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15 REVIEWS INSIDE

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Diablo II and Baldur's Gate II expansions
MechCommander 2 • Desperados

Man Tasso

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"Top 20 PC Titles of E3 2001." -GAMESPOT.COM

"Five Most Impressive Titles of Show." -NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

"Runner-up, Best Strategy Game of E3 2001." -GAMESPY

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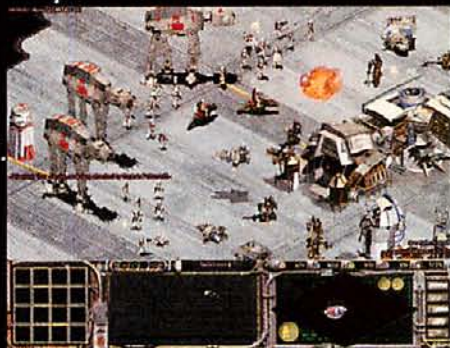




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COVER STORY 52

The Force Is Back!



The LucasArts empire finally strikes back! After the downward slide of the Episode I games, the Star Wars universe is now getting the PC gaming revival it deserves. We look at all the STAR WARS games coming up, and yes, we can't resist saying it; the Force is strong in this lineup.

Cover illustration by Marc Sasso



GAMER'S EDGE109

The definitive guide to using the assassin and the druid in **DIABLO II: LORDS OF DESTRUCTION**, the "Gentleman's Guide to COUNTER-STRIKE," and insider tips for **BALDUR'S GATE II: THRONE OF BHAAL** from BioWare. Also, how to achieve space-station harmony in **STARTOPIA**, plus the usual Dirty Tricks and Easter Eggs.

READ.ME30

G.O.D is dead, EA games update, the CGW Mix, Top 20, and our own DJ "Milkman" goes "wiky-wik-wik" with the Mixman Digital Music Mixer.

(Right: Mike Wilson, G.O.D. Founder)



PREVIEWS

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW



Etherlords

This fantasy-themed strategy game from Fishtank Interactive features an original game environment where ether controls the world. No, Dr. Gonzo is not involved in development. **Page 46**

Hidden & Dangerous 2

World War II wasn't just storming Omaha Beach or tanks clashing in the Ardennes forest. There was a lot of top-secret infiltration, espionage, and general creeping around. That's your tour of duty in **HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2**. **Page 48**



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Exclusive new AQUANOX and MUDPIE Hot Shots!

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Something good from Canada?!
We review a kickass machine
from Voodoo Computers.

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STAFF EDITORIAL: WILLIAM O'NEAL

Oedipus Spyro!

My son, Julian, is nearly seven years old and I'm a typical dad in many respects: I taught him how to hit a baseball, torture his sister, catch a football, bait a hook, ride a bike, take a corner kick, climb a tree, and even how to use a computer. And when it comes to



technology, at his young age he's more adroit than most of his grandparents. For all of this I am proud. That is, I was proud until he beat me at HOT WHEELS RACING on his PlayStation.

It's every father's dream when holding his newborn son in his hands: that he'll someday grow up to best you at everything. He'll be more successful, land more chicks, get a better education, or be a professional athlete. All of my fantasies about my son someday transcending *my* accomplishments came to a grinding halt the other day when the little bastard beat me at HOT WHEELS RACING, then proceeded to taunt and berate me for nearly half an hour.

"Mommy! I beat daddy! I beat daddy!" he gleefully screamed throughout our house, which all of a sudden seemed way too small.

"That's great, honey," my wife replied. Then under her breath she asked me, "Did you let him win?"

Knowing that pride often "goeth before the fall," I bit the proverbial bullet and admitted that he, in fact, had beaten me fair and square. I repeated the admission to make sure that I wasn't in fact in the midst of some horrible nightmare: "He beat me, goddamnit! Fair and square!"

Reality having sunk in, I nursed my wounds with a shot of Don Julio and a Tecate chaser, then, like an aging silverback on the downward slope of his reign, retreated to the comfort of my La-Z-Boy and remote control.

With my ass firmly ensconced in pleather I vowed to never play HOT WHEELS RACING again: you know, setting the good example of, if at first you don't succeed, quit. But my son—competitor that he is—had tasted blood, and he wanted more.

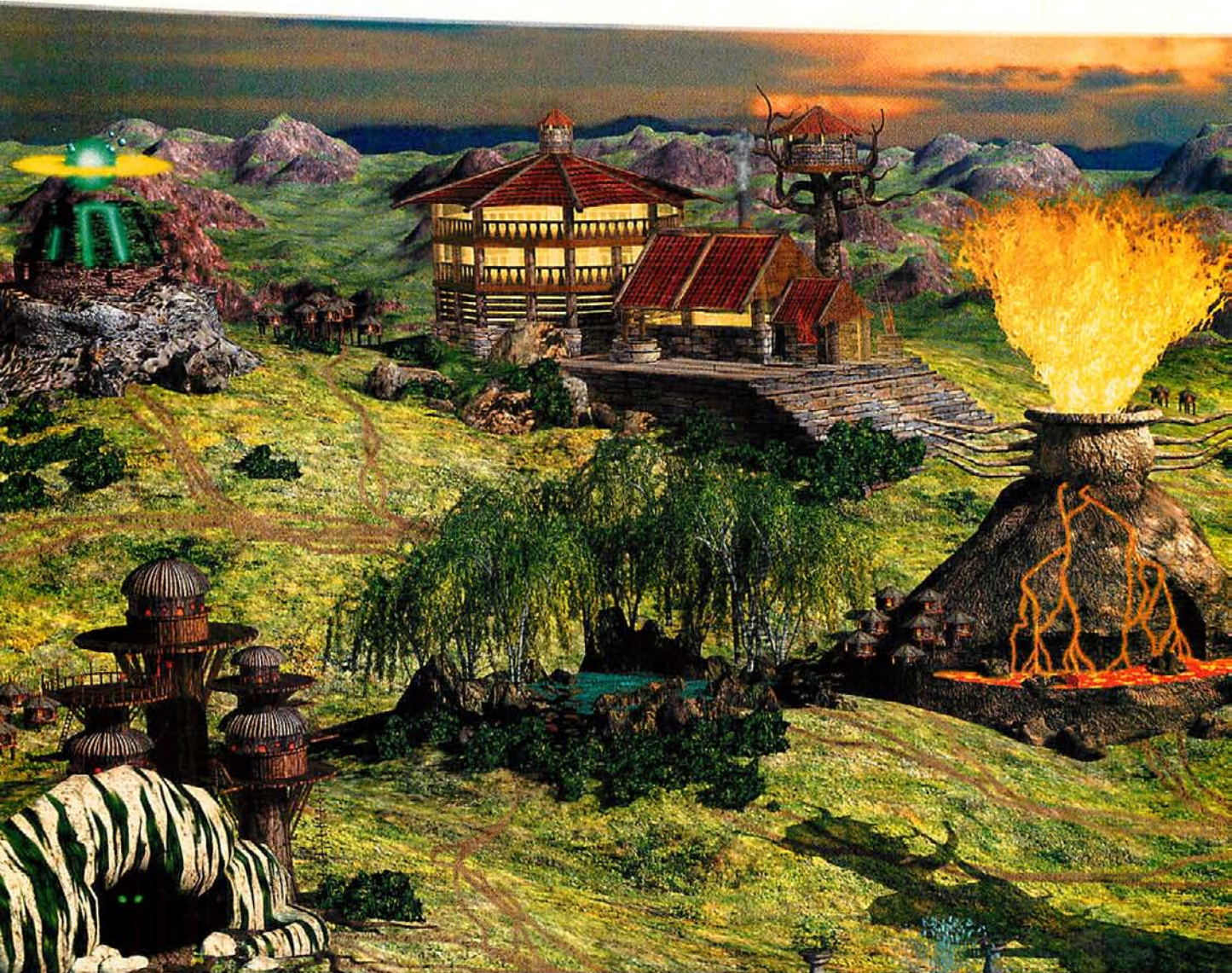
"Wanna play again, Daddy?" he asked me sheepishly. "No," I replied, "I'm gonna watch the rest of this baseball game."

"Mommy! Daddy's afraid to play me 'cause I beat him," he jeered.

Before things got out of control, I knew there was only one thing that a self-respecting father like me could do. I glanced at my watch and told him to go to bed. **CGW**



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Letter of the Month: Online Angst

Let me say from the first that this is a bitch session.

In a trend that seems to have started around the time of *ULTIMA ONLINE*, the release of games that are woefully far from finished seems to be getting worse. What is the deal? When did we, as consumers, decide to allow game companies to do this? The most recent offender in my game library is *WORLD WAR II ONLINE*. I bought the game on the day of release and installed it, only to find that even the offline version was unplayable. When I first did manage to log on, I was told I needed a patch to play. A 67MB patch. Now, on a 56K connection and an overloaded server, that equals about

eight to 12 hours of download time. Then, when I finally got the patch, a host of problems greeted me: servers that crashed every five minutes, horribly slow frame-rates, etc.

Please don't get me wrong—I think the idea behind *WWII ONLINE* is a good one, and eventually it will be a very good game, but who decided to release it now? Obviously the game is still deep in the beta phase.

I don't mean to single this game out—it is just a convenient example. But this trend continues. Games are continually released in what are obviously beta forms, followed immediately by game designers posting hundreds of apologies

and excuses about what went wrong and how they didn't expect these problems. The big question is: WHO is deciding to release these games and why? With the upcoming release of several MMORPGs in the relatively near future, I hope that whoever makes these decisions will decide, for once, to hold a game until it is ready.

Jay Woody

*We agree with you completely, Jay, and we unleash the bitch sessions of our own throughout this month's issue. Check out our review of *WWII ONLINE*, as well as this month's columns from Tom McDonald and Jeff Green. It's a horrible trend, it's getting worse, and we hate it as much as you do.*

He Likes Our Rag

I have been reading your rag for a couple of years now, and like so many others, count on you to keep me informed of the gaming world happenings.

I began playing *MAJESTIC* this week and was fortunate enough to meet some great folks through the game. One of these individuals mentioned in passing that she had just finished playing *A.I.*, and hoped that *MAJESTIC* would be of that caliber. "A.I.?" I asked. She directed me to a URL.

In order to promote the upcoming release of the movie *A.I.*, an interactive game was established. Although no interface was used, the plot was promoted through e-mail, links, and even hints in the movie's trailer. Granted, I don't have a pristine collection of *CGW* all in plastic sacks and such, but I do read your rag, rather thoroughly I might add. Where was this article? How come I don't remember you mentioning it? What else am I missing out on?

The Uninformed Doc Thirst

Actually, you're missing out on a lot. That's because you keep calling us a rag. As soon as you decide to be a little nicer to us, we'll send you the real issues.

Not the German Corner!

I must tell you the first thing that I read when I get your magazine is the *Canadian Corner*. I have rarely laughed so much over readers' mail, but that corner is the best. I have been to Canada a few times and found the people nice and full of humor.

Boy, I am sure glad you don't have a *German Corner*. I could just imagine you guys implying that everybody goose steps down to the local kiosk to pick up the latest issue of *CGW*, provided it has been cleared by the ministry of propaganda (laffs).

Keep up the good work, and most of all

the *Canadian Corner*.

**Peter Goetter-Park
Eppingen, Germany**

Yeah, like we're gonna take on the Germans. The only reason you picked on the Canadians was because we could. You guys are too scary.

More BLACK & WHITE Hatred

I remember when *CGW* used to ream games for having more bugs than a Louisiana swamp. This must no longer be true. *BLACK & WHITE* is a large bug with a (great) game in between. All the game does is lock up EVERY time I want to move scaffolding. I love playing it, but when I have to restart lands because the auto-save (while bugging me at the most inopportune moments) does not do anything when I have to restart the game, it turns into work to just grind through the same sh*t over and over again. Five stars used to be a gem *CGW* gave to the best games (MOO, for example). Now it is a worthless tool to sell more advertising.

Joe Chandler, Jr.

SACRIFICE was one of the best RTS games I've ever played. I bet lots of people would agree with me on this. But why did it never make it big? It never made the Top 20. A huge article was never written on how great it was. It was just another game.

"I bought this tight new game called *SACRIFICE*," I say.

"*SACRIFICE*, what's that?" they say. That's how I felt. I think *SACRIFICE* deserved more than that. And *BLACK & FREAKING WHITE* made it to number 1, 2, 3 and is still there! *BLACK & WHITE* sucked! *SACRIFICE* should've taken over, but NOOOOO! It didn't. Why? Why? Why?

6Psycho6Maggot6

Well, first of all, you've got to do something

*about your name, dude. Really. Second, we agree with you on *SACRIFICE*. It was our Strategy Game of the Year last year, but unfortunately, was sadly overlooked by the majority of gamers. Real-time strategy fans should definitely hunt this one down.*

How About \$5K, Plus a Free Copy of SUMMONER?

I was perusing your July issue again, reading about all the great *WWII* games coming our way. However, I noticed that on page 62 the top caption says the troops are taking cover behind Allied tanks. Oops! Those two tanks are Tiger I's. They are Axis tanks—you know, the bad guys...the Germans? By the way, I'm looking for a career change. If you can pay 40K a year plus benefits, I can point this stuff out.

Kevin Hjermstad



We Think He Likes STARCRAFT

Is it just me, or is *STARCRAFT* the best game on Earth? I know—tough competition...but have you played this game? I mean, have you PLAYED THIS GAME?! Heck—I don't even like RTS's! I didn't then, and I don't now! I tried a few others, of course, after I had thrived off of *STARCRAFT* for a while

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LETTERS

(COMMAND & CONQUER, for instance), but they SUCKED! I suppose STARCRAFT is in a league of its own. Well, Blizzard, if you can hear me—PLEASE don't just make one version of that ever so amazingly, astoundingly exciting game. *CGW*: Does Blizzard have plans for another in the future? Oh, by the way, to all of you gamers out there who don't own a copy of STARCRAFT: I want to remind you that just as telephones are a necessity in every home, STARCRAFT (and the expansion, BROOD WAR, I might add) is a necessity on the hard drive. Seriously. Your C drive will hate you without STARCRAFT. It's like going without water for weeks in the Gobi desert, without even so much as a mirage in sight.

Kevin Kane

We're Sorry, But He Begged

Please please please put this in an issue! I really want some people to see this. I have a few problems with some of the people who have been writing in.

1. Quit whining about the scores of some games. If you don't know why the game received a certain score, then read the damn review.
2. Quit whining about which magazine is better. All three computer game magazines hold equal value in my mind (you know which three).
3. The next person who whines about violence in computer games should get a serious beating. No one cares about your opinion on why this magazine or any other is the devil's work because it has some ad featuring some sort of violence. I guarantee you no one has committed any crime because of games. If you don't want to see the violence, then don't buy the games or don't let your kids buy the games.

That's all I can think of now. Laterz. *CGW* is awesome—probably my favorite magazine.

KC Nilmeier

We're a little worried about the level of hostility in your letter here, KC. Perhaps you should lay off the computer games for a while.

Write to us at: Cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

For help with subscriptions:
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Wait, Is He Breaking Up With Us?

Dear *CGW*,

Well, the time has come for us to part ways. It has been a good relationship for the past nine years, but I will be letting my subscription go. Having just published my third book, I am now earning an amazing two figures per month in book royalties, and I find that I no longer have time to make use of this magazine (let alone play any games). No, I read the stories and reviews and long for a life filled with more time to spend aimlessly clicking away with my mouse. But those days are gone, and I must now spend the time I have left spreading my voice to the world. It is a sacrifice that I make—I know you must admire my selfless dedication—but the world needs more books about dragons and I am helpless to stand against the world's calling.

I will, of course, still pick up the occasional issue that has a cover that interests me. But alas, 12 issues a year—it is all too much for me now.

So, dear friends, this is goodbye. I hope you all continue to do well in the following years.

Regrettably,

Michael R. Mennenga
Sci-fi/Fantasy Author

P.S. Tell Jeff I don't think he sucks too bad.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: Game of the Year?

OPERATION FLASHPOINT hasn't hit the United States yet. We'll have to wait for September. But I've played the demo (simply fantastic), and I've been reading various message boards where people discuss the game now that it's been released across the pond. I'm going to go out on a limb right now and say that this WILL be Game of the Year for 2001. And frankly, I think it deserves a cover story!

Vern Pellerin
San Diego, CA

The Return of TRADE WARS

I'm disappointed to see that you failed to mention the revival (at last) of one of the

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PUBLISHERLEE UNIACKE
lee_uniack@ziffdavis.com

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

EDITOR-IN-CHIEFJEFF GREEN
jeff_green@ziffdavis.com

EDITORKEN BROWN
k_brown@ziffdavis.com

MANAGING EDITORHOLLY FLEMING
holly_fleming@ziffdavis.com

TECHNICAL EDITORWIL O'NEAL
wil_o_neal@ziffdavis.com

REVIEWS EDITORROBERT COFFEY
rob_coffey@ziffdavis.com

PREVIEWS EDITORTOM PRICE
tom_price@ziffdavis.com

STRATEGIES & TIPS EDITORTHIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN
thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com

ONLINE EDITORIAL DIRECTORGEORGE JONES
g_jones@ziffdavis.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORSCHARLES ARDAL, MARK ASHER,
T. BYRL BAKER, GORDON BERG, LOYD CASE, TOM CHICK, DESSLOCK, BRUCE
GERYK, JEFF LACKEY, RAPHAEL LIBERATORE, THOMAS MCDONALD

ART DIRECTORROB SCHULTZ
rob_schultz@ziffdavis.com

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTORJASON BABLER
jason_babler@ziffdavis.com

CONTRIBUTING DESIGNERANDREW BURWELL
andrew_burwell@ziffdavis.com

MANUFACTURING DIRECTORCARLOS LUGO
c_lugo@ziffdavis.com

SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGERANNE MARIE MIGUEL
a_miguel@ziffdavis.com

AD PRODUCTION COORDINATORTERESA NEWSON
t_newson@ziffdavis.com

PREMEDIA DIRECTORVICKI EGAN
v_egan@ziffdavis.com

PREMEDIA MANAGERSTEVE REIMERS
s_reimers@ziffdavis.com

PREMEDIA TECHNICIANROGER DRAKE
r_drake@ziffdavis.com

HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS

ADDRESS NON-SUBSCRIPTION RELATED QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK TO:
CGW EDITORIAL, 50 BEALE STREET, 12TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105. OR YOU MAY
CONTACT US VIA: CGWLETTERS@ZIFFDAVIS.COM PHONE: (415) 357-4900 • EDITORIAL FAX: (415)
357-4977 WEBSITE: WWW.COMPUTERGAMING.COM

GROUP ASSOCIATE PUBLISHERSUZANNE REIDER
suzie@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4915

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/
MIDWEST TERRITORYMARC CALLISON
marc_callison@ziffdavis.com • (630) 382-9034

DISTRICT SALES REPRESENTATIVE/
EAST COAST TERRITORYTALLIE FISHBURNE
tallie_fishburne@ziffdavis.com • (617) 354-0284

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/
MIDWEST AND EAST COAST TERRITORYEMILY OLMAN
emily_olman@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-5226

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/PACIFIC NORTHWEST
AND BAY AREA PENINSULAIAN SINCLAIR
ian_sinclair@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4925

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/PACIFIC NORTHWEST
AND BAY AREA PENINSULAMARY GRAY
mary_gray@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8782

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/
SOUTHWEST TERRITORYKAREN LANDON
karen_landon@ziffdavis.com • (760) 942-6277

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/SOUTHWEST TERRITORYLINDA PHILAPIL
linda_philapil@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8761

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/TEXAS, WASHINGTON,
SAN FRANCISCO TERRITORYMARCZYAMAGUCHI
marczy@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-4944

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/TEXAS, WASHINGTON,
SAN FRANCISCO TERRITORYMEIGHAN O'ROURKE
meighan_ourourke@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4920

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER AND
CREATIVE DIRECTORREY LEDDA
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8775

MARKETING COORDINATORANNIE LIPSCOMB
annie_lipscomb@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8249

ADVERTISING COORDINATORTIPLER UBELLOHDE
tippler_ubelohde@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4930

SALES ASSISTANTKRISTEEN LAUT
kristeen_laut@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8778

SALES ASSISTANTCHERYL FARRELL
cheryl_farell@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8783

HOW TO CONTACT ADVERTISING & SALES

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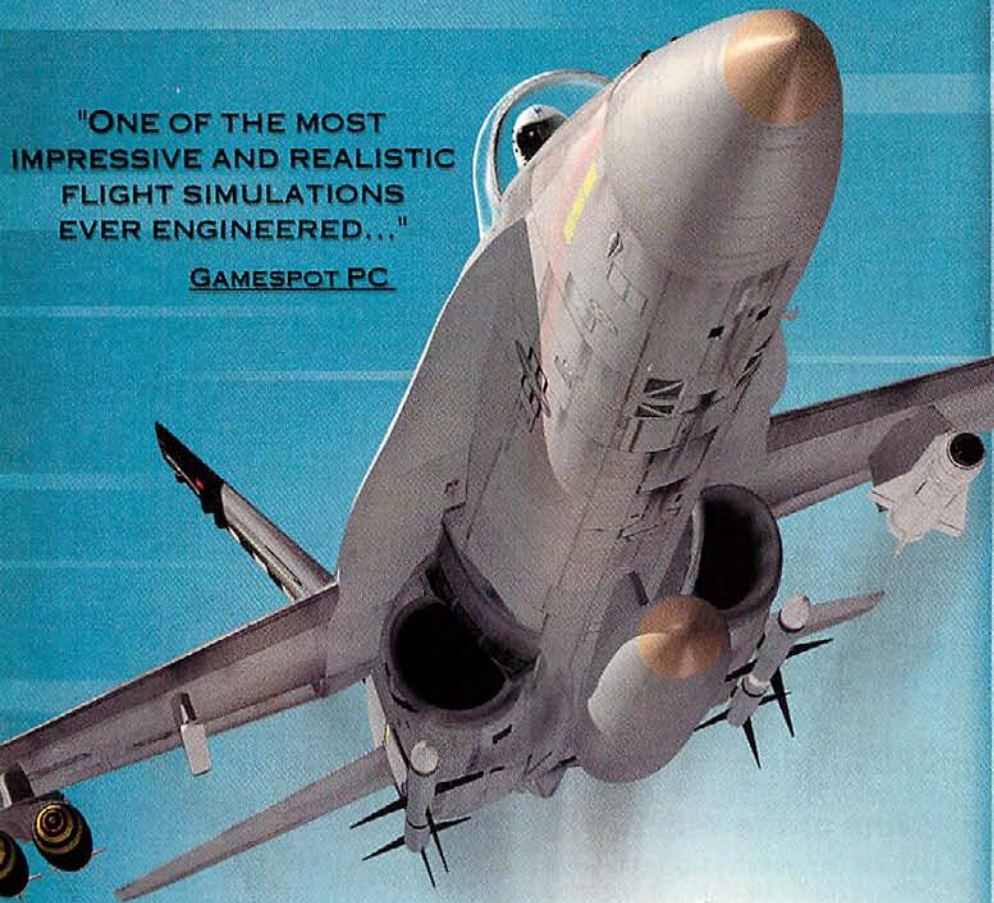
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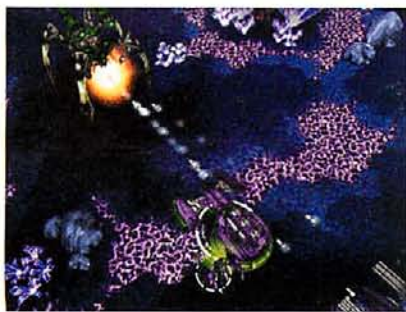
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you might have missed at E3. I cannot account for the hours I wasted playing TRADE WARS on BBS's. Though I realize that many of your younger readers may not appreciate the greatness of TRADE WARS and the strategy buried within, those of us who started before the Internet wasted many many hours playing ANSI graphics-based games like TRADE WARS. Now, at last, there is a massively multiplayer game based upon it, expected to be released in Q1 of 2002. Give some credit to the resurgence of one of the games that made us itch to log on and play our daily turns, to conquer a 5,000-sector universe, and stage massive team invasions!

Josh Dalton

Handy Stats: The Fans Speak Out

Where'd the *Handy Stats* go? The stats were not too handy but always funny to read. What gives?

Geoffrey

OK, I've had to accept that the magazine is being taken over by young kids (Scooter, Wil), and the fact that the magazine has gone from over 250 pages a month to a mere 106, and that your best staff (minus Jeff Green, of course) has left, but the one positive thing that you have done with your

magazine is now gone. Return *Handy Stats* or I will begin my search for a new magazine!

Thanks.

Andrew Friedrich
Richland, Washington

We liked *Handy Stats*, too. The only problem is that it was written by Alex Handy, who no longer works for us. So we could keep it, but we'd probably have to change the name. Dandy *Stats*? Randy *Stats*? Any other suggestions?

This Month's Random Angry Canadian

OK guys, I got a major bone to pick with you. Not two hours ago I purchased this magazine. Guess how much I paid?? I live in Canada so it was a good 10 bucks. I brought it home and began flipping through it like normal when I began to notice something. The ads. You see, lately I have been buying your magazine a lot and have noticed one thing. More and more ads. Up until now I have let it slide but this time I whipped out the old calculator and decided to investigate. And to my disgust I found that no less than about 35 percent of your magazine was ads!!!! That only leaves 65 percent for relevant information!! 35 percent! C'mon guys, that is way too much of a ripoff for 10 dollars. I mean, a six-page ad for one game (C&C RENAGADE)??? That just

problem, to be honest, is that advertising is way down (a problem that extends into the entire tech publishing industry right now). With fewer ads, we have to publish fewer edit pages. So, yes, the magazine is much smaller now than it used to be, and no one is more bummed than the editors—who end up cutting many, many pages before the issues hit the newsstands.

How to Get Published in CGW: A Case Study

I cannot explain how much I'm addicted to the *Reviews* section of your magazine. Every month when I receive a copy, I sit for hours, carefully reviewing every detail that's explained, and add up the pros and cons afterwards. I don't even buy a game anymore unless the descriptions I've read prove the game is of good quality. And I must admit, you've been correct every time. I feel that Jason Kapalka, Loyd Case, Tom Chick, Gordon Berg, Elliott Chin, Jason Babler, Gord Goble, and Tom Price all deserve a big pat on the back for a job well done on the September 2001 *Computer Gaming World's Reviews* section. Those guys really rock.

Justin

The mothers of Jason, Jason, Tom, Tom, Gordon, Gord, Elliott, and Loyd all thank you. Justin. You're a fine young man and we salute you and your good taste.

"...all other things being equal, I'd rather kill myself than be fathered by Jeff Green."

plain sux. Now I have just bought a new computer and want to subscribe to your magazine so you can either refund my money on this issue, fix the problem, or at the very least publish my letter so other gamers like me can voice their opinions on this subject.

Cory

Actually, that ad/edit ratio, while high, is not all that uncommon in the magazine biz. The big

Shooter Overkill

First of all, all other things being equal, I'd rather kill myself than be fathered by Jeff Green [*Greenspeak*, September 2001]. Second, your 19-page shooter spectacular is not so spectacular for people who don't play or are sick of this game genre (that is—for all five of us). But honestly, don't you think that there are too many shooters? I doubt you'd be able to come up with a 19-page strategy or adventure spectacular. I am not complaining about simulation games because I see that you have no problem dedicating one review after another to little Barbie dolls that set themselves on fire (yes, THE SIMS).

Strategy and adventure games, however, do not seem to be so popular in the media, and most of them receive low scores to begin with (reminds me of my SATs). Are we going to see more and more first-/third-person shooters in the future, or is there a chance that gamers will get tired of them? No matter what the plot is about, at the end it all comes down to kill or be killed. And it seems that every other hyped game to be released is like that. Very original. Not.

Alex Izvekov

Jeff Green replies: Alex? Son? Is that you?

Penny Arcade© by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (www.penny-arcade.com)



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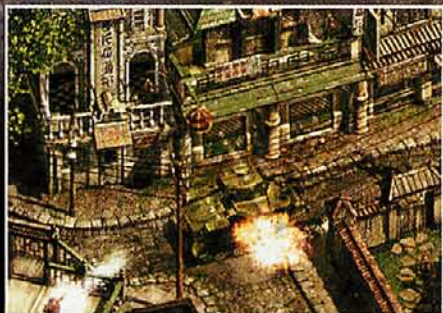
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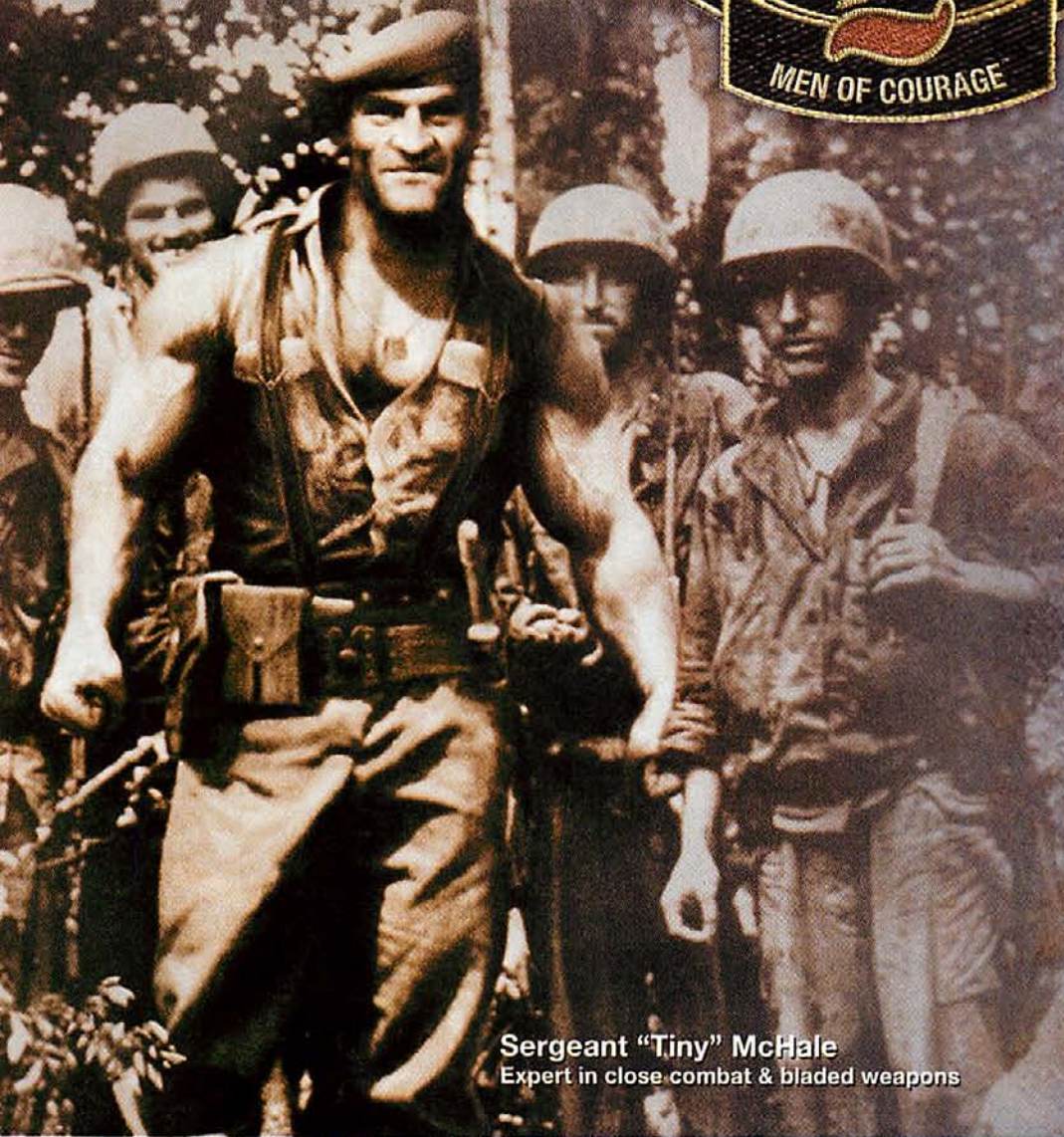


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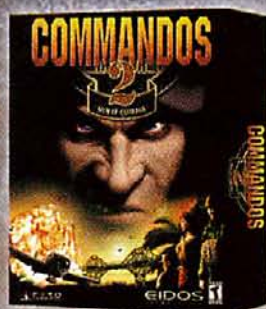
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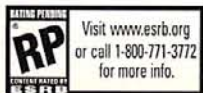
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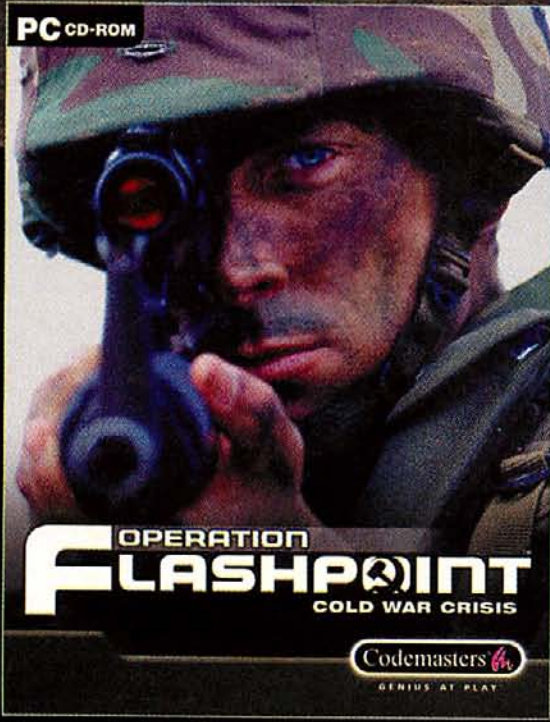


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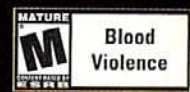


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AquaNox

AQUANOX is set in a postapocalyptic world of politically unstable communities known as Aqua (first explored in Massive Development's ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY), an environment spiced with newly uncovered yet ancient gods and monsters. You are Emerald "Dead Eye" Flint, a mercenary submarine captain charged with exploring underwater cities and strange life forms in the deep ocean.

AQUANOX does not follow the ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY model, however. It's not a role-playing feast with a trading side salad. Project Manager Wolfgang Walk explains: "We learned from ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY that trade pretty much kills the balance of the game if your schedule doesn't allow you to make it a main feature. RPG elements also proved to be very disturbing. People were able to act and talk in many different ways with hardly any results in AM. Gamers want to see their fighting skills at work during combat—not their character-development skills."

Massive's aims with AQUANOX were to create a wide variety of tactical options and weapons for the player who appreciates a good bloodfest, as well as to formulate tactical approaches to stealth missions using precision-based attacks.

"There's no puzzle-solving in this one, just common sense.... You don't need a Big Bang Torpedo when you just want to secretly infiltrate an enemy building," Walk says.

There are, however, environmental realities that must be observed. Vessels move through the medium of water, a "thicker" material than the vacuum of space. Therefore, players will experience inertia when changing direction. Also, ships have to deal with currents that can be utilized to tactical advantage. For example, a player can float silently, without engine noise, while passing through a guarded canyon. There are also decompression limitations to consider and range-of-sight issues at extreme depths. However, the simulation aspects of the game are there to assist the action and not to dominate it. After all, turning AQUANOX into a realistic underwater simulation would "screw up

all the fun," according to Walk.

The 30-mission campaign is linear, with a couple of side quests for players who need extra money. Typical gameplay sequences have the player moving from one underwater station to the next, meeting NPCs, experiencing elements of the story, learning the background of Aqua itself and, before leaving, grabbing orders and briefings for new missions. Players receive financial rewards for successfully completing missions. Having entered the dock, players can also equip their vessel. There are more than 40 vessels to choose from, with all the goodies that money can buy—assuming your pockets are not empty.

During missions, dynamic events often occur that result in new tasks for the player. These unexpected twists give the game variety and maintain a sense of the unknown, alleviating the potential for campaign ruts—a problem in many true simulations.

Action-based games, with or without atmospheric graphics and cultural details, often rise or fall on game balance. Massive has imposed a gradual learning curve right up to the end of the game. "We more or less use the QUAKE controls, so the beginner has absolutely no problems with getting started," says Walk. "However, our AI allows us to challenge even the most experienced player. When fighting against two vessels with full AI capability, you will need to be very clever to even survive. So after learning to control your ship, which takes about five minutes, you need to learn how your enemies fight."

At press time, the game was still under development and some features had yet to be decided upon, including multiplayer and network options. There will be the usual deathmatch and capture-the-flag modes over a LAN or the Internet, and more advanced networking options may be added.

While AQUANOX promises fun and frolics, it's also one of the first games to be optimized for nVidia's GeForce3 line of graphics cards. That means AQUANOX will also tempt gamers with plenty of eye-popping surprises. Exciting gameplay and beautiful GeForce3-powered graphics? Somebody hand us a SCUBA tank.

—Paul Rigby



cyanworlds.com

Mudpie

Rand Miller, one half of the two-brother team that brought the world the blockbuster *MYST* series, is back. His company, Cyan Worlds, located in Mead, Washington, has lifted the veil on *MUDPIE*, a massively multiplayer online game that allows players to explore a vast underground civilization.

The cavernous city of D'ni, drawn from *MYST* lore, is a deserted place where players can build their own neighborhoods or explore the ruins with friends. The neighborhoods will be safe, invitation-only places where kids can avoid unfriendly players.

"The story is set in the present day. You come to D'ni and find it's been destroyed," says Miller, who has been working on the game for two years with a mostly new team that has expanded to 50 people. "That's your starting point. From there, you can explore the underground

world. You can explore the D'ni culture and history and yet not feel like you're being force-fed a story."

Players start above ground in a landscape that looks like the rocky crags of New Mexico. Underground, D'ni itself covers an area larger than four square miles. Players will also be able to visit other worlds: The caverns of D'ni will contain a variety of linking books that will transport players to new Ages. Cyan Worlds plans to start the game in the ruins of D'ni, and then add new Ages for players to explore over time.

The game is powered by a 3D graphics engine created by Headspin Technology, a Chapel Hill, North Carolina, company that Cyan recently purchased. Its robust design allows the artists to use lighting and shading to create a beautiful impressionistic effects, like purple reflections of water dripping down the side of a cave. And in contrast to the *MYST* and *RIVEN* games, you will be able to turn your head

in any direction and see everything in perfect 3D-rendered form.

The game's business model isn't yet complete. Decisions about who will publish the game and how much players will have to pay every month haven't been finalized. But Miller says he hopes the game will take advantage of two new breakthrough technologies: voice over the Internet and broadband.

Just as *MYST* propelled demand for CD-ROMs in 1993, Miller believes that *MUDPIE* will increase demand for broadband. The game is certainly ambitious: Miller put \$5 million of his own money into the development effort and expects to raise \$7 million more to get the game in shape for launch.

"We're making something we want to play, trying not to copy anyone else, and thinking out of the box," Miller says. "If this is truly to become the vision that we want, it will be the most expensive computer game ever." —Dean Takahashi

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G.O.D.'S FALL FROM GRACE

In between high ideals and raucous E3 parties with transvestites, midgets, and strippers, Gathering of Developers lost its way. What went wrong?

By Geoff Keighley

For the past three years, the parking lot across the street from the E3 Expo in Los Angeles has been home to the Promised Lot, an event best described as the Steve Martin movie *Leap of Faith*, about a slyster evangelist, crossed with the CD-ROM puzzle game FREAK SHOW. Featuring everything from a 30-foot-high inflatable Gene Simmons to strippers in Catholic schoolgirl outfits and lesbian oil wrestling, the Promised Lot was the carnival-like showpiece of Gathering of Developers, a group of rebellious developers who banded together to form their own publishing company. Founded in 1998 on the

principle that independent developers should be able to get a better deal than what was being offered by most software publishers, G.O.D. did its best to shake up the industry. Partners Mike Wilson and Harry Miller championed the cause at every turn, often accusing companies like Activision and GT Interactive of exploiting developers and treating them like unruly children.

The Next Testament, an imitation Bible distributed at E3 2000, summarized G.O.D.'s creed. Chapter 7 of the "Book of Gathering" stated: "And let it be told that The Gathering is indeed the antipublisher, a cancer within the existing corporate system

of shallow, out-of-touch publishers who have little knowledge and no regard for the developers and games or the culture they were born out of."

But while G.O.D. touted itself as the antipublisher, the reality was just the opposite: G.O.D. had been completely bought out by publisher Take 2 Interactive only days before last year's E3. At the same time it was making a lot of noise about the need for artists to maintain their independence, G.O.D. had sacrificed its own independence to keep itself afloat. Meanwhile, G.O.D. continued to pour Take 2's money into several development projects. But in the three and a half years

since G.O.D.'s inception, only RAILROAD TYCOON 2, TROPICO, and MAX PAYNE have turned out to be certified hits.

That's probably what precipitated the announcement in August that G.O.D.'s Dallas and Austin operations would be shut down, and the brand would be run out of Take 2's New York office. Wilson and Miller found themselves out of a job; what was supposed to be the gaming industry's Boston Tea Party ended with the leaders being bought off and dispersed.

Passing the Collection Plate

What led to G.O.D.'s demise? Chalk it up to a number of prob-



While Take 2 spent millions keeping him in business, G.O.D.'s Mike Wilson carried a cross at E3 to signify his unhappiness with the publisher.

lems, including a lack of funding, infighting among the developers and company management, and a slate of products that didn't sell. After all, one hit game in three years was a far cry from what Wilson first pitched to the media and an assortment of developers, including 3D Realms Entertainment, Epic MegaGames, and Ensemble Studios. (The first two signed on; Ensemble opted to remain with Microsoft.) If things went right, G.O.D. was supposed to be the United Artists of game publishers and home to a board of developers who would ensure that every game shipped had triple-A blockbuster potential. In addition to Epic and 3D Realms, Terminal Reality, Ritual Entertainment, PopTop Software, and Edge of Reality signed on as founding members.

But financing was always a problem for G.O.D. In the early days, Wilson and Miller hit the road in hopes of raising \$25 million. By May of 1998, after months on the road, G.O.D. still hadn't been funded and Wilson was forced to take what amounted to the only real offer: a distribution deal with Take 2 Interactive for \$7.5 million in

was supposed to ensure that what little money the company had was spent wisely. "The thought and the plan behind the board was genuinely honest," explains Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinski. "But in practice, G.O.D. was disorganized and the developer board was a joke." Part of what made the board a joke was the fact that games such as the BLAIR WITCH PROJECT and KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS circumvented the approval process. "I didn't run [KISS] through the development board because I was so excited about the license and the team," says Wilson.

