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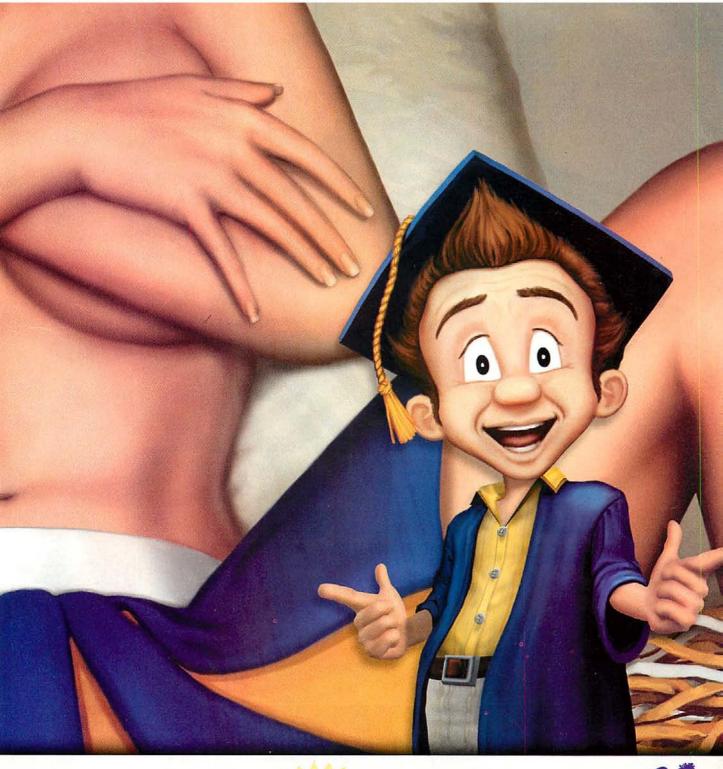
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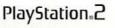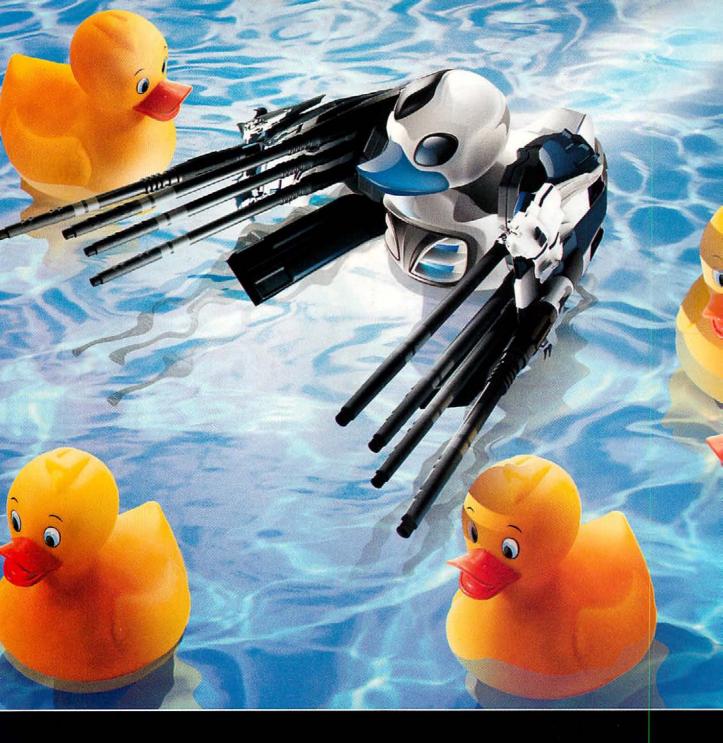
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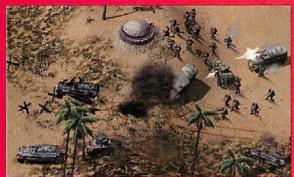Fight for good or evil as your army experiences emotions in battle.

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Contents

74

■ COVER STORY
EVERQUEST 2

Five years after *EverQuest* changed the face of online gaming, Sony is finally back with the sequel...and it's not messing around. Want to see the toughest zones in the game? The hardest monsters? The coolest new spells? We did, and we're here to share.

54

62

57

92

96

90

105

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Ding Time

Good-bye family, hello rotonga mages

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hi, my name is Jeff Green, and I'm a former *EverQuest* addict. Yes, like those sad doofuses you see grimly profiled on *48 Hours* or *Dateline*, there was a brief period of time a few years ago when I forgot I had an actual real life, because I was too busy leveling up my dwarf paladin in Sony Online's online fantasy world. Though I thought I was immune to such behavior, the game sucked me in to an extent that's made me wary of MMOs ever since. Fortunately, a whole generation of MMOs that basically stunk came out, so it was easy to stay away. But with *City of Heroes*, *World of WarCraft*, and now *EverQuest II*, I feel myself drawn like a moth to a flame again. The *EverQuest II* beta I've been playing has proven that Sony has been listening to its critics and has been studying the good work being done by its competitors. It also has an amazingly killer graphics engine. Doofaeus, my rotunga mage, is level 6 at this point, and I have only just begun to ding. To all of my friends and family, I apologize in advance.

And in other (sad) news, this issue marks the departure of both Wil O' Neal and Johnny Liu. Johnny, we just barely got to know you. Wil, we knew you all too well, and this place is 10 times quieter without you. And I'm not saying that like it's a good thing. Good luck, guys.

KRISTEN SALVATORE
MANAGING EDITOR
Kristen Salvatore just got back from Austin, Texas, where she attended the empowering Women in Gaming conference. Meanwhile, back at the office, the guys celebrated her absence with a *Porky's* marathon.

ROBERT COFFEY
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Robert Coffey will not rest until Jeff Green admits that he lost Robert's Concrete Blonde CD. What Robert doesn't realize is that selling a CD on eBay is not the same thing as "losing" it. See you on *People's Court*, fella!

DARREN GLADSTONE
SENIOR EDITOR
When not tearing his hair out compiling the Radar section, Darren is busy collecting every cool piece of technology ever invented. This month, for instance, he's been flying around the office in his hovercraft, flipping us off from 10 feet in the air. We love Darren.

RYAN SCOTT
CD-ROM EDITOR
CGW's resident boy genius (or is it girl Friday?), Ryan puts together the splendiferous Check Out section, compiles the CD, and eats every goldang Rice Krispies treat in the candy machine every month.

ROB SCHULTZ
ART DIRECTOR
Rob Schultz is the big brain who takes our lousy art ideas, throws them out, and makes good ones instead. Why he puts up with this rather than starting his own company and making a million dollars is *CGW*'s biggest mystery.

MICHAEL JENNINGS
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
While everyone else on staff squawks and bleats all day like sick farm animals, Zen master MJ keeps a cool, stoic, calm front. If Steve McQueen knew Quark (and were still alive), he'd be Michael Jennings.

SOME FIGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY.
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THE MANCHURIAN GAME REVIEWER

After having read your *Doom 3* review and seeing the five-star rating, I can't help but wonder if there was some bias involved in your final score.

If you read various Internet forums at all, you'll notice the majority of people are saying that *Doom 3* is simply a good, albeit run-of-the-mill first-person shooter with decent graphics and sound or that it outright "sucks." I'm in the camp that feels that *Doom 3* is a good game but is nothing special or revolutionary, unless you are talking about the graphics. I accept the outside possibility that your magazine might have been totally wowed by *Doom 3*, but I consider that highly unlikely given the high number of gamers who feel differently.

I can't help but wonder if a few things were at work with your review. The most obvious thing is that your magazine staff had the opportunity to be some of the very first to play *Doom 3*. There has to be a certain novelty factor or "high" that comes with that knowledge. I'll wager that Id and Activision furnished your experience with some of the very best gear available for the PC today. I'll also bet that the room was set up in such a way that the experience in terms of sight and sound were second to none and that such an experience goes well beyond what most gamers will experience in their "real world" setup.

Now we come to what you may consider my most sinister assertions. How do we, the public at large, know that you weren't threatened in some way by Id Software or Activision to give a high review score to *Doom 3* or forever be barred from any future early review opportunities? How do we know that giving a high review score wasn't a condition to being able to come see the game before its public release? If those two questions don't ring as true, then how do we know if you didn't strike up some sort of business deal in exchange for a boosted review score?

I also can't help but wonder if the five-star rating was more about pride than anything else. After all, *Doom 3* has been hotly anticipated for a very long time, and

it would be difficult to admit from a business or even a PC-gaming-magazine standpoint that *Doom 3* was anything less than stellar. What magazine devoted to gaming on the PC dares admit that *Doom 3* wasn't a gameplay revolution? It would be like admitting defeat.

Of course, the decline of gaming on the PC is a concern to me and everyone else, but in light of the fact that a lot of people disagree with your reviews, you may have done more harm than good to our little hobby. If people fueled by your reviews go out and buy *Doom 3* and it fails to meet their expectations, it not only makes you look bad, but also adds to the discouragement factor. And to me, that sort of selling out to developers and publishers is one of the most shameful things of all.

Mark Hopkins

Mark, we're too stupid to be that nefarious. But let us say, we did play *Doom 3* on a great machine (and even then, we noted some technical issues), and it's running great on our less-than-

stellar personal machines; we weren't threatened by Id (have you seen these guys? Our intern could take the lot of them); we have never bargained and never will bargain coverage in exchange for ratings; we are precisely the magazine that would dare to admit *Doom 3* wasn't a revolution (did you see our *Star Wars Galaxies* review?); and we truly did love the game. And remember, online forums are dominated by people who'll fight to the death over *The Silmarillion*—those cranks are hardly representative of humankind, let alone all gamers.

TASTES LIKE CHICKEN

Public auction! Thirty-five exotic life-sized trophy animals! By order of Brazilian Steakhouse! Thirty-five exotic life-sized trophy animals featuring: elephant, leopard, (2) hyenas, ostrich, musk ox, polar bear, (2) black bears, giraffe, goat, moose, caribou, antelope, black and gray wolves, ibex, warthog, mountain lion, zebra, eland, gemsbok, blesbok, otter, seal, fallow deer, civic cat, and more! ▷

Put a Plug in it!

I am not from Canada and definitely do not speak Canadian (whatever that is). However, in the Sept. '04 issue, Erik Wolpaw reviewed *Joint Operations* and said that 50 square kilometers is 31 square miles. That is simply not true in Canada (which I'm NOT from) or anywhere else in the world. There are 1.609344 kilometers in a mile, so 50 kilometers does convert to 31 miles. However, there are 2.589988 square kilometers in a square mile. Thus, there are only 19.3 square miles in 50 square kilometers. It's not that big of a deal, but I felt compelled to point it out. Everything would just be easier if we could avoid those silly conversions and the U.S. switched over to the metric system. I'm not saying that because I'm from Canada (which I'm really not), I'm just saying that because it would be easier. Really.

Anal Boy

You don't actually expect us to remotely take you seriously, do you, Anal Boy? C'mon, Anal Boy. We want to listen to you, Anal Boy, but, Anal Boy, we can't. Sorry, Anal Boy. In one ear and out the other, Anal Boy. You will forever be the butt of our jokes, Anal Boy.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL JENNINGS

Mail Bites

I'd like to say hi to my mom and note that my dad put Robert Coffey's "Pants-free leprechaun jig of victory" into effect.
—Seth

It would be nice to blend an FPS game with a scenario tree like the one that was developed for *Panzer General*.
—Fred Gilligan

🔲 Are you like us? Are you wondering why a purported steakhouse is selling off the corpses of zebras and fallow deer? Are you thinking that maybe there's a perfectly reasonable and terrifying reason they went out of business? And what the hell is a blesbok?

THE FORCE IS STRONG IN THIS ONE

In your 10 Years Ago in *CGW* piece from the October 2002 issue, you say that if LucasArts released *TIE Fighter* with "a quick graphical update and make it run on Windows XP, we'll forgive you for canceling *Sam & Max* [2]."

Maybe I'm missing something here (I'm not as up on these things as I used to be), but didn't LucasArts release both *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* with updated graphics using the *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* engine? While that's still a bit dated, it offers far superior graphics to those in the original, which were little more than unadorned polygons. The cockpit images were the same as the ones in the original (that is, very dated), but the *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* engine's graphics make the games passable by modern graphic standards. As for Windows XP compatibility, the *XVT* engine used DirectX 5 (I believe), so the games should run fine in XP. Or is there an incompatibility I've overlooked?

Anyhow, I've been subscribing to your magazine since the original *TIE Fighter* came out (or so). Keep up the good work.
Zvi Rosen

We looked into it, Zvi, and we were able to find versions of *TIE Fighter* and *X-Wing vs. Tie Fighter* that would run on Windows ME. In theory, if they run on ME, they should run on XP, but considering how crappily everything except *Barbie's Dream Pony* ran on ME, we're a little doubtful. But at $1.99 on Amazon.com, they might be worth the gamble.

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

Ballshooter Games announces the release of *Brain Gym 2*, offering players four all-new and incredibly entertaining games for Pocket PC in one pack.
Press Release

Heh heh heh...you said "ballshooter."

BRAIN-DEAD LETTER OFFICE

For the life of me, I can't find a way to send an e-mail directly to the *CGW* editors, so I hope that this is the right place to send this to.
Jet Black

You don't have an address for people to send letters to listed anywhere that I could find. Getting tired of our whining?
Taylor McLean

Here at the *CGW* bile hive, we are forever bemoaning the dearth of letters we receive. Perhaps we should bemoan our own dumbassity—we've been consistently failing to publish our e-mail address. So here it is: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com. Now start writing to us!

THE CHARACTER OF OUR CONTENT

OK, first off, I love this magazine, I really do. When it comes in the mail, it is the highlight of the month. Now that we have the sucking up out of the way, let's get to the point. No. 1, you used to feature "Penny Arcade" in your magazine, now you don't. I just want to know why. "Penny Arcade" is friggin' awesome! Second, how come *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* isn't in the Hall of Fame? I mean, it's your Hall of Fame, and you seem to love it as much as I do. *KOTOR* is in my estimation right up there with *TIE Fighter* as best *Star Wars* game ever made. Period. So please just give some snappy answers to my stupid questions.
uberCTfan

You can still read "Penny Arcade" online, bag boy. We like the strip, too, but it was getting too R-rated for a magazine like *CGW*, which caters to housebound nerds. As for *KOTOR*, we agree it's a great game—but games become eligible for the Hall of Fame only two years after their release. We like the passage of time to cool our fanboy jets and to gain some perspective.

Mail Bites

The visual of the dancing, pants-free leprechaun kept me awake for hours. Thks.
—Eric

Nancy Kirk is on a mission to save the world's quilts, one quilt at a time.
—Nancy Kirk

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Console Publishers Get PC

MIDWAY, NAMCO, SEGA, AND OTHER CONSOLE PUBLISHERS ARE MAKING A SERIOUS DASH TO PCS—BUT WHY?

Namco is rolling up its sleeves to make PC games. Just don't expect Asuka Kazama from *Tekken 5* coming out of Flagship Studios.

Inside

Psychotic
Tim Schafer talks about going back to his gaming roots: PC gaming with *Psychonauts*.
34

Quakin'
We came, we saw, we fragged at this year's QuakeCon.
40

Christopher Lee
Holy crap! We actually got to talk to Christopher Lee about his involvement in *EverQuest II*.
42

Sega saved *The Matrix Online*. What else are they up to?

Unreal Tournament's Gorge frags on...at Midway.

The arrival of the next-generation consoles was supposed to bring about the death of the PC, causing everyone to become full-time console developers. That didn't happen. In fact, PC business is booming, and some companies are making more money than ever.

"I believe that on the side of publishers, there was some belief or concern that maybe the PC might be dying out," says Bill Roper, chief executive officer at Flagship Studios. "I think that what they're finding out is that that's really not happening."

What has happened, however, is a movement of console publishers—many who have never touched the platform before—into the PC's realm. Weren't these the same publishers looking the other way just years before?

Most industry watchers aren't surprised. "The two biggest-selling games of all time are both PC games," says Mark Rein, Epic Games' vice president. "If you ignore that, you're just stupid."

CONSOLES COME, CONSOLES GO

It's no coincidence that this comes as the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube are nearing their ends. Publishers are looking for additional revenue sources before the next generation.

"2005 and 2006 are transition years for the console side of the business, and those transitions are bloody," says Steve Allison, chief marketing officer at Midway Games. "While we have plenty of capital in the bank to survive this time, we'd rather use some of that capital to invest in the PC side."

Namco signed Flagship Studios, Midway stole Epic Games from Atari, Sega has its hands in *The Matrix Online*. But actions will speak louder to gamers than any number of fancy publishing deals.

After all, console publishers have traditionally limited their PC support to pushing out half-assed ports of console releases.

HALF-ASSED NO MORE

Midway is one publisher that wants to change this image. "We are going to take a lot of care with the console-focused games that we bring to PC," says Allison. "We are very serious about being in this space.... Epic is the first of a few big developers we will be working with on PC."

"Midway was pretty serious. If they're talking to us, they've got to be pretty serious about PC gaming," says Rein.

Sega America is another example that wants to recommit to the PC gaming market. One reason, according to VP of entertainment marketing Scott A. Steinberg: "PC gaming doesn't go through the same [five-year] cycle as consoles." It also helps that with SegaSoft, they've already been in this space before. "*The Matrix Online* was an excellent opportunity for us to build on our position as a leader and pioneer in the online space," says Steinberg. Does this mean we'll be seeing more PC titles from Sega? "Absolutely!"

Roper believes Namco is headed in the same direction. "We were very convinced that this was definitely a strategic direction for Namco," he says. "It really feels like a concentrated effort."

Having found success on consoles, however, many publishers may be coming into the PC world without much of an idea of how the audiences and markets differ.

Grantley Day, director of PC development at Namco, tells us his company is "an industry innovator of quality games, with success on every platform we've pursued," as is evidenced with *Soul Calibur* and *Tekken*. However, many of these games are from genres (fighting, shooting) that typically don't find success with PC audiences.

"In some ways, we're educating each other on some things, which is good," says Roper. "The differences between a console and a PC are more on the creative side than in the publishing aspects."

The more companies pouring resources into high-quality games, the better, but the hurried nature of these publishers entering the market leaves an uneasy feeling that many will jump ship when the new consoles are finally established.

"I think some will, but not the smart publishers," says Rein. "The smartest will recognize they can make a lot of money on PC."

"Any major publisher we're talking with is interested in how to create a relationship, something that's going to be here five, 10, 15 years from now," says Roper.

Whether console publishers are here to stay remains to be seen, but more PC games can't be a bad thing. "It's like [the console publishers] created new opportunities for some publishers while allowing some other publishers to rekindle an old flame," says Roper. ⊠ **Patrick Klepek**

> "The two biggest-selling games of all time are both PC games. If you ignore that, you're just stupid."
> —Mark Rein, VP of Epic Games

■ HE GOT GAME

Psycho Surgery

Tim Schafer wants to get inside your head with *Psychonauts*. We got into his...

Tim Schafer's *Psychonauts* was going to be an Xbox-only game. Well, it was until Microsoft dropped it (and Schafer's Double Fine Studios) from its first-party lineup this past spring. Thank God, because Majesco has picked up Microsoft's slack and is now offering up this inventive game on the PC as well.

The obvious question is why this game was even dropped in the first place. While both parties are vague about the matter, it seems no coincidence that Ed Fries, Xbox's vice president of games publishing and *Psychonauts*' chief evangelist within Microsoft, was let go just before the ax fell. *Psychonauts*, it seems, was simply too much of a left-field idea for the Redmond giant—and so, after being funded by the deep pockets of Microsoft for nearly four years, Majesco will now publish the game on PlayStation 2 and PC as well. "We always wanted as many people as possible in the entire world to see the game," says Schafer. "The biggest hurdle will be getting the feel right on PC, particularly with mouse-and-keyboard controls...but we think we can do it."

Psychonauts is an evolution of Schafer's celebrated graphic-adventure style (*Grim Fandango, Full Throttle*) fused with the hands-on playability and rich gameplay opportunities provided by console platform games (*Super Mario Sunshine, Ratchet & Clank*). It is, quite literally, a journey into the psyches of the insane. Each mind becomes an actual physical level, full of various twists, turns, fart jokes, and psychological demons. For instance, there's Milla's Dance Party—a level set inside the mind of Brazilian levitation expert Milla Vodello—which takes players for a ride through her internal disco party (which, of course, is complicated by various emotional hang-ups). The whole adventure is wrapped in some of the most inspired graphics we've seen in years, achieving a doodley, almost hand-drawn look while maintaining the depth of 3D.

Of course, "feel" is something the Double Fine team has wrestled with from the very beginning. "The first thing you always try to tackle is the thing you're most scared about," explains Schafer. "So while I'd done lots of adventure-game gameplay before, I've never had to do stuff that felt good— grabbing a ledge, how many microseconds until you can pull up on the ledge, and how high should he jump, and should you be able to double-jump...that kind of thing. It's that whole game-as-toy thing—it should be fun just to run around and grab things. And I think we've done that." As for the dearth of creativity in the industry, Schafer remains hopeful: "That could fix itself. Just in the same way that independent films exploded—that was a reaction to something, it wasn't like everything was great in the world of Hollywood movies and that's why independent films came along. Independent films came along because people wanted an alternative to the things they were seeing."

At this point, *Psychonauts* is looking spectacular; while the humor and aesthetic are already proven quantities, time will tell if the gameplay mechanics can be preserved in their transition to PC. Judgment day arrives next spring. ☒ **Evan Shamoon**

■ FOREVER AND EVER

A Duke Nukem Timeline

Wonder what's happened since *Duke Nukem Forever* started? So do we...

January 1997 Work begins on *Duke Nukem Forever* using the *Quake II* engine.

May 1998 First *DNF* promotional video shown at E3.

November 1999 *Unreal Tournament* launches.

May 1999 *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* opens.

November 1997 *Quake II* launches.

Voyager 1 has traveled 6.5 billion miles since *DNF*'s initial announcement.

Late 1998 3D Realms announces that development is switching to the *UT* engine. George Broussard says that *DNF* will launch in 1999.

Dreamcast

September 1999 Sega Dreamcast launches.

November 1999 *Quake III Arena* launches.

Comic Craft

PULP

The eagerly awaited *World of WarCraft* isn't the only upcoming foray into Blizzard's medieval fantasy world—the franchise will soon be the subject of a three-chapter graphic novel series entitled *WarCraft: The Sunwell Trilogy*. The project is a collaboration between Blizzard and TOKYOPOP, who many comic fans will recognize as the publisher of several popular Japanese manga series.

FOUR-COLOR WARCRAFT

The trilogy is set between the events of *WarCraft III* and *World of WarCraft*. It chronicles the adventures of a blue dragon named Kalec, who has been sent to investigate the possible reappearance of the destroyed Sunwell, a source of great power for the elven kingdom. Kalec soon finds himself beset by

trouble on all sides—contested by the evil Undead Scourge for the Sunwell's power and pursued by a crafty dwarven bounty hunter. Along the way, he meets up with a mysterious peasant girl named Anveena, who ends up being a vital piece of the puzzle. *The Sunwell Trilogy* will plant story seeds for future *WarCraft* games, and we might even see a few cameo appearances—including a certain fallen prince from *WarCraft III*.

The story is being penned by esteemed fantasy author Richard A. Knaak, whose previous works include a number of novels and short stories in the wildly popular *Dragonlance* series, as well as several current and upcoming *WarCraft* novels. Knaak is no stranger to comics, either: His most beloved *Dragonlance* novel, *The Legend of Huma*, has recently been adapted into a comic

miniseries by Devil's Due Publishing.

