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**COMPUTER**

*Earth's Best* **PC Gaming** *Magazine*

# GAMING WORLD

**SPECIAL 14-PAGE E3 REPORT!**

**2004**

# FALL GAMES PREVIEW

**BEST ONLINE  
RPG YET!  
CITY OF  
HEROES  
REVIEWED!  
SEE PAGE  
70**

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A close-up, high-contrast photograph of the American flag. The flag is shown in a dynamic, waving state, with the blue field of stars and the red and white stripes clearly visible. The lighting creates deep shadows and bright highlights, emphasizing the texture of the fabric. The text "THIS IS NOT A GAME." is superimposed in the center of the image.

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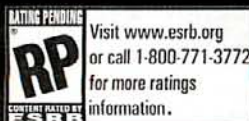
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CD-ROM  
SOFTWARE



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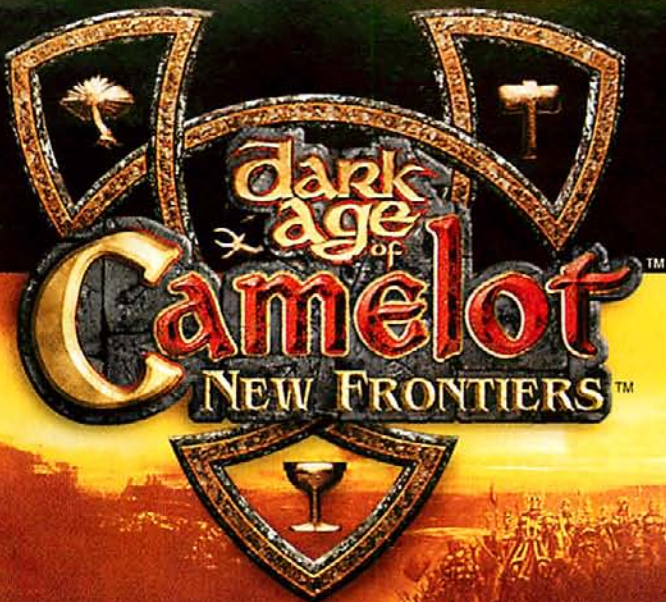
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Violence

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August 2004 Issue #241

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Generally, we wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have us as members. But not Jeff! He wants to be friends with everyone online! Yay!

## 22 Letters

Lots of people hated our **Far Cry** review. Lots of people liked our **Far Cry** review. We let both groups vent their spleens before thoughtfully mopping up.

## 26 Radar

As the **E3** fallout subsides, we've got some interesting stories for you. We have an inside look at **Alienware's** new PC technology, a real-world test drive of the mysterious **Phantom** game system, and the true story of a boy with leukemia who's fighting back cancer in his own videogame. All this and a surefire list of ways to blow a hundred bucks are comin' at you in this month's Radar section.

## 38 Previews

It's a special all-MMO previews month, complete with hands-on impressions of **EverQuest II** and **World of Warcraft**, as well as a deeper look at **The Matrix Online**, **Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed**, **Auto Assault**, and **Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia**.

COVER STORY

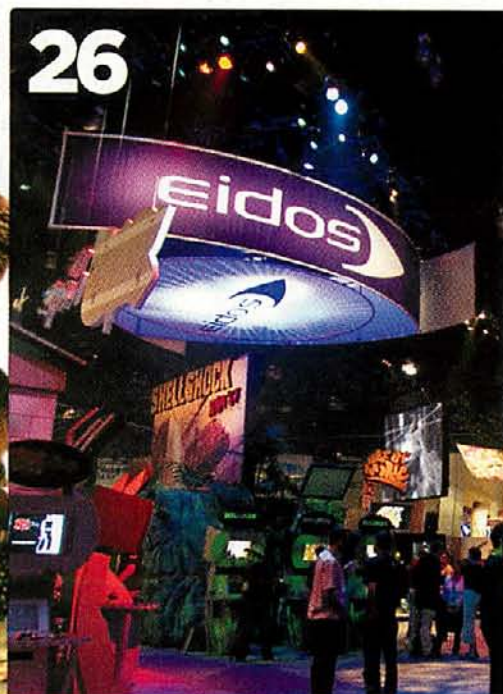
# It Came From E3

This year's E3 has come and gone, and we've gotten sneak peeks at some of the hottest games you'll be playing later this year. Just feast your eyes on **Splinter Cell 3**, **Auto Assault**, and **F.E.A.R.**, as well as updates on eagerly awaited games such as **Half-Life 2** and **Rome: Total War**.

# 56

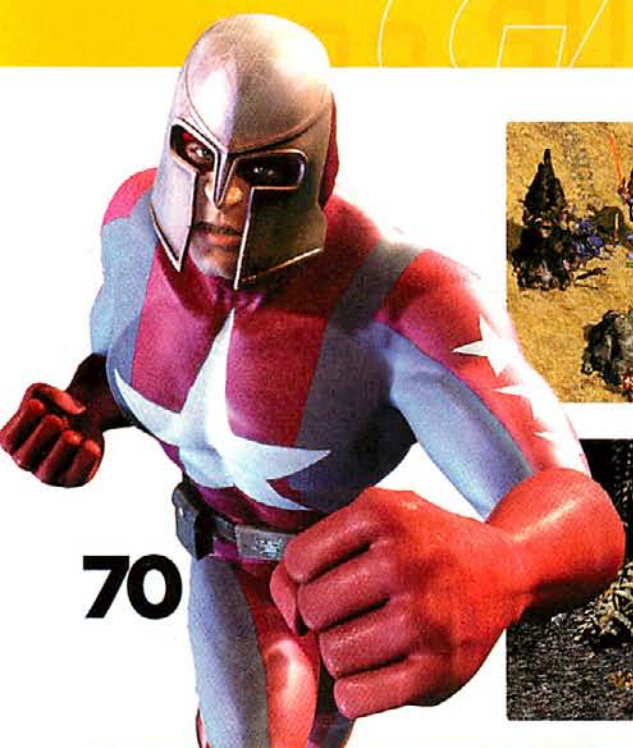


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## 70 Reviews

Finally, we can don tights and run around without all those odd stares—**City of Heroes** has shipped, and we've got all you need to know (and then some) in our review of the best MMO of the year so far. Need more reasons to flip to the Reviews section right now? How's about **Hitman: Contracts**, **Warlords Battlecry III**, and **Crystal Key 2**? OK, maybe not **Crystal Key 2**.

## 86 Tech

Wil takes a look at **Vicious PC's** small form-factor rig while Dave gets comfortable with the latest graphics cards by **ATI** and **Nvidia**. Also, Joel shows you how to update your drivers, and as always, there's a new Tech Medics, Wil Power, and Cracked Case.

## 101 Check Out

We've got good news and better news. The good news: another **A-List** full of great buying recommendations and the **Rewind 100's** recap of all the recent games you should be playing. The better news? We've got some big changes in store for Check Out in the coming months—so keep an eye out!

## 112 Tom vs. Bruce

This month, Tom and Bruce duke it out in the new real-time-strategy expansion **Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots**.

## 116 Scorched Earth

Princess Sissypants justifies his sissypants-ness.



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# Meet UP @ 1UP.com

The all-new 1UP is here, and it's exploding with new features! We've still got all of that great daily content you've come to know and love, but we're now the first-ever destination for gamers to meet, play, get informed, and show off.

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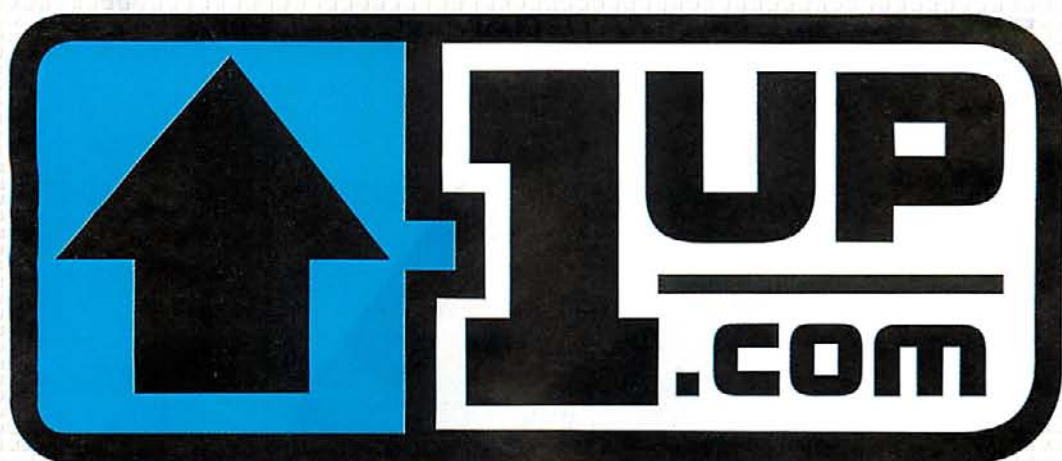
YOUR GAMES



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#### MY CLUBS (7)



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**Shoe's World**

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**SOCOM II Club**

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**Dan Hsu**

Honolulu HI

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**Sam Kennedy**

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YOUR FRIENDS

You've got a voice, let it be heard! Tell everyone what you're playing or doing.

#### DAN'S 1UP JOURNAL

My day at the office

Some of you realize that I've had no more than "I've had a good symbol and witty banter" to understand why *Prince of Persia*: The Sands of Time is getting the special highest score possible. The rest will need a little more explanation than that, which I'm only too happy to provide.



The setup of *Prince of Persia* is a very simple one, and it stays simple the whole way through. When the Prince's father finds another castle, owned by a malicious king, the Prince is sent to give glory to himself and break the dagger in time. When the whole party arrives at the Sultan's palace and receives their scrolls to the Sultan as a gift, the Prince tricks the Prince into unearthing the Sands of Time, which transforms all of the game's elements except the Prince, the Prince, and a captured prince named Farid into sand. Dan Hsu, it's time to take Prince to reverse the sand using the power contained in his dagger of time.

Tuesday, January 25, 2005 5:17 AM [@1up.com](#)

Next generation Consoles

The game is pretty simple, too. The Prince has quite a few moves, but nothing that seems superhuman. The whole thing is a game, but it doesn't have much suggestion of action (especially in a game with sword) and even more so (and I believe it would be possible for an extremely physically fit person, like the Prince, to play).

YOUR JOURNAL



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## 1UP Yourself

Hey, computers now have the Internet!

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: VELVET ED

In my attempt to be more of a cheerleader (I love wearing those cute uniforms), I am here this month to plug our new, revamped website: 1UP.com. I know you're thinking that the last thing the world needs is another lame gaming website, but that's where we come in: It's not lame! In addition to the usual stuff—news, previews, reviews (including some stuff posted ahead of the magazine), there will be all sorts of fun stuff to do. You and your favorite CGW goons can write blogs, trade games, post pics, form clubs.... That's right, we can be friends online now! I'm hiding from you already! Just kidding! 1UP.com will give us all a place to hang out online, because, as we know, one can never spend too much time in front of a computer. CGW: giving antisocial psychopaths a home for more than 20 years! Oh, it's just a joke. We'd never really give you weirdos a home. But join 1UP.com anyway. It's free, it's easy, it's Atkins approved. But don't stop buying CGW, because there will always be stuff available only here, and, besides, it's the only home Ryan Scott has. You don't want Ryan sleeping in the gutter, do you? Yeah, we do, too. But keep buying CGW anyway, and we'll keep doing our best to make it worth your while. Did I mention my cheerleader outfits?



KRISTEN SALVATORE  
MANAGING EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: SUGAR HIGH  
Oh so sweet, but oh so deadly, Sugar High will kill you dead with that body of hers, which we can say here without fear of getting sued because we're talking about a fictional game character and not our managing editor, OK, Kristen?



ROBERT COFFEY  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: REVOLUTION 9  
After successfully prosecuting the Manson family in the '70s, this crime fighter now runs helter-skelter through the streets of Paragon City. And when he runs backward, you can hear his battle cry: "Turn me on, dead man."



DARREN GLADSTONE  
SENIOR EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: KOSHER KRUSHER  
Oy! You call this a costume? I'm never going to that dry cleaners again! Using the power of unleavened bread, the Kosher Krusher goes meshugah on all of Paragon City's evildoers. You'd better hope he passes over you, too, schlemiel!



WILLIAM O'NEAL  
TECH EDITOR

CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: PEPPER LEBEJIA  
Pepper Lebejia takes down bad guys the only way she knows how: by shopping till she drops, girlfriend! Paris may be burning, but not Paragon City, thanks to the most fabulous superheroine to ever slip into 9-inch stilettos.



JOHNNY LIU

PREVIEWS EDITOR  
CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: JOHNNY LIU!  
Secret identity? Those are for wussies! You don't need a secret identity when you're Johnny Liu! Johnny shouts his own name in righteous fury at the moment of ultimate victory, making everyone not already dead wish that they were. Or that *he* were.



RYAN SCOTT

CD-ROM EDITOR  
CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: DESTINY  
This fetching young lass is the real Ryan, revealed at last. Slender. Powerful. Seductive. That "Ryan Scott" nerd is merely a Clark Kent front for this brilliant beacon of feminine power. You go, girl. We mean: go. Like, leave the building. Now.



ROB SCHULTZ

ART DIRECTOR  
CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: BAUHAUS  
Interior designer by day, Picasso of justice by night, Bauhaus wields his mighty sense of design to paint Paragon City safe for all! Yeah, Bela Legosi is dead, and you will be too, buddy, if you cross the mighty Bauhaus! Art kills!



MICHAEL JENNINGS

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR  
CITY OF HEROES IDENTITY: CAPTAIN SAVAGE  
Captain Savage prowls the streets of Paragon City in his pimped ride, wishing it were still the '70s, when the world was a cooler place, albeit without high-speed Internet access. You looking for trouble? Try it. Captain Savage is waiting for you, tough guy.

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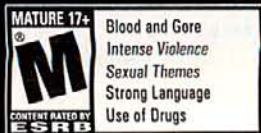
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## NAM '67



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**You're once, twice, eight times a loser...**

I'm French, I'm short, and I'm a gamer. I just came to write about my pal Brett Alexander Smith. He lives close to me, he makes fun of me, and I'm a retard. We live in a part of Wisconsin you've probably never heard of unless you've been there. Every day our lives go on, warm or cold weather, and we see each other every day, but once he got *CGW*, that all changed. I was just a boy back then, and I remember the day he came to me saying he got this "sweet magazine." I thought he was going mentally insane or something, but as I looked on, I was completely brainwashed. I snatched the magazine from him and yelled for him to back off. He snatched it back and I didn't ask for it again—obviously, I'm French. The next time I went to the store, I saw *CGW* on the shelf and grabbed it. That's when my life ended. The magazine consumed my every thought—my mental capacity was being diminished. It sucked me and my life in, but that's also when I became a PC gamer.

Venomslay

**You're French, short, a gamer, a self-described "retard," and you live in Wisconsin. No wonder you tend to refer to yourself with a lowercase "i."**



## Far cries and whispers

First, I'd like to say that I've been a devoted subscriber to *CGW* for years and have always looked forward to your features and reviews.

Now regarding your *Far Cry* review.... I couldn't believe that you ripped into what is probably one of the best first-person shooters since *Half-Life*. My first thought was that the infamous French Olympic skating judge must be working at *CGW* as a reviewer. I thought you were way too harsh and put too much emphasis on the checkpoint approach to the save feature. I mean, *Halo* used a similar method and had its share of frustration, but it still went on

## But soft, what wind from yonder window breaks?

**D**ear *CGW*,  
I prithe that thou shalt giveth to thy an exemplar of thy fair nature for which I beseech. For art thou not to send that which has yet to be bestowed upon mine middle-class soul, a demo disc. If thou art to not send me my disc-esque deliverance, I shalt march unto thy offices and ram the rolled-up form of yon magazine into your CD-sending guy, in a suppository configuration.

Eggy

Noble sir, thy jest is truly divine and your wry jape most noble indeed. For you must knowest that should your craven heart miraculously become as leonine as great Richard himself and you dare bare thine fallow and pocked visage within our hallowed chambers in a sortie of brutal vengeance, then verily the barbed hooks upon which we snare the wriggling piscine wonders of the briny deep shalt be pounded deep into thine ass.



to be the greatest Xbox title ever (not to mention a damn good PC game). I love *Far Cry* and think it deserves top honors for both its gameplay and outstanding graphics, thanks to the Cry engine.

Please, for the love of the industry, try not to shoot down a kick-ass job done by a seemingly unknown bunch of developers.

Oliver Daniel

I just wanted to comment on your article in the July 2004 edition of *Computer Gaming World* in regards to the *Far Cry* save-game system. I have to say I wholeheartedly agree with your article. To be blunt, I think the save-game system SUCKS! I hope they plan on doing something about it soon, because I have stopped playing the game because of it. I can't begin to tell you how many times I had to play the same areas over and over again due to the lame save-game system. It got old REAL QUICK!

Take care, and I always look forward to your amusing articles.

Paul Bateau

If I ever were going to consider *Far Cry*, I would have gotten rid of that notion in a hurry after reading "Moron McStupid." Having victimized myself in the past by getting so carried away that I forgot to save when I should have and then getting killed and having to start all over, I can't imagine a game with such a lame save feature. However—as you already know—you should get ready for the onslaught of hate mail!

Granniegamer on 1UP.com

Lest I end on a sour note, let me begin on a sweet one: I love *CGW*. I always have. Heck, I still refuse to throw away my 13-year-old issues, and it's not all just to annoy my wife. But having said that, I'll get right to the awards I've decided to hand out to two of *CGW*'s finest and most deserving reviewers. The envelope, please....

The date is April 1999. The *CGW* POS Review of the Decade goes to Scorpio for her piss-poor review of one of history's truly

## Mail Bites

**I love the Over/Underrated section. I wish it were a monthly feature.**

—Kuredan on 1UP.com

**I hope you die of colon cancer. Good day.**

—jedi\_75 to Robert Coffey

**Does anyone else think ATI's Ruby has a really creepy look on her face?**

—LarryFromMadrid





great games: *Baldur's Gate*—damning it with faint praise and a four-star rating. Fast-forward to June 2004. The CGW POS Review of the Decade goes to Robert Coffey for his piss-poor review of one of history's truly great games: *Far Cry*—damning it with faint praise and a three-and-a-half-star rating.

Great call there, Coffey. Your petty, vehemently snotty review of what will undoubtedly prove to be one of gaming's legends because of the admittedly irritating save-game design (which it shares with numerous other co-port PC releases) is tantamount to kicking out Brooke Burke for having a nick on her shin.

**Taig Stewart**

Hi, I'm James from Singapore. I have to disagree with your *Far Cry* review. I think that it's worth at least four to four-and-a-half stars. I agree with you that it has a bad save-game system, but three-and-a-half stars seems unfair. It had a wonderful graphics engine, and, most important, [it was] mostly bug free. Most games nowadays come with at least a few glitches or crash bugs; it is most refreshing to play one that is mostly bug free. That alone will at least earn it another star or a half. Thx.

**James Lim**

I'd just like to say thanks for an honest evaluation of *Far Cry* and not a whitewash job as done in [another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits]. I subscribe to both magazines and received [another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits] the day before I got CGW. Having read their "review," I was about ready to go out and buy the game. I read your review the next day and then went online and found out that others had similar

complaints about the game's save system.

It is refreshing to find somebody who has not sold out to the game manufacturers and tells the truth. [Another PC-gaming mag whose name is deleted to avoid frivolous libel suits] has some gushing kiss-ass reviewer who never mentions the save system at all but instead says, "*Far Cry* is...deserving of your time and your money. Go buy it right now." Why don't they

just label this "review" for what it really is—an advertisement.

And yes, the save system a game uses is important to me. I bought *I'm Going in 2* and actually liked the game except for the problem of only three saves allowed per level. I stopped playing it after a while because of this.

So, thank you for a candid, honest review. That's the kind of reporting gamers deserve!

**Robert Matthews**

And thus we arrive at a definitive answer regarding our *Far Cry* review: yes and no!



Love is all around. Why don't you take it?

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This world is here today...go online to meet the right person for you.

**Beau Paige**

Thanks, Beau, but we don't need to go online to wallow in love—we've got the warm, fuzzy CGW offices to set our hearts aglow with the inner radiance that only love can create. Every Wednesday, we dress up like our favorite characters from *Steel Magnolias*, watch the special-edition DVD, and have ourselves a good cry. We are deeply in touch with our feminine side. Especially Coffey.

## Overrated/Underrated

I've wanted to do this for years:

**CGW features:** Overrated: Check Out. I mean, it's cool, but it's just another pile of opinions. Underrated: *Tom vs. Bruce*. I don't care how high it's rated, it's underrated. This is the best feature in any of the three mags I subscribe to. Nothing else captures what it's actually like to play said games.

**CGW layout:** Overrated: Pages are in odd colors. Underrated: Being able to read those pages with clashing colors.

**CGW staff:** Overrated: Robert Coffey. Switch to decaf, man. Underrated: Wil O'Neal. Always picked on, always solid. Thumbs up.

**CGW features no longer there:** Overrated: Greenspeak. Underrated: Loading.

**CGW cover features:** Overrated: The ad pasted to the cover of my June issue. What was it for again? Underrated: Being able to see the spine of my June issue of CGW after I peel the ad off.

**Reasons to pick on CGW staff:** Overrated: Wil O'Neal for no discernible reason. Underrated: Jeff Green because he always looks and acts stoned.

**Rants about the mag:** Overrated: Robert Coffey regurgitating his dictionary on the back page. Underrated: Letting Robert Coffey edit the Reviews section.

**CGW features that were gone, now they're back:** Overrated: Hall of Fame. Underrated: Reality Check.

**Game features:** Overrated: Realism. Underrated: Fun.

**Lost editors:** Overrated: Scooter. Underrated: Scorpio.

**Darryl R. White**

The June issue of CGW has got to be one of the best issues in years. Not only does it have a picture of my favorite game, *Crusader: No Remorse*, in Letters and say that it is underrated and one of the best action games ever, but it also takes Scorpio to task for her horrid and vindictive review of *Baldur's Gate*. I tried to do the same in a letter all those years ago, but Johnny defended her to the last. As if that weren't

Mr. Coffey, thank you for your criticism of *Far Cry*.

—Russell O'Hara

I quit my job and broke up with my girlfriend to play the FREE WEEK of *Planetside*.

—W. Guy Harbuck

I read that Attorney General A\$\$crotch is going to run a big crackdown on video and software pirates. IMO it's about time.

—Crevel on 1UP.com





enough, you have an awesome preview of *KOTOR 2* and you mention *Tron 2.0*'s reformatting level as the most underrated, which I total agree with. To top it off, you mention Kari Wuhrer as the most underrated FMV actor. Even mentioning her would have been enough, but you have a picture of her as well. Perhaps to keep the magazine at such a superb level, you should use her picture for everyone on the staff page, except for Kristen, of course.

My only gripe is with the stupid *SYNC* paper cover covering the *KOTOR 2* cover. Please, no more covering the cover.

Josh Duckworth

Just finished reading your June issue, and let me say, please do not (ever again...ever) glue or fasten in any other way an advertisement for another magazine to the cover of my copy of *CGW*. I don't appreciate having to tear that off and retard my poor June issue; I can't even read the binding text because it all got torn off.

That being said, to the real meat: I sat stupefied while you declared *Desert Combat* the most underrated mod. While I originally agreed, immediately I regained my composure and remembered *Natural Selection*. Come on, *Desert Combat* doesn't add nearly as much to *BF1942* in either fun or new material when compared to *NS*. *NS* created the FPS/RTS hybrid and recently added a combat mode involving assault-style play in which aliens and marines square off on small, harsh maps to gain XP and annihilate the enemy's base unit (a single alien hive and a single marine command chair). It's a very different style of play, and with a decent team, it can be a helluva good time. *SOMEBODY* needs to start publishing these guys; they have so much dedication and talent.

Second, I must heartily commend your choice for most underrated level, *Tron 2.0*'s reformatting level. That was the best time I've had in a computer game in a very long time; I laughed like a giddy little schoolgirl the whole time. Amazing concept and execution. *Monolith* has extraordinarily talented developers, and I've been devoted to them ever since the original *Blood*.

And on a side note, I think *BloodRayne*'s Rayne beats out *NOLF*'s Archer as the sexiest game character.

Aaron Hartsock

The response to our Overrated/Underrated feature was great, and you'll all be glad to know we plan on making it an annual

feature at the very least. So please send your own Overrated/Underrated items for inclusion in our next one. As for the *SYNC* wraparound on our mag, we got a big response there also, and, well, we feel your pain. If our marketing gurus decide to do this again, we promise to make them use olive loaf for the wraparound so that you can at least enjoy a tasty treat after you tear it off.



### Disturbed reader of the month

Mr. Coffey...ever since the first issue of *Scorched Earth* burned and tainted my young mind, I have been wanting to tell you this: Thank you. I used to flip to the back page of every issue to read Greenspeak and

see what juvenile tricks Jeff would try and unleash on the world, but now I gleefully read *Scorched Earth* and feed the evil blackness of my soul. Your writing isn't just the concentrated evil spewing out of a demonic soul that everyone takes it to be...it's something more. It's the poetic essence of hardcore gaming at its peak. No other person, sane or not, would be so infuriated over the lack of a feature like a checkpoint in *Far Cry*. Most people I know would just say, "Oh well...guess I'd better not die," but you...you attack it like a vulture descending on the rotting flesh of an eviscerated zebra in the middle of the African wilds. Your disgusting and horrific analogies are the most comical ways to relate to videogames, and I will proudly say that as long as *Scorched Earth* remains, so will I. You own my soul, Mr. Coffey—and I'll wear that badge with pride—but please try not to stain it...I was renting it only for a short while.

Russell Cady

Put down the magazine. Walk to the phone. Call someone you love. Ask for an intervention. Everything is going to be just fine, we promise.

—T1nman33 on 1UP.com

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# Radar

Stays crunchy in milk



## E3: T





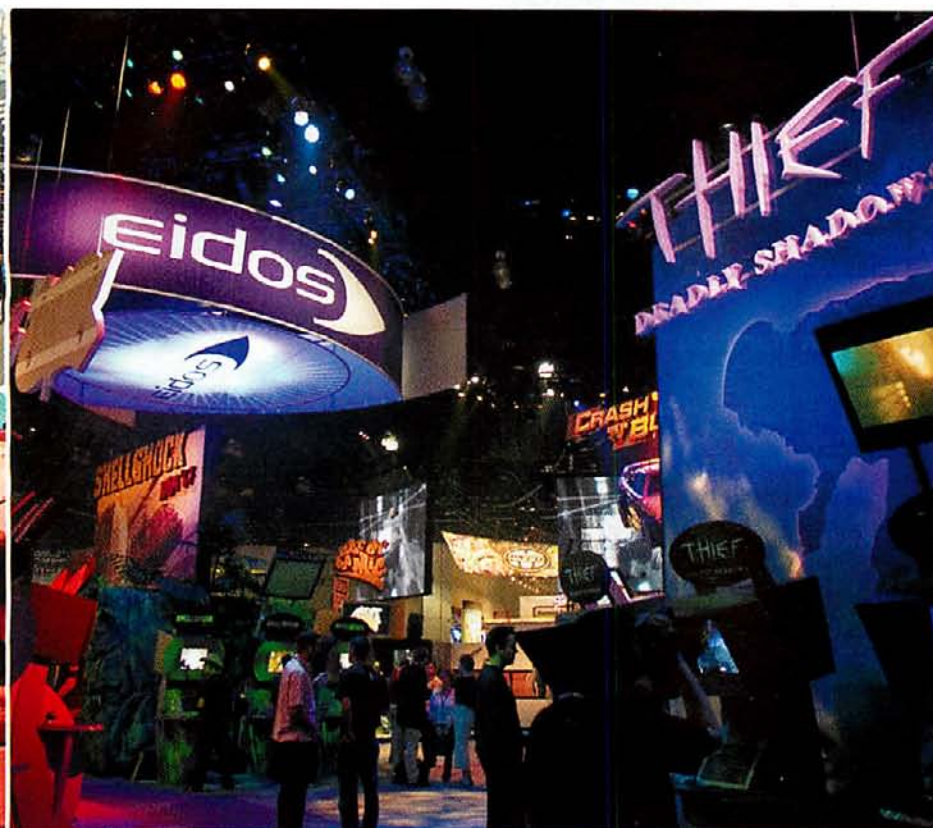
**Ghost Story**  
The Phantom gaming box is actually real. We know, we actually played with it.



**Curative Gaming**  
Games aren't all about killing people—they're about killing cancer cells, too.



**Got Evil?**  
We're hot on the trail of the third evil genius that you control in Elixir Studios' new game.



# 2 Year in Pictures

A quick look at the greatest show on Earth



**A**s our heads finally clear up after this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, we're trying to put together the pieces of what happened and why there are hoofprints in Wil's underwear. This, however, is just a quick look at the sights that made up E3. Want the inside scoop of the best games for this year? Check out our mmmassive MMO story and the scoop on the best and biggest games for 2004.





## HIGH TECH

# Alien Technology Sighting

PC maker pushes envelope with new hardware

**W**hile everyone was buzzing about Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS at this year's E3, Miami-based boutique system builder Alienware quietly stole the show with the announcement of its new Video Array technology available in the new ALX computer line. In a move to please hardcore PC gamers and technophiles alike, Alienware's X2 motherboard enables two identical PCI-Express videocards to work in parallel to dramatically improve graphics quality.

Benchmark numbers haven't been released yet, but Alienware claims that the Video Array has resulted in performance jumps of up to 50 percent. A behind-closed-doors demo backed up that claim, and we've got to say, we're impressed with both the hardware and Alienware's push beyond the status quo.

## How does it work?

Alienware created software that lives in between the game and the videocard drivers, effectively "splits" the signal, and sends the split signal to each videocard. Each videocard then sends its own video signal to Alienware's proprietary video merger hub, where the individual signals are again combined into one. Because of this, the Video Array will be able to work with any two identical "off-the-shelf" graphics cards running each card maker's standard drivers.

The X2 motherboard is based on Intel's Tumwater chipset and supports two PCI-Express cards, two Intel processors, DDR2-400 memory, SATA RAID, gigabit Ethernet, and 5.1 Dolby Digital audio.