Wilson's excitement was not shared by consumers. Before long, G.O.D. was in dire need of a hit to generate cash, but that hit proved elusive, especially as major games like MAX PAYNE continued to slip behind schedule. By mid-2000, G.O.D. was out of money and facing a difficult choice: Go out of business or sell out to Take 2.

"Selling to Take 2 was definitely an ego blow," says Wilson. "The problem was that after we sold, Harry and I were no longer in control of the company and things started changing." The

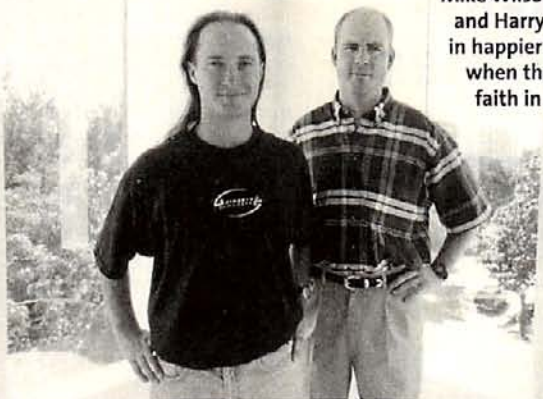
GOD'S GAMES

Overall sales of 1.3 million units in three years explains the Gathering's precarious finances—especially since RAILROAD TYCOON II accounted for 351,000 of those copies.

| Game | CGW Rating | U.S. Sales |
|---|------------|---------------|
| 4x4 Evolution | 4 | 41,500 |
| Age of Wonders | 4 | 71,000 |
| Blair Witch Volume 1 | 1 | 49,000 |
| Blair Witch Volume 2 | 1.5 | 16,000 |
| Blair Witch Volume 3 | 1.5 | 8,500 |
| Darkstone | 3.5 | 130,000 |
| Fly! | 3.5 | 93,000 |
| Fly! 2/Fly! 2K | 2 | 47,000 |
| Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 | 3.5 | 44,000 |
| Jazz Jackrabbit 2 | 2.5 | 29,000 |
| Kingdom Under Fire | 1 | 20,000 |
| KISS Psycho Circus/Collector's Edition | 3 | 42,000 |
| Nocturne* | 1.5 | 109,000 |
| Oni | 2.5 | 50,000 |
| Railroad Tycoon II/Gold | 4.5 | 351,000 |
| Rune | 2 | 49,000 |
| Serious Sam | 4.5 | 83,000 |
| Tropico | 3.5 | 67,000 |
| AVERAGE | 2.7 | 76,000 |

Sales data provided by NPD INTELLECT.
*CGW's 1999 Coaster of the Year

Mike Wilson (left) and Harry Miller in happier times, when they had faith in G.O.D.



"We were never truly independent because we didn't have the chance to raise enough money. We were independent minded, but that's quite a different thing."—Mike Wilson

advances, which would lock up the Gathering's first 10 products. "Gathering never really had the chance to operate as it was originally envisioned because of its inability to get funding from the start," explains Phil Steinmeyer, founder of PopTop Software.

But even if G.O.D.'s financing was tight, the developer board

developer board lost whatever power it had, and the summer 2000 titles bombed. "KISS came out and failed, HEAVY METAL got forced out after slipping significantly and going way over budget, and it didn't sell either," says Wilson. "The failure of both those games to earn out basically sealed our fate, with Take 2

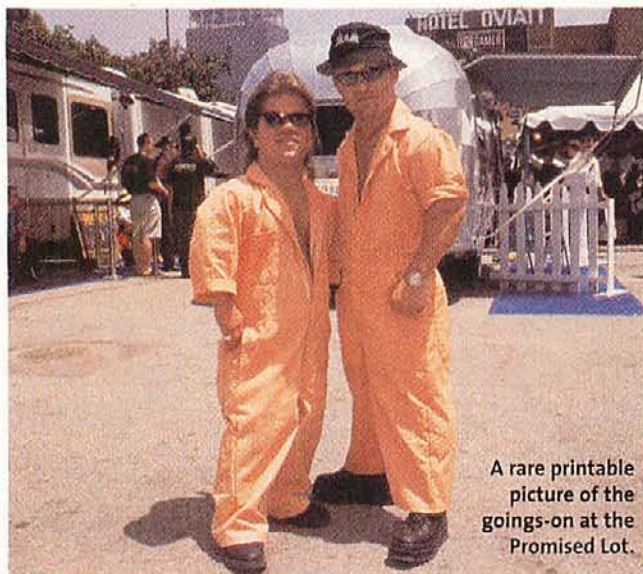
deciding that all development decisions would be taken over by them." The blow to the founders' vision was cushioned by a sizable payoff: Wilson netted \$5 million in Take 2 stock from the sale; Miller made out with nearly \$2.5 million.

Privately, many developers believe G.O.D. may be better off

without Wilson. "Mike is an amazing PR guy," says Jay Wilbur of Epic Games, who worked with Wilson at id Software. "But being the CEO of a company is something fundamentally different, and I'm not sure the Gathering had the management it needed to be a success—it was the Peter Principle [a person rises to the level of their incompetence] in action, to be honest."

Was the Idea Doomed?

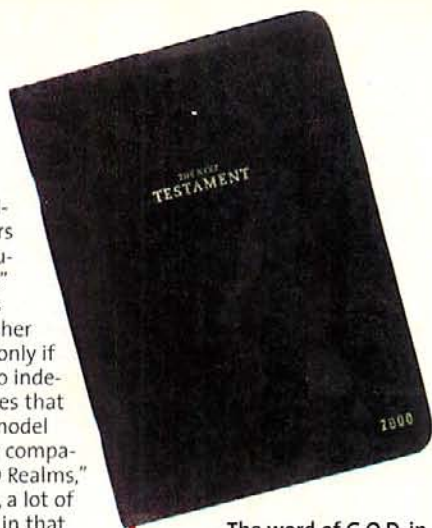
Could the idea of a developer-driven publisher ever work? Ron Chaimowitz, founder of GT Interactive software, says the idea was doomed from day one. "The business model didn't



A rare printable picture of the goings-on at the Promised Lot.

lisher is not contributing to the process," he says. "The reality, though, is that a publisher can be a very well-oiled machine with years of experience in distribution, marketing, and PR."

Wilson still thinks his developer-driven publisher model could work, but only if developers can afford to independently finance games that run over budget. "The model will really only work for companies like id, Epic, and 3D Realms," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of our developers weren't in that position and required additional funding when their game slipped." Given G.O.D.'s financial position, additional funding was hard to come by, and that resulted in many games shipping before they were complete—including RUNE and FLY 2. "Take 2 told us that we had to ship our game by the end of the quarter or...we'd be liable to pay them back all our



The word of G.O.D. in the company's Next Testament turned out to be its last testament.

G.O.D.'s Fall From Grace—Continued

make sense," he says. "There are a number of costs and risks that publishers have to indulge in which prevent you from giving

operators earned a royalty of 35 to 50 percent on each copy sold, while some mainstream publishers typically gave no more

"G.O.D. was disorganized and the developer board was a joke." —Cliff Bleszinki, Epic Games

50 percent royalties to a developer—7 out of 10 games don't make money. The publisher has to eat those development costs and spread the risk over multiple products." Under G.O.D.'s model of sliding royalties, devel-

than 25 percent.

Brian Raffel, cofounder of Raven Software, agrees that the role of a publisher should not be dismissed. "I think it's an easy trap for a developer to look at a publisher and feel that the pub-

advances on development," explains Terminal Reality's Evan Russell. In the end, the vibrant flame of independence was snuffed out by the realities of a public company trying to meet quarterly

projections. (Take 2 referred our questions about G.O.D. to Wilson.)

G.O.D.'s three-year experiment leaves a legacy of mostly mediocre games, disappointed developers, and disillusioned founders. While the God Games brand will continue to appear on future titles such as MYTH III, DUKE NUKEM FOREVER, and STRONGHOLD, what Take 2 dubs the "biggest and brashest of all indie labels" will in effect become just another marketing brand for a public company—a far cry from its original purpose. Ironically, Wilson's next venture is a DVD-based video magazine entitled *Substance* that will cover "people and things of substance," he says. Perhaps the magazine will feature the substance that the God Games brand now sorely lacks. **CGW**

REALITY CHECK

Zzzzzzzzz. Snrk! Oh, we're supposed to say something here. Well, there's not much to be said for this somnambulist assortment of snoozers. Let's hope that next month games like MAX PAYNE and the

expansions to DIABLO II and BALDUR'S GATE II will put a merciful end to this mediocre summer.

| | CGW | PC Gamer | CGM | Gamespot | Adrenaline Vault | gamerankings.com |
|----------------------------------|-----|----------|-----|----------|------------------|------------------|
| Atlantis: Trial By Fire | D- | C- | C- | D+ | * | C- |
| Cossacks: European Wars | B- | C | * | B- | * | B- |
| Echelon | B- | A | * | B- | C- | B- |
| Emperor: Battle for Dune | C- | A- | * | B+ | C- | B+ |
| Fly! II | D | D+ | * | C | * | C |
| Half-Life: Blue Shift | B+ | C | C | B- | C- | B- |
| Offroad Redneck Racing | B- | B | C | B | C- | C+ |
| Star Trek: Elite Force Expansion | D | B- | C+ | C+ | * | C |
| World War II Online | D | C- | F | C | * | C |
| Z: Steel Soldiers | D | C+ | * | C+ | * | B |

* no rating available at press time

The CGW Mix



MAX PAYNE

We got it just before deadline...and finished it the day after. While the plot is a clichéd mishmash of *The Punisher* and every John Woo movie ever made, "bullet time" adds a lot to gameplay; it's disappointing to play a shooter without it now. Look for our review next month.



ANARCHY ONLINE

It's the MMORPG we all love to hate. Even with game-wrecking bugs, we manage to play it into the wee hours of the morning. ANARCHY'S DIABLO II-like addictiveness keeps us glued to the screen as we slay monster after monster trying to achieve that next uber item. Must...get...level...40...Bau...Cyber Armor!!!



SIDEWINDER PAD USB

Someone actually listened. We pined for our old-style SideWinder pads after their unwieldy follow-up, the Game Pad Pro, left us cold. The old SideWinders just felt right. Now they're back and they're USB. Even if the Xbox flops, at least Microsoft did one thing right this year.



SPIDER-MAN TRAILER

The best part of the *Final Fantasy* movie was getting to see the awesome trailer for the upcoming *Spider-Man* movie, directed by cult hero Sam "Evil Dead" Raimi. Yeah, we'll be out the day this movie opens. Catch the trailer at www.spiderman.sonypictures.com/.

MILKMAN MEETS THE MIXMAN

Hold onto your faders, people! The Mixman DM2 is here to save you from your Casios with a music-making gadget so simple, even a suburban white boy could whip up something halfway groove-worthy. It's like Reason (superreal, superhard-core, superfresh music-editing software) for retards.

Apart from letting you go "wikky wik" with the cool play-back wheels, the DM2 (Digital Music Mixer) lets you make your own CD-quality jams with a large collection of samples taken from actual house music, hip-hop, techno, and electronica tracks. You map different samples to the pads on the wheels, doing in seconds what would take a DJ hours. The Mixman automatically synchs up the samples to your tempo, creating the seductive illusion that you have rhythm. You can record a track on each wheel, and fire them back together or fade back and forth between the two. The warp controller even lets you add funky "flanging" sounds like "Whoosh!" "Vreeep!" and "Pyooowwww!"

Once you get the hang of it, you can do gigs or upload your mix to Mixman's site and bathe in the adoration of your peers. There's no MIDI support (look it up) and VST plug-ins wouldn't hurt (look that one up, too), but hey, for beat masters on a budget, it's the next best thing to two turntables and a stack of vinyl. (\$120)

James "The Milkman" Mielke DJ'd at major clubs in New York City for 10 years, and considers himself qualified to simultaneously admire and mock the DM2 and its potential user base for all it's worth.



On the Radar

Multiplayer Power Restored, Captain



Activision must have come to its senses. After announcing at E3 that *STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER* would not have multiplayer, the company now says the game will have five multiplayer modes: deathmatch, team deathmatch, Federation versus non-Federation, star-base attack and defense, and turkey shoot. The game is being developed by legendary sim designer Larry Holland.

Crimson Skies, the Movie?

DreamWorks Pictures may have picked up the movie rights to Microsoft's barnstorming action game *CRIMSON SKIES*. The studio is looking to develop the property into a live-action feature film, according to *Variety* magazine. Do filmgoers really want to see those two-bit mugs blown up to huge proportions? We'd pay to see them get blown up.

Big Surprise

The long death watch is over: John Romero is officially out of a job, along with Tom Hall, now that Eidos has pulled the plug on the monument to hubris that was *Ion Storm Dallas*. Warren Spector has become head of Eidos' *Ion Storm* subsidiary. Spector's Austin office is considering changing its name because of the 12 million tons of diseased baggage *Ion Storm* bears.

TORN Canceled



Black Isle Studios' 3D RPG, *TORN*, has been canceled, and five of Black Isle Studios' 56 staff members were laid off. Interplay offered no explanation for the game's cancellation. *TORN* featured an enhanced version of Monolith's powerful Lithtech engine, which gave the game a compellingly immersive look. Black Isle Studios is currently co-developing *NEVERWINTER NIGHTS* with BioWare.

Video-Game Ratings Attacked

A new study by Harvard University researchers claims that 40 percent of video games don't adequately warn consumers of their violent content. The researchers said violent content includes minor hitting and fighting as well as weapons, shooting, and death. "There appears to be a fair amount of inconsistency in [the ESRB] content descriptors," said Kimberly M. Thompson, the study's lead author. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board promptly criticized the study, saying it "has a conception of violence that most Americans don't share. It finds violence in games like *MS. PAC-MAN* and *THE SMURFS*."

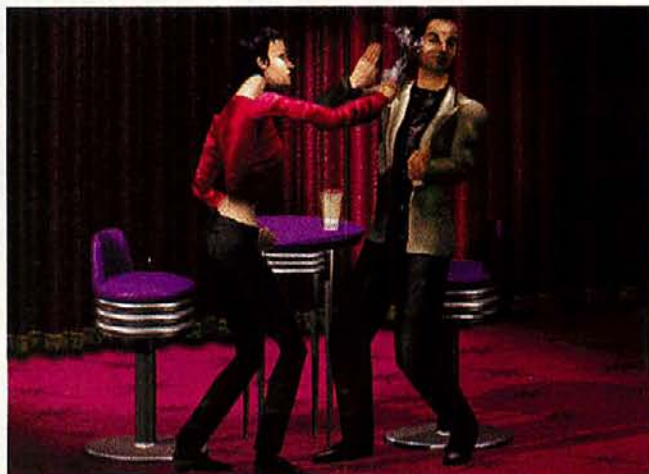
Game Companies Ask to Have Suit Dropped

Eight video-game publishers have asked a federal judge to dismiss a lawsuit brought against them by the families of the victims of the Columbine massacre. Lawyers for the companies said the class-action suit should be dropped because it doesn't allege that any particular game led Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to go on their rampage. The motion argues that video games are protected as free speech, and the companies that make them cannot be held liable for someone's reaction to them.

In Memoriam: Douglas Wayne Myres, Jr., 1964 - 2001



This issue is dedicated to the memory of Doug Myres, aka "Fresh," vice president of Gathering of Developers, who passed away May 4 as the result of an asthma attack. His great character, wit, and infectious smile will be forever missed.



The Sims: Hot Date

Love is the battlefield

Okay, we give up. This winter's *HOT DATE* add-on is going to give us yet another reason to keep playing *THE SIMS*. *HOT DATE* is the first of three add-on products that will honestly expand the *SIMS* world. Finally, you'll be able to take your Sims out of their homes and into something approximating the real world; in this instance, it will be a player-designed downtown area. And it's all in the name of love.

All the new material is being crafted to develop relationships between your virtual people. New environments, including custom-built gift shops, restaurants, parks, and bars, are perfect for pitching woo (or making an embarrassingly sloppy pass). New objects will help set the mood—cuddle in the Love Tub, get hot in the Sauna, or enjoy a romantic al fresco meal courtesy of the Picnic Basket. You can

even buy your lover a gift in a local gift shop (and if it's one of the several new lingerie styles, the receiving Sim will start wearing it instead of his or her pajamas).

Livening up the action will be a bunch of new interactions, all focused on this many splendored thing we call love. You'll be able to play footsie, whisper in your beloved's ear, and enjoy a variety of new kiss styles. Reflecting the scary side of romance, you'll be able to run into other random Sims while in town (you don't want to run into Bella Goth if you're squiring around a new love) as well as endure the special sort of hell that only a blind date can bring.

Start ripping your Barry White CD collection now—you'll need the MP3 mood music when *HOT DATE* ships just in time for the holidays. —Robert Coffey



THE BIG BANG THEORY

AT THIS VERY SECOND
THE UNIVERSE
IS RAPIDLY
EXPANDING.

08:18:01:13

08:18:01:13



MU PRIME 36

"Who put this guy in charge?"

ATTENTION

FLEET ADMIRAL COMMAND

08:18:01:13



TAU CETI

"taking fire, need assistance!"

ATTENTION

FLEET ADMIRAL COMMAND

08:18:01:13



ALPHA CENTAURI- "Real stick, sir."

PHI PRIME- "THIS FLEET IS TOAST!"

08:18:01:13



When you're commanding a fleet this big, the next Big Bang just might be you. Conquest: Frontier Wars puts you in the galactic hot seat where you must deploy and control a massive starfleet across the universe. Don't let it collapse. Your fleet. Your fate.

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Command up to 6 highly intelligent fleet admirals who implement your orders, assess threats and react with organized tactics

NICE THEORY.
IN YOUR CASE,
IT'S BLOWING UP
IN YOUR FACE.

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Mild Language



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PIPELINE

Establishing software release dates is as tricky getting George Lucas to tell you what happens in *Episode III*. These dates represent the best available information we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: egwletters@ziffdavis.com.

Updates



Earth and Beyond

EARTH AND BEYOND: Westwood's been focusing on the starting areas for each of the races to make the learning curve easy for newbies. It's also working on character generation and stress-testing the servers.

CIVILIZATION III: According to Firaxis president Jeff Briggs, most of the gameplay elements are in and the team is now playtesting and balancing. Of course, balance is crucial in a



Civilization III

CIVILIZATION game, and achieving it could take quite a while.

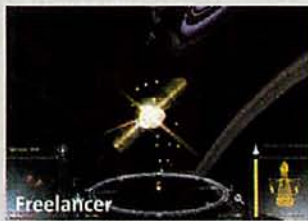
THIEF III: The programming effort has switched from planning to implementing, according to project lead Randy Smith. Smith's comments on the fan site Through the Looking Glass: "We've made a ton of progress on interface, player movement, and AI." There are "guards who patrol, see, and hear, and when they detect



Thief III

you they say, 'must have been rats' afterward." In addition, he said you can already play Garrett in the game: You can sneak him around, hide in shadows, and even shoot arrows. A first pass on the missions is almost complete.

FREELANCER: According to Digital Anvil's Jorg Neumann, "FREELANCER is coming along very well and has made tons of progress since the E3



Freelancer

build. The story script is now complete and recording will start soon in L.A. We have also finalized the universe layout and have connected all the systems via jump gates. Combat and formation AI, as well as work on the story and random missions, are progressing well. Final figures, animations, and optimized models are coming online every day. Every day brings us a good deal closer to the finish line."

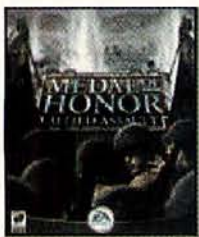
| | | | |
|---|----------------|--|----------------|
| Age of Mythology Ensemble | Spring 2002 | Motor City Online Electronic Arts | Fall 2001 |
| Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne G.O.D. | Spring 2002 | Myth III: The Wolf Age G.O.D. | Winter 2001 |
| Aliens vs. Predator 2 Monolith | Winter 2001 | Neverwinter Nights Interplay | Winter 2001 |
| Aquanox Fishtank Interactive | Fall 2001 | Operation Flashpoint Codemasters | September 2001 |
| NEW Asheron's Call: Dark Majesty Microsoft | Winter 2001 | PlanetSide Verant | Summer 2002 |
| UPDATE Asheron's Call 2 Microsoft | Winter 2002 | Rails Across America Strategy First | September 2001 |
| NEW Comanche 4 Novalogic | Winter 2001 | UPDATE Red Faction THQ | September 2001 |
| Combat Mission 2 Big Time Software | Fall 2001 | NEW Republic: The Revolution Eidos | Summer 2002 |
| UPDATE Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood | Fall 2001 | UPDATE Return to Wolfenstein Activision | Winter 2001 |
| Counter-Strike: Condition Zero Sierra | Fall 2001 | NEW Rogue Spear: Black Thorn UbiSoft | Winter 2001 |
| Destroyer Command UbiSoft | Summer 2001 | UPDATE Sid Meier's Civilization III Infogrames | Fall 2001 |
| Deus Ex 2 Eidos | Summer 2002 | Sid Meier's SimGolf Electronic Arts | Fall 2001 |
| NEW Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza Sierra | Fall 2001 | Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance Microsoft | Fall 2001 |
| UPDATE Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte | Fall 2001 | SimsVille Electronic Arts | Spring 2002 |
| UPDATE Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms | January 2002 | Sims Online Electronic Arts | Summer 2002 |
| Dungeon Siege Microsoft | September 2001 | Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix Activision | Winter 2001 |
| Earth & Beyond Westwood | Winter 2001 | Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment | Summer 2002 |
| Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda | Fall 2002 | Spider-Man Activision | September 2001 |
| Empire Earth Sierra | Fall 2001 | Star Trek: Borg Assimilator Activision | Winter 2001 |
| Etherlords Strategy First | November 2001 | Star Trek: Bridge Commander Activision | Fall 2001 |
| NEW Europa Universalis II Strategy First | Winter 2001 | Star Wars: Galactic Battleground LucasArts | Fall 2001 |
| EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin Verant | Fall 2001 | Star Wars: Galaxies LucasArts | Spring 2003 |
| Flight Simulator 2002 Microsoft | Fall 2001 | Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II LucasArts | Spring 2002 |
| UPDATE Freedom Force Electronic Arts | Christmas 2001 | Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic LucasArts | Fall 2002 |
| Global Operations Electronic Arts | Winter 2001 | Stronghold G.O.D. | October 2001 |
| Halo Microsoft | Spring 2002 | Team Fortress 2 Sierra | Spring 2003 |
| Heroes of Might & Magic IV 3DO | Fall 2001 | Thief III Eidos | Summer 2002 |
| Hidden & Dangerous 2 G.O.D. | Winter 2001 | UPDATE Throne of Darkness Sierra | September 2001 |
| IL2 Sturmovik UbiSoft | November 2001 | Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon UbiSoft | Spring 2002 |
| NEW Imperium Galactica 3: Genesis CDV | Spring 2002 | Unreal II Infogrames | Spring 2002 |
| Master of Orion 3 Infogrames | Spring 2002 | WarCraft III Blizzard | Spring 2002 |
| Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Electronic Arts | October 2001 | Zoo Tycoon Microsoft | Fall 2001 |
| Might & Magic IX: Writ of Fate 3DO | Spring 2002 | | |



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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PREORDERS



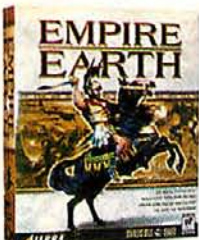
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (EA GAMES) Staying true to the gameplay features that made Medal of Honor one of the most acclaimed games of 1999, MOH Allied Assault builds on that success, adding new player weapons, new interactive Allied vehicles, smarter enemy AI, and artillery strike calls.



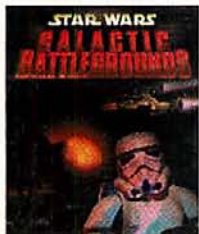
The Sims Expansion: Hot Date (EA GAMES) Hot Date will not only add new character models and objects that players can buy for their houses, it'll also feature dating between sims. Players will be able to either have their sim ask another sim out, or use a new in-game matching service.



Everquest: Shadows of Luclin (VERANT INTERACTIVE) With a new territory to explore, with its own secrets, artifacts, and unique monsters, new game elements, including a new player race and class, plus an upgraded 3-D graphics engine, this expansion will open a new world to players—literally!

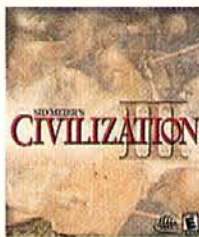


Empire Earth (SIERRA STUDIOS) This game promises to be the premier historical real-time strategy game, as accessible as Age of Empires, but with far more excitement and depth, offering players unprecedented freedom to customize both the historical scope of their game and the character of their civilizations.



Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds (LUCASARTS) The destiny of a galaxy hangs in the balance, and you're in command of campaigns that will determine the final outcome of the Galactic Civil War. This is an epic real-time strategy set against a backdrop of the entire Star Wars saga.

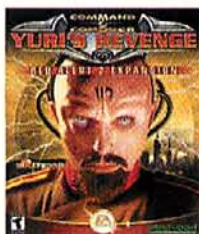
THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Civilization III (INFOGRAMES) A whole new dimension of strategy and possibility that was absent in past Civilization games is created by integrating the concept of culture into the Civilization universe. Brute military force is no longer the only option you have for conquering enemy civilizations.



MS Flight Simulator Pro 2002 (MICROSOFT) Flight Simulator 2002 is the new edition of Microsoft's highly realistic, graphically advanced flight simulator, the best-selling PC flight simulation game ever and includes real-time, interactive Air Traffic Control (ATC), stunning new scenery and visual effects.



Command & Conquer Red Alert 2 Expansion: Yuri's Revenge (EA GAMES) Two months after the events of Red Alert 2, Yuri and an army of psychic soldiers reappear. An emergency team composed of core Allied members is hastily assembled and is sent back in time to stop Yuri before he takes over the world.



Red Faction (THQ) A rebellion breaks out as a deadly disease known as The Plague is spreading through the miner population. You get caught up in an epic struggle to bring down the mining conglomerate known as the Ultor Corporation and find a cure for the deadly plague. Of course, this won't be easy.



Madden NFL 2002 (EA SPORTS) EA Sports looked back on Madden 2001 to see what they could change or refine to make it a little more realistic. This game comes with improved defensive AI, which has also been affected by an increase in different player animations, better graphics, and knock-back blocks.

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20

TOP 20

Top-Selling PC Games in June



Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (Vivendi) \$35 **★★★★★**

This expansion offers the kind of enthralling experience that turned us into gamers in the first place. With its two new character classes—the assassin and druid—the expansion also gives you a reason to replay the entire game. The best DIABLO yet.

1

The Sims (Electronic Arts) \$41 **★★★★★**

Not much of a surprise here—this game's got legs like Anna Kournikova. Most hardcore gamers couldn't care less, but the other 249 million people in the country are suddenly interested in a computer game. We couldn't be happier.



2

The Sims: House Party (Electronic Arts) \$29 **★★★★★**

Not much of a surprise here, either. Will Wright's party with the people continues, and why not? With all the people who've been thrown out of work lately, virtual parties may be the only kind anyone's having.



3

4 Myst III Exile (UbiSoft) \$41 **★★★★★**

5 Black & White (Electronic Arts) \$42 **★★★★★**

6 The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion (Electronic Arts) \$29 **★★★★★**

7 Roller Coaster Tycoon (Infogrames) \$27 **★★★★★**

8 Diablo II (Vivendi) \$38 **★★★★★**

9 MS Train Simulator (Microsoft) \$42 **★★★★★**

10 Half-Life: Blue Shift (Vivendi) \$27 **★★★★★**

11 Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (Microsoft) \$44 **★★★★★**

12 Sim Theme Park (Electronic Arts) \$19 **★★★★★**

13 Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal (Interplay) \$31 **★★★★★**

14 Emperor: Battle for Dune (Electronic Arts) \$45 **★★★★★**

15 World War II Online (Strategy First) \$39 **★★★★★**

16 SimCity 3000 (Electronic Arts) \$19 **★★★★★**

17 Starcraft/Battlechest Bundle (Vivendi) \$25 **★★★★★**

18 Roller Coaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes (Infogrames) \$28 **★★★★★**

19 Tropico (Gathering of Developers) \$39 **★★★★★**

20 Pearl Harbor: Zero Hour (Simon & Schuster) \$19 **not rated**

Based on sales figures for June 2001. Source: NPD INTELECT Market Tracking

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

5

Oct. 1996

This 316-page phone book included a five-star review of QUAKE ("a towering programming feat that goes beyond immersive to make you feel like you're there"), a gushing preview of TOMB RAIDER that missed one or two things ("Lara's biggest asset, aside from her firearms, is her Olympic-gymnast constitution"), six pages of gobbledegook about 28.8K modems (thank God those days are over), and a story about John Romero leaving id to found his own company.



10

Oct. 1991

We were spooked by CDs back then. "The frightening reality is that the arrival of CD-based storage technology has upped the ante on art, music, and game size.... Even at \$60, a game now has to clear 40,000 units to break even." We also inducted SIMCITY into the Hall of Fame, saying "Will Wright's brainchild created a genre...and captured the hearts and minds of more than a third of a million gamers." Make that hundreds of millions.



15

Oct. 1986

Oddly enough, 15 years ago we put another Lucas game on the cover—an ancient ancestor to today's massively multiplayer online games. HABITAT was described as a "new interactive hi-res gaming environment" complete with avatars, quests, chat, and home decor customization. Intrigued by the prospect of "software that provides the sights and sounds of a world that evolves as players interact with one another," we sounded like pioneers at the sight of their first steam train.



WORLDWIDE OIL RESERVES ARE DANGEROUSLY LOW
THERE IS NO TIME TO SWITCH TO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES
MAYHEM AND CHAOS ERUPT AS FEAR GRIPS THE WORLD...

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3 WARRING PARTIES: USA, RUSSIA AND IRAQ

2 CAMPAIGNS AND 5 MISSIONS FOR EACH WARRING PARTY

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Best RPG of E3
- Computer Gaming World



Best of E3 - RPG
- Game Revolution



Top 20 Games of E3
- GameSpot

** The sequel to Arena and Daggerfall, the award-winning 1994 and 1996 RPGs of the Year.*

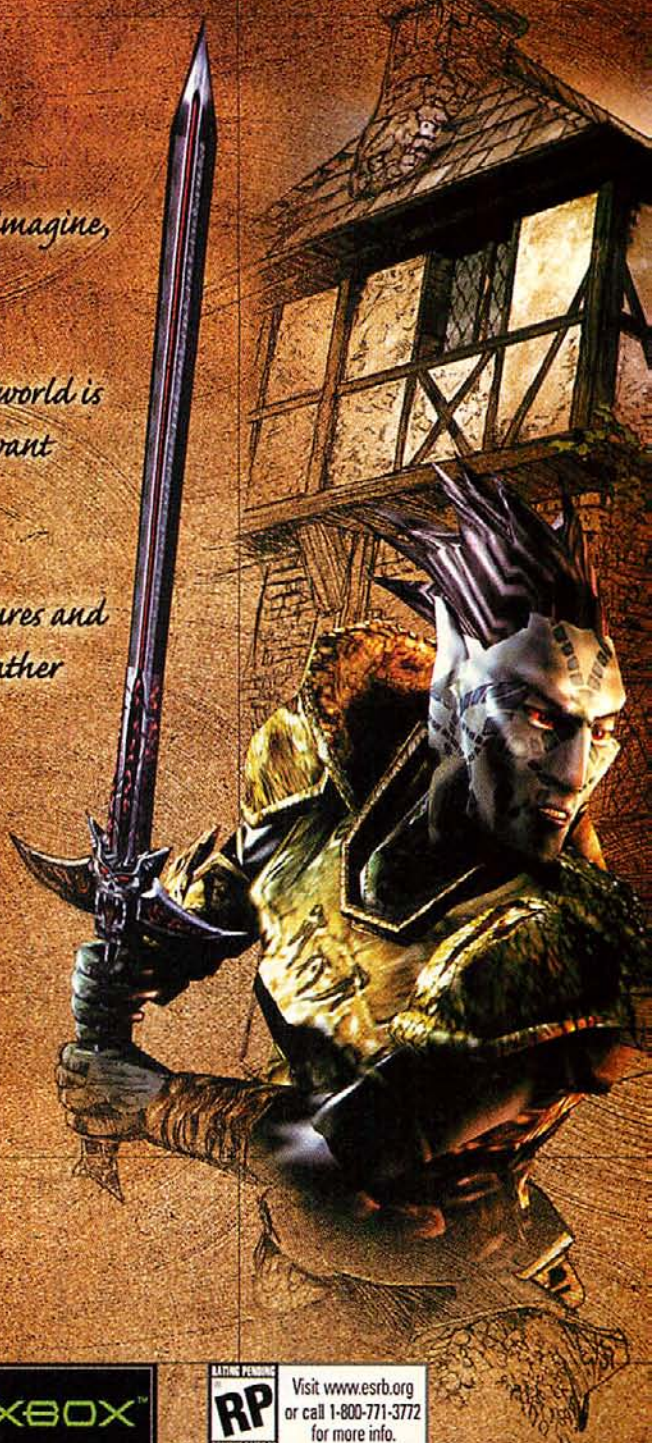
** Live another life. Play any character you can imagine, from the heroic warrior to the secret assassin.*

** Explore another world. The enormous game world is open and free for you to discover. Go anywhere you want and do anything you want.*

** Next generation technology. Realistic textures and objects, incredible polygon counts, and advanced weather systems truly take you to another world.*

** Choose your friends. Involve yourself in guild politics and a huge variety of quests. Thousands of characters remember you and your actions.*

** Download new adventures. Included with the PC version is "The Elder Scrolls Construction Set". Create, share, and download new characters, dungeons, quests and more.*



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Finalist, Best RPG of Show
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Elder Scrolls Series
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The Elder Scrolls III

MORROWIND™

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Left: Summoned creatures fight for their seated, casting hero. Middle: The adventure mode map is in full 3D and offers rotational camera angles. Right: Casting enchantments on weak monsters can make them powerhouses.



ETHERLORDS

Imagine the computer version of **MAGIC: THE GATHERING** taken a step further. That's what Russian developer Nival Interactive, maker of **RAGE OF MAGES** and **EVIL ISLANDS**, is shooting for with **ETHERLORDS**, which merges the tactical combat mode of trading-card games with the adventure play mode of the **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC** series.

It's Not Hot Air—It's More Like Gas

ETHERLORDS sets its fantasy stage by explaining that the entire universe is made of—you guessed it—ether. (Think of it as mana and you'll be just fine.) Four different races manipulate the four distinct flows of ether: Chaos, Motion, Vitality, and Synthesis. While multiplayer will allow all four races to be played, the single-player campaign only offers a choice between two sides, with each side representing an alliance. As one would expect, each race possesses unique attributes (such as differing forms of magic, creatures, and heroes), giving players the freedom to pick the one that best suits their style of play.

Although **ETHERLORDS** draws on several well-known turn-based fantasy games for inspiration, the adventure mode most resembles the overland exploration found in the **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC** series. Players can summon heroes at any time to search the map for resources and artifacts;

heroes are also used to control buildings and to seek out and destroy the enemy. Unlike in **HOMM**, however, the movable units are strictly heroes and not some monstrous superstack composed entirely of fantastical beasts.

The Care and Feeding of Heroes

ETHERLORDS builds upon certain tried-and-true RPG conventions, such as awarding experience points for successful combat, and uses them to advance the player's surrogate selves. In this game, though, increased points not only raise a hero's level and stats, but also let you increase his or her special abilities. Over time, this allows you to create fairly specialized heroes whose skills you can enhance by attaining spells or artifacts that complement their unique capabilities.

Keeping your more developed heroes alive and well is key. Just because heroes rarely advance higher than the 10th level, don't fall into the trap of

GENRE: Strategy

RELEASE DATE: November 2001

PUBLISHER: Fishtank Interactive

DEVELOPER: Nival Interactive

CONTACT: www.etherlords.com



thinking they will be easy to replace. There are a limited number of encounters per map, so a newly summoned low-level replacement hero may have a difficult time finding anything left to fight for those precious experience points. Indeed, players will want to be extra careful with their most powerful units, because losing a high-level hero in the later stages of a mission could prove disastrous. Finding the right balance of heroes to maintain is critical.

The Combat Shuffle

The biggest selling point for *ETHERLORDS*, its tactical combat, is drawn from trading-card games and will ultimately make or break the game. The combat design revolves entirely around a hero's ability to cast the spells that are unique to each

The spells available for casting during combat are randomly determined, but accumulate from one move to the next if unused. So, just as in *MAGIC: THE GATHERING*, players will often center their schemes on trying to balance their "deck" by maximizing the probability of a certain spell being available at the right time. Moreover, a spell can be cast each time it is made randomly available, as long as the hero has the proper rune associated with it. So if a hero is carrying five runes for each of the 15 spells in the spellbook, that's up to 75 total spells that could be cast during a single combat situation—not that any battle would last that long.

The combat itself is broken down into distinct, alternating moves, and each action is fully rendered from a cinematic perspective in glorious 3D-accelerated splendor (as is the adventure mode). Once

rages, the greater chance a higher-level hero has to succeed—if the proper spell strategy is in place, that is. And herein lies the hope for lesser heroes who have to take on a stronger opponent. An elaborate strategy that takes too long to pan out can easily be defeated with the right counterplan.

Finally, combat and spell casting can also take place on a global level. Spells can be directed at opponents' castles or used directly against their heroes. When you physically attack a castle, the combat is resolved in a separate ethereal plane via your heroes. Should you lose, your hero doesn't die, but your castle will lose hit points. If you lose your castle, you've lost the mission.

At press time, a large beta test to uncover any unbalanced strategies had just gotten under way. It's quite a task,

Blazing new trails in turn-based fantasy by Gordon Berg

Mini-hopper

race. Although there are more than 70 spells per race to choose from (some harder to acquire than others), only 15 spells can be carried in a hero's spellbook at any one time. Still, when combined with a hero's special abilities, this allows for a quite a few different strategies to emerge and evolve.

given the option to attack, a hero often summons a creature, casts a charm, or invokes some sorcery. A summoned creature cannot attack until the next round but it can block a physical attack against its hero, absorbing damage to spare its master. If it does that, it can't attack in the next round, though, so decisions must be made constantly on both the offensive and defensive levels.

With each move that goes by in a combat turn, more and more magical power becomes available to a hero. In practical terms, this means that the longer a battle

given that there are more than 300 spells and 120 summoned creatures to choose from. Throw in each hero's special abilities and the artifacts, and it's obvious that it won't be easy to balance things from a multiplayer perspective, let alone make the AI competent in all of *ETHERLORDS'* other facets. And the diplomacy model—never easy to implement—isn't even in the build I've been playing. Still, *ETHERLORDS* is intriguing and packed with potential. Let's cross our proverbial fingers and hope that Nival Interactive can pull this off. **CGW**

What does 3D give you? The most dynamic combat you've ever seen in a turn-based fantasy strategy game.



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

by John Houlihan



Covert ops in the deserts of Libya.

Unpack your cloak and dig out your dagger for more WWII covert ops

Developers aren't usually renowned for the tiny size of their egos, but the success of *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS* apparently came as a huge shock to Czech development house Illusion Softworks. While the game was flawed, its compelling blend of squad-based action and strategy quickly propelled it to cult

status among PC combat veterans. Fans and critics alike hollered for a sequel and now, two years later, *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* is really taking shape. And this time the developers at Illusion—are taking no prisoners.

Head to Head With Hitler

No one quite fancies a crack at Nazi Germany like the Brits. And so with a "toodle pip!" and a stiff upper lip, *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* once again casts you in the role of Lieutenant Gary Bristol of Churchill's Special Operations Executive (the forerunner of the SAS). You're leading a hand-picked team of specialists to strike deep into the heart of the Third Reich, and your actions quickly attract the attention of Hitler himself, who assigns the mysterious Scarred Man (an SS counterintelligence officer) to foil your commando shenanigans. This ongoing confrontation between Bristol's SOE and its SS-SD nemeses forms the core story line in the latter part of *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2*'s single-player campaign.

The action is based in authentic World War II events and environments that span the entire theater of the war. With 23 missions in places as diverse as the beaches of Dunkirk, the deserts of Libya, and the frozen wastes of Norway, your four-man team will practice the black arts of espionage, assassination, and sabotage in both third- and first-person perspectives all over the world.

The balance between action and strategy is a fine one, but the emphasis remains on commanding your four-man squad in classic tactical style. However, the developers are introducing a new solo

"lone wolf" mode for more gung-ho, trigger-happy players. And while the original game suffered a little from a mountainous learning curve, this time you'll get a gentler ride initially. As the campaign wears on, each mission will become ever more complex, involving multiple objectives and culminating in a dramatic showdown between your team, the Russian NKVD, and the SS. One thing is for certain—no one ever joined Special Operations for the quiet life.

Going Commando

Powering *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* is the brand-new LS3D game engine, which has replaced Illusion's own *Insanity* engine. While it's certainly technically impressive and capable of pumping over 30,000 polygons (with full support for light maps, projected shadows, and single-mesh characters), what you'll appreciate most are the rich, sophisticated mission environments and ultrasoft character animations that deliver some of the most authentic WWII combat action to date. Illusion has also addressed one of the major criticisms of the original game: the Tactical Interface map. The endless succession of keys and clunky interface design that plagued the first game are gone; the new, refined interface allows you to issue orders, switch between squad members, and watch the outcome in realtime more easily, giving you much greater tactical control of your men.

Speaking of your men, there's been an

GENRE: Action

RELEASE DATE: Q4 01

PUBLISHER: Gathering of Developers/Take 2

DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks

CONTACT: www.hidden-and-dangerous.com



British paratroopers storm a Nazi base.



Stalking the corridors of a U-boat.

attempt to inject more personality in them, with up to 10 different character traits and selected special abilities governing how individuals perform on the front line. You'll certainly need to select the soldiers best suited for each job, because the Axis AI has been considerably beefed up. With awareness states designed to mimic human behavior, and Wehrmacht and SS troops able to cooperate locally to defend objectives or hunt you down, you'll feel like you're playing against real combat vets.

Of course one of the major attractions of *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* will be a chance to get your mitts on a huge variety of genuine World War II equipment and vehicles. As a crack commando team, you'll have access to a state-of-the-art (for the 1940s) arsenal including specialist weapons like the Sten gun Mk 2(S) and the De Lisle commando carbine (see sidebar). However, Nazi sentries everywhere will be quaking in their jackboots at your most unassuming weapon: the silent but deadly garotte (piano wire).

Baby, You Can Drive My Tank

Responding to fans' requests, Illusion has incorporated a full complement of standard vehicles to aid your mission, such as the BMW motorbike and sidecar combo, Tiger tanks, and the Soviet ISU 152 tank. More exotic variants will include Japanese gunboats, the prototype British Chariot Mini Sub, and ME 323 transport planes, as well as one of the world's first experimental Fa 223 helicopters. Wherever your theater of operations, *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* will ensure that you'll be able to carry the fight across all fronts, by land, sea, or air.

