# COMPUTER

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

# GAMING

## WORLD

### 125+ GAMES
REVIEWED & RATED!

## DOOM 3
## REVIEWED!
IT'S HERE AT LAST.
WAS IT WORTH THE WAIT?
**SEE PAGE 70**

**EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST!**

# MEDAL OF HONOR:
# PACIFIC ASSAULT

**HANDS-ON** WITH EA'S EXPLOSIVE NEW WWII SHOOTER

**SPECIAL FEATURE!**
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# THE DELL XPS GAMING PCs.
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Inspiron XPS Notebook shown with Skullz design option.

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A 21ST CENTURY LOOK AT ANCIENT BATTLES
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## DON'T RELIVE HISTORY...MAKE IT!™

"Why I may never play Battlefield 1942 again"

*– PC GAMER, March 2004*

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■ COVER STORY

# MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

In this month's cover story, we've got the skinny on **Pacific Assault's** multiplayer features—as well as a few other new surprises.

**56**

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JEAN-PIERRE ROY

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## HALL OF FAME
It's that time of year again: time for a new round of *CGW* Hall of Fame inductees! And no, we didn't induct Will Wright again.

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## PREVIEWS

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## THIS MONTH ON 1UP.COM

### CGW.1UP.COM

Which games are tearing up the charts on our official website? To no one's surprise, the most popular games of the moment are **The Sims 2**, **Half-Life 2**, and **Doom 3**. There's also an up-to-the-minute gaming news feed, gameplay tips on everything from **Silent Storm** to **Final Fantasy XI**, and timely release dates for everything you're looking forward to playing.

> CGW BUZZOMETER

### CGW-RYAN.1UP.COM

Ryan Scott likes **Akira Kurosawa** movies, comic books, and pictures of the Punisher punching polar bears in the face. And he hates that annoying Fanta soda theme song. You know, the one that they play in the theater before every movie. His blog is a random assortment of aimless thoughts, and his game collection is...well, it's so big that it won't even fit. Or maybe he's just too damn lazy to tally up his 19-year collection of floppy disks and Intellivision cartridges

### BOARDS.1UP.COM/

As usual, our *CGW* Game Discussion and Magazine Comments message boards are laden with the same sorts of criticisms, comments, and undecipherable drivel that you find on pretty much every Internet message board. Except ours is peppered with executive editor Robert Coffey's trademark insanity and freelancer Arcadian Del Sol's trademark bitter anger. So pop on over, say hi, and tell us what you like or dislike about the magazine.

# 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.

Check out the **cool new stuff** you can do!

If you have a GameFace, we have a place for you to put it.

**YOUR NAME HERE**

YOUR FACE HERE

**YOUR GAMEFACE**

Show off your game collection and trade games with others!

**YOUR GAMES**

# Get YOUR GameFace on.

# Doomed

## Hey, why don't I get a haiku, too?

**JEFF GREEN** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

So, I was sitting in my office, feet on the desk, flask in hand, breathing a sigh of relief that another fantabulous issue was in the bag when the big news came: Id Software and Activision had announced that *Doom 3* had finally gone gold and was ready for review. That was the good news. The bad news was that if we wanted to review it in this issue and avoid waiting a month, we had to go to Activision's office in Santa Monica and play the game there. The risk of piracy was too high for the company to let even one copy out of its sights—an understandable worry. The problem: That's not standard operating procedure for us. We want to experience games exactly as you would. And you're not going to be playing it at Activision on a state-of-the-art PC with the developers standing over your shoulder telling you how cool their game is. But this is *Doom 3*! How could we say no?! So here's what we did. Darren Gladstone and I flew down there. Darren played the game from start to finish, while I was the U.N. observer, ensuring the process was kosher. And it was. Darren played the whole thing, with no meddling from Id or Activision. They left him alone. And he loved it. And I did, too. And so will you. It still wasn't our ideal way to review a game, but this is a crucial game and a crucial review. *Doom 3* is everything we hoped it could be. Upgrade now.

**KRISTEN SALVATORE**
MANAGING EDITOR

"Mom," I hear them call
"Deadline extension for me?"
Not on your life, pal

**ROBERT COFFEY**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Sleepytime crawlspace
Hot drifter sammich wid cheez
Bathtub filled with tears

**DARREN GLADSTONE**
SENIOR EDITOR

Games: *Doom 3, Missing*
Head reeling, too much writing
He needs a drink now

**WILLIAM O'NEAL**
TECH EDITOR

So many choices
Tequila? Bourbon? Lap dance?
Wil loves his vices

**JOHNNY LIU**
PREVIEWS EDITOR

Running marathon
Help SF AIDS Foundation
Great cause, please support

**RYAN SCOTT**
CD-ROM EDITOR

Been here for a year
Gotten moved around four times
Where is my stapler?

**ROB SCHULTZ**
ART DIRECTOR

Mister fancypants
Sphincter says what? Tell me please.
Jeff, you are bossman.

**MICHAEL JENNINGS**
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

Screenshots multiplying
Layers merge into design
A thing of danger

What If grass had nerves and mouths to scream when you mowed It? Whoa...

"Realizing Your Potential"

The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become. —Charles Du Bois

How's this for a thought-provoking quote? I recommend you read through this quote three or four times to really absorb the subtleties of it.

Here are some questions for you to think about that build on this thought.

Who are you right now?

How do your colleagues see you?

How would they describe you?

How would your best friend describe you?

Pick out 10 words or phrases that these people would use to describe you—choose five positives or strengths and five negatives or weaknesses. Take a couple of minutes and do it, please.

This describes who you are right now. Is this who you want to be?

Even more important, is this the best you can/could be?

How much of your potential are you actually realizing? There is who you are right now, and then there is who you could be right now.

How would you like to be described as a leader or manager?

How would you like to be described as a friend?

A question to ask yourself daily is what actions can you take today, this week, and this month to move toward being the best you could be?

The size of the gap that exists between who you are and who you should/could be directly correlates to your success and happiness in life.

So few of us are really operating at the level we are capable of.

**Ross McBride**
**Managing Director**
**The Corporate Performance Institute**
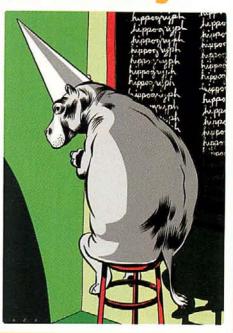
Sadly, Ross, we at *CGW are* really operating at the highest level we are capable of. After too many deep-fryer calamities than we can count or care to remember, we have—like the most foul, stagnant water imaginable—sunk to our

# Je suis Monsieur Pantalon de Smarty!

On page 44 of your August issue, the comment was made: "With a name like 'hippogryph,' shouldn't the creature look half hippo?"

To clarify, the name hippogryph comes from the Greek "hippos," meaning horse and "griffen," which means griffin. Thus, the hippogryph is a half horse, half griffin, with the front of griffin (which is simply an eagle) and the back of a horse. Hippopotamuses, on the other hand, are literally "water horses." I hope that from this point on we can avoid any confusion.

**Guardian of the Myths**

Thank you so much for guarding the myths. We, like the rest of America, salute you and your awe-inspiring devotion to this most sacred duty. But we're puzzled: Why doesn't Merv Griffin look more like an eagle?

appropriate level. We offer your intelligent, thought-provoking rhetoric to our younger readers, at least a handful of which might not be beyond saving.

## Crusader: No Luck

I was flipping through an old magazine when I saw that you named *Crusader: No Remorse* the most underrated Hall of Fame game. Second to *X-COM,* this game started more fights between me and my brother than any other game on our one computer, and now we can't play it anymore. My version (the only version) is DOS only. Do you know how I could load it or where I could get a Windows version?

**David Kovacs**

Sorry, David, we don't. Back when we finally gave *Crusader* its due and put it in the Hall of Fame, we tried playing it in order to get new screenshots—and just to have an awesome good time. No dice. We couldn't get it working and we don't know of any Windows version, either. Life...she is a chain-smoking bitch, no?

## Kudos Korner

I just received my (OK, my husband's) August copy of *CGW,* and I have to give kudos to Eric Johnston, the senior software engineer at LucasArts, for opening up his heart to leukemia survivor Ben Duskin. God bless him for helping make a young boy's wish come true. And not surprisingly, it didn't take "years and millions of dollars to create" the game or make the wish come true.

**Iva F.**

We have to agree with you. This is probably the coolest story of the year in gaming.

# Mail Bites

Please add more free, full-version games on DVD discs! More DVD cover mounts, please!

—Rodel Rufo

Most people spend their days dealing with jerks of all kinds who inflict generous amounts of frustration upon them. Who needs that in their games?

—Richstex

## What's so bad about San Diego?

At the risk of having to enter the witness protection program, change my name, and relocate to San Diego, I feel the need to point out that Mr. Coffey's view on difficulty settings is a just bit askew. Not all of us play games for a living. Some of us work full-time jobs as software engineers and spend weekends going door-to-door selling subscriptions to *Jet* magazine only to barely make ends meet. Playing a game on Normal or Expert difficulty level is not about being masculine—it's about having a nondiminished gaming experience. If you wish to mindlessly blast through 90 levels of *Half-Life 2* on Easy and ruin the experience for yourself, then so be it. But does Mr. Coffey expect me to run down to the local CompUSA, plop down $90 on a special edition (that I've been waiting three years to be released), then run back home and finish it in one three-hour sitting on Easy? Then what? I would find this, to say the least, a bit unfulfilling. I suggest that Mr. Coffey take a step back and try to see things from a normal gamer's perspective. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must get back to packing. (Now where did I leave that curling iron?)

P.S. And no, I've never been mistaken for Tyne Daly. Well...maybe Rosie O'Donnell, but never Tyne Daly.

**Todd Wilkinson**

You make some good points, Todd. Then you completely undercut your argument by confessing to your $90 outlay for some marketeer's boondoggle, and it becomes clear that you, sir, are a millionaire! Obviously, your insanely luxurious lifestyle means you have not only the time to play all games on the hardest setting, but you can do so on a solid-gold computer while wearing a spun-gold tuxedo surrounded by supermodels in platinum G-strings. Nice try.

## Making lemonade

I noticed a lot of people sending in letters telling you how outraged they were over the *Sync* covering—apparently they missed the true genius of the idea. I felt I'd pass along just how great of an idea I thought it was with a recent event. I discovered a moth flying around in my room. I was determined to destroy it, and destroy it I did. Using the *Sync* covering from the June 2004 issue, I was able to kill the moth without damaging the actual magazine cover! I later used the cover to foil a bank robbery and save the president's life.

Kudos to the geniuses behind that marketing ploy!

**Will Crawford**

## Bruce and Tom to the Rescue

I really liked the Tom vs. Bruce *Thrones & Patriots* playoff in your August issue. It was totally hysterical. I'm like everybody else: I lead a frantic life and need a laugh once in a while. Maybe people get more stuff when they get older, but they can still get stressed out. If you think having a boss is sometimes bad, try having a business partner. With a wife, kids, an ex, a staff, property, vehicles, a microwave, a vacuum cleaner, and a mood watch, something is always broken or someone is always out of shape. Everybody's the same. We all need to get away from annoying people (like Jeff) and have a few laughs. All the more reason articles like Bruce and Tom's are so great. Good going, guys, and keep up the good work. (Sometimes your articles even have some good tips, but that's secondary.)

While I'm on the topic of annoying people, Jeff, I miss you! You're no Mark Twain, but you can be funny once in a while. Why don't you write some more of your stuff? Your wife (and everybody else) knows you're a no-good, shiftless bum. You can't do any more damage to your marriage or your credibility with your team, so write some more articles. I'm from Toronto, and you've all (even Wil) given my sled dogs and me many happy moments. All the best, guys. Thanks for keeping me and so many other people happy.

**Sir Stanley**

It's our pleasure to please you, Sir Stanley. Even if you're Canadian.

## Department of Korrections

In last month's *CGW*, we incorrectly printed the score for *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*. The official *CGW* score is 4.5 stars and is an Editors Choice. *CGW* regrets the error.

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JOCK ITCH

# Wide World of EA

**CGW** gets the inside scoop on the next season

**Inside**
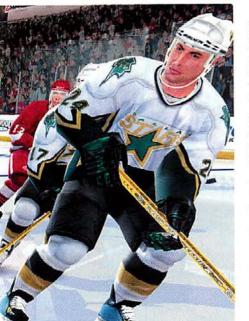
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War games are nothing new, but it's about time someone started looking at the big picture.
**34**

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Pinball isn't dead. A few people have kept it alive with virtual re-creations of the real thing.
**40**

**W**elcome back, everyone! It's October, and you know what that means: *Madden* cover model Ray Lewis is probably nursing that injury he got due to the *Madden* Cover Curse, Tiger Woods is set to rock the golf world, we hope there isn't an NHL lockout, and it's time for some "proper football." Sharing set space with Wil O'Neal, I'm Darren Gladstone, and *this* is *CGW SportsCenter*.

*The world leader in PC-sports-game articles written in the month of October*

# Sports

Tonight we're here to talk about just about the only game left in town: EA Sports. It was only a couple of years ago that everyone wanted a piece of the PC sports pie. Sierra, Microsoft, 3DO—you name it. But EA was the only one strong enough to win the title. But enough jibber-jabber...let's hit it.

## Madden NFL 2005

*Madden* has been dominating the digital gridiron for almost 14 years, and with the overwhelming lack of competition (both figuratively and literally), it seems that its dominance will no doubt continue. Loath to rest on its laurels, the playbook is changing, and 2005 is the Year of the Hit. The development team has been taking cues from current trends in the NFL, so the game's defense is getting a makeover. Assistant producer Damion Banks acknowledged as much at a recent press conference, saying, "A good defense is what wins championships."

How are you going to win one for the Gipper? A controller such as Logitech's PlayStation-ish Dual Action gamepad is one of the keys to victory. While Coach Banks says that keyboard/mouse players won't be penalized, they won't be able to take advantage of this year's biggest addition: the hit stick. This feature is all about timing and momentum. Get it right and BAM—you're rewarded with unique tackles (from the 1,000-plus animations) and increased chances of causing a fumble. Screw-ups, however, will leave you with a couple of broken ankles while you retrieve your jock from the turf.

Making better use of the analog stick in this year's PC version, the enhanced Playmaker feature will allow you to better call the shots on the fly. Defensively, you'll be able to quickly assign individual man coverage ("locking" on or off a player) or shift back to a zone defense—great for faking out receivers. Offense hasn't been left out, though. You'll be able to change formations without changing the play. And that isn't even going into the fact that you'll be able to create your own audibles.

Another big deal this year is the ability to instill some situational awareness into your players' brains. Option plays will have the experienced A.I.-controlled players (let's say Randy Moss, for example) looking for different routes, while the rookies will more often than not just go long. As for going head-to-head online, Banks says EA doesn't need Punkbuster. With fair-play settings in place, Banks says there will be fair reporting of cheats and people who punk out of losing matches.

Will you give a rat's ass about the create-a-fan topless, face-painted, beer-gut-ridden guy you can re-create in the game? Probably not, but close-ups throughout will add flavor and indicate how good or bad you're doing. What you probably will care about is the career mode, which is dubbed Storyline Central. Using a PDA interface, you keep track of your team, its progress, and the 20,000 different real news stories that can impact your season—and for added flavor, there's a recorded radio show. *The Tony Bruno Show* gets real coaches and players to come in and comment on how your team is progressing. You get to keep going until you run the team into the ground. Fail to meet owner expectations and you're out of a job.

## NHL 2005

Time to hit the ice, Darren! Last year, the *NHL* franchise got a few teeth knocked out. Literally. 2004's game was based entirely on thuggery. With all that focus on hitting and beating the snot out of Tie Domi, I forgot we were supposed to score points to win.

In typical EA fashion, assistant producer Dan Sochan is promising to build on the flash factor with authentic coliseum layouts; six hundred top players remodeled from scratch and given personalities; and more subtle touches, such as seeing the glass shake or shatter. What you'll notice when you start playing is the focus on finesse and passing. With open-ice support, you're not locked in to playing as the guy with the puck. So get your lazy ass into position and get yourself open for the pass. When you're on defense, you can even call out picks. All this, and with the refined skating engine, you'll have tighter control.

More important, the A.I. idiocy is being squashed. A pro skater knows better than to go offsides over the blue line. So should computer-controlled players. Now they do. Players side-skate by the blue line, and they behave more like their real-life counterparts. Aggressiveness, passing, and shooting biases mean that when you aren't controlling Darien Hatcher, he's gonna go looking for trouble (Sochan's favorite).

Among the single-player modes is a World Cup–type hockey tournament based on the new real-world event. The dynasty mode is even more of a sports RPG than it was last season. Each team has an owner with a unique personality and different goals for each season. As with *Madden*, you've got to meet expectations or get canned. There's also a risk/reward system for drafting and ⊕

**2005 is going to be known in the *Madden* series as the Year of the Hit.**

trading players. Try low-balling Lemieux one time too many and he'll be so offended that he'll never sign with your team. Another unusual addition is a consolelike free-for-all mode. This over-the-top minigame is a half-ice grudge match for scoring and beating up 40 top players in the league. Sochan also let slip that console-PC online multiplayer matches are on tap for 2006. And hey, if there's a lockout, hockey's digital version may be the only game in town.
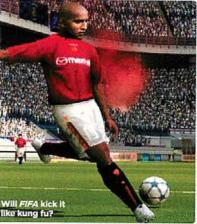
## Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

Associate producer Rich Rogers teed up for some hushed silence on the green, talking about building the better Tiger traps into this year's golf game. Continuing the tradition of building up attributes RPG-style, there is a lot to unlock in this game, with GameFace II and the ability to customize your swing.

You'll be able to take on 15 real tour players on 14 different courses. Play against—and unlock—legends such as Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus, and Arnold Palmer. But the real interesting part is making each course even more challenging by "Tiger-proofing" it. Shorten or lengthen the course, tighten the green, raise or lower the elevation—trust us, you'll be able to make this game a lot tougher if you want. Ultimately, you want to assemble your "dream 18." Take the 18 most tweaked-out holes from all the courses you've unlocked and try to win the Masters.
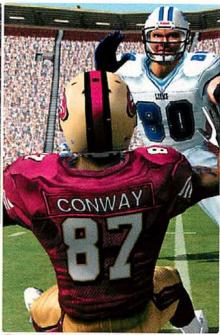
## FIFA Soccer 2005

Wil, who once held down the title for best PC soccer player ever, is ready to go international! While *FIFA Soccer 2005* scores points every year, soccer is probably the only category in which EA still has to


Will *FIFA* kick it like kung fu?

stare down some tough competition. Most notable is Konami's *Winning Eleven* series, which has been winning the console cup and is coming on strong for the PC crowds (see this month's review of *Winning Eleven* for more on that).

What could propel *FIFA* this season is a much-needed quality first-touch play style. While playing, increased sensitivity and a fluid kinetic system are incorporated so that real-world momentum comes into play. Let's say you're running downfield and a ball lands. You need to quickly change direction and kick. Your momentum carries you along


Yet again, Conway gets knocked on his ass.

better than humiliating and deking out your opponent. And when you aren't in control of the ball, you'll still be in control of your teammates by calling tackles or sending teammates down the line. What

## What could propel *FIFA* this season is a much-needed first-touch play style.

after you kick, or, if you try forcing a move, your guy will fall flat on his ass.

Plenty of added animations make it feel even more authentic, with plenty of different ball traps and passes. Still, nothing's

still needs to be worked on is the A.I. After all, as you're running downfield, you still have to rely on your team to hear the announcer scream "Goooooooooaaaaaal!"
Darren Gladstone and Wil O'Neal

# Fantasy Football Draft

Partnering with Stats, the world's leading sports information provider, EA Sports is also kicking off a Web-based fantasy football league for the 2004-2005 season. Some of the highlights of what'll be available: real-time stat coverage, standings and injury reports; weekly predictions; and player news. Teams can even compete for prizes like $20 off EA games and an EA Sports bobblehead trophy.

Ten bucks buys entrance into a public league, while 100 bones lets you be the commissioner of your own league, in which you call the rules and scoring systems for up to 32 team owners. Want to get started? Go to www.easports.com/fantasy. But for the moment, here are Wil's top picks for the All-O'Neal team.

**Ricky Williams**
DOLPHINS
Like Wil, he cut off his dreads. Oh yeah, he's also ready for a breakout season.

**Tom Brady**
PATRIOTS
He's got two rings and model good looks.

**Todd Heap**
RAVENS
He learned quietly under Shannon Sharpe and will factor greatly into the Ravens' offense.

**Terrell Owens**
EAGLES
TO has attitude, skill, a new team, and tons to prove.

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■ HOT ZONE

# Bug Game Hunting

## Hackers have a back door to your PC: games

**S**top. If you're playing an unpatched version of *Unreal Tournament 2004* online right now, hackers could sneak on to your PC. Not many people think about that. But Luigi Auriemma does.

Auriemma has been called a lot of things in the past year: a programmer, an independent security researcher—he was even falsely accused of being a hacker and extortionist. What this 23-year-old from Milan, Italy, will be remembered for, though, is doing the one job that no one else will: looking for security holes in games and then reporting them to the proper authorities.

### Vulnerable

Most recently, he discovered the security hole inside *Unreal*'s multiplayer code. By hammering a game server, hackers can easily implant programs for remote code execution to the host machine or spoof IP addresses to gain access to your PC. Even though this particular issue affects only the game servers using unpatched code, it doesn't mean you're totally safe.

"The biggest single security threat from playing an online game is shutting off antivirus software just to get the most out of playing a game," says Symantec spokesperson Kraig Lane. Lane oversees Symantec's Consumer Internet Security Products line (which includes programs such as Norton AntiVirus and Norton Personal Firewall) and is an avid gamer. Lane says that it's not like the old days when AV software would choke down system performance. He says, "We've got much more powerful PCs today that can juggle multiple tasks, and most games now preload levels into memory." This means the eternal loading screen for *Far Cry* will last a little longer, but it won't impact gameplay once you get started. Lane stressed that any time you go online, you're exposing yourself to possible attacks.

So get some firewall software, make sure the antivirus program is running, leave the lights on, deadbolt your door. The point, according to Lane, is that "you open e-mails with a cautious frame of mind, and just because you're playing a game, you aren't going to be 100 percent safe." For example, have you tried playing a map lately? And do you find that in order to join the fight, your computer needs to download a few files from the host? This is how it gets started.

### Plugging leaks

Then there's *Half-Life 2*. Valve's vaunted Steam service could have been compromised with the code theft. What then? Will hundreds of thousands of people be lining up to buy a Trojan horse that allows hackers to stroll onto their PCs? While nobody's talking at Valve, Auriemma is. He says, "The *HL2* code theft could be a problem only if programmers have badly programmed the game. Proprietary protocols, hidden functions, and encryption are the real risks for the users." Hopefully, the year delay on *HL2* will have removed any weak points.

Epic MegaGames took Auriemma's warnings seriously and released a fix to the *Unreal* code, the V3236 patch. But not everyone is as quick to react. One, there's the sad reality that "most games are supported only for a short time, so new bugs are never officially fixed," according to Auriemma. Other companies are occasionally taken aback by outsiders uncovering code flaws. In one case, GameSpy accused Auriemma of being up to no good. While spokespeople were unavailable for comment, we did get to read the cease-and-desist letter, which claimed he had, among other things, demanded money for his findings (which Auriemma says is totally untrue).

Lane wanted to give his two cents and then some on the whole GameSpy matter: "Business software security researchers have been doing this for years. It's an understood necessity, finding those security holes." Microsoft issues updates and patches all the time, often for bugs that have been caught by these experts. More important, Lane says, "Luigi is the only guy out there [focusing on games as a possible security hole], and he got a very strange backlash as a result." ❌ **Darren Gladstone**

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■ HOME FRONT

# Army Brats

## Winning hearts and minds in the virtual war



*Ghost Recon 2* in action.

**G**o in teams of four. Stay alert. Keep the squad together and alive. All this is taught to us by playing PC war games.

Once upon a time, a customized *Doom* mod was made to help train the military. Now, games are being made from scratch, based on semirealistic scenarios that entertain and teach civilians military tactics used in real combat situations. Are these games propaganda, conditioning us to hate and kill? Or are they just good, clean fun?

### War on error
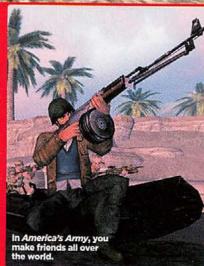
For some, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2* is proof enough of U.S. warmongering. This upcoming game sees Ghosts—U.S. squads—shipped to North Korea to confront a general who is diverting food aid to the military during a famine. He is quickly rising to power, and it's your job to stop a coup from taking place.

A recent story in the U.S. military's *Stars and Stripes* newspaper ran a quote (which first appeared in *Tongil,* a government-run North Korean newspaper) that stated, "[Americans] have shown their hatred for us. This may be a game to them now, but...in war, they will only face

miserable defeat and gruesome deaths." Whoa! Did North Korea just call us out over a game?

*Ghost Recon 2* game designer Christian Allen says that "games, especially those set in fictional conflicts, are simply entertainment." But any game that takes place in a contemporary, real-world setting is bound to draw some heat. "Various people have been unhappy with plot lines in [our] games," he adds. Some Russian groups expressed unhappiness with the first *Ghost Recon,* which deployed troops to the Republic of Georgia, but Allen explains, "[Red Storm] gets a lot of support from fans who live in [countries where these games take place]."

Kevin Ramirez, an avid gamer and spokesperson for the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO), thinks it boils down to the videogame violence question. "Someone isn't going to hate North Koreans after playing a game, but young kids and teenagers who play these games might not [understand] the historical context behind events in the game." In the case of *Ghost Recon 2,* it could make the child want to learn more about North Korea—or, if unchecked by parents, it could spell trouble.



