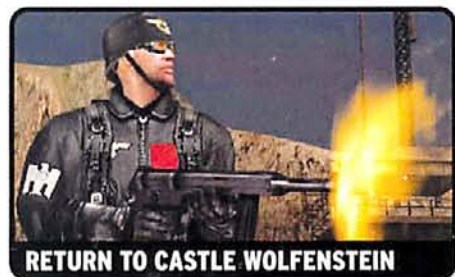


COMPUTER

January 2002 ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

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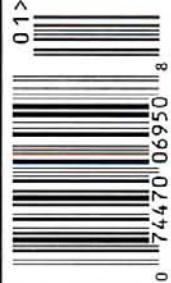
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insects in Marae Lassel

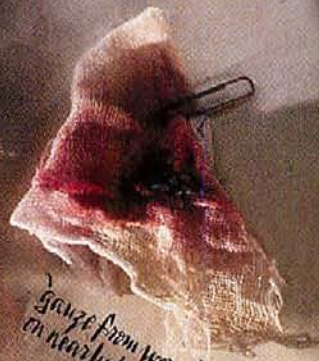


My millionth
pyreal coin - ah... the
joy of being a monarch



- claw from
nearly lost
arm

Note to Self:
Olthoi breed
deadlier than
last month

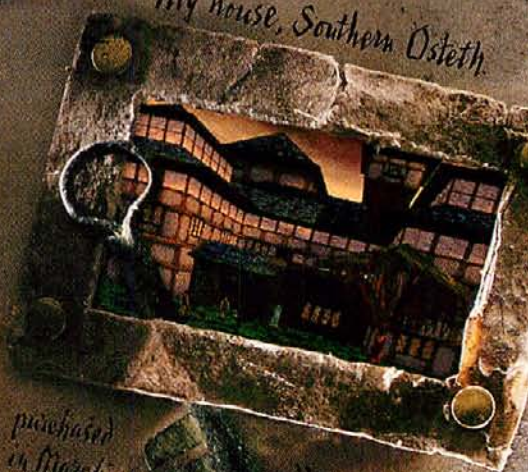


Gauge from wound
on nearly lost arm



Dusk lily from my 2nd trip
to Marae Lassel

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in March



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in axe and sword*



*"hair of the beast"
-lock of hair
from my first
tunereck killing*

*friends in my allegiance, each chosen
for a purpose,
a specific skill*



Blade Master



Enchantress



Life Mage



Archer

*Another slain beast
(see claw, see hair)*



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Obsidian Plain
-possibly the most
dangerous land
I've ever
visited*



*-Arrowhead from my
vassal's first kill*

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“YOU ARE ABOUT TO EMBARK
UPON THE GREAT CRUSADE.”

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, D-Day.



Violence



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COVER STORY

Master of Orion III

CGW visits Quicksilver Software and gets the big—make that enormous—picture of the definitive space strategy game.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

January 2002 Issue #210

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**Bad guys,
good guys,
and innocent
bystanders
all go splat
in *Mafia*.**

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MAFIA

Illusion Softworks re-creates the heady heyday of the Mob in an upcoming game.



92 CIVILIZATION III



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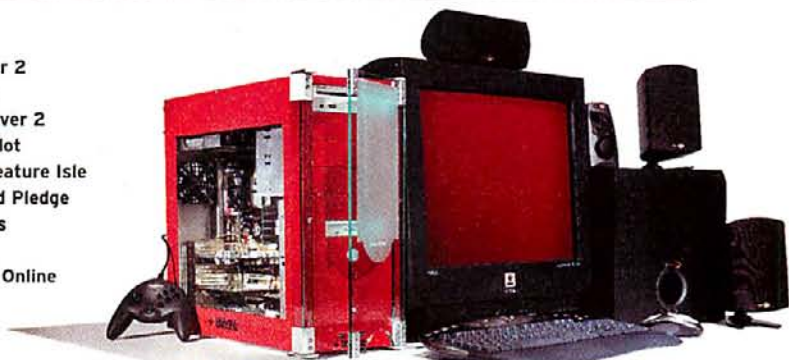
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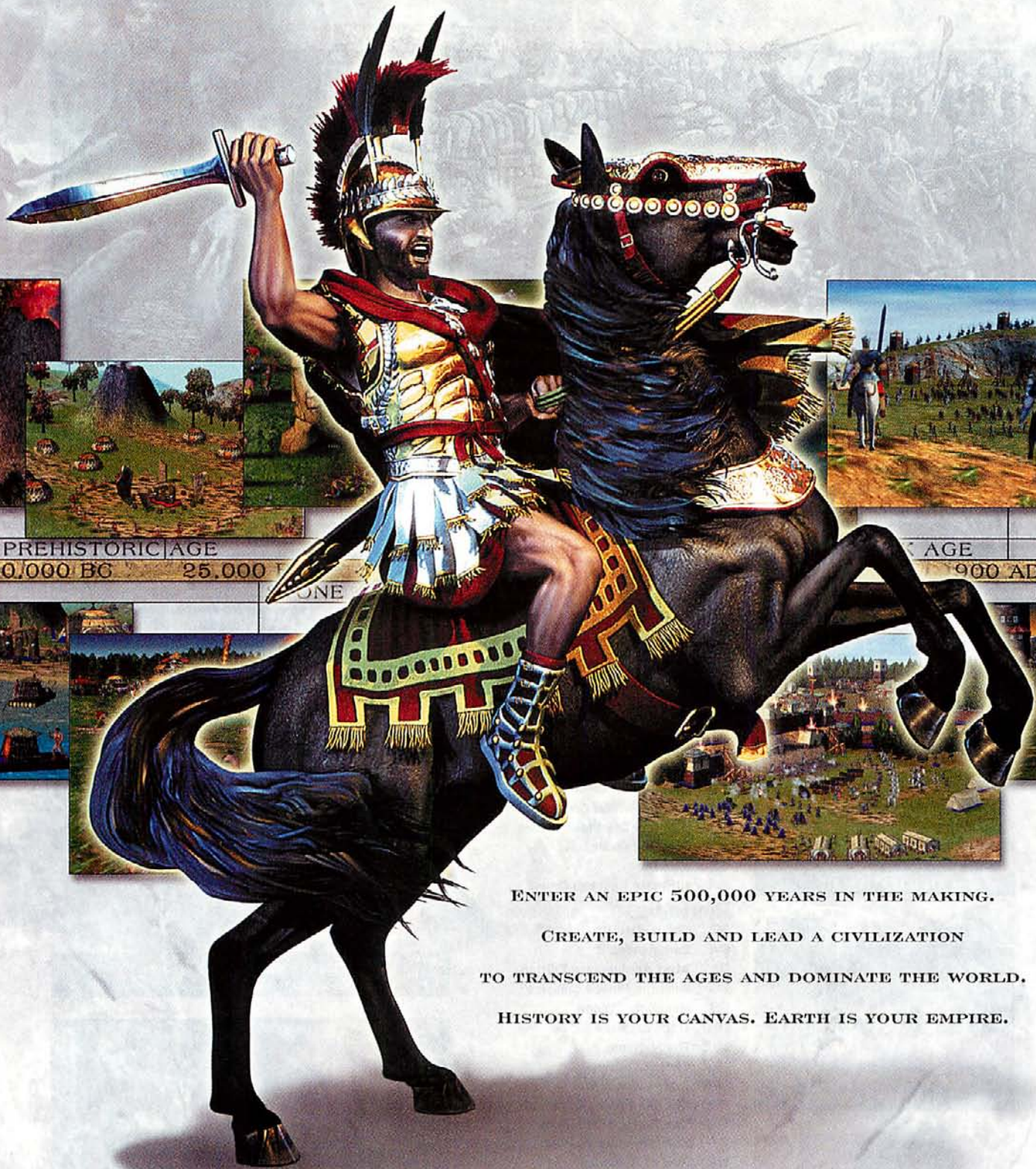
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Who's on top this year?

