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HITMAN

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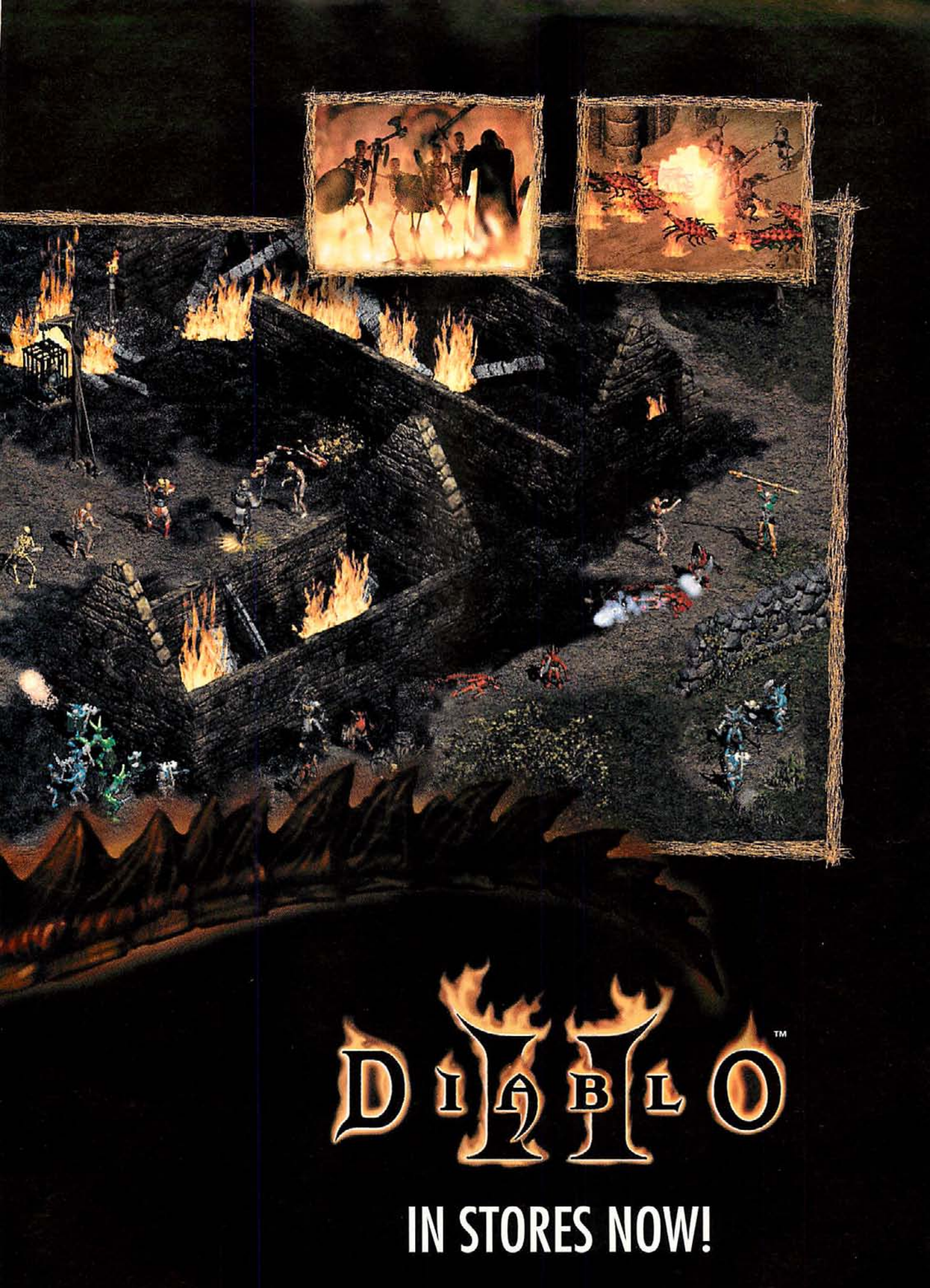
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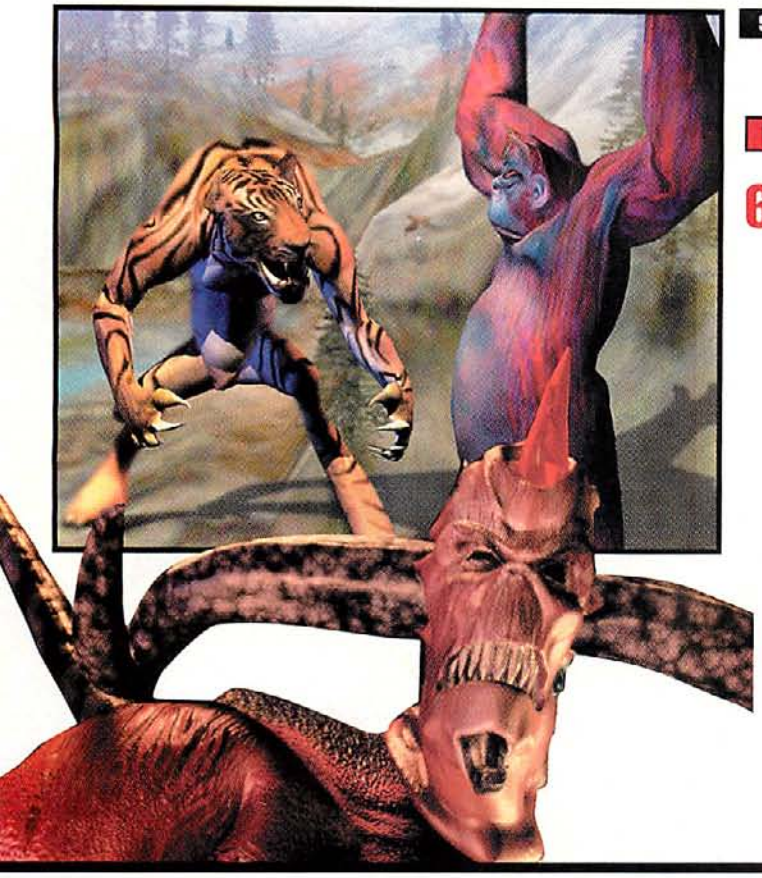

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60 They Might Be Giants

Just when strategy games were getting as predictable as the plot of a porn flick, along come five new games, from five experienced designers, that haven't a single cliché among them. Get the word on the fresh gaming styles of BLACK & WHITE, DREAMLAND CHRONICLES, TROPICO, REPUBLIC, and SIGMA.

80 Diablo II

The Devil made us do it. Really! How else can you explain this mammoth review and strategy feature on a repetitive, dated, absolutely un-3D game that we can't stop playing? Obviously, something right wicked is in the house.

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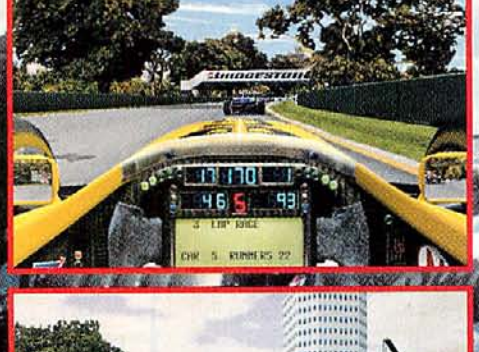
A Norse is a Norse, of course, of course.

one small step for man...

one screaming leap for racing games.



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Formula 1

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BUNGIE TAKES THE MICROSOFT PLUNGE, CROATS CRAFT SERIOUS SAM, TIPPECANOE AND TF2, AND MR. SNEAKY GRABS A PEEKY AT GAMING'S DIRTY LAUNDRY.

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Big Daddy lays down the law.

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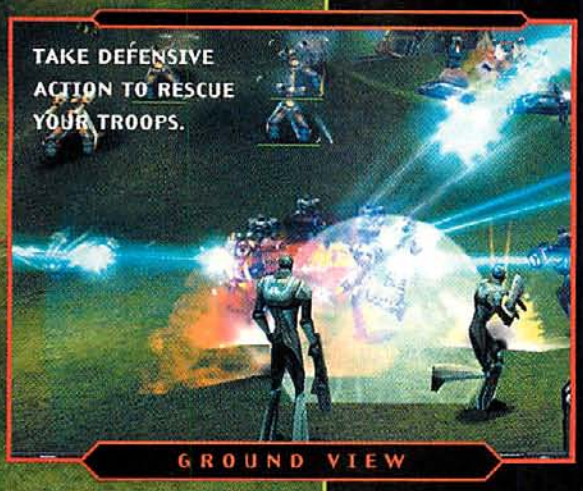

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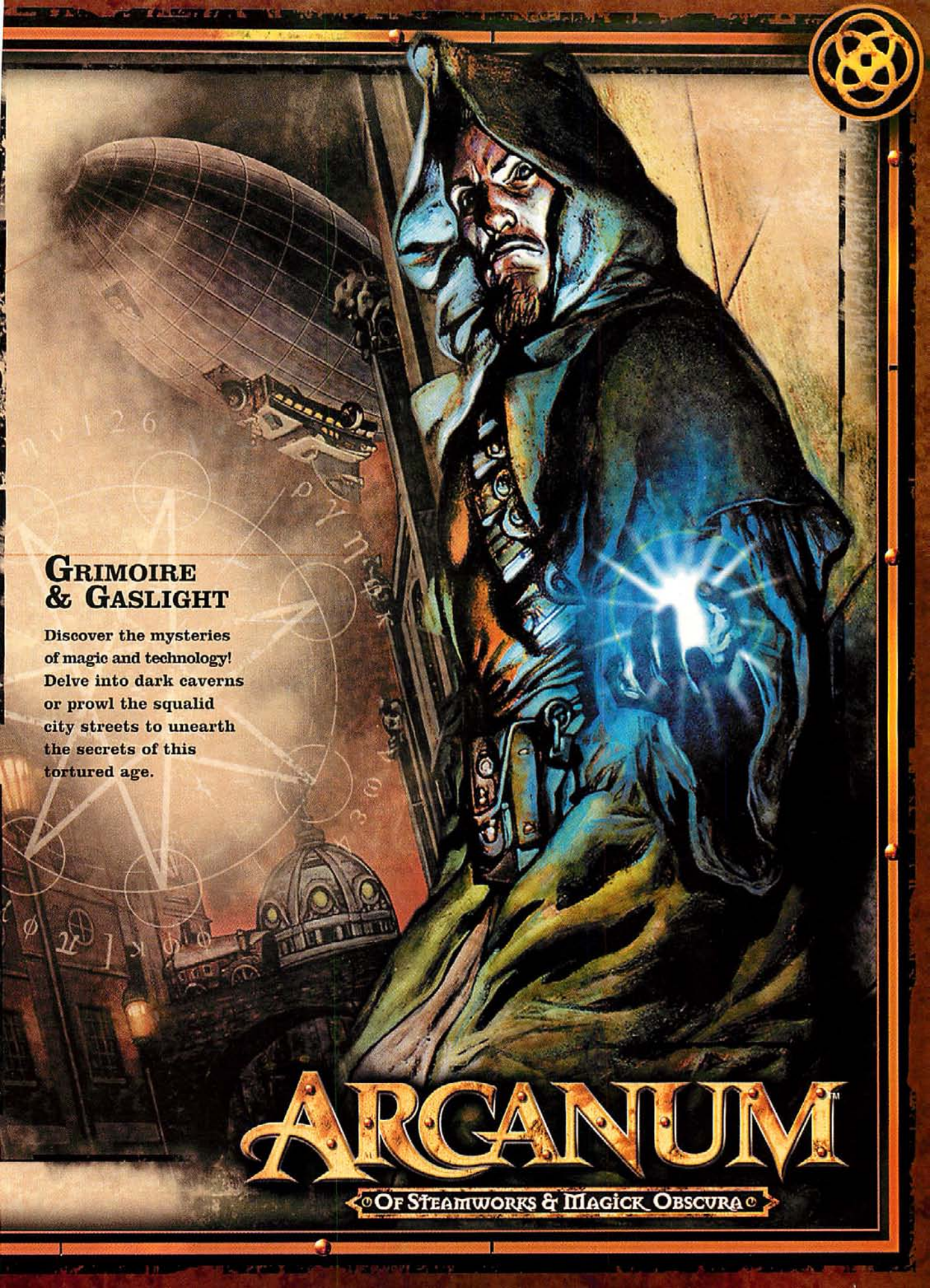
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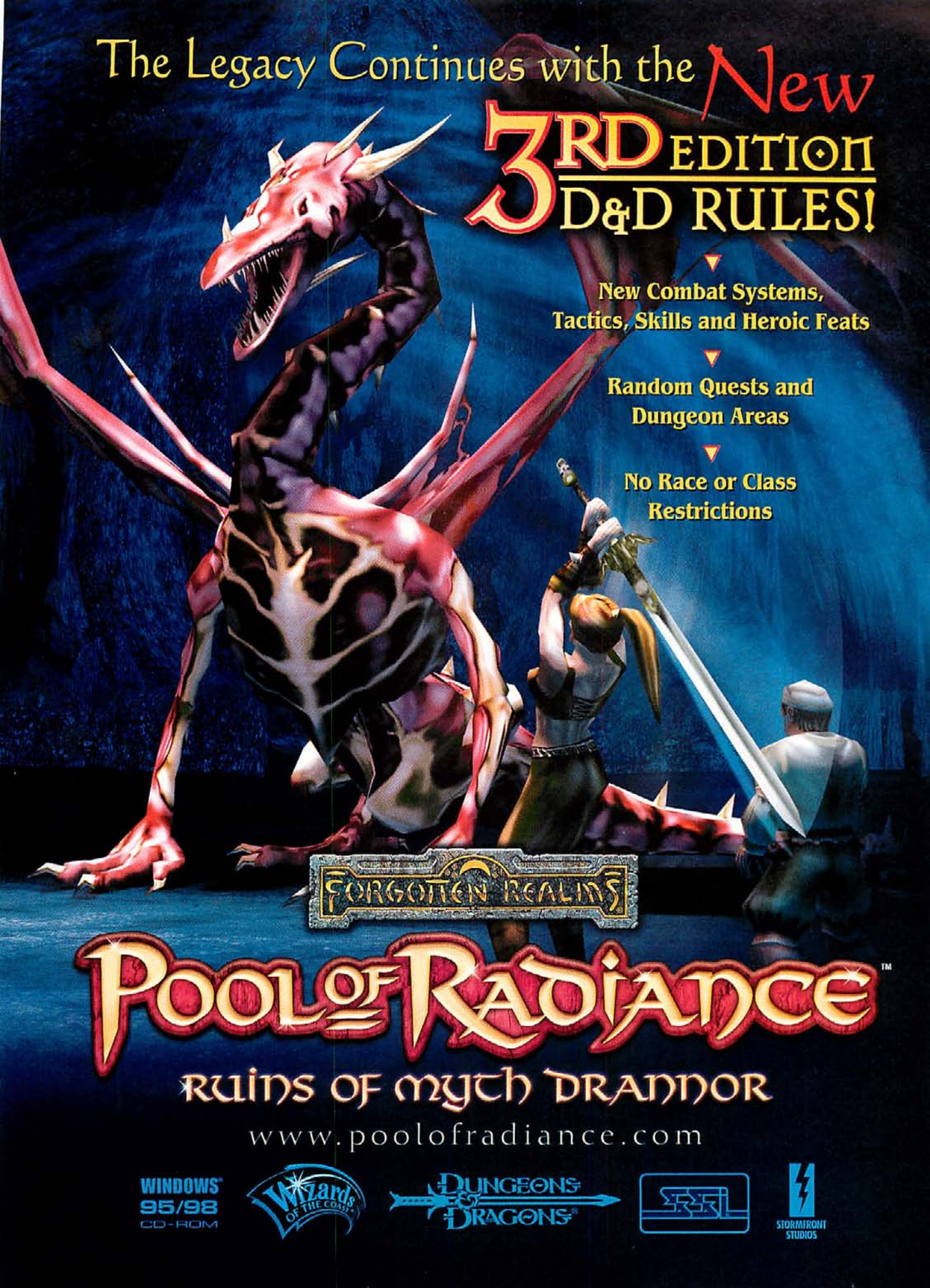
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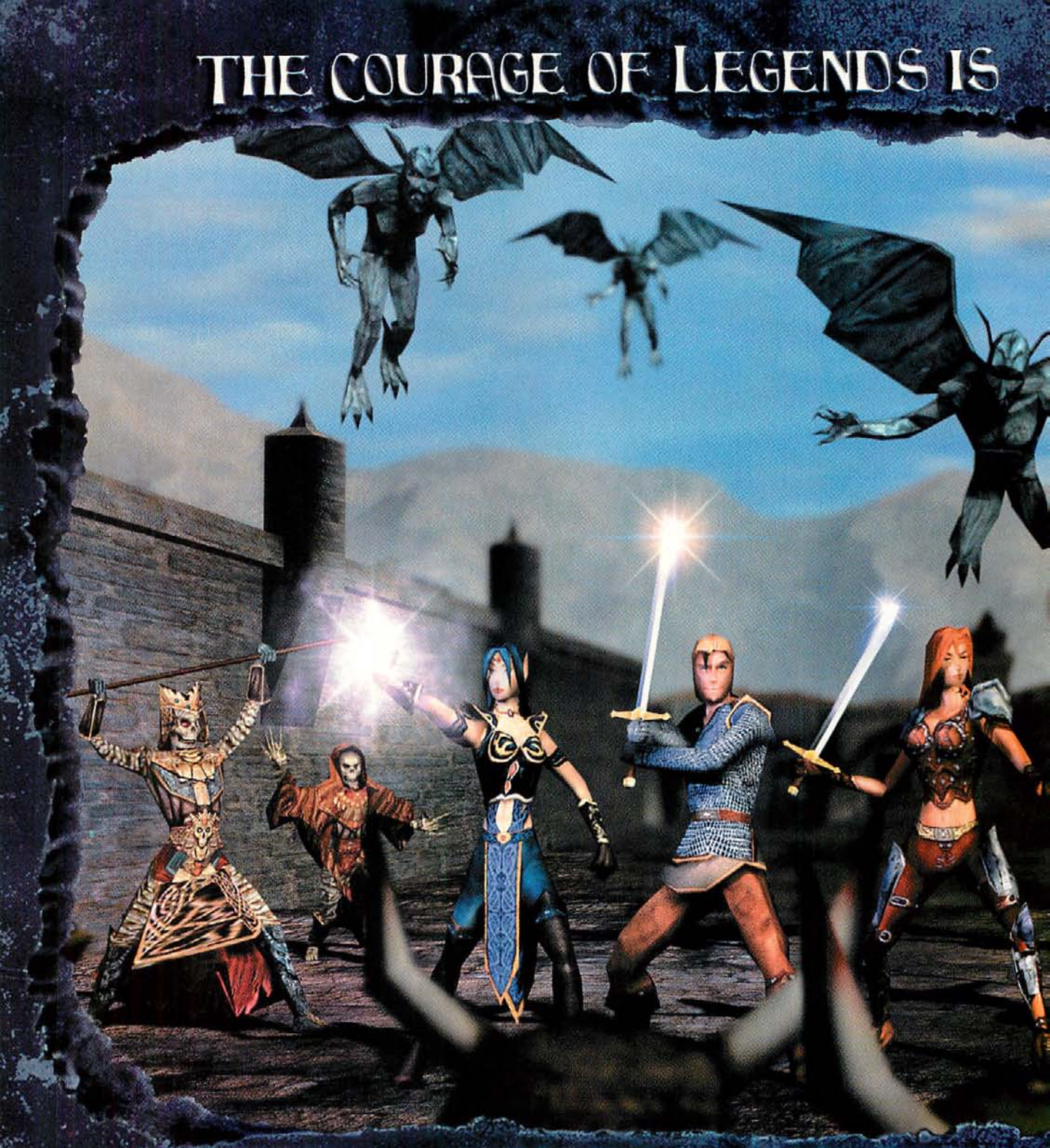

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Actual game footage

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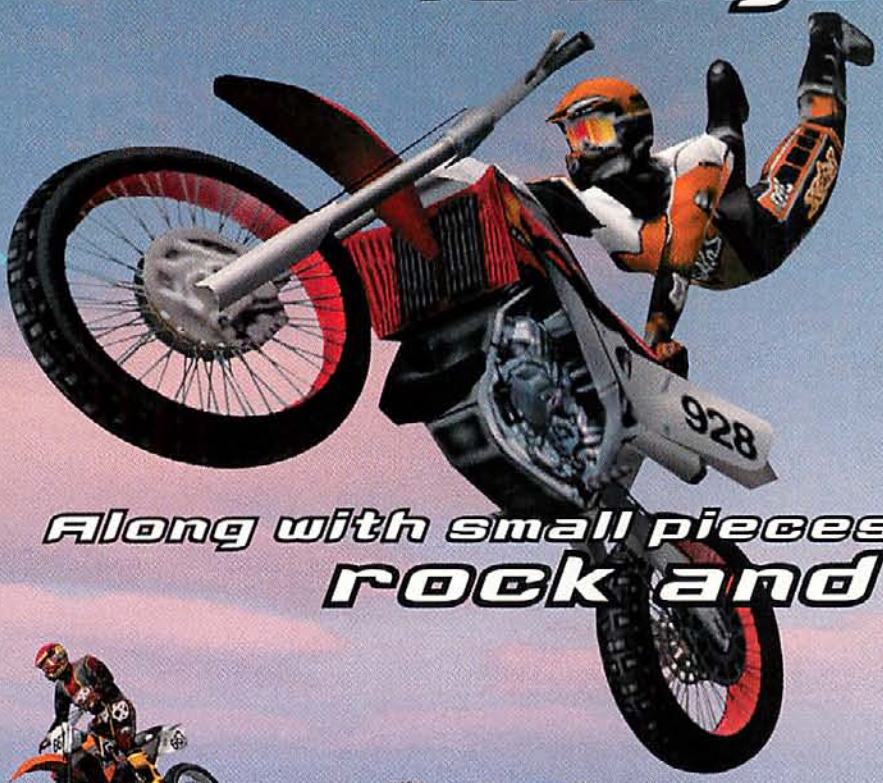

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12 Hours Later

As a general rule, unless the pay-off is a tropical beach and brightly-colored drinks, or week upon week of free time, 12-hour trips suck. But somewhere over Nova Scotia, the appropriateness of travelling 6,500 miles to England to see BLACK AND WHITE struck me. After all, a short, traffic-filled, one-hour drive from San Francisco to San Jose would have seemed, well, too easy a journey. I was on my way to becoming the first person in the world to actually play the feature-complete version of what could be one of the most important games in the history of PC gaming.

As journalists, we speak in strong words quite frequently. It's part of the job. But pragmatically speaking, BLACK AND WHITE represents a significant, much-needed shift. Up until now, games have come in two flavors: linear, puzzle-solving affairs that force you to move along at a pre-determined pace; or the much less popular, wide-open, creation-oriented experience like THE SIMS. BLACK AND WHITE melds the two together.

For the most part, even at their finest, games still are held to the movie paradigm. Motion pictures (and books) represent the most linear plot possible. Excepting movies like *Go* and *Clue*, and the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, the stories in these genres have only a single way for the hero to win, or for the story to finish: the director's or writer's way.

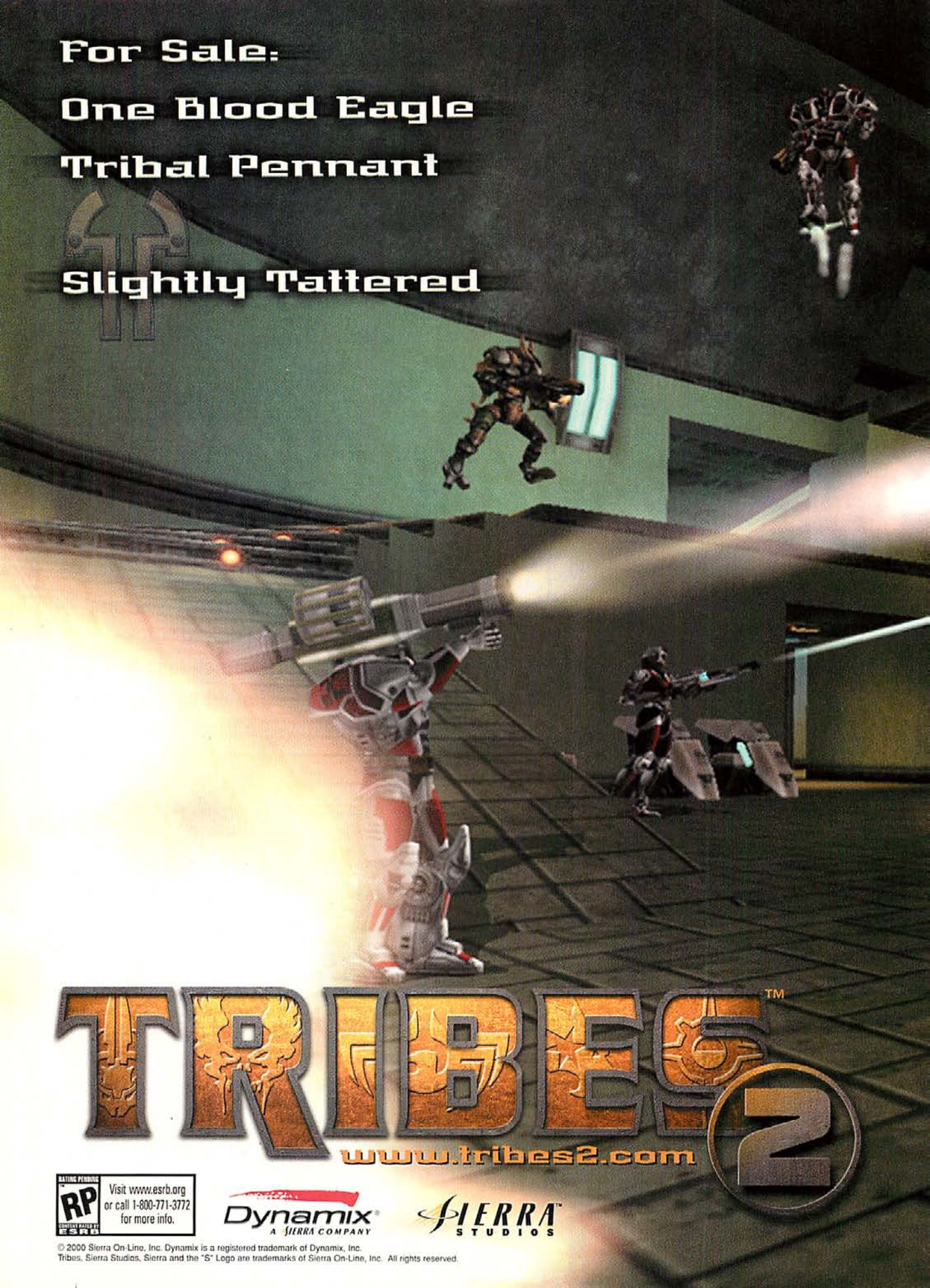
Up until now, games have come in two flavors: linear, puzzle-solving affairs that force you to move along at a pre-determined pace; or the much less popular wide-open, creation-oriented experience like THE SIMS. BLACK AND WHITE melds the two together.

Too many computer games stick to this paradigm. I'm sure it's much, much easier to develop games that feature solutions that can only be solved via highly specific methods.

But PC games are capable of so much more. My hope is that BLACK AND WHITE represents the inevitable shift, be it in single-player or online, toward PC games that place you in the middle of a giant sandbox with loosely defined rules—and still manage to tell you a moving story. Isn't that the true meaning of interactive entertainment?

I'm curious to hear your opinion. Do you think games need to make this shift? Sound off at george_jones@ziffdavis.com. CGW

George Jones



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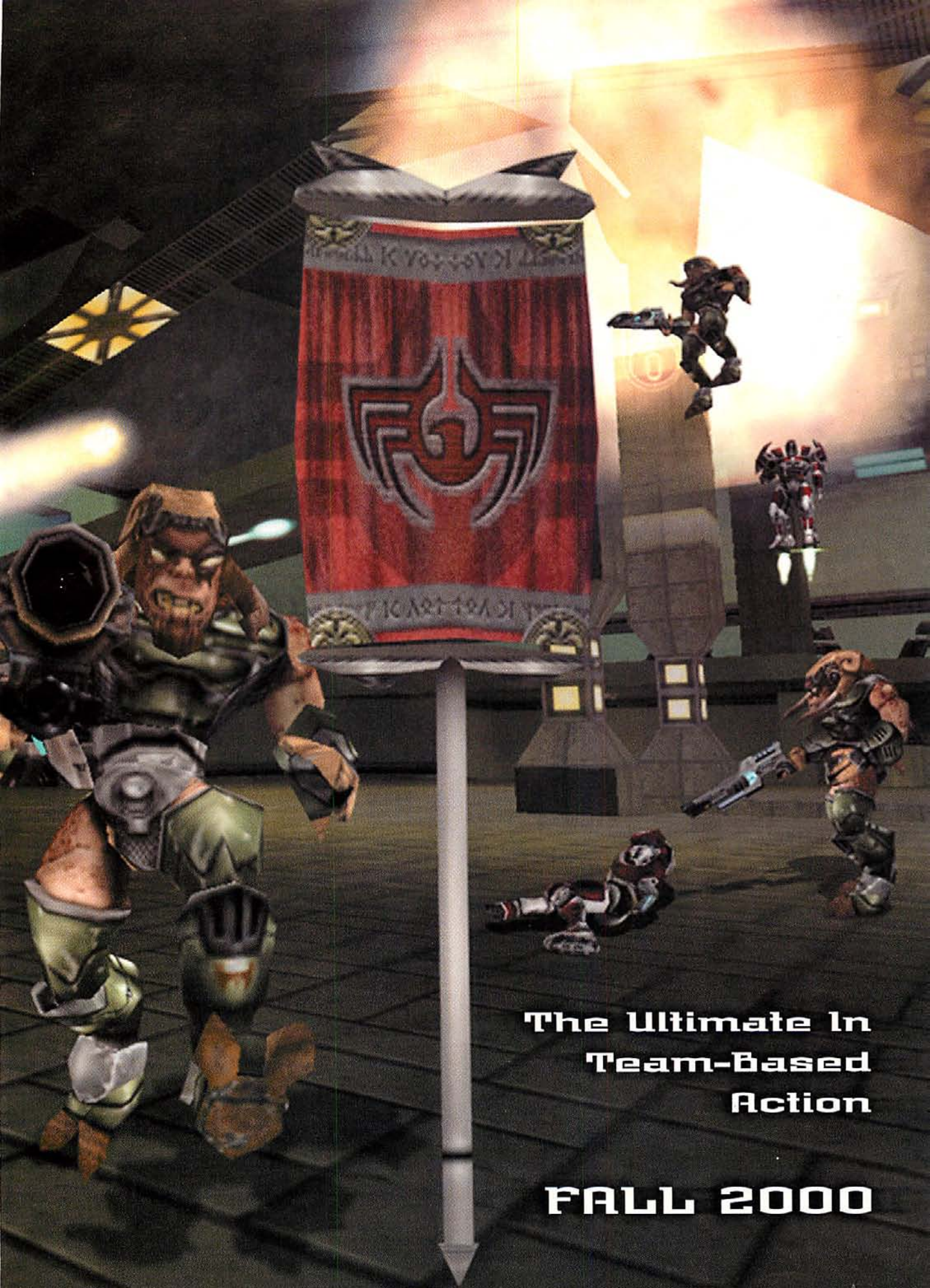
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LETTERS

Impossible Dream #409

■■■ It's about time online gaming took a big step into the real world. Here's my proposal: If I want a pint of Ben & Jerry's and a Snapple, I could drag myself to the store or go to Kozmo.com and have it delivered, but where's the fun in that? Instead, I want to dial up a local gaming server and challenge whoever's there to a 10-minute QUAKE III deathmatch. If they accept and I win, the server automatically places my drink 'n' ice cream order with Kozmo.com and splits the cost between my two opponents (whose credit cards are instantly charged). Less than an hour later, my order is delivered and all is right with the world.

I know my idea is rife with problems, but I don't care! I think it would be great if something like this existed. Please, bug all your game-design friends to get right on it. Or if not that, at least give my Sims the ability to order me a real pizza.

Dominick Cancilla

Sim-antics

■■■ Your Top 40 readers poll in the August 2000 issue rated THE SIMS at #6 overall, and yet it fails to make the top 5 in the "Simulations" category. It finished 18 spots ahead of your #1 Simulation, MechWarrior 3. Am I missing something? Doesn't the word "sim" at the beginning of games such as "SimCity" and "SimCopter" stand for simulation?

C. Atkins

CGW defines simulations narrowly as vehicular simulations from a first-person perspective. Many games with "Sim" in their title involve building and resource management, which we categorize as strategy games. With genre hybrids becoming more common, we've minimized the importance of these classifications, but they're still useful for comparing similar games.

Another Doom Idea

■■■ What the hell is id thinking? Sure, DOOM was a great game...five or six years ago. If id gave DOOM a new engine and re-sold it, it would be worth crap. Seriously, what was the point in DOOM? Collect four key-cards to unlock a door, then kill 40 more nightmare creatures from hell. That's just plain lame. I don't know how many times I've played a game with no point to drive you through it. Id better give the next DOOM some new elements (especially the ability to jump and maybe some RPG elements)...then it might be worth your 50 bucks.

Daniel Portin

Greenspeaks the Truth

■■■ Jeff Green's June Greenspeak was right on. Blizzard truly is one of the best gaming companies out there, confirmed by my purchase of DIABLO 2 recently. But I think I know why game companies don't carry out conversations like those in Jeff's column...some of them have big egos. Really big egos.

Unmeel Banerjea

Role-Playing Rant

■■■ VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE: Another fantastic-looking piece of crap.

Once again, a great license and a possibility to be something more than TOMB RAIDER. But no, they apparently spent their budget on graphics and an unwieldy combat system. There's no story, appalling voice acting, cut-scenes are as bad as most console ports: two faces looking at each other while their lips move. Stupid NPC artificial intelligence that never lets you forget that they're expendable.

BORING.

An RPG is NOTHING without a *good story*. So what makes a good story? A good villain? No. Several good villains. Role-playing means deciding how to react to a variety of different circumstances, so conflicts need that variety. A good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and progresses through them without using a leash. A good RPG is so engrossing, so interesting, so FUN that you can forget who you are to the point where you find yourself reacting not how *you* would, but how *that* guy in the cool pixels would. The best RPG is when you don't even notice yourself reacting.

You want profits? Put the time and effort into a well-crafted tale, with all these components designed to make you invest your life into the story, and they will come!

John Talcott

DEPT OF CORRECTIONS

In our July list of the Top 10 Mac Games (pg 116), we incorrectly referred to CALL TO POWER as "SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER." Oops. CTP isn't a Sid Meier game (although some wags may argue it's surely a Sid design...). Sorry, Firaxis.

In our August review of X-PLANE, we incorrectly identified an X-1 in a screenshot as an X-15. As Clint Webb and others pointed out, the little X-1 flown by Chuck Yeager when he cracked the sound-barrier doesn't look much like the black, swept-wing, rocket-powered beasts that went to Mach 5. We stand corrected.

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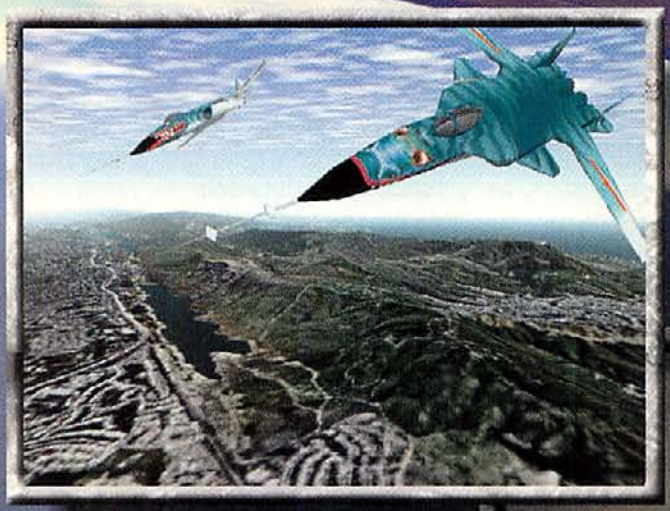

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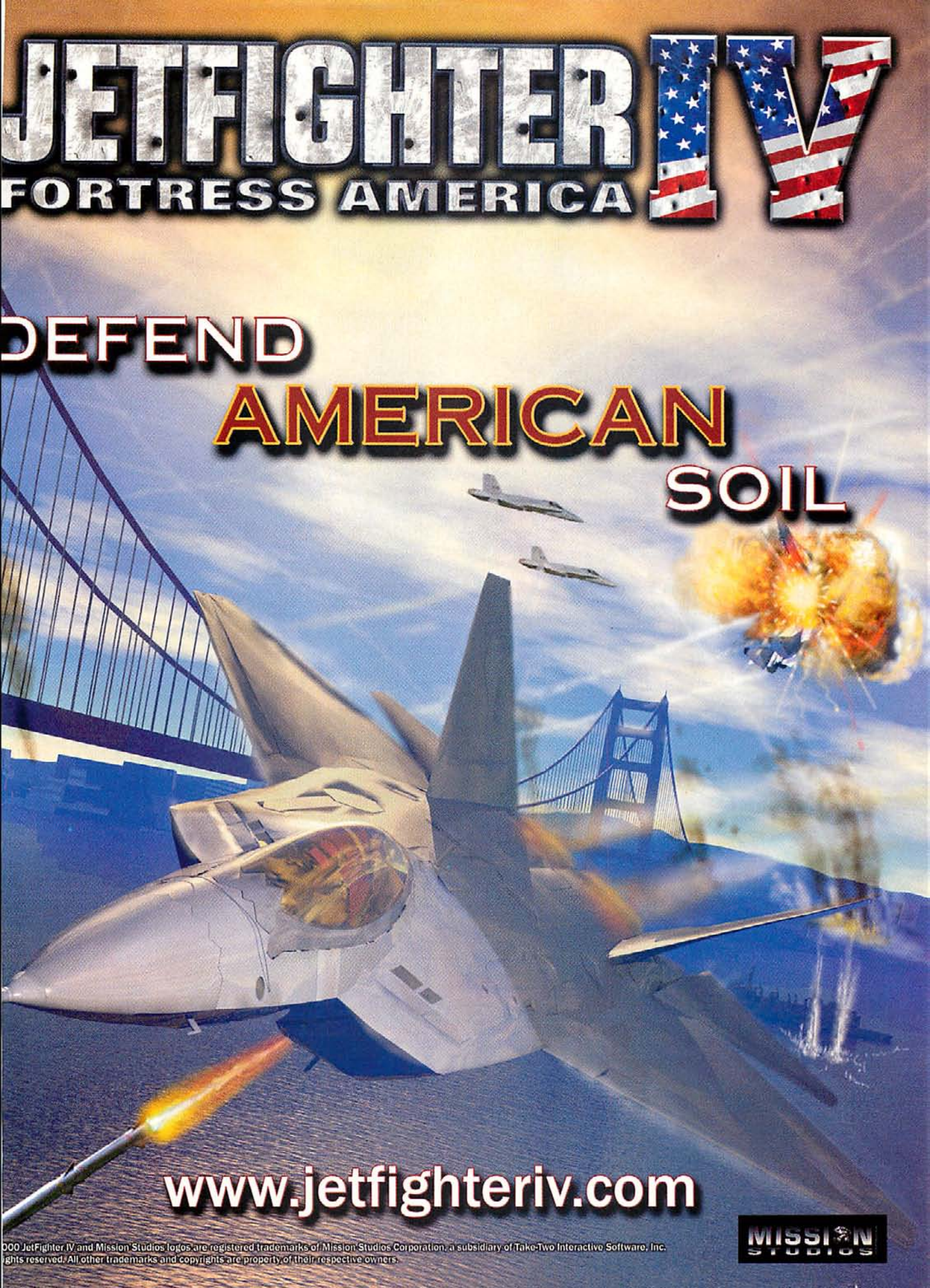

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INSIDE

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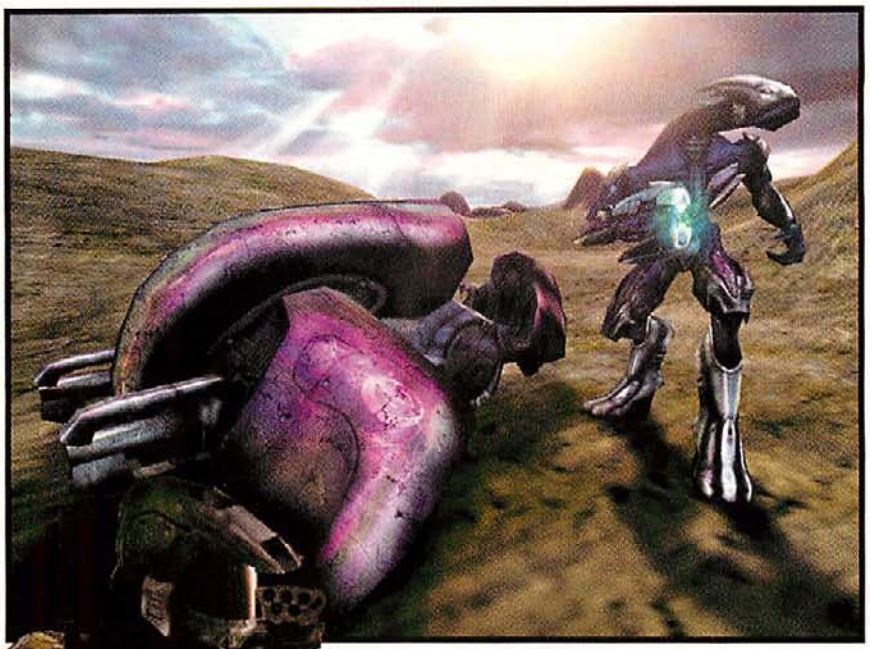
- Mr. Sneaky
- No One Lives Forever
- Ex-X-Commie Julian Gollop

Microsoft Bags Bungie



Mac gamers crushed, while PC gamers await word on HALO's platform preference

It was a jump rather than a push for Bungie Software. On June 19th, Bungie agreed to be purchased by Microsoft. Bungie was not in financial distress, but rather saw this acquisition as a good opportunity, according to Peter Tamte, executive VP of Bungie, who talked to *CGW* about the deal.

"Why sell?" Tamte said. "For the opportunity to play a key role in the launch of the X-Box. And by that, I mean that a lot of companies had approached Bungie about buying us for more money than Microsoft offered. But none of these other potential buyers offered us two important things that Microsoft did. First, Microsoft is allowing Bungie to maintain its independence as a development studio and retain our Bungie values." Tamte elaborated on the values, saying that they "like to create new technologies because it allows us to create far more original games. We want the gamers to have a new experience when they play a Bungie game."

The other important element in the deal according to Tamte is that Bungie is getting to be a key developer for the X-Box. "We're jazzed up by the X-Box. We're really excited by the opportunity that Microsoft has given us to be a leading developer for it."

As part of the sale, Take 2—which had owned 19.9 percent of Bungie—received some cash, the rights to all the MYTH games, the rights to ONI (which looks like a Fall release, according to Tamte), and the rights to create two games using the HALO engine. Microsoft gets the exclusive rights to HALO and the rest of Bungie's catalog, including MARATHON. Bungie will relocate to Redmond as part of the deal, but will still maintain and operate Bungie.net. They anticipate that HALO, one of the star games of E3, will be

featured on Bungie.net.

While the deal makes sense for both parties—it gives Bungie a financial safety net while still allowing them creative freedom, and it gives Microsoft a star developer for the X-Box—it does raise some questions. Is this the future of all independent development companies, finding a buyer? And what about support for Macintosh games?

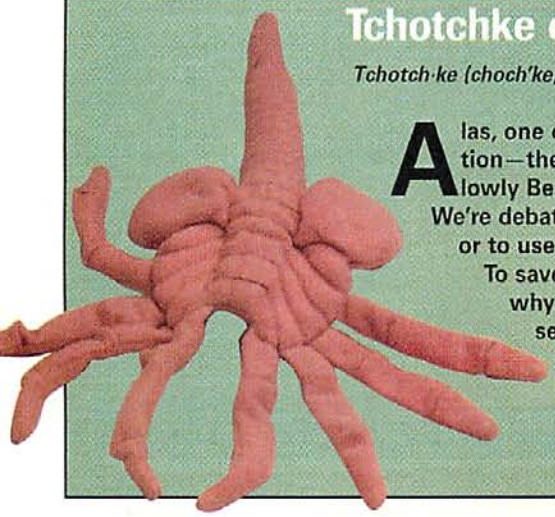
Gathering of Developer's Mike Wilson thinks that "the industry is reaching a point where being an 'independent' as a publisher makes little or no sense, unless broadband distribution changes things the way the music industry has changed. There are still good reasons for the artists to remain independent, but it's a hard road and most are not cut out for it. Independent artists are the heart and soul of every entertainment industry, and they are responsible for virtually all real innovation in the media arts."

