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# COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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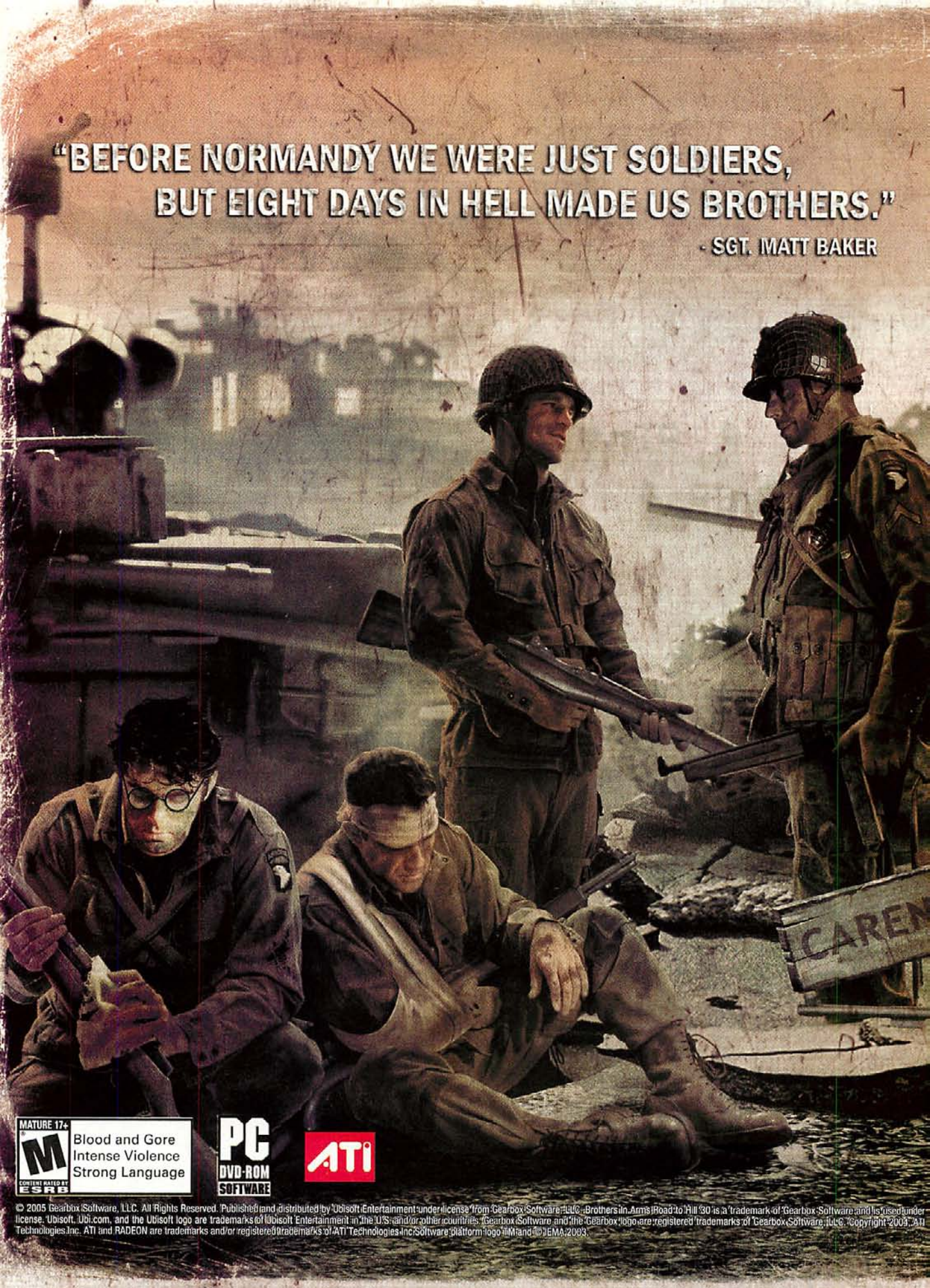


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TEEN
T
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Crude Humor
Sexual Themes
Violence
Game experience may change during online play.
PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE
NVIDIA

*Requires The Sims™ 2 or The Sims™ 2 Special DVD Edition to play.

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Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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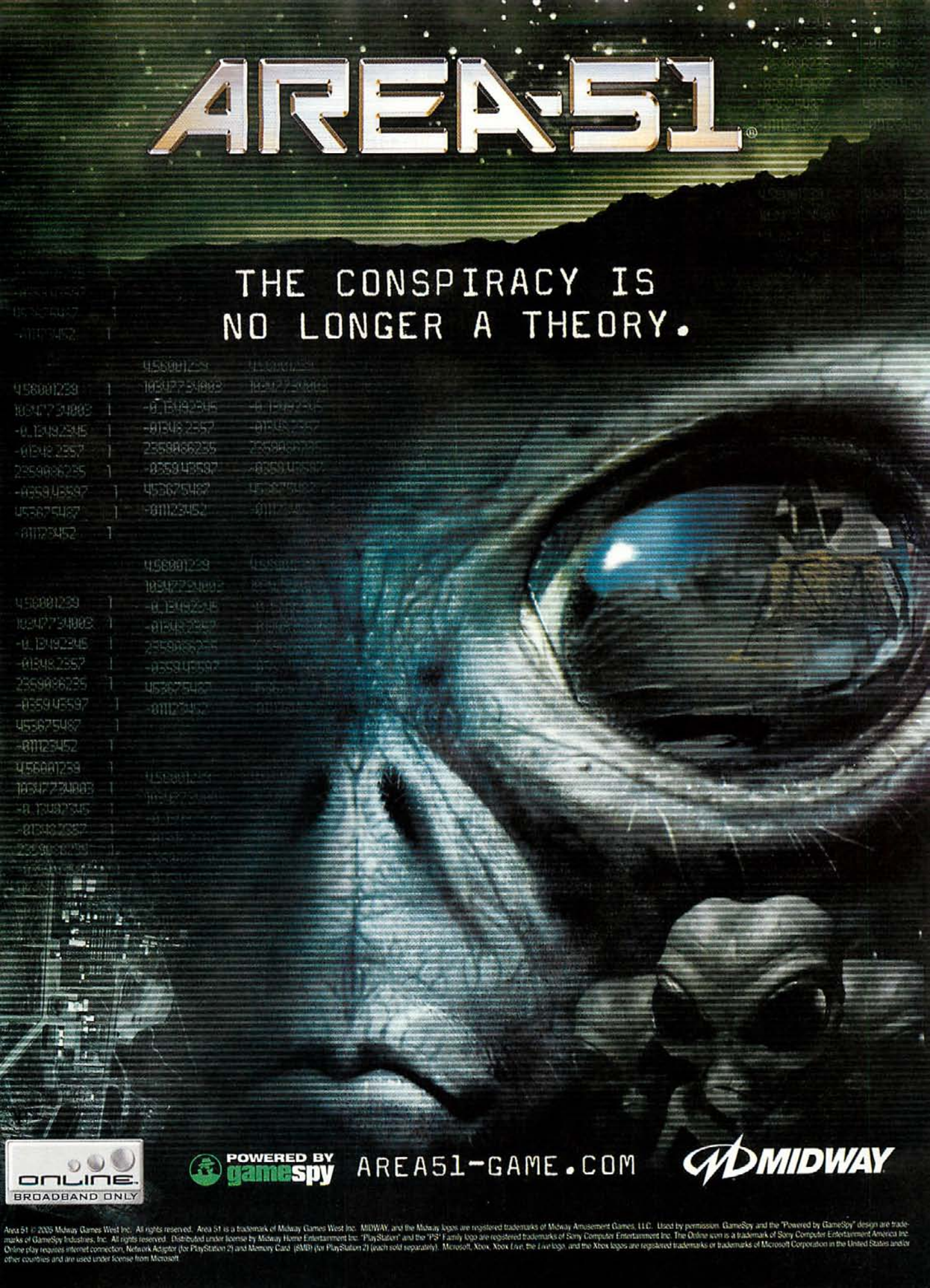
XBOX

XBOX LIVE

PlayStation 2

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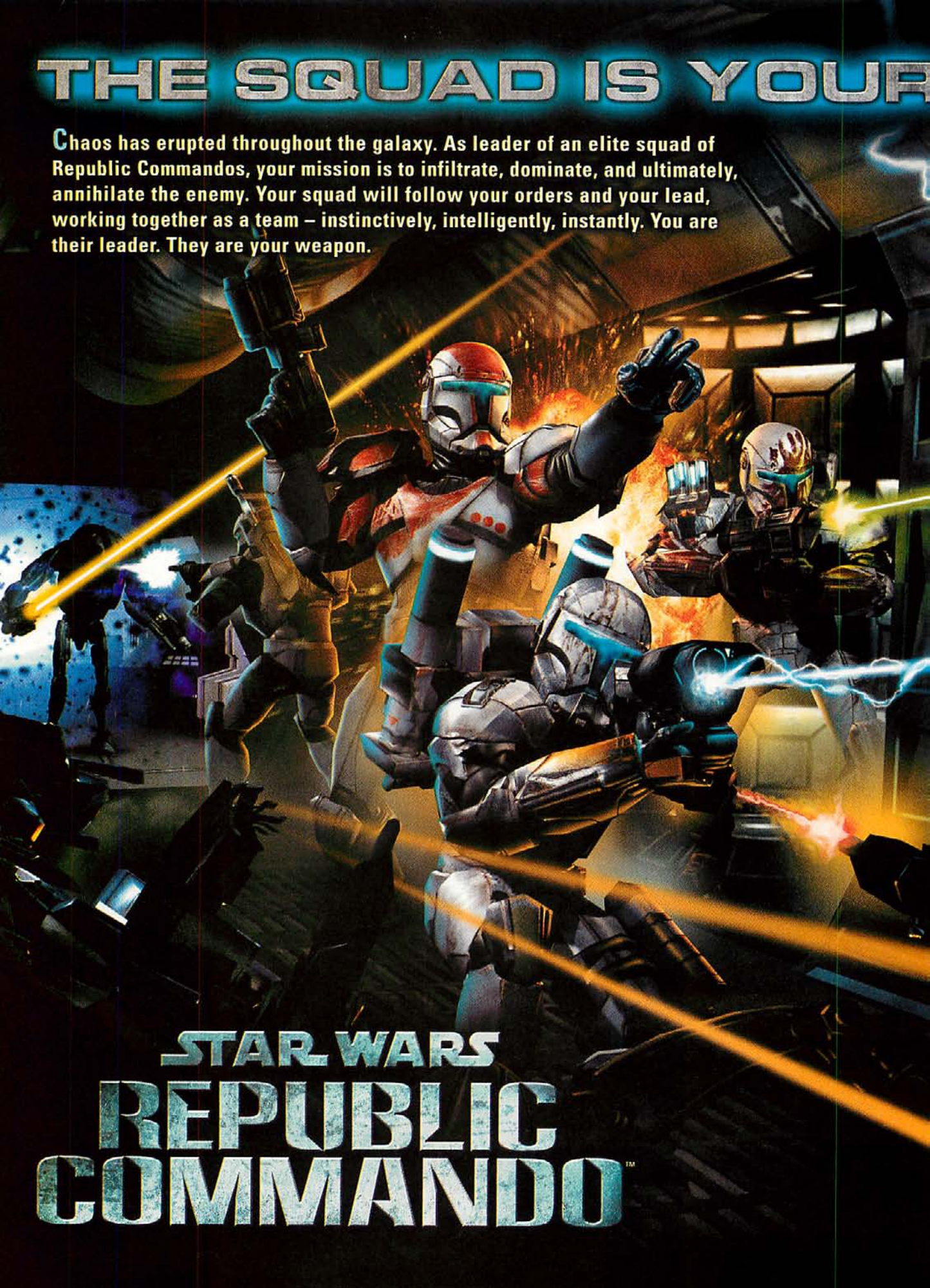
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Game Experience May Change During Online Play

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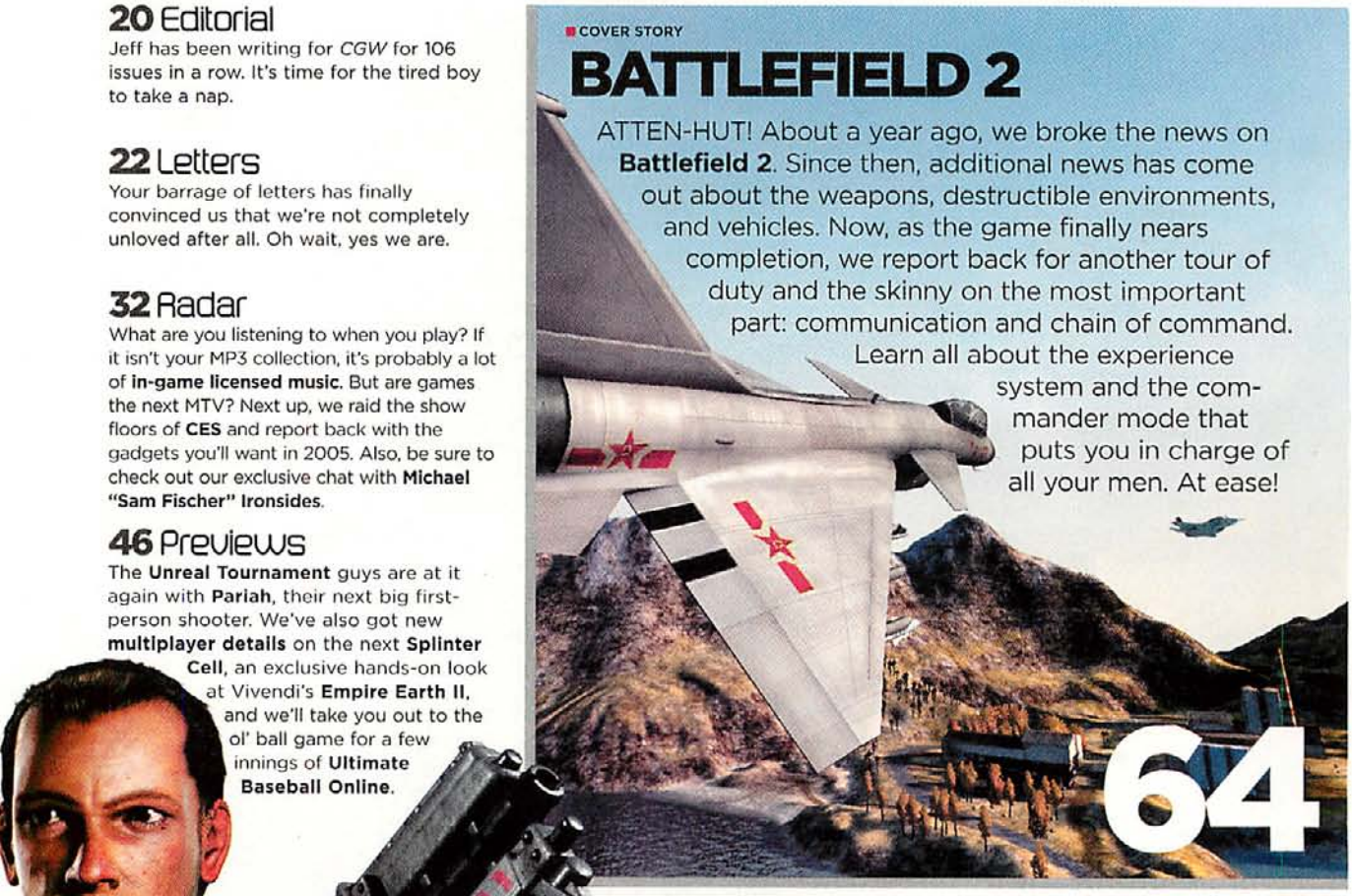
COVER STORY

## BATTLEFIELD 2
ATTEN-HUT! About a year ago, we broke the news on **Battlefield 2**. Since then, additional news has come out about the weapons, destructible environments, and vehicles. Now, as the game finally nears completion, we report back for another tour of duty and the skinny on the most important part: communication and chain of command. Learn all about the experience system and the commander mode that puts you in charge of all your men. At ease!



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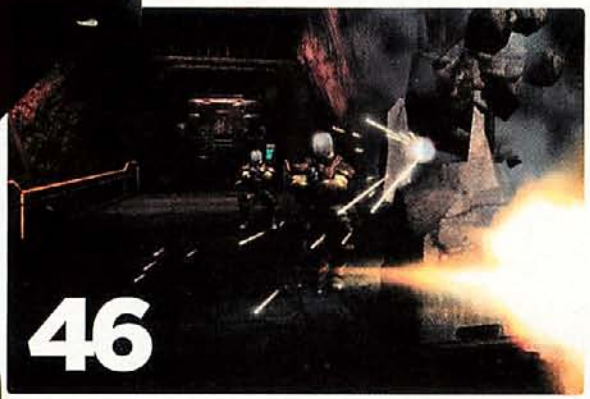
This space could be wasted on any favorite quote from the **Star Wars** movies you all have memorized. But we figure that's been beaten over the head a few too many times. So instead, we'll let your imagination do the work, and just tell ya to go read our **KOTOR II** review. And while you're there, you might as well read **Playboy: The Mansion** and **Need for Speed Underground 2.**



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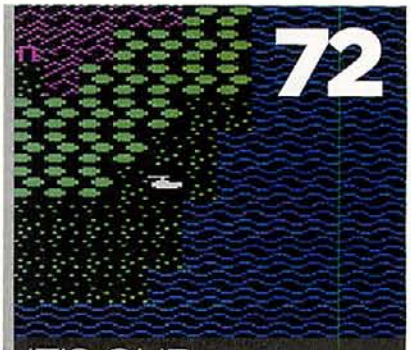

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## IT'S OUR 250TH ISSUE!
As Kristen's Nana used to say, "It's time to blow your doodoodoodoos!" Dust off those plastic party hats, people, and come on down memory lane with us as we recall 250 issues of *CGW*.

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### CGW.1UP.COM

Ubisoft is one of the main supports of the Canadian economy? Midway gets the Unreal Engine 3? Find out all of the latest industry news at 1UP.com.

### KRISTENSS.1UP.COM

Not that what she has to say is particularly riveting (unless you like baseball and SpongeBob SquarePants), but we figure the only way to get Kristen to update her blog more than once every 200 years is to highlight it here. We're quite dastardly, aren't we....

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We love crazy, obsessed people. Really, we do. How else could we stand ourselves? But sometimes, things just go too far.

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Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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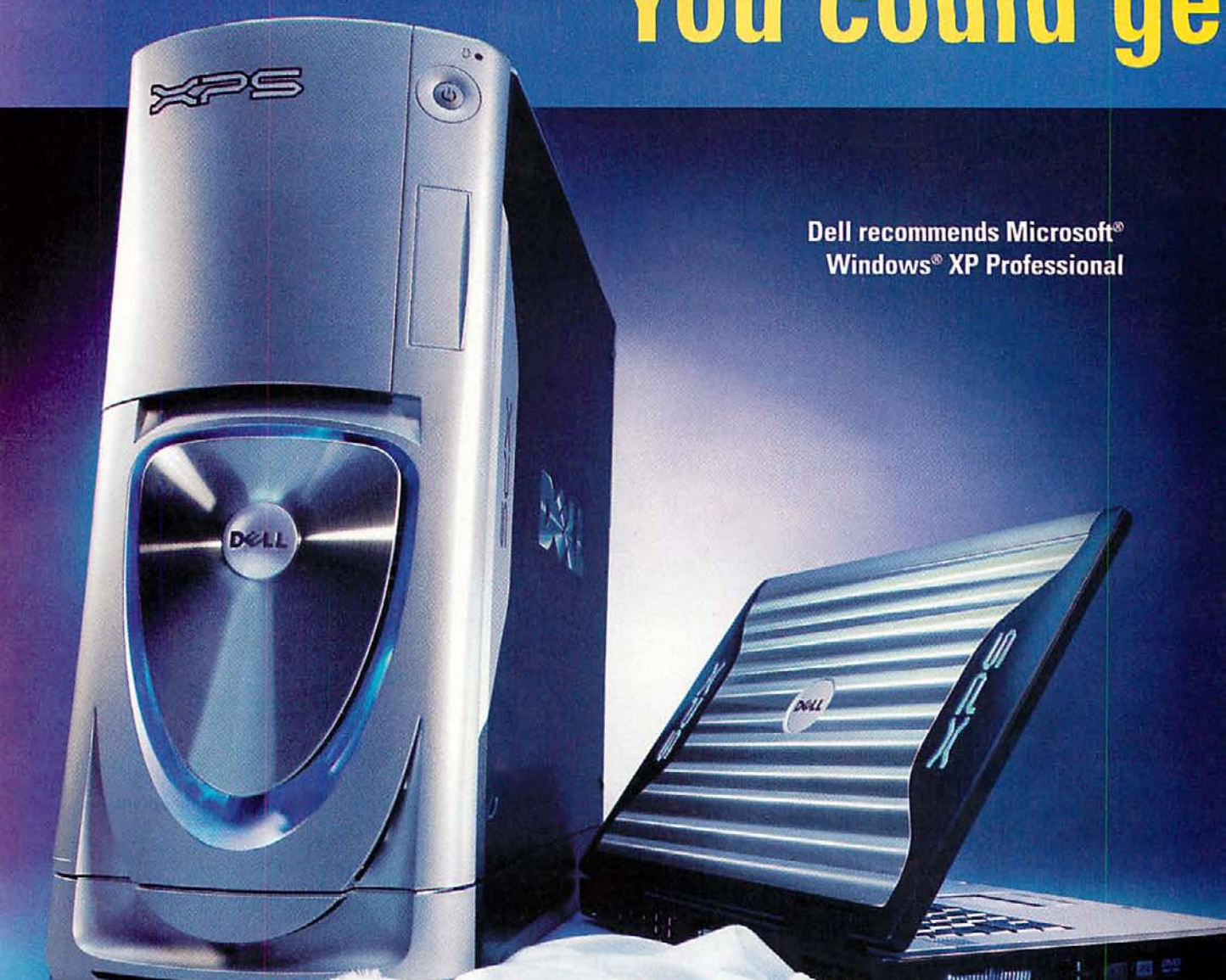


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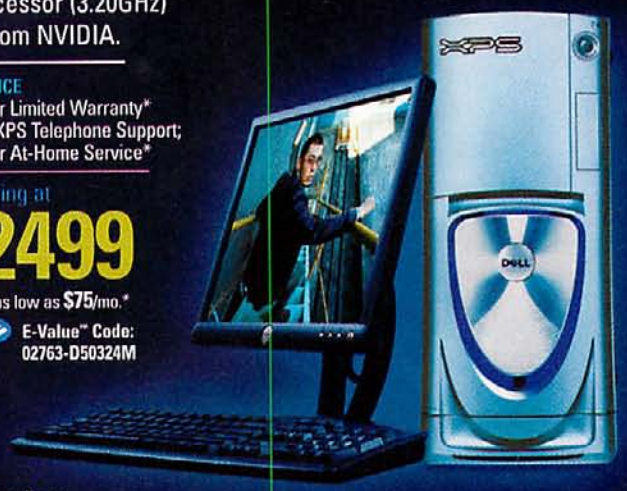


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# Happy Birthday to Us

**We look like a monkey, and we smell like one, too**

**Well, kids, we're 250 issues old today! Funny, we don't feel a day over 200! It must be all those Pilates classes we're taking.**

In any case, could it be any more obvious (or trite) to say that we've come a long way since that first issue in November 1981? Back when Russell Sipe founded this magazine, computer gaming was about as geeky a subculture as you could get—a new frontier for chess club geeks, *Dungeons & Dragons* players, board gamers, and other assorted misfits (a term I use with love, as I was one, too). This was who *Computer Gaming World* was made by and for—as the full pages of BASIC code in our early issues amply prove.

It'd be easy to sink into mushy nostalgia and lament for days gone by, to wish for more "innocent" times, to harp grumpily about how things were better back then. But the truth is, I don't really believe that. Yes, I have very fond memories of the "old days." When I look at old issues of *CGW*, I get jealous of the freedom we used to have—before everything became so insanely commercial and competitive—to put whatever the heck we wanted on the cover. But I'll take today's games over those from 25 years ago any day. Could any of us typing in commands in *Zork 1* have even dreamed of the kind of sophisticated, beautiful games out today?

This is my 106th issue writing and editing for *CGW*. Good god. I started here in July 1996 with Issue #144, which featured *Quake* on an ugly puke-green cover. Since then, I've watched this entire staff turn over and the PC-gaming industry go through multiple ups and downs. The editor-in-chief back then was the great Johnny Wilson, a legend in this business, with more knowledge, clout, and influence than any of the rest of us buffoons who have followed—and don't think we don't know that.

It's been a great ride. After 106 issues, I still love my job. So thanks for hiring me, Johnny, and thanks to all of you for reading all these years. It isn't game over yet.

**JEFF GREEN** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## YOUR FIRST **CGW MEMORY?**

**KRISTEN SALVATORE**
MANAGING EDITOR
The entire office was quiet—it must have been deadline week—and everyone's eyes were glued to their monitors. Suddenly, a voice rang out. It was Robert singing "Give It Away" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers...in an Ethel Merman voice. In an instant, my heart was won.

**ROBERT COFFEY**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
With my wife and kids still living in San Diego, I had relocated to a basement apartment full of slugs in SF. On day one, I was told that *CGW* was being shut down. About to quit and storm out, I was told it was all an elaborate joke. What merry pranksters!

**DARREN GLADSTONE**
SENIOR EDITOR
It was 1982. On vacation with the family in Washington, D.C. and bored out of my mind, I grabbed *CGW* Issue #2 off the newsstand. I chose to read about *Might and Magic* rather than tour the Washington Monument. Yep, even back then I was hopeless.

**RYAN SCOTT**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
I remember undergoing the staff's torturous nicknaming process. Among the candidates were "Spoon" (Wil O'Neal's idea—I'm afraid to ask why), "Animal," and "Beaker" (the latter two courtesy of Darren). I can deal with Animal. Hey, anything's better than "Chim-Chim."

**REBECCA GROSS**
INTERN
On my first day, everyone was busy shipping the magazine. Rather than have me underfoot, the guys let me blow the hell out of some *Doom 3* demons. I've been their loyal subject ever since.

**MICHAEL JENNINGS**
ART DIRECTOR
My first *CGW* Holiday Gift Guide meeting. It was a combination of cracking up while the ace edit team invented gaming genres like Ren Faire Randy, Nappy O'Leon, Jaques Strappe...and fearing for my life while Robert Coffey seared a hole through me with his eyes.

**PAULA STRINGFELLOW**
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
Walking into Jeff Green's office for an interview, I saw a bunch of things lying on his desk. First thing I noticed: a couple lines of sand set up like cocaine on top of a *GTA: Vice City* promotional mirror. Lying beside it, a hollowed-out Bic pen...total ice breaker.


COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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# Letters

Because we have the extra paper

### BAD DOG!

Thanks for bringing the Marvel lawsuit to our, the readers', attention. This just goes to show that Marvel is no different than corporations like Disney...all it cares about is its stinking greed. I wonder what Stan Lee has to say on this particular issue? Is this just the greedy company board and stockholders pulling the strings on this? Personally, I don't believe that Stan Lee would stifle such creativity...but I could be wrong.

So what's next, Marvel? Are you going to sue Mead for making notebooks that allow kids to draw likenesses of your precious little superheroes while they're daydreaming about your comics in school? Sue little Johnny because he didn't give trademark references to your precious little superhero characters in his letter to Grandma on what he wanted for Christmas?

Well, you can guarantee one thing, Marvel: The consumers that you market your comic books and movies to also play computer games and videogames. You're snapping back at the hand that feeds you in more ways than one. We'll just have to leave you tied up in the backyard for a few days with no food and see how quickly your attitude changes!

**Glenn Bruner**

**We were tempted to agree with you, Glenn, but then we realized that Marvel isn't protecting its intellectual property so much as it's protecting us gamers from it. Thanks to the company's selfless litigation, *City of Heroes* fans are free from the threat of having to tolerate Forge, Sleepwalker, Power Pack, Puck from *Alpha Flight*, and Dazzler.**

### THE FIRST STEP IS ADMITTING YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

When your magazine introduced me to *Bookworm*, I was forever hooked. It was quite possibly the most addictive game I had ever played—until *World of WarCraft*. *WOW* is so addictive that I have given up all other games to pursue my gnome warlock and mine copper veins. This game will take over my life. "/train" rocks.

**Andrew Edelman**

### HOMEWORK CHECK!

Last month I pointed out to my wife how disgusting the thought of intern Rebecca Gross and Jabba's tongue was. A few minutes later I was telling her about the letter from Bender844 suggesting that you give a topic for Letters every month and that you replied with this month's topic: What's that smell? Her response: "Probably that intern doing it with Jabba."

**Kevin Manning**
**Alexandria, VA**

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner...and so many poor, innocent, faceless losers.

### A FINE LETTER...FOR US TO POOP ON!

I was looking at the February issue when I came upon page 61, which has the Sound Imperial insert. After reading the paragraph, I noticed your last sentence: "Which button do you press to signal your parents to pick you up?" That is a direct quote from the DVD *Late Night With Conan O'Brien: The Best of Triumph the Insult Comic Dog*. Sorry, *CGW*, but that's too lame, even for you.

**D. Grebence**

## The Life Aquatic

Today is the day after Christmas. As I was sitting down and installing *Half-Life 2* on my computer, I ran into an interesting dilemma.... Was it my hardware? No, my brand-new $3,000 Vaio ran *Doom 3* just great. It was my location. You see, I was loading my game onto my laptop while standing duty on a $2 billion nuclear submarine. I'm a single senior military man who plays a lot of games and is gone about 10 months a year from my supercomputer hooked into the wall at home, so I don't get the convenience of having an Internet connection at my disposal to log on to Steam and activate the brand-new game that I just installed. There are a lot of military like me: We're a mobile group with a lot of disposable cash—we buy games and computers. The majority of us liked *Half-Life*, but the majority of us can't enjoy part deux because of the BS of making a Steam account just to run a game locally on our laptops while deployed. Out of our crew of about 150 on the submarine, I would say a good 60 percent are gamers. After I'd installed the game and figured out how I'd been duped, my CO made a tour of the boat to see how the guys were doing. He laughed when he saw *Half-Life 2* sitting on the table—his wife had gotten him a copy also. He didn't laugh when I told him what he had to do to get it to work. Hope you got some good toys during Christmas. Mine didn't work.

**Danny Hager, U.S. Submarine Force,**
**Apra Harbor, Guam**

**We feel your pain, Danny, and because we hate to see anyone in that kind of pain, we're sending you a copy of our Shooter of the Year, *Painkiller*. That should help take the edge off.**

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

## Mail Bites

**Please grind up some Valium and put it Robert Coffey's cereal.**
—Benjamin Bilton

**In the words of Huggy Bear, you just moved up a notch in my book.**
—Gary Hermann

**Add one old gamer lady to your demographic.**
—Carole Shieber

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Yeah, you caught us. We hereby promise not to steal any more copyrighted puppet material. Your letter really made a rainbow connection with us.

### HIS SATANIC MAJESTY'S REQUEST

After reading the letter by Sam Atherton in the February 2005 issue, I was compelled to write a letter to y'all addressing the same subject. My mom won't allow me to have certain game titles that she deems inappropriate or "evil" (*GTA*). Can a PC game actually be evil? Does my mom have a valid claim that these games can damage my psyche?

**Elgringo**

Yes. But not in the way you think. The next time you load *GTA*, play the CD backward—you can clearly hear the phrase "Turn me on, dead man" over and over, while on your monitor you'll see a flaming devil skull vomiting skinned kittens. So whatever you do, don't do that.

### LI'L GENIUS FAN CLUB

That was a heckuva Scorched Earth column [*CGW* Issue #248], but what struck me most was the *Earl Weaver Baseball* confession. I was working at a small weekly in Chula Vista, CA, and the sports editor turned me on to *EWB*. He had a *Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* there, and I typed in the '76 Reds; he pulled all the stats for the '86 Mets, and we played five-game series, seven-game series, three-game series—Reds won every time! Drove the poor man right out of journalism and back to the green, green hills of Kentucky. I still have my *EWB* floppy around here...just no 5 1/2-inch drive to put it in. And would it even work on XP? Did anyone ever update it?

**Jim Trageser**

Robert still has his *EWB* floppies as well—for the Amiga. Proving once and for all that he is the biggest loser on staff, nay, on this very planet.

### A FRIENDLY REMINDER

I just unwrapped the mailing package of my February issue of *CGW* to find it surgically cut up into a weird trapezoidal shape and many of the articles unreadable. At first, I thought it was a new marketing ploy, perhaps from the same people that brought us the DVD debacle of 2003! Then I noticed the renewal notification and realized that this was a new marketing ploy, and the message was that the same kind of surgical removal of parts could accidentally happen to me.

I'm sorry for the late renewal; I swear to God it's in the mail. I promise never to let my subscription even come close to lapsing again. Please tell Jeff "The Don" Green not to send Robert "Vinnie" Coffey and Darren "Guido" Gladstone over for a visit. (Kristen he can send. If I'm gonna get hurt, at least I'll enjoy it!)

Respectfully,

**Gene "Please Don't Hurt Me" Juricic**

Good decision, Gene. We'd hate to have to start playing rough, and we'll be honest—we really weren't looking forward to trying to stuff a whole horse's head inside the polybag. OK, maybe Robert was, but the smell of that head turned the rest of us off weeks ago.

## Department of Corrections

**Whoops! In our *Dungeon Siege II* preview in Issue #248, we miscredited Gas Powered Games president/creative director Chris Taylor as the game's lead designer. Kudos to Chris, as well as actual lead designer, Kevin Lambert.**

**We properly credited *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* as our RPG of the Year last issue—we just didn't give credit to the right people for the game. So take a bow, Troika, for your fine work creating the game, and hey, you take a bow, too, Activision, for publishing such a fine game. And hey, *CGW*, take a blow to the head for getting it wrong.**

## Ye Olde Mailbag

**Here at *CGW*, we believe in free speech—which pretty much explains our paychecks. If you'd like to join in, send us your pithy observations, urbane witticisms, sly compliments, and unhinged ranting to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com. Operators are standing by.**

## Mail Bites

**As a fellow gnome warlock engineer, I laughed out loud about Eggbert's exploits. I hated those troggs, too, until I leveled up.**

**—Hakeswill, on the Garona server**


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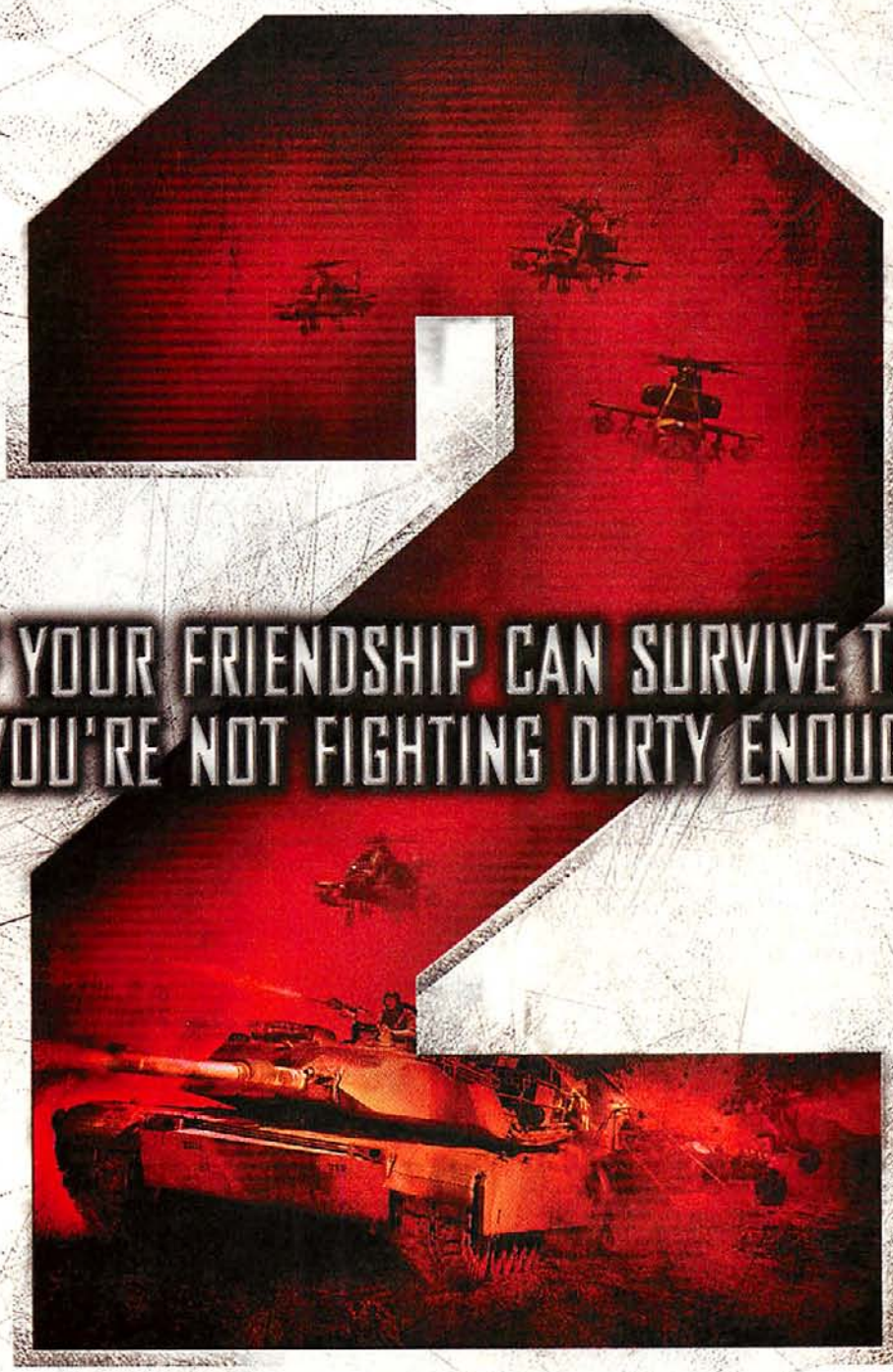
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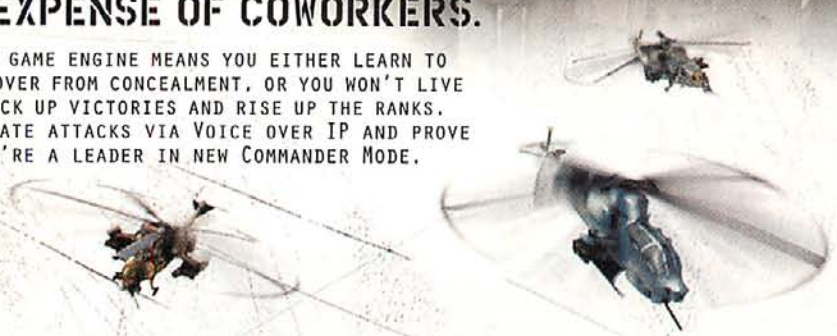

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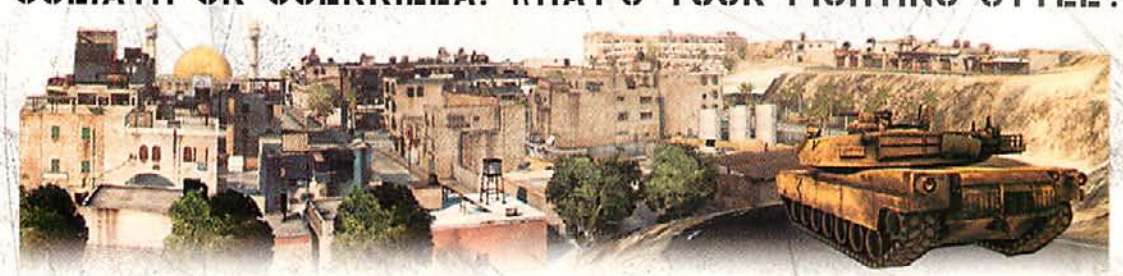