## Power to spare

Considering the awesome power of the latest batch of high-end graphics cards by both ATI and Nvidia, is Alienware's Video Array technological overkill? Brian Joyce, director of marketing for Alienware, says, "The visual experience provided by the latest games is largely hardware limited." So, will *Far Cry* and upcoming titles like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* tax even ATI's and Nvidia's high-end cards? Joyce notes that the Video Array technology will enable gamers to experience these games at incredibly high resolutions with all of the "bells and whistles" turned on. Of course, systems running the Video Array won't come cheap—they'll be at least \$4,000, thanks to two high-end PCI-Express graphics cards, water cooling, and a massive power supply. Expect these machines to begin shipping in late 2004. **William O'Neal**



## Console Corner

Games worth grabbing from your little brother

### XBOX

#### Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

Give us a second. We have to get over the shock that a game based on a Vin Diesel vehicle is actually awesome. It shows how a good movie-licensed game can be done, and here's the really scary part—out of nowhere, this game could go on to become one of the best Xbox games to date. The animation and

graphics even rival what we've seen from Id's vaunted *Doom 3* on Xbox. Set as a first-person shooter, you get a gritty, up-close look at Butcher Bay. But, when you need to start jumping and climbing, the camera automatically pulls back to a third-person view. Yes folks, this is a year full of surprises, and, God help us, we may even see the movie now.

**ALSO CHECK OUT:** *Red Dead Revolver* (PS2, Xbox), *Front Mission 4* (PS2)





AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

## Got Evil?

## WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

"THE EMERALD DRAGON"

ALIASES: THIRD EVIL GENIUS



## CHARGES BROUGHT

CONSPIRACY TO KILL U.S. NATIONALS;  
CONSPIRACY TO USE WEAPONS OF  
MASS DESTRUCTION AGAINST U.S.  
NATIONALS; CONSPIRACY TO USE  
LASER OR DEATH RAYS FOR  
EXTORTION PURPOSES

## DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth: Unknown Height: 5' 10"  
Weight: 170 pounds Build: Medium athletic  
Speaks: English, Chinese  
Scars and marks: Surgery scar on left temple  
Hair: Bald Eyes: White Sex: Male  
Complexion: Olive Citizenship: Chinese

## BACKGROUND

Began on the streets of Hong Kong as a simple pickpocket. Joined a local Triad gang and quickly ascended in the organization until captured by ANVIL (Asiatic Notorious Villain Incapacitation League) agents in 1986.

ANVIL implanted a communications chip inside Dragon's brain to spy on Triad activity, but underestimated Triad resources. Dragon rewired the chip to spy on others and build up his own criminal empire. With advance knowledge of ANVIL's every move, he's untouchable.



## KNOWN ASSOCIATES

**ELI BARRACUDA** New York crime lord  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Super Headshot, Ghetto Posse

**ELSA KRABB** Matron at mental institute  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Motherly Love, Electro-Shock Treatment

**THE GREAT MESMERO** Evil hypnotist  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Telepathic Mind Control, Willpower Drain

**'RED' IVAN** Former head of Russian secret police  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Grenade Jig, Mines

**JUBEI** Ronin  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Wind Walk, Evisceration

**TOP HAT MAN** Unconfirmed  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Smooth Operator

**DR. NORA TOXIN** Unconfirmed mad scientist  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Poison Parfum por Homme, Hallucinogenic Powder

**MOKO** Angry Incan spirit  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Feral Roar, Pound

**DR. ETHAN ASIA** Psychotic surgeon  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Terror Tactics

**PAPA JAMBALAYA** Voodoo priest  
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Puppetry, Mind Fog

## The Nerd Herd

Street geeks speak

Microsoft is bringing PCs and consoles together with XNA. Is this a good thing?



## Adrian Wing

TORONTO, ONTARIO

The whole "cross-platform controller" thing is bugging me. I don't want to be forced to play PC games with a

gamepad. Whenever I play a console game, I miss the head-shot accuracy of my trusty mouse and keyboard.



## Amy Hoskins

WATERFORD, CT

This will allow all gaming geeks (console or PC) to come together—not to mention making things much easier

for the developers. This means more games for me to choose from.



## Erik Elsasser

HIGH BRIDGE, NJ

This is an awful trend. For starters, this could be bad for the PC industry. After all, how many of us have proudly

upgraded just to play the latest game? Developers will no longer push technology as they cater to the lowest common denominator—consoles.



## Marcus Eikenberry

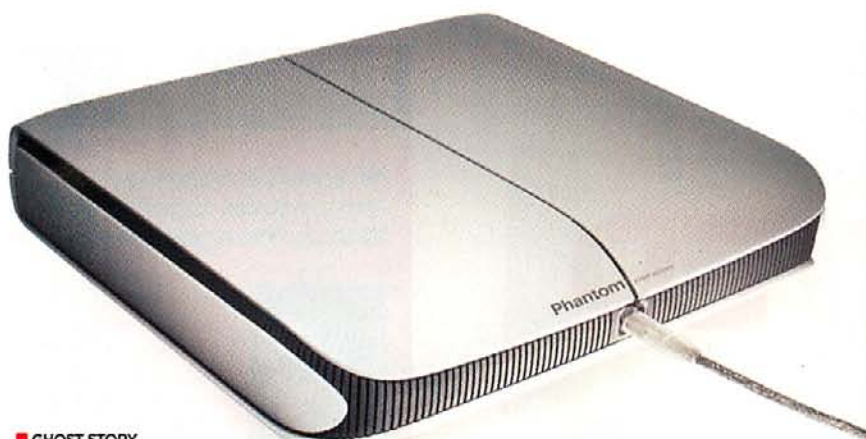
PORTLAND, OR

This is a great thing. Do you want to come home after a hard day and fiddle with your PC to get

your game to work? Heck no! If we can just load PC games onto a console and play them with no configuration problems, I would buy one just for that.

Are you wondering where the heck we dig these guys up? They are real folks who write us and post messages on our boards at [www.IUP.com](http://www.IUP.com). Think you got what it takes? Do you want to be one of the few, the proud, THE HERD? Drop us a line at [cgwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cgwletters@ziffdavis.com) or just look for the whole gang online.





GHOST STORY

# Trick or Treat?

Infinium Labs' Phantom PC console appears

Until now, the infamous Phantom console was looking like vaporware at best. This year's E3, though, marked the first time people could get their hands on the system. Sitting down? Good. The system actually worked and, as you can see from the picture, you won't be embarrassed to put it in your home theater.

The Phantom is optimized to work on HD sets (1080x768-pixel resolution/1080i), and we played *Unreal Tournament 2004* with solid framerates and no hang-ups. That's most likely because there's a decent computer lurking under the hood, and it only has to pump out a maximum resolution of 1080x768 for televisions. Even the unusual slanted keyboard tray and mouse combo worked surprisingly well (and this in light of our skepticism). And yes, we played it live on the Internet.

The only shaky part is the pricing plan. The hardware will set you back \$200, or you can have that fee waived if you sign a two-year contract for \$30 a month. Since you need the service to use this box anyhow, Infinium may as well just own up to it

and say that it wants your \$720. This is when you start reaching into the realm of budget-friendly game systems (like, say, the first generation FragBox, which went for \$1K and is more powerful).

At least Infinium will have games. Though final announcements are pending, spokespeople say there's going to be a solid lineup of titles available. And since the Phantom is based off an embedded version of Windows XP, you can expect most major hits (including MMOs) to be available. The basic plan entitles you to age-old *Deer Hunter*-like titles, while "premium" games will cost money to rent or buy. Final prices of games, though, will be set by publishers. Whether you want to download a quick demo and instantly play it or rent a title, the options are there.

Obviously, this console-ization of PC gaming is meant to cater to two groups of gamers: the casual and the budget-conscious. Either way, anything that expands the number of competitors online sounds good to us. We'll just have to wait and see how scary the final product is when it ships November 18. **✉ Darren Gladstone**

## A Tale of Two PC Wannabes

Both upcoming options promise no-fuss PC gaming in your home theater. So what's the difference between them?

THE CONTENDERS	Phantom	ApexTreme
PRICE	\$200 + \$30/month	\$499
AVAILABLE	November 18	September
INSIDE	2.5GHz AMD Athlon XP 2500+ CPU, 256MB RAM, 128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700 Ultra videocard, 40GB hard drive	2GHz AMD Athlon XP 2000+ CPU, 256MB RAM, 64MB Nvidia GeForce4 MX videocard, 40GB hard drive
THE HOOKUP	Downloads all game content via broadband connection—premium titles cost extra money to rent or buy (plus broadband access, separate)	Uses 56K or broadband connection to download scripts for playing your off-the-shelf PC games
THE EXTRAS	Slick, stylish box that has games delivered straight to the system	Funky, chunky box that also doubles as a TiVo and DVD player

## The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

News and views from the Wild West



### The Good NCsoft

Talk about coming out of left field! How is it that these guys, in the course of a year,

have managed to outdo the big guys in North America with some fresh new ways to do MMOs? There's *Guild Wars*, *Auto Assault*, and *Tabula Rasa* all coming down the road. And then there's *City of Heroes*. The fact is, *Heroes* has had pretty much the most successful launch of any MMORPG to date, and is winning over new fans every day—including those (like us) who have been wary of the genre until now.



### The Bad Games on CDs

It's time, everyone. It's time to move on. *Myst* is a decade old, and that might have been the best and last reason ever to

put a game on a CD. Now, we have DVDs. The newest, biggest games coming out are so huge that the multiple CD-ROM installs are reminding us of the bad old days of floppy disks. Upgrade your PC. Now. Fer cryin' out loud, you can buy a DVD drive on the Web for 25 bucks! So, please join us in the 21st century—and give game publishers a reason to release ALL new games on DVDs.



### The Ugly Microsoft's E3 game lineup

No, no, we don't mean the Xbox games. Of course those looked awe-

some. We can't wait to play *Jade Empire*, *Halo 2*, and *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*. What we're talking about is the company's embarrassingly paltry PC game lineup, shoved into a corner of the gigantic Xbox booth like lepers. The games themselves looked fine—*Dungeon Siege 2*, *Zoo Tycoon 2*, *Vanguard*—so no offense. But when that's all Microsoft has to offer, along with some reassuring words about how, really, don't worry, there's more to come—well, we worry.



## 5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

What we said when you were nursing



### 5 Years Ago, August 1999

Our E3 report called out some soon-to-be-famous, some soon-to-be-infamous titles: *Black & White*, *Age of Empires II*, *Shogun: Total War*, *Freelancer*, *Oni*, and a little something called *The Sims*. But arguably, the big news at E3 this year was the duck-and-cover act that some publishers were doing with their titles. In the wake of *Columbine*, *Kingpin* and *Soldier of Fortune* were shown in a tiny cubicle hidden by a black curtain and requiring a company escort for admittance. With wolf packs of big media prowling the show floor and looking for controversy, were people running scared? You betcha.



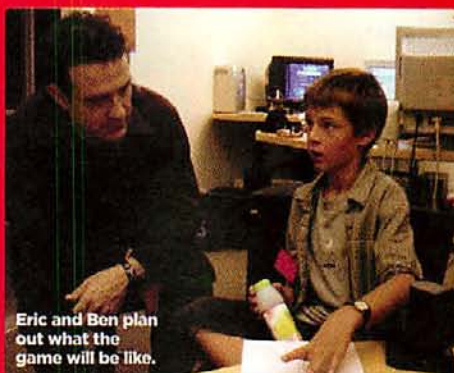
### 10 Years Ago, August 1994

Maybe we love *City of Heroes* so much today because it's been a freaking decade since we've really been able to roleplay as superheroes. Ten years ago, we ran a chomping-at-the-bit preview for *The Superhero League of Hoboken*, a comic RPG from Steve Meretzky. But the big news 10 years ago was a five-star chunk of digital crack known as *X-Com: UFO Defense*, which is simply one of the best PC games ever made.



### 15 Years Ago, August 1989

Five years ago, we had a copy of this issue. Now we can't find one. Fortunately, we started running this 5, 10, 15 column some five years ago, so we can say with some certainty that this issue featured Peter Molyneux's *Populous*, in which, as a tribe leader, the player "must direct his people on a campaign of conquest that employs a variety of man-made and natural disasters to subjugate the enemy." Then again, maybe that wasn't in the issue. We have no way of knowing. Maybe we couldn't find the issue back then and just made stuff up. We do that all the time—you don't think *Scooter* ever really existed, do you?



Eric and Ben plan out what the game will be like.



It may not be *Half-Life 2*, but it's worth the download.

■ CURE THIS

# Beat Cancer. Get High Score

Make-A-Wish kid deals with disease and wins

**B**en Duskin needs your help fighting leukemia. Just be sure to grab the power-ups and avoid falling victim to the robarf monster guarding the barf shield. Not every kid gets a game made in his honor, but then again, Ben isn't like every kid.

About three and a half years ago, Ben was diagnosed with leukemia and began a hard-fought battle. Now, his leukemia in remission, he's back in the fourth grade and making a game inspired by his experiences. "Videogames showed me I could do something besides sit in bed," says the precocious 9-year-old. "I wanted kids to have something to do while getting treatments and show them what the medicine is doing inside their bodies." Granted, we doubt there are cartoony characters on hoverboards shooting cancer-killing beams, but hey—we get the idea.

That's what got the Make-A-Wish Foundation's attention. "We get a lot of requests to take a trip, go to Disneyland, or meet a celebrity," says Patricia Wilson, executive director of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. "But [Ben's request] was very different because it was genuinely philanthropic."

To help make Ben's dream a reality, The Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation sent out a plea to the gaming community. Most companies responded by citing that it would take



years and millions of dollars to create a game. It was Eric Johnston, a senior software engineer at LucasArts, who answered the call. Johnston, who has worked on such titles as *Escape from Monkey Island* and *Star Wars: Episode I Racer*, spent the next six months meeting with Ben to create *Ben's Game*. Once a week, they outlined what they wanted to do. They even spent a day in the LucasArts sound studios recording Ben yelling out "Ow!" and shouting "Yahoo!"

Since the beta version launched at [www.makewish.org/ben](http://www.makewish.org/ben), more than 70,000 people have downloaded the arcadey shooting game. The best part, besides the fun, is that it's socially redeeming. And, according to reports, the game already has quite a few fans. One chemo patient wrote in to say that he played *Ben's Game* all night.

✕ Darren Gladstone

**"Videogames showed me I could do something besides sit in bed."**





RADAR

■ NOW LOADING

# Call of Duty: United Offensive

Publisher: **Activision** Release Date: **Fall 2004**

And now, for a brief moment of historical perspective: On August 23, 1943, on its fourth and final attempt since the German invasion, the Russian army advanced and captured the city of Kharkov. This ended the battle of Kursk, sending the German forces into retreat for the duration of the war. You will be quizzed on this—and expected to remember it when playing the expansion to *Call of Duty*.





Can this game get even more broken? According to CDV, yes.



Here we see the hasty escape of the Brat Designs team from reality.

#### FIRING LINE

# A Breed Apart

When publishers and developers collide

**P**ublishers: Developers don't appreciate it when you change their game and then release it. That seems to be exactly what German-based CDV Software has done with the recently released shooter *Breed*.

In response to numerous criticisms about the quality of the final product (which received a 1.5-star lashing in our July issue), developer Brat Designs accused CDV of making numerous heavy-handed modifications to the game, including rewritten and rerecorded dialogue, different level scripts, and blander

textures—not to mention using an old build of the game that was several updates behind the finished product.

CDV's response? "The final master that Brat Designs delivered to CDV was considerably improved by CDV," claims a CDV representative on the company's official forums. "The fact is, from CDV's point of view, we're ultimately the ones who made this game even playable. The level that was delivered by Brat was, for the most part, not playable; the balancing was practically nonexistent, and even the textures were unsightly. The

voiceovers, too, had to be changed because the original files were so indecent that the USK—Germany's age-rating agency—would have intervened."

Speculation is still flying as to the current and future relationship between the two companies, and Brat Designs has not yet reacted to CDV's public challenge for a full disclosure of its original textures and levels. *Breed*'s largely mediocre reception certainly isn't doing much to help matters, though. It's pretty safe to say that the game can't get much worse than it is now. **✖ Ryan Scott**

#### ROAD TRIP

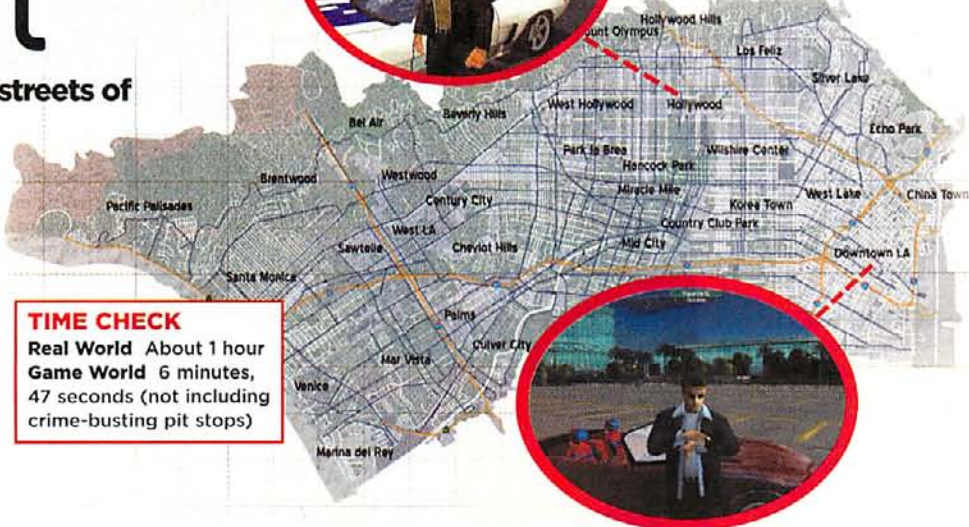
# True Traffic Report

Just how true are the streets of L.A. in *True Crime*?

What's so "true" about *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*, anyway? As the game speeds to store shelves and we raced off to E3, we got to wondering just how accurate the 40-some-odd miles of road are in Activision's *GTA* tribute. With all that traffic (day or night!) in Los Angeles, it'll take you about an hour to get from Sunset Blvd. (where we spent our evenings) to the Staples Center (home of E3). In the game, you can clear that distance in about seven minutes.

#### TIME CHECK

**Real World** About 1 hour  
**Game World** 6 minutes, 47 seconds (not including crime-busting pit stops)





■ MEN IN TIGHTS

# Pulp Fiction

**City of Heroes comic takes the online world offline**

**R**ick Dakan, co-creator of *City of Heroes*, isn't getting much sleep these days. "Half the day I'm doing design work for the game. The other half, I'm working on the comic," he says. That's right, Blue King Studios (which Dakan formed) will be sending a free monthly comic based on the new superhero MMO to game subscribers. Don't think, though, that this is just another cheap marketing ploy to push the comic. We did at first, and Dakan set us straight: It's being used to bridge a gap between the two mediums.

Back in 2000, Rick helped form the idea that was to become the heroic MMO (see the review on page 70). But about 16 months ago he decided he wanted to focus more on the writing aspects and not day-to-day programming chores. To this day, he's still working with Cryptic Studios, creating documents about the villain groups that detail their histories, goals, minions, and so on. But now he has another way to explore that world.

## Coming soon...

As we go to print, the first five issues are already mapped out. The first issue introduces readers to Paragon City and the three main characters who will anchor the



series—Horus, Apex, and War Witch. But as the series continues, there are a number of interesting ways that the comic will tie in with the game. Starting with the third issue, a new game element is introduced roughly every two issues. It could be new villains, a new city zone, or a new major plotline.

Take, for example, issues three and four, which Dakan was nice enough to tease us with. A new enemy group is introduced: The Carnival of Shadows. Think sexy Cirque du Soleil female villains. They have a lot of influence in high society, and led by Vanessa DeVore, these high-level psychic acrobats aren't people you want to mess with. Neither are the super-powered Praetorians or the ultra-high-tech Malta Group.

Besides being a vehicle for unveiling new game elements, Dakan also hopes to garner a loyal readership that wants to follow the exploits of the main characters. Of course, some may have a vested interest since, starting with issue five, player-created heroes will make cameos in the comic. While he didn't have all the details handy, Dakan says that customer-service reps will select those who are worthy or have achieved a certain status in the game to earn representation in the comic. Also planned for every issue are eight pages earmarked for a community section. It'll include things such as player-hero profiles, tips, articles, and background stories. Will the mighty marvels of CGW ever bust heads in the comic? Stay tuned! **■ Darren Gladstone**



# 100 BUCKS

It's burning a hole in your pocket. Go spend it



## COMIC

### Wanted

\$2.50, [WWW.TOPCOW.COM](http://WWW.TOPCOW.COM)

Your estranged father that you never knew? He just died, and you just found out that he was The Killer, one of the world's most dangerous men. This twisted take on supervillainy follows the life of Wesley Gibbons, meek loser turned villainous prodigy, as he gets deeper into a society of bad guys who secretly run the world. Too bad all the superheroes are dead.

## TOY

### Call of Duty Action Figures

\$9 EACH, [WWW.PLANETOYS.COM](http://WWW.PLANETOYS.COM)

Forget about all those wussy transforming robots and bioengineered soldiers of the future. Action figures need to get back to basics, like the highly detailed *Call of Duty* figures do. Series one enlists six soldiers representing the American (82nd and 101st Airborne) and German (Totenkopf Division Officer, Das Reich Division, and Wiking Division) militaries.



## MOVIE

### Alien vs. Predator

\$10 A TICKET (IN SAN FRANCISCO), [WWW.AVP-MOVIE.COM](http://WWW.AVP-MOVIE.COM)

Apparently, the aliens and predators have shackled up in Antarctica for a couple millennia. So in a proper rip-off—we mean tribute—to classics like *The Thing*, a bunch of wayward humans stumble upon them. This movie screams “disaster,” but you know that you’re still going to run out to see it. We will. Our advice: Go for the safe bet and pick up the Governor’s two-disc *Predator: Special Edition* instead. The remastered print looks and sounds good—perfect for hearing those memorable lines like “Stick around.”

## BOOZE

### Maker's Mark and Coke

\$5 AT HAPPY HOUR

Ever wonder how it is we come into the office every day and not kill each other? Two words: Maker's Mark. It makes us funny and attractive to women. (Finally!) Remember, kids—if you're under 21, liquor is a bad, bad thing. Just awful! Really! Just ask Darren after this year's E3.

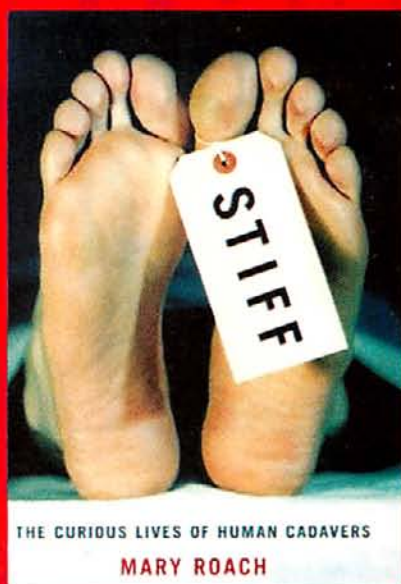


## DVD

### Freaky and Geeks: The Complete Series

\$49, [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)

We'll take one guess which side of the “freak” or “geek” fence you fell on when you were in high school. What we can't figure out, though, is why this amazing TV series disappeared. What, were you too busy watching crap reality shows? This boxed set collects every episode and packs it onto six discs with multiple commentary tracks and deleted scenes.



## BOOK

### Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers

\$14, [WWW.WWNORTON.COM](http://WWW.WWNORTON.COM)

No, this isn't Robert Coffey's cookbook; it's a grimly fascinating look at what happens to our bodies after we're done with them. *Stiff* traces 2,000 years of humanity's boldest scientific finds and some of the weirdest undertakings that involved the postmortem lives of people.



## MUSIC

### Snow Patrol, Final Straw

\$10, [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)

Those looking for a mellow round of music to chill by can find a couple catchy hooks on Snow Patrol's new CD. The fuzz-rock sound is melded with indie Brit-pop and what you wind up with are songs like “Run” and “Gleaming Auction” that get into your head and won't leave.

Pocket Change: \$.50



# THIS IS NOT A THIS



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**- PC GAMER, March 2004**

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# Previews

See 'em now, play 'em soon

Speaketh to the hand.

## MMORPG MMADNESS

This ain't like other magazines with their fluffy Previews. Here, we scrutinize every upcoming MMORPG, describing what looks great and calling out all the potential problems.

Beautiful modeling and texturing is employed to create the right look.

"Your sword is longer than my sword."





**The Matrix Online**  
Do you think this is a magazine you are holding? Silly reader, the Matrix has you.



**Tabula Rasa**  
Richard Garriott ponders how to be unique and special in a massively multiplayer world.



**Guild Wars**  
Classic *Diablo*-style action. No monthly charge. And strikingly beautiful. Hurray.

PUBLISHER: Microsoft DEVELOPER: Sigil GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: 2005

# Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

Spiritual successor

**U**n Vanguard's design team (which includes key people from throughout *EverQuest*'s development) clearly knows its dictionary definitions: The vanguard is the forefront, the frontrunner. And that's just the role the team is envisioning for its work: *Vanguard* aims to be the frontrunner among next-generation MMORPGs, a game that will lead players to new worlds of adventure.

## The world

*Vanguard* is set in a once-magical world striving to rediscover its enchantments. The player initially views a world that looks much like our own (though populated by elves and halflings), but over time, more and more of the fantasy is revealed. For example, you might first encounter normal bears (inasmuch as it's normal to

dwarves, high elves, and the vulmane, a bipedal wolflike creature.

## The hook

Keith Parkinson, the famous fantasy painter, is the art director on *Vanguard*. You may recognize his work on the box of the original *EverQuest*. His vision combines with *Vanguard*'s technology to create a game world populated by amazing-looking environments and edifices. Huge, mountainous fortresses will look good from their topmost towers to their hidden waterways.

Expect a dearth of teleporting transport systems—the team plans to focus on making travel fun. To that end, the developers are working on enough content to create worlds they hope will last for five to 10 years, with ecosystems that make sense and smart interface design.



**"I've got a team here that I have to tell to go home."**

encounter a bear), but as you venture forth, you begin to encounter zombie bears and undead bears. And trees with moving roots. And piranhas with feet and nervous tics. And frogs that open wide grins to reveal huge chompers. And, perhaps most unusual of all, enemies with personality. The environments themselves offer personality, too, with continents that reflect real locales. For example, Thestra, the first continent in the game, is similar to Western Europe in its design and ecosystem.

From a technological standpoint, *Vanguard* uses a full range of tools and tricks to create graphically rich realms in a network-intensive MMORPG space. Scalable texture maps and the layering of different shaders make it possible to create the rocky face of a canyon, and no matter where in the game world you view an area from, the image holds up.

While the total number of races has not yet been finalized, we do know there will be seven races native to Thestra: Thestran humans, barbarians, half-giants, halflings,

The developers also plan to employ tools that ease the maintenance of these online worlds. For example, object instancing programs allow for easy manipulation and placement of an enemy inside the world, so what once took days or weeks can now be done in a few minutes.

## The snare

There are no absolutes; even the most experienced bunch of professionals has its misses. Yet, Bradley McQuaid, one-time lead programmer and producer of *EverQuest* and now coproducer of *Vanguard*, reassuringly states: "I've got a team here that I have to tell to go home. This is how badly they want to put their heart and soul into this game."

Other than that, the biggest snare is the wait for this game—the release date is not expected until well into 2005.

The development team recognizes 2004 as the year for *EverQuest 2* and *World of Warcraft*, but a lot can happen in a year. If other games take too much of a lead, it'll be harder to entice players away.

by Johnny Liu

## The Word: THE FUTURE



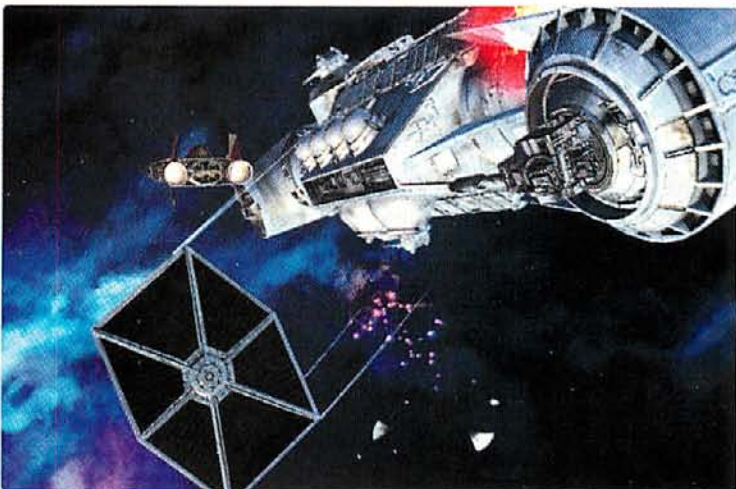
Some villages are structured and laid out more similarly to dungeons.



PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: October 2004

# Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

Fly me to the moon



**A** long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, while the original *Star Wars Galaxies* was being completed, the dual empires of LucasArts and Sony Online Entertainment already planned to implement spaceships into their online game. That time is upon us with the first *Galaxies* expansion, *Jump to Lightspeed*.

## The world

As pretty much everyone over the age of 2 knows, *Star Wars* is one-third lightsabers, one-third weird Muppets, and one-third spaceships. Gross simplification, yes, but if you've ever wanted to be a giant Hasidic Wookiee (Darren) or a naughty Twi'lek dancer (the infamous Robert Coffey), *Galaxies* is the closest you can get to living in the *Star Wars* universe, outside of kidnapping George Lucas.

Thus far, there are 10 planned space zones adjacent to principal planets such as Naboo and Corellia, as well as some wild space zones. You can also look forward to large squadron-based raids on capital transport ships.

## The hook

Spaceships! While a full list of all the ships

available has not been released, rest assured that all the mainstays will be in the game, including the X-wing, the Y-wing, and various TIE-fighter models, as well as the *Millennium Falcon*. Cockpits and ship statistics will closely match the designs and descriptions set down in the movies, and ships will feature upgradeable shields and weapons.

Having your very own spaceship also does away with one of the worst problems of the original game: the shuttle system. When you've got a ship of your own, you can jet to those faraway galaxies on a whim. Concerning these space commutes, instead of using special space fuel, the ships will degrade part by part. Simply replace worn-out components to keep your ship in tip-top shape.

The promise of real-time twitch-action space combat in the vein of the classic *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games incorporated into *Galaxies*' fully realized player economy and society is tantalizing. Plus, there are no plans for an added monthly fee to play the expansion.

## The snare

We hate to bring this up again, but the original *Galaxies* did "win" our 2003

Coaster of the Year award. Yet, people do learn from their mistakes—take, for example, Cinco Barnes, lead designer of *Jump to Lightspeed*.

"Since *Star Wars Galaxies* was so many things...so massive, so successful, so lauded, and so maligned, the lessons are endless," says Barnes. "What we know now about prerelease hype, player design feedback, core-game necessities, experimental technologies, and original play mechanics is staggering. Bringing *Galaxies* to market was no walk in the park, but the experience is worth the challenge—a hundred times over."