Art duties for *The Sunwell Trilogy* are being handled by Jae Hwan Kim, who is considered to be one of Korea's top comic artists. Kim has a solid background in martial arts manga; he is best known for his work on TOKYOPOP's *King of Hell*, which is one of Korea's best-selling manga series.
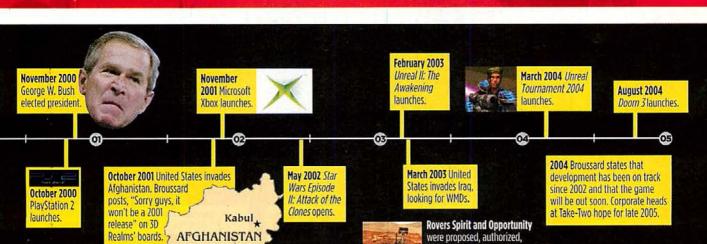
The Sunwell Trilogy will be published simultaneously in both the United States and Korea. The first volume, titled *Dragon Hunt*, is scheduled to hit stores next March, with the second to follow later in the year. Blizzard has also hinted at the possibility of graphic novels based on *StarCraft* or *Diablo*, depending on how well this initial series sells. If they're even half as popular as the games themselves, it shouldn't be long before we're knee-deep in Blizzard comics. ⊠ **Ryan Scott**

Blizzard's epic strategy franchise gets its own comic

November 2000 George W. Bush elected president.

November 2001 Microsoft Xbox launches.

February 2003 *Unreal II: The Awakening* launches.

March 2004 *Unreal Tournament 2004* launches.

August 2004 *Doom 3* launches.

01   **02**   **03**   **04**   **05**

October 2000 PlayStation 2 launches.

October 2001 United States invades Afghanistan. Broussard posts, "Sorry guys, it won't be a 2001 release" on 3D Realms' boards.

May 2002 *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* opens.

Kabul ★
AFGHANISTAN
Kandahār

March 2003 United States invades Iraq, looking for WMDs.

Rovers Spirit and Opportunity were proposed, authorized, announced, designed, launched, and successfully landed on Mars in less time.

2004 Broussard states that development has been on track since 2002 and that the game will be out soon. Corporate heads at Take-Two hope for late 2005.

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Hundreds of thousands of **Star Wars** fans have immersed themselves in the epic struggle for the Galactic Empire in the highly successful massively multiplayer online game, **Star Wars** *Galaxies: An Empire Divided*. Now, **An Empire Divided** expands into space with the release of its first expansion, **Star Wars** *Galaxies: Jump To Lightspeed*. Experience a whole new level of action-oriented gameplay and content that lets you jump into the cockpit of classic **Star Wars** starships and join the fight for the Galactic Empire.

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AND UNDERGROUND CITIES

Tapping the Id

The guys from Id Software talk about life after *Doom 3*

Doom 3 is out, official news about *Quake 4* is finally available, and word has it the boys at Id Software aren't sleeping much these days. With a few minutes for them to breathe between projects, we caught up to lead designer Tim Willits and CEO Todd Hollenshead during this year's QuakeCon. ⊠ Darren Gladstone

About what's up next for Id Software:
Tim Willits: A short vacation, digging through my ever-growing stack of unplayed games, and then getting right back to work. The next projects are already happening. John [Carmack] announced that we have a *Doom 3* mission pack on the way, but that's all I can say for now on that. And we've already started initial work on the next brand-new game.

The artists have started working on concept art and prototypes for it. And John is also adding enhancements to the engine. I'm excited because it's going to be a brand-new intellectual property, a whole
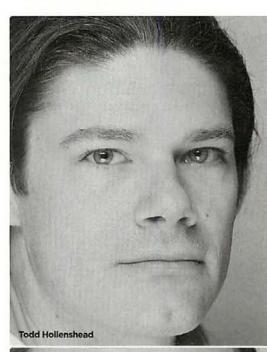
bust down a door and run in with your biggest gun. You'd miss out [on] the creatures jumping out of the shadows, and half the point of playing is gone.
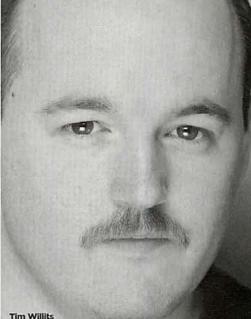
About "being ready when it's ready":
TW: While John kept us focused, it still took eight months longer than planned. It's the curse of trying to perfect a new engine and create a game at the same time. The great thing about the next title is that we're starting off with the *Doom* tech. And we're not adding a lot to the engine. You know, John's working on a few systems, but it's basically the same. So that'll give us an opportunity to get done with our next project a whole lot quicker.

Id Software's take on duct tape and mods:
TH: Actually, we've been surprised at how fast people have gotten some mods out. But we do include everything that's in the box for a reason. Obviously, a lot of people wanted the flashlight attachment for their shotgun. We've already seen a mod that allows for 32-player

Todd Hollenshead

"The fact that it's a *Doom* game means there are a lot of expectations."

new franchise. We can't talk about if the pacing will be fast like the old games or slowed down like in *Doom 3* just yet...but I'm definitely psyched.

On how *Doom 3* was received by the public:
TW: The fact that it's a *Doom* game means there are a lot of expectations. Most people love it, but some make the mistake of trying to compare this game to a *UT2004* or *Far Cry*. Truth is, this was intentionally built as a single-player survival-horror game. Kind of like *Resident Evil* but with more action and better camera control. And yes, it's slow and heavily scripted, but it's all for a reason.
Todd Hollenshead: We wanted to slow the pace down and take a more tactical approach. I think it's good that the game humbles you when you play it like Rambo, because it's not as scary when you just

multiplayer matches, and there are plenty of others in the works.

Will there ever be a *Doom* movie:
TH: I really do think that in the next 18 months, there will be a very good *Doom* movie up on the big screen. The preproduction is going on now in Prague. Andrzej Bartkowiak (*Cradle 2 the Grave*) is directing, and Karl Urban (*Lord of the Rings*) just signed on to play the lead. We already have an excellent script (which doesn't mirror the game's story), and Universal has already spent literally millions of dollars on getting the movie to where it is now. And so now it's just a matter of following through. I'm very much looking forward to it. There have already been rumors of The Rock being involved. He could be, but he would play the role of Sgt. Kelly.

Tim Willits

■ QUAKECON

A Whole Lotta Quakin' Goin' On

We go behind the scenes of one of the biggest LAN parties

his summer, 5,570 hardcore PC gamers descended upon Dallas for the sole purpose of fragging. Every year at QuakeCon, the mecca of all things Id Software, people come from as far away as Europe to win the tournament's $25,000 first prize. Others drive across the county just to lug their monster PC rigs into the Bring Your Own Computer area.

READY TO RUMBLE

No surprise to anyone, Fatal1ty walked away unscathed and $25,000 richer from the *Doom 3* competition. There was a case mod competition that produced some impressive entries. Vazzini spent seven months and $2,000 fitting a server into a *Dallas Morning News* newspaper stand. The Fifth Column clan out of Oklahoma cannibalized the top of a Papa John's delivery car and created its LAN-boy rig.

READY TO STUMBLE

The event isn't just about fraggin' and braggin', though. For many of the participants, QuakeCon is the biggest social event of the year and a chance to hang out with some of the people they've spent most of their free time trying to kill. The members of GB Clan, for example, wore combat helmets in honor of *Enemy Territory* (their favorite game) and met up with buddies who play online.
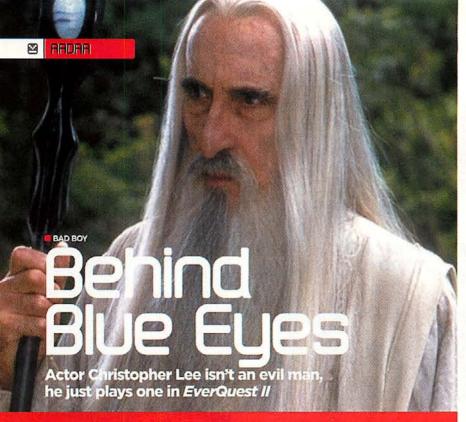
While the daytime features plenty of mod workshops, multiplayer tournaments, and PC-building contests, the night becomes a Bawls-and-vodka-fueled bacchanalia of sorts. Just imagine as thousands of postpubescent guys and gals cut loose in their hotel rooms. Not surprisingly, there are always a few "incidents" that security must handle, and this year was no different. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, one of the hired hands regaled us with tales of ribaldry, from the young man who was kicked out of the posh Gaylord Texan Resort (site of this year's event) for urinating off of a sixth-story balcony to the woman who was supposedly handling her boyfriend's, er...BFG in one of the many hot tubs.

As you can guess, nearly everyone had a great time, ensuring that the 2005 event will be bigger and better. If we're allowed back across state lines. ⊠ **Will Tuttle with moral support from Darren Gladstone**

■ BAD BOY

Behind Blue Eyes

Actor Christopher Lee isn't an evil man, he just plays one in *EverQuest II*

Actor Anthony Hopkins once said, "I don't play villains, I play people." And if you follow that logic, then Hopkins' fellow thespian Christopher Lee has played some of the best people in cinematic history. Besides portraying Dracula in nearly a dozen films, Lee was Francisco Scaramanga in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Count Dooku in *Star Wars Episode II* (a role he'll reprise in next May's *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*).

That is probably why the people at Sony Online hired the 82-year-old British actor to play Lucan D'Lere in *EverQuest II*. "He's an overlord, he's a tyrant, he's a dictator, and he is immortal," Lee explains. "Nobody knows where he comes from, but he is ruthless, has no feelings at all, and he wants what we would call world dominion."

Unlike some actors of his stature, though, Lee—who has also lent his impressively commanding voice to such games as *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, *Freelancer*, and *Conquest: Frontier Wars*—doesn't consider voicing videogames to be

a step down. "If anything," he says, "it's a step up. It's a huge challenge, you know. Voice acting is probably more difficult to do than anything else for an actor because whatever I say has got to fit the character I play. So I have to have an idea of what sort of person I am and how I'm supposed to play it before I do the dialogue and record it.

"But it's also another experience for me," he adds. "There was a French-British conductor, long dead, his name was Sir Thomas Beecham, and he said, 'Try everything once except folk dancing and incest.'"

Of course, Lee's decision to do *EverQuest II* might have less to do with furthering his career in gaming than it does his lifelong love of the fantastic. "I've always had tremendous imagination, and I've always loved fantasy," he says. "I adored reading about myths and legends of every civilization when I was very small, and I was brought up, like most of us, on the stories of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, which were, indeed, grim. I still buy books on fantasy, whether they are mythology or history."

Still, none of this really explains why a nice guy like Lee often plays people who are not so nice. "Well, I'm an actor," he says. "And if you're an actor, it's not a question of whether you're a nice man or a nasty man. You can play anything if you're a real actor. And after 57 years, I think I'm just beginning to get the idea." ☒ **Paul Semel**

> ## "Voice acting [for a videogame] is more difficult than anything else for an actor."

NEWS FEED ›› Mech love, not war. A cool mod for the aging *Half-Life* engine: Pilot *Macross*-inspired bots in a sweet battle to the death. Go to www.mechmod.com ›› Blank slate. Major delays for *Tabula Rasa* means 2005 can't come quick enough. ››

CORRUPTING YOUTH

Secret Shopper

We send a kid undercover to try to buy M-rated games

"**E**xcuse me. Do you have *True Crime: Streets of L.A*?" I ask, knowing full well that it's an M-rated title. "Sure, dude," the guy behind the counter says without batting an eye as he sells me the game. Score one for the high-school freshman. At this point, you're probably wondering, "Why is *CGW* trying to corrupt a semi-impressionable, admittedly young-looking 15-year-old?" To prove a point.

The ESRB rating system has done a good job of rating games. The question is if those ratings are being properly enforced and if people even understand the rating system. In the same manner that a kid can't get into an R-rated movie without adult supervision, underage gamers are supposedly not able to buy M-rated

games. *CGW* tried this experiment in San Francisco a few years ago, and kids were able to buy adult games without a hitch. With 10 stores targeted, it was time to hit the streets of Los Angeles to test our theory and see if anything had changed.

THE EXPERIMENT BEGINS

Armed with a tape recorder, digital camera, and "special operative" Greg by my side, our first stop is Circuit City. *Doom 3* is one of the goriest and most hyped titles of the year—and it will be mine. In the home stretch, a female clerk is ringing me up when some supervisor-type guy comes over and says, "Excuse me, you can't buy this game. It's M rated." "So? I've bought a bunch of these before." OK, so I lied. "Your parents aren't with you,"

he says. Shut down. I'm sure my mom's glad he stuck to the rules, but man, what a hard-ass.

Next on the list is an EB Games at the local mall. If one branch let me buy an M-rated game (that's where I got *True Crime*), maybe my luck would hold up at another location. Not a chance. I pick up an M-rated title and get ejected from the store before even reaching the register. Clearly, the morality—or the training—is different at every store.

WORST BUY

My trip to Best Buy met with some really strange results. The sweet woman at the register changed moods quickly upon seeing the M-rated game in hand. My instinct was to stay calm, act maturely, and use the biggest words in my arsenal to try to change her mind. She got angrier. This clearly wasn't working. While she wasn't willing to sell me an M-rated game, she was more than happy to give me the finger. Irony duly noted.

I had the most success at CompUSA, buying both the controversial *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Doom 3* there. I didn't even have a conversation with the clerk at the register, there was just the blip of the barcode reader. Ditto at Kmart. Granted, there were no games worth the effort, except for the outdated *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in HARM's Way*. The cashier knew more about Martha Stewart than the ESRB.

As it turns out, every store may have the same rules, but it's at the whim of the workers and their managers whether or not I can buy games. When I was denied a copy of *Doom 3* at Gameland, a mom-and-pop store, I asked the owners why I couldn't have the game. As a small store with no other customers inside, they clearly could have used my sale. Instead, the man simply says, "You shouldn't be playing this game." You know, they were trying to help me. I can respect that. ⚡ **Corey J. Padnos**

REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	CGM	GameSpot	IGN.com	GameSpy	1UP.com	GameRankings.com
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	C	B+	B-	C	—	C+	B-
The Political Machine	A	—	B-	—	B+	—	B-
Codename: Panzers	B-	A	—	—	—	—	B+
Spider-Man 2	D-	F	C-	D+	D	—	D+
Catwoman	F	D	C	D-	—	D+	C

NEWS FEED ›› Set phasers to dork. SF-based Perpetual Entertainment has acquired the rights to the coveted *Star Trek* license to create an MMO game in which you don't control a Trekkie. ›› BioWare says *Jade Empire* will eventually come to the PC! ››

KOHAN II
KINGS OF WAR

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■ CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW

The AIM Game

Mythic Mark : CGW - Instant Message

File Edit Insert People

CGW: Hey there, Mark; it's Darren from *CGW*.
Auto response from Mythic Mark: I am currently away from the computer.
CGW: Hello? Mark? You there? Greeeaat, just sitting here, all alone. In a chat room. This is sad. I'm supposed to be chatting with Mark Jacobs, cofounder of Mythic Entertainment. You know, the guys behind *Dark Age of Camelot*...sigh...
Mythic Mark returned at 12:06:10 PM.

Mythic Mark: Hey there! Sorry about the delay.

CGW: Ha ha, it happens. Say, I've been meaning to ask: With all these MMOs and so little free time, aren't there are only a finite number of people to play these games?

Mythic Mark: Well, even if you believe that only a small percentage of gamers are currently interested in playing pay-for-play online games, there's still room for growth. The problem is that we are in what I call the "Age of Disappointment." Making MMORPGs is harder than making regular PC games.

CGW: Then what's going to bust us out of this Age of Disappointment?

Mythic Mark: Well, it depends on how you want to look at things. If you are talking about bringing in new players, *WOW* is by far the best bet. The *WorCraft* name will get people who have never played an MMO interested in at least looking at it. I can't say that about many games. I'll state here that I believe that if *WOW* is stable at launch (like *DAOC*), it will sell more copies it's first month than any other online game.

CGW: Even your upcoming sci-fi MMO? ;p Seriously, though, what about *Imperator*?

Mythic Mark: Nice segue :). What I've done is take one of the most important junctures in Roman history—the transition from Republican rule to Imperial rule, centered around the reign of Tiberius. In the game, Imperial rule is overthrown, the first Roman reformation happens, a new Republic is born...and continues to thrive. The game will take place probably a couple of hundred years from today.

CGW: Very cool idea, but it won't be a laser-gun version of the same ol' MMORPG?

Mythic Mark: I have no desire to make a fantasy MMORPG with laser pistols. What we are trying to do first is create a very good sci-fi setting for a game. Within that setting, we are then focusing on sci-fi elements that belong in such a game. Second, I believe that players want something more from the next generation of MMORPGs that will be different from the current gen. Third, we want to learn from our mistakes as well as the mistakes of others in this space. While I don't want a revolutionary game, I'll be happy with an evolutionary one with some revolutionary elements. If this game is just *DAOC* in space, it will fail miserably.

CGW: Going back to these sci-fi elements for a second, does that mean there will be flight elements? First-person-shooter combat?

Mythic Mark: FPS-type things, yes. Flight, not likely, as I don't want to promise something we might not be able to deliver on by release. *Imperator* is an RPG, but I think that even as an RPG it can learn from other genres.

CGW: OK, can you go into more detail about how *Imperator* is going to be borrowing from other genres?

Mythic Mark: In terms of the FPS genre, the best ones have made combat exciting, tactical, and downright challenging. Combat in most MMORPGs is anything but that. One of the things we are focusing on is how to make combat more like an FPS but without the twitch. In terms of other genres, we are also looking heavily at improving the social options in our games. We are not making *The Sims* in space, but we can add things that are not in *DAOC* that are more geared to socialization among the players.

CGW: How would you make a game more FPS-y without the twitch factor?

Mythic Mark: That's the challenge, isn't it? :-) [We're still working on that.]

CGW: Can you go into the enemies that you'll be fighting in *Imperator*?

Mythic Mark: First and foremost are the Mayans. These are the bad guys in the game. Nasty, evil, and dedicated to conquering Terra and all of its colonies. These guys show no mercy and are very, very dangerous adversaries. They also have mechanical "helpers" that carry out their dirty work. These things are also very nasty and have a bad disposition. Sort of like me after a long night, short on sleep, and with no iced caffeine-laden beverage in the morning. Like today. :)

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Mark Jacobs, one of the "elder statesmen" of online gaming, had a whole lot more to share with us about *Imperator* and the state of MMOs. In fact, he took Darren to school. Read the whole conversation for yourself at aimgame.1UP.com.

Trash! Warn Block Games Video Talk Send

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*
What we said when you were nursing

5 Years Ago, December 1999
He was the first human ever inducted into *CGW*'s Hall of Fame, and how did we honor him? By calling his very humanity into question by stating, "Sid Meier is a virus from outer space." Two decades after 1984's *Solo Flight*, Meier is still going strong—strong in only the way an alien can—with Sid Meier's *Pirates!* due for release later this year. *Age of Empires II* was our cover story, getting a big, fat five-star rating. We really really loved the trebuchets. A lot.

10 Years Ago, December 1994
Are you there, God? It's me, *CGW*. Why did we put a battle cruiser on the cover? Did we actually think that warships and yuletide cheer went hand in hand? And did we think the illustration of an out-of-control Santa sled barreling in for a tailhook landing on an aircraft carrier somehow bespoke of peace on Earth and goodwill to men? And what about the elves manning the antiaircraft guns? And what's with the elven butt crack? What is wrong with us?

15 Years Ago, December 1989
In a defining moment for *CGW*, Russell Sipe announced the promotion of Johnny Wilson to editor. Johnny would go on to run *CGW* for nigh onto 10 years, becoming virtually synonymous with the mag. He'd also be the only writer in *CGW* history to refer to Kierkegaard and actually mean it. Another defining moment: Charles Ardai reviewed the very first *Prince of Persia* game and proclaimed, "*Prince of Persia* is a tremendous achievement." We're hoping the next game, *Prince of Persia: The Warrior Within*, can earn the same sort of accolades—we're betting it will since *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* managed to snag our Action Game of the Year award for 2003.

■ COVERT OPERATIONS

Different Joint, Different Ops

We got the intel on the new *Joint Ops* expansion

Ten-HUT! Going behind enemy lines (that is, getting a few people at NovaLogic a little drunk), we scored the exclusive inside scoop on what's coming up next for the *Battlefield*-killing FPS game. The expansion, entitled *Joint Ops: Escalation*, has the conflict in Indonesia (from the original game) spilling over into other parts of Asia. Rebel troops have gained support, and the Joint Ops forces have a whole new set of headaches pending in Southeast Asia.

WAR RAGES ON

You're still battling up to 149 other people online, but the big changes are really more vehicles, tweaks to the engine, and how the game plays. In *Escalation*, you get to play on 15 new multiplayer maps, which include industrial complexes, military bases, and airports—to name a few. To help defend these locations, you'll have access to new emplaced weaponry that, if you're not careful, can overheat.

Speaking of defense, you can suit up your troops with Interceptor body armor. If you don't, the new localized player damage model will have you hurting. If you get shot in the leg, you'll be limping to the next waypoint; a hit to the arm can mess with your aim. When going on the offensive, you'll be able to choose your ammo type (full metal jacket and so on).

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

As you'd expect, there are also a whole lot of additions to the arsenal on both sides of the fence. From early looks, we figure that there are about eight new vehicles and nine new firearms. But there's a great deal of parity here. For every M1A1 Abrams tank that the Joint Ops forces roll out, the rebels can fight back with a T-80U.

Aside from the tanks, we know that there are Kawasaki KLR 650 motorcycles for quick insertions, AH-64A (and Ka-52) attack helicopters, and a couple of antiair vehicles. New weapons include items you might expect, such as the G3, G36, FN-FAL, MP7, and P90. We, however, are psyched to see the Javelin in action. These man-portable, fire-and-forget antitank missiles can be deadly in the field.
⊠ Darren Gladstone

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TOP HITS

Games Go Pop

MTV2 actually plays music—and games

W e've been talking about the game industry and Hollywood merging for a good long time. But music? Recently, MTV2—the music channel that actually plays music—has started "modding" its videos. *Video Mods*, which started running September 18, has already completed its first "season" for the network (eight episodes shown every other Saturday).

ROCK: THE GAME

Why include videogame characters in music videos? Who decides which ones are featured? One source, under anonymity, confided that the games are chosen on a paid basis. Basically, videogame publishers pay consideration fees to get the rights to use their characters for these videos on MTV2. Spokespeople were unavailable for comment on this particular issue.

We can at least tell you what you've missed: Rayne from the *BloodRayne* series prancing around to Evanescence's "Everybody's Fool"; Fountains of Wayne's "Stacy's Mom" as performed by *The Sims 2* players; and the Von Bondies' "C'mon C'mon" with jetpacking groupies in *Tribes: Vengeance*. Other artists such as Black Eyed Peas, Lil John, New Found Glory, the Darkness, Christina Milian, Ying Yang Twins, and the Vines got similar treatments from games like *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*. The series seems to be fairly well received, and according to Dave French, a spokesperson for MTV, the channel is already considering going ahead with a second season of the show.