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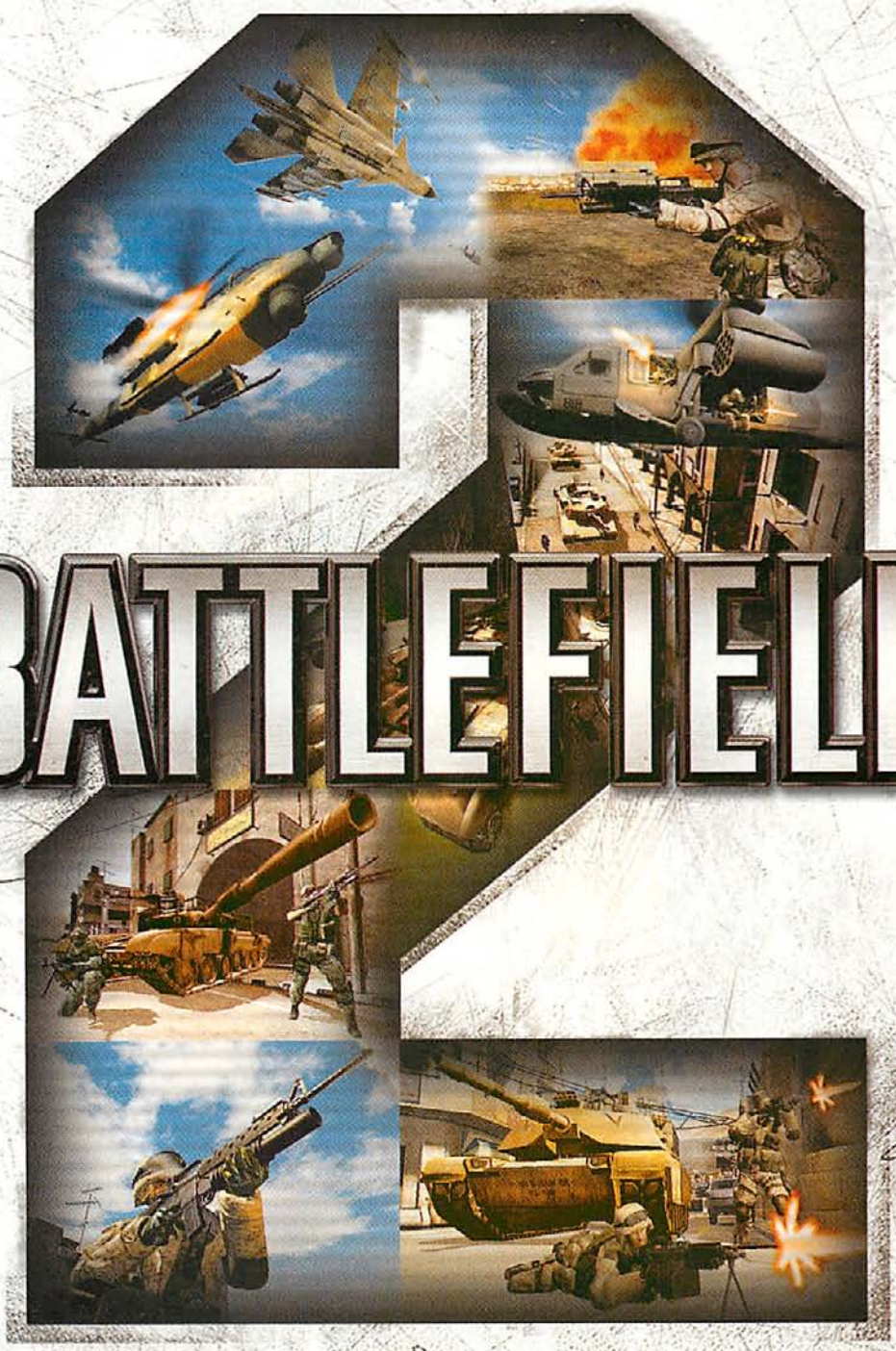

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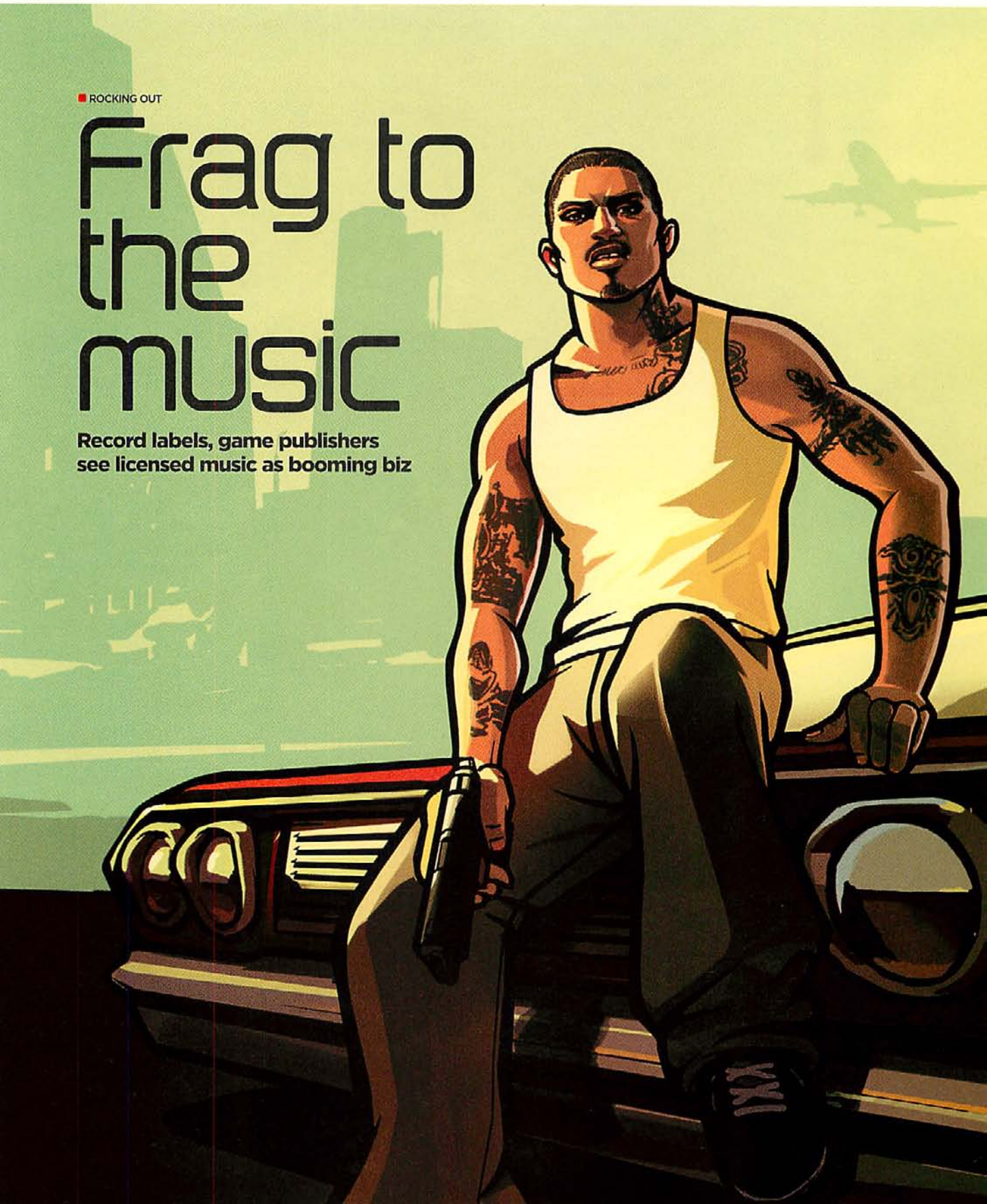
ROCKING OUT

# Frag to the music

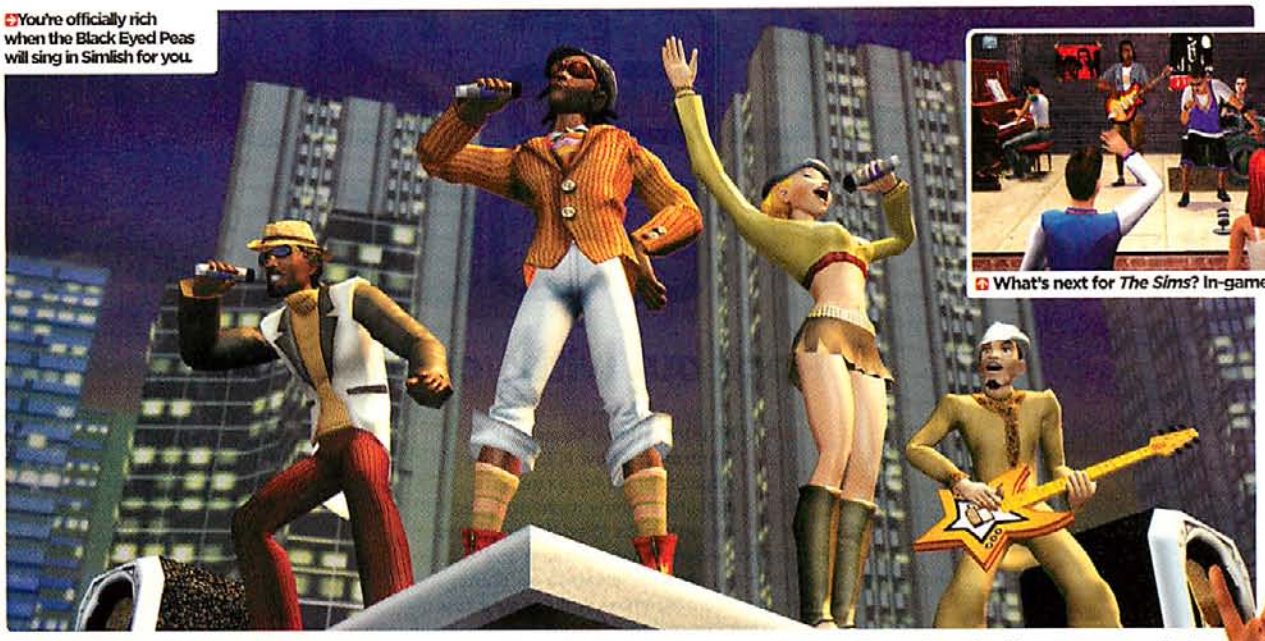
**Record labels, game publishers see licensed music as booming biz**



**Geek Chic**
Get the skinny on some of the coolest, newest gadgets coming out in 2005.

**Iron-y**
Will the real Sam Fisher please step forward? We talk to Michael Ironside.

**Redux**
*Bad Mojo* is back and optimized for Windows XP. But what about the rest of the games we want remade?



You're officially rich when the Black Eyed Peas will sing in Simlish for you.

What's next for *The Sims*? In-game concerts?

**"Sound and music make up more than half of communicating a story, greater even than what you're seeing." Steven Spielberg said that about movies, but it also applies to games. As games increase in widespread acceptance, so has the impact of licensed music within them. Now games are becoming as big a pusher of pop culture as radio or MTV—if not bigger. And it's more than just a few game publishers that are seeing the results.**

## LICENSE LIKE IT'S HOT

EA and its EA Trax program have reshaped the licensing landscape, ushering in new business opportunities. "Our games—and the music in them—represent a lifestyle," says Steve Schnur, worldwide executive of music at EA. "They are what MTV used to be: being hip, being current, ushering in trends, and single-handedly creating 'cool.'" Powerful words, but when your company has *NBA Live*, the top-selling videogame soundtrack of all time (it actually earned a platinum record from *Billboard* in 2002) and can commission the Black Eyed Peas to rerecord an entire album in "Simlish," it's not entirely without merit.

While licensed music typically caters to fans of a specific style, a game's popularity spreads the music to untapped markets. Swollen Members, a Canadian hip-hop group featured on games from EA, Activision, and others, is a band taking advantage of new licensing opportunities. "The gaming community has been a great culture for us to be exposed to, and we've been lucky enough to have been embraced by the culture," says Prevail, the Swollen Members' MC.

Millions of gamers hear these artists, and Tim Riley, music supervisor at Activision, sees this as a captive audience. "Depending on the game, getting a spot on a soundtrack can be as powerful as being added to a radio station's playlist," he says. This comes from a company behind the *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* games, which always muster an eclectic mix of musical styles in their soundtracks—most recently with Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, and hip-hop artists sharing the same billing.

## NEW MUSIC MARKETS

With this popularity shift, record labels see games as a new source of revenue. "In an era when downloading [music] has eroded record sales and independent record labels' corresponding marketing budgets, labels are being forced to look at creative, cost-effective ways to market their product," says Kris Dirksen of Battle Axe Records, the label behind Swollen Members. "As the traditional outlets for selling music begin to weaken, artists and labels are going to be forced to embrace technology and find creative new ways to sell their music."

Rockstar is another game publisher grounded in the notion that games and music are intertwined as parts of pop culture. Earlier *GTA* games broke new artists, and *Grand Theft Auto III* placed them on radio stations. The company's subsequent sequels captured different eras and dipped into licensed music with some success. Both *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* were released alongside specialized soundtrack box sets. The soundtracks were a strong selling point for the game and a focus of critical acclaim, but that acclaim didn't turn into CD sales. Despite the millions of copies of the game sold, in the two years since *Vice City*'s release, the '80s box set collection has sold only 30,135 discs, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Maissa Dauriac, music supervisor at Syncope Entertainment, theorizes that the sales reflect the wrong sales mentality. "With a [videogame] soundtrack, you need to offer the audience an original song that is not available anywhere else but on that soundtrack," she says. "The correct formula would be to follow what movie soundtracks have been doing successfully for years."

As the music business, Hollywood, and others continue to dip into videogames, the impact and importance of licensed music can only escalate. Or, as Schnur says, "The only rules are that there are no rules...and this is just the beginning."

**Patrick Klepek**

**"Getting on a game soundtrack can be as powerful as being added to a radio station's playlist."**

## THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

April 2005

### The Good
**Grand Theft Electroencephalogram**

A few scientists have taken a break from proving that videogames cause kids to murder each other in order to use our favorite pastime to help treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. A technique called neurofeedback, in which patients learn to alter and control their errant brain waves, requires participants to focus on a game while jacked in to some kind of wire-spouting brain harness. Enjoy the good press while it lasts.

### The Bad
***WOW!* That sucks...**

February's "Good" entry took a dramatic turn for the worse. After a generally problem-free honeymoon period, Blizzard's massively multiplayer juggernaut *World of WarCraft* became a victim of its own massive popularity, with overcrowded servers leading to stunning lag and crashing issues. Though things appear to be fixed, for a while, Blizzard voluntarily slowed down sales of its game.

### The Ugly
***Doom 3* – Common Sense 0**

In the upcoming *Doom 3* expansion pack, *Resurrection of Evil*, note that even the *zombies* have figured out how to attach a light to their clothes—or in this case, their blood-spattered hazmat suits. Also note that your futuristic space marine still has not.

GEARHEADS

# CES 2005 Report

## Rock out with your geek out

**The International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas is great for a couple reasons, namely roaming three gigantic halls filled with gadgets by day and relentlessly gambling and leeching from friends' expense accounts by night. Ahem. Anyhow, what should you be looking forward to in 2005?**

First stop: the games. CES isn't necessarily a gaming showcase, although there seems to be more gamerelated stuff every year. Microsoft stuffed some PC games into the far corner of its mega-pavilion. Nvidia and ATI were also on the scene. Heck, even Fatality was pimping a branded graphics card.

This recliner from hell will rock your body—and your bank account!

But we also found some crazy gadgets. Fatties, rejoice! The NeXfit BK-R3 is an exercise bike/controller for the PC ($1,800, www.nexfit.com). It's not the first exercise-type game on the market, but it looks cooler than the other options. Too bad riding a bike in front of a PC doesn't look cooler than, well, anything. And as if that wasn't enough virtual-gaming-whatsits, the creators of QMotions-Golf were talking up their next project—due out in March—the QMotions-Baseball Active Game Controller (www.qmotions.com). Slip the sensor over your bat and try not to hit anything while you swing away.

What you are looking at is the next Walkman. But it plays games, too.

For those less willing to get up, we also came across some quality rumpshakers. Offering way-over-the-top home-theater action is the D-Box Quest (starts at a mere $5,500, www.d-box.com). This expensive La-Z-Boy from hell is a plush leather chair with

1UP.com NEWS FEED

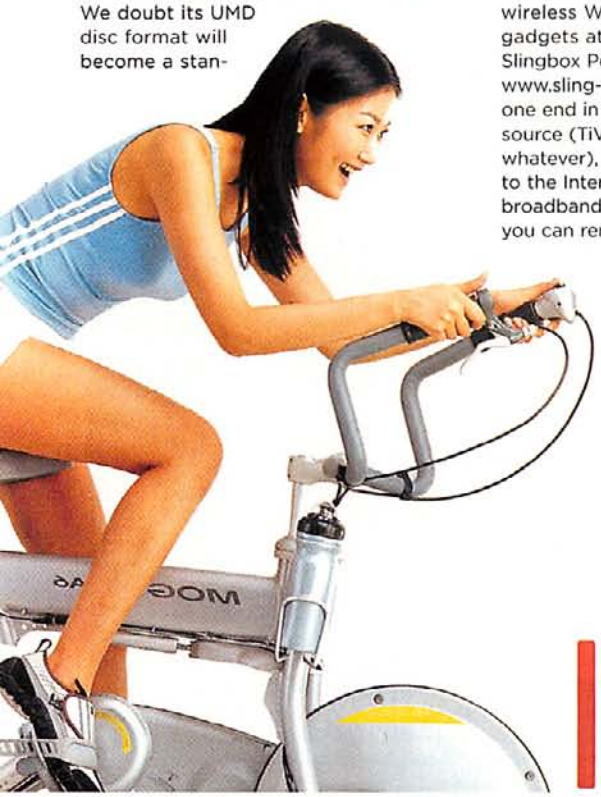
»» Another classic brand is making a comeback. The Netherlands' Yeahronimo Media Ventures acquired the legendary Commodore brand to make...get this...MP3 players. The Commodore eVic 20-GB ships by June. ««

hydraulic actuators that actually vibrates and jostles you around as you watch movies and play games! More in tune with the gaming lifestyle is the slick new Pyramat rocking chair ($800, www.pyramat.com), which rocks, thanks to the 2.1 speaker system built in to the chair, both figuratively and literally. Plus, it's actually comfortable and well suited for lounging. Spherex, on the other hand, touted its RX2 chair, which houses a 5.1 sound system ($1,600, www.spherexinc.com). Any chair with a center channel aimed at the crotch is OK by us. The quirkiest and most affordable of this bunch, though, has to be the ButtKicker Gamer ($149, www.thebuttkicker.com). Attach this subwoofer to the center post of your desk chair and your posterior gets the workout of a lifetime, thumping with every explosion and gunshot. And speaking of sound, Dolby was busy touting its Dolby Digital Plus technology. It can support 13.1 channels, which means your home-entertainment center will require 13 speakers and a subwoofer to take full advantage of it. Next up: a speaker you can actually sit in.

## HANDOUTS

A big gaming device on display was Sony's PSP, the PlayStation Portable. We doubt its UMD disc format will become a standard for movies (imagine having to buy the same movie twice so you can view it in your home theater and on the road), but the device still made believers of us. The potency of a PlayStation 2 in your hands is hard to argue against. Plus, the sturdy, sexy design could conceivably make it the next Walkman. On the other hand, you have the multifunctional Gizmondo. This game- and video-playing, picture-taking, message-sending GPS device will feature games like *Conflict: Vietnam*, *OutRun*, and the vaguely interesting GPS-based *Colors*. On its own, it's a decent piece of technology, but come late March when the PSP ships, you'll likely never hear about the Gizmondo—or any other handheld gaming device—again.

Other big trends at CES were on the digital entertainment front. PC and consumer electronics manufacturers are creating home media servers and client devices for watching your content while on the go. Archos' fourth-generation recorder, the AV430 ($800, www.archos.com), works like a portable TiVo and MP3 player. Not only can it play back shows and music, it can also record high-quality clips straight from a television, no computer required. It's even a wireless Web surfer! Want to leave the gadgets at home? Check out the Slingbox Personal Broadcaster ($250, www.sling-media.com). Plug one end in to your AV source (TiVo, DVD player, whatever), then hook up to the Internet. With a broadband connection, you can remotely control



Finally, a way to get off your butt (kind of) while playing PC games.

**CES is becoming more game-related every year.**

**NEWS FEED** >> Why let the U.S. Army have all the fun? Go to www.royalnavy.mod.uk and play England's military Web games. >> Happy 10th B-day, Bioware! >>

Roger Ebert says, "Imagine a film in which Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton meet Quentin Tarantino and Bugs Bunny."

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# CONSOLE CORNER

A look at the rest of the gaming world

**There are plenty of good games out there beyond what's on the PC. Whether you also own a PS2, Xbox, GameCube (or, in our cases, all three), we're here to help. So, here's our pick for the best of the console games coming out this month.**

PLAYSTATION 2

## God of War

Two blades and a whole lot of death: That sums up this mythology-inspired action-platformer for the PS2. In fact, even this early in 2005, *God of War* gets our nomination for bloodiest hack-n-slash of the year. Expect no less from the twisted people behind the *Twisted Metal* series.

In one area, we had to square off against a bunch of harpies. How do you take 'em down a peg or two? Hop on their backs and yank off their wings, then watch for the arterial spray. YAY! Family fun! Even though the PS2 is coming up on its five-year anniversary, the graphics and level of detail in the environments are simply gorgeous.

Not enough action for you? Also coming out is *Devil May Cry 3* for the PlayStation 2. Both of these will show that the ol' PS2 still has plenty of life and great games left in it.

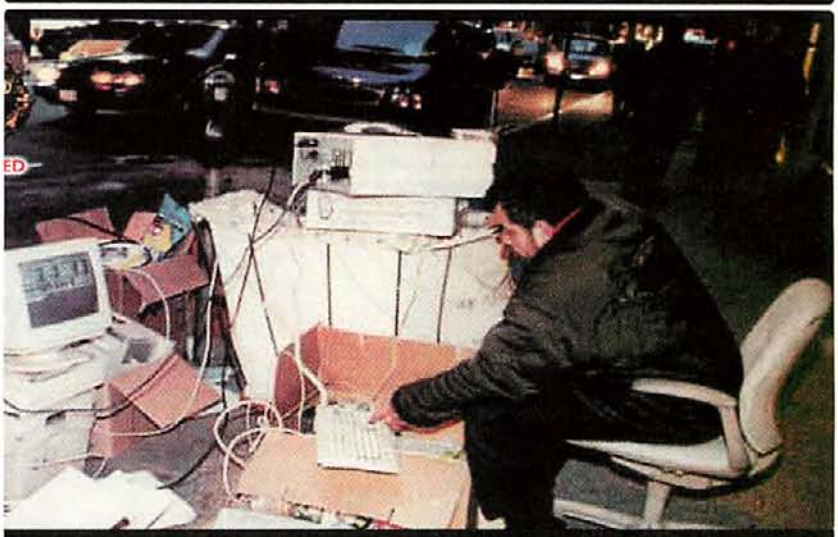
and view your shows from anywhere in the world.

Other faves: Samsung's 102-inch plasma TV that can actually replace a wall in your house, and one hopeful guy passing out flyers about his Smell-O-Vision product for computers. By far the most high-tech gadgets, though, were spotted by two crack reporters who wandered into the Star Trek Experience. After downing a Warp Core Breach cocktail from hell, we found the Datapad. It's only an early prototype, but it promises to let you do things such as take digital notes and store all your important information. This handy device should be ready by the 23rd century.

**Darren Gladstone and Libe Goad**

**Record your shows, take 'em with you, and even surf the Web with this little guy.**

# PICTURES FROM THE DIGITAL UNDERGROUND



**In case you've been wondering why the *World of WarCraft* servers have had so many problems lately, someone at onepvp.com got to the bottom of it. We're not 100 percent sure, but we *think* this is a shot of the Kilrogg server in action.**

**NEWS FEED** In the midst of EA's many acquisitions, 60 people at the EALA studio were surprised to get their pink slips. The L.A. office hosts EA Publishing, EA Trax, and mobile gaming. Spokespeople say it's all in the name of restructuring.

# Asheron's Call

## Throne of Destiny™

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CELEB CHAT

# Iron-Clad Theory

## The third time's a charm for Michael Ironside, the voice of *Splinter Cell* hero Sam Fisher

**For many actors, the chance to be the voice of a videogame character often comes after people start to recognize their face. But for Michael Ironside, it seems his role as the voice of *Splinter Cell* hero Sam Fisher is what's led to his long-overdue props. "It's really interesting," he explains while working on the third installment of the series, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*. "I'm not getting people with photographs to sign, I'm getting people who walk up to me and say, 'Mr. Ironside, can you sign this please?' and it's a copy of *Splinter Cell*. And it's every social, economic layer of society—everyone from guys in three-piece suits with Gucci bags to some street urchin in Barcelona who could hardly speak English, just 'Sam Fisher,' 'Mr. Ironside,' y'know."**

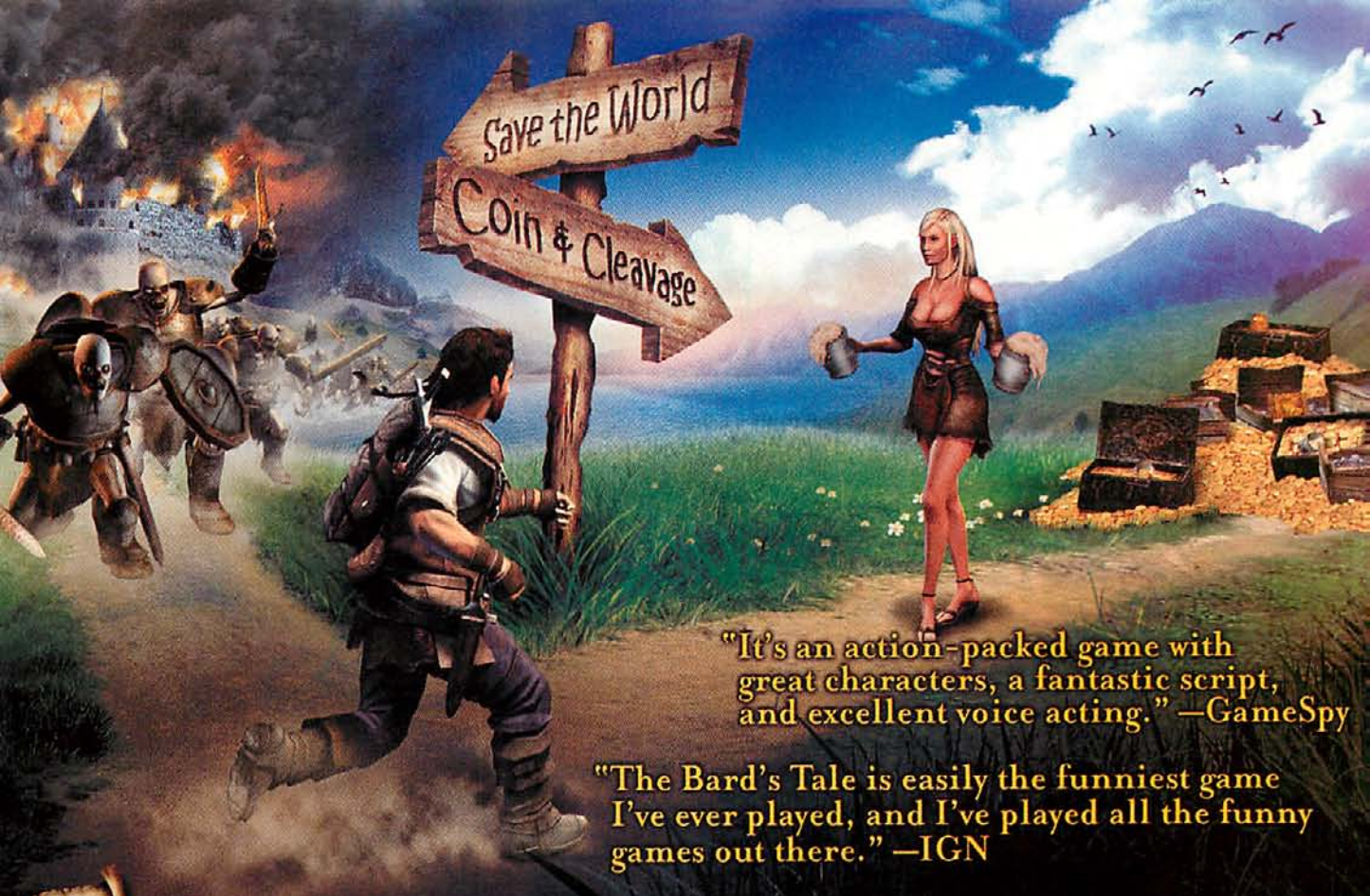
While some actors might be annoyed that they're recognized more for a videogame than the numerous movies and TV shows they've done (which, for Ironside, include a whole slew of projects—*Total Recall*, *SeaQuest DSV*, *V*, *Starship Troopers*, and, our favorite, his role as Jester in *Top Gun*, to name but a few), Ironside seems to care more about the challenge than the compliment. "It's a whole new art form for me," he says of his role as a videogame hero's voice. "It scared the living s*** out of me the first time I did it. I don't do well in sound booths; I'm more of a reactor, so I felt a lot of trepidation coming in. But I liked the challenge, and now I'm starting to understand the format. I'm understanding the freedoms."

You still want that autograph, now?

Further keeping Ironside on his toes is that, from game to game, the character of Sam Fisher has changed and evolved more than one would think. "In the first game," he explains, "there was a fullness of the character where we were trying a whole bunch of things: humor, anger, frustration. In *Pandora Tomorrow*, he was angry and almost brutal. The brutality's still there [in *Chaos Theory*], but I just think it's now tempered with a certain amount of wisdom and a kind of an intellectual sarcasm. I also think Sam has a little more world-weary empathy for the people he's running into this time. So it's been a good progression."

Does that mean, should the opportunity arise, that Ironside would be interested in playing Sam Fisher in a *Splinter Cell* movie or TV show? "Oh, I'd love to do it," he says. "I'd have to knock off 25 pounds and get into shape, but it'd be worth it." **Paul Semel**

**NEWS FEED** Last month we knew some big things were in store for Take-Two games. We weren't kidding! In a bold move, it has signed deals with Firaxis, bought Visual Concepts away from Sega, and changed its name to 2K Games. With more soon! ▸▸




"It's an action-packed game with great characters, a fantastic script, and excellent voice acting." —GameSpy

"The Bard's Tale is easily the funniest game I've ever played, and I've played all the funny games out there." —IGN

# The Bard's Tale™

Spring 2005

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REHASH

# Classic Gaming Redux

## Got Game cleans out the classics closet

**Every day in the office, we wax nostalgic about the classics, games that, back in the day, fired the imagination so much that we *still* talk about them. Thanks to Connecticut-based Got Game Entertainment, the talk is over and you can dig into at least one of the more obscure classics from 1996: *Bad Mojo*. This redux treatment is a pixel-for-pixel re-creation of one of the more out-there and original ideas from an era of really inventive games, now optimized to run on modern machines.**

In *Bad Mojo*, Mad scientist Roger Samms has been temporarily turned into a cockroach. You heard right. Kafka, a cockroach. And that's where you come in. Great (for the time) visuals and an unusually gripping story have you crawling on all six legs around a decrepit building in San Francisco, solving puzzles. Yep, sure is a far cry from the glut of FPS and RTS titles that flood store shelves these days.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

And true to most "Director's Cuts" and "Special Edition" treatments that come out for home video, the game features several hours of goodies that make it well worth the $20 admission price. Making-of documentaries highlight auditions and brutally honest interviews, and the disc also houses all the creepy FMV movies, along with an optional commentary track with producer Alex Louie. There's even a video hints section that walks you through the more difficult puzzles in the game. (Take that, GameFAQs.com!) Will the band get back together for a *Bad Mojo 2*? Nobody knows for certain, but if you miss the glory days of adventure gaming, your collection is incomplete without *Bad Mojo (Redux)*. **Darren Gladstone**

## OTHER GREAT GAMES IN REDUX

Lots of games are already being optimized for Windows XP—but there are still other comebacks we crave

| GAMES WE WANT OPTIMIZED! | WHAT IT'S ABOUT | AVAILABILITY/COST | WHERE? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grand Theft Auto 1 & 2 | Murder, mayhem, and carjacking in glorious 2D! | Yes/Free | www.rockstargames.com/classics |
| Sam & Max Hit the Road | Graphic adventure meets surreal comedy | Yes/Free(ish) | A free XP-friendly version promoted *Armed and Dangerous*. It's out there somewhere! |
| Underneath a Steel Sky | Classic cyberpunk at its finest—and free-est! | Yes/Free | www.revolution.co.uk |
| Broken Sword 1 & 2 | Two great, highly stylized graphic adventures | Yes/Free | www.revolution.co.uk |

| GAMES WE WANT OPTIMIZED! | WHAT IT'S ABOUT | AVAILABILITY/COST |
|---|---|---|
| Crusader: No Remorse | Puzzle-solving and death-dealing action | Nope |
| Dungeon Master | A classic RPG. Think Wizardry, but pretty | Nope |

**NEWS FEED** ›› Loose lips sink ships. News of *Myst V: End of Ages*, the final *Myst* game, leaked out recently, so expect more pretty pictures. ›› Next, EA Europe's VP of marketing and sales let slip info of a *Sims*-based TV show that is currently being discussed.

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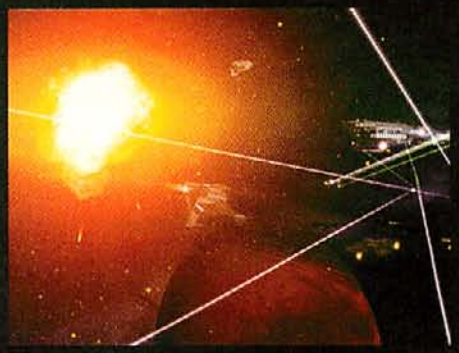

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# 100 Bucks

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

■MUSIC
### The Stills, Logic Will Break Your Heart
**$12, WWW.AMAZON.COM**

No, this is not some lame cover of Interpol. The Montreal-based band draws from the likes of the Cure, New Order, U2, and Radiohead to craft a good, mellow, nonwhiny rock CD. After all, you don't always need music to kick you square in the gut, do you? Drop in the disc, hit play, and listen to "Lola Stars and Stripes" and "Gender Bombs."

■MUSIC
### Bowling for Soup, A Hangover You Don't Deserve
**$14, WWW.AMAZON.COM**

More of a pop-rock band than we're used to, Bowling for Soup has a bunch of catchy tracks in that Sum 41 way—but with a Texan twang. The song you've likely heard on the radio, "1985," may be a little overplayed but is still a sign of good things to come. Also, a shout-out to *CGW* alum Jason Babler: "Ohio (Come Back to Texas)" is for you.

■DVD
### Volcano High
**$18, WWW. AMAZON.COM**

Protect ya neck, grasshoppa! This hip-hop kung fu flick is loaded with fighting, lots of crazy special effects, and an all-star cast handling the voices. Andre 3000, Lil Jon, Snoop Dogg, Method Man, Tracy Morgan, and Pat Morita head up this MTV-fueled dub of a slick flick taking place in one messed-up high school.

■PULP
### Black Panther
**$3, WWW. MARVELCOMICS.COM**

We put our annoyance with Marvel back up on the shelf for a minute. Here's an awesome new comic starring one of the more underrated superheroes out there. Black Panther, is the mystically super-powered leader of the Wakandan people. Here's the crazy part and why we've gotta give this comic a shot: The writer worked on the *House Party* films! High-top fades for everyone!

■PULP
### Seven Soldiers of Victory
**$3, WWW.DC-COMICS.COM**

You've heard of the miniseries, but a maxi-series? Well, brace yourself for one of the most ambitious storytelling efforts in comic-bookdom. Spanning centuries and 30 issues, the series links together several short stories that tell about the Sheeda, an evil force returning to harvest the Earth. Our only defense is these "Seven Soldiers" of legend—seven people who must save the world...without ever meeting one another.

■CALLOUT
### "Celebrity" Phone Calls
**$30, WWW. HOLLYWOODIS-CALLING.COM**

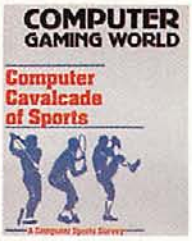
Yes, folks, you can finally put a price on fame. For a mere 30 bones, you can get B-list celebs to call your crib and wish you a happy birthday, or just make a quick crank call. That's right, Lorenzo Lamas and Todd Bridges are a mere 10 digits away. It's the perfect gift for the lonely nerds who have been waiting to hear back from Erin "Col. Wilma Deering" Gray ever since sending that fan letter in 1981. Sigh.

■CUBIST
### The Cubes
**$15, WWW. CUBEFIGURES.COM**

Being a corporate drone is fun! Create your own soulless, loveless workplace, replete with nondescript cubes. Each set has one 2-3/4-inch posable plastic figure and all the de rigueur corporate items, including computers, charts, graphs, and TPS forms. Heck, you even have the ability to create you own useless business titles—just like in the real world! Darren just appointed himself vice president of janitorial services of his new micro Ziff Davis office.

## THAT WAS THEN: APRIL, 1989

Looking back at the way we were




**Thanks to a drunken Captain Hazelwood, the Exxon oil tanker *Valdez* had just run aground, and organizations around the world were scrambling to contain the damage. Thousands of students were starting to rally in Tiananmen Square. Milli Vanilli's "Girl You Know It's True" was lighting up the pop charts (God help us). *Black Knight 2000* was being set up in local bars for all the pinball fiends. But who cares about the rest of the world? What was happening in *CGW*?**

Six glorious pages detailed a "Computer Cavalcade of Sports." You remember when people still made sports games for the PC, right? You know, stuff like *Rich Tauber's Bass Champ*, the wrasslin' game *Take Down*, and *Winter Challenge*. Electronic Arts even signaled the beginning of the dreaded "EXTREME" sports trend with *Kings of the Beach* (replete with this eye-bleed-inducing Day-Glo ad).

A seriously detailed review and strategy guide for *The Magic Candle* laced most of the issue, but the line of the month, without a doubt, comes from a review of Activision's *F-14 Tomcat*: "Miramar, Miramar, off the wall." Wow.

■PULP
### The Intimates
**$3, WWW.WILDSTORM.COM**

Teenage angst. We love it! Screw *Smallville*, *The O.C.*, and all that pretty-boy stuff you see on TV. We want to know how a whole high school dedicated to superheroics ticks. Dating, drama, destruction. You'll dig it.

■CARBO LOAD
### Can of Pringles
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Maybe it's the hypnotic handlebar mustache of Mr. Pringle. Then again, maybe it's the cardboard-like taste. Either way, relish the snacky joy of these crack-laced chips. We do, working on every issue.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Violence

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–Gen. Barry McCaffrey, USA (Ret.)
IN STORES NOW
ACT of WAR: DIRECT ACTION
ATARI

# Previews

If you're looking for a good plot, *Pariah* just might deliver.