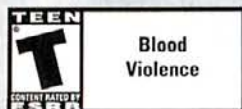


34 READ ME

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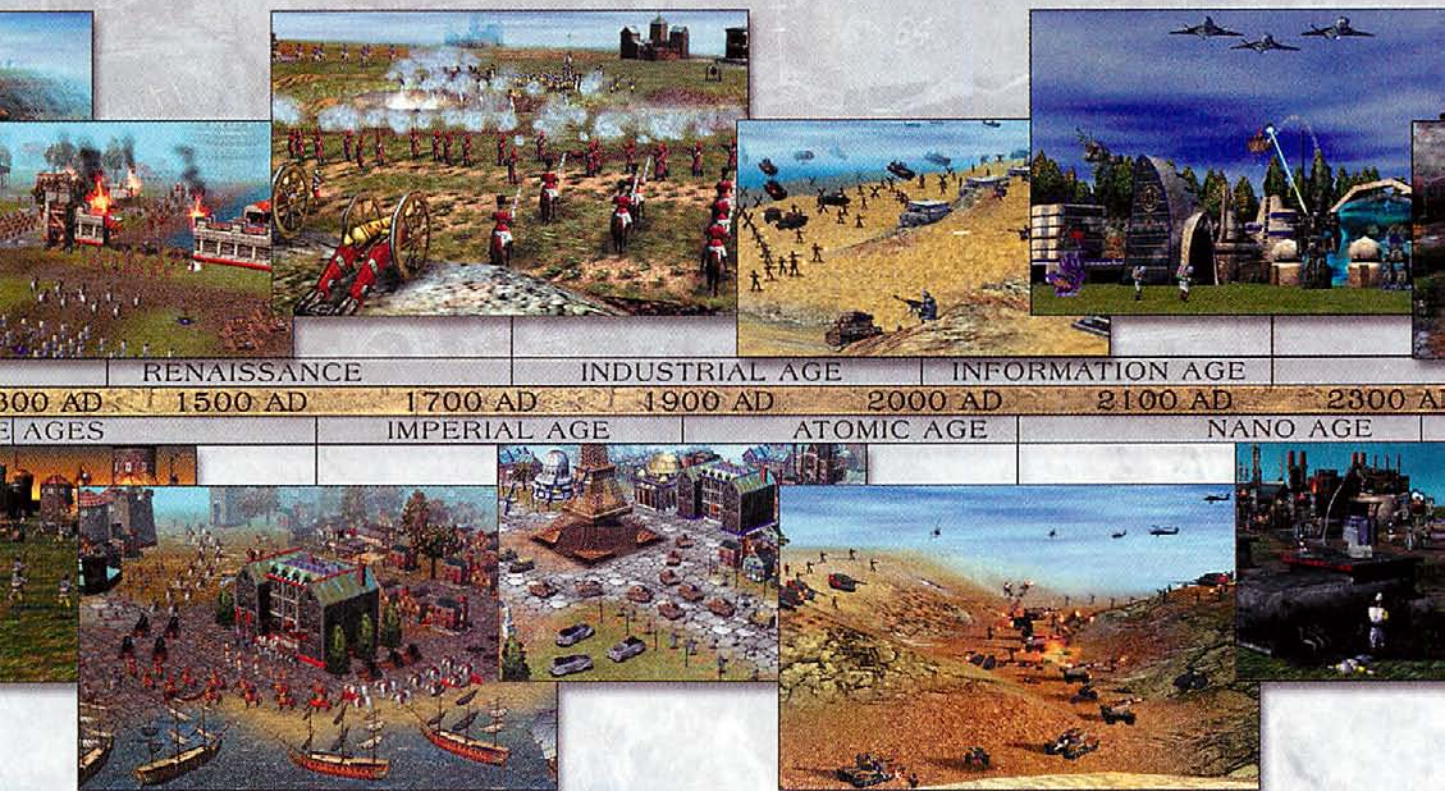


