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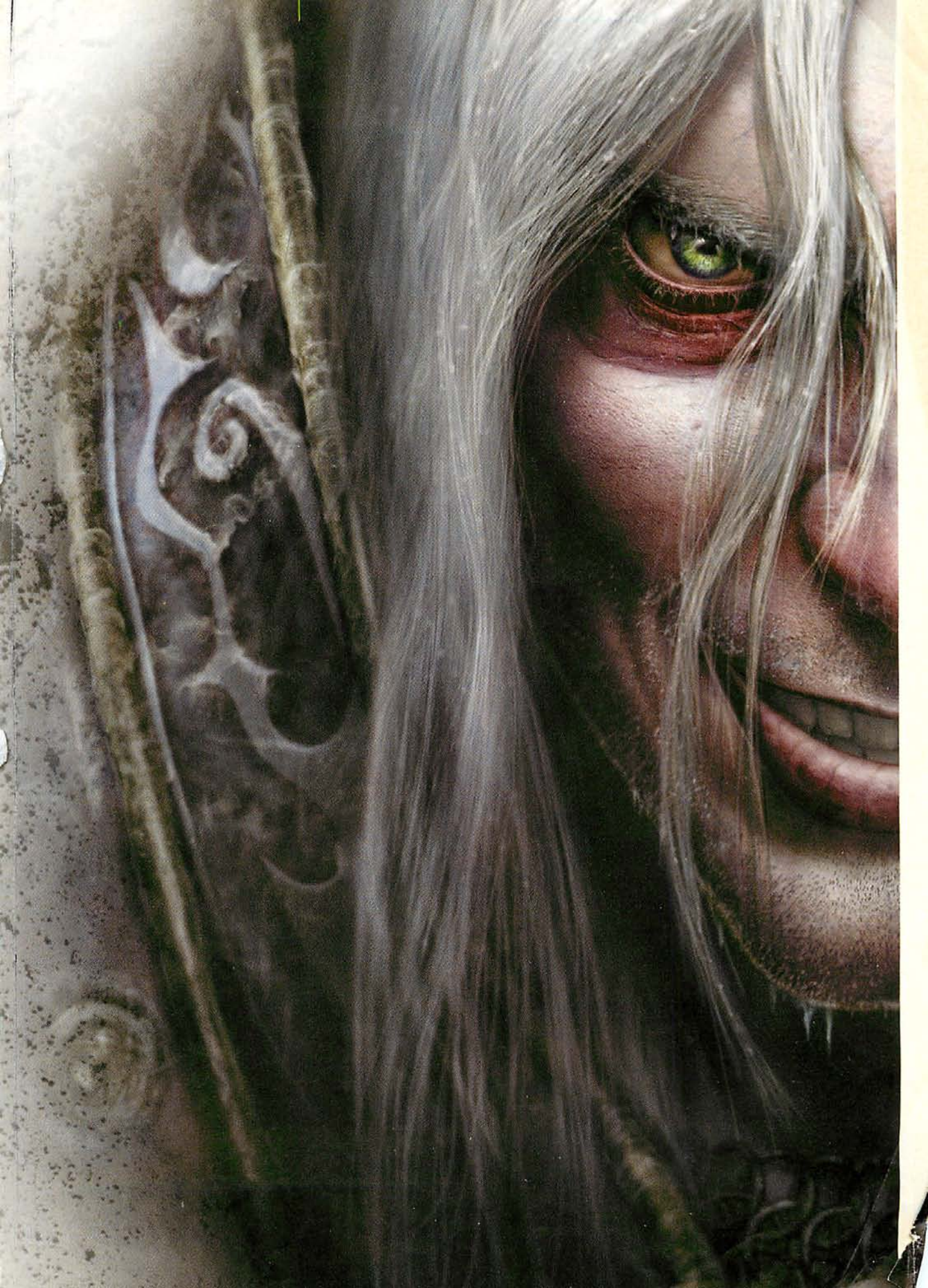


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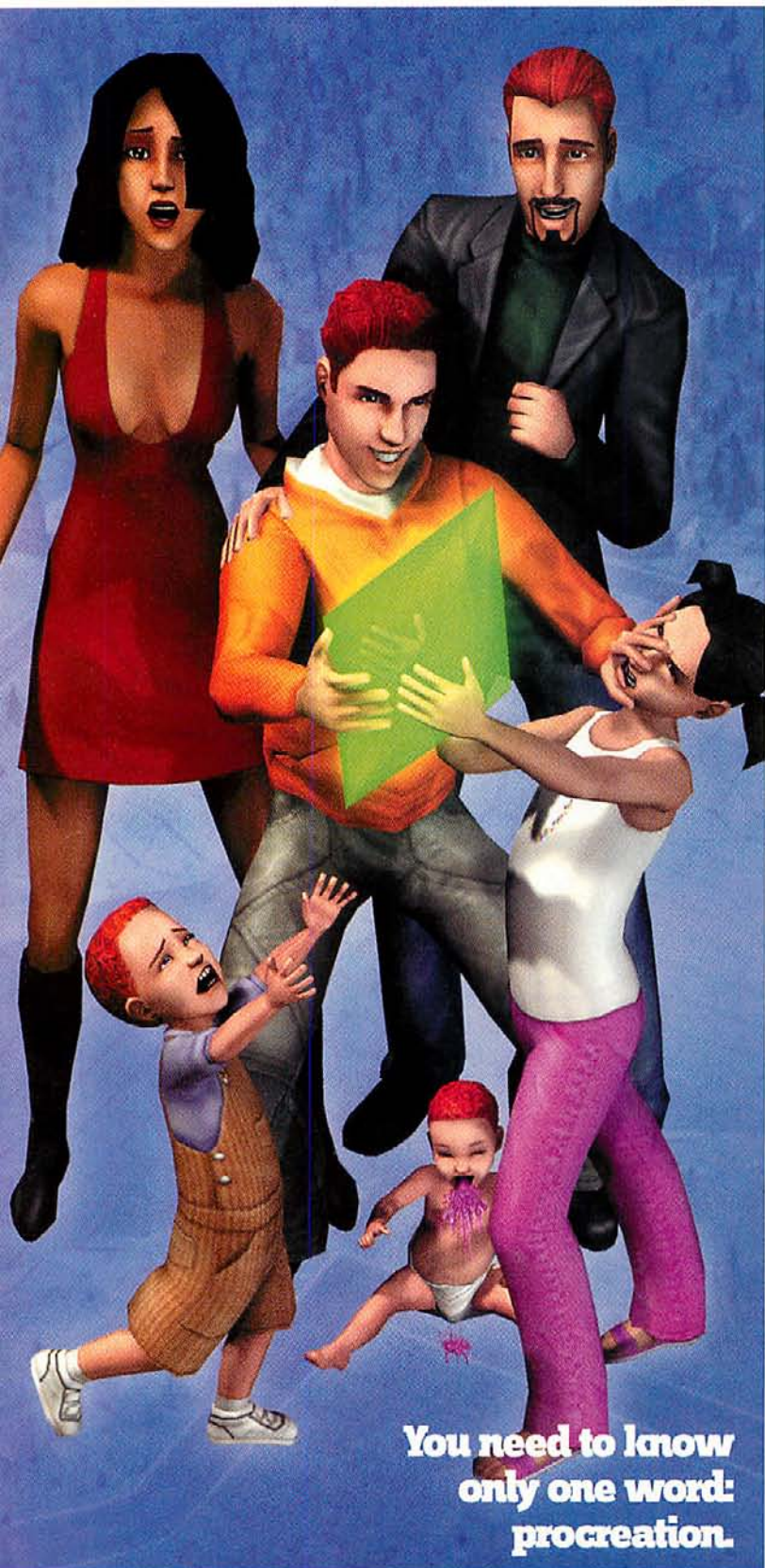


MATURE SEXUAL THEMES
VIOLENCE

REPUBLIC

THE REVOLUTION





**You need to know
only one word:
procreation.**

56 COVER STORY
The Sims 2

Maxis turns *The Sims* into SimBegetting by putting the emphasis on families. We thought we played games to escape our families.

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Jeff explains why it's a good month to play last month's games.

16 Letters

You hate us, you hate us not. We don't care. We love you anyway.

24 Loading...

This month's shots are brought to you by the letter "H." Space cases should be happy to see more of **Homeworld 2** and MMORPG hard cases will dig what's in store for **Horizons**.

28 Read Me

Since nobody reads Tech anymore, Will's worming his way into Read Me. This month he stinks up the joint with reports on the new Nvidia NV35, an Activision shooter called **Trinity**, and the latest PDA for gaming: the Palm Zire 71. Plus, we take another look at **Tron 2.0** and show you **Max Payne's** new kung fu. Meanwhile, Jeff Green learns how to throw pies at cartoon characters in **Toontown** (pg 30).

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64 Behind the Game: Halo

Intrepid newshound George Jones ventures deep into Texas this month to see how Gearbox Software is coming along with the long-overdue PC port to Bungie's **Halo**. Did he get the story? Or did he just go to strip clubs instead?

92 Tech

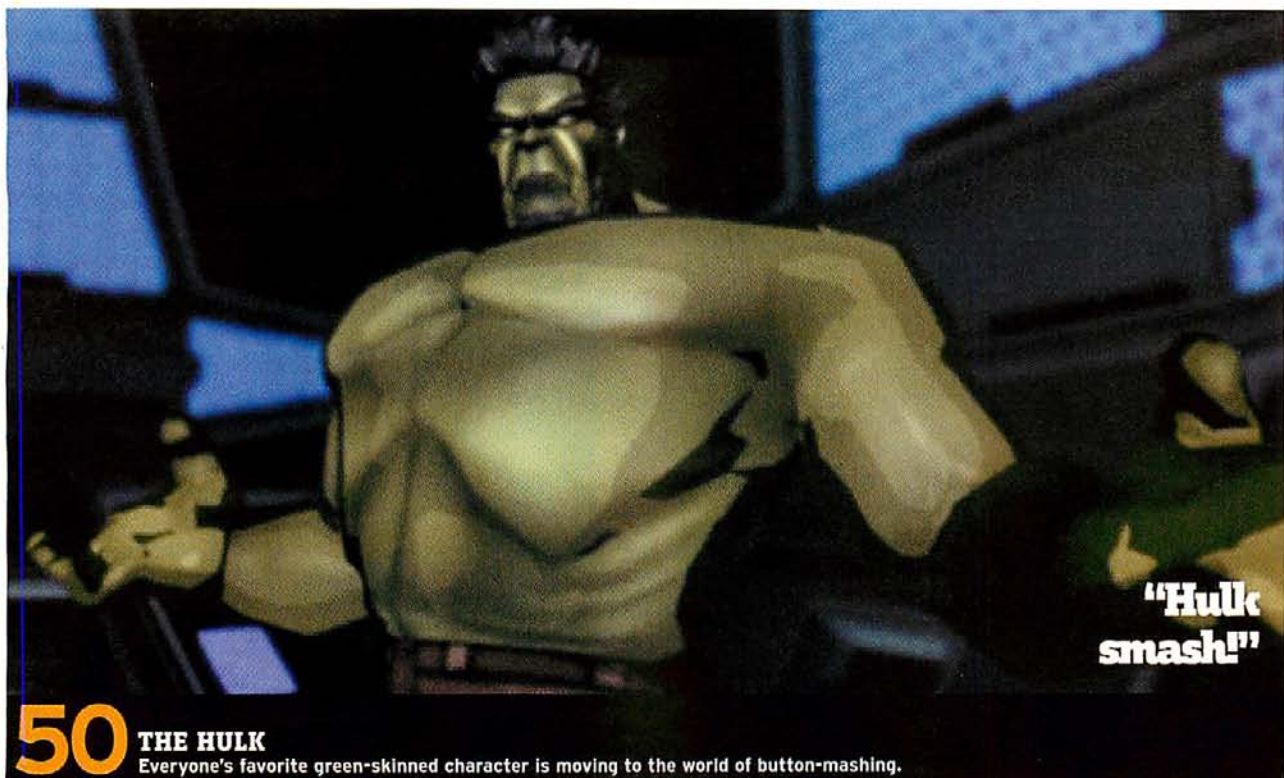
Falcon sends much love to the troops with their patriotic Mach V, while Dell gives the Dimension a gaming makeover. Also, Cracked Case, Tech Medics, a new Power Rig, and Wil Power.

101 Gamer's Edge

Tom and Bruce's dogfighting tips for the **IL-2** expansion, a guide to Roman Empire domination for **Praetorians**, and a walkthrough for The Golden Gift, the free **Age of Mythology** expansion included on this month's CGW demo disc. Also, be the envy of all your geek friends with a guide to setting up LAN parties.

116 Scorched Earth

Mr. Aggressive meets Mr. Passive Aggressive.



**"Hulk
smash!"**

50 THE HULK

Everyone's favorite green-skinned character is moving to the world of button-mashing.



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The NV35 is coming to get you.



92 TECH
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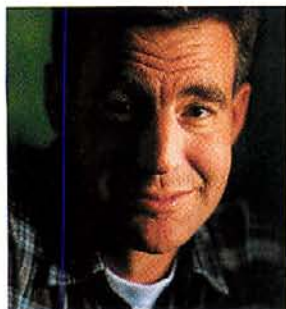
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Stank-tastic!

We play crap games so you don't have to

It may be a great time to be a computer gamer, here in 2003, but it sure as heck isn't obvious from this month's Reviews lineup. Yeeesh. What a load of stink. I actually wanted to put that phrase—"a load of stink"—on the cover, but I was convinced by my bosses that that might not be the best way to sell magazines. Like I care about that! But if you're reading these words, then you've obviously bought or stolen the magazine already, so you people can hear the truth. The truth is, you're screwed. Sorry about that. What we have here, in this month's Reviews section, is the most 1.5-star games we've had in one issue in 20 years, plus our very first zero-star game. If it's any consolation, just know that we're the ones who actually had to play all those lousy games. You just have to read about 'em.

Still, I don't want you to be all bummed out now and put the magazine down. If I knew it would cheer you up, I'd swallow some goldfish or maybe do my Jerry Lewis impersonation, which is always good for a laugh or two. But since you're way over there and I'm way over here and you can't see me anyway, let's just move on.

Instead, let's focus on the positive. For starters, we have the cover story, *The Sims 2*. Hey—stop rolling your eyes. It's not another expansion. Having conquered the world with what is now the best-selling PC game of all time, Maxis is doing what any good developer would do: taking chances and upping the ante. *The Sims 2* is not more of the same, and it's doing a few things—like letting Sims age and die—that will surprise and maybe even piss off its most loyal fans. That can only be good.

Elsewhere, we have an update on *Halo* for PC, if you can believe it, plus an interview with Gearbox, the developer "porting" it to the platform it was meant to be on in the first place. (Not that we're still bitter about that.) Also, take a look at the preview for *Breed*, a shooter from a small development house in England that may upstage *Halo* at its own game. Strategy fans should check out the preview of *Republic*, a long-delayed game that is finally starting to look like a reality.

Finally, because he never gets any respect around here and because he slipped me five dollars, let me direct your attention to Wil O'Neal's Tech section, where this month he puts down the MP3 players for the fastest gaming PC we've ever tested. You want to know what it is? Hah—now you have to read his section.

OK? So it's not all bad news this month. Don't even dare bring up the old "PC gaming is dying" thing, or I'll be forced to hit you. You just wait. This year will be more amazing than ever. Really. We just can't prove it this month.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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TOM MCDONALD

Tom ended his career as a filmmaker when he found himself in a dingy Alphabet City apartment, sleeping in a chair while clutching a broom to beat off dachshund-sized rats. An artist facing the choice between suffering for his lifelong passion or living in the burbs and writing about things like this amazing new game called *Eye of the Beholder* would have sweated the decision. Tom dropped the broom and left. He's never seen another rat.

ROBERT COFFEY

It's hard to believe that it's been almost five years since Robert (shown here with one of his two kids) infected, er, came aboard the good ship *CGW*. Time sure flies when you're dispensing hate. It seems like just yesterday he was living in a damp basement apartment that was crawling with slugs he would kill with his bare feet in the dark. The final score from three months in the basement: Robert-37, Slugs-0. But deep down, aren't we all the real winners?



KRISTEN SALVATORE

Our beloved copy chief Kristen Salvatore is currently batting .349 with a career-high on-base percentage of .412. She's best known for pioneering the famed NY Yankees pitching program whereby fatasses like David Wells are motivated to take the field by being told there's a pepperoni pizza and a six-pack of Schlitz buried under the mound.

SUPERCORN

Unable to fully evolve, Supercorn continues to fashion a world of his own arrested development—a high-gloss world of social dysfunction, populated by hoards of barely clothed bondage loving, big breasted cheerleaders. His illustrations are 13-year-old sexual frustration incarnate—with all the frenzy, excitement, and emotional impediment that comes with such a distinction. See an example in this month's Tech Medics.



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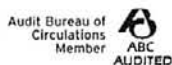
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Letters

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Real Slim Shady

About your May 2003 issue: Is it just me, or does that look like Eminem with boobs on the cover?

Andrew Schran

Actually, yeah, it's Eminem with boobs. Sales of his last CD, *The Eminem Show*, weren't as high as expected, so Marshall decided to supplement his income by getting some implants and posing for magazine covers. Okay, now that's what we call "a joke." Marshall, put the bat down and tell your lawyers to calm down.



Girls! Girls! Girls!

A few months back, a subscriber asked that you put more porn in this magazine. You declined his offer. Last month [May 2003] you had a picture of a woman in a very revealing "shirt," if you would call it that. You also had a very large picture of Dawn, the NVIDIA GeForce FX spokes-nymph in her birthday suit. I must admit, it was a very happy birthday, but it was not entirely appreciated. I am not sure you thought of this, but you are basically going against your word. I'm not gay, but I get tired of opening any magazine (even a computer gaming magazine) and seeing real/fake pictures of scantily clad women. Clean up your mag and tell anyone who wants porn they should buy a porn magazine, not a computer gaming magazine.

Adam Collins

We still have no intention of putting "porn" in the magazine. But, come on, the occasional cheesecake shot? We work hard here. We don't want to look at spaceships and orcs all the time. Is that so wrong?

Open-ended gameplay

I just read your awards for Games of the Year [April 2003]. I do agree that *Grand Theft Auto III* deserves Game of the Year. But you also gave a nod to open-ended gameplay, specifically *GTA3*. You said that 2002 was the year for open-ended gameplay. But what about *Fallout* and *Fallout 2*? Those have been the most interactive games I have ever played. You could go in so many different directions that I had to beat those games three times each before they got repetitive. You could be the savior of the wasteland, or devil spawn. You could do everything in these games that you could do in *GTA3*. I think these games deserve a nod.

Justin Yann

We loved the *Fallout* games too, but really, those games were still about following a story line, no matter how much you could customize your character and affect the outcome. What a game like *GTA3* offers is hundreds and hundreds of hours of extra gameplay—races, mini-games, and other challenges—on top of the main story. That's what we're talking about here.

Sea Dogs goes Hollywood

Somebody needs to get fired. What genius at Bethesda decided that they should change the name of their upcoming RPG from *Sea Dogs 2* to *Pirates of the Caribbean*? The name *Sea Dogs* has a good reputation with gamers, and the Wal-Mart crowd is going to be very disappointed to discover the game has nothing to do with the movie. (The girls especially—no Johnny Depp, no Orlando Bloom!)

I suppose there is the odd chance that name association will attract some new gamers to the genre, but more likely, the movie will flop, and the game will be dragged down with it. Akella deserves better.

Nate

It's not just the girls who will be disappointed that Orlando Bloom isn't in the game. Jeff Green has been crying like a little girl ever since he found out.

Hypocrites R Us

I have been using a burned *Half-Life* CD for years, just not registering the game, and now that I want to play *Counter-Strike* with it I have to either get a code generator or a new CD. This vexes me quite a bit, because as I see it I should be able to illegally play Internet *Half-Life* like I can illegally play single-player *Half-Life*. While I'm at it, what's with all the new contributors? Are you editors doing ANY work? Maybe you should. Just a thought. Have a nice day now!

With loving kindness,
Sam Allison

Sam, Sam, Sam: what have we told you people about burning game CDs? Not good. Remember, the more you burn game CDs, the less

"What's with all the new contributors? Are you editors doing ANY work?"

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MAIL BITES

I was just wondering if I could get a date with Dana? She's soooooo hot! Anyhow, I hope she's single.

Dana's biggest admirer

Hey, do you guys have any plans for bringing back the Canadian Corner? It was really funny. Or like an Iraqi Corner would be cool.

Beta Kim

Regarding Sniper's letter "Am I Hardcore?" [May 2003]: Vader's lightsaber was red, not purple. Guess he's not that hardcore.

B+Man

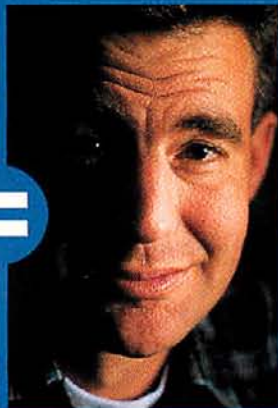
Jeff Green: I'm a board-certified psychiatrist who reads your magazine. I'm keeping my eye on you.

Tracy Bennet

JAN-MICHAEL DUMBASS

It is now my firmly held belief that Jeff Green is actually a pseudonym for Jan-Michael Vincent... who is posing as an "Editor-in-Chief" at CGW after the untimely demise of his series *Airwolf*. I know the truth Jan-Michael...you can't hide forever.

Faithful Chief
Lesbian Porn
Librarian of the
Tarsis Shriners,
Banning



Nice theory. But the truth is more like this.



money the game industry makes, and the more likely it is that we will eventually lose our easy jobs here. So cut it out. Just keep burning music CDs like us—now that's cool.

Remember, kids, it's not the game that sucks—it's you!

When CGW reviewed *Silent Hill 2*, it didn't get such a good score [April 2003]. It's obvious to me that since the game is so perfect, the reviewer must have been playing it wrong; I have tips for getting the most from your *Silent Hill 2* experience.

- 1) You must play with all the lights off, otherwise the glare on the screen can really make the game less enjoyable not to mention harder to play.
- 2) Make sure you have the music and sound on. The sound is essential and the music adds to the game.
- 3) Unless you're really paying

attention, you can ignore most of the plot with little consequence.

These tips should make the game more enjoyable. And if they don't...then it's a personality fault and the game is still perfect.

Paul Ware

Command and segregate

I want to congratulate you on your latest CGW editorial on racism [Scorched Earth, June 2003]. I've seen these racist stereotypes slip unheeded into games and newsgroups over the years.

I'm glad you spoke up.

Jim Cobb

These are the geeks you are looking for

I think Thierry Nguyen fell off his scooter and cracked his head open on the pavement, bringing his intelligence to the

level of Wil O'Neal—but hold that thought for half a sec. In your August 2002 issue, a reader named Jeff Massie wrote in that there were five Jedi. (He said you had left out Oobiedoobi Bloobidoobi Bladoobi). Well, it seems that both CGW and Scooter must re-read their scriptbooks, because there were only three Jedi in the *Star Wars* trilogy: Luke Skywalker, Obi Wan, and Yoda. Darth Vader was a Sith (Jedi hunter), and Emperor Palpatine was a corrupted politician (gee, THAT'S never happened before). Remember, Mr. Anakin Skywalker never completed his Jedi training. Both Mr. Nguyen and Jeff Massie should be thrown into the starlacc pit, and while your at it, put Wil O'Neal in there for that extra level of annoyance.

The Plastic Lightsaber
Jacob Meyer

P.S. I love the magazine and tolerate the audio, I mean Tech section

Just reading through your April 2003 magazine when I noticed that in your *Star Wars Galaxies* update feature, you referred to the walkers in the images as AT-ATs. Those are AT-STs. AT-ATs are the four-legged behemoths in *The Empire Strikes Back*. AT-STs are the little "chicken walkers" also seen *Empire Strikes Back*, but are more well-known for their role in *Return of the Jedi*.

Not that I'm nitpicking. I just don't want to have those who play SWG who have never seen a *Star Wars* film to be ridiculed by hardcore fans because they mistook an AT-AT for an AT-ST...which subsequently got them killed minutes later.

Keep up the good work!

Ryan McGechaen

"Both Scooter and CGW should re-read their *Star Wars* script books."

Actually, we don't call the AT-ST in that shot an AT-AT, so in the words of our defensive news editor Ken Brown, "You can kiss our keister."

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Blood
Violence

Grand Theft Auto

Vice City



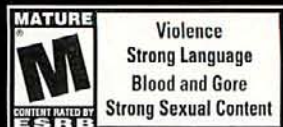
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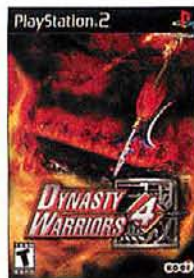


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If you bought all these games, it would cost about **\$186.**



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- STAR WARS CLONE WARS
- TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003
- TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE
- MINORITY REPORT

INSIDE THE GAME

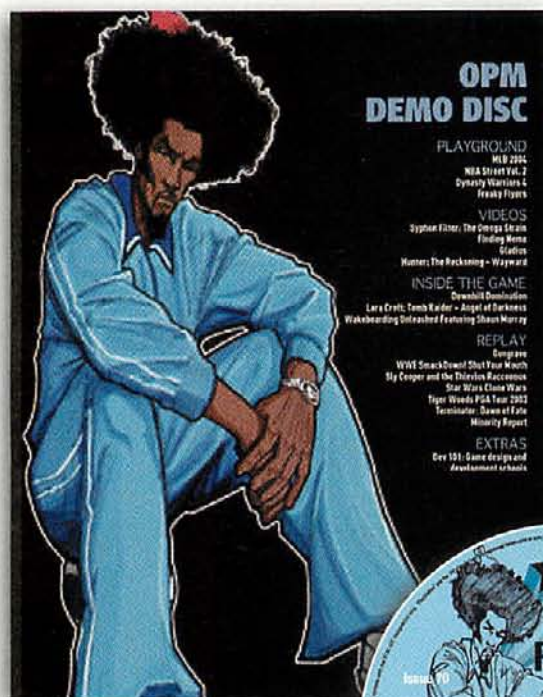
- INSIDE THE GAME
- DOWNHILL DOMINATION
- LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER-ANGEL OF DARKNESS
- WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED FEATURING SHAUN MURRAY

EXTRAS

- DEV 101: GAME DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

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DELL™



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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone

HOME- WORLD 2

Space: 1999. *Homeworld* blew up on the scene with killer graphics and a great 3D spin on RTS space combat. How could you not love the *Battlestar Galactica* overtones or the massive melees that had dozens—if not hundreds—of tiny units zipping around each other onscreen? As good as it was (we gave *Homeworld* 4½ stars), the original still had some problems. The sequel, due out in July, looks to address most of the first game's control issues. More important, though, *Homeworld 2* is looking good. Check out this shot for a taste.

The mothership remains the core of production, but new subsystem research adds a whole layer of customization for larger ships. Will you go for a fighter launch bay or a cloaking generator?

The nebulae, dust clouds, and planets will all play a part in spicing up space and providing a strategic impact during gameplay.


A dramatic space battle scene set against a deep red, hazy sky. Numerous starships, including large capital ships and smaller fighters, are engaged in combat. Bright red laser beams crisscross the scene, illuminating the ships and creating a sense of intense action. The ships have a complex, industrial design with various panels, lights, and protrusions. The overall atmosphere is one of high-stakes warfare in a futuristic setting.

You've got two unique
races and fleets to
choose from: the
Hilgarans and the
sinister Vaygr.

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA

What is there to say about *Horizons* that hasn't been said already? A lot, actually. This MMORPG has lots of potential, and sadly, there isn't enough room here to mention all of the game's interesting aspects. You'll get your bloodthirsty fill of hack-and-slash combat, but there are trade skills to develop, player-owned houses and businesses to attend to, and the ability to play as a dragon (that's right kids, a dragon), just to name a few highlights. So, will you settle for a really colorful picture with plenty of little things called out?

Monsters will travel in packs, giving them the ability to dynamically build their own communities, send out raiding parties, and attack players and their villages.



Entire communities can be built and owned by players. Construct full-featured castles, guilds, and cities that leave a permanent mark on the world.

Screw chatting, we want action. There's a big emphasis on keeping your eyes on gameplay and out of the chat window.

Read Me

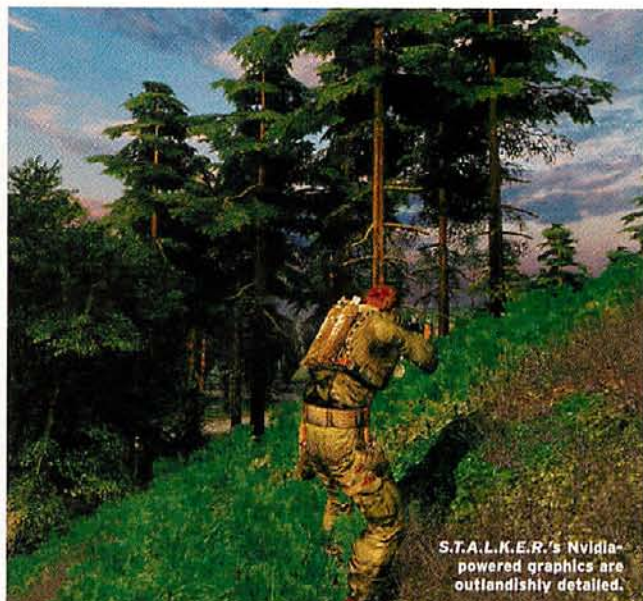
Sexy time! Edited by Ken Brown



TECH

The GeForce That Doesn't Blow

Nvidia's new GeForce FX 5900 Ultra picks up speed and leaves the "leaf blower" behind **By William O'Neal**



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s Nvidia-powered graphics are outlandishly detailed.

**TOONTOWN**

Jeff finds an online game that's more his speed. **Page 30**

**TRON 2.0**

Scooter trips the lightcycle fantastic. **Page 31**

**TRINITY**

A new FPS from the makers of *Return to Wolf*. **Page 32**

**VIVENDI**

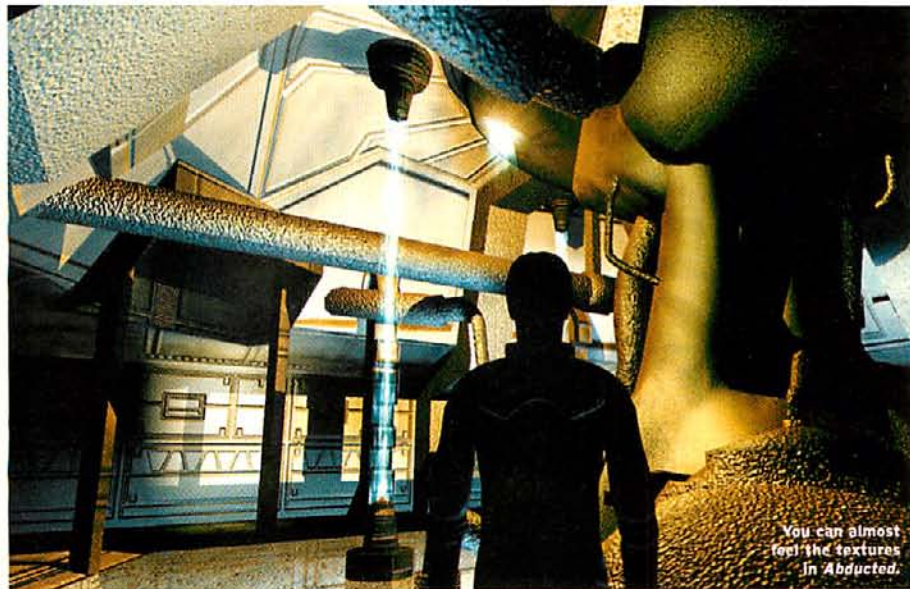
Homeworld 2 update, Tribes news, and more. **Page 36**



Deus Ex: The Invisible War



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost



You can almost feel the textures in *Abducted*.

Nvidia is trying to kill two birds with one stone. On the high-minded side, they're on a quest to bring photorealism to games. And on the not-so high-minded side, they want to be the biggest and baddest kid on the graphics card block. The GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (NV35) is the product that they believe brings them closer to their first objective while, according to our test results, returns the performance crown back to the Santa Clara-based company.

After the debacle that was the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra (NV30), referred to in many circles as the "dust buster," "leaf blower," and "whistle-tip," Nvidia is hoping that the NV35 will prove to be the technological leap forward that they had expected the NV30 to be. While the original GeForce FX was plagued with delays, marketing screw-ups and technological gaffes, the NV35 is in many ways a revved up, new and improved version of the much-maligned NV30.

Like the NV30, the NV35 features .13-micron architecture (smaller than the Radeon 9800 Pro's .15-micron size), which enables the chip to run a little cooler. And while Nvidia was knicked for shipping the NV30 with 128-bit DDR2 memory with a maximum throughput of 16GB/sec, the NV35 boasts an impressive 256MB of 256-bit DDR1 memory with a maximum throughput of 27.2GB/sec. This will probably be the most significant bullet point in the NV35's arsenal, as memory bandwidth handicapped the NV30's performance in several tests. And this handicap was made more conspicuous by the fact that

The NV35 beat the crap out of the Radeon 9800 when we upped the resolution and enabled advanced graphics features.

ATI's 9800 Pro shipped with 256-bit DDR1 memory, enabling the card to compete handily with the "more powerful" NV30.

We tested the 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra on a 3GHz Pentium 4 against ATI's flagship 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro. While the NV35 was pretty much even with the 9800 Pro in every test with the bells and whistles turned off, it beat the crap out of the Radeon in every test once we upped the resolution and enabled features like 4x anti-aliasing and 4x anisotropic filtering. However, because our test board didn't fare so well in our *NASCAR 2002* and *UT2003* benchmark scores, the 1024x768 3DGameGauge numbers were strangely similar. Regardless, these results fall in line with what Nvidia has been telling us—that the NV35 was designed to run at 1600x1200x32 with everything turned on. When you crank anisotropic filtering up to something like 8x, the delta widens even more.

According to Nvidia, the GeForce FX line of cards has been "architected for Next Generation games." Translation: Don't expect to see games that support all the bells and whistles that the GeForce FX cards support right away. However, Nvidia is hoping that by creating products from the top (the \$499 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra) to bottom (the \$79 128MB GeForce FX

5200) that support DX9 and vertex and pixel shader 2.0+, just to name a few, that developers will have a reason to develop titles that take advantage of all that power.

Nvidia plans to offer the new NV35 in various flavors, including the Ultra at \$499 and a "non-Ultra" version for \$399. In addition, Nvidia will offer a non-Ultra 128MB version of the GeForce FX 5800 for \$299.

The real question is: Do you need it yet? Not until *Doom III* comes out.

NV35 vs. ATI Radeon 9800 Pro

At 1024x768, the two chips are surprisingly close in performance. It's at the higher resolutions with all the graphics options cranked that the new GeForce FX 5900 pulls away.

	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
3DMark2003 Pro (1024x768)	3532	2595
3DMark2003 Pro (1600x1200)	2138	1363
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1024x768)	83	84
3DGameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200)	69	56

TEST SYSTEM: We tested both cards using Windows XP Pro on a 3GHz Pentium 4 800MHz FSB with 1GB of Kingston DDR 400 and a 240GB Seagate SATA RAID configuration. The test results shown were all at 32-bit, with 4x anti-aliasing and 4x anisotropic filtering turned on.



MODS

Kung Fu Maxter

New Max Payne mod lets you fight like a Hong Kong action hero **By Jon M. Gibson**

It's like Max Payne took the red pill and wound up in *The Matrix*. Now he twists through the air, runs up walls, and kicks enemies in the head—even in Bullet Time. Something tells us the game's creators never imagined this.

"As long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan," explains Kenneth Yeung, the young mod-maker responsible for Payne's new martial arts skills. "To me, watching those masters in motion is the most beautiful, ass-whomp symphony there could ever be."

It took Yeung 18 months of programming in his free time, but the game now offers a wild display of martial arts moves, including combat with a staff. Players earn "style" points for quick kicks and punches, thrusting them up the ranks to the highest kung fu level—but only in hand-to-hand-combat. (You can still shoot, but you don't get any points for



using weapons in combat.) Players can pull off complicated wall jumps, flying takedowns, mid-air body juggling, and a variety of other moves that defy gravity and description.