As for the $64,000 question: For which platforms will HALO be available? Mac fans should be comforted by Tamte's remarks. "A decision has not been made, but if we do a PC version, we'll do a Mac version too." While that may ease the worries of Mac fans somewhat, maybe it's PC fans who should be concerned. If you want to see a PC and Mac version of HALO, fans have started a petition at **www.game-over.net/halo/.**

—Mark Asher

Aliens Hungry for More

Fox Interactive confirmed months of rumors with their recent announcement that Monolith is working on a sequel to ALIENS VS. PREDATOR. The sequel is optimistically slated for a late-2001 release, and will use the latest and greatest, best and brightest version of Monolith's LithTech 2.0 engine. Though the game is in the earliest stages of development, we were excited to hear the designers' plans for the game: a better sense of pacing, more atmosphere (with a focus on scaring players), both brightly-lit and dark environments, and a much greater level of detail. If the detail we saw in some early character models is any indication of the final game, it should be incredible—with different character types readily recognizable at a distance, thanks to 3D-modeled attachments like gloves, ammo clips, and belts on Marines; and an articulated (and most likely functional) targeting laser on the Predator. We don't want to sound like hypesters, but this could be the big breakout hit Monolith has been hoping for. *—Robert Coffey*



Tchotchke of the Month

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

Alas, one of the creepiest monsters in all of science fiction—the *Alien* face-hugger—has been reduced to a lowly Beanie Baby. What's next, alien queen piñatas? We're debating whether to gouge some collector on E-Bay, or to use it to wipe the lacquer out of our coffee mugs. To save it from such fates, tell us in 100 words or less why you want a soft, cuddly face-hugger and we'll send it to one lucky winner, while exposing your closet Beanie Baby obsession by putting your plea in Letters. cgwletters@ziffdavis.com. No office visits by costumed alien queens, please. (That means you, Jeff.)

The GOOD...

WARGAMES RESURGENT?

Two new wargames have caught fire recently, SHOGUN and COMBAT MISSION, both of which are finally giving wargamers realistic combat experiences in 3D (see the reviews this month). SHOGUN debuted at #4 in the sales charts in the U.S., and #1 in Great Britain. COMBAT MISSION sold out in less than a week, and it was only available online. Here's hoping this success augurs better times ahead for the neglected wargamer.

The BAD...

LICENSED GAMES

Why spend a lot of money trying to make a killer game when you can spend fifty grand on a movie license and move mountains of mediocre-ware at WalMart? That's the question a lot of suits must be asking, because the list of licensed games keeps growing: BLAIR WITCH, PLANET OF THE APES, OBI-WAN, SOLDIER, EVIL DEAD, and now HIGHLANDER. As if all the other movie-based games didn't suck enough...

and the UGLY

DIRTY LAUNDRY

For the ugliest stories in the gaming biz, check out the rumors and mud-slinging going on at fatbabies.com. Recent stories tell of mismanagement and incompetence at EA and German magazine publisher Computec Media. The gory details are enough to make any bigwig blanch—Bitch X would be proud.

FIRST-DAY SALES OF DIABLO II WERE OVER 200,000 UNITS WORLDWIDE, ACCORDING TO BLIZZARD. WITH PRICES RANGING FROM $50 TO $60 FOR THE STANDARD AND COLLECTOR'S EDITION, GROSS REVENUE WAS OVER $10 MILLION — MORE IN LINE WITH A MOVIE PREMIERE THAN A PC GAME.

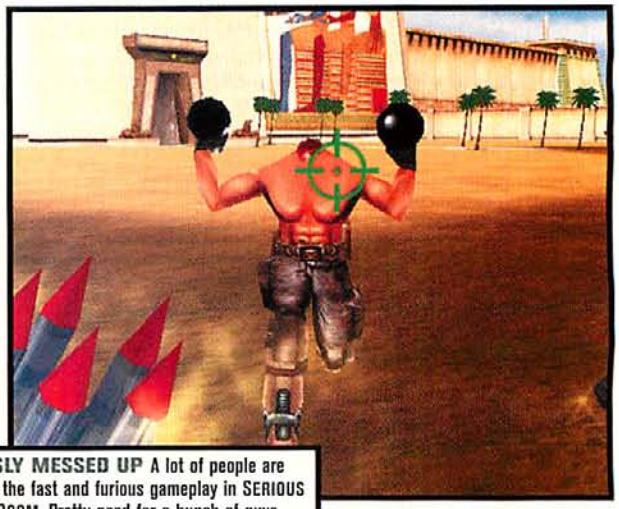
Can You Not See That I Am Serious?!

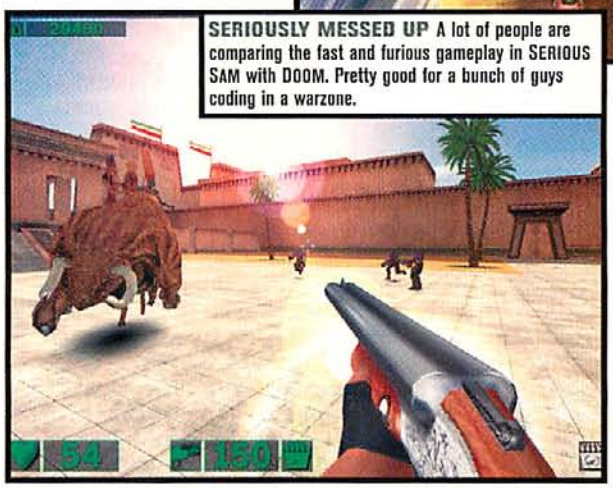
Croatia is the birthplace of Serious Sam, the new darling of shooters

The heir to DOOM might just be from Croatia. That's where a handful of guys have spent the last few years programming a surprisingly good shooter—in between stints in the Croatian army.

When Croteam released its SERIOUS SAM Technology Test, they had modest expectations. "We hoped people would like it. The reaction caught us unprepared," says Roman Ribaric, CEO of Croteam. What was initially "one interview on GA-Source and a couple of posts on BluesNews and VoodooExtreme" became two weeks of nonstop press interviews and online posts raving about the game.

How did this little tech test attract so many people? Richard "levelord" Gray over at Ritual thinks "it's the essence of the genre, an essence that seems to have been lost amongst all the technology and hype of today's games. It's simple and pure; it's efficient elegance in the first-person shooter arena. It reminds me of the original DOOM." Cliff Bleszinski at Epic says, "It's fun stuff, no doubt! There's something beautiful about unloading a boomstick into a monster and watching the gun fly back as the monster is knocked flat on its ass. These guys really get the issue of 'feel' when it comes to gunning down monsters in an FPS. The demo has buzz because of this factor. It's just fun as hell to shoot things in this absurd title!"





SERIOUSLY MESSED UP A lot of people are comparing the fast and furious gameplay in SERIOUS SAM with DOOM. Pretty good for a bunch of guys coding in a warzone.

With the fame that it has garnered, publishers and licensees predictably took notice and started lining up. Winner of the SERIOUS SAM sweepstakes? Gathering of Developers and their new O.D.I. (On-Deck Interactive) line of budget-priced games. While the technology and resources O.D.I. can provide is great for Croteam, this move could be equally beneficial for G.O.D. by legitimizing O.D.I. CEO Mike Wilson hopes to shape O.D.I. as a sort of "farm system" for up-and-coming developers, a minor league where they can put out smaller, shorter, but fun-packed games before moving on, as Wilson puts it, "to creating their three-year RPG."

It's a gaming Cinderella story, where simple fun is the champion. As Levelord observes, "It's very cool that the team is from Croatia. Here we are, with all our mounds of money and power tools—and WHAM!—along comes this terrific shooter from a country we thought was still in the demise of civil and economic unrest. Fantastic job, Croteam!"

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamers.com	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
NFS: Porsche Unleashed	A	A+	A	A	B+	A	A
Starlancer	B	B	B	C+	C	C-	B-
Messiah	D	B+	C	C	B-	B-	C+
Imperium Galactica II	B+	B	C	C	A	*	B
Tachyon: The Fringe	C+	A	B	C+	B	B	B
Star Trek Armada	D	B-	C	C+	B	B-	C+
NASCAR 2000	B	B	C	C	B	B-	B
Gunship!	C	C-	C	C	B-	C-	C
Ka-52 Team Alligator	C+	B-	B	C+	C	*	C+
Risk II	B+	C-	A	B	A	B	B+

*** indicates game has not been rated**

And the Winner Is... NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED, extending EA Sports' excellent track record with the series. There weren't any real bombs this month, but that may be due to the gaming press playing softball with games like MESSIAH. Reality Check welcomes Gamers.com to the spot previously occupied by PC Games, PC Accelerator, and Incite. Hope you have better luck.

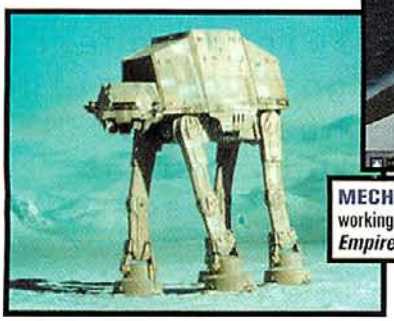
IF YOU GET BUSTED BY THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT IN MESQUITE, TX, GET A GLIMPSE AT THE LITTLE SILVER PLATES ON THEIR SHOTGUNS BEFORE THEY TOSS YOU IN JAIL. YOU MIGHT READ THAT THEY WERE DONATED BY ID. TIRED OF GETTING PULLED OVER IN THEIR FERRARIS, ID DONATED $30,000 TO THE SHERIFFS DEPARTMENT A FEW YEARS AGO, AND IT'S BEEN SMOOTH SAILING EVER SINCE.

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

STEALTHMODE

by Foghorn Sneakhorn III

■■■ Financially troubled **Eidos is up for sale,** with EA rumored to be the new owner. Yes, the $30 million Eidos poured into Ion Storm didn't help, but the rumors of **John Romero being fired** are wrong (or at least premature). Rumor has it that Eidos did reject Romero's idea for a massively multiplayer online RPG. Industry observers speculate that **Ion Storm's expensive penthouse offices will be shut down.** It was built for 100 people and 3 full teams, and they're down to less than 30 people.



MECHWALKER 4 Is Activision working on a game based on ***The Empire Strikes Back*?**

SUB SIM RESURFACES
SILENT HUNTER II is under construction again, with a new developer.

Now that **Sony has purchased EVERQUEST developer Verant Interactive,** the circle is complete. Verant was spun off from Sony's 989 Studios during the development of EVERQUEST, and now with the smashing success of that game, Sony was all too happy to lock up Verant's titles, including EVERQUEST 2, STAR WARS ONLINE, and some other unannounced projects. What this means is that these games are controlled by Sony now, so you can kiss any X-Box or Dolphin ports goodbye. Verant is going to produce **another EVERQUEST expansion** to tide fans over until EVERQUEST 2 is ready for primetime.

Could Activision have grabbed a *Star Wars* license? All I know is, they've requested footage of *The Empire Strikes Back*. It's possible that LucasArts, which is focusing on making games based on ***Episode One*** and the next movie, have licensed out the rights to one or more of the older movies.

Hasbro Interactive and Wizards of the Coast have reportedly signed a developer to do **yet another online version of MAGIC: THE GATHERING.** Players will be able to trade their virtual cards online, and if they tire of the online game, they will be able to swap their virtual card collection for a duplicate collection of real Magic cards.

SILENT HUNTER II has resurfaced. Sim fans will recall that SH II is being designed to work in conjunction with SSI's DESTROYER COMMAND, so it makes sense that both would be developed by the same publisher, Ultimation.

Bethesda's sequel to DAGGERFALL, **MORROWIND, will ship with a full-featured editor** that allows players to create their own adventures. The RPG scene may eventually rival the shooter-mod community, with games like NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, DUNGEON SIEGE, and ARCANUM all coming with robust editors.

A lot of gamers are pointing fingers at Irrational Games, blaming them for the demise of Looking Glass. Irrational, the creative force behind SYSTEM SHOCK 2, was working on a new game for Looking Glass and dropped that project to work on PS2 titles for Crave. This allowed Microsoft to back out of their contract with Looking Glass, which in turn led to Looking Glass' financial problems. What never surfaced, however, is that Irrational was unhappy with the money they were getting from Looking Glass. That's one of the chief reasons they looked elsewhere.

Coming Attractions: EA.COM

Come September, gamers will get a glimpse of the enormous implications of the Electronic Arts-AOL deal sealed late last year. That's when EA's flagship online effort—ea.com—moves from beta-testing into the general public.

How does AOL play in? Internet traffic, and tons of it. Upon launch, the America Online games channel, currently one of the most populated gaming arenas on the Internet, will be run exclusively by EA. This channel will serve the same content available through the Internet, made AOL-friendly. Expect an assortment of card and parlor games, featuring some brand-new titles, with more core-oriented online games making their debut later on this year. These will include unique, multiplayer, browser-based experiences using existing EA products, and some massively multiplayer efforts, including the mysterious-sounding MAJESTIC. Watch for more details next month. —*George Jones*

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

September 1985

From the trash heap of gaming history we bring you…

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: You are a young woman of the Regency Period. Your goal is to marry the best possible match and avoid spinsterhood. One to six players, with each player having varied attributes—beauty, wit, grace, etc. You attend parties, spread gossip, and keep an eye out for a wealthy bachelor.

10

September 1990

Interplay scored a major licensing coup, securing the rights to *the* hottest literary property for gaming translation—J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.*

And they did a pretty decent job turning Tolkien's vision into three role-playing games. Now, with the film version of *Lord of the Rings* on the horizon, the time is right for yet another crack at a Tolkien game. Who's going to score the license? We've got our ears to the ground….

5

September 1995

It was one of those awkward technological transition times in gaming. We were moving from DOS to Windows 95 and nothing seemed to work right.

The few true Win95 games that were out were often slow and buggy, and getting our old DOS games to work in the new environment was a pain in the ass. Ugh. Good riddance.

PROTOSTORM.COM

Superfly's Johnson

■■■ The Laziest Men on Mars? No, no, no—more like the Geniuses of the Universe, for it took geniuses to find the glittering diamond hidden in the lump of coal that is DAIKATANA. The mysterious Laziest Men pulled slabs of dialogue from the game, rearranged it, and set it all to a funky beat. The result? A tongue-in-cheek three-way sex romp between the game's heroes that is easily the funniest thing on this planet. Ever. We got headaches from laughing so hard.

How will the cash-poor Hiro and Superfly pay Mikiko for that pizza delivery? Check out this month's CD and hear the genius of the Laziest Men on Mars for yourself. —*Robert Coffey*

CGW PROFILE

Julian Gollop

The Englishman behind X-COM, MAGIC & MAYHEM, and the upcoming DREAMLAND CHRONICLES speaks

Is THE DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE inspired by X-COM?

Yes, although DREAMLAND is just the latest development in the evolution of Mythos Games' strategy games. X-COM was itself inspired by our earlier titles such as LASER SQUAD and REBELSTAR.

What is the coolest thing about DREAMLAND?

There are so many cool things, but here's one. I get a lot of smug satisfaction blowing the head off an alien and playing soccer with it—passing from soldier to soldier—and still being able to meet the mission objectives.

The pausable real-time combat in X-COM APOCALYPSE worked well. Why are you returning to turn-based combat with DREAMLAND?

It is all to do with the feel of the game. DREAMLAND is set in a grim, post-apocalyptic future where the human race is struggling for survival. With just a few soldiers, you have to succeed again and again in every tactical situation. The intimate, tense atmosphere of DREAMLAND can only be recreated with turn-based combat. Additionally, the 3D system is far more useable because the player can control characters from a third-person or first-person view, without losing control of the situation.

I laughed out loud the first time I saw a cow being dissected by the aliens in X-COM. What were the aliens doing?

That's a pretty good question, really. Cattle have been found strangely mutilated with various bits of the anatomy removed, such as the rectum [*the aliens can have that part – MA*] or a tongue. Some have blamed the government, but really it is those bug-eyed aliens who were just trying to figure out which parts of the cow to eat. They obviously hadn't found a McDonalds.

Ever seen a UFO?

Yes, of course, but my memory was wiped after seeing it.

Are there any aliens in X-COM or DREAMLAND inspired by your mother-in-law?

Yes, the Ethereals. They turn up when least expected and they can read your mind.

X-COM was responsible for more missing gaps in time than any aliens could ever hope for. What made it special?

Difficult question. I think some of the random elements helped, coupled with the interaction between the strategic and tactical levels. We ended up with a game that I didn't know how to win—I didn't know which were the best strategies or tactics, even though I designed all the game's systems. That is what makes a good strategy game.

Do you still work with your brother at Mythos? What's that like?

I still work with Nick, and together we manage the company. Its okay these days—I am used to the humiliation of been bullied by a younger brother.

Last question. How come there were no bathrooms in the X-COM bases?

There are outdoor facilities. This does, of course, compromise the defenses of the base.

Big guns. Fast planes. Gorgeous dames.

Dogfight opponents online in cutthroat multiplay.

Fly 11 tricked-out planes in 24 thrilling missions.

Customize your wings with rockets, machine guns and more.

The 1930s ain't what they used to be. America lies in pieces and air power is king. It's a shoot-or-get-shot-down world. You'll dogfight ruthless air pirates. Rescue saucy pinups. Dodge flak from dicey femmes fatales. And mix it up with other aces online. But remember, one thing still holds true—don't get mad, get even.

www.microsoft.com/games/crimsonskies

Microsoft

Zone.com

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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VETERAN PC-GAMES EDITOR DENNY ATKIN HAS RESIGNED AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AT *COMPUTER GAMES MAGAZINE*. ATKIN, FORMERLY OF *CGW* AND *COMPUTE*, IS MOVING ON TO A HANDHELD PDA MAGAZINE, A PERFECT FIT FOR A GADGET FANATIC.

Team Fortress 2 Update

New TF1.5 skins show where Valve is headed

With little news coming out of Valve about its highly anticipated TF2—and with rumors circulating that the engine was once again being retooled—we asked Valve's senior software engineer, Yahn Bernier, to tell us where things are going. He didn't comment on the engine, but he did say "TF2 will be a lot better looking than what we've shown up until now. We will have the ability to put players into a wider range of environments than what we've shown in the past."

Those familiar with the project know that the goal of TF2 is to create a sense of being part of a war through an extended campaign. Bernier says the scenarios are being built around that level of complexity.

"TF2 will have both extended scenarios and single-map scenarios," he says. "It will have multiple map campaigns/scenarios where the results of one are relevant in the next. [Our new] Valve Player Persistence (VPP) ... allows for more of the feel of a massively multiplayer RPG."

TF1.5 will be out later this summer to tide us over until TF2's arrival next spring.

The new character skins coming for TF1.5 show off much higher polygon counts. Valve will be rolling out several new models at the end of summer, including female characters. These are the skins for the Medic, Heavy Weapons Guy, and the Soldier.

first look

No One Lives Forever

Here's an idea whose time has come: a cheeky mix of Austin Powers and James Bond in a '60s-era spy thriller laced with bits of THIEF and HALF-LIFE. Shaken, of course...not stirred.

Under development at Monolith – creators of the critically acclaimed SHOGO – NO ONE LIVES FOREVER is the first game to boast the developer's new Lithtech 2.0 engine. As a result, NOLF boasts plenty of technological advancements such as a reactive difficulty level that adjusts to your playing style.

The Lith engine can also support smooth transitions from indoor to outdoor environments. Monolith is exploiting this by setting the game in exotic locations all over the world, from the Alps to the Carribean, Northern Africa, and outer space. Some of the scenes are pretty wild, as when the main character Cate Archer gets thrown out of a plane and has to kill a guy and take his parachute before becoming a lawn dart.

NOLF's storyline serves up plenty of spy genre mainstays, including an international counter-terrorist group, UNITY, pitted against an international terrorist group, HARM; and a lead character who totes around a bevy of cool "gadgets." But at least the game won't be a run-of-the-mill shooter. The game's producer, Chris Miller, puts it this way: "The game is very much a first-person-action-strategy title." Look for NOLF later this Fall. —*William O'Neal*

Female protagonist Cate Archer is as hot as Felicity Shagwell from *Austin Powers 2*. Let's hope she's as much fun to play with.

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

Recent Releases

DARK REIGN II
Pandemic's DARK REIGN was a solid – but underrated – game. Now, they meld the proven design/playability with a new slick-looking 3D engine. Maybe more gamers will pay attention, and make up for the lackluster sales of their previous titles.

ICEWIND DALE
Sure, it's competing against DIABLO II, but this is authentic, old-school *D&D*; it's all about tactical combat and dungeon-exploring. It'll give *D&D* fans a chance to explore the Spine Of The World, and feel like they're in one of those R.A. Salvatore novels.

WARLORDS: BATTLECRY
The team behind the great WARLORDS games is behind this, but this isn't WARLORDS IV. It's an interesting little mix with elements of HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC, FANTASY GENERAL, and even DIABLO. Will it all come together? We'll see.

		THEY SAY	WE SAY
	4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
	Age Of Empires II: The Conquerors Microsoft	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	Dec. 2000
	Anachronox Eidos	Summer 2000	Sept. 2000
	Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
	B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
	Baldur's Gate II Interplay	Summer 2000	Sept. 2000
NEW	Battle Isle: The Andosia War Blue Byte	October 2000	October 2000
	Battle Of Britain Rowan	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE	Battle Realms Crave	Summer 2001	Summer 2001
	Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
UPDATE	Civilization: Call To Power 2 Activision	Fall 2000	October 2000
	Clive Barker's Undying EA	Winter 2000	Nov. 2000
	Close Combat: Utah Beach Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Comanche vs. Hokum Empire	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood	Winter 2000	Nov. 2000
	Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
	Commandos 2 Eidos	Winter 2000	Nov. 2000
	Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
	Crimson Skies Microsoft	Summer 2000	Sept. 2000
	Destroyer Command Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
NEW	Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	Spring 2001	April 2001
UPDATE	Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Who Knows?	Dec. 2000
	Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW	Echelon Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
	Empire Earth Sierra	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
	Escape From Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
	Evil Dead: Hail To The King THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
	Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
	Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
	Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	January 2001
	Harpoon 4 Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	Hitman: Code 47 Eidos	Summer 2000	Sept. 2000
	Homeworld: Cataclysm Sierra	Summer 2000	Sept. 2000
NEW	IHRA Drag Racing Bethesda	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
	I'm Going In Eidos	Fall 2000	October 2000
	Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	Legends Of Might & Magic 300	Winter 2000	Winter 2000

		THEY SAY	WE SAY
	Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art Of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	February 2001
	MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
	MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
	Metal Gear Solid PC Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE	Motor City Online EA	Winter 2000	????
	Neverwinter Nights Interplay	April 2001	Summer 2001
	No One Lives Forever Fox	Winter 2000	Dec. 2000
	Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Praetorians Eidos	Spring 2001	March 2001
	Reach for the Stars Mattel	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW	Republic: The Revolution Eidos	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
	Red Faction THQ	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	Return To Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000	Nov. 2000
UPDATE	Rune G.O.D.	Fall 2000	Nov. 2000
	Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW	Sea Dogs Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE	Settlers IV Blue Byte	November 2000	Nov. 2000
	Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
	Sid Meier's Dinosaur! Electronic Arts	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
	Sigma Microsoft	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
	Silent Hunter II SSI	Winter 2000	Summer 2001
	SimMars EA	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
	Simsville EA	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	Sovereign Sony Online	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
	Squad Leader Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE	Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster	Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
UPDATE	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
	Startopia Eidos	Winter 2000	Nov. 2000
	Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
	Sudden Strike CDV	Fall 2000	Sept. 2000
	Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE	Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2001
	The World Is Not Enough EA	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
	Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
	Tribes 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
	Tropico G.O.D.	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	WarCraft III Blizzard	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
	Warlords IV Mattel	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
	Waterloo Breakaway Games	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Wizards & Warriors Activision	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
	Zeus: Master Of Olympus Sierra	Fall 2000	Sept. 2000

it RULETH.

"It's the perfect real-time strategy game...one of the most important new RTS games in a long time."

- Gamecenter.com
Rating: 8 out of 10

"...it's the perfect title for jaded RTS fans that need a breath of fresh air!"

- PC.IGN.com
Rating: 8.4 out of 10

"...oozes innovative ideas and gamplay... gamers will appreciate this rare treat"

- Games Domain
Rating: Silver Medal

"...Majesty is a fascinating and fun romp full of originality..."

– CGW
Rating: Four Stars

"If Majesty helps set a trend, then 2000 might go down in history as the year in which gaming changed forever."

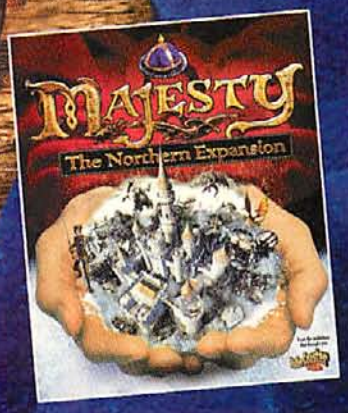
– Gamespot.com
Rating: 8.8 out of 10

You are King. You Rule.

MAJESTY™

The Fantasy Kingdom Sim

MAJESTYQUEST.COM



Rule new territories with Majesty's Northern Expansion pack!

EVERYONE E

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MICROPROSE www.microprose.com

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Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	4	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
4	3	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
5	5	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
6	6	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
7	8	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
8	9	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
9	7	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
10	10	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5
11	11	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
12	12	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
13	13	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
14	16	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
15	14	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
16	17	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
17	15	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
18	18	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
19	19	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
20	20	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
21	23	**Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
22	22	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** Hasbro	4
23	21	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
24	26	**Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
25	25	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
26	24	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
27	28	**Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
28	27	**Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
29	29	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
30	30	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
31	35	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
32	32	**EverQuest** Sony	4
33	31	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
34	34	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
35	36	**Nox** Westwood Studios	3.5
36	37	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
37	33	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
38	40	**Civilization: Call to Power** Activision	3.5
39	39	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
40	38	**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 early summer doldrums of gaming have struck the *CGW* Top 40, and struck hard. This month's list is about as exciting as watching algae bloom in an abandoned kiddie-pool, with nary a new game to stir the stagnant waters. Thank the thunder god for the late-summer storm of games that are sure to stir things up. On the ballot for next month: SHOGUN, DEUS EX, COMBAT MISSION, DIABLO 2, MDK 2, and more. Log on and vote!

Top Action Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
4	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	3.5
5	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
3	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
4	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
5	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4

Top Simulations Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
3	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro	3.5
4	**World War II Fighters** Electronic Arts	4.5
5	**European Air War** Hasbro	4

Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3.5
4	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5
5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
2	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
3	**The Sims** Maxis	5
4	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5

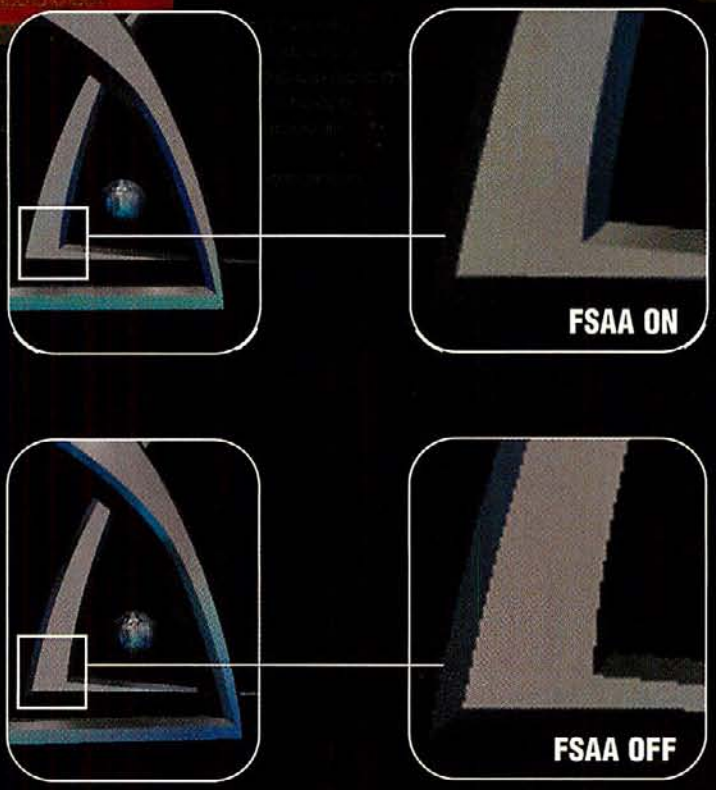
"Game to Watch in 2000"
Computer Gaming World
"Best Hardware of E3"
techextreme.com

CIVILIZATION IS NEAR COLLAPSE

AN ANCIENT CONSPIRACY IS EMERGIN

ONLY YOU CAN STOP IT

FULL-SCENE ANTI-ALIASING



MATURE M — Animated Blood and Gore, Animated Violence

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

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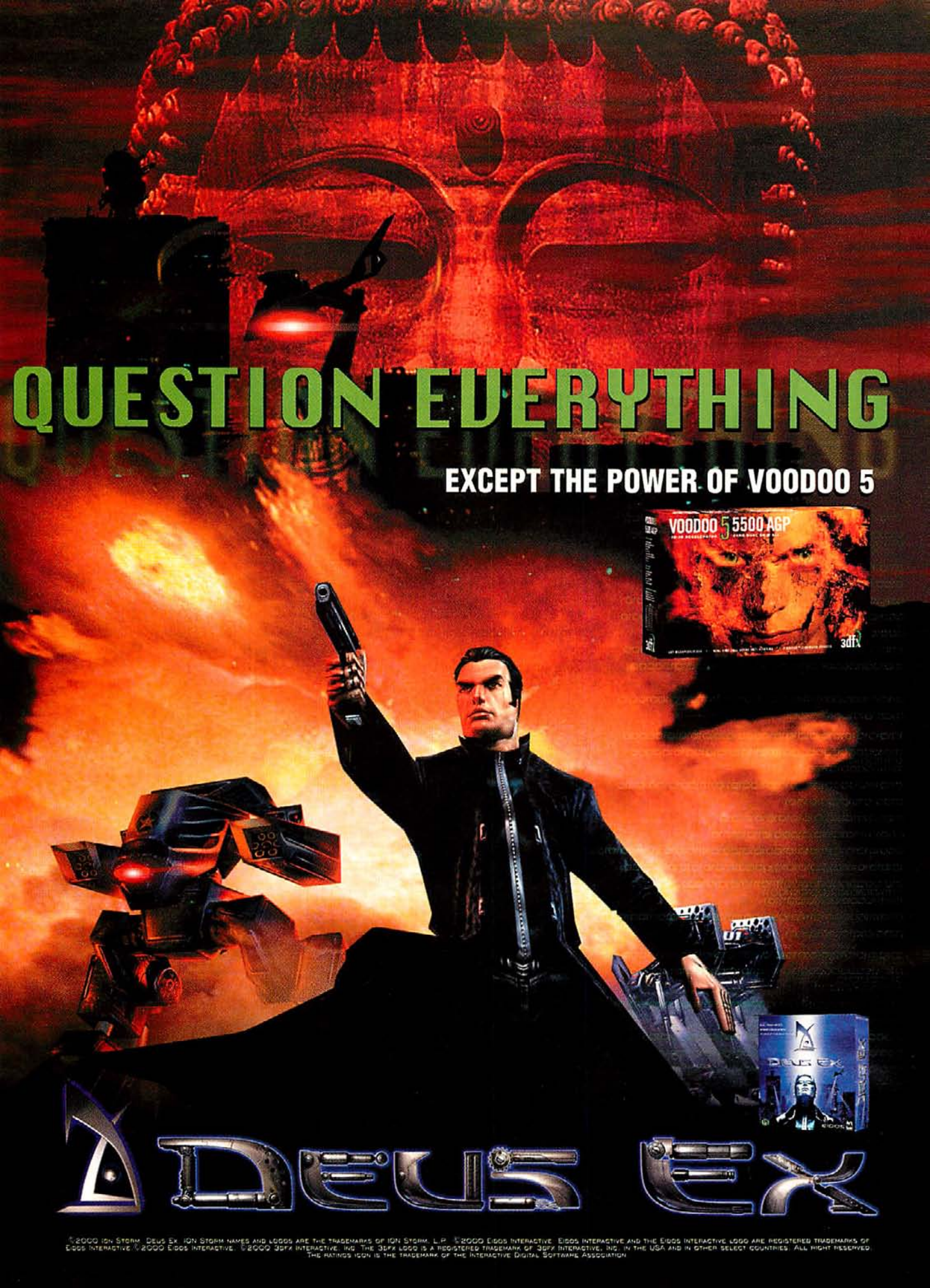
3dfx



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Tribes 2

TRIBES 2
GENRE: Multiplayer Action
RELEASE DATE: Q3 00
PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios • DEVELOPER: Dynamix
CONTACT: www.tribes2.com

We play the only team shooter sure to ship this year—and it rocks | by Robert Coffey

With all the new features and game types, TRIBES 2 has one definite, rock-solid carryover from its predecessor— it's a ton of fun to play.

A *CGW* squad recently engaged in an exclusive playtest of this massively multiplayer team shooter, and came away very impressed with what we saw. The game-worlds are enormous and beautifully rendered, running the gamut from icy mountain ranges complete with gently falling snow, to lush islands surrounded with water you can use to your tactical advantage. The game will ship with a slew of new games, including the one we played, Flag Hunters. A combination of CTF and Deathmatch, Flag Hunters is a frenzied, every-chump-for-himself contest where slain enemies cough up a flag you can grab and carry to a Nexus to score points. Once we were done with Flag Hunters, we dished out some punishment in a quick deathmatch because, well, just because we could.

We could write a couple thousand words about how cool we think this game will be, or we could let the game speak for itself. Check out the action in these screenshots from some of our games, and we bet you'll start counting the days until TRIBES 2 ships.

The first thing that hits you is how huge the worlds are...

...and how beautiful, too. With three layers of sky textures and immense peaks and valleys, you'll need to use the vehicles in the game just to get around...

...and to engage in vehicular duels. The vehicles have been engineered to be easier and more fun to pilot than the flying transports in the first TRIBES.

Vehicular fun in TRIBES 2 is best expressed as vehicular manslaughter – grabbing a ton of air and landing on some hapless enemy schmuck...

...or dogfighting in the new air vehicles. As intense as combat was in the first game, the addition of vehicles ensures that TRIBES 2 conflict will be even faster – and from all sides.

So, how do you deal with the persistent threat of Death From Above?

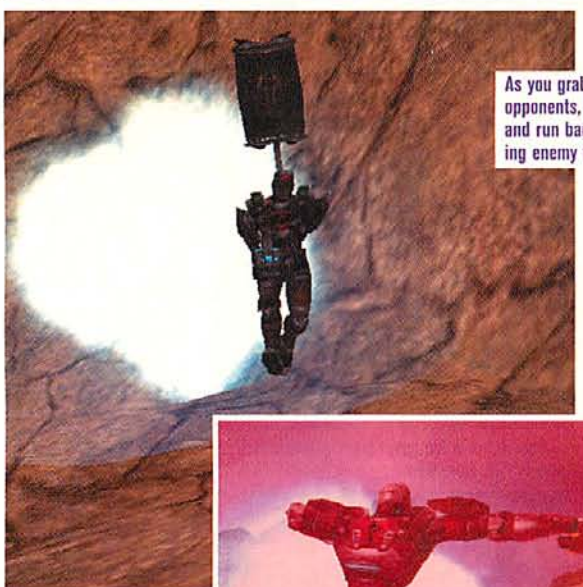
With the new rocket launcher, that's how. Designed for ground-to-air defense, you'll simply need to hold your aim to lock on a target. Fire your rocket...

...and watch it swoop after your contrail-spewing victim.

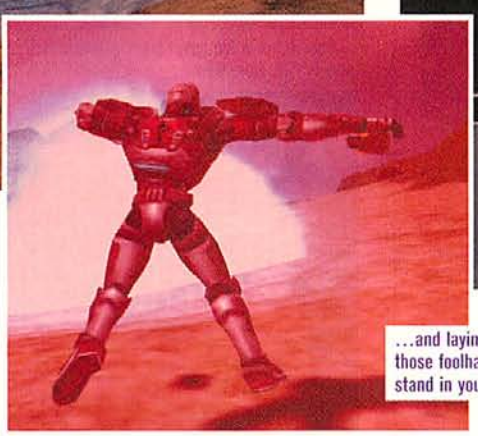
Eventually it'll catch up, and...

Boom! Pilot and plane explode and come crashing down to earth.

In Flag Hunter games, it's every man for himself.



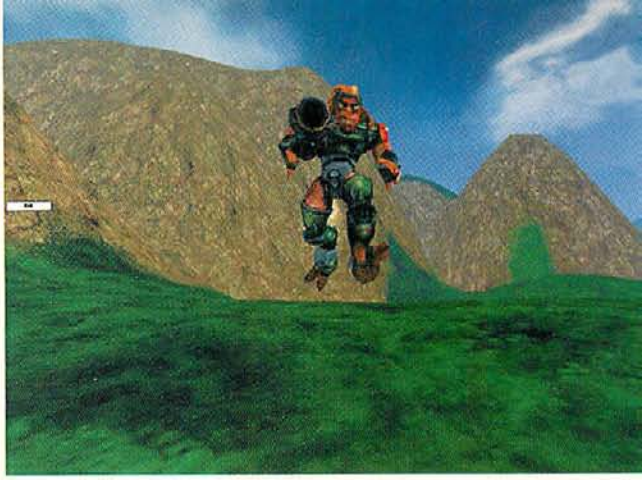
As you grab flags from your slain opponents, you'll have to jump-jet and run back to the Nexus, avoiding enemy fire...



...and laying waste to those foolhardy enough to stand in your way.

Of course, another strategy is simply to stay in the Nexus like this guy, and ambush returning combatants, stealing their flags for yourself.

The gameworld environments are tied to the separate tribes, leading to widespread conflict.



You'll have to dodge explosive disc fire in lush tropical worlds...

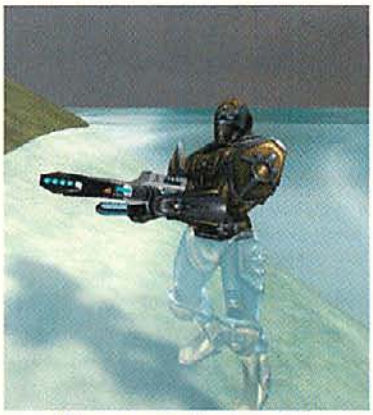
...jump-jet down on unsuspecting victims in sandy island worlds...

...pursue enemy flag-carriers across coastal beaches...

...and face-off with hostile forces on barren worlds, carpeted in slick ice and fallen snow.

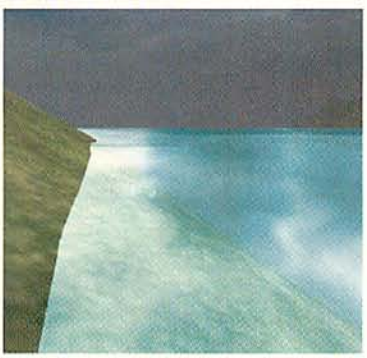
Along with new weapons comes some new technology...

For a nifty surprise attack, stand knee-deep in some water...



...wait for an unsuspecting opponent to appear...

...then activate the new Cloaking device to quickly fade from view.



5 New Things You'll Love in TRIBES 2

1. ONLINE VOICE SUPPORT with separate channels for offensive and defensive team members, as well as for individual vehicles.

2. NEW WEAPONS, including a locking anti-air rocket launcher and a melee weapon, the Shocklance, which will inflict about 20% damage in a frontal attack, but which is instantly lethal when "backstabbing."

3. NEW VEHICLES including a 4-wheel scout ATV, a bomber with individual stations for team members, and an assault vehicle that allows gunners to choose which turret to deploy.

4. MOBILE BASES allow you to set up remote inventory stations deep in the battlefield, even within enemy territory. Whether or not you can respawn here has not been decided.

5. A REVAMPED, TRANSPARENT HUD eliminates the need to toggle between command screens and the battlefield, allowing you to stay focused on the action.

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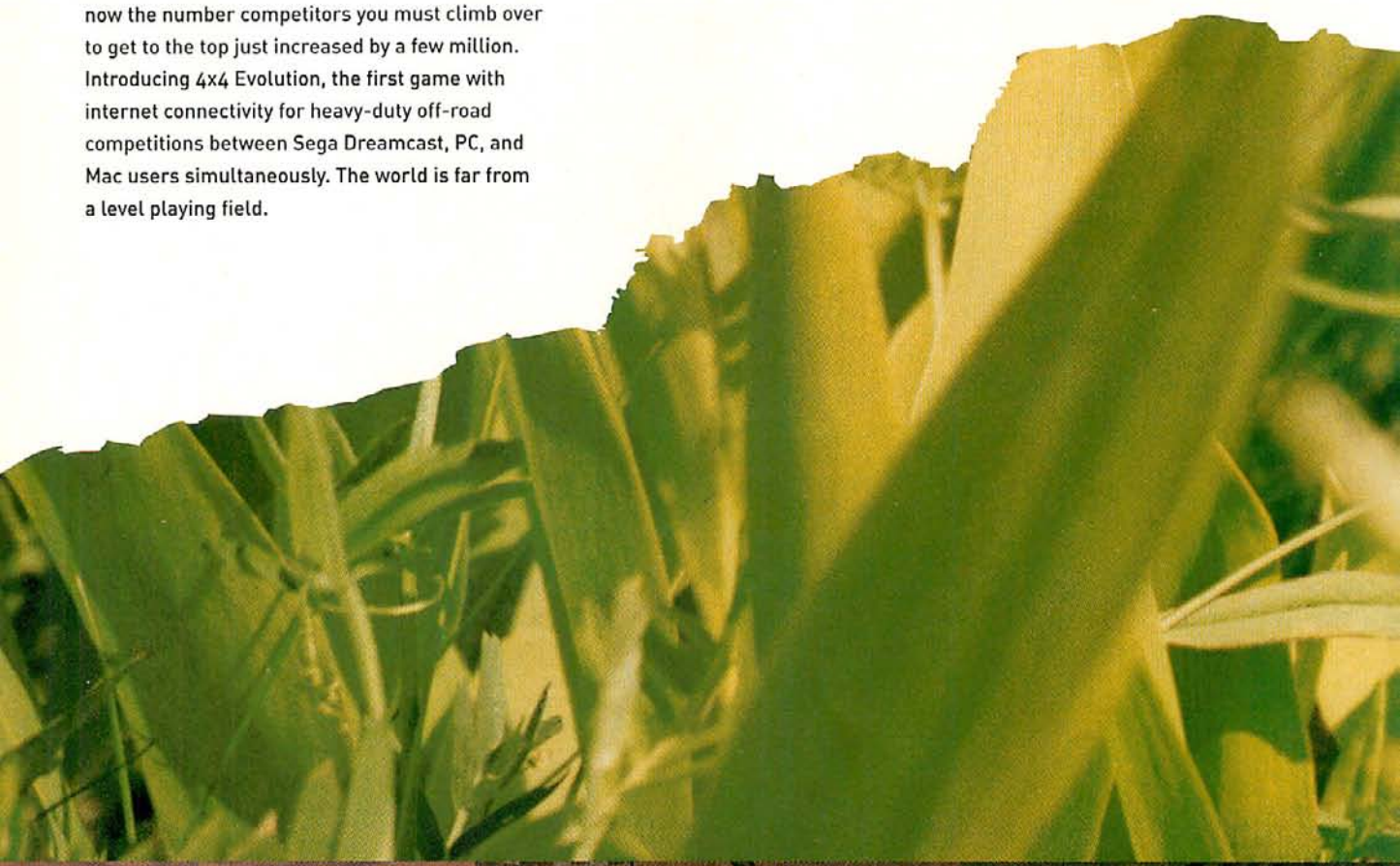
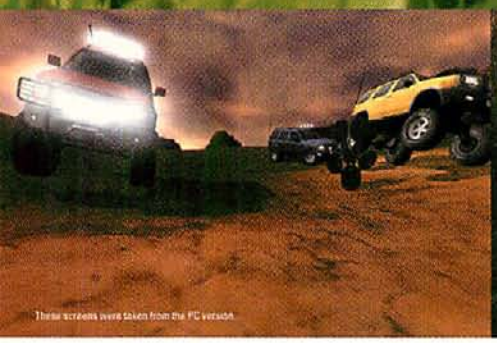
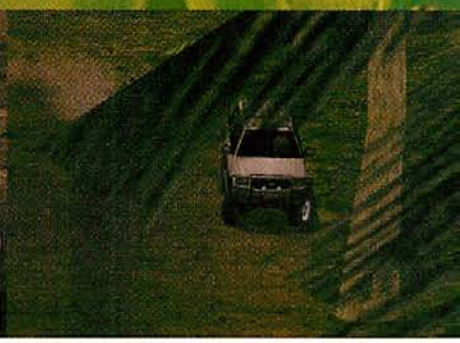
4X4 EVO™

Ever felt like the whole world was against you? You're about to experience déjà vu.