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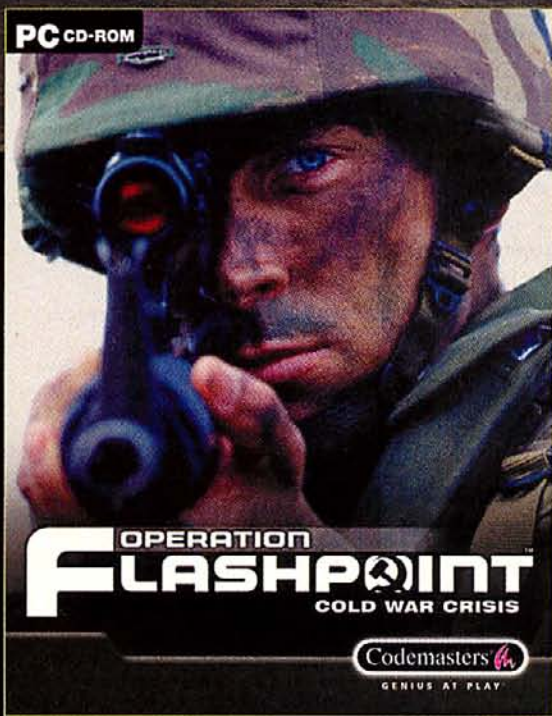


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"Operation Flashpoint is a perfect blend between fun and realism."
PC GAMER



The Resident Grown-Up

I never dreamed that at age 28, I'd be a mother of nine. Two months ago, I was hired as the managing editor for CGW. Typically, a managing editor is the organizer for a magazine. She's the one to set the deadlines, make sure things ship to the printer, set up meetings, etc. The responsible stuff.

Here it goes way beyond organizing. "Andrew, you're not allowed to play *Madden* with Wil until you get that feature laid out. Robert, are you playing *Mystery of the Druids* again? Your reviews were due last week—you're grounded to your office until they're finished!" Last week Tom asked me a question and accidentally called me Mom.

We had a meeting to brainstorm cover story ideas a few days ago. Since Jeff and Ken were busy fighting over who got which Krispy Kreme, I asked, "What are some of the ideas that people have for next month?"

"I know jujitsu!" shouted Scooter. Tom chucked a piece of doughnut at Wil. Robert started singing a Red Hot Chili Peppers song in his Howard Cosell-*opera* voice: "Give it away, give it away, give it away now!" Jason asked, "Are we done yet? I need to get back to my desk because my necromancer's about to level up." I went to my office and cried.

The guys have had their own share of frustration with me. The last game I played on a regular basis was computer solitaire. My first week, Robert came into my office and handed me a box, saying, "Here's the latest MMORPG, should be the greatest thing since the *EQ: Scars of Velious* expansion." When he registered the befuddled look on my face, he took back the box and said, "Never mind, why don't you try this fun game instead—it's called *Bejeweled*." They now recognize my perpetual look of confusion and will stop to explain terms like *mech* and *kludge* or to recount the entire history of the *Myth* franchise.

There are great things about my new job. I know lots of fun new acronyms. I can legitimize my newly developed *Bejeweled* addiction by reassuring myself that it's okay, I work on a gaming magazine, this is part of my job. My boyfriend thinks I have the coolest job ever because I bring him games. And having a boss who likes to put things off can be good—it's easy to talk him into letting us leave the office early to go play pool.

Now if you'll excuse me, there are some articles overdue—I have to go confiscate *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*.

Dana Jongewaard
Managing Editor

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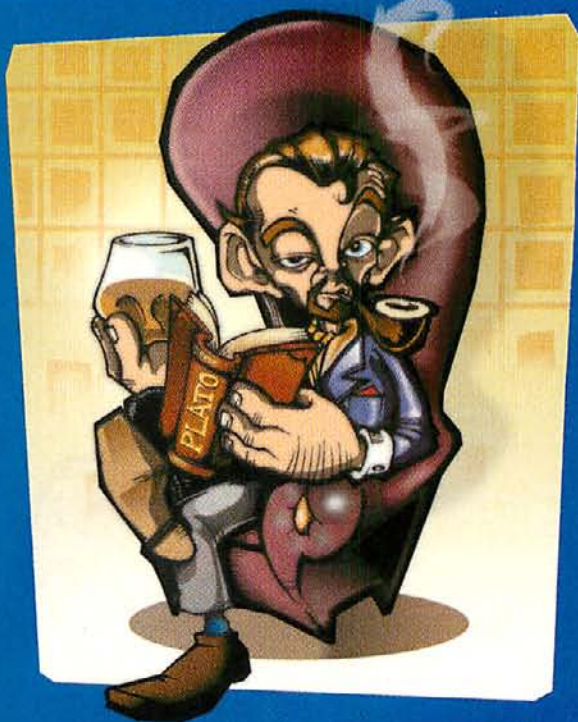
Send hate mail and brownie recipes to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

While reading Tom Price's review of *Max Payne* [November 2001], I had to pause and ask myself, "Am I a moron? Am I so poorly educated that I don't know such simple English basics such as noir, the Bard, or the works of Dashiell Hammett, Irvine Welsh, or James Ellroy?" I'd like to consider myself somewhat intelligent, but I didn't know I had to be an English major to thoroughly appreciate a review in *CGW*. The article was well written, and correct, but who was the review's target audience, the English lit professor at Harvard? Next time could you just say the writing sucked?