In the immortal words of Neo, "Whoa!" Go to kungfu.maxpayneheadquarters.com to download it now.

FIRST LOOK

Disney's EQ for Kids

Toontown prepares the next generation for addiction **By Jeff Green**

File this under games that sound terrible but actually may rock. Disney's *Toontown Online* is an MMORPG aimed squarely at the pre-teen crowd (and their parents)—and, wait, don't skip to the next article just yet. VR Studios, the developers, have clearly done their



homework. *Toontown Online* lets kids do what their deadbeat parents do—assume online personas and level up by bashing things—but in a bright, cartoony, 3D Disney world, complete with Mickey and Donald.

Since Scooter was busy this month, we had my 9-year-old daughter Sarah beta test this game—and she's still hooked. Standard MMORPG gameplay has been smartly translated into kid-friendly terms. "Combat" involves using gags to reduce the "laugh points" of the game's bad guys, evil corporate suits called "cogs." All player communication is menu-driven, so chatting is safe. Non-combat-oriented mini-games abound where kids can easily rack up jellybeans, the game's currency. And the player characters—cartoon dogs, cats, ducks, horses, and rabbits—are ridiculously cute and highly customizable.

The game should launch by the time you read this. Say hi to my kid, Miss Rosie Superdoodle, and tell her to let the old man back on the PC.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD HALF-LIFE 2

Okay, so, yeah: duh. This is

good. What we want to single out here is the way that Valve handled the rollout of this game: Basically, they just worked hard and kept quiet and only spoke up when they had something real to show. As opposed to the industry standard of crowing for years about how great your game is and then never actually getting it done (cough, 3D Realms, cough).



THE BAD LAME SAVE SYSTEMS

Haven't we been over this a million times already? Developers, please, for the love of God, let us save anywhere in our damn games. Two recent games—*IGI 2* and

Indiana Jones—have abominable limited save systems that force you to endlessly redo parts of levels you may have already completed, just because the developers think we need the challenge. Guess what? We don't. We gave you our money. Let us play the way we want to play now.

THE UGLY WASHINGTON BANS "VIOLENT" GAME SALES



And so it begins. In April the Washington state senate passed a bill that would levy a \$500 fine to retail employees who sold violent video

games to minors under age 17. Here's a couple questions. Who decides what's "violent"? And how come there's no fine to sell R-rated movie tickets to kids? Or a fine for, say, HBO to show R-rated TV programs like *The Sopranos*? And don't even get us started on gun control laws. Welcome to the United States of Hypocrisy.

HANDS-ON

Tron 2.0

Dare I say it, a glowing preview?

By Thierry Nguyen

Man, even if *Tron 2.0*'s gameplay turns out to be sub-par, one can't help but be entranced by the bold art direction where the game world is awash in glowing (literally) colors. Thankfully, after some more time with a playable build, *Tron 2.0* continues to look and play impressively well.

In fact, I can honestly say that after playing the first few levels in a new build, we stand behind the optimism from our January 2003 cover story. The weapons remain the same from our previous reports for the most part. The most impressive addition is the Prankster bit, which resembles a purple missile. It's not merely some explosive rocket; upon impact, it creates a black hole that sucks enemy programs into it.

Tinkering around with the subroutines feels both flexible on-the-fly and very playable. If you feel sneaky you can load up the Fuzzy

There's now a full-on lightcycle circuit.

Signature subroutine to mask your footsteps. Other times, just load up armor subroutines and Primitive Damage to increase melee prowess, and start brawling. Or use the newly implemented Power Block, where you use your Disc to reflect enemy shots back at them—at the "gold" state, it's capable of one-shot kills.

Last time behind the wheel, the lightcycles were still being prototyped, and at this point, there's now a full-on lightcycle circuit. Modeled after *Gran Turismo*, the lightcycle circuit consists of 16 different tracks that get unlocked via the single-player story, and serves as a great little diversion from the main game.

The Discs of Tron multiplayer mode is also up and running. It does a good job of feeling more like a sport than a traditional deathmatch. Tactics go beyond "hit your opponent"; for example, in the default arena, you can destroy your opponent's platforms, restricting his mobility—just like in the movie. In another arena, you can hit colored switches on the walls that will make platforms of that same color disappear as well; it's possible to continually alter the landscape and force your opponent into a literal corner.

My only concern at this point is the lightcycle camera, which takes some getting used to. It's either locked, which makes every turn very jarring as the camera stays behind the lightcycle, or I have it on manual control but keep on forgetting to move the camera. Those lightcycle races sure can be intimidating. In the build I played, it took me a while just to get used to playing on the practice mode. Personal driving issues aside, *Tron 2.0* looks to be on track for its August release.



REALITY CHECK

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

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
C&C: Generals	C	B	B-	A-	A	B+	B+
Freelancer	A	B+	A	B+	A	B+	A-
IGI 2: Covert Strike	D-	C	C	C	B+	*	B-
Master of Orion 3	C	C	D	C+	A	B	C+
Praetorians	B+	B-	B-	B+	A-	B	B
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	A	B+	B-	A-	A-	*	A-



FIRST LOOK

Trinity

Activision unveils a 'non-traditional' single-player shooter with shades of Deus EX *By William O'Neal*

The problem with first-person shooters is that each new one is pretty much a refresh of every title that preceded it, and most attempts to create something new fall short of expectations.

Gray Matter Studios is trying to break that mold. The developer behind *Kingpin*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, and *Redneck Rampage* is working on a game called *Trinity* that the studio's creative director calls "a non-traditional FPS." Set in New Orleans in 2013, *Trinity* centers on a main character known as the Night Stalker who is trying to solve the mystery behind a plague that has infected the city. Gray Matter seems hell-bent on giving gamers

an awesome story-based game, which is why *Trinity* will have no multiplayer modes.

Gray Matter's creative director Drew Markham says *Night Stalker* has been "bio-augmented," which explains his super-human strengths, unique abilities, and a base level of health that starts at 170 as opposed to the standard 100. The *Night Stalker* won't find health power-ups throughout the levels but will heal himself with stem cells, the catch being that he can't heal himself while simultaneously fighting.

The game looks gritty and urban and brings to mind titles like *Kingpin* and *Requiem: Avenging Angel*. We'll keep you posted as more details become available before the game's next year release.

WHOA

Matrix Contest

Enter the Matrix...and win lots of cool stuff!

Are you the One? In celebration of the upcoming *Matrix* movies and game, *Computer Gaming World* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, along with our sponsors—Nintendo, Sony Computer Entertainment, Infogrames, and Warner Home Video—challenge you to follow the white rabbit through our magazines this month and find out the truth! Just find all five (5) rabbits hidden on the pages of each magazine and submit your answers at gamers.com/feature/matrix/. All correct entries will be entered in a random drawing for a chance to win one of the following great prizes:

Grand Prizes
(Five will be given away!)
Sony PlayStation 2
Nintendo GameCube
Microsoft Xbox

First Prizes
(10 for each platform!)
Infogrames' *Enter the Matrix* game for PC, PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox

Second Prizes
30 *Animatrix* DVDs
20 *The Matrix Special Edition* DVDs
10 *The Matrix* DVDs (regular version)

Runners-Up Prizes
20 1-year subscriptions to *Computer Gaming World*
20 1-year subscriptions to *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

HOW TO PLAY
The June issues of *CGW* and *EGM* will each have five white rabbits hidden on five different pages. To enter, you need to:

1. Find the five pages with white rabbits in *CGW*.
2. Find the five pages with white rabbits in *EGM*.
3. Log on to the contest page at gamers.com/feature/matrix/.
4. Enter the five white rabbit page numbers for *CGW* in sequential order from lowest to highest.
5. Enter the five white rabbit page numbers for *EGM* in sequential order from lowest to highest.

Correct entries received by July 1, 2003, will be entered into a drawing for the prizes. Only one entry per person is accepted. And, oh yeah, the rabbit on this page—it counts! It's a freebie. Now go find the four (4) others...and good luck! Be sure to come back next month for another chance to enter!

Full legal rules available on page 115 or at gamers.com/feature/matrix/.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW



Five Years Ago, July, 1998
Only one thing mattered five glorious years ago and no,

we're not talking about the Mad Catz Panther XL ad featuring John Romero all dolled up like King friggin' Vitamin. No, five years ago we were consumed with *StarCraft*, which landed a glowing five-star review extolling its "artfully balanced play, imaginative story line, and strategic depth." We liked it so much we started a 3 million installment strategy guide in the same issue. The *Encyclopedia StarCraftica* should be done sometime in 2115.



Ten Years Ago, July, 1993

A two-page ad on pages 52 and 53 touted one of 1993's must-haves:

Quarterdeck's QEMM-386, a \$99.95 memory management program that lets you make the most of your memory "whether you have one megabyte or eight." Apparently, DOS wasn't so great after all. What was great? How about a sneak preview of a little something we like to call *DOOM*? We said it would need a "muscular 386" to run well but we were confident that once it was released we'd love it. Damn straight.



Fifteen Years Ago, July, 1988

Okay, one guy is a

certified gaming legend, the other a bestselling author who has lent his name to a number of outstanding games. But still, c'mon. Doesn't this photo of Sid Meier, Tom Clancy, et al look more like some kind of Russian mafia merger or Wall Street drug deal? All it needs is John DeLorean and one of those brick-sized late-'80s cell phones and it would be perfect.



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ENGAGE IN EPIC CONFLICT against a horde of alien invaders and other foes in the single player campaign. Deathmatch-style Multiplayer gameplay modes include Holomatch, Capture the Flag, Elimination, Action Hero and many more.

LEAD YOUR TEAM INTO BATTLE across numerous environments including: planet-side ruins, space stations, volcanic planets, alien colonies, treacherous swamps and other exotic locales.

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READ ME

HANDHELDS

DeZire

Slick new Palm is better for gaming, and loaded with extras **By William O'Neal**

It's no coincidence people refer to them as "toys" since that's what we're using them for—entertainment. According to Palm, as much as 80 percent of the apps people are downloading for their PDAs are games. Why else would company reps drop by CGW's offices and give me a loaner?

The new blue Zire 71 (\$299) is a sleek device targeted at consumers. In addition to having all the usual Palm features, it has a nice color screen, a digital camera that takes pictures at 640x480, a built in MP3 player, and the ability to play video files in several formats. It ships with 16MB of internal memory but you can always boost that if need be.

What's interesting about the Zire 71 is how Palm has redesigned it for gaming. Whereas the previous model had buttons for scrolling through menus (yawn), the 71 has a better layout and a little joystick-style button that is ideal for gaming. On top of that, users won't be required to download games anymore. Sega, PopCap, and UbiSoft take advantage of the SD expansion slot by offering memory cards called PalmPak Game Cards (\$29.95). We tested out a few of the Game Cards and it was a snap:



Dropping the card into the slot takes you straight to a launch screen requiring only a couple of taps to be up and gaming.

Expect to see boxed copies of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, and *Shinobi*, as well as Ubi Soft's *Rayman* and a five game puzzle-pack from PopCap with *Bejeweled*, *Mummy Maze*, *Seven Seas*, *Alchemy*, and *Atomica*.

GBA SP, you're cool, but you're not this cool.



HOME BREW: FREE GAMING

By T. Byrl Baker

This month art imitates life as we look at a mod modeled after the war in Iraq and a sim that lets users deal with some of the problems posed by the space program.



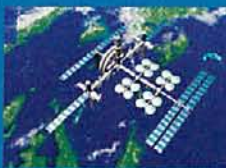
Desert Combat 3 Alpha

Desert Combat brings *Battlefield 1942* into the 21st

century, pitting U.S. forces against pre-war Iraqis with modern equipment like Apache helicopters, A-10 attack jets, and M1A1 tanks. The latest version also introduces powerful but fragile AC-130 attack planes, Harrier jump jets, Hind choppers for the Iraqis, mortars for indirect fire, a slew of new personal weapons, and the controversial suicide bomber.

The mod retains the blend of simulation and arcade action that made the original

game so popular, but kicks it up several notches with its overpowered weapons and extremely fast vehicles. Despite all the changes the dev team is doing a better job of balancing the classes and sides. Get this mod while it's still free, because someone's gonna make a fortune on it eventually.



Space Station Manager

MistariL.com
\$19.95

With renewed

focus on the

space program in general and the space station in particular, it's interesting to play a game that simulates the development of the multi-billion dollar orbiting research platform. Starting with the development and launching of profitable communications satellites, players eventually work their way up to designing and maintaining enormous orbital habitats, all while trying to stay within budget. A slick interface makes the game look deceptively simple, but creating profitable or even self-sufficient stations requires a lot of planning and 3D design sense that doesn't leave an inch of wasted space.

THE FUTURE OF REALITY TV

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gamespy

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comag

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tv net guide

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FIELD TRIP

Homeworld Bound

Vivendi's lineup expands with Tribes: Vengeance, The Hobbit, War of the Ring, and more **By Ken Brown**



Vivendi might not be a household name, but most gamers know who Blizzard Entertainment is. Vivendi owns Blizzard—along with Sierra Entertainment, Fox Interactive, and a slew of others—and Vivendi's future is in question right now while the parent company attempts to sell its gaming division. Rumor has it that Microsoft and Electronic Arts are not interested in buying it, which is actually good for PC gamers, because it's less likely that Blizzard would become the next Bungie (and all of Blizzard's games would only ship on Xbox).

Although Vivendi's future is uncertain, the company's line of games continues to grow. In addition to the upcoming *Homeworld 2*, Vivendi recently announced *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring*, *The Hobbit*, *Lords of the Realm III*, and more. Wil O'Neal and I had a chance to check out a few of the titles at the company's pre-E3 event, so here's what I learned while Wil flirted with Vivendi's PR ladies.

The creators of *Battle Realms* are working on *Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring*, the first RTS based on the Tolkien saga. Players choose either the forces of good and fight for the One Ring's destruction, or play as the forces of evil to claim control over Middle-earth. The game will introduce locations and characters not featured in the films, single-player and multiplayer campaigns, special abilities for the heroes, magic, and more.

Homeworld 2 is taking dramatic shape and is rapidly approaching its fall release. The game looks like an evolutionary improvement on the original space-based strategy game, with better graphics, lighting, and much more detail.

Mother ships are now customizable to let different players pursue different tactics. Fighters will no longer be useless against capital ships, because they can

target the larger ships' subsystems such as engines or weapon turrets. "Now you can target the engine subsystems and that is enough to potentially cripple the ship," says producer Alex Rodberg.

But the big news was Vivendi's signing with Irrational Entertainment (*System Shock 2*, *Freedom Force*) to create the next *Tribes* games. *Tribes Vengeance*, scheduled for late next year, will reportedly feature a story-driven single-player campaign in addition to its trademark multiplayer action. Irrational seems to be setting the bar pretty high in terms of graphics quality, with realistic facial expressions, vehicles that kick up dust, and stunning weapon effects—powered by a modified version of the Unreal engine. It should be one to watch, so next month we'll bring you a special in-depth scoop on what this game has in store. Check it out!

Although Vivendi's future is uncertain, the company's line of games continues to grow.

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Connect with voice support.



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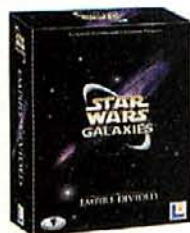
Play WWII's greatest battles.

VALVE

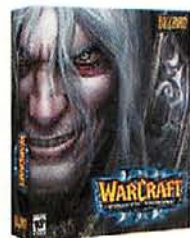
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ACTIVISION

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS



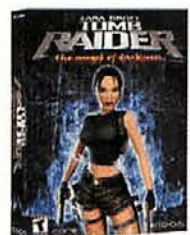
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided (LucasArts) A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.



Warcraft III Expansion: The Frozen Throne (Blizzard Entertainment) Following in the tradition of previous Blizzard expansion sets, this game provides gamers with a vast new chapter in the epic Warcraft saga. Revisit the war-torn world of Azeroth where a new threat has arisen throughout the land.



Neverwinter Nights: Shadow of Undrentide Expansion Pack (Infogrames) NWN's first official expansion pack includes a new 40-hour single player campaign plus game features new to Neverwinter Nights, such as additional D&D skills, feats, classes, monsters, weapons and spells.

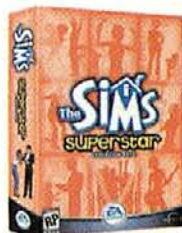


Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (Eidos Interactive) Lara Croft returns in Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. Accused of the murder of her one time mentor Von Croy and pursued by the police, Lara is drawn into a dark world of blood, betrayal and vengeance.



Homeworld 2 (Sierra) Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



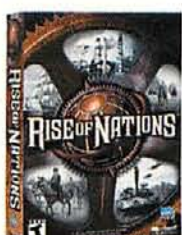
The Sims Superstar (Electronic Arts) In this expansion pack for The Sims, players can realize their fantasies of fame and fortune as they pursue the dream of being a rock star, a movie star, or a supermodel and live the lifestyle of a celebrity. This is your all-access pass to the world of superstardom.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Rockstar Games) Released for the PS2 last October, GTA: VC became the best-selling video game of 2002. The game's Miami Vice look, hit soundtrack, well-told criminal story, and open-ended gameplay made VC a hit with gamers and makes its foray onto the PC.



Enter the Matrix (Infogrames) Features awesome gunplay and spectacular martial arts that bend the rules of the Matrix. This game is an integral part of the experience, with a story that weaves in and out of The Matrix Reloaded, the sequel to the Academy Award®-winning film.



Rise of Nations (Microsoft) Combines the sweeping scope of epic historical turn-based strategy games with the quick decision-making of real-time games. You can move through the entire sweep of human culture quickly and have a satisfying game experience without playing for hours!



Medal of Honor Allied Assault Deluxe Edition (Electronic Arts) Features the hit title MOH Allied Assault and the MOH Allied Assault Spearhead expansion pack, plus strategy guides for both games. Also includes a bonus disc with a behind-the-scenes sneak preview of the making of the next MOH title.

All available now at the
Computer & Video Games store at

amazon.com.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

The best PC games, as voted by gamers



Road to Rome: 10 tons of run-and-gun.



The art of war: Carnage is beautiful in *Generals*.



Old 47 has some staying power in *Hitman 2*.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome (EA)	★★★★★
2	Command & Conquer: Generals (EA)	★★★★☆
3	Hitman 2 (Eidos)	★★★★★
4	Medal of Honor: Spearhead (EA)	★★★★☆
5	Unreal II: The Awakening (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
6	SimCity 4 (EA)	★★★★★
7	Freelancer (Microsoft)	★★★★★
8	No One Lives Forever 2 (Sierra)	★★★★★
9	Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 (EA)	★★★★★
10	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Ubi Soft)	★★★★★
11	Madden NFL 2003 (EA)	★★★★★
12	RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
13	Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down (NovaLogic)	★★★★☆
14	MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries (Microsoft)	★★★★★
15	FIFA Soccer 2003 (EA)	★★★★☆
16	Civilization III: Play the World (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
17	Medieval: Total War (Activision)	★★★★★
18	Vietcong (GODGames)	★★★★☆
19	Praetorians (Eidos)	★★★★☆
20	Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (LucasArts)	★★★★☆

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last six months. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES



Enter the Matrix
(Microsoft)

Go to
www.amazon.com/matrix for
Special Offers!

Features awesome gunplay and spectacular martial arts that bend the rules of the Matrix. This game is an integral part of the experience, with a story that weaves in and out of *The Matrix Reloaded*, the sequel to the Academy Award-winning film.

Features:

- Game script written and directed by the Wachowski Brothers
- Nearly one full hour of exclusive, never-before-seen Matrix footage using the film's actors.

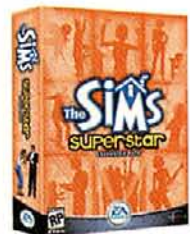


Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
(Rockstar Games)
\$49.99

The unflinching violence, adult themes, and heart-pounding crime simulations made *GTA: Vice City* a hit with the media and politicians. Love it or hate it, it can't be denied that this game represents the pinnacle of game design—as measured by both sales and fun factor.

Features:

- improved graphics and sound
- additional PC controls
- several options for players to customize the game.



The Sims Superstar Expansion Pack
(Electronic Arts)

Buy *The Sims Deluxe* and *The Sims Superstar* and get **\$20 off**. See site for detail.

Pursue the dream of being a Rock Star, Movie Star or a Supermodel and live the lifestyle of a celebrity.

Features:

- All new gameplay centered around a new fame score in the game!
- Build skills and win famous Sim friends to advance through ten levels of fame
- All new "Studio Town" location with three distinct themes: movies, music, and fashion

Check Out More Great Deals
Online at

amazon.com.

PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the channel **By Di Luo**

A note on the dates: The system by which we list games divides the year into quarters with January through March being Q1, April through June being Q2, and so on. We can only give you approximate dates here because the companies are often uncertain about the exact release dates.



1 SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY: Larry Holland—the brains behind *TIE Fighter* and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*—is finally back with *Secret Weapons Over Normandy*. Slated for September, the recently announced title is a third-person flight sim that revolves around a “secret squad of pilots dedicated to thwarting the Third Reich.” You’ll get to fly more than 20 WWII-era planes in 30 missions. The game will take place in the skies of 15 unique theaters stretching from Europe to Burma.



2 AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS: Microsoft and Ensemble Studios recently announced *Age of Mythology: The Titans*. The expansion will include a fourth culture, the Atlanteans, in a 12-mission single-player campaign. The Atlanteans will also feature 18 new human and 10 new myth units. Though Microsoft hasn’t revealed too many details, one power that sets the Atlanteans apart seems to be their ability to upgrade normal humans to hero units. Look for the expansion some time in the fall.



3 PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: Wannabe buccaneers visiting the *Sea Dogs 2* website were in for a surprise—you’re automatically transferred to a site for *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Apparently, Bethesda spotted a profitable movie tie-in and decided it would get more name recognition. What’s changed? Not much. It’s still being developed by Akella; ship combat, RPG-like character development, and swordplay are all in place. Since changes seem cosmetic, the company shouldn’t have trouble hitting the July release date.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Age of Wonder: Shadow Magic	Gathering	Q3 2003
American McGee's Oz	Carbon 6	Q2 2004
Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom	Q4 2003
Aquanox 2	JoWood	Q3 2003
Armed and Dangerous	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII	EA	June 2003
Black & White 2	EA	Q4 2003
Breed	CDV	Sept. 2003
Call of Duty	Activision	Q4 2003
Chrome	Strategy First	Q2 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q2 2003
Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Q1 2004
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Q2 2003
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	August 2003
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantia	Mythic	Unknown
Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware	Q3 2003
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q4 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q4 2003
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q3 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Empire of Magic	Summitsoft	Q2 2003
Etherlords II	Strategy First	Q3 2003
EverQuest II	Sony Online Entertainment	Q4 2003
Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island	EA	Q3 2003
Farcry	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Flashpoint Germany	Matrix Games	Q3 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse	3DO	Q4 2003
Full Throttle 2: Hell on Wheels	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Ghost Recon 2	Ubi Soft	Unknown
Ground Control 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Hannibal	Arxel Tribe	Q3 2002
Half-Life 2	Sierra	Sept. 2003
Halo	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Hidden & Dangerous II	Gathering	Q3 2003
The Hobbit	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q3 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	EA	Q4 2003
Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring	Vivendi	Q1 2004
Lords of EverQuest	Sony	Q4 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Madden NFL 2004	EA	Q3 2003
Max Payne II	Rockstar	Q4 2003
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	Q1 2004
Men of Valor: Vietnam	Sierra	2004
The Movies	Activision	Unknown
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Infogrames	June 2003
No Man's Land	CDV	Q3 2003
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Unknown
Pirates of the Caribbean	Bethesda	July 2003
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Railroad Tycoon 3	Gathering	Q3 2003

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q4 2003
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Savage	iGames	June 2003
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Splinter Cell: Shadow Strike	Ubi Soft	Unknown
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Activision	Q2 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	GSC	Q4 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Motor	Q3 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q4 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q3 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tribes: Vengeance	Sierra	Q4 2004
Trinity	Activision	Q2 2004
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista Games	August 2003
Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	Q3 2003
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Will Rock	Ubi Soft	June 2003
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

■ NEW ■ UPDATE

THE MOST UNREALISTIC RACING GAME EVER.



Heavily armed renegade racing
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ROCK 'N ROLL RACING

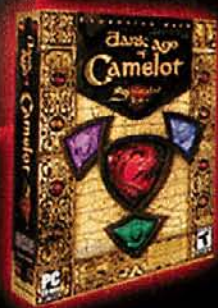
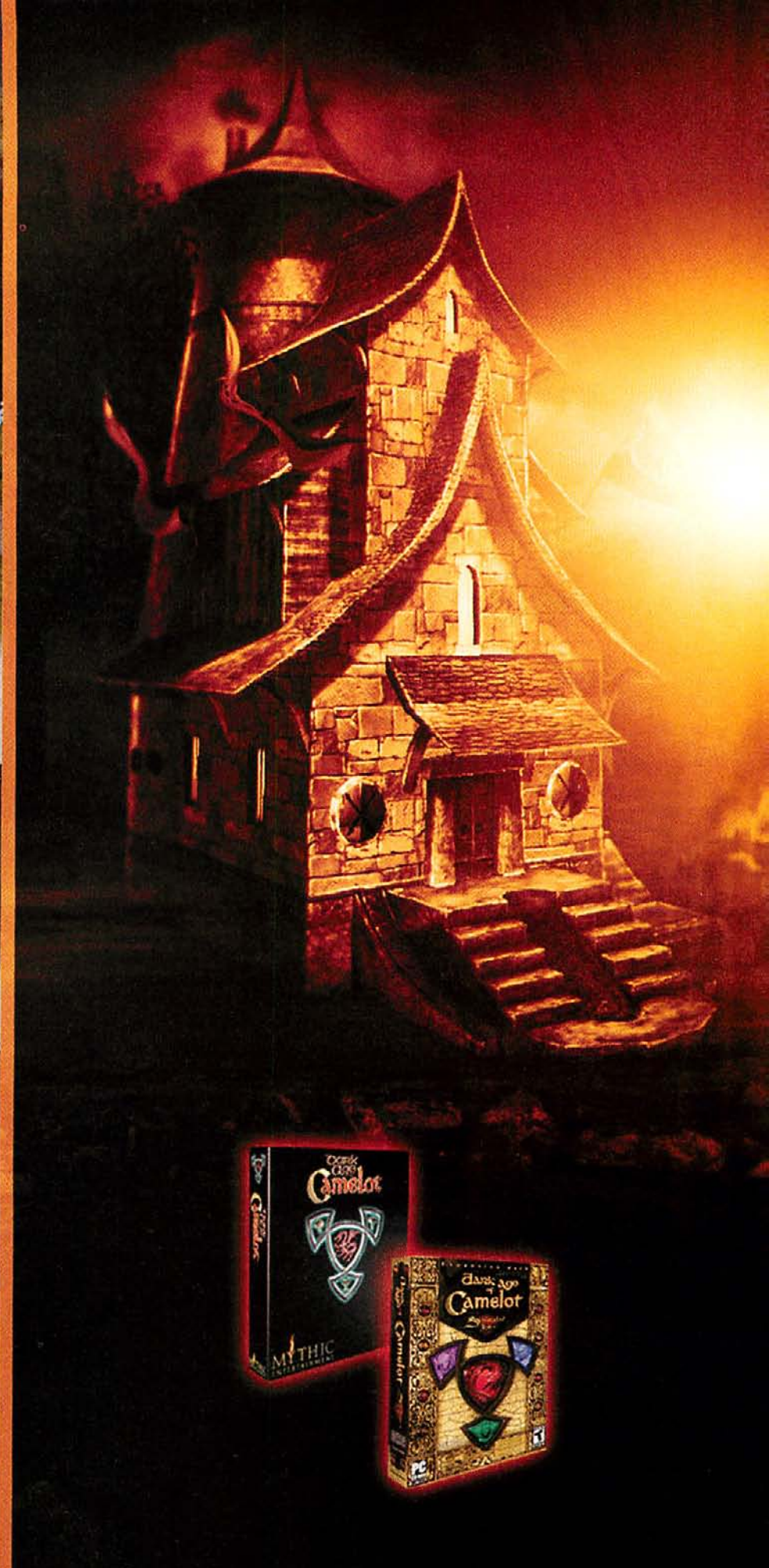
The Blizzard classic. Now on
Nintendo Game Boy® Advance.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Mild Violence

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STAKE YOUR CLAIM

dark age of Camelot

IT'S WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR

Always Evolving. Constantly Growing. An online world that grows richer and more vibrant each day. Dark Age of Camelot quickly became the most critically acclaimed MMORPG of the year and has continued the quest to reign supreme over the lands. Since then, adventurers in our lands have seen the addition of hundreds of new monsters ravaging, scores of new quests to complete, have discovered ways to create magical items and epic new areas, fraught with perils and rewards, to explore. Last winter saw the release of the first expansion pack, Shrouded Isles, revealing three new continents, six new races, six new classes, and a graphic engine that made Dark Age of Camelot the envy of its competitors. Now we're introducing the most robust player housing found in any MMORPG. If you haven't visited our world before, it is time to discover the magic of our Realms; if you are someone whose absence from Camelot has been sorely missed, it is time to come home again, to the challenge, danger and enchantment of the Dark Age of Camelot.



Violence



www.darkageofcamelot.com

INTERNET CONNECTION AND
ADDITIONAL ONLINE FEES REQUIRED

PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE

Show those tinheads
all hell by blowing up
their bridges!



Fighter jets are light, nimble, and fun to shoot other fighters with.



Breed tanks can also be used, given you only kill the pilot while leaving the tank intact.



Controlling this A.I. guy is a matter of using the F-keys for commands like "Regroup," "Fire at will," and "Cover me."



You and your USC buddies can hop in and use different parts of the tank.



This tinhead dancing a jig is actually a Breed soldier.

BREED

First-person shooting mayhem in land, air, or space **By Thierry Nguyen**

Years and years ago, the idea of a game that melded vehicular combat (both in space and on land) with first-person shootery was high-impossible to imagine. In fact, we saw a game eons ago (1998) called *Rock* that planned to do just that, but alas, the developer went under. With games like *Battlefield 1942* and *Operation Flashpoint* proving that vehicles and foot soldiers can play together, the next logical step is to create the sci-fi combat game that couldn't be done in '98. Enter *Breed*.

LICENSED TO DRIVE

Breed is all about action. Sure, there's a backstory, but all you need to know about it is, "Breed conquered Earth, and we're taking it back," or so says producer Sven Schmidt. Over the course of 20 missions, you'll take your squad of United Space Corps minions to battle Breed aliens on missions that ask you to retrieve a data disk, assault and occupy an enemy base, or rescue space POWs. This shooter's hook falls somewhere between *Halo* and *Battlefield 1942*. Not only can you drive around all sorts of vehicles and have a ragtag band of brothers tearing up the landscape, but some of those vehicles can seamlessly fly from the mothership in Earth's orbit down to terra firma—and without a loading screen that interrupts you midway through.

Like in the *Rainbow Six* series,

With proper A.I. tweaking and weapon balancing, *Breed* could easily be called *Battlefield 2642*.

players can easily switch between different squad members by pressing a key. By default, you'll usually be jumping between members of a four-man squad, but you can also directly control the dropship pilot, the dropship gunner, and even a turret gunner on the USC *Darwin* (the human mothership). The 20 vehicles range from jeeps to APCs to flying scouts, and they all use the same WSAD interface. You'll need these vehicles to run across the vast landscapes, some of which take up a whopping 200 square kilometers of game space.

BREED SHOOTING

Similar to tactical shooters and *Halo*, *Breed* only lets you carry two weapons: your standard assault rifle and one specialized weapon, whether it be a rocket launcher, sniper rifle, or minigun. While there are specific classes with specialties (i.e., heavy gunners get outfitted with a rocket



Almost every vehicle, dropship included, is controllable.

launcher, snipers with a sniper rifle, etc.), anyone can use any weapon; it just becomes a matter of precision. Heavy gunners have a hard time sniping, while the regular trooper has a tough time hefting a big ol' rocket launcher everywhere he goes. So, while it's not ideal to be using a weapon you're not specialized in, it's still helpful to be able to at least use it when, say, your fellow soldiers get capped in the head. Of course, you can also use weapons dropped by the Breed, but you will experience a similar lack of precision when you use their hardware.

Besides traditional Deathmatch and Capture-the-Flag multiplayer modes, *Breed* also features co-op and Assault modes. The co-op campaign supports



There aren't too many buildings that can withstand multiple hits from a tank cannon.



It's not fair for a fighter jet to shoot up an unarmed convoy, but hey, it's war.



You can mess around in a dropship instead of fighting on the ground.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CDV
DEVELOPER: BRAT DESIGNS
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON
TINHEAD SHOOTER
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER
2003

Coordinate plans with your squad and get ready to strike. Just make sure the guy with the bazooka has a clear shot.



Here we see scientists working on a formula for the perfect Pilsner—or on some devious method of killing people.



As you can tell, there's a variety of climates to fight through. Here, you'll be tangling with the Desert Fox.



These Nazi stooges are a whole lot smarter than those in the first game. Trust us, they will try to flank you.



Wow, grass fields. A farm. Exciting. Seriously, though, the detail looks nice.



H&D2 is taking full advantage of Mafia's graphics engine. Can you tell which is the real house and which is the game-modeled version?

HIDDEN AND DAN

Serving up World War II action with a touch of British class **By John Marrin**

Released in 1999, *Hidden and Dangerous* got high marks for its realistic portrayal of World War II. That was then. These days, you've got to do something exceptional to stand out from the quickly bloating bunch of action wargames. Illusion Softworks, the gang behind the Tommy-gun-and-meatballs title *Mafia*, may have found a way to distinguish itself with *Hidden and Dangerous II*—so long as it can ditch the notorious bug issues that riddled the original game.

The sequel chronicles covert missions of British SAS commandos in various World War II campaigns. While most games are based in the European theater, *H&D2* goes further afield, with seven sorties in locations such as Africa and Burma. This gives gamers a more varied taste of battle in open

there's a bit of variety. As in the previous *H&D*, you're able to commandeer assorted vehicles such as tanks and trucks, and to use various mounted guns, which adds a bit of diversity to the gameplay. And when you're looking for a subtle way to come in through the back door, you can swipe a Nazi uniform and infiltrate the enemy—so long as you don't attract any attention from the computer-controlled opposition.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Illusion has also given the A.I. a kick in the pants. Enemies now take into account their comrades' actions, so if you snipe a soldier, you can expect any others nearby to come looking for you and to attack in a coordinated fashion. As for your side of things, team members build their skills from mission

It's possible to play the entire game in the Tactical mode as a real-time or even a turn-based strategy game.

desert and thick jungle scenarios. Tasked with stealthy ops such as hostage rescue, infiltration, and search and destroy, you've got to plan in order to be successful here.

A DIFFERENT PLAN OF ATTACK

A new Tactical mode is one of the most striking differences from the first game. Designed to replace the planning map, Tactical mode essentially lets you give very detailed orders to your team. It makes it possible, for example, to tell your sniper to use a particular clump of brush as cover. Your squad members can be given orders for stance, behavior (aggressive, defensive, or passive), and formation, and you can define the specific path they take. In fact, though *H&D2* wasn't designed specifically for this, it's possible to play the entire game in the Tactical mode as a real-time or even a turn-based strategy game, by using the Pause feature.

While most of your fighting is on foot,

to mission, so keeping your team alive can help you to stay alive further down the road.

How does the game look? Ah, fahgedaboutit! *H&D2* uses a refined version of *Mafia*'s graphics engine. Most of the time, you'll be sneaking through the woods and fields rather than mowing down mobsters on the asphalt streets, but you can still see the positive results in these screenshots. And aside from the environment graphics, human movements have been motion-captured, for added realism.

The single-player campaign is fairly deep, with several modes. Lone Wolf tests your skill by having you play missions without teammates. In Carnage, you have to eliminate all enemies in the level to win. For those who dig teamwork, the GameSpy-supported multiplayer modes are also in good shape. Go for a straight-up Deathmatch or opt for Occupation, which has teams fighting for territory control. Skirmish mode pits teams against each other with competing



It gets a little cold out here, so why not shoot a few bullets at krauts to get the ol' blood flowing?



"Franz do this, Franz do that...I never see him loading der cannon."