Both the single-player and multiplayer game modes feature several vehicles. Toasty!

*Pariah*'s single-player mode is a desperate fight for survival.

The doctor is now in...and he's got your prescription for pain.

Inside

48

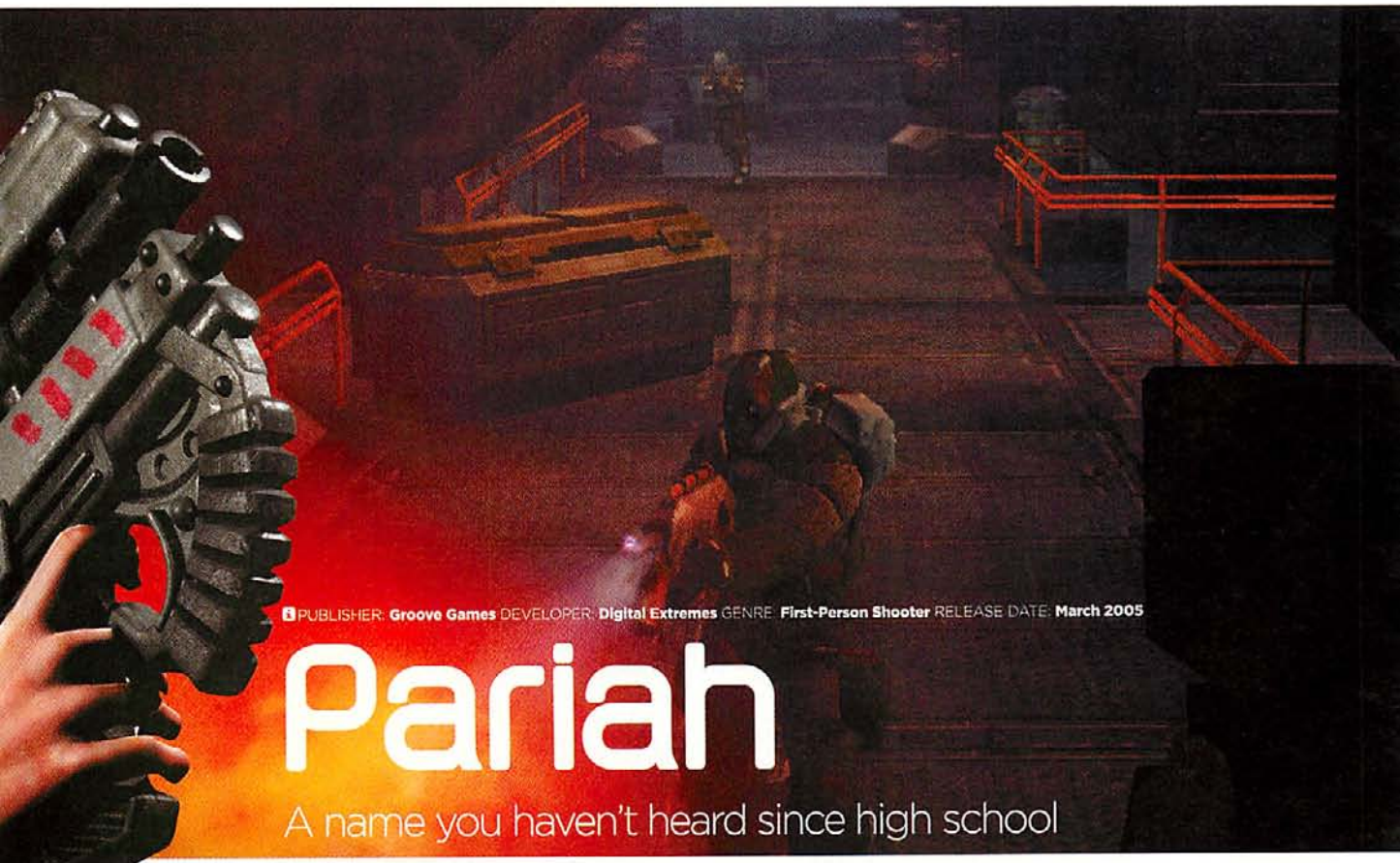
**Splinter Cell Chaos Theory**
We've got full details on *Splinter Cell*'s all-new multiplayer co-op mode.

52

**F.E.A.R.**
After taking *F.E.A.R.*'s multiplayer for a spin, and we're afraid... very afraid.

58

**Project: Snowblind**
*GMR* alum Andrew Pfister chats with Eidos about its upcoming shooter.



PUBLISHER: **Groove Games** DEVELOPER: **Digital Extremes** GENRE: **First-Person Shooter** RELEASE DATE: **March 2005**

# Pariah

## A name you haven't heard since high school

**No one could stop me. Not the alleged "elite" gunners from competing publications. Not Digital Extremes spokesperson Meredith Braun. Not even James Schmalz, creative director behind the upcoming FPS *Pariah*. But before relishing this sweet victory, let's get up to speed—for starters, what's so great about *Pariah*, anyway?**

### WAR CRAFTING

The "big deal" bullet points go beyond the usual gee-whiz graphics, Havok physics, emergent A.I., and purty explosions. Oh, those are all definitely well-represented here...but *Pariah* takes an extra step by letting you craft weapons to your own tastes.

Throughout the game, you'll find nine base weapons—rifles, lasers, shotguns, and so on. At various points, you'll acquire weapon energy cores (WECs), which allow you to mod your gear. The catch: There are only so many WECs in the game world, meaning you'll need to decide which weapons to amp up. In the single-player game, a weapon can be upgraded three times. Leveling up the frag rifle, for example, allows for faster reload times, while the second improvement is a damage-heavy magneto concentrator, and the final upgrade packs even more punch.

### SINGLE, PLAYA

Unlike Digital Extremes' *Unreal Tournament* series, *Pariah* is being crafted as a unique single-player experience. It's set in the year 2520 and features an intricate plot with a definite survival vibe. Combat medic Jack Mason and his quarantined patient are shot down over a prison planet called "Earth," and it's up to you to help them escape.

A highly modified Unreal engine is being put to good use in the game's lush environments, lacing up a whopping 18 single-player levels. There are also several interesting scenarios, such as an entire level that puts you in a tense vehicle chase. Another is an aerial showdown, with two side-by-side dropships racing to blow each other out of the sky.

### ALL ABOUT THE FRAG

Multiplayer is, obviously, pretty frantic. Weapons can only sustain two upgrades here, but you'll be able to snag fallen WECs as you rack up frags. The middle mouse button opens an upgrade menu, making it quick and easy to craft custom-made equipment.

Speaking of easy mods, *Pariah*'s level editor simplifies the process for the programming-deficient. Drag and drop a few premade items, alter the terrain, then jump in to see what works. There's even an object limiter that prevents dumbass designers from killing framerates with excess clutter.

Multiplayer is the usual cannon fodder: deathmatch, team deathmatch, and assault. First, you'll pick a class, which determines your loadout. Then it's time for action! Four vehicles from the single-player game also carry over for the times when a BFG just isn't enough.

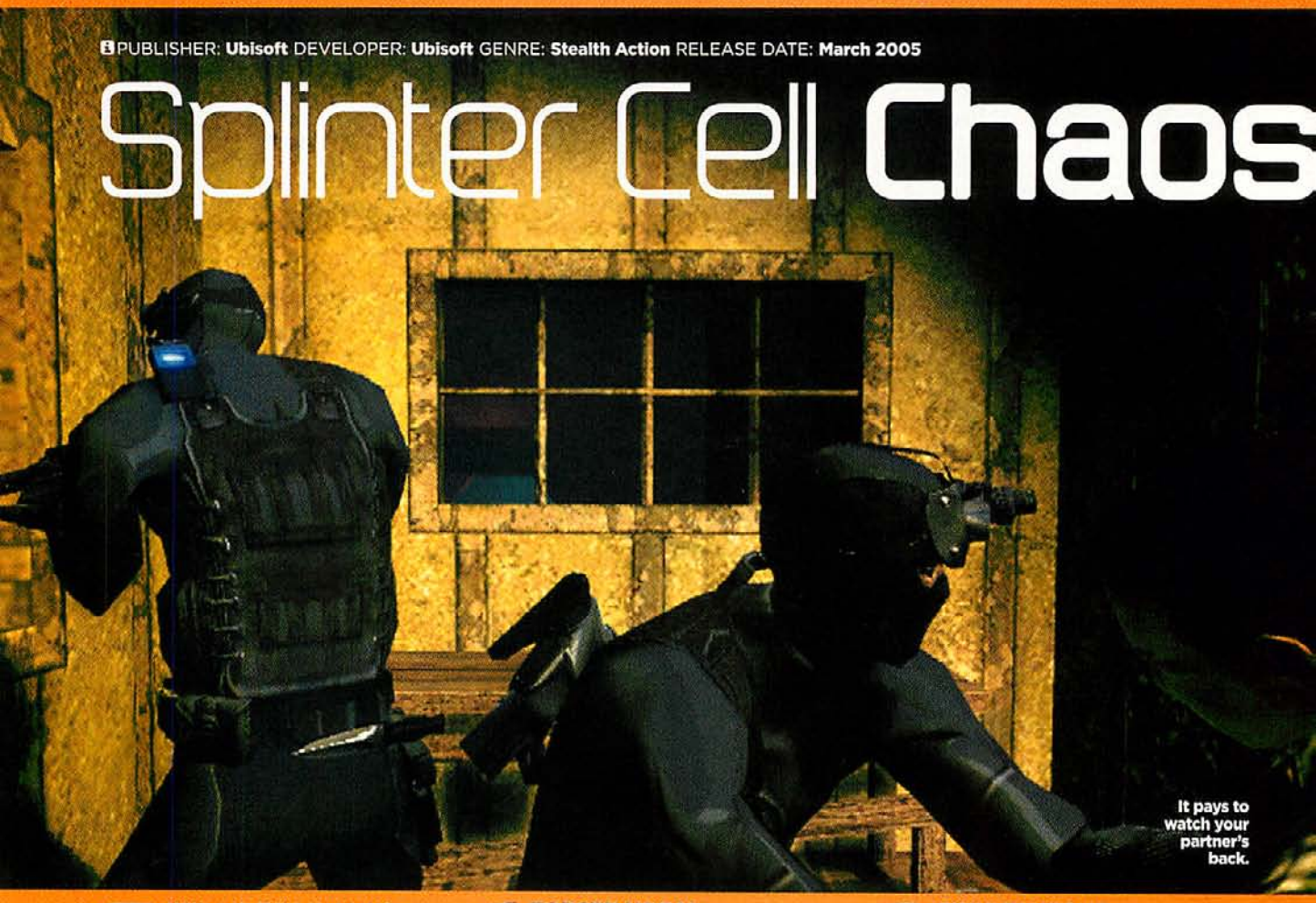
My first match took place in an aquatic base, and my plasma gun required a pair of protective goggles to offset the beam's blinding blasts. It wasn't pretty—but it was close. Later, open terrain and much sneakiness allowed li'l ol' me to own the allegedly natural-born killers I was pitted against. Better luck next time, kids. **Darren Gladstone**

**The Word: MOD!**

***Pariah*'s level editor simplifies the process for the programming-deficient.**

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft** GENRE: **Stealth Action** RELEASE DATE: **March 2005**

# Splinter Cell Chaos



It pays to watch your partner's back.

With a staff list that totals roughly 250 names (including those working on the console versions), three distinct game modes, and a new open-ended single-player game, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* is Ubisoft's most ambitious project yet. And while it features improvements over last year's *Pandora Tomorrow*, *Chaos Theory*'s new co-op mode is its creative lead horse. Check out a few of the cooperative moves that are in store.

## 1 FORCED VOCAL COMMUNICATION

As usual, you can rappel down the side of a building...but rather than securing yourself to a pipe on the roof, you can now leave the rope management to your partner. As you descend, your partner can move around on the roof, leaving you free to avoid obstacles. The trick here is that he can't see what's going on below—so you'll have to maintain constant communication in order to reach your target destination.

## 2 SIMULTANEOUS RETINAL SCANNERS

Beginners may think that this example is as simple as cooperating to activate a pair of retinal scanners—but *Splinter Cell* veterans know it's a little more complicated than that. The single-player game finds you grabbing guards from behind and forcing them onto the scanners...and there is at least one co-op situation in which both spies will be required to pull the same maneuver in sync.

## SINGLE-PLAYER **MODE**

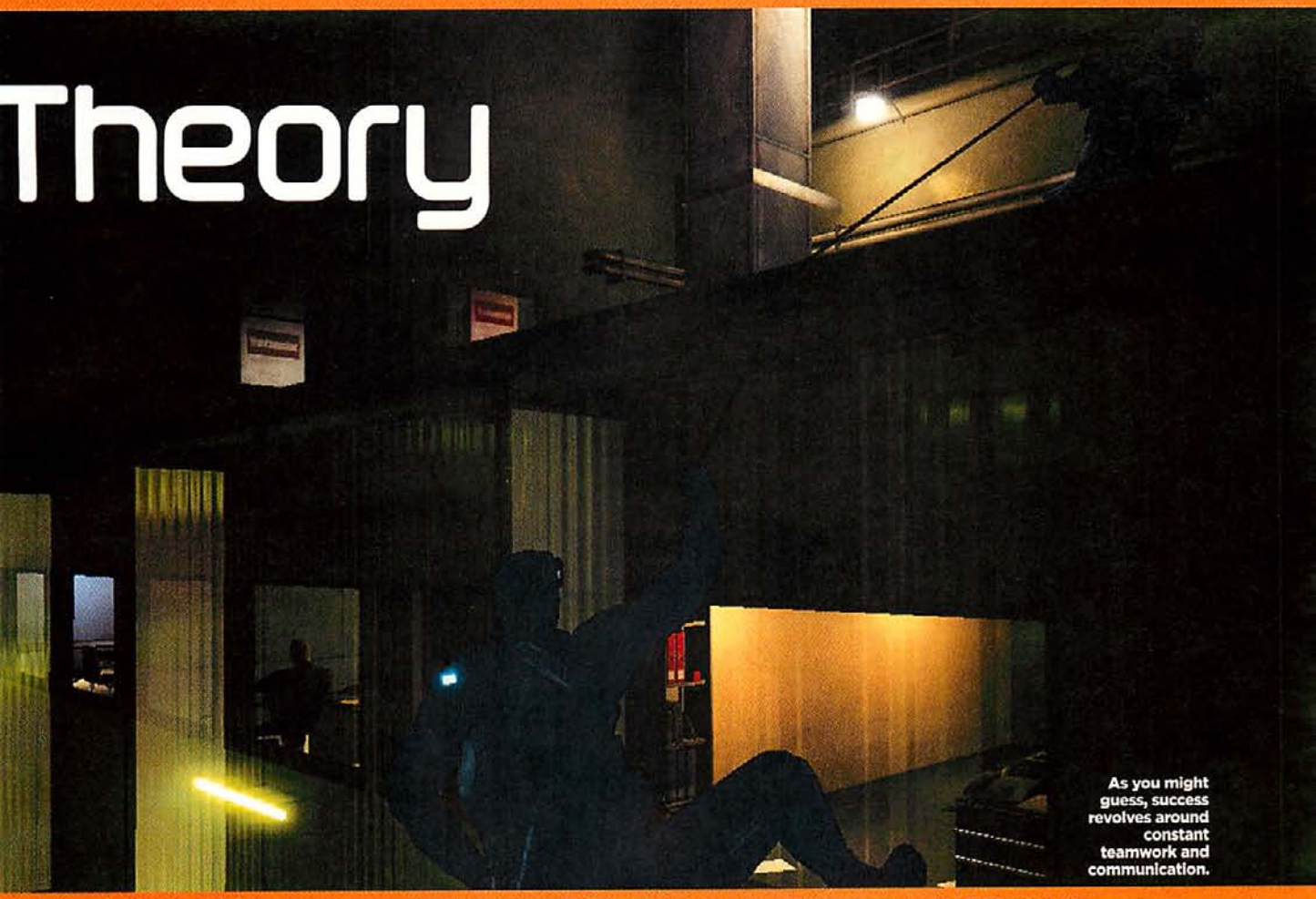
**Eager for more Sam Fisher? Here's a peek at the first single-player level**

You'll insert yourself into the enemy complex via a series of dark caves. Night vision is a must.

As always, staying still and silent will help you get the jump on your adversaries.

Sneaking up on one of the unsuspecting guards provides some much-needed recon for the mission at hand.

# Theory



As you might guess, success revolves around constant teamwork and communication.

## 3 THE TOMOENAGE

This one may be stretching the boundaries of stealth gaming—but hey, *Splinter Cell*'s multiplayer has never aimed too high with the realism. The tomoenage, or "circle throw," is a judo move in which one person grabs the other, sticks a foot into his chest, and rolls backward on the ground, sending his partner flying. You'll use this move to throw your partner across large gaps.

## 4 THE MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE DROP-IN

Yeah, you probably saw this one coming a mile away. This technique has one spy holding a rope while the other glides silently into the heavily secured room below...just like in the movies! Like the rappelling maneuver, this move requires steady voice communication, as each spy will have a different view of the action.

## 5 A HELPING HAND

One of the simplest co-op techniques is to work together as you climb up ledges: Have your partner boost you onto a higher platform, then reach down and pull him up behind you. This move enables spies to gain leverage by taking the high ground—and to make hasty escapes by taking routes that enemies can't follow. ⊠ Matt Leone

The Word: **BOOST 'N' PULL**

Lights out!

The man you've been ordered to rescue is being tortured and interrogated by enemy forces. Looks like a pretty grisly situation.

Just one more guard between you and the hostage. But have you reached him in time?

A bridge far enough.

The detailed *Empire Earth* engine does it again!

What's *Empire Earth* without a touch of sci-fi?

Force fields are handy for preventing death from above.

PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: Mad Doc Software GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: April 2005

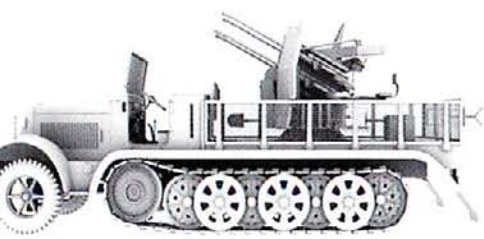
# Empire Earth II

## Same song, simpler verse?

**Imagine an RTS that's streamlined, distilled down to some basic principles. Big Huge Games' *Rise of Nations*, for instance. Now imagine an epic sprawl of rules, powers, units, and resources. Stainless Steel's *Empire Earth*, for instance. Imagine trying to reconcile these two approaches into the apparent paradox of more streamlined sprawl. This is what Mad Doc Software seems to be doing with *Empire Earth II*, a complex but manageable RTS for players who aren't afraid of a lot of detail.**

### K.I.M.S.

It's easy to picture the developers at Mad Doc putting up signs around the office that read, "Keep it manageable, stupid!" They seem determined to preserve the immense amount of variety in *Empire Earth* without heaping it up into a mountain of stats, resources, units, and the deluge of other features that buried the original game under a mudslide of micromanagement.



For instance, you'll have dozens of peons in a typical game of *EE2*. In addition to building, your workers harvest four basic resources, two epoch-specific resources, tech points from universities, and bonuses from city centers. And they do it across the multiple territories that comprise an *EE2* map.

### STOP TOUCHING ME

It sounds like an exercise in herding cats, but Mad Doc has created a simple centralized interface—you can manage all your peons with a few clicks on the main screen. Do you have a surplus of lumber and a shortage of gold? Hold the cursor over the resource display and you'll see exactly how many peons are harvesting each resource. Just left-click lumber a few times to "pick up" some citizens and right-click on gold to "drop" them there—you're done! There's also a detailed full-screen map available if you need to fine-tune your peon placement. In fact, you can play through an entire game of *EE2* without once clicking on a worker to tell him what to harvest.

### AGE OF SALTPETER

Another unique element is the way the epochs progress. The game's 15 epochs range from the Stone Age to the modern day, topped off with a vaguely sci-fi themed epoch. But unlike any other age-driven RTS, this isn't necessarily a race to the finish line.

Each epoch has a set of 12 technologies; you have to research six of them before you can "buy" the next epoch, at which point the six unresearched techs will be lost to you forever. So there's a trade-off between maximum efficiency and the speed of your advancement.

Furthermore, some resources are replaced as you progress. For instance, when you change from epoch IX to epoch X, iron is phased out and saltpeter is introduced. If you've stockpiled a lot of iron, you might as well spend it on your military before you age up—or dump it on the market, making it easier for players who hang back to buy it up for their military. And then you're going to have to make sure you can secure whatever sources of saltpeter appear on the map...all without ever having to click on a single peon. **Tom Chick**

**The Word: CLICKY-OTOMY**

**Unlike any other age-driven RTS, this isn't necessarily a race to the finish line.**

"911
EMERGENCY..."
Please help me! <<

"...SHOTS FIRED!
REQUESTING
BACKUP"
>> I think he might be dead
"OFFICERS DOWN!
REPEAT...
OFFICERS DOW

MATURE 17+
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Intense Violence
Strong Language
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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SIERRA

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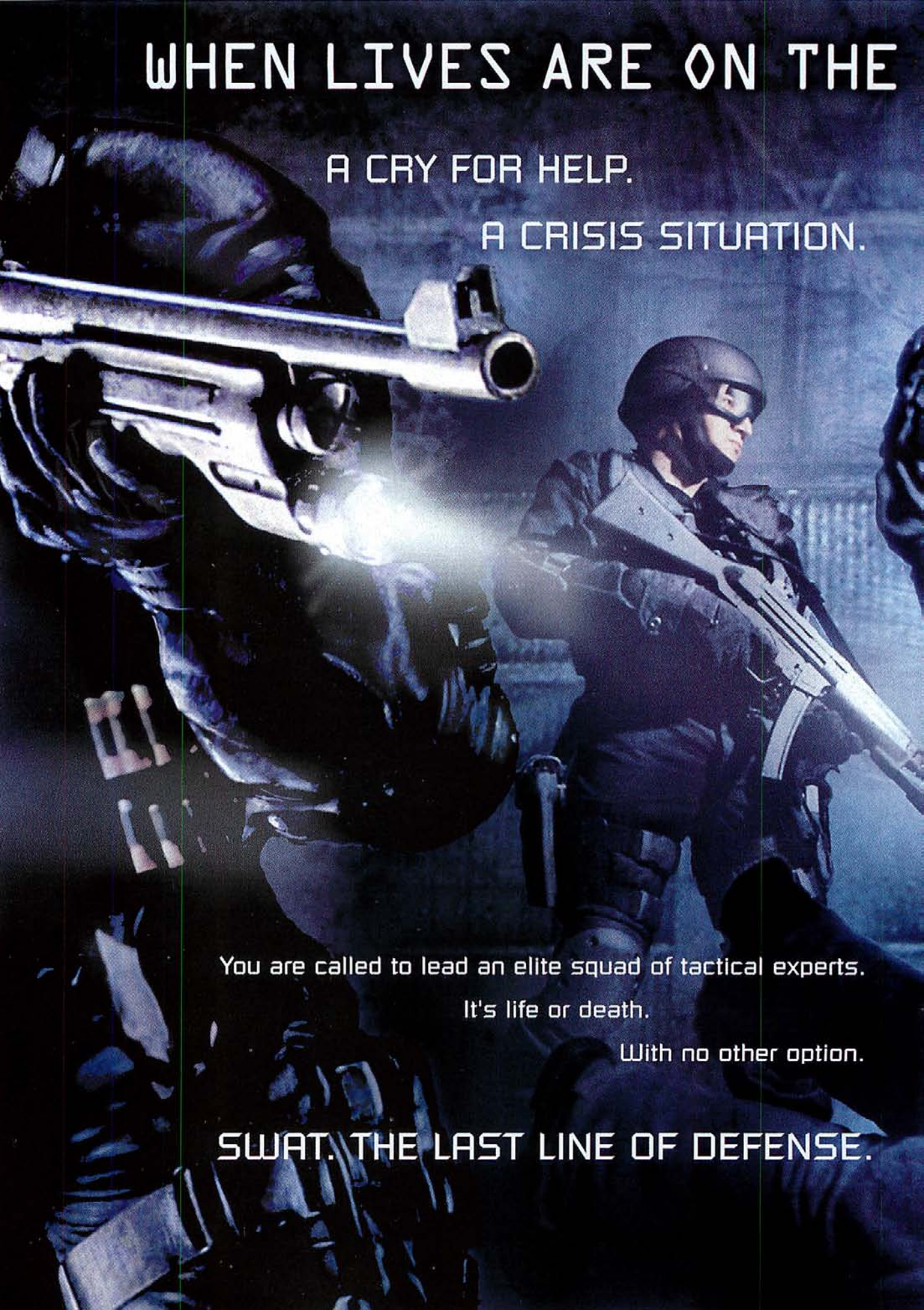

WHEN LIVES ARE ON THE
A CRY FOR HELP.
A CRISIS SITUATION.
You are called to lead an elite squad of tactical experts.
It's life or death.
With no other option.
SWAT. THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE.

LINE...S.W.A.T. ANSWERS THE

CALL.

UNPRECEDENTED
LEVEL OF AUTHENTICITY

SWAT SITUATIONS
AND ACTION WITH ONLINE
MULTIPLAYER

SWAT TACTICS
AND TEAMWORK
ON 14 LEVELS

SWAT EQUIPMENT
WITH LETHAL AND
NON-LETHAL
WEAPONRY

# SWAT 4

SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS

HEROES WANTED.

Mythic's next foray into the massively multiplayer market is still over a year away, but if it's anywhere near as good as *Dark Age of Camelot*, it should be well worth the wait. *Imperator* thrusts players into a dark alternate future, where the Roman Republic and the Mayan Empire wage a bloody war of intergalactic proportions. Here we see a group of Roman legionnaires battling it out in a debris-strewn area known as Tartarus. Located on the planet of Hades Prime, Tartarus is a former Republic dumping ground for wrecked cars and spacecraft. We don't quite know what these legionnaires are firing at, but judging from their gear, we're pretty sure they would clean up in any gladiatorial arena. They're armed to the teeth, sporting massive chain guns and plasma swords—not to mention some pretty badass armor that puts that crappy Russell Crowe movie to shame.

PUBLISHER: **Mythic Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Mythic Entertainment** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **2006**

# Imperat

or

PUBLISHER Vivendi Universal | Monolith | First-Person Shooter | June 2005

# F.E.A.R.

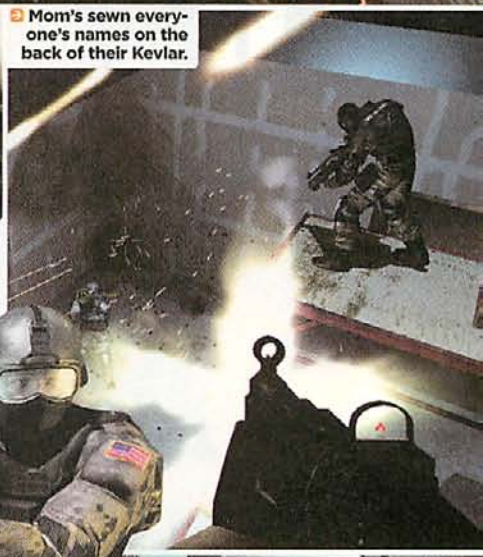
## Fright festival

**Ever since hordes of psychotic monks exploded in satisfyingly fleshy chunks in *Blood* way back in 1997, there's been an untapped underbelly of horror-based first-person shooters just waiting to be cut open and reinterpreted by developers from the *Silent Hill* school of game design. After bathing in goat's blood in preparation for hours of hands-on multiplayer *F.E.A.R.* action, we were surprised at how much the game's online portion relies on tried-and-true gaming staples to instantly addict you, instead of resorting to shock scares.**

### SCARE TACTICS

Monolith has crammed a triad of addictive innovations into the eight-level multiplayer mode: gob-smacking visuals, a fine balance between arcade gaming and tactical strategy, and good old-fashioned gimmickry. For starters, the Havoc engine is at work here, meaning that the game can throw rag dolls around, create visual filters for obscuring smoke after explosions, and clip bits off walls, all of which have direct effects on the tactics you'll use. Heads will fly, and arterial sprays can patter the ground with crimson.

But there's method to this multiplayer madness, with teamwork and tactical decisions affecting your score just as prominently as takedowns and head shots. Speaking of takedowns, we got to fire off a great assortment of weapons—the regulation assault rifles and shotguns were pretty cool, but the nail gun (pin dead foes to walls!) and the plasma cannon (it's the *Quake* rail gun—but prettier!) were the coolest of the bunch.



Mom's sewn everyone's names on the back of their Kevlar.

### A SLOW BALLET OF DEATH

What really got our hearts racing—and our blood-pressure medicine prescription increased—was the slow-mo mode. Or, if you're the designers of *Max Payne*, "that bullet-time design we nicked from *The Matrix*." This mode has you running headless-chicken style around the compact and bijou levels in search of a blinking device. Picking it up activates a slow-mo bar, which you can fill and trigger to bring the entire game to a screeching halt...or, at least, down to one-fifth regular time. You'll have a slight speed advantage over the opposition while the effect lasts, which makes it an especially sound tactical strategy.

Gimmickry aside, this looks to be a novel way of implementing a gaming effect more played out than bloom lighting. Whether it will be enough to wrench the fragsters away from *Counter-Strike: Source* and *Call of Duty* remains to be seen. **David S. J. Hodgson**

The Word: **FRIGHTFUL?**

**Teamwork and tactical decisions affect your score just as prominently as takedowns and head shots.**

# TRUE EVIL NEVER DIES



# DOOM 3

EXPANSION PACK

## RESURRECTION OF EVIL

A Game By id

idSoftware.com

Developed By nerve

Distributed By ACTIVISION

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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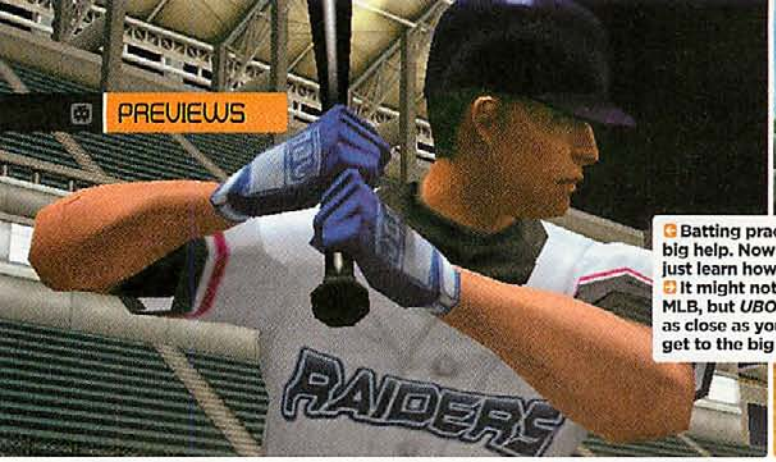
# Become a King.

FIREFLY STUDIOS'

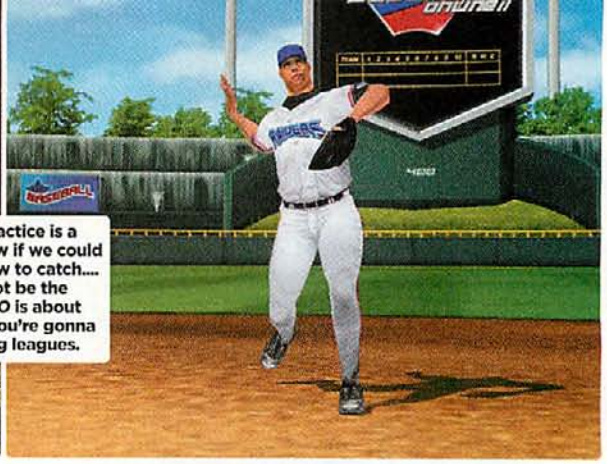
# STRONGHOLD 2

FIREFLY STUDIOS

2K GAMES




Batting practice is a big help. Now if we could just learn how to catch.... It might not be the MLB, but *UBO* is about as close as you're gonna get to the big leagues.



PUBLISHER: **Netamin** DEVELOPER: **Netamin** GENRE: **Sports MMO** RELEASE DATE: **April 2005**

# Ultimate Baseball Online

## Already above the Mendoza line

**It's roughly 14 days, 15 hours, and 50 minutes until pitchers and catchers report—and we'd be lying if we said *UBO* filled the gap entirely, because it's far from perfect. Pickup games are predicated on having enough willing participants on the server, so you may be in for a wait while rosters fill up. When you do hit the field, be prepared for various *bons mots* in the chat window (one recent gem during a game: "Anyone seen the movie *Anchorman*?" Uh, play ball, kid). And prior experience with baseball games probably won't help much here: Proper fielding requires perfect positioning, and a defensive practice mode hasn't yet been implemented. We're told it's on the way, along with deeper league play, the ability to catch and throw while running, and—if *UBO* is a success—a whole slew of sports MMOs.**

Yet it's still easy to spend a ton of time on *UBO*. Batting is easy to get the hang of, and the crack of the bat is damn satisfying. When chats stay on topic, the small (but dedicated) community does a good job of strategizing and cheering each other on. There's also an undeniable appeal to playing a baseball game against other human-operated opponents.

### HIT 'EM WHERE THEY AIN'T

You'll earn points by practicing and by making offensive and defensive plays on the field. Parameter points raise your overall level, while skill points can be distributed as you wish, allowing you to really customize your character—for example, you can max out your pitcher's curveball or your batter's ability to smash inside pitches. The only way to know a player's specialties is to face him repeatedly—just like in real baseball.

According to developer Netamin, *UBO* is designed to put "you" in the game—to let armchair knuckleballers live out their dream of going to The Show. I'll be spending most of *UBO*'s launch date watching the A's home opener against Baltimore, but there's a good chance I'll have my PC running in the background—Weasel, my catcher, has some practicing to do. **Kristen Salvatore**

**The Word: CAN OF CORN**

PUBLISHER: **Eidos Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Traveller's Tales** GENRE: **Action** RELEASE DATE: **April 2005**

# Lego Star Wars

## A long time ago, in a toy factory far, far away....

**Despite the dubious critical success of its recent film incarnations, *Star Wars* still has some oomph to its name, and Traveller's Tales has seized the opportunity to bring gamers a fresh take on the saga—by fusing it with the nostalgia-inducing Lego franchise.**

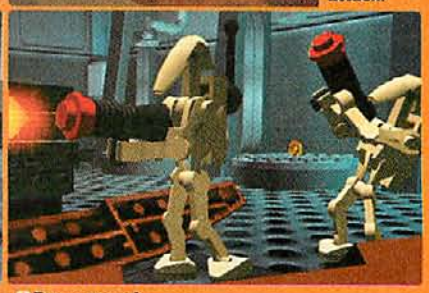
Yes, it's just like all those fan-made Internet trailers—but taken a step further. Anakin, Obi-Wan, R2-D2, and all the characters and locations of the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy are given the Lego treatment, turning the celebrated space opera into an action-packed battle between good blocks and evil blocks. Though we've sworn a Jedi oath to keep the new *Episode III* content under block and key (ha!), we can say that the game sports an epic feel and a deep, engaging narrative. Ah, who are we kidding? Jedi Knights grin maniacally as they sever the arms of annoying droids; pieces of furniture can be tossed about using Force powers; and you can even cause a room full of chairs to break out in a dance number, groovin' along to the tunes of everyone's favorite cantina band.

And the best part? You don't have to worry about any Legos breaking on you mid-lightsaber duel. The farce—er, Force—is strong with this one. **Rebecca Gross**

**The Word: USE THE FARCE**

Obi-Wan staves off a deadly laser attack.

Natalie Portman has never looked better!



Roger roger!

"Stealth with a sexy twist" XBN

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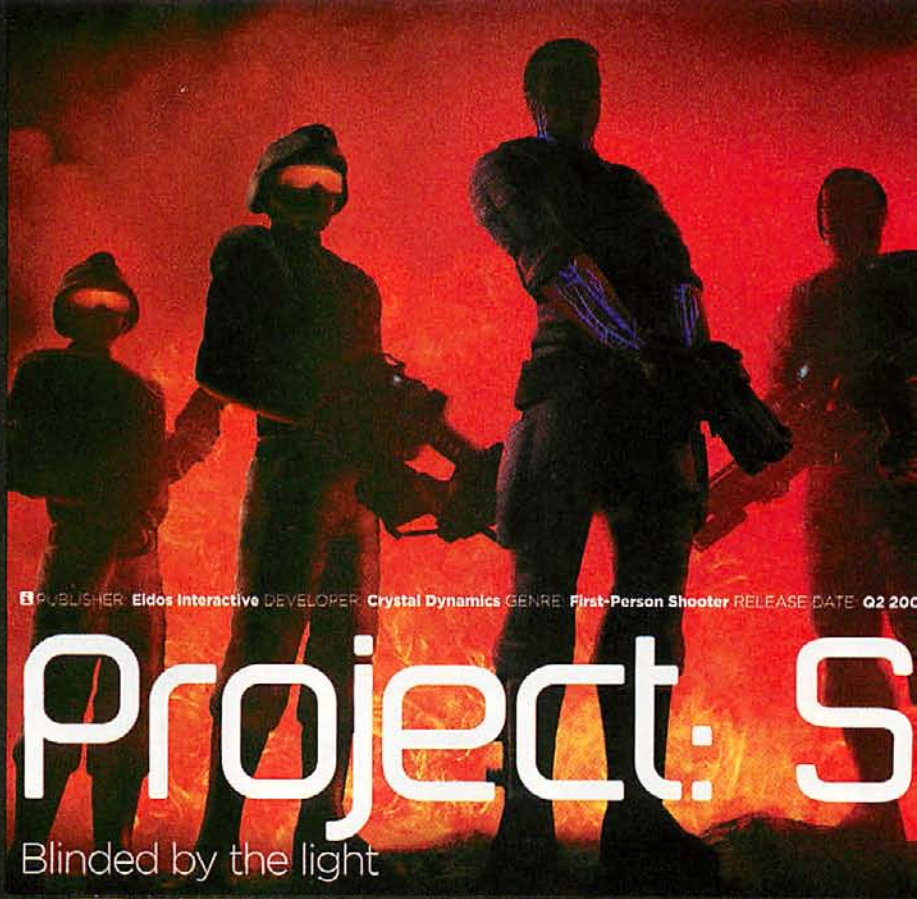
# PIPELINE

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

| Game | Publisher | Expected |
|---|---|---|
| Advent Rising | Majesco | May 2005 |
| Age of Empires III | Microsoft | 2005 |
| Auto Assault | NCsoft | 2005 |
| Bad Day L.A. | Enlight | Q3 2005 |
| The Bard's Tale | VU Games | 2005 |
| Battle of Britain | Ubisoft | Q1 2005 |
| Battlefield 2 | EA | May 2005 |
| Battlestations: Midway | THQ | Q2 2005 |
| BioShock | TBA | TBA |
| Black & White 2 | EA | 2005 |
| Blitzkrieg II | CDV Software | Q2 2005 |
| Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth | Bethesda | Apr 2005 |
| City of Villains | NCsoft | Q4 2005 |
| Civilization IV | TBA | 2005 |
| Cold Fear | Ubisoft | Q2 2005 |
| Commandos: Strike Force | Eidos | Q2 2005 |
| D&D Online | Atari | Nov 2005 |
| Dragon Age | TBA | 2006 |
| Dungeon Siege II | Microsoft | Q1 2005 |
| Elder Scrolls IV | Bethesda | 2005 |
| Empire Earth II | VU Games | Apr 2005 |
| F.E.A.R. | VU Games | Jun 2005 |
| Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich | VU Games | Q1 2005 |
| Ghost Recon 2 | Ubisoft | Jun 2005 |
| GTA: San Andreas | Rockstar | Jun 2005 |
| Guild Wars | NCsoft | Apr 2005 |
| Hitman: Blood Money | Eidos | Q2 2005 |
| Imperator | Mythic | 2006 |
| Imperial Glory | Eidos | May 2005 |
| Jaws | Majesco | Q3 2005 |
| King Kong | Ubisoft | Q4 2005 |
| Lego Star Wars | Eidos | Apr 2005 |
| The Matrix Online | Sega | Q2 2005 |
| Middle-Earth Online | VU Games | 2005 |
| Myst V: End of Ages | Ubisoft | Q3 2005 |
| Neverwinter Nights 2 | Atari | Q2 2006 |
| Operation Flashpoint 2 | Codemasters | 2006 |
| Pariah | Groove Games | Mar 2005 |
| Project: Snowblind | Eidos | Q2 2005 |
| Psychonauts | Majesco | Apr 2005 |
| Quake IV | Activision | 2005 |
| Rainbow Six: Lockdown | Ubisoft | Q2 2005 |
| S.T.A.L.K.E.R. | THQ | May 2005 |
| Sacred Underworld | Ascaron | Q1 2005 |
| Splinter Cell Chaos Theory | Ubisoft | Mar 2005 |
| Star Wars: Empire at War | LucasArts | Fall 2005 |
| Stolen | Hip Games | Apr 2005 |
| Stronghold 2 | Global Star | Apr 2005 |
| Stubbs the Zombie | Aspyr | Q3 2005 |
| SWAT 4 | VU Games | Apr 2005 |
| Tabula Rasa | NCsoft | Sep 2005 |
| The Movies | Activision | 2005 |
| The Sims 2: University | EA | Mar 2005 |
| TimeShift | Atari | Fall 2005 |

■ New ■ Update



PUBLISHER: **Eidos Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Crystal Dynamics** GENRE: **First-Person Shooter** RELEASE DATE: **Q2 200**

# Project: S

## Blinded by the light

Even during a firefight, it's tough to find parking.