You ask us, it's about time someone like MTV picked up on this idea. The show has obviously been fostered by the Machinima movement—creating movies from videogame engines. Unfortunately, MTV2's director of programming, Alex Colletti, was unavailable for comment at press time, but we'll take a guess at one of the inspirations: the awesome "Ice Man Cometh" clip that features a bunch of *Star Wars Galaxies* players groovin' to Vanilla Ice. Never seen the video? Check it out at www.windspireentertainment.com.
❌ **Darren Gladstone**

DUMPSTER DIVER
Digging up gold in the bargain bins

For some inexplicable reason, Activision saw fit to assault PC owners with a blatantly half-assed version of *Spider-Man 2*. Developed by Fizz Factor (the same fine company that excreted *The Hobbit*), this atrocity bears no resemblance to its superior console counterpart. Yeah, thanks for thinking so highly of the PC crowd, Activision. Do yourself a favor and stick with the good stuff: the comic noir-inspired *Max Payne* and the Silver Age comic RPG *Freedom Force*. You might even have some spare change to buy real comics!

FREEDOM FORCE $10   **+**   **MAX PAYNE $20**   **=**   **SPIDER-MAN 2 $30**

100 Bucks

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

■ COMIC
Bad Mojo
$13, WWW.AIT-PLANETLAR.COM
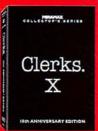Lesson learned by Bruce O'Connor: Never get into a fender bender with a freshly divorced witch. The rising baseball star, on his way to his first spring training, accidentally hits a man-hating witch's car. Rather than go through insurance, she places a hex on him that causes him to die at dawn and then get reborn every night. And you thought that you were having a bad day!

■ PULP
Hard Case Crime novels
$7, WWW.HARD CASECRIME.COM
The dame was loaded—and so are these books. Mickey Spillane once called pulp fiction "chewing gum for the mind." Fast-forward to today, where the Hard Case Crime line brings back the flavor of the good old days: lost noir stories and new novels written and presented in the classic style. Be sure to look for *Little Girl Lost*, *Grifter's Game*, and *Fade to Blonde*.

■ DVD
Clerks X
$25, WWW.AMAZON.COM
About 10 years ago, Kevin Smith released an indie film about two guys that work at crappy strip mall stores. Since then, he's released a number of geek movies starring comic and videogame dorks. You know, like us. This new three-disc edition is loaded, and we mean LOADED, with extras that you need to check out: new documentaries, commentary tracks, remastered prints of the film, extra footage, and a collection of shorts that are finally compiled here.
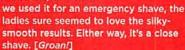
■ MUSIC
Green Day, American Idiot
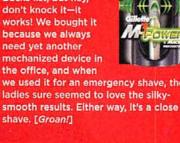**$13.50, WWW.AMAZON.COM**
Green Day fans have been waiting four long years for a new album. No doubt, this pop punk-rock CD will go down as one of their more controversial pieces—as if the title didn't clue you in. Early hype called it "a bold, polished punk opera." Don't know if we'd go that far, but we definitely dig the scathing title track.

■ GADGET
M3 Power razor
$12, WWW.GILLETTE.COM
We know, we know, not the sexiest entry into to the celebrated 100 Bucks list, but hey, don't knock it—it works! We bought it because we always need yet another mechanized device in the office, and when we used it for an emergency shave, the ladies sure seemed to love the silky-smooth results. Either way, it's a close shave. [*Groan!*]

■ DVD
Saved!
$19, WWW.AMAZON.COM
Are you all down with the G-O-D? If you're ready, drop this awesome flick into your DVD player and watch how a bunch of kids "kick it Jesus style" in a small suburban town. In addition to having a great story, *Saved!* should be given props for its terrific cast, which includes Macaulay Culkin—who proves that he's got more than those *Home Alone* movies in him.

■ MOVIE
Shaun of the Dead
$7 MATINEE TICKET, WWW.SHAUNOFTHEDEADMOVIE.COM
Any flick that bills itself as a romantic comedy with zombies is a must-see in our books. This British tribute to *Dawn of the Dead* and *28 Days Later* stars Shaun, a slack thirty-something who coasts through life. One night, while on the outs with his girlfriend, the dead start to rise. So who better than a drunken idiot to try and save the world—or at least his relationship?

■ COMIC
Avengers
$3.50, WWW.MARVEL.COM
Nothing can be finer than watching "The Earth's Mightiest Heroes" implode right before your eyes. Starting with Issue #500, they've started disassembling. Two heroes dead, one in solitary confinement—and that's just in one issue. This is all building up to when they reboot the series with Issue #1 and a whole new roster including...Wolverine and Spider-Man?

Pocket Change: $.00

Can you say "police brutality"?

Calling in the cavalry.

"It's not what it looks like! Okay, maybe it is."

You'll have to act fast to save innocent hostages.

PUBLISHER: **Vivendi Universal** DEVELOPER: **Irrational Games** GENRE: **Tactical Shooter** RELEASE DATE: **Q1 2005**

SWAT 4

Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?

U ntil recently, it looked like the *SWAT* franchise was MIA. *SWAT: Urban Justice* had been scrubbed, and a disappointed Rod Fung (then executive producer) mouthed off in these very pages about the faltering series. Fortunately, Vivendi has seen the error of its ways: The *SWAT* series is now in some very capable hands. Irrational Games, the same guys responsible for resurrecting the *Tribes* series in this year's *Tribes: Vengeance*, is faithfully bringing our favorite crime busters up to par for the 21st century.

DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

Simply called *SWAT 4*, this isn't some epic story. Rather, it's a collection of 14 single-player (or six-player cooperative) missions that'll have you tackling gangbangers, robbers, and even serial killers. Sticklers for detail will be happy to hear that the game maintains plenty of authentic weapons and

tactics; the big focus here, though, is on smoothing out controls and streamlining the interface so you can instinctively issue commands to your squad. This is a welcome change from one of the problems that plagued earlier titles in the series. While the HUD is still early in the optimization process, the direction that Irrational is taking with the contextual command menus is already quite clear. You'll no longer need to fumble through three layers of commands just to order a breach and clear. See a crook who needs to be cuffed? Just walk up to him and hit the Space Bar; you'll give the obvious contextual order and he'll be detained.

In one scenario we played through, we

had to use two separate teams to release hostages. Controlling your team is one thing, but you also need to be able to keep close tabs on team two. Not a problem at all! You can dynamically create and size onscreen windows, which gives you the first-person view of anybody in the field. You also have the option of instantly jumping into any character you want. This came in especially handy in one test run we had on a house arrest while investigating a suspected serial killer.

POLICE QUEST

At the house, one team covered the back, making sure the suspect didn't try to escape. My sniper had the God's-eye ▶

The sniper saved me from a potentially fatal ambush, silently taking down the homicidal suspect.

⬆ **Air Tasers look way cooler than they feel.**

◀ view of the situation, with his sights set on the living room. All clear—time to move. "Wait!" the sniper shouted. That's right, your team actually does a good job of communicating with you. In fact, there's a lot of time being dedicated to voice chatter and to developing personalities for your various team members. But will this instill all that much more emotional investment in keeping 'em alive? It did for me, and it's a good thing, too: The sniper saved me from a potentially fatal ambush during the raid, silently taking down the homicidal suspect. Creeping further around the environment, we made our way into a very detailed basement with decor from the John Wayne Gacy collection.

As you can see from the screenshots, *SWAT 4*'s visual aspects are shaping up quite nicely. That probably has something to do with the fact that we're looking at the *Vengeance* engine in action—which means that in addition to having detailed doors for you to knock down, it's got Havok physics, which will allow you to take good advantage of the game's environments.

CUSTOM CRIME

Not sold yet? The game will also be shipping with a fully functional scenario editor, just in case Irrational's missions aren't tough enough for you. You'll be able to change all the variables: weapons, victory conditions, starting positions, enemy aggressiveness, and so on. Unfortunately, you won't be able to design maps in the editor. However, since it's based on *Unreal* technology, the ever-creative gaming community shouldn't have any problems making its own levels if it's so inclined.

Even with all this good stuff, we've still got a long wait—*SWAT 4* has a few months to go before it's ready for a live field test. Even in the prealpha state we played, it already looks very promising, as well as true to the spirit of its predecessors. Lock and load—*SWAT 4* will be beating down the doors early next year. ☒ **Darren Gladstone**

The Word: FREEZE!

🅱 PUBLISHER: **Eidos Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Pyro Studios** GENRE: **Strategy** RELEASE DATE: **Q1 2005**

Imperial Glory
Celebrating the old world order

With so many epic warfare games on the horizon, it appears that everyone wants to rule the world. Pyro Studios, best known for the *Commandos* franchise, is making its newest effort stand out with majestic battles and epic skirmishes. Set in Europe between 1739 and 1830, *Imperial Glory* gives gamers the chance to unleash their inner Napoleons.

A TIP OF THE HAT

We walked into this demo with visions of a *Rome: Total War* tribute. Though they may be separated by 200 years' worth of subject matter, the two games definitely share some common design principles— but once you're in the thick of it, you won't confuse the two titles.

After you choose from among five playable empires (Prussia, Austria, Russia, France, and Great Britain), you'll see that *Imperial Glory* is a detailed account of war during the Napoleonic era. Gameplay takes place on a *Risk*-like world map where you can oversee troop allocation, as well as diplomatic duties in the single-player campaign. Or you can let your strategic advisor run the show, leaving you to fight. There are 70 technologies to develop over the course of play, and— true to tempestuous history—you can determine the political course of a country, be it a republic or dictatorship. While there is a free-form campaign that lets you rewrite the past, history buffs will appreciate controlling real-world commanders that start low and get promoted over time.

MASTER AND COMMANDER

The real fun starts when you're fighting over the 55 provinces and 29 maritime areas in the game. While they aren't randomly generated, the game's 50-plus maps are incredibly detailed and feature extremely interactive environments. Time of day, weather, and elevation all factor in as you plan out your battles, and the destructible buildings and landscapes add an extra layer of strategy to the mix.

Naval battles are another key factor and are replete with a gorgeous ocean model and plenty of sloops and frigates to lead into combat. Honestly, the maritime escapades alone could make a great game—but they're just one piece of a much bigger whole. ☒ **Darren Gladstone**

The Word: WARTIME

Playboy: The Mansion

Name: Playboy: The Mansion

Parents: Arush Entertainment (publisher), Cyberlore Studios (developer)

Birth Date: Holidays 2004

Vitals: Sims-style management game in which you control a "timeless" (read: not geriatric) Hugh Hefner as he traipses through the mansion, the grotto, and the clubhouse in pursuit of hotties.

Ambitions: Build the Playboy empire by completing mission objectives that include publishing popular issues of the magazine, establishing the Playboy Jazz Festival, and launching Playboy.com. Successful ventures mean more money to upgrade the mansion's already decent trappings, throw parties, and interact with decidedly tumid young women—whose rendered boobies are actually visible during photo shoots and...er...romantic interludes.

Turn-ons: Renders of real celebrities eventually start to show up; aside from famous faces like Carmen Electra, a whopping 95 Playmates participated in getting their likenesses into the game. One such Playmate (thanks, Stacy!) actually came to our office to confirm that the game does a good job of re-creating the mansion and the grotto. If your life's ambition mirrors that of Hugh Hefner's, this is your chance to live the dream.
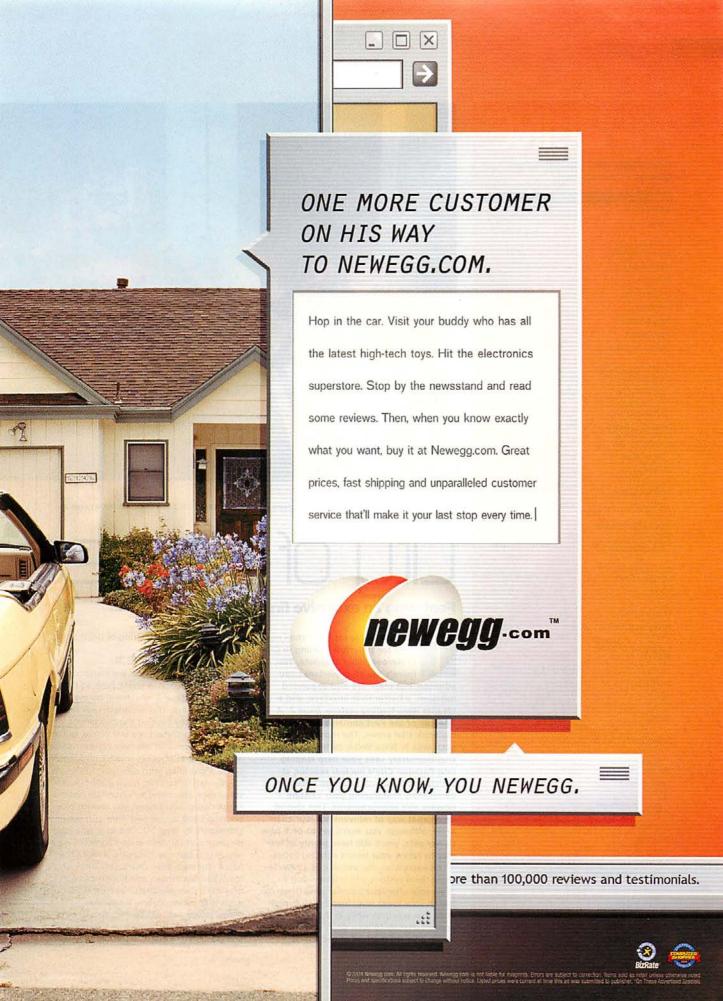
Turn-offs: You can get what you're probably seeking much cheaper and faster if you just go buy the magazine instead.

People Say I Look Like: The managing-editor Sim with boobs. There's no denying the fun of introducing naughty bits into what is essentially The Sims, but the missions largely revolve around the minutiae of running a magazine (Hire free-lancers! Commission photo shoots!). That could get old fast...even for those of us who don't already do it every single day.

PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

■ New ■ Update   ▶

PUBLISHER: **NCsoft** DEVELOPER: **Cryptic Studios** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **Q3 2004 (Issue 2)**; **Q4 2004 (Issue 3)**

City of Heroes:

Featuring an exclusive first look at *Issue 3*!

There's a whole lot more than new duds for superfolk coming in *City of Heroes' Issue 2* update. Yep, there's the all-important cape addition, but there are also expanded missions, a better user interface, and a cleaner item-trading system. *Issue 2: A Shadow of the Past* contains several new high-risk trial zones. The most interesting such area is Terra Volta; completing this trial ultimately sees your hero leaping into Paragon City's nuclear reactor, at which point you will have the option of completely reassigning your existing powers and enhancements. **This should be a great way of reinventing your character; although you won't get to pick new power sets, you'll still have plenty of leeway to refine your hero's existing focus.**

This expansion also introduces a reverse-sidekicking system, which allows you to scale your character's power level down to match your lower-level friends'. All experience that you gain while in this state is applied directly to your debt, which makes for an efficient method of getting back onto your feet after a string of deaths.

COMING SOON: ISSUE 3!

Why stop there, though? We also scored an exclusive scoop: a sneak peek at the as-yet-untitled *Issue 3*, which will be available for the holidays. This expansion will finally move the story beyond the borders of Paragon City. Details are still vague, but we can likely expect to see new zones outside of the city and possibly more interdimensional areas filled with new cosmic threats.

Speaking of cosmic, *Issue 3* introduces some new otherworldly character options. These "epic" archetypes will reward players who have developed their current characters to level 50. One epic slot will be unlocked for each such character, which you can use to create a "light" or "dark" themed alien character. Think of them like Superman and his Kryptonian brethren: stronger than mere mortals, but each with a debilitating weakness.

New power sets will be introduced; we're told to definitely expect some sonic powers, and possibly archery if all the kinks can be

Halt, evildoer! For the skankily dressed and zombiefied hand of justice is upon you!

The otherworldly Shadow Shard is just one of the new zones in *Issue 2*.

City of Heroes has capes and robots. Now, all that's missing is PVP.

Issues 2 & 3

worked out. You'll have to wait for 2005's *City of Villains* expansion for more new archetypes, but *Issue 3* has one other major addition to tide you over: the skill system.

UTILITY BELT

Skills are *City of Heroes'* answer to the ubiquitous MMO crafting system—except they're totally different. Characters will be able to specialize in one of four different skill trees: Detective, Science, Communication, and Scholarship. They can further specialize in various areas of expertise, such as Forensics or Security for the Detective tree. Skills are level-independent and wholly optional; your character will be able to interact with myriad objects during the game, at which point he can attempt a series of skill checks. Success brings new objectives or perhaps

some extra experience. For example, succeeding at a Security check in a bomb-infested building might reveal the explosives on your mission map.

Skills are learned and improved by studying at universities throughout Paragon City. You'll earn temporary, expendable skill boosts during missions; these are somewhat similar to inspirations but can also be converted into wisdom, which is used to add permanent skill boosts at the aforementioned universities. As with enhancements, you'll find generic skill improvements as well as stronger, more focused upgrades along the lines of dual- and single-origin enhancements. The only skill you'll need for now, though, is the patience to hold out for all this good stuff. ⊠ **Ryan Scott**

The Word: MAD SKILLZ

> **Skills are *City of Heroes'* answer to the ubiquitous MMO crafting system— except they're totally different.**

◁ PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
■ Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile	Myelin Media	November 2004
■ Imperial Glory	Eidos Interactive	January 2005
The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-earth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
■ The Matrix Online	Sega	November 2004
■ Medal of Honor Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	November 2004
Middle-Earth Online	Vivendi Universal	February 2005
■ MotoGP 3	THQ	Q3 2005
The Movies	Activision	March 2005
NASCAR 2005	Electronic Arts	February 2005
Need for Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	November 2004
■ Neverwinter Nights 2	Atari	2005
■ Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2006
■ Pacific Fighters	Ubisoft	November 2004
■ Painkiller: Battle out of Hell	DreamCatcher Interactive	November 2004
Pariah	Groove Games	February 2005
Playboy: The Mansion	Arush Entertainment	November 2004
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	November 2004
Quake IV	Activision	TBA
Robots	Vivendi Universal	March 2005
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari	November 2004
■ S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	THQ	Q1 2005
■ Scarface	Vivendi Universal	Q4 2005
■ Scrapland	Enlight Software	Q4 2004
Serious Sam 2	Gathering	2004
The Settlers: Heritage of Kings	Ubisoft	November 2004
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	November 2004
Silent Hunter III	Ubisoft	2005
■ Sonic Heroes	Sega	November 2004
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
■ Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II— The Sith Lords	LucasArts	Q4 2004
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	February 2005
■ Stronghold 2	Global Star	Q1 2005
SWAT 4	Vivendi Universal	Q1 2005
Tabula Rasa	NCsoft	March 2005
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal	TBA
Top Spin	Atari	Q4 2004
Ultima Online: Samurai Empire	Electronic Arts	November 2004
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	Microsoft	TBA
World of WarCraft	Blizzard Entertainment	TBA
■ New ■ Update		

Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

Because "*Warrior Within*" sounds better than "2"

Ubisoft has confirmed *Warrior Within* as the subtitle of the formerly untitled *Prince of Persia 2*—which is probably a smart move, since if we're going strictly by the numbers, this is actually *Prince of Persia 5*. "*Warrior Within*" definitely doesn't sound as cool as "*The Sands of Time*," but hey—we'll give it the benefit of the doubt.

Naming conventions aside, this new *Prince of Persia* is everything last year's critically acclaimed game was, and more. A lengthier quest, multiple endings, and all kinds of killer time-manipulation effects are included here—not to mention an even more robust combat system, which allows you to fight with two weapons, strangle your enemies, and perform deadly limb-severing combos. If that's not enough, you'll also be treated to some pretty spectacular boss battles, including a hulking rock monster with a literal Achilles' heel.

It should all add up to an even more epic adventure than its predecessor, which was hailed as *CGW*'s 2003 Action Game of the Year. Get ready to roll out the red carpet for *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* this November. **Ryan Scott**

The Word: REGAL

❰ Prince wins. Fatality!

❰ To defeat this titanic boss, you'll have to nick his heel, then leap onto his back, *Lord of the Rings* style.

The perfect night: a full moon, a loaded gun, and thee.

Feeling hot, hot, hot!

Perhaps he should see a doctor about that skin condition.
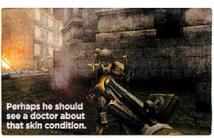
PUBLISHER: **DreamCatcher** DEVELOPER: **People Can Fly** GENRE: **Horror FPS** RELEASE DATE: **November 2004**

Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell

Or, as we like to call it, PKBOOH!

The name of the game is still "kill, kill, kill" in *Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell*, an expansion to one of the most exciting first-person shooters to spray bloody demon goo across our screens in recent memory. With 10 new single-player levels and two additional multiplayer modes to choose from, you'll pick up right where the original left off—ridding purgatory of the raging undead—including 30 freakish new monsters—by rendering their ghoulish faces into so much mush, courtesy of various weapons. There's a new assault rifle/flamethrower at your disposal, but we remain partial to the spinning blade of the Painkiller—there's something undeniably satisfying

about slicing packs of undead soldiers into piles of gory cold cuts. Salami sandwich, anyone?

THINGS THAT GO BUMP

So far, we've played just one level, but we're happy to report that no one seems to have fixed what wasn't broken. Spooks still abound—in the Leningrad level, they take the form of skeletal soldiers commanded by worm-eaten superiors and aided by what appears to be an escaped mental patient wrapped in a suit made of explosives. (Note: churning into this guy with the Painkiller may not be the greatest idea—turns out that dynamite sometimes blows up when you slice into it. Go figure.)

The environments remain suitably creepy, rife with hellish explosions and backed by a soundtrack that actually heightens the freakiness factor; the choir sounds like it's praising the motherland even as Leningrad burns around it, punctuated by screams of terror sounding in the distance. Everything here is pretty damn intense.

Battle Out of Hell was originally due out in October, but publisher DreamCatcher says that extra month will go into raising more awareness and "simply making the game perfect." If that means more hell-raising carnage, we're more than willing to wait. ✗ **Kristen Salvatore**

The Word: **KILLTHRILLER**

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **Electronic Arts** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **November 2004**

Ultima Online: Samurai Empire

Roamin' with ronin

⬆ There's one thing that'll never change: *UO's* predilection for goofy clothes. ⬆ If these ronin guys are anything like the dude from *Yojimbo*, we're scared.

Seven years after launch and *Ultima Online* is still going strong enough to warrant a brand-new expansion pack. EA has listened to the most die-hard fans in massively multiplayer gaming and has granted their most heartfelt request: a Far East addition to the game world that will allow gamers to become ninja and samurai. The new landmass is actually three separate sprawling slabs of real estate that make up the Tokuno Islands (first hinted at in *Ultima I*, where it was known as the Land of the Feudal Lords).

While there are new home-building options, new treasure, more than 20 new monsters, and new dungeons, the biggest additions are the two aforementioned character classes. Ninja have a number of new skills—with an emphasis on stealth—

and possess the ability to take the forms of various animals (with their attendant special abilities) and a little something called Death Strike. Yeah, that one should be pretty good.

Samurai are offensive juggernauts with skills that let them grow stronger over the course of a battle. For example, the Whirlwind attack grants a damage bonus based on a samurai's Bushido skill, increasing his damage for every enemy that surrounds him.

A revamped guild system will round out the major additions and tweaks—which, given the clunky guildstone interface that the game has stuck with up until now, is a very good thing. ✗ **Robert Coffey**

The Word: **STILL KICKIN'**

PUBLISHER: **Gathering** DEVELOPER: **Destineer** GENRE: **Tactical FPS** RELEASE DATE: **October 2004**

Close Combat: First to Fight
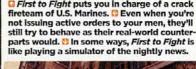
Too close for comfort?
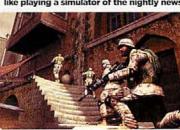
With war on the nightly news to an extent we haven't seen since Vietnam, I feel some ambivalence about *Close Combat: First to Fight*, a tactical FPS whose main selling point is its realism. Now, I'm not questioning the game's authenticity; it was originally designed as a training tool for the U.S. military, incorporating input from 40 active-duty Marines—some of whom are currently serving in Afghanistan or Iraq. But I can't help questioning the goal. Is this level of hard-hitting realism really what we need from our games?

