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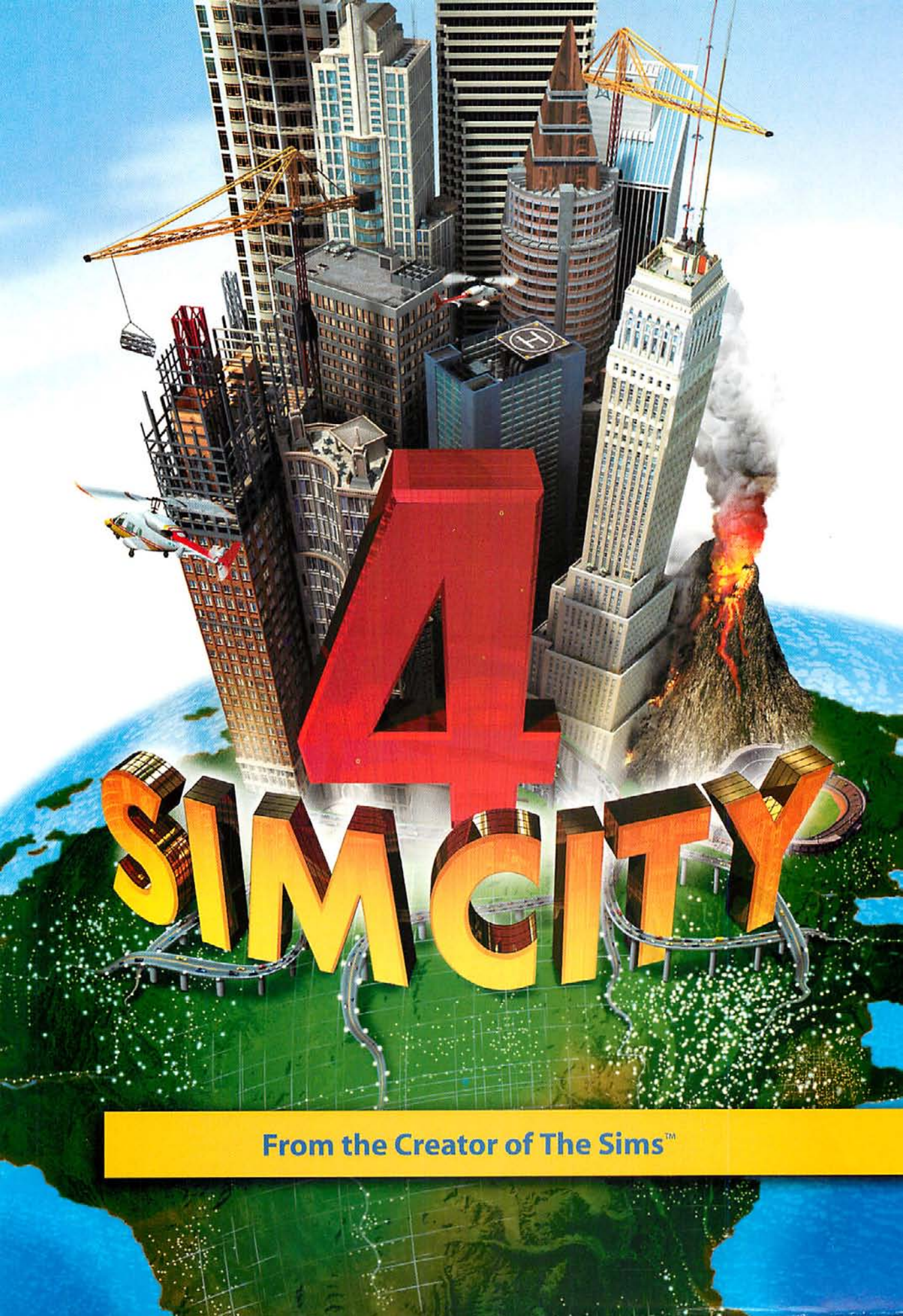
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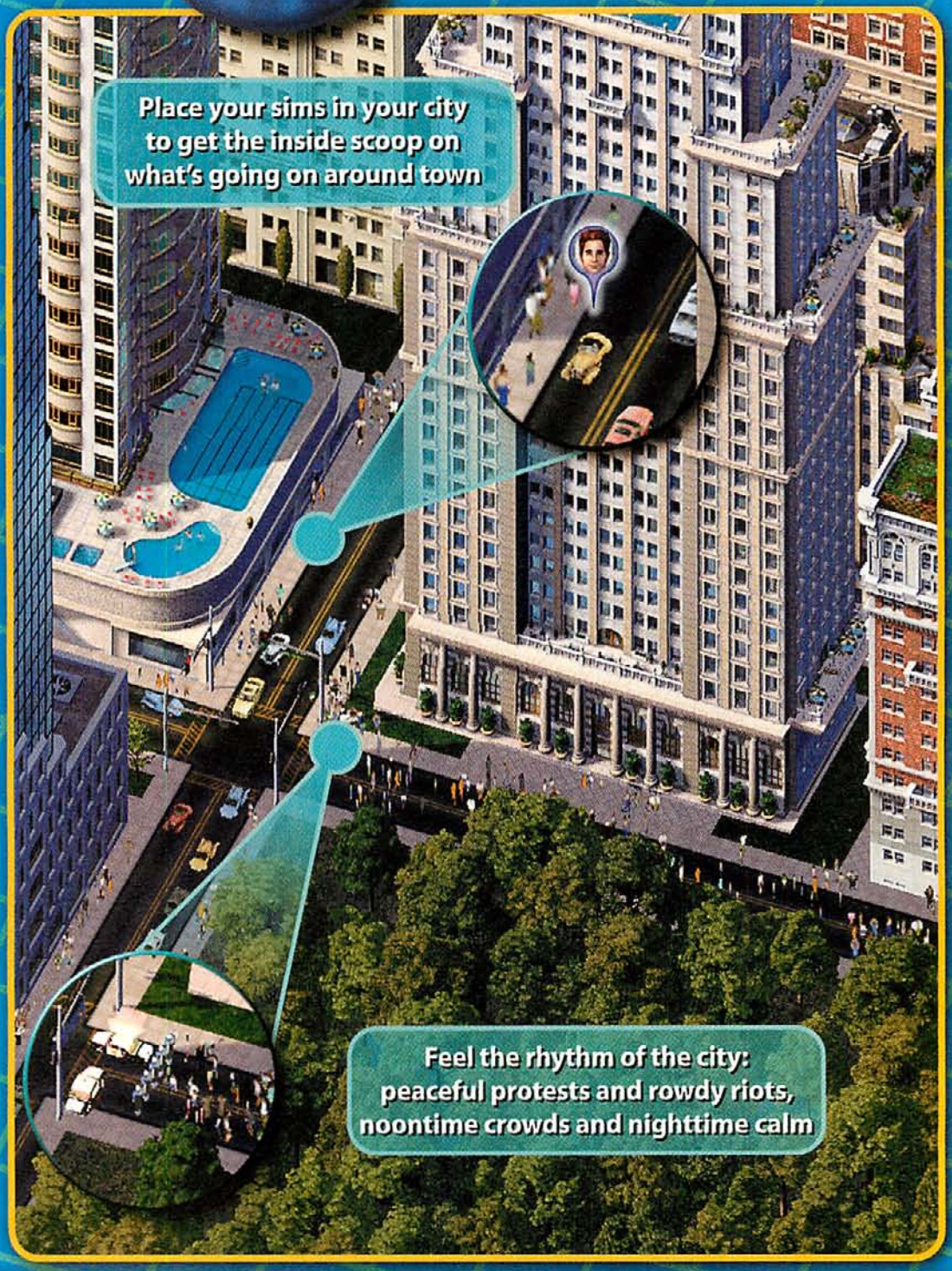

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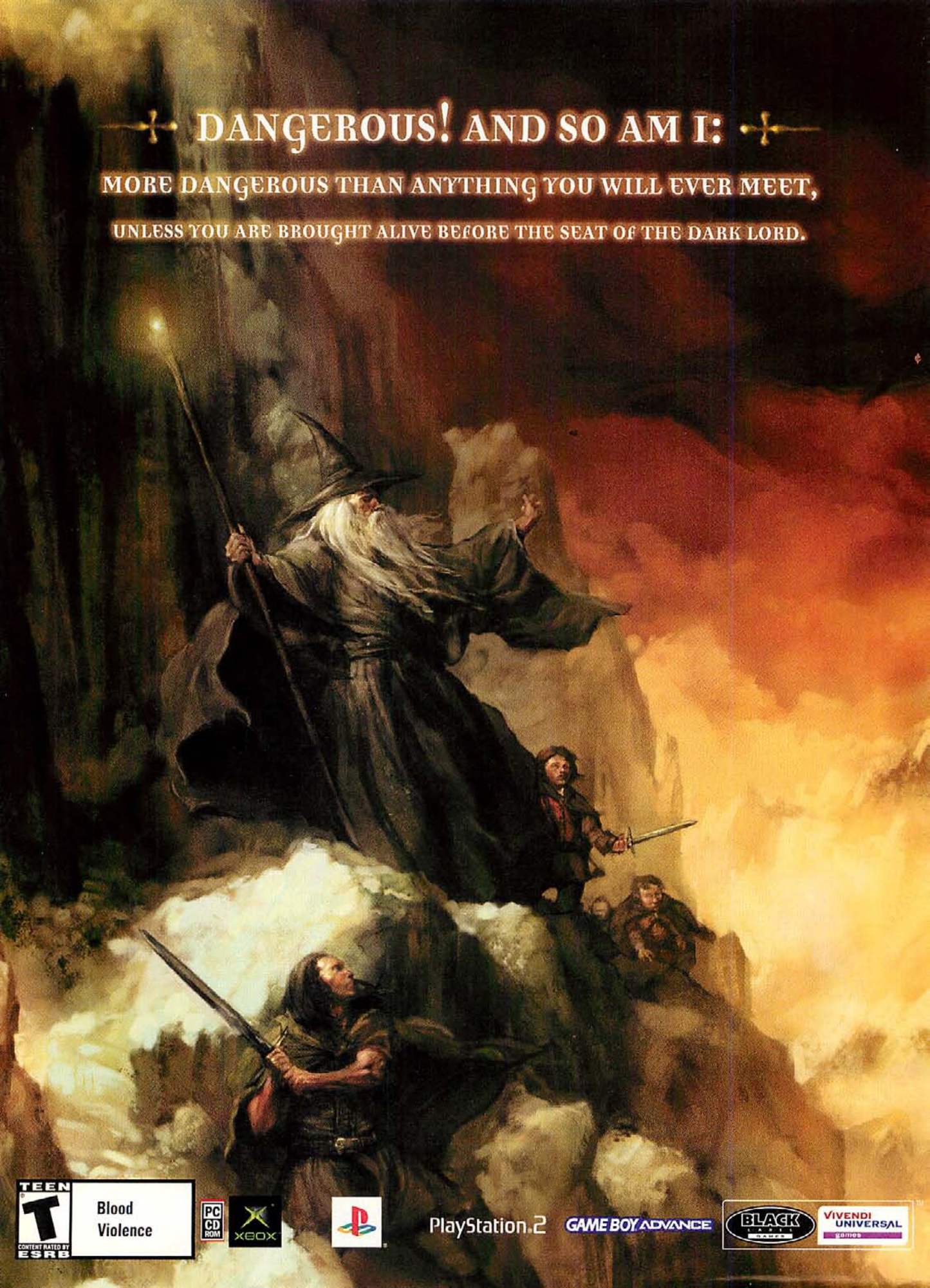
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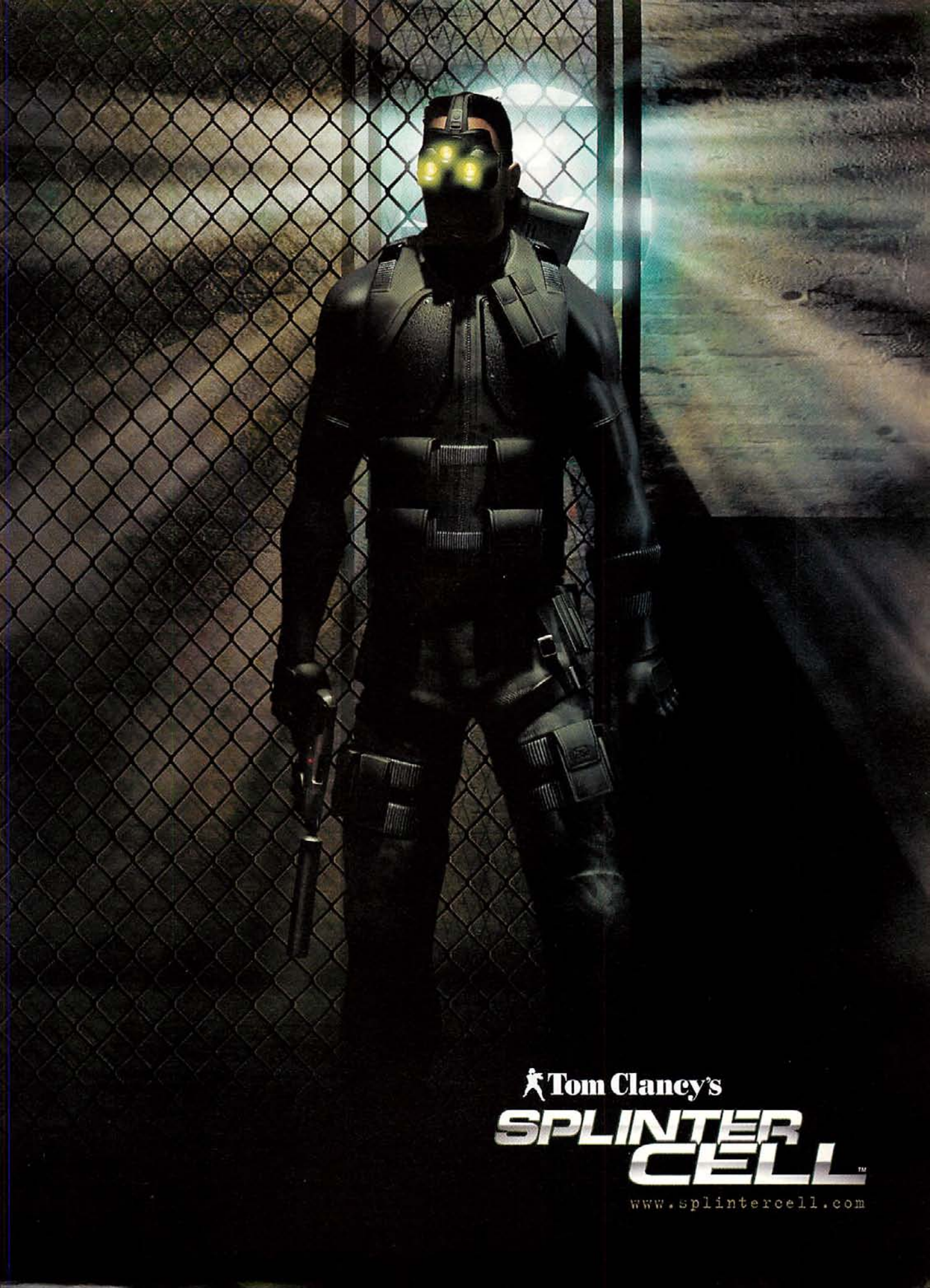
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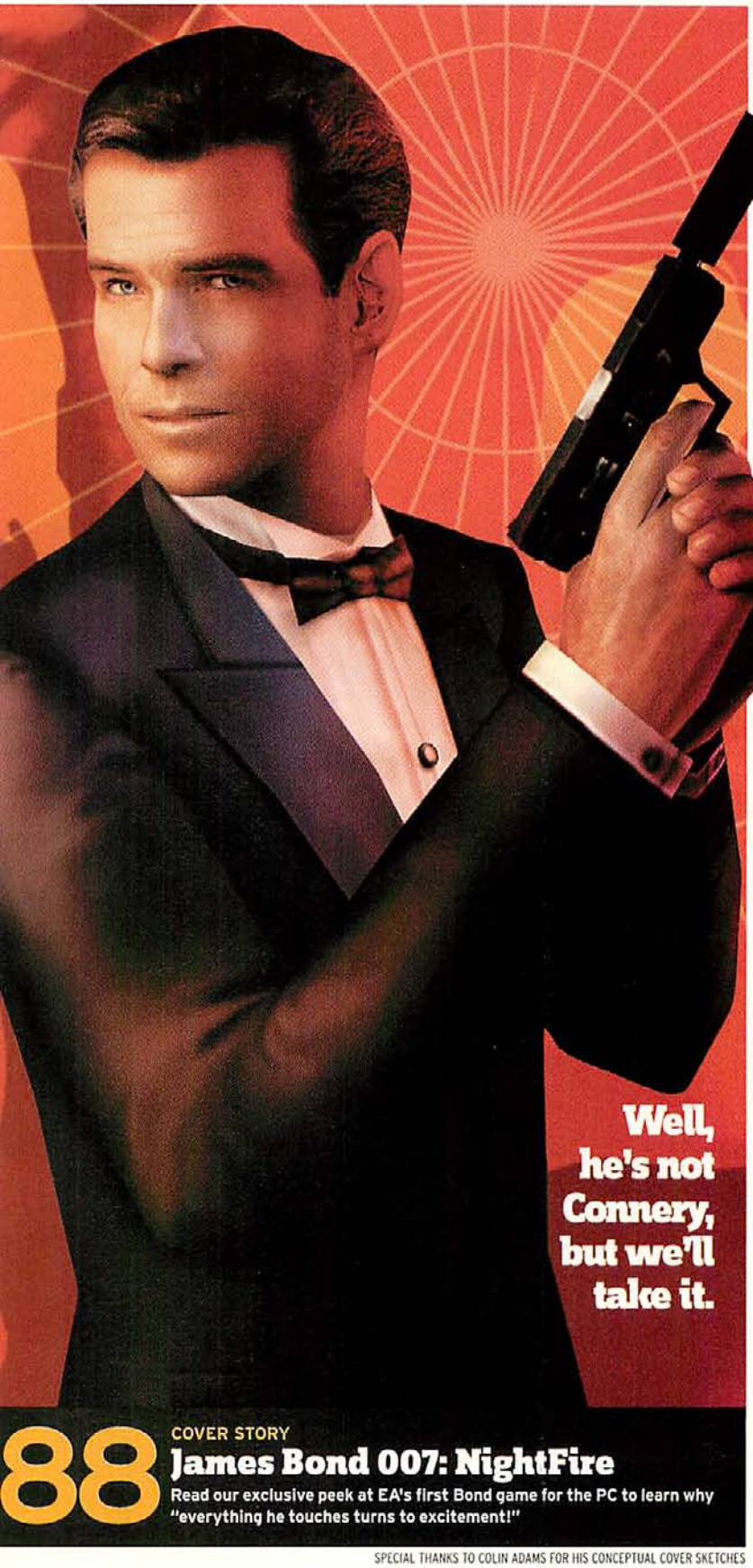

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James Bond 007: NightFire
Read our exclusive peek at EA's first Bond game for the PC to learn why "everything he touches turns to excitement!"

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18 **Letters**
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30 **Loading...**
These screenshots left us speechless. Well, almost. Get dumbfounded by these amazing shots from *Hegemonia, SimCity 4,* and *Raven Shield.*

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110 **Hall of Fame**
Two landmark multiplayer games and one legendary adventure game designer get their due.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO COLIN ADAMS FOR HIS CONCEPTUAL COVER SKETCHES

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Save up your C-bills–there are some new mechs in town.

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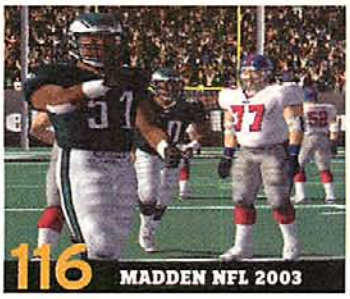

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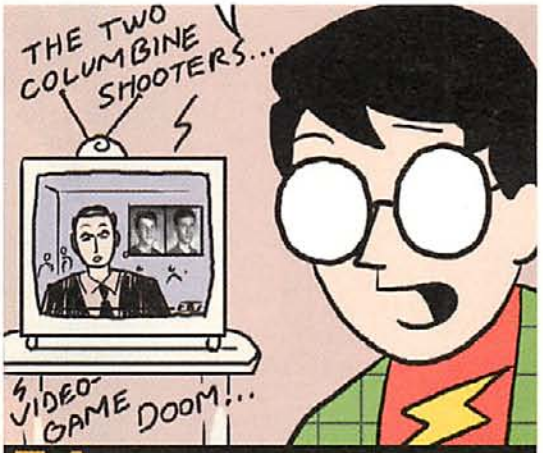

54 SCOTT MCCLOUD
Do games make us violent, or are we that way naturally?

138 TECH
The devilishly fast Diablo X5 from ABS.

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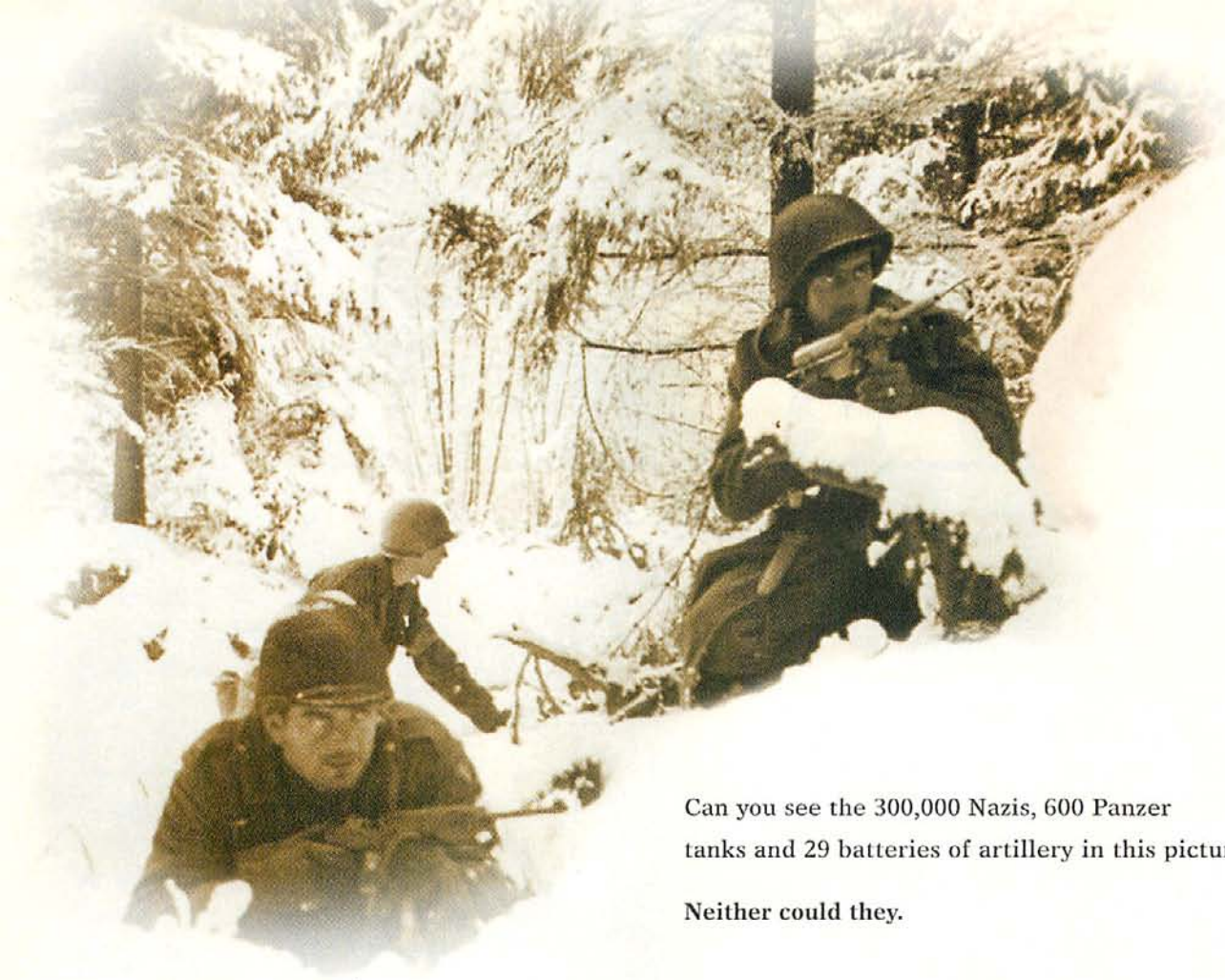

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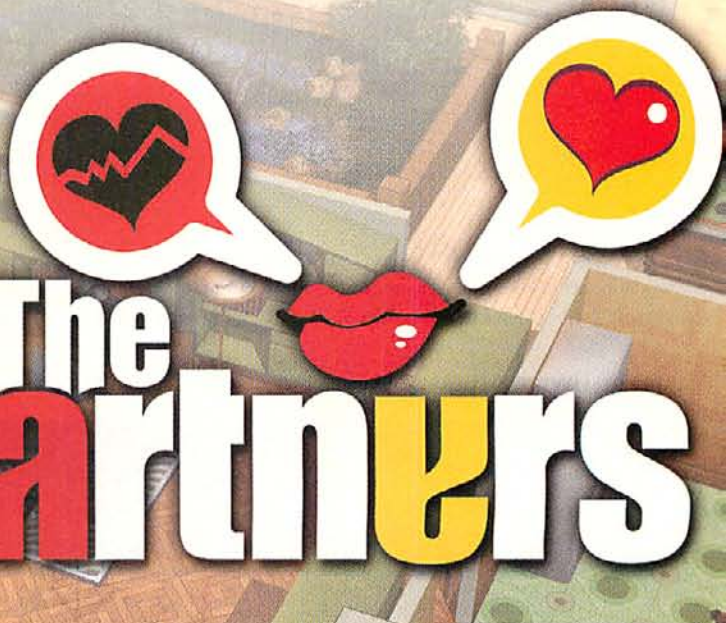

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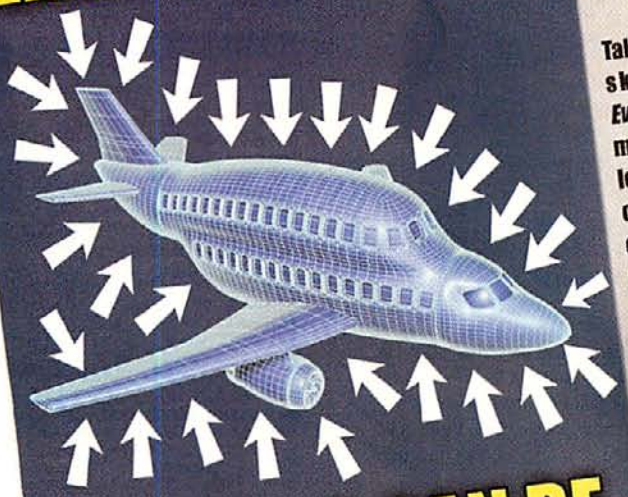

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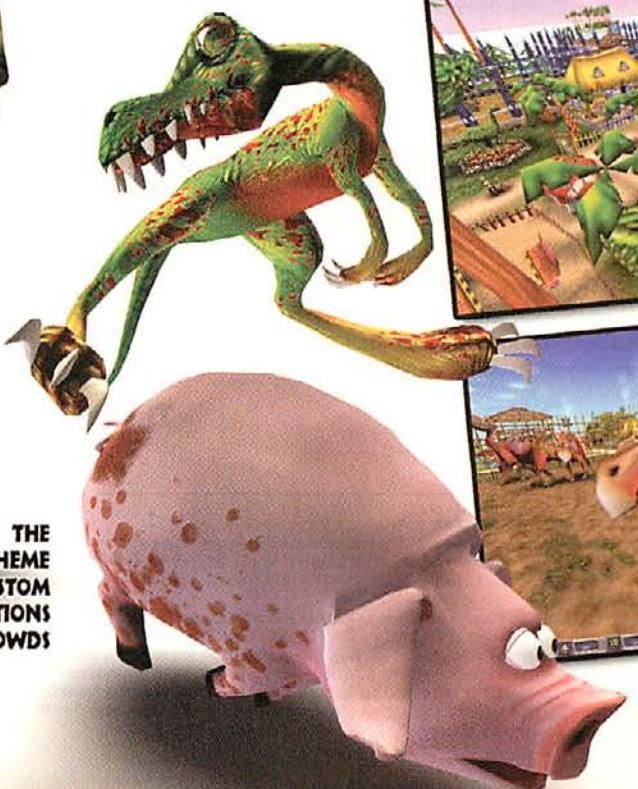

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Stop the Hate!

I guess I'm writing this because I'm the least controversial person on staff. I'm no editorial firebrand like Wil O'Neal with his liberal claptrap, Tom Price with his fey anti-elf screeds, and Ken Brown with his dastardly treatment of his child. No, I just write about weird Japanese cartoons. While those three get voluminous hate mail, I get, "That show Scooter talked about is soooooooooooo coooool—he kicks it like kung fu!"

In our line of work, we tend to have some unpopular opinions. For every time we've raved about a *Half-Life* along with the rest of the press chorus, we've also panned a *Vampire: The Masquerade* when everyone else loved it. And you made sure we knew that everyone except us loved it. With every review, be it positive or negative, the floodgates open up and we get an in-box full of manifestos telling us how wrong we all are.

I could just make blanket pronouncements like: "We're always right—live with it, dillweed." And although that may be the case, an easier statement for us to present as the party line is: "This is our opinion, and we are standing behind it; sorry you disagree with us." Fifteen-page proclamations on why our opinion is wrong get met with the big fat X button that deletes mail in Microsoft Outlook. However, a focused, literate, 50-word paragraph explaining why a reader disagrees with a published review will be looked at and even possibly reprinted in Letters.

We don't like graffiti scrawl masquerading as email.

For those of you who want the Cliffs Notes version of this editorial, here you go: Our reviews are criticisms and recommendations. If you disagree, don't write us a letter filled with phrases like "j00 suxOrs!!!" Instead, take some time to think out a civil, intelligent response. We are always open for healthy discussion and debate; we don't like graffiti scrawl masquerading as email. Stop writing us cranky letters in order to validate your opinion while invalidating ours. If you love a game, just keep loving it—don't spend so much time trying to convince us to change our mind. Above all, remember that it's just one guy's (well, one guy plus an editorial staff) opinion, nothing more.

That said, I recommend checking out the fine musical stylings of Messieurs Shatner and Nimoy in their *Spaced Out! The Best of Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner* album, and everyone should read a copy of Hiroyuki Nishigaki's *How To Goodbye Depression: If You Constrict Anus 100 Times Everyday. Malarkey? or Effective Way?* Also, if you have a date coming over, I heartily recommend watching Takashi Miike's *Audition*. Nothing brings a couple closer than watching a woman work acupuncture needles. And piano wire.

Thierry Nguyen
Features Editor

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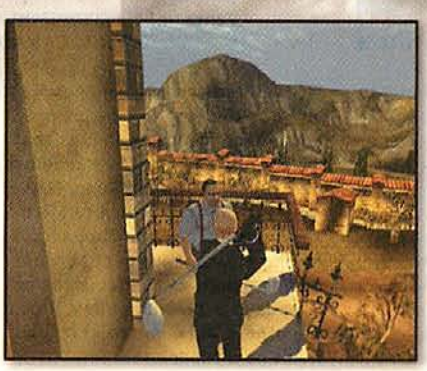

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Letters

Give us the virtual hug we need by writing to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

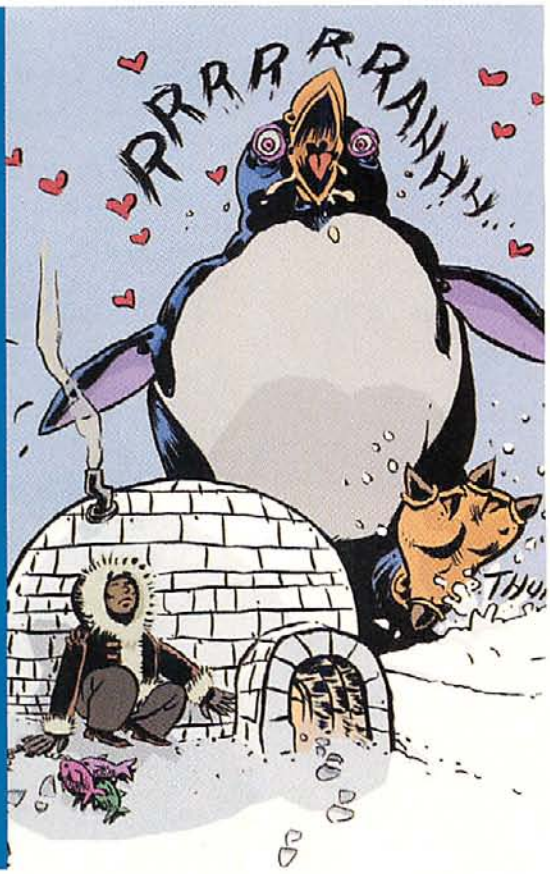
LETTER OF THE MONTH

One Canadian's Revenge

How's it going, eh? After reading the August issue, I had to comment on your preview of *The Thing* in Read Me. You have probably already been roasted over this howling error, but as a Canadian, I can't resist the opportunity to get some shots in, after all those cheap shots you guys seem to enjoy making about Canada.

When you write an article containing comments about geography, at least check on your facts first, or find an elementary school-aged child and ask. As this game is set in the Antarctic, the only danger you are in from the animal world is maybe getting molested by a sexually frustrated emperor penguin. Polar bears are found in the Arctic (basically Canada's backyard), which is at the opposite end of the world from the Antarctic. OK, got it now? The Antarctic is the South Pole, the Arctic is the North Pole. Here endeth the geography lesson—now put on the dunce caps and go stand in the corner.

Robert Weldon



A Girl Gamer! Too Bad She's Canadian

My name is Vanessa, I'm 14, and yes, I'm a FEMALE computer gamer! I'm soon to become a subscriber to your amazing magazine—I'm very impressed with it! But anyway, I was wondering if you could help me. Way back when DOS was the king, I remember distinctly playing this cool game called *Maniac Mansion* (I was about 6) and I believe it was shareware. I have searched everywhere for a copy of this game, but to no avail. The object of the game was to pick four characters, two of which would go up to this crazy mansion and rescue your friend who was trapped by the evil scientist. It was a pretty corny game and the graphics were absolutely horrid, but still, I'd like to get a copy and reminisce with it. If you could tell me as much as you can about where I could find a copy, I will be forever in your debt...or maybe just keep subscribing....

Vanessa Sclauzero-Oshawa
Ontario, CANADA

***Maniac Mansion* is a gaming classic and was the first in a series of LucasArts adventure games that included the *Monkey Island* games, *Sam and Max Hit the Road*, *Day of the Tentacle* (the sequel to *MM*), and the sublime *Grim Fandango*, among others. Your best bet for finding a copy of *Maniac Mansion* nowadays is probably eBay. Pick up the others while you're at it; you won't be disappointed.**

Babler and His Beaver

After reading the review for *Gore* in your September issue, I really felt that the entire piece crossed the line from simple irreverence for the subject matter into blatant disrespect. Obviously, if a game is poorly made, a bad review is warranted and even expected, so as to warn off consumers from wasting their money. *PC Gamer* published its own poor review of this game a month or two back, but at least they had the decency to actually review the content matter, instead of writing some story on beaver trapping. From what I do know of

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM HITI

"Review the content, instead of writing some story on beaver trapping."

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Violence
Blood

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"This will go down as a *Black & White* review. You'll see."

MAIL BITES

Penny Arcade is about as amusing as masturbating with a flaming cheese grater.
Voidindigo

Thanks for reassuring me that I'm not the only person who was less than overwhelmed by *WarCraft III*.
M.Longo

After reading your *WarCraft III* review I must say this: I hate you Robert Coffey.
Matt Bruce

Scooter + Predator = William O'Neal.
Richie L.

I have a solution to Wil's popularity issue: don't let him write anything.
Dirty Diaper Casey

this game, it was put together by a couple of guys over a few years as a labor of love. The least you could have done was explain in your review why you didn't like the final product. What you did was unprofessional and leads me to question the value of any future review published in your magazine.

P. Summey

Sometimes I think your magazine rates the reviews by payment. For example, I'm a big company with a lot of advertising money. I give you a game to review. If the game gets 1 star, one ad. Five stars, five full-page color ads. Right when I'm about to lose hope, Jason Babler comes along with the best review ever. His *Gore: Ultimate Soldier* review is so truthful! I know no one can make this stuff up, and it's obvious that Mr. Babler has the freedom to write what he feels is best. Thank you for having such a well-managed magazine!

James

James, there are two things we don't stand for around here: people questioning our editorial integrity and people complimenting Jason's writing. Hello! He's just a measly artist! Make us mad like this again and we'll come over to your house en masse to kick your butt. As soon as EA sends the limo over to pick us up.

Someone Finally Feels Our Pain

I was just thinking (not on purpose, mind you) as I was reading the latest issue of *CGW*. What is the process you go through when choosing which letters are to be printed and which letters are to be rejected and left on the coffee room table until someone spills something all over them so they have to be thrown out? (That's what we do with our junk mail!) And I also noticed another thing...WHY must you print the letters mailed by girlfriendless nerds who have nothing better to do than point out your spelling errors and argue with your reviews? Out of the bunch of letters that are printed, maybe four have some relevant, thoughtful insight to them. That's all I wanted to know—expect my subscription renewal form in the mail.

French-Fries

We're Gullible

I was very disappointed with the review of *NWN* in the September issue. Since when do you review games on their potential? "Play a good RPG, then make a great one." Yeah right. BioWare couldn't do it, but a band of unpaid computer geeks will rise up and save the day! *NWN* is a 3-star game.

You seem to have fallen for the hype. The reviewer glossed over the problems. This game was released prematurely. There's even an ad in the same issue that urges people to "preorder." I guess they didn't expect the game to be out yet. The latest 1.21 patch should be considered one of the worst patches in history and BioWare continuing to leave it up is contemptible. This will go down as another *Black & White* review. You'll see.

BTW: I love your magazine. Really.

Marty Keneally

Nobody Knew Who They Were, or Where They Were Going

As a Christian, I have had considerable difficulty finding a fantasy Tolkienesque RPG that I would like to play. Now I have finally pinpointed the problem I (and others like me) have with RPGs: the great a'heaping of druidic references. From idiotic ones like holly plants and oaks involved in spells, to rather dangerous ones like pentagrams and summoning up monsters and demons and goodness knows what else, practically all fantasy RPGs (especially those ones associated with *Dungeons & Dragons*) are stuffed with this druidic stuff. Magic, fine. Spells, fine. But for the love of all that is good, enough with Stonehenge! I'm really getting sick of seeing it every time I play a fantasy game!!

I can't imagine that any of you (with the possible exception of Robert Coffey, who sounds like he moonlights as a witch doctor on the Internet to some weird tribe in Bonga Bonga) really give a cartload of mathoms (I'm testing your dorkdom) whether or not RPGs are plastered with demonic stuff. So, for the sake of those who do (and would) give a cartload of mathoms, please wield whatever mighty influence you have to encourage game developers to tone down the druidic garbage.

Michael J. Reale

Jethro Tull Fans, Unite!

You know I promised myself I would not start this letter by typing f*** you a******, so I added a few words first. I am willing to bet that your career and this magazine, which gets worse by the month, will not last as long as Jethro Tull.

If your editorial ranting [September 2002] against nerds, Jethro Tull, and elves is the funniest thing that you can write, then I feel great sadness for you. You should also realize that the groups you are against are the same people who buy this rag (except for the elves, of course) and therefore pay your salary. If the intention of the article was to cost the magazine more subscriptions, then you may have succeeded in a big way. The magazine has turned to crap lately anyway, so it will be no great loss if I let my subscription run out.

I think you need to apologize to nerds, elves, and especially to Ian Anderson immediately.

A soon-to-be-ex-subscriber, Peter Fochesato

I Think We've Found Our New Intern

I'm writing in response to Mike who wrote the letter titled "We Want a *LOTR* Game, My Precioussss....." in your September 2002 issue. Anyone who says "mind you," "thrice," and then quotes a *Dune* movie seriously needs a swift kick in the gonads. I am offering my services in that area should Jeff have any trouble velcroing his Skechers. I'm free weekday evenings, not because I have an important job, but because that's usually when I wake up.

Jess

We Lied!

I have been a long-time subscriber to your magazine, and I enjoy the majority of your reviews and agree with most of them. But in your review of *GTA III* you lied! You said that Liberty City is a fictional place when it isn't. Here in Miami, Florida, there is a neighborhood called Liberty City and it is very much like the Liberty City from the game. Just letting you know that there are places that suck a fat one.

Adam Geist

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Passive Gaming

I've been a fan of your magazine for quite some time, but in your September issue your review of *GTA III* missed one critical point that makes it such an explosive game. *GTA III* creates a world where there is more happening than whatever your character is doing. Ever just sit on a busy or crowded corner and watched time fly? You get to see muggings, hit and runs, car accidents, yuppies in sports cars zipping through traffic, gangland fights, and more. Suddenly instead of the player's needs and goals being the focal point of the world, you get the impression that you are just a small fish in a big sea. I have a feeling this feature will come to dominate the future of gaming, as technology makes it easier and more feasible to propel this idea into other genres and games.

C. Lion
Los Angeles, California

Wow, that was a deep, almost Zen-like observation, C. Do you want to be our staff guru?

We'll Have to Unfreeze Jeff's Head, but OK

Dude, if you could do me a favor, when *Duke Nukem Forever* comes out, give my great-grandchildren a call and say it would have been their great-grandpa's dream to live to see the day, would you?

Emil Tsao

The Future Mrs. Wil O'Neal

THIS ONES 4 U WIL:
ABOUT YOUR STUPID F****** COLOUM ABOUT A CAMRA WHATEVER ISSUE IT WAS THEN YOU TALKED ABOUT A SPORT TRAC? I DRIVE A SPORT TRAC, AND LET ME TELL YOU ITS MORE USEFUL THAN THAT NAPPY HAIR YOU GOT. AND ONE MORE THING THING, THIS IS A GAMING MAGINZE JEFF... IF THIS IS ALL UR TECH DEPARTMENT CAN COME UP

WITH, WHY DONT YOU FIRE HIS SORRY ASS. IM CANCELLING MY SUBSCRIPTION AND GOING TO PC GAMER, AT LEAST THEY TALK ABOUT GAMES.

Brandy McLain, Louisiana

PS. JEFF YOU DONT HAVE TO PUT YOUR 'GREENSPEAK' IN THE TABLE OF CONTENTS, EVERYONES KNOWS THAT LAME SH*T IS ON THE LAST PAGE.

You know, Jeff, Brandy does have a point about your column.

"When *Duke Nukem Forever* comes out, give my great-grandchildren a call."

A Minor Problem

Mature ratings on video games are to inform parents of the content of video games. It is the parents' responsibility to keep track of what their children are playing, watching, and listening to during their spare time. This bill [see September 2002 issue, page 40] is just one more example of parents pushing off the responsibilities onto someone else. Let's say Mutt can't buy the video game anywhere, now what is he going to do? Probably go smoke pot or spend his money on other things that are illegal or more destructive than playing a video game.

Adam H., 21

I am 16 years old, and I play a lot of computer and console games. Most of them are M rated. Why? Because my parents allow me to, not because they don't CARE, but because they realize that I am old enough to distinguish the difference between a game and reality. My parents always know what I am buying because they ask. The same thing goes with CDs—I listen to Slipknot and Korn and other hard rock. And my parents know; they also know that my music isn't the source of all evil. Parents should be involved with minors' purchases, so there shouldn't be any restrictions as far as retailers go.

SASdude

Correction

The Letter of the Month illustration in the October issue was done by Colin Adams (www.colinadams.com).