**Barely enough time has passed for any one person to have played last year's smorgasbord of shooters in its entirety. But like going back for thirds at Thanksgiving dinner, sometimes you just can't get enough...especially with an FPS that sports as many creative features as Eidos' *Project: Snowblind*. High-tech gadgetry and biological character enhancement are just the beginning—we've asked producer John Chowanec to tell us more about the game and give us the skinny on what to expect from the PC version.**

**CGW:** FPS fans have been groomed to expect certain things. How difficult is it to break away from the genre's typical conventions and clichés?

**John Chowanec:** Once we really started to focus on the weapons and augmentations, it became clear to us that, given the pace of our game, these elements would add quite a bit to the mix. When you're coming up against a large contingent of enemy soldiers, it's really up to you how to dispatch them. Given the flexibility of the weapons, it's quite common to discover new ways to combine them when fighting large groups. With each weapon having a distinct alternate firing mode, you can get pretty creative.

**CGW:** Is there anything in particular you think the team really hit the mark with in *Snowblind*?

**JC:** There are a few things I think we've done very well, such as the concept of "smart weapons." Given the general chaos of the battlefield, it was important for us to devise a host of A.I.-driven weapons to help players deal with the hordes of enemies typically onscreen. For example, the alternate fire on the

# nowblind

You'll find no shortage of cool weapons in *Snowblind*.

Flechette gun looses a swarm of attack drones that literally run on their own A.I., finding enemies to kill. This can be especially handy when you're facing two separate groups of enemies and you need to keep one group busy. The attack drones also instill a panicked reaction in enemy troops, causing them to create crossfire. Oftentimes, they'll wipe each other out simply trying to take care of the drones—it's pretty fun to watch. There will be about 24 different weapons and augmentations in total, which should be enough variety for just about anyone.

**CGW:** Do the mechanical differences between console and PC shooters have a large impact on how *Snowblind* plays? Who would have the advantage in a theoretical PC-versus-Xbox match?

**JC:** It's hard to say. The console versions have targeting assist specifically for the controller, which the PC version doesn't require...but who am I kidding? I think the PC user would win...the mouse is always so accurate when properly employed.

**"Who am I kidding? I think the PC user would win."**

**CGW:** Is the PC version designed to support player modifications, custom maps, or official expansion packs?

**JC:** We're definitely not ruling out possible expansions, but we're also not planning support for player mods or custom map creation. Maybe next time!

**Andrew Pfister**

The Word: **FROSTBITE**

## THE PREVIEWS GRAVEYARD

**Well, we thought they were cool**

Not every game makes it out the door. Here's a look back at a few titles that ended up on the cutting-room floor and what we said about them at the time. Did we make the right calls? The world will never know.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD CLASSIC ISSUE 250

**Dragon Empires**
LIFESPAN: **09/2001 - 09/2004**
PUBLISHER: **Codemasters**
DEVELOPER: **Codemasters**
**"Storming an enemy city atop a fire-breathing behemoth sounds like it could be fun." –John Houlihan,** *CGW* #212 (March 2002)

**SimsVille**
LIFESPAN: **05/2000 - 09/2001**
PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **Maxis**
**"This much is certain—when *SimsVille* ships sometime early next year, millions of people will buy it, it'll be fun, it'll be addictive, and it'll give us the illusion of control and power." –Robert Coffey,** *CGW* #205 (August 2001)

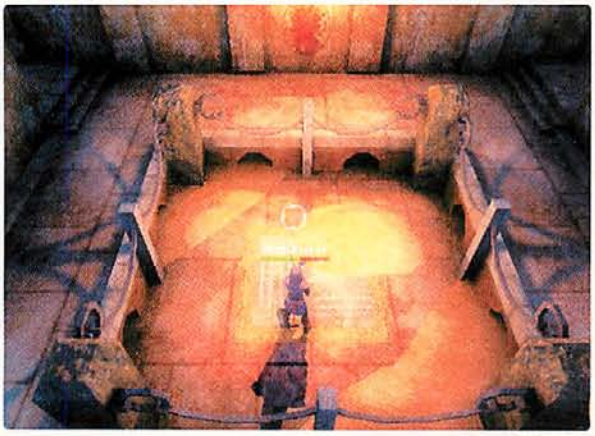
**Sovereign**
LIFESPAN: **08/1999 - 02/2003**
PUBLISHER: **SOE**
DEVELOPER: **Verant**
**"There really hasn't been a game like this before, and if Verant can deliver, particularly in balancing the game properly, it promises to be one fascinating experience." –Mark Asher,** *CGW* #185 (December 1999)

**SWAT: Urban Justice**
LIFESPAN: **02/2002 - 03/2004**
PUBLISHER: **Sierra**
DEVELOPER: **Sierra**
**"Gamers are treated to greater replay value, thanks to tools for editing entities, missions, and campaigns." –V. Long,** *CGW* #213 (April 2002)

**Ultima Worlds Online: Origin**
LIFESPAN: **05/2000 - 03/2001**
PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **Origin**
**"Fortunately, the game itself looks very promising, although given the recent history of *Ultimas*, it would be prudent to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude for this one." –Desslock,** *CGW* #193 (August 2000)

**Ultima X: Odyssey**
LIFESPAN: **08/2003 - 06/2004**
PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **Origin**
**"In one giant leap, *Odyssey* is about to propel *Ultima* from the graphical middle ages to the top tier of massively multiplayer games coming in 2004." –Ryan Scott,** *CGW* #232 (November 2003)

# DIGITAL UNDERGROUND The best games you've never seen



FROM: **Iridon Interactive** AVAILABILITY: **Q2 2005**

## Everown

**Word on the street:** The world's first massively multiplayer murder simulator? Well...not exactly. However, player-versus-player encounters are paramount in this game of gladiatorial combat. Participants choose a fantastical or futuristic character and then assault adversaries using poison or traps, as well as missile and melee attacks. Like *Ultima Online*, *Everown* shows the action from above, with multiple camera angles providing close-ups of every kill. Good news for newbies, too: Built-in matchmaking services guarantee everyone an equal chance of survival.
**Sounds kinda beat:** As with any original concept, it could work brilliantly or flop harder than *Daikatana*. We're also somewhat dubious about Czech developer StringData, which has yet to make an impact on the industry. But by promoting tactical forethought over the standard treadmill approach—and supporting 56K modems—this enterprising outfit might just be on to something. Paired with the proper publisher, the title could theoretically create a comfortable niche amongst enthusiasts disenchanted with most MMOs' plodding pace.

FROM: **Wicked Studios** AVAILABILITY: **Q2 2005**

## Keepsake

**Word on the street:** Poor Lydia. Upon arriving at Dragonvale Academy, a school for the magical arts, the unfortunate apprentice finds the campus completely devoid of life. You'll help her search the university's grounds for her missing classmates. Aided by an active, on-demand hint system and intuitive interface, *Keepsake*—a visually striking fantasy tale—lends itself naturally to amateur adventurers. Translation: Anyone miffed by *Myst*'s difficulty should love it.
**Sounds kinda beat:** Hmm, Wicked Studios...can't say we recognize the name. And it's not like *King's Quest* clones stand much of a chance at storming the sales charts this side of 1993, either. Worse, several of the team's principal contributors boast former ties with now-defunct publisher Cryo Interactive, a company known for creating singularly disappointing games. What we've seen of *Keepsake* so far looks impressive, though. Stay tuned..

FROM: **Shadow Tor Studios** AVAILABILITY: **Q3 2005**

## Barrow Hill

**Word on the street:** Finally, a title that's guaranteed to score well with scholars and shut-ins alike. Set against the backdrop of Barrow Hill—a 4,500-year-old burial mound and accompanying stone circle located in Cornwall, England—this archeological adventure is based on unfettered access to footage from the site. Desktop detectives are charged with delving into a wealth of puzzles and pagan cultural references as they attempt to uncover who—or what—lurks beneath the mysterious landmark.
**Sounds kinda beat:** UK-based Shadow Tor Studios admits it outright: It's a new media outfit, not a game production house. However, it has cut its teeth on educational programs, short films, and other interactive amusements. Furthermore, the local legends surrounding the game's real-world setting (disappearing workers, off-color religious rites, etc.) are certainly frightening enough, even before undergoing digital enhancement. Chances are, this outing will scare the pants off the few gamers who bother wearing them.

WRITTEN BY SCOTT STEINBERG

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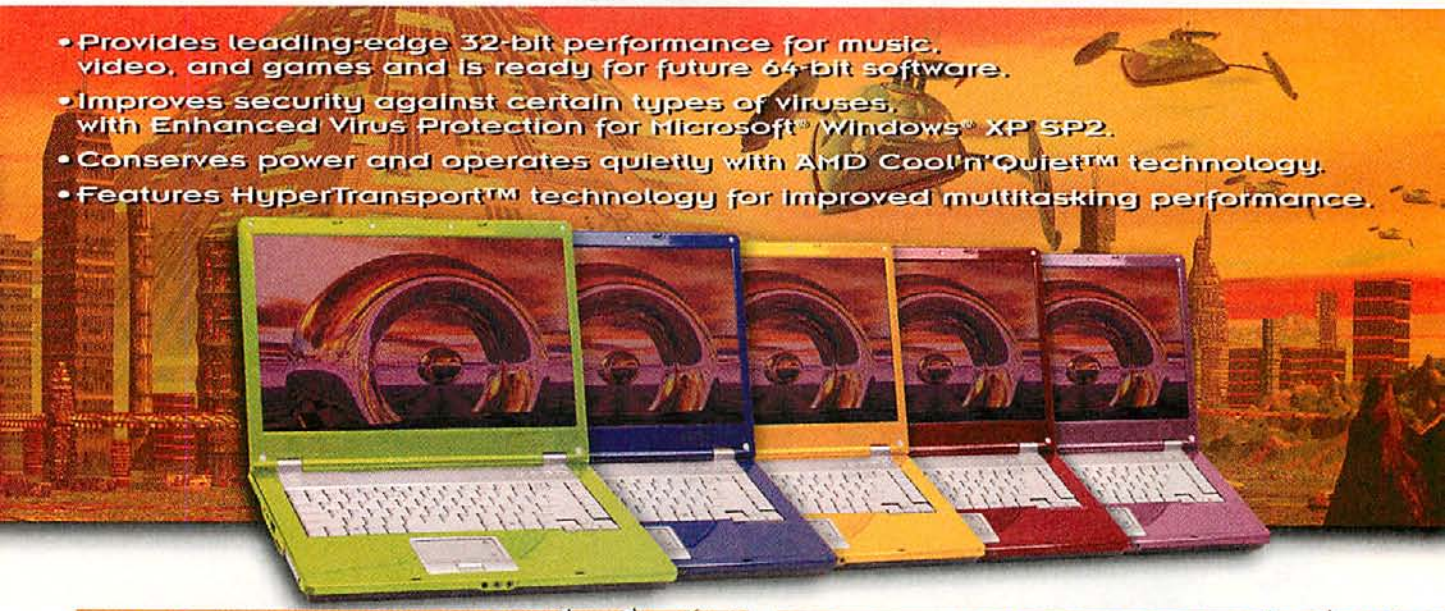

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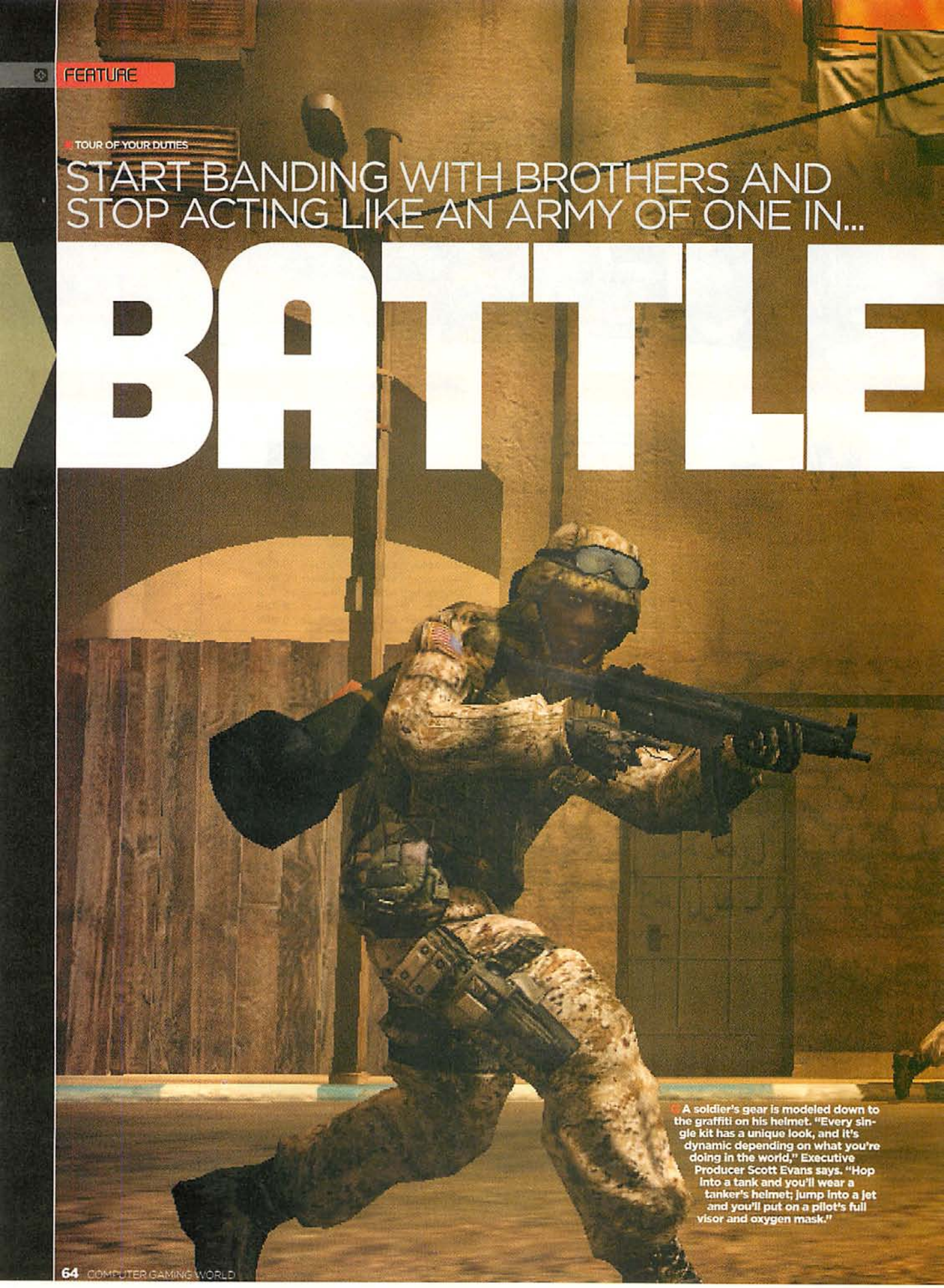
# BATTLE



A soldier's gear is modeled down to the graffiti on his helmet. "Every single kit has a unique look, and it's dynamic depending on what you're doing in the world," Executive Producer Scott Evans says. "Hop into a tank and you'll wear a tanker's helmet; jump into a jet and you'll put on a pilot's full visor and oxygen mask."

# FIELD 2

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **Digital Illusions** GENRE: **Multiplayer Shooter** RELEASE DATE: **Summer 2005**

## BY SHAWN ELLIOTT

**A Predator, the unmanned aerial vehicle that's tele-fragged at least two top-ranking al Qaeda members in the real-world war on terror, talks us to our target: a small Middle-Eastern Coalition (MEC) force probing our outpost's perimeter. I'm sitting forward in an AH-1W Super Cobra's gunner seat with one of EA's finest behind me on the cyclic control stick. I see silhouettes through my cannon camera, a sterilizing filter that sets a surreal screen between my 20mm and the men in its crosshairs. "Smoke 'em," the pilot says as he holds a practiced hover.**

High-explosive rounds hammer the desert floor, turning a convoy into a quarter-acre junkyard. When the dust settles there's one less hostile. No bragging, no "suck it down, s***bag"—just a solemn "kill confirmed." At times, the game is too true-to-life for you to gloat about death, but the real reason to stow the smugness is because, even in a boron-shielded cockpit, we're still far from safe. *Battlefield 2*, developer Digital Illusions' latest massive, multiplayer war zone set to storm store shelves this June, may be lifelike, but it's also balanced. "Every kit is effective against another type of vehicle or infantry class, and, on the flip side, has vulnerabilities as well...much like rock-paper-scissors," explains executive producer Scott Evans. "Trying to establish these relationships takes a ton of tuning time. We playtest, make a change, playtest, make a change—thousands of times in the development cycle."

### ROCK, PAPER, MISSILES

One of the guys we're up against might wield a wire-guided surface-to-air missile. Another might be a medic, ready to revive his fallen friends with a pair of defibrillator paddles. And if the last man standing happens to be a squad leader (who also serves as a mobile spawn point for the eight or so soldiers under his command), we'll have to cauterize the Hydra's head.

What their makeup is, we'll never know. Viewing the world in real time from a strategic, top-down vantage point, our commander says satellite imagery shows inbound backup. As we whisk away to intercept the airborne spearhead, he preps the artillery to soften the armored prong below. Rounds strike the solid skins of tanks and transports, beautifully twisting tons of steel. This is a gorgeous game. But for all the miles of visibility, the sand-blasted streets and bump-mapped shop fronts, the slow-rolling foothills thick with scrub, *Battlefield 2* looks best all blown to hell. "We're using an entirely new engine, built from the ground up," Evans explains. "You're seeing contrails on missiles now and motion blur when artillery blows up. We've even got birds in the bushes that fly off as you approach, possibly alerting other players to your presence—a lot of little touches that bring the world to life." If shelled, certain bridges collapse like houses of cards. Rag-doll physics toss around troopers before dropping them in obscene dead-man poses. And, as I'm about to find, air combat fills the sky with smoke and fire.

**BIRDS IN BUSHES FLY OFF AS YOU APPROACH, POSSIBLY ALERTING PLAYERS TO YOUR PRESENCE.**

It is high time for a little urban renewal—*Battlefield 2*-style.

**MEDIC**
PRIMARY WEAPON: The M16A2 assault rifle.
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Medics can patch up wounded comrades and revive the recently fallen with defibrillator paddles.
TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Shouting "Clear!" and stopping a camping sniper's heart with a shot of electric current.

**ANTITANK**
PRIMARY WEAPONS: The Predator one-man, portable fire-and-forget missile system overflies its target and fires its warhead directly onto the more vulnerable armor at the top of a tank.
TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Curving a wire-guided missile around a building and into the guys behind it.

**ENGINEER**
PRIMARY WEAPON: The Remington 11-87 combat shotgun is devastating in any firefight.
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Engineers repair wrecked vehicles and create on-the-spot motor pools by entering a Humvee or APC.
TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Booby-trapping a bridge with enough antitank mines to take out an entire brigade.

**SNIPER**
PRIMARY WEAPON: The 15-pound M24 rifle can accurately hit a target up to 800 meters away.
TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Sniping a passing pilot through his cockpit (it's now possible) and smiling as his plane crashes.

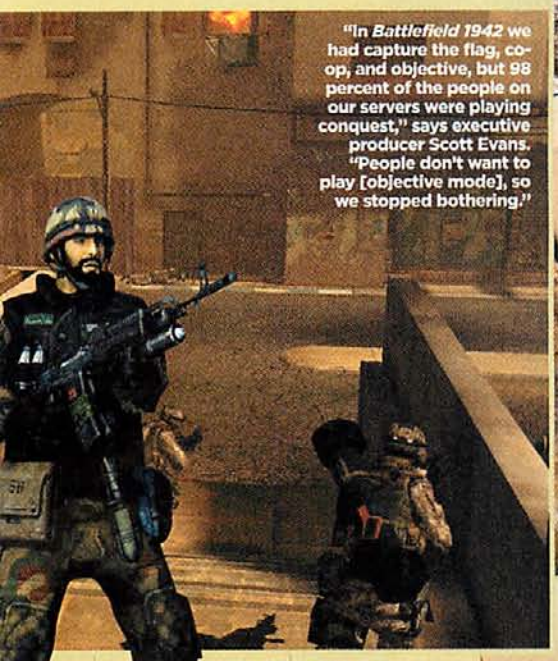
## NO GUTS, NO GLORY

**EVER SINCE WE BROKE the news on *Battlefield 2* last year, we've had one big question, one thing that bugged us about the original game: The gameplay focused on communication and coordination, but the game fostered neither. For career soldiers who organized into clans and used third-party programs such as TeamSpeak to stay in touch and strategize, seesawing capture points weren't a problem. Weekend warriors who popped onto public servers, though, lacked Patton-approved battle plans.**

**Finally, a proper chain of command! EA wants to ensure that any player can pick a match and become a working part of a well-oiled war machine, and it's providing both the ability and incentive to start banding with brothers and stop acting like an army of one. Here's the scoop on how it works, from the top down.**

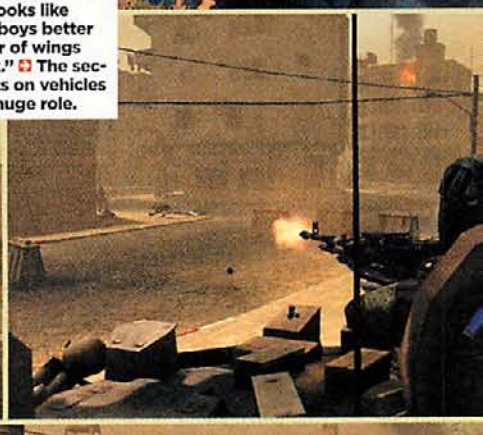
### COMMANDERS

**In addition to dropping shells on foes and supplies on friendlies (see Generally Speaking, page 68), a commander calls the shots, saying who needs to be where and when via in-game voice chat. He can also shoot it out in the dirt and muck, but, being distracted by other duties, he is better off staying someplace safe. To become head honcho, a player must meet specific rank requirements, post his profile, and apply for the position.**



"In *Battlefield 1942* we had capture the flag, co-op, and objective, but 98 percent of the people on our servers were playing conquest," says executive producer Scott Evans. "People don't want to play [objective mode], so we stopped bothering."

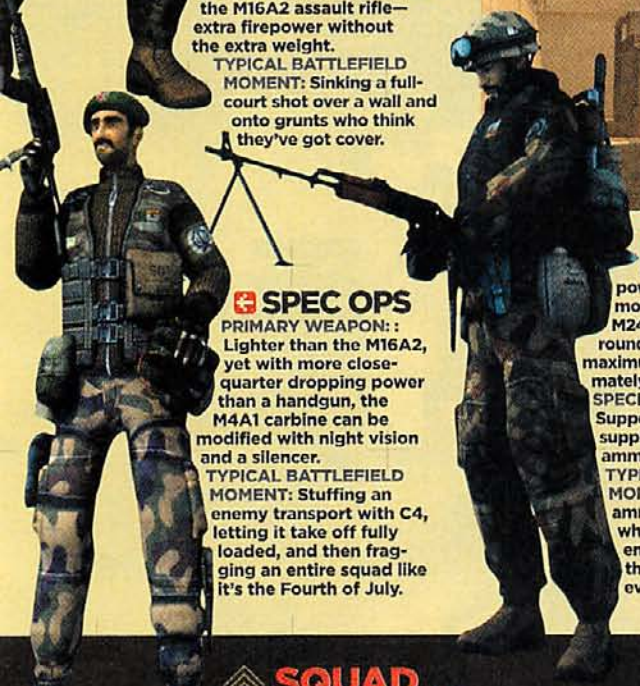
The targeting computer makes combat easy for those who are scared of the twitch factor. "Uh-oh. Looks like those Duke boys better sprout a pair of wings pretty quick." The secondary spots on vehicles now play a huge role.



## ASSAULT

PRIMARY WEAPON: A breech-loaded, single-shot, pump-action weapon, the M203 grenade launcher attaches to the M16A2 assault rifle—extra firepower without the extra weight.

TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Sinking a full-court shot over a wall and onto grunts who think they've got cover.



## SPEC OPS

PRIMARY WEAPON: : Lighter than the M16A2, yet with more close-quarter dropping power than a handgun, the M4A1 carbine can be modified with night vision and a silencer.

TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Stuffing an enemy transport with C4, letting it take off fully loaded, and then fragging an entire squad like it's the Fourth of July.

## SUPPORT

PRIMARY WEAPON: A powerful and accurate mobile weapon, the M249 belches out 1,000 rounds per minute at a maximum range of approximately two miles.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Support class soldiers can supply allies with ammunition.

TYPICAL BATTLEFIELD MOMENT: Leave a stack of ammo out as bait. Then, when unsuspecting enemies come, chew through 'em before they even know what hit 'em.

## SQUAD LEADERS

While assuming leadership is simple—make and label a squad from the appropriate menu—proving your worth takes practice. Grunts sign into squads with no strings attached, so they're free to leave and find another should you start looking like a lousy leader. To maintain gung-ho morale, you'll want to consult with your commander, conveying his intel to your troops and calling in artillery support and supply drops, as well as set waypoints through a simple onscreen command interface that pops smoke where you want your men. Otherwise, sticking together is a cinch, as all of a squad's headsets are tied together, and highlighted icons both hover above squad-mates' heads and mark their positions on your in-game map.

## SQUAD MEMBERS

Two things nobody wanted to do in *Battlefield*s gone by: tune up a tank and then watch its driver disappear without lending you a lift, or selflessly patch up an ally only to be shot down in the process. But because this *Battlefield* actually awards points for the performance of class-specific deeds, it's now in your personal interest to help friends in need. Plus, without ammo bins and first-aid stations (beyond airdropped crates), allies are the only way to stay stocked up. But here's what'll really have medics rushing you like merchants in a third-world market: *BF2*'s persistent stat-tracking system never forgets your finest hours, even across multiple matches, and gradually grants you access to new guns and gadgets, as well as permission to apply for commander status.

# GENERALLY SPEAKING

## Executive producer Scott Evans plays boss in commander mode

***Battlefield 2*'s persistent stat-tracking service records more than straight kill counts. The guy you've fragged the most; the guy who's fragged you the most; class, weapon, vehicle, and map preferences—it's all there. Plus, you can see from here what bonus weapons and abilities you've unlocked for each class.**

1

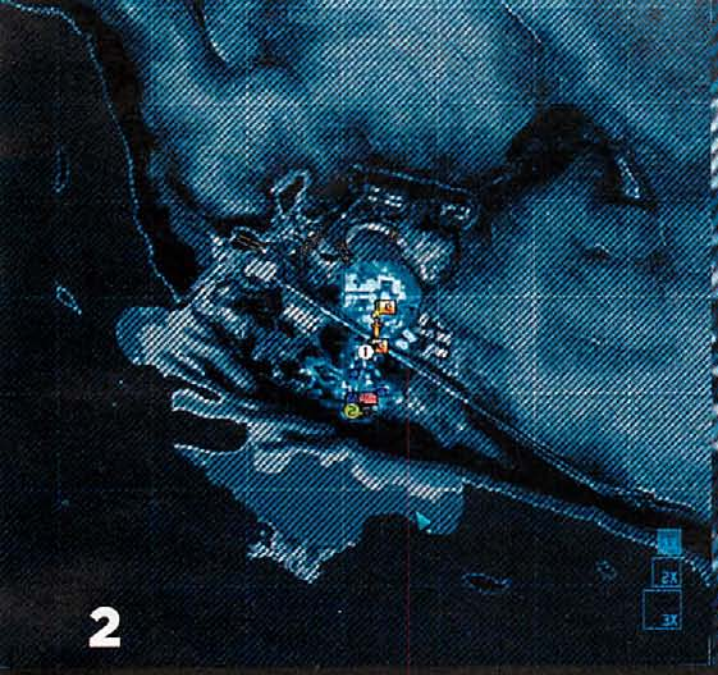
As the ranking soldier on the server, I just applied for and was approved to become the battlefield commander for the USMC. This is a 16-player match on the Gulf of Oman map. This means the action is going to be fast and fluid between three closely placed control points. I'm going to have to stay on my toes. First up: a satellite sweep to reveal the positions of enemies over the entire battlefield. But only the commander can see it. Since the players on my team have formed only one squad, I relay what I see over VOIP to the squad leader.

4

I decide to zoom in my satellite view to a close-up over the firefight. I see lots of enemy soldiers getting ready to ambush a friendly M1 tank. Time to drop in some artillery to support the assault!

5

# I BRING UP THE ORDERS MENU AND...



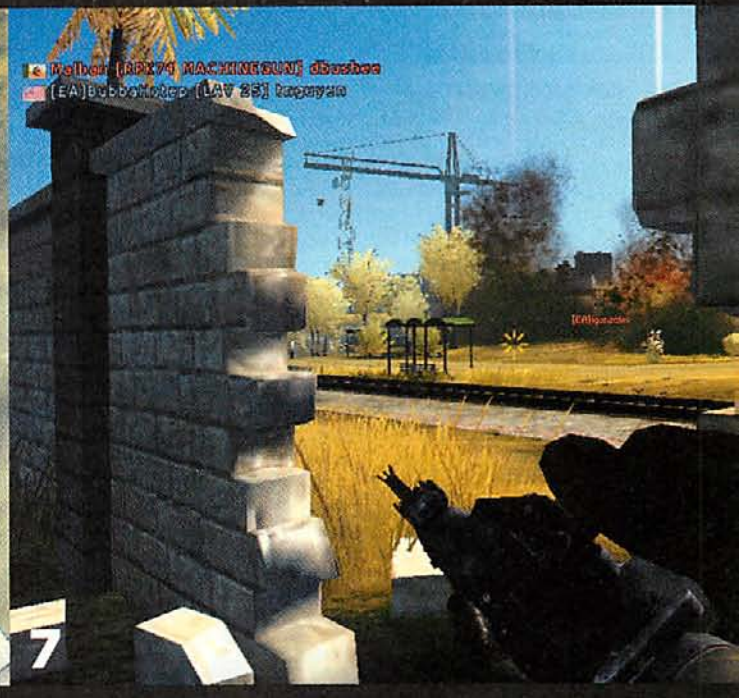
2

The rest of my team has now organized into two squads under my command (as indicated by the 1 and 2 icons on the screen). I immediately order them to assault the center control point. After issuing the order, the attack icon appears on my screen so I can remember the orders. My squad leaders, who are in-game, receive the attack order and off they go!

3

My MEC counterpart has probably ordered his squads to attack the same control point. I'm going to put up a UAV spy drone over the area I've ordered my squads to attack. The UAV will reveal the position of enemies in a small radius to my entire team. This info will help my teammates anticipate the enemy. Multiple enemies appear in the UAV detection radius! A hot firefight is ensuing around the control point.

6



7

## ...DROP AN ARTY STRIKE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ENEMY POSITION!

As the commander, I have the option to switch between first person and overhead view anytime I want. I decide to watch the artillery splash in first-person view. Boom! I just took out an enemy BTR-90 and two enemy infantries. My two squad leaders enthusiastically thank me over VOIP. Now it's time to push the enemy back into their base and capture that last control point.

### LEAVE THE DRIVING TO US

**There's no more sitting back and enjoying the ride. In some cases, a vehicle's second seat is just as important as the pilot's, putting you in charge of countermeasures and camera-guided missiles (the new big, bad mother of all *Battlefield 2* weapons). In the air, shotgun seats also offer better visibility, crucial for spotting tangos before they can slip into your blind spot, whereas land-lubbing passengers can choose between manning machine guns or firing their own class-specific weapons out of windows.**

**"...and if you look to your left, you'll see a column of tanks that just got decimated."**

## MY SQUAD LEADER CHIMES IN OVER THE HEADSET: "LOOKS LIKE YOU NEED A HELPING HAND. HANG TIGHT."

### KODAK MOMENTS

The Cobra's missile warning system sounds, and my pilot starts emptying countermeasures like confetti—MiGs at 10 and 2. I pull on my parachute and float between a pair of flak bursts. It's the sort of situation only characters in *G.I. Joe* cartoons survive, but thanks to the game's TiVo-like recording function, I have video evidence.

"This is an open sandbox environment governed by physics rather than scripted rules, and crazy things can happen," says Evans. "I've had foes in fast attack boats swipe our LCAC [short for landing craft, air cushion. LCACs are used to transport weapon systems, equipment, cargo, and personnel from ship to shore], drive it back to base and pack it with antiaircraft platforms, then park it beneath our carrier's flight deck to shoot planes as they take off. That said, we wanted to give players a tool with which to capture and trade movies of these 'battlefield moments.'"

Bailing out over no-man's-land, it could take me longer to hump to the nearest hot spot than if I had died and gone to respawn heaven. But this is not *1942*. Here, I can sprint—simple and essential. Here, the theater of operations can expand and contract according to player count. With 15 people on the server, the map remains a manageable size with two or three capture points to contest. As the game grows to 32 or 64 soldiers, server admins can make boundaries bulge, building new firebases to fight for. As it turns out, I'm just a hop, skip, and a low crawl from the next encounter.

The base belongs to the MEC—no way a single trooper will turn it, so I slip into a shanty and sit tight. Outside, an enemy support class supplies his squadmates with ammo. Down the sights of an M4 carbine, he's an easy shot, but best to wait for reinforcements. Suddenly, my squad leader chimes in over the headset: "Looks like you could use a helping hand out there. Hang tight."

I'm sabotaging an airdropped supply crate with sticks of C4 when the Bradley arrives, Bushmaster blazing. It's only after climbing into the cupola that I see the on-foot hostiles we're firing at. "Turn that turret," I stutter, but it's too late. One flanked and fired; now we're scrap metal and a scorch mark with a smug bastard, TOW in hand, squatting over us. Still, it's too soon to collect my dog tags...not when revenge is just a respawn away.

**Hint: You don't want the business end of this guy pointing in your general direction.**

**With all the aircraft in this game, AA units play a big role. Well, it doesn't hurt when you turn the turret against ground targets, either.**

IF YOU SEE THEM
IT'S TOO LATE
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

# 250...AND

**IN HONOR OF OUR 250TH ISSUE, *CGW* CRACKS OPEN THE ARCHIVES AND LOOKS AT WHAT'S COME TO PASS**

*Computer Gaming World* blinked into existence 250 issues ago in November 1981, and founder Russell Sipe's timing in launching the magazine was eerily prophetic. Just a few months earlier, IBM released the very first IBM PC. Designed by a team that was encouraged by IBM execs to bypass the company's restrictive bureaucracy, the IBM 5150 sported a 4.77MHz Intel 8088 processor and used either cassette tapes or floppy disks for storage.

At the time, the outrageously expensive $1,565 PC wasn't even considered a home computer. In fact, it was barely even a blip in gamers' collective consciousness. The gaming systems of the day were the Apple II, the TRS-80 (affectionately known as the Trash 80), and Commodore's VIC-20, which would soon be followed by the legendary Commodore 64.

However, IBM's newly minted standard was on the rise. The PC's secret sauce—its open architecture—allowed enthusiasts and PC parts manufacturers to evolve it into a more powerful and functional computer. As the home computers of the early 1980s aged, the PC quickly worked its way into more homes and eventually became the de facto gaming system. By 1987, *Computer Gaming World* was primarily a PC gaming magazine.

# CHANGE

**All righty then. We're going to abandon the typical anniversary navel-gazing right here, because as we paged through more than 27,500 pages of the *CGW* archives, we felt inspired by the evolutionary forces (both within and outside the PC game business) that have pulled, tugged, changed, killed, rebirthed, and revolutionized the single most important aspect of PC gaming: gameplay.**

**We present for your examination and enjoyment the eight significant evolutionary leaps of PC gaming that have come about in the past 250 issues. After all, who better than us to guide you through all that we've seen over these 20 some-odd years?**

## PC AS A DICE ROLLER

In 1981, programmers around the country began to convert the tabletop experiences of the 1970s into more automated single-player experiences—in other words, war games and *Dungeons & Dragons*-style role-playing games. Not surprisingly, the gameplay in these early computer titles mimicked the turn-based tabletop experience.

This gameplay trend was partly due to the limited processing power of early PCs—the earliest PC games used the computer's power primarily as a calculator, a map, and a set of dice and

BY GEORGE JONES

*George Jones, former editor-in-chief of CGW, has floated around the industry for years. Now he's gone rogue, serving as an analyst for various game publishers.*

## 1981?
### A little perspective

**Just to drive home how long ago 1981 really was, consider the state of the world at the time. All these events took place in the same year *Computer Gaming World* issue #1 was released.**

**The IBM PC is introduced.**

**The VIC-20, Sinclair ZX81, and Texas Instruments TI-99/4A are released.**

**Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American test-tube baby, is born.**

**MTV makes its 24/7 video music debut on cable.**

**The first space shuttle is launched as *Columbia* takes to the sky.**

**Inaugurated just two months prior, President Ronald Reagan survives an assassination attempt by John W. Hinckley Jr.**

***Pac-Man* makes its debut.**

**Hot films of the year included *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Chariots of Fire*, and *On Golden Pond*.**

**Grandmaster Flash's album *Adventures on the Wheels of Steel* marks the first-ever use of the scratch.**

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that five homosexual men in Los Angeles, CA, have a rare form of pneumonia seen only in patients with weakened immune systems.**

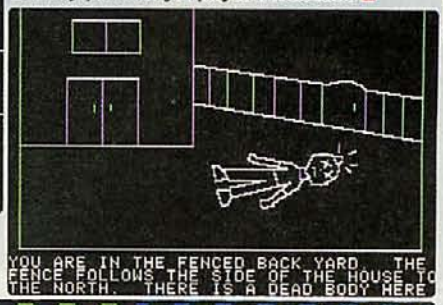
**Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake are born.**

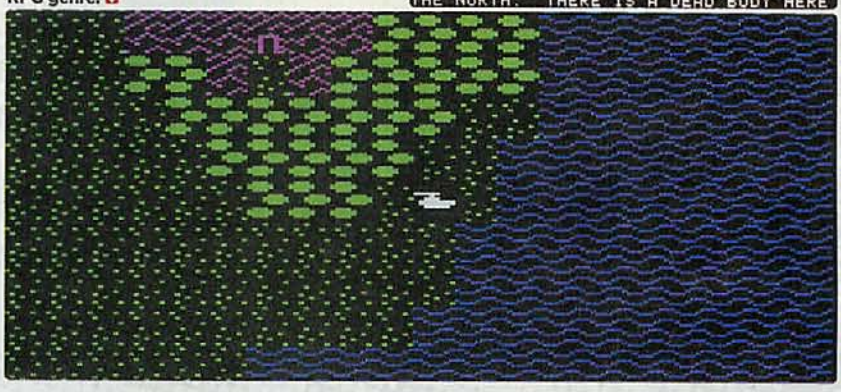
The tried-and-true format of adventure games such as *Mystery House* and *King's Quest* could still be found years later in more modern adventures like *Bad Mojo*, in which you played a cockroach.

used only the keyboard for input—but these games also took this route because it was hard to conceive of a computer doing much more at the time.