As if Mother Nature wasn't enough to deal with, now the number competitors you must climb over to get to the top just increased by a few million. Introducing 4x4 Evolution, the first game with internet connectivity for heavy-duty off-road competitions between Sega Dreamcast, PC, and Mac users simultaneously. The world is far from a level playing field.







ALL THE TOP SUVS AND TRUCKS FROM LEADING MANUFACTURERS TO CUSTOMIZE • 16 MERCILESS OFF-ROAD COURSES, EACH WITH THEIR OWN ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT, MUSIC SCOR

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Developed by TERMINAL REALITY

Published by GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS

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Sega Dreamcast. Mac PC CD ROM

DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY
New to CALL TO POWER 2: border disputes. The game map displays nation borders. Cross into your opponent's territory, and you'll get embroiled in a diplomatic snarl. Be careful—failure to move your units out of enemy territory could cost you.

Call to Power 2

World conquest gets even more civilized

by George Jones

A good idea in real life and in science fiction novels, space living doesn't work out too well in computer games. At least not in last year's CALL TO POWER. Realizing this—and striving to provide a more consistently enjoyable game—Activision immediately scratched space living from the game when they began hatching plans for the sequel.

That was just the beginning of the overhaul. While CALL TO POWER 2 will play in a similar fashion to the original, the game's designers—who are acutely aware of and motivated by ALPHA CENTAURI's critical success—are not playing the timid sequel game, but are overhauling almost every aspect of the original best-selling design.

The Blame Game

In CALL TO POWER 2, Activision aims to capture a truer form of diplomacy than any other game—extended, back-and-forth negotiations with multiple possible outcomes. The ultimate goal is to create a dialogue that more closely resembles a conversation than a series of menu selections.

Accomplishing this won't be easy. The most important aspect of CALL TO POWER 2's revamped diplomacy model is that it puts forth many more choices and options for diplomatic maneuvering. You'll be able to select the tone with which you address your rivals (friendly, condescending, or hostile), and the huge range of demands and requests give you a wider range of bargaining room. In addition to the usual cease-fires and peace treaties, wannabe Kissingers will also be able to request nuclear/biological weapons reductions and a slew of other options. Wannabe Napoleons can barter for entire cities.

If balanced properly, going back and forth with the various world leaders will be a blast. It might start simply...the Russian leader might demand that you give him the Gunpowder advance. You might reply that you'll give him Gunpowder, but only if he gives you the Writing advance plus 100 gold. The Russian leader might then reply that this is unacceptable, and you'd go on from there. Hopefully, we'll see the kind of escalating, high-stakes, diplomatic tension that the gaming industry hasn't experienced since Chris Crawford's 1986 geo-political masterpiece, BALANCE OF POWER.

CALL TO POWER 2
GENRE: Strategy
RELEASE DATE: October 2000
PUBLISHER: Activision
CONTACT: www.activision.com

Finally...Scenarios

In previous versions of CIVILIZATION, you could never fully trust your allies; since only one person could win the game, a knife in the back was inevitable. CALL TO POWER 2, however, will allow for allied victories, potentially creating some unique dynamics. But this also raises some questions. When you are allied with computer-controlled forces, will the most powerful commander be in charge? Will you be able to combine forces to coordinate your strategy? And how will the computer manage in such a complex environment? Activision needs to make sure they play-balance this innovative aspect of the game to the max.

The diplomatic and allied victories should allow the game's other big addition—individual scenarios—to flourish. Imagine playing the English in a WWII scenario, where the goal is not to dominate everyone, but simply to survive. Or a Cold War map that emphasizes checking the advance of communism or

capitalism. The possibilities are endless...and appealing. Thankfully, Activision will be including a scenario editor with the game.

Choose Your Own Adventure

In place of the space- and science-oriented end story of the original game, CALL TO POWER 2 will feature several different opportunities for victory. You'll still be able to win the game with science and research; you'll also be able to win via economic or diplomatic means.

Since ocean living—an under-utilized aspect of the original game—is replacing space as the end-of-game frontier, expect one of the game's endings to revolve around the sea. Here's hoping that Activision doesn't find itself regretting their emphasis on aquatic living. On paper, it sounds compelling, but like last year's outer-space setting, it's still an extra dimension of gameplay and units to get used to.

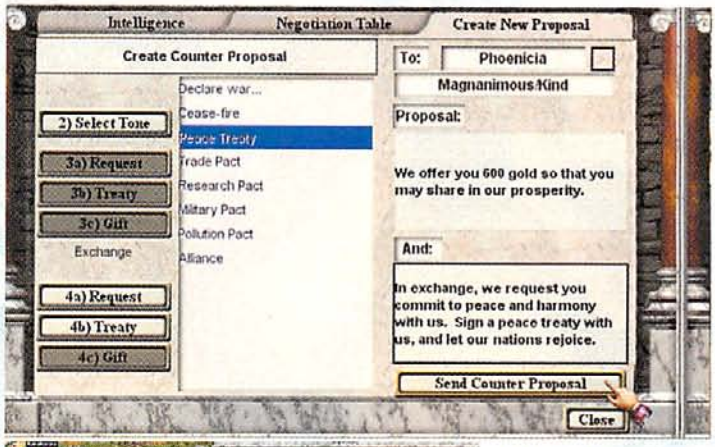
As always, you'll be able to win the game the good old-fashioned way—via brute force. Through the use of a nifty army manager, you'll be able to create and align your forces much more easily. The game's new click-drop, right-click interface will greatly aid the movement of your armies.

Da Mayor

Gamers accustomed to the tedium of micro-managing cities—and the resources they harvest—will appreciate Activision's decision to eliminate the concept of workers. Instead of moving your workers around the finite number of surrounding terrain tiles, each city in CALL TO POWER 2 will have a sphere of influence. Depending on the size of a city, a certain percentage of every tile that falls into this area gets harvested.

As a city grows in size, the sphere of influence will grow. The spheres start off small, with eight or so tiles at the beginning, but gigantic cities will likely have spheres of influence extending to 48 tiles.

Specialists will still be available to help give that extra boost to a city's productivity, and Mayors—the game's urban autopilot—can handle city development and management all on their own. Mayors can be turned on or off at will, and you can even specify goals for the AI, so that it will focus its efforts on population growth, production, or gold.



TALK SOUP The game's revamped negotiation mode, which allows for bartering and bantering, could elevate the standard for the entire genre.

Plus Other Features, Like...

...the Cyber Attorney and the Moray Striker. New urban advances like the VR Amusement Park and the Cornucopia Vats (which replace the Beef Vats). New Wonders like the Empire State Building (which improves diplomatic relations) or the Appian Way (which eliminates unhappiness). Stealth units' ability to see all other stealth units. Easier, more comprehensible trading.

Activision is serious about the CALL TO POWER franchise, which, interestingly enough, was the best-selling turn-based strategy game on the market last year, according to PC Data's numbers. This is probably due to the more mainstream appeal of a real-world-based game, versus some fairly in-depth science fiction.

It's important for Activision to make sure they get CALL TO POWER 2 out by their October goal. Otherwise, they're going to be going head-to-head with two Sid Meier turn-based juggernauts: DINOSAURS and CIVILIZATION III.

Then again, given the original game's sales, maybe they're not so worried after all. CGW

CALL TO ARMS! The game's army manager and improved interface should streamline matters of war. Graphically similar, CALL TO POWER 2 will give you a slightly different angle on the action than last year's version.

5 New Features in CALL TO POWER 2

1) ALLIED VICTORIES Trusting an opponent is easier when you can both win.
2) SCENARIOS Finally, strategy game story-telling.
3) MULTIPLE ENDINGS Scientific, political, economic, and military victory conditions will make the end-game more interesting.
4) FEATS OF WONDER Discover the highest mountain, or a new continent, and your nation gets a boost in morale or productivity.
5) ARMY MANAGER Invaluable during extended "police actions."

The Numbers Racket

Turn-Based Strategy Game Sales
(Source: PC Data)

game	units sold
1. CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER	293,046
2. ALPHA CENTAURI	281,115
3. HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III	185,553
4. CIVILIZATION 2 Gold	171,495

RUNE
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q3 00
PUBLISHER: G.O.D. • DEVELOPER: Human Head
CONTACT: www.humanhead.com

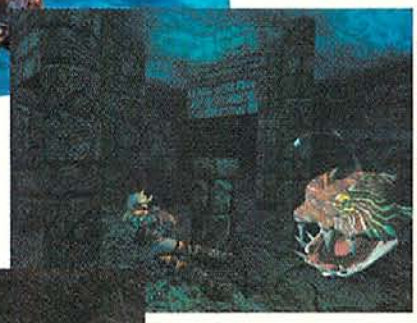
Rune

Thor and Odin are alive and well, and living in an *UNREAL* world

by Thomas L. McDonald

Huge men wielding huge swords and warhammers as they fight giants, dwarves, and gods just seems like a natural fit for an action game. Marry the concept to a heavily-modified version of the UNREAL engine, give it to people who worked on HERETIC II, and you really can't miss.

RUNE, the debut title from Human Head Studios, mines the rich source material of Nordic myth and legend. You play as Rangar, a young warrior growing to manhood in a Viking village. Carnack, an evil warlord and follower of Loki, is behind a series of raids that have decimated other villages. After he kills your father, you find yourself sucked down a whirlpool into the Viking underworld. You must make your way through the land of the dead, the Goblin lands, the city of the Dark Vikings, the lands of dwarves and giants, and beyond in order to wreak your revenge.



BEASTS OF VALHALLA
Human Head is drawing heavily on Norse myth to populate the world of RUNE with gods and monsters.

Gameplay is a mix of complex combat and puzzles, all from a third-person perspective. Control is simple—one key for attack, one key for defense—but the permutations can be quite complex. Moving as you strike will create different types of attack; for instance, moving forward will result in a full-bodied slash while moving backwards yields an upward thrust. You can create combination attacks, but you'll have to properly time your follow-through. Combat encounters are sensitive to maneuver and position, so you'll need to move around and look for weak points. Well-placed attacks can take off a head or an arm, which can then be scooped up and used as a weapon. Eighteen basic weapons—plus some special weapons found later on—yield over 400 combat-specific animations.

Weapons are divided into Bashing, Axe, and Sword categories. Each weapon has different ratings for damage inflicted, speed of attack, follow-through, and so on, so some may be more suited to fast combinations than others. So far, the giant axe and giant broadsword are both in place and mightily impressive in terms of sheer size and animation detail. Each weapon also has a special "rune power," giving it an added attack value for limited amounts of time. These range from vampire attacks that drain health from a target, to one which turns foes to friends.

A final factor affecting combat will be a "bloodlust" rating. As Ragnar kills, his fury grows until he finally explodes in a near-unstoppable berserk rage. Balanced with the emphasis on position and timing, it adds up to a unique combat experience with a much different dynamic than the usual hackfest where the person with the fastest mouse clicking wins.

Human Head has squeezed even more eye-popping tricks out of the UNREAL engine, including projected shadows and models that dynamically scale to ensure the best frame-rates. The biggest addition is a Skeletal Deformation and Dynamics system that employs full hierarchical skeletons and meshes. "The skeletal system not only allows us to have many more animations in memory," says Lead Programmer Paul MacArthur, "but also allows us to attach objects arbitrarily to any model, detect collisions of objects with specific body parts, turn the head and body to look at things in the game dynamically, and do rigid body dynamics." The result is an engine that is to UNREAL what HALF-LIFE was to QUAKE II. CGW

Friends come and go, but Family is for life.

MAFIA

www.talonsoft.com/mafia

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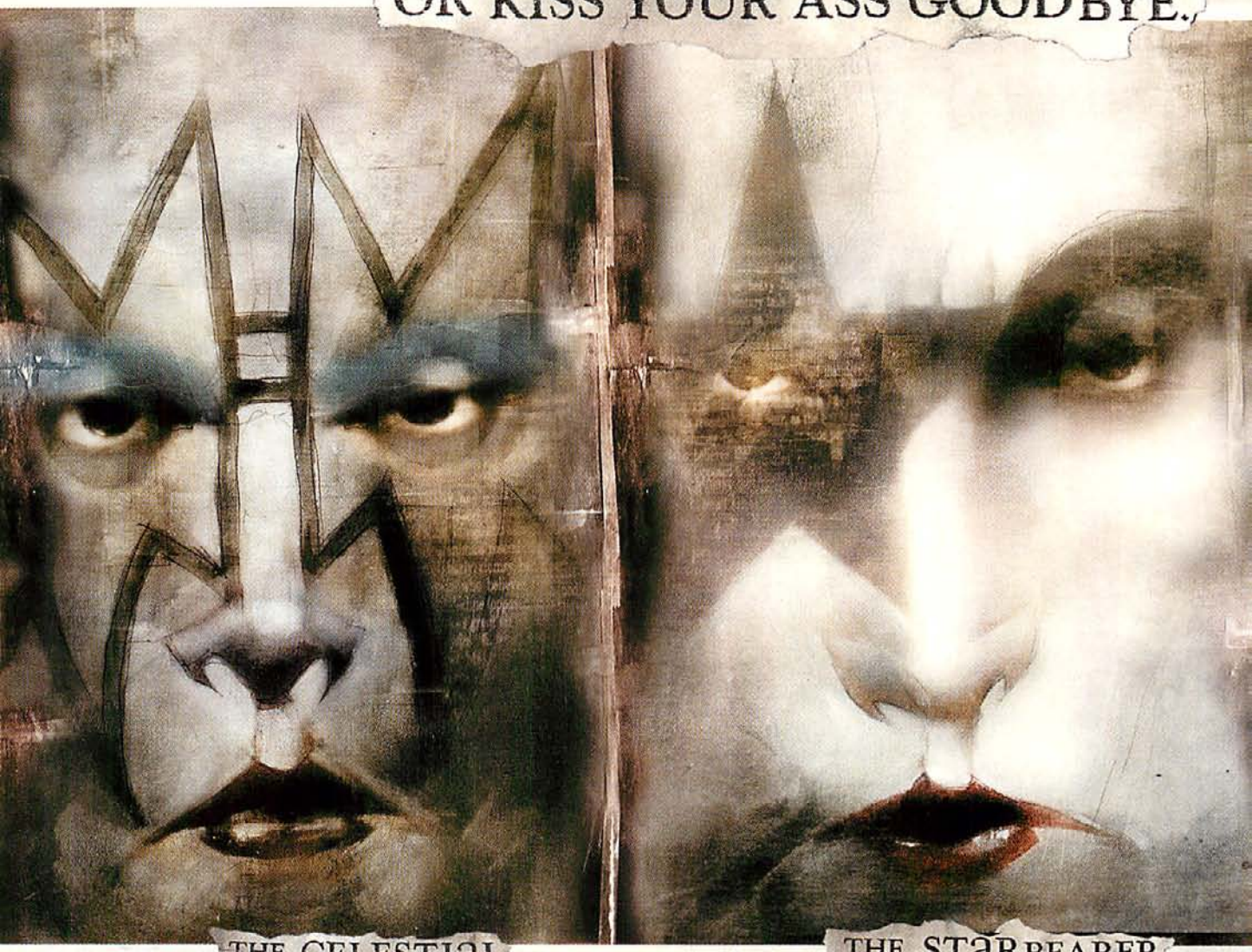
OR KISS YOUR ASS GOODBYE.



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"A wildly original game world, and some of the most frenetic action seen to date."
–NextGen Magazine, February 2000

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Republic .....page 70

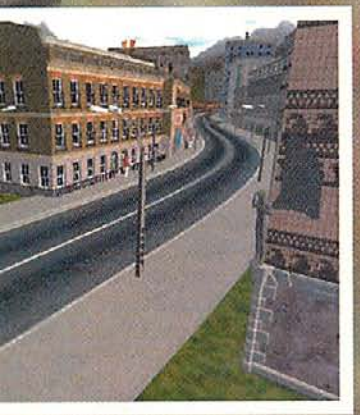
Freedom Ridge ....page 71

Tropico .....page 75

They Might Be Giants

And they might give strategy games a swift kick in the ass

For years now, the battle hymn of the strategy game has been sung with just two notes, both in the key of C. The bulk of strategy games were either variations on the turn-based world-building of CIVILIZATION, or subtle spins on the real-time world-bashing of COMMAND & CONQUER. Just as this duotone drone was lulling us to sleep, along come five new strategy games, from five veteran designers, all with radically new themes, original gameplay riffs, and—believe it or not—emotional depth.



Black and White

Lionhead Studios creates a god game...in the truest sense imaginable. by George Jones

Developer: Lionhead Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
ETA: Fall 2000

Designer: Peter Molyneaux
Previous Games: Populous, Syndicate, Magic Carpet, Dungeon Keeper
What's the Big Idea? "BLACK AND WHITE is atonement for all my previous game design sins," says designer Peter Molyneaux. In our minds, this majestic strategy game may do more than simply atone for his sins. BLACK AND WHITE, scheduled for release in late September, just might elevate the entire PC-gaming genre to new heights.

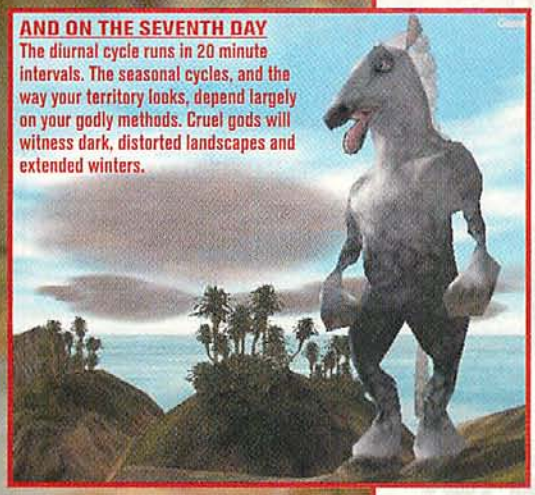
Out of tragedy, faith is born.

Two parents stand on a sandy beach, watching their child swimming. Out of nowhere, a gigantic whale surfaces and swallows the child. Distraught, the parents do what human beings have done for tens of thousands of years: They pray. They pray for divine intervention. They pray for God's help.

To the amazement of the bereaved parents, their prayers get answered in the largest possible way. *You* get sucked through the cosmos and appear before them. They realize their child is gone, but bask in the knowledge that someone or something heard their prayers. And their people now have a god to watch over them.

You know nothing more than what's obvious: You are these people's newfound god. Your sudden appearance gives rise to some introspective curiosity. Where or what were you before the desperate parents' prayers were answered? And who, exactly, answered their prayers? Do you owe your very existence to these people? Or were you an out-of-work deity hanging out in some sort of cosmic god-lounge waiting for your number to be called?

Get used to the questions. Right from this heart-tugging intro, BLACK AND WHITE—an evocative god game in the truest sense of the word—makes you wonder, think, and... feel.



AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY The diurnal cycle runs in 20 minute intervals. The seasonal cycles, and the way your territory looks, depend largely on your godly methods. Cruel gods will witness dark, distorted landscapes and extended winters.

Rules of the Universe

Amazingly, Peter Molyneaux's design document puts forth just three simple rules:

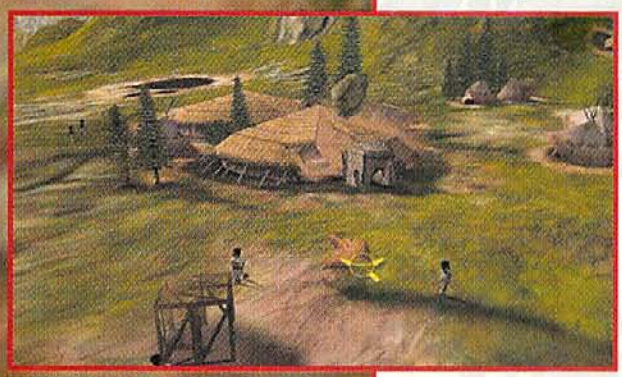
1. Belief is everything. If nothing believes in you, you are powerless.
2. In the areas where there is belief in you, you can interact with things. In areas where there is none, you can do nothing.
3. Your creature will assist you in playing the game.

These rules provide the groundwork for Lionhead Studios' most critical and daunting task: transforming and merging BLACK AND WHITE the concept into BLACK AND WHITE the game.

They also exemplify the game's open ambition to be both an experience and a game. More rules would equal more constraints, contrary to BLACK AND WHITE'S goal of allowing the player to play the game at their own pace, and in their own way.

Computer games typically exist on two planes—the (usually traditional) gameplay itself; and an accompanying story that gets you from level to level. Or battle to battle. The tricky part for the extremely talented Lionhead Studios team has been coming up with ways to keep the player motivated, involved, and directed—without creating too much structure.

BLACK AND WHITE intricately connects plot and gameplay. The story, which unfolds over five different chapters, is a majestic, quasi-biblical tale that involves multiple peoples, other more powerful gods, and decision-making. Plot and gameplay are tightly and ingeniously woven together through the game's primary play structures, Challenges and Quests.



IT TAKES A VILLAGE Each of your followers has a name and specific desires. Your goal – impressing them with your godliness – can be accomplished through a variety of methods. Satisfy their needs, uproot trees, or randomly smite the innocent.

Divine Intervention

Initially, the Challenges—all of which are optional—are simple. To begin with, you'll have to help your newly-inherited villagers construct your temple by uprooting trees and placing them near the construction site (be careful not to crush the villagers when you drop the trees!).

Challenges are activated by villagers' prayers, an extremely effective, often emotionally-provocative method for pulling you into BLACK AND WHITE. It's the perfect way to present the player with gaming tasks without spoiling the fiction of the game. Even more importantly, the villagers' prayers create some awe-inspiring moments that should effectively cast you in the role of god. In-engine, letter-boxed cut-scenes and an engaging, moody score further enhance this effect.

How you resolve the various challenges is up to you. At one point, a mother prays to you to help find her lost little boy. Assuming he's within your sphere of influence, you can simply pick him up with your hand and move him home. Or, you can pick up his sister and move her to his location, where she'll lead him home.

Or you can simply ignore the mother's pleas and let the child starve to death. Not the humane option, but—as your devilish sidekick argues—do you really want to spoil your followers? This could make life more difficult for you in the future.

Successfully completing a Challenge results in rewards, which range from helpful information to a higher birth rate. The stories in the challenges even loop back. At one point, two men pray for your help in building an ark to explore the world. Helping them gather wood and food for their journey pays off later when you move to one of the game's later landscapes.

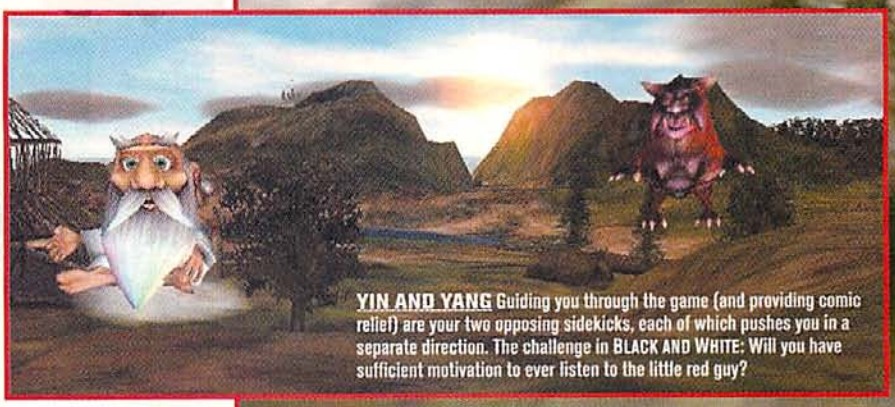
The Real World

The real-world challenge for Peter Molyneaux and Lionhead Studios is to make sure that the Challenges serve two functions. First, they must provide varied gameplay that helps the player get better at the game. Second, they must tell interesting tales that emotionally involve the player and force them to make tough decisions, such as being put into a position where they have to decide between the lesser of two negative outcomes. Or situations where helping one person could possibly hurt another. These are the types of decisions that could elevate BLACK AND WHITE to an instant classic.

The more personal the challenge, the more effectively BLACK AND WHITE will advance its central concept—that of a fledgling god who learns what it actually means to be a "capital G" God. Key to this concept is going to be enmeshing players in the lives of the villagers. The recurring characters and looping plot seem to indicate that this is exactly where Molyneaux and Lionhead Studios are heading.

The game's Quests are basically meta-Challenges that serve as the game's golden path. As you advance through the various challenges and quests, you will be rewarded.

MONSTER ISLAND Initially, you choose between three different creatures. As the game goes on, however, you may be able to switch to new ones. Creatures reflect their master's divine methods, both in acts and in appearances.



YIN AND YANG Guiding you through the game (and providing comic relief) are your two opposing sidekicks, each of which pushes you in a separate direction. The challenge in BLACK AND WHITE: Will you have sufficient motivation to ever listen to the little red guy?

We, The People

As with any god, your relationship with your followers is more than important. As you undertake (or choose to ignore) the more gameplay-oriented structures of the game, you still need to tend to your followers' needs and impress upon them your all-mighty importance. After all, the stronger their beliefs, the stronger you are.

In each village, a series of flags indicates your followers' needs. So at times, they may need more housing, food, or even sex. Your answer may be to simply ignore them. Or, you can give them general instructions to build various structures in different locations.

Complicating matters, as villagers start to get used to your presence, they become harder to impress. At the beginning, uprooting trees and cracking rocks in half will suffice. But as time goes on, you're going to have to find new and different ways of motivating your people. Some of these ways may not be too nice.

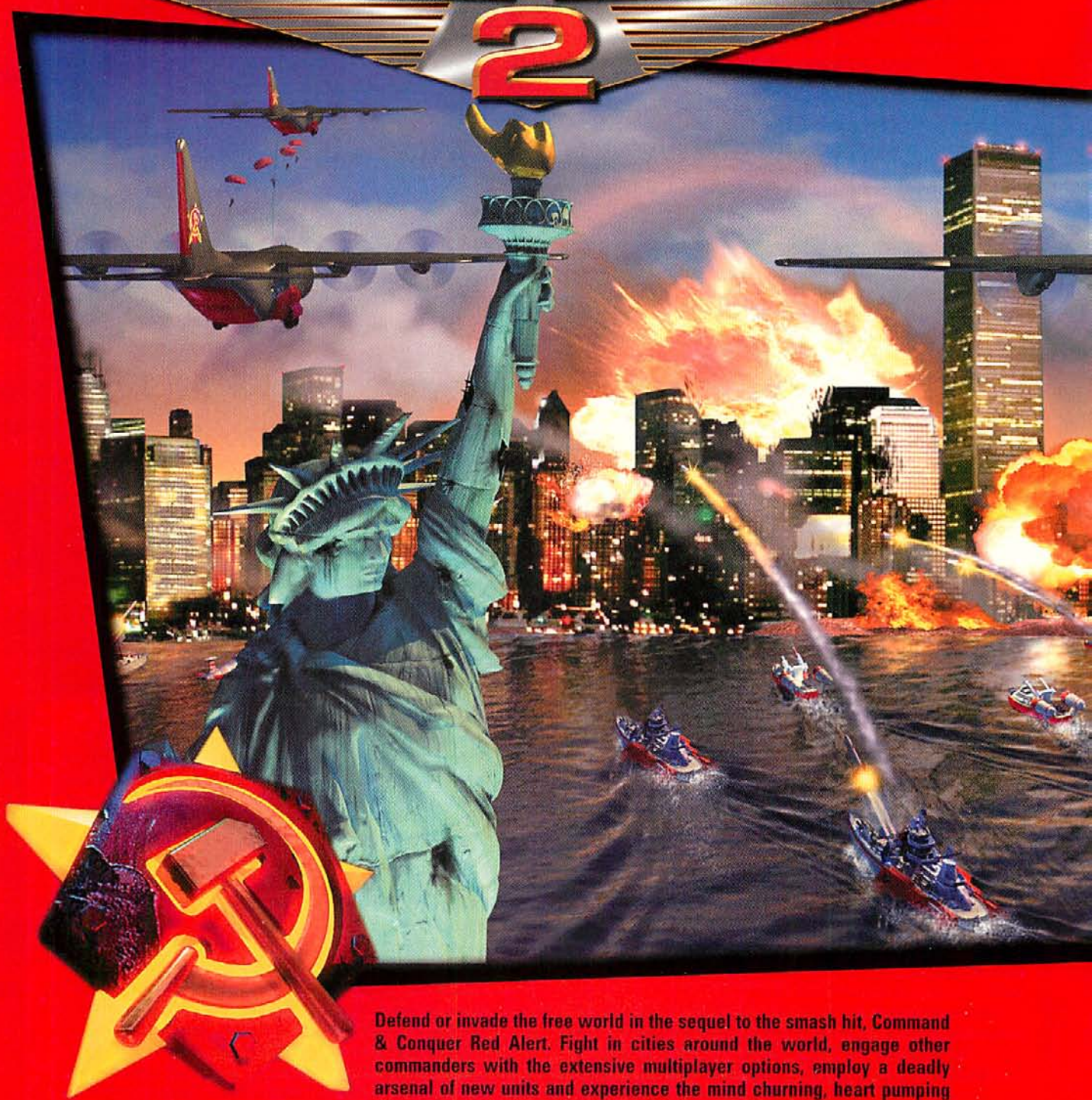
Furthermore, how you treat your followers has specific effects on their performance and behavior. A cruel, Old Testament god who advances through Challenges in harsh ways will see followers who work harder but have less time to procreate. On the contrary, a kind, soft god will have followers who procreate like rabbits, but who don't work nearly as hard.

If you make your people extremely happy, they'll erect a Wonder in your name. For instance, the Tibeta Wonder will decrease the desires of all your different peoples, and make your shield spell stronger.

Villagers also serve another important function. By encouraging them to dance and chant outside your temple, you accumulate mana, which helps you cast powerful spells. But don't make them dance too long without feeding or healing them, or they'll die of starvation or exhaustion.

At the beginning of the game, you inherit a single village, but as the game progresses, you'll encounter different tribes, each of which has their own strengths, weaknesses, and demands. In some ways, this part of the game is similar to AGE OF EMPIRES; the Norse are good Fisherman, while Celtic tribes excel at worship and farming. Wisely choosing not to spoil the plot, Molyneaux and Lionhead are keeping story details close, but this much is clear: Since faith is the game's only real currency, your people serve as important a role in the game

COMMAND & CONQUER™ RED ALERT™ 2



Defend or invade the free world in the sequel to the smash hit, Command & Conquer Red Alert. Fight in cities around the world, engage other commanders with the extensive multiplayer options, employ a deadly arsenal of new units and experience the mind churning, heart pumping ride of the most intense Real-Time Strategy game ever.

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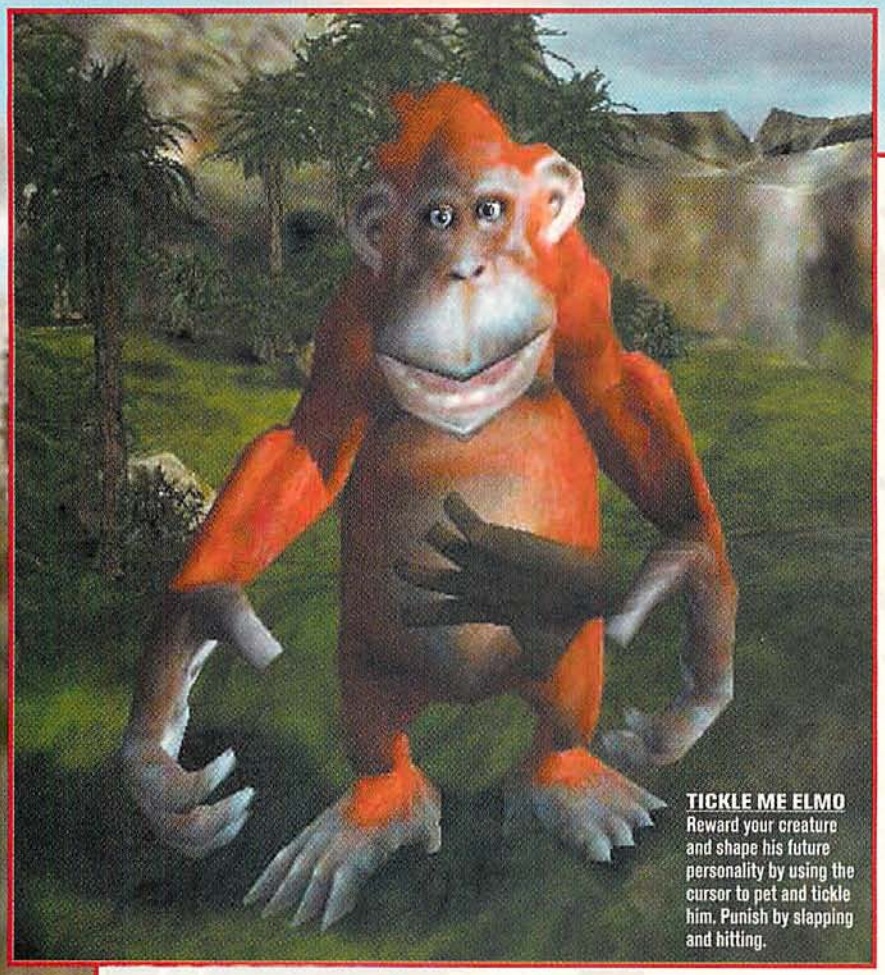
FULL-SCALE INVASION THIS FALL



TICKLE ME ELMO
Reward your creature and shape his future personality by using the cursor to pet and tickle him. Punish by slapping and hitting.

as you do. As the game's story—which involves other gods and other lands—progresses, you'll have to make critical decisions about which villagers accompany you as you move around the world. Interestingly—and this may be a not-too-subtle commentary—villagers never engage in combat. War, as BLACK AND WHITE appears to see it, is the providence of the gods.

As gameplay rule number-two indicates, new villages often sit outside of your circle of power. Given your godly goal of increasing your number of followers, you're going to have to rely on the game's single most unique—and important—construct to aid you.

Creature Double Feature

One of the game's early Challenges involves journeying through a valley where mystical, magical creatures lay. You choose one, and all of a sudden BLACK AND WHITE takes on an entirely new dimension.

Initially there are three creatures to choose from: lion, cow, or ape. As the game progresses, you'll encounter all manner of creatures, from a human-looking character to a Tortoise. Depending on how you play the game, you may be able to switch creatures.

The creature's main function is to serve as the living embodiment of your spirit—the word made flesh, so to speak. Your godly powers and range of influence are limited by the number of your believers, but being a physical entity means your creature can go wherever it wants, hopefully spreading your word by impressing naïve villagers with its prowess. The creature is critical in helping you to extend your reach and your presence. But first, you have to show it how.

When you first choose your creature, it is tiny, scared, and shy. You must instruct this magical creature. By attaching a leash to it and showing it how to eat, drink, hold, and throw objects, you help it grow. Teaching is accomplished by the time-tested stick-and-carrot method. If you want to teach your creature that villagers are not to be eaten, punish it by slapping it repeatedly. Similarly, teaching your alter-ego to gather wood for your people involves having it watch you uproot trees and place them near the Storage Pit, then tickling its belly or stroking its head as a reward.

As your creature learns the skills you want, it becomes more and more autonomous, to the point where it will actually imitate you and take on tasks it feels you would normally perform. You're going to want to spend tons of time helping your creature learn to help you.

This intelligent beast also helps you when things get overly complicated. Part of the decision-making process involves balancing the time it takes to manage your little friend, help your people live better, progress through the challenges, and convert new followers. A properly-groomed sidekick makes the game a lot easier. For example, to convert a new tribe, you might simply tether your creature to the village and let the animal take over. Good creatures will impress the villagers by committing good deeds. Evil creatures will impress the villagers by destroying the village and eating the people.

This much talked-about aspect of BLACK AND WHITE should make for some amazing moments. At separate points in the game, your creature will make friends, or fight MORTAL KOMBAT style (you can help it in these arena battles by casting spells or showing it where to attack). It may even fall in love.

In much the same way that *American Beauty* (and, some would argue, THE SIMS) provided a provocative, biting take on suburban ideals and the American Dream, BLACK AND WHITE may be just as insightful and relevant a commentary on our relationship to divinity.

Blind Ambition?

BLACK AND WHITE's ambition appears to be unending. Complimenting the game's story, open-ended play, spellcasting, and character profiling is an online component that will allow you to take your creature onto the Internet. Here, gamers will be able to play in two different ways: in a kind of online chat environment where the creatures can engage each other in conversation or combat; or in a more standard, multiplayer, real-time strategy game, where the goal is to convert villagers to your faith.

The big question: Can Molyneaux and Lionhead Studios pull all this off? The game almost certainly seems destined to succeed; we'll have to wait until later this year to find out whether their efforts result in a very good game, or a great one.

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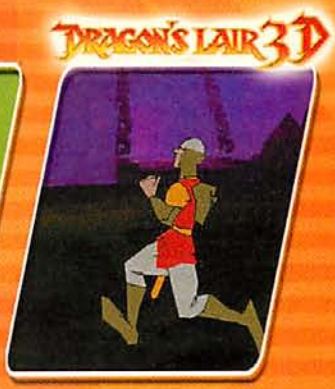

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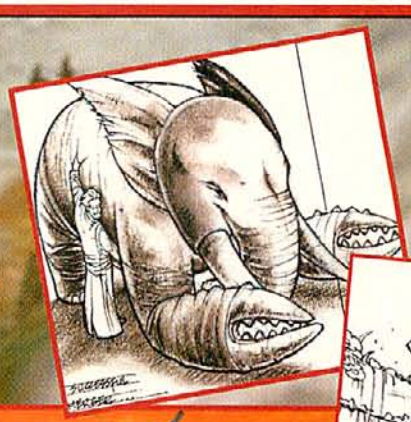
Sigma

The Ultimate Creation Myth. by Robert Coffey

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Relic Entertainment • **ETA:** 2001

Designer: Alex Garden • **Previous Game:** Homeworld

What's the Big Idea? It's evolution as a game, and a game that evolves. With billions of potential creature types, the multiplayer clashes should be fascinating.



IT'S A WILD, WILD LIFE Flying horses, gigantic chameleon/giraffe hybrids, rhinos blessed with the speed of cheetahs – the units in SIGMA will be limited only by your imagination (and the animal population).

In SIGMA, a blender is the ultimate weapon.

No, it's not a Mixmaster or a Hobart—it's a genetic blender, a technology capable of creating fantastic new species by recombining the DNA of existing, real-world animals. Imagine intricate archipelagos teeming with gigantic cheetah-lizards guarded by poison-spitting flying snakes, or a sweeping tundra with packs of polar-friendly rhino-wolves ripping apart giraffe-gorilla hybrids already half-dead from the hostile environment. Every unit in this game is created by the player, promising an unprecedented degree of customizability as animals are mixed and matched with the "what'll *this* do" abandon of a demented ten-year-old with a chemistry set.

The difference here is that in lieu of beakers brimming with chemicals, gamers will have access to roughly 60 base creatures. These animals will be the only resource in the game and they will exist in an actual ecosystem that players will have to manage—extinction of vital species is a very real concern. The concept of a living ecosystem branches throughout the entire gameworld, with day and night cycles dictating the use of nocturnal hybrids for nighttime assaults; additionally, you'll have to engineer units suited for the varying environments, lest your herd of killer polar bear-whales perish in a futile attack on a desert stronghold before they even see combat. You'll also have to weigh your animal supply against your design wish list: Powerful creatures like whales (which grant gigantism) will be in very short supply.

Part of this game's allure—apart from the lively 1930's B-adventure-movie motif—is that the results of your mad doctoring are rarely predictable. Oh, you can pretty much guess what combining certain animals might get you: Fuse a snake with a bat and combine the result with a trigger fish and you'll get the aforementioned poison-spitting flying snake. But with over 70 different attributes powering every creature in the game, the unexpected is to be, well, expected. Who would have thought that melding a chameleon with a giraffe would result in a shambling behemoth of enormous destructive power? Certainly not the game designers, who were as surprised as anyone else.

While there are a slew of features on the "maybe" list, the one we're most intrigued by is the Random Button on the genetic manipulator. This button might unlock recessive, hidden abilities like fire-breathing...or, it could just screw up the creature entirely.

Though SIGMA is in the very early stages of development, we couldn't be more excited about its potential—the fact that it's being developed by Relic Entertainment, creators of the very innovative HOMEWORLD, is even more reason to be hopeful that the game will fulfill its incredible promise. Relic changed the way gamers thought of 3D with HOMEWORLD, and they seem poised to do the same with unit creation this time around.

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Republic: The Revolution

Vote for me—or else. by Ken Brown

Developer: Elixir Studios • **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive • **ETA:** Q4 00

Designer: Demis Hassabis • **Previous Game:** Theme Park

What's the Big Idea? Become the next president of a fictional, Soviet-style state in the traditional way: through bribery, blackmail, and extortion.

■■■ Why leave power politics in the hands of policy wonks?

They don't know how the game is played. If you want to see real politics in action, try raising support for a party boss in a former Soviet state. Or, for those who can't swim in handcuffs, you can experience the same thing and more in REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION, without the long-distance commute to Moscow.

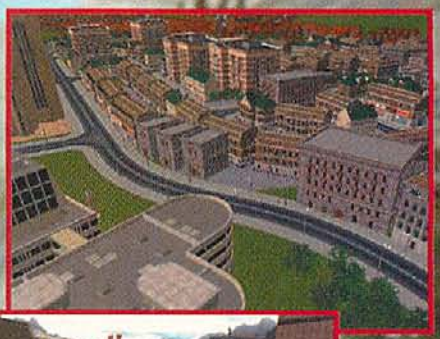
Far beyond a mere political simulation, REPUBLIC combines elements of SIMCITY and GANGSTERS into a huge, complex, 3D world where lying, cheating, blackmail, and extortion are all fair game. The goal is simple: Become the next President of the fictional Republic of Novistrana, by any means necessary.

Players choose their character from one of five fields: politician, businessman, criminal, religious leader, or general. Starting off with one supporter and a small headquarters, you try to gain power by influencing prominent citizens such as TV stars and archbishops. When your powers of persuasion run dry, you can try less ethical means such as brainwashing or blackmail. You can behave as ruthlessly or as compassionately as you want, as in many of Peter Molyneux's games, but every decision has its consequences.