We don't know about you, but we're certainly willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. **Johnny Liu**

## The Word: FORCE-FUL



Inside the cockpit.

**One-third lightsabers, one-third weird Muppets, and one-third spaceships.**



PUBLISHER: Warner Bros./Sega DEVELOPER: Monolith GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

# The Matrix Online

Down the rabbit hole

**F**ree your mind with a different breed of MMORPG in *The Matrix Online*. As a "red pill," newly freed and sent back into the Matrix, your allegiance is up for grabs. Do you help out the humans, the machines, or the Merovingian?

## The world

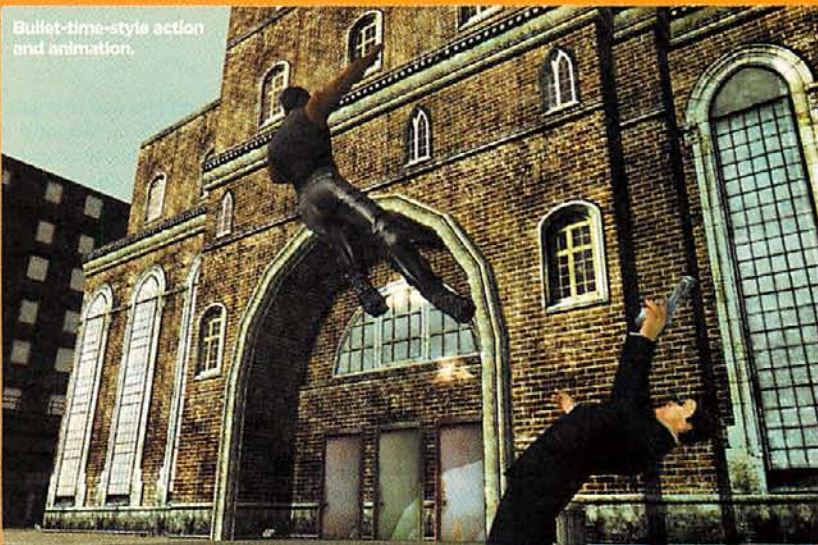
What is the Matrix? It's a computer simulation of urban human life—essentially a gigantic MMORPG, except you can't log off when you want to and your naked body is floating in jelly. Megacity, the metropolitan cityscape of the Matrix, is a sprawling maze of towering skyscrapers that goes a long way toward replicating a true big-city feeling.

The game takes place right after the events of *Matrix: Revolutions*, but the game's director of online development, William Westwater, promises an experience more closely reflective of the first film. "In the first movie, there was still a sense of mystery," says Westwater. "That's what we're trying to bring to *The Matrix Online*."

## The hook

*The Animatrix* was entertaining, thanks to its eclectic mix of tangential stories and varying artistic motifs, and *The Matrix Online* daringly follows suit in its attempt to try new ideas, including a new "leveling" system. Characters choose one of

Bullet-time-style action and animation.



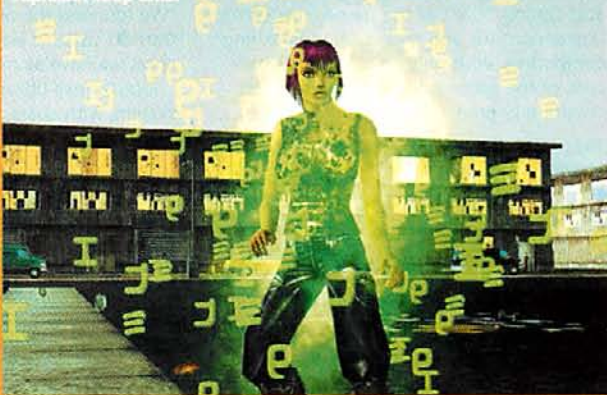
three professions—soldier, hacker, or martial artist—and can be decked out in a full range of leather, alligator skin, and vinyl. However, instead of straight level-building, abilities can be downloaded and sampled as necessary. Permanent choices come into play only deeper in the game, after you're familiar with the system. This eliminates sifting through unknown statistics and being locked into your choices.

*The Matrix Online* will also be very story driven; the author of the comic book *Concrete*, Paul Chadwick, has already scripted out an advanced year-long plot. But missing crucial plot twists isn't a problem—story episodes will be available for download.

## The snare

*The Matrix* isn't quite the powerhouse it used to be; interest in the series has steeply declined since the last two sequels were

Alphabet soup time.



released. Fans still hold steadfast to the original film, but the mainstream public might not be interested in a new game after playing the best-selling but poorly polished *Enter the Matrix*.

Monolith is a talented studio, but this is its first MMORPG. Even so, the company has wrangled in some excellent MMORPG talent, such as *Asheron's Call* lead designer Toby Ragaini. We're also told to expect some former *EverQuest* developers to be on board.

Because Ubisoft recently pulled out of the project, the game has endured a bit of publisher schizophrenia. We learned in a surprise announcement during E3 that Sega and Warner Brothers are now copublishing the game, which is gearing up for a Q4 release. **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: KUNG FU**





PUBLISHER: Destination Games DEVELOPER: NCsoft GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

# Tabula Rasa

## A clean slate for MMORPGs

**Y**our mom is wrong—you aren't special. There's someone out there who can run faster than you, can do longer division than you, and has a higher-level *EverQuest* character than you. Boo hoo.

Your math may be weak, but something about MMORPGs doesn't add up. How can you feel like a fabled hero of yore when you're surrounded by countless other heroes? Enter *Tabula Rasa*, an MMORPG that promises a personal self-esteem-boosting experience.

### The world

With a combination of sci-fi and fantasy aesthetics, *Tabula Rasa*'s world is a unique merger of Western fantasy and Eastern design that bears a superficial resemblance to Sega's multiconsole *Phantasy Star Online*. Much of the game is privately "instanced" for you and your adventuring compadres, with only about 5 to 10 percent of the game occurring in the open community area.

*Tabula Rasa* goes out of its way to create an individualized experience by featuring such bells and whistles as a house of your own that you can furnish and decorate. You can also build a friends list and invite those pals to crash your crib.

Three different mission types are available for adventurous folk. Scripted missions have clear goals, such as taking out a group of bad guys or escorting someone to safety. There are also PVP missions depicted as war games, à la capture the flag. The third mission type is a sort of open-battlefield combat.

### The hook

Richard Garriott, aka Lord British and the creator of *Ultima Online*, has worked under the radar alongside a dedicated team for three long years to create *Tabula Rasa*. "We founded the online game space," Garriott says. "If anyone has online experience, we have as much as there can be."

*Tabula Rasa* utilizes a unique three-meter system, with characters defined by body,

mind, and spirit aspects. Enemies share this trinity as well, and different weapons are useful against different aspects. For example, music weapons can either boost or weaken the Spirit meter.

In most MMORPGs, death carries frustrating penalties. In *Tabula Rasa*, death does not bring direct punishment, but rather a reduced reward. Most missions take less than 30 minutes; the worst thing that could happen is having to replay a failed mission—far better than the dreaded *EverQuest* corpse run.

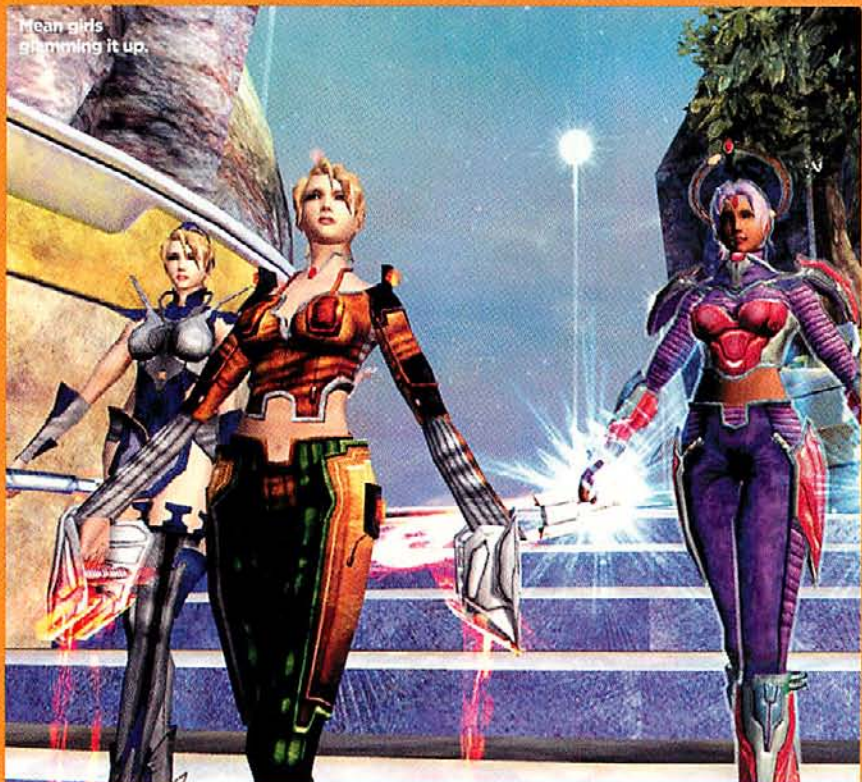
### The snare

Large-scale MMORPGs have plenty of hurdles to overcome, but some players actually enjoy their faults. A "single-player experience but with friends" approach might not be what dyed-in-the-wool MMORPG players are looking for, but this paradigm shift sounds very appealing. **Johnny Liu**

### The word: FRESH SLATE

**"We founded the online game space."**

Whatchoo looking at?





# EverQuest II

Hands on with the new Evercrack

Anybody got a milk bone?



"Hi, I'm Sally Struthers! Here at the Norrath School of Smashing and Killing, you can earn your certificate in face punching, slicing off heads, phat lewt, or spawn camping. GET YOUR DEGREE!"

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the original *EverQuest* is just about the most highly praised game ever created. Countless imitators, good and bad, have come out since *EQ*'s release in 1999. *Ultima Online* may have started the MMO craze with a bang, but *EQ* set the mark for the vast majority of MMOs to follow. Now, five years later, the eagerly awaited sequel is almost upon us. Will it raise the bar—or will it amount to just another shallow copycat?

## The world

The fantasy world of Norrath is richer and more vibrant than ever before, with even more character options to choose from. All the old favorites from the original *EQ*—including humans, dwarves, gnomes, trolls, iksar, and various elven races—make their return here, along with a new rodentlike

species called the ratonga. After creating your character via a thoroughly well-detailed generation process reminiscent of *Star Wars Galaxies*, you'll choose a basic profession (fighter, mage, priest, or scout) and be sent on your merry way, completing quests and defeating deadly monsters as you explore the ins and outs of the gargantuan game world.

## The hook

*EQ2* is an incredible-looking game on par with many of its next-generation competitors. The animations, textures, and superb lighting effects are light years ahead of its venerated alma mater, and the game certainly looks more alive than ever before. Speech is another big addition—most of the game's characters now have spoken dialogue, an unprecedented step for the MMO genre. Character development progresses along a branching class system, with six advanced classes available to each of the four basic professions. Utilizing your character's talents and interacting with the game world is now easier than ever,



*EQ2*'s critters and spell effects are top-notch.

with an intuitive control scheme and convenient, context-sensitive menus. To all appearances, *EQ2* refines its predecessor's gameplay in all the ways that matter.

## The snare

Aside from the obvious competition from such solid games as *City of Heroes* and *World of Warcraft*, *EQ2* also has another bitter competitor: itself. With more than 400,000 *EQ* subscribers, *EQ2* is sure to meet a great deal of resistance from die-hard *EQ* fans who have poured countless hours into their characters. After all, starting completely over after five years can be a real pain. Despite this, SOE hopes the two games will coexist peacefully while still allowing new players to be folded into *EverQuest 2* when the game is released this fall. **Ryan Scott**



OMFG, I just pwned that goblin. LOL!

**Five years later, the eagerly awaited sequel is almost upon us.**

**The Word PHAT LEWT**



# World of Warcraft



Witness the flight of the hippogryphs! Night elves can hail these winged beasts in order to travel great distances. The first step is to track down a hippogryph master in a city. One thing to ponder: With a name like "hippogryph," shouldn't the creature look half hippo?

Each of *WOW*'s different races has a different air-taxi transport system. Trolls, taurens, and orcs have wyverns. Humans, dwarves, and gnomes take to the skies on gryphons. And the undead fly on vampire bats.







PUBLISHER: Blizzard Entertainment DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

# World of Warcraft

Orcs vs. humans vs. the need for sleep

**W**orld of what? Just kidding. This game has been looming large over the MMORPG landscape since it was announced, with gamers hoping for what could be, and rival game developers cringing in fear for the same reason. Because if Blizzard can apply the same kind of magic that has made its *WarCraft*, *StarCraft*, and *Diablo* games international blockbusters, then the company could easily flatten the competition. Still, Blizzard is a newcomer to the genre, and there are plenty of high-profile alternatives out now or on the way, so, unlike any game it has made before, this is far from a slam dunk. But is it really wise to bet against Blizzard?

## The world

With a series of strategy games, ridiculously detailed manuals, and novels behind it, Blizzard's *Azeroth* was a rich, well-defined fantasy world before the company even started on *World of Warcraft*. But in the game, *Azeroth* is coming alive like never before, with a brilliant artistic vision that is reminiscent of the world's strategy games but also unlike anything you've ever seen before: It's a 3D cartoon wonderland, sometimes humorous, sometimes frightening, and always a marvel to behold. All of the races, creatures, lands, and cities of the *WarCraft* games are now yours to live in and be a part of—and if the so-far-successful beta test is any indication, many of you may never leave.

## The hook

The hook? Well, it's Blizzard. That will be reason enough for tons of gamers to check this out—even, as Blizzard hopes, gamers who've never been interested in MMORPGs before. Blizzard's goal from the start has been to make an online RPG with as much mainstream appeal as all its other games, and the ongoing beta test is proving that the company is well on its way. Gameplay is largely quest oriented—and the quests are in grand abundance throughout the world, while the skills and crafting systems will



Hanging out with kodo beasts.



I'M NOT A MAD COW. I'm just having a bad day. "sniff"

**A feast of gaming that never leaves you a second to wonder what to do next.**

have you obsessively pursuing side projects all the time. The net result? A feast of gaming that never leaves you a second to wonder what to do next.

## The snare

*World of Warcraft* has a couple things going against it. One is expectations. Everyone expects miracles from Blizzard, and all the hype—including our own—may leave some gamers wondering what the fuss was about. Gamers not into a classic fantasy setting, including some right here at CGW, may find titles like *City of Heroes* to be more compelling and unique. Does anyone really need to be a dwarf or elf



"RARGH. Red Bull gave me wings!"

again? And then there's the worry of too much success: that a drove of newbie players will kill the experience for more hardcore online gamers. Still, "fear of success" is a problem that most developers would kill for. **Jeff Green**

**The Word: ORCLICIOUS**



PUBLISHER: NCsoft DEVELOPER: ArenaNet GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Late 2004

# Guild Wars

"MMor" for less: No subscription fees!

Diablo-style real-time action mixes with *Magic: The Gathering*-style strategy.



A torture device that goes to "11"



It's news to no one that most MMOs devolve into nothing more than chore simulators. What gamer hasn't committed countless hours to turning boring, weak characters into powerhouses, only to repeat the cycle over and over again? ArenaNet aims to change that; its development team, made up of the networking talent behind Battle.net and veterans of many Blizzard games, wants you to have fun from the get-go with its new title *Guild Wars*, a massively multiplayer action game in the vein of *Diablo*.

During E3, ArenaNet invited the public to play *Guild Wars* missions with E3 attendees via a free downloadable client available on the company's website. From May 12 to May 14, scores of players were online, battling other players and nonplayer characters in this new fantasy playground.

## The world

Missions take you to places like the Tombs of Dracir, which features large, crumbling stone fortresses. This harsh, rocky expanse, rich with reds, browns, and purples, is a sharp contrast to the lush green jungles of the Wilds, where plant life is three times the height of any human character. Along the way, you encounter original creatures like the lightclaw griffon and fierce bone dragons composed of reptilian remains. The stunning lighting across these realms imbues the game with a sense of magic.

## The hook

The game's successful pick-up-and-play quality comes from the innovative way players acquire skills. *Guild Wars*' character-enhancement system was inspired by *Magic: The Gathering*, the popular fantasy card game. There are hundreds of skills to learn, but only eight can be taken into combat. Your choices, not endless leveling up, will decide your fate. The free-fighting gameplay was modeled after *Diablo*'s, except that character classes are character professions (six announced so far), and players can specialize in two of them.

Plus, playing *Guild Wars* online is free. That's a revolution everyone should follow. In the future, players who want to expand their experience can purchase chapter expansions, available via download or at retail outlets. Predictive downloading will stream necessary content in as needed: The expansion will be downloaded, just waiting for a final OK from your credit card.

## The snare

Although there are fresh elements among the creatures and visuals, *Guild Wars* still runs the risk of getting lost in the clutter of online fantasy games. Not too much information is available about the game's story, but what is known fits the familiar clichés inherent to the genre. While developers don't have to create a nonfantasy story to stand out, another sword-and-shield entry such as this will have to fight its way out of the crowd. **Jason Allen**

**The Word: FREE-DOM!**



RARGH—watch where you put those hands!



PUBLISHER: NCsoft DEVELOPER: NetDevils GENRE: MMO-Action RELEASE DATE: TBA

# Auto Assault

## Drive-by shooting

**M**MORPGs don't always have to be about elves, pixie dust, and other forms of...well...nonmanliness. How about one that takes place in a postapocalyptic world? You know, *Mad Max* style, with car combat, explosions, and destruction? Thankfully, that's exactly what *Auto Assault* promises.

### The world

A vast wasteland populated by humans, mutants, and biomeks, where you drive around creating mayhem or walk around communities looking for items to soup up your road rocket.

**MMORPGs don't always have to be about elves and pixie dust.**

### The hook

The Havok physics engine allows for fully destructible environments and vehicular manslaughter that sends enemies flying through the air, rag-doll style. These physics effects are possible across a MMO because the effects are done natively on each player's computer.

The game's cars drive smoothly whether you use the keyboard or a mouse. Vehicles can also be outfitted with improved armor and weaponry. Ah, the spoils of battle.

### The snare

*Motor City Online*, the closest thing to an MMO car game, failed dismally, but that was straight-up racing, not combat. If online worlds can blend with pure vehicular action, then *Auto Assault* will be worth "tuning up" for. **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: DESTRUCTION**



Commutes are murder.

PUBLISHER: NevraX DEVELOPER: NevraX GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: August 2004

# The Saga of Ryzom

## Create and customize the details

**H**onestly, the word "Ryzom" sounds like either a dietary fiber or some new medicine. Yet *The Saga of Ryzom* might be the prescription against staid and tired MMORPGs. In a mix of fantasy and science fiction, players will adventure forth with swords and rifles, sorcery and technology, in a large game world.

### The world

*The Saga of Ryzom* takes place on the planet Atys. You play as one of four races in the game, and NevraX says more playable races may be added after the game's release.

Expect dungeons, player housing, instanced zones, and more in the final release as well.

### The hook

The developers promise huge battles involving players and creatures in a seamless game world. Perhaps the most interesting aspect however is *Ryzom*'s robust skill- and spell-based character-building system. You select a basic spell type, such as an icebolt. Then you add or subtract range, spell damage, and other special effects the spells might have. All of this is balanced by a cost for each addition. Want to increase the

spell's range? It will cost more in terms of casting requirements.

### The snare

It remains to be seen how well this cost-customization system works in long-term play, but we are still intrigued by the dimension and strategy to character customization and growth. Yet, *Ryzom* will have to muster more moxie and buzz in its current beta period to stand up to the higher-profile releases. **Mark Asher**

**The Word: CUSTOMIZE**



Looks like you've got a spider problem.



Flashy, shiny lights on the planet Atys.



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WILL BE YOUR MEN.



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Blood and Violence



[WWW.CODEMASTERS.COM/SOLDIERS](http://WWW.CODEMASTERS.COM/SOLDIERS)

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PUBLISHER: Funcom DEVELOPER: Funcom GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

# Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion

## End of the world as we know it

**A**lien Invasion shakes things up for the world's first sci-fi MMORPG. Waves upon waves of extraterrestrials are attacking Rubi-Ka, a remote desert planet colonized by modern man's descendants 30,000 years in the future.

### The world

The scenario is very *Dune*-like; Rubi-Ka is the only place in the known universe where a strange substance called "notum" is found, and as such, several factions vie for control of it.

### The hook

Beside the vicious throngs of E.T.s, the key feature is the addition of player-run communities. With the help of craftsmen, you can build your own estates and outfit them in many ways. There are also player-run towns, complete with guild HQs, grid terminals (grids serve as rapid transit), and even guns to fight off attacking UFOs.

### The snare

*Anarchy Online* is getting up there in years, and it's starting to show. Though it is currently the best it's ever been, the question remains whether it can still hold its head above the multitude of upcoming MMORPGs. **Miguel Lopez**

**The Word: INVADED**



Take me to your leader.



That's the second-biggest alien death ship I've ever seen.

PUBLISHER: Mythic Entertainment DEVELOPER: Mythic Entertainment RELEASE DATE: 2005

# Imperator

## Centurions and legionaries in the future

**R**ome wasn't built in a day, and neither will be *Imperator*, the futuristic MMORPG by the creators of *Dark Ages* of Camelot.

### The world

What if the Roman Empire had never fallen? In *Imperator*, *Gladiator* meets *Blade Runner* in a technologically advanced futuristic world.

### The hook

The alternate history concept is very intriguing. And the massive tome of concept art we've rifled through is filled with slick and clever designs. Much of the game's playable areas will be created on the fly, or "instanced," and characters will be developed through a skill-based system that is enabled through "life event" quests. Interesting detail: The major enemy of the



Roman Empire will be the Mayans.

### The snare

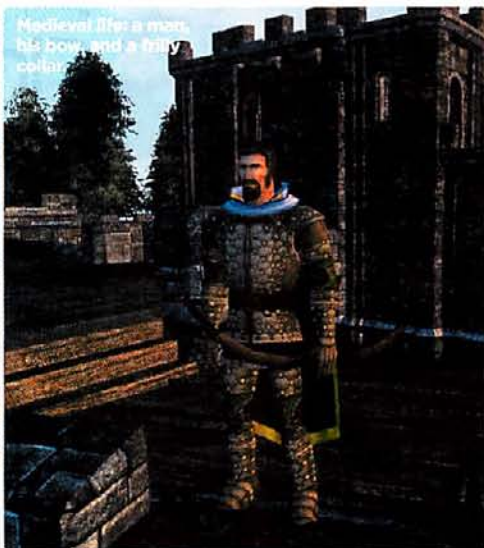
This falls alongside *Vanguard* as a sometime in 2005 release. **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: TROJAN HORSE**





In your best Sean Connery: "Welcome to Camelot."



Medieval life: a man, his bow, and a frilly collar.

PUBLISHER: Mythic DEVELOPER: Mythic GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Summer 2004

# Dark Age of Camelot: New Frontiers

Welcome once again to Camelot

**M**ythic is revamping the player-versus-player (PVP) portion of *Dark Age of Camelot*, the company's flagship game, with a new expansion, *New Frontiers*—a free download for existing customers. Current subscribers can already access the beta version.

## The world

The *Dark Age of Camelot* world is divided into three realms eternally at war with one another. Albion loosely uses the mythic setting of Arthurian legend. The realm of Midgard is based on Norse tales. The third realm, Hibernia, is inspired by Celtic myth.

## The hook

In *New Frontiers*, players can jump into battles more quickly via the new Realmwars map window. The teleport options and the common battlefields players fight over

have been redone and consolidated into one zone. Keeps have been redesigned and are now upgradeable, giving players more control over the castles they occupy. There will even be fast attack boats!

*Camelot's* Realm Abilities system is also receiving an overhaul. These important abilities, formerly earned by killing enemy players, will be rebalanced and retuned.

## The snare

Although still going strong, *Camelot* has quite a few miles on the odometer, and some players may be itching to change rides. Luckily for those feeling antsy, a second expansion, *Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs*, offers a complete graphical overhaul. Check out the sidebar for side-by-side comparisons. **Mark Asher**

The Word: **MEDIEVAL**



"Rook" at this.

Although still going strong, *Camelot* has quite a few miles on the odometer.



## Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs

Soon after the release of *Dark Age of Camelot: New Frontiers*, another expansion, *Dark Ages of Camelot: Catacombs*, will offer a complete graphic overhaul. The character on the right is the current look; this same character on the left shows how the expansion will upgrade the visuals. No more flat faces, dopey expressions, or armor that doesn't look like armor.



# PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Advent Rising	Majesco Games	September 2004
Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion	Funcom	September 2004
Armies of Exigo	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Atlantis Evolution	The Adventure Company	November 2004
Auto Assault	NCsoft	2004
The Bard's Tale	InfX Entertainment	2004
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Q1 2005
Black & White II	Electronic Arts	2005
BloodRayne 2	Majesco Games	October 2004
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Bohemia Interactive	September 2004
Call of Duty: United Offensive	Activision	Q4 2004
Chessmaster X	Ubisoft	2004
City of Villains	NCsoft	2005
Civilization IV	Atari	2005
Codename: Panzers	CDV Software	2004
Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars	Canoga Publishing	September 2004
Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs	Mythic Entertainment	December 2004
Dark Fall: Lights Out	The Adventure Company	Q3 2004
Doom 3	Activision	Q3 2004
Dragon Age	Microsoft	2004
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q4 2004
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	November 2004
Empire Earth 2	Vivendi Universal	2005
EverQuest II	SOE	September 2004
Evil Genius	Vivendi Universal	September 2004
The Fall: Last Days of Gala	TBA	Q3 2004
F.E.A.R.	Vivendi Universal	2005
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Square Enix	Q4 2004
Fistful of Dollars	Empire Interactive	Q3 2004
Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich	Irrational Games	2004
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	September 2004
Guild Wars	NCsoft	November 2004
Half-Life 2	Vivendi Universal	2004
I of the Enemy	Enemy Technology	Q2 2004
Juiced	Acclaim	Q3 2004
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal	October 2004
LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts	August 2004
The Matrix Online	Sega	October 2004
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Men of Valor	Vivendi Universal	Q4 2004
Middle-earth Online	Vivendi Universal	October 2004

New Update



PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

## Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia

There's nothing final about this fantasy



**S**quare Enix shocked the world when it released *Final Fantasy XI*

for the PC earlier this year. Who would have thought that a publisher known for epic, arguably overwrought console RPGs could produce one of the most solid and playable MMORPGs around? *Chains of Promathia*, the expansion due out this fall, promises to expand the game's rich world considerably. We're just a little skeptical as to what, exactly, the expansion will bring....

### The world

Vana'diel, quite possibly the most aesthetically detailed world in MMORPG history, is a land beleaguered by hordes of beastmen—a catchall for various types of evil humanoids. Three rival nations have forged an uneasy peace in order to combat these threats.

### The hook

*Chains of Promathia* will add 40 areas to *Final Fantasy XI*'s already feature-rich world. Square Enix has been tight lipped about precise details, but we do know that among these new zones will be a giant metropolis populated by goblins—*FFXI*'s most lovable tiny terrors.

### The snare

It is yet to be revealed whether there will be any new character jobs in *Chains of Promathia*. If the answer turns out to be “no,” then that would make *COP* one of



Picturesque Vana'diel.

the most half-assed expansions in MMORPG history. We don't want this to be the reality for one of our favorite massively multiplayer games ever, but we'll call 'em as we see them.... **Miguel Lopez**

### The word: DISABLING



### Koei

Square Enix isn't the only Japanese console developer hopping aboard the MMORPG train. Koei, known for a multitude of games grounded throughout Asian history, is releasing *Nobunaga's Ambition Online* and *Uncharted Waters Online* in Japan. Neither is currently slated for a domestic release.



PUBLISHER: Gravity DEVELOPER: Gravity GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: May 2004

# Ragnarok Online

## MManga Online RPG

From *StarCraft* ballads hitting the pop charts to players dying in Internet cafes, Korea is one country that loves the PC. *Ragnarok Online*, one of Korea's popular MMORPGs, has now been translated and published Stateside.

### The world

*Ragnarok Online* is based on the fantasy comic series *Ragnarok*, by Myung-Jin Lee, published in the U.S. by TokyoPop. These comics take elements of Norse mythology and blend them with classic fantasy tales and Asian design. It's an entertaining serial adventure of gods and warriors.

The world of these comics is re-created online, with 10 different lands/environments and 20 different job classes that are earned through a hierarchical chart.

### The hook

*Ragnarok Online* claims to be one of the top MMORPGs in Korea, so it must be doing something right. Appealingly, a 15-day free trial is available in the States, but be prepared for a long download—at least the game has bite-sized split RAR files.



Thankfully, the interface system allows you to play windowed, so you can battle the beasts while writing e-mail.

### The snare

Just because something is incredibly popular across the globe does not mean it will do well here. First off, the character graphics are 2D sprites with 3D backgrounds; most players will think the cutesy-poo characters and cartoon worlds look too dated. Second, the English translations are clumsy. Only extensive play will tell if there's more to this game than first meets the eye. **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: NORSE-EAST**

PUBLISHER: TBA DEVELOPER: Climax GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Q1 2005

# Warhammer Online

## Fantasy, minus the pretty elves

If there's one thing that the 25-year-old Games Workshop is known for, it's creating fantasy worlds that are dark and raw. Last month, we checked out *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, which features a futuristic world filled with orcs and other beasts. Get rid of the "40,000" and the "futuristic" elements, and you're left with *Warhammer Online*—another Games Workshop property that embodies the outfit's dedication to creating dark, immersive worlds.

### The world

All you *EverQuest* junkies can keep your rainbows and bright, sunny colors. The world of *Warhammer Online* is a dank, dreary, and thoroughly dismal hellscape.

### The hook

For fans of the series and perhaps some dark-minded newcomers, *Warhammer Online* promises adventures filled with "dangerous discovery." The beasts you'll encounter don't have any visible indicators that telegraph their power levels, so consider



yourselves warned: If a creature looks like it can tear you limb from limb, it probably will.

