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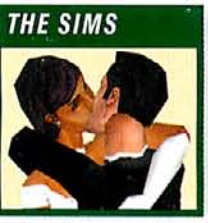

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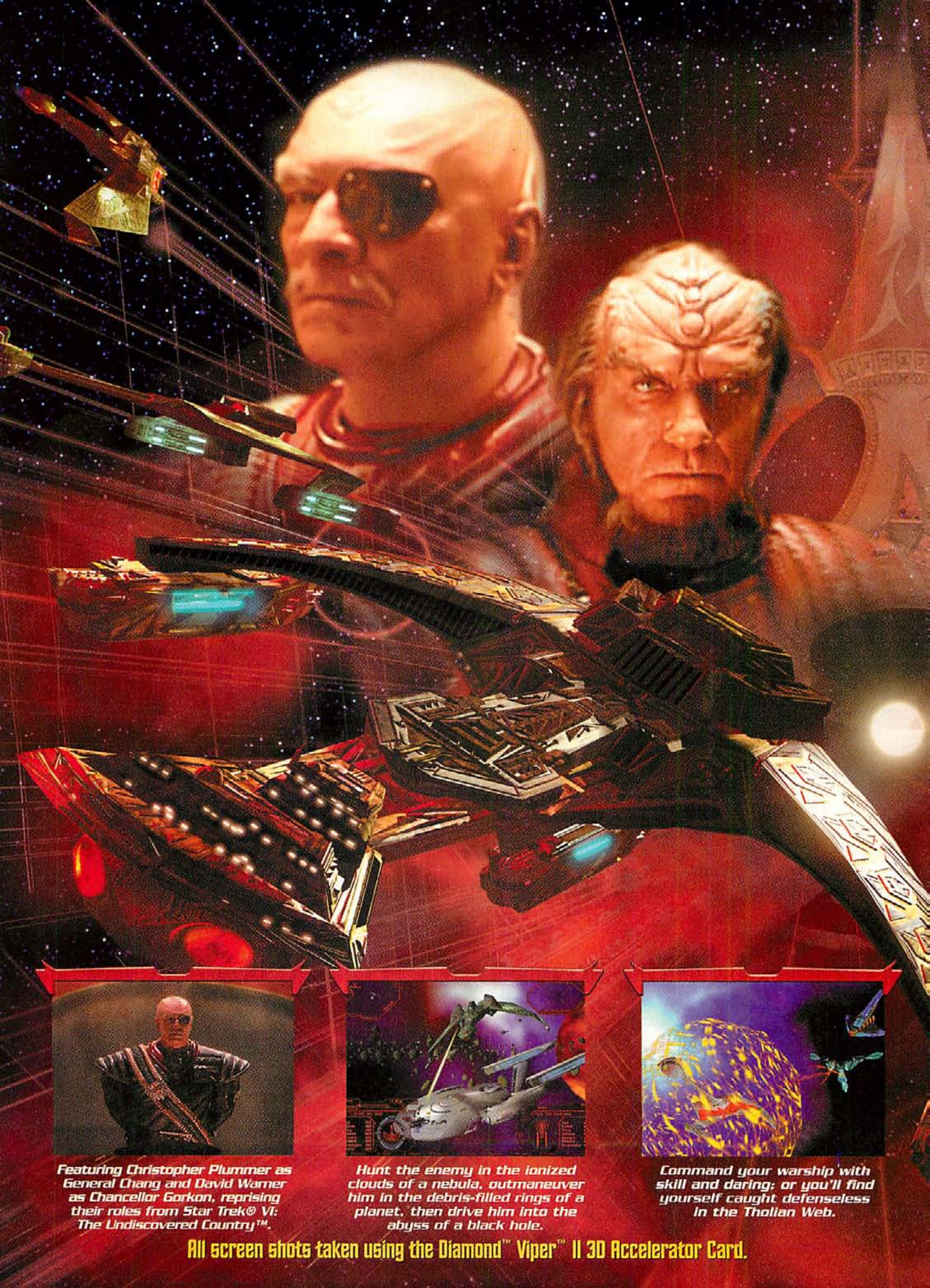

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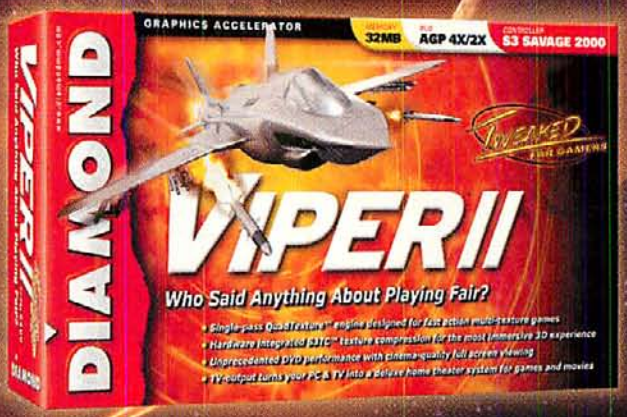

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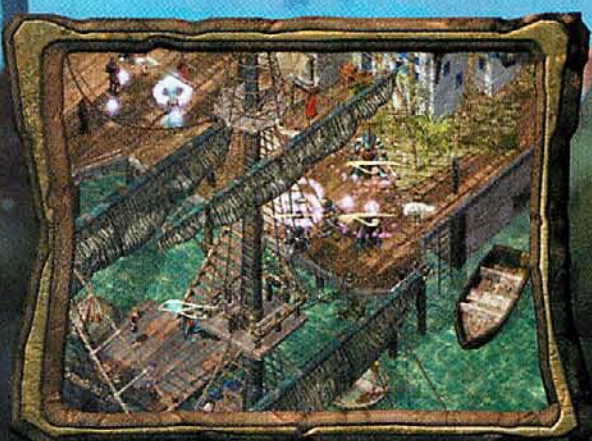

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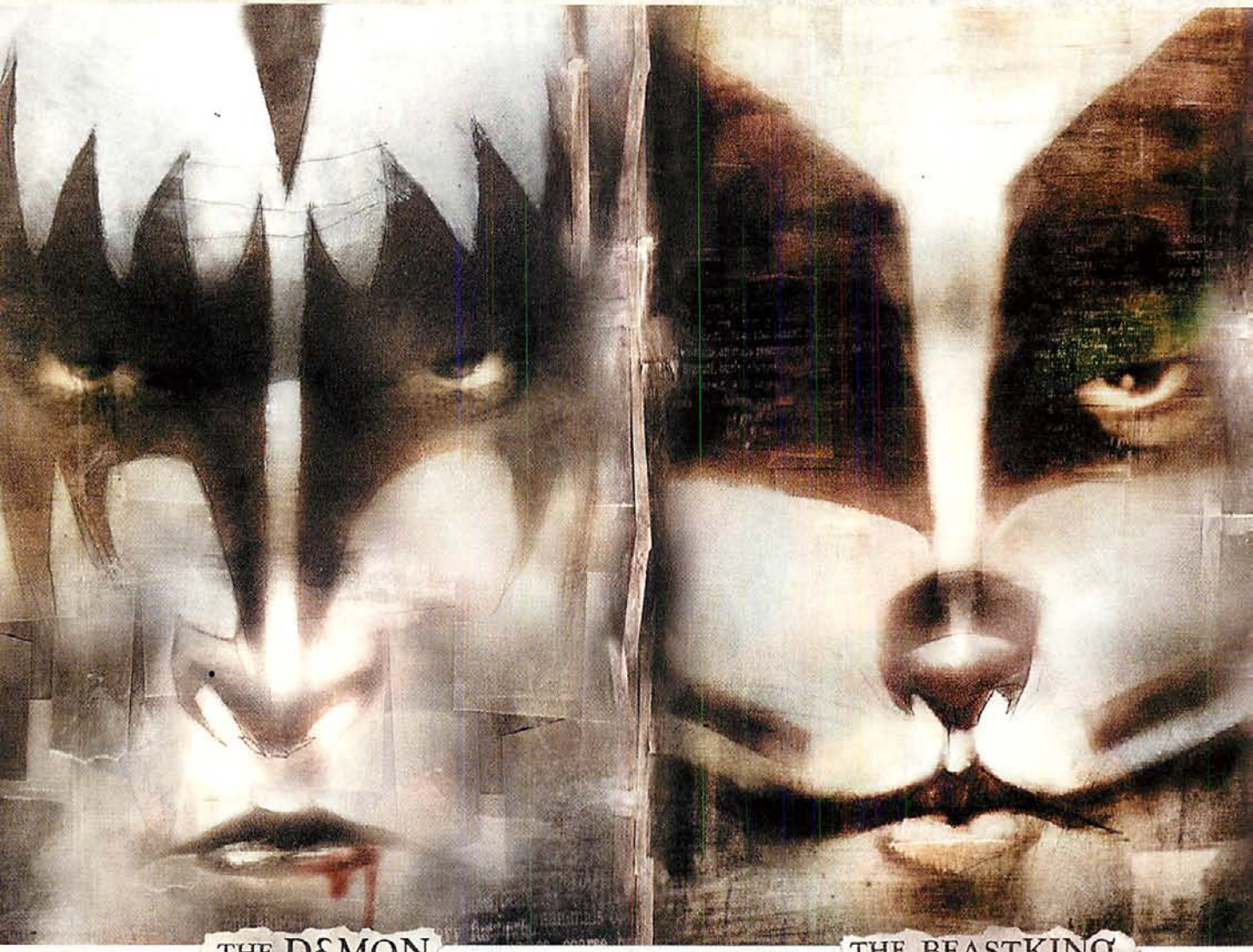

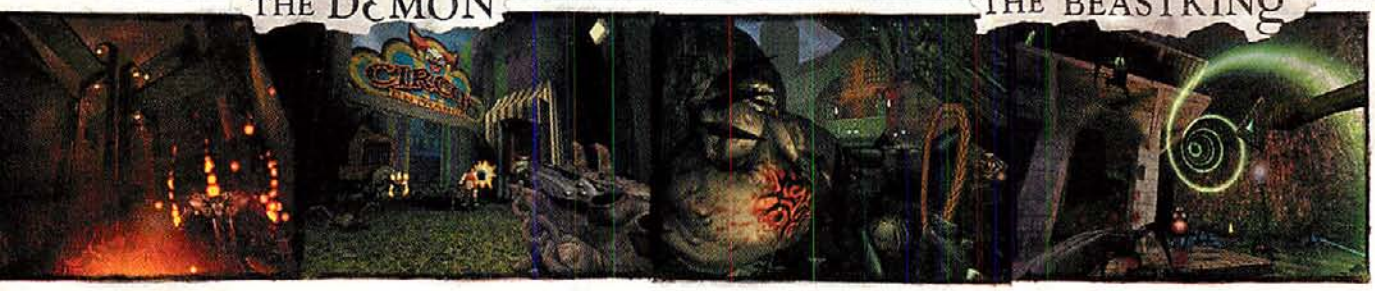

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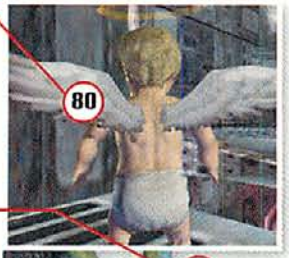

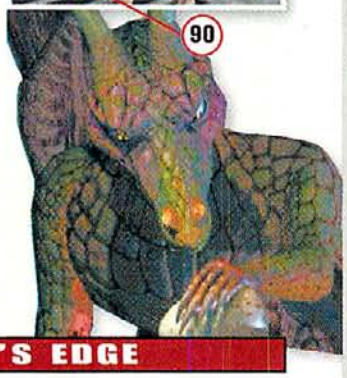

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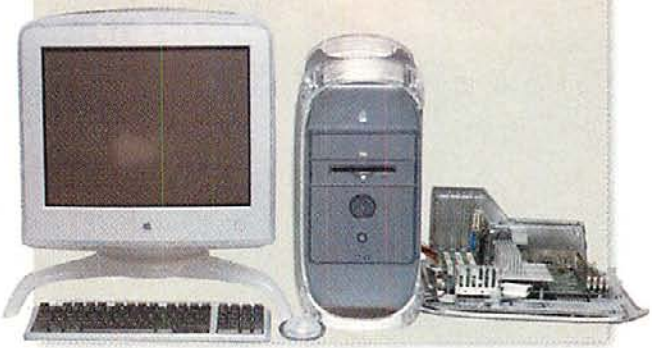

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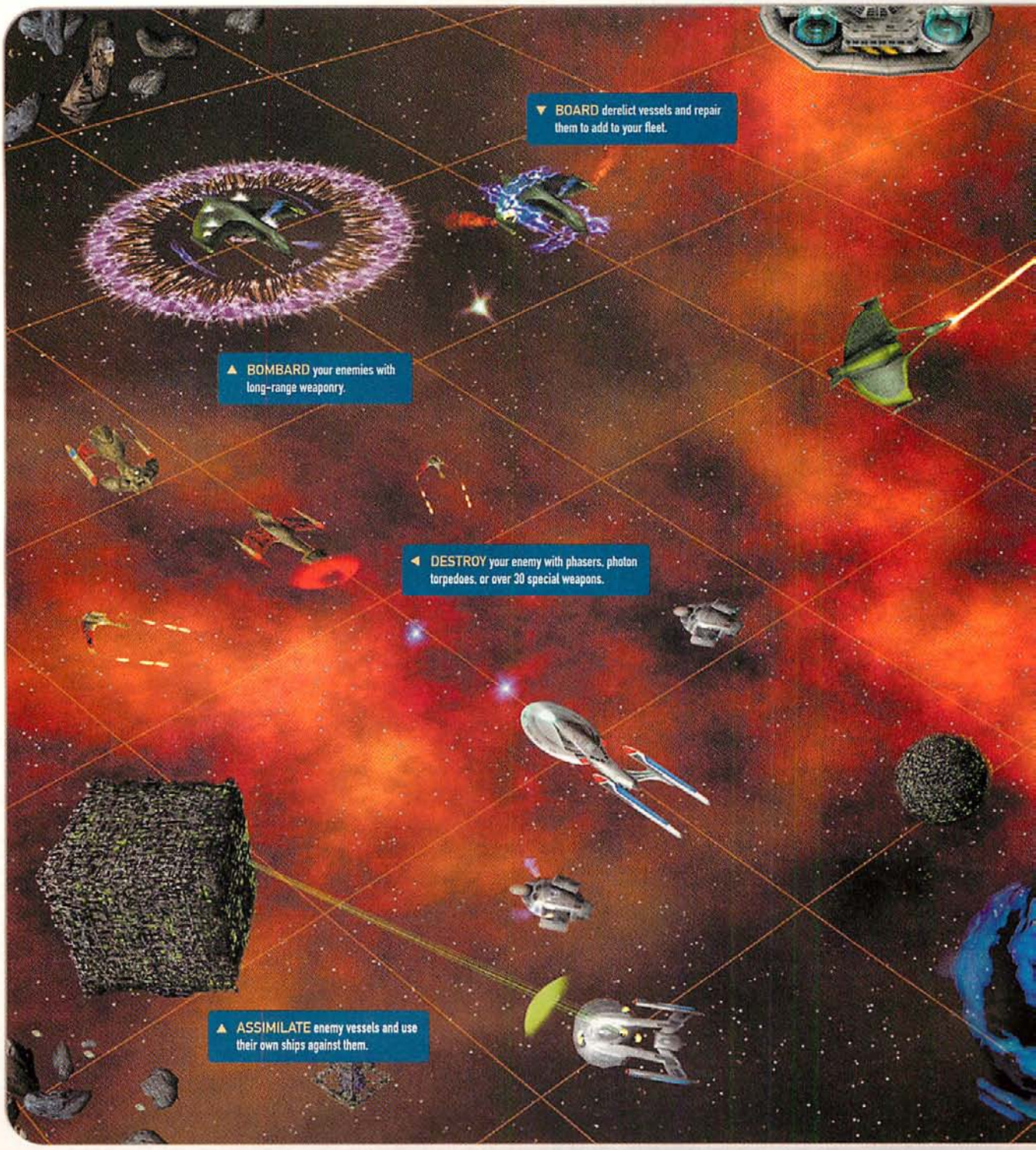

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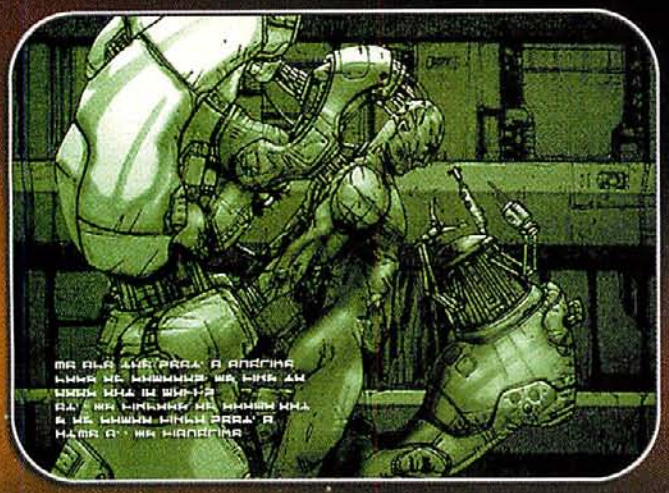

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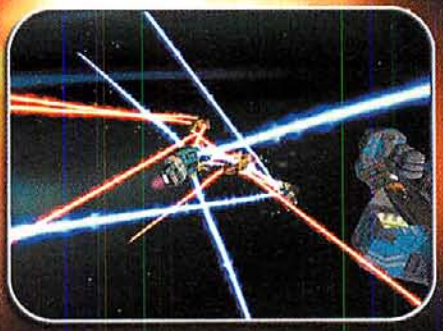

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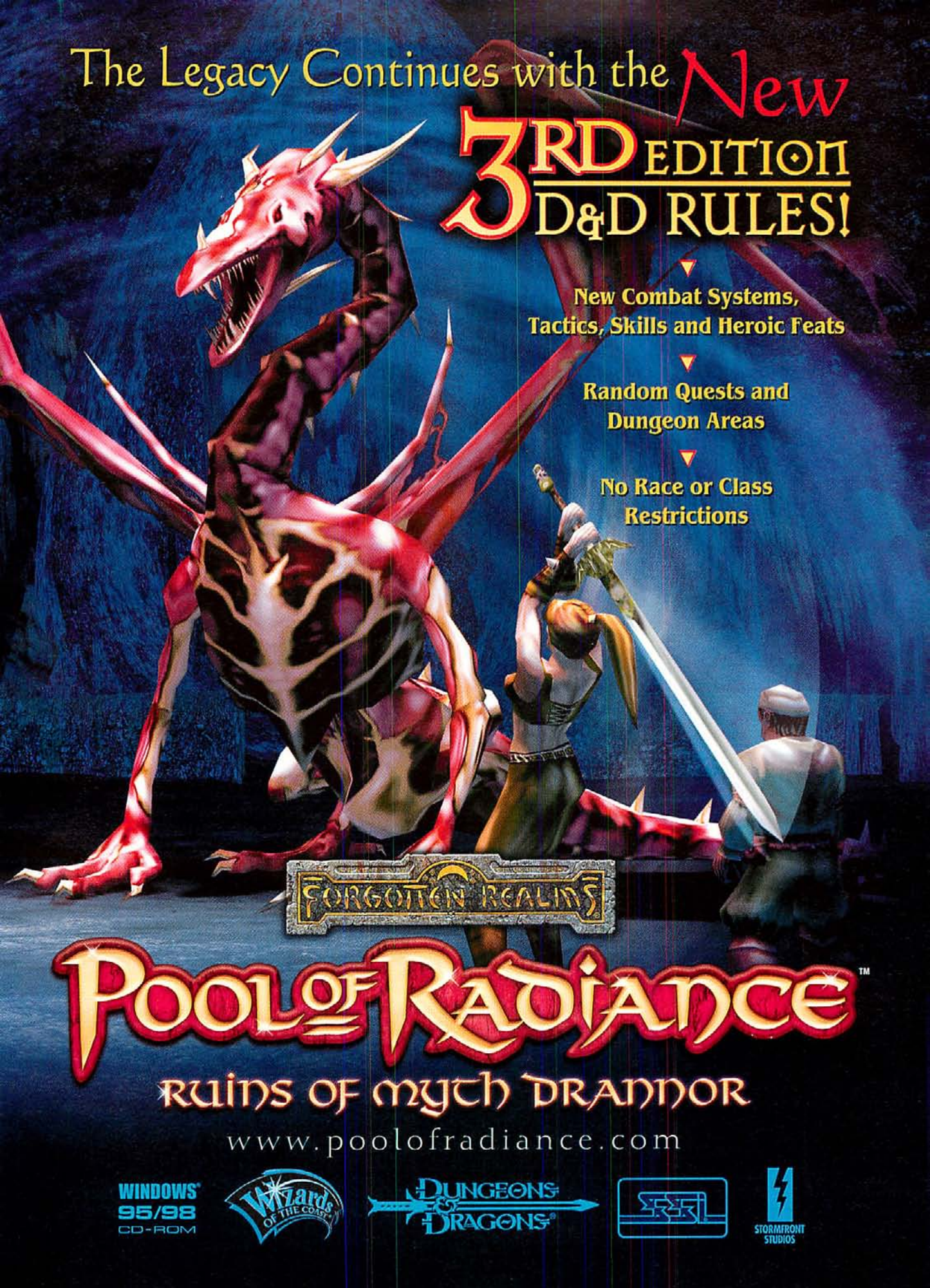
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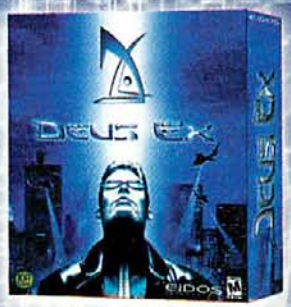

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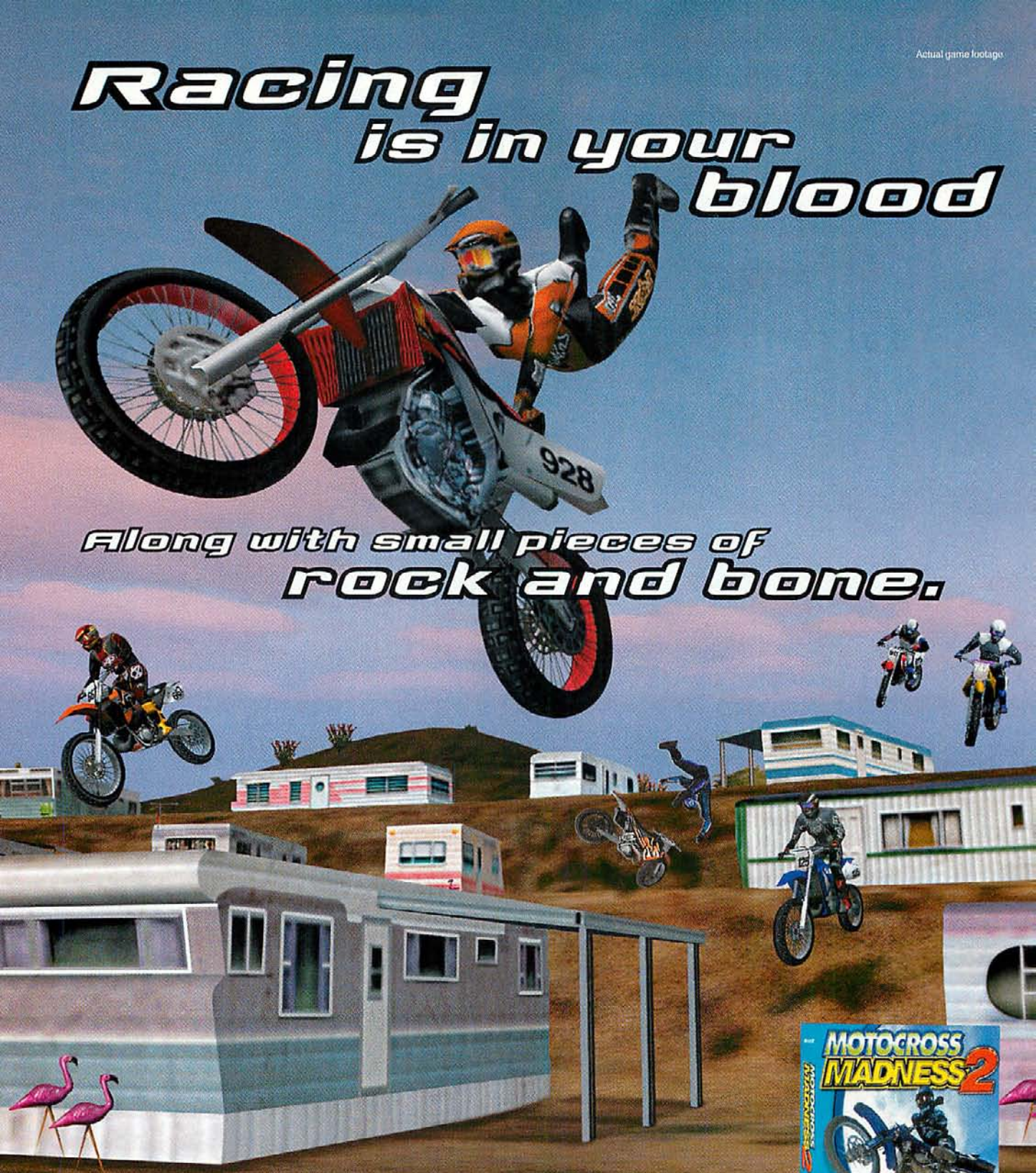

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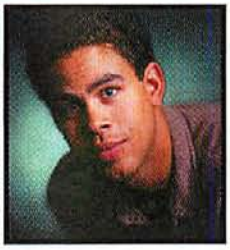
Keeping It Real

Mark Austin. Andrew Bednarz. Gordon Farell. Ingo Van Thiel. Chances are, unless you are one of these guys, you don't know them. But in this day and age, they're almost as important as the Sid Meiers and Chris Roberts of the gaming world. And in the very near future, they could be absolutely crucial to the success of our lifestyle.

As Bill Gates remarked when he addressed the Game Developers Conference this March, PC gaming's big strength is innovation. A large part of this comes directly from the minds of game designers. But another aspect of innovation comes from a second wave of game designers, like the four I mention above—game devotees who take existing titles like AGE OF EMPIRES 2 and spend hours building incredible new experiences for the rest of us.



At *Computer Gaming World*, we routinely marvel at the ingenious, insane, and insanely ingenius designs "regular" gamers are capable of creating, and I'm proud we were able to build a story around them. This month, author

From our perspective, relying on the people who fanatically play PC games is an amazingly logical idea.

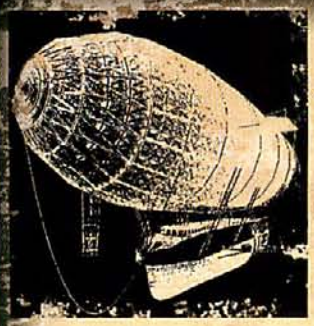
T. Byrl Baker pays homage to this group with a story detailing the finest home-brewed add-ons on the Internet. You'll be amazed at this incredible collection of add-ons, levels, maps, and missions. You'll also be able to experience new levels of entertainment with your game collection during the dog days of summer—a time when the game releases tend to be few and mediocre.

Up in Canada, the designers at Bioware (makers of BALDUR'S GATE and MDK 2) are taking the concept of home-brewed gaming one step further with NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, our second cover story this month. In their unique *Dungeons & Dragons*-based RPG-and-then-some, Bioware is not simply encouraging grass-roots game design. They're actually relying on it, as well as the group consciousness that can form around a hit game, to help build out what could be the most interesting role-playing environments ever created. From a game design perspective, it's certainly the most ambitious game we've seen to date.

From our perspective, relying on the people who fanatically play PC games is an amazingly logical idea. CGW

P.S. Thanks for all your responses to last month's editorial on gaming piracy. We've included a sampling of the comments in our Letters section on page 29.

George Jones



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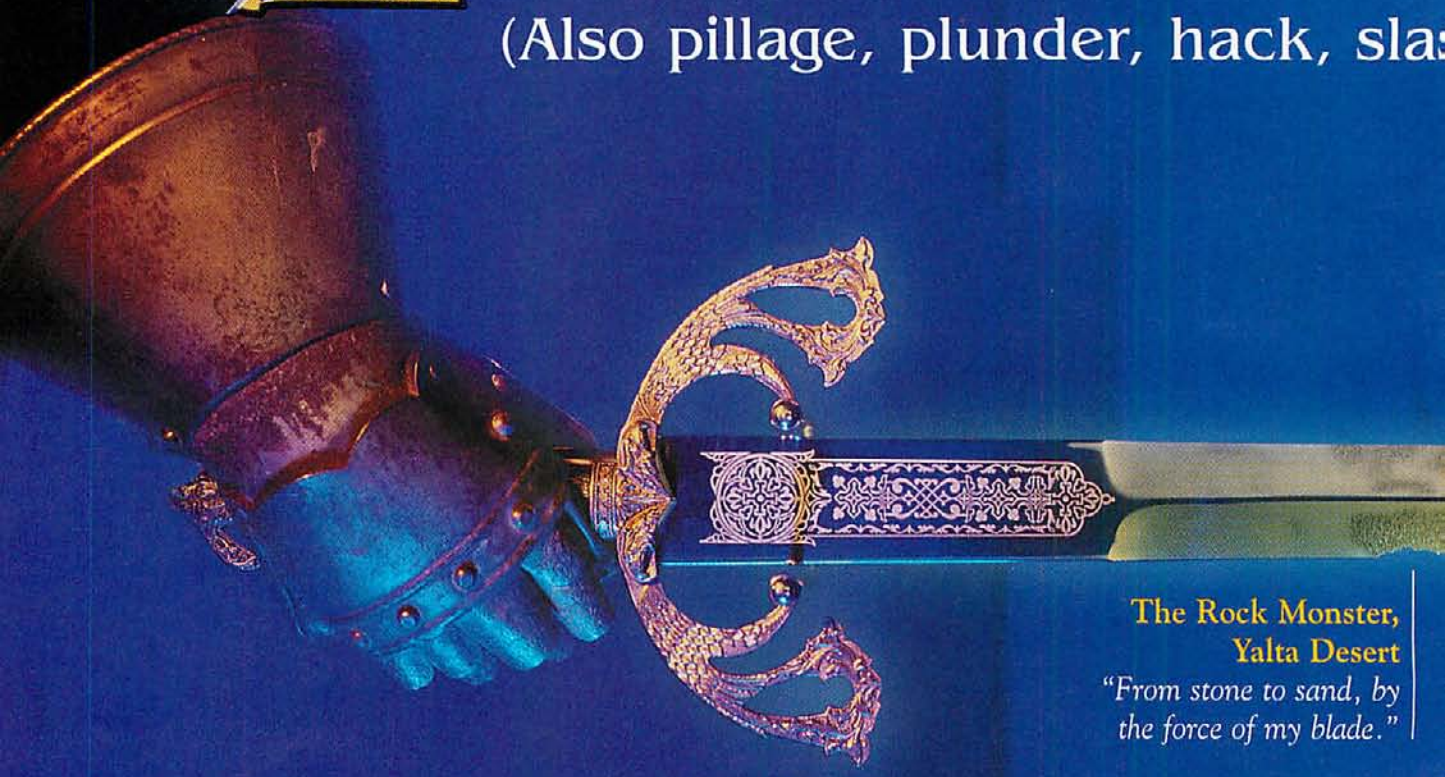


The Rock Monster,
Yalta Desert
"From stone to sand, by the force of my blade."

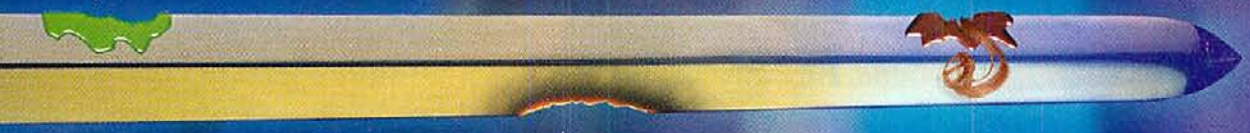
LEGEND OF THE BLADE MASTERS

Die by the Sword.

and conquer by the sword.)

Trial of the Worms, Wizard's Cave
"Green is for the precious life that I take from thee."

Date with Queen Arachnid, Elven Forest
"If only her exoskeleton was as tough as her will."



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LETTERS

Soldier of Fortune: The Bloody Aftermath

Robert Coffey's review of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE (June, pg. 120) was totally irresponsible. Mr. Coffey states that we are counting on the "...public outrage-induced publicity..." to sell this game. This is simply untrue. We declined interviews with national TV shows to avoid irresponsible showmanship. We have gone to great effort to provide parental password protected lock-outs of violence in the game. We voluntarily rated the game for mature audiences only.

Mr. Coffey also accuses us of being racists. His claim is that in order to induce the player of a shooter to want to kill his opponents, the bad guys have to be asking for it. He further states that we have done this "...by letting you slay lots of people of color, primarily Arabs or Asians." He further claims that the "... other – *white* – enemies..." are all somehow disguised so that you cannot see their faces, while "...the colored faces of Iraqis and Japanese are apparently inhuman enough that it's okay to shoot their legs off their body before their blood-spurting torso hits the ground." Again, this is contrary to facts.

In SOF, our goal was to depict the *Soldier of Fortune* license in a realistic manner. We picked hot spots around the globe, based on current events, not on the color of the people you would kill. We then depicted our enemies accordingly.

Both of the main enemies in the game are white. We have gone out of our way to embrace racial diversity, and we have been accused of racism as a result.

Mr. Coffey has transgressed beyond the bounds of acceptable opinion and moved into the territory of irresponsible journalism. I would appreciate a follow-up, unbiased review by an unbiased reviewer.

Brian Raffel
Studio Vice President
Raven Software

Robert Coffey replies: I did not accuse Raven of being racist. I don't believe you set out to create a game that endorsed the killing of minorities. But it is my opinion that the game does just that. While the colored faces of enemies are unobscured and realistic, most of the white opponents have their faces hidden. The white enemies are cartoonishly rendered and slapped onto stereotypical villain models. The two main villains are white, but one is heavily tattooed to the point of surreality while the principal enemy is never seen outside of body armor. He could be green for all the player knows.

You claim that you bent over backwards to avoid appearing to revel in the game's high level of violence. I can give you the benefit of the doubt regarding your motives in avoiding the mainstream press, and I can understand why you produced a violence-locked version. But I also know that not once in having this game shown to me over the last year or so did anyone fail to illustrate–repeatedly and with emphasis–how brutally you could rip people apart in it.

Aside from these issues, the conclusion of my review is that I found SOF wanting as a game. Without the savagery, there's not much there. That's why I believe it's fair to criticize the game's gratuitous level of violence – because I believe it was used as the game's main "feature" in lieu of a compelling design.

EXCERPT FROM SOLDIER OF FORTUNE REVIEW
JUNE 2000, #191

Doing Unto the Others

No one has made a shooter with babies for bad guys, for the simple reason that most people would understandably balk at killing babies. Bad guys in entertainment have to be asking for it; they have to be different than you; you can't feel anything for them. Movies do this by rarely showing the faces of the legions being killed; games do it by making the enemies aliens, demons, cultists, or something equally far-fetched. SOF does it by letting you slay lots of people of color, primarily Arabs or Asians.

Yes, there are other – *white* – enemies to kill, but snow-suit hoods, protective masks, ludicrous tattoos, and heavy sunglasses obscure their faces. The few white faces you actually *see* so stereotypically scream EVIL, you can shoot them without compunction. Not so for the hundreds of non-white bad guys you slaughter – the colored faces of Iraqis and Japanese are apparently inhuman enough that it's okay to shoot both their legs off their body before their blood-spurting torso hits the ground.

Piracy and CGW

Editor-in-Chief George Jones' June editorial regarding piracy ("Copy Protected") brought in quite a few emails. Here's a sampling:

I think you did nothing wrong in giving out the address [of a CD-ROM copy-protection cracking site]. If it takes a copy-protection cracking site to be able to play the game, so be it. Most stores will not let you return an open PC game, even if it does not work on your system. But they will gladly exchange it for the same game, whatever good that does. So as a consumer, you gamble every time you buy PC software. You first hope it is what you expected, then you hope it works. If either one of the aforementioned wishes fail, you are stuck with a product you don't want.

Ivan V. Dunken

Until recently, I've never had the need or desire to download any cracks. I realize that pirating a game is the same as any other kind of stealing. Then, I bought TOMB RAIDER 4, and it didn't work in my DVD drive. I took it back, thinking it was defective – but the replacement didn't work either. All my other games worked, so why not this one? So, I copied the files onto a bunch of zip disks on another computer, went to gamecopyworld.com for the crack, and now I'm playing the game.

Granted, the URL you ran is probably the worst solution to the problem, but is "Sorry, UT doesn't work on your computer, how about a copy of Jazz Jackrabbit" that much better? I don't want to downplay piracy, but I don't think game companies should hide behind it, either.

Rob Jordan
Seattle, WA

Using the argument "anyone who really wants to pirate software is going to figure out a way to do it" is a good way to antagonize anti-piracy groups. It's almost like saying you're against piracy, but you're going to promote it because you won't make a difference in how people find it. Imagine using that as an excuse in a court of law.

Dan Edwardson

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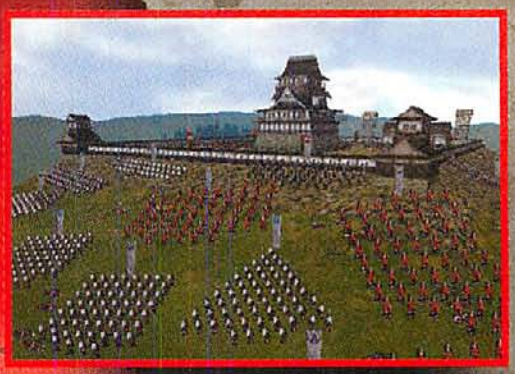

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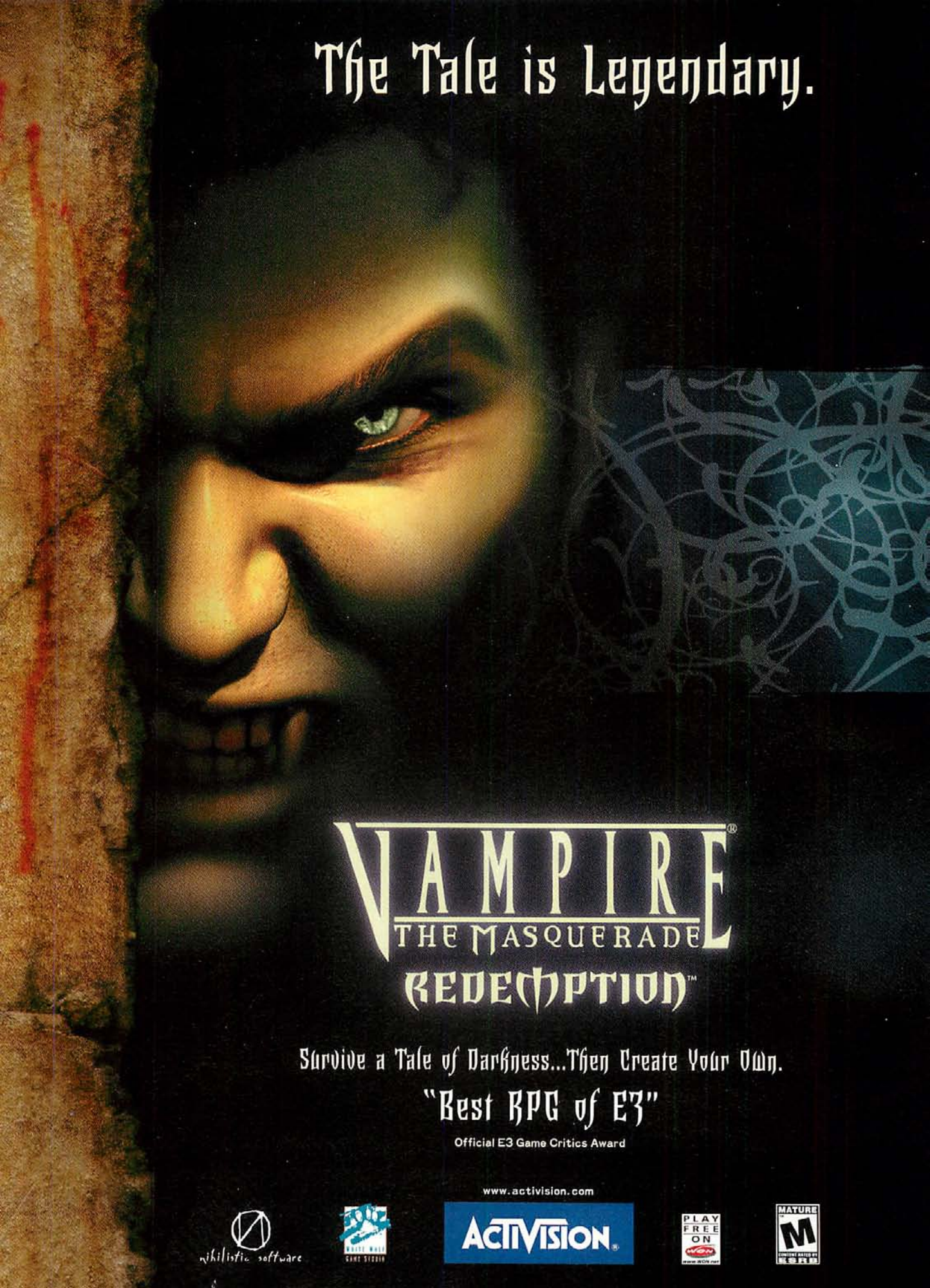
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The SIMS Expansion Pack

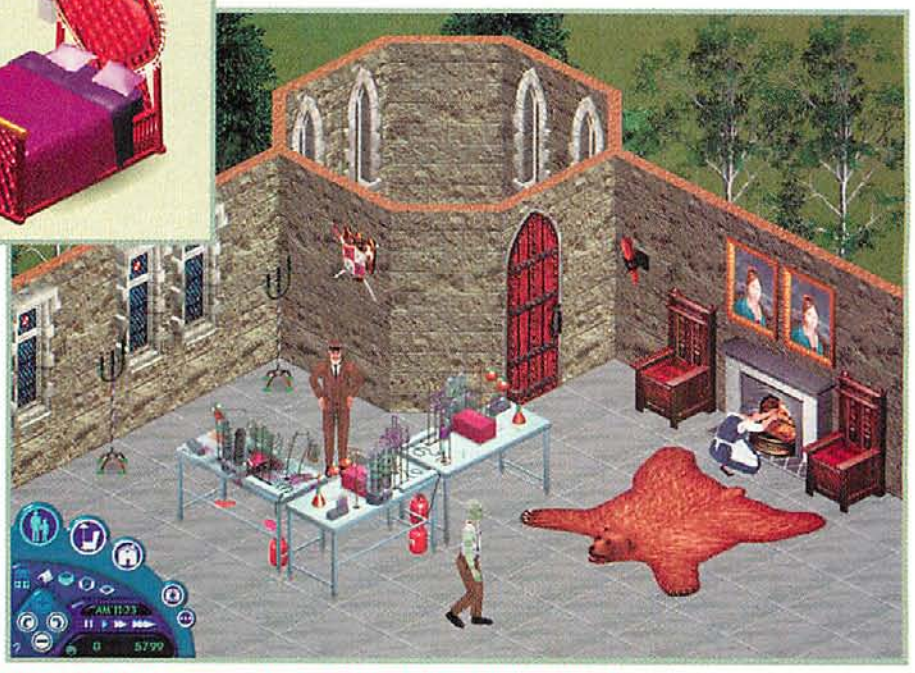
More toys for your virtual dollhouse with THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE

The digital soap operas playing out on computers across the world are about to get a whole lot more complicated. And that's a very good thing.