In *America's Army,* you make friends all over the world.

### The next big battle

While publishers must artfully dodge those fine lines of international relations, one game developer must be extrasensitive. "Since [*America's Army*] is made by contractors for the U.S. Army, we're well aware of the implications of creating real-world scenarios," says Christopher M.

---

**NEWS FEED** ≫ In an effort to stop cybercafe violence, Los Angeles county is cracking down on Internet café hours for minors. They can play only between 1:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. Any time after that, there are fewer idiots in the chat rooms. ≫

You will be outnumbered in *Overmatch*.

Chambers, deputy director for *America's Army*. That's why they "avoid using actual places or people, and we're extracareful not to implicate foreign governments."

The U.S. Army's solution: create wartime scenarios in hotspots all over the globe. If they happen to look like the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or some unnamed Asian nation, so be it. That, according to Chambers, is how the next U.S. Army game—titled *Overmatch*—will play when it comes out next spring. This single-player game will focus on smaller, better-trained, and better-equipped forces taking on a much larger foe (think *Black Hawk Down*). Considering that the game will be free, it sure makes a good advertisement—or, as *Tongil* categorizes it, "propaganda"—for the U.S. Army.

"Actually," Chambers says, "we are extremely pleased with these games. We're opening up a whole new way to communicate with younger people." With more than 3 million registered users and hundreds of millions of hours of online gameplay, it's an easy way to convey the message of being a soldier. It is, according to Chambers, "one of the best sources for positive awareness of the Army." An independent survey confirmed this: When




⬆ The Army's Adventure Van in action.

recruiting stations around the country. It could be a simple matter to induct gamers from there, right? Chambers is quick to shoot that theory down: "We're very concerned about people's privacy.

## "[The *America's Army* game] is one of the best sources of positive awareness."

asked how they had heard about the U.S. Army in the past six months, 29 percent of young adults aged 16 to 24 mentioned *America's Army*. Same goes for 19 percent of parents with children aged 16 to 24. This trails behind TV coverage of the war in Iraq and the war on terror as a source for positive press for the military.

"The *America's Army* game might be doing a little too good a job of recruiting," says Ramirez. "For starters, online performance is monitored on leader boards. Then, tournaments are held at

There are no unwanted spam e-mails or cold calls from recruiters."

There's no direct study showing how many people have enlisted because of these games, but it's hard to dismiss the reality of these subliminal recruiting tactics. Heck, there's a semi (called the Adventure Van) that rolls across the country, letting people hop into the virtual cockpit of an Apache helicopter or M1 Abram tank to play "war." It's all about mindshare—and the current crop of military games has it in spades. ✉ **Darren Gladstone**

## Top 5 Downloads
The best money you'll never spend

**FOCUS ON:**
**Gravity**

Gravity sucks—unless it is implemented well in a physics-based game along the lines of this month's selections.


**1 Gish**
**$19.95**
*Gish* sets the platformer genre on its head by changing the protagonist into a gelatinous tar ball that squishes into tight places, tightens up to squash enemies, grows spikes to cling to walls, and jumps by using Superball-like compression.
**www.chroniclogic.com/gish**


**2 N**
**Free**
An abstract hybrid platformer and puzzle game, *N* demands that players come to grips with its reduced-gravity environment so that they can navigate clever levels while avoiding more clever enemies. **www.harveycartel.org/metanet/**


**3 Hamsterball**
**$19.99**
Most old-school gamers fondly recall *Marble Madness*, and *Hamsterball* turns that low-res relic into a smooth-rolling and slick roller-coaster ride. Yes, there is a tiny hamster in the ball....
**www.raptisoft.com**


**4 Neverball**
**Free**
*Neverball* may look a lot like *Hamsterball* in the screenshots, but it is more akin to GameCube's *Monkey Ball* than *Marble Madness*. Use the mouse to tilt the playing field and roll the ball through coins and past obstacles to hit the goal and proceed to the next challenging level.
**www.icculus.org/neverball**


**5 Aerial Antics**
**$19.95**
Any game that involves a jetpack is worth checking out on general principle, and thrusting around on one comprises the core gameplay of *Aerial Antics*. Too bad the music sucks.
**www.leadfootproductions.com**

■ TALK TIME

# Digging a Deeper Dungeon

## Game guru DW Bradley on building a better RPG

The PC was once the proud home of role-playing greatness, but where have all the good RPGs gone? While there are rare exceptions, like *KOTOR*, the PC isn't what it used to be when it comes to RPGs. For starters, according to game guru DW Bradley, they are the toughest games to make. "We've had a major jump in hardware over the last 10 years, but these better-looking games haven't been nearly as fun or creative [as those of the old days]," he explains.

This isn't nostalgia talking. As one of the men behind the *Wizardry* series, Bradley knows what works and what doesn't. RPGs have gone two ways: Point-and-click action à la *Diablo* and turn-based micromanagement. "Point-and-click [gameplay] is laborious and repetitive, while turn-based, automated combat removes care."

### New world orders

More control needs to be in the hands of the players; they need to feel like they have more vested in the world. That, says Bradley, is what will happen this fall when *Dungeon Lords* hits store shelves. He hopes to bridge the gap between the pen-and-paper experiences of a real-life game and the action of a good computer game. That is, your skill at using the keyboard to land blows and dodge fireballs is as important as the ability points you develop.

"This is the game that I've always wanted to make," says Bradley. There's a full 3D world that the player interacts with and a complex story line worthy of the games of yesteryear, but the achievement is being able to successfully bring it all together and make it feel as real as possible to the player. The nonlinear world means you're free to uncover the mysteries of the game at your own pace, and a unique character-development structure doesn't lock you into a set path. (Every class has access to just about every skill; some are just harder to learn than others.)

Over the past decade, we've seen a number of great companies fold because they took chances on the wrong thing. Interplay (*CGW* #242, page 29) is a great example of that. The development costs for games have skyrocketed, and as a result, they have gotten to the practical scales of making a movie. "Since these costs are so high, there's been a lot of copying of the *Baldur's Gate* formula and not enough innovation," Bradley adds.

Obviously, he has a lot invested in his own project, but Bradley insists that *Dungeon Lords* "represents the kind of game that people have been craving." We'll be able to tell you if that's the case in another month or two. ⊠ **Darren Gladstone**

> ## Games may look better, but they're not as creative or fun as [those of the old days].

HEAL POTION ACQUIRED

## Console Corner
### Games worth grabbing from your little brother

Not every good game comes out on the PC. Sad, we know, but it's the truth. So, as a service to you, we pick out one game that stands above the rest.

■ **XBOX**
### Fable

Sit back for a little story, a story that you create by your choices in the game. This sprawling fantasy action-adventure promises a huge world that evolves with you and a character who can be as good or as bad as you want him to be. Start as a child and grow into a man based on your actions. Rat bastards that do all the wrong things will wind up looking nasty and won't be too welcome by the locals. This ambitious concept has been kicking around for years, but the often-delayed *Fable* should finally be on store shelves by the time you read this—we hope.
**ALSO CHECK OUT:** *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* (PS2, Xbox), *Donkey Konga* (GC)

**NEWS FEED** ›› *Universal Doom*: The movie that threatens to be based on *Doom 3* has changed studios again. Universal has optioned the film with first-time director Enda McCallion. ››

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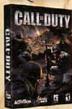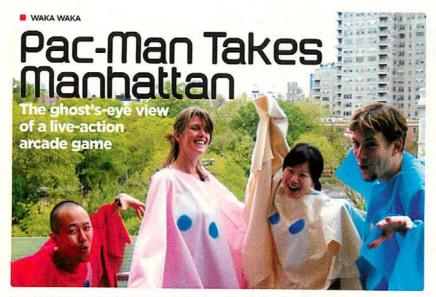
ACTIVISION.

activision.com

■ WAKA WAKA

# Pac-Man Takes Manhattan

**The ghost's-eye view of a live-action arcade game**

Lurking near a power pellet, I crouch uncomfortably between two parked cars. "Is Pac-Man hot? Which dots are gone?" I ask my controller via cell phone. Wearing a jagged sheet over my head with a "pellet map" taped to my inner arm, I am prepared to eat Pac-Man, get eaten, or get hit by a car. I hope for invincibility.

## Ghost busting

*Pac Manhattan* (www.pacmanhattan.com), a large-scale live-action Pac-Man game created by a class of NYU interactive telecommunications program grad students, was played this past May. Instead of dots and tunnels, the game is remapped onto a 24-block grid surrounding Washington Square Park. After all, no place is more Pac-worthy than New York City.

Part social experiment and part game, *Pac Manhattan* is real people playing by videogame rules. Well, except that in real life, Pac-Man can run across the street and not to his death when trapped between two ghosts. Players include four ghost runners and Pac-Man, all who relay their coordinates via cell phone to their controllers, who are networked with a common Shockwave map application. While ghosts constantly update their locations, the ghost controllers surmise



⊕ **New Yorkers have now seen everything.**

Pac-Man's whereabouts based on the dots that have been cleared.

Early Saturday morning, I am handed my Clyde poncho, along with Pinky, Inky, and Blinky. The Pac-Man player's outfit looks best—bisected by a circular cardboard Pac-Man prop, he looks like a survivor of a freak Pac-Man/human head-on collision.

## Press Start

We are "released" from the ghost pen under the Washington Arch one by one, just like in the arcade game. Though at first we have a strategy of combing the west grid, our plan is thrown out the window in the excitement of the running and yelling. The game becomes a free-for-all.

The game blocks are long, unbelievably long, so I walk. A curious couple sees me lurking near a fire hydrant and tangle of yellow construction tape. I look over and yell, "This is human *Pac-Man*!" They cheer back! People love *Pac-Man*, and we are recognized all over as videogame celebrities that day.

I lurk near the bonus fruit, a cup of real cherries. There he is! Pac-Man! I spring across MacDougal but quickly lose the long-limbed yellow one. His legs are twice as long as mine! As I make my way over to a cluster of uncleared dots, I hover near the last power pellet. When I see Pac-Man, I run after him. But he is also running after me. Why?

He tags me, and I am out! My controller fails to mention that I was "blinking." Meanwhile, Pinky intercepts Pac-Man with a lethal combo of lurking followed by a surprise attack.

As a relatively low-tech student project, *Pac Manhattan* actually worked well. Ms. Pac-Man better watch herself, though. There's a new sheriff in town. ⊠ **Raina Lee**

# The Good, the Bad & the Ugly
## News and views from the Wild West



### The Good
*Doom 3*
We could be all whiny and bitchy about how long this damn game took, but, you know, why be petty like that? The fact is, it's here and it kicks ass like no one's business, just like we hoped it would. After all these years, Id Software delivers the Big One, and it's everything we could have hoped for. Upgrade your rig now—it's worth it.



### The Bad
PC game drought *Doom 3* aside, it is a very, very light period indeed for new PC games. And those that have been coming out have ranged from mediocre to lame. We refuse to get doom-and-gloom about it, because there are still so many great titles on the horizon, but this is one of those months where we find ourselves playing *Baldur's Gate* or *Heroes II* or *Grim Fandango* again and wondering where it all went wrong.
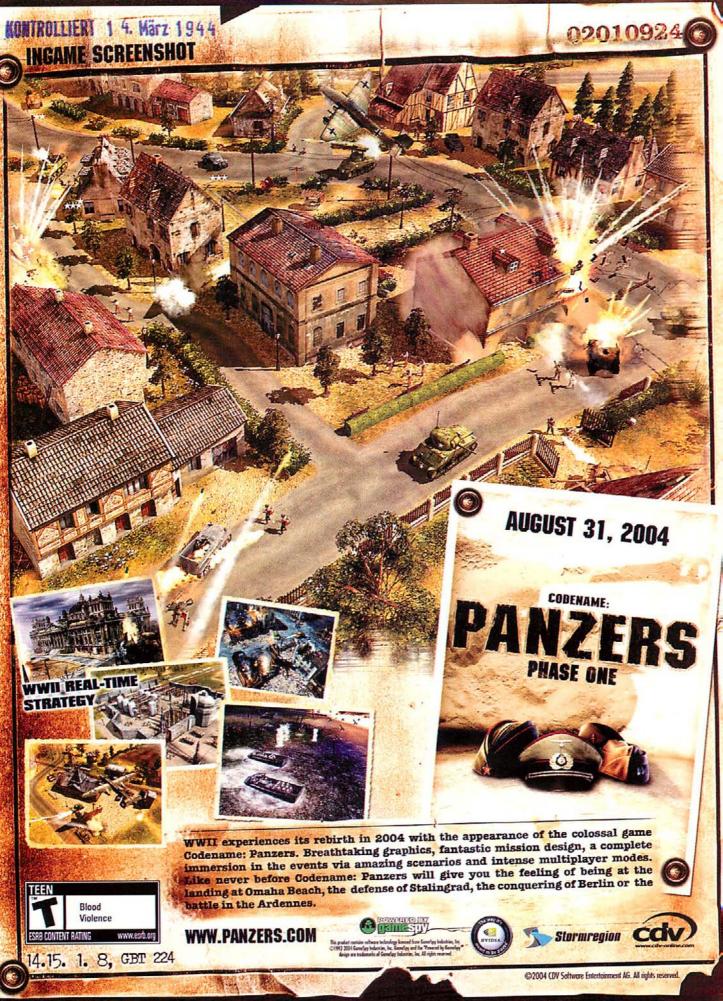


### The Ugly
EA's online strategy
Looked at from a long-term perspective, EA's massive-multiplayer strategy is beginning to look like that endless car wreck portrayed in Jean-Luc Goddard's Weekend. With the cancellation of *UXO*, that makes the second sequel to *Ultima Online* in a row cancelled. This follows on the heels of the *Motor City Online* fiasco, the disappointing *Earth and Beyond*, the underachieving *Sims Online*, the *Majestic* implosion...seriously, does anyone know what they're doing over there?

◣ EXTRA CREDIT

# Pinball Wizards

## Underground programmers sure play a mean pinball

or pinball fans, October 5, 1999, is a day that lives in infamy. That's when Bally/Williams, the world's biggest producer of pinball machines, turned off its assembly lines forever. Thankfully, some slaves to the silver ball have taken it upon themselves to save their heritage by creating pinball-emulation programs. Today, a huge online community is growing. Timeless tables are being re-created while whole new ones are being built for a new generation of players.

### Insert coins

Classic pinball machines were on the brink of being relegated to dusty warehouses and private collections, but one man took it upon himself to save pinball from history's dustbin in early 2000. Randy Davis, an ActiveX programmer living in Alaska, was inspired by a pinball-playing coworker (and by Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set*) to



⬆ *Fight Night*, an original table, is just one example of how people can do their own thing.

### The Original Pinball Wizard

The concept of virtual pinball has been around for nearly 20 years. In 1985, Bill Budge, a game designer working for Electronic Arts, created the *Pinball Construction Set*, which allowed players to drag and drop pinball components on a virtual playfield. While *PCS* wasn't the first pinball simulation, it was the first that let users design and share tables. It wasn't a huge hit, but it developed a cult following.

create the Visual Pinball programming language. His mission: make it as simple as possible. He took a drag-and-drop interface that combined Visual Basic, C++, and ActiveX controls to give users increased flexibility in creating virtual tables. Although the design is done in a strictly 2D environment, the program renders tables in full 3D, allowing for realistic physics using ramps and multilevel playfields. Visual Pinball made it (relatively) easy for people to re-create their favorite old pinball tables using

photos and manufacturer's schematics.

Enthusiasts the world over began re-creating their favorite old pinball games, all the way from the early 1900s through the '70s and '80s. But the introduction of ROM boards for pinball machines in 1975 made things a little more complicated for the likes of Visual Pinball. These ROMs were used to digitally dictate scoring, control gameplay, and play event sounds (like, for example, Raul Julia yelling out "The Mamushka!" in *The Addams Family* pinball

**One man took it upon himself to save pinball from history's dustbin in early 2000—Randy Davis.**

game). As time progressed and dot-matrix displays were implemented, these ROMs would also come to control the digital minigames. Enter PinMAME. PinMAME could be combined with Visual Pinball to make VpinMAME, which allowed creators to visually build a table and then access the ROM to control the gameplay.

## Ball saved

With all these tools, the community broke up into factions to create the games they wanted to play: one (http://irpinball.ztnet.com/) that re-created only older, pre-1975 games using Visual Pinball, and another (www.vpforums.com/vptables/)—which has re-created more than 400 recent games—that utilized ROMs. Popular tables include *Black Knight* (the first to have speech, multiball, and a multi-level playfield), *The Twilight Zone*, and *Terminator 2*—and all of the sounds and effects you remember are still there. There is very little overlap between the two groups since many Visual Pinball creators have no interest in playing ROM-based games and vice versa. Still, everyone involved agrees that being able to re-create and share games they played as children is what keeps them going.

Others have created their own pinball games, either based on popular licenses (*The Jetsons* is one notable example) or using an original idea. These designs run the gamut from old-fashioned dual-flipper and single-level games to playfields that have multiple ramps crisscrossing each other, triple levels, and walls lined with flippers. The designs are truly limited only by the creator's imagination, and so far, there are approximately 900 different original boards available for download. There are even a few examples of "non-pinball" Visual Pinball games. Games


⊕ **This is an actual screenshot from the game board.**

such as bowling and miniature golf have been created in which the player uses the plunger to knock down pins or bank balls into holes.

So what does the future hold for the pinball-emulation movement? This seems to be the question on everyone's mind, although there's no apparent answer. Davis dropped out of sight over a year ago, and no new version of Visual Pinball can be released without his approval. That hasn't stopped table makers from creating workarounds to add more realism to the aging build. A recent addition lets them map images onto the ball to mimic reflections, conveying a ball in motion.

All this attention to detail is being done so that they (and you) can choose from hundreds of vintage machines—from the time before you were born to top-of-the-line tables of the 1990s—and have it feel like the real thing. Davis may be MIA, but the scene that he helped create is alive and rolling. ⊠ **Will Tuttle**

---

# Putting It All Together

- ☑ Create a PINBALL directory on your C drive.
- ☑ Install Visual Pinball TB6.1 and VpinMAME 1.32.001 into it.
- ☑ Run the VpinMAME setup program to link everything together.
- ☑ Download the newest VBS Scripts (v3.12) into your Tables folder.
- ☑ Download font pack v3.8 and place it in your PC's font folder (in the Control Panel).
- ☑ Download the PinMAME samples and place them in the VpinMAME\samples directory.
- ☑ Download new tables into the Tables directory.
- ☑ Download ROMs for newer tables into the VpinMAME\roms directory.
- ☑ Double-click on the table you want to play!

**Don't know where to find the files?** Try www.vpforums.com/vptables/tables.php.

**Need more detailed instructions?** Go to www.mameworld.net/.

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# 5, 10, 15 Years Ago In *CGW*
What we said when you were nursing

### 5 Years Ago,
**October 1999**

Inbred ass clown Robert Coffey—as his "fans" refer to him—started getting the first trickles of hate mail that, years later with Scorched Earth, would swell into a tidal wave of loathing. This redesign issue marked the debut of *CGW*'s Inside Gaming series of genre columns, and Coffey had the temerity to suggest that *Alpha Centauri* might've been better if people had just understood it. Fortunately, a number of Editors' Choice-quality games drowned out that half-wit's whining, including *Dungeon Keeper 2*, *Railroad Tycoon II*, *Might and Magic VII*, and *Need for Speed: High Stakes*.

### 10 Years Ago,
**October 1994**

A decade has passed, and the special place in our hearts reserved for the glory of *Tie Fighter* still belongs to none other. The only reason this Hall of Fame space sim got five stars was that our five-star rating system prohibited us from giving it seven. Here at *CGW*, we openly lament the demise of the hardcore space-combat genre and have this simple suggestion for LucasArts: Give this baby a quick graphical upgrade and make it run on Windows XP, and we'll forgive you for canceling *Sam & Max*.

### 15 Years Ago,
**October 1989**

Inside the mag, we gave *SimCity* our Game of the Year award, but the real face of gaming—all pouty and ruff—was on the back-cover ad for *Space Rogue*. The next time your kids ask, "Were the '80s as fun as they look on those VH1 specials?" show 'em this scarf-wearing, wing-coiffed Kevin Dillon wannabe sucking in his cheeks while wearing a shoulder-padded Members Only knockoff pleather jacket and tell 'em, "No, little one, they were a terrible time. A terrible, terrible time." Then walk off muttering, "Never again."

# 100 Bucks

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

■ COMIC

## Astonishing X-Men

**$3, WWW.MAR-VELCOMICS.COM**
Joss Whedon has a lot of free time on his hands now. What with the cancellation of *Angel*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Firefly*, Ryan was all sorts of weepy around the office. Rest easy, kiddo—the first few issues of Whedon's new comic are already sailing off store shelves. Whedon has signed up to do at least 12 issues of the new series, and it's already off to an interesting start, with a cure for the mutant "virus." Which mutants will volunteer to lose their powers to live a normal life? You gotta read on to find out.

■ MUSIC

## X-Ecutioners, Revolutions

**$12, WWW.X-ECUTIONERS.NET**
Another kind of "X-Men" also earns a spot on this month's radar. The newest CD from these NYC deejays cuts up tight tracks and serves 'em hot. *Revolutions* is admittedly geared more toward the mainstream non-deejay-heads, but that doesn't stop it from also being good in the process. What might throw you off are some of the offbeat collaborations (The Blue Man Group?) and remixes such as the White Zombie-fueled "(Even) More Human than Human," but hang in there. By the time you get to the infectious "Ill Bill," you'll be itching to hear it all over again.

■ DVD

## SCTV Network / 90 — Volume 1

**$61, WWW.AMAZON.COM**
While everyone else was carrying on about how brilliant *Saturday Night Live* was back in the day, there was a whole other cult classic that fell between the cracks. John Candy, Eugene Levy, and the infamous Bob and Doug Mackenzie (Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis) all got their starts on this awesome show. It may not be back on the air, but it is finally on DVD, with a bunch of extras, behind-the-scenes features, and, of course, a bunch of yucks.

■ GRAPHIC NOVEL

## The Losers: Ante Up

**$10, WWW.DCCOMICS.COM**
An elite black-ops team is left for dead by its CIA handler. Now it wants payback. This may sound like a revamped take on the A-Team, but it's a whole lot more. In fact, to call this book a graphic novel doesn't do justice to what *The Losers* actually accomplishes. The art and layout tells the story almost as much as the taut scripting. Basically think of what would happen if Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven* were poured into comic book form.

■ MOVIE

## Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow

**$10 TICKET, WWW.SKYCAPTAIN.COM**
Originally slated as a summer movie, we were banking on seeing Jude Law dive-bomb into a stylish retro metropolis. We'll say it: We're still on the fence as to whether this movie will totally suck—but we're keeping our fingers crossed. Honestly, we are hoping that the movie will borrow a whole lot from the *Crimson Skies* universe and style as opposed to plain ol' planes buzzing through cities.

■ COMIC

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This is becoming the unofficial snack food of *Computer Gaming World*. The crispy, tasty snacky-ness that tainted our childhoods is what gets us through those long, painful deadline cycles. Running a close second were sun-dried caterpillars (they are for real—seriously!).

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Capes—which, according to NCsoft, are the single most popular player-requested feature—will finally be unveiled.

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a CAPE!

ZOOM!

POW!

# City of Heroes: Issue No. 2

## Coming next issue!



The capes flow freely and realistically.

**C**ity of Heroes has emerged as an enormous critical and commercial success. Not satisfied to lazily roll around in its newly acquired piles of money, developer Cryptic Studios plans to release significant content updates every few months. The first of these updates—or "issues," as the team calls them—arrived at the end of June. Issue No. 2 is tentatively scheduled to go live sometime in September. Though the first issue included an impressive amount of new content, Issue No. 2 appears to be even more ambitious. According to NCsoft's Brian Clayton, "We literally have the full team working on the update."

### The world

Issue No. 2's title, *Shadow of the Past*, refers to a 200-foot-tall "interdimensional plunderer" called Rularuu the Ravager, who menaced Paragon City back in the roaring '60s. Luckily, before his interdimensional plundering could properly commence, Rularuu was defeated by a group of superheroes. In an ironic coup de grâce, the heroes trapped Rularuu in an otherworldly prison called the Shadow Shard, where he's been stewing ever since. Back in the present, experiments by the shady Portal Corporation have opened a rift into the Shadow Shard. The end result is a huge new area outside of Paragon City, explorable by players of level 40 and above. This area is split into four different zones, with a look somewhat reminis-

cent of Xen from the end of *Half-Life*. Lots of oddly shaped floating islands abound, connected by jump pads that offer cool alternatives to the traditional travel powers.

Though you won't be able to fight Rularuu himself until a later issue, you will have to deal with his minions, including purple giants known as brutes; wisps, which look like evil versions of the spindly aliens from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; big floating eyeballs called sentries; gaseous storm elementals; and tiny yet powerful versions of the brutes, called natterlings.

Less information has been revealed about the second new area, the Hollows. Designed for characters from levels 5 to 15, this section of Paragon City has been devastated by several types of subterranean monsters unleashed by the Troll gang's blasting operations.

### Caped crusaders!

Capes—which, according to NCsoft, are the single most popular player-requested feature—will finally be unveiled in Issue No. 2. We had a chance to see them in action during a visit to Cryptic's offices in San Jose, and the extra time that was spent to correctly implement them has paid off. They look terrific; the fabric blows in the wind and follows a player's movement in an utterly convincing fashion. Available to all characters at level 20, capes feature interior and exterior colors, a choice of several clasps,

and a variety of applicable decals.