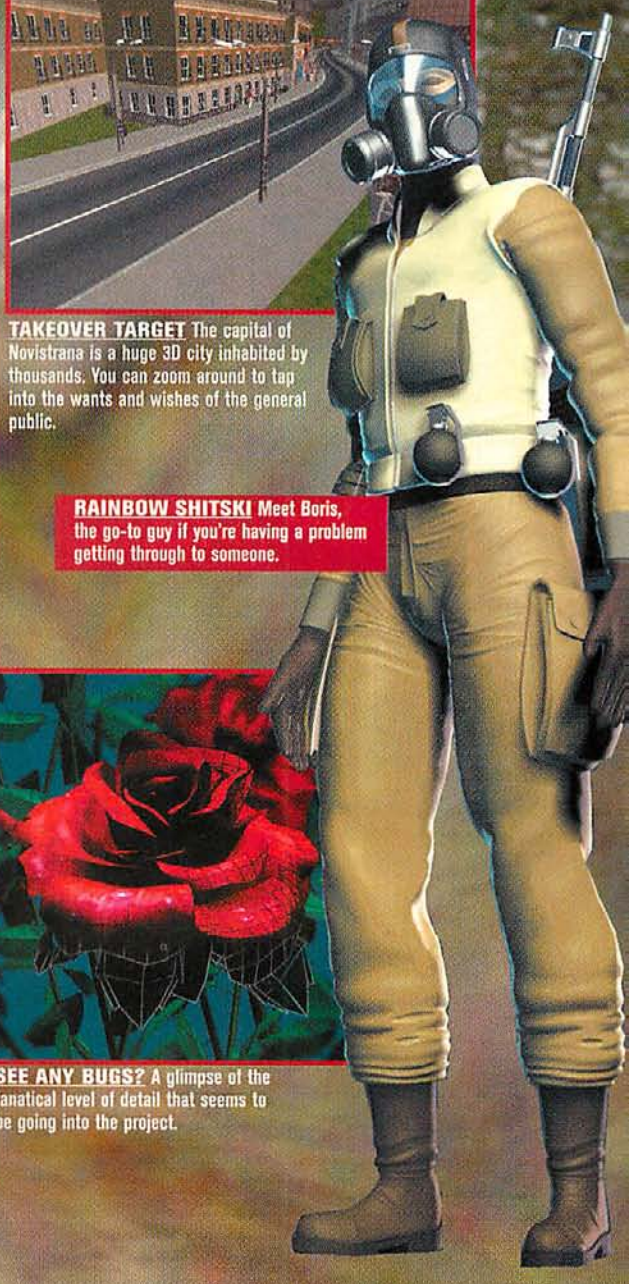
With the support of those loyal to you, you'll start to influence the general population. You'll have hundreds of potential actions to choose from: Organize a rally, rig a soccer match, arrange secret police hits, or broadcast your message on the nightly news. Meanwhile, up to 16 other factions (human or AI) are trying to stop you and seize control for themselves. And then there's the President, who's not going to sit idly by while you try to depose him.

The design for REPUBLIC is certainly ambitious, but the graphics engine is equally impressive. Built from scratch to render millions of polygons in realtime, the engine will reportedly allow free movement in cities with thousands of people wandering around. According to the developers, you can zoom smoothly from a satellite view of Novistrana, to a close-up view of the dew on a flower in a window box. If that sounds a bit like the engine from BLACK & WHITE, give yourself a gold star. Demis Hassabis—a programming *wunderkind* who co-designed THEME PARK with Peter Molyneux at age 17—wrote much of the engine for BLACK & WHITE. He left Lionhead to found Elixir Studios, the English development studio making REPUBLIC.

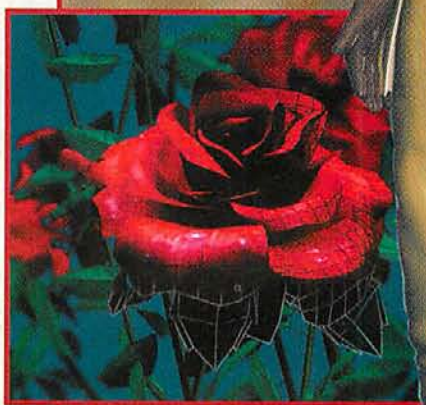
Given the challenges inherent in the design, it's not likely we'll see this game by its scheduled winter release. Once it ships, it will be another thing to see if the U.S. market embraces a strategy game based on powermongering in a fictional Soviet-style state. But for sheer originality, scope, and ambition, REPUBLIC has our vote.



TAKEOVER TARGET The capital of Novistrana is a huge 3D city inhabited by thousands. You can zoom around to tap into the wants and wishes of the general public.



RAINBOW SHITSKI Meet Boris, the go-to guy if you're having a problem getting through to someone.



SEE ANY BUGS? A glimpse of the fanatical level of detail that seems to be going into the project.

Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge

Mighty Mythos turns back the clock...in style.

by George Jones

Developer: Mythos Games • **Publisher:** Bethesda • **ETA:** February 2000

Designers: Julian and Nick Gollop • **Previous Games:** X-Com series, Magic & Mayhem

What's the Big Idea? Julian and Nick Gollop aim to recreate X-COM, one of the most amazing PC game experiences in the last ten years.

■■■ It's X-COM with shocking graphics, an even stronger story, destructible environments, first-person perspective, and the Men in Black. And no real-time mode.

It's FREEDOM RIDGE, Mythos Games' (makers of the original X-COM) evolutionary, old school, turn-based strategy title. It's our dream come true.

The first of what could be a series of several DREAMLAND CHRONICLE games, FREEDOM RIDGE is set in a post-apocalyptic world. Aliens have ravished much of the planet, quarantining humans into small reservations that have been increasingly whittled into smaller chunks of land.

Much like X-COM, FREEDOM RIDGE moves along three different paths. From the global view, you identify enemy crafts, intercept them, and send infantry forces to go in after any remaining aliens. As you move along, you'll begin to put together the pieces of an immense story...and hopefully to turn the tables on the alien menace.

AT CLOSE RANGE Much like X-COM, FREEDOM RIDGE allows you to set aside action points in case your troops encounter aliens after your turn. New to the game: You can actually guide your soldier's reaction, using the first-person perspective to determine line of sight.

CRASH! Splash a Sauron ship and scramble your troops to mop up any leftover aliens.

The World Is Not Enough

The game's rotating global view is vintage X-COM—you can see the borders of the human reservations and the ever-expanding alien territories. Various icons indicate cities, military bases, and enemy fortifications. To prevent the enemy from spreading, you'll have to intercept alien craft as they try to land and set up shop in new territories.

Much like Mythos' original hit, when you scramble fighters (or with enough research, your own spaceships), you give your aircraft specific instructions. In FREEDOM RIDGE, this means a series of turn-based instructions as to whether to attack or evade, and how far away from the alien craft your ships should be.

Initially, the alien craft are more powerful than your

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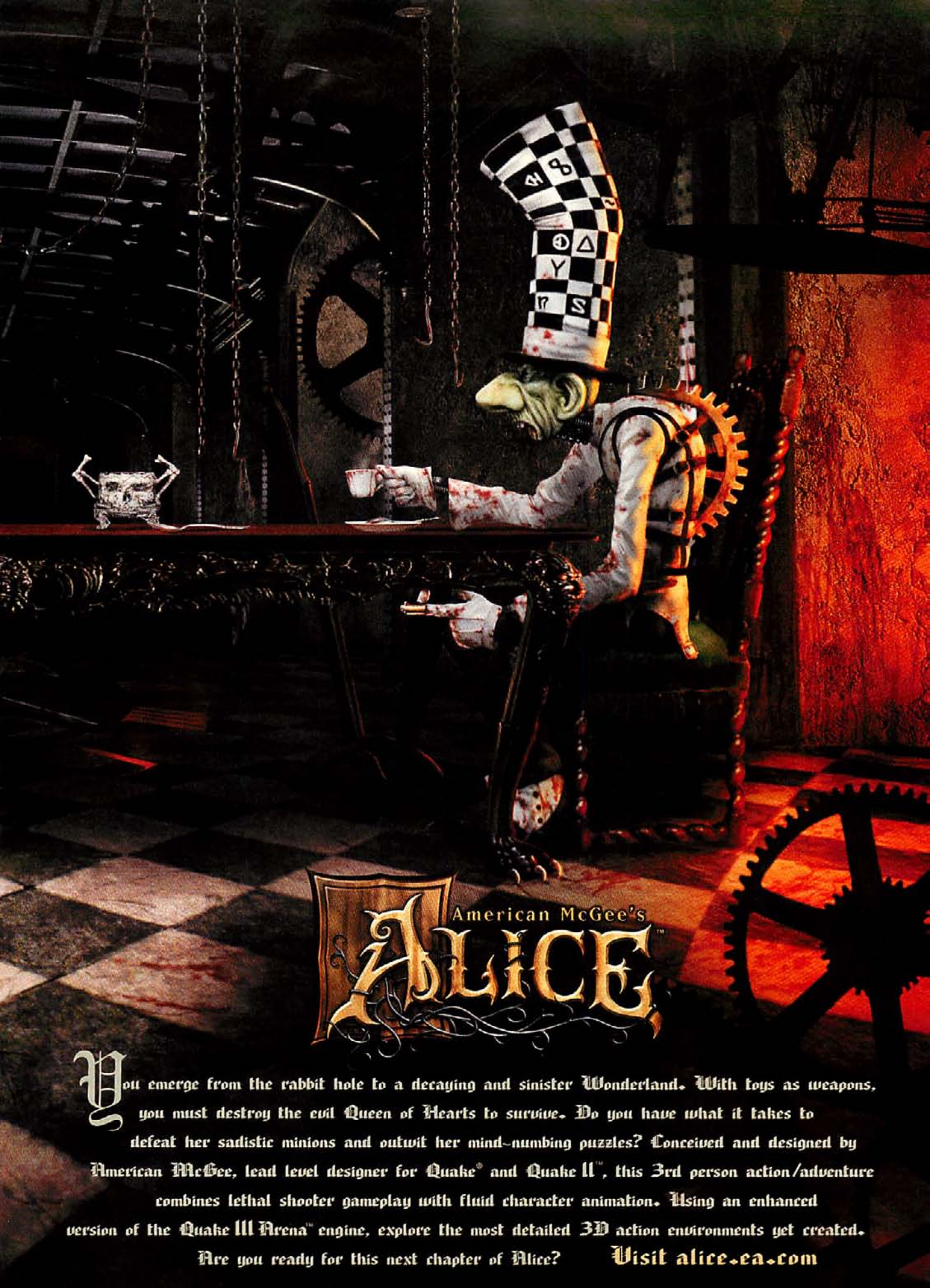

You emerge from the rabbit hole to a decaying and sinister Wonderland. With toys as weapons, you must destroy the evil Queen of Hearts to survive. Do you have what it takes to defeat her sadistic minions and outwit her mind-numbing puzzles? Conceived and designed by American McGee, lead level designer for Quake® and Quake II™, this 3rd person action/adventure combines lethal shooter gameplay with fluid character animation. Using an enhanced version of the Quake III Arena™ engine, explore the most detailed 3D action environments yet created. Are you ready for this next chapter of Alice?

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jet ships. But the occasional take-down, and the resultant ground combat, will help you turn the tide.

Charge!

Once you shoot down an enemy craft, or if you receive a report of alien activity in one of your cities, you'll outfit your squadron and send your troops into combat. This, the most intense and important aspect of the game, is also very similar to X-COM. Each of your units has a certain number of action points, with which you can move them around, crouch, kneel, and attack. You can even leave a certain number of action points in reserve that will allow your troopers time to react to enemy movement. There is one major difference between the two games, however: tremendous 3D graphics.

For a turn-based game, FREEDOM RIDGE boasts a remarkable game engine that not only looks attractive, but is a fully-interactive 3D environment. This means that if you know that aliens are in the kitchen of a house, you can now use your mortar to blast your way through brick walls to spring an attack on them.

Each soldier is rated in eight different categories, from health to bravery to strength and psionic abilities. Unlike X-COM (which promoted troops based on experience alone), as your troopers die, you'll make the decisions about who replaces whom in the command chain. Based on leadership ratings, commanders will be more or less effective; at times, leaders will even be able to assert their morale in order to resuscitate less-veteran soldiers who get spooked by the aliens.

Hopefully, the ground-based action won't become tedious, as it did toward the middle and end of the X-COM games. To that end, Mythos is including many different elements that should keep ground attacks interesting, like many weapon types and vehicles that can be driven around during combat. An automated attack-mode wouldn't hurt.

Additionally, the game's pacing will also throw varying, more strategic missions at you. For instance, to take out an alien base, you may have to go in and take out the power supply for that base first.

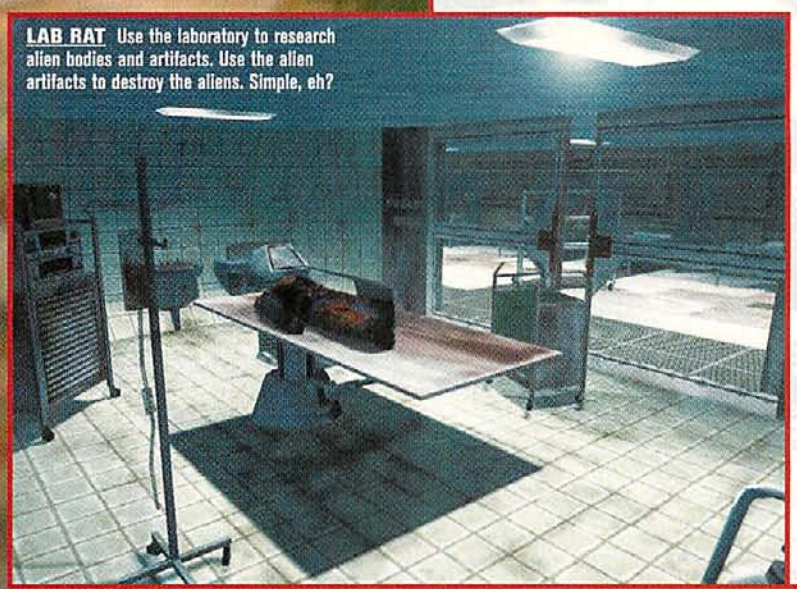
I JUST LOVE REDECORATING FREEDOM RIDGE boasts a fully-interactive 3D engine, complete with destructible brick walls.

Men in Black

As you succeed in ground-based combat, you'll scavenge extra supplies and resources for your squadrons. You'll also be able to research both the aliens and their fancy technologies, and in the process, unlock the game's story.

The key alien menace here is the Sauron, the aggressive, rapidly-expanding, dinosaur-looking race that has taken over the earth. These creatures are breeding new plants and animals...all of which you'll encounter as you play through the game.

But as the game goes on, you'll encounter another alien race and even the mythical Men in Black (who, coincidentally, were supposed to appear in the original X-COM, but were stripped-out early in development). Unfortunately, determining the intentions of these other factions isn't going to be easy. Mythos is emphasizing more story this time around, and from an early look at the plot, get ready for an *X Files*-type ride that will involve espionage, diplomacy, ballistic missiles, and Dreamland, also known as Area 51.



LAB RAT Use the laboratory to research alien bodies and artifacts. Use the alien artifacts to destroy the aliens. Simple, eh?

As you expand, you'll take over alien bases and build new bases of your own, piece by piece. But protecting mankind becomes more imperative in FREEDOM RIDGE; your scientists and soldiers are all drawn from the human settlements. Allow the Sauron to capture your cities, and you'll have a smaller, inferior talent pool to recruit from.

DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE should be out in February 2001.

Tropico

Peeling back the layers of PopTop's banana republic sim. by T. Byrl Baker

Developer: PopTop Software • **Publisher:** G.O.D. • **ETA:** March 2001

Designer: Phil Steinmeyer

Previous Games: Heroes of Might & Magic, Railroad Tycoon II

What's the Big Idea? The creators of RAILROAD TYCOON II offer a new twist on the real-time strategy theme by putting you in control of your own Caribbean island. How long can you exploit the island's niches before the citizens revolt? Stock up on cubans and greenbacks while there's time

■■■ If you thought SIMCITY was only good for inflicting floods and earthquakes on innocent computer people, then this could be the game for you...

TROPICO is an empire-building game that doesn't just allow you to be nasty, it positively encourages it. Instead of being a benevolent leader whose goal is to improve the lives of your subjects, you play a dictator on a fictional Caribbean island whose goals are money and power.

You create your own dictator, but establishing yourself as the next Fidel Castro or Idi Amin is only half the battle. Players are also responsible for creating farms, an industrial base, housing for their population, and other structures that will generate income, make people happy, and expand their own dictatorial sphere of influence.

Gameplay involves creating and managing buildings and dealing with political issues, but the main focus is on the island's inhabitants. "Control is not exerted so much by the army barracks, it's exerted by the actual soldiers themselves," says PopTop president Phil Steinmeyer. There are about 50 unit types in the game, such as doctors, bankers, and soldiers, and each has nearly 50 traits and statistics that coalesce into unique personalities.

Even the dictator has personality strengths and weaknesses, forcing the player to role-play instead of serving as some impersonal god-like being who tinkers with things from on high. Steinmeyer created a dictator to show us how it works, and we ended up with a communist leftist author who had diplomatic skills and a bonus on alcohol production. Then Steinmeyer chose the negative traits. "We'll make him alcoholic and give him Tourette's Syndrome so the annual New Year's Eve speeches are a little more entertaining," he chuckles. These initial traits set the tone for the entire game, as they determine where your island is situated on the capitalism vs. communism axis, and the religious vs. military axis.

FADING BEAUTY The graphical detail in TROPICO is outstanding, even at this early stage. The game boasts multiple resolutions, and the interface scales to accommodate them.

(left) NOBODY'S PERFECT No dictator is complete without a few disgusting personal flaws.

LIFE'S A BEACH Tourism generates a lot of cash. Lure them with a grand hotel on a sandy beach, then soak them with fancy restaurants and friendly brothels.

Eden's Evil Twin

The island may look idyllic, but all is not perfect in paradise. Rebel factions form and cause all sorts of chaos. "The ultimate seat of power is the presidential palace," Steinmeyer says, pointing to a beautiful red-roofed building. "If you lose that, it's game over."

There are a couple of ways this can happen. Most of the time, a charismatic rebel leader will cultivate dissent, building popular sup-

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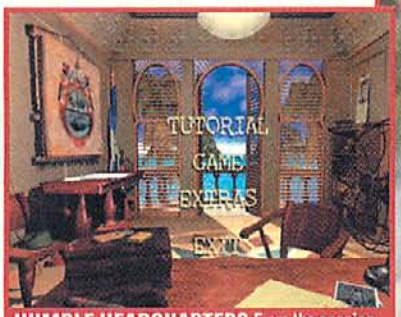
port for the rebel cause. If he recruits enough soldiers, he can launch an attack on the palace. Other times, unhappy citizens can turn against you, and the next thing you know, there's a popular uprising going on.

And what makes citizens happy? Money, of course. A strong economy means you can pay your people higher wages and give them access to things they want, like advanced education. To make money, players can sell goods or go for the big bucks by encouraging tourism. "It takes a lot of corn or sugar to equal what one American tourist staying in a $300/night room can rack up in a week or two," says Steinmeyer. The downside is that tourist structures like grand hotels and casinos are expensive to build and require a skilled work force. Tourists also need a lot of variety and low crime rates, or they won't stay long and they'll tell their friends what a crummy time they had.

SHOE SHACK The red-roofed palace is your base of power, and ultimately the most important building in the game.



HUMBLE HEADQUARTERS From the opening screen on, TROPICO drips with atmosphere.

While the developers have focused on people, there is no provision to directly control the inhabitants of the island. "Your interactions are based on the buildings and the politics of the game, but you're trying to use those to influence the people," says Steinmeyer. Radio and television stations are a good example, as players can use them for multiple purposes. Religious leaders can broadcast religious programming, and players looking for a quick buck can select pop music and other commercial programming. Of course, this works both ways, and if the rebels seize your broadcasting stations, they can use them to gain sympathy and awareness for their cause.

HACK AND SLASH Nothing like exploiting natural resources for a quick buck.

Island Life

The islands themselves are modeled in terrific detail, with complete weather models and deformable terrain that actually affect gameplay. Fluffy clouds that would serve as pure eye-candy in most games drift over the island and deposit rain. "When they hit a hill, they tend to drop the rain on the near side of the hill," says Steinmeyer. He demonstrated by calling up a rainfall overlay that covered the island and showed wet areas in green and dry areas in red. The game will have several such overlays that will help show everything from where to plant certain crops to rebel zones of control.

Steinmeyer then showed us how the deformable terrain makes a difference by zooming in on a small pit mine in the center of the island. As he sped up the action, the little miners went into high gear, and the pit they were digging slowly increased in size. "That does environmental damage and hurts tourism in the surrounding area," he observed.

Good as TROPICO looked when we saw it, it was still about nine months away from completion, with PopTop shooting for a March 2001release. They still have to add much of the political model to the game, and they also want to incorporate many special features, such as Edicts and Papal Visits. Edicts will be very powerful, but you won't be able to use them very often. Religious leaders can request a papal visit, while military-oriented leaders can declare martial law to quickly quell a rebellion. If the remaining portions of the game come together as well as the elements they were able to show us, TROPICO could turn out to be a warm Caribbean breeze that will freshen the strategy genre. CGW

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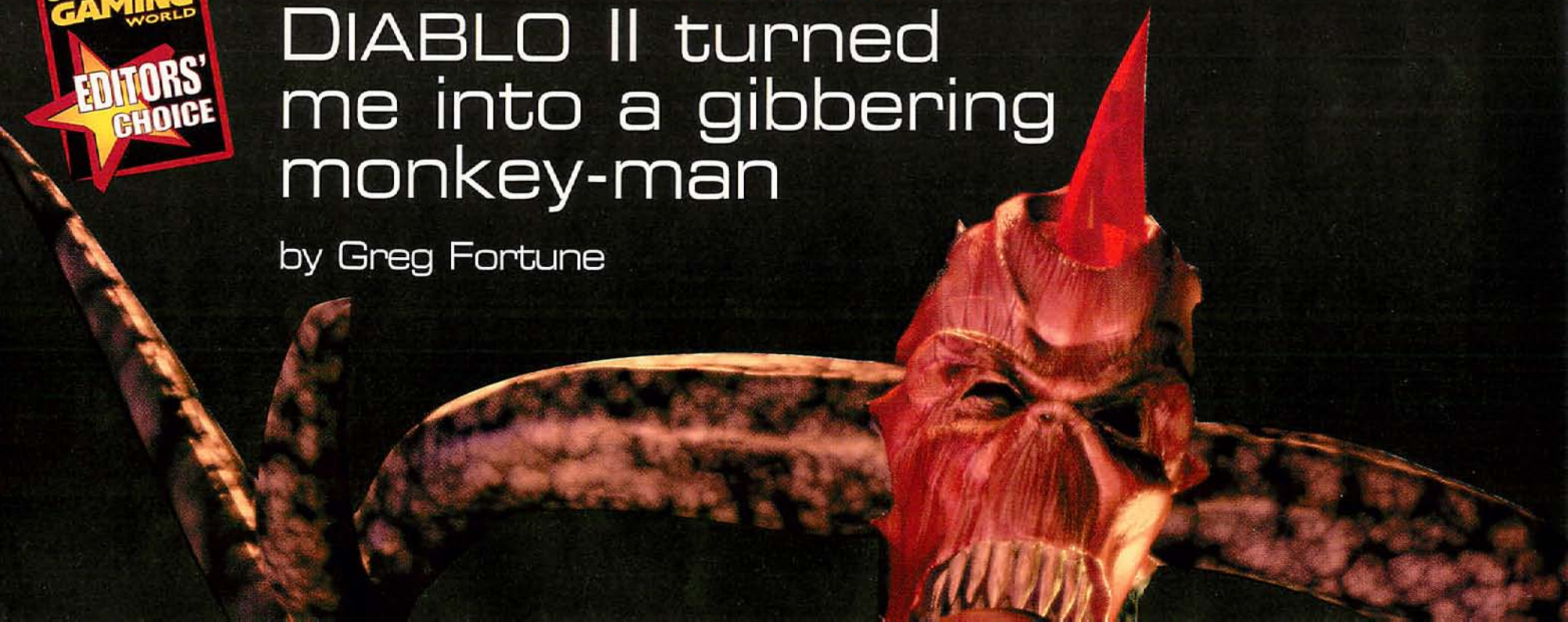
The Devil Made Me Do It!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

DIABLO II turned me into a gibbering monkey-man

by Greg Fortune



Forget Sigmund Freud—he was a hack. Carl Jung? Whatever. If you want real psychological savvy, talk to the guys at Blizzard. They're the real deal.

How else to explain how they've been able to bypass the conscious mind and tap directly into the part of our brains that can remember what the Comic Book Guy said in the 2nd episode of the 5th season of *The Simpsons*? (Answer: "But Aquaman, you cannot marry a woman without gills; you're from two different worlds!")

My unconscious mind tells me that I am crushing thousands of monsters. It tells me to forego sleep, meals, and occasionally more basic bodily functions. It tells me that my name is no longer Greg but Angry Keebler, and that I must maim, kill, and destroy. Everything.

It tells me that DIABLO II is not a game I will finish playing and never touch again.

My ego, which acquiesced long ago, wonders how and why. How does such a simple premise become so engaging? Why can't I quit?

CGW RATED ★★★★½

PROS

Mmmm... Diablolicious.

CONS

Slightly annoying save-game feature; unstable BattleNet; for the love of god, give us our lives back.

Requirements: Pentium 233, 650MB hard drive space, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, DirectX-compatible video card. **Recommended Requirements:** 64MB RAM (128 for BattleNet creators), 28.8Kbps modem. **3D Support:** Optional Glide, Direct3D support with 3D card. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Havas Interactive • Developer: Blizzard • $50 • www.blizzard.com ESRB Rating: Mature

Travel in style The waypoint system, another new addition to DIABLO II, allows you to quickly move to individual sub-areas without having to do a lot of walking.

Mad Skills The interface for the character stat and skill menus. Notice that the skills are divided into tabs, which organize the skills and spells by type.

Paging Betty Ford

The answer is simple. DIABLO II transcends its individual features and becomes an experience that is so much more than the sum of its parts. If you played the original, you already know the genius in game design that I'm talking about. In almost every instance of this sequel, that genius has been extended, upgraded, and enhanced in all the right ways.

Once again, all of the maps, items, and monsters are randomized each time you start a new game, meaning that once again, you can forget about memorizing the locations of the best magical weapons or most powerful creatures.

High on my list of favorite improvements is the complete lack of load screens. Blizzard figured out a way to pre-load the areas you are most likely to visit from any given location, so that when you step through a portal or move into a new area, you don't have to wait 60 seconds for the new sector to make an appearance.

New PC gamers will probably take this feature for granted. Don't. I went back and played some of the original game and was instantly struck by how much wind the load screen took out of my sails. Back then, however, losing momentum was one concern DIABLO— which single-handedly revitalized RPGs—didn't have to worry about.

Fever for the Flavor

Part of DIABLO's role-playing genius lay in the unique strategies required for each character. This sequel improves upon that. Whereas originally, all the characters had access to the same list of spells regardless of class, DIABLO II implements completely different spells and a new addition—skills—for each character class.

You may want to make a point of playing each character class (see sidebar) for most of the first act before deciding which character you want to hunt Diablo with in the single-player game. Each offers unique benefits and challenges and, as in the original game, a distinctly different experience.

The skills are a welcome addition. Rather than hunting around for books to learn spells from, you now earn points to increase your skills when you advance levels or complete certain quests. Some of the skills are passive; once learned and activated, they provide you with benefits that don't drain your magic supply.

Tied into dependency trees, all of these skills have minimum level requirements, which adds an extra dimension of strategy to the game. As you level up and earn points to spend on your skills, you'll want to build up your lower-level skills and spells in preparation for the branch of higher-level skills and spells you'll eventually want to cast. So you need to figure out an overall strategy (defense or offense? Fire or ice?) while your character is relatively new. Given the number of skills and spells compared to the number of points you receive to activate and upgrade them, you can count on a fair degree of specialization.

Consider that you can convert your single-player characters into LAN multiplayer characters, and that your friends can do the same, and that you can play cooperatively to beat the game (more on that later). Then, think of all the possible character combinations you and you friends could come up with that would compliment each other...hey, wait—don't go—I'm not done yet.

Now How Much Would You Pay?

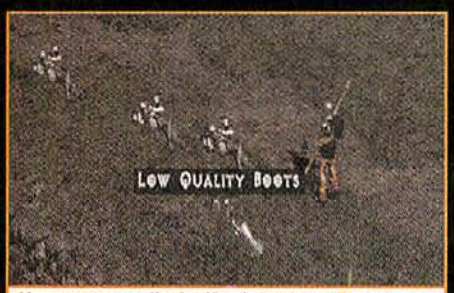
In almost every way, Blizzard has created some nifty improvements. Locating objects on the ground is easier thanks to the ability to highlight all items using the Alt key. To repeatedly attack a target, you can hold down the mouse button (although occasionally I find myself clicking away; it's more visceral that way).

Gold no longer takes up inventory slots, but is managed in a separate area in the inventory screen. For that matter, you also have a private stash box in town (even in the multiplayer game), in which you can tuck away a few items and your excess gold.

The game still features a slew of magic weapons and unique objects. A new "socketed" item class has been added, which allows you to modify the attributes and properties of an item by adding gems and skulls (which can be found on dead bodies and in certain shrines) to the available sockets.

On the downside—and this has been the primary bone of contention with

Holy Roller The Paladin pictured here is using his power of Might to inflict added damage, while gaining extra experience.



No more needle in the haystack These boots might be hard to find without the new item-highlight feature. Now, you can decide what to take and what to leave before you pick the first item up.

Are you experienced? In addition to healing and mana shrines, there are now experience, resistance, and gem shrines as well. This Paladin will gain added experience from every kill until this shrine's effect wears off.

gamers—DIABLO II does lack a traditional save function. The game saves map layouts, but not map states, so if you don't find a waypoint (which occasionally requires some serious searching) and you Save and Exit, you will be forced to re-do the same dungeon maps you had already partially or completely completed, which can be quite large. This is still the case when you use the Town Portal.

This is particularly a problem in the humongous jungles of Act III, where the waypoints are few and far between. A higher number of waypoints, or the ability to fully save the game at any time, would have fixed this. Also, since the game is constantly saving, there's no mechanism for backing out of stupid decisions.

At times, this can be extremely irritating, but I did find that not being able to undo mistakes added extra tension to the game. Though, isn't that why the game features Hardcore mode, where if you die, your character is irrevocably gone forever?

And Another Thing

One other quibble: The game's quests, while still quite rewarding and handled very well, occasionally end in anticlimactic fashion. Not every quest has to end with a big bang; but you should get skills, experience points, or a cool movie as a bonus for completing a quest. This doesn't happen all the time, though. In the second quest in Act III, for example, you recover the Gibdinn Blade for a town. When you return it to them, they basically tell you "Great. Thanks. Oh, look at the time...gotta go. Buh-bye." Similarly underwhelming is Tainted Sun, the third quest in Act II.

Gamers are also encountering a bug involving the Summoner quest near the end of ACT II. A patch fixes this, but creates another problem within the game. Knowing Blizzard, they'll fix all this (and more) by the time you read this.

And With A Little Help From My Friends

Multiplayer DIABLO II, when it's working right, more than makes up for any deficiencies. You can play all the same levels and complete all of the same quests found in the single-player game, but you get to bring help.

Don't think for a second that adding more players to the game will make things easier. In fact, adding players to the game makes things much, much harder. As the game demonically informs you when extra players join your game, the more players in a game, the tougher and more resistant to damage the monsters get.

Two different multiplayer games exist—LAN and BattleNet. In an effort to eliminate the hacking and player-killing rampant in the original game, Blizzard has coded part of BattleNet so that characters who play here exist only on their servers. This means that you can play multiplayer with your single-player characters as long as you play on a LAN or on one of the open character BattleNet game servers, because your online characters cannot be used in the single-player game.

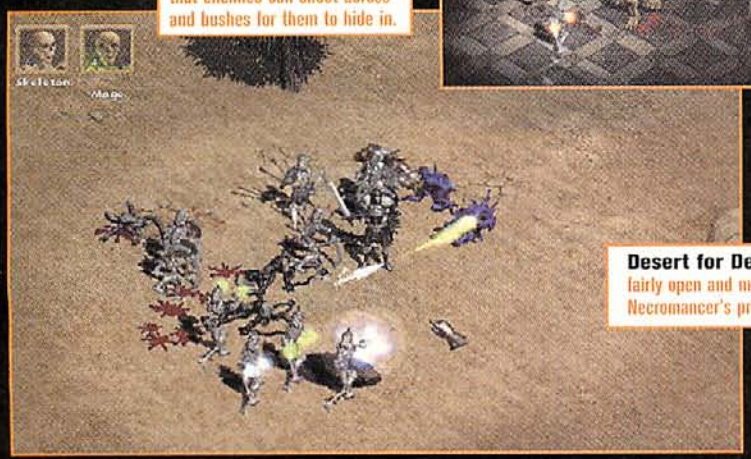
This wouldn't really be a problem, but BattleNet kept going down every ten minutes or so due to the high load. Granted, there were usually forty-five thousand connections at a time being reported by the server, but if you are going to offer a service to paying customers, you need to make sure that it works. Expect this to get better once things settle down a little bit...or when Blizzard adds more servers.

Like every other aspect of the game, multiplayer—which works really well with the new skill sets—works in such a fantastically enjoyable way that you're going to find yourself (re)experiencing that good old shiver as you relapse into DIABLO addiction.

I am happy to report that the original game was no fluke. The gameplay still holds up, particularly with Blizzard's ingenious additions. Once again, DIABLO II is the standard by which other games of this kind will be measured.

Welcome to the Jungle The jungle levels feature rivers that enemies can shoot across and bushes for them to hide in.

In the Harem In addition to the wide open outdoor areas, there are plenty of indoor and underground areas to conquer as well.



Desert for Dessert The desert levels are fairly open and make the perfect place for this Necromancer's private army to make a stand.

Here's A Story

The Barbarian
A hulking brute with the strength to wield two two-handed swords, one in each hand. The Barbarians' skills involve proficiency with specific weapon types, powerful battle tactics, and thundering war cries that frighten your enemies and strengthen your allies.

The Amazon
The closest thing to DIABLO's Rogue, being rooted in bow and spear tactics. An interesting shift here is that each bow you find no longer comes with a bottomless quiver of arrows. Arrows can be found or purchased. Either way, make sure you've got a good supply of them. The Amazon is a powerful member of any raiding party due to her ability to inflict large amounts of damage without ever getting close to her enemies.

The Paladin
A holy warrior whose faith both protects him and aids him in dispatching enemies. While he's able to learn combat skills like the Shield Bash and Zeal, most of his power comes in the ability to reshape his aura as an offensive or defensive weapon. The Paladin's aura has the ability to affect other members of his party as well, adding to the power of the entire group. A single Paladin can raise the attack rate for your entire group, reduce the effectiveness of all enemies near your party, or add resistances to all friendly players and NPCs. For obvious reasons, it's easy to like this character.

The Sorceress
The full-time magic user, her spells revolve around the forces of the elements: fire, ice, and electricity. She can use many of the spells that were found in the original game, as well as some new abilities, including being able to change the rate of her mana recharge. While lacking hand-to-hand fighting prowess, a lone Sorceress can nonetheless take on large groups of enemy creatures and eliminate them with her powerful spells.

The Necromancer
He has spells that revolve around curses, poison, and bone, and has the ability to raise the bodies of fallen enemies as undead soldiers. These dark spells are incredibly powerful, a bit morbid, and a whole lot of fun to cast against unsuspecting foes. Cast terror, confuse, or weaken on your enemies. Poison them or use corpse explosion to damage a group engaged in combat. Raise the dead and send them into battle against their former allies.

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Read This Before Dancing With The Devil

by Thierry Nguyen, Robert Coffey, and Alex Handy

You probably just want to rip into DIABLO II right away and start thwacking the Fallen left and right. Simmer down. While you're waiting for the game to install, peruse this guide, and see how you can make maximum use of the different character classes, and get some general hints on how to succeed in the single-player game before moving on to the BattleNet big leagues.

The Great Escape

■ Whenever you can, dump your money into your stash. Although gold doesn't take up any room, dumping it means that you won't lose any when you die. Exiting and reloading a game after dying gives you all items intact, except for whatever gold you dropped on the floor.

■ Stock up on Town Portal, and only carry one or two Identity scrolls. When you can, buy a tome of Town Portal, and make sure it's stocked with at least 10 scrolls. Only carry a few Identity scrolls for emergency, in-field identifications; otherwise, just gather the new loot and have it all identified in one fell swoop back in town.

■ When a boss is too tough, don't be afraid to get cheap. Use Town Portal to weave in and out of combat. Quickly drop a portal, hop in, heal up and restock, and re-enter the fray. Most bosses don't heal up...unless you've been in town for a really long time. You can effectively come and go as you please, and win by attrition.

When taking on bosses like Andariel, don't be afraid to play cheap by Town Portalling back and forth. The only thing that matters is who lives, right?

On The Attack

■ Can't decide between two really powerful-sounding weapons? Let the market be your guide. Try to make both items equal in value (either by fixing them or by using one in combat until their durability is the same). Then, see how much cash each one is worth. You'll probably want to keep the more expensive item. If their costs are nearly equal, then that's when it's time to flip a coin.

■ Magic-users should always cast their protection spells in town. Once cast, head over to the local healer for a much-needed refill of the old mana pool.

■ If you find any set items while playing on BattleNet, remember that they're extremely valuable to other players. Try visiting some of the trading rooms after your game. You can probably get a pretty nice price for your green items from other players who are close to completing a set.

■ Although magical weapons are more useful and valuable, socketed weapons make for solid back-up armaments. Try to find an axe or a sword that has three sockets, and put an emerald, a sapphire, and a skull in it. That way, each swing lets you freeze, poison, and sap life and mana from your opponent. For shields, use a diamond and an emerald to boost all of your resistances. Finally, put a skull in a helm for life and mana regeneration, plus a gem for whatever stat you feel like boosting.

■ Never underestimate the power of a Paladin. If you're playing online and you don't have a Paladin in your party, you'll be at a distinct disadvantage. You'll understand why the first time your Paladin casts Thorns in a net game.

■ Use mercenaries as cannon fodder. They take some damage back. Holy Freeze is practical because it weakens any nearby enemies, due to the freezing effect. Be sure to have at least one point in the Resistance auras (Fire, Cold, Lightning, Cleansing); even a single point will significantly cut down on the damage inflicted by certain enemies, at least until you get Salvation. Might is nice early on, but you should save your points for Concentration instead – it adds higher damage bonuses, uninterrupted attacks, and requires less points.

Character Development: The two main stats to develop are Strength and Dexterity. Because you'll be weaving in and out of combat, you need to be able to both dish it out and take it back. Save a powerful two-handed weapon for heroes or bosses, and stick to using a one-handed weapon and shield the rest of the time.

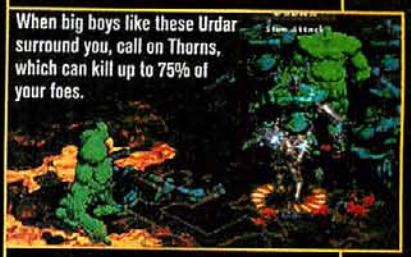
Both these rare weapons are nice, but it looks like I'll be keeping Viper Scratch over Death Sunder.

Character Tips

Paladin

Single-player: The most valuable combination of skills are the Aura of Thorns and Zeal. Since you'll be alone most of the time, the monsters are going to inevitably surround you; and these two skills, when used in conjunction, will allow you to both weaken and attack several enemies simultaneously. Vengeance is also a good combat skill to develop – save it for fighting boss characters. Late in the game, Redemption, which allows you to suck life and mana from the dead, and Salvation – which grants you all resistances – will be your best friends.

Multiplayer: The Paladin assumes two roles here: melee fighter and, due to his auras, party support. Prayer is always good for a post-battle healing boost. Again, Aura of Thorns is great, as it ensures that anyone attacking a party member is going to



When big boys like these Urdar surround you, call on Thorns, which can kill up to 75% of your foes.

Sorceress

Single-player: The Cold and Lightning skill trees are the best ones to focus on. Particularly because the various Cold armors will help your defense tremendously, and Lightning will eventually yield Energy Shield and Teleport. All of this will make you a lot harder to hit – making it easier for you to hit the enemy instead. For bosses, use Static Field to knock down your foe's health before finishing them off.

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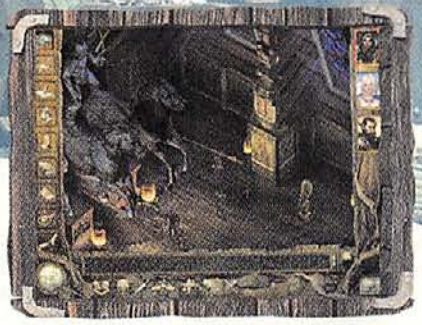

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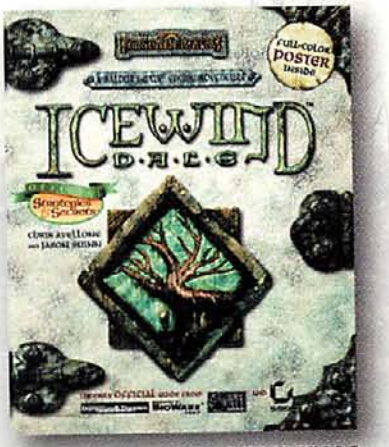

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NICE SET OF STATS Sorceresses now possess decent fighting skills. You should develop more than just your Energy stat.

Multiplayer: Offensive Cold spells are the way to go (Ice Blast and Glacial Spike in particular), mainly because of the side effect of freezing your enemy. Damaged and frozen enemies make for easy targets for the rest of your party. If you want pure offensive power, opt to follow the Fire tree, and focus on Fireball and Meteor. Stand back, deliver a round of spells, and then join in on the melee combat mop-up.

Character Development: Ironically, the Sorceress is also a capable fighter. The stats you'll want to focus on are Strength and Energy. This will allow her to wield most weapons and armor, which will help when your mana run out and you need to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. Like the fighter, you'll probably want to stick to the tried-and-true, one-handed-weapon and shield combination. If you really want to play as a spells-only, old-school mage figure, then develop Vitality instead of Strength to make up for your lack of powerful weapons or armor.

Necromancer

Single-player: The Necromancer is not an easy guy to build up. Throughout the first act, you'll have some trouble dispatching your enemies. Fortunately, the wise Necromancer is never unprotected. If you're playing alone, you only have one real choice: skeletons. The Necromancer is designed to command an army of the undead, and skeletons can be created in large enough numbers to actually bring this army into being. Golems are your big bruisers, but since you can only have one of any given golem type at a time, you should mainly use them to dispatch enemy heroes and champions. In a single-player game, you'll do well to fill out your army with skeletons, skeletal mages, and the occasional golem to serve as your personal bodyguard.

Multiplayer: For online play, the Necromancer serves two purposes. If your party has a Paladin, the Necromancer should concentrate on combat magic (Teeth, Corpse Explosion, Bone Spear). If there is no Paladin in your group, however, the Necromancer should use his curses. They are an excellent way to improve the combat effectiveness of a party.

Always cast Bone Armor before you hit a mana shrine or anything else that will restore your magic power.

Character Development: Your stat tree should be one long sprint to Revive. It's the best Necromancer skill and once you have it, you're pretty much unstoppable. When considering items, keep your eye out for rings and amulets that help you cope with elemental damage, as the Necromancer is a bit unequipped for that. Oh, and a good scythe will compliment any Necromancer's wardrobe – it's powerful, and it goes with your shoes.

Barbarian

Single-player: The Barbarian is probably the easiest choice for the soloist. Of all the characters, this lumbering brute is the best equipped to deal with the tribulations of life in the wild. The first thing any self-respecting barbarian should do is raise his Find Potion attribute. For most of the first act, this is a bit useless, but once you get into the latter parts of the game, you'll be thankful for the constant supply of health potions this skill provides. With only 1 or 2 points dedicated to Find Potion, a Barbarian can stay in the midst of battle for hours without ever resorting to a town-portal scroll.

Multiplayer: Your war cries are your best friends; they can raise your party's stats to dizzying heights. Barbarians should concentrate on the more hostile battle cries, such as War Cry and Taunt. Taunt is particularly useful for online games, especially when one of your party's magic-users is being swamped by Thunder... er... Saber Cats.

Gheed and his counterparts often hold some amazing items, if you've got the guts to take a risk.

Character Development: Of the other Barbarian skills, Iron Skin is fantastic – get it as soon as you are able. By the time you can afford it, your Barbarian should already be impossible to hit, but every little bit helps. The increase in defense from this skill makes it very worthwhile. If you have a high dexterity rating – and you should – frenzy is also an extremely effective skill, as is Whirlwind. However, the Leap Attack is probably the single most effective skill the Barbarian possesses: it can get you in and out of battle quickly, and it does a wagon-load of damage to the defending party. As for weapons and armor... take your pick: The Barbarian can use anything. For bosses, the weapon-shield combination works well. For everyone else, go Gladiator style and use twin two-handed weapons.

can deliver some extra damage, and take blows meant for you. Mercenaries specializing in Cold damage are always more useful, as they will freeze and slow down your foes for you.

Don't just blaze through; take the time to explore the little dungeons and scour all the remains off of enemies; even a common Sand Cat might carry a rare ring.

■ We'll revisit the topic of Hardcore mode on BattleNet, but for now, there's one easy piece of advice to consider: Be on the defensive. Always try to improve dexterity when leveling up, as that dictates how often the enemy will be able to hit you. Focus on all the defensive skills of your class, have a large batch of potions at hand all the time, and run or town-portal away whenever the situation gets too hot.