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

But maybe that's just me. If you want the immersive, gun-in-your-hands feeling of an FPS combined with a regulation-perfect depiction of military practices, *First to Fight* is your game. The proprietary graphics engine is nothing stunning, and the generic, largely linear missions aren't exactly gripping drama, but the game delivers on its promise of realism, thanks principally to the A.I.-driven behavior of both friendly and enemy soldiers. You're in charge of a four-man

fireteam programmed to behave at all times as real-world Marines would—even when you don't issue orders, they automatically do the right things. Similarly, each enemy soldier has a distinct "psychology model" that determines how he reacts to your actions. For instance, if you separate enemy troops from their leader, you can cause confusion and panic, leading to a faster, safer victory for your team.

⊕ *First to Fight* puts you in charge of a crack fireteam of U.S. Marines. ⊕ Even when you're not issuing active orders to your men, they'll still try to behave as their real-world counterparts would. ⊕ In some ways, *First to Fight* is like playing a simulator of the nightly news.

In the end, of course, all the talk of realism can't disguise the fact that the game boils down to prowling a wrecked cityscape, encountering hostile Middle Eastern soldiers, and killing as many of them as you can. I can understand why the Marines commissioned it, but *First to Fight* might not be for everyone. ⊠ **Charles Ardai**

The Word: **BATTLE WEARY**

PUBLISHER: **Atari** DEVELOPER: **TimeGate Studios** GENRE: **RTS** RELEASE DATE: **November 2004**

Axis & Allies

Board game makeover

⊕ The strategic map is virtually the same as the board game. ⊕ A bomber flattens the enemy's navy.

Axis & Allies is the most-played war game today. Its elegant design has taught many board gamers the joys of strategic bombing and the dangers of invading Russia. Despite its history as an introductory war game, it's never been properly ported to PCs. The last attempt was bug riddled, and the A.I. made Hitler's decision to attack Stalingrad look bright. With any luck, Atari's upcoming *A&A* port will fix that.

TimeGate Studios, the team behind the *Kohan* series, is giving this updated version of *A&A* a modern face-lift, marrying the board game's classic turn-based design with modern RTS elements. Playing as any of the major WWII powers, you build armies, research technologies,

and invade enemy soil. However, your actions—rather than a fistful of dice—determine a battle's outcome. The turn-based map has been transformed into an RTS environment, with all the army-building, resource-gathering gameplay you'd expect from the genre. Like TimeGate's other games, *A&A*'s battles will focus on tactics and combined arms instead of peasant micromanagement.

Though the departure from the board game may incite skepticism among *A&A* fans, TimeGate has a successful pedigree and may actually give *A&A* the PC gaming treatment it has been denied for so long. ⊠ **Di Luo**

The Word: **DICELESS**

DIGITAL UNDERGROUND Games comin' from out of nowhere

FROM: **GSC Game World** AVAILABILITY: **Q2 2005**

Heroes of Annihilated Empires

Word on the street: The game is a heady cocktail of fantasy roleplaying and real-time strategy. You'll command armies rather than individual troops—and the battlefields can accommodate up to 64,000 units. Six nations, half a dozen spell schools, and a treasury of artifacts are just the beginning. From creature summonings to a cinematic story line filled with ever-evolving characters, the setup for an epic saga is firmly in place. And this is just the beginning—*Annihilated Empires* is the first installment of a trilogy.

Sounds kinda beat: Sweet, just what we need—another foray into obscure realms of might and magic. Still, let's not forget that GSC has earned itself some respect for slinging together a promising little diversion known as *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* Marketing sword-and-sorcery outings isn't the easiest task, but word-of-mouth hype can do amazing things. After all, *Age of Wonders* went under the radar but not into the waste bin.

FROM: **Metropolis Software** AVAILABILITY: **Q1 2005**

Diabolique: License to Sin

Word on the street: Sorry, no softcore porn here. Just old-fashioned adventure, albeit with a twist: You play as Dark Eaville, a secret agent serving Satan himself. Apparently, angels and devils have been fighting on Earth for eons...you're simply getting in on the fun a bit late. Scenarios involve stealth, sabotage, and sniping sequences, as well as wild rides on fancy roadsters and the odd Amazon boat. Minigames and macabre run-ins render it a sinfully intriguing setup.

Sounds kinda beat: Polish producer Metropolis Software has a shaky track record, which includes such shady offerings as *Odium* and *RoboRumble*. In all fairness, the team has been in business since 1992—it obviously knows enough about interactive entertainment to keep the rent paid. The jury's officially out on this one, though we suspect someone would have to sell their soul to Old Scratch to make this anything more than a sleeper hit in America.

FROM: **Warthog Texas** AVAILABILITY: **Q3 2005**

Conquest 2: The Vyrium Uprising

Word on the street: Dig *Conquest: Frontier Wars*? You'll flip for its successor, which introduces four new races, as many campaigns, and more sizzling 3D sci-fi RTS encounters. Sail the stars in spacefaring vessels like devourers, basilisks, and glimmers as you collect resources, conduct research into new technologies, and settle differences via ship-to-ship combat. A dynamic galaxy beset with black holes and novas awaits exploration, with ancient technologies and amorphous horrors lying in wait.

Sounds kinda beat: Never heard of Warthog? That's because the studio formerly known as Fever Pitch is under new management—and with great power comes great shareholder responsibility. The former upstart outfit has become part of a sizable company traded on the London Stock Exchange, and while an Enron-sized scandal isn't expected, such transitions have a way of stifling a project's creative potential.

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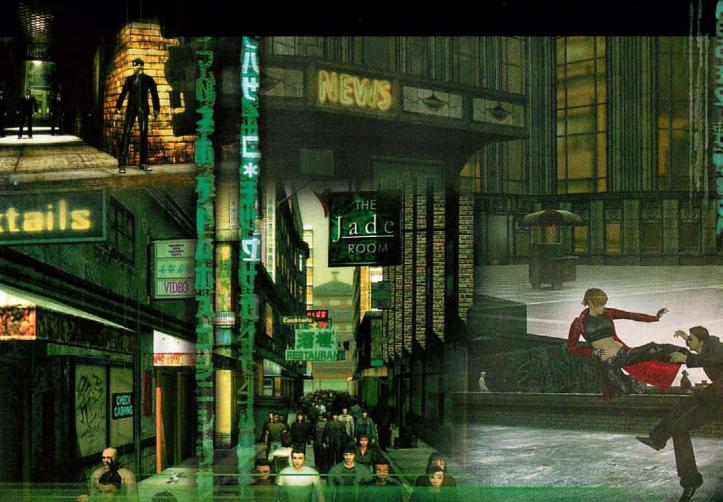
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You stay in wonderland and I show

you how deep the rabbit hole goes.

THE Jade ROOM

NEWS

THE MATRIX ONLINE. THE MOST REALISTIC URBAN ENVIRONMENT OF ANY MMO

The Matrix goes massively multi-player. An intelligent mission system. Ongoing input from the Wachowski Brothers. Realistic and intense fighting in wire-fu and bullet-time. The chance to alter Matrix history forever. And a huge, ever-evolving world the likes of which have never been seen in MMOs. It's *The Matrix Online* and the rabbit hole just got deeper.

SEGA

MONOLITH

ATI

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

THE ONCE &
FUT

Five years ago, Sony Online had it easy. It was 1999, "massively multiplayer" was not yet a common gaming term, and those who had experienced online roleplaying did not have very high expectations—the genre was too new, and the technology too limiting, to be considered anything more than an experiment for early adopters and übergeeks.

Which is why *EverQuest* hit the gaming community like an earthquake. *Ultima Online* may have paved the way, but *EverQuest*—with its 3D graphics engine and insidious carrot-and-stick gameplay— was the first massively multiplayer game to garner mass appeal. The game had virtually no advance hype, but after its release, the word of mouth was tremendous, eventually making *EverQuest* a full-fledged phenomenon, sucking hundreds of thousands of gamers in, inspiring support groups for "*EverQuest* widows," and landing on the cover of mainstream magazines like *TV Guide*.

In more recent years, however, *EverQuest* has fallen out of favor. Yes, it still has its legions of devoted fans who log on every night, ignore their families, and crowd *EQ* fan fairs to meet their fellow elves and dwarves in real life. But the mainstream gaming community has largely moved on. Many gamers migrated to the first post-*EQ* wave of MMOs, like *Dark Age of Camelot* and *Anarchy Online*, which borrowed heavily from *EQ* but fixed its major annoyances. ▷

URE KING
SONY GEARS UP FOR BATTLE IN EVERQUEST II
BY JEFF GREEN

Now, after a couple years of false starts and broken promises, we are finally, for real, in the next generation of MMOs. Mythic's *City of Heroes* is a Game of the Year contender and one of the year's biggest hits, while looming on the horizon is Blizzard's 800-pound gorilla, *World of WarCraft*. So Sony, with the most successful MMORPG to date, quite astonishingly finds itself in the role of underdog with the sequel to the game that essentially started it all.

But if *EverQuest II* is far from a sure thing, Sony does not appear to be panicking—at least not publicly. A visit to its office in San Diego in early September, with the beta test in full swing, revealed a team relatively calm and confident, albeit one that was putting in 16-hour days and subsisting on pizza and Diet Coke. We spent two days playing the game, talking to the team, and getting peeks at a bunch of the upper-level stuff that, until now, has not been revealed to the public.
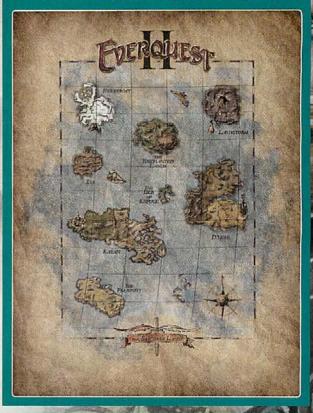
What's clear is that while every MMO has learned the lessons taught by *EverQuest*, the *EverQuest* team has learned the lessons since taught by everyone else. *EQ2* is not just a minor upgrade but a complete rewrite, incorporating everything the genre now demands, while still retaining its core identity. We've covered this game at length already (see our May 2003 cover story), so in the pages ahead we're presenting various snapshots of the almost-complete game, including many things the developers have never revealed before. What are the toughest zones in the new game? What are the coolest new spells? There are lots of spoilers ahead, so consider yourself warned. Now read on!

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Norrath is not what it used to be, having experienced centuries of catastrophes since the days of *EverQuest*. The continent of Antonica was ravaged by war, then ripped apart into a series of smaller islands separated by turbulent seas. The moon of Luclin exploded and rained fire down upon the lands. Other than that, though, everything's been pretty groovy.

FIVE COOL NEW SPELLS

For some players, *EverQuest* is and always will be about spell-casting. *EverQuest II* will see the return of some trusty favorites but will also introduce tons of new spells as well, all spectacularly animated and guaranteed to please your inner Gandalf.

Here are five of the coolest new spells you can expect to see in the earlier levels of the game.

SONGSTER'S LUCK (LEVEL 17 BARD)
A bard's Songster's Luck casts a sparkling armor that protects party members from being hit by monsters and inspires them to attack more accurately.

QUAKE (LEVEL 44 SUMMONER)
Not related to the Id game, this spell causes a minor earthquake and rock slide to assail the victim.

SIPHON LIFE (LEVEL 44 NECROMANCER)
Necromancers, evil creepy people that they are, can siphon the life out of a victim and convert it into health for themselves.

ARCANE BINDINGS (LEVEL 5 MAGE)
A mage's Arcane Bindings uses chains of arcane energy to hold an opponent in place, not allowing him to move. Then you can whale on him with impunity.

REGROWTH (LEVEL 12 DRUID)
Not the Viagra spell we were hoping for, Regrowth is a druid spell that heals the target party member with the power of nature.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

MASSIVELY EPIC ONLINE

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

MONSTERS

When we say that the monsters in *EverQuest II* are "better looking" than the ones in the first game, we don't mean we want to go out with them. At least not right away. What we mean is that the designers are pouring all their talent into making them as graphically stunning as they can. Here are five of the toughest new monsters in the game.

ICE GOBLIN

Ice goblins inhabit the frozen lands of the north, scheming to increase their wealth and power. Though generally small of frame, they are deadly in numbers.

SIREN

Beautiful and exotic, sirens have been known to lure many an adventurer to a watery grave. They possess a seemingly hypnotic power that overwhelms those unlucky enough to encounter them.

HILL GIANT

Hill giants inhabit many secluded regions, including the area now known as Thundering Steppes. Adventurers seeking to plunder those riches had best be wary, lest ye be stepped on.

SLITHERMAW

The slithermaw is an odd creature that lingers in dark places, like Robert Coffey's basement. Originally thought to be a mutated form of plant life, some believe the slithermaw originated in some realm beyond Norrath.

MANTICORE

Hideous beasts that seem an unnatural hybrid of many species, manticores stay secluded in dense jungles like the Feerrott. Fierce predators, they have many deadly weapons at their disposal, such as their skin-melting halitosis.

STATION PLAYERS: YOUR OWN EQ WEBSITE!

One of the coolest new features in *EverQuest II* is actually not even in the game itself—it's on the Web. The just-announced "Station Players" essentially gives every *EQ2* player a free website to check up on his characters, as well as on guild activities.

Every guild in *EQ2* gets a free guild website, where members can upload images, post articles, conduct chats, and so on. Though the sites will be hosted through Sony, Sony ensures that it will not be policing the sites, so guild members are free to say whatever they want without the hammer coming down. The site will include fully automated, updated rosters that will be useful for tracking a number of stats: the number of members, average level, trade skills, and more. Guilds will also be able to recruit directly from their site.

In addition, every player will have a webpage containing a fully automated, constantly updated profile of all his characters. You'll be able to check your stats, weapons, equipment, loot, and spells, and you can also check such statistics as how long you've played, how many quests you've solved, how many times you've died, and so on.

All this automatic stat tracking has another purpose: Players will be able to go to other pages, where they can see how they are performing versus the rest of the world. *EQ2* will automatically track and post on a daily basis practically every stat you can think of: who killed the most creatures, who hit for the most damage, who found the most items. Every single item in the game is tracked, so players who collect items before anyone else—whether by doing quests, killing monsters, or making them— will be immortalized forever, for all to see. *EQ* servers will track the time items are found down to one one-thousandth of a second, too—so go ahead and try to claim you found that sword before anyone else. We'll all know you're a big doodyhead liar.

Players in *EQ2* will get their own webpages, where they can check out their characters, equipment, and stats—even when not logged on to the game.
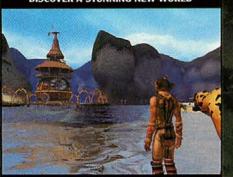
THE SAGA OF RYZOM

Ryzom could be the prescription against staid and tired MMORPGs.
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

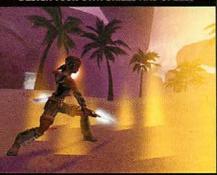**Ryzom could be the answer to your massively-multiplayer prayers...**
PC GAMER

DISCOVER A STUNNING NEW WORLD

DESIGN YOUR OWN SKILLS AND SPELLS
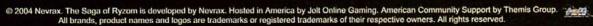
ENGAGE ENEMY HORDES IN EPIC INVASIONS

CRAFT AND ENCHANT UNIQUE ITEMS

UNCOVER THE PAST

BECOME A HERO

WWW.RYZOM.COM

THE FOUR TOUGHEST NEW ZONES

Even the most hardcore of *EQ* basement dwellers playing the game 24/7 are going to have a long while before they reach *EverQuest II*'s upper levels. Shown here for the first time are the game's four toughest zones. We're talking raid-level tough, so don't even think about going there alone.

EVERFROST
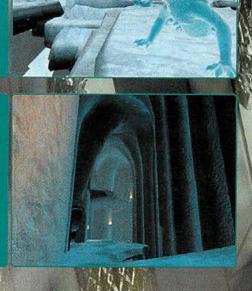
An island of eternal ice and snow, Everfrost is both beautiful and foreboding. Its glacial peaks sparkle in the sun, but this is a harsh land where a single mis-step can be deadly. No doubt due to the trying conditions present here, Everfrost's inhabi-tants tend to be powerful crea-tures that do not tolerate intruders. Especially not you.

PERMAFROST

Found within the icy landscape of Everfrost, the ancient keep of Permafrost is home to a mighty race of ice giants. Servants to the white dragon known as Lady Vox, the giants jealously guard the keep against invaders. Rumors indicate that some tragedy has befallen the dragon who rules here, but no mortal eyes have seen the truth that remains locked deep inside this frozen citadel.
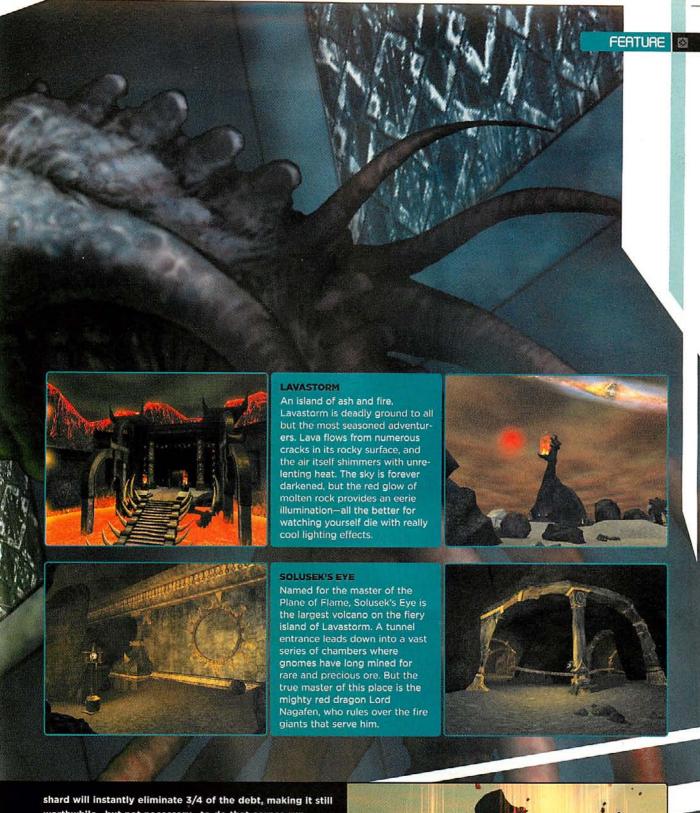
HOW DEATH WORKS

Death, perhaps the most hated game mechanic in all of *EQ,* is getting a makeover for the sequel. In the original, hapless gamers would take a huge XP hit when killed—often even caus-ing you to level down, the ultimate humiliation—while the dread-ed corpse run to retrieve your loot could be so frustrating and time-consuming that players would often just abandon their characters forever and create new ones rather than deal with it.

Happily, all of that is gone in *EQ2.* There is still a penalty, for sure, and the designers openly acknowledge that their version of death is still harsher than the one in *World of WarCraft.* But overall, death is much friendlier.

Now, rather than taking a hit on XP already earned, you will incur a debt on future XP—in essence, like a credit card debt. At the moment of death, you respawn back at your last bind point, while a ghostly form, your spirit shard, remains at the place you were slain. Your equipment is still with you, but it is damaged, and a red bar on your XP bar indicates a lien on any XP now gained. Retrieving your spirit

LAVASTORM

An island of ash and fire, Lavastorm is deadly ground to all but the most seasoned adventurers. Lava flows from numerous cracks in its rocky surface, and the air itself shimmers with unrelenting heat. The sky is forever darkened, but the red glow of molten rock provides an eerie illumination—all the better for watching yourself die with really cool lighting effects.

SOLUSEK'S EYE

Named for the master of the Plane of Flame, Solusek's Eye is the largest volcano on the fiery island of Lavastorm. A tunnel entrance leads down into a vast series of chambers where gnomes have long mined for rare and precious ore. But the true master of this place is the mighty red dragon Lord Nagafen, who rules over the fire giants that serve him.

shard will instantly eliminate 3/4 of the debt, making it still worthwhile—but not necessary—to do that corpse run.

The most interesting new dynamic, however, is how death affects groups. Now, if one member of a group dies, all party members will incur XP debt. The slain character still bears the brunt of it, but everyone is slapped with a small debt, thus giving parties much more incentive to keep one another alive.

So don't even think about abandoning your tanks now, you wimpy clerics: If they die, you get punished, too.

NORRATH:
THEN AND NOW

EverQuest II takes place 500 years after the first game. Though you may recognize some of the names, a series of cataclysms over the last five centuries has fundamentally altered the landscape, and destiny, of the lands of Norrath. Here is a glimpse of two familiar locations—Freeport and Qeynos—as they appeared in the first game and how they appear now. As Dr. Zaius once said to Taylor: Be careful...you may not like what you find.

THEN

QEYNOS

Qeynos stands as a beacon of hope in a world ravaged by disaster. After centuries of devastation and conflict, the forces of good have gathered together in this place to bring order to the shattered lands of Norrath. What was once a small city has grown into a huge metropolis and center of commerce, ruled by Antonia Bayle, the fetching lass gracing the cover of this magazine. Those adventurers walking the path of light call this place their home.

NOW

The old Qeynos clock has been replaced by one crafted by gnomes.

THEN

FREEPORT

Freeport was once a city of many different beliefs, but in the last 500 years, it has fallen completely under the control of the menacing Overlord, an immortal human lich named Lucan D'Lere. Under his reign, the city has grown into the capital of a powerful empire, stretching its shadowy influence over the remnants of the shattered world. Adventurers who seek the path of darkness will find a place within these walls.

NOW

Freeport's docks attract more commerce than ever before.

Make sure you play *Medal of Honor Pacific Assault*™ on a PC powered by it just isn't fair. To get a free download to optimize your motherboard fo

*Look for systems with the Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology logo which your system vendor has verified utilize Hyper-Threading Technolo

Run for your life!
He's using Hyper-Threading
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faster game play, visit intel.com/go/gaming.

intel.

Blue Man Group goes to war.

⬆ My, what big, umm, back tentacles you have!

⬆ Zombies with bubbling green plague shields!

ℹ️ PUBLISHER: **Gathering** DEVELOPER: **TimeGate Studios** GENRE: **RTS** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium 4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM, 700MB install, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2.0GHz, 512MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**

Kohan II: Kings of War

A bold sequel to a bold original

⬆ Maelstrom engines with their purple khaldunite rain.

⬆ Add wizards to your army for a shocking development.

⬆ And the walls came tumbling down.

94 🎮 **Evil Genius**
Everybody wants to rule the world—just maybe not quite like this.

🎮 **Call of Duty: United Offensive**
Three sides, one war, and maybe seven hours. **92**

🎮 **ShellShock: Nam '67**
The horror, the horror.... **96**

Inside

A shadow city under siege.

🎮 Hero, kohan, or rock star? You decide.

EDITORS CHOICE GAMING

The first *Kohan* was a noble failure. It solved many real-time strategy problems by eliminating peon herding, reworking the basic economics, and streamlining unit interaction. By dramatically changing the way you played an RTS, it reduced micromanagement and shifted the emphasis from twiddling to tactics. But people stayed away in droves, flocking instead to splashier conventional fare such as *WarCraft III* and *Command & Conquer: Generals.* So you could hardly blame the developers at TimeGate if they were to have chased commercial success by making *Kohan II* more like those other games.