Less of a cosmetic change is the new badge system. Badges are awarded for completing various tasks, such as visiting parts of the city, defeating a certain number of a particular enemy, or even earning special combinations of other badges. Earned badges will appear as a status symbol on a character's ID card but will also confer more concrete benefits, such as permanent increases to either health or endurance.

The mission system is also being enhanced. New goals, such as simultaneous objectives and escort-style challenges, are being implemented. These new missions aren't hogging the spotlight, though—the team is also going back through many of the existing missions in an effort to make them more unique.

### The plot thickens

It's tough to find anything to complain about in an entirely free expansion pack. Still, with the entire original team working on updates, you may wonder who is left to work on *City of Villains*. Though Cryptic is still being cagey with the details, it has confirmed that the company's staff has practically doubled and that the new hires (including pen-and-paper RPG veteran David "Zeb" Cook) are hard at work on the nefarious villainy that awaits us next year. **Erik Wolpaw**

**The Word: FREE!**

# Scrapland

## Optimally primed hands-on

The world of *Scrapland* is a hodge-podge stew of robotica: Start with the Planet of Junk from *Transformers: The Movie*, then add in some *Reboot*-style characters, *Iron Giant* retro, and *Futurama* robots. Finally, finish it off with a quirky sense of junk-yard design, and you've got one unique free-form action game.

In *Scrapland*, you play as D-Tritus ("detritus," as in garbage), an intergalactic robot who arrives in the city of Chimera and is immediately assigned a job as a journalist. Luckily, a big story is about to break: For some reason, the Great Database—a master archive that catalogs the robotic souls used to resuscitate their owners upon death—seems to be mal-functioning, and the robots aren't being revived anymore. It's up to D-Tritus to find out why this is happening.

### Mech love and war

*Scrapland* presents a wide-open, *GTA*-style experience that boasts plenty of shiny, metallic Day-Glo visuals and two distinct play modes. The vehicular mode controls much like the classic *Descent*'s, but with a more race-minded, flat-planed sensibility. The highways and byways are filled with NPC vehicles, and shooting down certain ships earns you money to upgrade your


⬆ These little guys are pretty cute...right up until they're eviscerating you with their laser beams.

own vehicles—although you'll have to be constantly wary of deadly cops.

The other play style is on-foot action. In this mode, D-Tritus has the ability to take over the souls of more than 15 different types of robots and all the unique powers that come with them. For example, the banker bot can steal cash from unsuspect-ing NPCs. This mode also includes adven-ture-game aspects, such as having to speak to NPCs. Our favorite line of dialogue so far? The mayor robot's campaign slogan: "The other candidates are all bastards, whereas I am made out of robotic goodness." He's got our vote.

> "The other candidates are all bastards, whereas I am made out of robotic goodness."

### American made?

So, how does American McGee, he of *Alice* and *Doom* fame, play into all this? Aside from bringing name recognition to the table, McGee serves as executive pro-ducer, lending insight on hon-ing the gameplay, narrative, and


⬆ Free-form action in upgradeable ships.

cinematic aspects. But take note: "American McGee Presents" isn't the same thing as "American McGee Builds From Scratch." If you're looking for another *Alice*, *Scrapland* ain't it. While McGee has played a large part in the game's polish and presentation, the style, design, and humor are uniquely Mercury Steam's.

The build we saw was apparently com-pleted before McGee became involved with the project, so it will be interesting to compare this version to the McGee-ified final one, due to be released in November. ⊠ Johnny Liu

**The Word: MECHANIZED**

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PUBLISHER: **Activision** DEVELOPER: **Gray Matter** GENRE: **FPS** RELEASE DATE: **Fall 2004**

# Call of Duty: United Offensive

## Call waiting—for the sequel, that is

I f you've already been drafted for the award-winning *Call of Duty*, then you may as well sign up for a second tour. *The United Offensive* expansion is almost here, and we have an in-depth hands-on of the game's late beta. Based on what we've seen (roughly a third of the game), *United Offensive* still feels like the one and only *Call of Duty*: It's a high-action cornucopia of sensory overload. There's still that thrill as you rush into battle, as well as that intangible sense of camaraderie with your NPC compatriots. This is, like its predecessor, a game of moments.

### United we stand

*United Offensive* includes 13 single-player missions spread across three different campaigns: The Battle of the Bulge, the Russian invasion of Kursk, and the invasion of Sicily by the British.

Speeding through the streets of Sicily, you man the guns of a motorcycle sidecar. A nearby explosion tosses you from the bike, ending the first rail-shooter segment. As you and the driver hobble away, dizzy and confused, the onslaught of enemy soldiers affords you no chance to catch your breath.

Mortar strikes continue to rock the earth, shaking the cobblestone streets that line your getaway. You "cook" a grenade, delaying your toss until the very last moment. The enemy can't kick the sucker back if it blows up in his face. Finally, your


**↑ An otherwise pleasant afternoon boating trip ruined by those damn Nazis.**

escape on foot takes you to the loading docks, where you speed away on a motorboat. But it doesn't end there— enemy boats careen toward you in relentless pursuit.

And all of this is in just one stage.

### Ich bin ein multiplayer

Several new modes should ignite more interest in multiplayer. For example, in domination mode, a number of points must be taken over in order to gain control of the map. Speaking of the map, strangely, an overhead view is not included. A blatantly unbalanced jeep is among the new vehicles, complete with a chirpy honk to get your teammates' attention and taunt enemies. This jeep may be great for


**↑ Multiplayer mayhem!**

reaching map points, but it's easily mowed down by one of the many playable tanks. If you are the lone rider in a vehicle, you can switch smoothly from driver to gunner posts as the need arises.

With so many military-themed FPS titles heading to shelves this year, the competition will be fierce. Can an expansion pack stand up to the opposition? Whether *United Offensive* can fully duplicate or outdo the original experience can be determined only with the final product, but already it seems safe to say that the game will, at the very least, do no worse. ⊠ **Johnny Liu**

**The Word: CALL WAITING**


**The chirpy jeep holds three passengers: driver, shotgun, and gunner.**

PUBLISHER: **Gathering** DEVELOPER: **Pivotal Games** GENRE: **Tactical Military Action** RELEASE DATE: **Q4 2004**

# Conflict: Vietnam

## Attention, soldier!

Have you noticed the war-game bandwagon effect? In 2002, *Battlefield 1942* and *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* helped kick off a slew of WWII games. Recently, the focus has shifted to the Vietnam era, spearheaded by titles like *Battlefield Vietnam*, *Men of Valor*, and *ShellShock: Nam '67*. Gathering's *Conflict* series is joining the trend, abandoning the Middle East backdrop in favor of the Vietnamese jungle.

### Jungle boogie

The third game in the franchise, *Conflict: Vietnam* puts players in control of four neophyte soldiers who are fighting for survival as they search for the rest of their squad. While *Vietnam* uses the same gameplay engine as the two previous *Desert Storm* games, the promised experience is much more story driven, with more cut-scenes and deeper character development.

*Vietnam* still promises plenty of hardcore action and intense situations. You can freely switch between any one of your four squad members as you explore the harsh Vietnamese jungle; the active character directs the rest of the squad via context-


⬆ You can man the controls of several different vehicles, such as jeeps, tanks, and riverboats.


⬆ Vroom vroom!

sensitive commands. These comrades can carry out a number of tasks, such as applying first aid to the wounded, laying down cover fire, and disarming booby traps.

*Vietnam* emphasizes choices: You are given the freedom to choose from several branching paths in the game's 14 levels. You earn points for racking up kills and meeting mission objectives; these points are spent on improving squad members' various combat attributes, such as sniping and first aid, allowing you to tailor your group into the ultimate fighting brigade.

### Tiger Traps

The idea sounds good on paper, and *Vietnam* does sport some PC-specific graphical touches, including dynamic lighting and realistic wind effects. However, we can't help but remember the last two *Conflict* games...which, well, sucked. Hopefully, *Conflict: Vietnam* can shrug off that lackluster pedigree and rise up as serious competition in this new era of war games. ⊠ **Ryan Scott**

The Word: **FLASHBACK**

---

PUBLISHER: **Gathering** DEVELOPER: **Atomic Games** GENRE: **Strategy** RELEASE DATE: **September 2004**

# Close Combat: First to Fight

## The few, the proud

The U.S. military loves videogames. Just look! The Army has *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. The Navy has *SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs* on the PS2. And now, the Marines are in on the lovefest with *First to Fight*, the next chapter (now FPS driven) in the successful *Close Combat* strategy series.

### As real as it gets

*First to Fight* is being created with the participation and input of several real Marines, some currently serving on duty in Iraq. Re-creating "real" combat highlights the importance of accuracy; look forward to real Marine weapons and behavior.

The original *Close Combat* strategy
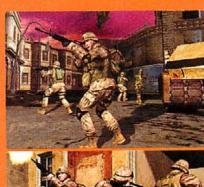
series spread across five releases. The first cooperative effort with the Marines was in the prior release, *Close Combat Marines*. That "game" is currently being used as a tactical training tool within the Marine Corps and at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Hey, if it's good enough for West Point....

### Then again....
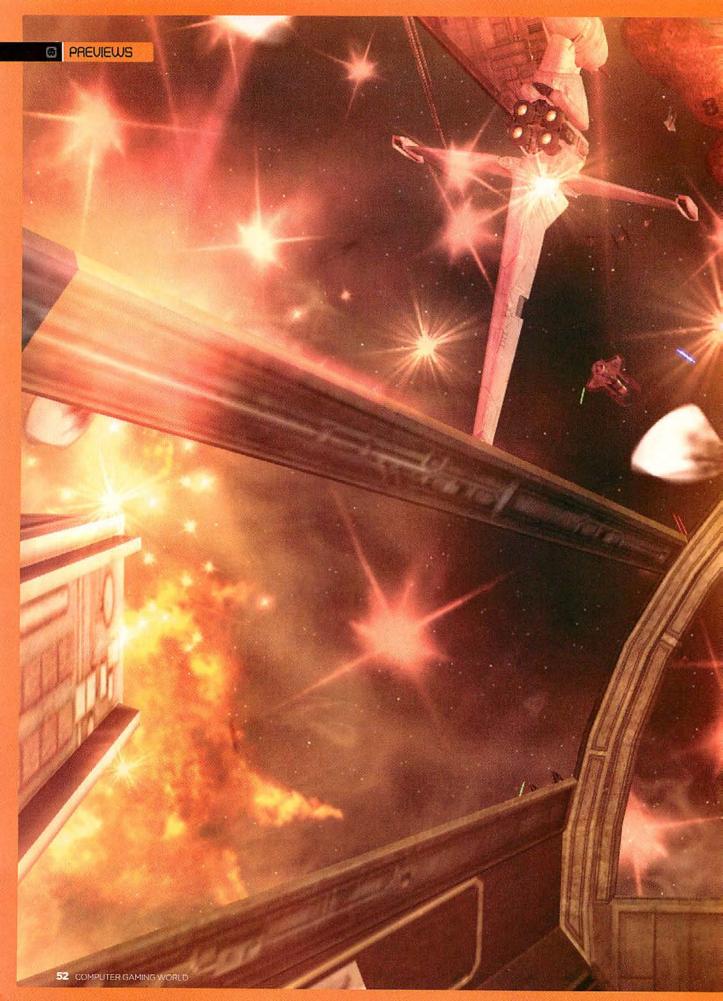
There are a whole lot of military games competing for the same mindshare and space. Perhaps the most similar games in the same action-strategy genre would be *Rainbow Six* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. It should prove to be a close fight. ⊠ **JL**

The Word: **SEMPER FI**





**❚ *First to Fight* is being created with the participation and input of real Marines.**

# Star Wars Galaxies:
# Jump to Lightspeed

*Jump to Lightspeed*, the first expansion to *Star Wars Galaxies*, combines stellar *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*-style dogfights with the persistent world and economy of *Galaxies*. Fly the unfriendly skies in ships like the pictured YT-1300 (aka "a" *Millennium Falcon*). Newly created pilot characters immediately receive a shiny Z95 spacecraft; this squat baby X-wing is your first set of training wheels on the road to more than 15 different *Star Wars* spaceships.

Every ship has an appropriate feel: TIE fighters can turn on a dime, while helming the YT-1300 feels like piloting a massive 747 (or maybe just a space Winnebago). There will also be ships wholly new to the *Star Wars* canon, such as the Blacksun heavy fighter and the TIE oppressor. Note: Z95 sounds like a radio station.

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# PIPELINE

## Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

■ New  ■ Update

---

# Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile

## Organize like an Egyptian



⬛ Rockin' the Casbah! Rock the Casbah!



**T**he keys to Egypt's success were organization and the religious zeal with which the people obeyed almighty Pharaoh. A stinging whip and occasional sandal to the ass helped, too. *Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile* plays to that format as the first-ever society sim-builder—which means you, as Pharaoh, get to command your eerily real digital minions.

### Pyramid scheme

Plucking elements from both *The Sims* and *Sim City*, *Children of the Nile* focuses not only on physically building up Egypt, but also the plight of its people. Happy people spell success! These folks go about their daily routines without direct control, and unlike *Sim City 4*'s "play with your Sims" feature, *Children of the Nile* allows you to get an in-depth view of your people's daily lives and gauge their contentment. You can literally follow an Egyptian around through the first-person-perspective option, watching his daily routine.

Quick lesson on in-game social structures: there are three social classes that allow for both lateral and vertical mobility. At the bottom are lower-class peasants. Craftsmen, including merchants and brickmakers, comprise the middle level, and finally, the upper-class elite is made up of nobles who own private farms and priests who act as teachers and operate the temples.

Religion plays a fundamental role in the game, as citizens go to temple during crisis situations to alleviate their depression. Temples also provide health care, mortuary services, and education. Yet ultimate success in the game comes from leaving a lasting legacy through obelisks, sphinxes, and grand pyramids.

### What Sphinx?

Unfortunately, we're not expecting too much from *Children of the Nile* in the visuals. The graphics and level of detail, while decent, aren't quite at the level of other current simulation games, though hopefully, the detail within the gameplay will more than compensate. ⬛ Jennie Sue

The Word: **RAA!**

PUBLISHER: **Activision** DEVELOPER: **Creative Assembly** GENRE: **Strategy** RELEASE DATE: **September 2004**

# Rome: Total War

## A hands-on with Activision's new strategy epic



These spears are an effective "offensive defense" against the charging cavalries.

The Carthaginians are hiding weapons of mass destruction—big elephants! During my hands-on time with a nearly complete *Rome: Total War*, I decided to destroy the evil-doing Carthaginian threat once and for all.

As a torrent of my troops shoved their way through Carthage's capital city, my foe's elephants were shocked and awed by the sheer majesty of my troops. The elephants went nuts and stamped out their own men. A beautiful cheap victory!

At that point, I ran out of money, so I decided to tax my own people to continue my invasions.

### Lend me your ears

Activision and Creative Assembly visited the *CGW* office with a near-final version of the latest game in their award-winning strategy series (*Medieval*, the second game in the series, is being inducted into our Hall of

Fame—see page 74). While there were still some bugs to be stamped out, as would be expected, *Rome: Total War* feels rock solid and plays great. The controls are direct and easy to pick up, though there are still some user interface changes planned.

The single-player Historical Battles lets you play through actual historical events, like the Roman army's escape through the Teutoburg Forests. Pushing through the fog of war, Rome is suddenly surrounded by vicious rottweilers! Who let the dogs of war out? Germanic barbarian tribes, that's who. These dog units are inexpensive to generate and effective demoralizers when they use enemy troops as chew toys.

### The next Total War

Creative Assembly is already well under way with the next game in the series, thanks to an efficient simultaneous two-game development cycle. (*Medieval* was developed using the *Shogun* engine, while new technology was developed for *Rome* and its planned follow-up). The subject matter for this next game hasn't been nailed down, but there is interest in properly revisiting the medieval era again, as well as North American history and the Napoleonic Wars. We'll bring you more details as they develop, but in the meantime, get ready for what could be the best strategy game of the year. Johnny Liu

**The Word: MAXIMUS**

# DIGITAL UNDERGROUND Games comin' from out of nowhere



FROM: **CD Projekt** AVAILABILITY: **2005**

# The Witcher

**Word on the street:** Can't tell Adam Sandler from Andrzej Sapkowski? Neither can most Americans. Not to worry—it won't be an issue once you sink your teeth into the gorgeous sword-and-sorcery epic based upon Sapkowski's dark fantasy works. Armchair adventurers play as a champion trained since birth to protect the public from evil beasties. Moral dilemmas, majestic backdrops, and madcap real-time skirmishes are all constructed via BioWare's Aurora engine, last seen in *Neverwinter Nights*.

**Sounds kinda beat:** CD Projekt is known primarily for localizing existing titles for the Eastern European market, not original software design. Furthermore, this'll represent the first time the business has put a worldwide push behind any product—even if it is a quality selection, the program will live or die based on worth-of-mouth support. Strong buzz or no, the package could fly well under the radar. Just look at the ungodly fate that befell *Divine Divinity*.

FROM: **Cenega/Plastic Reality Technologies** AVAILABILITY: **Q3 2005**

# El Matador

**Word on the street:** Say hello to our little friend, an intriguing new stealth-action game in which you play a DEA agent bent on bringing down a South American crime syndicate, the narkomafia. Besides crocodiles and dogs, adversaries include hyperintelligent sentries who'll track your movements throughout an intense, nail-biting adventure that's heavy on graphic violence and cinematic clichés. Slick gadgets let you step cautiously past foes or slaughter surly civilians and psychopathic paramilitaries outright. And you thought government jobs didn't pay....

**Sounds kinda beat:** Jungle love worked for Morris Day and the Time; whether Czech outfit Plastic Reality Technologies can score a hit exploiting the concept remains dubious. *Far Cry* set a high standard for lush and tropical environments, and if earlier in-house efforts (*Korea: Forgotten Conflict* and *Loco-Commotion*) are any benchmark of the company's capabilities, we're hardly optimistic. As is, the ship date remains many months off, so there's time for a minor miracle yet.





FROM: **Master Creating** AVAILABILITY. **2005**

# Restricted Area

**Word on the street:** Cross *Blade Runner* with *Baldur's Gate*. Add a dash of *Diablo* and float a little *Matrix*-style mysticism on top. Voilà—you've got one of the most promising cyberpunk RPGs in years. As one of four characters pursuing a shared story line, participants battle for bionic implants and engage in co-op multiplayer antics. The kicker: postapocalyptic showdowns are powered by IRIS, an advanced isometric game engine primed for maximum visuals.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Three's company in most cases, but not always where fast-paced arcade action, intricate plotlines, and detailed statistical data are concerned. German developer Master Creating has thus far cut its teeth solely on budget titles. In addition, similarly inclined products from the same territory—*Sacred*, anyone?—haven't wowed audiences either. If the formula is right, we could be in for the finest futuristic RPG romp since *Freelancer*.

**MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT WAS A SEMINAL GAME** when it was released in the fall of 2002. It was as thrilling a WWII simulation as we had ever seen, and the Omaha Beach level alone, modeled after the first battle scene in *Saving Private Ryan*, had gamers talking for months. The game was a triumph for the PC, but on the console side of things, well, this storied franchise was losing some of its luster. When the latest console release in the series, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, was received with something bordering on hostility, we had to worry—would the next PC *Medal of Honor*, a shooter set in WWII's Pacific theater (like *Rising Sun*), stink as badly? Had the series simply run out of steam?

# TROPICA
# ST

## EA TAKES ITS BLOCKBUSTER MEDAL OF HON

L
**OR** SERIES TO PEARL HARBOR AND BEYOND...

ORM!

BY WILLIAM O'NEAL

When we initially previewed *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* in our February 2004 issue, things were looking good for the franchise. But there was some cause for worry. Once *Allied Assault* was completed, much of the talent that contributed to the title's success left EA to work on other games, including Activision's *Call of Duty*. That said, quite a few of the people who worked on *Call of Duty* have returned to EA for *Pacific Assault*. Considering how much we love both *Allied Assault* and *Call of Duty*, we can only believe that the return of much of the "old school" talent means *Pacific Assault*, like *Allied Assault* before it, will have us hooked for some time. And after spending a day with the *Pacific Assault* team, we're decidedly optimistic that the final game will return the lost glory to the *Medal of Honor* franchise.

### THE OFTEN OVERSHADOWED WAR IN THE PACIFIC

According to Brady Bell, *Pacific Assault*'s senior producer, "We really wanted to take the game to the Pacific theater and do something different. We also wanted to push the technology and push the gameplay, and there are so many stories in the Pacific theater that offer unique opportunities for us to do all of these things." Brady goes on to explain, "Some people thought that if we just did *Allied Assault* in the Pacific, that would be enough. But we wanted to do more than that. This game was going to be the most relentless, intense, authentic representation of Pacific theater WWII combat."

The folks at EA recognize that, while ▶



# THE HISTORY OF FLIGHT

In case you're wondering how flight got into *Pacific Assault*, it was less a marketing decision and more the hopes of one person. The lead engineer of the project continued to pester Brady Bell with the mantra, "We can put flight into the game." After hearing this dozens of times, Bell told him, "Go ahead. You have two days to show me what you can do." After two days, the lead engineer returned with a working flight sim, leaving Bell with the rare but envious job of coming up with a story that would make the inclusion of flight both possible and in line with the game's plot.



▲ Once you take over the controls, you'll be able to wreak some havoc on the Imperial navy.

"SOME PEOPLE THOUGHT THAT IF WE JUST DID *ALLIED ASSAULT* IN THE PACIFIC, THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH. BUT WE WANTED TO DO MORE THAN THAT."

**THE BIG STORY WITH *PACIFIC ASSAULT'S* MULTIPLAYER IS THE NEW INVADER MODE, WHICH EA HOPES WILL OFFER MORE ROBUST GAMEPLAY AND INCREASE THE FOCUS ON THE TEAM.**

After coming ashore, you'll rally with your squad before engaging the enemy. Firefights in *Pacific Assault* will be pretty intense. Be sure not to shoot the guys with stars above them.
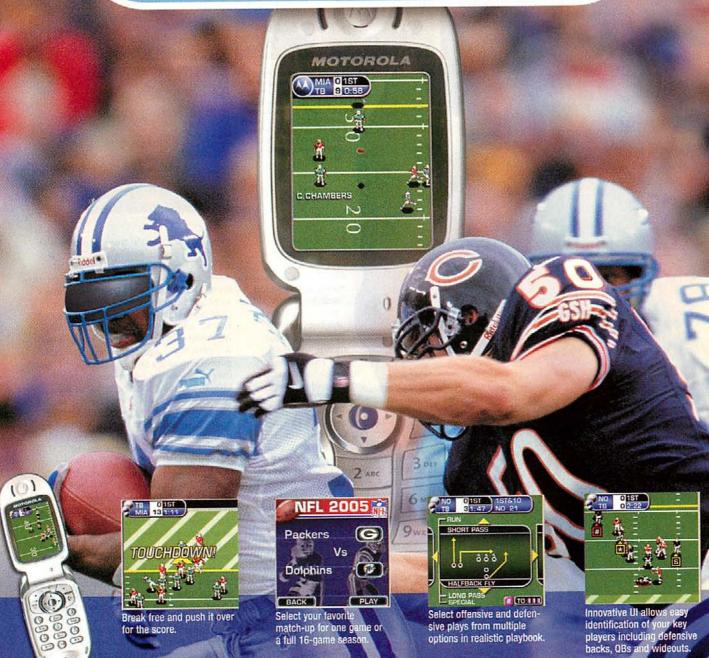
they set the bar pretty high with *Allied Assault*, many of the devices previously used to immerse the player in the action had grown stale. In describing the team's new take on the series, Bell says, "In all of the *Medal of Honor* games, we always focused on the games being very cinematic. The danger with that is that games become very linear and scripted. It's fun the first time you go through it, but you do it again and again and you realize that there isn't that much there. The first time can be a really good time. And that was great a couple of years ago, but that's going to be the big change going forward for us—to get that same kind of cinematic experience, but in a more dynamic way, so players feel like they're causing the action to happen, regardless of where they are in the action."

Many WWII games have been criticized for being too linear, or "corridor based," as Bell puts it. An example of this is the Brecourt level in *Call of Duty*, in which you essentially run through a series of trenches killing any German soldier who gets in your way. This is not the case in *Pacific Assault*. EA showed us one of the game's levels, which takes place at the Henderson airfield on Guadalcanal, where your specific mission objectives can be met in a plethora of ways.

### SGT. SMARTY PANTS

In keeping with the *Medal of Honor* series' attention to historical detail, gameplay in *Pacific Assault* will be squad based. With that in mind, EA has gone to great lengths to ensure that the A.I. in the game is...well, intelligent. Bell explains that "A.I. used to

# JAMDAT SPORTS

# NFL 2005

MOTOROLA

MIA 0 1ST
TB 9 0:58

C. CHAMBERS

TB 0 1ST
MIA 13 1:11

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Break free and push it over
for the score.

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Packers
Vs
Dolphins

BACK          PLAY

Select your favorite
match-up for one game or
a full 16-game season.

NO 0 1ST 1ST&10
TB 3 1:47 NO 21

RUN
SHORT PASS

HALFBACK FLY
LONG PASS
SPECIAL

Select offensive and defen-
sive plays from multiple
options in realistic playbook.

NO 0 1ST
TB 0 2:22

Innovative UI allows easy
identification of your key
players including defensive
backs, QBs and wideouts.

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for wireless and features all 32 NFL teams and their rosters.
Multiple game options include quick play, favorite team and
opponent choice, different game lengths and real player stats.

**NFL**

**PLAYERS INC**

**JAMDAT** mobile

www.jamdat.com

**A** BAR in hand, it'll be up to you to lay down a heavy base of fire. **B** Many of *Pacific Assault*'s missions will involve close-quarters combat. **C** This corpsman (medic) doesn't carry a lot of hardware. When the fighting gets tough, you'll have to watch *his* back.