Like all the best sequels, *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* aims to retain the core playability of the original game while adding a whole raft of improvements and new features to delight its fans. If you need to go deep behind enemy lines this year, *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2* will almost certainly be your weapon of choice. **CGW**



Coordinate your boys via the new tactical interface.



Threading the needle—disarming a door trap.



H&D2's new LS3D game engine promises sumptuous environments such as these, above and below.



WEAPONS OF WAR

ALLIED WEAPONS



- De Lisle Commando Carbine (silenced)
- Caliber: .45
- Muzzle velocity: 900 ft/s
- Magazine: 13
- Mass: 9 pounds

Specialist Commando carbine adapted for covert operations. Note the lightweight stock and huge silencer—silent but deadly.

- Enfield .38
- Caliber: .38
- Muzzle velocity: 600 ft/s
- Magazine: 6
- Mass: 1 pound, 11 ounces

The standard-issue sidearm for SOE officers and operatives. It's compact and reliable with reasonable stopping power at short range. You'll get only six rounds, so use 'em wisely.

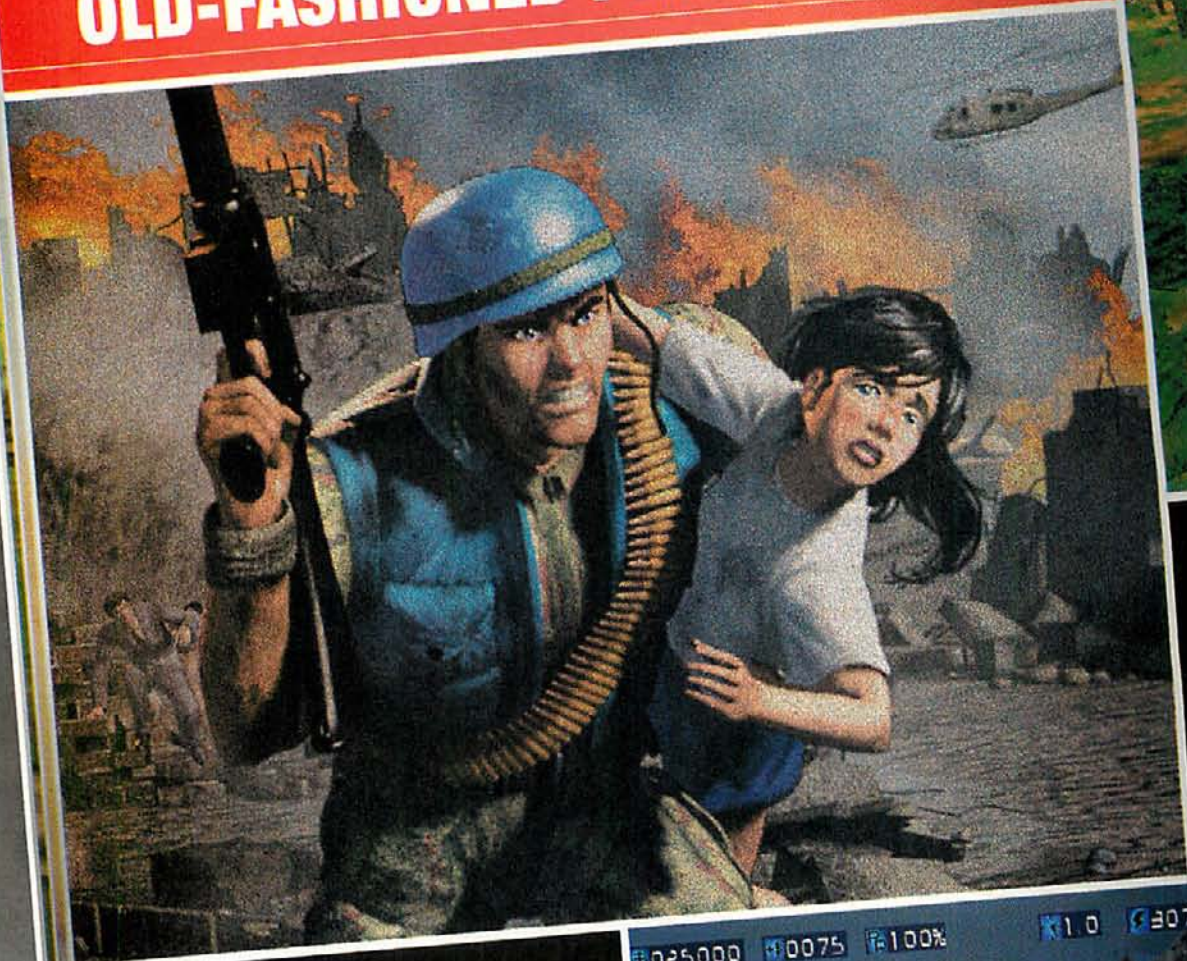


AXIS WEAPONS

- MP 44 / 43
- Caliber: 7.92mm
- Muzzle velocity: 2150 ft/s
- Magazine: 30
- Mass: 11 pounds, 5 ounces

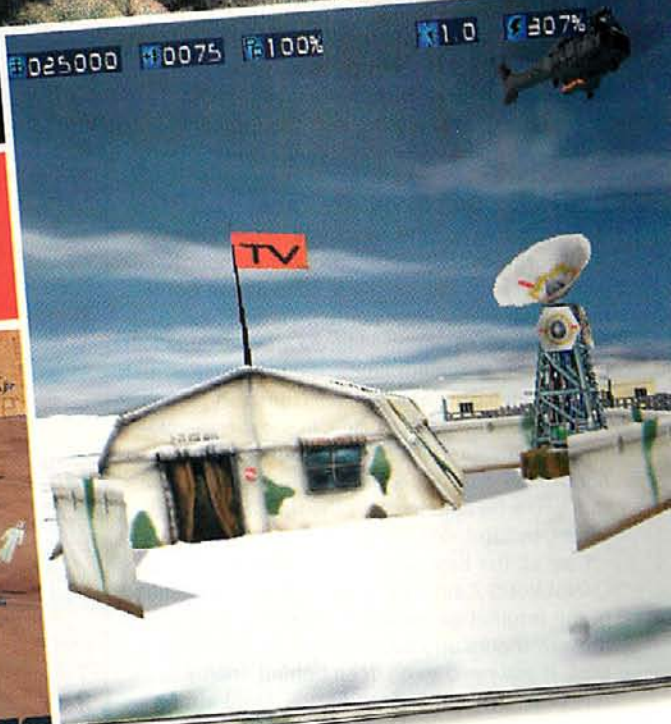
Heavy-duty assault rifle much favored by Nazi paratroopers and SS-SD forces. You don't want to get on the wrong end of one of these babies; however, in the right hands...

**NOTHING WINS A WAR LIKE GOOD,
OLD-FASHIONED PROPAGANDA!**



LOW ON TROOPS?

These brainwash camps will turn civilians into soldiers dedicated to your cause.



Violence

CONFLICT ZONE™

MODERN WAR STRATEGY

By GARY KEITH

IT'S TIME AN RTS GAME GAVE YOU A REAL WAR.

REAL WAR IS NEVER cut and dry. The media criticizes your every maneuver. Rabid public opinion erodes your army's budget. Terrorists wield propaganda against you. That's why real war is won with the guts to fight with every weapon you have – even spin control and civilian manipulation – to keep your forces rolling. It's an intense war. Someone's got to win it.



When your forces need that extra "kick," a nice human shield gives great cover from oncoming assaults!



Watch out! It only takes one enemy rocket to turn a civilian rescue mission into a public relations nightmare

VERBATIM

“Everything that concerns the bombing of peaceful residents is the ill-intended propaganda of terrorists.”

—Vladimir Putin, Russian Prime Minister, Nov 1st 1999

“It has been said that in war, truth is the first casualty. That may be so for the media policy of an isolated dictatorship, but not for NATO.”

—Dr. Javier Solana, The Secretary General of NATO, May 7th 1999



BULLETIN:

You've got the enemy pinned in a small village. But is the victory worth taking civilian casualties?

GOOD PRESS ISN'T BOUGHT, it's made. With a media-training center, making propaganda is easy!



SEPTEMBER 18, 2001

13

IN STORES
SEPTEMBER 2001



www.ubisoft.com



Do not underestimate the power of the Force.

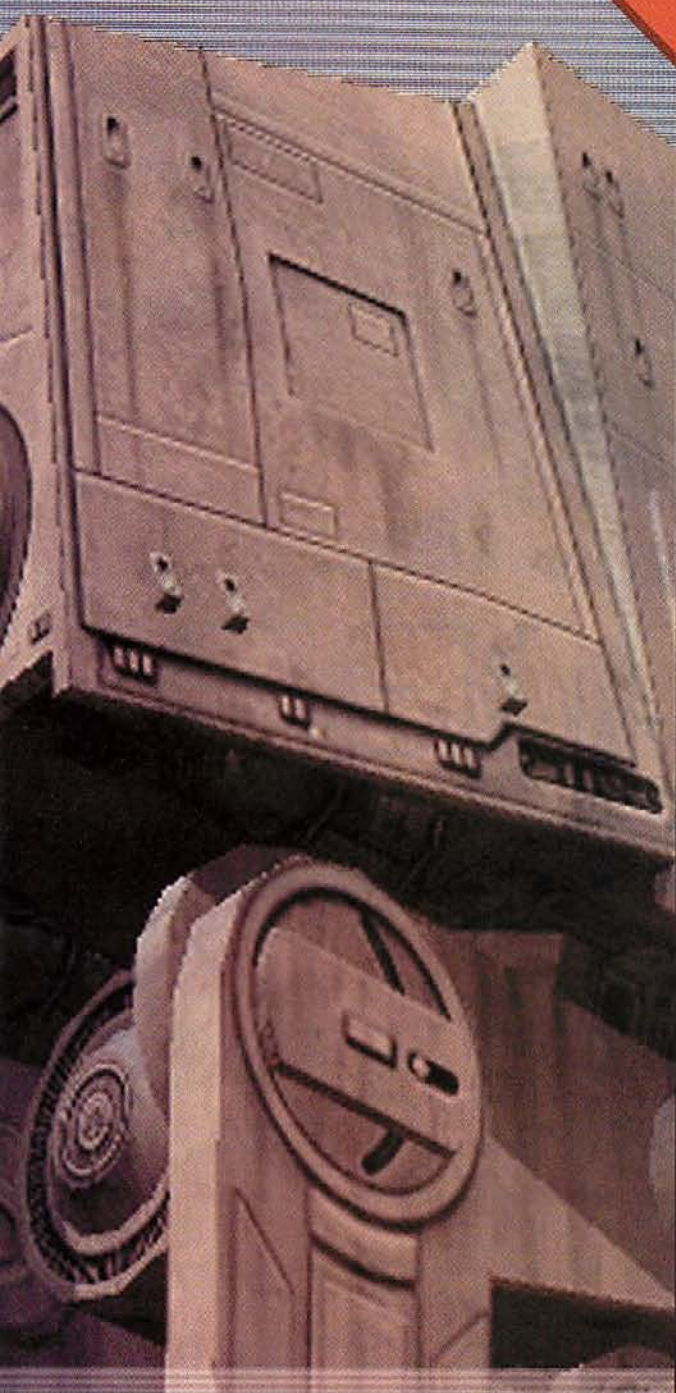
●●● It's been 24 years now. Twenty-four years since the Force first grabbed hold.

Twenty-four years since George Lucas' original space opera, *Star Wars*, first appeared on movie screens. And for a great many of us, the world hasn't been the same since. ●●● Since the first film's debut in 1977, the *Star Wars* franchise has enthralled and entertained millions of fans all over the world with its simple, strong, and archetypal stories that combined classic mythic themes—good and evil, responsibility and desire, heroism and destiny—with old-fashioned, popcorn-chomping moviegoing thrills. It has proved to be an irresistible combination, a cultural (and marketing) phenomenon that to this day has no real rival. *Star Wars* was a natural, perfect source for gaming, and the history of computer games is dotted with a number of classic STAR WARS titles. ●●● But a funny thing happened upon the release of *Episode I* and its related games in 1999. Maybe it was all the hype. Maybe it was our expectations. Whatever it

was, despite an avalanche of hype, despite all our excitement and goodwill, the sad fact was that the STAR WARS EPISODE I games (like, for many people, the film itself) turned out to be a major disappointment. After the high of JEDI KNIGHT, *CGW's* 1998 Game of the Year, the STAR WARS gaming franchise, for the first time ever, seemed weak and unfocused.

●●● The LucasArts team, painfully aware and extremely protective of the status of their franchise, knew from the reaction to the EPISODE I games that they had blown it. So they regrouped. They sat back, thought about what it was that made their earlier games so popular, and came up with a new plan of attack. And when LucasArts revealed the resulting games at E3 this year, they became *the* story of the show. No one saw it coming, and everyone, including the geeks at this magazine, was thrilled. ●●● So it is with much excitement that we present the next generation of STAR WARS games, coming soon to a PC near you. If you have lost faith over the years, read on. The Force is back. Big time.





THE F A I R



STAR WARS GALAXIES

The creators of EVERQUEST team up with Lucas to bring the Rebellion home



Since George Lucas' spectacular space opera dazzled audiences 24 years ago, we've experienced only tantalizingly brief visits to that galaxy far, far away. The four movies combined total only about eight and a half hours—not enough to satisfy our craving to step into that world, heft a lightsaber, and lop a Stormtrooper's head clean off before his knees hit the floor. Or to see a Wookiee actually pull someone's arms out of their sockets, instead of just howling about it. Or to join forces with hundreds of rebels against an Imperial attack backed by massive AT-ATs, dodging their towering legs as their torsos lumber over you.

All of these things will be possible in the upcoming massively multiplayer game STAR WARS: GALAXIES, according to the team building it, and we have reason to believe them. Led by executive producer Rich Vogel and creative director Raph Koster, who cut their teeth on ULTIMA ONLINE, the design team is packed with veterans from both EQ and ULTIMA ONLINE. They are adamant that GALAXIES will be a completely different experience than those games, and just a casual glance at the screenshots seems to

back that up. Boasting an all-new 3D engine, GALAXIES already makes EVERQUEST look crude in comparison.

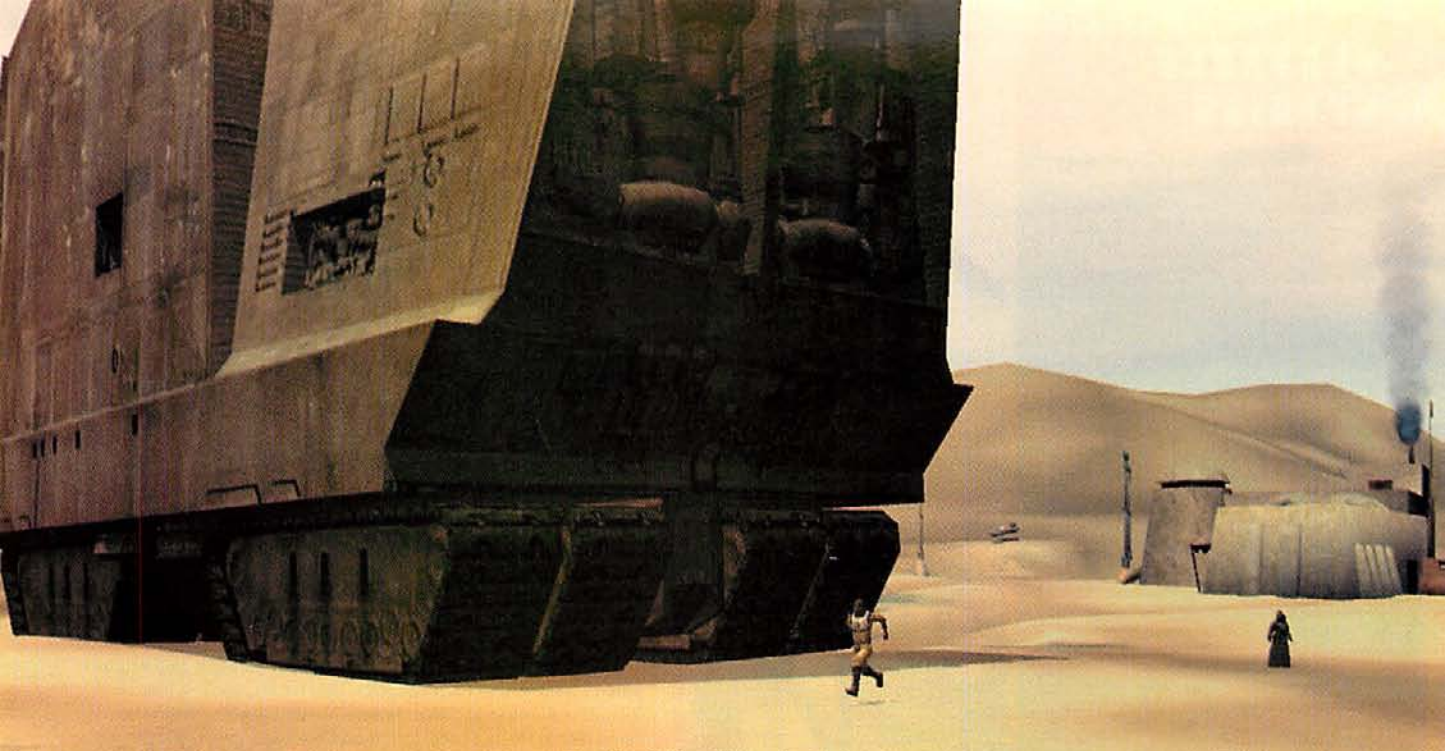
GALAXIES looks like you walked up to the front of the cinema and somehow morphed into Obi Wan's world. It's a world that will include most of the things *Star Wars* fans would expect, while offering a surprising diversity of skills and professions with which to play out your intergalactic fantasies. If you have the slightest tendency toward online addiction, if you even suspect that you feel minor disturbances in the Force, then close this magazine, don't get a GeForce3 card, and forget all about it. Because if you don't, this thing is going to hunt you down in your humdrum haunt like C-3PO and RT-D2 in search of Ben Kenobi—and your world is going to change. Two years from now when you peer down into the smoking ruins of your former life, remember: We warned you.

A Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy

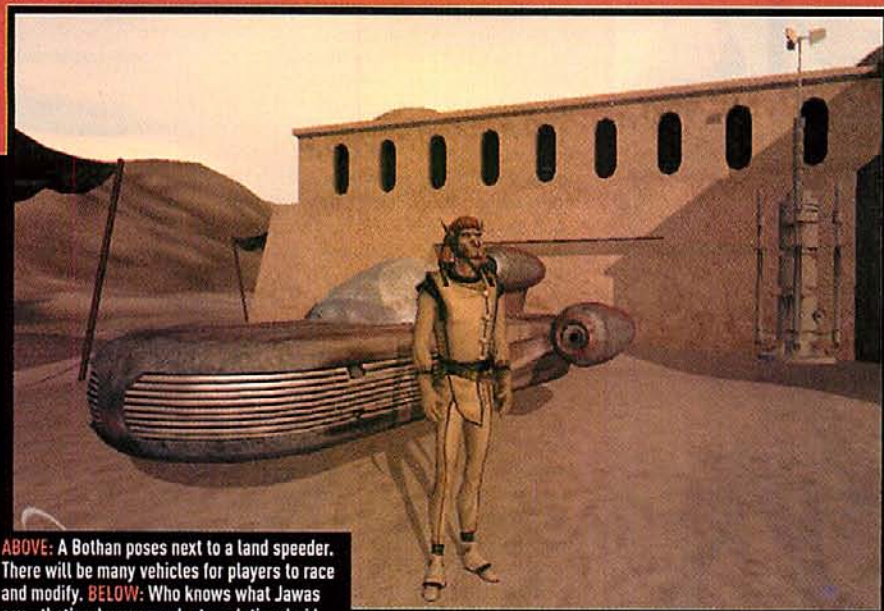
GALAXIES will draw upon a rich collection of material from the four existing films, *Episode II* (currently in production), and the Expanded

Universe of novels, comic books, and games. The initial launch, however, will probably focus on a handful of known planets, including Tatooine and Naboo. On each planet, you'll be able to visit several different locations, including cities (Mos Eisley and Mos Espa on Tatooine; Theed and Otoh Gunga on Naboo), wilderness areas (the Dune Sea on Tatooine; the Lianorm Swamps on Naboo), and special sites (Jabba's Palace on Tatooine; the Gungan Sacred Place on Naboo). You won't be able to traverse entire planets, only certain navigable areas (up to 16 virtual square kilometers). Rather than building entire planets, the designers are focusing on detailed environments populated by a variety of plants and more than 100 types of creatures. There will be day and night cycles, weather effects, and variations in terrain and climate on some planets.

New areas and entire planets will open up after the game's launch, such as the Space Expansion, which will feature X-wing-versus-TIE fighter-style galactic furballs. Without the Space Expansion, players will travel from one planet to another by simply hopping on a



Everything is being built to scale—Sand Crawlers and Krayt Dragons will loom frighteningly large.



ABOVE: A Bothan poses next to a land speeder. There will be many vehicles for players to race and modify. **BELOW:** Who knows what Jawas say—that's why you need a translation droid. Players can own, modify, and program droids.



shuttle. Interplanetary travel will probably entail a load screen, but transitions between areas on the ground should be seamless.

So what will you be able to do? That depends on what you want to do. Your choice of character will not prevent you from pursuing certain skills, although a few species may be better (or worse) at some things than others. The designers are attempting to support a vast array of skill paths, including bounty hunter, smuggler, miner, blaster builder, chef, tattoo artist, and even hairdresser. You'll farm, raise animals, build, and customize bots, race speeders, get into politics, or pursue one of several combat professions. Rather than advance through levels as in *EVERQUEST*, player will advance by earning skills that broaden and define their character. You'll earn skills by completing missions, spending money on training, achieving proficiency with related skills, and attaining a particular standing with a faction or NPC guild.

Skills will be grouped logically into "professions," which are essentially skill trees. As skills become more specialized (higher up a profession tree), they become more expensive. Players will choose to specialize by working straight up a single profession tree or will buy several bottom-tier skills to be more of a generalist. Rewards for climbing skill trees include the acquisition of titles, such as Master Chef.

If you decide you don't like your skill tree, you won't be strung out on the proverbial limb. Players will be able to give up a skill to regain skill points. However, players will never lose their titles (a Master Chef who trades in his cooking skills for blaster repair will become a Former Master Chef). The developers are hoping this will encourage players to try new things, since there's no penalty or commitment involved.

"Hokey religions and ancient weapons are no match for a good blaster at your side."

Combat is obviously an area of intense focus for the designers. Hayden Blackman, the game's producer, says, "We're shooting for a very cinematic quality to our combat. We want to include a variety of special moves and animations, many of which will only be available by attaining combat-related skills.

PLAYABLE SPECIES

Each of the eight playable species has various strengths and weaknesses. Humans represent the "norm" (no modifiers) against which all the others are balanced. There are male and female genders, and broad customization options will let you get just the right shade for your reptilian skin.

HUMANS: The predominant species in the galaxy, humans can be found in virtually all walks of life and on most habitable worlds. They have a wide range of abilities, but are particularly adept at politics. Customization options will allow various races and wide diversity.

WOOKIEES: Everyone's favorite walking carpets have greater physical strength and fortitude, but below-average mental abilities and quickness. Wookiees may be able to build and use weapons that other species can't create, such as bowcasters. Customization options will include changes in fur color and possibly pattern.

TWI'LEKS: In general, they're similar to humans—slightly weaker, but with improved focus. Twi'leks can learn a secret "head-tail" language that only other Twi'leks can understand. Twi'leks have become Jedi Knights, pilots, crime lords, and politicians.

TRANDOSHANS: Large, reptilian humanoids with great strength and natural regenerative powers. Trandoshans are less intelligent than humans, but they have claws, so their melee attack is more dangerous. This warlike species places heavy emphasis on activities such as hunting.

MON CALAMARI: Mon Calamari are amphibious humanoids with fishlike faces and huge eyes. They are weaker than humans, but have greater intelligence and willpower (they taste better, too). Mon Cal do swimmingly in underwater environments, but suffer health penalties in hot or dry environments.

BOTHANS: Although mentioned only once, in *Return of the Jedi*, Bothans are renowned as the galaxy's best spies. The stocky humanoids with fur-covered faces are weaker than humans, but faster and more agile. Bothans make excellent scouts and soldiers.

RODIANS: Remember Solo's pal Greedo from the cantina? Rodians are identifiable by their multifaceted eyes, flexible snouts, short antennae, and suction-cup fingers. Generally weaker and less intelligent than humans, they are very quick and agile. The hot-tempered Rodians make excellent bounty hunters and mercenaries.

ZABRAKS: Darth Maul's species has several different races, each exhibiting a different vestigial horn pattern. Zabrats are similar to humans, but have increased willpower (at the cost of some physical speed and quickness). Players will be able to customize both horn and tattoo patterns.



Wookiee



Twi'lek



Trandoshan



Mon Calamari



Bothan



Rodian



Zabrak



Players will be able to control their posture (standing, prone, crouched), take aim, put themselves on the defensive, and use a variety of vehicle-based weapons. Because combat in STAR WARS most often involves ranged weapons, we're focusing on that aspect of combat first and foremost. Jedi are also receiving special attention."

In addition to wielding lightsabers, Jedi and Dark Jedi will be able to train to use Force attacks. Blackman says the team will include a number of Force powers, including some from the films (Force Push, Force Jump) and the Expanded Universe, as well as new powers being developed for GALAXIES. "Force powers will fall into skill-tree categories as well and they will be attained in a similar manner," says Blackman. Some powers will be defensive in nature (Force Heal, Force Shield); others will be combat related (Force Choke). Jedi may be able to use lightsabers to block blaster bolts, but that hasn't yet been confirmed.

Injuries won't be merely physical. Each character will have three main attributes: Health, Action, and Mind. If you get shot with a blaster, it will reduce your Health; if someone uses a Force power on you, it could affect your Mind stats. If one of those three major attributes is depleted, your character will be knocked out. You won't be dead yet unless someone delivers a coup de grace. You'll simply be incapacitated until you are brought out of it or heal out of it naturally. If you die, you'll be able to loot your corpse to recover items you were carrying at the time (à la EVERQUEST). The game will also include an "insurance" system that will let you replace insured items after your death. Some rare or special items (such as a Jedi lightsaber) might not be insurable, though.

But the real appeal of GALAXIES won't just be getting tattooed on Tatooine and serving up dishes to Jabba the Hut. The attraction for a mainstream audience will be the prospect of climactic, large-scale battles with hundreds of participants squaring off in Rebel versus Imperial showdowns. Scenes like the Battle of Hoth, from *The Empire Strikes Back*, seem ideally suited for a massively multiplayer online game, provided the game and its servers can support hundreds of players in individual combat zones. Fortunately, the team wants to build that as much as we want to play it.

Says Blackman, "We plan to support a feature in the game that will allow players of opposing factions (Rebel versus Imperial) or enemy guilds to create Battlefields, which are special areas where large-scale battles can be organized and resolved. We're also allowing guilds (which can be aligned to a faction) to declare war on one another, which will encourage Imperial-versus-Rebel guild wars. In order to create the proper sense of immersion, Imperial NPCs will be highly visible in many areas of the game, allowing for large-scale combat outside of the player-versus-player system."

It's a tall order to fill, since there's never been an online game with so many ground units that offered players a rewarding experience. And to accomplish that in addition to all the other things on the designers' list will require a level of expertise and commitment beyond anything we've seen before. But isn't that what people expect from a STAR WARS game? We don't care what magic goes on behind the scenes, we just want to open a door into that world and finally get a chance to play in it, too.

—Ken Brown

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

●●● It's all so obvious now: BioWare wants to become the Empire of the Geeks. How else can one explain the fact that after conquering the AD&D license, the company decided to foray into *Star Wars* territory? All it needs to do now is finagle a development deal involving *Star Trek* or *Lord of the Rings* and we'll all start answering to our new Canadian overseers. ●●● I wouldn't mind, because if *STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC* has any of the grandeur and drive behind *BALDUR'S GATE II*, I'll be the first to hop on my new moose mount. Announcing the game in July 2000, BioWare gave itself plenty of time to polish its vision for *KNIGHTS*, which is slated for a mid-2002 release. Good thing, because BioWare will be forging into uncharted territory. ●●● *KNIGHTS* will be the first game to take advantage of the "back story" of the *Star Wars* universe. Set in an era previously explored only in the *Star Wars* comic books, *KNIGHTS* takes place a whopping 4,000 years before the current continuity. That means *KNIGHTS* will be a game in which swash-buckling Jedi are everywhere, and so are the Sith (evil Jedi, for the non-fanboys out there). There will be multiple character classes available, though, so gamers who'd rather be scoundrels than Jedi will have a choice. The location I saw was Tatooine, but knowing BioWare, expect to see a couple more famous planets and some all-new ones, since the game has the most open-ended and unknown setting of all the *STAR WARS* games. ●●● A lot of design work is still being done, and any actual programming is very preliminary at this point. For one thing, the game is using the entirely new Odyssey engine created specifically for it. What I saw was a case of "similar to, yet different from" past BioWare games. For instance, the perspective shown was more a behind-the-avatar third-person perspective à la *MDK 2* than the isometric perspective that BioWare is known for. Despite it looking like an action game, BioWare promises that *KNIGHT* will have more of that tactical, pausable-real-time gameplay that *BALDUR'S GATE* players are familiar with. Another engine feature BioWare showed off was detailed character animations for the various in-game models, which allow faces to have synchronized lips and display various emotions. ●●● Another asset of the new engine is that it pulls off scripted sequences similar to those you'd find in a shooter. True, there were scripted scenes in BioWare's previous games, but you couldn't really interact with them. *KNIGHT* is more like *HALF-LIFE* or *NO ONE LIVES FOREVER*, where the scene unfolds right before you. One scene I saw showed a bunch of Jedi fighting off an

invading army; as the player explored the castle under siege, more troops would pour in through the walls. An amusing moment came up when a droid, warning the player of the imminent danger, got cut off midsentence by enemy troops blasting him to pieces. This scene looked like something you might see in one of the films.

That's about all we know about *KNIGHTS* at this point. But hey, it's those brainy BioWare folks we're talking about here. This promises to be the best combination of Canada and sci-fi since Rick Moranis played Dark Helmet in *Spaceballs*. —Thierry Nguyen



GALACTIC

Bigger, Better,
and Did We
Mention Bigger?

BATTLE GROUND

very so often, it's nice to make a difference in this world. It's nice to know that an ordinary, everyday American can take a simple stand and just by making his or her voice heard, make the world a little bit better for everyone. And so it is with tremendous pride and sobering humility that we, the pasty, whining crybabies of *CGW*, are pleased to announce that our mewling and puking about *STAR WARS: GALACTIC BATTLEGROUND* has resulted in the resizing of the AT-ATs so that they now appropriately tower over the Imperial Stormtroopers.

We haven't been this flushed with pride since that magic day about two months ago when Scooter took his first steps.

As a matter of fact, LucasArts is resizing a lot of the art in *BATTLEGROUND*, and we couldn't be happier. As much as we like to think it's all because of us, the fact is, the design team took a good, hard look at the game and realized that if they wanted their product to truly represent the scope of the battles in the *Star Wars* movies, they were going to have to move away from the "unit as cardboard counter" school of representation. Buildings are larger, mounted units like Speeder Bikes now have their mounting units drawn to scale, and all the big nasty guys are appropriately big and nasty.

Heroic Effort

And what a slew of units gamers are going to get come November. The game will offer players six civilizations—Naboo, Trade Federation, Empire, Gungan, Rebel Alliance, and Wookiee—with loads of units for each. While most of the units will



The Gungan units are all animal based, like these mobile shield generators right out of *The Phantom Menace*. And check out those underwater buildings—they're an advantage unique to the Gungans.

have parallels across civilizations, they'll all look strikingly different, so while the game interface will give flying units a generic Fast Fighter moniker, you'll see X-wings flying for the Rebels, TIE fighters for the Empire, and weird flying critters for the Gungans. Even better, unique hero units will be included in the game so you can have Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker while you grapple with the sad fact that sending alleged "hero" unit Jar-Jar Binks to a certain bloody death will instantly cause you to lose that scenario.

Or maybe not. In an amazing display of openness and fan support, LucasArts is including a scenario editor and a mind-boggling amount of other resources so players can create their own scenarios and campaigns. While Jabba the Hut won't be available in the primary game, he (it?) will be available for custom missions. Expect a Kill Jar-Jar mission about 10 minutes after the game hits shelves. How many characters will there be? So many that LucasArts felt compelled to include two Lando Calrissians. Has George Lucas' kimono ever been more open? Actually, let's just scrub that image from our minds...

Age of Jedi

BATTLEGROUND will be using the expanded AGE OF KINGS engine, so the fundamental gameplay should be instantly recognizable to most strategy gamers. LucasArts is even tweaking the engine to

make it more helpful. For example, the Idle Villager button will blink to alert you any time you have an idle peon so you can immediately put that person to work.

You'll guide your civilization through four stages of technological advancement, harvesting four different resources (food, ore, carbon, and some energy thing called nova) as you wage war against your rivals. Even though every culture will have its own style, all the buildings will have a similar look and an identical footprint. That means you should be able to instantly pick out a heavy-weapons factory on any base regardless of whether it has the sleek lines of the Naboo or with the more whimsical organic architecture of the Gungan. But while the buildings may be similar, there will be some significant differences between civilizations. For instance, only the Gungans will enjoy the use of a mobile shield generator (just like the ones in *Episode I*). Also, every civilization will have different strengths and weaknesses. The Rebel Alliance will have some of the worst heavy mechanized units but will enjoy the best air units and some of the best infantry. Not surprisingly, the enormous Wookiee have the best regular troops but some of the worst Jedi.

Additionally, every culture gets a unique unit, just as the different cultures in *AOE* do. Rebels can use airspeeders; the Empire can build Dark Troopers right out of *DARK FORCES*; the Trade



1: Three different types of walkers, all scaled to be big and scary, the way God intended them to be. 2: Tech levels take the place of AGE OF EMPIRES' Iron Age and so on. 3: Culture-specific "Monuments" take the place of AGE's Wonders. They can be built as a victory condition in multiplayer as well. 4: All four resource types are color coded for easy reference on the World Map, though you might have trouble finding them during a

huge multiplayer free-for-all like this. 5: Also now being scaled properly: mounted units and units toting gun emplacements like these. 6: BATTLEGROUND's air units are a first for an AGE-powered game and are particularly tricky to balance. 7: Interfaces will be the same across civilizations, but each will have a look appropriate to its particular side, as in this early pass on the Rebel Alliance interface.

Federation can generate Destroyer Droids; the Naboo can train Royal Crusaders that are essentially mini-Jedi; Wookiees can create Berserkers; and the Gungans have Marauder units. All of the units are being balanced primarily against an archrival—for example, the Rebels are built to oppose the Empire more than any other side. But each side will be able to go against any other side in a multiplayer mode that will support up to eight players.

All of these units will be available over the six campaigns, each composed of seven to eight missions, each telling an individual story—it's more AGE OF KINGS than STARCRAFT in execution. In a knowing nod to the enormous appeal of Wookiees, two of the campaigns will be Wookiee campaigns. While the Naboo don't get their own campaign, an alliance with the Gungans will make their unit set available during the single-player game.

A New Hope

So there it is: We at CGW have moved BATTLEGROUND onto our Officially Excited About list. As much as we trumpet gameplay, we have

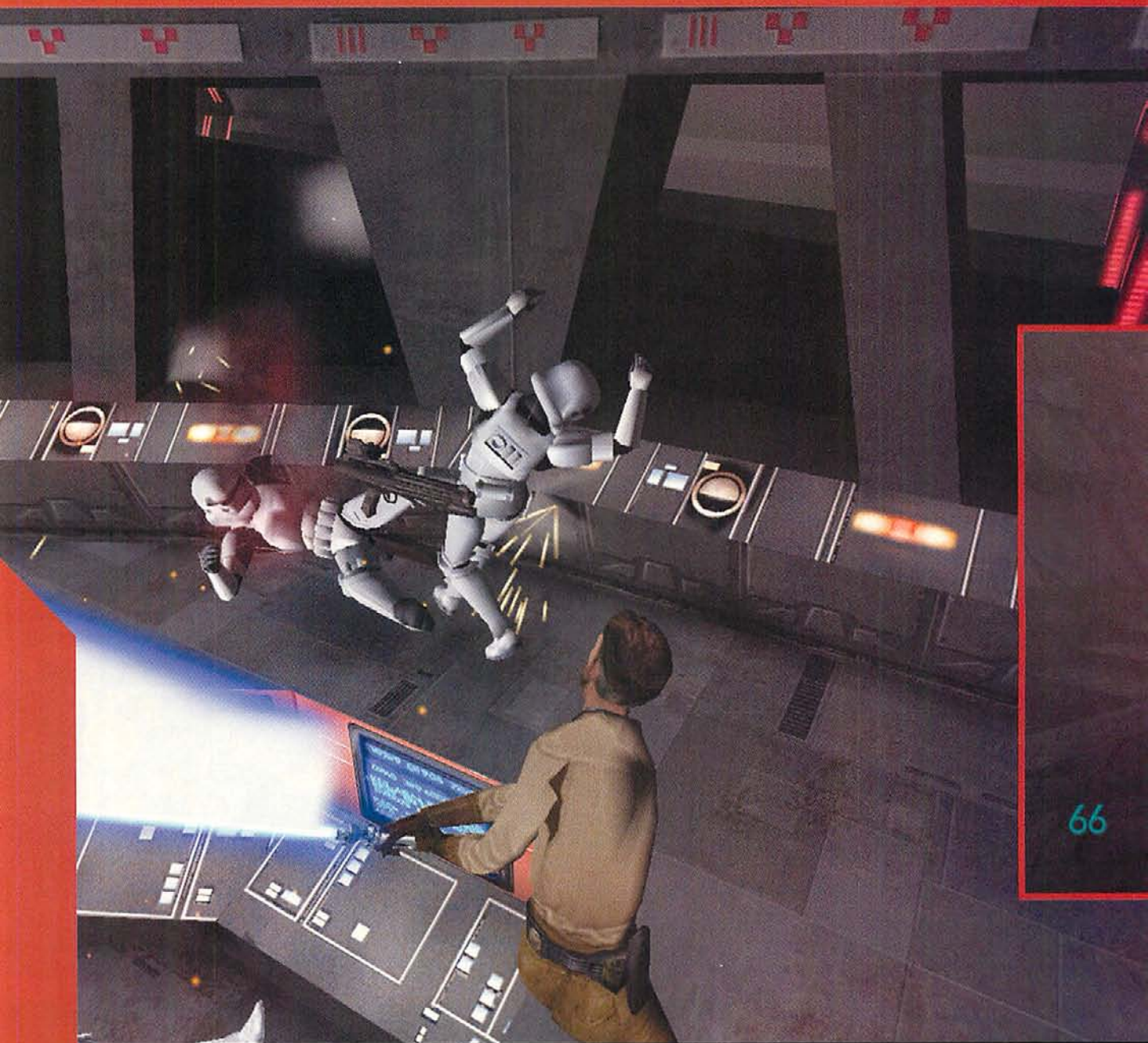


Wookiees defend themselves against an invasion by the Empire. Why couldn't we have seen this instead of those friggin' Ewoks in Return of the Jedi?

to admit to a certain shallowness regarding graphics—they *do* matter to us. And BATTLEGROUND now has graphics—and sounds, and units, and characters, and gameplay—that have

us convinced that LucasArts isn't about to make the whole FORCE COMMANDER mistake twice.

Now if someone could just edit Jar-Jar out of Episode II we could die happy. — Robert Coffey



66



41

100



96

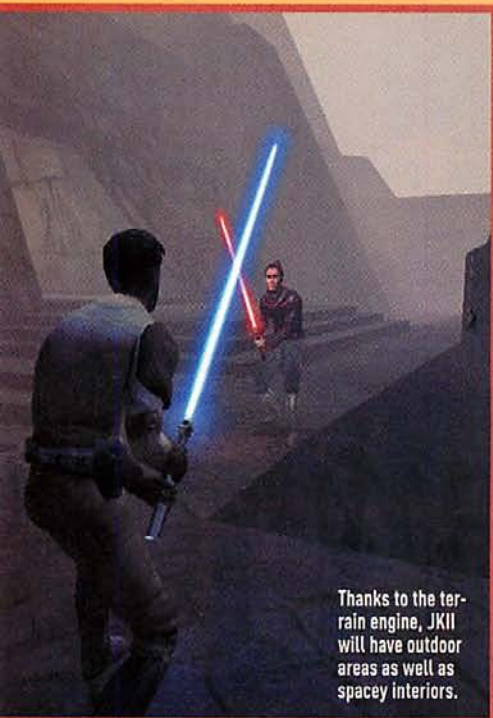
ABOVE: Raven's GHOUL technology will allow for more detailed stormtroopers—and more detailed slicing and dicing of said stormtroopers.

LEFT: Massive interiors and dizzying drops will be the architectural norm for this installment.

RIGHT: Much as in the first game, you'll use first-person mode with ranged weapons and third-person with the lightsaber. The bowcaster and the stormtrooper rifle are the only confirmed weapons so far.

JEDI KNIGHT OUTCAST

The Force is looking strong at Raven •••



Thanks to the terrain engine, JKII will have outdoor areas as well as spacey interiors.

ack in 1997, *Star Wars* fans finally got to experience life as a Jedi firsthand with the release of the now-classic JEDI KNIGHT. A sequel wasn't expected, especially after JK creator Justin Chin left LucasArts, but one of the pleasant surprises at this year's E3 was the announcement that there is indeed another game in the works—and it's not OBI-WAN, the title originally planned as a "pseudo sequel" to JEDI KNIGHT.

Brett Tosti, project leader on the new game, JEDI KNIGHT II: OUTCAST, says that after LucasArts canceled the PC version of OBI-WAN, the company decided to create a true sequel in the PC DARK FORCES line. The even better news is that LucasArts decided to go with veteran developer Raven Software (SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE) to create the new game.

Raven is determined to keep this game true to the spirit of the original. Thus, it will be story based and will have intricate level design, action-oriented gameplay, and

puzzles. One of the preliminary puzzles in the game involves Kyle standing on a moving platform that's dumping its cargo into a trash compactor. Timing is crucial here, as you get dumped onto the slanted conveyor belt and need to run to the stable edge before the belt delivers you into the churning metal maw of the compactor. Other puzzles were directly influenced by *Episode I*. Taking a cue from such moments as when Obi-Wan cut through a large door with his lightsaber, there are several instances where Kyle must cut down support structures to collapse some architecture, or slice his way through a wall.