With worldwide sales of THE SIMS already topping the one-million mark, an expansion pack dishing up more of the stuff that has hooked both casual and hardcore gamers is practically a license to print money. Fortunately, Maxis isn't just looking to milk this cash cow, and is gearing the pack to introduce new, intriguing gameplay elements along with the new lamps, couches, and toys. The goal, according to Executive Producer Sinjin Bain, is to introduce elements to the game that create new story and gameplay (along with some humor) in order to further engage the imaginations of players.

Even at the most basic level—the career tracks—LIVIN' LARGE will offer twists and turns to shape the lives of your Sims in new, less predictable ways. For example, the new Hacker career track starts you off as a beta-tester who moves through stints as a game designer and programmer, before abandoning any real work to embrace the new economy as a venture capitalist. Other career paths will be Musician (work your way up from subway singer); Paranormal; Journalism (game reviewers just miss the bottom rung of this job ladder); and Slacker (golf caddies and 7-11 clerks).

A truckload of new objects will effectively double the amount of items in the game, but many of these new objects will have deeper repercussions than just being a comfy chair. Some will take cues from the infamous disease-spreading gerbils downloaded from **www.thesims.com**; they will have lasting affects on your Sims' lives. For instance, you can purchase an antique lamp inhabited by a wish-granting genie, but not all genies are created equal. Wishes for love or money or anything else could backfire horribly and leave your Sims worse off than they were before. A new workbench will allow characters to produce charming garden gnomes, but a low



LAB SWEET LAB The mad scientist enjoys a quiet day at home with his zombie pal.

mechanical skill will result in lawn ornamentation that basically functions as a proximity mine.

Perhaps the most interesting new item is a fortune-telling crystal ball, since it will introduce the possibility of strongly directed, result-oriented behavior. The glimpse into the future will let players enjoy a window of opportunity where they can affect or avoid future events. The item set hasn't been finalized yet, and some of the more intriguing items remain on the Definitely-Maybe list, including Bain's personal favorite: a voodoo doll for tormenting other Sims.

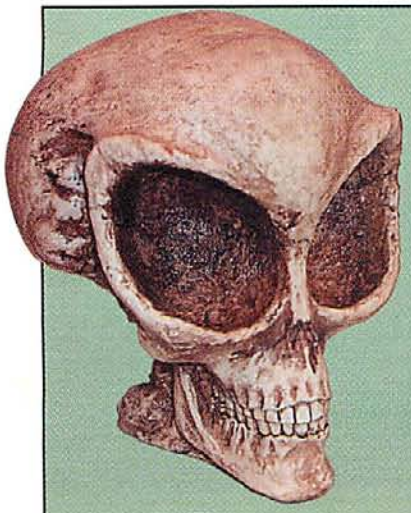
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR
Not all genies are created equal – wishes can backfire if you get stuck with an incompetent mystical being.

A new cast of NPCs will be introduced and will exert a more profound effect on your Sims' lives than the current maid, gardener, pizza boy triumvirate currently does. For one thing, space aliens (perhaps drawn by your excessive telescope-usage) may abduct you, forever changing the way you interact with the world and other Sims. A Tragic Clown (who refuses to leave) may show up at your home to perform various disastrous tricks, and the Grim Reaper himself may show up when a Sim dies, affording you the opportunity to bargain with the devil for the life of your perished Sim.

New architecture and décor styles to be included in LIVIN' LARGE include a castle-setting perfect for mad scientists experimenting with the new, personality-altering chemistry set; a garish Vegas-collection, ideal for lounge singers; and a sleek, retro 50's and 60's-line, certain to suit that perfect nuclear family you've been nurturing for months.

It all adds up to a pack that expands upon the core concepts of the original game. We can't wait to start torturing our Sims when the pack ships this Fall.—*Robert Coffey*

Tchotchke of the Month



Tchotch·ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

Here's all Agent Mulder would've needed to walk into Louis Freeh's office and say, I fu#$-ing knew it! You can't keep me down anymore!" That is, until Mr. Freeh turned it over and pointed to the Made In China sticker on the bottom. This finely-detailed skull makes a wonderful addition to our severed-head collection, and raises our collective appraisal of Hasbro a notch (even though we're still skeptical about X-COM ALLIANCE). The good news is that you don't have to commit to a lifetime of poverty (by becoming a gaming editor) to get one. Head over to **majestic-n.com** to pick up one of your own.

The GOOD...

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

Well, shiver me timbers! Maybe adventure games aren't completely dead yet. LucasArts' surprise announcement of a fourth MONKEY ISLAND game—due this Fall no less—is a welcome blast of good news for long-suffering adventure fans. Every previous game in this series about hapless pirate Guybrush Threepwood has been a treasure of comic genius. Don't let us down now, LucasArts.

The BAD...

DIRECTSTANK

In what may be a sign of the upcoming apocalypse, a company named DigiScents recently announced iSmell, a hardware device for the PC that will create custom smells from a "palette" (cartridge) of 128 chemicals, allowing you to smell burning rubber, your enemy, and god knows what else. We shudder at the thought of this combined with a SOUTH PARK game.

and the UGLY

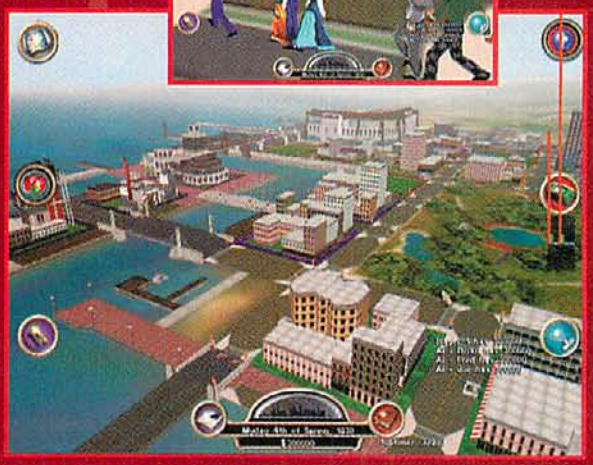
30-4

The nightmare that is the *CGW* softball team's inaugural season continues. We thought our 15-0 loss was bad. That's until we lost our last game 30-4. Of course, it didn't help that the other team was made up of cheaters and weasels, bringing in some ringers from the Dominican Republic, apparently, just to crush us. Anyone from the Berkeley Rainbows now reading this: You suck.

News & Notes... G.O.D. (the Gathering of Developers) has announced a new publishing label, On Deck Interactive, which will publish low-price, mass-market games. Among the games announced: a KISS pinball game and a Duke Nukem hunting game.

first look

Monopoly Tycoon



Hasbro's digital empire continues to expand apace. Among the company's recent product announcements: an expansion pack for their critically acclaimed real-time strategy game, and MONOPOLY TYCOON, the first new Monopoly game in 40 years. MONOPOLY TYCOON seems to be exactly what Maxis was shooting for when they first started discussing SIMCITY 3000 – a 3D city simulator that focuses on the inhabitants of a city, rather than on the city itself. Hasbro's upcoming real-time city-planning game allows you to manage the broad, economic workings of a town without having to deal with details like water and power supply.

Instead of laying out your city from scratch, MONOPOLY TYCOON presents you with a pre-existing city design. Your goal is to make the most money possible by buying city blocks (all of which are Monopoly board-game properties, plus a few additions) and building housing or businesses on the land; and, making sure that the rates, prices, and wages for your properties are competitive. You'll compete against several AI (or human) opponents with the same goals, which could make for interesting gameplay twists: While you'll want to beat your opponents, you'll have to keep in mind the overall health of the city and its inhabitants. Like the original game, owning all the properties in a particular color group – Park Place and Boardwalk, for example – will bring you more revenue.

Even in its early state, the game features many nice touches. At a glance, you can see how popular your city is – the bus depots and docks swell with new arrivals. Or, if things get dire, the freeways crowd with people itching to get away because they can't find work, housing, or happiness.

As the game evolves from the 1930's into the present day, the characters in the game – whom you can follow throughout their daily activities, gauging their happiness level – will change their clothing styles and even drive more modern cars.

Despite the Monopoly name, MONOPOLY TYCOON – to be released on October 15 – looks like a robust, entertaining strategy game along the lines of the smash hit ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON. The tricky part for Hasbro will be balancing what is a fairly complex game in such a way that that it's accessible to the mainstream masses, but entertaining for gamers as well. *–George Jones*

Majesty

Hasbro Interactive also announces MAJESTY add-on

Majesty: The Northern Expansion

In the NORTHERN EXPANSION – Hasbro's add-on to MAJESTY, their interesting take on fantasy/real-time strategy – Cyberlore, the game's developers, are adding new buildings, spells, play tweaks, and monster enhancements to go with twelve brand-new quests.

Coolest amongst the new buildings are the Mausoleum, which will allow you to resurrect slain heroes for a price, and the Magic Bazaar, which sells magic items to your heroes. The new batch of monsters – from the massive Yeti to the Greater Gorgons – also include new lairs that will allow enemy creatures to defend themselves.

MAJESTY fans will also be happy to know that Hasbro plans on releasing at least three extra downloadable quests for this expansion pack, which should be on store shelves in mid-June. *–George Jones*

Old Man Murray's Scientific Breakthrough

From the Department of Blatant Plugs: Our favorite gaming Web site in the world, Old Man Murray, outdid itself in early May with its funniest feature ever, the Crate Review System—"the world's first completely unbiased review methodology." All games are reviewed based solely on how long it takes for the first crate to appear. Another brilliant, bitter, and biting take on the industry from the crankiest guys in the business. Read it at **www.oldmanmurray.com/features/crates/crates2.shtml**

Massively Maddening RPGs

Sony, Origin, and Microsoft all struggling with success

What do a lightning strike and a buggy billing program have in common? Both were the source of gaming woes for ULTIMA ONLINE and EVERQUEST fans, respectively. As the number of players of the three big massively-multiplayer online roleplaying games—ULTIMA ONLINE, EVERQUEST, and ASHERON'S CALL—continues to grow to a combined 500,000 subscribers, the problems related to providing service for these games get more interesting.

Verant Interactive and Sony Entertainment recently shipped their first expansion of the EVERQUEST gameworld, THE RUINS OF KUNARK. Initial impressions of the expansion are good (we'll review it in a future issue), but many players who pre-ordered it directly from Verant haven't received it yet. No, their copies weren't hijacked by a band of orcs, but they might as well have been. Many eager EVERQUEST fans pre-ordered the game and paid extra for overnight shipping. Their credit cards were duly charged, but they didn't receive the game by April 24th, when it went live.

We spoke to Verant's CEO John Smedley and he described what happened. "We had an order-processing problem. When we ran the pre-orders through the billing program that Sony wrote for us, it screwed up," Smedley told us. "We didn't know that it screwed up and passed the information along to the shipping company that we contracted with to fulfill our orders. The result was that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Incite	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
1602 A.D.	C-	C	B-	B+	B-	C	C+
Gabriel Knight III	D-	B+	B-	A+	C+	B+	B-
Interstate '82	D	C+	C-	C	C	C-	C
NFL Blitz 2000	B-	D+	B+	C	D+	C	C
Pharaoh	B+	B+	B-	B+	B+	B-	B
Planescape: Torment	A+	A	A	B+	A	B+	A
Quake III Arena	B-	B+	B-	B+	A	B-	B
Shadow Watch	C-	B-	C-	C	B-	C-	C
Superbike 2000	A+	A-	A	A+	A-	B+	A
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation	B+	B-	B+	C	B-	C-	C+

And the Winner Is...EA Sports' SUPERBIKE 2000 and Interplay's PLANESCAPE:TORMENT, both of which scored high grades across the board from the gaming press. The scores are all over the map for most of the other games. Check out GABRIEL KNIGHT III, in particular, which went from our own D- score to an A+ from *Incite*. Note that *Incite* replaces the now-defunct *PC Accelerator*, which in turn had replaced the also-defunct *PC Games*.

*** indicates game has not been rated** ● **red = editor's choice game**

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

July 1985

PC gaming's most famous debutante had her coming-out ball in 1985. Carmen Sandiego, the mysterious nemesis of Broderbund's geography games, made her first appearance in WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? She would go on to be the first PC game character to make the leap to TV, with her own Saturday-morning cartoon show.

10

July 1990

The *Advanced Dungeon & Dragons* license was pure gold a decade ago. The sales charts for early 1990 had three *AD&D* games in the top 25, including CHAMPIONS OF KRYNN, CURSE OF THE AZURE BONDS, and POOL OF RADIANCE. *D&D* may once again be a gold mine in these days of role-playing resurgence. See our cover story for just one of several games that will use the new *Third Edition D&D* rules.

5

July 1995

Our staff propeller-heads had their boxer shorts in knots over the promise of "the 3D-accelerator card revolution." The new graphics technology under development at places like Diamond, Creative Labs, and Matrox—with their hardware dedicated to the task of pumping out polygons and extreme resolutions of 800x600—promised to take gaming to The Next Level. And by golly if it didn't!

Land. Sea. Air. Underground.

The First Real-Time Strategy with Total 3D Warfare

"The look and feel of excellence."
-Strategy Plus, 2000

"Slick, challenging, surprising, huge: Earth 2150 seals the coffin of the 2D RTS forever."
– PC Gamer, 2000 –

Earth 2150's revolutionary 3D engine produces spectacular visual effects that fundamentally influence your strategy and tactics. It's not just a whole new way to look at RTS. It's a whole new way to play it.

EARTH 2150

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Violence

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CD-ROM

"Earth 2150 is a joy to play and behold."
-PC Gamer, 2000

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Rowan Software, creators of MiG ALLEY, CGW's 1999 Flight Sim Of The Year, are developing a WWII sim tentatively titled BATTLE OF BRITAIN. It will simulate 1,000 Luftwaffe raids in 1940, and let you pilot RAF or Luftwaffe craft in a dynamic campaign.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

they didn't get all the orders, and some customers didn't receive the expansion as a result. It was our responsibility. We fixed the problem for those who didn't receive KUNARK by the 24th by refunding their shipping, and giving them a free month of play. We've taken care of the problem now."

Smedley added that on the first night KUNARK was available, a record 60,934 players were logged on at the same time. Currently, there are 225,209 EVERQUEST subscribers, and Verant and Sony have just launched the game in Europe and expect to add another 100,000 players in the next three months. "We're adding servers like crazy," Smedley said.

Origin also recently shipped an ULTIMA ONLINE expansion called RENAISSANCE. This expansion doubled the landsize of the ULTIMA ONLINE world and introduced new areas where players are not allowed to prey (pkill) on other players without there being mutual consent. However, RENAISSANCE shipped to retail stores without the code on the server side fully-implemented, so early buyers of the expansion couldn't access the new land and other features. The original lands were still playable, however. What happened? Origin's David Swofford explained. "The weekend before the game shipped, an electrical storm knocked out the power for a couple of days. As a result, we were late in implementing all the server-side code. We offered players refunds or a free month of play as compensation." Swofford also talked about some of the other changes in RENAISSANCE. "The accessibility of the product has been increased. We have a new tutorial and a new area, Haven, where over 2,000 volunteer companions are available to help new players." Swofford said that ULTIMA ONLINE currently has about 185,000 subscribers.

Finally, there's ASHERON'S CALL from Turbine and Microsoft. Things were looking dire for this game, but it received a respite. Of the big three games, this one was the only one where any problems were strictly in-game and scripted. The game sports an engaging storyline that constantly evolves, and players recently saved the Direlands from the evil Shadow Battalions. That done, Turbine has declared a "Hero's Respite" as they plot the next dose of evil to visit upon the lands. Players likely don't have long to wait, but in the meantime they can enjoy some new changes, including increased loot on monsters and a new weapon, the rapier.
—Mark Asher

first look

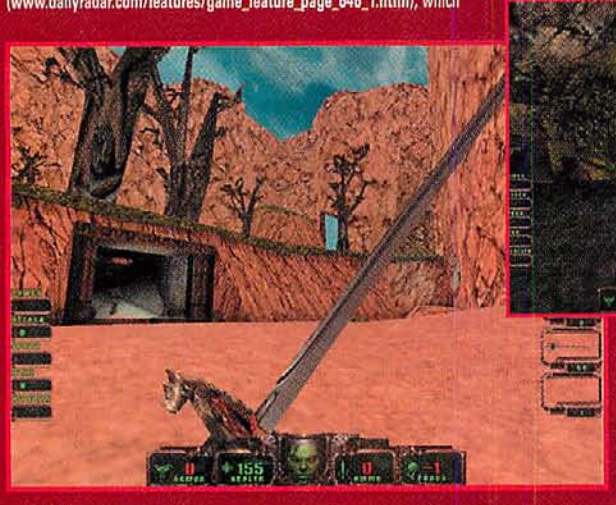
DAIKATANA: The Soap Opera Continues

Demo released to underwhelming response and online flame wars

Call it a miracle of miracles, check the temperature of Hell, insert many other clichés here, but know that it is true: DAIKATANA, John Romero's long-awaited debut game for Ion Storm, finally went gold. At press time, a demo had just been released to the public. And the online community has crucified it.

UseNet threads and web-based message boards echoed a general sense of disappointment. Complaints ranged from the poor enemy design to the dated graphics. Huge threads were generated on just the save-game system (in which you must collect save-gems scattered throughout levels) alone. People started referring back to the infamous "Bitch" ads, in an attempt to fuel their bile. Daily Radar posted a particularly vicious review of the demo (www.dailyradar.com/features/game_feature_page_646_1.html), which prompted Romero himself to blast the Web site in an email that was then posted publicly.

The game may very well be out by the time you read this, but don't expect the flame wars to die out any time soon. Love it or hate it, DAIKATANA will be the most-debated game of the year, easily.



Scooter Weighs In

Editor's Note: We asked our Inside Action columnist, Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen, to play the DAIKATANA demo and then share his feelings with us.

What do I think of the demo? Well, I'll admit that I was severely underwhelmed. I liked a few things. It felt like I was in a Ray Harryhausen film when fighting the skeletons, and I dug the Xena-style Discus. But what's with the "Ultimate Gas Hands?" The Deathmatch action *does* feel akin to QUAKE or even DOOM, in terms of sheer speed and firepower. Other than that, the game felt very dated. Of course, this *is* just a demo, but demos are generally indicative of final product — that's the point of them, after all. But there is a chance that the game could be decent. Heck, I remember disliking most of the JEDI KNIGHT demo when it first came out.

Maybe the game will salvage the wreckage that the demo has wrought. Or the demo could just be an indication of the rough road ahead. Whatever the case, look here for an honest-to-God objective review. I'm not even doing it, because I know that my hype-created-bias will seep in. I'm pretty sure someone who's been living in a hype-free cage, more-or-less, will be reviewing the actual game, and I'll probably just summarize my own impressions in a future column. *—Thierry Nguyen*

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first look

RED ALERT 2: Reheating the Cold War

Can Westwood recapture the fading C&C magic?

The Berlin Wall may have crumbled some time ago, but that means nothing when you're dealing with Westwood's alternate world history. RED ALERT 2 takes place a few years after the original game, with the victorious Allies having rebuilt most of Europe. A puppet dictator has taken Stalin's place in an Allied effort to avoid further conflict; unfortunately, the Allies underestimate this supposed figurehead, and before you can say "Incoming Nukes" war breaks out all over again.

The focus in RED ALERT 2 is on fast and furious battles, so Westwood has stripped down the TIBERIAN SUN engine to better handle the speed the designers are shooting for. While players won't get the layered, deformable terrain of TS along with other bells and whistles, it's not exactly like those new features were the lone bright spot in the gamer's generally tepid response to that title. Actually, the stripped-down engine looks in some ways better than TS, with a clean, brightly-illustrated feel that is much snazzier than the somewhat muddy graphics of the C&C sequel.

FRENCH FRIED The Eiffel Tower is *plus dangereux* in RED ALERT 2's alternate universe.

The Allies will have just a few new units, chief among them an all-terrain Tanya better suited to spreading her particular brand of destruction; and Terror Drones, unmanned spider-like units designed specifically to counter the tank rushes that dominated the first game. The Soviets will enjoy the most changes, thanks in part to their development of psychic abilities: The Yuri unit will mentally attack enemies, psychically-controlled giant squids will terrorize the oceans, and the Psychic Sensor building will display which Soviet structure is currently being targeted by Allied forces. Look to *CGW* for more details as the game nears its fall ship date. *—Robert Coffey*

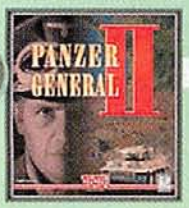
BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER The emphasis this time is on fast and furious battles. Will they have the depth to please hardcore gamers?

The Dumpster Diver

CGW Looks Into the Bargain Bins for Some Good Deals

Tired of forking out hordes of cash for crappy games? We hear you. We went on yet another dumpster-diving excursion at our local EBX, and found four classic games that together will cost you five dollars less than a brand-new copy of MESSIAH, this month's poster boy of Suck. Yes, instead of contributing to Dave Perry's hair-gel fund, you can buy four *CGW* Editor's Choice games—one of which now resides in *CGW*'s hallowed Hall of Fame.

PANZER GENERAL II $10
Turn-based wargaming at its best.



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-Computer Gaming World, June 2000

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-Computer Games Magazine, May 2000

"Bottom Line: If you want a computer that'll make having to read a game's system recommendations moot for the foreseeable future, Falcon has got the system for you."
-PC Gamer, December 1999

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www.falcon-nw.com

Bethesda has announced a sequel to the underappreciated MAGIC & MAYHEM. The new game, MAGIC & MAYHEM: THE ART OF MAGIC, is due January 2001 and will again be developed by Mythos Games, makers of the original X-COM.

pipeline

We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month, other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

Notable Releases

DAIKATANA: Yeah, the demo ain't so great, but this is *John Romero* we're talking about here. He did DOOM and QUAKE! That talent must have come from somewhere! Maybe the real deal is better than the lackluster demo. Then again, maybe not.

EVERQUEST: RUINS OF KUNARK: The king of online fairy-hacking has just gotten some huge tracts of land. A new race, a new continent, snazzier-looking enemies, and a host of other additions and balance changes round this expansion disc out. It's time to get addicted again, we think.

IMPERIUM GALACTICA II: Hey, this looked really cool when we last saw it – the slick 3D-ness of HOMEWORLD combined with old-fashioned, turn-based galaxy conquering. The many UseNet reports about bugs are putting a hazy nebula in the way, though, so we won't know for sure.

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Age Of Empires II Expansion Microsoft	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	December 2000
Anachronox Eidos	March 2000	September 2000
Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Summer 2000	September 2000
NEW Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Comanche vs. Hokum Empire Interactive	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
NEW Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood	Winter 2000	November 2000
NEW Commandos 2 Eidos	Fall 2000	November 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Crimson Skies Microsoft	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
UPDATE Dark Reign 2 Activision	Summer 2000	August 2000
Deus Ex Eidos	April 2000	June 2000
UPDATE Diablo II Blizzard	June 2000	July 2000
NEW Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Who Knows?	They ain't telling
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Evil Dead: Hail To The King THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Felony Pursuit THQ	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Fly!2K G.O.D.	Winter 2000	December 2000
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Good & Evil GT	Who Knows?	Possibly canned
Ground Control Sierra Studios	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
UPDATE Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	January 2001
Harpoon 4 SSI	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Homeworld: Cataclysm Sierra	Spring 2000	September 2000
Icewind Dale Interplay	June 2000	June 2000
NEW I'm Going In Eidos	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE KISS: Psycho Circus G.O.D.	May 2000	June 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	February 2001

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
UPDATE MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Motorcross Madness 2 Microsoft	June 2000	June 2000
NBA Inside Drive 2001 Microsoft	November 2000	November 2000
Need for Speed: Motor City Electronic Arts	Winter 2000	Way too secretive
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	April 2001	Summer 2001
NFL Fever 2001 Microsoft	August 2000	August 2000
Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Praetorians Eidos	Winter 2000	December 2000
Reach for the Stars SSI	Spring 2000	May 2000
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000	November 2000
Rock GT Interactive	Fall 2000	Possibly canned
Rune G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Settlers IV Blue Byte	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Shogun: Total War EA	June 2000	June 2000
Sid Meier's Civilization III MicroProse	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Silent Hunter II SSI	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
SimMars Maxis	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
Simon The Sorceror 3D Southpeak Interactive	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster Interactive	August 2000	August 2000
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Christmas
The Longest Journey FunCom	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
*Tribes 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Triple Play 2001 EA Sports	April 2000	April 2000
NEW The Undying Dreamworks	Winter 2000	November 2000
Vampire: The Masquerade Activision	May 2000	????
WarCraft III Blizzard	December 2000	Summer 2001
Warlords: Battlecry SSI	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Werewolf ASC Games ???	Who Knows?	We Sure Don't
NEW Zeus: Master Of Olympus Sierra	Fall 2000	September 2000

Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	3	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	5	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
4	6	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
5	4	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
6	8	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
7	9	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
8	16	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
9	13	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
10	7	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
11	10	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
12	11	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
13	12	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
14	14	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
15	23	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
16	43	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
17	22	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
18	20	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
19	17	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
NEW	20	– **Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
21	21	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
22	18	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
23	19	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
24	24	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
25	25	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
26	30	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
27	36	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
28	28	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
29	34	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
NEW	30	– **Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
31	31	**EverQuest** Sony	4
32	32	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
NEW	33	– **Nox** Westwood Studios	3.5
NEW	34	– **Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
35	37	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
36	33	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
NEW	37	– **Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
38	29	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
NEW	39	– **Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
NEW	40	– **Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at *www.computergaming.com.* The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

The Top 40 games have changed now that STARCRAFT and QUAKE II are off the list. (When games reach the ripe-old-age of two, they are retired from the poll and become eligible for the Hall of Fame. STARCRAFT was inducted last month.) You'll find several new games on the list, while others have moved up, particularly THE SIMS, which shot up 27 spaces to #16.

The most popular genres remain action, strategy, and RPGs. Strategy games represent 35 percent of the Top 40; action games occupy 25 percent; and RPGs equal 22.5 percent. Sports and simulations combined only amount to 15 percent. Pity the lonely adventure title, GRIM FANDANGO, the sole standard-bearer for a dead genre.

Top Action Games

1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	3	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
4	5	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
5	6	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	3	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
3	2	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
NEW	4	– **Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4.5
5	4	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4

Top Simulations Games

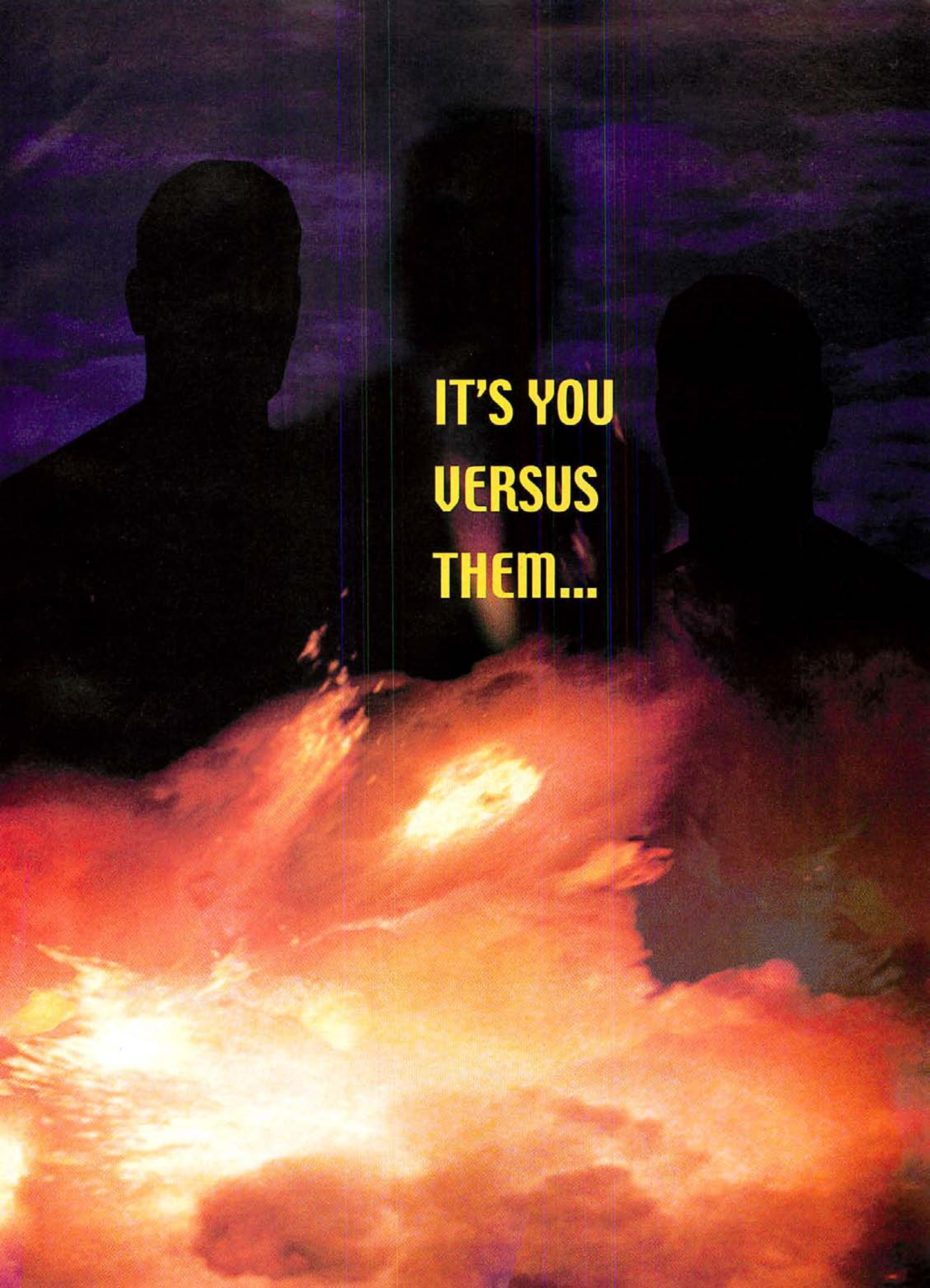
1	1	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
2	2	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
3	4	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
4	5	**European Air War** Hasbro Interactive	4
5	6	**World War II Fighters** Electronic Arts	4.5

Top Sports/Racing Games

1	2	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
NEW	2	– **Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
3	3	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
4	4	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5
5	5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

1	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
2	3	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
3	4	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
4	5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
5	6	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5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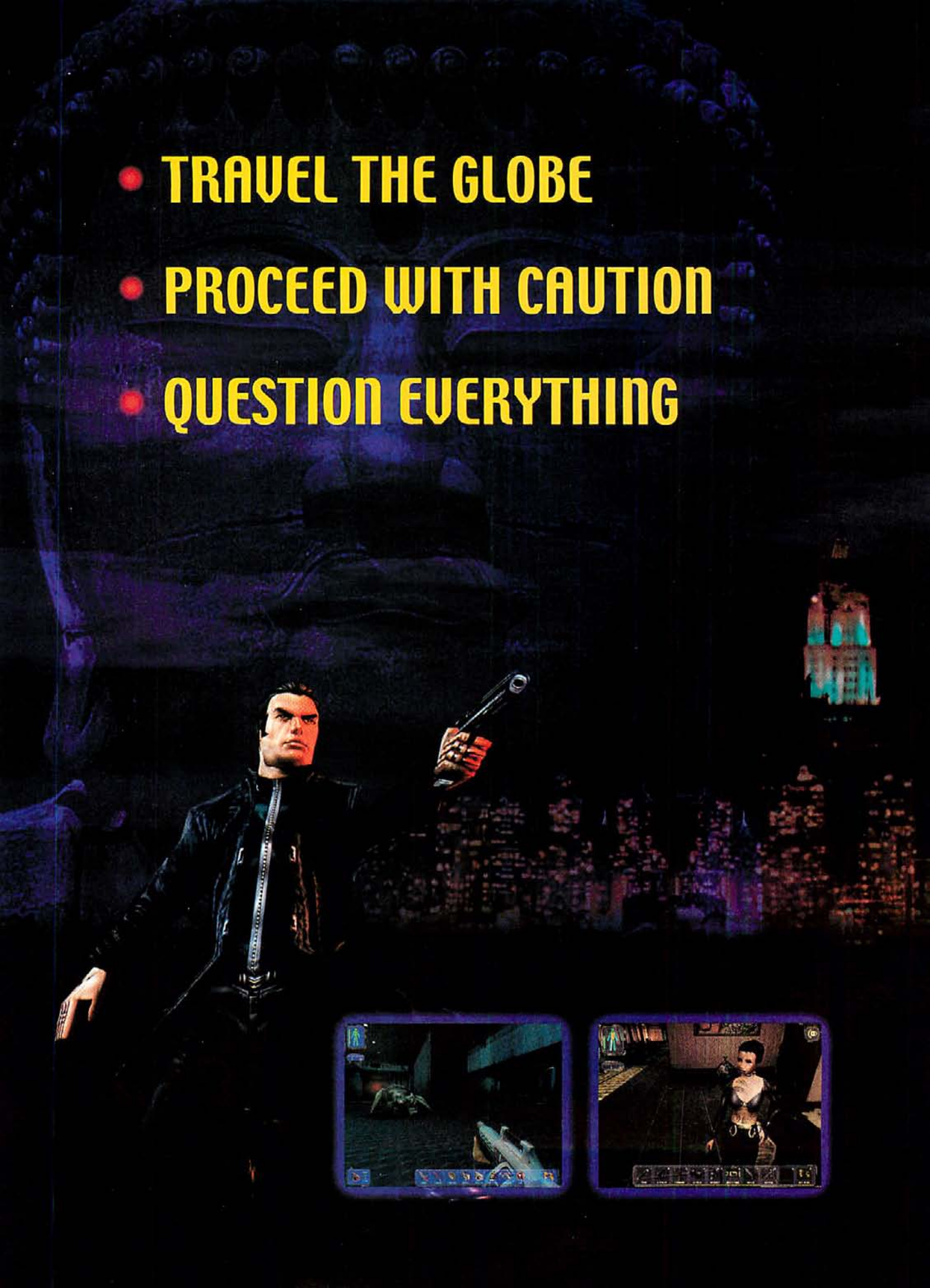
- PROCEED WITH CAUTION
- QUESTION EVERYTHING



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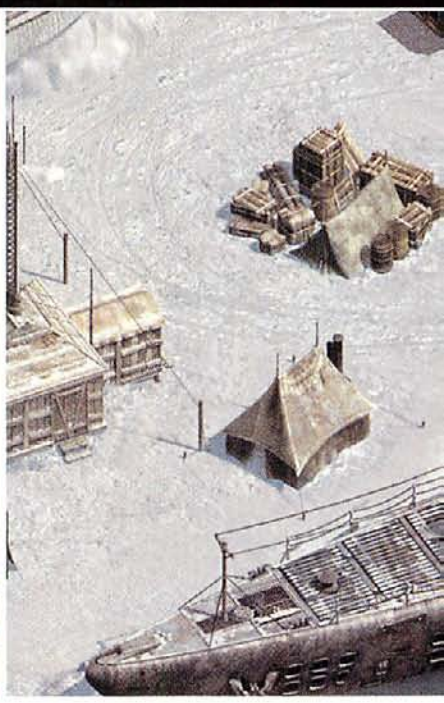


Commandos 2

Grittier, prettier, and more forgiving, COMMANDOS 2 will bring you back alive

by Ian Marsh

During the height of the real-time strategy glut two years ago—when publishers hawked more than 30 RTS games with names like WAR INC., WARBREEDS, WARGAMES, WARSPORT, WARZONE 2100, and the ever-popular DOMINION—an unknown studio from Spain snuck in with a totally fresh WWII tactical-combat game that stole gamers' hearts like a commando with nylons. COMMANDOS' focus on stealth tactics using five unique squad members appealed to gamers who'd grown weary of throwing huge numbers of generic units at nondescript enemies. Solving the puzzle in each mission was often frustrating, but there were lots of cool things to play with—like tanks and machine-gun emplacements—and the graphics were strikingly detailed. Combined sales of COMMANDOS and its add-on, BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY, sold over 1.2 million copies worldwide, which is about 1.1 million copies more than most of its RTS contemporaries.

COMMANDOS 2
GENRE: Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** Nov. 2000
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios
CONTACT: www.eidosinteractive.com/commandos/

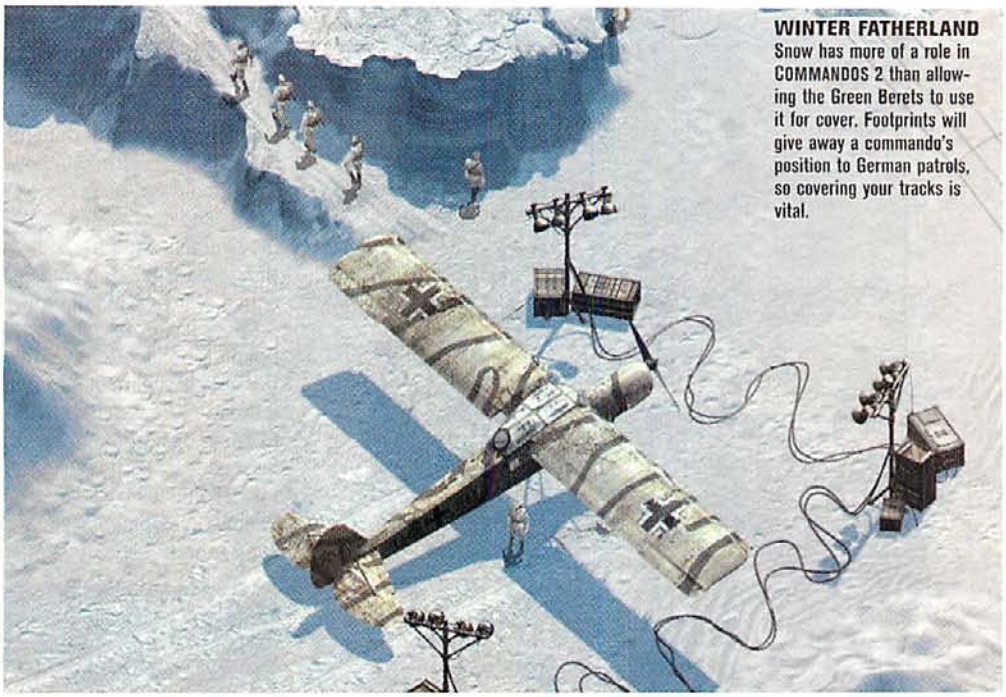
For the past two years, Pyro has been working on the inevitable sequel. Naturally, they don't consider it a sequel, since it will have an all-new engine, new artwork, and new challenges, but the basic gameplay remains the same. All of the characters have re-signed for the next tour, including Green Beret Jack "Butcher" O'Hara, driver Sam Brooklyn, Fins the marine, Fireman the gunner, Duke the sniper, and Frenchy the spy. They will be joined by the comely Natasha, who first appeared in BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY. Not all of her abilities have been determined, but she will keep the ability to infiltrate the enemy as a civilian, and Pyro is adding opportunities for her to act as a sniper and to provide medical backup.

The real newcomer is Paul Toledo, known as Lupin, who is a natural thief. He'll be able to climb or jump, sneak past German soldiers and steal objects from them, or look through windows to see what's inside. His skills underscore how you'll need to use the special abilities of each commando to solve the missions.

Grand Scale

Pyro's aim with COMMANDOS 2 is to make it even more immersive than the original. The early version we saw ran briskly at 640x480, and looked dramatically more detailed than the original, with a far greater sense of scale and depth. Resolution will go up to 1024x768, but the lowest resolution shows the local environments better and the tactically important areas for gameplay. The interface has been improved with the addition of a small map and the ability to quickly zoom in and out of the environment.

Pyro plans to include missions set in Europe, the Pacific, and Asia. Nowhere is the visual scale of the game more apparent than in the scenario based on the



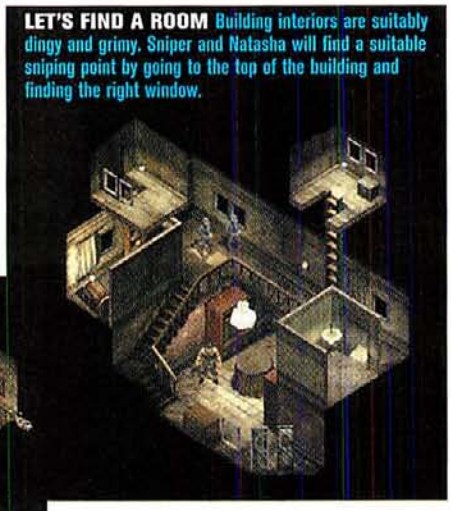
WINTER FATHERLAND Snow has more of a role in COMMANDOS 2 than allowing the Green Berets to use it for cover. Footprints will give away a commando's position to German patrols, so covering your tracks is vital.

famous prisoner-of-war camp Colditz—the designer's favorite, but a nightmare for the graphics department, which had to create an authentic replica of the old Saxon castle. The magnitude of their task is clear, because for every window in the castle, there's a corresponding interior that has to be designed.

Some of the missions focus on outdoor operations, such as the Bridge Over The River Kwai. Others are set indoors, such as inside the concrete pens of a submarine base. Interiors relate completely to exteriors, so you can send in a sniper and pick a suitable vantage place to cover the actions of your other men. You can even look through the window to aim. Once you've entered the building, the game reveals a fully-rotatable 3D plan of the interior, so that hidden nooks and crannies can be explored.

Although it looks 3D, COMMANDOS 2 remains a strictly 2D game. By sticking with 2D, Pyro could once again focus on lavishly detailed scenes, with buildings conveying a period atmosphere—right down to the grimy wallpaper and tiled floors. Japanese gun emplacements, bamboo huts, and the palm-fringed beaches of Pacific Ocean atolls are all similarly convincing.

Underneath the 2D visuals is a 3D pathing system of ramps and corridors that define the environment for the characters. Balustrades and walls can be vaulted by soldiers, yet will stop vehicles from rolling over them. Characters can get into caves, dive underwater, and swim along river beds, the paths of which correspond to the surface route of the water. Air supply will be limited, so the commando will have to come up for breath and risk exposure to the Germans. Terrain can be used to advantage, not just to duck around corners, but to leap from bridges into rivers and to swim to safety, touches that lend the game a very heroic and cinematic quality.



LET'S FIND A ROOM Building interiors are suitably dingy and grimy. Sniper and Natasha will find a suitable sniping point by going to the top of the building and finding the right window.

Your squad will once again be able to take the controls of various vehicles, including Panzer IIIs and jeeps. Tanks will require two characters to operate—the Driver to move them, and the Gunner to fire the main gun. Vehicle movements are being carefully modeled to simulate realistic handling, but Pyro says the vehicles will still be easy to control. The list of vehicles isn't final yet, but the developers promise lots of variety, including an elephant—a real one, not the German tank destroyer.