**D** be, you see an enemy, the enemy sees me—shoot! In *Pacific Assault*, it's all squad-based A.I. on both the Allied and the enemy sides." Warfare in the Pacific was about squads, teams of fewer than 10 soldiers, each one with a different role and specialty. Adds Bell, "These people were afraid to get shot, and that's something we've lost with first-person shooters. In *Pacific Assault*, we want you, the player, to be afraid to get shot. You're free to go off and try to be Rambo, but you're gonna get your ass kicked pretty quickly." EA describes the A.I. in *Pacific Assault* as "pressure based." This means that depending on how well you're doing, you'll either raise or lower the morale of the other side. And based on that fluctuating morale, the enemy will choose to flank you, retreat, or call for
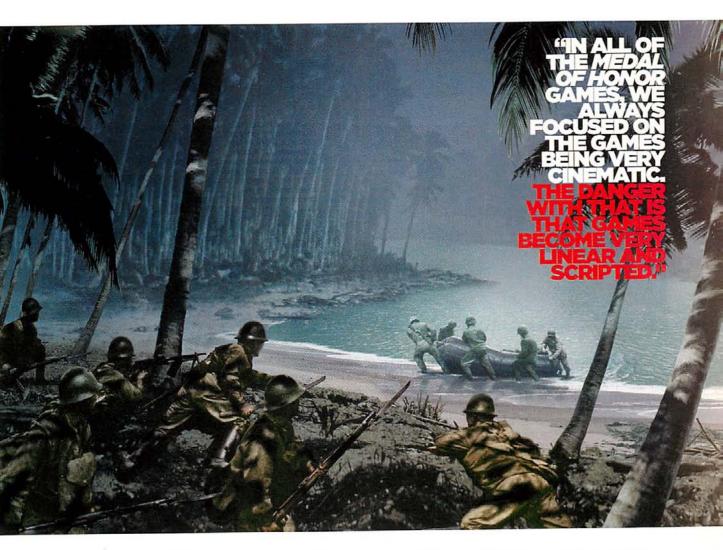
help. Explains Bell, "If there's an officer in the enemy squad, he'll rally his guys, and he may choose to have them banzai if they get down to only a couple of soldiers and all hope for them is lost." I was able to play through the Henderson airfield level several times, and each time through, the A.I., both enemy and Allied, behaved differently. If I played timidly, the enemy A.I. grew more aggressive and eventually overwhelmed my squad. Similarly, if I was overly aggressive, I often found myself effectively going it alone because my teammates lacked my aggressiveness.

In another move to set *Pacific Assault* apart from other first-person shooters, the development team has decided not to litter the game with power-ups. Instead of busting open crates to find health packs, you'll rely on your corpsman (the Marines' version of a medic) to fix you up. When your health is depleted in *Pacific Assault*, you fall down into a state that EA calls "the verge of death," where you still stand a chance of being healed by your corpsman, or you may be finished off by a Japanese soldier's bayonet thrust or boot to the face. "This introduces a new flavor into the game," says Bell. "Before, you'd fall down and the screen would just fade out. Here, you fall down and the world drains out, but you hear audio flashbacks from earlier experiences in the game." While incapacitated, we found ourselves continuing to root for our team. While you're lying there on "the verge of death," you can call for your corpsman to come and heal you. If it's safe, he should be able to. However, there will be times when your corpsman will be attempting to heal you and a Japanese soldier will pop him or sneak up and bayonet him.

**DEPENDING ON HOW WELL YOU'RE DOING, YOU'LL EITHER RAISE OR LOWER THE MORALE OF THE OTHER SIDE. AND BASED ON THAT, THE ENEMY WILL CHOOSE TO FLANK YOU, RETREAT, OR CALL FOR HELP.**

**"IN ALL OF THE *MEDAL OF HONOR* GAMES, WE ALWAYS FOCUSED ON THE GAMES BEING VERY CINEMATIC. THE DANGER WITH THAT IS THAT GAMES BECOME VERY LINEAR AND SCRIPTED."**

## PACIFIC ASSAULT: PART DEUX!

The big story with *Pacific Assault*'s multiplayer is the new invader mode, which EA hopes will offer more robust gameplay and increase players' focus on the team. The developers received a lot of feedback regarding what gamers wanted out of multiplayer, and they put this advice to good use when creating invader, which empha-sizes cooperation and meeting specific in-game objectives. This class-based mode will allow players to play as an infantry-man, a corpsman, an ammo technician, or a combat engineer. A game of invader entails an invading team and a defending team (up to 32 players total) competing against each other over huge maps.

We played one level as Allies tasked with setting explosives on a series of targets while the defending Japanese fought to foil those attempts. Meaningful teamplay was central to success—only the combat engi-neer had explosives, so our team had to work together to ensure he stayed nice and safe. Adding to the tension was the new reinforcement pool, which is depleted each time a player respawns. Because the ▶

🔼 Your first experience with flight will be "rail ride" as you control the tail gunner in a Dauntless.

⊙ Depending on their morale, the enemy will either be more or less aggressive. ⊙ As the game progresses, your buddies' faces will age. ⊙ As the fighting gets more hectic, expect banzai charges.

⊙ number of reinforcements is limited, players will want to avoid dying and respawning. This new feature also discourages running and gunning, and favors teams that will work together and call for a corpsman to come heal wounds. Teams can win invader matches by meeting all of the level's objectives or by depleting the other team's reinforcement pool.

## THE AGE OF FLIGHT
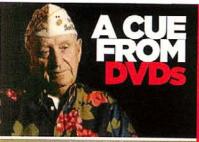
The biggest addition to *Pacific Assault* is the introduction of flight. WWII's Pacific theater was enormous, and naval and air power were huge factors in many battles, including Guadalcanal and Wake Island. Of course, *Pacific Assault* aims to be more

than just your typical WWII game. According to Bell, "Everything we've done in the *Medal of Honor* games that's been vehicle based (whether it's a train or a Jeep) has been a rail ride. But that's not good enough anymore." The level in which flight is introduced involves the main character hopping a ride on a Dauntless as the tail gunner. Of course, it starts out as a rail ride, but in the middle of the flight, things change, and you're given the stick.

When asked about why an infantryman would know how to fly a plane, EA let us in on the backstory that explains this apparent inconsistency. After securing Henderson airfield on Guadalcanal, the protagonist, Tommy Conlin, spent months hanging out

with the pilots and learning how to fly. Of course, Bell is quick to point out that "this is not a flight sim, but rather a fun and rewarding experience of flying around in these environments in accurate planes."

With new technology, physics based on the Havok engine, and some unique gameplay devices, *Pacific Assault* is set to be yet another seminal WWII-based first-person shooter.⊠

## A CUE FROM DVDs

One of the great things about DVDs is that you often get more than just the movie. In addition to the feature presentation, many DVDs offer extras such as director's and/or actors' commentaries, deleted scenes, and behind-the-scenes footage. The *Pacific Assault* team realized that in making the game, it had accumulated a wealth of information that would just go unused upon the game's completion. Being history buffs, they decided to create a DVD version of the game (which will retail for about $10 more than the stand-alone game), which they're calling the Director's Cut. The Director's Cut will have a ton of cool features that in many ways will make *Pacific Assault* almost like an interactive educational tool. There's a timeline feature that uses a map to tell players all about the war in the Pacific. Beginning with the attack on Pearl Harbor, a simple click on any of the images will give you information about the various battles, the equipment used during them, and the personalities involved. In addition, gamers can choose to play through the game itself with Pop-Up Facts enabled. This is designed for those countless times that the *Pacific Assault* team expects us to replay the game. If the game's A.I. isn't enough to make you want to play it several times over, the Director's Cut will have more than enough pull to compel you to keep playing.

## Planescape: Torment

With the release of *Baldur's Gate* in 1998, developers faced a new challenge: making a better, more memorable RPG. A year later, Black Isle Studios almost did just that. It took the surreal, otherworldly *AD&D Planescape* tabletop game and created one of the most unique role-playing games ever.

Imagine an interdimensional pit stop where you begin as a corpse on a slab. With amnesia. Think *Memento* with swords and sorcery. From there, you traverse the various parts of the afterlife on a quest to remember what happened to you and what your real name is. All the while, you regain "memories" and gain skills as you outwit opponents and perform feats. Essentially, this entire existential experience is one massive character-creation tool with an incredible story—plus, there's a wiseass talking skull sidekick.

## John Madden NFL Football Series

Not many videogame franchises can claim the kind of dominance that the *Madden NFL Football* series has. Now 15 years old and with tens of millions of copies sold, *Madden* continues to set the bar for all other football games, and is the rare title that has managed to transcend gaming and become a bona fide lifestyle. While players have favorite iterations of the game, the fact remains that *Madden* just continues to get better. Whether it's with improved graphics, online multiplayer for PC and consoles, or more in-depth management features, the folks at EA Sports just keep making this thing better.

# Hall of

## Unreal Tournament

When cruel A.I. constructs take over the earth, we can reminisce fondly about a simpler time when bots killed humans for fun, not genocide. A beautiful yesteryear when the best PC game of the year was "unreal," in both name and description. Perhaps *Unreal Tournament* was part of the evil robots' master plan, setting the stage for a quick and easy takeover. Just think: Addict the humans to richly varied arenas with smooth controls. Give them an armory of cleverly balanced dual-firing weapons, so they think they have some chance at resistance. Finally, get them accustomed to the viciously clever bots that will ultimately usurp them.

Evil future robots that will put us in pink fleshy pods and mine us for robot juice—we salute you!

## Medieval: Total War

Like the famous Bayeux Tapestry, *Medieval: Total War* is a deft portrayal of ambition and war, but also an illustriously woven empire-building and real-time-strategy game of epic scale. The tumultuous and violent Middle Ages serve as an extremely detailed historical backdrop—so much so, history teachers could use *Medieval* as a teaching aid. With an arsenal of single-player campaigns, historical battles, deep yet accessible tech trees, and playable factions, *Medieval* offers the content of at least two games packed into just one. Victory can be achieved through battle, diplomacy, economics, glorious achievements, or any combination thereof, and there's the considerable added challenge (and enjoyment) provided by a sweeping and graphically indulgent real-time combat model that miraculously manages to be both authentic and extremely compelling. With its scope, depth, and tremendous replay value, *Medieval: Total War* may be the perfect historical strategy game.

# Richard Garriott and Jon Van Caneghem

**Jon Van Caneghem**

It is unlikely that we will ever again see game designers whose individual achievements are as all-encompassing, influential, and visionary as Richard Garriott's and Jon Van Caneghem's. Though their careers are completely separate, there are interesting parallels between these two. Each started a humble, one-man operation making a rudimentary role-playing game, and each transformed that first title into a dynasty, selling millions of games and spawning hugely successful companies: Garriott's Origin Systems and Van Caneghem's New World Computing.

Garriott created his first game, *Akalabeth*, in 1979 while still a high-school senior. He made the entire product himself, stuck the games in ziplock bags, and sold them himself. A year later, he made *Ultima I* and forever altered the landscape of PC gaming. Arguably the greatest RPG series ever made, the *Ultima* games went on to win award after award (and four spots in our Hall of Fame) and eventually spawned the watershed, revolutionary *Ultima Online*, the first successful MMORPG ever released.
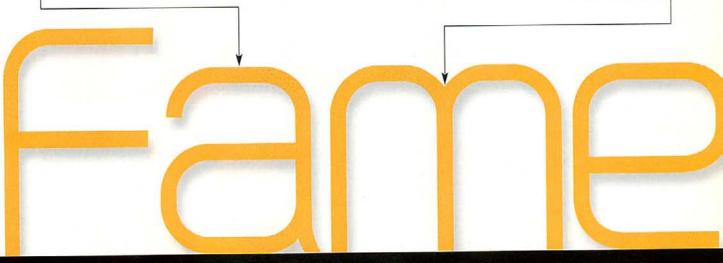
Van Caneghem's story is similar. He made *Might and Magic* in his apartment in 1986, single-handedly creating a universe that would play out over a series of hugely popular RPGs. These games begat the awesome *Heroes of Might and Magic* strategy series, still the benchmark by which all fantasy strategy games are judged.

Now, ironically, with both their companies dead and gone, Garriott and Van Caneghem find themselves at NCsoft—the red-hot publisher of *City of Heroes*. Neither of these remarkable creators has anything to prove—but we sure are glad they're back in the game.

**Richard Garriot**

# THE CGW HALL OF FAME

## PEOPLE
**Dani Bunten Berry,** Game Designer
**John Carmack,** Programmer
**Ron Gilbert,** Programmer, Game Designer
**Sid Meier,** Game Designer
**Roberta Williams,** Game Designer
**Will Wright,** Game Designer

## GAMES
**Alone in the Dark** (I-Motion, 1992)
**Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn** (Interplay, 2001)
**The Bard's Tale** (EA, 1985)
**Battle Chess** (Interplay, 1988)
**Battleground series** (TalonSoft, 1995–present)
**Betrayal at Krondor** (Dynamix, 1993)
**Chessmaster** (Software Toolworks, 1986)
**Civilization** (MicroProse, 1991)
**Command & Conquer** (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995)
**Counter-Strike** (Mod, 1999)
**Crusader: No Remorse** (Origin, 1995)
**Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight** (LucasArts, 1999)

**Day of the Tentacle** (LucasArts, 1993)
**Diablo** (Blizzard, 1997)
**Doom** (Id Software, 1993)
**Dungeon Master** (FTL Software, 1987)
**Earl Weaver Baseball** (EA, 1986)
**Empire** (Interstel, 1978)
**EverQuest** (Sony Online, 1999)
**F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)
**Falcon 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
**Fallout** (Interplay, 1997)
**Front Page Sports: Football Pro** (Dynamix, 1993)
**Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within** (Sierra, 1996)
**Gettysburg: The Turning Point** (SSI, 1986)
**Grim Fandango** (LucasArts, 1999)
**Gunship** (MicroProse, 1986)
**Half-Life** (Valve Software, 1999)
**Harpoon** (360 Pacific, 1989)
**Heroes of Might and Magic II** (New World Computing, 1997)
**High Heat Baseball 2000** (3DO, 1999)

**Kampfgruppe** (SSI, 1985)
**King's Quest V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
**Lemmings** (Psygnosis, 1991)
**Links 386 Pro** (Access Software, 1992)
**M-1 Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)
**Master of Magic** (MicroProse, 1994)
**Master of Orion** (MicroProse, 1993)
**Mech Brigade** (SSI, 1985)
**MechWarrior 2** (Activision, 1995)
**Might and Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)
**M.U.L.E.** (EA, 1983)
**Myth** (Bungie, 1997)
**Panzer General** (SSI, 1994)
**Pirates** (MicroProse, 1987)
**Quake** (Id Software, 1996)
**Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)
**Red Baron** (Dynamix, 1990)
**The Secret of Monkey Island** (LucasArts, 1990)
**SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)
**The Sims** (Maxis, 2000)
**StarCraft** (Blizzard, 1998)
**Starflight** (EA, 1986)

**System Shock 2** (Electronic Arts, 1999)
**Tetris** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1988)
**Their Finest Hour** (LucasArts, 1989)
**TIE Fighter** (LucasArts, 1994)
**Tomb Raider** (Eidos, 1996)
**Ultima III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
**Ultima IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
**Ultima VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
**Ultima Underworld** (Origin Systems, 1992)
**War in Russia** (SSI, 1984)
**WarCraft II** (Blizzard, 1996)
**Wasteland** (Interplay, 1986)
**Wing Commander** (Origin Systems, 1990)
**Wing Commander II** (Origin Systems, 1991)
**Wing Commander III** (Origin Systems, 1994)
**Wizardry** (Sir-Tech, 1981)
**Wolfenstein 3D** (Id Software, 1992)
**X-COM** (MicroProse, 1994)
**You Don't Know Jack** (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
**Zork** (Infocom, 1981)

# Reviews

Now with 100 percent more fabulousness—because you're worth it!

Oh, don't mind me. I'm just gonna hang around here for a while. Everything is just about to go to hell, and you've got a ringside seat on the monitors. The creepy, crawly trites are the cannon fodder of the game, always getting underfoot.

Here comes the welcoming committee.

PUBLISHER: **Activision** DEVELOPER: **Id Software** REQUIRED: **Pentium 4 1.5GHz, 384MB RAM, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet, 2-4 players**

# Doom 3

## Like a bat outta, well, you know...

Was it something she ate or is she just possessed? In case you were curious as to where all those trites were coming from.

How about a nice, quick stroll across the Martian surface?
Space marine, meet imp; imp, this is dinner.

**Hour 21:** Nerves rattled, I'm physically and emotionally spent, but I'm done playing the most intense experience in gaming. While I'm not a big fan of being locked in a dark *Altered States*-like room at Activision's offices to prevent game piracy, it was worth the effort just to have bragging rights for playing Id's newest creation early. Yes, *Doom 3* is finally here, so let's get to the big question first: Is it as good as all the hype would have you believe?

## Hell, yes!

*Doom 3* is more than just one of the best games of 2004—it's also better than this summer's spate of action movies. OK, so the plot isn't a big surprise to anyone at this point (a lone marine has to fight off an invasion from hell). It's the execution that makes this game so damn good. The stellar visuals, amazing audio, and incredible attention to detail draw you into another world.

Just take the beginning of the game as you arrive at a bustling Martian research facility. The base is open for business, and you can see a whole lot if you choose to explore. People are wandering halls, informational videos are playing, and true to form, there are plenty of secret things to find (anyone up for a round of *Super Turbo Turkey Puncher 3*?). As the game progresses, the story advances

through quick in-game cut-scenes, e-mails, and video clips that slowly tease you with as much backstory as you want to sift through. The first level eases you gradually into the game mechanics, teaching you the basics in a fashion similar to the one the original *Half-Life* used back in the day. Kick start the action as soon as you think you're ready by reporting in for duty. Brace yourself.

## Jumping at shadows

The next 20-some-odd hours will have you constantly on the razor's edge—kind of like the classic horror-movie scene in which there's a sudden musical spike and a cat leaps from the closet (you jumped at those, admit it). All of *Doom 3* is goosed with similar moments. You'll be wandering darkened hallways armed with a flashlight. You spin around to a hiss, but it's only some hydraulic machinery grinding away. Can a human being sustain that kind of heightened paranoia for hours at a time? It wasn't pretty, but I did. Let's just say that you need to go slow and steady through each level. Running and gunning, outside of multiplayer, will just get your damn fool self killed right quick.

Graphic details like volumetric shadows (some dandified, fancy-boy term for the dark) provide only half of the tension. The

audio is an as big, if not bigger star than the zombies. However, you really do need a 5.1 surround system to play. Toggling between speakers and stereo headphones, I found a lot was lost in translation.

I also ran into a small audio hitch while playing, a new phenomenon in games that rely on in-game 5.1 surround sound: audio overlap. Imagine you have one guy standing to your immediate left and talking into one ear while two guys are talking across the room and a television is playing at the same time. It may sound simple, but all the audio has to be intelligently spaced around the room. I could only re-create this problem once at the very beginning of the game, but *Thief: Deadly Shadows* had this exact problem as well.

## Scary good

So as we've established by now, you will jump back. A lot. Even if you've played through an area before, even if you know where all the demons are, you will still be jolted because Id's craftsmen did such a careful job orchestrating your claustrophobia. Yes, we may be a little jaded on scripted sequences

110    69        ▣    117

⬆ Look at the cute little hell cherubs... awww.... ⬅ On tonight's episode of *Queer Eye for the Satanic Guy*, we look at how candles can really spruce up a room. ➡ Lost souls are like mosquitoes—you've got to swat them quick.

90    83        3    139

⬆ Is it just us, or do the fat zombies look like Tor Johnson (of *Plan 9 From Outer Space* "fame")? ⬅ Decisions, decisions. Do you call for help or go it alone? ➡ One of the many hidden gems is this mini-game in the kitchen.

100        100

You ever get that feeling that you're being watched?

guiding the action, but this three-ring circus of adrenaline and fear elevates gaming as an art form and puts it on par with Hollywood. All the event triggers are strategically placed and add that extra bit of fear just when you thought you were safe.

Another way the game immerses you is with interactive devices. That's right, the days of using red and blue keys to advance are long gone. It's now a world of utilizing security codes and fetching various components to get gear up and running again. Turn off lights, operate machinery, download information—there's a lot to do here. But this immersion also lets you choose some courses through the game. An example: At one juncture, you can opt for either jumping puzzles or some seriously hairy firefights to advance. There are other choice turning points but, unfortunately, they have no direct effect on the ending. You're steered to one very cool but inevitable conclusion in hell and the archeological dig site of an ancient Martian civilization.

## QUESTION

**Why are there chain saws on Mars?** Someone at FedEx screwed up a shipment—they needed jackhammers.

### In a locked box

Obviously, there is a price to be paid for all this: a new computer. If you're still getting by on Windows 98, upgrade (it only works for Windows 2000 and XP). If you've got a machine with less than 384MB RAM, upgrade. If you don't have a 5.1 speaker kit, buy one quick. You'll need it all if you hope to get the game looking as good and running as well as we did (in Activision's offices, we played on a 3GHz Dell with 1GB RAM, GeForce 6800 GPU, and a Logitech Z-680 5.1 speaker kit). There is one thing you should know, though. While we played the game at various detail levels and resolution settings, we decided to show you what the game looks like at 800x600 pixel resolution. We aren't kidding; all our screenshots were taken at 800x600. The crazy part is that there is an "ultimate" graphics setting that machines aren't even ready for yet and won't be able to support until the next generation of graphics cards come out.

So, with the game done and review written, I can finally rest easy for a few seconds. Sure, there were a few nitpicky points, but that won't stop anybody from enjoying this game one iota. *Doom 3* blew my mind and messed with my precious sleep patterns for two days straight. Give me a week and I'll be ready to play it again. Now that Id has grabbed back the FPS crown, we say, "Hail to the king, baby!" ☒ **Darren Gladstone**

**Verdict** ★★★★★
**This is one hell of a ride!**



## MULTIPLAYER SMACKDOWN

Welcome, folks, to *CGW*'s Terrordome! It's a perfect day for fragging each other in *Doom 3* LAN matches on the five maps that ship with the game. We could've opted to play last man standing, tournament (1-on-1 Quakecon-like matches that have others not playing but waiting as spectators—those itching for action won't dig this too much), or team deathmatch, but we're ruthless—it would be a straight-up free-for-all fight to the death. Let's cut right to the action, which is already in progress:

**ROBERT COFFEY**
HANDLE: **Le Petite Morte**

**DARREN GLADSTONE**
HANDLE: **Deadman Walken**

**JOHNNY LIU**
HANDLE: **El Senior Muerte**

**KRISTEN SALVATORE**
HANDLE: **Mr. Body Massage**

**ROUND ONE:** You'd figure Darren would have a commanding lead since he just powered through the single-player game, but he's having a shaky start. He has to remember that multiplayer is a lot faster paced. Where the single-player mode has an adrenaline meter that limits you, there is no speed limit here. Still, he manages to pull ahead on the Reactor map thanks to locating the berserker helmet and screaming his way to an early win.

**ROUNDS TWO AND THREE:** Johnny is stealthy like a ninja. Dodging multiple buckshot rounds from Darren, he leads the cocky old-timer down a hallway. He tosses a grenade down the hall behind him, but Darren sees the ploy, knows what's coming, and

evades. Problem: Darren underestimates the blast radius. A string of curses ring out. Grenade connected. The invisibility power-up and the insidious lab in the Frag Chamber level are the only things that keep Darren from coming in last place.

**ROUND FOUR:** Edge 2 and Lights Out become Robert's hunting grounds. Armed with a rocket launcher and true grit, he gets body parts to fly everywhere. Johnny fires back a few volleys, but Robert proves that he's the best at hiding in shadows and pouncing when you least expect it.

**ROUND FIVE:** The highlight from some seriously hairy chain-gun firefights in Delta Labs was a makeshift boxing match. Kristen took Johnny in the best two-out-of-three falls.

**FINAL SCORE?** Well, we all had our good games—and the multiplayer performance was hitch free. Johnny barely edged the rest of us out, but whatever. At least we can say we were among the first to frag and get fragged in *Doom 3*. ☒ **Darren Gladstone with additional reporting by Johnny Liu**

# DUNGEON LORDS

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WINTER 2004

Editor's GCM Choice

GAME CHRONICLES
BEST OF E3
2004 NOMINEE

BEST OF SHOW
2004

# Ground Control II

## Destruction without distractions



**T**he story is typical. It's 700 years into the future, and there's a war between the freedom-loving peoples of the Northern Star Alliance and the oppressive Terran Empire. As a captain in the NSA, you must lead your small group of troops against overwhelming odds to defeat an alien threat and save the world.

The gameplay, however, is anything but typical. *Ground Control II* focuses solely on destruction and mayhem, without the usual distractions of resource management. Tactics, timing, and reaction speed—rather than economic savvy—are the primary contributors to success.
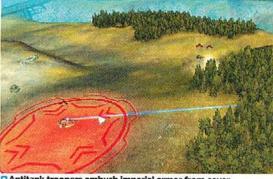
### Alphabet soup

Battles in *GC2* are usually focused around a couple of acronyms: VLs (victory locations) and LZs (landing zones). VLs are strategic spots that you must capture and hold to win a scenario; they also provide APs (acquisition points) with which to purchase reinforcements. When you acquire troops, they arrive by dropship on your LZs. If you lose your LZs, you're stuck until you can retake one.