Top Secret: The Cows Strike Back

What was perhaps the goofiest hoax in gaming has become a reality: the Cow Level. You'll need to have finished the game once, and have three things: Wirt's Leg from Tristram (Act 1), a Tome of Town Portal, and the Horadric Cube.

First, make sure you're in the Rogue Encampment, then toss Wirt's Leg and the Tome into the Cube, transmute them, and voila, a portal to the Cow Level. Have fun mooing down the Cow King.

Amazon

Single-player: You'll need to work towards getting the Explosive Arrow as quickly as possible and becoming adept at "corralling" your enemies. When hordes of goatmen or sabercats swarm you, run literal circles around them, bunching them up in a tight clot before you unleash a volley of arrow bombs. This conserves mana and kills several enemies at once. You'll also want to get the Cold Arrow early and, later in the game, the Ice Arrow. Both of these will slow or stop enemies, keeping them at a safe distance for your ranged attacks (and a level 3 ice arrow is a single-shot kill for most monsters, even in Act III).

A particularly nasty tactic is to block a doorway by stopping a monster with an Ice Arrow, then bombarding the trapped horde behind him with savage Immolation Arrows. Passive skills to focus on are Critical Strike and Penetrate (the better to knock down enemies before they reach you), as well as the various dodging skills.

Multiplayer: Here, the Amazon plays a vital support role. Think of yourself as artillery, softening up targets for your front lines to finish off. Weaken enemies with Explosive Arrows and Immolation Arrows and let your Paladins and Barbarians do the rest of the work. Amazons are also good for covering a retreating party, buying time for the retreat by freezing (and possibly killing) pursuing Cantors and Zealots with Ice Arrows.

Most any magic arrows will make quick work of Flayers, but you'll want to pound the little bastard into party ice with Ice Arrows so their watery remains can't be raised by the fire-breathing Shaman.

Character Development: While the javelin skills make the Amazon a more well-rounded character than DIABLO's Rogue, this character's strong point is still the bow. The high Dexterity ratings you'll need for the best weapons will prevent you from beefing up your Strength high enough for the tough armor that javelin melee combat requires. And pumping that Dexterity rating high is key – it lets you use the most powerful bows and increases your Attack rating so you'll be pumping your enemies full of arrows before they can lay a claw on you. By Act II, you should start dumping skill points into your Energy rating, since you'll be leaning heavily on magic in the later acts. When outfitting your character, look for rings and amulets that enhance your Attack rating, and especially anything that replenishes or upgrades your mana.

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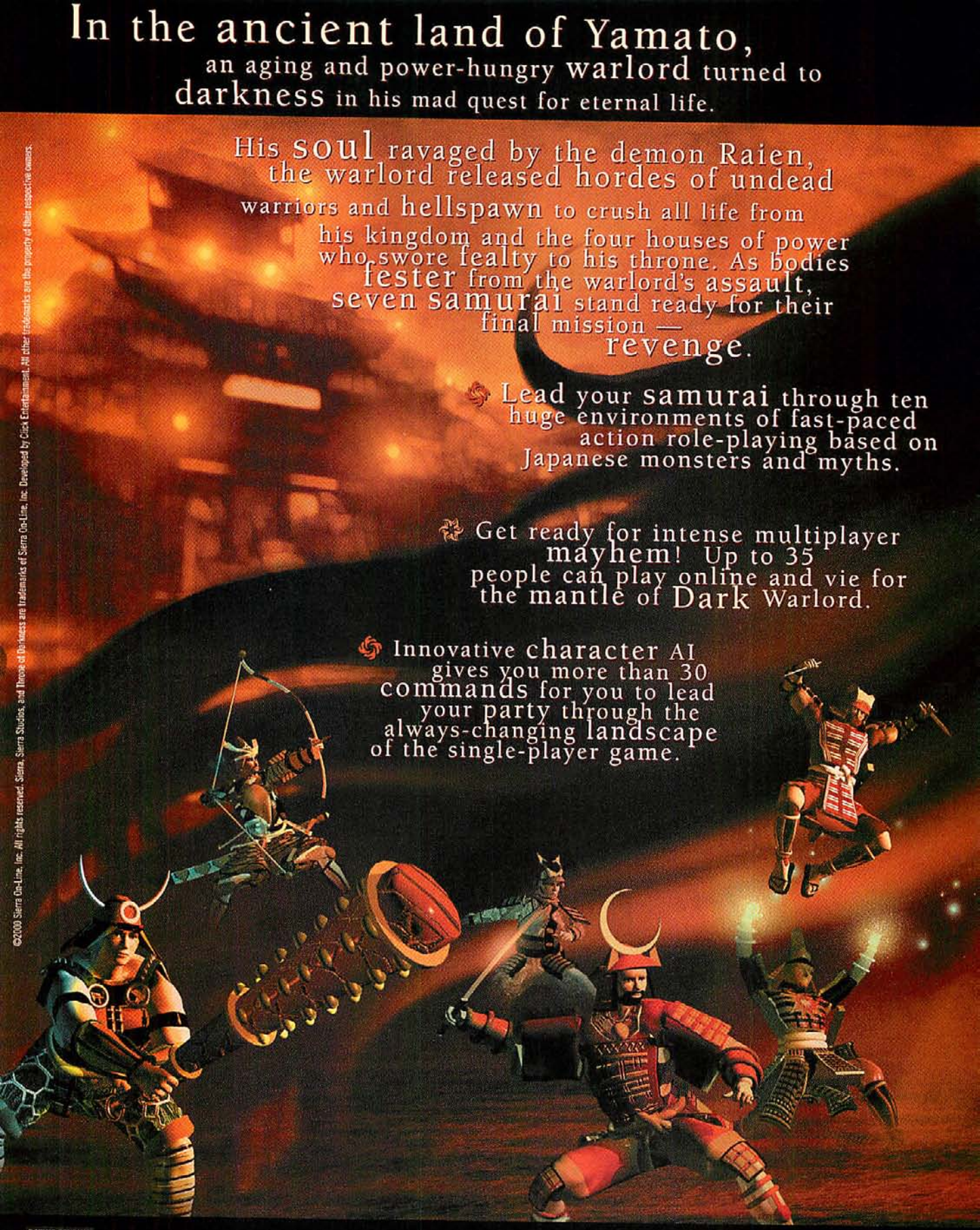
an aging and power-hungry warlord turned to darkness in his mad quest for eternal life.



His soul ravaged by the demon Raien, the warlord released hordes of undead warriors and hellspawn to crush all life from his kingdom and the four houses of power who swore fealty to his throne. As bodies fester from the warlord's assault, seven samurai stand ready for their final mission — revenge.

- Lead your samurai through ten huge environments of fast-paced action role-playing based on Japanese monsters and myths.
- Get ready for intense multiplayer mayhem! Up to 35 people can play online and vie for the mantle of Dark Warlord.
- Innovative character AI gives you more than 30 commands for you to lead your party through the always-changing landscape of the single-player game.

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RATING PENDING

RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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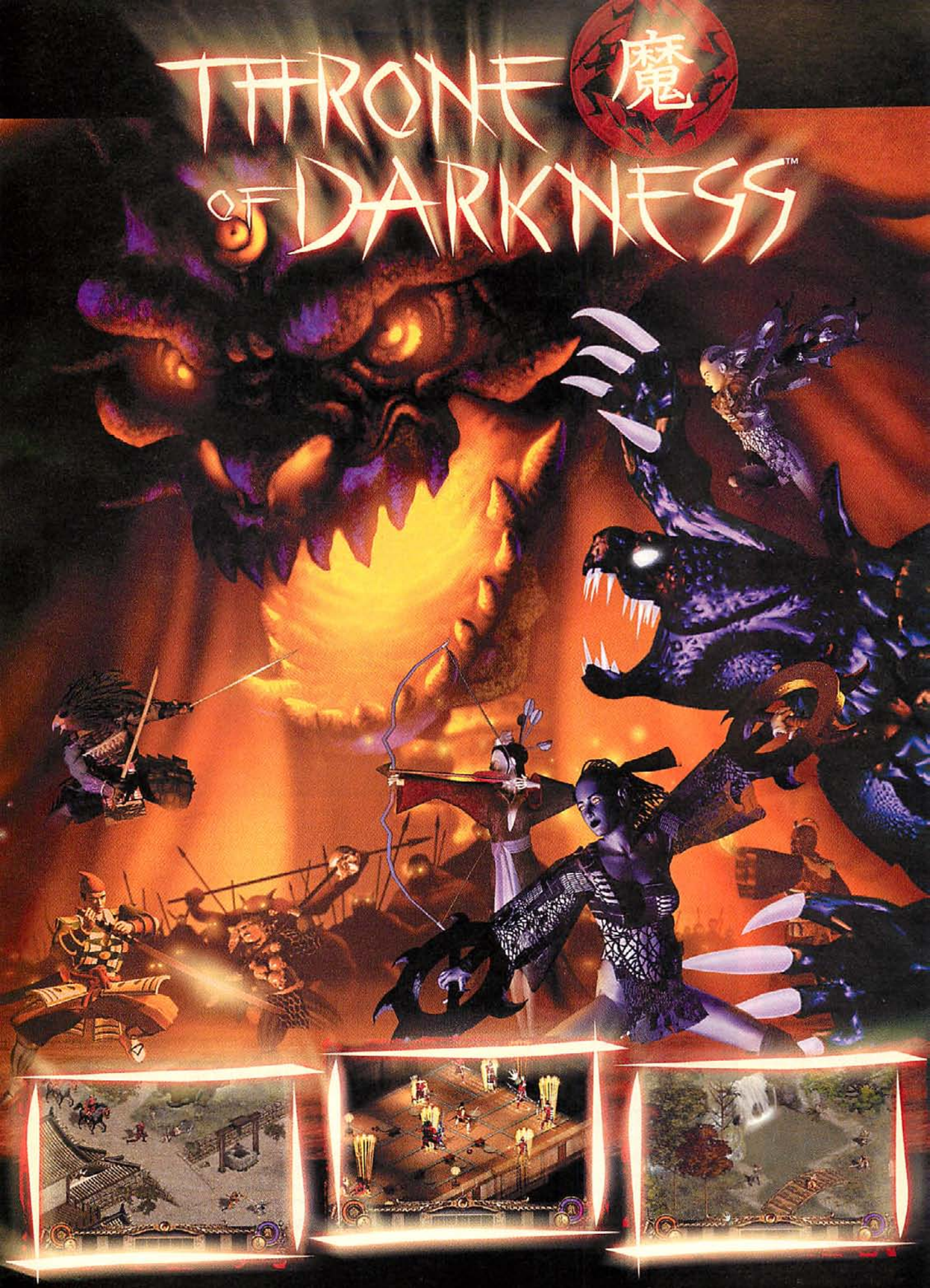
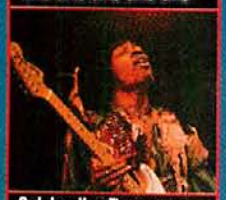
THRONE OF DARKNESS™



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 review only finished games– no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

Sun Tzu would be pleased with SHOGUN's artful blend of strategy, simulation, and action

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

The Way of the Warrior

THE CASTLE OF PAIN Gorgeous environments and realistic sound effects create a highly immersive and authentic tableau. Terrain, weather, fortifications, and troop types all play important roles.

STRATEGY

reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Tomorrow at sunrise, I, honorable Daimyo of the Mori clan, march my Samurai army against Takeda castle at Kai. Even though my shinobi spies tell me that Takeda is ready to topple, I have taken extra precautions by dispatching Horse Cavalry from the nearby highlands of Izu, and Warrior Monks from our homeland at Mimaska. Many seasons and countless sacrifices place me on the threshold of complete victory. I do this in the name of Mori honor. Tomorrow, the Takeda perish and all 60 provinces will unite under my banner. Tomorrow, I become Shogun of Japan.

Welcome to SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, a masterfully designed strategy game set in the tumultuous period of Japanese history known as the Sengoku Jidai, or the warring states period of the 16th Century. SHOGUN not only provides an excellent mix of gaming genres for the historical wargamer, turn-based strategist, and 3D-action buff, but it's also an extremely stable game. SHOGUN's 3D combat engine is likened to warring in the majestic Kurosawa film, *Ran*, without the melodramatic tragedy. Thank goodness – Electronic Arts and Creative Assembly released SHOGUN just in time to rescue gamers from a noticeable shortage of quality strategy-simulation games.

Cutting Down the Enemy Is the Way of Strategy...

SHOGUN offers four gaming choices: an in-depth campaign mode; a historical battle mode for recreating one of five historical battles in realtime; custom battle mode for creating your own army unit dispositions in realtime; and a multiplayer tactical-battle mode via LAN or Internet. There's also a detailed tutorial to

CGW RATED

PROS

An epic game that will please James Clavell fans, Japanese military historians, and Risk-lovers ready for the next challenge.

CONS

Multiplayer lacks a campaign element; no turn-based multiplayer mode.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 500MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium 300MHz or AMD K6, 64MB RAM, 8x CD ROM, 1.5GB hard drive space.
3D Support: 4MB PC or AGP video card w/DirectX 7. **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8 players with 33.6 kbps or faster connection.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Creative Assembly • **$29** • **www.ea.com**
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

FORMATION TRAINING Formations play a vital role in SHOGUN's wonderful 3D combat mode. Knowing which ones to use at any given moment increases unit effectiveness.

help you better understand the tactical phase of SHOGUN's real-time 3D combat. Your goal in the campaign game is simple: Unite all of Japan under your rule through combat and subterfuge and become SHOGUN, or supreme military dictator. SHOGUN is about ambition and war.

In a campaign, you choose from one of seven clans to rule as the Daimyo (warlord). Each clan possesses its own strengths and weaknesses, which determine your strategy. The Mori clan, for instance, builds warrior monks at lower cost. However, unwieldy terrain leads to a lack of farmland, limiting the amount of income the Mori can produce. Conversely, the Hojo start off with the highest income and can therefore construct castles at a lower cost. Choosing clans like the Uesugi is more challenging because their provinces are stretched thin. Regardless of clan, strategy depends on developing and managing their provincial resources in order to build armies for conquest.

The strategy aspect of SHOGUN is as easy to grasp as that of the classic Milton Bradley boardgame Shogun (now called Samurai Swords), but with greater depth. SHOGUN tests your resource management, diplomatic, political, and advanced planning skills, but it also tests your skills as a battlefield tactician. Similar to the boardgame, you move units around the map to gather intelligence, assassinate rival generals and emissaries, negotiate treaties, and attack enemy provinces.

To be successful, you must first generate income from your lands in the form of SHOGUN's main resource, koku (the amount of rice necessary to feed one man for a year). In addition to feeding your troops,

RISK AND REWARD Players move units across the provinces of feudal Japan like moving tokens on a board game. The game can be played entirely in this strategic, turn-based mode.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"If the developers were really trying to impress the notion of damnation on the player, mission accomplished."

— Brett Todd, reviewing VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE—REDEMPTION.

Suddenly, This Summer

By Tom Price

Summer is the time for dry spells, be they weather-related or on the gaming front. Game publishers usually save their big new releases for the lucrative holiday buying season of late fall. But this year, something strange is happening. A whole slew of highly anticipated games are hitting shelves early, and by the look of this month's reviews, they're a field of winners. SHOGUN, MDK 2, GROUND CONTROL, DIABLO-freakin-2! Not to mention some unexpected gems like EVOLVA and COMBAT MISSION. And reviewing DEUS EX, DARK REIGN II, and WARLORDS: BATTLECRY for next month's issue will keep us indoors until all this annoyingly nice weather is past. At least we're no longer in danger of losing our pasty complexions we worked on all winter.

Hopefully, publishers will make this mid-year renaissance an annual occurrence. Too many good games get crushed under the holiday rush, and gamers are tired of making Q1 games last until Q4 (although THE SIMS sure hasn't run out of steam yet). Now, you'll be playing DIABLO II right up until Christmas Eve (what? You were going to do that anyway?). Drop me a line at tom_price@ziffdavis.com and let me know which summer release you're most looking forward to. I'll be out by the pool, enjoying a mai tai, playing ARCANUM on a laptop.

SEPTEMBER REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Army Men: World War	★★★★★
Army Men: Air Tactics	★★★★★
Combat Mission	★★★★★
Diablo 2	★★★★★
Earth 2150	★★★★★
EverQuest: Kunark expansion	★★★★½
Evolva	★★★★★
Flying Heroes	★★★★★
Ground Control	★★★★★
Klingon Academy	★★★★★
Lemmings Revolution	★★★★★
MDK 2	★★★★½
Operational Art of War: COW Edition	★★★★★
PGA Championship Golf 2000	★★★★★
Shogun: Total War	★★★★½
SimCity 3000 Unlimited	★★★★★
Test Drive: Le Mans	★★★★★
Vampire: The Masquerade	★★★★★

NONE SHALL PASS Crossing a bridge can wreck a force's morale. Archers make a great defense as they rain arrows at those attempting to cross.

CONTRACTOR NEEDED: INQUIRE WITHIN SHOGUN's tech tree is easy to understand, but make sure you know what troops you need before embarking on a lengthy construction campaign.

koku is needed for constructing buildings and training new units. You can increase koku production by improving farmlands, building ports, or raising taxes; but if you raise taxes too high, you run the risk of rebellion.

Each province has the ability to produce koku, and in turn, to develop the necessary structures to build your armies. Constructing a castle allows for more upgrades and building options, which in turn creates more options for training units. Later in the game, special events will occur such as the arrival of Dutch or English Traders, who give you the opportunity to build more advanced structures like an arms factory for muskets. SHOGUN also includes a slew of unit types, from basic Samurai Archers and Yari Samurai (spearmen) to more advanced Musketeers, Ninjas, and Geisha assassins. Units can be enhanced with improved weapons, armor, and morale. The game's straightforward technology tree makes the research and building model manageable.

The Way of the Warrior Is Death...

SHOGUN provides three options when attacking or defending a province: Command your troops personally, let the computer decide the outcome, or retreat into a nearby province. Choosing to command your troops personally switches you to the blood and guts of SHOGUN – 3D real-time tactical combat, where you can control up to 2500 samurai. Before combat starts, however, you get to assess weather and determine a course of action: Fight now, or wait for more advantageous weather conditions under a clear sky, or during rain, snow, or fog. Depending on the troop dispositions, it can be advantageous to fight in the rain, if, for instance, they possess heavy cavalry – rain wears cavalry down. Once battle begins, you control units through a robust interface, with a combination of keyboard commands, mouse clicks, and/or desktop icons. Combat takes place on a variety of wonderfully rendered 3D terrain maps, and the atmosphere is heightened with good audio effects and ambient music.

SHOGUN's combat model is as authentic as they come, and during the battle, factors like troop types, morale, formations, terrain, weather effects, and fatigue all come into play. Creative Assembly did its homework and applied Sun Tzu's *Art of War* principles to each unit's AI. So, for example, brute force is usually not enough to win. Units haphazardly thrown at the enemy will surely be routed before a battle's end.

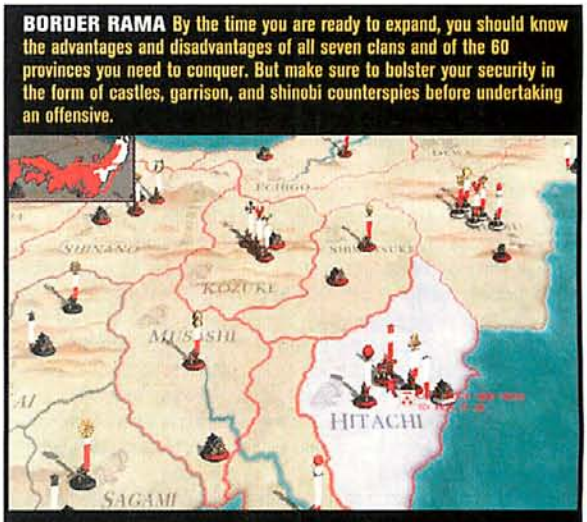
Eliminate all rival clans, Ronin, and rebels, and you will become Shogun. As Shogun, you are presented with an interesting cinematic describing the fruits of your efforts, both past and present. What's next? Play again or move on to multiplayer, via LAN or EA's Internet server. There's nothing more adrenaline-pumping than eight armies slugging it out in some Japanese valley. However, I did have a beef with SHOGUN's multiplayer game. It not only lacks the ability to play in turn-based mode, it's also missing a save-film feature for reviewing battles already played. What were they thinking?

Be Extremely Mysterious, Even to the Point of Soundlessness...

As good as SHOGUN is, it's not perfect. The simplistic interface suddenly becomes tedious when controlling several provinces and hundreds of units. A menu option similar to that in BRAVEHEART (which allowed viewing of general production cycles at any given time, both territorially and locally), would have been more efficient than clicking through two dozen provinces in order to calculate structures and unit dispositions.

I was also disappointed with the diplomacy model. Treaties with neighboring clans are broken without justification. And even though you can form alliances with neighboring clans, you cannot join forces to defeat a common enemy. Alliances rarely last long, serving only to stall the enemy while preparing offensives.

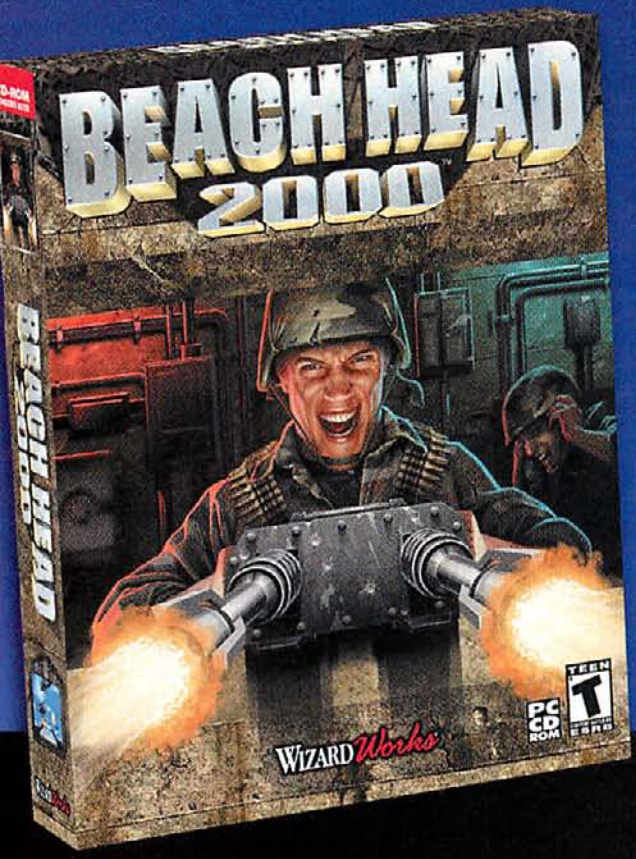
I was generally pleased with unit balance, except in the case of the Geisha. Anyone using them usually has the upper hand in assassinating enemy generals, shinobi, and emissaries. I also found Ronin and rebel-controlled provinces to be more powerful than any of the seven



BORDER RAMA By the time you are ready to expand, you should know the advantages and disadvantages of all seven clans and of the 60 provinces you need to conquer. But make sure to bolster your security in the form of castles, garrison, and shinobi counterspies before undertaking an offensive.

ABACUS WANTED After each battle, a summary screen tallies victory or defeat, while assessing individual unit performance in honor gained, heads taken, men lost, and remaining troops.

DEFEND OR DIE!



You are the last line of defense against an overwhelming enemy assault. Blast away at land, sea and air forces as they rush you from every direction. Clear the beach, defend your post and pray that the supply plane comes in time!

IT AIN'T NO BEACH PARTY!

- Aim in on landing troops, helicopters, tanks, grenades, jet fighters, bombers and more!
- In your face hardcore photo-realistic 3D action!
- Wave after wave of intense enemy assaults!

AVAILABLE NOW!

Works INFOGRAMES DIGITAL FUSION INC. PC CD ROM TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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clans. Destroying them requires more resources and concentrated effort than it should. The throne room is of limited utility in the game. It's the only place where you can receive emissaries to form alliances, but beyond that, it's a waste of time. Your advisor spouts obscure wisdom from Sun Tzu that rarely pertains to current events. It would have been beneficial if an abacus was added to show each of your province's koku revenues, or a map detailing army victories, or even court entertainment in the form of the geisha playing Japanese sonnets (she just sits there).

The tactical game, though well made, has some minor shortcomings as well. During the fray, it's difficult to discern which units are which, especially during the heat of a massive melee. Color-coded highlighting – as in MYTH – would have been a welcome addition.

Despite these flaws, SHOGUN possesses an impressive amount of depth and replay value in both strategy and tactical gameplay, making it the leading candidate for Strategy Game of the Year. Bottom line: SHOGUN is well worth the price, so strap on your Do, powder your Katana, and join the armies of the Sengoku Jidai. CGW

Shogun Strategies

Achieving Battlefield Mastery

SHOGUN adheres to the classic book on strategy and tactics by Sun Tzu, *Art of War*. "One should appraise a war first of all in terms of five fundamental factors," writes Sun Tzu. "The first of the fundamental factors is politics; the second, weather; the third, terrain; the fourth, the commander; and the fifth, doctrine." In SHOGUN, all of these factors apply.

Politics: Play the Hojo clan if you're having difficulty. The Hojo are the easiest to manage because of higher koku yields and defensible borders. Make alliances with surrounding Clans so you can focus your attacks on one enemy at a time. Clans like the Takeda, Oda, and Imagawa are not to be trusted since they tend to break alliances quickly, and this is especially true if one of your provinces invites attack. Target wealthy provinces, and likewise, make sure you shore up defenses on your own valuable provinces. If you fall short of koku, raise taxes for only one turn. Use shinobi to encourage rebellion in enemy provinces with low loyalty ratings. It'll keep the enemy from mustering offensives against you.

Weather: Know what effect weather has on all troop types. Rain renders Arquebusiers useless once their powder gets wet (the more advanced muskets can still fire). Archers also suffer effects in rain, since bowstrings dampen; and with wind, because accuracy is reduced. Snow will reduce the mobility of all units, especially cavalry, which easily tire.

Terrain: Review the battle map before starting the battle and look for key strategic points like bridges, forests, and hills. Higher ground increases archers' accuracy and range. It is also better to attack downhill, since units attacking uphill tire quickly. Use heavily armored troops and cavalry to draw out the enemy before committing a full-scale assault.

Commander: Morale is very important in SHOGUN; build it in your army by utilizing the same units and commanders. Higher morale makes units more effective in combat. Always use the generals (Taisho) with the highest honor in battle. Their honor bonus is passed to the troops they lead. Likewise, concentrate your attacks on the enemy Taisho. If he falls, then the enemy will rout faster. In turn, always protect your generals with an escort of shinobi or ninja for security against any assassination attempts.

AVALANCHE! By using terrain and weather effects, red army holds the upper hand – literally. Red archers are able to rain arrows more accurately and effectively, whereas, because of snow, green army's troops are heavily fatigued before combat begins, making them highly susceptible to rout.

THOSE WHO HAVE EYES BUT CANNOT SEE The battle starts out in fog. The red army did not scout for the enemy, so it marches haphazardly into a valley, then proceeds to attack a green army, perfectly formed and waiting on the slopes. Within minutes, much of the red army scatters because of fatigue, loss of men, and lowered morale.

Doctrine: Die-hard strategists may be tempted to skip the tactical game altogether and to allow the computer to decide the fate of their armies. Even though the AI is balanced, I strongly recommend you play the tactical game. Commanding your army in battle almost always improves your chances. Remember to destroy as much of the retreating enemy as possible, or they will return to fight you another day. Use cavalry units to run down routing troops, or try maneuvering a unit behind them, to cut off retreat.

Use formations during battle. Loose formations are great for decreasing the effects of missile attacks, whereas close formations will hold key defensive points more effectively. Wedge formations are effective in breaking enemy defenses and lines. Use cavalry to attack archers. And Warrior monks are more effective if "engaged at will."

THIS IS NO SOLO MISSION

Welcome to the universe of massive multiplayer space combat. Join your squadron online. Confront other civilizations. Play free on worldwide servers. Or fly in hundred-ship dogfights on Zone.com. Just keep in mind—those that fly alone, die alone. **www.microsoft.com/games/allegiance**

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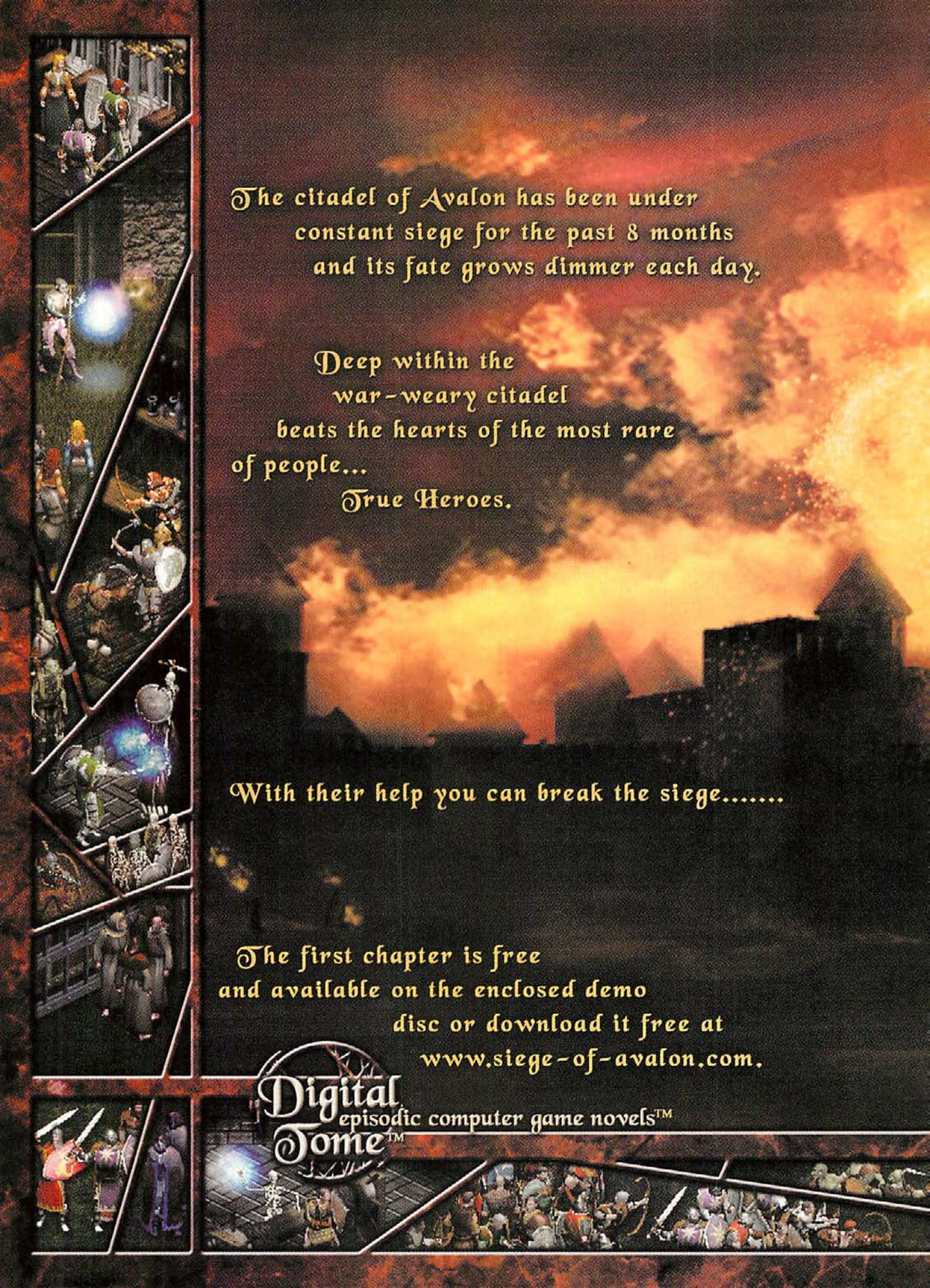
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constant siege for the past 8 months
and its fate grows dimmer each day.
Deep within the
war-weary citadel
beats the hearts of the most rare
of people...
True Heroes.
With their help you can break the siege.....
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disc or download it free at
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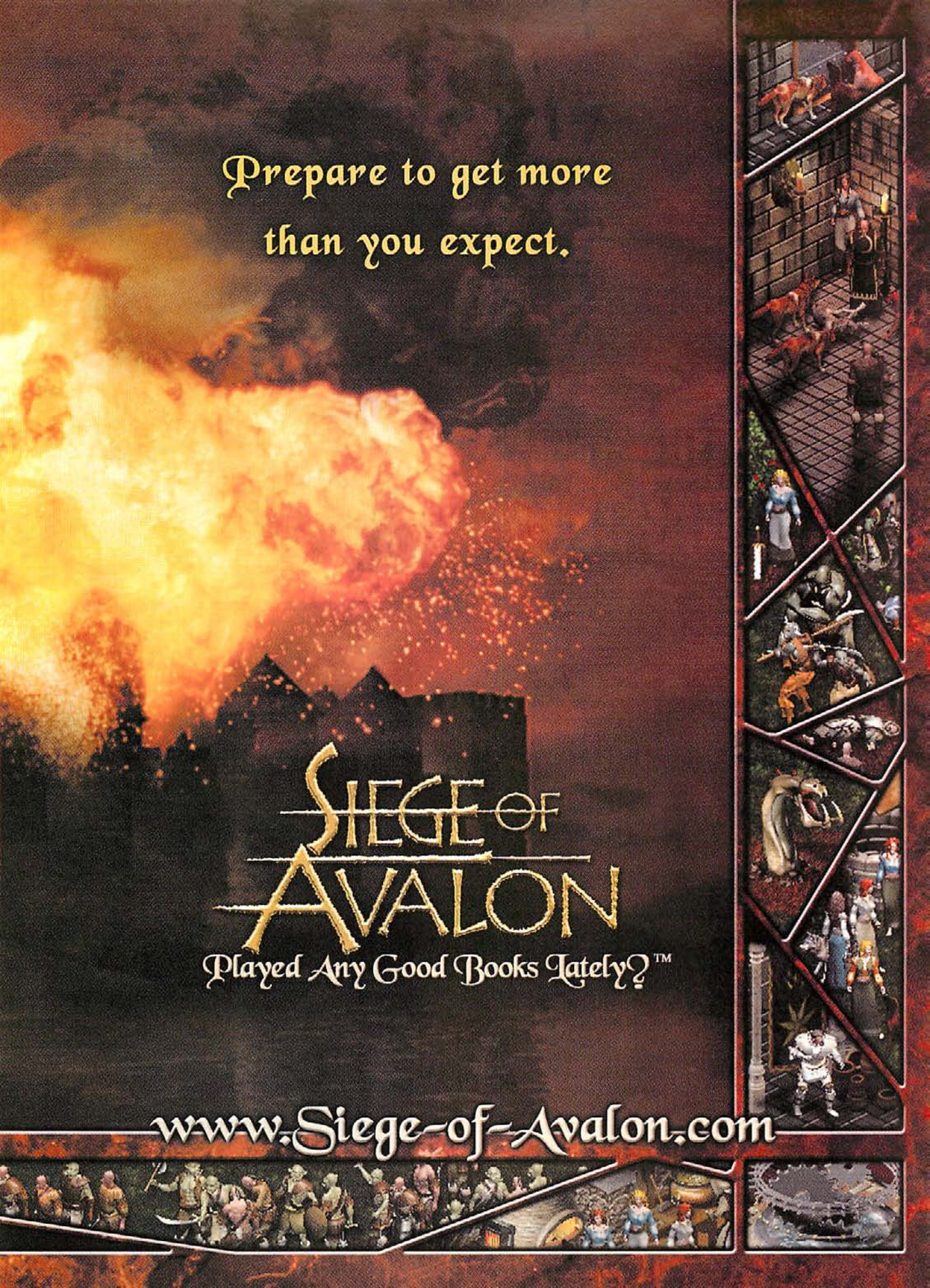
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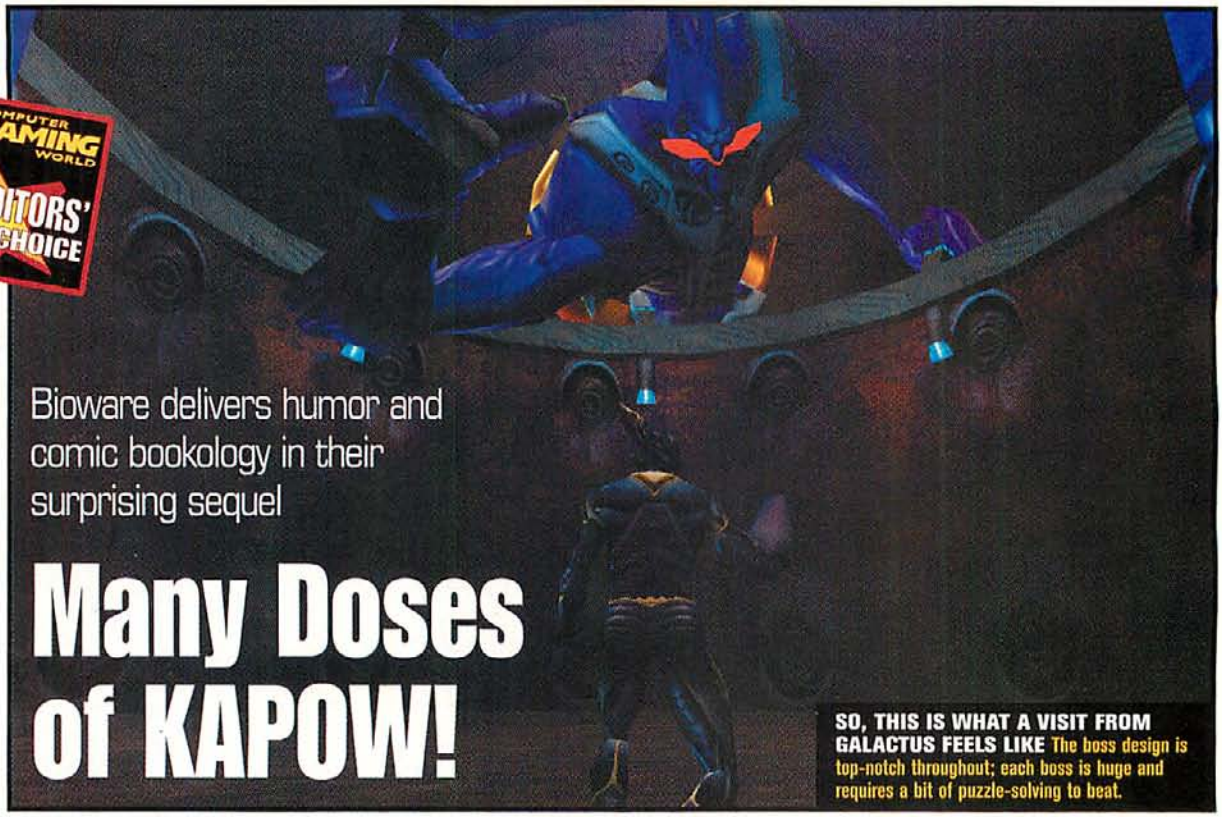


COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Bioware delivers humor and comic bookology in their surprising sequel

Many Doses of KAPOW!

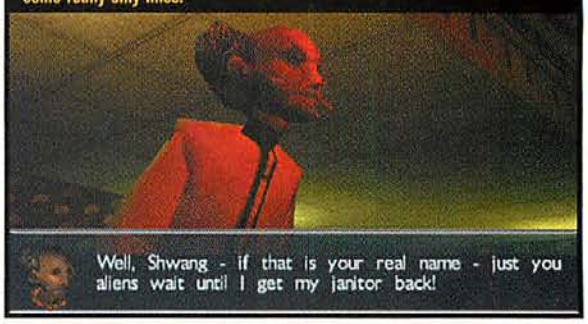
SO, THIS IS WHAT A VISIT FROM GALACTUS FEELS LIKE The boss design is top-notch throughout; each boss is huge and requires a bit of puzzle-solving to beat.

Gamers who lament over the lack of comic-book inspired games – here's one staring you in the face. Okay, so no one has an "S" slapped on his chest, and there's nary a Marvel or DC logo anywhere on the box. But everything about BioWare's MDK 2 – its load-screens, cutscenes, level design, and gameplay – appears to have leapt right off a four-color panel and onto your 32-bit color screen. MDK 2 brings you the best of what Jack Kirby and Stan Lee had to offer in the 60s; it's a mad vision of heroes that fly, rampage, and invent with reckless abandon, pitted against over-the-top villains who spout world-conquest diatribes. It features pure action that screams "POW! BANG! ZOOM!"

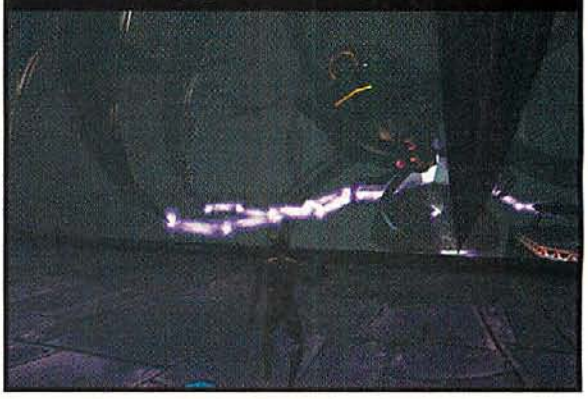
MDK 2

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

THE NAME'S SHWANG, SHWING SHWANG The cutscenes featuring Doc Hawkins are the best, as they combine a perfect voice with some really silly lines.



LIGHTNING SPIDER AWAY! It's big, it's flashing, it's pretty. I really have no idea what's going on, but I'm too bedazzled to care...



Crisis on Infinite Canadas

Plotwise, you couldn't get much lighter than MDK 2. Max, Doc Hawkins, and Kurt are enjoying some brews after the end of the original MDK when yet another alien minecrawler attacks Edmonton, Canada. Kurt is dispatched quickly, and soon you'll find yourself romping across the planet, Hawkins' ship (the "Jim Dandy"), and a variety of alien craft. Gameplay is similar to the previous game in that you'll be zipping down a linear series of interconnected locations, and you'll have to either thump or jump your way past obstacles.

The major departure from the previous game is that you're playing all three characters, not just Kurt. Max stops being an airstrike weapon

CGW RATED

PROS

It's a comic book rendered as a game: colorful, over-the-top, action-packed, and fun.

CONS

Platform-game holdovers, like twitchy controls and jumping puzzles, provide the wrong sort of challenges.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 16MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 3D card, DirectX-compatible sound card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** OpenGL **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** BioWare • **$40** • **www.interplay.com/mdk2** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence.

BAD PUZZLE, BAD! Jumping puzzles like this one in level eight made me want to punch holes in my wall with my forehead. At least I can save anywhere.

PAINT THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS Sometimes, you just need to stop and trip out.

DOC IN SPAAAACE! Your mental reflexes will be tested periodically with Doc Hawkins; you have a limited time to figure out how to assemble this makeshift spacesuit (hint, hint).

and gets his own levels, while Doc Hawkins branches out from briefing-giving to adventure-taking. Out of the game's ten levels, each character is featured in three, with the final level giving you the choice of which character to be. It's all one sequential story, and the game manages to actually make sense of your switching characters so much.

The character switching brings out three unique playstyles. Just as in the original game, playing Kurt involves jumping, shooting, and sniping. Max is more about pure action, as he pumps out bullets from guns in each of his four hands; the gunfire is only interrupted by the occasional jumping puzzle. Finally, Doc Hawkins plays like an action-oriented LucasArts game; you'll have to pick up inventory items and combine them in bizarre ways to solve puzzles, dispatch enemies, or find ways of jumping around. These puzzles range from fixing a leaky pipe to guiding a goldfish through some tunnels in order to flip a switch.

Whatever Happened to the MDK of Tomorrow?

Since MDK was designed by Shiny, there's the question of how BioWare addressed the general humor and attitude of the original. Rather than try to imitate Shiny's style, they made their own distinct mark in the spirit of Shiny's method. Instead of focusing on the odd/twisted or the extremely weird items, BioWare focused on goofy dialogue that uses a mix of pop culture, scatological humor, and well-cast voice actors. The result is that MDK 2 is as funny as the original, but in a different way.