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS

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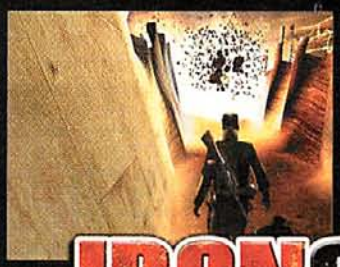

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The Face Of War Changes October 2002

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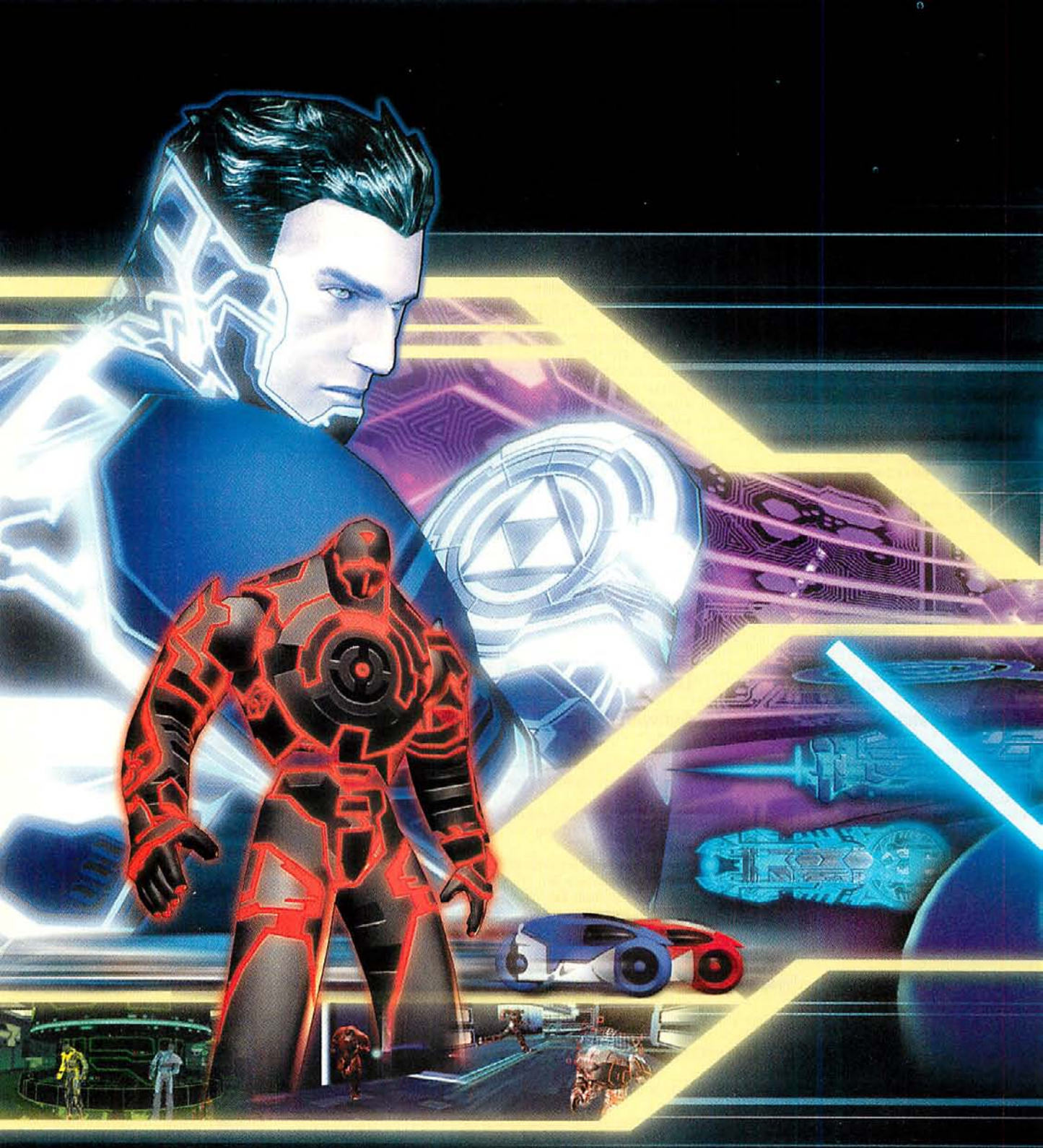

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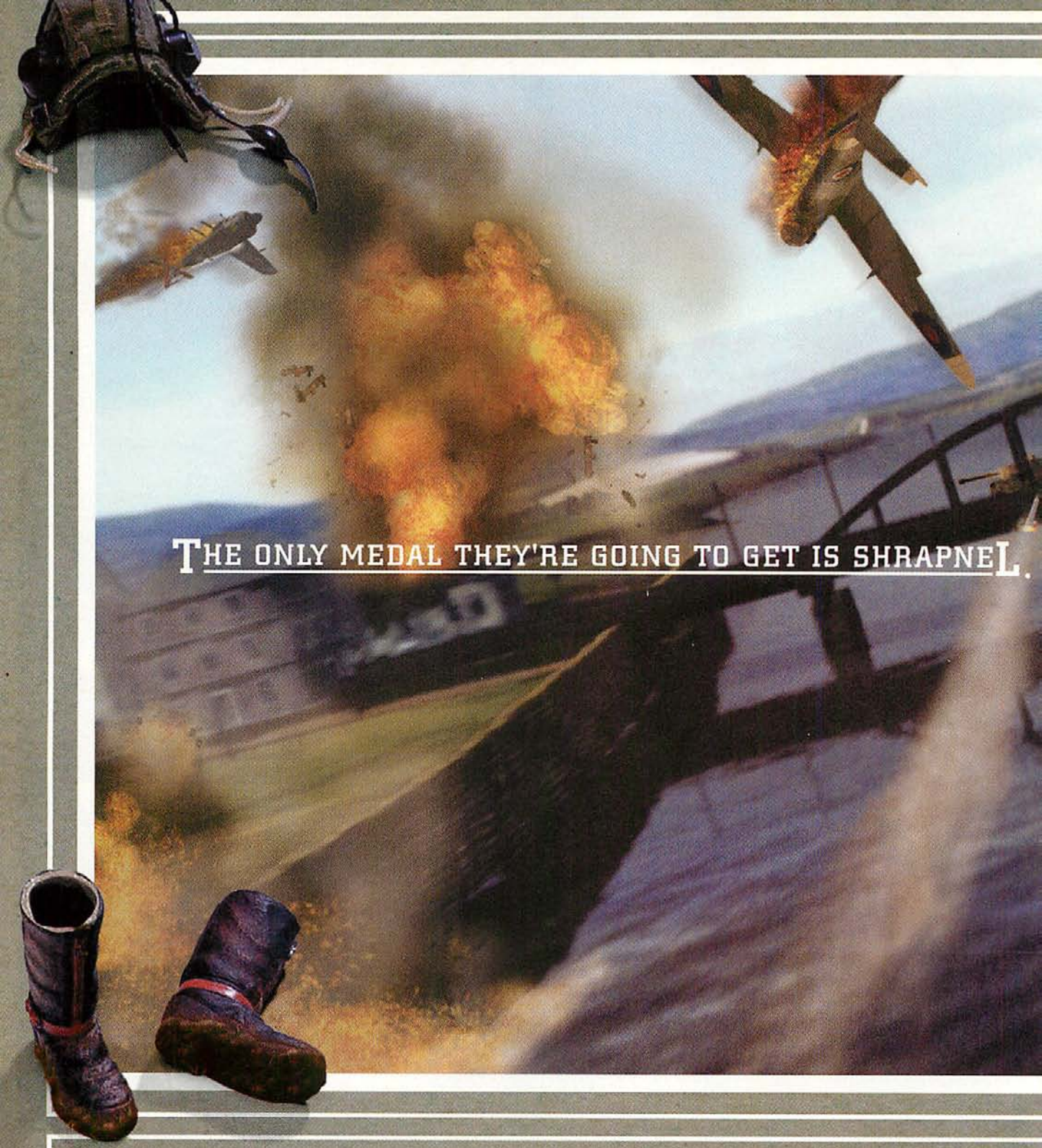

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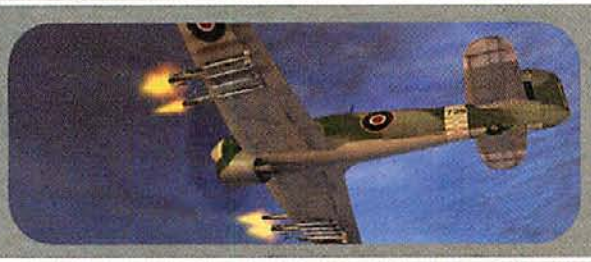

Microsoft

Combat Flight Simulator 3

Battle For Europe

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Loading...

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

HEGEMONIA: LEGIONS OF IRON

If you needed more convincing to go out and buy a next-generation graphics card (and considering how well the new technologies in upcoming games like *UT 2003* and *Doom III* are using those cards' powers, we gotta wonder what other proof you need), then take a look at the stunning *Hegemonia* from Digital Reality, the developers of *Imperium Galactica I* and *II*. Set in 2104, *Hegemonia* is a space-based 3D RTS that has you battling fleets of fighters, capital ships, space stations, and everything in between as you protect our solar system from outside invaders. *Hegemonia* should be occupying hard drive space come this fall.

Weapon and explosion effects, along with real-time reflections and other graphical bells and whistles, make for a cinematic experience, thanks to the powerful Walker engine being developed in-house at Digital Reality.

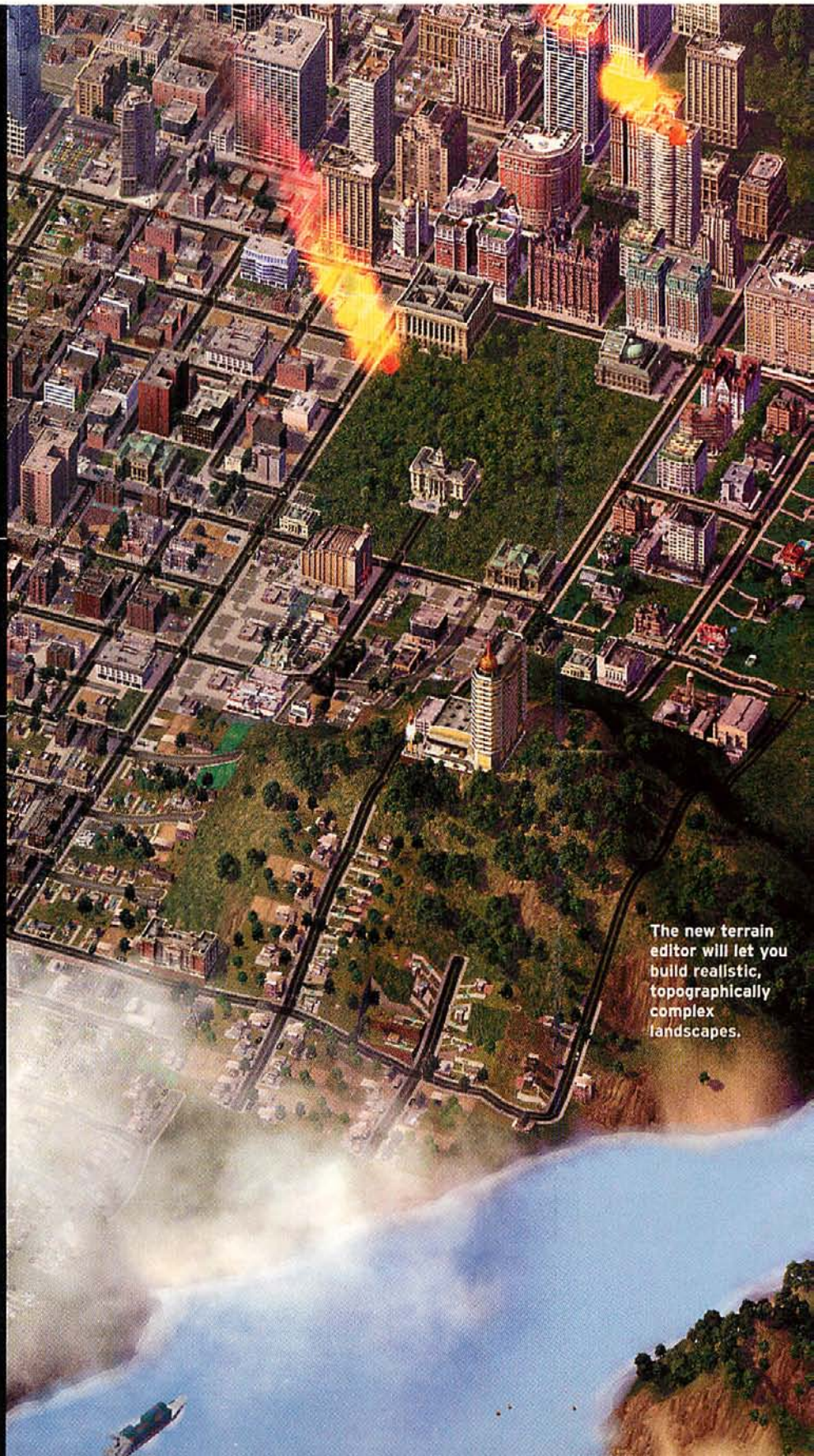
The game puts more than 40 types of ships at your disposal. Smaller ships are grouped into squads that gain experience from one mission to the next. They'll need to stick together to take out this behemoth.

Hegemonia is a pretty traditional RTS, requiring you to harvest resources and research technology. There are more than 200 technologies to research, so you'll stay busy.

The game starts in our solar system, but *Hegemonia* will take players to new systems and weird planets. Believe it or not, people actually live on this lava world.

SIM CITY 4

It's hard to remember now, but way back in the '90s, back when gamers were real men who made their AUTOEXEC.BAT files and liked it, *SimCity* was the signature franchise for Maxis—one of the original blockbuster PC games. In the last few years, of course, it's been eclipsed by upstart spin-off *The Sims*—but that's only encouraged the *SimCity 4* team to try harder. As the game gets closer to completion, we continue to be impressed by the game's intense level of control and ease of use. And check out them tornaders!



The new terrain editor will let you build realistic, topographically complex landscapes.

When you're building roads, the game engine will automatically place bridges where needed.
You'll now have direct control over natural disasters, like tornados, which you can use to punish those tiny, evil people down there.
Balloons, drifting clouds, and other atmospheric elements help your cities feel more alive than in previous versions.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

Did you miss all the cool, slick counterterrorism hijinks in our July issue? Well, here's a quick refresher: you get the depth and realism of past *Rainbow Six* games, with interface and accessibility tweaks to make the game fun for everyone, whether you're an ex-Special Forces soldier-turned-gamer or a fan who just knows *Counter-Strike*. The switch to *Unreal* technology translates into a beautiful counterterrorism sim worthy of a Loading shot. Get ready to thwart tangos this November.

This guy could have outfitted his gun with all sorts of neat gadgets, but he decided to go with a stock model.

Kneeling and other actions like lying prone are animated correctly thanks to skeletal modeling.

We didn't want to clutter this nice shot with an ugly interface graphic. Suffice it to say, all you had to do to get in here was put the cursor on the door, select Open & Clear, and watch the team go into action.

Certain walls allow penetration, which means that bullets can tear through them and take out whatever's on the other side.

Higher skin detail means you have much more realistic-looking operatives, with the right helmets, holsters, ammo magazines, and whatnot—and all of it is positioned correctly.

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM RATING PENDING TO EVERYONE

RP-E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

FIRAXIS

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Also visit Civ3.com to find out about Play The World,™ a multiplayer expansion pack that lets you go head to head, and play a game in about an hour. It's an all new way to play Civ.

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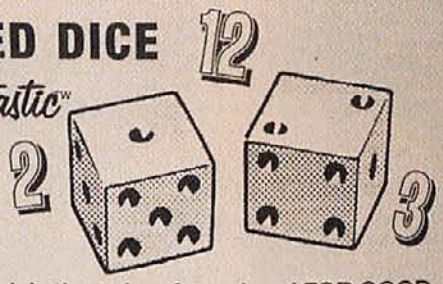
By *Craptastic*™



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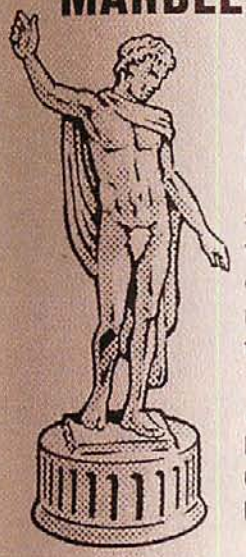

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60:
You'll need gadgets, lots of gadgets, gadgets to master the art of becoming invisible, infrared goggles to start, maybe a grappling hook
TEEN
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Violence
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but don't pat yourself on the back yet tick because that was only one minute tock and there are still 1,400 left in the day tick and 14 more classic Bond enemies to fight online.

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Online maps provided by GameSpy

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Read Me

The opposite of reality TV Edited by Ken Brown

The Imp has come a long way from its intro in *Doom*.

FIELD TRIP

QuakeCon

Guns and money in the heart of Texas By Thierry Nguyen

INSIDE

UNREAL II
Remember *Halo*? Now you won't have to.
Page 42

SCOTT McCLOUD
Reads between the lines of reports on violence. **Page 52**

ROLLER-COASTER TYCOON 2
Bigger and better than before. **Page 55**

C&C: GENERALS
Westwood's latest RTS looks amazing. **Page 56**

The new Demon is a homicidal maniac with a bad headache. And he doesn't like people. Want to meet him?

Id has resurrected several classic monsters for *Doom III*, including the Demon, Hell Knight, Imp, and rocket-launcher-wielding Revenant from *Doom II*.

Once again, id Software impressed gamers with its annual QuakeCon, which has transformed from an informal fan gathering into a mini-E3 put on by Texas-based developers and open to gamers everywhere.

What was different about this year's QuakeCon was the juicy info given about *Doom III*. Carmack's keynote this year had less of the technical jargon that his keynotes are known for and more details about the game itself.

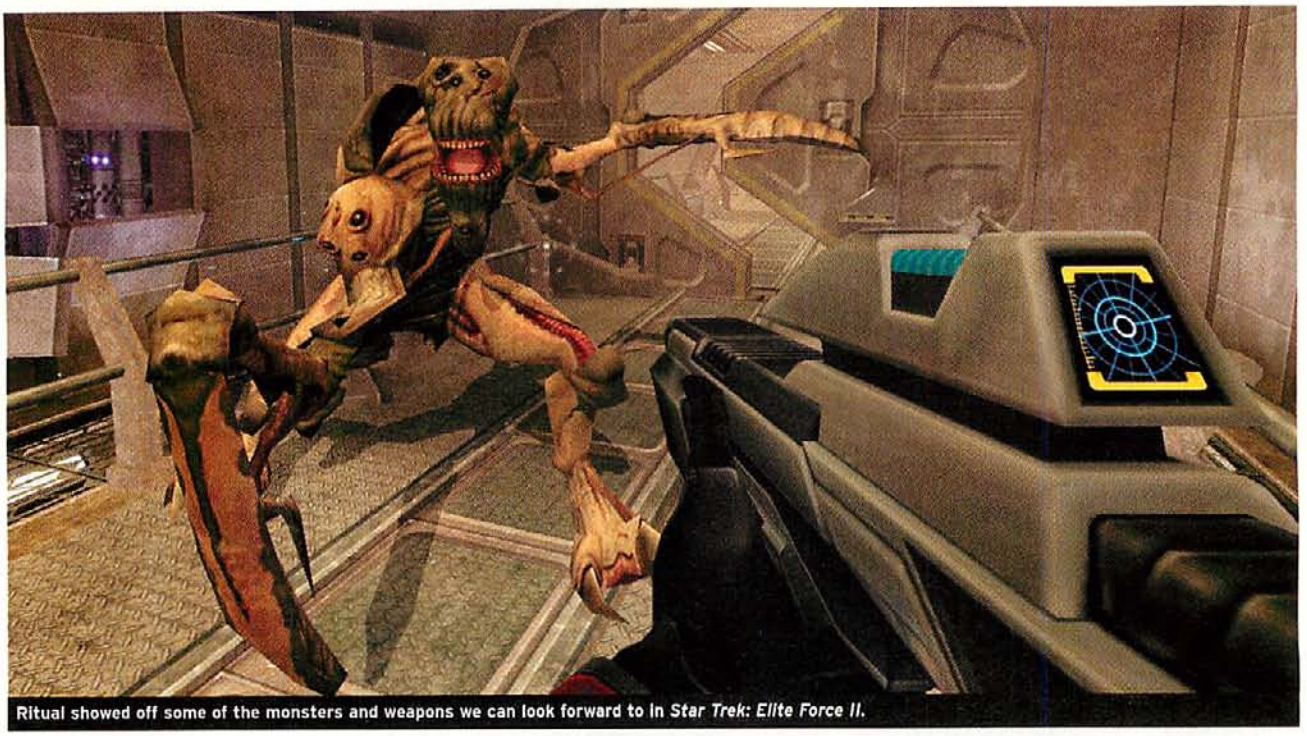
Besides confirming the Xbox release of *Doom III*, Carmack and his id cohorts discussed some gameplay features. Revelations included limited outdoor environments (the player might get trapped outside the base, for instance), usable computers (complete with interface, used for obtaining mission objectives and solving puzzles), and a weapons list. The major *Doom* weapons will be back, including shotgun, assault rifle, rocket launcher, and BFG. There might be a chain saw, but it's not confirmed yet.

Id has resurrected and updated several classic monsters for the game, including the Demon, Hell Knight, Imp, and the dual shoulder-mounted-rocket-launcher-wielding Revenant from *Doom II*.

Gamers who flocked to QuakeCon were given tickets to the *Doom III* theater, the same one used in E3. The audience enjoyed a revised version of the E3 demo that showed off a higher resolution and better detail thanks to the ATI Radeon 9700 with optimized drivers.

Activision also offered up *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* and *Star Trek: Elite Force II. Enemy Territory* will be a stand-alone product that builds on the team-play aspect seen in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer. In the single-player campaign, the player will have a squad of AI-controlled bots, serving as engineer, medic, and lieutenant.

The Bring Your Own Computer area was filled to capacity for the first time, with more than 1,300 gamers and PCs in one room.



Ritual showed off some of the monsters and weapons we can look forward to in *Star Trek: Elite Force II*.

Work on *Elite Force II* proceeds strongly. The team from Ritual showed off a more populated version of the level displayed at E3 and also demonstrated more monsters, new weapons, and various uses for the tricorder.

In tournament news, favored gamers like John "ZeRo4" Hill (who won last year's tournament) and Johnathan "fatality" Wendel ended up not competing for the grand prize; the winner this year was Alexey "M19*LeXeR" Nesterov, who took away $20,000 for himself. In the *Wolfenstein* team tournament, The Doctors (a Canada-based clan) took the $25,000 grand prize.

Look for a story on the process of putting QuakeCon together next month.

Id programming wunderkind John Carmack explains some of the features in *Doom III*.

GAME MATH

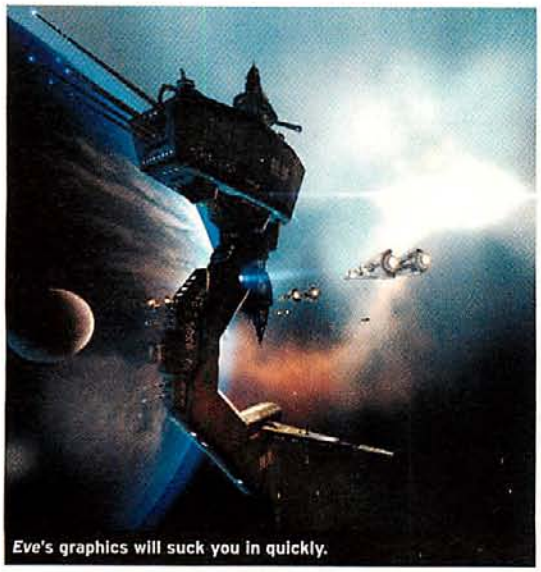
Formulas they never taught in game school By Erik Wolpaw

(Internet Explorer + AOL Instant Messenger) / Zork = **MAJESTIC**

Black & White / Dig Dug = **DIGGLES**

EverQuest x Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots = **ANARCHY ONLINE**

Wolfenstein 3D − LanguageQuest: German = **RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN**



Eve's graphics will suck you in quickly.

PREVIEW

Eve: The Second Genesis

Star Trek meets *EverQuest* in this sharp massively multiplayer space sim **By Tom Price**

Eve's focus on PVP combat means there will be lots of action.

Some of us dream of the day when we can live and travel through space, exploring distant worlds and contacting alien life forms. That day may not come in our lifetimes, but we can always dream about it. And what better way to dream about something than to play it?

Eve: The Second Genesis lets you do just that. It's a massively multiplayer space sim set in a galaxy distant from Earth. Players conduct business as they travel around the more than 5,000 solar systems in customizable ships that range from small fighters to large capital ships.

First you'll choose a race and profession. There are five races in the game, each with unique characteristics. Careers include the military, pirating, space trading, and bounty hunting. Jobs are usually advertised at space stations, either by NPCs or human players who need to have something done.

What separates *Eve* from other MMOs is that it focuses more on player-versus-player combat. There will be a lot of action out there, not just people killing bots for experience points. In fact, there are no experience points or leveling up. Players learn specific skills; the more they learn, the more powers and abilities they'll have. If you get your ship blasted out from under you, you can escape in a pod, but you can also be captured and held for ransom, or killed and your body harvested for biomass.

Watch for *Eve* to go online sometime late this year.

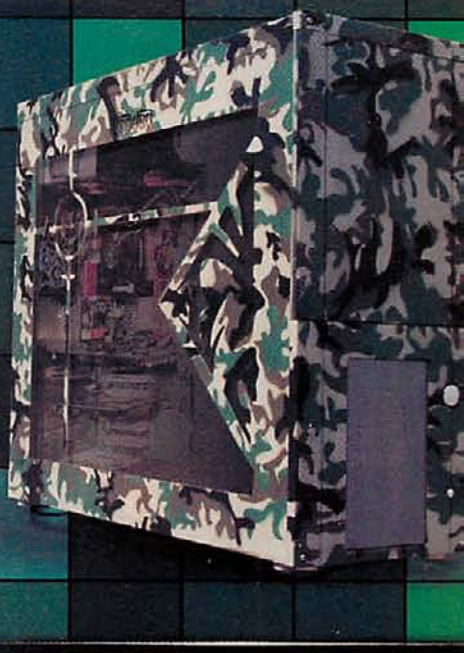
Mighty Mini

Combo MP3 player will carry your music and game files, too By George Jones

The Creative Nomad MuVo is one awesome little gadget. The size of a cigarette lighter and weighing a mere *one ounce*, the diminutive device is both a portable hard drive and MP3 player. It delivers high-fidelity audio (20Hz to 20KHz) and can store 64 or 128MB (depending on the model) of music, game saves, and downloads. Just hook it into your USB port.

If there's one device that has scored instantly with the cynical *CGW* staff, it's this thing. And at $129 for the 64MB version, it's affordable, too. Get one.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE



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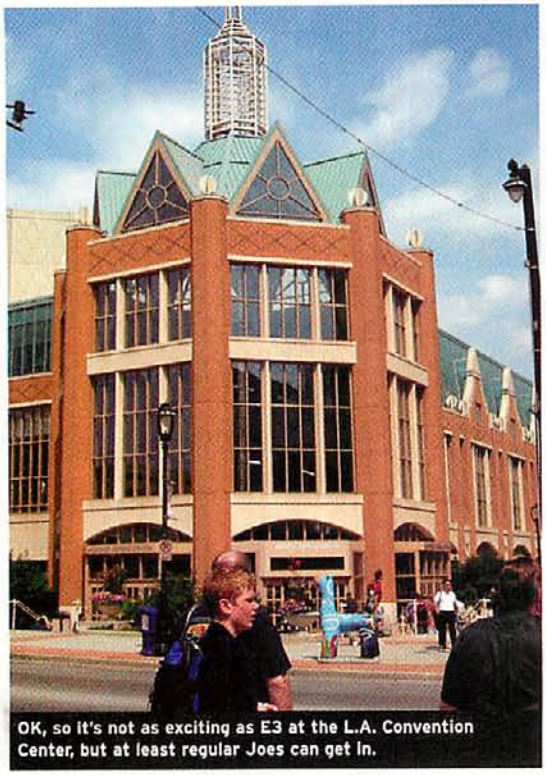
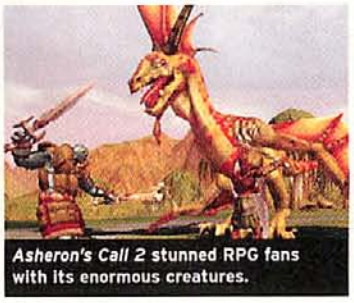


OK, so it's not as exciting as E3 at the L.A. Convention Center, but at least regular Joes can get in.

Magic: The Gathering Online was huge at the Wizards of the Coast booth.



Asheron's Call 2 stunned RPG fans with its enormous creatures.

Use nukes wisely in *Rise of Nations*—both sides have a limited supply.

GEEKFEST

Better Than Blatz

Gamers flock to Milwaukee for GenCon 2002 **By Tracy Baker**

For those who could see past the Heroclix and medieval chicks, there was plenty of PC goodness to be found at GenCon 2002. As expected, the show was big on massively multiplayer RPGs, including grassroots efforts like *Rubies of Eventide* as well as goliaths like *EverQuest* and *Asheron's Call 2*. The *EQ* folks were showing off the *Planes of Power* expansion, which features some terrific animation and 20 new zones that all have a unique look. Ubi Soft's booth was besieged by swarms of players looking to play the latest beta of *Shadowbane*, which looks like the game grizzled MMO fans have been waiting for. We were impressed with the completely customizable interface, and the unrestricted player-versus-player environment caters to the hardcore. Fortunately there are no anonymous kills, so feel free to gather up your guild buddies to dish out some serious payback. "Our backstory is *The Fellowship of the Ring* meets *The Road Warrior*," says lore master and designer Sam Johnson. The brutal, free-form gameplay reflects that vision.

The surprise hit of the show was Simon & Schuster Interactive's massively multiplayer space opera *Eve: The Second Genesis*, which was set up alongside the company's *Farscape* game on a single demo machine crammed in a tiny booth. The stunning space-scapes and 70 ship models had passers-by gawking throughout the show. *Eve* is all about big numbers, and senior producer Mike Wallace promised we'd see 100,000 simultaneous players scattered throughout 10,000 solar systems. (For more on *Eve*, see our preview on page 45.)

Microsoft drew huge crowds to see *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries*, *Impossible Creatures*, *Freelancer*, *Age of Mythology*, and *Asheron's Call 2*. *MechWarrior* fans were lined up around the booth to get a chance to blast one another in the game pods that were set up to demo *Mercenaries*, which is shaping up to be one of the best in the series in both its concept and execution. The new ability to use a secondary lance means players can command up to eight mechs at once. There are enough customization options that even the famous mechmeister T.J. Wagner is still spending a lot of time piecing together the perfect instrument of destruction. "My fiancée calls it 'the home shopping network,'" he says. (See the preview on page 82 for details.)

Other highlights at the Microsoft booth included an updated demo of *Age of Mythology* and an early alpha of *Rise of Nations* that really showed off how distinct each race will be. *Freelancer*, *Asheron's Call 2*, and *Impossible Creatures* looked almost ready to ship.

GenCon moves next year, but unfortunately not back to the Playboy resort where the show was held in 1977. Instead, we'll see you in Indianapolis next July.

The surprise hit of the show was Simon & Schuster's massively multiplayer space opera *Eve*.

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FIRIONA VIE from "EverQuest®" courtesy Sony Online Entertainment Inc.

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Still shots just don't do justice to this game.

UPDATE

Unreal II

The shooter that will beat *Halo* like a gong By Jason Brown

The explosions, shots, and fire were dazzlingly over the top in terms of special effects.

Since our March cover story, we hadn't seen much of *Unreal II*, so we jumped at the chance to check out the latest build with the team's executive producer. We went into the demo with high expectations, and it still blew us away. The only games that can stand up to its amazing graphics are *Doom III* and *Deus Ex 2*, and *Unreal II* will beat both of those games to shelves by a year. Remember *Halo*? Well, when this game ships, you won't have to anymore.

The environments are all beautiful and distinctly different. One of the game's 13 worlds, which appeared to be a mix of the environments of *Aliens* and *Star Trek*'s Borg, was not only stylish, but also of unusually immense scale. Instead of the typical corridors and rooms, *Unreal II* is getting expansive interiors that dwarf the player—the massive alien structures make players feel like peons.

Level design is spectacular.

We expect a lot of pyrotechnics in an *Unreal* title, and this game delivers. From flamethrowers to incendiary grenades to alien EMP blasts, the explosions, shots, and fire were dazzlingly over the top in terms of special effects.

We were glad to hear why Infogrames chose Legend Entertainment (*Wheel of Time*) to develop the game. Executive producer Matthew Powers says Legend was chosen because they understand how important story is to an immersive experience. To this end, the design team is also focusing on numerous scripted events to tell the story and boost the "wow" factor.

We could talk about the stellar AI that crouches, creeps, ducks behind cover, and circles around pillars. We could go on about the unique weapons for the two classes—human and alien—each of which has an alternate fire. We could talk about how you can deploy and command marines and position sentry turrets to defend an area. Or we could talk about how each map seems to have combat challenges that make every mission different.

But let's just leave it at this: everything we're looking for in an FPS is in there. The only hitch is that it's been delayed until early 2003, to prevent cannibalizing sales of *Unreal Tournament 2003*. Hurry the hell up, Epic!

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD
CELTIC KINGS

Strategy First scored big last year with its sleeper strategy game *Kohan*–besting *Civ III* for every major strategy game award–and it looks like they could very well do it again this year with the just-released *Celtic Kings: Rage of War*, as good a game about ancient warfare as we've played in a long time. Check out our review in this issue.

THE BAD
UNREAL II IN 2003

Not again! Another game we badly want–delayed! Infogrames announced that *Unreal II* is slipping until 2003 because *UT 2003*, which is coming out first, is late, and they don't want the two games overlapping. We understand, but we're annoyed anyway, because *Unreal II* has been looking sweeter than ever. Every day this game gets delayed, another little piece of us dies inside.

THE UGLY
JUSTIN ON AMERICAN IDOL

Yeah, we know that this has nothing to do with gaming. And we hate to admit that we watch *American Idol*. But Justin must die. We can't stand him. The insufferable smile, the bony legs in leather pants, and especially the Sideshow Bob hair. By the time you read this, we'll all know whether he won, but right now, he's inexplicably made it to the final two. We hate him.

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Mild Violence
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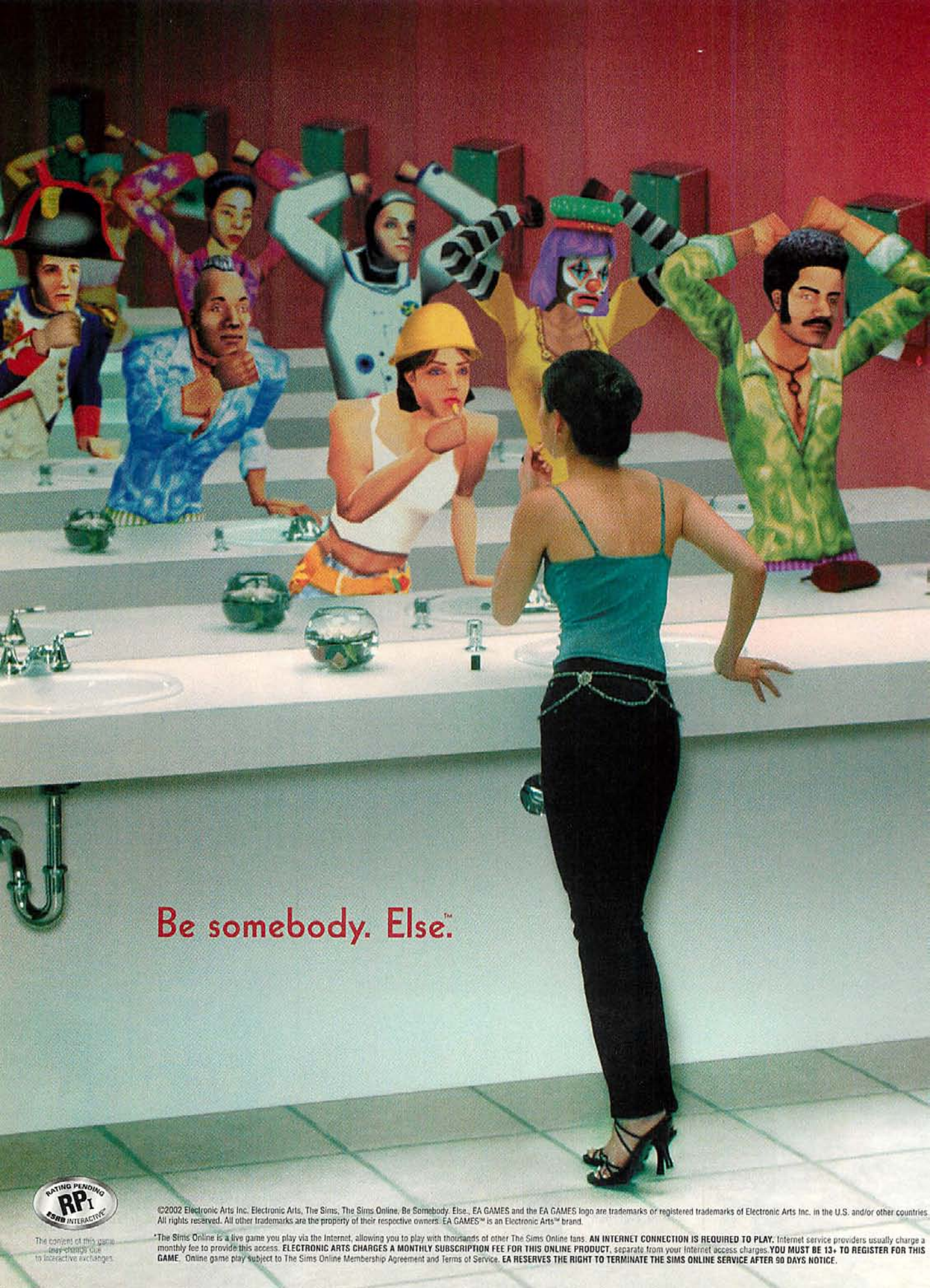

RATING PENDING
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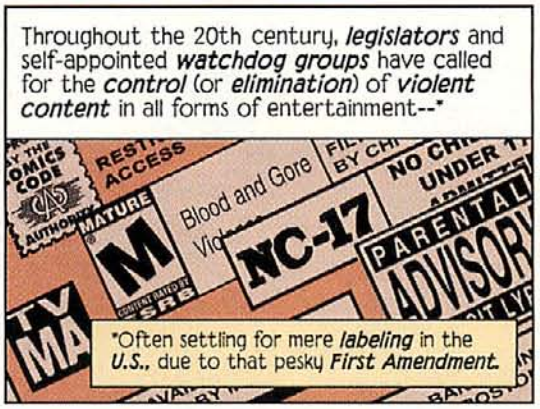
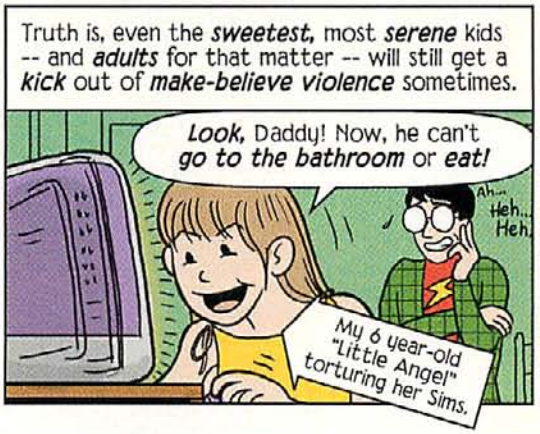
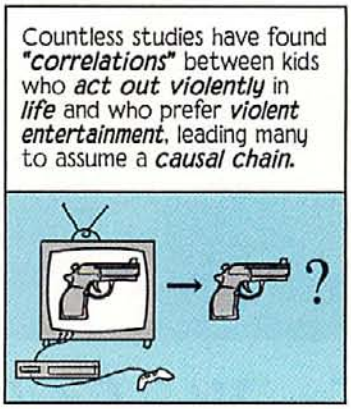
DISCOVERING GAMES
#10
BEING
BAD
The idea that violent entertainment can be "bad" for you is hardly a new concept.
by Scott McCloud

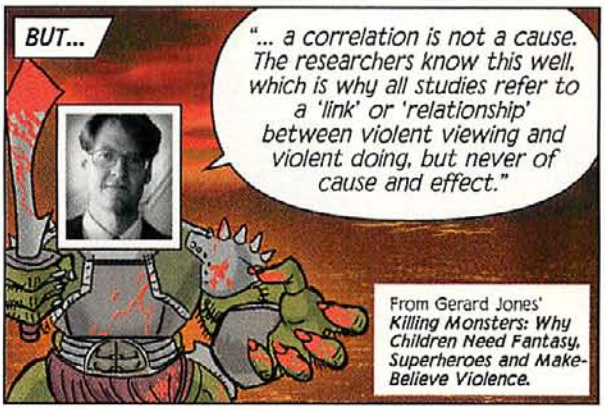

Throughout the 20th century, legislators and self-appointed watchdog groups have called for the control (or elimination) of violent content in all forms of entertainment--*
RESTRICTED ACCESS
Blood and Gore
NC-17
NO CHILDREN UNDER 17
PARENTAL ADVISORY
MATURE
M
TV MA
*Often settling for mere labeling in the U.S., due to that pesky First Amendment.

--rarely asking Why we're attracted to such content in the first place.
My loyal flock give their children crosses, not guns.
WRRRR...
NEWS
BANG! You're dead!


Truth is, even the sweetest, most serene kids -- and adults for that matter -- will still get a kick out of make-believe violence sometimes.
Look, Daddy! Now, he can't go to the bathroom or eat!
Ah... Heh... Heh.
My 6 year-old "Little Angel" torturing her Sims.

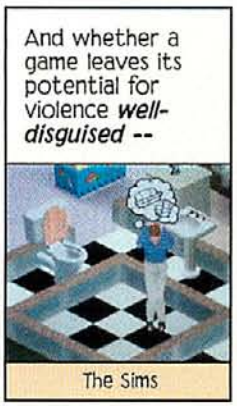
But, it's when violent entertainment and violent behavior coincide that cries for censorship soar.
THE TWO COLUMBINE SHOOTERS...
VIDEO GAME DOOM!...

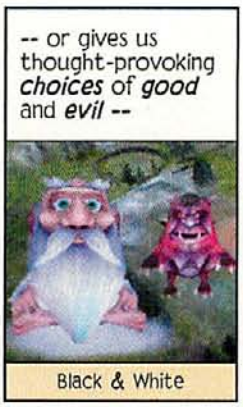

Countless studies have found "correlations" between kids who act out violently in life and who prefer violent entertainment, leading many to assume a causal chain.
?


BUT...
"... a correlation is not a cause. The researchers know this well, which is why all studies refer to a 'link' or 'relationship' between violent viewing and violent doing, but never of cause and effect."
From Gerard Jones' Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Superheroes and Make-Believe Violence.

"The link may mean only that aggressive kids like violent entertainment."*
*or even that the latter provides a healthy alternative for the former.

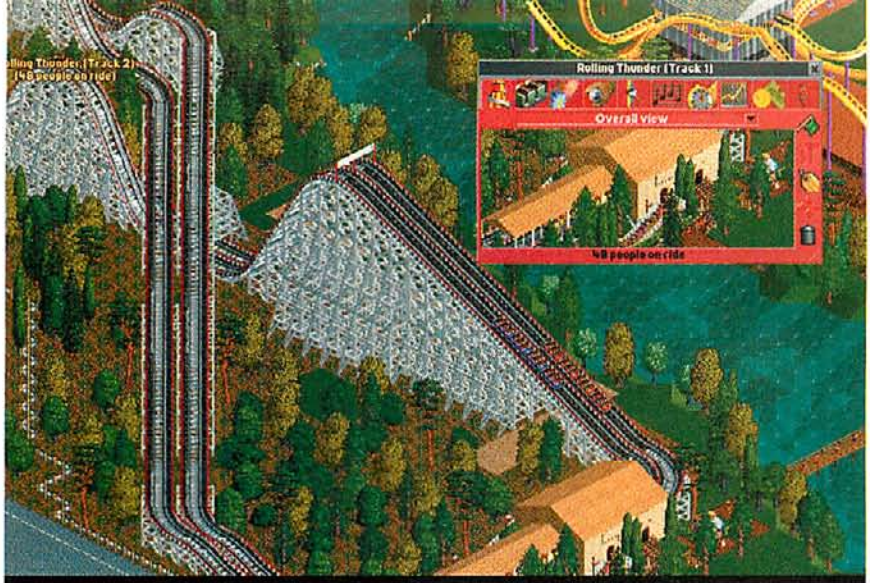
In truth, society functions in large part because we suppress aggression everyday. Games provide an outlet for those urges.


And whether a game leaves its potential for violence well-disguised --
The Sims


-- or gives us thought-provoking choices of good and evil --
Black & White

-- or actually compels us to commit crimes as a part of routine game play --
Grand Theft Auto III

-- eliminating those fantasies would do little to reduce real-world violence, and in fact might do just the opposite.



RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 adds five complete Six Flags theme parks for you to play with. Here's the Rolling Thunder ride at Magic Mountain in California.

HANDS ON

RollerCoaster Tycoon 2

Everyone's favorite vomit sim is back! **By Jeff Green**

Since its 1999 debut, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* has become one of the most successful and influential computer games of the past decade, selling millions of copies and inspiring every third-rate game designer to cash in on its success with their own tycoon game.

Not bad for what is essentially a one-man operation. Independent game developer and roller coaster fanatic Chris Sawyer designed both *RollerCoaster Tycoon* and its sequel completely on his own.

At first glance, the sequel (due out now) looks the same. But a good look at the beta reveals how much has improved. You now create parks on a much larger grid, and you can build the coasters themselves at greater elevations, practically begging your guests to launch some truly spectacular projectile vomits. There are many more animations now (one coaster ride, according to Infogrames, has more animations than appeared the entire first game). The engine has been tweaked for faster, smoother scrolling around your park.

As in the first game, there's no linked campaign, just a series of increasingly difficult scenarios. There will be new objects, stores, and themes, but for fans of real-life roller coasters, the biggest news is the inclusion of five actual Six Flags theme parks and 25 of their most popular rides, rendered in their entirety for you to play with, study, and modify.

The sequel addresses our biggest complaint over the original by including a sandbox mode for designing parks and rides in a freeform environment. A new editor will also let you create scenarios with virtually limitless customization that you can upload and share with others.

Doom III this ain't. Graphics border on primitive and gameplay doesn't exactly offer the kind of adrenaline rush that will convert *Counter-Strike* addicts. But *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* has the appearance of offering a better, bigger, more streamlined version of a humble yet weirdly addicting game.

You can now monitor the actions and attitudes of every single guest, each of whom is individually named.

RollerCoaster Tycoon inspired every third-rate designer to cash in on its success.

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Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	9/27/02
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	10/3/02
Total Immersion Racing	Empire Interactive	10/3/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Sierra	10/3/02
Earth & Beyond	Electronic Arts	10/9/02
Delta Force 5: Black Hawk Down	Electronic Arts	10/16/02
G.I. Combat: Episode I, Battle of Normandy	Strategy First	10/18/02
NASCAR Thunder 2003	Electronic Arts	10/22/02
EverQuest: Planes of Power	Sony	10/23/02
Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	10/23/02
The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	10/24/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	10/29/02
SWAT Urban Justice	Sierra	10/31/02
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	11/4/02
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	11/5/02
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	Simon & Schuster	11/5/02
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	Vivendi	11/7/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	11/8/02

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U.S. forces invading a beach are getting worked by GLA soldiers and rocket buggies.

These tanks can either sit and fire at the enemy or shoot down the towers and let them crush their targets instead.

GLA vehicles (green) taking on Chinese units. The Chinese have a predilection for tanks that spew lots of fire.

HANDS ON

Command & Conquer: Generals

Armies with devastating firepower await your orders, sir **By Thierry Nguyen**

The game's depiction of a conflict between China, the U.S., and a terrorist group has lots of explosive action.

Don't expect pixellated tank rushes or Giant Squids with psychic attack powers in this *Command & Conquer*. Instead, picture battles reminiscent of *Black Hawk Down* or Operation Desert Storm, filled with supersonic fighters, massive tanks, angry mobs, Tomahawk missiles, and devastating air fuel weapons, all in gritty 3D. The game's depiction of a violent conflict between China, the U.S., and a terrorist group has lots of impressive elements like air-to-air combat, nuclear strikes, and buildings and landscapes there for destroying.