As far as enemies to cut down, there will be plenty of returning baddies, such as stormtroopers and droids, but LucasArts is being very tight-lipped so far about new creatures in the game. Raven is using the QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA engine for the game, and it's been able to incorporate the GHOUL technology from the SOLDIER OF FORTUNE games, creating a much greater level of realism than ever before seen in this series. The stormtroopers, in particular, are much more detailed now, with articulated motions and shadows. When Kyle looks through his binoculars to stormtroopers on patrol, it almost looks like a scene from one of the movies.

Much as it plans to do for SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II, Raven has implemented fear in the enemy AI. You'll see stormtroopers flee when you whip out your lightsaber now (after all, Jedi are the most feared warriors in the galaxy, so it makes sense for weak-willed scum to run in terror when they see you with your saber). In addition to enemies reacting differently depending on your weapons, there'll be group and leader AI. Thus, a commander of stormtroopers will keep his men steady even in the face of your saber, but if you cut him down first, they'll lose their nerve and run.

As in the previous game, JEDI KNIGHT II will let you use Force powers. While removing some powers that no one ever used, Raven is adding new ones, such as the Jedi Mind Trick and the ability to throw your lightsaber, giving it ranged capabilities to complement its lethal melee power. The Jedi Mind Trick will confuse your enemies, and Tosti says that the team hopes to implement a power that will cause enemies under its influence to give you useful information.

The acquisition of Force powers will be more streamlined and deliberate. Rather than picking from a host of powers every time you gain a level, in JKII you'll already know most of them, and there will be additional powers as you level up. You no longer choose. Tosti says this

means the designers can tailor the levels to the gameplay more, since they can control which powers players get as they progress through the game. Also, more in tune with the MYSTERIES OF THE SITH expansion pack, there aren't diverging paths now; light- and dark-side powers get equal treatment.

Plotwise, JKII takes off after the events of MYSTERIES OF THE SITH. In that expansion, Kyle was seduced to the dark side but rescued by Mara Jade—highlighting the balance between light and dark. This balance will affect gameplay itself in JKII, as NPCs will react differently depending on how you act. If you commit acts of evil, such as cutting down innocent bystanders, NPCs won't talk to you anymore. Subsequently, if you help an NPC out, that NPC may then present with you shortcuts or bonus items help you complete the level. The team is trying to make your evil or good acts have an impact within the game itself, rather than tying such acts to an overall choice in the end game or playing them out with cut-scenes.

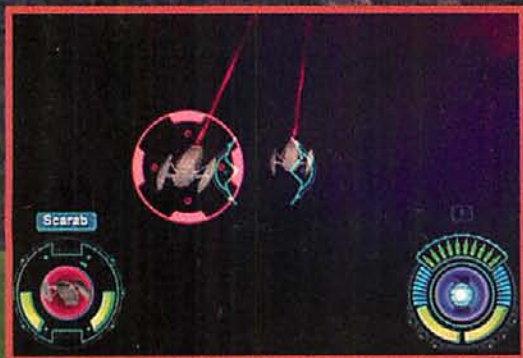
The story is being closely guarded by LucasArts right now, but Tosti says Kyle will have to solve a mystery, will explore new and familiar locales, and will have to deal with more Jedi. The title and Tosti's own hints suggest that Kyle doesn't exactly get along with the new Jedi order founded by Luke Skywalker. Whether this leads to an actual confrontation in the game between the Jedi order and Kyle remains to be seen.

The E3 build I saw was just thrown together to demo the possibilities of JEDI KNIGHT II, and won't appear in the game. However, I did see a few of the levels that are being built. They all took place in the smuggler-populated city of Nar Shadda, which included a bar level, a hangar with an enormous ship, and a junkyard. All this was capped off by a meeting with a mafia-boss-like scavenger.

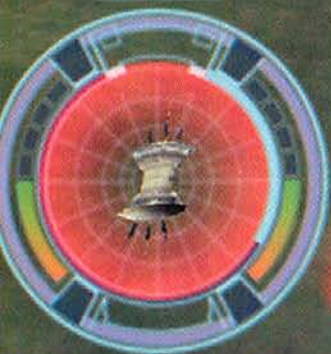
One concern is whether the new game, using the Q3TA engine, can maintain the look and feel of the original—and so far it looks good. I saw a couple of levels that featured the same sense of vertigo-inducing heights that was prominent in the original game. Since the Q3TA engine does have terrain, the levels will be a mix of outdoor and interior settings.

JEDI KNIGHT II is still at least a year away, and Raven has been working on the game for only a few months. But the fusion of Raven's solid development track with LucasArts' blessing looks like we may finally, belatedly, get a worthy follow-up to the 1998 CGW Game of the Year.

It really does look like the Force is back.
—Elliot Chin



Mine



STARFIGHTER

For those of you waiting for LucasArts to return to its earlier simulation model for space-flight games, which worked so flawlessly in the X-WING and TIE-FIGHTER games: Well, you're going to have to wait a little longer. But if the shoot-'em-up arcade style of the ROGUE SQUADRON series is more your cup of Tatooine tea, then the new STARFIGHTER game—ported from the PS2—should make you very happy.

STARFIGHTER puts you in the cockpit of one of three different *Episode I*-era fighters, each with a unique pilot. The most recognizable craft is, of course, the Naboo N-1 Starfighter, helmed by Rhys Dallows, a young, inexperienced pilot from Naboo's capital city of Theed who learns the inner workings of flight combat by being thrown smack into the middle of the war with the Trade Federation. As the game progresses, two other characters will unlock: Vana Sage, a mercenary pilot flying her own starfighter, the Guardian Mantis, for the Trade Federation, and Nym, a Feeorin pirate who flies a heavy laser-bristled bomber known as the Havoc. Each pilot will come with a unique series of missions, and each starfighter will fly differently from the others as well as have a unique set of primary, secondary, and advanced-secondary weapons.

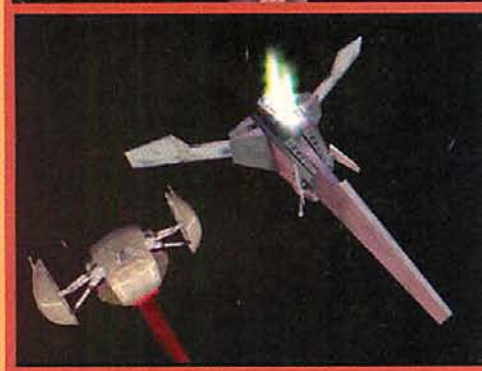
The missions you fly won't be just the

Somewhere between simulation and arcade lies fun.

standard turn-and-shoot runs in many space sims. As in the ROGUE SQUADRON games, a good portion of the action takes place planet-side, where you'll find yourself roaring through canyons and valleys. There will be a fair share of open-space dogfights to give you your upper-atmosphere fix, plus a level that takes place inside a cavernous capital ship, much like Lando's Death Star run in *Return of the Jedi*. Wherever the action takes place, STARFIGHTER will present you with a wide variety of flying options and mission objectives to keep the gameplay fresh.

STARFIGHTER is more than just a simple port. Sure, the gameplay and story line will remain largely unchanged from the original PS2 version, but it will use the more potent graphical power of the PC by increasing the amount of polygons as well as upping the resolution of the textures. STARFIGHTER is a gorgeous game, with amazing weapon and engine effects and beautifully rendered landscapes.

Considering the generally warm critical reception that the PS2 version received, and the fact that LucasArts is upgrading the graphics and adding joystick support to make this version a PC-friendly effort, STARFIGHTER seems destined for great heights. —Tom Price





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AN INTERVIEW WITH SIMON JEFFREY

LucasArts president spills all

Although he is usually found pacing in his black cape and mask within the Death Star, LucasArts president Simon Jeffrey recently took the time to answer a few questions from *CGW* Editor-in-Chief Jeff Green.

How long have you been at LucasArts? And what does your title mean?

•• I have been president of LucasArts Entertainment for about 18 months. It means I get to use Force powers to have people buy me drinks. Jeff, buy me a drink.

Just to establish some street cred here: How big a *Star Wars* geek are you yourself? Do you play the games? Read the comics? Collect the action figures?

•• I've seen *A New Hope* [the original 1977 film] 96 times, and am a huge fan. I've played most of the games through to completion and have a number of books and toys. Yeah, I'm a geek!

When you came aboard, what were your primary goals for the franchise?

•• Absolutely to reinvigorate STAR WARS gaming, and again have people feel that they can pick up any LucasArts game in a store and buy it with confidence, knowing it's going to be great.

Is it easy to make STAR WARS games? In other words, is the franchise just so dang popular that you can put the name on anything and know it will sell? Or is it the opposite? Would it be easier, for example, to be working in some generic sci-fi setting, where you could make up everything as you went along?

•• It's really not easy to make STAR WARS games at all! There is a complex mythology that we need to work within. We have seen with some recent games like STAR WARS DEMOLITION [for the PlayStation and DreamCast] that you can hit a serious genre disconnect. And *Star Wars* fans are no more forgiving of poor quality than anyone else; in fact, they probably have more demanding standards. *Star Wars* provides a fabulous universe within which to work. The canon is unparalleled, and now we think of our games as expanding the universe, rather than exploiting it.

What kind of pressure or feedback do you get from the humongoid fan community? Do you listen to fans and take them seriously?

•• One of the biggest lessons we have learned recently is to listen to the fan community. We now actively participate in and encourage community. We're soon going

to be announcing some cooperative plans to the mod community, which should make a lot of people pretty happy.

Does George Lucas himself ever look at, approve, or play any STAR WARS games? Has he ever commented on them personally?

•• George sees every game we do, whether STAR WARS or original. He often gives suggestions in the early design stages, and has a lot of feedback in particular with regard to our original games.

In retrospect, what's your take on all the EPISODE I games? There was so much hype, about the movie and games, and ultimately it seems like both critics and fans considered them to be something of a letdown. Was the anticipation too high? Would it have been impossible to really please people? Or do you think the games were simply not as good as they could have been?

•• I don't want to dwell too much on the past. We're willing to acknowledge that we learned some big lessons from the EPISODE I pro-

gram. We have made huge efforts recently to ensure that our games are of premium quality once more. E3 was a great turning point for us, and we're thrilled to see the press pick up on that. Winning *CGW's* Game of the Show was a huge kick!

Was it a conscious strategy on your part to actively seek out "A-list" developers, like Verant and BioWare, for the new games? Or did they come to you?

•• It was absolutely a conscious strategy to go after the best development talent in the world. We spent some time figuring what genres we could be market leaders in, figured out the best development talent in each of those genres, and then went after them. This is an ongoing process, and we are still talking to a number of really cool developers about future projects. This has enabled us to also focus on substantially building up our in-house studio—putting more resources and infrastructure in place to build some very cool new products [and revisiting some old favorites]. You'll start to see the results in time.

"We're willing to acknowledge that we learned some big lessons from the EPISODE I program. Therefore, we're not killing ourselves to get EPISODE II games done in time for the movie release next summer."

gram. Therefore, we're not killing ourselves to get EPISODE II games done in time for the movie release next summer. It's more important that the games we build, no matter what *Star Wars* era they are set within, are of the highest quality. We see no reason why "classic" and "new" STAR WARS games can't be developed and published in the same time window, and so whilst there certainly will be EPISODE II-related product next year, we're taking a more balanced approach.

We're writing this story as a kind of "LucasArts is back" piece. Do you think that's fair? Because it implies that you went somewhere. It implies that maybe things weren't so great for a while. Would you agree with that? Why? (Or why not?)

•• We don't deny that for a while, some of the games we produced were not met with the same level of acclaim that we were generally

next year or so.

How much independence do BioWare, Verant, and the rest have with their game designs? How much direct input does LucasArts maintain?

•• We see all of these games as joint ventures. We're working with them for a reason—they are the best in the world at what they do—and therefore we do not want to cramp their efforts by mothering them to death. However, we have a lot to offer by way of partnership, and have many strengths and resources we can provide. And of course, we oversee the story telling and approve every aspect of game design and execution.

Are there any games coming out that will us kill Jar Jar?

•• Now why would you want to do that? :)

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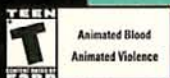
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Lowered Expectations

Sure, in a perfect world our reviewers would work in a vacuum. Unhampered by relentless preview coverage on the Web and in print, their acutely toned minds would have no extraneous prerelease information clouding their steady analytical gaze. Games would be judged solely on their own merit, without any bias that might have been formed by seeing a new screenshot daily for the past six months.

But it's not that way, nor will it ever be. The media people charged with giving the gamer community information on upcoming games are the exact same people who must turn around and give unbiased reviews of said games to said community. And we can't help but form personal opinions early on, even if they are just based on screenshots or a twitchy little ten-second QuickTime video. Expectations are a part of what we do.

Look at this month's lineup. There are so many expectations riding on that slate that it's mind numbing. Games like *ARCANUM* and *ANACHRONOX* have been previewed so many times, that any surprises they might have held are sure to be blown by now. And what about the franchises? *DIABLO*, *BALDUR'S GATE*, *BATTLETECH*, *STAR TREK*, *FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL*...each of those games carries the burden of its entire series; a bad game could affect future spinoffs.

But then a couple of games come along that surprise the hell out of us, either because we dismissed them out of hand long ago, or we got too drunk on the press tour to even remember the game being demoed (I faintly

remember something about vomit on the keyboard having a negative effect on gameplay).

I'm talking about *HOSTILE WATERS: ANTAEUS RISING* and *STARTOPIA*, two titles that seemed a little lost in the preview rush, but definitely deserve your attention now. The kind of attention that is green and crumpled and crammed in your wallet. Check out the reviews and get back to me at Tom_Price@ziffdavis.com with the name of the game that surprised you (good or bad) when you played it. I'll be here, waiting for the Next Big Thing.

—Tom Price



A pleasant surprise: *HOSTILE WATERS*

OCTOBER REVIEWS

| GAME | RATING |
|---|-----------|
| Arcanum | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Anachronox | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| WWII Online | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| MechCommander 2 | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Diablo II: Lords of Destruction | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Star Trek: Deep Space Nine—Dominion Wars | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Startopia | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| The College Years | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Desperados | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.



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.



Late in the game the environments, if not the enemies, get more interesting. You will still be fighting giant spiders.

The most fun you'll ever have not having fun

Argh-Canum

My definitive ARCANUM experience came as I entered the game's home stretch. I had to get my party to a remote evil island, and not a single captain of any ship in the classic high-fantasy/early industrial Victorian England gameworld would take me. But I had choices, lots of choices. I could gamble for a ship. I could buy one. I

could kill an undead pirate and take his ghost ship. Or I could fulfill three quests for the undead pirate and he'd give me his boat. So many possibilities, so much potential gaming richness.

But a lack of gambling skill kept the gambler from gambling with me. The ship builder wouldn't talk to me, let alone sell me a boat. The

pirate and his undead crew were patently unkillable. And despite my best efforts, an innocent mistake in the execution of the pirate's quests prohibited the game from recognizing them as "done," thus leaving me up ARCANUM's creek without a paddle. Or a boat, in this case.

Death of a Thousand Cuts

In the end, a quick custom patch solved the problem and I was able to finish the game. But why did it even get to that? Because the

game didn't give me enough detail to finish one of the three quests properly. Specifically, I had to destroy a sword wrought from evil itself. That's all my quest log said to do—destroy the sword—so I ended up destroying it the wrong way and I was stuck. Four more words in the log specifying how to destroy the sword would've fixed the problem.

Was it a bug? Not exactly. It was an oversight, one of many that kept popping up and frustrating whatever enjoyment I was getting from the game. Non-scaling random encounters sound like no big thing—except that the constant wolf, bear, and spider attacks while you travel across the land are brutally

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA

reviewed by Robert Coffey

CGW RATED

PROS

An incredibly rich and nuanced character system, complemented by a great story well told.

CONS

Design lapses, flat combat, and lots of little annoyances continually interrupt the fun.



The character screen is incredibly deep, with countless stats and skills that can be adjusted after every level gain. Considerately, the game comes with about two dozen career paths you can use to automatically shape your growing avatar.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 1200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet.

Publisher: Sierra • **Developer:** Troika Games • \$45 • Arcanum.sierra.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; blood, mature sexual themes, violence.

lethal early in the game and pointlessly time consuming later, when your character is buffed up and just trying to get somewhere. Town maps that you can't annotate (and occasionally garbled text on the few locations that self-annotate) are a real headache when you can't remember where in a sprawling city some quest-giving NPC lives, and you're forced to go door-to-door.

And how annoying is it to travel from town to town trying to sell excess armor because armor merchants, blacksmiths, herbalists, and others will buy back only certain items? How aggravating is it that your NPC party members insist on toting around a ruined, utterly irreparable piece of 800-pound armor at a severe encumbrance penalty to themselves? How frustrating is combat when your magic-using party member casts nonworking healing spells on you until he passes out, instead of just delivering the killer blow to whatever is attacking you? How maddening is an in-town waypoint system that seems like a great solution for covering ground until your party members get snagged on the first immobile NPC they pass and you're forced to painstakingly shepherd them?

Sleepless in Arcanum

Sadly, the game is just loaded with similarly troublesome design decisions, all seemingly handcrafted for maximum hair-pulling effect. My favorite: You cannot rest in a dungeon. So you have to constantly backtrack multiple levels to the surface to rest and heal. Even when playing as a dwarf, exploring old dwarven mines and finding an abandoned dwarf bedroom complete with a little dwarf bed, you cannot rest.

All this stinks because ARCANUM has so much promise. The story takes so many twists and turns that anything you do that's related to it draws you deeper into the game. When you're tasked with digging up information on people and events, the effect is more like being pulled into a real mystery than like receiving a typical RPG quest. Most key characters do and say the unexpected, and there are some striking motivational reversals. It's all delivered via a huge amount of smartly written dialogue, truly engaging books and documents you discover in the gameworld, and some sharp voice acting. And if there's a more engaging and originally conceived gameworld than ARCANUM's Merlin-meets-Jack the Ripper cityscapes, I'd like to see it.

But in addition to the other design flaws, the talented crew at Troika—the people who brought us FALLOUT—failed to fully realize that wonderful gameworld. Until the very end, too much of the world looks the same. And the vast majority of the monsters are various wolves, bears, and spiders—where are the technological horrors and magical monstrosities? A few (admittedly cool) Jules Verne-style automatons and a handful of liches scattered throughout the world do little to break up the constant canine/ursine/arachnid onslaught.

Combat is similarly bewildering. You'd expect epic battles pitting the do-it-yourself gadgetry of the technologist against the mystic might of the mages. You'd be wrong. Put aside the fact that most of your enemies are animals, and you're still faced with combat that is essentially you banging on bad guys—with sword, gun, arrow, or spell—while they just hit you over the head. Maybe we've been spoiled by the sprawling, strategically deep spell wars of the BALDUR'S GATE games, but when the most important combat decision you make is whether to go into turn-based or real-time mode, isn't that a bit lacking? And



A train system will whisk you from one city to another, but there are so few stations you'll still find yourself making long, arduous treks on foot.



Successful combat is mostly an endurance contest with little depth compared with other RPGs. And why does my shape-shifting party member—the blue creature—keep running away even though she's healthy?



With their reliance on combining items to create new ones, the inventory of technology-based characters is almost always crowded. Encumbrance can become a real issue.

when the real-time combat is just a good way to stay out of range of the slow-moving monsters and not the frantic death spree of a DIABLO, isn't that a little disappointing?

There is fun to be had here. When it all comes together, when the story drives the action, when the combat is bloody and perilous, when your technologist character learns how to make a devastating elephant gun out of spare parts, ARCANUM is a gas-lit wonder. With its near-constant rate of leveling, the long-term planning, and the payoffs its incredibly deep character-generation system affords, this is a game that understands the pleasures and rewards of a true RPG as few others do. There is more hardcore, satisfying character sculpting in this game than in any other on the market. Unfortunately, there are more good, solid kicks to the shin in it as well. **GGW**



The stagey look, vivid effects, and turn meters for every character should be familiar to console RPG vets. The great camera movement is all ANACHRONOX, but all the action and special effects in the world can't cover up the fact that this is a QUAKE II game in a QUAKE III world.

It took three years, but Ion Storm delivered the goods

Finally: Fantasy

It's been more than three years since Tom Hall announced ANACHRONOX, an epic homage to FINAL FANTASY-style role-playing.

In that time, a lot has changed for RPGs and Ion Storm, but Hall and his team stayed true to their vision despite distractions. Is this the first Ion Storm game to live up to its hype?

For those who've played

the FINAL FANTASY games, ANACHRONOX will seem very familiar—turn-based combat, lots of different locales, elaborate characters, and dozens of hours of

gameplay. At first, it's almost too familiar, so much so that you might think Hall is just dishing out a cheap imitation of the real deal. But within the first few hours you'll find that this game stands tall on its own merits as a fun RPG with humor, personality, and a good story.

ANACHRONOX is unlike your typical PC role-playing game. Besides the obvious console conventions, like timed turn-based combat, the story doesn't start out as the usual epic, save-the-world tale. In the beginning of the game,

you're just stumbling along, mired in decidedly mundane tasks as befits your status as washed-out detective Sly Boots. It isn't until you've explored much of the world, talked to characters, and familiarized yourself with the game that you are plunged into that epic struggle to save the universe. Being thrust immediately into a world-on-the-brink story line, as players are in so many games, can be overwhelming. Here the designers display a superb sense of timing, starting out small and slowly building to the main event.

A Motley Crew

Where ANACHRONOX really shines is in its characters. Each is unique, with an interesting back story and motivation. Surprisingly good voice acting and excellent dialogue go a long way in establishing each character's identity. Later in the game cut-scenes really dig into the history of the main characters, increasing your attachment to them. Personality and imagination pervade every character in the game, right down to ancillary characters like the planet Democratus (yes, a planet joins your party). Democratus is represented by a council of eight bickering officials who never agree on anything and is one of the most amusing characters in the game.

Best of all, unique worldskills allow each of the player characters to interact with the puzzles scattered throughout the gameworld in a different way. Democratus has a tractor beam for snagging

ANACHRONOX

reviewed by Elliott Chin

CGW RATED

PROS

Good story and dialogue; interesting, humorous characters; fun puzzles.

CONS

Buggy; lots of running around; lack of combat and slow combat.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 460MB hard drive space, 12MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium III or AMD Athlon, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card. **3D Support:** OpenGL **Multiplayer:** None

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Ion Storm • \$40 • www.anachronox.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence, mature sexual themes.

otherwise unreachable items, while Sly picks locks to open locked doors, behind which usually lie important documents and items that advance the game.

Each worldskill is itself a miniature puzzle game that must be solved every time you access it. For instance, when using the tractor beam, you have to play a small version of whack-a-mole. In the game's fiction, the council members are objecting to your use of the tractor beam, and you have to berate them until they shut up. The eight bickering council members pop up like moles and you whack them with your talking head. When your robot companion PAL-18 uses his "comptalk" skill to steal information from a computer, a grid appears and you have to create a path through the grid from the start point to the end point using a combination of connector pieces. These frequently recurring puzzles add variety to the usual questing and fighting.

In rare instances, minigames also break up the gameplay. After the planet Sunder is destroyed, for example, you have to guide your shuttle through debris and crashing spacecraft in a short take on side-scrolling action games. And when invading a hive of alien robot-hornets, you have to play a rather torturous rail-shooter minigame.

Errand Boy of the Future

The minigames and brainteasers showcase a surprising aspect of ANACHRONOX: its emphasis on puzzles over combat. Sure, there's fighting, along with several dungeon-type areas filled with monsters, but most of the gameplay in ANACHRONOX is actually puzzle solving. You have to talk to person A, who tells you to talk to person B, who won't give you what you want until you retrieve an item for him from person C. There are lots of quests that require you to go back and forth between different areas in a city. (Most of the time, what you need to complete a puzzle is contained in one city, so you don't have to journey too far afield to complete your quests.) In ANACHRONOX, you often have to talk to every NPC and search every space for possible clues. Sometimes, you won't know that a person is the sole means of reaching your objective until you've talked to every other person in the area. To the designers' credit, though, you never feel lost, and Fatima, your in-game secretary, does a good job of keeping you abreast of your main goals, although she is useless in tracking side quests.

Combat is certainly a large part of the game, but even in the dungeon levels you won't be fighting nearly as much as you would in hack-and-slash RPGs. Not only is the frequency of combat different, but so is the very FINAL FANTASY style. It's turn based, but with timed meters that determine when you can take your action. Throw in lots of pomp and ritual and you've got very slow combat. Instead of just attacking, the staff-wielding Grumpos has to leap high into the air, spin around several times, and then slam his staff into the enemy—every single time he attacks. When you cast a MysTech effect, ANACHRONOX's version of spells, you see your character gesture, summon a special effect replete with lights and colors, and then attack the enemy. Combat takes patience, as you can't skip past these animations.

Funny Business

One of the best things about ANACHRONOX is that it's just *funny*, and you'll find yourself chuckling at various stages in the game. Or maybe not—the quirky



ANACHRONOX's skewed sense of humor comes through even in combat—this verbose sidekick is literally talking an enemy to death.



ANACHRONOX begins in a dark slum but spans a multitude of unique, far-off locales, including the bright and antiseptic world of science, Sunder.

humor may not be every gamer's cup of tea. The CGW staff was almost equally divided between those who liked the hijinks and those who loathed them. But I was happily impressed by an irreverent style that still managed to accommodate some fairly deep emotions and characterizations.

It's a shame that the graphics aren't commensurate with the rest of the game. All the character models are too boxy, betraying their dated QUAKE II heritage, and although some environments and MysTech special effects are nice, this game definitely isn't being served by its graphics. The music and sound effects are much better, and the use of camera movement throughout the game is outstanding.

But how can a game that took three years to complete have so many bugs and technical problems? At least three times, I encountered game-stopping bugs. Once, after a long cut-scene and a particularly annoying minigame, the game failed to load the proper level, trapping me in a pitch-black confined space. A reboot and replay fixed that, but I had to turn the game from full-screen to windowed mode in order to avoid another crash after defeating a big boss. And there are other, less egregious bugs in the game, which aren't enough to really slow it down.

Despite the bugs and poor graphics, ANACHRONOX is clearly a good game. It has an interesting and well-paced story, excellent dialogue and characters, and fun gameplay. This is one substantial RPG that surprises in many ways, often for the better.

Feel free to (finally) believe the hype. **CGW**

It's a bird!
It's a plane!
It's a...tank?

WWII Offline

Among the thousands of little-known episodes from World War II only recently uncovered with the publication of Cornered Rat's massively multiplayer game was the moment when German infantrymen were paralyzed by the thought: "Mein Gott! Die Briten haben einen Fliegenbehälter!" (Translation: "My God! The British have a flying tank!") Flying tanks aside—actually, connection times, installation, stability, load times, interface, graphics, controls, and gameplay aside—WORLD WAR II ONLINE:

BLITZKRIEG would be a fine game. It still might be when (or maybe if) it's finished sometime next year. Obviously, someone at Cornered Rat dozed off after lunch one day, awoke from a horrible nightmare about something called testing, and stamped "Gold Master"

on the first WWII ONLINE CD he laid his hands on. Unfortunately, he stamped this over "Alpha Build."

Premature Invasion

Or perhaps Cornered Rat had a reason for pushing the most ambitious, coveted game in memory out the door when it was unfinished. It's not only slow and unstable, it's missing crucial features and sports show-stopping bugs. The glimpses of brilliance and potential are testa-

posed to be the dream war sim, allowing people to take on realistic roles in every facet of a WWII battle: naval, air, armor, infantry, artillery, and command. Thousands of gamers would band together into armies to fight combined-forces battles that would rage across vast landscapes. If you squint, you can see traces of this incredibly appealing concept, but the game is only a shadow of its promise.

There are two very separate issues to deal with in evaluating WWII ONLINE: the state of the game at launch, and the core design elements. The first is easy: The launch was an unmitigated disaster (refer to the *Read.Me* story in last month's issue). The game crashed like crashing was some holy duty. Load times were crushing. Frame-rates could be counted on one hand, with a finger left over to make your opinion known to Cornered Rat.

Crippling Private Ryan

While some of these initial problems were worked out, the second tier of launch issues reared its head: A single, giant persistent-state world could not be delivered as promised; there are smaller, separate

As CGW went to press, several of the problems in WORLD WAR II ONLINE had been addressed via a series of hefty patches. Also, to its great credit, Cornered Rat has promised not to start the game clock and charge monthly fees until the game is in a much more playable state. However, we still recommend you pass on WWII ONLINE until it is actually finished. We will monitor the game over the coming months and keep you posted as to its current state.

Requirements: Pentium 400, 256MB RAM, 3D hardware acceleration, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 600, high-speed Internet connection. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** Subscription-based; \$9.99/month.

Publisher: Strategy First • **Developer:** Cornered Rat • \$40 • www.wwiionline.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; blood, violence.



The French at their very best: blowing up a parked, empty tank.

It's a little-known fact that many German tanks were knocked out by dumbasses firing small-caliber weapons at them. Ah, realism.

ment to ambition and skill. Cornered Rat bit off a huge project that would have made strong men quake.

WORLD WAR II ONLINE: BLITZKRIEG

reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

CGW RATED

PROS

Occasionally, the concept, scale, and gameplay meld to create the greatest minute and a half of gaming around.

CONS

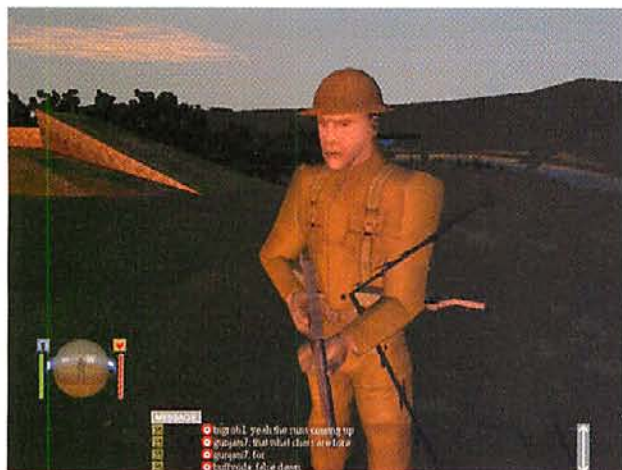
Horrendous bugs, lag, missing features, cumbersome controls, low frame-rates, middling graphics, long load times, and much more.

worlds instead. The promised ranking system and RPG elements aren't there (or if they are, they've been put in a very secret place so that no one can actually enjoy them). There are no community features, just a confusing lobby that lets you pick a side, a place to fight, and a "vehicle." This reduces the game to little more than COUNTER-STRIKE with tanks and planes (and tank-planes). Communication is botched, making it difficult to scrape together a platoon. And a less intuitive and informative interface than the lobby's is hard to imagine.

Scratch that. There *is* a less intuitive interface: the one in the game. Control in WWII ONLINE is something you get used to, not something you like. The airplanes are twitchy, with limited views, blind spots, and terrible frame-rates. In a tank, you can perform only one crew-member action at a time—you can drive, see, or fire the gun—not all three. The idea is to force cooperation. That's nice if you want to do that, but a design shouldn't force you to. The most notorious control convention is the infantry interface, which requires you to first Shift-left click, then right click, then left click to fire a gun. This is supposed to replicate the challenge of firing a real rifle. I've fired rifles. It's not this challenging.

The Unstoppable Frog Menace

Frankly, they can shove their realism claims, since they didn't even bother to implement grenades, mortars, and other common infantry weapons. For all the noise about how "real" the experience would be, it's far from it. TRIBES 2 offers a more realistic combined-forces experience. There are only a few airplane, tank, and gun types for each of the three sides (Britain, France, and Germany) right now. New theaters and weapons are supposed to be released over time, assuming the game survives long enough. Naval elements didn't make the cut at all. The badly implemented communication features lead to a lack of actual leadership or coordination. There's also a horrible balance issue, since there are currently no limits on the number of show-stopping weapons than can be spawned in a session. This means



Doesn't this infantry man look a bit like a chimp from *Planet of the Apes*? The soldiers in the game also look depressed, perhaps from the 10-minute load times.



It's really cool to fly over a raging battle, and if you can ever get more than one frame per second, you might someday be able to do this.

the French can spawn the unstoppable Char artillery as often as they want, and handily chew up the opposition.

All this occurs in a gameworld that contains crummy 2.5D trees and annoying ground-blurring techniques. Very vexing is the lack of a third-person view. I can't look at the outside of my plane. I say "plane" because *everything* in the game is a plane. WWII ONLINE is built on a flight sim engine; ground units are merely planes with no X axis. This explains the "Do you want to leave the vehicle?" question you get when you're playing as infantry, as well as the *Fliegenbehälter*.

The Longest Game

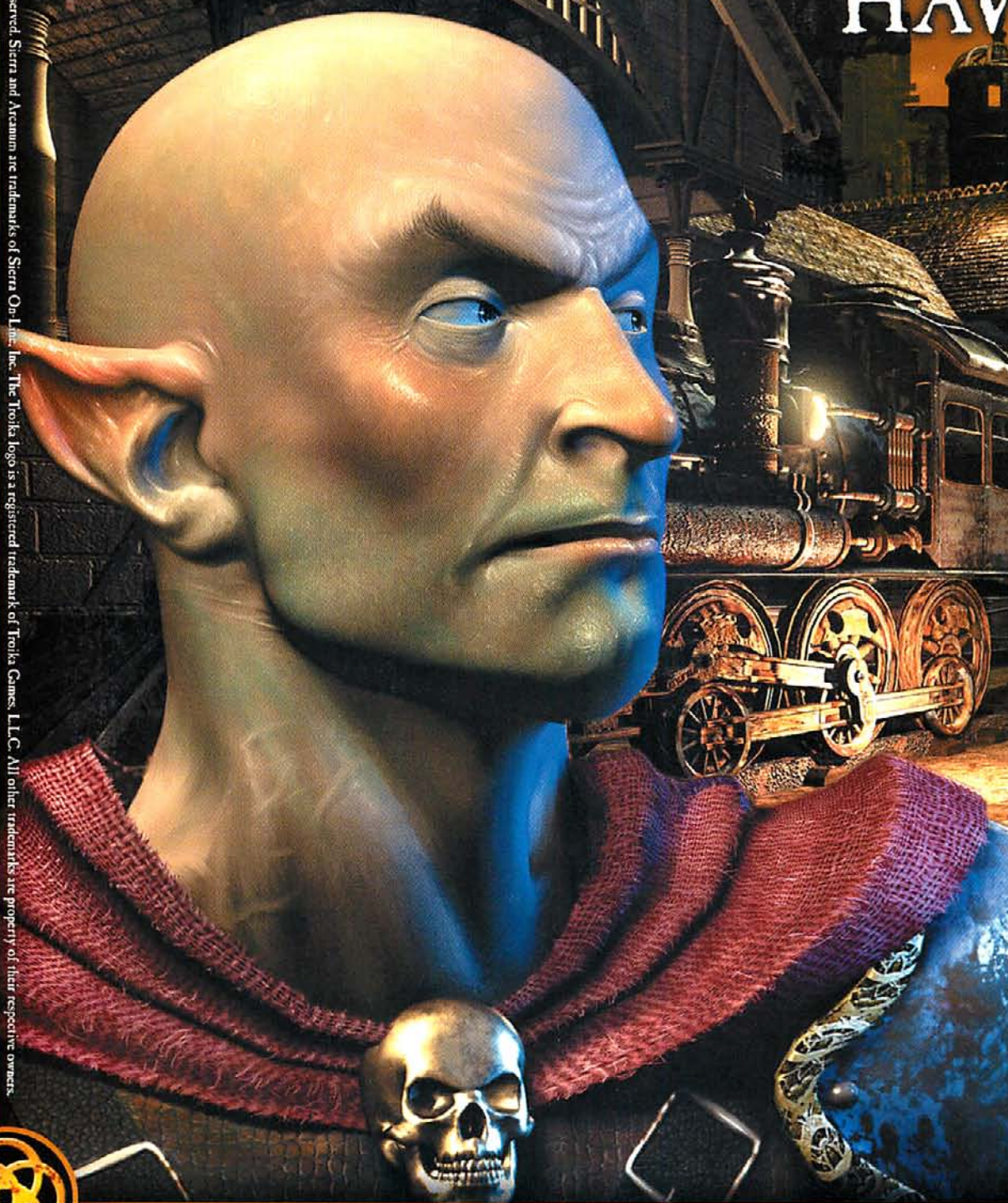
The gameplay experience instills a type of Stockholm Syndrome. You are held captive by its bad or boring elements so long that the good moments are like something airlifted in from the Best Game Ever. One of the key issues is the humongous physical size of the gameworld, resulting in a huge amount of transit time. As infantry, you either ride or end up walking (sometimes for an hour) in search of something to do or kill. Add your extremely low survivability, and you get an hour of tedium punctuated by 90 seconds of interesting gameplay. But boy, do you wind up loving those 90 seconds.

Yes, there is something to enjoy here. Quite a bit, if you are patient. The tank portion, aside from control and viewing problems, is strong. If the frame-rates are improved, the flight sim elements probably will also be workable. With practice and teamwork even the infantry element starts to work. Entering a large-scale battle, blitzing towns, mopping up resistance, and capturing control flags has real appeal. When everyone manages to coordinate and attack an enemy together the game reaches enormous heights. But there is much to tolerate and wade through to get to those points.

Will it be fixed? *Can* it be fixed? My gut tells me that this may never amount to a satisfying experience. Still, the control, stability, and design issues can be surmounted by gamers with patience and a love for the subject. WWII ONLINE is a raw, incomplete game, but it offers people something they want, and they may be willing to go the extra mile to get it. **GGW**

WH
HAV

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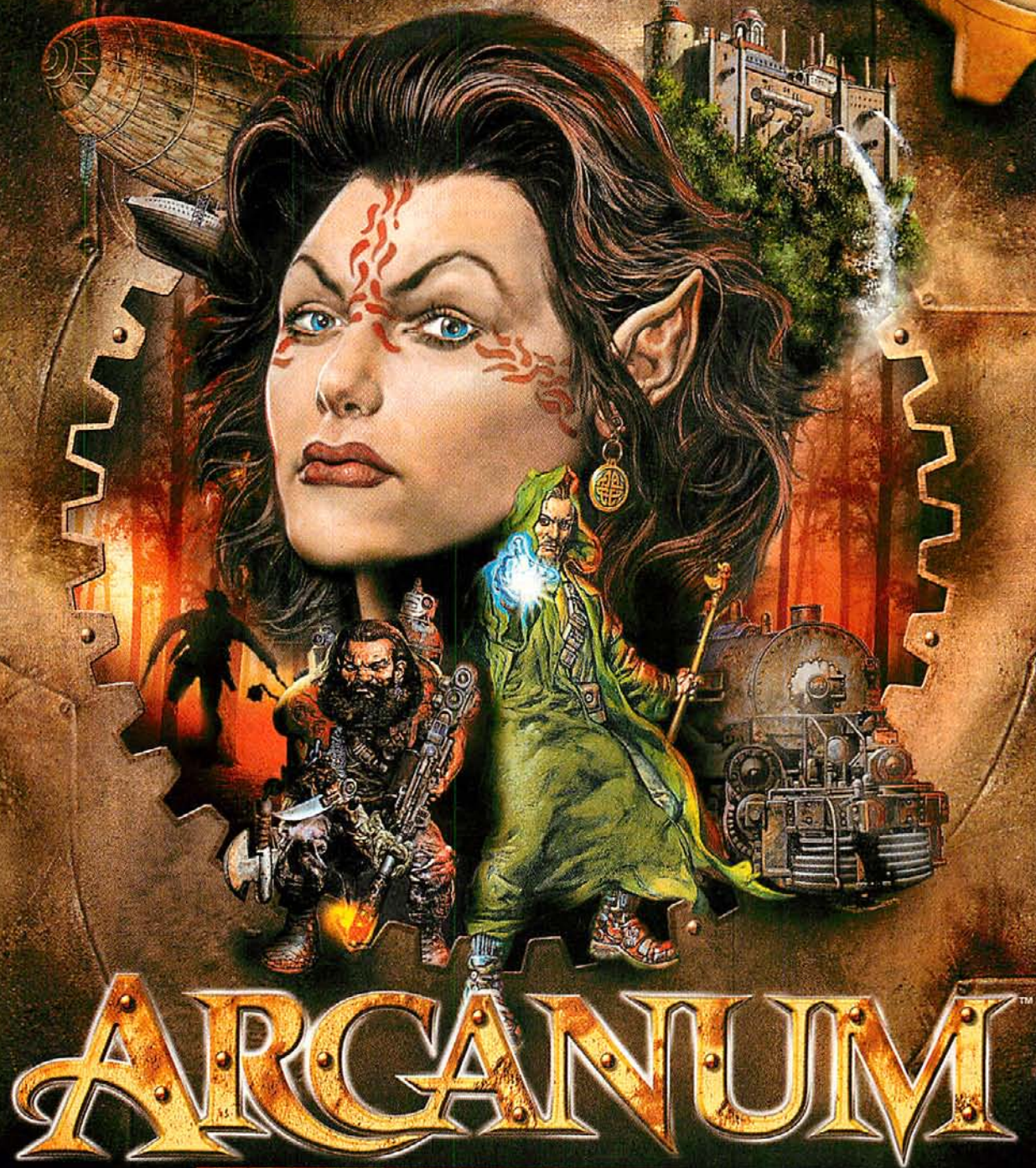
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MECHCOMMANDER 2 lets you make a big scene in a little world

Lightning Bugs

You have to expect that something will be lost when you take gargantuan walking tanks weighing 30 to 100 tons each and shrink them down to an inch in size. Thimble-sized BattleMechs don't quite instill the same awe and dread we've come to expect from MECHWARRIOR games. The scale change also makes it harder to believe that there are diminutive humans sitting in those tiny cockpits, but we'll overlook that for now (suspension of disbelief should be a minimum requirement).

While it's not as electrifying as a space sim like MECHWARRIOR 4, MECHCOMMANDER 2 gives people a chance to play in the *BattleTech* world at a different level, and explore a range of options that aren't available to Mech jockeys.

MECHCOMMANDER 2 lets

you see the whole battle and control nearly a dozen Mechs simultaneously. Strategic choices include where and how you want to fight, as well as what combination of Mechs and pilots you want.

But there's an inherent sense of detachment in being lifted out of the cockpit and floated above the battlefield. It's like being in a hovering Pope-mobile, serenely impervious to damage, and so far away you can't even hear the clomping of your Mech's feet (although you can hear them bowl over the occasional tree or fence). MECHCOMMANDER 2's success is in large part determined by how well it can overcome said detachment; to make you feel an important part of what's going on. Otherwise, it may as well be BeetleCommander.



An enemy tries a vain attempt to elude overwhelming firepower with his jump jets.