Your dropship and APs are all the resource management there is. *GC2* encourages thrift with your troops and limits how quickly your APs accrue: The more troops you've deployed, the fewer APs you get. You can also use your APs to upgrade your dropship by giving it more armor, weapons, speed, fuel, or cargo capacity. Speed affects how quickly the dropship moves from your off-map bases to the battlefield. When upgraded with weapons and armor, the dropship is a very powerful weapons platform.

Once you join the battle, there are many tactical tidbits to consider. Infantry can take cover in both forests and buildings for defensive advantages, units on higher ground have bonuses against those below, and even armor is more vulnerable in the sides, making flanking attacks more effective. Units also have a secondary mode that changes their capabilities: NSA assault troopers, for example, can gain antitank


**Antitank troopers ambush imperial armor from cover.**

abilities, though this causes them to become stationary. As your units rack up kills, they gain experience, increase in level, and perform more efficiently.

### Combined arms

*GC2* requires good combined arms tactics for success. Infantry are very good at holding terrain such as buildings or forests, and heavily armored units rule the plains. Air units can easily destroy armored juggernauts unless they're ade-

An aircraft murders defenseless artillery.

Imperial base defense
Light Hoverdyne
Health: 129/150

The most important areas in GC2 are guarded by bunkers and stationary guns.

NSA troopers form a perimeter around their initial LZ.

quately protected by antiair units like rocket launchers. Most of the game's strategy involves figuring out what kind of force mix works best with each scenario.

All this attention to tactical detail adds up to a game that's both nuanced and fast paced. Freed from worrying about resources, players can concentrate on bold flanking maneuvers, stubborn fighting withdrawals, and all the other actions that make an armchair general's heart go pitter-patter.

## Good, bad, beautiful

The presentation is as strong as the gameplay, with big explosions and richly detailed units. Even the cinematics and voice acting are not intolerably cheesy. The well-paced 24-mission single-player campaign is divided into two segments and offers a variety of missions, including beach assaults, desperate defenses, and stealthy infiltrations. The A.I. is crafty; it knows enough to attack where you're weak and circle around your flanks to take lightly guarded positions.

The multiplayer portion of GC2, allowing up to eight players, is equally good. It offers co-op and competitive games, but these are sadly limited to just 10 maps and suffer from the occasional bit of extreme lag.

A few interface problems mar the game. The camera angle can be awkward, and controlling large numbers of troops simultaneously is difficult since you cannot select more than 16 units at once. The control

problems are exacerbated by the micromanagement necessary for determining a unit's mode of operation. It'd have been nice if the A.I. could figure out when to use its antiarmor or antipersonnel capabilities, instead of requiring you to jump around the map telling all your units individually. These problems aren't horrible in small skirmishes or most multiplayer games but can lead to frustration in some of the larger and more difficult single-player battles.

Parts of GC2 are too frustrating, and there's a little too much micromanagement involved, but everything's good enough that you can easily forgive the faults. Strategists tired of mining gold and whipping peons into shape should consider Ground Control II strongly recommended. ⊠ Di Luo

## Verdict ★★★★☆
A beautiful RTS with solid single- and multiplayer gameplay. What more can you ask for?

## Both Sides Now

There are three factions in GC2: Terrans, NSA, and Virons. The Terrans are unfortunately unplayable, controlled only by the A.I. Their forces rely heavily on armor but are inferior to their NSA counterparts on a 1-to-1 basis. The NSA is a pretty standard "modern" force; it has good armor, decent artillery, and very good air units, including transports and fast attack helicopters. The Virons, an alien race enslaved by the Terrans, are masters of biotech. They excel in infantry and heavy-armor units and have the ability to "meld" two units of the same type into a single, more powerful unit. This maneuver is a bit tricky to pull off in the heat of battle, but it gives the Virons a lot of flexibility.

**Players can concentrate on bold flanking maneuvers and all the other actions that make an armchair general's heart go pitter-patter.**

# Missing

## More effective than the back of a milk carton

If the lives of Jack Lorski and Karen Gijman rested solely in my hands, they'd both be long dead. That's not a comment on the quality of *Missing*. The game is, in fact, top-notch and a steal at 20 bucks. Their untimely demise is directly related to my mental meltdown from playing this taut psychological thriller that can be best described as *Se7en* fused with *The Da Vinci Code* and a better-thought-out version of EA Games' *Majestic*.

### Tangled web

There's a very thin veil separating reality from the game world. Jack and Karen have been abducted. Weeks later a CD-ROM appears at the SKL Network. That disc, the play disc you're popping into your PC, is the key to finding them, but it's your e-mail client, Internet connection, and brain that will be taxed as you try to track down the truth behind the killer's "The Great Work."

As with all twisted madmen obsessing over the arcane, you play by his rules—pass a series of tests to earn more intricate challenges. The tasks you face fall into three different categories: logic, research, and coordination.

The logic puzzles sometimes require a little trial and error. The necessary research truly tests your Google kung fu and comprises a huge part of *Missing*. The real trick becomes sifting out those kernels of information on the Web. You get a few hints from the CD, but you have to go fishing on

> ## Surprisingly well-done footage helps set the mood for darker things later in the game.


⊕ Get ready to hit the Internet to do research—a LOT of research.


⊕ If you thought watching home movies was fun, wait until you dissect one nine ways from Sunday.

websites both real and created solely for the purpose of this game. Sometimes the answers will be right in front of your face; others will have you digging deep just to find out someone's first name. But as you're doing all this research online, you're uncovering the mystery, feeling like you're truly a part of it.

If you're stumped, the game tracks your progress and e-mails you story line updates and hints for solving puzzles. It's great for helping the story along, but my test Hotmail account didn't seem to agree. Filters identified messages as spam. So brace yourself for having to learn about cheap Viagra pills while playing *Missing*.

### Smashingly good

The coordination minigames, by comparison, were sometimes fun and sometimes keyboard-smashingly frustrating (literally—we're still looking for Darren's F12 key —*Ed.*). At least all these elements were mixed up so as to not make you feel like you're trudging through different flavors of the same damn puzzle. Solve one or two and you get rewarded with video footage. This surprisingly well-done footage helps set the mood for darker things later in the game, as does the great music.


⊕ Each puzzle begins with a hint from The Phoenix, which teases out a little bit more of the story.

### Spoiler alert

After all the buildup, puzzles, and some interesting twists, the game quickly went from downright amazing to just all right. The tension rises up until the very end, when you have to—wait for it—read some e-mail. Seriously, the end of the game is literally mailed in. At least the developers left an opening for the inevitable sequel, where they can make up for it. Are the puzzles still fun? Yes, and definitely worth playing through once. ⊠ **Darren Gladstone**

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**Verdict** ★★★★☆
The only thing missing from this great, innovative puzzle game: an ending.

# The Suffering

## Exit light, enter night...

With the PC release of *The Suffering*, desktop gamers who shun those (seemingly) simplistic console crossovers may need to reexamine their biases. A macabre action-adventure previously haunting Xbox and PlayStation 2, *The Suffering* is proof that console gaming possesses a creative energy all its own—a sense of ambience and design unaffected by the legacy of PC classicism. Although the game is a retelling of many unsubtle pulp clichés, including horror flicks, prison movies, and themes of redemption versus damnation, *The Suffering* manages to be an entertaining and downright unnerving ride into the mouth of madness.

### Prison break

The story hits the proverbial fan when you, a convicted killer named Torque, are transferred to a maximum-security slammer for slaying your wife and child. Within minutes of your arrival, the entire building is rocked by what appears to be not just an ordinary earthquake, but an earthquake that conveniently blows the doors off hell and unleashes its unsavory spawn. After watching a gruesome massacre of both inmates and guards, you escape from your cell, find a shiv, and take your first steps on the road to perdition.
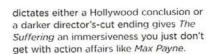
Even though story intricacy isn't *The Suffering*'s main strength, players will find themselves glued to the game as its intersecting narratives—one focuses on the events at hand, while the other divulges dark secrets about Torque's past via flashbacks—peel back layer by layer. What also gives the story urgency is the fact that your actions throughout the game ultimately determine whether Torque himself is guilty or innocent of his crimes. Sure, these deeds often come down to binary choices ("Gee, should I pop this guy...or not?"), but the fact that your behavior

> **The Suffering manages to be an entertaining and downright unnerving ride into the mouth of madness.**


The bloody prison in *The Suffering* makes HBO's *Oz* look like Club Med.


⬆ Don't worry too much about the guards—they're busy having their torsos exploded.


⬆ When you transform into a hideous beast, you lose your pants—never a good idea in prison.

dictates either a Hollywood conclusion or a darker director's-cut ending gives *The Suffering* an immersiveness you just don't get with action affairs like *Max Payne*.

### Hard time

But, like Rockstar's noir shooter series, *The Suffering* plays—sans bullet time, of course—like a conventional first- or third-person shooter, replete with all the predictable staples of the genre. Weapons come in your standard shades of pistols, shotguns, machine guns, and grenades. In terms of an action game, *The Suffering* feels remarkably unremarkable. However, thanks to careful design, the game is nicely balanced between moments of explosive violence and chilling periods of dead calm—each element accentuating the other.

Unfortunately, those of you coming off visual highs such as *Far Cry* and *UT2004* may find little here to feed the eyes. *The Suffering* may have looked passable on the Xbox eight months ago, but now, it simply looks fugly on any midlevel machine. Yet, amazingly enough, *The Suffering* manages to deliver an uppercut of suspense and fright, simply because the game takes itself so seriously at all times. In fact, the vibe is so prevalent with evil and perversion that you may find yourself running for natural sunlight. Fans of Clive Barker and a four-letter word starting with "f" need look no further for a dirty fix. ⊠ Che Chou

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆
A fairly standard action game redeemed by some true suspense and fear.

# Soldner: Secret Wars

## Some secrets are meant to be kept

O n my first *Soldner* mission, I stealthily drove to the perimeter of an enemy camp, belly-crawled to within sniping distance, and picked off guards before planting explosives on a fuel tank to complete my task. I soon discovered that a quicker way to meet my goals was to hop in a jeep, head straight for my destination, and tear-ass around the enemy's base a few times. With freakish regularity, my computer-controlled opponents would blow up whatever or whomever I was after as I circled around them. Hostage-rescue missions required a somewhat different strategy—rolling up in a tank and blasting everything in sight—but again, stealth was not needed.

### Too many choices

It's clear that *Soldner*'s single-player game is something of an afterthought and that JoWood's focus is on the game's multiplayer component. And upon first glance, multiplayer seems to offer a lot. There are eight multiplayer modes and dozens of weapons, vehicles, and pieces of equipment to choose from. All these choices, however, end up being one of the game's weaknesses. When faced with deciding which of 19 different rifles (and more weapons are being added regularly) is best for a quick deathmatch round and nothing but names and prices to base my choice on, I go by the tried-and-true method of picking the weapon that looks the most lethal. True, the game's website (soldner.jowood.com) provides detailed descriptions of every item available, but having this information pop up as you scroll through your choices would be



🔺 Through the scope of one of *Soldner*'s 10,000 weapons.

## You never quite get past the feeling that there are a half-dozen better shooters you could be playing.

more useful.

Since the game lacks a training mode, there's no way to try out different weapons prior to purchase, and the game's myriad aircraft present an even greater challenge—you'll find yourself ditching a lot of helicopters before getting the hang of the finicky control system (or, more likely, simply choosing to travel by land). And the driving physics in land-based vehicles presents its own problems: My jeep once rode partway up a tree, while a tank sometimes had problems maneuvering over small obstacles.

### Alone again, naturally

As a rule, *CGW* does not review patched games; however, to play *Soldner* online required a patch.

This fixed 40-plus issues, including desktop crashes and collision detection, but certainly not all of the game's problems. Perhaps because of these bugs, your mercenary is apt to be a lonely hunter on a lot of the multiplayer maps—at prime gaming times, many maps hold just one or two other players. That said, you can have a pretty good time on some of the online battlefields, but you never quite get past the feeling that there are a half-dozen other shooters with better graphics, damage effects, and physics that you could be playing. With *Joint Ops* already out and *Battlefield 2* on the way, JoWood may have felt pressured to get this product out the door, but it's unlikely that many people will stick with *Soldner* for long since there are so many superior online shooters available—and more on the way. ⬛ Tom Edwards



This qualifies as stealth in single-player games.

**Verdict** ★☆☆☆☆
There's just no reason to play a shooter with this many problems.

# Aura: Fate of the Ages

## No brain, no gain

The substance that *Aura: Fate of the Ages* radiates isn't difficult to identify; the game is enveloped in a distinctive *Myst*. *Aura* presents some beautiful prerendered backdrops reminiscent of those found in that famous series, and it also contains a similar collection of mechanical and pattern-recognition puzzles. It adds nothing new to the adventure genre, but its gameplay is mostly enjoyable anyway. As usual in these "find the magical artifacts before an evildoer gets his hands on them" excursions, there are numerous glowing machines that must be activated before important items can be unearthed. *Aura*'s puzzles range in difficulty, but hints for some of the tougher ones can be found in either the automatically updated notebook or right in the landscapes, making life easier. For example, repairing an old mill requires energizing three battery-driven devices, and hints on getting those devices to spin correctly are painted on some nearby tins.

The puzzles are pleasant and fair, with a couple of possible exceptions. There are four worlds to explore—unless you're tone deaf, in which case the game ends in the third world with a puzzle involving musical pipes and tuning forks. A different puzzle in the second world could also be a killjoy; it involves four columns of circles that have to be adjusted on a device to trigger a bridge to form. Only one column at a time can be seen, and the rest rotate around the inside of the device. Each of the circles has four symbols on it, for a total of 64 symbols that have to be aligned into one continuous pattern. Needless to say, by the time you activate said bridge, your greatest wish may be to jump off it, and if you can complete the puzzle without a walkthrough, you should apply for a job as a cryptographer for the FBI. Some of *Aura*'s other puzzles are a bit bizarre, but they do contain interesting components, like a collection of glowing fangs. You can get killed only in one area, and *Aura* presents an interesting situation there, too, as you get attacked by unruly Amazons.

A couple of desktop crashes, a weak plot,



⬆ It's hard enough just trying to figure out what's required in this musical puzzle. Never mind actually solving it if you're not musically inclined.

and those two potentially aggravating conundrums do mar what otherwise could have been a stronger game. Still, *Aura: Fate of the Ages* exudes a respectable glow with its plethora of thought-provoking puzzles and elegant graphics. ⊠ **Denice Cook**

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆
MIT could use a few of this game's puzzles as its early admissions test, but *Aura*'s still enjoyable overall.

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# TrackMania

## Fender bender

What's worse than a mediocre piece of shareware? Answer: a $30 retail game that looks and plays like a mediocre piece of shareware. And that, unfortunately, is what *TrackMania*, Enlight Software's new arcade racing/track design game, amounts to.

At best, *TrackMania* is a rough skeleton of what you might expect a racing game to be. There's exactly one—yes, that's right, one—car. And aside from a few customizable skins, there's nothing about your vehicle that can be changed or enhanced.

As far as raceways go, there are three varieties of tracks (snow, desert, and grass), all equally devoid of animation or other signs of life. Though there's a decent selection of individual courses in the main racing mode, most of them end up looking simplistic and feeling highly redundant. There's nothing special here—or even anything done particularly well.

The built-in course editor helps a bit, but it too is fairly basic. *TrackMania*'s other alternate modes, including its multiplayer mode, add little substance to the experience. Even the music is offensive, consisting of little more than a collection of grating guitar riffs. All told, *TrackMania* reeks of shareware-caliber game design. If you seek a fun racing game, keep on truckin'. ⊠ **Ryan Scott**

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆
Just go buy some Matchbox cars instead.



It's the snow level!



⬆ And here we have the desert level!
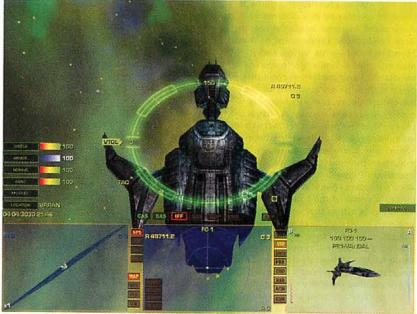
# Universal Combat

## Burden of dreams

I n 1982, maverick German director Werner Herzog released a film called *Fitzcarraldo*, which detailed a 19th-century robber baron's attempt to drag a riverboat over a mountain in the Peruvian jungle. A documentary on the making of this movie came out the same year. It revealed that Herzog, rather than relying on special effects, had actually dragged a real boat over a real mountain in a real jungle in the real Peru—and in the process, drove himself and everyone around him insane. The minor tragedy of the whole episode is that the documentary is a lot more entertaining than the ponderous film.

Such has been the case with the long-running *Battlecruiser* series of space sims. The very public lawsuits, countersuits, cease-and-desist orders, heated debates, stalkers, tantrums, threats of physical violence, and general miasma of controversy that surrounds the series' visionary creator, Dr. Derek Smart, have been more thrilling than any of the rickety, awkward games that resulted from his decade-long obsession with creating the ultimate space-combat simulator. The good news is that with the fifth entry in the series, *Universal Combat*, Smart has made a game that's closer than ever to being almost as interesting as the drama that surrounds it. The bad news is that it still isn't very good.

## In the year 3000...

For the uninitiated, *Universal Combat* simulates the year 3000. Not any particular part of the era, like, say, the blowing up the Death Star part, but pretty much the whole thing. It plops you down in the middle of the universe, gives you access to more than 100 vehicles—including spaceships, jeeps, tanks, submarines, ships, and jets—and lets you do more or less whatever you want. That is, assuming you take the time to learn the absurdly complex interface. It's hugely ambitious in scope but unpolished in its many, many details.

Gaining basic knowledge of the controls should occupy the average person for longer than it takes to finish *Max Payne*. To get you started, there's a 100-page printed manual, a 200-page downloadable appendix, and an 80-page downloadable tutorial. Every key on the keyboard is used for something. Twice. There's an undeniable nerd satisfaction



⊙ The TLD in action! Or maybe it's the LTD. Or the TTD. Anyway, that's definitely the TDD there in the middle.



The planetside visuals aren't exactly state-of-the-art.



Landing on a big, flat bitmap of a city.

that comes from mastering the interface, but once you accomplish this task, the game itself doesn't work very hard to reward you for your efforts. Expect lots of aimless wandering and long periods of tedium punctuated by visually unimpressive combat.

With its daunting interface, an over-the-top fixation on the most trivial details of starship control, and a general disregard for any kind of satisfying, flashy production values, *Universal Combat* goes beyond simply targeting the average starship-combat enthusiast. This is a game designed for people whose routine space fantasies at some point turned the corner into actual fetishism. Not that there's anything wrong with that. If you've enjoyed previous installments of the series, this is a bargain-priced (selling for $19.95) incremental advancement on everything you already like. For anyone who doesn't share Dr. Smart's very specific obsessions, however, *Universal Combat* is an exhausting, impenetrable bore. ⊠ **Erik Wolpaw**

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆
**An ambitious but ponderous chore.**

# World Soccer: Winning Eleven 7 International

## Real football finally comes to the PC

While console gamers have had the luxury of playing Konami's soccer games in various forms, PC gamers have really only had EA's licensing juggernaut *FIFA* series if they wanted to play a full-on action soccer game instead of some kind of egghead management sim. With the release of *Winning Eleven 7* for the PC, computer gamers have finally been treated to the best pure arcade soccer game available with a keyboard or a gamepad.

While casual fans may not immediately appreciate it, Konami's offerings are far truer to the flow of actual soccer than the *FIFA* series, which feels like a combination of hockey and basketball on grass by comparison. The pace is a bit slower, the ball movement more realistic, and there is less focus on highlight play after highlight play. A well-played game of *Winning Eleven 7* gives the impression of having watched a TV soccer match and controlled the results. It's that good.

While most PC sports gamers will own some form of gamepad, configuring yours for this game takes a bit of effort—when I first plugged in my USB Logitech pad,

none of the buttons did what it was supposed to do. This is apparently normal. Fortunately, there is an extensive controller configuration utility. Because this is essentially a straight console port, the game has no real mouse functionality.

Once all the buttons are doing what they should, you'll find *Winning Eleven*'s gameplay more demanding than the *FIFA* series. The many tactical modes extend to the ability to fine-tune teamwork and cooperation between players as well as the ability to properly manage game formations and substitutions, and together they make *Winning Eleven* a complete soccer package. It won't be until you've recovered from the idea that you're actually able to re-create true soccer gameplay on the PC that you'll notice the outstanding graphics (both player and stadium renderings), impressive animations, and generally good commentary by Peter Brackley and Trevor Brooking.

The one thing you won't be able to do with *Winning Eleven 7* is play with actual players and teams in the world's major soccer leagues. While Fox Sports World advertises its English Premier League cov-


The goalmouth action feels just chaotic enough.


National teams get the proper treatment.

erage in the back of the manual, the league options are vanilla, with four two-division leagues in the career mode. Fortunately, there is a game editor, and this being a PC game, edited files have already sprung up for download from fan sites. Despite its lack of major licensing, *Winning Eleven 7* brings the true spirit of soccer to the PC. ⬛ Bruce Geryk

**Verdict** ★★★★⯪
Some serious footie.

# Virtual Skipper 3

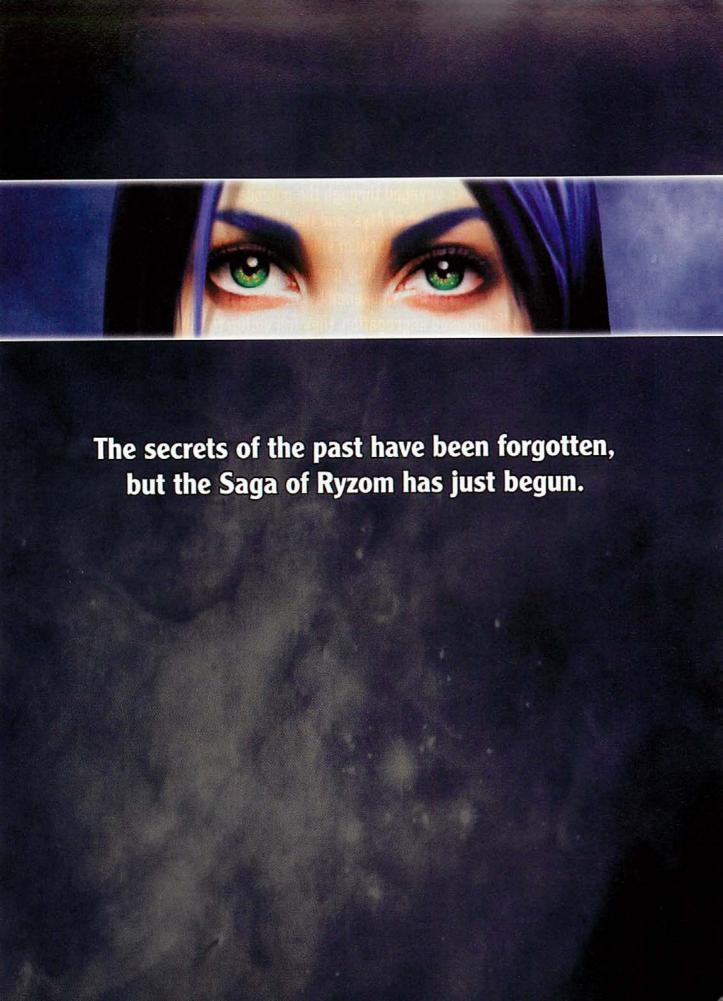## Proof that there was a Virtual Skipper 1 and 2

After the glut of sailing sims a few years ago—what, you don't remember?—and the incessant nitpicking by hardcore sailing fanatics ("Realistic? When the Trimaran tacks a full .34 seconds faster than the one I sailed in Sydney in 1979?"), it appeared that the genre was dead, a victim of modern game economics and its own fan base.

Enter *Virtual Skipper 3*, easily the best PC sailing simulation on the market today—for whatever that's worth. Real-life skippers will find that the variety of boat styles (America's Cup Class, Melges 24, Offshore Racer, and Open 60 Trimaran), combined with extremely detailed envi-

ronmental and boat physics, provides both a challenge and an education. But even landlubbers will find the training races and trials interesting, and the sailing aids will gradually move you from learning how to maximize the speed of your boat in a variety of wind conditions to experimenting with racing tactics. Races are located in a wide variety of well-known sailing venues, and if those included aren't enough, you can set up custom races or even use the included editor to create your own locations and race setups. Thus, *Virtual Skipper 3* truly is the Holy Grail of sailing sims, satisfying both hardcore and casual virtual helmsman. ⬛ Jeff Lackey


Forget the beer and the rest of the crew won't even look at you.

**Verdict** ★★★⯪★
Sailing fans will love it, and sim fans looking for a different style of challenge may want to give it a shot.