After seeing limited gameplay at E3, we recently had the opportunity to see the game in action at the offices of EA Pacific. From the U.S. campaign, we played the tutorial and the first and fourth missions. Rather than offer the typical stale tutorial, *Generals* follows *C&C: Renegade* in giving you a realistic mission that happens to have training elements. In the tutorial, players attack a Global Liberation Army chemical factory.

Veteran *C&C* players will notice that the interface menu has moved to the bottom of the screen from the side. Another big change is that you now use a bulldozer unit to construct a base. Rather than be limited by a power grid (as in previous *C&C* games), you can now build a structure anywhere, just as long as you can get a bulldozer to your target location. Also, buildings and units are now upgradable: you have the option of adding control rods to the power plant to make it more efficient, and you can upgrade each ranger infantry to carry flashbangs and scout drones.

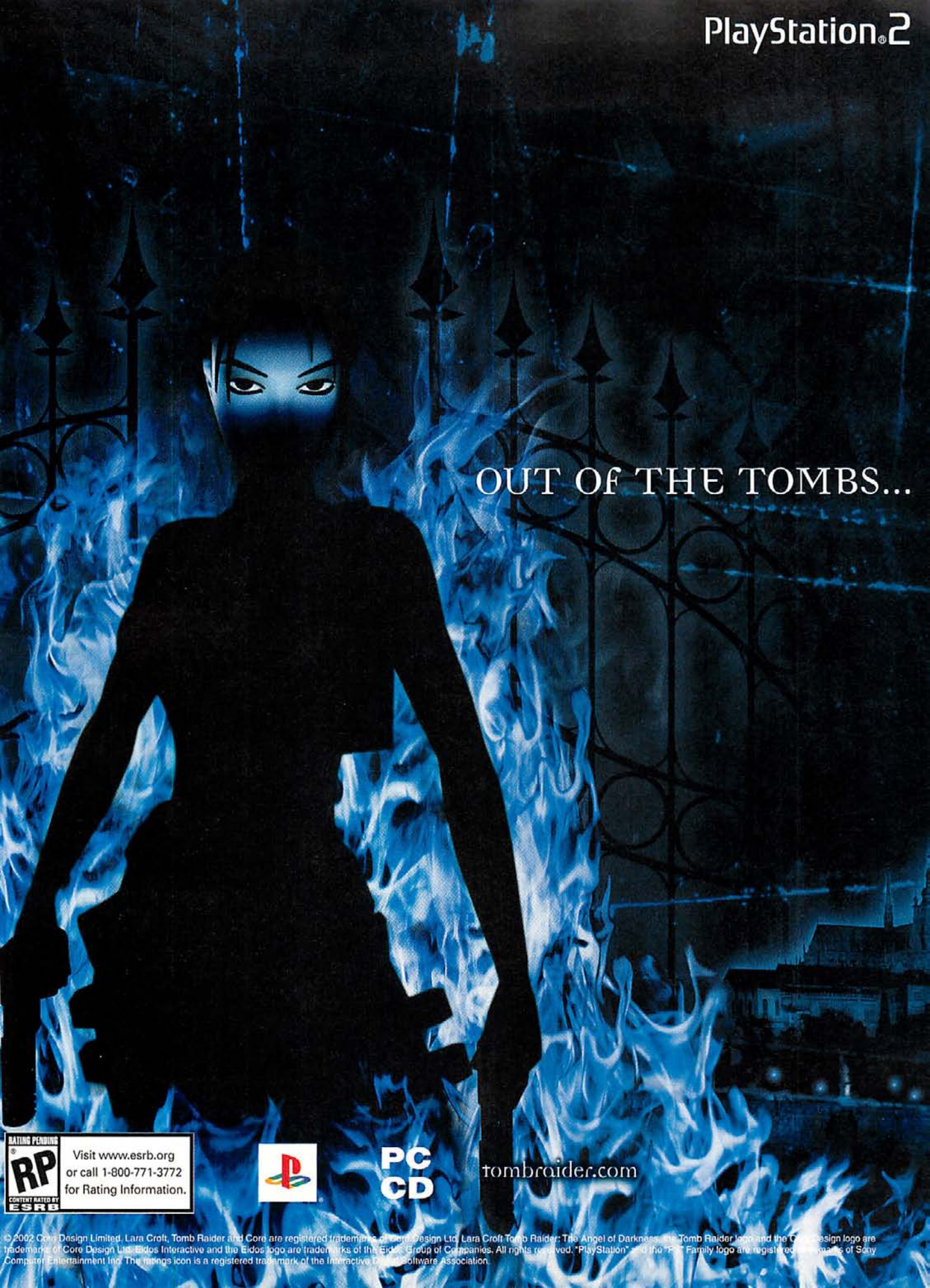
Each side has a big superweapon: the U.S. has a satellite ion cannon, the Chinese have a nuclear missile (shown here), and the GLA have a chemical one.

Generals' answer to the preponderance of heroes in most RTS games is the generals themselves. Each side chooses one of three generals; each general, in turn, influences the player by adding automatic unit veterancy, new attacks, and new units.

The first mission, Siege of Baghdad, showed off more features, such as populated cities with civilian crowds and the ability to knock over buildings, which can be used to your advantage. Several times after scoring a direct hit on a tower, I was treated to the sight of it collapsing onto some hapless soldiers.

The beach assault mission is a weird mix of *Black Hawk Down* and the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*. Your rangers and Tomahawk missile launchers are getting hammered by GLA defenders rooted in the beachhead, and you have to find a way to neutralize them and establish a base.

Although they had originally scheduled a preholiday release, the EA Pacific developers want to take their time to do this one right, so they have pushed the release to late January. Stay tuned for an in-depth preview next month, covering more details like the three sides, the campaign, and which side has the Biggest. Tank. Ever.



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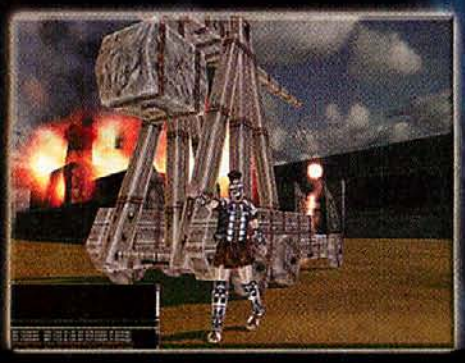

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Vast galaxies lie waiting for you to plunder them.

The planet screen tells you what's on each known planet and who controls it.

The combat graphics look like a throwback to an earlier time.

PREVIEW

Master of Orion III

Will Quicksilver's space-based opus appeal to more than just *MOO* fans? **By Jason Brown**

In January we were so excited about *MOO III* we put it on the cover. Developer Quicksilver Software has pushed the ship date from this past spring to this year's holidays, but even with the extra development time, what we saw recently didn't exactly knock our socks off.

The interface seemed bland. The main new addition is a status report that pops up each turn and lists everything that occurred in your empire. It's exhaustive and useful (we guess), but at this point it's all just text.

One aspect the team has been focusing on intently is allowing players to automate almost everything in the game. You can set the AI to kick in whenever certain conditions are met. For example, if a planet experiences unrest, you can have the AI respond with a predetermined set of actions. This should go a long way toward reducing micromanagement later in the game.

Combat really disappointed us. It's not hard to build a fleet and you can set rally points anywhere you want, but the ships and special effects looked simplistic. Even the planets and bases looked fairly standard. There was nothing interesting in the background or the textures, and the most noticeable piece of the battle map was the grid plastered on top. On top of that, the units had about as much detail as board game pieces. We were told that combat doesn't require a 3D accelerator card, and we believe it. But in this day and age, that's not a bonus.

What we saw didn't exactly knock our socks off.

The design is unquestionably ambitious, with huge galaxies, colonization, trading, espionage, politics, a large number of alien races, space combat, and more. It may please old-school *MOO* players who don't care about whiz-bang graphics, but it looked dated to us.

GET A LIFE

And maybe your mom will stop crying

Earthviewer
We downloaded the Earthviewer from www.earthviewer.com and were simultaneously wowed and creeped out by the detailed satellite imagery of our homes, our office building (above), and the lawn-jockey-strewn trailer park hovels of every reader who has written to tell us how full of crap we are. Be warned, Jonathon Livingston Nazgul—we're watching you.

Daniel Johnston
Incredibly lo-fi recordings by a slightly lisping manic-depressive may not sound like the best purchase, but you'd be wrong. The poster boy for outsider music, Daniel Johnston makes some of the most poignant, funny, melodic music we've heard. The double CD of *Continued Story/Hi, How Are You* is a great way to discover his weird brand of genius.

Liquor and Lots of It
Nothing livens up the exercise in tedium of the annual family Thanksgiving dinner like a big vat of cheap alcohol. Suddenly you'll find the courage to tell your parents about the nasty thing Santa did to Mommy under the mistletoe that year you cried all through Christmas. Play your cards right and you won't even be invited to the kids' table next year.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle
Haruki Murakami is a master of the surreal, and this novel is pure genius. With a missing wife, a pair of psychic sisters, and the search for truth at the bottom of a well, he takes you on a mind-blowing journey. This is one trip we highly recommend you take—just don't forget to bring your baseball bat.

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HANDS ON

World Warp One

The first World War never ended in the alternate reality shooter *Iron Storm* By Rob Smolka

No matter what you think of the game, you have to give *Iron Storm*'s alternate reality of a World War I that never ended some points for originality. The year is 1964, and for 50 years war has raged in Europe, resulting in an understandably depressed group of combatants. With the hope of putting an end to the madness, you, in the role of Lt. James Anderson, must complete a series of stealth missions to try to eliminate the opposition's head man, Baron Ungern-Sternberg.

From the preview version we played, *Iron Storm* seems fairly typical of the genre, with either a first- or third-person perspective available in campaign mode or multiplayer. The setting adds quite a bit of flavor to the proceedings, influencing everything from weapon design to the vehicles to the uniforms. The engine does a decent job of displaying terrain features, but the character models are rather angular, and the details, like lip-synching and fluidity of animations, seem a bit off. There is still time for developer 4X Studios to work out the kinks, so we hope this will be addressed.

We were impressed with a few features, such as the reactions of the computer-controlled soldiers, both friendly and hostile. The sound effects are also well done, making you feel as if you're right smack in the middle of the conflagration. 4X Studios claims to be inspired by *Medal of Honor*, but the game feels more like Westwood's *Renegade*. We'll find out for sure when it's released this holiday season.

PREVIEW

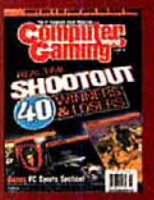
Casino Empire

Like Vegas, without the hookers and puke By John Houlihan

Even Robert De Niro's legendary character couldn't rule the strip in *Casino*, but that's exactly what you're supposed to do in Sierra's *Casino Empire*. The new strategy game plays like a kind of "Casino Theme Park" and challenges you to run the entire operation—hiring dealers, feeding your players, sabotaging rivals, and even fending off the mob. There are 12 gaudily themed casino challenges to conquer, complete with high-rollers and celebrities to attract. You'll even be able to sit down at your own high-stake tables and play blackjack and poker against some of the meanest gamblers on the strip. Roll those bones!

Where blue-collar Sims dream of retiring.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*



Five Years Ago, November 1997

Our intern's spindly arms nearly snapped under the weight of this 446 page issue. Zounds! But that was a different era: Our cover story featured 40 games that were simultaneously beating the RTS genre to death. We also had a 38-page sports gaming supplement. And—oof!—the ads! Interplay alone bought 35 pages. These days Interplay collects soda cans along the highway to meet payroll.

Ten Years Ago, November 1992

Last month's cover wasn't the first time we tormented mankind with our made-for-radio mugs. Ten years ago we "celebrated" our 100th issue with one of the ugliest covers ever. Our proud description: "...the rendering portrays Golden Emperor (publisher) Russell Sipe, vizier Johnny Wilson at left, proud chef Ken Brown, and elven cake-bearers Alan Emrich, Chris Lombardi, Dawn Thompson, and Mike Weksler." It's really not a party until you add a few elven cake-bearers.

Fifteen Years Ago, November 1987

This issue featured the review of the first *Leisure Suit Larry* game. Inexplicably popular, Larry appeared in a seemingly endless series of sniggering sequels, petering out, ironically, right before the comedy goldmine of Viagra. This issue also featured an ad for *Credit Card Christianity: The Game of Televangelism*. Complete with a warning that "the living God cannot be programmed into a computer," the game let you create your own televangelist and blik believers.

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PREVIEW

Treasure Planet

Think of it as *The Ancient Art of War* in space **By Tom Price**

A game based on a Disney license of an upcoming animated movie ordinarily wouldn't interest us much. A game like that would probably get flipped into the "I'll get to this sometime after never" pile. But upon closer inspection during a little hands-on playing time, what we thought would be *Treasure Island* in space reveals itself to be a fun and unique little RTS that's worth playing.

Currently in development by Barking Dog Studios (the same people who brought you *Global Operations* and *Homeworld: Cataclysm*—what a weird pedigree!), *Treasure Planet* puts you at the helm of solar-sail-powered space ships that look a whole lot like 18th-century sailing vessels. Except in space. It sounds weird, but it looks pretty cool, and the gameplay, although eschewing the traditional RTS base building and resource harvesting, is actually fairly deep. It's more of a tactical game, and it reminds me a lot of the classic *Ancient Art of War at Sea*, only Disneyfied. And in space.

There is a single-player campaign, a basic skirmish mode in which you can control up to 12 ships, and of course multiplayer over LAN and Internet. We were lucky enough to get our hands on some early code, and we have to admit we had a lot of fun. Don't dismiss *Treasure Planet* as a kid's game or a cheap movie tie-in. It's more than that: it's a swashbuckling good time.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Jason Brown

We know you feel compelled to pick up the latest *Thing*, but it may not give you the greatest bang for your gaming buck. Scrounge around and you could find three or four gems that you've never played—all for less than the latest blockbuster.

Kohan $19

Warrior Kings $9

Warlords Battlecry $7

The Thing $40

EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Open-Source Gaming

For sheer ingenuity, no commercial title can match the level of innovation coming from open-source gaming projects. This month, I looked at a number of games that have benefited from giving everyone source code access. As so many people work on these projects at any given time, new content and bug fixes are introduced constantly.

FlightGear
www.flightgear.org
Requires: OpenGL graphics accelerator

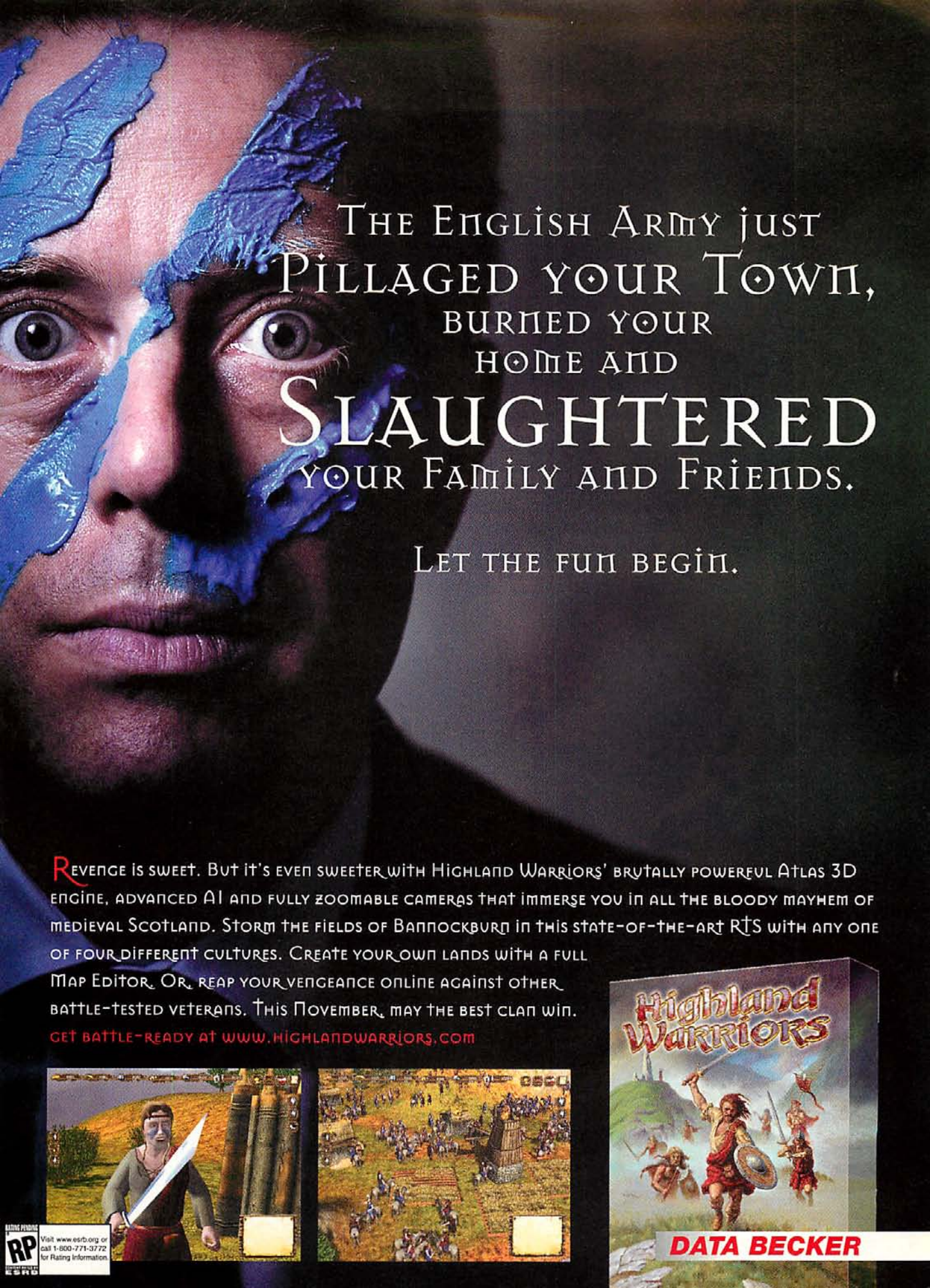
FlightGear is a complete flight simulator that has been under development for years and is constantly improving. Setting it up takes a little technical know-how and a lot of downloads, but if you can get past that hump, a lifetime of aerial adventure awaits. The core physics engine is advanced enough that it is used in many aerodynamics research projects worldwide, and the graphics engine is completely customizable. New planes are being created constantly, and the terrain graphics range from a plain (but accurate) map of the entire globe to photorealistic textures that would tax a 128MB video card.

As the project's current moderator Curtis Olson points out, *FlightGear* contains hundreds of elements that add immensely to the sim's realism but aren't immediately apparent to casual observers. For example, at night the stars are all where they are supposed to be, and the game follows a realistic day/night cycle. A large community has crystallized around this deep simulation, so be sure to check the related links at the Website.

Racer
www.racer.nl
Requires: Pentium II or faster CPU, OpenGL accelerator, DirectX 8

If you're a fan of the hyperrealistic physics served up by *Grand Prix Legends*, give *Racer* a try. The project still has a long way to go before every aspect of driving a race car is implemented, but it's getting there. Best of all, if there's anything you don't like or want to tinker with, you can customize nearly every part of the sim by messing with simple ASCII files.

The main download includes only a handful of cars and a single track, but poke around the Website to find plenty of extras and links to other community sites. You can even create cars and tracks of your own, but you'll need an editor like 3D Studio Max and a lot of experience to get started. The latest version as of this writing supports cars built out of as many as 3,000 polygons, so modeling vehicles isn't kid's stuff.


THE ENGLISH ARMY JUST
PILLAGED YOUR TOWN,
BURNED YOUR
HOME AND
SLAUGHTERED
YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.
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REVENGE IS SWEET. BUT IT'S EVEN SWEETER WITH HIGHLAND WARRIORS' BRUTALLY POWERFUL ATLAS 3D ENGINE, ADVANCED AI AND FULLY ZOOMABLE CAMERAS THAT IMMERSE YOU IN ALL THE BLOODY MAYHEM OF MEDIEVAL SCOTLAND. STORM THE FIELDS OF BANNOCKBURN IN THIS STATE-OF-THE-ART RTS WITH ANY ONE OF FOUR DIFFERENT CULTURES. CREATE YOUR OWN LANDS WITH A FULL MAP EDITOR. OR, REAP YOUR VENGEANCE ONLINE AGAINST OTHER BATTLE-TESTED VETERANS. THIS NOVEMBER, MAY THE BEST CLAN WIN.
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The galaxy will change before your eyes as an epic story unfolds. Your actions, and those of your allies, will determine the fate of humanity.

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Start your career in style with a powerful starship designed, painted and named by you. Upgrade your starship in thousands of ways with new weapons, engines, shields and devices.

TEEN T ESRB INTERACTIVE

Blood and Violence.

*Earth & Beyond is a live game you play via the Internet, allowing you to play with thousands of other Earth & Beyond fans. AN INTERNET CONNECTION IS REQUIRED TO PLAY. Internet service providers usually charge a monthly fee to provide this access. ELECTRONIC ARTS CHARGES A MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR THIS ONLINE PRODUCT, separate from your Internet access charges. Online game play subject to the Earth & Beyond Membership Agreement and Terms of Service. EA RESERVES THE RIGHT TO TERMINATE THE ONLINE SERVICE FOR THIS PRODUCT AFTER 90 DAYS NOTICE.

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– Computer Gaming World.

LIVE YOUR OWN LIFE

Grow your character and your starship as you choose. Become powerful by succeeding in the challenges you enjoy the most, including combat, exploration, and trade activities. Choose from a variety of space-faring careers, each with its own unique blend of potent skills.

FORM POWERFUL ALLIANCES

The galaxy is populated by thousands of brave starship captains like you, each with their own identities, motivations and unique skills. Team up on group adventures and reap the benefits of cooperative exploration, trade and combat.

"NOT ONLY DOES IT LEAVE THE TIRED FANTASY REALMS BEHIND, IT REINVENTS THE GAMEPLAY INTO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT, YET JUST AS ADDICTIVE." – GameSpy

"A MASSIVELY-MULTIPLAYER ONLINE RPG THAT ACTUALLY OFFERS SOMETHING DIFFERENT. THE UNIVERSE IS INDEED A MIRACULOUS PLACE." – UGO

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SIERRA STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS mad·doc SOFTWARE Maximize your experience with pentium 4

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EXPANSION TO THE "PC GAME OF THE YEAR"
–GameSpy

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MORE EPICS. MORE ACTION. NO PRISONERS. Witness the rise of the Roman Empire from the front lines. Engage the enemy on the blood-soaked beaches of Iwo Jima in the WWII Pacific Theater. Lead a union uprising on a Mars settlement in an all-new Age of Space campaign. The "PC Game of the Year" went beyond the ages. Introducing the expansion of Empire Earth—The Art of Conquest. Further proof that EPIC is too small a word.

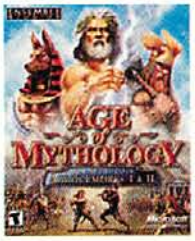
www.empireearth.com

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

The Sims Online *(EA Games)* Take your Sims to a multi-player online world where you get to be whoever you want to be. Build a network of friends from around the world to enhance your power, wealth, and social standing. In this open-ended world, you choose your role, your attitude, and your destiny.

Everquest: The Planes of Power *(Sony Online Entertainment)* You will be introduced to an arching story line through the Planes of Power, home of the gods of Norrath. Hundreds of new items, quests, and encounters will keep even the most revered players challenged and enthralled.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring *(Vivendi Universal)* Explore the massive environments of Middle Earth as one of the Fellowship. Solve puzzles and fight enemies like Orcs, Black Riders, and an evil Balrog in the quest to destroy the One Ring of Power.



Age of Mythology *(Microsoft)* Transport yourself to a time when heroes did battle with monsters of legend and the gods intervened in the affairs of mortal men. Wage war using human armies and diplomacy, enhance military and economic performance through resource gathering and trade.

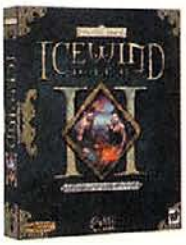
Counterstrike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

The Sims Unleashed *(EA Games)* For the first time ever, you will give your Sims the chance to add a furry friend to the family. An expanded neighborhood with 15 additional residential lots and five community lots will give your Sims and their pets a variety of places to meet their neighbors.

Unreal Tournament 2003 *(Infogrames)* Using the latest Unreal technology, UT2003 takes you to the merciless arenas of the future, where elite warriors rely on skill, speed, cunning, and awesome firepower to demonstrate their style and become the ultimate champion.

Earth and Beyond *(EA Games)* This is the first online role-playing galaxy, filled with monsters and strange new worlds. It is also home to thousands of other players from around the world. Alien encounters, new discoveries, perilous quests, diplomatic backstabbing, and epic wars await you and your friends.



Icewind Dale II *(Interplay)* Continue the classic dungeon crawling experience of the first game. New races, classes, kits, items and spells, and a horde of new monsters and areas to explore. Take pleasure in the joys of dual-wielding and new kits, like the Mercenary and the Dreadmaster.

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos *(Blizzard Entertainment)* Four mighty playable races—humans, orcs, night elves, and undead—compete in a finely balanced dance of conquest. Combines the lessons learned from StarCraft, all the previous WarCrafts, and new 3-D technology to create a vibrant strategy game.

All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at

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Get thousands of game titles at amazon.com/videogames

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RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

It's a world of *WarCraft*

StarCraft and *Diablo II* are still on the list, so who's surprised at *WarCraft III*?

Neverwinter Nights proves Canada has one valuable export.

The Sims: Vacation refuses to budge from its campsite.

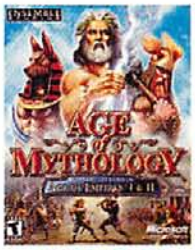
Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	1	**WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos** ($59, Vivendi Universal)	★★★½
2	2	**Neverwinter Nights** ($55, Infogrames)	★★★★½
3	3	**The Sims: Vacation** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★½
4	5	**The Sims** ($41, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
5	8	**Backyard Baseball 2003** ($19, Infogrames)	NR
6	4	**Grand Theft Auto III** ($49, Take 2 Interactive)	★★★★★
7	6	**Medal of Honor Allied Assault** ($45, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
8	12	**The Sims: Hot Date** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
9	17	**The Sims: Livin' Large** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
10	7	**WarCraft III: Collector's Edition** ($76, Vivendi Universal)	★★★½
11	18	**Microsoft Zoo Tycoon** ($27, Microsoft)	★★★½
12	19	**RollerCoaster Tycoon Gold** ($28, Infogrames)	NR
13	–	**RollerCoaster Tycoon** ($19, Infogrames)	★★★½
14	20	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** ($31, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
15	15	**StarCraft: Battle Chest** ($20, Vivendi Universal)	NR
16	10	**Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix** ($43, Activision)	★★½
17	–	**Delta Force Task Force Dagger** ($28, NovaLogic)	NR
18	–	**The Sims: House Party** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
19	9	**Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** ($48, LucasArts)	★★★★★
20	–	**Backyard Basketball** ($19, Infogrames)	NR

July retail sales results by NPD Intelect

NOTABLE QUOTE

"Vin Diesel is a *Dungeons & Dragons* aficionado—the movie star strolled into a Wizards of the Coast hobby shop [and] started reading a spell-casting manual."
—John Brodie, August GQ magazine

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES



Age of Mythology
(Microsoft)
Great Price! ~~$49.99~~ $44.99

Call upon the gods to act on your behalf or reinforce your armies with more than 20 mythological creatures.
Features:
- New 3D engine adds a deep richness of graphical detail
- Unique new title based on the ancient cultural history of the Greek, Norse, and Egyptian cultures
- Incorporates Ensemble Studios' trademark features from previous Age of Empires games

Conflict: Desert Storm
(Take-Two Interactive)
Great Price! ~~$49.99~~ $44.99

You have been deployed deep behind enemy lines where the terrain and conditions are barbaric.
Features:
- Survive 15 challenging missions each with multiple-path solution
- Employ air-strikes, heavy artillery and vehicles to hit your targets
- Unprecedented AI governs enemy and squad behavior
- Engage in day and night combat with cyclic lighting

Everquest: The Planes of Power
(Sony Online Entertainment)
Great Price! $29.99

The next installment in the best-selling, critically acclaimed EverQuest series!
Features:
- Up to 18 new planar zones that push your teamwork abilities to the limit
- Hundreds of new items and monsters
- Exciting new quests and challenges await even the most experienced players
- Central storyline links the content from every zone into one compelling quest

Everquest: Atlas
(Sony Online Entertainment)
Great Price! $19.99

Never before has there been a book about EverQuest that is this extensive.
Features:
- A comprehensive collection of maps that will guide you on your questing adventure
- Over 170 detailed maps of the world of Norrath
- Includes the Planes of Power, this guide will aid players throughout their adventures

Check Out More Great Deals Online a

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PIPELINE

Truth, lies, best intentions, and everything in between By Rich Laporte

Here are our latest educated guesses as to when those games are actually shipping. Keep in mind the rule of thumb: The further out a game, the more likely its date will change. For up-to-the-minute dates and releases, visit gonegold.com.

1 *Star Trek: Star Fleet Command III* is on track for a November release according to Activision. This time around, the development team has focused on taking away the micromanagement of running your starship and has introduced a new interface for system management. Also, for the first time in any *Star Trek* game, gamers will be able to "significantly customize their vessel's weapons, engines, shields, and other systems."

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
1503 A.D. The New World	EA	Q1 2003
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	11/01/02
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Q4 2002
Batman Vengeance	Ubi Soft	09/25/02
Battlefield 1942	EA	09/12/02
Call of Cthulhu	FishTank	Q1 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q3 2002
Civilization III: Play the World	Infogrames	10/30/02
Combat Flight Simulator 3	Microsoft	10/25/02
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time	Q3 2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	Q1 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	11/06/02
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	10/24/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q1 2003
Divine Divinity	HIP	10/02/02
Doom III	Activision	TBA
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	Q3 2002
Duke Nukem Forever	GOD Games	Unknown
Earth 2150: Lost Souls	Strategy First	09/04/02
Escape from Alcatraz	HIP	Q2 2003
Eve: The Second Genesis	Simon & Schuster	Q4 2002
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	Sony	10/22/02
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q2 2003
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	10/17/02
Ghost Master	Empire	11/2002
Gothic II	JoWooD	Q4 2002
Hegemonia	DreamCatcher	11/15/02
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003

2 Interplay hopes to ship their next RPG, *Lionheart*, around mid-November. The game will use the SPECIAL rules system (the turn-based system used in the *Fallout* series), which the developer has adapted to a real-time fantasy setting. The game includes a random item generator that can create thousands of weapons and items, spells that evolve and grow as your characters' ability increases, and a classless system that allows for customized characters.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Heroes of Migh and Magic IV: Gathering Storm	3DO	09/25/02
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	10/15/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	10/02/02
Hitman 2	Eidos	10/02/02
Homeworld 2	Sierra	TBA
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	11/20/02
Imperium Galactica III: Genesis	CDV	Q3 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Indiana Jones and The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Q1 2003
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA	11/20/02
Links 2003	Microsoft	09/20/02
Lionheart	Interplay	11/19/02
Lock On	Ubi Soft	12/20/02
Logging Tycoon	Bushsoft	08/2004
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	TBA
Master of Orion III	Microprose	Q4 2002
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	Microsoft	Q2 2002
Medal of Honor: Reload	EA	11/19/02
Nascar Thunder 2003	EA	10/23/02
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q4 2002
Need for Speed: Pursuit 2	EA	10/23/02
NHL 2003	EA Sports	09/18/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Fox Interactive	10/03/02
O.R.B	Strategy First	11/19/02
PlanetSide	Sony	Q4 2002
Praetorians	Eidos	11/27/02
Prisoner of War	Codemasters	09/25/02
Pro Racer Driver	Codemasters	11/20/02

3 *SimCity 4* is incredibly high on my must-have list and hopefully it will make its late November release. Finally making the move to 3D, the game looks sensational, and the gameplay, while similar to versions past, has been refined to be more intuitive and fun. Gamers are now welcome to import their *Sims* character for feedback. Since you have a personal relationship with them, they'll tell you what they think of the area and how you might improve it.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Project Nomads	CDV	10/02/02
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	11/19/02
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	11/15/02
Rollercoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	10/09/02
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q2 2002
SimCity 4	EA	11/20/02
The Sims Online	EA	10/25/02
The Sims Unleashed	EA	09/25/02
Sniper	Xicat	09/20/02
Sovereign	Sony	Unknown
Splinter Cell	RedStorm	11/28/02
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	11/13/02
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual Entertainment	Q1 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q4 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Stronghold: Crusader	Take 2	09/11/02
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	10/30/02
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	TBA
Thief III	Eidos	Q2 2003
Tiger Woods PGA 2003	EA Sports	11/06/02
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	11/20/02
Tron 2.0	Monolith	TBA
Unreal II	Infogrames	Q1 2003
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Q4 2002
Warlords IV	SSG	12/11/02
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q3 2002
Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania	Microsoft	10/18/02

NEW UPDATE

YOU'VE BEEN LEFT BEHIND...

The third installment in the Earth 2150 series, *Lost Souls* is a 3D RTS voyage that has you scrambling for resources as you swear revenge on those who left you behind in a world that is set to crumble and vanish. The challenge is to make it out on time. The goal is to make it out alive.

- Three new, extensive campaigns with 30 original, nail biting missions.
- Map editor to create your own maps.
- Quick and easy tutorials take you through the basics of gameplay.
- Travel through several different countries for a variety of challenging environments.
- Over 25 multiplayer maps for LAN and Internet.

AND TIME IS TICKING away.

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EARTH 2150

LOST SOULS

Strategy First

INFINITE

ZUXXEZ ENTERTAINMENT AG

INFOGRAMES

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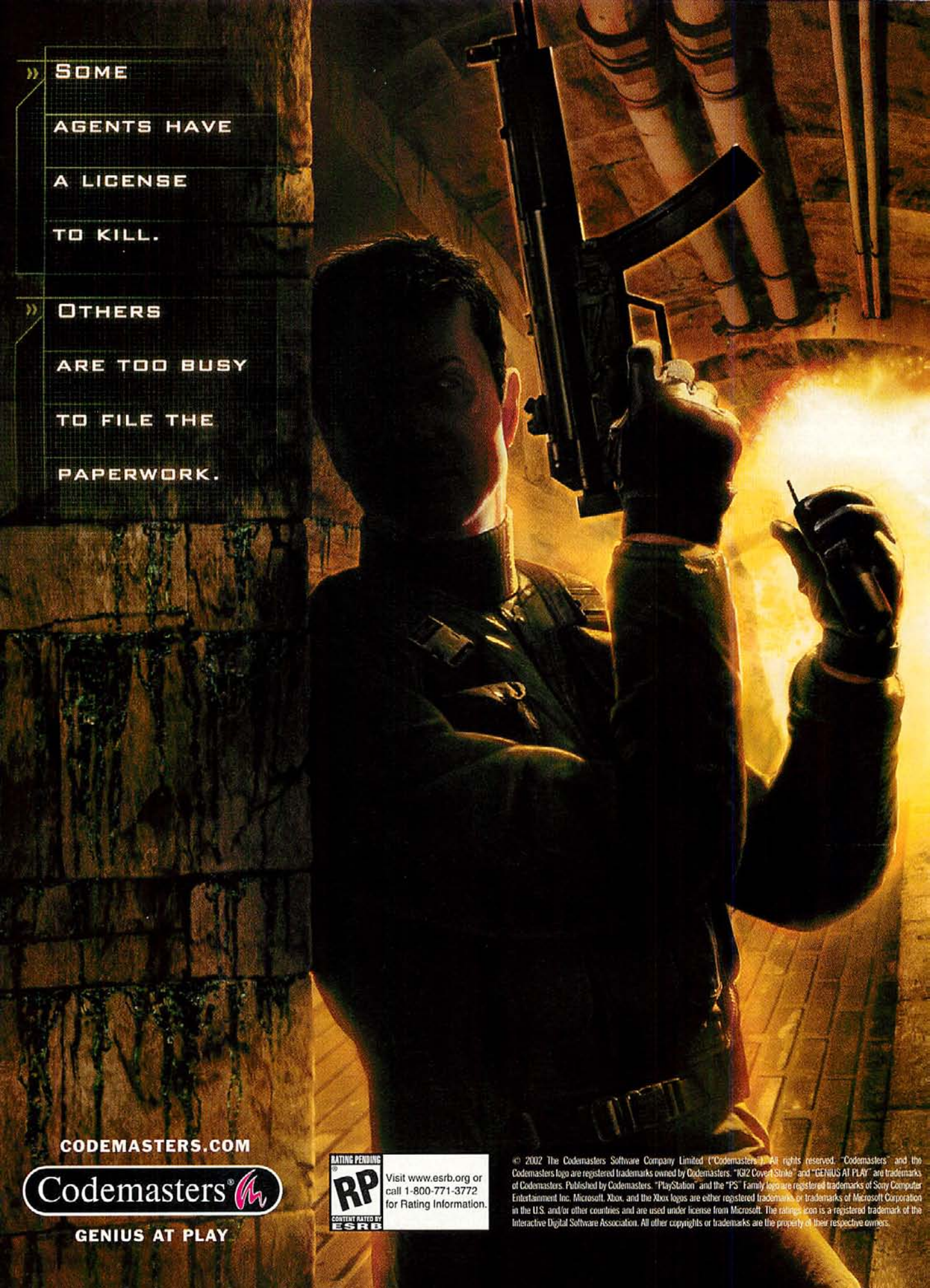
TEEN T

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence


» SOME
AGENTS HAVE
A LICENSE
TO KILL.
» OTHERS
ARE TOO BUSY
TO FILE THE
PAPERWORK.
CODEMASTERS.COM
Codemasters
GENIUS AT PLAY
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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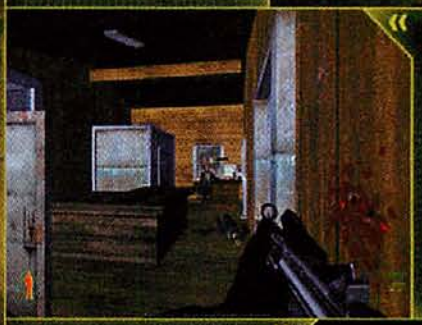
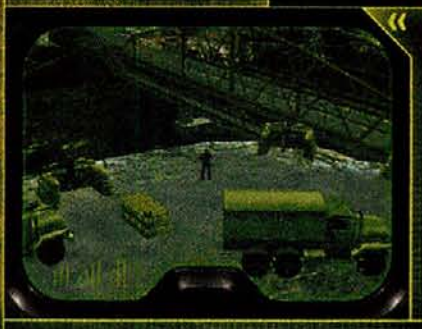
Employ stealth and espionage or go in with all guns blazing—experience multiple styles of gameplay with high-tech equipment including a ZimoTech™ GPS Map Computer and night vision goggles.

Take on intense missions in a world-spanning storyline through three massive theatres of combat—Russia, China and the Middle East.



Choose from a huge armory of 27 authentically reproduced weapons—from basic combat knives and sniper rifles to portable rocket launchers and proximity mines.

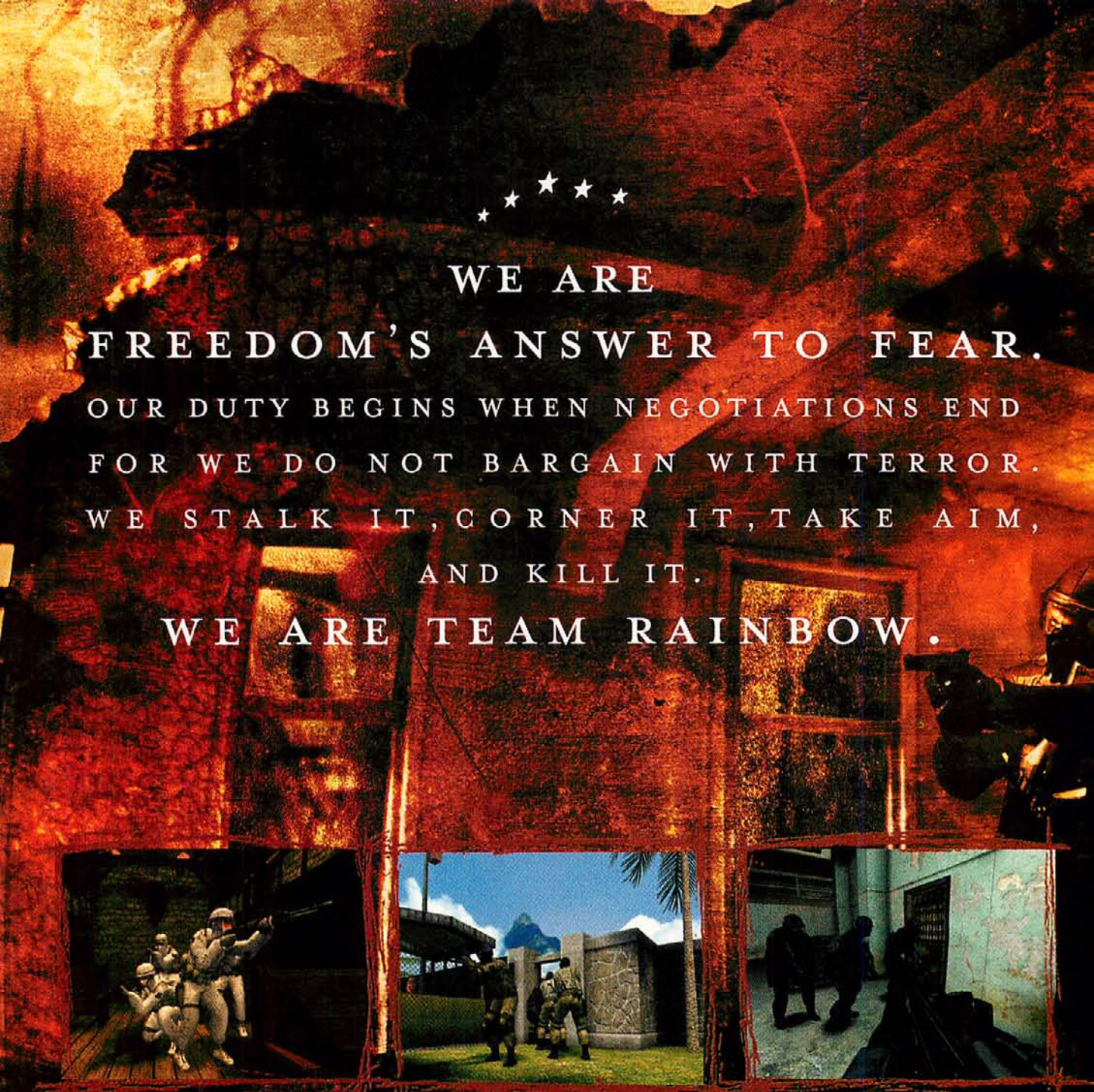
Operate a stability-sensitive weapons targeting system—experience the hostile environment of a battlezone.



Join forces with up to 16 combatants—objective-based online multiplayer gameplay allows for complex levels of team coordination.

I.G.I.-2
COVERT STRIKE

PC CD ROM



SQUAD-BASED COUNTER-TERROR

The father of all tactical shooters returns, in an all-new game locked and loaded to change the face of action gaming. AGAIN. Advance to a new level of gaming realism with new high-tech gear to hunt the Tangos and 57 weapons to take them down. Experience unmatched graphical realism and high velocity multiplayer action powered by next generation Unreal™ technology. We wrote the book on tactical squad-based combat. Now we're rewriting it. Study up.

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

Ubi Soft ENTERTAINMENT
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Red Storm ENTERTAINMENT

PC CD ROM

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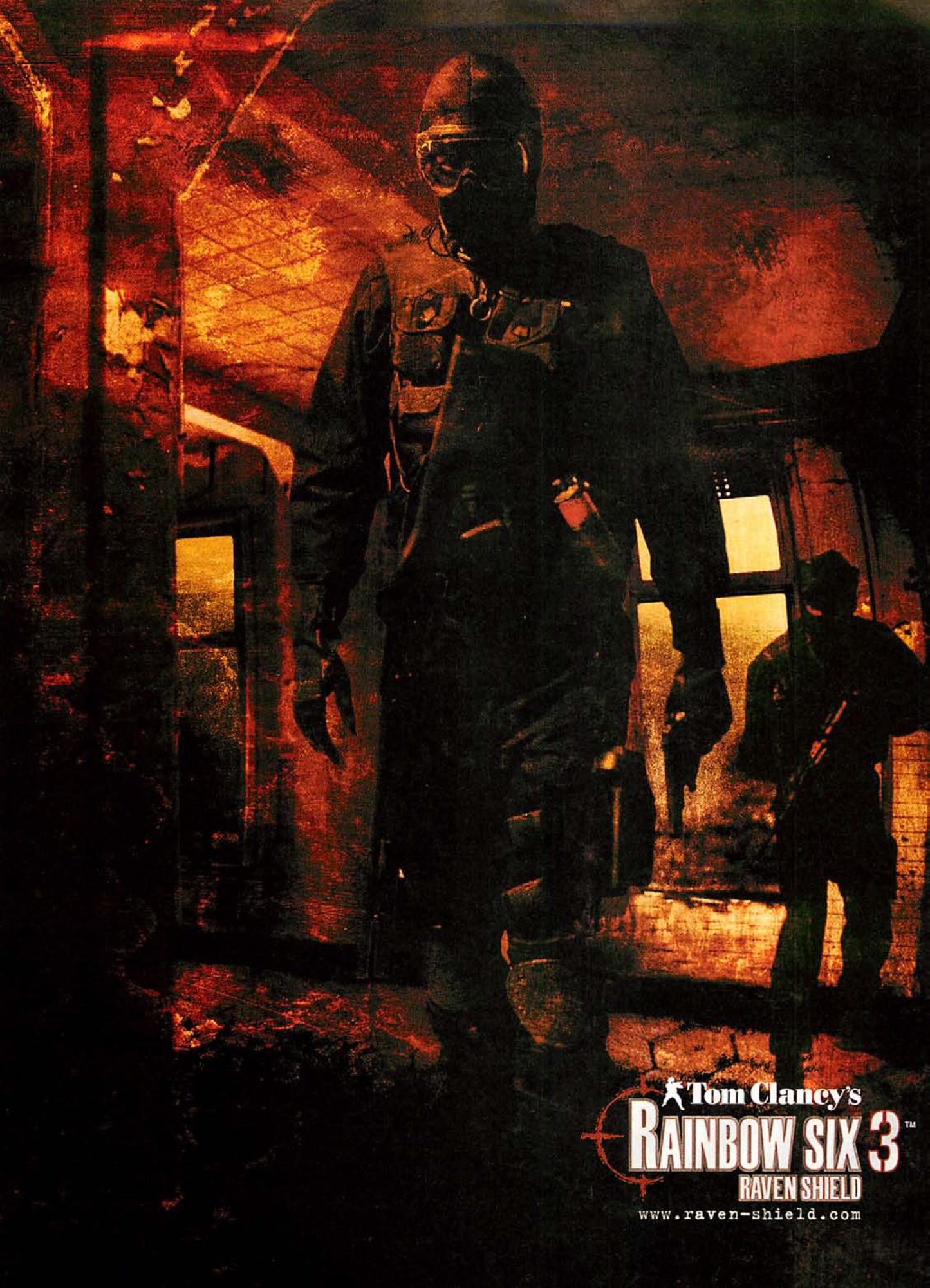

Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX 3
RAVEN SHIELD
www.raven-shield.com

Searching dead or stunned enemies is an important way to replenish ammo, armor, and health.