My Mech marauders blast a defender before he can duck behind a wall. Explosions, flames, and smoke are convincingly depicted.

rebel leader's tendency to put the wrong emphasis on nearly every line. Compared with other games, though, the performances are above average, and since there is a sizable cast, quantity manages to overcome spotty quality.

The mission structure is mostly linear, with occasional branching options. The missions usually involve the typical "liquidation of enemies" design motif; making you destroy bases, dropships, or Mechs. None of them are particularly inspired or extraordinary. After each briefing, you then pick the Mechs and pilots you wish to take on your mission.

The Mech Bay is a huge improvement over the original MECHCOMMANDER. It's a snap to choose what mechs you want, strap pilots in, and launch. Although you could play the entire game without changing loadouts, it's very easy to reconfigure and save custom ones for later. MECHCOMMANDER 2 also addresses a serious oversight in the first game: heat. Every weapon has a heat factor now; the cumulative effect of which can be seen as you build. Beware: once you start tinkering with weapons, heat sinks, and armor, it can become a rather absorbing pastime.

The game world is convincingly portrayed in 3D. Most of the missions feature hilly terrain, trees, and

MECHCOMMANDER 2

reviewed by Ken Brown

CGW RATED

PROS

Big improvement over MECHCOMMANDER; pretty graphics; cool pyrotechnics.

CONS

Lack of realism and believability.

Showdown on Carver V

The designers try involving you with a series of video-clips about a conflict on planet Carver V. As a mercenary mech commander, you're asked to handle dirty work for the planet's largest military force, House Steiner. Off to a good start as you take orders from battle-hardened Steiner commander Colonel Renard (convincingly portrayed by Rick Deats), the believability of these videos then evaporates a few missions later, when lesser actors appear. By the end, you're left cringing by the

Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz (400MHz with MMX or 3D Now if no hardware acceleration), 64MB RAM, 8MB 2D video card, 600MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 600, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D acceleration. **3D Support:** Direct3D
Multplayer: LAN, Internet.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Microsoft • \$45 • www.microsoft.com/Games/mechcommander2/ • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

water, which not only look pretty but offer strategic advantages. Navigation is simplicity itself: You pan with the mouse, zoom in-and-out with the mouse-wheel, and change viewing-angle by simply right-clicking. The fog of war has been mercifully eliminated.

While the buildings and vehicles contribute to a sense of realism, the developed areas lack sufficient vehicles and people to seem more than detailed sets. Soldiers make occasional appearances, where they're promptly roasted by even the weakest mech; that explains why they aren't around more often. But in a world where the civilian population is being ravaged by competing Mech armies, one would expect hundreds, nay, thousands, of panicky civilians to be lighting out at the first sign of trouble. Night missions tend to be a little spookier and immersive, perhaps because such omissions are less obvious after dark.

Laser Light Show

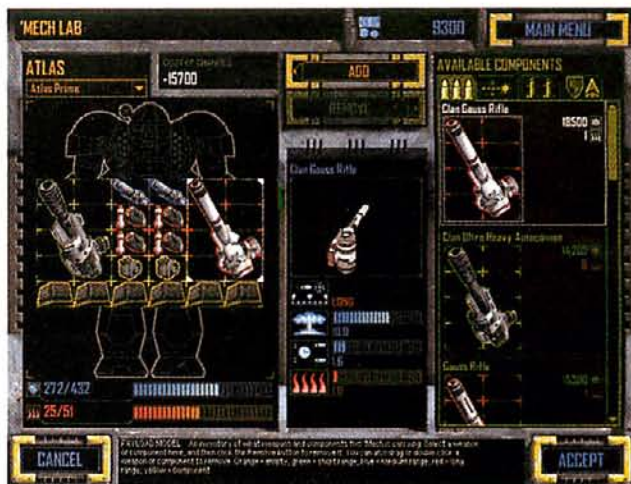
The areas that show the greatest attention to detail are the Mechs themselves, and their dazzling firepower. Each looks unique, and are all built to scale (unlike the first game). They've detailed animations for every action, and they constantly track left and right, checking for threats. Automatically engaging an enemy (using line-of-sight), the pyrotechnic displays of missiles and particle beams always bring a thrill. As they take damage, limbs can be blown off, weapon systems destroyed, and entire mechs explode—resulting in damage to your own units. Some structures are also explosive, so there's plenty for the closet pyro to enjoy.

Often outnumbered and with little reinforcement opportunity, the challenge is to pick away at the enemy's defenses or find a way to draw him out. Although the missions, Mechs, terrain, and fixed defenses vary throughout the game, you'll do many of the same things in every mission: Scout out the defenses, take over bases, turn defensive turrets against their masters, draw mechs into an ambush, then repair yours, and do it again. While you can call in fixed artillery or air strikes, you'll usually have to devote your resources to repair. Select a unit can be difficult at times and once in a while a unit will refuse to be repaired, even though it is eligible.

During the mission, you can monitor each mech's stats. A small photo turns into a video link when that pilot communicates with you. After each mission, promoted pilots can be trained in a specialty skill, further increasing their effectiveness. The in-mission chatter and after-mission promotions do help create a sense of attachment to your pilots. Despite all that, you only rarely feel that there is a war going on and lives are at stake.

Part of that is because there's very little of what I'll call the "pucker factor" on the battlefield. Fixed defenses are generally weak, and the enemy rarely attacks in sufficient numbers to scare you. Real battles are terrifyingly stressful events; in MECHCOMMANDER 2 they are generally isolated encounters with a small number of enemy units.

More importantly, there was only one moment where I felt an emotional reaction. Towards the end of a mission, a Clan member with a dangerous reputation threatened to wipe out my team. He issued the threat as he approached a fuel storage container. Targeting the container incinerated him instantly. I was still gloating when the mission ended, only to learn that my only elite pilot, Meat, had



Changing your mech's loadout is a simple matter of drag and drop. Of course, there's never enough money or space to get all the good stuff.



A variety of terrain and building types helps keep things interesting.



Brief videos like this one set up each mission. Too bad the acting quality is inconsistent.

died because I left him in the fray too long (some super-aggressive pilots only stop fighting when you order them to eject). My smug satisfaction turned to shock, and then anger when I realized that the guy I'd been carefully grooming—who'd helped me win several

missions—wasn't going to be coming back. It was the only time in the game that I really cared about what was going on.

Which is not to say MECHCOMMANDER 2 is a bad game. It's technically proficient, challenging, and well-crafted throughout. It has almost all the things hard-core RTS fans ask for, including the ability to save any time, a robust scenario editor, and multiplayer support. There're some glitches, including crash bugs, no skirmish mode, long load times, and slow frame rates when a lot of Mechs are slugging it out. But most of those things didn't bother me that much.

What bothered me was that I didn't have a greater sense of involvement with the people and events going down on Carver V. Perhaps that's too much to ask for in a real-time strategy game, but this is the plot-driven *BattleTech* universe we're talking about here; I'll keep my fingers crossed for MECHCOMMANDER 3. **CGW**

It's flailing its arms valiantly, but the original survival-horror franchise may need to be laid to rest

Back From the Dead

There were horror games before 1992's **ALONE IN THE DARK**, but none of them were actually frightening. They used either text or crude drawings to tell their stories, and it didn't really work. Oh, the stories got told—some better than others—but I don't remember any of the games making my heart beat even the slightest bit faster. **ALONE** blew me away—it blew all of us away back in 1992.

ALONE IN THE DARK changed everything. It's hard to imagine now, with survival-horror games like **RESIDENT EVIL** and third-person action adventures

like **TOMB RAIDER** so firmly imprinted on our minds, but there were no such games before **ALONE IN THE DARK**. **ALONE** was the first game to put the player in control of a large, detailed human figure who explored mysteri-

ous three-dimensional environments and fought monsters in close-up, full-screen battles shown from suspenseful camera angles that changed as you played. Add the genuinely scary soundtrack full of echoing footsteps and the howls of damned creatures, and for the first time you had a game that could produce the same pulse-pounding, heart-in-your-throat sensation a really good horror film provides.

So what happened to the **ALONE IN THE DARK** franchise? There were two sequels in the '90s, but there hasn't been a new one for years. Why?

Well, **ALONE** may have changed everything, but so did Thomas Edison's phonograph, and you don't see many teenagers these days getting their tunes off of wax cylinders. After the last **ALONE** game, other

developers picked up the ball and ran with it, creating more realistic characters, more detailed stories, better puzzles, more intuitive interfaces, and so on. **ALONE** was outstripped by its competitors, and inevitably gamers favored new games that, though less innovative, were more aesthetically pleasing.

Given our industry's current fascination with dusting off old hits and trying to make lightning strike twice (new **DOOM**, **CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN**, and **DRAGON'S LAIR** games are in the works), it was probably only a matter of time before someone came up with the



What else does this game contain? How about some disgusting gore? It's a horror game after all. Here's our heroine, sans eyes.



More often, dramatic moments are undercut by the ugly character graphics.

clever idea of making a new game in the **ALONE IN THE DARK** series. The idea is appealing: Combine the most modern technology available with the oldest pedigree and see what you get. Unfortunately, most such attempts to date have been disappointments. So the question is whether this particular act of resuscitation has produced something fresh and exciting (like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, say) or something less than wonderful (more like *Star Trek: Voyager*).

Heart of Darkness

The first signs are mostly positive: The game opens with a stylish animated sequence showing how occult investigator Edward Carnby and sexy young linguist Aline Cedrac end up separated on an ominous island off the coast of Maine following a plane crash. But the first bad sign also appears in this sequence—the ominous island is named Shadow Island, a bit of hit-you-over-the-head writing that even the scripters of *Scooby Doo* might have balked at. The second bad sign comes when you have to choose which character to play: You are suddenly confronted with lower-quality graphics than the opening animation led you to expect, and some

ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

reviewed by Charles Ardai

CGW RATED

PROS

Nicely claustrophobic environment; effective soundtrack; some good scares.

CONS

Painfully amateurish writing; disappointing in-game graphics; controls that feel like they haven't improved since 1992.

Requirements: Pentium-II 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space, 3D card. Recommended Requirements: 128MB RAM 3D Support: OpenGL Multiplayer: None

Publisher: Infogrames • Developer: Darkworks • \$40 • www.aloneinthedark.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; blood, gore, and violence.



Awkward controls mean that you'll have to make sure you've lined up and aimed properly before taking a shot at whatever is shambling toward you.

more jarringly bad writing.

Look at the characters' faces and you see sketchwork that looks like something a second-rate magazine illustrator might produce. Sure enough, as you progress through the game, you discover that while the background images are consistently impressive, the characters generally look mediocre. The effect of some of the game's most dramatic scenes is undermined by ugly artwork, and things aren't improved by the low-rent animation: Characters wave their arms woodenly while they talk, but their lips never move.

As for the writing, let's just say that it doesn't make me feel like I'm in good hands when the character descriptions sum Aline up with the line "Characteristic: Father unknown" and Edward with "Characteristic: Owns a double barrel [sic] gun." The bit about Aline searching for her father comes into play later as the story unfolds and represents one of the yarn's few high points. Unfortunately, the rest of the game's story is an overripe mishmash lifted from grade Z horror flicks and expressed in language that calls to mind the ebullient dialogue of Ed Wood. "Our fate is written—but we do not know how to read it!" says one character. When menaced by monsters: "Terrifying things! Shadows! Living shadows! Flee! Get out of here! Any way you can!" Advice for a character who has narrowly escaped being slaughtered by the undead: "Just keep your chin up!" I'm sorry to say I could quote plenty more gems like these.

Playing Dead

Of course, you could ask what difference it makes whether the writing is good, given that the story is just an armature on which to hang the action of the game. The thing is, the writing in the original game was good, a skillful pastiche of H.P. Lovecraft, and reading it was one of



Nine years later, we go from a sensible, albeit blocky female protagonist to a more Lara Croft-inspired one.

the great pleasures the game offered. Here, the writing is awful, and even where it doesn't detract from the action it fails to elevate it.

Keep in mind that the action mostly involves searching through a house and its grounds, collecting keys to open new areas and weapons to fight off various monsters. Ninety percent of the game's puzzles involve unlocking a door or combination lock of some sort, while the remaining 10 percent involve finding ways to kill particularly tough beasties. Each new location is fun to look at, but it's not like the action is in and of itself all that involving. One thing that could make it more enjoyable and less routine is strong writing—but no such luck.

Another thing that could elevate the mundane gameplay is a strong user interface, but *THE NEW NIGHTMARE* doesn't give you that either. By default, you use the arrow keys to move and hold down the "A" key to run, but the only effective way to aim and fire your weapons is with the mouse, which means that you'll be shifting between the keyboard and mouse continuously, shooting and unable to move or moving and unable to shoot—either that or shooting and moving, but only walking rather than running. Needless to say, any hesitation in the game can be fatal, and *fatal* can really mean fatal here, since you're allowed to save your game only a limited number of times. (I'm not talking about a limited number of Save Game "slots" that you can overwrite to your heart's content. I'm talking about only being able to invoke the Save function at all when your character is holding a one-use Charm of Saving, and there aren't a lot of those scattered throughout the game.) Mind you, it's not the worst interface I've used (the recent *BLAIR WITCH* games were worse), but the combination of a hackneyed story, atrocious dialogue, and awkward controls is not one that compels player loyalty.

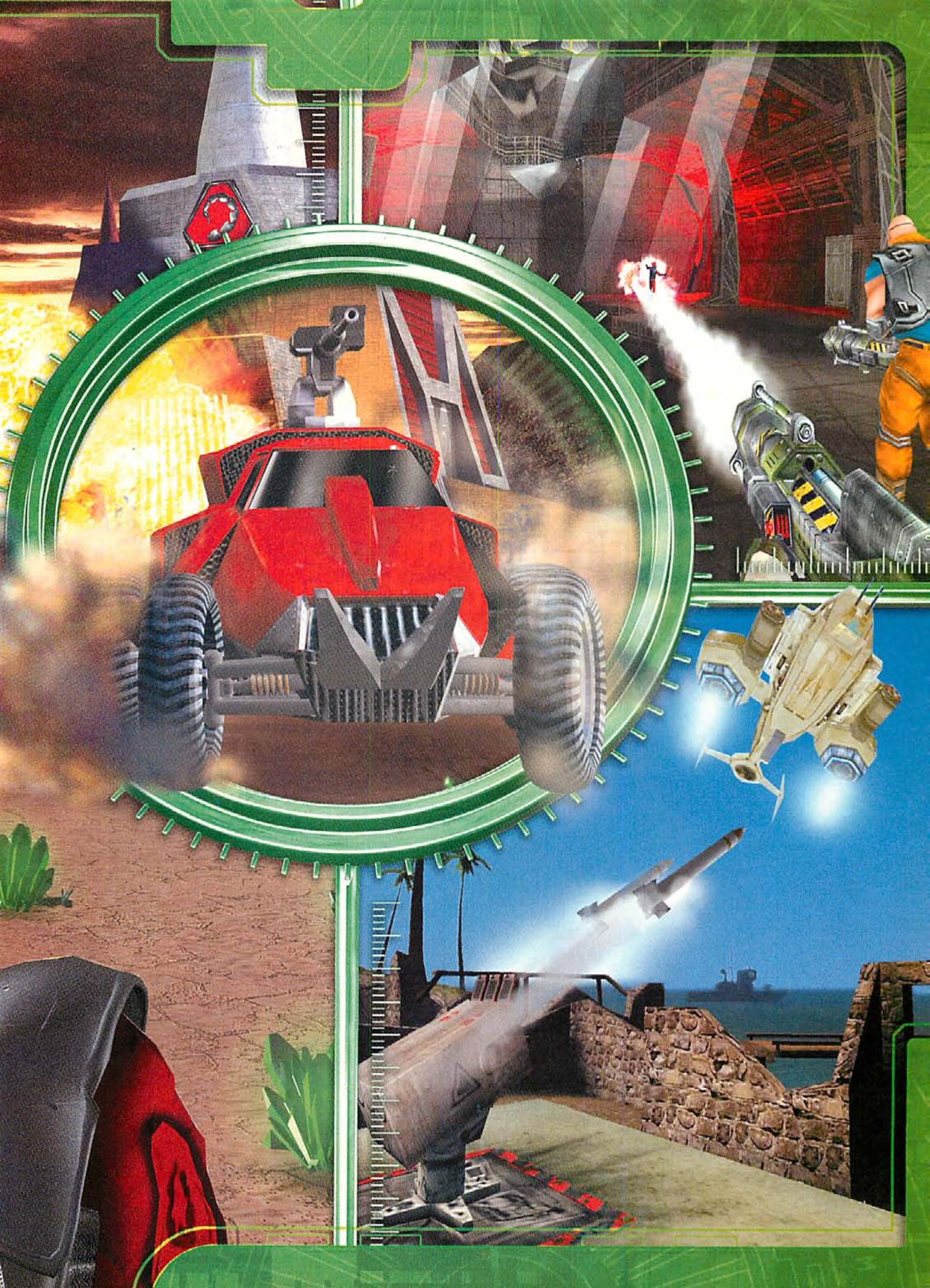
Darkness Calls

So why would you play *THE NEW NIGHTMARE*? The scenery is memorably atmospheric, and so is the soundtrack. There are some jump-out-of-your-chair scares. And there's the nostalgia factor: Except for the bad writing, the designers have done an excellent job of recapturing the gameplay and flavor of the original.

But the fact is that the industry has moved on, and there are plenty of other games that have done survival-horror and third-person action better than the one that invented the genre. *THE NEW NIGHTMARE* is a worthy successor to the 1992 original, and if it had come out in 1993 we'd be praising it to the heavens. But it's not 1993—or 1995 or 1997—and we have come to expect more. I'd like to think there's still life in the *ALONE IN THE DARK* concept, but this *NEW NIGHTMARE* hasn't done a particularly good job of finding it. **CBV**



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PAGE 110

DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION has caused us to reenact *Dawn of the Dead* in my household. I stay up playing the game until dawn, and then my wife wakes up and sees me at the computer and I'm dead. It's the best expansion to a game I've ever played.

LORD OF DESTRUCTION does what every good expansion should do: smoothes the rough edges of the original game while offering new content that improves what came before. With its two new character classes, the assassin and the druid, the expansion also gives you a reason to replay the entire game. It doesn't stop there, though. The new act, which has the player chasing down Diablo's brother Baal, is the best DIABLO yet. It's superb

gaming, the kind of enthralling experience that turned us into gamers in the first place.

The new character classes are the most interesting ones yet devised by Blizzard.

The assassin has

jumped straight out of STREET FIGHTER II with her clever combinations of charge-up and finishing attacks. And her trap skills, which allow players to trap areas and lure monsters to their pyrotechnic deaths, add a new level of cleverness to playing the game.

The druid is an interesting mix of fighter and spell-caster. You can play him as a shape changer, turning him into a werewolf or werebear, or you can have him draw upon the forces of nature with his spells and summon forth tornadoes and volcanoes. It offers quite a contrast in play styles.

In fact, with the expansion, DIABLO II takes on new tactical depth. Blizzard has

beefed up the mercenaries you can hire: They now gain levels along with your character, and you can give them weapons, armor, and shields to help boost their effectiveness. At times, my mercenary was a better fighter than my main character.

To round out the experience, both new character classes can summon additional help. The druid can summon wolves or a powerful grizzly and the assassin can summon a shadow of herself, called a Shadow Warrior. Now, with the



A druid battles enemies in the outstanding siege that opens the new fifth act.

mercenary in tow, you're controlling an entire party.

Finally, the new resolution, bumped up to 800x600 from 640x480, displays more of the map. This gives you a better feel for what's coming and lets you exercise a bit more tactical control over combat situations.

The new act contains some of the most compelling DIABLO action yet. You're thrust into the middle of a battle and tasked with killing the overseer laying siege to the barbarian town. You have to battle through enemy lines as catapults drop fire, ice, and poison on you from afar. You'll even see barbarians fighting to their last breath, terribly outnumbered; if you act quickly, you can save them and they'll fight alongside you. It really feels like an epic war instead of a dungeon crawl.

DIABLO is in large part about getting that new and better item, and now there are more items than ever. Your stash is bigger to accommodate more magic items (runes and jewels), new matched sets, new class-specific items, and more.

Faults? The 800x600 resolution is still a bit dated and the game chugs a little now and then. It's pricey, too. But that's about it. This expansion has taken a game that didn't quite live up to sky-high expectations when it was released and made it one of the most satisfying gaming experiences I've had. I've played through the entire five acts with both a druid and assassin and I'm nearly done playing through them again with both characters in Nightmare mode. Now I can't wait to go to Hell.

And if LORD OF DESTRUCTION keeps getting me stared down at 5:30 a.m. by my wife, I may get there sooner than expected. **CGW**

DIABLO II EXPANSION SET: LORD OF DESTRUCTION

reviewed by Mark Asher

CGW RATED

PROS

Significantly improves DIABLO II; the new act is the best yet.

CONS

Still only 800x600 graphics; a bit expensive for an expansion.

Requirements: Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space, original copy of DIABLO II. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** Glide, Direct 3D. **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players).


Publisher: Blizzard • **Developer:** Blizzard North • \$35 • www.blizzard.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; animated violence, blood, and gore.



Guess who's the bad guy?

You guessed right.

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BioWare gives gamers a fitting send-off to its epic role-playing game

This Is the End, My Only Friend

Standing outside of Candlekeep back in 1998, stick in hand, in glorious 640x480 resolution, I wouldn't have been able to conceive of Scooteris in the present day. How could he go from tree-hugging halfwit to dragonscale armor-clad warrior wielding weapons of instant decapitation and able with but a single thought to instantly teleport himself to a secret fortress that floats in another dimension? Yet that's what he's become in **BALDUR'S GATE II: THRONE OF BHAAL**.

TOB is the expansion to BGII, but more importantly, it's the climax of the entire **BALDUR'S GATE** saga, in which everything comes full circle for your avatar. It's a tightly focused work that has you constantly topping yourself in terms of "deeds to brag about." You take on entire armies, meet liches as frequently as goblins, and even face off against Demogorgon himself. I thought Demogorgon was

just some Really Big Guy until my more *AD&D*-attuned compatriots clued me in to the fact that he's "the Prince of Demons" and the *AD&D* equivalent of Sauron—someone so powerful that people spend more time talking about him than attempting to fight him.

With such mighty deeds to be done, everything in the game gets ramped up. Your characters can attain obscenely high levels—into the mid-30s. Imoen gets the ability to summon comets, dragon heads, and divine beings (a far cry from *Monster Summoning I*, where a couple of kobolds would be my sad attempt at "backup"). Your enemies are more powerful too.

Demiliches, monks who fight with the force of dragons, and other weird interdimensional critters await you. Even the normal dragons get smart enough to do things like turn invisible and heal themselves periodically.

To attain this tone of epic conflict, the expansion is much more



Yes, I'm fighting Demogorgon; here, in fact, I'm killing him.

focused than the previous game. It adds three more chapters, which are much like playing BGII chapters three through six. Sure, occasional breaks and side quests pop up, but you're mostly moving and conversing from one epic battle to another. The only break in the action is the brilliantly designed *Watcher's Keep* dungeon, beckoning you with its treasures, devious traps, and even throwbacks to classic RPGs. Some may find the relentless combat daunting, and the nonlinear elements lacking. Others may think that with the new character abilities (such as thieves' obscene *Use Any Item* skill), the game is unbalanced.

But ultimately **THRONE OF BHAAL** is an epic ending to a sweeping saga, and gamers who've stuck with their original **BALDUR'S GATE** characters all the way through are the ones who'll be most rewarded. Yes, the plotting may need some work, the combat occasionally feels repetitive, and it could've been a little longer, but consider this: We all expect to merely slay Foozle and bathe in the accolades of whatever podunk kingdom we just saved. The original **BALDUR'S GATE** ended that way, and each successive iteration of this series has built upon that basic heroic tale, but when **THRONE OF BHAAL** concludes, the tale is transcended as it and your character truly become the stuff of myth and legend. When was the last time a saga ended so fittingly? Certainly not the train wreck that ended the

ULTIMA series.

THRONE OF BHAAL is the resounding ending that the **BALDUR'S GATE** dynasty and its fans deserve. You owe it to yourself to play it. **CGW**

Starting off as a half-elf ranger with a stick, Scooteris was kind of cool by the end of BG and its expansion, with +2 armor and a longbow. But it's not until TOB that he gets equipment that can kill with one blow.



Requirements: Pentium-II 233, 32MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Direct3D **3D Support:** Direct3D
Multiplayer: LAN, Internet (1-6 players).

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** BioWare • **S30** • www.interplay.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; blood, use of tobacco and alcohol, violence.



BALDUR'S GATE II: THRONE OF BHAAL

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

CGW RATED

PROS

A great dungeon; grandiose battles; new items and abilities; it ends everything almost perfectly.

CONS

Might be too battle-heavy for some players; others might take issue with the game's linearity and the insane power of all the characters (including you).

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BALLISTICS

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When did STAR TREK games get good?

Deep Space Fine

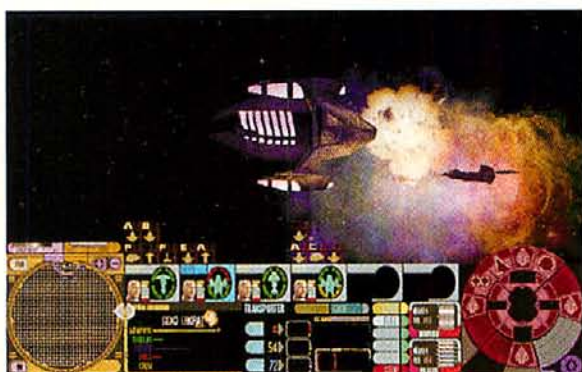
With a name that's almost as long as the syndicated show the game is based on, STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE—DOMINION WARS strives to be what many have called the Holy Grail of computer entertainment: a STAR TREK game that doesn't entirely suck. Sadly, it's not the perfect STAR TREK game we've been waiting for; but fortunately, you'll have enough fun playing it that you probably won't notice.

Using the last two seasons of *Deep Space Nine* as an inspiration, DOMINION WARS recreates the action and drama of a galaxy on the verge of interstellar war. As the Federation scrambles to defend itself, repel the invading forces of the Dominion Alliance, and prevent an all-out invasion of Earth itself, players experience the drama firsthand—with the option of playing through missions as

either side of the conflict.

While DOMINION WARS touts itself as a real-time strategy title, it does not saddle you with tedious resource management, and the only empire building comes between missions, when you can use experience points to upgrade ships, recruit experienced captains, and expand your fleet. Gameplay focuses more on ship maneuvers and tactics—think of it as STARFLEET COMMAND LITE. Those who crave more of a challenge can use the included companion software to create and trade custom missions and compete head-to-head online with up to seven opponents, using the popular multiplayer service provided by Gamespy. You can even scan your photograph, dress it with a sharply tailored Starfleet uniform, and proudly display it within the game. I challenge you to find an inner child not completely excited by that prospect.

At first glance, it would appear that victory is determined by the decisions the player makes, but that is not entirely accurate. While both campaign paths are progressive, they are not dynamic. If you should fail at one of your primary objectives, your choices are to restart the mission, reload a previous saved game, or stop playing altogether. DOMINION WARS is a disappointingly linear experience



Don't let all those little buttons fool you—the interface is fairly straightforward. And what's not to understand about brilliant explosions like this?

in which success means entry to the next assignment and failure means rewinding the war and trying again. Couple this with the fact that there aren't nearly enough missions, and once again you find yourself looking at a STAR TREK game and wondering what could have been.

DOMINION WARS recovers itself enough to be a fun and rewarding game, but only after you download the patches now available. Out of the box, it is a complete mess, with missions that don't recognize when you've won, frequent lockups, and saved games that refuse to reload. The good news for those of you who don't own this game yet is that you've waited long enough. It's now safe to pay money for this product.

Fueled by imagination and undaunted by the failures of the past, the quest for the perfect STAR TREK game goes on. Meanwhile, STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE—DOMINION WARS is fun, and if you think about it, isn't that what really matters? **CGW**

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE—DOMINION WARS

reviewed by Arcadian Del Sol

CGW RATED

PROS

An enjoyable tactical STAR TREK game that doesn't require intimate knowledge of Starfleet blueprints.

CONS

Out of the box, the short, linear campaigns are kneecapped by bugs.

BUILDING THE PERFECT STARSHIP

DOMINION WARS ships with a companion product called STARSHIP CREATOR: WARP II that allows players to construct starships and train captains, then test them using custom missions.

The manual for this utility is a single page that folds out like a car map and is so large that I literally had to enlist the help of a friend to hold up one end while I navigated my way through the program. If you follow the guide, it does begin to make sense, and STARSHIP CREATOR provides an interesting option for online play.

Should you decide to pass, the "manual" makes an excellent tarp, perfect for protecting your minivan from the elements.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350, 128MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2–8 players).

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive • **Developer:** Gizmo Games • \$40 • www.dominionwars.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; violence.



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Ex-Bullfroggers give us **THEME SPACE STATION**It's **DUNGEON KEEPER...in Spaaaaace!**

Sometimes you load a game with no expectations and find a little gem. **STARTOPIA** is a case in point. This quirky, engaging real-time space-station manager plays like DOUGLAS ADAMS' **DUNGEON KEEPER**. Full of wit and breezily playable, it overcomes some nagging shortcomings with pure charm.

Right from the start **STARTOPIA**'s slick, stylish 3D presentation separates it from the current herd of repetitive 2D economic/management games. The game is set entirely within a curvily Kubrickian multilevel space hub populated by a host of transient alien life forms. As station manager, you build the facilities that will keep production moving, alien wayfarers happy, and competition at bay. This is no

simple task, since the station is an orbiting depot where frazzled, sick, violent, unhappy, and generally needy aliens stop for rest, recreation, a bite to eat, medical services, work, and the occasional brawl.

Facilities are "unpacked" as blueprints that are laid out in different compartments, and then built by droids. Some are freestanding, self-contained units. Others, such as the bunks and the sickbay, are rooms requiring doors, decorations, furniture, equipment, and lighting. Naturally, you charge for the use of these amenities, trying to make the largest profit while irritating the fewest patrons. The coin of the realm is the "e," an energy credit that aliens pay for using your services. This energy in turn powers your facility, enabling you to expand into other areas of the space station. The economics are simple but effective.

There's a pretty astounding array of structures to choose from, all providing services essential for various operations. Facilities for food, health, industry, entertainment, maintenance, and relaxation can be either bought on the market or researched in labs.

As the game progresses, you can trade items for profit. **STARTOPIA** introduces these elements with a light tutorial that leads into a 10-mission campaign game. In the campaign, you receive credits for achieving certain goals, with the arc of individual missions prescribed by a fairly limited script.

The campaign doles out new features and gameplay elements so gradually it begins to feel like an extended tutorial—just when you



A little interspecies lovin' at the Love Nest is just the ticket for some weary travelers. Remember, no touching allowed.

feel you finally have everything the game has to offer, the campaign is over. Fortunately, there is a very full-featured sandbox mode. Here, you can set specific goals and victory requirements for a wide-open game, or engage up to four others in competitive building using Gamespy.

The real heart of this game is not in the familiar mechanics, but in the particulars and style. The alien races are a cartoonish assemblage of hip sci-fi clichés, such as the saucer-eyed Greys and the mystical Zedem Monks. Rows of multilimbed, bug-eyed aliens sit on uncomfortable seats waiting their turn for the doctor or the Love Nest while tacky music plays in the background. There's a hint of the familiar—as if these are guys dressed in rubber suits for an episode of *Star Trek*—that gives **STARTOPIA** a kind of winking, ironic tone.

This easily could have degenerated into little more than **PIZZA TYCOON** in space, but for the sure hand of Mucky Foot, a team of ex-Bullfroggers (many of whom worked on the similar **THEME PARK**). From annoyances like litter and sick patrons to the "guest" who simply will not be happy no matter how many brothels and Slugpartments you build, this has many of the classic Bullfrog elements—and some of the flaws. Most detrimental to the entire experience, however, is the lack of a usable manual. Eidos has included a jewel-case afterthought that treats actual information as some rare commodity to be doled out sparingly. The interactions of aliens and structures—indeed, even the *functions* of certain structures—go largely unmentioned. It's irritating, but it doesn't keep **STARTOPIA** from being a fresh, often funny entry in the management genre. **CGW**

STARTOPIA

reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

CGW RATED**PROS**

A witty, stylish, very solid management and building sim.

CONS

Lame manual, tutorial-like campaign game, and those damn rats!

Requirements: Pentium-II 450, 64MB RAM, 3D hardware acceleration, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 600, 128MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2-4 players).

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Mucky Foot • \$40 • www.eidosinteractive.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence, suggestive themes.

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Build a college football dynasty with **THE COLLEGE YEARS**

Big Man on Campus

One kid tells you he's flunking out of college. Another is depressed after losing his girlfriend. The kid you had such high hopes for is in trouble with the law. **SIMPARENT?** No, this is **THE COLLEGE YEARS**, a fascinating sports management sim that places you behind the clipboard of a university football head coach.

If you've played Solecismic's NFL football sims (the **FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL** series) be aware that **THE COLLEGE YEARS** is more about players than about formations. Since the longest any player will be with their team is five years, college coaches are continually in recruiting mode, trying to refill the pipeline with new talent. This is the heart and soul of the game, as you try to identify the best players from

about 14,000 high schools and entice them to join your program rather than your hated rival's.

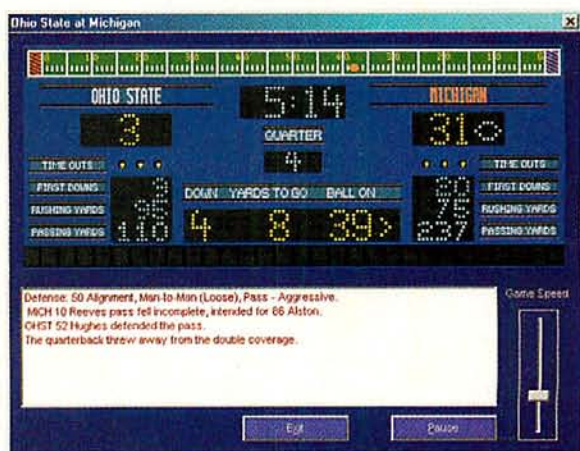
Every high school hopeful has priorities: How far away is your college? How prestigious is your athletic

program? Does your school have a good academic program in his major? Has he always dreamed of playing for Alabama or Michigan? Each of your scouts is rated for his ability to evaluate talent at each position. A scout in the Deep South who's excellent at rating quarterbacks may find a future All-American at Toomsaba High in Mississippi who was overlooked by other universities, while a scout who's poor at evaluating QBs may convince you to waste a scholarship on a dud.

Between games, you'll spend the season scouring the country for new talent, contacting hot prospects, and eventually offering them scholarships. If you're coaching at a small school, such as Central Michigan University (you can start at any Division 1 school), you have to make some tough decisions about your recruiting—spend all your time trying to convince

the nation's top-rated running back to come to your school instead of one of the big ones, and you may lose the chance to pick up some more realistic prospects.

In addition to recruiting, you have a team to coach and games to play. Once your prospects are signed, you have to balance their time: too much time on the field and not enough social time and a player may lose his girlfriend and go into a funk that affects his gridiron performance. A player rated low in intelligence and making bad grades will need extra study hall



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|------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------|
| Flora Bowl | Florida (12-1) vs Alabama (12-0) | Albany, GA | \$7,100,000 |
| Sugar Bowl | Florida State (10-1) vs Florida (11-1) | New Orleans, LA | \$4,750,000 |
| Orange Bowl | Florida State (10-1) vs Southern California (9-2) | West Palm Beach, FL | \$4,100,000 |
| Fiesta Bowl | Michigan (9-2) vs UCLA Tech (9-2) | Tucson, AZ | \$3,500,000 |
| Cotton Bowl | Wisconsin (10-2) vs Texas (10-2) | Dallas, TX | \$1,700,000 |
| Jeopardy Bowl | Oregon State (8-2) vs Georgia (8-2) | Michigan, MI | \$1,600,000 |
| Medicine Bowl | Ole Miss (7-4) vs California-Los Angeles (8-2) | Pearl City, HI | \$1,300,000 |
| Bells of the Bowl | Clemson (9-2) vs Nevada-Las Vegas (8-2) | Shelbyville, TN | \$1,270,000 |
| Sammy Cat Bowl | Texas A&M (9-2) vs Miami of Florida (9-2) | Miss. St. | \$1,270,000 |
| Pony Bowl | Michigan State (7-4) vs Auburn (7-4) | San Francisco, CA | \$950,000 |
| Tuna Salad Bowl | Georgia Tech (8-4) vs Oklahoma (10-2) | Montgomery, AL | \$900,000 |
| Hotchkiss Corn Bowl | Miss. (7-4) vs Southern Mississippi (7-4) | Richmond, WA | \$710,000 |
| Hilary Minton Bowl | Kansas State (7-4) vs Oregon (7-4) | Albion, GA | \$710,000 |
| Corn Dog Bowl | West Virginia (7-4) vs Rice (8-4) | Pearle, TN | \$650,000 |
| Butterfly Ballet Bowl | Maryland (7-4) vs Purdue (8-5) | West Palm Beach, FL | \$650,000 |
| Treasure Bowl | Colorado (8-5) vs Notre Dame (8-2) | Rochester, NY | \$630,000 |
| Unearthed Sock Bowl | Boston College (7-4) vs Tennessee (7-4) | Wilmington, PA | \$470,000 |
| Macadam Bowl | Arizona State (7-4) vs Marshall (10-2) | Yuma, AZ | \$470,000 |
| Cleopatra Bowl | Virginia (7-4) vs South Carolina (7-4) | Hartford, VA | \$470,000 |
| Unearthed Freight Bowl | Baylor Young (8-2) vs Texas Christian (10-2) | Atlanta, GA | \$470,000 |
| Louise Sue Bowl | Air Force (8-2) vs Western Michigan (8-4) | Myrtle Beach, SC | \$470,000 |
| Uvalde Car Bowl | Florida State (7-5) vs Ball State (8-2) | Genoa, MI | \$470,000 |
| Happy Fun Bowl | Mississippi State (8-5) vs Wake Forest (8-5) | Los Angeles, MA | \$470,000 |

It might not be much to look at, but **THE COLLEGE YEARS** teems with gridiron drama.

time, or he may flunk out of school.

After you set your depth charts and establish a game plan, you run your men onto the field and watch them do battle. "Watch" is the operative word here, as you don't call the plays during the game. Surprisingly, that doesn't detract from the game nearly as much as you might expect. You've recruited your team, decided to start that hot sophomore over your senior quarterback, set up a detailed defensive/offensive game plan, and now you watch the results unfold on the field. There's incredible satisfaction in seeing that raw linebacker you recruited out of a small high school in Texas develop into a monster who destroys your opponents, or a running back no one else recruited break into a long run in the last quarter of the Rose Bowl. And there's a bittersweet feeling when your star quarterback leaves school a year early to go into the NFL draft. After building a nationally respected program at a small university, you may find yourself surprisingly conflicted when a Michigan or Florida offers you their head coaching job.

If crisp Fall Saturdays mean college football to you, get this game. **CGW**

Requirements: Pentium II, 64MB RAM, Windows 95/98/ME/NT4/2000, 4X CD-ROM. Multiplayer: None

Publisher: Solecismic Software • Developer: Solecismic Software • \$35 • www.solecismic.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

THE COLLEGE YEARS

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

CGW RATED

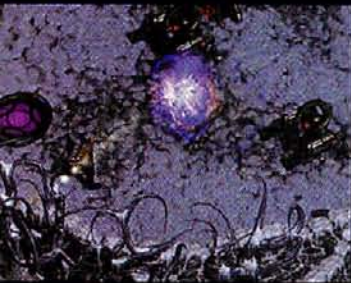
PROS

A superb and deep college football simulation—unsurpassed recruiting and player-management aspects.

CONS

Some minor quirks in the ratings and bowl system; a few bugs.

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mistaken for a savior by an enslaved race



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ZAX

THE ALIEN HUNTER

An unexpected gem rises from the depths

These Waters Run Deep

After finishing the first mission of **HOSTILE WATERS: ANTAEUS RISING**, I had only one thing on my mind: Is it too late for Scooter to assign this to someone else? I really wasn't looking forward to spending hour upon hour of precious gaming time toting a resource harvester around some cheesy-looking digital islands with a weaponless transport helicopter. Scooter had lied; he'd told me this was an action game.

But then something interesting happened. The between-missions cut-scene kicked in, and I was riveted. Wow, a really well-scripted, in-engine cut-scene that moved the story line forward and was

entertaining, to boot. And wait a minute...this story was actually good!

HOSTILE WATERS is not the same old futuristic dystopia run by all-powerful, all-consuming corporations that you must struggle against with your rag-tag band of...well, you know

the drill. This time, the future is a place of world peace and prosperity. War and violence have been overcome by technology that can create anything, anytime, anywhere (thank you, nanotechnology!), and the world is a near-utopian paradise. The trouble is, the former leaders of those evil corporations have formed their own rag-tag band; now you must revive the last of the old warships (the Adaptive Cruisers) to put down their attempts to return the world to its strife-filled past.

Soon I was hooked. Not so much on the gameplay, but on unlocking the cinematics. Then, as the game allowed me to do more and gave me more control over my Adaptive Cruiser, the *Antaeus*, the richness of the gameplay as well as the elegance of the design revealed itself.

Defining that gameplay can be problematic for someone accustomed to conventional genre definitions. In essence, you control the ship (you don't move it around; it's more a base of operations), and therefore you're responsible for creating and managing combat and support units. In that way, **HOSTILE WATERS** follows traditional real-time-strategy rules. But most of the strategy elements happen in the ship's war room while the action is paused, so in that sense it's almost a turn-based game. Add the element of action that comes in when you take direct

control of your vehicles, and you've got a genre hybrid that's less concerned with melding disparate types of gameplay than it is with trying to be fun. And it succeeds.

HOSTILE WATERS is a complete package—good back story, attractive graphics and sound, original gameplay; it's got it all. But it does have its draw-



Thank the talented comic-book writer Warren Ellis (*Planetary*, *Transmetropolitan*) for the fantastic cut-scenes. He was the one who scripted each of these little gems.

HOSTILE WATERS: ANTAEUS RISING

reviewed by Tom Price

CGW RATED

PROS

Original gameplay; well-executed story line.

CONS

Occasional crashes; wonky controls in action mode.



The graphical world of **HOSTILE WATERS** is not only beautiful, it's interactive. The sun rises and sets throughout, making the day-to-night cycle a key tactical component.

backs. I had a problem with the game crashing to the desktop once in a while. Occasionally, the highly demanding mission objectives are left a little unexplained. And then there's the graphic profanity. No, wait—I liked that part.

