is a full-on brawler armed with a bow and the mighty Anduril; while Gandalf is a finesse fighter, wielding Glamdring and five devastating spell attacks to smite the Orcish hordes.

Tempted by the power of the one true ring? Sure, but every time Frodo uses it, he steadily loses purity, which will attract the attention of the ring wraiths and eventually cause him to succumb to the dark power. And there's more than enough to worry about from some of Middle Earth's deadliest creatures, with the watcher in the water, the giant cave troll from Moria, and the fiery Balrog providing some spectacular boss fights.

EA has snapped up the official movie license, so Surreal's Fellowship is based on a book license from Tolkien Estates, which means there's no virtual Liv Tyler (sigh). But it means they can be more authentic and explore characters like Tom Bombadil and locations like the Trollshaws and the Wight's Barrow, which the film didn't quite reach. And, of course, because EA didn't bother to develop their LOTR game for PC players, their game can go to Mordor for all we care.

The Fellowship of the Ring will take the first steps in its epic journey toward Barad-Dûr this fall.



Boromir challenges you, "Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough."

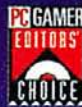


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Doom III will take advantage of ATI's new Radeon cards.

HARDWARE

Radeon Dethrones GeForce4

New graphics cards from ATI outperform Nvidia's fastest **By Jason Brown and William O'Neal**

Since E3, ATI has been claiming superiority in the graphics card market.

Nvidia has been kicking ass in the graphics card market for so long that it took us by surprise when ATI announced new cards that are faster than those using Nvidia chips. According to preliminary reports from Ziff Davis's ExtremeTech.com, the top-of-the-line Radeon 9700 Pro bested Nvidia's flagship, the GeForce4 Ti 4600, at everything from 3DMark2001 SE Pro to a suite of common games. The Radeon 9700 Pro will retail for \$399, the same price as the best GeForce4.

Since E3, ATI has been claiming superiority in the graphics card market. When id Software showed *Doom III* on a machine using a Radeon prototype, ATI said their card was the only one capable of running the game smoothly. However, *Doom III* creator John Carmack says, "*Doom III* is designed around what was made possible on the original GeForce and reaches an optimal implementation on the (Nvidia) NV30."

The new Radeons come in different configurations: some sold by ATI, some licensed to third-party card makers, and some made expressly for system builders. ATI's 9700 comes with 128MB of RAM; the 9000 ships with 64MB. Both boards will have a faster version called the "Pro,"



which will have a higher clock speed.

The 9000 and 9000 Pro share the same abilities as the 9700 and use much of the same architecture. The 9000 cards roughly match Nvidia's GeForce4 and GeForce3 line of cards in their DirectX 8.1 support and abilities, but the 9700 takes the lead and is the first to incorporate the advances of DirectX 9.0.

ATI appears to be leading the pack for now—at least until Nvidia releases its much-anticipated NV30, but that may not be for several months. Stay tuned to see which card will come out on top and for our reviews of the new Radeons as soon as we receive shipping versions. All should be available by the time you read this.

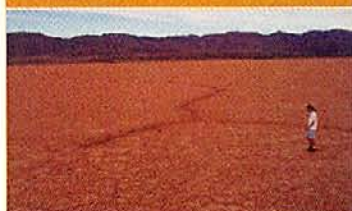
THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD MORE COMIC BOOK GAMES?

The CGW Super Dorks are frothing at the mouth over two rumors currently floating around regarding

comic book games with both Marvel and DC superheroes. The first is that Irrational may be working on a *Freedom Force* game with DC characters. The second is that Sony Online, maker of *EverQuest*, is negotiating with Marvel to make an MMORPG based on the Marvel universe. Please, mommy, let it be true!



THE BAD SUMMER DROUGHT

It seems like it's feast or famine with PC gaming. A few months ago, we were besieged by good games. Now, we're on the second month in a row of a fairly weak group of games (just check out our reviews lineup for proof). The upside is that now we can turn off our computers and pay attention to our friends and families instead. Just kidding.



THE UGLY TRIBES FRANCHISE SLIDE

At one time we actually thought

Sierra's *Tribes* franchise had the potential to own online gaming. But after the promising first game, things have just steadily gone to hell. *Tribes 2* we already know was a buggy nightmare, but now word is that the latest patches from GarageGames have made the game even worse. Plus, Sierra announced the cancellation of *Tribes: Fast Attack*, a port of the single-player PS2 game. Here's hoping they get this thing back together again.

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HANDS ON

Dragon's Lair 3D

Playing the new *Dragon's Lair* reveals something bigger than Daphne's oversized D-pads **By Jason Babler**

When film companies make sequels to hit movies, they often fail. The originality of *Batman* was completely and utterly absent in *Batman & Robin*. Instead of amping up the story, they amped up silly action sequences and the pecs on George Clooney's suit. Apparently, Dragonstone Software is following the same approach: They've made sure that Princess Daphne's nipples are prominently poking through her lingerie in the opening sequence, but they've forgotten to expand on the gameplay concepts that made the original unique.

Daphne's protuberances also point up a major contradiction within the game. Her front-and-center D-pads would suggest *Dragon's Lair 3D* is for adults, which makes sense because the majority

of gamers drawn to this game are going to be nostalgic old-timers who blew countless quarters at arcades playing *Dragon's Lair* in their youth. So if *Dragon's Lair 3D* isn't a kid's game, why does it play like one?

Jumping, leaping, and swinging my way through the first few levels of the beta only confirmed my fears: this game could be a huge disappointment. Dragonstone has ably turned its signature franchise into a 3D adventure with cartoonish cel-shaded characters and monsters running around in realistic, richly detailed environments, but at the expense of the nerdy, tongue-in-cheek knight humor and interesting scenes. Why is there nothing but simplistic combat and jumping puzzles? With all the rope swinging, plank hopping, and

abyss jumping, I don't see much for adults to get into. Controls seem great at first, but jumping on ropes practically ensures your death and thus the infamous, annoying, repetitive death cut-scene. Hopefully the complete game will allow quick saves wherever you want and not at the beginning of long jumping sequences or repetitive cut-scenes.

The bottom line is that right now, months before its release, *Dragon's Lair 3D* seems to have whiffed on an opportunity to enrich the original game. I really hope the full version has something that will overcome these tired gimmicks. If it doesn't, and if the game doesn't decide which audience it's supposed to appeal to, then ironically this may be the game that puts Dirk the Daring in the greatest peril of all.

DESIGNER BEAT

Raves and faves of the game designers **By Mark Asher**



CHARLES MOYLAN

Battlefront.com (Combat Mission)

NOW PLAYING: I'm too busy making games to play any right now. But when I have some time, I want to play *Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin* of course, and then check out the latest *Front Office Football*, then conquer Europe in *Strategic Command*.

LISTENING TO: Beck, Cornershop, Kristin Hersh.

READING: *Game Programming Gems 2*. Scary, I know, but this is pleasure reading for me!



LENNART SAS

Triumph Studios (Age of Wonders II)

NOW PLAYING: *WarCraft III* and *Ico* (PS2). I'm no big console fan, but *Ico* is one of those rare games with a unique charm that is fun at the same time.

LISTENING TO: Porcupine Tree—British progressive music with a pinch of Pink Floyd. Combines beautifully written songs with modern electronica and sometimes metal influences.

READING: *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*—very inspiring. In fiction I just picked up the last volume of Tad Williams's *Otherland* series.



BILL ROPER

Blizzard Entertainment (WarCraft III)

NOW PLAYING: A quick trip around the home and office reveals for PC: *WarCraft III/Dark Age of Camelot/Neverwinter Nights*; console: *Grand Theft Auto III*; tabletop: *Carcassonne*.

LISTENING TO: The three CDs currently in the changer are *Stunt* (Bare Naked Ladies), *Lager Than Life* (The Poxo Boggards), and *Giant Steps* (John Coltrane).

READING: I usually have more than one book in progress—the latest include *The Stand*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *The Operator*.



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DISCOVERINGGAMES

DISCOVERING GAMES

A WORD ABOUT SUPERHEROES

#9

PART TWO



by Scott McCloud



The *Spider-Man* game takes its hero very *seriously* and conveys the *thrill* and *drama* of personal power *effectively* --



-- while the wickedly *satirical* characters of *Freedom Force* offer their *power fantasies* with *tongue* firmly planted in *cheek*.



Freedom Force's *superhero send-up* is a throwback to the *comic book camp* of the '60s and '70s -- a time when comics were seen as nothing more than the *village idiot* of *pop culture*.



Nevertheless, the *designers* at Irrational Games show a great *knowledge of* and *affection for* their *Lee-Kirby era* comic book *source material*.



Spider-Man, on the other hand, takes both the movie *and* the comic books as mere *springboards* to explore the potential of such *power fantasies* in a *new medium*.



For *comics readers*, superheroes have long offered a special kind of *escape* -- a chance to rise *above* it all. The *Spider-Man* game does this both *literally* and *figuratively* with great *skill* and considerable *style*.

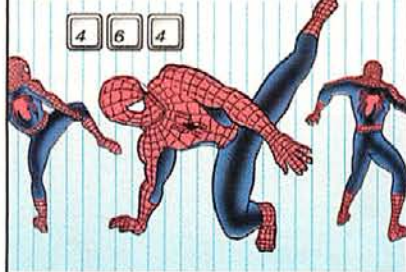
Spider-Man's *semi-first-person orientation* helps boost the sensation of true "*role-playing*" in the more *literal* sense.



Whereas, the omniscient, *bird's-eye view* of Freedom Force's RPG-style game play discourages an *emotional connection* to any one *character*.



There's also an *intuitive quality* to Spider-Man's *fighting game style* keyboard controls which, with *practice* --



-- can seem as *automatic* as our own *motor impulses*, leading to a sense of *personal participation* more than F.F.'s *menu-based* actions.



On the other hand, Freedom Force's extensive *customization* and *avatar choices* offer the kind of *control* and sense of *free will* that would be *prerequisite* of the *perfect* power fantasy.



Freedom Force also more fully explores the *variety* of possible superpowers...

AARGH!
CURSE YOU,
FREEDOM-
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...though it may be another *generation* or two of *designs* and *input devices* before the *full spectrum* of superpowers becomes *available*.



In some ways, the very presence of *cut-scenes* and *storylines* are a necessary *infringement* of the whole *idea* of the power fantasy.



After all, what could be more *emasculating* than to have someone else *writing your life* for you?



In this respect, it's really the *shooters* and games like *Grand Theft Auto* that have best captured the *boundless territory* of the *power fantasy* with their "*no rules*" game play.



But there's a special *direct appeal* to power that only *superheroes* can deliver, and with two such *well-done games* on the shelves, the genre is bound to *grow*.



Now let's hope the *game market* doesn't let them grow *out of control*. Comics already made that mistake *once* and we've been *paying for it* ever since!



BAD TRENDS

Premature Strike

Wal-Mart shoppers discover their "Special Version" of *Strike Fighters* wasn't quite finished **By Jeff Lackey**

Gamers who bought Strategy First's *WWII Online* upon its release may have a sense of déjà vu.

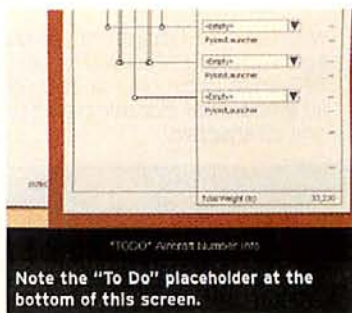


The special version of *Strike Fighters* comes with special features, such as this block of black tiles in the middle of the ocean.

Strike Fighters: Project 1 showed up in Wal-Mart in late July, much to the surprise of the game's development team and beta testers. When flight simmers posted that they'd purchased the long-awaited '60s-era sim, beta testers said the game was far from being finished. The game's program developer, Tsuyoshi Kawahito, seemed to confirm that by writing in an online post: "We believe we still have anywhere from two weeks to two months left to go on this project...All of us at [developer] Third Wire were extremely saddened to have to see it go out this way...We sincerely apologize for having released this in such an early state."

For its part, Strategy First claimed the game was in fact finished and that the decision to release it was a joint one made by publisher and developer. According to a company spokesperson: "The release that you are discussing is a limited release to one specific retailer [Wal-Mart] and is not a beta copy, as some have insinuated....The game is in fact playable. However, we understand that there are some gameplay issues, and we are addressing them in a patch that will be released shortly...If people do not want to download the patch, Strategy First will be more than willing to send them the patch on CD."

We've played the "special version"—



Note the "To Do" placeholder at the bottom of this screen.

many commands and features don't work, "To Do" reminder placeholders are visible, graphic anomalies abound, and crashes are frequent. As the developer and testers stated, the game is unfinished.

So why did Strategy First release an unfinished game? Officially, they're reluctant to say. Privately, they say they had little choice but to release the game to meet a critical deadline necessary to get onto Wal-Mart shelves. Sources unrelated to Strategy First or Third Wire say that Wal-Mart carries new titles (other than "hot" titles) only at certain times during the year; miss your deadline and Wal-Mart won't shelve your product. Whatever the reason, gamers who purchase the Wal-Mart version of *Strike Fighters: Project 1* are paying \$40 for an incomplete product.

Those who bought Strategy First's *WWII Online* upon its initial (and very buggy) release may get a sense of déjà vu from this. But the real culprit here appears to be the power of the nation's largest retailer and not negligence on the part of the publisher. Regardless, for the sake of consumers, developers, and retailers, we hope that big retailers reconsider such heavy-handed policies.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins **By Robert Coffey**

We're not the sort of people to say that spending lots of real money on intangible things of imaginary value (Hello, Enron! Hiya, WorldCom!) isn't a wise life plan, we're just saying *Magic: The Gathering Online* wastes your money and makes potty in your pillowcase while you're away at work. Might we suggest the following alternatives?



Homeworld: Cataclysm \$11



Star Trek: Elite Force \$14



EverQuest* \$5



Undying \$14



Myth II \$10



Unreal (jewel case version) \$5



Competitive Magic Online Deck \$59



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LIST-O-RAMA

Top 10 Role-Playing Games

CGW's favorite dress-up pixie-dust games of all time **By the CGW Editors**

READER POLL

What's your favorite RPG?

- 1 Diablo
- 2 The Sims
- 3 Morrowind
- 4 Baldur's Gate II
- 5 Neverwinter Nights
- 6 Fallout
- 7 Planescape: Torment
- 8 System Shock 2
- 9 Ultima IV
- 10 Betrayal at Krondor

SOURCE: GAMERS.COM

Another month, another internal CGW poll, another opportunity for genetically-predisposed-to-irritate reviews editor Robert Coffey to toss a monkey wrench in the works. This month, Mr. Ass of Dumb tried to nominate *The Sims* by comparing it to the free-form, make-your-own-adventure experience of *Morrowind*. Although he got a few sympathetic nods, in the end no one voted for *The Sims* anyway.

However, when we included *The Sims* in the online voting, it rocketed to the No. 2 spot. Knowing our readers, you might have a bone or two to pick with all of this. Feel free to rip Robert a new one at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.



1 Fallout

Instead of elves, hippogriffs, and wands, our No. 1 RPG served up radioactive heaps of supermutants, drug addiction, a quest about crop rotation, and some of the most brutal gun-blasting combat of any game, any genre.

2 Baldur's Gate II

Simply the definitive AD&D game of all time, brilliantly blending character, an epic story, and tactically rich combat.

3 System Shock 2

So what if *System Shock 2* grabbed the No. 4 spot of our Top 10 first-person shooters last month? You still create and play as a noncombat character. The scariest game we ever played, *System Shock 2* is also the game to knock most frequently on the CGW Hall of Fame door without getting in.

4 Betrayal at Krondor

When you talk about great stories in RPGs, you have to talk about *Krondor*. Based on the popular series of Raymond Feist novels, *Krondor* created an absorbing, gritty fantasy world all its own, without crutch standbys like Orcs and hobgoblins.

5 Might and Magic: World of Xeen

The undisputed apex of John Van Caneghem's outstanding fantasy RPG series, *World of Xeen* was also one of the most uniquely structured RPGs ever, encompassing both *Might and Magic IV* and *V* with a "crossover" quest that linked the two together. A charming, goofy masterwork.

6 Ultima VII

It introduced the most infamous RPG villain of all, the Guardian, but *Ultima VII* was also the pinnacle of all that made *Ultima* great. Absolute freedom, a "living world," bread baking, murder (featuring a corpse strung up on a barn wall), and a cult, *Ultima VII* was the last of the great *Ultimas*.

7 Dungeon Master

This real-time hack 'n' slash dungeon crawl was a revelation when it came out more than a decade ago. Its graphics and sound were amazing in its day, and *Dungeon Master's* Interactive, seemingly living game-world set a standard that other games would forever fall short of recreating.

8 Ultima IV

Considered one of the best games

ever, this *Ultima* was noteworthy for introducing morality. It was a game in which you had to weigh the morality of your actions and figure out how to be Virtuous, Just, or Compassionate. And what other game ends not by slaying a Large Lord of Beastes, but by reading a book?!

9 Diablo

Without a doubt, *Diablo* was the most addictive RPG ever. Stripping role-playing to its bare essentials, this classic had gamers hacking Undead ass within three minutes of loading the game. Sure, you could plow through it in one marathon session, but the genius of this game compelled you to immediately start over again as a new character or at a higher difficulty level or online. We couldn't get enough.

10 Morrowind

Finally fulfilling the promise of the entire *Elder Scrolls* series, *Morrowind* gave gamers a breathtakingly huge gameworld and let them loose in it to do as they wanted. No RPG has come close to *Morrowind* in offering players such flexibility and freedom in play and character creation. Quite possibly the last RPG you'll ever need.





Here's what a buffed-up, multiclassed minotaur (right) looks like compared to a base-level one (left).

MMORPG FYI

Less Dorky Role-Playing

Multiclassing in *Shadowbane* makes characters unique

By Thierry Nguyen

Long the realm of hardcore D&D dorks, *Shadowbane* will be the first massively multiplayer online RPG to offer multiclassing. Rather than follow a strict template like other MMORPGs, in which your character's skills are largely predetermined, *Shadowbane* lets you cross skills and classes so your character can become truly unique among the hordes.

After picking a base character class (fighter, rogue, mage, or healer) at the start of the game, players have the chance to pick a special promotion class upon reaching Level 10. After

this, the player can pick a new discipline or subclass every 10 levels; examples include archery, blademastery, wyrmslayer, and stormlord. Hence, you can end up with wizards who can actually fight, fighters who can sneak up on you, or thieves who can cast spells.

Multiclassing also makes player-versus-player more interesting, as you can't simply glance at other players and immediately know all of their abilities; they might have some tricks up their sleeve. Now Jeff can finally combine lute-playing, pansiness, sneakiness, and general dorkitude into one hybrid character.

Civ: The Board Game

By Ken Brown

Most computer gamers got into gaming so they didn't have to deal with people, so why is *Civilization* being converted into a board game? Because there are a helluva lot of board games sold every year, and, frankly, the world could use an upgrade from *Monopoly* and *Risk*.

As befits the classic PC game, Eagle Games has put a lot of time and design attention into *Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame*. The game features 884 miniature plastic pieces representing armies, navies, settlers, leaders, and cities from four historical periods: ancient, medieval, gunpowder, and modern. The board is big—at 46 by 36 inches—and colorful, and the game comes with more than 100 cards depicting technological advances and Wonders of the World. Perhaps best of all, you can play it three ways (basic, standard, or advanced), which should please everyone from newbies to hardcore board gamers (most of whom do not look at all like Ferengis).

The game should be in stores September 6,



available for \$49.95 from large retailers or \$59.95 from specialty stores. Eagle Games is a relative newcomer to the board game scene, but the company's other games have been well received, particularly *War! Age of Imperialism*, which board gaming critics have hailed as an instant classic. For more information, go to www.eaglegames.net.

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Icewind Dale II	Interplay	8/29/02
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	9/5/02
Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom	Sierra	9/13/02
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	9/15/02
Sniper	Infogrames	9/19/02
Rayman Arena	Eidos	9/26/02
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	9/27/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	10/4/02
Counterstrike: Condition Zero	Sierra	10/16/02
G.I. Combat: Episode I, Battle of Normandy	Strategy First	10/18/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	10/29/02
Unreal II - The Awakening	Infogrames	11/21/02

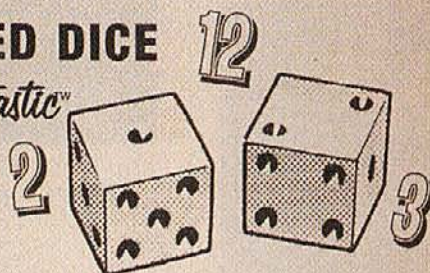
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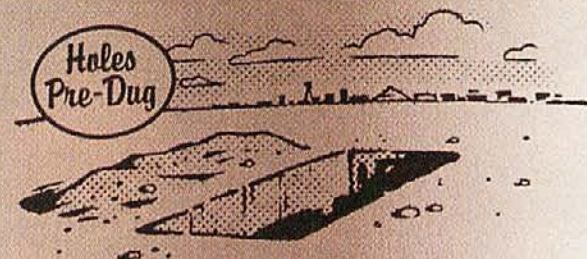
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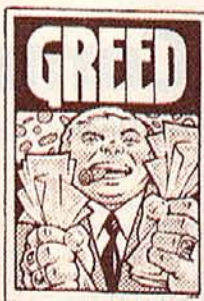
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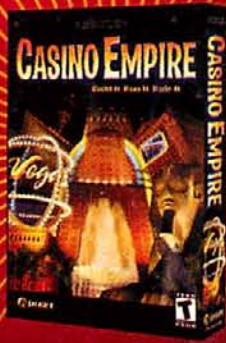
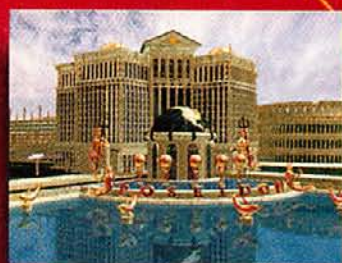
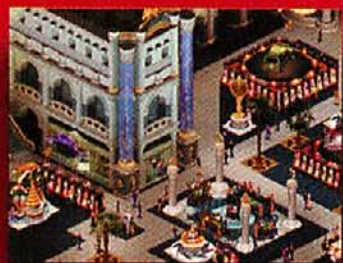
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Gamers can now match wits with the dreaded Russian T-34.



The new infantry models look pretty good up close—a big improvement over the original.



A heavy German assault gun lies in wait.

PREVIEW

Dress Warmly, Comrade

Wargamers look to the eastern front for *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin*

By Bruce Geryk

It was almost cruel the way Battlefront released *Combat Mission*: all it did was leave wargamers craving more. That addiction is about to be fed, with the upcoming *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin*, which just proves that it's not really World War II until the Russians show up.

As the product of almost two years of development, though, *CMBB* is far more than just *Combat Mission* with Russian uniforms. The system has been refined in so many ways that it would almost take a separate manual to detail the changes. Of note: Battlefront reworked the machine gun system to more accurately portray

more realistic infantry animations.

To cope with the huge number of new vehicle models required, Battlefront.com turned to its fanatical user base, which responded enthusiastically. The result is that more than 50 modelers have credits in *CMBB*. Some submissions were used as is, while others were combined to take

It's not really World War II until the Russians show up.

CMBB will add everything necessary to fight it out on the snowy steppes of Russia or at Stalingrad or even in Finland. Sixty stand-alone scenarios and 10 operations will cover every aspect of the fighting, from the initial invasion through the enormous tank battles at Kursk to the last, bitter, inevitable struggle for ruined Berlin.

things like suppressive fire, they revamped the armor penetration algorithms to include even more data, and they made historically specific adjustments for such things as the problems peculiar to Russian artillery early in the war.

CMBB also boasts several graphical improvements, including higher resolutions, more detailed textures, and

advantage of the best features of each.

CMBB will be available by September 20 for PC and Macintosh. In the United States, the game will be available only online, but PC gamers in western Europe will be able to find it in retail stores thanks to German publisher CDV Software. All Macintosh users will have to order online.

REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
Age of Wonders II	A	A	A+	A-	A-	A-	A-
Gore	F	D+	C	C	B+	C	C+
Neverwinter Nights	A	A+	A+	A	A	A	A
Soldier of Fortune II	C-	B-	B+	B+	A-	A	B+
Sum of All Fears	C-	B-	B-	B-	A-	C+	B-
WarCraft III	B+	A	B+	A	A	A	A

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Light effects for spells liven up the stodgy but detailed dungeon graphics.

PRELIMINARY PREVIEW

Divine Divinity

Enjoyable enjoyment from Germanic Germany **By Robert Coffey**

Somewhere in Larian Studios there must be a whiteboard with several titles crossed out: *Swords & Swords*, *Glorious Glory*, *The Adventuring Adventurer's Adventurous Adventure*, and *Daikatana II*. Seriously, how awful did the other choices have to be to make the designers of *Divine Divinity* go, "Oh yeah, baby, that's the one! That one is a winner!"? Thankfully, some hands-on time with this game revealed that while Larian Studios may need a remedial course in game titles, they have a better handle on the whole game design side of things.

This RPG isn't going to break any new ground—*Divine Divinity* looks like a stodgier *Diablo*, with the same isometric view and loads of monsters that need killing. Although the art has a stiffer, old-school feel to it than the Blizzard game, the amount of detail in the settings creates a rich and unique sense of place. At first it appears you have just three character classes from

which to choose, but the truth is you have something more on the order of a *Morrowind* scale of choices: every time my fledgling fighter leveled up, I could pick new skills from across all classes to augment him. As there are 96 skills with five levels each, you have enormous leeway in creating exactly the character you want. Throw in that there are often multiple solutions to various quests and problems, à la *Baldur's Gate II*, and the replayability of the game should be very high.

I was sucked in by the depth of character development and the beginnings of what seemed like a good storyline. There's still a fair amount of work to be done, though, prior to the game's fall release. It could benefit from stealing the livelier battle animation from *Diablo II* as well as a "locate treasure" hotkey. But if Larian pays as much attention to the gameplay as they have to the levels, we might one day see *Divine Divinity II: The Sequel: Act Two*.

AVP, Wolfenstein Head to Big Screen

By Mark Asher

After 10 years, 20th Century Fox is finally getting smart and making a movie based on *Aliens Versus Predator*. Paul W.S. Anderson, the film's writer and director, is no stranger to games and movies. He directed *Resident Evil* and is set to make *Resident Evil 2: Nemesis* as well. He also directed *Soldier*, *Event Horizon*, and *Mortal Kombat*, perhaps the best of the old bad game movies.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein is also getting the big screen treatment from Columbia. The movie will follow an Army ranger who has to derail Gestapo experiments conducted in Castle Wolfenstein.

Some long-rumored movies, like *Doom* and *Duke Nukem*, are in the same freezer as Ted Williams's head. Don't expect them soon. Hotter prospects include *Grand Theft Auto* and *Max Payne*. And like a *Wolfenstein* zombie that won't stay dead, *Wing Commander* may be getting some more screen time—this time as a Canadian TV series that's on a budget, we're guessing, of maple syrup and bacon.



GET A LIFE

Isn't it about time?



Flaming Lips

The Flaming Lips have been making some of the most gloriously weird psychedelic rock for years, but with 1999's *The Soft Bulletin*, the band created a sonic masterpiece. Their new *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* is another trippy chunk of art-damaged bubble-gum. It's ELO meets the Butthole Surfers, for smart people.



Wedded "Bliss"

Now that our managing editor Dana Jongeward has succumbed, we suddenly have

way more wed than unwed people on staff. God forbid we suffer alone. Get out there and meet someone—we've found people on death row are generally eager to get hitched, and you don't have to live with them. It's a win-win!



Fraud

Mix David Sedaris with Homer Simpson and you get David Rakoff's *Fraud*, a hilariously insightful collec-

tion of essays on subjects such as posing in a department store window as Freud, attending spiritual retreats led by Steven Seagal, and even tracking down a decade-old sperm donation. You'll laugh your geeky nerd glasses off.



Godzilla DVDs

When you need to tickle the lowbrow lobe, nothing beats five DVDs' worth

of monster mayhem. One package gets you *Godzilla: King of All Monsters*, the way-too-surreal *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, the whimsy-filled *Godzilla's Revenge*, the xenophobic *Terror of Mechagodzilla*, and even a decent non-Godzilla monster flick, *Rodan*.

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You'll still be challenged to build tidy, easy to defend castles in *Crusader*.

HANDS ON

Stronghold: Crusader

Firefly Studios works on building castles in the sand

By Robert Coffey

Last year, *Stronghold* captivated us with its appealing graphics, deep economy, and gameplay that was a cool mix of defensive strategy and castle design. We loved it. We're a little less certain about the sequel. But after some time spent playing the *Stronghold: Crusader* beta, we're giving designers Firefly Studios the benefit of a somewhat reserved doubt.