While you're busy laughing at Doc Hawkins' one-liners or groaning at the farting aliens, you'll also notice the absolute beauty of the game. This is one to show off that brand new VooDoo 9500/GeeForce 47 you bought. Whatever card you've got, this game will paint luscious vistas, dazzling lights, insanely detailed enemies, and eye-wrenching visual effects. It's also a very tightly-programmed engine – just about any decent machine can run the game comfortably at 1024x768 resolution, and power-gamers will get good frame-rates even at 1600x1200 resolution. The exceptions to this are levels seven and eight; you'll probably want to turn the detail down a bit on these levels, unless you like grinding along like a slime-less slug.

The Dark Platform Saga

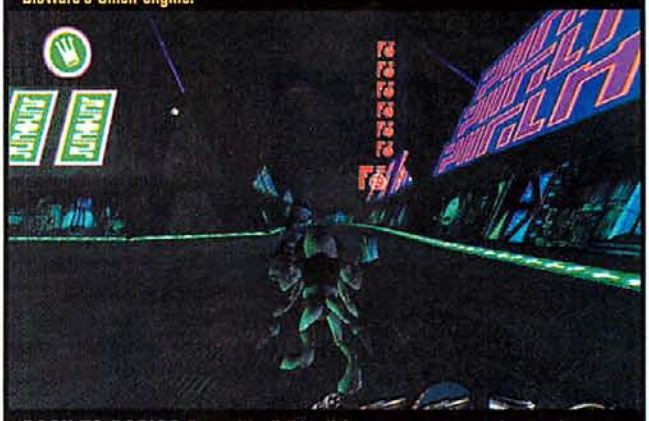
While the game is full of big, gorgeous fun and zany laughs, it's still got some problems. This is a platform game at heart; hence, it comes with some of the same problems inherent in most platform games.

The control scheme is still a bit twitchy. Even though the default scheme is designed with the first-person-shooter fan in mind (keys for movement and mouse for aiming), jumps and turns still tend to be out of whack. Sometimes your character will either turn way too quickly or way too slowly, or you'll find yourself dying because you didn't quite hit the jump button hard enough. Doc Hawkins, in particular, suffers from an awkward interface, mostly in the "arming" and using of certain items.

The jumping puzzles, for the most part, are pretty fair, although there are some that are insanely difficult. Even players who were, like myself, weaned on MARIO, PITFALL, and SONIC will find themselves slamming their desks as a result of some jumping puzzles in level eight, specifically.

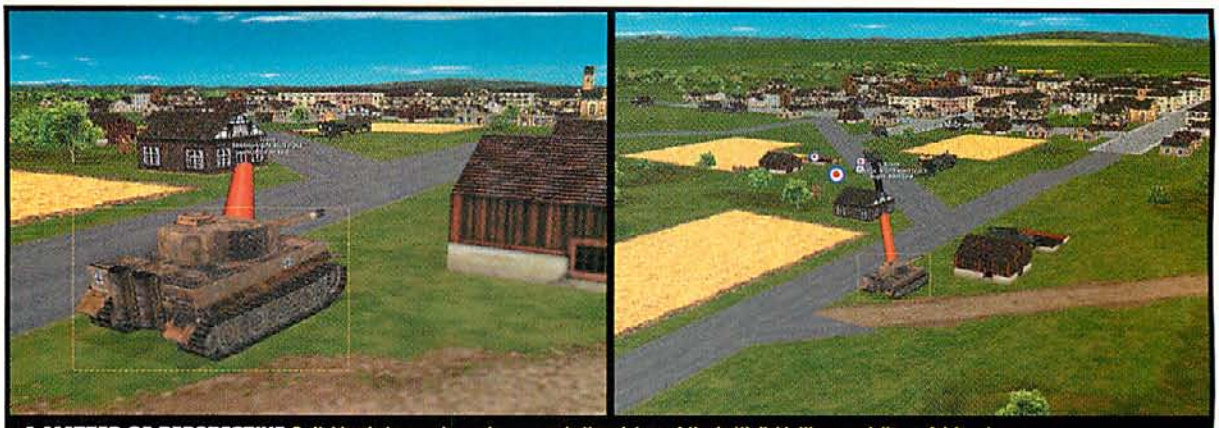
One of the main differences between the PC version and the DreamCast version is the addition of a Save-Anywhere feature. I'm a huge proponent of Save-Anywhere, but it does mess with puzzle design, effectively rendering null some of MDK 2's more challenging situations. This is most evident on Doc Hawkins' levels, where some of his puzzles are solvable by trial-and-reload, rather than by thinking them through.

All in all, despite some ire-raising puzzles and twitchy controls, this is a flat-out *fun* game. Approach this as it is: a well-crafted action game that emphasizes shooting, sniping, jumping, and puzzling. Don't go in looking for the future of action gaming. Look at it the same way you would a classic comic: big, colorful, dumb (in a good way) fun mixed with goofy humor, pulse-pounding action, and an appreciation for guys in costumes thwarting aliens in bigger costumes. CGW



FOUR-FISTED TALES Max runs and guns through amazing levels, thanks to BioWare's Omen engine.

BACK TO BASICS Even with all this slick newness, one can always rely on Kurt's sniping abilities (complete with taunting alien) from the previous game.



A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE Switching between views gives you a better picture of the battlefield. It's especially useful for viewing line-of-sight across uneven terrain.

The first 3D wargame scores a major victory

Wargaming's New Look

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

For years, wargamers had been pleading for games that took advantage of advances in computer technology to create original, engaging simulations. Instead, they got games which either looked like more realistic versions of games they had played in paper form, or which used the computer as a calculation machine for incredibly complex combat systems – but which were still based on mechanics from 20 or 30 years ago. Recycled ideas have been the hallmark of wargaming.

COMBAT MISSION

reviewed by Bruce Geryk

COMBAT MISSION takes these tired ideas and tosses them out. In their place, it asks the question: How can a computer wargame use attractive graphics in the service of accurate simulation, and make the combination fun? The answer is a fully 3D, turn-based masterpiece in which players plot their moves simultaneously, and then watch their orders unfold in 60-second slices of realtime. It's the game everyone imagined 20 years ago as the ultimate "computer wargame." Guess what? It's finally here.

Western Front Shootout

While the first thing that might come to mind upon seeing COMBAT MISSION is a WWII version of SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG, the similarities are limited to 3D graphics and a foundation in history. COMBAT MISSION is actually more akin to familiar hex-based games such as RISING SUN or WEST FRONT. The biggest difference is the 3D presentation, and wargame veterans will find that at the tactical level, this changes everything.

The subtitle of COMBAT MISSION is "Beyond Overlord," and the scenarios all deal with battles fought on the Western Front on or after June 6, 1944. While most combat units are squads, individual vehicles and leaders are depicted, as well as smaller units such as special weapons teams. Players can command American, German, French, British, and even Polish forces in battles such as Falaise Pocket and Operation Market-Garden. The number of unit types depicted is staggering, and this allows for great freedom in scenario design when using the editor. "Operations" consist of multi-scenario battles over a large map, and introduce supply considerations. There is even a "Quick Battle" function that generates random scenarios based on some general user-specified parameters. The replayability of COMBAT MISSION is almost endless.

What's That Burning Smell?

One of the most striking aspects of COMBAT MISSION is the degree to which it demonstrates the inadequacy of traditional two-dimensional, hex-based representations of combat. After many years of playing hex-based games, it's easy to internalize a set of conventions (such as line-of-sight rules) and mistake them for the real thing; COMBAT MISSION takes these illusions and obliterates them in spectacular fashion. The simple act of turning a 2D environment into a 3D one changes the way players look at the battlefield. Important terrain features have to be identified from a "real world" perspective. Keeping troops in supporting positions, creating crossfire zones, and maintaining proper command distance all become far more difficult when you take away the crutch of a flat map and a hex grid. The command experience in COMBAT MISSION is far more realistic as a result.

Gameplay consists of each player plotting his orders during the Orders Phase, and then watching them simultaneously unfold during the Action Phase. Free camera control allows

CGW RATED

PROS

An instant wargaming classic.

CONS

The interface and graphics are a little rough around the edges.

MERRY CHRISTMAS When has a turn-based game ever looked like this?

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz (Pentium 200MHz if no 3D card), 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D graphics card. **3D Support:** Direct 3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** PBEM/hotseat (2 players), Internet with upcoming v1.1 patch; one CD per player.

Publisher: Battlefront • Developer: Big Time Software • $45 • www.battlefront.com • ESRB Rating: Not rated.

players to view this action from whichever angle they choose, or to lock the view on important units.

Despite its focus on command and a realistic view of the battlefield, COMBAT MISSION is not an abstracted "command-level" model of warfare where you give your units general orders, and then sit back to watch the results. Underneath the 3D graphics is a wargame that is as detailed and open to micromanagement as any traditional hex game. Every unit must be given exact orders regarding where, when, and how fast to move, at whom to shoot, and how to reach its destination. The interface allows for minute control of your units through sophisticated waypoint schemes and different movement modes. The units themselves have some intelligence, and will take measures to defend themselves if unexpected circumstances arise, but the game very much hinges on how well each player plans their turn, down to the last detail.

The simultaneous-move system and the unique environment make COMBAT MISSION a very challenging game. Tactics have to be coordinated, and even though each turn only lasts a minute, that minute is a long, long time during combat. Many things can happen, and a few mortar rounds or the unexpected arrival of an enemy tank changes the entire battlefield situation instantly. The best tactics are those that anticipate problems, which means players have to visualize how their orders will unfold during the turn, and not simply their position at the end. When playing all but the smallest of scenarios, this can be very challenging.

Players who meet this challenge, however, will be rewarded with a wargame experience unlike any other. Turns can be viewed repeatedly and from many different angles, and it is during this replay phase that COMBAT MISSION comes to life. Watching your infantry get ambushed is a heart-stopping experience, and playing the game can be like watching a good war movie. The tension is higher than in any wargame to date – even the CLOSE COMBAT series. It's a different kind of tension, to be sure, but it's no less nerve-wracking. The excellent sound effects enhance this feeling immeasurably.

COMBAT MISSION has all the features (rally, panic, smoke, river crossings, artillery) that wargamers would expect in a game like this, and adds a few new ones. Units can be spotted by sound alone, making tanks particularly hard to conceal when moving. Command lag means that units farther from a formation commander suffer some delay in executing their orders. Added together, all these features make for one of the most detailed simulations available.

COMBAT MISSION is not perfect, but it's awfully close. The biggest problem is the lack of an overview screen to help players locate units. The designers say this was a conscious omission to reduce the player's omnipotence, but it can be a little frustrating in some of the larger scenarios. Some animations, like the flames coming from burning vehicles, are a bit sub-standard when viewed up close. There is also no TCP/IP play available yet, although Battlefront promises a free upgrade to remedy this later in the summer. These points are dwarfed by all of the things that COMBAT MISSION does brilliantly. Unlike some other wargames from small developers, COMBAT MISSION includes a sturdy, 170-page manual that explains the game in detail – it even has an index.

SMOKE 'EM IF YOU GOT 'EM Knowing how to use smoke properly is a key to victory.

SILENCE THAT GUN Artillery has an awesome effect on the battlefield. Here, an anti-tank gun gets blasted amidst flying hunks of frozen dirt .

CLICK, MOVE, DIE Giving orders is as easy as right-click and point.

The economics of game distribution have hit wargames particularly hard, and COMBAT MISSION is no exception. The game is not and will not be available in retail stores, and can only be purchased directly from Battlefront via their Web site. But this shouldn't deter anyone from buying it. The trend toward derivative game design means that revolutionary games come along rarely. COMBAT MISSION is a revolution on CD. Join it. CGW

Fighting the Faux Foe

Wargame artificial intelligence (or the lack of it) has been a prickly problem over the years. The fact that an experienced wargamer can generally crush most game AI means that for a true challenge, wargame fans need live opponents. This is a problem when most wargames are turn-based and don't lend themselves to Internet play, and many people don't like the drawn-out nature of play by email games. The difficulty introduced by COMBAT MISSION's 3D perspective might obscure the fact that the AI is pretty darn good. As usual, the computer is better on the defensive than when attacking, but in general, it puts up quite a fight. Concealed units choose targets wisely, instead of just taking potshots at the first half-track to blunder past them. Units are smart about moving: A tank, when brought under heavy fire near some trees, backed up behind them instead of turning around and exposing its rear. While the best competition will still come from head-to-head games against good opponents, COMBAT MISSION has a few tricks to show off in single-player mode. Don't underestimate your enemy!

ROCKET RANGER Some units, like this Rocket Terradyne, are excellent at taking down both air and ground units. Their weakness: infantry.

MORE POWER The more powerful a unit is, the less of them there will be in a squad. From left: Main Battle Terradyne, Heavy Terradyne, Artillery Terradyne.

Sierra's new tactical RTS makes the grade

Familiar Territory, New Ground

GROUND CONTROL

reviewed by "Major" Tom Price

GROUND CONTROL is the latest in a new wave of real-time strategy games that eschew the traditional resource harvesting and tech-tree climbing model in favor of pure, unrelenting, tactical combat. Think MYTH, but with healthy doses of COMMAND & CONQUER, TOTAL ANNIHILATION, and HOMEWORLD. In raw gameplay terms, GROUND CONTROL is spot on, delivering one of the most visceral "you are there" depictions of combat we've seen in this game-style. As a complete package, it does have some problems, the most obvious of which is a clichéd storyline wrapped around clichéd missions in which the rigid scenario-scripting fails to provide much challenge or replayability in single-player mode.

Plot-o-matic

It's 2419, and super-powerful corporations rule the post-apocalyptic earth. (Sigh.) War has been banned on terra firma, so the corporations pit their security forces against each other for control of mysterious alien technology found on a desolate colony world. (Yawn.) You are a loose-cannon field commander with authority issues (Zzzzzzzzz) who must lead your squads of infantry, armor, support vehicles, and aircraft through the standard escort-defenseless-units and take-out-the-radar-type missions. For the first half of the game, you play as Major Sarah Parker of the Crayven Corporation's security forces, and for the second half you play as Jarred Stone, a Deacon in the Brotherhood of Nod... er, I mean the Order of The New Dawn, in a hackneyed story that's been done so many times before that anything less than parody is unacceptable at this point.

Units for the respective factions differ fundamentally, but are still well balanced. The Crayven vehicles (or terradynes) are all tracked or wheeled, while the Order's units all hover (that's why they're called hoverdynes, duh). As a result, the Order has the advantage of speed, while Crayven can accommodate heavier armor. Firepower is pretty evenly matched, even though Crayven forces use mostly projectile-based guns while the Order favors energy-based weapons.

Categories of units break down the same, no matter which side they're on. Each side has two infantry-squad types to choose from and four armored vehicle types (scout, light, medium, and heavy). Crayven Corp. has three support-squad types (artillery, anti-air, etc.) to the Order's four, but they make up for it with four aircraft types to the Order's three. Then, of course, you have your command APC that houses your commander and cannot be destroyed – otherwise, it's mission over. APC's have very little firepower, but they're tough to kill and can heal your other units. With the exception of the APC, all squads can be configured to hold different types of secondary weapons like mortars and depleted uranium rounds, as well as supplementary equipment like deployable sentry guns and health powerups.

A squad's behavior pattern can be configured as well. Setting a squad to be offensive, defensive, recon, or balanced will affect attributes such as firepower, armor, or speed. All of this can be done in the Configure Squads subscreen before each mission. This adds an interesting element to the game and gives it some much needed depth, since proper squad configuration is crucial to the success of certain missions.

Since there's no base-building or resource harvesting (that is, it happens behind the scenes and out of your control), you can't just crank out new units at will. You only have what you cram into your dropships at the beginning of each mission. And since units gain experience with each mission they finish, protecting them becomes priority one. Losing a veteran squad caused me to restart a mission more than once, not just for the sake of finishing said mission, but for

CGW RATED

PROS

Beautiful graphics enhance the sensation of real combat.

CONS

A storyline right out of a community college creative writing class.

Requirements: Pentium-II 233, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** P-II 333, 64MB RAM, 450 MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Glide or D3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN/Internet through WON.

Publisher: Sierra Studios • **Developer:** Massive Entertainment • **$50** • **www.sierrastudios.com/games/groundcontrol/**
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and violence.

all the subsequent ones that would be impacted. Of course, if there were an in-mission save like there should be, I wouldn't have had that problem. Unfortunately, at the dropship configuration screen, where information about squad veterancy would be most useful, it's nowhere to be found. Only in the post-mission statistics screen can you view a squad's accomplishments and level of experience.

Control That Ground

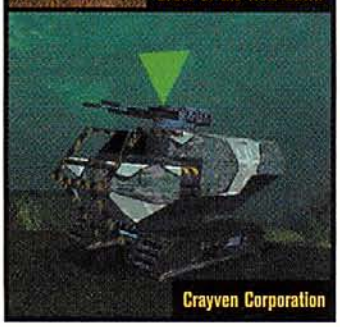
Controlling your squads is surprisingly simple, thanks to a highly intuitive interface. Icons representing each of your squads are grouped at the bottom of the screen, and contain health and activities information. Clicking on an icon selects that unit, and double-clicking centers that unit on the screen. Standard RTS controls are, of course, in place – like box-dragging and Ctrl-grouping – and you can set your units to guard each other. I wish players were given the option of setting closer guards, because escorts will always follow the escortees at quite a distance. Formations are also very simple to execute, but there need to be more than just three. Mostly I just switched between column formation while moving and line while attacking. Because friendly fire is something you have to watch out for, using the right formation in a firefight is key.

GROUND CONTROL does a great job capturing the greasy, bloody, smoky reality of combat, thanks in part to its spectacular 3D engine. The 3D terrain modeling is not just fantastically realistic and pretty (second only to MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2, in my opinion); it's also integral to the game. You must use the terrain to your tactical advantage by taking and holding the high ground, or using shadows and high grass to disguise your units. You can even tip the scales of war by attacking out of the sun. Sure, lots of strategy and/or war games have given you attack bonuses for the same things, but thanks to the go-anywhere camera, you can see these tactics from an almost first-person level. The close zooming camera lets you enjoy the nicely-detailed vehicle and building models up close and personal. In fact, the free-floating camera is surprisingly easy to use, considering how much ground it covers and how much it can do. Along with the command interface, it's one of the best design points of the game.

SUNSPOTS Jaeger units are already pretty stealthy, but with the suns to their backs, they're darn near invisible.

OH CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN The APC is the most important vehicle in the game. It houses your commander, repairs damaged units, and carts infantry around.

Order of the New Dawn



Crayven Corporation

The Game Remains the Same

Aside from the corny backstory, there's only one major flaw, but it's very major. The missions consist almost entirely of scripted events, and therefore lack any real enemy AI. Enemy emplacements will be in the exact same place every time, and enemy units will always show up at the same place at the same time. So once you've played a mission through, you can go back with artillery or any other unit and simply suppress each spot where an enemy showed up before. This probably explains why there's no skirmish mode in GROUND CONTROL, a style of game that relies heavily on clever AI. Fortunately, multiplayer mode is executed excellently, with teamplay implemented and multiple modes like deathmatch and capture the flag to choose from.

Ultimately, GROUND CONTROL is a good game that could have been much better. First-time developers Massive Entertainment made some rookie mistakes, but they also created a killer engine and an interface that's simple and fluid. They should be commended for that. And despite the flaws of the single-player experience, the multiplayer mode and custom game mode will allow the online community to breathe life into the lifeless areas of the game. CGW

SECONDARY SCHOOL All units (except the APC) have a secondary weapon that usually inflicts a lot more damage, but has a limited charge (no more than 3).

TWEAKER The squad configuration screen allows you to set a squad's layout and equipment, as well as a pattern of behavior.

Bad design drains the life out of VAMPIRE

I Vant To Suck

I once had a college roommate who was a fanatical player of White Wolf's original pen and paper *Vampire* role-playing game. Brad and his friends were so into the gaming world, in fact, that they used to play it out on the streets, painting their faces white and faux-stalking co-eds as they walked home from pubs. Call me crazy, but this didn't seem quite normal to me. I've been a little suspicious of anything *Vampire*-related since.

Judging by the quality of Nihilistic's new game, I've had every right to be. VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE–REDEMPTION is a vapid, repetitive debacle that will leave both casual role-players and the Brads of the world hunting for some garlic and holy water. The darkly sexual, urban/gothic themes that my roomie once enjoyed are portrayed with all the foreboding of a POKÉMON game played in a sunlit garden with your eight-year-old nephew. Fear comes not from the bloodsuckers on screen, but from the mind-numbing repetition necessitated by the lack of a proper save-game feature. Or, from the possibility that you'll dislocate a finger due to the incessant click-click combat that passes for role-playing.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE–REDEMPTION

reviewed by Brett Todd

"Is this all that remains of noble Christof?"

REDEMPTION opens in 12th Century Prague, the plot focusing on a crusader who belongs to the Order of the Swordbrethren: Christof Romuald. After developing a forbidden love for the nun who nursed him back to health following an injury, Christof gets wrapped up in evil dealings and is turned into a vampire in short order. He then takes part in political infighting between vampire clans, kills a *lot* of bad guys, and winds up in the 20th Century, seeking redemption for his tortured soul.

CHRISTOF'S CREW The higher class of Viennese vampire wears a lot of armor and comes packing enough serious hardware to get medieval on anyone's ass. And I thought Frank Langella was scary enough in his cape and tuxedo.

Sound exciting? It isn't. While there is always an urgent task awaiting your attention, the characters handling your marching orders would rather prattle on endlessly than let you go to it. Parts of the game lurch from one agonizingly long filibuster to another with only moments of gameplay to break the boredom. If the developers were trying to impress the notion of Christof's damnation upon the player, well, mission accomplished.

These dialogues are also filled with the most unintentionally funny lines I've heard since *Mystery Science Theater 3000* went off the air, with every plot point in the game accompanied by a laugh-out-loud comment. Try keeping a straight face when the Crusader himself mutters gems like "I like not this talk of the skin of virgins." Or when you hear howlers such as "Does he not know that I can crack his sealed crypt at any time with the Anointed Skull of the Lamia?!" A Charlton

SHUT UP ALREADY! Every character in REDEMPTION delivers a long, monotonous speech at one point or another. Chesty vamp babes, lecherous wizards, floating priests, giggly slave merchants, megalomaniacal theologians – all have way too much to say.

CGW RATED

PROS

One of the best looking role-playing games currently on the market...

CONS

...which doesn't matter because those pretty pictures are saddled with a boring story, insipid dialogue, no save-game feature, and infuriating repetition.

Requirements: Pentium-II 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 720MB hard drive space, Direct3D. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 400MHz, 128MB RAM, 945MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN or WON.net on the Internet (2-4 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Nihilistic Software • $38 • www.activision.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.

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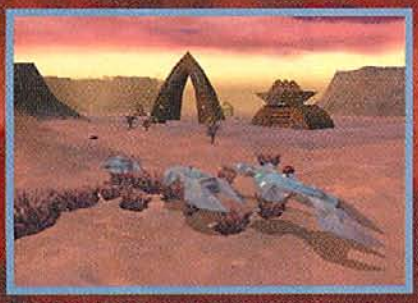

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Heston would've had a tough time pulling those lines off; the fifth-rate crew Nihilistic has assembled here doesn't stand a chance. All of the main characters speak with young American voices more appropriate for The Gap than for the grim saga of a man who's seeking to redeem his soul in old Prague and Vienna.

This clunker of a story is further hampered by awkward gameplay and game mechanics. First and foremost, there is no proper save-game feature. Aside from the autosave that kicks in every time you finish a level, the only way to save your progress is by clicking on the ankh or cross in a designated Haven. This leads to a great deal of infuriating repetition that will likely cause a lot of gamers to simply uninstall the game and return it. It's hard to believe that Nihilistic could be so woefully out of touch with the PC game market.

CHAOTIC EVIL Battles always turn into anarchic messes where you're surrounded by enemies. Not being able to pause the action while you give orders to your party members will take the control of combat almost completely out of your hands.

Ahh, the Idiots of the Night...

Role-playing is completely absent in REDEMPTION. In traditional RPG fashion, characters kill monsters to gather experience points and loot. The former is used to bump up attributes like Strength and Agility, and vampire Disciplines such as Mesmerize and Potence; the latter is spent on armor, weapons, and other handy items. Despite these similarities to other RPGs, I never felt like I was truly building characters. There's no real interaction with NPCs. Branching dialogue involves only two or three possible responses, all of which lead to similar results. The linear plot made me feel like I was just putting Christof and his pals through the motions.

And these idiots of the night don't make any beautiful music together. Once you get your coterie filled out with three or four members, gameplay moves from vaguely annoying to blood-boiling. Battles become chaotic messes where you simply click on the nearest baddie as quickly as possible in the hopes that it'll all be over soon. While the hack'n'slash combat is incessant (I must have killed over a hundred enemies trying to escape the Society of Leopold level alone), you can't pause the game to give orders or play with character AI. All you can do is take control of one party member and hope that the others do something reasonably intelligent.

LONDON CALLING Christof adapts pretty well to 20th-Century England. Flamethrowers and tasers don't faze him, and he's a natural with a pistol.

SO, YOU'RE, LIKE, ALREADY ENGAGED? At least it isn't hard to tell which nun Christof's got the hots for. Pert-breasted brides of Christ – like Anezka here – get all the attention when hunky Crusaders drop by the convent.

Most of the time they don't. They're more apt to shoot you in your back than watch it. They'll guzzle blood like it's going out of style, and then waste it by invoking Disciplines to fight every little Ghoul Rat that comes along. Replenishing blood during combat isn't much fun, either. Draining enemies is almost impossible because while one vampire tries to suck, the others will continue pounding the foe into dust. The only positive is that enemies are even dumber than allies are. They'll often watch battles, and sometimes won't move a muscle – even while you're slicing them to ribbons.

Buff, You Ever Been to Prague?

REDEMPTION is a pretty good-looking game. The 3D engine is attractive, albeit in a shallow, first-person-shooter style that doesn't emphasize the horrific settings and moody atmosphere. It supports 32-bit color and most high resolutions, though I found some battles pretty jerky when playing at a standard (for my system) 1024x768x32. Colored lighting really slowed things down. And there's more. The third-person point-of-view doesn't allow you to look up, and it obscures what's directly in front of the selected character by skewing at an odd angle. Characters don't move so much as lurch. Audio quality is generally poor, thanks to some popping and an apparent poor use of EAX.

The only saving grace for this title could be the Storyteller multiplayer mode. It allows gamers to recreate pen and paper role-playing sessions online, with one player directly controlling the adventure as the gamemaster. Storyteller could become an online sensation if the VAMPIRE community gets behind it. Games can already be found on WON.net, though they're limited to settings from the single-player campaign at the moment (albeit ones dressed up with new monsters and items placed out by the gamemaster), since the planned "Embrace" level editor has yet to be released.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE–REDEMPTION is one of the stupidest, most disappointing computer games that I've ever played. All of the license's promise has been completely wasted in a haze of poor scripting, community-theatre voice acting, and idiotic design decisions. Call Buffy Summers, polish up that crucifix, sharpen a few stakes, get thee to a nunnery – avoid this one by any means necessary. CGW

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A Trek combat game done right, but not in time to save the franchise

Academy Award

STAR TREK: KLINGON ACADEMY

reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

Playing *Star Trek* games has become such a numbing, familiar experience that one is tempted to write snappy review openings (like this one) before the CD even hits the drive. So what does Interplay go and do after driving their *Trek* license into the ground for years? They actually make a decent *Trek* space simulator. KLINGON ACADEMY is not perfect, mind you, but it is certainly the best sim ever made with the *Trek* universe. Despite some bugs and rough interface conventions, it is a remarkably polished product.

Space sims have long taken their cues from *Star Wars*, with its WWII dog-fighting feel: fast and nimble. The *Star Trek* world, however, has always approached space combat as though it were a naval battle: slower, heavier, and more tactical. It's been very hard to turn that into a balanced game that is both thrilling and an accurate reflection of the series. STARFLEET ACADEMY took a stab, but failed due to out-of-date graphics, overly complex controls, and a limited view of the scene. With its slick new engine and more refined design, KLINGON ACADEMY largely overcomes those problems.

TRACTOR PULL The tractor beam is hard to deploy successfully, but it can be helpful in holding an enemy while you board him.

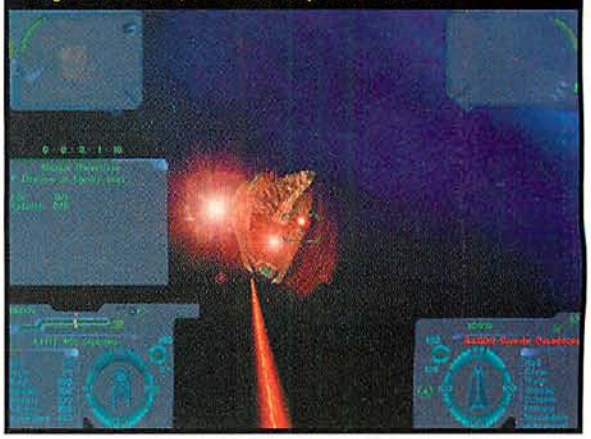
It Is a Good Day to Die

Spread over 25 narrative missions and infinite custom encounters (both solo and multiplayer), it is a game of quite impressive depth and epic scope. There is an amazing array of ships, from the smallest, most nimble Bird of Prey with its forward-facing weapons, to enormous Dreadnoughts bristling with guns on every side. Naturally, you play as the Klingons in the scripted mission, but there are also plenty of Federation, Romulan, Thoilian, Gorn, and Sha'kurian vessels, objects, and stations. The game offers a very diverse experience, allowing for faster (though never really "fast") turning dogfights to multi-ship fleet encounters complete with escorts flying cover, capital ships firing broadsides, and support vessels. In the narrative game, you start with a small ship and move up, but in the quick-game menu, any ship or combination of ships can be configured for a custom encounter. Multiplayer has eight slots for team or solo games, and competitors spend points to buy and outfit their ships.

A sim like this can easily devolve into confusion and micro-management hell, as was the case with STARFLEET ACADEMY. KLINGON avoids this in several ways. First of all, the view options are much better, with an external camera and views out all sides. The default, straight-ahead perspective works fine for ships with only a forward-firing battery. A special gunnery mode provides a decent solution to the problem of controlling weapons on four sides. Essentially, this is a rotating "gunner's chair" that enables you to lock a target and visually track it as it flies around your ship. A strip represents a flattened-out 360-degree panorama of your situation. When an enemy comes into range of a weapon, an icon lights up to show which side (port, starboard, fore, aft) can now fire. In this way, you can man all weapons on all sides from a single place, while a helmsman steers.

The many stations essential to controlling a large ship have also been streamlined without losing any of their power. The engineer,

THE FEDS In quick and multiplayer missions, you can select from the ships of six different races, all with slightly different instrument color and design schemes. Here, a Federation ship attacks the Gorn.



CGW RATED

PROS

Good balance of action and tactics; interface renders many complex elements manageable; tons of gameplay, thanks to custom missions.

CONS

A bad ship-warping bug; ships tend to ram when they should evade; missions can become very difficult.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, DirectX sound and video card, 3D acceleration. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 400MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 1-8 players via TCP/IP and LAN.

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** 14 Degrees East • **$44** • **www.interplay.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen

helm, science, security, medical, targeting, and weapons stations provide fine control over a dazzling array of ship components. You may need to tend to damage, reallocate power, steer, scan a target, prep sick bay to handle the wounded, beam out a security force to take over a ship, and overcharge weapons in a single battle. This could easily overwhelm, but a combination of fairly-smart officer AI (which improves with experience) and macros makes it much easier. Of particular importance are customizable power macros that instantly reconfigure a ship for different purposes, ranging from offensive action to warping out. There are plenty of mappable hot keys to instantly get to the command you want (though more of these would have been welcome). The result is a very satisfying balance between commanding and fighting.

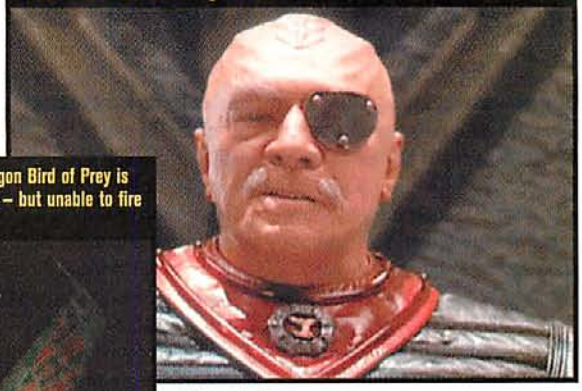
CLOAK AND DAGGERS A Klingon Bird of Prey is cloaked, which makes him invisible – but unable to fire until he de-cloaks.

Glorious Visuals

While prone to frame skips – and not state-of-the-art, visually – KLINGON ACADEMY looks very good. The models are excellent, but some textures are a little rough. Damage modeling is very impressive, with effective explosions and entire sections of huge starships flying off. The designers have taken great pains not only to create an interesting looking "spacescape," but one that also has some effect on gameplay. Battles may take place in the orange fog of a gas giant or inside blue planetary rings. To give this some added weight, each landscape may have an effect on ship performance. For instance, solar coronas affect energy-based weapons and kill crews when shields go down, while others impair sensors or effect shields.

The movies that run between missions are quite nicely done. The plot line is nothing special – a cadet leaves the Academy, takes part in a Klingon invasion, foils yet another traitor subplot, etc. – but the execution is very professional. Essentially a prequel to *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, KLINGON ACADEMY uses Christopher Plummer to great effect as the Shakespeare-spouting General Chang, one of the few interesting Klingon characters. Several other good performances – including David Warner reprising his role as Chancellor Gorkon – and some decent dialogue, character insight, and production values make these sequences appealing despite the boiler-plate storyline. A handy utility lets you view these scenes as a continuous, 90-minute movie without playing the game. The movies account for the whopping six-disc size of the package.

NICE EYE-PATCH BOLTS Christopher Plummer is excellent as General Chang, though it is sometimes hard to take him seriously when he ends each scene muttering "kaPLOP!"



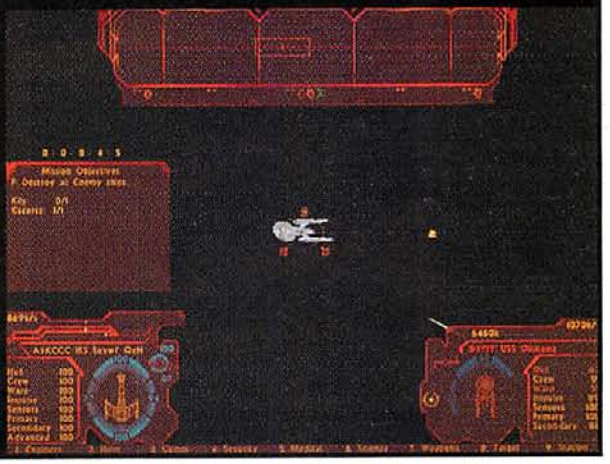
A Tear in Space

While there are some reports of bugs involving hard crashes, I did not experience a single lockup. I did, however, encounter one hell of a glitch over and over again. When you warp into a new sector, you do so cloaked. This gives you plenty of time to assess the situation, gather your wits and forces, and approach the target ships. A sensible strategy is to close in to weapons range under cloak, then de-cloak and fire from a rear quarter. This gives you several opening salvos before most ships can respond and turn. When de-cloaking at close range, however, the target ship often vanishes. Almost every time it does this, the ship reappears on your starboard and fires a full spread, usually causing some hull damage. It all happens in a second, but I could get the glitch to repeat about half the times I tried, most often when I was very close.

Aside from this bug, which is admittedly pretty heinous, the game runs very well. Missions are interesting and complex, with many layers and objectives. The only really annoying missions are those which involve bombing a target on a planet, since targets can be small and hard to find. Combined with sometimes overwhelming odds and no in-mission save, this makes the game grindingly hard at times. While enemy AI is okay at attack and maneuver, it also has a tendency to ram when it should evade. All of these problems are frustrating, but manageable. The important thing is that after years and years of giving us awful *Trek* games, Interplay has atoned by creating one of the best. Against all odds and expectations, KLINGON ACADEMY emerges as a terrific, entertaining experience. CGW

DIE, HUMAN SCUM A Fed ship bites the dust in an impressive explosion of bits and pieces. Large pieces can fall off ships in the course of a battle.

GUNNER'S MATE The gunnery chair tracks a locked target while displaying the complete situation in the strip at the top of the screen.



EVOLVA uproots the tree of life

You Say You Wanna Evolution?

Incremental changes over time are fine, but if you want to kick alien butt, you better be able to adapt quickly. As one of the EVOLVA, you will be able to do precisely that. Although the plot is generic (cleanse yet another alien infestation), the ability to mutate your team of Genohunters by extracting DNA from the giblets of slain enemies adds interesting evolutionary elements to this third-person shooter. And since each of your four Genohunters has different strengths and weaknesses, there are strategic considerations as well.

At the heart of this genre-blending game is the mutator screen. Once you absorb enough alien DNA, you have the option to mutate each of your Genohunters. With each mutation, there are two evolutionary paths to choose from. Do you prefer to upgrade weapons or to increase speed and agility? Do you balance your Genohunter team or make each member a specialist? The choices are yours, and theoretically, you have nearly an infinite number of mutation possibilities. In many cases, however, the differences are too subtle to have much impact. Still, by the end of the game, you will have seen more mutations than a zookeeper in Chernobyl.

EVOLVA

reviewed by Joe "Biter" Bailey

Totally Organic...

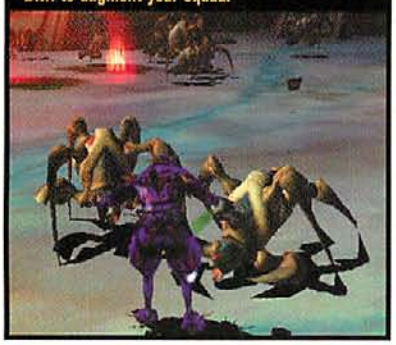
As most of the game takes place outdoors, there are (thankfully) no industrial-style corridors. Instead, the texture palette and "living architecture" give the game an organic feel. Even indoors, EVOLVA manages to avoid slipping into the dreaded "corridor crawl" by using both curved and sloping tunnels. Although some of the later levels may seem barren, the only visual disruption to the feel of the game comes from cartoon-like crystal structures. Sometimes less is more.

Other visual treats include a semi-reflective skin for your squad of Genohunters that changes color based on the lighting. Your Genohunters will also change appearance depending on their evolutionary path and weapon selection. Weapon pyrotechnics do not disappoint. Although visual quality can be adjusted for your machine, at lower settings the graphics can be unimpressive. More importantly, at very low settings, the fogging distance decreases so much that ranged weapons lose their value. The resulting surprise attacks will lead to frequent reloads.

THE NAME OF THE GAME Evolving – it's not just a good idea, it's awful purty too.

IT'S ALIVE Even the architecture of the gameworld lives and breathes.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST A typical large-scale battle in EVOLVA not only provides excitement, but once you win you can suck up all the monsters' DNA to augment your squad.



Kleenex Anyone?

Of the 10 weapons available by game's end, one really stands out. For lack of a better description, the weapon is a lethal loogie. Unlike UT's bio-sludge, this ordnance comes from within. And not only will it slow your enemies down, it is also highly flammable – watch out for the backsplash. Defensive devices are also available and include temporary invisibility and a shield generator. All weapons include a secondary mode, and each is useful in specific circumstances.

EVOLVA's levels are most effective when they present challenges other than gauntlet runs. The sinking-island level is a real gem. Fighting off aliens while racing rising water create an urgency that makes for excellent gaming. While movement through the 12 large levels often requires brains as well as brawn, strategic choices are limited to placement options and choosing the best team member for the current task. There are no formations and you cannot specify modes such as defend or hold. Thankfully, the AI is good enough that you can concentrate on the one Genohunter under your direct control without worrying about the others.

The biggest weakness in EVOLVA is the multiplayer-connection interface. You need to know the IP address of the host server to join a game, but there is no utility for finding one. Note to developers: Multiplayer gaming should never be more than three clicks away, period. As an alternative, you can play the game on Heat.net. Unfortunately, the few times opponents were found there, network latency was absolutely abysmal.

Despite the connection issues, EVOLVA gets most things right, and it is both a challenging and enjoyable game. Hopefully, natural selection will keep this one on the store shelves for a long time. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

It's a fun, pretty, challenging, cross-genre shooter.

CONS

Multiplayer could use some work.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 450MB hard drive space, 64MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 4MB Voodoo or equivalent, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, TNT II Ultra or equivalent. **3D Support:** Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Computer Artworks Ltd. • $45 • www.interplay.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood, gore, and violence.

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BOTTLENECK Terrain features create situations like this, where opposing forces come to loggerheads in a canyon.

TANK RUSH While the game encourages deeper tactics, sometimes you just have to run shielded tanks at an enemy base.

EARTH 2150 exceeds its standard RTS model with depth and subtlety

Rich Earth

EARTH 2150
reviewed by Tom Chick

If we're going to have yet another real-time strategy clone with a gratuitous 3D graphics engine, it should at least be as good as this one.

EARTH 2150 is rendered in full polygonal glory, so you can rotate the map, tilt it, zoom in and out, and watch tanks jostle and bob over hill and dale. This is almost entirely useless while actually playing the game, but you'll feel like you're getting your money's worth from your accelerator card, and it makes for good screenshots. So bless their German hearts at TopWare Interactive for actually making a great real-time strategy game to go along with their fancy 3D graphics, because God knows the last thing we need is just another pointlessly pretty engine.

Before we get too carried away singing their praises, we'd like to remind TopWare and their publisher that we don't appreciate it when they leave all the important details out of a game's manual so they can charge us $20 for a strategy guide. There are big, fat, ozone-layer-sized holes in the EARTH 2150 manual where there should have been lists, tables, and explanations. Forcing us through a lot of trial and error because they couldn't be bothered to give us information we need is not a good way to ensure replay value.

Fortunately, there are other things in EARTH 2150 to ensure replay value. The three sides aren't as dramatically different as STARCRAFT's, but they have subtle strengths and weaknesses that emerge the longer you play the game. Researching your way up each side's technology tree forces some hard choices, often dictated by what your opponent is doing. Does he have lots of flying units? Back off the slow cannons and improve your chain guns and 20mm shells. Is he throwing slow armored chassis at you? Go for the lasers to overheat his metal behemoths. Is he putting shields on his buildings and units? Forget the energy weapons and research long-range rockets. Since you won't be able to unlock the whole tech tree in most games, someone will eventually trump someone else, tilting the balance of technology and gaining the upper hand. This is no game about mere tank rushes.

Because there's a solid AI at work, you'll get a lot of mileage from the flexible skirmish mode and the streamlined map editor. EARTH 2150's AI succeeds in the two areas where most RTS games fail – the computer is adept at unit pathfinding and at launching effective assaults.

You'll also get a lot of mileage from the single-player campaigns, which are good for playing several times over with their clever balance of tactical necessity and long-term strategic thinking. To win the campaign, you have to save up a certain amount of resources. This is money in the bank, as it were, that you won't be able to spend on building or research during a mission. You have to minimize losses and use your experienced units wisely, so there's a deeper sense of involvement than you get in most mission-based RTS games.

Early on, it seems that EARTH 2150 suffers from feature creep, taking an "everything but the kitchen sink" approach to gameplay: Weather, diurnal cycles, modular unit design, tunneling, ammo supplies, weapons checks and balances, and battle plans down to individual units are some of the things you'll have to manage while fighting battles. But since you can issue orders while the game is paused, and since you can automate much of this, the game is easier than you'd expect. What emerges after a three- or four-mission learning process is a deep and varied game with a shiny veneer. And what emerges after several hours of exploring its features is one of the best, and best-looking, RTS games in the crowded genre. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
TopWare managed to fuse together a few dozen diverse elements and fashion a great RTS...

CONS
...but they forgot to finish the game manual.

Requirements: Pentium-II 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 451MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 400MHz, 64MB RAM, 961MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players), modem (2 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Mattel Interactive • Developer: TopWare Interactive • $40 • www.mattel.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

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Simply the best golfing experience available on the PC

It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

The best golf sim available for the PC. Them's fighting words to a lot of PC golf nuts, to whom the LINKS or JACK NICKLAUS series are the epitome of all a golf sim should be. But Sierra's PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000, with its wonderful new TrueSwing 3 interface, provides the most golfing fun that can be had short of actually hitting the links.

Golf sims have used some type of "click-meter" interface for the swing since Moses wore shorts. But the problem with these is that they are inherently artificial and distance the player from the action on the screen. Line up the shot, click a spot on the screen, try to catch a line as it hits a mark, click again, then try to catch the line as hits another mark with another click. Then sit back and watch the on-screen golfer swing.