Look! It's our old friend the snowmobile!

A hairspray can that converts to a welding torch is better than any Bond toy.

NOLF 2: A SPY

Banana peels, French mimes, fey Englishmen–what is this,

When *No One Lives Forever* first arrived on PCs back in 2000, gamers were surprised to find that it was not only a highly polished and innovative first-person shooter, but also that it had a unique theme and direction that was as funny as it was stylish. *CGW* was pleasantly surprised enough to name *NOLF* the 2000 Action Game of the Year.

But if you think there are no surprises left in store for us fans of *NOLF*, well, you're wrong. In addition to an enhanced graphics engine—the latest incarnation of LithTech, called Jupiter—*NOLF 2* is getting a number of gameplay enhancements to make Cate Archer's latest adventure even more shagalicious than the last.

Environment modeling and lighting have come a long way in the LithTech engine.

The Sounds of Silence

If there was one thing that most players found fault with in the original *NOLF*, it was that stealth missions were too unforgiving. In *NOLF 2*, the first two levels rely heavily on stealth, but this time you can take a combative approach—just be prepared to face the consequences once the alarm has been sounded. Sound is a crucial element of stealth missions, so the developers have paid a lot of attention to it; you'll get plenty of silent weapons. When playing in an area like the Japanese village at night, darkened doorways and alleys allow you to be rendered invisible as long as you don't move. It's a good trick to have, especially because the AI seems to be a lot tighter and much more clever.

Another big change to gameplay is the introduction of an RPG-like skill points system. You gain skill points for accomplishing mission objectives, with additional points awarded for the completion of optional quests or finding a certain item or staying within mission parameters. For instance, in the Siberia mission, you can earn skill points for not killing too many Russian guards. You can avoid killing them by hitting them with tranquilizer darts and sleeping gas, but don't forget to take their weapons from them or they'll come after you when they wake up. When you acquire skill points, you apply them to one of several categories like stealth, stamina, or marksmanship.

A trademark of the *NOLF* games—and all campy spy movies, for that matter—are the wacky gadgets.

Exploding Kitties

NOLF's signature brand of humor is back as well. One of the best parts of the original game was sneaking around and listening to the incidental conversations of guards and other people. When I first played through *NOLF*, I would actually wait to take someone out until I was done eavesdropping. In *NOLF 2*, the hilarious conversations are back, and you can talk to other friendly characters, sometimes just to hear what funny topic they'll digress into.

Another trademark of the *NOLF* games—and all campy spy movies, for that matter—are the wacky gadgets, and Cate Archer uses many on her missions. Mostly based on items commonly found in a woman's purse, they include things like a lipstick camera, a nail clipper lockpick, and a hairspray-can welding torch. There are also some bizarre weapons like bananas and exploding robot kitties.

Good thing it takes a long time to spell "Kalashnikov" in the snow—otherwise we might not have enough time to sneak up on this guy.

No One Lives Forever 2 is one of our most anticipated games, and this little hands-on taste has made me realize that we'll be getting not just more of what we all loved in the first game, but a whole lot of new stuff to boot.

GAME STATS

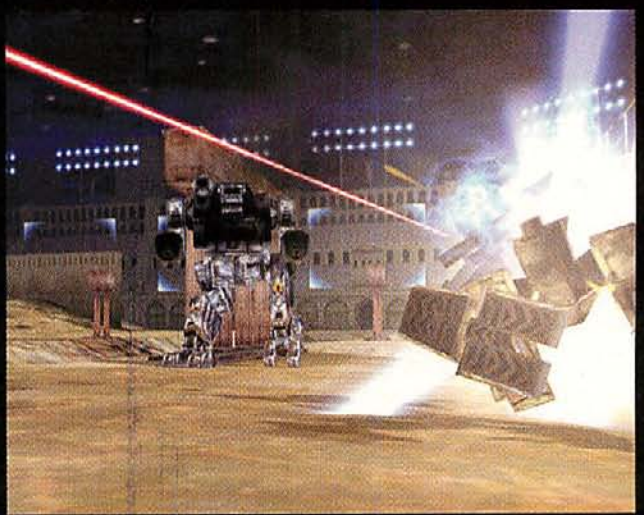
PUBLISHER: Fox Interactive
DEVELOPER: Monolith
GENRE: Action
URL: nolf2.sierra.com
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002

IN HARM'S WAY

Cirque du Soleil? By Tom Price

The Solaris VII Coliseum is a good place to earn cash without dipping into the main campaign.

This is the new way to snag a contract: fly to a system, see which missions are available, and sign up. How you finish earlier missions determines which new ones become available to you.



The basic engine remains the same, so modern machines can now run *MechWarrior* in its full splendor.

MECHWARRIOR 4:

New and old school put together By Thierry Nguyen

MERCENARIES

Microsoft is going totally old school with the *MechWarrior* franchise. The latest *MechWarrior* game will play homage to what is widely considered the best mech game ever, *MechWarrior II: Mercenaries*. *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries* (apparently Arabic numerals are the thing in this age) will be a massive redesign of *MechWarrior*, from its appearance to its gameplay.

In single-player, you start by choosing a sponsoring company; your choices include the Northwind Highlanders, Gray Death Legion, Wolf's Dragoons, and Kell Hounds. Each company has its advantages and weaknesses—for example, the Northwind Highlanders have early access to LostTech but start with fewer funds, and the Gray Death Legion has more starting funds but higher operating expenses. These companies allow gamers to form their own mercenary outfit but still be associated with the most famous mercenary companies from the BattleTech universe. In multiplayer, Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone will track statistics for players and companies. Hopefully players will notice the mercenary companies being tracked and form clan groups around these official standings. Additionally, multiplayer participants can now restrict mechs by C-bill cost, not just weight.

Fight in a big gladiatorial free-for-all, complete with sports-style commentary and cash prizes.

No Free Launchers

Cost is a big factor in the Free Market (first seen in the *Black Knight* expansion), and now the Free Market has been expanded to let you trade in weapons, mechs, and pilots. That includes every mech from *MechWarrior 4* and *Black Knight*, the optional *Inner Sphere* and *Clan* expansion packs, and 10 brand-new mechs. New weapons include the rotary autocannon, which has a faster firing rate but is prone to jamming, and the Arrow IV missile, which is a big, slow weapon designed to take out big, slow mechs. If you don't have enough money for the Free Market, you can try salvaging from the field.

A first in *Mercenaries* will be the ability to command a secondary lance; hence you'll have control over seven other pilots in the field. You can coordinate assaults more effectively, because four other guys will be available to shoot everything around. You'll want to save some cash to hire veteran pilots for all of your missions.

You earn money by finishing missions and their bonus objectives. Repair and maintenance expenses are deducted once every cycle, which is roughly equivalent to a week. Sometimes jumping between two planets might take a couple of cycles. A quick way to earn cash without advancing the campaign is to fight in the Solaris VII Coliseum. There, you choose a weight class and fight in a big gladiatorial free-for-all, complete with sports-style commentary and different cash prizes awarded according to your ranking.

Read the Book, Play the Movie

Rather than a linear campaign, expect an expanded version of the branching introduced in *Black Knight*. Missions are unlocked when you complete other missions, but you're not forced to play them in any preset order. You can use your dropship to travel among star systems and pick up missions as they become available.

The developers worked closely with FASA Studios and got an advance peek at some of the upcoming BattleTech novels. As a result, key events within the universe will be depicted in the game around the same time it premieres in the fiction; in fact, a huge, climactic battle that the next few novels lead up to will be the scene of a playable mission in *Mercenaries*. In the grander conflict between Steiner and Davion, some missions will align you with a particular house. It is possible, however, to stay perfectly neutral in the big conflict, which could result in three possible endings.

Cyberlore has been doing solid work with the *MechWarrior* franchise, and *Mercenaries* looks like a great stand-alone addition before the inevitable *MechWarrior 5* (or *V*?) pops up. Save your C-bills for *Mercenaries* when it ships this winter.

If you can afford it, you can now take a second lance into a mission, letting you control a total of eight mechs in the field.

With all sorts of planet hopping going on, you'll pass through environments such as swamps, cityscapes, deserts, and the chilly Arctic.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Cyberlore
GENRE: Sci-fi sim
URL: www.cyberlore.com/games/mw4mercs/mw4mercs.html
RELEASE DATE: Winter 2002

The new Celtic culture (in green) isn't very sophisticated, but it has savage fighters.

Razed cities will now look like ruins. Sacking an opponent's city doesn't affect gameplay, but it is satisfying.

You can build new facilities like radar towers and airfields. Radar gives a combat bonus to units in the area. Airfields function the same as airports, but don't require you to build a city.

CIVILIZATION III:

Major expansion adds new cultures and units, multiplayer support,

PLAY THE WORLD

an editor, and more

By Ken Brown

There are expansions, and then there are Expansions. The former add a smattering of new units and game types or levels; the latter reignite your smoldering interest and turn it into a raging wildfire all over again. They make you wonder how you were able to play the game *before* the expansion. *Play the World* is one of those kinds of additions: an addictive addition.

If you want to play *Civilization III* multiplayer, you'll need to have the add-on. But even those who are less interested in multiplayer will find plenty of new features to make it worth their while.

New Stuff

For starters, there are eight new civilizations to play with, each with its own unique unit, attributes, and leaders. Managing units like Viking Berserks, Mongol horse-mounted archers, and Korean rocket carts (an early Katyusha-type weapon) should mix things up a bit and give you a few new bruises on your buttocks. New core units have been added as well, including guerrillas and medieval infantry. The guerrilla allows obsolete units (like swordsmen in the modern era) to upgrade to something useful. Guerrillas are expensive, but they require no resources to build; they are good for harassing opponents when you don't have the resources to build conventional military units.

All of the new units have spiffy animations, particularly the conquistadors, who have dogs that attack with them. Some of the original units' animations have been enhanced as well; siege engines now have soldiers to maneuver them around.

Other improvements include a stock exchange, commercial docks, and civil defense functions. A new wonder, the Internet, will provide the equivalent of a research lab in every city. Plus there are new facilities such as airfields and radar towers that can have a major effect on your military capability. All of these elements will help add variety and depth to both single-player and multiplayer games.

Firaxis has also added a few features to reduce repetitive tasks, particularly later in the game. Stack movement lets you move entire stacks of units together (at the rate of the slowest one), eliminating repeat orders. Auto-bombardment orders air units to repeatedly bomb a target every turn, and rally points help you muster units more efficiently.

Multiplayer Modes

Because gamers have different playing styles, Firaxis decided to offer three multiplayer options: turn based, simultaneous turn, and turnless. Turn based is closest to the single-player game but can take more than 12 or even 14 hours to play all the way through. If you want to spend your evenings waiting for some dimwit to take a turn, that style of play is your best option.

Simultaneous-turn play is better, but it still entails a waiting period if one player takes longer than the rest. Turnless is Firaxis's innovative solution to the waiting problem. In turnless mode, the action never really stops, but unit movements are limited by a turn clock. You can move a unit once per round; after you move it, you have to wait until the clock cycles through one revolution before you can move it again. You can set the length of the turn clock to suit your taste, but it automatically lengthens later in the game to give you more time to move all of your units.

The new "turnless" mode is an ingenious solution for multiplayer.

Although the turn clock helps speed play, a full game can still take hours to get through. So the team has added six new short game modes for people who want to get a quick game in during their lunch hour. One example is regicide, where each player has a king, which is a physical unit (like Abe Lincoln for the Americans), and each other civilization aims to take the king down. Once your king is gone, you're out—the game is short and sweet.

A look at the new great leaders. Why does Genghis Khan look like he's pooping?

A Korean rocket cart opens up a can of whup-ass on a warrior.

Other metagames include mass regicide, in which you have to kill all the given units of your opponent; elimination, in which players lose when one of their cities is captured; and several modes that declare a winner based on the accumulation of victory points.

And if all of the above isn't enough for you, Firaxis will also be bundling a powerful editor and mod management utility with *Play the World*. These tools will make it easy for users to create, download, and sort custom scenarios. And to get you started, they're including new unit types such as World War II, medieval Japanese, and even dinosaurs.

It couldn't be clearer that the folks at Firaxis are looking to reward their loyal fans. With such a large mix of new units, features, and abilities, this *Civ III* expansion should keep you raising armies and razing cities long into the future.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Firaxis
GENRE: Strategy
URL: www.civ3.com
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002

gamespy
Best of
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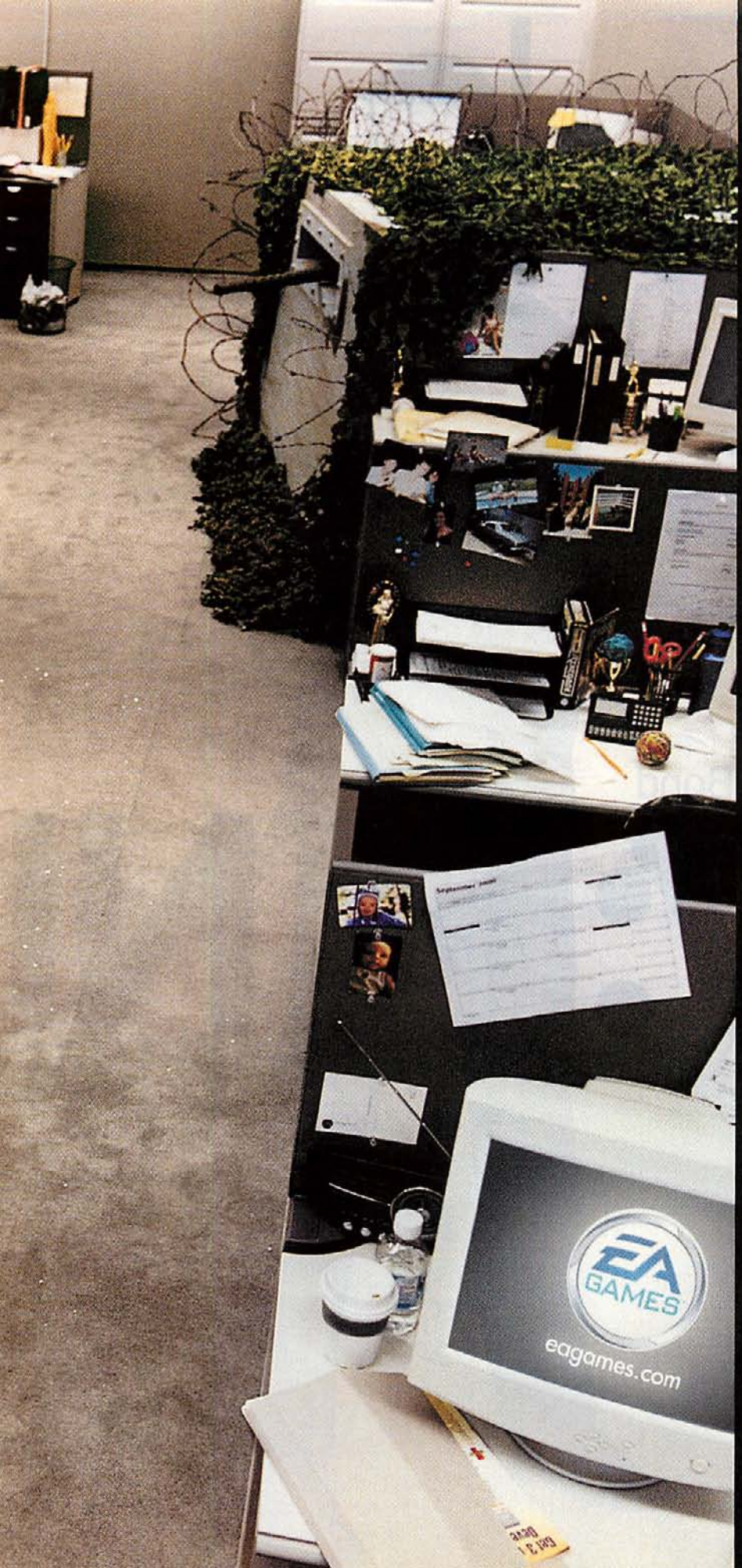
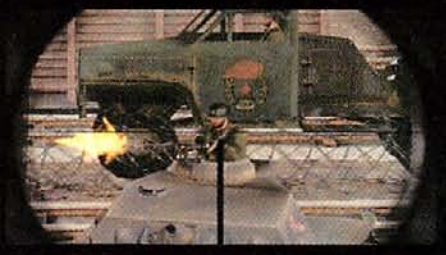


64 fearless players.

35 hell-raising vehicles.



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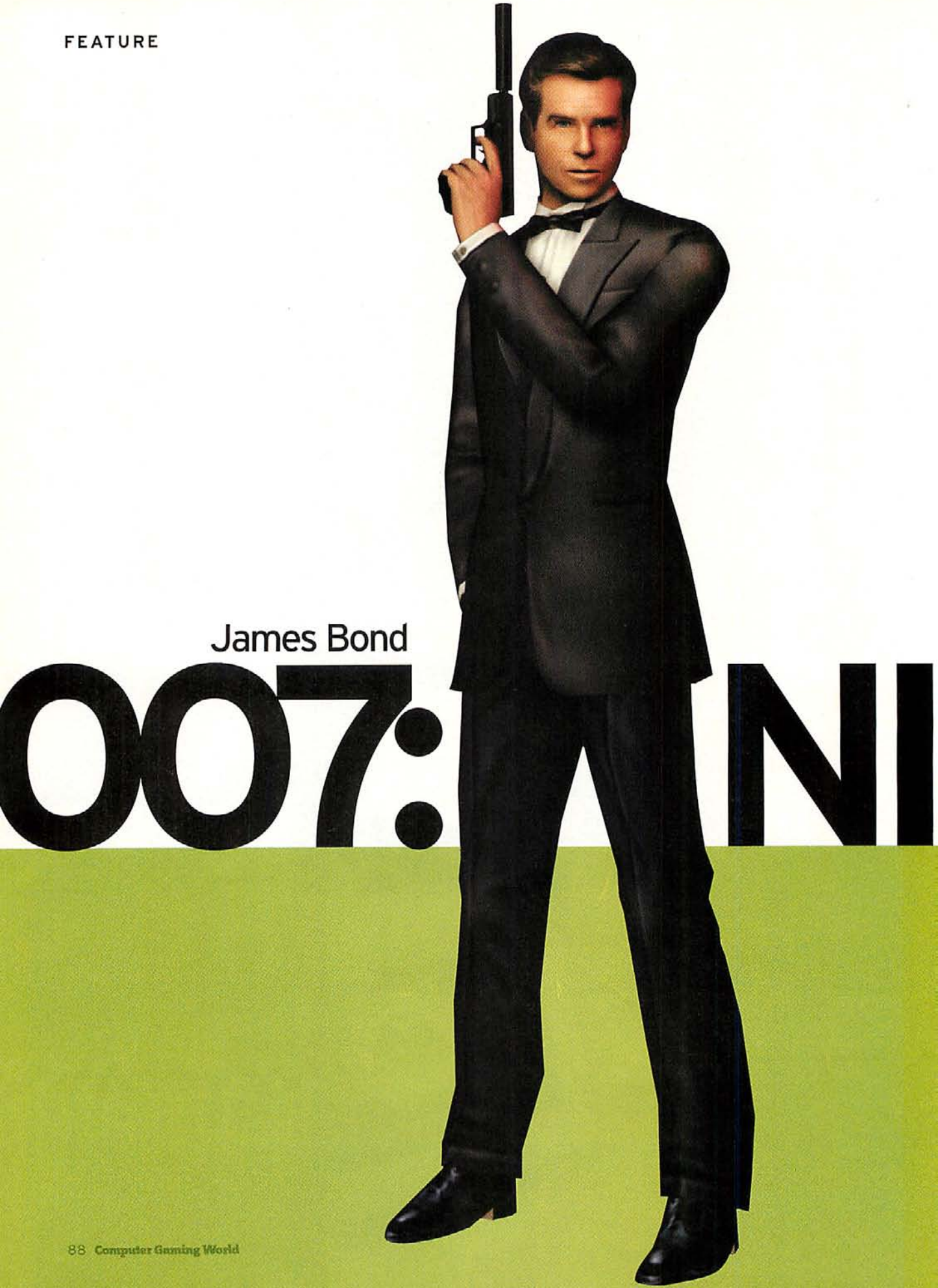
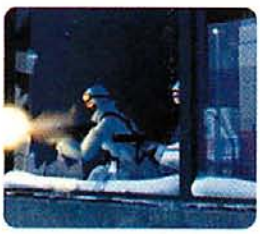


James Bond

007: NI



JAMES BOND FINALLY HAS A LICENSE TO KILL ON THE PC

BY KEN BROWN

GHTFIRE

BOND. JAMES BOND.

Say those three words and no matter who your favorite actor is (as if there was any doubt), everyone knows who you're talking about. Ian Fleming's 007 was the original superspy: a sophisticated man's man who can socialize with the world's elite one minute, and then save us from their diabolical plans the next. He can out-drive, out-ski, and outsmart anyone—equally adept playing baccarat or hopping in a jet and taking off amidst a storm of bullets and rockets. He never fails, he always looks good, and he always gets the girl.

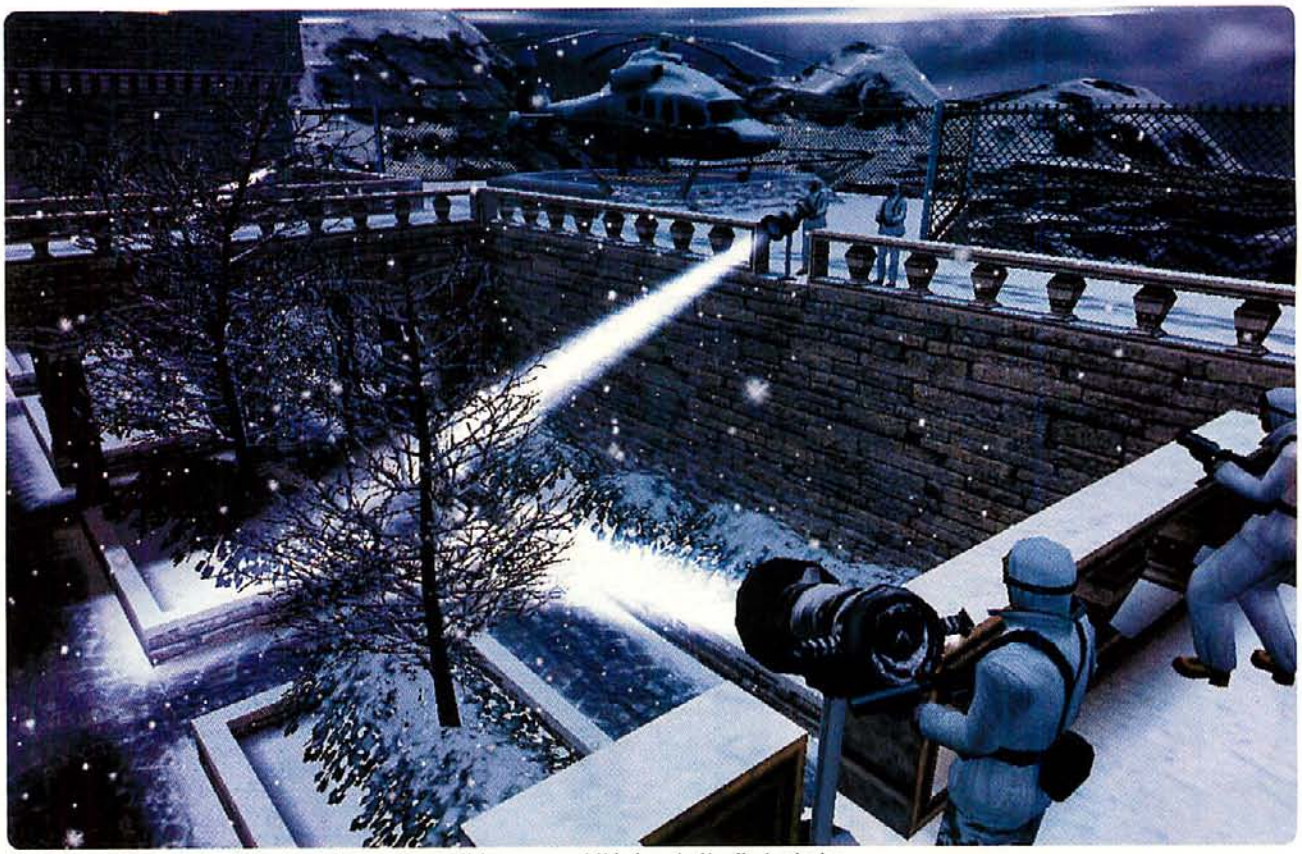
Since 1962, when *Dr. No* first introduced audiences to Bond, there have been 22 films with the suave secret agent, all boasting exotic locations, wild chase scenes, killer gadgets that actually kill, and some of the most beautiful women ever to appear onscreen. The movies defined a new genre of spy thriller, while spawning books, video games, accessories, and, of course, that International Man of Mystery, Austin Powers. In the process, Bond entertained millions and made a lot of people rich.

Yet there's never been a PC game that let you slip into his Italian loafers. Why? Given his ongoing popularity, and the fact that most boys between the ages of 9 and 90 secretly wish they were him, he's a ready-made action game hero. Electronic Arts snapped up the exclusive interactive rights to Bond long ago, releasing numerous console games (that have never surpassed Rare's *GoldenEye* on the N64 for sheer gaming brilliance). But EA obviously never thought they could make enough money on a PC version before now. So the very fact that the world's largest video game company has decided to create a custom PC version of *NightFire*—complete with full multiplayer capability—is great news for computer players.

Too bad EA didn't quite go all the way, but we'll hold our gripes for the moment.

FROM CONSOLES, WITH LOVE

NightFire is being developed simultaneously for several platforms, and all games are scheduled to launch around the same time as the newest Bond film, *Die Another Day*, which comes out on November 22. Gearbox Software is in charge of the PC version, which is good because they have a great track record, with games like *Half-Life Blue Shift*, *Counter-Strike* (boxed version), and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* to their credit. (Gearbox is also currently



Getting past the guards at the Austrian castle won't be easy—and this is only the first mission.

THE BOND FILMS

Martinis shaken not stirred, narrow escapes, winning at baccarat, villains who put the hero into elaborate peril and explain their grand plans instead of just shutting up and putting a bullet in Bond's head: these are just a few of the signature characteristics that make Bond Bond. Here's a quick rundown of the Bond films that have helped to shape the franchise and our expectations.

DR. NO (1962)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Jamming U.S. nuclear missile signals on behalf of SPECTRE

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Honey Ryder (Ursula Andress)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: The bikini-clad Ursula Andress emerging Aphrodite-like from the surf on Dr. No's remote island.

THEME SONG: John Barry Orchestra

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (1963)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

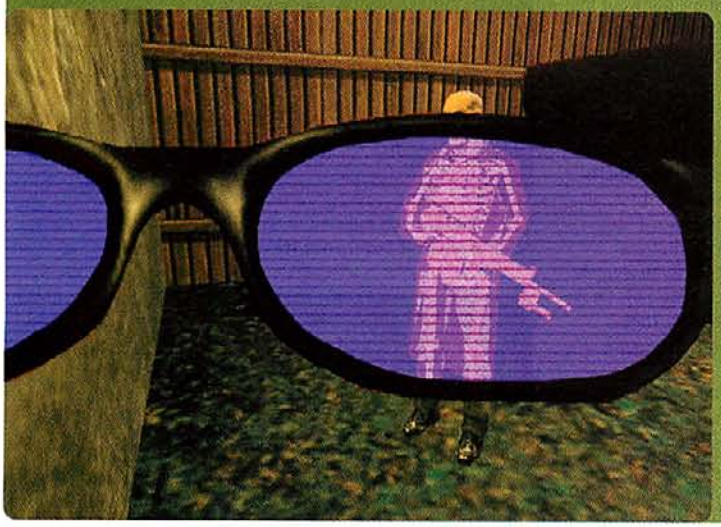
VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Trapping and killing Bond

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Tatiana Romanova—they weren't even trying (Daniela Bianchi)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Rosa Klebb's switchblade shoes, Bond's juiced-up briefcase complete with a throwing knife, 50 gold sovereigns, an AR7 sniper's rifle and a canister of tear gas.

THEME SONG BY: Matt Monro

MULTIPLAYER MI6



Multiplayer support is what will set *NightFire* for the PC above all other versions. Gearbox's experience with *Counter-Strike* should pay off here. Development Director Landon Montgomery says Gearbox is "leveraging our experience with our past team-based multiplayer modes, and we'll be including deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag, and a surprise mode or two focusing on the fiction of being a spy. Of course, multiplayer Bond just wouldn't be right without team modes based on MI6 versus Phoenix, or good guys versus bad."

He adds, "Gadgets will factor into the modes of play significantly, and I think this will bring a new flavor to multiplayer not seen recently." With cool toys like X-ray glasses that let you see through walls and auto-targeting suitcase gun turrets—not to mention weapons like grenade launchers and shoulder-fired missiles—multiplayer could turn out to be something very special.

Players will be able to choose from among a large variety of skins, including several famous characters from the films. EA's marketing says that *NightFire* draws on characters and scenes from 40 years of Bond films, but this is what they really mean: you can look like Oddjob or Jaws in multiplayer. We'd be thrilled if those characters could perform special attacks based on their film abilities, but EA's not promising anything at this point. It may be left to the mod makers to carry out.

working on *Halo: PC* and *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero.*)

The games share many of the same plot points and objectives, but each version will have features unique to the platform. The console versions will have driving levels featuring the new 12-cylinder, $229,000 Aston Martin Vanquish (for which there's already a waiting list in real life), equipped with weapons and gadgets. Unfortunately, the closest PC players get to the Vanquish is seeing it in a cinematic cut-scene. But at least we'll have 32-player multiplayer support that lets you choose skins of famous Bond characters like Oddjob and Jaws.

The PC version will also have some exclusive single-player levels, says associate producer Michael Condrey. These include a decommissioned nuclear power plant, a South Pacific subterranean assembly facility, and an Austrian airfield.

Q's gadgets are integral to each mission. In addition to a spy camera, you'll get a PDA that decrypts codes to open locked doors.

THE TEAM IS WORKING TO INCLUDE FAMOUS CHARACTERS IN MULTIPLAYER, INCLUDING KILLERS LIKE ODDJOB AND JAWS.

GOLDFINGER (1964)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Robbing Fort Knox and causing economic chaos

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Oddjob decapitating statuary with his hat, the girl painted gold to death, Bond's near bisection by a laser creeping toward his crotch.

THEME SONG BY: Shirley Bassey

THUNDERBALL (1965)

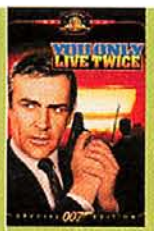
JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Extortion with nuclear bombs as leverage

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Domino (Claudine Auger)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Bond fighting sharks and taking on an army of scuba-diving henchmen in the underwater climax.

THEME SONG BY: Tom Jones



YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE (1967)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Triggering World War III

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Kissy Suzuki (Mie Hama)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Bond's apparent murder at the very beginning of the movie.

THEME SONG BY: Nancy Sinatra

CASINO ROYALE (1967)

JAMES BOND: David Niven (Ian Fleming's original choice, mind you)

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Winning Bond's money at the casino

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Agent Mimi, a.k.a. Lady Fiona McTarry (Deborah Kerr)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Woody Allen as Little Jimmy Bond in this hit-or-miss Bond parody.

THEME SONG BY: Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass

>>>

The game features an all-new story that pits Bond against "green industrialist" Rafael Drake. Drake's company is involved with dismantling warheads and disposing of nuclear waste, but he's actually a radical environmentalist. Drake employs his secret stash of ICBMs and a private army of astronaut commandos to assault a U.S. space weapons platform and hold the world hostage. We're not sure why an environmentalist would threaten the world with nuclear annihilation, but what the hell—it's Bond. And Bond is once again the only thing between a power-crazed maniac and global domination.

NO ONE DIES TWICE

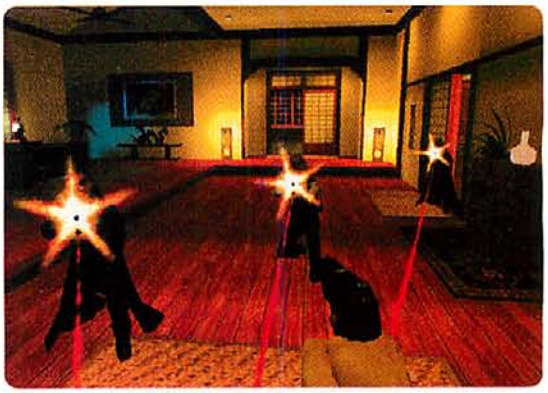
The game opens with a dramatic cut-scene reminiscent of Bond's HALO jump into the South China Sea in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. This time, he leaps from the back of a C-140 and parachutes into the Austrian Alps. His mission: infiltrate Rafael Drake's ornate castle, chat up some women, and find out what Drake's up to. Each mission is bookended with cinematic scenes to help set the tone. They reminded me of the cut-scenes from *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear*, only with higher-resolution models.

When Bond lands on a snow-covered bridge facing the castle, you're in control. Right away the game evokes an authentic feel as you face an imposing castle that's protected by armed guards. Falling snow adds to the atmosphere.

Gearbox is using a new engine for *NightFire* that has endured far beyond its roots in *Half-Life*. It draws huge scenes with complex architecture and weather effects, and effectively handles the many scripted events scattered throughout the game.

One of the best features of *NightFire* is the variety of ways to complete each mission. In the Castle mission, you can hop on a passing truck and ride it into the compound, sneak around to a side door, and burn the lock off with a laser beam from the watch that Q gave you. Or you can head into the woods to go around the castle and enter through a second-story window. Each of the different paths throughout the game will yield a very different experience: some will require stealth, some will simply require a head-on assault.

In another mission, Bond has to infiltrate a Japanese country estate (also protected by ubiquitous guards with



You can play each mission differently, but sometimes you'll have to shoot it out—hence the whole "license to kill" concept.

In one of the team-based levels, Bond has to help his partner stay alive by picking off guards with the sniper rifle.

ONE OF THE BEST FEATURES IS THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO COMPLETE EACH MISSION.

THE BOND FILMS

ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE (1969)

JAMES BOND: George Lazenby

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Releasing a killer virus

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Teresa DiVicenzo (Diana Rigg)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: There's lots of great action in this underrated movie, but all you need to know is this: Bond falls in love, gets married; she dies.

THEME SONG BY: Louis Armstrong

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER (1971)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: World domination

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Plenty O'Toole (Lana Wood)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: "I'm afraid you've caught me with more than my hands up"; Bond getting thrashed by gymnasts Bambi and Thumper; Charles Gray, the narrator from *Rocky Horror* as the villain.

THEME SONG BY: Shirley Bassey

LIVE AND LET DIE (1973)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Heroin distribution

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Solitaire (Jane Seymour)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Geoffrey Holder looks like a 7-foot skeleton, does voodoo, and has this really creepy laugh—this wasn't exactly the strongest 007 flick ever made.

THEME SONG BY: Paul McCartney and Wings

THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN (1974)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Shooting Bond with a very expensive gun

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Mary Goodnight (Britt Ekland)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Francisco Scaramanga's twisted theme park hideout complete with the original Mini-Me, Nick Nack (Hervé Villechaize).

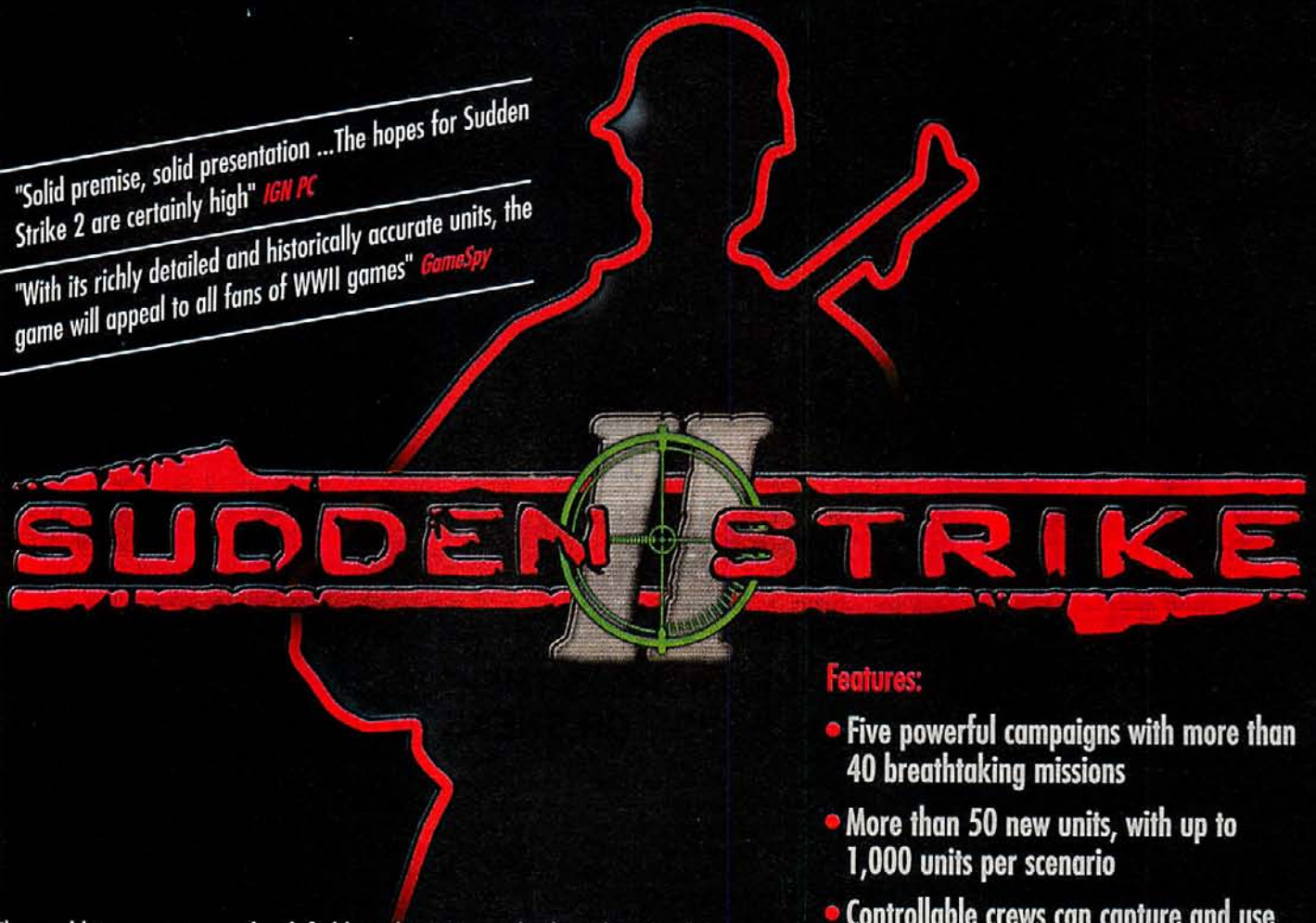
THEME SONG BY: Lulu

>>>

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*



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www.cdv.de

FIREGLOW

WEAPONS

The lobby of this Tokyo high-rise is representative of the level of interior detail throughout the game.

HE CAN CLAMBER ACROSS THE ROOF, SHOOT HIS WAY THROUGH THE HOUSE, OR SNEAK IN ON A WIRE.

submachine guns). He can clamber across the roof and drop down into a courtyard, shoot his way through the house, or enter via a wire suspended across the garden. To go by wire, Bond must first shoot the lanterns hanging from it, each of which leaves a sparking section of exposed wire; the challenge is to time Bond's crossing over these sections (when they aren't sparking) while watching for patrolling guards (he can't shoot if he's holding onto the wire). This becomes a very tricky and fairly suspenseful moment in the game.

It also illustrates how the player's perspective changes from first to third person at certain times in the game. The camera often switches to third person when Bond is outside a building, to give the player a view of others in the area. By using this perspective, you can see which windows have guards in them, so you'll know when to make Bond crouch or move away. It should add that extra bit of suspense players expect from a spy game.

DON'T CALL US "HENCHMEN"

Until now we've talked about guards as if they are all the same. Actually, they're not. Some guards and enemy soldiers may look similar, but almost every character will have unique facial

THE BOND FILMS

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME (1977)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Destroying the world

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Anya Amasova (Barbara Bach)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Gigantic, steel-toothed evil henchman Jaws (Richard Kiel).

THEME SONG BY: Carly Simon

MOONRAKER (1979)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Destruction of life on earth

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Dr. Holly Goodhead (Lois Chiles)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Zero gravity sex, Jaws finding a girlfriend who has braces.

THEME SONG BY: Shirley Bassey

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY (1981)

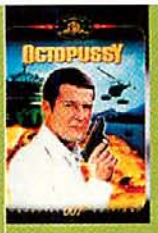
JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Recovering an encryption device

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Melina Havelock (Carole Bouquet)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Bond being dragged behind a speedboat over a reef, a subplot involving ice skaters and the Winter Olympics.

THEME SONG BY: Sheena Easton



OCTOPUSSY (1983)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Starting World War III (yet again)

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Octopussy (Maud Adams)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: The smutty title.

THEME SONG BY: Rita Coolidge

features, and some of them will have very smart AI. Landon Montgomery, development director at Gearbox Software says, "We've enhanced the AI system that we've worked with in the past and implemented cool new AI behaviors." For example, if an enemy enters into combat with you and has access to a corner, he will run to that corner and use it as cover. You'll find that the enemies in *NightFire* also have survival instincts, even reacting to live grenades in a logical fashion. (Is he close enough to kick it away? Close enough to throw it away? Close enough to throw it at you?) As James Bond, you're definitely going to have your hands full with these guys.

The enemies with the toughest AI will probably be Drake's Black Ops soldiers. Dressed all in black, these guys pack silenced MP5s, so you may not hear them even after they start shooting at you. Even if you can sneak up on them, they have katanas and a variety of jumping moves that will make them very tough to deal with.

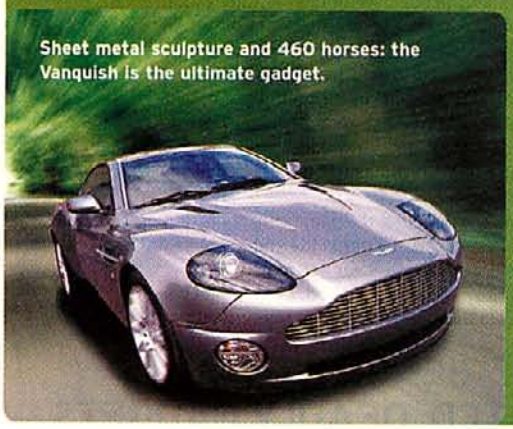
"James, is that a pistol in your pocket, or...?" There'll be plenty of babes for Bond to cavort with.

But you won't always have to go it alone. A staple of every Bond film is the gorgeous Bond girl who helps 007 with his mission, and the developers haven't overlooked that. Bond teams up with a couple of agents in *NightFire*, including Zoe

THE ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

This is the closest you'll actually get to it.

Sheet metal sculpture and 460 horses: the Vanquish is the ultimate gadget.



After Halle Berry, the hottest thing that'll appear in the upcoming Bond movie, *Die Another Day*, is the $229,000 Aston Martin Vanquish. The Vanquish is the company's newest flagship, a 190-mph supercar capable of running with the fastest street-legal vehicles in the world. Under the hood is a 460-horsepower V12 that'll send freshly laid asphalt flying like so much pillow stuffing.

The Vanquish also stars in the console versions of *NightFire*. Players can drive the car in several chase scenes and have it converted into a snowmobile or submarine.

Unfortunately, the closest PC players will come to the Vanquish is seeing it in a cut-scene. EA's Michael Condrey says the decision not to include driving levels in the PC version was a challenging one. "We felt that keeping our focus [on first-person action] would better meet our audience's needs than having to divide our efforts and attempt to incorporate a driving engine. This decision allowed us to develop additional PC-only levels that won't be found on any of the console versions, as well as adding new and exciting features to multiplayer."

Although we're happy to see EA investing the time in multiplayer, we consider the absence of any vehicular action in the game a pretty big omission. How can you have a Bond game without a driving level or a chase scene? Especially after games like *No One Lives Forever*, which let gamers ride in a variety of vehicles, it's something that players will probably expect.

Interestingly, Aston Martin places huge value on its cars appearing in the movies. *USA Today* reported that AM pledged $70 million to MGM studios to be in *Die Another Day*. That's despite the fact that the British automaker has reportedly presold the first three years of the Vanquish in the United States. A company spokesperson says the connection between Aston Martin and Bond is "almost spiritual."

NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN (1983)

JAMES BOND: Sean Connery

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Holding NATO for ransom

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Fatima Blush (Barbara Carrera)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: The torturous health club sequence, and an incredibly geeky video game duel that now just looks bad.

THEME SONG BY: Lani Hall

A VIEW TO A KILL (1985)

JAMES BOND: Roger Moore

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Destroying Silicon Valley with an earthquake

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: May Day (Grace Jones)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Scenery-chomping Christopher Walken as the most berserk villain in any Bond movie, Roger Moore aging to the point where he resembles your great aunt.