During these nascent years, more sophisticated notions of storytelling were extremely limited and mostly confined to setting up the story, with very little in the way of plot development. Much like the pen-and-paper experiences upon which they were based, these early games expected players to use their minds to further develop the story and characters as they roared across the deserts of Africa or fought skeletons in the dungeons of Britannia.

Released in 1981, Sir-Tech Software's *Wizardry* and Richard "Lord British" Garriott's *Ultima I* have had a long-lasting effect on the RPG genre.



## ADVENTURE GAMES CAPTURE THE "MAINSTREAM" MASSES

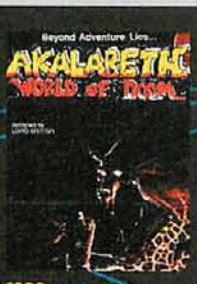
It's hard to imagine now in an age when all stories and adventures are visually driven, but when Roberta Williams released *Mystery House* in 1981, she created a new evolutionary branch of computer gaming. Prior to this, many of the early mainframe computer games of the 1960s and 1970s were strictly text driven.

*Mystery House* was the first computer game to pair black-and-white images with these adventures. A few years later, *King's Quest* propelled this concept further with color graphics. Interestingly, while Sierra Online began to make a fortune from graphic adventures, another company named Infocom maintained a short-lived devotion to the text-only adventure with critically acclaimed games such as *Zork* and *Planetfall*.

The adventure-game genre served an extremely important function—it broadened the appeal of home computer games. For many, the concept of playing computer games possessed tremendous appeal, but

## ADVENTURES IN COMPUTER GAMING

**What the heck has happened since the first issues of *Computer Gaming World*, you ask? Follow along with this handy timeline.**




**1980**
- Richard Garriott releases *Akalabeth: World of Doom*.

**1981**
- IBM PC released.
- First issue of *Computer Gaming World* hits newsstands.
- *Ultima Wizardry*
- Roberta Williams, Online Systems release *Mystery House*, the first graphic adventure.

**1982**
- Infocom releases *Zork* and *Deadline*, text-based adventures for DOS, the Apple II, and the Commodore 64/Amiga.
- *Ultima II: Revenge of the Enchantress*

**1983**
- *Ultima III: Exodus*
- *M.U.L.E.*

Nontraditional games such as *Pirates!* and *Seven Cities of Gold* experimented with forms of gameplay that remain popular to this day in games like *Grand Theft Auto III*.

the intricate details inherent to RPGs and war games felt intimidating and tedious. This alternate "mainstream" genre allowed the player to enjoy the more leisurely and understandable story-driven gameplay.

Unfortunately, the adventure-game genre failed to evolve as players began to desire more real-time interactivity with their environments and stories. While the legacy of fusing a rich story with devious puzzles carries on, fewe traditional adventure games are being released each year. Instead, they're melding into other genres.

## BEYOND DRAGONS AND TANKS

As players and programmers realized that narrative and story could be tightly woven into the fabric of a computer game, people began to experiment with new genres and new ways to play them.

*Sid Meier's Pirates!*, released in 1987, was one of the shining examples of this movement. Previously working on flight sims and war games, Meier stepped away from combat to create one of the great games of all time. In addition to the unique theme, *Pirates!* featured a novel play mechanic that allowed players complete freedom to develop their characters in any way they chose.

The mid-'80s were awash with interesting concepts and gameplay as a result of this newly emerging consciousness around game design. Game designers also began to explore more sophisticated and diverse themes. Dani Bunten and Electronic Arts' legendary *Seven Cities of Gold* forced gamers to remake a key historical decision: coexist with the Native Americans or destroy them. In one of gaming history's more powerful symbolic analogies, if the player's pixilated explorer so much as touched a Native American, that character died.

**The adventure-game genre served an important function—it broadened the appeal of home computer games.**

FLASHBACK

### RUSSELL SIPE

*CGW* FOUNDER

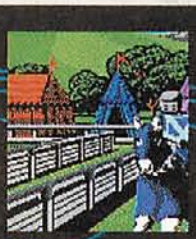
**What was the impetus for launching *Computer Gaming World*?**

In early 1981 I had some questions about perceived problems in computer history-based simulations. I looked around to see if I could find reviews of these games. Of course, there were none. It occurred to me that no one was paying attention to computer games in the press, including the computer press. It was obvious to me that computer games were going to be big one day. So I said to myself, "Someone should start a computer game magazine." The rest, as they say, is history.

*Russell Sipe still follows his passion for astronomy. Learn more at www.sipe.com.*

**1984**
- *Dr. J and Larry Bird Go One on One*
- *King's Quest: Quest for the Crown*

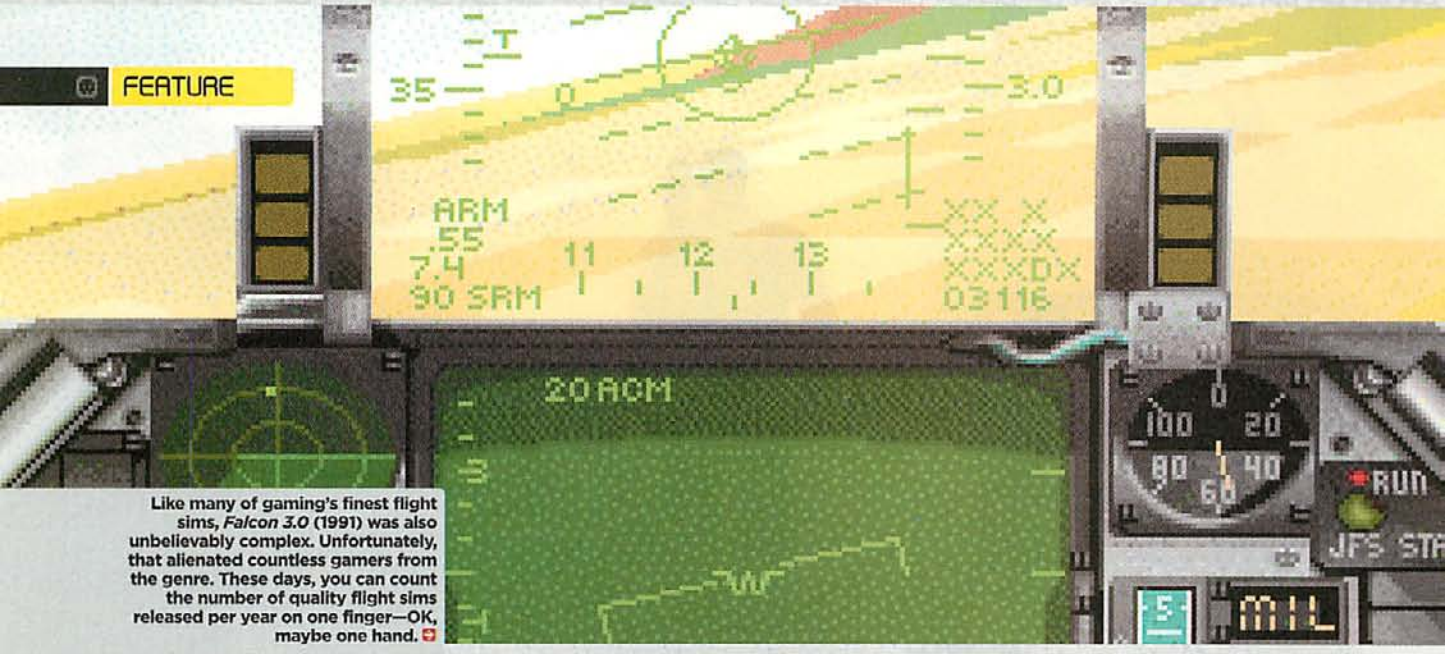
**1985**
- *Kampfgruppe*
- *F-15 Strike Eagle*
- *Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar* blows gamers away with ethical choices and a reputation system.



**1986**
- *Defender of the Crown*
- *Conflict in Vietnam*
- *Earl Weaver Baseball*

**1987**
- *The Seven Cities of Gold*
- *Sid Meier's Pirates!*

**1988**
- *Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny*
- *Tetris*




Like many of gaming's finest flight sims, *Falcon 3.0* (1991) was also unbelievably complex. Unfortunately, that alienated countless gamers from the genre. These days, you can count the number of quality flight sims released per year on one finger—OK, maybe one hand.

FLASHBACK

## BILL ROPER

**What's your strongest memory of *Computer Gaming World* over the last 250 issues?**

I distinctly remember when editor Terry Coleman was one of two editors to come and see *WarCraft: Orcs & Humans* back in 1994. We were literally begging people to come by our booth, which was little more than a card table set up in what would nowadays amount to an oversized office cube, to look at the one computer we had running a slide show, as well as a demo of the gameplay. Fortunately, Terry instinctively got why the game was something special and really became the first champion of Blizzard's work at *CGW*.

*Formerly of Blizzard, Roper was one of the creative forces behind* **WarCraft**, **StarCraft**, **Diablo**, *and more. He struck out on his own in 2003 and is now the president of Flagship Studios.*

### TAKE FLIGHT

In 1995, *Computer Gaming World* had a cardinal rule for selling magazines: Put a plane on the cover and watch newsstand sales soar. Back in the '80s, flight simulators were a perfect fit for the wonky, hardcore world of computer gamers. For many, the ability to realistically simulate the previously unattainable sensation of flying a fighter jet, fighting the Red Baron, or piloting a commercial airliner was the epitome of gaming at its most powerful.

This genre literally bred itself out of existence by the turn of the century. As flight-sim fans' desires for increasingly more-hardcore experiences (and hardcore input devices) were met, casual gamers found the genre to be completely inaccessible. Take a look at this past year. We could count the number of good flight sims on one finger. For all our progress, sometimes evolution takes a step backward.

### REAL TIME GOES BIG TIME

When Will Wright released *SimCity* in 1989, strategy computer gaming broke out of the turn-based doldrums and embraced real time with open arms. Wresting absolute control of time away from the player represented one of the major turning points in the history of computer gameplay. After years of playing PC titles based on board and tabletop games, gamers were enthralled by the experience of playing in an environment that continuously unfolded—it was a *Matrix*-like effect. Prior to real-time gameplay, gamers had no idea that a quicker pace, faster on-the-fly strategizing, and more immersive play environments were even possible.

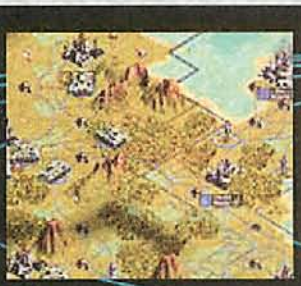
Interestingly, *SimCity* was so groundbreaking in its real-time approach that it took PC game designers a few years to fully understand and harness the gameplay made possible by real-time environments. In 1992, Westwood Studios released *Dune II*, the first traditional real-time strategy game. Two years later, Blizzard released *WarCraft: Orcs & Humans*. A year after that, Westwood released *Command & Conquer* and Blizzard released *WarCraft II*. The genre was in full bloom a few years later, and it still is.

*StarCraft*, *Age of Empires*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*—each new RTS continues to build upon *Dune II*'s foundation. These days you can hardly find turn-based games.

**With *SimCity*, strategy games broke out of the turn-based doldrums and embraced real time with open arms.**

**1989**
- Will Wright unleashes *SimCity*.
- *Harpoon*

**1990**
- *Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon*
- *Wing Commander*
- *Red Baron*
- *Ultima VI: The False Prophet*



**1991**
- *Sid Meier's Civilization*
- *Leisure Suit Larry*
- *Falcon 3.0*

**1992**
- *Dune II* kick-starts the RTS genre.
- *Ultima VII: The Black Gate*
- *Wolfenstein 3D*

**1993**
- *Doom* scares the living crap out of gamers everywhere.

The real-time advances that debuted in *SimCity* can be directly traced to *Dune II* and *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War.*

## THE DEBUT OF THE 3D SHOOTER

Coinciding with the shift to real-time gaming, another huge revolution loomed. In 1992—thanks to John Carmack and John Romero—Id Software released *Wolfenstein 3D* and challenged the conventional rules of PC gaming.

By the early '90s, the influence of consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System was undeniable, and game designers were incorporating elements into PC games.

Fresh on the heels of *Wolfenstein 3D*'s success—and before any other company was able to release another 3D shooter—Id kicked the concept (and the gaming industry) into overdrive in 1993 with the release of *Doom.* In addition to featuring blazing-fast action, *Doom* also triggered two wildly significant gameplay innovations: Its LAN-based play was the precursor to the online fragfests millions of gamers engage in on a nightly basis, and Id's decision to embrace custom-created levels and level modifications granted previously forbidden access to hundreds of thousands of would-be level designers. The viral nature of downloadable shareware also helped propel the addictive shooter. In fact, *Doom* has had a more significant impact on the evolution of PC gaming than any other game in history.

A few games—most notably *Half-Life* and the recent release of *Half-Life 2*—have attempted to evolve the basic play mechanics *Doom* put forth, but most 3D shooters have simply stuck to the original formula.

## THE RPG REEMERGES—WITH A NEW TWIST.

By 1996, *CGW* RPG reviewer Scorpia's stinger was withering, and RPGs were getting tired. Microsoft was launching Windows 95, and yet the games were still painfully old-school, revolving around the same fundamental mechanics developed in the 1980s with the release of games like *Ultima III.*

Blizzard changed the genre overnight in 1996 with *Diablo.* This fast-paced RPG emphasized rapid mouse-based action over the sluggish, tedium-filled (and theoretically more cerebral) gameplay RPGs were previously known for. Talk about a revolution. Some traditional RPGers were outraged that the game was being classified as an RPG. The simple click-based action felt like a perversion of their favorite genre, but it featured experience points, magic, hit points, and most importantly, *lots and lots* of magical items to find.

For the gaming masses—and any hardcore RPG fan who gave the title a chance—*Diablo*'s appeal was undeniable. Its focus on continuously rewarding the player for success (as opposed to punishing him), constantly moving the story and gameplay forward, and its overall emphasis on placing fun over tedious details are now mainstays in all modern RPGs. Without *Diablo*, the role-playing genre might have gone the way of war games, flight sims, adventures, and Charo.

FLASHBACK

## JOHNNY WILSON

FORMER *CGW* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**What have been the biggest changes in PC play mechanics over the last 20-plus years?**

**1** *SimCity*: It showed that a game did not have to be about violence or based on fantasy to be interesting. It demonstrated the potential for gender crossover when more females began to play than had played previous computer games, and it showcased the idea of real time in setting the stage for today's real-time strategy games.

**2** *Sid Meier's Civilization*: The editorial staff said it in the 150th issue, and I still say it: This is the best game of all time. It did not set the technology world afire. It merely offered the most amazing blend of construction and destruction, creation and conflict that had ever been assembled in a computer game. The turn-based mode gave you time to reflect on what you were doing, but the addictive nature of having to see what happened next kept you playing into the night with a "just one more move" mentality.

**3** *Wolfenstein 3D*: Yeah, I know. You weren't expecting me to answer with a shooter, and if you were, you would have expected me to say *Doom* or *Quake*. Sorry! Without this one, the FPS genre simply wouldn't exist. It was the whining about killing the dogs that made the Id guys move to the *Doom* story line, because they didn't believe anyone would object to killing demons (Wrong!), and it was the deathmatch mode in *Doom* that led to the FPS revolution. None of it would have happened, though, if they hadn't done this award-winning shareware product.

*Johnny Wilson and his wife, Wailam, live in the Atlanta area. Johnny is currently writing a trilogy of fantasy novels for Wizards of the Coast.*

**1994**
- ***WarCraft***
- ***X-Com***
- ***Panzer General***
- ***Ultima VIII*** **disappoints gamers with action-oriented play.**
- ***Myst*** **released. *CGW* dismisses it as not being cover worthy. *Myst* ends up being the biggest PC seller to date, moving more than five million copies.**
- **Sierra's *Front Page Sports Football* embraces season-after-season franchise mode well before *Madden* does.**

**1995**
- ***WarCraft II***
- ***Command & Conquer***

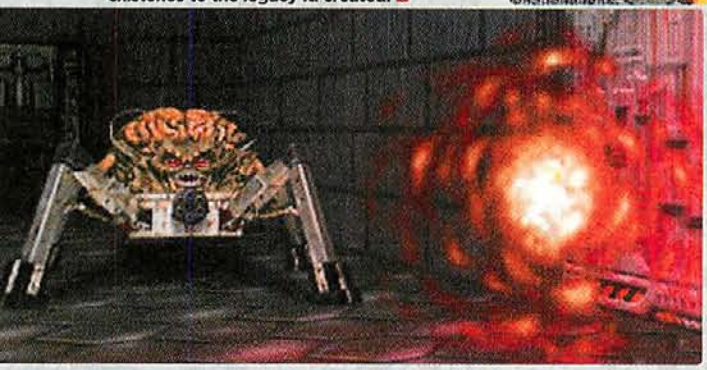
**1996**
- ***Bad Mojo***
- ***Duke Nukem 3D***
- ***Quake***
- ***Computer Gaming World*** **names *Civilization* the best game of all time.**

**1997**
- ***Age of Empires***
- ***Ultima Online*** **debuts; in beta testing, Richard Garriott's character Lord British is assassinated.**

**1998**
- ***Half-Life*** **changes the face of 3D shooter genre.**

When Richard Garriott's iconic Lord British character was assassinated by a *UO* player, gamers everywhere began to sense the seemingly limitless potential of massively multiplayer games. While the play mechanics are fairly different, *UO*'s legacy lives on in *World of WarCraft* and other MMORPGs.

*Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) marked the debut of the most popular genre in PC gaming, but *Doom* pushed it into overdrive. The entire first-person-perspective genre owes its existence to the legacy Id created.



## NEW WORLDS: THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE

In 1997, Origin released *Ultima Online*, which represented a complete circle in the history of gaming. Fourteen years prior, Richard Garriott and Origin's *Ultima III: Exodus* shocked gamers into playing RPGs. *Ultima Online*'s initial financial success shocked game publishers everywhere into realizing how hugely popular (and lucrative) massively multiplayer role-playing games could be.

**Ultima Online's initial financial success shocked game publishers into realizing how lucrative MMO games could be.**

Unfortunately, *Ultima Online*'s popularity and play mechanics were fleeting. Encouraged by *UO*'s success, Verant Interactive and 989 Studios (now all part of Sony Online Entertainment) released *EverQuest*. The more simplified, action-oriented gameplay quickly captured gamers' imaginations in ways very few digital experiences ever have. Much like *Dune II* and *Doom*, *EverQuest* (or *Evercrack*, as it was often called around the office when it first launched) has had a pervasive influence on gameplay. Virtually every massively multiplayer RPG released since has borrowed *EverQuest*'s basic play structure.

Essentially an online reinvention of the RPG, MMORPGs are having a revolutionary impact upon our expectations of what a computer game can be. Think about it: After years of wishing for it, gamers can now truly and completely inhabit their characters in a fully realized universe. In online games, gamers can take on whatever persona they want. They can acquire property. They can work with other gamers to accomplish incredible feats. They can get married. They can exploit others. They can be evil. They can be good. They can be in between. What we are seeing today with *EQ2*, *World of WarCraft*, and *City of Heroes* is just the beginning of a new digital frontier.

The early architects of gaming dreamed of a day when there would be virtual worlds populated with hundreds of thousands of gamers who could all play together. Looking forward, the only question now is what gameplay changes the next 250 issues will see.

FLASHBACK

### CHRIS TAYLOR

**What is one theory about PC game design you know is true but can't prove?**

That players want a naughty game disguised as a normal game. I ain't provin' that one, but it's sooooo true!! *Chris Taylor, the creative director at Gas Powered Games, is responsible for the likes of* **Total Annihilation**, **Dungeon Siege**, *and several crimes we're not currently aware of.*

FLASHBACK

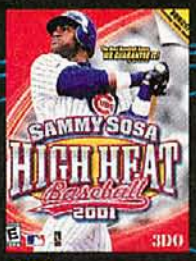
### JOHN ROMERO

**What has been the biggest change in PC play mechanics over the last 20-plus years?**

To the point: incredibly graphic, brutal, and bloody destruction of your enemies. I'd say that thanks to our early 3D games at Id Software, we satisfied the thirst for blood that the public at large was evidently craving. Most games pre-*Wolfenstein 3D* had mild violence in them; since the beginning of computer gaming, violence has been a mainstay, whether it's shooting little aliens or even selecting "attack" from a menu—the goal has been the same: obliteration of your opponent.

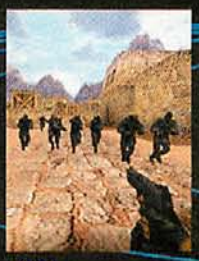
*Former lead designer at Id Software and one of the driving forces behind* **Doom** *and* **Quake**, *John Romero is now working for Midway on* **Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows**.

**2000**
- ***Ultima IX: Ascension*** **released in highly buggy state.**
- **Columnist Jeff Green pens harsh, controversial open letter to Lord British, aka Richard Garriott.**
- ***EverQuest***




**2000**
- ***High Heat Baseball 2001*** **released;** ***CGW*** **office pool results in editors coming to blows.**

**2001**
- ***WOW*** **announced.**
- **Ion Storm closes.**
- ***Bejeweled*****-mania sweeps** ***CGW*****.**



**2002**
- ***Counter-Strike*** **inducted into** ***CGW*** **Hall of Fame...first time a mod is inducted.**

**2004**
- ***EverQuest II***
- ***Sid Meier's Pirates!***
- ***World of WarCraft***
- ***Half-Life 2***

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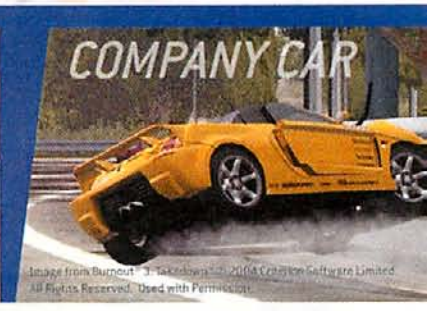


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PUBLISHER: **LucasArts Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Obsidian Entertainment** GENRE: **RPG** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

**Is that a double-sided lightsaber in your pocket?**

The handmaiden (she won't tell me her real name) and I cut through monsters on Dxun.

Don't let this handsome fellow's good looks deceive you. He is up to no good!

Vaklu troopers go down like big sissies as I slice and dice them with my double-sided lightsaber.

**Playboy: The Mansion**
There's this new thing online called smut—you're better off with that.

**Need for Speed Underground 2**
Baby, you can drive my tricked-out, flashy car.

**Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone**
A Demon Stone is much more evil than Fraggle Rock.

Why fight fair when you can hide behind furniture?

Things are looking grim for Jedi Knight Dumbo McMoron. Fortunately, I have recently saved.

**As the countdown toward *Star Wars Episode III* continues, only one question remains: Is it going to suck less or more than *Episodes I* and *II*? Let's not even broach the possibility of it being good. That's just setting us up for disappointment—again.**

Meanwhile, *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* has the exact opposite problem. *KOTOR* wasn't just a good game, it was one of the best *Star Wars* games ever made, right up there with *X-Wing* and *Dark Forces*, combining a great, original *Star Wars* story line with deep, old-fashioned *D&D*-style roleplaying.

*KOTOR II*'s challenge is that it must live up to those high standards. The good news is that it mostly succeeds. And though it doesn't really innovate at all over the first game, the new story and characters more than hold their own in this worthy sequel.

## HOW DID I GET HERE?

*KOTOR II* is set five years after the first game, which itself is set 4,000 years before the events of the first movie. It was a smart conceit, allowing the designers to use the *Star Wars* universe without being slaves to the films.

This time around, a civil war has left the Jedi order decimated, and the Sith have been hunting down all the remaining Jedi Knights. As *KOTOR II* opens, only one known Jedi is left, and guess who that is? Yeah, it's you. The only problem, in standard RPG fashion, is that, after living through a Sith attack, you awaken to find that your connection to the Force has been severed and you have no real knowledge of what's going on.

It's standard-issue stuff, but developer Obsidian Entertainment, taking over for BioWare, manages it with a fine hand. This team was the main creative unit behind 1999's awesome *Planescape: Torment*, one of the most complex, adult RPGs ever made. As you make your way through the story line, tackling the multiple subplots and side quests (I spent more than 50 hours getting through it all), your decision making, as you pursue a light or dark path, is more ambiguous, with more unexpected consequences. (Light-side players will find themselves scolded for doing "the right thing" at times.)

The NPCs, too, while often conforming to standard *Star Wars* archetypes (the wise-cracking pilot, the loveable droid), are, in some cases, like Kreia, the mysterious Jedi consular at the heart of the story, much more richly drawn this time. If there is any fault with the story or characters, it's the same one the designers made in *Planescape*: using huge passages of dialogue and exposition that, while always well-written, will try the patience of those who just want to, you know, play the game.

## SAME AS IT EVER WAS

As far as that goes, you're basically playing *KOTOR* again—and that's not really a complaint. Obsidian has made some tweaks to the game engine—for example, adding Jedi "forms" (kind of like combat stances)—but honestly, I made it through the whole game without noticing a single difference. New Force powers and weapons abound, and many of them are quite good (Force Scream was one of my favorites), but, as usual, the real fun, and the most power, comes from the lightsaber. In fact, by the game's midpoint, it's practically too powerful—I was able to cut through hordes of enemies with almost no trouble, ever.

Obsidian makes up for that, though, in one of the game's few annoyances. A few times, you will find your party unexpectedly split in half, or, in one case I experienced, completely unavailable, locking you into a sequence with a particular character or characters you don't really know or haven't used before and may not have properly equipped. On the other hand, the enemy A.I. is occasionally utterly brain-dead, making these tougher encounters easier to manage. Often, just hiding behind a piece of furniture will solve the problem with melee fighters. Or even just attacking from long range, because certain bad guys will fail to trigger at all.

Graphically, the game is getting dated. This is what happens when a sequel comes so fast. It's nice to not have to wait five years—but one wishes that Obsidian had had more time to give us cooler stuff to look at. It doesn't help, further, that some of the game's locations, like Dantooine, are essentially retreads of the first game's. That's just lazy.

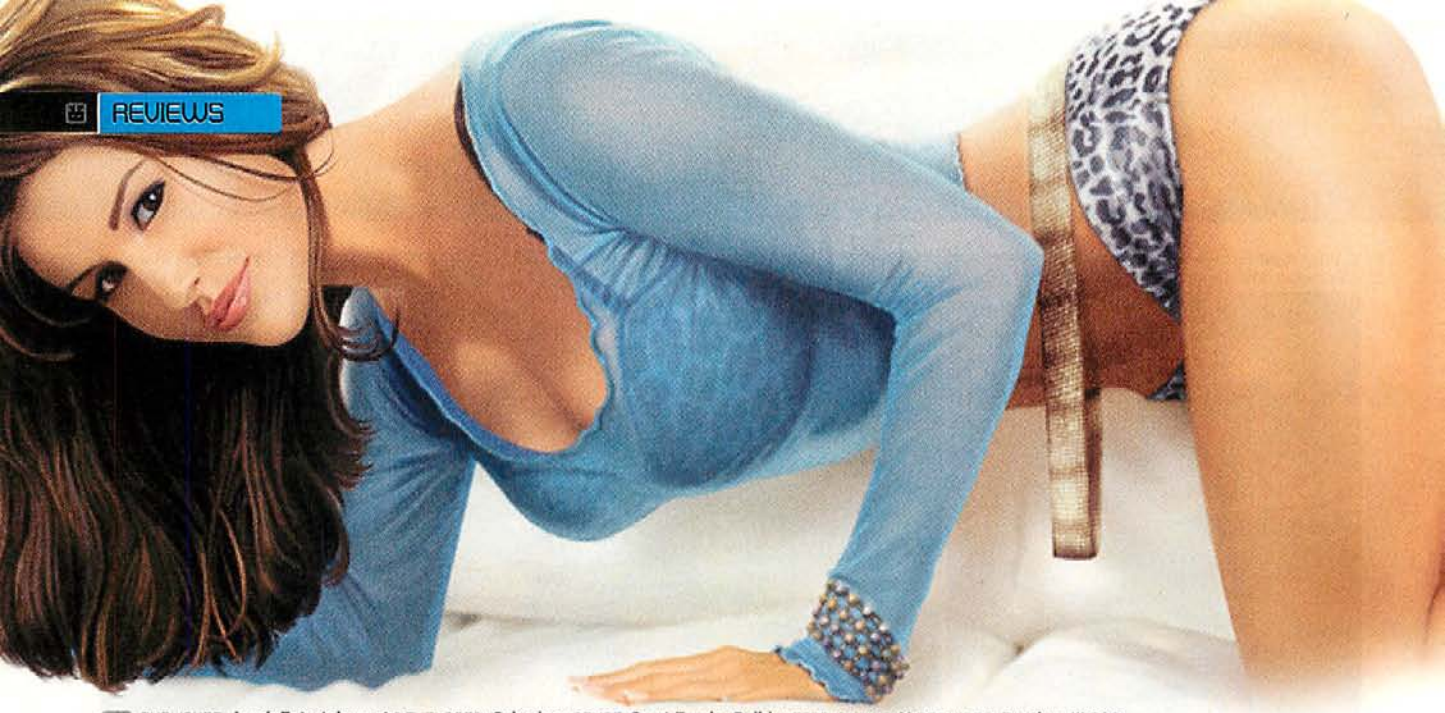
## INTO THE BLUE AGAIN

But if *KOTOR II* ultimately feels like *KOTOR 1.5*, well, better that than *Daikatana 1.5*, right? This is a very good follow-up to the best single-player role-playing game in years. *KOTOR II* is a big, often complex, mature piece of storytelling—and I'll take it over anything that's been onscreen with the *Star Wars* name in 25 years. **Jeff Green**

**The new story and characters more than hold their own in this worthy sequel.**

**Verdict** ★★★★½

**Doesn't break any new ground, but still solid entertainment and better than any *Star Wars* movie in 25 years.**



PUBLISHER: **Arush Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Cyberlore** GENRE: **Smut Empire Builder** ESRB RATING: **M** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB install, 32MB videocard, DVD-ROM drive** RECOMMENDED: **512MB RAM, 64MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Playboy: The Mansion

## Welcome to Areola 51

**When I was in seventh grade, my friend Peter LaMarca would steal *Playboy* magazines and bring them to school in a shoebox. I would find boys willing to pay twice the cover price for these magazines. We made a killing. But this was well before the Internet brought bare-naked boobies straight to Junior's computer for free. Peter and I would be obsolete today in much the same way *Playboy: The Mansion* is, though the game perishes at the twin swords of better, more accessible smut online and better, more accessible gameplay just about everywhere else.**

### TURN-ONS

Confounding expectations, *Playboy: The Mansion* actually almost makes a case for itself as a diversion worthy of some, if not much, of your time. As *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner, you can play in a pure (and utterly boring) sandbox mode, or you can plod through the marginally interesting missions. The missions take you from the very beginnings of the magazine, through its trials and tribulations (i.e., the Moral Majority), up to the present day. Every mission has a slew of objectives to meet (starting a video business, getting big stories), all while you deal with the month-to-month challenge of putting together a magazine. And getting that magazine published every month—hunting down the killer interview, meeting current market demands, etc.—can be kinda fun. Kinda. The first dozen times maybe. After a very short while, it becomes a grind, a grind not helped by the unchallenging assembly-line process of slapping each mag together. It's the same with the game's signature photo shoots—once you come to terms with photographing topless digital models, it's sort of challenging and fun until an incredibly narrow selection of poses utterly kills that part of the game. Plus the models frequently go all *Blair Witch* on you, posing straight into the corners of rooms.

***Trés jolie*, Coco! *Trés jolie*!**

**Public sex. Boy does it get old, and fast.**

### TURNOFFS

The game looks and plays a lot like *The Sims 2*—just without the charm, depth, challenge, graphics, animation, possibilities, freedom, and ability to generate a desire to keep it installed. Everything you do in the game is repeated ad infinitum, and it totally kills any interest the game might muster. Most of the game is spent throwing parties. This wouldn't be so bad if the parties were entertaining, but each and every one plays out the same way, thanks to a criminally limited amount of interaction choices. Everyone stands around, someone gets drunk, people have sex in public, and you do it all over again. Like a boot stomping you in the face, it might be tolerable the first time, but somewhere around the 17th, you're ready to stop.

**Another freaking party--please kill me now.**

The game is also rather sloppily constructed. Playmates will hover in midair, humping someone who isn't there. A character may sport a beard on just one side of his face. And since the camera is fixed squarely on Hef, finding people in the mansion is a big pain in the ass.

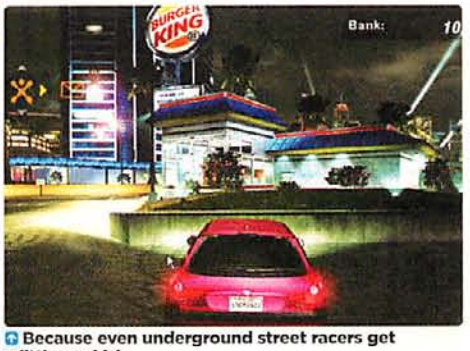
So is there any value here? Well, there's a bunch of in-game music, including one ditty that features the lyric "Love is a chemical, straight from your genitals!" so I imagine that the hunt for the perfect father/daughter dance song for countless weddings has just ended. But other than that, no.

**Robert Coffey**

**Verdict** ★½☆☆☆

***CGW*'s unabashed dictionary says: If this is living the life, you might prefer dying the death.**

I only regret that this still photo doesn't do my spinning rims justice.




Because even underground street racers get a little peckish.

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **EA Canada** GENRE: **Racing** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 933MHz, 128MB RAM, 2GB install**
RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2GHz, 256MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet, LAN (2-6 players)**

# Need for Speed Underground 2

## ...in which Kristen finally gets her due

**I'm almost embarrassingly late with a review of *NFSU2*—the game was released last November—but considering *CGW*'s track record of giving me only juvenile, crappy games to review, can you blame me for drawing out a good one? Not that it took much—*NFSU2* is so big that even if I'd tried to speed through it, it still would have taken me a while to play it...probably just long enough to tide me over until the next iteration of the series. Very crafty, EA!**

*NFSU2* definitely goes a long way toward erasing those other games, with graphics that are nothing short of gorgeous as you careen through the fictional city of Bayview, made up of five different sections that unlock as you progress. Bayview is huge, full of bridges, buildings, fountains, turnpikes, shortcuts, hills—tons of interesting opportunities for cool races, all rendered crisply and colorfully. Rain and lighting effects aren't muddied even when graphics settings are cranked up, and lag wasn't ever an issue.

### GO WHERE YOU WANNA GO

Movement through the big, open city gives the illusion of total freedom—you can explore everywhere in search of predetermined race points as well as "pickup" races you find along the way. But the story itself is essentially on rails, insomuch as you must complete a certain number of races to win attention from a sponsor, and then win a certain number of predetermined races to fulfill your sponsorship. Winning a certain race or races gets you noticed by a magazine, and you need to get on a certain number of magazine covers in order to unlock the next part of the city, etc.

The races themselves aren't exactly free-roaming, either; it's not as though you know where the start and finish are and get there by the fastest route. Rather, you follow a prescribed route with few shortcut opportunities. Still, the races are damn fun, and it's great that you don't have to do every type of race to progress, so if you're good at circuit and drag racing but crap at sprints, you can choose a sponsorship that's heavy on the races you like. This is pretty indicative of how friendly the game is overall—it's not so easy that you're over it quickly, but it is forgiving enough that when you lose a few races while mastering drifting you won't toss the controller down and give up.

Tweakers will appreciate the tons of available modding options, but while I enjoyed goofing up my Peugeot with various

spinning rims, side skirts, and neon underlighting, I can't say the result was a particularly good-looking car, so the attraction wore off pretty fast. But that didn't mean I could ignore it—to progress, you have to achieve a certain "visual rating."

That and the ridiculous story and pathetic voice acting from a faux-street Brooke Burke notwithstanding, *NFSU2* is the most fun racing game I've played in a while. It totally delivers the stuff that makes me a fan of arcade racers: a kick-ass environment and just enough deviation from reality to make me want to stick with it even when I don't immediately win. In fact, *NFSU2* ranks among the most entertaining games I've played in a while—and I'd say that even if my last two reviews hadn't been for *Leisure Suit Larry* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

**Kristen Salvatore**

**NFSU2 ranks among the most entertaining games I've played in a while.**

**Verdict** ★★★★½

**Not as free-roaming as it claims to be, but a damn fine ride all the same.**

PUBLISHER: **Atari** DEVELOPER: **Stormfront Studios** GENRE: **Action** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 2.8GB install** RECOMMENDED: **None** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

## In the realm of the senseless

Saving the stupid wood elves. Again.
The God of Hunger is...hungry!

**Apparently written by a college freshman who barely passed psychology but really, *really* liked it, *Demon Stone* is chock-full of awful character development. In this third-person hack-n-slashing action game, each of your three heroes has a sob story about how he was separated from his home and family. Together, they must save the world from the hideous fate of being ripped to shreds by two armies intent on destroying each other. However, your main incentive for staying alive doesn't spring from any fondness for the characters, but from a desire to avoid being force-fed the same cut-scenes over and over again.**

### IS THERE A "YOU" IN TEAM?

The basic setup of the game has promise. You can switch players on the fly, and each has a specialty to offer. The rogue can slip through the shadows unseen and slaughter enemies. She also jumps, but that's needed only for a few mini-scenes and hidden treasure spots. Using the fighter doesn't require much finesse, since his strength is, well, his strength. His special abilities include busting large rocks and obstacles. The mage has an unlimited long-range attack, much better for killing end guys than knives and axes are.

Yet the game doesn't take advantage of its foundation. Much of the gameplay involves either protecting something or attacking something that's protected. Defeating most of the bad guys doesn't require finding weaknesses, so the attack description you find most pleasing is the one you choose to level up.

When upgrading, there's no need to ration your experience points or gold. Even if you're a pacifist, you can still afford everything. This would be very cool, but all of the characters' upgrades are focused on their main abilities. After a while, you get bored of seeing the words "increases the time Zhai remains undetectable."