STANDING FIRM
But, to its credit, TimeGate isn't budging an inch. Apprehensive fans will be delighted that so many of the things that made them love *Kohan* are completely intact in the sequel. You still assemble your cities as if they were single buildings, you still recruit and control your armies in easy-to-manage companies, you still deal with resources as a balance rather than a sum, and the shrewd tactical A.I. still controls the minutiae of combat. These things still form the cornerstone of *Kohan's* gameplay. "If you don't like it," TimeGate seems to say, "there are plenty of other RTSes. This is how we do it."

And oh boy, do they do it. *Kohan II* consists primarily of armies sweeping across the map. They're searching for enemy movement, getting tangled in epic clashes, butting up against cities to lay siege to them, breaking through walls, falling back to regroup, and rushing to reinforce each other. And as it all happens, you're able to make the hard choices that keep the game interesting. Do you sell off your extra iron for mana, or do you improve your foundry so you can support another infantry company? And do you use your limited wood to add a ranger so your infantry can speed through forests, or do you give them a complement of archers? And you can afford to ponder all these questions because *Kohan* doesn't bog you down with the unit baby-sitting that's central to so many other real-time-strategy games.

FICTION AND FACTION
But for all the similarities to the original *Kohan,* there's plenty of new content and technology. Most of the units are carried over from the first games, but they're more neatly divided into six separate races with distinct play mechanics. The mythology is as inscrutable as ever—I played the original games extensively, and I still don't know a drauga from a gauri, much less what the hell a kohan is—but the themes are recognizable. The elves have growing buildings, the undead can field large armies of rotting zombies, the orcs have beastriders, the humans gather lots of gold, the dwarves have strong buildings, and the devils have weird monsters. More or less. It gets more complicated when you take into account that most of the races can choose among different factions for unique heroes, bonuses, technologies, and units. In fact, it's all a bit messy, but it gives you plenty of room to flex different strategies. Although the basic gameplay is simple, there's a staggering amount of depth and flexibility.

The new 3D graphics engine is muscular and colorful, even if the artwork is often unimaginative. Someone should tell TimeGate that the undead and night elves from *WarCraft III* called, and they want their artwork back. To be fair, there are bursts of creativity that pay off: knights on ostriches, giant robots, Michelin Man djinns, and snarling packs of loping dogs. The spell effects add a splash of colorful action, and they're actually useful as a way to see who's doing what to whom. *Kohan II* can be slowed down if you want to really pay attention to a battle. With the 3D graphics and the option to zoom in close,

> ## "If you don't like it, there are plenty of other RTSes out there for you. This is how we do it."

there's none of the first game's "ants at war!" vibe. In fact, because of the fantasy setting and the powerful new graphics engine, cranked-down zoomed-in battles can be spectacular in a way that Creative Assembly's *Shogun* and *Medieval* battles can only dream of.

TOOLS OF WAR
The interface is actually a step backward from the original *Kohan's*, with some things buried deeper than necessary. You have to dig to look at unit stats, upgrade buildings, or research technologies. But *Kohan's* interface peccadilloes aren't as annoying as they would be in another RTS in which you have to simultaneously play general, lieutenant, and quartermaster. You're making broader choices here, so you can afford an extra click to drill down a layer deeper.

The fact of the matter is that there's nothing else like *Kohan II.* Except, of course, *Kohan* itself. Hats off to TimeGate for staying true to what it accomplished. And here's hoping that more gamers sit up and take notice this time around. ⊠ **Tom Chick**

Verdict ★★★★✩
Just say no to *WarCraft* and yes to *Kohan II.*

Call of Duty: United Offensive

Unremarkably remarkable

Generally, when reviewing a game, I am—at the very least—left with a couple pages of notes. But not this time; no, this time, there's simply a Post-it with one word on it: Russia. Where were all my notes? Probably somewhere back in time, when I played the original *Call of Duty* and loved it to death.

WORLD WAR 2.0

There's more to *United Offensive* than the Russian campaign, but that's the part that really stuck with me—probably because that's the part that really stuck with me the first time out. *United Offensive* does make a few obvious additions to the core gameplay, giving you the ability to sprint short distances (perfect for running for cover) and also letting you "cook off" grenades to better control where and when they explode. But at its heart, this is *Call of Duty* all over again...only shorter and more difficult. Where most expansion packs try to reinvent or expand the play of the source game, *United Offensive* is content to re-create the original experience to such a degree that I suspected I might be replaying levels from the first game.

But when a shooter is as excellent as *Call of Duty*, slavish devotion may not be such a bad thing. Much like in the first game, there are three minicampaigns, each with a unique flavor: The American campaign is a heroic war movie, with GIs bravely forging ahead in the Battle of the Bulge; the British levels start with a harrowing bombing sortie and leave you fighting with the resistance in a series of *Guns of Navarone*-style sabotage missions; and the Russian levels are something like a walk through the fires of hell during an acid hurricane—they are, as before, a chaotic and gripping triumph of game design.

Less a triumph of game design are some of the challenges rehashed from the original. I could have lived without another desperate "hold the farmhouse until reinforcements arrive" scenario. Ditto the "hold the train station until reinforcements arrive" scenario. And the...well, you get the idea. A little more creativity would've been nice here. *Call of Duty*'s signature rail-shooter elements do get some reinvention, and you'll man a variety of gun

The British campaign opens with a tough bombing mission, in which you'll man the defensive guns.

Soviet forces assault a village.

emplacements, be they in bombers, on speeding PT boats, or amid the smoldering rubble of a Russian city.

This expansion is a compelling, dramatic WWII shooter with some of the most cinematic action ever converted into 1s and 0s—just like *Call of Duty*. If you're OK with that, you're going to be more than OK with *United Offensive*. ⊠ **Robert Coffey**

Verdict ★★★★☆
Sometimes more of the same is just fine.

Axis vs. Allies

After you blast through the single-player game in seven hours, there's a good collection of 11 new multiplayer maps and three new modes to play. Capture the flag, base assault, and domination are nothing terribly revolutionary, but they've smartly incorporated vehicles into the mix in an obvious nod to *Battlefield 1942* and the genre it's spawned. OK, so this may not be a massive *Battlefield*-like melee, but when you load these maps with the eight available vehicles (six different types of Allied and German tanks, a jeep, and a light truck), it adds some tight dynamics to the firefights. One panzerschrek shot, and your three-seater jeep is going down. Another nice touch is the merit system, which ranks multiplayer performance: Skill (accomplishing objectives) on the battlefield equals additional weaponry. All told, you'll get a lot more mileage out of this game with these new tweaks.

Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol

Aka *Alpha Black Zero: Interminable Game*

H ere's a true tale of *Alpha Black Zero*: During one of the game's roughly 20 missions, you have to painstakingly escort a slow-moving pair of engineers down a long, twisting road. After about 20 minutes, you make it to the end and think, "Well, thank God that's over." Only it turns out that you have to march the entire way back, pick up a new team of engineers, and do the whole thing over again. So you suck it up and make the second monotonous trip. And then the unthinkable happens: The game insists that you embark on this rotten nonadventure a third time.

ENOUGH ALREADY!

The moral of the story is that *Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol* could use some serious editing. Everything about it is too long. The enormous levels take place in a mixture of interchangeable, featureless expanses of hillocks and canyons and generically futuristic interiors. The frequent cut-scenes drag on forever—one, detailing a conversation between a motionless group of soldiers and the webcam-like interface of a government supercomputer, tips the scales at nearly 10 minutes. Hell, even the game's title has at least two too many words.

Happy memories: near the end.

The orange level.

All of which would have been more tolerable if the gameplay were better. *Alpha Black Zero* is ostensibly a third-person tactical shooter. You lead a team of five marines, who, as a group, can be outfitted with one of three weapon loadouts before each mission. Within a mission, you directly control one team member at a time but can switch between them at will. Characters not under your direct control act autonomously, though they'll accept general orders such as "stay," "follow," "hold fire," and "fire at will." The problem is, none of this is necessary. The game may look like a squad-based tactical shooter, but nothing about it requires any actual squad tactics. By and large, your best bet is to simply let your team swarm around you and fire at whatever they want. You'll only ever need to switch characters if the one you're controlling gets killed.

However, you'll also need to cycle between everyone at health and ammo stations because they're not smart enough to reequip themselves—an oversight that quickly becomes irritating.

Unfortunately, the game fails as a pure shooter as well. Enemy design is as bland and uniform as the environments. You'll fight an indistinguishable array of soldiers until very near the end, at which point the game halfheartedly tosses in a few robot spiders. Worse, the controls are mushy and imprecise. Nothing seems solid in the world; both you and your enemies often appear to sort of float across the landscape. Combined with the loose controls and an erratic framerate, this problem gives the whole experience a disconnected, dreamlike quality not exactly conducive to hard-hitting action.

On a positive note, the entire game can be played cooperatively over the Internet. On a less positive note, there's absolutely no reason to do this. *Alpha Black Zero* might not be the worst game ever made, but it may be the most tedious. ⊠ **Erik Wolpaw**

> ## The moral of the story is that *Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol* could use some serious editing.

Verdict ★☆☆☆☆
Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz....

Evil Genius

All that's missing is the evil and the genius

One of the best aspects of the game is trap making. My traps were so evil that the game called me "nefarious!"

If ever a game deserved to be better than it actually is, it's *Evil Genius*. In a world of generic copycat game ideas, here is a genuinely great and novel premise. Inspired by '60s spy movies (or, more accurately, parodies like *Austin Powers*), *Evil Genius* is a strategy game that puts you in the role of an aspiring criminal mastermind bent on taking over the world. A Dr. Evil game!? How could it go wrong?

As it turns out, in a number of ways. Elixir Studios did a nice job with the aesthetics—the animation, sound, and music are charming and funny throughout—but in the more important matter of gameplay, *Evil Genius* blows it with inexplicable and frustrating design decisions that bog the whole thing down. Every time you try to love it, it ends up pissing you off all over again.

NEED THE INFO

Evil Genius cribs its basic structure from two gaming classics: *Dungeon Keeper* and *X-Com*. Half the game is a base-building sim in which you must design your underground fortress and manage the army of minions who come to serve you, as well as combat the forces of "good guys" who constantly try to invade your hideout. At the same time, you must aggressively plan and monitor your evil deeds on a world domination screen. Here, you send out your minions around the globe to steal funds and conduct acts of infamy (like stealing the Eiffel Tower) that raise your notoriety among the world's underground elite. The notoriety is a double-edged sword: It brings more evil henchmen to your fold but also increases your "heat" amongst the good guys, who will step up their efforts to wipe out your base.

So far, so good. And at times, as you get the rhythm of balancing your base building with your world domination plans, you will have nice big chunks of strategy-gam-
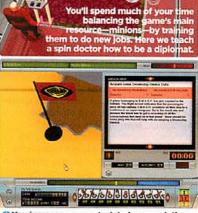
My evil genius thinks it's funny that someone is being tortured. That's pretty evil.

Let's torture this guy, too.

More torturing. Good times!

Laboratory

You'll spend much of your time balancing the game's main resource—minions—by training them to do new jobs. Here we teach a spin doctor how to be a diplomat.

You increase your notoriety by completing acts of infamy. Sadly, the acts are carried out offscreen: You never see them in progress.

In the more important matter of gameplay, *Evil Genius* blows it.

ing fun. It helps that the game's graphics and sound, while not mind-blowing, capture the feel just right, with the kind of tongue-in-cheek charm that made another spy spoof, *No One Lives Forever*, so fun. Elixir did a great job animating and providing localized sound for all the ridiculous goings-on in your lair—the booby traps, the prisoner interrogations, the Ping-Pong games in the break room.

THROW ME A FRICKIN' BONE

But sadly, this mostly ends up for naught. *Evil Genius* is a frustrating affair, suffering repeatedly from an unforgivable sin: It penalizes players for lacking information they couldn't possibly have. The only way you can win short of cheating or using a strategy guide is to know exactly how the developers thought you should play.

Base building, for instance, while ostensibly "open ended," requires meticulous planning, or you'll be faced with a mess of a layout and a relentless A.I. that will destroy you. But you won't know this until it's too late. Rooms, once built, can't be redesigned or resized, and when you're a newbie, it's simply not intuitive how big the rooms should be. Worse, it's not clear which rooms are most important—far too much is unlocked too early, so you are overwhelmed with choices, and there is no sense of priority or urgency. (Hint: ignore the hotel entirely.) By the time you realize you didn't need the staff room to be quite so big and that your control room is too close to the entrance, for example, it's too difficult to fix it—your only real recourse

to restart the game. The lack of a sandbox or skirmish mode to practice in only exacerbates the problem.

Similarly, the game is far too stingy with information on how to solve the various missions; objectives are either obtuse or simply don't tell you how to proceed. Some missions will only progress if you have minions in specific zones on the world domination map—but no hints are given as to which zones those are. Sheer luck or mind-reading are your only options.

Interaction with the units themselves is often frustrating. Dealing with your henchmen—the muscle units—is the most egregious example of this. Though you can click on them and tell them where to go, they cannot be given patrol orders or be made to stay put, so they will constantly wander off, almost uncannily, to the most remote corners of your base, never there when you need them most. Your Evil Genius unit itself, which one might think would be important in a game called *Evil*

Genius, is actually all but useless. Not once in over 40 hours did I ever feel compelled to click on the unit.

Other annoyances abound. Why is room construction paused when you first create a room? Why do I right-click on an interrogation chair to select it but left-click to select everything else? Why isn't there a speed setting, so I can zoom ahead when nothing's going on? And why, above all else, do I never see any of my acts of infamy, even once, any time in the game? Stealing the Eiffel Tower sure sounds like fun. Too bad the only thing I get to do is watch a timer.

Evil Genius could have been great. Instead, it's a near miss—a great idea poorly presented and inadequately explained. And that ain't my bag, baby. ⊠ **Jeff Green**

Verdict ★★☆☆☆
Evil Genius has its moments, but I wouldn't play it again for....*one million dollars.*

No evil genius would be truly evil unless he cloned himself. Which is what I am doing here.

ShellShock: Nam '67
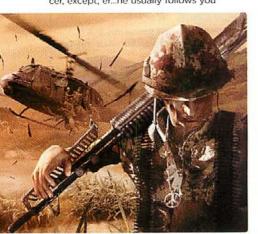
Nothing but bad flashbacks

pparently, the official memo saying, "Games about the Vietnam War are A-OK!" has officially passed, yet that memo most likely had no statements about making any good Vietnam War–era games. Despite the presence of a good game like *Viet Cong*, there are, as expected, numerous mediocre games, and oh boy, is *ShellShock: Nam '67* one of them.

If there's one thing *ShellShock* has, it's atmosphere. The jungle levels look pretty convincing, there's lots of soldier chatter in and between missions, and there's the requisite '60s-era soundtrack. This atmosphere nearly makes you forget that you're playing a pretty standard third-person shooter.

VERY RAW RECRUITS
Despite the atmosphere liberally poured all over *ShellShock*, there's a distinct lack of polish when it comes to the game and even the aforementioned atmosphere. Enemies look clever at first. "Hey, they're hiding behind a rock and throwing grenades—that's good A.I.!" one might proclaim. Yet you'll notice that these same enemies always approach you from the same pathways in handy clusters—which makes them feel less like vicious guerrilla fighters and more like blood-spurting bullet sponges. You're sent on stealth missions that neither require nor use any stealth; you're told to silently slice sentries, but due to a total lack of feedback (there's nothing remotely resembling a visibility or stealth meter), it's often easier to just shoot everyone as though you're in a shooting level. You're often told to follow your commanding officer, except, er...he usually follows you

⬆ The graphics range from serviceable to decent.

instead (thankfully, the levels are generally linear enough to figure out where to go). Your interface for defusing booby traps (a quirky-looking maze that uses the arrow keys) is sloppy and unnecessary—not only did I fail most of my defusings, but I didn't even get hurt as a result. Any levels that involve a building seem rushed in design, since the buildings are little more than bare walls with brown or gray textures and the occasional chair. Despite using the mouse, and no matter what sensitivity setting you use, your aim feels as imprecise as it would on a console controller.

OOOH, ME SO HOARY!
The atmospheric presentation reeks of trite, clichéd stereotypes on both sides. You have the bald American who curses liberally and is so transparently sociopathic that his handle is "Psycho," and he, predictably, acts the cruelest and least levelheaded in all cut-scenes and scripted events. You occasionally see bodies contorted in ways that are supposed to shock you, but they actually remind you more of the same art you've seen in *Doom II*. The Vietnamese are portrayed as either pathetic, helpless civilians (whom you can generally kill without penalty—they usually just die, but some will actually attempt to fight you) or deviant enemies. Particularly unsettling is a

⬆ This hut with the moving awning indicates that sexual congress is taking place. Only a "If this hut's rockin', don't come a-knockin'" sign would've been less sophomoric.

sequence in which you literally have to kill every Vietnamese prostitute in a brothel, followed by an even more unsettling (and misogyny-soaked) cut-scene in which a Vietnamese mama-san is brutally tortured.

Despite the noble claims to portray the Vietnam War as a harsh and brutal experience, *ShellShock* feels more like a shooting gallery with occasional expletive-filled dialogue and a Rolling Stones soundtrack. No atmosphere, cliché or not, can correct its overall mediocrity. *ShellShock* tries to be *Apocalypse Now*, but ends up *The Green Berets*. ▣ Thierry Nguyen

---

Verdict ★☆☆☆☆

A bad third-person shooter is still bad even with '60s music and Vietnamese prostitutes.

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Port Royale 2

Buy low, sail high

Port Royale 2 makes only surface improvements to its predecessor, but these changes have deep effects. Almost every element has been adjusted, and the result is a simpler, more satisfying game. The premise is the same: As a captain in the burgeoning Caribbean settlements, you can sail for the French, Spanish, English, or Dutch—or you can abandon all allegiances and turn pirate. You trade goods, attack convoys, help develop towns, and hunt pirates for fame and fortune.

The experience system is noticeably improved. Your ability to expand your production facilities is not based on just wealth, but also on your standing with individual towns. In order to build production facilities in a settlement, you must improve your standing with the locals by supplying needed goods or providing donations. Once you're established, you can further improve your standing by building civic structures such as hospitals and schools.

Your standing also affects prices at the market, which is important: Port Royale 2 is about making money, and trading is the most lucrative path. The major trade improvement is the addition of completely automated trading routes. Once a captain has enough experience, you can assign him to a route. The captain will make all the buying and selling decisions himself, unless you decide to manage the routes, and once you have a few trade routes set up, you'll literally be making millions—towns will even come to you for financial assistance.

WARSHIPS

Combat still plays a large role in the game, but the system has been given an overhaul. It's easier but not necessarily better; you can control only one ship, and even with a large fleet, you have only one vessel at your disposal at any given time. You can select another ship from your fleet, but the first will become inaccessible for the remainder of the fight. The problem with this system, though it's easier to manage, is that the same restrictions don't apply to your enemies. Even when you outnumber your foes, your ships can get pummeled fairly quickly. This new system is even more problematic when you are assaulting towns or pirate hideouts because a well-fortified harbor will tear through your single ships.

Dueling is another new addition. Pirates

⬆ Using automated trade routes is the best way to make money quickly.

Almost every element has been adjusted for a simpler, more satisfying game.

⬆ The dueling is new and fairly simple, but it's a nice break from the constant sailing.

⬆ Governors in friendly towns will give you missions, though the rewards are sometimes a bit too skimpy.

will always challenge you to duels when you breach their hideout defenses, and ship captains will often challenge you to duels in order to save their crew during boarding attacks. The dueling system is easy—just block and attack—but it makes for a nice diversion from the otherwise constant seafaring.

Questionable combat changes aside, Port Royale 2 is much improved. It isn't a deep game, but it offers enough variety so that it stays addictive long after you've mastered its somewhat simple formula. There are even plenty of side quests to keep you occupied while your captains

follow their trade routes and make you money: You can rescue the governor's daughter, block trade routes to enemy towns, or just hunt for hidden treasure.

Like its predecessor, Port Royale 2 is somewhat slow to start. It can take a long time to earn enough money to explore beyond the initially accessible towns. But once you have a nice fleet at your command, it's a continually engaging experience. ☒ **Ron Dulin**

Verdict ★★★⯪☆

A simple but addictive combination of trading and Age of Sail combat.

Campaigns on the Danube

Torture for control freaks

I am a geek. Still, I didn't realize quite how bad I was until now. Nothing—not even having had women run away screaming at the sight of me, nor the same women falling dead of boredom when cornered and subjected to my discourses on the defects of the Ming military organization—tells me I'm a geek as much as liking this game does.

Campaigns on the Danube isn't your average war game. Instead of catering to the mania for control shared by most war gamers, *Danube* puts you in the role of a Napoleonic Army commander...with all of the restrictions and frustrations faced by those men, short of saddle sores. There are no battalions to maneuver; you just send messengers with vague objectives, like attacking or retreating toward certain towns, to your corps commanders and then hope that their divisions obey. These messengers take hours of game time to reach their objectives and may even be captured or killed along the way. With full fog of war, you won't even know if your messages arrive. Even when the messages get there, your commanders may

never carry out their instructions.

Danube adheres to Napoleon's quip that "amateurs discuss tactics and professionals discuss logistics." There will be no brilliant tactical double envelopment in battle, and most of your game time will be spent managing supply wagons and marching routes. This might sound like a very dry game, but the gameplay is surprisingly refreshing—especially since so many other war games have moved toward micromanagement. This game is almost educational in that it illustrates the difficulties faced by the commanders of the day. As a PBEM game, *Danube* can be quite fun, and it allows tactics, like cavalry raids and feints, that few other games do.

There are a few faults with *Danube*. The interface is clunky, the A.I. is hapless, and it takes too long to replay a PBEM turn. There also aren't enough scenarios. Your efforts are focused on the two campaigns fought along the Danube between Austria and France in 1805 and 1809, and there are a couple of variants for each—but since you usually have five or six units to issue orders

The hapless Austrian corps commanders concentrate too slowly to fight off a French thrust. No, really—that's happening right there.

to each turn, even the longest campaign scenario doesn't last very long.

This game definitely isn't for everyone, but masochists who find fascination in supply wagons, attrition, and the confusion of horse-powered communications might find it enjoyable...and become closer friends with their inner geek. ⊠ **Di Luo**

Verdict ★★★½☆
Feeding 50,000 men has never been so much fun.

Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy

The drengins are back in town

Galactic Civilizations was last year's surprise gift to all the sci-fi strategy fans who got burned on *Master of Orion 3*. This year, Stardock has released a $20 expansion that adds some nice twists to the original game, although not in the manner of most expansion packs.