THEME SONG BY: Duran Duran

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS (1987)

JAMES BOND: Timothy Dalton

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Starting another World War (yawn)

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Kara Milovy (Maryam d'Abo)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: James and Kara escape from a falling plane in a jeep, and Q demos a boombox that fires a rocket-propelled gun.

THEME SONG BY: a-ha

LICENCE TO KILL (1989)

JAMES BOND: Timothy Dalton

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Avoiding Bond, who is out for revenge

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Lupe Lamora (Talisa Soto)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: None really

THEME SONG: Gladys Knight

>>>

How on earth can this geisha thank Bond for rescuing her?

Bond's high-rise climb is an example of the third-person action sequences.

The Japanese estate is a beautiful place, complete with koi ponds.

Nightshade, who originally appeared in EA's *Agent Under Fire*. In one of the missions unique to the PC, Zoe has to make her way into an aircraft control tower to disable a security system so the two can escape. When she gets ambushed by swarming guards, Bond has to pick them off with a sniper rifle from a nearby building.

WHERE DOES HE GET THOSE WONDERFUL TOYS?

Naturally Bond will be packing his standard Walther pistol, but he'll have a lot more weapons at his disposal. These include flashbangs, smoke and frag grenades, various rifles, a grenade launcher, and a four-tube missile launcher. Each weapon also has an alternate fire, such as a silencer for the pistol, a scope for the rifle, and a three-round burst for the submachine gun. In alternate fire mode, the missile launcher switches to a nose-cam view and lets you steer it to your target.

Of course it wouldn't be a Bond experience without an assortment of sophisticated and deadly gadgets. Unfortunately, Desmond Llewelyn is pushing up the daisies, but there will be a suitably gray-haired virtual Q who equips Bond with his toys. Among these are a watch equipped with a laser beam, a stun gun lighter, a cell phone grappling hook, and some special grips that enable Bond to scale buildings. My favorite is a suitcase that turns into a machine gun turret when dropped; it'll automatically mow down any target within its range.

Bond will also carry a tricked-out pair of glasses. They have three modes: night vision, infrared, and X-ray. The infrared mode reveals body heat to detect guards through certain kinds of walls and doors. X-ray mode lets you see concealed objects in people's clothing. Yes, they also let you peep at women's underwear. Curiously, this doesn't work on men—it reveals only their skeletons. It's odd and totally sexist, but then again, it is Bond.

BOND IN SPAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACE!

If there's one thing that shouldn't disappoint anyone, it's the variety of locations in the game and the amount of detail that seems to be lavished on them. The Austrian castle has an amazing amount of detail, from paintings on the wall to perfectly ruffled curtains and ornate columns. Reflective floors and lighting add even greater ambiance to this level.

In addition to the castle, players will infiltrate a Tokyo high-rise, rescue beautiful geisha held hostage in a Japanese country estate, blast their way through a fortified jungle base, penetrate an underwater South Pacific training facility, and maneuver through a zero-gravity space station. In the space station, Bond and his enemies float and glide through the air, which offers a completely different challenge from the rest of the game.

We're not sure if the game ends there, but as it's assured that Bond gets the girl in the end, we hope it does, if only for the opportunity to hear one more time:

British minister: "My God, what's Bond doing?!"

Q: "I think he's attempting re-entry, sir."

IT WOULDN'T BE A BOND EXPERIENCE WITHOUT AN ASSORTMENT OF SOPHISTICATED, DEADLY GADGETS.

THE BOND FILMS

GOLDENEYE (1995)

JAMES BOND: Pierce Brosnan

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Destroying London's economy with an EMP blast

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Xenia Onatopp (Famke Janssen)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Bond almost dying between Onatopp's killer thighs and the tank chase through the streets of St. Petersburg.

THEME SONG BY: Tina Turner

TOMORROW NEVER DIES (1997)

JAMES BOND: Pierce Brosnan

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Starting World War III, this time to boost newspaper ratings and land broadcasting rights to China

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Paris Carver (Teri Hatcher)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* star Michelle Yeoh kicking everybody's ass as Colonel Wai Lin.

THEME SONG BY: Sheryl Crow

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH (1999)

JAMES BOND: Pierce Brosnan

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Avenging her dad and killing M

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Trying to convince audiences Denise Richards is a nuclear physicist.

THEME SONG BY: Garbage

DIE ANOTHER DAY (2002)

JAMES BOND: Pierce Brosnan

VILLAIN IS BENT ON: Something evil

LUDICROUS BOND GIRL NAME: Jinx (Halle Berry)

MEMORABLE MOMENT: Halle Berry keeping her shirt on after whipping it off in her last two movies.

THEME SONG BY: Madonna

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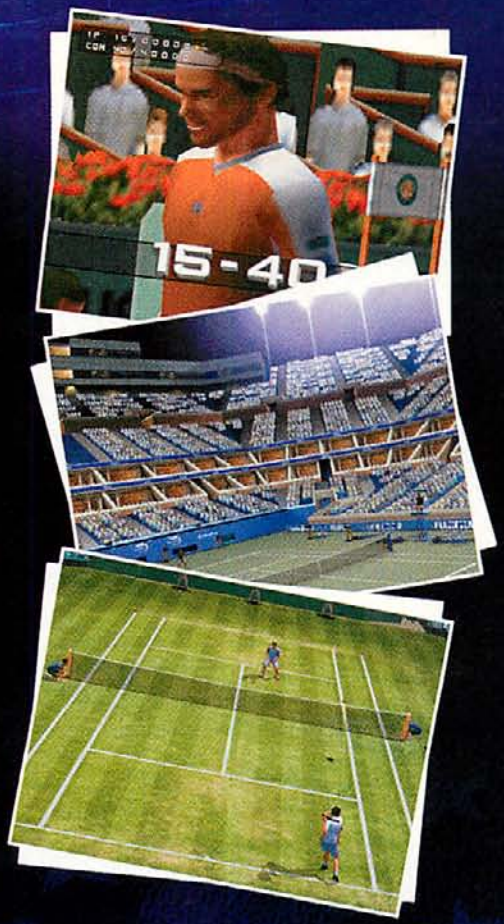

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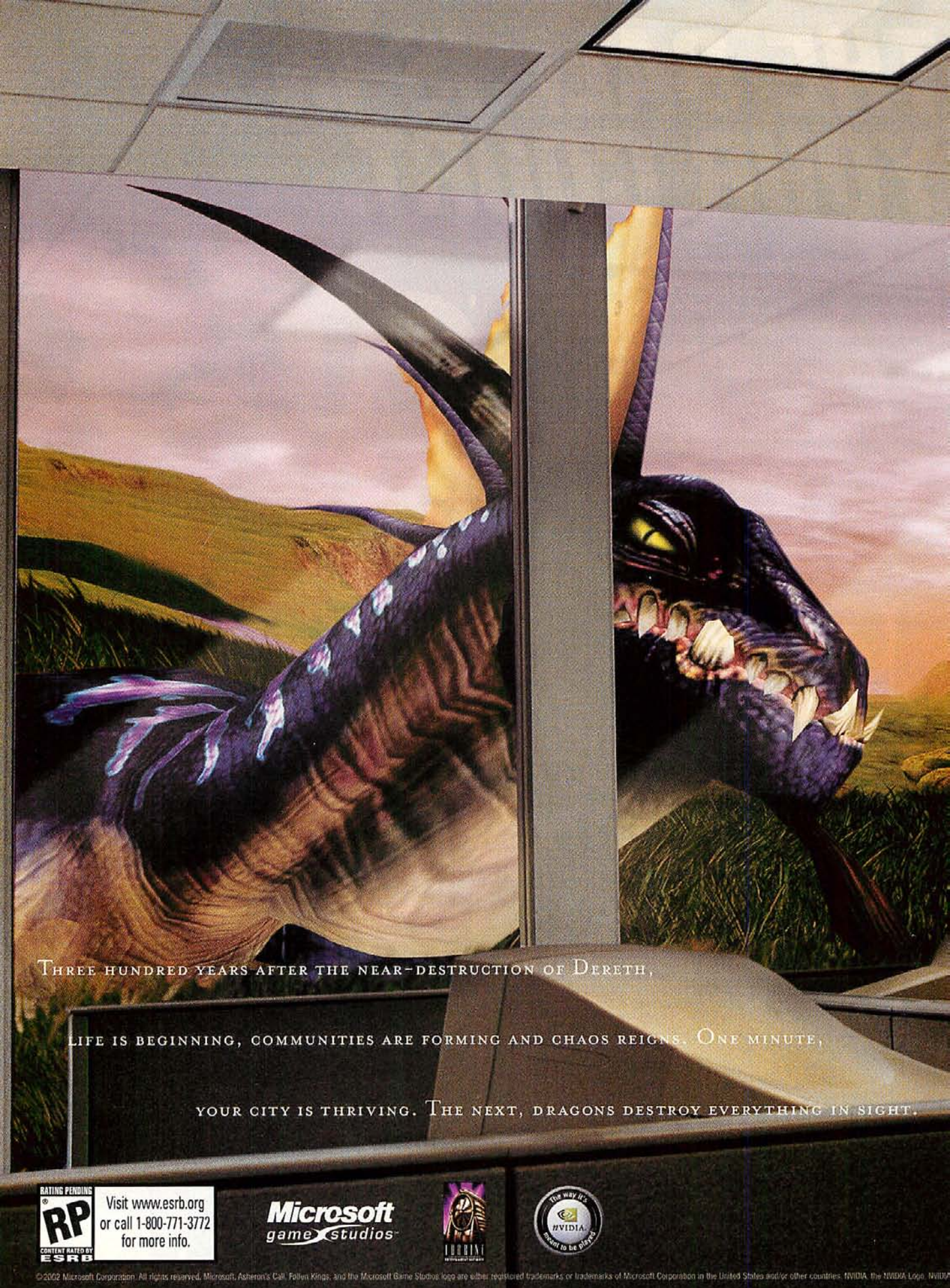

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LORD BRITISH'S BRAIN-CHILD TURNS FIVE

ULTIMA ONLINE

FIVE YEARS AGO,

the massively multiplayer RPG was born, heralded by just two letters: *UO*. Before that there were MUDs, and even *Meridian 59*. But *Ultima Online* started it all, way before Sony Online Entertainment rolled out its behemoth, *EverQuest*.

Upon its release, however, *UO* was shredded by the gaming press. In my *CGW* review, I wrote, "The reason so many people [player-kill] is because it's much more fun than playing *UO* 'the real way,' in which you must do a series of repetitive tasks in order to be strong enough to kill anything larger than a pig," and "Get *Ultima Online* only if you are willing to put up with a whole lot of grief." Months later, in giving the game our Coaster of the Year award, we wrote, "No game came into 1997 with greater hype, anticipation, and promise than this one, only to be so utterly disappointing." We were so harsh on the game that Origin created "jwilson slime," a pond-scum-esque critter in the game named after then-editor in chief Johnny Wilson. There was no love lost between us and them. Five years later, here we are giving *UO* the props it has earned.

GENRE: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME

BY THIERRY NGUYEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER: ORIGIN

Famous comic book artist and toy designer Todd McFarlane designed the look of beasts like this Horde Demon.

UO's recent 3D client sharply divided the community, but all is well now.

This guy died so that you can play online (or so the backstory fiction claims).

> "IT APPEALED TO ME BECAUSE IT WASN'T LIKE THE TYPICAL GAMES I USED TO PLAY. IT'S NOTHING LIKE DIABLO OR STARCRAFT. YOU'RE NOT JUST LIMITED TO ONE CLASS. YOU CAN BE ANYTHING FROM A MAGE, WARRIOR, OR EVEN A FISHERMAN IF IT TICKLES YOUR FANCY."

UO has not only managed to dig itself out of the grave that we prepared for it, but the game has also gone on to bring innovation to MMO design (housing, community building), launch the careers of some of the most important MMO people around, join players together (such as at the *UO* Fan Faire), and maintain strong numbers to this day.

RISING FROM THE GRAVE

What drew everyone to *UO* in the first place? Although there were many articles warning gamers away from *UO*, the reputation of the *Ultima* series and word of mouth overcame the negative press. People were commonly brought in by friends who enjoyed the beta or by just hearing that *UO* was an online version of *Ultima*.

With all of these people joining up, how did Origin manage to keep them there? What prompts players like retired U.S. Army Colonel Dave Harbison to say, "Despite negative reviews, marketing that seems less than state-of-the-art, and comparatively poor graphics...*UO* still holds great appeal, enjoyment, and loyalty"?

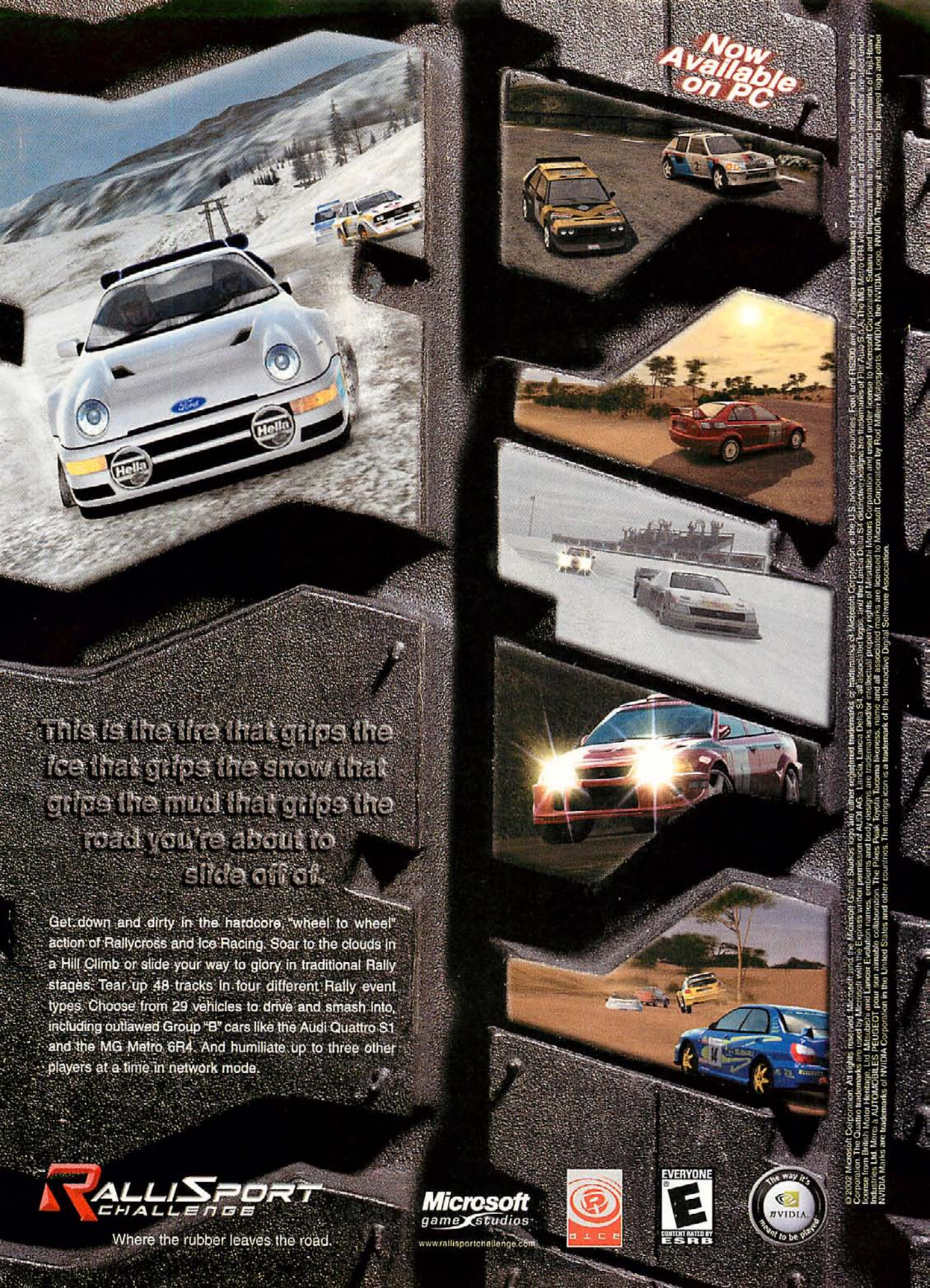
Lead designer Tom "Evocare" Chilton believes, "It was primarily the sheer determination on the part of thousands of *UO* players that allowed *UO* to survive its early stages and become a success....The early commitment of the *Ultima* fanbase ensured its success."

Jonathan "Calandryll" Hanna, who's been both a community coordinator and lead content designer, thinks it's all about listening to players. "We have a staff of four full-time employees whose entire job is to get feedback from the players to the development team....The development team has made great strides in finding ways to incorporate player feedback into their designs, and I think *UO*'s success reflects that." Chilton adds, "The live team was [at first] focused entirely on improving accessibility, reducing the bug count, working on localization, and stabilizing the service."

Their hard work hasn't gone unnoticed; when we polled veteran *UO* players, everyone remarked on the game's continual evolution and improvement. "It never gets stale or old. There are always new and exciting things happening," comments Diane

FORMER EDITOR IN CHIEF JOHNNY WILSON ON THE *UO* LAUNCH

Ultima Online was more than a graphical MUD and more than a multiplayer version of the classic *Ultima* series. It was a grand vision, a glorious social experiment...and it was flawed. I remember the first time I logged on. There were lots of characters in the first tavern I visited and the conversational fonts flowed all over the screen like a Jackson Pollock painting. I also remember walking through the woods and encountering tons of pieces of furniture piled up because the characters wanted the experience for making the furniture but didn't want to wait in line at a store in order to sell it. The in-game virtual economy didn't work nearly as well as the out-of-game virtual economy in which characters were suddenly worth hundreds and thousands of dollars. Most of all, I remember the backhanded "honor" of having a special slime creature named after me. The "jwilson slime" appeared in the game shortly after *Computer Gaming World* gave *Ultima Online* the Coaster of the Year award. Frankly, I didn't mind being called a slime, but this slime dulled your weapons. I really hated being called dull, even indirectly.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A player makes with the zapzap in *UO: Lord Blackthorn's Revenge.*

Players who really dug Captain Dasha can now get a 6-inch version of her.

FIVE BIGGEST MOMENTS IN *UO* HISTORY

1. Lord British killed in the beta Everyone remembers this virtual assassination, even though it happened in the beta. It resulted in the assassin being banned for taking advantage of exploits in the system, even though he claimed to have been role-playing.

2. The fall of the city of Trinsic Perhaps the greatest moment in *UO* history, when a swarm of undead overran a popular player-filled city—the kind of stuff that makes up emotionally-resonant climaxes in war movies.

3. *Ultima Online: The Third Dawn* The addition of a new 3D client split the community in half and created technical support headaches for Origin upon launch.

4. The housing expansion of Trammel Thousands of players logged in and waited until dawn for the new land to open, so that they could claim choice real estate for their house. Unfortunately, the crowd resulted in a server crash.

5. The Virtues Designer Jonathan Hanna brought about *Ultima*'s most defining feature: The Seven Virtues. Even without Garriott, the game had finally become *Ultima*, online.

Dungleman-Davis, a five-year *UO* veteran and longtime member of the player community.

CHILDREN OF *UO*

Origin managed to repair the wreckage from the initial release, which attracted and kept more and more players in the game. The developer also happened to house Raph Koster and Gordon Walton, two minds who have gone on to play great parts in the two biggest online games currently in development: *Star Wars Galaxies* and *The Sims Online*.

In discussing the design for *Star Wars Galaxies* and what *UO* taught him, *UO*'s creative director Raph Koster explains, "I learned that bad apples will go to great lengths to ruin someone else's experiences and that you have to take as hard a line as you can. Players will regularly and continually surprise you with the depth of their commitment and of their creativity: give them the ball and they'll run with it. I learned that we weren't crazy when we said that players would play to bake bread.

"If it weren't for *UO*, I wouldn't be doing *Star Wars Galaxies* now, certainly. Every day I apply the lessons learned, and the most important lessons are the ones I learned from players. I feel privileged to have been involved in giving them the tools they needed to make their experience what they wanted, humbled by what they did, and deeply sorry for all the many areas where we tried to give them a good experience and failed. Those lessons shape everything I do on *SWG*."

Gamers slinging spells in a crypt in *UO: Renaissance.*

Gordon Walton, executive producer of *The Sims Online*, reflected on his experience as the executive producer for *Ultima Online*: "I learned many things from the experience of operating an entertainment service of that scale, and I also learned from the passion of the audience. I learned how hard it was to change players' impression of a game once it was set at launch, even if you addressed the key issues. I learned how hard it is to make changes at a sustainable rate in a large and complex service environment. I learned a lot about quality and how hard it is to repair the

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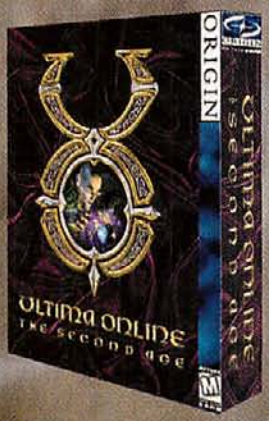

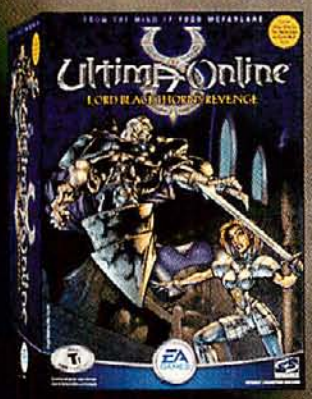

Five years and many boxes later, *UO* is primed for its *Age of Shadows* expansion (which adds paladins and necromancers), and who knows, maybe *UO II*.

engines while the plane is in flight. Finally, I hope I learned how to listen to the aggregated player feedback, and how to best react to it for the good of the overall service. My work on *The Sims Online* can only benefit from my time on *Ultima Online*."

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

Origin recently announced the *Age of Shadows* add-on slated for release in early 2003. The expansion will increase players' housing options by introducing a new realm, more housing, and a house-creation tool; it will also bring necromancers and paladins to the game. Our further inquiries about *UO*'s future have been met with coy responses.

Players continue returning to the game regardless of the latest expansion plans. Veteran player Hotaru explains, "[*UO*] appealed to me because it wasn't like the typical games I used to play. It's nothing like *Diablo* or *StarCraft*—you're not just limited to one class. You can be anything from a mage, warrior, or even a fisherman if it tickles your fancy." If the current environment is any indication, players will keep coming back, and *UO* will have quite a healthy future.

REFLECTIONS ON *ULTIMA ONLINE*, FROM RICHARD "LORD BRITISH" GARRIOTT HIMSELF

There were many important lessons that came from the experience of creating, launching, and operation of *UO*. If I had to pick the most important lesson, it would be understanding that good engineering discipline works better than the usual game software hacking process. *UO* started life as a low-budget development project, well off the EA radar, and it was originally cobbled together using early *Ultima* graphics and hacked together client/server code. The results were very powerful, but far from stable and hardly expandable or maintainable. Ultimately the *UO* live teams have rewritten pretty much every line of code that was originally included with the game. Good initial coding standards are essential to creating an operationally acceptable game which will then let the designers and players grow and evolve the compelling world they wish to live and play in.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ARCADIAN DEL SOL, THE DEVELOPERS AT ORIGIN, RAPH KOSTER, GORDON WALTON, RICHARD GARRIOTT, AND THE PLAYERS WHO HELPED WITH THIS PIECE. TO READ FULL COMMENTS AND INTERVIEWS WITH PLAYERS AND DESIGNERS, GO TO WWW.GAMERS.COM

Warlord Kabur may look like a bloodthirsty miscreant, but he's actually one of the good guys.

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The Entertainment Depot, Editors' Choice
RPG Dot, Platinum award
GamePen, Numb Thumb award
PC Zone, Classic award
Voodoo Extreme, Can 'o Whoopass award
Zen Gamer, Gold Zen award

GameSpot, Game-of-the-month Gold award
AllOutGames, AOG Seal of Approval
Xistenze, Choice award
VN Roundup, Stamp of Approval
General Protection Fault, Must Have award
Loadedinc, Hot Property award

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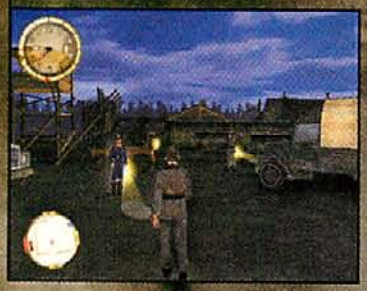

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EverQuest

You can hate it, you can fail to get it, you can want to strangle your loved one for playing it 24/7–but there's no denying *EverQuest*'s status as one of the most important and influential games of the last few years. Although Origin deserves major credit for essentially creating the massively multiplayer online role-playing game genre with *Ultima Online*, it was Verant (now Sony Online Entertainment) that scored the genre's first major home run with *EverQuest*. The game inspired a compulsive addiction so scary that support groups of players' spouses actually began offering help and advice to "*EverQuest* widows."

EverQuest truly created a feeling of a living, breathing world, thanks in no small part to the large, friendly player community, all the members of which were logging just as many hours in the game as you were. Once you had spent a certain amount of time in *EQ*, that world became just as real–and sometimes more important–than the real world. It's helped that Verant has continued working to keep the game fresh, with big expansions and free upgrades that keep players always coming back to see more. *EverQuest* is still the most popular MMORPG to date and the one to which all new titles are compared. But that may change soon. *EverQuest II* is on the way.

Two multiplayer monsters and the maker of SCUMM join the pantheon.

Hall of

Counter-Strike

Hall of Fame entry is generally reserved for people or things who've been retired or are no longer in their heyday. Not so *Counter-Strike*. From its early days as a rough *Half-Life* mod, through its official release by Sierra, to today, *CS* has grown and grown in popularity. It's the most popular mod ever and is still right up there, years after its first release, as one of the biggest online games in terms of sheer numbers on a daily basis. You could log on right now and easily find 50,000 people playing. That's astronomical.

So what makes *CS* special? What separates it from every other tactical simulation? For one, it's not a sim. Sure, the weapons are modeled with realism in mind, and there are no power-ups or health packs lying around, but *CS* was and is all about fun over realism. Two teams armed with real-world guns going head-to-head to plant or defuse a bomb, or rescue or defend some hostages, round after round is the closest thing to playing "guns" when you were a kid. This time instead of yelling, "Bang! I shot you!" and hearing, "Dude, you totally missed," you'll just get people accusing you of hacking. Some things never change.

Ron Gilbert

Why are we crediting someone for creating scum? Well, we actually mean SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion), which was the heart of many LucasArts adventure games such as *Maniac Mansion*, *Day of the Tentacle*, and *The Secret of Monkey Island*. The brain behind these games is Ron Gilbert, who programmed the SCUMM engine and designed the classic LucasArts games they powered.

Just making SCUMM and the first two *Monkey Island* games would have been enough to put him in the Hall of Fame. But then he went and created Humongous Entertainment and Cavedog Entertainment, two stellar game companies. Although Humongous was "just" a children's edutainment developer, Gilbert put as much thought, design effort, and humor into *Putt-Putt* and *Pajama Sam* as he did into *Guybrush Threepwood* and *Purple Tentacle*. At Cavedog, Gilbert funded and produced Chris Taylor's classic *Total Annihilation*.

Since leaving Humongous/Cavedog, Gilbert has created another edutainment company, Hulabee Entertainment. Although we still hope for the day when his never-finished adventure game *Good & Evil* comes out, for now we'll keep a close eye on whatever comes out of Hulabee, and salute Gilbert for being one of computer gaming's great pioneers.

Fame

THE CGW HALL OF FAME

PEOPLE

Dani Bunten Berry, Game Designer
John Carmack, Programmer
Sid Meier, Game Designer
Roberta Williams, Game Designer

GAMES

Alone in the Dark (I-Motion, 1992)
The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)
Battle Chess (Interplay, 1988)
Battleground series (TalonSoft, 1995-present)
Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix, 1993)
Chessmaster (Software Toolworks, 1986)
Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)
Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995)
Crusader: No Remorse (Origin, 1995)
Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight (LucasArts, 1999)
Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993)
Diablo (Blizzard, 1997)
Doom (id Software, 1993)
Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1986)
Empire (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
Fallout (Interplay, 1997)
Front Page Sports: Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
Grim Fandango (LucasArts, 1999)
Gunship (MicroProse, 1986)
Half-Life (Valve Software, 1999)
Harpoon (360 Pacific, 1989)
Heroes of Might and Magic II (New World Computing, 1997)
High Heat Baseball 2000 (3DO, 1999)
Kampfgruppe (SSI, 1985)
King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)
Links 386 Pro (Access Software, 1992)
M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989)
Master of Magic (MicroProse, 1994)
Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1993)
Mech Brigade (SSI, 1985)
MechWarrior 2 (Activision, 1995)
Might and Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (EA, 1983)
Myth (Bungie, 1997)
Panzer General (SSI, 1994)
Pirates (MicroProse, 1987)
Quake (id Software, 1996)
Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 1990)
Red Baron (Dynamix, 1990)
The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)
SimCity (Maxis, 1987)
StarCraft (Blizzard, 1998)
Starflight (EA, 1986)
Tetris (Spectrum HoloByte, 1988)
Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989)
TIE Fighter (LucasArts, 1994)
Tomb Raider (Eidos, 1996)
Ultima III (Origin Systems, 1983)
Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)
War in Russia (SSI, 1984)
WarCraft II (Blizzard, 1996)
Wasteland (Interplay, 1986)
Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1990)
Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)
Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)
Wizardry (Sir-Tech, 1981)
Wolfenstein 3D (id Software, 1992)
X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)
You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
Zork (Infocom, 1981)

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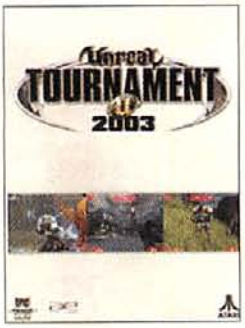

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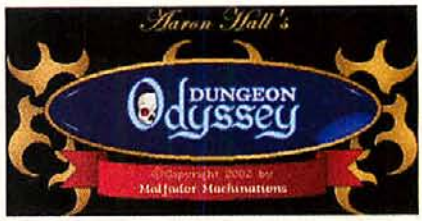

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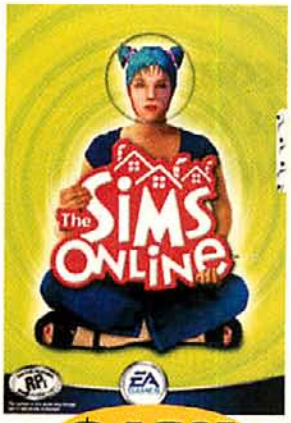

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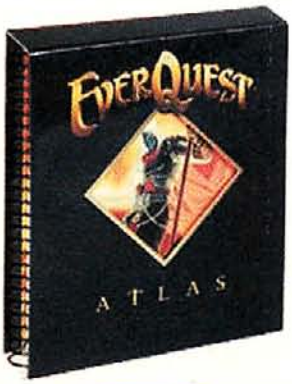

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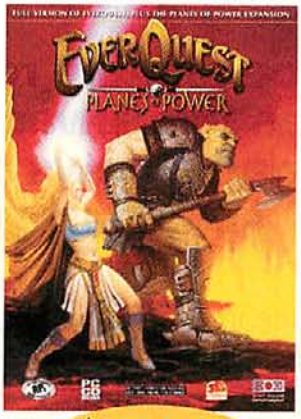

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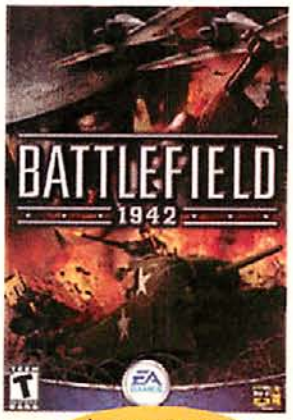

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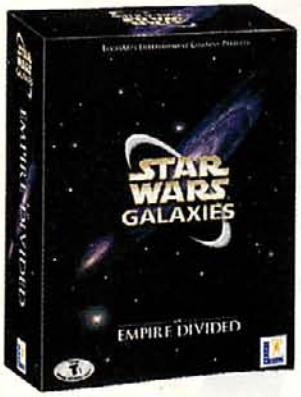

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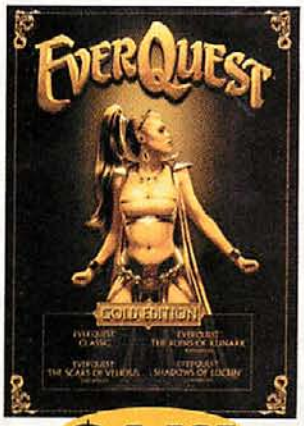

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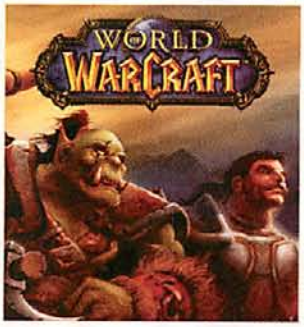

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

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Celtic Kings: Rage of War

How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

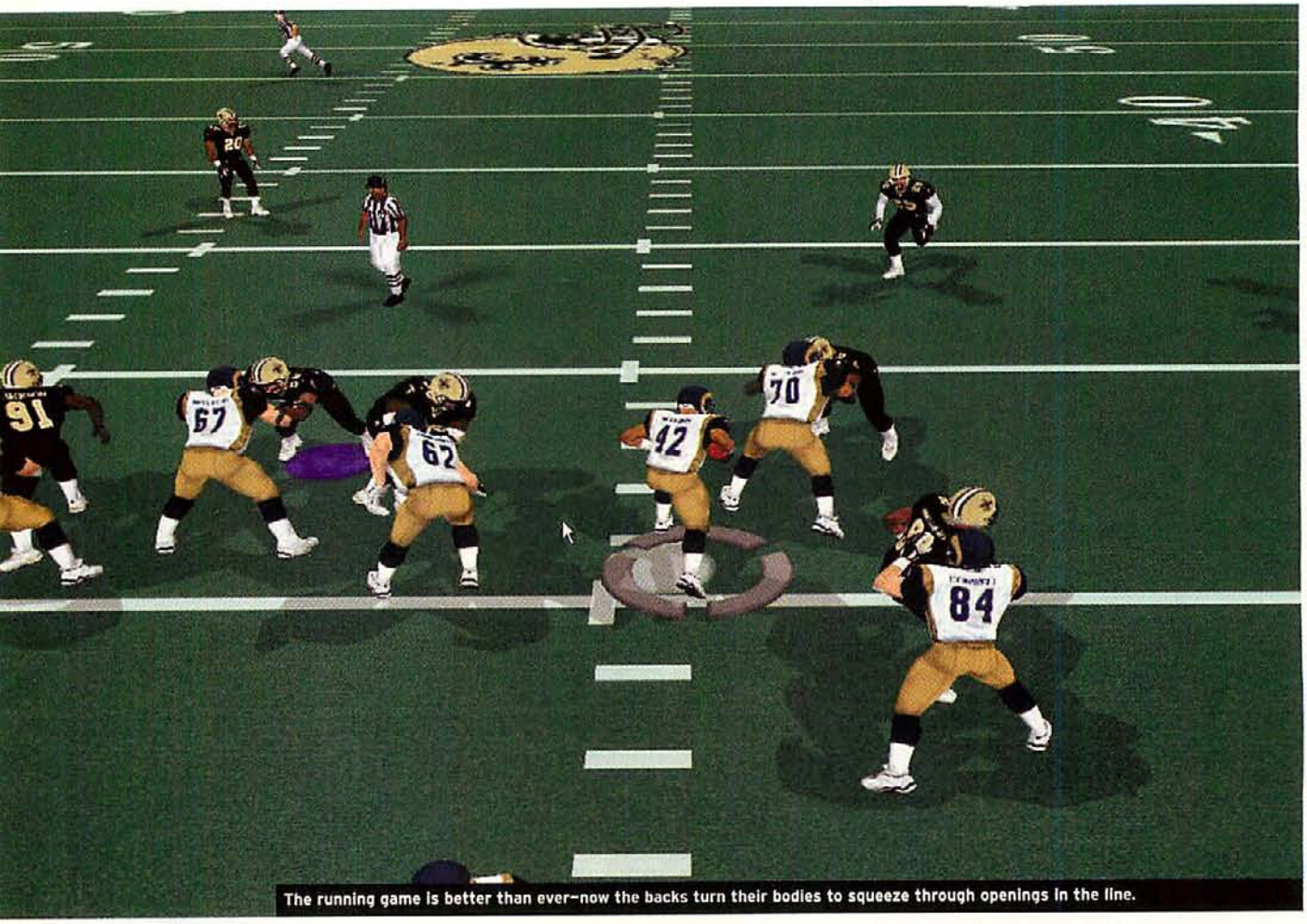
★★★★★ **OUTSTANDING** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★½ **VERY GOOD** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

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

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

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



The running game is better than ever—now the backs turn their bodies to squeeze through openings in the line.

Madden NFL 2003

Finally on the same field as the console big boys **By Rob Smolka**

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports**
DEVELOPER: **EA Sports**
GENRE: **Sports**
URL: **www.easports.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$39.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 75MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 700MB hard drive space, gamepad**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-16 players)**

Thank God for consoles. No, I haven't turned traitor or lost my mental faculties. The reason I'm so grateful to the PC's dumbed-down cousins is that without them, we wouldn't have been blessed with such a fantastic football game to play on our beloved system of choice. You see, *Madden NFL 2003* may be the only football game available for the PC, but the ruthless competition among Sony, Sega, Microsoft, and EA Sports for the precious dollars of PS2, Xbox, and GameCube football fans has resulted in some truly outstanding examples of the genre, and we gamers are the beneficiaries. And unlike previous PC versions of *Madden*, in which EA Sports took the incredibly lazy route of regurgitating the previous year's console code, glaring warts still attached, we are now on equal footing, with a game that takes advantage of the PC's particular strengths.

With every new iteration, the *Madden* series gets closer to replicating the game of pro football on our monitors.

Relive great matchups from the past—like the '78 Steelers and Cowboys.

It's Good!

And that's putting it mildly. *Madden 2003* is one of the most beautiful games I've ever had the pleasure to ogle at on my monitor. The one major asset the PC can claim over the consoles is the ability to display games in ridiculously high resolutions. Any decent system these days should be able to handle 1024x768, but if you're packing some extra power in your tower, you can crank this baby up to 1600x1200 and glory in the visual magnificence. My Athlon 1800XP and Radeon 8500 combo had no problem cranking out frame rates at this resolution, and even after more than a season's worth of contests, I'm still amazed by how sweet this game looks. The incredibly varied and ultrarealistic animations add to the ocular festivities, and the face mapping of the players is as good as I've seen in any game.

The player editor is quite powerful, letting you put a replica of yourself in the game, no matter how out of shape you happen to be!

The rest of the package is nearly as superb. The interface has been streamlined and refined, and if you've been keeping up with the series, you'll be impressed with its ease of use. Newcomers shouldn't have too many problems, either, but any game with this many options is bound to be a bit confusing at first. One notable improvement comes in the form subtraction. The comatose play calls of Pat Summerall have finally been retired (as has Pat), and the game has improved tenfold because of it. Color commentary still isn't that great: Al Michaels has some difficulties with enthusiasm and voice inflection and Madden can get extremely repetitious. But compared to what we had before, it's like angels singing.

None of the features would mean a thing if the game stumbled on the field, but the gameplay is the strongest part of the package. Nearly every problem that I've had with the *Madden* series over the years has been addressed. Sure, there will always be room for improvement in certain areas (clock management, play calling, individual players' AI), but we've finally reached the point where the adjustments that need to be made are at the fine-tuning level, not the "boy this sucks–they really need to rethink it" level. All of the players on the field take actions that are at least appropriate and are occasionally brilliant. And the coaches of the computer teams actually have a clue about what to do when the end of the half or the game is approaching.

Training Camp

One of the greatest additions to the game (whose exclusion in the past always irked me to no end) is the accelerated play clock. This simple change makes all the difference in the world when you're playing a game. Now, when you or the opposing team head to the line of scrimmage, the play clock will automatically run down to 15 seconds, with an appropriate amount of time being taken off the game clock. What this does is: a) result in the correct number of plays in a 60-minute game, b) force you to make quick decisions before the snap as far as reading the defense or calling an audible, and c) make the two-minute drill meaningful.

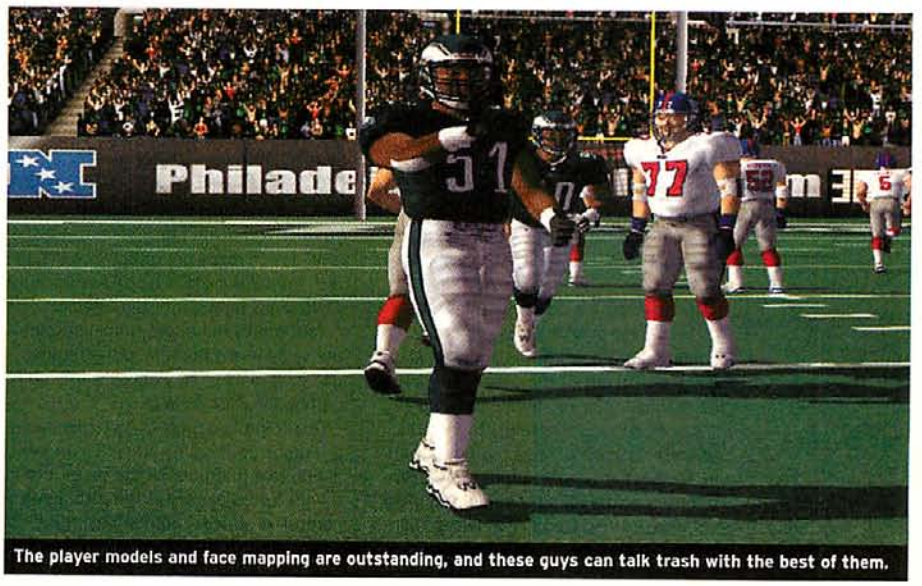
The play modes are phenomenal, too. The 30-year dynasty mode is masterfully executed and quite challenging, even for the sharpest of wannabe coaches and GMs. The online play is smoothly implemented and fully supported by EA Sports, with tournaments and online rankings so you can claim bragging rights. Perhaps the best–and most useful–mode of play is the minicamp. In this segment, you travel around the country and learn how to master the game and its plethora of control options. Your rewards, other than a set of enviable skills with the gamepad, are that you can then unlock relevant game situations based on the skill you've just mastered, and you can open up other camps that teach you even more advanced techniques. This is not only a great idea, but also one of the most fun parts of a game loaded with great experiences.

Madden NFL 2003 is one of the most thorough and impressive games I have seen in any genre. If you even think you might like to try a football game, I urge you to run out and get a copy. If you're the type that habitually buys *Madden* every year, you're in for a real treat.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This is what happens when EA actually tries: a football classic.

After more than a season's worth of contests, I'm still amazed by how sweet this game looks.



The player models and face mapping are outstanding, and these guys can talk trash with the best of them.

Aliens Versus Predator 2: Primal Hunt

A weak expansion pack to a great game By Jason Babler

PUBLISHER: Sierra Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Third Law
GENRE: First-person shooter URL: avp2.sierra.com
ESRB RATING: Mature; blood and gore, strong language, violence
PRICE: $19.99

REQUIREMENTS: *Aliens Versus Predator 2* RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet, LAN (2-16 players)

When *AVP2* came out last year, it burst through *CGW* and subsequently took home the awards for Best Action Game, Best Multiplayer Game, and Best Gaming Moment. *Primal Hunt* is going to take the Best Blueballs award for not delivering on what could have been a great expansion.

As with most expansions, there is a list of exciting features on the box: nine new single-player missions (three per species), four new multiplayer levels, a few new weapons, and two new creatures to fight. But it's not as fun as it sounds.

The weapons are a real letdown. As a corporate Human, you get a deployable remote sentry gun (true to the restored scenes from the *Aliens: Special Edition* DVD), but you get the gun only at the end of the Human level; even then, it's useless in the boss fight. You also get a turret gun, dual pistols, and an upgraded motion tracker, none of which are very impressive.

The Ancient Predator race is virtually indistinguishable from the Predator race in the original game. You get an energy flechette that sucks and the ability to self-destruct in multiplayer. Basically, there's nothing to write home about. You do get to play as the PredAlien, but the gimmick is superficial: you get the Predator's mandibles, which show up when you give head-bites, and being a face-hugger or chestburster allows you to break through vents.

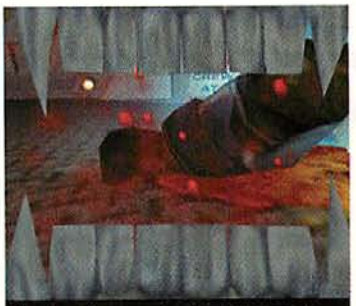
The new PredAlien isn't much different from a regular Alien—you just get a different-looking head-bite.

The Ancient Predator race is virtually indistinguishable from the regular Predator race in the original game.

Early into playing this expansion pack, I thought that the Aliens perhaps had improved AI. One gripe I had about the first game was that a horde of attacking Aliens tended to come at you in a straight line. But a thorough playing of the expansion showed that the Aliens have gotten even dumber. And the gameplay is a big disappointment. When I wasn't irate over the clipping and bounding problems, I was annoyed at being pulled out of the game experience by seeing Aliens suddenly spawning.

It seems like Sierra really rushed this to market. Some of the boss fights were incredibly hard, while others were over before my adrenaline even got pumping.

There's little difference between the character classes, and the two new creatures you fight are incredibly lame—but all this wouldn't be so horrible if the level design made up for it. It doesn't. In fact, *Primal Hunt* took a noticeable chunk of its levels right out of the original game. What's fun about running around the same levels that are in the regular game? It makes you wonder what you're getting for your 20 bucks.



You have to munch a lot of Human to grow up to be a big, strong drone.

Hug a Predator when he's around his buddies and they'll put him—and you—out of misery.