### The snare

Compared to other titles competing for a slice of the MMO pie, *Warhammer Online* looks dated. Though Games Workshop has decades of experience as a tabletop-game manufacturer, it is a relative newcomer to PC gaming. Will its RPG background allow for a smooth transition into the digital market? Only time will tell. **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: RAW**

## PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
The Movies	Activision	October 2004
Myst IV: Revelation	Ubisoft	September 2004
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	Electronic Arts	February 2005
NHL 2005	Electronic Arts	Q3 2004
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Q4 2004
Pacific Fighters	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Playboy: The Mansion	Arush Entertainment	Q4 2004
Priest	JC Entertainment	2004
Prince of Persia 2 (working title)	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Project Jane-J	The Adventure Company	2004
Psychotoxic	CDV Software	2004
Quake IV	Activision	2005
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari	November 2004
Rome: Total War	Activision	September 2004
Shade: Wrath of Angels	Canega	2004
Shark Tale	Activision	October 2004
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	November 2004
Silent Hunter III	Ubisoft	September 2004
Silent Storm: Sentinels	Encore Software	2004
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Splinter Cell 3 (working title)	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	THQ	September 2004
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	September 2004
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	LucasArts	Q3 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—The Sith Lords	LucasArts	February 2005
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	November 2004
State of Emergency 2	Bam Entertainment	Q4 2004
Supremacy: Four Paths to Power	Strategy First	2004
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy First	Q3 2004
SWAT 4	Vivendi Universal	Q1 2005
Tabula Rasa	NCsoft	November 2004
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal	December 2004
Tribes: Vengeance	Vivendi Universal	Q4 2004
Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines	Activision	November 2004
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	Microsoft	2005
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	THQ	September 2004
Warhammer Online	TBA	Q1 2005
Wartime Command: Battle for Europe 1939-1945	Codemasters	Q4 2004
World of Warcraft	Blizzard Entertainment	2004
Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim	Konami	Q4 2004
Zoo Tycoon 2	Microsoft	Q4 2004

■ New ■ Update



# DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

The best games you've never seen

FROM: Headfirst Productions AVAILABILITY: Summer 2005

## Deadlands



**Word on the street:** Cross HP Lovecraft with *High Noon*, and you'll have a good idea of what this third-person action affair entails. Based on Pinnacle Entertainment's pen-and-paper role-playing franchise, this adventure borrows heavily from both spaghetti Westerns and supernatural thrillers. Blood mixes with whiskey and sawdust when an evil spirit possesses a murdered gunslinger and sets out seeking vengeance. It'd be a turkey shoot if the outlaw's killers hadn't made a pact with evil extraplanar forces....

**Sounds kinda beat:** Headfirst's track record is dodgy—there's a reason *Simon the Sorcerer 3D* never set foot on American shores. As for *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*, we'd be less shocked to witness the Elder Gods return than actually see it ship. But let's not forget that once upon a time, these folks brought us horror classics like *Elvira* and *Waxworks*. The company is at its best when it's playing with a dead man's hand.



FROM: Lesta Studios AVAILABILITY: Q1 2005

## Pacific Storm

**Word on the street:** World War II real-time-strategy romps are more common than bullet holes in a B-17 Flying Fortress. But ones that could also double as hardcore simulations or thorough tactical engagements? Not so much. Commanding American or Japanese forces, you re-create all the major sea battles of history's greatest armed conflict using battleships, destroyers, submarines, antiaircraft guns, and more. Take control over vessels in first-person mode if desired, but be warned...with visuals this photorealistic, flashbacks are unavoidable.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Lesta Studios hasn't proven itself with one worthy contender; so far, it has given the Western world a single lackluster offering in *WWI: The Great War*. Suspicion runs wild whenever an independent development house promises an ambitious product. The firm is claiming complete historical accuracy, which is always a contestable sales point; count on armchair generals to apply the strictest of scrutiny to this puppy when it ships.



FROM: Dejobaan Games AVAILABILITY: Q3 2004

## Inago Rage

**Word on the street:** Design a cityscape, then bound through it blasting everything that moves. There's a high concept if ever we've heard one. Play involves chasing swarms of mechanized enemies around 52 official urban environments or custom-built levels composed from over 100 building blocks such as skyscrapers and catwalks. Despite a cheesy story line (the action follows heroine Ise "Inago" Asahi as she competes in a futuristic gladiatorial sport), the title should offer exhilarating arcade-style entertainment for all.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Been there, done that. Run-and-gun affairs just don't carry much weight this side of 1990. Nor do products in which the female lead's cup size rests somewhere between Dixie and shot glass...hey, that's just the market. Then again, with the recent explosion in the popularity of mods, the program could enjoy cult renown if amateur craftsmen latch onto it. Tinkers in training should keep their eyes peeled for the game's impending release.



ATARI



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# IT CAME FROM E3!

CGW'S MONSTER  
FALL PREVIEW

**N**ope, we're not *Xbox Gaming World* just yet, folks. If 2003 was the year that calmed everyone down about the supposed death of PC gaming, with more great PC games than you can shake skinny CGW editor Ryan Scott at, 2004 is the year that proves PC gaming is here to stay, with a ton of promising new titles that you'll find *only* on the PC. Not that we're being defensive. There's no need for that—not anymore. At this year's E3 (Electronic Entertainment Exposition)—gaming's annual coming out party for the year's upcoming titles—PC gaming was as strong as ever. Just look through the following pages and you'll see what the real problem is: There are *too many* cool games coming up. But as far as problems go, we'll take it. So check 'em out and start saving or stealing your brother's pennies now. You're gonna need them.

ILLUSTRATION BY TAVIS COBURN





## Zoo Tycoon 2

**Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios **Developer:** Blue Fang Games **Release Date:** Fall 2004

**THEY SAY:** There will be new ways to build your dream zoos, new first-person and zookeeper modes that let you experience and care for animals firsthand, deeper gameplay, and a new sandbox mode.

**WE SAY:** Whatever.

## Black & White 2

**Publisher:** Electronic Arts **Developer:** Lionhead Studios **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** City-building and honest-to-god RTS combat fulfill the promise of this wannabe gaming revolutionary.



**WE SAY:** The first game let us down, but Lionhead is promising better creature

training and pacing. We're keeping our fingers crossed that this time, this moral Rorschach test will succeed and blow us away like the original should have.



## Tabula Rasa

**Publisher:** NCsoft **Developer:** Destination Games **Release Date:** 2005

**THEY SAY:** An all-new, original fictional fantasy



# Rome: Total War

**Publisher:** Activision **Developer:** The Creative Assembly **Release Date:** Q4 2004

fighting onscreen in real time. A few years ago, this kind of thing wouldn't have been possible even in cut-scenes, let alone in a running game engine. But let's get down to what really matters here: flaming pigs. You can release flaming pigs at your enemy. That's Game of the Year material right there.

**THEY SAY:** The Creative Assembly's acclaimed strategy series moves to ancient Rome, where you take on the likes of Julius Caesar and Hannibal to become the most successful Roman emperor since Derek Jacobi. As in the previous games, you'll play on the battlefield, with tens of thousands of units at your disposal, and on a *Risk*-style strategic map, where you'll make your political decisions.

**WE SAY:** This game looks awesome, with thousands of units



MMO by gaming pioneer Richard Garriott. **WE SAY:** Garriott and company pretty much created the graphical MMO with *Ultima Online*, with mixed results. With the lessons learned from that experience and ambitious design goals including real-time combat, voice-over-IP support, and some gameplay innovations, this is a game to watch.



### Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

**Publisher:** Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA LA Studios **Release Date:** Q1 2005



**THEY SAY:** *Pacific Assault* will knock *CGW 2003* Action Game of the Year *Call of Duty* off its pedestal with squad-supported FPS combat in a graphically rich WWII setting. **WE SAY:** The last *Medal of Honor* PC game was a legit Game of the Year candidate. *Pacific Assault* looked great at E3, and we're betting it will at the very least be another outstanding entry in the series.



### Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

**Publisher:** LucasArts **Developer:** Sony Online Entertainment **Release Date:** Q2 2004

**THEY SAY:** It's a groundbreaking expansion pack for a groundbreaking MMORPG. **WE SAY:** They may actually be right: Real-time ship-to-ship space combat should redeem the letdown we felt over *Galaxies*. It's gorgeous, it's exciting, and we can't wait.

## F.E.A.R.

**Publisher:** Vivendi Universal Games **Developer:** Monolith Productions **Release Date:** Q2 2005

**THEY SAY:** Monolith describes this first-person shooter as "*The Matrix* meets *The Ring*," and that's not too far off for what was one of the creepiest and best-looking games of E3. *F.E.A.R.* is about an elite top-secret strike team (First Encounter Assault and Recon) that takes on paranormal threats. Monolith has been quietly working on this for a while, using a brand-new game engine (not LithTech) and promising the game equivalent of a "blockbuster action movie."

**WE SAY:** As we declared a couple issues back, Monolith is the most underrated developer in the business, with a string of awesome games under its belt (*No One Lives Forever*, *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, *Tron 2.0*)—but not one breakout hit among them. It's due, and this dark, scary game (miles away from the light humor of *NOLF*) could be the one. The creepy little girl at the heart of the mystery makes us want our mommies.







## Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich

**>>Publisher:** TBA **Developer:** Irrational Games **Release Date:** 2005...we hope

**THEY SAY:** The game that made us believe in superhero games again is back—or at least it will be as soon as Irrational Games lines up a publisher. Like the original *Freedom Force*, *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* is a squad-based tactical-strategy game set in a hilarious, brilliant parody of a comic-book universe, with larger-than-life heroes and villains who live and die by the cliché. This time around, our heroes travel back in time to comics' Golden Age to take on everyone's favorite villains, the Nazis.

**WE SAY:** We're suckers for the first game. It doesn't hurt that Irrational Games is a brilliant development house (remember *System Shock 2*?), but this franchise speaks directly to our geeky, comic-book-lovin' hearts. How can you not love a game with an Italian bad guy named Fortissimo who blasts people with deadly opera singing? For freedom! Again!



### Missing

**>>Publisher:** DreamCatcher Interactive **Developer:** Lexis Numerique **Release Date:** July 2004

**THEY SAY:** *Silence of the Lambs* in an Internet-centric horror/suspense adventure game. **WE SAY:** The last Internet-centric game we played was *Majestic*, and it sucked. *Missing* could be better because it looks genuinely creepy, it uses both real and made-up Internet content, the FMV doesn't look bad, and you can play at your own pace.

### Kohan II: Kings of War

**>>Publisher:** Gathering **Developer:** TimeGate **Release Date:** August 2004

**THEY SAY:** Same innovative *Kohan* gameplay





that won the original a CGW Strategy Game of the Year award, only fully 3D and in a more living, breathing world.

**WE SAY:** We loved the first *Kohan* (duh), and we have faith in TimeGate, but with the game so close to release, why isn't Gathering trying to generate hype? Should we be worried?



### Dungeon Siege 2

**Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios **Developer:** Gas Powered Games **Release Date:** Q4 2004



**THEY SAY:** This is a big overhaul of what people like about the original *Dungeon Siege*. More items, the ability to craft your own goods, branching skill trees like in *Diablo*

//, and, apparently, an honest-to-god plot this time around are all on the plate of juicy new offerings.

**WE SAY:** Wow. What happened? Even with all these improvements, this game still needs an exorcism.

### Dragon Age

**Publisher:** TBA **Developer:** BioWare **Release Date:** 2005

**THEY SAY:** Don't think that BioWare forgot its roots. Combining what it learned in *Baldur's Gate* and *KOTOR*, the team is working on a new epic RPG.



**WE SAY:** We officially did a spit-take in a behind-closed-doors look at the game. When BioWare is ready to show more and announce a publisher, we'll be the first ones there.

### The Movies

**Publisher:** Activision **Developer:** Lionhead Studios **Release Date:** Q3 2004

**THEY SAY:** This isn't your typical tycoon game. Not only can you run your movie studio into the ground, but you can also create the world's worst movies and upload them to the Web.



## Games for Windows?

Who makes PC games? Apparently not the maker of the primary PC operating system. Microsoft's sprawling E3 setup was all about Xbox. The three PC titles it showed were underwhelming at best: *Zoo Tycoon 2* (nice enough, but c'mon), *Dungeon Siege 2* (not much different from the first game), and *Vanguard*, an MMO that, as of E3, was pretty much just an architecture program, what with the developers refusing to reveal any features beyond the supercool and realistic buildings their game engine can build. (We've learned a little more about it since then—check out the preview on page 38.)



## Brothers in Arms

**Publisher:** Ubisoft **Developer:** Gearbox Software **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** The only first-person WWII tactical shooter, *Brothers in Arms* will feature real military tactics supported by revolutionary A.I. In telling the true story of a squad of 101st Airborne paratroopers that included two Medal of Honor winners, Gearbox is bending over backward for realism, using aerial recon imagery to help create the game maps and putting real-life squad members into the game as the characters you command and fight alongside.

**WE SAY:** Remember when we named Gearbox the most overrated game developer? We may have to revise that. The demo we saw was gripping, with the squad splitting into two teams, one laying down suppressing fire, the other flanking and assaulting an entrenched German position. If the entire game is this cool, then Gearbox will have created a legit Game of the Year candidate.



# Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines

**Publisher:** Activision **Developer:** Troika Games **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** This is not the hack-n-slash RPG poser that was the first *Vampire* game. *Bloodlines* details a deep story line that is actually being folded into the official pen-and-paper game's fiction. Playing as one of seven radically different vampire clans, players will make their way through a nocturnal world, solving story-driven quests and fighting all sorts of nightmarish beasts. And sucking blood. Sucking lots and lots of blood.

**WE SAY:** Last year we said *Bloodlines* "just looked plain sad." Well, we take that back now. In a weird, bloodsucky way, this may be the next *System Shock*, an action-RPG in which detailed character development is just as vital as gripping first-person combat. The game features multiple solutions to challenges, different paths and experi-

ences depending upon which clan your character belongs to, the ability to use both persuasion and combat to succeed, and the muscular beauty that is Valve's Source technology powering it all. What's not to like?



**WE SAY:** We were very skeptical at first, but after seeing it, we see ourselves in pictures.



## Ghost Recon 2

**Publisher:** Ubisoft **Developer:** Red Storm **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** An updated graphics engine, smarter A.I., and a whole different feel (the ability to switch into third-person

mode and voice commands) make this the next step in squad-based warfare.

**WE SAY:** Too many gimmicks or the console-ization of the tactical shooter? Who cares? So long as it's fun!

## Advent Rising

**Publisher:** Majesco Games **Developer:** Glyphx Games **Release Date:** Q3 2004



**THEY SAY:** *Advent* is trying to take what's worked from a bunch of different shooters and bind it together into an epic story that spans three games.

**WE SAY:** The concept could be really good if the bugs are removed—and if the game ever gets finished. Hey, you guys at Majesco... stop reading this and get back to work!





### Star Wars Republic Commando

►► Publisher: LucasArts Developer: LucasArts Release Date: Q3 2004



**THEY SAY:** Take characters from *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* and suit them up as Clone Wars troopers. Lead a squad of elite soldiers behind enemy lines in the *Star Wars* universe.

**WE SAY:** The context-sensitive interface seems a little too console-ish, but it looks pretty and we're still optimistic. It all boils down to how tight your squadmates' A.I. is.



### Tribes: Vengeance

►► Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: Irrational Games Release Date: Q4 2004



**THEY SAY:** A complete overhaul of everyone's favorite jetpack-oriented multiplayer



## Star Wars Battlefront

►► Publisher: LucasArts Developer: Pandemic Release Date: Q3 2004

**THEY SAY:** How can you not like the idea of *Battlefield 1942* set in the *Star Wars* universe? The bean counters at LucasArts sure do. While mod-makers have been trying to pull off this feat with mixed results, *Battlefront* actually promises a whole lot more than just a few vehicles and

soldier types in a galaxy far, far away. Most notable is the unique slant on the multiplayer campaign with Galactic Conquest. While vying for control of different planets, you can gain advantages and A.I.-controlled allies like Darth Vader to watch your back. With the classic and new trilogies represented—not to mention the fact that you finally get the opportunity to stomp a few Ewoks on Endor—this could be the *Star Wars* game action junkies have been waiting for.

**WE SAY:** Up until *KOTOR* came out last year, we'd been *Star Wars* cynics. No longer. *Battlefront* is looking good. Producer Jim Tso confirmed that 64 players are locked down for multiplayer mode, and we're ready to declare war on you all online.



# The Sims 2

► Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Maxis Release Date: September 2004

**THEY SAY:** *The Sims 2* becomes even more of a sim: Every Sim in this sequel is blessed/damned with a very human mortality. Every Sim will have lifelong goals, dreams, fears, and worries that you'll achieve or frustrate at your whim. With the new finite life span, Maxis has made the Sims better able to address their base needs (you won't have to dictate every potty break) so that you can focus on the big life moments. A new home-movie feature will let players capture in-game footage, then cut and score it in any movie-maker program before uploading it to share with the world.

**WE SAY:** The best-selling PC game of all time should become the best-selling sequel of all time just before it's followed by five years' worth of the best-selling expansion packs of all time. Resistance is futile—once again, *The Sims* will redefine gaming addiction. It looks simply brilliant.

► shooter franchise.

**WE SAY:** Looks like some pretty good level design, as well as a lot of refreshing and somewhat quirky new gameplay concepts, like—wait for it—a meaningful single-player game.



### EverQuest II

► Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment Developer: Sony Online Entertainment Release Date: September 2004



**THEY SAY:** The sequel to the most popular massively multiplayer game ever created.

**WE SAY:** Even *EQ2* will get a run for its money from games such as *City of Heroes* and *World of Warcraft*.



### The Matrix Online

► Publisher: Sega Developer: Monolith Productions Release Date: October 2004

**THEY SAY:** A massively multiplayer experience that takes players into the world of the *Matrix* film trilogy.

**WE SAY:** Despite Monolith's excellent pedigree, we can't help being a bit skeptical after those last two movies and the increasingly crowded MMO space.

### Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

► Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: High Voltage Software Release Date: October 2004



**THEY SAY:** A new Larry, new gameplay, and the same brand of risqué adult humor that made the classic *Larry* games, well, classics.

**WE SAY:** Drop-dead hilarious. We're eager to get our hands on this one.



### Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

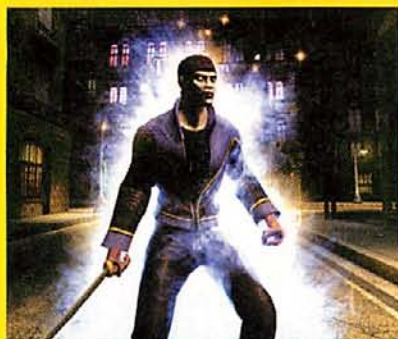
► Publisher: THQ Developer: Relic Release Date: September 2004



**THEY SAY:** An RTS with rocking action and animation, like a giant orc puppy snatching up enemies in its mouth and crunching away.

**WE SAY:** The game has personality, but only the final will tell if it has the "play" to match.





## »» Activision Rulez

Activision has veered more toward console games in the last couple of years, so it was a pleasant surprise to see the company with such an amazingly strong PC game lineup at E3 this year—probably the best of any major publisher at the show. *Rome: Total War*, *The Movies*, *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*, and *Call of Duty: United Offensive* all looked great. Now if we just could have seen that little game from Id Software....



## »» Battlefield 2

»» Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Digital Illusions CE Release Date: Q2 2005

**THEY SAY:** War continues to be hell within the *Battlefield* franchise, and EA promises a whole lot more of what made the first game great. Of course, you'll get better graphics and more detailed cities in which to wage modern warfare, more people to fight online (100 per match), and more vehicles to pilot (30). But just about everybody out there is trying to ape *Battlefield*'s magic formula. How do you make it stand out? You make a sequel with a greater sense of community and teamwork and a proper chain of command. The highest-ranked players—not just in the matches, but in the community—earn the right to be commanders in the field, getting an aerial view of the action and the ability to call in air strikes.

**WE SAY:** Good thing EA finally announced the sequel...we couldn't stomach another expansion. Are we excited about this game? Did you read last month's cover story? We're already picking sides in the inevitable medic matches (defibrillators only, please) to come.





## Call of Duty: United Offensive

**>> Publisher:** Activision **Developer:** Grey Matter  
**Release:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** Fight once more in the military campaigns against the Axis. Plus, new on-rail-style stages.

**WE SAY:** It'll follow the footsteps of the original *Call of Duty*, but will that be enough

against the slew of new military titles? Probably.



## RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

**>> Publisher:** Atari **Developer:** Frontier Developments  
**Release:** November 2004

**THEY SAY:** All the amusement-park high jinks and more of the original, but now in full 3D.



## Pariah

**>> Publisher:** Groove Games **Developer:** Digital  
Extremes **Release Date:** 2005

**THEY SAY:** A new story-driven FPS from the good folks who brought us *Unreal*.

**WE SAY:** It's really too early to tell. The environments aren't quite there, and the enemies were oddly sidestepping. The visual warping effects did look sharp, though.



# Auto Assault

**>> Publisher:** NCsoft **Developer:** NetDevil **Release Date:** 2005

landmarks spread across barren wastelands splintering into pieces. Think of pedestrians sailing like rag dolls through the sky. Hey, it's the end of the world—you might as well go for a drive.

**WE SAY:** The basic action part of the game was playable at E3, and we really enjoyed it. Add in upgradeable weaponry and armor and there should be a side of meaty depth. We're predicting *Auto Assault* will be a deliciously destructive joyride when it ships next year, but we have one question: How much will gas cost in the future?

**THEY SAY:** Mankind has fought back from the brink of extinction with science! Science, of course, meaning big monster cars iced with rockets and machine guns. Join *Auto Assault*, a massively multiplayer online car-combat game in which men, mutants, and biomeks vie for dominance. Utilizing the Havok physics engine, nearly everything in the postapocalyptic environments can be explosively destroyed. Imagine houses and



# S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

► Publisher: THQ Developer: GSC Game World Release: September 2004

**THEY SAY:** In the wake of a second Chernobyl disaster, mercenary soldiers known as "stalkers" have surfaced to recover the artifacts and anomalies of the fallout. As a stalker, you compete against or cooperate with other free-roaming A.I. stalkers while battling a bunch of deadly mutants. Your competitors could easily complete a primary game objective before you do. This kind of open gameplay promises an end to linearity, allowing the game to wrap up in one of eight completely different endings.

**WE SAY:** S.T.A.L.K.E.R. looks good and has a game engine as sharp as *Half-Life 2*'s. Our worry: The "free" gameplay could just mean "unsatisfyingly random." The right tweaks are needed so that any experience you wander into will still be fun. Since this game is story driven, much of the final verdict rests on how the narrative and plot play out. And just what the hell does that S.T.A.L.K.E.R. acronym stand for, anyway?

**WE SAY:** It looks like fun, but we play these *Tycoon*-style games endlessly. Will this *Tycoon* be as fresh as the original?



## Guild Wars

► Publisher: NCsoft Developer: ArenaNet Release: Late 2004



**THEY SAY:** From the people who designed Blizzard's network back end, Battle.net, comes this MMORPG *Diablo*-style game with a dose of strategy.

**WE SAY:** It looks great and has no monthly charge. If only all MMORPGs offered this kind of "free"-dom.



## Evil Genius

► Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: Elixir Studios Release: September 2004

**THEY SAY:** Be a classic villain in the Bond mold, control your evil island empire, and take over the world! Mua-ha-ha!

**WE SAY:** Chaining traps together to kill secret agents is wicked, but here's hoping the simulation-management core of *Evil Genius* will be fun, not work. We'd feel better if you were constantly building

## Console Devs in PC Space

A year or so ago, it seemed every PC developer was fleeing for consoles. Now, the tables are slowly turning, as longtime console developers expand into the PC space. Sega is copublishing *The Matrix Online*. Namco has bought into PC development with Flagship Studios. Square Enix will be handling *EverQuest II*'s launch and community in Japan, as well as continuing the growth of its PC *Final Fantasy Online*. And Koei is developing PC MMORPGs *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Uncharted Waters*.

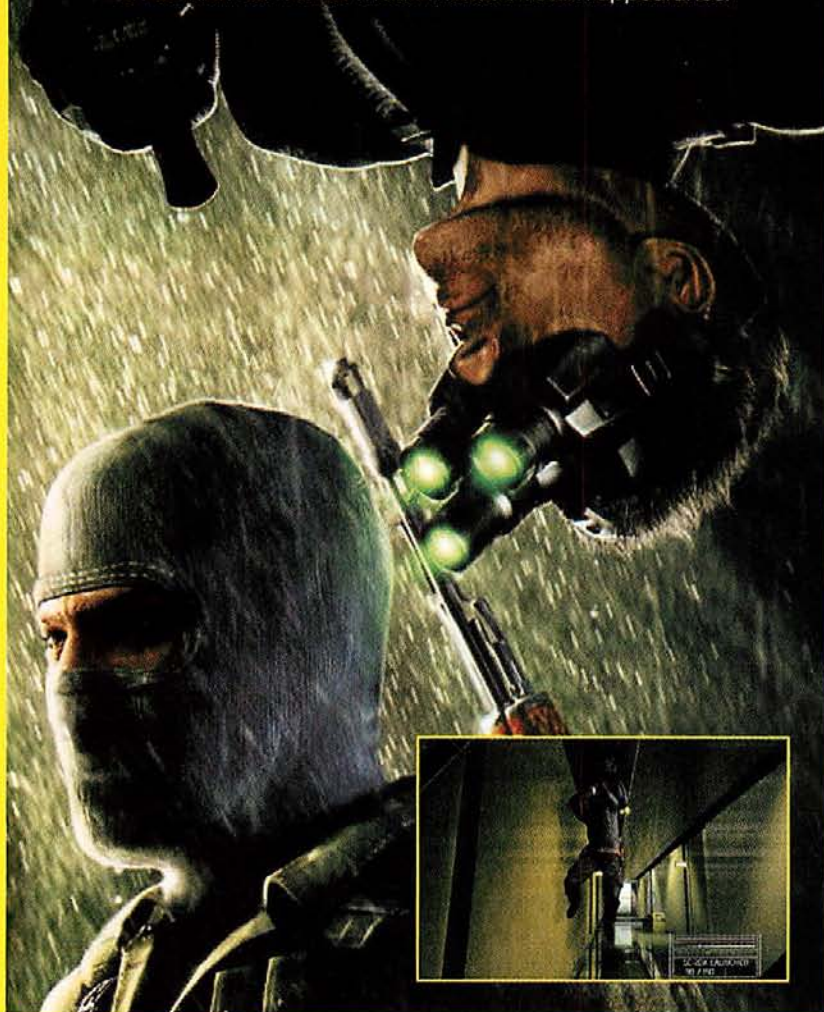


# Splinter Cell 3

► Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Ubisoft Release Date: Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** Professional spy Sam Fisher is off to Korea to stop a group of terrorists from starting the next world war. The follow-up to *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* features better enemy A.I., more weapons, a new cooperative multiplayer mode, and a purportedly nonlinear level-design structure.

**WE SAY:** From the recent *Splinter Cell 3* video demo we saw, the most obvious improvement is to the game's visuals, which are drastically better than those in the mostly-the-same-looking *Pandora Tomorrow*. Some of the new stealth options look pretty cool as well, such as Sam's ability to grab guards from below and throw them off ledges. You'll also have a knife this time around, which you can use to quietly cut through certain types of materials—not to mention bad guys' throats. The co-op mode seems like a lot of fun, too; we just hope the oh-so-kick-ass versus mode makes a return appearance.



► fresh bases à la *Dungeon Keeper* instead of being stuck with one ever-growing base for the whole game.



## World of Warcraft

► Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment Developer: Blizzard Entertainment Release Date: Q4 2004



**THEY SAY:** Blizzard takes its flagship strategy-game franchise into the crowded realm of online RPGs, hoping to apply its magic touch to a genre that has yet to win over mainstream gamers.

**WE SAY:** The ongoing beta test has shown this to be as fun, slick, and addictive as Blizzard fans had hoped. But *City of Heroes* is out now—and it rules. Orcs versus superheroes? Tough call.



## The Witcher

► Publisher: TBA Developer: CDProjekt Release Date: 2005

**THEY SAY:** Straight outta Poland, *The Witcher* is an action-RPG based on the works of fantasy writer Andrzej Sapkowski, using BioWare's Aurora (*Neverwinter Nights*) engine.

**WE SAY:** This game is about a monster slayer, so you get to slay lots of monsters. Yay! Scary-looking and pretty, it was one of the nicest surprises at E3. Now all it needs is a publisher.



# Half-Life 2

**Publisher:** Vivendi Universal **Developer:** Valve Software **Release Date:** Summer 2004...or so they claim

**THEY SAY:** Though *Half-Life 2* certainly needs no introduction at this point, the never-ending hype continues to build as it nears its summer release. The adventures of Gordon Freeman continue in a beautifully detailed game world, replete with hauntingly realistic physics and highly emotive character models. Plenty of new weapons are available, including the gravity gun, which can be used to turn any number of innocuous items into instruments of death. Players can also look forward to a slew of drivable buggies and other vehicles.

**WE SAY:** We saw it, we played it. It's a lot of fun, and we're pretty eager actually to get our mitts on the finished product and dive in. Valve marketing guru Doug Lombardi is promising a 2004 release, but at this point, we'll believe it when we see it. Our only question is: By the time it's actually in our hands, will it really be all that revolutionary?



## The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth

**Publisher:** Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA LA Studios **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** *The Lord of the Rings* goes RTS, courtesy of the folks behind *Command & Conquer: Generals*. Stunning graphics evoke Peter Jackson's triumphant trilogy.

**WE SAY:** The E3 demo was awesome—but suspiciously canned. Sure, it's pretty as hell and features that great movie music, but how will it really play?

## Sid Meier's Pirates!

**Publisher:** Atari **Developer:** Firaxis Games **Release Date:** Q4 2004



**THEY SAY:** This remake of Sid Meier's classic 1987 game is a genre-bending collision of strategy, combat, adventure, and more while you sail the high seas as a 17th-century pirate captain in the Caribbean.

**WE SAY:** Who knew "courtly dancing" ranked so highly among pirates' antics? That alone makes this game look a bit more swish-buckly than swashbuckly, but it's Sid Meier we're talking about, so keep hope alive.



## Myst IV Revelation

**Publisher:** Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft **Release Date:** Q4 2004

**THEY SAY:** The fourth entry in the *Godzilla* of adventure-game franchises promises to finally reveal the fate of the brothers Sirrus and Achenar, imprisoned by their dad way back in the first game. Also, you'll get to pull lots of levers.

**WE SAY:** We've bagged on the *Myst* games a lot because we're mean that way, but *Myst IV* looks like it goes a long way toward fixing some of our main complaints. Like making puzzles we can actually solve. ☒





# Reviews

We hate them so  
you don't have to!

Looking for action? It's  
easy to find a few good  
men and women to  
team up with.



A frosty blaster, like  
Iceberg here, is handy  
for dealing damage  
and freezing foes.



Our friend El Mas Macho  
is—how do you say—en  
fuego as he races off to  
combat.