While flawed, **HOSTILE WATERS: ANTAEUS RISING** could represent a watershed in gaming. Is this the turning point where developers stop trying to make their games compelling by borrowing the same tired elements from past titles, and actually build games that are wholly original from the ground up? **HOSTILE WATERS** might not achieve that perfectly, but if you're a jaded gamer like me, this game will seem like one of the freshest breaths of air you've taken in a long time. **CGW**

Requirements: Pentium 266, 48MB RAM, 340MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350, 64MB, 465MB hard drive space, GeForce 3D card. **2D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** None

Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Rage/14° East • \$40 • www.antaerusrising.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; blood, gore, violence, and language.

Old West commandos round 'em up in DESPERADOS

A Fistful of Puzzles

DESPERADOS: WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE bills itself as a Western real-time strategy game, but you're in for a shock if you're expecting cowboy rushes, gold-mine harvesting, and gunpowder tech-trees. Instead, what you get is a mission-based puzzle game in which you must coordinate the unique talents and tools of a small group of characters to overcome vastly superior enemy firepower with stealth and trickery. This may sound familiar to anyone who's played Eidos' COMMANDOS—in fact, DESPERADOS amounts to an Old West variation on that innovative game.

While the debt to COMMANDOS is obvious, right down to a similar interface, DESPERADOS improves on the formula in several ways. The missions are cleverly structured as part of a *Magnificent Seven*-style story line that has your main character, John

Cooper, recruiting a half dozen old friends for an eventual raid on a bandit chieftain—typically after rescuing them from a lynch mob or angry bandits. Each of your colorful cohorts possesses a host of special abilities, and the key to the game is learning to use each character in conjunction with the others. For instance, Samuel Williams is an explosives expert with a trained rattlesnake that's ideal for scaring horses, while Kate O'Hara is a femme fatale who can distract enemy guards by fiddling with her garter. They're certainly a more diverse and talkative lot than the generic frogman and engineer characters in COMMANDOS.

The actual missions usually require you to reach some goal while avoiding large numbers of heavily armed enemies. As in COMMANDOS, you can see "vision cones" for the bad guys indicating where they're looking and whether or not they're alerted to your presence; once trouble starts, your foes are usually quick to call for backup. This, along with the baddies' unerring marksmanship and the fact that losing even a single character ends the game, means that your first slip-up will usually result in your hitting the Quick-Load button as hordes of gun-toting banditos descend upon you.

In all likelihood you'll use the Quick-Load button a whole lot more than your Quick-Draw. Players used to a more gradual dif-



Each character has distinctive tools and abilities, such as Samuel's dynamite keg, used here to clear a rockfall on the trail ahead.

ficulty curve will be taken aback by the sheer cliff of DESPERADOS' challenges: The very first mission after the single short tutorial had me reloading at least 20 or 30 times. Luckily, Quick-Load really is quick—it takes less than a second—though if you wait until a character has actually died before reloading, you're forced to go through a somewhat more cumbersome menu-based procedure.

Before long you'll be taking on daunting missions that seem to require you to perform four-dimensional calculus involving the patrol paths, vision cones, and hearing radii of a dozen or more guards. In practice, this usually boils down to sneaking up on guys, knifing them, and dumping their bodies in a shack. Blazing gun battles are fairly rare, usually indicating that you've screwed something up and will soon be reaching for Quick-Load once again.

If you can live with the brutal difficulty level and the somewhat un-Roy-Rogers-like emphasis on stabbing people in the back, DESPERADOS offers a whole lot of gameplay, with incredibly detailed environments ranging from border towns and swamps to river boats and mountain fortresses, all full of interactive elements. For instance, while cautiously creeping up on a bandit who's sleeping by a farm, you might startle nearby chickens, waking him up with a chorus of squawks. Or you might be able to cut the ropes suspending a bale of hay above two guards, knocking them out and allowing you to make a Hollywood-style leap down onto their horses.

The combination of intensely cerebral planning and split-second reactions isn't for everyone, but for those who like this sort of thing, it's the sort of thing they like. At least until COMMANDOS 2 shows up, DESPERADOS is undoubtedly the new sheriff in town.

CGW

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 500 or better. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer:** None

Publisher: Infogrames • **Developer:** Spellbound • \$30 • www.infogrames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

DESPERADOS: WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

CGW RATED

PROS

Clever story line; incredibly detailed levels; extremely challenging puzzles.

CONS

Insanely difficult; characters are hard to make out at higher resolutions.

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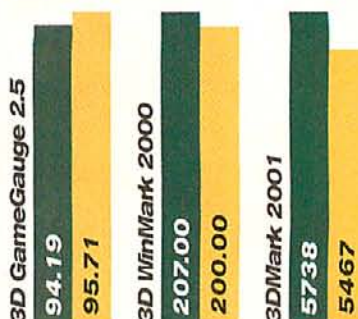
Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

A Little Black Magic



The Benchmarks

■ AMD 1.4 GHz Athlon
■ Voodoo Monsoon

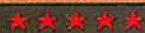


Finally, something other than vitriol from Canada

Rahul Sood, president and owner of Voodoo Computers, has a serious problem: He's obsessed with fans. And no, we're not talking about the kind of fans who break into celebrities' houses to steal their underwear. We mean the seven fans humming inside the Voodoo Monsoon EGAD-DDR/1400, the 1.4GHz Athlon-based machine that Sood recently sent to us.

Much has been said of late about obsessive behavior. I bet you can name six friends with OCD. But sometimes, we can benefit from other people's obsessions. That seems to be the case with the Monsoon EGAD-DDR/1400 from Canada's very own Voodoo Computers.

The Monsoon is about as badass a machine as you can build. In addition to



Pros

Excellent performance; sweet cabling; awesome tech support; looks cool.

Cons

It's made by Canadians.

the 1.4GHz Athlon processor, it sports an ASUS A7M266 motherboard, 256MB of PC2100 DDR RAM, a Hercules 3D Prophet III graphics card, Samsung's SyncMaster 955DF 19-inch monitor, a Hercules Game Theater sound card, Klipsch Promedia 4.1 speakers, a Pioneer 16X DVD-ROM drive, a Plextor 16/10/40 CD-RW drive, and 80GB of storage in the form of dual 40GB IBM Deskstar 7200-rpm hard drives in a RAID configuration. Of course, anybody can put a bunch of components in a box. What makes the Monsoon stand out from the other top-shelf computers are its extras.

First, there's the clear panel on one side of the case that shows off the insides of the machine. Painted yellow on the inside, with a little fluorescent light to boot, this PC is easily the talk of CGW's lab—talk that usually consists of Managing Editor Holly Fleming telling me to stop playing COUNTER-STRIKE and write my articles. But I digress.

Apart from making the system look like a museum exhibit, the panel gives you a better view of the refrigeration system. There's a massive fan keeping the AGP and PCI cards cool, the standard rear-panel fan, one on the top of the

case, and get this: fans on each of the machine's 40GB IBM hard drives.

The Monsoon is designed with LAN parties in mind, and to that end ships with a D-Link 538TX Ethernet card, a 25-foot Ethernet cable, and the GearGrip Pro carrying system from CaseAce Products. And that clear side panel will definitely ensure that you'll be the envy of all your gaming buddies.

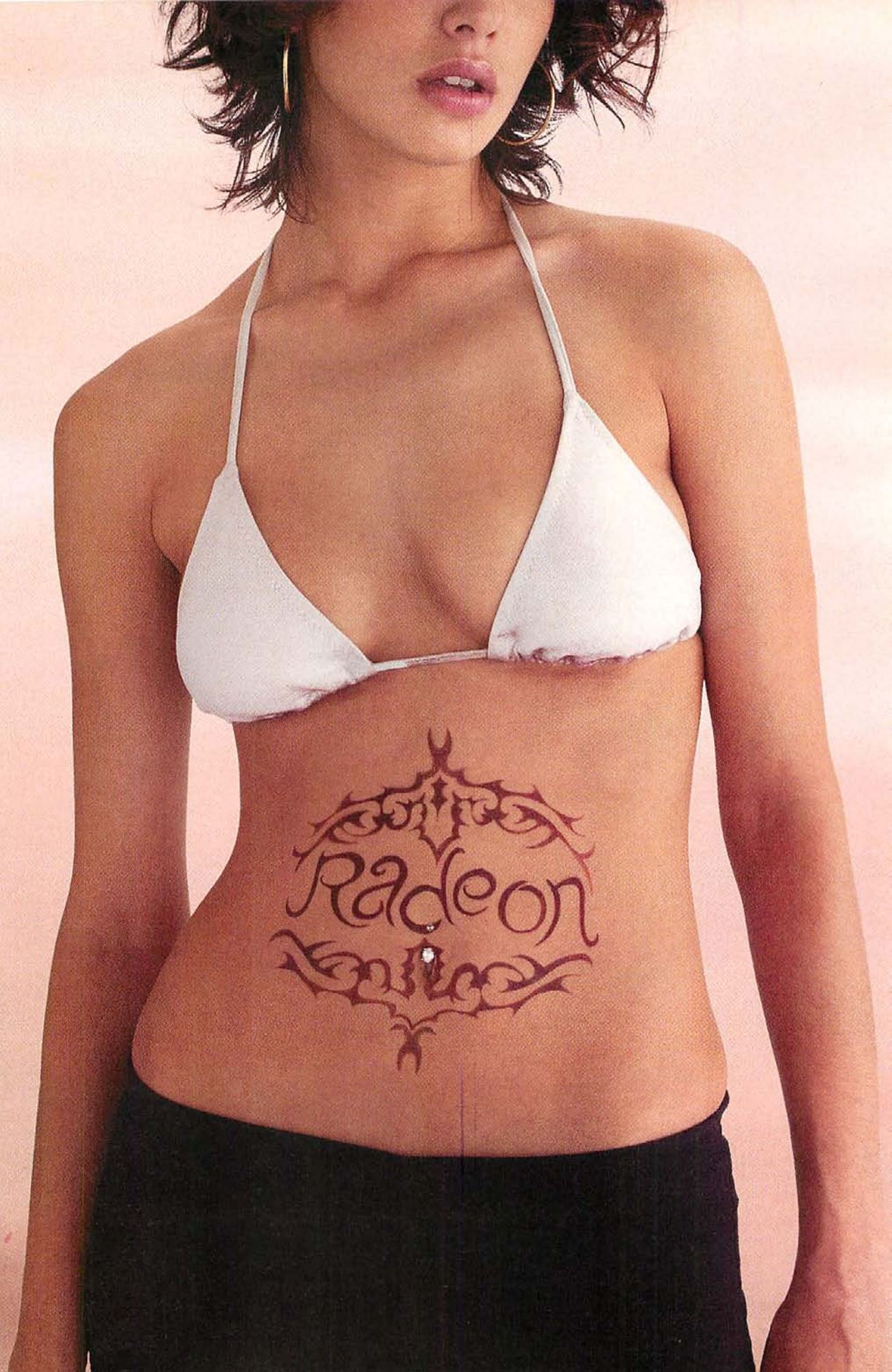
When it came time to benchmark the Monsoon, it was obvious that the machine would kick ass. The machine scored QUAKE III frame-rates of 152.6 in 16-bit and 150.3 in 32-bit mode on its way to achieving a 3D GameGauge score of 95.71. Compare that to the 94.19 3D GameGauge score achieved by the 1.4GHz Athlon-based Alienware machine last month. Likewise, the Monsoon scored an awesome 200 on Ziff-Davis' own 3D WinMark 2000, and it continued to rock on MadOnion's 3DMark 2001 with a score of 5467.

At a hair over three grand, the Monsoon EGAD-DDR/1400 isn't the cheapest machine around. But Voodoo isn't apologetic. They feel that you get what you pay for, and in this case, we're inclined to agree.

Voodoo Monsoon EGAD-DDR/1400

\$3,200 | Voodoo Computers | www.voodooopc.com





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RADEON™ 8500

Put some metal to that pedal

THRUSTMASTER NASCAR DIGITAL 2 WHEEL

★★★★☆ Thrustmaster is well known for its T2 series of racing wheels. And while its NASCAR Digital 2 Wheel continues in the T2's footsteps, it does so at a slight cost.

The wheel is easy to set up: Just install Thrustmaster's drivers, clamp the wheel to your desk, plug it into a USB port, and voilà.

\$80 | Thrustmaster | www.thrustmaster.com

Pros

Nice look and feel; rock-solid clamping system.

Cons

Pedals absolutely suck.

Requirements

Pentium 133, USB port, CD-ROM drive, Windows 98, DirectX 7. Mac-compatible.

The NASCAR Digital 2 provides one of the better wheel-clamping systems and offers greater stability, especially for more aggressive drivers. The stick shift is solid, though it does have a slight slapstick feel. The blue wheel, too, is solid and sports a sleek new look with a simulated-metal faceplate. Thrustmaster also adds an IC chipset for control.

Unfortunately, in balancing price and features Thrustmaster cut some corners. Though steering performance is good, the bungee cord system used for returning the wheel to center is too tight, and in more sensitive games like NASCAR 4, it takes some getting used to. Also, the pedal base is poorly designed. Not only is the base too light, the pedals are overly stiff. Quickly accelerating and braking will cause the pedal base to slide all over the floor—a major oversight.

This wheel is ideal for the beginner or casual gamer on a budget, or even a Mac



gamer jonesing for a wheel. But given its lack of force-feedback or sturdy construction—especially in the pedals—more serious drivers should look elsewhere to enhance their racing experience.

—Raphael Liberatore

Touch and go

MASSWORKS ID-75 TOUCH-SCREEN CONTROLLER

★★★★☆ Coming from a Macintosh background, I understand that innovation can be both a blessing and a curse. Enter the Massworks ID-75 digital color display, a portable 320x240 LCD sporting a nifty integral touch-screen capability. For gamers who have yearned for an alternative to the keyboard or mouse for mapping keys, there may be hope. But for such a promising gadget, the ID-75 has more than its share of shortcomings.

Setting up the Massworks ID-75 was more difficult than I expected given such

an advanced-looking plug-and-play device. After installing the software, rebooting the computer, and plugging the ID-75 into the USB port, I configured the display. Configuring games and applications using a control panel located in the icon tray should have been intuitive. But since the ID-75 ships with a short list of preconfigured template layouts, I was forced to develop my own layouts using the ID-75's editor. After mapping my game's configurations, I had to add images to the display.

I soon discovered that the ID-75's ergonomics posed a bit of a challenge, too—especially when using it for games requiring quick reaction. In a game of UT, for example, I found it completely unnatural and time consuming to remove my hand from the mouse or keyboard in order to touch the screen and change my weapon of choice. Can anyone say "frag bait"? The same thing happened in COUNTER-STRIKE. Even though the display connects at 12MB per second and uses a hypersensitive touch screen, I found the ID-75's reaction time a tad slower than keyboards performing the same actions. The ID-75 also kept crashing my computer because of a memory leak in

the software. Massworks has a patch available on its website that corrects this.

On the plus side, in games like DIABLO II and BALDUR'S GATE II, the ID-75 seemed a better fit than keyboards for dealing with character and inventory screens. It was also good for surfing the Web, and having cool icons representing my favorite websites definitely enhanced the experience.

As innovative and cool looking as the ID-75 is, gamers will want to think hard about whether the price tag is worth the shortcomings. Who knows—Massworks may be onto something that will develop into the gaming device of the future.

—Raphael Liberatore

\$300 | Massworks | www.massworks.com

Pros

Innovative concept; excellent build quality.

Cons

Too expensive; tedious to set up.

Requirements

Intel-compatible PC with USB support; Windows 98, ME, or 2000.



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Banking on a dime

SAITEK ST50

★★★★★ For those of you who are too poor (or too cheap) to buy a gaming device for that bargain-bin copy of MECHWARRIOR 3 that you picked up at EB World, the time has come to splurge a little. For \$10—or about the price of a Maker's Mark Manhattan at an upscale drinking establishment—you can buy a functional joystick that will enhance any game that requires one. Easily the most affordable computer product since the mousepad, the Saitek ST50 Stick

\$10 | Saitek Industries | www.saitek.com

Pros

Can't beat this price.

Cons

Only three buttons and no USB connection.

Requirements

PC; Windows 95, 98, or ME.

and Throttle combo is probably the least expensive piece of gaming hardware you'll ever buy.

The ST50 is easy enough to install—just hook it up to your gameport, click on the Windows Gaming Options Control Panel, select "3-axis, 2-button joystick," calibrate it, and you're up and running. The ST50 is lightweight, but it sports three suction cups at the base so it won't slide around the desk surface in the hands of more aggressive stick handlers. There's also a minithrottle at the base, but its range of motion is somewhat restricted. The simple construction and smallish size allow for only three buttons, so the ST50 is somewhat limited for advanced flight sims like FLY II and FALCON 4, which are best played with a multitude of buttons and high-hat switches. But while it lacks the smooth mechanics, precision, and features of Saitek's well-made Cyborg line, the ST50 is a functional solution for most joystick games.



The ST50 is perfect for beginners, casual gamers, tightwads, and budget shoppers. It's also a good choice for gamers with multiple computers, especially for LAN parties. Let's face it, for 10 bucks, there's not much to complain about. Sometimes, you get what you pay for. In this case, you get a little more.

—Raphael Liberatore

Mini-Me keyboard

P8000

★★★★★ The P8000 is a more functional and ergonomically streamlined version of Saitek's GM2 Action Pad. Gamers who find the mouse and keyboard a bit overwhelming will benefit from the P8000's versatility. It can be used in conjunction with a mouse, joystick, gamepad, and/or keyboard. But there's one catch: Not all games support two or more DirectInput devices, so you may be out of luck with games like MECHWARRIOR, for which the use of a joystick in addition to the P8000 is desirable, but unsupported.

Setting up the P8000 is a snap. Simply load Saitek's Gaming Extensions software, then plug the P8000 into your USB port. The Game Profiler Wizard provides several preselected configurations for a variety of popular games, including BALDUR'S GATE, DIABLO II, EARTH 2150, AGE OF EMPIRES II, QUAKE III ARENA, SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR, GROUND CONTROL, and SWAT 3. If a profile for your game isn't available on the CD or Saitek's website, there's a somewhat convoluted option for mapping customizable profile configurations, shortcuts, and



macros using the P8000's two large buttons (Fire and Shift), eight-way D-pad, and 35 buttons. The P8000 also includes several JPEG game overlays and a rather futz paint program for customizing your own overlays.

You can place the P8000 in a number of positions—piggybacking on your existing keyboard, on your lap, beside the keyboard. Though it took some getting used to, I found the P8000 most useful for tactical sims like SWAT 3 and ROGUE SPEAR because of its tight grouping of action-oriented commands. Buttons are overly sensitive, however, so you need to avoid resting your fingertips on the keypad unless you want to alert terrorists to your arrival. There's an additional concern: In games like DIABLO II, you're forced to exit the game in order to configure the P8000, rather than using the in-game Options screen.

Overall, the P8000 offers advantages and versatility over a keyboard. The benefit, however, depends on the type of games you're playing and how much effort you're willing to spend on configuring the profiles. In the end, most will find the simple, classic combination of a tried-and-true keyboard and mouse hard to beat.

—Raphael Liberatore

\$49 | Saitek Industries | www.saitek.com

Pros

Designed with ergonomics in mind; includes a decent assortment of preconfigured game profiles.

Cons

Useless for games recognizing only one input device; sometimes cannot be configured in-game; pricey.

Requirements

Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, Windows 98 or ME, USB port, Internet Explorer 4.x or later, and DirectX 7a or later. Mac compatible.

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Edition

| Component | Manufacturer/Model | Price |
|-------------------|---|---------------|
| Case | Antec SX-830 | \$80 |
| Motherboard | ASUS A7V-E | \$90 |
| CPU | 900MHz AMD Duron | \$75 |
| Memory | Crucial 128MB PC133 SDRAM | \$25 |
| Graphics Card | Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 | \$150 |
| 3.5" Floppy Drive | Teac | \$25 |
| Hard Drive | Maxtor DiamondMax VL40 40GB ATA | \$100 |
| CD/DVD-ROM | Creative PC-DVD Encore 12X | \$140 |
| Monitor | Samsung SyncMaster 753 DF 17" | \$175 |
| Sound Card | Creative Sound Blaster Live! Value | \$40 |
| Speakers | Altec Lansing ACS95W | \$25 |
| Modem | Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem | \$50 |
| Keyboard/Mouse | Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro with IntelliMouse Optical | \$75 |
| Joystick | Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick | \$40 |
| Game Pad | Microsoft SideWinder Game Pad USB | \$30 |
| Total | | \$1120 |

Lean Machine

I'd like to personally thank all 5,239 of you who emailed me about the 900GHz Duron that I included in the Killer Rigs in August. AMD, too, called me and wanted me to let all of you know that that CPU won't be coming out for a while.

Now that we're past that...

I decided to go with just the Lean Machine this month 'cause I didn't change anything in the Power Rig. As for changes to the Lean Machine: You'll notice that I've included a Samsung monitor. The Voodoo machine that we reviewed came with a SyncMaster and I love it. Microsoft has re-released its—sometimes—vaunted SideWinder Game Pad, now with USB, so that replaces the Thrustmaster game pad. 'Nuff said!



At \$150, Hercules' 3D Prophet 4500 64MB graphics card is a steal. While it won't garner GeForce3-type numbers, you'll have cash left over for those all-important lap dances.

Wil Power



Don't hate
the player,
yada,
yada,
yada!

Ever get the feeling that everyone hates you? Here at CGW, we get that feeling all the time. (Is it still just a feeling when you receive a deluge of emails confirming your "hunch"?) For instance, you can spend 30 hours playing some horrible game and give it a deservedly craptacular rating only to find that everyone—from gamers and developers to other magazines—jumps down your throat. Hell, spend 30 or more hours playing a truly great game and give it a glowing review, and people still hate you. It seems that sometimes you just can't win.

So how do we deal with this at CGW? Well, mostly we drink a lot. And when that doesn't work we smoke a lot of weed. But I digress. A lot of times we actually learn from reader feedback, especially when it comes from Canadians, antigaming Christians, or Republicans, all groups that we have the utmost respect for. The thing is, though, we don't learn anything of value.

As I write this editorial I'm sitting on a plane from NYC, where I spent the past week at PCEXpo looking at a bunch of cool shtuff (and even more stupid junk that needn't have been invented), and the hate is continuing. The flight attendants on the plane, too, really hate me. Maybe it's the fact that I'm bumping OUTKAST on my laptop without the use of headphones. Doesn't everybody love the Poet and the Player? Hmm. Maybe they're angry with me because after four double Bloody Marys, I'm getting a little belligerent. I'm digressing again.

Regardless, I'm sure that people are gonna continue to hate us whether it's for a negative review or a positive one. For instance, in this very issue, I reviewed a kickass system from Voodoo Computers and loved it. You know what? Someone's gonna accuse me of being in the company's pocket. Also in this issue, Raphael Liberatore reviewed a racing wheel and had some pretty harsh criticisms of it. You know what? Someone's gonna accuse him of being biased against Thrustmaster. Whatever. We're gonna keep on doing what we're doing, because for some reason, people (in spite of believing that we're a bunch of liberal, godless idiots without a stitch of journalistic integrity) keep on coming back.

So read up, get your hate on, and don't forget to send all your menacing emails to jeff_green@ziff-davis.com. He loves the stuff.

TECH

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

Time to Pony Up!

I am not a computer dummy when it comes to desktop hardware, but I have recently acquired the task of purchasing a laptop and I'm stumped. The main problem is that I'm confused about the video for laptops. I want a laptop that can do word processing, but I also want something that I can play an occasional graphics-intensive game on, or play a DVD on. Which is better: the RAM that is dedicated from the BIOS (32MB or 64MB), or getting a laptop that has a video card with, say, 8MB or 16MB of video RAM? I would like to go with the nVidia GeForce2GO on the Dell Inspiron 8000, but I would like to keep the price tag below \$1,500, \$2,000 at the most.

That's a tough predicament. The video card and attendant amount of video memory *are* gonna be your biggest concerns. When it comes to gaming on a laptop, if you're not using a machine with the nVidia GeForce2GO chipset, your gaming experience is gonna be hit or miss. Most laptops from Dell, Toshiba, Gateway, Fujitsu, or Sony come with the ATI Rage Mobility or the S3 Savage chipset in anywhere from 4MB to 16MB configurations. The thing is, those cards are nowhere near the GeForce2GO when it comes to gaming. Some games, like BLACK & WHITE, may not work at all. And games that do work, like QUAKE III ARENA, UT, or any of the HALF-LIFE games, will just look bad and your frame-rates will suck. At press time, I went to Toshiba's website and there I found a Satellite 2805-S402 with a 16MB nVidia GeForce2GO for \$2,200. By the time you read this, it may be below your \$2,000 cap.

The Internet Is Dead

I downloaded some free games off of CNET and they are not working on my system. I am running Windows 98. Every time I try to go into one of the games, it tells me to open QuickView or CFG. I don't know what that could mean because Quick View and CFG are already installed on my system.

CNET sucks.

Check Your OpenGL Settings

I have a Creative Labs PCI 3D Blaster Savage4 with 32MB RAM. I know it's not the best card, but it isn't horrible either. However, any 3D game I attempt to play (whether it be HALF-LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE, DEUS EX, or BLACK & WHITE) gets HORRIBLE frame-rates, even while running in 640x480. With COUNTER-STRIKE, the BEST I can expect to get is 35fps, but I usually average 19fps, and that's running in 640x480. Also, with 3DMark, the tests run so slow that 3DMark crashes. I have installed all the latest drivers from Creative, and I have no idea what else to do. HELP!!!

Have you checked to make sure that you have Vertical Sync set to "Always off" in your Display Properties? Machines often come from the manufacturers with Vertical Sync turned on, and this slows down your frame-rates something terrible.

Sound on a Budget

I'm planning to get a set of speakers, but I'm on a low budget. I was wondering which you think would be the better choice, the Cambridge FPS 1800 or the Altec Lansing ACS56. They are similarly priced but I'm just not sure. Altec is packing more wattage and has that SPDIF input, but I have a feeling the Cambridges are just better. The sound card I am getting is the Sound Blaster Live! Value.

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article

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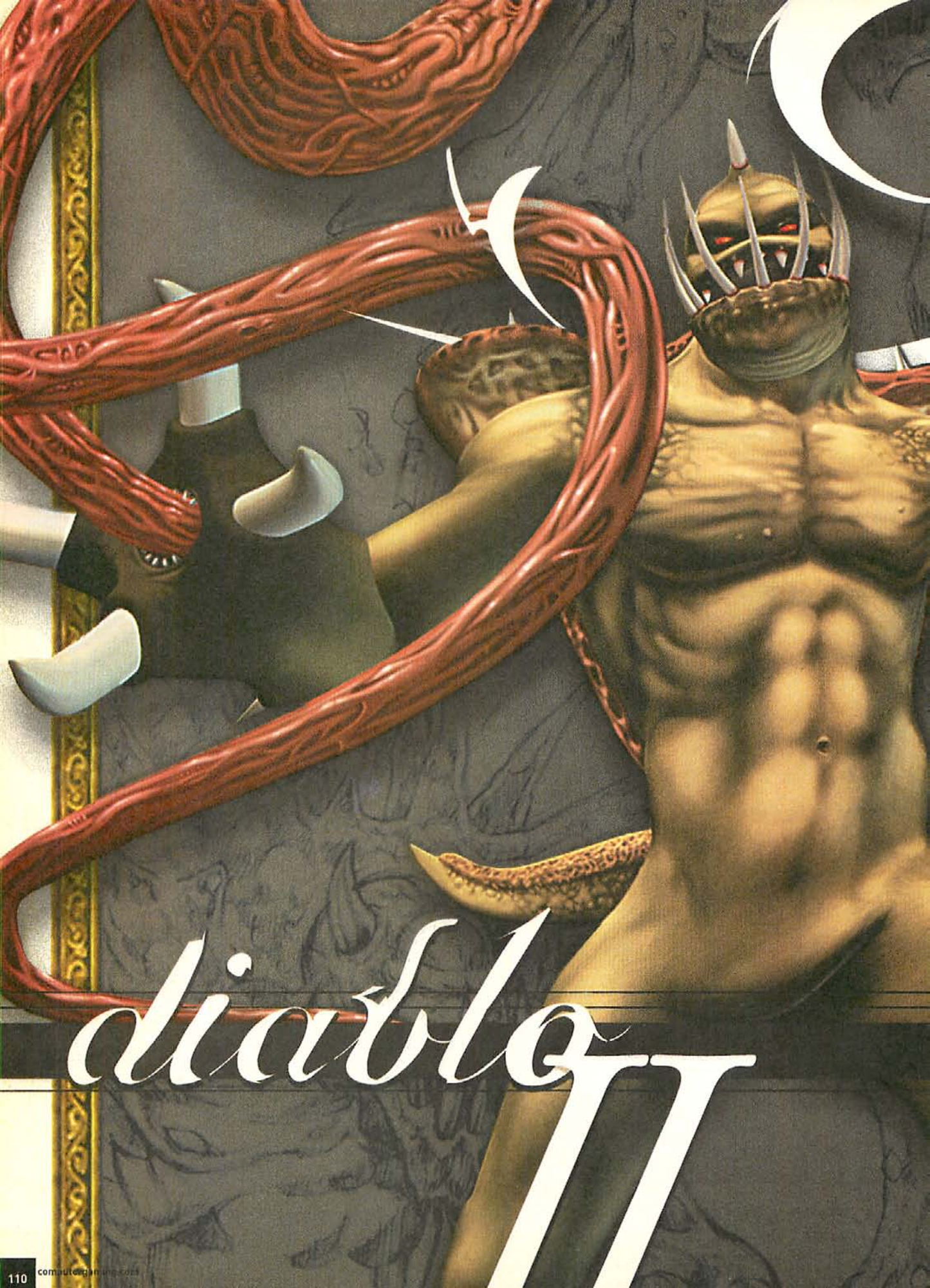
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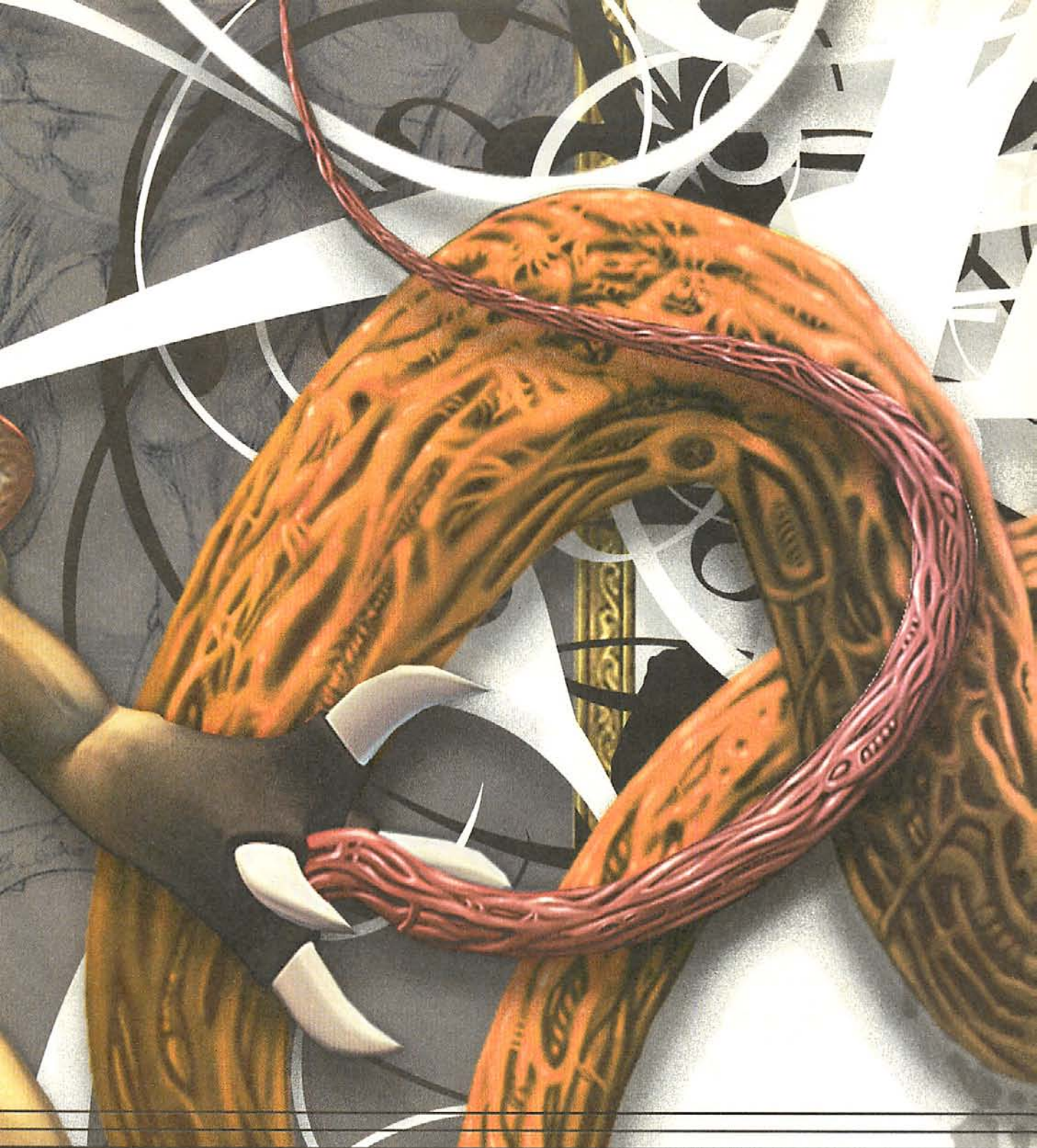


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YOUR IN-AND-OUT GUIDE TO ACT FIVE AND THE NEW CLASSES

If you're one of those people who likes to summon the forces of nature to put out a campfire, or melt effortlessly into the shadows of the night as you sneak into the kitchen for a snack, Blizzard's new **DIABLO II** expansion has just the characters for you to play. Here's the scoop on building the mightiest druid or the most deadly assassin, along with some tips for working your way through the new act in this expansion. Those monsters will be mewling and Baal will be bawling by the time you're through with them! **BY MARK ASHER**

How You Wanna Play?

One of the first things you need to decide before you play one of the new character types is how you want to shape your character. In *DIABLO II* the allocation of the skill points forms your character, so before you make that allocation, ask yourself: Do you plan on playing through the game more than once with a character?

If you think you'll whomp on Diablo and Baal on Normal level and then hang up your armor, just have some fun with your skill points and sprinkle them all over so you can sample the cool abilities and spells. *DIABLO II* on Normal really isn't that hard, and there's no penalty for dying. You'll get through the game without too much mishap no matter how you spread out your skill points.

It's when you plan on continuing to play a character in Nightmare and Hell modes that you need to focus your skill-point allocation. You can't be a generalist and do well. You need to pick a style of play and funnel your skill points into the skills that support that style. It's hard to not use some skills because they're all fun, but it's essential if you want to maximize your character. Before we look at each hero, here are a few general tips.

Speed Kills

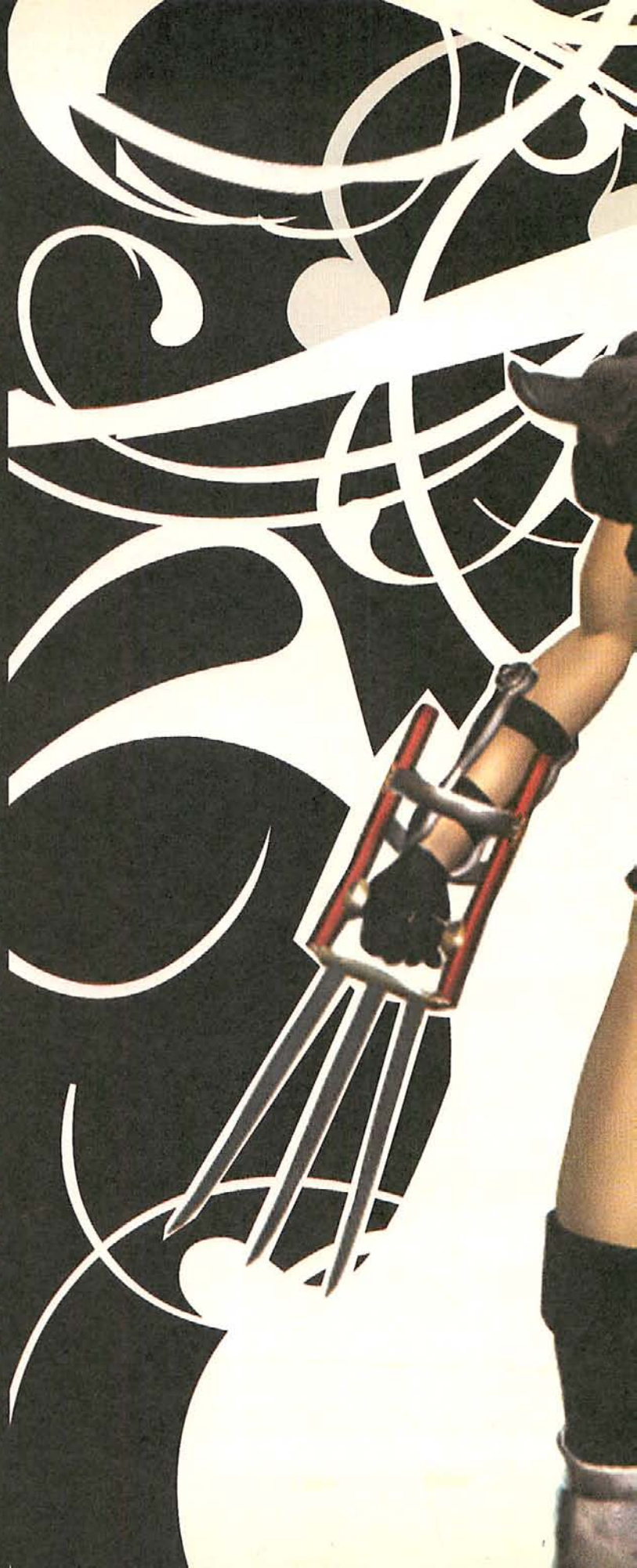
There's no substitute for speed in *DIABLO II*. You should tilt your weapon and item accumulation toward things that allow you to attack and run faster. We've found that weapons with a "very fast" rating are the most effective. If you can find one with a magical speed bonus, or find an item that boosts your attack speed (as some magic gloves do), hold onto it. The same goes for boots—get ahold of a pair with a speed bonus and not only will you be better able to run away from trouble, the game will be more fun because you'll cut down on travel time.

After speed, you want to boost your attack rating. Ideally, you want a fast weapon that hits a lot. Then you can whack the monsters repeatedly and keep them off balance so that they have trouble even attacking you. It's better to take a few more swings to finish off a critter than to be slower and trade blows. Attacks that slow down the monsters are also quite helpful. Anything that adds cold damage will slow them down. Knockback weapons and those that cause the monster to flee can be helpful too, but you might find it irritating to chase a creature around.

Next, you need to focus on your resistances. Find items that boost your resistances to the various attacks—fire, lightning, cold, and so on. It's especially crucial to have good resistances in the Nightmare and Hell levels. Otherwise, the "named" monsters and end-of-act bosses are even deadlier.

And finally, while speed and resistance items are key, don't forget that some other items are great for specific situations. If you find a weapon that's designed to slay demons, it might be worth saving in your backpack for the end-of-act demons like Duriel.

Now on to the heroes.





the assassin

I love the assassin. She's a lot of fun to play and may be the most subtle of all the **DIABLO II** heroes with her charge-up and finishing moves. You can specialize her in two ways: Make her an incomparable melee fighter, or make her a clever hero who relies on traps and a few other choice skills to beat down her opponents from afar.



Melee Mayhem: First, stick with the claw series of weapons and equip one in each hand. As a backup weapon, save a good bow or crossbow when you find one. There are a few times when you'll want to keep your distance and attack, but 98 percent of the time you'll wade in with both claws. You'll want to split attribute points between strength, dexterity, and vitality, with a few tossed into energy (just a few—you don't need a lot of mana). Below is a suggested distribution of skill points. You'll focus mostly on the Shadow Disciplines. You'll use some Martial Arts skills as well, with the focus on a few charge-up attacks. You'll ignore Trap skills entirely.

SKILL BRANCH: SHADOW DISCIPLINES

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

■ **Claw Mastery, level 1**A lot—at least 15

This is a passive skill and will always be "on" as a result. It increases both your attack rating and damage bonus, letting you hit more often and for more damage.

■ **Psychic Hammer, level 1**1 point

It knocks back the enemy. Not a good skill but you need 1 point in it to open up other skills.

■ **Burst of Speed, level 6**4 or 5 points

This is an awesome skill that lets you attack and run faster. You get diminishing returns after 4 or 5 points, so that's all you need.

■ **Cloak of Shadows, level 12**1 point

An okay skill that briefly lowers enemy defenses. You need it to unlock other skills.

■ **Weapon Block, level 12**2 or 3 points

A nice skill that gives you a 36 percent chance to block an attack with 3 points invested.

■ **Shadow Warrior, level 18**1 point

A nice skill that gives you an extra fighter, but you want to save your points for the better Shadow Master.

■ **Mind Blast, level 24**2 or 3 points

This is a nifty attack that stuns the enemy and can confuse some enemies so that they attack each other. At times, one of your best skills.

■ **Venom, level 30**1 point

This adds poison to your attacks (including bow attacks), which can be effective. The downside is that it removes Burst of Speed. It's nice in the right situation, though.

■ **Shadow Master, level 30**At least 5 points

The Shadow Master is a more powerful Shadow Warrior. She lasts a lot longer and can use any of your skills.

SKILL BRANCH: MARTIAL ARTS

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

- **Tiger Strike, level 1**1 point at first, more later
Get a nice charge-up attack with up to 300 percent damage.
- **Fists of Fire, level 6**1 point
This gives you a fire-based charge-up attack. You can ignore this line of skills until much later.
- **Cobra Strike, level 12**5 or more points
It steals life and mana. It's quite effective.
- **Claws of Thunder, level 18**2 or 3 points
It gives you either lightning, nova, or charged-bolt effects.
- **Blades of Ice, level 24**2 or 3 points
It does cold damage and freezes the enemy.

TERRIFIC TRAPPER: If you'd rather make the assassin a more subtle (and more difficult to play) character, specialize in traps with some Shadow Disciplines thrown in. You'll want to put more attribute points into energy since you'll be casting a lot of spells, but be sure to work up the other attributes too so that you can wear better armor and use better weapons.