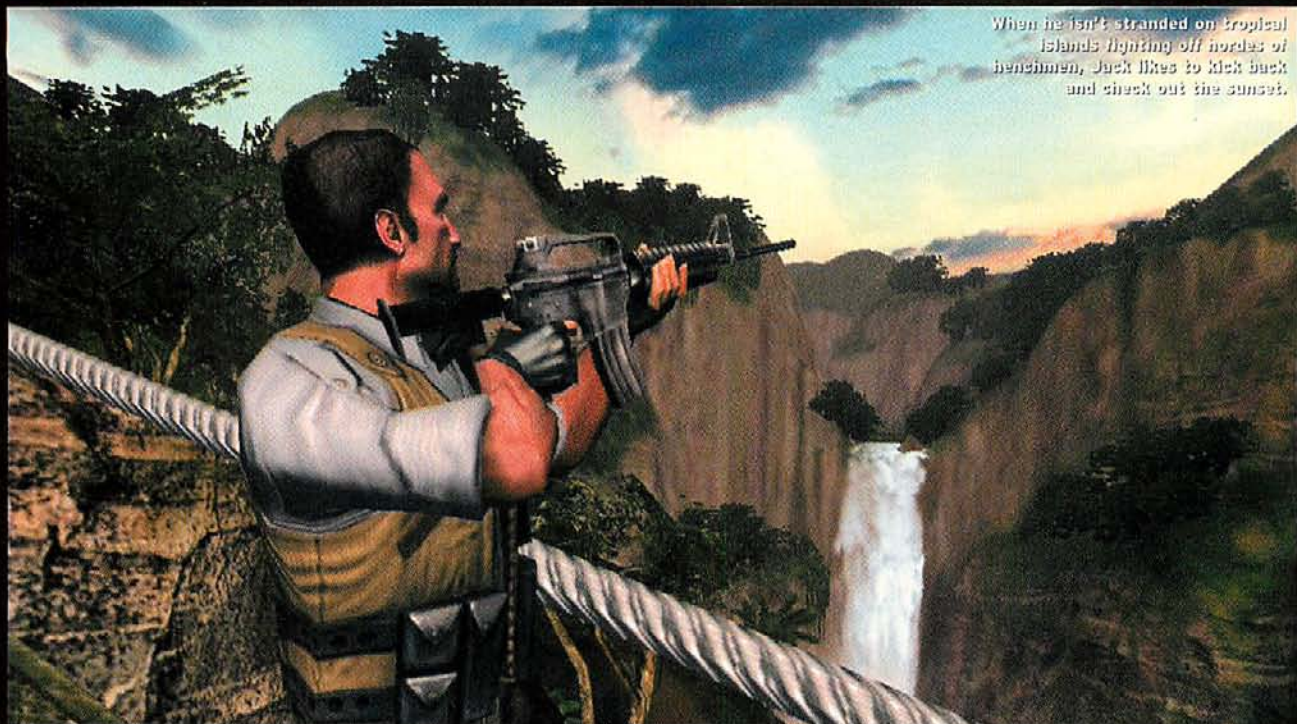
objectives—for instance, one team is charged with defending a bunker while the other side is supposed to destroy it. As of this writing, Illusion figures to ship 10 missions for each multiplayer mode. A map editor won't ship with the game, but the team at Illusion has said that it won't close any doors. If the add-on packs for the first *Hidden and Dangerous* are any indication, fans can expect that and more.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: ILLUSION SOFTWARES
GENRE: THIRD-PERSON
ACTION/ADVENTURE, TURN-BASED/REAL-TIME (WHEW!)
GAME
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2003

GEROUS II





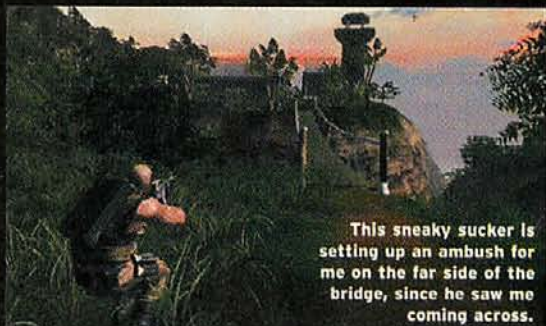
When he isn't stranded on tropical islands fighting off hordes of henchmen, Jack likes to kick back and check out the sunset.



"Now just hold that pose for a second and say 'cheese.'"



"Hey guys, I just felt something by my legs....ummm, guys?"



This sneaky sucker is setting up an ambush for me on the far side of the bridge, since he saw me coming across.

FARCRY

Make a game engine and they will come **By Darren Gladstone**

Tech-demo-cum-videogame, *Farcry* has a lot going for it. Originally conceived as eye candy to show what Crytek's 3D engine can do (the game developer geeks did, in fact, come to check it out at this year's Game Developer's Conference), *Farcry* is evolving into a bona fide game to watch. The question becomes, then, how to make a title that'll stand apart in the overly crowded FPS genre. But, this first-person shooter has a new game engine that shows a lot of promise—and a lot of detail.

SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE BEAR

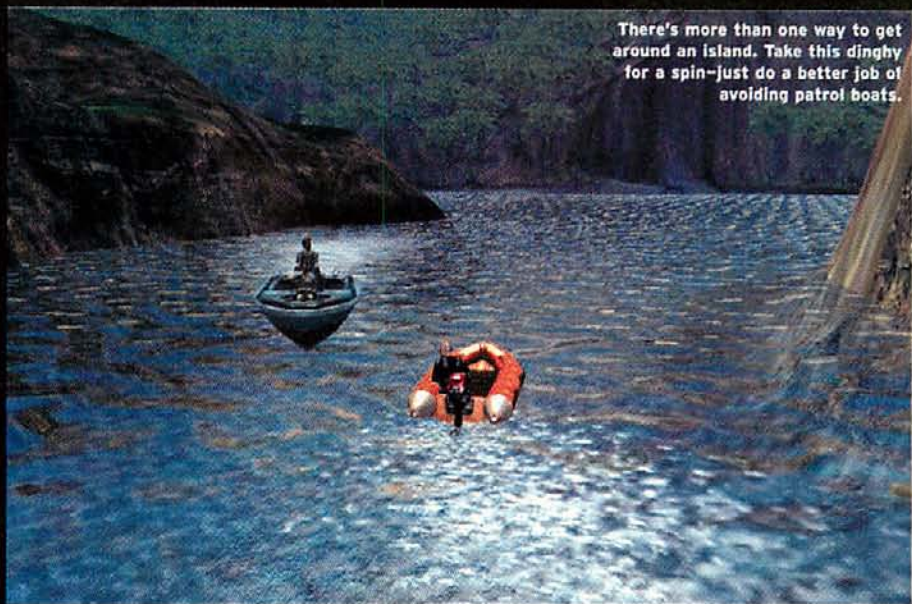
The 2-kilometer-scaled maps shown off in the demo have some pretty impressive scenes. I could wax poetic about the neat-looking environments and slick-looking character models, but the pictures on this page are worth more than a few measly words. Producer Christopher Natsuume took the helm for a guided tour of the island on which our hero is stranded. With a powerful sniper scope, Natsuume sighted enemies and rocket-launcher-created craters clear across the deformable map.

"See that guy over there?" Natsuume asked, pointing to soldiers in the middle of a clearing. "We spent a lot of time working on the A.I., so that it operates on senses, not scripted routines." That is, each A.I.-controlled baddie has radius ranges. Each can hear and see only so far, but if one catches you, he'll smartly use cover to get to where the last noise came from, or where you were spotted. Obviously, there is still a lot of tweaking to be done, but in my three attempts to take a hill, the computer-controlled troopers cut off my advance every time. The A.I. is already smart enough to outflank you and send runners to call for backup.

In keeping with the big emphasis on randomness and unpredictability, there are several movie-like elements often missing from games. How often do you get sniped by some ludicrously accurate A.I. and—bang—you're dead? To that end, Natsuume wants to add some dramatic tension. The accurate shots will be registered, of course, but there will also be a bunch of near misses. "Imagine you're running through the jungle and all of a sudden, a hail of fire erupts around you. You've got seconds to dive for cover." Sounds a whole lot less frustrating than simply walking into a deathtrap, doesn't it?

HERE'S A STORY OF A GUY NAMED....

The details on the actual plot still need hashing out, but there will be some



There's more than one way to get around an island. Take this dinghy for a spin—just do a better job of avoiding patrol boats.

The A.I. is already smart enough to outflank you and send runners to call for backup.

story-driven emphasis to push things along. You're flying a nosy reporter over some nameless tropical island, only to be shot down; you've got to figure out how to get off the island. The nine missions are allegedly seamless levels split up by cut-scenes that play while the next mission loads. In Natsuume's opinion (and we definitely agree with him), nothing's more annoying than being pulled out of the game by some Loading screen.

As it stands right now, there will be roughly nine weapons (all the traditional fare) and as many as six vehicles at your disposal. While details on the multiplayer modes need to be fleshed out, it looks like some of the dinghies, Humvees, and beach buggies you'll drive in the single-player campaign will also be in multiplayer.

The really good news here is for the development and modding communities: It looks pretty simple to pick up the tools and design your own levels, so whatever the folks at Crytek decide to omit, you'll be able to create on your own. According to Natsuume, the in-game tool lets you see the level as it unfolds, and it is five to six times quicker than the tool for building a *Counter-Strike* map.

What we saw firsthand in the office ran as smooth as silk, even though the game isn't due out until this winter. All we need now is a good story and engaging level design. Stay tuned for details on this new shooter—we'll keep you posted as we learn more in the coming months.



A bunch of soldiers just caught me trying to sneak by.



Mmmm, sexy developer screen. This is the design tool in action.

GAME STATS

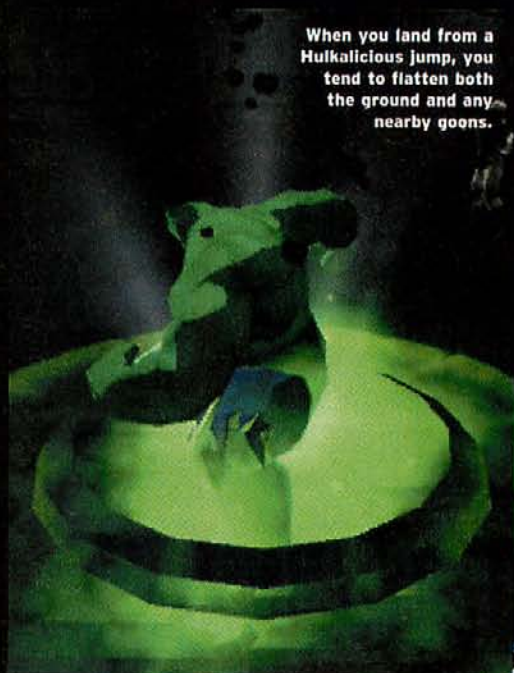
PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER: CRYTEK
GENRE: 3D ENGINE TECH-
DEMO SHOOTER
RELEASE DATE: WINTER 2003



Just as Hulk retains his purple pants, Crawford keeps his evil hairdo and beard when he becomes Ravage.



Tanks aren't much of a problem when you're big, green, and can leap so high that people think you're flying.



When you land from a Hulkalicious jump, you tend to flatten both the ground and any nearby goons.

THE HULK

Scooter smash! *By Thierry Nguyen*

The Hulk is probably the easiest game idea to pitch. Just scream "HULK SMASH!" and be done with it. In fact, it's almost wrong

to call this a game. How about a cross-promotional movie tie-in? Whatever the case, the *Hulk* game is shaping up as an interesting combination of beat-em-up smasher and *Metal Gear Solid*.

It helps that *Spider-Man* single-handedly made comic-book properties the latest Hollywood in thing, and *Freedom Force* bolstered the idea that good superhero games can be done on PC. Besides, the PC is ripe for some good old-fashioned romping and stomping.

PRETTY AS A PICTURE

The game takes place a year after the film's story line, with Bruce Banner trying to un-Hulkify himself. A nefarious fellow named Crawford (replete with evil beard and hairstyle—bwah-ha-ha) says he can help. Chaos ensues, and you spend the rest of the game smashing and screaming, just as you would expect in a *Hulk* game. All of this shouting and wrecking ultimately has you going after the Leader (that silly *Hulk* villain whose head resembles a massive pair of, shall we say, cajones), who's making a massive army of gamma-radiated soldiers. Along the way, you fight other *Hulk* villains, like Half-Life, Flux, Madman (all from the comics), and even the Hulk-dogs from the movie.

Most comic book-inspired games tend



Green Hulk tries to stop Orange Hu-er, Madman, from making some other Hulk-derivative.

The interface is pretty simplistic, but jeez, how complicated do you need to get when it comes to smash or grab?

to emulate the look and feel of their counterparts. *Hulk* is going for a uniquely stylized cel-shaded look. While most cel-shaded games look like cartoon wannabes, *Hulk* adds some embossing and bump-mapping effects that give the characters' faces a very distinct gloss.

Gameplay is pretty much straight beat-em-up when you're the big green guy. The interface is simplistic, but then, how complicated do you need to get when it comes to smash or grab? The Hulk has a large variety of moves (45 in all), which you can apply to both your enemies and the environment. So, in addition to flinging the game's hapless goons around, you can also grab things like tanks, cars, and telephone poles to wield as weapons.

Heck, you can even punch rockets in midflight.

Radical Entertainment (the developer) worked hard to generate a game world with loads of useable and destructible items lying about. Finally, there's the requisite Rage mode, where Hulk gets angry

(think Robert Coffey in the throes of berating *Postal 2*) and starts taking it out on everyone. Rage has its own on-screen meter (like a health meter) that is raised by getting hit or collecting special Rage Orbs.

COMIC CHAOS

Unlike most superhero games where you're always the superhero and not the mild-mannered alter ego, *Hulk* lets players banter around as, well, Banner.



What did Half-Life do before becoming a Hulk villain? He was an English teacher. Yes, English degrees are worth it!



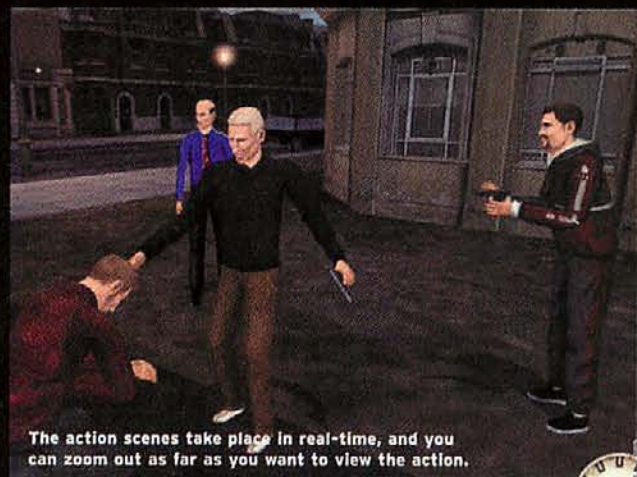
Hulk kicking up a ruckus in the desert turns out to be nothing more than a dream. What original dramatic technique!

While your Hulk persona is fine and dandy for smashing your way with reckless abandon through Hulk-dogs and soldiers, you'll need Banner to be smart and sneaky. Banner's levels usually involve sneaking around a base, solving puzzles, and grabbing information. The game split is about 70 percent Hulk and 30 percent Banner. For all the levels involving Banner, Eric Bana (who plays Banner in the movie) provides voice work.

Get ready to paint the town green as the Hulk this summer.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI
UNIVERSAL/BLACK LABEL
GAMES
DEVELOPER: RADICAL
ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: THIRD-PERSON
SMASHER
RELEASE DATE: SUMMER 2003



REPUBLIC: THE

Machiavelli's wet dream realized **By Di Luo**

Fortune favors the brave and ambitious in this fascist simulator. The Soviet Union has fallen, and you are determined to make the most of the opportunities spawned from the chaos. *Republic: The Revolution's* fictional plot unfolds in the former Soviet republic of Novistrana, which has been ruled by a ruthless dictator for decades. As an enterprising and charismatic young man, you attempt to exploit the people's dissatisfaction in order to topple the president and gain absolute power. From humble beginnings with few resources and followers, you seek to win the hearts and minds of your people by any means necessary.

GOT POWER?

If the ruthless acquisition of power is your bag, you'll love the basics behind this game—so listen up, Cheney. There is no ideology such as capitalism or socialism involved. Instead, *Republic's* ideology focuses on the value you place on the means of achieving power. It is represented by a triangle of counterbalancing factors—force, influence, and money—that act in a rock-paper-scissors fashion. Men of influence who can sway the opinions of the rich are

If the ruthless acquisition of power is your bag, you'll love this game.

easily cowed by brute force. Thugs, on the other hand, can be bought for money. To achieve power, you can focus on any of these means, although success usually requires a good balance of the three.

Gameplay concentrates on time and personnel management. In each game, you may recruit up to six people into your inner circle. Each can perform one of 70 actions in the day's three phases. Possible lieutenants all have fleshed-out backgrounds ranging from Mafia toughs to influential TV stars. These backgrounds often determine their possible actions and limitations, such as the times of day they act for you. Strangely enough, there are no women to recruit; Elixir, the developer, says

this is due to the male-dominated society prevalent in former Soviet republics. Still, one wonders why all the TV stars and journalists have to be male. Perhaps Elixir Studios ran out of money to hire female voice actors?

Your subordinates can perform actions ranging from leaflet campaigns to assassinations to outright military coups, with quite a bit of strategic depth involved in choosing among them. Most advanced actions require you to scout an area, and your success rate increases if you take the trouble to do some prep work, such as spreading disinformation or intimidating the area's residents into silence.

In order to achieve your ultimate goal, you must win control of three cities, ranging from a provincial town to the capital. Each is divided into multiple districts populated by hundreds of individually modeled people who go about their daily lives. Although somewhat free-form, you must meet specific objectives in each city before moving on.

ONCE IS ENOUGH

While there is a massive playground to explore, *Republic* may encounter a problem with replay value. Since there is no multiplayer mode and the cities

and their inhabitants remain the same in every game, you only get alternate experiences by attempting different paths to power. Hopefully, the developer has included strong A.I. for your opposing factions to make it interesting.

If done well, *Republic's* intriguing premise should lead to a great game. When we saw it at Eidos, everything looked good, but Elixir is trying to meet an ambitious schedule, as Eidos wants the game on shelves by June. This leaves those working on it less than two months to test, produce, package, and ship the game. With an expansive engine that involves three huge cities and hundreds of individual onscreen characters, this will be a formidable task for even the best testers and bug squashers.



Chasing booty: The only women in the game are for decoration or honey traps.



Government lackeys on patrol.



Leafletting campaigns are cheap and effective ways to drum up early support.

REVOLUTION

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: ELIXIR STUDIOS
GENRE: FASCIST SIMULATOR
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2003



Pure Pinball



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost

Big-time, highfalutin publishers spend millions in ads and press tours to promote their newest games. But what about the little guy making the next *Doom* in his basement? What about those great games that aren't being distributed Stateside? There are plenty of good titles you've never heard of...and that's what *Outta Sight* is all about.

PURE PINBALL

FROM: IRIDON INTERACTIVE
GENRE: ARCADE
AVAILABILITY: SUMMER 2003

THE PROMISE: Swedish outfit Iridon knows its arcade games, having succeeded in bringing *Excessive Speed* to market where Epic failed. Empire Interactive may be the next victim upstaged, as Iridon's *Pure Pinball* could give Empire's esteemed *Pro Pinball* franchise a run for its money. *Pure Pinball* boasts three 3D tables (*Excessive Speed*, *World War*, *Runaway Train*), advanced special-effects technology, and intricate ball physics. Good thing these 100,000-plus polygon tables are virtual... no quarters required means more room in your pocket for rent money.

THE CATCH: Pinball is an all-but-forgotten memory in 2003. There's a reason we haven't seen many entries in this genre lately: Nobody's buying 'em. As a result, development on such products has been halted or shifted to Eastern Europe, as in *Pure Pinball*'s

known as the Zone, seeking salvageable goods, which can be pawned for upgrades. The game's deep, but also a looker—Nvidia has already used the title as a GeForce FX showpiece, even though the developer didn't have a North American publishing deal (it does now!).

THE CATCH: Twofold. One, the company's last attempt at anything resembling an FPS, *Codename: Outbreak*, went way under the radar here in the States. Second, just because a product works wonders as a graphics demo doesn't mean it'll make a great game...*Incoming*, anyone? But we've continued to keep our eyes on this one, and the good news is that every time we see it, it looks even better. We'll try not to jinx it with too much hype, but expect more coverage as the ship date nears.

MASSIVE ASSAULT

FROM: WARGAMING.NET
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
AVAILABILITY: TBD

THE PROMISE: War is hell. For some, it's also a game—see George W. Bush or *Massive Assault*. More likely these days to slam-dunk opinion polls, the latter is billed as a modern upgrade to classic tabletop titan *Risk*. Huge and varied environments, sparking pyrotechnics, provisions for diplomacy, 26 total units, and striking 3D terrain are its calling cards.

OUTTA SIGHT

The best games you've never seen **By Scott Steinberg**



Massive Assault

case—it's developed in Hungary, hardly a hotbed of AAA product development. But with a little help from Encore, SummitSoft, or another value-minded publisher, the title could score its immigration papers.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: OBLIVION LOST

FROM: GSC GAME WORLD
GENRE: FPS/RPG AMALGAMATION
AVAILABILITY: NOVEMBER 2003

THE PROMISE: The Cold War is over, but thanks to developers like GSC (*Cossacks*), Russia's still keen on invading American shores. A sophisticated action game-cum-FPS/RPG hybrid, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* takes place around Chernobyl. As a hired gun, you enter a radioactive landscape

Interestingly, play also features secret allies...which, coincidentally, is something else it possesses that *Dubya* doesn't.

THE CATCH: Real-time strategy gaming from an unknown developer; a surefire recipe for disaster back in '96. We're just now recovering from *Tribal Rage* and *The L.E.D. Wars*. Still, even a jaded old bunch of grognards can admit times have changed, even if public opinion hasn't; these days, rumor has it, independents can make a splash (see *Battlefront.com*'s *Combat Mission*). Inspiring further confidence, the company's website states, "All of Wargaming.net's employees have degrees in computer science, physics, or math...." Translation: They're smarter than you.

"FIRE IN THE HOLE!"



WORLD WAR II

FRONTLINE COMMAND



IN STORES NOW!

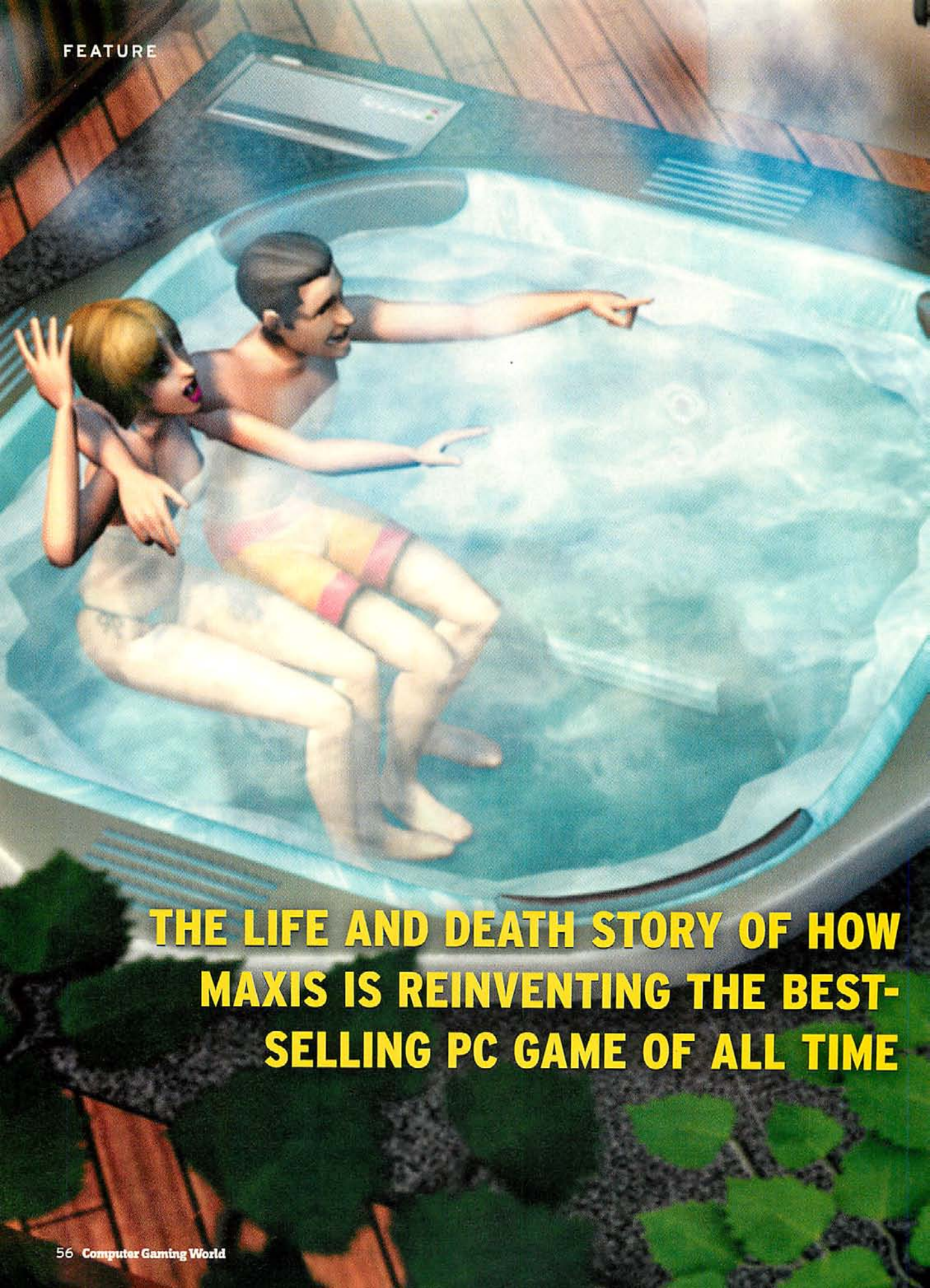
Command your forces and turn the tide of Axis aggression while conquering fortress Europe using a vast amount of authentic infantry, vehicles and weaponry. - 3D engine allows for advanced tactics • True 3D Line Of Sight • "Hearing" system where enemy units can be heard • Intelligent and adaptive AI reacts to your strategy • Advanced "Morale" system where "Heroic" actions can be performed • 25 missions can be played either as a 12-mission "Recruit" campaign or a 20-mission, non-linear "Veteran" campaign

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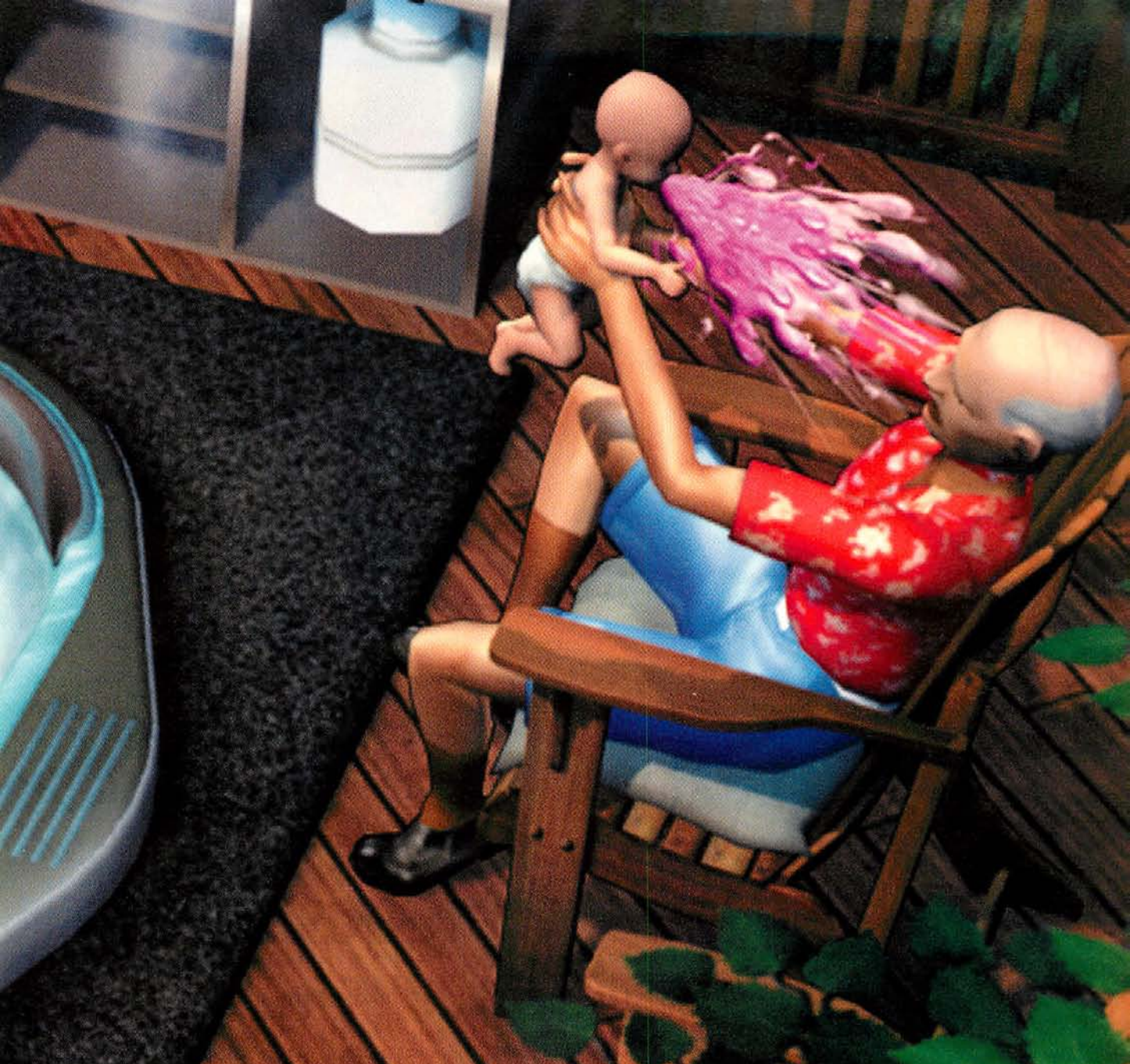
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**THE LIFE AND DEATH STORY OF HOW
MAXIS IS REINVENTING THE BEST-
SELLING PC GAME OF ALL TIME**



SIMS 2

BY THIERRY NGUYEN



PUBLISHER: EA
 DEVELOPER: MAXIS
 GENRE: ARCHITECTURE/EUGENICS
 SIMULATION
 RELEASE DATE: Q1 2004

With *The Sims*' unprecedented success, was there any doubt there'd be a sequel? After selling more than 20 million copies in the franchise (dwarfing sales of *Half-Life* and even *GTA3*), the real question is, how do you improve on a runaway hit?

Sure, you could make the leap to 3D and add tons of objects and interactions, but putting window dressing on the same game is hardly the stamp of a Will Wright/Maxis product. It certainly wouldn't be enough to compel another 20 million sales. No, what Maxis needed was to wrap legions of new players in a more powerful emulation of life, to steep them in something more meaningful than the daily grind. What did they come up with? Digital DNA.

In a massive antithesis to the Human Genome Project, Maxis invented the genetic codes of an entire species of simulated people. With that, the next generation of *The Sims* portrays life, death, and procreation—and the myriad triumphs and tribulations involved in seeing Sims sail through the seasons. In short, Maxis changed *The Sims* from a daily sitcom to a multigenerational saga.

Now more than ever, art will simulate life: Birth. School. Work. Death.

Good-bye *Groundhog Day*, hello reality.

**IN SHORT, MAXIS
 CHANGED *THE SIMS* FROM A
 DAILY SITCOM INTO A
 MULTIGENERATIONAL SAGA.**

THE QUICK TOUR

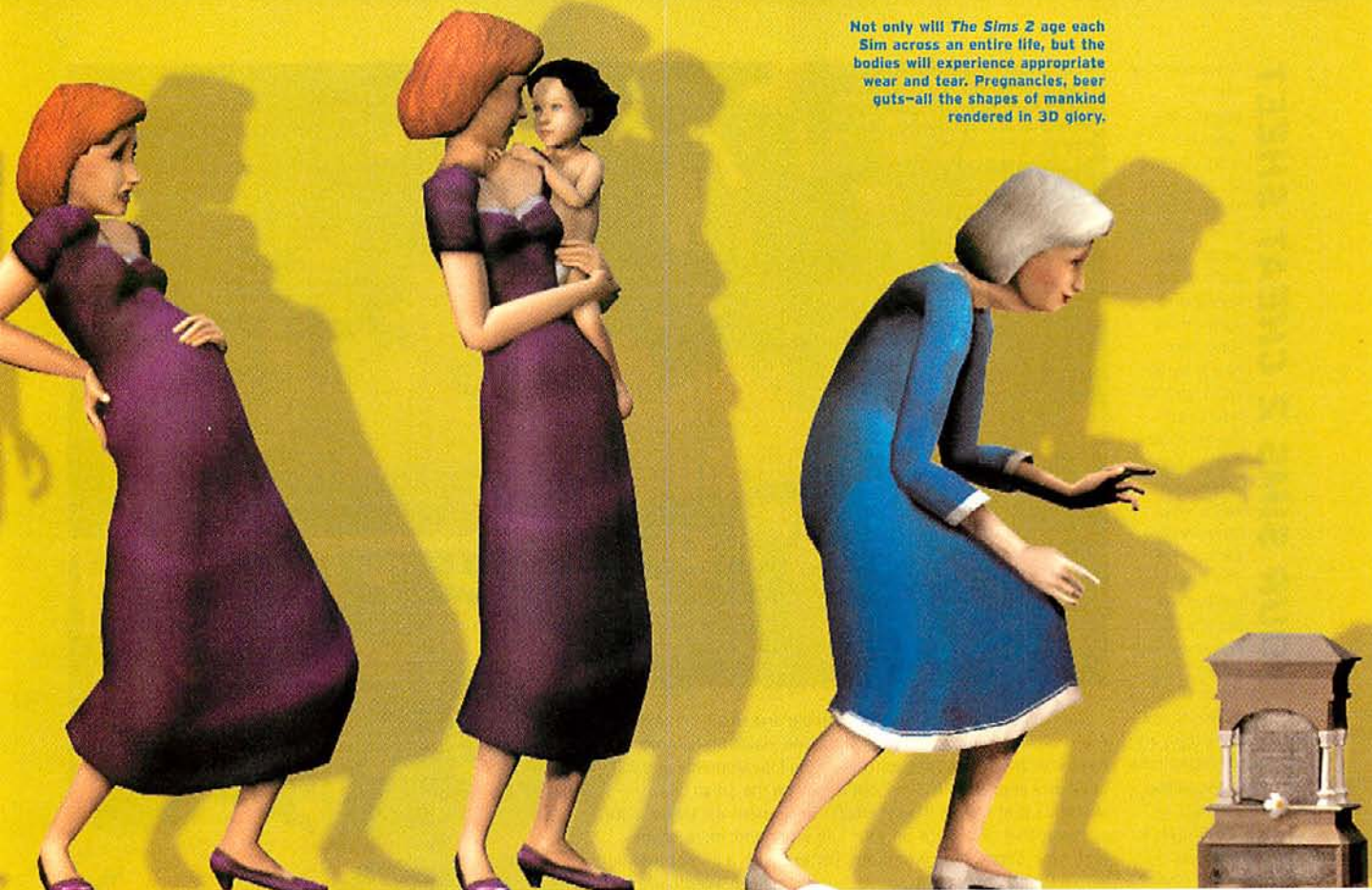
The process of creating your Sim begins much like in the first game, but there are some dramatic changes. Thanks to the fancy new 3D engine, you have much more flexibility in customizing your Sim, including the ability to create your own face (see "Facial Makeover," page 62). If you don't have time to craft that perfect Scott Baio visage, you can hit the Random Face button to generate a new, totally unique little Sim.

After crafting your Sim, you pop into a game world that, at first glance, looks a whole lot like the previous game: same isometric view, same little green diamond hovering over your Sim's head, and the same weird Simlish spouting from their little mouths. The only difference is that the graphics look a lot cleaner than those in the original game.

It's when you click on the Rotate Camera arrow that the new 3D engine suddenly kicks in. Rather than being locked into four



You too can partake in the "formula versus breast-feeding" debate, thanks to *The Sims 2*'s added child rearing.