Compare that with the mouse swing in PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000, in which you move the on-screen golfer's club into the back swing and forward swing in synch with your mouse, the golfer's every movement reflecting your mouse movements in real time. As simple as it sounds, when executed properly (as it is here) the difference in the gameplay is enormous. Factors such as the tempo of your swing make a big difference in your shots – just as in the real deal. Shots around the green become a matter of kinesthetic intuition, rather than a rational deliberation over clicks on a swing-meter. Stuck under some trees? Instead of clicking on a "punch shot" option in a menu, click-click-clicking, and then watching the computer make the shot, with TrueSwing you place the ball forward in your stance, adjust your feet, take a short backswing, and "poke" the ball low and hard. And the first time you do that – and the golfer reacts in real time to your hand movement and executes the shot the same way you'd do it on the real course – you'll sit back, smile, and realize: This is virtual golf at its best.

A superb swing interface would be wasted without a good golf simulation in which to use it. The good news continues, as PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000 boasts an impressive physics model, tweaked to be even better than last year's version. Courses are rendered in beautiful 3D, with totally configurable cameras. Tour seasons can be created, each tournament having its specific entry requirements, cut, and purse, with career records and earnings tracked. If you've ever played weekend golf with your buddies, placing wild side bets on greenies, sandies, and so on, then you'll be pleased to see that side bets are available in the game. Computer opponents can be created with any combination of skills, and a learning mode can be turned on, allowing the AI player to increase in skill with experience. If you want to play other human players, you can play via LAN or on Won.net (alas, no direct IP to IP Internet play).

Last, but far from least, is the course designer, which is not only a blast to toy with, but ensures a wealth of free new courses on the Internet. Improvements in the course designer allow courses designed in PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000 to be more detailed than those for the 1999 version.

In the end, TrueSwing 3 sets this game as high above its competition as Tiger Woods sits above his. If you want the best golf sim experience available today, PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000 is the only choice. CGW

CLEANING UP OK, if I clean this piece of grass out of my 3 Wood I might have a shot at the green...

DO THE HUSTLE All the side bets that make weekend golf "interesting" are available in PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000.

CGW RATED

PROS

A swing interface that makes everything else feel archaic; the course architect ensures a wealth of free courses.

CONS

Internet play is limited to Won.net.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, mouse. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM.
3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** 4 players via Internet (through Won.net), IPX/LAN, or modem.

Publisher: Sierra Sports • Developer: Headgate Studios • $30 • www.sierrasports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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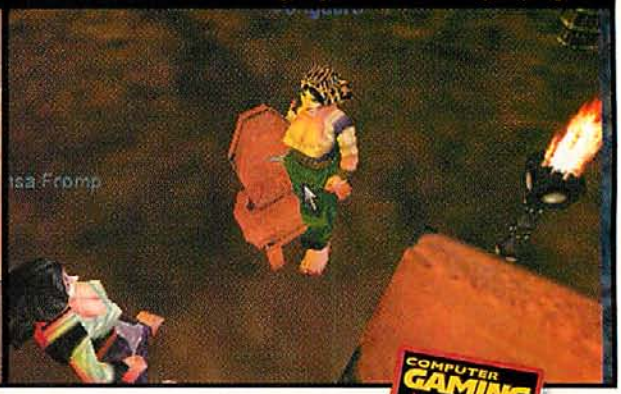
DEM BONES There's plenty of big game for the Iskar to hunt.

BIMBO BAGGINS Even the very, very small have some very, very large...



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

But I still haven't run into that hot blond elf

EverBreast

EVERQUEST: RUINS OF KUNARK

reviewed by Alex Handy

Aside from the unabashedly sexist ad campaign (you've seen the hot elf chained to the wall while her busty friends try to free her from the evil lizardman and scantily-clad Drow... oops, I mean dark elf), it's hard to find problems with EVERQUEST. It's even harder to find problems with RUINS OF KUNARK, the expansion for the wildly successful massively-multiplayer online role-playing game that has destroyed the lives of thousands. With RUINS OF KUNARK, Verant takes the world of Norrath into new territory with the addition of a new island, a new race, and new baddies to thump.

Wide Open Spaces

Easily the most exciting feature of KUNARK is the expanded world. The continent of Kunark is home to an incredible variety of areas for players to explore, ranging from the newbie-friendly plains and swamps around the Iskar city of Cabilis, to the deadly Frontier Mountains and the Emerald Jungle, suitable for highly experienced players. The new areas help alleviate the overcrowding that has been dragging EVERQUEST down over the past few months. With this update, Verant also has addressed the problem of players camping out by enemy respawn locations. While this can still be a problem on the main continents of Norath (albeit much less so), monsters abound in such large numbers that there's no need to camp out and wait for them. Fortunately, there are plenty of ships that will take you to Kunark, allowing players to quickly spread out over the new southern lands.

The new race and its new tracts of land have been welcomed with open arms by EverQuesters. The Iskar, despite being only a few months old, are a thriving race. And now that players can exceed the previous limit of level 50, there are a lot of exceptionally powerful lizardmen and lizardwomen running amok.

To the casual observer, the most obvious improvement to the game is the graphics engine. Everything in the world of Norrath is now alive. You can actually see characters fidget, animals ripple with breath, and trees sway in the breeze. It's unusual to see such graphic splendor in an online RPG, but RUINS OF KUNARK manages to display some of the best graphics anywhere on the PC.

Chinks in the Chainmail

There are still a few problems with EVERQUEST, however. For starters, the lag and overcrowding are steadily increasing again. It seems as though Verant is plugging a dam with this expansion (albeit with a large finger), but the pressure of overcrowding and hideous ping times is beginning to build again. Hopefully, the addition of KUNARK will help prolong the inevitable until other solutions can be found. There are also a few quirks in the interface to deal with: Some mouse clicks can get lost when you're rummaging through your inventory, and it's occasionally difficult to select targets by clicking on them.

RAT PACK And yes... the rats are still here.

ALONE IN THE DARK The new engine allows for some amazing new lighting effects.

These are extremely minor problems, however, when you consider that EVERQUEST delivers online role-playing like no other game right now. Almost everything here is done perfectly. In every genre there's a leader that unquestionably beats out the competition: EVERQUEST is the HALFLIFE of the online RPG world. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Great graphics; fabulous gameplay; newbie-friendly; much improved pings; less crowding.

CONS

Some interface glitches; servers are filling up fast; may be smothered by its own success.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator card w/ 8MB, 600MB hard drive space, Internet connection. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 400MHz, 128MB RAM, DSL or cable modem. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Duh.

Publisher: Sony • Developer: Verant • $40 setup, plus $10 per month. • www.everquest.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood and gore, suggestive themes.

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QUICK HITS

THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR: CENTURY OF WARFARE

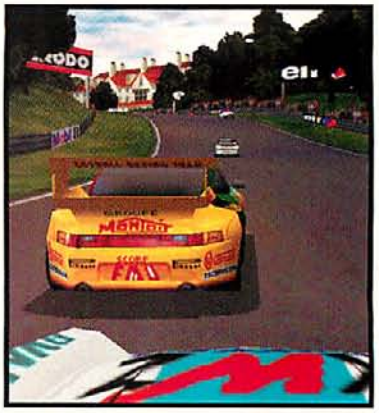
Wargamers can be forgiven for being a little confused by the succession of titles (six in total) released by TalonSoft under the rubric of its THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR (TOAW) game system. CENTURY OF WARFARE (COW) combines all five previous titles into a single package, along with some additional scenarios to boot.

Like most compilation packs, its value depends in part on which components you've already paid for. The conversion of TOAW to the TOAW2 engine revitalized many older scenarios; user-created scenarios – many of which are excellent, by the way – can be imported as well. COW also features new WWI scenarios, and even a few unadvertised new WWII battles.

★★★★★

If you own both TOAW 2 and TOAW: WARGAME OF THE YEAR, you might not get full value for your money from COW. Otherwise, it represents a significant addition to a proven and highly enjoyable game system and is worthy of any wargamer's library. *–Tim Carter*

Genre: Wargame • **Publisher:** TalonSoft • $40 • www.talonsoft.com • **RSAC Rating:** Violence; damage to realistic objects.



TEST DRIVE: LEMANS

Genre: Driving • **Publisher:** Infogrames • **Developer:** Eutechnyx • $30 • www.infogrames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Infogrames' latest arcade-racer offering, TEST DRIVE LE MANS, touts a realistic, 24-hour, Le Mans-style race. But if sitting in front of your computer driving for 24 hours adds to realism, then why would you play an arcade racer for 24 hours? The shoddiness of this game begins with the controls: The game also had problems recognizing my assortment of steering wheels, and so I was forced to use the keyboard. A keyboard just doesn't cut it for this dedicated racing-sim guru. Racing in arcade and championship modes was fine, but with no options to adjust the computer-controlled cars, a lack of a rear-view mirror, a bland announcer, and no multiplayer features, racing TEST DRIVE LE MANS quickly became tedious and boring. Even though the game has serviceable graphics, nice visual effects, and decent arcade-style racing, it didn't live up to its promise of a realistic driving experience. In the end, you're better off dumping a turbo charger into your old Toyota Corolla than driving this box of rusty bolts. *–Wade "Sensei" Hermes*

★½

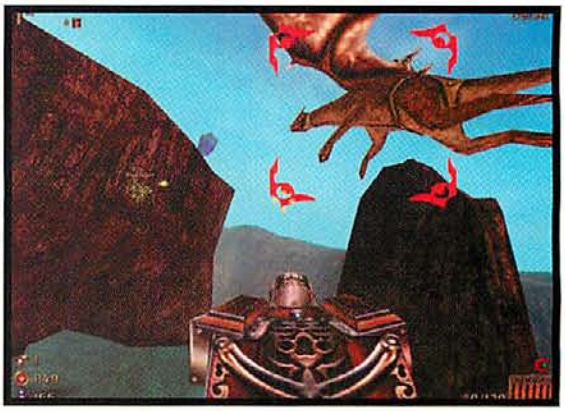
FLYING HEROES

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** Take 2 Interactive • **Developer:** Pterodon and Illusion Softworks • $30 • www.talonsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence, mild language.

Do not be fooled by its value pricing and weak cover art; FLYING HEROES is a surprisingly enjoyable game.

It offers a fresh take on the popular tournament-style shooter, with the added dimension of flight. All gaming action takes place in flyable "aircraft" which includes dragons, zeppelins, and winged beer-barrels. The weaponry is just as diverse, but is mostly derivative of things you've seen before. Graphics are well rendered, with all of the expected bells and whistles. The game improves the standard single-player tournament ladder by adding economic incentives; frags and side-quests earn you money that can be used to upgrade your "aircraft" and weapons, and a loan shark is provided for those times when you need money immediately (just make sure you pay him off quickly). Regrettably, online play is still an unknown due to a lack of players on **Heat.net** (probably because of the game's recent release).

★★★½



Had FLYING HEROES run without a hitch, I could have ignored the adequate but uninspired sound and cheesy voice acting, and would probably have rated it four stars. Unfortunately, I had to disable my joystick port to get it to run. Despite these minor faults, if you like tournament-style shooters, FLYING HEROES deserves a look. *–Joe "Biter" Bailey*

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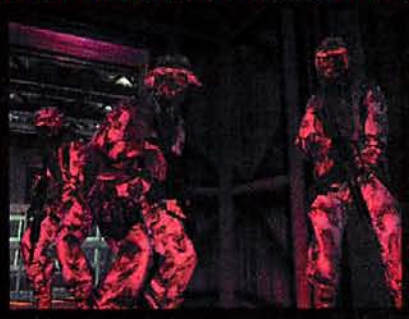

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

msn Gaming ZONE

FREE INTERNET GAME PLAY

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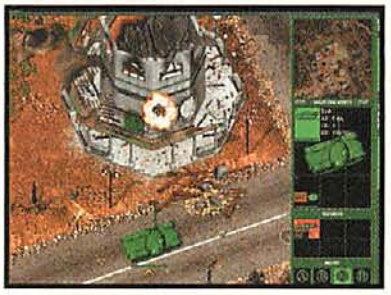
ARMY MEN: WORLD WAR and ARMY MEN: AIR TACTICS



3DO's toy-soldier game ARMY MEN, in which squads of eternally-warring Green and Tan miniatures spring to life for your plastic-melting pleasure, created some excitement upon its January 1999 debut. Yet, underneath the cool concept lay a title hindered by sloppy controls, repetitive gameplay, and problematic programming – a situation made all the worse when subsequent sequels offered precious few upgrades. Into this lackluster environment wade the latest installments in the bargain-priced franchise, ARMY MEN: WORLD WAR and ARMY MEN: AIR TACTICS.

Neither truly revitalizes the franchise, nor do they effectively deal with key trouble spots. Movement continues to be mired by clumsy controls that'll have you inadvertently bumping into and becoming trapped in the scenery. Ordnance frequently misses its mark, even when crosshairs and tracers indicate a direct hit. And both are plagued with jumpy camera movement, potential lockups, and a top-down perspective that looks antiquated and unfairly conceals your enemy.

★★½☆☆

AIR TACTICS is certainly the more annoying of the two. Though you do get a chance to fly an attack helicopter into Tan territory and experience numerous real and miniaturized environments among 20 unique missions, the chopper-confined gameplay feels limiting and is simply more work than play. Irritating insects plague your every move. Elevation adjustments are automatic and dictated by the height of the surrounding terrain. And the lack of independent viewing means you can't scroll over upcoming enemy strongholds in advance of flying into them.

WORLD WAR, on the other hand, has the common decency to pack a less restrictive design and a little variety within the flawed ARMY MEN framework. It lets you switch controls between soldiers, and command several men concurrently, navigate a variety of WWII-inspired vehicles, and utilize a wide range of weapons, from mortars to sniper rifles to napalm air strikes. The pre-game tutorial is instructive, and the independent camera control offers a graphic lay of the land before you get there. And to make things interesting, your own men are susceptible to friendly fire. Far from perfect, ARMY MEN: WORLD WAR is the better of two lackluster games. *–Gordon Goble*

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** 3DO • $20 • www.3do.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

SIMCITY 3000 UNLIMITED

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Maxis • $40 • www.simcity.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

If you're a SimMegalomaniac suffering from extreme SimWithdrawl because of a lack of new challenges and tortures to impose upon your SimCitizenry, your new fix has arrived. Unfortunately, like most fixes, this one's a bit overpriced.

Among the highlights for this term is the Building Architect, which allows you to design any size or complexity of building; it'll bring out the Frank Lloyd Wright in all of us. With a few mouse-clicks, you can also convert a city to a European – or the especially cool-looking Oriental – architecture set.

★★★★☆

Also new are the mission-based scenarios (including nuclear disasters, freedom from mob rule, etc.). Those with Job-like patience can create their own with the extremely complicated Scenario Editor.

Feeling a tad sadistic? Then introduce your loyal subjects to new disasters, including Toxic clouds, whirlpools, locust plagues, and falling space junk (but hey, Maxis, where's Godzilla?).

If you're new to the SIMCITY series, UNLIMITED is an excellent introduction to the genre. But I think it would have been more fair to faithful fans for Maxis to have priced this as an add-on disk for SIMCITY 3000, instead of forcing current owners to buy the game again. It's enough to make 3000 lose a few points in the popularity polls. *–Mark Brooks*

LEMMINGS REVOLUTION

Genre: Puzzle • **Publisher:** TalonSoft • **Developer:** Psygnosis/Take 2 • $20 • www.talonsoft.com **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Success in game design is a double-edged sword. Sure, the money is nice, but a successful game inevitably demands a sequel, which almost invariably requires the perversion of an elegantly-balanced design with gimmickry in the name of novelty.

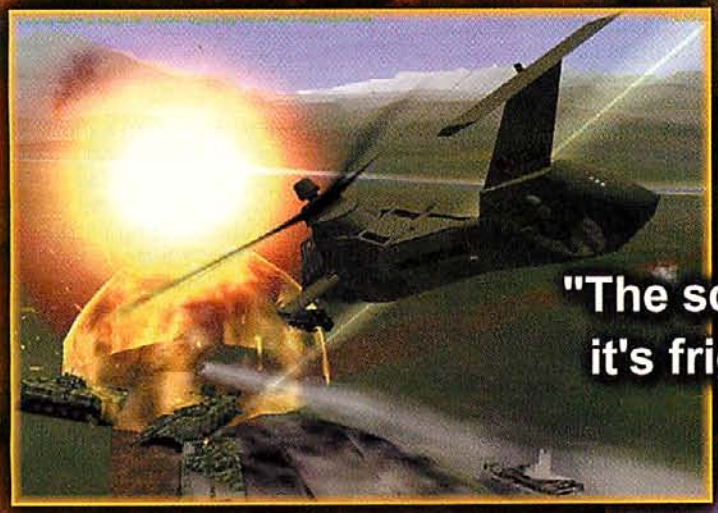
Fortunately, the gimmicky twist employed in LEMMINGS REVOLUTION – wrapping the traditionally 2D levels around a 3D cylinder – adds nothing of interest to the long-running LEMMINGS franchise, which means that it does nothing to pervert the elegant simplicity of one of the best puzzle games going. Once your eye acclimates to the whirling 3D weirdness, you'll find your good ol' lemming friends up to their good ol' tricks – blindly bopping their cute green mops toward horrendous deaths, requiring gamers to step in and help the tribe block, bash, build, and climb its way out of 100 deviously designed death-trap levels.

★★★★☆

New puzzle elements, like gravity-flipping gates, transporters, laser switches, and trampolines add April freshness to this perennial puzzle-fan favorite. *–Chris Lombardi*

ENEMY ENGAGED

RAH-66 COMANCHE
VERSUS
KA-52 HOKUM



"The scenarios are so realistic, it's frightening." PC Gamer

"The rush of flying at 30 feet and 90 knots is unsurpassed." Combat Sim

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PC CD ROM

3D ACCELERATOR REQUIRED

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A PARTITION BACKUP MAKES REINSTALLING WINDOWS ALMOST PLEASANT

Saving Your World

by Loyd Case

Here's the situation: Windows has become slow as molasses over a period of 18 months. Defragging doesn't help; the uninstaller chokes; and every time you run scandisk, it always finds errors. So, you back up your critical data and reformat the hard drive.

Since you've been housecleaning, you decide it's time to upgrade your motherboard, so you now have a nice new board that supports PC133 memory. The chipset on the new board is so new, you've had to install a veritable host of new drivers. You finally load up a few games, your office applications, DirectX, and all your hardware drivers. You're done, right?

Wrong. If you'd like to save yourself this headache again in six months or a year, then you're not done yet. Before you start back into hot and heavy gaming, it's time to back up the main partition on your hard drive. If you ever have to do a clean install of Windows from scratch, a partition backup makes life much, much easier.

Your Hard Drive

Partitioning the drive is simply building a layout of data on the drive that your operating system can interpret as volumes, files, and directories. The base volume is the partition. A single drive can actually be split into multiple partitions. For example, you may have a single, large drive split into two partitions, a C and a D drive. I generally prefer to have two separate, smaller hard drives, each partitioned into a single volume. Call me paranoid, but having two physical drives gives me a sense of security.

Backing up the partition is essentially making a "snapshot" of your system at one moment in time. When you back up a partition, you back up everything about the partition: the directory structure as well as the files. However, modern partition backup tools are very smart about sizing partitions, so you don't necessarily have to reinstall the backup file to an identical drive—which makes partition backup an ideal tool for upgrading hard drives also.

IMPORTANT!

Read this article in its entirety before following any of the steps in it! Before you nuke any drive partitions, be sure to back up your data files, and copy the info to reconnect to your ISP so you can access the Internet after reinstalling.

The Ghost in the Machine

There are several partition backup utilities on the market, but my tool of choice is Norton Ghost, which comes in both corporate and personal versions. The personal version is very inexpensive, and pretty easy to use.

If you have two hard drives in your system, your best bet is to have one be your everyday drive, and put the Ghost image on the other. That way, should your main drive go belly up, you've still

GADGET OF THE MONTH

While the Cult of Palm is alive and well and living here at *CGW*, could it be that the PalmPilot has met its match? Compaq's new PDA, which uses Microsoft's Powered Pocket PC operating system, offers a color 320x240x4096 color TFT display, 32MB of memory, audio support (MP3 and WMA playback), and standard applications like Microsoft Pocket Word, Pocket Excel, Outlook, Internet Explorer, and Windows Media Player. Its USB connectivity makes hot-syncing a much faster process, and will help move MP3 and WMA files onto the unit faster, too. The unit's rated battery life is 12 hours per charge, but your mileage may vary. The iPAQ also has a standard PC Card slot for expansion, so you can add a network card, modem, or additional storage. Compaq is also offering an 11Mbps wireless networking card, making network connectivity as easy as coming within operating range of a wireless LAN.

Compaq iPAQ H3600 Pocket PC • $499 • www.compaq.com/products/handhelds/pocketpc/

got a clean image to restore to the new drive. But if you're living on a single hard drive, and many of us are, you'll want to use Windows' FDISK utility to create two partitions on that drive. So follow these steps:

Create a bootable floppy disk (format the disk in Windows and select the "copy system files" option), and copy these utilities to it: FDISK, FORMAT, and MSCDEX. These can be found in the C:\WINDOWS\COMMAND folder. You'll also want your CD-ROM drive's DOS driver.

You'll need to create two DOS startup text files, AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS. In CONFIG.SYS, you'll want to set up your CD-ROM drive's driver with the following:

DEVICE=HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=MTMCD.SYS /D:CDROM

In AUTOEXEC.BAT, you'll want to have a line for MSCDEX, DOS' CD-ROM extension:

MSCDEX /D:CDROM

Before you nuke anything, make sure that your system can boot using this floppy disk, and that you can read a CD-ROM disk in DOS. If you can't, check the CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT startup files to make sure you've got the right syntax, and that all the needed files are on the floppy disk.

Now that you've backed up your needed data files (you did, didn't you?), put the bootable floppy into the floppy drive, and boot using it. Make sure you've got your Windows CD-ROM handy. Now, take several deep breaths, and run the FDISK utility. Go ahead and delete the primary partition.

In creating two new partitions, I generally use the two-thirds/one-third rule, making the C drive the larger partition and the D drive the smaller. So, on a 20GB drive, the primary partition would be 13.4GB, and the second partition would be 6.6GB. Once you've created these partitions, reboot your system using the floppy disk, and now format both of these new partitions. You'll have some time here, so go grab a cold one.

Once both new drive partitions are formatted, you're ready to run Windows setup.

Once the Windows install completes, get your ISP software or configurations in place, and make sure you can connect to the Internet. Add graphics and sound card drivers to taste and simmer. Now, install DirectX 7.0a, and whatever business apps you use on a daily basis.

Now we're ready to take our "snapshot" using Ghost. In our example, we'll look at backing up a partition, but backing up a drive is pretty much the same thing, except that you can include multiple partitions.

BACK IT UP

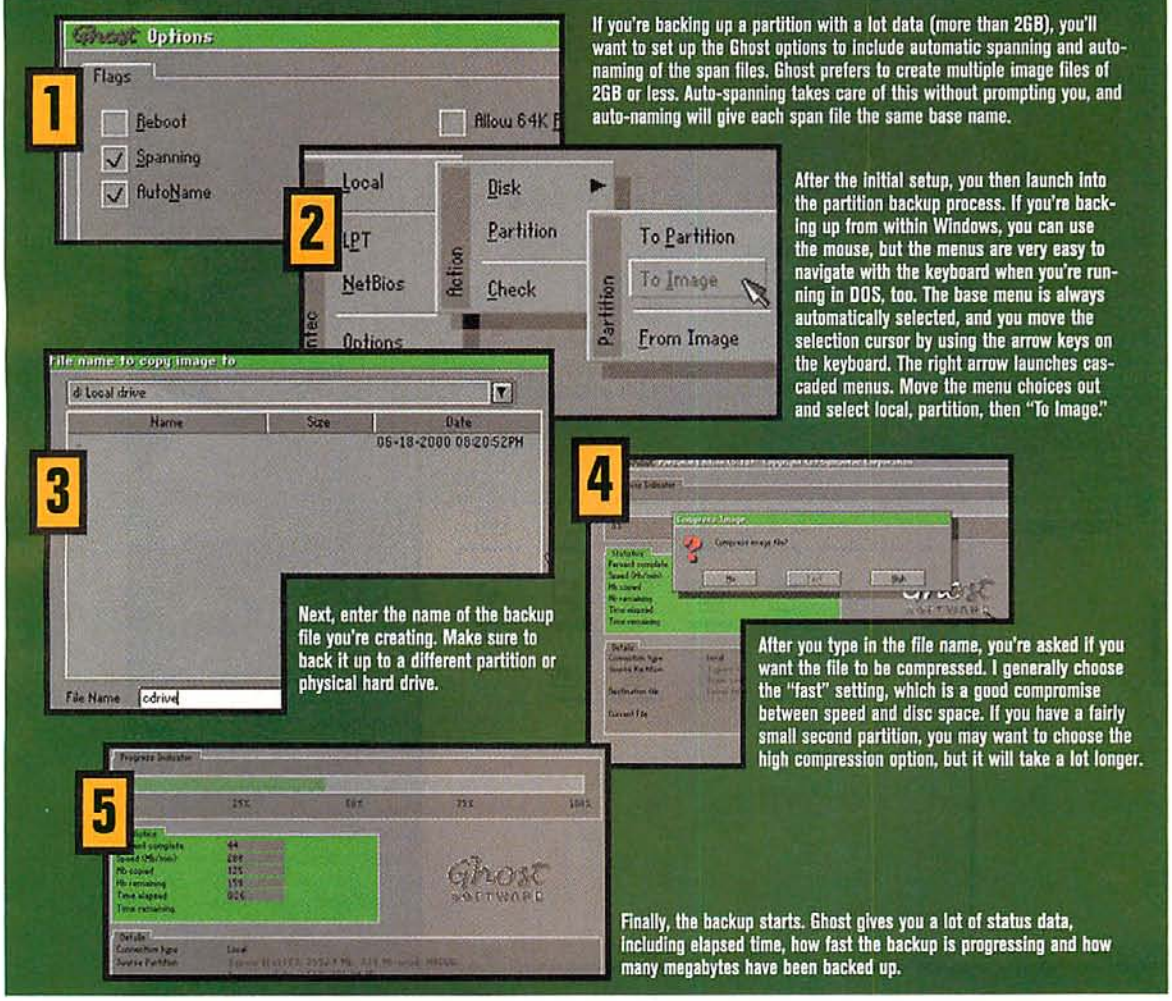
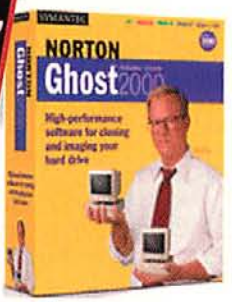


Image Restoration

When it comes time to restore the partition backup, first make sure you've copied off any valuable data files from the partition to be restored. This may include items like your Favorites folder, your ISP settings, any email, and so on. Create a bootable floppy disk, and copy the Ghost executable (GHOST.EXE) to it. When you restore a partition, you OVERWRITE everything on that drive. Remember, Ghost only creates a snapshot in time of your hard drive. As you use your system, you'll be adding new apps, creating new data, and generating other files. Make sure anything you want to keep is stored away safely. Then you can restore the old partition.

The process of restoring a partition is similar to backing it up. However, there are several extra steps. First, you have to choose the backup file name. That's easy. Then you have to tell Ghost the source partition you want restored. Most of the time, there's only one choice. CGW

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE



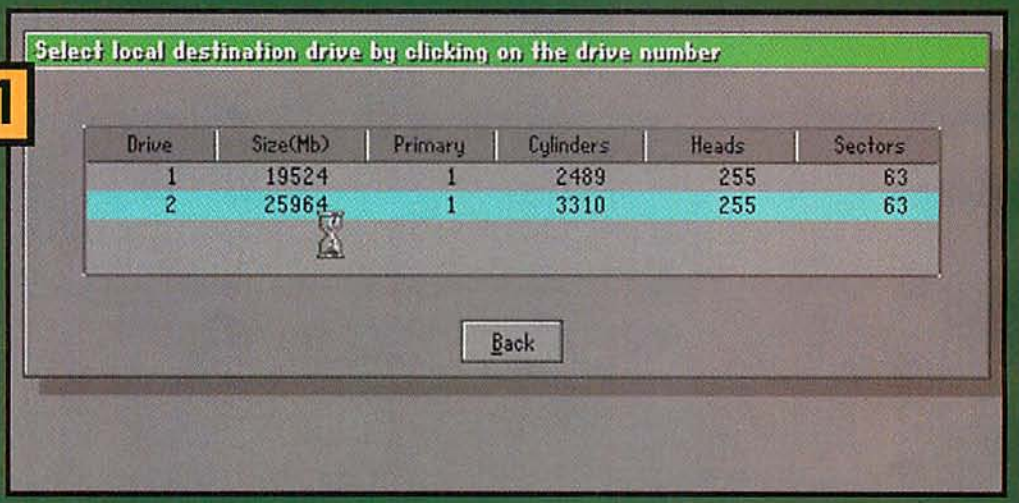
★★★★½

NORTON'S GHOST: PERSONAL EDITION

Price: $63
Manufacturer: Symantec
Contact: www.symantec.com

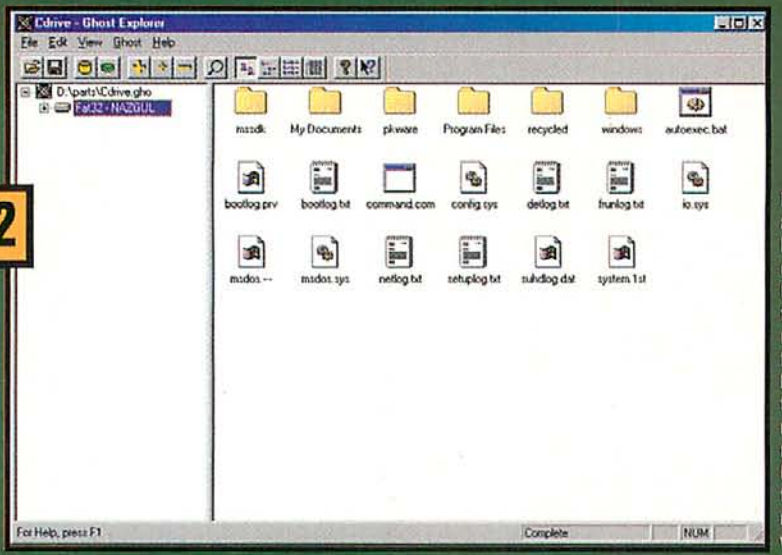
BACK FROM THE DEAD

1



The next step – and the potentially dangerous one – is to pick the target partition. Once you launch the restore, it's irreversible. So make sure you pick the correct destination drive AND the correct destination partition. Double check before you hit OK. There's no feeling quite as bleak as when you realize you've just restored the wrong partition to the wrong drive.

2



But what if all you really want is an individual file? That's no problem. Ghost Personal Edition comes with a cool tool called Ghost Explorer, an application that lets you peek into the backup file and even extract individual files. As the name implies, it bears a strong resemblance to the Windows Explorer. So there's really nothing to stop you from making frequent backups using Ghost; just remember to keep that first one around, so you can do a clean install of Windows without the headaches.

I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ and RADEON™ DDR gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerates. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature will come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI

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Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR

How Much 3D Is Enough?

We've come a long way, baby. But we have much farther to go.

Last month I tested five of the latest 3D cards, and as I plowed through all the performance tests, I got to thinking, will we ever reach a point where we have enough 3D? The new GeForce 2 cards can run QUAKE III at 1024x768x32 at over 90 frames per second. How much more performance do we really need?

3D chipsets have been on a blistering growth curve, aided by rapid advances in chip manufacturing. To get an idea as to just how far we've come, consider this: At 640x480 running at 60 frames per second, a GeForce 2 chip can process more triangles in a 3D environment than there are pixels on the screen to display them. And it won't be long before 3D chips can achieve this same feat at 1024x768. What happens when we've got more triangles on the screen than pixels? 3D programming shaman John Carmack has noted that at this point, you need to consider another programming model. To that end, there are other 3D primitives (the basic geometric building block for creating a 3D model) waiting in the wings, like curved primitives called NURBS. The bottom line is, 3D chips' astounding growth spurt is far from over, and you don't have to look any further than X-Box's specs to see where things are headed. Its stated texture fillrate is anticipated to be three times that of GeForce 2.

So What Does Enough 3D Look Like?

Well, the initial answer is easy enough: 3D graphics should look like the real world—absolute photo-realism, that is. So, maybe the easier way to understand the answer is to do a little math:

Photo-realism – Where We Are Now = What 3D Technology Still Needs to Do

Included in the answer to this equation are things like full radiosity lighting (calculated rays of light) with an unlimited number of lights and shadows. Also in this mix would be particle systems that could interact with these lights, like dirt being kicked up by a passing vehicle that would interact with lights and shadows. Very realistic facial rendering and animation—particularly when avatars are speaking—is another worthwhile goal. We need more highly-detailed models, and frankly, more models acting onscreen during gameplay. Think about it: In the 3D games you've played recently, how many moving characters are on the screen at any given time? Answer: a lot fewer than there ought to be. Imagine you're on the run from government security goons, and want to try and disappear into the canvas of a crowded marketplace filled with thousands of people, or you're playing in a real-time strategy game where you've got several thousand troops descending on your stronghold. Think of SHOGUN cranked up several orders of magnitude. The list of needed improvements goes on and on.

Until games look like real life, the frenzied pace of graphic acceleration will continue unabated.

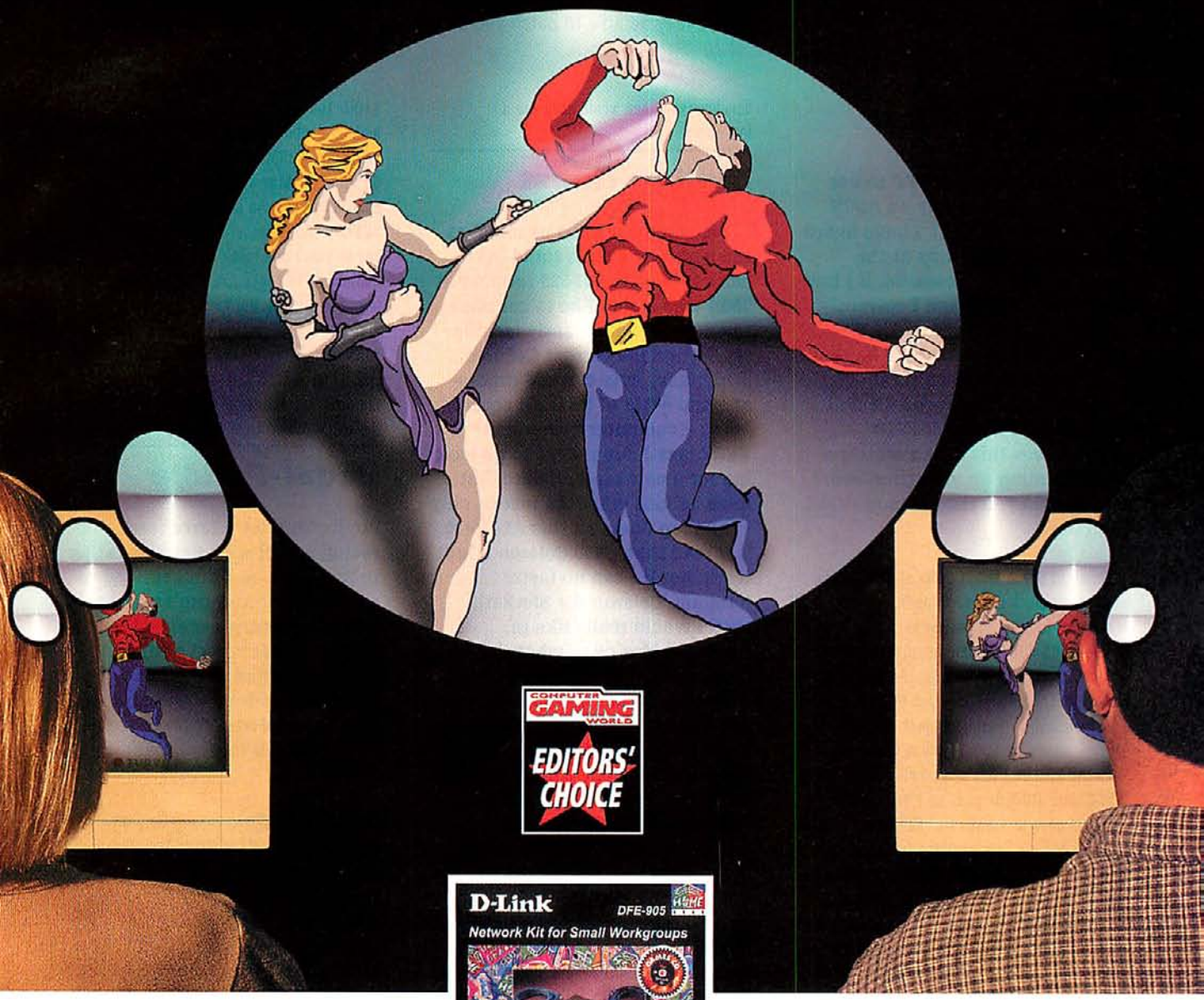
Both 3dfx and nVidia have some ideas on how to begin tackling some of these challenges. 3dfx's full-scene anti-aliasing (FSAA) will help clean up some of the graphic distortion that rendering inaccuracies produce. And nVidia's accelerated transform-and-lighting (T&L) will put more triangles on the screen to create these more detailed worlds, while simultaneously relieving the CPU of these processing-intensive tasks. Unfortunately, these two companies have managed to simultaneously agree and throw mud at each other: 3dfx is working on accelerated T&L (so are ATI and Matrox), and nVidia is working on improving their FSAA support in Direct3D.

Keep on Keepin' On

Of course, many more characters onscreen with individual behaviors means you'll need a bigger CPU to keep the whole circus flying. So, in addition to more 3D horsepower, CPU horsepower will have to continue scaling as well. And yet another reason that performance will continue to grow is economics—3D chip and CPU makers have to generate demand for their latest wares, and there's no better poster child for more performance than gaming.

So, short story long, there's no real end in sight to the ongoing upgrade rumba we dance year after year. But take heart, because generation by generation, we're getting closer to gaming's Promised Land. CGW

Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.



To get the Maximum performance out of a multi-user game, get off the Internet and get on a D-Link 10/100Mb Fast Ethernet Network. Up to 200 times faster than the Internet, and 10 times faster than other legacy networks. Easy to set up and install, a D-Link 10/100 Network In A Box comes with everything you need to build a Windows 95/98 Network.

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Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by 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@zd.com**.

Get on the RAMBUS

I want to upgrade my PC to use RAMBUS. I plan to buy an ASUS motherboard (P3C-E). I have heard that the RAMBUS runs at the speed of the processor. So, if I buy an 800MHz RIMM and I currently have a 500MHz Pentium III, will the RAMBUS even work? I have only seen RAMBUS chips at 600, 700, and 800MHz speeds. Or will the RAMBUS run at 500MHz speed? Does this speed matter a lot depending on your processor? How would you recommend that I upgrade?

Yeah, all of the different parts of PCs moving at different clock speeds sometimes makes my brain hurt, too. But to answer your question, on the ASUS P3C-E motherboard, you should be able to use any of these speed grades of RAMBUS. The differences have to do with these memories' maximum clock rate, with higher-clocked parts being more expensive. 600MHz RAMBUS has a maximum data rate of 1.2GB/sec; 700MHz goes to 1.4GB/sec; 800MHz goes to 1.6GB/sec. The speed of this memory doesn't have anything to do with your CPU speed. So, you could run your Pentium-III with RAMBUS on any of these three speed variants. As for which speed grade to buy, the safe advice is to err on the side of horsepower, and go with 800MHz. But from CPU/chipset testing, I've found that RAMBUS can make a difference in some very high-resolution test cases; but if you opted for 600MHz RAMBUS, it probably would barely show up in benchmarking, and would save you a few bucks.

Mother Quest

I love computers just as much as the next guy. I am a timid over-clocker (Pentium-II 333 running at 360!) who would like to continue to upgrade his currently lacking rig beyond his current GeForce SDR, pansy over-clocked processor, and 64MB of RAM. Of course, being a computer gamer and VERY lazy I don't want to go looking for a new motherboard, but I have no idea what the fastest chip I can plop down on this AL440LX is. I read that a 400 Celeron might work, but if I can go faster (mmmm, Celeron II + Slotket), then I would really like to. I have no idea as to what the fastest chip I can put on here is, considering that Micron either did not include the motherboard manual or I lost it in the piles of invoices they sent when I got this computer 2+ years ago. Am I stuck with this pathetic 5 multiplier or what? And what's that burning?

According to Intel's spec sheet (available on the Web at support.intel.com/support/motherboards/desktop/al440lx/spec.htm), you've got the fastest Pentium-II CPU the AL440LX will support. Slot 1 Celeron 400MHz chips seemed hard to come by in my initial search, but 433MHz parts were available for just under $100. The problem is this: Your motherboard's highest supported multiplier is 5, so even a shiny new 433MHz Celeron would still run at 333MHz (66MHz system bus x 5). So the only thing you'd be gaining is an onboard 128KB level-2 cache, but more than likely, you wouldn't see much of a performance improvement. Looks like a motherboard swap is in your future. But buck up—motherboards aren't nearly as hard to install as they used to be, and if you're motivationally-challenged, your local computer retailer will probably do the swap for you for a small fee, if you buy the motherboard from them.

Pedal-Paddle

I'm looking for a force-feedback racing wheel with paddles rather than pedals, as I am confined to a wheelchair and can't use my legs. I currently use a Thrustmaster wheel with paddles for braking and accelerating, but it has no force-feedback. I do use a Microsoft force-feedback joystick for flying and that works fine.

There are several fine choices here, and they include wheels from Microsoft, Logitech, and Guillemot. Of the three, Guillemot's Ferrari wheel is probably the standout, given that its force-feedback technology is the newest. It does come with pedals, but also has programmable wheel-paddles that you can map to accelerator/brake, then map shifter controls to front buttons. The Guillemot Ferrari wheel sells for around $130.

TECHTIP Drivers Wanted

If you're looking for one-stop surfing to get the latest graphics card drivers, check out **www.reactor-critical.com**. This site gathers the latest drivers from nearly all the major 3D-card manufacturers and puts them in one convenient spot.