The one visual bright spot is the appearance of oases, which actually figure into gameplay. With water obviously at a premium, food producing buildings must be built on the oases. Whereas you could wall off a lot of your essential buildings in the first game, *Stronghold: Crusader* forces you to be a lot more active in guarding your resources. These oases will be huge points of contention in multiplayer.

After playing it for a while, we're going to give *Stronghold: Crusader* the benefit of a reserved doubt.

On the surface little has changed. You still build a castle and an entire medieval community from the ground up, planting and harvesting crops, refining raw materials, manufacturing goods, levying taxes, and so on. If anything, *Stronghold* fans are likely to be initially excited by all the new units and gameplay features and the shifting of the game into a more historically grounded experience, that of the Crusades of the 11th and 12th centuries.

I found myself drawn into the campaign but a little put off as well. The Arabian desert milieu is much less colorful than the green and pleasant lands of medieval Europe. The charming character animations remain, but overall graphics suffer against the rugged backdrop of unrelenting brown.

Firefly is pushing hard for a robust multiplayer, but I can't help wondering why. In light of the still-on-shelves *Age of Empires II* and the impending *Medieval: Total War*, do we really need another siege-focused medieval warfare game? *Crusader* seems to be playing against *Stronghold's* defense-focused strength. My skirmishes against the Crusader AI were interesting—the multiplayer here is slower and more economy focused than any competitor—but it didn't really pull me in. At least right now, the game isn't visceral enough for my taste.

Then again, this game has time before its early autumn release. I'm hoping that the single player keeps what made the first game so much fun and forgoes the full-tilt offensive.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Big Mods

Hope you have broadband, because the two mods I'm recommending this month are massive. I don't know which is more amazing; that the people responsible for these fantastic add-ons have enough time and devotion to create hundreds of megabytes worth of original content, or that they're willing to give them away for free.

Shadows Over Soubar for Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

www.teambg.net/soubar

Requires: Baldur's Gate II and the Throne of Bhaal expansion

Neverwinter Nights

may be getting all the attention now because its editing tools are allowing for all kinds of mods, but don't let that make you overlook one of the most ambitious *Baldur's Gate II* add-ons ever released. *Shadows Over Soubar* is more than 300MB worth of hundreds of new items and monsters for the game, along with tons of new areas to explore and quests to complete. The new character kit isn't really fun to play, but that's by design, and one of the new NPCs that uses the kit adds an entirely new dimension to *Soubar's* seamy underbelly.

As with all BG II mods this big, SOS has its share of bugs, but creator Charles Blisson releases a steady stream of patches at the official SOS Website. You also must start a new game for the mod to work. It's worth the effort, and if you don't have broadband, the add-on should be available on CD for a nominal charge by the time you read this.



Thievery for Unreal Tournament

www.thieveryut.com

After taunting us with screenshots and feature lists for a seeming eternity, the Thievery UT team

finally has released *Thievery*, a total conversion for *Unreal Tournament* that gives Thief fans the multiplayer action they've craved for years. The team did a great job of bringing all the elements of the Thief series into an entirely different engine—the game looks like a prettier version of Thief 2. Considering that they created all textures and sounds from scratch, that's pretty amazing.

Gameplay is just like Thief's. Players can creep to cut down on noise, and the light gem is fully implemented, making thieves invisible to guards when they remain motionless in a dark area. *Thievery* includes 11 maps, each with unique architectural styles. If you get sick of cowering in the corner, you can assume the role of a guard, bashing infiltrators' heads with a mace, shooting them with crossbows, or sticking them with your trusty sword. Just watch out for caltrops, flashbombs, and death from above while you're on patrol.



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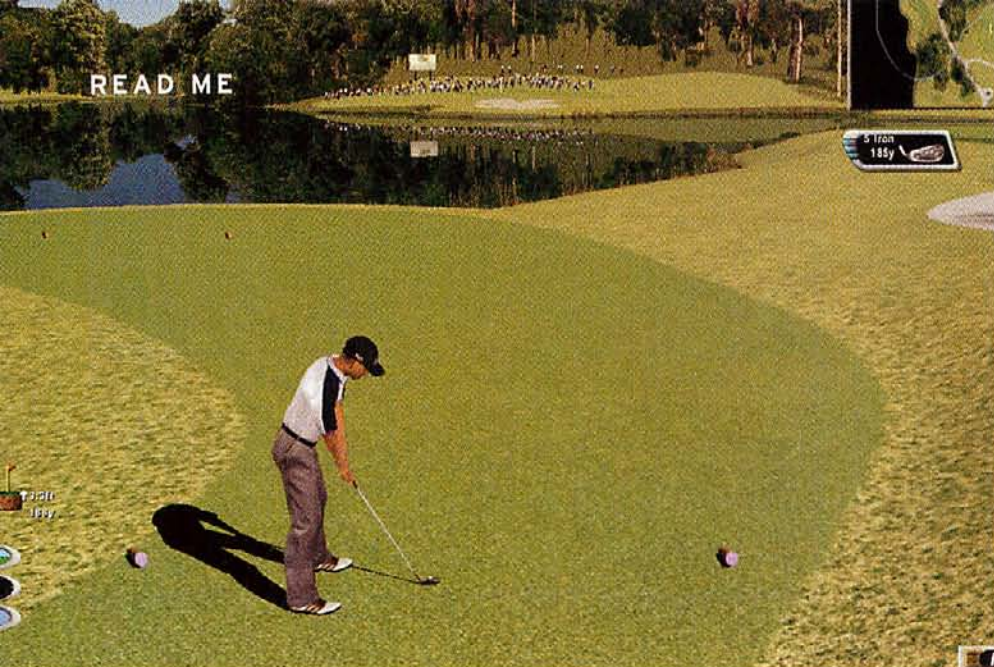
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HANDS ON

Links 2003

Caddyhacking comes of age **By John Marrin**

I get out on the links a few times a year, and if I stroll into the 19th hole for a cold one with a few good shots under my belt, I'm a happy duffer. Usually my ball is so deep in the woods, I think I'm deer huntin'. But *Links 2003* makes me feel like a PGA pro with some new features that virtual golf nuts will appreciate.

Links veterans will notice that the 2003 version has 3D golfer models with plenty of new animations. PGA pros Sergio Garcia, Jesper Parnevik, David

Toms, and Annika Sorenstam are showcased, but you can create a custom golfer to suit your style. Your player's muttering (the pro's own voices have been recorded) and their reactions, like kissing their club after a sweet shot, add a human touch to the game.

Links 2003 also includes some very sweet courses to play: Cabo del Sol, Gleneagles, Skeleton Coast Golf Club, Cambrian Ridge, and Kauri Cliffs are all included. The terrain is high-res with very detailed textures. Microsoft claims that the courses have been

mapped with GPS data and are extremely accurate. Well, they certainly are intimidating...and tough. But if you yearn for a different challenge, there's the full-featured Arnold Palmer Course Designer so you can design and share your fantasy course with other *Links* players online.

All I can say is that I played the beta of *Links 2003* a lot like I play golf in real life—meaning not very well. But I take some solace in the famous words of Ty Webb, “Be the ball.” Get ready to tee off this holiday season.

PREVIEW

The Art of Conquest

Empire Earth expansion takes gamers into space **By Tom Price**

Fans of *Empire Earth* are getting what they asked for: a brand-new epoch, as well as two complete single-player campaigns, each with a host of new units, buildings, powers, and calamities. The Space Age Epoch begins on your home world and then allows you to explore and conquer other planets. As you advance, you'll be able to build new units, including fighters and capital ships that let you travel through space.

The new single-player campaigns focus on specific moments in history. The first, set in ancient Rome, puts you into power as consul Gaius Marius, and later as Julius Caesar. You'll have new units to play with, such as Legionnaires, and the ability to conscribe regular citizens into the military.

The second campaign involves the Pacific theater of World War II. This one focuses more on combat:



SAS commandos can swim and plant charges, radio men can call in paratroopers, and flamethrowers can roast enemy units.

All of the game's original civs are also getting something new and unique, be it a unit, a building, or a special power. Get ready to start building new empires when *The Art of Conquest* ships this winter.

5. 10. 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

Five Years Ago, October 1997



The next time some half-wit starts expounding on the offensiveness of games, pistol-whip the bastard. And while you bludgeon him, show him how things are nowhere near as awful as five years ago. This issue featured a review of *Meat Puppet* (aka “the evil-baby killing game”), a *Take No Prisoners* ad in which some guy's shotgun-blasted organs are helpfully labeled, and a number of letters responding to our accurate assessment of *Shadow Warrior* as racist crap. Take that, Donahue, you strutting popinjay!



Ten Years Ago, October 1992

Every so often a reader asks about getting back issues and we respond,

“Are you insane?” Ten years ago we ran a two-page review of *Solitaire's Journey*, a friggin' solitaire game. OK, it was a good solitaire game, but still—did humankind really need a tidy treatise on the history of solitaire including the earliest 14th century references? Yikes. Maybe people want the old issues so they can read our cover story on great games like *X-Wing*. Yeah, that must be it.



Fifteen Years Ago, October 1987

“Remember Jim Zuber's classic *Millionaire* stock market

simulation?” Nah, we don't either, but we were confident 15 years ago that our readers did. Thumb through this issue and you'll feel every Braxton-Hicks and true contraction during the incredibly awkward birth of our hobby: games like *Nord and Bert Couldn't Make Head or Tail of It*, *Bop 'n' Rumble*, *Rings of Zilfin*, and of course *Quizam*. Suddenly, *Britney's Dance Beat* seems like digitized Dostoyevsky.

RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

The reign of *WarCraft* has begun



WarCraft III debuts where all Blizzard games do—at the top.



Will *Neverwinter* be evergreen?



The Sims don't want to return from their Vacation.

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	—	WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos (\$59, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
2	—	Neverwinter Nights (\$55, Infogrames)	★★★★★
3	1	The Sims: Vacation (\$29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
4	2	Grand Theft Auto III (\$49, Take 2 Interactive)	★★★★★
5	4	The Sims (\$41, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
6	8	Medal of Honor Allied Assault (\$45, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
7	—	WarCraft III: Collector's Edition (\$76, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
8	—	Backyard Baseball 2003 (\$19, Infogrames)	NR
9	3	Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (\$48, LucasArts)	★★★★★
10	6	Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix (\$43, Activision)	★★★★☆
11	14	Microsoft Zoo Tycoon (\$27, Microsoft)	★★★★☆
12	11	The Sims: Hot Date (\$28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
13	7	Dungeon Siege (\$43, Microsoft)	★★★★★
14	5	Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind (\$47, Bethesda Softworks)	★★★★★
15	16	Starcraft: Battle Chest (\$20, Vivendi Universal)	NR
16	9	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (\$28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
17	15	The Sims: Livin' Large (\$28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
18	—	Microsoft Zoo Tycoon: Dinosaur Digs (\$18, Microsoft)	★★★★☆
19	—	Rollercoaster Tycoon Gold (\$28, Infogrames)	NR
20	18	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (\$31, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★★

June retail sales results by NPD Intellect

NOTABLE QUOTE

"The only thing that could be more hostile to newbies than *Magic: The Gathering Online* is sending young convicts to prison without pants."
—Robert Coffey, CGW



CATE ARCHER
ISN'T LIKE
OTHER SPIES

PIPELINE

Who has the darts? By Rich Laporte

Can you believe it's almost fall? The holidays are rapidly approaching, when many publishers release their biggest titles. It's

also the time when we hear about games that just won't make it and have to slip until next year. Here's the latest as of August 1, but as

always, for up-to-the-minute news and updates, head on over to www.gonegold.com and see when games are shipping.



1 *Command & Conquer: Generals* is looking great, and Westwood is going to take a little more time to get it out to us. It's now slated for the first quarter of 2003, giving the developers plenty of time to streamline the new and improved RTS graphics engine. Although many of us would love to have the game this year, Westwood is known for holding onto a game and making sure it's polished before it goes out, so there's really no surprise here.



2 With *Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom*, Impressions takes their City Building series online for the first time with the help of Breakaway Games. The game is set in China, and players can control neighboring cities, form alliances with friends, trade goods, and, of course, invade each other. Those who like a more peaceful game can form alliances to work together on massive projects, such as the Grand Canal. *Emperor* is scheduled to take over this fall.



3 Not only does *Combat Flight Simulator 3* look spectacular (see this month's Loading), it's going to please everyone who found previous campaigns flat. Microsoft has added in some role-playing elements to your onscreen pilot, with stats that will affect your performance. Bombing skill and health will also play a part. With 18 flyable aircraft, cooperative multiplayer missions, and an incredible new graphics engine, this looks to be one of the best Microsoft has to offer.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
1503 A.D. The New World	EA	08/16/02
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	10/11/02
AVP 2: Primal Hunt	Sierra	08/14/02
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	04 2002
Battlefield 1942	EA	09/17/02
Call of Cthulhu	FishTank	08/15/02
Celtic Kings: Rage of War	Strategy First	08/20/02
City of Heroes	NCsoft	03 2002
Civilization III: Play the World	Infogrames	TBA
Combat Flight Simulator 3	Microsoft	03 2002
Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time	03 2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	01 2003
Conflict: Desert Storm	Sci	04 2002
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	08/15/02
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	10/18/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	04 2002
Divine Divinity	HIP	10/02/02
Doom III	Activision	TBA
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	03 2002
Duke Nukem Forever	GOD Games	Unknown
Earth and Beyond	EA	08/20/02
Emperor: Middle Kingdom	Sierra	09/11/02
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	Sony	TBA
EverQuest II	Sony	03 2003
Farscape: The Game	Simon/Schuster	08/30/02
FreeLancer	Microsoft	03 2002
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	08/05/02
Gothic II	JoWood	04 2002

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	08/27/02
Haegemonia	DreamCatcher	04 2002
Halo	Microsoft	Unknown
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	02 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	10/15/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	10/02/02
Hitman 2	Eidos	09/16/02
Homeworld 2	Sierra	TBA
Icewind Dale II	Interplay	08/28/02
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	09/11/02
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	03 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	01 2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	03 2002
Industry Giant II	JoWood	09/05/02
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA	04 2002
Links 2003	Microsoft	09/20/02
Lock On	Ubi Soft	09/20/02
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	TBA
Madden NFL 2003	EA Sports	08/20/02
Mafia	Take 2	09/05/02
Master of Orion III	Microprose	09/25/02
Medieval: Total War	EA	08/20/02
Moonbase Commander	Infogrames	08/14/02
NBA Live	EA Sports	03 2002
Need for Speed: Pursuit 2	EA	09/26/02
NHL	EA Sports	09/18/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Fox Interactive	TBA
O.R.B.	Strategy First	08/30/02
PlanetSide	Sony	04 2002
Praetorians	Eidos	03 2002
Prisoner of War	Codemasters	09/25/02
Pro Racer Driver	Codemasters	10/02/02

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Project Nomads	CDV	03 2002
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	03 2002
Real War: Rogue States	JoWood	09/11/02
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	02 2002
Rollercoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	03 2002
Season Ticket Football 2003	Infogrames	08/15/02
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	02 2002
SimCity 4	EA	04 2002
Sims Online	EA	03 2002
Sniper	Xicat	09/20/02
Sovereign	Sony	02 2002
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	04 2002
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual Entertainment	01 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	04 2002
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	03 2003
Stronghold: Crusader	Take 2	09/11/02
Sudden Strike 2	CDV	08/30/02
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	09/18/02
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	TBA
The Thing	Universal Interactive	08/21/02
Thief III	Eidos	04 2002
Tron 2.0	Monolith	TBA
Unreal II	Infogrames	01 2003
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	09/27/02
Virtual Spring Break	Eidos	08/21/02
WarBirds 3	Simon/Schuster	09/03/02
Warlords IV	SSG	03 2002
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	03 2002

■ NEW ■ UPDATE

**SHE'S SMART...
SHE'S SEXY...**

**AND SHE'S KNOCKING'EM DEAD
FROM INDIA TO A TRAILER PARK IN OHIO.**



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[HTTP://NOLF2.SIERRA.COM](http://nolf2.sierra.com)

MONOLITH



Blood
Violence

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- UGO

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Captain Sten might make a valuable addition to the team, wouldn't you say, Major?

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APRIL 17, 1944: 2330 HOURS

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CODEMASTERS.COM



GENIUS AT PLAY



**PC
CD
ROM**



Mild Violence

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APRIL 20, 1944: 1227 HOURS

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APRIL 20, 1944: 1607 HOURS

Escape to freedom to continue your mission, but beware—failure could change the outcome of the war.



WORLD WAR II
PRISONER OF WAR™

Escape is all in your mind.



Two American P-51 mustangs hunt ground units.



Hey buddy, need a ride to the front?



Although not heavily armed, Scouts have the ability to call in positions for airstrikes and artillery barrages.

BATTLEFIELD:

With 64-player games and 35 vehicles, *Battlefield* has multiplayer more

After two nosedives, one crash into the aircraft carrier's control tower, and one not-so-happy encounter with a forest, I was finally flying my F4U Corsair on my first bombing run. But much like the real-life pilots of World War II, I had no way of knowing exactly where my bombs would hit when I released them. I made a quick guess, taking into account my flight speed, angle, and height—and let the bombs fly!

But don't think *Battlefield: 1942* is a flight sim; that is only one small aspect. Due in early September, EA's new World War II multiplayer action game is a 64-player slugfest. The infantry I hit were really other players, not just AI scripts (though bots are also available). The tank I broadsided was being driven by a live person, with another gamer manning the machine gun. Even the offshore aircraft carrier I took off from was being controlled by one of my fellow



Not only can you jump into and drive vehicles, you can also take over weapons like machine gun nests and antiaircraft emplacements.

As do *GTA III* and even *Tribes*, *Battlefield: 1942* gives players the freedom to play the game any way they want to.

homo sapiens. In all, *Battlefield* lets players control 35 vehicles, including battleships, submarines, ground vehicles, and various airplanes. Or you can just grab a rifle and set out on foot. As do *GTA III* and even *Tribes*, *Battlefield* gives players the freedom to play the game any way they want to.

Tora, Tora, Tora

The maps I played were like huge, outdoor capture-the-flag maps, but with elements reminiscent of *Unreal Tournament*'s old Assault mode. Using Conquest mode, teams vie for control of key capture points, which double as vehicle and player respawn locations. When players are killed, they are kicked back to a menu that lets them choose which kind of soldier they want to be—Scout, Assault, Medic, Anti-tank, or Engineer (each has a different loadout or special ability)—and at which capture point they want to respawn. But respawning costs a ticket and it's subtracted from the team's total. The game is over when either all the tickets are used up or all

the points are captured. Standard team deathmatch and capture the flag are also available for those who are too chicken to try something new.

There will be 16 maps in all, drawn from famous World War II locations spanning Europe, the Pacific, and North Africa. You can be part of the U.S. forces duking it out mano-a-mano with the Japanese in a Pacific archipelago, with ships and aircraft playing a huge support role to the ground troops. Another map is set in a thick Eastern European forest where Russians confront the Germans with Jeeps, APCs, and truck-mounted rocket-launchers.

Play Well With Others

In one match I played, I was driving a tank up to an enemy-held capture point running down unlucky enemy infantry and anything else in my way. In my carelessness, I drove straight into a tank trap, which ground me to a halt. While I struggled to move, an enemy Scout relayed my position to a nearby battleship. I was a sitting duck.



Tanks, planes, ships—any vehicle you need to get the job done is at your disposal.

After one miss I was vaporized by the ship's main battery, thanks to the Scout who used his special ability, viewing with binoculars, to let his teammate manning the ship nail me with pinpoint accuracy. Even with the wide range of vehicles and weapons and class-based special abilities, game balance is maintained; with good cooperation a well-coordinated team can make short work of its enemies.

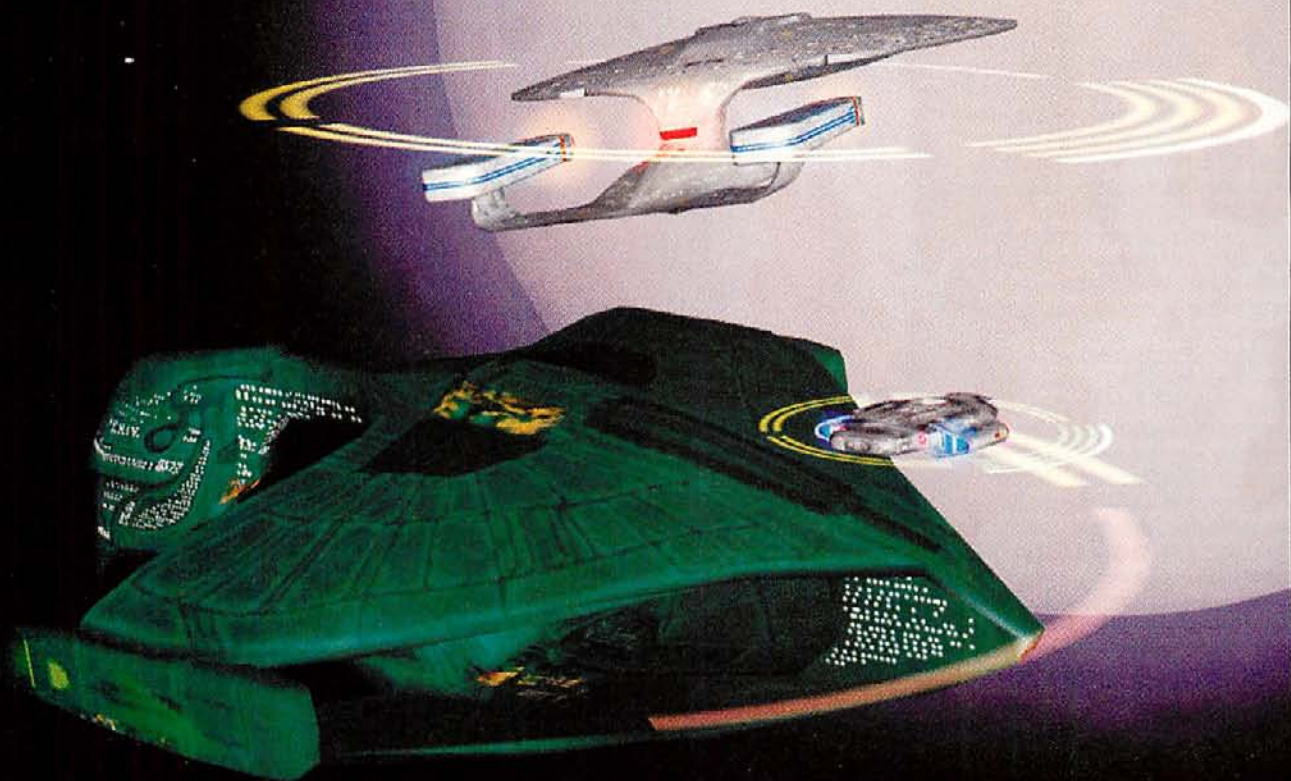
Battlefield: 1942 is all about interaction and teamwork, with each person a small piece of a huge, ever-changing strategy. Multiplayer games that require this much coordination between gamers are rare; ones that are as fun as *Battlefield: 1942* are even rarer.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
GENRE: Action
URL: www.battlefield1942.com
RELEASE DATE: September 2002

1942

massive than some MMOs By Jason Brown



Note the difference in scale between the gigantic Romulan warbird and the small Defiant-class ship.



The revamped interface is much less intimidating.

OFFICERS				AVAILABLE				Star Base	
OFFICER	STATION	WORTH	SKILL	OFFICER	STATION	WORTH	SKILL		
KAGAN	ENGINEER	45		MAX-TARR	Y1 HELM	100	Trained		
KALLEN	SECURITY	33		JOHN	Y1A HELM	100	Trained		
KUMAS	HELM	44		KAR WOODMAN	Y1B HELM	100	Trained		
AMPHIB	SCIENCE	30		GODDASH	Y2 MEDICAL	100	Trained		
K'THORN	TACTICAL	33		KALLEN	Y2A SCIENCE	100	Trained		
K'PEN	MEDICAL	57		WUDEL	Y2B MEDICAL	100	Trained		
				WUDEL	Y2C MEDICAL	100	Trained		
				KAGAN	Y2 SCIENCE	100	Trained		

OFFICER PROFILE				OFFICER PROFILE				
SKILL	BONUS	SKILL	BONUS	SKILL	BONUS	SKILL	BONUS	
KAGAN	TARGETING	0%	GODDASH	TARGETING	+10%	KAGAN	TARGETING	+10%
INTELLIGENCE	0%	WEAPON ENHANCEMENT	+10%	INTELLIGENCE	14	WEAPON ENHANCEMENT	+10%	
TOUGHNESS	0%	SUB SYSTEM TARGETING	+10%	TOUGHNESS	14	SUB SYSTEM TARGETING	+10%	
HEALTH	0%	PLUGGING	+10%	HEALTH	14	PLUGGING	+10%	
WORTH	0%	LEADIC HANDSHIPS	+10%	WORTH	14	LEADIC HANDSHIPS	+10%	
		EMERGENCY PROCEDURES	+10%			EMERGENCY PROCEDURES	+10%	
		IN TRAINING				IN TRAINING		
		DEFENSIVE PLANNING	0%			DEFENSIVE PLANNING	0%	
		COUNTY PROGRESS	0%			COUNTY PROGRESS	0%	
		SCANNER TECHNOLOGY	0%			SCANNER TECHNOLOGY	0%	
		CLARK COUNTERMEASURES	0%			CLARK COUNTERMEASURES	0%	
		FIND WEAPONS	0%			FIND WEAPONS	0%	
		TRANSFER EFFICIENCY	+10%			TRANSFER EFFICIENCY	+10%	
		REPAIR	+10%			REPAIR	+10%	
		SLURRY AND RECHARGE	0%			SLURRY AND RECHARGE	0%	
		FIND AND	0%			FIND AND	0%	
		FINISH PROGRAM	0%			FINISH PROGRAM	0%	

Recruiting experienced officers can enhance your combat capabilities and add new abilities such as subsystem targeting and high-energy turns.

STAR TREK STARF

The next generation of *Starfleet Command* games By Denny Atkin

Hardcore *Star Trek* fans—call us “Trekkies,” “Trekks,” or “those guys still living in their parents’ basements”—will tell you that the even-numbered *Trek* films are the best. With *Star Trek Starfleet Command III*, developer Taldren is about to prove that the “odd-number curse” doesn’t apply to *Star Trek* games. This sequel has made some significant jumps: from original publisher Interplay to Activision and from the original series era to *The Next Generation* time period. Yet players of earlier games in the series will feel right at home. *SFC III* boasts a familiar interface, but the underlying game has undergone a complete refit to be more accessible, immersive, customizable, and reliable.

Strange New Worlds

The game takes place in the *TNG* era, specifically between the last episode of *Voyager* and the upcoming *Star Trek: Nemesis* film. The three campaigns focus on the Klingons, Romulans, and Federation. (In Skirmish and Conquest modes, the Borg are playable as well.) The secondary races from earlier *SFC* games, such as the Hydrans, Lyrans,

more logical, less intimidating layout. There are some new systems as well. Chief among these is warp drive, very useful for evasion and hit-and-run torpedo attacks. At impulse speeds, you can now travel in reverse, which makes getting a bead on enemy ships in close-quarters combat much easier. A subtle change in weapons control significantly enhances gameplay: as long as a weapon has some power going to it, you can still fire it, albeit at a weaker strength. You spend a lot less time evading while you wait for phasers to recharge now, which makes combat a lot more interesting.

SFC III reintroduces officers to the series, adding a bit of an RPG element to the game. Officer skills build on each mission, and you can use prestige points to hire new crewmembers at starbases. Advanced tactics such as high-energy maneuvers and subsystem targeting are available only to experienced officers. If your helmsman gets stunned or killed during a melee, you’ll find your tactical situation dramatically changed, with an unskilled redshirt at the station.

Ship configurations have also gotten key changes. Previous games in the series offered a number of variants in



You can customize your ship's system, creating a gunship powerhouse or a speedy, maneuverable strike ship.



Among the new environments is a nebula, where enemy ships become hard to target and detect.

SFC3 offers players *MechWarrior*-style customization.

and Mirak, are AWOL, but other races, such as the Ferengi and Cardassians, have cameos. Although there are fewer campaigns, scripted missions (about 20 for each campaign) are richer than in previous games.

Online play using the Dynaverse 3 campaign engine is slated to support at least 128 players per server. Taldren promises that you won't see the Dynaverse glitches of previous *SFC* titles this time. Online play is getting months of prerelease testing—the game was “feature-complete” back in June, and it won't ship until November.

The Bridge

Newbies and experienced crew alike will appreciate *SFC III*'s simplified interface. While it still has the same general look as earlier games, icons and controls have been rearranged in a

each starship class, but *SFC III* goes further by giving you *MechWarrior*-style customization. As you gain prestige points, you can spend them on refits for your ship's systems. Upgrade your targeting computer, beef up your rear shields, drop in more powerful quantum torpedoes, or load your ship with transporters and marines. There are mass limitations specific to each ship class, which keeps weapons loads within the realm of sanity.