SKILL BRANCH: SHADOW DISCIPLINES

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

- **Claw Mastery, level 1**1 point
You need this to get to Burst of Speed.
- **Psychic Hammer, level 1**1 or 2 points
It knocks back the enemy, so you can use it to push enemies into traps.
- **Burst of Speed, level 6**5 points
Great skill. You get diminishing returns after 4 or 5 points, so that's all you need.
- **Cloak of Shadows, level 12**1 point
You need it to unlock other skills.
- **Weapon Block, level 12**2 points
You don't want to have to block, but 2 points gives you a nice chance.
- **Shadow Warrior, level 18**1 point
A nice skill that gives you an extra fighter, but you want to save your points for the better Shadow Master.
- **Mind Blast, level 24**5 points
You'll need to do more damage with this spell as a trapper, and you'll need to have a better chance of confusing the monsters.
- **Venom, level 30**1 point
This adds poison to your attacks, including bow attacks, and can be effective. The downside is that it removes Burst of Speed. It's nice in the right situation, though.
- **Shadow Master, level 30**At least 5 points
The Shadow Master is a more powerful Shadow Warrior. She lasts a lot longer and can use any of your skills.

SKILL BRANCH: MARTIAL ARTS

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

- **Tiger Strike, level 1**1 point
You won't be fighting much, but if you have to, 1 point here gives you an attack with up to 300 percent damage.

You can also develop finishing moves for a melee fighter, but you may want to wait on those. To use the charge-up attacks, select the appropriate one for the creature. Use a fire attack on a cold-resistant creature, for example. I like the basic Tiger Strike attack simply because it gives you awesome physical damage. Put 10 points into it and you can do 840 percent damage with a fully charged Tiger Strike attack. I suggest skipping the other charge-up attacks (other than Cobra Strike, which is nice for healing), because in Nightmare and Hell games you'll run into some monsters that are immune to physical attacks. That's why the cold-, fire-, and lightning-based attacks are handy.

SKILL BRANCH: TRAPS

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

- **Fire Blast, level 1**1 point
Not much good after the early acts, but you need it to unlock other skills.
- **Shock Web, level 6**1 point
Not that great.
- **Blade Sentinel, level 6**1 point
Not that great.
- **Charged Bolt Sentry, level 12**1 point
Not that great.
- **Wake of Fire**At least 3 points
This one shoots five waves of flames. Pretty nice, but don't put too many points into it.
- **Blade Fury, level 18**3 points
This is a quick ranged attack that does physical damage. The key is firing off a lot of these.
- **Lightning Sentry, level 24**5 or more points
Finally, a trap worth investing a lot of points in. This one shoots lightning 10 times.
- **Wake of Inferno**5 or more points
A great fire-based trap that does significant damage. It shoots 10 times.
- **Death Sentry**5 or more points
This one shoots lightning and will explode nearby corpses for quite a bit of damage. It's not as effective without corpses around it, though.
- **Blade Shield, level 30**1 point
Hope you don't really need this.

The trap-happy assassin is a bit harder to play since you're relying on traps more than direct attacks. It helps to develop powerful Mind Blasts and an effective Shadow Master. Get a good bow or repeating crossbow and help your merc and Shadow Master when you're not casting traps and confusing the enemy with Mind Blasts.

What mercenary to use: For a melee assassin, a merc from Act Three with a cold spell is the best bet. He'll freeze the monsters so you can whack 'em, and do a better job of staying out of trouble. For a trapper, the barbarians in Act Five may be what you need. They'll melee while you sit back and toss traps.

the druid

Doin' It With the Druid

The druid's also a lot of fun to play. You can make him into a consummate melee fighter not unlike the assassin, or you can play him as a spellcaster who stays back and out of trouble. He's even more versatile than the assassin in many ways.

Howlin' Wolf: If you want a top-notch fighter, play the druid as a werewolf. The combination of skills below will give you an extremely tough werewolf that hits for a lot of damage very quickly. He'll also be fast enough to run away from tough situations, and he'll have pet wolves or a grizzly to help.

SKILL BRANCH: SHAPE SHIFTING

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

■ Claw Mastery, level 11 point

You need this to get to Burst of Speed.

■ Werewolf, level 110 points

Werewolf boosts your attack speed (very important) and your attack rating (also important). Put at least 10 points into this skill.

■ Lycanthropy, level 115 points

This is a passive skill that boosts the druid's hit points while he's in wolf form and also lengthens the duration of the shape change.

■ Feral Rage, level 122 to 3 points

This lets you run and walk faster, boosts your damage and attack ratings, and lets you life steal with every hit.

■ Rabies, level 181 point

Use it to infect large crowds of monsters and run away while they're poisoned.

■ Fury, level 303 or 4 points

Attack up to five opponents at once with boosts to damage and attack ratings.

SKILL BRANCH: SUMMONING

SKILL AND LEVEL.....POINTS

■ Raven, level 11 point

Lousy skill, but you need it to unlock others.

■ Oak Sage, level 610 or more points

Boosts the hit points of your entire party.

■ Summon Spirit Wolf, level 61 point

Only good in the early levels.

■ Summon Dire Wolf, level 18.....1 to 3 points

Gives you one to three pretty tough wolves.

■ Summon Grizzly, level 30.....1 or more points

Gives you a powerful grizzly.

About the pet spells, you can have only spirit wolves, dire wolves, or a grizzly summoned—you can't have more than one type at once. I prefer putting points into the grizzly, though you can make an argument that three dire wolves with extra points allocated to them are tougher.

Now's a good time to mention that whatever weapons and armor you have equipped transfer their attributes to your druid's attack and defense abilities while he is shape changed. So a fast attack weapon is still desirable.

What about the werebear skill, you ask? Hey, it's good too, but there's no match for the speed of the werewolf. It's always better to attack fast and hit more often than it is to land more powerful blows.

MASTER OF NATURE:

The other way to play the druid is to eschew shape shifting and focus on elemental skills and summoning. You'll want a good bow or crossbow, preferably one with knockback and/or cold damage to keep the monsters off you. You'll stay back casting and summoning when playing the druid in this fashion. Be warned that the elemental spells are hard to aim for the most part.

As a casting druid, you may want to go with the dire wolves since they will occupy the monsters better than a single grizzly.

What mercenary to use: For a casting druid, grab a melee merc, such as the barbarian. For a werewolf druid, use a casting merc, such as the freeze-gun guy from Act Three.

SKILL BRANCH: ELEMENTAL

SKILL AND LEVELPOINTS

- **Claw Mastery, level 11 point**
You need this to get to Burst of Speed.
- **Firestorm, level 11 point**
Not that great, but you need it to unlock other skills.
- **Molten Boulder, level 63 points**
The boulder will knock back enemies, keeping them away from you. You can also aim it. (Most of the elemental spells are difficult to aim.)
- **Arctic Blast, level 65 points or more**
This one's also easy to aim and freezes the enemies.
- **Fissure, level 121 point**
1 point's all you need, though it is a nice skill.
- **Cyclone Armor, level 121 point**
It absorbs a bit of fire, cold, and lightning damage. Not that great, really.
- **Twister, level 181 point**
Not bad, but save your points for Tornado.
- **Volcano, level 245 points**
This is a nice skill. It does good fire damage and can even serve as a barrier at times.
- **Tornado, level 2410 points**
One of the best elemental spells, though hard to aim. Fire off a rapid salvo of these and watch them do damage to each monster they hit.
- **Hurricane, level 301 point**
It's not a bad spell, but it doesn't really fit in with the elemental style of play.
- **Armageddon, level 305 or more points**
Very nice spell, though a bit hard to use at times. It creates a fiery rain that follows the druid around, so you have to run around to hit the enemy.

SKILL BRANCH: SUMMONING

SKILL AND LEVELPOINTS

- **Raven, level 11 point**
Lousy skill, but you need it to unlock others.
- **Poison Creeper1 point**
A weak vine that poisons the enemy. Not much help in harder levels.
- **Oak Sage, level 61 point**
Boosts the hit points of your entire party.
- **Summon Spirit Wolf, level 61 point**
Only good in the early levels.
- **Carrion Vine, level 121 point**
A vine that replenishes the life of your druid.
- **Heart of the Wolverine, level 181 point**
Increases the skill of the druid's party in battle.
- **Summon Dire Wolf, level 181 to 3 points**
Gives you one to three pretty tough wolves.
- **Solar Creeper, level 244 points**
This vine replenishes the druid's mana, which helps a casting druid. It also sucks down the corpses, which keeps some skeletons from reanimating.
- **Spirit of Barbs6 or more points**
With 6 points into this skill, enemies are hit with 100 percent of the damage they inflict on you from the barbs. Stay back and keep summoning animals and let the enemy bleed itself to death while attacking them.
 - **Summon Grizzly, level 301 or more points**
Gives you a powerful grizzly.

Baal

Baal-tle Royale

Be warned, there are some mild spoilers below. Don't read this if you don't want to know how the

story unfolds. There are six quests in Act Five. Here are some quick tips on getting through them.

Quest 2: Rescue on Mount Arreat

Qual-Kehk gives you this quest to free 15 barbarians from three different pens. It's similar to the first quest. You're in the Frigid Highlands, which functionally is almost identical to the Bloody Foothills. You'll have to dodge catapults again. In addition to the Imps and Maulers, you'll see Siegebeasts in this level—and they pack a wallop. Once you free the barbarians, Qual-Kehk rewards you by allowing you to hire barbarian mercenaries and giving you three runes. If you put the runes into a three-socket shield in the correct order—Ral, then Ort, then Tal—it makes the shield into a runeword item, Ancient's Pledge, which has bonuses beyond what the runes would normally give. There's also an optional dungeon level in this region that you can explore.

Quest 4: Betrayal of Harrogath

Anya will give you this quest after you rescue her, opening a portal to The Halls of Vaught. Here you'll find the traitor Nihlathak in his dungeonlike lair. You'll have to fight down to him. It's pretty straightforward, but Nihlathak can explode corpses, so he can be tough. You'll encounter Blood Lords and Suicide Minions. These minions are walking bombs; either kill them with a ranged attack, or time their attack well. They'll follow you indefinitely if you run, but if you let them run up they'll stop and pause for a moment before exploding. If you time it right, you can avoid damage. Your reward from Anya will be a personalized item of your choice. She'll put your name on an item, in other words.

Quest 6: Eve of Destruction

This is what you've been building for, an encounter with Baal. Enter the Worldstone Keep and fight down four levels to get to the Throne of Destruction, where Baal is located. You'll need good resistances again. You'll be pounded from afar by succubi and up close by Blood Lords and the annoying Suicide Minions. Baal will attack you

on each level if you stand still for a while. You won't see him, but you'll hear him laugh and he'll hit you with a spell. It's mostly a nuisance, but if your health is low it could kill you. Once you get to Baal he'll toss several waves of creatures at you, each progressively harder. The last wave consists of Baal's Minions, and

these are very tough. Expect to run, heal, and portal a lot. Once you beat this last wave, Baal retreats to a new level. Grab all the loot and sell it before following him. The last level is just you and Baal, but as you might expect, he's very tough. He'll curse you with auras, freeze you, send tendrils to attack you, and even summon a mirror image of himself to attack you. Forget everything except Baal, and attack him. Kill him, and the tendrils and fake Baal disappear. Like any end-of-act boss, expect to retreat a lot. Rejuvenation potions are essential. Kill Baal, collect and sell your loot, then talk to Tyrael to get the game-ending cinematic. Whew!

Quest 1: Siege on Harrogath

Visit Larzuk the Blacksmith in the new town in the Barbarian Highlands, Harrogath, to get this quest. You have to kill Shenk the Overseer, who's in charge of the siege. You'll venture out onto the Bloody Foothills and fight your way to the end of the area to find Shenk. Two things to look out for: First, don't stand still too long. There are catapults off-screen that'll target you. Second, you'll have to fight the annoying Death Maulers and Demon Imps, both of which have ranged attacks, so be on your toes. Shenk is tough, but at least he doesn't have a ranged attack. Once you complete the quest, Larzuk will add sockets to any item for you one time. There's also an optional dungeon level in this region that you can explore.

Quest 3: Prison of Ice

Visit Malah to get this quest to find Anya in the Frozen River. You'll have to go to the Crystalline Passage and explore that to find the entrance to the Frozen River. There'll be a number of new monsters in these levels, such as Frozen Horrors and Succubi. Needless to say, protection from cold attacks is helpful in these ice levels. Once you complete this quest you'll get a reward from both Malah and Anya. Malah will boost your resistances and Anya will give you a rare item specific to your class.

Quest 5: Rite of Passage

Anya will give you this quest as well. You have to travel through the Ancient's Way to go to the Arreat Summit. Go to the Crystalline Passage and find the Glacial Trail. Work through that to find the Frozen Tundra, which leads to the entrance to Ancient's Way. From here, you find the entrance to the Arreat Summit where this quest takes place. You'll encounter three barbarian gods who guard the Halls, and you'll have to defeat them to prove your worth to enter. They're statues, but when you click on them, they give a speech and then come to life and fight you. This is one of the tougher battles, so cast a portal before fighting it so you can run away, heal, recruit a new merc, and so on. Rejuvenation potions are also recommended. Once you defeat them, you can enter the Worldstone Keep for the final quest.



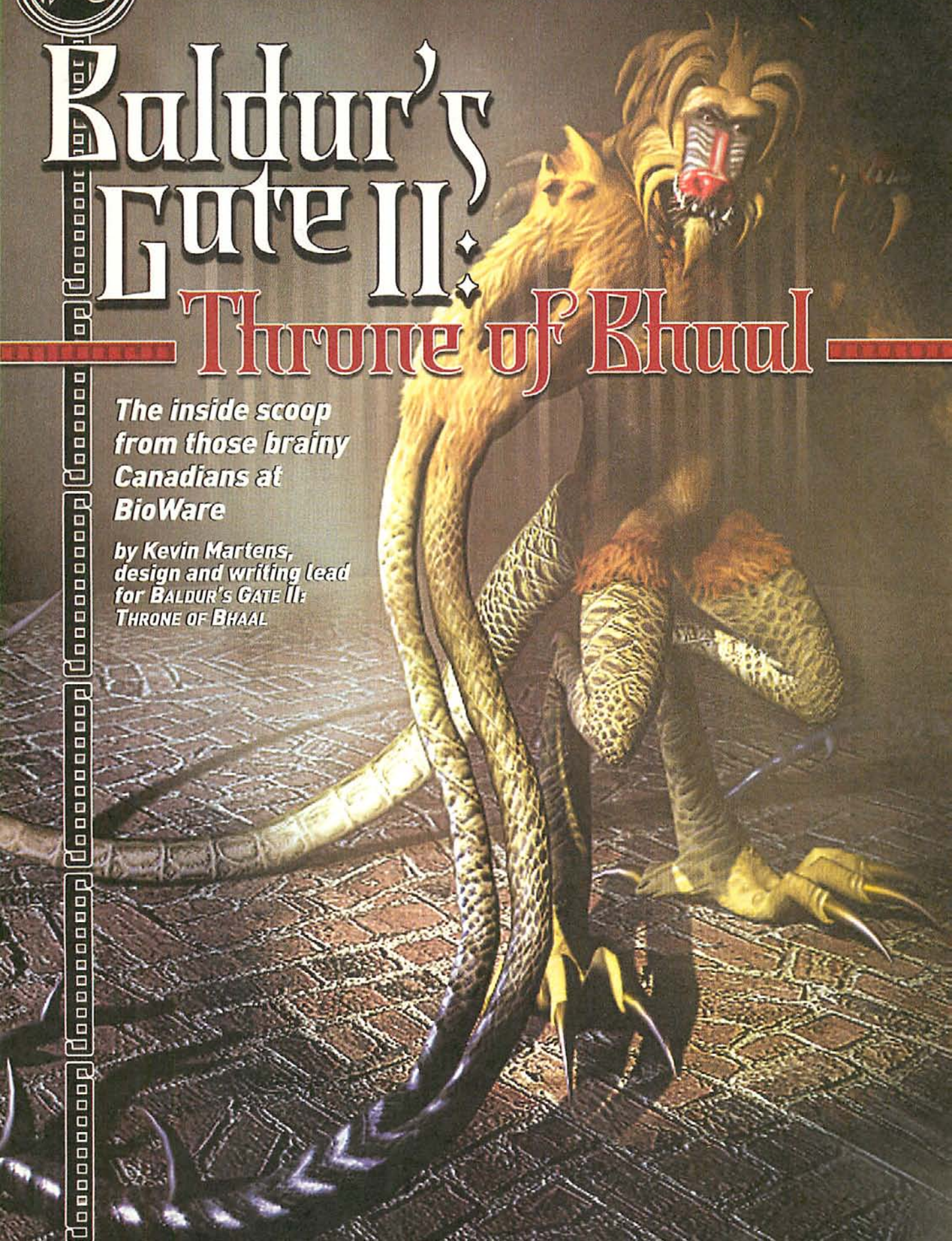


Baldur's Gate II

Throne of Bhaal

*The inside scoop
from those brainy
Canadians at
BioWare*

*by Kevin Martens,
design and writing lead
for BALDUR'S GATE II:
THRONE OF BHAAL*





This guide isn't here to tell you exactly how to play through the game, but rather to offer a number of simple and effective general strategies. These may not be the best strategies for each situation—in every combat circumstance in the game, due to the number of class, spell, and item options we have, there's always an ideal class/race/spell/item combo that will work better than anything else—but they work well in general combat. This is a game, after all, so have fun and experiment. I'll give you the basic tools to get through the game, and allow you to find Quirky Way #3 to Kill a Lich on your own. Afterward, I'll focus on THRONE OF BHAAL-specific skills and encounters.

Melee Combat

In melee combat, you have to worry about only a few basic things:
Your Hit Points: Of course. As a melee combatant, you'll typically be up close and personal with some very deadly enemies. Make sure you have potions of Extra or Superior Healing ready at all times. It doesn't hurt to have a cleric backing up your primary fighter (the one the monster is focusing on) in addition to the potions. If you have enough potions and use them at the right time, you can effectively double or triple your hit points.
The Most Dangerous Foe: Naturally, you'll want to take out the most dangerous enemy first. It isn't always easy to see who this is, especially if you haven't played AD&D outside of the series. One general rule is that named characters are usually tougher than generic people. For example, if you meet a group of soldiers, "Captain Binky" will probably be tougher than "Soldier." Typically, magic users are more dangerous at these high levels than melee fighters—



Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

they're craftier and use fiendish strategies. Take out mages and clerics fast with hasted fighters and/or archers.

Enemy Protections: Pay attention to the combat information, and make sure that your melee characters are actually doing damage to their enemies. Many high-level creatures have immunities to certain types of damage or weapons. With a high-level melee character, you should have lots of proficiency slots to fill so put them into weapons with different sorts of damage. Have a bladed weapon like a sword along with a blunt weapon like a hammer, and pull out the best weapon for the situation.

Magical Combat

With such high levels at stake during the

game, magical combat becomes very strategic. Here are a few basic rules that will have you out-casting a lich in no time.

Spell Triggers and Contingencies: I cannot stress this enough: Chain Contingency and Spell Trigger can solve nearly any problem that a mage will face. Chain Contingency allows you to automatically cast three spells of eighth level or lower on any number of conditions. My personal favorite use is to automatically cast three *Abi-Dalzim's Horrid Wiltings* as soon as I see the enemy. I follow this up by casting a Spell Trigger with which I've linked three Chain Lightnings. Neither spell hurts party members, so you don't need to worry about where you cast them. After this, any low- or midlevel creatures should be dead or very close to it. Use your powerful ninth- and eighth-level spells to take out anything else still moving.

Counterspells: Some creatures and many other spellcasters will have magical protections. You'll need to know the correct counterspells to take their protections down and give them the pounding they so richly deserve. The king of counterspells is the ninth-level *Spell Strike*: It will take down *Minor Spell Turning*, *Minor Globe of Invulnerability*, *Spell Immunity*, *Globe of Invulnerability*, *Minor Spell Deflection*, *Spell Turning*, *Spell Shield*, *Spell Deflection*, *Spell Invulnerability*, and *Spell Trap*. Other spells that you might want to check out (especially if you're saving your ninth-level spell slots for something with more boom) are *Pierce Shield*, *Khelben's Warding Whip*, *Ruby Ray of Reversal*, *Pierce Magic*, *Lower Resistance* (take that, dragons!), *Breach*, *Secret Word*, *Spell Thrust*, *Remove Magic*, *Dispel*

Magic, and *Detect Illusion* (to get rid of mirror images and invisibility). These are all described in detail in your manual. For creatures that have high

magic resistance as well as protections (dragons or liches, for example) casting a Spell Trigger that has *Lower Resistance* along with some of the other protection-removing spells is very effective. For maximum effectiveness without wasting your higher-level spell slots, memorize multiple *Breach* spells and a couple of *True Seeing* spells. Cast *True Seeing* before the battle, then target enemy mages with a *Breach* spell as soon as you see them. Have your fighters prepared to smack the mage around once his defenses have been taken out by *Breach*.

Protection and Prep Spells: There are all sorts of protection and preparatory spells that you can cast with high-level wizards.



Use 6. The pocket plane will transport the best few with the sleep spell to use it again.

Use the new Pocket Plane ability to revisit your pocket plane and sleep safely before any major encounter.



Use Chain Contingency in conjunction with three Horrid Wiltings to wipe out most creatures in the room in any given battle.



Another useful fighter ability is *Hardiness*. Use it along with *Greater Whirlwind* to deliver a good beatdown.



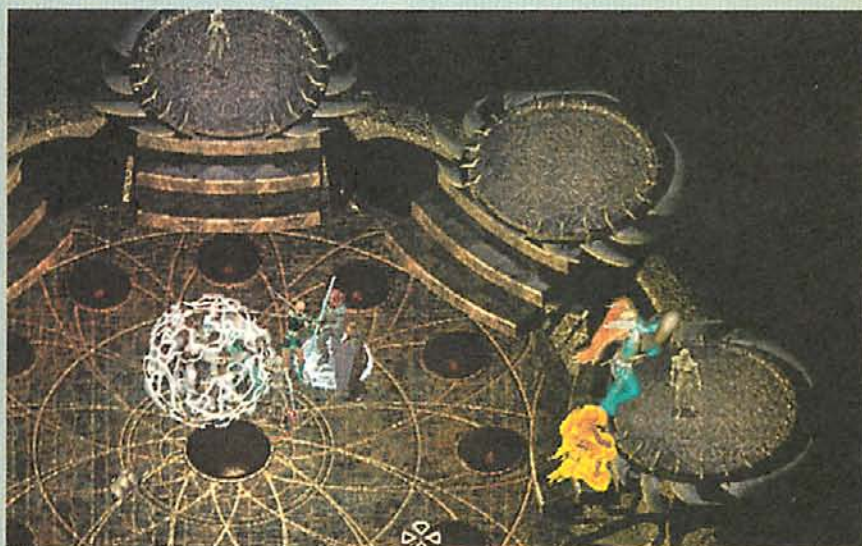
One good use of *Improved Alacrity* is to turn yourself into a semiautomatic Magic Missile gun.



Melissan here might be a helpful friend, but she's not as helpful as these tips from the BioWare guys.

Here's just one common combo that is effective for most situations: Spell Immunity to Abjuration, Stoneskin, Protection From Normal or Magical Weapons (depending on whom you're fighting), Spirit Armor, Haste, Fire Shield, and Mirror Image. This group of protection spells will prepare you for any mid- or low-level fight. For high-level fights, cast Stoneskin, Mass Invisibility, Spell Turning, and then Simulacrum. Attack using the Simulacrum until it dies. Have Contingency spells ready with Improved Mantle, Mirror Image, Mislead and whatever other protection spells you need; set them to go off as soon as you are hit (basically, when you join the battle after your Simulacrum dies). Whatever the Simulacrum couldn't kill can be wiped up with your typical high-level strategies.

Casting Times and Damage: As a general rule, pay close attention to the casting times of the spells that you have, as well as to whether or not they affect your party when cast. The big, flashy spells that people like to cast (like Meteor Swarm or Incendiary Cloud) often have long casting times and will harm your party members as well as your enemies. Cast a spell that's appropriate to the situation. If you're being heavily attacked and damaged, there's virtually no chance that you'll get a spell off if it requires an entire round to cast. Cast a quick protection spell like Mantle, then a quick disabling spell like Power Word Blind. Then, momentarily safe, run a short distance and bring out the big guns. If you're in the middle of a fight, use area spells like Wail of the Banshee or Abi-Dalzim's Horrid Wilting so that you won't harm your fighters, who are most likely immersed in the whole mess. If a powerful creature is almost dead, don't waste massive high-



Have summoned creatures ready to pounce on the various Sendai statues as they come to life.



The Gorion Wraith's goons are all undead level drainers. Use Negative Plain Protection and your high-level Turn Undead to supplement your combat.



Here, the enemy is doing what you should be doing: casting spells that disrupt your mages' own spell casting.

Clerics and Druids

Clerics or Druids are an extremely important part of both offense and defense. With a solid knowledge of your spells and the creatures against which you will use them, you can do as much damage as a mage—or more—without ever resorting to melee combat.

Protection and Prep Spells: Before every major combat, make sure that you cast a group of all-purpose protection spells such as Bless, Chant, Defensive Harmony, Armor of Faith, and Protection from Evil 10' Radius (when fighting evil creatures). Then cast specific protection spells when needed. If you're going to be fighting powerful

undead creatures like vampires or shades, cast Negative Plane Protection on all melee characters to protect them from the level drain. If you're going to be fighting illithids, cast Chaotic Commands on everyone. Scout with an invisible creature or Farsight, or use the Ranger's Tracking ability to find out what you'll be facing so you can prepare properly. If you plan to engage in melee, cast spells like Holy Power, Champion's Strength, and Righteous Magic. Druids should make sure to use Iron Skins.

Fighting Mages: You may want to have a few different spells prepared if you're going up against magic users. A good set is Shield of the

Archons (for spell protection), True Seeing (to get rid of enemy invisibility, mirror images, and so forth), Magic Resistance, and Death Ward. These will all help to protect you from the mage's spells.

The next order of business: Disrupt the caster. Miscalc Magic, Dispel Magic, and Silence 15' Radius all can ruin his spells. Another disruption method is to simply deliver enough damage to interrupt him; even a single point of damage is enough to disrupt a lich when he's trying to destroy your entire party with Wail of the Banshee. Flame Blade (a great weapon for hurting mages who are protected from magical weapons), Summon Insects,

Insect Plague, and Creeping Doom are all spells that follow the "hurt him so that he can't concentrate" model, which neutralizes him and allows you to take him out at your leisure.

Summoning Spells: This applies to mages as well. Summoning creatures, whether they're powerful demons or lowly kobolds, is always helpful. Higher-level creatures like demons and elementals can be as effective as one of your fighters. Any creature can serve as a distraction that allows you more time to prepare or to attack a target. Make sure you take advantage of any special abilities a summoned creature might have.



Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

level spells on him. I still Magic Missile frequently, even when fighting dragons and giants.

High-Level Spells and Abilities

All of the high-level abilities in *THRONE OF BHAAL* are useful, but when used in combination with other spells or abilities, they become truly fearsome powers. Here are a few suggestions on how to use your abilities and on which ones to select first.

Mage Pool (Mage, Sorcerer)

Improved Alacrity: Wow. When used properly, this allows you to end a potentially long battle in moments. This basically lets you cast a spell as soon as you're finished casting the previous spell, *with no pause whatsoever*. It lasts for only two rounds but is probably the most powerful spell in the game. Why? When used strategically with low casting-time spells, it allows you to get off an ungodly amount of spells. For example, if you cast Improved Alacrity and then one of the other high-level abilities—like Comet or Dragon's Breath, both of which have a casting time of 3 and don't hurt party members—you can get four Comets off and *still* have time for something else before Improved Alacrity runs out. Try the same thing with Magic Missile. Memorize enough of them, and you can fire off 10 Magic Missiles rapidly. Combine Improved Alacrity with magic items that lower your speed factor (Robe of Vecna, Amulet of Power) for extra effectiveness.

Wish: Although it isn't a high-level ability, it's a handy spell when used correctly. Wish is basically an all-purpose combat spell. Every time you cast it, five Super Spell options pop up and you're allowed to choose which one you'd like to use for your situation. There are three types of effects: good (for example, heal everyone in the party), neutral (say, heal 50 HPs on everyone, including enemies) and bad (such as heal all enemies). The Wish genie randomly chooses from the list every time you cast the spell. However, the higher the caster's wisdom, the fewer bad and neutral effects are in the pool. The danger is that you're sometimes given a list of five bad effects, and must choose one. However, with a reasonable amount of wisdom or with a wisdom-enhancing potion, the risk is extremely low. When things get hairy, use Wish.

Summoning Planetars and Devas: This applies to clerics as well as mages. One of our testers, Stan Woo, says, "Simply put, these are the best summoning spells in the game (though the Elemental Princes from the Cleric pool are also very, very good). There isn't a single battle in which a Planetary or Deva isn't useful. They have



When fighting a mass of lower-level enemies, use the Deathblow spell to quickly tear through them.



Focus on taking out Hive Mother and Nalmrissa first.

complex spell scripts, powerful melee abilities, and require little or no baby-sitting. Use them often." By the way, paladins also get this ability.

Cleric Pool (Cleric, Druid)

Aura of Flaming Death and Globe of Blades: These two offensive/defensive spells can be lifesavers as well as enemy killers. Cast them together; they're wonderfully cumulative. One neat trick suggested by QA team member Nathan Frederick is to cast Sanctuary or Invisibility along with one of these spells, and then walk your protected character around without having him attack (the spells will do it for him). Watch your confused enemies explode.

Summoning Elementals and Elemental Princes: A wonderful cleric ability, and an incredible druid ability. A cleric casting this spell has a 10 percent chance of summoning an Elemental Prince instead of a plain (though powerful) Elemental. A druid *always* summons an Elemental Prince. Watch these Elementals destroy anything that gets in their way as you calmly sip tea and discuss Tethyrian poli-

tics with Elminster.

Mass Raise Dead: This raises and heals all dead party members. Obviously useful in any tough battle. Just keep your cleric protected from whatever it is that's killing everyone else.

Fighter Pool (Fighter, Barbarian, Ranger, Paladin, Monks)

Deathblow and Greater Deathblow: One of the fun new things that we've included in *THRONE OF BHAAL* is a bunch of horde battles—hordes of low-level creatures all attacking you at once as you mow through them like a scythe through wheat. These spells enhance your ability to completely dominate low-level creatures. It's always fun to take out 30 orcs with Minsc alone.

Whirlwind and Greater Whirlwind: Some of the best fighter abilities, useful in any situation. Make these abilities a part of your general arsenal.

Smite: One of the best one-on-one battle abilities in the game. Smite makes every blow landed in the first round into a critical hit, and every blow landed afterward

knocks an opponent back and stuns him. Combine this with Greater Whirlwind for ultimate carnage.

Rogue Pool (Thieves, Bards)

Thieves and Bards have a large pool of cool and useful abilities. Here are just a few examples.

Use Any Item and Scribe Scrolls: Innate cleverness and adaptability allow high-level rogues to use things that would normally be restricted from their class. Combine this with Scribe Scrolls, and you have a great supplementary spellcaster. Play around with Use Any Item and see what sorts of interesting item combos you can come up with. Designer Drew Karpyszyn suggests equipping the Staff of the Magi in your alternate weapon slot so that you can turn invisible and then backstab. Choose the staff to go invisible again, even in the middle of battle.

The Super Traps: Exploding, Spike, and Time Traps are extremely deadly. Designer John Winski and QA team member Kevin Booth both extol the virtues of traps. Even in the middle of a fight, you can set traps away from the battle and have a hasted creature lead the enemy to your traps. Watch the resulting carnage.

Evasion, Greater Evasion, and Avoid Death: These are great defensive abilities. Use them as general defensive spells and as last-ditch efforts to save you sorry hide when you're overwhelmed.

Specific Fights

Allow us to set you squarely on the road to victory in some of the tougher battles that *THRONE OF BHAAL* has to offer. A few tips from designer Dave Gaider, who scripted Gorion, Draconis, the Final Seal Women's Fight, and Demogorgon; Stan Woo (QA); and designer Andrew Nobbs follow.

Gorion Wraith (from the Forest of Mir): Most importantly, use Negative Plane Protection to save yourself from the level drains. All of his minions drain levels. Also, remove his Fire Shield before you enter into melee with him, or be prepared to heal for a long, long time.

Draconis (from Abazigal's Lair): Draconis' big trick is that he casts Spell Immunity to Abjuration. This stops you from casting spells like Breach, Dispel Magic, and Lower Resistance. Uh oh. What you'll need to do is use a counterspell that isn't Abjuration; use Ruby Ray of Reversal and then tan his scaly hide like he's any other dragon. If you don't have Ruby Ray, run around like a sissy until his protection wears off. To combat Draconis' invisibility, keep True Sight up at all times. He also runs off to heal when he goes invisible, so don't worry if True Sight doesn't reveal him right away. Hunt him down and kill him. Don't let him get too far away or he will heal himself fully and summon more invisible stalkers.

The Final Seal Women (from the Watcher's Keep, Level 5): The Hive Mother



Those thief traps are even mightier this time, with capabilities ranging from exploding to stopping time briefly.

and Nalmissra *must* die first. Watch out for Nalmissra's Mass Charm and the Hive Mother's ranged spells. Engage the Hive Mother in melee right away with a strong melee character. Setting traps before they spawn in is also a cheap but effective strategy. Be careful around the Marileth. She has Protection From Magical Weapons, and you should dispel this before closing with her. She has seven attacks per round, so kill her quickly once the protection is down.

Demogorgon (End Boss of the Watcher's Keep): Do *not* be distracted by his minions. Concentrate *everything* on Demogorgon. Everything else in the room is there to distract you. Don't let us do that, and you'll find that the fight isn't so impossible after all.

Sendai (from the Lair of the same name): Stan Woo suggests that you stock up on summoning spells, and have the summoned creatures stationed at the statue that's going to appear next. If you're not sure which one will be next, have a creature at each. Then when that statue becomes active, the creatures will attack her and hopefully hit her before she gets her protection spells up. Keep a couple of fighters at the room's entrance to deal with the two Drow that pop up after each Sendai statue is destroyed. Also, for the lower-right statue, it's a good idea to remove her Protection From Evil when she gates in a Pit Fiend. That way, you can let the Pit Fiend do some of your work for you.

Demilich (from Watcher's Keep, secret entrance in the Githyanki area): Andrew Nobbs has a foolproof strategy for killing

demiliches, formerly the most feared creatures on the Sword Coast. Take a berserker with Grand Mastery in hammers and outfit him with the Runehammer, the ultimate undead slayer. The berserker ability makes the character immune to Imprisonment (the demilich's primary attack) and the +5 hammer takes care of business. You won't even get injured.



Layer on your own protection spells before battle, and you'll be able to last long enough to stand toe to toe with most foes.

GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO COUNTER-STRIKE

How not to be a prat in the premiere online shooter by Tom Price

If you've been avoiding installing COUNTER-STRIKE for fear of looking like the world's biggest n00b (that's short for *newbie*, which, for you, well, newbies out there is an inexperienced player) as soon as you join your first server, fear not. Your friendly neighborhood flash-bangers at CGW are here to help you through the finer points of CS etiquette, as well as give you a few tips on becoming a better player.



Basic Advice for Newbies

Rule number one: Watch and learn.

Trust us, your more experienced teammates don't want your confused ass at the front of the pack giving away their position or being useless (although your value as a shield is usually appreciated). You're better off watching your buddies' backs for flanking enemies and observing how the better players (follow your top guy) get it done. Whatever you do, don't stay so close to their backs that you're blocking their exit from a firefight. There's no quicker way to get fragged by your own teammates than by blocking them.

Rule number two: Keep it simple.

It doesn't matter how much money you've earned thanks to your superior teammates, if you think you're going to buy the most expensive guns in the game (such as the heavy machine gun and the high-end sniper rifles) and still be effective, forget it. It takes time to learn how to properly shoot those guns, and often you're gonna find yourself dead and spectating before you even get a round off. Stick to the MP5 and a Kevlar/Helmet setup. It'll never do you wrong, and some of the best players prefer that gun to many of the more powerful ones. Also, stay away from the grenades early on, unless it's a Heavy Explosive grenade. Misuse of flashbangs (in effect, blinding your teammates) is another offense punishable by fragging.

Camping

Camping is one of the most hotly debated issues in the world of COUNTER-STRIKE and other online first-person shooters. Many servers claim to ban it and threaten to kick off players who do it. But you n00bs are asking: What is it?

The term *camping* was used early on in the advent of online multiplayer gaming to describe the act of hiding or lurking in a particular spot (preferably where one couldn't be seen until it was too late) and picking off unsuspecting or otherwise busy players one by one. It's universally accepted to be a seriously cheap (or as Technical Editor Wil O'Neal would say, "budget") maneuver, and clear evidence of a lack of skill.

But camping in COUNTER-STRIKE is a far more complicated issue. There are plenty of instances where it's not only okay to camp, it's downright necessary. Keep in mind that the game is supposed to be a simulation (sort of) of real-world situations that counterterrorist and police SWAT teams deal with all the time, and terrorists by nature don't play by the rules. So much of this debate is pretty ridiculous. Have you ever heard a SWAT team captain say: "Yeah, we would've rescued the hostages but the terrorists were a bunch of campers!"

So let's lay out a few situations and determine whether or not camping is kosher:

Two terrorists come into a room, one carrying the bomb. They're cut down by

two CTs who then wait in a corner of the room near the bomb, which is lying on the floor. Verdict: Cool. The bomb is the central objective on a detonation map, so the CTs should do whatever they can to prevent its detonation.

Two terrorists come into a room, one carrying the bomb. They then camp in behind some boxes, killing every CT who comes by. Verdict: Uncool. This is a



classic camping maneuver by someone who has no skills. Plus, you're not accomplishing team goals and therefore are cheating your buddies out of their filthy lucre.

The last terrorist alive is guarding the hostages with an AWP (you know, that big, nasty green sniper rifle) and picking off approaching CTs one at a time. Verdict: Cool. He's just doing his job. And if a team of CTs can't coordinate to take out one guy, even if he does have a cannon with a scope on it, well, then they deserve to lose.

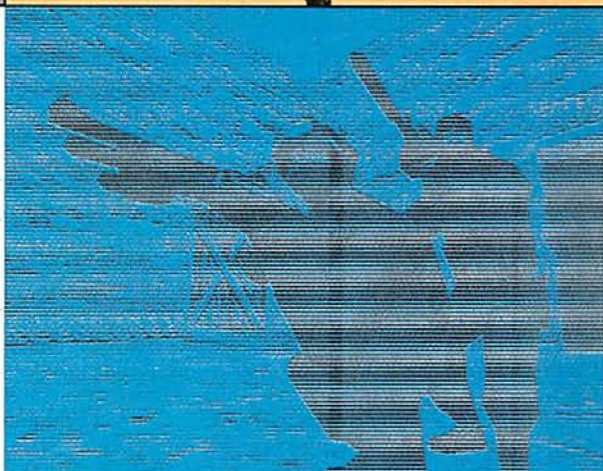
The last CT alive on a hostage map is camping in his own base, waiting for the Ts to come looking for him. Verdict: Uncool. CTs should never, ever base camp. Especially on a hostage map. Those scientists are waiting!



Responsibilities

Nothing chaps my ass like people who treat a CS game like a team deathmatch free-for-all. You have objectives, people! Here's a quick breakdown:

| Map | Terrorist | Counterterrorist |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| de_maps (detonation) | Easy: Set up the bomb. | Defuse it. Look out for Ts lurking nearby and buy a defuse kit—you'll need it. |
| cs_maps (hostage rescue) | Prevent the hostages from being rescued. | Rescue the hostages at any cost. |
| as_maps (assassination) | Kill the VIP. And any of his bodyguards who get in the way. | Don't let the VIP get killed. Don't even leave him alone. Be a human shield. |



A Word on Cheating

It's bad. We here at *Computer Gaming World* feel it's our duty as responsible gaming pundits as well as upstanding members of the CS community to vociferously condemn any form of cheating, be it wall/skin hacking or grenade spamming or whatever. It ruins the fun for everyone involved and for what? So some 13-year-old can brag about being 43-2 on de_dust last night? To whom, his nonexistent friends? C'mon people, be good sports and play fair. It'll extend the life of this game we all enjoy so much. Otherwise, people will get sick of your immature attitudes and migrate to another game that the hackers haven't gotten to yet, and CS will wither and die on the vine. Do you

really want that?

That said, I'd like to make an argument for the occasional LAN cheat. Under certain conditions, the LAN cheat (when one person who is in spectator mode relays information about enemy movements and positions to someone who is still playing, a move known as "ghosting") should be allowed. For instance, if the last player on one team is AFK (away from keyboard), the other guys could run around forever looking for him. In the name of brevity and getting the next round started, it's okay to tell your buddy, "Hey, their last dude's AFK." And if the other team is doing it, that also makes it okay. Gotta have some parity, you know.



Ten Commandments

- Thou shalt not flashbang thine own teammates.
- Thou shalt not bunny hop.
- Thou shalt not camp if there's only one player left on the other team.
- Thou shalt rescue the hostages/defuse the bomb/escort the VIP if thou art a CT.
- Thou shalt imprison the hostages/plant the bomb/kill the VIP if thou art a T.
- Thou shalt not slaughter the hostages at the beginning of the round and have thy teammate buy thou a gun.
- Thou shalt not covet thy teammate's weapon, follow him around waiting for him to die, then take it.
- Thou shalt cover thy teammates' behinds.
- Thou shalt not go AFK for more than one round.
- Thou shalt not whine about people cheating when thine ass is getting kicked.



Complaints

Three small, personal complaints: I know the player name you choose for yourself is personal and your own business, but some things need to go. No more references to the following things: marijuana, Tupac,

Gladiator, or hacker talk. If I see any more names like [420]Maximus_kine or l33t_mAkAvELi, I swear I'll go Don Colluminati on someone. Enough with the complaints about frag stealing. This is a

team sport. If one of your buddies puts the killing round in a guy you just unloaded on, be thankful. You probably would have been killed reloading if it wasn't for him. And what's up with the bunny hopping?

Startopia

Uses and abuses of your aliens by Thomas L. McDonald

STARTOPIA may be a refreshing twist on the management/building genre, but its manual can safely be fed into the shredder. Not to worry—we've got the biggest omission, a race-by-race breakdown, covered. Each race has different skills, functions, and trading strengths, and understanding them is crucial to planning, buying, selling, and waging war.



Greys: The most common race, the Greys get along with everyone and like to spend money on entertainment. They offer the best deals on medical equipment and make good doctors. They are also regular buyers of entertainment crates and luxury goods such as Discos. Buy entertainment crates from Sirens and sell them to Greys for a good profit. They'll fight, but not well, and are best kept manning the sick bay.



Groulean Salt Hogs: Hard workers needed to staff the Recycler and the Factory, Salt Hogs need just simple food, a bed, and a job. They tend to be loyal no matter what their loyalty rating is. They will, however, sometimes balk at working if there is no entertainment on the base. Buy their Recycling Plants, Scuzzers, and industrial goods, and sell them Consensors. They will fight well.