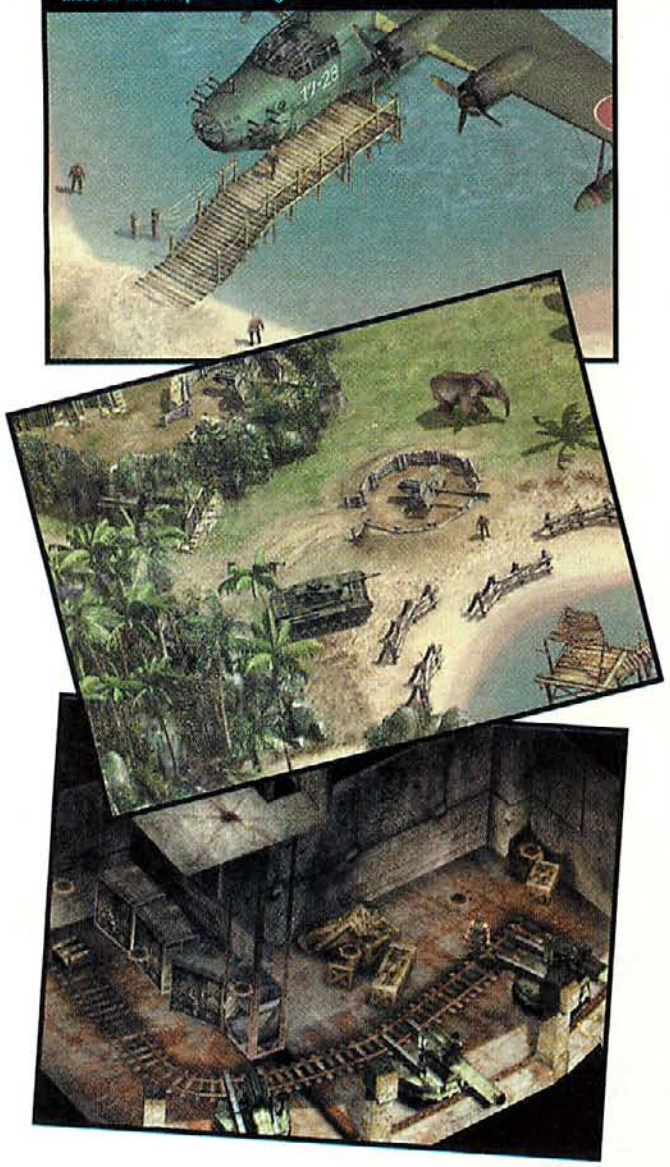
You See Anything, Schultz?

If you played the first game, you know how frustrating it could be to see your men get wasted the moment they came within enemy range. The visibility rules have changed so that sentries now have to spot your commando, aim, and shoot—which should come as some relief for COMMANDOS vets used to fumbling for their weapons on a character's backpack. The new visibility routines mean you'll be able to round a corner and duck back without being shot, although the enemies may be alerted to your presence. Running will also make it harder for your soldiers to get hit.

In addition to your squad, allied soldiers will occasionally be available. Although they'll usually be in combat, such as a firefight, they can be ordered to perform tasks such as keeping lookout or patrolling an area. The soldiers are useful for ambushes, using a commando as bait to lure Gerry into a trap. It's just one of the points where running away—a key action in surviving some of the missions—becomes vital.

However, if you kill one enemy soldier in an area, his compatriots

BEACH BOYS Verdant jungle and palm-strewn shores conceal deadly gun emplacements, which can be turned against the enemy. Behind the bamboo exteriors lie rooms that are as detailed – if less grand – than those of the European buildings.



will know it's a dangerous area and will react accordingly. So unless you time the ambush perfectly, shooting one soldier just as he rounds a corner will only result in the others becoming cautious, rather than following their unlucky squad mate to their deaths.

While Allied soldiers will react to circumstances, the commandos are still dependent on the wits of the player. The designers firmly believe that control of the key characters should not be taken away from the player at any point. The downside to this is that your elite commandos may survive their perilous mission only to be run over by their own truck. But that's the price you pay to control a squad of loyal—albeit witless—killers.

Minor issues like these aside, COMMANDOS 2 is clearly building on an already strong formula. Rather than rely on the novelty value of a few new characters, Pyro has taken a broader view to improve its game, from graphics quality, to game design to enemy artificial intelligence. With the lessons learned from the first game, and the two years it's taken to develop the sequel, there's every reason to believe Pyro's maniacs and their progeny will perform even greater feats of valor the second time around. CGW

BLOW IT SKY HIGH Taking inspiration from classic war movies, the wooden bridge from the film *The Bridge Over The River Kwai* is a key target for your explosives expert.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS 2 Pyro Studios recreated this famous P.O.W. camp from early plans of the actual building. The Germans used Colditz Castle for Allied officers who repeatedly escaped from other camps. Now, it's your job to break it.

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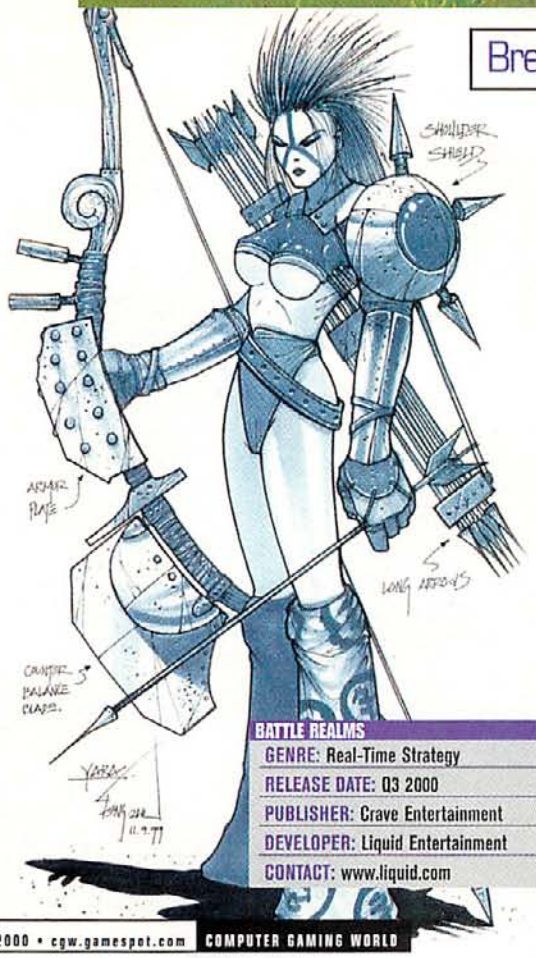
HORSE-JACKING This sequence shows off the great 3D world of BATTLE REALMS and how horses and riders are treated as separate entities, not as one unit. Here, a thief slips out from the cover of the forest canopy, hops on his distracted enemy's mount, then rides off.



Breathing new life into the RTS | by Robert Coffey

Battle Realms

Think about your standard real-time strategy game. When you stomp that anonymous geek online, have you really achieved a strategic, military victory? Or have you actually achieved an economic victory, scrambling up the tech tree and amassing resources faster than the other guy in order to finance that horde of tanks/mutalisks/heavy cavalry you just lassoed and threw at your victim? Do you play games because you enjoy monopolizing crystals/gold/tiberium? Or because you want to smack someone around? If it's smacking you want, then BATTLE REALMS may be the answer to your strategic prayers, a game that may well change what we expect from a real-time strategy game.

BATTLE REALMS
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2000
PUBLISHER: Crave Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Liquid Entertainment
CONTACT: www.liquid.com

It's Alive!

What sets BATTLE REALMS apart from the rest of the RTS horde? Is it the four distinct races battling in a fantasy universe with a heavy Asian influence? Is it the gorgeously rendered 3D world? Is it the broad assortment of experience-gaining, special-ability attacking, troop bonus granting hero units? No, though all that stuff is more than good. Where BATTLE REALMS makes its big break from the pack is in its Living Resource System, an intricately interconnected, realistic approach to the standard resource model that will force gamers to make critical strategic decisions through every moment of every game while simultaneously serving up a bunch of exciting new play options.

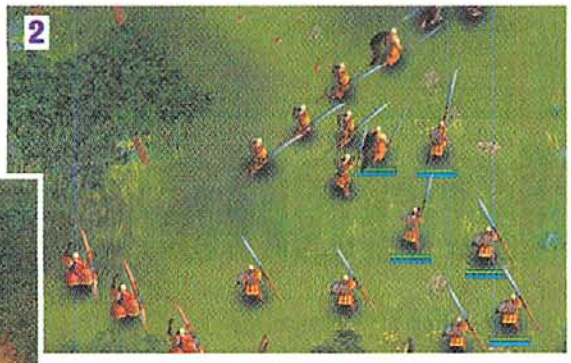
The goal is to keep players from just charging up a tech tree, and

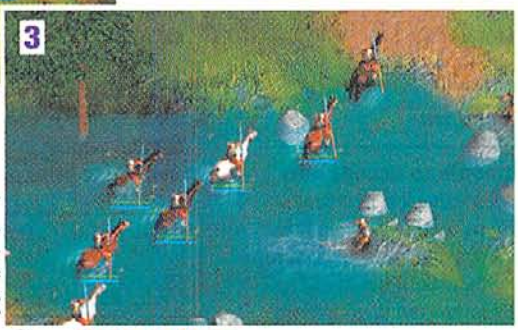
MI DOJO ES SU DOJO A typical village nestled in the woods. Note the realistic scale of the units to the buildings – when units train at dojos, you'll actually see them enter and start sparring.

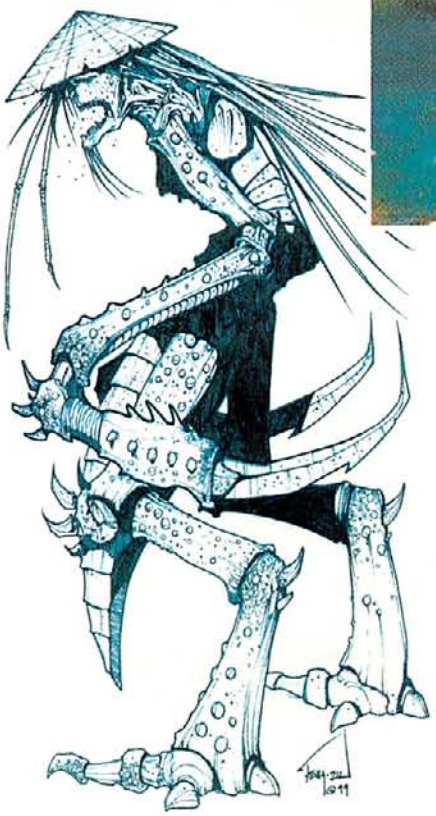
instead make them measure every decision by how their actions affect other game dynamics. For example, while there are tons of buildings to upgrade your units, your units aren't manufactured by the buildings as in a standard RTS. Instead, a changeable birthrate generates peasants for your village. You can task these peons with harvesting rice and fetching water, or you can take a hit in your resource collection by training them to become spearmen or archers. Once trained, you can send them off to do battle, or you can invest in further training, sending your spearmen to a dojo to become ninjas for instance. Ninjas are great units, make no mistake, but your ability to fend off cavalry charges will suffer somewhat if you forgo a sturdy defensive line of spearmen. The bottom line is this—whatever you do with virtually any element in the game will affect other elements, forcing you to weigh the pros and cons of any strategic choice you face. *That's* why they call them strategy games, fellas.

This Clan Is My Clan

The campaign tells the story of Kenji, a prodigal son returning to the game's mythical land to reunite four rival clans: the corrupt Lotus Clan; the animalistic Wolf Clan; the spiritually honorable Dragon Clan; and the vicious Serpent Clan. Every Clan features an entirely unique set of units, but the single-player game only lets you play as either the Dragon or Serpent Clan (in keeping with the game's Asian flair, early yin/yang moral decisions will decide your path). Every clan will be available in multiplayer contests.







1) A squad of Dragon clansmen face off against a cadre of vicious Wolf Clan members.

2) Customizable battle plans and formations will make armies of mixed units fight at their most effective level and keep skirmishes from degenerating into the standard RTS free-for-all.

3) Shallow portions of rivers will be passable by units both on foot and horseback. And that water ripples in a real purty way, too.

And what an assortment of units you get: undead units that scoop handfuls of putrefying organs from their guts to hurl at enemies; pack masters that command packs of ravenous wolves; fire-breathing hero units that can gain experience to the point that they can immolate huge amounts of enemies in a phoenix-like eruption of fire. It's the most exciting and ambitious mix of units we've ever seen.

Commanding the highly specialized units in crowded battles will be made more feasible through Battle Plans. Essentially, every mix of units will operate from a logical playbook, with cavalry charging through enemies or flanking to reach the archers in the back ranks, while defensemen hold the line against attackers. While the BATTLE REALMS team will be spending a lot of time tuning these plans, they know gamers will want the opportunity to create their own and will include an editor when the game ships.

There's so much more to this game, that these two pages can barely scratch the surface—a living world where birds fly out of trees to give away concealed troops, the yin/yang system that influences every unit's effectiveness, the more than 40 Zen Master heroes that are so vital to success in the game. We can tell you this much, though: BATTLE REALMS is a game we will definitely be keeping our eyes on. Stay tuned for more. CGW

5 Resources in BATTLE REALMS and How They Affect Each Other

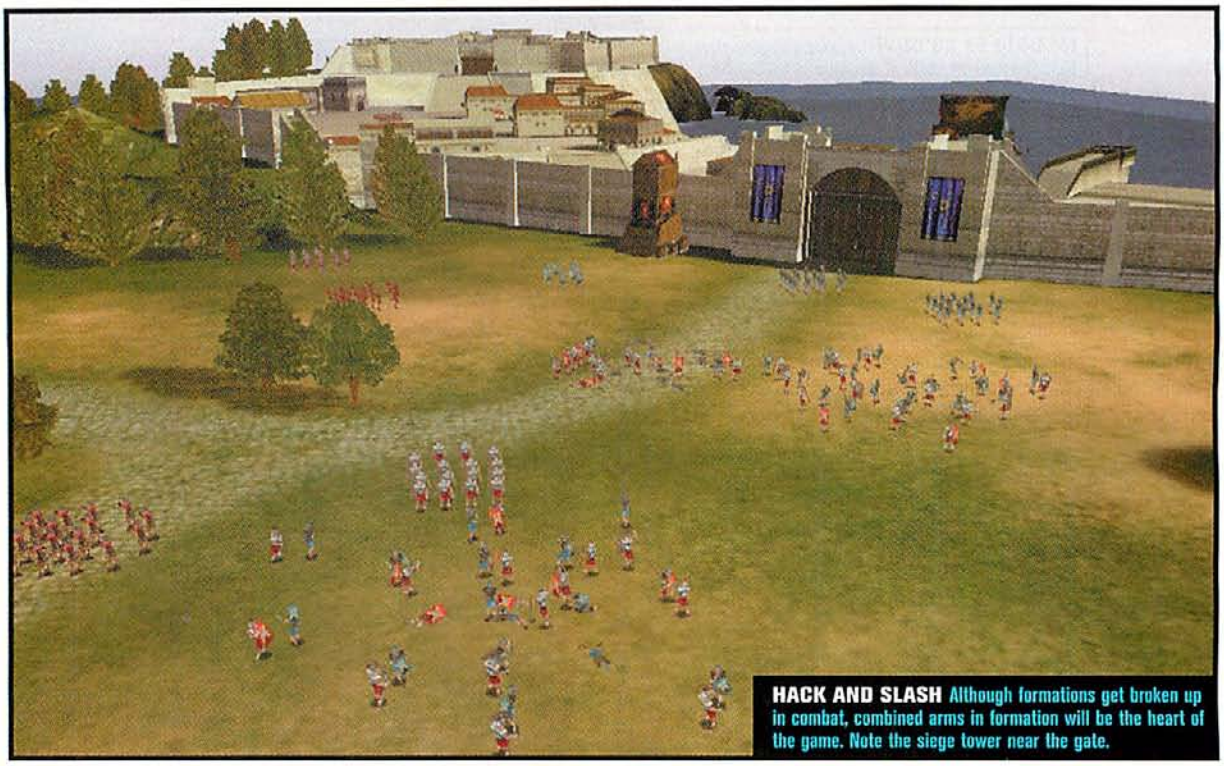
1) HORSES Horses are caught in the wild and tamed. Virtually any battle unit can hop aboard. The flip side is that enemies can steal them, or, in the case of the Wolf Clan, feed the steeds to their lupine hordes.

2) RICE Every unit and building requires rice to sustain it. The more peasants in the fields, the more rice you produce. Special Zen Masters will increase production.

3) PEASANTS Peasants impact almost every aspect of the game, providing the raw material for every combat unit as well as constructing buildings and tending farms.

4) WATER With fire a living element in the game, water will be needed to douse blazes.

5) SACRIFICIAL UNITS Some of the higher-echelon units can be sacrificed on altars to summon powerful dragons or Spirit Warrior-generating Necromancers.



HACK AND SLASH Although formations get broken up in combat, combined arms in formation will be the heart of the game. Note the siege tower near the gate.

Praetorians

Pyro recaptures the glory of Roman conquest By Ian Marsh

REG: All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

XERXES: Brought peace.

REG: Oh, peace? Shut up!

—Monty Python's The Life of Brian

It's not easy getting people to accept new technologies. And the less they know, it seems the less they want to change. So it was when Rome wanted to share a few modern conveniences like central heating, hot baths, and paved roads with their neighbors. Europeans weren't really interested in what Rome had to offer. So the Romans—good businessmen that they were—resorted to a few high-pressure sales techniques, such as the Legionaries, whose short swords and steel-tipped pikes ultimately produced the suasion the Gauls and Britons needed to get with the program.

PRAETORIANS isn't about the finer points of ancient Roman civilization. It's all about the violent, bloody oppression of people using armored phalanxes backed by archers and siege weapons. Similar in many ways to Electronic Arts' upcoming SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, it's one of the new breed of strategy games emphasizing formation combat in a beautifully-detailed 3D environment. And to help you admire the scenery and get a

TOWERS OF POWER Stockades and watchtowers help defend the enemy nation of Gaul.

better view of the action, you'll also be able to pan and zoom around the environment to get a closer view of your men leaping from the towers and fighting on the battlements. Welcome to the new wave of 3D strategy games—this is what we've been waiting for.

Like SHOGUN, units are represented by blocks of small, finely-detailed 3D men. Over 10 types of Roman soldiers are included, including archers and the elite Praetorians of the title, as well as 20 types for the enemy nations of Egypt and Gaul, including Chariots. Each unit type has strengths and weaknesses against other troops, so archers will be very weak in hand-to-hand combat, but deliver a devastating ranged attack; and the Praetorians are heavily armored and slow, vulnerable to catapults or fire, but strong in melee. Cavalry can use their speed to close quickly on archers, but are vulnerable to pikemen. Success depends on using the right combination of units, which requires an understanding of combined arms attacks and support.

Formations aren't just for looks; they change the attack and defense values of troops. Heavy infantry—such as the Praetorians—can form a testudo, for example, increasing their resistance to archery, but further reducing their speed and increasing their vulnerability to catapults and fire. Pikemen can form up to block a narrow passage, such as a bridge, bracing their weapons to resist attack—especially from cavalry.

Orders of battle are largely fixed from mission to mission, but variety comes in the form of building resources, which can be used to create catapults, assault towers, and scorpions. Assault towers and ships—which are used only for moving large bodies of troops—look particularly impressive, as waves of men quickly issue from them over a wall or across a dock, and form up ready to face their foes.

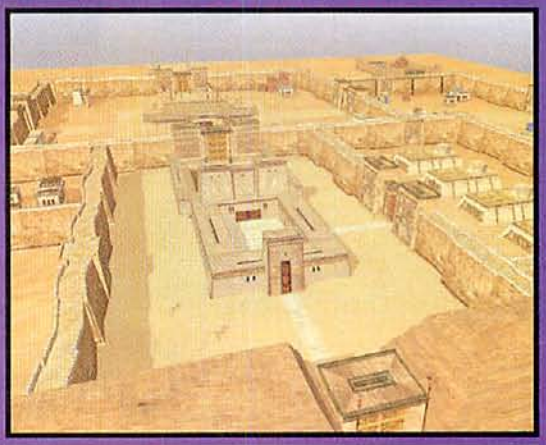
PRAETORIANS
GENRE: Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios

Multiplay will reportedly be an important element of the game, with 16 single-player missions intended to act as rigorous preparation for combat against other human opponents over the Internet. While the single-player missions initially focus on the internal strife of Rome, after gaining sufficient experience, the forces of Egypt and Gaul come into play. Night missions add to the challenge, restricting visibility and slowing troop movement. You'll be able to see units, but you won't be able to identify them until you're on them. Torches and fires will help you see more clearly, but they'll also make your men stand out more.

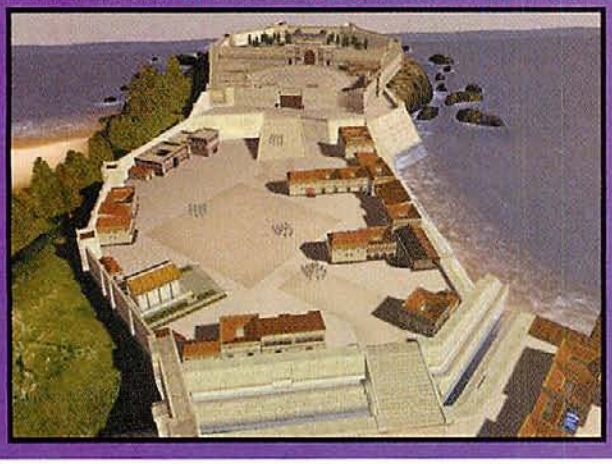
PRAETORIANS is shaping up well, with some impressive ancient settings, including sea-bounded citadels and even the mighty pyramids. Pyro has initially concentrated on getting the camera controls for the 3D environment right so that they don't get in the way of the game; once you've decided on a particular viewpoint, you'll be able to leave the view alone most of the time.

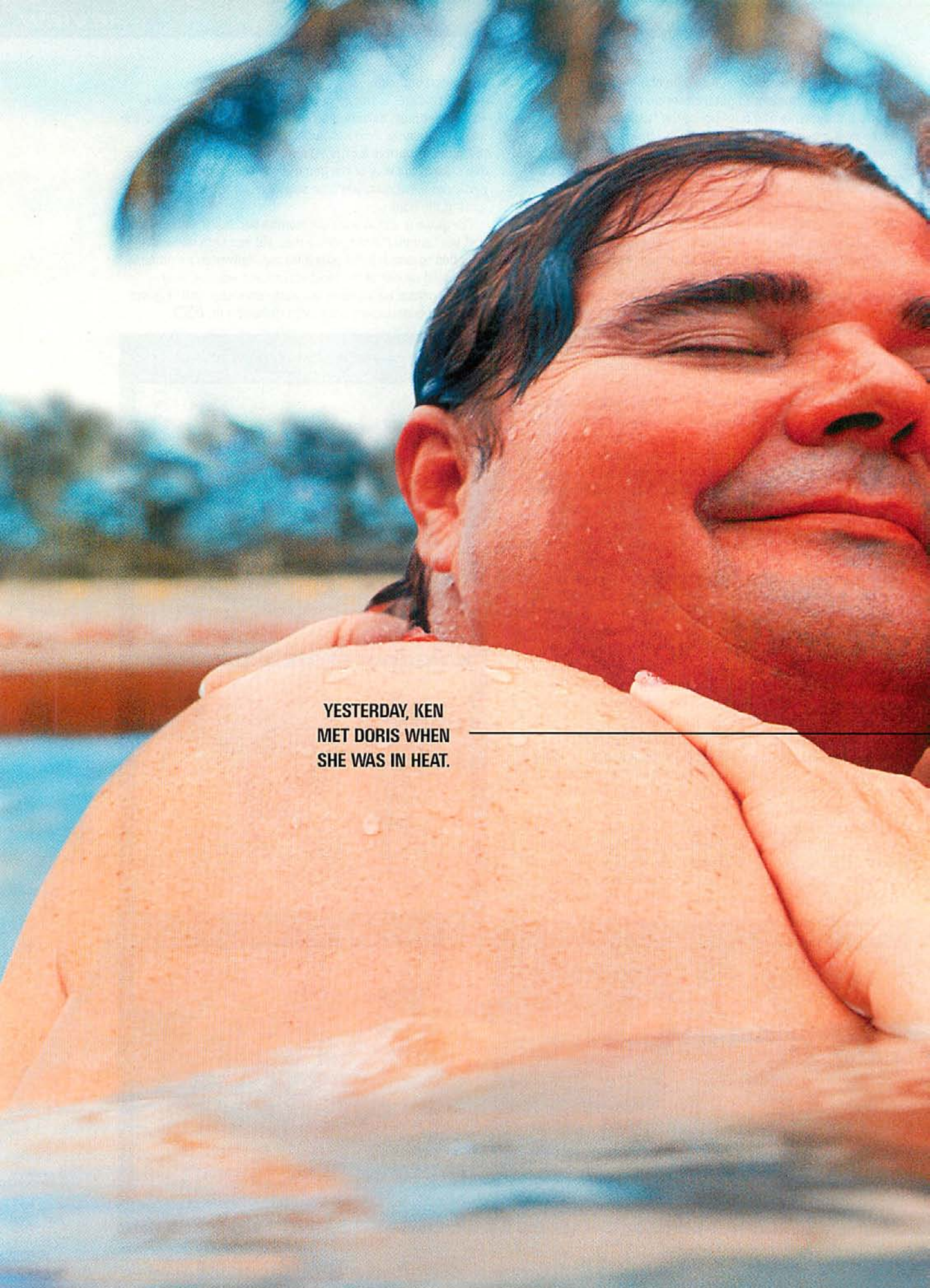
The game is still at least six months out, but it's obvious that the designers are treating their subject with obsessive attention to detail. If the gameplay can deliver on its promise, this should be one of the most stylish and exciting new strategy games we've seen in a long time—the kind of game siege-loving strategists have been dreaming of. CGW

CITY OF KINGS Your legions will face stiff Egyptian resistance, with archers on the battlements and Chariot attacks at your flanks.



SEASIDE CITADEL Pyro's fanatical focus is obvious from this exquisitely detailed fortress. You can pan around each scene to get a better view of the action.




YESTERDAY, KEN
MET DORIS WHEN
SHE WAS IN HEAT.

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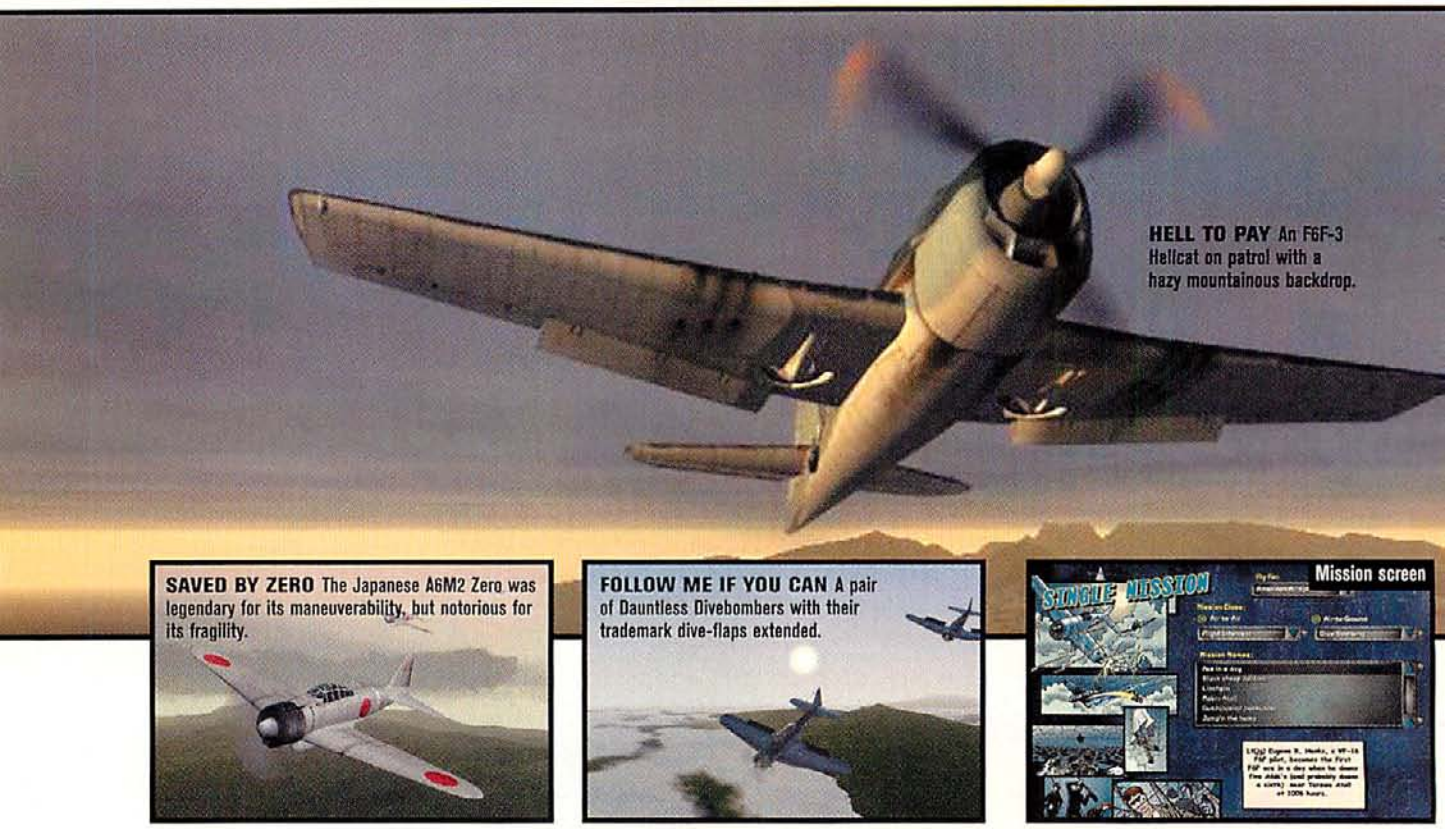

HELL TO PAY An F6F-3 Hellcat on patrol with a hazy mountainous backdrop.

SAVED BY ZERO The Japanese A6M2 Zero was legendary for its maneuverability, but notorious for its fragility.

FOLLOW ME IF YOU CAN A pair of Dauntless Divebombers with their trademark dive-flaps extended.

Mission screen

Flight Combat Simulator 2

Microsoft is gunning for an airborne RPG by Dave Salvator

Perhaps the biggest problem dogging flight simulations is the very name of the genre itself. Many airborne titles endeavor to cram loads of realism into the experience, but their obsession with turn rate, wind shear, and g-load effects often comes at the expense of creating an entertaining game. Maybe this genre needs to be re-christened "flight games," and leave the domain of flight simulators to NASA and the airlines.

With its upcoming FLIGHT COMBAT SIMULATOR 2 (FCS2), Microsoft is endeavoring to create an entertaining flight game set in the Pacific Theatre of Operation of World War II. Above and beyond accurate flight modeling, the emphasis here is on putting the air combat into the context of a larger storyline, as well as making you feel the personal urgency of bringing those wingmen home alive.

By covering this often-neglected front of WWII, the FCS2 team also brings some equally neglected planes out of mothballs, including Grumman's F4F Wildcat and F6F-3 Hellcat, the A6M2 Zero, and the Douglas "Dauntless" Divebomber. Latter WWII birds will also be there, like the Vought F4U-1A Corsair—a.k.a. "The Ensign Killer," due to its low-altitude handling difficulties.

FLIGHT COMBAT SIMULATOR 2
GENRE: Simulation • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Microsoft
CONTACT: www.microsoft.com/games

To help set the stage, the FCS2 development team is creating interface screens that have a 1940's comic book feel to them, and rather than taking the 30,000-foot view of the war's progression, FCS2's story instead concentrates on the other airmen in your fighter wing, and the events that unfold in your little corner of the war. The intent is to give these airmen depth of character, and create the sense that these are your buddies and you'd defend them with your life. When you do get into the furballs, you'll be able to issue orders to your wingmen and get feedback on their status. And if they've got their own skins to save, they may not come to your rescue.

Of course, it wouldn't be a realistic flight game without solid flight models and an impressive graphics engine, and the FCS2 team is planning to implement both. As you can see from these screens, FCS2—despite its focus on narrative and context—isn't skimping on the visuals, and you'll have another factor to contend with that dogged pilots throughout WWII: inclement weather—clouds, haze, rain—that made flying difficult, if not impossible. Using U.S. Geological Survey terrain data, the FCS2 team will recreate the real islands and landmasses of the South Pacific that the U.S. and Japanese pilots struggled over.

And for the revisionist historians out there, FCS2 will include a graphical mission editor; the same one, in fact, that FCS2 developers used to create the game's own missions. And, of course, FCS2's multiplayer options will include mêlées through Microsoft's The Zone. Hopefully, if FCS2 covers the fundamentals well, and succeeds in placing great flight-combat gameplay within a compelling story, it could help this embattled genre's stock recover and find greatness again. CGW

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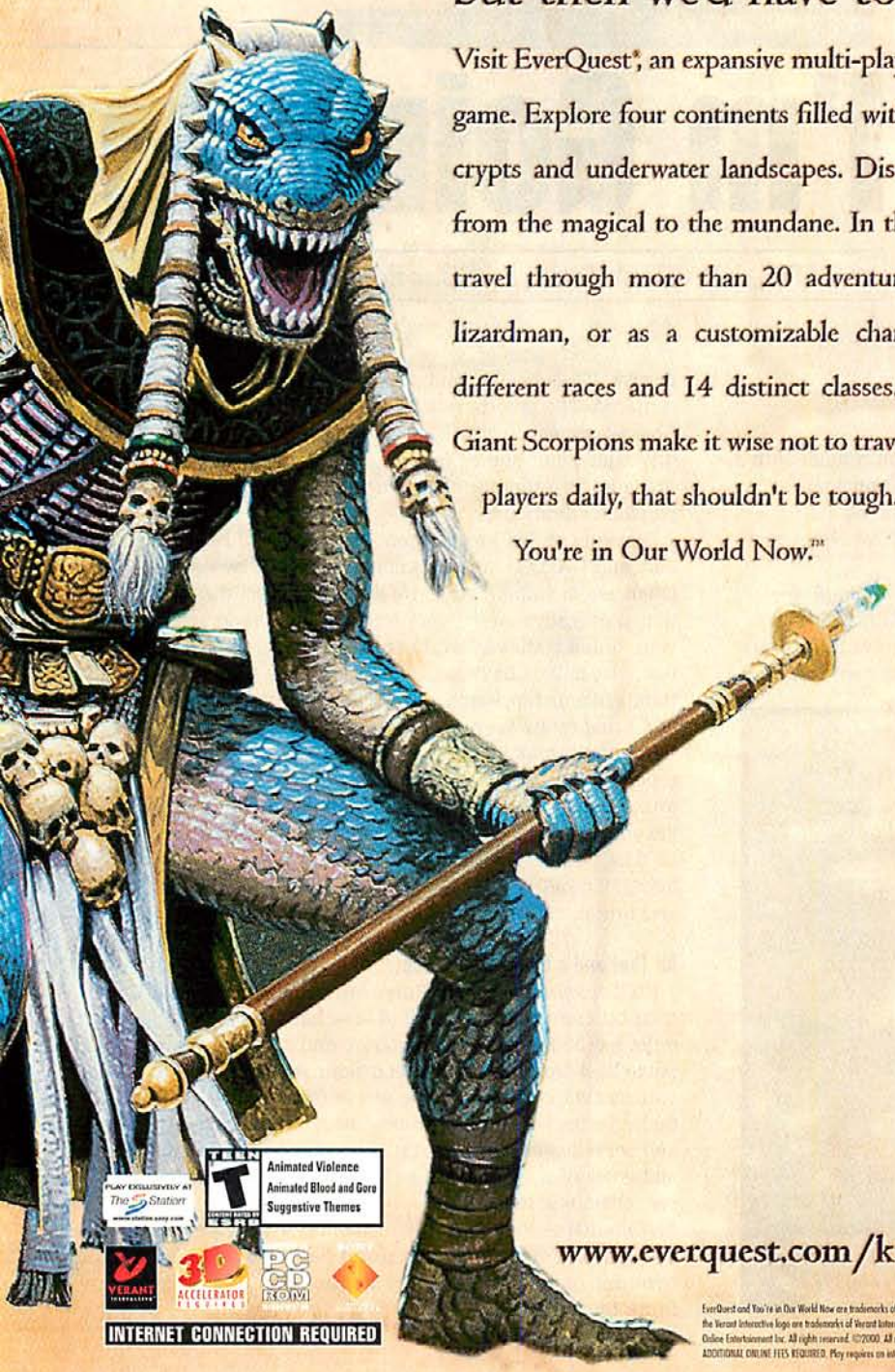

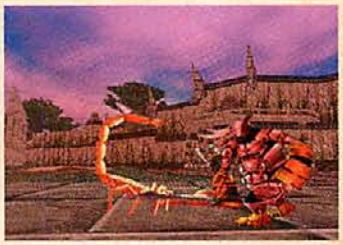

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www.everquest.com/kunark

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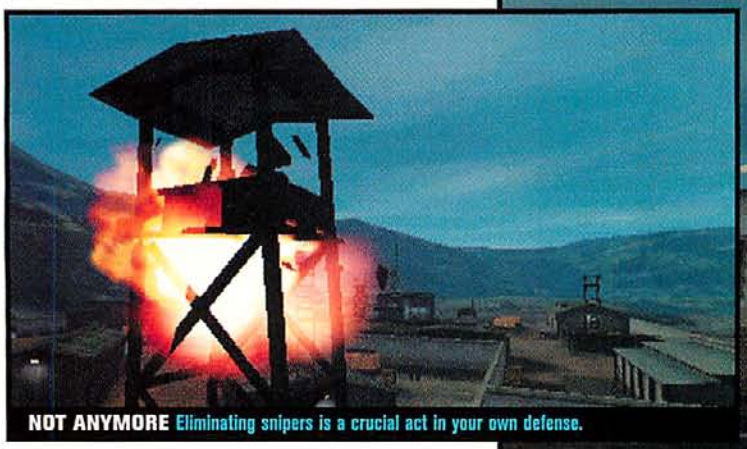
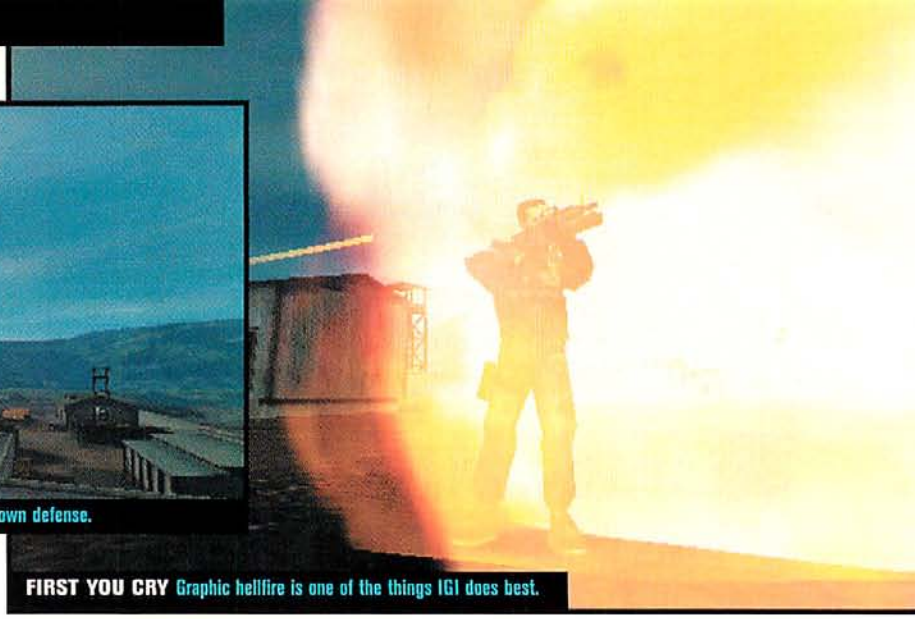


NOT ANYMORE Eliminating snipers is a crucial act in your own defense.



FIRST YOU CRY Graphic hellfire is one of the things IGI does best.

I'm Going In

But first, I'm going to think about it

By Holly Fleming

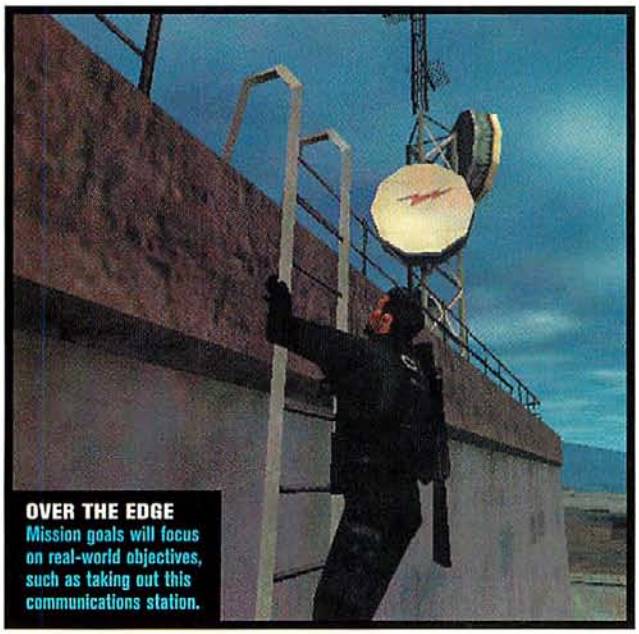
Sunrise is rendered so blissfully—and coldly—in I'M GOING IN, that you might forget your objective. But in a few seconds, your serenity will dissipate and the dread will seep in as the game works its modern-military angle. In IGI, you're going to have to think your way out of death.

Think "THIEF with guns." Stealth will be crucial in this game; 80% of your mission will be the penetration of an enemy compound, for instance, while the remaining 20% will be shooting your way out. And how furtive you are will dictate whether five Russians come after you, or 35.

From Russia With No Love at All

You'll be guided by Anya, a tyrannical Russian colonel with a glib, sexy voice. The Russians want to sell their nuclear weapons to terrorists, and you—as a Special Forces Operative—are going to want to prevent that. However, your odds here will be oppressive.

Through the training levels and 15 different single-player missions, you'll be forced to glean a lot of your information aurally. From your radio in your mounted-computer PDA, to the cues you'll take from triggering alarms and your own sound decoys, IGI is heavily audio-centered. The reverberations from your weaponry will drive this point home: Your grenade, for example, causes a jarring ringing-of-the-ears and palpable vibrations.



OVER THE EDGE Mission goals will focus on real-world objectives, such as taking out this communications station.

Speaking of, IGI has a potent assortment of both Warsaw Pact and NATO weapons, among which are two sniper rifles (silencers included), an M-16, a TOW missile, the aforementioned grenades, and a very efficient knife (and you can drag your knifed bodies away afterwards). Ballistic physics are very realistic; bullets have mass and their trajectory is affected by things like distance and wind. The designers put in their time at a firing range for precise sound accuracy.