New Life and New Civilizations

As you play, you'll notice other enhancements popping up faster than tribbles. The graphics engine has seen a significant rebuild, with more detailed ships, system-specific damage textures, and impressive glows from warp engines, weapons fire,

and solar halos. The engine now supports dropping in custom bitmaps in addition to new 3D objects, so look for some interesting “total conversions” from the *SFC* community.

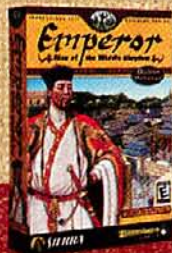
Even though the team is still working to balance the play, we're already impressed with *SFC III*. With the addition of custom weapon loads, warp drive, and officers, combat is a lot more tactically engaging than in previous releases. More intelligent handling of power management and weapon cycling makes for faster-paced gameplay, without turning *SFC III* into an action game. Best of all, the missions we played had more depth and tactical challenge than the “oh, joy, another space monster” encounters you'd see too often in previous *SFC* games. Expect the game to beam down this November.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Taldren
GENRE: Real-time Strategy
URL: gaming.startrek.com/games/sfc3/
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002

LEET COMMAND III

He who builds superior city
makes grand gesture.



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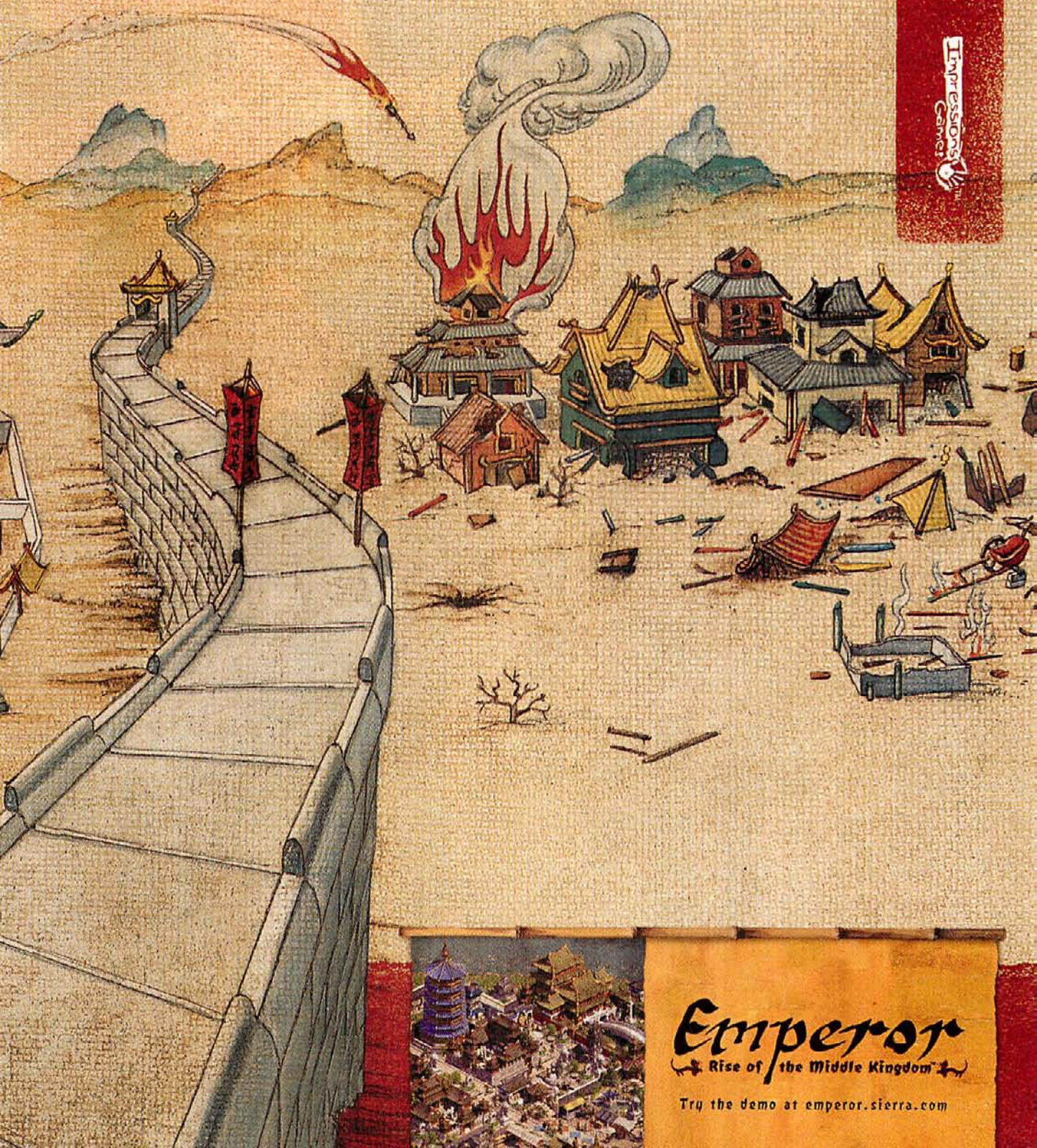


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dollhouse is going online.

Only this time,
we are the dolls.

The S



A large, stylized lowercase 'i' in yellow with a white outline, positioned to the left of the main title.

ms

Online

A stylized cityscape in shades of blue and purple. Buildings are represented by white outlines with rectangular windows. A central building has a figure standing on its roof and a window showing two people. Another building to the right has a figure in a window. The background is dark blue with white starburst patterns and concentric circles representing signal waves.

By Jeff Green

GENRE: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER STRATEGY GAME PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER: MAXIS RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002

www.computergaming.com 83



Your home is also your business. These enterprising folks have created a game show on their lot to entertain and reward other Sims.

A

sk the folks at Maxis a question about *The Sims Online*, and, chances are, no matter what you've asked, you may get back the same answer: "The Sims are real."

The answer is a mantra of sorts. It's a sentence they repeat over and over, as a way of differentiating the game from all previous *Sims* titles. It's also a message—almost a warning—to the millions of gamers

who have spent the past two years managing/destroying the lives of the tiny digital people in Will Wright's phenomenally successful human ant farm.

When *The Sims Online* launches this November, it's going to look much like the game that has dominated the bestseller charts for two years, but in fact it is a completely new, fundamentally different experience.

Gone are Bella and Mortimer Goth, as well as every other AI-controlled Sim in the game. Gone, too, is your ability to control the world. In *The Sims Online*, you're not God. You're just a Sim. And all those other Sims—they're real people, too. Now, when you try to shake a Sim's hand, or kiss a Sim, or punch a Sim in the face, that other Sim will be another human, another *Sims*

Online player—and that player is sitting behind a computer somewhere out there in the real world.

A good idea? A lame one? No one, not Will Wright himself, nor anyone else at Maxis, has any clue how this will play out. Because even Will Wright has no control over the *Sims* this time—because we are the *Sims*. The *Sims* are real.



When you log onto the game for the first time, you'll create a Sim to represent yourself. You'll have literally hundreds of customization options. You can create up to three Sims per account.

The Man Machine

The Sims Online is a huge, ambitious, and risky attempt to translate the gameplay that made *The Sims* the best-selling PC game of all time (16 million copies have been sold to date, including the expansions) into a language that works in the massively multiplayer arena. Why risky? Because it doesn't fit the profile. There are no monsters to kill, no levels or armor class to attain, no Dwarves to kick. You can't kill other players. It's neither fantasy nor sci-fi based. And *The Sims* fan base (which is more than 50 percent female, according to Maxis), includes a great many casual gamers, not the kind of hardcore loons who spend their entire waking lives in games like *EverQuest*. But these differences are obviously what make it such a strong candidate (along with the very different *Star Wars Galaxies*) for being the breakthrough massively multiplayer game we're all waiting for—if it works.

Gordon Walton, the game's executive producer (and former producer of *Ultima Online* at Origin) says there is now "a small army" of nearly 100 people at Maxis trying to ensure that *The Sims Online* does work, and a public beta should be in progress by the time you read this. Like everyone else involved, Walton realizes that it's the fans who will determine how the game plays out. "The players themselves will create and own the world," he said. "We're giving them the tools and then watching to see what they do with them."

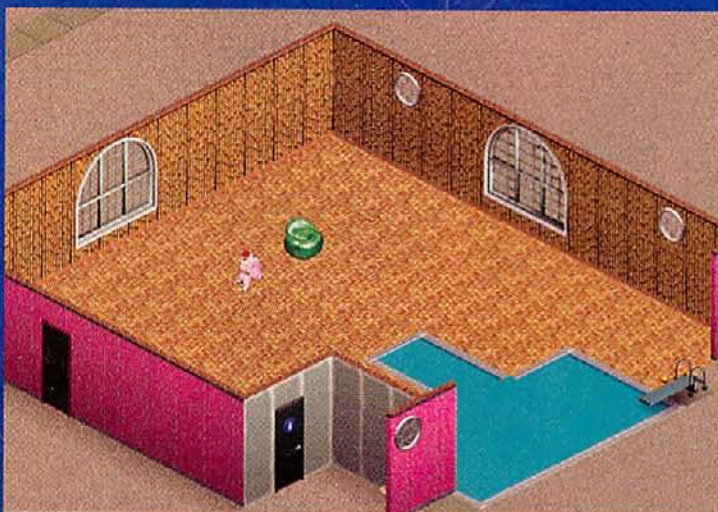
Those tools include many that longtime *Sims* players are already familiar with. The graphics and interface look nearly identical to the single-player game, and the basic mechanics of building a home, earning skill points, and keeping all your "motives" up—hunger, comfort, hygiene, bladder, energy, and fun—are still intact. *The Sims Online* is thus instantly recognizable and playable to anyone who's ever played *The Sims* before. But everything works differently now.

Hall of Mirrors

The first time you log on, you'll create your Sim, your online persona. The character creation screen features hundreds of skins and heads to choose from, serious to ridiculous, and eventually you should be able to upload your own skins. Next you'll choose a place to live in the online world. Maxis will initially ship the game with four city maps (replicated over many servers) and give players enough starting "cash" (simoleans) to buy a lot and start building a home. Lot prices will vary, depending initially upon the terrain you choose—a beachfront, island, or mountainside lot will be more expensive than an inland one.

After the cities become inhabited, lot prices will fluctuate according to local density and the players' own dynamic real estate market. You can own only one lot per city, but you can sell it at any time, either back to Maxis for a fixed price, or to other players for a price you negotiate. You can sell your home to other players completely furnished, meaning that in theory you could just play the game as an architect, buying one lot at a time, designing and furnishing a home, and then selling it for more cash to others.

So after you have a Sim and a home, then what? What is there to do? Well, unless you have some perverse desire to role-play a poor, sad, friendless hermit online, you're going to want to interact with other players, to make friends and earn cash and become a thriving member of the community. Or not. Maybe you'd rather be an annoying, wandering pest or a beggar or a ghost or the leader of a cult. How you play will be limited only by your imagination.



My new house. It's me and a chair. Strange—I'm not getting many visitors yet.



OK, now I have a buffet table, a dancing cage, and a chess game. Maybe now I'll start attracting people.



Yep, I'm popular. And success begets success. The more people show up, the more other people want to come, too.



The friendship web lets you see at a glance how many friends you or other Sims have in the game. Clicking on a face will bring up info about that person.

Rat Race

For many players, the goal of *The Sims Online* will be the same goal they have in real life: to make tons of money and have lots of friends. How you earn money in the game is entirely up to you. Unlike the single-player game, there are no career paths in *The Sims Online*. Your Sim doesn't just go to work off-screen and earn you cash. Now you actually have to earn it yourself, but you get a number of ways to do this.

Because each player gets only one lot, your home is also essentially your place of business. Simply by getting other players to visit your lot, you'll earn money. Every 24 hours, you'll receive a visitor bonus from Maxis based on how many people have visited your lot and how long they stayed.

But how do you get people to visit? Will Wright calls it "an economy of motives." All Sims need to keep their eight motives in the green to function properly—they need to eat, sleep, have fun, socialize, and so on. So you need to bait people, give them incentives



Dance parties are particularly fun, with rows upon rows of possible animations that let you get down far cooler than you could in real life.

and rewards for visiting and sticking around. A nice restaurant, for example, will increase people's food, comfort, and social motives. A dance hall or club will increase people's fun and social motives. Skill points are another incentive you can exploit. Open a gym with pools and exercise equipment, for example, and players can come in and improve their Body skills. Finally, you can take advantage of others' desire for cash by placing job objects in your house, which let players make objects (such as pizzas or wooden gnomes) that they can then sell for cash themselves. The beauty of the systems is that you, in turn, get a cut of everything sold—in addition to getting a bonus for drawing them into your house in the first place. The

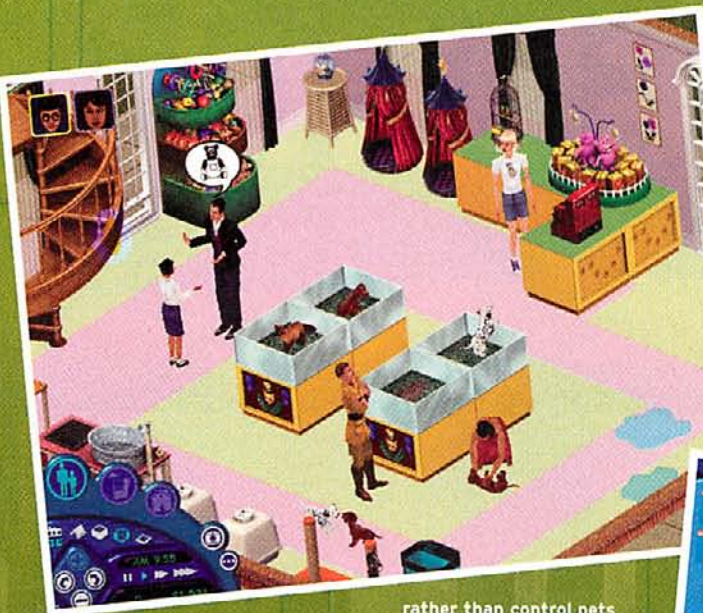


After logging into the game, you'll see an overview of the city you're in. All the currently inhabited properties will be represented by flashing stars on the map. You can visit only the property of someone who's logged in and at home.

You need to bait people—give them incentives and rewards for visiting your place and sticking around.

Sick of *The Sims* yet?

Too bad. There's a lot more on the way...



Sims Unleashed

For those who have perfected the art of managing their virtual self's urination rate, the *Sims Unleashed* is about to throw out an entirely different challenge—making sure your dog doesn't mark your entire living room as his territory. *Sims Unleashed* adds the most-requested feature to the *Sims* stable: pets. Expanding beyond the decorative fish, your Sims can now walk out of a pet store with a bird, reptile, dog, or cat.

Pets help the social dynamic by being a friend. They're considered family members, so they count toward your "family total" of eight. You can arrange the family total in many ways, from a nuclear family with a dog and a cat to four roommates and four dogs to one crazy old lady with seven cats.

Not only are pets considered friends and family, but they also get you the classic "single fellow takes cute dog to the park and attracts a multitude of attractive ladies." Pets are a great people magnet, making it easier for your Sim to forge relationships with others. Birds and more exotic pets are basically objects like the fish; the dogs and cats are the real focus of this expansion. In fact, dogs and cats have their own statistics and skills to manage. (But

rather than control pets directly, you issue orders through your Sim.)

Besides the pets, *Sims Unleashed* adds even more vacant lots and the ability to view all of your lots on one massive neighborhood screen. That makes it easier to swap views between households, and it's a kick to be able to gaze upon your entire virtual society all in one screen. New career fields include fashion, education, animals, the circus, and the food industry. That doesn't count gardener, which isn't a job but a new activity. Players can now purchase dirt to plant seeds in, grow their own food, and either store it for consumption or sell it at a farmer's market.

Maxis could have easily added just pets and been done with it, but with the new careers, locations,

and the gardening subtheme, *Sims Unleashed* looks to be the most comprehensive of the expansion packs. Check it out this September.

Sims Deluxe

Also coming in September is this re-release, which incorporates *The Sims* and *Livin' Large* in one pack. Most significant, it includes the new *Sims Creator*, which will let you create a whole new skin for use in the game and insert a face (whether yours or Mr. T's) as well. Just take a digital image, and the *Sims Creator* will show you how to wrap the face around your



Sim and how to make adjustments later. With the ability to modify clothes, tattoos, accessories, and faces, *Sims* fanatics can go completely nuts when creating their virtual selves.

SimCity 4

A lot of the focus for *SimCity 4* at press time is on polishing the terrain, modifying tool and weather effects, and adding "life" to the city. Details such as policemen using firehoses in riots or firemen striking when their funding is cut are the kinds of things the team is adding. The most impressive addition is working tornadoes, with houses and animals doing their best Twister impression when getting swept up by a particle-system-created tornado. Look for a spiffy Loading shot of this city builder next month.

—Thierry Nguyen



ALL AMERICANS PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE.

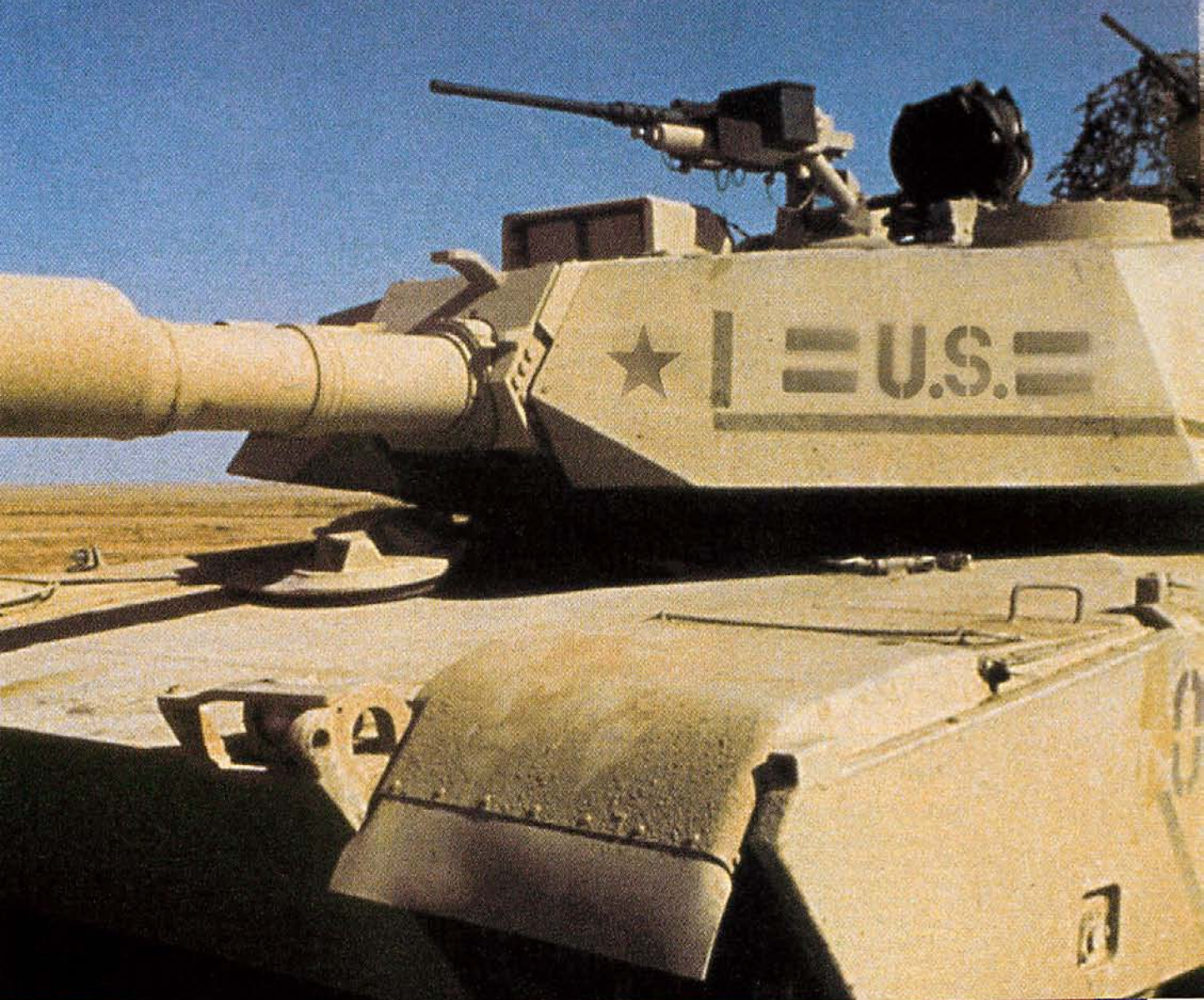
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You said it, Pol.

Then the pink thingy to
the blue thingy.

Skill: 0.97
Speed: 14%

Boy, for some reason
I feel at home here...

I'd always thought that "mind over matter" was a crack; who'd have guessed!

smart players will provide everything a Sim needs—including beds, bathrooms, and food (all of which you could charge for)—to keep people around as long as possible.

The catch to all this, however, is that you need to be logged on and at your lot yourself for anyone to visit. This leads to perhaps the game's most crucial social relationship: roommates. Having roommates, who live on your lot with you, is the easiest and most lucrative way to play *The Sims Online's* economic game. You can have up to eight roommates, who all share the objects in the house and split the daily profits. Only one person needs to be home for people to visit, so obviously the more roommates you have, the easier it is to stay open. Plus with each roommate acquired, your lot size increases, enabling you to make a bigger, cooler, and more impressive home.

For some the incentive to become someone else's roommate may be as strong as the incentive to have their own place. For new players, it means they don't have to spend their limited cash on a lot; they can start sharing in the profits of someone else's labor; and they get an instant social group.

Because, as in real life, roommates can quickly turn into nightmares, the original property owner will have ultimate authority over the lot, which comes with certain privileges.

such as the ability to build rooms or sell objects, that the other roommates won't have. (So as an owner, you won't log on one day and find your home gutted or sold.) In addition, you'll have access to menu items that let you maintain control, such as an admit/ban list for Sims, as well as the crucial ability to permanently kick out any psychotic roommate.

Of course, you don't have to participate in the rat race at all if you don't want to. You don't have to work or live anywhere. You can be a roving vagabond, a bum. You could wander from lot to lot, giving back rubs for money, playing the guitar, or begging. You could spend your time being a social butterfly or a nuisance, and although you may not have access to the tons of stuff for sale, you can ably survive in the game if that's how you want to play.

According to Chris Trottier, the lead designer, this has always been one of the team's goals. "Right from the start this was one of our big design challenges," she said. "We wanted to figure out how to reward people for different kinds of behavior. We didn't want to force you to play the economic game." Thus, Maxis will provide players below a certain economic threshold with a weekly allowance (previously called "welfare" by the team) that will allow you to at least buy enough food to stay alive and keep playing.

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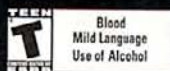
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On Griefing: An Open Letter to "Dude"

Dear Dude,

There you were, minding your own business, just looking for some help in making a pizza to earn a few simoleans, when we showed up and made it our personal mission from God to destroy your Sim life. For two hours straight, we systematically taunted, insulted, belittled, badgered, harassed, demeaned, and humiliated you. What had you done to deserve this? Absolutely nothing—we were complete and unabashed jerks who targeted you simply for the glee in kicking digital sand in your virtual eyes. We urged other players to boycott your pizza-making efforts and they did. We exclaimed that you wore diapers—other people's diapers—that you ate children, and kept your shoes filled with urine. We were incorrigible, and with the encouragement of Will Wright, who was chuckling at our antics over our sadistic shoulders, we were unstoppable.

Unstoppable until we got thrown out of the house. Physically picked up and thrown out by the seat of our snazzy clown suit pants by the owner of that particular house for playing too rough. We knew *The Sims Online* had no police—we didn't realize that players could exercise a real-world type of authority over whom they'd let in. But like a bad case of crabs we came back—thankfully, the owner of the home was too distracted to exercise her option to bar us permanently from her property. And so the harassment continued.

But we're sorry now. We aren't usually grief players. Maybe there's something nasty in the water at Maxis. We promise to play nice from now on if you just answer this one question: où est Sylvie? —Robert Coffey

Trotter also pointed out that such players may very well succeed on their own in other ways. *The Sims Online* will have a number of daily Top 100 lists on which players can keep track of not only things like the most popular or lucrative sites, but also the most popular individual Sims, the funniest Sims, or the biggest lotharios.

"There are a number of different paths to success," said Trotter. "Our goal was to find ways to reward people for however they wanted to play."

Good Grief

Of course, as veterans of online games already know, the way some people want to play is as-how can we put this delicately?—total freaking jerks, playing only to make others' lives miserable (see sidebar "On Griefing"). Maxis is well expecting a certain amount of antisocial behavior and, in fact, could be said to be somewhat encouraging it, with some hilarious new animations that will let players act out their darker sides: vomiting, having public meltdowns, pile-driving one another, and, in a particularly inspired piece of cruelty, ripping another player's heart out and then stomping on it (figuratively—not for real).

But there's always a limit to what's acceptable online, and there are always gamers unwilling or unable to stay within that limit. However, *The Sims Online*'s very structure makes griefing nearly impossible to sustain. There are no common areas or public property where griefers can torment people. Every single lot is owned by a gamer who maintains complete control. If a guy is bothering other players on your lot, you can throw him out, or even ban him permanently: the end. If you're really uptight about keeping the peace, you can even limit access to your lot to only those officially registered as your friends.

By the way, although there's no player-killing in the game, you can indeed die. Starvation will be the most common way, but you can also electrocute or drown yourself, among other tragic means. Once you're dead, you stay dead, wandering the game as a ghost, until you can convince another live player to resurrect you, which will require a special skill or job object. You can die on purpose, if being a ghost appeals to you, as it apparently does to none other than Will Wright himself.

"I like the idea of death parties," he said, "where the first thing you do when you walk in a house is die."

House Party

Death parties: this is the kind of game element that will set *The Sims Online* apart from the rest of the massively multiplayer crowd. Freed from the burden of the typical treadmill that characterizes most of these games (killing stuff to buy stuff so you can kill bigger stuff), *The Sims*



Every day *The Sims Online* will display a host of Top 100 lists, ranking players and their property by a variety of criteria. Top players earn bonuses daily.



Think you're funnier than Conan and Letterman? Be the star of your own show.

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Ghost Master

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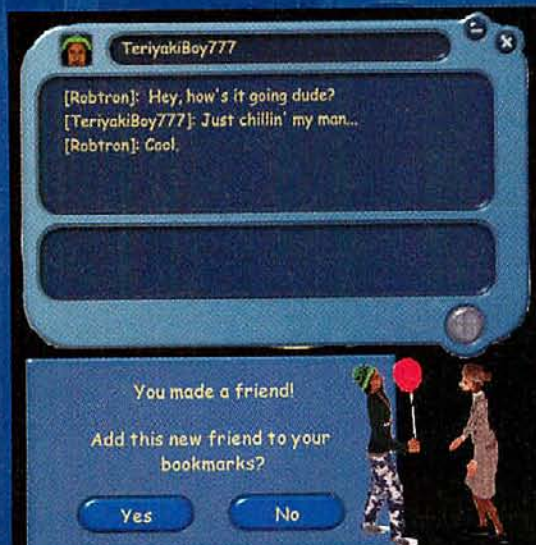
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Job objects, like this pizza station, encourage players to work together to make something (in this case, a pizza) and earn money. Certain job stations will require certain skills, so the more skilled you are at a task, the more valuable you'll be to other players.

The Sims Online has more of an aura of a free-form, barely-in-control, worldwide house party.



To communicate with others privately, there is a completely functional instant messaging program embedded in the game, as well as the ability to send email to players currently offline.

Online has more of an aura of a free-form, barely-in-control, worldwide house party that you'll want to log into just to see the new, weird stuff people have come up with. Certain lots are going to be popular not because they help you earn anything, but simply because they're so much fun—the online equivalent of a popular bar. Groups may organize for events, such as putting on a live play, and Maxis even has plans in the works to be able to broadcast special live events that would be viewable by thousands of players at once. You might be able to log in at a certain time on a certain server, for example, and see the real-life trailer to a new movie or hear a new single, all within the world of the game.

This is brand-new territory for both Maxis and the gaming community. It has the makings to be either something truly new and exciting in online gaming or a colossal bellyflop. Is Maxis pushing their luck with the seemingly indestructible *Sims* license? Will gamers line up for an online game in which killing dragons and aliens is not the main goal?

And what kind of world will we create as Sims? Will it be a mirror of the real world? Or something funnier, scarier, and, as impossible as it seems, more bizarre?