Not only will *The Sims 2* age each Sim across an entire life, but the bodies will experience appropriate wear and tear. Pregnancies, beer guts—all the shapes of mankind rendered in 3D glory.

distinct camera angles, you can now rotate the camera smoothly around each scene. Hitting Zoom puts you in a lulling focus shot, rather than a jarring jump cut into your Sim's face.

But the new engine offers more than just smooth moves. Every object is now fully 3D, which allows for more animations to help make the Sim world feel more real. When your Sim works out on a weight machine, for example, you can see how many weights are actually being used. And you'll watch as he adds more. Recliners will now kick back, and cheap beds will break from the wear and tear of too much "play."

DON'T FORGET TO BEGET

Let's talk about making babies. The original *Sims* was about a single Sim forging relationships with other Sims, while *The Sims Online* made those other Sims into actual people. With *The Sims 2*, not only do you produce children, but you raise them into adulthood. Those children will go out on their own, find other Sims, and create their own children—and so the cycle continues. The game will keep track of all the Sims and their children, making a vast family tree retrievable with the click of the mouse.

Within the context of raising an entire family, the team added the Life score, a new scoring mechanism driven not only by money, but also by how well your Sim is living life and in what kind of environment, both physical and emotional.

While your Sims are still rabidly acquisitive, possession of items is no longer the sole metric that gamers use to evaluate themselves. The Life score essentially reports on how well you're living your life; it factors in all your Life Moments and provides a numerical value that summarizes your Sim's lot in life—finally, a poor Sim can be happy.

SIMS MAGIC

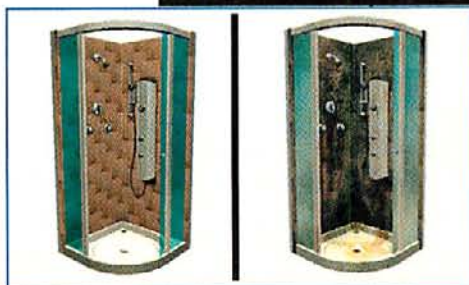
Arthur C. Clarke once noted, "Any technology, sufficiently advanced, will be indistinguishable from magic." We recently got a behind-the-scenes look at the technology and genius behind the magic that is *The Sims* at an object design meeting.

Five designers locked in a small conference room hammer out the details of a single usable object. The meeting starts with an innocuous, "Let's talk about the polygraph machine." This is followed by a giant display filled with numbers, check boxes, text boxes, and a single image of the polygraph.

Designers give a flurry of responses: "It's a reward object for the criminal path." "It'll improve a skill." "It'll zap you if you get a question wrong."

A pause. "It's going to zap you?" The designers launch into a five-minute discussion on the concept of electrocuting the player and how it affects the player and the game overall. Then they move on to discuss the teaching value of the polygraph and the difficulty level of implementing the object, i.e., animating it, deciding on how many options it would have when the player clicks on it, etc. Finally, they sign off and move on to the next object. This process happens for each and every object, so think about that the next time you click on the freakin' moose head.

LEFT: A snazzy new shower besmirched by the grime of humanity. ABOVE: A telescope to both stargaze and engage in voyeurism with.



YOUR SIMS 2 CHEAT SHEET

There are more than 500 objects, as opposed to *The Sims*' original 125. Not every object from the expansions will be included, but a select few from each were chosen.

- There are now 18 career paths, with 10 levels each.
- Teenagers and elders have seven career paths, with three levels each.
- The neighborhood will be like *The Sims: Unleashed*, with 50 lots total.
- There are weekends now.

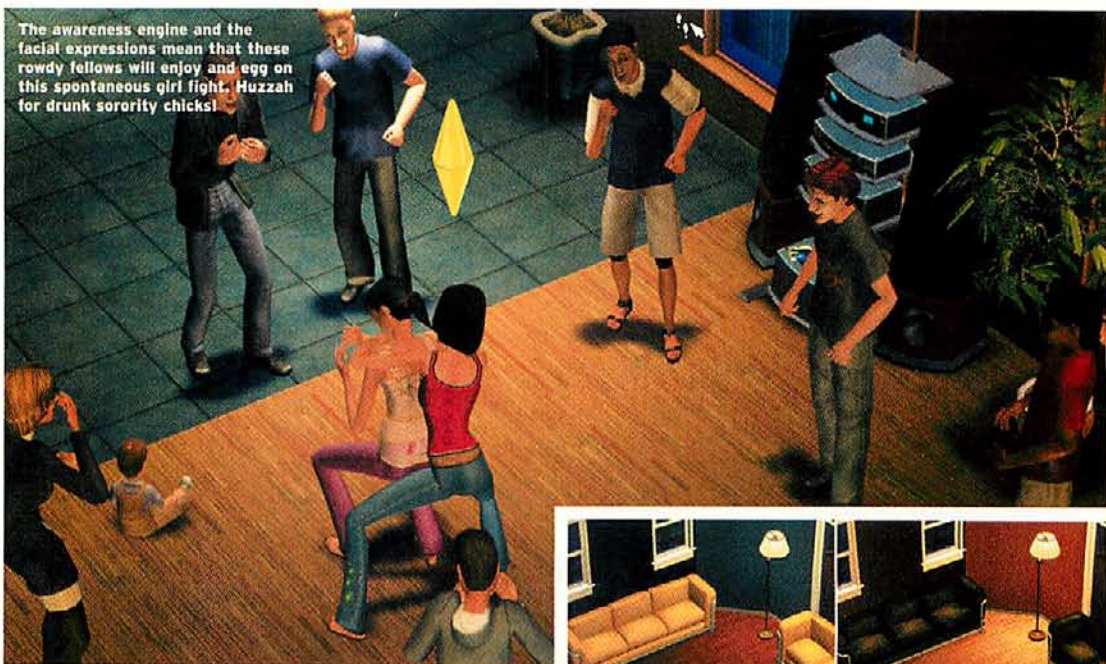
While there are no specific dates, time is referred to by the weekly calendar, i.e., "Your kid's birthday is next Monday."

- Time passes for your currently selected family only; other Sims in the world are frozen in time.

- There are three new motives: Thirst, Mind, and Family. (Family is a different type of Social; the old Social is now called Friends.)
- NPCs (such as the maid, the pizza deliverer, etc.) are now actual Sims who can join your family. There are no pets.

- Elders, upon retirement, receive a pension and basically become free Sims who help out their family.

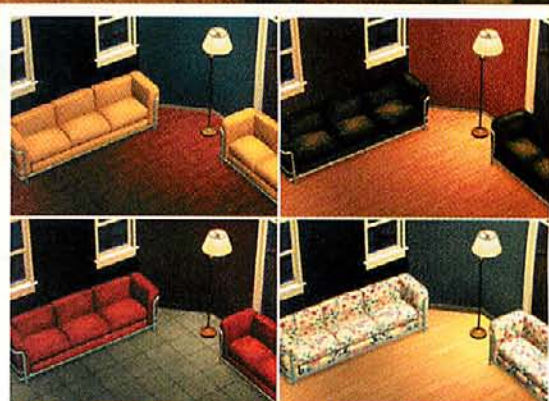
The awareness engine and the facial expressions mean that these rowdy fellows will enjoy and egg on this spontaneous girl fight. Huzzah for drunk sorority chicks!



Life Moments are key events, both big and small, created by the choices you make for your Sims. The major firsts of life (first kiss, first child, first words) are Big Life Moments and will obviously impact your Sims, but it may be the Small Life Moments that have a bigger effect. Since there will be far more of these, their influence on your Life score and, more important, your Sim, will be enormous. For example, a parent playing with a toddler may seem subtle, but it can have a profound effect: A happy kid grows up into a happy adult, and happy adults tend to succeed. Each Life Moment is recorded in your easily accessible Story Album. Imagine an entire familial history filled with childhood, marriage, procreation, senility, and loss—all recorded for you to see.

THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

The Sims 2 designers have made the Sims' gameplay more complex in possibilities, yet much easier to manage. For example, consider nested interactions. Remember how sleeping or reading or watching television was something you were locked into? In order to take a short break to do anything else, you had to cancel that activity, do what you wanted to do, and then manually reselect the bed/couch/reading chair. Nested interactions let you perform a new action without manually interrupting any consistent action; for example, if you're already watching television on your couch, you just select the fridge to get your snack. The game automatically knows to get you up,



The exact same room, but with different furniture textures, walls, and floors to illustrate how different one room can be, thanks to the new 3D engine.

retrieve your popcorn, and then sit your lazy self back down, munching on popcorn while boob-tubing out.

The Sims are also eerily aware of their surroundings. Senior producer Tim LeTourneau noted, "One of the things we've been working on the most is the awareness engine." For example, Sims grow particularly attached to their possessions and will notice if something in the house is broken or missing. In the case of something being missing, they actually think about it and yearn for it to be back. They also notice interactions between other Sims. If a Sim is watching television and he looks over to see his best friend and his wife making out, he'll actually throw a fit and possibly start a fight. Or, if a dirty old man starts peeking through his telescope at his neighbors, the neighbors might eventually notice him and call him on it.

WILL AT WORK

Interestingly enough, Will Wright isn't directly involved in the day-to-day work of *The Sims 2*. "I've been dividing up my time between *TSO*, *Sims 2*, and stepping right into my next project." Yikes, Wright is already working on his next big game, but all he can say is, "It's huge." This überproject won't be announced until 2004, and any attempt to

discern its nature is greeted with Wright's best impression of a shifty fellow. The closest we can come up with is that years ago, when answering the question "What game would you most like to make?" he started talking about the philosophical ideas of Hermann Hesse and human knowledge in general. Yeah, it makes our brains hurt, too.

Even though he doesn't sit at his

desk pounding on *The Sims 2* design document, he's still very much involved with the sequel. He plays it for hours on end, like every other person on the project, and gives a lot of creative input, whether by attending design meetings or just tapping on a designer's shoulder and giving a suggestion. Like Sid Meier, Wright may not be in the trenches, but he's very much a part of *The Sims 2* development process.



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NO CAN DO

With such a flexible character-driven environment, Maxis made sure several things were impossible, no matter what. These include:

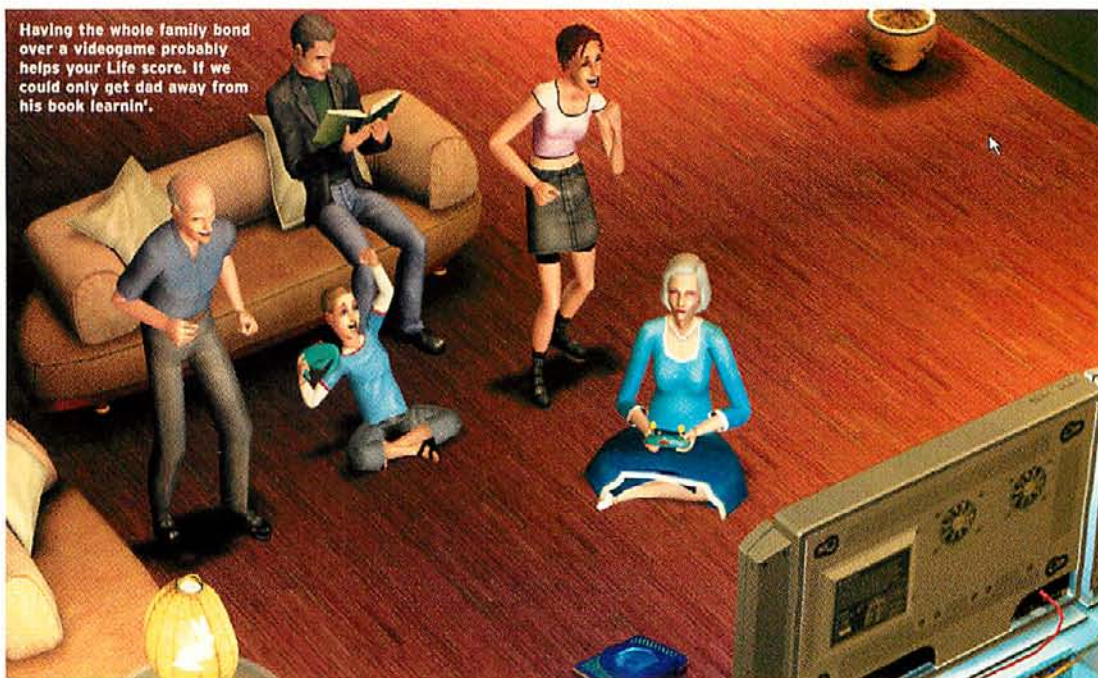
- No incest. Not only for the moral reason,

but also because the genetics engine can't handle what to do if a brother and a sister try to create a child. That and the graphics engine is incapable of rendering cyclopean babies.

- No teenage pregnancies. Teenagers can "play" all they want, but nothing will come out of it. Literally.

- No underage affairs. Teenagers can have romantic relationships only with other teens. If one becomes an adult, the other has to age up before resuming their romantic relationship—no 16-year-old paramours for older men.

Interestingly enough, while it's impossible to re-enact *Lolita*, one can re-enact *The Graduate*, because Benjamin Braddock was a college grad before Mrs. Robinson seduced him.



IT'S A WONDERFUL (TWISTED) LIFE

Accompanying these moments of storytelling and gameplay are the Sims themselves, drawing from a staggering array of character animations. Sims express love, anger, deceit, lust, despondence, and contentment with their faces. Whether it's the "come hither" expression on the French maid's face or the shift, furtive look of the voyeuristic old man, these expressions make the Sims feel more like people, which then makes their stories more evocative.

Here's just one example of the spontaneous storytelling emerging from the Sims, their awareness, and their new expressions: Imagine a college-age girl with a twin sister and a hot boyfriend. At the twins' home, the boyfriend "accidentally" starts making out with the wrong twin. The sisters have a heated argument, while he stands amused at the sidelines. At some point, the mother comes home, and what happens next? While the twins keep arguing, the boyfriend raises his eyebrows at the mom, and the two of them hook up.

Even the hired help (NPCs) are fair game. Your randy grandpa can eye his comely French maid, woo her into bed, have a heart attack, and die. Later, surviving kin squabble over his inheritance at his deathbed, with a lawyer present.



Tiny touches, like a face filled with surprise or mischief, are subtle, yet they profoundly affect the overall experience.

Screaming toddlers, sullen teens, deadbeat dads: It's real life in all its glory. That's what *The Sims 2* is aiming to be. Not just a sequel, but a glimpse into a true digital family. Get ready to create your own family dramas in 2004.

FACIAL MAKEOVER

The interface is still being tweaked for usability and aesthetics, but we were shown just how insanely detailed face creation is. Most games are content with templated facial characteristics like big blue eyes and a goatee for players to mix and match—ultimately creating a character that looks pretty generic.

In *The Sims 2*, Maxis is going for a multitiered structure that allows for different options at every level. After selecting a facial archetype followed by standard features (nose,

eyes, etc.), you then dive into the facial modifiers. At press time, they're an arcane set of dials and sliders that do everything from modify the circumference of the eyes to the depth of the philtrum. Maxis showed us replicas of both Michael Jackson (complete with freakishly small nose and bleached skin) and a young Rasta-like Richard Nixon. You can truly re-create anyone, even yourself, into the game.

Before you give yourself a freakish nose and Andy Rooney eyebrows, be aware that all of your traits will be passed down to your progeny. "We have a genetics model running underneath the game that tracks all the different recessive and dominant genes of every character," says LeTourneau. So every kid does have appropriate traits carried from the parents. Consequently, traits like the Jackson nose and skin will also be passed down to children. Ick.



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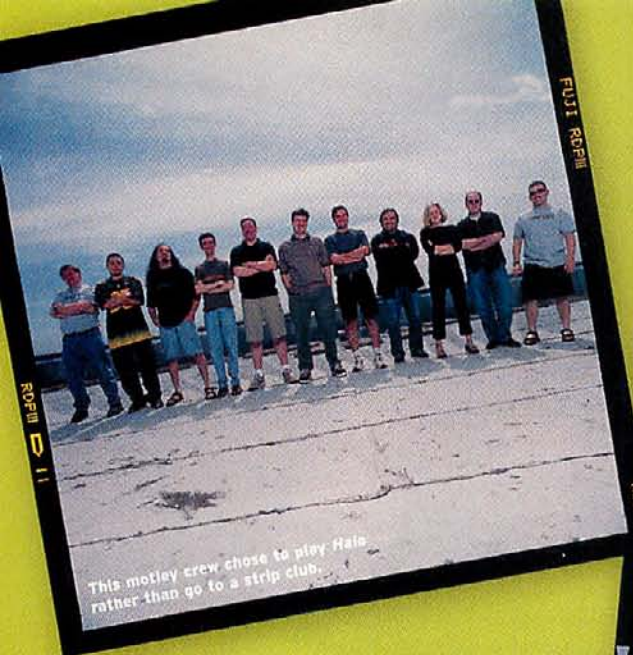
HELLO,

AAA

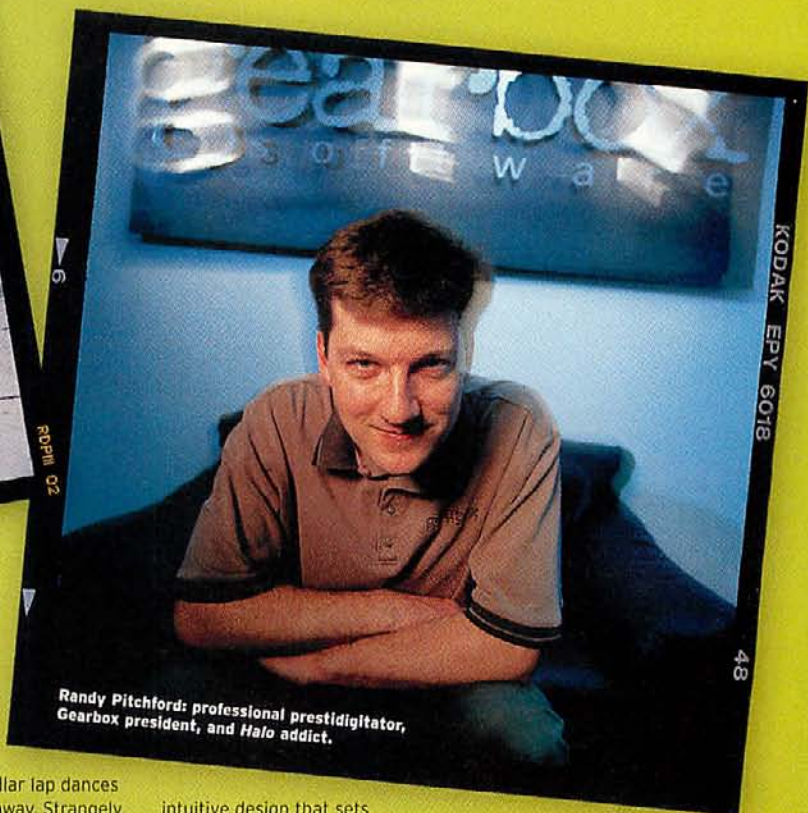


**GEARBOX SHIFTS INTO OVERDRIVE TO FINALLY BRING
MASTER CHIEF TO PC—WITH MULTIPLAYER TO BOOT**

**BY
GEORGE
JONES**



This motley crew chose to play Halo rather than go to a strip club.



Randy Pitchford: professional prestidigitator, Gearbox president, and Halo addict.

Baby Dolls?" The question hangs expectantly in the air. At the end of a grueling 12-hour day of working on *Halo* for PC, a visit to this legendary Dallas strip

joint appears to be a no-brainer.

"Baby Dolls." The group of six quickly assents. Twenty-dollar lap dances and the stripper scent of strawberry-vanilla lie 15 minutes away. Strangely, this crowd doesn't look all that excited.

"Cool. Let me run to the bathroom real quick." With his youthful looks, collared shirt, and boundless energy, 32-year-old Randy Pitchford resembles a tall high schooler more than the president of Gearbox Software. "Then we can leave."

After Pitchford hustles off, fate reverses itself.

"You know...." Andrew Jenkins, the sole Microsoft representative at this point, has been getting his head handed to him all day by the Gearbox guys in *Deathmatch Halo*. "We could get a quick game in before we leave."

No one objects. "Works for me," says David Mertz, *Halo* for PC's level designer, who came to Gearbox right before it handled *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. "Death Island. I'll set it up."

Pitchford returns to an empty reception room and learns *Halo* has trumped naked women again! He's not surprised; there's no shame in gaming with this crowd. "I'd rather do this anyway," he confesses.

Two hours evaporate in what feels like 20 minutes. Lightning fast and furiously engaging, *Halo* for PC, much like the original game, clearly possesses the magical, intangible combination of gameplay, graphics, and

intuitive design that sets apart legendary experiences like *Quake* and *Counter-Strike* from the merely good. But with a mouse and keyboard (as opposed to the Xbox controller), *Halo*'s entertainment factor is amplified and somehow more direct.

"Wow," Pitchford, a professional magician who has performed at Los Angeles' legendary Magic Castle, leans forward in his chair and half shouts. "There are four Banshees in the air." Small, individual aircraft used by the alien menace known as the Covenant, the Banshees swoop and soar easily and responsively, leaving twin jet trails and a distinct, TIE fighter-like howl in their wake.

The four-way furball makes for an epic, intoxicating buzz—the type that lingers for hours and leads to post-*Deathmatch* yuckfests. The type of buzz Xbox gamers won't ever receive because the Xbox version of *Halo* doesn't allow Banshees in *Deathmatch*.

"Oh, man," Pitchford says. Now a gunner in a ground-mounted Covenant gun turret is picking off the four Banshees. Groans and laughter can be heard from 100 feet away. "That is sick!" Pitchford's voice, normally quite even, suddenly jumps in octave and volume. "That's just sick!"

THE FACT THAT HALO WAS ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE XBOX DEBUT CONSOLE AT ITS LAUNCH LINGERS IN THE AIR, UNMENTIONED



Here, riding shotgun takes on a whole new meaning.



So much for a fair fight as this guy gets quadruple-teamed.

WHAT TOOK SO LONG?

Sick also describes the gut-wrenching sense of loss PC gamers experienced in May 2001 when Microsoft announced *Halo* would land on Xbox before an eventual PC port. Two years later, Microsoft and Bungie will finally bring the instant classic to its original platform late this summer.

What took so long? According to Gearbox, Xbox's technological sophistication, particularly at the graphics level, is most responsible for the delay. "Essentially, the Xbox is a PC in a box," Mertz explains. "But it's highly specialized hardware." At the time of its release, the Xbox videocard wasn't even available for PC.

The fact that *Halo* was almost single-handedly responsible for selling Microsoft's debut console at its launch lingers in the air, unmentioned and untouched.

Because *Halo* for Xbox allowed multiplayer only via LAN and direct connection, Gearbox had to build the PC version of *Halo*'s networking code from scratch. Reardon takes a deep breath and rubs his eyes as he reflects on the project. "From an engineering standpoint, this work is substantial."

It's so substantial that Gearbox has as many engineers working on *Halo* for PC as the original Xbox version had. Half of them are working on networking code, and it's paying off. Even in early beta stages, the code seems extremely stable and capable of supporting many players.

If gamers can get past the ignoble notion of playing a port, *Halo* might be the next big multiplayer shooter online and in tournament play. Gameplay feels nicely balanced and incorporates a raft of new features. Flying Banshees, a flamethrower, a Warthog jeep with a rocket launcher, the Covenant gun turret, and a slew of new maps set on ice fields, islands, and crowded forests indicate Gearbox is focusing on this translation as seriously as an original game. (Unfortunately, co-op play won't be included.)

"Bungie had a lot of stuff they wanted to put into the [original] game," explains Mertz. "So we looked at that. But we were *Halo* fans before we got this project, and we've always had our own fantasies." Like a Hot Wheels Criss Cross Crash-inspired map featuring a double jump in the center. Or the Fuel Rod gun, a mortar-type weapon capable of flipping over a Warthog.

Bungie Studios director Pete Parsons is clearly a huge Gearbox fan. "It was superimportant that we work with a kick-ass team that was passionate about *Halo* and had the experience to do the job right," he says. "Gearbox's work on *Half-Life: Opposing Force* and *Tony Hawk 3* for the PC was top-notch."

Unfortunately, Gearbox's work on *James Bond 007: NightFire* was clearly not in the same league, a setback Pitchford and crew still struggle to shake off. Pitchford has a difficult time explaining: "We gave them what they needed....Historically, the more control Gearbox has had over a title, the better it has been."

The topic comes up repeatedly over the day, and it's almost painful watching Pitchford and Mertz process the grief and learn how to shake off

the negatives. Perhaps in more ways than the teams understand now, even the James Bond franchise is integral to Gearbox's development.

THE HALO EXPERIENCE

"*Halo* is bulletproof." It's almost lunch, and Pitchford has just danced through the stunning single-player mode with Mertz at the controls. Given the substantial hype the Xbox version received from gamers and the mainstream press, it's easy to forget the primary reason *Halo* rocketed to the forefront of gamers' consciousness: the single-player experience. In the middle of an interstellar war, aliens level a starship. You and the ship's precious, top-secret data—Earth's location—are ejected onto a Ringworld. The aliens come hunting.

"It's a simple reason," Pitchford explains while Mertz plays through a frantic level where a human drop ship crash-lands and gets overrun by Covenant shock troops, "but *Halo* is great because it has a perfect feedback loop." Mertz unintentionally demonstrates this notion. As he bobs and weaves, firing on the alien soldiers, some of the Covenant troops throw their hands up and run, while others fan out and protect themselves with translucent energy shields. The sequence feels so immediate, it's hard to not bob and weave along with Mertz.

We move on to another level, one that demonstrates *Halo*'s amazing capacity for storytelling. The score, dialogue, and gravity of the scene calls to mind Orson Scott Card's epic sci-fi novel, *Ender's Game*. *Half-Life*, *Deus Ex*, and *System Shock* aside, interactive science fiction—particularly in the shooter category—rarely reaches these heights.

Envy Gearbox, whose partnerships with the likes of Bungie, Activision, Valve, and EA are providing a safe haven for scrutinizing and elaborating on esoteric rules of game design. "It's like Picasso said," Pitchford explains over lunch, "You have to learn the rules before you can break them."

Time will tell how well Gearbox has learned the rules, but for now the design shop's focus is solely on *Halo* for PC. "We want everyone who has an Xbox," Pitchford hopes, "to absolutely lust after this version."

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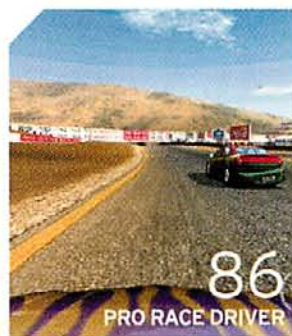
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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



**This herpeptic
accretion of
digitized hate and
social retardation
would have the
pope swearing
like a guttermouth.**

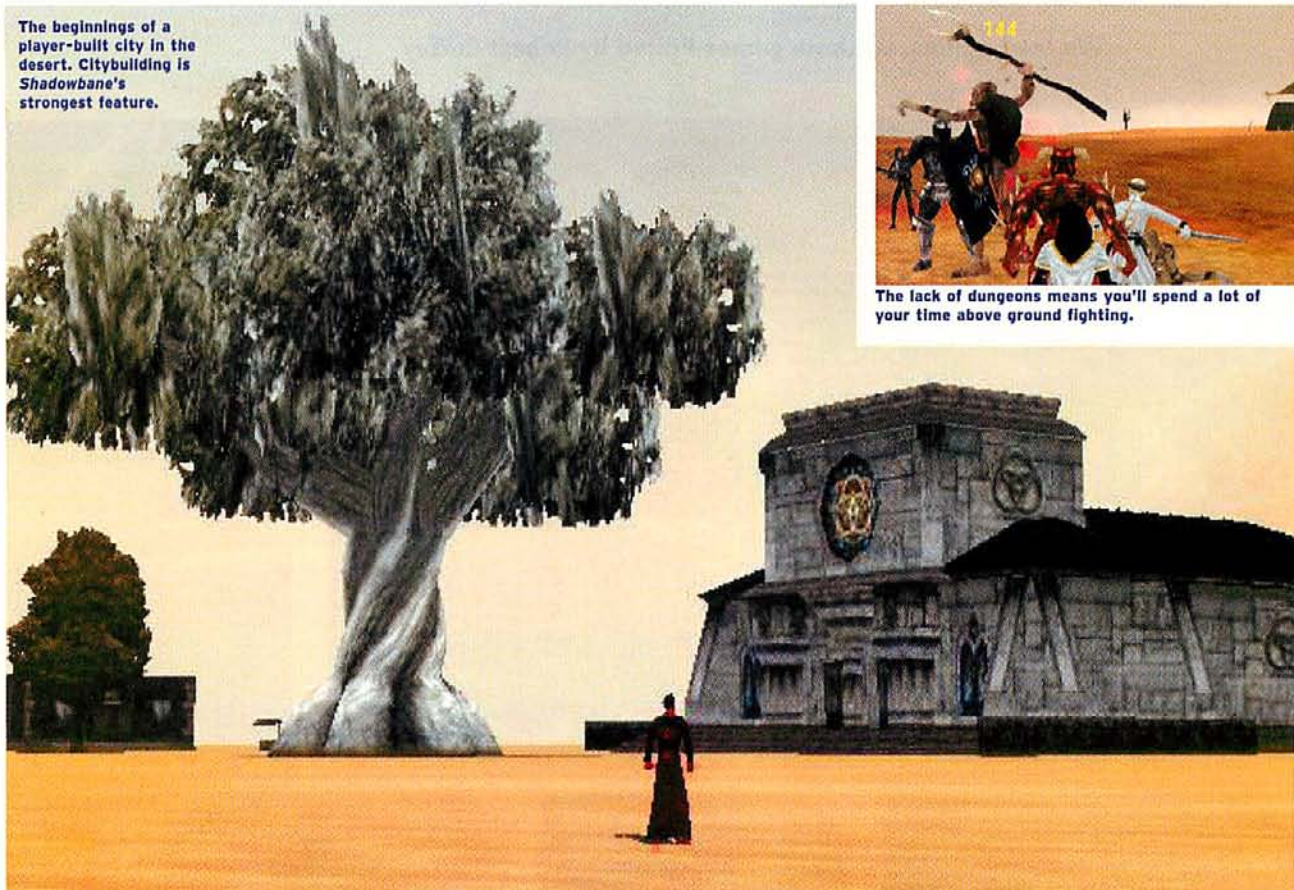
POSTAL 2 **90**



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The beginnings of a player-built city in the desert. Citybuilding is *Shadowbane's* strongest feature.



The lack of dungeons means you'll spend a lot of your time above ground fighting.

Shadowbane

Have fun raiding the castle BY MARK ASHER

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
 DEVELOPER: WOLFPACK STUDIOS
 GENRE: MMORPG
 ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD,
 VIOLENCE PRICE: \$39.99
 PURCHASE, \$12.99 MONTHLY
 FEE REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
 700, 128MB RAM, 1.3GB
 HARD DRIVE SPACE, 56K
 INTERNET CONNECTION
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM 4, 256MB RAM,
 HIGH-SPEED INTERNET
 CONNECTION MULTIPLAYER
 SUPPORT: MASSIVELY
 MULTIPLAYER

S *Shadowbane* will change the way you think of massively multiplayer online games.

It's a game centered on conflict but policed by its players. It's a game that rewards players who band together to build rather than to destroy. And it's a game unlike any we ever expected from developer Wolfpack Studios. These are, after all, the folks who said, "I don't play to bake bread, I play to crush!" Ironically, it's the bread-baking part of the game—players' options to build cities and nations—that makes *Shadowbane* a winner.

If you've played *EverQuest* or *Dark Age of Camelot*, a lot of *Shadowbane* will be familiar to you: You create a character, venture into the game world, and knock monsters in the head until they're dead, for which you get experience points and loot. Form groups with other players to kill tougher monsters. Kill enough monsters and you advance a level. Keep repeating this process until you hit the level cap, which in *Shadowbane* is 60.

Fast-tracking

The difference is that, in *EverQuest* and *Camelot*, this level-advancement process takes several hundred hours. In *Shadowbane*, it's accelerated dramatically. In three weeks of play and 60-plus hours of leveling, I've hit Level 49 with my main character.

Shadowbane's player-friendly grouping rules encourage large groups and fast leveling. As a veteran of these kinds of games, I can't emphasize how pleasant it is to be able to level quickly. You won't want to go back to the agonizing pace of the other games after playing this one.

A game like *EverQuest* makes the argument that it's the journey, not the destination, that's important. In *Shadowbane*, the destination is everything. It's designed around player-versus-player conflict, but expands that theme to guild-versus-guild conflict, and eventually to nation-versus-nation strife. While this "play to crush" design seems like it would invoke chaos and destruction, it has actually created a fascinating game world of guild

alliances and secret alliances, of politics and betrayal, and of city creation and nation building. Already, my guild has been attacked, retaliated, negotiated a truce, seen that truce broken, declared war, and finally negotiated another uneasy truce. Who knows what next week will bring?

We built this city

Players' ability to build cities and stock them with merchants, trainers, and guards—all of which can be destroyed by other players—is unlike anything in any other MMORPG. Once you experience it, you won't want to settle for anything less. Building a city is prohibitively expensive and beyond the means of one player; only a group of dedicated players in the form of a guild can afford one, and upgrading and maintaining the city is an ongoing process and expense. Once a guild creates a second city, it forms a nation. The ability to create cities and nations gives players an immense sense of empowerment, ownership, and pride.

Cities protected by a Tree of Life are



It takes a village to tear one down—here, a bunch of players gather before laying siege to a city.



A city burns as it's being attacked.



Launch a war on a city and you get to use siege engines.



Graphically, *Shadowbane* can't compete with recent titles like *Asheron's Call 2*.

invulnerable, so gangs can't just run in and attempt to tear them down. To wage war on a city requires that a group of players cast a bane circle (not easy or cheap to get) on it. Once the bane circle is cast, the defenders get to set the time the war begins.

Dark shadows

Shadowbane isn't without problems. The graphics engine is dated and would've looked dated two years ago (I like the art direction, though). The game suffers from lag at times, and is prone to crashing (though I experienced only

like the point-and-click movement system. Finally, as a cautionary note, no one knows how the player-nation politics will pan out: If one nation arises and dominates, that could drive players from the game if the underdogs don't rally.

Still, *Shadowbane* has jolted much-

Shadowbane has jolted much-needed new life into the massively multiplayer genre.

Character development in *Shadowbane* is also a strong suit. There are 18 classes that can be specialized by finding discipline runes, which grant new powers. The Black Mask rune, for example, gives assassin-like powers such as Backstab to non-assassin classes. Characters can be further distinguished by the way training points are spent on skills such as Axe-Wielding, Sorcery, and Sneak, letting you approach a class like warlock from either the fighter or mage side of character development.

a few crashes). There have been some server rollbacks and more server downtime than I find acceptable. The leveling process, while fast, doesn't bring anything new to the genre. And there are no dungeons in the game—none!

At times, the game can brutal—when you die, everything you carried that wasn't equipped falls into your “grave,” which anyone can loot. The invisible thief class can pick your pocket. Any passerby can loot the corpse of the monster you just killed. The interface will be confusing at first, and you may never

needed new life into the massively multiplayer genre—a genre that was showing every sign of being drowned in a flood of derivative games. It's a brave attempt at something new, and it succeeds. Play to crush if you want, but you'll get more satisfaction from playing to create an empire.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Rather than kill monsters over and over again, build cities and an empire.

IGI 2: Covert Strike

Take me out, please! BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
 DEVELOPER: INNERLOOP
 GENRE: IDIOT SAS COMMANDO
 SIMULATOR ESRB RATING:
 MATURE; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
 PRICE: \$39.99
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
 700, 128MB RAM, 1.9GB
 HARD DRIVE SPACE
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM 4 1.2 GHZ, 512MB
 RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN,
 INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

Traditionally, people watch movies or play games about super-spies or Special Forces agents because, well, the agents are badass. The fact that ex-SAS/current-IGI-agent David Jones gets constantly surprised by third-rate terrorists and inscrutable Chinese troops goes beyond suspending disbelief, and is just one of the litany of annoyances that plague *IGI 2: Covert Strike*.