### GAMECLAW

The most irritating aspect of *Demon Stone* is the carpal-tunnel-syndrome-inducing gameplay, which harkens back to the original *Diablo*. The incessant clicking is reminiscent of, but not nearly as gratifying as, using a retractable ballpoint pen.

Another major problem is that you can't control the camera angles. Since the lens is always focused on the bad guy or the environment, it's embarrassingly easy to lose your character. Even more maddening are the sudden view changes that leave you wondering which direction you're actually heading. The lack of manual camera control also makes it easier to accidentally deflect enemy fire into your teammates, though normally they don't wander aimlessly into enemy fire. In fact, it's almost guaranteed that if someone dies on a mission, it's the character you're currently controlling. So hooray for you.

The enemy A.I., on the other hand, leaves a lot to be desired. Characters' predictable one-two-three attacks are easily countered, and their group communication is nonexistent. Archers and mages often hit their own grunts, and the thugs themselves can't go two steps without elbowing each other in the ribs.

Maybe it's just Patrick Stewart's narration, but *Demon Stone* is enjoyable despite its flaws. If you want to get your knuckles bloody or evaporate enemies on the spot, or better yet, if you're in a vicious, backstabbing mood, *Demon Stone* satisfies those basic needs, but not much else.

**Rebecca Gross**

**The incessant clicking is reminiscent of, but not nearly as gratifying as, using a retractable ballpoint pen.**

The Orc King calls upon his minions.

Bobby Fischer wants his chessboard back.

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆

**Could have been much better, could have been much worse.**

PUBLISHER: **Monte Cristo** DEVELOPER: **Digital Jesters** GENRE: **Peasant-Appeasement simulator** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 950MB install** RECOMMENDED: **None** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Medieval Lords

## The definitive nonorthogonal construction sim

A real medieval lord would give those frowny faces something to really frown about.

**According to *The Oxford History of Medieval Europe*, it was medieval rulers who invented the phrase "get medieval on your ass." And they meant it. And they did it as often as possible. It was a time when even the slightest civic complaint was resolved with swift and horrible retribution. The commoners are complaining because they're hungry? How about we convene a peasant advisory council, have them prepare a report, and then fill their bellies with boiling oil. Through their butts. So forget *Evil Genius*—you'd think a game called *Medieval Lords* would really let you indulge your inner *Omen*-esque devil child. Instead, *Medieval Lords* is a largely by-the-numbers city-management sim that, while not incompetent, is bone dry enough that you may eventually start to hope for one of those fabled game-induced epileptic seizures just to spice things up a little.**

For the most part, the game is structured like pretty much every city-building game ever made. You lay infrastructure and do whatever you can to keep the rotten peasants happy so that they'll pay taxes and keep breeding. The entire palette of available structures is bland. For instance, even though your main building is called "the dungeon," nobody's ever tossed into it and then never seen again. In fact, nothing bad ever happens there. City Hall would have been a better name for it.

The game's big innovation is its "nonorthogonal" construction system. What this means in nonmedieval terms is that buildings can be placed at any angle, and bordered areas, such as corn fields and cow pastures, are arbitrarily defined using a point-to-point system, sort of like creating a trapezoid in a paint program. On a purely aesthetic level, this gives your resulting cities an appropriately ramshackle look. In gameplay terms, however, using the touchy placement interface to maximize precious real estate can be a real pain.

There's also a combat system you use to defend your borders from encroachment and expand into adjacent territories. But with only two types of troops available and a completely hands-off battle engine, the combat feels distinctly halfhearted.

*Medieval Lords* is a familiar-feeling game with absolutely no personality. On top of that, it utilizes the much-maligned StarForce copy protection scheme. So if you were looking for a game to skip on principle as an act of protest, this would be a painless choice. **Erik Wolpaw**

**Verdict** ★★½☆☆
**A thoroughly routine city-builder.**

PUBLISHER: **Shrapnel Games** DEVELOPER: **ProSim** GENRE: **War game** ESRB RATING: **Not Rated** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 300, 32MB RAM, 350MB install** RECOMMENDED: **None** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet (2 players)**

# Raging Tiger: The Second Korean War

## What's new, pussycat? Very little

As exciting as the graphics get: an American force attempting an amphibious landing.

**The developers of *Raging Tiger: The Second Korean War* have tried so hard to make a hyperrealistic war game that they seem to have forgotten that it's more important for a good game to be entertaining than completely realistic. The setting is a near-future U.S. preemptive attack against North Korea that aims to destroy its weapons of mass destruction. Battles take place in real time and at the tactical scale, rarely involving formations larger than a battalion.**

The combat engine tries to model all aspects of modern warfare, including refugees, collateral damage, and over a dozen different ammunition types. Unfortunately, so much attention is paid to hardware issues such as gun-penetration rates and vehicle speeds that "soft" factors essential to small-unit actions, such as morale and leadership, are ignored.

Also absent is a credible attempt at making the game playable. There are so many orders and options available that even simple things like moving require far too many clicks and menus. The tutorials and the 100-plus-page manual are not particularly enlightening and do little to teach a newbie the basics of the game system.

If you can get past the clunky interface and poor A.I., there is some value in *Raging Tiger*. The game ships with 12 scenarios, multiplayer options, and a very detailed scenario editor. For those of you who crave endless realism in your war games, it's probably as realistic a military simulation as you'll get without risking being exposed to IEDs and insurgent attacks. For the rest of us, it simply fails as a game. **Di Luo**

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆
**Almost as hard to play as it is to look at.**

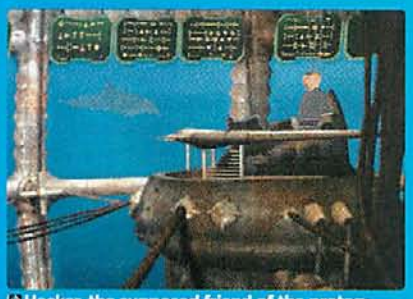
PUBLISHER: **Tri Synergy** DEVELOPER: **Razbor Studios** GENRE: **Adventure** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 1.5GB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Legacy: Dark Shadows

## Sees the light of day—unfortunately

**When the quotes on the box of a new game repeatedly stress an easy interface as its most remarkable feature, you know you're in trouble. This is especially true when it's a 2D adventure game. I mean, how much is there to mess up? You point the mouse and you click. Unfortunately, *Legacy: Dark Shadows*, the adventure game in question, really does have little else going for it.**

The Hotel Ares, 22nd-century Mars' new vacation hot spot that you'll visit as an Earth-born female PI, boasts a marquee that reads, "Your best stay on the Mars. Enjoy your staying." As if this isn't enough of a hint about the game's quality, it presents this marquee amidst some of the most mundane, dated-looking industrial backdrops and 3D character models seen since Tri Synergy's last second-rate sci-fi adventure, *Midnight Nowhere*.



Hacker, the supposed friend of the protagonist, acts a little fishy in more ways than one.

*Legacy*'s interplanetary tale is weak, too: it has more holes in it than a moon made of green Swiss cheese. The story centers on the abduction of your journalist friend in connection with government misdoings, but midway through, it flings you into a radioactive, dilapidated city and then abruptly flings you back without tying up the loose ends there. Worse, the prologue and ending diaries have little to do with either of these scenarios. Razbor's website provides additional backstory that better links some of the game's areas, but prolonged thinking about this game is the last thing you'll want. The enemies are downright goofy; there's a ridiculously blocky giant rat in a tunnel, and in a warehouse you'll encounter a humanoid that you must kill even though it never really bothers you, or else the game grinds to a halt.

You'll wield a few weapons in *Legacy*, but what you'll fight most is boredom. There is little history explained or emotion shown between the supposedly friendly main characters, and all of the voice acting is uniformly numbing with nary a trace of lip-synching. The voiceovers sound as if different cheap mics and effects were haphazardly changed during the recordings. There are many basic inventory puzzles like spraying water onto a camera to keep it from watching you, and a few simple logic puzzles like pushing barrels around, but with the low production values, they aren't much fun. You'll actually welcome *Legacy*'s intermittent desktop crashes so you can leave the game quickly—but better yet, don't buy it at all. **Denice Cook**

**Verdict** ★½☆☆☆

**The only thing *Legacy* leaves you with is a feeling of relief when it's over.**

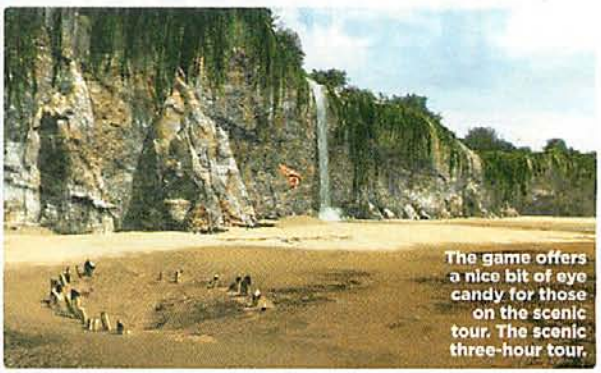
PUBLISHER: **The Adventure Company** DEVELOPER: **Kheops Studios** GENRE: **Adventure/Puzzle** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 800MHz, 64MB RAM, 1GB install, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1GHz, 128MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Return to Mysterious Island

## *Survivor*, Jules Verne style!

**To the more literate among us, *Return to Mysterious Island* obviously relates to Jules Verne's novel *The Mysterious Island*. I'm not one of those sufficiently well-read people to have known this before playing *Return to Mysterious Island*, though the connection was revealed as the plot unfolded. At any rate, *Return to Mysterious Island* tells the story of Nina, a young woman attempting to sail around the world when a storm sinks her boat and washes her up on the shores of...you guessed it: the Mysterious Island (otherwise known as Captain Nemo's retirement home/final resting place).**

As adventure games go, this is a rather small one that only seems longer and larger because of the time it takes to solve some of the puzzles. Unlike in most adventure games, you'll often find multiple solutions here; some puzzles are entirely optional, and solving them rewards the player with more insight into the plot. It's not exactly a difficult game either, aside from some of the pixel hunting for vital objects (one word: saltpeter) and the series of electronic combination lock puzzles near the end.



The game offers a nice bit of eye candy for those on the scenic tour. The scenic three-hour tour.

However, toss in a monkey sidekick named Jep, and we have enough island castaway clichés and charm to keep this castaway from becoming a castoff.

**Stephen F. Gehringer, Esquire**

**Unlike in most adventure games, you'll often find multiple solutions here.**

**Verdict** ★★★★☆

**It's not about to revolutionize the adventure genre, but fans of such games will not be disappointed.**

PUBLISHER: **Strategy First** DEVELOPER: **Nicely Crafted** GENRE: **MMORTS** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 500MHz, 64MB RAM (128MB for Windows XP), 28.8 Internet connection** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium III 800MHz, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows XP), 32MB videocard, 56K Internet connection** MULTIPLAYER: **Massively Multiplayer**

# Time of Defiance

## That feeling is your life slipping away

**Remember how every so often on Looney Tunes, Bugs or Daffy would sneak into the lab of some mad scientist and have it out with him? Remember how somebody would knock over a jar of ether and everything would kind of... sloooow... dowwwwwwnnnnn? Well, if you liked that wascawwy wabbit better once he had tranq'd up, *Time of Defiance* is the game for you, as developer Nicely Crafted has taken the RTS genre and cracked open the ol' ether jug on it.**

### IT'S...

This is not to say that *TOD* is a bad game. It's built on a solid enough 4X model, and there's a wide variety of ships, structures, controls, and resources to work with. Plus, aside from the huge scale, there's not a whole lot of difference between *TOD* and your average RTS, so the learning curve is fairly smooth. The whole game takes place in a solar system made up of tiny planetoids floating around a central gravity core. You start out on your own little chunk of heaven and have a modest fleet—and you just go from there.

### ...SO...

Unfortunately, going "from there" can be one long-ass trip. The first scout ship I sent out took 12 minutes to arrive at an adjacent sector—and that's 12 minutes of my time, not game time. Meanwhile, I ordered my shipyard to build a colonizer, which gave me ample time to take a break and eat dinner while the ship was under production. To be fair, once you've built up a big enough empire, you'll have a lot of stuff going on simultaneously and not so much thumb-twiddling to do. But even then, the game is permeated with a sense of unhurriedness. If you manage to tussle with another player (which is rare), you usually just sort of sit back and watch your warships lob torpedoes at each other. And the game's rather staid color palette and simplistic graphics don't do much for the adrenaline factor, either.

**The graphics engine may not be flashy, but at least it has a great zoom function.**

### ...SLOW...

Nevertheless, MMO fanatics will find plenty to like here. *TOD* give them something to do besides sharpening their +5 broadswords, and it's one of the few games out there that provides a sense of what it must be like to govern a vast empire. If you're looking for RTS writ large (and slow), *TOD* is worth checking out. **Eric Neigher**

**Unfortunately, going "from there" can be one long-ass trip.**

**Verdict** ★★★½☆

**Heavy on time, light on defiance.**

PUBLISHER: **Shrapnel Games** DEVELOPER: **Boku Strategy Games** GENRE: **Turn-based Historical War Game** ESRB RATING: **None** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 300MHz, 128MB RAM, 350MB install, 6x CD-ROM drive, 32MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **None** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet, PBEM, Hotseat (2 players)**

# Dragoon

## When the sprites come marching in

**David Erickson has been doing 18th-century warfare for a while now. His *Horse & Musket* series has been responsible for giving computer war gamers the rare chance to fight important but obscure battles from a time when armies dressed like peacocks lined up and just shot at each other. Erickson's designs have done a good job of capturing the cumbersome command structure of the time, and although the system based on leader activation is nothing new (nothing about his game system really is), it's a very faithful traditional war-game rendering of pre-Napoleonic warfare.**

*Dragoon* feels very much like its predecessors in terms of not only its basic game mechanics (which are very similar), but in the look of the game and the structure of its scenarios. Serious war gamers will appreciate the degree to which combined-arms interaction is modeled. The competence of the A.I. opponent seems very uneven—in some scenarios it's very respectable and puts up a good fight, while in others it seems completely at sea. Given Shrapnel's history, expect an expansion pack full of new scenarios to be released sometime in the future. Don't expect anything pretty, but with this kind of war game, you basically have to accept that the meat is in the mechanics. **Bruce Geryk**

**The level of historical research is amazing—even if it isn't amazing to look at.**

**Given the leader-activation system, control freaks need not apply.**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

**Solid, smart, and old.**

**It's a very faithful traditional war-game rendering of pre-Napoleonic warfare.**

PUBLISHER: **The Adventure Company** DEVELOPER: **Detalion** GENRE: **Adventure** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB install, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2GHz, 256MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **None**

# Sentinel: Descendants in Time

## Generic: Descendants in Tedium

**In *Sentinel: Descendants in Time*, you're a robber infiltrating a tomb guarded by Tamara, a holographic woman from a futuristic civilization. She installs mechanical and pattern-recognition puzzles to halt your spelunking, but instead of the timeworn Egyptian theme you'd expect, the backdrops here are images she's re-created from her high-tech homeland. As you progress through beautiful Jupiter-engine-powered 3D worlds, this guardian tells you things about herself and gets you wondering if you, too, are one of her creations. These plot twists partially make up for the lack of backstory about you.**

Certain puzzles are elegant (if unrealistic), like those you'll find throughout a lovely marshland world, where you'll create walkways from light beams and use flowers to energize elevators. Unfortunately, many puzzles are just tedious, such as a space station surrounded by a maze that hampers your entry and exit.

Tedious, too, are a symbol-laden lava locale and a seaside world with color-coded ropes that activate pathways. Both areas have so many bridges to fix that you'll feel more like a maintenance worker than a tomb robber. Story twists, character interaction, and a built-in hint system keep *Sentinel* from being completely boring and frustrating; it's a shame that the repetition in certain worlds robs this tomb-raiding adventure of its potential. **Denice Cook**

**This space station's satellite puzzles were fun—but getting through the maze to enter the station wasn't.**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

**Point, click, fix, watch, explore, repeat, blah blah blah.**

PUBLISHER: **Matrix** DEVELOPER: **Koios Works** GENRE: **War Game** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 500, 128MB RAM, 1.0GB install, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium II 800, 256MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet (2 players)**

# Tin Soldiers: Alexander the Great

## One tin soldier rides away....

**Alexander's cavalry clashes with Indian elephants.**

**The last stand of the Persian army.**

**In the olden days, traditional war games were generally forced into a "you go, I go" system in which players take alternating turns due to the complexities of keeping track of simultaneous "we go" turns. Even with the advent of computers to handle the bookkeeping, few designers dare defy orthodoxy to make we-go games. Koios Works breaks tradition with *Tin Soldiers: Alexander the Great*, a simultaneous-turn tactical game that's both playable and enjoyable.**

*Tin Soldiers* depicts the great battles of Alexander, from his suppression of Thebes to the invasion of India. Its name describes its unique presentation: Rather than looking like boxy graphics of cardboard chits, *Tin Soldiers*' units are beautifully detailed miniatures that look fresh from the toy box.

Gameplay is relatively simple. Each turn has three phases: command, reaction, and reserve. In the command phase, both sides tell their units whether to move, attack, or defend. In the reaction phase, certain units can have their orders changed to react to enemy moves. Finally, in the reserve phase, units that were held in reserve may receive orders, often to plug holes or react to emergencies. Since things happen simultaneously, there's a great deal of unpredictability, and you must plan for the enemy's future moves.

The system does a good job of simulating the linear warfare of the period without bogging down in useless detail. Frontal assaults are often bloody for both sides, while even the strongest units crumble when attacked from the flanks. The system is not perfect, however. Lightly armed skirmishers are (as expected) nearly worthless in melee but are not given higher movement rates than the heavily laden phalanxes. Morale and leadership are undervalued, as armies fight nearly to the last man even with their commander dead, even though ancient armies were notorious for melting away after the fall of their commanders.

*Tin Soldiers* comes with eight interesting scenarios and a campaign. Unfortunately, you must play through the campaign game to unlock the scenarios. You also can't play as Alexander's enemies except in multiplayer. Even more unfortunate than these restrictions is the lack of PBEM play. *Tin Soldiers* allows for Internet play, but with battles often lasting hours, it is impractical.

Despite its faults, *Tin Soldiers* is still a worthy purchase. It distinguishes itself through its presentation, gameplay system, and a subject matter that's neglected in computer war games. **Di Luo**

**Verdict** ★★★½☆

**Finally, a good ancient-era war game!**

PUBLISHER: **Paradox Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Paradox Entertainment** GENRE: **Real-time historical war game** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 450MHz, 128MB RAM, 900MB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium II 800MHz, 512MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet, LAN (2 players)**

# Hearts of Iron II

## Brains of cheese

**Paradox Entertainment's *Europa Universalis* was, without a doubt, one of 2001's most original designs, an ingenious conversion of an obscure, complex board game into an engaging real-time strategy game. Since then, Paradox has been using its game system to shoehorn lots of different historical periods into computer games—most notably the fatally flawed *Hearts of Iron*. While this sequel fixes some of that game's most egregious problems, the fact of the matter is that a design that works well for 17th-century geopolitics doesn't work so well for 20th-century wars.**

*Hearts of Iron II* is undoubtedly the most detailed strategic World War II game ever created. Far more than a combat game, it features a system that allows you to influence the very political underpinnings of the prewar period, as well as research weapon systems, which has a significant impact on military success.

Unfortunately, all this detail doesn't quite add up to a convincing simulation of WWII. The biggest problem is that the province-based movement system doesn't lend itself well to re-creating the kinds of huge land campaigns that give a good strategic war game its sense of scope. The second problem is that the detail itself doesn't feel like it makes a lot of difference in combat. That's not to say it doesn't; rather, there is too much detail to handle relative to the payoff. A lot of it feels like added flavor, as it doesn't have a direct impact on the game.

The provincial movement system feels most awkward when dealing with huge fronts like Russia.

People looking for a WWII sandbox with tons of detail will love this game since there is simply so much to do. Unfortunately, games this detailed need to ensure that a complex system will still yield plausible results. A game that allows the entire German army to hole itself up in Warsaw while the Poles control all of Germany clearly has some mechanical holes to fill.

In the end, *Hearts of Iron II* feels like an amalgam of details in search of a cohesive game design. Dividing Europe up into provinces made a lot more sense when many of those provinces could be treated as separate nation-states. And diplomacy based on sending other countries money worked much better in 1540 than it does in 1940. Abstraction is fine, but when it's mixed with detail to this degree, it needs to be better integrated into an overarching game structure. You can still have plenty of fun sweating the details in *Hearts of Iron II*—just don't look too closely at the whole thing. **Bruce Geryk**

**Verdict** ★★½☆☆
**The world's biggest ahistorical sandbox.**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD CLASSIC ISSUE 250

# THE START OF SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

## Back before they were giants

**After more than 20 years of publication, *CGW* enjoys a rare sense of perspective when it comes to the big franchises in gaming. Before the colossus of *World of WarCraft* bestrode the Earth, the franchise found its feet in a much more modest debut. Here's what we said about it, and some of the other biggest titles in gaming, way back when.**

### WarCraft: Orcs & Humans

DEVELOPER: **Blizzard**
**Offspring: *WarCraft II: Tides of Darkness, WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos, World of WarCraft***
**What We Said Then: "Between the real-time play and the interesting mixture of opposing units, it seems we've got a great game here—a game designed for an ebbing and flowing contest of tactical and strategic wits." Chris Lombardi, *CGW* #126, January 1995**

### SimCity

DEVELOPER: **Maxis**
**Offspring: *SimCity 2000, SimCity 3000, SimCity 4, SimAnt, SimPark, SimCopter, Streets of SimCity,***

***SimEarth, The Sims, The Sims 2***
**What We Said Then: "As nice as the scenarios are, they are not anywhere near as compelling as designing your own (cities).... All we can say is, 'Buy this game.'" Johnny Wilson, *CGW* #59, May 1989**

### Doom

DEVELOPER: **Id Software**
**Offspring: *Doom II, Doom 3, Quake, Quake II, Quake III: Arena, Countless dead university servers***
**What We Said Then: "Doom is a virtuoso performance. Stunning graphics, pulse-pounding sound, intense gameplay, and multiplayer mayhem combine to form what is probably the best action game to date." Bryan Walker, *CGW* #116, March 1994**

### Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord

DEVELOPER: **Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead**
**Offspring: *Wizardry II: Knight of Diamonds, Wizardry III: Legacy of Llylgamyn, Wizardry IV: The Return of Werdna, Wizardry V: Heart of the Maelstrom, Wizardry VI: Bane of the Cosmic Forge, Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant, Wizardry 8***
**What We Said Then: "I would rate Wizardry as one of the all time classic computer games. It sets the standard by which all fantasy role-playing games should be compared." Mark Marlow, *CGW* Vol. 2, #3, May 1982**

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| AMD Mobile Athlon™ 64 Processor 3700+ | $ 1585 | |
| AMD Mobile Athlon™ 64 Processor 3400+ | $ 1335 | |
| AMD Mobile Athlon™ 64 Processor 3200+ | $ 1309 | |
| AMD Mobile Athlon™ 64 Processor 3000+ | $ 1259 | |
| AMD Mobile Athlon™ 64 Processor 2800+ | $ 1239 | |

AMD 64 Athlon FX

AMD 64 Athlon

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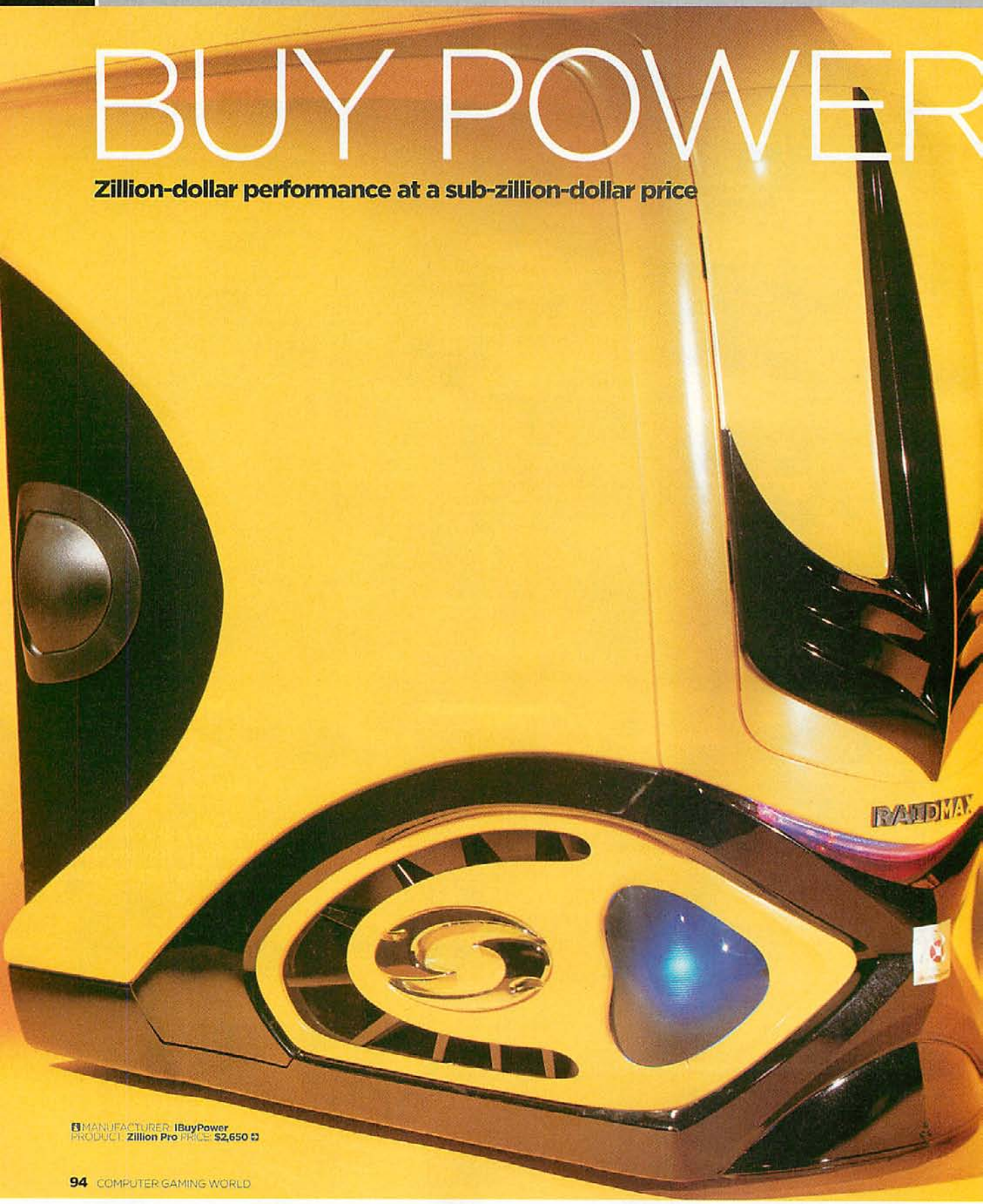
# BUY POWER

**Zillion-dollar performance at a sub-zillion-dollar price**




MANUFACTURER: IBuyPower
PRODUCT: Zillion Pro PRICE: $2,650

Inside

**GeForce 6600 GT OC 128MB Videocard**
Long product name, fast card.

**TrackIR 3-Pro**
OK, you may look like a fool wearing this, but you'll play like a pro.

**Razer Diamondback Mouse**
Can a simple mouse make your gaming better? You bet.

# FOR LESS

**A PC from IBuyPower offers the right balance of performance and price for hardcore gamers looking to increase their frag counts without squandering their college funds or dipping into their Hawaiian-vacation money. Simply put, IBuyPower is the best at building inexpensive high-performance rigs like the Zillion Pro, systems perfect for gamers on a budget.**

A former Editors' Choice winner, the Zillion Pro still packs plenty of innovation. The biggest upgrade is a switch to Nvidia's new high-performance, low-latency NForce4 PCI Express-based technology found in the rig's combination of an MSI full-featured K8N Neo4 Platinum motherboard and AMD's great-for-gaming Athlon 64 4000+ processor with HyperTransport technology. This match of components led to blisteringly fast gaming, but only after updating the K8N BIOS due to quirky system instability caused by the immaturity of the NForce4.

Quirks aside, the Zillion Pro ripped through our 3DGG *Doom 3* and *Halo* benchmarks at 84fps and 87.88fps, respectively. With a full gig of DDR2 PC3200 RAM clocked at 400MHz, along with two Western Digital 250GB HDDs in RAID 0, this type of performance is to be expected. Toss in ATI's flagship Radeon X850 XT VPU for impressive *Doom 3* benchmark scores, and the Zillion Pro hits the gaming mark.

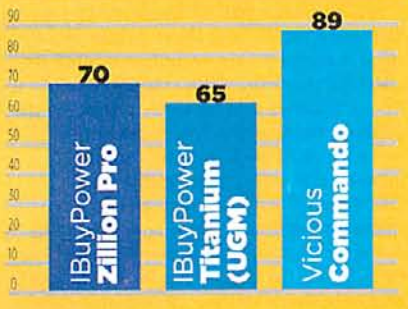
The Zillion Pro uses the Raidmax Samurai chassis painted in hard yellow. It has a flimsy front panel that tends to stick, but the Samurai offers plenty of cooling and upgrading room. Unfortunately, as with the innards of the Titanium UGM system, anyone opening up the IBuyPower case will reveal a messy tangle of wires. This can make future upgrades an annoying exercise that will test your dexterity more than your tech acumen.

The Zillion Pro's Sony dual-layer DVD-ROM drive cranks *Far Cry* or your favorite reference DVDs. Add IBuyPower's three-year limited warranty with one year of ICare deluxe 24/7 on-site tech support, and you have a high-end gaming system you can afford. If you crave NForce4 horsepower for *Half-Life 2*, *Pirates!*, or *Rome: Total War*, then the Zillion Pro's priced-to-move value is difficult to pass up. **Raphael Liberatore**

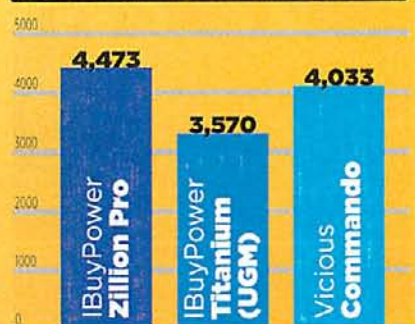
**SCORE:** ★★★★☆

**A former Editors' Choice winner, the Zillion Pro still packs plenty of innovation.**

## 3D GameGauge Lite 1.0




## 3DMark05




ALL TESTS RUN WITH 2X AA (ANTIALIASING) AND 4X AF (ANISOTROPIC FILTERING) TURNED ON UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

## YOU BUY POWER

**IBuyPower has carved out a nice niche for itself by offering a good balance of price and performance. Its ability to underbid the competition is due largely to its status as a direct OEM distributor, which essentially means it enjoys bulk-access discounts to components that it can then pass on to customers. So, even if IBuyPower's Zillion Pro system is just a tad over your budget, odds are there's something among the company's broad selection of gaming computers that is within your means. The splash page alone at www.ibuypower.com showcases over 20 preconfigured PCs—from the B-T-S-64 AMD Athlon 64 and Gamer Supreme Intel PCI Express-based systems to its priced-to-move Weekly Gamer Special PC, as well as its Battalion notebook line featuring the new ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 Pro videocard for gaming on the go.**

**All systems, including its Media Center, WorkStation, and Pocket ePC lines, are easily configured to taste (as is the case with most online retailers), and each comes with IBuyPower's 30-day money-back guarantee, ICare service warranty, limited replacement parts guarantee, lifetime toll-free tech support, and 24-hour shipping service. Considering its price-to-performance ratio, the variety of computers available for every computing need, and a notable customer-support package, IBuyPower should be regarded as a serious choice for your next prebuilt gaming rig. So watch out, Alienware, VoodooPC, and Vicious PC, because IBuyPower just might become a serious contender in the gaming-PC market.**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

MANUFACTURER: **BFGTech** PRODUCT: **GeForce 6600 GT OC 128MB DDR AGP Videocard** PRICE: **$229**

# POWER ON THE CHEAP

Say yes to higher fps

**Known for its assortment of graphics high rollers, BFGTech cast some doubt on yours truly by claiming it would bring high-performance gaming to those on a budget. I mean, why would it risk ruining its reputation for making the fastest and most upscale videocards in the market by coughing up a sloppy budget card? But as soon as its shiny new GeForce 6600 GT OC for old-school AGP systems arrived at my doorstep, my sniggering skepticism changed into serious fascination when the card started running benchmarks like no one's business.**

Yep, BFGTech has hit the price-to-performance sweet spot dead center. How does it perform this exceptional feat? By carefully jacking up the standard GeForce 6600 500MHz engine clock setting to the 525MHz mark while overclocking the memory clock to 1,050MHz for an increased memory bandwidth at 2.5GB/sec. Then it mixes together dual 400MHz RAMDACs, high-speed GDDR3 memory, 8-pipe Superscalar GPU architecture, DirectX 9 Shader Model 3.0 support, and Forceware Unified drivers and comes up with a nimble card that runs slightly faster than other Nvidia 6600 competitors—and all at a price that's easy to swallow.

**This is an impressive, affordable videocard solution.**

The GeForce 6600 GT OC benchmark scores reflect the muscle gained from overclocking. This was most evident in *Doom 3* running at 1280x1024 resolution with 2x AA and 4x AF enabled, where it ran at a silky smooth 52fps. Watching the card devour frames in both *UT2004* and *Far Cry* really drove home the point that this is an impressive, affordable videocard solution—especially considering its lowly 128MB of GDDR3 RAM. Even the *Painkiller* tests topped the 50fps barrier.

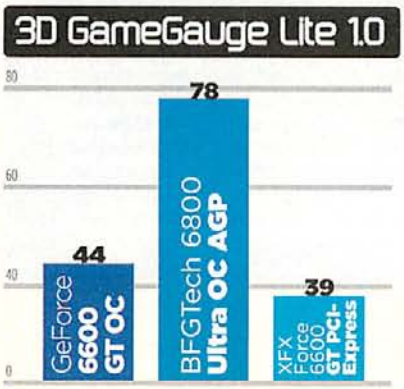
The 6600 GT OC uses a large, shiny copper heat sink and fan to provide not only snazzy views through your computer's window case, but superior cooling over standard aluminum-based thermal solutions as well. This videocard also features dual DVI, HD, and S-Video ports. With a lifetime warranty, 24-hour technical support, and a new www.bfggaming.com file and patch download server, BFGTech shows it can deliver on its promise.

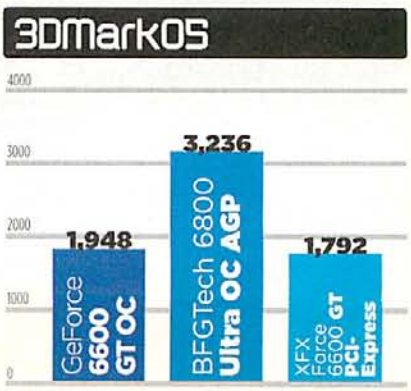
So, why haven't you upgraded already?

**Raphael Liberatore**

**SCORE:** ★★★★½

**The card does a great job rendering *Rome: Total War*'s massive battles.**




ALL TESTS RUN WITH 2X AA (ANTIALIASING) AND 4X AF (ANISOTROPIC FILTERING) TURNED ON.

MANUFACTURER: **Saitek** PRODUCT: **Gamers' Keyboard** PRICE: **$59**

# MODDING **DELIGHT**

## Saitek lights it up

**If you're the sort of gaming vampire who does his fragging in a pitch-black room, here's the keyboard for you. The ice-blue glow of Saitek's Gamers' Keyboard looks incredibly cool, and its adjustable backlighting provides a useful viewing source in even the darkest of environments. This gem provides an ideal solution for computer modders looking for the perfect peripheral to showcase their creations.**

More important, Saitek has created a keyboard every bit as rugged as it is stylish. In testing, all 104 keys endured countless hours of *UT2004*, *Joint Ops*, and *Far Cry* frenzy and the most arduous twitch-monkey key pounding in existence. If you're constantly replacing keyboards due to wear and tear, you can subtract that expense from your budget right now.

The Gamers' Keyboard may not actually *make* you better, but you'll definitely *feel* you're playing better—it's just that smooth and responsive. And for something built so tough, the sound of every keystroke is surprisingly muffled.

On top of this, the Gamers' Keyboard adds a programmable command pad sporting nine keys that can be equipped for up to 27 commands using Saitek's gaming-profile software. Bottom line: This keyboard is an amazing piece of manufacturing prowess and design. **Raphael Liberatore**

**SCORE:** ★★★★★

**This is an ideal keyboard for computer modders.**

MANUFACTURER: **Belkin** PRODUCT: **Nostromo SpeedPad n52** PRICE: **$49.99**

# POCKET **HERCULES**

## Finally, a cool gaming peripheral for the rest of us

**Belkin's second-gen SpeedPad is basically a beefed-up keypad that lets players use only their left hand to access all the keyboard commands they need—it's an essential tool for everyone from FPS fanatics to RPG fans. It's also perfect for notebook-computer gamers who want to reduce wear-and-tear on their integrated keyboards.**

By default, the n52 is set up for the WASD movement commands used by the majority of FPS games, but the included profile-editor software makes it easy to remap any portion of the device, including the integrated scroll wheel and eight-way directional pad, so players can assign everything from individual key presses to complex macros.

Different profiles can be created and assigned on a game-by-game basis and are automatically loaded when the game is launched. The sword fighting and ballroom dancing in *Sid Meier's Pirates!* became easier once the directional pad was mapped to the movement commands, and mastering scads of hotkeys in *World of WarCraft* was a snap thanks to support for "shift states" that let gamers assign up to four different commands to each key.

Occasionally, the computer didn't respond to input when multiple keys were pressed simultaneously, but this intermittent annoyance was the only downside to a truly amazing gaming peripheral. **Tracy Baker**

**SCORE:** ★★★★½

**As essential tool for everyone from FPS fans to RPG fanatics.**

MANUFACTURER: **Saitek** PRODUCT: **X52 Flight Control System** PRICE: **$129**

# TOP FLIGHT

## The X52 comes with everything but the jumpsuit

**The X52 Flight Control System (FCS) jets into airspace carrying a payload of accolades already garnered from its FCS predecessor, along with an impressive list of enhancements. In other words, Saitek's new and improved X52 FCS is just like the previous X45 FCS...but better. So tighten your jumpsuit and double-check your flight log, because we're going to take the X52 for a ride.**

The X52 is two flight controllers in one setup—it comes with a full-featured joystick matched with a high-functioning throttle controller. Construction of the joystick and throttle is good, both being built out of metal and rubber. Unlike its predecessor, the X45, the X52 throttle features a miniature LCD monitor called a Multi-Function Display (MFD), which is designed to present a variety of flight data, flight-control settings, profile information, and flight times in three separate modes during flight. Aside from LED backlighting for many of the buttons and switches, the MFD is really the highlight of the X52's setup.

**The X52 is a perfect match for demanding and highly detailed flight sims.**

The X52 is a perfect match for demanding and highly detailed flight sims like *Microsoft's Flight Simulation 2004*. There's plenty of control during flight due in part to a broad range of selector and toggle switches, including two well-designed eight-way high-hat switches, a two-stage metal trigger and metal pinkie switch, and several buttons. With so many control options, flying feels authentic and enjoyable, whether you're piloting the latest planes or flying at night in a biplane above the Sierra Nevadas. Can a game controller actually contribute to a game's ability to create its own reality? The X52 can.