I don't know. Will Wright doesn't know. No one knows. The Sims are real now. They can't be controlled. The possibilities are endless.

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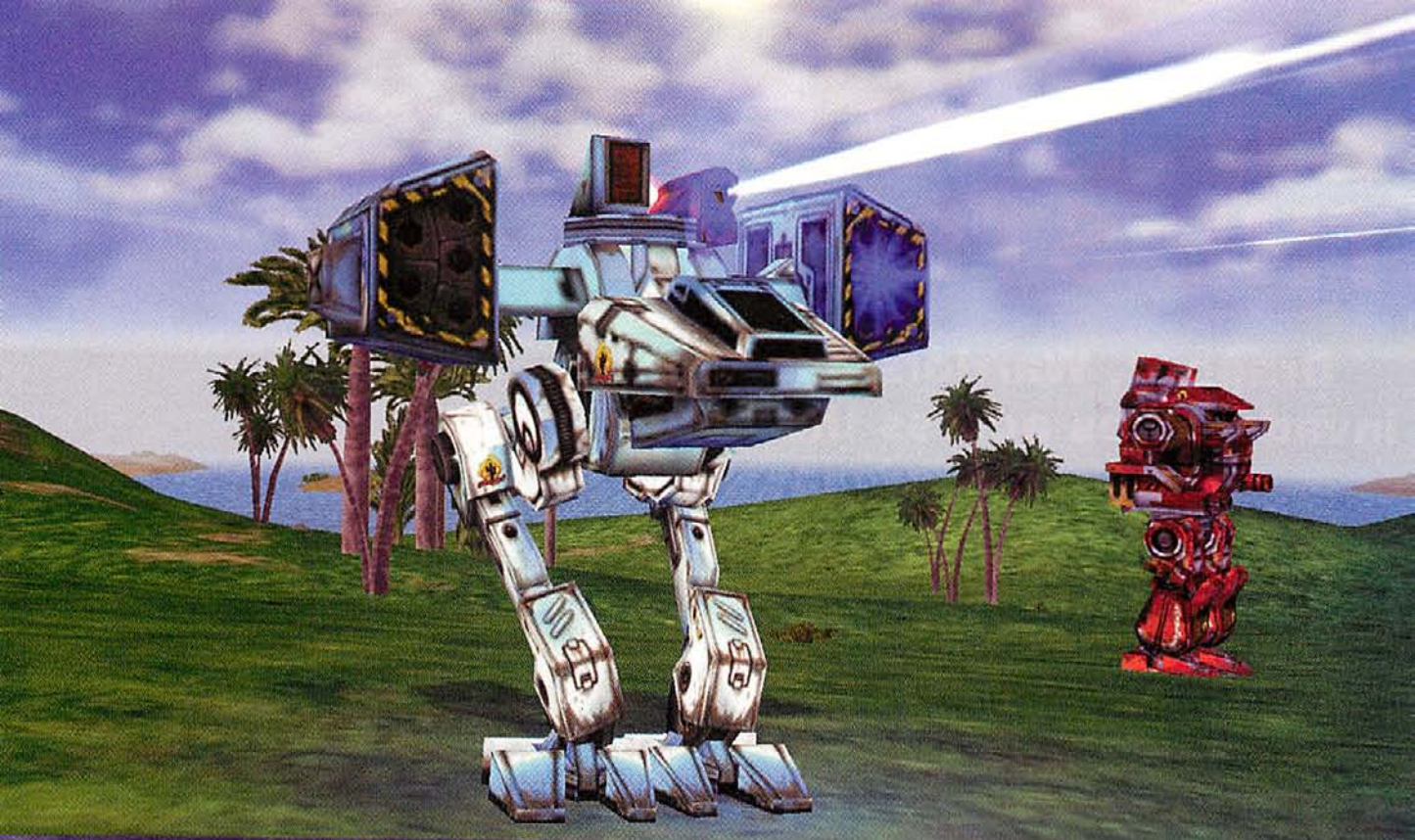
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The tour kicks-off in San Diego, CA on June 21st
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equipped with 13 Sony VAIO computers
with Intel® Pentium® 4 processor,
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for event schedules,
stories from the road and more.

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San Diego June 21, 26-30
Long Beach June 22-23
San Francisco July 3-7

WASHINGTON

Seattle July 10-14

OREGON

Portland July 16, 19
Hood River July 17-18

ILLINOIS

Chicago July 24-28

OHIO

Cleveland July 31 - August 4

MINNESOTA

Minneapolis August 7-9

PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia August 15-18

MARYLAND

Baltimore August 22-25

NEW YORK

New York City/New Jersey
August 28 - September 1

CONNECTICUT

New Haven September 2

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Boston September 5-7
Cambridge September 8-10
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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

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F1 2002

How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches



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

★★★★★
VERY GOOD
Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

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

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

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

The CO2: Battlefields mission is a high-octane single-player battle—your objective is to take the hill from the enemy and then hold it against their counterattack.



Operation Flashpoint: Resistance

Vive la Résistance! By Raphael Liberatore



PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Bohemia
Interactive GENRE: Shooter
URL: www.codemasters.com
ESRB RATING: Mature
 gore, violence PRICE: \$29

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 4
500, 128MB RAM,
550MB hard drive
space, original game
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 4 700, 256MB
RAM MULTIPLAYER: Internet,
LAN (2-16+ players)

Riding fast on the heels of last year's tactical shooter megahit, Bohemia Interactive has created an expansion pack worthy of its predecessor. In fact, *Resistance* is so complete that Codemasters could have easily sold it as a stand-alone sequel. A multitude of added features—including a brand-new, 100-square-kilometer island; a 20-mission campaign; five stand-alone missions; new weapons and vehicles; an enhanced graphics engine, and a handful of multiplayer maps and game types—makes *Resistance* the new benchmark in expansion packs. It's that good.

Guerrilla Warfare

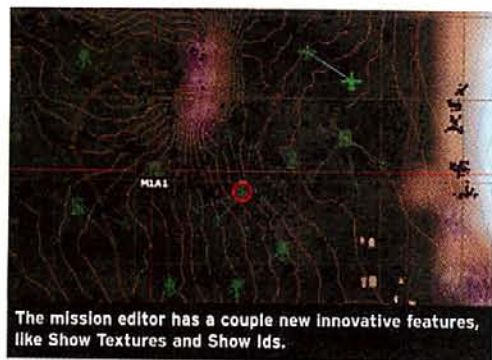
Resistance's single-player game is played as either a finely scripted campaign game that takes place during the Cold War or five independent missions pump-

ing with adrenaline-infused combat. The campaign builds on the successful principles of the original and adds dynamic activities such as scavenging for weapons and equipment and recruiting new soldiers, which help determine how well each mission is performed.

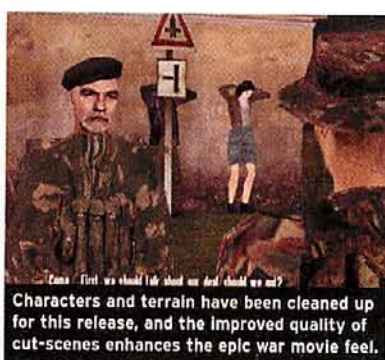
The script is quite good, with a few pseudodynamic sequences and improved dialogue and voiceovers sprinkled throughout the missions. The events here occur a few years prior to those in *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis*. The campaign focuses on the life of Victor Troska, a retired Russian Special Forces soldier whose home island of the Independent Republic of Nogova is invaded by the Soviets. You play Victor in either first or third person as he leads his resistance fighters through 20 well-crafted missions, from blowing bridges and aircraft to protecting supplies and stealing tanks.

Missions are challenging and offer a variety of objectives, adding multiple layers to an already difficult combat environment. The real challenge lies in swiping enough gear to arm yourself against the Soviet onslaughts—your troops lack weapons, equipment, and mechanized armor. Scavenging for supplies sets the tempo of each mission, in which precious troop resources are spent carrying out mission objectives and picking up gear from dead Soviet soldiers. The added ability to grab and drop weapons, ammo, and equipment makes arming the resistance possible. Obtaining the right gear really enhances your chance to build an effective guerrilla force powerful enough to repel the Russians.

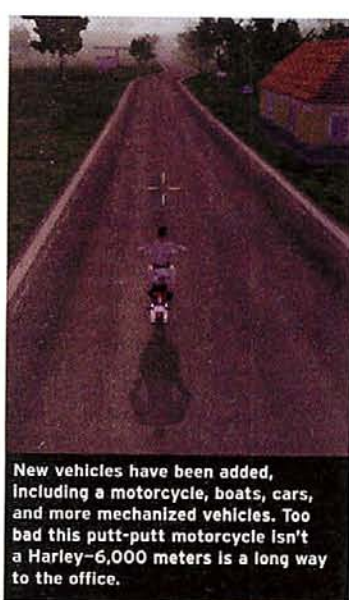
Although they are sometimes tedious to watch, cut-scenes are dramatic and actually help propel the story. By the end of the game, you'll feel as though



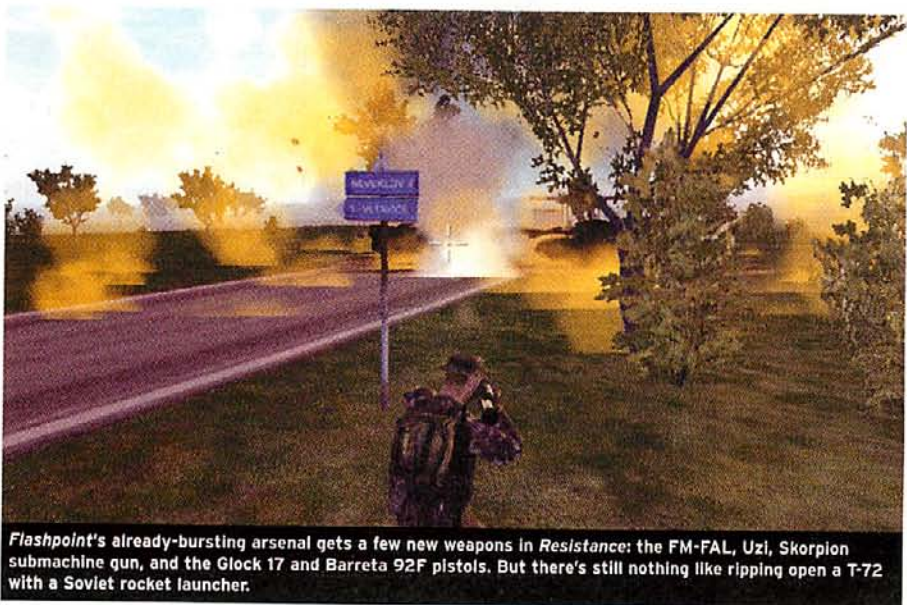
The mission editor has a couple new innovative features, like Show Textures and Show Ids.



Characters and terrain have been cleaned up for this release, and the improved quality of cut-scenes enhances the epic war movie feel.



New vehicles have been added, including a motorcycle, boats, cars, and more mechanized vehicles. Too bad this putt-putt motorcycle isn't a Harley-6,000 meters is a long way to the office.



Flashpoint's already-bursting arsenal gets a few new weapons in *Resistance*: the FM-FAL, Uzi, Skorpion submachine gun, and the Glock 17 and Barreta 92F pistols. But there's still nothing like ripping open a T-72 with a Soviet rocket launcher.



The improved multiplayer interface lets you easily become a grenadier and have a better time in-game thanks to more solid network code.

Resistance is so complete that Codemasters could have easily sold it as a stand-alone sequel.

you've played through an epic movie, because large portions of the story are conveyed through compelling scenes. The climactic final battle, for example, when Troska must overcome overwhelming odds in order to save his island ends with a dramatic do-or-die mission. It is the stuff of memorable gaming moments.

Resistance's five independent single-player missions are designed for the serious *Operation Flashpoint* fan. To call them challenging is an understatement, as each mission presents a difficult objective that requires you to be on your toes throughout the entire operation. Slacking will get you killed fast. More important, each single-player mission offers a wide range of mission types, such as escorting a convoy of supplies, zipping around the map in a Hummer and avoiding the enemy, flying cargo to the resistance, or attacking an enemy base with an Apache helicopter.

Low-Intensity Conflict

One of *Operation Flashpoint*'s shortcomings was its lean graphics engine; *Resistance* fattens it up rather nicely. Terrain features and character models now look smoother at high resolutions, with more trees, foliage, and clouds for depth. But, unless you possess a super-fast processor and graphics card, the game will plod. I experienced occasional frame drops while playing the game on a high-end 2.4GHz machine with a GeForce4 Ti 4600 video card. Audio also suffers from a number of bugs; EAX and multichannel support rarely work. Disabling hardware acceleration did help, but not enough to make me appreciate Bohemia Interactive's ambitious attempt at creating surround-sound environments. But neither shortcoming is enough to stifle gameplay.

Resistance also improves on *Operation Flashpoint*'s multiplayer. The interface has been revamped with improved menu

features, an in-game browser, GameSpy server support, and an easier way to set up player roles. Not only does *Resistance* run more stably than the original game, thanks to reworked network coding, but joining a game is easy. The inclusion of a handful of new missions from the campaign game along with the original maps turns *Resistance* into a big-league multiplayer experience.

Without a doubt, *Operation Flashpoint: Resistance* should take its rightful place in the halls of expansion fame. Diehard fans will enjoy it as much as a full-fledged sequel, but they can do so at an expansion price point. Run, don't walk, to your nearest game retailer and join Nogova's movement.

VERDICT ★★★★★

With features and content worthy of a brand-new game, *Resistance* is the new benchmark expansion pack.

F1 2002

Speed thrills... By Rob Smolke



PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: Image Space
GENRE: Racing
URL: www.easports.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$39.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 16MB Direct 3D video card
RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 32MB Direct 3D video card, steering wheel with force feedback
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

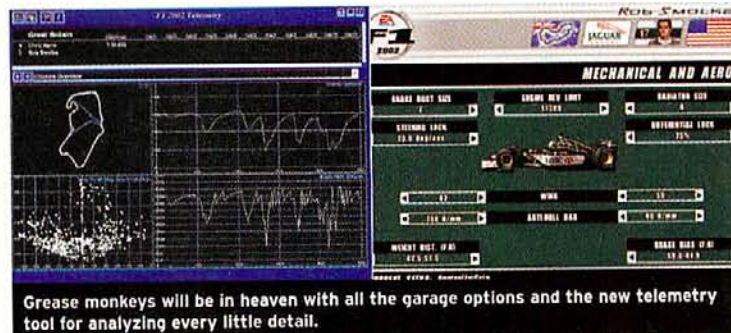
Do you have the urge to get in the cockpit of a four-wheeled missile, to negotiate hairpin turns at absurd speeds while battling 21 bloodthirsty opponents who would be more than happy to see you end up a crumpled wreck in their rearview mirror? Yeah, me neither, but I must admit that simulating that experience from the comfort of my office chair is a whole lot of fun, and EA Sports' *F1 2002* is about the best representation yet of this popular racing style.

Despite this being the fourth game in the *F1* series in two years, the quality has improved by leaps and bounds in this short time frame. Each successive release has improved in nearly every area, and the 2002 edition is no exception. From its uncannily accurate physics model to its drop-dead gorgeous graphics (assuming you have the system horsepower to crank up the settings), it sets a new standard for *F1* racers—one that the next installment in Geoff Crammond's *Grand Prix* series will be hard-pressed to match.

Like Papyrus's award-winning racing games, *F1 2002* manages to be all things to all gamers. Experts have an amazing array of options for squeezing every last bit of torque out of their engines. Utter novices can turn on all of the many driving aids, adjust the intensity and smarts of the AI drivers, and have fun right from the get-go, while learning the

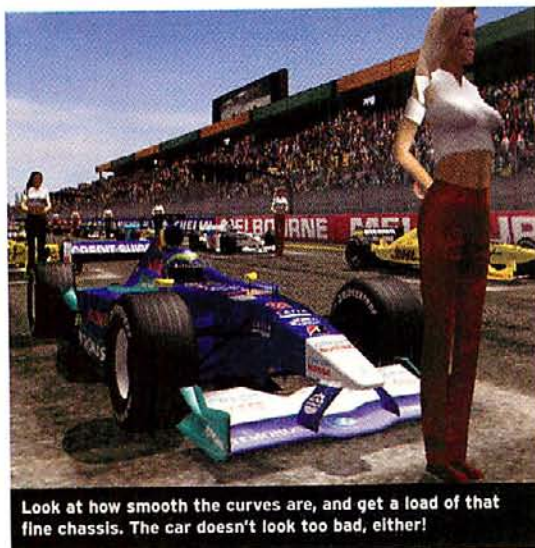


This looks like a perfect opportunity for a nice game of chicken! There are plenty of driving aids to help prevent situations like this.



Grease monkeys will be in heaven with all the garage options and the new telemetry tool for analyzing every little detail.

F1 2002's drivers tend to act like and, more important, have the frailties of real human beings.



Look at how smooth the curves are, and get a load of that fine chassis. The car doesn't look too bad, either!

skills needed to play the game at its intended realistic level.

Unlike the figures in way too many racing games, *F1 2002's* drivers tend to act like and, more important, have the frailties of real human beings. Unlucky engine failures and tire blowouts put contestants out of races at inopportune times, and close-quarter jostling feels appropriately competitive. Drivers are also programmed to act like their real-world counterparts, yet one more great feature in a game that includes all the real-life teams, circuits, vehicles, and league rules.

The perfect game is as hard to achieve as the perfect lap, unfortunately, and *F1 2002* does show some signs of tire wear. The loading times between screens are interminable, even on extremely high-end systems. During the waits, you'll hear a repeat of the dialogue that plays during the loading screen. The weather is dynamic, often changing as the race

goes on, but the graphical effects of the wet stuff don't live up to the rest of the visuals, and the frame rate takes a major hit in the process. Finally, although the game is completely playable with a keyboard or gamepad, you'll need a force feedback-enabled wheel (or, less desirable, an analog joystick) to get the most out of the physical aspect of the game.

None of these complaints manage to dim the light of *F1 2002's* bulb very much, though, and the flaws only stand out as they do because of the rest of the game's elegance. Whether solo or with friends and foes over the Internet, *F1 2002* is a game that racing fans will definitely want to take a few laps around the track with.

VERDICT ★★★★★

F1 2002 delivers authentic, yet accessible, racing enjoyment for all.

Massively Merciless.



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Le Mans 24 Hours

Turn, damn you, turn!
By Rob Smolka

PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Infogrames
GENRE: Racing
URL: www.tdlemans.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
450, 128MB RAM,
670MB hard drive
space, 16MB Direct 3D
video card RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 4
1.2GHz, 256MB RAM,
32MB Direct 3D video
card MULTIPLAYER: Split-
screen (2 players)

There are very few things in this world I would want to do for 24 straight hours. And as much as I love auto racing, being forced to participate in or even watch an event that lasts an entire day sounds like a torture devised by an evil mind rather than an activity that sane folk engage in. Nevertheless, the 24 hours at the Le Mans track is one of racing's most well-known and popular events, joining the Daytona 500 and Indianapolis 500 as an icon of the sport.

This is Infogrames' attempt to simulate it on the PC. More accurately, this is a port of the PS2 version, which was a lot of fun to play. But at some point in the translation, somebody took a syringe and extracted the most important ingredient needed to make an enjoyable racing game: the ability to properly control your car. They also forgot to add a cockpit view, a common exclusion on the console side but a sin for a PC racer, especially one with such ludicrous system requirements. But give *Le Mans 24 Hours* the power that it needs, and you'll be treated to a pretty sweet-looking game.

Of course, you don't really have to compete for a full, real-time day to win the eponymous race, though the option is there if you're crazy enough to want it. Because the goal is to complete as many laps as possible during the time frame, things work out just as nicely when you



The AI drivers don't have to contend with the shoddy controls like us poor humans do, so beating them to the finish line is rare.



Le Mans 24 Hours is a joy to look at, but its lack of inner beauty is exposed once you get to know it.

You'll quickly develop Schwarzenegger-like biceps if you try to play with a wheel.



participate in shorter races with condensed time; you're given choices ranging from 10 minutes to 10 hours. There are six tracks to race on in addition to Le Mans (the box claims 12, but five of them are just shortened versions of the main tracks), and more than 70 cars to choose from, but all the options and features in the world aren't going to save a game that's essentially very little fun to play.

The most obvious sign of trouble in a racing game is when it's an improvement to play with a digital gamepad rather than an analog wheel or joystick. Guess which controller is best for *Le Mans*? You'll quickly develop Schwarzenegger-like biceps if you try to play with a wheel, regardless of the difficulty level you choose or the adjustments you make: each turn requires you to crank it all the way to the left or right, and then, maybe, you can pivot the car enough to make it through without having to jam on the brakes and nearly come to a stop.

There's really no point in even considering buying this game, what with the huge number of superior products on the market. It has a few attractive elements—the graphics (though some low-res textures left over from its console origins rear their ugly head at times), an animated pit crew, and the strategy that comes with a superlong race—but the plusses end there. On top of its unforgivable handling problems, the game has no damage model, so the other cars can be completely ignored and have no bearing on your actions.

Overall, *Le Mans* is boring, the deadliest of sins for a racing game, especially one whose major selling point is based on staying interested for an entire rotation of the earth.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Despite some pretty graphics, mushy controls will manage to turn off both the arcade and sim crowds.

The war is far from over!

"Solid premise, solid presentation ... The hopes for Sudden Strike 2 are certainly high" **IGN PC**

"With its richly detailed and historically accurate units, the game will appeal to all fans of WWII games" **GameSpy**

SUDDEN STRIKE

Features:

- Five powerful campaigns with more than 40 breathtaking missions
- More than 50 new units, with up to 1,000 units per scenario
- Controllable crews can capture and use every motorized vehicle, including: tanks, aircraft and trains
- Fast-paced multiplayer mode with up to eight players

The world is an enormous battlefield, and you're on the front line, in the center of realistic WWII strategic battle action! Command German, Russian, British, American or Japanese troops and fight on water, land and in the air to destroy your enemies and win the war!



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Cards to view:

Sets:

Number owned:

Number for trade:

Rarity:

Version:

Sort by:

Search for:

☐ Show pre-Invasion card sets

Goblin King

122

Creature — Lord

All Goblins get +1/+1 and have mountainwalk. (They're unblockable as long as defending player controls a mountain.)

To be king, Numgii did in Blog, who did in Unkul, who did in Viddle, who did in Loll, who did in Alrok. . .



Magic: The Gathering Online

Tap my elf, please **By Jason Kapalka**

PUBLISHER: Wizards of the Coast
DEVELOPER: Leaping Lizard
GENRE: Turn-based strategy
URL: www.mtgonline.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; mild violence
PRICE: \$14.95 retail, \$3.29-\$9.99 for additional packs of cards

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 333,
64MB RAM, 600MB hard
drive space, 56-kbps
modem **RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:**
DSL connection or cable
modem, obscene wealth
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Online only

Psst. Hey, you. Yeah, you. C'mere. I got a game for ya. I know, you just got *WarCraft III* and *Neverwinter Nights*, but you gotta see this. Oh yeah. Check out those sweet, circa-1995 graphics—classic stuff, never goes outta style. And, oh yeah, we even got sounds. Listen to that thing beep. Sweet.

Not sold yet? How about that interface? You can totally resize it. Awesome, huh? You might have to spend six or eight hours figuring it out, but it's worth it. OK, here's some combat. Check this out: see that dragon? Yeah, the little white box with the blurry picture. OK, it's gonna attack now...WHOA! Did you see that? It totally rotated 90 degrees. And beeped. That's hellra hot, dude.

And I haven't even gotten to the best part. You have to buy all of your units and spells. Yeah. You can't really pick the ones you want, but if you buy enough at random you're sure to get

some good ones. Oh yeah. You can totally get a decent starting collection going for, oh, \$200, maybe \$300.

Awesome, huh?
You might think I'm exaggerating for comic effect here. But you'd be wrong.

The long-awaited online version of *Magic: The Gathering* is in many ways a colossal affront to gaming. Never mind the antiquated, ugly graphics or the sanity-twisting interface: the pricing scheme will send many prospective players bounding for the hills, shrieking with laughter. If you thought the geeks in the back of the comic book store dripping nacho cheese on their collectible cards were pathetic, think

how cool you're going to feel spending a lot of real money on imaginary cards.

There's an almost insulting paucity of imagination on display throughout the entire product. Unlike the recent *Etherlords*, which used *Magic*-style mechanics but represented creatures and spells with gorgeous 3D effects, the official version couldn't be troubled to include any sort of audiovisual stimulation beyond a few generic sound effects. Watching "cards" flip over on their sides is about as exciting as it gets.

Sure, players get to select one of about, oh, three avatars, but because the play areas are displayed as a bunch of tables with guys playing cards, it's

The brilliant game design endures, like a sweet-smelling rose atop a giant mountain of dung.



Check out the visceral combat experience as this Shivan Zombie attacks.



hard to figure why they didn't just go for total verisimilitude, with the nacho cheese, comic book racks, and more realistic avatars like "Sweaty Guy in Hoodie" and "Acne-Scarred Teen."

But the weird thing is, none of this matters, not if you're one of the people this game is targeted at. If you're not already familiar with *Magic*, forget it—despite a few half-hearted tutorials, you'll probably find it much, much harder to learn the game online than in real life (see sidebar for a newbie's perspective). But if you're already a regular player, or, like me, a former player who abandoned the game for lack of opponents (or lack of desire to frequent the stale-smelling back rooms of comic stores), then you're probably going to be hooked despite everything.

For us, the electronic cards may be worth more than the real ones; the next time I'm likely to use my dusty collection of physical cards is approximately never. And somehow, the gouge-o-rific, indefensible prices just make those "cards" seem all the more valuable and prized when you get a nifty rare. Just as in "Real Life."

Although graphics and sound were given short shrift, the game does include just about every imaginable tourney, league, and variant of *Magic* that it's possible to play, from the hardcore Constructed tourneys for "suitcase" players with thousands of cards, to assorted sealed-deck events that level the playing field, to month-long league games for the more casual player, to esoteric booster and Rochester drafts, and so on and so on. Of course, to compete in all these, you're going to have to spend real cash on card packs and event tickets—every single time you participate.

And the big thing: the brilliant game design, conceived by Richard Garfield and polished to a high sheen over the years, endures, like a sweet-smelling rose atop a giant mountain of dung. Not everyone will want to climb that mountain. But those who make it to the top will be amply rewarded—assuming they haven't lost their sense of smell.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Astonishingly good and frighteningly bad at the same time.

A NEWBIE'S PERSPECTIVE

Being a complete and utter newbie in the world of collectible card games like *Magic*, I was exactly the sort of casual gamer Wizards of the Coast was looking to rope in with their low box price. My experience? I floundered beyond belief when I tried to figure out how to play this game. The tutorial, while it hints at the strategy involved, doesn't expose you to anything useful except the procedure for laying down the cards. When I was in a real game, the only way for me to figure out how to use my cards was for someone else to beat the crap out of me using those same cards. Figuring out which cards to buy was an even worse nightmare. The online storefront offered no direction at all toward what might be helpful for a new player, no instructions, no nothing. Even more maddening? One of the virtual booster packs that I wanted to buy was "out of stock." How?!? It doesn't even exist!

In a recent CGW interview with Wizards' senior marketing manager Kyle Murray, he claimed the developers were creating a system that would make it easy for new players to become a part of the community. Well, Kyle should make a visit to the practice room and watch all the people struggling through this nightmarish system. Were it not for free credits toward cards and the helpfulness of my coworkers, I would never have ventured past the box purchase.

—Dana Jongeward



With the same graphics engine as *MechWarrior 4*, the pack looks pretty spiffy, if a bit dated.

MechWarrior 4: Inner Sphere Mech Pack

Paying for free content By **Thierry Nguyen**

PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Cyberlore
GENRE: Sci-fi sim
URL: www.microsoft.com/games/mechwarrior4
ESRB RATING: Teen; violence
PRICE: \$12.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
300, 64MB RAM,
55MB hard drive space,
MechWarrior 4 RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
800, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet
(2-16 players)

Who wouldn't want more gigantic robots to smash the crap out of other ones? Or a new jamming device that fools your enemy into thinking, "Hmm, he's not out to kill me, he's here for the scenery," until you show him what for? Well, expect to fork over some cash for these new trinkets.

The *Inner Sphere Mech Pack* gives you old-school mechs like the Zeus, the Dragon, the Highlander, and the Hunchback, along with an IFF Jammer and two multiplayer maps: all stuff meant for either multiplayer matches or Instant Action mode. Because the pack lacks a single-player campaign, it seems

a bit sparse. I'm used to having a solid single-player campaign as a foundation for multiplayer hijinks, and it felt plain weird that I had to go online and beat up some other dorks just to play with the new stuff. Heck, Instant Action lets you use only the new mechs and the IFF Jammer—the new maps aren't even available in Instant Action.