The secrets of the past have been forgotten,
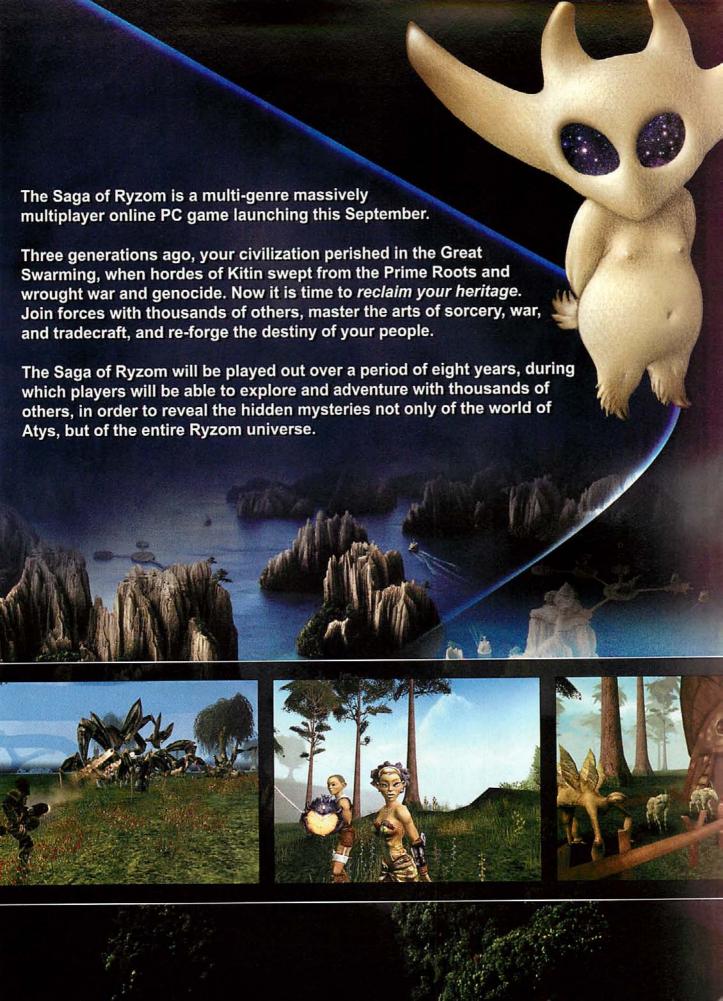but the Saga of Ryzom has just begun.

For many centuries I have voyaged through the quiescent corridors of Ryzom. I bore witness to the Green Rising of Atys, and the birth of Hominkind. I witnessed their striving for survival in a merciless world of killing plants and swarming beasts. Worse, entrenched in their brutish ignorance they gave themselves to bloodshed in their vying for power with their own kin. Thus weakened by interracial warfare and bound to their territories in their self-imposed segregation, they fell victim to the terrible swarming of the Kitin...

Elias Tryton, Year 2525

The Saga of Ryzom is a multi-genre massively multiplayer online PC game launching this September.

Three generations ago, your civilization perished in the Great Swarming, when hordes of Kitin swept from the Prime Roots and wrought war and genocide. Now it is time to *reclaim your heritage*. Join forces with thousands of others, master the arts of sorcery, war, and tradecraft, and re-forge the destiny of your people.

The Saga of Ryzom will be played out over a period of eight years, during which players will be able to explore and adventure with thousands of others, in order to reveal the hidden mysteries not only of the world of Atys, but of the entire Ryzom universe.

Three generations have since passed for healing wounds and rebuilding lives, for intro-spection and rekindling the spirit of hominkind. The time has now come for the wise and the brave to take up the reins of ambition, to blaze the trail to a new order, to span the rifts between continents and forge the destinies of their civilizations.

Elias Tryton, Year 2525

**A Story Line That Matters**
Ryzom boasts a wholly original universe fusing
science fiction and fantasy where players shape the story
and each server charts its own course.

**A Lush, Living Ecosystem**
The world of Atys is alive, with a rich and diverse ecology where flora and
fauna dynamically interact with each other and the ever-changing environment.
Nothing is static in Ryzom.

**Flexible Skill-Based Advancement**
Develop your character through a skill-based system that grows in detail as you gain
experience. Ryzom offers five huge skill trees with thousands of possible choices.

**Rich Item Creation/Enchantment**
Hunt and forage for scarce natural resources to craft complex items from the
bottom up, then add enchantments to your equipment to make it vastly more
powerful.

This is my one hope, for in unity will we best be armed to repel the tide of advancing evil. Certainly, I already hear the ominous rumblings of the Enemy that, alas, shall one day rock the very bowels of the green planet. But I have faith yet in this, the New Beginning of Mankind...

Elias Tryton, Year 2525

## Massive Territorial Invasions
Ryzom's RAID Engine delivers excitement on a large scale. Monsters will assault key outposts, dynamically invade territories, and devastate entire regions if left unchecked.

## Epic Battles with Hordes of Monsters
Fight hundreds of creatures at once in pitched battles! Ryzom offers groundbreaking mass combat mechanics that allow combat on a scale never before seen in MMORPGs.

## Customized Skills and Special Attacks
Ryzom's unique Modular Action System lets you create your own custom actions. From a core set of building blocks, make as many spells and special attacks as your imagination will allow.

## Guilds and Factions
Meet new friends and form your own Guild to compete against other players (PvP) or build strong alliances to face common enemies in mass combat.

# THE SAGA OF RYZOM

"It looks great, sounds compelling, and, perhaps more importantly, feels different from the raft of fantasy MMOs threatening to gut the market"

*ign*

"Ryzom could be the answer to your multiplayer prayers..."

**PC GAMER**

"Ryzom could be the prescription against staid and tired MMORPGs"

**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**
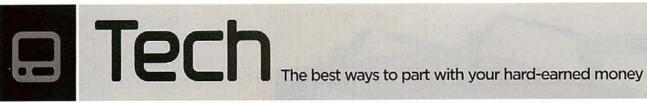
"2004 Best MMO of E3 Award"

**WARCRY**

## Join the Saga, reveal the history, and become the future.

# HARDCORE HARDWARE

**We take a look at the hottest, and in some cases, the coolest stuff out this fall.**
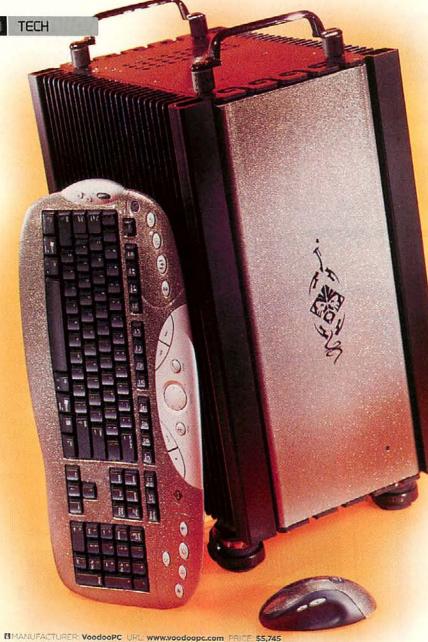
Last month, we tried to help the kids with some "back to school" advice. This month's Tech section is devoted to the latest in over-the-top gear. Loyd Case beats up on Voodoo's "silent system." New *CGW* reviewer Chris Angelini takes some time away from writing for Sharkyextreme.com to review Intel's latest mobo and ATI's midrange card. We also take a look at Dell's latest gaming rig, the Generation 3 Dimension XPS, and Joel shows you how to keep your motherboard's firmware up to date. Sit back and enjoy. And if you have any comments about this month's Tech section, head over to recently relaunched 1UP.com and let fly with the hate.

## Inside ✚

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

## If silence is the Holy Grail of PC gaming, then its King Arthur is performance.

cable management. VoodooPC takes the case and adds its paint magic and system-building mojo—the result is a killer gaming box that's utterly noiseless.

### What's Inside?

Inside the box resides an Athlon 64 3800+, a gigabyte of DDR400 memory, an ATI Radeon X800 XT Platinum Edition, and a RAID array based around the 10,000 rpm 74GB Raptor drives from Western Digital. A pair of Plextor optical drives (DVD+/-RW and CD-RW) round out storage. Since this is a gaming rig, we configured the system with an Audigy 2 ZS soundcard.

If silence is the Holy Grail of PC gaming, then its King Arthur is performance. The F50 has that in spades, posting a 3DMark2003 score in excess of 12,000. We saw framerates in *Far Cry* north of 100fps, and that was with lots of eye candy turned on, though the average framerate was closer to about 80fps. And we were hitting over 80fps in *Unreal Tournament 2003* and over 150fps in *Call of Duty*, all at high resolutions. Suffice it to say that game performance is excellent.

The combination of an Athlon 64 3800+ and the Radeon X800 XT is a potent one that's likely to keep you in high framerate territory for most games. Heck, even *Doom 3* might be playable with some pretty visuals turned on. The RAID configuration enables fast loading of levels, and using the Raptor drives offers some assurance that the array will be reliable under heavy use.

When we say "silence is golden," we mean it. This system will set you back $5,745. This does not include a monitor, keyboard, or mouse, but it does include a copy of Windows XP Professional. That's a lot of loose change, though you can save $400 by skipping the fancy paint job. Buy it and your ears will thank you. ⬛ **Loyd Case**

**MANUFACTURER: VoodooPC** URL: **www.voodoopc.com** PRICE: **$5,745**

# SILENCE IS GOLDEN

The VoodooPC F50 won't win any awards for looks, but the only sounds it will make will be from your games

**Based on a $1,200 silent case system from Zalman, the VoodooPC F50 generates no fan noise whatsoever. Booting it up is almost eerie, as all you hear is the low-level chatter from the hard drive. If not for that and the Windows fanfare when the OS comes up, you'd swear it wasn't running at all.**

The F50 is massive, weighing in at nearly 60 pounds. The chassis looks like an industrial heater since the case itself is part of the cooling system, replete with fins, heat pipes, and a fanless power supply. The CPU, north bridge, and graphics-card fans have been replaced by heat-pipe coolers that are connected directly to the thick aluminum case. The fins on the case itself serve to vent heat. A pair of solid doors hides the front and back, which would otherwise be completely open—no front bezels on this puppy. Cable guides grace the top and bottom of the case, allowing for easy

**SCORE:** ★★★★☆

# MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

ATI's X600 XT replaces the Radeon 9600 XT

It's easy to get excited about top-shelf hardware, the kind of stuff that costs more than one month's rent but is fast enough to justify the price. Mainstream components just aren't as sexy. However, with the advent of PCI Express, even midrange hardware includes exciting new technology, and that's not counting platform advancements such as DDR2 system memory and high-fidelity audio.

ATI's Radeon X600 XT is an evolutionary step beyond the Radeon 9600 XT, with native support for PCI Express x16 graphics rather than the standard AGP 8x slot, which gives it a total of 8GB per second of bidirectional bandwidth compared with AGP's 2.1GB per second. Quite simply, there's more room to accommodate demanding applications, such as editing high-definition video in real time. But the chip itself centers on the same architecture, featuring four-pixel pipelines and a

pair of vertex shading engines, all manufactured on a 130nm low-k process. It even sports the same 500MHz core clock speed. Fortunately, ATI did make improvements to the card's memory subsystem, employing 128MB of 370MHz DDR RAM on a 128-bit bus to boost available bandwidth by 22 percent.

Whereas higher-end PCI Express graphics cards come with a six-pin power connector to augment the interface's power delivery, ATI's Radeon X600 XT doesn't need the extra juice. As a result, you may be able to get away with not buying a new power supply on top of the motherboard, processor, memory, and videocard needed to enjoy PCI Express graphics on Intel's 925X chipset. And because the card is small with a minimalist heat sink, it works well in a small form-factor or home-theater-gaming environment.

The Radeon X600 XT's resulting performance characteristics are certainly respectable. *Far Cry* is playable at 1024x768, running at nearly 45 frames per second. Of course, that's significantly slower than ATI's PCI Express flagship, the X800 XT, or even Nvidia's single-slot GeForce 6800 GT, both of which are still playable right up to 1600x1200. The X600 XT fares slightly better in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, where it nearly hits 37 frames per second at 1600x1200. Naturally, the other two cards

are still significantly faster. Less-demanding games perform much better on the X600 XT—the *Comanche 4* and *Final Fantasy XI* benchmarks have no problems running at 1600x1200.

Attractive as the Radeon X600 XT may or may not be, retail availability is still undetermined, although ATI confirms that it won't manufacture an AGP implementation of the chip. According to ATI, all of the company's PCI Express products are currently shipping to OEMs and system integrators since there isn't an upgrade market quite yet. When it does emerge on store shelves, expect prices between $199 and $299, depending on display and memory configurations. When you compare that to the $499 required to take home ATI's X800 XT and consider the number of new components needed to build a platform centering on the new 925X chipset, ATI's mainstream Radeon X600 XT gets a whole lot sexier. ▪ **Chris Angelini**

**SCORE:** ★★★⯪☆

*Far Cry* is playable at 1024x768, running at nearly 45 frames per second.

# INTEL'S LATEST—FAST, BUT AT A PREMIUM

Intel's D925XCV motherboard has everything you may *someday* need

The proliferation of new technology is quite often an arduous process. Intel's new 925X chipset isn't going to be any different, especially since it relies on the rapid adoption of DDR2 system memory, PCI Express graphics cards, and LGA775 processors. The process has to start somewhere, though, which is why Intel is unveiling its D925XCV motherboard. Sporting all of the latest core logic's bells and whistles, the D925XCV is designed with enough performance in mind, Intel hopes, to encourage a swift shift to the vision of Intel's digital home.

At the heart of the D925XCV lies an MCH (memory controller hub) bearing the chipset's 925X name. Responsible for communication between processor, graphics, and memory, the board's MCH exclusively supports PCI Express x16 graphics (say good-bye to your AGP 8x videocard), up to 4GB of DDR2 memory running at either 400MHz or 533MHz (bid farewell to the DDR400 modules

> **The D925XCV is designed with enough performance in mind, Intel hopes, to encourage a swift shift to the vision of Intel's digital home.**

you just bought), and a Pentium 4 processor designed for the new LGA775 socket interface (donate your old Socket 478 chip to someone who'll give you a good Christmas present). It also connects to a new ICH (I/O Controller Hub) with its own set of special features through a new 2GB-per-second bidirectional link.

The ICH6 reflects Intel's push for greater integrated functionality. To begin, it supports PCI Express x1 slots, of which the motherboard offers two. It's also equipped with four Serial ATA connectors with hardware support for RAID 0 striping and RAID 1 mirroring. The chipset only supports one parallel ATA port to offer compatibility with optical drives, making it necessary for you to buy a Serial ATA hard drive. Another lauded feature is the board's 7.1-channel High Definition Audio, a new standard championed by Intel. It has enough fidelity to support the Dolby Digital EX, DTS, and THX specifications, given proper software support. Finally, the D925XCV comes equipped with Gigabit Ethernet and eight USB 2.0 ports.

All of that newfangled technology is pricey, unfortunately. The motherboard alone sells for $230 on the street. Moreover, DDR2-533 memory is roughly two times more expensive than standard DDR400. Add a PCI Express graphics card, power supply, and an LGA775 processor, and you can see why upgrading to a D925XCV is somewhat daunting. Finally, keep in mind that the slogan for

Intel's desktop boards is "Integrity to Build On." In other words, the D925XCV prioritizes stability, so if you prefer the tireless pursuit of performance, check out ABIT's AA8-DuraMAX or ASUS' P5AD2. ⬚ **Chris Angelini**

**SCORE: ★★★★★**

# SPEED FREAK

Velocity Micro's Vision 64 is fast, but is it a good deal?

It would be nice to say that with the Velocity Micro Vision 64, you could have it all: a powerful computer with decent components for a bargain price. Sadly, some trim-level defects and instability keep this system from being everything we had hoped for.

The Vision 64's case comes with a spiffy grey-black paint job and a front-side temperature readout for multiple sensors, but it feels flimsy. The bezels don't stay on—when I ejected one of the DVD drives, the tray blew its bezel right off and onto the floor. Another bezel is missing in action, giving you a nice view of the inside of the

performance numbers even when pitted against this year's Ultimate Game Machine rigs—and the Vision 64 hovers around the same price range as those systems (if you add a monitor and speakers).

I ran 3DMark2003 at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and 8x AF (enabled through the graphics card's driver applet, not through 3DMark2003), and it spat back one of the finest scores we've seen to date: 6197. That and the *Halo* score of 85fps (run at 1280x1024 without AA or AF) put it ahead of the ABS Ultimate M6 (thanks, of course, to the 6800 Ultra).

Real-world tests left me satisfied. The

Vision 64 crunched through piggish titles such as *Far Cry* and *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising* with nary a slowdown. It was almost enough to make me forgive the gap-toothed bezel.

But the bezel wasn't the only thing to raise my ire. During playtesting, the system locked up about half a dozen times over the course of five days. Rhyme and reason didn't prevail, as it hanged at different times and at different temperatures. It locked during play in several games, once while installing a game, and it even froze a couple of times immediately after booting. In other instances, I was able to play for hours without a hitch.

It's very possible that the freezes are unique to this particular unit—a bad RAM module, for instance, or a motherboard defect could be at fault. Regardless, this was a less than stellar showing for what should have been a midrange dream. **Joel Durham Jr.**

> During playtesting, the system locked up about half a dozen times over the course of five days. Rhyme and reason didn't prevail, as it hanged at different times and at different temperatures.

**SCORE: ★★★½☆**

rig. Also, the windowed side panel was warped.

The guts are about right considering the Vision 64's price. While that 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra is a monster, the AMD Athlon 64 3800+ is a little weak compared to an FX-53; nevertheless, the Vision 64's numbers are still impressive. Velocity gave its rig a gigabyte of DDR memory blasting along at 400MHz. A single Western Digital hard drive provides 250GB of space for games and mods (and, if you must, Quicken files), while the audio is taken care of by an onboard chip. If I could change one bit of gear, it would be the audio equipment: With so many games taking advantage of EAX Advanced HD, I'd have liked a Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy 2-based soundcard here.

## A high-velocity performer with a catch

By fitting the Vision 64 with a bleeding-edge graphics card, Velocity guaranteed impressive gaming benchmarks. Indeed, it's a mighty system, kicking out serious

# DELL'S GAMING WORKHORSE

Dell's Generation 3 Dimension XPS is a safe way to try out the latest technology

When Dell burst onto the gaming scene with its original XPS gaming system, we welcomed its arrival with tempered optimism. We love Dell's reputation for shipping stable systems and we've never had any problems with its tech support. That said, we worried that its use of proprietary parts and commitment to Intel would hamper performance. We were right. The XPS systems are plenty solid, but they aren't the speed demons we've seen from Voodoo, Falcon, Alienware, or Gateway. Dell has recently released its Gen 3 XPS. And while it's faster than its predecessors, when it comes to performance, it's still slower than the competition.

## New technology

The big news in PC hardware is the introduction of PCI Express and Intel's latest chipset. Dell's Gen 3 XPS doesn't necessarily take advantage of all that this technology has to offer—we didn't expect it to. While the Generation 3 XPS ships with ATI's 256MB Radeon X800 XT PCI Express graphics card, Dell passed on using the chipset's integrated High Definition Audio, going with Creative Lab's Audigy 2 add-in PCI card instead. But this is a double-edged sword that exemplifies the so-called Dell experience. We've spoken to a few people who have had trouble with Intel's High Definition Audio, and because Dell went with Creative's proven product, customers who buy the Gen 3 XPS won't be calling Dell's tech support about the sound. Then again, gamers who want the hottest technology currently available won't be pleased. Also, while the two cards are pretty close when it comes to performance, ATI's Radeon X800 XT is slower than Nvidia's GeForce 6800 GT.

Nevertheless, the Gen 3 XPS does come with some cool goodies: dual 250GB Western Digital hard drives in a 500GB RAID 0 configuration, 1GB of DDR2 memory, Intel's 3.6GHz Pentium 4 processor, a DVD multidrive and a standard CD-RW, Logitech's Z680 5.1 speakers, and, oh yeah, Dell's awesome 20.1-inch 2001FP LCD monitor. The XPS also has tons of USB ports and multiple FireWire ports.

## Take me to the numbers
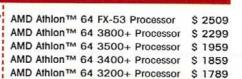
Like we mentioned earlier, the XPS' weakest link is in the performance department. We benchmarked it at 1280x1024 and 1600x1200 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. With that in mind, its 3DMark2003 score of 4,908 at 1280x1024 is fewer than 200 points less than the 5,087 that our Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT-equipped Killer Rig achieved. Actual game tests are where its shortcomings really showed up. Its 3D GameGauge 3.5 score of 58fps at 1280x1024 is about 40fps less than the Killer Rig's score! That's significant.

Of course, numbers only tell part of a system's story. The fact remains that this machine is fast enough to handle any games you can throw at it. Furthermore, you get the assurance of knowing that if anything goes wrong with it, you've got a major corporation backing it up. That said, Dell is still using a proprietary motherboard, meaning it's not the most upgradeable system around. But hey, Dell knows this. If you're a hardcore gamer who doesn't have plans on upgrading anytime soon, you'll no doubt be pleased with the Gen 3 XPS. That 20.1-inch LCD is supersexy, those Logitech speakers are the bomb, and you know that when you order it, it'll show up. 🖪 **William O'Neal**

**SCORE: ★★★★☆**

# GO GO GADGET!

Check out the latest crop of toys that are occupying Wil's time

## MONSTER GECKO PISTOLMOUSE FPS GAMING MOUSE ➡

People have been trying like mad to come up with a better way to play first-person shooters than with the keyboard and mouse. You know what? They haven't. And this is why the PistolMouse is so interesting. You're still technically playing with the keyboard and laser mouse, although holding a pistol in your hand does add a touch of realism. Be warned, though, that playing games with the PistolMouse takes some getting used to.

## ↔ CREATIVE MUVO SLIM

The debate still rages on about the relative merits of flash-media-based devices (Creative's MuVo line and Apple's iPod Mini) versus hard-drive-based devices (Creative's Nomad line and the original iPod). The thing is, they each have their good and not-so-good points. Creative's MuVo Slim, regardless of that debate, is awesome. It has 256MB of flash memory (so it'll never skip), and supports USB 2.0, and the rechargeable battery lasts up to 17 hours and recharges while it's plugged into your USB port.

## SAMSUNG VI660 (SPRINT PCS) ➡

If picture phones aren't your thing, Samsung's VI660 is the perfect phone for you at around $50. You can download a ton of ring tones, surf the Internet, and play games on it. There's even a gamepad accessory available.

## ↔ JAKKS PACIFIC TV GAMES

While *XBN*'s Andrew Burwell thinks that JAKKS TV Games are merely "s***ty old games," we still can't get enough of them. Call it nostalgia. Call it Generation X gone too far. Or call it akin to sleeping with an ex-girl-friend. The fact remains that everyone loved Pong, the Atari 2600, and Ms. Pac-Man back in the day, and it's hard to not love 'em now. ❌ **By William O'Neal**

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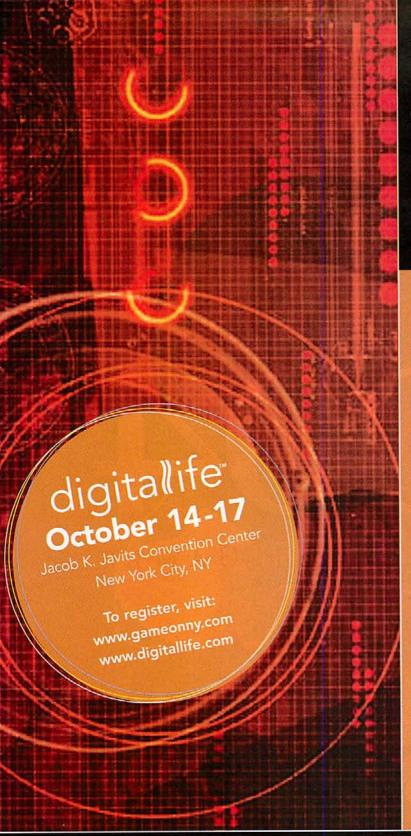
# Wil loses the forest for the trees...again

W hen one of your hobbies becomes your job, it's easy to lose interest in the very things that once made you excited. Years ago, I would tinker with my computer for no reason other than the fact that it was there. I'd spend hours on end overclocking my graphics card just to see how many more frames per second I could squeeze out of it, only to restore the default settings once my curiosity had been sated. I once installed Linux on a machine over a 14.4kbps modem, and it took days to complete. Once I had it up and running, I bragged to a group of friends then reinstalled Windows. Now, though, vendors send me info about their latest products and often I let out a sigh and lament the work that company A's new technology will mean for me. Cry me a river. Of course, every now and then, something comes along and shakes me out of my funk.

After announcing its latest chipsets, called the 925 and 915, Intel sent a couple of boards my way, most notably the Intel D925XCV, based on the 925X chipset. When the kit, including two 250GB Maxtor hard drives and 1GB of DDR2 memory, showed up, I was in the middle of completing last month's issue, so the boxes just sat there for a few days. Well, with last month's issue in the bag, I had a little free time, so I put together the Killer Rig that appears in this issue. Without the burden of an immediate deadline, I was able to put together a killer system around the D925XCV motherboard. This motherboard is not just a screamer—it boasts some pretty awesome technology, such as High Definition Audio and Gigabit Ethernet.

When you live and die by deadlines, it's easy to lose sight of what's fun about computing. As the saying goes, "Don't lose the forest for the trees." ● William O'Neal

# Loyd's
# Cracked Case

## Network me

**H**ere in "The Basement," as my lab is affectionately known, the systems are all networked together. This is also where my Friday Night Follies LAN party sessions take place. Networking a bunch of homebrew systems in a single room may sound difficult, but in fact it's pretty easy. Buy a switch, connect up all the PCs, configure IP addresses, and go. If you add a router to the mix, it's even easier, because the router will auto-assign IP addresses to your systems. The thing is, this isn't good enough. My wife and daughters, for example, wanted to connect to the cable modem throughout the entire house.

### A happy wife makes for a happy life

So a couple of years ago, we had the house wired. We had full CAT5e going to the dining room and all three bedrooms. A Linksys 16-port 10/100 fast Ethernet switch lived inside the Leviton box and handled all the physical connections for both the office and throughout the house. An SMC router lived between the switch and the cable modem.

For a while, that was good enough. I could connect easily to the Ziff Davis network via VPN. My wife would happily connect up in the living room to surf the Web. Her situation was somewhat complicated by the fact that her employer had supplied her with a private DSL line, so her work connectivity was limited to her office. The kids both had fast Ethernet connections in their bedrooms, giving them Web access and, more important to them, IM (instant messenger) access.