With Saitek's own programming software, gamers can manage the X52 with multiple flight-sim profiles for every game, all of which are changeable on the fly. Saitek offers several premanaged profiles and support for all PC flight-sim titles, or you can make your own according to your preferences.

The X52 has all the features and enhancements that define a top-notch PC flight controller. Yeah, it lacks the mighty build quality of CH Products' FCS setup, but this Saitek FCS is arguably the most stylish and technically adept joystick throttle system available. Best of all, the X52 is priced to move.

**Raphael Liberatore**

**SCORE:** ★★★★☆

MANUFACTURER: **NaturalPoint** PRODUCT: **TrackIR 3-Pro** PRICE: **$139**

# HEAD TRACKING DEVICE

## Poor man's VR gives sim pilots a combat edge

EDITORS' CHOICE Computer Gaming

**The TrackIR 3-Pro is a VR gadget that tracks head movement, letting you literally look around the cockpit in flight and racing games, which should put an end to uttering those famous last words: "I never saw him coming."**

TrackIR combines a webcam-sized device with a reflective dot that tracks your head movement. True geeks can affix an included reflective tracking dot directly to their foreheads or sunglasses. The rest of us can slap the adhesive dot on a headset microphone or cap, or better yet, buy NaturalPoint's less-nerdy TrackHat, which includes a small reflective panel.

Using TrackIR takes a little adjustment, since movements are exaggerated so that you can look behind you without actually turning from the monitor. By default, TrackIR just lets you pan and tilt your view. The optional Vector Expansion clips give you full 6DOF (six degrees of freedom) movement, allowing you to lean out of the cockpit to look past the engine during takeoff or lean forward to look at the instrument panel.

So far, only about 20 games have direct TrackIR support, though older driver versions can emulate a mouse, which does work with a handful of unsupported games. Third-party add-ons add keyboard and joystick emulation.

TrackIR is pricey, but the amount of immersion it adds to titles like *Pacific Fighters*, *Flight Simulator 2004*, and *Live for Speed* is worth the money—and the embarrassment of playing a game with a shiny dot on your forehead.

**Denny Atkin**

**SCORE:** ★★★★½

**The TrackIR should put an end to the famous last words: "I never saw him coming."**

MANUFACTURER: Razer PRODUCT: Diamondback Mouse PRICE: $59

# SNAKE BITE

## The best gaming mouse ever

**After years of nipping at Logitech's and Microsoft's heels in its attempts to create the perfect gaming mouse, Razer has finally accomplished this feat, surpassing both. The Diamondback mouse is a performance tool designed specifically for pure adrenaline-fueled gaming. In fact, using one may get you banned from game servers due to its unfair advantage in speed and precision.**

With technical enhancements galore, the Diamondback uses a powerful optical engine (with a high-powered light encoder prism) along with a 16-bit data path to overcome Window XP's fixed USB polling rate limitation. This translates into fluid and precise high-speed motion, most beneficial in fast-paced shooters like *UT2004* and *Painkiller*. Speeding through the dark recesses of *Doom 3*'s underground labyrinths, the Diamondback's ultra-high 1,600 dpi resolution and gigantic 6,400fps are particularly useful when you're ambushed by pop-up beasts from the netherworld.

The Diamondback not only performs like a champ, but looks like one, too, coming in both "chameleon green" and "magma" colors. Both sport sleek, contoured side rails, which feel comfortable to any sized hand. The Diamondback also possesses a grand total of seven programmable buttons, with the two big buttons now coated with nonslip material for those with clumsier digits. Add deep Teflon feet that glide effortlessly across any surface and a gold-plated USB connector, and you're armed with the best gaming mouse on the planet. Just be prepared for the flood of insults and accusations of cheating from those sporting less competitive gear.

Raphael Liberatore

**SCORE:** ★★★★★

**Using a Diamondback may get you banned from game servers due to its unfair advantage in speed and precision.**

## GEEK SPEAK Technical jargon dipped in honey

| | |
|---|---|
| Clock speed | Determines the number of instructions the processor executes per second. Clock speeds are expressed in megahertz (MHz) or gigahertz (GHz). |
| Superscalar | CPU architecture that allows for the execution of more than one instruction per clock cycle. |
| NetBurst | Intel technology that increases the frequency capability of the CPU and doubles the pipeline to 20 stages. |
| Cache | Memory storage system used for holding data. Both AMD and Pentium CPUs contain either an internal Level 1 cache or external Level 2 cache. |
| Instruction set | Basic commands sent to the processor for performing specific tasks |

# Tech Commando

## Commo from the hardware front lines

**An Asus SLI NForce4 motherboard, Kingston DDR2 RAM, two XFX Force GeForce 6600 PCI Express videocards, an NZXT Nemesis chassis—each of these all-star components got my heart racing as I built this month's Killer Rig. This would be the fastest Killer Rig in *CGW* history, largely due to the powerful AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 processor I used. I really like this processor. A lot. Why?**

How about its 2.6GHz clock and memory controller speeds, 1MB of L2 cache, and 128-bit integrated memory controller running at the same speed as its core frequency? This is a serious CPU made for serious gaming.

But I got to wondering: Does it make Intel's Pentium 4 obsolete? In the short term, not really. I'm one of the few who feels the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition is a decent processor for gaming; this despite the mocking from hardcore enthusiasts about its mediocre performance gains over other P4 CPUs, expensive price, and continued use of the older 0.13 micron (130 nanometer) process. Contrary to popular belief, the P4 EE's 1,066MHz CPU bus with 2MB of L3 cache does give memory access a shot in the arm, along with improved performance scaling in computer processes. The P4 EE also offers DDR2/533 speed support and a faster synchronous 8.5GB/sec CPU-to-memory bandwidth link. True, the P4 EE falls behind the Athlon 64 FX-55 in game benchmarks, but it does perform better than the FX-55 in a majority of multitasking and multithreading tasks, and Intel's Netburst technology benefits users as well. Is this enough for a gamer looking for the best performance? Well, no, because it's not the best, but it still should be more than enough to meet any gamer's needs. Going forward, the FX-55 will continue to dominate our Killer Rig and most machines by boutique system builders like Falcon Northwest—until, maybe, the next Intel chip is released. Raphael Liberatore

**Does AMD's Athlon 64 FX-55 CPU make Intel's P4 obsolete?**

MANUFACTURER: **Thrustmaster** PRODUCT: **2-in-1 Dual Trigger Gamepad** PRICE: **$19.99**

# DOUBLE TAP

## It's all in your trigger finger

**Thrustmaster products have a good reputation, and nothing about the Dual Trigger is going to change that.**

This solid gamepad has two connectors at the end of its cord, one a USB plug for PCs, the other fit for Sony PlayStation 2 jacks. Slightly larger than a standard PS2 controller, the Dual Trigger is rugged and designed for adults. It's also innovative, featuring two programmable analog triggers on its underside.

The gamepad uses an internal memory chip to store the trigger programs, so programmability requires no software. The triggers have a gentle tension and enough throw to make them ideal for mapping functions like vehicle acceleration or any control that's pressure sensitive or gauged on a positional range. It takes some creativity to find a better way to use the triggers and some careful practice to master them, but even without them, this gamepad is more than adequate for gaming needs. It worked great in tests on both platforms and proved considerably responsive and easy to handle in games like *Need for Speed Underground 2* and *Madden 2005*. Simply put, the Dual Trigger is an affordable, comfortable, and versatile gamepad for both PC and PS2 owners. ⊠ **Bernie Dy**

**An internal memory chip stores trigger programs, so you don't need to use software.**

**SCORE:** ★★★★☆

MANUFACTURER: **Logitech** PRODUCT: **Cordless Rumblepad 2** PRICE: **$39.99**

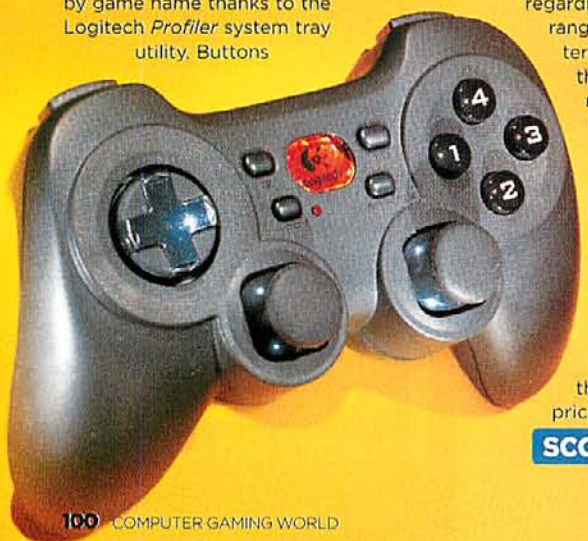
# DOUBLE RUMBLE

## Logitech perfects the Rumblepad

EDITORS' CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

**Like its predecessor, the Rumblepad 2 is exactly like having a wired gamepad, but without the hassle of knocking things off your desk every time you use it. Controls are just as responsive and accurate as with a wired pad, and in some cases, like a complete run-through of *Smash T.V.* on MAME, even better.**

Functions are all programmable by game name thanks to the Logitech *Profiler* system tray utility. Buttons can be programmed as a keystroke or a macro, and the sticks can be individually programmed to act as a joystick, a mouse, or as an extra four buttons. *Profiler* has sacrificed some ease of use for maximum customization, but I was able to set the controls up fairly quickly both for some laid-back fishing in *World of WarCraft* and for that complete run-through of *Smash T.V.* from across the room on a couch. Logitech's claims regarding the controller's 30-foot range proved correct, as I encountered no interference even though my room contains a multitude of wireless devices. It also runs 50 hours on two AAs, which Logitech thankfully included.




At $39.99, it costs twice as much as the average wired gamepad. But if you use a gamepad or have been getting by without one in games that *should* be played with one, the convenience and performance of this wireless pad is worth the price. ⊠ **Matthew Gallant**

**SCORE:** ★★★★★

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD CLASSIC ESSAY 250

# HOT ROD JUNKYARD

## Resigned to the scrap heap

**When we debuted our Ultimate Game Machine feature in January 1996, one of the pioneers in boutique-rig building, Falcon Northwest, came out on top with its Mach V.**

**"We really have to appreciate the attention to detail that Falcon Northwest has applied to the Mach V. Not only was this a real fire-breather in terms of performance, but it came with a very nice set of premium components," said Dave Salvator in Issue #138.**

**And what did that $3,995 "fire-breather" pack into that big beige tower? How about a Pentium 133, 16MB of RAM, a 1.6GB hard drive, and a sweeping 15-inch monitor. The 2.1 speaker system was positively exotic for its time.**

**The following month featured a do-it-yourself version of UGM that would eventually morph into our signature Killer Rig. And what killed the most? The price tag at a whopping $9,497. Ouch. But it bought you a Pentium 133 with 16MB RAM, a 2.1GB SCSI hard drive, a Matrox Millennium videocard (expandable to 8MB WRAM!), a 28.8 modem, a $1,700 21-inch NEC monitor, and a $999 Forte VFX-1 helmet because, well, we bought into that virtual reality boondoggle as much as anyone. Nowadays, you can find all that horsepower packed into your wristwatch. Without the helmet.** ⊠

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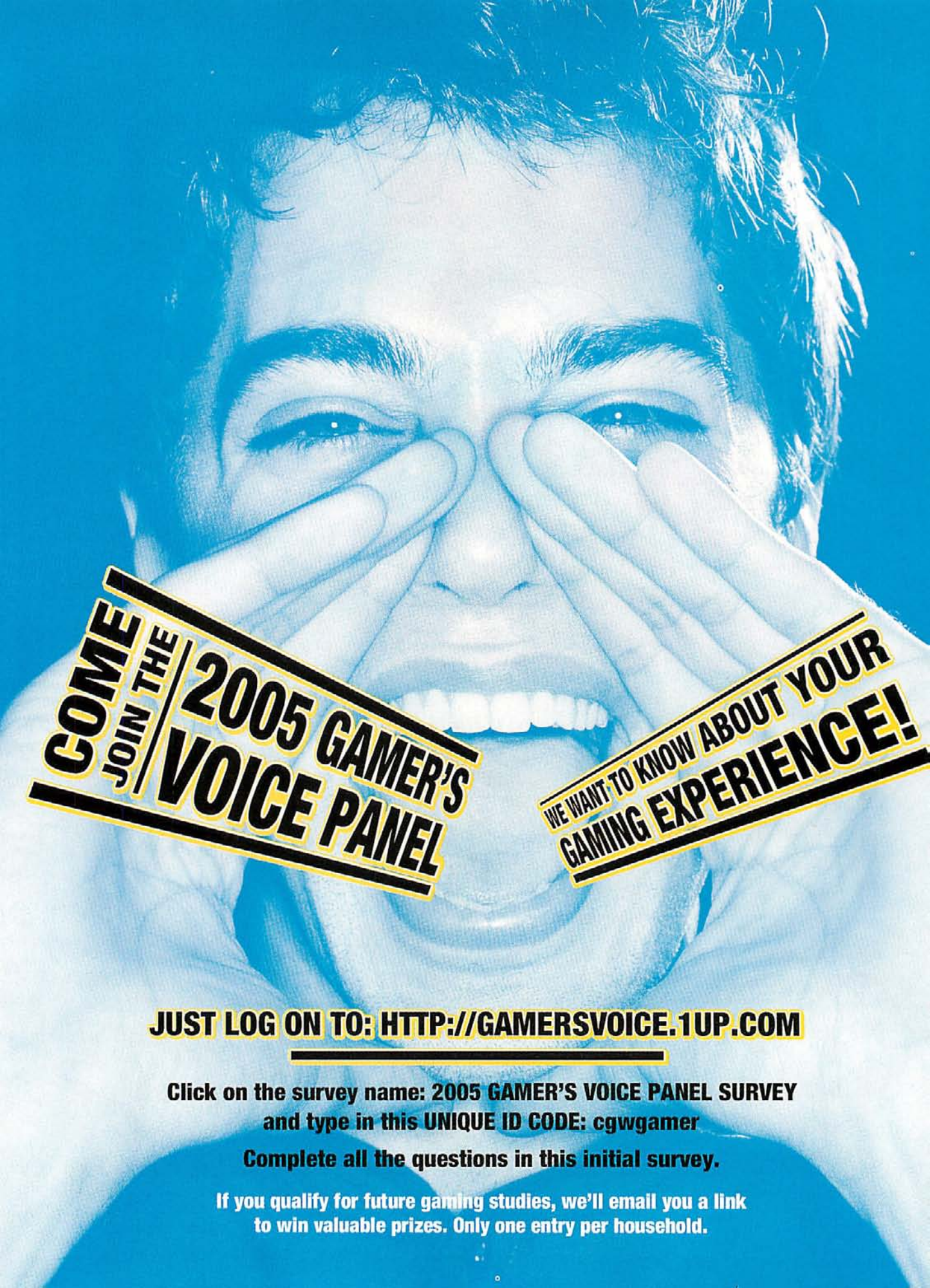
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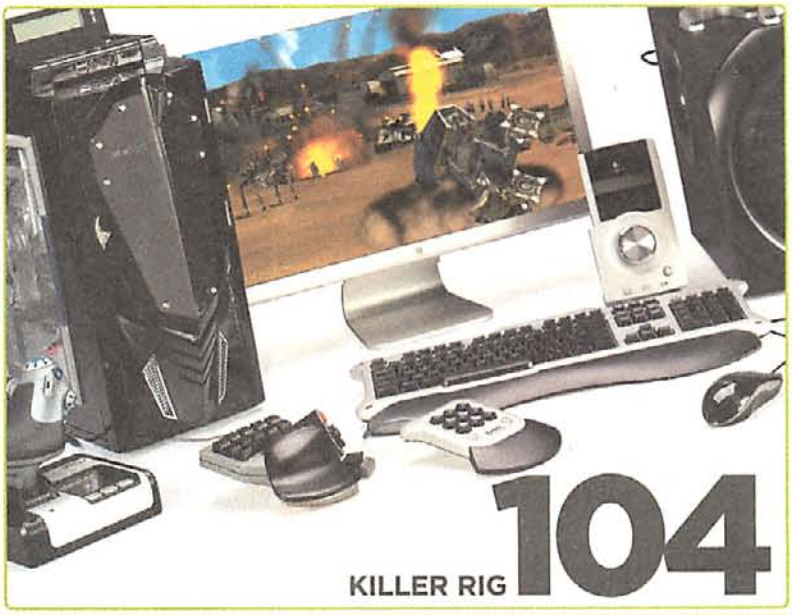
# Check Out

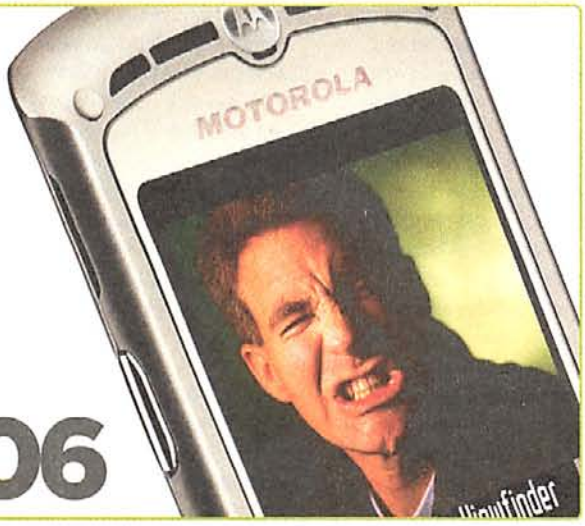
FAST FORWARD 108



KILLER RIG 104

REWIND 100 109

CHRONICLES OF EGGBERT 111




A-LIST 106

## Inside

**1,040: That's the total number of entries we** received for the February issue Check Out Intro contest. One thousand frickin' forty, people. We couldn't be more pleased, both by the fact that people other than our own staff are actually reading this magazine, and to announce that the winner of the contest is Steve Broesder. Steve will receive a sumptuous bounty of goodies from the good people of NZXT, including the Nemesis Elite case, a Nemesis poster, and a T-shirt. Congratulations, man.

## The Guts

| | COMPONENT | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Case | NZXT Nemesis Elite Edition midtower case | $65 |
| Power supply | Thermaltake Silent PurePower 680-watt with active PFC power supply | $150 |
| Processor (CPU) | AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 | $880 |
| Motherboard | Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe | $230 |
| Memory | Two Kingston HyperX KHX4300 533MHz 1GB DDR memory module kits (2GB total) | $580 ($290 x2) |
| Hard drive | Two Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 SATA 200GB 7,200 rpm hard drives with 8MB buffer | $270 ($135 x2) |
| Graphics | Two XFX Force GeForce 6600 GT Extreme Gamer Edition 128MHz DDR3 RAM PCI Express | $360 ($180 x2) |
| Optical drive | Mad Dog MegaSTOR 16X Double Layer DVD3R3RW internal drive | $65 |
| Optical drive 2 | LG 52x/32x/48x CD-R/RW drive | $25 |
| Floppy drive | Sony floppy drive | $12 |
| Monitor | Apple 23-inch Cinema Display | $1,999 |
| Keyboard | Saitek Gamers Keyboard | $60 |
| Mouse | Razer Diamondback optical | $50 |
| Speakers | Logitech Z-5500 Digital 5.1 speaker system | $400 |
| Controller | Belkin Nostromo SpeedPad n52 | $35 |
| Controller | Logitech Cordless Rumblepad 2 | $40 |
| Controller | Saitek X52 Flight Control System | $129 |
| TOTAL COST | | $5,350 |

# Killer Rig

### FX-55 Centurion redux

**We finally scored what is arguably the biggest gaming enhancement since 3DFX mass-produced the Voodoo graphics card: Nvidia's SLI (scalable link interface) architecture with NForce4 technology.**

Simply stated, SLI offers double the performance by linking two videocards together in a PCI Express framework, resulting in increased framerates and gaming nirvana. Since Asus was one of Nvidia's first SLI technology partners, and since the company has a knack for producing feature-rich motherboards, we were excited when the new Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe PCI Express motherboard arrived. Combined with AMD's überpowerful AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 processor, it became the perfect backbone for our Killer Rig system. Since Asus motherboards and AMD FX processors beg to be overclocked, we added Zalman's monstrous CNPS7700-Cu heat sink and fan to keep things cool, along with NZXT's Nemesis Elite die-cast aluminum chassis with LCD fan control and 120mm case fan for awesome thermal conductivity. The Nemesis Elite is the perfect midtower design for overclocking fanatics, and even better, it comes at a bargain price. We chose Thermaltake's PurePower 680-watt power supply because of its efficient cooling and lower decibel ratings, in addition to SATA, PCI Express, and active PFC support, all inside a decked-out case with a cathode ray tube to enhance the case's mod-lighting effects.

Two GeForce 6600 GT videocards with 128MB DDR3 RAM from XFX Force provide our SLI Nemesis rig with gaming muscle. We also added 2GB of Kingston's HyperX 533MHz RAM, which comes with heat shields, and two Seagate Barracuda 200GB SATA HDDs in a striped RAID 0 configuration for faster read/write speeds. Next, we tossed in a dual-layer DVD burner from Mad Dog, a CD-R/RW from LG, and a floppy disk from Sony for removable media support. Rounding out our SLI-based Killer Rig are two of the best gaming devices around: Saitek's ultracool Gamers Keyboard and Razer's slick high-performance Diamondback optical mouse. We then connected Apple's phenomenal 23-inch

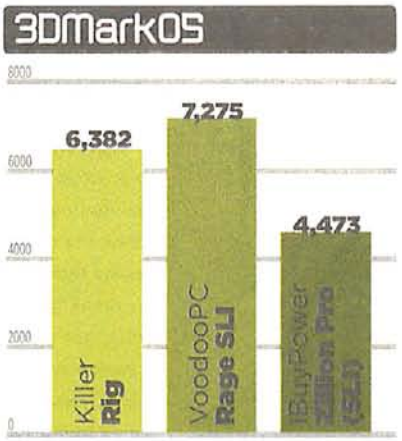
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

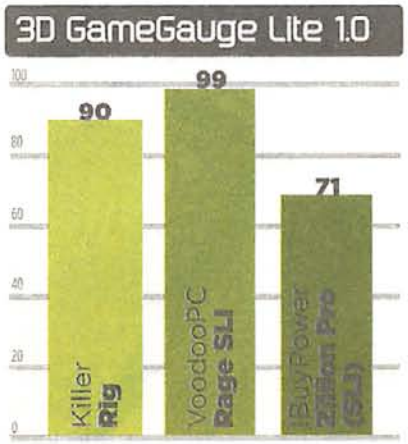
LCD monitor, and since we're focusing on controllers this month, we sprinkled a few more game controllers in the mix...just because we can.

In finalizing our DIY diamond, we loaded Windows XP Pro with Service Pack 2, updated the drivers, tweaked the system settings, then slightly overclocked the FX-55 CPU. During 3D GameGauge benchmark testing, the SLI Nemesis ripped through *Halo*, *Far Cry*, and *Doom 3* with ease. It almost felt like we were reliving the glory of our recent UGM-winning VoodooPC Rage SLI rig.

This Killer Rig was exhilarating to build. What could possibly top it? Perhaps next month's machine, in which we swap the GeForce 6600 GT videocards with faster GeForce 6800 Ultras, like the ones used in VoodooPC's Rage SLI. We can't wait.

**Raphael Liberatore**




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

# A-List

**The latest and greatest gadgets you gotta get**
BY KRISTEN SALVATORE

URL: **www.xmradio.com/mify** PRICE: **$349.99**

## DELPHI MYFI XM2GO

With all due apologies to the man in my life, I am utterly and hopelessly in love with the Delphi MyFi XM2go personal XM satellite radio. How could I not be? It's done so much for me in the short time it's been in my company. It's true that I was administered nitrous during a two-hour dentist appointment for what can only be described as a satanic level of teeth cleaning, but what would that have been without the crystal-clear dance tunes of channel 82, System, to block out the noise of the drill? And when rain forced me to garage my beloved Honda scooter and take the bus to work for two weeks straight, what saved me from the sounds of the man next to me breakfasting on squeeze cheese directly from the can? Only the consistently dulcet tones of channel 80, The Move. Even in my apartment—so cavelike we were once briefly evicted by a mold outbreak of epic proportions—proper positioning of the antenna means a constant stream of tunes, news, sports, stock quotes, and anything else you can fit into about 250 channels. I've practiced shiny-gadget idolatry for many years; it's nice to see that something can still pleasantly surprise me.

URL: **www.motorola.com** PRICE: **$599.99**

## MOTOROLA V3

"Hello, Mom? Hi, it's me! Everything's great, why? Oh, yeah, I know I don't call enough...but I think that's about to change. See, I've got my hands on just about the prettiest, shiniest cell phone you've ever seen, the Motorola RAZR V3. That's right, the one on television. Yeah, it has a camera—a frickin' nice camera, actually. No, it's not like it'll replace my real digital camera, but it's still really nice. Of course I can e-mail the pictures to you—hang on, I'll send you one now. Oh, yeah, the display is amazing, full color and pretty crisp, considering it's on a phone. Plus it's pretty big, so you can actually see what you're doing when you're navigating through addresses and IMing and stuff. Actually, I think the most amazing thing about it is the size—it's ridiculously thin, but not so small that I feel like I'm gonna lose it or break it or something. Yeah, it's pretty over the top price-wise, but if you're into shiny toys, it's worth it. OK, gotta go—I wanna sync my phone with my PC via Bluetooth, plus the ninth person today just stopped me to tell me how cool this thing looks. I'll call you later, OK? Yeah, I promise."

# TECH REWIND

18 months of Tech scores at your fingertips

| PRODUCT | MONTH | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| ABS Mayhem G1 | 05/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| ABS Ultimate M6 | 07/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Actiontec 54Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router | 11/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Alienware Aurora | 01/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Altec Lansing MX5021 | 07/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Asus Extreme AX800 XT 256MB GDDR3 PCI Express | 01/05 | ★★★★★ |
| Asus Radeon 9800 XT | 04/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Asus V9980 Ultra graphics card | 05/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Asus V9999 Gamers Edition Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT AGP 256MB GDDR3 GPU | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| ATI 9600 XT | 05/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| ATI All-in-Wonder 9800 | 10/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| ATI Radeon X800 XT and XT Pro | 08/04 | ★★★★½ |
| ATI Radeon X800 XT PCI Express 256MB GDDR3 | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| ATI Radeon X850 XT Platinum Edition PCI Express | 03/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| ATI X600 XT | 10/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Belkin Wireless Pre-N Router | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| BFGTech Nvidia GeForce 6800 Ultra OC AGP 256MB GDDR3 GPU | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Bose Companion 3 | 07/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Boxx Technologies GameBoxx | 07/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Creative Labs Decoder DDTS-100 | 04/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Creative Labs GigaWorks S750 | 04/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Creative SoundBlaster Audigy 2 ZS Notebook | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Cyberpower Gamer Ultra 9900 Pro | 06/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Cyberpower Infinity 9900 Extreme | 04/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Dell Dimension 8300 | 06/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Dell Generation 3 Dimension XPS | 10/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Dell Inspiron XPS | 09/04 | ★★★★½ |

**Belkin Wireless Pre-N Router**

| PRODUCT | MONTH | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| Dell W20040 LCD TV | 09/04 | ★★★★½ |
| D-Link DGL-4300 GamerLounge Wireless Router | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| D-Link GigaExpress DGS-1008D 8-Port Gigabit Switch | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| EMachines M6807 | 05/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Falcon Northwest FragBox | 10/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Falcon Northwest FragBox 2 | 11/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Falcon Northwest FragBox Pro | 05/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Falcon Northwest Mach V | 06/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Gateway 200 ARC | 09/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Gateway 710G Gamer | 06/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Gateway 710XL | 01/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Gateway FMC-901X | 05/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Gateway M675 | 02/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Gigabyte N68T256DH Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT AGP 256MB GDDR3 | 01/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| Hercules Prophetview 920 Pro DVI | 03/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Hypersonic Aviator AX6 | 05/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Hypersonic Cyclone | 01/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| IBuyPower Back to School Machine | 09/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| IBuyPower Gamer Extreme | 03/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| IBuyPower Titanium-XP | 10/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| IBuyPower Zillion-FX | 06/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Ideazon Zboard keyboard | 12/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Intel D925XCV | 10/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Logitech MX510 Performance Optical Mouse | 07/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Logitech X620 6.1 Speakers | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Logitech Z-2200 | 04/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Logitech Z-3 | 04/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Logitech Z-5300 | 02/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Logitech Z-5500 | 12/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Microsoft Wireless Optical Desktop Elite | 12/03 | ★★★★☆ |

**Tapwave Zodiac**

| PRODUCT | MONTH | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| Nvidia 128MB GeForce 6600 GT PCI | 12/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Nvidia 2004 MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra | 09/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Nvidia GeForce 6800 Ultra | 08/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Nyko Air Flo Mouse | 12/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Nyko PC Air Flo EX | 12/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| PCFX Leviathan III | 11/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Philips Acoustic Fusion 610 | 11/03 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Philips Brilliance 230W5VS 23-inch LCD | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| PC Laptops Annihilator 987 | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| ProStar 9095-1B | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Sennheiser PC 150 Headphones | 12/03 | ★★★½☆ |
| Shuttle SN45G | 11/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Tapwave Zodiac | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Tek Panel 300 | 12/03 | ★★★½☆ |
| Toshiba Qosmio E15-AV101 | 12/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Toshiba Satellite 5205-S705 | 09/03 | ★★★★☆ |
| Toshiba Satellite P25-S670 | 09/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Totally Awesome Computers Ridiculously Insane PC | 01/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| U.S. Robotics USR5470 54Mbps Wireless Network Kit | 03/05 | ★★★½☆ |
| Velocity Micro Gamers Edge | 01/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Velocity Micro Vision 64 | 10/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Vicious PC MSI MEGA 865 | 08/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Vicious PC Ninja | 06/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Voodoo Hexx c:355 | 06/04 | ★★★★½ |
| VoodooPC Envy M:860 | 11/04 | ★★★★½ |
| VoodooPC F1 | 01/04 | ★★★★½ |
| VoodooPC F50 | 10/04 | ★★★★½ |
| VoodooPC Voodoo Doll | 02/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Widow PC The Sting | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| XFX Force Nvidia GeForce6600 GT 128MB DDR3 PCI Express | 01/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| Zalman ZM-RS6F Theater 6 headphones | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |

**Zalman ZM-RS6F Theater 6 headphones**

# Fast Forward

**Something about working on our 250th issue has made us all sentimental and stuff. Looking back over our gamin lifetimes, we've chosen what, for each of us, are...**

## OUR 5 MOST INFLUENTIAL GAMES

**Our own personal walks down memory lane**

### JEFF GREEN

PUBLISHER: SSI RELEASED: 1996 SYSTEM: PC

#### 1 Fantasy General

It's been a bit forgotten by now—but not by me. Merely my favorite fantasy strategy game of all time (with the *Heroes of Might and Magic* series right behind), *Fantasy General* was an ingenious, insanely addictive, and at times brutally tough game that had me playing literally all night, "just one more turn" echoing in my fevered brain.

PUBLISHER: Blizzard Entertainment RELEASED: 1995 SYSTEM: PC

#### 2 WarCraft II: Tides of Darkness

It was all about the turn-based games for me—until *WarCraft II*. Former *CGW* editor (and now Blizzard employee!) Elliott Chin turned me on to this, and for months, I could do nothing else. Blizzard's first masterpiece—and the grandfather of our most recent Game of the Year—*WarCraft II* is the first game I put on every new PC.

PUBLISHER: Id Software RELEASED: 1993 SYSTEM: PC

#### 3 Doom

An obvious choice, for sure, but with good reason: Even Id's previous game, *Wolfenstein 3D*, did not prepare you for the glorious, scary-as-heck watershed that was this game. Not only was *Doom* a wonder of level design and atmosphere, it also helped launch PC gaming's mod community—one of the most significant events of this industry. I still have floppies full of *Doom* WADs, somewhere in my house....

PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment RELEASED: 1999 SYSTEM: PC

#### 4 EverQuest

I resisted this—and all online RPGs—at first. I just could not see the appeal. But once I finally gave it a chance, I was sucked in big time—so much so that I ultimately had to quit cold turkey, like a guy quitting cigarettes, because all I did was think about this game. I miss you, Doofaeus, but I can never play you again. My wife would never forgive me.

PUBLISHER: Infocom RELEASED: 1980 SYSTEM: PC

#### 5 Zork I

"You are standing in an open field west of a white house...." Ah, yes. To old folks like me, that might be the greatest moment in the history of PC gaming. Infocom's seminal text adventure wouldn't look much like a "game" at all to you young punks today, but you'd be wrong. This was gaming at its purest and most imaginative. It's been all downhill since *Zork*.

### ROBERT COFFEY

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** RELEASED: **1987** SYSTEM: **PC, Tandy, Amiga**

#### 1 Earl Weaver Baseball

Without this title, I might never have made the jump from arcade rat to computer gamer. *EWB* set a standard for sports-game features that wasn't equaled until *High Heat 2000* was released more than a decade later. My friends and I were obsessed with our *Earl* league—played on an Amiga, of course, so we got not just color but *actual voices* as well.

PUBLISHER: **Microprose** RELEASED: **1993** SYSTEM: **PC**

#### 2 X-Com: UFO Defense

More than 10 years after its release, we still hear of games that should be "the next *X-Com*." And we're still waiting. An absolutely brilliant blend of turn-based tactical strategy, global planning, and role-playing, *X-Com* is the only game I've ever played for 36 hours straight without sleep.

PUBLISHER: **Faster Than Light** RELEASED: **1987** SYSTEM: **Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore**

#### 3 Dungeon Master

Forget *Half-Life*, any of the *Dooms*, and even *System Shock*—this is the game that got me to jump the highest out of my chair. The sense of a living world it created was perfectly distilled in that first insanely startling beholder attack. How powerful was *Dungeon Master*'s spell? My wife watched over my shoulder every minute I played...and jumped higher than I did.

PUBLISHER: **Sierra** RELEASED: **1998** SYSTEM: **PC**

#### 4 Half-Life

An argument for most perfect shooter ever: headcrabs, Surface Tension, *Counter-Strike*, the G-Man, Barney, the lethal beauty of a simple crowbar, and the unholy marriage of my personal superhuman crossbow skill and the Bounce deathmatch map. It's a daunting legacy—one even the incredibly polished sequel can't quite measure up to.

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** RELEASED: **2000** SYSTEM: **PC**

#### 5 The Sims

Before *The Sims*, I relied on RPGs to create virtual beings I cared about, but Maxis' masterpiece took my personal avatar emotional investment to a new level. That this game found a way to make the seemingly mundane so addictive and entertaining is a testament to its genius. It also helps that you could reduce people to chronically pants-wetting drowning victims.

# KRISTEN SALVATORE

## 1 Lemonade Stand

You built up an inventory of the necessary supplies and ingredients, then sat back and watched your customers' reactions via thought bubbles. Nothing blew up or bled, but I still played the heck out of it. Does anyone know who published it originally? If so, drop me a line at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

PUBLISHER: Broderbund RELEASED: 1986 SYSTEM: Apple II, Commodore

## 2 Karateka

As straightforward a fighting game as you will ever find, *Karateka*'s simple story (fight the bad guys, rescue the princess) and no-nonsense action (fight, fight, and fight some more) had me hooked for years after its graphics had been far outstripped.

PUBLISHER: Spectrum Holobyte RELEASED: 1986 SYSTEM: Apple II, Commodore

## 3 Tetris

So simple...so gratifying...so #%&@ing addictive. I actually dreamed about it on a regular basis, and on more than one occasion, found myself mentally rearranging buildings on my college campus so they'd fit together better. Before I had *Bookworm*, I had *Tetris*—and it was good.

## 4 Doom/ Grim Fandango

Both of these, of course, have shown up on others' lists (Jeff's and Darren's, to be precise), but to leave them off mine would be sacrilege. These two went a long, long way toward reinvigorating my love of gaming at times when I might otherwise have seen my PC solely as a word processor.

PUBLISHER: Monolith RELEASED: 2000 SYSTEM: PC

## 5 No One Lives Forever

With its swingin' '60s theme and hot, hilarious heroine, *NOLF* totally won me over. It was the first time in a while that I'd gotten a good laugh out of a game, and it was a damn decent FPS to boot. Like, I totally dug it, man—and still do. I recently reinstalled it on my PC at work.

# DARREN GLADSTONE

PUBLISHER: Sir-Tech Software RELEASED: 1981 SYSTEM: Apple II

## 1 Wizardry

The first game that got me hooked on gaming and doomed me to a life of nerd-dom. The plush black box promised adventures in "The Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord." What I got was hours in a darkened room in front of my Apple. Simple vector graphics ("Whoa! Graphics?!) and a vivid imagination kept me playing and mapping out every level on graph paper.

PUBLISHER: FTL Games RELEASED: 1984 SYSTEM: Apple II

## 2 SunDog: Frozen Legacy

You want open-ended gameplay and free-roaming worlds? RPG strategizing? How about some action? Long before *GTA*, *Freelancer*, or *Diablo*, there was *SunDog*. This game had it all: space exploration, pitched battles with space pirates, commodity trading, and back-alley shootouts with thugs. Want to see what you missed? Emulators await you online.

PUBLISHER: LucasArts RELEASED: 1998 SYSTEM: PC

## 3 Grim Fandango

Among many great graphic adventures to come along, *Grim Fandango* had the benefit of coming out last with the best technology and Tim "The Mad Genius" Schafer at the helm. The twisted humor and great film-noirish graphics hooked me.

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive RELEASED: 1999 SYSTEM: PC

## 4 Unreal Tournament

Am I denying the significance of the original *Doom* or the intricate storytelling from *Half-Life*? Hell no, but when I played the first *Unreal Tournament*, something clicked. With easy-to-program bots, huge multiplayer matches, inventive weapons, and, best of all, the invention of assault mode, it's an undeniable classic.

PUBLISHER: NCsoft RELEASED: 2004 SYSTEM: PC

## 5 City of Heroes

I didn't play many MMO games prior to *City of Heroes*, but along came a game that anybody could get into and, better yet, made you feel like an all-powerful superhero without unbalancing the game.

# Rewind 100

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

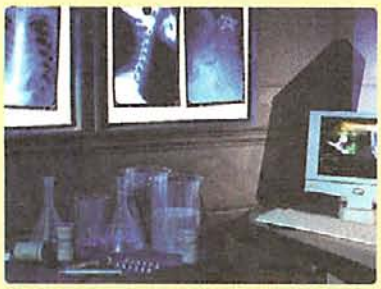
| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| Alida | Holiday 04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Alexander | 03/05 | ★★☆☆☆ |
| Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol | 12/04 | ★★☆☆☆ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Scrapland | Holiday04 | ★★★★½ |
| Arena Wars | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| Armies of Exigo | 03/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| Aura: Fate of the Ages | 10/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Axis & Allies | 01/05 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Besieger | 09/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Beyond Divinity | 08/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Call of Duty: United Offensive | 12/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Campaigns on the Danube | 12/04 | ★★★½☆ |
| Catwoman | 11/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Chaos Legion | 08/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| Chris Sawyer's Locomotion | Holiday 04 | ★½☆☆☆ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay—Developer's Cut | 03/05 | ★★★★★ |

## Rewind100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| City of Heroes | 08/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Codename: Panzers | 11/04 | ★★★½ |
| Conflict: Vietnam | 01/05 | ★★½ |
| Conspiracies | 05/04 | ★½ |
| Crusader Kings | 08/04 | ★★½ |
| Crystal Key 2 | 08/04 | ★½ |
| CSI: Crime Scene Invest. | 08/04 | ½ |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dark Fall II: Lights Out | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| D-Day | 01/05 | |
| Dead Man's Hand | 08/04 | ★½ |
| Dead to Rights | 04/04 | ★★½ |
| Decisive Battles of World War II: Battles in Normandy | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Doom 3 | 10/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Evil Genius | 12/04 | ★★★½ |
| Far Cry | 06/04 | ★★★½ |
| FIFA Soccer 2005 | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| FireStarter | 06/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Full Spectrum Warrior | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy | 12/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Gangland | 06/04 | ★★★½ |
| Ground Control II: Operation Exodus | 10/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban | 11/04 | ★★★½ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hitman: Contracts | 08/04 | ★★★½ |
| Horizons: Empire of Istaria | 05/04 | ★½ |
| Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile | 01/05 | ★★½ |
| Jack the Ripper | 05/04 | ★½ |

## RYAN SCOTT

PUBLISHER: Sierra
RELEASED: 1988
SYSTEM: PC

### 1 Leisure Suit Larry 2

As bizarre as it may sound, *Leisure Suit Larry 2* was the first PC game I ever owned (OK, well, that and *Caveman Ugh-lympics*). It was also my first exposure to graphic adventures—a genre that would become my obsession for the next five or so years.