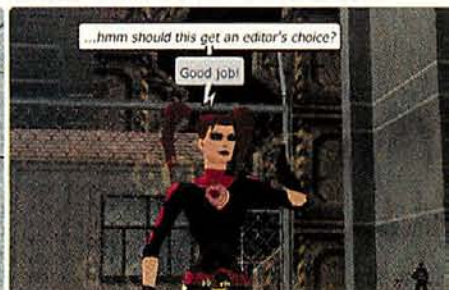
**PUBLISHER:** NCsoft **DEVELOPER:** Cryptic Studios **GENRE:** MMORPG **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III  
800, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2GB install, 56K Internet connection **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.7GHz,  
512MB RAM, 128MB videocard, broadband Internet connection **MULTIPLAYER:** Massive!

## City of Heroes

Take me down to the Paragon City



You may not be able  
to use their real  
names, but all the  
tools are here for  
letting you re-create  
popular characters.



...hmm should this get an editor's choice?

Good job!





**Lineage II**  
NCsoft tries to strike gold twice in the same month and comes up short.



**Warlords Battlecry III**  
Once again, your heart will soar and your spirit will sing with magical delight—or something like that.



**Hitman: Contracts**  
Too much filler, not enough killer?



**City of Heroes** is something that everyone instantly gets. You're a superhero. Ever since you raced through the schoolyard screaming that you were The Flash, you dreamed this day would come. I did. Here's the really refreshing part: Unlike nearly every other MMO out there, this game is accessible and—dare I say it—fun from the very start. Even with the few bugs and flaws we encountered while defending Paragon City from evil-doers, *City of Heroes* blows a superpowered gust of fresh air into an increasingly stale sword-and-sorcery MMO world. But is it worth the \$15-a-month toll? Read on, true believers.

### Secret origins

As soon as you kick off the character-creation process, you know that you're about to create a genuinely unique persona. Male or female, human, alien, or robotic, there's lots of variety. With all the colors, body types, sizes, body parts, accessories, and bits of clothing, you'll be hard-pressed to find two characters in the entire online universe that look identical. If you want to be a bright blue, busty, half-robot, half-alien babe who chomps on cigars and wears a combat helmet, go for it. Just make sure you like it because you'll be stuck with that initial costume design. The only thing that's missing is a cape. Superman without a flowing red cape is just wrong! Before I start sounding too much like the comic book guy from *The Simpsons*, though, changes are already on the way. Typical for MMOs, at press time we learned that capes and costume modifications are coming in the June update.

Considering that you can create up to eight characters on each world server (eight characters multiplied by 10 world servers equals 80 potential characters), you're going to spend a lot of time unleashing your creativity. When you're not busting heads, walk down Main Street and enjoy the makeshift beauty contest going on. People are re-creating well-known superheroes, movie stars, cartoon characters, and some damn crazy combinations of all three. A couple favorites the CGW crew has come across include Bart Sampson, Bat Manuel, and *Saturday Night Live's* Ambiguously Gay Duo.

### With great power...

But you aren't here just to play dress-up. You've got to choose your origin and superpowers, and then get out there. The five basic archetypes flesh out the types of powers you can develop: tanker (they take one for the team), scrappers (awe-



Go get 'em, Head Case! Here, she's messing with yet another guy's mind.

some fighters), blasters (ranged specialists that can't take a punch), controllers (they control weather, mess with minds), and defenders (healers).

The powers themselves are varied, interesting, and visually satisfying with many different effects. You'll start out on the basics (enhanced punches, blasts, and so on), but when you see your character summon a refrigerator to lift and throw at enemies, you know that you've got something special. Every archetype has a laundry list of powers that makes sense in context, and, after level six, you get access to a general power pool. Over time, you can gain superspeed, flight, leadership abilities, or—a personal favorite—teleportation.

Now here's where this game takes a left turn and catches old-school RPG players off guard: There isn't a conventional inventory system in this game. No +5 swords and such. You have slots for stashing inspirations (the superhero equivalent of magic potions), you can find enhancements to your superpowers, and the coin of the realm is influence. So, while your character's appearance won't dramatically change throughout the course of the game, the different ways you amplify your



**We're all still playing this game night and day, long after the review is over.**



## The CGW Wrecking Crüe\*

\*names have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent



### EL MAS MACHO

Don't think that because he's a big goon, he isn't a smart guy. This former UC Berkeley nuclear physics student stumbled over some stray plutonium and gained amazing powers.

### HEAD CASE

The mistress of messing with your head. You've dated her, she's broken up with you, she's called you at 4 a.m. to tell you how much she misses you.

### THE DONKEY PUNCH

A master of the mystical martial art SuckaPunch, he sneaks up on foes and clobbers 'em upside the back of the head when they least expect it.

### THE GIZMO

He's the guy you hate. Name a gadget, and this lucky punk already has it. Using hot technology, he takes down foes from a distance.

### MOSES ICEBERG

The Hebraic hero of frost, Iceberg, tries to fight the good fight—and honor the Sabbath. Criminals shiver in fear as they hear from a distance: "Oy! So cold!"

### SMALL BUSINESS

This spunky little lady is always trying to cover everyone's bottom line. That's why she uses her healing powers to keep the Crüe alive.

powers will.

Fortunately, each of these powers and their enhancements is succinctly described. The downside is that there's no way to test a power beforehand. You're stuck with whatever choices you make. Don't like the enhancement you plugged in? Just replace it with another one. That last superpower you picked not to your liking? Well, you're stuck. Sorry about that. At least you can pick additional powers every other level. And really, there are no "wrong" choices because more often than not, you'll be in a group with others whose powers will complement your own.

### Meanwhile...

Enough talk—it's time to battle for what's right. The tutorial—though monotonous after your fourth character—is a quick and very helpful introduction to the play mechanics in this game. Once you're on the streets, you start off feeling like a superhero. Sure, you've got those starter-level missions, but you're not some feeble who'll wither away if a rat coughs on you. You're fighting thugs and fascists, zombies and robots, and the list just goes on from there. From level one, you feel like you have the strength of 10 men. Just don't try fighting (solo) those 10 men at the same time. You will get swarmed. Sure, your level 15 scrapper will make quick work of the level 3 thugs later on, but you'll get no rewards for doing so—save for stress relief and simply knowing you saved another digitized denizen of Paragon City.

And to Cryptic Studios' credit, the characters you're fighting are not only inventive and largely original looking, but also intelligent. If one's health gets too low or the tide of the battle is turning, they make a run for it, since criminals are a naturally cowardly lot. The one tactic that pokes some holes in their intelligence, though, is pulling foes. Have someone sniper-blast the bad guy furthest removed from the pack, and most of the time, the pack won't follow in pursuit. The detection radius of enemies seems a little off. Other than that, the battles themselves are fast-paced and don't feel like your standard sit-hit-attack-and-walk-away fare. Cue up one attack, dart in and out of range—it almost feels like more of an action game than it really is.

But where do you find the action? As you explore the huge city zones and uncover more contacts, more plotlines unfold and more complex missions become available. You can also feel free to stop random crime in the streets...but criminals don't just wander around, begging to be taken in. They gather in logical areas: alleys, parks, industrial complexes—you get the idea. Of course, there are pocket-universe missions that'll take you underground, into factories, and to countless other locations to track down mini-



...mmmm...brains!

bosses and the like. There is just too much ground to cover. At least Cryptic built an ingenious mass-transit system to get you all over the city in a flash and to keep crowding to a minimum. Additional city zone servers pop up when needed so that all heroes are amply spread out.

The untrained player may get a little turned off, thinking that this is a simple, but fun, leveling treadmill. That's what we were inclined to think until we started experimenting with task-force missions. This is the equivalent of those epic comic book stories that span several issues. Wrought with twists and turns, you turn back aliens and larger world-domination plots.

### Crisis on Infinite servers

Sadly, there's a necessary evil that we accept to a degree when it comes to MMOs—server crashes. Fortunately, over the course of months since the game launched, we've had only a handful of crashes. But we were always back up and running shortly after getting kicked off the crowded servers. It's just a shame that there are a couple of world servers that everyone has crowded onto, while others are basically empty. If only you could transfer characters between worlds. It happens all the times in comics, after all.

Speaking of "It happens all the time in comics," how come there's no player-versus-player combat? Eventually, the *City of Villains* expansion will address this, but c'mon! Heroes always deal out fisticuff therapy on one another, only to eventually reach some truce to team up and fight a bigger, badder menace. Personally, I just wish I could've physically beaten down all the kill stealers that roam the early areas such as Atlas Park and Galaxy City. Who are we to complain, though? We're all still playing this game night and day, long after the review is over. We love it, and sadly, we don't have much of a life outside of it. Thank God there aren't more MMOs like this one. **X Darren Gladstone**

### Verdict ★★★★★

I hate MMORPGs; if I see another orc, I'll scream—but I love *City of Heroes*.



**PUBLISHER:** Eidos Interactive **DEVELOPER:** IO Interactive **GENRE:** Action-Adventure **ESRB RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM (Win98), 256MB RAM (Win2000/WinXP), 32MB videocard, 2GB install **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** None

# Hitman: Contracts

## A blast from 47's past

**I** can really appreciate a man who neatly folds his clothes when he takes them off instead of dumping them in a heap on the floor. But is Agent 47 of *Hitman: Contracts* really that obsessive-compulsive in his dead-side manner? For all his stealthy services as a professional "cleaner" and his tidy costume changing, this walk down a killer's memory lane gives players an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

### Previously on Hitman...

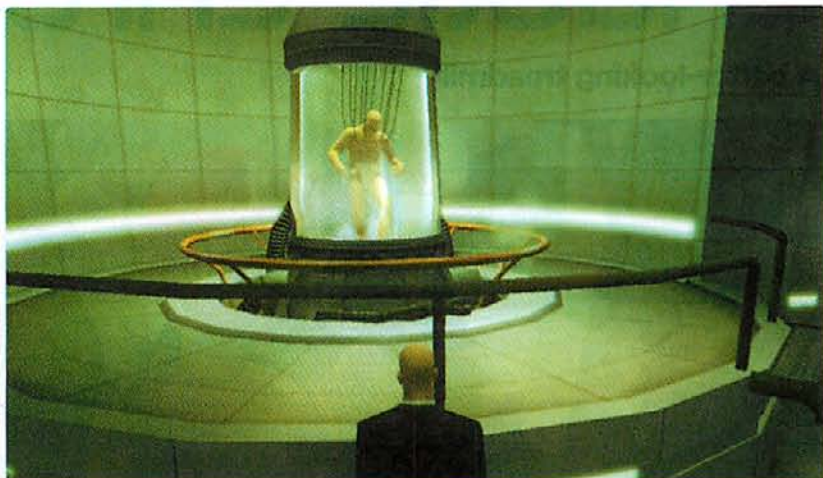
*Contracts* begins right where the original *Hitman* ends: Agent 47 must break out of the asylum, aka cloning facility, he was created in. The second level, set at a warped fetish party in a meat-packing plant, combines a rescue mission with some creative contract hits. But after this nice, twisted intro into the game, déjà vu sets in with the later levels.

*Contracts* starts off with a deliciously nightmarish bang and has its moments of excitement, but it eventually can't help but feel like an expansion pack—if only because about half of its levels are from the original *Hitman*. Sure, these missions have been graphically overhauled, have some new details, and include the classic peace-conference-bombers level and the Red Dragon Triad's four-level gang war. Yes, the original *Hitman*'s wonky controls and camera are history, and you can actually save limited times during missions on two out of three difficulty settings, just like in *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*. Still, *Contracts*' premise of a wounded Agent 47 being holed up in a hotel while having flashbacks about past jobs would have hit closer to the mark if the game consisted of 12 brand-new levels.

### Death be not loud

And if you're trying to unlock *Contracts*' 12 bonus weapons by completing every level with a "Silent Assassin" rating, for which you can't alert or show aggression toward anyone except for the targets you quietly eliminate, a little frustration can set in as well. There are multiple ways to play out missions, but the stealthiest choices require precise timing. You may miss opportunities to strangle victims from behind, hide makeshift weapons, use the new syringe, or exploit chemicals if you don't speed into place at just the right moment.

You won't really need the bonus weapons if you continue playing as a Silent Assassin,



**Contracts** begins at the asylum, aka cloning facility, where the first *Hitman* leaves off.



Lee Hong and his Red Dragon Triad are the focus of four levels in *Contracts*. Unfortunately, they're basically the same four levels that debuted with the original *Hitman: Codename 47* game, only prettier.

either, and getting them into your inventory after you've unlocked them requires convoluted game-menu hopping. Other challenges include the sparseness of information you're given about missions and the amount of reconnaissance required, although these are trademarks of the *Hitman* series.

Thanks to enemy A.I. from the run-straight-at-you school, shooting your way through the game with collected enemy weapons is simpler, except on Professional difficulty. There, Agent 47 takes a lot of damage from attacks, the sole saves are at each level's start, and the only people shown on the map are you and your intended target.

All in all, despite the patient sneaking this game encourages, *Contracts* seems a little rushed. Besides all the refurbished missions,

**Despite the patient sneaking this game encourages, *Contracts* seems a little rushed.**



The bloated Meat King can be eliminated stealthily with the unlikely help of baked chicken, as long as you time your visit to the kitchen right.

various Radeon cards have encountered crashing cut-scenes, black screens, and missing closing credits. A patch is now available, but it's too bad IO Interactive didn't just wait and release *Contracts* with 12 all-new levels. **Denice Cook**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

It's a flashback expansion pack that could have been more.



**PUBLISHER:** NCsoft **DEVELOPER:** NCsoft **GENRE:** RPG **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 2.2GB install, 32MB videocard, 56K Internet connection **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium III 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, broadband Internet connection **MULTIPLAYER:** Massively

# Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicles

A better-looking treadmill



Though they are nicely detailed, there isn't much variety in the characters.



The Unreal engine makes *Lineage II* look great, even if it plays a bit too much like the original.

**T**he original *Lineage* was so successful in Korea that it remains one of the most popular MMORPGs ever released, even though it looks pretty awful and plays about the same. If nothing else, NCsoft addressed the first issue with this sequel. The graphics, powered by the Unreal engine, look great—it's almost enough to keep you mindlessly impressed as you murder your hundredth wolf.

And 100 wolves would be a low estimate. In the early portion of the game, most of the quests you're offered require you to kill some ridiculous quantity of a single monster. An NPC will ask you to bring her 50 goblin heads, and you will comply—over and over again—

because repeatedly completing newbie quests is one of the best ways to make money.

## I needa adena

Money seems to be everyone's primary motivation in the game. This widespread greed makes sense, since items are expensive, as is upgrading your guild. Like characters, guilds can increase in level, but doing so requires a significant investment. (Guild benefits will apparently become clear after castle sieges, still in testing at the time of this review, become available.) Money is such a driving force that a good many of the characters you meet will be bots run by macros, designed entirely to gather adena, the game's currency. Many





❑ Gaining levels often requires you to fight the same creatures over and over again.

## Player versus Player

*Lineage II* players are generally nice, helpful...and also one of the most vocally bigoted groups of people online (or at least a very vocal minority is giving the wrong impression). Almost all of the much-hated bots are allegedly being run by Asian players, and so the hate-speak tends to get fairly ugly. It can be a disheartening experience to hear a litany of anti-Asian vitriol simply because someone got his magic ring stolen out from under him. As of this writing, NCsoft seems to be doing nothing about either the bots or the rampant abuse on the chat channels, both of which will hopefully be remedied in the not-too-distant future.

## There isn't much variety in character appearance, which is disappointing, since other games are offering an incredible amount of customizability.

players tell stories about being killed by these bots, though I luckily escaped such a frustrating fate.

Killing players is possible but somewhat discouraged through a system of karma that makes your character unwelcome in towns and announces your status to other players until the karma is worked off. Players can attack others anywhere, and it's especially a problem when you're sitting down waiting for your health to regenerate, and someone kills you with a single hit for no reason. The community does a good job of policing itself, and groups of vigilantes will hunt down known player-killers and make sure their names are besmirched on the game's busy chat channel.

The chat channel is also a good way to get advice from other players, who are generally helpful. If you've ever played a MMORPG before, though, you likely won't need any help. *Lineage II* is as straightforward as the genre gets, taking the formula to its most repetitive. There are only two basic character classes at first (fighter and mystic), although you can choose specialty classes at higher levels. There is one interesting mechanic, however. As you kill monsters, you earn both skill points and experience points. The former are used to purchase new skills, allowing you to choose which spells or abilities you want to use. Though you can eventually

afford most of your classes' abilities, the skill points system offers a bit of customizability in a game otherwise lacking in it.

### It looks good. It looks the same

There isn't much variety in the equipment, and with a few exceptions, your character at level 10 will have approximately the same stuff as any other character of your race and class at level 10. There also isn't much variety in character appearance, which is somewhat disappointing, since other games (such as NCsoft's own *City of Heroes*) are offering an incredible amount of customizability.

This is especially disappointing because *Lineage II* looks so good. The characters are highly detailed and at extreme close-ups almost look like cel-shaded animation. The spell effects are particularly impressive, with your character drawing dramatic glyphs in the air. The combat animations look great as well, with monsters doing jumping attacks and animals attacking with viscous jabs and snarls. And so it's a shame there isn't more variety.

It's easy to play solo in *Lineage II*, which is good because groups are difficult to come by. When you can find a group, organization is difficult because you can't see other players' levels or even get an approximation of their relative level. More



Several monster models are recycled, such as this gremlin, which appears in other regions as an imp.



❑ Towns allow you to buy items from NPCs from character "stores," which are basically characters who just camp in the town center.

important, the lack of variety in character classes at the sub-20 levels makes playing in large groups a bit boring.

If you aren't a fan of the basic MMORPG formula, you'll likely find the whole game a bit boring. It's only a slightly refined version of the genre's most basic concepts—like a slightly improved *EverQuest*—without enough variety to at least mask the repetition. ❑ Ron Dulin

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆  
A lovelier version of *Lineage*.



**PUBLISHER:** Enlight **DEVELOPER:** Infinite Interactive **GENRE:** Real-time Strategy **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 1GB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-6 players)

# Warlords Battlecry III

**Bigger? Yes. Better? Mostly**

Looks like another bug hunt.



**T**he *Warlords Battlecry* series is a veritable toy box of a real-time strategy game. It's crammed with a colorful collection of stuff that you can throw together and play with in a hundred different ways. The gameplay isn't about careful balance so much as it's about sheer variety, an inviting sea of strengths and weaknesses and different tactics that may or may not work depending on who else is playing. Did the slow, stolid dwarves beat the stuffing out of your frail fey? Next time, try rushing them with the swarm or an early army of buffed-up Plaguelord ghouls. Are you sick of Dark Elven spiders poisoning your hearty knight cavalry? Boost their armor earlier or bring along a healer hero. For every tactic, there are a dozen counter-tactics worth trying.

## You do the math

In *Battlecry III*, the toy box is considerably bigger. With 16 sides that can be led by a hero of any of the 16 races combined with

any of the 28 classes, the total number of permutations is...hold on a sec...six times six...carry the three...multiply by 28...well, it's a really big number that you're not likely to exhaust any time this century.

Even through the graphics are still unrepentantly 2D and a lot of the artwork is recycled, don't let anyone tell you this is a warmed-over *Battlecry II*. There are five new races, a new hero system, and an

entirely new kind of single-player campaign. Some changes were obviously inspired by *WarCraft III*. Heroes now level up during a game, carry potions, can buy items at a shop, and can fight creeps to find more magic items. None of these changes, however, are as substantial as the way the underlying mechanics have been reworked. The races have been changed to balance them out without



⚡ A titan backed by an army of floating swords.



⚡ These guys are here to show that ghouls just want to have fun.





❖ The Plaguelords' disease-ridden base isn't a very tidy place.



❖ Not just more choices, but more meaningful ones.



❖ When T-Rexes attack!



❖ In the campaign, you'll travel to faraway places, meet interesting monsters, and kill them.



## Don't Call Me Dumbo!

My favorite new race in *Battlecry III* is the Empire, with its grab bag of foreign mercenaries and spells. It's an RTS box of chocolates! But the Empire really strikes back once it starts building elephants midgame. These big fellas stomp little units for double damage, hitting with all the power of late-game dragons or even titans. Although they're blind as bats, slow to move, and even slower to build, they're inexpensive and they have hit points to spare. Get a couple of elephants out early enough, and you can plow right through another player's base, towers be damned.

And it's about time real-time-strategy games gave the pachyderms their due. The Indians and Persians get powerful elephants in *Rise of Nations' Thrones & Patriots* expansion. Their elephants are perfect for knocking over infantry and buildings. And then there is the dramatic appearance of elephants in Creative Assembly's upcoming *Rome: Total War* and the Oliphaunts in Electronic Arts' upcoming *Battle for Middle-earth*. Who needs dragons anymore? To paraphrase Richard III, "An elephant, an elephant, my kingdom for an elephant!"

simply homogenizing them. The units themselves are also better balanced, with more importance put on factors such as unit experience, armor, and attack types. Forget what you learned in previous games, because it won't apply here. There is not only more to do, but also more meaningful things to do, many of which you couldn't do before.

The new campaign veers away from *Battlecry II*'s open-ended map crawl in favor of a more restricted story-driven adventure. You can still play skirmishes if you just want to level up your heroes, but the new campaign offers more of a sense of exploration and accomplishment. You unlock new areas of the map, figure out quests, ally with races, and fill your stash with magic items to sell or swap out for a particular mission. It's a great way to make *Battlecry* more appealing to players who might want a little more storytelling and scripting in their single-player game.

### Self-inflicted wounds

Unfortunately, *Battlecry III* is going to be a lot less appealing to new players because of some critical fumbling on its way to the

retail shelves. At press time, Enlight's multiplayer matching service still wasn't working, and the networking code made it hard to get games with more than two players going, even on a LAN. Factor in some disappointing bugs and a tendency to crash to the desktop, and you can imagine a lot of people opting just to stick with *WarCraft*. Then there's the issue of the incomplete documentation. Significant info missing from the manual (what does weather do? How does armor work? What's this morale thing that seems to be so important?), and important reference files were left off the CD and still aren't available online. Infinite Interactive (née SSG) used to be known for conscientious customer support and thorough documentation. If it's not careful with releases like these, the company is going to be known for making sure its excellent games never achieve the sort of success they deserve. ❖ Tom Chick

### Verdict ★★★★★

A whole lotta RTS goin' on—and some bugs.

**Forget what you learned in previous games, because it won't apply here.**



**PUBLISHER:** Hip Games **DEVELOPER:** Larian Studios **GENRE:** RPG **ESRB RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800MHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 2GB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** None

# Beyond Divinity

The pale *Beyond*

**L**et's talk about first impressions. The original *Divine Divinity* made a bad one, starting with a title that could have sounded good only to someone whose knowledge of English came from a Michelin phrase book. The sequel, *Beyond Divinity*, makes a better one. The title's not quite so god-awful, for one thing, and the designers have added multicharacter parties, fixing one of the original game's shortcomings.

## Same old story

But what's said about first impressions is true: They can be deceiving. What makes the original game so good is the storytelling. The graphics may be dated and the play mechanics a bit clunky, but the story is rich and full of the sort of character-driven quests that made old-time role-playing games like the *Ultima* series so much fun. *Divine Divinity* surprises you by successfully reviving an old style of gaming, and if the look and feel of the game is also a bit old-fashioned, well, that's part of the package.

*Beyond Divinity* is fine, but it's not as good as its predecessor. In spite of any



❖ They're not using phasers—at least, I don't think so.

**In spite of any number of small improvements, the new game feels more stale and by-the-numbers than the first one.**

number of small improvements, the new game feels more stale and by-the-numbers than the first one. The interface is, if possible, clunkier than before—especially when it comes to switching among the multiple characters you now control—and the storytelling feels less inspired and more routine.

## The odd couple

The basic premise isn't bad: A crusading good guy and an evil death-knight have been captured by a demon and, as punishment, "soul forged" to one another. They can't leave each other, and if one dies, the other dies, too. As much as they despise one another, they have to work together to get themselves unshackled.

But instead of the sort of dramatic Frodo/Gollum relationship you might be imagining, the scenario plays out through charmless banter that reminds you of a

bad cop-buddy movie. Matters are not helped by what is literally the worst voice acting I've ever heard, in or out of a computer game (so awful that I had to turn the sound off). The environments you travel through could come from any generic fantasy game, as could the standard button-mashing combat. The *Diablo* games weren't exactly a font of originality, but at least they were enlivened by striking visuals and invigorating action; here, the graphics are muddy and unappealing, while the stop-and-start combat style (the game allows you to pause the action to dole out orders, healing potions, and so forth) is tiring rather than exciting. Even the skill trees are disappointing—they may be more sophisticated than *Diablo*'s (you're not limited to one class; you can unlearn skills to recover skill points), but they're poorly designed, and I kept losing my way in the confusing nested menus.



❖ Exciting combat?

Die-hard RPG fans will still find some enjoyment here, but I have to say, if I didn't have to review the game, I'd have quit playing after the first few hours. ❖ Charles Ardai

## Verdict ★★☆☆

Disappointing graphics, voice acting, and interface outweigh the few sparks of creativity.



**PUBLISHER:** Atari **DEVELOPER:** Human Head Studios **GENRE:** Shooter **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2GB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** A lightweight skeet machine and a good 12-gauge shotgun **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-8 players)

# Dead Man's Hand

**Sorriest Western shooter in tarnation**

**I**t's a shame that in the sadly overlooked "Western shooter" category, the latest entry is so dad-gum bad.

The problem is that *Dead Man's Hand* was designed for Xbox, so it's not the kind of shooter most PC players really want. Playing it is like shooting pop-up targets at a carnival, with extra points and loud noises awarded for head shots. Yee-haw, kids! Shoot a target and win a prize!

You play a Mexican vigilante in the Old West who was wronged by the nasty Gang of Nine. You take down the Nine, and hundreds of gravelly throated gunslingers, in more than 20 missions that take place in mines, ghost towns, brothels, and other Western-themed locales. There are a variety of rifles, shotguns, and pistols; thrown weapons like dynamite sticks and crude Molotov cocktails; and even some Gatling guns and cannons to play with.

The game tries some new things, like letting you play poker to get extra ammo and health before a mission. There's also a bit of shooting from horseback that's entertaining when you see wounded opponents dragged by their horses. But these rail segments have none of the



Most of the game looks like a horse's ass, although not always so literally.

thrills found in games like *Call of Duty*.

Mostly, *Dead Man's Hand* is a long exercise in target practice, with lifeless enemies in dull levels. There's no saving during a mission, the graphics are weak, and there's no team-based action. What's worse, there's just no depth, artistry, or

genuine thrills to be had. This roundup ain't worth the saddle sores. Move along, little doggie. **Ken Brown**

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆  
 A five-card dud.

**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** 369 Interactive **GENRE:** Adventure **ESRB RATING:** M **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 600, 246MB RAM, 640MB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** 512MB RAM, 32MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** None

# CSI: Dark Motives

**An adventure game without any adventure**

**W**hat do you get when you combine one of the hottest franchises on television, a successful game publisher, and a quality development studio? If you've never purchased a *Star Trek* or *X-Files* game, I'll tell you: a tiny box of disappointment.

*CSI* is one of the best shows on television because it has clever writing, brilliant cinematography, and quality acting. *CSI: Dark Motives* carefully avoids all three of these. I used to really love adventure games, but after playing this one, I can't

remember why. The game episodes are clever but poorly scripted. In each, there's a point at which the game and reality part company. Each time I had a suspect brought in for questioning, a seemingly reasonable question like "Why did you leave a bloody bat at the crime scene?" is not one of the options available. You find a suspect's bat covered with the victim's blood at a crime scene, and you're told you can't get a warrant to search his home because you haven't linked him to the crime scene yet.



Put this game in there and cover it back up.

I lost four hours of my life pixel hunting for evidence when I could have been doing something fun—like watching the first-season DVDs of *CSI*, a far better option. **Arcadian Del Sol**

**Verdict** ★★★★★  
 Fun if you're already a fan—of boredom.

**I used to really love adventure games, but after playing this one, I can't remember why.**



PUBLISHER: Strategy First DEVELOPER: Paradox GENRE: Strategy ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 600MB install RECOMMENDED: None  
MULTIPLAYER: Internet, LAN (2-8 players)

# Crusader Kings

The Fair to Middlin' Ages

War and conflict dominated the Middle Ages for a multitude of reasons, including ambition, greed, vengeance, and adventure. Even during the absence of war, rulers were constantly confronted with such challenges as royal succession, imperial or feudal governing, territorial hegemony, and ecclesiastical authority. All of that and then some can be found in *Crusader Kings*, a challenging strategy game/feudal-kingdom simulation from the maker of *Europa Universalis 2*.

## The Reformation

*Crusader Kings* spans 400 years of medieval history, with players ruling one of the 20-plus historical dynasties of Christendom. The ultimate goal is to amass as much wealth, prestige, and piety as possible in the course of building an empire. Players must enact laws at the Court of Justice; build universities, cathedrals, and castles; set taxes; appoint nobles; deal with the Church; and form alliances with neighboring kingdoms in order to expand. Chivalric deeds, such as joining a crusade or appointing a bishop to a courtly rank, also influence your rule.

This is a big game that lets you reenact the Crusades, defend against the Mongol onslaught, and form feudal nation-states across Europe, Northern Africa, Persia, and



4 The light-red guy is surrounded by the white guy who's fighting the surrounding gray guys. Meanwhile, the deep-red guy in the center quietly weeps.

Palestine. Also included are historical elements, such as dealing with the Black Plague, forming trade alliances with the wealthy Hanseatic League, and supporting the influential Knights Templar Order; monarchs must master these challenges or lose precious prestige points.

The real challenge of empire building, however, comes from the jealous dukes, cantankerous lords, treacherous bishops, and scores of courtiers and nobles who rule the various provinces within your domain, each of whom possess unique personality traits (master theologian, hopeless spender, etc.) that affect play.

## Serfs up

*Crusader Kings'* pausable real-time Advance system for researching technology and improvements lessens micromanagement and separates the game from other resource-strategy titles (like the *Europa* series). Advance benefits—such as castle

construction, improved weapons, flourishing guilds, and more-loyal serfs—are limited to the duchy that researched them before they can spread to other parts of your kingdom. This reflects the time period well since most technological advances came about by trial and error rather than some sort of rigorous methodology. Unfortunately, this can take quite some time depending upon the advance's level (1 to 5), with level 5 taking more than 50 years.

Multiplayer contests let up to eight players battle for prestige and piety across a LAN or the Internet. Essentially, it's the big-picture multiplayer system we longed for in *Medieval: Total War*. In fact, this game is very similar to *Medieval*, only even less accessible and without the big real-time battles. *Crusader Kings* supports mods and, in a rather unique feature, allows you to export your finished kingdom into *Europa Universalis 2*.