To say the A.I. is inconsistent is an understatement; the more apt description would be "sharpshooting idiots." In *IGI 2*'s world, terrorist training camps crank out minions who have amazing pitching arms, eagle eyes, and walnut-sized brains. How else could one explain how these guys can throw the perfect grenade toss, no matter the distance? Or shoot you in the head five times with an AK-47 from 200 meters away? These amazing shooters and throwers also tend to do things like throw grenades from inside a building when they hear you outside, ignoring the fact that they're in while you're out. Or run single-file into a room, even when seeing a buddy gunned down in front. Or have a hard time aiming at you when you're lying prone at their feet.

The enemies aren't the only fellows who failed school. Apparently, Innerloop missed the game design memo that informed people "Yanking all the weapons away from the player is now clichéd, don't do it anymore," because that situation happens twice: once in a limp-wristed *Behind Enemy Lines* imitation, and again when you're in a prison. And there are missions where you have to protect friendly A.I. idiots from getting shot over and over again. Several times, you're advised about the value of stealth, but really, you're much better off running and gunning (except in missions where



David Jones is such an amazing agent that he doesn't notice the Chinese troops sneaking up on those oh-so-quiet metal catwalks.



The A.I. can hit me from this far, but they have to be bright enough to look up. Until then, I can keep on racking up the bodies.



This soldier must be farsighted, because he can hit me from across the room, but not when I'm under him.

In *IGI 2*'s world, terrorist training camps crank out minions who have amazing pitching arms, eagle eyes, and walnut-sized brains.

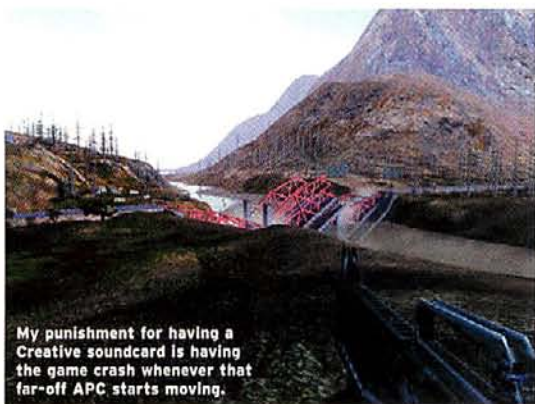
pulling an alarm is instant failure). The save system is pretty atrocious. On Normal difficulty, you get a whopping three saves, for mission areas that can easily take up to an hour or so each. Here's a summary of each mission on Normal: run around for five minutes figuring out what to do. Die. Then run around for five minutes again, and when you get into minute six and think you're safe, save. Then shoot more dorks, and get killed again. Reload your first save, complete some objectives, and then save again, thinking that you're safe. Find out you're wrong when a guy hits you from across a hallway with a shotgun, and realize that the second save is useless because you set yourself up to be killed every time, and there are no medical syringes until you get to something like mission number nine. Redo everything you had to do since save one all over

again, and spend the rest of the level being paranoid because you don't want to waste a save game. Nineteen missions become 19-plus hours of tedious task repetition over and over and over due to the save system.

IGI 2 is an example of mediocrity dragged much further downward by sheer ineptitude. It could have been another so-so tactical stealth shooter, but the saves, the idiots, the clichés, and the crashes shove it into coaster territory. Originally, instead of "Institute for Geotactical Intelligence," IGI stood for "I'm Going In." No, this time, you must stay out at all costs.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces.



My punishment for having a Creative soundcard is having the game crash whenever that far-off APC starts moving.

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Devastation: Resistance Breeds Revolution

In a postapocalyptic world, only the bugs survive BY T. BYRL BAKER

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ARUSH
ENTERTAINMENT AND
GROOVE GAMES
DEVELOPER: DIGITALO STUDIOS
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON
SHOOTER ESRB RATING: MATURE;
BLOOD AND GORE,
VIOLENCE PRICE: \$39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700,
256MB RAM, 1GB HARD
DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D
CARD RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 512MB
RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET,
LAN (2-16 PLAYERS)

Where did things go wrong? From the moment the first level of this FPS loads, you know *Devastation* should be something special. Sure, it's set in some clichéd corporate-run future where years of revolution and neglect have left the entire world coated in rust and dust, but that theme has never been taken so far visually. Each level looks like an actual working environment, coated with photorealistic textures and loaded with hundreds of 3D objects that can be picked up, thrown, or blasted to bits. Surely, if the developers lavished that much attention on the graphics and level layouts, the rest of the game must be imbued with the same magic.

Unfortunately, enthusiasm for the single-player game doesn't survive first contact with the enemy. Kamikazes must have been the expert consultants for the advertised "next-generation" A.I., as scores of opposing soldiers seem content to rush blindly into the business end of a player's weapons, so combat quickly becomes more tedious than exciting.

Ironically, the decent A.I. of your teammates makes the game even duller. When not killing themselves by repeatedly running into electric fences, your little buddies busy themselves with mowing down the enemy, many times leaving you with very little to do. This has to be the first shooter that gets easier as it progresses. First, you get ass-kicking companions; then you get the ability to respawn endlessly during missions, and when that happens, all tension drains away as the game turns into the equivalent of a deathmatch against sheep.

Even the end boss is anticlimactic—assuming you fight your way through all the crash bugs to make it to the last level. The single-player game is stable at



Unreal-engine-powered graphics offer detailed environments but don't do diddly for gameplay.

All tension drains away as the game turns into the equivalent of a deathmatch against sheep.

the beginning, but as things progress, increasingly severe (and random) crashes occur until it becomes a minor miracle that the game loads at all. Even when it's running, players must contend with other flaws, like an encumbrance system that doesn't work and A.I. teammates who refuse to perform scripted tasks, making it impossible to complete a mission.

For a game that touts its physics engine and environmental interactivity, neither is implemented well. Who cares if you can pick up nearly any object and fling it at someone, if doing so has no impact on the gameplay? It's also difficult to suspend disbelief when the game uses a crazy frictionless Martian gravity model that lets players punt oil drums like footballs.

There are dozens of weapons to play with, ranging from swords to chain guns, but this is another category in which the game doesn't live up to its potential. Most firearms have all the power of a BB gun, with sound effects to match. The innovative remote-controlled rat drone is a nice surprise when it first becomes



The P*Laser is the most devastating weapon in *Devastation*. Too bad it shows up late to the party.

available, but it can't make up for the overall mediocrity of the weapons set.

All of the A.I. and crash flaws could almost be forgiven if *Devastation* offered a decent multiplayer experience, but once again, it falls flat. It's difficult to pick a server, since the in-game server browser lists all ping times at zero. In the few smooth matches I did manage to find, the anemic weapons, lackluster level designs, and dearth of game modes proved that this game has absolutely nothing new to offer online thrill seekers.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release



You get a little more help than is necessary during the penultimate mission.

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Vietcong

Vietnam action games finally begin to come of age **BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS
DEVELOPER: PTERODON
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, MILD LANGUAGE, VIOLENCE
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: \$49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700, 256MB RAM, 1.8GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-6 PLAYERS)

Vietnam never quite caught on as a subject for gaming. Perhaps it's freighted with too much emotional baggage, and certainly the graphics technology chokes on the dense jungle environments needed to convey the tight, sharp combat of Vietnam. Because of its unique place in American history, Vietnam requires a careful touch. *Medal of Honor* could work from the *Saving Private Ryan* template to convey the hard-bitten action of war, but there is no *Saving Private Ryan* for Vietnam.

So it was a surprise to find that Pterodon—a developer from the Czech Republic—has done a pretty admirable job of keeping a steady, inoffensive tone throughout most of *Vietcong*. In place of rabid gung-ho Robert Duvall-style napalm-sniffers, we get mostly professional military focused on their missions. The elements likely to get knees a-jerkin'—such as the pidgin English of Vietnamese characters—may grate on PC sensibilities, but frankly, they're not far off the mark. The enemy is treated as, well, the enemy. Vietcong are there to be killed, South Vietnamese are there to be protected or act as point men.

While Pterodon got the design elements right, it fumbled the graphical side. Instead of taking the simple and reasonable road of licensing an engine, it used its own scratch-built technology. The



Striking scripted events add a lot of punch to the game's action.

engine seems to have been designed to push a lot of polys around in order to make up the ambitious leafy environment of the jungle without a lot of advanced shading features, but there are problems. First, it doesn't push those polys particularly well. Perhaps sensing the engine was not making the grade, the designers have an autodetect that downscales the graphics settings even for a top-of-the-line system. Even with this, the framerate takes the express elevator to the basement, which is generally unhelpful during the quick bursts of action that define this game; however, this is mostly due to the copy-protection, and an illicit no-CD hack does wonders for said framerate.

Second, the engine doesn't really look good up close, and up close is how you see it when taking cover behind leaves seemingly made of Mega-Blocks. Clipping is elevated to high art here, with enemies—and your character—getting lodged in the landscape. That said, it handles the long view quite well, and the lighting is decent. Models are adequate to good, and some of the in-game scripting—such as gunships swooping in to support a firefight—are striking.

Since the campaign game is dedicated to U.S. Special Forces rather than standard infantry, the missions become more complex, resulting in a largely satisfying sequence of multitiered missions. While you enter the action with a squad (composed of a point man to act as guide, a medic, and a radioman), control over them is fairly limited. They



Between missions, you return to base camp, where you can wander around, review mission files, talk to people, change weapons, and otherwise hack around.

act on their own initiative with consistently good A.I., using blocking terrain and covering fire. The game strikes an effective balance between pure action and a tac sim: You can take two, maybe three bullets, but not many more.

All this ties together to create a consistently enjoyable and challenging action-game experience compromised only by technical limitations. Vietnam may be far enough in the past to become acceptable fodder for gaming, and games like *Line of Sight* and the forthcoming *Men of Valor* certainly point to a mini-trend. These are difficult games to do well, making it a small miracle that *Vietcong* is as enjoyable as it is.

VERDICT ★★★★★

While it delivers a much better Vietnam combat experience than you might expect, the graphics can be problematic.

In place of rabid gung-ho Robert Duvall-style napalm-sniffers, we get mostly professional military focused on their missions.



The weapons are real-world models of the period and do a good job of replicating the unique properties of each.

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Line of Sight: Vietnam

Keep this out of your sight BY THIERRY NGUYEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES.
DEVELOPER: NFUSION
INTERACTIVE GENRE: FIRST-
PERSON SHOOTER
ESRB RATING: MATURE; BLOOD,
VIOLENCE PRICE: \$29.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 550,
128MB RAM, 200MB HARD
DRIVE SPACE: RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ,
256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT:
LAN, INTERNET
(2-32 PLAYERS)

My mission is to assassinate a local Vietcong officer. A helpful Vietnamese peasant girl is supposed to lead me down the tricky pathways and point out the officer, but the moment I start, she bolts off. After awkwardly running to catch up with her, I look back to see my spotter/partner stuck in a log. Switching over to him, I get unstuck, switch back, and then haul ass to again follow the girl, only to see that she's way down the path, not caring about me being lost. Thankfully, my compass points me toward my mission objective (so why did I need to follow her?), but as I'm walking, I get pegged in the head by a VC. After a reload, I shoot him and proceed to belly-crawl, hiding behind bush thick and thin the rest of the way. However, VC soldiers, despite being behind an even thicker bush, manage to zero in on my head while I'm silently behind cover.

A reload later, I crawl forward, firing my gun at random intervals; the noise triggers an aggressive reaction within the VC that reveals their position. Thankfully, this mission is in daylight: My



Caution! A tricky Vietnamese force-field prevents you from going down this path in the middle of the map.

night vision goggles only put a green filter over the land, becoming less-than-absolutely-useless. (Funny how the VC, having no night vision, can still see my camouflaged, prone body.)

I stumble onto a fortified position, with three or so VC shooting down on me. As I'm frantically running around, trading fire with them, the peasant girl stands in the middle of all this, doing absolutely nothing. I guess she's magically shielded from all the bullets. She finally leads me to the officer, who I promptly snipe with my



Snazzy, immersive environments can't overcome badly designed maps and cheating A.I.

rifle, leaving her to stand in the wilderness alone, doing and saying nothing. I have trouble leaving because I somehow keep running into invisible force-fields that prevent me from going down perfectly open paths. After haphazardly meandering around, baby-sitting my spotter and making sure I save frequently, I make it to the exit point.

That's one of the 12 missions in *Line of Sight: Vietnam*. Ugh.

Funny how the VC, having no night vision, can still see my camouflaged, prone body.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The VC are dirty cheaters in this lush but restrictive and nonsensical portrayal of sniper life in the Vietnam War.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

C&C: *Generals*, *Black Hawk Down*, *SimCity 4*

By Thomas L. McDonald

Command & Conquer: *Generals* is up to version 1.5 with mostly minor bugs on the squish list.

Online stat recording has been fixed so that disconnecting players are tracked and wins/losses correctly tabulated, and the online lobbies no longer list players in the wrong place. The number of Rangers appearing after destruction of a U.S. barracks is now lower, since it was being used as an exploit. Another exploit hole, this one allowing multiple workers to speed structure build times, is closed. Missile tracking, which was getting wonky after rocket-buggy upgrades, now works properly, and both rocket buggies and comanches reload reliably.

A number of balancing issues have made their way into the past few patches. Upgraded napalm does less damage than it did. GLA bomb-truck health, worker health, tunnel-network gun damage, marauder hit points, and stealth-fighter hit points are all increased; while scorpion tank, tunnel

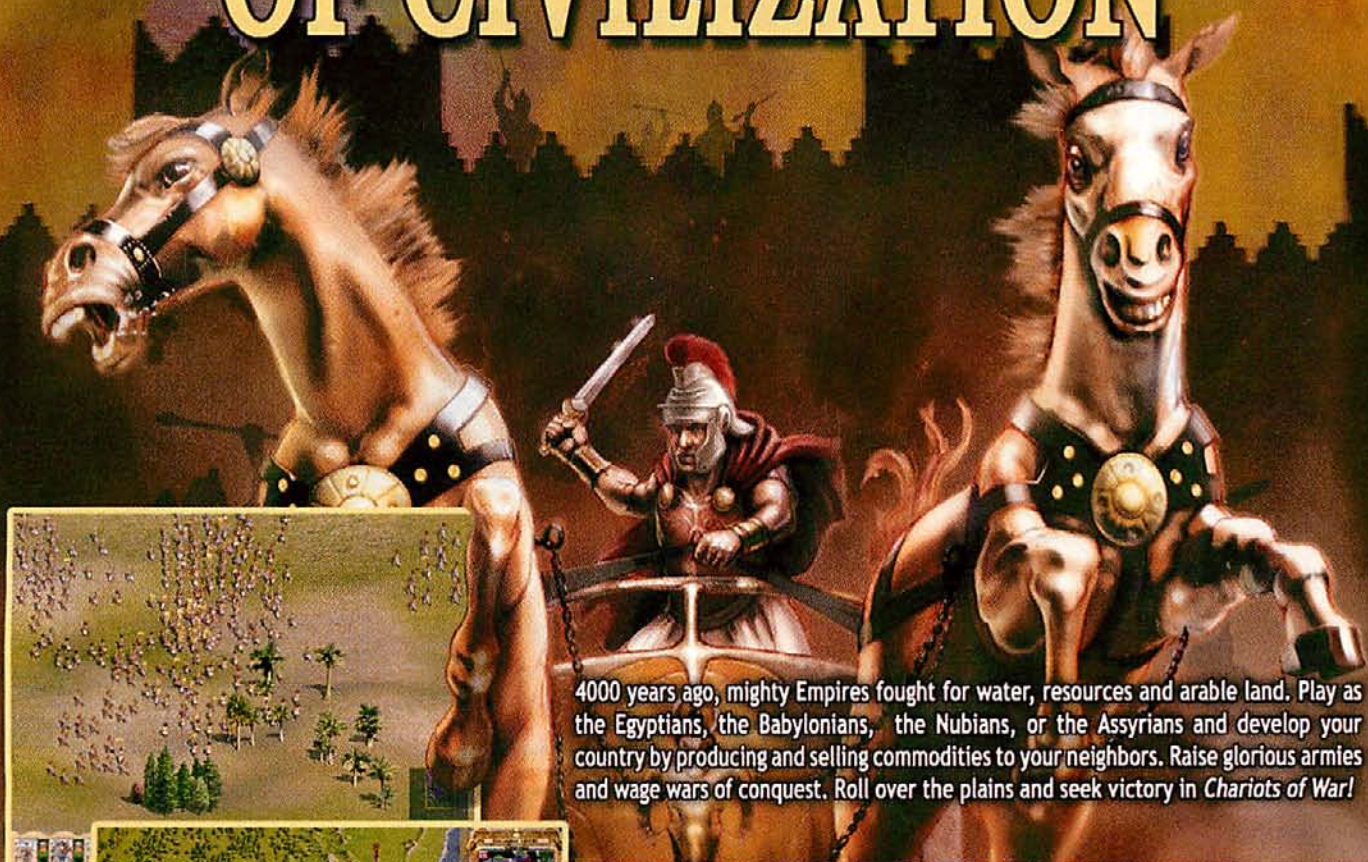
network, and GLA arms dealer build times are tweaked. Overall, no huge problem has reared its ugly head, which is as it should be for a game so thoroughly tested before release.

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down version 1.1.0 has a tiny slate of fixes for its initial patch. On the multiplayer side, claymores now acknowledge the friendly-fire option, while claymores at spawn points no longer crash the servers. Flag respawn and zone color issues have been resolved across the board. On the single-player end of things, there are some waypoint fixes for mission Diplomatic Immunity and minor goal fixes for mission Radio Aidid.



Version 1.0.272.0 of *SimCity 4* has tackled the zoom and rotation issues, resulting in faster switching for both. A number of other performance improvements, such as better framerates, more effective management of the memory cache, and new settings options, all go a long way to improving the enjoyableness of this game. Several dozen other fixes address everything from graphical glitches to gameplay elements, such as neighbor deals and graphs.

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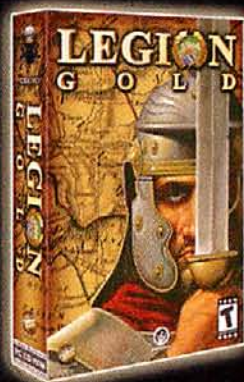
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! Fresh-off-the-boat pirates going in search of whores and rum.

Tropico 2: Pirate Cove

Wenches, pirates, and gold BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: THE GATHERING

DEVELOPER: FROG CITY

GENRE: STRATEGY

ESRB RATING: TEEN;

SUGGESTIVE THEMES,

VIOLENCE PRICE: \$39.99

REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III

500, 64MB RAM, 1.8GB

HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB

3D CARD RECOMMENDED

REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III

800, 128MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

Tropico 2: *Pirate Cove* is a dissertation on Marxist economic theory disguised as a game. You, my bourgeois friend, play the role of a pirate king with dictatorial powers over a small Caribbean island. Your sole goal is profit, without any thought about the welfare or happiness of your subjects.

Class warfare

The economic model of *Tropico 2* revolves around the struggle of the ruling and working classes. The working class of oppressed proletariats consists of slave labor kidnapped by the ruling class, or "donated" to your service by friendly imperialist powers such as France, Britain, or Spain. The production that results from their endless toil keeps the island fed and supplied with the war materials necessary for the accumulation of power and money.

Instead of bettering their lives, the product of the proletariat's labor is used to increase the happiness of the ruling elite, in this case the pirates. As they

increase in power and experience, pirates demand more and more entertainment, including cigars, rum, wenches, and fruit pastries. Lacking such services, they soon become disgruntled and will desert or even launch mutinies.

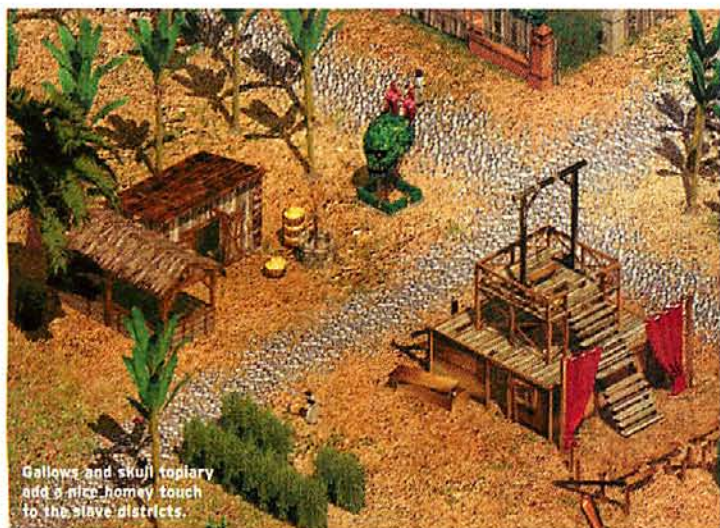
If you manage to keep the pirates fed and happy, they can then be used to plunder the trade lanes to fill your coffers. Though the buccaneers will demand a good portion of the loot, you can siphon quite a bit for your retirement fund, and this accumulation of wealth is the focus of most of *Tropico 2*'s scenarios.

Balancing the needs of the two classes provides the meat of the gameplay. If you fail to keep the workers resigned to their fate (you can build gallows to intimidate and churches to pacify) or the pirates happy, you'll be subjected to slave rebellions or pirate coups. While this provides a decent amount of strategic depth to the game initially, it really limits the number of ways to play the game.

Unlike the original, which offered a choice between being a benign ruler or an oppressive one, only oppression works in *Tropico 2*, and you'll find yourself performing random executions in no time. Economies are also based solely on lumber gathering, with a small side show for iron mining and weapon production. In any scenario, the same buildings must be built, the same edicts must be issued, and you must pretty much repeat the same steps or face certain defeat.

Wars of profit

Your pirates may have to pay for some of their entertainment on the island, but real profit, like any good industrialist knows, is made through war. Once your ships are properly supplied with the tools of destruction, you can send them out for death, destruction, and plunder. Their success is determined by their experience level, the armament of their ship, and the traffic of the areas that your ships prey upon. You may even attempt to foster wars or seek patrons



Gallows and skull totemary add a nice homey touch to the slave districts.



Ships range from dinky sloops to towering frigates.



This exciting log is all that you see of your washbuckling exploits on the high seas.



Your fleets can contain as many ships as you have docks to support and captains to command.

The morbid joy of torturing hapless captives makes you forget, briefly, the unfulfilled promise of the game.

amongst the Imperialist powers to increase your opportunities.

In theory, this would be the most exciting part of the game, but in practice, it quickly becomes tedious. There is no control of your ships while they're on patrol. Instead, you can only give them vague rules of engagement such as boarding enemy ships to increase plunder, or harassing them from afar to reduce risk to your pirates. Other than cruises for profit, ships can be sent on kidnapping missions to find both skilled and unskilled labor. The kidnapping missions are crucial but ultimately tiresome.

The interface also has some strange omissions that add to the tedium. It often takes too many clicks and menus to do anything. Ransoming captives for example, requires navigating three

different menus for each one, and finding specific information about multiple people on your island is nearly as complicated as filling out a tax form.

Yo-ho-ho-hum

Tropico 2's novel setting, chirpy music, and lighthearted presentation, like good propaganda, helps mask many of the system's inherent deficiencies. The morbid joy of torturing your hapless captives (who provide you with news reports about increases in shoe production) makes you forget, briefly, the unfulfilled promises of the game. Even with all its faults, the game never really gets bad, and the most generic scenario retains some inexplicable charm.

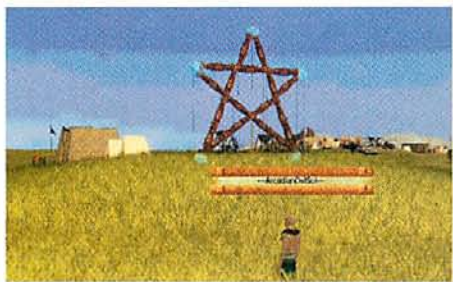
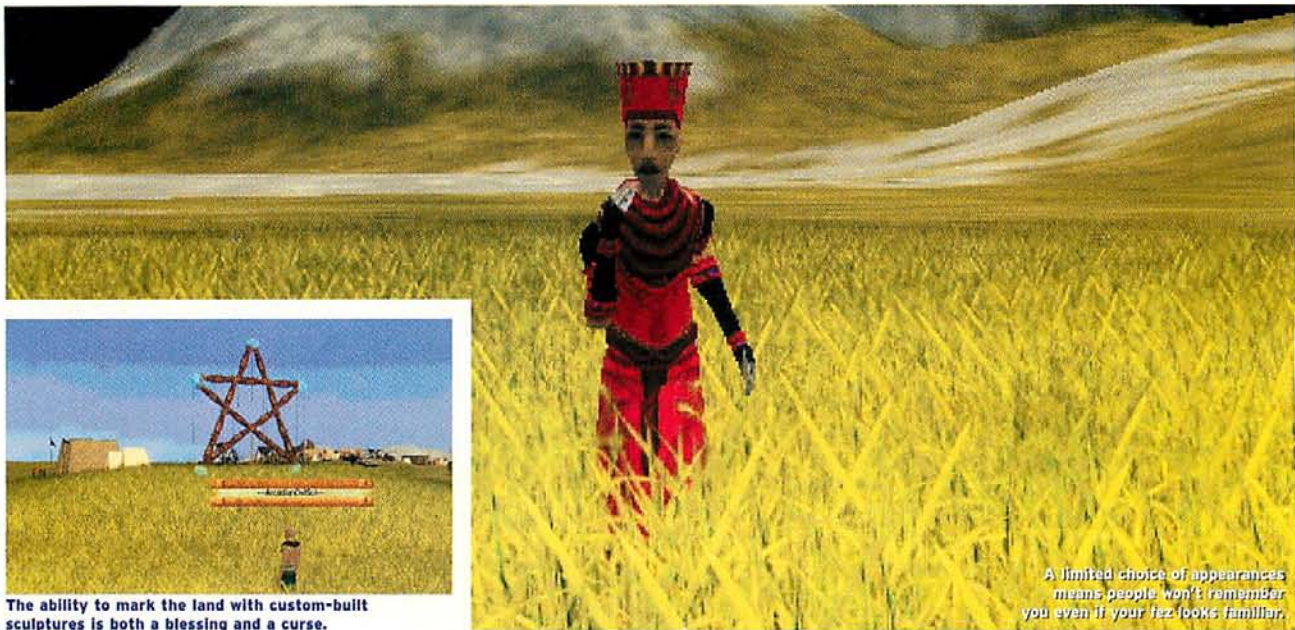
With a campaign game of 15 linked missions, a handful of stand-alone scenarios, and a flexible sandbox mode,

there is a lot of gameplay here. Still only the sandbox mode, which allows you to customize your pirate king's abilities and set your victory conditions, is truly worthwhile as the campaign game is little more than a bunch of stand-alone scenarios linked with the veneer of a story.

Developer Frog City should be commended for trying to make *Tropico 2* different from the original. Unfortunately, some of the new features just aren't all that fun despite the appeal of creating a washbuckling pirate empire.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A competently done city building game with nothing to set it apart from the crowd.



The ability to mark the land with custom-built sculptures is both a blessing and a curse.

A limited choice of appearances means people won't remember you even if your fez looks familiar.

A Tale in the Desert

A refreshing change of pace for the combat-weary *EverQuest*-er BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EGENESIS
 DEVELOPER: EGENESIS
 GENRE: MMORPG
 ESRB RATING: N/A
 PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WITH
 24-HOUR REVIEW PERIOD,
 \$13.95 PER MONTH
 THEREAFTER
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 400,
 128MB RAM, 100MB HARD
 DRIVE SPACE, INTERNET
 CONNECTION
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM II 700, 256MB
 RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVELY
 MULTIPLAYER

A *Tale in the Desert* is not a game in which legends are born on the point of a spear. You don't slay the grizzled beast for its magical monacle. Instead, you gather grasses by the fistful and dry them in the sun. You mix them with clay to make bricks. The bricks are used to build better tools, or are traded to acquire new skills. It can all be done by your lonesome, but joining an established guild is clearly the way to go.

Every online game boasts a built-in mechanism for community support, but *A Tale in the Desert* is the only one I've played that can back that boast up with its design. When you join a guild, you get a built-in resource pool for growth and bartering, as well as eager participants for your various discipline tasks. Your accomplishments here are not measured by gold, but by your contributions.

development of advanced beekeeping.

But not everything is devoted to the greater community—some things you can do for yourself. Sorted into seven disciplines, your individual progress is measured by the completion of chores in each knowledge path, most of which require the direct participation of other players to be completed.

Community interaction is somewhat forced upon you, but most players are happy to help those that help them in return. To advance in leadership, you need 20 fellow Egyptians to sign a petition. Your next task requires you to be honored with 10



This saw was perfect for turning wood into construction-grade boards. Now all I need is a lawnmower to find them.

should punish you by wasting your time.

While I found the game a refreshing diversion from the usual slash-and-loom online fare I've become a little worn out on after years of play, I did find the heavy focus on interaction with other players to be too much of a good thing. Having a closely knit community is an asset to any online game, but sometimes, you just want to do your own thing and be left alone for a few hours. *A Tale in the Desert* will cost you a monthly access fee but offers a 24-hour test drive, which is not long enough to acquire a taste for it. If you give it enough time, it could grow on you.

Having a closely knit community is an asset to any online game, but sometimes, you just want to do your own thing.

Knowledge is not only your own personal gain, but can advance the culture forward technologically. So, while the 200 bricks you've just baked might be useful for building yourself a new urn or a rock sculpture, you can also drop them off at the local university. I contributed my produce toward the

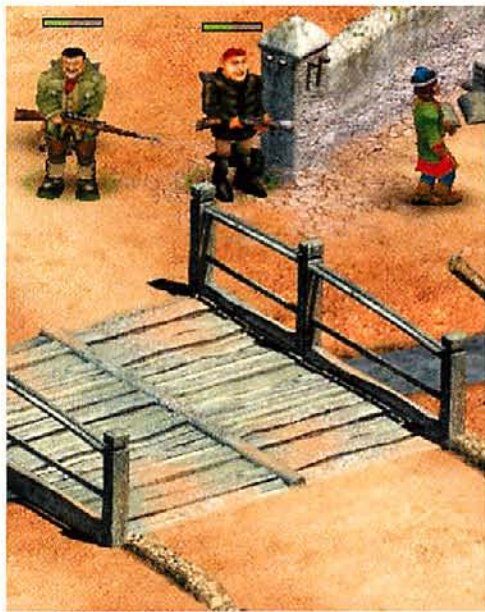
shrines built for you by new players to whom you have served as mentor, teaching them the basics. While most tasks are well designed, a few need further consideration. Missing a 20-minute deadline to foot across North Africa because you miscalculated something is just wrong. No game

VERDICT ★★★★★

This odd little game is perfect for the social gamer exhausted by conflict-based gaming.



The radial interface is handy enough, but too involved for a game with so few rewards.



Every bridge is a bridge too far in *Grom*.

Grom

To live and die (and die some more) in Tibet BY CHARLES ARDAI

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CDV SOFTWARE
 DEVELOPER: REBELMIND
 ESRB RATING: TEEN; MILD LANGUAGE, VIOLENCE
 GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
 PRICE: \$45.99
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 350,
 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD,
 920MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM III, 64MB 3D CARD
 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

No one likes a good *Indiana Jones*-style adventure game more than I do. I even have a certain amount of patience for mediocre ones. But there comes a point at which love of old-fashioned adventure just can't overcome the pain of playing a game that's flat-out awful.

Grom means well, and "flat-out awful" feels like too cruel a description for a game that's so earnest and eager to please. For heaven's sake, who can hate a game full of yetis and yaks? But the fact is that *Grom* is so poorly designed that it's basically impossible to play, and it's so poorly written and drawn that you have very little incentive to try anyway.

The game's story plops you down in the middle of Tibet in 1942, on the trail of a dozen ancient superweapons the Nazis want to use in their quest for world domination. (You can just imagine

to do a lot of cat herding: Pause the game; select a weapon, a physical stance, an A.I. strategy, and a movement plan for each of your characters; set the game in motion again; see at least one of your characters get killed, immediately ending the game; reload your last saved game; try again. A single battle can require you to save and reload a dozen times.

Clicking on an enemy fires your weapon at him (if you've chosen a projectile weapon), but clicking next to an enemy makes you walk to the spot you clicked on—so you'll spend a lot of time walking into danger when what you meant to do was fire your gun.



This is what passes for a thrilling fistfight.

One Ark of the Covenant? That's nothing! We'll have our guy search for twelve!

the design meeting: "One Ark of the Covenant? That's nothing! We'll have our guy search for twelve!") Initially, you control the rugged, mustachioed Colonel Grom and his sidekick Petr. As the game progresses, other characters join your party.

And that's where the trouble starts. Instead of having you manage the affairs of a single character, *Grom* requires you

Characters set on autopilot generally behave correctly, but the one under your control does nothing unless you tell him to; in a crowded fight scene, you can lose track of which character this is until you notice, too late, that one guy is just standing there, passively getting shot or stabbed. It's a mess.

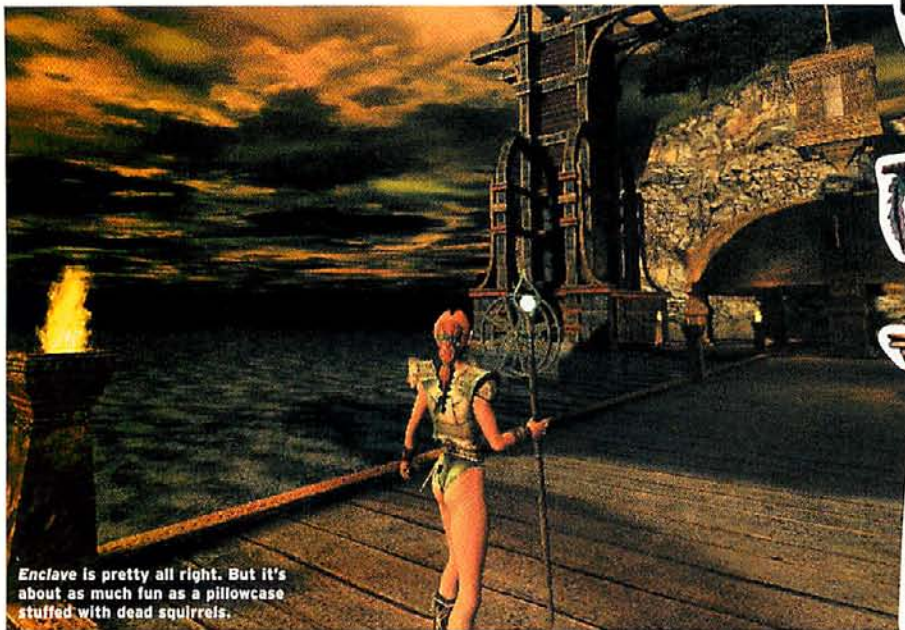
In between battle scenes, you're treated to overly long dialogue sequences (poorly

translated from the original German), clunky minigames (drop to your knees 50 times in three minutes to win some gold—no snickering, now), and a bizarre rock-paper-scissors-style card game that allows you to haggle over price when buying or selling goods. Is any of this fun? I'm afraid not.

Meanwhile, the graphics look like something out of a 1994 sidescroller, and a typical example of the script's sense of humor is having a character named "Stinking Milk of Yak." Maybe you'd put up with the painful interface if, in return, you got a great story and amazing visuals, but for this bottom-of-the-barrel stuff? Thank you, no.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Poorly designed controls make this pallid *Indiana Jones* clone unplayable.



Enclave is pretty all right. But it's about as much fun as a pillowcase stuffed with dead squirrels.



Enclave

Apply rock to head. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI
 UNIVERSAL/BLACK LABEL
 GAMES DEVELOPER:
 CONSPIRACY
 ENTERTAINMENT
 GENRE: HACK-AND-SLASH
 ACTION ESRB RATING: MATURE:
 BLOOD, VIOLENCE PRICE:
 \$39.99 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM
 III 700, 128MB RAM, 2.5GB
 HARD DRIVE SPACE
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM 4 1.7GHZ, 253MB
 RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

Enclave is precisely the sort of game fated barely to register in the consciousness of gamers before being entirely forgotten—unless you're one of the unfortunate few who actually played the heaping pile of awful that is this Xbox port. For those sorry sad-sacks, nothing short of death is likely to scrub the excruciating memory of this exercise in tedium and bone-headed design from their minds. I wish I could offer some sort of succor to you, but I'm all too aware of how futile an endeavor that is. You see, I too have played through *Enclave*, and life shall never seem sweet again.