G. Gray
Cloverdale, California

Your letter struck a chord here at *CGW*, G. Perhaps it was the tone of quiet desperation, so famously recognized by Thoreau as one of modern man's greatest afflictions, that affected us. Or perhaps it was your Joycean sense of outraged anti-intellectual intellectualism that impressed us so. Or perhaps you're just a moron.



Sergeant Shifrin Sets Everyone Straight

Greetings, esteemed ones of *CGW*!!
A quick response to a letter written by Aybara Wolf in the December 2001 issue—and a defense for Tom McDonald.

Aybara should look a bit deeper into history. I've been on active duty in the Army for about 16 years (I can retire in four more years and then work for the ancient one, Jeff Green) and stationed in Germany for nine of those 16 years. Of course, in the military, we are required to learn nuggets of lore so we can spout them off with confidence when asked.

Now, Aybara does correctly state that the German word for tank is "Panzer." But if you look a bit further back in history—say, around World War I—tanks were not originally called tanks. Because of their design, the WWI tank looked like a water cistern (a term used by the British Army). "Cistern" is simply another word for tank—i.e., "water tank." Over a period of time (and possibly due to some American language influence), the term "tank" instead of "cistern" stuck.

As far as *fliegen* goes, I have NO idea where that came from. Tom McDonald is on his own there.

Keep up the fine work and I'll keep my subscription intact.

D. Shifrin
Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army

Rule One of Fight Club: Don't Mention the Ads

On page 80 of issue 208, there is a black-and-white ad for *Civ III* featuring



Gandhi fighting Abraham Lincoln.

I believe this is a nod to *Fight Club*: Lincoln and Gandhi are the two historical figures Brad Pitt and Ed Norton's characters said they'd want to fight.

Canada sucks.

Jeremy

Wow, good catch, Jeremy. But what's with the slur against

Canada? We don't condone that kind of behavior around here.

More Bejeweled Tales of Woe

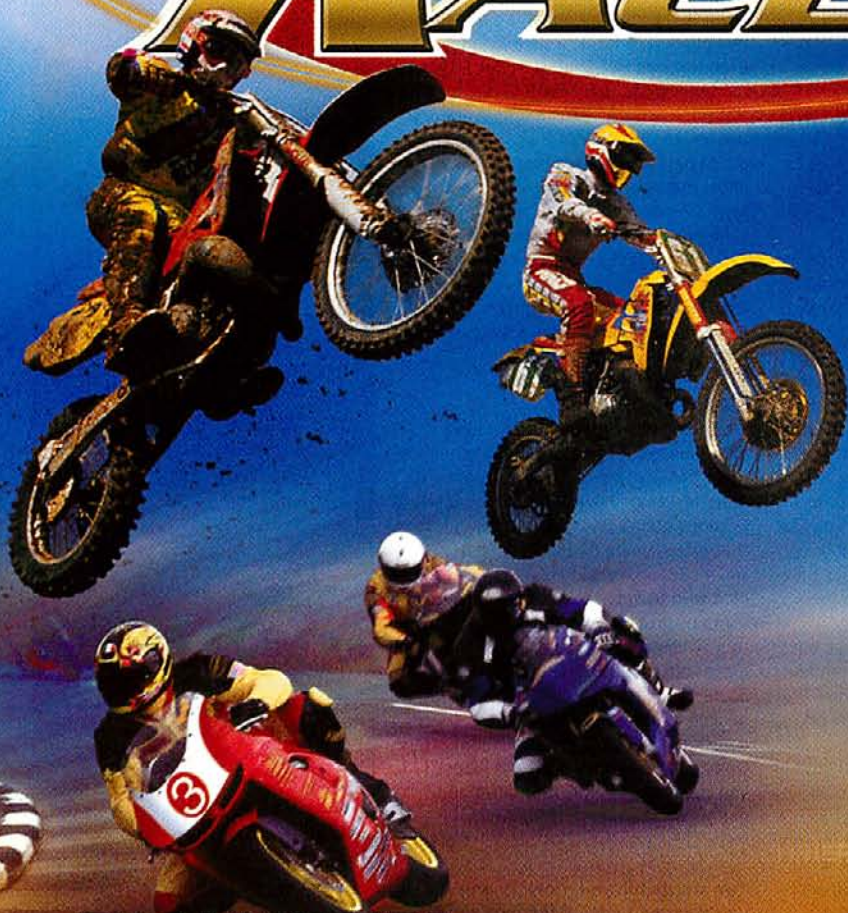
My wife has never understood why I choose playing video games over mowing the lawn, working, and bathing (thanks *EverQuest*). So I built her a Pentium III 1GHz system with GeForce2 (she was, of course, unimpressed), with the hope of getting her into gaming. Maybe start off with *Barbie Equestrian* or something, and work up to *Diablo II* all-nighters. No luck. Then came *Bejeweled*. "Hey honey! Check out this pretty jewel game!" Now she spends more time playing that than I spend playing MY games! All hail *Bejeweled*! Of course now, nights out, dinner, and sex are out of the question. Ummm...I gotta go get a life now.