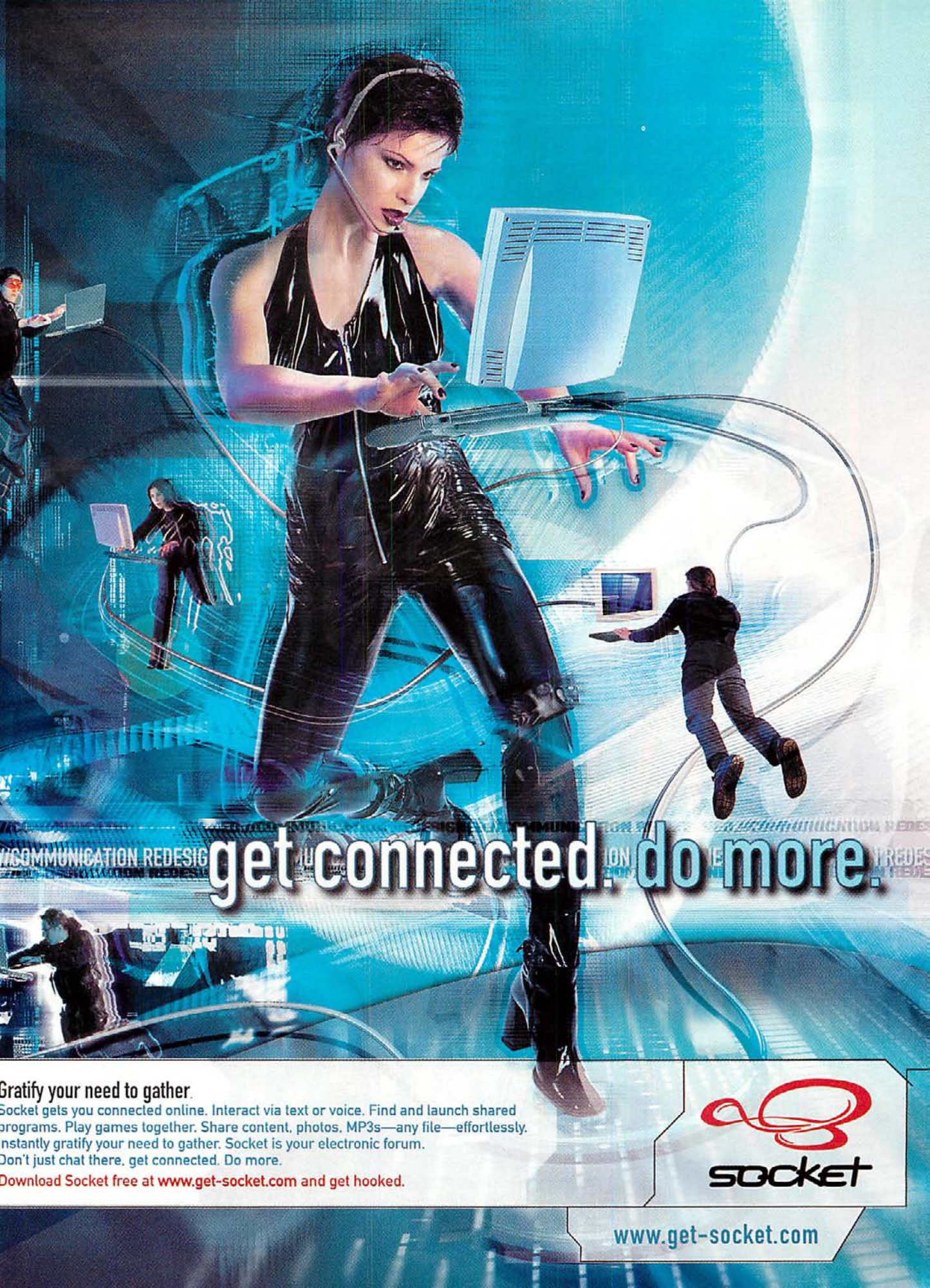
But don't think you'll be able to dish all this out with no repercussions. You'll be pursued by APCs, helicopters, and attack dogs. The AI is spry and responsive. In this game, if you kill your enemy's buddy, your enemy will come after you—and he'll be pissed. The game has a similar damage model to SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, though I'M GOING IN will be realistic and brutal, not gratuitous.

All That and a Chain Link Fence

IGI'S sprawling eastern-European terrain and the skies—in their different times of day and weather—are affecting in their quiet foreboding. Colors are muted and somber, creating a palpable backdrop for the mental machinations of the game. The various compound structures are suitably neutral, with the tanks, jeeps, helicopters, sniper nests, underground tunnels, and surveillance cameras stationed strategically among them—and much of it surrounded by a striking and psychically-intrusive chain link fence.

While IGI is *Rambo*-esque in theme—with you as the bad-ass Special Forces guy—the result here is a "thinker-shooter" hybrid, a game that demands cunning and finesse before brute force. CGW

I'M GOING IN
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q3 00
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Innerloop
CONTACT: www.eidosinteractive.com



Gratify your need to gather.

Socket gets you connected online. Interact via text or voice. Find and launch shared programs. Play games together. Share content, photos, MP3s—any file—effortlessly. Instantly gratify your need to gather. Socket is your electronic forum. Don't just chat there, get connected. Do more.

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socket

www.get-socket.com

Finishing a great game is like losing a good friend (sniff). So many hours together, so many good times, and then it's over. Woe is you.

But the end is not necessarily the end. Thanks to some of your very creative fellow gamers, a game can live on and on, with new maps, new levels, new tweaks and hacks—some at a level of quality that matches, or even surpasses, that of the original games. We've dusted off some of our old game friends and gone in search of ways to inject them with new life. Here's what we found...

By T. Byrl Baker with the CGW Staff

Game Over!

and over. and over... and over...

Unreal Tournament

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM

INFILTRATION
One of the first true mods for UT, Infiltration infuses some reality into UT's gameplay. Weapons are based on real-world counterparts like the M-16A2, Beretta M92F, and Benelli M3 shotgun. These weapons actually kick, so watch your aim.
File Name: infiltration_271.zip Location: www.planetunreal.com/infiltration

UWAR
The UWAR mutator sprinkles colorful powerups throughout levels that can increase your speed, or cause other incremental changes to statistics.
File Name: UwarMutator120_UTRetail.zip Location: www.planetunreal.com/uwar

DM-Anubis

EPIC'S BONUS PACK
Epic didn't need to release the bonus pack, but we're sure glad they did. It adds a few new maps and other enhancements to the game, and is worth installing for the Skaarj Hybrid skin alone.
File Name: utbonuspack.zip
Location: www.unrealtournament.com

AS-BRIDGE
AS-Bridge is a user-created assault level that plays like an action movie. It's fast, furious, and the bot pathing is particularly good. Even the cut-scene at the end of the mission is better than average.
File Name: as-bridge.zip Location: members.xoom.com/ggcap

CTF-GATEWAYS
We loaded up this symmetrical CTF map and didn't stop playing for hours. This is one of only a few maps we've tested where gravity varies depending on whether you're indoors or outdoors.
File Name: ctf-gateways.zip Location: www.planetunreal.com

CTF-FIN
This map looked downright ugly when we first loaded it, but gameplay couldn't be more beautiful. Fight your way across a barren landscape littered with bunkers and small hills that provide the perfect cover for sniping.
File Name: ctf-fin.zip
Location: www.planetunreal.com

UTETRIS MOD
Sometimes it's nice to take a break from the gore and noise, and there's no better way to do it than with this mutator that lets you play a game of Tetris.
File Name: tetris.zip
Location: www.planetunreal.com/mutation/tetris

DM-PRONG][
This is one of the most innovative deathmatch maps ever created, packed with more unique features than anything that shipped with UT. Bots are phenomenal in DM-Prong][, so keep an eye out for snipers.
File Name: dm-prong][.zip
Location: www.unreality.org/fleshdance

AS-ASTHENOSPHERE
A terrific assault level, especially for solitaire play. Your teammates will leave you in the dust if you don't know your way around.
File Name: AS-asthenosphere.zip
Location: www.planetunreal.com/willhaven

DM-ANUBIS
Mark "OZ" Austin is famous for his map designs, and he has outdone himself with the Egyptian-themed DM-Anubis. It's so pretty we were hesitant to shoot up the place.
File Name: DM-Anubis.zip
Location: www.decyber.com/ozworld

Quake III Arena

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM

CLOCKBOT

Bots were something of an afterthought in Q3A, and therefore didn't get all the attention they needed before the game shipped. If you find yourself fragging them on a regular basis, start throwing Clockbots into your matches. They act more like a skilled human than the other bots we've tried.
File Name: clockbot_v0.2.exe
Location: www.botepidemic.com/clockbot

LONELY PLANET

Run through this level a few times by yourself before turning it into a deathmatch arena, just so you can gawk at the impressive architecture and perfect lighting effects at your leisure.
File Name: dmmq3dm3.zip Location: www.fileplanet.com

QUAKE 3 ADDICTION

An update of an excellent QUAKE map, Addiction has curvaceous architecture, perfect texturing, and flows really well.
File Name: addict.zip Location: www.peej.co.uk

CORIOLIS STORM

Coriolis Storm is one of the most atmospheric deathmatch levels ever created. We practically choked on the dust hanging in the air on the lower levels.
File Name: lun3dm1.zip Location: lunaran.fragland.net/lunsmaps.html

QUAKE 3 FORTRESS

The mighty Fortress has returned to grace the latest chapter in the QUAKE series. The one we tested was in beta, so check the Web site for a final release.
File Name: q3f_beta1_20000401.zip
Location: www.q3f.com

KHAOOOHS

This level seems relatively simple at first, but a multitude of jump platforms turn it into a monster of a deathmatch level.
File Name: kaos.zip
Location: www.planetquake.com/vondur

MEATPAK

Meatpak contains three maps, but the one that is permanently fused to our hard drive is Whitemeat. This bowl-shaped arena is massively fun, especially for those skilled with the railgun.
File Name: meatpak.zip
Location: www.fileplanet.com

COLISEUM 2 BETA 1.5

This is a beta of Coliseum 2, which adds runes to QUAKE 3. Runes bestow special abilities or stat bonuses to those who pick them up, like the Vampire rune that lets you steal health from others.
File Name: coliseum.zip Location: www.planetquake.com/coliseum2/

FISTS OF FURY 1.0

The best mod for bad shots, Fists of Fury turns QUAKE 3 into a close-quarters battle by forcing players to rely on their fists. Powerups keep the game interesting.
File Name: fury11.zip Location: www.planetquake.com/fury

HEAVY WEAPONS BETA 1.2

This add-on increases speed and bumps up the power of the weapons in the game, in case QUAKE 3 was playing a little slow for your taste.
File Name: hweaponsb12.zip Location: www.fileplanet.com

Thief

ROGUE'S HONOR

Few fan-made missions approach the quality of the levels that shipped with THIEF, but Triston Attridge has surpassed them with Rogue's Honor. Features like a working equipment store, guards carrying lanterns through a dark tunnel system, and ingenious puzzles make this mission an instant classic.
File Name: roghon.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

THIEFLOADER 1.5

Install Andrew Bednarz's ThiefLoader before copying any extra missions to your hard drive. It lets you launch new levels from a list (you don't even need to decompress them) and maintains separate saves for each mission.
File Name: thiefload15.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

LORD EDMUND ENTERTAINS

The first in a series, Lord Edmund Entertains is a polished level with great design complemented by an interesting story. Also includes cool extras like new voice files.
File Name: edmund.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

THE VIGIL

This is the sequel to Lord Edmund Entertains, and is very close to being the perfect THIEF mission. Bring your reading glasses, because this is one story you won't want to miss.
File Name: vigil.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

THE DEATH OF GARRETT

Take the time to fight your way out of the caverns at the start of this mission and the rewards are great. This is a terrific level with a good plot.
File Name: dog.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

GATHERING AT THE BAR

One of the first fan-made missions ever made, Gathering at the Bar remains one of the best. Several approaches to the mission give this terrific replayability.
File Name: gatb11.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

BLOODSTONE PRISON

Many people didn't like the missions in THIEF that featured undead enemies, but then none of those had the design and atmosphere of Bloodstone Prison. This is the gold standard for undead missions.
File Name: bldstn10.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

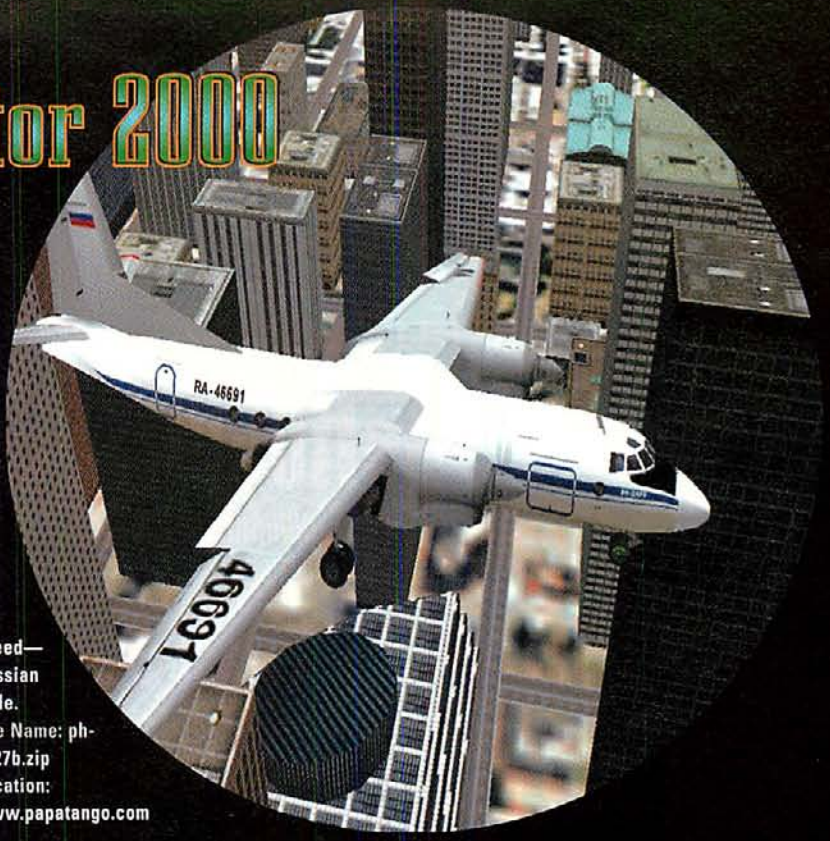
CIRCLE OF STRAIN 3

The third chapter in the venerable Circle of Strain series, this mission has terrific graphics and the layout requires cunning gameplay.
File Name: cos3.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

RANSTALL KEEP

THIEF is famous for its dark environments,

Flight Simulator 2000



AN-24RV

This isn't the fastest or sleekest plane available for FS2K, but it certainly is one of the most impressive. This Russian transport plane gives a great sense of mass and looks stunning from the external views, thanks to impressive texturing and smoothly moving parts. It even comes with a loadout utility that lets you add passengers and cargo to test fly the plane at different weights.
File Name: an24rv_e.zip
Location: www.flightsim.krsk.ru/24/index_e.htm

SU-27 B

When you tire of toddling around in the AN-24RV, strap on this SU-27 to satisfy your need for speed—Russian style.
File Name: ph-su27b.zip
Location: www.papatango.com

SR-71A

So the SU-27 still isn't meeting your needs? Turn the world into a blur with this SR-71A.
File Name: pss-sr71a.zip
Location: www.avsim.com

BELL-BOEING MV-22 OSPREY

If you can't decide between a helicopter or a prop plane, compromise with this tilt-rotor MV-22 Osprey. It isn't perfect, but that's due to FS2K's limitations, not the authors'.
File Name: v22_fs2K.zip
Location: www.avsim.com

THE CUB COLLECTION

There's a highly-detailed Piper for every environment in Ronald Ackerly's magnificent Cub Collection.
File Names: pc180wo.zip; pc_L21.zip; pc180wof.zip; pc180clf.zip; pc180clu.zip
Location: www.fsadventure.com

PIPER SENECA V AND UPDATE

OK, so it technically isn't a FS2K plane, but who could resist including this masterpiece from Graham "Dotcom" Waterfield and Peter Sidoli?
File Names: fsd_n95d.zip; fsd-psup.zip
Location: www.avsim.com

F8 U CORSAIR

This F8 is about as close to photo-realistic quality as anything we've flown. The cockpit could use some work, but it really doesn't matter since you'll spend so much time staring at the plane from an external view.
File Name: f8creusad.zip
Location: www.avsim.com

JOLLY RODGERS GRUMMAN F-14A TOMCAT

This beautiful recreation of an F-14A also happens to be a blast to fly. Be sure to look at the impressive detail on the landing-gear struts.
File Name: f14aj200.zip Location: www.avsim.com

BOEING B727-200 CAESAR-AIR AMERICA AND AIR EUROPE

If you like flying the Big Iron, try this B727-200. Your passengers will feel really cool flying in a plane that looks this good.
File Names: cspo7272.zip; cse_7272.zip Location: www.avsim.com

NAV 3.0

The latest version of Ted Wright's Nav makes flight planning a snap and provides a moving map when you are in the air, among other features.
File Name: Nav30.zip Location: www.en.com/users/wright/Nav.shtml

but this level makes things even more spooky by displaying everything (except lighting) in black and white. Who knew THIEF-noir would be this entertaining?
File Name: ranstallkeep.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

THE TREASURY

Great voice acting, challenging puzzles, and a sound sense of humor are enough to make The Treasury an entertaining romp, and the numerous special effects elevate it well beyond the average fan-made mission.
File Name: treasury.zip Location: www.thief-darkproject.com

Rogue Spear

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM

NIHON; NIHON ENHANCEMENT PACK; NIHON FIX

ROGUE SPEAR is a terrific game, but where are the ninjas? The author of the Nihon mod—Mother.may.i—must have asked the same question, because Nihon adds both ninjas and samurai to the ROGUE SPEAR world. Attempting to hack away at Tangos with your katana is not advised, but Nihon and its enhancement pack make for some wonderful multiplayer action.

File Names: nihon_setup1.exe; nep_setup.exe; ROMMEL.cxp
Location: www.mothermayi.net

NATO*SPO 3.1

Like guns? Then you'll love the NATO*SPO 3.1 add-on. The mod packages most of the guns found in the popular NATO series of add-ons and simplifies installation.

File Name: NatoSpo3.1uo.exe
Location: members.xoom.com/Clan_XTC

TERRORIST ENHANCEMENT

The AI in ROGUE SPEAR is a vast improvement over that of its predecessor, but that's like comparing Neanderthals to chimpanzees. Make the Tangos tougher with this AI add-on.

File Name: TerroristEnhance.zip
Location: www.rsdatabase.com

RYKO'S SOUND PACK

This sound pack will make your neighbors fear things that go "BOOM!!" in the night.

File Name: RSRyko102.zip
Location: members.xoom.com/aryko

OMNIPOTENT INFANTRY WEAPONS

Apparently, ROGUE SPEAR wasn't realistic enough for Clan Omnigeek. They tuned all the weapons, based on feedback from a professional, and the results are impressive.

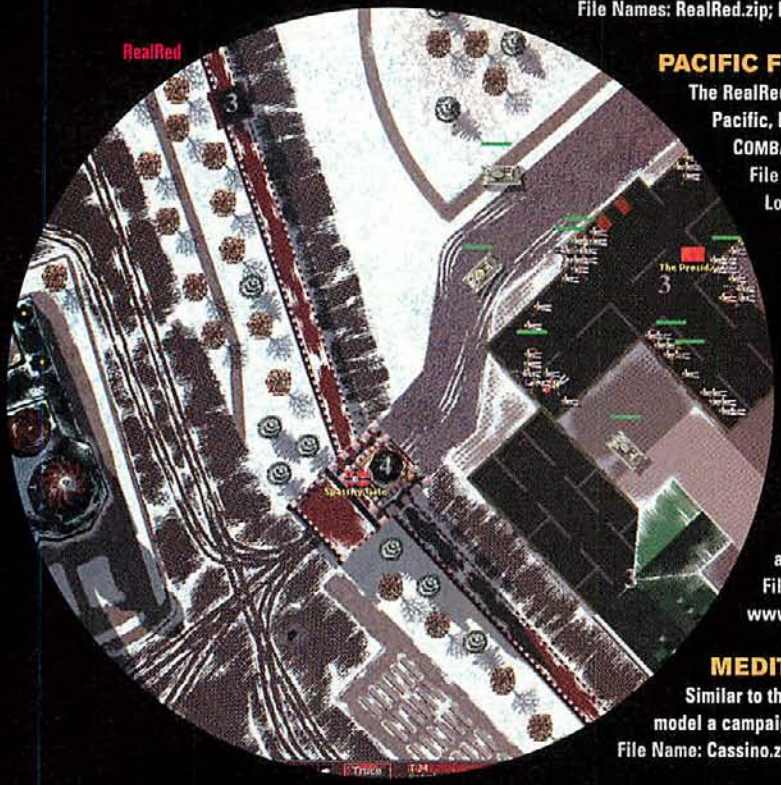
File Name: opmod27.zip Location: www.rsdatabase.com

Close Combat

REALRED AND GRAPHICS PACK

No matter how much time and research goes into a wargame, there is always a pack of grognards itching to make it better. We don't mind, especially when all the grumbling results in add-ons like RealRed. RealRed completely overhauls the CLOSE COMBAT 3 engine, adding new weapons and making those that were there to begin with more historically accurate.

File Names: RealRed.zip; RRGAv1.zip Location: www.clubssi.com/rgretz



PACIFIC FRONT WITH SOUNDS AND SCENARIOS

The RealRed team is working on a version of the game that models combat in the Pacific, but why wait when you can play Close Combat Pacific Front for CLOSE COMBAT 2?

File Names: cc2pf.exe; sounds.zip; plus all scenario files
Location: member.nifty.ne.jp/takixxx/cc2_eng.htm

THE GREAT WAR, WITH INTERFACE AND SOUND PACK

This mod twists the CLOSE COMBAT 2 engine to let it model WWI clashes. Check the site for a CLOSE COMBAT 3 patch that does the same thing, as it should be completed by the time you read this.

File Names: TheGreatWarv15.zip; intrface.zip; sounds.zip Location: www.clubssi.com/thedugout

FRANCE: 1940 VERSION 2 AND TERRAIN SPRITES

This mod lets you wind the clock in CLOSE COMBAT 3 back to 1940, and moves the action from the Eastern Front to France.

File Names: 1940v2.zip; 1940terr.zip Location: www.clubssi.com/d88/1940/patch.html

MEDITERRANEAN CAMPAIGN (MONTE CASSINO)

Similar to the France: 1940 patch, this mod uses the CLOSE COMBAT 3 engine to model a campaign in Italy—complete with new terrain graphics.

File Name: Cassino.zip Location: www.clubssi.com/d88/med/index.html

Half-Life

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM

COUNTERSTRIKE BETA 6.1

Find out for yourself why Counterstrike is considered one of the best multiplayer add-ons for HALF-LIFE (or any first-person shooter, for that matter).
File Name: csb61full.exe
Location: www.counter-strike.net

SimCity 3000

BUILDING ARCHITECT

Maxis knew users wouldn't be happy for long with the buildings it supplied with SIMCITY 3000, hence the Building Architect. This building editor lets budding architects create any sort of building imaginable; visit the SIMCITY 3000 Web site and peruse the hundreds of buildings posted there if you don't believe us.
File Name: BATPATCH_English.EXE Location: www.simcity.com

European Air War

ENEMY COAST AHEAD V. 1.4

Charles Gunst has done much to extend the life of EAW, and his Enemy Coast Ahead add-on is his greatest achievement so far. It adds seven more flyable planes to the mix, including a version of the Mosquito VI. It also adds a host of improvements to the existing planes and tweaks the damage model slightly.
File Name: eca14.zip Location:
www.geocities.com/weurger/main/eca.html

EAW CONTROL PANEL 1.6

Configuring the finer aspects of the EAW .ini file is a chore, so let the EAW Control Panel do all the work for you.
File Name: Ecapnl30.zip Location:
www.geocities.com/weurger/main/

Enemy Coast Ahead

EAW Control

ECA CONTROL PANEL V 3.0

Another add-on by Charles Gunst, the ECA Control Panel lets users easily configure their Enemy Coast Ahead settings.
File Name: Ecapnl30.zip Location:
www.geocities.com/weurger/main/

EAW STAB 2.0

Many new skins and terrain files are available for EAW, and the Stab utility will help you manage them all.
File Name: eawstab20.zip Location:
www.ozemail.com.au/~matttm/eaw/download.html

MEATWATER'S SOUND PACK 2.5

WARNING: Do not install this sound pack unless your shingles are on tight. Flying a P-47 with this add-on enabled is a viable substitute for laxatives.
File Names: v20.exe; mweaw25.exe Location:
www.meatwater.de

Grand Prix Legends

AI TWEAKER

Even getting around the track in one piece in GRAND PRIX LEGENDS requires hours of practice, so winning is out of the question for mere mortals. Install Kari Ikonen's AI Tweaker to bring Jim Clark and the gang down to your level.
File Name: AITw103.zip
Location: www.theuspits.com

Jane's F/A-18

ART MANAGER

New skins, cockpits, scenery, and other artwork is released for FA/18 on a regular basis. Keep all your add-on files in order with the Art Manager. Its preview window is a godsend.
File Name: fa18art.zip
Location: fa18.sim-arena.com

Jane's Fleet Command

WDP V. 5.0

FLEET COMMAND was sold as a simulator, but played more like a bad episode of G.I. Joe. Update it with this database and add so much realism that the Department of Defense might confiscate your computer.
File Name: WDP.zip Location: members.xoom.com/_XMCM/Warship100/WDP

Fighter Squadron: SDOE

PLANEPACK 5.3A

Everyone who flies SDOE online uses the PlanePack, and for good reason. The superpatch adds new aircraft to the game (finally, we can fly a BF-109!), and dramatically enhances the flight models of all the other planes. Graphics upgrades round out this package that no owner of SDOE should be without.
File Names: planepack53.zip; Planepack_Patch5.3a.zip
Location: ftp.3dgw.com/addon/sdoe/aircraft/

SDOE CONTROL 2000

Why configure FS:SDOE the hard way when SDOE Control 2000 is available? This utility can help you adjust settings you never knew existed.
File Name: SDOEControl2000.zip Location: ftp.3dgw.com/addon/sdoe/utilities/

MICHAEL HARRISON'S BETA PATCH (PLUS PATCH FOR VERSION 1.5)

It's widely known that Activision forced Parsoft to castrate FS:SDOE before it hit the shelves. That didn't stop Michael Harrison from putting his baby on life support by releasing beta patches that restore at least some of the game's former glory.
File Names: fsc151b5.zip; fspatch150.exe
Location: dragonseye.com/FSBeta

GROUND CREW 3.0 BETA

Sick of swapping various plane skins in and out? Install Ground Crew and automate the process.
File Names: gc3beta1.zip; pendll15.zip Location: www.tomb.demon.nl/alt/

MEATWATER'S ROLLING THUNDER SOUND PACK

Meatwater's sound packs are featured twice in this article for one reason: They rock. We recommend that apartment dwellers interested in keeping their apartments use headphones when this is installed.
File Name: mrt10.zip Location: www.meatwater.de

Age of Empires II

CHECK OUT THE CD-ROM

THE COMING OF THE UNBORN KING: A PENDRAGON SAGA

Others have attempted to create campaigns using a King Arthur theme, but Gordon Farell has outdone them all with his Pendragon Saga. The campaign takes place before the birth of Arthur, and culminates in a mission where you get to play the part of Merlin himself.
File Name: pendragonpak.zip
Location: aok.heavengames.com

HAVOC BOT 1.2

Yeah, this AI upgrade cheats, but who cares? It plays a mean game and doesn't use its unlimited resources to simply rush the player.
File Name: havocai1.zip
Location: aok.heavengames.com

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

This campaign turns AOK into an adventure game with RPG elements. Travel across the countryside as Robin Hood, engaging in quests and recruiting merry men to do battle with the sheriff's forces.
File Name: tarh1-2.zip
Location: aok.heavengames.com

WILLIAM, WARRIOR OF THE SUN

This scenario is packed with so many triggers and special features, it effectively becomes a role-playing game. It's a fun, challenging scenario with beautiful maps.
File Name: william_warrior_of_the_sun_v105.zip
Location: aok.heavengames.com

THE QUEST

How Ingo Van Thiel was able to bend the AOK engine to his will so effectively remains a mystery, but somehow he has created perhaps the most unique and gorgeous scenario we have played.
File Name: the_quest.zip Location: aok.heavengames.com

The SIMS

NEW OBJECTS OF THE WEEK

Maxis has provided a new object every week since the release of THE SIMS. Topiaries, party balloons, new indoor plants, guinea pig, moose head, cuckoo clock, wall lights, and a slot machine—all can be yours if your bandwidth is right.
Location: www.thesims.com

HOMEMASTER 4.0

Homemaster allows you to preview and import all of the new wallpaper and carpeting you'll find on Sim fan sites. The Mall of the Sims (www.mallofthesims.com), a SIMS Web site designed

GRANDPA HACK'S ADD-ON ADVICE

Don't screw around without protection. Downloading gobs of add-ons is a good way to get a dose of the digital clap. Make sure you have a virus checker active when downloading off the net.

Read the instructions. Some add-ons require careful file manipulation to get them running. Always read the installation instruction in the README file or on the host Web site before trying to install an add-on.

Back up your files Add-ons, like any other piece of software, have bugs. And sometimes those bugs are serious and can corrupt saved games and player files. Always back up any important player files before fooling around with add-ons.

Say "Please" and "Thank you" The majority of add-ons are created by game fans like you. They do it for love, not money. If you like an add-on, drop the creator some fan mail.

NASCAR Legends

N@50 FOR NASCAR '99

Before NASCAR LEGENDS, there was the N@50 patch. This total conversion does a commendable job of simulating NASCAR cars of the 60s and 70s, changing NASCAR 99's physics, graphics, and nearly everything else. New tracks and classic cars like the Cyclone and Charger are also included.
File Names: N@50v99.exe; N@50v99t1.exe; N@50v99t2.exe Location: www.theuspits.com

N@50 '73 CARSET

Cory Walker's add-on for the N@50 patch puts many more virtual cars at your disposal, and all are modeled as well as the NASCAR 99 engine will allow.
File Name: 1973cars.zip Location: www.theuspits.com

N@50 WINGED WARRIORS CARSET

This patch adds 19 cars from the 1970 NASCAR season, including the fabled Dodge Charger Daytona and the Plymouth Road Runner Superbird.
File Name: wingwarrior.zip Location: www.theuspits.com

THE PITS TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP '99

Go from a stock car to a touring car with this incredible patch. One of the most thorough user-created add-ons of all time.
File Name: TPTCC99v1.exe Location: www.tptcc.com

SOUND UPDATE FOR NASCAR LEGENDS

NASCAR LEGENDS is a great simulation, but what happened to the sounds? Fix them up with this patch.
File Name: NL_sound.exe Location: www.theuspits.com

like an actual shopping mall, is a great place to start your hunt for that elusive, perfect tiling and wallpaper combo.
File Name: homemaster_4.0.exe Location: www.simzonline.com/thesims/files/

FACELIFT GOLD

This handy utility from Maxis allows you to add new faces to your Sim neighborhood. A "genetic algorithm" generates new faces from which to select.
File Name: faceliftgold.exe Location: www.simzonline.com/thesims/files/

MTV SKINS

Here they are, the stars of THE SIMS commercial running on MTV, ready to star in your own version of *The Real World.*
There are hundreds of outstanding Sim skins out there. A great place to start your collection is Sim*Stars, www.jfxdesigns.co.uk/Simstars/, a site that offers dozens of excellent celebrity skins.
File Name: MTVSkins.exe Location: www.thesims.com

NAKED SIMS PATCH

Do you find the pixelation of naked Sims a bit prudish? Go *au natural* with this patch, which reveals naked Sims in all of their anatomically incorrect splendor.
File Name: scpatch.zip Location: msnhomepages.talkcity.com:6010/strategyst/crazy4sims/

THE SIMS DESKTOP THEME

You aren't a complete SIMS geek until you've got the desktop theme package, which transforms your desktop into a 24-7 Sim rave.
File Name: sims_desktop_theme.exe Location: www.thesims.com

Heroes of Might & Magic III

The HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC fan community is one of the most prolific in all of gaming. There are hundreds of maps available for each of the games in the HOMM series.
The Astral Wizard (www.astralwizard.com) is a great place to start your map hunting, as all of the hundreds of maps here have been extensively played, reviewed, and rated by other players and map creators.
Hero Chronicles (homm3.com) is another excellent site, with a slick presentation and a ton of info and maps, including a bulk download of all HOMM3 maps (currently 78 total) on the site.
File Name: all-june25th.zip Location: homm3.com

Starfleet Command

NEWSHIPS PACK 1-8

All we can say is, "wow." This upgrade contains the first eight ship packs from the team at the Newships Project, containing everything from several versions of good ol' NCC-1701 to juggernauts like the Borg Sphere. Visit the site for more Newships packs.
File Name: newshipspack1.exe
Location: www.starfleetuniverse.com

TOS SOUNDS

TOS stands for "The Original Series," and fans of these older episodes will immediately recognize the enhanced bleeps in this add-on sound pack from Michael Callahan.
File Name: sound.zip
Location: www.starfleetuniverse.com

GORN AND HYDRAN SPECIAL MISSIONS

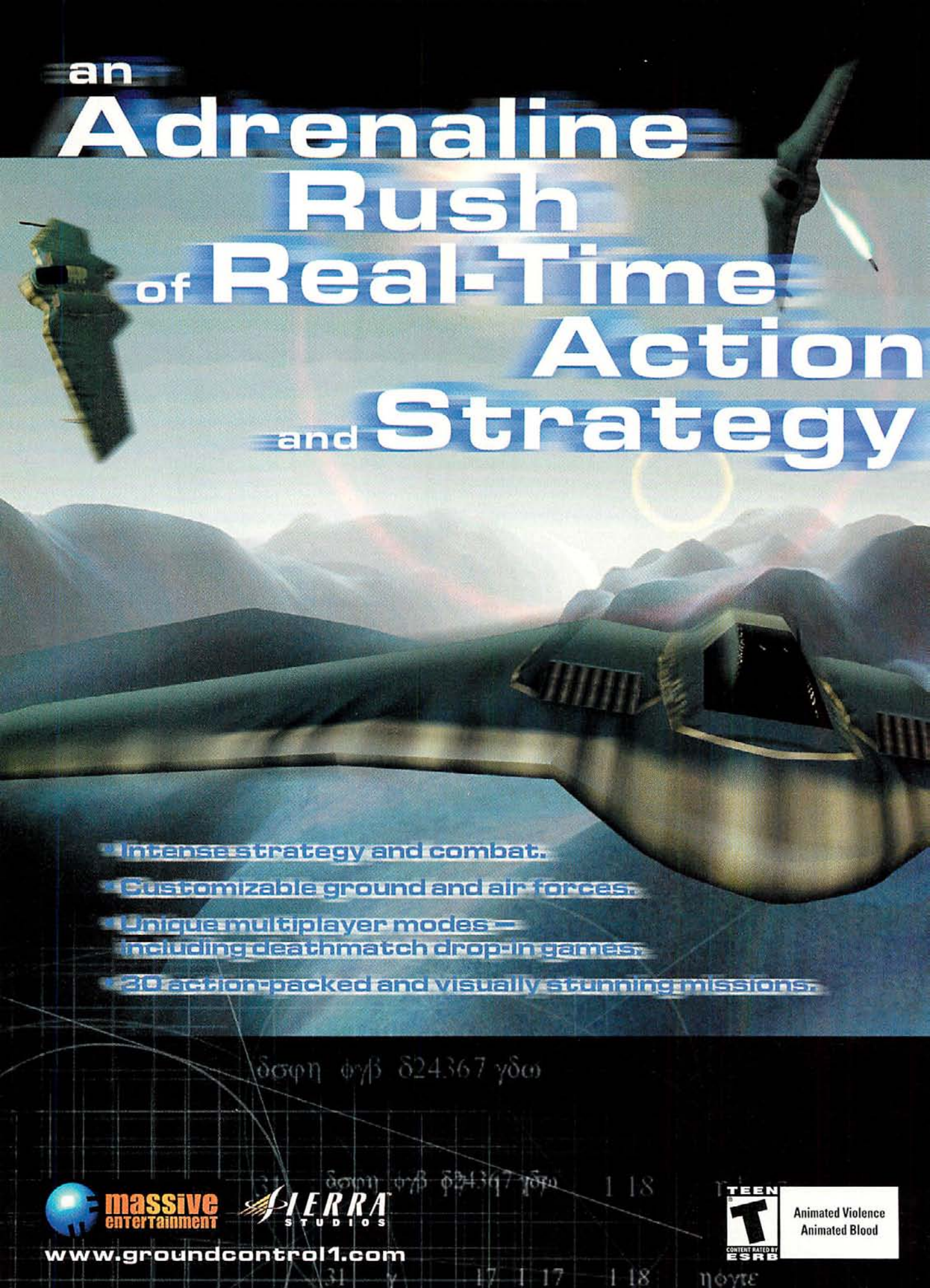
Interplay has actively supported SFC since its launch, keeping users supplied with new patches and even new missions. This collection of extras adds some nice Gorn and Hydran missions.
File Names: sfc_bonus_gorn_missions.zip; sfchydran.zip Location: www.interplay.com

NEWSHIPS NTOS PACK 1

At last, the Kzinti have been added to the STARFLEET COMMAND universe, replacing the Hydrans in the main campaign. 51 types of Kzinti ships are included, along with four new ship models from the original *Star Trek* series.
File Name: ntosmod.exe
Location: www.starfleetuniverse.com

HYDRAN CAMPAIGN

The Hydrans are fun to play, yet sadly underutilized in SFC's main campaign game. These excellent missions plug directly into the regular Hydran campaign and nicely amend that deficiency.
File Names: Hyd_J1.scr; Hyd_J2.scr; Hyd_J3.scr; Hyd_J4.scr; Hyd_J5.scr; Hyd_J6.scr; Hyd_J7.scr
Location: hometown.aol.com/kzmeilofu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of Real-Time
Action
and Strategy
• Intense strategy and combat.
• Customizable ground and air forces.
• Unique multiplayer modes —
including deathmatch drop-in games.
• 30 action-packed and visually stunning missions.
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TEEN
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Animated Violence
Animated Blood

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Okay, roleplayers, let's role-play.

We are standing in a windowless, fluorescent-lit conference room, white boards on every wall. We are a band of heroic game designers, programmers, and artists armed with vision, smarts, stamina, and +3 Dry-Erase Pens of Brainstorming. We have been charged by our liege to dream up the ultimate computer role-playing game.

What do we do?

Let's start with the easy stuff. Naturally, we'd want an elegant and powerful set of role-playing rules that have been battle-tested through years of play. And, of course, we'd want a slick 3D-graphics environment with all the latest ooh-ah visual gimcrackery with which to render our worlds. A state-of-the-art interface and combat system are givens.

What else? Yes, of course, it'd be multiplayer. Thousands of players. Hell, why limit ourselves? An infinite number of players. But the multiplayer design would allow players to carefully choose who they wish to play with, and how they wish to play. Cheating, hacking, unwanted player-killing, and general obnoxiousness will be easily dealt with, thanks to our clever design.

And if this is going to be the ultimate computer RPG, we'd have to bring back someone who's been shut out of computer role-playing for the last 20 years—the Dungeon Master, that strange breed of gamer who delighted in creating worlds, telling stories, and moderating disputes. This is the person who really made the experience come to life, and who tailored each adventure to the players' abilities and interests. We'd have to provide Dungeon Masters with a rich set of tools so that they could bring their pen-and-paper skills to the online environment.

All right, not bad for a start. But we're still missing something—a game. We need characters, plots, quests, towns, dungeons, dragons, treasures. We need guilds, songs, poems, politics, rivalries, and wars.

Enter the Ultimate Bad Guy of our scenario. The Dragon of Budgets and Release Schedules, the Demon of the Realistically Possible, the Crusher of Dreams. Fortunately, we've anticipated his arrival, and have a plan that's both brilliant and risky. We're not going to build the ultimate RPG. We're going to call

CALL GUINNESS We've got a new record-holder for world's largest butt-thong. The NEVERWINTER engine will allow for some of the largest creatures we've seen in a 3D RPG.

This World Is What You Make It

You could sit around waiting for someone to create the ultimate online role-playing game. Or you could grab some tools and some friends, and do it yourself.

by Chris Lombardi

upon the most powerful force in the gaming universe to face down our dragon—gamers.

Gamers, we decide, are going to build our game for us.

If You Build It...

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, a project of Bioware and Interplay's Black Isle Studios, has the potential to be the ultimate role-playing game we've just dreamt up. Or at least half of it. The other half depends on you, the role-playing community, for NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is not really a game—although it will ship with a full, feature-length RPG—so much as an online role-playing game construction kit and Dungeon Master facilitator. The design team's goal is to create a system that will allow people to have exactly the same interactions they would have in a pen-and-paper role-playing game—including the Dungeon Master's experience of designing and running a game—but with all the benefits that technology can bring to the RPG.

It's one of the most ambitious and risky projects we've seen in gaming, but the potential payoff is enormous. If the system is solid, powerful, and flexible, and if gamers get behind the project and build worlds with its tools, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS could ignite a massive online role-playing craze unlike anything we've seen thus far—including the text-based Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) scene (of which NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a natural, evolutionary extention), not to mention the massively-multiplayer scenes of ULTIMA ONLINE and ASHERON'S CALL. Origin and Microsoft, be afraid. Be very afraid. MUDers who've waited a decade for a graphical toolset, rejoice.

Nitty Gritty

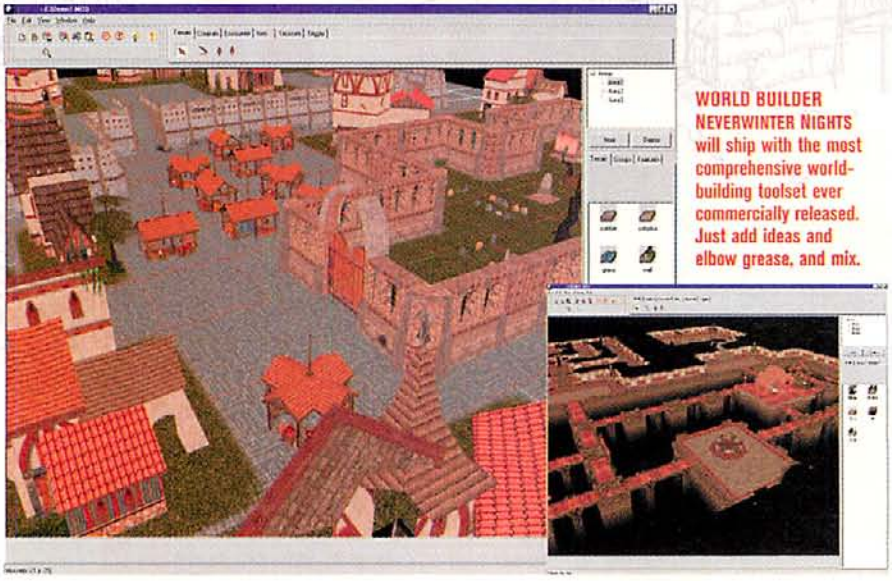
At the core of NEVERWINTER NIGHTS lies the *Third Edition Advanced Dungeon & Dragons* rules, the new, streamlined version of the old war horse that started the RPG ball rolling 25 years ago. The Bioware design team has worked closely with the *AD&D* design team to ensure a faithful implementation of the new system, and the result of the collaboration may be one of the richer combat systems we've seen in the commericial online RPG realm, incorporating such dynamics as two-weapon fighting, and combat options like "parry," "disarm," and "overbearing" blows that can knock an opponent back. There are even "called shots," attempted-blows to body parts with specific nasty consequences for

"Gamers, we decide, are going to build our game for us..."

REUNITED And it feels so good. This party could be composed of all your old pen-and-paper role-playing buddies, connected to a NEVERWINTER server via the Net.

your opponent. Multiplayer combat will be resolved in real-time, and will be designed to gracefully handle net latencies somewhere in the vicinity of 500-700 milliseconds.

The combat, and everything else, is presented by a real head-turner of a 3D-graphics engine that renders a third-person view of your character. The perspective creates a superb sense of scale, and the lighting effects are the best we've seen in an RPG. Distant light sources, like a setting sun or a bonfire, cast long shadows across the landscape. Move your character near a torch, and you can see the flickering flames reflecting dynamically off the character's shiny bronze armor.



WORLD BUILDER NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will ship with the most comprehensive world-building toolset ever commercially released. Just add ideas and elbow grease, and mix.

This Old Dungeon

The rules and graphics engine all work in service to Solstice, the project code-name for the toolset that is the heart and soul of NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. Using these tools, you'll have the power to create a rich role-playing world on par with many a commerical computer RPG. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will ship with a complete adventure spanning four different environments, all created using the tools. But while the design team hopes this adventure will be able to stand on its own— providing 40+ hours of questing pleasure—its true goal is to demonstrate to players what the toolset is capable of. As Bioware producer Trent Oster says, "Anything we can do with Solstice, you can do. That's been the mandate of the design from the beginning."