*Crusader Kings* is a good game, but its convoluted interface, some minor bugs, and lack of a detailed manual make it a tedious and frustrating game to learn for both old-school *Europa* fans and newbies alike. There are rewards to be had here—but you're going to need to put in some time to reap them. **Raphael Liberatore**



4 Every NPC in the game has personality traits that affect your strategy and progress. It can be overwhelming at times.

**Crusader Kings spans 400 years of medieval history, with players ruling one of the 20-plus historical dynasties of Christendom.**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

Big sweeping game, but too unwieldy even for seasoned players.





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**PUBLISHER:** The Adventure Company **DEVELOPER:** Earthlight **GENRE:** Adventure **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 600, 64MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 1.3GB install **RECOMMENDED:** None **MULTIPLAYER:** None

# Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm

Unlocking the door to a world without logic

I don't know about you, but whenever I'm trying to pull a really heavy lever that just won't budge, I always like to capture a huge insect inside a cage and then hang it from the offending lever. That gets it moving every time. If this is the sort of logic that runs through your mind, you'll love *Crystal Key 2*. You should also seek professional help.

This first-person adventure follows the story of a man named Call, the only unscathed inhabitant of a planet whose population has been turned into a mass of mindless automatons. After an encounter with a mysterious girl, Call winds up in an alternate world with a similar problem, and it's your job to guide him on his journey and figure out what exactly is going on. This largely consists of wandering through bland environments, conversing with characters who look and sound like they belong in a budget *Lord of the Rings* remake, sorting through a number of clichéd sci-fi plot points, and deciphering a baffling assort-



Does this look like someone you'd want to rescue?

ment of inventory-based puzzles.

Along with the puzzle described above, you'll find yourself carrying other fun-filled tasks, such as "throw the algae and the bacteria in the pool to open the portal" and "spray the fruit juice into the tunnel so that a bunch of fireflies swarm in and light the way." *Crystal Key 2* does have one great thing, though: a flying squirrel. Maybe you can use him to fly far, far away from this game. **—Ryan Scott**



GIVESSSSS ME THE PRECCCCCCCCIOUS!

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆

A stunning example of why adventure games aren't as popular as they once were.

**PUBLISHER:** Strategy First **DEVELOPER:** Legend Studios **GENRE:** RTS/War **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 1GB install **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet (2-14 players)

# War Times

Even worse than the rest

World War II RTS games are a dime a dozen these days, and *War Times* is a standout: It's even more mediocre than the rest. Created by a Spanish development team, *War Times* is a badly translated, ugly, and unoriginal game.

Gameplay is reminiscent of the simplest RTS from the last century: Collect two resources, build a few labs for research, get an army, and then mob the enemy. There are four playable sides: Germans, Americans, Brits, and Soviets (one wonders about the absence of Italians and Japanese to balance the sides). Units, which include the standard armor, artillery, and infantry, are very generic and add little to the historical flavor of the game besides their names. One small positive is that a bit more emphasis is placed on air forces, which include fighters, bombers, and even transports for paratroops. This adds a third dimension to battles that many other WWII games ignore. Unfortunately, the poorly implemented

interface makes controlling air units difficult, diminishing one of the game's few highlights.

The two campaigns (one Allied, one German) are divided into 10 or so missions each and are much like the control scheme—slow and awkward. They are, at best, "inspired" by history and usually have little to do with the battles on which they're supposedly based. An early Battle of Britain scenario, for example, has German troops occupying southern England, a feat Hitler could only dream about. None of the scenarios are particularly challenging, either, since the A.I. is incapable of mounting coordinated attacks or responding to threats. Most of the action is scripted, and missions often feel like puzzles as you try to figure out how not to trigger enemy forces that overwhelmingly outnumber you. Terrain also feels very artificial and usually acts only as a funnel to lead you toward prescribed events.

The action is frustratingly slow, due to the dawdling resource system and awkward



German siege artillery provides assistance in a river crossing.

control scheme. Bad pathfinding dooms your units to an existence stuck behind rough terrain unless you pay minute attention to their movements. The blandness continues in the multiplayer modes—though there are many maps, few stand out or show any character whatsoever.

With a poor presentation and poor gameplay, *War Times* feels like an overpriced piece of budgetware that's destined to languish in bargain bins until its desiccated corpse turns to powder and is blown from our memory. **—Di Luo**

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆

Like mayonnaise just starting to spoil, *War Times* is blandly bad.



**PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom **GENRE:** Action-Adventure **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 1GHz, 64MB videocard, 128MB RAM, 720MB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 2GHz, 128MB videocard, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB install **MULTIPLAYER:** None

# Chaos Legion

Surviving the horror of this survival-horror

**T**he PC port of Capcom's PS2 survival-horror game *Chaos Legion* has an interesting feature: It installs in nine languages. Unfortunately, if you got the game at release, the only thing this enabled you to do was say "dead on arrival" nine different ways.

The first run contained dual CDs that installed and then produced a "wrong disk inserted" error instead of starting the game. There are working CDs finally available now, but I've birthed children in less time than it takes them to fire up. Still, they're speedy compared with the time it took Capcom to ship them. I got the original, nonfunctional PC version in early January, but Capcom's website took until February to post replacement information. Even complying ASAP, I didn't receive new discs until the end of March. The initial problem was widespread, and the need for a third party .exe hack was documented in *Chaos Legion* PC reviews from major gaming websites and magazines, as well as on Capcom's own forums. Members there were downloading cracks to get the disks to run, although those no-CD patches were not supported by Capcom. Supposedly, a copy-protection issue was behind the trouble, making it ironic that using an illegal crack was the only way to bypass these game-killing flaws. If that were indeed the case, perhaps it's time for publishers to start routinely testing their games after the copy protection is added.

## After all that, is it worth playing?

Not really. Here's the lowdown on *Chaos Legion*: You're a sword-wielding hero having a bad hair day who's hunting down a miscreant intent on destroying Earth. To catch this miscreant, you must first slash through repetitive stages of demonic enemies among bland backdrops of inaccessible stone buildings. Despite their insipid settings, the largest bosses do impress graphically, but the battles are long, and you can't save anywhere in *Chaos Legion* except between stages.

On a positive note, you are able to summon upgradeable creatures called legions to battle alongside you, although doing so lessens your own attack power. The different legions slice, smack, explode on, or shoot arrows at enemies, and they acquire



**❑** The bosses in *Chaos Legion* are larger than life and visually impressive, but it's tedious to take them down without a save-anywhere feature.

special attacks as they gain experience. Things would've been better if the most powerful legion didn't get blown up five minutes into the game, though. Besides not portending well for the futures of the other, lesser legions, this one's vanquishment forces you to collect his scattered remains from various stages before you can use him again. You also lose all the legions during the most boring stage, in which you become a sidekick chick who jumps around and fires pistols while marching like she's got gum stuck to the soles of her shoes.

Capcom has an arsenal of high-quality survival-horror console games such as *Devil May Cry* and the *Onimusha* series from which to create PC ports; why the company chose to port *Chaos Legion* instead is mystifying, but gamers might have been better off if its discs had stayed forever unplayable. **✖ Denise Cook**

## Verdict ★★★★★

Capcom's army of fine survival-horror titles doesn't include this *Legion*.



**❑** Arcia, the female sidekick, is apparently just as sick of seeing the same monsters that you'll be by the time you finish *Chaos Legion*.



**❑** If hero Sieg doesn't summon legions, then his attacks are more powerful; but he's vulnerable when surrounded.

**I've birthed children in less time than it takes the game CDs to fire up.**





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\* RADEON X800 XT 256MB DDR compared with NVIDIA's eVGA FX5950 256MB DDR, as measured by Aquamark 3, Halo - Combat Evolved, Splinter Cell, Tomb Raider - Angel of Darkness, and Unreal Tournament 2004. Testing conducted April 22, 2004 on the following system: Pentium 4-3.2GHz CPU, 1GB PC3200 RAM, i875 chipset, 1600x1200 resolution 4XAA & 8XAF.



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## Vicious PC's ME

Vicious PC's small form-factor rig has all the bells and whistles

**N**ow that the small form-factor secret is out of the bag, it seems that every boutique system builder is coming out with one. Of course, this means that each manufacturer will have to take some unique steps to separate itself from the fray. Falcon's FragBox, for instance, boasts that unique handle, cool-looking Lucite case, and Falcon's own cooling techniques. Voodoo PC's Doll rocks an awesome paint job and all the power those wacky Canadians could get into a tiny box. Vicious PC's answer is more about merging the gaming PC with your typical home-entertainment setup, all thanks to its decision to build its machine around

MSI's MEGA 865 chassis. Behold, the "home theater PC."

### Less vicious, more MSI

This machine is less about Vicious than it is about the MSI MEGA 865. As it stands, the box itself is the story. The MEGA 865 is an Intel i865G-based motherboard with a bunch of goodies included. The machine has instant-on for CD and MP3 playback, as well as built-in Wi-Fi (something that I've been decrying most media center PCs for lacking), onboard 5.1 surround sound audio, and a six-in-one media card reader/writer.

Where Vicious comes into play is in building the machine for you. Anyone can buy the MEGA 865 box for around \$350, but it would be up to you to compile the rest of the parts—CPU, graphics card, memory, hard drive, optical drive, etc.—and put it all together. That said, Vicious has put its machine together with some top-notch parts: an Intel 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor, a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card, and 1GB PC-3200 DDR400 memory. Vicious adds to the package by shipping the machine with Altec Lansing speakers and ViewSonic's awesome VP201s 20.1-inch LCD.

I put the machine through my standard suite of tests and it performed really well. Its 3DMark2003 (v.340) score of 2,344 at 1024x1024 with 4x AA and 8X AF turned on is right in line with the \$2,500 midrange machines I reviewed in June. Furthermore, its AquaMark 2003 and 3DGameGauge 3.5 scores were similarly competitive.

One consistent issue with small form-factor PCs is upgradeability, and the MEGA 865 is no different. It has a small 250W power supply, so don't expect a GeForce 6800 to work in it. But for the time being, it's a great little machine that'll work well in a media-center environment. **William O'Neal**  
Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

### Verdict ★★★★★

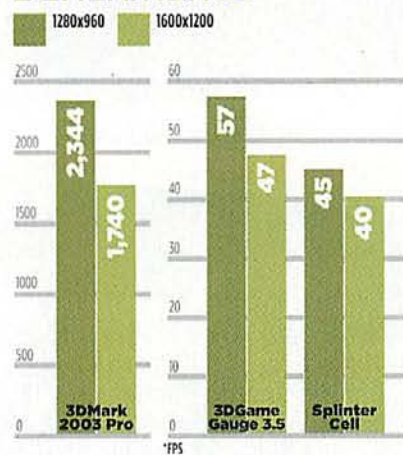
A somewhat pricey machine with some unique touches.



### By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER/MODEL	Vicious PC MEGA 865
PRICE	\$3,299
OPERATING SYSTEM	Windows XP Professional Edition
PROCESSOR	3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4
MEMORY	512MB PC-3200 DDR400
HARD DRIVE	74GB Western Digital 10,000 rpm SATA
GRAPHICS PROCESSOR	Sapphire 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT
OPTICAL DRIVE	NEC DVD+-RW combo drive
MONITOR	ViewSonic VP201s 20.1-inch LCD
KEYBOARD	Logitech Cordless Access Duo Optical
MOUSE	Logitech Cordless Access Duo Optical
SOUNDCARD	Onboard 5.1 Surround Sound
CASE	MSI MEGA 865
POWER SUPPLY	250W power supply
MISCELLANEOUS	6-in-1 card reader; external media control buttons

### Benchmarks



Note: All tests run with 4x AA (antialiasing) and 8x AF (anisotropic filtering) turned on unless otherwise noted.







90

### Battle of the Titans!

Dave beats up on ATI's and Nvidia's top-of-the-line graphics cards.



94

### Woe Is Loyd

In this month's Cracked Case, Loyd laments the upcoming major system upgrades.



98

### How to...

Joel Durham Jr. gives you some tips on keeping your drivers updated and in good condition.

# GA 865 Has It All

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MANUFACTURER: ATI URL: [www.ati.com](http://www.ati.com) PRICE: Radeon X800 XT \$499, Radeon X800 Pro \$399 (anticipated retail prices)

# ATI Delivers More of a Good Thing

ATI's Radeon X800 XT and Pro show that the Canadian company is on track

**A**TI surprised everyone, including itself, with the Radeon 9700 Pro, the first DX9 GPU to hit store shelves. ATI's impressive showing came at the same time that Nvidia's competitive answer, the NV30 (GeForce FX 5800 Ultra), was late to the market and lacking in performance. As ATI brings out its next GPU, the Radeon X800 XT, the question is, can the company deliver a repeat performance? The answer would seem to be, "Hell yes."

## The plumbing, examined

ATI unveiled two new GPUs, the Radeon X800 XT—the company's 16-pipe flagship GPU, which will be offered in a \$500 3D card—and the X800 Pro, a 12-pipe version of the XT, which will retail for around \$400.

Both ATI's Radeon X800 XT and

Nvidia's newest architecture, the GeForce 6800 Ultra, employ 16-pixel-pipe designs in which those pipes are ganged into four groups of four. Both architectures also have six vertex processing units. At this basic level, the architectures are more similar than they are different. However, there are important differences.

ATI elected not to support DirectX's Shader Model 3.0, whereas Nvidia did. Currently, only a handful of games use Shader Model 3.0, so while Nvidia does hold an advantage here, how much of an advantage this is remains to be seen.

The X800 XT has 160 million transistors versus the 222 million that the GeForce 6800 Ultra packs. Because ATI is driving 28 percent fewer transistors, it's able to run the X800 XT's clock rate higher than even Nvidia's high-end 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU. What's impressive is that ATI can run at higher clock rates while drawing much lower peak

power than the 6800 Ultra. As a result, the X800 XT needs only a single power connector and internal slot, whereas the 6800 Ultra needs two of each.

The X800 XT's engine is clocked at 520MHz, giving it a considerable 30 percent advantage over the 6800 Ultra. Nvidia's 6800 Ultra Extreme cuts into that advantage, but even here, ATI has an 18 percent advantage. We expected these clock advantages to allow ATI to open up a performance lead, and it did in places, but to Nvidia's credit, the overall races wound up being very close.

## The numbers, on fire

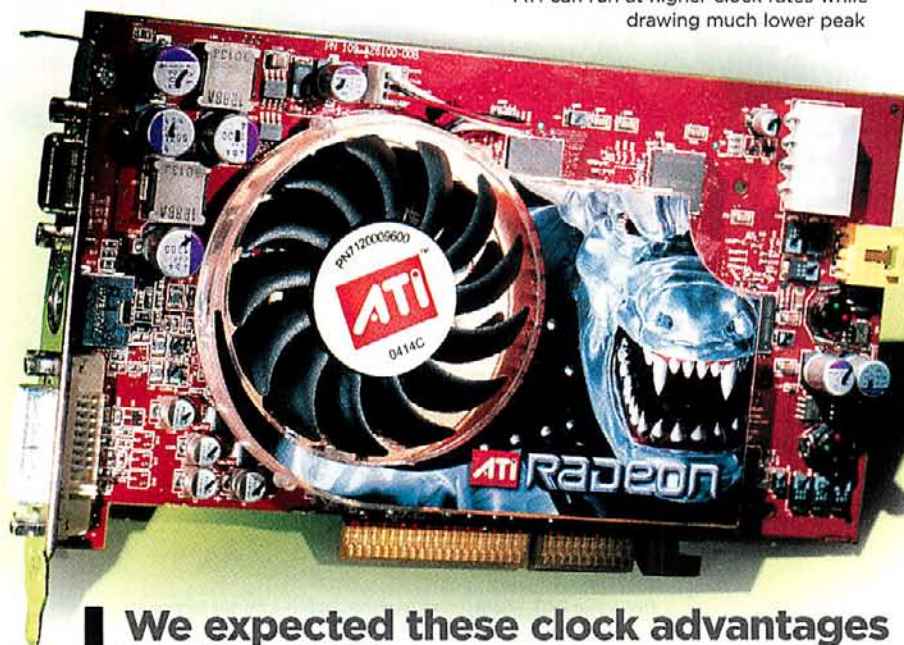
ATI starts off roughly even with Nvidia's new 3D iron on 3DMark03; however, ATI is able to best even the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme on AquaMark3. As we head into our 3D GameGauge testing, the X800 XT again clings to a slight lead at the 1600x1200 test resolution versus the 6800 Ultra. Nvidia does pull ahead with its 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU at 1600x1200, although the performance lead is only about 5 percent. ATI's lower-priced X800 Pro doesn't fare so well versus the 6800 GT, and Nvidia holds leads at all three test resolutions. However, at 1600x1200, the X800 Pro closes the gap considerably, trailing Nvidia by about three points.

The race is almost too close to call. Nvidia holds the lead in the battle of the \$400 price point, whereas ATI holds a slight lead in the \$500 contest.

Nvidia has the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme GPU, which will ship in limited quantities and likely be priced over \$600. This technically gives Nvidia the performance crown, though not by much. In the \$500 race, we give the edge to ATI for its slight performance lead, smaller space requirements, and lower power draw. But either GPU will let you get your game on now and have you well prepared for *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2*, and the next generation of demanding 3D titles. **Dave Salvatore**

## Verdict ★★★★★

ATI keeps up the momentum from the Radeon 9700/9800, but this race with Nvidia is almost too close to call.



**We expected these clock advantages to allow ATI to open up a performance lead, and it did in places, but to Nvidia's credit, the overall races wound up being very close.**



MANUFACTURER: Nvidia URL: [www.Nvidia.com](http://www.Nvidia.com) PRICE: Boards based on the GPUs are expected to be priced at: GeForce Ultra 6800: \$499, GeForce 6800 GT: \$399. Prices for cards using the Ultra Extreme will likely be over \$600.

# Nvidia Comes Out Swinging and Connects

**Nvidia's GeForce 6800 Ultra packs a serious punch**

**N**vidia is used to success. However, its NV3x family of GPUs arrived late and have underwhelmed performance-wise. Meanwhile, ATI delivered a killer GPU in the Radeon 9700 Pro and gained mind share. Nvidia knew this time around it needed to score big to regain lost ground. Well, Nvidia has done this with a new GPU that significantly outperforms its predecessor, sometimes by a better than 2X margin.

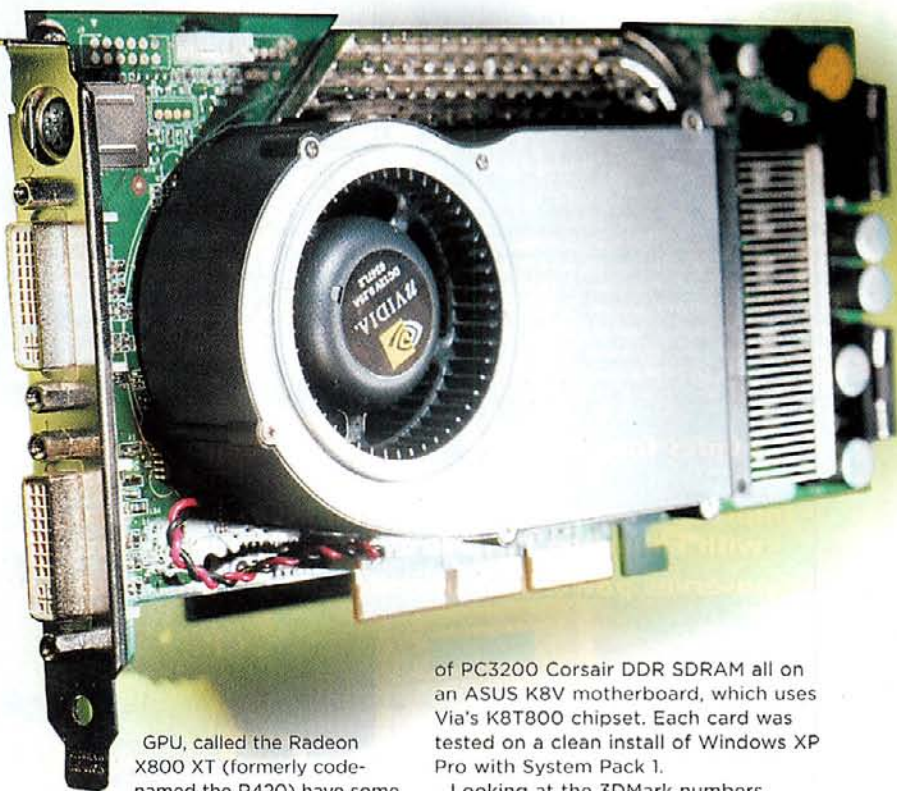
## Under the hood and screaming

Nvidia's mantra for the NV40 architecture, now called the GeForce 6800 Ultra, is "wider is better." To that end, the new GPU has four times as many pixel pipes (16) as the NV30 and twice as many vertex processing units (six). Nvidia clocks standard GeForce 6800 Ultra's engine at 400MHz and its DDR-3 memory at 550MHz (1.1GHz effective). The new GeForce 6800 Ultra actually has a slower engine clock than the current-generation GeForce FX 5950 Ultra, but don't let the lesser clock speed fool you. This part screams. Big time.

Nvidia has also unveiled two more GPUs, the GeForce 6800 GT and a "golden sample" version of the Ultra, which for now Nvidia has dubbed the GeForce 6800 Ultra Extreme. The 6800 GT is clocked at 350MHz for the engine and 500MHz (1GHz effective) for the DDR-3 memory. The Ultra Extreme GPU's engine clock will depend on how aggressive the add-in card maker's thermal solution is, but we tested a card with a 440MHz engine clock and 550MHz (1.1GHz effective) for the memory.

The GeForce 6800 Ultra and ATI's latest

**The Ultra Extreme represents the best gaming GPU money can buy, but be prepared to shell out over \$600 to lay your hands on one.**



GPU, called the Radeon X800 XT (formerly code-named the R420) have some striking similarities in their architectures. Both have 16 pixel pipes and six vertex processing units. And both have four-way crossbar memory controllers and are currently using 550MHz DDR-3 memory.

A noteworthy difference, however, is that GeForce 6800 Ultra supports DirectX's Shader Model 3.0, whereas ATI's newest GPU does not. Currently, only a small handful of games are using Shader Model 3.0, since only the GeForce 6800 Ultra supports it. More games will support SM3.0 over time, but they'll all have fall-back rendering options for non-6800 hardware. So while Nvidia does hold an advantage here, how much of an advantage it is remains to be seen.

## Impressive performance numbers

Our test system was outfitted with a 2.2GHz Athlon 64 3400+ CPU and 2GB

of PC3200 Corsair DDR SDRAM all on an ASUS K8V motherboard, which uses Via's K8T800 chipset. Each card was tested on a clean install of Windows XP Pro with System Pack 1.

Looking at the 3DMark numbers, Nvidia jumps out to an early lead, especially with its Ultra Extreme edition of the 6800 Ultra. However, on AquaMark, even the Ultra Extreme trails ATI's X800 XT. This same part does allow Nvidia to claim victory in the 3D GameGauge test results, though a look at the standard GeForce 6800 Ultra results shows Nvidia trailing a bit, notably at 1600x1200.

The Ultra Extreme represents the best gaming GPU money can buy, but be prepared to shell out over \$600 to lay your hands on one. And appreciate that Nvidia's lead, even with the Ultra Extreme, is slight and that this GPU will require a 480-watt power supply. **Dave Salvatore**

## Verdict ★★★★★

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# Lloyd's Cracked Case

## Upgrades...again

**H**ere I am again, sitting in the basement (which is where much of my testing goes down) contemplating another system upgrade. You see, here in the basement I have a "production system" that I call Dumbledore, and this system remains pristine and untouched. This is the system on which I do a lot of my writing and on which much of my actual work data is stored.

Currently, the production system is a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 with 1GB of RAM and three hard drives. It's running on an Abit IC7-G motherboard, which uses the 875P chipset. Two of the hard drives are 120GB Seagate SATA drives, configured as a RAID 1 redundant array. The boot drive is an Ultra ATA 100 Western Digital WD2500JB. The 250GB boot drive also houses my digital music files, which have been ripped to the hard drive from my CD collection in WMA 9 lossless format.

All work and no fun make Dumbledore a dull boy, so a boatload of games are installed, as well as the usual office applications. In other words, upgrading the system will be no easy chore. Since the production system remains fairly static for a year or more, I'm probably going to wait until the next generation of chipsets comes out. I'd like to drop in a PCI Express graphics card and convert entirely to SATA hard drives. Then I'll need to make several decisions.

First, do I stick with Intel or move to an AMD 64 chip? Both CPU types have pros and cons, and I haven't actually decided yet. It may ultimately depend on which processor brand gets a stable PCI Express infrastructure first, not on the merits of the CPUs themselves. In the past, that would have meant almost certainly sticking with Intel, but core logic for Athlon 64s has become pretty solid in the past year.

### Behold, a new standard

PCI Express is the salient feature. It's a serial, point-to-point connection. Graphics cards will be built on a "16-lane" PCI Express connector, offering bidirectional bandwidth of 4.2GB per second—double that of today's AGP 3.0. But the new chipsets will offer more than two SATA ports. Of course, they'll also have the traditional PCI slots as well.

Along with the new chipsets comes a

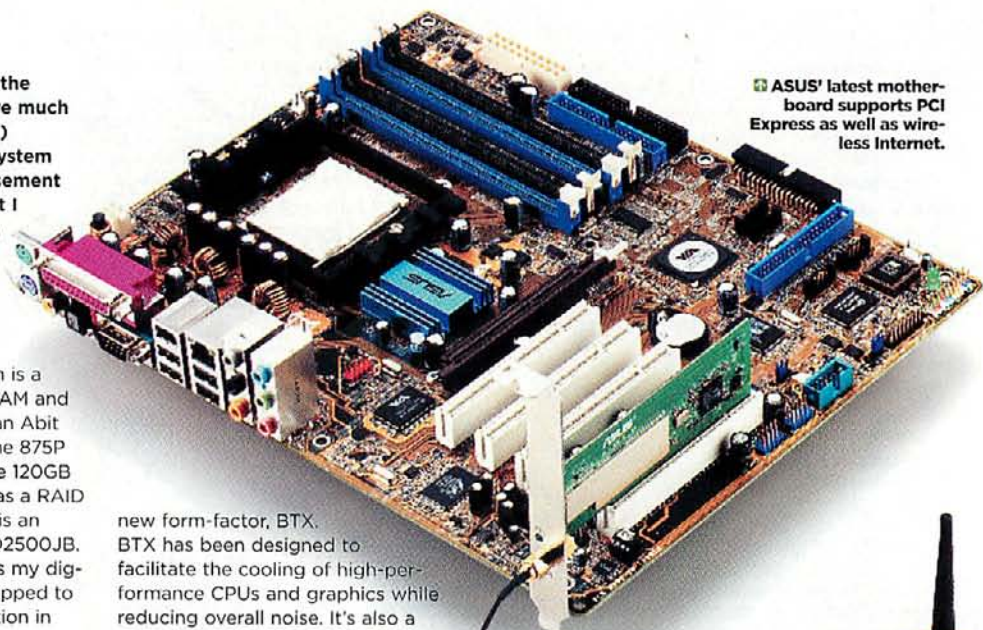
new form-factor, BTX.

BTX has been designed to facilitate the cooling of high-performance CPUs and graphics while reducing overall noise. It's also a more flexible standard, allowing for small and large form-factors. However, you'll probably see ATX-based motherboards using PCI Express chipsets as well, so you won't immediately have to toss out that shiny aluminum case.

One feature I'm also searching for is a quieter PC. My current system lives in a Super Flower aluminum tower case. The internal fans, plus the power-supply fans, are pretty noisy. I like the internal design of the case quite a bit, but it is a bit of an echo chamber. I'll have to move to a new case anyway when the BTX form-factor motherboards come out. I figure if I have to do such a major upgrade, I might as well transition to BTX as well.

The graphics decision won't be easy, but I'm leaning toward Nvidia's new NV40 (or NV45, as the native PCI Express variant will be known). It's looking like ATI's new X800 XT GPUs will offer performance parity—which is a good thing—but not spiffy new features like Shader Model

ASUS' latest motherboard supports PCI Express as well as wireless Internet.



3.0 support. But it's not a done deal yet. I want to see shipping cards and what shape the actual release drivers are in. Like AMD and Intel, the horse race between Nvidia and ATI is still pretty close.

So stick around as we contemplate upgrades over the next few months. It's going to be a wilder ride than it has been in a few years. And once I make my choice, I have to move all my data and applications over. And you thought purgatory only existed in *Painkiller*.... **—Lloyd Case**

**And you thought purgatory only existed in *Painkiller*....**



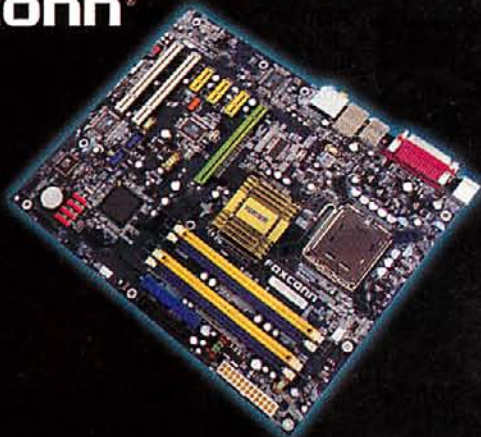
Of course, in *Painkiller*, purgatory ain't so bad.



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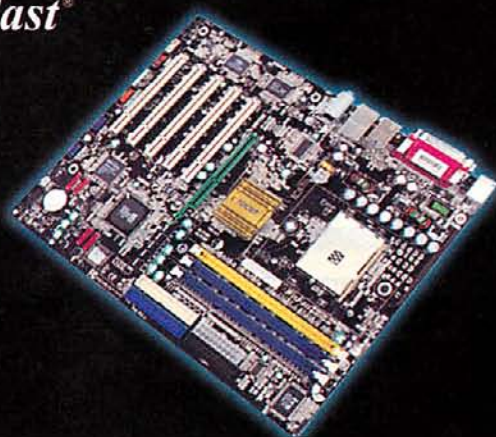
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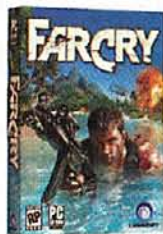
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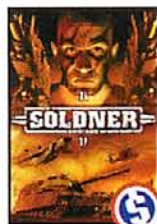


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# How to Keep Your Drivers Up to Date

It isn't as easy as you may think ☒ Joel Durham

Is your software up to date? We're not talking about Windows; of course you run Windows Update on a regular basis. We're not talking about games, either; you habitually download the latest patches for your favorite titles, right? No, we mean your device drivers, those hunks of code that tell Windows how to use your hardware.