Dan Bejma
Carlsbad, California

I've subscribed for about two years. I know that's nothing compared to your Big-Time Subscribers, but I'm only 14, so BACK OFF! Okay, now I just wanted to tell you all that your magazine kicks major butt. And also, my lifelong goal is to make it into the top 15 scorers for *Bejeweled* on Zone.com. I'm ranked like 735,274 right now—I'm almost there!

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MAIL BITES

The kids have enough gaming magazines. Be a MAN's magazine. Be a cross between *Maxim*, *High Times*, and *Mad* magazine. Blaze a trail!

Mr. Rhee

Kudos for the *Wrath of Khan* reference in the title of the *Startopia* review. It's this commitment to true geekdom that keeps my faith in *CGW* alive.

Intelligoth

Who was the bright guy that took a twit from the mailroom, made him "technical editor," and allowed him to have a column?

Steve Madsen

Dear editors of *Crappy Geeky Wusses* (that's what it stands for right?)...

Ryan Kelly

Keep up the good work guys (and gals)!
Brenden Nelson

Yeah, that's a nice "life goal" there, Brenden. Very ambitious. Can we talk to your father a sec?

Anarchy Online: Did We Go Too Easy On 'Em?

I have been subscribing to *CGW* for about seven years now. I love the magazine and count on you guys to guide me on what games to spend my gaming dollars, and more important, my limited gaming time on. If you say a game blows chunks, I don't go near it. I have jumped the gun in the past and bought games before reading your reviews and have been sorry—most recently with *Star Trek: New Worlds*.

Having said that, I was disappointed to read the "review" of *Anarchy Online* by Thomas McDonald (November 2001). This article read more like a "just hang in there with us, guys, we'll get it fixed" propaganda item from Funcom. Granted, facts were presented and a balanced list of the game's good and bad points was evident. However, I got the feeling that I was reading an op/ed piece as opposed to an unbiased review. It was the last line of the article that really got to me. McDonald writes, "When it becomes fully functional, *Anarchy Online* will be the MMORPG by which others will be measured." Anyone or anything can be great if they fully realize their potential. It is the act of actually fully realizing said potential that makes someone or something great.

Bottom line, I just hope that you guys stay away from wanting a game to be something it is not, and instead let us know what it REALLY is. I depend on you guys. You let me down. Don't do it again or I'll have to come down to the offices and spank Jeff Green in front of the entire *CGW* staff!! 'Nuff said.

Love,
Jeff Taylor

AO may be a great game in theory, but so was the idea that the sun rotated around the Earth. It didn't work out well in the end, but in theory it was really nice and pretty.

You must have been paid to write that review. I don't understand how you even got the game to run long enough to get a real review out of it. It had to be a bribe—that is the only way to justify that review, or else a band of supertrained ninja monkeys took over the magazine and let the review go through.

Whichever it was, I am ashamed of you all. I thought that, even though your magazine is a gaming magazine, you were still required to deliver the truth. Do you know the truth? YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH!!! (Or at least

not in this review.) In closing, just two words come to mind: for shame!
Aesorian the Aristocrat

Pool of Excrement

I am an RPG freak on both console and PC (but I don't like *Diablo*). Anyway, I recently discovered the next *Pool of Radiance* game. I saw it at ebgames.com. Then I got interested and went to Gamespot.com. Why was this game not in a preview or Inside Role-Playing or even freaking Hot Shots?! So far, it looks ten times better than *Baldur's Gate II*. I just hope your review is a full review and not one of those micro ones. All those RP gamers who are reading this just know that *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor* is going to be one of the best-looking AD&D games around.

Name lost because we're stupid

Our review is in this month's issue. Read it and find out why we avoided this game.

Games...or Girls?

Which do I pick? On one hand, I have girls, who are wonderful. On the other hand, I have computer games (like *Starcraft*) that I have played for years. Recently I don't find myself striving for that extra minute on *Diablo II*. Instead when I get on my computer, I sit and chat with friends. I think about girls and try to be around them. I still find it fun to play computer games, but I am no longer obsessed. Please help me! If I could get hold of a good game, I might be able to get sucked back in. Computer games can be so much better than women because they don't get mad. If you could, please SUGGEST A GAME to get me off this girl stuff right now.

Colson

Two words for you, Colson, and you'll never think about real girls again: *Alley Cats*.

Blizzard Sucks

The Rune-word combo "duress" in your November issue [Gamer's Edge] is bull****. I wasted a lot of time and effort acquiring those runes and the best three-socket armor in the game, only to have it be a complete ****ing waste.

Last damn *CGW* I buy,

Ray

We got those rune combos straight from Blizzard, so blame them. We take no responsibility for the editorial content of our magazine. Just kidding. We're sorry, Ray. Please don't leave us.

We Meant to Do That

I am sorry to say that you, my friends, demigods of computer gaming, screwed up. Oh, and what a stupid mistake it was.



Leelee Sobieski Comer

Poor Jeff Green. The guy brown-nosed and back-stabbed his way to the top, yet he still gets no respect from his underlings. Jeff, you should can Tom Price and William O'Neal and replace them with Leelee Sobieski. Sure, she probably couldn't edit a grocery list even if her life were depending on it, but a girl with that much mammary potential would make a great intern, to say the least.

All hail King Jeff!

Uncle Jim

We're not exactly sure what you mean by "mammary potential," Uncle Jim, but every time we say that phrase out loud, Scooter starts sweating and twitching. Leelee starts here next week.

In the last issue (December 2001) on page 138, on your winning trick, you have a screen shot of *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction*. Last time I checked, *Ultima Online* was not a *Diablo II* expansion pack. Tell Mr. Green there to let up on the beans and pistachios diet—the fumes are screwing you up.