What can you do? Quite a bit. You can, of course, design environments from the ground up, placing walls, raising elevation, covering the terrain with various textures, structures, and objects. You can place monsters, treasure, special items, and non-player characters. You'll be able to create customized weapons by assem-

bling a sword, say, out of a selection of hilts, wrist guards, and blades. You can write text dialogue for characters, or record it in a speech file. You will even be able to create dramatic cut-scenes by recording "staged" actions within the game. For the novice dungeon designer, the developers are hoping to include a number of Microsoft-style "Wizards" to help with the architecting. These tools alone could create the kind of game mod community that has risen up around QUAKE or HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC, with skilled world creators designing stand-alone adventures for other players.

The Return of The Dungeon Master

But it's the multiplayer angle that's got us really excited. Modules designed with the NEVERWINTER NIGHTS tools can be set up as multi-player servers into which up to 64 people can connect. Players designated as Dungeon Masters will have access to the tools and can use them while the game is in progress. So, just as in pen-and-paper gaming, a DM can control the environment of the adventure. The DM can drop monsters on unsuspecting adventurers and reward them with treasure and experience. The DM can "possess" the bodies of monsters to fight against players, and of non-player characters to deliver dialogue and flesh-out the story. In short, the DM can do everything he or she did at the tabletop, but without having to worry about dice roles and bookkeeping.

Many of the members of the NEVERWINTER design team are the worst sort of EVERQUEST addicts, and they're putting their experience to good use in the multiplayer component. For instance, they're taking the issues of player-killing and character hacking head-on. Player-killing, always a contentious topic in the online RPG world, will be a server option. The administrator of a server will be able to switch player-killing off and on, or to designate specific areas of a server's world for player-on-player combat.

PYROMANIA! NEVERWINTER will include this strange new thing called "magic" which makes pretty colors, and hurts bad guys real bad.

There will be several layers of security against character hacking. A server can be designated as "local," which means anything goes. If players want to use insanely maxed-out characters that they've hacked, fine, have at it. A server can also be set up to host "server characters" which will be very difficult to hack, but the characters created on that server will have to stay on that server—the preferred option for those who want to keep their NEVERWINTER server running as a persistent environment. Finally, there's the "character vault." The vault will be a character server run by Bioware/Black Isle. When you play with a vault character, you check him or her out of the vault, and when you're done, you check him or her back in. The server will check to make sure that the character comes back with a reasonable amount of experience. If a level-two character checks out and then checks back in an hour later at level 15, the server will adjust the character to a reasonable level. It won't completely stop hacking, but it will help curtail it.

The designers' online experience is evident in the interface as well. The chat and inventory windows are transparent, allowing obsessive chatters or inventory futzers to keep their windows open and still keep an eye on the on-screen action. Character portraits will appear next to their speech in the chat window, so all you have to do to speak directly to another player is click on their image. The control interface is one of the more innovative we've seen, employing the concept of "gestural interface." Right-click the mouse, and options will appear in a circle like a compass rose, with commands in the cardinal directions. Move your mouse

THROUGH THE DARK PORTAL Torches cast flickering shadows and reflect dynamically off the shiny metal armor.

5 Fun & Fascinating Facts About NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

1) IT'S MULTI-PLATFORM & INTEROPERABLE NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will support the Windows, Mac, Linux, and the ever-popular BeOS operating systems, and all versions will be completely interoperable.

2) VOICE CHAT The designers are committed to including voice chat in the game, though they've yet to choose the specific technology.

3) RANKINGS The NEVERWINTER NIGHTS matching service (hosted by mPlayer) will support world-wide rankings for each character class, as well as for best role-players, best servers, etc.

4) UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS The NEVERWINTER tools could be used by clever gamers to create other sorts of games beyond standard RPG adventures. Some possibilities include Capture the Flag-type games and variants, and real-time strategy games between two Dungeon Masters.

5) BONE-CHILLING IRONY!!! NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is being developed in Edmonton, Canada, which enjoys many long dark months of winter with life-threateningly cold temperatures. Neverwinter? Nevermind!!

up to select, say, Combat, and you'll get a new set of combat commands on the compass rose. Move your mouse in another direction to select a combat option. The idea is that, after a while, you'll come to know the more common commands as physical gestures. Magic missile could be "up, right, left" or Called Shot to Head could be "down, down, down." The designers are putting a lot of effort into the interface, because, as producer Trent Oster says, "This is a game we want you to be playing for years, so the interface must be phenomenal."

Massive Multiplayer Potential

64-player servers, moderated in real-time by Dungeon Masters, is an interesting proposition. But the potential of NEVERWINTER reaches scary proportions when you consider portals—links between NEVERWINTER servers. Servers can be linked to servers allowing a character to walk from one world, or one part of a world, to another. Conceivably, groups of players could collaborate to form a huge network of NEVERWINTER worlds, a world-wide web of non-stop role-playing action.

Will players do it? Consider this: NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is still a year away from release, has received very little publicity, and already there are over 30 Web sites upon which folks are planning out their worlds and networks of world. Some of these plans, like the project to revive the original NEVERWINTER NIGHTS from America Online (see sidebar), are—in the words of Trent Ostler—"truly terrifying in scope."

Which is an apt description of the NEVERWINTER project as a whole. Designing a full-length RPG is one of the toughest assignments in game design and has broken many a game company's back. But doing that, plus creating a consumer-quality toolset of unprecedented scope, *and* designing it all around a multiplayer server—well, that's just nuts. The kind of nuts of which huge breakthroughs are made.

If anyone's got a shot at pulling it off, it's got to be Bioware and Black Isle, who together have forged the best RPGs in the last few years. In their favor, they have smarts, drive, experience, and a partnership with one of the smartest, most ambitious, and creative forces in gaming—you, the community of gamers. If Bioware/Black Isle can come through on their end of the NEVERWINTER NIGHTS proposition, it's up to you to come through on yours. CGW

Up From the Ashes

Players Plan to Use New NEVERWINTER NIGHTS to Resurrect the Old

The Bioware project is not the first online RPG to bear the NEVERWINTER NIGHTS name. The original NEVERWINTER NIGHTS—the first graphical online RPG ever—ran on America Online for many years, developing a large and faithful following. America Online shut down the original NEVERWINTER NIGHTS in 1997, displacing some of the oldest guilds in online gaming.

If the new NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a success, the old NEVERWINTER NIGHTS may rise up from the ashes. A group of original players are hatching plans to use the Bioware tools to recreate the original game in as much detail as possible. To learn more about the project, check out the Neverwinter Nights Consortium at usadnet.com/nwncon/.

I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE All of the objects and textures included in the NEVERWINTER NIGHTS adventure will be available for use in your own creations.

UNOBSTRUCTED VIEW Sure, the fog is nice. But the best part of this shot is what you don't see. Interface and chat windows are all transparent, so you can always keep your eyes on the action.

Submarine TITANS

250 Million Years Ago,
Man Evolved Out of the Ocean.

This Year, He Goes Back!

In the year 2047, a massive comet ravages Earth's surface and the remnants of mankind descend to the bottom of the ocean in order to survive.
A hundred years pass, but even in the still of the deep, one truth remains—where man goes, war will follow. Now the cradle of creation has spawned the seeds of man's destruction and all the oceans of the world are not big enough for three civilizations locked in a fierce battle for man's final frontier.

"Submarine Titans is shaping up to become one of the most enticing RTS games of the millennium."

CNET.com

Coming Summer 2000

Three distinct civilizations to play - two human, one alien.

Fully realized 3D underwater universe including 5 depth/elevation levels.

Includes a powerful scenario editor and an intelligent random mission generator.

Multiplayer action over Internet or LAN allows up to 24 players.

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HOW DO WE RATE?

★★★★★

Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★

Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

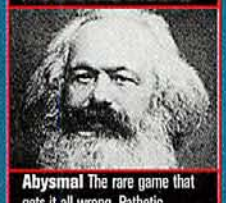
★★★

Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★

Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★



Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

We reviews only finished games– no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: MESSIAH

Get some blood on your halo in MESSIAH

God Awful

ACTION

reviewed by Charles Ardai

JUMPIN' AND BOBBIN' While Bob the angel may make a unique protagonist, gameplay elements like jumping-to-that-adjacent-platform are hardly unique.

For a game that prides itself on its state-of-the-art graphics, Interplay's MESSIAH is awfully ugly. Not ugly in the sense of being bad looking (though you wouldn't think from looking at it that you're seeing anything worth the three years it took to develop) – I'm talking about an ugliness that is more than skin deep. Not since Origin's 1995 bomb BIOFORGE have I played a game that revels so much in its own vileness. That game opened with a torture sequence and went downhill from there, but it was an episode of Teletubbies compared to MESSIAH.

Cute Lil' Angel o' Death

Don't be misled by the game's cherubic main character: You may play a tiny, diaper-clad angel sent down from heaven to rectify misdeeds on earth, but your demeanor is anything but angelic and your methods are more demonic than they are divine. Your chief weapon in the game is possession: You can enter and take over the body of any character you meet in the game, and you pretty much have to do so at every opportunity, because you're a fragile little thing with no chance of survival, otherwise. Try to run a gauntlet of armed cops or thuggish sewer dwellers in just your Pampers, and you'll be angel flambé before you've taken two steps.

Your mission is to rescue the world from the clutches of a cult-like group called the "Fathers," described in the game's rambling backstory as a sort of cross between SPECTRE and the GOP. Somehow, they seem to have captured Satan; now you have to track them down at their secret moonbase so that, on God's behalf, you can prevent them from using

CGW RATED

PROS

Novel possession angle encourages new modes of problem solving.

CONS

Gameplay is marred by bugs, awkward controls, unbalanced combat, and sickening plot elements that'll make you want to take a shower afterward.

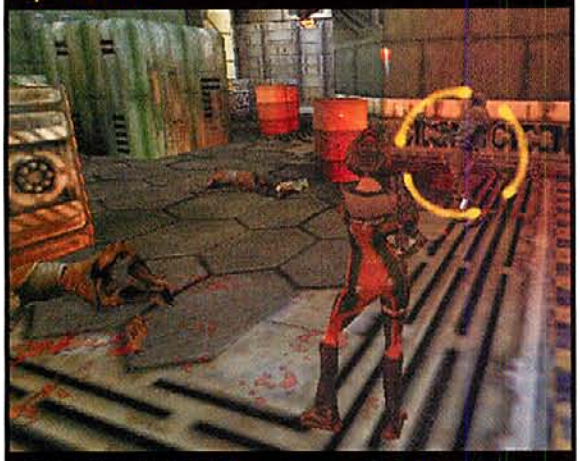
Requirements: Pentium-II 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator with 8MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 128MB RAM, lots of patience.
3D Support: Direct 3D, Glide **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Shiny Entertainment • **$45** • **www.interplay.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and gore, mature sexual themes, strong language.

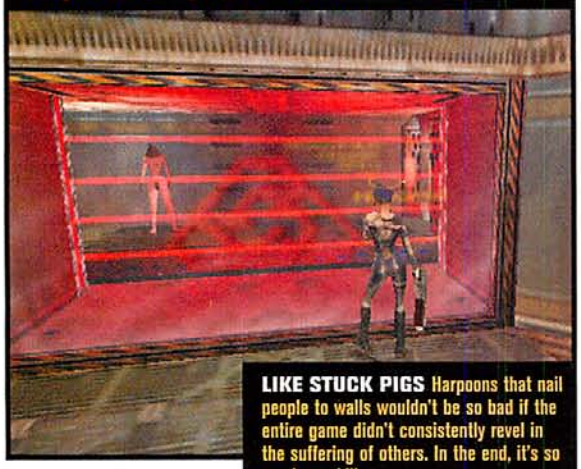
their power over Satan to dominate the world. I think. It's all very confusing, not to mention shockingly badly written. Between copious typos and naïve pronouncements ("The leaders of the Earth no longer care about the people"), the game will keep you guessing as to whether you're in the hands of professional designers or a couple of sub-literate, alienated adolescents.

The events of the game won't clear things up much. There's lots of gross-out stuff of the sort you'd expect an adolescent to come up with (in one scene, you possess a rat and cross a vat of muck on a bridge of human bones). There's lots of bloody violence: You get to use a harpoon gun to leave an enemy impaled

GUNFIGHT IN AN OKAY CORRAL Lopsided gunfights in crowded areas make survival unlikely. It took several tries to wipe out this cannibal squad and move on.



SEX & VIOLENCE A naked woman on a meathook. MESSIAH is forever finding new and exciting ways to show off its adolescent "edginess."



LIKE STUCK PIGS Harpoons that nail people to walls wouldn't be so bad if the entire game didn't consistently revel in the suffering of others. In the end, it's so much overkill.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

> **"Try to run a gauntlet of armed cops or thuggish sewer dwellers in just your Pampers and you'll be angel flambé before you've taken two steps."**
> ***— Charles Ardai, reviewing MESSIAH.***

Spoiled Rotten

By Tom Price

When it comes to the latest PC gaming technology, we admit to being completely spoiled. While our desktops are just slightly above average 450s, Technical Director Dave Salvator keeps our testing lab stocked with the latest fire breathing CPUs and 3D cards.

The downside is that it's easy to get aloof about system requirements, much to the chagrin of readers who are trying to squeeze the last few drops out of their P233 and Voodoo 1. But with its exorbitant system requirements, F1 2000 (reviewed this month by Brett Todd) brought an Athlon 850 with an nVidia GeForce to its knees. This brought up an interesting debate at our monthly review ratings meeting: How do we review a game that technology has not yet caught up to? Does a title deserve to get dinged when its graphics engines sits ahead of the technology curve? Ever-advancing graphics certainly enhance PC gaming and set it apart from console systems, but a lot of gamers with lower end machines can get left out in the cold.

Let me know what you think by dropping me a line at Tom_Price@ziffdavis.com. Meanwhile, I'm going to play the CRIMSON SKIES beta on our new PIII933 equipped with a Voodoo5. God I love this job.

JULY REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Asheron's Call	★★★★★
F1 2000	★★★★½
F/A-18E Super Hornet	★★★★★
International Soccer 2000	★★★★★
Messiah	★★★★★
Might & Magic VIII	★★★★★
NASCAR 2000	★★★★★
Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed	★★★★½
Triple Play 2001	★★★★★
Tzar	★★★★★

BODY MOVING Characters in the game are just so much disposable armor. In the first shot, I'm waiting to possess the scientist behind the podium. Once I grabbed him, the cop killed him and then I took him over.

through the chest and pinned to the wall, and a sniper scope to blow someone's head off at twenty yards. There's a level of sexism that goes beyond the usual demeaning stereotypes: The women not only have big breasts and wear skimpy outfits, they also turn up dressed in bondage gear and hanging nude from meathooks. And there's a general atmosphere of cruelty, of enjoying violence not for the adrenaline rush of the action – or even for the fun of cartoonish bloodshed – but for the entirely too realistic pain it causes.

In one scene, a character you possess has to leap from a high ledge. Having the fall kill the character would be bad enough, but instead of killing him, the fall just cripples him, and for the next ten minutes – while you make your way through the rest of the room's puzzles – you have to endure the sound of his screams of pain and his begging for help. It's truly repellent – I don't even like to think of the sort of sadist who would enjoy it.

STREETWALKERS With her sassy pose and ample figure, you can be excused for mistaking the cop for the prostitute.

Shot to Hell

Entirely apart from this sort of aesthetic concern, there are plenty of straightforward technical reasons to wish MESSIAH were better. The controls take forever to get the hang of; even when you get used to the mechanics of possession, which takes some doing, you'll find yourself skidding around like a clumsy ice skater, since each press of the over-responsive movement keys sends the screen swinging wildly. Actions other than movement are handled through an awkward "one key to do everything" system that allows you to only carry one weapon at a time, and to only take a single action in any given location. Depending on where you are standing, you can either pick something up, put something down, or use something, and imprecise positioning will often result in your putting down your gun when you meant to open a door. Combat is reasonably simple – crosshairs appear over each target and all you have to do is pull the trigger – but the typical battle in MESSIAH consists of you against a dozen super-fast, armed-to-the-teeth thugs with perfect aim. In other words, you die a lot. And while the goal of getting you to think of stealthy, possession-related ways to get around in secrecy is a laudable one, in practice you'll spend a lot of the game getting shot.

The game's main technical claim to fame is that its proprietary graphics system increases or decreases the number of polyons each figure contains, depending on how close or far away the figure is supposed to be, and also (I believe) how many figures are on the screen at once. In principle, this is supposed to improve graphical realism and speed; in practice, there are plenty of recent games that are better-looking than MESSIAH, and plenty that are faster. In fact, I experienced more screen slowdowns, clipping problems, and odd graphical quirks with MESSIAH than with most games, not to mention a number of outright crashes. The game was also hard to install and to get running, and once I succeeded, I was never able to get the sound in the opening animation sequence to work.

This is not to suggest that MESSIAH is a terrible game – once you get used to the controls, it's fine. But it's never more than fine. Most of the puzzles are ordinary platform-game fare: Jump from ledge to ledge, ride elevators, float to the top of a room on updrafts from giant fans, and so forth. An interesting storyline and characters might have been enough to rescue the game, but the crypto-religious gibberish MESSIAH tries to pass off as its story (presented in large blocks of text, no less!) is nothing more than warmed-over Philip K. Dick.

It's possible that what MESSIAH's designers were after was to replicate the creepy, genuinely frightening atmosphere of HALF-LIFE, and if so, you at least have to give them credit for a well-chosen goal. But where HALF-LIFE gave you a character to play for whom you could feel empathy and a predicament that was relentlessly engaging, MESSIAH gives you a succession of characters who are literally no more than empty shells – you pick them up and throw them away like tissues when you're done – and a predicament so bizarre as to be incomprehensible.

MESSIAH tries very hard. But it could have used a little more work on its fundamental gameplay and story, and a little less on making every strangling in the game look and sound so realistic. CGW

Fight Like the Devil

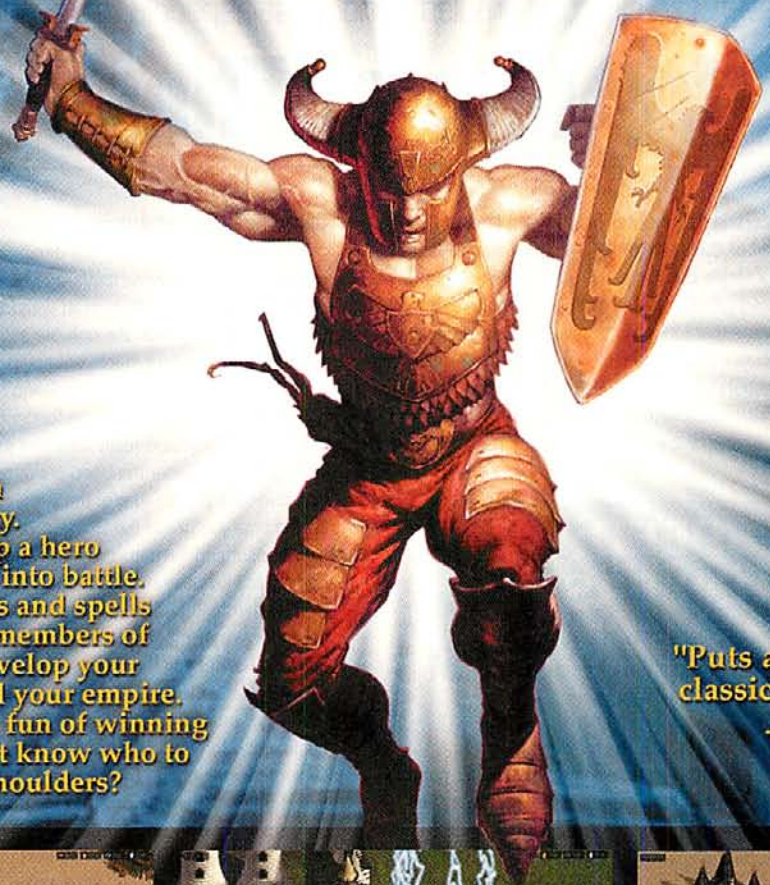
There are two ways to prevail in MESSIAH's heavily one-sided firefights, and neither involves playing by the rules. The slightly more legitimate approach is to possess your enemies one at a time, letting them see you as you do it. The terrified buggers will immediately turn their fire on their possessed ex-comrades. Once a given host has been properly perforated, pop-out and inhabit another bad guy. Repeat until all enemies have slaughtered each other.

The other approach – even less sporting, but what the hell, life's short – is to use cheat codes to gain an unfair advantage. Press "Escape," and then type "ucantkillme" to render your character invulnerable.

Or type "braindead" to turn off all enemy AI, leaving the game's heavily-armed monstrosities standing around like so many statues. You can ignore them or pick them off like fish in the proverbial barrel, using the weapon of your choice: "bigbang" gives you a bazooka, "lightmeup" a flamethrower, and "rapidfire" a machine gun.

WARLORDS BATTLECRY

BECOME A HERO



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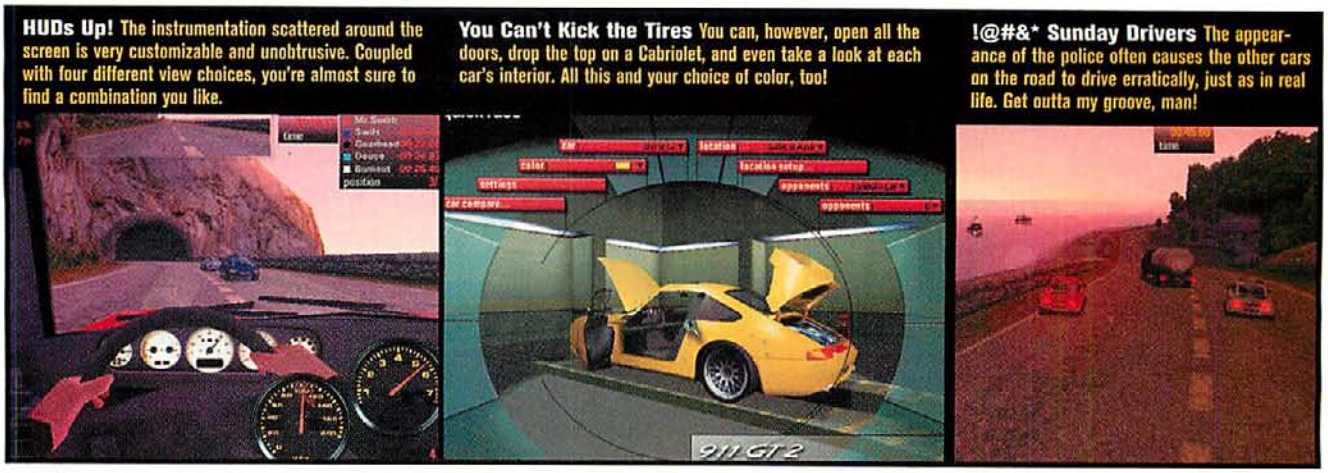
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



HUDs Up! The instrumentation scattered around the screen is very customizable and unobtrusive. Coupled with four different view choices, you're almost sure to find a combination you like.

You Can't Kick the Tires You can, however, open all the doors, drop the top on a Cabriolet, and even take a look at each car's interior. All this and your choice of color, too!

!@#&* Sunday Drivers The appearance of the police often causes the other cars on the road to drive erratically, just as in real life. Get outta my groove, man!

Many cars, several tracks, one emblem, and no salespeople. Who could ask for more?

Need for One of These!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED

reviewed by Greg Fortune

I have to admit to a certain degree of concern when I heard that the latest installment of the NEED FOR SPEED series was to focus on the offerings of a single car company. Sure, there are a lot of elements to a good racing game, but isn't car selection one of the major ones? Could a game that focuses narrowly on a single make of automobile retain the appeal of a game featuring numerous exotics? Well, the answer is a resounding yes. NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED uses two new campaign modes to expertly highlight the capabilities and history of one of the most desired and respected lines of performance cars in the world. The result is a far deeper respect for the Porsche than I had expected from a computer game.

If you are worried about flaws in the game engine, graphics glitches, or controller problems, forget it. The EA team has pretty much got this engine down to an art. Everything works about how you'd expect, especially if you've played any of the other games in the NEED FOR SPEED series. Force feedback, multiplayer support, brake tuning, and gear ratios are all easily accessible and well-presented.

Track selection is mainly a function of the mode you're playing. If you simply want a quick single-player race or knockout tournament, you'll have nine different tracks to choose from. However, that is clearly not where EA intended you to spend your time. The real meat of the game is the two single-player campaign modes; Evolution and Factory Driver.

Darwin's Theory of Automobiles

The new Evolution mode is a direct by-product of the narrow focus on Porsche. Here you have the opportunity to start with Porsche's flagship offering, the 356, and basically race through the entire Porsche history. You can buy and sell from your stable of cars, purchase upgrades, and race your new acquisitions in class-specific races. My favorite part of this mode was the differences in performance from car to car. The '50 356 Coupe Ferdinand really feels like it's chugging along with a 1200cc engine under the hood and a basic suspension underneath you. Even the throaty roar of the wide open throttle sounds just right. By the time you get to the Boxster, you'll *really* appreciate the modern power plant and suspension. If you have a nostalgic bone in your body, you'll love the evolution mode.

The other featured racing mode is Factory Driver, and this is where the rubber really meets the road. If you think you can get by just knowing how to jam the pedals to the floor and executing the occasional power slide, forget it. To be on the Porsche Factory Team, you've got to learn to drive like a pro. Your assignments generally come in the form of crazy bets, dares, and assignments from the senior team members. Dietrich says, "You've got three minutes to get this Boxster all the way down to the docks – through traffic and police patrols – and don't scratch it!" Frank says, "Beat my best time on the course marked out on the skid pad with that 911 over there if you want to keep your job." By the time you're done with this campaign, you'll feel like you just graduated from the Jim Russell School of High Performance Driving.

Let's Get Out of Here Before the Cops Show Up!

This is a great game, whether or not you're a fan of the Porsche. EA's gamble in focusing on a single car-maker pays off in spades, thanks to the two new campaign modes. One can only hope that there are more games like this under the hood at EA. In the meantime, there's no longer a need for me to get that second mortgage on my house to finance the 911 I've always wanted. All the Porsches in the world and not a salesman in sight... I must be dreaming! CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

A great driving game, whether you're a Porsche enthusiast or not.

CONS

Short on high-speed tracks.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 150 MB install. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct 3D and OpenGL. **Multiplayer Support:** Modem and TCP/IP (2-8 players).

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Electronic Arts • $50 • www.needforspeed.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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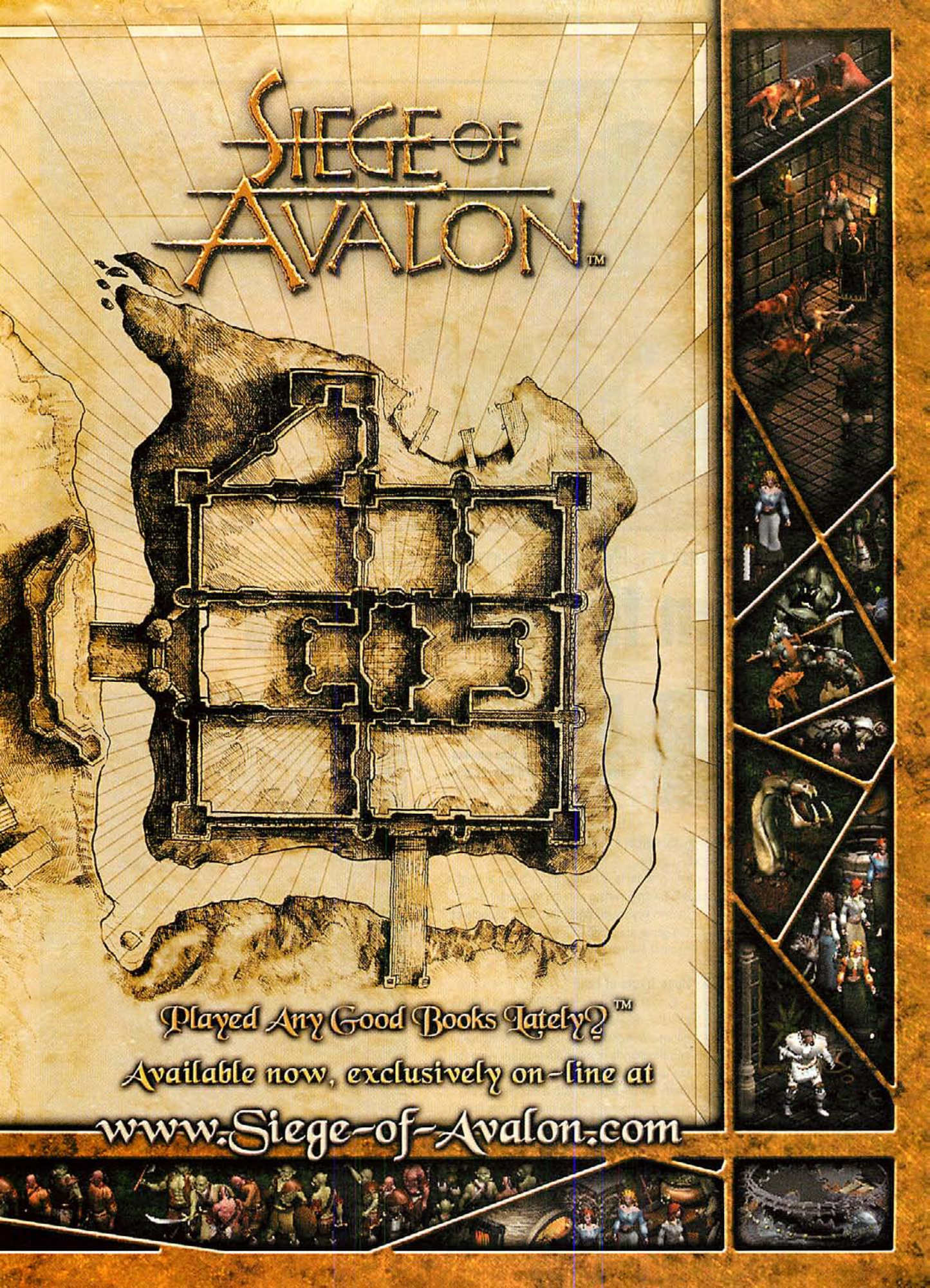
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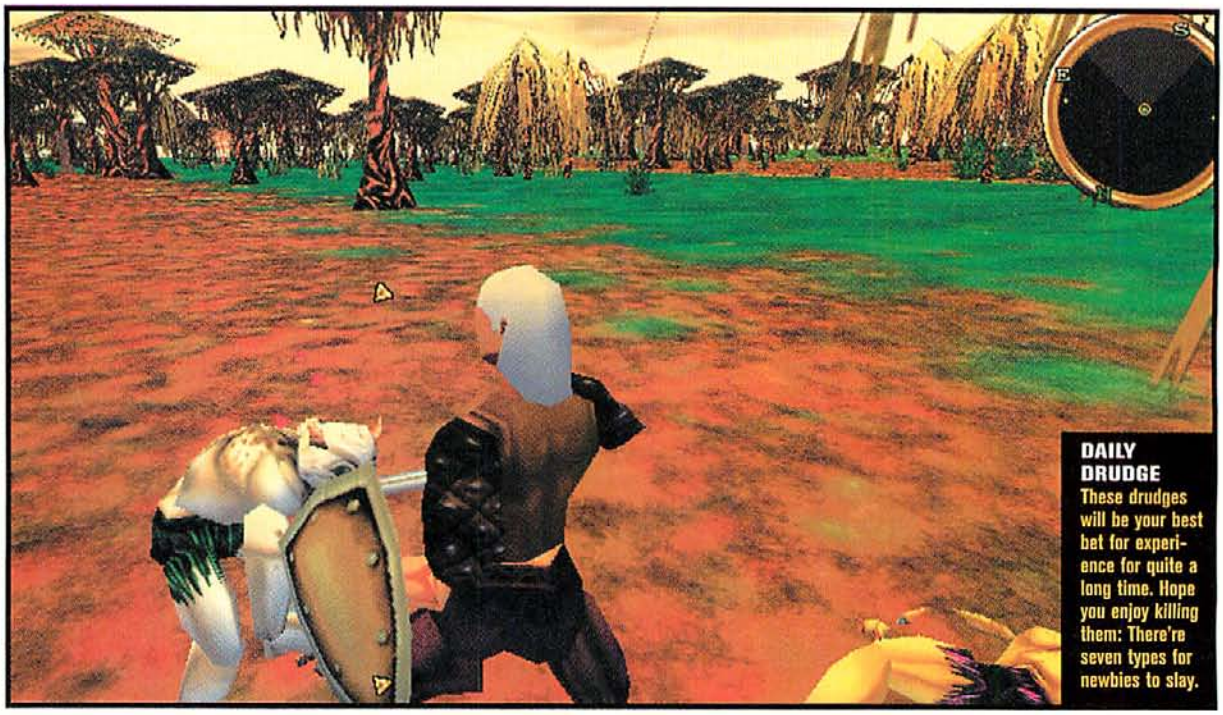


DAILY DRUDGE These drudges will be your best bet for experience for quite a long time. Hope you enjoy killing them: There're seven types for newbies to slay.

Online Marathons, Pyramid Schemes, and Affectionate Monsters

A Run for Your Money

ASHERON'S CALL

reviewed by Alex Handy

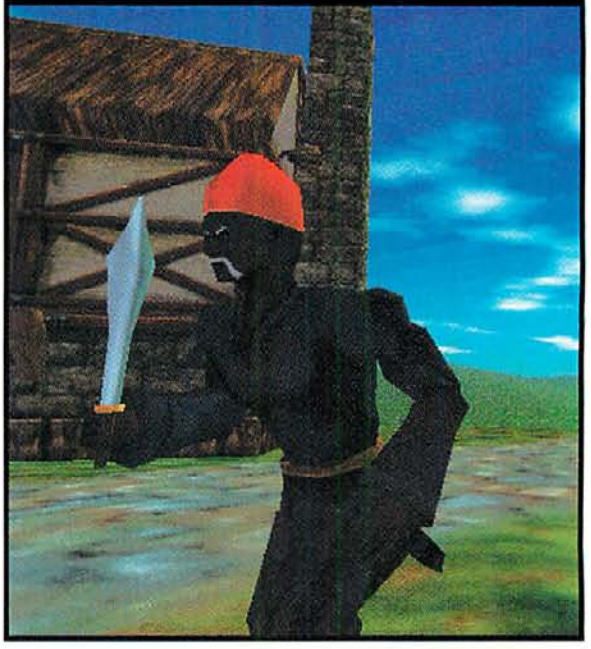
Run like hell. This is not a warning; it's a slogan. In the world of Dereth, you'll spend more of your time running than crimson-haired Lola. Legging it out to dungeons, running from various beasties, jogging across huge expanses of open land. At times, it feels as though ASHERON'S CALL is the world's first massively-multiplayer sprinting game.

But amidst all this running, a game is hiding. It can be an enjoyable experience, but it can also be aggravating enough to warrant a thrown keyboard. While the social aspects of the game are some of the best available, the combat system, simply put, is terrible.

Huge Tracts of Land

In the tradition of EVERQUEST and ULTIMA ONLINE, ASHERON'S CALL takes us into an enormous world filled with treasure, monsters, and thousands of other adventurers vying for the title of "Most Important Character." It's a pretty simple formula with a few new ideas spicing up the otherwise homogenous flavor.

But that formula is modified by a game world that's larger than anything you've ever



RUN! IT'S A SHRINER! Characters can start out with a number of neato outfits, ranging from pantaloons and turbans to cloaks and fezzes.

CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent community; gorgeous world; no overcrowding.

CONS
Horrible combat system; not enough newbie monsters.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 170MB hard drive space, 32MB RAM, Internet connection. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 3D accelerator 64MB RAM, high-speed Internet connection. **3D Support:** Direct 3D

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Turbine Entertainment Software • $40 • www.zone.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence.

seen, and there are no cars to help get you from place to place. It's big enough for newbies to coexist with each other in blissful ignorance, big enough to keep players from getting bunched up in the prime hunting grounds, and big enough to make for some long jogs if you die in the middle of nowhere. But that's what makes online RPGs fun, right? Dying in some desolate wasteland and running back to your corpse before someone finds it first? Well, yes and no. Unfortunately, the line between newbie areas and the big boys' territories is less than well defined. Not that we'd expect giant signs shouting "Warning! Death ahead!" but it would be nice if the more violent creatures were a bit further from town...and a little less friendly.

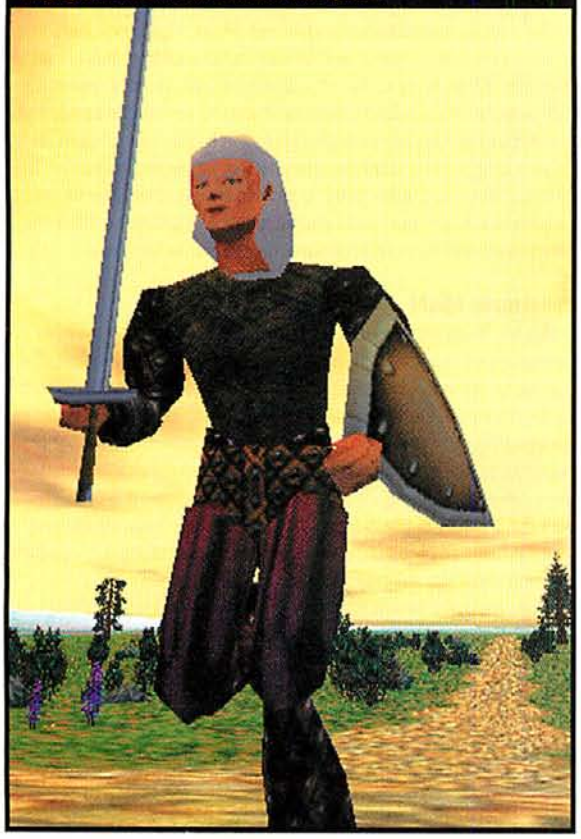
It does seem, at times, that the baddies are a bit too affectionate. Rather than simply chasing you from a distance, ASHERON's monsters attempt to mount you. I wish I were kidding. The locals refer to it as sticking; I call it freaking obnoxious. Here's a typical scenario: I'm running along a road towards Holtburg when I see some Phytos Wasps by the roadside. I, of course, decide to run, straight on down the road. The wasps, however, being the excitable creatures they are, begin pursuit. Once one of them gets close enough to take a swing at me – and becomes plastered to my back – he's no longer bound by the game's physics engine. Monsters are actually repositioned on the fly so that they are close enough to attack you. It's quite unnerving to see a Gnawer Thresh pushed across the landscape by an unseen force so that it can get in a good swing at your retreating comrades.

STAY A WHILE AND LISTEN There's a wealth of character poses to choose from, which help make ASHERON'S CALL one of the best games on the scene for social interaction.

My Way or the Amway

On a lighter note, ASHERON'S CALL is also the first game to capture the true fun and excitement of pyramid schemes. You can swear allegiance to other players, thus offering them some of the experience you gain. They, in turn, offer you protection, shiny metal objects, and low-interest loans. Eventually, when you move up the ladder, you can recruit your own followers, give them gifts, tantalize them with the wonders of your new brain (gratuitous Upright Citizens Brigade reference), and so on. The system does a good job of ensuring the acceptance of newbies into the gaming fold. While it is disturbing to see this sort of thing in a virtual world, it's a relatively effective alternative to clans.

HE'S WEARING VELVET PANTS Only a taste of the long hours spent running from place to place. As you can see, my character's legs are bulging with muscles from constant wind sprints.



Alas, gaining experience through pyramid schemes is by far the easiest way to advance your character in the lands of Dereth. Combat is a pain in the proverbial tuccus. The sticky monster problem isn't the only chink in ASHERON's chain mail. Combat is relatively unexciting, save for those all-too-common times when you're swarmed by a herd of rats and eaten alive. Combat walks that fine line between real-time and turn-based. Once you find a monster on your radar (the particularly-nasty monsters don't show up on radar until it's too late), you select it with the mouse and enter attack mode. Here, you use a slider to determine whether your attack will be fast or powerful. Then players select either a high, medium, or low attack. After that, you sit back and wait until your target is dead. Sure, it works, but it's absolutely no fun, and it's a bitch if you're being attacked by multiple targets at once.

For a single-player game, a bad combat system is simply annoying. When you're going to be spending weeks at a time online, however – dicing small animals so you can level up – it'd be nice if the time you spent in battle were interesting. Turbine would do well to scrap their combat system entirely and start from scratch.

Run, Frodo, Run

As a virtual world, ASHERON'S CALL excels, but as a game, it is little more than a social experiment interspersed with periods of being killed by goblins. In truth, the only fun to be had here is in running across the lands, avoiding combat like the plague.

ASHERON'S CALL offers nothing in the way of traditional RPG chopping-fests. But if you're looking to dive deep into a world in which you can overcompensate for your powerless existence in the real world (I know I am), ASHERON'S CALL can be a rewarding place. The players are – for the most part – friendly and understanding, and the perks for those who manage to reach the upper echelon are far above those found in other online RPGs.

Just be sure to ask yourself, before logging on: Where do I want to run today? CGW

I GOT A ROCK The already outdated, flat sprite graphics look less sharp than usual and feature uninspired animations. Instead of the genuinely creepy trees from MM7, this time we get...rocks.

UP FROM THE DEPTHS Inexplicably, there's still no full-screen mode, even though there are hotkeys for all of the commands. This new panoramic view gives you a larger view of the gaming world, and of these Tritons who rise up from flooded corridors.

I CHOOSE YOU Traditionally, games in this series have lacked meaningful interaction with non-player characters, and that's still the case here. But at least you get to choose among competing factions, and there are even a few cameos from previous characters in the series.

An archaic engine limits the appeal of MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII

The Magic Is Gone

Cleave the ogre, fireball the vampire, grab the gold, and acquire a spiffy new leather outfit. A typical night out in Manhattan? For some, perhaps; but it's also a well-established formula for a hack-and-slash RPG. While some gamers prefer their RPGs with additional depth and involved storylines, there are plenty who are content to explore territory and to slay hundreds of monsters to gain experience points and equipment for their violent virtual counterparts.

Ensnaring players with the temptation of "*just one more*" experience level, magic item, or shiny bauble, the MIGHT AND MAGIC series has consistently exploited this formula. But even the most proven formula fails occasionally, especially when used too frequently, and that's certainly the case with MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII: DAY OF THE DESTROYER. The latest installment in New World Computing's acclaimed role-playing series skimps on attention to detail, and doesn't offer enough innovation to appeal to anyone beyond hardcore fans of the series.

MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII: DAY OF THE DESTROYER

reviewed by P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki

In With the Old

In order to produce an annual installment in the series, New World Computing has recycled the same engine in three successive games. Gameplay in MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII is virtually identical to MIGHT AND MAGIC VII. Most RPG fans are willing to accept the reuse of technology, because the inherent complexity of the genre mandates extremely-lengthy development periods. But the proprietary Horizon and Labyrinth graphics engines looked outdated even when initially unveiled.

As usual, gameplay consists of systematically exploring an expansive gaming world from a first-person perspective while stomping hundreds of savage beasts to gain experience points to make your party staggeringly powerful. Although the series typically provides a rudimentary plot to justify the ensuing slaughter, MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII's plot is more involved and requires your characters to gain the support of various factions in order to save the gaming world from pre-ordained destruction. Well-produced, animated cut-scenes provide meaningful plot development during the course of the game – a feature surprisingly absent in most of the series – in addition to rewarding players for landmark achievements.

The use of an established engine has allowed the developers to focus on providing additional character options and on improving the interface. While some of the new character classes have essentially just been renamed – Dark Elves, for instance, are fundamentally just monstrous versions of the Archer class – it's definitely extraordinary to have dragons and other beasts available as player characters. The interface has been redesigned to provide a panoramic view of the gaming world, and the handy journal function improved to allow map annotations and to more accurately record trainer locations.