One thing I do have to give this game a thumbs-up for is its story. It's an interesting tale that puts all the races into a fight for an ancient artifact that can control, or at least hold at bay, the Aliens. The story, told from the perspective of the three races, spans a time period from 500 years in the past to the time frame in *AVP2*. Expect to see familiar Human characters from the original game. The expansion pack also resolves some lingering questions from the original game, but sadly *Primal Hunt*'s ending doesn't answer all the questions the game raises, leaving an opening for yet another expansion pack. Great.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

You're not getting much, even for an expansion pack.

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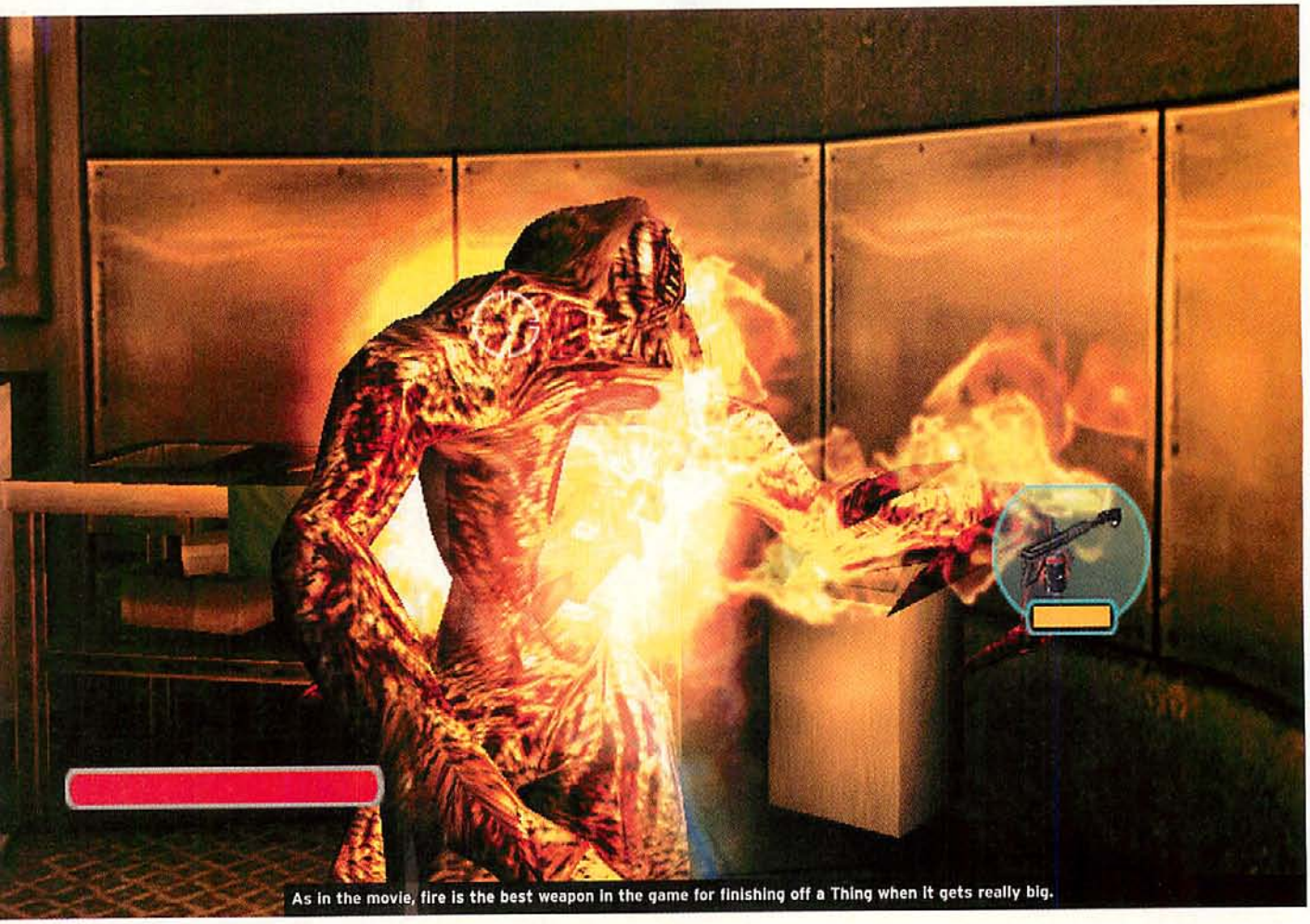

As in the movie, fire is the best weapon in the game for finishing off a Thing when it gets really big.

The Thing

Put it back in the ice—it's thawed out too early! By Thierry Nguyen

PUBLISHER: Universal Studios Interactive
DEVELOPER: Computer Artworks
GENRE: Action
URL: www.thethinggame.com
ESRB RATING: Mature; blood and gore, violence
PRICE: $49.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 600
MULTIPLAYER: None

Most game adaptations of movies are doomed to fail. What works as a passive experience on a big screen doesn't translate well into an interactive experience on a small screen. For every instance of a *Goldeneye* or *Aliens Versus Predator 2*, there are more abominations like *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza* and *E.T.* Right between these camps is *The Thing*. Positioning itself as a sequel of sorts (taking place two months after John Carpenter's 1982 movie), *The Thing* almost succeeds as a game but gets stopped short by some glaring mistakes.

Evolution of Fear

Computer Artworks' previous game, *Evolva*, was a solid effort at third-person action with squad management. *The Thing* evolves that style by adding the elements of trust and fear. Like the movie, the game is wrought with paranoia about who's infected with the Thing. You need to earn the trust of your squadmates (who are engineers, medics, and soldiers) by giving them weapons, performing a blood test on yourself, or killing manifestations of the Thing. Otherwise, your squadmates won't listen to you. You can always try to coerce them into following an order (point a gun to their head), but that significantly notches down their trust in you.

Because the Thing tends to manifest as a blood-spewing mishmash of body parts, it can spook even the most hardened soldiers. Whenever your squadmates encounter the Thing or walk into a room where it's splitting bodies open hither and thither, they'll start to freak out. At their most scared, they won't listen to orders, they'll start pissing their pants or vomiting, or they'll just blow their own heads off with guns. You can alleviate the soldiers' fear by giving them weapons, killing the nasty Thing beasts, or administering adrenaline shots.

On top of managing your buddies and their scarediness, you zip around the famous Antarctica base (some locations are straight from the movie, others are new), opening doors, killing Things, and figuring out what's going on. Some puzzles are straightforward—for example, a door needs fixing, so you need to find an engineer to repair it. Others are a bit more involved: what do you do when you find yourself trapped and weaponless (this tired action game cliché) with a big Thing roaming the hall next to you or when you encounter a trapped medic, an engineer who doesn't trust you, or a locked armory? Puzzle tasks may include using video cameras, reading computer logs, and using devices like furnaces and power generators on gibbering, gross Things.

I Can't See You

Unfortunately, *The Thing* is one of those

Anyone can be the Thing: some are scripted to be the Thing but some just fall victim to a glitch and become a Thing, even after being marked as infection free.

There are quite a few references to the movie in the beginning, including locations (like Blair's makeshift ship here) and computer logs that discuss characters and their fate.

Sometimes cameras help get you past certain obstacles or see the enemy's patrol pattern.

One of these sprawling beasts gets so big, you'll have to be in a vehicle to fight it.

Cut-scenes are all rendered in-engine.

Certain people must be scripted to become Things no matter what, to support the premise that "even your team members can become goretastic tentacled manbeasts."

games that has a great concept but is filled with crippling annoyances that drag down the entire experience. For example, you can't look up or down in third person, and you can't move in first person–forgivable in *Metal Gear Solid*, which was focused on stealth and careful aim, but not for a game in which you're surrounded by severed heads sprouting legs. After games like *GTA III* and even old-school *Tomb Raider* allowed free-looking in third-person perspective, the lack of a Z-axis feels particularly limiting.

Because this is a console port, it uses a save-point system that requires you to find data recorders scattered around the levels. I didn't mind the lack of save-anywhere, but the placement of the save-points could use some work: it was frustrating to fight the first big boss and then not find another recorder until significantly further into the next mission. To top it off, whenever you die, you get the option to either restart the level or go to the main menu. Couldn't someone slap on a Load Game button instead of making me go back to the menu to load?

The Thing virus itself is inconsistent in the gameplay. I understand that early on certain people must be scripted to become Things no matter what, in order to support the premise that "even your team members can become goretastic tentacled manbeasts." But still, late in the game, I could perform a blood test, get a "he's human!" result, and a minute later see my buddy become another blood-spewing flesh pile. Also, teammates would disappear inexplicably: three characters enter an elevator with me, the door closes, the next level loads, and–poof–now there are only two.

The Thing is a competent survival horror game, with hooks that could have made it better and programming errors that bring it down. I did, in the end, enjoy playing the game despite its annoyances. If you can stomach the multitude of little errors, the game is a fun horror ride, and it serves as a plausible follow-up to the events in the movie. Survival horror fans who don't mind the glitches and console carry-overs will probably enjoy this game. For everyone else, *The Thing* will feel like a game that got thawed out a little too early.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

This is a great game concept that's perfectly in tune with the movie, but you'll get bogged down by glitches and annoyances.

Celtic Kings: Rage of War

The stuff of legends **By Raphael Liberatore**

PUBLISHER: **Strategy First** DEVELOPER: **Haemimont Games** GENRE: **Real-time strategy** URL: **www.strategyfirst.com** ESRB RATING: **Mature; blood and gore, violence** PRICE: **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **None** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet, LAN (2-8 players)**

War dominated ancient Gaul, a place where Celts, Teutons, and other Gallic tribes constantly battled in the age-old struggle for more land. Welcome to *Celtic Kings*, where only the bravest and most heroic warriors, counseled by the mysterious druids, can carve out a piece of ancient Gaul through hard combat and successful resource management.

Celtic Kings offers gamers two well-designed single-player games. Both versions provide an RPG element similar to *Warlords Battlecry II* and *WarCraft III*, in which levels are gained through combat, quest completion, and the acquisition of magical items. The more levels your heroes gain, the more effectively they and the troops under them will fight when in battle.

The adventure game is a finely scripted story filled with historical intrigue and battle. As in the movie *Braveheart*, the hero in *Celtic Kings* is out to destroy invaders who are hell-bent on oppressing his people. Backed by the Celtic goddess Cathobodua and following the will of the druids, your hero, Larax, pursues the Teutons through vast kingdoms, ancient ruins, and druid shrines. As he beats back the Teuton invaders across a huge map, Larax joins forces with an eclectic cast of characters that includes spellcasting druids, Viking heroes, and cunning village chiefs. In the end, the alliances formed from mission to mission unite Gaul in victory.

Stonehenge for sale. Druids play an important role in *Celtic Kings*, offering wisdom and artifacts. Your hero will come across many sanctuaries like this one, where druids can perform a number of useful incantations to bolster your hero's heroics.

You can configure computer opponents for defensive, chaotic, or aggressive playing styles.

Whereas the adventure game is scripted, you can play the single-player game against up to seven computer opponents in a variety of settings, configurations, and victory conditions. Owing to the game's depth, you can configure computer opponents for defensive, chaotic, or aggressive styles of play with varying degrees of difficulty. Additionally, you can select an island map and provide your opponents with various artifacts for added fighting prowess. You can choose to play either fierce Gauls or efficient Romans, each with unique unit types and buildings that define your strategy.

The village hall is your central holding area, where you gather resources and feed and quarter your troops. The capture of an enemy village hall gains you control of that village.

Hail, Maximus! Heroes are the most vital unit in *Celtic Kings*, and the arena is the place to hire them to lead your armies.

Celtic Kings is different from other resource strategy games because it eliminates the need to build structures. The single-player game starts with one stronghold containing a village hall, blacksmith shop, arena, barracks, tavern, and druid house. Food is essential for feeding troops and peasant workers, and gold is required to strengthen your army with unit upgrades from a simple tech tree. Food is produced in villages, while gold is generated in strongholds and outposts. Establishing trade routes to neighboring villages in order to gain more resources may dictate additional strategy. Such trade routes can also help you balance the population density of your villages, as overpopulation can lead to starvation.

Haemimont Games did a decent job with graphics resolution; the details are better than those in most other RTS games I've seen. The map editor is a bonus, allowing you to create your own missions and maps.

Celtic Kings is a deft blend of combat, resource management, and role playing against the backdrop of ancient Gaul. So, paint yourself up like a Celtic warrior, grab your sword, and join the fray.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A fine blend of strategy, combat, and role playing, *Celtic Kings* is a game even legendary Gallic hero Finn Mac Cool would find a worthy challenge.

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MC's arcade appearance and action make you feel as if you should be popping quarters into a slot while playing.

MoonBase Commander

Matinee sci-fi warfare for the kiddies **By John Fletcher**

PUBLISHER: **Infogrames Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **Humongous Entertainment**
GENRE: **Sci-fi strategy** URL: **www.us.infogrames.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$19.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 233, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **None**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, TCP/IP (2-4 players)**

MoonBase Commander is a kids' game. Adults might find it simplistic, repetitious, and boring, but it's possible that younger kids might find it accessible, challenging, and addictive.

MC is an attempt to bring children into the strategy game genre. Essentially it's an arcade game with some light RTS elements—teach the kids how to allocate resource points while never really making them think. Each mission starts the player with a single hub pod and orders to either destroy the enemy or beat them to a geographic location. All the factions in the game have the same units, which differ only slightly in appearance and color. Your movement options are to launch either buildings to expand your reach or bombs to destroy enemy units. Each unit on the menu of launch options costs 1, 3, or 7 points, which are deducted from a total generated at the beginning of every round.

As in any arcade game, the levels get progressively harder with the addition of challenges like wind speed, multiple enemies, and time limits. The game plays very smoothly, and for a few minutes it's mildly amusing to gauge your launches against the wind and terrain. But turn off the voice-over immediately, as the voice talent in *MC* is unrelentingly irritating.

Simplicity permeates every aspect of *MoonBase Commander*. It takes about five minutes to figure out, and everything from the scenario objectives to the map editor are as basic as they come. This is not necessarily a bad thing—an *MC* mission can make a nice cool-down from an evening of more intense gaming. On the other hand, with no bells or whistles of any sort, the game is exceedingly bland. More than once I had to remind myself that I was getting paid to play it. Without that incentive, *MC* would be seeing about as much action on my computer as *Minesweeper*.

MC is one of those quiet little games that won't sell much and seems to serve mainly as a résumé builder for the project's participants. It's solid but unremarkable and will soon be one of those titles in the $7.99 bargain bins. Still, it does what it does well and is a good choice for parents who don't mind if Junior indulges in some cartoon-style explosions that at least don't expose him to the immorality of games that reward carjackings and thrill kills.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

There's nothing terribly wrong or right with *MoonBase Commander*, but odds are the kids it's targeting are already playing better games.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

Soldier of Fortune II

By Thomas L. McDonald

I'm comforted by the fact that Raven put only 16 "dismemberment zones" in *Soldier of Fortune II*, because, as we all know, 17 dismemberment zones would have been just sick. *SOF II* is sadistic in the purest sense: a mixture of casual cruelty and unrelenting repetition, much like the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Its only saving grace is a multiplayer mode that would kick much more ass if it had more than three decent maps. (Those are, however, some mighty fine CTF maps.)

Version 1.01 slightly ameliorates

that situation by adding four new multiplayer maps, though these are also of variable quality.

Multiplayer seems to have gotten the most attention in 1.01, with the addition of a new Demolition mode and a weapon called the MP5SD. The MP5 is a remarkably useless weapon, and its inclusion adds nothing to the game but an incredibly irritating sound effect akin to BBs falling on a tin roof—in stereo! The Raven team tended to a variety of multiplayer problems—among them exploit holes, buffer overruns, a leaning bug, and various server management problems—making for a smoother online experience. They also cleaned up single-player mode a bit, so various mission errors including spontaneous death and a level that never ends are now fixed. The incredibly irritating NPCs Who Can See Through Tall Grass have had their X-ray vision removed, and stun grenades now have more of an effect on NPCs. Overall, the 1.01 patch offers some very-needed improvements.

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Barbarians at the gates? Not quite—more like holding back the Mongol dribbles.

Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom

Eastward, ho! By Tom Chick

PUBLISHER: Sierra
DEVELOPER: Impressions Software GENRE: Strategy
URL: www.sierra.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: $39.99

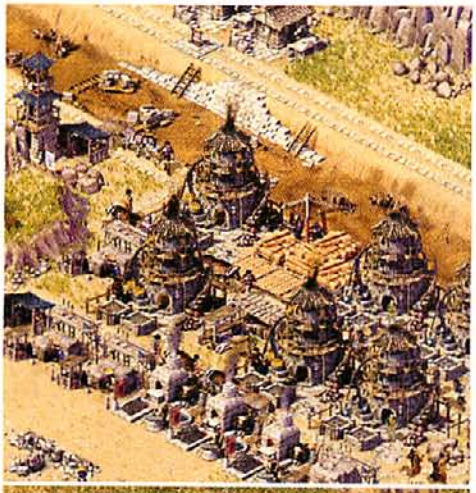
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 900MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet, direct connect (2-8 players)

After casting about for other ancient civilizations, Impressions has taken its city-building series to China, where it achieves a delicate balance of the familiar and the exotic. The familiar is the same old game system they've been honing since Caesar started it all 10 years ago: lay out your roads, set up your industries, and watch it all bustle. The exotic is the new setting, with colorful architecture, clattering rickshaws, Buddha statues, cherry blossom trees, and the occasional shrill strain of Asian pipe music.

One of the enduring problems in this series has been getting those friggin' walkers (who deliver the goods your city needs) to go where they're needed. *Emperor* finally solves the problem by letting you build walls to divide your city into discrete districts. You have control at every gate over who can pass, which makes it much easier to control who's walking where. This means your safety inspectors won't be wandering around on the south side while the northern half of your city burns to the ground. Also new is the ability to plant different crops at each farm, a flexible irrigation system, and three distinct climates. These factors give *Emperor* a nifty Sim-farm vibe. Because *Emperor* covers a longer period of history than did the previous games, you'll find a lot more variety among the industries and commerce types as you play in different eras of Chinese history.

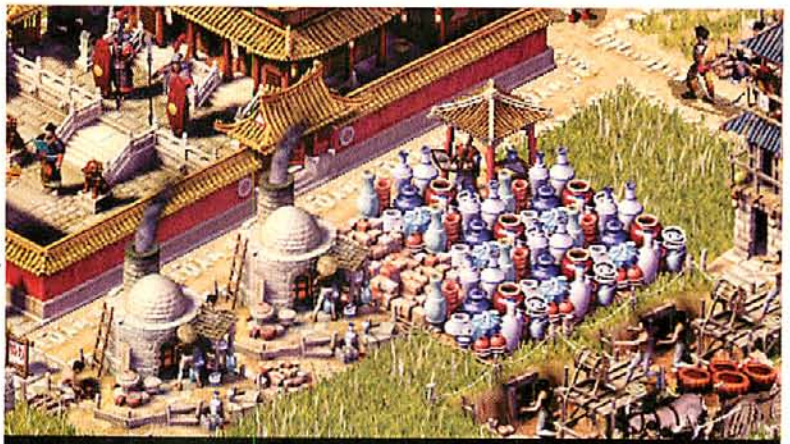
The combat system is still coarse and chaotic, driven by a dumb and easy-to-beat AI. Naval combat has been removed in favor of more types of land units, including siege engines for attacking city defenses. The new religious system is a step backward from the previous games, mainly offering the micro-managerial hassle of appeasing a bunch of whiny heroes with periodic gifts. The convoluted Chinese zodiac element doesn't add much to the game. There's also an obscure feng shui scheme by which certain

The core of the game is as satisfying as it ever was.



The Chinese New Year celebration here is indicative of the inspired art and animation direction that bring lots of life and color to the game.

Much of the satisfaction in the game is to be found in starting and completing big projects like the Grand Canal.



Fine ceramic wares waiting for export: trade is still a big part of this sort of game.

buildings in certain places make for a more harmonious, and therefore healthy, city. Good luck figuring out how this ancient Chinese secret is supposed to work.

Although the Chinese setting is largely a skin job, it's an effective one. The developers at Breakaway did a superb job overhauling the artwork and animation. For instance, you'd expect fishermen to be guys in coolie hats sitting in boats. Instead, you see an animation of fishermen using tethered birds of prey to catch their fish. You get New Year's parades, elaborate pagodas, tigers and pandas in bamboo forests, and exotic rock formations. You're trading bags of rice, spools of silk, and bronze, ceramic, and lacquer vessels. Herbalists and acupuncturists roam the streets making house calls. A man in a silk robe carries a banner announcing performing acrobats in the marketplace.

Underneath this veneer, the core of the game is as satisfying as it ever was. You can choose from among several campaigns that take you through relatively short and focused scenarios as well as epic multihour sessions, all driven by specific goals. There are also open-ended games, a random map generator, and new multiplayer support (see sidebar). But no matter how you play them, Impressions' city-building games are like houses of cards. When they work, you get a grand, delicate, elaborate structure. When they collapse, it's a spectacular failure. Along the way, you're treated to the aesthetic appeal of seeing the city you designed swarm with activity. *Emperor* offers up the delight of *RollerCoaster Tycoon* with a historical bent and a sharp, colorful Asian edge.

MAKING MULTIPLAYER WORK

A multiplayer city-building game? How does that work? Anyone who tried *SimCity 2000 Network Edition* knows how it doesn't work: everyone trying to build the same city, hashing out the details of garbage collection and police coverage...*SimCityCouncilMeeting*. *Emperor* takes a different approach, giving each player a city with which to race to accomplish the scenario goals. In cooperative scenarios, cities team up to win. The goals tend to keep playing time to less than two hours, although you can save longer games and resume them later.

Cities are connected on an empire map that allows espionage, conquest, and trade. Unfortunately, espionage and conquest don't work very well in multiplayer games. Spies have only minor effects and the AI is completely ineffective at using your armies when you attack. But trading activities in multiplayer games breathe new life into the genre. In the Eight Kingdoms multiplayer scenario, for instance, each city has something every other city wants. Some scenarios have menagerie victory conditions, which means you'll have to stock your palace zoo by exchanging local animals with other cities. "I have a panda bear from Chengdu, a pheasant from Jianking, and a crocodile from Guangzhou. If I can just get a wild pig from Luoyang, I'll be all set." When you have to deal with human players for this, the nuances of personal interaction add an intriguing new angle to city building.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Without the problems that took away from earlier Impressions city builders, *Emperor* delivers solid, familiar gameplay in an exotic setting.

Airborne Assault: Red Devils Over Arnhem

I was only following orders **By Bruce Geryk**

PUBLISHER: **Battlefront.com**
DEVELOPER: **Panther Games**
GENRE: **Company-level wargame**
URL: **www.battlefront.com**
ESRB RATING: **Not rated**
PRICE: **$47.00**

REQUIREMENTS: **Celeron 366, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Celeron 500, 128MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet, LAN (2 players)**

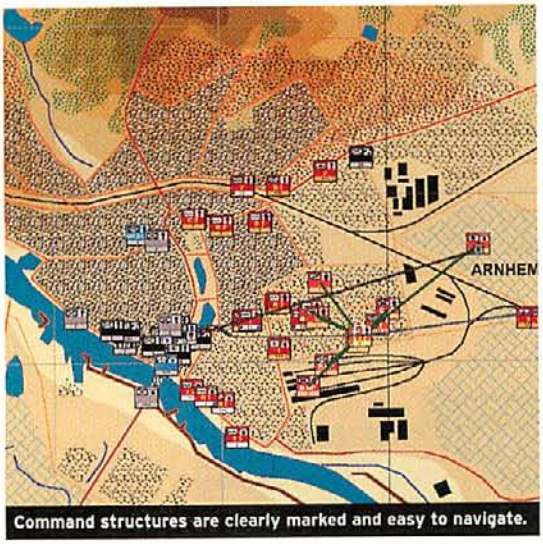
Innovation in operational wargaming has been a long time coming. While the idea of resolving simultaneous, real-time orders on a hex-free battlefield made its appearance in Chris Crawford's *Patton Versus Rommel* 16 years ago, newcomer Panther Games takes it much further in *Airborne Assault*. This sound concept shows off the strengths of the PC as a wargame platform while also exposing its weaknesses.

Airborne Assault is a company-level simulation of the 1944 Market Garden operation to seize the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem. It doesn't simulate all of Market Garden, focusing only on the British 1st Parachute Division and its heroic battle (immortalized in the film *A Bridge Too Far*), and thus mostly leaves out the American airborne forces and the land-based thrust to link up with the bridgehead. It's a good design decision: while the epic feel of this massive operation is lost, the narrowed scope keeps the player from being buried in command decisions, which is what this game is all about.

The close-quarters nature of urban combat comes through well at the highest zoom.

The game's genius is that it forces you to focus on the command structure as a basis for strategy in a way no wargame has done so far.

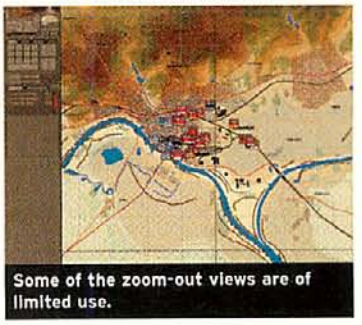
The game's genius is that it forces you to focus on the command structure as a basis for strategy in a way no wargame has done so far. In a move worthy of the Prussians, the designers have made it possible to scroll through an entire command structure simply with the arrow keys. Want to know which unit directly commands the one you have selected? Hit the Up key. This ability is important, because giving orders to formations, not individual units, is often the key to success.



Command structures are clearly marked and easy to navigate.

The game plays out in real time, although the pacing suffers somewhat from the need to constantly hit the Pause button in order to examine the battlefield. This is where the focus on the Arnhem bridge really proves valuable; if you were constantly forced to scroll up and down Hell's Highway to adjust your orders, the tedium level would skyrocket. With most of the action north of the Rhine, the battlefield is manageable.

Good AI in *Airborne Assault* manifests itself not only in good countermoves by the enemy, but in intelligent maneuvers by your own forces in response to the disposition of their headquarters. Ordering a battalion to attack and then defend a certain area results in a comprehensive reorientation of your units, with artillery redeploying to the least-threatened area of your perimeter and other units coordinating appropriately. It's truly transparent command. You can always give specific orders to every individual unit, but that is often not the best way to play.



Some of the zoom-out views are of limited use.

Airborne Assault isn't a command simulator, because at any time you can click on any unit you want and give it orders, and the only delay is the time it takes the unit to reorganize and implement those orders. You can always see all of your units as well. At the real Arnhem bridge, the overall commander often had little idea of what was happening. That wouldn't make for a very interesting game, though.

Airborne Assault plays very differently from most computer wargames, but for the most part, its design comes up aces.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

A polished, conceptually sound approach to wargaming that still has a few problems to solve.

Austerlitz: Napoleon's Greatest Victory

Probably more fun than old Nappy had himself **By Bruce Geryk**

Austerlitz was a large battle, and giving orders to entire brigades at once is often necessary.

PUBLISHER: **Shrapnel Games**
DEVELOPER: **Breakaway Games** GENRE: **Real-time wargame** URL: **www.shrapnelgames.com**
ESRB RATING: **Not rated**
PRICE: **$44.95 plus shipping**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Internet, LAN (2-8 players)**

There is something to be said for perseverance. Breakaway Games has now developed three games (*Antietam, Waterloo,* and *Austerlitz*) based on the *Sid Meier's Gettysburg* engine, and after a bit of a false start at applying the system to the Napoleonic era, Breakaway has finally hit on the right formula.

A real-time wargame that covers huge battles like Waterloo and Austerlitz necessarily involves lots of troops. Whereas the game of *Waterloo* left you with nothing but an overused Pause button, *Austerlitz* lets you turn units over to AI control; now while you're busy commanding a crucial flanking maneuver, you don't have to worry that your covering force is just twiddling its thumbs. The AI is certainly no Napoleon (or even Davout), but it's a welcome feature. And the game is now finally stable in multiplayer with more than one player per side, allowing you to fight as many as four against four. Cooperative *Austerlitz* is one of the best pure wargaming experiences that can be had.

Unlike in the American Civil War, cavalry fought on horseback in the Napoleonic wars. It makes for a much more interesting battlefield.

After you've worked out the command and control scheme, you'll see how well the *Gettysburg* engine adapts to Napoleonic warfare. In fact, it's arguably better suited to this than to the American Civil War, as the various unit formations that characterize Napoleonic warfare (square, line, road column, maneuver column, double line) add a lot of strategic depth, as does the focus on cavalry. With the new AI and multiplayer features, *Austerlitz* finally does justice to what was a revolutionary game system. Sid Meier should be proud.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

This sequel to *Waterloo* learned from that game's mistakes.

Strategic Command: European Theater

Around the war in a day **By Bruce Geryk**

PUBLISHER: **Battlefront.com**
DEVELOPER: **Fury Software**
GENRE: **Strategic-level wargame**
URL: **www.battlefront.com**
ESRB RATING: **Not rated**
PRICE: **$32.00**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 50MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **Hotseat, PBEM (2 players)**

Panzers in Russia, wolfpacks in the Atlantic, and massive bomber fleets do capture the imagination, allowing games with simple mechanics, like *Strategic Command,* to be interesting as long as they are clever about how they make these elements stand out. Here, they're not well integrated into the design and thus have little effect on gameplay.

Play is stereotyped from game to game. For instance, you'll never have a reason to build subs to strangle Britain economically; they aren't cost effective and are sunk too easily. Some of the research options are interesting, but the need to maintain a large army means you'll likely have to concentrate on the same support technologies each time.

Your tactical choices are equally limited. Although you can invade Spain to take Gibraltar and get the Italian fleet into the Atlantic to support an invasion of England, it makes no sense. If you insist on it anyway, the Soviets will hand you your ass. The game appears balanced against the Axis to make it challenging against the poor AI, so playing as the Allies is out of the question, as is multiplayer with a competent Allied opponent.

Fortunately, the game comes with a powerful and easy-to-use campaign editor, so you can fix some of the flaws in the standard game or just create your own scenarios. You can't change any of the basic game mechanics, though, so you're stuck with the problematic strategic warfare model, unwieldy naval combat, and weird economics. It's an addictive little game for a while, but after you've beaten it a few times, you won't go back.

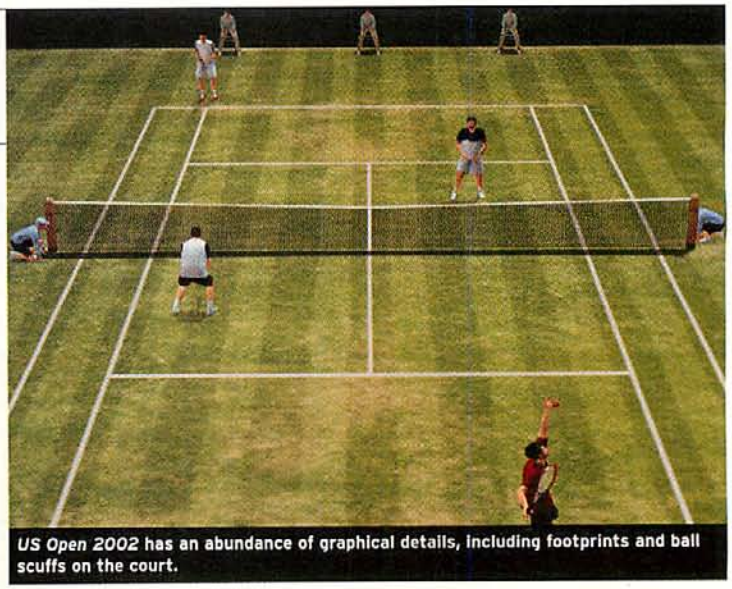
The struggle with the Soviet Union is the focal point of every game, no matter how you play.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

***Strategic Command: European Theater* is fun for a little while, but that's it.**

US Open 2002

Game, set, and match By Tom Price



US Open 2002 has an abundance of graphical details, including footprints and ball scuffs on the court.

PUBLISHER: Strategy First
DEVELOPER: Carapace
GENRE: Sports
URL: www.strategyfirst.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: $29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN (2-4 players)

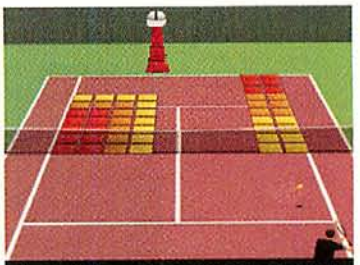
I don't want to bemoan the fact that there are few good sports titles for gamers of the PC persuasion. Sure, there's not a lot of competition, but the games we do have for each major sport are pretty damn good. *Madden*, *High Heat*, *FIFA*, *Links*—these are excellent games that we're lucky to have. But until now, we didn't have a really good tennis game. Yeah I know, I've been crying myself to sleep at night, too.

But seriously, even if you're not the biggest tennis fan in the world, if you think clay is something you played with in arts and crafts class, if you think Venus Williams is some hip-hop diva, if you think...well, you get what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that *US Open 2002* is a fantastic game that blends arcadelike, reflex-heavy action with genuine sports fundamentals that should please just about any gamer.

Before I tell you what's so great about *US Open 2002*, let me start with what's not so great. First, although it's a licensed USTA product, there aren't enough well-known players in the game. No Williams sisters, no Anna Kournikova, no Sampras, no Agassi—OK, maybe some of my tennis references are a little out of date, but Tim Henman just doesn't excite me all that much. The other fault I find is with the AI in the easy mode. It's just plain dumb, letting you set it up for the same exact kill shot every time. Plus, the AI never hits a ball out of bounds or faults on the net. Ever. Dial up the difficulty however, and you get a reasonable semblance of playing against a real live person.

That said, everything else about *US Open* is pretty much perfect. The game looks fantastic, especially with anti-aliasing turned on. Ball physics are well modeled and are affected by the different court surfaces. Control seemed sluggish at first, but then I realized that the game was actually taking the time to model real footwork instead of just letting players turn on a dime and run full speed in any direction (ahem, *Madden*?). The noises of the crowd are played dynamically, so that you get polite applause for early scores and oohs and ahhs for dramatic shots or match points.

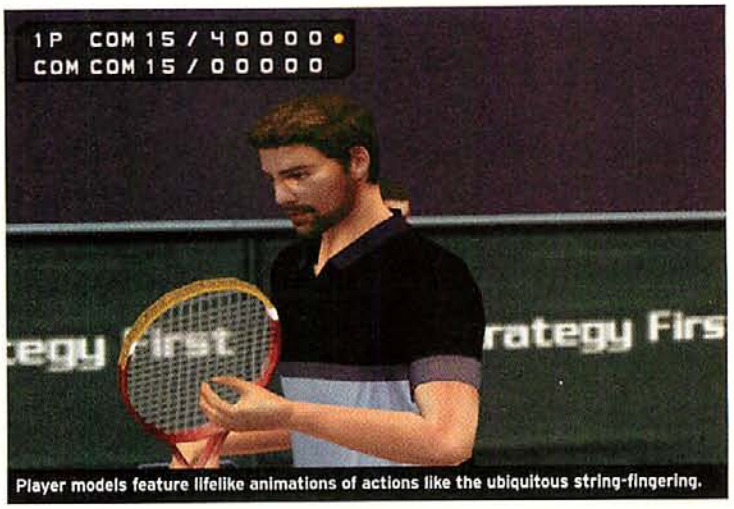
Even more than Anna Kournikova, *US Open 2002* makes me more interested in tennis.



The training modes cover almost every aspect of your game and reward you for hitting specific spots on the court.

Game modes include a pretty standard career mode that takes you through four tournaments: the U.S. Open, of course, as well as facsimiles of the French and Australian Opens and Wimbledon (all, except for the U.S. Open, referred to as Classics). Each tournament is divided into separate singles, doubles, and mixed doubles play for added gameplay. In career mode, there is an extensive set of training modules that let you practice your serves, volleys, and smashes. In addition to career mode, there are also arcade, challenge, and other modes. All of these are well done and give players plenty of time to brush up their game before embarking on a career.

I'm really not the world's biggest tennis fan, but this game has succeeded in the one test that any sports game should have to pass: Even more than Anna Kournikova, *US Open 2002* makes me more interested in tennis.

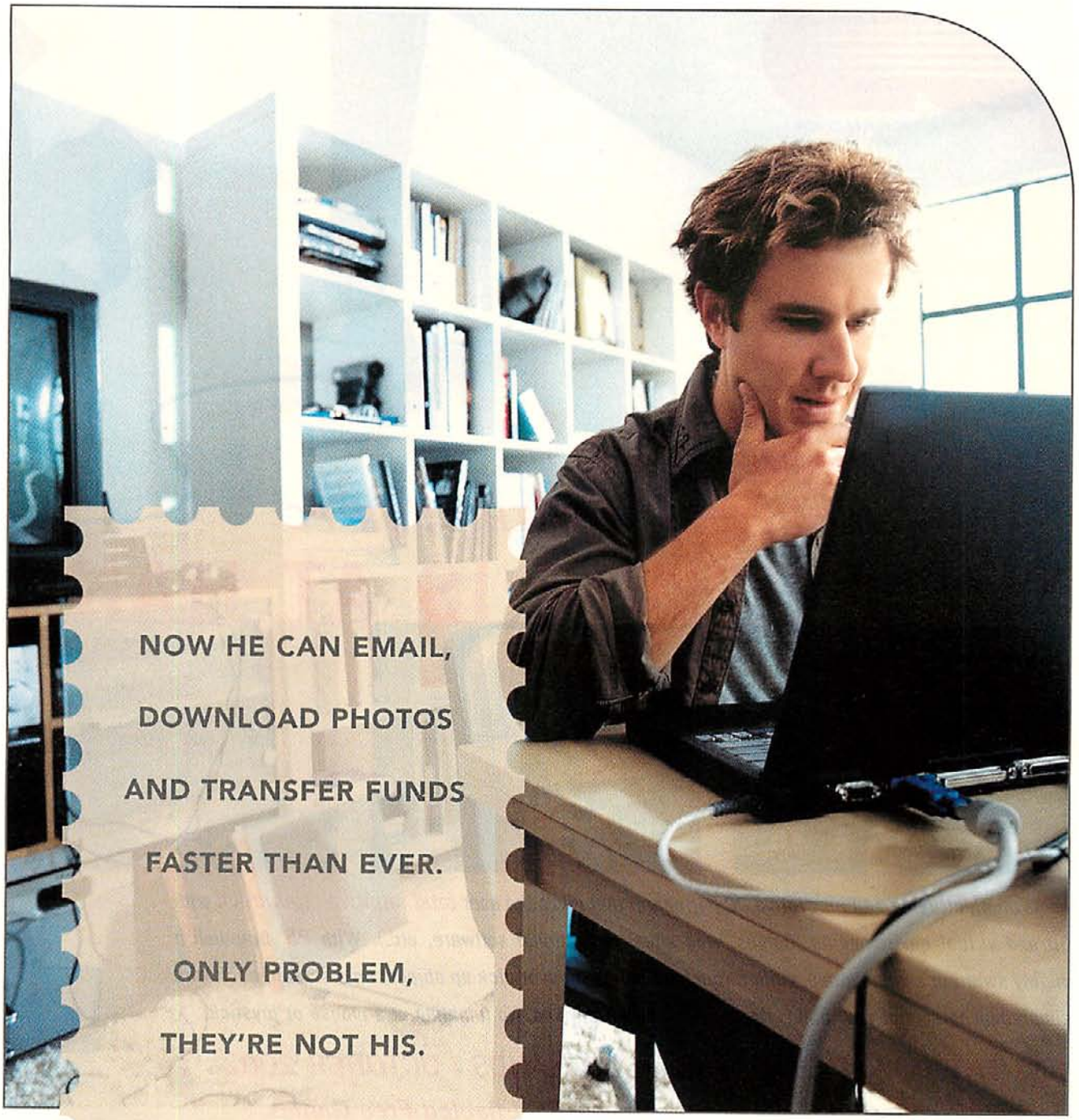


Player models feature lifelike animations of actions like the ubiquitous string-fingering.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Hard to find fault with this fine tennis sim.

NETWORK ASSOCIATES



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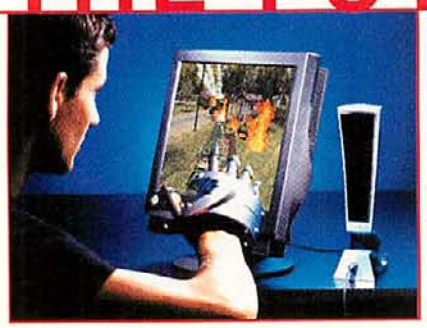

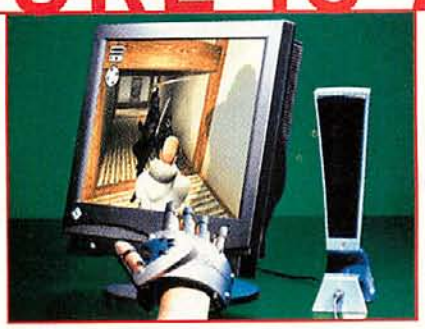

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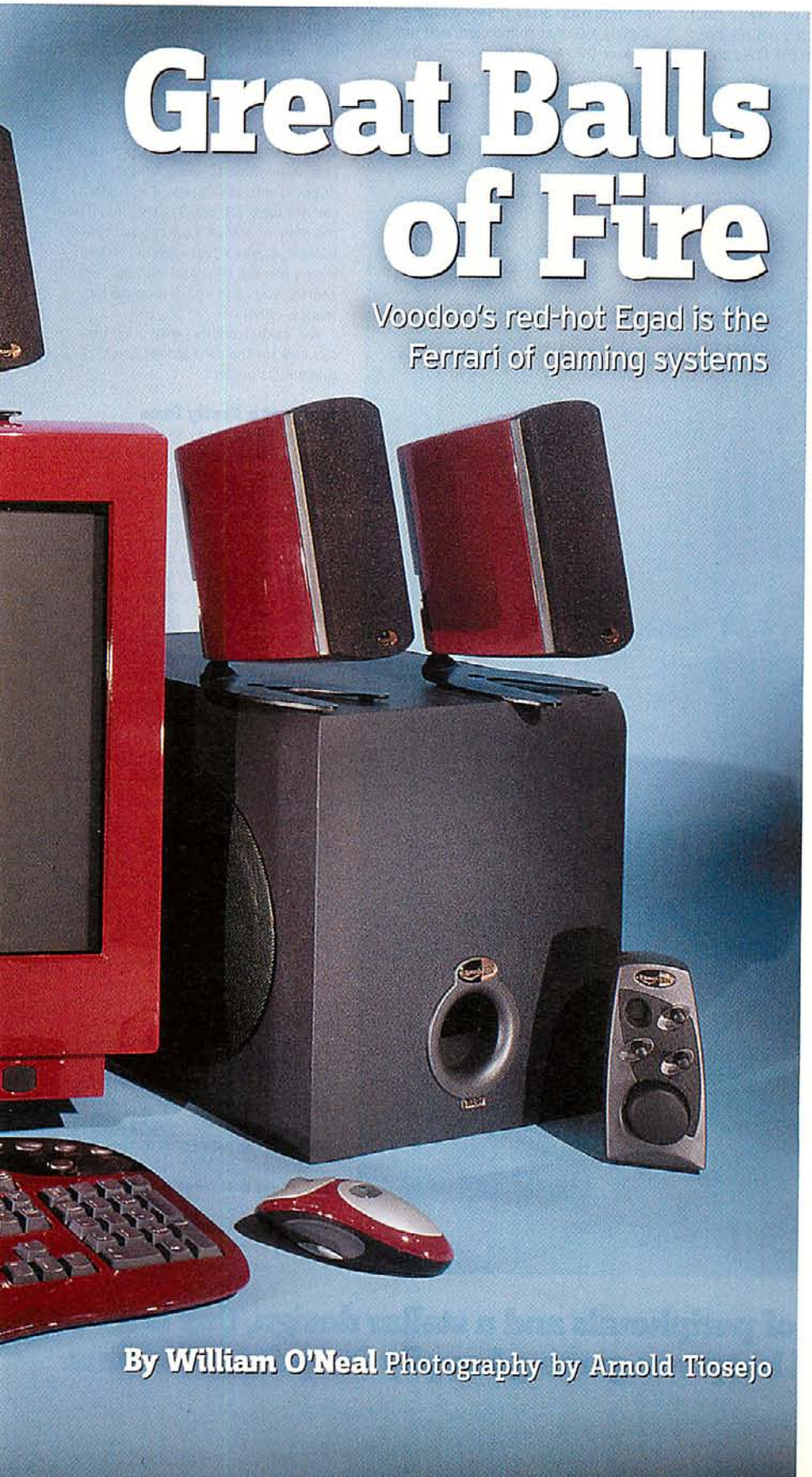
Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money **Edited by William O'Neal**

Great Balls of Fire

Voodoo's red-hot Egad is the Ferrari of gaming systems



By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

Some people drive Hondas, and some people drive Ferraris. That's the shortest way I know to put this. Some people just drive from point A to point B, and they don't need 400 horses, twin turbochargers, and rock-hard suspension to get there. But there are always those who demand performance. Not just a barn-burner masquerading as a sedan, but a high-performance beast that looks like it was dipped in candy-apple-red lacquer and coated with 20 layers of polyurethane, a streaking fireball that leaves the cops wondering what they saw. If computers were cars, this system would be that beast.

If you want performance, you have to be willing to pay through the nose for it. For the price of the Voodoo Egad E710 ($5,293), you could get two pretty stout systems. But you wouldn't get the premium components that the Egad boasts: a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, two 80GB Western Digital hard drives in a 160GB Promise RAID array, a Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer sound card, and the Plextor DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive.

The kicker is that this Voodoo machine features ATI's new 128MB Radeon 9700. The much-ballyhooed graphics processor is the hottest thing on the market right now, with performance that trounces that of the former king, the GeForce4 4600.

As a natural skeptic, I went looking for reasons to ding this machine. But you can't knock its looks: the guys at Voodoo know how to make machines that, in addition to being superfast, are dripping with sex appeal. The custom-car-like paint job ensures that you'll be the envy of any LAN party you bring it to. Hell, a geek could even get a date with a box like this. And, as you'll see shortly, you can't knock it on performance, either.

Yes, aside from its hefty price tag ($3,499 for the CPU alone), this machine is perfect.

Not Just a Pretty Face

The Egad may have come with a load of hardware that means business, but never mind that for a moment: the talents of the Radeon 9700 cannot be overstated. My initial tests comparing this card to VisionTek's 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600 on a similarly configured system had it beating the VisionTek by nearly 25 percent in 3DGameGauge 3.0 at 1024x768x32 with 4x full-screen antialiasing enabled. (Watch this space for a full comparison next month.)