No need for any thanks, though your next Dream Machine will suffice. And maybe the *Diablo II* expansion. And *Blue Shift*. And *Baldur's Gate II* and *Throne of Bhaal*. And an optical mouse. Or just time travel to get me *World of Warcraft*. (I'd estimate 30 to 40 years from now.)

Keep up the good writing and the dumb mistakes.

Jaymi "AbacusTafai" Mistry

While we're happy you found this mistake, we're not so happy that you have made your demigods look bad. So no free games for you. Instead, we offer you this exciting prize: We have decided to NOT cancel your subscription!

"IF JOHN WOO WERE TO MAKE A GAME,
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"[T]HIS SHOOTER BREAKS AWAY FROM THE GAMING PACK...CREAT[ING] THE KIND OF TENSION AND VISUAL WONDER THAT THE BEST ACTION MOVIES GENERATE." - COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

WHO SAID THE 90'S WERE BAD?!

GAMESPOT.COM RATING: 92%	FIRINGSQUAD.GAMERS.COM RATING: 90%	GAMEZILLA.COM RATING: 94%	AVIDCAMER.NET RATING: 94%	COLLEGE GAMERS RATING: 95%	GAMEPLANET.CO.NZ RATING: 90%	PC GAMER USA RATING: 90%
IGN.COM RATING: 93%	GAMERSPULSE.COM RATING: 98%	CNN.COM RATING: 90%	GAMESFIRST.COM RATING: 100%	PLAYBOY RATING: 95%	GAMEON.IT RATING: 91%	GAME INDUSTRY NEWS RATING: 100%
VOODOOEXTREME.COM RATING: 92%	PCGCENTRAL.COM RATING: 97%	3DCAMING.NET RATING: 95%	GAMEHELPER.COM RATING: 92%	PCALPHA.COM RATING: 94%	GAMEVISIONS.COM RATING: 98%	3DCG RATING: 100%
GAMESPY.COM RATING: 90%	GAMES.TUCOWS.COM RATING: 100%	GAMES XTREME RATING: 95%	GAMEGENIE.COM RATING: 100%	GAMEGURU.BOX.SK RATING: 93%	LISMOREGAMERS.COM RATING: 90%	CONE GOLD RATING: 96%
GAMEZONE.COM RATING: 97%	SHREDCO.COM RATING: 93%	PG STRATEGY GAMER RATING: 100%	PC ALPHA RATING: 94%	BARRYSWORLD.COM RATING: 90%	TECHTV.COM RATING: 100%	WARGAMER RATING: 100%
GAMEPRO.COM RATING: 95%	PCSHOOTER.COM RATING: 80%	THETRIPEHELIX.COM RATING: 90%	THE-CAD.COM RATING: 98%	H2H.CA RATING: 93%	INTELLICAMER.COM RATING: 90%	GAME CLUB CENTRAL RATING: 90%
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GAME-OVER.NET RATING: 90%	PCGAMEWORLD.COM RATING: 97%	FRAGLAND.NET RATING: 92.5%	JESTER NEWS RATING: 96%	FBI/REVIEWS.COM RATING: 91%	LOADEDINC.COM RATING: 90%	VIPERLAIR.COM RATING: 90%
PCARENA.COM RATING: 90%	ACTIVEMIN.COM RATING: 92%	GAMESRADAR.COM RATING: 95%	PC GAMER (UK) RATING: 95%	BETA-WORLD.COM RATING: 90%	BATTLE-FIELDS.COM RATING: 100%	ONEPC RATING: 95%

*QUOTE FROM COMPUTER GAMES MAGAZINE



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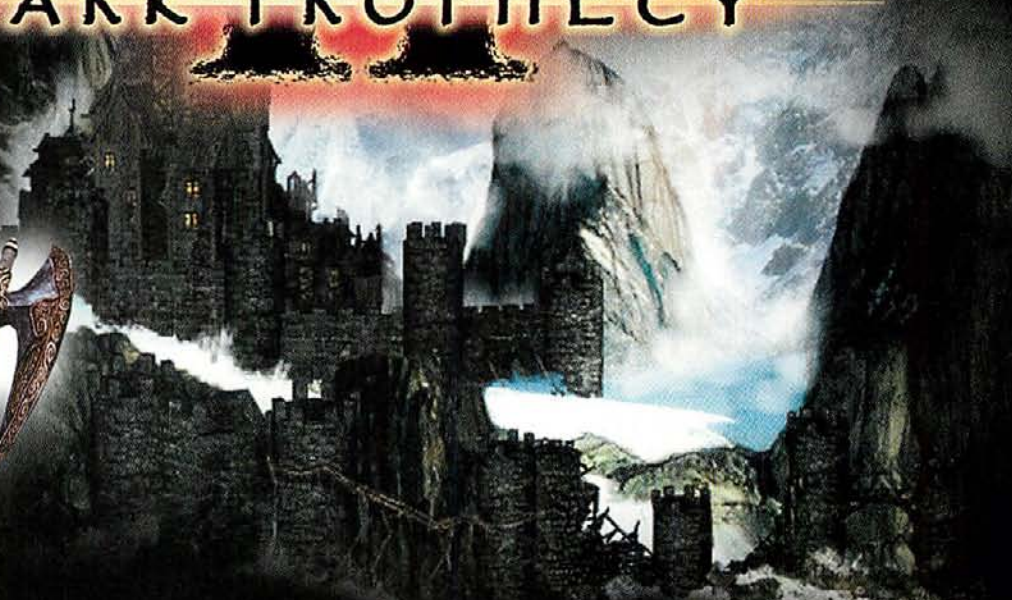




THE EMPIRE IS
IN A STATE OF RAMPANT
CORRUPTION SINCE THE
LOSS OF THE HEIR TO
THE THRONE.