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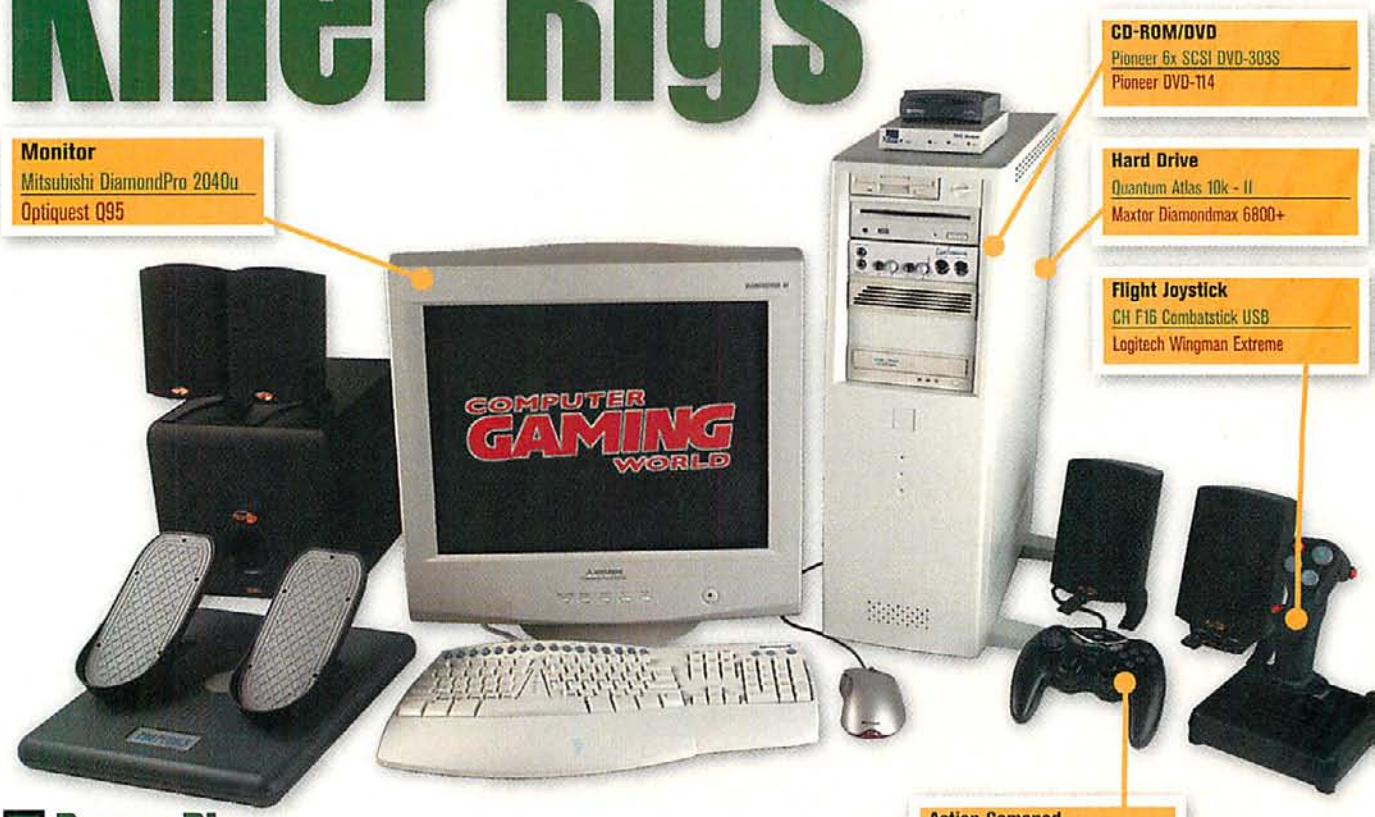
Killer Rigs



Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
YY Minicube case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$180	AGP 4X, Intel 820, RAMBUS
CPU	Intel Pentium-III 933	$800	OK, not a Gigahertz–but at least you can buy it
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$450	RAMBUS, baby!
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$185	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet II	$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	$880	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$270	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD-303S	$135	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2040u	$1,100	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$160	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$175	Loud, clean, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$40	Reach out and frag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$95	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	Natural in, Newtouch out
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$60	No balls!
NEW **USB Hub**	**Logitech WingMan 7-Port**	**$79**	**Get them USB ports upstairs**
		Total w/o Game Controllers	**$5,700**
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	**$7,155**

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.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Gigabyte 71X
NEW **CPU**	**Athlon 700 w/cooling fan**
Memory	128MB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
NEW **Primary Graphics**	**Hercules 3D Prophet**
Floppy Drive	Teac
NEW **Hard Drive**	**Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus 17.4GB drive**
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
NEW **Primary Audio**	**Sound Blaster Value**
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 Digital
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

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora took no prisoners in our recent testing, and its latest AMD Athlon-based rig pushes the CPU speed up to 1GHz. The Aurora is also packing 256MB of PC133 SDRAM for system memory, along with a GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card with 32MB of DDR SDRAM, Klipsch's testicular four-channel ProMedia V.2-400 speakers, and, it still comes in black.

Alienware's Area 51 ▪ $4,680 as configured ▪ (800) 494-3382 ▪ www.alienware.com

Lean Machine

In addition to its high-end 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

Lean Machine: How Low Can We Go?

It's just amazing how much PC you can put together for under two grand these days. And with that in mind, we've decided to crank the price limbo bar on the Lean Machine down to $1,500. To do this, we went with a 700MHz Athlon CPU, and a GeForce SDRAM 3D card. This is a downgrade from the 900MHz Athlon/GeForce DDR card we had in there last month, but these two changes let us bump the price down to under $1,500. Depending on your own budget, and how much CPU and 3D card prices have dropped by the time you read this, you may well be able to nudge up your CPU to an 800MHz, and possibly consider switching back to a DDR GeForce card. In any event, the Lean Machine we've built for you here, despite a little component trimming, is still a very solid box that will let you get your game on.

Price	The Skinny
$110	Solid, stable Athlon motherboard
$180	**The gigahertz cometh. Feel the love**
$100	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$130	**Solid GeForce SDRAM card**
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	**Fast and cheap**
$140	Slot-drive DVD
$300	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$45	**R.I.P. Aureal**
$70	Went back to my 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	Very solid 3D joystick with USB
$30	Solid, basic gamepad
Total	**$1,542**

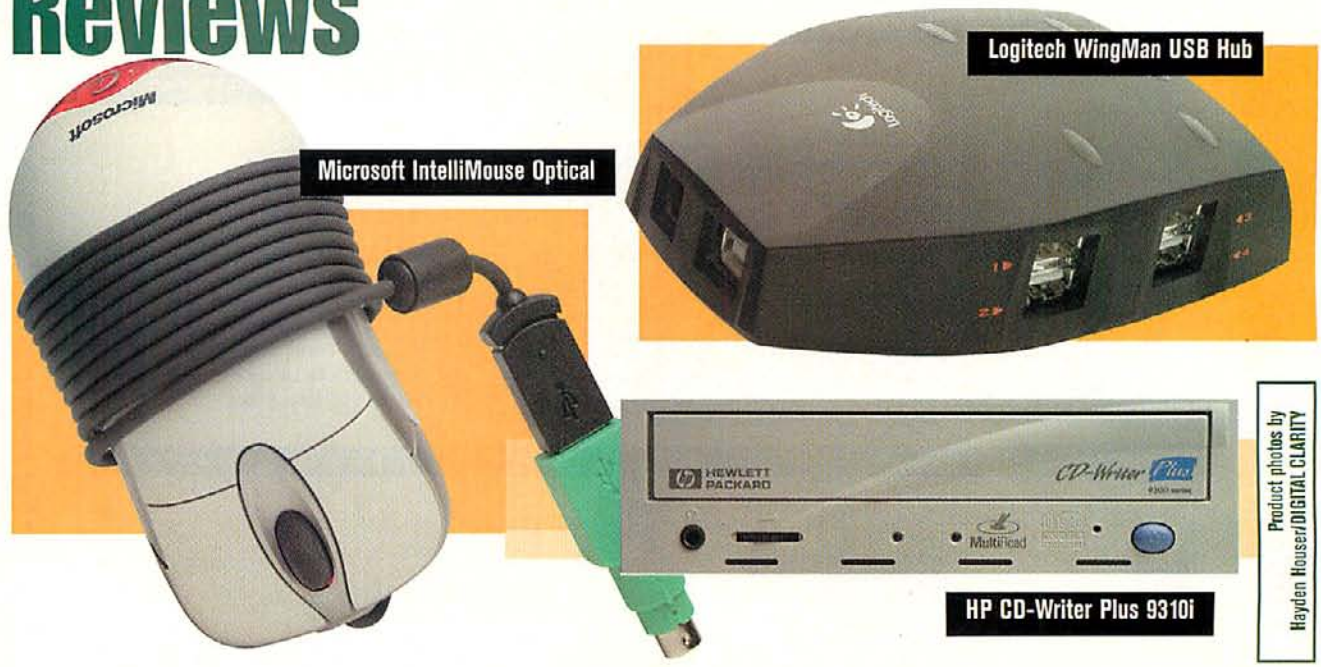
Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you:

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 around $120, the V3 3000 delivers good price/performance, and will do a good job with current games. And, 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 Hercules' 3D Prophet II, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS chipset, which took top honors in our latest round of 3D testing. This board has 32MB of DDR SDRAM, and if your monitor can tolerate it, try booting your favorite game up at 1600x1200; you'll be surprised how well things keep moving. At $310, this board doesn't come cheap. If money is an object, its now-one-generation-back predecessor, the GeForce-based 3D Prophet, is $225 at press time. It should be below $200 by the time you're reading this.

Reviews



MICROSOFT INTELLIMOUSE OPTICAL

Requirements: Windows 9x, Windows 2000, Mac.
Price: $56
Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.microsoft.com/hardware

The IntelliMouse Optical closely resembles its big brother, the IntelliMouse Explorer, complete with side buttons and the cool glowing tail. Like the original, there's also no mouse ball, with the mouse tracking performed by light emitted from the base of the mouse and reflected off the mousing surface. Gone, however, is the slippery surface. It's also a tad smaller and symmetrical in shape (great for lefties), with duplicate buttons on both sides.

In most cases, this is a superbly comfortable mouse. The response in most Windows apps, as well as the majority of games, is smooth and precise. It felt so good, it was almost love at first mouse. Turn-based and real-time strategy games seemed much less of a burden on my mousing hand. But a weakness revealed itself when playing an extended session of UNREAL TOURNAMENT. I discovered that very fast mouse flicks – as when doing a jump-turn – will cause the action to stutter. It's usually very brief, but long enough to get you fragged. Occasionally, the frame will freeze even longer. In the end, the IntelliMouse Optical – and all the ball-free rodents from Microsoft – have a high coolness factor, but if you're heavily into first-person shooters, you may want to steer clear. *–Loyd Case*

HP CD-WRITER PLUS 9310I

Requirements: Windows 9X, a free EIDE channel.
Price: $300
Manufacturer: Hewlett Packard
Contact: www.hp.com

Only a few short years ago, CD-writers were the toys of elitist bastards with way too much money to waste.

Thanks to the wonders of mass production, everyone and their brother can now cook up freshly-baked shiny plastic discs daily. HP spearheaded the CD-RW movement a few years back, and with the 9310I, they've kept their standards high, despite the current flood of sub-par CD-R drives.

The drive is simple to install, unless you're squeamish about opening your case. Software installation is equally simple: The HP software installer takes care of everything. Adaptec's EasyCD Creator and DirectCD are the included authoring-software packages, and they generally get the job done. There's also a free CD labeler from Neato, and an audio-editing program to help you jazz up your mixes.

But how does it write? Well, the 10X writing is both a blessing and a curse. If you're writing from your hard drive, your CD's will be finished in record time: around five minutes for a full write. But most CD-R media isn't 10X compliant, so you'll have to crank down the speed to be safe. We had few problems with non-10X media, since it can't keep pace. Also, writing at 10X is generally too fast for a normal CD-ROM drive, so if you want to copy a CD, you'll have to slam on the brakes.

But in general, this is an excellent drive that stands out for its ease of installation and snappy presentation. *–Alex Handy*

LOGITECH WINGMAN USB HUB

Requirements: Windows 9x, Windows 2000, Mac.
Price: $80
Manufacturer: Logitech
Contact: www.logitech.com

We've waxed on (and waxed off) about how cool USB controllers are, and how their plug-and-play functionality make swapping game controllers a snap. But there's a snag – those damn USB ports are still on the backs of our PCs. So, the logical solution?

Get the ports onto the desktop. Logitech's new seven-port WingMan USB Hub is the hardware for the job, with a few caveats.

A USB hub is a wonder of simplicity: Plug it into a free USB port and watch Windows detect it (there's no driver to futz with because it's built into Windows). But with Logitech's offering, there's a catch – you'll need to use the power supply, otherwise this hub won't come up. Many hubs let you run either powered or unpowered, and Logitech's hub claims to do this as well. But without its included power supply, this hub wouldn't work.

The other catch is that all the ports are located on the sides of the hub, meaning that it won't fit into tight spaces very well. If you're looking for a good basic four-port, unpowered hub, Saitek's got one. But if you've got the space and the power, Logitech's WingMan Hub will put a whole mess o' USB love onto your desktop. *–Dave Salvator*

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

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

READER TIP

COUNTER STRIKE

You guys always have great tips about retail software, but not much about mods. Since COUNTER-STRIKE (CS) is one of the most popular mods out there, I'll share a few tips I've learned for it. One of the most important things I've found is to fire in bursts. Too often, I've seen people empty a clip in two seconds, only to have most of their shots go off wildly. Short bursts are most effective, and can be achieved by tapping the mouse button. Ideally, you want about two to three rounds a burst. Another important thing is to move stealthily. When running, your footsteps can be heard and will give away your position. Walk along the shadows, and your enemy won't know where you are until you kill them. Also, when walking you have less of a chance of running into an enemy and then running past him, exposing your back. Most everyone who plays CS knows that by crouching you can achieve stealth, but almost no one knows that by crouching before using ladders, the sound of your climbing is muffled. One last tip is that if you come across a crate that you can't normally jump, get a teammate to crouch and use them as a smaller crate to get on top of the bigger one. This tactic can be used to surprise enemies who wouldn't expect anyone to be up there. Good luck with these tips. –Steven Wagner

For a smattering of tips for a popular mod, we're giving Steve a copy of MORTYR, CODENAME: EAGLE, and a PLANET OF THE APES t-shirt. Enjoy!

FLYING HEROES

Sky Knights and Lizard Riders are wasting one of their clan's strengths if they're banking to turn all the way around – press the Insert key to do an Immelman that changes direction faster than any other clan. The Hammercraft should use freelook to take advantage of their gun turrets while maneuvering to keep enemies out of their overhead blind spot. And the Magion don't have to rely on ammo gathering so much if they learn to use effective combos like the Stir n' Freeze, a.k.a. "Dairy Queen combo": Hit your target with Disorient, and then an Iceball. After spinning and falling to the ground encased in ice, he'll never be able to draw a bead on you to counterattack.

CHECK OUT THE REVIEW p. 100

MDK 2

Three heroes, three brief tips. For Kurt, remember that you can now strafe from side-to-side while in Sniper View. Since headshots will down most enemies, it's now plausible to switch to sniper for a moment to off someone. Grab yourself a Sniper Shield, and you'll be practically invincible when picking people off from a distance.

For Max, keep in mind that when using the jet-pack, your current momentum is preserved. So, instead of burning your precious fuel, just jump forward, let your momentum carry you, and use the fuel in spurts to keep you afloat.

Finally, Doc Hawkins cannot mantle. At all. He'll grab, but he can't pull himself up. He can only make jumps to lower levels, and *very* close jumps. If you're not landing onto your destination, chances are there's a place to use the ladder, an alternate route, or something you can just fire atomic toast at.

EARTH 2150

CHECK OUT THE REVIEW p. 114

In RTS 101, you all learned that the first step in winning is to harvest resources faster than your opponents. Play EARTH 2150 accordingly. For the United Civilized States, this means having a harvester on every square of an ore field, and building enough refineries to accommodate them all. As the Eurasian Dynasty, build a cluster of mines on the ore field; even if a mine only touches a single square of the field, it will still extract ore. But since the Lunar Corporation isn't limited by a bottleneck between the ore field and the refinery that produces credit, this is where they'll trounce the opposition every time. Pile up your mines, and by the end of the game, you're liable to have outproduced your opponents by a factor of 5 to 1.

GROUND CONTROL

Any old cannoneer worth his breechloader will tell you that you don't have to see the enemy to make his life hell. Suppressing fire is a key tactic in GROUND CONTROL for slowing down your enemies' movements, and hopefully making a dent in his forces at the same time. All units are capable of doing it, but artillery pieces are especially effective. Simply hold down Ctrl and left-click the area you wish to rain shells upon (red cursor is in range, blue is out) and your units will comply. Then, just move your main battle terradynes in to mop up.

Suppressing fire works best in choke points or areas that are too hot for forward observers.

CHECK OUT THE REVIEW p. 104

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE—REDEMPTION

When it comes to using Disciplines, use the combo favored by the Nihilistic Team: Celerity, Potence, and Feral Claws. You'll move fast, be stronger, and deal out aggravated damage (the hardest type of damage to guard against). These Disciplines are pretty much accessible to every character, and if you power each of these with the maximum of five dots, you can literally tear through most of your enemies.

CHECK OUT THE REVIEW p. 106

Also, have at least one character fully develop the Presence Disciplines. A powerful Awe is a great way to incapacitate a single foe, and a fully developed Majesty will cause just about everything around you to stand still and take the punishment, without repercussions.

Inside STRATEGY

BY ROBERT COFFEY

robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Catching the Next Wave

What do designers think is going to push strategy forward?

This month's cover story examines the games we think will set trends in strategy gaming in the foreseeable future. But what do game designers themselves think? What do they see as the next big thing in strategy games? We ran an informal survey, and here's what we found out:

Mark Skaggs, Westwood Studios (RED ALERT 2): With every game taking us one step closer to the "holodeck," I think a continuing trend in all games is a higher degree of realism. On the RTS front, continued integration of 3D will happen in ways that won't alienate less-sophisticated users. I think we'll also see modified gameplay to broaden the appeal of RTS games beyond core gamers. Coupled together, these two elements will be a big win for the strategy genre as a whole.

ROBERTS MIX

1. MDK 2
2. ALLEGIANCE
3. GROUND CONTROL
4. Zombie College at www.icebox.com
5. HIGH HEAT 2001

Ed Del Castillo, Liquid Entertainment (BATTLE REALMS): Increased depth of play. In fact, the genre is really irrelevant—entertainment is about exploring emotion. RTS's are about the emotions experienced on the battlefield: heroism, fear of death, honor, and the pain of loss. Strategy games need to use whatever means to evoke those emotions without genre distinctions.

Brian Reynolds, Big Huge Games (CIV II, ALPHA CENTAURI, and Big Huge Games' big secret first game): I think 3D graphics technology is rapidly approaching the stage where even strategy games (which tend to have zillions of little units on the screen at the same time) can take advantage of it, and that's going to be a major paradigm shift. New kinds of games will be possible which weren't before.

Rob Pardo, Blizzard Entertainment (WARCRAFT III): Currently we seem to be in a transition phase. Many developers have shied away from the traditional RTS genre and are really trying to find the next "big thing." The next big game will be the strategy game that can use a full 3D world and make it accessible to the broad market of gamers.

Julian Gollup, Mythos Games (X-COM, MAGIC & MAYHEM, DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE): I still think that the biggest problem with many strategy games is inadequate AI. In the future, AIs will also have the ability to learn and develop personalities. Imagine playing a game where you simply cannot tell the difference between your human and non-human opponents. Now, that would be pretty scary.

Will Wright, Maxis Entertainment (SIMCITY, THE SIMS): I think as the graphics arms race starts to hit diminishing returns, we'll see developers searching for something cool to spend their excess CPU horsepower on. I think that more and more of this horsepower will start to go into new forms of AI. This won't just mean more efficient routing and stuff (which is good also) but rather more believable computer opponents and NPCs. Your computerized adversaries (and allies) will start to demonstrate emotional responses to your actions (through their irrational tactics) and the ability to learn from the tactics you use against them.

What's most interesting about these responses is how most of the designers seemed to focus on nuts-and-bolts issues like 3D graphics. As exciting as great-looking games are, that's a thrill usually lost after the first hour or so of play.

But look a little deeper and you'll see a more subtle thought resonating through most of their words: increased realism—courtesy of 3D graphics—but, more importantly, better opponents. Del Castillo talks about games that stir your emotions; Gollup imagines a human-like AI that learns and develops a personality; Wright takes that idea a step further when he imagines a computer opponent that reacts emotionally to your playing style. If smarter, more engaging games are the Next Big Thing in strategy, the future looks bright indeed. CGW

Enter the Dragoon

Napoleonic wargamers must be a glum lot, with three years passing since the last major 19th-Century wargame, TalonSoft's BATTLEGROUND: PRELUDE TO WATERLOO. Their patience will pay off this fall with the arrival of WATERLOO, based on the award-winning Sid Meier's GETTYSBURG/ANTIETAM engine. Breakaway Games, which developed ANTIETAM, has modified the engine to incorporate higher-resolution artwork, better animation, smoke, fires, and explosions. The game will accurately portray Napoleonic warfare with unit formations, authentic weapons (including rockets), and cavalry charges. Even the uniforms will be precisely detailed, based on more than 60 historical troop types. It's hard to please a grognard, but this game should succeed where Napoleon failed.

–Ken Brown

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Inside SIMULATIONS & SPACE

BY GORDON BERG

grognard@concentric.net

Rage Against the Machine

EA fails to rescue JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON

I've been cursing like a drunken stevedore with a bad case of Tourette's Syndrome ever since I got wind of the ill fate that befell FLIGHT: COMBAT (aka ATTACK SQUADRON), the long-anticipated WWII sim from Looking Glass Studios. By now you've surely heard about the demise of Looking Glass Studios, and along with it, some of the best gaming franchises ever created. (You think I'm upset? You should see my wife, over the prospect of not playing any new THIEF games.) Yes, Looking Glass must bear the blame for putting themselves into such financial straights. But *damn* is it frustrating to hear how a sim as promising as FLIGHT: COMBAT was only a few months away from being finished after 28 months of work when Electronic Arts cancelled their plans to publish it as JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON.

I realize the continuation of this sim would have been under unusual and difficult circumstances. After all, a portion of Looking Glass would have had to effectively remain intact by retaining key personnel, securing offices and equipment, providing benefits, etc. However, a source within the development group informed me that these obstacles had all been hurdled.

What's even more damning is that EA didn't spend the big bucks normally associated with the production of a sim such as ATTACK SQUADRON. They didn't have to, because Looking Glass took all the risk by "bonding" their sim ahead of time with a separate company in order to ensure the game's completion.

All EA had to say was yes. When EA said no, they killed whatever chance FLIGHT: COMBAT/JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON had to see the light of day. Team members once willing to stick around for less pay than what they could make elsewhere had to move on (after all, they have families to feed).

I have a hard time accepting how a company that's worth $1.6 billion, as EA is fond of describing itself, won't publish a sim they could have practically gotten for a steal.

Obviously, there's more to this story, most of it grist for the rumor mill. There are tales of how Looking Glass undersold the project to EA to begin with and hence set themselves up for failure, and there are accusations that EA had been looking to get out of flight sims altogether. Perhaps JAS missing its deadlines merely gave EA the excuse they were looking for. According to EA's Jeff Brown, "...our decision wasn't based on a formula for measuring profitability. It was based on our deep uncertainty that the project could meet any schedule given the changes in senior management and a history of missing deadlines."

Fair enough. EA didn't have faith in what was left of the team to get the game done and that's why they said no. I'm very sympathetic to how a company needs to make sound business decisions, but it just kills me to hear how this game had a chance and was instead left to die so close to completion. If the big companies like EA don't take the risk on ground-breaking games, games that push the limit to redefine and maybe even re-ignite genres, then who will? It certainly won't be the independent developers like Looking Glass.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

GORDON'S MIX

1. ENEMY ENGAGED: COMMANCHE-HOKUM
2. FLYING HEROES
3. The sheer joy that only COUNTER-STRIKE can bring...over the hell of a 56K modem.
4. CIVILIZATION II (I'm hooked all over again.)
5. My new Saitek driving wheel. Lord help me, I might try out some racing sims.

WHOPPER OF A CHOPPER SIM

Now This Is How It's Done

Razorworks' ENEMY ENGAGED: COMMANCHE-HOKUM should be available in the U.S. by the time you read this.

A follow up to their prior APACHE-HAVOC release, EECH has actually been available in Europe for a few months now. Although EECH can stand on its own merits, it can also incorporate the campaigns found in APACHE-HAVOC if you have it installed on your hard drive, effectively increasing the total number of helicopters and campaigns you can fly (and you should be able to pick up AH real cheap now). With improved graphics and AI, this sim will definitely cleanse your palette from the crap that was GUNSHIP! and KA-52, and it might even challenge the pedestal you've placed under the LONGBOW series. CGW

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Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

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The Little Guys Strike Back

Inside the skulls that hatched the COUNTER-STRIKE mod for HALF-LIFE

The COUNTER-STRIKE mod for HALF-LIFE is, without question, the slickest user-made mod out there, and is probably the reason why HALF-LIFE is still being played online. It's so slick, in fact, that HALF-LIFE developers Valve want to spotlight and bundle the mod in an upcoming HALF-LIFE update. This month, I had a chat with the two main guys behind the HALF-LIFE mod COUNTER-STRIKE, "Gooseman" and "Cliffe," to learn a little more about this good ol' rags to riches tale.

Counter Proposal

Q: How did this happen in the first place? Did Gabe Newell just e-mail you one day, or what?

A: (Gooseman) We developed a relationship early in CS's development. As it became more popular, they approached us about buying the rights to CS. I honestly can't remember what they said; I believe it went something like, "Gabe Newell has invited you to his 200-acre mansion to discuss the possibility of buying the rights to your soul"...just kidding.

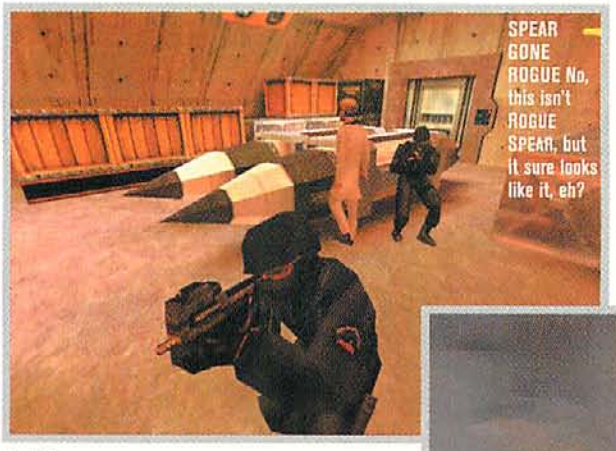
(Cliffe) We'd been working with Valve pretty closely for a while. They've given incredible support to the mod community. The interest they took in CS was gradual, and we started talking with Art Min at Valve about some sort of partnership.

Q: What are the concrete effects of this partnership (besides bundling CS with HL)?

A: (Gooseman) We still maintain full creative control over CS; development will continue as it has in the past year. The biggest change will be the possibility of working more closely with new technology that Valve develops (such as network code).

(Cliffe) CS being in the official HALF-LIFE updates is the only plan, currently. But we may work with Valve to do something else (perhaps a sequel for their next-generation engine, etc.). Nothing's been decided yet.

Q: CS was a cult project and is now officially backed by a company—did you ever imagine this happening?



SPEAR GONE ROGUE No, this isn't ROGUE SPEAR, but it sure looks like it, eh?

SMOKE AND MIRRORS The latest version of COUNTER-STRIKE has smoke grenades to obscure enemy vision.

A: (Gooseman) Yes, of course, it was all part of the master plan. We're actually kind of surprised it took this long...heh heh. Actually, the truth is, no one in the CS camp really expected it to be this popular. We're happy it is, though, that's for sure.

(Cliffe) I can remember when we first opened the site in May of 1999: We'd look at our stats and see that fifty people had visited, and *that* blew us away. It was a very slow process and it still amazes us to this day that it's gotten this popular. Working closely with Valve is pretty surreal in that we both idolized these guys just a year ago.

Q: CS, at this point, is a finely crafted piece of work. Are you guys going to use this as a highlight on a resume, and try to join up with a game company at some point, or you gonna pretty much stay independant/freelance?

A: (Gooseman) We totally enjoy doing CS as a freelance/independent project. It's not as lucrative as working in a company, but having the freedom to design a game from the ground up—without having someone look over your shoulder—is priceless. We'll try to keep it this way for as long as we can.

(Cliffe) I'd have to say that the benefits of being independent are great. The whole team is pretty independent and everyone has a strong personality, so there aren't many limits to what can be done.

Q: Finally: What were your biggest influences, both within and without gaming (movies, books, etc.) in creating CS?

A: (Gooseman) I became interested in the topic of terrorism while reading about it online. I visited various sites that cover terrorism, and it got me thinking about how neat it'd be if there was a game that would let me be a counter-terrorist. I wanted to create a balance between realism and action. When it came to artwork, other games—such as SILENT SCOPE, VIRTUA COP, and DOOM—influenced me. I tried to capture the look of some of these games, yet at the same time, I wanted to portray counter-terrorism as realistically as possible. This involved doing research on many of the more famous counter-terrorism units, such as the German GSG-9, French GIGN, UK SAS, etc. Another thing I really enjoy about 1st-person shooters is the fact that you can *see* your gun. It just makes the experience that much more immersive for me, so I went about trying to make the guns as realistic as possible—trying not to skimp on any details.

(Cliffe) Strange as it may sound, I think perhaps the main influence was the FPS genre in general, and how it was becoming so sci-fi oriented. A game where you put away your hyperblaster and picked up some real weaponry was a breath of fresh air, and I think a lot of people agreed. CGW

Thanks to both Gooseman and Cliffe for taking time out of tuning COUNTER-STRIKE 6.5 to answer our questions.

SCOOTER'S MIX

1. ***Gladiator*** **(still my favorite movie this year)**
2. **DEUS EX**
3. **MDK 2**
4. **Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (the actual manga, not the hacked-together anime)**
5. **Waiting for cursed PacBell to send me my DSL installation kit.**

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Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

BY T. BYRL BAKER

tbbaker@email.com

The Joy of Text

As the graphic adventure dies, ye olde text adventure may be making a comeback

My introduction to computer gaming came in the form of ADVENTURELAND on my friend's cutting edge Commodore VIC-20. Sitting there night after night, navigating a text-based world with a two-word parser while squinting at an out-of-focus TV is likely what caused the mole-like vision I live with today, but I've never regretted those formative marathon gaming sessions. It wasn't long before I was exploring all the now-classic Infocom games on my very own Commodore 64.

THUMB'S UP A java version of the classic ***Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*** text adventure awaits you at DouglasAdams.com.

T. BYRL'S MIX

1. THIEF 2 fan missions
2. MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2
3. TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER for the Dreamcast
4. WARIO LAND 3 on the Game Boy Color
5. *The Perfect Storm* by Sebastian Junger

Interactive Fiction Sites

Baf's Guide to the Interactive Fiction Archive
baf.wurb.com/if
Douglas Adams' *Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy* site
www.douglasadams.com/creations/infocomjava.html
FreeArcade.com's Scott Adams page
www.javaarcade.com/Zplet.jav/Scottadams.html
The HTML-TADS site
www.tela.bc.ca/tela/html-tads
The Interactive Fiction Archive
ftp://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive or http://www.ifarchive.org (the HTML mirror site)
Leisa ReFalo's Interactive Fiction site
www.geocities.com/Heartland/9590/interactive.htm
PalmPilot Entertainment Zone Interactive Games Area
www.fortunecity.com/underworld/rpg/22/
Pilot-Frotz Download Page
geocities.com/SiliconValley/Way/2367/download.htm
RedGrendel Project
www.redgrendel.com
SPAG site
www.sparkynet.com/spag
The TADS Page
www.tela.bc.ca/tela/tads
WinFrotz home page
www.cris.com/~Twist/WinFrotz
XYZZY News
www.xyzzynews.com
ZIP for the PalmPilot
www.palmglyph.com/zip.html

The technology bug has bitten me hard since those salad days, but every year or so I get an urge to revisit the time when my brain served as a 3D graphics accelerator, and I check the Web for the latest creations from the interactive fiction community. This is one of the few areas of gaming where a talented individual with a story to tell can still create one of the top games in the genre; the Interactive Fiction Competition proves it to me each year.

The tools used to create and play these games have improved massively since Infocom's glory days. There are two major programming languages in use today, Inform and TADS. They both have specific strengths and weaknesses, and you'll need an interpreter to play the games created with them.

My current favorite interpreters are WinFrotz for Inform games and HTML-TADS for TADS games. HTML-TADS is by far the cooler of the two, letting users play games through a browser interface that allows for the easy addition of graphics and sound effects. As the name implies, it also allows for all kinds of HTML tricks, and authors are coming up with interesting ways to use the technology all the time. The best thing about it is that it still plays older TADS adventures, with a prettier interface than I'm used to.

Once you have the free interpreters, you'll want to grab some games. Diving straight into the Interactive Fiction Archive, an enormous ftp site, is not recommended. Instead, try one of the major review sites, like the Society for the Promotion of Adventure Games (SPAG), Baf's Guide to the Interactive Fiction Archive, or the XYZZY News site.

For those of you who don't want to go to all that trouble, there are many interactive fiction games you can play directly through any Java-enabled Web browser. Douglas Adams' Web site has a complete version of his infernally difficult HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, and **FreeArcade.com** let me experience the Scott Adams games like ADVENTURELAND all over again.

Despite all the good games and new user-friendly interfaces, IF is not nearly as popular as it used to be. Now, after years of waning interest, it seems that this form of gaming may be poised for a comeback. Bedouin, Inc., a mobile communications company, recently launched the interesting RedGrendel program that aims to put commercial interactive fiction in the hands of mobile phone and PDA users. Their thought is that mobile platforms, with their small screens that are designed to display crisp text and little else, are ideal for interactive fiction games. RedGrendel was established to promote the development of these games by offering authors royalties ranging from 10%-40% of net sales. Whether interactive fiction can once again be commercially successful is a matter of serious doubt, but judging from the quality of some of the games I've played, I can only hope it works out.

Regardless of the RedGrendel's success, the legions of Palm users can play tons of interactive fiction games on the go by downloading Pilot-Frotz or Pilot Zip to convert and interpret Inform games. This software lets you access verb lists and provides all the directions in which you can go at any given time, meaning gameplay consists mainly of tapping instead of writing out words. You can learn more about the process and download dozens of games at Leisa ReFalo's excellent Interactive Fiction site. Another terrific source for games (complete with small reviews) is the PalmPilot Entertainment Zone Interactive Games Area, which currently has nearly 100 interactive fiction games in its archive. CGW

Drop in on some friends

When terrorists secured the compound, Alpha Team mobilized on their **favorite server.**

Agent Z **instant-messaged his teammates** with a ballsy scheme to go through the window.

Twenty minutes of breaking glass and shattering limbs ensued.

Afterward, they regrouped on the **chat channel.**

"Next time, **you** guys be the terrorists!"

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INSIDE GAMING

InsideSPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

Bring It On, Online!

MADDEN 2001 sets the tone for online franchise play

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If EA Sports' plans for MADDEN 2001 are any indicator, this could be a breakthrough year for online PC sports games. Whereas 3D-shooters have been there for ages, the past few years have seen few sports games—MADDEN and HIGH HEAT are the only ones that come to mind—push into the realm of Internet play. The underlying reason was a combination of technical and ideological shortcomings. To find and engage a human opponent in a one-on-one contest was awkward, and you traded off latency and season play. To many sports gamers, online play just didn't seem worth the effort.

But the future of sports games lies online, despite the technological barriers. "Career and season modes are fun, but they lack something playing against a computer opponent," argues Mark Dickenson, Executive Director at 3DO (HIGH HEAT 2001). Indeed. Evidence of this becomes obvious just walking around the HIGH HEAT-obsessed *Computer Gaming World* offices—the office custom league is the primary culprit.

EA Sports plans on aggressively pursuing online season play in MADDEN 2001 with improved networking code and, more importantly, an improved Madden lobby and an innovative Franchise play mode. Here, gamers will be able to engage in a real-time draft and real-time free agent signings over the course of several seasons. "It will work like NHL 2000's commissioner mode," explains Steve Chaing, Executive Producer of MADDEN 2001. "Certain games will have to be played by a certain date, so you'll have to make plans with your opponent to get online and play."

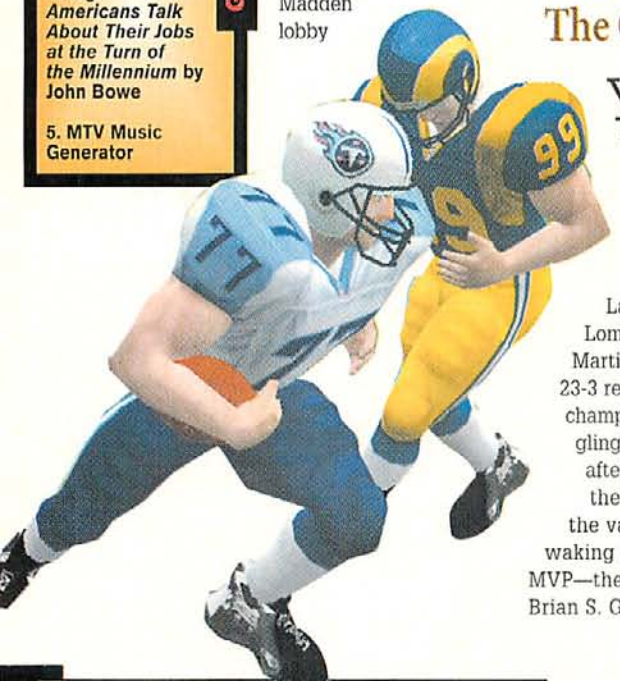
Of course, Chaing cautiously notes, "It's tricky because you have to support the high-end and the low-end gamers. We'll probably have to patch the online version of MADDEN a few times as we go."

And that's okay. The important part is just getting there in the first place. From here, it's only a matter of time before we see four- and five-player matches, career modes that play out over multiple seasons, and hype and hoopla commensurate with real-life sporting events.

Mark Dickenson couldn't agree more about how important league play is for sports games like HIGH HEAT 2001. "The Internet is going to be one of the key factors in bringing baseball games out of the hardcore and into the mainstream."

GEORGE'S MIX

1. DARK REIGN 2
2. MDK 2
3. DIABLO 2
4. *Gig: Americans Talk About Their Jobs at the Turn of the Millennium* by John Bowe
5. MTV Music Generator



THE BOYS (AND GIRLS) OF SUMMER

High Heat 2001: The CGW League

Year two of the *CGW* HIGH HEAT League is half over, and some familiar names sit atop the standings. Robert Coffey's Yankees amassed a 17-game winning streak before a major upset at the hands of Jeff Green's scrappy Oakland A's. Last year's runner-up Chris Lombardi rode the backs of Pedro Martinez and John Smoltz to a gaudy 23-3 record. At press time, last year's champion George Jones was struggling to regain last season's form. But after a 4-2 split with the Yankees, the league is a little afraid that the vaunted Red Sox machine is waking up. Leading the league for MVP—the voluptuous horror that is Brian S. Giles. CGW

Flame of the Month

One man's angry response to a highly contentious USENET newsgroup thread about the Top 10 PC football games of all time:

"You're a complete idiot, pal. I've been a columnist, editor, publisher, and three-time best-selling author in this industry going back to 1985...My company has development credits on more than 10,000 entertainment products going back to 1983. I also probably get paid more for any single thing I write than you make in a month. I've been in this newsgroup on and off since it was first founded and on BBS groups of related types even before that, so put your genitals back in your pants, pick up your wounded ego and take constructive criticism in stride and move on. You have NO clue and I'm willing to bet that in 2 years, no one will even remember you. Best of luck in the fry cook industry. Then again, that's automated now, so you might consider a new major."
www.gamespy.com/top10/football_a.shtm

10. NCAA 99
9. NCAA Gamebreaker 98
8. Front Office Football
7. Front Page Sports Football Pro 97
6. Madden 2000
5. Madden 93 (Genesis)
4. Front Office Football 2
3. TV Sports Football
2. NFL 2K (for the Dreamcast)
1. Tecmo Bowl (Nintendo)

Inside Sports would like to humbly submit our list, which makes the following revisions:

10. Front Office Football
9. TV Sports Football
8. NFL GameBreaker
7. Playmaker Football
6. NFL Challenge
5. Super Bowl Sunday
4. Tecmo Bowl
3. NFL 2K
2. Madden
1. Front Page Sports Football

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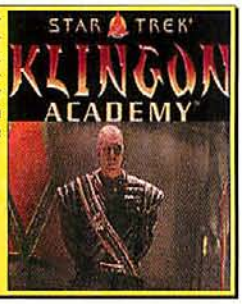
$28.95

Eidos (Action)
Release: 10/00
PC CD

'STAR TREK: KLINGON ACADEMY' includes a 30 mission, solo-play campaign & multiplayer mode. Features 3D interactive space terrain, innovative gunnery chair, over 40 new warships, 10 new weapon systems, and a comprehensive mission editor.



Interplay (Action)
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PC CD

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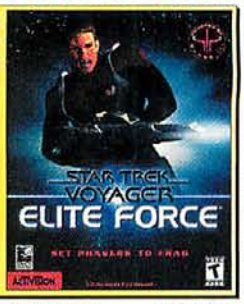

Activision (Action)
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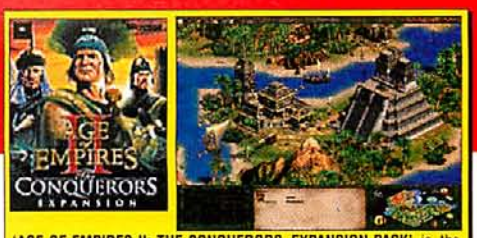

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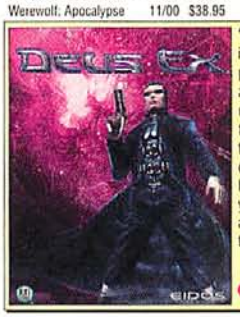

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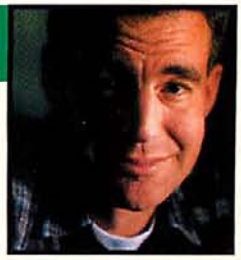
by Jeff Green



What Hath I Wrought?

My kid is a game addict...and who's laughing now?

"Turn off that computer game right now and get ready for school!!" There it is, folks: the most depressing, awful thing that's ever come out of my mouth. Including vomit.

Let me start from the beginning.

It was a weekday morning, and, as usual, my daughter Sarah and I were running late. In the many months in which it had become my job to take her to school, we had been on time exactly twice. What can I say? You try getting a kid up and out in the morning. There's a litany of rituals to perform—beginning with untying them and letting them out of the closet—as well as fighting the kid's natural inclination to not want to get up and go to school. And who can blame her? Not me. With all due respect to teachers everywhere—who have the world's hardest and most important job—I never developed a love for the institution myself. Not since that old bat Mrs. Leventhal, my first-grade teacher, busted my wooden airplane in half.

Still, you know, the kid's gotta go to school. She has to suffer just like I did. That's the way it works. That's why I had a kid.

■■■

When I last wrote about Sarah, she was in pre-school and was just starting to get into gaming. I wrote about how proud I was that she was becoming a gaming geek, and how important it was to her development. A couple years later, I'm starting to wonder what I was smoking at the time, and if my dealer might have any left (Jesse: Call me!).

Actually, I'm still thrilled that she likes games, and I'm even more thrilled that she's getting good at them. As I've watched her plow through Humongous Entertainment's fantastic adventure games—the PUTT-PUTT, FREDDI FISH, and SPY FOX series—I've witnessed her powers of reasoning kick in big-time. I'm not saying she got this all from computer games. No doubt much of it is just the natural genius imparted by my DNA.

But there's also no question in my mind that the games *have* helped. Now, when she looks at a new puzzle, she doesn't immediately assume the answer will come in two seconds. Now, she knows to think things out, to understand what the problem is first, and then to go about solving it logically. It's a cool thing to watch.

She's also started helping *me* out. Last week, I was fretting over MDK2, stuck on the end-boss puzzle of Level 6. Sarah watched me for a while, and then scribbled on a piece of paper: "Maby you shod get something that is stiky like the spy gajit in Spy Fox to klim the boxis." First of all, back off on the spelling errors, bub. She's not even in first grade, and this is still more literate than half the letters we get in the *CGW* mailbox. Second, she was right. Not about finding something sticky. But climbing the boxes *was* the answer to the puzzle—something I hadn't figured out yet.

Imagine my pride at that moment. Like Joe DiMaggio watching his son get his first base hit, or Louis XVI watching his son exploit his first peasants, it's the kind of moment that dads live for.

■■■

Still, though, I want my kid to be edjeecated. And for this to happen, I have to get her to school. And for *that* to happen, I have to get her up in the mornings.

It's a weird thing, being a parent. Try as you might to avoid it, you will end up saying all the same lame things your parents said to you. Some people fall naturally into the role of the tyrant—like Mussolini or my father-in-law—but to many of us, it's a drag to have to be the "bad guy" and lay down the law.

Imagine my pride at that moment. Like Joe DiMaggio watching his son get his first base hit, or Louis XVI watching his son exploit his first peasants, it's the kind of moment that dads live for.

I have spent my entire life trying to get away with playing games as much as possible, while fooling various authority figures who have attempted to thwart my efforts. Parents, teachers, bosses, even (at times, I admit) girlfriends: all servants of The Enemy, forcing me to divert my attention elsewhere when all I really wanted to do was get past the next boss, puzzle, or scenario.

And now, here we are, on a school morning, and Sarah is utterly obsessed with PYJAMA SAM 3. She's near the end, she can feel it. But Dad won't let her play.

Get dressed. Brush your hair. Finish your cereal. No, you can't play now. No, not even for a minute. We're leaving. Get your shoes on. They're upstairs? Go get 'em. Hurry up....Hello! Let's go! Don't make me come up there. What're you—oh, man—*turn off that computer game right now and get ready for school!*

I'm so sorry, Sarah. Someday you'll understand. You won't like it. But you'll understand.

And then you'll do it to your kids.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that Sarah finished PYJAMA SAM 3 at school that day, after sneaking the save game file onto a Zip disk. Email Big Daddy Green at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com. CGW

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