PUBLISHER: Maxis
RELEASED: 1989 SYSTEM: PC

### 2 SimCity

I played this game to death, and then some. None of the sequels managed to capture me quite the same way, and I still go back to this one from time to time. And still, to this day, I have never managed to achieve a Megalopolis-level city.

PUBLISHER: Sierra RELEASED: 1993
SYSTEM: PC

### 3 Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers

The original *Gabriel Knight* was the first game I owned on a CD-ROM, and it ties *Sam & Max* as my all-time favorite adventure game. It also had some of the best voice acting in gaming history—if you ask me, this game featured lead actor Tim Curry's defining role.

PUBLISHER: Origin Systems, Inc.
RELEASED: 1997 SYSTEM: PC

### 4 Ultima Online

I spent three straight years on *UO*'s Pacific server, where I lived the life of a mage named Ragnarok, and later, an insane garbage-picking thief named Gamelon. I really dug the PVP combat, and I ran with some of the best guilds ever (Black Hand and Kindred, represent). Now where's my *UO2*?

PUBLISHER: Microsoft RELEASED: 1999
SYSTEM: PC

### 5 Age of Empires II

There's nothing more pathetic than having to admit that *Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds* got me into the RTS genre...but *Age of Empires II* is what really sealed the deal. Sure, there have been better games since then, but this one deserves the credit for turning me on to them.

## REBECCA GROSS

PUBLISHER: Mindscape
RELEASED: 1988
SYSTEM: Apple IIgs

### 1 PaperBoy

Much of my youth was misspent in front of my grandma's computer smashing windows and terrorizing little girls jumping rope. Grandma wasn't too happy that I nearly broke her joystick twice, but the fact that I could never beat her score mollified her a bit. That and my sweet little-girl smile.

PUBLISHER: Majesco Games
RELEASED: 2004 SYSTEM: PC

### 2 Bookworm

Forget *Scrabble* and *Boggle*; this game has taken control of my life. My dreams are plagued by Zs without any vowel in sight, and burning red blocks threaten to smoosh me every two seconds. My support group keeps encouraging me to be strong, but I always find myself thinking, "Just one more game."

PUBLISHER: Blizzard Entertainment
RELEASED: 1994 SYSTEM: PC

### 3 WarCraft: Orcs and Humans

At the tender age of 9, I played my first real-time strategy. *WarCraft: Orcs and Humans* taught me many valuable lessons, but most important, it taught me how to cheat. I can still remember copy-pasting Pot of Gold every time I became overzealous and low on supplies. Ah, good times, good times.

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
RELEASED: 2004 SYSTEM: PC, PS2

### 4 Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Maybe it was the puzzles. Maybe it was the awesome combat. Maybe it was the Prince ripping off his shirt. Whatever it was, this game dominated my life for hours on end; never before had I felt such a connection to an action game.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
RELEASED: 2004 SYSTEM: PC

### 5 Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

The crushing realization that not everything carrying the Harry Potter trademark is good was the moment I crossed the threshold of adulthood. What I wouldn't give to go back.

# The chronicles of Eggbert

## One gnome's journey through *World of WarCraft* BY JEFF GREEN

Clown time is over.

For Eggbert, the past 30 days in *World of WarCraft* have been days of woe, days of struggle, days of ganking, and days of death. There's also been quite a bit of keyboard pounding, as well as late-night bouts of existential angst, in which I wonder, while tossing and turning under the covers, exactly when and how my life went so wrong that this is what I do with all my free time, rather than, say, water-skiing with Audrey Tatou along the French Riviera. Then I remember that gnome warlocks don't even have a water-skiing ability, not at level 28 anyway, and I stop with that nonsense and get back to work.

With my new gloves and shoulder pads...I am ready for the Cure concert.

I fight my way to Van Cleef. This quest will end tragically for me.

### HOURS 60-120

Most of this month, as I claw my way through the 20s, has been spent in the wilds of Duskwood, and most of that time has been spent dead, as I stubbornly refuse to give up on the quests at the Raven Hill graveyard even though they're clearly too much for me. It doesn't help that nearly every monster in the whole area aggros, and that most of them are immune to Fear, one of my cheapest and best warlock tricks. However, if one is going to die repeatedly, one might as well do it in a graveyard, as Grandma always used to say. All I know is, if I never have to do the Darkshire/Raven Hill corpse run ever again, I'll be a happy little gnome.

When life (or *WOW*) has you down, go kill some raptors.

To lick my wounds, I spent the time around levels 23-27 back in a couple easier areas, cleaning up quests I never finished. The Wetlands are tons of fun, and my questing around the excavation site yielded me, in one play session, a couple excellent drops: a Demon Band ring, which gave me +4 strength, +2 stamina, and +2 spirit; and Sage's Gloves of the Whale, which gave me 26 armor and a +5 boost to spirit and stamina. The only problem with those gloves, as nice as they are statwise, is that they are a bit...fey. These are the kind of gloves you'd wear while listening to Belle and Sebastian and smoking clove cigarettes. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Finally, after spending forever avoiding grouping with other people—since, for the most part, I hate other people—I did bite the bullet and join a group of French players to try to take down Van Cleef in the Deadmines. My professional analysis: That is one big-ass dungeon. It took us hours, literally, to make our way to Van Cleef himself. The smell of victory was in the air. (Or maybe that was just the French people.) And then? At the moment of triumph? As Van Cleef's hit bar slowly went down? My connection died. I was cut off. Booted from the server. All that work for nothing.

Eggbert soldiers on, but man, this month kinda blew.

## Rewind100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising | 09/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Kohan II: Kings of War | 12/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Kuma\War | 09/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude | Holiday 04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle | 08/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Madden NFL 2005 | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Men of Honor | 01/05 | ★★★★½ |

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|---|---|---|
| Missing: Since January | 10/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Myst IV: Revelation | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| NBA Live 2005 | 03/05 | ★★★½☆ |
| NHL 2005 | 01/05 | ★★½☆☆ |
| NHL Eastside Hockey Manager | 03/05 | ★★★★½ |
| Perimeter | 09/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Pitfall: The Lost Expedition | 01/05 | ★½☆☆☆ |
| The Political Machine | 11/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Port Royale 2 | 12/04 | ★★★★☆ |
| Prince of Persia: Warrior Within | 03/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| Rome: Total War | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |

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|---|---|---|
| The Saga of Ryzom | 01/05 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Secret of the Silver Earring | 01/05 | ★★★★☆ |
| Shadow Ops: Red Mercury | Holiday 04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos | 04/04 | ★★½☆☆ |
| ShellShock: Nam '67 | 09/04 | ★½☆☆☆ |

## Rewind100

| GAME | ISSUE | RATING |
|---|---|---|
| Shrek 2 | 09/04 | ★★★★½ |

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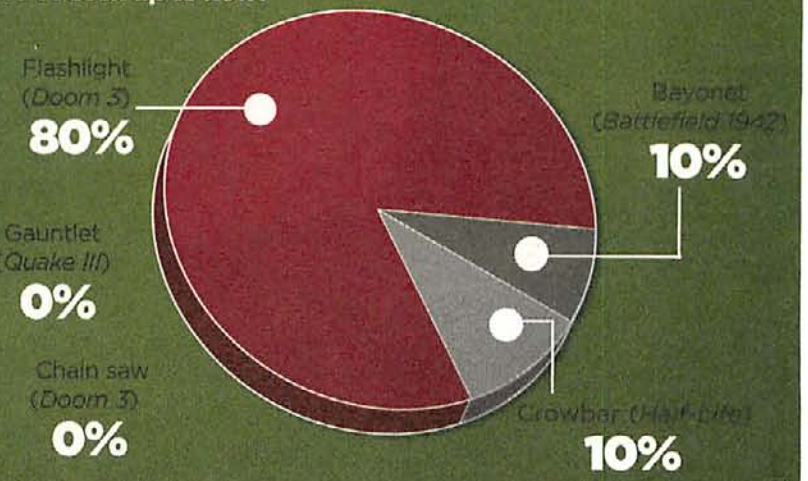
|---|---|---|
| Silent Hill 4: The Room | 01/05 | ★★★½ |
| The Sims 2 | 11/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Singles: Flirt Up Your Life | 09/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Soldiers: Heroes of WWII | 11/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Soldner: Secret Wars | 10/04 | ★★½ |
| Spider-Man 2 | 11/04 | ★★★½ |
| Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow | 06/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Star Chamber | 05/04 | ★★★★½ |
| Star Wars Battlefront | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| The Suffering | 10/04 | ★★★½ |
| Thief: Deadly Shadows | 09/04 | ★★½ |
| Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| TrackMania | 10/04 | ★★★½ |
| Tribes: Vengeance | Holiday 04 | ★★★½ |
| True Crime: Streets of L.A. | 09/04 | ★★★½ |
| Universal Combat | 10/04 | ★★½ |
| Unreal Tournament 2004 | 06/04 | ★★★★★ |
| Virtual Skipper 3 | 10/04 | ★★★½ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Wanted: A Wild Adventure | Holiday 04 | ★★★★½ |
| War in the Pacific | 11/04 | ★★★½ |
| War Over Vietnam | Holiday 04 | ★★½ |
| War Times | 08/04 | ★★½ |
| Warlords Battlecry III | 08/04 | ★★★½ |
| World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International | 10/04 | ★★★★½ |

## POLL OF THE MONTH

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

**We can't yet vote on what will probably end up being the best humiliation kill ever: *Battlefield 2*'s medkit. In the meantime, what's the most humiliating form of taking someone out that we've seen up to now?**



## WHAT'S UP WITH 1UP?

**A few words from 1UP.com's editor-in-chief**

Over the past few months, I've tried to give regular readers of *CGW* a good sense of some of the cool stuff you can do on 1UP, and I hope by now, all of you have signed up and started your own blogs. For those of you who haven't yet, I wanted to offer one final suggestion: just try it. Seriously, just give it a shot.

Blogging is interesting. Were it not for 1UP, I probably would have never blogged myself—it just didn't seem to be my sort of thing. Writing a journal about yourself for everyone to read? Yikes. Why would I ever want to do that? I get enough strange e-mail as it is. But as I quickly learned, blogging doesn't have to just be about you—it can be about whatever you want it to be. Blogging is about what's on your mind; it's about expressing your opinions, venting your frustrations, or trying to inform others. Some people use their 1UP blogs to review games, others use them to comment on news, and still others even use them to discuss politics (ahem).

Even after having had my blog for over half a year, I can't say that I'm 100 percent comfortable with it. Of course, actually finding time to update it is probably my biggest issue, but even figuring out what sort of stuff to include can be a tad unnerving at times. I mean, what do I have to say that I think is so important that people would want to read about it? I've found it's best not to think about it too hard and just write what comes naturally. Blogs are supposed to be casual, so I find it's best to write them as if I was e-mailing a friend.

One cool new addition to 1UP is a feature we call the Blog of the Day (http://blogoftheday.1up.com). I highly recommend checking it out for an idea of some blog possibilities. This is likely going to be the final column I write for *CGW* (at least in this format—*CGW* has some cool surprises in store for next month), so I invite you to continue reading my ramblings at capnsmak.1UP.com. But only if you agree to at least try to blog yourself. **Sam Kennedy** http://capnsmak.1UP.com/

# CGW'S HALL OF INFAMY

## Because even we can't be right all the time

**As we look back on the past 250 issues of this glorious publication, we find many things to be proud of. Other stuff...well, what can we say? Maybe we were drunk at the time. How else could you explain the following?**

### The Vampire cover

Back in April 1999, someone on staff (and no, they're not here now) thought it would be a bold new direction for *CGW* to put a half-naked real woman on the cover rather than our usual half-naked 3D polygonal elf woman—sort of like *Maxim* but less classy. Needless to say, the National Organization of Women cancelled its subscription.

### Porn ad

If you need any more proof that this magazine is not, in fact, the *New York Review of Books*, how about the fact that for years we ran ads for porn CDs in the back? At least, we think it was porn. Or maybe *Baby's Got Butt* was actually an educational toilet-training CD-ROM.

### Oh yeah, it was special

"Trespasser: Jurassic Park *may well be as revolutionary in its genre as the original* Jurassic Park *film was in its genre...[it has] the most realistic world ever explored in a computer game.... We're convinced that* Trespasser *is going to be something special."* CGW *cover story,* ***March 1997***

Yeah, it was so special that by the time it came out, we gave it a whopping one star and named it our Coaster of the Year. We've made bad calls on which games to feature on our covers over the past 250 issues (hi, *Slave Zero*!), but this one was one of the worst.

### How not to sound smart

*"Electronic Arts is attempting to jump into the forefront of the microcomputer software field as an immediate success, much as the goddess Minerva leapt full grown from the brain of her father Zeus."* CGW, ***October 1983***

Not only is this a perfect example of the kind of pretentious writing we used to think constituted good journalism, but we further embarrassed ourselves by not even getting the pretentious literary allusion correct. (Um, that would be Athena, not Minerva, kids.) Luckily, no one probably read the article, since it was about some no-name company no one's ever heard from since.

### Bad ads

Like we keep telling you people, we have no control over the ads that go in this magazine. And even though we might agree that they all suck, some suck worse than others. To wit, this ad for *Blood*, in 1998, which, not surprisingly, upset more than a few angry parents. Or, if you don't think that's bad, how about a "bad-ass" football game that calls you, the consumer, a "douche bag"? Yep, nothing but class around here.

## DESERT ISLAND GAMES

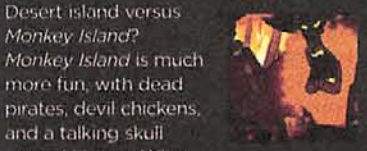
**You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...which ones? E-mail us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject "Desert Island Games" (along with your name and city/state) and give us your picks!**

**Quest for Glory**
I can spend countless hours practicing knife throwing, drinking dragon's breath at the bar, and flirting with the blond centaur girl. Ah, the social life.... <weep>

**Wing Commander 3: Heart of the Tiger**
While getting my L33T flying skills in shape, I can watch Mr. Hamill in the best role he's had since Luke Skywalker. Now, where's my coconut?

**MechWarrior 2**
I'm a sucker for the time period, traditional war games, and the ability to play "what if?" games with a scenario editor. Again, there are lots of ways to stave off boredom.

**The Curse of Monkey Island**
Desert island versus *Monkey Island*? *Monkey Island* is much more fun, with dead pirates, devil chickens, and a talking skull named Murray. Why does my tummy feel funny?!



**SimEarth**
After discovering coconut milk is a natural laxative and naming a skull-shaped rock Murray, maybe I can finally figure this game out!

**Jared Greene**
**Aurora, CO**

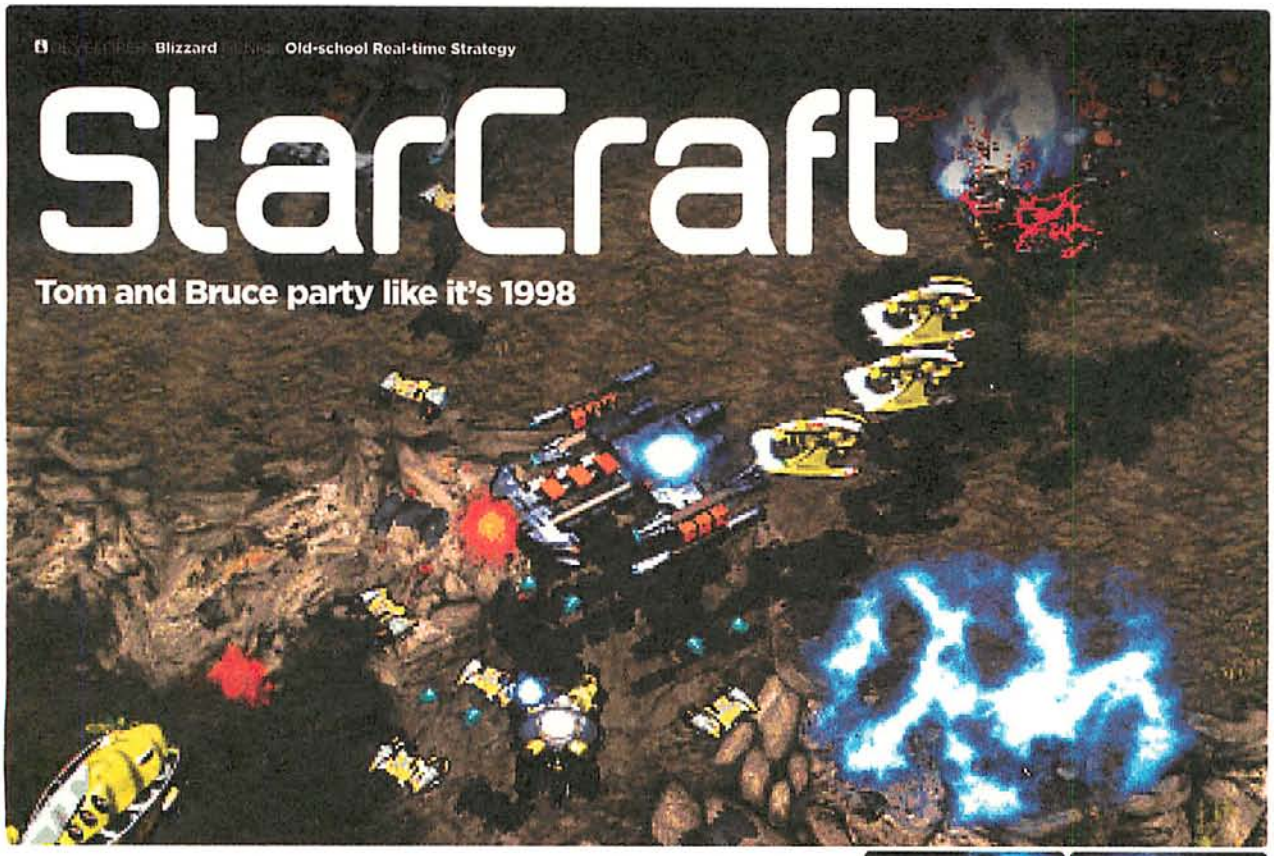
# Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins

Blizzard | Old-school Real-time Strategy

# StarCraft

## Tom and Bruce party like it's 1998



**Bruce: Back in 2002, I spent a month in South Korea watching the World Cup. I brought back a bunch of *StarCraft* comics, cookbooks, intimate apparel, and whatnot. This got Tom thinking, and when we were looking for a game this month, he suggested we write up our own non-Korean *StarCraft* fan fiction.**

**Tom:** That's partly correct. I did suggest *StarCraft*, but for three reasons that have nothing to do with writing fan fiction: 1) It's a very slow time of year, so unless we thought of some cool retro game, we were going to end up playing that awful *Playboy: The Mansion* thing to see which of us could publish the sexiest issue, 2) I was curious to see how this seminal RTS has held up over the years, and 3) since it's an RTS, it's going to be an easy win for me. Remember how badly Barack Obama beat Alan Keyes last November? It's going to be like that.

**Bruce:** Nonsense.

**Tom:** I should admit that I practiced a little. I know Geryk considers this cheating. In fact, Geryk calls it cheating whenever I do anything that gives me an edge, whether it's reading the manual or installing a trainer that gives me unlimited resources. He's very touchy that way. But to refamiliarize myself with the game, I logged on to battle.net and was surprised to discover a bustling multiplayer community, which I promptly joined by jumping into a one-on-one game that lasted all of about eight minutes. Remember how badly Alan Keyes was beaten by Barack Obama last November? It was like that. So then I played a game against the A.I., which is ruthlessly efficient, vicious, and—as I discovered when I watched the replay—knows exactly where all your units and buildings are. I have no idea what a casual *StarCraft*-er is supposed to do if he doesn't feel like playing the campaign. Fortunately, I have Bruce to beat up on.

**Bruce:** I chose the Americans because given how things have been going in the world lately, this pretty much ensures that I'm going to win. Big. So I just start clicking on the button that builds robots, secure in the knowledge that these robots will get together and figure out what to build and how to go about kicking Tom's ass in the most efficient manner possible.

**Tom:** If any race in *StarCraft* is America, it's the protoss, whose units are more expensive but more powerful. The terrans have some nice firepower, but protoss survivability is unparalleled. At least that's what I learned by reading the unit data and strategy tips in the *StarCraft* compendium that Blizzard maintains online. The manual is only partly helpful, packed as it is with backstory and flavor text. But the compendium offers all the hard facts you need to establish that the protoss are the Americans, the zerg are the Russians, and the terrans are, I dunno, China. Or maybe Iraq, but with actual WMDs.

Tom

Bruce

Disruption webs shut down Bruce's ground troops.

**Bruce:** I'm starting to suspect these American robots were actually imported from France, because they don't seem to be very good at doing anything by themselves. In fact, instead of figuring out how to put their roboty skills to good use on their own, they all end up standing

**Tom**
Last month:
Tom made that scurvy dog Bruce walk the plank in *Sid Meier's Pirates!*

**Bruce**
Last month:
Bruce spent most of his time in jail while Tom conquered the high seas.

around unless I lead them by their little mechanical hands.

**Tom:** In the world of real-time strategy games, we call this micromanagement, which has come to be a dirty word. Later games will try to minimize it, but developers like Blizzard and Westwood have built games around it, almost as if it were one of the resources, like gold or Vespene gas. If I want my corsairs to use their disruption web or my reavers to replenish their scarabs, I have to press a button to make it happen. *StarCraft* is from a time before autocast.

**Bruce:** Based on what I've been hearing from a few of my very well-connected sources, apparently at one time people really liked this game. I'm not really sure how that's possible. Not only are these robots not smart enough to find something to do on their own, but there isn't even any way to select idle robot worker droids with hotkeys. This is a feature I'm pretty sure has been in every real-time strategy game since *Battleship*. Leave it to the geniuses at Blizzard to remember to put a Find Minerals key into *World of WarCraft* but forget to include a Find Lazy-ass Socialist Robot key in this one.

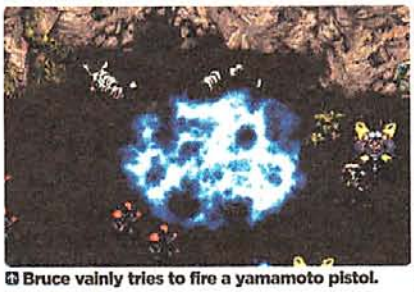
**Tom:** We're playing on Lost Temple, which is a popular ladder map. Each player starts on a plateau with a single access ramp, so it's easy to close yourself off from nonflying units by setting up defenses around the ramp. I'm not going to bother doing this, because Bruce is too timid an RTS player to actually attack me. However, in our few test games, Bruce learned to set up defenses after being zealot-rushed a few times. So for our real game, I'll just close him in and let the principles of economics run their course.

**Bruce:** Tom's best strategy in this game has been choosing the protoss, which is some kind of race of space Germans. All of their units are really tough and don't seem to have any disadvantages except that they don't work well when it gets cold. Since another of Blizzard's incredible errors way back in the day seems to have included forgetting to put in a Stalingrad map, this makes the protoss pretty much invincible.

**Tom:** OK, I can accept being the Germans. What Bruce may not realize is that the protoss units are expensive. In the world of *StarCraft*, you get what you pay for. I've got observers running patrols over the map, and I see that Bruce is setting up a second base. Meanwhile, I've had a second base going as well as two additional assimilators bringing home the Vespene. Since Vespene gas is a limiting resource for anything but the most basic units, Bruce's two refineries mean he won't be able to keep up with my four assimilators.

**Bruce:** A helpful hint Tom gave me in one of the practice games was that *StarCraft* is all about collecting a ton of resources. The clear implication was that if you collected enough resources, you won automatically, so that would conveniently save me from having to learn what any of the units do. Unfortunately, this seems to have been just another one of Tom's lies. At least I built a ton of those missile-turret things to fend off those long-headed guys he always sends at my base five minutes after we start playing.

Stuff at Bruce's base just starts "randomly" blowing up for "no reason."



Bruce vainly tries to fire a yamamoto pistol.

Tom's carrier, *Zuikaku*, moves in to slaughter some helpless marines.

**Tom:** As I crank out a token force of zealots and dragoons, I station them at the bottom of Bruce's ramp. This will keep him from trying to break out onto the map any farther. It'll also keep him on his toes. There's nothing that says "I've got my eye on you" like an army hanging out at your doorstep.

**Bruce:** Once I had my own little Maginot Line securely around my base, I felt comfortable enough to send some lazy robots out to establish another base. However, thanks to either bad scouting on my part or bad game design on Blizzard's, I had completely missed a Vespene gas resource right below the ramp that leads to my base. Tom didn't, though, and now he's parked there, effectively splitting my two bases with a bunch of space Germans. So it's like I have my own little Stalingrad pocket, except kind of in reverse. Man, this is getting confusing.

**Tom:** Now that I've got observers doing recon on the map, my robotics facility is building a reaver. This will let me bombard Bruce's base from a safe distance. A pair of stargates are on their way to bring in some corsairs with disruption webs to shut down Bruce's turrets. I'm keeping my forge busy researching improved plasma shields, which guarantees my already formidable units will be able to take a lot of punishment.

**Bruce:** My version of Team America: World Police is a couple of wraiths and a single battlecruiser. Figuring that America can do anything simply because it is America, I lasso these guys and some marines and just click on Tom's assorted intergalactic Nazis. Have fun dying, Herr Chick.

**Tom:** The battlecruiser is indeed impressive. The fully charged disruption webs on my corsairs can't shut it down, since the webs don't work against flying units. I don't realize this until I've already laid the webs, which is what I get for not studying up more on what does what to whom. Apparently, Bruce hasn't studied up on this either, because he marches a group of about 10 marines right into the web, where they obligingly stand around while my zealots slaughter them. Meanwhile, my handful of dragoons and the corsairs' rapid-fire neutron flares whittle away at the battlecruiser's hit points. Bruce finally pulls it back, but it's so slow that I have no problem chasing it down and killing it. That can't have been cheap for Bruce.

**Bruce:** One of the things I researched in one of these million buildings I accidentally built was something called a yamamoto gun for my battlecruiser. Sadly enough for American interplanetary hegemony, you apparently have to be Dr. Derek Smart.

Esquire to fire it. That's probably due to the detailed simulation of the control system. At this point, I have to assume that the only parts of the map that don't have Tom camped out on them are the parts I can see Tom isn't actually camped out on. Fortunately for me, one of these has a Vespene gas deposit. Unfortunately, it's on the other side of the map. I grab a few marines and one of those buildy-bots and send them off on what is sure to be a suicide mission.

**Tom:** Hey, look, little signals on the minimap near my main base! For a moment, I wonder if Bruce is actually attacking me. No such luck. He's just got a few marines accompanying an SCV to try to set up a third base. I divert my newly constructed carrier, which was drifting to my army's marshalling point at the foot of Bruce's ramp. A small squadron of interceptors starts strafing his units, none of which can fire back.

**Bruce:** I think my units are broken, because a lot of them are just standing around while Tom kills them. It's like they know that Tom is good at these games, so why bother trying—we'll all be back in the game box in a few minutes, so hey, why break my back, eh? Sorry, that was a bit of *StarCraft* working man's fan fiction.

**Tom:** Since Bruce can apparently spare the resources to try to set up a third base, I'd better slow him down. My reaver pops off its scarabs at the missile turrets he has guarding his expansion base. It takes only two scarabs to destroy a turret, and I'm pretty sure they've got the range to hit Bruce from outside his line of sight. The carrier hangs back to provide interceptor cover if I have to pull the reaver back.

Interceptors shut down Bruce's Vespene gas refinery.

Protoss observers keep watch to make sure Bruce doesn't actually develop an economy.

Bruce's second attack, or How to Lose Even More Battlecruisers.

**Bruce:** Here's a weird thing: Every time I scroll away from my base to check something and then scroll back, one of my structures has blown up. Blizzard was kind enough to remind me how much I suck at this by having my structures stay on the map as rubble, which is a real confidence booster. Because I can't see what Tom is attacking me with, I automatically assume he is cheating.

**Tom:** Since I've got my army parked at the ramp leading out of Bruce's main base, he won't be able to do anything to rescue his expansion base. My reaver mops up the last of his missile turrets, and then I send in a few zealots to mop up at their leisure.

**Bruce:** One of the really annoying things about this game is the unit acknowledgements, which seem to reveal a deep hatred of America by suggesting that the only people among us who will ever make it into space will be uneducated, vulgar hicks. The guy in the battlecruiser was really annoying me, which is why it's great Tom took care of that for me by killing him.

**Tom:** Now that those big things are out of the way, it's time to turn my attention to Bruce's main base. Trying to get my units up the ramp reminds me how frustrating bad pathfinding can be. Everyone gets gummed up trying to move through narrow areas, so some units start working their way along the base of the plateau—it's like herding cats. Eventually, I have to move a few units up at a time. Then I have to set up my units without the benefit of any sort of autoformation. This sort of baby-sitting is one of the biggest problems with going back to an older game like *StarCraft*.

**Bruce:** One of the reasons I'm sure Tom chose this game is that he's used to games that have crappy graphics with fixed resolution limits. I'm much more picky about what I play and thus am easily unnerved by this. Plus, which genius made it so you could only see like two feet in each direction? Thanks, Blizzard genius art design guys, but I don't really need to see the space Germans up that close.

**Tom:** The 640x480 resolution is an obstacle at first, mainly due to the limited viewing range. But eventually, I got used to the coarse resolution and started seeing what Blizzard's artists were doing. I have plenty of units now, and I'm confident I can overwhelm whatever defenses Bruce can afford. But I'd rather use a bit of finesse, so my reavers and the interceptors from my two carriers pick off the missile turret he's got on one side of his base. This clears the way for the squad of six dark templars I've built. These guys attack slowly, but they hit really hard. And they're cloaked. Since Bruce doesn't seem to have a science vessel, the only way he'll be able to see my templars is if they stray too close to one of his turrets. With a bit of careful guidance, I bring them in to slaughter his SCVs and then start working on his command center. This will be over shortly.

**Bruce:** Tom is all big into the movies and whatnot, which is why I think he's doing whatever it is that makes me see that predator effect where everything is all see-through and blurry and then a horrible monster kills you. Except in my case a horrible monster is killing all my buildings and my French marines can't or won't do anything about it. I'm pretty sure the whole predator trick is a tribute to Tom's state governor, whom I know he likes a lot. All I have to say is this: Can you believe that the same company that made *World of WarCraft* made this game? It's like if you found out that Andrei Tarkovskii had also been a porn director. Oh well.

**Tom wins.** ⊠

Coming Next Month...

MAY 2005 ON SALE APRIL 5

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| [illegible] | Magic Betrayers | [illegible] | |

# Old Faithful

## Gordon who? Can't you see I'm playing *Bejeweled 2*?

**I recently had the pleasure of replacing my home PC with a beefy new state-of-the-art gaming rig sporting a snazzy flat-panel monitor, a killer audio setup, the latest/greatest/fastest videocard, two gigantic superquiet hard drives, and what I like to refer to as an absolute ape assload of RAM, because if you can't alliterate pointlessly, why alliterate at all? Finally, I have a machine up to the task of playing all the latest games in all their cutting-edge technological glory. What would I install first?**

Talk about a no-brainer: *Diablo II, Pro Pinball: Big Race USA, Civilization III,* and the text-based spreadsheet game *Hollywood Mogul 2* were installed in minutes. *Zuma Deluxe* didn't make the jump because—to my surprise—it seems those 12-step programs really do work. Well, that and there's a brand-new *Bejeweled* that has sunk its greasy barbed talons into my brainmeat. Just in case you're wondering, yes, I have moved my *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* and *Riddick* saves from the old machine, but here it is three weeks later and I still haven't actually installed those games. I'm sure I will. Probably. I think so. I just don't know when. Most likely once I'm done tearing through my closet trying to locate my copy of *Baldur's Gate II*.

Oh, sweet Mistress Irony, how very ironical thou art! Here I am possessed of a fire-breathing behemoth of a gaming machine and I'm whiling away my midnights clicking through the ugly-even-for-a-decade-ago font vomit of *Hollywood Mogul 2. Battle for Middle-earth* languishes on my cluttered desk while the Methuselahan *StarCraft* spins happily in my DVD drive. All the newest software and hardware at my disposal and yet I'm spellbound by *Big Race USA*, a 6-year-old version of an even more aged arcade gaming pastime. I'd ask what is wrong with me, but fortunately I am married, so I have a professional questioner of self-worth at my disposal 24 hours of every long, tortuous day.

"For the love of God," my wife exclaims, "don't you ever get tired of that old stuff?" She has a point—as do I when I observe that I've known her since high school and that perhaps she should be grateful for my fondness for all things aged, obsolete, and played out. Presto! She's gone (along with the kids, the car, the dog, and the title to the house).

ILLUSTRATION BY MICK BROWNFIELD

**These are the palate cleansers that scrub my gaming tastebuds clean.**

But like I said, she has a point. If my rationalization for upgrading is predicated on the demands of the latest games, why am I wallowing in the oldest games? I think it has something to do with the fact that I like these games. No, I love these games. These are the games I come back to again and again; these are the palate cleansers that scrub my gaming taste buds clean. Granted, it's difficult to picture Diablo himself as a light melon sorbet with hints of rosemary, but The Lord of All Evil is just that for me. After sinking some 300 obsessive hours into *City of Heroes*, nothing quite wipes the brain and readies the critical faculties for reviewing *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* like three days straight of chopping up the burning dead—both in my backyard and in *Diablo II*.

"But why," queries the Post-it stuck on the divorce subpoena, "are you playing 'palate cleansers' now, when you're not between games but are in fact breaking in a new computer?" Fair enough, you ceaselessly hectoring harpy, I muse in the storage shed I now call home. Why indeed? Because in a truly pathetic way I love these games. Pathetic not because I am repeatedly obsessed with these games (though I am), but pathetic because I want to nurture and care for every one and zero on those CD-ROMs. Every time I trigger the multiball feature in *Big Race USA* and all four balls are spinning and bouncing and banging smoothly around the playfield, I ask the game, "There...isn't that better? Don't you like it here more?" I want to preserve these games; I want to be there for these games the way I want them to be there for me. More than anything, I want these games to be happy, and so, as my wife's lawyer has repeatedly pointed out, I am insane. And I'm OK with that. If rationality prohibits me from playing through *Heroes of Might and Magic III* for the 26th time, then I want no part of it. The newest and shiniest games will worm their way onto my sparkling dual hard drives soon enough anyway; for now, I'm happy—no, I'm elated—to be conquering the world yet again as a militaristic Socialist superpower in *Civ III*. Besides, if *Painkiller* and the new *Tiger Woods* golf game play their cards right, they might be the first things installed on the next computer I buy. **Robert Coffey**

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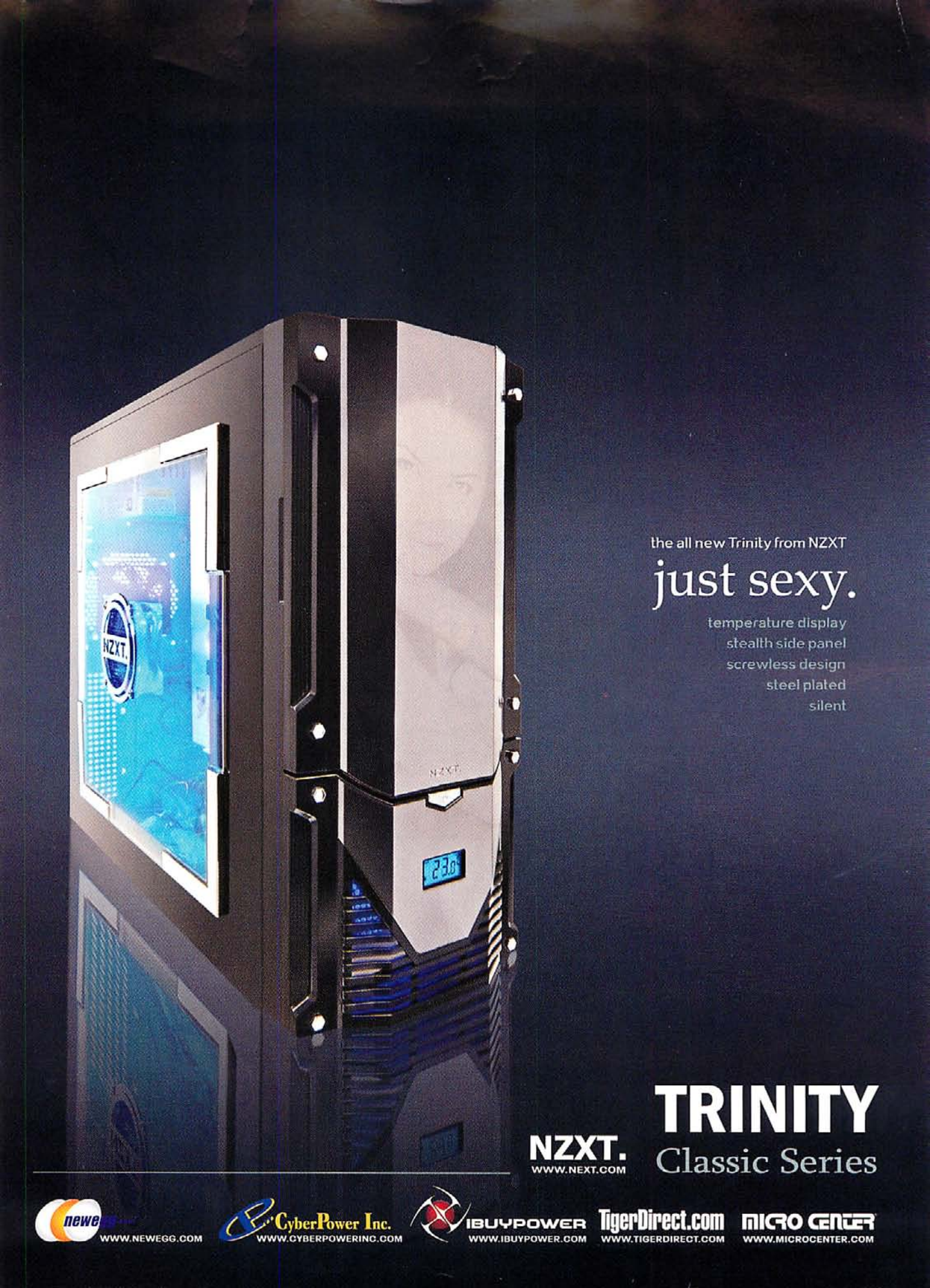
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