What it boils down to is that you are paying for a new weapon and four new mechs. Yes, you get two new multiplayer maps in the box, but you can also download these maps for free. So whether you should buy the pack depends on how you feel about paying 13 bucks for five new items that work only in multiplayer. If you're a diehard multiplayer *Mech* fan who's lucky enough for money to not be a factor, then go right ahead. But I think that if a bunch of Eastern Europeans can manage to independently release new vehicles for free (see *Operation Flashpoint* and *IL-2 Sturmovik*), it's weird for Microsoft to make us pay \$2.60 for each item in this pack.

At least *Counter-Strike* and *Operation Flashpoint* give owners of the original game a choice between downloading a humongous patch for free or paying a nominal fee for the convenience of having a CD. But Microsoft just wants players to fork over money, rather than give them the option of using their DSL connections or cable modems to download



The Heavy Gauss Rifle punches through anything and is a hefty weapon for multiplayer matches.

the 60MB that this pack comprises. Let the people who hate downloading stuff pay the money, and let the patient ones grab it online. At least the pack isn't in the \$30 price bracket.

This isn't a bad little multiplayer addition, but I can't help feeling stung by Microsoft making gamers pay for a patch and some new vehicles, the sorts of things companies that support their products generally provide for free.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

It's fun stuff for multiplayer *Mech* nuts, but shouldn't this have been free or something?



Jeff Green is running amok as the Dragon, one of a whopping four new mechs, in the Coliseum map (which, incidentally, is also available online).

Whether you should buy it depends on how you feel about paying 13 bucks for five items that work only in multiplayer.

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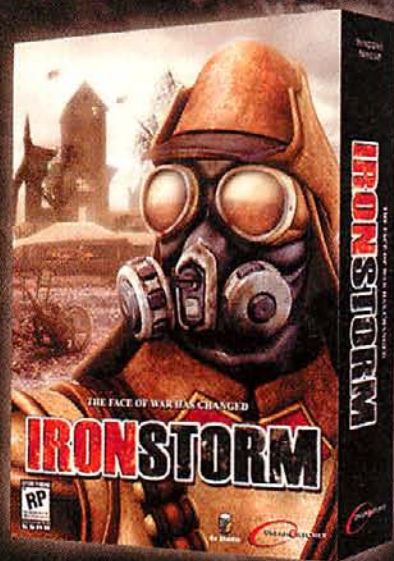
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I can't wait to play."

- GameSpy

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Rock Manager

Everybody Wang Chung tonight
By Dana Jongewaard

PUBLISHER: DreamCatcher
DEVELOPER: Pan Interactive
GENRE: Rock manager sim
URL: www.dreamcatcher-games.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; comic mischief, suggestive themes PRICE: \$19.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 233,
32MB RAM, 100MB
hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
250MB hard drive
space MULTIPLAYER: None

With TV shows like *American Idol* and *Making the Band* earning high ratings, DreamCatcher has jumped on that bandwagon with *Rock Manager*, answering the prayers of all those gamers who've clamored for the opportunity to manage losers to a career of stardom. Through the course of eight missions, you deal with talentless prima donnas, washed-up rehab-loving metal bands, and sensitive reclusive alternatypes. Your job is to keep band members happy and healthy while simultaneously ushering them through the process of recording a single, getting a distributor, promoting the record, and setting up concerts and tours.

The missions provide a decent variety of scenarios, but gameplay is very repetitive. Promoting your single is a sad joke—recording studios provide surveys

your band performs—it has nothing to do with talent.

One of the worst downfalls of the game is the inability to have more than one

constant profanity that bumps the game rating to M eliminates that audience.

With a total of four hours of gameplay (eight if you count the times technical



What do two punk rockers, two pop princesses, and a metalhead make? A No. 1 hit on the country chart!

Deal with talentless prima donnas, washed-up rehab-loving metal bands, and sensitive reclusive alternatypes.

indicating the target audience, but the promotion tactics through the local media outlets offer no way to reach the potential buyers directly. You can mix the songs performed by the band in the studio, but how you mix the song does little to affect the chances of the single getting picked up or not—I mixed all of my bands' songs exactly the same way and was able to successfully complete each of the missions. The concert halls you play are determined by the type of music

game going simultaneously. If you start a new game, your saved game is erased. And in my case, both times I exited the program, the saved game had bugs when I tried to resume play. I was finally forced to leave the program open on my computer in order to be able to play it to completion. Playing the first half through three times proved that replay value is nil—this game is all preprogrammed, with no AI to worry about. It could be somewhat appealing to younger players, but the

failings made me repeat the first half), you don't get much for your money. But if you have \$20 burning a hole in your pocket and want to spend four hours of your life listening to annoying cartoon characters whine about their need for a vacation, then go for it.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Better than playing a Wilson Phillips box set, but not much.

Maximum Capacity: Hotel Giant

For the Basil Fawlty in you By Rick Ernst

PUBLISHER: JoWood
Productions DEVELOPER:
Enlight Software GENRE:
Business sim
URL: www.hotel-giant.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; comic mischief, suggestive themes PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
350, 64MB RAM,
610MB hard drive
space RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
600, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: None

The 1999 release of *Rollercoaster Tycoon* gave the ancient business-sim genre a big boost. Since then, games looking to milk that same cash cow have let you run everything from pizza chains to zoos. *Maximum Capacity: Hotel Giant* fares better than many recent tycoon games, no doubt due to the experienced hand of designer Trevor Chan.

Hotel Giant gives you control over a range of accommodation, from suburban inns to huge resorts. You set the layout, staff, policies—all the nuts and bolts you would expect. You also have access to an impressive array of competitor information, market research, and other business tools. The fully 3D view makes

layout a breeze, and you can zoom in and follow any of your patrons or staff, or even walk around your hotel from your customers' point of view.

Graphically, the game breaks from the traditional "eye in the sky" viewpoint of most business games and instead takes a cue from another recent runaway hit, *The Sims*. *Hotel Giant* is similar in look and feel to the voyeur's dollhouse but focuses on business goals rather than basic housekeeping and bathroom duties. All told, it's a solid and enjoyable game that should appeal to both business tycoon fans who want to focus more on their customers and fans of *The Sims* who want to play a more goal-oriented game.



See your hotel from the customer's point of view.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The Sims meets a solid, if not riveting, business simulation.

Master desert tactics, before they master YOU !



www.gatheringofdevelopers.com



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VIOLENCE

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Syberia

Adventure gaming comes in from the cold By **Charles Ardai**

PUBLISHER: Microids DEVELOPER:

Benoit Sokal

GENRE: Adventure

URL: www.syberia.info

ESRB RATING: Teen; use of

alcohol and tobacco

PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II

350, 64MB RAM,

600MB hard drive

space, 16MB 3D card

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:

Pentium III 500,

128MB RAM, 1GB

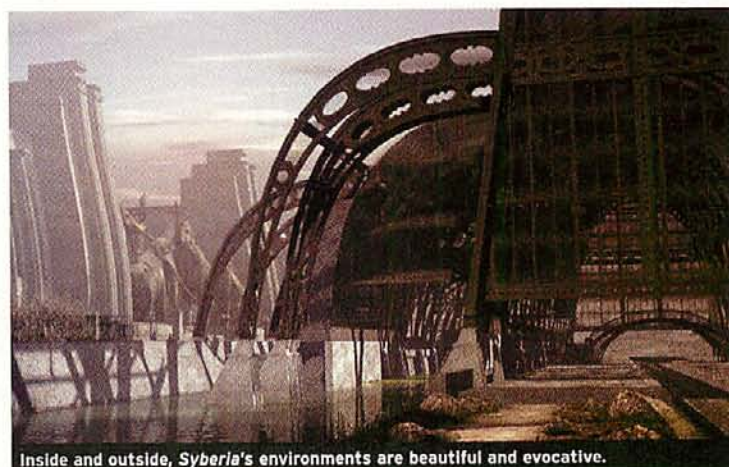
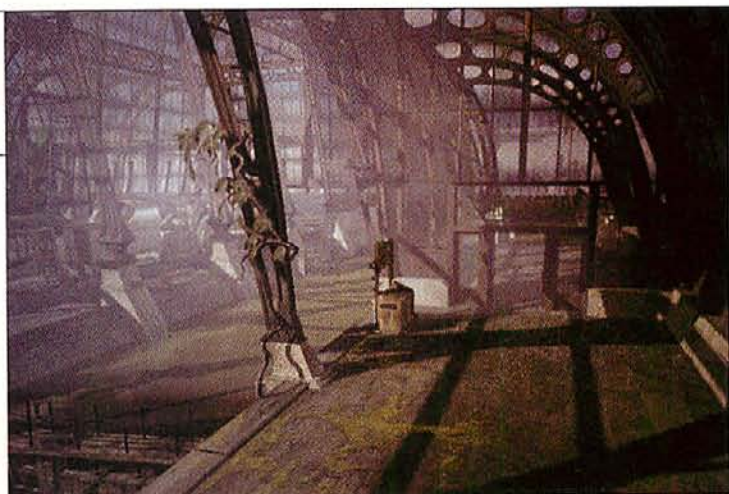
hard drive space, 32MB

3D card MULTIPLAYER: None

It's been a long time since I played an adventure game that really made me happy—so long, in fact, that a few issues ago I declared the whole field of adventure games dead. Well, I was wrong. There is still one man out there who knows how to make a great adventure game and somehow keeps managing to talk game companies into letting him do it. His name is Benoit Sokal, and his new game, *Syberia*, is easily the best traditional adventure game in years.

From the very first scene, in which an automaton leads a funeral procession for its maker through the rain-swept streets of a town in the French Alps, *Syberia* draws you in and doesn't let you go. The graphics are the finest I've ever seen—*Myst* looks like a crayon drawing compared to this. The classical score and ambient sound effects make the game world feel full and alive rather than empty and sterile. The puzzles are conventional (lots of gears and levers to manipulate), but they are incorporated into the story with care and so avoid coming across as abstract brainteasers. And the story they're incorporated into is intriguing and deftly told. You're an attorney representing the Universal Toy Company in its attempt to buy the famous Voralberg automaton factory from the last surviving member of the family, Anna Voralberg—only it's Anna's funeral procession that you come across in the opening scene, and then you learn that her long-dead brother, Hans, may actually be alive...

As you follow Hans's trail from town to town, you uncover secrets about his and Anna's past, often told in cut-scenes that are genuinely breathtaking. The game is not without its flaws—noninteractive dialogues that go on too long, the need to cover the same ground repeatedly as you



Inside and outside, *Syberia's* environments are beautiful and evocative.

shuttle back and forth between locations you've already visited—but each time you feel a twinge of frustration or impatience, the designers come through with a stunning bit of storytelling or a graphical grace note, and the smile creeps right back onto your face.

Like Sokal's previous game, the underappreciated *Amerzone*, *Syberia* is eccentric and charming—and likely to be underappreciated. The pace is leisurely,

the story thoughtful. Nothing blows up in the opening scene; no zombie dogs erupt from the shadows to eat your face. In some ways, despite its cutting-edge graphics, *Syberia* is a throwback to an earlier era, when there was room for games that made you think as well as ones that honed your reflexes. Alas, as the automaton makers in the game lament, "Computers, video games, and electronic robots now predominate in our society, rendering traditional clockwork mechanisms obsolete. The age of the wind-up toy is over. Such technology cannot compete in the modern economic climate and has fallen by the wayside." Old-fashioned adventure games are the wind-up toys of the computer gaming world: elegant, mesmerizing, virtuoso creations that people have lost the habit of enjoying. It would be a shame if *Syberia* fell by the wayside, but it might. I encourage you to find a copy before it's gone.



Toys like these dolls hold many of the puzzles to be solved by our heroine.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Easily the best new adventure game in years, though it loses some steam after its outstanding first act.

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Shadow of Destiny

Interactive, but just barely By Rob Smolka

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Konami
GENRE: Adventure

URL: www.konami.com

ESRB RATING: Teen; animated violence
PRICE: \$39.99

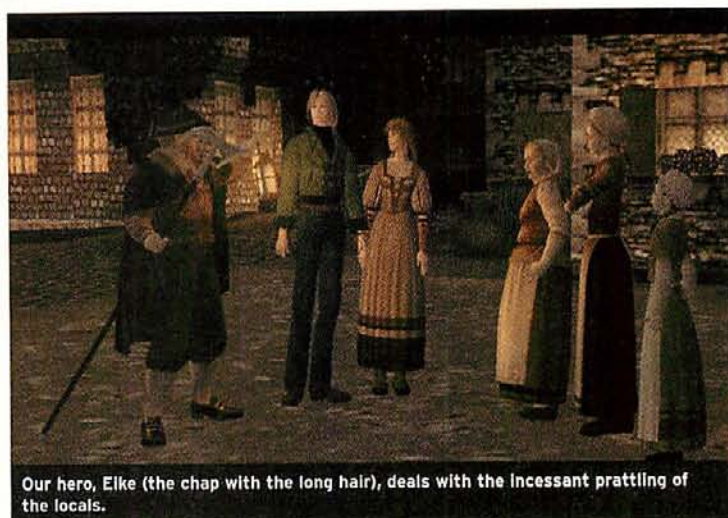
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
450, 64MB RAM,
700MB hard drive
space, 16MB 3D
video card

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: None

The original PlayStation 2 version of *Shadow of Destiny* received fairly high scores from many console game reviewers when it was released last year, which makes me wonder...were they all completely out of their minds? Maybe I'm way off base here, but I expect my games to contain actual gameplay and not be a series of long, poorly acted cut-scenes, lightly salted with puzzles that require the intelligence of a gnat to solve.

Shadow of Destiny is saved only by its intriguing storyline. The game starts with you witnessing your death, and with the help of a mysterious benefactor who gives you a time-traveling device, you must go back to prevent your own murder. Each mission requires little more than running around and finding the right character or object you need to thwart that particular death, and the solutions are so obvious that even a nongamer should have no trouble completing the game in a matter of hours. The vast majority of that time will be consumed by the drawn-out cinematics, fighting the terrible control scheme, or dealing with the dopey console save system. There are multiple endings and additional scenes for those who opt to play through again, but once was more than enough for me.

With a maximum resolution of 800x600, the look of the game is acceptable but nowhere near what PC gamers have come to expect these days. The characters are straight out of an anime movie, with the requisite large eyes and flowing hair, and their animation is rather stiff. The textures of the buildings could have benefited from a higher



Our hero, Elke (the chap with the long hair), deals with the incessant prattling of the locals.

Maybe I'm off base here, but I expect games to contain actual gameplay.

resolution, but for the most part, the graphics in the interactive portion are sufficient. The cut-scenes are beautifully rendered.

As for the audio, it misses more than it hits. The voice acting ranges from mediocre to downright annoying, and the background music is forgettable at best. The dialogue is long-winded and often painfully hilarious. You can turn off the voices and stick with reading the captions that automatically appear on the bottom of the screen, but there's no way to speed past the dialogue, unfortunately.

If you're looking for a slightly interactive movie with a decent story, you may like *Shadow of Destiny*. But I think those easily impressed console gamers need to be exposed to some LucasArts classics like *Monkey Island* or *Grim Fandango* to understand what a good adventure game really is.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Shadow of Destiny's interesting premise is ruined by sleep-inducing gameplay and cut-scenes.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

By Thomas L. McDonald

This month's Revisionist History goes into double overtime to bring you not one, but two, patches.

Dungeon Siege is behind this unexpected largesse. Although Gas Powered Games hasn't managed to squirt either the siege editor or the first patch past the beta stage, the minor progress they've made is worth noting. The siege editor beta (v1.09B.306) has about all the functionality we can expect, and it even works most of the time. It's, well, an editor: 3,800 nodes, 1,200 objects, 200



monsters, 150 NPCs, lighting, scripting, and all those other feature list bullet points.

As for the pre-patch (v1.09B), it has a modest slate of improvements.

Slowdown and other performance problems were among the few serious complaints, and Gas Powered is diligently working on smoothing out these nasty bits. This includes sound drops as well as some annoying object problems, such as things that float or are inaccessible. A few other features, such as repaired journal updates, expanded ZoneMatch functions, and improved boss encounters, round out the bill. Maddox, on the other hand, has taken a



more vigorous approach in their latest, sweeping patch for *IL-2 Sturmovik* (v1). Included is a generous selection of new flyable aircraft for all sides.

Fixes and tweaks fall into three categories: realism enhancements, fixes to co-op mode and server support, and general stability and bug fixes. A variety of improvements were made to the realism. Padlocking was completely reworked and now offers better target selection and increased maximum locking distance. Maddox has also expanded the flexibility for multiplayer sessions by accommodating console commands, as well as allowing timeouts and player autokicking.

Jazz & Faust

A long, stiff nail in the coffin of the adventure game **By Thomas L. McDonald**

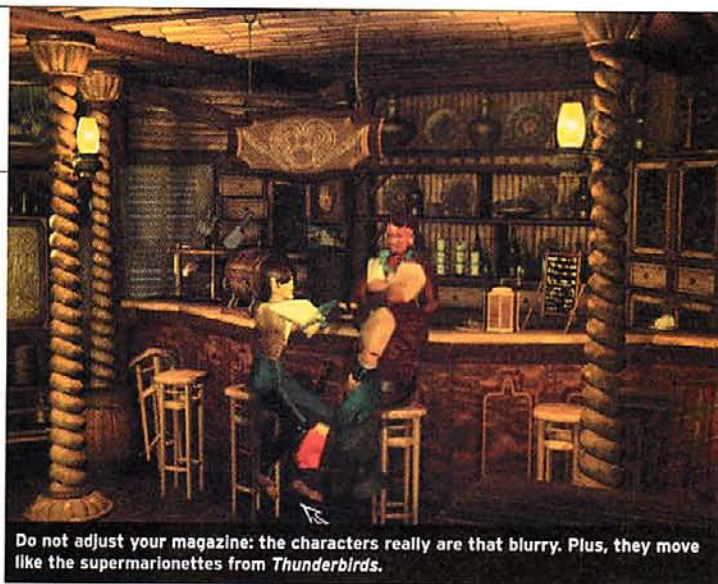
PUBLISHER: 1C
Company/Saturn-Plus
DEVELOPER: Saturn-Plus
GENRE: Adventure
URL: www.jazzandfaust.com
ESRB RATING: Teen;
suggestive themes, use
of drugs, violence
PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
300, 32MB RAM,
800MB hard drive
space RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
750, 64MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: None

When old-school gamers gather 'round the cracker barrel out front of the general store, one of them inevitably says something like, "Adventure games..." and trails off while heads nod sagely and say, "Ayup." That's because the old-timers know that adventure games are deader than 5.25 floppies.

If you had any reason to doubt this, *Jazz & Faust* is a poke from a sharp stick to remind you. Even when adventure games were at their peak, *Jazz & Faust* would have been considered a stiff. A bland, badly written import from Russia with excruciating voice acting, it attempts to hang its hat on some pretty backgrounds and the slightly novel feature of being able to play the game from the perspectives of two characters. Jazz is a rogueish kind of fella, and Faust is a sea captain and a bit of a dandy. The game uses the same backgrounds to create a different adventure—with different puzzles and dialogue—for each character.

The locations themselves are nice to look at, and even have night and daytime versions, but there is precious little going on within the frame. When either character walks into a location, the pixel hunt begins as you diligently run your mouse from side to side and top to bottom looking for hot spots. The vexing thing, however, is that even hot spots are not



Do not adjust your magazine: the characters really are that blurry. Plus, they move like the supermarionettes from *Thunderbirds*.

always accessible depending upon where you are in the story. Hot objects may be all around you, but unless you've passed a certain point in the story, you can't pick them up or use them.

The result is constant backtracking to check out every "locked" object after you perform a task, on the off chance that a designer found it logical to let you pick up, say, a ladder after giving a drunk a bottle. Most of the puzzles involve little more than finding object A and giving it to person B in order to get object C and give it to person D. As if that weren't enough of a gaming deterrent, developer Saturn-Plus hobbled *Jazz & Faust* with repetitive sound effects, voice actors straight out of the methadone clinic,

and absolutely torturous dialogue.

Traditional adventure games went the way of the woolly mammoth because their function—providing gamers with a world to explore—is done better by 3D games. If you loved adventure games and think even slim pickins are better than none, *Jazz & Faust* will disabuse you of that notion right quick. Better to let the games live on in your memory, where totem poles are always moist with mayonnaise and Leisure Suit Larry never scores.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Simultaneously boring and frustrating, with a design that buries the needle on the Irritation-o-meter.

Fulda Gap '85

Return to the Cold War with the latest monster boardgame from HPS **By John Fletcher**

PUBLISHER: HPS
Simulations DEVELOPER:
John Tiller
GENRE: Wargame
URL: www.hpssims.com
ESRB RATING: None
PRICE: \$49.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133,
32MB RAM, 250MB
hard drive **space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet,
email (2 players)

Back in the Reagan '80s, when *Red Dawn* was considered plausible moviemaking, wargamers delighted in endlessly slugging out imagined Russkie invasions of Western Europe. *Fulda Gap '85* returns to those glory days, a testament to paranoid fantasies past in a world of paranoid reality present.

As usual, HPS delivers a polished, engaging boardgame that will devour countless wargaming hours. My favorite style of play is in one of the marathon campaign games, as NATO with the fog-of-war option on. The tension is continual as seemingly endless numbers of Commie tanks relentlessly break against beleaguered GIs. The AI shrewdly pulls tired formations out of the line and replaces them with fresh divisions. I rely on pocket defenses with German line divisions while

the U.S. V Corps' studly armored cavalry and attack helicopter formations race from crisis to crisis. Eventually NATO reinforcements enable counterattacks against increasingly battered Warsaw Pact units, but it's a nail-biting time the entire way through.

My only complaint is with the subject. Cold War what-ifs are simply dated in this era of very hot conflicts. The Persian Gulf, Iran-Iraq, or Pakistan-India would be more pertinent topics. Still, *FG '85* is great fun and well worth the



Hooray for the monster game! With 27 scenarios and three campaigns, you'll never run out of options.

money—and that's the bottom line, right?

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great what-if simulation of a rather dated topic.

Baseball Mogul 2003

Just a bit outside By Rob Smolka

PUBLISHER: Monkeystone
GAMES DEVELOPER: Sports
Mogul GENRE: Sports
strategy URL: www.monkeystone.com
ESRB RATING: None
PRICE: \$19.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 100,
16MB RAM, 150MB
hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium II 400, 64MB
RAM MULTIPLAYER: None

The category of text-based baseball sims that feature a career mode (as opposed to season replay games like *Diamond Mind Baseball* or *Strat-o-Matic*) has heated up considerably these last few years. Where the *Baseball Mogul* series once reigned solely and supremely, it now faces the stiff competition of *Out of the Park Baseball* and *PureSim Baseball*. Unfortunately for the *Mogul* men, their product has stagnated, while the new bloods have beaten them at their own game.

That's not to say that *Mogul 2003* is a bad product. It has a believable statistical engine chugging beneath the surface, and it's by far the most multimedia-rich of all of the mentioned games. It also has the benefit of the Major League Baseball Players Association license, which I don't find terribly compelling in a game that focuses on a fictional future, but that feature may be a selling point for some potential purchasers. Most important, *Mogul* can be quite addictive and loads of fun for the statistically enamored baseball fan who yearns to be a silicon Steinbrenner.

The problem *Mogul 2003* faces is that it's a base model in a field filled with luxury rides—it'll get you where you need to go, but you'll need to hand-crank the windows, manually adjust the seat, and

For text-based sports, *Baseball Mogul 2003* does an eye-pleasing job of presenting the game—it even has some rudimentary sound effects!

forego the CD player for the wonder that is AM radio. There's little direction to help you along as you try to set up and run a league, and the interface is poorly designed at nearly every level. New features like the fantasy draft are great, but they're difficult to enjoy thanks to the tedious way the game forces you to search for players. The lack of drag-and-drop functionality is still a (excuse the pun) drag, and not being able to enlarge the playing window beyond about half the size of your screen is infuriating. The game was also infested with bugs upon its release, although most of the problems have been fixed with several patches.

Mogul 2003 still has the huge advantage of being the most visible product in its genre; the franchise has been around long enough now that people recognize it, and the competition is mainly sold online (*OOTP* is marketed as *Season Ticket Baseball* and sold in stores, but I would guess that this just confuses people). However, anyone interested in this type of game would be advised to take a long look at the friendlier, more polished alternatives.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Still a fun game, but the competition has left *Baseball Mogul* in the dust.

Hooligans: Storm Over Europe

Bugger off, ya bloody ponce! By Tom Price

PUBLISHER: hip developer
DARXABRE GENRE: Strategy
URL: www.hooligans-thegame.com
ESRB RATING: Mature; violence, animated blood, suggestive themes, use of drugs, use of tobacco and alcohol, strong language
PRICE: \$30

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
300, 64MB RAM,
300MB hard drive
space RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
600, 128MB RAM,
600MB hard drive
space MULTIPLAYER: LAN
(2-4 players)

After the unparalleled success of *Grand Theft Auto III* on PS2 and, thankfully, the PC, it was inevitable that game designers would consider the restrictions of good taste null and void and attempt to duplicate that game's success. Of course, they missed the point that *GTA III* was great because of its open-ended game design and not because of the anything-goes theme of murder and mayhem. *Hooligans* is not built upon a solid foundation of game design, although it does get a point for finding some humor in its ultraviolent subject matter.

Of course that's the viewpoint of an American who's never been in a soccer riot or had my town torn up by one, as many in Europe have. Some members of the gaming press over there are so offended by this game they've refused to

cover it in any way whatsoever.

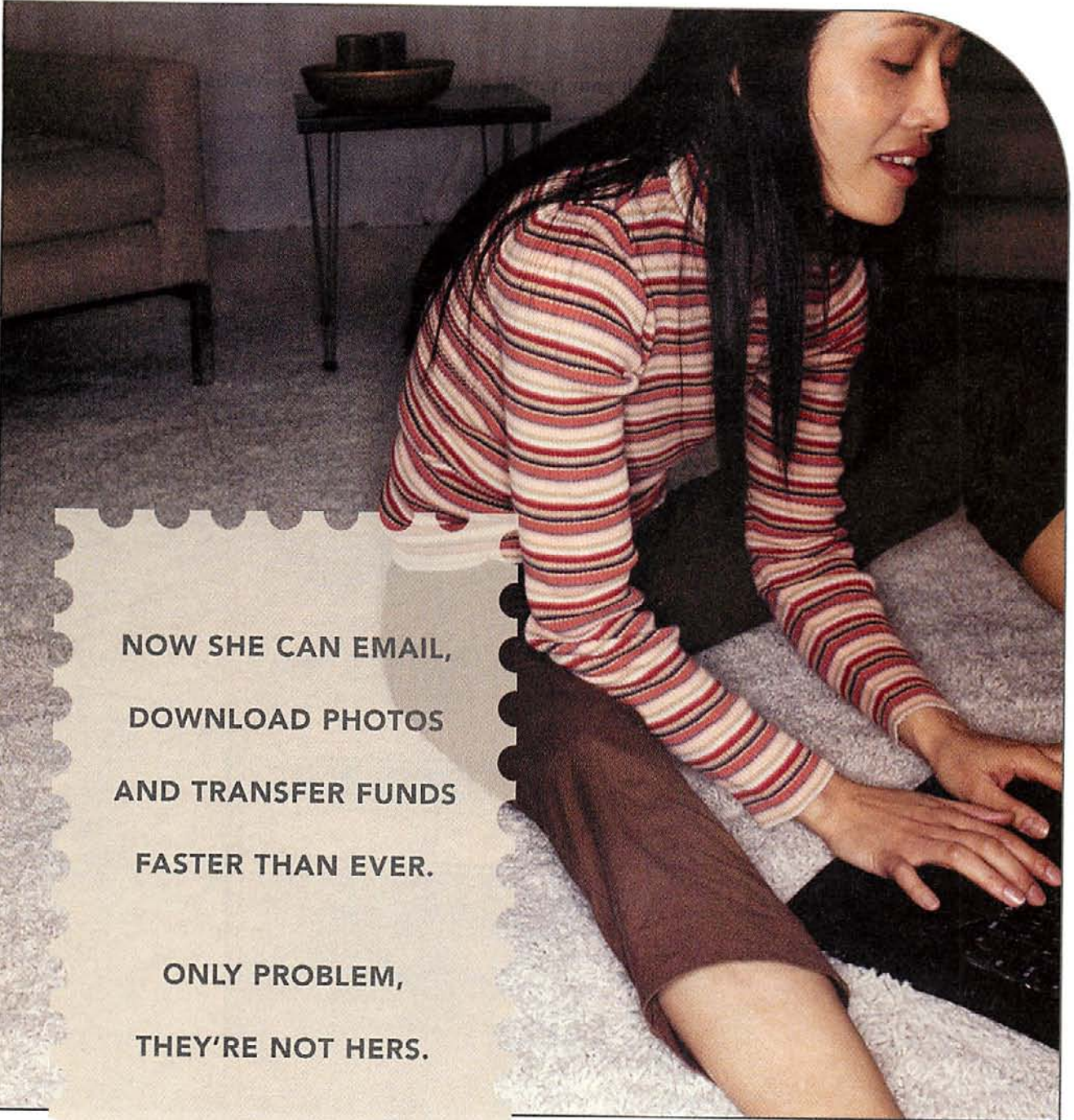
Still, the concept's not a bad one: an RTS in which you control a raucous crowd of bikers, ravers, and bulchs (I have no idea) with one main resource: beer. In fact, the tagline for the game is "The only thing to fear is running out of beer." You guide your gang in robbing and looting to raise more money, to buy more beer, to recruit more hooligans. Seems simple, but the control is janky. Your guys wander around a lot, and brawls are uninteresting. And right there is the crucial mistake. If you're



going to have a game about riots, they better be damn fun to watch.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Offensively boring or boringly offensive. You pick.