This graphically rich but gameplay bankrupt third-person action game lets you guide a variety of character classes through beautifully lit yet horribly designed levels until blood pours out of your eyes like tears. There's some

muster up the will to keep playing instead of sticking your head in the oven.

Before each misbegotten mission you can select and equip whatever class of character you want. This isn't as unrelentingly hideous as most of the game. Not being locked into a single class is a kind of cool idea—you can jump from a knight to an archer to a druid and more. The drawback is that they all pretty much stink like a big gooey pile of decaying roadkill since the combat is so shallow that all the classes boil down to (a) ranged combat where you die when the enemies get near you, or (b) hand-to-hand combat where you die even faster. *Enclave* seems to be going for quick-paced brutal fighting, but the vulnerability of your characters coupled



Because if you're not fighting skeletons in a fiery lava-drenched underworld, you're just not playing a game.

The only real drawback to the character classes is they all pretty much stink like a big gooey pile of decaying roadkill.

claptrap plot, which makes something less than absolutely no sense at all, but all you really need to know is that the Forces of Light are fighting the Creatures of Darkness. You have to complete the Light campaign to unlock the Darkness campaign, which is ostensibly much harder, if only because you have to

with the viciousness of enemies and moronic paucity of healing potions makes every combat a long, protracted, and mind-bogglingly unrewarding affair.

Ratcheting this up to new levels of aggravation is the save system. There isn't one. Oh, there are maybe one or two checkpoints scattered along the way, but

these don't save your game, they're merely respawn points for if you should die during a level. Should you need to stop for any reason, like the game crashing for the seventh straight time in the exact same damn spot no matter what you do, well, you're out of luck, my friend.

Let's see, what else absolutely sucks about *Enclave*? I've got one—you find items during a mission and can use them, but suddenly have to purchase them to use them for the next mission. Your precious healing potions vanish mission to mission, that's pretty lousy. You have to buy everything, but you can't sell anything you pick up. The camera complicates combat needlessly. There's more, believe me, but the bottom line is this: Run, don't walk, away from *Enclave*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Twenty to 30 hours of gameplay, and not a single one of them worth a damn.

BloodRayne

Occult artifacts, super Nazis, and a sexy vampire—and it's boring **BY RON DULIN**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MAJESCO
DEVELOPER: TERMINAL REALITY
GENRE: ACTION ESRB RATING:
MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE,
STRONG LANGUAGE,
VIOLENCE PRICE: \$39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 733,
128MB RAM, 2GB HARD
DRIVE SPACE, 64MB 3D
CARD RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM 4 2.53GHZ, 512MB
RAM, GEFORCE4 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

BloodRayne is a third-person action game that borrows its best elements from other sources: *Blade*, *Max Payne*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are only the most obvious inspirations. You're a scantily clad half-vampire fighting against an army of super Nazis who are, of course, searching for some generic occult relic. Along the way, the game misses no opportunity to be "edgy." Buckets of blood, flying viscera, bouncing breasts, and the occasional lamely interjected swear word all band together to make the ESRB's Mature rating seem all the more ironic.

The first third of *BloodRayne* isn't promising. You begin in a swampy Louisiana town where most of the inhabitants are mutating into zombie-like creatures. Featuring boring level design and equally boring goals, the tedium of the first few missions makes them difficult to complete. Making things worse is the fact that in the vampire mythos of the game, water causes damage to our hero. The earlier



Rayne has some stylish moves.

You're a scantily clad half-vampire against an army of super Nazis who are, of course, searching for some generic occult relic.

swamp levels are, obviously, full of water, and the game's unresponsive controls make it challenging in the least enjoyable way. Character animations are good, but unfortunately, they also make controlling Rayne difficult, as you must wait for whatever action she's performing to finish before you can begin the next one.

Things get considerably better in the second chapter, which requires you to infiltrate a Nazi base and assassinate a group of elite officers. At this point, the game becomes more of a traditional shooter, relying less on jumping from place to place and more on collecting weapons and causing mayhem. At this point, you begin gaining new powers, such as the ability to slow down time à la *Max Payne*; the introduction of these talents gives the otherwise straightforward game some novel twists.

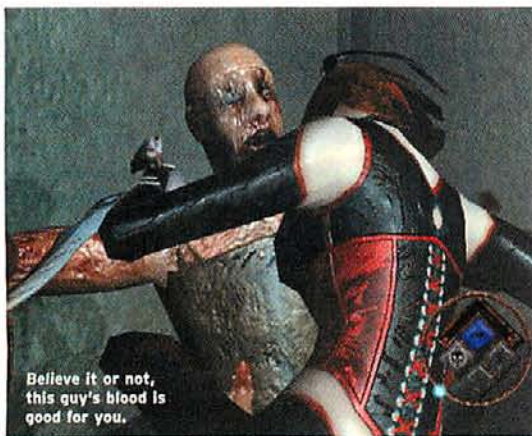
You use both melee weapons and a wide array of guns, and you can switch easily between gunplay and close-up slicing. The latter fills your Blood Rage meter, eventually allowing you to perform some more devastating moves. Rayne flips and spins and attacks with her swords, and it looks pretty good with the slow-motion effect. The combat is also chaotic—you'll face dozens of

enemies, hacking arms and heads away and leaving every level looking like the floor of a drainage-challenged slaughterhouse. The game generally looks decent, but the quality of the textures is notably impressive; Rayne's patent-leather bondage outfit shines and wrinkles, though you'll probably wonder where she bought patent-leather bondage gear during World War II. Likewise, the mutants in the first chapter have rotting heads and diseased skin, making them look like waxy half-eaten apples.

BloodRayne was originally a console game, and its roots show. You can only save at the beginning of a level, which is an obvious attempt to add longevity to an otherwise short game. And it is short, which unfortunately means that the terrible opening is a good portion of the game. If you can get past the unresponsive controls and don't mind the overall tasteless but complex tone, *BloodRayne* still offers only a few hours of moderately entertaining carnage.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Mildly distracting, fairly generic, and thoroughly tasteless.



Believe it or not, this guy's blood is good for you.



You can use the harpoon knife to reel in enemies for the kill.

The damage model visually simulates damage realistically, but even major damage won't physically affect your car.



The main menu area is supposed to help draw you into the atmosphere of the story. It doesn't.



This is the first cut-scene, and the only one that really sets up your character. Too bad there aren't more like this to draw you into the so-called story.

Pro Race Driver

Days of blunder BY WADE HERMES

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
 DEVELOPER: CODEMASTERS
 GENRE: RACING/RPG
 ESRB RATING: TEEN
 PRICE: \$39.99
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700,
 128MB RAM, RECOMMENDED
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4
 2GHZ, 512MB RAM, 1.5GB
 HARD DRIVE SPACE
 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN,
 INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Whether simulation or arcade, racing games have one common theme: Win every race. Each trip to the winner's circle lets you progress to more tracks and higher divisions through the accumulation of points or money. Once the overall championship has been won, though, you never feel any real association or attachment to the driver. Codemasters' *Pro Race Driver* attempts to break that mold by including a story line and classifying it as a "Car PG." Here, the player competes as fictitious rookie race-car driver Ryan McKane, who must prove himself and earn his way to the world championship by racing against 42 authentic licensed cars in 13 championship divisions on 38 different tracks. The question is, does this game truly live up to the term "Car PG"? I think not.

The introduction sets up the *Days of Thunder*-cloned story, with rough and tumble NASCAR-style racing causing the

death of the main character's father. The first cut-scene loosely follows the movie, but this is where the continuity and interest level of the story ends. Cut-scenes from this point on don't do much to progress the story, with some scenes showing brief images of crew members jumping over a wall or beautiful cyber babes just standing there doing nothing. Even your character's bad attitude and hatred of his older brother go unexplained.

Story line aside, you can't even call this a finely tuned racing game, due to its seemingly unfinished content. The A.I. is so bad that opponents will blatantly ram into you when you're driving in their programmed groove, as if you aren't even on the track. Also, they slow down too much in the turns and drive at speeds too fast on the straights. This problem is magnified in the free-time single-race events, resulting in making this feature totally unplayable.

On a PC with a Hercules Game Theater XP soundcard, sound was plagued with crackling noises, and at times, some voice-overs appear out of sync with the characters' speech. Graphically, the game is above average, but it's too cartoonlike for my taste. Additionally, if



Driving into that turn up ahead will be hard to judge in this view because the cluddy game engine makes it feel like you're driving 20mph, not 65mph.

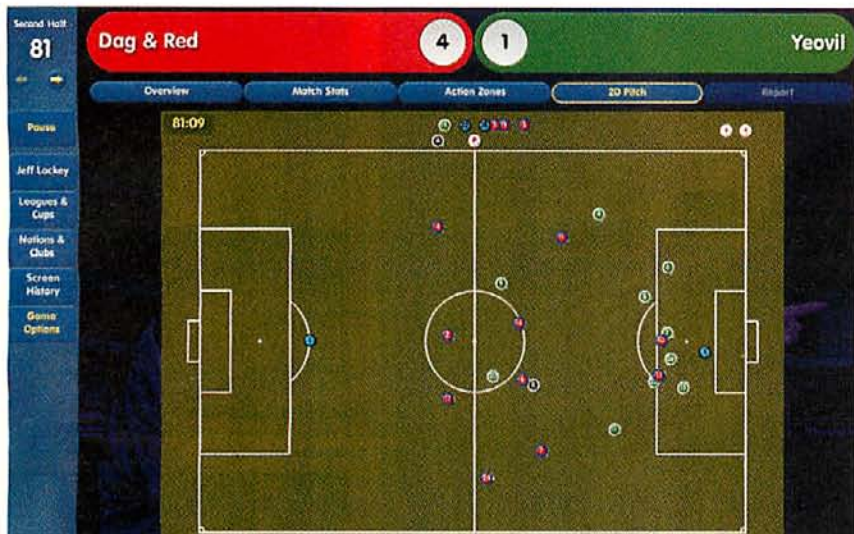
you're the type of gamer who likes to simulate more realistic driving with the in-car view, you won't get that experience here. The sense of speed is severely diminished in this view, almost to the point of slow motion. This in turn degrades your sense of distance, hampering your ability to successfully negotiate turns.

On the plus side, there is some enjoyment in racing the various tracks and trying to finish first in the point standings for all divisions. This is the game's only real challenge, but with a poorly implemented story and no real character or skill development to validate the whole Car PG concept, *Pro Race Driver* is just another tier-progression-style racing game, and not a very good one at that.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Lame story, lame racing, lame A.I.—lame game.

Story line aside, you can't even call this a finely tuned racing game, due to its seemingly unfinished content.



The new 2D match engine provides more info than you might expect. Seriously.

Championship Manager 4

The best sports management game gets better BY JEFF LACKEY



GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EIDOS
 INTERACTIVE DEVELOPER:
 SPORTS INTERACTIVE
 GENRE: SPORTS MANAGEMENT
 SIMULATION (ESRB RATING):
 EVERYONE PRICE: \$39.99
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
 600, 64MB RAM (128MB
 FOR XP), 500MB HARD
 DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4
 1GB, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER
 SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET
 (2-16 PLAYERS)

Championship Manager 4 is hardly a normal game. Its dynamic and immersive world is a standard to which all other sports games can only aspire. CM4 pulls you into a gaming universe in which you, as the manager of a league team from one of 39 countries, deal with temperamental players, an aggressive media, fickle fans, a demanding board of directors, and much more. Who would've thought a career-based soccer management game could be so addictive?

Even people who weren't soccer fans have found themselves ensnared in the *Championship Manager* series, where managing people interactions is at least as important as managing team finances, where kicking recalcitrant players in the butt is as necessary as kicking the ball into the goal.

The *Championship Manager* line has been one of the top-selling franchises in Europe for years and, since CM4 is a complete rewrite of the engine, a lot of fans have been afraid that something would be screwed up in the process. They can relax—a few bugs have crept in, some minor and some more serious, such as one in which match scores may randomly change. SI Games has acknowledged the bugs and has committed to fixing them (most likely by the time you read this). But the improvements accomplish

what many thought impossible: CM4 is significantly better than its predecessors.

The most noticeable change is the new 2D animated view of the match. Previous incarnations have described the match-play verbally, as if one were listening to a radio broadcast. As simple as it appears, it's surprising how much player information and game-day ambiance the 2D match engine conveys, with little touches such as injured players heading to the tunnel and after-goal celebrations. CM4 is packed with a bevy of enhancements, including assistant coaches who take a much more active role in helping you manage your squad, a new in-depth training module, more control over the details of your tactics, and much more. Atmosphere has always been the heart and soul of this franchise, and it's taken to even higher levels with increased media activity and players with much more personality.

Don't be thrown off by the fact that this is soccer; if you're a sports fan, the odds are high that the world of CM4 will suck you in.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's an incredible sports role-playing game disguised as a soccer management sim.

Who would have thought a soccer management game could be so addictive?

Vazhar
 by Full Sail Student
 Brian Germain



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I shot this turkey three times in the head. His noggin must be made out of the same titanium and ceramic alloys as the U.S. M1 Abrams tank. But it looks like he's finally dying now.



Finally! A game that makes sniper rifles useless!



Another bulletproof bad guy does the bad-framerate lurch toward me. If I'm lucky, the game will crash again and I'll be spared the embarrassment of dying.

New World Order

This new world should have remained undiscovered **BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY
FIRST/PROJECT 3D
DEVELOPER: TERMITE GAMES
GENRE: SHOOTER
ESRB RATING: MATURE;
VIOLENCE, BLOOD
PRICE: \$29.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 1.4GB
HARD DRIVE SPACE, 64MB
3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM 4 1.4GHZ, 512MB
RAM, 128MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN,
INTERNET (2-32 PLAYERS)

Gaming 101: Bad code begets bad gaming. Whether you're restarting *New World Order* because of crashes or watching your nails grow as you sit through lengthy mission reloads, it's a major downer. Just when you think it can't get any worse, you encounter the unforgiving lag and choppiness that comes with reacting to enemy actions. You're trapped in a time warp watching your reticule crawl millimeter by millimeter across the screen as countless enemies converge on your position. To your horror and frustration, your character turns into an almost lifeless target. Getting stuck on the map and enduring clipping problems are minor blemishes in comparison.

To top it off, *New World Order's* premise is just plain silly. You play John Dobbs, an ex-Navy SEAL and newly recruited operative for the highly elite

GAT—an organization dedicated to eradicating the Syndicate—a group of worldwide terrorists doing the usual bad things. Yawn. Dobbs, unlike the well-trained Navy SEAL he's supposed to represent, is forced into a ludicrous scoring system that limits his access to useful weapons. It's like making a surgeon to operate with a pocket knife. Fortunately, you're allowed to pick up AK-47s and shotguns from fallen enemy soldiers. Unfortunately, picking them up is no easy task: Dobbs has to crouch in just the right spot before grabbing the weapon. It's a pain in the ass.

Ballistic effects are nonexistent. All weapons do pretty much the same damage, from 9mm pistols and M4s to shotguns and miniguns. No matter what you use, killing bad guys at point-blank range still consumes lots of ammo. Toss a frag grenade into a room full of

baddies, and you'll be lucky if you kill one of them. The only noticeable damage is a lack of area lighting. And adding to the pyrotechnic snafu, flashbangs that store more energy than the typical nuclear power plant are also worthless. Head shots don't matter either, so don't bother picking up a sniper rifle. Silenced weapons are also pointless since the seemingly psychic bad guys react anyway.

New World Order offers a variety of multiplayer games, but multiplayer is pretty much worthless if you can't find anyone to play with, right? The servers I jumped on were devoid of activity.

Bottom line: *New World Order* is a prime candidate for Coaster of the Year. You'll have more fun lobbing old potatoes at the squirrels in your yard than playing this mess.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Only *Postal 2* keeps *New World Order* from claiming the title World's Lamest Shooter.

Just when you think it can't get any worse, it does.

Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

Thrice as nice BY DENICE COOK

GAME STATS

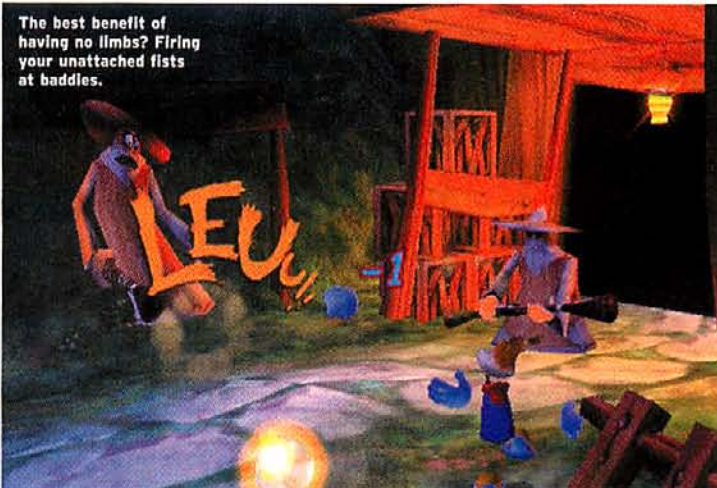
PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT
GENRE: PLATFORMER/ARCADE
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE; COMIC
MISCHIEF, VIOLENCE
PRICE: \$19.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
600, 128MB RAM, 800MB
HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB
3D CARD RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III
1GHZ, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER
SUPPORT: NONE

What's a limbless, helicopter-haired hero to do when his pal Globox inhales a buglike

Black Lum? Besides fighting nimble hordes of other outraged Black Lums, hero Rayman must guide his buddy Globox through nine gorgeous, flamboyantly colorful lands to the doctor (apparently, the ingested Lum won't allow nature to take its course). Various adversaries hinder Rayman's travels, courtesy of responsive A.I. that challenges his fighting fists: A glowing bog harbors a spell-casting witch; a comical mansion reveals a gun-wielding stalker; an antique ship floats amidst cannonball-firing fish.

Bonus arcade games are unlocked with points earned from combat and the obligatory platformer gem-collecting. The most exhilarating arcade challenges are in the main game, though, and they break up the fight scenes nicely. Rayman must skateboard across speeding light rays, then catch his runaway sneaker in a bumper-car-like chase and later pilot a stolen rocket, just to name a few. Platform jumps are much simpler than

The best benefit of having no limbs? Firing your unattached fists at baddies.



those of PS2 console cousins *Maximo* and *Sly Cooper*, but Rayman's power suits add pizzazz when he's traveling from scene to scene.

Although *Rayman 3* eschews *Rayman 2*'s emphasis on story and exploration to focus more heavily on combat, the most annoying battles are had with the game's camera system. Response is sluggish, and target lock-on swings the camera behind Rayman only in wider scenes. In the quirky gamepad department, certain fights quickly devolve into Rayman versus the Rumblepad, whether you're using a directional pad or thumb stick. There's nothing like trying to dodge the Hoodstomper boss while the camera drunkenly sways overhead and then withdraws through the wall of the fight arena on its own, halting on the outside. Staring at a black wall, you then blindly

mash buttons while Rayman dies inside. Turning the game's screenshot grabber on and off temporarily rights the camera, but similar Rumblepad issues blemished several other *Rayman 3* scenes on both my WinMe/DX8.1 and WinXP/DX9 PCs, so beware, unless a patch for current v4.20 software becomes available. Microsoft Sidewinder and Logitech Wingman Extreme gamepads (as well as mouse and keyboard controls) worked acceptably, though. And despite a lethargic camera whatever the controller, *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* is still worth a platform gamer's hard-earned gems.

The most annoying battles are had with the game's camera system.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If only the camera system were half as responsive as the bad guys are.

Casino Inc.

Where everything is craps BY JOHN FLETCHER

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: KONAMI CORPORATION
DEVELOPER: HOTHOUSE CREATIONS
ESRB RATING: MATURE;
VIOLENCE, SUGGESTIVE THEMES, GAMBLING
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450,
64MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE
SPACE RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 600,
128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE
PRICE: \$29.99

I must be uncool not to like a tycoon game with hookers, hit men and professional card cheats, right?

At its core, *Casino Inc.* is an average little tycoon game where you buy gear, place it around an empty interior, hire staff, and watch the money roll in. But they added a twist to separate it from the tycoon pack: "mature content," including heavies, hookers, and white trash walking around with bras or beefcake bubbles over their heads to show they're horny. Unfortunately, none of it is particularly compelling and adds only marginally to gameplay. While it's kind of fun, once, to have a bouncer take some poor stiff downstairs for some discipline, it's hardly the kind of blockbuster material you build a game around. Then there's *Casino Inc.*'s

fascination with puking patrons. The folks at Hothouse don't hold their liquor well—the second I set the drink strength at my bars to medium the casino floor suddenly looked like I'd just served a buffet of three-week-old shrimp at a Legionnaire's convention. The net result was that I needed to hire another janitor.

I thought I'd have the freedom to build, say, a biker casino with lots of strippers and heavy metal music. Instead, I got stuck meeting pedestrian objectives like "Increase your gambling share by 20 percent." The game teases you with the dark side of casinos, then sticks you in micromanagement hell. There's no chance to enjoy watching card cheats and juvenile delinquents disrupt your competitors when the voice-over guide is continually whining, "The staff is



Knocking sense into clientele—even if they're girls in sailor suits—is all part of the business plan.

asking for a raaaaise." Constantly hiring and firing staff while monitoring smiley face morale markers hardly qualifies as Tarentino-esque adult fun. So maybe I'm uncool, maybe not, but I'm old enough to recognize a bad game with a weak hook and no heart.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Been there, done that business sim with hookers.

Postal 2

Return to sender BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

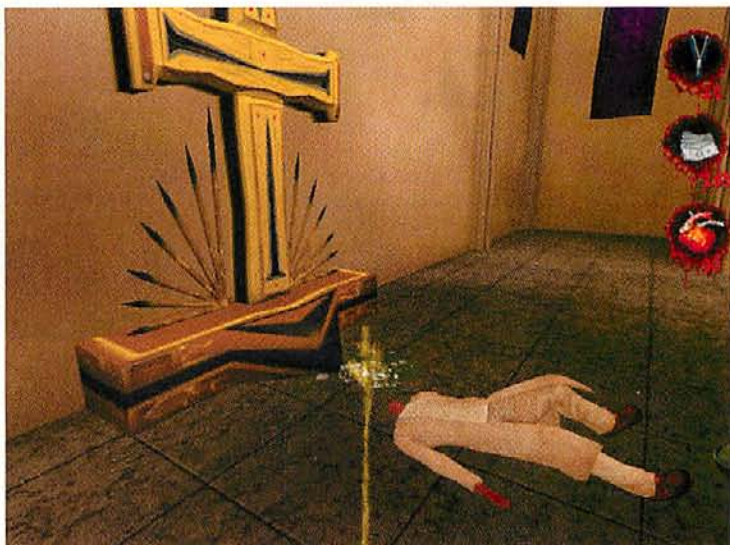
PUBLISHER: WHIPTAIL
 INTERACTIVE
 DEVELOPER: RUNNING WITH
 SCISSORS
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 ESRB RATING: MATURE; INTENSE
 VIOLENCE, MATURE HUMOR,
 ADULT LANGUAGE, USE OF
 DRUGS, BLOOD AND GORE
 PRICE: \$49.95
 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 733,
 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD
 DRIVE SPACE, 32MB
 VIDEOCARD
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 PENTIUM III 1.3GHZ, 512MB
 RAM, 64MB VIDEOCARD
 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

We caught a lot of flak a few years ago for using a naughty word in a preview for *Majestic*, and we pretty much resolved against using it again. Until we got *Postal 2*. So turn away if you're under 18 or weak of heart, because the only honest response we can make is this: Copulate this game.

You might argue that such a profane reaction debases us, that by saying this we only sink to *Postal 2*'s level, and to that I can only say that this herpetoid accretion of digitized hate and social retardation would have the pope swearing like the most guttermouthed drunken Tourette's sufferer. It's a relentlessly idiotic, ill-conceived, hateful, humorless romp through an infected colon.

All you really need to know about *Postal 2* is "Fag Hunter." That's the title of an arcade game in the Running With Scissors offices in the game, and it pretty much sums up what passes for humor in *Postal 2*. RWS has turned decrying political correctness into a personal crusade, but this is simply offensive by even the most primitive metric. Everything in this product is shot through with the pathetic mewling and puking of self-pitying crybaby dilettantes so consumed with pointing out how they're being crucified they fail to notice that they're the half-wits pounding the nails in. Antiviolence protesters storm the RWS offices! Oh, boo-hoo-hoo.

In a weird way, your heart almost breaks from the concerted, energetic, woefully misdirected attempts at "edgy" humor limping throughout this dispiriting exercise in godawfulness—it's just so overwhelmingly pathetic. From the screaming Osama Arabs to the cat-and-dog-munching Asians to the lighthearted japes about Waco, everything in this shooter is pulled from



Pissing on a dead terrorist's neck stump in church. Now that's gameplay.

Everything in this shooter is pulled from the "Look I made a doody!" school of humor.



Jesus gives you the finger! Sheer comedic genius!

the "Look I made a doody!" school of humor—only less subtle. References, politically incorrect and otherwise, are constantly made yet never put into any sort of context and therefore are about as effective and funny as a sock full of liver. *Postal 2* has hanging chad jokes for crying out loud; even Jay Leno stopped making those a year ago.

But just in case you're the kind of person who's pissing on yourself with excitement at this idiocy, there are plenty of other reasons to avoid *Postal 2*. Excruciatingly long load times in excess of a full minute, often within moments of each other, make wandering through the graphically mediocre sprawl of the town a case study of stupidity. The alleged location-based damage model is a lie, as it takes repeated shotgun blasts at point-blank range to



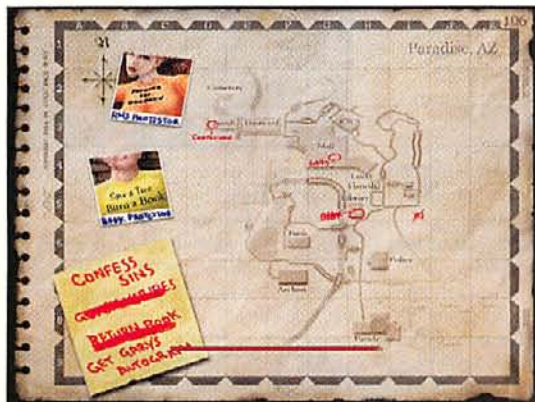
Another graphically rich interior in *Postal 2*.

drop an unarmored foe. The game is built around five fun-filled days of running errands that feature real-time waiting in line and devolve into the same "some wacky politically untouchable or oversensitive group storms the building" style of mayhem. You have to escape a burning building at least twice. The voice acting sucks, the framerate drops when things get hectic, the interiors are little more than boxes with an occasional desk inside, and more.

Until someone boxes up syphilis and tries to sell it at retail, *Postal 2* is the worst product ever foisted upon consumers.

VERDICT ★★★★★

No.



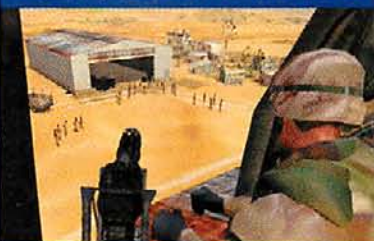
A map of the town shows you where you need to go to complete each day's errands.

REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in **red** indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
1503 A.D.: The New World	6/03	The game's depth keeps things interesting, if not addicting	★★★★☆
American Conquest	5/03	Impossible to control, impossible to play	★★★★☆
Archangel	4/03	All that's missing is fun and competent game design—an action/adventure nightmare	★★★★☆
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	3/03	This next-gen MMORPG is going to need killer monthly episodes to justify the fees.	★★★★☆
Astoria III	3/03	Deeper and better thought-out than many prettier MMORPGs	★★★★☆
Battlefield 1942: Road to Rome	5/03	Great new maps and weapons enhance an already-classic multiplayer shooter	★★★★☆
Bookworm Deluxe	6/03	More addictive than crack and better for your brain, too	★★★★☆
Chemicus: Journey to the Other Side	5/03	Puts the "bore" in "boron"	★★★★☆
Cossacks: Back to War	4/03	Too many units, too much micromanagement, not enough fun	★★★★☆
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	4/03	Plenty of new stuff for the serious <i>DAOC</i> addict	★★★★☆
Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater	3/03	Budget price with better-than-average gameplay	★★★★☆
Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair	3/03	Buggy, poorly designed, and disappointing, it's still better than the arcade version	★★★★☆
Europa 1400: The Guild	5/03	There are three or four games lurking here, all of them enjoyable	★★★★☆
EverQuest: The Legacy of Ykesha	6/03	It's about time for Sony to ease up on the constant <i>EQ</i> expansions	★★★★☆
Freelancer	5/03	The finest space sim since <i>FreeSpace 2</i> and <i>Privateer</i>	★★★★☆
Frogger: The Great Quest	4/03	The only thing great about this quest is finally being done with it	★★★★☆
The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games	6/03	Run-of-the-mill blood sport	★★★★☆
Harbinger	6/03	This sci-fi <i>Diablo</i> clone is tepid at best	★★★★☆
High Heat 2004	6/03	A great franchise goes in the wrong direction	★★★★☆
Highland Warriors	5/03	Better than haggis, but not by much	★★★★☆
IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles	6/03	The paragon of WWII flight sims	★★★★☆
Impossible Creatures	4/03	All style, no substance, this routine RTS is a huge missed opportunity	★★★★☆
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/03	It may look a little funky, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★☆
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	6/03	A decent take on the tycoon genre with the bonus of T-Rexes eating people	★★★★☆
Master of Orion 3	5/03	This disappointment demands too much and provides far too little	★★★★☆
MVP Baseball 2003	6/03	This is the PC baseball game to buy this year	★★★★☆
NASCAR Racing 2003 Season	5/03	Papyrus' last NASCAR game goes out with a whimper	★★★★☆
Neocron	4/03	This sci-fi MMORPG doesn't have what it takes to beat <i>Anarchy Online</i>	★★★★☆
Platoon	3/03	Every bit as bad as you'd expect it to be	★★★★☆
Post-Mortem	6/03	Five-star story undone by two-star dialog	★★★★☆
Praetorians	5/03	This rewarding game eases the pain of waiting for <i>Rome: Total War</i>	★★★★☆
PureSim Baseball 2003	5/03	If you're looking for a good text-based baseball GM sim, this is the game for you	★★★★☆
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/03	Surpasses the earlier <i>R6</i> games in every way to become the definitive tac-sim	★★★★☆
Restaurant Empire	6/03	Forget those champagne wishes and caviar dreams—this is closer to Denny's	★★★★☆
Revolution	6/03	You say you want a revolution? Not this one you don't.	★★★★☆
Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood	3/03	A fresh, deep squad-based game in the <i>Commandos</i> vein	★★★★☆
Silent Hill 2	4/03	It'll bore you...to death	★★★★☆
SimCity 4	3/03	A fresh, gorgeous take on a classic, but you'll need a beefy computer to run it	★★★★☆
The Sims Online	4/03	More chat room than game, this is the first blemish on the <i>Sims</i> empire	★★★★☆
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	3/03	Better than <i>Links</i> the way Tiger is better than you	★★★★☆
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	3/03	One of the best stealth-action games ever comes to the PC	★★★★☆
Unreal II: The Awakening	4/03	Only the early parts of this FPS match the outstanding graphics—saginess ensues	★★★★☆
World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	6/03	There's a whole lot more to this racer than "rednecks turning left"	★★★★☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down

★★★★☆

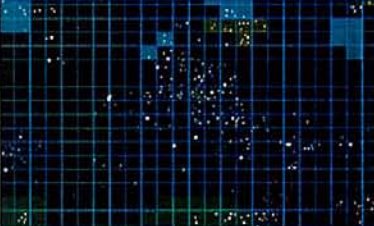
NovaLogic whips up a challenging, mission-based game that wisely eschews the tac-sim route in favor of delivering a thrilling variety of intense, nonstop action. And the multiplayer game via the NovaWorld servers is top-notch, to boot.



Laser Squad Nemesis

★★★★☆

A play-by-e-mail strategy game may sound disconcertingly like chess, but *LSN* is the baby of the brains behind CGW Hall-of-Famer *X-Com*, and the depth and addictiveness of this nifty little time-eater reflects that pedigree. It's a fast download at www.lasersquadnemesis.com, and a six-month subscription is a bargain at \$25.



Galactic Civilizations

★★★★☆

Still tormented by the bitter aftertaste of *Master of Orion 3*? Then grab a copy of *Galactic Civilizations* as fast as you can, and all that unhappiness will wash away. This space-based 4x game succeeds in pretty much every place that *MOO3* fell on its face—a solid diplomacy system, real strategic depth, lifelike A.I., a workable interface, and more. An essential for any grand strategy fan.



The King Center

MANUFACTURER: FALCON NORTHWEST
PRICED: \$4,597 (\$3,898 W/OUT CUSTOM PAINTJOB)



of the
woods?

Falcon's Mach V Canter-wood machine is a force to be reckoned with

When this system landed at CGW, I had to carry it around the editorial offices to show off the awesome paint job. While reactions to the patriotic theme covered the gamut from "Gimme a friggin' break" to "That's hella dope!" one thing was clear: This was the fastest system I've ever tested. And of course, if your political leanings tend more toward the left, you can just as well have Falcon hook you up with a nice peace symbol. 'Cause regardless of what you put on the outside, when it comes to the guts, you'll still have one of the fastest rigs on the block, so who could argue with that?

By William O'Neal Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

If the Dell Dimension XPS system I reviewed this month is the PC equivalent of a Lamborghini Diablo VT decked out with all the amenities, Falcon's latest Mach V—a Canterwood (800MHz FSB)-based screamer that rocks with a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor—is more like a NASCAR machine. The Mach V may not have seat warmers or 20-inch spinner rims, but it's so fast that anyone who appreciates speed won't mind.

This machine is raw. Built around Intel's D875PBZ (Canterwood) motherboard (the same motherboard that's in my Power Rig), it's powerful yet simple. Intel's 3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB) processor, 1GB of Kingston KVH3200 HyperX DDR, and ATI's 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro give this beast the brunt of its power. It scored 18766 in 3DMark2001 SE at 1024x768x32 with AA and AF turned off, and 7572 at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on. The Mach V achieved similarly impressive numbers in 3DMark2003 at 1024x768x32 with AA and AF turned off (5783), and at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on (1383).

BY THE NUMBERS

MANUFACTURER	FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V	DELL DIMENSION XPS
Price	\$4,597	\$3,999
Operating system	Windows XP Home	Windows XP Home
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)
Case	ATC-110 Exotix American Flag	N/A
Power supply	Enermax 365 Watt	Dell 460 Watt
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ (Canterwood)	Dell Intel 875P-based
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX DDR	1GB DDR 400
Hard drive	72GB Western Digital SATA RAID configuration	240GB RAID configuration RAID configuration
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
DVD-ROM drive	Toshiba 16x DVD-ROM drive	16x DVD-ROM drive
CD-RW drive	Sony DVD-/RW drive	DVD+RW/+R drive
Monitor	N/A	18" flat panel LCD
Speakers	N/A	Logitech Z-680
Keyboard	Logitech Elite	PS2 Enhanced Multimedia
Mouse	Logitech MX700 Cordless	Logitech MX500

BENCHMARKS

3DMark2003 Pro (1024x768x32; no AA, AF)	5783	5466
3DMark2003 Pro (1024x768x32; 4x AA, AF)	2619	2564
3DMark2003 Pro (1600x1200x32; no AA, AF)	3302	3230
3DMark2003 Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x AA, AF)	1383	1355
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no AA, AF)	18766	17909



Speed like this doesn't come cheap, though. Falcon did include some killer components with the Mach V—Creative

Labs' Sound Blaster Audigy 2 EX Platinum, a Sony DVD-/RW drive (in addition to a 16x Toshiba DVD-ROM drive), Logitech's MX700 Cordless Optical Mouse, that awesome paint job, and Dual 36GB Western Digital WD360 SATA hard drives in an 72GB RAID configuration. But

the company typically goes completely balls to the wall with its rigs, so I expected nothing less than two 120GB drives in that RAID configuration. Furthermore, unlike the Dell machine I reviewed this month, the Falcon showed up sans monitor and speakers. Of course, when you're dropping four large on a computer, I guess an additional \$800 on speakers and a monitor isn't too big a deal. Hmm...

But enough about that—back to the games. Anyone who's played around with Novalogic's *Comanche 4* benchmark knows how difficult it is to squeeze any

This machine is raw, but speed like this doesn't come cheap.