DISCIPLES

DARK PROPHECY

THE MOUNTAIN
CLANS ATTEMPT TO
REUNITE THEIR LOST TRIBES
AND RETURN TO THEIR
ANCIENT WAY OF LIFE.





THE LEGIONS OF
THE DAMNED PLOT
THEIR VENGEANCE AS THE SEAL
ON THEIR GOD'S EARTHLY
PRISON DETERIORATES.

FROM A TIME OF PEACE COMES AN AGE OF WAR



THE UNDEAD
HORDES GODDESS
SEARCHES FOR DIVINE BLOOD
TO REVIVE HER DEPARTED
SOULMATE.

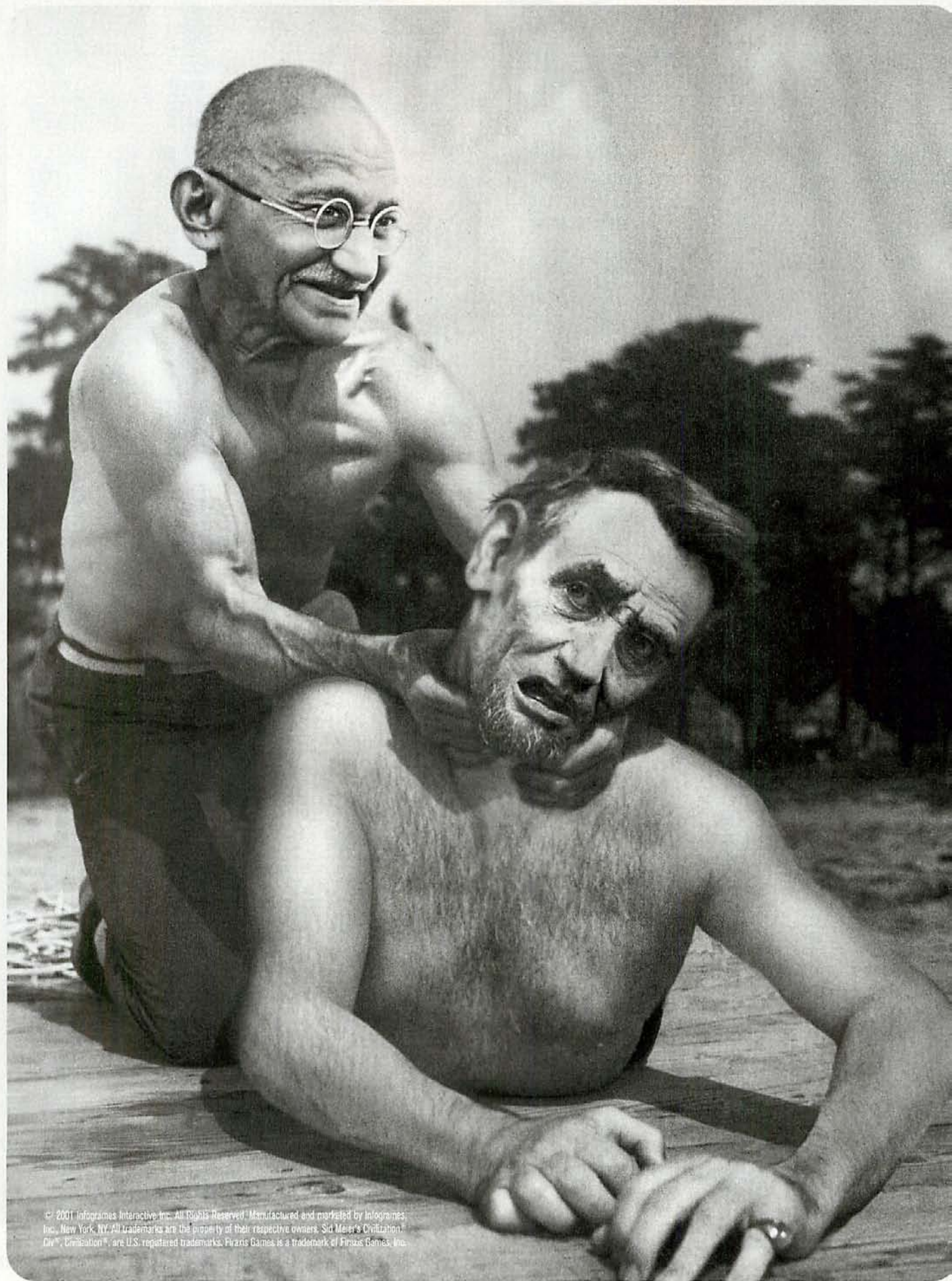
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Rewrite history.



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POWER WITH NEW
MILITARY UNITS,
LARGER ARMIES AND
NEW WAYS TO
ENGAGE THE ENEMY.

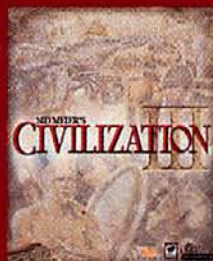
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AS YOU CREATE
YOUR CIVILIZATION.



TRADE SHREWDLY
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VALUABLE RESOURCES
AND EXOTIC
LUXURIES FOR
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With Civilization III, Sid Meier and Firaxis Games unveil the ultimate version of the greatest strategy game of all time. Civilization III is loaded with exciting new features and pathways to victory. Demonstrate your cultural savvy and diplomatic finesse as you match wits with the greatest minds in history. Set up trade alliances. Enter into truces. Or just do things the old-fashioned way and use your military power to take what you want. This highly addictive journey builds on and enriches the Civilization experience and makes this the must-have game of the year. Civilization III. History is up for grabs. www.civ3.com



Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price



Go from indoor environments to realistic outdoor scenes faster than you can say "Skaarj." Come to think of it, how do you say "Skaarj"?