I tested the Egad using Extremetech.com's 3DGameGauge 3.0, *Quake III: Arena*, and 3DMark2001 SE Pro. 3DGameGauge 3.0 compiles frame rates from a plethora of games, including *Comanche 4, Serious Sam: The Second Encounter, Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, Dungeon Siege, IL-2 Sturmovik, NASCAR 2002, NHL 2002,* and *Unreal Tournament 2003.* Most impressive was the Egad's 3DMark2001 SE Pro performance. At 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off, it scored an incredible 15816. Not satisfied, I turned on 4x FSAA and, at the same resolution, the Egad scored 11449. Having failed to make this machine break a sweat, I cranked the resolution to 1600x1200x32 and still had FSAA turned on. Amazingly, the machine still scored 6494.

These are the kind of 3DMark2001 SE Pro numbers that the original GeForce3 cards were getting at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off! In other words, with a machine of this caliber, it's possible to play games at superhigh resolutions with 4x FSAA turned on and the textures cranked all the way up.

Tests with individual games, too,

With a kick-ass list of peripherals and a stellar design, this is a solid beast that will keep you gaming happily for quite some time.

showed that this machine is a brute. The antiquated *Quake III: Arena* smoked at 1600x1200x32 with all the textures and 4x FSAA turned on, reaching frame rates of 91 fps. In other tests, including *Serious Sam: TSE* and *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*, the Egad didn't show dramatic performance improvements over the comparison machine running a GeForce4 Ti 4600 card at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. But when I turned FSAA on and cranked up the resolutions, the Egad still flew and the performance of the GeForce4 Ti 4600-based machine fell off.

Voodoo's Egad is one of the most incredible machines that I've tested. With a kick-ass set of peripherals and a stellar design, this machine will keep you happily gaming for quite some time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It might take an inheritance to afford it, but this is one of the most awesome machines ever to land at *CGW*.

By the Numbers

	VOODOO EGAD E710	ABS DIABLO X5
Manufacturer	Voodoo PC	ABS
Price	$5,293	$2,794
Operating System	Windows XP Home	Windows XP Professional
Processor (CPU)	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 w/ 533MHz FSB	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 w/ 533MHz FSB
Motherboard	ASUS P4T533-C	ASUS P4T533-C
Case	Tifosi E710 chassis	Custom case
Memory	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM
Hard Drive	Dual 80GB Western Digital drives in RAID array	Dual 80GB Maxtor MX6L080L drives in RAID array
Graphics Processor	ATI 128MB Radeon 9700 (R300)	ASUS 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer
DVD-ROM Drive	Plextor DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive (20/10/40-12A)	16X DVD-ROM drive
CD-RW Drive	N/A	40/12/40 CD-RW drive
Monitor	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ 22"	NEC MultiSync FE991SB 19"
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1
Keyboard	Logitech Cordless Desktop keyboard and mouse	Multimedia keyboard
Mouse	Logitech Cordless Desktop keyboard and mouse	USB mouse
Miscellany	USB 2.0; IEEE 1394; SmartMedia and SD slots	USB 2.0, IEEE 1394
BENCHMARKS		
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; no FSAA, no *NASCAR 2002*)	78.0	62.1
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA, no *NASCAR 2002*)	55.9	25.7
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	81.2	92.3
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	67.1	61.6
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	15816	13393
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	11449	6713
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	11131	8400
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	6494	2443
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	289	247
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	206	114
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	162	113
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	91	43
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	109	102
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	88	52
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	146	135
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	146	102

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ABS Diablo X5

Ain't no doubt, this rig is built to par-tay! By William O'Neal

MANUFACTURER: ABS
URL: www.buyabs.com
PRICE: $2,794

If machines from outfits like Voodoo PC, Falcon Northwest, and Alienware are the Ferraris of gaming machines, then ABS rigs are more like Mustang Cobras. They might not be as sexy as machines built by the other boutiques, but they are plenty fast and cost less.

Now, with the Diablo X5, ABS is trying to add a little spice to an already technologically sweet package.

The Diablo X5 that ABS sent us boasts just what you'd expect from a top-notch machine: a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor, an ASUS P4T533-C motherboard, 512MB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, 160GB of storage in the form of twin 80GB Maxtor hard drives in a RAID array, a Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer sound card, and a GeForce4 Ti 4600. What makes the Diablo X5 special is that for $2,794 you get all this plus Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers and a 19-inch NEC MultiSync monitor.

Although the Diablo X5 wasn't as fast as the Voodoo Egad that we also tested this month (see page 134), 99 percent of gamers would be more than pleased to play on this rig. It scored an incredible 13393 in 3DMark2001 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with full-screen antialiasing turned off and 6713 with 4x FSAA turned on. The Diablo X5 even beat the Voodoo at *Comanche 4* at 1024x768x32 with no FSAA, scoring 57 fps to the Voodoo's 55. But once we turned FSAA on or cranked up the resolution, the Voodoo Egad quickly surpassed the ABS.

The Diablo X5 ships with a list of components that are all class, although the excessive lights and faux brass fittings made it look a little cheesy. Also, the inclusion of that bizarre one-click mouse makes no sense for gamers. I'd order the Diablo X5 with a Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0 instead.

Had ABS's Diablo come equipped with an ATI Radeon 9700 Pro like the Voodoo, it might have been able to match the Voodoo in performance, and by the time you read this, Radeon 9700s will be readily available. But with a street price of $2,794, the X5 will certainly do a gamer right.

With the Diablo X5, ABS is trying to add a little spice to an already technologically sweet package.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A really good machine at an even better price.

Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar

Casual gamers need not apply **By Jeff Lackey**

MANUFACTURER: **Thrustmaster**
URL: **www.thrustmaster.com**
PRICE: **$299.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **Windows 98/2000/ME/XP, USB port, DirectX 8 or higher, Pentium or compatible processor**

Thrustmaster's HOTAS Cougar throttle and stick system is a serious piece of hardware targeted at the hardcore flight sim fanatic. Everything about this monster—its glossy black steel construction, 17-pound weight, 28 programmable buttons, programmable hat switches, 10 axes, and $300 price tag—spells "serious." No other HOTAS (hands-on throttle and stick) system is programmable to the insane level of complexity that the Cougar is. Suffice it to say that you can program any combination of complex commands in a way that enables you to invoke them with a flick of the finger.

In addition to its features, the Cougar's idiosyncrasies also prevent this from being an ideal setup for the casual gamer, and even for some in the hardcore market. The first surprise for anyone unfamiliar with Thrustmaster's joysticks is the strength of the springs. It takes real effort to move the stick and hold it in an uncentered position. Some simmers love the feel, others hate it: if you are able to give it a test run, try before you buy. The Cougar stick also feels grooved into the X-Y axis—in other words, resistance is higher in the diagonal directions. Similarly, the throttle has superb functionality, but the position and strength of the detents (spots in the throttle's throw that click and provide resistance, indicating the idle and full military positions) may be troublesome to some. There are Web forums that provide modification instructions for these aspects.

The price and springs assure that the Cougar isn't for the casual gamer, and it would be near blasphemy to use this hardware for a silly arcade game. But if you live for the next *Falcon 4 SP* update and wear an oxygen mask when you fly sims, the Cougar may be essential hardware for your virtual cockpit.

If you wear an oxygen mask when you fly sims, the Cougar may be for you.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Its quirks and price make it less than ideal for everyday gaming, but Thrustmaster's HOTAS Cougar may be a hardcore simmer's dream.

WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Knowledge Is Good

Last month's hardware opener created quite a...well, I'll call it a "buzz." When I decided to open the section with two Mac reviews I knew that some people would be unhappy, but boy was I in for a surprise. The last time *CGW*'s hardware section caused that big of a stir was when I used this column as a place to exorcise my frustrations over the results of the 2000 presidential election.

A lot of people castigated me for sullying the pages of *CGW* with four pages of so-called "Mac crap," many even pointing out that they don't buy this magazine to read about a dying OS. I guess some people would like to see the same things written about every month: a review of a really good GeForce-based graphics card and advice on which motherboard you should buy. It's my belief, though, that it's good for all of us to know what's going on in computer gaming beyond which graphics card is the best (ATI's Radeon 9700), which sound card you should buy (Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer), or whether Intel or AMD is winning the CPU war (Intel).

It's good for us to know what's going on in gaming.

The whole thing reminds me of a seminal encounter that I had with *EGM*'s Che "The Notorious C.H.E." Chou. I was talking s*** about how PCs are better gaming platforms than consoles, to which Notorious coolly responded, "Sure, for some games. For others consoles are better. Who cares anyway? I play games, not platforms."

This conversation occurred nearly a year ago, yet the fallout from the Mac coverage has had me thinking about the bizarre connection between PC gamers and Mac users. Both platforms, PCs for gaming and Macs for, well, everything, are under assault from competitive alternatives that seem to gain ground every day. And these threats have both groups acting like troglodytes (*def*: 1 : a member of a primitive people dwelling in caves 2 : a person resembling a troglodyte, as in reclusive habits or outmoded or reactionary attitudes).

Ultimately, holing up in a cave, whether literally or metaphorically, pretending that other platforms aren't good for gaming isn't going to ensure that your platform of choice survives. Rather, as gamers first, it's in our best interest to keep ourselves informed of what's new, good, and interesting on the gaming front.

eDimensional TrackIR

How to get ahead in simming **By T. Byrl Baker**

MANUFACTURER: **eDimensional Inc.**
URL: **www.edimensional.com** PRICE: **$119.95**

REQUIREMENTS: **USB port**

Flight simmers are an obsessive lot. They think nothing of dropping hundreds on the latest force-feedback HOTAS setup and enormous monitors, sometimes several, just to give them the feeling that they're actually going Mach 2, strapped into a Martin-Baker Mk.2 ejection seat instead of slouched in a ground-bound office chair. To those with a passion for simming and a lot of disposable income, I have one suggestion: get a TrackIR.

If you play a lot of flight sims, the TrackIR is definitely worth the price.

The device hooks into a USB port and sits behind your keyboard or on your monitor. It comes with a sheet of adhesive silver dots, and you must stick one of these dots on your forehead so the main unit can reflect an infrared beam off of it and translate the dot's movement into cursor movement. Move your head a little to the left, and you're watching the world slide by under your left wing. Tilt your head back, and you can get a visual through the top of your canopy on that bogey who's trying to outturn you.

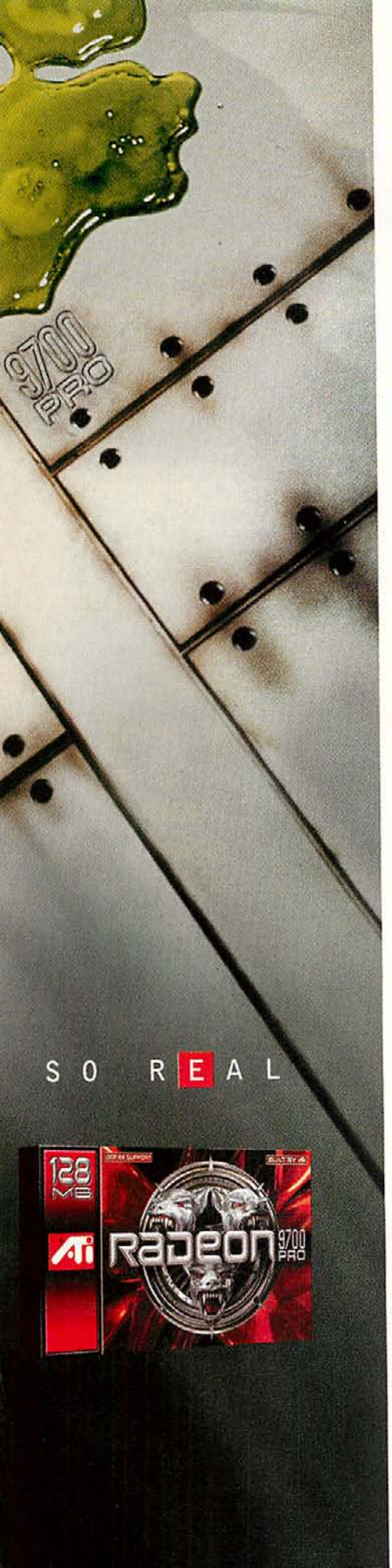
You already have a hat switch, you say? Well, it can't provide you with the experience of being able to glance down at your instruments and smoothly check your six before lining up a target in your sights—without touching the keyboard, joystick, or mouse. I tested this device concurrently with some 3D LCD glasses, and the TrackIR did far more to suck me into a dogfight than the glasses' 3D trickery did.

The product works well out of the box with any game that supports mouse panning, and there is a small patch that lets you add support for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002*. The included software even lets you configure the TrackIR as a hat switch for games that don't support mouse panning.

If you play a lot of flight sims, the product is definitely worth the price because there's no more cost-effective way to get the situational awareness it delivers. The TrackIR gets you closer to the feeling of flying than any other peripheral can.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

If you can live with the possibility that you might go to a dinner party with a silver dot fastened to your forehead, then this is a must-have for the flight sim fanatic who has it all.



CH Fighterstick USB and CH Pro Throttle USB

You *can* please all of the people all of the time! By Jeff Lackey

MANUFACTURER: CH Products
URL: www.chproducts.com
PRICE: $150 each

REQUIREMENTS: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, one open USB port for each device, DirectX 7.1 or higher

CH Products' top-end HOTAS offerings, the Pro Throttle USB and Fighterstick USB, are rarities: they are capable of satisfying the needs of the super-hardcore simmer, yet casual gamers will be equally delighted with their friendly design and functionality. The heart of this setup is the Pro Throttle. Although not an exact replica of any actual fighter throttle, its design is superb in functionality and feel. A mode switch on the throttle allows multiple assignments for the three four-way hats, one eight-way hat, three buttons, and mini-joystick. This means you can program about 70 commands for the throttle (and double that amount if you use the Fighterstick's shift-button feature). The throttle operates smoothly, is well built, and is dependable, and CH's products have a well-deserved reputation for lasting longer than the computers they're attached to.

The Fighterstick is a joy to operate and can do more than most folks require.

The Fighterstick is CH Products' top-of-the-line joystick. Its myriad buttons and hat switches will provide casual gamers with any programming options they might need, and hardcore simmers will appreciate its mode switch and shift-key capabilities, which result in more than 130 possible command or macro assignments. Three LEDs on the Fighterstick and the Pro Throttle display which mode you're in.

Ergonomically, the Fighterstick is well organized, although those with smaller hands may have to stretch to reach every button. Overall, the Fighterstick is a joy to operate and can do more than most folks require.

The only downside to the CH offerings is their skimpy documentation, but you can find most information online. When you take into consideration the broad range of needs between casual gamers and hardcore simmers, CH Products' Pro Throttle and Fighterstick combo can't be beat.

VERDICT ★★★★½

They're pricey, but the quality, functionality, and dependability of CH Products' joystick and throttle system is unsurpassed.

IT HURTS.

The amazing RADEON™ 9700 PRO is the **fastest*** board ATI has ever created. Powered by VPU technology, it delivers the ultimate **3D gaming experience.** It's the **first to provide 8 pipelines** for twice the rendering power. The **first to fully support DirectX® 9.0.** And the first to deliver the highest level of realism possible. Now you're unstoppable.

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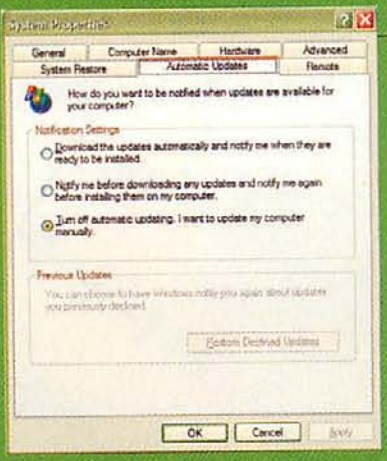
RADEON 9700 PRO™

*ATI's RADEON™ 9700 128MB DDR compared with Nvidia Geforce 4 Ti4600 128MB DDR, as measured by Unreal Performance Test v918 and 3DMark 2001 SE. Tested on the following system: P4-2.4GHz CPU, Intel 850e chipset, 512MB PC800 memory, Windows XP Professional with ATI driver v.Alpha1 and NVIDIA driver v2832. Resolutions: 1024x768 and 1280x1024.

How To Speed Tweak Windows XP

By default, Windows XP is full of clutter and not optimized for anything—hose it out and speed your games up with these tweaks **By Joel Durham**



STEP #1

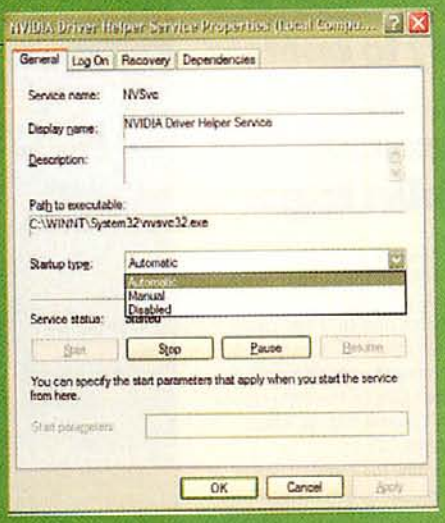
MURDER THE MAINTENANCE APPS Start by choosing the System icon in the Control Panel. There are three things here to eliminate: System Restore, Automatic Updating, and Remote Assistance. Navigate to each tab, and check or uncheck the appropriate boxes and select the appropriate radio buttons to cleanse your system of these largely useless applications.

STEP #2

TOSS OUT WINDOWS MESSAGING Ready to kill that stupid little buddy icon that nobody uses? Choose Start and Run, and type C:\WINDOWS\INF\SYSOC.INF. Substitute your Windows directory if necessary. This will open a text file that maliciously hides some programs from the Add/Remove Programs folder. Find the line that starts with "msmsgs=" and edit the word "hide" out of it. Save the file, open Control Panel's Add/Remove Programs, and click on the Windows Components button. Scroll down, and you'll find Windows Messaging just waiting to be unchecked.

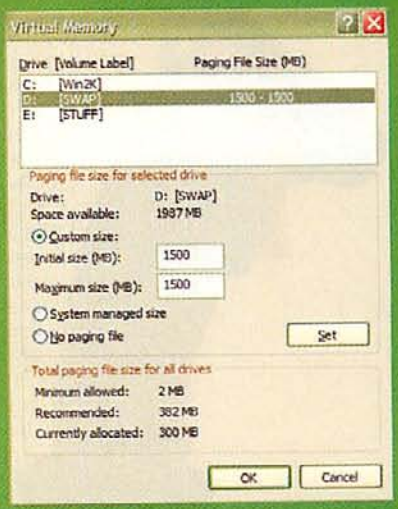
STEP #3

PURGE UNNECESSARY SERVICES Open Control Panel, select Administrative Tools, and then select Services. Here you'll see a list of things running in the background to enable certain functions of Windows XP. Some start automatically, and you don't need all of them. Turn them off by setting them to Manual: right-click on the service, choose Properties, pull down the Startup type box, and select Manual. Some functions you will turn off include Automatic Updates, Error Reporting, Indexing, Internet Connection Firewall (unless you're using it), Messenger, NVIDIA Driver Helper, Portable Media Serial Number, System Restore, and Task Scheduler.



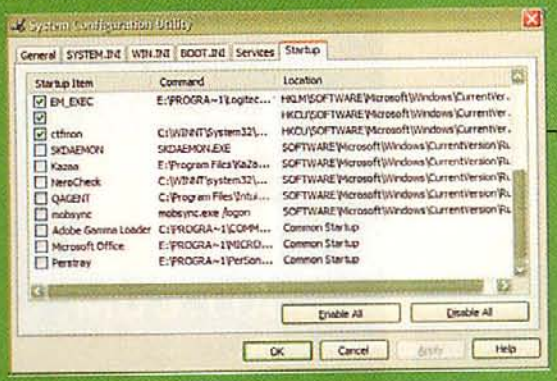
STEP #4

REIGN IN THE SWAP FILE XP is conservative when it first sets up the paging file and then uses precious resources to resize it. Take that control out of Windows' hands by making your swap file huge and static. Open the Control Panel and choose System, select the Advanced tab, click on the Performance settings button, and go to the Advanced tab. There, you can set your own swap file size. If you have a large drive and enough free space, make it 1000MB. Choose the Change button and make both the Initial and Maximum sizes 1000MB. Otherwise, make it as large as possible. You'll have to reboot when you're done.



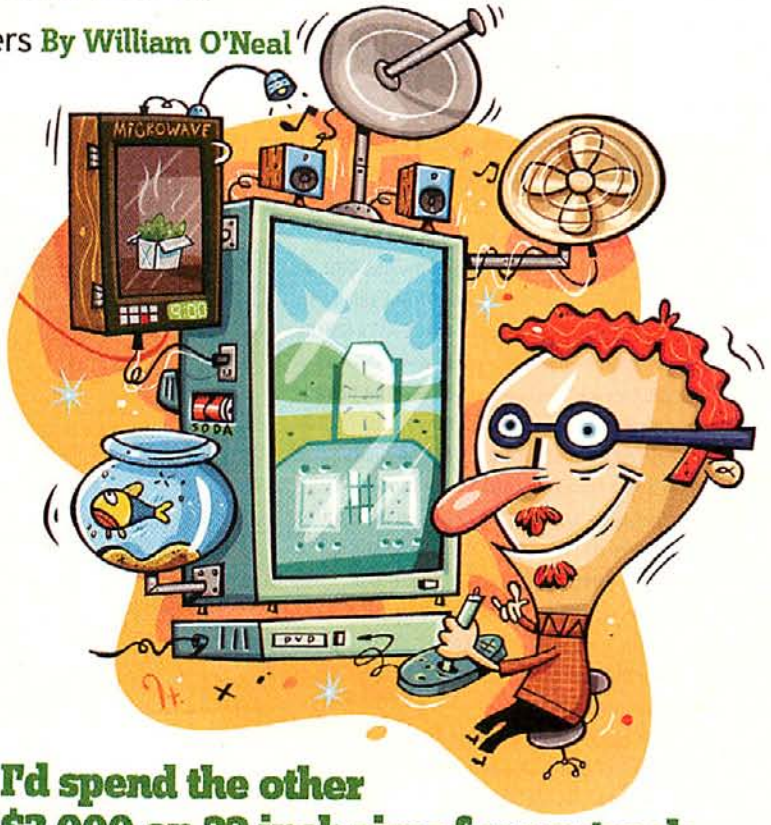
STEP #5

GET RID OF STUPID STARTUP ITEMS Finally, you can purge your system tray of silly files by hitting them where they live: in your Startup folder and "run" registry key. The easy way to do this is to use the System Configuration Utility. Launch it by hitting the Start button and then choosing Run. Type MSCONFIG. Choose the Startup tab. Uncheck anything frivolous, like Creative Labs AudioHQ; quick launchers from RealPlayer, MusicMatch, WinAmp, Kazaa, Microsoft Office; and—unless you use their special functions—hardware utilities like MouseWare and Microsoft SideWinder. The beauty of the System Configuration utility is that if you uncheck something and discover that part of your system doesn't work, all you have to do is go back in and check it again.



Tech Medics

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



I'd spend the other $3,000 on 22-inch rims for my truck.

What Would I Do With $5,000?!?

If you had a $5,000 budget to build the best computer that you could for both gaming and graphics (Photoshop, Quark, and so on), which components would you include and what brand would they be?

Matt

I'd spend about $2,000 on an Athlon XP 2200+ machine with 512MB of RAM and an ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card. I'd spend the other $3,000 on 22-inch rims for my truck.

Get a Paper Route!

I want to upgrade my computer. My current computer is a 1GHz AMD Thunderbird with 256MB PC2100 DDR RAM, a 64MB GeForce2 MX400 and a 16X DVD-ROM. I have about $300 to spend. What do you suggest I get?

knucks

What kind of motherboard do you have? Depending on the type of motherboard in your computer, you may be able to upgrade your CPU without having to swap out your motherboard. If, however, you're unable to upgrade your CPU with your current board, I'd suggest getting a new graphics card and possibly more RAM. A 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4200 will dramatically increase your machine's performance.

Not Another Boutique Computer Company

I have a real crappy computer and I'm trying to get my dad to buy a new one. I found a site, buyaib.com, that has low-priced PCs. It seems to be too good to be true, so I was wondering if you could tell me anything about them. But if a whole new PC fails with my dad (he keeps insisting that the computer is good, even though we got it five years ago) I might just upgrade. I'm guessing you'll tell me to upgrade the CPU and video card, but it's a Pentium III 350MHz, with an ATI Rage Pro and 256MB of RAM.

Adrian

Let's tackle your second problem first: you may want to consider building your own computer. It seems to me that your old machine has seen better days, and upgrading your CPU will require that you buy a new motherboard anyway. Considering that, you may want to think about putting together a completely new system: motherboard, CPU, graphics card, and RAM. Now to your first question. I've never heard of AIB, but that doesn't mean that they suck. Prior to a few months ago, I had never heard of ABS, but apparently they've been around for damn near a decade. Your best bet is to check out the news groups or go to deja.com and search for "AIB" and "buyaib.com" to see what comes up.

Not Really a Question...

Let me start by stating that I'm an audio engineer, so I'm not just some dips*** talking out of his butt about this. On to the issue. I was reading the Tech Medics section recently, and there was a question about which microphone to buy. In your response you stated: "As for the hum, I don't know what would cause that other than a blown mic diaphragm."

Well that's probably the last thing that would cause it. It's probably due to either poor grounding or just radio frequency interference. Of those two, the RF interference is the more likely culprit. Computers give off tons of RF due to the electronics in them, and most inexpensive microphones aren't shielded from such things. Just thought you should know. Keep up the good work.

Jake Ostendorf

Thanks. However, that wasn't my response—that came from my predecessor Dave Salvator. He's officially blacklisted.

Which Mobo Am I Using?

Is there a way that I can find out which motherboard I have without cracking the case? I tried Dxdiag and didn't see anything useful in there. Did I overlook something, or is there somewhere else that I can look?

Caleb

That's a tough one. Some BIOSes will tell you the make of your motherboard, but not necessarily the model number, during the POST. Also, in the Windows Device Manager you may be able to find out which chipset your motherboard is running, but again, not necessarily the make and model number. Anyway, your best bet is to just crack the case.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK HORNADY

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine

By William O'Neal

It's been a while since I updated my Power Rig. But of course, there hasn't really been a lot of new and interesting stuff to put in it. That changed recently in the span of about five days. First, I received Intel's latest top-of-the-line CPU, a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 with a 533MHz front-side bus. Before I had even installed the thing, ATI's 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card (also known as the "GeForce4 killer") showed up. By that point I was raring to go, and then I got my hands on 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM. Well, all right!

I set about testing my new Power Rig with 3DGameGauge 3.0, Dave Salvator and Loyd Case's latest test suite. The Power Rig scored an impressive 15140 on 3DMark2001 SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. More impressive, though, was the score of 10922 that the machine got at the same resolution with 4x FSAA turned on. The Power Rig lost out in *Jedi Knight II*, *Dungeon Siege*, and *IL-2 Sturmovik* to the Voodoo Egad that we tested this month, but it kept up in *Serious Sam: TSE*, *Comanche 4*, and *Quake III: Arena*.

Finally, I've gotten new stuff worthy of the Power Rig.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
Motherboard	Intel D850MV	$150
Case	Antec Plus660B	$120
Processor	Intel 2.8GHz Pentium 4 w/ 533MGHz FSB	$600
Memory	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	$400
Graphics Card	ATI 128MB Radeon 9700 (R300)	$400
Monitor	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ 22"	$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		$3,440

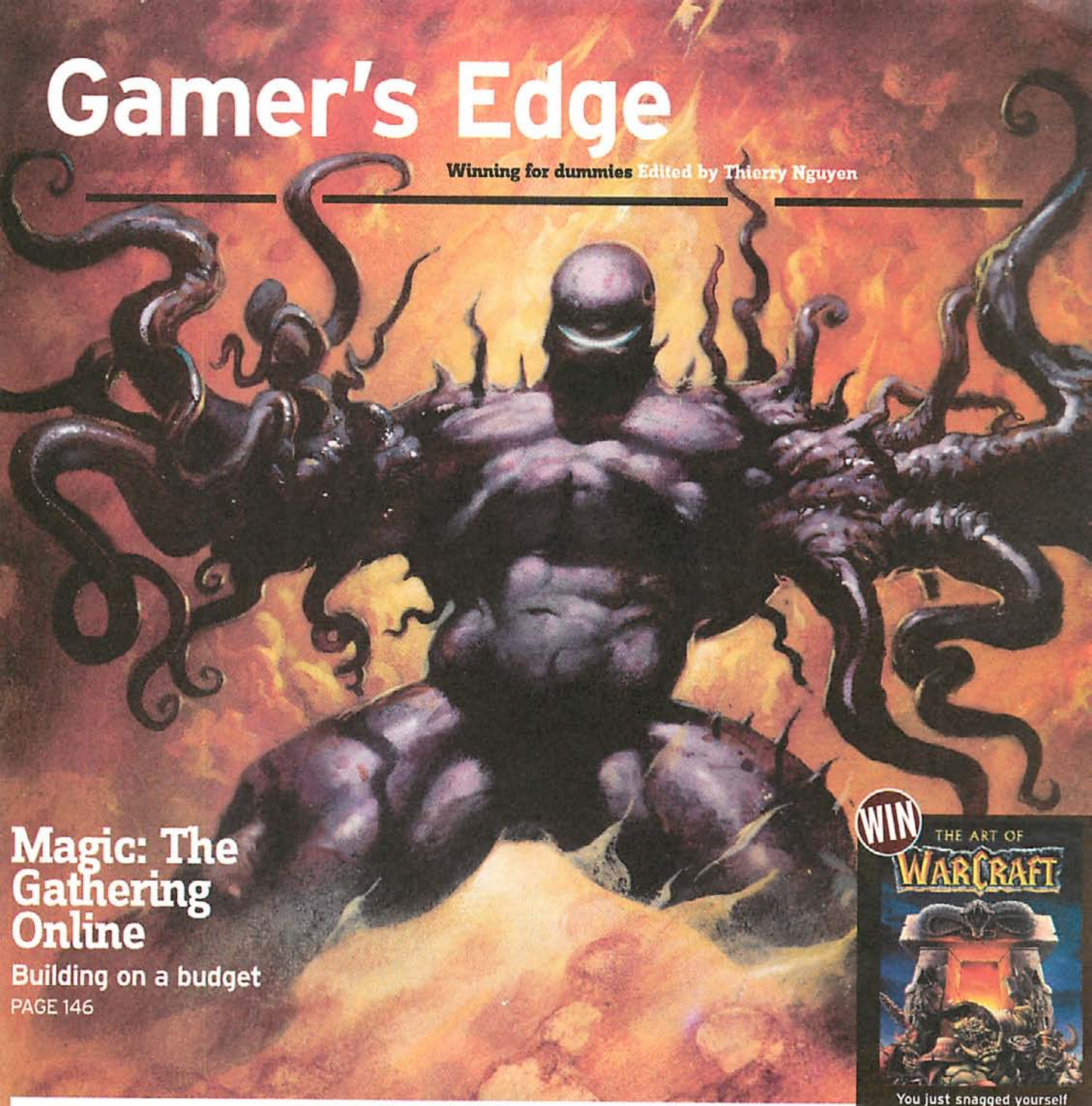
BENCHMARKS

TEST	SCORE
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	70.5
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	54.9
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	68.2
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	64.9
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	15140
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	10922
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	10697
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	6255
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	280.1
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	205.8
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	167.6
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	90.2

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Thierry Nguyen



Magic: The Gathering Online

Building on a budget

PAGE 146

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

While waiting for more good *WarCraft III* tricks, we got a good one for that old standby, *Jedi Knight II*.

One of my favorite tricks in *Jedi Knight II* is easy to do on the map Nar Shadda Streets. First, make sure Force Push is at the maximum level. While you're fighting on this map, keep a lookout for any hotshots who are jumping around; there's always a couple of them. Start hunting the jumper and wait until he gets in the air, then use Force Push on him. When an enemy is in the air, he can't use the defenses against Push, so he'll go flying higher into the air and—if you aim it right—fall to his doom even if he lands on something. What I mean by "aim it right" is that you force him up and over the gaps with your push.

My other favorite trick is very annoying. Make sure you are a Dark Sider and max out Force Grip. Now search for the map Death Star. Once you're in, make your way to the bottom area and find the trash compactor. Right next to the trash compactor is that big room that looks like part of the Death Star Cannon. Right before entering that room, you'll see a control panel. If you get close to it, you activate a killing ray in the big room. Now wait for people to come your way. When someone approaches, use your Force Grip, move them into the big room, and then touch the switch. You don't have to see the switch for it to work. It's really funny watching them squirm in your grip and then die when the beam is turned on. Hope you like it.

—Scythe82

You just snagged yourself the gaming version of a Criterion Collection DVD: the *WarCraft III: Collector's Edition*.

We're still waiting for more copies of *WarCraft III: Collector's Edition* to grace our cubicles. Until they arrive, we're giving away this excellent-looking book, *The Art of WarCraft*. If you have only the regular version of *WarCraft III*, this book will almost make you feel as though you have the *Collector's Edition*.

MAGIC THE GATHERING ONLINE

Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk show you how to stay competitive with cheap decks

Can you play *Magic: The Gathering Online* without dropping a bazillion dollars into it? Tom and Bruce gave themselves a $40 limit each to find out.

The way cards are sold presents a dilemma if you want to buy only $40 worth. You can buy the theme decks, but they're pre-built, so you miss out on half the fun of *Magic*: building your own deck. However, $40 isn't enough to build a single-color deck, or even a well-tuned dual-color deck. But if you're willing to wade into the wild world of trading, you can easily swap out the colors you're not using for cards in the color you are using. We decided to play the hands we were dealt, as it were, because Bruce is too ill-tempered to interact with *Magic* geeks and Tom would have used his powers of persuasion to swap basic lands for coveted rares.

A good rule of thumb is to build your decks in thirds: one-third creatures, one-third effects (enchantments, sorceries, and instants), and one-third lands. For a two-color deck, be sure to divide your cards as evenly as you can. Force yourself to stick to the 60-card minimum. Smaller decks are invariably more focused and it's easier to anticipate which cards you'll be drawing.

Tom's Deck

I'm going to use black and blue; I'll call this my Sneak, Smack, and Regenerate deck. I'll sneak in with some unblockable creatures, smack him with some Tims (*Magic* parlance for blue sorcerers that you can tap to cause a point of damage), and defend myself with black regenerating blockers. For unblockable creatures, my pair of Cursed Flesh enchantments weakens a creature but renders it unblockable to anything but black. My Frightcrawler is also immune to nonblack blockers, and the Traveler's Cloak allows me to give a creature the land-walking ability of my choice. My Zombie Boa can be blocked, but I can pay to specify a color that will be instantly destroyed if it tries to block the Boa. Shimmering Wings give a creature flying, and they can be easily pulled back into my hand and put on another creature.

One reason I chose this deck was that I was fortunate enough to get four Tims. I have two Prodigal Sorcerers and two Stormscape Apprentices. For regenerating defense, I have an Urborg Skeleton, a blue Metathran Zombie, a Goham Djinn, a Nightscape Familiar, and Patchwork Gnomes. Among the other creatures I use to fill out my deck are two Stormscape Familiars that reduce the cost of black spells and one Nightscape Familiar that reduces the cost of blue spells.

Finally, I have some cards that will let me cycle through my cards faster by getting free draws (Cephalid Looter, Probe, Thieving Magpie, Scavenged Weaponry, Tainted Well, and Recover). Furthermore, I can knock cards out of Bruce's hand with Probe and Bog Down. Alas, if only I had some counterspells to really get the most out of my blue mana.

Bruce's Deck

I ended up with a lot of green, which is creature heavy, so I might as well build a creature deck. I'll fill it in with some interesting blue spells and fliers, because green is low on fliers.

I need a good mix of cheap creatures (for speed) and big ones (for power). Wild Mongrels are a decent 2/2 with a power-up, and Krosan Archer can block fliers. The Springing Tiger is expensive, but at Threshold (seven cards in my graveyard) it becomes a 5/5. Rabid Elephants get bonuses when blocked, and are pretty tough to begin with. My Thought Devourer is big and it flies, so the hand reduction is worth it. Elephant Ambush gets me a 3/3 token for 4 mana, but it can be cast from my graveyard for its Flashback cost, essentially letting me play it twice.

I have a few squirrel cards I might as well include. Chatter of

the Squirrel costs 1 mana and gets me a 1/1 token. Nut Collector is much more expensive but can churn out a 1/1 token each turn. It's more useful for its Threshold ability to make all squirrels +2/+2. A Squirrel Nest gives me the ability to use a land to make a 1/1 token every turn instead of tapping it for mana. Lastly, Druid's Call allows me to put out a 1/1 token for every point of damage my enchanted creature does.

Aether Burst and Equilibrium, which can return a creature to its owner's hand, are there to clean out any of Tom's more difficult creatures if they get in my way. One turn without a key blocker is often all I'll need if I have my big creatures out.

First Match

Turn 1, Bruce: I drew the Squirrel Nest and a Chatter of the Squirrel, as well as a few forests. If Tom doesn't get some creatures out fast, I can possibly rush him.

Turn 2, Tom: So Bruce "Elf-hater" Geryk has a green deck? I have my regenerating Metathran Zombie out, but I need to keep the appropriate mana available during Bruce's turn. This is the dilemma of regenerators: they can tie up mana, which is a disadvantage early in the game.

Turn 3, Bruce: I play the Squirrel Nest this turn and get another Chatter of the Squirrel. I can play that card again for its Flashback cost, so I'm eventually getting four 1/1 tokens for 6 mana. Not too shabby.

Turn 4, Tom: I have a hefty Giant Cockroach out and I've put Scavenged Weaponry on it so it packs an extra punch. But he keeps throwing disposable squirrel tokens to block it, so I'm doing just minimal pest control. It's cockroaches versus squirrels: thrill to the scene of white-hot vermin-on-vermin action. It's going to be hard keeping up with all those little tokens. My best hope is to get a Tim or two into play to zap them.

Turn 5, Bruce: Even squirrels can have a nasty bite. I sent a squirrel rush at Tom this turn and he tried to block with his Giant Cockroach. Using a Giant Growth instant, I turned my 1/1 token into a 4/4 menace and cleared out the Roach.

Always beware when someone playing green has cards in hand and one untapped forest. He may be hiding something!

Turn 7, Tom: With my regenerating Urborg Skeleton and Metathran Zombie, I can hold off the squirrels if he keeps attacking with them, but I can tell he's just building up the stupid little rodents to rush me. Whereas I'm limited by the number of creatures in my deck, his squirrel tokens have no such limitation. If I can get my Rushing River or Dematerialize card, I can take out that stupid Squirrel Nest.

Turn 9, Bruce: I think this is over. I not only got a Rabid Elephant out, but I also enchanted it with a Druid's Call, which puts another squirrel token out for each point of damage it takes. Tom doesn't have anything that can kill the elephant, so he's forced to use regenerating creatures to block it. He gets the creature back, but the Druid's Call still gives me another squirrel. Even if he gets another big creature or two out, he can't stop the rodents forever.

Turn 11, Tom: I finally get Dematerialize and go to cast it on the Squirrel's Nest, only to have

Bruce whip out something called Syncopate, a card that counterspells my card unless I can pay extra mana, which I can't. And the squirrels keep coming—still no Tims. I do, however, have a Plague Spitter, which causes 1 point of damage to all creatures and players during the upkeep phase and would be great for wiping out all those squirrels. Unfortunately, I'm too low on health to bring it out.

Turn 14, Bruce: I've been able to rush Tom the last two turns and overwhelm his defenses. He doesn't survive this turn.

Second Match

Turn 1, Bruce: Tom obviously fixed this game because I drew no lands, and therefore have to mulligan. Even my second draw nets me only an island.

Turn 4, Tom: My regenerating Urborg Skeleton is across the table from Bruce's Cephalid Scout. I'm doing fine with lands but Bruce has only islands out. I'm hoping his hand is clogged with green creatures. I bring out a Giant Cockroach that should be able to power over any weak blue blockers he gets out. This is an auspicious beginning.

Turn 5, Bruce: My Thought Devourer will force my hand size down to three, which is no great loss considering I'm mainly holding expensive green spells I can't use yet. But I need to be able to keep that Giant Cockroach at bay.

Turn 5, Tom: This is the perfect time to play Bog Down, a sorcery card that will knock cards out of Bruce's hand. As a kicker cost, I can burn two of my own lands to make him discard three cards instead of two. As he has only three cards in his hand, I think it's well worth the cost.

Turn 6, Bruce: I need either a forest or a Diligent Farmhand, a 1/1 creature I can sacrifice in order to search through my deck and find a basic land. I put two Farmhands into the deck for precisely this reason. But not only am I short on land, I'm short on Farmhands. I feel like a bankrupt cotton farmer.

Turn 7, Tom: I just drew Oppression, which will be the equivalent of pouring salt in Bruce's wounds. With this fairly expensive black sorcery card in play, each player will have to discard a card from his hand to cast a spell. Because Bruce's hand is empty and I have cards to spare,

this is perfect for me. Bruce has an annoying powerful flier and a few weak creatures in the way, but I think this will slow him down enough that he won't be able to bounce back.

Turn 10, Bruce: This is supposed to be a fast deck, so if I don't get creatures out early, it's tough to get momentum back. The Cephalid Looter helps me cycle through my cards, but the forced discard means that I can cast a spell only if I have another disposable card in hand.

Turn 12, Tom: I'm realizing that one weakness of this deck is that it can't inflict a lot of damage. Bruce is almost completely helpless and I was still having a hard time getting past his blockers. I had a Prodigal Sorcerer plinking away at his hit point, but otherwise, I couldn't get through—until now. I just put a Traveler's Cloak on my Thieving Magpie, giving it island-walking so Bruce can't block it. The beauty of this little combo is that every time I damage him, I get to draw a card. For good measure, I use my Prodigal Sorcerer to fatally Tim the Cephalid Looter he was using to draw cards.

Turn 13, Bruce: I finally got the Farmhand out, but Tom's Prodigal Sorcerer just pinged it away. I'm not interested in sitting here and being killed by one damage point per turn from that bird, so I'm going to concede and hope I can win the rubber game.

Third Match

Turn 1, Bruce: Lots of forests. I got burned by not drawing any land last game, so I'm reluctant to mulligan. I'd rather hold onto the land, which I can play each turn, and hope that I get creatures out eventually, rather than take the risk of having to discard creatures because I don't have the land to play them.

Turn 3, Tom: I bring out Arcane Laboratory, an annoying card that limits players to casting one spell each turn. Bruce seems to have a lot of cheap creatures, so this might slow him down. Meanwhile, I have a Tim out to plink away at him without being limited by the Arcane Laboratory.

Turn 4, Bruce: Because I have the land to eventually be able to cast all my creature spells, Tom's Arcane Laboratory doesn't scare me too much. The fact that we can play only one spell per turn means there will probably be fewer creatures out than usual. I haven't seen any really nasty creatures in Tom's deck, so as long as I can play my big guns wisely, I'll have the advantage in the endgame.

Turn 4, Tom: Now I'm Timming away with a second Tim.

Turn 5, Bruce: I put Rabid Elephant out. Tom doesn't have any of those regenerating creatures in play yet. When you have the advantage like this, it's best to press it unless you know your opponent has an instant that can counter it, like Giant Growth.

Turn 6, Tom: First squirrels, then elephants. What is this, *Zoo Tycoon*? Someone needs to explain to Bruce that *Magic* is supposed to be about goblins and dragons and that kind of thing. I have a really powerful black creature called a Goham Djinn that can easily take on his Rabid Elephant, plus it can regenerate. And guess what Bruce does when I summon it? Yep, out comes the frigging Syncopate counterspell. Thanks to the Arcane Laboratory, I can't cast another spell this turn.

Turn 8, Bruce: With still no regenerating blockers in sight, I can build up my Rabid Elephant so that Tom has to either lose a creature to it each turn or take massive damage. Blanchwood Armor, which adds +1/+1 for each forest in play, gives the elephant +4/+4. Feel the pain, Tom!

Turn 8, Tom: He's not attacking with that big mammajamma elephant yet, but it's just a matter of time. It'll kill anything I send across, so I can't attack Bruce for now. My options for getting rid of it are limited. (Note: after the game, Bruce asks why I didn't just use my Stormscape Apprentice to tap Rabid Elephant so it couldn't block me. I politely explain that the Apprentice has to spend white mana to do this, which comes from Plains, which I don't have, you moron. Then Bruce points out that I could have used my Dream Thrush's ability to convert a land to a Plain, which could have powered the Apprentice. I pretend I noticed this but didn't do it because I needed to save the mana for something else.)

Turn 10, Bruce: I'm getting very lucky, and now have Seton's Desire on my Rabid Elephant. Last turn I got my Cephalid Looter out. If I get one more card that I need, there could be fireworks.

Turn 12, Tom: It's like that elephant just eats one of my creatures each turn.

Turn 14, Bruce: Yowza! Got it. My strategy now is to discard enough cards with my Cephalid Looter to reach Threshold quickly. You'll see why in a minute.

Turn 14, Tom: He's been fishing for some card, because he's using his Cephalid Looter to draw extra cards. I don't know what he has up his sleeve. I'm regretting the Arcane Laboratory, because I have several things I can do, but being able to cast only one spell each turn really slows me down.

Turn 15, Bruce: My only spell this turn is Overrun, which gives all my creatures +3/+3 and Trample until the end of the turn. With five forests out, my Blanchwood Armor makes my Rabid Elephant an 11/12, and Seton's Desire makes it a 13/14. What is most important, though, is that thanks to my Cephalid Looter, I have discarded enough cards to reach Threshold, and Seton's Desire forces Tom to block the Rabid Elephant with every creature that can do so. Because the Rabid Elephant gets +2/+2 for each creature blocking it, and because this is Trample damage, his creatures are basically committing suicide. I don't quite finish Tom off this time, but he has no way to block me next turn. Tom concedes and I win this duel and the match.