Altarian Prophecy has the requisite new units (paladin, wraith, vamp, and sovereign spacecraft), new Galactic Wonders, and new races—but the real bonus here is the campaign editor, which allows for the creation of linked campaigns. The clean, efficient game mechanics of *Galactic*

Civilizations have always worked best in smaller, focused situations that emphasize the game's clear strategic choices, and the ability to make your own scenarios of this sort means that someone out there will likely make something cool for you to play. *Civilization III: Conquests* showed the extent to which focus can improve a wide-ranging strategy game, and so does the included campaign in *Altarian Prophecy*, which takes you through a number of different play styles. And yeah, the new units are cool, too. The game also serves as a compilation of all the improvements to the original game released incrementally by
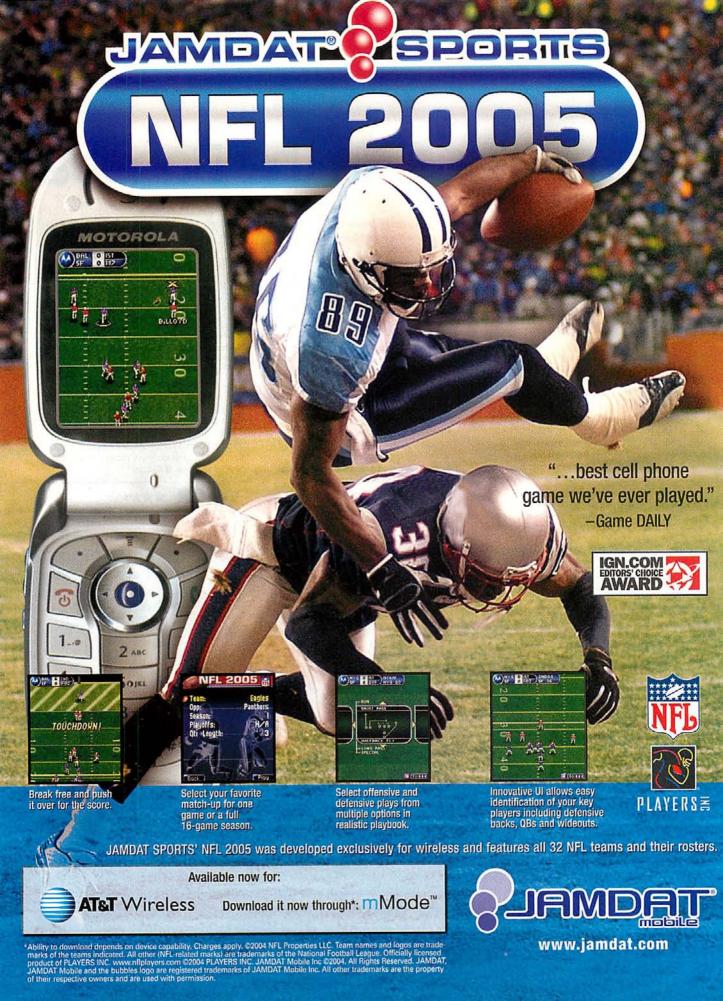
Stardock, so if you just have the original version lying around, this inexpensive add-on should remind you why you loved the first game so much. ⊠ **Bruce Geryk**

The real bonus here is the campaign editor, which allows for the creation of linked campaigns.

Verdict ★★★★☆
A good, inexpensive add-on to a great game.

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AHEAD OF THE GAME

WIRELESS GUIDE

wireless.1UP.com

A bonus supplement to
Computer Gaming World

Final Fantasy on the Go

Some of the biggest RPGs of all time come to cell phones in Japan.

NOW PLAYING

>BEFORE CRISIS: Return to the world of Midgar and work alongside Sephiroth in this *FFVII* sequel.

>RIFTS: Put away your D20 and take a classic tabletop RPG on the go.

>FFI
Revisit the first *Final Fantasy*.

MOBILE RPGS TAKE OVER JAPAN

Thought these classic quests were addictive before? Now you'll never have to put them down.

Cell-phone games are incredibly popular in Japan, especially ports of '80s arcade classics and simple puzzlers. So when Square Enix announced it would be bringing the first games in its two largest franchises—hell, the two largest franchises in Japan, period—not to mention a new spin-off of one of the most popular RPGs of all time to cell phones, it helped validate the idea of "real games" on phones. Next year, it's likely the company will bring some, if not all, of these games to the States.

Final Fantasy Mobile
The story of *Final Fantasy* hasn't changed in the past 15 years: Four light warriors set out to defeat four elemental fiends, relight their color-coordinated orb, and cleanse the world of evil. The gameplay is based on the older WonderSwan Color remake, not the new *Final Fantasy I+II: Dawn of Souls* for Game Boy Advance. Enemy graphics and battle screens are much improved, but the world map, towns, and dungeons resemble a high-color version of the original NES game.

The simple battle system lends itself extremely well to one-handed play, a must for Tokyo's crowded subways. The phone's "D-pad" moves the characters and cursor, while the center button controls speaking and confirms commands.

Dragon Quest Mobile
Dragon Quest (known as *Dragon Warrior* in the States) tells the story of a noble hero who saves the princess, defeats the evil Dragonlord, and brings peace to the land...while killing tons of slimes along the way. The gameplay is the same as ever: 1-on-1 battles are based around basic menu commands. The graphics have been completely redrawn in a high-resolution, high-color style that blows away previous versions, including the Super Nintendo remake. The screen tears occasionally when scrolling the field map, but the battles are free of graphical blemishes.

Final Fantasy Mobile

The spell effects are particularly impressive and as animated as anything found in *Dragon Quest VII*. Of Square Enix's two cell-phone games, *Dragon Quest* is far and away the more impressive.

Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII
When Square announced it would make a prequel to *Final Fantasy VII* starring the antiheroic Turks, fans rejoiced. When, 10 seconds later, Square announced the game would be exclusive to cell phones, fans were confused. Now that the beta test has begun, it's time to take another look at *Before Crisis*.
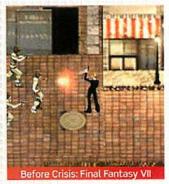
Set six years before the events of *Final Fantasy VII*, *Before Crisis* promises to give gamers the "truth" behind the Turks and the shadowy Shinra company. Favorite characters Rude, Elena, Rufus, and Reno all show up, but there are two new Turks, too: Verd, a grizzled man with an unknown past, and Shion, the current "leader" of the group. Gamers, however, take the role of "new recruit," speaking with and receiving missions from their more famous NPC superiors. A large advertisement in Tokyo's Shinjuku station suggests Sephiroth, Cloud, and Zack all make cameos—though how the story ties into *Final Fantasy VII*'s is still unclear. In the world of *Before Crisis*, the new rebel group Avalanche is starting to become a thorn in Shinra's side, and the Turks

Dragon Quest Mobile

have been assigned to stop those rabble-rousers.

After accepting a mission from the Turks, players move around the urban environments. Enemies are engaged directly on the field map, but sneaking past without being seen is possible, thanks to the pre-rendered graphics' overhead perspective. The battle system is action based; players have access to several different attack and magic techniques. Male characters attack with a melee rod up close, while female characters use a ranged weapon. The game also features a unique Materia magic system: Players "create"

Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII

Materia by taking pictures with their cell phone's built-in camera, and the dominant color of the photo determines the Materia type.

The most promising feature of *Before Crisis* is network connectivity. Players who are captured or overpowered can ask other players to spring them from jail or join forces against their foes—even in the middle of a battle. Players can also swap messages and Materia.

Square is already promising additional playable characters down the line. Combined with the easily expandable mission-based structure, it's clear that Square is treating *Before Crisis* as a long-term prospect.

RIFTS: PROMISE OF POWER

N-Gage plays host to a little old-school roleplaying

For fans of Kevin Siembieda and his pen-and-paper roleplaying game *Rifts*, the dream of a videogame based on the popular franchise has long been unfulfilled. For 14 years, Siembieda refused all licensing requests for a videogame, but that has finally changed.

Nokia's announcement at this year's E3 came as a shock to fans; the first videogame to be based on the epic role-playing game *Rifts* was to launch on the N-Gage in the summer of 2005. Why did Siembieda say yes to a company like Nokia, and is it even possible to incorporate such a vast universe into a mobile game? At a press event in Vancouver, Nokia finally revealed the first details of the upcoming *Rifts: Promise of Power*.
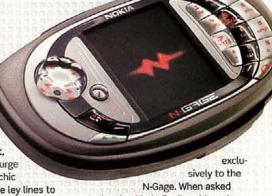
The pen-and-paper *Rifts* was published by Siembieda, who had been playing *D&D* and other RPGs since the 1970s but found the rule set frustrating. He wondered why there couldn't be one set of rules for all games. That was when *Palladium Fantasy* and the first "universal" RPG rule set were born. Over the next few years, megahits like *Robotech* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* came from this game system. Even with all these successes under his belt, Siembieda still felt something was missing: a world where anything was possible. This world would become *Rifts*, and in 1990, the project he had planned so carefully for years was finally ready for print.

Rifts is an epic role-playing game with a story set on a future Earth. In it, billions of human lives were lost in a nuclear holocaust, and the sudden surge of unleashed psychic energy caused the ley lines to surge with insuppressible power. Floods, earthquakes, and natural disasters all ensured more human deaths, feeding energy into the already pulsing ley lines. This unstoppable chain of events caused rifts, or tears in the very fabric of space and time. Players struggled to survive in a world full of multidimensional travel, supernatural beings, gods, demons, a vampire kingdom, time travel and time travelers, robots, cyborgs, automatic weapons, and even Martians. The game was a huge success, selling out 10,000 copies in three months.

So how suitable is the N-Gage for a game of such epic proportions? Backbone Entertainment and Nokia have teamed up to bring *Rifts* exclusively to the N-Gage. When asked why Siembieda finally said yes to Nokia, *Rifts* producer Shane Neville replied, "There are a ton of fans who want to see the franchise carry through, and when your creative director and your producer are two of the biggest *Rifts* fans around, you know we are going to ensure that happens."

In a massive undertaking, the title will include over 80 hours of tactical gameplay, 11 playable classes, over 50 enemies and NPCs, and at least six locations, all pulled from the original title. *Rifts: Promise of Power* is a tactical-RPG featuring turn-based combat with a 3D camera that automatically zooms back, allowing the player to enact multiple attacks on a grid-based battleground. The combat itself is based on an attack-point system similar to the one in *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Players will battle in familiar locations such as the New German Republic; the Coalition States, an antimagic coalition in North America; Lazlo, a modern-day Toronto; Scotland, full of spells and fairies; Old Bones, a black-market town in Quebec; and a futuristic China. The designers of the game are also bringing back the most popular character classes for this game: glitterboy, the juicer, head hunter, mind melter, ley line walker, burster, cyber knight, battle magi, crazy, and mystic.

While the game is still in the design stages, Neville announced that multiplayer cooperative play will be available via Bluetooth functionality. And while the details are still under wraps, N-Gage Arena will be incorporated into the game, allowing for global connectivity, though online multiplayer has not been officially announced.

85% HIT   DMG: 4 - 14 MDC
● YES
No

Markus
MDC: 150 / 160
HP: 85 / 85
AT: 9

Joe
MDC: 65 / 65
HP: 45 / 45
AT: 16

-150

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TOYS

All the tech that's worth your cash

It's December, and that means one thing to us: getting our hands on some new toys. Fortunately for us, vendors like to oblige our selfish yearnings by sending us stuff—with the caveat that we'll write about our new acquisitions. This month we got our hands on some pretty juicy tidbits. Toshiba's latest media center notebook, the Qosmio, isn't the best gaming notebook in the world, but it's still pretty darn cool. Wil also got to beat on Nvidia's midrange card, the 6600 GT. And we have reviews of some nice gift options, such as Logitech's new laser mouse, the new Zboard keyboard, Logitech's kick-ass new surround-sound speakers, and Nyko's very latest Air Flo gamepad.
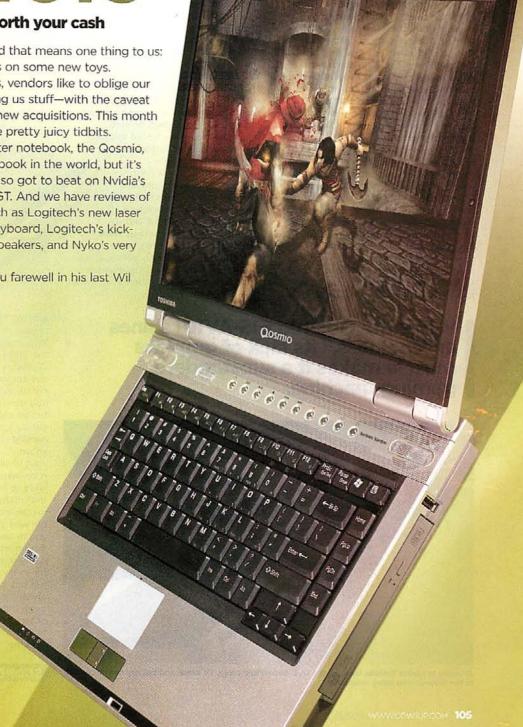
Oh yeah, and Wil bids you farewell in his last Wil Power column.

Inside

GEFORCE 6600 GT **108**

LOGITECH Z-5500 **110**

NYKO AIR FLO **112**

🖪 MANUFACTURER: **Toshiba** MODEL: **Qosmio E15-AV101** PRICE: $2,699

TOSHIBA'S LATEST MOBILE LINE

An awesome multimedia machine that leaves gamers wanting more

If there's one adjective that accurately describes Toshiba's line of media center notebook PCs, it's "cool." It's hard not to be impressed by these machines: The 15-inch TruBrite display on the new Qosmio E15-AV101 is crisp and clear, the machine rocks a 75GB hard drive, it has built-in TV tuner capabilities, and those little Harman Kardon speakers keep getting better and better. With all of these accolades, why didn't this machine earn an Editors' Choice award? It's simple: graphics.

Nearly everything about the Qosmio E15-AV101 is awesome. In addition to the components mentioned above, the machine ships with what Toshiba calls a DVD SuperMulti drive. In other words, DVDs you burn on this machine will more than likely work in any DVD player. Furthermore, the Qosmio line is designed so that you can play DVD movies, listen to CDs, or even watch prerecorded television without having to launch the Windows operating system. This means that you'll be able to

do these things more quickly (since you won't be booting into Windows) while also extending your battery life. In a nutshell, the Qosmio E15-AV101 is a multimedia dream come true. Gaming, however, is where this dream begins to fade.

WE NEED MORE HORSEPOWER!

While the Qosmio E15-AV101 shines in "coolness," its lack of graphics muscle makes it a substandard gaming machine. The rig we tested shipped with a woefully underpowered 64MB Nvidia GeForce FX Go 5200 graphics card, and our benchmark numbers exposed this machine's Achilles' heel. We tested the machine at 1024x768 with both AA and AF turned off, and the numbers were downright horrible: 1,265 in 3DMark2003, 8fps in AquaMark 2003, and 45fps in the *Unreal Tournament 2003* benchmark. We didn't even install *Doom 3* on this machine.

Of course, the Qosmio wasn't designed with gaming in mind. If you want a truly gaming-capable notebook PC, get a Dell Inspiron XPS or a Voodoo Envy. What the Qosmio does well is everything else. We love the built-in TV tuner card (the Toshiba Satellite we reviewed in September has the TV tuner in a removable bay, which means you can't have the battery, DVD MultiDrive, and TV tuner in the machine at the same time)

> **While the Qosmio E15-AV101 shines in "coolness," its lack of graphics muscle makes it a substandard gaming machine.**

and media center capabilities. We recorded a ton of the 2004 Summer Olympics and watched at our convenience. This media center application works like TiVo. You download the guide for your particular cable or satellite situation and simply hit Record on the included remote control to save your favorite shows.

All in all, Toshiba's Qosmio E15-AV101 is an awesome machine—if you don't want to play games on it. Research says that many PC gamers have multiple machines. While I know plenty of people who can afford only one machine, if you're one of the lucky few who have the necessary scrill to have a dedicated gaming machine and a killer notebook for everything else, then by all means, run out now and buy this thing. It's that awesome. If, however, you want a notebook that can easily play something other than *Age of Empires*, you're better off with mobile solutions from Dell, Voodoo, or Alienware. ⊠ **William O'Neal**

🖪 Unlike in earlier Toshiba laptops, the DVD SuperMulti Drive, TV tuner, and battery can all coexist in the Qosmio—no more swapping!

SCORE: ★★★★☆

BY THE NUMBERS

Manufacturer/Model	Toshiba Qosmio E15-AV101
Price	$2,699
Operating System	Windows XP Media Center Edition
Processor (CPU)	Intel 1.7GHz Pentium
Memory	512MB DDR
Graphics Processor	64MB Nvidia GeForce FX Go 5200
Optical Drive	DVD SuperMulti drive
Display	15-inch TruBrite display (1024x768)
Input Device	Touch pad
Miscellaneous	Four USB 2.0 ports; Built-in TV tuner; LCD TV capabilities; 1394 FireWire port; Harman Kardon speakers; S-Video in/out
3DMark2003 Pro v.340	1,265
AquaMark 2003	8
Comanche 4	27
UT2003 Botmatch	45

NOTE: ALL TESTS WERE RUN AT 1024X768 WITH AA AND AF TURNED OFF.

I'm out, bitches!

After four years at *CGW*, I'm pleased to announce that I've been shown the door. That's right, you jerks won't have William O'Neal to push around anymore. But seriously, it was fun. That said, before I set out for "greener" pastures, also known as a rival publisher just two blocks away from Ziff Davis, I've been asked to write one last column.

When I showed up in December of 2000, I had no idea what I was in for. George Jones warned me on my first day, "Dude, get ready. You're gonna get so much hate mail." Boy, was he right. That said, he didn't mention all the positive feedback that I'd receive. I got tons of really touching mail from soldiers stationed overseas. I also appreciated all the mail I got from other black guys who thought they were the only black dudes in the world who liked to mess around with computers. I appreciated being able to connect with other people who worried they were all alone.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THAT STUFF?

The best part about being *CGW*'s technical editor (aside from that enormous paycheck) was being one of the first people to see new technology. Being able to build machines with cutting-edge products that aren't available to the public is so much fun, and I'm sure I'll miss it. Of course, on the flip side, I won't miss the 600-plus word e-mails that some of you would write complaining about my choices.

As far as *CGW*'s Tech section is concerned, you can rest assured. While *CGW* is now "Wil-free," it'll continue to cover trends in gaming hardware.

> **Before I set out for "greener" pastures, also known as a rival publisher just two blocks away from Ziff Davis, I've been asked to write one last column.**

MANUFACTURER: **Nvidia** PRODUCT: **128MB GeForce 6600 GT PCI Express** PRICE: **$200**

NVIDIA'S MIDRANGE DOOM 3 OPTION

Nvidia's GeForce 6600 GT is fast enough, and it won't break the bank

EDITORS CHOICE GAMING

For years, I've been fielding questions from readers asking me which components they should get to prepare their machines to run *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*. Until now, my answer has always been, "The best graphics card you can afford." What I really meant was, "Get whichever $500 card is the current king of the hill." Nvidia's GeForce 6600 GT turns that logic on its head. We got our hands on one and put it through our suite of tests.
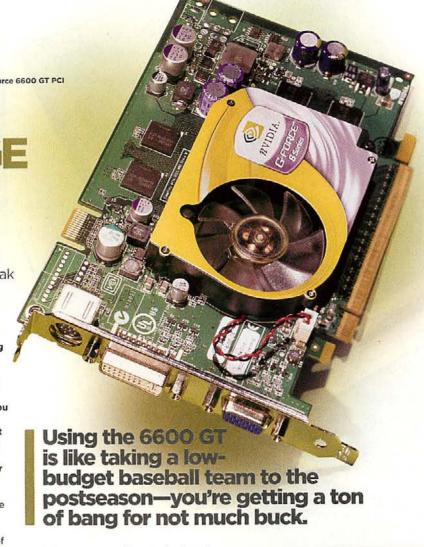
We tested the 6600 GT at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on, and we were seriously impressed. On our test machine, a Shuttle XPC SB81P box with an Intel 3.4GHz Pentium 4 EE and 1GB of Kingston HyperX DDR 400 memory, we achieved some pretty good numbers. The 6600 GT's 3DMark2003 score of 2,559 at the above-mentioned resolution is incredible for a midrange card, but most impressive was its *Doom 3* score of 26 frames per second at those settings. If you turn off AA and AF, this thing will scream at *Doom 3*. Which means, if all the other components are powerful enough, you'll be able to play the game without shelling out $500-plus on a graphics card.

Of course, this brings us to the PCI Express issue. Nvidia will also offer an AGP version of the card, but unlike its PCI Express–based brother, it will require a power connector. The PCI Express version of the 6600 GT pulls power from the motherboard.

TECHNOLOGICAL THROWBACK

Similar to its big brother, the 6800 GT, the 6600 GT has support for Nvidia's Scalable Link Interface (SLI) technology, which allows users to install two PCI express

Using the 6600 GT is like taking a low-budget baseball team to the postseason—you're getting a ton of bang for not much buck.

cards into a system with a motherboard that has two PCI Express 16-lane slots. Old-school gamers will remember SLI from the 3dfx Voodoo days. You'll need an Intel Tumwater-based motherboard (which also supports dual Xeon processors) to do this, and they're not cheap. Which begs the question, if you can afford this kind of horsepower, what are you doing buying a midrange card anyway, Rockefeller?

Using the 6600 GT is like taking a low-budget baseball team to the postseason—you're getting a ton of bang for not much buck. In addition to its performance results, the 6600 GT supports an awesome list of features, including support for Shader Model 3.0 and DDR3 memory with a 128-bit memory interface. The 6600 GT PCI Express version is a fantastic solution if you're putting together a PCI Express–based rig. That said, we have yet to see how the AGP version stacks up.
⌨ **William O'Neal**

SCORE: ★★★★½

HARDWARE HISTORY

The graphics-card scene is getting pretty hot these days. It reminds me of the time years ago when we made the jump from PCI to AGP graphics. Back then, the new bus promised greater bandwidth and, eventually, better gaming performance. With the introduction of PCI Express, we're at a similar point in technology history. Years from now, we'll all look back at the introduction of PCI Express similarly. The thing is, the success of Nvidia's GeForce 6600 GT—and similar cards—will undoubtedly be linked to the introduction of PCI Express.

MANUFACTURER: **Logitech** PRODUCT: **Z-5500** PRICE: **$400**

MORE CRUNK IN THE TRUNK

Logitech ups the ante with its new speaker kit

We hailed Logitech's Z-680 as one of the more "crunk-wor-thy" speaker kits when it came out late last year. (Translation: it had soul-shaking sound.) But that system, as good as it was, still lacked that extra bit of bump. That's why Logitech went back to the drawing board and tried to further refine an already great THX-certified system. The result is its new flagship, the Z-5500.

Your butt doesn't need to be numb from having a front-firing subwoofer under a PC, but it helps. Usually, an over-powered sub is thrown into a system to compensate for lackluster performance. That wasn't the case here. This system actually has natural-sounding mids and highs. When we popped in Ray Charles' *Genius Loves Company*, there was great dynamic range. Charles' raspy highs on "You Don't Know Me" rang clear and sharp.

Things went slightly south, though, when the Von Bondies were dropped into the CD tray. "The Fever," a good bass-heavy riff, showed that while the 187-watt, 10-inch subwoofer is a vast improvement over the Z-680's, it still sounds a little off in direct 6-channel mode. Kicking it over to the Dolby Pro Logic II (it also decodes Dolby Digital and 96/24 DTS sound) music dealt with some issues.

The real reason you want this kit, though, is to immerse yourself in *Call of Duty: United Offensive* and *Doom 3*. Whether it was tracer fire whizzing by my left ear or hearing demons hiss as they prepare to shiv me from behind, the Z-5500s really throw sound at you from all sides. And that's say-ing a lot, considering that Creative Labs released a powerfully good (and way over the top) 7.1 surround system.

OK, so you get a bigger, more powerful subwoofer that you'll bang your shins on if you put it too close to your chair. You'll also notice that there's been major cosmetic surgery so this kit doesn't look like a hunk of junk. The big change is the two-tone con-trol panel with a two-line display that's legi-ble from across the room. While it does have one coaxial and one optical digital input, we wish that there was room for a few more inputs in back.