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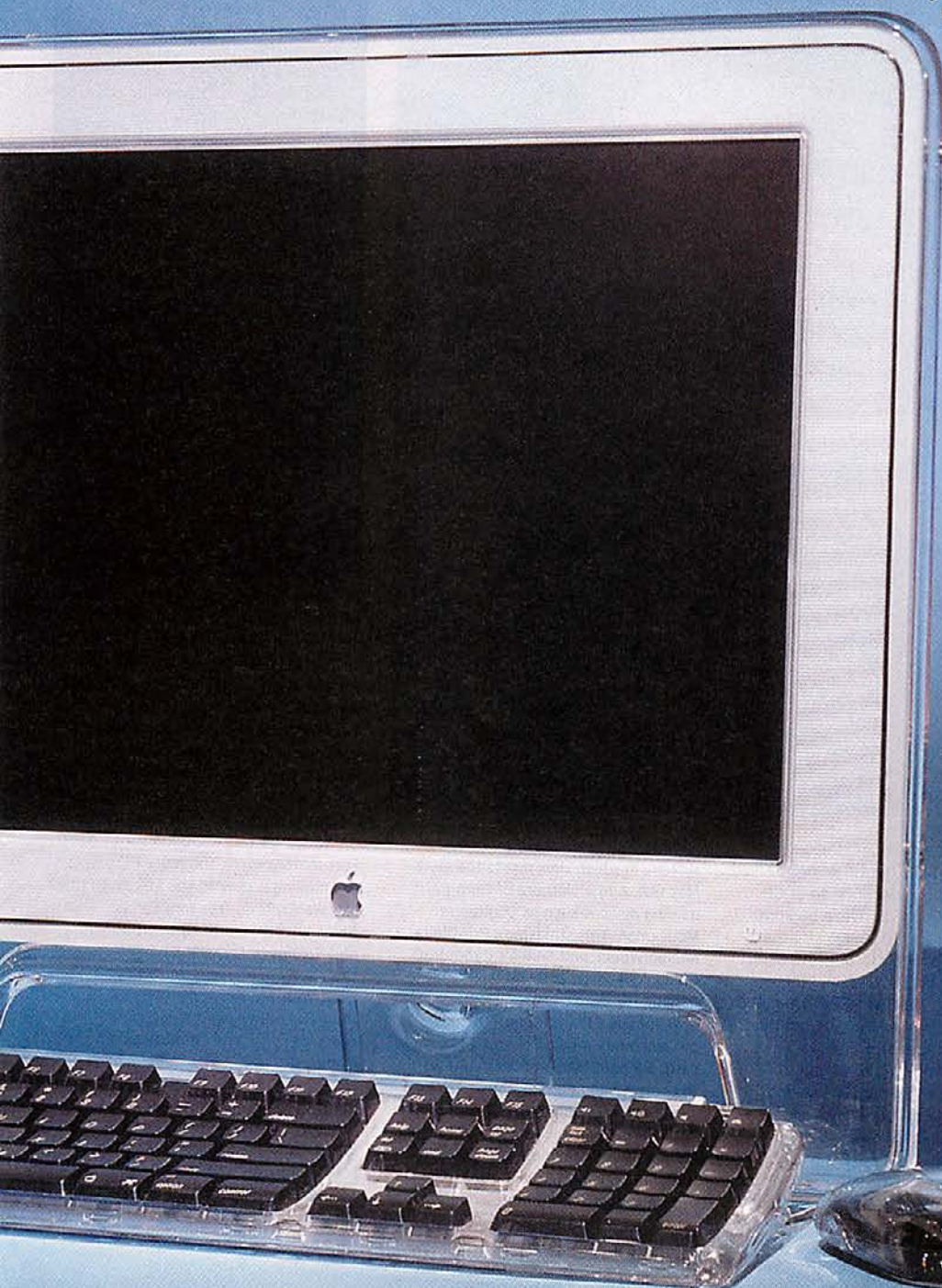


MANUFACTURER: Apple Computer
URL: www.apple.com RRP: \$3,000

owerMac G4

Apple finally breaks the 1GHz barrier, twice over! **By Raphael Liberatore**

Photography by Arnold Tiosejo



Apple's newest G4 PowerPC computer, like every other

Macintosh before it, speaks of elegance, sophistication, and ergonomics. But is it buff enough for demanding gamers who want pounds of muscle? I put the G4 to the test and found that it is indeed plenty powerful.

The new G4 sports not one, but two, Motorola 1GHz PowerPC 7455 processors with AltiVec (codename: Apollo). The processors come equipped with 128-bit internal memory paths and L2 and L3 caches. Interestingly, the G4's L3 cache uses 2MB of DDR SDRAM at 500MHz, with throughput clocked at 4GB per second. Add streamlined, seven-stage

Third-party devices such as ThrustMaster's Pro Digital 2 Racing Wheel and a Saitek flight stick make the G4 a worthy gaming rig.



pipeline architecture, and the G4 is exceptionally fast. The G4 comes packed with powerful components: an 80GB 7200 Ultra-ATA hard drive, a 56-kbps modem, 10/100/1000 base-T ethernet, USB and FireWire ports, a 4X AGP slot, PCI slots, expansion bays, and three slots for up to 1.5GB of PCI33 RAM. And the G4's oven-style panel still can't be beat for easy accessibility.

Playing to Apple's Digital Hub aficionados, the G4 has an amazing DVD+R/CD-RW burner known as the Superdrive, which allows you to burn DVDs and just about anything else using Apple's proprietary iTunes, iDVD, iPhoto, and iMovie software. All of this comes

with OS X, Apple's revamped operating system, in which Unix meets the stylish Mac GUI. Add a plethora of third-party gaming devices such as Logitech's Mouseman, Thrustmaster's Pro Digital 2 Racing Wheel, and Saitek's Cyborg 3D Gold Flight Stick, and you have a worthy gaming rig.

As for the GPU, although the base model comes with a GeForce4 MX video card, die-hard Mac gamers might want to consider adding either a GeForce4 Titanium, ATI Radeon 8500, or Radeon 7500 Dual GPU. Initial tests on the G4 turned up remarkable frame rates. Running *Quake III: Arena*, *Myth III*, *Max Payne*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *Return*

BUT WHAT CAN YOU PLAY?

Historically, the problem with gaming on the Mac has been the dearth of available titles. And few things frustrate dedicated gamers more than knowing that there's a great game out there that they just can't play. While there still are fewer Mac-compatible games out there, the gap between PC and Mac choices seems to be shrinking.

The best place to get Mac gaming information is—of course—Apple's Games channel (www.apple.com/games). Here you can find a comprehensive list of games, new and old, that are currently available: everything from classics like *Quake* to newly announced titles like *Max Payne* and *WarCraft III*. Apple's Games channel is also a great place to find out about hardware announcements that relate to Mac gaming.

Another problem with Mac games is finding them, which is where Aspyr Media (www.aspyr.com) comes in. Based in Austin, Texas, Aspyr Media distributes a ton of games, including *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Desert Siege* and *Medal of Honor Allied Assault*. You can also go there to preorder games.

to *Castle Wolfenstein* in 32-bit 1024x768 with everything turned on, the G4 averaged a steady 120 frames per second between the GeForce4 MX and Radeon 8500 cards. At 1600x1200x32, however, the rate dropped to 85 fps. These are decent scores for a rig branded as a mom-and-pop computer, and for a new Mac OS that still needs some tweaking.

The only problem remaining for Mac gamers is getting the games they want. Fortunately, more and more PC games are making it over to the Mac, with titles like *WarCraft III*, *Freedom Force*, *Shadowbane*, *Jedi Knight II*, *Doom III*, and *Soldier of Fortune II* having crossed the once-ominous chasm. This is a positive trend for Apple gamers, as ultimately raw speed and cool features don't make for the ultimate gaming rig. Games do.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Has enough muscle for just about any task, but game content remains thin.

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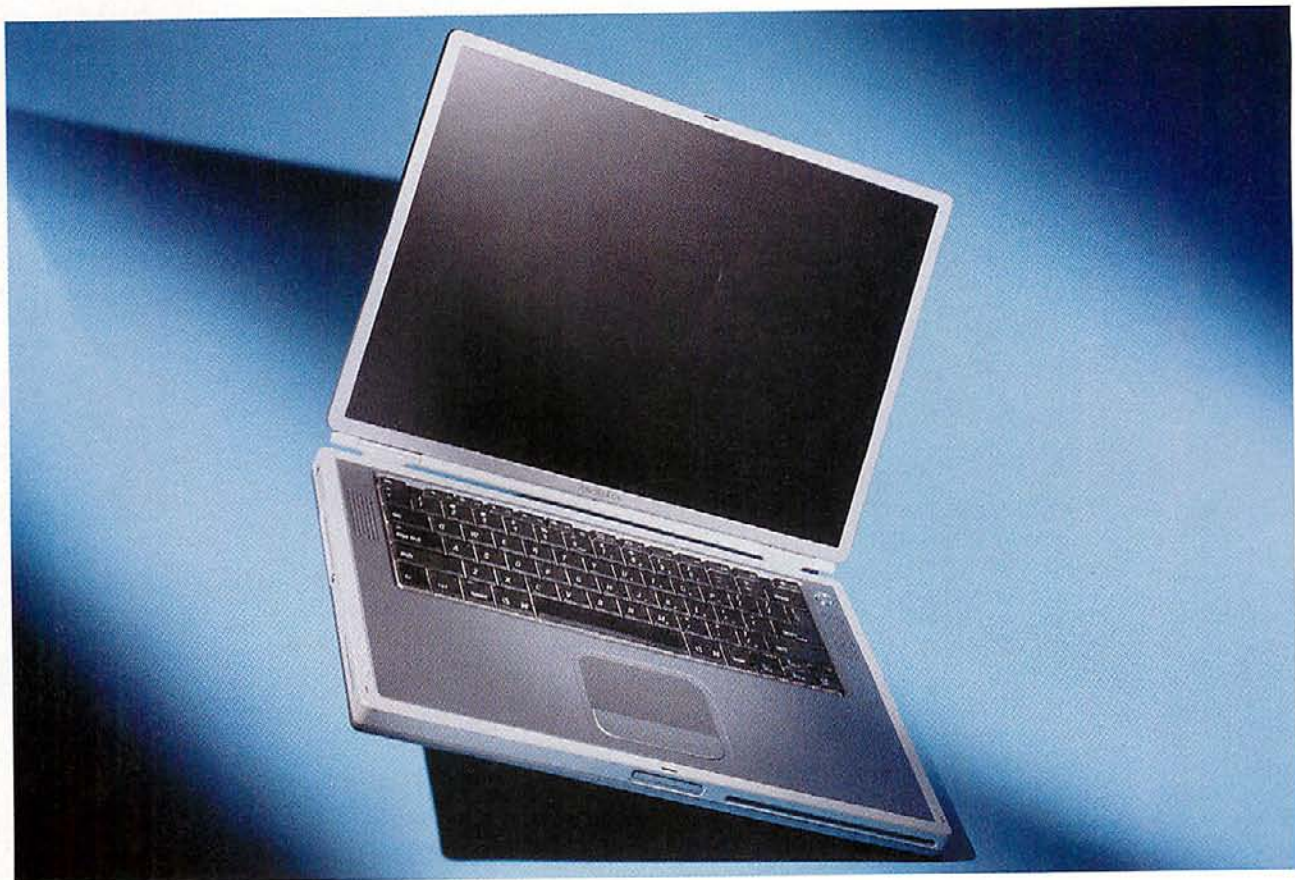


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Apple PowerBook G4

Take note, PC makers: there's more to computing than raw power **By William O'Neal**

MANUFACTURER: Apple
Computer
URL: www.apple.com
PRICE: \$3,000

The first thing you notice about Apple's PowerBook G4 is how cool the thing is: its sleek looks, lightweight design, and wide screen make you wonder why PC makers can't make machines this aesthetic. And when it's powered up, the PowerBook G4 continues to impress. It sports the types of bells and whistles seen only in top-of-the-line PC notebooks, and if not for the sub-par 32MB graphics card and dearth of Mac-compatible games, this baby would easily have earned five stars.

The PowerBook G4 we tested came with an 800MHz PowerPC processor that also boasts a 1MB level-3 cache. For PC guys like me, that 800MHz designation stands out like Longfellow Deeds's black foot. But this 800MHz processor is comparable to Mobile Pentium 4 processors that run at up to twice that speed.

The PowerBook G4 comes with good features: 512MB of PC133 SDRAM, a 40GB hard drive, 15.2-inch active matrix TFT display with a native resolution of 1280x854, a slot-loading DVD/CD-RW combo drive, PC card/CardBus slot, FireWire, two USB ports, 10/100/1000 base-T ethernet and 56-kbps modem, integrated 802.11b wireless, and DVI and S-video output ports.

I used to despise the Mac OS, but OS X has me changing my tune. It's backward-compatible with older Mac operating systems and is easy to learn how to use.

But enough about that. You all want to know how good the PowerBook is for gaming. Here's where things get dicey. The G4's 32MB ATI Mobility Radeon leaves a lot to be desired. In *Quake III: Arena*, it achieved rates of 58 frames per second at 1024x768x16 and at 1024x768x32. A year ago these numbers would have been impressive, but with non-Apple laptops shipping with 64MB GeForce4 440 Go chipsets that achieve *Quake III: Arena* frames rates of 150 fps, it's hard to look past this machine's

graphical handicaps. The Radeon is perfectly capable for gaming, but you will see some choppiness and often be forced to lower the resolution for games.

On the game-supply front, things are looking up for the Mac. Not only did we test this laptop with *Quake III: Arena*, but we also played *Medal of Honor Allied Assault*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds*, *American McGee's Alice*, and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. Mac-compatible games on the horizon include *Ghost Recon* and this game called *Halo* that I think a lot of people like.

If you're looking for the best portable for gaming, you won't find it in the PowerBook G4. But if you're a creative type who spends a lot of time in Quark and Photoshop and also wants to game, I think you'll be happy with it.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A stylish and powerful laptop that's held back by its sub-par graphics processor.

It sports bells and whistles seen only in top PC notebooks.



HP DVD Writer dvd200e

External DVD writer supports FireWire and USB 2.0
By Ken Feinstein



MANUFACTURER: Hewlett-Packard
URL: www.hp.com
PRICE: \$599

REQUIREMENTS: PC with available USB 2.0 or IEEE 1394 FireWire port

HP's dvd200e DVD writer seems to defy that law of the universe that no new technology can work properly in its first iteration. But the dvd200e introduces two brand-new technologies, USB 2.0 for fast data transfers and the DVD+R write-once DVD format, and they both actually work well. Will wonders never cease?

This external drive connects via FireWire (IEEE 1394) or USB 2.0. We tested both interfaces with excellent results. Both offered truly plug-and-play installation; we connected the drive and Windows XP Home Edition automatically recognized it. USB 2.0 runs at 480 Mbps, a little faster than FireWire's 400 Mbps. Compare that to USB 1.1's pitifully slow 12 Mbps and you can see USB 2.0's potential. The two interfaces delivered the same performance, writing 1.1GB of data in only seven minutes.

The drive can read CDs and DVDs and write CD-Rs, CD-RWs, DVD+RWs, and DVD+Rs. You can rewrite on 4.7GB DVD+RWs

thousands of times, which makes them ideal for backups and archiving data. However, most DVD players can't play DVD+RWs, so they're of little use in creating your own DVD movies.

The write-once DVD+R format promises much better compatibility. HP bundles the excellent MyDVD authoring software; using it, I created in only a few minutes a DVD of MPEGs downloaded from the Net. This disc played without problem on a wide variety of DVD players. I don't expect this format to work with all players, but it seems to be broadly compatible.

As you'd expect, all of this leading-edge technology doesn't come cheap. The drive itself costs \$599 and you'll need a PC with FireWire or USB 2.0 support. HP sells DVD+RWs for a hefty \$10.99 but DVD+Rs are only \$5.99. Overall, though, this drive's power and flexibility make it well worth the price.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This DVD writer does it all and does it well.



WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Change Is Good

This has been an interesting month, to say the least. Dana got hitched a few weeks ago and has been honeymooning ever since. But rather than devolve and form a *Lord of the Flies*-inspired boys' gang, replete with loincloths and bizarre homoerotic rituals, we just sort of stopped working. I haven't played this much *Counter-Strike* in months, and the bartenders up the street (at our "second office") are happy to have us—and our generous tips—back.

But alas, all things (I'm not even gonna say "good things") must end. I'm writing this column, which was due exactly one week ago, on the bus to the office, knowing that I'll have to explain to Mom why I haven't submitted anything in a week.

Anyway, this is also an interesting time for PC gaming, a time when it seems that things are taking a turn for the better. There have been some announcements lately that give us hope that our beloved hobby will continue to flourish: ATI recently announced the release of its vaunted Radeon 9700 graphics card, the 128MB monster that powered Carmack's *Doom III* demo at this year's E3; and in spite of financial woes, Nvidia seems to be on track to release their next-generation graphics processor, if not by the end of the year as they claim, then by early next year at the latest. And Microsoft has announced that *Halo* will be released for the PC and Macintosh.

I'm really excited about this month's hardware articles. Although many people seem to want more of the same graphics card and system roundups, I think it's important to explore other areas of computer gaming (by the way, a Mac is technically a "personal computer"). To that end, I decided to open the section with a Mac review, in an attempt to explore an often-ignored aspect of gaming, as well as to spur a little dialogue. In other words, let me know what you think about the Macintosh as a gaming platform (william_o'neal@ziffdavis.com). While there aren't nearly as many games for the Mac as there are for the PC, there are more than ever before, including titles like *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Quake III: Arena*, and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, just to name a few. Also, the two Macs we review this month are both gaming-capable screamers, so it's become pretty obvious that you can game on the same rig that you use Photoshop and Quark for.

Well, I'm tired of writing, and my bus is about to pull into the terminal, so enjoy the section.



Monsoon Planar Media 9 Speakers

Monsoon gives 2.1 speakers a new image **By Raphael Liberatore**



MANUFACTURER: Monsoon
URL: www.monsoon-speakers.com
PRICE: \$99.99

Monsoon's speakers have a reputation for innovative style and technology. A few months ago, I had an opportunity to review their two high-end dipole Planar Focus Technology transducer systems, which both scored well. Their latest 2.1 offering, the Planar Media 9, offers the same technology but at a lower price. But the question remains: can speakers rated at 76 wrms total watts deliver the same performance and quality as their 5.1 and 4.1 siblings? The resounding answer is yes.

The Planar Media 9 comes with two dipole-radiating, ribbon transducer flat-panel satellites rated at 19 watts each. The subwoofer has two 19-watt, 6.5-inch, dual-voice coil drivers housed in a small cabinet. The Control Center

possesses a mute button, master volume and bass dials, and a headphones jack.

After burning in the speakers with a *Best of Trance* CD, I set the volume at 90 decibels, using a sound level meter for testing. The speakers fared extremely well at this high volume, producing a strong soundstage presence that rivals more expensive 5.1 systems. Highs were clean, and I heard a lean midrange tonality in Pat Coil's *Sheffield Drive* track "Escape Clause," as well as in Eugene Ormandy's stellar performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéherazade*. High-energy songs from *Queen's Greatest Hits* along with *The Best of the Rippingtons* conveyed good tonal balance. I was also impressed with the PM 9's crisp localization,

displayed when playing an assortment of DVDs, from *The Matrix* and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* to *Fantasia 2000* and *Shrek*. During *The Matrix*, for example, the satellites produced in crisp detail the sound of rounds dropping to the floor when Neo and Trinity penetrated the high-rise to rescue Morpheus. Of course, games are where these speakers really show off. In *Medal of Honor* and *WarCraft III*, the booms and rumbles emanating from the subwoofer were coherent, with little distortion.

Without a doubt, Monsoon's Planar Media 9 is the best 2.1 speaker system I have ever had the pleasure of listening to. If you're concerned about space and price, then look no further.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Monsoon's Planar Media 9 speakers compare well with more expensive 5.1 and 4.1 systems.

The PM 9 fared well at high volumes, rivaling expensive 5.1 systems.

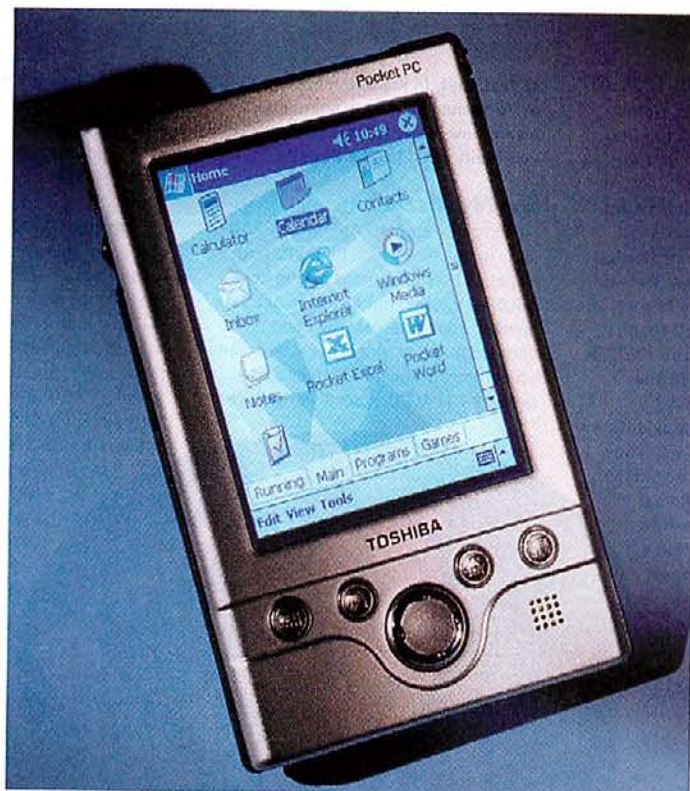
Toshiba e310 PocketPC

This pocket rocket is sexy, but it still won't make you a hit with the ladies By Darren Gladstone



MANUFACTURER: Toshiba
URL: www.toshiba.com
PRICE: \$399

REQUIREMENTS 486/66 DX
or higher CPU,
Windows
98/ME/2000/XP,
32MB RAM, 65MB
hard drive space,
CD-ROM drive, USB
or IrDA port



Power users and dorks will love how the e310 handles, while the fashionable will dig its slim looks.

It's getting so you really can fit the power of a PC into your pocket. The Toshiba e310's power might be on par with that of some old desktop, but it's more than sufficient for tuning out the jackass sitting next to you during your commute. Better still, this slick handheld lets you do it in style.

Power users, corporate types, and grade A dorks will love how this PocketPC handles, while the fashion-conscious will dig the slim looks and gunmetal casing. This sucker is *slim*—less than a half-inch thick—and it weighs only 4.9 ounces, but what's impressive is the 206MHz Intel StrongARM CPU that delivers the goods under the hood.

One of the rallying cries for Microsoft's PocketPC 2002 OS is that it handles multimedia. PocketPC's abilities are well displayed here: with the e310's built-in media player you can listen to MP3s or watch an episode of *Crank Yankers* on the road. As the device is fronted by a sharp, colorful, 3.5-inch reflective LCD (320x240 pixels and 65,000 colors), it's good for games, too. For proof, try playing the RTS game *Argentum*, a port of *SimCity 2000*, or any number of other

titles we've found for the OS—they look downright impressive.

Of course, there's usually a price for such power. But whereas most PocketPC devices suck down juice like 12-steppers gulp coffee at an AA meeting, the e310's rechargeable lithium-ion battery just keeps going. We actually lost track of the battery life after a couple hours.

The only downside is that the thing needs memory for all this entertainment, and although the e310 has a built-in Secure Digital card slot, it has only 32MB of RAM inside—and that needs to be divvied up between the CPU and your files. This PDA lists for \$399 on its own, and the price goes up another \$100 or so when you start shelling out for extra MMC or SD cards.

More powerful PocketPCs, like the e740, are starting to ship with the new X-Scale CPU. They promise better video and game performance, but, of course, the extra muscle costs about \$200 more.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you're looking for a good all-around deal, you can't go wrong with the e310.

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Tech Medics

You've got questions; we've got answers **By William O'Neal**

What's the Deal With GTA III?

Last month in my review of *Grand Theft Auto III*, I mentioned the bug that disables menus when you're running Windows XP in conjunction with an Nvidia-based graphics card. Since then I've been deluged with reader mail asking me about the fix. According to Take 2 Games' Website, "This problem is solved by the use of a newer version of d3d8.dll than is shipped on CD with Windows XP." You can find the file by going to the Rockstar Games Website at www.rockstargames.com, navigating to the official *GTA III* (for PC) page and clicking on the Support button. From there, click the Technical Help button and scroll down to the Video section. You'll find a description of the problem as well as a link to the downloadable file that fixes the problem.

Move to the Mountains and Stop Bothering People

My buddy has a 500MHz Pentium III with 128MB of RAM with a 16MB ATI Rage 128 Pro graphics card. Any suggestions for free tweaks like overclocking utilities?

Ivan

No.

Big, Big Hard Drives

I have a question about the new large hard drives. How do you suggest configuring one of these beasts (100GB or greater)? Do most people section them into multiple partitions or use them in one large chunk? I know that partition size used to affect performance, and older versions of Windows could support only certain size partitions. But I don't know if those limitations are gone. So if you were getting a new XP system with a 120GB hard drive, how would you set it up?

Steve Motley

A lot of people still partition their hard drives. A common configuration would be a 10GB C: drive for the OS with a 110GB D: drive for applications. Partitioning your hard drive will improve performance, but today's machines are

so fast that, in my opinion, the performance gains are negligible. I mean, how many frames per second do you really need in *The Sims*?

Say My Nizzle...

I plan to buy an AMD Athlon XP 2200+, and I'm not sure which motherboard to get. I'm seriously considering an ASUS A7V266-E, but I want to get your opinion. I don't necessarily need onboard audio or video, because I plan on getting an Audigy X-Gamer and a GeForce4 Ti 4600. Also, a word on cases

because they are easy to find, inexpensive, and simple to use. If, however, you want a case that's truly off the shizzle, get an aluminum CoolerMaster case.

Pricewatch.com

I recently upgraded my computer so that I didn't have to call it an ancient piece of ****. I got rid of my old Pentium II, Riva TNT, my motherboard, and my memory. I was able to find the replacements for these on Pricewatch.com quite easily. I found an ASUS A7V333 motherboard with audio for \$120, an AMD Athlon XP 1800+ for \$110, a GeForce4 MX 420 for \$100, and 256MB of Crucial PC2700 DDR RAM for \$60. I have noticed that this magazine and many others don't represent the prices that are easily found on the Internet. Representing prices accurately would allow people to make an equal or better machine [than the Killer Rigs] with less money. Just a suggestion. Keep up the good work.

Bryan Hockey

P.S. Got any extra Killer Rigs lying around?

I agree 100 percent. But getting close to accurate prices for the items used in my Killer Rigs is harder than putting the damn machines together. Within my lead time of about two months,

Getting close to accurate prices for the Killer Rigs is harder than putting the things together.

and power supplies: I'd like to have a high-end case, with a power supply in the 400-watt range. Any suggestions?

Jeremy

With that CPU I'd consider getting either an ASUS A7N266 nForce or MSI KT3. As for cases and power supplies, I'm partial to Antecs

prices invariably drop. But rather than hedge in that direction, I err on the other side, and the retail prices that I list are higher than those that will exist on Pricewatch.com by the time an issue ships. So what's a reader to do? Well, just know that you can easily find parts at prices lower than those printed in this magazine.



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CREATIVE[®]

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos image courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine **By William O'Neal**

Remember last month when I promised to update my Killer Rigs? Well, I lied. But I didn't intentionally lie, as I was hoping to build a new machine around ATI's recently announced Radeon 9700. Unfortunately, it's press time, and I won't be receiving the card until next week.