Then my wife's employer decided to pull the private DSL line and supply her with VPN software, offering to pay part of the cost of the cable modem line. Now suddenly she wanted VPN access everywhere. At the same time, I was getting a bit tired of having "mere" fast Ethernet

access. Gigabit Ethernet beckoned.

So I pulled the SMC router and Linksys switch. I found a Dell 24-port Gigabit Ethernet switch for under $400, which replaced the 16-port 10/100 switch. A D-Link AirPlus Xtreme G router took the place formerly occupied by the SMC router. The AirPlus is both a wired and wireless router, supporting a sort of turbo 802.11g protocol for wireless networking that can double throughput if you have supported "turbo g" capable cards or chips in your mobile computers. Most of the PCs on the wired network are Gigabit capable already, thanks to the wonders of motherboard integration.

So now my wife happily connects to work from anywhere in the house. My daughters really don't notice much difference, and I can move really big files around the wired network more quickly than before. All was well. It did take a

bit of figuring to set up all the wireless-capable PCs in a secure manner, but I can now keep casual, drive-by users from connecting to my network.

This actually solved another niggling problem. You see, when I had CAT5e wire pulled throughout the house, I'd forgotten to wire the family room. That's where the television and multichannel audio system live. Now, I can connect in with 802.11g and get network access on the big-screen television through the home-theater PC. Heck, I've even played some Internet games on the big Samsung 50-inch DLP rear-projection television.

All of this was not without cost, however. And today, I'd probably still wire up the house, though with CAT6. But one bonus of the cabling we used originally is that the cable bundle includes fiber-optic connections to every room. So I've begun thinking.... ⊠ **Loyd Case**

⊡ **You're not Loyd. If you were Loyd you'd need a 24 Port Gigabit Ethernet Switch in your house too.**

> **Networking a bunch of homebrew systems in a single room may sound difficult, but in fact it's pretty easy. Buy a switch, connect up all the PCs, configure IP addresses, and go.**

# Check Out

## Inside

**Check us out! No, really, check us out!**

After nine months of regurgitating the same old boring A-List and four-page Rewind spread, we've retooled the Check Out section with some fresh new stuff. Killer Rig is back and badder than ever (in a good way), and our new Fast Forward section will bring you plenty of dynamic content each month. Now check us out, dammit!

# Killer Rig

## Back by...uh...demand

Revolutions rarely work—they're typically an extreme overreaction to an already extreme situation. If history has taught us anything, it's that happiness is best found in the middle. The problem is that technology doesn't necessarily change from month to month, and because of that we killed it. You know what happened? It didn't change much from month to month, either. With that in mind, we've decided to find a happy medium. Each month, we'll build either a low- or high-end Killer Rig from either Intel or AMD, and the shortened A-List will boast a more dynamic variety of products, ensuring that the list itself changes from month to month.

### Behold, Intel's newest chipset

Just when you thought you had this whole CPU thing figured out, Intel went and shook things up by announcing two new chipsets: the 925X (Alderwood) and the 915G (Grantsdale). I managed to get my hands on Intel's 925X-based D925XCV motherboard and decided to build a machine around it. Holy crap! This motherboard is awesome. For starters, the D925XCV has a ton of cool features, including support for PCI Express graphics and DDR2 memory, as well as built-in Gigabit Ethernet and onboard HD Audio.

I built my 925X machine in an Antec P160 case, using a HIPRO 460W power supply, Nvidia's 256MB GeForce 6800 GT PCI Express graphics card, 1GB of Micron DDR2 memory, and a pair of 250GB Maxtor hard drives in a 500GB RAID 0 configuration.

I benchmarked my machine with 3DMark2003, AquaMark 2003, and 3DGameGauge 3.5, all with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on—and I'm happy to report that this machine screams. Its 3DMark2003 scores of 5,087 and 3,880 at 1280x1024 and 1600x1200 are truly impressive, and we all know how awesome *Halo* scores of 77 and 61 frames per second are. Numbers aside, the D925XCV is also extremely easy to install: The board ships with a huge fold-out diagram that highlights how to connect the front-panel connectors as well as the various USB and FireWire cables. Sleek, simple, and functional. Word! ■ **William O'Neal**

Antec **P160 case**

Nvidia **256MB GeForce 6800 GT PCI Express**

Maxtor **Dual 250GB Maxline III SATA hard drives**

## 3DMark2003 Pro v.340

| | Killer Rig | Velocity Micro Vision 64 | Dell Dimension XPS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 5087 | 6197 | 4908 |

## AquaMark2003

| | Killer Rig | Velocity Micro Vision 64 | Dell Dimension XPS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 38 | 49 | 27 |

ALL TESTS RUN WITH 4X AA (ANTIALIASING) AND 8X AF (ANISOTROPIC FILTERING) TURNED ON UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Viewsonic
**VP201s 20.1-
inch LCD**
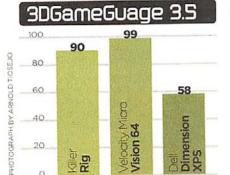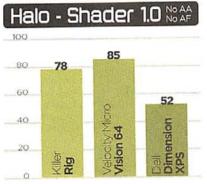
Logitech **Z680
5.1 speakers**

## The Guts

| MODEL | POWER RIG | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Operating system | Windows XP Professional Edition | $300 |
| Case | Antec P160 | $100 |
| Power supply | HIPRO 460W | $100 |
| Processor (CPU) | Intel 3.4GHz Pentium Extreme Edition (800MHz FSB) | $1,000 |
| Motherboard | Intel D925XCV (Intel 925X chipset, code-named "Alderwood") | $250 |
| Memory | 1GB Micron DDR2 | $200 |
| Hard drive | Dual 250GB Maxtor Maxline III SATA hard drives in a 500GB RAID 0 configuration | $500 |
| Graphics processor | 256MB Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT PCI Express | $500 |
| Soundcard | Onboard Intel High Definition Audio | |
| Optical drive | Pioneer DVR-107D DVD-/+RW combo drive | $100 |
| Monitor | Viewsonic VP201s 20.1-inch LCD | $1,000 |
| Keyboard/ mouse | Microsoft Wireless Optical Desktop Elite | $100 |
| Speakers | Logitech Z680 5.1 speakers | $300 |
| Miscellaneous | Gigabit (10/100/1000 Mbits/sec) LAN; eight USB 2.0 ports; four conventional PCI slots; two PCI Express x1bus slots; one PCI Express x16 bus slot (graphics card); one 1394 FireWire port | |
| TOTAL COST | | $4,460 |

### 3DGameGuage 3.5

| | |
|---|---|
| Killer **Rig** | 90 |
| Velocity Micro **Vision 64** | 99 |
| Dell **Dimension XPS** | 58 |

### Halo - Shader 1.0  No AA No AF

| | |
|---|---|
| Killer **Rig** | 78 |
| Velocity Micro **Vision 64** | 85 |
| Dell **Dimension XPS** | 52 |

PHOTOGRAPH BY ARNOLD T. OSEJO

# A-List

## Our picks
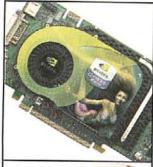
"Hey, wait!" you're probably saying. "This isn't the same boring six pages of A-List I see every month! What's up with that?" Yes, A-List has been trimmed down to just two pages in order to make room for all the other great new Check Out content. Now, instead of presenting you with the same eerily similar six-page hardware guide each month, we'll have two pages of rotating monthly selections from different categories, courtesy of *CGW* hardware ninja Wil O'Neal. And in return, you can all stop sending us hate mail about the A-List. That's a fair trade, right?

# COMPONENTS

What's up with this newfangled PCI Express thing? Can't we just stick with our AGP cards? Sheesh, it hasn't even been around that long. Only like...seven years or so. Excuse us while we sit in our corner and feel old.

## Videocard

| PRODUCT | WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT |
|---|---|
| **HIGH-END PICK**<br>**256MB Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT**<br>$500<br>Nvidia | At the heart of Wil's Killer Rig, Nvidia's flagship card is fast and even more power-hungry than Ryan Scott. The first PCI Express card we've played with, this thing blows its AGP competition away. Of course, not everyone can just run out and plug it in; it needs more power than NORAD—and a PCI Express x16-capable motherboard—to really take advantage of its awesome power. |
| **MIDRANGE PICK**<br>**256MB ATI Radeon X600**<br>$200 to $300<br>ATI | The midrange market is where companies make all their money. That's because not everyone is gonna run out and drop $500 on an after-market graphics card. ATI's midrange PCI Express option, the X600, will cost anywhere from $200 to $300 depending on the configuration (memory, etc.) you choose. While it'll be plenty fast for current games, how it will handle *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* remains to be seen. |
| **BUDGET PICK**<br>**128MB ATI Radeon 9600 XT**<br>$150<br>ATI | The Radeon 9600 XT used to be ATI's midrange pick. Of course, that was before everyone jumped on the PCI Express bandwagon. If you're still running an AGP system and are on a budget, then you can't go wrong with this card. It's fast enough for most games that are out right now, and it won't break the bank. |

# MOBILITY

One day, we'll all be wearing geeky calculator and PDA belt holsters, just like Darren Gladstone. OK, so he doesn't actually wear one of those—but he was recently seen gloating over his new N-Gage QD screenshot-capture kit, which is even geekier.

## Laptop

| PRODUCT | WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT |
|---|---|
| **HIGH-END PICK**<br>**Satellite P25-S670 Media Center laptop**<br>$2,599<br>Toshiba | Toshiba's Satellite P25-S670 Media Center laptop is the ultimate jack-of-all-trades. Is it a TiVo? Yes. Is it a gaming laptop? Yes. Is it a DVD player? Yes. While it's not as fast as Dell's Inspiron XPS, the Satellite P25-S670 is just plain cool. |
| **LIGHTWEIGHT PICK**<br>**200ARC**<br>$2,225<br>Gateway | With its light weight and built-in 802.11b/g wireless capabilities, we're in love with Gateway's 200ARC. Add the built-in DVD multidrive into the mix and this baby is the ultimate road warrior. |

## Phone

| PRODUCT | WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT |
|---|---|
| **OUR PICK**<br>**Samsung VM-A680 (Sprint PCS)**<br>$300 ($150 with service commitment)<br>Samsung | The Samsung VM-A680 is a multimedia workhorse that lets you do everything from watching television (streamed over the phone) and playing games to taking pictures or videos of the ladies in your chemistry class, which you can e-mail, or send to other Sprint PCS-enabled phones. Hell, when you're done with all that, you can even call Mom and ask for more beer money...er, lunch money. |

## PDA

| PRODUCT | WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT |
|---|---|
| **OUR PICK**<br>**Sony CLIE UX-50**<br>$500<br>Sony | Notebooks are great, but even the thinnest and lightest ones are a pain in the ass to lug around campus. PDAs are just way more convenient. Just ask Darren, the resident gadget dork: He swears by this one. It's got a sidekick-sized keyboard that can type up documents, built-in Wi-Fi for Web surfing in class, and one sweet friggin' design. These puppies, while hard to find, are worth the search. |

## Gadget

| PRODUCT | WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT |
|---|---|
| **OUR PICK**<br>**Nomad Jukebox Zen Xtra MP3 Player**<br>$400<br>Creative Labs | Don't get suckered into buying an iPod—it can't read half the file types of the Zen Xtra (namely WMA). So what are you gonna do with the 60GB of space? Upload your whole music collection in a flash, thanks to the USB 2.0 hookup. Then stash your homework and term papers with all the room you've got left over. |

# Fast Forward

Hey look, something besides six boring pages of A-List! Welcome to our new Fast Forward section, where you'll find plenty of random and goofy stuff to keep yourself entertained for five minutes (at least!).

## MORE OVERRATED/UNDERRATED!

The Overrated/Underrated feature from our June 2004 issue was a pretty big hit, and we've been flooded with e-mail telling us how much everyone loved it. You ask, we listen—here are a few more Overrated/Underrated picks for you!

### THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED
### NOSTALGIA TRIP

**OVERRATED ADVENTURE GAMES**
Have you looked around on the Web lately? There are tons of people getting all wistful about the olden days of adventure gaming. There are even a few fan groups dedicated to remaking some of Sierra's and LucasArts' classic titles. Sorry to break it to you, guys, but adventure games ain't what they used to be—and probably never will be again.

**UNDERRATED SINGLE-PLAYER RPGS** You just don't see too many good single-player RPGs for the PC these days. Sure, we got *Knights of the Old Republic* last year, and there's a sequel due out pretty soon. But what ever happened to the good old days of *Ultima, Wizardry,* and *Might & Magic*? Heck, even *Planescape: Torment* seems like ages ago. What a shame!

### THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED
### BABE OF GAMING

**OVERRATED LARA CROFT** Everyone's gaga over Lara Croft. Well, maybe not so much anymore (after the train wreck that was *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*), but there was a time when you couldn't glance at a gaming message board without seeing someone ask for *Tomb Raider* nude codes. Get over her, guys. She's just a bunch of pixels.

**UNDERRATED CATE ARCHER** Fiery, young cat-burglar-turned-suave-secret-agent, *No One Lives Forever*'s Cate Archer is one of the most badass babes in PC gaming. It's too bad this cute little super-spy slipped under most gamers' radars—but then again, that's what secret agents are supposed to do, right?

### THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED
### CODE THEFT

**OVERRATED HALF-LIFE 2** Yes, we understand that the code theft caused *Half-Life 2* to be delayed a bit longer. That's all well and good, but there comes a point when we have to wonder whether it's just become a convenient excuse—we're about to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the game's original September 30 street date, and the damn game is still nowhere in sight.

**UNDERRATED GATES OF TROY** The gold master for Slitherine Strategies' *Gates of Troy* was stolen from a London postman in late June. Slitherine has pushed back the game's release date, fearing possible piracy troubles. That is, if these malicious thieves realize exactly what it is they've got. Um, what the hell is this game again?

### Darren's Picks

**◄ City of Heroes**
Where else can I see Johnny Liu and Ryan Scott dressed up as spandex-clad crime-busting heroines—besides the office lunchroom? Don't ask. Yeah, so I'm guilty, too.

**◄ Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising**
For the record, Johnny's a cheap bitch when it comes to *UT2004.* That's why I have him play on my team in these kinds of games now.

**◄ Crusader: No Remorse**
OK, so I had to dip into the nostalgia bin for this one. Before *Diablo* was raising hell, this game lit up my hot-rod Pentium 90. It's a shame it isn't playable on newer PCs.

## THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED
# WEB GAME
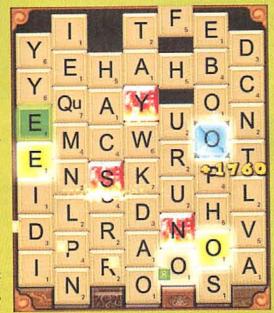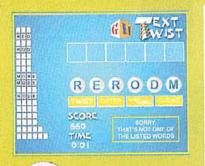
**OVERRATED BOOKWORM** To be fair, *Bookworm* (and the rest of PopCap's outstanding puzzle library) really does deserve all the credit it gets. But boy, did we ever go overboard with this one when it first hit the Web. The mere mention of this game is almost enough to kill our productivity all over again. Well, maybe not—but you get the picture.
**UNDERRATED YAHOO! TEXT TWIST** What was Jeff Green doing when he was supposed to be writing his stories for the past two issues? Playing this silly word-matching game on Yahoo. And, from what we hear, getting beaten down pretty badly at it by his 10-year-old daughter.

## THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED
# VAPORWARE

**OVERRATED DUKE NUKEM FOREVER** 3D Realms' official release date for this game—which has been in development since dinosaurs roamed the earth—is "when it's done." *Duke Nukem Forever*, sadly, has become a legend among vaporware. If you ask us, it didn't even look all that great to begin with, but hey—whatever gets people talking, right?
**UNDERRATED PREY** Another 3D Realms first-person shooter, *Prey* was canceled in order to shift the development focus to *Duke Nukem Forever*. And we all know how well that's panned out so far. Still, *Prey* allegedly was to sport visuals that rivaled those of *Unreal* and *Max Payne*, which sounded like a big deal at the time. Maybe if 3D Realms had stuck with this one, it'd actually have something good by now.

# Rewind 100

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

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| **Across the Dnepr** | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| **America's Army: Special Forces v2.0** | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Armed and Dangerous** | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| **Battle Engine Aquila** | 04/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| **Battlefield Vietnam** | 06/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Besieger** | 09/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ⊕ **Beyond Divinity** | 08/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| **Beyond Good & Evil** | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre** | 04/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Black Mirror** | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| **Blade and Sword** | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| **Breed** | 07/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| **Broken Sword 3** | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Celebrity Deathmatch** | 02/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| **Chaos Legion** | 08/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| **Chrome** | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **City of Heroes** | 08/04 | ★★★★★ |
| **Civilization III: Conquests** | 04/04 | ★★★★★ |
| **Combat Mission: Afrika Korps** | 04/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| **Conspiracies** | 05/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| **Contract J.A.C.K.** | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| **Counter-Strike: Condition Zero** | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| **Crusader Kings** | 08/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| **Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm** | 08/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| **CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Motives** | 08/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| **Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis** | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |

# ◀ Rewind100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|------|-------|--------|
| Dead Man's Hand | 08/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Dead to Rights | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Desert Rats vs. Afrika Corps | 07/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Desert Storm III | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Deus Ex 2: Invisible War | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Dominions II | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Far Cry | 06/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| FIFA 2004 | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Final Fantasy XI | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| FireStarter | 06/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Gangland | 06/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Gothic II | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Hidden & Dangerous 2 | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Hitman: Contracts | 08/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Horizons: Empire of Istaria | 05/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Jack the Ripper | 05/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Jetfighter V | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |



| ⬆ Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising | 09/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Judge Dredd: Dredd Versus Death | 07/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Korea: Forgotten Conflict | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Kuma\War | 09/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |



| ⬆ Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle | 08/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Lock On: Modern Air Combat | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Lords of EverQuest | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Lords of the Realm III | 07/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |

# LISTMANIA!
## 5 mods you can't live without

### 1. Half-Life: Counter-Strike
www.counter-strike.net/

Yeah, like this one's really a surprise. This team-based counterterrorism modification for *Half-Life* breathed new life into the mod community upon its release in 1999, and it quickly became one of the most popular online games of all time. Even now, five years later, the *Counter-Strike* community continues to thrive.

### 2. Battlefield 1942: Desert Combat
www.desertcombat.com/
*Desert Combat*, which has become something of a modern equivalent to *Counter-Strike* in terms of popularity, transforms *Battlefield 1942* into a tactical, modern-day Middle East conflict. The beta currently features a Desert Storm campaign, though additional campaigns are planned for future releases.

### 3. Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City
www.gtaforums.com/
Ever wish you could take all the motorcycles, helicopters, and other cool rides of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* into the New York City–inspired setting of *GTA3*? With this extensive conversion, you can! *Liberty City* also features somewhat tweaked vehicle physics, as well as a few new graphical effects for all the *GTA* fiends among you.

### 4. Unreal Tournament 2004: DeathBall
www.deathball.net/
This total conversion mod transforms *UT2004* into an insane team-based deathsport, mixing rugby, football, handball, and a good helping of violence.

### 5. Tribes: Vengeance—Starsiege 2845
www.mechnex.net/
*Starsiege 2845* is an officially sponsored, total conversion mod for the upcoming *Tribes: Vengeance* and thrusts players into the old-school mech- and vehicle-based environment of the original *Starsiege*.

# SECOND LOOKS
## Final Fantasy XI



**🖫 PUBLISHER: Square Enix** RELEASED: **November 2003**

Ever since Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series entered the MMO fray back in November 2003, we've spent a crippling amount of time wading through the infinite challenges that the game's world of Vana'diel has to offer. Having made our way through the game as the diverse red mage (along with spending a great deal of time leveling up every other available job), we've learned to love and hate a great number of things about this impossibly deep adventure.

Looking over the time we've put in, we'll say this: *FFXI* can be a cruel lover. The game is punishing to newcomers, requiring severe patience to master both the haphazard difficulty level and menu-heavy interface. Death comes frequently no matter what level you are, with severe penalties that still need to be addressed.

While struggling to acquire your job-specific artifact gear at higher levels, you not only have to battle insanely tough monsters for rare keys, but also have to find the requisite chests, which are often camped by Japanese autobots. This is when the game trades honest challenge for brutal unfairness.

Though these flaws can be grueling, the rewards for dedicated play are many, and the community can be a fantastic place to make new friends. Squenix has been very good about listening to user feedback, having streamlined various functions and game imbalances since *FFXI*'s release. The free patch updates are usually very generous in the new content they supply, which means that the upcoming bona fide expansion pack, *Chains of Promathia*, must be something special. In the end, *FFXI* is as addictive as the world of Sony's *EverQuest* games, but the steep difficulty level will send many gamers packing to less-punishing delights. ▪ **James Mielke**

# HISTORY LESSON

A look at EA's *Medal of Honor* franchise

EA's *Medal of Honor* series of WWII shooters, originally developed by 2015, has spawned too many imitators to count. To complement this month's cover story, we present you with a short trip down memory lane and a look at *Medal of Honor*'s undeniable influence on the FPS genre. ⊠ Di Luo

### Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
January 2002

*Allied Assault*'s excellent script and painstaking authenticity raised the bar considerably, setting a new standard for historical shooters. There were plenty of nice touches, such as the distinctive PING! of a Garand rifle expelling a spent clip and A.I.-controlled soldiers who were smart enough to run away from—or even throw back—grenades. The engrossing gameplay earned universal praise, despite late-game annoyances such as the frustrating sniper town and the silly tank level. *Allied Assault* also had one of the single most memorable scenes in gaming history: participating in the first wave of the Normandy Invasion and charging up Omaha Beach into the fire of German machine-gun nests. Few games have come close to the terrible grandeur of this reenactment.

### Medal of Honor: Allied Assault—Spearhead
November 2002

Where *Allied Assault* began with a mad charge up a beach and into near-certain death, *Spearhead*'s opening moments see you jumping out of a burning plane into enemy fire. This expansion relied on virtually hopeless situations for much of its drama. For example, during the chaos of D-Day, you must stem the German juggernaut in the Battle of the Bulge and eventually face off against a horde of Nazi tanks in the conquest of Berlin.

*Spearhead* made much greater use of rail-shooter gameplay and vehicles than *Allied Assault* did. Machine guns, antitank weapons, halftracks, and even Russian T-34s provided a good break from the usual circle strafing.

Unfortunately, *Spearhead* was incredibly short. *CGW*'s review called it "probably the most exhilarating and intense shooter yet...for five hours."

### Medal of Honor: Allied Assault—Breakthrough
September 2003

All good things come to an end. While its two predecessors were filled with intense action, *Breakthrough* was a yawner. It wasn't as short as *Spearhead* and included some new multiplayer modes, but this couldn't make up for the fact that the series was just starting to feel tired.

Perhaps because the famous Western Front battles were already covered in previous games, *Breakthrough* made you into a special operative behind enemy lines. This, combined with the game's vast assortment of confined environments and annoying night missions, turned *Medal of Honor*'s epic scope into a clichéd one-man-army affair. Perhaps it should have been called *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault—Broken* instead.

We can only hope that *Pacific Assault* will be the series' much-needed breath of fresh air, rather than yet another mediocre rehash.

## ⊡ Rewind100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|------|-------|--------|
| LOTR: Return of the King | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Manhunt | 07/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Midnight Nowhere | 02/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| MVP Baseball 2004 | 06/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Mysterious Journey II | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| NASCAR Thunder 2004 | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| NBA Live 2004 | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| ⊡ Need for Speed Underground | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Nemesis of the Roman Empire | 07/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Nosferatu | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Once Upon a Knight | 02/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| One Must Fall: Battlegrounds | 04/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Painkiller | 07/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Patrician III | 02/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Pax Romana | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Perimeter | 09/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| PlanetSide: Core Combat | 02/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Railroad Tycoon 3 | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| ⊡ Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword | 06/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots | 07/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Sacred | 07/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Secret Weapons Over Normandy | 03/04 | ★★★☆☆ |
| Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos | 04/04 | ★★★☆☆ |

## Rewind 100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| Shrek 2 | 09/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Silent Hill 3 | 03/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Silent Storm | 04/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Singles: Flirt Up Your Life | 09/04 | ★☆☆☆☆ |
| Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow | 06/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Squad Assault: Western Front | 03/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Star Chamber | 05/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Star Fury | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic | 02/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Syberia II | 05/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles | 05/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Terminator 3: War of the Machines | 04/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| The Hobbit | 02/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| The Simpsons: Hit & Run | 02/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Thief: Deadly Shadows | 09/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Title Bout Championship Boxing | 05/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Trainz 2004 | 04/04 | ★★★★½ |
| True Crime: Streets of L.A. | 09/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Two Thrones | 06/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Unreal Tournament 2004 | 06/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Uru: Ages Beyond Myst | 02/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Vegas Tycoon | 04/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Victoria | 03/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| War of the Ring | 02/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| War Times | 08/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior | 07/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Warlords Battlecry III | 08/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc | 05/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Worms 3D | 05/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| X2: The Threat | 03/04 | ★★★★½ |
| XIII | 02/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| X-Plane 7.40 | 04/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| You Don't Know Jack— The Lost Gold | 05/04 | ★★½☆☆ |

# HIGH SCORE

Our favorite things of the moment at 1UP.com

Hey guys! Check out our ever-expanding gaming community at 1UP.com, where you can create your own journal, track your game collection, build a network of friends, and chat with other *CGW* readers. You can even join our club at cgwfans.1UP.com and let us know which clubs, blogs, and goofy pictures you'd like to see on this page each month!