Unbalanced Might

But too many aspects of MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII seem to have been slapped together without adequate testing or forethought. The dungeons are incredibly basic in design, especially when compared to the distinctive subterranean environments included in the past two games. While the unique abilities of the new classes are almost universally interesting, some of them are so powerful that they unbalance gameplay. Missile weapons are still overpowered, especially with the addition of the dragon's 100% accurate basic attack; and since virtually all of the old spells are back, incantations such as paralyze and invisibility still make the game relatively easy.

While hardcore fans may merely be grateful for another MIGHT AND MAGIC that provides familiar gameplay in new environments, most gamers will prefer to wait for the more innovative Lithtech engine MIGHT AND MAGIC games, due next year. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Another expansive world to explore; monster player characters; a more intricate and integrated storyline than its predecessors.

CONS
Dated graphics; unbalanced gameplay; too much combat.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 375MB hard drive space, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: 3DO • Developer: New World Computing • $40 • www.3do.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

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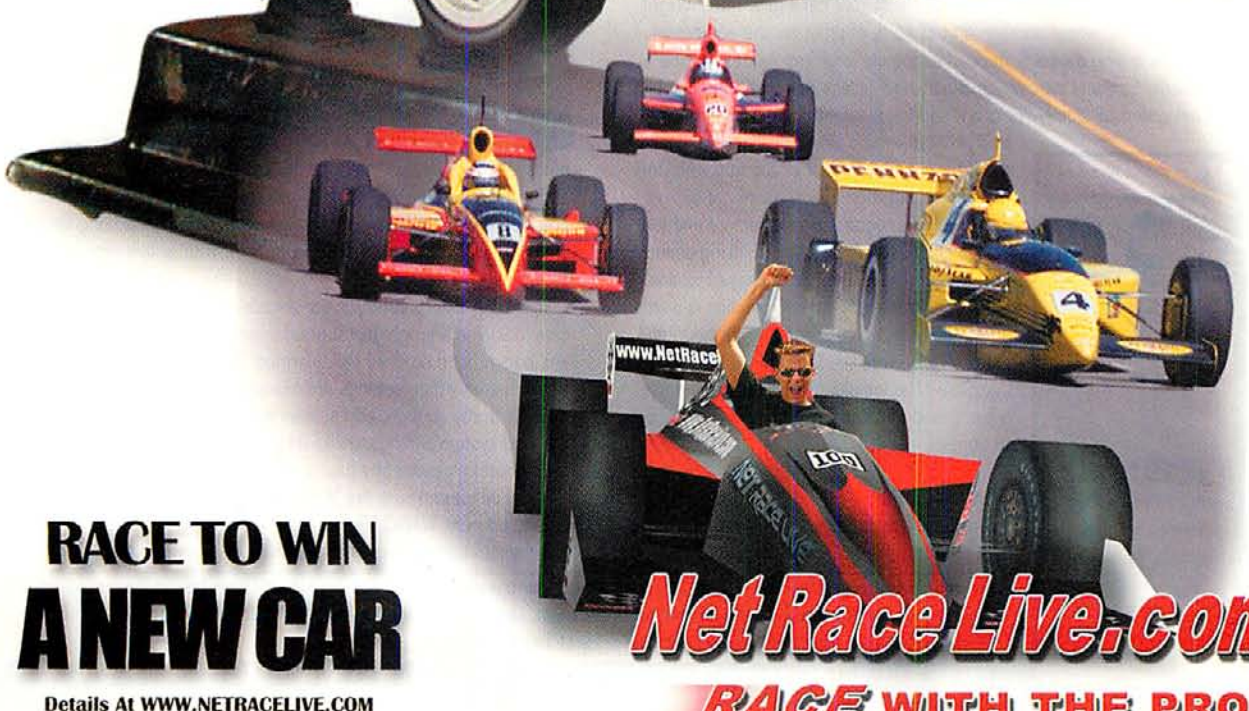

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RACE WITH THE PROS

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Back to the Track

For all its dominance of the PC sports-game universe, EA Sports has never been able to craft a good, serious driving title. NASCAR and Formula One aficionados have traditionally found the company's offerings wanting, and that didn't change when the execrable NASCAR REVOLUTION was released last year. A pig of a game that featured the dubious combo of insane system requirements and physics dumb enough to make Albert Einstein roll over in his grave, it was all but unplayable.

Unlike its revolutionarily bad predecessor, NASCAR 2000 is a fun game. EA Sports has finally put (most of) the pieces together and crafted an entertaining title that preserves the essential thrill of pushing a car to more than 180 mph. At the same time, however, this is still "NEED FOR SPEED does NASCAR." Hardcore realists should clutch their copies of NASCAR RACING 3 to their chests and stop reading right now. If you're an arcade-racing fan who'd like to shift the scene from Dolphin Point to Sears Point, keep going.

NASCAR 2000
reviewed by Brett Todd

Take Your Place in the Driver's Seat

First and foremost, NASCAR 2000 is packed with goodies. Game mode options let you run a quick race, go up against Richard "The King" Petty in a one-on-one showdown, take part in a race weekend, set up a full championship season, or go online for some multiplayer action. All of the top drivers from the current season are on hand, along with a number of legends like Cale Yarborough and David Pearson. The computer drivers are fully configurable, allowing you to adjust their handicaps or boosts in important areas, like overall performance level and horsepower.

Eighteen authentic NASCAR tracks (all but Daytona, licensed exclusively to Sega) and five fantasy ovals are available right from the start – no lock-out nonsense here. Garage-tweaking options are quite vigorous. Feel free to mess around with your car's gear ratio, weight distribution, wheel camber, and all sorts of other arcane equipment.

The driving model is good, if extremely forgiving. Aside from the deadly banks at places like Bristol and Talladega, most turns can be navigated by simply flooring it and keeping your controller of choice pushed hard to one side. You'll never mistake the driving model for that of Sierra's NASCAR RACING 3, but then again, you're not supposed to. The focus is on excitement and tension, as opposed to strategy. Thinking ahead and planning a killer series of passes means nothing if your eye/hand coordination is a little off. Opposing drivers aren't exactly thoughtful, either. Cagey vets like Dale Jarrett often morph into Dale "The Intimidator" Earnhardt and use a bump-and-run strategy that will send you out of control.

Crash Into Me

So, as you might expect, crashes take place with great regularity. Dumb down your opponents' intelligence and they smack into you all the time. Crank it up and they smack into you all the time. You'll take damage from each crack-up, though it's typically pretty minor. Careen headlong into a wall, and all you have to worry about is the four or five seconds lost on the clock.

For an EA Sports product, the visuals are unimpressive. While the cars look nice enough, the surroundings are ugly and jarring. Tracks and background scenery seem jagged. Pop-up is rampant, even when the resolution settings are cranked all the way up. Still, the game is pretty enough, and at least it runs properly at the recommended system settings, unlike its predecessor. I'll take this tradeoff for a good frame rate any day.

If you can appreciate the "fun over physics" philosophy that EA has embraced here, NASCAR 2000 is a worthwhile purchase. It'll have the sim fanatics reaching for something else, though. CGW

RUN, DON'T WALK Not only did I walk away from this one, I actually managed to finish the race in twelfth spot. So, damage modeling isn't exactly realistic. Also, there are a lot of crack-ups in the game, both major and minor. Fun for the ambulance-chasing fans, if not an accurate representation of NASCAR.

FIELD OF SCREAMS Some of the fantasy tracks are very challenging. Lakeshore features a number of hairpin-like curves that will test your driving skills and cause all sorts of congestion. Don't expect to escape an event here with your vehicle intact.

CGW RATED

PROS
Great visuals and emphasis on arcade fun make this an intriguing title for racing novices.

CONS
Isn't in the same league as NASCAR RACING 3.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX or AMD K6 266, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive, 2MB AGP or PCI DirectX 7-compatible video card, DirectX 7-compatible sound card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 24X CD-ROM drive, Direct3D-capable video card.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-4 players via Internet; 2-8 players via network; 2 players via serial.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Stormfront Studios • $40 • www.easports.com • ESRB Rating: All

JAMMED UP IN THE CORNERS This isn't a pretty situation to drive through, but it sure does show off how sumptuous the graphics are. F1 2000 is the best-looking racing simulation currently available – as long as you've got the MHz to run it properly.

GET OUT OF MY WAY One thing's for sure, computer-controlled drivers in F1 2000 aren't shy. Opponents typically barrel down the track with reckless abandon, causing dangerous situations like this one.

EA delivers a wake-up call with F1 2000

Out of the Pits at Last

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

F1 2000
reviewed by Brett Todd

EA Sports isn't kidding around anymore. Judging by the improved quality of the label's recent racing sims, the powers that be in Redwood City have finally realized that they weren't giving gearheads their money's worth. Dreck like NASCAR REVOLUTION cemented the firm's rep as one of the worst publishers of racing sims currently mangling a physics model.

But that's changed over the last couple months. First NASCAR 2000 arrived, bringing with it good gameplay and respectable – if not iron-clad – physics. Now comes F1 2000, EA Sports' first attempt at simulating Formula One racing. Designed by Image Space Incorporated, the developer behind the highly-playable SPORTS CAR GT, this is another sterling effort that blends an impressive driving model with an irrepressible sense of excitement. Its only Achilles' heel is the need for an F1-class computer in order to show it off properly.

Gameplay modes in F1 2000 are extensive. Test Day, Quick Race, Grand Prix weekend, the entire Championship season, and multiplayer are there to choose from. All the current top F1 racers and teams are included, along with the 17 tracks that will be visited during the 2000 season.

The driving model is outstanding. With the 11 difficulty options at their most unforgiving, this game is a true Formula One simulation. Maybe some seasoned vets can tell the difference between this game and long-respected titles like Ubi Soft's MONACO GRAND PRIX RACING SIMULATION 2 and Papyrus/Sierra's GRAND PRIX LEGENDS, but I sure can't. Dumbing these options down makes the game novice-friendly. I turned Braking Point and Steering assists on for my first few laps, and quickly got the hang of racing an F1 car again.

There is also a comprehensive garage. Fooling around with dozens of options in the vehicle setup menu makes a huge difference in your car's performance. Stiffen the front anti-roll bars, and you'll add more understeering in corners and you'll have to make more pit stops because of the added burden put on your front tires. Increasing the front wing will add oversteer to offset the understeer of the above, but you'll pay a price in reduced straight-ahead velocity.

One serious problem, however, is the smash-em-up derby style of the computer drivers. Like NASCAR 2000, the computer drivers are extremely aggressive. Everyone is cranked up like Michael Schumacher on benzene, so expect a lot of bump-and-run action and numerous collisions, particularly at the beginning of events. Racing with invulnerability off can lead to a very long day, as damage is modeled quite realistically and each impact will take its toll.

One area where EA Sports driving games haven't changed is their high system requirements. NASCAR REVOLUTION and F1 2000 are the most demanding games that have ever resided on my hard drive. Even the recommended Pentium-II 450MHz is a far cry from the 600MHz or greater processor that's really required to crank up the visual options here. Anything less than that, and you'll be stuck with Edsel-like frame rates and left fiddling with the detail settings until the Ferraris come home.

If you do have the horses, you'll find F1 2000 a real treat for the eyes. Vehicles look like they drove right off a television screen and are complete with all the colorful advertising decals that help Mika Hakkinen and Jacques Villeneuve maintain those Swiss bank accounts. Tracks bring exotic locales like Monaco, Hockenheim, and Montreal to vivid life, though the predominant landmarks are garish ad billboards. Audio seems curiously flat. Even with EAX support turned on, engine revving was one-dimensional and wimpy.

Regardless of the high system requirements, EA Sports has delivered a message to PC-racing enthusiasts. The company known for fluffy arcade racers has finally put together a driving title that competes with the big boys at Papyrus and Ubi Soft. This is the most complete Formula One title on the market today, and should be on the hard drive of every certified computer-gaming gearhead. CGW

CGW RATED

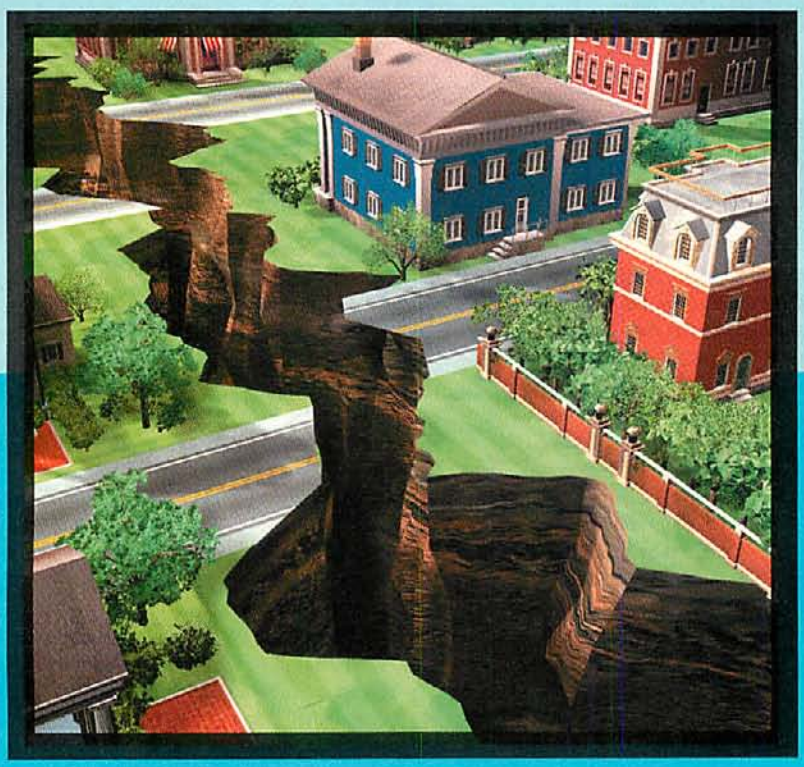
PROS
One of the most fun, real, and gorgeous racing sims available.

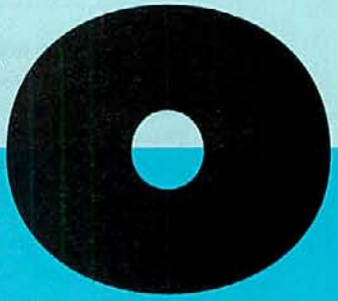
CONS
All this accuracy and excitement comes with a hefty 600MHz price tag.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz or AMD K6 2, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 16X CD-ROM drive, 4MB AGP or PCI DirectX 7.0a-compatible video card, DirectX 7.0a-compatible sound card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450MHz, 128MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space, 16X CD-ROM, Direct3D graphics accelerator card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8 players via Internet (TCP/IP network).

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Image Space Incorporated • $38 • www.easports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Shake up





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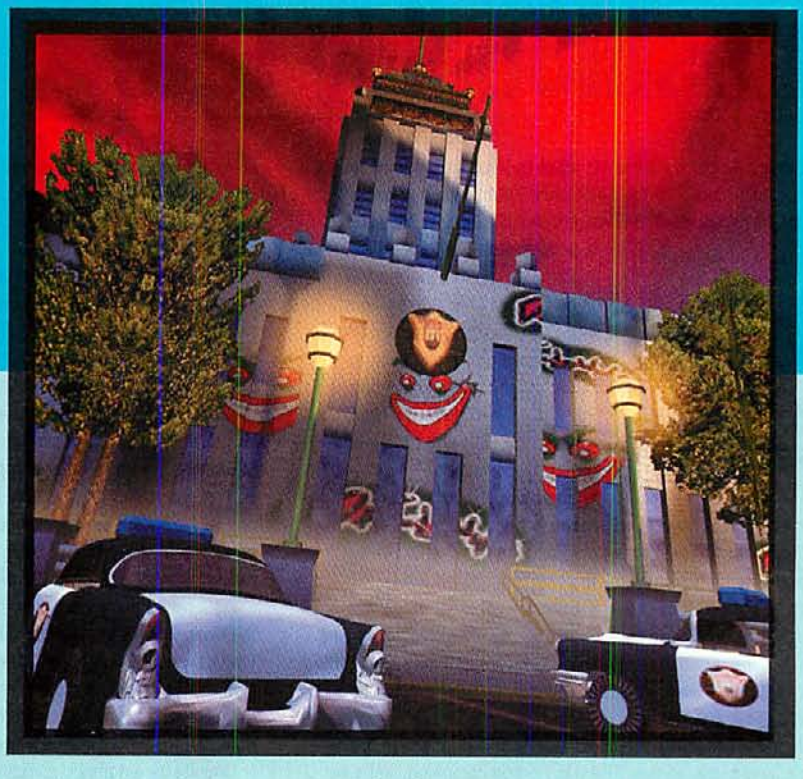

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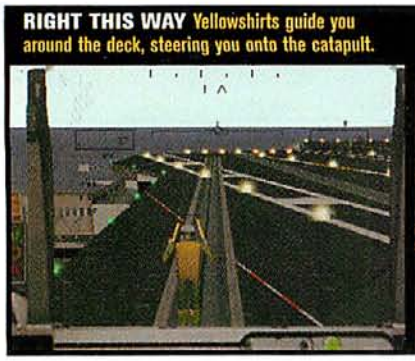
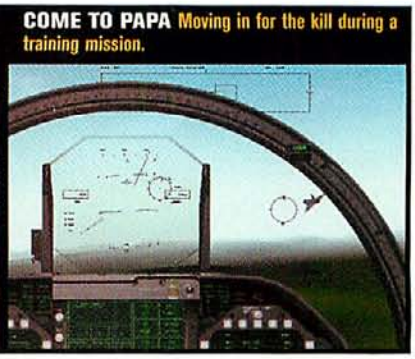


RIGHT THIS WAY Yellowshirts guide you around the deck, steering you onto the catapult.

IS THIS THING ON? SUPER HORNET has one of the most complex engine-start procedures found in a flight sim.



COME TO PAPA Moving in for the kill during a training mission.

When coming to a flight sim party, don't arrive after Jane's

Unfashionably Late

SUPER HORNET

reviewed by Tom "KC" Basham

It was a brave move, squaring off head-to-head with one of Jane's premiere study sims, F/A-18. And Digital Integration's offering does a lot of things right. But there's one big thing it did wrong: It arrived after the Jane's title.

We've come to expect a few things from a Digital Integration flight sim. First, it'll have a world-class mission-planning system based on the outstanding one first introduced in TORNADO. Next, DI products usually sport state-of-the-art flight models. Unfortunately, though, there's always *something* that makes me shake my head and utter, "What the hell were they thinking when they came up with *this*?" DI's SUPER HORNET pretty much meets all my expectations.

Flight sim opening videos rarely – if ever – represent actual air combat, and SUPER HORNET's was particularly unbelievable. Its sins were many, but the submarine sequence (yes, a submarine sequence) stands out as a prime example. Save yourself the grief – just hit the ESC key and move on.

SUPER HORNET features the usual variety of instant action, training missions, and battle sorties. There is no true campaign, just a set of canned combat missions situated in the Barents Sea and Indian Ocean. I've never been a fan of limited mission sets, especially when there's no mission editor available.

Even fresh out of the gate, SUPER HORNET required a patch to fix a bug with the cockpit artwork at higher resolutions. But once patched, I saw smooth frame rates even at maximum resolution. Buzzing over (simulated) India, however, the rendered terrain failed to inspire. The terrain itself is rather dark and dull, highlighted by roads that are not part of the terrain texture maps, but rather drawn over the top of the textures.

No self-respecting flight sim enthusiast ever reads the manual until they've flown a few sorties. Armed only with the keycard and a prayer, I headed straight for a daylight air-to-air combat sortie over the Barents Sea. I promptly found myself sitting on the carrier's deck wondering, "How do you start this damn thing?" Soon, I flipped the APU on and ran up both engines.

Once airborne, I discarded the keyboard in favor of semi-randomly flipping switches throughout the cockpit. Once I had the radar appropriately configured for an RWS air-to-air search, I asked the AWACS for information, and proceeded toward a group of contacts. But switching to single-target track (STT) mode, my radar failed to identify the first contact, presumably because of aspect angle limitations. Switching targets, my radar identified my next contact as a MiG-27. My AIM-120 separated and appeared to fly an unrealistic, pure-pursuit course to the target rather than a more realistic climb-and-dive profile. Nonetheless, it splashed the target and I proceeded to engage a Mi-24 with an AIM-9. As I moved into range, the Sidewinder "growl" changed pitch, indicating a good lock.

Figuring I'd done enough damage for the day, I turned hard toward the boat. The jet bled speed during the high-g turn, but more slowly than I expected. Although quite resistant to departing from controlled flight, while screwing around en route to the carrier I cut power and established a pretty high sink rate that very nearly took me into the drink. Recovering, I gathered myself for the last big task remaining.

Despite its automatic carrier landing system (ACLS), doing a manual carrier trap in the F/A-18 can still be a harrowing experience. But the landings weren't quite as challenging as I expected. On one approach, I actually thought the boat was stationary, since I could discern no movement on final, and the carrier wasn't generating a wake. The lack of motion greatly simplified my approach, though the task was still not simple by any means. The LSO barked commands at me, some of which I'm sure were intended to kill me. Further, I never could see the "meatball" during the approach. Nonetheless, I persevered and got back aboard safely. Perhaps due to the carrier's slow movement, I found that these landings never really got my heart going, thus denying me aerobic exercise for the day.

Timing may be SUPER HORNET's worst enemy, having arrived after JANE'S F/A-18. Although definitely a solid sim, it's somewhat eclipsed by Jane's representation of the F/A-18E, especially regarding the carrier landings, HARM missile operation, wingmen, and bad weather. SUPER HORNET does quite a few things right, though, certainly qualifying as a hardcore simulation. But given a choice between the two, JANE'S would still have to get the nod. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Provides players with a reasonable look at a day in the life of an F/A-18 pilot.

CONS

Ground terrain isn't so hot; the missions are "canned" (not dynamic).

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, DirectX-certified sound card, 4MB Direct3D-compatible card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D-accelerator card, 400MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 24 players, LAN or Internet.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Digital Integration • $38 • www.superhornet.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence, mild language.

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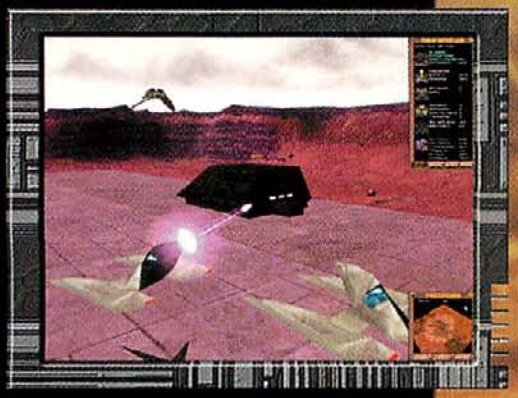

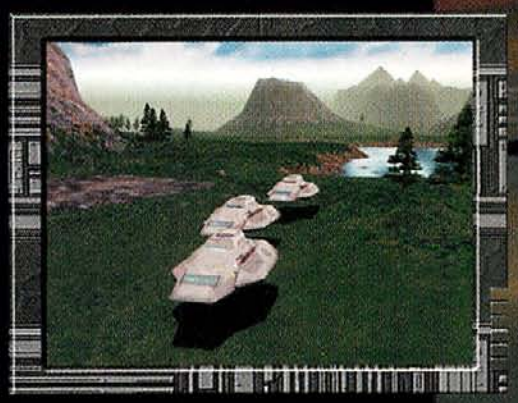

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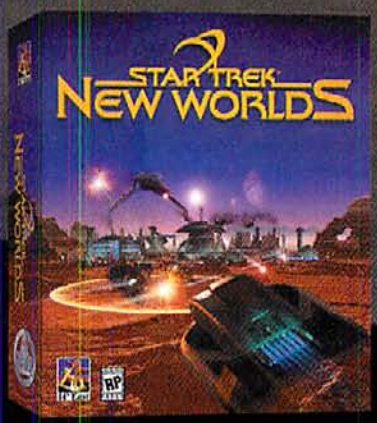

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The real-time strategy game you should have bought this month

A Tzar Is Born

TZAR: THE BURDEN OF THE CROWN is far better than its title. Of course, that's not saying much, since the developers seem to have skipped Game Naming 101. This is the class where they teach you not to use the words "burden," "tedious," or "onus" in your title.

Fortunately, not only is TZAR better than its title, but it would live up to an even flashier title. Something like EMPIRECRAFT or AGE OF WARS. The obvious description of TZAR is a cross between Blizzard's WARCRAFT and Ensemble's AGE OF EMPIRES, with the detail of Trevor Chan's SEVEN KINGDOMS. Never mind that it's missing WARCRAFT's strong atmosphere, AGE OF EMPIRES' accessible interface, and SEVEN KINGDOMS' delicate balance; TZAR is an ambitious and largely successful attempt to have a real-time strategy cake and eat it too.

TZAR: THE BURDEN OF THE CROWN

reviewed by Tom Chick

The most ambitious thing about TZAR, and where it occasionally stumbles, is the way it tries to unite opposing concepts. For instance, it blends historical flavor with fantasy whimsy, but ends up diluting both. The result is a contrived atmosphere that feels like a made-for-NBC miniseries: *The Wonderful Worlds of Aladdin, Confucius, and Charlemagne.* Lead swarms of Janissaries and Satraps, even if you don't know what they are; eventually, Magic Carpets and Genies will come tumbling down the tech tree.

The tech trees are another focus of TZAR's ambition. Fairly early on, you'll have to build one of four expensive guilds that serve as choke points along the tree, effectively forcing you to choose a path. This creates some extra variation beyond the three races, avoiding the standard RTS pattern of moving along a narrow path to the game busting uber-techs.

Unfortunately, TZAR's interface is a jumbled mess of icons scattered haphazardly through different menus. The manual carefully omits any helpful detail and the game could definitely have used some sort of printed reference. The online help is very good once you find it, but the particulars of TZAR's buildings, units, and technologies are not easy to learn.

FARM AID If this were AGE OF KINGS, you'd have to replant every one of these farms.

TZAR is perhaps most successful at reconciling swarms of massive armies with unique characters who have inventories and experience levels. The scope of the game supports some epic battles, but the level of detail allows for the emergence of heroes who can use magic items to become even more powerful. On the one hand, you have your hordes of disposable units; but on the other hand, you can get attached to individual characters.

Unlike many recent real-time strategy games, TZAR has a challenging and competent AI, even if it is a bit overzealous. The units in the game seem restless, as if they had ants in their pants. Idle peasants will take up an axe and start felling trees. A group of knights will take off after a lone chariot on the other side of the screen. You'll repeatedly ask yourself things like, "Didn't I have a mage somewhere?" and "Where did my ninjas go?" You'll have to make liberal use of the Stand Ground command to keep track of your armies.

DO THIS! NO, DO THAT! TZAR features battles a' plenty, but the interface and a lack of formations make control a bit dicey.

And once the battles begin, all hell breaks loose. There are no orderly formations, and units don't do a good job of supporting each other. This makes it hard to take advantage of the balance of strengths and weaknesses among TZAR's units. "People, listen up! Archers to the *back* of the line and pikemen on the *right* flank, please." But they won't listen, and instead you'll get something approximating the 1979 Who concert in Cincinnati.

TZAR faces some heavy competition from two highly anticipated real-time strategy games released this month, STAR TREK: ARMADA and FORCE COMMANDER. It is far and away the better game. But sadly, it will probably be overlooked by many of the gamers who would most appreciate its accomplishments.

How does this sound: TZAR: THE BURDEN OF BEING A GOOD GAME WITHOUT A SUREFIRE LICENSING DEAL? CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

A strategy game with a challenging opponent. These days, that's quite an accomplishment.

CONS

With its interface, detail, and scale, it can get away from you if you're not careful.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: TalonSoft • **Developer:** Infinite Loop • $50 • www.talonsoft.com • **RSAC Advisory:** Damage to Realistic Objects

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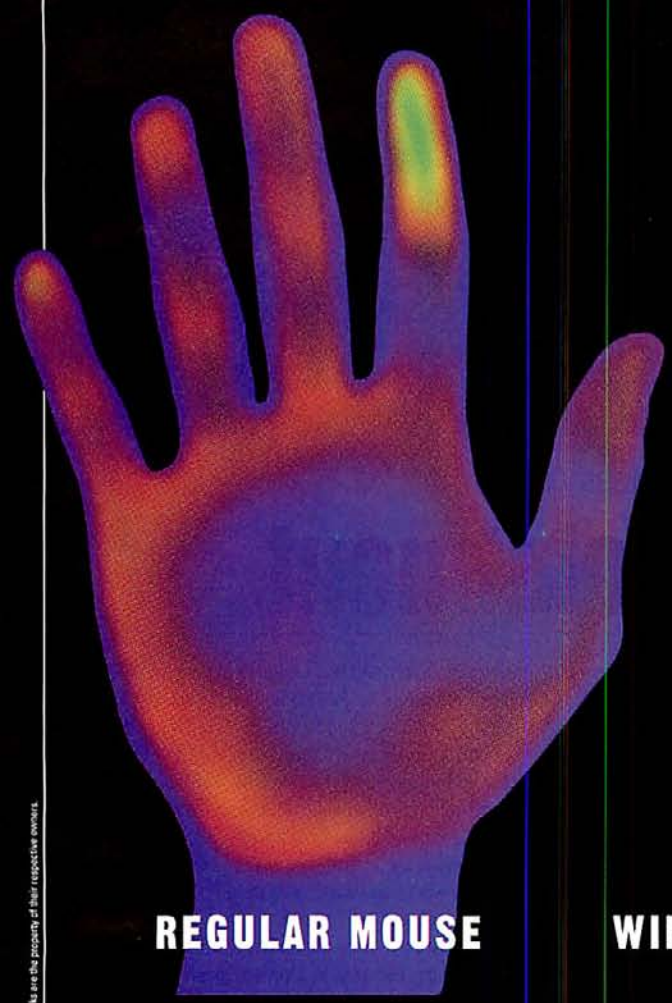

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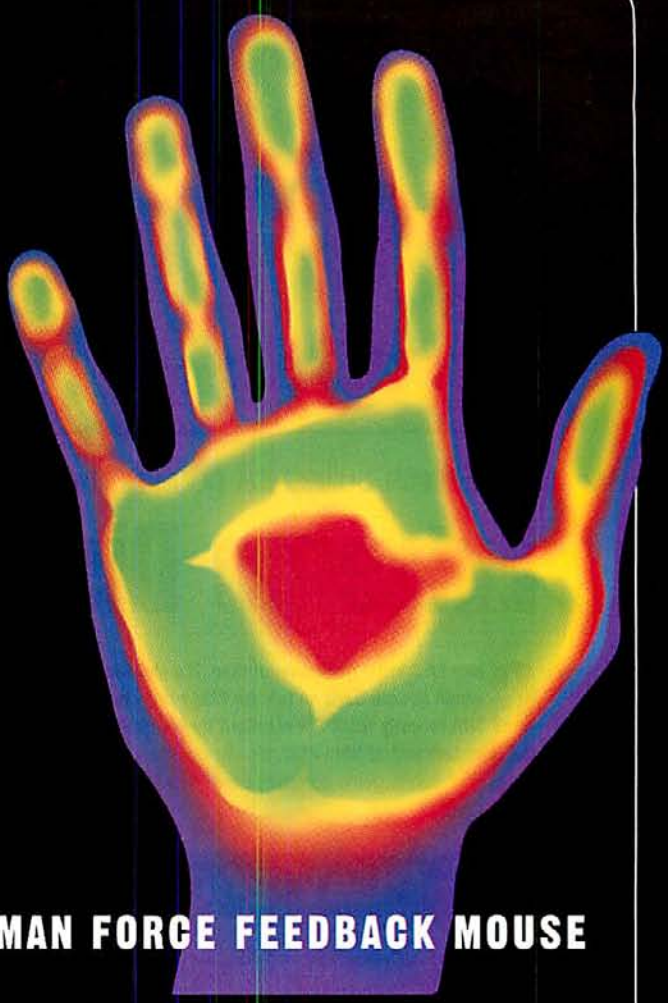

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NOW PITCHING, KOKO Way too often, the character animations have the players hunched over, dragging their knuckles on the ground like gorillas.

FIRST-PERSON FIELDER An interesting first-person camera option for fielding puts you into the game, but it's useless, since you can't really judge balls with any accuracy.

YE OLDE HOME RUN DERBY Like hitting dingers at the Renaissance Fair is *really* in the spirit of our national pastime.

EA Sports sullies its good name with a lifeless game

Extreme Disappointment

Given EA Sports' golden reputation, it's shocking that they would release such an inferior title when cross-town rivals 3DO recently reset the standard for baseball sims with their latest installment of HIGH HEAT. It's shameful, and makes it seem as if the original sports game company cares little for what PC baseball enthusiasts really want. TRIPLE PLAY 2001 is not realistic, attractive, or even remotely fun. It's a dull, sluggish, ugly piece of software that no one – no matter what they're looking for – should buy over HIGH HEAT 2001.

TRIPLE PLAY 2001
reviewed by Tom Price

TRIPLE PLAY 2001 has a litany of flaws, but when you jump into a game, you'll immediately notice problem number one: unresponsive and sluggish controls. When hitting, it's next to impossible to check your swing. Unlike HIGH HEAT – where you can let go of the button mid-swing to check – just tapping the gamepad button in TRIPLE PLAY results in a full swing. On the basepaths, you have to tell your base-runners when to slide. The fielding is no better – the game's sluggish controls make tracking down the ball a nightmare.

Unfortunately, automating the base-running and fielding isn't much of an option considering the lameness of the AI, which includes fielders who don't back each other up or cover their appropriate bases, and base-runners who take enormous leads regardless of their speed and then get picked off.

Say Something Nice...

TRIPLE PLAY deserves minor props for the on-field pop-up menus that allow you to easily set your defensive alignments and base-running strategies. And then there's the element that propelled HIGH HEAT to the top of the heap and sunk Microsoft's BASEBALL 2001 – the pitcher/batter interface. TRIPLE PLAY is better than Microsoft here, but not as good as HIGH HEAT with its perfectly exaggerated pitches. The flaw in EA Sports' approach is that the difference between a ball and a strike is obvious, so it's hard to catch people – or the computer – looking. On the mound, the game's power meter and "aftertouch" controls make it difficult to throw pitches where you want them to go.

Still, when you connect well with a pitch, you can really feel it, and there's some nice ball-flight physics that capture the slice of a ball hit down the line. Too bad the ball itself is a square (even in 1024x768) when viewed at a distance.

I was genuinely shocked at how horrible this baseball game looks. A lot of complaints have been made about the squatty, disproportionate player models in HIGH HEAT, but they're nothing like the scruffy apemen who populate TRIPLE PLAY. The game's decent animations don't help much due to the choppiness of the graphics engine. Because of this, the whole game seems like it's running in slow motion. It also features the worst looking stadiums in any baseball game, hands-down. Compared to the excellent graphics of recent EA Sports titles such as SUPERBIKE 2000 or NBA LIVE 2000, TRIPLE PLAY just doesn't measure up.

Whiff!

EA Sports is known for quality sports titles, but if they keep this up on the PC side, that reputation won't last long. PC sports fans might remember that Sierra had the same reputation three years ago. It appears that the TRIPLE PLAY designers think that taking batting practice in a medieval castle (with a big giant and maidens fair!) is what gamers are looking for. We're not. What we're actually looking for is a solid game engine supported by robust league capabilities.

Actually, we're not even looking for this anymore. Not since HIGH HEAT 2001 was released. Skip TRIPLE PLAY 2001 and check it out. Hopefully, EA Sports will do the same. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
You can always buy HIGH HEAT 2001 instead.

CONS
Slow-as-molasses controls and poor graphics ruin it.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32 MB RAM, 65 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz, 64 MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct 3D
Multiplayer Support: 2 players hotseat, modem-to-modem, Internet, LAN.

Publisher: EA Sports • **Developer:** EA Sports • $40 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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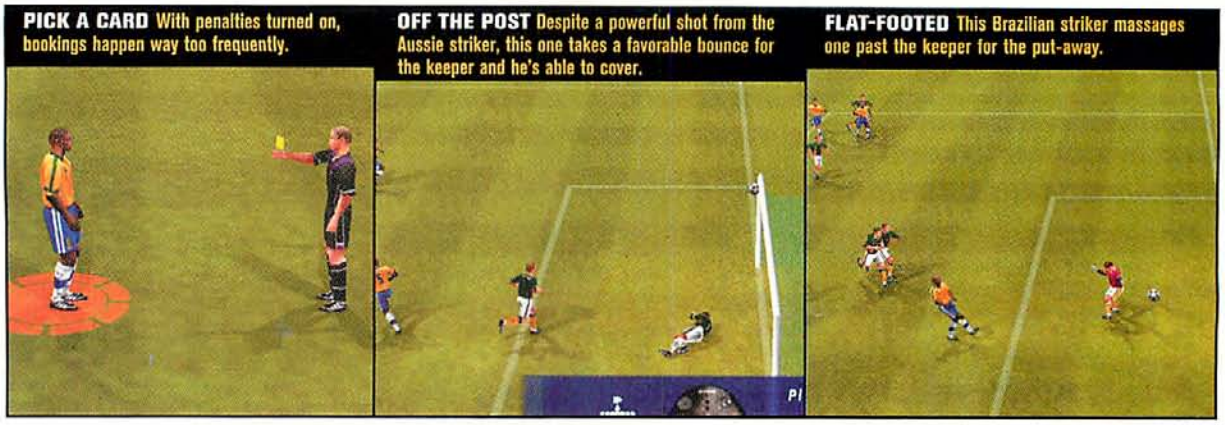

PICK A CARD With penalties turned on, bookings happen way too frequently.

OFF THE POST Despite a powerful shot from the Aussie striker, this one takes a favorable bounce for the keeper and he's able to cover.

FLAT-FOOTED This Brazilian striker massages one past the keeper for the put-away.

Impressive visuals, but no soul

Pretty on the Outside

The biggest challenge in creating a sports title is to identify and capture the soul of the sport. When accomplished, this separates the best titles from the rest of the pack. EA Sports currently wears the crown with its formidable FIFA series. Enter Microsoft, another challenger.

In their debut performance, Rage Software (the game's developer) puts on a decent showing for Microsoft in INTERNATIONAL SOCCER 2000. For $20 bucks, this title gives good bang for the buck. But like other Microsoft sports titles we've seen as of late (baseball and basketball), INTERNATIONAL SOCCER 2000 has the look, but it doesn't quite have The Love.

MICROSOFT INTERNATIONAL SOCCER 2000

reviewed by Dave "Kick Me" Salvator

Run and Gun and Run and Gun

To the developers' credit, their game engine fares well compared to FIFA for pure visuals. But in the all-important arena of gameplay, SOCCER fails to measure up – despite its billing as "a fast-paced, arcade-style soccer simulation." Unfortunately, this soccer sim all too often feels like a coin-op arcade game. There are some fun, intense moments – like the fast-break give-and-go, where only the keeper stands between you and glory – but even these moments are marred by goaltenders who almost never charge the oncoming striker, making for easy pickings.

At its highest level, soccer is a game of artistry and guile, where players move with the ball in a seeming ballet, eluding multiple defenders, and finally the keeper, to score. But the lack of special, evasive moves in INTERNATIONAL SOCCER – moves which the FIFA series possesses – means that the magic of a striker like Italy's Baggio, Brazil's Ronaldo, or Chile's Zamarano is lost.

While the game features international play, Microsoft has neither a FIFA nor an MLS license, so the teams have fictional players. And since there is no player editor, you can't tweak the teams to have their actual real-world players. Also missing are countries' internal leagues/clubs, again probably owing to the lack of a FIFA license.

A few features exist for the would-be head coach in all of us, but they're light on detail. You can arrange your line formations, choosing a more aggressive or defensive configuration. But there are no deeper management options, like setting an individual player's aggressiveness and defensiveness, or man-marking (having one particular player guarding another).

Don't Eat the Yellow Card

One other area where INTERNATIONAL SOCCER seems a bit out of whack is bookings. With penalty calling turned on, damn near every slide tackle results in a penalty, and half of those in cards. Admittedly, slide tackling *is* a dicey proposition, and there's often some controversy over the call. You can't trip the man from behind, and when coming in for a tackle, you have to get more ball than man. But the way the game calls penalties, you'd think you just hip-checked the guy hockey-style. The only thing missing is two minutes in the box. Compounding this problem, the game's controls are clumsy, making it even harder to avoid defensive fouls.

One area where EA's FIFA series has truly excelled is in creating that ambience and groove that propels you into the game – that transcendent feeling that you're not only watching a game on TV, but that you're controlling it too. Microsoft's commentary engine is often jarring, going quiet for periods of time and then suddenly bursting out with, "It's a throw-in!" Crowd swells occur out of context as well.

Still, this is a good, solid effort, and on a purely arcade level, INTERNATIONAL SOCCER isn't a bad title. One consolation for gamers: at $20 bucks, this title is a bargain. But the intangible X-factor that would have elevated it to the level of the FIFA series' pitch is lacking. Now that Rage and Microsoft are on the board, maybe they'll find redemption in their sophomore effort. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Great looking graphics with fluid animation.

CONS

Clumsy controls, excessive penalties, and an overall lack of funk.

Requirements: Pentium 133MHz, DirectX 6.1, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, DirectSound-compatible sound card, 4x CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 4MB 3D card, Microsoft SideWinder game pad. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Two players, same-machine.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Rage Software • $20 • www.microsoft.com/sports/soccer2000 • **ESRB Rating:** None

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YOU CAN STEER CLEAR OF TROUBLE AND IMPROVE GAME PERFORMANCE BY UPDATING YOUR DRIVERS

Driver's Ed

by Loyd Case

When you're having technical problems with a game, the person you ask for help will often reply, "Have you updated your drivers?"

If you've been running on the same drivers for more than a year, sooner or later you're going to run into problems.

Drivers are a fact of life with computers, especially for gamers. A driver is simply a piece of software that allows the operating system or an application to talk to a particular piece of hardware. Your 3D accelerator has a driver, your sound card has a driver, even your motherboard hardware has drivers—though those are mostly built into Windows itself.

Like any piece of software, a driver can be buggy or incomplete. But a good driver can also make up for defects in the hardware. A good case in point is the Savage 2000 graphics chip. There are some flaws within the chip itself that are fairly serious, but the drivers have code to work around those problems. Drivers can also add new features, in a sense. That is, the feature will *appear* to be part of the hardware, but is really being run by the driver (your CPU is doing the work). Some graphics cards a couple of years ago were notorious for this, and Windows games would run slowly or crash when an expected feature was really a driver hack.

Problem Children

The most common issues with drivers involve graphics cards and sound cards. There are typically two types of drivers for these: *product* drivers and *reference* drivers. Board makers ship product drivers for the actual hardware inside your PC. For example, if you have a Creative Labs Annihilator Pro, then Creative Labs will distribute a customized driver for their card. Then there are reference drivers, which are distributed by the maker of the core technology. In the case of our Annihilator example, the reference driver would be an nVidia GeForce DDR driver you'd download from the nVidia Web site. Note that a product driver and a reference driver may be one and the same. Again, if we look at Creative, the drivers for their Sound Blaster Live cards are, of course, reference and product drivers, since Creative makes both the chips and the boards.

Let's take a look at the process for getting and installing drivers. What follows are directions for Windows 98 and Windows 98SE; Windows 95 is a little different, but not much.

ON DRIVER SAFARI

Check the following sites for the drivers you need for both your graphics card and sound card.