Thyorian Grekka-Targ: A prickly race to deal with, the Targ tend to be spies, so keep an eye on them. When hiring, emphasize loyalty over skill, since they man the Consensor and could pose a security risk. They have cheap Cargo Holds, Power Boosters, and Consensors, and will be happy to buy industrial and black-market goods for top price. They too will fight.



Turraken: This research race is the cheapest source of lab equipment and very good to have on hand if you decide to take the tech-tree route (rather than the trading route) to attaining new items. Once hired and on base, however, the Turraken must be kept busy or they tend to start sabotaging things. Like the Sirens, they hate the Monks. They will *not* fight.



Kasvagian: You don't really want them around, but you *need* them. These are your fighters, guards, and frontline troops. They're disagreeable, hard to please, and just might revolt if not kept happy. Don't start hiring them until you have at least a partially developed entertainment deck. Give them their own entertainments, such as the Rough Bar. This will help keep them away from their foes, mainly the Karmaramas.

Arona Daal: This is a trader, not a race, but it's important to know how best to use him—which is hardly at all. If you are desperate you can buy from him, but his prices tend to stink. He is, however, your only source of crates at some key points in the game.



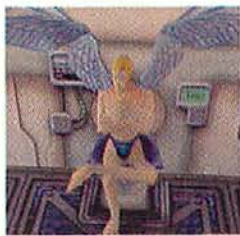
Karmaramas: The granola-eating peaceniks of the base, they can be noisy and are of limited usefulness. They spend their time on the bio deck working the farm and hanging out. If they get "enlightened" enough, they can make those around them happy. If you intend to fight instead of farm, it's best to give them the boot—their antiwar protests can create a bad scene, man. They are the cheapest source for food, though. Definitely not a fighting race.



Polvakian Gem Slugs: The upper crust of the base, they pretty much just sleep and party. Milk them for easy money if you have a well-developed entertainment deck, particularly with high-ticket entertainment such as the Palace Galactica. They're great for profits. If you want to keep them around, build them their own Sluggpartments, since they don't mix with the "lower classes." They hate *everyone*, particularly the Salt Hogs. Again, not a fighting race.



Zedem Monks: A nuisance at times, their sole benefit to the base is in keeping people religiously fulfilled. When hired, they'll build a temple and start converting useful races into fairly useless monks, albeit at a one-time profit to you of 5,000 energy per conversion. The Sirens can counter this effect, and the two are therefore enemies. These guys aren't fighters like them Shaolin monks.



Dahenese Sirens: The "pleasure givers" of the base, they staff your Love Nests and generally provide, er, *entertainment* for others on the base. They are vital for happiness, but may reduce productivity. Siren traders are the ones to go to for cheap entertainment crates and luxury goods. They pay good prices for medical items. Buy medical goods from Greys and sell to Sirens for a profit. They're lovers, not fighters.



Scuzzers: Not a race but android workers, Scuzzers come in three progressively more efficient models, plus a Security Scuzzer model. A full deck should have about five Scuzzers, each dedicated to a specific task: Have two clean, one maintain, one provide security, and one "float." Put the repair slider to about 50 percent and the recharge slider to about 20 percent to get the most out of them.

EASTER EGGS

DVD: Magnolia

New Line Home Video has hidden some great outtakes and bloopers on its two-disc Special Edition of *Magnolia*.

As on Criterion discs, you'll find color bars on the first disc of the box set, which can help in adjusting your TV set. Simply select Color Bars from the disc's main menu and wait about 20 seconds. Suddenly, the bars disappear and are replaced by

eight minutes of bloopers and outtakes from the movie—including Tom Cruise messing up his lines and Luis Guzman in his "bath" scene.

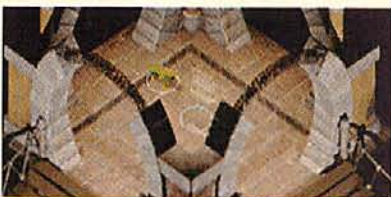
Once the bloopers are over, the disc will return to its "regular programming," aka the color bars.



Game: Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

The *BALDUR'S GATE II* expansion has two Easter eggs: one that anyone playing the game can find, and the other a reward for gamers who persevere through the entire *BALDUR'S GATE* saga.

The easy Easter egg first: When guiding the Spirit Warrior through the minidungeon in the fifth level of Watcher's Keep, try to pause the game. The easiest way to do this is to immediately press the space bar either when the Spirit Warrior walks into a new room or just after combat. Hopefully, you manage to pause the game before the dialogue options pop up. While paused, look at your map screen to check out the *THRONE OF BHAAL* team.



The other Easter egg involves carrying over multiple items. First, you'll need the Golden Pantaloons, all the way from freakin' *BALDUR'S GATE*. Yes, as in the first game. There's a nobleman in the Friendly Arm Inn who asks you to launder them. Keep them through *BALDUR'S GATE II*, and when you start *BGII*, you'll need to check a painting on a wall in Irenicus' dungeon.

Then, you'll need the Silver Pantaloons. In Athkatta, in either Chapter Two or Six, there's a quest that starts off with a man buried alive in the cemetery. In performing this quest, you have the choice of freeing a woman or keeping her for ransom. Do the shady deed, ransom her off, and you'll get the Silver Pantaloons as the ransom. Finally, you'll need to snag the Bronze Pantalettes in *THRONE OF BHAAL*. In Abazigal's Enclave, you'll be asked to retrieve an eyestalk from a gauth. Instead of doing this by yourself, you should "subcontract" the job to the petrified adventurers. Watch the funny cut-scene that follows, and you'll get the Bronze Pantalettes in addition to the eyestalk. When you have some free time after snagging all three items, go back to Amkethran and find the Dwarfen Smith. Ask him about what kind of work he does, which without the items elicits a cagey answer at best, and he'll take all the metallic pants and create the weirdest armor in the entire game. That's your reward for holding onto these weird pants throughout the games.



Kerrick the Smith: My lord! It is so rare to find three such extraordinary specimens! It would allow me to work, I could put them through the Pantaloons Tego-Magical Transmogrifier right now!

[The... um... eggs... what?]



WEB HIGHLIGHT

For those of you playing that Sid Meier classic *ALPHA CENTAURI* with the *ALIEN CROSSFIRE* expansion pack, you can't ignore Chris "Velocyrax" Hartpence's guide. Forget about any other strategy guide, official or Web based—Hartpence gets into the nitty-gritty of *ALPHA CENTAURI* and gives you more information than you can fathom. This is one heckuva classy FAQ, and we salute the dedication that Chris puts into letting you know how to best play *ALPHA CENTAURI*. Snag his guide at

<http://googlie2.tripod.com/spartanchronicles/id10.html>.

Send us your tips
Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put cgtips in the subject line). We'll publish three submissions each month. Please send genuine tips or strategies instead of cheat codes cut-and-pasted from the Internet. One winner will get something pulled at random from the *Computer Gaming World* BozoBin®!

CHEAT CODES



Action/Strategy

Hostile Waters:
Antaeus Rising

Just run the game with the `-setusupthebomb` option (`HostileWaters.exe -setusupthebomb`) and then while in the game you can press F8 to bring up the console, which lets you use one of the cheats (press F8 again to remove the console). Codes are case sensitive.

| Code | Result |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <code>enableallmovies 1</code> | Enables all movies in Cinema Menu |
| <code>filthylucre 1</code> | Gives 999999EJ |
| <code>invulnerable 1</code> | God mode for all units |
| <code>revealmap 1</code> | Reveals map |
| <code>Winlevel 1</code> | Successfully completes mission |



Anachronox

Go into your `\Anachronox\anoxdata\CONFIGS\Default.cfg` file. There's a line that reads `set debug 0`. Change the zero to a one. Then start up the game (it'll start in debug mode, which will show you lots of text messages). Once you're in the game, you can bring down the console by typing the tilde [`~`] key, and then type in the cheat `invoke 1:86`.

Skip Battles

Edit the config file as stated above, access the console by pressing tilde [`~`], then type in `battlewin`.

No Clipping Mode

Edit the config file as stated above, access the console by pressing tilde [`~`], then type in `noclip`.

DIRTY TRICKS OF THE MONTH

Also, the last RED ALERT trick ever!

New rules: Dirty Tricks for games we name.

Making Dirty Tricks a laissez-faire thing worked for a while, but after seeing the umpteenth tip for either RED ALERT 2 or COUNTER-STRIKE, we decided to tweak the rules a bit. Now we're awarding prizes for the best tip for a game of our choice.

That's right, we're picking from our better-rated games from recent issues, and issuing the call for tips. This month, we're asking for the best tips for KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS, one of the more innovative real-time strategy games out there. Also, Jeff Green is having a hard time and he needs your help. The best tip for KOHAN gets the RAINBOW SIX COLLECTOR'S EDITION, which includes everything you ever wanted in the RAINBOW SIX franchise.

We are, however, running one last RED ALERT 2 tip. It's the first one that really made those of us who still play RED ALERT 2 say, "Wow, I'd be really pissed off if that happened to me."



Here's an advanced RA2 early rush tactic. Quickly work your way to a war factory right at the beginning, and make the following combination:

One terror drone

Two engineers (Load these guys in after the antidog unit below.)

One dog or desolator (To cover against other dogs or foot troops; load this into the flak first.)

Now simply send this crew to the enemy base and deploy it near the enemy MCV.

When the enemy sees you deploying engineers, he's likely to repack his MCV and begin heading for the hills. At this point, your terror drone can attack the enemy MCV, which will lock it up and prevent it from redeploying. This tactic requires that the enemy has no walls and no repair bay, but you will find this to be the case against a large number of enemies. Taking out your foe's MCV this early on is likely to tip the scales in your favor.

—Robert Riter

And with that, we're done with RED ALERT 2. Bring on the KOHAN!

Bombing Tips (COUNTER-STRIKE)

This is a COUNTER-STRIKE trick for terrorists. Here's what you do: When you plant the bomb, throw a smoke grenade within the area of the bomb. The reason you would do this is that many times when I was a CT, I would barely diffuse the bomb. So if you were to throw a smoke grenade in, it would cause confusion in the CT and make it harder for the CT to locate and then diffuse the bomb. This is a little trick, but it may help the terrorist win.

—Yannick Mardirossian

I have got a really dirty little tip. On the Dust 2 map, at one of the bomb sites, you can hide the bomb. I forgot which one it is, but if you are a CT, it's the one where you have to go up a ramp and through a doorway; the boxes are on the right and there's a tunnel to the left. Anyway, a terrorist can go to the box on the end and plant the bomb above the crack. When you are done, the bomb will fall into the crack between the box and the wall. So once you get the bomb in there, you guarantee the terrorists will win!

Another crazy planting trick is on the original Dust. At the bomb site that's *not* next to where the CTs spawn, a terrorist can go to the white, higher ground to the left and jump on the three boxes stacked together. Start planting the bomb, and when you're nearly finished, jump *back* to the white high ground. If you time it right, you can leave the bomb on the white higher ground, and

no one *ever* checks there for the bomb.

—Benjamin Chen

This is an add-on, you can say, to the winning dirty trick in the last issue. It's a trick for the COUNTER-STRIKE map `de_inferno`. As a terrorist, get your team to the bomb site near the CT spawn. You need only two to survive the way there. Have the person without the C4 crouch down by the stack of boxes, and have the terrorist with the C4 get on the very top. Have the bomber go next to the crack on the left side of the crates up top, and face down toward the ground. Set the C4, and instead of being on the crates, it will drop down to the very bottom of the stack, visible but unreachable. All the CTs can survive and still not be able to defuse that thing. The C4 is so far into the area in the stack that there's just no way anybody can reach it. —Tim

Fighting Baal (DIABLO II)

Hey, I have a great tip for assassins in DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION. You need to be level 24+ and have put points into a good trap (like Wake of Inferno, Death Sentry, or Lightning Sentry). You also need to have Mind Blast. First gather up a bunch of monsters by running past them. Then use Mind Blast on them while you're laying traps all around the monsters. They'll be stunned and get dealt huge damage from the traps, while the few that you converted with Mind Blast will then take out any survivors. —Ryan Russell

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by Thomas L. McDonald • cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Hurry Up and Wait

Thumbs down on the botched releases of AO and WWII ONLINE

We've gone a good year and a half without a major massively multiplayer online game being rolled out. In that time I've had the pleasure of watching Al Gore lose the election, doubled the size of my DVD collection, moved, helped create a human life, and seen my son grow a whole foot. In other words, it's been long

forward to these games! God, am I a frigging idiot, or what?

Ultima Online Revisited

Before we beginning layin' the hammer down, let us pause and turn back the clock to the first few weeks of ULTIMA ONLINE. It was like something out of *Mad Max*. Utter

ally doing it, which meant that all early adopters of a game would become de facto beta testers. It seemed like hyperbole. Certainly Norwegians could anticipate all the problems inherent in MMORPGs. A country that gave the world the moving novels of Bjornstjerne Bjornsen and the soothing techno sounds of Amethystium would surely be able to vanquish the demons of client-server gaming.

It's Anarchy All Right

No such luck. On day one of ANARCHY ONLINE, Funcom PR copped to the following problems: Personal CD keys were often non-functional; registration was nonfunctional; customer support was in vapor lock due to volume; lag and crashes were rampant. Those were the first, acknowledged problems. As people played, they disappeared into walls and other dead zones. The account setup site was not encrypted for safe credit card payments. Exploitation bugs reared their heads, allowing people to cheat their experience, hit points, credits, and gear to almost any level.

At E3, a Funcom employee with the piercingly manly name of Ragnar assured me that his product would meet its July ship date.

"What's if it's not ready?" I sensibly asked, since the beta at the show had lag to burn.

"It will be," he responded confidently.

"But what if it isn't?"

"It will ship in July."

Since I assumed a man named Ragnar must have a two-bladed axed hidden somewhere in his laptop case, I didn't press the issue, but there was clearly a "ship-or-be-damned" stench in the air.

When asked about these problems, U.S. PR Manager April Jones put on her game face and said (with professionally mandated understatement), "The launch has not gone as smoothly as we had hoped. We ran a lot of tests and simulations, but nothing can fully, accurately simulate the real thing. I know that a lot of gamers think that there have been four major RPGs released and we should be able to learn how to do it right from the competition, but really each one is a trial by fire. We do what we can to anticipate problems, but it's never quite the same as when you flip on the On switch



Above: This ugly-looking character serves as a nice visual metaphor for the current unplayable state of ANARCHY ONLINE.



Left: WORLD WAR II ONLINE suffered from an equally botched release, but Cornered Rat's decision to stop the game clock and let users play for free went a long way toward maintaining gamers' goodwill.

enough that my memories of the utter groin-tightening awfulness of a massively multiplayer game launch were wiped clean. I waited for Cornered Rat's WORLD WAR II ONLINE and Funcom's ANARCHY ONLINE with the quivering anticipation of a schoolgirl about to meet a Backstreet Boy. I looked

chaos, player killers on the rampage, and people exploiting holes in the system, not to mention the mandatory lag from hell. People cheated their stats up and wrecked the economy. It was considered a disaster.

Compared with WORLD WAR II ONLINE and ANARCHY ONLINE, however, UO ran like a Swiss watch. At E3 this year Richard Garriott insisted that no one could roll out an online game without problems. The knowledge needed could be gained only through actu-

that first day."

That's semiacceptable in regard to lag, but a lot of these problems, such as the exploit holes and memory leaks, are simply due to improper testing. What really kicks gamers in the sack, however, is that Funcom decided to start the clock on the free month with a lot of these problems still outstanding. A source on the development team says this was due to miscommunication between developers and management, with message board complainers dismissed as a few disgruntled people. The official line, again from the beleaguered April Jones, is: "Internal testing showed that we had made major improvements and that while there were still people who were having some problems, the majority were able to play."

Norway right now is deep into that time of the year when the sun never sets. It is quite obvious that the combination of an 80 percent income tax and lack of a clear delineation between night and day has driven the entire ANARCHY ONLINE development team insane if they think the game is playable for a majority of subscribers.

Actually, it is not, which brings us to *Cornered Rat*. If there is a game that's more cocked up than ANARCHY, it is *WORLD WAR II ONLINE*. On day one of *Cornered Rat's* *WORLD WAR II* a 60MB patch was mandatory and the servers were capped at 500 users, along with so many other bugs that it's hard to quantify them (see my review in this issue). Though its game launched with even more horrendous problems than ANARCHY ONLINE, *Cornered Rat* did the right thing: As of this writing, it still had not started the clock on the free trial month.

No game should charge you a monthly fee if you can't properly play it. Keeping WWII free is going to buy the developers a little bit of time and good will and may well keep the game viable in the long term. Conversely, by charging people to play a broken game, Funcom is earning itself some well-deserved and possibly irreversible ill will. This despite that fact that, from a pure design and pro-

duction standpoint, ANARCHY is clearly a better, more finished product.

Cheaters Always Prosper

The crashes and lag are the most vexing problems in the short term, but history shows

in his eBay description, "you are bidding on 1,000,000 ANARCHY ONLINE credits. That is enough credits to get from levels 1 to 150 without ever needing to loot a single credit! These credits were obtained through missions, and are perfectly legit."

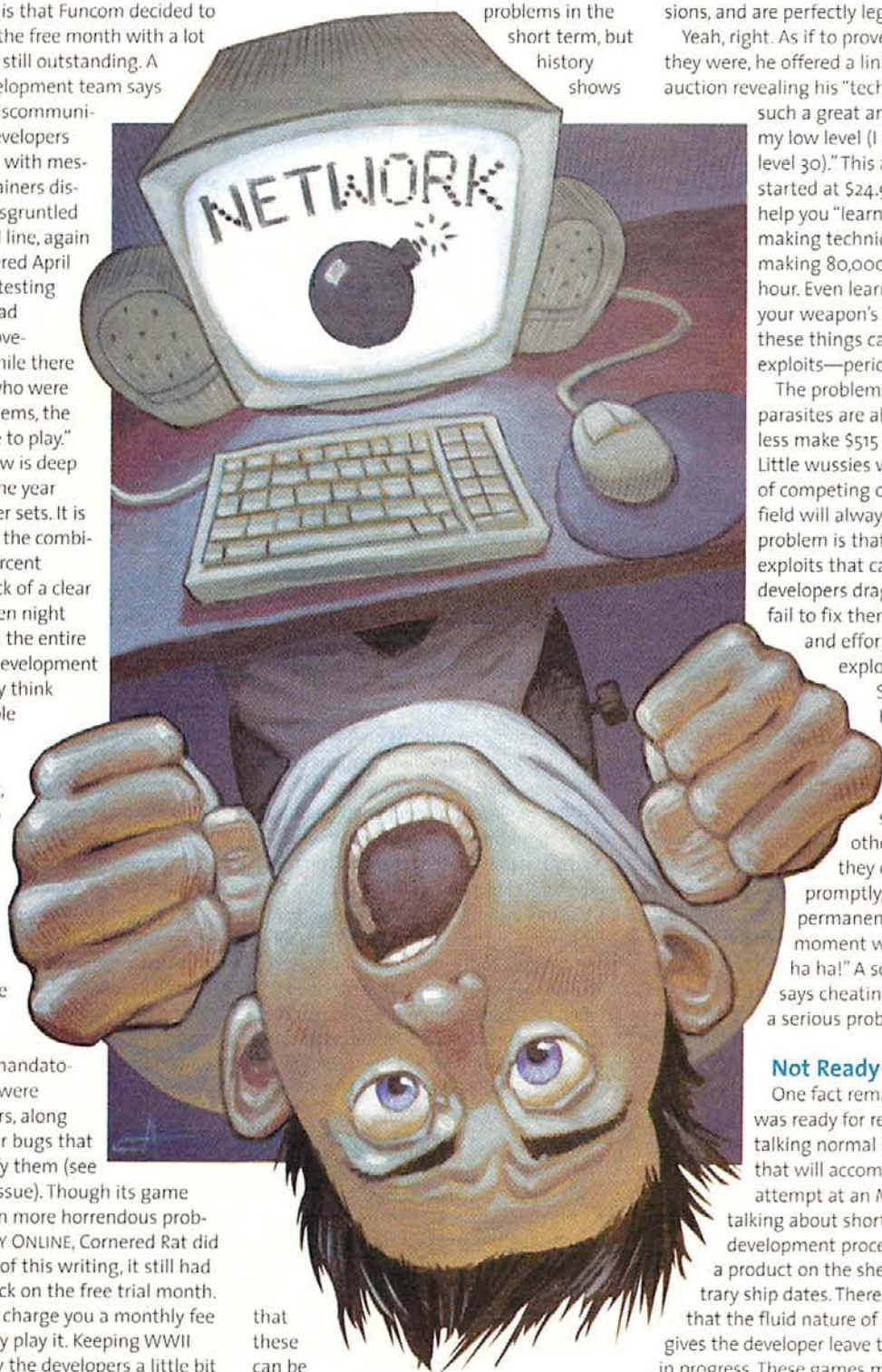
Yeah, right. As if to prove just how "legit" they were, he offered a link to another eBay auction revealing his "technique for getting such a great amount of credits at my low level (I acquired them at level 30)." This auction, which started at \$24.99, promised to help you "learn all the top money-making techniques, such as making 80,000 credits in one hour. Even learn how to double your weapon's speed." None of these things can be done without exploits—period.

The problem is not that some parasites are able to cheat, much less make \$515 off their cheating. Little wussies who are incapable of competing on a level playing field will always be there. The problem is that every game has exploits that can be fixed, yet developers drag their heels and fail to fix them. It takes time and effort to close exploitable holes.

So along toddle Funcom and *Cornered Rat*, rolling out games wide open to speed-hacks and other exploits. Will they close the holes promptly, efficiently, and permanently? Please pause a moment while I say, "Bwa ha ha ha!" A source at Funcom says cheating is not considered a serious problem there.

Not Ready for Prime Time

One fact remains: Neither game was ready for retail. We're not talking normal bumps in the road that will accompany anyone's first attempt at an MMO game. We're talking about short-circuiting the development process in order to get a product on the shelves to meet arbitrary ship dates. There is a presumption that the fluid nature of an online game gives the developer leave to treat it as a work in progress. These games may—indeed, should—grow and improve with time, but they have to be polished and functional when they head off to mastering, not weeks or months later. If this genre is to continue and grow, developers must realize that. They will have no future until they do. **CGW**

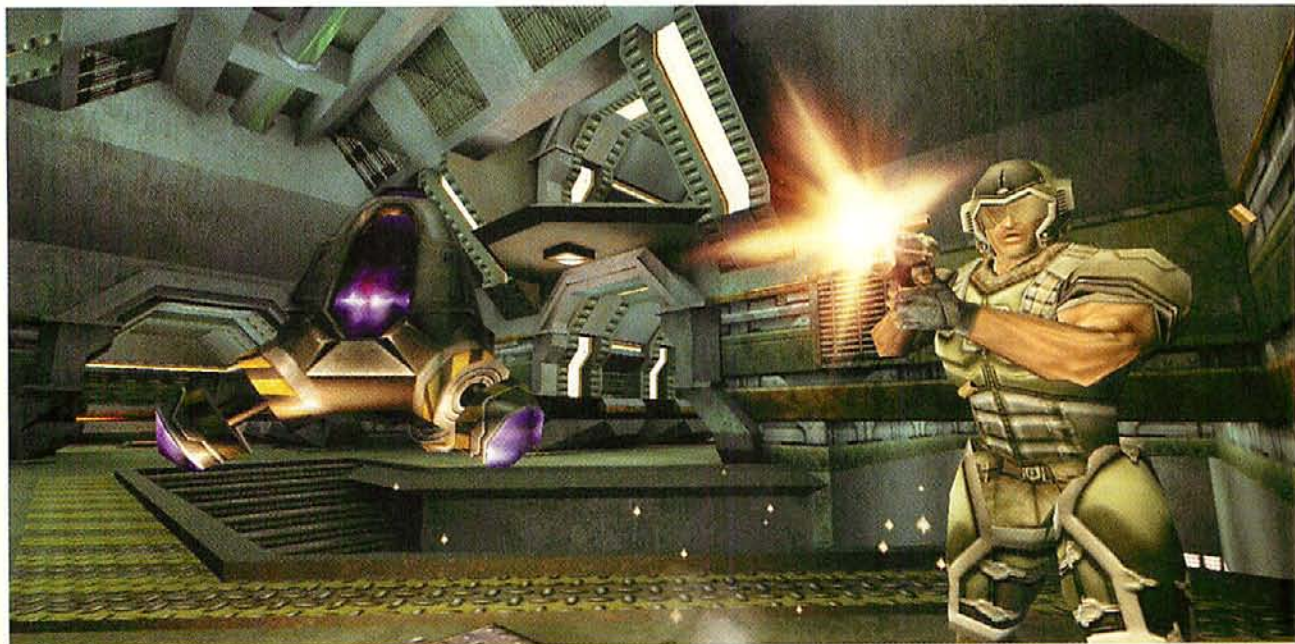


that these can be fixed. More problematic are cheat bugs, which often are never fixed right. Within a week of launch, some goober had auctioned off a million ANARCHY ONLINE credits for \$515 actual dollars after 17 bids. "Yep, you heard right," the seller crowed

by T. Byrl Baker • tbyrlbaker@msn.com

More GORE for Shooter Fans

A COUNTER-STRIKE killer...from Nebraska?



When I heard that a small team of guys back in my home state of Nebraska was putting together a first-person shooter called GORE, I just had to check it out. There aren't many game developers out there on the windswept prairie, let alone developers making a game this ambitious. If 4D Rulers Software has its way, GORE will make COUNTER-STRIKE but a faint memory for the frag minded.

4D Rulers was founded by Joel, Rick, and Nick Huenink in 1997. The brothers also run a sign company and ISP in their hometown of Beatrice, but currently work full time on GORE. The team in Nebraska licensed the basic engine from Texas-based Slam Software, and has partnered with an Australian company called Eyecon that handles all the major programming. 4D Rulers designed GORE and creates all its content, adding new features and special effects as Eyecon updates the engine. Company president Joel Huenink was kind enough to give me a tour of 4D Rulers' headquarters and show me the latest build of the game.

I downloaded the GORE tech demo to prepare for the interview and was surprised, frankly, to find it a little lame. The derivative level design, mediocre graphics, and me-too gameplay left me wondering how this team had the cajones to bill its game as a COUNTER-STRIKE killer. Sure, I was

impressed by some of the weapons—especially the shotgun, with its energy-shield secondary fire mode—but weapons do not a shooter make, crazy as that sounds.

If you've played the demo and had the same thoughts, do yourself a favor and give this game another chance. Even the guys at 4D Rulers are surprised at how far GORE has come since the demo release. Employees at the Hueninks' sign company are addicted to the demo, playing it every chance they get, and Joel is astonished when he sees the difference between the game on the employees' monitors and the build he's finishing. "I see them playing that and I go, 'What is that piece of crap you guys are playing?'" he says.

My sentiments exactly. Graphically, the game is now nothing less than stunning. Nowhere is this more evident than in the urban level included in the demo, which has undergone a complete

4D Rulers' upcoming GORE is a grassroots shooter with killer potential.

makeover. Based on user feedback that the level was too cramped, the level designers put more space between the buildings and it now has a nice, open feel. They also threw some enormous 3D buildings into the background that are inaccessible but really make the level look like a small part of a vast city. The textures, lighting, and overall look of the level all are improved immensely, and the team is working hard to give all of the levels they've created the same red-carpet treatment.

Special effects that were barely notice-



“Power-ups and ammo are glowing so brightly they nearly hurt my eyes.”

able in the demo are now cranked up to eleven. “We just got shaders in the engine maybe a month before the demo came out,” says Joel. “I really didn’t have time to correctly implement [them].” It’s obvious the team has been hard at work because now everything is slathered in special effects. Power-ups and ammo are glowing so brightly they nearly hurt my eyes, and environment mapping has been added to every reflective surface. Someone walks up wearing a helmet and I see the rest of the level reflected in the helmet’s glass visor, and I simultaneously notice a pair of eyes peering back at me from behind the transparent material. It’s one of those stunning effects that will be nearly impossible to notice during actual gameplay but serves to demonstrate the GORE development team’s slavish attention to detail.

The game now features true dynamic lighting, unlike *QUAKE 3*, which, according to Joel, “does a little overpass and just kind of brightens the textures. You can never really brighten a really dark area in *QUAKE 3*—it’s black no matter what. *GORE* has the real deal. It’s a lot more expensive [in terms of hardware], but worth it. When you get in a firefight now you really notice it.” He isn’t kidding. Watching rockets streak through a black corridor illuminating everything along their path with a light like the noonday sun left me slackjawed.

A complex damage model lets players target specific body parts, adding extra damage for head shots and other critical hits. In modeling armor, the team departed from the usual approach. Instead of acting like a generic shield, armor in *GORE* protects specific body parts and must be shot off before the part underneath can take damage. Marksmanship should become a key part of the game, as players able to target unarmored body parts will have a much easier time winning.

The game has a time-travel motif that does far more than just allow for a little back story. The design team has used it as an excuse to create some of the most creative levels I’ve ever seen. The demo just gave a taste of the standard temple, future tech, and urban levels seen in every shooter

since *DOOM*, but the final version adds everything from Wild West to haunted house themes. “We’re tired of running through disco dungeons,” texture artist Chris Holden tells me, and the team’s work reflects that sentiment.

Planned team-play features were not implemented when I visited, but Joel says that the final version will include many character classes that are completely different in their skills, speed, strength, and other aspects. Each will have a unique weapon, and with character types ranging from a blinding-fast but relatively weak female operative to a hulking, nigh-indestructible mech, creating balanced teams will take

plenty of strategy.

One of the most intriguing things about *GORE* is that if you don’t like it you can easily modify it. Most game parameters are stored in .GOD files that can be opened with Notepad and fiddled with endlessly. Joel showed me how it works by opening the file for the shotgun and editing the rate-of-fire entry to a fraction of its original number. With that simple tweak he created a devastating automatic shotgun that burned through ammo like a chaingun. Nearly every aspect of the game can be modified just as easily, and it’ll be a treat seeing what the fan community does when it gets its collective mitts on this game.

4D Rulers is gunning for a November shareware release, with a retail version following that if the company can find a publisher. **CGW**

Operation Flashpoint

Under normal circumstances it would be sad to admit that the most fun I’ve had with a game so far this year came from a free demo, but *OPERATION FLASHPOINT* isn’t your normal game.

I can’t yet comment on the quality of the retail version, which should be out in the United States by the time you read this, but I’ve been playing the demo for over a month now thanks to a few enterprising fans who hacked it and created some basic mission-editing tools. Now there are dozens of add-on missions that let players fly helicopters, use sniper rifles, drive tanks, and do all sorts of stuff that wasn’t allowed in the original demo.

Many of the OFP fan sites that hosted these missions have been abandoned for one reason or another (mainly out-of-control bandwidth costs), but a few good ones with links to both the demo and retail missions remain. *AxleOnline* (www.axleonline.com) is my personal favorite, and *OperationFlashpoint.net* (www.operationflashpoint.net) is another valuable resource. With

intriguing mods like *The Great War* (www.tgw.addr.com) and *Operation Vietnam* (www.operation-flashpoint.net/vietnam) in the works, it looks like I’m going to have to budget some permanent hard drive space for *OPERATION FLASHPOINT*.



by Bruce Geryk • ceremony@net66.com

Reality Check

WWII ONLINE offers a new world of "realistic" wargaming

Wargames and simulations don't seem to have much crossover in terms of audience, although both ostensibly aim first and foremost for "realism." But what happens when realism gets in the way of game design? The answer is instructive even for gamers who don't like the idea of trading in their hexes for joysticks.

The 57th anniversary of the D day invasion saw the launch of WWII ONLINE: an ambitious massively multiplayer persistent online simulation that hopes to give players the chance to take the role of an infantryman, tank commander, or pilot in a giant recreation of World War II. Realism is paramount, the designers have said.

WWII ONLINE allows you to ask some interesting questions. For example, how much fun is it to carry and fire a Mauser?

Apparently, not much. And that's exactly what the game's now-notorious three-keystroke aiming/firing system conveys. Infantrymen can only run for so long before getting tired. And driving a tank is a lot harder when you are stuck looking through a narrow viewport.

One comment on the official WWII ONLINE forums struck me. People had been complaining that the French Char B1 bis tanks were "too powerful" because they resisted numerous direct hits. One sarcastic French tanker popped in to berate his German opponents: "We're not invincible—

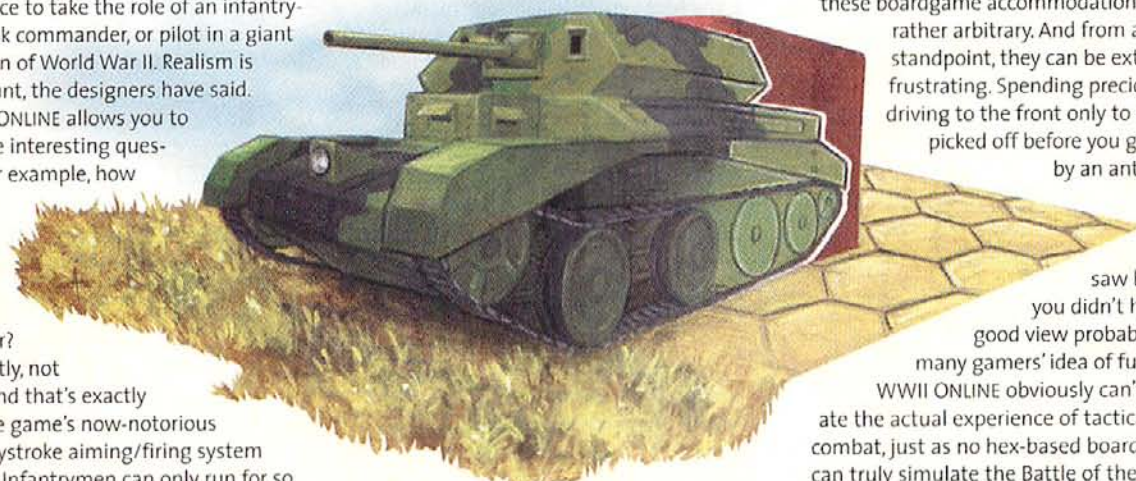
WWII ONLINE finally makes "factor fudging" obsolete. This is the part of wargame design where you try to massage historical outcomes out of squares with numbers on them by changing the numbers and re-arranging the squares. Panzers getting to Paris too quickly? Tone down the movement factors. Guderian can't get through the Ardennes in 1940? Lighten up the terrain a bit. Play-balancing wargames is often difficult because a lot of outside "metafactors" (outdated

movement" in hex-based wargames. Tactical games that tried to account for French armor doctrine had to somehow penalize players for the French one-man turrets, in which the tank commander also had to serve as the gunner. Add the restricted cupola view, and it's easy to see how the Germans could have enjoyed tactical superiority. But unless you actually sit in the virtual equivalent of one of these turrets and try to fight effectively while also keeping your tank from being blown to bits, these boardgame accommodations seem

rather arbitrary. And from a player's standpoint, they can be extremely frustrating. Spending precious time driving to the front only to be

picked off before you get there by an antitank gun you never saw because you didn't have a good view probably isn't many gamers' idea of fun.

WWII ONLINE obviously can't recreate the actual experience of tactical tank combat, just as no hex-based boardgame can truly simulate the Battle of the Bulge. But it shows how important game design is in turning abstract concepts into enjoyable game elements. Wargamers have struggled with the "realism versus playability" issue for as long as we've had needlessly complex wargame rules. The assumption has been that if you could model everything at the smallest level, there would no longer be a conflict. But guess what: In the end, they're just games. And games are supposed to be fun. At least they are at my house. **CGW**



“What is so interesting about WWII ONLINE from a wargaming perspective is how well it illustrates abstract concepts like ‘platoon movement’ in hex-based wargames.”

you just keep shooting at us after we're dead." Which happens to be precisely what the Germans did when faced with these monsters. In computer games, dead enemies have the good manners to blow up to let you know they're dead. In real life it's a slightly different story.

hard to see outside, you're going to miss. And if you can't communicate effectively with your buddies, you're essentially on your own. Which happens a lot in WWII ONLINE.

What is so interesting about WWII ONLINE from a wargaming perspective is how well it illustrates abstract concepts like "platoon

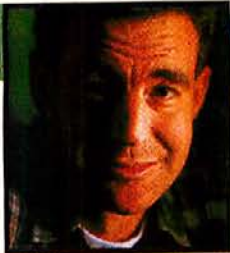


Getting rid of the hexes doesn't mean that realism is no longer a game design issue.



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Idiocy Online

Jeff vents his spleen on ANARCHY ONLINE'S massively ugly launch

Regular readers of this column—by which I mean myself, my cat, and my old cellmates back in the maximum-security block at San Quentin—may recall that a couple months back, I was a happy guy. I was feeling upbeat. I wrote a piece called "It's All Good," and I meant it. It was all good. But this month, everything has changed. Happy Jeff has gone away. Happy Jeff is curled up in a fetal ball in his Alone Place now and needs a hug.

Why this sorry spectacle? Why these tears of a clown?

Two words: ANARCHY ONLINE. It's been a long time since I'd looked forward to playing a game as much as this one—and it's been even longer since a game ended up pissing me off this bad. We're talking bang-on-the-keyboard mad. We're talking kick-the-cat mad. We'd even be talking beat-the-wife mad, except that she'd pick me up and break me in two if I so much as looked at her funny.

So I guess I'll just bitch about it in public instead.

ANARCHY ONLINE has always made for a good story, and has always been so easy to root for. How could you not love the charming little Norwegian company that was gonna take on the big boys of ULTIMA ONLINE and EVERQUEST? And the Orwellian/cyberpunk gameworld seemed like the perfect hook, the perfect change-of-pace from the interchangeable, Tolkienesque worlds being the likes of UO and EQ. The potential was (and, I should say, still is) huge, representing the first serious alternative for the many gamers curious about online play, but not interested in drinking mead and slaying dragons in Ye Elven Lands of Yore.

And in the months before the launch, everything still looked promising. Those of us in on the beta testing were experiencing tons of problems—that's what beta-testing is all about—but there was so much to be excited about. The graphics looked awesome, the sci-fi character classes were fun to

play, and Funcom was figuring out cool ways to handle some of the more annoying gameplay issues (like death) that have always bogged down games like EVERQUEST. Sure, the game was buggy and slow as hell, but there was still time to fix that. And these were Norwegians, after all. We Americans are used to lazy and sloppy work—that's what makes us great. But surely those superior, ultra-serious

to be the one to review it—and I couldn't get the damn thing running long enough to render any real judgment about it.

So consider that your first review.

I don't know when it was exactly that gaming companies decided it was okay to release online games in such an unfinished state, but man is it getting old. At least games like ULTIMA

"I don't know when it was exactly that gaming companies decided it was okay to release online games in such an unfinished state, but man is it getting old."

Scandinavians would not release anything that was less than perfect, right? Wrong.

On June 27, 2001, Funcom released ANARCHY ONLINE to the world, and it was as ugly and messy as any massively-multiplayer launch to date. In my own three weeks of playing, it's been nothing but utter frustration and annoyance. Horrendous, game-killing lag; broken missions and items; monsters delivering "melee damage" from two rooms away and shooting through walls; and constant, rampant disconnections have completely killed my goodwill towards this game.

Even worse, however, has been Funcom's attitude about it. In the game's first couple weeks, they managed to put on a bogus happy face for gamers, declaring ANARCHY ONLINE "playable," while simultaneously—and rather incredibly—asking the press to "hold back" on our reviews of the game until they had solved the more serious problems. In other words, the game was done enough for you to give them your \$50 (plus \$12.95 monthly fee), but it was not done enough for us to review it.

Yeah, sure. No problem. Actually, the only reason the ANARCHY ONLINE review is not appearing in this issue, you should know, is that I was going

ONLINE had the excuse, sort of, of being the first. They had to blaze the trail, so it was bound to be tough. But we've been through this so many times now. The makers of next-generation games like ANARCHY ONLINE and WORLD WAR II ONLINE—another new game with a nightmarish launch—do not deserve the same kind of slack from either gamers or the press.

My time—our time—is precious. Most of us have way more important things to do all day, every day than play games. So once you put that game on the shelves, we shouldn't have to be patient. We shouldn't have to give you a break. We shouldn't have to understand the complexities of games like this. That's your job. And if you can't handle it, or if you fail to deliver, then it's not gamers who should have to pay the price.

Online gaming is our last great frontier. So, game-makers, please, stop blowing it. Stop with the half-assed releases. Stop with the lame excuses. Stop, just stop, with all this anarchy online. **END**

When not writing columns like this one, Jeff likes to go for walks on the beach, sit by the fireplace, and yell profanities at strangers. Ask him out at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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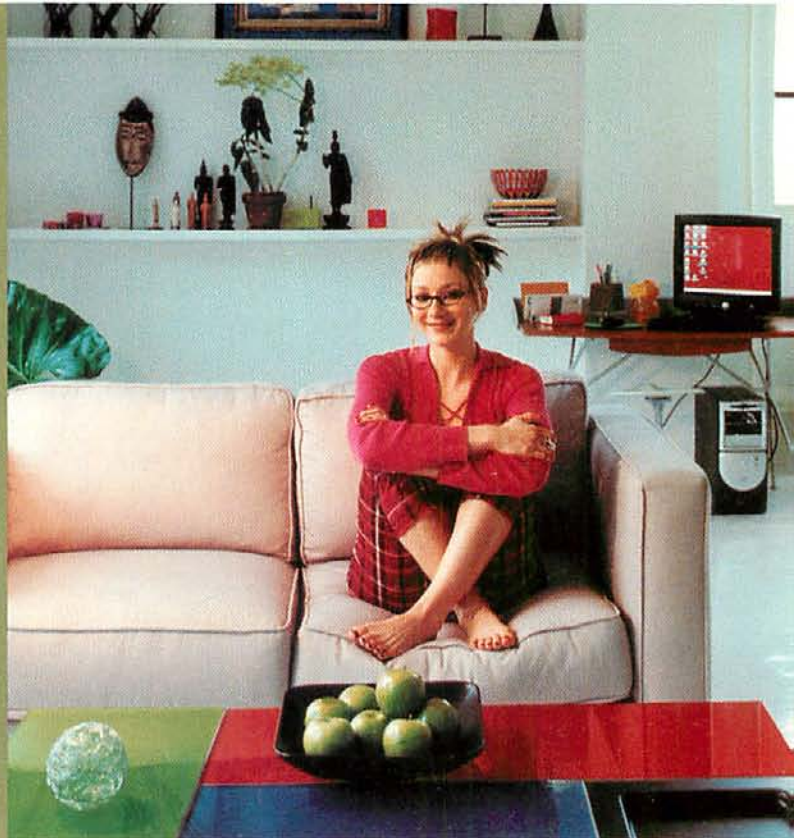
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1.8GHz.
my friends
are envious.
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are scared.



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