## FEATURED BLOG

**John Davison**
"jwhdavison"

Ranks Lurker
Current Points: 49350
Total Points: 49350
XBox Live Gamer Tag:
JWHD

**John Davison**
http://jwhdavison.1UP.com/

Contrary to what you might think, we aren't highlighting John's blog just 'cause he's the editorial director here. It's actually a damn entertaining read and a good "insider" glimpse into this whole wacky industry.

## CLUB OF THE MONTH

**GTA: Nice City**
http://nicecity.1UP.com/club
Do you ever wish those ruffians in *GTA: Vice City* would play nice? Well, in this club, they do. No blood and guts here—just ridiculously wholesome fun and hilariously doctored screenshots.

Dagnabit! I fell and dropped my ketchup! It's wasted!

wasted!

## STUPID PICTURE OF THE MONTH

JEFF GREEN—THE WEIRDO THAT HE IS—COLLECTS THESE STUPID THUMBS-UP PICTURES. AND HE LISTENS TO BAD COUNTRY MUSIC, TOO.

"If a game is not from Richard Garriot, you can safely assume you will not resort to hair pulling and going bankrupt just to play it."
—SERVANTES, 1UP.COM FORUMS

## WHAT'S UP WITH 1UP?
**A few words from 1UP.com's editor-in-chief**
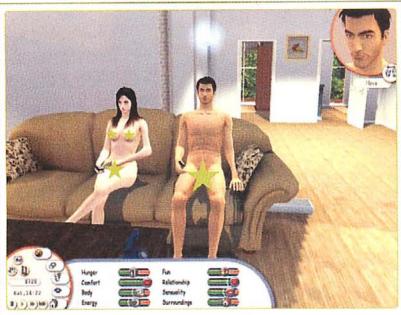
After months of preparation, we finally launched the new 1UP.com. One thing you'll immediately notice is that we're no longer just about the content—we've expanded to become the first-ever community for gamers. What this basically means is that now everyone has a voice on the site. Everyone has their own page with their own blog, interests, games, and photos. And that includes the Ziff Davis editors...who are all pretty interesting. You see, I've learned a lot about the *CGW* staff over the past few weeks. For example, I had no idea that Ryan Scott is a fighting-game fanatic (now I've gotta throw down a challenge!). Or that *Johnny Liu* is running in a national AIDS marathon this December (you can even visit his page to find out how to sponsor him). Or that Darren Gladstone likes watching classic WWII flicks. Or that Jeff Green is totally addicted to *Yahoo! Text Twist*, a free online game sort of like *Boggle*. Or that Michael Jennings watches Dr. Phil. I'm learning all sorts of things about these folks—and the crazy part is, I work with these guys. Imagine all the crazy things you can learn about them when you meet them on the site. So I hope you check it out, and I hope to meet you on there, too! ✕ **Sam Kennedy** http://capnsmak.1UP.com/

# SOUND OFF

*CGW's* readers speak up

Think you're clever? Got some good gaming suggestions? Just want to share your two cents? Send us your funny screenshots and and favorite PC gaming picks, and you might show up in the pages of a future Sound Off!



## CAPTION CONTEST
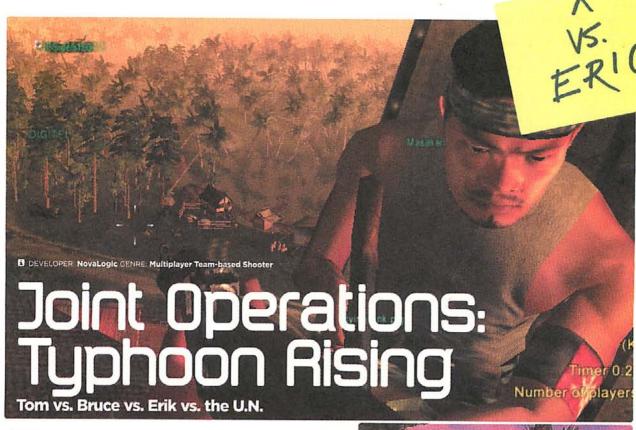
Do our captions suck? Think you can come up with something wittier? E-mail your caption for this *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life* screenshot to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject line "Caption Contest," and you just might win some sort of fabulous prize!

## POLL OF THE MONTH

Hit up our forums at http://boards.1up.com and vote in our monthly poll.



Who cares? **23%**

Doom 3 **15%**

Half-Life 2 **62%**

**What are you looking forward to more—*Half-Life 2* or *Doom 3*?**

# DESERT ISLAND GAMES

You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...but which ones? Send an e-mail to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject line "Desert Island Games" and let us know which games you would choose, and why!

**No One Lives Forever 2:** I have probably played this game more than any other, due to its spectacular story, great humor, fun gameplay, and perfect music.

**Beyond Good and Evil:** OK. So I'm guilty. I love games with quirks, and this one has them in spades. It's just a really fun game to play.

**The Longest Journey:** Probably the most underrated game in a genre of underrated games.

**Unreal Tournament 2004:** The best single- and multiplayer fragging experience, hands down. Reminds me of Tribes in its glory days. *Quake* who?

**WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne:** Solid story, great gameplay, and an exciting online experience...and with the Founding of Durotar campaign, it's *War-iablo*.

**David Bauer
Troy, NY**

^ VS. ERIC

B DEVELOPER: **NovaLogic** GENRE: **Multiplayer Team-based Shooter**

# Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising

## Tom vs. Bruce vs. Erik vs. the U.N.

The game is *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*. The place is Kubong Island Bridge on a server with about 60 players and a 30-minute time limit. The players are Tom, a hardened veteran, and Bruce, who just installed the game five minutes ago.

**Tom:** We're gonna need a bigger squad. I've enlisted Erik Wolpaw, who will join us in a strictly advisory position. His job will be to keep Bruce from getting killed while I go about trying to win the game. I don't want to use the word "baby-sit," but—oops, I just did.

**Bruce:** Tom Chick is a vain man. He's not just satisfied with being the most respected videogame journalist in the world today and being about 1 million times better than me at those games that make you eventually murder people in real life, but I think he has invited first-person-shooter expert Erik Wolpaw to provide neutral, unbiased game commentary about how great a player Tom is. Just like former U.S. Senate candidate Jack Ryan, Tom's just not satisfied unless other people are watching. In other words, while Erik is busy coming up with words to

describe Tom's amazing series of double-kills using nothing but flashbang grenades, I'll be figuring out how to open Humvee doors.

**Erik:** Even before the game starts, I face my first challenge. Tom and Bruce insist that I need a microphone in order to participate. Like teenage girls, fancy dancer Bruce and actual teenage girl Tom can't go five minutes without talking to each other. But whatever—it'll be a good opportunity to practice my military police radio codes while the two of them discuss how wrinkly they're both getting in the bubble baths they're probably soaking in. The problem is, I don't own a microphone. In a panic, but also sort of like an inventor like Jonas Salk, I plug a pair of headphones into the microphone jack and talk into one of the earpieces. For once in my stinkin' life, the joke is on the laws of physics, *BECAUSE IT ACTUALLY WORKS.*



⊕ A rare late-game shot of me crawling and Bruce standing up

Amazingly, microphones and headphones appear to be the same exact thing. I attach the earbud to a piece of duct tape, and then I tape the whole contraption—which I call Dr. Microphone in anticipation of the honorary doctorate I'll probably receive—to my upper lip.

## Mr. Chick's wild ride

**Tom:** Using voice-chat software to coordinate our actions, I command everyone into a Puma helicopter that's winding up. Geryk takes a while to comply.

**Bruce:** Trying to get into a vehicle in a NovaLogic game is like playing a fantasy role-playing game and having to know the Old English word for "healing potion" before you can drink one. Apparently, you

> ## Just like former U.S. Senate candidate Jack Ryan, Tom's just not satisfied unless other people are watching.

**Players →**

**⊟ Erik Wolpaw**
Special Guest Star!
Last month, Erik was
laying in a pool of
vomit. He will be
next month, too.

**⊟ Tom**
Last month:
Tom blamed his loss in
*Warlords Battlecry III* on
a woman. Somewhere,
Steve McQueen weeps.

**⊟ Bruce**
Last month:
Satan's home gets
awfully chilly as Bruce
manages to beat Tom
at a fantasy RTS.

Guarding the bridge.


Tom driving Tom's jeep.

don't "get in" or "enter" a vehicle—you "attach" it. That sounds really military. I spent 15 minutes going over every page of the manual, including the ones with the backstory, trying to find out how to get in a truck. In the tutorial, they just tell you to "get in the truck," like you fought in Nam and instinctively know every possible way of getting into trucks, even virtual ones.

**Tom:** I notice that our pilot's name is new65532. He flies us into the side of a mountain.

**Bruce:** For this game, since loud explosions and juvenile taunts make me alternately scared and irritated, I turned the sound down and played the whole game to the background music of Stef's trance mix, *Just Believe in Trance*. It's like "The Ride of the Valkyries" in *Apocalypse Now*, except it makes me feel like dancing instead of killing you. It also makes me totally miss whatever it was that made us blow up. I assume it was my fault and apologize into the microphone.

**Erik:** Dying gives me a chance to grab a medic kit, since it looks like healing Bruce and Tom will be a more lucrative undertaking than shooting at the U.N. peacekeepers on the other team, who will soon be killing Bruce and Tom.

**Tom:** By the time we respawn at the base, all the helicopters are gone. I grab a jeep and order Wolpaw and Geryk to hop in. We speed toward Bravo. Kubong Island is actually two islands: our rebel island to the northeast, with capture points Charlie and Delta, and the enemy joint-ops island to the southwest, with capture points Alpha and Bravo. The islands are connected by a 100-meter bridge, with a village on the beach at either end. By the time we finally reach the bridge, the other team is entrenched in the village on our side, preventing anyone from crossing. We dive out of the jeep and hit the jungle to lay down some suppressing fire from a position of cover.

**Erik:** There's an article in the current issue of *Weekly World News* called "Scientists Revive the Stupid Part of Einstein's Brain." This reminds me of the time I kept having to revive Bruce just so that he could immediately stand straight up and get shot in the head again. I realize that I can't

expect Bruce to drive the rebel dune buggies around on two wheels, which is a talent I share with Hollywood stuntmen. But for chrissakes, lying on your stomach and not moving is a talent Bruce needs to share only with babies. On the other hand, this helps my personal point total, so I can't get too mad. Back on the original hand, though, Bruce's talent for getting shot isn't helping our Indonesian separatist team's anti-imperialist authentic narrative of resistance, as hippies might say.

**Tom:** Wolpaw's resurrecting us, but we're not making any progress. Our teammates are getting bogged down here as well. So when I get shot, I respawn back at the base, grab the Puma, land it on the beach, and order Wolpaw and Geryk inside. They man the guns, and I start orbiting Bravo. After we inflict some heavy casualties on the defenders, joint ops gets wise—a few Stingers later, and we're just bodies falling out of a fireball.

**Erik:** A better name for *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising* would be *Joint Operations: Helicopter Ride* because that's pretty much all I get to do anymore, since Tom insists on driving every vehicle we find until it gets hit by a missile, at which point they should call the game *Joint Operations: Wait for Tom to Find a New Helicopter*. While I'm pouting and absentmindedly firing my gun out the window, I accidentally kill someone on the ground—*with a head shot!* I figure that person couldn't have been moving, so I send a message over the public channel that says, "LOL CAMPER!!!"

**Tom:** It's time for some heavier metal. The

BTR is an armored personnel carrier with a protected cannon turret on top. Each side on Kubong Island Bridge has one APC, which some moron is usually driving out to sea rather than into battle. Luckily, I find ours when we respawn after a thwarted gunship run. Wolpaw's in the turret, and Geryk is sitting in back, where we can keep him safely inside its armored shell. We pull up to the contested beach village, and Wolpaw lets rip with the cannon.

**Bruce:** To compensate for all the failures that Tom experienced in school when the cute girls wouldn't talk to him because he made the mistake of starting every conversation with a description of his favorite *D&D* character, Tom is now pretending that my actual life is actually at actual stake here and that I should stay in the back of this virtual, outdated, Soviet-era armored personnel carrier. OK, Tom.

**Tom:** It looks like the village is cleared when two jeeps driven by other rebels go speeding past us. They start across the bridge, and I cautiously follow. If we can get this BTR into a position to fire on Bravo, we can serve as a sort of armored spearhead for the rest of our team.

**Bruce:** Despite looking up all the neuroscience journal articles I could find using the National Institutes of Health database that included the keywords "Clancy Typhoon Sullivan gay marriage," I was never able to fully grasp the rules of this game. Maybe those experiments haven't been done yet. There were some weird symbols in the corner of the map that Tom said indicated the number of attackers and


⊕ I was going to shoot this down until I realized it may be one of ours.


⊕ On our way to crash into the side of a mountain.

defenders at each base. The weird thing was that there never seemed to be any defenders, because everyone was attacking the other side. I asked Tom, "Does anyone ever defend in this game?" His response was, "If they're morons, no."

**Erik:** The most amazing thing about the two friendly jeeps is that neither one of them bursts through the side of our APC and runs over Bruce, who up until this point has shown a spooky knack for being driven into by every vehicle in Indonesia. Before I can mention our good fortune, both of the jeeps explode. I suggest we begin driving in a snake pattern, but Tom floors it and heads straight over a bridge toward a village, where we suspect the jeep killers are hiding. The nerve-wracking sound of bullets pinging off the APC grows louder as we tear through the village and into a narrow valley beyond it. "Tom," I yell, "this is the police. Those bullet noises are coming FROM INSIDE THE TRUCK." Tom tells Bruce to stop firing his weapon.
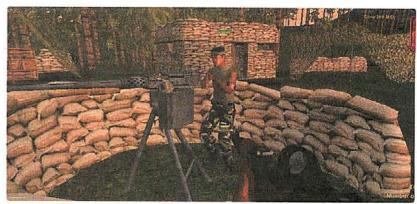
**Tom:** There's Bravo! I gun the engine, ramming into the side of the barricade outside the bunker, where at least two AT-4 missiles just shot past us. I leap out of the BTR and let loose with a perfectly aimed RPG shot right into the bunker's firing slit. Triple kill! I am John Frickin' Rambo! There are no more defenders inside Bravo, and now we're taking control.

**Bruce:** Having studied psychiatry, I can definitely state for the medical record that there is a significant probability that Tom actually believes he is John Rambo. I don't actually know who John Rambo is, since I was too busy actually fighting the Cold War to sit at home and watch movies about it. Since Tom was rooting for the other side during that time, I can see how his "warrior misidentification disorder" was kind of predictable.

**Tom:** We're on the defensive now. We fan out inside the perimeter and pick off the joint-ops attackers as they arrive. Even Geryk is getting some kills now. We've still got 18 minutes left. If we can hold Bravo, we'll win the game. I tell Wolpaw and Geryk that we're staying put.

**Bruce:** Tom's plan of winning by defense sounds like the Frenchiest strategy ever. I "attach" this .50-caliber machine gun and wait for something to happen. Kind of

**Over Kubong Island Bridge? I'll never get over Kubong Island Bridge.**


Nobody really came anywhere near close enough for me to shoot at them, but I didn't mind.

like 1940.

**Erik:** Mostly out of morbid curiosity, I decide to follow Bruce. Pretty soon, we're separated from Tom. In fact, we're separated from everyone on our team. And everyone on the other team.

## Learning to crawl

**Bruce:** I realize that any time I stand up in this game, I die. Consequently, out of the mortal fear that when this game ends, I'm going to have like 20 times as many deaths as everyone else, I start crawling. Where I'm crawling to doesn't really matter. My plan is that some guy will think he is in a safe place, leave his character standing there while he uses the bathroom in real life, and I sneak up on him and kill him. Since I can't hit anything that is moving, this is the most likely scenario for me killing anything. Except for the fishing boat I blew up with an RPG.

**Erik:** After his initial reluctance to do anything other than stand ramrod straight up while people shot at him, Bruce now refuses to ever stand up or even kneel. So I run about 50 feet ahead and jump up and down while Bruce painstakingly crawls over to me. We repeat this strategy for a while until we eventually find the fishing boat that Bruce then blows up. Since you can't revolutionize an omelet without terrorizing a few eggs, I figure, what the hell. Maybe the fisherman is collaborating with the U.N. or, worse, the Zionist Entity. I'm sure the boat explosion sent a strong message to all potential collaborators. Though not at the time, since there wasn't a single person within 10 miles of our position. Though I guess it wasn't a totally pointless act, since now I'm writing fan fiction about it.

**Tom:** What in the holy hell is going on here? Bravo is under heavy attack, and when I yell for Geryk and Wolpaw to shore up the left side, I see they've somehow managed to run all the way over the other side of the damn map. They're well past

Alpha, which is well defended in spite of a handful of guys on our team attacking it in vain. The action is here in Bravo, we're losing it with only seven minutes to go, and my men are AWOL!

**Erik:** Thanks to Internet scientists, even though Bruce and I are completely in the middle of nowhere, I can still hear Tom complain. My new objective—code name Zeta—is to make Tom shut up. With that in mind, I start walking toward Bravo. I may have misjudged how isolated we were, however, because after about 4 feet, I get shot. Bruce clearly sees me fall over dead. For a moment, I think that witnessing this violent tragedy will turn Bruce into a Southeast Asian Batman. Instead, Bruce calmly turns around and crawls back in the other direction. I respawn right near Tom.
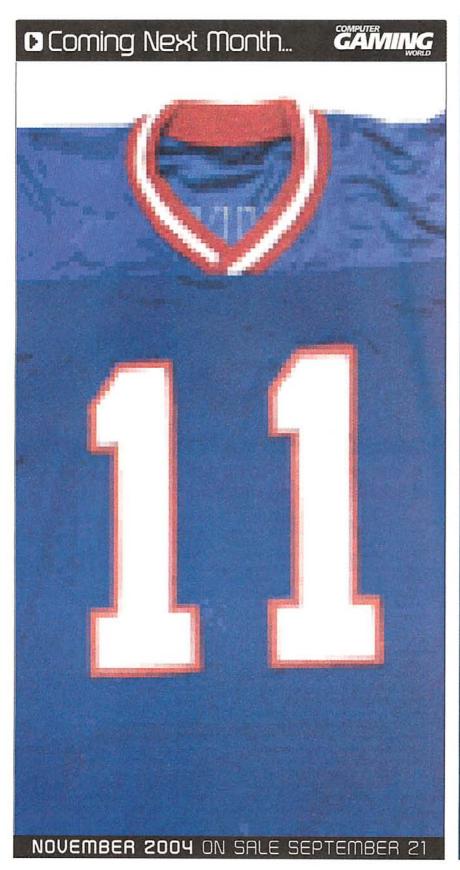
**Tom:** We're losing Bravo. It's not looking good. There are enough joint-ops troops there that we have to respawn way back on our own island and trek all the way back over the bridge. But the rebel-colored Bravo flag is falling at an alarming rate. While Wolpaw and I tear along the jungle roads in a jeep, I tell Bruce he's in a good position to hit the Alpha defenders from behind. Maybe, just maybe, we can finish assaulting Alpha before the joint-ops team retakes Bravo.

**Bruce:** I get to the end of the island before I notice that there is no more island. Tom is impressed that I have managed to get all the way around to the far side of the Alpha base, like it is some kind of strategy or something. I agree with him and run back toward Alpha at full speed, since there is probably nobody around to think up a strategy this good or else they would have also done it. Just as I run into Alpha, the game ends, and we win. Circumstantial evidence strongly suggests I did it. I hit all the taunt keys in a row and put on a new trance CD. Oh, and I quit the game.

**Final tally:** Rebels win with 1 minute and 48 seconds left on the clock. ▧

# My new objective—code name Zeta—is to make Tom shut up.

# ▶ Coming Next Month...

**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**



**NOVEMBER 2004** ON SALE SEPTEMBER 21

# There Is No "I" in Team

## Nor is there an "R," "X," "L," or 18 other letters

So, currently the biggest disappointment in my life—aside from every moment of every day—is that I couldn't get *City of Heroes* to run on my wife's notebook. No, I was not motivated by a sudden desire to draw the disbelieving, pitying stares of grande soy vanilla latte junkies by playing the game at the local Wi-Fi Starbucks. Instead, I was spurred by an atypical fit of responsible parenting: I wanted to let the 8-year-old razor-toothed homunculus my wife claims I sired play a game he desperately wants to play, but with me in the same game world, making sure no creep tries to become my son's new best friend. But just as big a motive was this: I just really wanted someone to play along with.

I love *City of Heroes*, but in many ways it's almost a single-player game. Oh, I've got a great big friends list, but they aren't actual friends, they're just people I grouped with once who weren't totally incompetent and are worth the effort of seeking out the next time I log on. They're less people than tools in a toolbox to help me get experience and new powers. *COH*'s fast-paced gameplay pretty much prohibits any deeper bonding, and frankly, I'm very OK with that. I avoid *EverQuest* because constantly resting to recoup hit points forces me to learn more about some guy's lifelong struggle for continence than I would ever want to know.

I realize there are guilds packed with people in MMOs and clans for every RTS and shooter ever released, and to these people I say, "Huzzah! You've got something almost akin to friends!" But for all the touting of multiplayer in PC gaming, as more games are released with only multiplayer play, the more I think PC gaming is becoming an isolated experience. We've been gibbing each other in *Unreal Tournament* and other shooters for years now, and while human players are more challenging than bots, let's face it, they're just stand-ins for the bots. We never see who we're fragging, never yowl in frustration in their faces, never get to dance a pants-free leprechaun jig of victory in front of them. We might be playing each other, but we're experiencing it alone.

The best gaming memories I have all involve other people. I've played in softball leagues forever, and those games are more vivid to me because to this day, I can relive them by talking to my teammates. Who can I talk to about my stunning victory



## We never get to dance a pants-free leprechaun jig of victory.

online in *UT*? My wife? She might indulge me, sure, but then she'd want to talk about succulents and/or our kids, and I need that the way I need to skin the bottoms of my feet. Real-life play rules, if only because trash talking is never as sweet as when you can tell your opponent to his face that you've spent the last hour shaving his mother's back. Bottom line: All games are better with your opponents or cohorts in the same room. When the teamplay patch for the original *Half-Life* was released, this office rang with cries of "Zombies to the bunker!" eight hours a day. For three years, *CGW* competed in life-or-death *High Heat Baseball* leagues in which we didn't just engage in hotseat play but also piled up behind the people playing just to watch. Thank God we did, or we'd have missed seeing former tech galoot Dave Salvator nearly break three toes kicking a subwoofer after a particularly bitter defeat.

Once upon a time, our electronic entertainment was played in a public space, in arcades where other people were watching or playing against us. Now we compete and cooperate, for the most part, anony-

mously online. How do we gloat satisfactorily? How do we rehash a spirited contest? A follow-up e-mail? The forced immediacy of hotseat play in a room more socially active than the home office holding the family PC has given console games a multiplayer enjoyability advantage for years. But now, console games are moving online, many with the millstone of live chat. Personally, I rank enduring the uninspired taunting of a barely parented 13-year-old right up there with eyelid excision on my list of Things I Hope Never Happen to Me, so don't be looking for me on Xbox Live.

Is a console party game still a party game if the party is spread across the country and you're alone in your living room? No, and this is where the PC reclaims real multiplayer. This weekend, you and your buddies get moving and haul all your PCs to one place and hook up a quick-and-dirty LAN. Replace STFU and LOL with the kinds of truly cutting comments you wouldn't bother to type. Because every PC game can be a party game when you're having a LAN party. ⊠ **Robert Coffey**
robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

All I can do is show you the door.

You're the one that has to step through.

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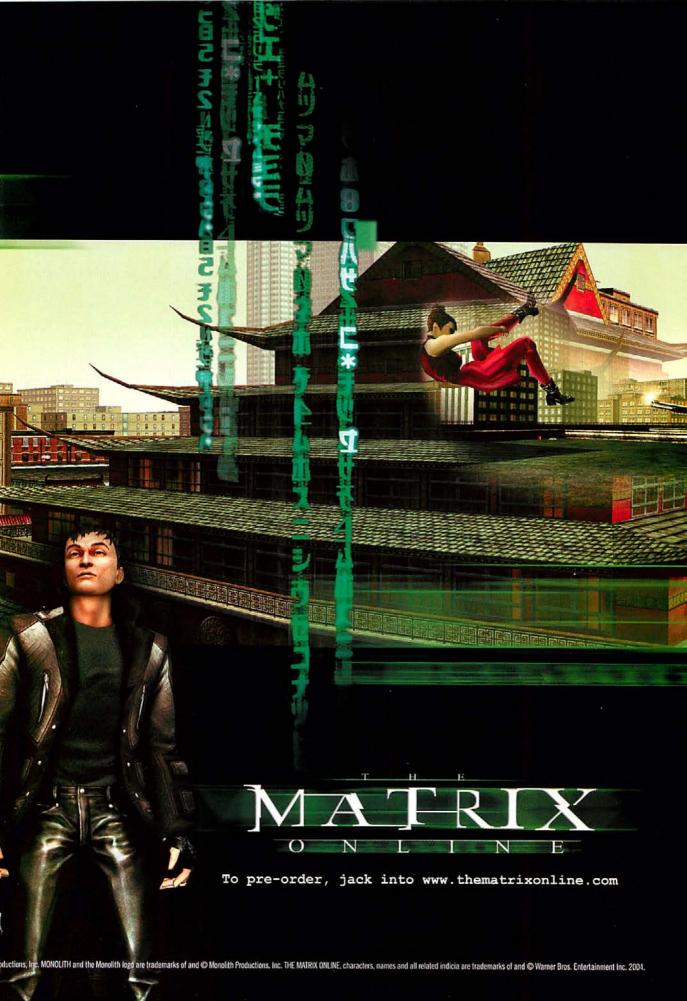
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