This kit ain't exactly cheap at $400, but it does a great job and is perfect for those that want rock-solid 5.1 surround sound without excessive bells and whistles.
✄ **Darren Gladstone**

SCORE: ★★★★☆

MANUFACTURER: **Logitech** PRODUCT: **MX1000 Laser Mouse** PRICE: **$80**

LATEST. GREATEST?
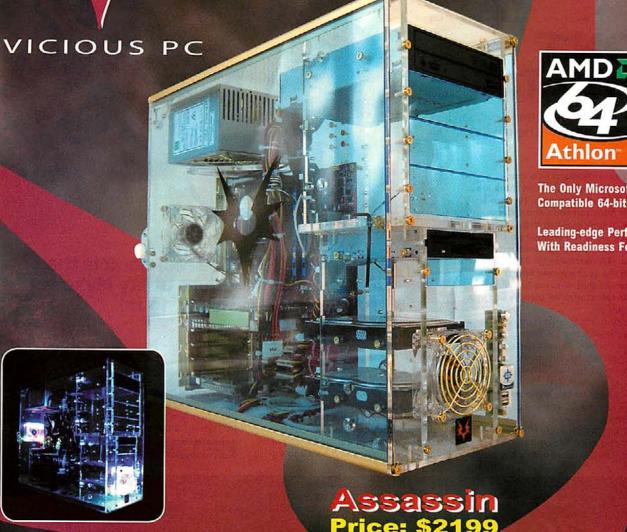
Is any mouse really worth $80?

According to Logitech, the MX1000 is 20 times more sensitive to surface detail than those red glowing LED optical mice. This is great if you use your mouse on polished wood-grain surfaces or a clear Lucite table without a mouse pad. I dragged the MX1000 across a variety of tricky surfaces and it never failed to respond. In games, it per-formed as sensitively as my optical mouse whether I was desperately fending off a pack of *Doom 3* imps or lining up a precise sniper shot in *Call of Duty: United Offensive*.

The MX1000 is very comfortable, charges quickly, and holds that charge a long time. So what's the hitch? There's no way to adjust the speed of page-scrolling buttons—it moves so fast that Web pages threaten to burst into flames. More problematic is the wheel button—games seem not to read it, even in a game like City of Heroes where that button has a default function. I like this mouse—quite a bit—but I didn't have to drop $80 on it. If you're willing to spend that much and you're not going to miss using the wheel button in your games, this is the mouse for you. ✄ **Robert Coffey**

SCORE: ★★★★☆

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MANUFACTURER: **Nyko** PRODUCT: **PC Air Flo EX** PRICE: **$25**

DON'T SWEAT IT

For those who fear the keyboard and mouse—help is here

I never realized how many sweaty-palmed punks there are out there. Seriously, I'd grab a controller from someone and it'd have this layer of funk that just didn't feel right. Then came the original Air Flo. Granted, I was more impressed with having a PS2-like controller for PC games than with the cool summer breeze that this gamepad shot onto my hands, but hey, while this controller blew, it was in a good way.
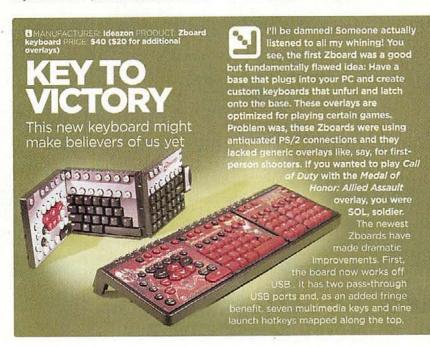
It's pretty much the same story this time around with the EX. Here's a good, functional controller that's perfect for playing *Madden*. The real hook, though, is the driver utility that Nyko is throwing in for good measure. Basically, it lets you remap any keys on this thing so well that it tricks your PC into thinking that it's a mouse.

Call of Duty was actually manageable on this controller after mapping the basic keys to it. The D-pad mimicked the WASD keys while the analog sticks replaced the mouse. It would have been better if we could map the movement keys to the left analog stick, but hey, it is Nyko's first attempt. Problem is, the Air Flo isn't really for me. I still prefer a keyboard and mouse

The real hook is the driver utility Nyko is throwing in.

for precision fragging. But for console gamers hooked on *Halo 2* and *Killzone*, this offers a fairly smooth transition into PC gaming. ⊠ **Darren Gladstone**

SCORE: ★★★★☆

MANUFACTURER: **Ideazon** PRODUCT: **Zboard keyboard** PRICE: **$40 ($20 for additional overlays)**

KEY TO VICTORY

This new keyboard might make believers of us yet

I'll be damned! Someone actually listened to all my whining! You see, the first Zboard was a good but fundamentally flawed idea: Have a base that plugs into your PC and create custom keyboards that unfurl and latch onto the base. These overlays are optimized for playing certain games. Problem was, these Zboards were using antiquated PS/2 connections and they lacked generic overlays like, say, for first-person shooters. If you wanted to play *Call of Duty* with the *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* overlay, you were SOL, soldier.

The newest Zboards have made dramatic improvements. First, the board now works off USB . It has two pass-through USB ports and, as an added fringe benefit, seven multimedia keys and nine launch hotkeys mapped along the top.

Also in the box is—get this—a generic FPS-centric keyboard overlay. Exactly what we were asking for in the first place! All the basic QWERTY keys are still present, but the number pad is gone, making room for the movement and numerous remappable buttons where your hands would normally find the WASD movement keys. But the proof, really, is in the fragging. It worked even though we're perfectly accustomed to using a traditional keyboard for first-person shooters.

OK, so on to the big question: Should you buy it? Elitist gamers and purists might sneer at the Zboard, but you can't argue with success. It does work, and in some ways, it makes controlling games a little easier. Who's more likely to pick this up: noobs still acquainting themselves with FPS games or guys with really creepy, stumpy, sausagelike fingers that always hit the wrong keys at the wrong times (like me)? ⊠ **Darren Gladstone**

SCORE: ★★★☆☆

Loyd's
Cracked Case

Starting from square one

michael called me the other day.

I'm assuming that Michael is his real name. He didn't give me his last name. He'd somehow tracked down my phone number. He told me he was calling from Montana. Or maybe it was Wyoming, I don't recall. Michael had read a lot of my columns in this magazine, as well as a lot of the stuff on ExtremeTech, the Ziff Davis technology site I co-manage. He also had one of my books and had read a lot of other information.

You see, Michael wanted to build a computer. He's grown tired of using his mother's PC and wanted to know where to start. I suggested gently that he should get started by buying a PC.

IN THE BEGINNING...

No doubt, some youthful prodigy born clutching a screwdriver is reading this and chortling, "My first PC was a water-cooled, overclocked rig I built with stone knives and bearskins!"

If you're one of those geniuses, stop reading right now and return to your logic analyzer. Most of us, however, started down the DIY path by doing small things: adding more memory, upgrading a graphics card, or installing a new soundcard. In my case, it happened many years ago. *Falcon 3.0* (yes, *3.0*) had just come out. I had a white-box PC ("white box" being the term for a generic PC bought from a local store) that used a 20MHz 386 processor. The sim supported something called a "high-fidelity flight model," which supposedly used real fluid dynamics to calculate the flight model. But you needed a floating-point coprocessor. Back in those dark ages of the PC, the floating point unit was

> **Some prodigy born clutching a screwdriver is reading this and chortling, "My first PC was a water-cooled, overclocked rig I built with stone knives and bearskins!"**

actually an external chip. So I bought an 80387 coprocessor and installed it in my 386. It was my first experience installing any type of chip, and it was nerve wracking. But I got through it and was cruising the virtual skies in short order.

Now, it's possible you may never want to build your own PC from scratch. Or if you've been reading this section of *CGW*, plus other magazines and the odd websites (cough, www.extremetech.com, cough), then the itch to build it yourself may be growing more insistent. But if you've never cracked open a case, then starting with an ATX chassis and a pile of parts is probably not going to be the best approach.

Instead, buy a PC. That's right, buy it, don't build it. But don't just buy any PC. While big manufacturers such as Dell and HP may build perfectly decent PCs, they often have structural quirks that make them poor candidates for future PC-building projects. Instead, buy a white-box system. It may not be the cheapest solution, but you end up with a system built in a

very standard way that's easy to upgrade. (I should note that a lot of the boutique gaming PCs are white-box systems in much fancier skins. A typical Falcon Northwest, VoodooPC, or Alienware system will be built up from components that adhere to normal industry standards. It's the really big boys that use funky power supplies or oddball custom case designs who lock you out.)

You can start small that way. A new DirectX 9.0c game comes out, so you install a newer graphics card. That half-gigabyte of memory suddenly starts to seem small, so you swap it out for a full gigabyte (selling the old RAM on eBay in the process). Then that hot new RTS ships, and you find that your CPU performance is anemic. So you pop off the heat sink, clean off the thermal goo, and swap in a new processor. Eventually, that PC you bought may have almost no original components in it.
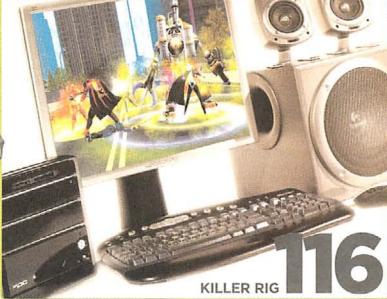
Congratulations: You've built a PC and never even knew it. Now you're ready to start with a pile of parts. ⊠ **Loyd Case**
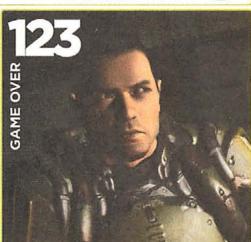
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Inside

We were thinking of calling this section

Check Yourself Before You Wreck Yourself (as one of our favorite insane TV personalities would say), but "Check Out" just rolls off the tongue so much more easily. This month, we've prepared a *Doom 3*-intensive Check Out, with some great strategies and the first installment of an all-new recurring comic by senior goofball Darren Gladstone.

Killer Rig

Get your LAN party on!

It's hard not to like small form-factor machines—they're portable, easy to build (sort of), and don't take up much space. But if you've been following this trend, you know that their small power supplies and cramped insides limit both upgradeability and the type of components you can use; for instance, many of the high-end graphics cards by both ATI and Nvidia require so much juice that they simply won't work with many small form-factor boxes. Shuttle was the first company to gain prominence in this area, and its XPC SB81P (dubbed the "high-voltage" system) is robust enough to handle fast CPUs. Thanks to the fact that it rocks a PCI Express motherboard, we were able to build a machine using Nvidia's midrange 128MB GeForce 6600GT graphics card.

Because the motherboard comes with the case, you don't have to worry about things like a front-panel power switch, USB ports, and FireWire connectors. That piece of good news aside, working within the confines of such a tiny box is a pain in the ass—which is something to bear in mind if you decide to go this route.

I decided to build this machine with the überexpensive Intel 3.4GHz Pentium 4 Extreme Edition processor, 1GB of Kingston HyperX DDR400 memory, and a Plextor DVD Multi-Drive. Since this setup is super-fast, I finished off the whole sexy package with a ViewSonic 20.1-inch LCD and

Logitech's superloud 2.1 speakers.

As you can see, this isn't exactly cheap—the Shuttle box alone will run you about $300 (for the case, power supply, and motherboard). You can save a ton of cash by building one with 512MB of memory, a smaller hard drive, a CRT monitor, and a less expensive CPU. ⚔ **William O'Neal**
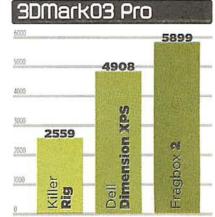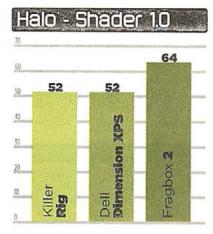
ViewSonic
VP201s 20.1-inch LCD monitor

Shuttle
XPC SB81P

> **Working within the confines of such a tiny box is a pain in the ass—which is something to bear in mind if you decide to go this route.**

3DMark03 Pro

Killer Rig	Dell Dimension XPS	Fragbox 2
2559	4908	5899

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

Logitech
Z-2200 2.1
speakers

The Guts

MODEL	KILLER RIG	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$100
Motherboard/Case	Shuttle XPC SB81P	$300
Processor (CPU)	Intel 3.4GHz Pentium 4 EE	$1,000
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX DDR400	$200
Hard drive	120GB Maxtor Hard Drive	$100
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce 6600 GT	$150
Optical drive	Plextor DVD Multi-Drive	$150
Monitor	20.1-inch ViewSonic VP201s LCD	$900
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$25
Speakers	Logitech Z-2200	$150
TOTAL COST		$3,100

AquaMark 2003

Killer Rig: 32
Dell Dimension XPS: 27
Fragbox 2: 48

Halo - Shader 1.0

Killer Rig: 52
Dell Dimension XPS: 52
Fragbox 2: 64

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

A-List

Our picks

The holiday season is almost here. Lots of good stuff has come out recently, including PCI Express graphics cards, blazingly fast processors, and hard drives with huge amounts of storage space. With all the resource-intensive games in the pipeline, this is a good thing—heck, there's an entire hardware guide dedicated to explaining how to play *Doom 3* in all its maxed-out, graphically overpowered glory...and something tells us that's just the beginning. But with our monthly A-List recommendations in hand, you're guaranteed to be ready for anything that comes up.

COMPUTERS

Where would we be without computers? Not working at a magazine called *Computer Gaming World,* that's for sure. With our luck, we'd be stuck at *Abacus Monthly* or something.

Desktop systems

PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **Generation 3 Dimension XPS** $3,699 (E-Value code 6V411-XPS3REK) Dell	Dell's PCI Express–based machine, the Generation 3 Dimension XPS, is an awesome system. With 1GB of DDR2 memory, 500GB of storage space, 5.1 speakers, and a killer 20.1-inch LCD, you're getting plenty of good stuff here.
BUDGET PICK □ **Back to School PC** $1,000 IBuypower	This rig ships with a powerful processor (3GHz Intel Pentium 4) and a weak graphics card (256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700LE), but since IBuyPower is a "build to order" outfit, you can easily tweak that configuration.

PERIPHERALS

We recently saw some pretty crazy-looking in-game speakers in our demo of *Playboy: The Mansion*...and an extremely spry Hugh Hefner popping and locking.

Speakers

PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK □ **Creative MegaWorks 2.1 250D** $150 Creative	Good speakers are a must-have. The thing is, you may not want to compromise quality in order to get a surround-sound setup. In any case, the MegaWorks 2.1 250Ds are great. They're THX certified, and the subwoofer kicks.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRISTIAN OLSON

COMPONENTS

Nowadays, most videocards are so beefy that you actually have to plug them into your power supply. Soon, we'll need automobile-grade engines just to use *Word*.

Videocard

HIGH-END PICK

PNY Verto 256MB Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT
$500
PNY

While Nvidia's GeForce 6600 GT card is good, the 6800 GT is even better if you can deal with the price tag. Of course, not everyone can just run out and plug it in; you need more power than NORAD —and a PCI Express x16-capable motherboard—to really take advantage of its abilities. It's worth noting that the 6800 GT outperforms the ATI Radeon X800 XT in Id's latest blockbuster, *Doom 3*.

MIDRANGE PICK

128MB Nvidia GeForce 6600 GT
$200
Nvidia

The midrange market is where companies make all the money. That's because not everyone is gonna run out and drop $500 on an aftermarket graphics card. Nvidia's midrange PCI Express option, the GeForce 6600 GT, is even powerful enough to run *Doom 3*. Add to that the fact that it doesn't have the same power requirements as its big brother, the 6800 GT, and you've got a pretty good card here.

BUDGET PICK

128MB ATI Radeon 9600 XT
$150
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 are 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

We can't help but wonder if desktop computers will one day be totally phased out in favor of laptops. Then maybe we'll have a good excuse to expense some of these badass-looking portable rigs we keep seeing.

Laptop

HIGH-END PICK

Dell Inspiron XPS
$3,000
Dell

Dell's Inspiron XPS is the ultimate desktop replacement. Not only does it weigh more than 10 lbs., but it also rocks an Intel 3.4GHz Pentium 4 processor and 1GB of DDR memory. We recently had ours updated with ATI's 256MB Mobility Radeon 9800; we can even play *Doom 3* at 1280x1024!

MEDIA CENTER PICK

Toshiba Qosmio E15-AV101
$3,000
Toshiba

Toshiba's Qosmio Media Center laptop is the ultimate jack-of-all-trades. Is it a TiVo? Yes. Is it a DVD player? Yes. That said, this machine isn't necessarily designed with gaming in mind, as evidenced by that underpowered 64MB GeForce FX Go5200 graphics card. While it's not as fast as Dell's Inspiron XPS, the Qosmio is still pretty cool.

LIGHTWEIGHT PICK

200ARC
$2,225
Gateway

With its lightweight 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.

Fast Forward ▶

Welcome to Fast Forward, *CGW*'s monthly back-of-the-book hodgepodge of all things PC-gaming related. Every month, we'll offer up a handy reviews index, a few editors' picks, and whatever else we manage to think of.

GAMERS' EDGE: DOOM 3

Having a tough time with those boss fights in *Doom 3*? We've got some killer strategies to help you out in a pinch
By Bryan Stratton, courtesy of Prima Games

VAGARY

Vagary is the first of four bosses you'll face in *Doom 3*. Half humanoid and half spider, she is the queen of the trites and delights in webbing up living humans and hanging them in her lair for late-night snacks.

Vagary's main method of offense is to telekinetically lift the objects in her lair and hurl them at you. You absolutely must keep moving at all times—sprinting if possible—to avoid them. Some adrenaline near the entrance to the EFR Main Shipping Hub can help.

Enter the EFR Main Shipping Hub with your HE hand grenades equipped, if you have any left. Otherwise, use the plasma gun. When you enter the hub, a cut-scene plays, showing Vagary crawling out of her hole. When the cut-scene ends, the battle is on!

Circle-strafe around her and toss HE hand grenades from a distance. When you run out of grenades (or if this attack method doesn't suit your play style), use fully automatic ranged weapons—preferably the plasma gun, with the chain gun as a backup. In a pinch, use the machine gun. You can find more clips near the area that Vagary crawled out of. **⬛ TIP: Find clips near the area that Vagary crawled out of.**

Vagary can also attack with her pincers and teeth, so using the shotgun is only recommended as a last resort. And no, you can't just run into the airlock to get away; it remains sealed until Vagary is dead.
⬛ CAUTION: Vagary hurls spiked boulders at you as well; be aware that they will hurt you even if you run into them while they're just lying around her lair.

After you kill Vagary, take a moment to pat yourself on the back, and then open the airlock bay door. Touch the control panel inside the airlock to complete the level and proceed to the EnPro Plant.

GUARDIAN

When the fight begins, you get a glimpse of the Soulcube, which has spinning blades surrounding it. The mammoth Guardian then rises up from the ground, and the fight commences.

First things first: Behind each of the four pillars are valuable pickups that will save your life. They include:
- **Pillar 1:** Rockets
- **Pillar 2:** Rockets
- **Pillar 3:** Large medkit
- **Pillar 4:** Rockets, ammo belt, grenades, BFG cell, and plasma cell

---

⬛ Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers

I used to be a hardcore graphic-adventure junkie. Sierra was the king of the hill back then, and for my money, it doesn't get any better than the original *Gabriel Knight.*

⬛ The Political Machine

This political simulator is oddly addictive, even to someone as politically ignorant as I am. This game has a simplistic grace that not too many games possess anymore.

⬛ City of Heroes

Yeah, so I haven't been playing it much lately. Too much "work" getting in the way. Lots of new updates and the looming *City of Villains* expansion will soon draw me back, though.

The Guardian is blind, but it spawns Guardian Seekers, which float above the arena, scouring it with searchlights. If a Guardian Seeker notices you, the Guardian charges toward you and attacks with crushing force.

To make the Guardian vulnerable, you'll need to kill all of its Seekers. This causes the Guardian to pause and spawn more Seekers from a blue light over its head. This light is the Guardian's weak point, but it is difficult to hit, as the Guardian sends out a barrage of fireballs once all of the Seekers are dead.

If you don't have any BFG ammo left, use the rocket launcher to take down the Seekers, then shoot the Guardian when it's vulnerable. Hide behind the pillars, wait for the Seekers to come by, and blast them before they have a chance to notify the Guardian of your presence.

Your only advantages are your speed and the cover that the four pillars provide. Remember that you can sprint constantly in Hell, so don't let up on the Sprint key until the battle is finished.

SABAOTH (AKA SERGEANT KELLY)
When you enter the CPU, Sarge rolls out of the northern door in his new guise as Sabaoth. That's right: His lower body is a tank and he's armed with a BFG-9000. There's no introduction; the fight begins immediately.

CAUTION: Unfortunately, your Soulcube will not kill Sabaoth.

The most important thing to remember is to disrupt Sabaoth's BFG blasts by shooting at them with small-arms fire, such as your chain gun or machine gun. The second most important thing to remember is to stay away from Sabaoth—don't let him run you down or strike you with his clawlike appendage.

As the fight progresses, the room changes. The floor panels around the perimeter drop out, revealing a lake of lava underneath. If you fall into it, you're a goner.

The four pillars in the room also occasionally become electrified. If you're near them when they do, you'll be shocked for heavy damage.

Rewind
100

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

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Across the Dnepr	04/04	★★☆☆☆
Aura: Fate of the Ages	10/04	★★★☆☆
Battle Engine Aquila	04/04	★★★☆☆

▣ Battlefield Vietnam	06/04	★★★★☆
Besieger	09/04	★★☆☆☆
Beyond Divinity	08/04	★★★☆☆
Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	04/04	★★★★☆
Blade and Sword	04/04	★★☆☆☆
Breed	07/04	★☆☆☆☆
Catwoman	11/04	★☆☆☆☆
Chaos Legion	08/04	★★☆☆☆
City of Heroes	08/04	★★★★½
Civilization III: Conquests	04/04	★★★★½

▣ Codename: Panzers	11/04	★★★★☆
Combat Mission: Afrika Korps	04/04	★★★☆☆
Conspiracies	05/04	★☆☆☆☆
Crusader Kings	08/04	★★★☆☆
Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm	08/04	★★☆☆☆
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Motives	08/04	★★☆☆☆

Rewind100

You'll find some helpful pickups in the arena: There are armor shards and some security armor in the west alcove, and both large and small medkits in the east alcove. Look behind the southwest pillar for a large medkit and some adrenaline and behind the northwest pillar for a plasma cell and security armor. The northeast pillar has a small medkit near it, and the southeast pillar has a plasma cell.

Keep using your chain gun or machine gun to knock out the BFG blasts, and use the rocket launcher to damage Sabaoth. If you keep at it, you'll have him on the ropes in no time. If you're not comfortable switching weapons this quickly or if this particular strategy isn't working for you, stick with the chain gun and pepper Sabaoth with it when you're not shooting down his charges.

CYBERDEMON

Welcome to the Hellgate. It's all come down to this: the final, hair-raising battle with the Cyberdemon.

TIP: The Hellgate is a manifestation of Hell on Mars. Your stamina is unlimited here, just as it was in Hell.

The Cyberdemon has two main methods of attack. From a distance, it fires volleys from the rocket launcher grafted to its right arm. Although the rockets are not guided like the revenant's are, they pack a tremendous punch.

The Cyberdemon's second attack is a doozy: It jumps and lands on you with both feet. Suffice to say, there are better ways to spend your day than getting crushed by a three-story demon. Keep your distance!

Watch out for the imps and maggots that crawl out of the Hellgate in the arena's center. If you stand still, they'll quickly overwhelm you while the much slower Cyberdemon plods over to stomp you into pulp.

CAUTION: There's another fairly obvious hazard in the arena: Be careful not to fall off of the edge and into the lava below. Doing so means instant death.