Neverwinter Nights

A beginner's guide to quest making

By Mark Asher

With *Neverwinter Nights*, gamers at last can create their own role-playing games without having a C++ book propped open near the monitor. The Aurora toolset is without a doubt the finest set of tools ever released to gamers, and already fans have authored more than 800 *Neverwinter Nights* mods. Here's a guide to getting started with these easy-to-use tools.

Before You Begin

Before you even open the toolset, you should take pen and paper and jot down a few ideas. Which areas do you want to model? How many NPCs will you use? What levels will your mod be designed for? Will you want to run it in dungeon master (DM) mode? Will you want others to download it and play it without benefit of a DM? Will there be a story behind it? Take a few minutes to outline what you want to do. Here's my outline.

- Two areas: a forest and a crypt.
- Two main bad guys: an Orc leader and a zombie lord.
- Designed to run without a DM.
- A simple story: a woodsman has had his ring stolen by the Orc leader. The player will defeat the Orc leader and his troops. The player will then receive a key to the crypt, go in, and fight the zombie lord and his undead.
- We'll make it for a single Level 1 player.

That's about it. Let's get going on the steps below to get you comfortable with using the toolset for creating your own module.

Using the Wizard

BioWare has made things especially easy with wizards. Selecting the Toolset option when *NWN* loads launches a wizard that steps you through most of what you need to do. (See Figure 1.)

Select the Create a New Module option; click through the Welcome popup.

Enter a name for your module. We'll call ours "*Computer Gaming World* adventure."

Now create an area for your module. We'll create a forest area first. Click on the Area Wizard button.

In the Name and Tileset popup, enter a name for the area you're creating and select an appropriate tileset from the list. We'll keep it simple and call ours "Forest" and select the forest tileset. The Area Wizard popup appears.

Large areas in *NWN* are made up of 10-meter-by-10-meter tiles. The default, which we'll use, is Medium, which is made up of 8-by-8 tiles. (See Figure 2.) After clicking on Next, the Finish popup displays. The Open Area in Area Viewer option is selected by default. Click on Finish to see your forest area in the viewer.

Click on Finish again and then exit the toolset.

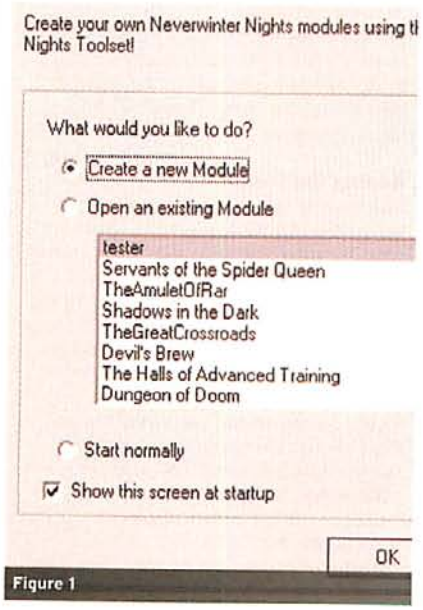


Figure 1

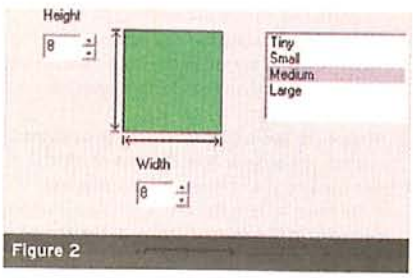


Figure 2

Figure 3

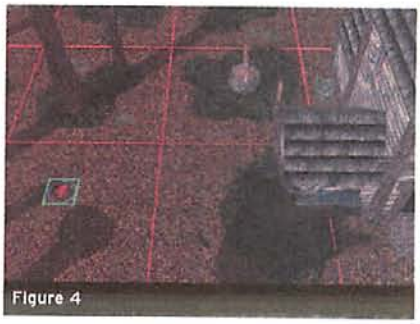


Figure 4

Save your adventure when prompted. Now start *NWN* as a single-player game, find your adventure, and load it.

Editing Your Initial Area

Now to fix up our forest. Load the toolset again and select the module you just created. First, note that you can't elevate terrain in most tilesets. If you want a hill, you have to use the Rural tileset to elevate terrain; so if you want a wooded area with hills, you'll have to put them in manually. (One tileset that you can elevate is City Exterior.)

Also note that to remove something you have placed, you select the Undo option. If you want to remove objects that were generated by the tileset, like trees in the Forest set, use the Eraser option under Terrain in the right-hand pane. After you select it, click on the tile you want to change. The tile will cycle through various designs, including one without trees.

After you load your module, you have to select the area you want to edit. We have only one area so far. Expand the list under Areas in the left pane of the Toolset window. When you find the Forest area, double-click on it to load it.

Now that the forest is loaded, let's create a house for our woodsman NPC. Move to the bottom-right corner of the tileset. Then in the right-side pane, under Groups, select the Lodge 2x2 object and drop it in the corner. You can right-click to rotate the building before you drop it in. (See Figure 3.)

We want the player to interact with the woodsman, so let's set an appropriate start location, which is where a player will initially start the adventure. By default the center of the area is the starting location, but let's put it just to the left of the woodsman's fine new home. Select the Paint Start Location button on the right side of the right pane and then click in front of the lodge. (See Figure 4.)

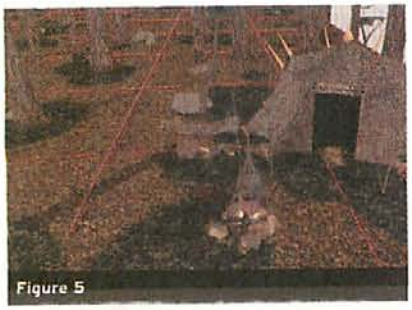


Figure 5

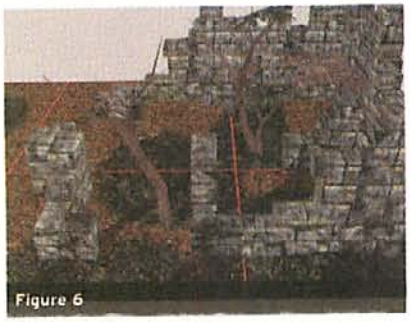


Figure 6

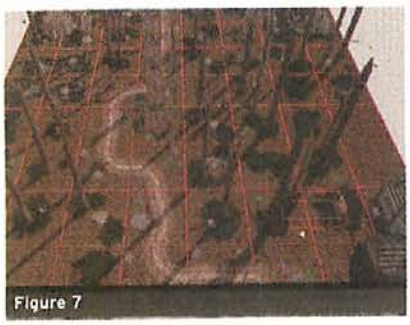


Figure 7

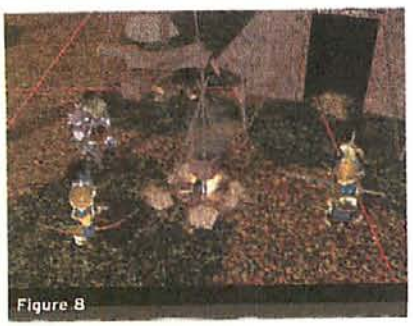


Figure 8

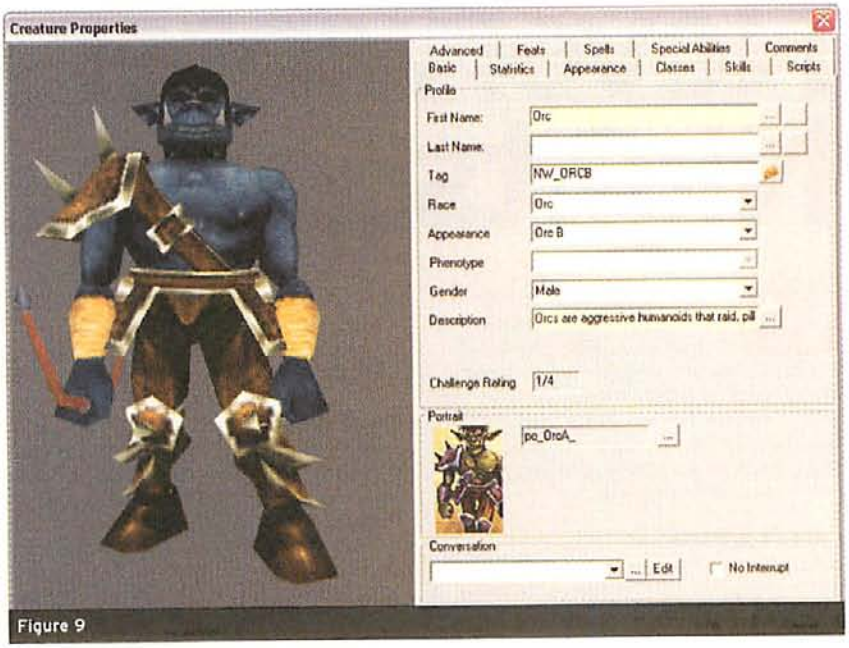


Figure 9

Now we can add areas for our other important encounters. We'll include a campfire for the Orc leader and his cohorts. We'll put it in the upper-left corner of our tileset. Under Groups select the Camp 1 2x2 object and drop it in. (See Figure 5.)

Now we'll put in the entrance to the crypt we're going to make a little later. The entrance goes in the upper-right corner of the tileset. Under Groups select the Ruin 1 2x2 object and drop it in. (See Figure 6.)

We've covered the basics in this tileset, but let's drop in some more objects to make the forest interesting. Along the left side of the tileset, we'll put a stream to help define the edge of the tile. And let's include a few big trees and a road that winds from the woodsman's lodge up through the middle of the tileset to the top center of the tileset. You'll find all these objects in the right pane when Paint Terrain is selected. You can add lots of other cool things, like a humanoid cage in the Orc camp or webbed areas to make a place look creepy or serve as a home for giant spiders, for example. (See Figure 7.)

Adding NPCs and Monsters

Now for the really fun part: dropping in some monsters and adding our woodsman NPC.

First we'll populate our Orc camp. Select the Paint Creatures button in the right pane, select Humanoid, and then select Orc to see the list of available Orcs.

There are two basic Orc types. One carries a sword, the other a bow. Put one of each near the fire, select them individually, and rotate them to face the fire. The rotate buttons are found at the bottom center of the screen below the view of the tileset. Next drop in an Orc chieftain near the fire. (See Figure 8.)

Right-click on one of the Orcs and select Properties to examine it. Here you can view and change a lot of interesting things, including the hit points and other stats. (See Figure 9.) Look at the challenge rating. For the chieftain, it is 10. This number roughly corresponds to the monster's level. The chieftain is way too tough, so let's lower his rating. You can do this in several ways, but we'll take the easy route and just lower his hit points from 120 to 15.

Now let's add more monsters for the player to fight: wolves, goblins, more Orcs, ghasts, bears, and our woodsman, a common male Human.

The idea is to give the player some monsters to fight so the player will be at Level 2 when it's time to go into the crypt. Put the monsters in, save the mod, and test it with a new character to see if you have enough monsters. You have to be careful to space the monsters far enough apart so that they don't all converge on the player at once. Also, be aware that the monsters will attack the woodsman if they get close enough.

You can also add monsters by using the Encounters feature. This method keeps your module more flexible: the game will adjust the difficulty and number of monsters based on the size of the player party and its members' levels. If you go this route, you might want to set the spawn point out of the player's view so that the monsters don't seem to magically appear.

Adding the Story

Now to spice up our adventure with some story. We'll give the woodsman a tale to tell when the player interacts with him. It seems he's had a magic ring stolen by some Orcs. If you could retrieve it for him, he'll reward you and tell you the legend of the crypt. To create the story, we need to add some conversation to the NPC and add a magic ring to the Orc chieftain's inventory.

Let's get the hardest part out of the way. Right-click on the Human you added to represent the woodsman and select Properties. Let's change his name to "Woodsman."

Click on the Tag button to give him a unique tag. Change "NW_CREATURE_00" to "Woodsman." Under the Advanced tab, make him a Plot character, which makes him invul-

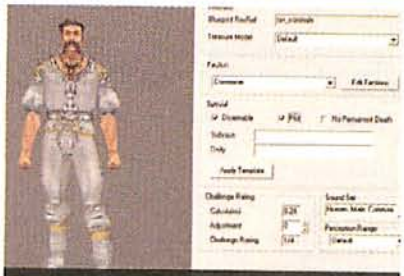


Figure 10

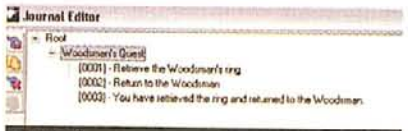


Figure 11

Figure 12

nerable. (See Figure 10.) Close the Properties window and right-click on the woodsman again. This time select Add to Palette to add the woodsman as a custom NPC. You will be asked to select a category for the woodsman to appear under. Make sure you're on the Basic tab and then click on Category and add him to the NPCs–Humans category.

Now we need to add conversation and have the woodsman give the player a quest to find that magic ring. First we'll add a quest to the journal. Select Journal Editor from the Tools. In the Journal Editor window, click on the Add button near the top. This adds a new journal entry. Edit the entry to read "Woodsman's Quest." Now click on the Add button three times to add three new entries nested beneath the Woodsman's Quest entry. Edit the first to read "Retrieve the woodsman's ring," the second to read "Return to woodsman," and the third to read "You have retrieved the ring and returned to the woodsman." Check the Finish Category box. (See Figure 11.) Note that the XP field in the Journal window is for notes only; to add XP to a quest you need to script it in.

Now we'll add the conversation that gives the quest to the player. We will create two conversations, but they will be in the same file. We'll have the initial conversation when the player receives the quest from the woodsman, a conversation that occurs if the player returns to talk to the woodsman without completing the quest, and a final conversation that takes place after the player completes the quest. Here's where the process gets a bit weird: the conversations will be listed in reverse order. We're doing a bit of scripting here. When it's done, the whole conversation will look like what you see below (without the words in bold type):

Last conversation

Woodsman: Did ya find it? Did ya get my ring?

Player: Not yet, old-timer.

Player: Easy as pie! What's my reward?

Woodsman: Fantastic! Now that I think about it, why don't you keep the ring? You might find it handy if you decide to investigate the crypt up north. Watch out for the undead though!

First conversation

Woodsman: Hey there! You ain't one of them Orcs, is ya? Nah, you don't smell bad enough to be one of them, though you ain't no daisy.

Player response option 1: You didn't graduate from charm school, did you? My name is <FullName>. Why are you so antsy?

Woodsman: Them Orcs stole'd my ring. I'd kill them until they was dead, but my arthritic is acting up. Hey! How about you kill them? I'll give you a reward!

Player: Hot damn, that sounds great! I'll get that ring and then get my reward. You may be a crazy old coot, but you're cool!

Player response option 2: Are you calling me an Orc? Because if you are, I have a problem with that.

Woodsman: Now, now, youngster, get that battle-ax out of your rear. I don't talk much to people and I forget my manners sometimes. It's just that those blasted Orcs stole my magic ring...Hey, why don't you fetch it for me! I'll give you a reward.

Player: Hot damn, that sounds great! I'll get that ring and then get my reward. You may be a crazy old coot, but you're cool!

Select the woodsman and right-click on him to bring up the Properties window. Near the bottom of the Basic screen, click on the Edit button to the right of the Conversation field. This brings up the Conversation Editor window.

In the Conversation Editor window, click on the Add button to add a new conversation. An Input Text window appears. Just type in the woodsman's greeting. Work the Orc angle into this opening bit. How about "Hey there! You ain't one of them Orcs, is ya? Nah, you don't smell bad enough to be one of them, though you ain't no daisy."

Now we add the player's response. We'll keep it simple and give the player just a couple of possible responses. For the first conversation path, with the woodsman's conversation selected, click on Add and type into the Input Text window: "You didn't graduate from charm school, did you? My name is <FullName>. Why are you so antsy?" You'll see that your statement is now nested under the woodsman's lines. The <FullName> variable will insert the player's name in the sentence.

Now we need the woodsman to respond. With the player's conversation selected, click on Add again and type, "Them Orcs stole'd my ring. I'd kill them until they was dead, but my arthritic is acting up. Hey! How about you kill them? I'll give you a reward!"

We want the player to accept the quest, so we'll give him just one response. With the woodsman's second snatch of conversation selected, click on Add again and type, "Hot damn, that sounds great! I'll get that ring and then get my reward. You may be a crazy old coot, but you're cool!" Now select the Other Actions tab in the Conversation window and click on the Journal drop-down menu and select Woodsman's Quest. This will update the player's journal and add the quest.

Now for a bit of variety, we'll add a second conversation path. Select the woodsman's initial greeting again, click on Add, and type, "Are you calling me an Orc? Because if you are, I have a problem with that." With this statement selected, click on Add again and type, "Now, now, youngster, get that battle-ax out of your rear. I don't talk much to people and I forget my manners sometimes. It's just that those blasted Orcs stole my magic ring...Hey, why don't you fetch it for me! I'll give you a reward."

With this response from the woodsman selected, click on Add again and retype the player's "Hot damn!" response. Again, use the Other Actions option to add the Woodsman's Quest to the player's journal. (See Figure 12.)

Now go back and add the last conversation (starting with "Did ya find it? Did ya get my ring?"). Select that conversation and select the "Text Appears When..." tab. Click on the Script wizard button (the far-right button next to the blank Conversation field). You'll see a new window with a list of variables. Select the Local Variable checkbox. Enter "nFirstTimeTalked" in the empty field in the upper right and then enter "1" in the field in the lower right. Click on Add and then Next. Now rename the script something like woodsman1 and hit Finish. What we've done is set a condition for the text to appear. We've told the game not to display this bit of conversation until the variable nFirstTimeTalked equals 1. (See Figure 13.)

Now we'll move down to the next bit of conversation nested under the root, "Hey there! You ain't one of them Orcs, is ya?" Select this, select the Actions Taken tab, and start the Script wizard. Select Set Local Variables. Enter "nFirstTimeTalked" in the empty field in the upper right and then enter "1" in the field in the lower right and finish the wizard. Now we're making the game set

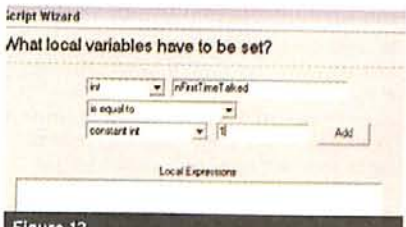


Figure 13

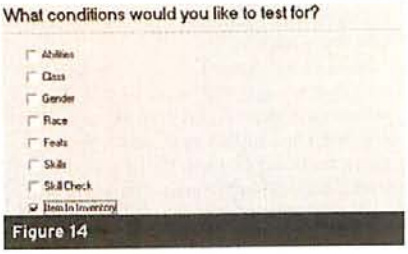


Figure 14

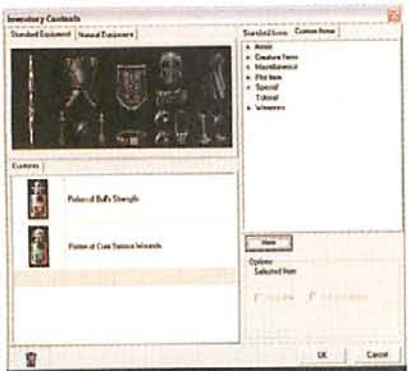


Figure 15

the variable when it runs this part of the conversation.

The sequence works like this: The first time the player talks to the NPC, the variable hasn't been set yet so the "Did ya find it?" bit of conversation is skipped, and the "Hey there!" bit is what the NPC says. After he says it, the variable is set thanks to the script we made. The next time the player talks to the NPC, the "Did ya find it?" conversation will take place because the condition has been met.

Now select the "Easy as pie! What's my reward?" part of the conversation, and use the Script wizard to tell it to look for the ring in the player's inventory. Select the Item in Inventory checkbox and click on Next. (See Figure 14.) Now enter the tag name for the magic ring (which we haven't made yet but will). The tag name will be WoodsmansRing, so enter that now.

Adding the Quest Item

Now we'll add the magic ring to the Orc leader's inventory.

- Find the Orc leader, right-click on him, and select Properties.
- Click on the Inventory button to display the Inventory Contents screen.
- Select the Custom Items tab and click on New. (See Figure 15.)
- Scroll down, select Ring, and click on Next.
- Now we need to name it. Let's call it WoodsmansRing. You also need to designate it as a magical item, and then select the level range and the quality. We'll go with 1-5 and high quality. Click on Next.
- Select the category it will be listed under. Because it's a quest item, we'll put it under Plot. Click through the rest to finish making the ring.

Now we need to give the ring its magical properties. Select the ring under Plot, right-click on it, and select Properties. Note the tag name for the ring, which should be WoodsmansRing.

Select the Properties tab and remove the current magic properties using the arrow button. Scroll through the list of available properties and select Damage Reduction +3, Dark Vision, and Freedom of Movement. Use the arrow key to move them to the Assigned Properties list. (See Figure 16.)

Check the Identified box so the player doesn't have to identify the ring.

Now return to the Inventory Contents window and select the Custom tab. Find the ring and drag it from Custom to the Standard Equipment contents area and check the Droppable box. This causes the ring to drop as treasure when the Orc leader is slain. (See Figure 17.)

Adding the Crypt

We'll be duplicating a lot of the steps we performed when we made the forest area, so let's get through this quickly.

Start the Module wizard and use the Area wizard to create the crypt. Select the Crypt tileset and use the default medium size. Be sure to name your module.

You'll start with a center tile in the Crypt tileset. Shrink the view and you can see the complete area, which is dark except for the center piece. Use the Paint Terrain tools to lay out the rest of the crypt. You might find it easier to place a floor tile in a corner and paint the starting location there. Ours is a simple design: it's a linear dungeon crawl with a series of rooms connected by corridors and doorways. (See Figure 18.)

After you lay out the crypt, populate it with monsters and objects. To stay in theme, let's put in only undead monsters. The zombie lord goes at the end, of course. He's too hard as is, so we lowered his hit points from 120 to 50. You can also paint objects like braziers, barrels, garbage, signs, chests, and so on. You can paint visual objects, like rays of light, flames, and magic sparks. You can also add sound effects, like creepy music. If you decide to add traps, it's a good idea to make them hurt but not kill if you don't want to frustrate your players.

When you've finished adding monsters and objects, save your crypt and test it with a Level 3 or Level 4 character.

Adding Area Transitions

This is the final piece in the puzzle. We need to link our two areas together with an area transition.

- In the forest, place an area-transition trigger in the ruins. Add a waypoint next to it.
- Do the same in the crypt near the starting point.

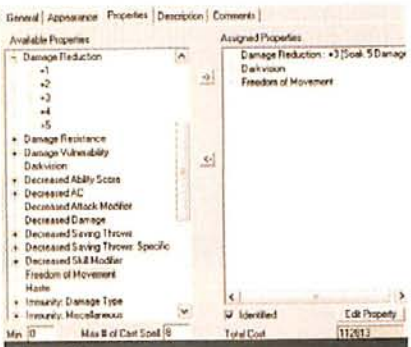


Figure 16

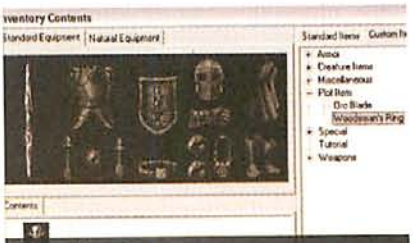


Figure 17

Figure 18

- Give each waypoint a specific tag—this is *very* important. Remember the tag name for each point.
- Set the forest area transition to the crypt waypoint.
- Set the crypt area transition to the forest waypoint.

That's it! Of course, it is a bit easier to use doors because doors don't need waypoints. Keep that in mind when you're building your mods. It would be easy enough to add stairs going up from the crypt and then drop in a door if you like.

Get to Modding

Hopefully, you can see how easy it is to make playable mods with the Aurora toolset. The only tricky part is the scripting. It is programming, but the game holds our hands a bit with clever wizards.

There are also many examples of scripts to be found at BioWare's Website and at various *NWN* fan sites. Plus, if you plan on DM-ing your mods, you don't even need scripting. You can make up conversations on the fly and drop quest items into a player's inventory. So go forth and mod already!

The archmage is the safest bet for your first hero because he can summon a Water Elemental to supplement your initially small army.

WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

Your guide to Human heroism and victory By Elliott Chin

All four races in *WarCraft III* present unique play styles. Each race has different strengths and weaknesses and requires different strategies. While Humans might be considered boring when compared to the other races, they're a great first race to play because they offer good melee units, excellent spells, and strong siege and air support.

Hero Selection

The first big decision you make when you start the game is which hero to recruit. Your first hero in a general situation should be the archmage. But if you go with the archmage, resist the temptation to pick Blizzard as your first spell. Although it's not as sexy, Water Elemental is actually a better spell. It does more damage than Blizzard in the long run, and also provides another target for enemy units to concentrate on. This increases the longevity of your units and saves you resource costs. You can always pick Blizzard later, but Water Elemental is more helpful in the early game, and becomes better as you add levels. You can have up to four summoned water elementals at a time, which is also a bonus. They are the strongest of all summonable creatures, except for the infernal created by the Dread Lord's ultimate spell, Inferno.

After you select Water Elemental, you should choose Mana Regeneration so that you can generate spells quickly. It's a great help when you add another hero and spellcasters to your army. Next you can choose Blizzard or opt for a second-level Water Elemental spell. When you can learn Mass Teleport, you should, as it gives you unequaled movement ability.

Your second hero choice depends on which strategy you want to adopt. The mountain king is the strongest melee unit and has the best attack spells for taking out multiple melee units and heroes. The paladin, though, has much better defensive skills.

If facing Undead, you want to go with the paladin. And indeed, if you are certain of fighting Undead, the paladin might be your best first choice. His Holy Light spell can destroy Undead easily, and his other skills are all good to have. The paladin's Divine Shield can be the difference between victory and defeat. At high levels, it gives you 30 seconds to attack enemy heroes with impunity. In addition, while under the effects of Divine Shield, the paladin is immune to spells, such as the Dread Lord's annoying Sleep spell. If in doubt about which skill to choose, Devotion Aura is always good.

The mountain king is a good choice if you foresee facing swarm units, like Orc grunts or Night Elf huntresses. His Thunder Clap is a great

FOOTMEN'S DEFEND

Footmen will be the mainstay of your army until you get knights, but they must be upgraded to stay competitive. One critical upgrade is the defend skill, which protects you from most ranged units. Defend reduces damage suffered from piercing attacks to 30 percent, but it also slows footmen from average to slow speed. Defend works against all ranged and air units except for the Night Elf huntress, who deals normal damage.

Defend is also good against towers, because all towers deal piercing damage. In the early game, it gives Humans an excellent way to counter towers. While other races tend to wait until they get siege weapons, a Human player can research the defend skill and then rush a defended enemy base.

Mass Teleport is a great spell. Sneak a lone unit into an enemy base and then jump in for a surprise attack.

USING MASS TELEPORT

This spell is very useful for defense and offense. You can use it as you would the Town Portal scroll and simply flee back to town whenever your army and hero are about to be destroyed. But if you do this, take care to cast the spell while your hero can still withstand a few hits because Mass Teleport takes time to put into effect. You can also use the spell to quickly come to an ally's aid, making this spell perfect in multiplayer for coordinating attacks and coming to the rescue of a friendly town. Just remember that you need to have one of your own ground units to teleport to. This isn't a problem when teleporting home, but requires forethought if you want to use it to help an ally.

You can also use Mass Teleport offensively, as an instant transport across land. This usually means you have to send a quick knight unit to be your destination ahead, but it means you can travel great distances quickly.

For best effect, you can use the Sorceress's invisibility spell on a unit, move it behind an enemy's base, near his workers, and then teleport in for a surprise attack. Because players tend to neglect invisibility detection as a skill, you'll likely sneak by without incident, and then be able to deliver a crushing blow to the enemy.

skill to use against massed melee units because it damages and slows all surrounding units. The radius of the attack is actually large enough to catch huntresses, despite their range. The mountain king is also your best choice for taking down heroes because two of his skills are hero killers: Storm Bolt and Thunder Clap. Both will stun or slow a hero, preventing him from fleeing effectively and giving you free reign to pummel him. You should use the mountain king's ultimate spell, Avatar, just as you enter battle. Not only does he become truly powerful, but he is also immune to spells, which is great in the later game when enemy heroes are trying to stop you with spells like Entangling Roots, Warstomp, and the like.

When you have your heroes, scouting will reveal to you your enemy. Depending on whom you're fighting, your strategies could vary widely.

Versus Orcs

Orcs are in many ways the mirror image of the Humans. Both have strong melee units, but whereas the Humans favor defense, the Orcs rely on sheer offense. Orc melee units already do the most damage of any units in the game, but the horde also has some great abilities that pour on the damage. In the middle of the game, the Orcs can get the kodo beast, which adds +2 to +4 damage to each unit. And in the late game, the shaman gets the Bloodlust spell, which boosts a unit's attack speed by roughly 50 percent. By the end of a long game, you could be facing Orc taurens that can dish out an average of 50 damage per hit and attack as fast as knights!

Therefore, you must research all the armor upgrades as early as possible to offset the Orcs' great advantage in melee damage. And once the Orc player gets Bloodlust, you must use the priest and research his Inner Fire spell, which gives your units a +5 armor bonus to balance out the increased Bloodlust damage. The sorceress is also an essential unit in the midgame, because her Slow spell will hinder the Orc offensive. Her Polymorph spell can be used to neutralize enemy taurens and shamans. Because the Orc's Dispel Magic ability is an offensive spell on enemy units, it can't be used to neutralize your Slow and Polymorph spells.

The footmen's defend ability isn't crucial because the Orcs don't have a lot of piercing attacks. Also, you needn't worry about Orc air units, because your riflemen, gyrocopters, and gryphon riders can easily deal with Orc wyvern riders. Conversely, because your air power is superior to the Orcs', you'll use gryphon riders and gyrocopters to destroy enemy expansions and bases. The Orc player will have to counter you with troll headhunters, which you can then run over with knights and footmen.

Versus Night Elves

The Night Elves are a very tough race to fight if you play Human, especially because even a small pack of huntresses can quickly snowball into a swarm that no footman or rifleman defense can withstand. The key to fighting the Night Elves is to prevent them from amassing their huge Huntress armies. If they do, there is little you can do to fend off the torrent of moon glaives. Unfortunately, a good Night Elf player can have huntresses very early in the game, so it is imperative for the Human player to go on the offensive early against the Elves.

As soon as you can, harass the enemy with massed footmen. If you do this, you must research the defend ability so that you can withstand Night Elf archers' attacks. Having this advantage you will easily cut through the enemy's archer defenses. You'll also want to go with the archmage as your first hero and choose Water Elemental as your first spell. Water elementals are a good counter to the archdruid's treants (which will undoubtedly be called on to make quick work of your footmen rushes). The summoned water elementals are also good against huntresses, should the Night Elf player manage to avoid your early rushes and come back at you with those units. Your strategy should be to run the Night Elf player into the ground, because if you let them set up an intricate attack or a mass of huntresses early on, you will have a hard time defending yourself.

In the mid- to late game, your knights will be excellent counters against the huntresses, and the enemy will have to go with druids of the talon and claw to battle you. Be careful not to invest too heavily in magic, because the Night Elf dryad will be able to dispel any negative

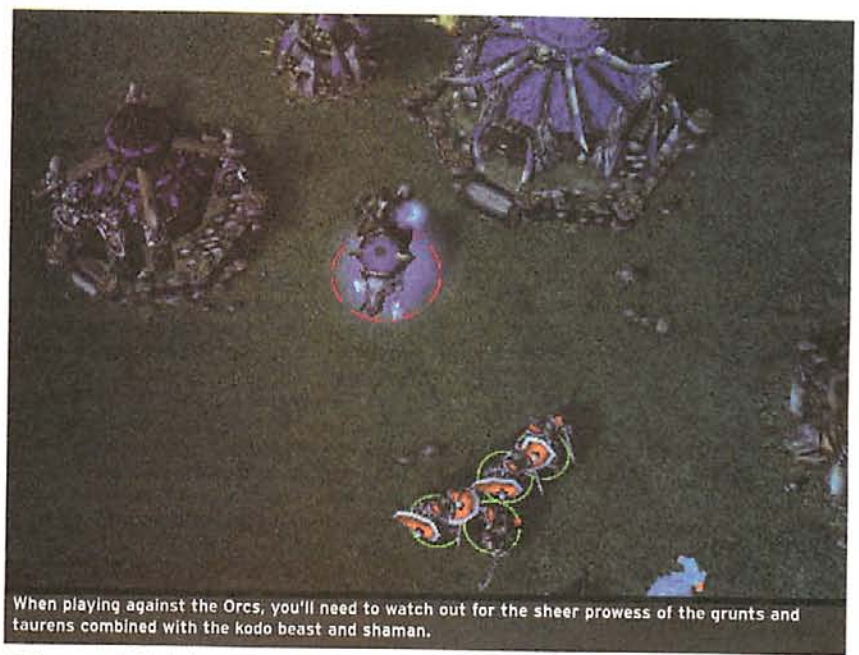
RIFLEMEN

You should add riflemen to your footmen army as soon as possible. They do nearly double the damage of footmen and give you the much-needed ability to concentrate firepower on ranged units and spellcasters. Riflemen are also your counter to air units and, of course, they give you the ability to kill heroes from afar. Against very strong ranged units like the huntress and crypt fiend, you'll need footmen up front with riflemen behind to gang up on the wounded. If you use riflemen, make sure you research their long-rifles upgrade to give them the same range as other ranged units in the game. For this, you'll need to go to the keep and build a workshop. Upgrade the attack of your riflemen quickly as well, because they'll be doing most of the damage in your combined arms attack. All ranged attackers, including riflemen, should be under strict control so you can concentrate fire on one target at a time. Have them attack nearly-dead units and any spellcaster or ranged units first.

USING SORCERESSES AND PRIESTS

The sorceress is a powerful spellcaster that you should add to your army as soon as possible. With her Slow ability, she can cripple the enemy, and prevent enemy casters and heroes from fleeing your footmen and knights. Use her Invisibility spell to scout with little resistance. Upgrade the sorceress (and priest) as soon as you can, because each upgrade not only gives you a new spell, but increases hit points by 75, raises attack strength, increases mana regeneration, and adds another 100 to your mana maximum. If you plan to use Polymorph, be sure to turn off autocasting for Slow so that you have enough mana to use the spell. Target high-level units (like abominations and chimerae) or spellcasters (like necromancers and shamans) immediately. Against the Orcs, target the kodo beast, which immediately reduces the power of all nearby Orc units. It's wasted on smaller units. Once you've used Polymorph, then you can switch back to autocasting Slow. If you want to have your spellcasters provide good fire support, use the sorceress rather than the priest, as she has more hit points and twice the attack power. The priest is good if you are facing lots of summoned creatures, like water elementals, spirit wolves, and skeleton warriors. The priest's Dispel Magic deals 300 damage to these units. Moreover, with Inner Fire the priest can boost the attack speed and armor of your units. But aside from his spells, the priest doesn't offer much in ranged fire support.

The paladin is the hero du jour when facing the Undead. Use Holy Light to smite Undead units.



When playing against the Orcs, you'll need to watch out for the sheer prowess of the grunts and taurens combined with the kodo beast and shaman.

spells you cast, like Polymorph, Slow, and even your Water Elementals. Good Night Elf players will be able to thwart your magic. Instead, press the attack with upgraded knights and riflemen, and be sure to target the dryads and druids first. Learn to identify and destroy the druid of the talon, because he will decimate your army with Cyclone and Faerie Fire. Make sure you have the priest's Inner Fire to counter the Faerie Fire effect.

Versus Undead

The Undead are also a tricky race to fight. They have excellent air capabilities so you have to watch out for brigades of gargoyles harassing your supply lines. And you have to contend with the overwhelming swarm of skeleton warriors. Your melee units are about evenly matched with the Undead melee units, although theirs are cheaper and faster to build. Be sure to upgrade your weapons and armor to maintain a slight edge over them. Be wary of crypt fiends, which have lots of hit points and a potent long-range attack. They are stronger than riflemen and very hard for footmen to take down. You'll have to research the defend skill to fight crypt fiends, and you'll need concentrated riflemen as backups.

You'll want to have a paladin hero around to destroy the Undead units quickly and to provide better defense to frustrate the Undead attackers. If facing hordes of skeletons, you should research the priest's Dispel Magic power, which can destroy skeletons in an area quickly. The computer actually uses this tactic very well, and you should emulate it. While your

upgraded knights can withstand a barrage of skeletons, you'll have a much easier time facing the Undead if your priests can simply wish skeletons away.

Because an Undead player can get to gargoyles very quickly, you'll want to have riflemen as a staple in your army early on. You'll already want to do that to counter the Undead crypt fiends, but this is a gentle reminder to make sure that by the end of the game you have many gun-toting Dwarves around lest you find yourself helpless against a sudden rush of stone-faced fliers. Because the gargoyles are adept at picking off your peasants, build several guard towers around your lumber and gold sites to ward against this sneaky tactic.

Be wary of the Undead's Dread Lord hero. His Sleep ability is deadly: it can quickly neutralize a large army. Target him as quickly as possible with concentrated fire.

Armor and Weapon Types

WarCraft III, like *StarCraft*, has a subtle underlying system that rules combat mechanics. There are the obvious stats, like hit points, attack damage, and armor, but underneath it all is the armor and weapon system. Each unit has three attack types: normal, piercing, or siege (the fourth–chaos–is used only in single-player mode). There are five armor types: light, medium, heavy, fortified, and hero (only for heroes–duh). Low-end melee units have medium armor; high-end melee and air units have heavy armor; and ranged units and spellcasters have light armor. Buildings all have fortified armor.

Consult this chart to see how each armor type fares against each attack type:

	Normal	Pierce	Siege
Light	150%	75%	50%
Medium	100%	100%	100%
Heavy	100%	150%	100%
Fortified	50%	35%	150%
Hero	100%	50%	50%

For example, a rifleman that does 20 piercing damage on an attack deals 30 damage to a heavy-armor Orc wyvern rider, 15 damage to a light-armor troll headhunter, and 20 to a medium-armor grunt. The different values mean that most melee units are great against ranged units and casters, while ranged units are the best counter to high-level units and air units.

Build Orders and Expansions

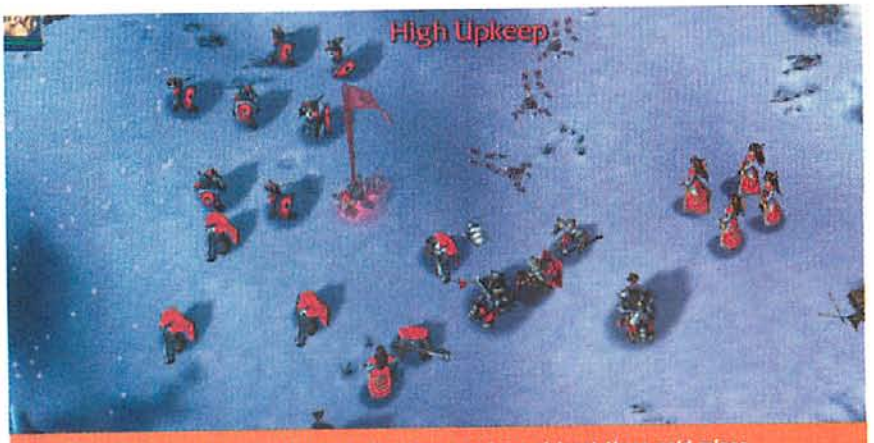
When and what you build determines how good an army you can field and how quickly you can do it.

As a Human player, you should immediately set three peasants to mining gold. Have one start building an altar of kings, and set another one to building a barrack. Rope the third peasant from the mining crew, after he has delivered a bag of gold to your town hall, into building a farm. Have your town hall crank out two more peasants who immediately start chopping wood. When your first farm is done, build two more as wood permits. Eventually, you'll want five peasants on your gold mine and three on wood, with one extra floating if you can spare it for buildings and repairs. With this first build order, you will have three footmen ready by the time your first hero arrives.

Build a blacksmith shop and a lumber mill as soon as you can for supporting riflemen, unit upgrades, and the improved lumber harvesting technology.

You won't want to expand to a new gold mine until you have an army large enough to defend it. But as a Human player, you have a great advantage in that you can rush construction. When you are ready to expand, send over three or four peasants and have two construct your town hall while the other two build towers nearby. When they are done with the towers, have them help with the town hall. You'll be done much faster than any other race, and have the peasants available for immediate mining.

As for building additional barracks, don't do it until you have expanded. A good rule of thumb is to have one barrack (or any other unit-producing building) per gold mine. This isn't *StarCraft*, so you don't need as many unit-producing buildings, but if you have the gold, you should bump up your production schedule.



High upkeep is a terrible situation to be in unless you have at least three gold mines.

UPKEEP

Upkeep is a new feature in the *Craft* series that takes some getting used to. Try not to enter the low-upkeep state until you get a second gold mine. And don't enter high upkeep until you have two expansions going. The hit on gold income is tremendous in high upkeep, and only with three gold mines up and running will you get roughly the gold output of a single, no-upkeep gold mine.

Because of the upkeep costs, you don't want to amass troops and not do anything with them. You should always be on the offensive, aggressively scouting out the enemy and harassing them with hit-and-run tactics. Ideally, this will keep your upkeep low since you won't have hordes of troops standing idle in your town. Try to do all your upgrading at no or low upkeep. You should enter high upkeep only when you are ready to mount a large offensive. That's when you crank out troops and hit the population cap for a great attack. As you lose numbers in your assault, you'll drop to low upkeep for better gold mining to support another large ramp-up.

UPGRADE EARLY, OFTEN

Upgrades are what keep low-level units useful in the mid- to late games and make high-level units unstoppable in the end. Armor upgrades are especially important because armor doesn't actually deduct its numerical value from an opposing attack, but instead reduces a percentage of damage dealt. That means armor is just as good, if not better, against heavy-damage units (like the frost wyrm) as it is against low-damage units (like the ghoul). Blizzard has an intricate formula for calculating damage reduction from armor, but it begins as a roughly 5 percent reduction in damage for each point of armor. As armor value increases, though, the percentage of damage reduced per point decreases, eventually topping out at armor 50 and a 75 percent reduction in damage. A footman with 2 armor suffers about 90 percent damage from any single attack, while an upgraded militia with 10 armor suffers 63 percent damage from each attack. A fully upgraded knight with the paladin's Devotion Aura and the priest's Inner Fire has 20 armor, and takes only 46 percent damage from all attacks. You can find the formula at Blizzard's Website at www.battle.net/war3/basics/armorandweapontypes.shtml. But if you don't want to bother, all you really need to know is that you must upgrade your unit's weapon and armor as soon as possible. If you have two gold mines going, it is a good idea to build two blacksmith shops and upgrade armor and weapons concurrently, or upgrade both melee and ranged units at the same time.

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Greenspeak

Kill Joys

Facing a firestorm over *GTA III*, Jeff reaches for the gasoline **By Jeff Green**

Although it may be hard to believe, the editors at *CGW* are really not looking for trouble, most of the time. Live and let live, we say. Hakuna matata, we also say. Pulu see bagumba.

But try as we might, we cannot always avoid controversy. Certain topics are hot buttons, and whenever we bring them up, people get mad. Just ask Canada. And now, our mailbox is once again a seething cauldron of hate. Why? Because in the September issue we did something that many readers (and some industry professionals) are having a hard time with: we praised the excessively violent *Grand Theft Auto III* while trashing the also excessively violent *Soldier of Fortune II*.

Hypocritical, said some of you. Immoral, said others. "Lame, Jeff, lame," said one particularly disappointed reader.

But although I will concede that we piled on *SOF II* rather hard, and although I will acknowledge that *GTA III* is not going to win a Nobel Peace Prize, I do not buy the central argument presented by a bunch of you, so I'm afraid I have to risk further wrath and bring this mess up here once again.

I acknowledge that *GTA III* is not going to win a Nobel Peace Prize.

***

The gist of many of the complaints is that while both games are undeniably violent, *SOF II* is somehow less offensive because the people you are slaughtering are "bad guys" and thus deserve to have their brains blown out, whereas in *GTA III* you can kill completely innocent bystanders with no repercussions whatsoever.

"What is more deplorable?" asks one reader. "A realistic depiction of the horrors of war and terrorism, or players rewarded for carjacking and killing innocent people?"

"Are you going to let your daughter know how much 'fun' you think it is to kill hookers [in *GTA III*]?" asks another.

OK, those are good questions. One could, on the face of it, take the subject matter of each game, boil it down to a superficial summary—"kill terrorists" in one, "be a gangster" in the other—and conclude that the former is somehow more "moral." Well, duh. In no way can I reasonably sit here and write that the subject matter of *GTA III*—the situations it puts you in, the actions it allows you to take—is anything but deplorable. And it would be equally naïve (and unpatriotic!) of me to argue that the good guys in *SOF II* do not in fact have good reasons for operating against the game's villains.

But this was not the point to us. Never mind the myriad noncontroversial gameplay aspects—the level design, originality, depth, and variety—that so clearly make *GTA III* the superior game. To us, the reason one offended us and the other didn't was not a matter of whom you kill in the game or why. It was all in the attitude and presentation.

To us, *SOF II*'s cold fixation on the act of violence itself, the "ultrarealistic damage modeling anywhere on the body" (as the developers put it themselves), was too much, no matter how "justified" it might be. Yeah, so maybe this is how real-life violence is. But you know, looking at stuff like this, I can't help but think: reality is way overrated.

***

With *GTA III*, I wonder if those who complain about it have ever even seen it. The game is painted in such broad comedic strokes, and it's so unrealistic that the supposed immorality of it has no weight, no resonance. I can't take it seriously because it doesn't take itself seriously, *as it should be*.

GTA III is a guilty pleasure. That's one of the great perks of being an adult: you can do stuff that's not always "good for you." Being a good husband, father, neighbor, and friend are all things I take very seriously. I play games to escape, to de-stress from all that, not to learn about life. I am not looking for moral or spiritual guidance from games, in the same way that I'm not looking for nutritional value while wolfing down a pint of Chunky Monkey ice cream. I am indulging. On purpose. I try to balance out this crap—this stuff that I know is crap—with things that are better for me, like vegetables and PBS specials on marine life.

So please don't play the morality card. These are computer games we're talking about here. They're all just various degrees of dumb. Learn about life from the proper source, friends. Television.

Mr. Cranky Pants is off to Hawaii to chill out for two weeks. Send sunburn cures for his pasty ass to jeff_green @ziffdavis.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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