3DMark2003 Pro*



*1024x768x32, 4x AA and AF

additional frames per second out of it. The Mach V's score of 40.07fps at 1600x1200x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on is nothing less than amazing. And this machine's *UT2003* Botmatch score of 52.38fps at the same resolution is likewise impressive.

When it comes down to it, Falcon makes rigs that aren't for the faint of heart. At more than \$4,000, it takes a discerning palate to know exactly how to appreciate the subtleties the Mach V brings to the table. Subtleties aside, however, the fact remains that the Canterwood-based Mach V I tested here is hands down the fastest machine I've tried thus far. If pure speed is what you want, you'll be hard-pressed to outdo this machine.

VERDICT ★★★★★

About as expensive as they get, but no one ever said raw speed was cheap.

“



”



(We believe that greatness speaks for itself.)

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Dell Does Its Homework

Dell's new Dimension XPS takes aim at the gaming PC market **WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: DELL
PRICE: \$3,999

More than simply an 8300 with a facelift, the XPS is Dell's answer to custom gaming rigs designed by Voodoo PC, Falcon Northwest, and Alienware. While the Dimension XPS stands as an enormous step forward, hardcore gamers who want upgradability along with raw power will be frustrated by Dell's continued use of proprietary products.

People buy a top-of-the-line beast so they can open the box, set the machine up, and get to playing. And this is exactly where the Dimension XPS shines. Designed for the so-called "intense gamer," the XPS is essentially a Dimension 8300 with aesthetic touches. This rig has everything: a Canterwood motherboard built around Intel's 875P chipset, dual-channel DDR 400 memory, eight USB 2.0 ports (two in front), two FireWire ports (one in front), Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Audigy 2 soundcard, 128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card, a 460-watt power supply, dual 120GB 7200 RPM hard drives in a 240GB RAID configuration, and an 18-inch flat-panel LCD.

Considering the list of components in the XPS, I wasn't at all surprised at how well it performed. It scored 5466 in 3DMark2003 at 1024x768x32 with

AA and AF turned off, and 2564 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on at the same resolution. Compare that to Falcon Northwest's 3DMark2003 scores of 5783 and 2619 with the same settings. In specific game tests, the XPS scored 81fps in 3DGameGauge at 1024x768x32 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on; that's only three frames per second less than the Falcon rig. More specifically, the XPS achieved *Unreal Tournament 2003* Botmatch scores of 76 and 47 with 4x AA and 4x AF turned on at 1024x768x32 and 1600x1200x32.

Gamers have consistently dissed Dell's cases for being difficult to open. In order to open last year's model, you had to lay the chassis on its side and simultaneously release buttons on the top and bottom. With the XPS, however, there's a latch on the left-hand side of the chassis that opens the entire left side; all the drives (hard drives and optical drives) are connected to the open door and are easily accessible. While I still prefer a more standard panel that you simply remove, other editors seemed to like this design.

Once the XPS is open, it's easy to see everything Dell packed into it. But hey,

where's the power supply? In a move likely to earn the ire of many hardcore types, Dell placed its proprietary 460w power supply in the bottom of the chassis—a move it claims aids in keeping the entire system cool. Fine, but if the power supply goes on the fritz, don't think you'll be heading to the local Best Buy to replace it.

On the tech-support side, Dell has created a specific division trained to deal with the gaming-specific questions it expects XPS customers to have. Also, the online configurator for assembling XPS machines will be designed for gamers' needs; it will focus, for instance, on graphics cards, CPUs, and, hopefully, peripherals like Logitech Z-680 and Klipsch ProMedia speakers.

When all is said and done, the XPS is a formidable rig boasting excellent performance and touches that will appeal to gamers. But those who want more upgradability may continue to be frustrated with the machine's use of proprietary products.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Gamers will love the new XPS, but hardcore types will balk at the lack of upgradability.



One-Trick Clydesdale

If you own a 6.1-capable soundcard, Creative Labs' MegaWorks THX 6.1 650s are tough to beat **BY T. BYRL BAKER**



TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: CREATIVE LABS
PRICE: \$400

When Creative launched the Audigy 2 and hyped the soundcard's 6.1 surround-sound capabilities, we were pumped. But then Creative went and messed everything up by providing the inexpensive but anemic Inspire 6600 as the only speaker set that could take advantage of the new technology. Finally, with the release of the Creative MegaWorks 650, Audigy 2 owners get the speaker set they've been waiting for.

standard are few and far between (*Beastmaster*, anyone?).

As for games, the speakers pumped out sparkling, smooth-panning audio in all the EAX-enabled games we tested, and the satellites maintained their clarity all the way up to their ear-splitting maximum volume. The sub is capable of incredibly loud, deep bass, although it sometimes rattles when certain frequencies are played at high volume. The entire system is controlled

The MegaWorks 650 speakers are the set Audigy 2 owners have been waiting for.

This surround solution eschews fancy digital connections and external surround decoding and focuses instead on being the best possible analog speakers by putting 600 watts of raw power on tap to drive its six satellites and hefty down-firing subwoofer. Unlike systems such as Logitech's Z-680s and Klipsch's ProMedia GMX 5.1s, which both offer coaxial digital and optical connections, the MegaWorks' strict adherence to analog connections proves its PC pedigree.

DVDs with DTS-ES and Dolby Digital EX soundtracks get added punch in the rear surround mix from the extra speaker. Flicks like *Lord of the Rings: Extended Edition*, which has a DTS-ES Discrete Surround soundtrack, take on an entirely new sonic quality. Unfortunately, soundtracks encoded to use that

by a tiny remote. Disappointingly, it's wired, but that configuration at least allows for an integrated headphone jack—much more convenient than having it in one of the speakers.

The only thing more massive than this unit's sound is its price. People who drop \$400 on computer speakers are probably looking for a bit more in terms of features and controls, but for those with an Audigy 2 who are looking for the best mix of 6.1 sound quality and power, the MegaWorks 650s are currently unbeatable. Now, if we could just get more games that use EAX Advanced HD...

VERDICT ★★★★★

She don't look like much, but wait'll you hear her sing.



WIL
POWER

By William O'Neal

Sound Off

What's the deal with Klipsch's GMX D-51 speakers and Sound Blaster soundcards? Plenty of you have written me about getting the GMXs to "work" with a Sound Blaster soundcard, so here's the deal, as far as I've been able to figure things out. The GMXs can decode a true Dolby Digital signal when it's output from a Dolby-capable soundcard and it's received through either the GMX module's optical or coaxial port. If you're using an nForce2-based soundcard that's spitting out a Dolby Digital signal, for instance, the GMX receives that signal and you're cold chillin' in discrete 5.1 audio Nirvana. The problem with the Audigy 2 is that it isn't spitting out a true Dolby Digital signal; it's spitting out a PCM signal and the GMX doesn't necessarily know what to do with that. In gaming and non-DVD movie scenarios, you get 5-channel stereo audio. Klipsch claims that by using this method you get discrete 5.1 audio in DVDs, but we haven't been able to confirm or deny this.

It is extremely important to buy speakers and soundcards that either speak the same language or combination of languages. The mistake I made when reviewing the GMXs was testing them on two PCs (one using an Audigy 2 and the other using onboard nForce2 audio) and an Xbox using the GMX's optical port. Because not many PC games take advantage of multichannel audio, 5-channel stereo audio wasn't that big of a deal on the PC, and DVD movies sounded OK. Furthermore, when using the GMXs with an Xbox, I was in fact cold chillin' in discrete 5.1 audio Nirvana.

I was initially under the impression that the GMXs were true multiplatform speakers similar to Logitech's Z-680s. They're not. While the Z-680s work perfectly well with PCs with onboard nForce2 audio and Sound Blaster soundcards, they're also awesome for consoles like the PS2 or the Xbox. In other words, the audio scene is about as complicated as the graphics scene.

Loyd's Cracked Case

The perfect display By Loyd Case

The number and types of displays available to gamers have exploded in the past few years. Not long ago, you had one choice: a good color CRT. Now you have CRTs, flat-screen CRTs, LCD displays, and HDTV displays using plasma monitors or front projectors if you have the bucks and the space. So, what's the best display for gamers? Let's look at the possibilities.

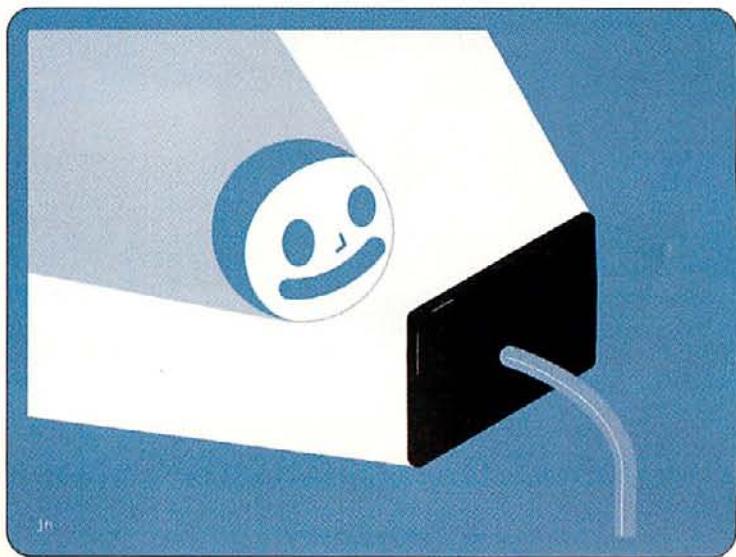
First, we'll review the key parameters necessary for a good gaming display, and then we'll take a quick look at each of the key technologies.

Response time

The name of the game is framerate, particularly for most 3D games. A framerate of 60fps, which is the minimum needed for fast-action games, requires a response time of 16.67 milliseconds to avoid visual anomalies such as image ghosting. CRTs often have much faster response times than LCDs, and you don't often see animation ghosting or smearing on a half-decent CRT.

Color fidelity

No display on the market can actually show all the possible colors the human eye can detect. Monitors advertising the ability to display 16.7 million colors often can't really display that many. It becomes even more problematic with LCDs, since many LCD flat panels on the market today can't resolve more than 6



visible and distracting faint gray line across the monitor, which is the tension wire that holds the grill in place.

Finally, we also like flat-screen CRTs, but they aren't perfect. Cheap natural-flat tubes often have visible geometry or convergence distortion, particularly at the corners. Flat CRTs are made with a piece of glass that's actually curved on the inside and flat on the outside. If the curved-glass quality is lacking, then you can see distortion in the display.

at 1600x1200x32 at 85Hz can be had for well under \$500.

CRTs are even evolving when it comes to technology. Recently, *PC Magazine's* Nick Stam wrote an interesting piece on how some companies are still working to improve the CRT: Check out www.extremetech.com/article2/0,3973,98515,8,00.asp.

New school: LCD flat panels

LCD flat-panel prices have dropped dramatically in the past few years. You can pick up an 18-inch flat panel that can handle 1280x1024 resolution for under \$600. Be wary of cheaper displays, though—most have pixel response times of greater than 20 milliseconds, and you'll likely see significant ghosting or other image issues. They are also mostly 6 bits per pixel.

Newer LCDs—such as the Hitachi CML174 reviewed in *CGW* #225—have a much better response time and can look very good, but they also tend to cost more. Another downside is that if you want a flat panel that can handle 1600x1200, be prepared to shell out well over \$1,000.

The exotic

Of course, if you want a really huge image, you can always go with a front projector. As soon as you enter this realm, though, you're talking really big bucks. A projector capable of 1280x1024 is easily over \$4,000. A good DLP projector that can do 1024x768 is well over \$2,000.

The number and types of displays available to gamers have exploded in the past few years.

bits per pixel, which translates to about 256,000 colors. At first blush, 256,000 sounds like a lot, but you can often see noticeable and distracting color banding in games that support 32-bit color. Also, local color gradations, even on 16-bit color games, can often result in color banding on 6-bit LCDs.

Other issues

A few years back, dot pitch was a major issue on CRTs: The smaller the dot pitch, the better the image quality. These days, most CRTs have a dot pitch well under 0.28mm, so that's not often an issue.

Some people, myself included, prefer Trinitron-style (aperture grill) displays. However, these displays often have a

With these thoughts in mind, let's take a look at what's available.

Old school: the CRT

Most gamers still use CRTs, since they're cheap, have a fast response time, and can have terrific image quality. They also suck power, generate heat, and are heavy. Here in the Case basement, the temperature can rise substantially when we turn on eight CRTs.

Still, the CRT is the best solution for most gamers. You can shop less carefully than you must for LCDs, and the overall quality of CRTs has improved. You can still buy crap, but the good stuff has come down dramatically in price. A decent 19-inch CRT capable of running

Tech Medics

You've got questions; everyone loves redheads! By William O'Neal

When (not necessarily) good APIs go bad

I recently purchased a PC with the Nvidia GeForce4 MX 440 installed. I then went out and purchased *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield*. After the installation I tried to play the game, but a prompt came up saying that the 3D hardware was not DirectX 8.1b compatible. But it works fine with *Medal of Honor: Spearhead*. My question is, is this graphics card compatible with DirectX of any kind?

TJ

From what I can gather, that card supports everything up to DirectX 8, and it appears that *Raven Shield* is a DirectX 8.1 title. *Spearhead* only requires DirectX 8. In other words, you might be out of luck.

Mmm...Dana!

I'd just like to point out that Dana is hot—redheads are the bomb. I saw her on CNN Headline News hawking the new issue. Stay sexy, Dana.

Shawn

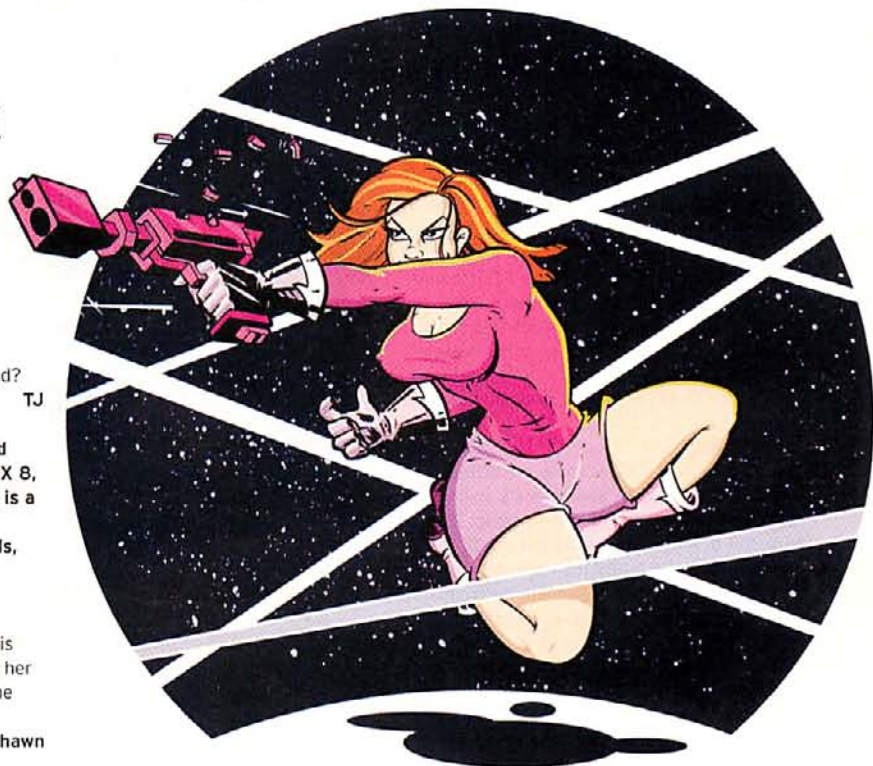
You think she looked good on TV, imagine what it's like to have to see her in person every day. Now, if only we can figure out how to get rid of that pesky husband of hers.

Can I set up a LAN through a USB?

I recently got a refurbished laptop and, being the cheapskate I am, I didn't shell out a few extra dollars for a NIC. Can I get on a LAN game through some fancy USB setup, or do I have to buy a NIC? Also, is it possible to create a LAN (or at least a direct link for playing games) between two computers using only a USB cable? I've seen cables like that at Radio Shack, but they're advertised as link cables.

Chippo125

You can buy a 3COM PCMCIA LAN card from a place like Pricegrabber.com for \$20. That said, any "fancy USB setup" is likely to cost more than \$20. I haven't tried to create a gaming-capable network with a USB cable, but I have done it with a FireWire cable; Windows XP sees 1394 FireWire devices as network adapters. However, judging from the fact that you're a cheapskate, I doubt your laptop has a FireWire port.



The solution? If you want to play games over a standard Ethernet LAN, buying a PCMCIA LAN card for \$20 should solve your problems. If, however, you want to connect two computers, I'd suggest getting a PCMCIA 1394 FireWire card and connecting the two machines via FireWire. Not only will it be easy enough to set up, but the FireWire card will also come in handy if you decide to pick up an MP3 player or do any video editing. As for the "link cable" thing, I used to play *Doom II* between two computers using a null-modem cable, but that was back in 1996. Bite the bullet, step into the 21st century, and buy a NIC or a FireWire adapter.

More power!

I have a 1.4GHz processor with a 40GB hard drive and two CD-ROM drives running Windows ME. I recently installed a 350-watt power supply, along with an Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 card. Everything was smooth and seamless. In the weeks following, I installed an additional 120GB hard drive with a two-fan hard drive cooler. When I boot up, I'm at 80 percent system resources. When I start running an application or two, it drops to between 50 and 65 percent (depending on what I'm doing), and the system begins to run a bit

sluggishly. When I close out of everything but stay connected to the Internet and run *Soldier of Fortune II* multiplayer, the cursor movement is very choppy. If I restart the system and go back to *SOF2*, it runs fine. So, after my longwinded description, do you think I need an even higher wattage power supply or could it be something completely different? I highly respect your opinion and advice.

Jeff

Hmm...the fact that you highly respect my opinion says a lot about you—all of it bad. Anyway, based on what you've told me, I'm inclined to place the blame on your power supply. The first thing I'd do is remove the new hard drive and that dual-fan hard-drive cooler. Next, I'd run a benchmark app like 3DMark2003 to get a base number. Then I'd add the hard drive and run 3DMark2003 again. If your system performs at or near your base number, you can assume your power supply has enough juice to run your system as it is. Next, I'd plug in that dual-fan hard-drive cooler and run 3DMark2003 again. I get the feeling your system won't perform as well. If that happens, you can assume your current power supply doesn't have enough juice for the hard-drive cooler.

Killer Rigs

Intel's new motherboard has Loyd and Wil giggling like schoolgirls By William O'Neal

As Intel continues to create technology for technology's sake, the chasm between its top-of-the-line piece and AMD's grows ever wider. My Power Rig is now running Intel's latest beast: a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor with an 800MHz frontside bus. When compared to the Athlon XP 3000+ machines in my mid-range PC roundup a couple months ago, that's like the Lakers taking on the Sparks...sort of. That said, I'm still a fan of AMD processors, if for no other reason than that I really like nForce2 motherboards like the ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe. But enough about that.

Power Rig

This month's Power Rig is easily the fastest machine I've ever built, and it boasts an impressive list of stuff: a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor (800MHz FSB), 1GB of Kingston PC3500 HyperX DDR memory, Intel's D875PBZ (Canterwood) motherboard, dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 240GB RAID configuration, and a Nvidia's new 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra.

This motherboard and CPU combo is something else. Tests that stress the CPU alone don't show an appreciable speed difference between the 800MHz processor and a 3.06GHz 533MHz Pentium 4. But in tests that take advantage of its dual-channel DDR400 capabilities, the 800MHz chip smokes.

Other amenities in the machine include support for serial ATA with RAID support, eight USB 2.0 ports, and GigaBit Ethernet. Other than those not-so-subtle changes, everything else on the Power Rig is the same.



The chasm between Intel's top-of-the-line piece and AMD's grows wider.

Lean Machine

Compared to the Power Rig, my Lean Machine looks, well, pretty lean. Then again, it costs more than \$2,500 less—I guess you have to decide how much those improved numbers are really worth to you. For the money, the Lean Machine is a fantastic gaming rig. And if you were to throw in a faster graphics card, I have no doubt you'd be able to play any game released in the near future.

3GHZ PENTIUM 4 POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	\$300
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	\$700
Case	Antec PlusView 1000AMG	\$100
Power supply	Antec True Blue 480 (480 watts)	\$100
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ 875P chipset (Canterwood)	\$180
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX PC3500 DDR	\$350
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA hard drives in a 240GB RAID configuration	\$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900	\$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy 2	\$100
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD/CD-RW combo	\$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE2111SB	\$600
Speakers	Cambridge MegaWorks 610D	\$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	\$55
TOTAL		\$3,860

3DMark2003 Pro*

5498

POWER RIG

LEAN MACHINE 2879

*1024x768x32, No AA, AF

ATHLON XP 2200+ LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$200
Processor (CPU)	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	\$125
Case	Antec Lanboy (300 Watt SmartBlue power supply included)	\$100
Power supply	N/A	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (nForce2)	\$140
Memory	512MB Corsair XMS PC-3200 DDR	\$150
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5200 Ultra	\$80
Soundcard	Onboard nForce2 5.1 Audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sony DVD-ROM Drive	\$40
Monitor	19" ViewSonic E90fb	\$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire 2.1 2500	\$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	\$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	\$45
TOTAL		\$1,255

Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less Edited by Dana Jongewaard

IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles

Off we go into the
wild blue yonder

PAGE 102

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick is for *Command & Conquer: Generals*.

Play as the Chinese and build more Gatling cannons than you have power for (but not too many). When the opponent rushes you with infantry, use overdrive on the nuclear power plant to give power

back. The infantry will realize too late that the Gatling cannons are back on and will be slaughtered. This works especially well against players who try to rush you.

—Ian Morrison



Congratulations, Ian! You've won yourself a copy of *Freelancer*. If you'd like to win your own free copy of *Freelancer*, send an e-mail with your dirty trick for a recent game to cqletters@ziffdavis.com with a subject line of "Dirty Trick."



IL-2

STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Tom and Bruce get on the highway to the danger zone **By Tom Chick & Bruce Geryk**

Tom and Bruce will play five multiplayer games of *IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles*. They have used the mission builder to create three evenly matched missions, one mission skewed in favor of the Allies, and one mission skewed in favor of the Axis, all on the Online2Summer map. In each mission, a flight of four planes begins at an airfield and is given a destination on the other side of the map. The routes for each player cross at the halfway point, which is where a fight will presumably take place. Players have agreed to fly at 5,000 feet until the other planes are in visual range.

Six 85mm antiaircraft guns have been placed around each airfield to discourage chasing enemy aircraft too close to their destination. Each aircraft successfully landed (i.e., each aircraft that doesn't end up as a giant smoking crater on the airstrip) at the destination airfield scores that player a point. The player with the most points at the end of five games will be declared the winner.

Bruce will play as the Germans (and the Finns in game 3). Tom will play as the Russians.

Game 1: Interceptor duel

Bruce will be flying BF-109G-10 Messerschmitts. The G ("Gustav") models were late-war upgrades to the famous series, although they were tricky to fly and their performances lagged behind those of the FW-190 models. Tom will be in the MiG-3, which was fast and maneuverable at high altitudes. Although most MiG-3s were poorly armed, Tom will be using the MiG-3U, the Usilennyi ("strengthened") variant with an improved cannon, a model that never actually went into production.

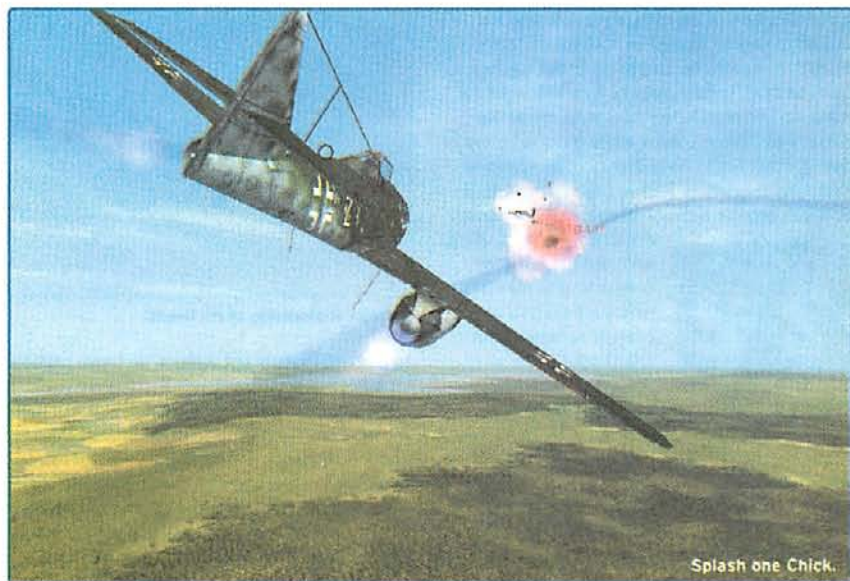
Tom: My normal routine when I see Bruce's planes will be to hit TAB, 2, 3, TAB, 1, 1. This orders my flight to attack the enemy fighters, and then orders my wingman to cover me. Bruce pulls up when our two flights meet each other, and I take a few shots at him. As I roll over to find him, I see Red 3 hot on his trail and they're diving furiously. I'd rather keep the fight up high, but this opportunity is too good to pass up. So I join Red 3 in the pursuit only to realize that Bruce isn't diving, he's crashing.

Once I pull up to rejoin the fight, I see the wreckage from one of my MiGs that had just exploded, and Red 4 is hot on another guy's tail. As I'm climbing up to join him, my wingman shrieks that he's been hit. I open the throttle to 110 percent, nose over into a slight dive, and start running from whoever shot down my wingman.

Once I get some distance, I see Bruce's wingman and manage to pounce on him for a second kill. In the process, however, I get the last two Messerschmitts on my tail. We start doing head-on passes when I realize I've been hit and my engine is overheating, plus I'm out of ammo. Luckily, they peel off and we all three go our separate ways. My engine dies on the way



Fried MiG.



Splash one Chick.

back, but I manage to barely glide onto the airfield without cratering.

Bruce: Tom's MiG-3 planes were designed for high-altitude combat, so I'd like to keep the combat down low, which fits well with the Messerschmitt's performance profile. I spot Tom when I'm just about at 5,000 feet, with him slightly below me. Perfect. Tom's plane turns to climb into me at a high-deflection angle of attack, nearly head-on. Looks like a perfect opportunity to "boom and zoom"—dive into Tom, let 'er rip, and then climb away to gain altitude and separation.

We trade shots with him ripping up my rudder and putting some holes in my windscreen—until my gun jams. Instead of climbing, I decide to continue my dive to get some separation...and right into the sights of the leader of the second MiG-3 flight. My wingman gets on his six but can't peel him off

before he shreds my plane and down I go. Seconds later, he pulls out of the dive and loses airspeed, my wingman finishes him off in a climbing turn, and then nearly gets killed himself by that MiG's wingman. That's an excellent example of why you never leave

GAME 1 SCORE	Bruce	Tom
	3	2

your wingman. My wingman notches another kill before going down to Tom's guns. I win, but it's nothing to be proud of.

Game 2: The West Front moves east

Bruce's FW-190A-9s were an advanced variant of the ubiquitous FW-190, powered by a 2,000hp supercharged BMW 801 engine. Tom's P-47 Thunderbolt (affectionately known as the "Jug") was provided to the Soviets in small numbers, for whom it demonstrated its qualities of outstanding dive rate, poor climb, ruggedness,

and tremendous firepower. Tom will be flying the late war "D" variant.

Tom: My planes pack a big wallop with their eight .50 caliber guns, but those Focke-Wulfs have really heavy cannons in their noses. However, since these jugs can soak up a lot more damage than those sissy German planes, I go head-to-head every chance I get. For instance, at one point, I tagged the rear end of a Focke-Wulf, chewing up his rudder. I didn't realize it at the time, but it put the frail little guy into a fatal spin and I got a kill.

Eventually, it looks like the Germans are trying to run. There's no sign of Bruce as me and my boys chase down one of the last two fleeing Focke-Wulfs. I've just about got him when I realize a second too late that I've strayed over Bruce's airfield. As I'm trying to get out of there, I take a fatal hit from the 85mm AA cannons. My engine burns out as I'm trying to get enough altitude to glide home and I have to ditch.

Bruce: The FW-190 is another good "boom-and-zoomer," and I'm looking forward to using a combination of altitude, airspeed, and my powerful engine to dart in and out of Tom's formation before he can bring those nasty guns to bear. Unfortunately, Tom manages to make an initial head-on pass with me as we close, and I jam my guns while he rips up my rudder. This time I have plenty of airspeed to make my escape, so I leave my wingmen to it and just get the hell out of there. My wingmen

acquit themselves fairly well, but it's not that comforting to me—this isn't supposed to be a contest between Tom and the A.I.

GAME 2
SCORE

Bruce	Tom
2	2

Game 3: Battle of the wildebeests

Bruce's Buffalos will duke it out with Tom's Yaks. Although the F2A Brewster Buffalo is famous as a sitting duck in the Pacific, it served the Finnish Air Force well. Its regular adversary in the skies over Karelia was the MiG-1, which was at a disadvantage at low altitude as well as being lightly armed.

Tom: These Yaks don't look so bad. As we pass over the Buffalos, I kick my plane over into a split S and rake a nice line of tracer fire right across Bruce's canopy. Even with a quick twist



Turn and burn.



German engineering at its finest.



If you dogfight in a Stuka, you'll end up like this.

to the left, I've still got altitude on those snubby little Finnish planes.

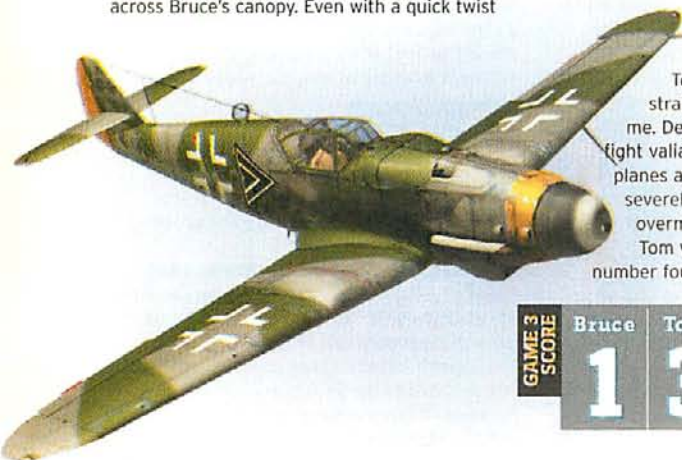
My wingman and I spend what seems like half the mission trying to turn inside Bruce's third and fourth planes. Eventually, the rest of my flight joins in and we're all swirling around like we're in a blender. When the column of circling planes reaches the deck, my wingman is hit and I make a break for it. In the ensuing dogfight, I manage to chew up Bruce's number four plane before the last three of us head for home after running out of ammo.

Bruce: The Yak-1 is a better aircraft than the Buffalo, but I don't get to find that out for myself before Tom's first gun burst goes straight into my cockpit and kills me. Dead. The rest of the Buffaloes fight valiantly, taking down one of Tom's planes and damaging another one severely, even though they are really overmatched. Yet another example of Tom vs. the A.I. By the end my number four plane is just an inoperable

mess with no controls, which finally allows Tom to slip in behind it and bring it down. It could only turn left. Tom's kind of plane!

GAME 3
SCORE

Bruce	Tom
1	3



Game 4: Stukas vs. Sturmoviks

The famous Ju-87 "Stuka" was slow, not very maneuverable, and vulnerable when not closely escorted by fighters. The IL-2 "Sturmovik" was likewise clumsy, but able to take a tremendous beating and still stay airborne. Neither one was designed for dogfighting, but they each have a rear gunner for additional protection. Tom will be at a definite advantage with his sturdy Sturmoviks (the Type 3M variants) against Bruce's Stukas (the D-3 variants).

Tom: These things are so pokey I can't even line up a shot during the head-on pass. After doing a split-S to chase what I thought was the trailing Stuka, I'm suddenly getting hit. My wingman earns his keep, as he takes down the German on my tail.

I snap off a lucky cannon shot that tears the wing off a Stuka. Then, as I'm chasing Bruce's wingman (and exhausting all my ammo in the process) I start getting hit a second time. Shrugging off the damage, I twist and climb. The whole time, Red 4 has been howling for help, asking someone to clear his tail, but he's not going down. These Sturmoviks just don't know when to quit. When I'm safely above the fray and heading back to base, I'm happy to see Red 3 and Red 4 trying to catch up. We got at least two kills and three of us make it back to base.

Bruce: An outrageous matchup calls for outrageous tactics. Because of the Stuka's low speed, being on Tom's six is actually not that great an idea, since it just makes me a juicy target for his rear gunner. This means I either have to go for high-deflection shots or maneuver to bring my tail-gunner to bear. Talk about ridiculous. I'm careful not to get too low or too slow, because if I have to climb for my life I'm basically dead.

I end up getting in a long, slow, shallow turn with one of the A.I. aircraft, and even though I hit the plane several times, it doesn't seem to make much difference. My tail gunner even gets a few shots off when I inadvertently swing my ass around to point at one of Tom's planes. Several times I watch pieces of metal come flying off of the Sturmoviks, but it doesn't seem to bother them one bit. The Stukas, on the

other hand, fall apart quite easily. I somehow manage to stay alive, but I'm the only one on my side to make it back.

GAME 4 SCORE
Bruce 1 Tom 3

Game 5: When you're a jet...

The Me-262 was an excellent performer against Allied bomber formations, as it combined superlative speed with satisfactory maneuverability. The BI-1, on the other hand, was essentially a "rocket plane" which made its first powered flight in 1942. Only six were built and none saw combat. That is, until today, when Tom will be flying them against Bruce Me-262s. Bruce enjoys the advantage in this match.

Tom: Man, these jets are lame. Basically they can fly in a straight line—and not much else. Fortunately, they can bring some pretty hefty firepower to bear if anything manages to put itself in front of them. I shoot up easily to the assigned altitude and see Bruce below me. For a moment, I consider just making a run for my base and landing all four planes for an easy win. But I'm afraid the newer Me-262s with their twin engines can outrun these earlier experimental single-engine jets. Besides, I have the jump on him.

But as I'm diving down, I realize I'm going to completely overshoot the Me-262s, so I tell everyone to rejoin and I try to turn around without blowing my altitude advantage. Which ends up blowing my altitude advantage anyway and places me directly under a flight of four hostile Me-262s. Nice move, Tom. This is why you're not a combat pilot in real life.

As my guys are screaming that they're hit, I pull away to get some perspective. When I come back around, I see three of Bruce's planes on Red 4. I come streaking in and take a few potshots at Bruce before he handily twists away. But now someone's shooting at me, so I spiral down to the treetops, taking with me what turn out to be all four Me-262s. But as they dive down at me, I get a lucky hit on Bruce and he explodes into a shower of flame and debris! I pull straight up—these are rocket planes after all—to try to rejoin Red 4. But just as I'm hopeful that we can pull a win out of this whole messy



Head-on pass equals headless pilot.

thing, my plane disintegrates in a hail of gunfire.

Fortunately, although Red 4 is mortally wounded with his guts showing through his ripped hull, he makes it home, giving me the one extra point I need to win the overall game.

Bruce: I'm just as fast as Tom and can out-turn him. This should be fun. Maybe it's overconfidence, then, that makes me not see him until I notice four streaks zooming past me in near-vertical dives. I pick out a target and dive into him, being careful with the throttle as it's easy to get too much airspeed. A few bursts leave him shedding debris and trailing smoke. As he goes into a long, lazy, flat turn, I line up my lead pursuit since I know I can turn inside of him. Just before he flies into my sights he goes into one of those power-dives and before I know it he's under and past me. These Russian rockets sure can motor!

The one way to disrupt a lead pursuit is to out-accelerate your pursuer. He makes the mistake of climbing into my turn, however, which allows me to follow him down on his next power dive,



Hey, where'd this American plane come from?

where I once again leave him trailing debris. I notice Tom scooting across the deck chased by my wingman, and I separate to line up a pursuit angle. I wait too long, and separate too far, though, which allows him to turn into me and climb for a head-to-head shot. I miss, he hits,

and I explode. I'm the only casualty on my side. I deserve to lose this match-up to Tom. And I do.