Company	URL	Drivers For:
3dfx	www.3dfx.com	Voodoo, Voodoo2, Voodoo3
ATI	www.atitech.ca	Rage Pro, Rage Fury, Rage Fury Maxx, All-in-Wonder
Aureal	www.aureal.com	Vortex, Vortex2 chips; Diamond MonsterSound MX300, Turtle Beach Montego and Montego II
Creative Labs	www.creative.com	SoundBlaster sound cards; 3D Blaster series, Annihilator and Annihilator Pro
Diamond	www.diamondmm.com	MonsterSound sound cards; Monster3D, Viper, and Stealth 3D cards
Matrox	www.matrox.com/mga	Millennium G400, Marvel G200, G400-TV
nVidia	www.nVidia.com	RIVA 128, TNT, TNT2, GeForce 256, Prophet 3D, Annihilator Pro, Xentor 32, Viper 770
S3	www.s3.com	Savage 3D, Savage 2000, Diamond Stealth series, Viper II

DRIVER MAKEOVER

The process of installing a new driver typically begins with downloading them from the manufacturer's Web site (see On Driver Safari sidebar).

If you're not sure which graphics card you have, right-click on your Desktop, and click Properties. Next, select the Settings tab dialogue, and click on the "Advanced" button. The upper-left-hand corner of the next dialogue box will tell you either what card or which graphics chip you're running.

In some cases, a tech-support rep can either email you the driver or send it via snail mail on floppies or CD. There are also "leaked" drivers floating around the Internet; these are often beta (unfinished) drivers. If you come across a leaked driver, use them with great caution. My advice is, when in doubt, don't. Beta software, by its nature, can cause some serious problems. Be wary.

1

CLEAN START Before you uninstall the driver, you should first change your graphics driver to something generic. The rule of thumb is to set up your PC for the PCI VGA driver, a "universal" driver that all graphics cards can talk to. This lets the new driver installation properly overwrite all of the old driver files. If some are in use during installation, old files may not get replaced – which will create a mess. To configure your system for the standard PCI graphics-card driver, run the display control panel, choose the "Settings" tab, click the "Advanced" button, and finally select the "Adapter" tab. At this point, click on the "Change" button.

2

NOW WE'RE TALKIN' Click on the "Display a list of drivers in a specific location." Now, click on the "Show all hardware" radio button; then scroll up, select "Standard display types" in the left pane, and pick "Standard PCI graphics adapter (VGA)". Note: You may need your Windows CD at this point. Once you select the standard PCI VGA adapter, your hard drive will spin for a moment, a progress bar will appear, then you'll be asked to reboot. Windows may reinstall the Plug-and-Play monitor; just click through the dialogues at this point. There, now you're in lovely, 16-color VGA. Kinda makes you nostalgic, eh? Yeah, us neither...

3

CLEANING HOUSE If the driver has an uninstall program, or appears in the add/remove control panel, you should now uninstall it. If not, go to \windows\inf or \windows\inf\other and remove any INF files that refer to the old drivers. (INF files are just text files, so if you can't tell which one is correct by the name, just load it up in notepad and inspect it there.)

GRAPHICS DRIVERS

Once you download the driver, you need to install it. Before installing it, you need to remove or deactivate the existing driver for your graphics card.

There are two methods for installing a driver. One is to use a setup program supplied by the vendor, such as Matrox or S3, and it's a very clean and painless way to install. Others, like Hercules or most reference drivers, are supplied as compressed (ZIP) files, so you unpack them into a folder before installing. Then you go through the steps outlined above: Run the Display Control Panel and navigate to the "Change" button. Once you get to the "Update device driver wizard", select the bottom radio button, "Specify a location", then browse to the correct folder. At this point, the driver should install, and Windows will prompt you to reboot.

POTENTIAL GOTCHAS

Even if you're careful, you may run into a couple of snags. During the installation process, you may get a "please insert disc" message, because Windows can't find a driver file. If so, you'll need to browse to the directory in which you unpacked the driver.

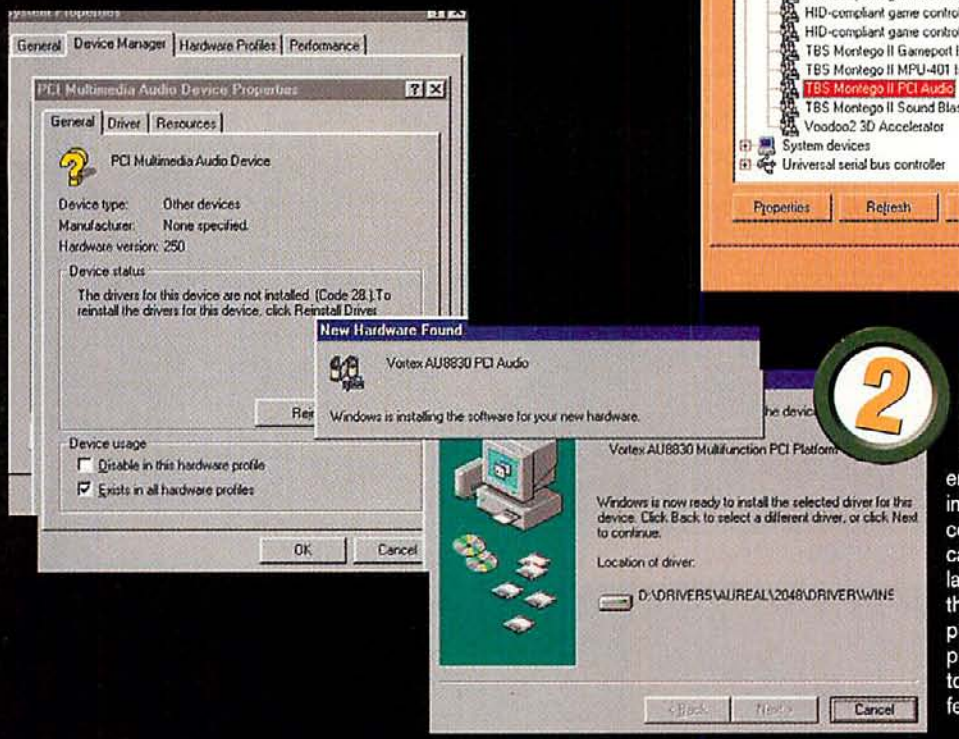
Sometimes you won't be able to increase the resolution above 800x600x256. Just make the change to that resolution, reboot, and from there you should be able to set a higher resolution.

Another common problem is very similar—except that Windows won't let you change the resolution. Check the monitor setting—it probably reads "unknown" or "default". Change it to either plug-and-play, or install the correct monitor INF file (the process is similar to installing the graphics driver, but you don't have to reboot. Check your monitor documentation).

AUDIO DRIVERS

You follow a similar process to install sound card drivers, but it's usually simpler. First, download the latest driver and unpack it into a folder (if it's a ZIP file). If the downloaded file is a program, then it's usually a complete setup package, and you can just launch it. In this case, you typically don't need to uninstall the existing drivers. If the new drivers are a ZIP file in a folder, you should try to uninstall the old drivers first.

GOODBYE FOR NOW If there's no uninstall process, remove the sound card devices from Control Panel's Device Manager. Next, take a look in the \windows\inf or \windows\inf\other folders, and if you see an INF file for your sound card, delete it so that Windows won't try and reload old drivers.



EUREKA After you reboot, Windows will "discover" the sound card. Then you can just point to the correct folder. Note that the "please insert disc" problem is very common with some sound card driver setups, particularly Aureal drivers. In fact, the full Aureal driver setup points to the demo setup programs, so you may have to switch between two different directories.

Buckle Your Seatbelts

Often, you'll be amazed at the improvement in both performance and image or sound quality you can get with new drivers. Sometimes the improvement will take the form of fewer crashes. The process is perhaps more complex than it needs to be, but the results are often worth the effort.

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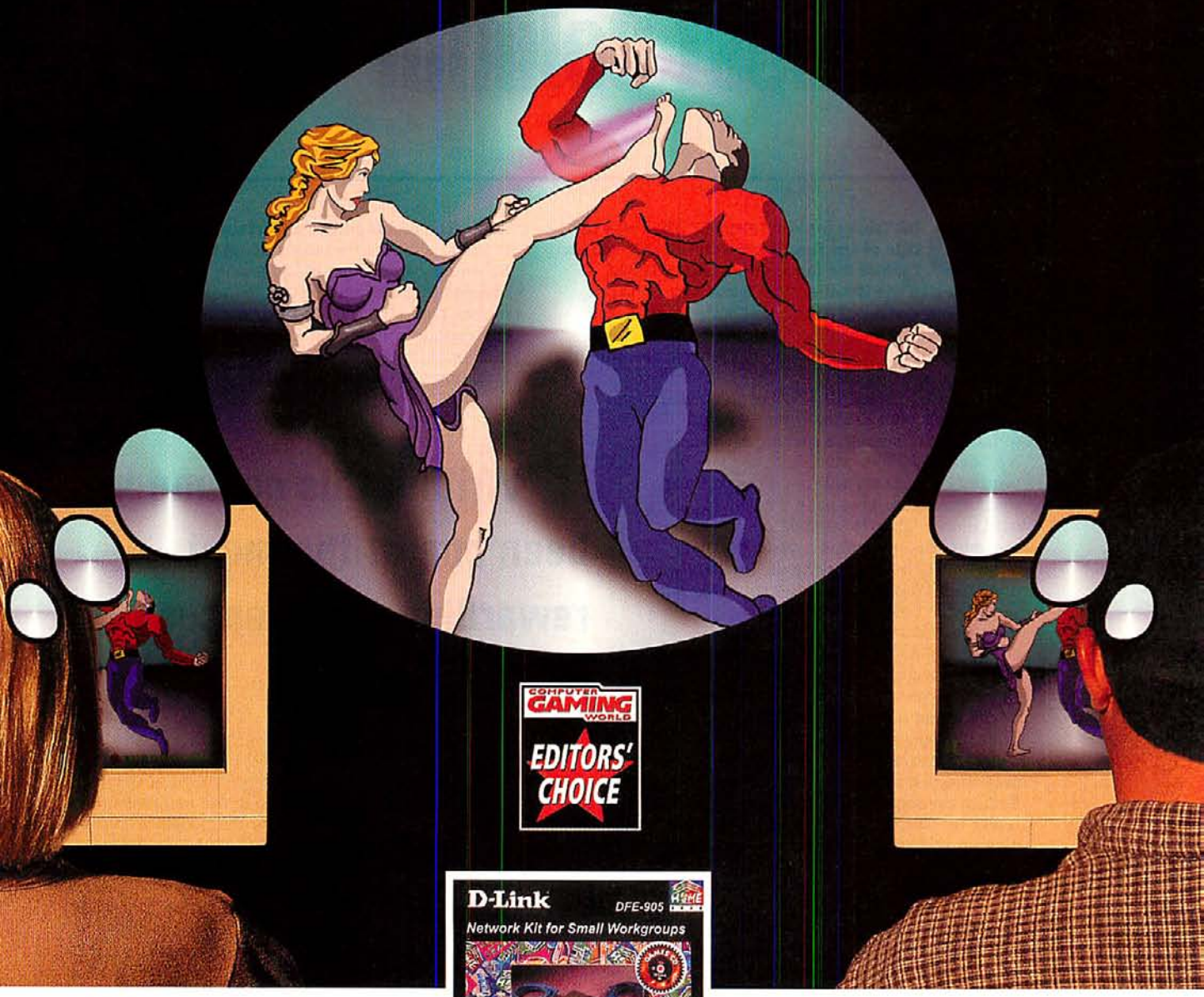

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Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

The Hardest Column

"Adieu" is not "goodbye"

"DOS Tricks for Windows 95." That was the title of the first "Under the Hood" column I wrote for *Computer Gaming World*, appearing in the October 1995 issue. Mike Weksler, *CGW*'s first technical editor, had gotten tired of writing the column, and basically twisted my arm to take it over. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

My writing career for *CGW* began a year or so before that, with the first graphics card roundup ever seen in a gaming magazine. It's now July 2000, which means that I've written 57 columns without a break. During that time, there have been a zillion graphics card pieces (or so it seems), lots of features, and even the odd game review. (Yeah, I occasionally do game reviews. I remember one email I got from a reader sounding surprised that I even play games.)

It's time to say "adieu."

The reasons for this are many and varied. I'm more or less at the top of my game in this business, and there's something of a desire to get out while I'm doing well. There's also a natural restlessness—57 columns means nearly five years, and it's about the only thing I can recall doing for five years straight. Finally, my roots in this business are in marketing (no, really, marketing people can be technical), and I have a yearning to get back into that fray. Call me crazy.

The Long, Strange Trip

It's stunning to see how far computer gaming has come. Back when I first got into computer games, the first WING COMMANDER had just shipped. When I first started writing for *CGW*, 3D games were titles like LucasArts' SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE and this little thing called DOOM. Since then, there's been a tremendous amount of consolidation in the business, but as ROLLER COASTER TYCOON and UNREAL TOURNAMENT show, there's still room for the solo developer or small studio. My real fear is that we may have lost sight of the dream that computer games may be the next art form—but that's another discussion.

However, it's not quite "off into the sunset." Come on, you can't get rid of me that easily. I'll be back for the occasional hardware review and even game review (hey, George, I want MECH COMMANDER 2, okay?). My email address will continue to be **loyd@uncertainty.com**, so feel free to drop me an email, though I can't really handle tech questions anymore. The **techmedics@uncertainty.com** will continue to work, with the messages being forwarded to Dave Salvator's capable hands. Someone wake up Dave, he appears to have fainted *(Uh, just taking my three o'clock nap—DS)*. You can expect the superb hardware coverage to continue, since Dave has been the real guiding light for the past five years anyway (pay no attention to that man behind the curtain...).

Writing this column has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

I'll Be Seeing You...

When you get right down to it, the real reason I've been writing this column is for the people who read it. As you might imagine, I get a tremendous amount of email, and it has ranged from flattery to flame, but it mostly consists of pleas for help. I'll never forget the email I got from a user who had faithfully bought all the products on our Killer Rigs list, then wrote to tell me he had all the boxes stacked on his kitchen table, but didn't know what to do next. That showed a certain amount of faith in my abilities that may not always have been warranted. At any rate, almost all the regrets I have about leaving revolve around you—the readers. Thanks for taking the time out of your day to read my babble, and thanks to all the people who have taken the time to write in over the years. You're the best bunch of readers any columnist could ever have.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to sign off. Gotta clean my glasses, doncha know.

Loyd Case now works for nVidia as a product marketing manager. His extraordinary contribution to this magazine, and indeed, to our entire industry, will be missed. But he leaves a great legacy and the highest benchmark to which to aspire. CGW

In Real Life, Guts and Lara would play with each other... not with you.

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MATURE M ESRB
Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage™

TEEN T ESRB
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation™

Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com.

What's DVI?

What is DVI? Is that for LCD monitors only?

For the time being, DVI (Digital Video Interface) is for flat-panel monitors with a digital interface. A digital LCD panel generally offers a better quality image than the equivalent flat panel with an analog (VGA) interface. Note that some CRT monitors are arriving on the scene with DVI, too, but the monitors themselves are still analog, and have their own RAMDAC.

Two Processors Better Than One?

I have a Pentium-II 300MHz rig, over-clocked to 450MHz, and I've switched to Windows 2000. I made the decision to play only the games that will run well on it. But it's almost time to upgrade. Is it better to go for a dual P-III 600-750, or opt for a single 800+ MHz setup? I do have quality PC100 ECC RAM (256MB), so that is a factor. Will I be totally wasting the second CPU on games—since 99 percent of games are not SMP-enabled—or will it help out by allowing the OS itself to spread across CPUs, thus allowing the game to use more of one of the CPUs?

Interesting idea, but you kind of answered your own question. Ninety-nine percent of games are not SMP (symmetrical multi-processor) aware, and having a second CPU in hopes that the OS would churn on one and the game on the other won't buy you anything, either. When you're gaming, the OS isn't doing much. And given that you've got ample memory (something all flavors of Windows crave), a single 800MHz Pentium-III would serve you better.

Dos Boot

I'm considering creating a dual-boot system, with both Windows 98 and Windows 2000 installed. Should I have more than one partition? Which operating system should I install first? What disk format should I use, NTFS or FAT?

If you have a large drive, having two partitions is handy, because you can back stuff up to the second partition. It's not as safe as two separate drives, but it's quite convenient. For example, you can then store the Windows setup directory on the D: drive (the second partition) and run setup off there, should you ever need to reformat the C: drive and reinstall Windows. If you do build a dual-boot system, stick with FAT32 for the disk format, since both Windows 98 and Windows 2000 can read FAT32. NTFS has some cool security options, but they aren't all that important for home use, and Windows 98 can't read NTFS. Finally, install Windows 98 first, then Windows 2000, if you want dual-boot capability.

Speed Reading

I was told that the speed used to record a CD-R is the maximum that it can be played back. Is this true?

Not even remotely. Music CDs burned onto CD-R will play back in an audio recorder at 1X speed, as you might expect. But we've pulled data off CD-Rs created at 4x speed at much greater than 4x speeds.

TECHTIP Send Hackers Packing

A number of online services – AOL and CompuServe most notably – and some dialing utilities may replace your standard Internet Protocol (IP) set with a custom set that allows hackers greater access to your machine. Unfortunately, the new, tweaked versions of these files will remain – even after you uninstall the service or go the extra step of doing an uninstall/reinstall of the TCP/IP stack itself. But relax, we'll show you how to make this right.

1. Using the Network Control Panel, remove all instances of TCP/IP (remember to write down any custom settings first – like DNS numbers – or your dedicated IP address, if you're given one).
2. Delete all copies of the winsock.dll and wlibsock.dll files from your Windows and Windows\System folders.
3. Using the Network Control Panel, reinstall the TCP/IP protocol (you may need your Windows 98 CD for this step).

If you're using AOL as your ISP, then check out eSafe at www.esafe.com. This software protects you from vandals who "piggyback" into your machine using AOL's connection. If you have another ISP, check out ZoneAlarm at www.zonealarm.com. It has a variety of great features that help keep you safe while you're online, especially if you have an "always-on" type connection like DSL or a cable modem.
–Greg Fortune

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Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$200	AGP 4x
NEW CPU	866MHz Intel Pentium III Coppermine	$900	Not a Gigahertz, but at least you can buy it
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$999	RAMBUS, baby!
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$260	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet DDR-DVI	$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k - II	$850	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2040u 22"	$1,250	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$199	Loud, clean, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$60	For fragging your buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
YY Minicube case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Natural, out with the Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$65	No balls!
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$6,978
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like, force-feedback controller
		Total	$8,393

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**. – *Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.*

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Gigabyte 71X
CPU	Athlon 750 w/ cooling fan
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Annihilator Pro
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus 10
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
Power Supply	Antec 300W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digita
Gamepad	Gravis Gamepad USB

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.

Power Rig

Falcon's Athlon-based Mach V came in last month and rocked the house for game performance. With its 900MHz Athlon CPU and tricked-out 32MB DDR SDRAM GeForce-based 3D card, this system set the new 3D GameGauge speed record at 65.5fps. The thrills don't come cheap – at nearly $5,600, this rig is not for the budget-minded. But it will easily manhandle whatever game you can throw at it.

Falcon Mach V ■ $5,593 as configured ■ www.falcon-nw.com

Lean Machine

In addition to its take-no-prisoners rigs, Dell also puts together very solid bang-for-the-buck-type systems as well. Thanks in large part to its high-volume buying power, Dell's Dimension XPS T comes in at just under $1,900 and includes a 700MHz Pentium III, 128MB of RDRAM, a 32MB DDR GeForce 3D card, 17-inch monitor, 10GB hard drive, and a decent set of Harmon-Kardon speakers.

Dell Dimension XPS T ■ $1,899 as configured ■ www.dell.com

THE BEST 3D CARDS

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you: For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a good job with current games, and should still move upcoming games along OK. The best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Creative's 3D Annihilator Pro. At press time, we were awaiting the release of new GeForce 2 cards, which we'll tell you more about next month. But without being able to test the new cards, we recommend the tried-and-true Annihilator Pro, which has great performance and may cost less now that it's been surpassed. If you're really on a budget, then Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra is available for around $150. Even if you upgrade your motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup, and they'll continue to perform well for you.

Price	The Skinny
$150	Solid, stable Athlon motherboard
$269	Great price for the performance
$100	Getting less RAM isn't worth the savings
$0	It's in there
$280	32-bits, transform and lighting, DDR
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	Fast and cheap
$105	Slot-drive DVD
$350	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$49	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Went back to our favorites
$70	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old familiar
$49	Drunk with power
$24	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Cheap, decent 3D stick
$30	Solid, basic, gamepad
Total	**$1,841**

THE HORSE RACE CONTINUES

The race to 1GHz has certainly been all over the news. We recently had the opportunity to check out the Falcon NW Mach V we reviewed last month with a 1GHz Athlon. The result was a pretty minor increase in performance – about 1.5 points in 3D GameGauge 2.5. Since high-end chips (900MHz and up) from Intel and AMD don't offer that much of a performance increase – and they're expensive and hard to find – we recommend that you get an AMD 850 or Intel Pentium-III 800-866, and save the difference for good games.

Reviews

APPLE POWER MAC G4

Price: $3,998
Manufacturer: Apple
Contact: apple.com

Despite its checkered track record with gamers, Apple's latest Power Mac seems to have the gamer in mind. With an AGP 2X slot sporting an ATI 128 Pro graphics card, three 64-bit PCI slots, Ethernet, wireless networking, FireWire, two USB ports, and Zip and DVD-RAM drives, this box came to play. The G4 also boasts a super fast 500 MHz PowerPC CPU with Velocity Engine (a.k.a. Altivec), a similar set of instructions to Intel's SSE SIMD instructions. Still, the G4 lacks some key components, most notably a set of speakers, a floppy disk, and a three-button mouse. And the latest Power Mac is still pricier than premium offerings on the PC side; while there's an entry level 400 MHz model starting at $2,100, the bruiser we tested weighs in at closer to four grand.

We ran UT, QUAKE 3, RAINBOW SIX, and MYTH II at the highest possible resolutions, and G4 performed well. We even hosted a UT multiplayer match with eight players, and the machine didn't even hiccup. Of course, because of the limitations of the ATI Pro card, games took a hit at the highest resolutions. *–Raphael Liberatore*

Mac Speed Trials

How fast is the G4? Here are frames-per-second performance numbers for three graphics hogs.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT	QUAKE 3	MYTH II
1024x768x32 23	640x480x32 38	800x600x16 75
800x600x32 28	1280x1024x32 10	1024x768x16 65
800x600x16 37		

All in all, the Power Mac G4 is a fine machine. It still lacks the PC's plethora of games, but more and more titles are finding their way to the Mac. Once developers start optimizing games for the Velocity Engine, add upcoming 3Dfx and nVidia Mac-supported products, a MHz jump, and a few more gaming titles, this G4 will become a killer gaming rig – the kind the Mac-faithful are still waiting for.

PROS

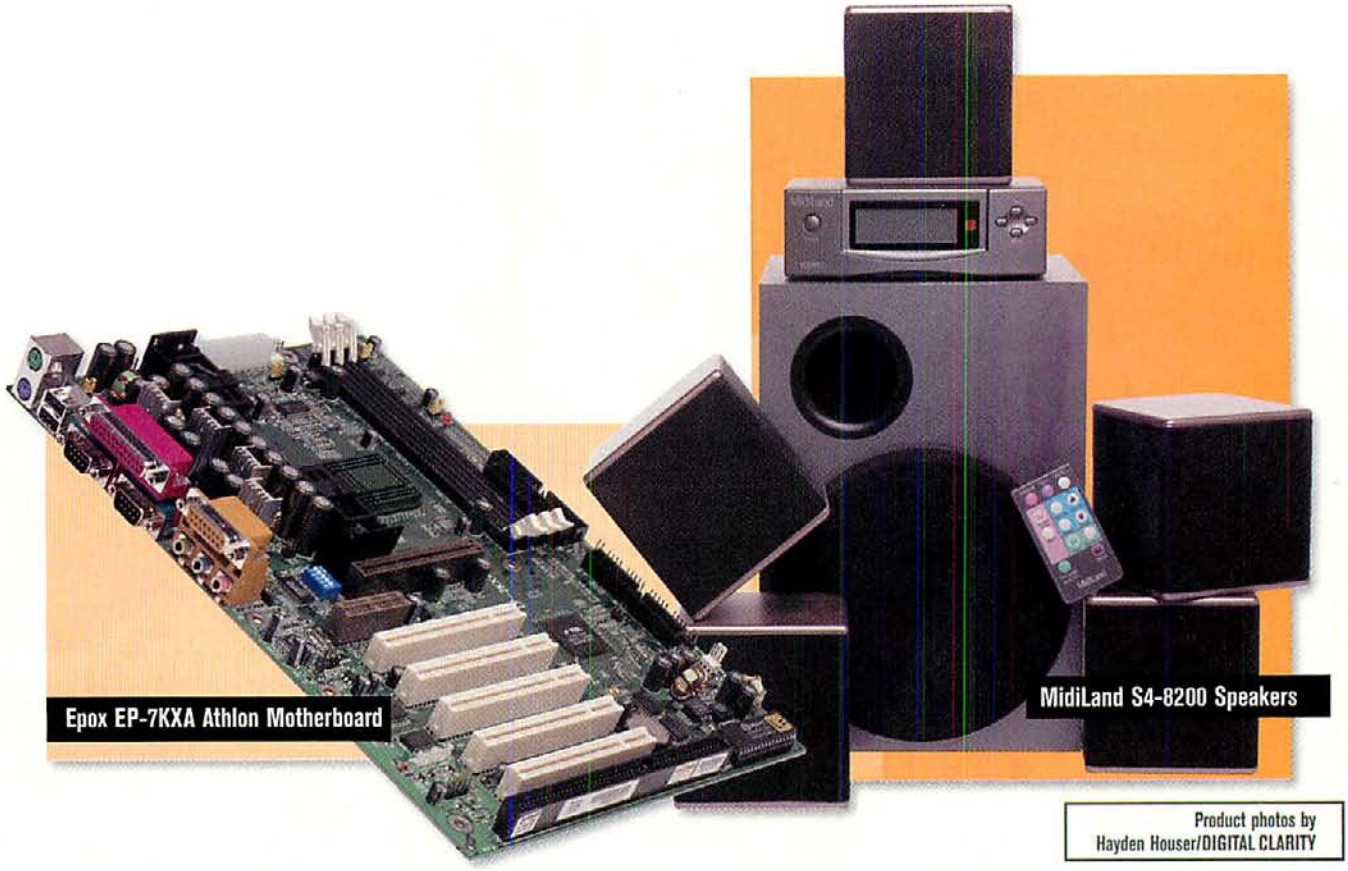
Solid performer; very expandable.

CONS

Mac still dogged by game draught relative to the PC.

Top 10 Mac Games

- 1. Unreal Tournament
- 2. Star Wars Episode 1: Racer
- 3. Quake III Arena
- 4. Falcon 4.0
- 5. Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri
- 6. StarCraft Broodwar
- 7. Myth II
- 8. Sid Meier's Civilization: Call to Power
- 9. Railroad Tycoon II
- 10. Aliens vs. Predator



Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

EPOX EP-7KXA ATHLON MOTHERBOARD

Requirements: Athlon CPU and PC133 SDRAM. • **Price:** $160 • **Manufacturer:** Epox
Contact: www.epox.com

Until now, Athlon-based systems were limited by their motherboard infrastructure. The lack of AGP 4X and faster memory support, coupled with the lower L2-cache speeds on the Athlon, meant somewhat slower performance than a Pentium III running with RDRAM. If you could afford it, a Coppermine/RDRAM solution was clearly faster. That picture has changed somewhat with the arrival of Epox's 1 EP-7KXA, which offers a number of features to boost Athlon performance, including AGP 4X and PC133 memory.

We tested this motherboard with an Athlon 800 and 128MB of PC133 SDRAM. Running 3D GameGauge at 1024x768, the Epox motherboard yields a slight (seven percent) performance increase over its predecessor, AMD's 751 Irongate chipset. In addition, performance was essentially identical to the 800MHz Pentium III-powered Dell system we reviewed in April. When you consider that an Athlon 800 and 128MB of PC133 SDRAM is quite a bit cheaper than an 800MHz Pentium III and 128MB of RDRAM, then AMD starts looking pretty good.

Unfortunately, that performance advantage disappears at higher resolutions. When we tested at 1600x900 and 1600x1200, the Epox motherboard's frame rates were actually slower than both the AMD Irongate system and the Intel 820-based Dell.

There are also some minor quirks with the Epox board, which requires you to manually set the "AGP driving control" to A8 in the BIOS setup screen. Otherwise, the Hercules Prophet DDR would lock up frequently. Still, for running games at 1024x768 with a fast 32MB 3D card, Epox's offering helps the Athlon CPU stack up well against Intel's Pentium-III/820. But it isn't that much faster than AMD Irongate-based motherboards, and can be slower if AGP and system memory really get hammered. *–Loyd Case*

★★★

PROS

Finally, an Athlon motherboard with advanced features: PC133 high-speed memory and AGP 4x support.

CONS

Memory transfers seem slow at high resolutions; it's expensive as motherboards go.

MIDILAND S4-8200 SPEAKERS

Price: $299 (street)
Manufacturer: MidiLand
Contact: www.midiland.com

Seeing a movie like *The Fifth Element* in full Dolby Digital glory is an ear-opening experience. But in the ever-blurring line between the PC and home-stereo/theatre gear, speakers have hit something of an impasse. The problem is that DVD's Dolby Digital runs in a 5.1 configuration, whereas sound cards output to 4.1 for DirectSound games. To date, only Cambridge SoundWorks DeskTop Theater DTT2500 Digital have figured out how to handle both, and run in either mode.

Erring on the side of home theatre, MidiLand's S4-8200s have assembled a 200-watt amplifier, a DVD decoder with digital audio-in, and a 5.1 speaker setup that delivers very good sound for music and DVD movies, and does a good job in two-channel mode with game audio. But what's missing is the ability to accept four-channel audio from today's sound cards, which is becoming DirectSound's preferred mode of operation. And while you can run the 8200s in ProLogic mode – which creates a four-channel setup – it doesn't really get the job done in terms of four-channel DirectSound3D rendering.

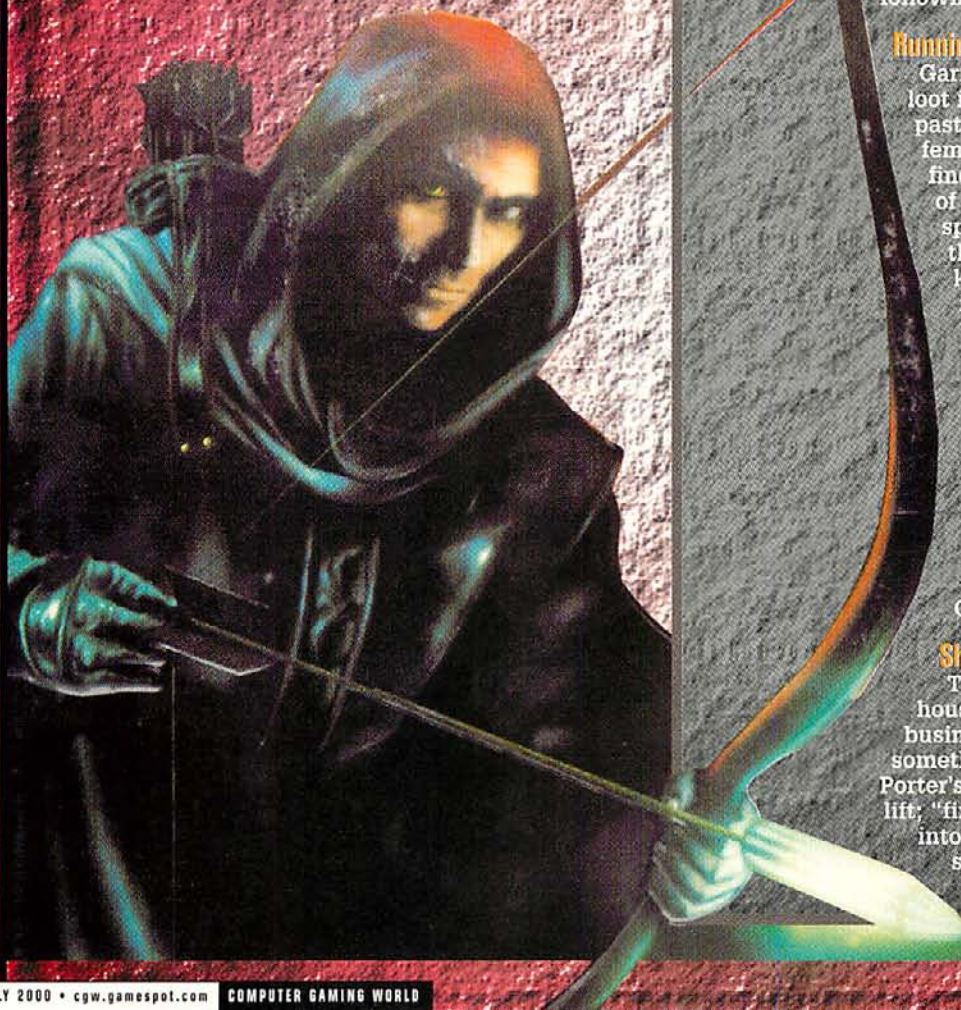
★★½

If you're space-challenged, and want to watch DVDs on your PC, the 8200s will do a good job; but if you want four-channel support for games, you'll need to look elsewhere. *–Dave Salvator*

THIEF II

THE METAL AGE

SECRETS AND LIES REVEALED FOR THIEF II BY BRETT TODD



One of the best things about THIEF II: THE METAL AGE is the secrets. Stopping the evil plan of Karras is all well and good, but rooting out all the secrets earns you real bragging rights amongst your taffer friends. Of course, with guards, steam-powered beasties, and those annoying face cameras getting in your way, this is anything but easy. If the shadows grow a little too dark, refer to the following list.

Running Interference

Garrett's first secret involves loot in the weapons locker, just past the whining male and female guards. Look closely to find a switch on the bottom left of one of the shelves. Next is a speed potion tucked away in the lower-right corner of the kitchen wine rack. A third floor bedroom features a switch below a vase stand. Trip it to unveil a wall safe above the bed.

Try making Basso and Jenever extra happy by fulfilling the bonus objective: Locate a pair of wedding rings. These golden bands can be found by carefully searching the back-right of the fireplace mantle in the Great Hall.

Shipping...and Receiving

The sprawling city docklands house many secrets. Most of the businesses in Building A have something hidden in them. Lord Porter's Fine Art features a broken lift; "fix" it by shooting an arrow into the control panel on the second floor. Search the freezer at Myne Steaks for a key to open the adja-

cent office's safe. Slashing away the tapestry in the office at Gilver Exporting reveals a gem. Mantle to the top of the music studio in T.N. Blackheart's to find a safe holding a valuable recording. Kilger Weapons Smithing has a pile of huge crates that can be mantled across to a treasure chest. Pick the lock on a crate in Lucky Selentura's gambling joint to snag some golden dice. Outside Lady Angelica's Experimental Apothecary is a large crate; jump inside and you'll find a rope arrow.

President Rampone's office in Building B has a secret chamber behind the bookshelves; open it by pulling the trigger book. The bay behind this building holds Captain Davidson's trading ship, a storehouse of secrets. Up on deck, move the wheel and telescope on the deck to open a crate in the captain's quarters (while still on deck, pick open a door to find a bag of spice and some nasty spiders). In the captain's quarters, cut away two tapestries to reveal chests.

Framed

Secrets one and two here are the easiest to find in the game: Just pull the unlit torches at the end of each passage leading away from the spider cave (where you emerge from the water) to open concealed passageways. The next two involve a secret route between the first-floor training room and Sheriff Truart's office above. To open this passage, hit a torch switch in a small storage area. You'll then need a rope arrow to reach the actual tunnel. After emerging in Truart's fireplace, push the winged statue that opens the path from that end to officially claim secret number four.

Five more secrets involve a route between Warden Affairs and a room in the southeastern corner of the third floor, another that connects the Main Office to Secured Records, and yet one more that links the Main Office to a hall near the Barracks. Just press either the rigged books on bookshelves or some fairly obvious triggers to find these. Punch the far-right target in the Target Range to open a way into the locked Armory for the last secret.

Ambush!

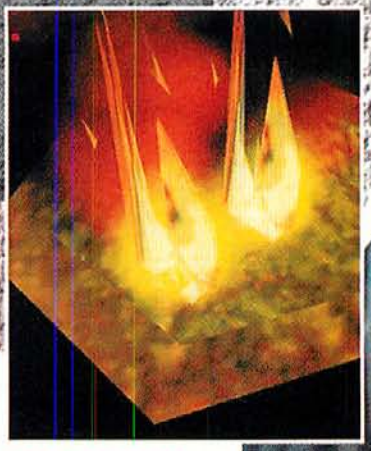
As you'll be far too busy running for your life, the designers made Ambush! secret-free.

Eavesdropping

Just one secret is stashed on the grounds of the Mechanist Cathedral. Turn left at the entrance and creep south until you reach a door on the left; pick it open. Take out the servant here, and hit a switch near the floor by a water trough to unveil a grisly secret.

First City Bank & Trust

Secrets will be the last thing on your mind while working through this difficult mission. But if you can evade the metal beasties for a bit, be sure to check out the music room. This is situated below the third floor security office and features a huge chandelier, so it shouldn't be hard to find. Pull a switch on the lower-left of the doorframe to disclose some thieving equipment below the stage. The last secret involves pulling a lever behind a large sculpture in the Hall of Statues on the top floor; it opens a safe-covering panel in



SAGE SECRETS

You'll need a guide like this one to locate some secrets. The fire-pit trigger (above center) located in the Necromancer's Tower in the Life of the Party mission took me an hour to discover, even after I spotted the outline of a secret compartment on the lower floor.

a nearby office.

Blackmail

This is another secrets-packed level. The first is a hidden graveyard that can be found just after climbing out of the rock passage on the way to the estate grounds. Be prepared to do some mantling.

There are two secret ways to reach Truart's basement: 1) Locate the Hammerite chapel on the first floor and shoot a broadhead arrow at the hammer-shaped hole above the huge hammer idol. This opens a section of the floor leading downward. 2) Hit a switch in the dining room fireplace, and you'll drop into another part of the cellar with a female corpse (she'll be a zombie if you didn't patch the game).

A bedroom directly to the south features a torch switch that leads to a gem. The last secret calls for shooting a target above the door in the second-floor weapons room for a gas mine.

Trace the Courier

Take the secret way: Head west, past the Mechanists. You'll find a torch lever in a northern alcove that opens a crypt.

Trail of Blood

There are no secrets to be found in this level, so enjoy a leisurely walk in the woods.

Life of the Party

This massive level is packed with seven secrets. Grab the first one by turning left at the bell tower and entering a nearby window for some water arrows and coins. The next two are in the Necromancer's Tower: A book in the first room you enter allows access to a lower level where you'll find gold, a speed potion, a healing potion, and Lord Azaran's corpse. Take the lift to the top and press a fire-concealed button to open a grate to Azaran's torture chamber. Head down there and grab the invisibility potion. You'll need to mantle up the iron maiden to get out.

Turn south by the Dayport Trader's Bank, and open a window to enter the building housing the astronomer's attic. Clear a way into this Syndey Omarr-wannabe's quarters by pushing some boxes out of the way. Flipping his telescope opens a closet where the explosive Sunburst Device (handy for breaking into the Carlysle Armory) and a fire arrow are stored. Adjacent to Lady Louisa's Suite is a torch switch that exposes a gas mine and an invisibility potion.

Angelwatch itself is home to the final two secrets; both are on the fifth floor. Push the right eye of a statue in a hallway alcove to open a door leading to a mine, a speed potion, and a healing potion. The corrugated metal closet across from the big fireplace features a switch on the top-left of the doorframe. Pull it to reveal the power switch for the alarm on the wall safe in Karras' office.

Precious Cargo

One secret can be found in the pirates' cove. Use a vine arrow to reach the third floor of the ruined house, and then hit the trigger

TELL-TALE SIGNS

Many of the secret triggers in THIEF II are easy to spot—if you know what to look for. Always check out doorframes, and give bookcases and unlit torches in odd spots a thorough going over.

on the floor of the east room. This unlocks the second-floor crawlspace where the lighthouse keeper stashed some coins, a healing potion, and the Antique Navigation Globe.

Kidnap

En route to kidnapping Brother Cavador, stop in at Site 4 to pick up this mission's lone secret: Pull the switch between the buildings on the right to reveal a scouting orb and a flash mine.

Casing the Joint

Most of the secrets here involve hidden passageways around Lord Gervaisius' mansion. The first can be found by mantling up the porch at your starting position and hitting a switch to enter the chapel. Two more are on the first floor, one running along the northern wall and another in the same position to the south. Just about every room has a wall switch that opens a door to this tunnel. A chamber beneath the east stairway on the first floor can be opened with a switch on a nearby pillar. The second floor features passages exactly the same as those on the lower level; look for ceiling switches here, though.

Exorcise the ghosts in the library by reading four passages in various books and opening a secret room in the north stacks.

When the spirits vanish, they leave behind Gervaisius' correspondence with Karras in the M section upstairs. Hit the book trigger on your left as you enter the middle aisle. Finally, search the second-floor balconies for a toolbox containing a cuckoo. Use it on the clock near the library entrance and set the hands to 12 to open the third-floor stairs.

Masks

All the secrets to be found during your return visit to Gervaisius' manor are on the third floor. The two studies are connected by a secret passage; hit a low switch in either room to open it. A switch on the desk in the north study opens an office under the bed in the south one that holds some loot. Finally, hit a switch on the far console in the northeast control room to open a secret door leading to the northern exhibit hallway.

Sabotage at Soulforge

Pull a switch in the plans room to reveal the only "traditional" secret in the final level: a section of Karras' private diary. The remaining three involve manufacturing a flash mine, a flash bomb, and a large explosive using the equipment at hand. To make a flash mine, start by using the Amalgamating Machine to combine acidic and quicklime mixtures. This creates a flare mixture that combines with an iron chassis to forge the mine.

For the flash bomb, use the Fusing Machine to fuse spring wiring and an acidic mixture, creating a flux spheroid. Fuse this with a steel plate for your bomb. To craft the large explosive, place a bantam node and a mine bulb in the Sealing Machine. Place the former in the left bin and the latter in the right. CGW

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

READER TIP

HOMEWORLD

The most effective tactic in HOMEWORLD is a mixed force, and this is one way to build a quick and effective one. This strategy is not guaranteed against all attacks or defenses, but it will work early in the game. It's sort of a "rush" strategy.

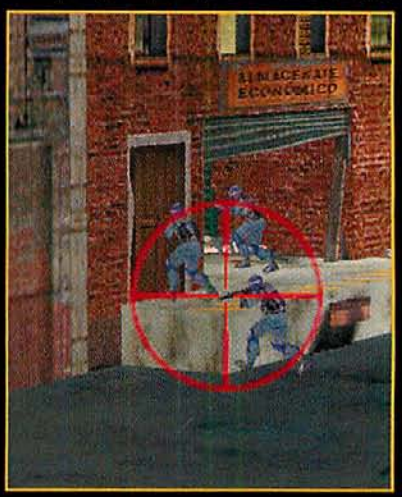
Scout the area, harass enemy resource collectors, and make at least three research ships – research interceptors and both types of corvettes. Make about twenty interceptors and make sure they're in claw formation. Try to make about fifteen light corvettes while still pumping out interceptors. If you happen to have attack-bomber capability, make some of those also. When you have a decent fleet (for me, about 25 interceptors and 15–20 corvettes), send them all in claw formation. When the enemy intercepts your attack, pull out all your fighters into sphere formation while having the corvettes maintain their formation. The corvettes are durable at their cost, so they make for excellent decoys. While the enemy is attacking your corvettes, your fighters are inflicting the real damage. Because the fighters are spread out in the sphere formation, they can only be destroyed one-by-one. When you're able to build destroyers or ion cannon frigates, have them enter the sphere along with the fighters. This will decimate incoming forces quickly; bring along some salvage corvettes as well. –Eric Lau

For an honest-to-God, good tip for a popular game, we're giving Eric our last copy of BEATDOWN, another MORTYR, and to celebrate the release of Star Wars Episode I on video, a copy of the Star Wars: Episode I Insider's Guide! Enjoy!