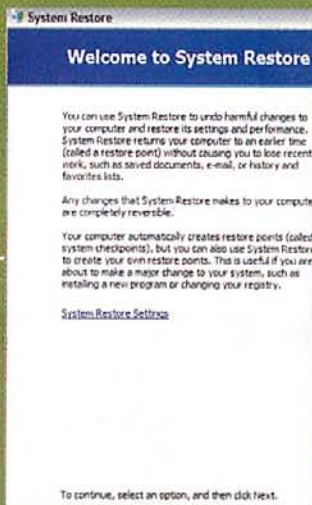
Keeping your drivers up to date ensures compatibility between your hardware and the latest software. Sometimes, newer device drivers can increase your system's performance, especially in the case of your PC's graphics card. Occasionally, new device drivers can enable new features. For example, updating your Sound Blaster Audigy 2 can make it compatible with EAX 4. Here's a simple, step-by-step procedure for keeping your Windows XP drivers current.

Check for new drivers as often as you can; You should do it at least once a month, but once a week is optimal.

## STEP #2

### Create a Windows XP restore point

Windows XP lets you create restore points in case a new driver or program causes your system to choke. Click the Start button and then click Help and Support. Next, click on the Restore link. Click the Create a Restore Point radio button and then click Next. Type in a description such as "Before Driver Update" and click Create. If the new drivers cause problems, use this wizard to restore your system to the point you've just created.



## STEP #3

### Download the latest drivers

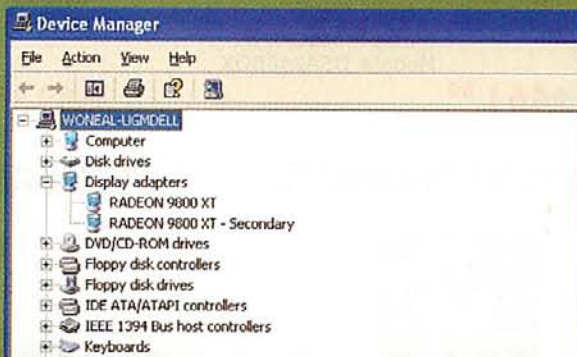
Head to the websites of the companies that manufactured your stuff. For Nvidia-based graphics cards, go to [nvidia.com](http://nvidia.com), and for ATI-based cards, navigate to [ati.com](http://ati.com). If you bought instead of built your computer and you're not sure what make and model the motherboard is, go to the PC manufacturer's website. Look in the Support or Download areas to find the latest drivers.



## STEP #1

### Make a list

Decide which components you need to keep up to date. Your list should include your motherboard (including its main driver and drivers for the hard-drive controller and USB hub), your graphics card, your soundcard or onboard audio device, your network interface, and your modem. Some components don't use drivers or use Windows native drivers and don't need to be updated; these items include your CPU, your hard drives, your optical drives, and your floppy drive, among others.



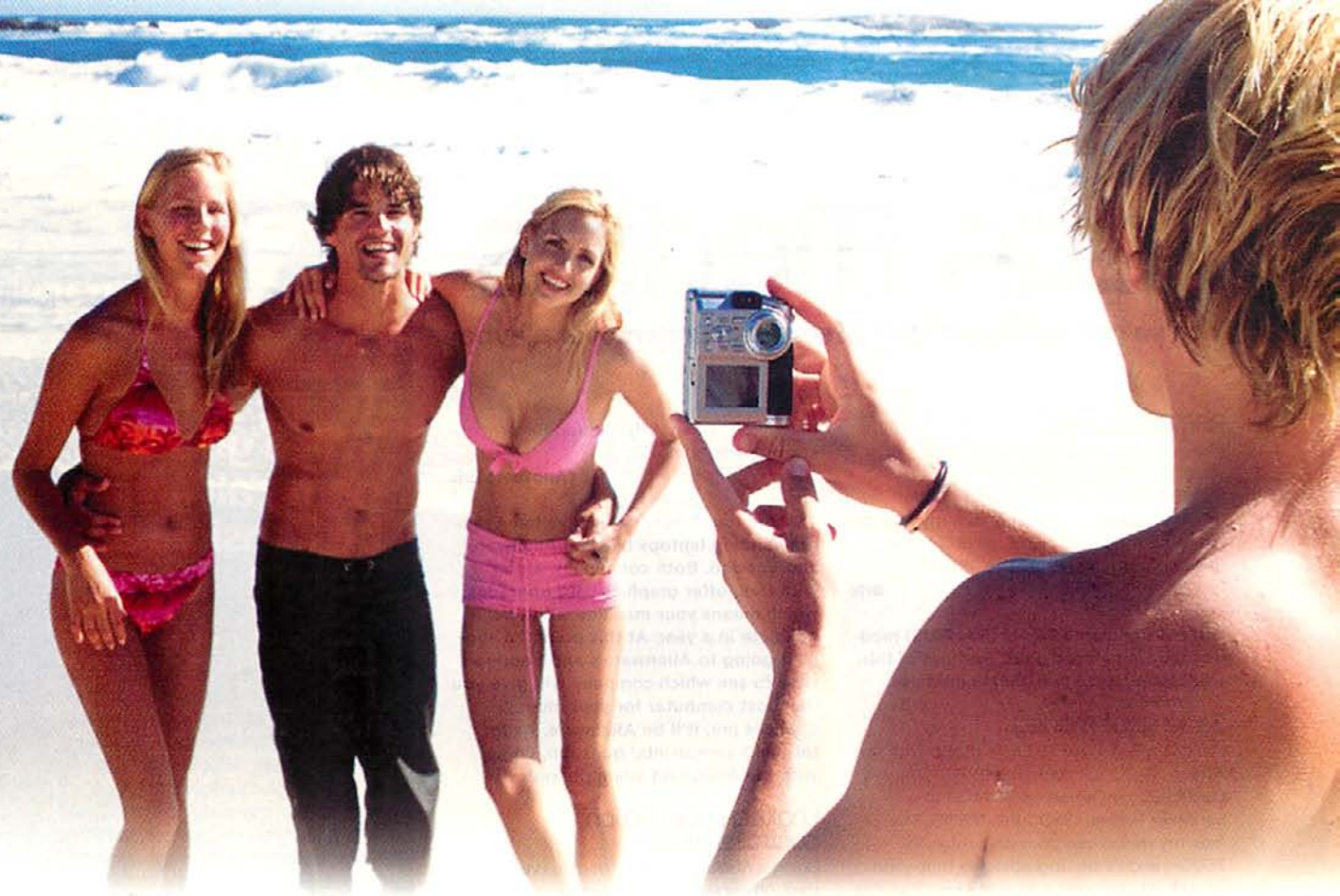
## STEP #4

### Install the new drivers

Most drivers come as compressed executables or, if they're Zip files, as Setup.exe programs. Run the appropriate file to install the drivers. If the drivers don't come with a setup program, you'll have to install them manually. To do that, decompress them into a folder whose location you'll remember and follow this procedure:

1. Open Control Panel and launch the System applet.
2. Click the Hardware tab and click Device Manager.
3. Find the category of the device you're working on and click the "+" sign next to it.
4. Find the device you're upgrading. Right-click on it and then click Properties.
5. Click the Driver tab and click Update Driver.
6. Click Install From a List or Specific Location and then click Next.
7. Uncheck Search Removable Media and fill in the check box next to "Include this location in the search."
8. Browse to the location of the new driver and click OK.
9. Follow the prompts to complete the driver installation.





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# Tech Medics

You've got questions, Jeff Green is an undercover playboy

## RAMBUS SUCKS

I have a Dell Dimension with 256MB of PC-800 RDRAM. I want to add another 512MB RAM. Can I add a single 512MB module and use a second "dummy" module to fill the second slot, or do I have to use two modules, each one 256MB?

Eric

You can populate RDRAM (RAMBUS) modules only in patched pairs. Because of this, you'll have to use two 256MB modules.

## Save your money

I've got a Gigabyte 7VTXH+ mobo with an Athlon XP 2000+ and 768MB RAM. I just upgraded my GeForce4 Ti 4400 to a Sapphire Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB. The max my mobo can go is an Athlon XP 2600+, and I'll be upgrading to that soon as well. At the point I upgrade my CPU, I've pretty much dead-ended this machine's upgrade cycle. I've got an available DIMM slot, and I could purchase another 256MB, 512MB, or 1GB DIMM, but is it cost effective? Will it improve game performance enough to warrant the purchase? Also, will this RAM be usable in a newer motherboard later? Do the motherboards for the Athlon 64 and Athlon FX accept this speed RAM (PC-1600/2100 at 2.5v)?

Scott

Those are great questions. If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't upgrade that machine anymore. 768MB of RAM is plenty, and with that Radeon 9800 Pro, you're gonna get about as much as you can expect out of that machine. Rather than dropping \$50 to \$125 on more memory, save that money for a mobo and CPU upgrade down the line. Also, the Athlon 64s need registered memory, so if you go that route, you'll have to replace the memory, too.

## Alienware or Voodoo?

I am about to spend \$3,000 or more on a gaming laptop and was wondering if you think I should go with Alienware or Voodoo. Of these two, which do you think is better? Also, should I get a

machine with an AMD Athlon 64 processor or a Pentium 4?

(Another) Eric

That's a tough one. Lately I've been recommending laptops by both Alienware and Voodoo. Both companies, along with Dell, offer graphics card upgrades, which means your machine won't be obsolete in a year. At this point, I'd suggest going to Alienware's and Voodoo's sites to see which company will give you the most computer for your money. Chances are, it'll be Alienware. As for the AMD-versus-Intel question, I'd go with the Athlon 64 when possible.

## Logitech Dual Action controller=POS

Being a *Madden Football* gamer, I've burned through enough cheapie generic gamepads that I finally decided to get something decent. So, based mostly on your recommendation in the Check Out section, I got a Logitech Dual Action pad. My first thought was that it was rather dinky, but I figured I'd get used to that, which I did. My second thought was that it seemed to be a really decent little pad that would work just dandy for my many hours of *Madden* mashing. After about a month, it all went to hell. I started having calibration issues with the left analog stick. I would have to replug the controller to get a recalibration. I got a USB hub to make sure this was not a PC problem. No dice. So I did a Yahoo search for "Logitech Dual Action calibration problem." Holy shizn! Turns out this is a pretty common problem with this gamepad. Numerous complaints about my exact issue. Seems Logitech has a lemon on its hands. Logitech's response? "There is no problem, so unplug your gamepad and then plug it back in, and it will be recalibrated." Ummmm...bite me. Right now, to get through a game of *Madden*, I have to unplug the stupid thing every 10 minutes or so, which sometimes results in having to save the game and restart it, too. I reckon that I am off to get a Thrustmaster controller now. Maybe you might consider recommending a gamepad that doesn't have such a glaring quality issue and isn't manufactured by a company that refuses to correct it.

Dale

Uh...thanks for the feedback. The thing is, I've had plenty of those gamepads and I've never had one go bad on me. But I will look into it.



**Will Power**  
His monthly spew of filth

## Will a good game always be considered good?

Recently, I was cleaning things up in my garage with my son when he came across a box of "old" PC games. You should've seen the look on this 9-year-old's face. You'd have thought he had caught a leprechaun and was about to liberate him from his pot of gold.

This box had games, both brand-new and opened, that, combined, probably ate up several years of my life. I let him take and install a few of the games, thinking that a kid who was raised on PS2, Xbox, and his own 3GHz Pentium 4 machine with a Radeon 9800 Pro in his room would quickly grow bored with the lackluster graphics and complexity of older titles such as *Age of Empires*, *Dark Forces*, and *Jane's Longbow*.

What occurred was amazing: Games that were good back in the day are still good. My son and his friends are bona fide *Age of Empires* addicts. One Friday night, I woke up around midnight to hear the clanging of sword on shield coming from my son's room. I walked into his room and asked him, "What in the hell are you doing?" He looked at me and, without picking up on the fact that what I really wanted to know was why he was on a computer at midnight, said, "I'm defending my fortress from the English."

*Age of Empires* is nearly 5 years old, yet it still holds up. While game developers go nuts about antialiasing, impressive water and smoke effects, and destructible environments, they need to remember that these things don't make a game great. It all comes down to gameplay. I rue the day my son gets his hands on the nearly 6-year-old *Half-Life*. **William O'Neal**

## Buy this graphics card

This one's a toss-up. Both ATI's X800 XT and Nvidia's GF6800 Ultra are awesome. Of course, if you don't have a monster power supply, go with ATI.

**Games that were good back in the day are still good.**





# Check Out



**103** SPEAKERS



COMPUTERS

**102**



REWIND 100

**108**



MOUSE

**104**



**103** GAMEPAD

## Inside

**It's another month, and that means yet** another round of solid CGW recommendations on everything from software to hardware. Yeah, we've been busy with E3 (and the post-E3 recovery) recently, but we've still managed to provide you with more gadgets, gizmos, and games on which to spend your moola, as well as Tom and Bruce's recent battle in *Rise of Nations*.



# A-List

## Our picks

Well, E3 2004 has come and gone, and as the dust clears, there are plenty of new games to get excited about. With stuff like *Splinter Cell 3*, *Prince of Persia 2*, *FEAR*, *City of Villains*, and *Dragon Age* coming at you over the next year or so, it certainly won't hurt to have a screaming-fast rig ready to play them on. And the A-List has plenty of advice on how to build such things. You might even call them...killer rigs. Hey, what ever happened to our Killer Rigs section, anyway? We just might have to do something about that....



## COMPUTERS

AMD, Intel. AMD, Intel. That's all we ever hear about. Anyone remember good old Cyrix? Actually, Cyrix wasn't all that good. In fact, the mere thought is enough to give us nightmares.

### Intel-based system



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

■ **710G Gamer**  
\$2,160  
Gateway

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Gateway has found the sweet spot between being a major OEM and a boutique system maker. Its 710G Gamer uses the same parts the small guys use, and it is damn near as fast. This machine is so sweet, in fact, that it won last month's desktop roundup. While it isn't necessarily as "fast" as machines by Voodoo and Falcon, its 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card, combined with a bevy of awesome accessories, has us sold.

### AMD-based system



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

■ **Hexx c:355**  
\$2,500  
VoodooPC

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While Gateway's 710G Gamer is like the Swiss Army knife of computers, VoodooPC's Hexx is an awesome balance of speed and style. AMD's Athlon 64 3000+ CPU, in combination with a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card and 1GB of Corsair memory, makes this rig plenty fast—but it's the Hexx's unique styling that really has us hooked. Who said PCs have to be ugly?



## LAN-boy rig



## PRODUCT

## WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

## OUR PICK

**FragBox Pro**  
\$1,795  
Falcon Northwest

Dave Salvator doesn't like anything, which is why we were surprised that he wanted to give Falcon's FragBox Pro an Editors' Choice award. Of course, one look at the thing and you can see why it's so cool. Inside that little box lurks an Intel Pentium 4 2.80GHz CPU, a 120GB hard drive, 1GB of memory, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card. Not all small form-factor PCs can pack that kind of power, but Falcon worked some serious "cooling magic" to get all that to work together.



## PERIPHERALS

Have you ever wanted a giant subwoofer that transfers sound waves into your body so that you FEEL the sound? Yeah, neither have we. But they apparently do exist.

## Speakers



## PRODUCT

## WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

## HIGH-END PICK

**GigaWorks S750**  
\$500  
Creative Labs

While some may scoff at a 7.1 speaker setup, who would turn down 700 watts of awesome audio power? With two rear and two side satellites, the S750 will turn your home sound setup into a movie theater.

## MIDRANGE PICK

**Z-5300**  
\$200  
Logitech

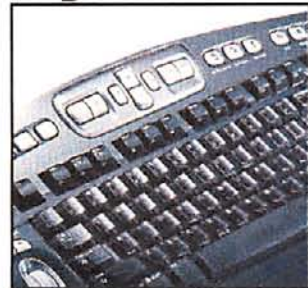
Logitech's Z-5300 system earned an Editors' Choice award in our February issue. This setup boasts incredible power, quality, and bass all at a decent price. Take note, though—these speakers lack digital inputs.

## BUDGET PICK

**Z-3**  
\$100  
Logitech

If you're on a budget, we suggest you forgo a cheap set of 4.1 or 5.1 speakers and opt for a good set of 2.1 speakers instead. Logitech's Z-3s sound great and look even better.

## Keyboard



## PRODUCT

## WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

## WIRED PICK

**MultiMedia Keyboard**  
\$30  
Microsoft

You can't go wrong with this handy keyboard. The buttons at the top allow you to perform common functions like launching a Web browser, opening folders, and controlling multimedia apps such as Media Player.

## WIRELESS PICK

**Wireless Optical Desktop Elite**  
\$100  
Microsoft

Microsoft's latest desktop set sports the company's new tilt wheel technology that allows you to scroll horizontally through documents. The keyboard is highly customizable, and its cushioned palm rest is more comfortable than a standard plastic one.

## Gamepad



## PRODUCT

## WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

## OUR PICK

**Dual Action USB**  
\$20  
Logitech

Ever since we put the Dual Action USB in the A-List, we've received complaints about it. Hey, it may look like a PS2 DualShock controller, but the fact is, if you're playing sports games on a PC, this is the pad to use.



## A-LIST PERIPHERALS

### Mouse



#### PRODUCT

##### WIRED PICK

**Intellimouse Explorer 4.0**  
\$50  
Microsoft

##### WIRELESS PICK

**Intellimouse Explorer 2.0**  
\$60  
Microsoft

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Microsoft's latest Intellimouse Explorer boasts the company's new tilt-wheel technology, but more important, it's very comfortable and rocks plenty of customizable buttons. It can also be connected to either a standard PS/2 port or a USB port.

Microsoft's Wireless Intellimouse Explorer 2.0 is essentially the wireless version of the Intellimouse Explorer 4.0. While it comes in several colors, we prefer the leather-bound version.

### Headset



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

**PC155**  
\$70  
Sennheiser

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Not necessarily a radical change, the Sennheiser PC155 is more of an update to the company's PC150 headset that Darren Gladstone loves so much. That said, if you're playing any online games with voice support, you'll like the PC155.

### Joystick



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

**Extreme 3D Pro**  
\$35  
Logitech

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While they aren't as popular as they once were, there are still some pretty good flight sims out there. Whether you're a hardcore or casual flight-sim fan, Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro will help you get the job done.

### Racing wheel



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

**MOMO Racing Wheel**  
\$100  
Logitech

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

The entry-level MOMO wheel is an awesome peripheral. What's not to love about feeling like you're actually behind the wheel? It's just the kind of thing that'll get your motor in gear for some *Need for Speed Underground*.



## DISPLAYS

Our E3 press room had a bunch of iMacs with really cool-looking LCD monitors—which we used for e-mail and Word. Now why don't we have some of those lying around the office?

### CRT monitor



#### PRODUCT

##### HIGH-END PICK

**22-inch MultiSync FE21MSB**  
\$600  
NEC

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

When it comes to gaming, CRTs can't be beat—and NEC's MultiSync has been the favorite of many of the boutiques for years. With a huge viewable area and a great price, this is definitely a recommended buy.

##### BUDGET PICK

**19-inch E90fb**  
\$225  
ViewSonic

For gamers on a budget, ViewSonic's 19-inch E90fb is a fantastic CRT display. While 14-inch monitors used to be entry-level displays, there's no reason to go below 19 inches with prices like this.



## LCD monitor



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**UltraSharp 2001FP**  
\$1,000  
Dell

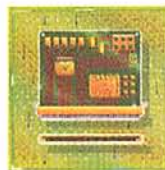
### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Dell's UltraSharp 2001FP is often packaged with the company's XPS gaming system. With a slick design and a response time of 16ms, this display makes gaming a real treat. It also pivots 90 degrees for vertical document viewing.

#### BUDGET PICK

**CML175B**  
\$500  
Hitachi

Hitachi's update to last year's CML174B model, the CML175B boasts a native resolution of 1280x1024 (great for gaming) and a 16ms response time. In other words, a great gaming LCD just got more...uh...greater(er).



## COMPONENTS

Remember back when people measured hard-drive space in "megabytes"? Yeah, well, we do. Now we feel really old. Damned kids these days with their 250GB hard drives and DVD-ROMs....

## Processor



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**Athlon 64 FX-53**  
\$800  
AMD

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

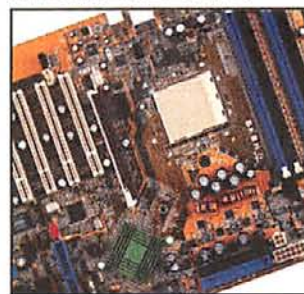
Among gaming processors, the Athlon 64 FX-53 is at the top of the heap. Even though the 64 bits aren't being exploited, the 32-bit applications run almost as fast as Darren can talk. We said almost.

#### BUDGET PICK

**Pentium 4 2.8GHz**  
\$200  
Intel

While the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 chip is not as king of the road as an 800MHz frontside-bus 3.4GHz model, it is still one zippy little core. Plus, with an Intel mobo, you'll be ready for the eventual upgrade.

## Motherboard



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**SK8V**  
\$200  
Asus

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

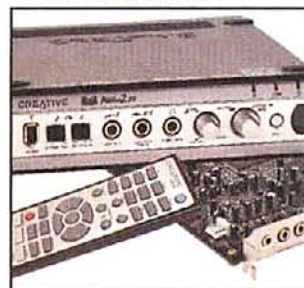
Designed for AMD's Athlon 64 FX line of processors, the SK8V sports the 64-bit chipset of choice—the VIA K8T800. This motherboard also boasts a 400MHz frontside bus, as well as support for DDR400 RAM.

#### BUDGET PICK

**D875PBZ**  
\$150  
Intel

Intel's D875PBZ isn't so much "low end" as it is flexible. Constructed around the i875P chipset, it has built-in SATA RAID support and makes a great backbone for an affordable Pentium 4 system.

## Soundcard



### PRODUCT

#### OUR PICK

**Audigy 2 ZS**  
\$200  
Creative Labs

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

You haven't experienced surround until you've heard an awesome 7.1 system. In conjunction with Creative's GigaWorks S750 7.1 speakers, the Audigy 2 ZS is awesome. Serious audiophiles can upgrade to the Platinum or Platinum Pro models for even more power.



## A-LIST COMPONENTS

### Videocard



#### PRODUCT

##### HIGH-END PICK

**256MB Radeon 9800 XT**  
\$350  
ATI

##### MIDRANGE PICK

**128MB Radeon 9600 XT**  
\$175  
ATI

##### BUDGET PICK

**128MB GeForce FX 5200 Ultra**  
\$80  
Nvidia

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

The Radeon XT was originally supposed to come packaged with *Half-Life 2*. Unfortunately, the game's release date slipped, but many of these cards are still being packaged with a coupon for the game when it is eventually released.

ATI's midrange part is plenty fast enough to handle any game you're currently playing. Sure, it may not be as fancy as a 256MB 9800 XT card, but it's definitely easier on the wallet.

Stay behind a generation of graphics cards to save some money. The Nvidia GeForce FX 5200 clocks in at about \$80, which is quite a bargain. Just make sure you don't buy the cheaper, non-Ultra version.

### Hard drive



#### PRODUCT

##### HIGH-END PICK

**Deskstar 7K250 250GB**  
\$250  
Hitachi

##### BUDGET PICK

**DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB**  
\$100  
Maxtor

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

A single 250GB Hitachi Deskstar hard drive provides more than enough disk space for 99 percent of the world's population. If you're in that rare 1 percent that needs more, double them up for a monstrous RAID array.

At a little more than \$1 per GB, Maxtor's 7,200 rpm DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB drive is a great option for a single-drive rig.

### Optical drive



#### PRODUCT

##### HIGH-END PICK

**DVR-A07U**  
\$200  
Pioneer

##### BUDGET PICK

**DDU1621 16x DVD-ROM**  
\$30  
Sony

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

This drive is not for the faint of heart—or light of wallet. Pioneer's latest combo drive does everything you need: You can create your own DVD movies, burn music CDs, or just back up your data.

Judging by the responses to our first-ever DVD, many of you have yet to adopt this technology. At around \$30 for a basic 16x drive, there's no reason to wait—and Sony's 16x DVD-ROM is a great choice.

### Case



#### PRODUCT

##### TOWER PICK

**TAC-T01-E1C**  
\$150  
Cooler Master

##### ALTERNATE-FORM PICK

**SN85G4**  
\$300  
Shuttle

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Cooler Master's TAC-T01 is big, heavy, and not necessarily cheap, but it's a great case for building that rig of your dreams. It's solid and shiny, and there's a metal monolith inset on the case's face. What is that thing for, anyway?

Shuttle's Nforce3 150-based setup is the perfect option for building an Athlon 64 FX-based shuttle box. The motherboard supports DDR400 and rocks Realtek's 6-channel audio. Plus, it's much more portable than a bulky tower.





# MOBILITY

Resident CGW newshound Darren Gladstone already has his finger on the pulse of the new N-Gage cell phone, which seems to be free of the sidetalking phenomenon that plagued the original model.

## Laptop



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**M675**  
\$2,600  
Gateway

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

With a 128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics card and a 17-inch display, Gateway's M675 is doper than most desktop PCs. Plus, it can be difficult to put a desktop PC in your backpack.

#### BUDGET PICK

**M6807**  
\$1,549 (after \$100 mail-in rebate)  
eMachines

eMachines' M6807 ships with a 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics chip, but in many tests, it outperforms machines with 128MB graphics options. That said, at only \$1,549, you'll be damned happy with this Athlon 64-based laptop.

#### LIGHTWEIGHT PICK

**Inspiron 300m**  
\$2,000  
Dell

The 300m is the perfect traveling companion. The docking station's extra battery space means more than five hours of life, and additional speakers give added rockability. Just don't expect to do much gaming on it.

## Phone



### PRODUCT

#### FLIP-PHONE PICK

**V1660**  
\$199 (\$49 with a two-year contract)  
Samsung

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Of the current crop of gaming-enabled phones, this one is the slickest, most game friendly of the bunch. With the addition of the \$39 PCS Game Pad (a GBA-like docking station), it's much easier to control the action.

#### NON-FLIP-PHONE PICK

**3660**  
\$200  
Nokia

Thanks to a new federal policy that allows you to keep your phone number when switching cell providers, negotiating and pinning down a really good deal on a phone is much easier. For a normal-sized phone, this model works great.

## PDA



### PRODUCT

#### PALM OS PICK

**Zodiac 2**  
\$400  
Tapwave

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

For the moment, you aren't gonna find another PDA with this kind of juice for the price that Tapwave is asking. With it, you can bust out some grinds in *Tony Hawk*, juggle your contact manager (yay!), listen to music, and watch *The Simpsons*.

#### POCKETPC OS PICK

**e805**  
\$540  
Toshiba

This PDA sits at the top of Toshiba's food chain. It's built especially for the power-hungry PocketPC user, and its bells and whistles far surpass the 400MHz processor and 128MB of free RAM. What better way to run MAME and countless games?

## Gadget



### PRODUCT

#### OUR PICK

**DSC-T1 Cyber-shot**  
\$550  
Sony

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Holy crap! Your wallet is probably bigger than this 5-megapixel digital camera. Sony's DSC-T1 is tiny, but it has a large LCD screen and 3x optical zoom. Poor battery life is the only price you'll be paying for high style.



# Rewind 100

What should you play today? Names in **red** indicate Editors' Choice games



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Across the Dnepr	4/04	An imbalanced, single-scenario <i>Korsun Pocket</i> add-on. Dnol worth the Dmonev	★★★★☆
Age of Mythology: The Titans Expansion	1/04	More bells, more whistles, same game	★★★★☆
American Conquest: Fight Back	1/04	Fight boredom and micromanagement by avoiding this lame stand-alone expansion	★★★☆☆
America's Army: Special Forces v2.0	3/04	<i>Special Forces</i> is the tactical-sim genre at its finest	★★★★☆
Armed & Dangerous	3/04	A straight-faced shooter with great cut-scenes	★★★★☆
Battle Engine Aquila	4/04	Gorgeous and fun <i>MechWarrior</i> -style action, but not deep or groundbreaking	★★★★☆
Battlefield Vietnam	6/04	Scariest, toughest, and prettier than <i>Battlefield 1942</i>	★★★★☆
Beyond Good & Evil	3/04	Gorgeous, stylish, and wholly original, this action-adventure is a gem	★★★★☆
Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	4/04	An entertaining add-on that beefs up the single- and multiplayer games. Rat-a-tat-tat!	★★★★☆
The Black Mirror	2/04	<i>The Black Mirror</i> 's gothic horror doesn't require much reflection	★★★☆☆
Blade and Sword	4/04	A lame <i>Diablo</i> clone that might've been interesting four years ago	★★★☆☆



Breed	7/04	The Breed wants the planet? Let 'em have it.	★★★★☆
Broken Sword 3: The Sleeping Dragon	2/04	<i>Dragon</i> flamboyantly breaks out of the box but drags it around a little too much	★★★★☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Call of Duty	1/04	<i>Call of Duty</i> is so good and so much fun that you'll undoubtedly wish it were longer	★★★★☆
Celebrity Deathmatch	2/04	Save your money by just throwing beer cans at the television	★★★☆☆
Chaser	1/04	A good-looking shooter that's fun only for the first few hours	★★★☆☆
Chrome	2/04	A stunning sci-fi-themed shooter that makes <i>Halo</i> look hollow	★★★★☆
Civilization III: Conquests	4/04	An incredibly refined new version of <i>Civ III</i> with multiplayer that finally works	★★★★☆



Combat Mission: Afrika Korps	4/04	<i>Combat Mission 2.1</i>	★★★★☆
Commandos 3	5/04	Maybe the toughest game ever, and not in a good way	★★★★☆
Conflict: Desert Storm II- Back Baghdad	2/04	At times engaging, but not quite all it can be	★★★☆☆
Conspiracies	5/04	Cheesier than the ripest Greek feta	★★★☆☆
Contract J.A.C.K.	2/04	No franchise shines forever— <i>J.A.C.K.</i> is the first blemish on the <i>NOLF</i> series	★★★☆☆
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	3/04	This game was great when it was free. For \$40, it's just good	★★★★☆
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	2/04	Good expansion for veteran players, but not much for new players	★★★★☆
Dead to Rights	2/04	This no-frills port of an aged, derivative, repetitive shooter was dead on arrival	★★★☆☆
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Corps	7/04	A good historical RTS, despite flawed infantry and some puzzelike maps	★★★★☆

## Game Bliss

Adventure



### Day of the Tentacle

N/A

This off-kilter sequel to *Maniac Mansion* sees Bernard, the original's übergeek hero, fumbling through time in an effort to foil the nefarious Purple Tentacle's world-domination plot.



### Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire

N/A

Arguably the best game in the series, *Trial by Fire* takes players on an *Arabian Nights*-inspired quest to protect the desert kingdom of Shapier from an evil sorcerer's elemental threats.



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Deus Ex 2: Invisible War	3/04	The sequel to <i>Deus Ex</i> is both dumbed down and smarted up	★★★★☆
Dominions II	2/04	The most gameplay of any 4X game available anywhere	★★★★★
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	2/04	Good stuff for fans of the original	★★★★☆
Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age	2/04	A solid entry into the burgeoning historical real-time-strategy subgenre	★★★★☆
FIFA 2004	2/04	It might be a rough console port, but it's still the best soccer game on any platform	★★★★☆
Far Cry	6/04	There's a good, maybe outstanding game lurking underneath all the frustration. Good luck getting at it	★★★★☆
Final Fantasy XI	2/04	A rock-solid MMORPG from one of the most unlikely sources	★★★★☆
FireStarter	6/04	It's better than <i>Deer Hunter</i>	★★★★☆
Freedom Fighters	1/04	Great teamwork tactics, but the PC version drew the short stick	★★★★☆
Gangland	6/04	A lot of possibilities and potential, but the riot of unmanageable action makes it hard to enjoy	★★★★☆
Gothic II	2/04	Better than the first, but still a little too wonky and foreign to be a classic	★★★★☆
Hidden & Dangerous 2	2/04	A really good game hampered by the same pesky bugs and problematic A.I. as the original	★★★★☆
Highway to the Reich	1/04	An excellent system gets better	★★★★☆
Homeworld 2	12/03	It's no <i>Cataclysm</i> —it's not even <i>Homeworld</i>	★★★★☆
Horizons: Empire of Istar	5/04	More of the same, with dragons	★★★★☆
Jack the Ripper	5/04	A good Ripper story butchered by bugs, feeble puzzles, and a bad ending	★★★☆☆
Jetfighter V	2/04	A rare combination of frustration and boredom	★★★☆☆



**Judge Dredd: Dredd Versus Death** 7/04 Dredd-fully underwhelming ★★★★★

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	4/04	A nice attempt at a <i>Commandos</i> clone in a fresh setting, with horrible A.I.	★★★★☆
Knights of the Old Republic	2/04	A total masterpiece from BioWare. Easily the best RPG of the year and possibly the best <i>Star Wars</i> game ever made	★★★★★
Lock-On: Modern Air Combat	03/04	A tasty treat for starving jet-sim fans, even without the dynamic campaign	★★★★☆
Lords of EverQuest	03/04	A fairly decent attempt at capitalizing on a tried-and-true ( <i>WarCraft III</i> ) formula	★★★★☆



<b>Lords of the Realm III</b>	7/04	A clumsy, series-ending combo of real-time and strategy	★★★★☆
<b>LOTR: The Return of the King</b>	2/04	Check your brain at the door for this sword-swinging, spell-slinging good time	★★★★☆
<b>Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds</b>	4/04	A painful fighting game in which you don't fight and don't use cards. Run away	★★★☆☆



<b>Manhunt</b>	7/04	Lots of gore, little innovation	★★★★☆
<b>Massive Assault</b>	1/04	Lemmings gone turn-based	★★★★☆
<b>Max Payne 2</b>	1/04	Improves upon nearly every facet but doesn't mess with the formula	★★★★☆
<b>Midnight Nowhere</b>	2/04	Horrible horror with a zero for a hero	★★★★☆
<b>MVP Baseball 2004</b>	03/04	A good game that could be destined for great things but isn't quite ready for The Show	★★★★☆
<b>Mysterious Journey II</b>	3/04	For puzzle players who like pretty pictures, too	★★★★☆

## Johnny's Picks

CGW staff faves



### Sam & Max Hit the Road

This early CD-ROM adventure recalls the

amusing misadventures of a canine shamus and a hyperkinetic rabbit thing. It was one of my favorite games growing up, as well as one of LucasArts' best adventure titles. The song in there about edutainment—hilarious!



### No One Lives Forever

Yes, *Half-Life* and other FPS games have a special

place in my heart, but the exploits of superspy Cate Archer in the original *No One Lives Forever* just combined action, stealth, and humor so well. What can I say? I like "teh funny."



### Unreal Tournament 2004

*Tourney 2003* is missing a certain spark the original game has, but *2004* does a

great job of recapturing it. Darren broke his mouse over this game—smashed it into splinters (funny!). Maybe I shot him in the back too often.



### Search for the King N/A

Accolade's shameless attempt at copying Sierra's popular *Leisure Suit Larry* series actually turned out pretty good. Circus performers, rock stars, and a guy named Les Manley—how much goofier can a game get?



### Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

The third chapter in the *Broken Sword* series follows an American lawyer and a French journalist as they investigate a series of events that lead to a source of unspeakable darkness.



## Ladies of E3

Our booth babes of the year



### Tera Patrick

Eidos may not have had a Lara Croft look-alike at this year's E3, but we certainly won't hold that against them—instead, adult film actress Tera Patrick was on hand to sign autographs. Oh, and she was promoting some game, too. What were we talking about again?



### BloodRayne

Another hot, gothic BloodRayne look-alike was on hand at the Majesco booth to help promote the upcoming *BloodRayne 2*. Check out the details on her costume. And those authentic blades! And her cute...nose.... Yeah, right.



### Vampire Chick

This young lady was at Activision's booth promoting *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*. Ryan really seemed to dig her, which is apparent from the 47 pictures he took of her. Sorry to burst your bubble, Ryan, but she's just smiling at you because she's being paid to.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
NASCAR Thunder 2004	3/04	Not bad, but we expected more	★★★★☆
NBA Live 2004	3/04	One of the best 5-on-5 games for any platform	★★★★★
Need for Speed Underground	3/04	Racing doesn't get much better—unless you're in a real car	★★★★★
Neighbors From Hell	1/04	A fun way to spend a single afternoon	★★★★★



Nemesis of the Roman Empire	7/04	Possibly interesting to mule traders, history buffs, and Bulgarian RTS fans	★★★★☆
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	3/04	A five-star expansion sadly undone by bugs	★★★★★
NHL 2K4	1/04	The best NHL experience on virtual ice	★★★★★
No Man's Land	1/04	Another follow-the-numbers RTS	★★★★☆
Nosferatu	2/04	Well, at least it sounds spooky	★★★★☆
Once Upon a Knight	2/04	A decent-enough RTS bogged down by a lame RPG and the mistaken belief that milk is funny	★★★★☆
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	4/04	If you're into third-person fighting games with robots, knock yourself out	★★★★★



Painkiller	7/04	Doom who?	★★★★★
Patrician III	2/04	Little more than a glorified Patrician II patch	★★★★☆
Pax Romana	3/04	A decent primer for Rome: Total War	★★★★☆
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2/04	A decent idea at its core, but not worth the price	★★★★☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Railroad Tycoon 3	2/04	You don't have to love trains to enjoy the historical and economic challenges here—but a little train love won't hurt	★★★★★
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	6/04	There's no excuse for this game to have the same sorry bugs and lame A.I. that plagued the original	★★★★☆
Rebels Prison Escape	1/04	Go get a copy of Commandos 2 instead	★★★★☆



Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	7/04	Almost perfect...and then it crashes	★★★★★
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Sacred	7/04	Sacred both improves upon and diminishes the Diablo model	★★★★☆
Savage	1/04	A potential blockbuster marginalized by its own delivery	★★★★☆
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	3/04	If the combat didn't stink, it might have been cheesy, over-the-top fun	★★★★☆
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	4/04	A skimpy add-on that's barely enough to satisfy true Shadowbane junkies	★★★★☆
Silent Hill 3	3/04	In SH3, the only things that go bump in the night are klutzy monsters	★★★★☆
Silent Storm	4/04	Like a gorgeous WWII mod to the revered X-Com. Highly recommended	★★★★★
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	1/04	The new focus on transportation adds substantially to an already excellent game experience	★★★★★

## Game Blues

Adventure



### King's Quest VII

A blemish on what is an otherwise fantastic series, *KQ7*'s beautiful visuals and storybook-like charm were undercut by its horrible interface and a staggering number of critical game-ending bugs.



### Gabriel Knight 3

Despite luring original *Gabriel Knight* voice actor Tim Curry back to the title role for this third monster-hunting outing, Sierra managed to wreck the series with a thoroughly asinine attempt at moving it into the 3D realm.



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Space Colony	1/04	A clever combination of real-time strategy and <i>The Sims</i> isn't clever enough to hold your interest for long	★★★☆☆



<b>Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow</b>	6/04	A four-and-a-half-star game riddled with far too many critical bugs	★★★☆☆
<b>Squad Assault: Western Front</b>	3/04	Better than <i>GI Combat</i> , like anchovies are better than lutefisk	★★★☆☆
<b>Star Chamber</b>	5/04	Original, fun, competitive, and free to try. What're you waiting for?	★★★★☆
<b>Star Fury</b>	2/04	Open-ended and flexible without being too complex	★★★★☆
<b>Starksy &amp; Hutch</b>	1/04	The bad rep of the '70s continues with this crappy game from a crappy license	★★★☆☆
<b>Syberia II</b>	5/04	Visually stunning, but the pedestrian gameplay saps some of the fun	★★★★☆
<b>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</b>	5/04	It's not as bad as you'd imagine—it's worse	★★★☆☆
<b>Temple</b>	1/04	Yet another good game marred by bugs. Wheeee!	★★★☆☆
<b>Terminator 3: War of the Machines</b>	4/04	Ugly and just plain terrible	★★★☆☆
<b>The Hobbit</b>	2/04	Standard console fare, lightly Tolkien-flavored	★★★☆☆
<b>The Simpsons: Hit &amp; Run</b>	2/04	The best <i>GTAS</i> rip-off ever, and a must-have for <i>Simpsons</i> fans	★★★★☆
<b>The Sims: Makin' Magic</b>	1/04	The final <i>Sims</i> expansion plays like a charm	★★★★☆
<b>Titans of Steel</b>	1/04	An old-school game with little crossover potential	★★★☆☆
<b>Title Bout Championship Boxing</b>	5/04	The undisputed heavyweight champion of boxing sims	★★★★☆
<b>Two Thrones</b>	6/04	It gets an extra half point for the low price	★★★☆☆
<b>UFO: Aftermath</b>	1/04	<i>UFO: Aftermath</i> is a good game that should have waited three weeks and one big patch longer to be released	★★★☆☆
<b>Unreal Tournament 2004</b>	6/04	Too busy shooting...must...write...review	★★★★☆
<b>Uru</b>	2/04	Some good puzzles, some bad action, no story, lots of familiar elements—maybe the eventual online content can make it more compelling	★★★☆☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Vegas Tycoon	4/04	A colorful and entertaining casino builder that fell shy of the jackpot	★★★★☆
Victoria	3/04	Good game, bad bugs	★★★★☆
War of the Ring	2/04	Good use of Middle-earth elements in a sadly mundane RTS	★★★★☆

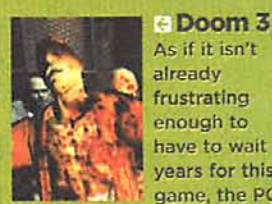


<b>Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior</b>	7/04	If you don't have the latest <i>Unreal</i> yet, play <i>Half-Life</i> ...or <i>Doom</i> ...or....	★★★★☆
<b>Warlords IV</b>	1/04	A strangely joyless version of a classic strategy franchise	★★★☆☆
<b>Wars &amp; Warriors: Joan of Arc</b>	5/04	Though it has its moments, Joan lacks a certain <i>je ne sais quoi</i> .	★★★☆☆



<b>Worms 3D</b>	5/04	Short doses of personality don't overcome the long bouts of frustration	★★★☆☆
<b>X-2: The Threat</b>	3/04	A much deeper yet less playable version of <i>Freelancer</i>	★★★☆☆
<b>XIII</b>	2/04	This Belgian import waffles between fun and frustration, excitement and tedium	★★★☆☆
<b>You Don't Know Jack: The Lost Gold</b>	5/04	Some treasures are best left buried	★★★☆☆
<b>X-Plane 7.40</b>	4/04	Lets would-be aircraft designers create a wild variety of flyable vehicles	★★★★☆
<b>Zero Hour</b>	1/04	C&C better than it's ever been	★★★★☆

## JUST COME OUT ALREADY!



### Doom 3

As if it isn't already frustrating enough to have to wait years for this game, the PC version of *Doom 3* wasn't even at this year's E3. Instead, we had to settle for a playable version of the freakin' Xbox port.



### Half-Life 2

We hate to beat a dead horse—or, in this case, to bash a sticky puddle of vaguely horselike entrails with a giant bludgeoning device—but *Half-Life 2* needs to hurry up and come out. With any luck, maybe the game will make its September 30 release date, even if it is a full year late.



### Duke Nukem Forever

Speaking of dead horses... yeah, we couldn't help ourselves. Poor Duke has devolved into a sad punch line over the course of the past five years, and our chances of actually seeing this title come to fruition are slim to none.



### Jack the Ripper

★★★☆☆  
Puzzles make or break adventure games. Unfortunately, *Jack the Ripper*'s lame puzzles—not to mention the assortment of bugs—place it squarely in the "broken" category.



### Wayne's World

N/A

Capstone made a horrible attempt at imitating the LucasArts' adventure-game model in the early '90s with this movie tie-in game, which has metalheads Wayne and Garth setting up a pizza delivery service to earn money. Um, what?





# Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins

**B** DEVELOPER: Big Huge Games PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios GENRE: Real-time Strategy ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: Pentium III 500MHz, 128MB RAM, 900MB install RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2-6 players)

## Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots

American History T vs. B



**B**ruce 00:00 As long as there are real-time-strategy games, there will be real-time-strategy-game expansions. And as long as there are those two things, Tom will be assured of beating me twice at the same game. We played *Rise of Nations* last year, and Tom won. As soon as Tom heard there was going to be an expansion, he marked the release date on his calendar with a big, red marker. Probably. That's just my artist's rendition of Tom's everyday home life.

**Tom 00:00** First, I don't even own a big, red marker. I explain to Bruce that it will be easier on him if he surrenders before the fighting starts. It's like that scene in the movies when the two generals ride out onto the field to parley before a battle starts. But we're doing it through chat windows instead of from horseback. When Bruce declines,

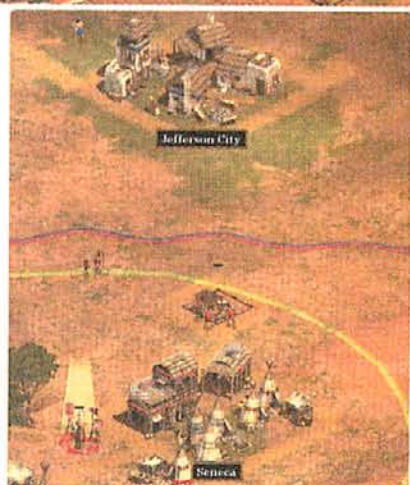
I start building up my Iroquois empire. I have bison, peacocks, and amber near my capital city, which is perfect stuff for the party I'm going to throw when I win.

### U.S.A! U.S.A!

**Bruce 00:31** When *Thrones & Patriots* came out, I graciously offered to let Tom play as the Americans. "Do you want to play as the Americans, Tom?" I asked him. Just like that. Instead of actually answering my question, Tom started complaining about how it was ridiculous that there's no United Nations side, and then got into some long game-design argument with himself about whether it might actually make sense not to have the United Nations in the game, as it would have to win every single time. I stopped listening around the time he began calling Kosovo "Bosnia." I hope Ashcroft's laser satellites are watching him real good.

**Tom 00:32** Remember to send your entry for this month's What the Hell is Bruce Geryk Talking About? contest to *Computer Gaming World*, c/o Ziff Davis Media, San Francisco, CA 94105. The winner will receive a free copy of the *Matrix Revolutions* DVD. [No, they won't. There is no contest. Send nothing. —Ed.]

**Bruce 2:12** Tom gave me some tips before we started, in the hopes that I'd at least be able to give him a competitive game. One of



**Two cities square off over an area known among the Iroquois as the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die.**

the tips he didn't give me was that if I slow the game down to very slow, he starts getting impatient and breaks out his Xbox to play at the same time. Consequently, our game replay said our game took 42 minutes, but it really lasted six hours. Later on, I started pausing the game at random times and asking him if we maybe should stop because the game kept freezing. Tom said he could tell I was pausing the game because the game messages said, "Game



**Preemptive Iroquois raiding for fun, profit, and peace of mind from catapults.**





**Tom**  
Last month:  
Tom caught lots of fish  
in the *World of Warcraft*  
beta.



**Bruce**  
Last month:  
Bruce watched Tom catch  
lots of fish in the *World*  
of *WarCraft* beta.



The Iroquois do a little whaling on the side for supplemental iron.



paused by Bruce," but I just kept denying it. I wonder if he believed me the way he probably believes Benon Sevan about the oil-for-food "misunderstanding."

**Tom 2:13** Remember, that's *Computer Gaming World*, c/o Ziff Davis Media, San Francisco, CA 94105.

**Bruce 4:54** My first city is up and running. I'm overproducing wood. Cool. Tom is probably inventing videogames.

**Tom 6:20** There's a large mountain in the center of the map. In the poetic/obvious style of the Iroquois, I'll call it Big Mountain in the Middle. The rest of the map is dotted with smaller mountains that'll only support three or four miners, but this big guy is prime real estate for a city with a foundry. I suspect this fact isn't lost on Bruce, so I foresee an extended and bloody battle for Big Mountain in the Middle.

**Bruce 7:49** I just aged up, which would be great except that Tom did this like a thousand hours ago. It feels like a thousand hours. Is this game over yet? I wanted to age up, too, but I had to research the money thing so I could raise my wood cap, and then I had to research the military thing for some reason, and the whole time I was just like, man, how did Tom age up so fast? I still have more territory than Tom does, which sounds good but really isn't, because he always fixes that about halfway through the game.

**Tom 7:55** Being a huge fan of the Iroquois' Mohawk spearmen, my free senate building chooses despotism, a form of government that gives me cheaper infantry.

**Bruce 8:09** I can always tell what kind of game it's going to be. If Tom changes his government to despotism, it means he's coming after me right away. If he changes to republic, he is going to wait to kill me until later. Either way, getting that message always reminds me to start building the government house, because I totally forgot about it.

**Tom 8:58** I've built Seneca at the end of a

valley formed by Big Mountain in the Middle and Smaller Mountain Off to One Side of It. This valley will make a perfect killing zone, so I call it the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die.

**Bruce 10:10** I'm building my third city—Jefferson City—right across a narrow mountain pass from one of Tom's cities. One thing I've learned is that it really pisses Tom off when you build close to him and then start throwing soldiers at him. Until he wins, of course. But pissing him off is just about all I have to look forward to in this game.

## Death to Bruce!

**Tom 10:51** Jefferson City just interrupted my control of Big Mountain in the Middle. The fighting is probably going to start much earlier than I expected, and this area won't be safe for metal mining. I'll need lots of metal, so I tap some of the smaller mountains and send out whaling ships. I start gathering Mohawk spearmen at the mouth of the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die, where I build a tower to keep the pesky Americans at bay.

**Bruce 10:59** With Jefferson City up, it's time to build some towers, a couple barracks, and a stable. While I do this, Tom starts on his own tower. I'm ahead of the curve! I'm winning! I'm winning!

**Tom 11:38** I've supplemented my resources with furs and wool, which go great with all my peacock feathers. My people win the award for best dressed. We celebrate by building the world-renowned Pyramids of Onondaga.

**Bruce 12:37** Commerce limits again. This time it's both food and wood. There are about a million things I need to research besides commerce, yet now I have to add this to the list. While I'm not interested in having the United Nations manage really anything, I'd be open to the idea of maybe, just possibly, having them manage stuff like this. I mean, how much harm could they do?

**Tom 13:20** My Iroquois scouts are called Takohs. Yeah, ha ha, like "tacos." It's really funny until you realize that they're invisible sooner than other scouts, so I can spy on enemies undetected. Unfortunately, Bruce has figured this out and he keeps counterscouts sitting around. Not only does this shut down my intel-gathering efforts, but it means Bruce has scouts hanging around who can see my armies (one of the Iroquois' most significant advantages is that their armies are invisible when sitting in friendly territory). So I hide my troops inside Seneca. In the meantime, I'm trying to maneuver tacos around to keep an eye on what Bruce is doing.

**Bruce 14:40** It's almost time for Tom to get a nasty surprise. My first catapult! He'll never know what hit him! I mean, besides a catapult.

**Tom 14:45** My taco can see your catapult, Geryk! We're way too close to each other for me to abide siege engines, so it's time for a preemptive strike through the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die. A side benefit of this is that my despot will gather raiding resources during the attack. ☹



Tom changes the faculty at Bruce's university.

**I just aged up, which would be great except that Tom did this like a thousand hours ago.**



**G** He pops off some decoy troops and leads my troops across the border. I smash the catapult with my Mohawk spearmen and use javeliners to cover their backs. It's over pretty quickly and I pull back, having done enough damage for the time being. My men retreat into Seneca to hide and heal up.

**Bruce 15:32** If one of you reading this right now was responsible for secretly watching me play and phoning it in to Tom Chick, you're on my list that I am sending to Ashcroft. Somehow Tom figured out that right now would be the perfect time to attack me with a bigger army than I have. I wonder how he knew that. Now Tom is attacking me with more guys led by one of those general guys. Imagine my surprise when I went to find my own general and realized I don't have one because I still haven't built the government thingy. And I wonder why I lose these games.

**Tom 15:55** The Americans are a defensive nation because they get an economic bonus for every infantry unit they have standing around. So when Bruce loses his army in a battle, his losses are compounded by the fact that he's also reducing his income. The American army works best as a peacetime deterrent. Which is why it's in my interest to wipe it out even if I sustain heavy casualties.

**Bruce 17:50** I aged up to Medieval, but Tom did that like last week. I also notice that he has a merchant collecting a resource right next to one of my cities, and he's not taking any damage. Did I forget to research that attrition thing?

**Tom 18:05** Bruce has another catapult. Time for a quick war party. It's the ol' Iroquois hit and fade.

**Bruce 18:08** Every time I'm just about to get a real army together, that guy calls Tom and tells him what I'm doing, and he attacks me with a bigger one. This is one of those times.

**Tom 21:50** Now I'm building the world-famous Hanging Gardens of Toronto. I love this new wonder, as it gives you a leg up on knowledge income and makes your economic research much cheaper. Plus, it looks like it would be a great place to build

a roller coaster.

**Bruce 22:03** The Americans build their first wonder instantly, as long as no one else has started it. I finally put my first one down: Terra Cotta Army. This will keep cranking out military units for me while I manage more important things, like how many two-by-fours my peasants can load onto their carts and take to market. Meanwhile, Tom is laughing at me from orbit.

**Tom 22:30** Our territory limits have neatly divided the island in half. Although the fighting is focused between Seneca and Jefferson City in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die, I build a few observation posts along the outer reaches of our border. These posts and my tacos will keep an eye on what Bruce is doing elsewhere.

**Bruce 22:45** I start bombarding Tom's tower on our border, which once again draws Tom's army in. This time, I kill all his guys. Then I manage to knock the tower down and, for good measure, head for Tom's city.

**Tom 23:00** My Mohawk spearmen are the perfect counters for Bruce's new knights. But what I didn't count on were the half-dozen squads of crossbowmen he kept off to one side. As he moves in on Seneca, I hunker down and wait for reinforcements.

**Bruce 25:20** Things don't go too badly here, although I'm not sure how Tom cranks out military units so fast. I finally pull back behind my border, only to watch Tom age up to Gunpowder and me hit the commerce cap again with food, wood, and gold. It's a trifecta. I once again need to research a bazillion things.

**Tom 25:30** I have the edge over Bruce when it comes to unit management. I'm reminded of this when his trebuchet rolls up next to my city and just sits there like it's waiting for a parking space.

**Bruce 27:00** It's just back-and-forth over Seneca now. I had three trebuchets going at once, but Tom destroyed two, but I killed most of his guys, but then...I think you get the idea.

**Tom 27:12** That was close. My warriors drove back the American aggressors and now I have arquebusiers firing at Bruce from across the border while my sexy little Hiawatha spies lure his units over to my side.

**Bruce 32:01** As he usually does when things aren't going his way, Tom resorts to bribery. It's not like the crossbowmen he bribed make that much difference, but it's the principle of the thing. I'm starting to lose the back-and-forth here. Time to think about moving the battle elsewhere.

**Tom 32:06** How'd he get Gunpowder Age this quickly? Now his arquebusiers are firing back at me. This is way too close for comfort. I need to secure the Valley Where Lots of



**G** The Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die lives up to its name.

Bruce's Troops Will Die, so I start a miniature Maginot Line.

**Bruce 34:36** Tom has built three towers on the border near Jefferson City, making it hard for me to mass my troops. Fortunately, I have a surprise attack brewing way to the west. It's kind of a backdoor plan. But when I try to sneak around to his capital, I find a little tower, way out in the middle of nowhere. Now he knows I'm coming.

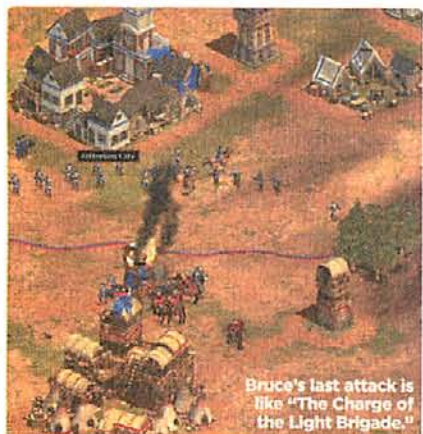
**Tom 35:13** There's nothing like a well-placed observation post. I see Bruce making a thrust for my capital on my far left flank. Nice try, but it's a fairly simple matter for me to pull my army back from the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die.

**Bruce 36:06** My knights are rampaging through the fields of Tom's capital, Onondaga. The only problem is that they could use some support. If Tom moves his army from Seneca to engage them, I have my Jefferson City force ready to sweep in.

**Tom 36:30** I hit his attack from the side, quickly taking out his lone supply wagon. This leaves his cannons helpless and his troops hungry. With the help of attrition, it doesn't take long to mop up the rest of his forces while my men enjoy a hearty meal of bison burgers and peacock pie.

**Bruce 37:07** With the failure of my attack on Onondaga, I push on Seneca from Jefferson City, but it looks like Herr Chick still has a pretty powerful force there. I knock down one of his towers, but we're soon bogged down in this go-nowhere warfare.

**Tom 37:10** Bruce has banged the remainder of his army up against Seneca's defenses in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die. As I'm moving my forces back up from Onondaga, I easily sweep over what used to be a hotly contested border. Taking almost no losses, I quickly capture Jefferson City, which opens a straight path to Washington. Soon, I'm laying siege to the American capital. Bruce sues for peace and I move all his people onto reservations where I allow them to open casinos. I build a theme park in the Valley Where Lots of Bruce's Troops Will Die and erect a roller coaster on the Hanging Gardens of Toronto. ■



**As he usually does when things aren't going his way, Tom resorts to bribery.**



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## Easy Does It

Because I ain't got time to bleed

**W**hen I was growing up, my mother had a little saying she'd share with me from time to time: "Get back in the root cellar or it's the curling iron." She also used to say, "Win or lose, it's how you play the game. But winning beats losing any day of the week." And you know what? She was right. The cool, damp comfort of that wormy root cellar was a better option than having my eyelids ritualistically seared by a girdle-clad hillbilly bride in a Gilligan mask.

But she was right about the winning thing as well. As I've teetered unsteadily down the rocky path of life, I have discovered that you will take fewer bloody tumbles if you keep the training wheels on. And that is why I play pretty much every game on Easy difficulty.

Let's make one thing clear right off: I don't review games on Easy. Those, I play on Normal or Hard, because that is, well, just the right thing to do. But when I play games for—get this—recreational, leisurely enjoyment, I dumb it down and charge on through. Incredibly, I find smiting evil, developing characters, and negotiating jumping puzzles downright enjoyable when I succeed without reloading some 500 times. Go figure.

Now, there are those of you, great, big, butch, tough, delusional guys with big, hairy Popeye forearms and stubble that will splinter the sturdiest razor, who will dismiss my easygoing habit as the most pathetic of pantywaist mincing. To you, I say: 1) What's it like to be mistaken for Tyne Daly? and 2) Do you really think your prowess at *Counter-Strike* and *Age of Mythology* makes you more of a man? Oh...I see. Well, no one else on God's green earth thinks so, Count Dorkula. Yet, to a certain segment of the gaming community, playing on anything other than Expert somehow diminishes one's masculinity. To those so sadly misguided, I say that quoting Doctor Who, arguing the merits of 2nd edition versus 3rd edition AD&D rules, calling yourself Legolas420 in *Magic Online*, and having a Seven of Nine poster pinned to the ceiling above your bed is much more damaging to your virility than daring to lower the hit points of enemies in some shooter.

I like a challenge as much as the next guy, but I get just about enough challenge making it through the day without gutting the mush-mouthed parolee without the mental capacity to adequately



**"Get back in the root cellar or it's the curling iron."**

process "No onions, please" at the Quizno's near work. Shouldn't another day of successfully smothering my homicidal urges instead of the ugly kid across the street who writes "Eat krap" on the dust of my car windows be rewarded with a nice blood-spattered pile of dead bots in *Unreal Tournament 2004* instead of successive last-place finishes? After a full day enduring Jeff's frequent and sudden crying jags, why would I want to watch my party perish over and over again in *Knights of the Old Republic*? Isn't one girlishly pigtailed, chronically weepy man in oversized footie pajamas on this planet one too many? I think so. And so does Jeff's wife. But I digress....

One of the many weird things about this job—other than the nagging odor of sweating cheese—is that you never have time to play games. Seriously. We're forever evaluating beta versions for pre-views, sampling games to verify free-

lancers' rating suggestions, or playing through something on an invariably tight deadline in order to write a review. It's hard to keep loving games, even good ones, when you have one weekend to barrel through one and produce 800 (hopefully) sparkling words about it. Playing *Fight Night* on my Xbox on Easy means that my big-eared Delmore Zippy character gets to be the light heavy-weight champion in the limited amount of time I can devote to this game before the next *Daikatana* consumes more of the precious few hours I have left in my life.

Without Easy, I never would have made it through *Baldur's Gate II*. Without the extra saves in *Hitman 2*, I would have quit three missions in. I never would have conquered the planet in any *Civ* game without the help that Easy gave me. Easy lets me have fun when I can, and isn't that what it's all about? **Robert Coffey**  
robert\_coffey@ziffdavis.com



WILL SMITH

# i,ROBOT

ONE MAN SAW IT COMING

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