GAME 5 SCORE
Bruce 3 Tom 1

OVERALL SCORE
Bruce 10 Tom 11





PRAETORIANS

Skirmish and multiplayer strategies from Prima's Official Strategy Guide

In the single-player campaign, you engage in a variety of battles, each of which has its own set of objectives and victory conditions. In single-player skirmishes and multiplayer games, this is no longer the case. When you engage in any of these 18 scenarios, there are no complicated mission objectives or long-term goals. In these missions, it's every tribe—or every team—for itself in an all-out attempt to take control of the entire map.

Starting conditions

In campaign missions, the starting conditions—the number/type of troops you controlled, the number of Unit and Troop Control Points, and so on—varied with every mission. In skirmish and multiplayer games, most of these factors are fixed regardless of the scenario you choose. Other factors, such as the population of villages, are determined by the map on which you play.

In campaign missions, the composition of your

starting army changes from mission to mission, requiring you to adapt your strategy to fit the troops you are given at the start of each scenario. In skirmish and multiplayer games, each tribe always starts the scenario with the same assortment of troops.

Every skirmish/multiplayer map has plenty of villages that you can take control of and use to bolster and rebuild your army as needed. However, as was true in the single-player campaign, there is a limit to how many units and troops you can control at any given time, as determined by the number of Unit Control Points (UCPs) and Troop Control Points (TCPs) available. Whereas these numbers varied in every campaign mission, it is always the same in multiplayer games, regardless of scenario and difficulty level: 500 UCPs and 50 TCPs.

New troops are recruited from the civilian population of the villages you control. In the

STARTING TROOPS



ROMANS	EGYPTIANS	BARBARIANS
Auxiliary Archers (1)	Archers (2)	Bowmen (1)
Auxiliary Infantry (1)	Slaves (1)	Infantry (1)
Spearmen (1)	Guardsmen (2)	Pikemen (1)
Centurion (1)	Official (1)	Chieftain (1)
Wolf Scout (1)	Wolf Scout (1)	Wolf Scout (1)

campaign missions, population varies widely. While village population increases over time in most campaign missions, some missions have a fixed number of citizens available for recruitment in each village. Once those citizens are



The more your opponents fight amongst themselves, the fewer enemy troops you have to face.



The "outnumbered" message means your troop production is far behind your opponent's.

used up, the village becomes useless.

In multiplayer games, village population always regenerates regardless of the scenario you choose. Village population varies from village to village on each map. The bigger a village's population, the more valuable it is to control. As you plan to capture villages in multiplayer games, go for the ones with the biggest populations first (when practical) to gain an advantage over your opponents.

Choosing a tribe

In the campaign game, you encounter all three tribes—Romans, Egyptians, and Barbarians—but you always play as the Romans. If you've played through the campaign, you are probably quite familiar with the strategies and tactics that apply to Roman troops. Although you fought against just about every enemy troop type and occasionally controlled one or two select Egyptian and Barbarian troops, non-Roman troops are probably alien to you.

Because you can play as any of the three tribes in skirmish and multiplayer games, familiarize yourself with Egyptian and Barbarian troops. This is particularly important if you intend to play against others online.

You might find yourself at a distinct advantage over other players in online games if you play as the Egyptians or Barbarians. Like you, your opponents are probably most familiar with Roman tactics, and know how Egyptians and Barbarians behave only when the A.I. is controlling them.

General strategies

In skirmish and multiplayer games, your goal is always the same: Eradicate your enemies. A player or team is eliminated from the game when all of the following are true:

- + They have no fighting troops remaining.
- + They have no siege engines remaining.



Villages with large populations are the most valuable real estate to control.



Attack or dig in?

The first decision you face in any skirmish or multiplayer game is whether to take an aggressive stance immediately in an attempt to end the game quickly or to take the time to fortify your starting position and adopt a defensive stance.

In the beginning of the scenario, before they have a chance to take control of a village and build new troops, your opponents are at their weakest. This makes launching an offensive the moment you locate your enemy a very tempting proposition. If you are successful, you can quickly achieve victory.

+ They have no leaders (centurions, officials, or chieftains) remaining. This includes leaders who occupy villages.

You don't have to eliminate your enemies' scouts or destroy currently unoccupied villages in the enemies' possession to win.

Regardless of the skirmish/multiplayer scenario you choose, you and your opponents start off in the same situation every time: You are plopped down somewhere near the edge of the map near one or more unoccupied villages. Many of your tactics later in the battle are determined by your position relative to your opponents and the map terrain. However, your first steps always should be the same:

- + Take control of a village and start building troops.
- + Find your enemies' starting locations.
- + Familiarize yourself with the terrain that lies between you and your enemies.
- + Organize your troops for their first duties.

With these steps taken care of, you're ready to get started with your tactical planning.



QUICK TIP

If you decide to follow the early offensive strategy in games where you face more than one opponent, always attack the closest opponent first. This is an excellent way to remove one or more potential attackers from the scenario before there is a chance for the opposing armies to grow to unmanageable sizes.



Multiplayer games let you explore the diversity of Egyptian and Barbarian troops.

An early offensive makes for a quick game, because your opponents are at their weakest at the start of the game. Plus, if your opponent adopts the same strategy, his starting village is an easy target. If you take it out early, you cut off his reinforcements. However, you are also at your weakest at the start of the game. Despite the subtle differences in troop types and performance between tribes, everyone is evenly matched at the start of the game. This means that you must dedicate all of your troops to the effort to ensure an even fight. This leaves your starting position very vulnerable. If your opponent plays defensively, he will have time to dig in and fortify his starting position before your troops arrive. While you're marching to the enemy village, your opponent will probably have time to produce additional troops. When you arrive, you might be outnumbered. Even if you kill off all of the defending troops, you might not have enough troops remaining to wipe out your opponent's garrison or village in a timely manner. In scenarios where you face multiple opponents, you can mount a reasonably strong attack on only a single foe, leaving you extremely vulnerable to the opponents you don't attack.

Of your two possible opening moves, taking the time to build up your forces and fortify your starting position is usually the best overall course of action. While it lacks the bravado of an early raid, it usually provides the best chance of long-term survival.

What you should do when taking a defensive stance is fairly self evident. Cover all of the entrances to your first village's clearing, build a couple of siege engines and a defensive tower, and pump up your army before you consider attack. A strong defensive position makes your initial village difficult to approach. Keeping troops close during the early game is the best way to thwart opponents who favor early aggression. With defenses firmly in place, you can commit a large number of attack troops to aggressive campaigns without having to worry (too much)



The open-ended nature of multiplayer games lets you experiment with ambush tactics.

about the safety of your starting village.

When dealing with multiple opponents, you don't have to worry about the second opponent sweeping in and taking your village without a fight while your troops are committed to a campaign against your first opponent one.

Disadvantages are that digging in at the start ensures a long, drawn-out game. This is especially true if all opponents adopt this tactic.

QUICK TIP When attacking villages with melee troops (as opposed to hitting them from a distance with siege engines and archers), attack from the back of the village, on the opposite side of the opening where troops exit the village. That way, if any enemy troops are produced while the village is under siege, they must walk around the village before they can engage your troops, giving you time to react.

QUICK TIP If you played through the single-player campaign, you ran into numerous effective ambushes set by the A.I. Replay these missions and pay attention to the ambush methods used by the A.I., and then emulate these tricks when you set your own ambushes.

Taking the time to build your defenses early on gives your opponent time to do the same.

Do not neglect your expansion efforts into other villages in favor of building a huge army at your first village. The opponents in a skirmish game usually follow a somewhat defensive strategy in that they don't attack you (or each other) right away. They do, however, expand aggressively, taking as many villages as they can as fast as they can. If you don't follow their lead, you will quickly fall far behind in troop production—a situation from which it is difficult, if not impossible, to recover.



How To...

SNEAK BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Too lazy to work for your reward? By **Chet Faliszek & Erik Wolpaw**

Sneaking behind the enemy's line and then capturing the rear flag creates a major headache for your opponents. Not only does it permit your team to squeeze them from two sides, the spawn areas at a map's extremities often come stocked with a generous supply of tanks, jeeps, and planes.



1 DEALING WITH HILLS

Your path behind enemy lines will often force you to clamber down hills that, if approached carelessly, will damage you. To navigate steep slopes, stand at the lip, turn sideways, and then step off. Once you start to slide, sidestep in the uphill direction to slow your descent. As long as the incline has no sharp outcroppings to toss you into space, you should arrive at the bottom unharmed.



3 THE HUMAN MISSILE LAUNCHER

This variation on the classic human missile gambit involves the Axis two-man bomber. One player (called the launcher) ferries another player (the missile) to launch altitude. The launcher then lands and picks up another missile. This tactic permits one team to efficiently fire an endless stream of soldiers at the other side of the map.



2 THE HUMAN MISSILE

With practice, this is not only the fastest and least noticeable way to get from one side of the map to the other, it's also the most satisfying, the most acrobatic, and the most likely to get you accused of cheating. First, hop in a plane. Once in the air, point the plane's nose straight up and fly in circles over safe ground as you gain altitude. After 20 or 30 seconds, you should be so high that you can no longer see the ground. Use the map to orient your plane towards your final destination. Now jump out of the plane. Don't open your chute! Just face your eventual landing spot and keep the forward movement key pressed. After a few seconds of freefall, your character will start to scream. This is actually a signal that your plan is working. Ignore the shrieking and concentrate on spotting a good place to land. Open the chute just before you hit the ground, and you'll have launched yourself across the entire map without taking any damage.



4 THE ADVANCED HUMAN MISSILE

This is a spectacular variation on the regular human missile. If, through incredible skill or—more likely—sheer luck, you find yourself freefalling right towards a tank or jeep, ignore the chute and press the "use" key just as you touch the vehicle to enter it without taking any damage. Summing up: You've catapulted yourself across the entire map, you're unhurt, and you're driving an enemy tank. If there were any justice in the world, at this point you'd immediately win.

How To...

HOST A LAN PARTYSocializing for nerds **By Joel Durham**

Online gaming is fine—when you can find a server with a decent ping. Even then, communicating with other players involves typing messages and hoping your intended recipients read them, or using voice-over-IP headsets which often sound like a shortwave radio coming from the bottom of a well filled with angry bees.

There's a better way to engage in multiplayer gaming, a way in which you can eliminate lag, talk smack at your rivals, and see the anguished faces of your opponents as you slaughter their avatars with well placed head shots. With the right amount of prep work, you can host a fun and satisfying LAN party. No matter the scope—whether you have two or three friends over, or if you put an open invitation on the Web—LAN parties are a great way to meet dedicated gamers, enjoy a terrific multiplayer gaming experience, and get the most out of the software titles for which you pay through the nose.

To host a killer LAN fest, just follow these 10 easy steps.

**1 PLAN YOUR EVENT**

How big will it be? Are you just having a few friends over, or are you going to invite the masses? Are you going to have prizes? If so, how are you going to acquire them? If the party is big enough, you might be able to get sponsorship from major game device manufacturers like ATI, Nvidia, or Hercules. Otherwise, you might charge an entry fee to pay for prizes and offset other costs. Consider all of these factors before you make the first phone call.

PICK GAMES

Decide which games you and your guests will be playing, and let the participants know. It's important to take this step early in the process so that attendees have a chance to acquire any titles they might be lacking, and, if it's a small party, to give the attendees a chance to suggest titles that they wish to play. *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament* are natch, but what about others? Tactical games like *Rogue Spear* are a lot of fun on a LAN. Also consider real-time strategy games like *Command & Conquer: Generals* and *WarCraft III*.

**EQUIP YOURSELF**

Let people know what to bring. Be sure everyone brings headphones; it's impossible to hear what's going on when you get 20 sets of speakers in the same room. Make sure everyone has a network interface card in their PCs, and let them know whether they need wired or wireless versions. Let everyone know how you will set up your network so that they have their computers configured properly. Even think in small details: Will you supply mouse pads, or should your guests bring them?

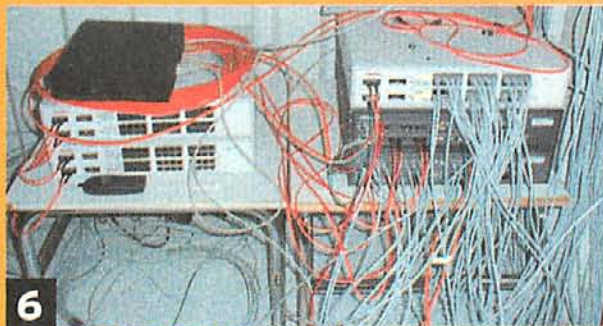
3**4****GET A ROOM**

Reserve enough space. If you're going to have a small party, you might only need one room in your house. However, if you're planning a big event, you might need to reserve a conference room at a local hotel. Indicate to the hotel staff how many people you expect to attend so they can help you decide how large a room you need. Shop around at various hotels to get the best price.

FIND A SEAT

Secure tables and chairs. For a little intimate party, the kitchen table might do. If you're planning a big event, however, you might need to rent tables and chairs from a local rental company. Look in your local Yellow Pages under Rental for party supply and equipment rental services. You'll want to rent 8-foot folding tables and folding chairs. You'll probably be able to seat six to eight partygoers per table.

5

**6**

WIRE FOR SOUND

Get the networking and electrical equipment. You'll need enough network hubs to accommodate everybody who attends. You'll also need the necessary CAT 5 cabling (unless you're using a wireless 802.11x network), outlet strips, and extension cords.

**8**

CHOW DOWN

Provide snacks and drinks. For a small gathering, you can ask guests to bring soda and chips. If you're having a large gathering, make sure there's enough food on hand for everyone to snack on. Consider ordering sheet pizza or having a catering service bring sandwich makings.

**7**

HOOK UP

Set up the equipment and the network. It's important to set up and test the network before people start coming over, so you can troubleshoot it if necessary. Have electric and network cabling running to each of the seats. If you plan run the games on a dedicated server (a very good idea), make sure they're installed on the server and running properly.

**9**

REST YOUR HEAD

Quake until dawn—literally. It's not uncommon for LAN parties to last several days, with games running until the wee hours of the morning. If you're hosting a little gathering, you might offer your guests space to sleep in a spare bedroom. For larger parties, see if you can strike a deal with the hotel that you're renting the space from for discounted room rates.

**10**

PARTY HARD

Have fun! You've done all the prep work, all the grunt work, all the publicity, all the phone calling, and all the schmoozing. When the party finally comes together, don't forget the reason you're having it: for nice, wholesome, high-fiber gaming! Enjoy yourself, you deserve it.



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: GOLDEN GIFT

A step-by-step walk-through for Microsoft's free new expansion

Scenario 1: Brokk's Journey

An old man arrives at Brokk's village with a curious tale, prompting Brokk to pack up his camp and prepare for a long journey to the entrance to the old dwarven mines.

The valley between Brokk's village and the mines once belonged to a Norse chieftan named Arngrim, but Arngrim's lands have been ravaged by a frost giant warlord named Folstag. Arngrim has retreated to a camp in the mountains northeast of Brokk's village, while Folstag's army occupies the large town in the valley.

The first objective is to build four ox carts, but don't rush. You're going to need more than a few ox carts if you're going to get Brokk to the mines. Carefully explore the area around Brokk's village, put the dwarves to work collecting resources, and start training ox carts and

military units. If you start running short of gold, there's plenty in the cave northwest of your town center.

As you explore, you'll find cows—lots of cows. Don't eat them! You'll need those cows later, so instead, rely on farms and hunted game for food. If you start running out of huntable game, there's a stream full of fish south of the village.

On the other side of the stream are the ruins of Arngrim's village, which include an unclaimed town center. There are also more cows in a pen, and one of Folstag's minions still lurks in the ruins. It's worth the resources to build a transport and send troops across the river to kill the giant, claim the town center, and recover the cows.

Once you build four ox carts, your objective changes and the location of the entrance to the

mines is revealed on the eastern edge of the map. Now your goal is to get Brokk and four ox carts to the cave.

Just northeast of Brokk's village, you'll find a healing spring guarded by towers and a few of Folstag's minions. Kill the giants and knock down the towers. Once you control the healing spring, it's easier to fight off any attackers Folstag sends.

Continue to build up your army. The walled-off mountain pass to Folstag's town is just southeast of the healing spring, but it's suicide to attempt a frontal attack. Even if you manage to batter down the walls, Folstag will cast Frost when your army moves through the pass. It's possible to force your way through, but there's a much easier way.

If you explore the hills northeast of the

This walkthrough assumes that you are playing *The Golden Gift* on Moderate or Hard difficulty. You will experience tougher opponents and a few unmentioned surprises when playing on Titan difficulty.

healing spring, you'll find Arngrim's camp. He's lost his land and his village, but he's more concerned about his missing cows. If you haven't found six cows yet, there are several more down the trails to the east and southeast of Arngrim's town. You'll also stumble across a path blocked by trees. If you've saved your Forest Fire god power, you can burn the trees down, opening up a path into the heart of the enemy town—but there's an even better way to get your army past Folstag's defenses.

Return six cows to Arngrim (any cows will do) and he'll open up an underworld passage next to his camp. The underworld passage leads to a secret vale behind Folstag's town. You'll still have to fight your way past a couple of walls and a town center to get to the dwarven mines, but you should be able to avoid most of Folstag's forces. Clear a path to the mines with siege weapons, then send Brokk and the ox carts through the underworld passage and to the mine entrance to win.

Scenario 2: Eitri's Journey

The scenario opens with the mysterious old man telling Eitri the same story he told Brokk, but with a sinister twist. Is he trying to get the brothers to fight each other?

The focus in this scenario is on controlling the water, so your first objective is to build a dock. You don't have any wood, but you start with a good supply of gold, so train a few additional dwarves and put them to work on the trees near your town center.

You also have a group of ragnarok heroes to protect your village. Be careful with the heroes—you can't train any more, and they're the only units in the scenario that can construct buildings.

As soon as you have enough wood, build a dock. Your second objective is to get Eitri and six dwarves to the entrance to the mines at the far north end of the map. Don't worry about trying to fulfill the objective immediately; you'll have to build a strong navy before you can achieve your goal.

Continue to train dwarves, gather resources, and explore the land around your village. Even with your dwarven mine god power, resources are limited, and you'll need to either complete the scenario quickly or attempt to establish a foothold on nearby islands.

It's easiest to try for the fast victory and ignore the other islands. Two human towns—Rolf's Raiders (red) and Bjarnar's Brigands (yellow)—are fighting for control of the water. Don't get bogged down trying to wipe them off the map. It's possible to avoid a lot of fighting if you let their ships engage each other, then pick on the survivors.

Build a strong navy—a balanced mix of drakkars, dragon ships, and longboats. You have to have enough of a fleet to safely escort a



Go northeast of this healing spring for a shortcut.



Happy villagers play in the snow.



The old man's visit inspires Brokk's journey.

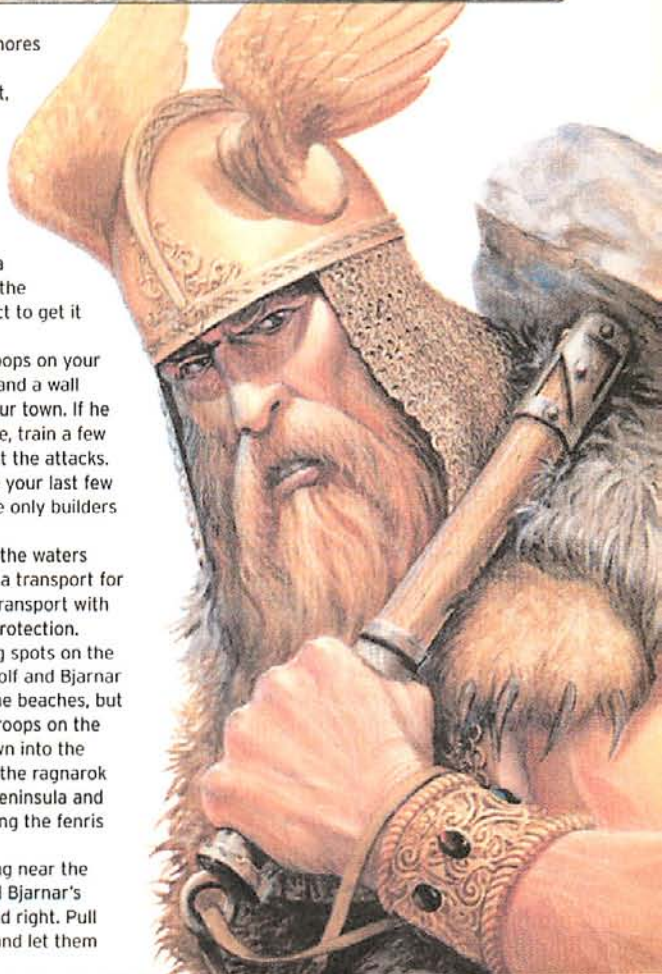
transport full of dwarves to the shores near the mines. Don't attack the enemy towns to the west and east, but try to keep control of the center of the map. Hostile krakens and other naval myth units are lurking in the water; use a group of four or five drakkars or a kraken of your own to counter them. Send a single ship to thoroughly explore the edges of the map, but don't expect to get it back alive.

Bjarnar will periodically land troops on your shores. A few well-placed towers and a wall should keep his soldiers out of your town. If he starts giving you too much trouble, train a few myth units at your temple to blunt the attacks. Once again, be careful not to lose your last few ragnarok heroes, since they're the only builders you have.

Once you are fully in control of the waters near the center of the map, build a transport for Eitri and six dwarves. Fill up the transport with three ragnarok heroes for extra protection.

There are three possible landing spots on the shores near the mine entrance. Rolf and Bjarnar have dropped armies on two of the beaches, but it's also possible to unload your troops on the narrow peninsula that snakes down into the middle of the map. Drop off Eitri, the ragnarok heroes, and the dwarves on the peninsula and head north up the pass, dispatching the fenris wolf that guards the trail.

As the pass opens into a clearing near the mine entrance, you'll see Rolf and Bjarnar's armies moving in from the left and right. Pull Eitri's group back down the trail and let them



fight each other. The two armies are well-matched, and any survivors should be easily mopped up by Eitri and the ragnarok heroes. Alternatively, if you've saved your Frost god power, use it to stop the two armies in their tracks and slip past them to the cave.

Use your ragnarok heroes and Eitri to kill the last fenris wolf in the clearing in front of the caves, then move Eitri and six dwarves to the mine entrance. Victory!

Scenario 3: Fight at the Forge

You take charge of Brokk's forces as the armies of the two brothers approach the dwarven forge deep in the mines. It's time to inflict some pain on Eitri—sharpen up those axes and get ready for a tough fight!

You have one objective: Capture and hold the dwarven forge long enough for Brokk to build Freyr's gift. Eitri's forces control the forge, but it will take him 15 minutes to complete the boar, so don't immediately rush Brokk's army to the center of the map. Instead, claim the nearby town center, build a couple of longhouses, start training additional troops, and use your starting jarl to explore the caves.

You start with plenty of resources, but since you can only train dwarves as gatherers, your economy is very dependent on gold. Fortunately, there's lots of gold in the caves—search near the bases of the largest cave pillars for all the gold you'll ever need.

Since you can't farm in the caves, you'll run out of food before long. Follow Brokk's advice and hunt bears at first, but you'll want to secure a safer food source. The underground lakes are teeming with life, but Eitri's boats have already occupied the best fishing spots. Leave the fishing ships alone and focus on destroying the single Dock at each lake. Once you destroy the dock, the fishing ships will convert to your side. Build your own docks on the lakes, and you'll quickly be swimming in fish.

After you've supplemented your starting army with fresh recruits, attack Eitri's guards at the forge. You should be able to drive off Eitri's forces without too much trouble. Now all you have to do is hold the forge until the boar is complete. Build up strong defenses around the forge—towers, walls, and a hill fort or three. Train troops near the forge too; if Eitri attacks with a large enough army, the forge might convert back, and you'd have to recapture it again and start over.

If you're feeling confident, send out raiding parties to harass Eitri's town to the west. Anything you can do to slow down his economy will help you hold the forge. If you're really good, you might even be able to completely destroy Eitri's town—that'd show him!

Unless you've wiped Eitri off the map, expect a strong attack just before you complete the boar. Don't panic! If the forge is well-defended and your army is balanced, you should be able to hold off anything he can throw at you. Just ride out the storm and watch the clock tick down.

Scenario 4: Loki's Temples

In the final scenario, Brokk and Eitri join forces and travel to Loki's mysterious mountains to recover their stolen creation.

You begin the scenario in the Mythic Age, but with no god powers. Several ancient temples to Loki are scattered throughout the mountains. By destroying the temples, the brothers can earn god powers from the Norse gods to help them reach the Battle Boar.

After the opening cinematic, use your ballista and raiding cavalry to destroy the Loki temple just to the southwest of your starting town center. When the temple falls, you will be granted the Great Hunt god power, but don't use it just yet. This first temple is the only one that is not defended by Loki's minions—you'll have to fight for the others.

Another temple can be found in a grove of trees west of your town. Be sure to bring Brokk and Eitri when you assault this second temple; it's defended by at least one Einherjar. When the second temple is destroyed, you will receive a second Great Hunt god power.

Between the second temple and your town is a herd of elk. Invoke both Great Hunt god powers on the thickest concentration of elk to create a truly massive herd. Park an ox cart and a few dwarves in the middle of herd and you won't have to think about building farms for a while.

Keep scouting the area with your Ulfark while you gather resources. You should find plenty of additional elk and several good sources of gold and wood. You'll want to build up defenses and a larger army, as the walled town to the west will send attack groups against you before long.

Eventually, build an assault team to destroy additional temples. The Norse gods will grant another god power—usually Flaming Weapons—whenever a temple is destroyed. Save the

Flaming Weapons for later in the scenario, when you have a large army that needs an offensive boost.

One of the Loki temples is on an island in the middle of a small lake. Build a dock and put a siege ship or two in the water, then take out the temple and any units defending it. Build a transport and move Brokk or Eitri past the island to the southwestern shore of the lake, where you can follow a trail to a shrine and a powerful relic.

Your scouts will eventually reveal a massive wall system defending Loki's town. Destroy one or two of the temples closest to the wall to earn Undermine god powers. When your army is assembled at the enemy's gates, use Undermine to tear down the walls, then flood through in force. Keep training reinforcements to send to the fight—Loki's minions will defend the town fiercely.

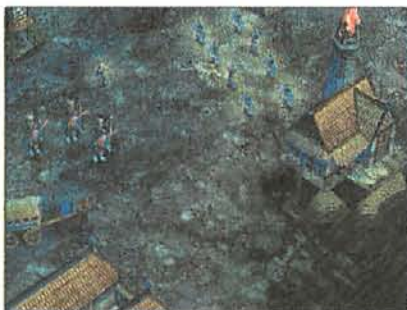
After destroying Loki's town, make your way to the Battle Boar's holding pen in the north. Bring Brokk, Eitri and plenty of hersirs with you, for Loki's mythic guardians protect the trails. Although walking woods are immune to the Forest Fire god power, you can still use Forest Fire to burn a shortcut to the Battle Boar if you take the right-hand path when the trail forks.

The walking woods are numerous, but an army with plenty of hersirs should be able to cut them down to size. Once you have defeated the walking woods, batter down the walls of the Battle Boar's pen and move Brokk and Eitri close to their creation.

Congratulations! You have reconciled two feuding brothers, turned the tables on the trickster Loki, and recovered Freyr's gift!



Dealing with Frost powers at the healing spring.



What's a mine without a group of dwarves?



Brokk and Eitri unite to fight against Loki.

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SWEEPSTAKES RULES

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. There are images of white rabbits hidden on five (5) separate pages of each of the June 2003 and July 2003 issues of each of *Computer Gaming World* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. To enter the sweepstakes, visit <http://gamers.com/feature/matrix/> and complete and submit the sweepstakes entry form. A completed entry form must have your name, address, age, and e-mail address (if you have one) and must also identify, in sequential order, either (1) the five (5) pages of June issue of each of *Computer Gaming World* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* that contain the images of white rabbits or (2) the five (5) pages of July issue of each of *Computer Gaming World* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* that contain the images of white rabbits. Entries related to the June issues must be received between April 22, 2003, and 11:59 pm (Eastern Standard Time) on June 2, 2003. Entries related to the July issues must be received between June 3, 2003, and 11:59 pm (Eastern Standard Time) on July 1, 2003. Ziff Davis Media, Inc. ("Sponsor") assumes no responsibility for lost, misdirected, or late entries, or entries containing incorrect or incomplete information. Sponsor shall select the prize winners on or about July 7, 2003, by random drawing from among all eligible entries received. The only entries that will be considered eligible entries are entries received within the time frames described above and that identify, in sequential order the five (5) pages of the relevant issue of each of *Computer Gaming World* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* that contain the images of white rabbits. The prizes are as follows

Prize list	Retail Value	Number	Total Value
GRAND PRIZES			
PlayStation 2	\$200	5	\$1,000
GameCube	\$150	5	\$750
Xbox	\$200	5	\$1,000
FIRST PRIZES			
Enter the Matrix (PS2)	\$50	10	\$500
Enter the Matrix (GC)	\$50	10	\$500
Enter the Matrix (Xbox)	\$50	10	\$500
Enter the Matrix (PC)	\$50	10	\$500
SECOND PRIZES			
Animatrix DVD	\$25	30	\$750
Matrix Special Edition DVD	\$28	20	\$560
Matrix DVD (regular)	\$20	10	\$200
RUNNERS-UP PRIZES			
1-year CGW subscription	\$19.97	20	\$399.40
1-year EGM subscription	\$19.97	20	\$399.40

The sweepstakes is open to legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, who are thirteen (13) years or older at the time of entry. Only one entry per person. If a person submits more than one entry, all entries submitted by the person may be ignored. Employees of Sponsor and its affiliates, and their immediate family members, are not eligible to enter. This sweepstakes is subject to all applicable laws and is void where prohibited. All submissions become the sole property of Sponsor and will not be acknowledged or returned. No substitution or transfer of prize permitted except as provided herein. Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prizes of equal or greater value if any prize (or any portion thereof) is unavailable. By entering the sweepstakes, each prize winner grants Sponsor permission to use his or her name, city, state/province, e-mail address, photograph or likeness, voice and entry for advertising, publicity or other purposes without additional compensation except where prohibited by law. All federal, state, local and other applicable taxes are the sole responsibility of the prize winner. Each prize winner will be notified by mail sent to the address indicated on his/her submission. Each prize winner (or, if the prize winner is under eighteen (18) years of age, a parent or legal guardian with due authority) will be required to submit a signed affidavit of eligibility and a liability/publicity release and confirmation that the prize winner has followed the rules of the sweepstakes, each in the form provided by Sponsor. The affidavit must be signed and returned within five (5) days of notification. In the event of non-compliance within this period, an alternate winner will be selected for such prize. Any prize notification or prize returned to the Sponsor as undeliverable

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Scorched Earth

Blood Sport

The hyper-masculine world of *Magic Online* By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

You'd think that an online arena populated by gamers playing an elaborate game of cards wouldn't be the roughest, toughest destination on the Internet. You'd think that with the digital medium alleviating the anxiety associated with the constant threat of the particularly life-threatening brand of paper cut that only a foil-gilded collectible trading card with elves printed on it can inflict, that having been provided this sparkling-with-pixie-dust sanctuary, the great dark lords of magic residing therein might find it within their cruel hearts to take a breath, relax, and enjoy the game and a newfound sense of camaraderie. Oh, there are a precious such few online, but the sad reality of *Magic Online* is that the average player is less a happy opponent and more a crybaby Lee Marvin in diapers.

Let's forget for a moment that this is only a game and reflect upon the fact that this is only a game that is little more than a butch *Pokémon*. And not by much. It's easy to dismiss Pikachu as profoundly sissified, but it's not as if Nullmage Advocate or Seeker of Skybreak are exactly Olympic athletes (ice dancers obviously excluded). And yet I've experienced more hostility from other *Magic Online* players than any other.

In a multiplayer contest where my teammate and I were about to lose, my cohort, through a cunning use of numerals, punctuation, and phonetic spelling ingeniously trumped the game's profanity filter to let loose a scorching screed placing the blame squarely on my head. Sadly, even the notoriously loose things we at CGW laughingly call "standards" prevent me from transcribing his tirade directly, but were he an Edwardian gentleman, it would sound something like this:

"I daresay, good sir, that your stratagem was ill-conceived in the extreme. On the occasion of my next congress with the women from whose womb you sprung, I shall be certain to convey my great disappointment in the apparently inadequate caliber of your education, a tragic



At least they're winners in *Magic Online*.

squandering which has thusly saddled you with an ignorance so profound and all-consuming that you are only worthy of providing the most base carnal services to myself and my livestock and are wholly and entirely unfit to compete with me upon this hallowed field of glory. I shall do this whilst shaving your most beloved mater's back. Adieu."

OK, so maybe we lost because I should've saved my Confound for later in the game, but still, a little perspective, my pimply, virginal friend! And while we're handing out front-row seats to The Big Picture, I'd like to take this opportunity to point out to the half-wits who feel compelled to type "fuggin a\$\$holl" when I cast a Counterspell that your insults are effectively neutered as completely as your physical self when

you're using your own Counterspell to negate mine.

Apparently, my deck—a nifty little blue number I call Denial of Service loaded with various counters and packed with Persuasions and Confiscates to kill my opponent with their own spells—is cheap. At least that's what people tell me seconds before the naughty talk starts. Somehow stealing a guy's Serra's Embrace-buffed Giant Warthog to deliver the finishing blow when I could just use my own creature is wrong. As opposed to the land-destruction decks. Or the squirrel decks. Or those

damned Slivers. News flash:

I didn't create these cards on my own and sneak them into the game. They're legal, they're allowed, so I'll try to keep my evil sniggering low enough so you don't hear it and you just start dealing with it.

But an astonishing number of players can't deal with it, and so these pinheaded losers (I call them losers because they are, in fact, losing) have found a way to relive the childhood glory that came from taking the big red rubber ball home and ending the kickball game. They don't let the game finish. They suddenly lose their connection one click away from defeat. Pathetic, yes, but not as brain-bendingly wretched as the sorry bastards who don't even have the dignity to tuck tail and run, and instead sit there, not clicking OK, not allowing the game to conclude, forcing me to click Concede just to get out of the game window and back to the lobby to search for a brand new mama's boy to beat.

Why some players would do this in a casual game that has no effect on their player rating is beyond even the ability of my prodigious brain to comprehend but, hey, I guess they can say they've never lost at *Magic*, right? At love, career, romance, sexual potency, friendship, sports, family, life, and the ability to walk down the street without provoking dog attacks and making sweet little babies cry, they've undeniably lost. But at least they're winners in *Magic Online*.

Huzzah, to you, proud sirs, huzzah!

Computer Gaming World (ISSN 0744-6667) is published monthly by Ziff Davis Media, Inc., 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY 10016. Subscription rate is \$27.97 for a one-year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add \$16.00 for surface mail. Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80328-7167. Canadian GST registration number is 865286033. Canada Post International Pub's Mail Product (Canada Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1058649. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A.



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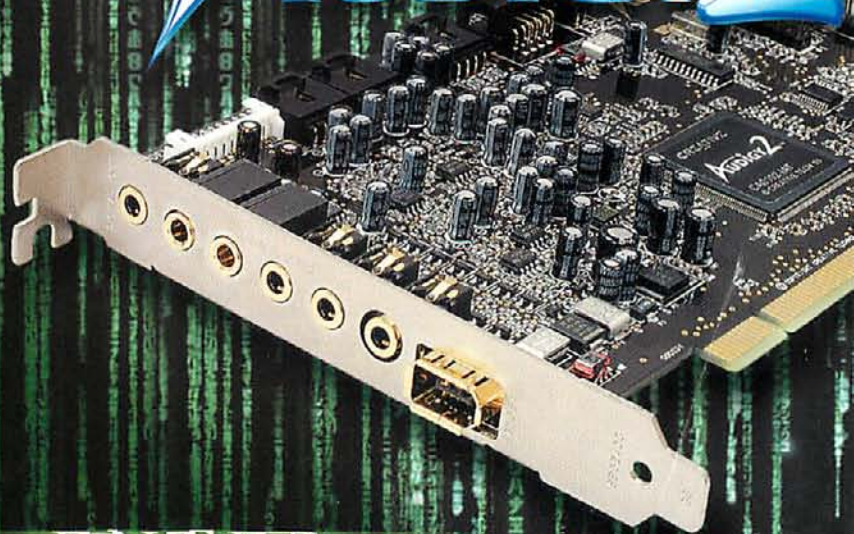
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