ROGUE SPEAR: URBAN OPS

MOUT Primer for URBAN OPS

URBAN OPERATIONS (UO) opens up a whole new twist for Hostage Rescue. Now UO requires MOUT, or street-fighting tactics, which can get downright nasty. Thankfully, UO adds multiple insertion points for the new maps; using them is key. Most importantly, effective use of snipers is critical, since there's plenty of open space in missions like the subway station in Virgin Moon, or the city streets of Infinity Seven. UO forces you to move to the objective rather quickly. Before you rush, make sure you place one or two sniper teams in overwatch positions, snipe away at tangos to clear a path to the buildings, and *then* signal GO. Now, your teams can concentrate on room clearing without meeting too much resistance before they get there.



WORMS: ARMAGEDDON

Had your fill of dirt? Aspire to glory beyond the garbage pile? Who doesn't? But to become a successful worm commander you'll have to make the dirt – or whatever the terrain may be – your friend. Assuming equal arsenals and parity in accuracy, using terrain offers a quick path to victory. The trick is to knock enemy worms into positions where they have only difficult shots, or no shots at all. Also, pay attention to your opposition's relative skills and capitalize by taking away his most accurate shots. It goes without saying that you should also concentrate your fire on enemy worms with the best field of fire, even if they're not the closest or easiest to hit.

The Canadians can't kill this royalty worm in one shot, but they can drop him down a deep hole.

Do a GiveMeTalk! Show for a chance to win a free computer with an AMD Athlon Processor!

AMD

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put CGTIPS in the subj line) and we'll publish one submi each month. Please do not simpl and paste cheat codes from the W your tip is published, we'll send something pulled at random fro the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!

MESSIAH

After you vacate their bodies, the ex-possessed are often surly and looking for payback. Rather than deal with a grumpy ex-possessed, use MESSIAH'S many steep precipices to dispose of the body as you exit it. Simply press the depossess button as you jump off a ledge. Bob will pop out of the victim's back, and you can glide him to safety. Meanwhile, your former host will regain feeling in his head, torso, and limbs just in time to have them smooshed at the end of a long fall. This may sound sadistic, but it's all in the spirit of the game.

MAJESTY

Money makes worlds go round, even the fantasy world in MAJESTY. Don't neglect your mundane duties as head of the ARS – Ardania Revenue Service. Take all your Houses off the tax route so your collector won't waste valuable time wandering in the suburbs for a measly handful of gold coins. Visit the Houses every now and again to check how much gold they've accumulated; when they've stored up thirty or so gold pieces each, click on each House's "tax once" button.

As soon as you can, build a second Marketplace. This not only gives you more income, but will secure a bonus tax collector after you build your Fairground, Blacksmith, and Royal Garden; with the two Marketplaces, you have the structures you need for the Fountain that indicates a bonus collector. Alternate Market Days between the Marketplaces so your heroes will always have someplace to shop. Build Guardhouses near each Marketplace to a) protect them and b) keep your collector from having to make a long trip back to the Palace. Build a Trading Post against a secured map edge after you've cleared out any monster lairs that might interfere with Caravans.

Keep a Guardhouse near each Marketplace so collectors don't have to make dangerous trips.

STAR TREK: ARMADA

If you're still plugging away at this game, some of the special weapons in STAR TREK: ARMADA may seem useless to you. But maybe you're not being creative enough; try the following tips for each race:

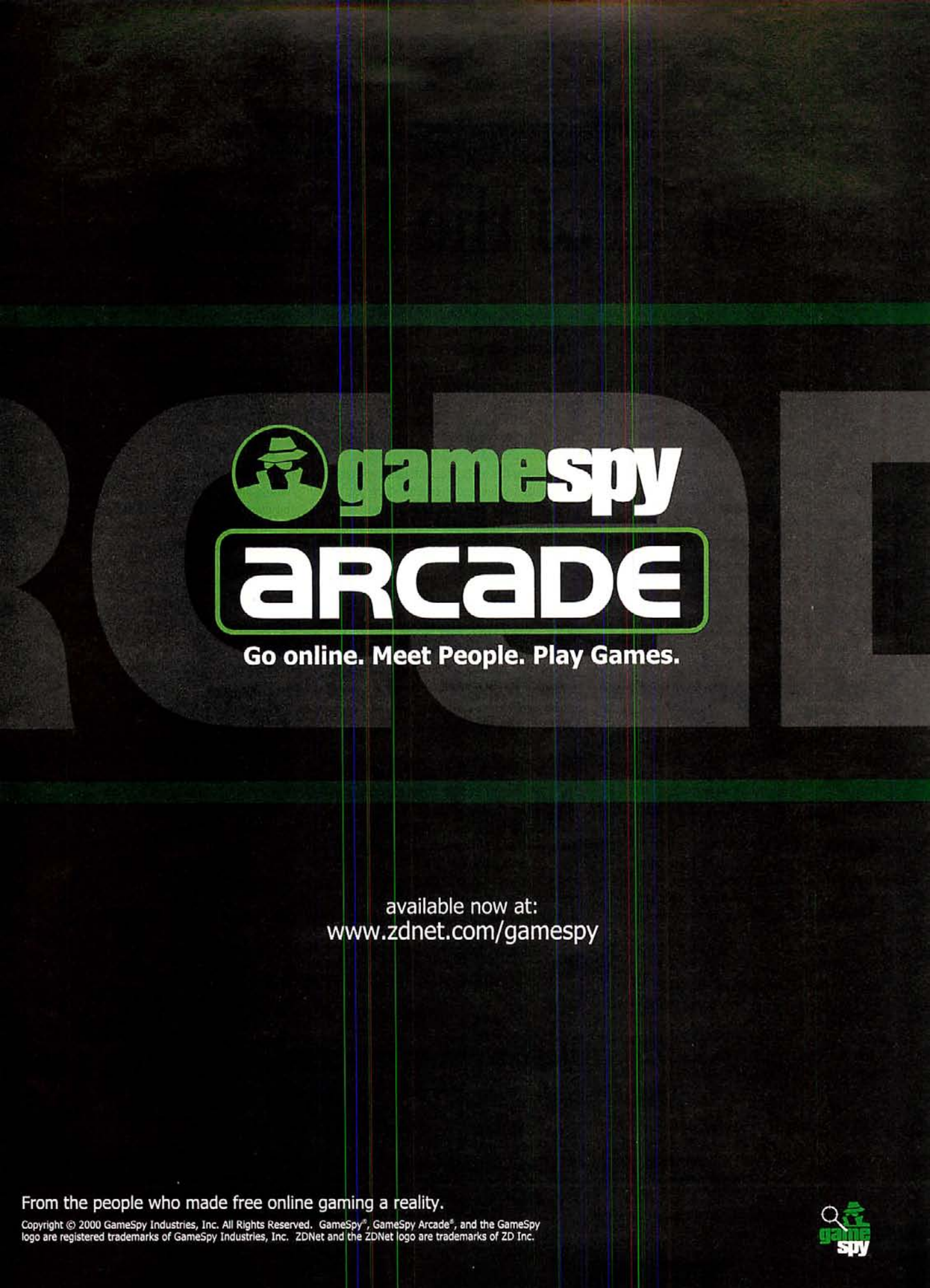
The Klingon Bird of Prey can use his Gravity Mines on enemy Dilithium Freighters to slow them and bog down his opponent's economy. Most players don't pay attention to their Freighters unless they're being attacked, and then they may not even notice the Gravity Mines.

The Federation Steamrunners can use an Engine Overload to disable a ship's engines. Big deal, you say? Just try it on a ship near a black hole.

The Romulan Warbird is invincible for a short time with its Shield Inversion Beam, which draws power from the enemy shield to make its own shields stronger. Lead the charge with a Warbird to draw enemy fire, and then bring in a second wave of weaker fast ships like Talons or Shrikes to take advantage of the weakening shields.

A swarm of Borg Interceptors with Transwarp Drives is an inexpensive and effective rapid deployment force. You can ambush the pods on your opponent's science station to take one of his special weapons pods offline at a critical moment.

This Borg Cube is no match for these Steamrunners once his engines have been knocked offline and he starts drifting into the black hole.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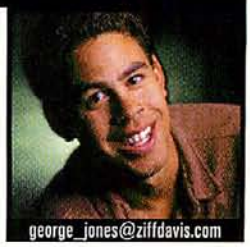
Inside SPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

Survival of the Fittest

Microsoft and EA Sports elevate their hoops, pigskin games



george_jones@ziffdavis.com

EA Sports and Microsoft seem to be intent on proving that Darwin's principles of evolution are not confined to nature. Each company's plans for this year's football and basketball titles follow a natural evolutionary path from their predecessors.

PC basketball titles have traditionally lacked solid career-play models and low-post moves. NBA LIVE 2001 and NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2001 feature improvements in both areas. Each game will allow multi-season play, including rookie drafts and multi-player AI-driven trades. Both games will also borrow a page from Sega's NBA 2K Dreamcast title and allowing players who catch the ball in the low post to make moves, rather than just to turn and shoot jump shots.

GEORGE'S MIX

1. *The Light of Other Days* by Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter
2. DIABLO II (beta)
3. *Ghost Dog*
4. Fox Sports' DIAMOND LEGENDS fantasy game at fox.diamondlegends.com
5. HIGH HEAT 2001

Each company's unique approach to sports games is evident from these improvements. When it comes to the low-post, NBA LIVE—typically more focused on scoring—will focus on low-post offensive moves. INSIDE DRIVE, on the other hand, is going to allow defensive players to defend the post by throwing up an elbow, making it difficult for an offensive player to back him down, depending on each player's strength.

In terms of career play, Microsoft will go a detailed step further than NBA LIVE by adding salary-cap considerations (including rookie salaries), as well as injuries to specific body parts. But EA Sports, in keeping with their ability to better capture the emotion of the game, will feature real-life coaches emoting on the sidelines.

Football Stands Pat

Expect both companies' football titles to improve along similar ideological lines. While EA Sports is focused on the experiences surrounding the game, Microsoft is focusing on the game itself.

Having already demonstrated a solid mastery of season play, MADDEN 2001 will be the first football game to aggressively move onto the Internet, with a national power ranking and tournament sponsored by EA Sports. The game will also feature new interface enhancements.

With NFL FEVER 2001, Microsoft is concentrating on two elements: making the season play as statistically accurately as possible, and making the on-field action more accessible—with overlaid graphics that show you receivers' routes and defensive players' assignments. You'll even be able to shout an audible for a single receiver to change his route right before the snap.

One other Darwinian principal made clear by examining Microsoft's and EA Sports' strategies: Competition is healthy. Unfortunately, Fox Sports' recent decision to withdraw from the PC-sports arena demonstrates the dark side of this principle: the weeding out of the weak.

NASCAR HEAT HOOPLA

Feel the Heat

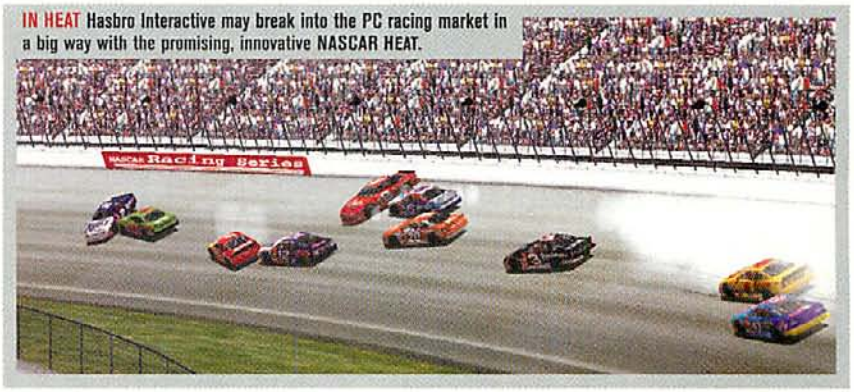
Microsoft and EA aren't the only guys innovating in the PC sports market. Up in Boston, Hasbro Interactive is making a breakthrough effort with NASCAR HEAT. In addition to the traditional single-race and career-racing modes, the game's designers are incorporating an exceptionally innovative Challenge mode that will allow gamers to face over 30 fictional and real-life racing scenarios. At the beginning, the challenges are simple: pass a few cars to take the lead; take a specific turn under a set time. But as the challenges progress, you'll be faced with more difficult missions that may involve threading your way through a nasty pile-up, or moving from fifth into first, second, or third place over the course of five laps.

Judging just by the game's stellar graphics and rock-solid controls, NASCAR HEAT would already be a success for Hasbro. This intuitive and commendable extra feature could propel them into the running for Racing Game of the Year when HEAT ships in early October.

HIGH HEAT 2001 ADD-ONS

Use the Net, Luke

Jason Wick, an avid (and, some might argue, crazy) HIGH HEAT fan, gets our Player of the Month award. We came to this conclusion after playing around with his Cooperstown Classic, Cooperstown 2000, and Negro Leagues team files for HIGH HEAT 2001. These ambitious and accurate add-ons are a dream come true for historical baseball fans, because they allow us to play HIGH HEAT 2001 with Babe Ruth, Sandy Koufax, Satchel Paige, and over one thousand other legendary players. Download them at **www.wewp.com/ballpark**. While you're at it, check out the stadiums, uniform updates, modified tune files, and everything else at The Ballpark Web site at **www.highheatcentral.com**. CGW



IN HEAT Hasbro Interactive may break into the PC racing market in a big way with the promising, innovative NASCAR HEAT.

Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

SWATting Bugs Dead

Scooter does battle with the developer of SWAT 3: BATTLE PLAN

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L.A. STORY, PART 2. SWAT 3: BATTLE PLAN will offer a battery of new weapons, mission editor, skin editor, and, yes, multiplayer options.

A universal truth learned early in life: There are people other than me. In recent months, I've positioned myself on this page as the observer; the guy on the outside yelling. That's fine for a while, but this section of the magazine *is* called Inside Gaming. Rants are fine here and there, but I feel that it's time for me to live up to the name and actually get into the guts of game development. This month, we're going to focus on the upcoming expansion pack to Sierra's surprisingly good SWAT 3.

SWAT 3: BATTLE PLAN, as it's called, will fill out the original game greatly, with mission and skin editors, new guns, and multiplayer features. While the team was banging away on it, I managed to sneak some questions to Rod Fung, producer of the original game and the expansion pack. My thanks to Rod for taking the time to answer these questions, and now I'll move out of the way so you can read more about BATTLE PLAN and what it was like to develop it. Think of it as a glimpse of the process from an "insider."

Battle Plan, Dental Plan

How long has BATTLE PLAN been in development?

That's actually hard to define. We've been planning SWAT 3 multiplayer from the very beginning of development, and we had a LAN version up and running over a year ago. Many aspects necessary for multiplayer needed to be developed in the single-player version first. I've had people working on multiplayer for some time now, even before we shipped SWAT 3. I currently have the majority of my in-house development team working on BATTLE PLAN.

What's been the hardest part of developing BATTLE PLAN?

That's easy: choosing which features we incorporate into the existing game, and which features we save for the next SWAT game. We have so many great ideas for gameplay we'd like to incorporate into SWAT 3: BATTLE PLAN, but many of these ideas would change the existing game too much.

How do you guys choose things like new firearms or scenario locations?

Well, for the choice of guns in the game, we base our ideas on what real operators use in the field. I seem to be the resident firearm guy here at Sierra, so the choices of which firearms go into the game kinda ended up going to me.

As for choosing the scenarios, we have a number of tactical criteria that need to be met architecturally for each environment. We'll then find a Los Angeles landmark or location that fits the mission criteria.

Any particular anecdotes about developing the game you'd like to share? Easter eggs that someone tried sneaking in, or a night where you guys played against real SWAT fellas and won?

Hmm...yeah, there're a number of new Easter eggs in SWAT 3: BATTLE PLAN, including a very unique area hidden in our LA Metro Subway mission. My lead environment artist, Mark Nicolino, spent many late nights after hours perfecting this Easter egg. If you locate it, I promise that it'll be very familiar to most of you.

We haven't had a chance to go up against the real LAPD SWAT yet, but I'm sure we will. My LAPD SWAT friends keep asking me when they can get a version of BATTLE PLAN so that they can show me how they do business.

What would you say was the single most important thing, a "universal truth" of sorts, you learned as a result of developing SWAT 3 and BATTLE PLAN?

Every time we develop a new game, we learn a multitude of new things. I can't think of any single universal truth that we learned during the development, but I can say that my team is very happy with the end result of SWAT 3: CQB. Our goal, from the very start, was to create the most realistic close-quarter battle experience possible. We created SWAT 3 because it was the game that all of us really wanted to play.

Next month, I'll flip the coin and talk about development from the hobbyist perspective with Minh Le, project leader of the HALF-LIFE mod, COUNTER-STRIKE.

HALF-LIFE SDK AVAILABLE

Some Things in Life *Are* Free

Some people, some companies just *know* how to foster a community. Consider Valve Software. While they have long made the HALF-LIFE SDK available for mod-makers willing to sign a non-disclosure agreement and agreeing to certain sale conditions, by the time you read this the whole kit and kaboodle should be available to anyone willing to download it. Users will still have to abide by an end-user license limiting how they can market their work, but the opportunities to create new games and not just mods figures to draw the attention of hordes of nascent game designers. The SDK will support almost any type of game, including isometric RPGs, both real-time and turn-based strategy games, and even flight sims. Valve is also releasing Worldcraft 3.3 to the masses with a slew of new features to make map-making infinitely easier and intuitive. There's a heap of technical gobbledygook like texture-locking, automatic texture continuity, and client-side particle systems that are bound to mean something to someone. Check out **www.valvesoftware.com/hlsdk.htm** for more detailed info and to get started on that COUNTERSTRIKE killer you've been developing in your head. —*Robert Coffey* CGW

SCOOTER'S MIX

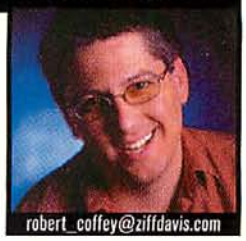
1. DIABLO II
2. David Mack's *Kabuki*
3. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* for the first time. Yeah, I'm a little behind.
4. ALLEGIANCE
5. SYSTEM SHOCK 2, again

Inside STRATEGY

BY ROBERT COFFEY

2D or Not 2D?

We may have seen the last of the 2D strategy games.



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I'm old enough to have actually seen *Young Frankenstein* in a movie theatre when it was first released. But I was also young enough to groan loudly when I saw that the movie was in black-and-white. What was all that about? No color? How could this movie possibly be any good? If I didn't have to wait for my mom to pick me up, I'd probably have walked out.

In retrospect, I'm glad I stayed. But as I was re-watching that movie recently, I recalled my initial reaction and wondered if game designers today face a similar hurdle. Does the simple existence of newer, flashier technology dictate game design? Will we ever see another 2D strategy game?

In the turn-based part of the market, definitely. With turn-based products essentially operating as glorified, complicated board games, the 2D model is a natural fit. But more and more of the real-time games parading through the *CGW* offices are 3D. Why?

Well, there are definite benefits to working in 3D. According to DARK REIGN 2 director Greg Borrud, building worlds in 3D—as opposed to painting them in 2D—is very freeing. "We don't like the sunset, we can easily change the light-time values. We find a chokepoint on a map is too tight, we widen it." Today's powerful 3D-editing tools make such adjustments a far easier task than recreating them from scratch.

Ironically, for all the visual gee-gaws you get with 3D, it's the visual aspect of games that takes the biggest hit by not being 2D. "3D is still not pixel-fine; sprite-based terrains are still prettier," says Ed Del Castillo of Liquid Entertainment. "And look at the buildings in AGE OF KINGS. They're so beautiful, you just want to stare at them."

So, are RTSs fated to be exclusively 3D? According to Del Castillo, yes. "You almost have to be, to be competitive. RTS is the most visually-forgiving forum, but people just expect it now, the way they expect editors for skins, mission builders, etc." Borrud thinks that a solid 2D game can succeed, something like DIABLO II or COMMANDOS 2. But I think that inadvertently makes another point—both of those games (and the AGE OF EMPIRES series) are well-established, popular product lines. They can get away with it...probably. If they don't grow and just deliver more of the same, I imagine that the lack of 3D will only add fuel to a TIBERIAN SUN-style player backlash.

MAJESTIC MAJESTY

Omnipotent and Impotent

The more time I spend with MAJESTY, the more I'm impressed by its unique play dynamics. While the lack of direct control over your units is bound to frustrate many gamers, it's a good kind of frustration, mimicking the real challenges of trying to control the actions of autonomous beings. The game designers deserve praise for clearing the biggest hurdle their unusual approach doubtlessly presented them: boredom. Think about it—if all you can do is suggest actions for heroes and not get knee-deep into the combat, there's a very strong possibility that play could get bogged down in a dull "wait and see" cycle. Cyberlore's game beats this by still presenting lots of command options, the ability to intervene with some spells, and a great sense of pace. With so much requiring your attention and input, your inability to issue direct orders is hardly ever noticed. CGW

ROBERT'S MIX

1. MAJESTY
2. *Three Kings* on DVD
3. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001, at least one game every day.
4. Revisiting SWAT 3
5. Kicking the ass of the world at UNREAL TOURNAMENT by exploiting my new DSL connection.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT

Wargaming Gets Real

Welcome to the dawn of 3D wargaming. Big Time Software's new COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD features WWII combat in a true 3D environment. Starting in Normandy in 1944, COMBAT MISSION lets you play as an Axis or Allied commander through historical scenarios leading to Germany in 1945. The game features 3D terrain and units, true line-of-sight, and painstakingly researched ballistics and damage modeling. It looks like a sim, but it's designed for war and strategy gamers: You give orders in turn-based fashion, then the orders are simultaneously executed during 60 seconds of real-time battle. If it plays as well as it looks, this could be the advent of a beautiful new age in battlefield sims. Check it out at **www.battlefront.com**. *–Ken Brown*

DAWN OF A NEW ERA
COMBAT MISSION has the potential to usher in a new wave of 3D wargames. Images courtesy Combat Mission HQ.

Inside RACING SIMS

BY BRETT TODD
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Welcome to the Middle Ground

Straddling the sim/arcade line in auto-racing games

As a rule, racing-game fans are some of the most narrow-minded people on earth. If they formed a political party, Pat Buchanan would be on their ticket. If they traveled back in time and served on the jury during the Scopes Monkey Trial, evolution wouldn't have stood a chance. If they worked on product design for Kraft, Velveeta processed cheese spread would never have hit the supermarkets.

Of course, since we're talking about turn physics and gear ratios as opposed to fascist politicians, scientific advancements, and ultra-addictive cheese food (okay, so I just had lunch), this isn't a bad thing. At least, not entirely. I mean, you've gotta be amused by racing-game zealots who proselytize about the divine nature of GRAND PRIX LEGENDS, the sheer accuracy of NASCAR RACING 3, the simple perfection of CART PRECISION RACING. In their minds, these sorts of games are the only worthwhile car and driver (apologies to Csaba Csere) titles on the market. All others are childish also-rans.

I once considered myself an unofficial member of that camp. While I never aspired to become a hardcore gearhead (you know, that special type of extremist whose wheel-and-pedal set costs more to insure than what he's got sitting in the driveway), unrealistic racers never found a home on my hard drive. Fun efforts like MIDTOWN MADNESS and DRIVER might have been SUPER MARIO KART for all the difference it made to me. I just couldn't see the point of wasting time with mushy, unrealistic physics that made it seem like I was piloting a jet-ski instead of driving a car. Even playing a game as good as last summer's NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES was a guilty pleasure that felt like something I should have been doing in the bathroom.

911 WAYS TO DIE While I may look pretty damn cool at the wheel of this puppy, it doesn't handle as nicely as it looks. The early '70s edition was a nightmare to guide down any road that featured a curve, and this is well-modeled in PORSCHE UNLEASHED...much to my occasional dismay.

That's changed of late. My perspective has been broadened by a number of great recent titles that shun rigorous physics models for sheer fun and excitement. At the same time, however, things haven't been dumbed down. Simmers may still prefer the likes of Papyrus' unparalleled NASCAR and GRAND PRIX games, but they shouldn't be ashamed to spend money on NASCAR 2000, DIRT TRACK RACING, TOCA 2, or my current fave, NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED. Developers seem to finally be approaching a happy medium that (partially) satisfies both factions. Simmers aren't being forced to compromise (much) on their high expectations, and the arcade crowd gets the virtual adrenaline it demands.

PORSCHE UNLEASHED stands out for me. This stunning racer walks the thin line between the stereotypically grim simulation and bury-the-needle excitement. Electronic Arts has proven that you can say "NEED FOR SPEED" and "reasonable driving physics" in the same sentence without collapsing into hysterical laughter. *Fixing what wasn't broken* flashed through my mind more than once while installing the game, but I needn't have worried. What the developers have tweaked here adds more to the game and to the distinctiveness of the Porsches you drive. Having to compensate for the weight differential between front- and rear-engine cars, being forced to tame the often uncontrollable '70s-era 911, and needing an anchor to rein in the über-understeering on some models takes nothing away from traditional NFS gaming. These elements only accentuate the basic appeal.

BRETT'S MIX

1. Trying to get "Uncle F-ka" from the *South Park* movie out of my head.
2. Fleeing shopping malls after realizing that I'd inadvertently been singing "You f--ed your uncle yesterday!" out loud.
3. PORSCHE UNLEASHED
4. THIEF II: THE METAL AGE
5. Enduring *Sopranos* withdrawal.

While I don't want a deluge of relatively lightweight games like PORSCHE UNLEASHED flooding the shelves, I'd love to see at least a few games bridge the gap between the NEED FOR SPEED and GRAND PRIX LEGENDS audiences. Being able to switch between authentic and arcade driving and damage models—and have this actually make a substantial difference in how the game plays—would make everything far more accessible. Novices with a hankering for some serious oval action would be able to get started in the shallow end and gradually work their way in deeper. Ever seen a rookie try a lap in GRAND PRIX LEGENDS? There's certainly no shallow end there. Starting from scratch with that one is more like slashing your wrists and jumping into shark-infested waters.

I'm optimistic that this happy day is coming to pass. Assuming that sales are high for the physics-enhanced PORSCHE UNLEASHED, developers will have to take note of the sea change in customer taste. People are getting accustomed to more choice, not less, and there's no doubt that racing-game designers will have to provide that in the future. CGW

Inside ADVENTURE/RPG

BY DESSLOCK
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Get Smart

RPGs thrive on complexity—so let's keep them complex

DESSLOCK'S MIX

1. MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII
2. Seeing my Canadian law firm's office over and over again in *American Psycho*
3. Hong Kong Jet Li movies
4. STARLANCER
5. WIZARDS AND WARRIORS beta

Tomes of scrawled notes, bulky pads of graph paper, and handfuls of sharpened pencils used to be as essential to RPG fans as broadswords were to their medieval alter-egos. While some players avidly jotted notes and gleefully drafted elaborate maps, other gamers found such tasks to be tedious chores. Since players were diverted from actually playing the game to scribe their annotations, gaming sessions were prolonged while the action was constantly disrupted.

Note-taking and mapping duties made RPGs less accessible and appealing to non-hardcore RPG fans. While diehard RPG players might have dismissed the views of those too lazy to craft a record of their characters' travels, gaming companies were commercially motivated to make the games less intimidating to would-be Avatars.

Developers responded to accessibility concerns by producing note-taking and auto-mapping features to record the essential information. At last, gamers were free to zip around gaming worlds without being tormented by the possibility that they'd forgotten to write down a vital clue that would bring their adventures to a screeching halt in about 40 hours. Role-playing games became a less daunting experience to uninitiated players and a less arduous undertaking for all gamers. And old-school fans who insisted upon role-playing a real-life "scribe character" could ignore the new features, and continue to manually chronicle information.

Best of all, these additional features broadened the appeal of RPGs without necessarily simplifying—or even changing—their actual gameplay. The inherent complexity of RPGs wasn't sacrificed in some inane attempt to reach more players by simplifying the character interaction, making gaming worlds smaller or the gameplay more linear.

Game Design for Dummies

Unfortunately, mischievous game companies have also attempted to broaden the appeal of games by simplifying gameplay and removing details that are viewed to be extraneous. Activision recently made the egregious (and commercially disastrous) mistake of producing over-simplified sequels to two critically acclaimed games (I-76 and BATTLEZONE). While the original games weren't as successful commercially as they were critically (although I-76 did quite well), they both generated great buzz for months after their initial release, and their sequels seemed poised to profit from their growing fan bases. Instead of marketing the strengths of the original games and trumpeting their critical acclaim, Activision opted to simplify the gameplay of both titles—which only succeeded in alienating critics and potential purchasers.

EASY DOES IT NOX's interface allows you to conveniently access controls and information, no matter how frantic the action gets. Now, let's see deeper RPGs adopt similarly intuitive controls.

By stripping out the complexity of the original games, Activision crafted products largely devoid of depth, attention to detail, and originality—not the best recipe for commercial success. That's not exactly a shocking assertion, and there are even some inexplicable exceptions—notably, any game with the word "millionaire" or "deer" in its title—but in general, attention to detail makes gaming experiences more immersive. Some of my favorite gaming memories are of inputting obscure, usually ridiculous, and/or obscene text questions into Infocom's old adventure games—only to delightfully discover that the developers had anticipated my queries and programmed apt retorts. Similarly, exploiting the interactive environments of ULTIMA VII to access new areas of the gaming world that I didn't even realize existed made Britannia a compelling place to explore with my characters. By cutting out details that may seem superfluous, developers risk creating a game that is accessible but terribly dull.

Complexity—on the Console?

Interestingly, while computer RPG developers seem to be constantly pressured by publishers to simplify gameplay, console RPG creators appear to be moving in the opposite direction. Console RPGs frequently throw in stand-alone mini-games or activities that don't directly affect the main plot. SHEN MUE features exactly the kind of huge interactive 3D-gaming world—full of areas that you never need to explore, but which add realism and depth—that PC game publishers seem to feel should be exterminated. It's not surprising that RPGs consistently dominate the console-game bestseller lists.

Developers keen on making RPGs more accessible shouldn't strip out elements that add gameplay depth. They should instead focus on simplifying RPG interfaces, which are historically unintuitive and cumbersome, and continue to enhance note-taking and mapping features. RPGs are popular precisely because they feature complex character-development systems, and detailed gaming worlds stocked with dozens of characters and items. Attempts to simplify these core elements of RPGs are usually misguided and rarely translate into commercial success. CGW

Who dares ignore the elves? For comments from the creators of DEUS EX, FALLOUT, and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 on this column's topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

BY T. BYRL BAKER

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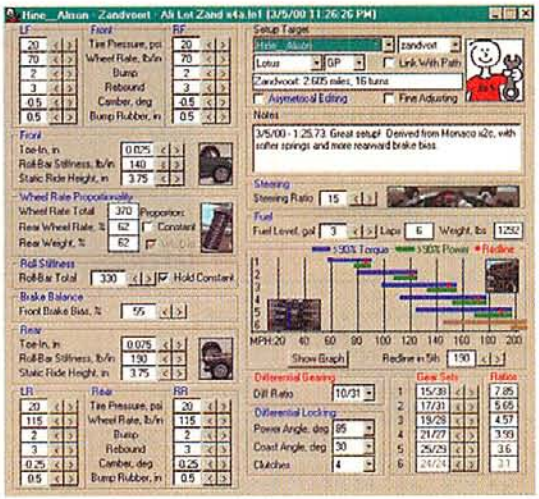
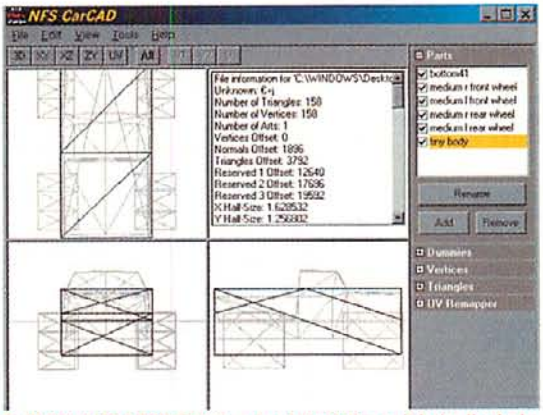
Drive, He Said

Super-charged add-ons for your favorite auto racing games

Ahh, summer. Well, technically it's spring as I write this, but you'd never know it from the warm breeze blowing through the window. To some, summer means the three B's: baseball, barbecue, and bikinis. To me, it means driving aimlessly for hours with the top down, carving curves as quickly as my nerves will allow.





(Left) GPL RACE ENGINEER It's not as intimidating as it looks, thanks to the outstanding help documentation.

(Right) AUTO SHOP It looks crude, but with some practice and a lot of luck, it's possible to make great things with CarCAD.

Of course, convertibles in the midst of a midwestern winter don't hold the same joy as they do in the more balmy seasons, so last winter I was forced to find an alternative. It came in the form of a Logitech Wingman Formula Force racing wheel and a pile of driving games. As it turns out, virtual gearheads are just as knowledgeable and capable (not to mention covetous of their "rides") as their real-world counterparts, and it wasn't long before my hard drive was stuffed with mods and add-ons for all my racing games.

Grand Prix Galore

Call me a glutton for punishment, but I've played GRAND PRIX LEGENDS ever since it was released. My only gripe with the game is that I completely suck at it, and never could place higher than fifth in any realistic race I entered. At least, I couldn't until Kari Ikonen's AI Tweaker entered my life. Now I can tailor every race to match my mediocre talent. I never knew how tough (and fun) this game could be until I started running with the pack again. The best thing about the program is that you don't even need to download it if you got this month's cover CD, as it's featured in our add-ons story.

As much as I enjoy the tracks that come with GPL, it never hurts to have more. If you have other racing games (like NASCAR 2, 99, or 3) check into the GPL Converter, which makes GPL-compatible tracks from other titles. These are full conversions with racing lines built-in and other enhancements. If you ever wanted to drive your '67 racers at Sears Point, here's your chance.

With all the new tracks, you're going to need a lot more setups—be sure to download Nate Hine's GPL Race Engineer. The program uses a Windows interface to let users adjust settings, has context-sensitive help, and provides handy charts and graphs. The help files do more than simply explain how to use the software, offering complete Introduction to Race Car Dynamics and Race Engineer's Handbook sections. This is a must-have for anyone wanting to maximize the performance of their GPL cars.

Need for Free

I'm not a total realism junkie. I tend to do better in the sims where crashing into the side of a mountain results in a dent and a 20mph speed reduction instead of a spray of car parts. That's why games from the NEED FOR SPEED series always find their way to my hard drive.

Cars for these games are easy enough to find, but if you want to try your hand at creating your own, check out CarCAD from Chris Bernard. It uses a familiar 3D wire-frame CAD interface to let you make just about anything imaginable. To manage all those new cars (and tracks, and just about everything else), use the excellent NFS Manager. It lets you switch out these things from the game and easily restore them from the CD (or an add-on file) at will. CGW

T. BYRL'S MIX

1. ROGUE SPEAR: URBAN OPERATIONS
2. THIEF 2
3. UNREAL TOURNAMENT add-ons
4. MICKEY'S RACING ADVENTURE (Game Boy Color)
5. Biomotor Unitron (NEOGEO Pocket Color)

ESSENTIAL LINKS

ALISON HINE'S GRAND PRIX LEGENDS SITE
www.simracing.com/alison/gpl/index.htm
A great site for all things GPL. You can nab GPL Race Engineer and nearly everything else you need to modify the game here.

GPL CONVERTER SITE
www.sim-garage.co.uk
Home of the track converter. Download the demo here that lets you convert up to five tracks from other sims.

NFSGARAGE
www.nfsracer.com
An essential site for add-on cars and tracks for the NFS series, this is also a good place to grab the latest versions of CarCAD and NFSManager.

Editor's Note: Inside Flight Sims by Gordon Berg will return next month.

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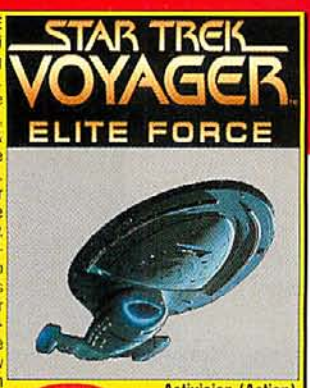

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Eidos (Action) Release: 6/00 PC CD

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Bungie (Action) Release:10/00 PC CD

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Baldur's Gate	12/98	$24.95
Baldur's Gate 2	08/00	$42.95
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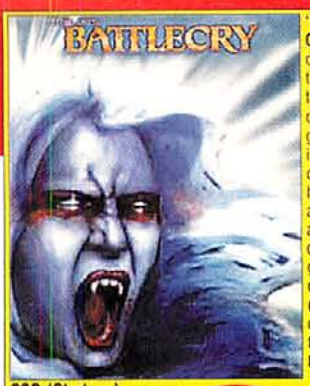

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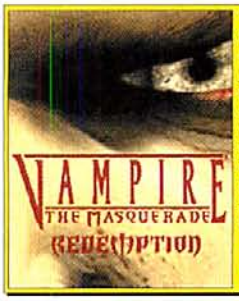

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Activision (Roleplaying)
Release: 6/00
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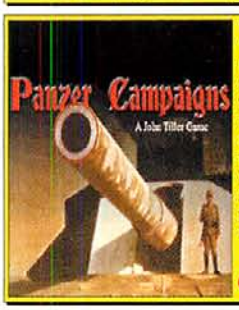

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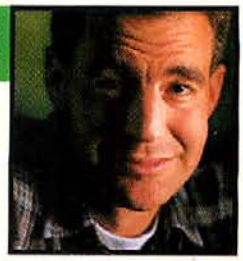
by Jeff Green



The Violence Problem

And my humble solution: Kill the academics.

This month, I'd like us all to engage in a bit of navel-gazing. Not actual navel-gazing. That's just a figure of speech. I don't really think we should be looking at each other's navels. This is a gaming magazine, after all, and not some kind of hippy love-in. On the other hand, any female readers who, in a sudden Brandi Chastain-style burst of exuberance, feel the urge to rip their shirts off while we talk here, please feel free. I'm used to it.

No, what I propose is a look inward. A holding of the mirror up to our industry, and to ourselves, as gamers, to see if there is any cause for concern. Why? Because I just finished poring over a 44-page document (without any pictures or pop-ups, no less) published by the American Psychological Association's Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, and I'm a little disturbed. This document claims to have found a link between video game violence and an increase in aggressive thoughts and behavior.

My initial thought, upon reading this, was to find the scrawny, know-it-all eggheads responsible for this gibberish and kick their freakin' asses. Realizing, however, that this might possibly lend further credence to their theory—as well as to a possible jail term for myself—I have decided to take a more mature (and less prosecutable) approach: public ridicule.

■ ■ ■

Actually, I don' t even have to try to ridicule them. The study practically speaks for itself. I could fill this page with direct quotes from the report and generate more laughs than I could possibly come up with on my own. Here is one of my favorites: *"We also found that for university students, total time spent in the recent past on video games has a potential detrimental effect on grades."* That's great stuff, huh? Thanks for the research. Play lots of games instead of study, and your grades might suffer. Coming up in their next groundbreaking study: conclusive proof that jumping into water makes you wet.

In any event, here is how they "proved" the link between violent games and aggressive behavior. First, they took 210 college students, and sat them down for three 15-minute sessions in front of either WOLFENSTEIN 3D or MYST on a Macintosh. That's right—two completely outdated games, on a Mac. Not only am I not surprised that the students exhibited aggressive behavior, I'm actually shocked they didn't bust the place up. Good thing they didn't make them play NIGHT TRAP, too, on an Amiga, or they might have had a riot on their hands.

After the third session, the subjects then participated in a "competitive reaction time" contest, in which the loser would receive a "noise blast" (whatever that is) at a duration and intensity set by his opponent. And here's the big finding: Those who played WOLFENSTEIN, a violent game, apparently gave longer blasts than those who played MYST, a non-violent game. Or, as the researchers so eloquently put it:

F(1, 198) = 31.35, p<.0001, MSE = 2406.05.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have our smoking gun!

■ ■ ■

Let's get real here.

Some computer games are incredibly violent, and manage to offend even the most strong-stomached among us. We know this. And some computer gamers play these violent games a little too long every day, and take it all a little too seriously. We know this too. There are meaningful dialogues to be had on the subject of game violence, and there are reasons for concern.

But for a group of academics to draw sweeping conclusions about an industry they are obviously so clueless about, based on a ludicrous, half-assed experiment that sounds like something out of a *Simpsons* episode, adds absolutely nothing to the discussion. And what, really, do they conclude anyway? Based on 45 minutes of watching a bunch of college kids playing WOLFENSTEIN, they suggest the following: "in the short term, playing a violent video game appears to affect aggression by priming aggressive thoughts."

Listen, Poindexter...just waking up in the morning tends to prime my aggressive thoughts...

I've got news for you, Poindexter. Just waking up in the morning tends to prime my aggressive thoughts. So does trying to park my car in San Francisco, dealing with the halfwits at my local drugstore, or trying to assemble the training wheels on my daughter's bicycle.

The reality is, "aggressive behavior" not only permeates every aspect of society, it's actively encouraged and admired. Sports, business, politics, academia: Winning and getting ahead and screwing the other guy is the American Way. And so, sadly, is pointing fingers and blaming your problems on others. Computer games are just an easy cultural scapegoat for larger and far more serious cultural problems—just like comic books, TV, music, and movies before them.

Do not fear computer gamers, professor. We're not bent on destruction. We're not here for your children. We're just normal, everyday schlumps like you. And if you'd please just leave us alone, and let us play our games in peace, we promise we won't hurt you.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that we've come up with our own mathematical formula: 1(more missed deadline)– (any original content) = 0 (paychecks received). Email Jeff at jhgreen@ziffdavis.com. CGW

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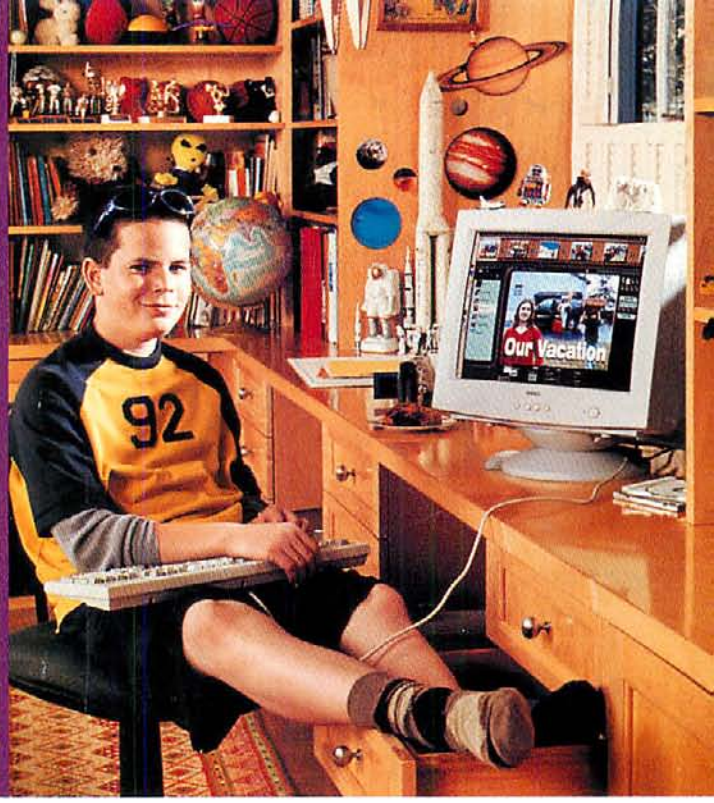

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