The Cyberdemon is completely invincible to all of your conventional attacks, including the BFG-9000. The only thing that hurts it is the Soulcube. You must hit the Cyberdemon with the Soulcube six times to defeat it.

You should circle-strafe around the Hellgate, staying across the arena—away from the Cyberdemon—at all times. Kill maggots and imps with powerful weapons such as the rocket launcher to rack up souls for the Soulcube. As soon as it's ready, launch it at the Cyberdemon.

Caution: Make sure no maggots or imps are between you and the Cyberdemon when you throw the Soulcube or you may inadvertently hit the lesser enemies instead.

If you're constantly sprinting and circle-strafing, you might be able to finish this fight without suffering a point of damage. If your foes get a few lucky shots in, however, use the medkit and security armor near the arena entrance, as well as the security armor behind a pillar on the northern side. ☒

GAME OVER
Darren "Funnyman" Gladstone makes with the ha ha

Panel 1: You know what I could go for right now?
What?
A delicious tiny chocolate cake from a Holly Hobbie Easy Bake Oven.
Me too!

Panel 3: I could have sworn I left it somewhere in my basement....

Panel 4: Guess not. But hey, at least I found my "baby on board" collection. You know, these things were a lot funnier when they used stuffed Garfield dolls in windshields.

FIELD REPORT
San Diego Comic-Con International 2004

They may not be videogames, but comics are just as much a part of America's entertainment culture as *Doom 3* and *Knights of the Old Republic*. And every year, thousands of comic fans, retailers, writers, and artists get together to celebrate the medium at the annual San Diego Comic-Con International. For four chaotic days, comic fanboys and creators alike bask in a celebration of this nerdy-but-still-pretty-damn-cool subculture as it takes place on a staggeringly vast show floor filled with shops, artist signing booths, discussion panels, and more industry announcements than you can count.

SDCC 2004 was no different, and it definitely showed that comics and videogames actually get along better than we seem to realize. For instance, comic series are currently in the works for games such as *BloodRayne*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *WarCraft 3* (which you can read more about in this month's Radar section). The folks from NCsoft were also on hand with information about upcoming content for *City of Heroes*—and they've announced that Statesman, the game's iconic superhero mascot, is being turned into a figure for WizKids' line of Heroclix miniatures games. This figure will be available in the upcoming *City of Heroes* special-edition box, which will also include concept art, a two-sided poster map, and an updated game client featuring the first two expansions. Finally, a discussion panel titled "Comics into Videogames" was held on the final day of the show, featuring—among others—Irrational Games' Ted Levine. The panelists offered their thoughts on recent games based on comics—what's good about them and what's not. With any luck, maybe this means we won't see a repeat of *Catwoman* anytime soon.

Rewind100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
The Sims 2	11/04	★★★★★
The Suffering	10/04	★★★☆☆
Thief: Deadly Shadows	09/04	★★★★☆
Title Bout Championship Boxing	05/04	★★★★☆
TrackMania	10/04	★★½☆☆
Trainz 2004	04/04	★★★☆☆
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	09/04	★★☆☆☆
Universal Combat	10/04	★★½☆☆
Unreal Tournament 2004	06/04	★★★★★
Vegas Tycoon	04/04	★★★½☆
Virtual Skipper 3	10/04	★★★½☆

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
War in the Pacific	11/04	★★★★☆
War Times	08/04	★★☆☆☆
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	07/04	★★☆☆☆
Warlords Battlecry III	08/04	★★★★☆
Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc	05/04	★★½☆☆

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International	10/04	★★★★½
Worms 3D	05/04	★★★☆☆
X-Plane 7.40	04/04	★★★☆☆
You Don't Know Jack— The Lost Gold	05/04	★★½☆☆

HIGH SCORE
Our favorite things at 1UP.com

Hey guys! Check out our ever-expanding gaming community at 1UP.com, where you can create a 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/club and let us know which clubs, blogs, and goofy pictures you'd like to see on this page each month.

FEATURED BLOG

Rod Servantes
"Servantes"

Rank: Lurker
Current Points: 8750
Total Points: 8750

Servantes
http://servantes.1up.com/

Servantes, *CGW* forum stalwart and hardcore *City of Heroes* addict, is pretty passionate about his PC games. He's even used his 1UP blog to assemble a lengthy discourse on the art of online warfare. Crazy!

CLUB OF THE MONTH

Can't Stop Club http://cantstopstop-club.1UP.com/

Have you ever been glued to a game for so many hours that you just *couldn't* stop playing? Ever lose a job or a girlfriend thanks to a game? These people understand.

STUPID PICTURE OF THE MONTH

WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, BUT THIS DEMONIC KITTY PICTURE COMES COURTESY OF *GMR* NEWS NINJA CHRISTIAN "FERRICIDE" NUTT.

"CGW is the best magazine out. EVER!! I'm serious."
—URGH...RIP!!!

WHAT'S UP WITH 1UP?
A few words from 1UP.com's editor-in-chief
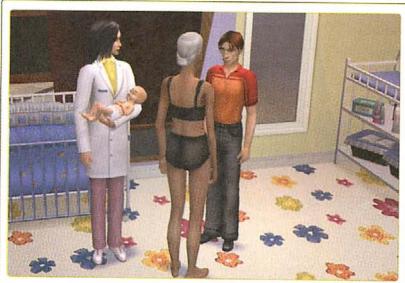
This month, *Maxim Online* decided to highlight 1UP.com as a place for gamer guys to meet girls. It's funny—since we certainly didn't design the site for that purpose—but it's true: 1UP is a great place for guys to meet girls (and vice versa). Although we don't really publicize this, a lot of the same technology that powers sites like Match.com was included in 1UP...except that our focus is on gaming. So say you're a guy who's looking to meet a girl gamer—we'll use *CGW*'s Ryan Scott [very single and available—Ed.] as an example. Ryan would do a search for females in their 20s who live in California and are into, say, *Doom 3*. If he wanted to find his ultimate dream woman, he could even put in the prerequisite that they also enjoy *Family Guy*. Believe it or not, he'd find a few cuties. In fact, there are a bunch of girl gamers on 1UP who seem to be attracting a lot of attention. Jenn Frank (superjenn.1UP.com) has been blogging about retro games, Ashlee King (x_kunoichi_x.1UP.com) has been blogging about getting a job at GameStop, and Zoe Flower (zoeflower.1UP.com—the greatest girl gamer of them all) has been blogging about all of her game industry exploits. So who knows? Maybe you'll find your dream girl on 1UP!
Sam Kennedy http://capnsmak.1UP.com/

SOUND OFF

CGW's readers speak up

Think you're clever? Got some good game suggestions? Just want to share your two cents? Give us a holler and you just 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 *Sims 2* screenshot, along with your name and address, to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject "Caption Contest," and you just might win a brand-new copy of the game for yourself!

THIS MONTH'S WINNER:
"I think I just found your keys."
Chris Smith Raleigh, NC

POLL OF THE MONTH

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

What's your take on massively multiplayer online games?

They're OK—no better or worse than any other genre: **23%**

I'm not into them at all: **54%**

I don't care one way or the other: **8%**

MMOs are totally freakin' AWESOME: **15%**

DESERT ISLAND GAMES

You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...which ones? E-mail us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject "Desert Island Games" (along with your name and city/state) and give us your picks!

Civilization III: *Civ 3* sucks up so much time in so little time that I'd be rescued before I knew it.

Medieval: Total War: Long, involved, detailed campaigns will keep me plenty occupied between searching for fresh water, hunting wild boar, and talking to inanimate objects.

The Sims: Socializing with these knuckleheads will make me long to be alone on a desert island. Oh, wait.

America's Army: Surely, I can hook up a satellite connection and get my fix of kick-ass multiplayer military action—in between the crashing servers, of course.

Solitaire: How appropriate.

Torsten Pihl Corvallis, OR

PUBLISHER **Gathering** DEVELOPER **TimeGate Studios** GENRE **Real-Time Strategy**

Kohan II: Kings of War

Skeletons vs. dwarves

Bruce, 0:00: Tom is playing as the gauri. I don't even know what that is. I'm the undead, which should be obvious to anyone who has seen a George Romero film. Tom actually suggested I play as the undead because they can heal anywhere (due to realism), and this might make me not lose quite as badly. But I'm not just the undead. I'm the Ceyah faction of the undead. Their platform, apparently, is faster speed and entrenchment. OK, I'll vote for that.

Tom, 7:30: I started in the village of Thorfin at the southern end of the map. In the bottom corner, I settle Hjord and conquer a drauga village named Vor Sark, which would let me waste my resources on half-dog/half-monkey units if I wanted. But my

Tom "liberates" a city of half dog/half monkeys.

Adellon pummels the giant purple robot. Surprisingly, this isn't a euphemism for anything.

biggest find was an artifact shrine. It took three attempts to beat the Mana Construct guardian, which was pretty embarrassing, considering the thing is just a giant purple robot. But once I captured the shrine, I was elated to discover Leila's Staff, which adds +15 percent to my units' health.

Bruce, 7:50: Kohan II actually has little construction units that build structures for you, unlike the other Kohan games, which were too abstract and intellectual to actually have physical representations of industrial concerns. The problem is that while I know that metal probably builds knights, I don't know what builds skeletons.

Tom, 15:29: I have a fireball-flinging hero

Maybe this is a job for the Orkin Man.

named Adellon leading a pack of trackers. They attack a lair of blackfang spiders, which trap them in webs and then poison them to death. The only thing more embarrassing that can happen in a fantasy world is to be killed by rats, which are fortunately not present here. If there were rats, they'd be called something different, much like elves are called haroun, dwarves are called gauri, and heroes are called kohans. Maybe rats would be sarkinnens or rosthards. Perhaps dingushuffers.

Bruce, 16:15: In case you were wondering, it turns out bonesmiths build skeletons. That is the picture of the anvil. If you see an anvil, do you think, "That's a big hunk of metal for making skeletons?" I don't.

⊕ Players

◀ Tom
Last month:
Tom won the votes of millions as the presidential favorite in *The Political Machine*.

◀ Bruce
Last month:
Bruce denounced **Tom** as a **Communist** and a threat to national security.

And as a result, I build the thing that makes ghouls. Ghouls are apparently made out of wood, for some reason that probably has to do with the last Ceyah elections. I have no idea what is going on, except that if I don't expand as fast as I can, Tom will own half the map before I have built my second city.

Tom, 18:47: While heading back with the newly risen Adellon to give those spiders what-for, I run afoul of one of Bruce's cities. It's called Dark Crossing, and it sits west of Thorfin, just north of my little cluster of sites at the bottom of the map. How did he establish himself down here so quickly? The Dark Crossing militia tangles with my trackers, who are sent into a series of unfortunate retreats. Adellon dies his second death.

It's time to hit Bruce as hard as I can, because he crumbles under aggressive tactics. Actually, Bruce also crumbles if I just turtle. In fact, I suspect Bruce would crumble if I were to just quit out and go play *Doom 3*. But that wouldn't be very interesting, so I decide to go with the aggressive tactics thing.

Bruce, 24:03: Judging from the size of the map and the number of cities I have, I suspect Tom and I are about even. Consequently, right on cue, Tom shows up with a big army and attacks my city of Dark Crossing. I assume this is the beginning of the end for me.

Tom, 23:30: My four companies, led by my four kohans, march on Dark Crossing from the south, striking at the soft underbelly of Bruce's empire. When Bruce's nightmares and skeletons arrive from the north, I handily shatter his brittle undead soldiers. After two minutes, Dark Crossing is mine. Not that I really want an undead city any more than I want that half-dog/half-monkey city, but at least Bruce doesn't get to use it.

Bruce, 26:29: Dark Crossing falls, but thanks to my undead healing anywhere and my other undead coming as reinforcements, Tom is going to have this city for all of about two minutes. And that's exactly what happens.

Tom 27:00: Bruce's counterattack includes companies with liches that slow my guys

⊕ **Bruce counterattacks at Dark Crossing.**

down and prophets that heal his guys. Both of them also sling magic attacks in battle. My troops haven't had time to fully recover; Thorfin quickly recruits three anvil companies to reinforce the battle, but by the time they arrive, my armies are broken and fleeing south to Hjord. Adellon the Oft-Killed has died a third time.

⊕ **With Dark Crossing retaken, the undead chase the, um...gauri.**

Bruce, 31:30: I'm actually in pretty good shape after that counterattack, so I decide to press my advantage and attack a town that Tom has inexplicably named Thorfin.

Tom, 31:41: How did he find my main city? I'm not ready for him. Thorfin's only defenses are my depleted anvils, while my experienced companies led by kohans are still recovering in Hjord. So in a desperate gamble, I rush them north to hit Dark Crossing while it's rebuilding. Maybe this will draw some of his forces off.

Tom, 33:40: I've taken Dark Crossing, but Bruce is still showing no sign of easing up at Thorfin, where he's knocking down the walls with four companies of nightmares and some skeletons. Two of my three anvil companies have fled, so I quickly march my forces from Dark Crossing toward Thorfin. They're advancing along the same path Bruce took and are poised to hit him from behind. When I strike, I'll hit the spellcasters first, since they position themselves behind the fighting.

⊕ **Thorfin under attack, take one.**

Tom, 34:35: Just as Bruce has rolled over the last of Thorfin's defenders, my two anvil companies drop out of column formation and line up to attack. They advance into the fray, killing his liches and prophets. Now Bruce's army is pinned in the confines of the breached wall while my reinforcements hack away at him.

Bruce, 36:09: I manage to hold off Tom's counterattack, but I don't think I can hold this city for long. Consequently, when Tom shows up a couple minutes later with a bunch of gauris or whatever, I figure I should let him have his city back.

⊕ **Bruce leaves Thorfin looted and burning, although eventually back in Tom's hands.**

Tom, 37:10: Unfortunately, the forces that weren't holding me back at the breach were hacking away at Thorfin's city center. They take it at the last moment, the gates open, and his armies run away. Damn. At least he's fled my capital, so I quickly recapture the city. Thorfin is mine again, and I've taken Dark Crossing. But Bruce's kohans have escaped with all their experience, and I have yet to explore most of the map. My first order of business is to build reliquaries so I can add healers to my armies.

Tom, 39:38: Without so much as taking a breather to bury his dead—oh wait, he probably presses them into service instead of burying them—Bruce descends on Dark Crossing. I rush out of Thorfin to defend it, but he intercepts me with two ghoul companies and some nightmares. He's running circles around me and thinning out my reinforcements, which are easily beaten back. I guess that's what I get for relying on slow infantry. Meanwhile, he has a kohan named Hasanko who's reached the highest level. Hasanko is summoning enormous bone golems that are particularly adept at smashing buildings.

Bruce, 40:47: Now that Dark Crossing in mine again, we're going to replay this one more time. Tom retreats to whatever fruity-named city he lives in, and I attack it. I think if I can take Thorfin from him and hold it, this game is mine. I bring down another nightmare company to attack his reinforcements as they arrive. This is called strategy, and I invented it.

Tom, 43:05: My new anvil companies and healers are destroyed as Bruce starts shredding Thorfin again. But then he stops, presumably to heal up his troops. Since he's not attacking, Thorfin technically isn't under siege, so my men also start healing. Furthermore, this gives me a chance to bring in reinforcements from ▶

Thorfin under attack, take two.

Bruce's elite companies held sway early, but as they and their commanders died, they went back to zero experience. And that's not good.

Hjord, as well as some beastriders, who are mounted on skull-headed horses from Von Sark, the drauga city. I take back any disparaging remarks I made earlier about the drauga.

Bruce, 44:31: I've built my fifth city. At some point, I need to turn my advantage in territory into a military advantage. Right now I'm managing so much combat that I can't even get basic structures built. I wish I had asked to play this game slower, had a few more cups of coffee to keep up with the pace, or just whined about it or something. But I didn't.

One of Bruce's fatal mistakes: pausing to rest before laying siege to Thorfin.

Tom, 44:48: Bruce is moving in again, but this gives me time to assemble all my units at once. While some anvils hold the breach, my beastriders head off a company of nightmares trying to flank me. This ties up his forces while my anvils arrive from Hjord. It helps that I've got enough gold to equip my infantry with Whitesteel weapons and armor, as well as Khaldunite weapons for additional damage. Before long, I've shattered his army, killed two of his kohans, and sent the survivors (including Hasanko) fleeing north. The second siege of Thorfin has been broken—and this time, it didn't fall.

Bruce, 47:36: As usual, just as I think I am about to clinch the game, Tom does something to wriggle out of it. This time, I'm not sure what it was—either better strategy, more units, or cheating. One thing I've noticed is that unlike in previous *Kohan* games, your heroes matter a lot. I should either have read the backstory or one of those *WarCraft* novels, because

once your kohans die, they lose all their experience. It's not realistic at all, but I didn't invent the game.

Tom tries yet again to retake Dark Crossing.

Tom, 49:15: Now that Bruce has been declawed, I send a lone anvil company to probe Dark Crossing. Just as I suspected, it's undefended—so I start knocking at the gates. But Hasanko and friends arrive shortly and drive me away, pursuing my anvils south toward Hjord. This gives me the perfect opportunity to swing my forces west out of Thorfin, then south from Dark Crossing to box him in. I have to try to kill his kohan lords.

Hasanko and his bone golem. This also isn't a euphemism for anything.

Bruce, 50:40: Tom has another town south of Thorfin that he calls Hjord, because I seriously think he was running out of names. I need to capture and hold one more of Tom's cities. This one probably isn't going to be it, though, because suddenly Tom starts attacking me.

Tom, 51:34: Five companies of heavily armed anvils fall onto Bruce's kohan lords. My drauga beastriders are hanging back, ready to intercept anyone who routes. First, a toxic-mist-spraying kohan named

Belphegor is killed, along with his company of nightmares. Then Hasanko's skeletons fall away and he runs north, right into Dark Crossing where Bruce has two companies of nightmares waiting. The beastriders are in hot pursuit, and the anvils are bringing up the rear. It takes a while, and there's some tense back-and-forth (during which Adellon dies yet again). I take Dark Crossing right around the one hour mark. Unfortunately, Hasanko escapes again. I can't wait to kill that guy.

Bruce, 1:04:58: We've been playing this game for an hour? Now Tom is attacking another one of my cities, which pisses me off. Fortunately, I drive him away, so that calms me down. If Tom hadn't captured Dark Crossing again, I'd have something like eight cities now. Instead, I have however many I would have had minus one. I'm reduced to making threatening comments into the microphone.

Tom, 1:05:31: Using my surplus wood, I recruit a pack of snarling maulers. They are accompanied by huntmasters, who summon even more maulers in battle. I think Bruce has Alt-Tabbed out to go play *Doom 3* or something, because I'm rolling through the first couple of cities with only minimal resistance. My most gratifying moment is when my roving packs of maulers surprise Hasanko and his skeleton company. The snarling beasts swarm him and finally manage to kill Bruce's last kohan lord.

Bruce, 1:10:50: Once he sets out from Dark Crossing, Tom is completely destroying me. I'm not sure what's going on, but the game has totally changed. I used to be able to win head-to-head battles against him, but because TimeGate Studios decided to base this game on fantasy roleplaying instead of military strategy, it turns out I can't win without leveling up my characters. If I wanted to do that, I'd play that werewolf game.

Tom, 1:20:12: Once Bruce is down to only two cities, we come to a negotiated settlement. His loss of cities coupled with his large armies have drop-kicked him into an economic death spiral. With no hope of recovery and no hope of standing up to my marauding drauga and gauri, he surrenders. I'm well on my way to being the Ken Jennings of Tom vs. Bruce. ◪

The game ends with Bruce's cities being visited by a giant steamroller called Tom's army.

AD INDEX

Tied to the Whipping Post

And so...the inevitable nattering nabob backlash

You know who I hate? Each and every one of you.

OK, that might be a bit, um, extreme, even for me. Still, there are times when I just want to grab a great big dead fish and start slapping gamers upside the head with it. And those times generally start right around the time the l33ter-than-thou game punditry starts going off about not really caring for the latest big game and instead preferring a Flash-based game they found on a Montenegro website. What is it about gamers—about people—that the second something starts getting some attention, be it *The Sims*, *Doom 3*, or Joe Stalin, they have to go and knock it off its pedestal?

Here at the Ziff Davis asbestos mill, there was actually an e-mail thread regarding *Doom 3* in which one guy wrote, "Waitaminit, I'm sick of the 'it's fun' cop-out from game pundits." Are you now, Mr. Superbrain? OK, aside from 1) the fact that this fella had done his fair share of game punditry and 2) his pathetic attempt at bourbon-soaked Norman Mailer tough-guy-ism by using "waita-minit" (almost as pathetic as saying "fella"), isn't fun more or less the point? Gaming's a leisure activity, right? So isn't "fun" not even a cop-out, but pretty much the complete and entire point?

Of course it is. But somewhere it became fashionable to jump aboard your high horse and start pounding the biggest game of the moment to paste under the hooves. I'm no fanboy Id apologist (in fact, I'm fairly certain there are urinal cakes stamped with my face in their offices), but what's not to like about *Doom 3*? I understand if it's a matter of taste, if you're the sort of gamer who prefers RPGs to BFGs, but if you like shooters, why dismiss a game because it fails to sustain your suspension of disbelief simply because it has monsters popping out of closets? My friends, if the basis of your argument is that monsters in closets are just too unrealistic, I suggest that you are sorely in need both of a new argument and something at least approaching a life. And possibly some antipsychotic medication.

Here's a little term I learned at my leotard-wearing playacting college: the willing suspension of disbelief. The whole point of the term is in that one word "willing." You've got to sign on to this coalition of the willing in order to get anything out of it, because without agreeing to enter into that little pact with the game, you're

There are times I want to grab a big dead fish and start slapping gamers with it.
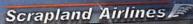
guaranteeing you'll get nothing out of it. Are the object-manipulation physics not realistic enough for you? Here's a news flash for you, Brainiac—the rest of us had that little chunk of Eureka! the second we used a mouse to move around a little hand in a 2D world representing a 3D space, we just decided to go with it and have fun instead of investing in our master's degree in Self-Perceived Genius. Is the game too much like some other shooter? Remind me again how dramatically different from each other every Mylar-sheathed comic book under your bed is. Uh-huh, that's what I thought. Nice *Firefly* T-shirt, by the way.

Right about now, there should be a nice little tidal wave of *The Sims 2* hate spewing from hardcore gamers. I've already seen it on the 1UP.com message boards and other sites, and the game hadn't even reached store shelves. What's the dominant argument against the franchise? The big sale numbers. How on earth can *The Sims* do so well while *Flying Heroes* languishes in bargain bins, goes the lament.

Maybe because it is a great game. Hey, lots of great stuff—like my interpretative dance celebrating trepanning—gets overlooked, but many, like *The Sims*, don't. Now, never let it be said I'm against hate, and certainly never let it be said that I'm against hating the popular kid (I think three restraining orders speaks quite eloquently to that point), but at least hate the popular kid on his ass-kissing merits and not just because he's popular. Yeah, Danny Toback, I called you an ass kisser (and 100 yards isn't quite as far as your attorney is leading you to believe, either).

C'mon, the whole notion of "gamer street cred" is just sad beyond words. You might think that in the great worldwide gaming family, you're the cool, smart uncle who really opens the window of life to us. Sorry, no—instead, you're the humorless second cousin who invited himself over on Christmas Eve and then pointed out that the kids didn't distribute the tinsel evenly on the tree. Congratulations on totally missing the point. ⊠ **Robert Coffey**
robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

ILLUSTRATION BY JON WAYSHAK