Well, in the words of Dave Salvator, "hope springs eternal." Next month, I promise, you'll see two entirely new rigs, one of which—I hope—will sport the Radeon 9700.



**Next
month
you'll
see two
entirely
new
rigs—
really!**

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	\$200
Motherboard	Intel D850MV	\$150
Case	Antec Plus 660B	\$120
Processor	Intel 2.53GHz Pentium 4 with 533MHz FSB	\$600
Memory	512MB Samsung RDRAM PC800	\$200
Graphics Card	VisionTek 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	\$400
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	\$700
Hard Drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200 rpm	\$200
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	\$70
CD-RW Drive	Teac 40X/12X/48A	\$100
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	\$100
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	\$300
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	\$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	\$50
TOTAL		\$3,240

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	\$200
Motherboard	ASUS A7N266-C nForce	\$150
Case	Antec SX-635	\$100
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 1800+	\$150
Memory	256MB Crucial PC2100 DDR RAM	\$120
Graphics Card	64MB VisionTek Nvidia GeForce3 Ti 200	\$200
Monitor	19" NEC MultiSync FE950+	\$320
Hard Drive	20GB Maxtor D740X Ultra DMA133 7200 rpm	\$100
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	\$70
CD-RW Drive	N/A	N/A
Sound Card	Onboard nForce 5.1 Audio	N/A
Speakers	Logitech Z-340	\$40
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	\$40
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	\$50
TOTAL		\$1,540

BENCHMARKS

Quake III: Arena 1024x768x32	244	137
Quake III: Arena 1600x1200x32	135	72
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x32	158	95
Serious Sam: TSE 1600x1200x32	116	59
Ziff Davis 3DWinMark2000	332	195
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1024x768x32	11691	6124
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1600x1200x32	7443	4202

Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Thierry Nguyen

DIRTIEST TRICK O' THE MONTH

Here's a little prank for Blizzard's latest, *WarCraft III*. Tricks that anger and confuse people like this one get you free schwaq, like *Morrowind* or even *WarCraft III: Collector's Edition*.

My attempt at trick of the month involves *WarCraft III*. It works with the Undead race only, and requires making lots of shades (evolved acolytes). After you get a bunch of these guys, put them in front of the entrance to your or your enemy's camp, in a line with no gaps between them. When an enemy ground force tries to get in, it won't be able to because the entrance is blocked by the shades. Because the shades are invisible, most units won't be able to attack them. This doesn't work against air units, as they can just fly over, but it's great against ground units.

A variation on this is to surround an enemy's hero with shades, say two per side (depending on the size of the hero), have them "hold ground," and then watch the hero spin around in circles trying to move. The only way out of this is a scroll of Town Portal or the archmage's Mass Teleport spell. I've done this many times, and I find it hilarious each time someone doesn't understand what's going on—and most don't. Thanks. —David Clark

You just snagged yourself the other hefty RPG, *Morrowind*. You like playing the Undead, so try being a vampire in *Morrowind*.

We're now giving away the Criterion edition of *WarCraft III: Collector's Edition*. Write in a Dirty Trick to claim one as yours!



Magic: The Gathering Online

Starting your first deck PAGE 130



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MAGIC THE GATHERING

YOUR FIRST DECK

Your first attempts at deck building don't have to produce lemons. Keep a few simple rules in mind to cruise through *Magic Online's* Casual Play room in a heartbeat.

COLOR CODING

Magic Online's five colors come with different styles of play. Whichever you feel most comfortable with is ideal for your first deck, although you should include two complementary colors.

BLACK

Black features a mix of creatures—some flying, some ground based—and ways to deal with threats played by the enemy. The color also has many cards that force your opponent to discard, diminishing their options with each turn. Overall, black combines aggressive and reactive play styles.

BLUE

Blue's strengths are flying creatures, counterspells to keep your foe's threats from entering play, and ways to draw additional cards. Blue is a conservative, reactive color, however, and is the most difficult to learn to play. It takes practice to learn which spells to counter and which spells to let your opponent cast. Don't play a counterspell-heavy deck early in your *Magic Online* career.

GREEN

If you like large creatures, green's your color. Green mages are about power, crushing your opponent by playing

creature after creature, and overwhelming enemies with brute force. No need for blue's flying creatures or black's evasive techniques when you have 5/5 creatures or bigger. You won't find much defense here, just a high-octane offense.

RED

Whereas blue keeps out creatures, red lets creatures enter play—and then shreds them apart. Direct damage spells are red's forte, and there are a lot of them in *Magic Online*. Red supplements its scorched-earth strategy with small creatures and, like green, plays aggressively. If you like defense with your offense, play red.

WHITE

White's credo is damage control, and it offers plenty of damage prevention for its flying creatures. Hypochondria, Embolden, and Solitary Confinement cards are stellar: you can't die if your enemy can't hurt you. To avoid being overwhelmed by green creatures, consider playing white for its best card, Wrath of God, which clears the board of all creatures. Like blue, white plays a slow, reactive game. If you're aggressive, play green. Choose white or blue to control the game. Red's best for creature killing. Black offers a mix of elimination and brutal creatures.

MIX AND MATCH

Ninety-five percent of *Magic Online* decks consist of one or two colors. Each of the 10 color combos has its advantages, but some are better than others. Here's a guide to the game's best color combos.

BLACK/RED

Black and red are *Magic Online's* best colors for creature elimination. Combine these colors with their best creatures, and your machine is tough to stop.

BLUE/WHITE

Blue counters the enemy's best spells, while white takes care of anything that makes it into play. It's the best control combo out there.

RED/GREEN

Speed kills. Green's Elves ramp up the deck's pace in putting in cheap, powerful creatures and burning spells that let them hunt with impunity.

BLUE/BLACK

A combination of counterspells with elimination and flying creatures is what this combo offers—and it means slow death for its adversaries.

BLUE/RED

Counterspells and burn are effective. It's hard for enemies to do much damage when nothing can make it into play and survive.

GREEN/WHITE

In the new Judgment expansion, look out for this creature-based combo. Green/white's strength is in its force, which lets you assault foes from air and ground.

BLUE/GREEN

Great for the speed/threshold decks but a difficult mix. Blue wants to play a passive game; green wants to be aggressive.

ENTERTAINMENT

BLACK/WHITE

Each color offers control, but its creatures don't fit well together. Other decks' sideboards easily attack each color.

BLACK/GREEN

Not for beginners. The Apocalypse supercards Pernicious Deed and Spiritmonger require these colors, but otherwise they aren't compatible.

RED/WHITE

Red has the creature kill, but white lacks the speed to supplement it. Don't go this route unless you're feeling ambitious. Go with black/red or green/red if you like aggressive play. Choose blue/white if your bag is control.

PRECONSTRUCTED PICKS

Wizards of the Coast sells four theme decks for each *Magic Online* expansion set. These builds contain only two rares and won't be mistaken for world-beaters, but they are a handy starting point for new players. Your first step in *Magic Online* should be to purchase one of these decks.

Let's start with the Whirlpool deck from the Apocalypse expansion set. This deck features a balance of direct damage spells, using cards like Fire and Scorching Lava that deal damage to creatures or players, as well as counterspells and bounce spells to keep your opponent's best creatures out of play while yours attack. The deck also has multiple copies of Apocalypse's Bloodfire creatures, which you can sacrifice to damage creatures in play. You will quickly see how brutal these beasts are.

WHIRLPOOL DECK: VERSION 1**ARTIFACTS**

- 2 Chromatic Sphere

BLUE CREATURES

- 1 Coastal Drake
- 2 Faerie Squadron
- 1 Metathran Transport
- 1 Rainbow Crow
- 2 Whirlpool Drake
- 3 Whirlpool Rider
- 1 Whirlpool Warrior

BLUE SPELLS

- 1 Confound
- 1 Exclude
- 2 Jilt
- 1 Opt

GOLD CREATURES

- 2 Minotaur Illusionist
- 2 Razorfin Hunter

GOLD SPELLS

- 2 Quicksilver Dagger
- 1 Suffocating Blast

**RED CREATURES**

- 2 Bloodfire Dwarf
- 1 Dwarven Patrol
- 2 Bloodfire Kavu
- 1 Flametongue Kavu

RED SPELLS

- 1 Bloodfire Infusion
- 1 Scorching Lava

SPLIT CARD

- 1 Fire/Ice

LANDS

- 12 Island
- 12 Mountain

Whirlpool, in its prefab form, is not difficult to play. You don't have to hold anything back, but you should not play multiple single-toughness creatures if you have a Bloodfire Dwarf in play. If you sacrifice the Dwarf, it deals 1 point of damage to each nonflying creature in play.

Go in for the kill if your opponent plays many creatures such as Llanowar Elves and Birds of Paradise, which produce mana that will speed your enemy's strategy along.

If you like your hand, don't play a Whirlpool Drake or Whirlpool Rider. When cast, these creatures make you shuffle your hand into your library, so you won't get to keep the same cards. But when you have five mana in play, hold extra lands you draw in your hand, so you can cycle more cards when you play a Whirlpool creature.

Your spells are designed to keep you in control of the game. Confound, Exclude, and Suffocating Blast are counterspells. Jilt returns a creature to its owner's hand and

damages another monster. Fire splits its damage between two targets. Quicksilver Dagger allows any creature in your deck to deal a point of damage to your opponent, and then you get to draw an extra card.

TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Play Whirlpool a couple of times to see how it holds up in the Casual Play room. Notice that some cards—among them Stun, Metathran Transport, Dwarven Patrol, and Opt—don't cut it.

Before you optimize a deck, ask yourself, which cards do you not see enough of? How about Fire/Ice? This deck has only one. Same goes for Flametongue Kavu, one of the best creatures in the game, and for the Bloodfire creatures that are supposed to keep the board clear.

If you find yourself praying that you'll pull a certain card often in the course of a game, add more copies of that card. Two copies of Jilt aren't enough in this deck. You can put up to four copies of one card in your deck, so run more of your best.

Stun lets you draw an extra card. But for you to maximize its effectiveness, your opponent must have only one creature in play—not likely against most decks. Chromatic Sphere, which also gets you only a card, is sometimes necessary to get a color of mana not produced by the deck's lands. But you're playing only red and blue, and you have plenty of Islands and Mountains.

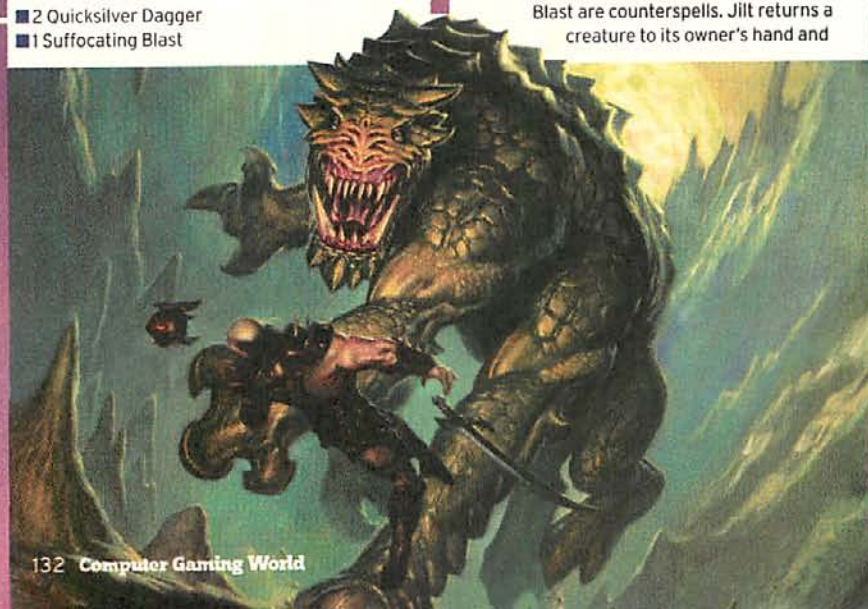
The preconstructed build also has several lesser creatures. It's hard to get around Dwarven Patrol's drawback: nonred spells untap Dwarven Patrols, so many times Dwarven Patrol gets stuck and doesn't untap until you play another nonred spell.

Coastal Drake is great in combination with Flametongue Kavu, but it's tough to pull off. You have only 60 cards, and it's better to do one thing well than three or four things adequately. Focus your deck.

Trying to do too many things often means accomplishing nothing. Make Whirlpool into a better deck. Look at the list for our fresh, improved deck. We've stripped the deck's two rares—Suffocating Blast and Whirlpool Warrior—to trade for commons and uncommons.

WHIRLPOOL DECK: VERSION 2**BLUE CREATURES**

- 4 Whirlpool Drake
- 4 Whirlpool Rider



BLUE SPELLS

- 4 Confound
- 4 Jilt

GOLD CREATURES

- 2 Minotaur Illusionist
- 3 Razorfin Hunter

GOLD SPELLS

- 2 Quicksilver Dagger

RED CREATURES

- 3 Bloodfire Dwarf
- 3 Bloodfire Kavu

- 3 Flametongue Kavu

SPLIT CARDS

- 4 Fire/Ice

LANDS

- 12 Island
- 12 Mountain

With all the card cycling this deck does, multiple copies of all your game winners ensure you'll find what you're looking for. The extra Fire/Ice, Flametongue Kavus, and Bloodfire creatures make short work of anything in play.

DO IT YOURSELF

When you've mastered the basics and improved the Whirlpool deck, build some decks that will impress those in the Casual Play area. If you've already bought online boosters or played the cardboard version of *Magic: The Gathering*, you probably have a deck idea. Review some basic rules that apply to every deck.

CHEAP IS GOOD

Big creatures like Hypnox and Devouring Stroussus may seem impressive, but you get to play only one mana each turn. Loading your deck with high-cost critters ensures one thing: a loss. Keep the majority of your spells to the range of four mana or less. *Magic Online* pros speak of the mana curve; when you're building a deck, have an equal number of spells that cost one, two, three, and four mana. The more cheap spells you have, the better.

SPELLS VERSUS CREATURES

In addition to applying the mana curve to both creatures and spells, you should keep a balance between card types. Don't play 16 creature enchantments and only eight creatures, or 20 counterspells and no damage-dealing cards. Balance is everything in creating a winning deck.

GET OVER THE RAINBOW

You've found cards in each color that you want to play with. Branch out into all five of *Magic Online*'s colors, but don't do it in one deck. Stick to one or two colors, so you'll be sure to draw the mana color you need to cast powerful spells. If you want to play more than two colors, don't include spells that require two mana of a single color to play (such as Firecat Blitz, which needs two Mountains to cast).

24'S A CROWD

You'd be surprised how many times a deck comes up short on land. Unless you play a monocolored deck or all of your spells are cheap, use 24 lands as a benchmark—don't stray below it.

CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Each deck has a theme. Some center on a particular creature type; others center on a card mechanic, such as flashback or threshold. Others center on a certain novel card. We'll take you on a

tour of decks of each type, so you can build your own after you've cracked a few virtual booster packs. Each deck has a limited number of rare cards, and we'll even offer some replacement options so you can get going without much effort.

CREATURE THEMES

Magic Online's most entertaining decks are based on creature types—merfolk, angels, zombies, centaurs, dragons, and more. Throw in a bunch of whichever monster type you choose. Don't clutter a zombie deck with creature elimination when you can add more zombies.



BIRDBATH

If squirrels aren't your thing, how about dropping

some terror on your enemies from above? With *Magic Online*'s Judgment expansion, birds place a tournament-caliber theme deck within your talons' grasp.

AIR FORCE ONE DECK

BLUE CREATURES

- 4 Sage Owl
- 4 Stormscape Apprentice

BLUE SPELLS

- 4 Keep Watch

GOLD CREATURES

- 2 Kangee, Aerie Keeper

WHITE CREATURES

- 4 Mystic Familiar
- 4 Soulcatcher

- 4 Suntail Hawk

WHITE SPELLS

- 4 Battle Screech
- 4 Prismatic Strands

- 4 Soulcatchers' Aerie

LANDS

- 10 Island
- 12 Plains

Flying high with the bird deck is simple. Throw creature after creature onto the table as you draw and attack like crazy—only flying creatures can block your birds.

In most cases, the deck plays out in three or four turns. Play creatures first, because fast damage is the name of the game. Play Soulcatchers' Aerie when you draw it—this card is a potent

weapon. Each time one of your birds is placed in the graveyard with the Aerie in play, all birds get +1/+1. Your opponent wants to clear the board with Wrath of God? Good. The next bird you play will be an 8/8, or larger.

Speed is the deck's best weapon, so your 20 birds cost only one or two mana each to cast. Sage Owl is particularly powerful, because you can rearrange the top four cards of your deck when it enters play. Soulcatcher grows each time one of your birds bites it. Mystic Familiar's toughness of 2 gives it a boost. Suntail Hawk is the deck's best bargain, costing just one mana.

Stormscape Familiar makes all of your white spells cheaper once it hits play.

On the defense side, Prismatic Strands prevents damage from all sources of a single color for one turn. Draw two or more against a monocolored deck, and you've won. Two or more Battle Screeches also will win almost any game. The Screech is the best creature token producer in *Magic Online*. Four mana and one untapped white creature in play get you four birds—in the Air Force One deck those birds are 4/4 or so.

Speed decks have a problem: when you play cheap spells quickly, you soon find yourself with no cards in hand. In this deck and any other fast blue deck, you want to play Keep Watch. For three mana, you draw a card for each attacking creature. In this case, that's one card for the entire flock, because you'll want to keep attacking even if your adversary has plopped down one or two cards that can block and kill a bird.

Experiment with the Judgment expansion's Quiet Speculation. Toss Battle Screeches and Prismatic Strands into your graveyard, where you can flash them back with ease. For theme purposes, this version of the bird deck uses two copies of Invasion's Kangee, Aerie Keeper. Kangee can pump your birds through the roof if you pay its kicker cost.

COMING NEXT MONTH

More tips on making a good, cheap deck and the rest of Prima's guide to creating your first deck.



Neverwinter Nights

Tips on tackling terror in *Neverwinter Nights*

By Elliott Chin

BioWare's latest RPG is another epic adventure that provides as much fun and challenge as the *Baldur's Gate* series. Here are a few tips to help you get started with character generation, skill and feat selection, and multiplayer games. We also look at the final encounter of the game. Be warned, though: there are spoilers ahead.

Choosing a Character

The choice of which class to play could be your most important one in the entire game. There are 11 classes in *Neverwinter Nights*, and they all have excellent strengths and benefits.

NWN is very melee heavy. Thus, you might be best off playing one of the four melee classes: fighter, barbarian, ranger, or paladin. They are the simplest to learn because all they do is attack. They all have great abilities, with the fighter being best and the paladin and barbarian tied for second (the former is better defensively and the latter better offensively). The ranger is the weakest fighter of the bunch, but he can summon creatures starting at Level 4. Thus, a ranger can add a third member to his party, something the other warrior types can't do. To compensate for the ranger's low damage potential, multiclass him with a rogue to get the extra sneak attack damage.

The lure of spellcasters, though, is undeniable, and if you want to unleash high-powered spells of destruction, you have no better choice than the sorcerer. This class can cast the most spells per day of all the classes, but it has a very limited spell selection. Again, because everything is combat-based here, you really don't need a big selection of spells—you just need high-powered spells. To make up for a small selection, grab several metamagic feats, which will improve the longevity of your

low-level attack spells and free up some of your later spell slots for more utilitarian spells.

You can't go wrong with fighter or wizard types, but don't overlook clerics: in third-edition *D&D*, they make up perhaps the most powerful class. They can also summon creatures, but they have more hit points, have a better attack bonus, and can wear any armor without risk of spell failure. They might not be as good in melee as fighters, but with their extensive array of buffs (like Bull's Strength, Bless, and Divine Power) they come close. Because the third edition provides more attack spells for clerics, they aren't too far behind wizards in terms of firepower, with spells like Searing Touch, Hammer of the Gods, and Firestorm. And have I mentioned their ability to heal themselves and their companions?

The druid is a good choice as well. Although he can't wear the heaviest armor, as a cleric can, he does get an animal companion in addition to his summoned creature, which means the druid, like the wizard and sorcerer, can have a four-character party as well.

If you choose to play a ranger, you must carefully choose your favored enemies. You fight a lot of humans, so pick them as your first favored enemy. You'll also fight quite a few giants early in the game, with ogres and trolls showing up frequently in chapter 2 and then joining up with giants in chapter 3. Orcs and Undead are also good choices because they show up throughout the game. Don't bother choosing dragons or goblins. Dragons are few in this game, and goblins are so weak you don't need a bonus to take them down.

If playing as a thief, always attack with a buddy (your henchman or a summoned creature)—you do sneak attack damage if you double up on an enemy.

Hired Help

Hiring a henchman is a must. But which one should you choose? You can select a barbarian, bard, cleric, monk, rogue, or sorcerer. Obviously, you want a henchman who can shore up your weak spots. If you are a fighter, you need healing or magic firepower, so you want the cleric or sorcerer.

If you are a wizard, you will need muscle and healing as well. You don't necessarily need a fighter henchman, because your summoned monster will fulfill that role (if you still want a fighter, go for the excellent monk). And you can bypass the need for a thief by choosing a pixie as your familiar. So go for a cleric.

FILLING THE SPELLBOOK



Damage reduction spells like *Stoneskin* are essential for a spellcaster's survival. No wizard or sorcerer should be without them.

Although high-damage spells such as *Fireball* and *Horrid Wilting* are great, don't forget utility spells like *Haste*, *Stoneskin*, and *Dispel Magic*. These spells will greatly enhance your longevity. *Haste* offers many benefits, including an AC bonus and the ability to cast more spells per round, but it's also great for buffing your henchmen or summoned monsters. Often, buffing up your support will benefit you in the long run better than just hurling around more damage spells.

Damage reduction spells, like *Ghastly Visage*, *Stoneskin*, and *Ethereal Visage* are must-haves: many encounters devolve into melee battles because enemies close in so quickly. Having a spell like *Stoneskin* makes up for your low hit points if you're playing as a wizard or sorcerer.

Dispel Magic is useful when you're facing powerful individual boss creatures, which tend to have several spell buffs on them. Unlike a tabletop game of *D&D*, though, *Neverwinter Nights* doesn't have many instances that call for the spell, so sorcerers might be better off learning something else. But you should at least keep a few *Dispel Magic* scrolls handy just in case.

Characters like the sorcerer and bard, who have to choose a set number of spells to learn, can use metamagic feats to get more mileage out of the spells.



The Elf cleric is the best class. You can wield a longsword, wear the best armor, cast buffs and attack spells, fight nearly as well as a fighter, summon creatures, heal, and turn Undead.

Opening Chests

If you don't have a thief in your party, you can always bash chests and doors open. If you go this route, get the Power Attack and Improved Power Attack feats. All inanimate

objects have damage reduction, which absorbs some of the damage you deal. If you're hitting a chest for only 5 damage per attack, and it has damage reduction 5, you'll never bash it open. But with Power Attack and Improved Power Attack, you can subtract from your attack roll and add the same number to your damage roll. Chests and doors are inanimate objects, so they have extremely low AC and hitting isn't a problem.



Instead of using the bard or thief to open locks, bash the locks open yourself. Only a handful of chests ever need a real thief to open them.



Better Booty

If you want to get better loot in the game, always quick save before you open up important chests—not the ones you find lying in the street on the Peninsula, but the chests in a major NPC's final stand. Because treasure in chests is generated randomly, you can save and then open, reloading and repeating, until you get a more valuable item or one that is more appropriate for your character.



A feat like Cleave comes in handy for taking down large groups of weak enemies like this one.

A thief is good for disarming traps and opening chests and locked doors. You won't find many traps, though, and you can bash open most chests. The bard is similar to the thief, but she can't provide nearly the same quality of support that the other henchmen do. Although she does have good buffs, she doesn't have the hit points to withstand battle like the cleric, and unlike the sorcerer, she can't help you end battles quickly with a few fireballs when things get desperate. The sorcerer can open chests and doors, thanks to his Knock spell, and he provides lots of firepower. In the end, the best choice for a warrior-type character is either the sorcerer or cleric.

Skill Selection

Within the variety of skills, there are some obvious good choices. Warrior types (except the ranger) don't have a lot of skill points, so just go for the combat skills, like parry and discipline. Discipline is especially useful if you are playing a multiplayer game like Contest of Champions, because player characters will usually use combat feats more than the computer does in the single-player campaign. Skills like persuade are not

very useful to characters other than paladin.

Spellcasters must max out their concentration skill. Encounters almost always end up at melee range, so you need to be able to cast spells under duress, which concentration lets you do.

Lore is good because it saves you time, but the money savings are negligible—you'll have so much gold by the end of the game you won't even notice the Identify costs. Get lore only for the convenience.

Taunt is overlooked but good if you have the skill points to spare. Don't use it against spellcasters, who are likely to have high concentration skill. Instead, try it on fighters and the like to lower their AC. Odds are they don't have any ranks in concentration.

Feats

Feats help to differentiate characters from each other. There are quite a few good ones to choose from, and everyone but the fighter will be faced with tough choices.

Toughness is an excellent all-around feat (better than its pen-and-paper counterpart), and is a must-have for sorcerers, wizards, bards, and

Creating a Four-Character Party

The benefit of playing a spellcaster such as a wizard or sorcerer is that you can have four members in your party. Every character can hire a henchman. Spellcasters (except paladins) can summon one creature to act as a companion, which makes three. And wizards and sorcerers also get a familiar, which gives you four party members. You could thus control a classic four-class party in NWN: play a wizard, hire a cleric henchman, choose a fairy familiar, and summon

a burly monster every day, and you'll have a well-rounded group. This benefit alone is enough to make the wizard or sorcerer selection a wise one. Just remember you will have to rest often because your spells will be exhausted long before any of your companions have to rest. In this case, it's wise to take a level in fighter (if you are a wizard) or paladin (if you are a sorcerer) for the extra hit points and weapon and armor proficiencies.

Because your daily capacity for adventuring usually outlasts your spell selection, you'll end up engaging in quite a bit of fighting, so getting in a level or two in a warrior class is wise. Remember: don't take more than two levels or you won't be able to learn the ultrapowerful Level 9 spells.

Druid, sorcerer, and wizard are the only classes that can get a four-character party, thanks to animal companions and familiars.

MULTIPLAYER TIPS



If you're a thief or have a rogue character like this panther in your party, always double up on enemies to take advantage of sneak attack.

In PVP games, like BioWare's new *Contest of Champions*, melee characters are king. Distances aren't very great in *NWN*, and whereas battles in tabletop *D&D* can start with the combatants hundreds of feet apart, in *NWN* you almost always get within melee range in a matter of seconds.

Take note of your party size first. In groups of three or fewer, have only one spellcaster. You need this character for buffs like Bull's Strength, Stoneskin, and See Invisibility. But beyond that, go with more warrior types than spellcasters. Rush the enemy casters first and press the attack. They won't be able to cast spells without provoking Attacks of Opportunity. If they run, they also provoke Attacks of Opportunity, and could very well go down while trying to run. The key to defeating spellcasters is to get in their faces right away. After you do that, you have the edge, and most casters go down easily.

In the CGW offices, we tried several games of *Contest of Champions*, and the team with the two fighters and one caster beat out the team with two casters and one fighter eight games in a row before the losers gave up.

FINAL ENCOUNTER

The final showdown with Morag can be a very tough encounter, especially because the game gives you no warning about the unfair circumstances of the fight. After you eliminate Maugrim, take the exit to the Inner Sanctum. But beware: you're actually making a detour before you get to the real Sanctum.

Before going through the portal, make sure to cast damage reduction spells and Protection From Elements on yourself and your party. When you step through the portal, you will be beset by two corrupted dragons, a brass and a silver one. These dragons are very tough and will quickly engage in melee. The brass dragon breathes acid, and the silver breathes cold, so your Protection From Elements spell comes in handy. But it's their rapid attacks and high melee damage that can do you in. Any spellcasters you have in your party will probably die first, unless they have immense concentration skill or some form of damage reduction, like Stoneskin or Ethereal Visage. The dragons, though, can be beat. And if you get into a real tough spot, you can always teleport back to base with your Stone of Recall.

After you defeat the two dragons, you will find the doorway leading into the real Inner Sanctum. It's very important that you save your game here with a real save file and not the quick save, and you must fully rest up and prepare new spells. The game fails to tell you that where you're going, you can't respawn and you can't teleport back to base. You can't even rest: once you enter the Inner Sanctum, there is no way out. The portal you came through disappears. And without the means to rest, respawn, or teleport, what you come in with—spells, hit points, items—is all you get. So go in prepared.

When fighting Morag in the final battle,



Morag begins the final battle immune to all attacks. You need to attack the praying Old Ones surrounding her in order to make her vulnerable to your attacks.



Concentrate on Morag and ignore her minions. Do that, and victory will be yours.

you have to touch the statue first or it will kill you with one blow as you rush past it. When you begin your battle with Morag, she's immune to all attacks. First kill whichever praying Old One corresponds to your attack type (for example, kill the Protector Against Mace if you are attacking Morag with a bludgeoning weapon), and then you can fight her. She will still have a Stoneskin or Energy Resistance spell on her, but when you've done enough damage to bring down her protection, you'll start harming her.

rogues—those characters with low-hit die.

Another essential feat for spellcasters is Combat Casting, which makes it easier for you to cast spells when in melee. Combine it with the concentration skill to ensure you don't get disrupted when casting.

If you are a sorcerer, take the Empower Spell and Maximize Spell feats. These feats bolster the power of your spells, making them as strong as their higher-level counterparts but without taking up a valuable "spell known" slot. For example, if you were a Level 12 sorcerer and had Maximize Spell, you wouldn't need to select chain lightning as your Level 6 spell because your maximized fireballs would do 60 damage per hit, more than the average of a chain lightning spell. Thus, by using a metamagic feat to emulate the damage potential of a Level 6 attack spell, you free up that Level 6 slot to learn an equally useful spell, like Ethereal Visage or Mass Haste.

Improved Critical is good, but only if you can

be sure of using a great weapon without having to change it often. Fighters and barbarians should choose this feat to increase their damage potential.

Warrior types need Power Attack and Cleave. You fight lots of hordes in *NWN*, and Cleave just clears them out. Also, as you reach the middle and later portions of the game, your base attack bonus is high enough (and monster ACs don't progress fast enough) that you can use Power Attack for an extra +5 damage without worrying about missing your targets. When using Power Attack, stay on top of which rolls you need to make in order to hit your enemy. You must have a better than 50 percent chance of hitting with each attack, so if your attack bonus is +15, and your enemy has AC 19 or 20, it's safe to use Power Attack. But if you're fighting a dragon with AC 30 or so, Power Attack is worthless, and using it will simply hasten your death.

Unless you are a monk, don't bother with the unarmed strike feats—Improved Unarmed Strike,

Stunning Fist, and Deflect Arrows. These make you use your bare fists, which are vastly inferior to weapons (though not in the case of monks, who get those feats automatically anyway).

Saved

There are a lot of instant kill spells and creatures in *NWN*. Bodaks, for instance, are Undead that can slay you instantly with a glance, and they appear in the chapter 1 finale. If you don't have a high Will save, you're gone. So invest in magic items that enhance your saving throws, like scarabs or cloaks of protection, which give you a bonus to all saving throws. Also, if you know you are about to be attacked by such spells or monsters, drink a potion that will benefit your appropriate saving throw. Your wisdom bonus increases your Will saves, constitution improves Fortitude saves, and dexterity enhances Reflex saves. Drink potions such as Endurance, which stacks with an ability-enhancing item like boots of striding, to get an even higher bonus.



The Mountain King's stormbolt is ideal for slaying heroes, as it does damage and stuns them for five or more seconds.

WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

Managing the mighty heroes of *WarCraft III* By Elliott Chin

Perhaps the most dramatic change in *WarCraft III* from previous *Craft* games is the introduction of heroes. These units can gain experience, use items, and eventually become much more powerful than normal troops.

Heroes are the key to victory in *WarCraft III*, and you'll want to acquire one as soon as you can. They're very slow to recruit, though, so don't wait until you build a barracks before you start your altar. The altar should be your second building, right after a population center (such as an Orc burrow or farm).

As soon as you get a hero recruited and assign him two units, you should go hunting for creeps to kill.

Heroes grow immensely in power as they level up, so you should be at least Level 3 before you

fight other players. A Level 3 hero means that you can have a Level 2 skill or spell. The difference between Level 1 and Level 2 chain lightning, for instance, is that you hit two more targets and cause 25 percent more damage per target.

You must manage your heroes carefully. More than in *StarCraft*, good unit management in *WarCraft III* is vital to survival. You can't throw units at the enemy, return to base, and then go back to the battle hoping to achieve a win. You have to watch the battle and manage your troops as the situation requires.

Your most important task is monitoring the health of your heroes. If their hit points start going into the red, it's time to get them out of there. Run heroes around so they avoid melee attackers. Most often, the enemy units will try

to chase them down, giving your troops the chance to attack the enemy troops with impunity. If you become desperate, use Town Portal to teleport back to town.

You also want to kill an enemy's hero as soon as you can. Target the hero with your ranged units. If you have only melee units, run up and surround him before attacking. This ensures that he can't escape.

Instead of first right-clicking on the hero, move all of your units to his area and encircle him. Then issue the Attack command. If the hero tries to flee, having ranged troops around gives you the opportunity to kill him when he runs.

These tips should aid you in controlling heroes in *WarCraft III*. For race specific strategies and more tactics, check back with us next month.

Stop That Hero THESE SPELLS ARE EXCELLENT HERO KILLERS



Orc

Tauren Chieftain War Stomp:

This special attack is great against heroes because it stuns them while

doing damage. War Stomp ends quickly, though, so you have to use it several times and have grunts nearby for maximum damage.

Wolf Raider Ensnare: Ensnare is great for immobilizing heroes, who can then be picked apart by ranged units. At the very least, even if you attack an ensnared hero with melee units, the hero won't be able to flee.

Shaman Purge: This is a great spell for hero

killing. Cast it on the hero as he tries to flee and you'll slow him down, giving your units time to catch up and cut him down.

Witch Doctor Stasis Trap: This is a very tricky spell to use, not least because you can stun your own units. However, you can plant this ward down near the enemy hero while keeping your own units well out of range of the Stasis Ward. When the ward triggers and stuns the enemy hero, you can rush in to bring down the hammer.



Human

Mountain King Stormbolt:

This is the ultimate hero

killer. The attack does a considerable amount of damage and also stuns the hero for several seconds, during which time you can easily destroy him with support units.

Sorceress Slow: This spell, like Shaman Purge, is excellent against heroes. You not only hamper their ability to attack, you also slow them to a crawl, making them unable to flee and thus susceptible to lots of punishing attacks. But unlike Purge, Sorceress Slow is an autocast spell, so you'll need to disable that ability if you want to specifically target a hero.

Mountain King Thunderclap: Like the Tauren Chieftain War Stomp, Thunderclap allows for a



It's important to kill creeps early, but don't rush off alone. Your hero needs several units to support him during creep hunting.

Item Use

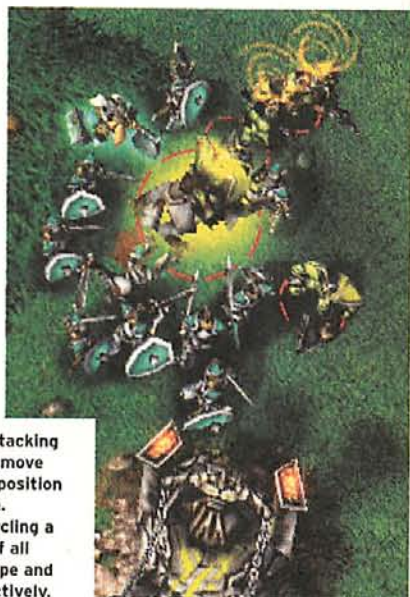


Use Town Portal scrolls to quickly move across the map. If your ally is in trouble, use Town Portal to move instead of running.



LEFT: Before attacking an enemy hero, move your units into position to surround him.

RIGHT: By encircling a hero, you cut off all avenues of escape and can attack effectively.



Don't neglect items. They can often make a hero twice as good as he normally would be.

If you are a spellcasting hero with good area attack spells, consider getting an Invisibility Potion. Immediately after casting Earthquake, Blizzard, or Death and Decay, use the potion so that you can maintain your spell without being attacked. Players are much less likely to have detectors in *WarCraft III* than they did in *StarCraft*, so this tactic should work well (until other players get wise to it).

It's always a good idea to have a Town Portal in your inventory, especially if you have one truly strong hero out in the field. In multiplayer games, a Town Portal is essential for rescuing your allies in dire times. Don't ever run over to an ally's town. They'll die before you can reach it. Use the Town Portal instead.

If you are using a spellcasting hero, try to acquire mana regeneration items. Potions of mana are good, and you also want intelligence enhancing items.

quick stun of a hero (and all nearby units as well), though it has very short duration.



Undead

Dread Lord Sleep: This spell is great for immobilizing heroes, but if you attack a sleeping unit, it will wake up. This spell

is best for removing a hero from a fight while you deal with his minions. You can also use it to stop a fleeing hero and give your army a chance to chase him down.

Lich Frost Nova: This spell duplicates a Slow effect on the target struck by the Frost

Nova (while surrounding enemies also suffer some cold damage). Thus, targeting a hero will not only hurt him, but also slow him down.

Necromancer Cripple: This spell works in principle like the Orc's Purge and Human's Slow, although it is even more debilitating because it halves the attack and defense of a target hero. Consider this a version of Slow on steroids.



Night Elf

Archdruid Entangling Roots: This spell is like Wolf Raider Ensnare,

except that it affects a much larger area. It will immobilize heroes and let you beat on them—and they can't run away.

Druid of the Talon Faerie Fire: This is great because it lowers the armor of the targeted hero. The best thing about this spell is that it can reduce armor to negative numbers, which in turn leads to bonus damage from attacks.

Druid of the Talon Cyclone: Use this spell to cut short a hero's escape—it immobilizes him for several seconds. Although you can't attack him during this time, you can rush underneath his position so that you can resume a full barrage of attacks when the hero lands.

Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne

The Chronicles of the War of Tom and Bruce By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk

A long time ago, in the ancient month of July, Tom and Bruce took the Council of Wrath scenario in *Age of Wonders II* and used powerful magicks (i.e., the scenario editor) to turn it into a two-player match. The land of the Council of Wrath consists of two halves: one inhabited by Tom, Karissa and her Orcs, and Yaka the Tigran lord; the other inhabited by Bruce, Undead Nekron, and Tempest the Human wizard. These halves are separated by a mountain range that can be traversed with pairs of teleporters or via an underground passage. The map's namesake, the city of Council, lies in ruins on an island to the north, where Rift Lords guard a cluster of mana nodes and magic items. This is the story of the war fought for that land over an Internet connection between Tom of California and Bruce of Illinois.

Tom, Day 0: When led by a peacekeeper wizard, the Tigrans are the ideal diplomatic race. They rate polite or better with every race except the Archons and Undead, meaning they can buy most of the independent cities on the map (which is where their gold bonus is particularly handy). Spells from the Sphere of Air can improve mobility, which is important on a big map. My goal is to have Haste Domain, a powerful global enchantment, up and running by the time I'm fighting Bruce. This effectively doubles unit movement in my domain, so I can quickly gather reinforcements and outmaneuver his armies.



Bruce, Day 0: As this is a large map, I'll take Explorer, giving my units a 20 percent movement bonus. I can further improve this by casting Enchanted Roads, which reduces the cost of road travel. I also take Constructor for the production bonus, which must be offset with a disadvantage. I choose Decadence, which raises the cost of unit upkeep. But as an Earth wizard, I can eventually offset this with Golden Age, a spell that increases city income. I choose the Goblins as my starting race.

Tom, Day 12: Bryn, a Dark Elf city in the center of my realm, is my first purchase. It's a steal at 335 gold. I'm building a stack of Bladedancers and Archers on

whom I'll cast Enchant Weapon. This spell is particularly powerful on units that get multiple attacks, because it compounds the +2 attack and +2 damage bonuses; an Archer's three weak shots become three medium power shots and both of the Bladedancers' double strikes are boosted.

Bruce, Day 15: I split my initial group and had my wizard capture



structures while my main forces went after nearby cities. You have to be careful not to divide your forces so much that they can't recombine quickly when threatened. And don't let your wizard wander too far from a tower in case you need to restore your magical domain.

Tom, Day 35: Because you can build only one thing per turn in a city, there's no point in increasing a city's production if you're just going to be making inexpensive units. Therefore, one or two of my cities will be geared toward increased production for expensive units and structures. A few will train armies, but most of the cities will sit idle to provide gold. It's important to keep in mind that *Age of Wonders* isn't like *Civilization*, in which every city should always be building something. That way lies destitution.

Bruce, Day 40: I've captured an Elf city, and because Elves are naturally wary of Goblins (wouldn't you be?), I'm building a temple to

raise morale and avoid revolts. It looks like I'll also have to do this for the Halfling and Archon cities on my half of the map.

Tom, Day 42: I now have a monastery to train monks in my main city of Kalocly. Every army should have a monk in tow to provide healing.

Bruce, Day 51: I'm concentrating my research on raising my wizard's casting specialist skill. With more casting points, I'll be able to quickly cast summoning spells, which is a more flexible way to react to threats than training armies.

Tom, Day 61: I've taken out one of my neighboring races, the Tigrans to the south, but my armies were too far away to save Bryn when Karissa, my neighbor to the north, attacked it with a stack of Orcs and Goblins. I rushed to build a wooden wall around the city, but I couldn't get enough defenders there in time. This just goes to show that it's important to have scouts at the borders you share with hostile neighbors. Cities and watchtowers can see out 12 hexes, a distance many armies can cross in two turns. Fortunately, Karissa's army pulled back and I was able to retake Bryn from the small garrison she left behind.

Bruce, Day 77: I'm in a full-fledged war with Nekron, the



Undead wizard and my last rival for dominance on this half of the map. I'm a bit overmatched, but I've been careful to keep my units in mutually supporting triangles. I've been able to bring superior numbers to the battles, but he has more advanced units, so I'm taking a lot of casualties.

Tom, Day 86: I have Karissa's last city, Raglamc, effectively surrounded. She's holed up behind a stone wall with five catapults, but I should be able to rush them with my wall-crawling prowlers. I'm waiting on reinforcements, but Karissa keeps summoning hell hounds. This is going to be messy.

Bruce, Day 90: There's been far too much back-and-forth in

parked on the teleporter to the island, and then there's the Rift Lord and his spawns on the island itself. These are all summoned creatures, so I'm saving up mana to use the Banish Summoned spell. It's expensive, but it has a relatively high attack value of 12 to counter their resistances.

Bruce, Day 122: Finally killed Nekron. Having taken out two



fighting Nekron. I'm going to back off and give myself time to build up a large army before attacking anymore. I outmatch him in terms of resources, so I'll eventually win any arms race. I just hope I'm not squandering time that should be spent getting ready to attack Tom.

Tom, Day 91: Raglamc has fallen, but I lost a lot of units to those catapults. Although this half of the map is now mine, I have only one good stack left. My gold income is decent, but I've been funneling a lot of money into improving research; I want to get Haste Domain in effect before I attack Bruce, and it's going to cost a lot of mana. Therefore, I'm going to try to take the Council island for its four magic nodes, which will provide 80 mana per turn. There are four elementals



wizards and solidified my hold on this part of the map, I'm going to use my cave-crawling Goblins to go underground. This will give me a jumping-off point for an assault against Tom, who (I hope) won't see it coming.

Tom, Day 126: Among the considerable casualties on the island was Lily, my Level 6 ranger, who was killed by a Rift Lord. But I've nearly doubled my mana income and I have a few useful magic items, as well as a useless Dwarf tool for repairing siege engines. Anyone want it? I sent Winger, my deranged-looking Halfling rogue, to recover Lily's magic items and take up the banner of leadership. Time to rebuild my army again.

Bruce, Day 142: My underground offensive has been a huge success (see screen below), and I've taken over another Dark Elf city. Now I'm just mopping up the spiders down here. I've also been using my Raise Terrain spell to close off my main city with mountains. If you keep a line of units along the road, you can cast the spell over them and they'll neatly carve a pass through the raised mountains. If I can raise these natural walls and cast Poison Domain, I should be able to mount a home defense with only a few units, freeing up more units for the attack.



Tom, Day 143: I'm not about to field an army made exclusively of flying units or mountaineers, so I have two choices for getting across the mountain range to Bruce: the teleporters or the underground passage. But a defender could easily make a deadly bottleneck in either of these routes, so I don't want to rely on them for bringing in reinforcements. Instead, I'm going to seize Bruce's closest city with a wizard's tower, Darkraven, and use the city as a beachhead. This will allow me to use one of *Age of Wonder's* greatest wonders: the teleportation gate. This instantly sends an army to any wizard's tower you control. My gate in Kalocly will be completed in three days, and I've just finished research on Haste Domain, which will take four days to cast.

Bruce, Day 150: I'm assembling a main attack force in the underground near the northernmost exit. I'll send some flyers with a few Free Movement-enhanced units across the south end of the mountains to distract Tom. Then, after I've engaged him with this decoy force, I'll emerge from the sewers...er, caves. It'll be just like in the movies, only this time the Goblins will win.

Tom, Day 154: Undead Darkraven is almost completely undefended, as is nearby Kador, a Frosting town. Bruce obviously wasn't expecting me. With my hastened units, by the time he

saw me coming, I was less than a turn away. I rush to build walls in anticipation of the counterattack. Meanwhile, I detach some cat masters to seize two nearby mana nodes for good measure. I notice Bruce hasn't converted the nodes to his sphere of magic, so I'm guessing he's not playing a strong spellcasting game. I've made a point to convert every node I've found to air and now my mana income, before upkeep, is more than 250 per turn.

Bruce, Day 154: It looks like Tom got the jump on me! I need to research Poison Domain, which will take 10 turns; and it will take another three turns to cast. It looks like I'm not going to have time to set up my diversionary attack, so instead I'll immediately launch my attack from the underground.

Tom, Day 157: Bruce just grabbed Bryn, my main source of army fodder, with a bunch of Goblins and Wyvern Riders. I can't frickin' believe he had all those units down in the caves. No wonder Darkraven was undefended. Unfortunately, I can't pull back my big stacks to defend my cities because the teleportation gates work in only one direction! I've put a hold on all new units being teleported and I'll assemble some impromptu defenders over the next few days. Fortunately, with Haste Domain in effect, I can easily outrun his slow Goblins. If he detaches his Wyvern Riders, I can hunt them down with cat masters and archers.

Bruce, Day 162: Now that we're able to play



out the tactical battles, Tom's chain lightning is proving very powerful. It can attack up to five units as long as they're next to each other, and he can cast it before I move my attackers, making me very vulnerable. My counterattacks on Darkraven got chewed up this way. I'm hampered by my reluctance to cast spells in combat, because doing so would make Poison Domain take longer to research and cast. When attacking Tom's stacks, I try to team up on one at a time because the position on the strategic map (inset) carries over to the tactical one (large map, below), where his other stack has to spend a few turns just moving across the map to engage.

Tom, Day 167: Bruce just cast Poison



Domain, which won't affect my Dark Elves but will weaken and continually damage my Tigrans, Dwarves, and Orcs. This is not good news. Fortunately, I captured the magic relay that extended his domain toward Darkraven, so my units there are safe. Because I have mana to spare, I'm whipping up a Disjunction that'll take five turns and have a 74 percent chance of dispelling his Poison Domain. After that, I'll start on a Power Leak to cut his mana income in half.

Bruce, Day 167: I'm running up against a mana shortage because of my spellcasting and because Tom has captured some of my mana sources. I'm going to have to cancel Enchanted Roads in order to keep Poison Domain in effect and build up a reserve of mana for combat.

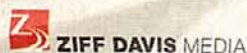
Tom, Day 172: Disjunction worked and now I'm sending out two armies, each led by a hero. The heroes' domain projection permanently extends the Haste Domain to their stacks, so I'll rush past Bruce's defended central cities and attack the cities in the back.

Bruce, Day 174: I'm trying to scrape up enough mana to recast Poison Domain after Tom's Disjunction cancelled it, but a bigger problem is that Tom blew right past my cities toward Domir and Eodd, which are undefended. I have no way of getting any defenders there ahead of Tom.

Tom, Day 177: I razed the two cities at the back of Bruce's realm and seized two more mana nodes. It's time to administer the coup de grâce. I moved everyone out of Darkraven and razed it. I'll ignore the rest of his cities and head straight for Draed, the site of his last wizard's tower, which he has somehow closed up in a ring of mountains. I've got four buffed stacks, two heroes, a full store of mana, and a surprise for him when I arrive.

Bruce, Day 180: I have a nice defense set up in Draed, but it's just delaying the inevitable. Once Tom got behind my defenses, his speed advantage really took a toll, as I was being constantly outmaneuvered and having to recapture magic nodes and the like. Also, I relied too much on a big army and didn't pay enough attention to developing my wizard skills. Tom showed how a powerful spellcaster accrues so many advantages that military force alone cannot overcome them.

Tom, Day 184: This is kind of anticlimactic, but it's still gratifying. He had two stacks of fairly strong defenders in his main city. The mountains were arranged so I'd be able to attack with only one stack at a time. So Winger rides up to the gates of Draed, just close enough to extend my domain into the center of the city. I have a Tornado spell queued up, which flings many of the units in a stack several hexes away. Not only does it decimate his strongest stack, but it hurls his wizard so far away that he can't even extend his domain into the ensuing city battle! I take the city and in the same turn I send one of my stacks after his wizard, who's sitting alone in the countryside, probably twiddling with flowers like Lear. It's a short battle of six Bladedancers and a pair of cat masters against one tornado-flung wizard. Thus end the Chronicles of the War of Tom and Bruce.



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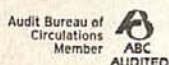
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Greenspeak

Gateway to Geekdom

Don't hate *The Sims*—it's creating new dorks every day **By Jeff Green**

Back before I got old and deaf and incontinent, I used to hang out at clubs, listening to bands. Really, I did. I know it's hard to believe when you see me now—a graying 40-year-old playing air clarinet to Benny Goodman CDs—but I was young once, too, and I kind of knew what was going on.

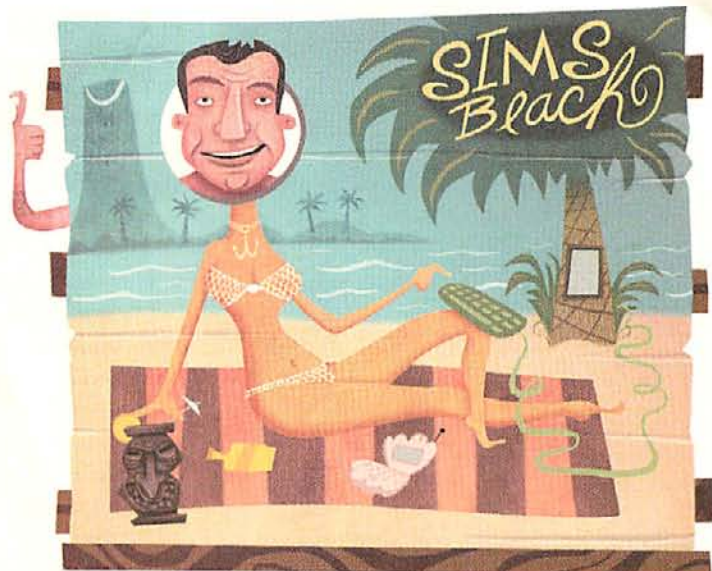
What I remember most about those days, actually, was how snobby my friends and I were about it all. We'd sit around and smugly congratulate each other for being the only ones on earth who knew that our new favorite band, Vegan Stool Sample, was the greatest thing ever. That would last just until they finally got famous with their breakthrough album, *Smells Like Burnt Tofu*, at which point we would proclaim that the band had sold out and that all the cool people already knew that it wasn't cool anymore.

This same kind of insular, fear-of-success thinking permeates the gaming community. We may have our favorite genres or games and bicker continuously over which is better, but we can unite in our hatred of any game that commits the ultimate uncool crime: crossing over into the mainstream.

Take *Myst*. For years, *Myst* was the one game that everybody had heard of, including my grandma, who died four years before it came out. Although many of us liked the game, its popularity became so huge, its presence so pervasive, that hardcore gamers began resenting it and ultimately dismissing it. It became embarrassing to admit you liked the game.

Now the same thing is happening with *The Sims*. Although the game originally started out with a lot of geek cred, as its popularity has skyrocketed, it has begun to wear out its welcome among the hardcore and lose credibility. We forget the humor, originality, and genius that caused the hype the game legitimately earned. Now we just think: How could a game this popular with nongamers be any good? Isn't it just a "girl's game" now? Enough already!

But I contend that any game that draws people in is a good thing, because the more people play computer games, the more the hobby becomes legitimized and loses its social-retard status. And it's especially good if the draw is a game like



It's funny, and its two biggest features aren't guns and breasts.

The Sims, a nonviolent game antithetical to the stereotypes the mainstream media has been pounding into people's heads for years.

The Sims is a "gateway drug." It's the harmless vice that leads to the serious stuff. Take the sorry case of CGW's own managing editor, Dana Jongewaard.

Here we have a nice, normal, nongaming, professional-type woman, whom we stole from a magazine called *Smart Business* (though they weren't smart enough to stay in business). When Dana first arrived at CGW, she looked upon those of us playing and talking about games all day with the same wary, horrified face one might make upon seeing a man defecating in public.

You could just imagine the conversations she was having with her friends after work. "You would not believe this place," she'd say. "These guys just play games and talk about *Star Wars* all day long. Except when it's *Lord of the Rings*. Or comic books. It is the saddest thing ever. My boss is like 40 going on 13."

But then we introduced her to *The*

Sims, and the brainwashing had begun. Dana took to the game for the same reasons that millions of others have. It's funny, it's easy to understand, and its two biggest features aren't guns and breasts. Casual play turned into obsession. That look of intense concentration at her desk was not that of a professional trying to get a magazine out—it was the look of someone trying to get Mortimer Goth to leave his bitch wife Bella.

And now? The process is complete. Now we have a woman playing not just *The Sims*, but a full-on übergeek game, *Magic: The Gathering Online*. Now we have the almost surreal spectacle of a formerly normal woman, sitting in her office at CGW yelling things like, "If it wasn't for that freaking mana burn, I would've crushed you with my Benthic Behemoth!"

This is what it's all about, folks. This is why *The Sims* is so cool. So stop hating on it. We have claimed another victim. If Dana can be turned, we can get anybody. The world is almost ours.

Send vegan stool samples to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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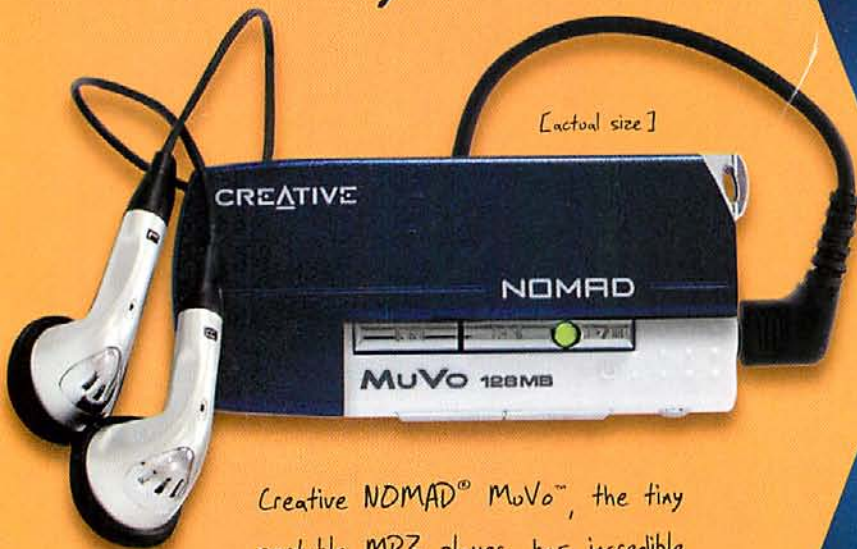
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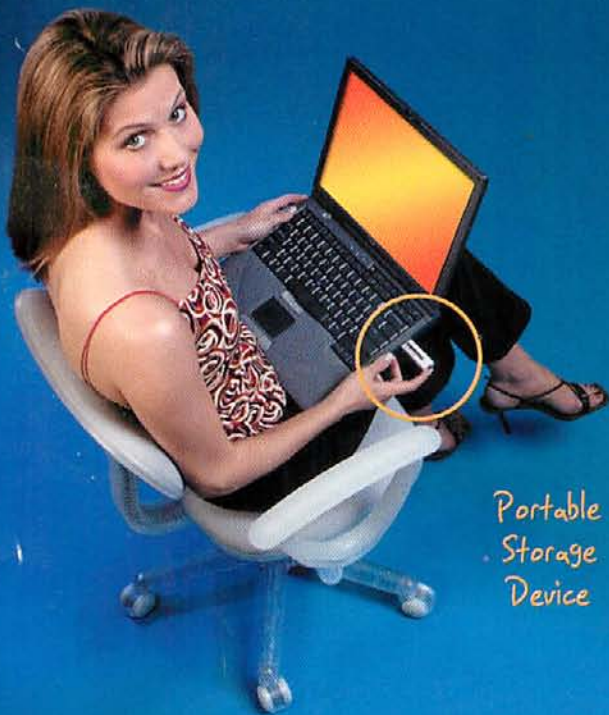
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