There are more than 15 weapons, of the Familiar Feel (Terran military hardware like this rocket launcher) and New Car Smell (exotic alien weapons like the MindClaw) variety.

UNREAL II

To many fanboys, there are really only two games, two 3D engines, two modes of gaming thought. We won't insult the *Unreal* fanboys by even mentioning that other game on the same page as this gorgeous shot of squads of Marines and Mercenaries duking it out in the glorious *Unreal II*. Let's just say that some gamers should be quaking in their boots right now.

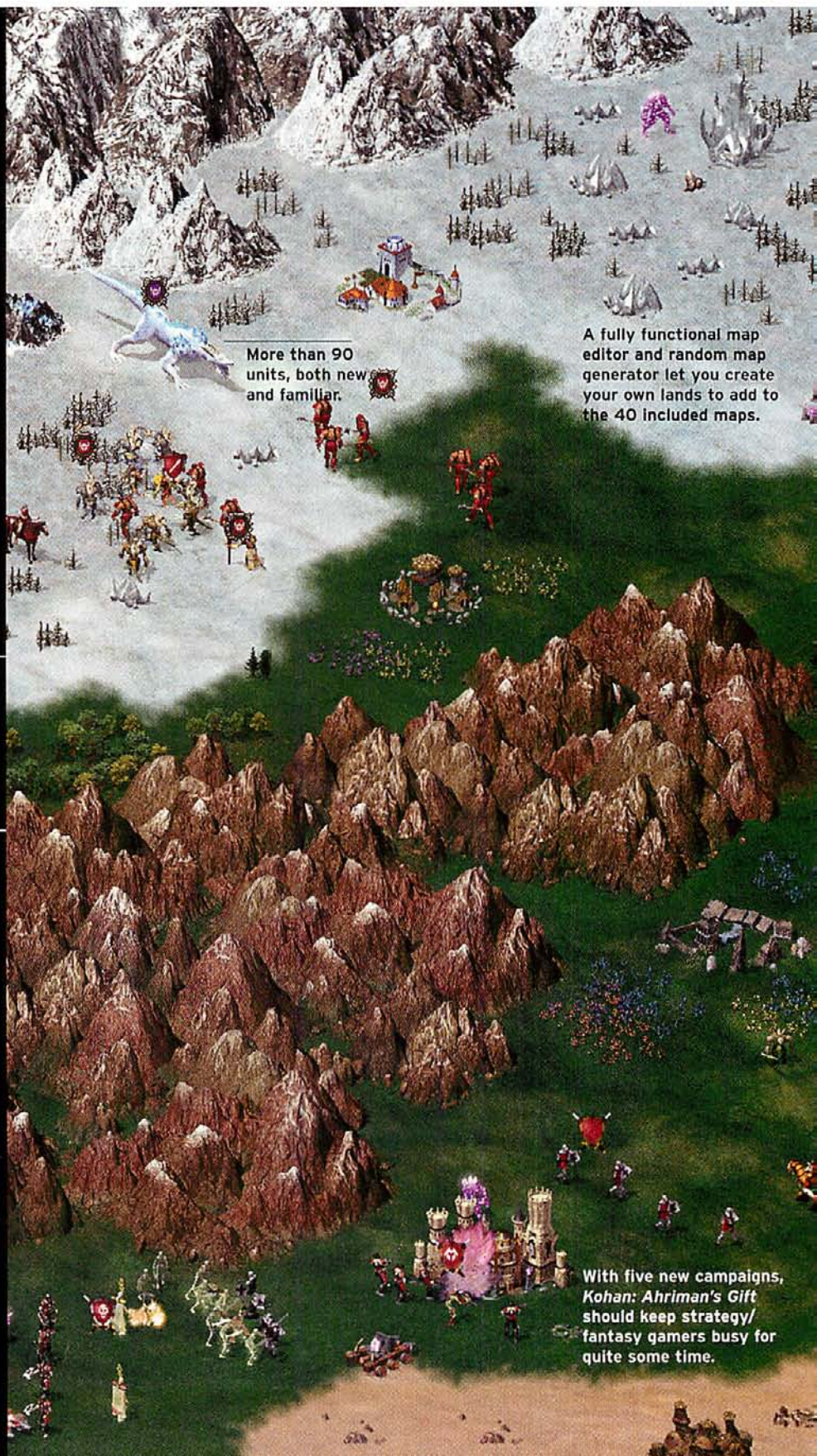
This Marine didn't make it—but *U2*'s new skeletal animation system made his last moments spectacular indeed.



Look at those pretty particle effects and all that polygonal grass. New Unreal II tech brings you tens of thousands of polygons onscreen.

Run away! Run away! This heavily armored Marine has suddenly decided he doesn't like the odds.

LOADING...



More than 90 units, both new and familiar.

A fully functional map editor and random map generator let you create your own lands to add to the 40 included maps.

KOHAN: AHRIMAN'S GIFT

We love pleasant surprises. And when *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* worked its way onto our playlists earlier this year, we got just that. Now comes another. *Kohan: Ahriman's Gift* is the first *Kohan* expansion; more accurately, it's a stand-alone prequel, but considering the huge amount of gameplay that it adds to the original game, it's almost like a sequel. At least this should tide us over until there is one.

With five new campaigns, *Kohan: Ahriman's Gift* should keep strategy/fantasy gamers busy for quite some time.



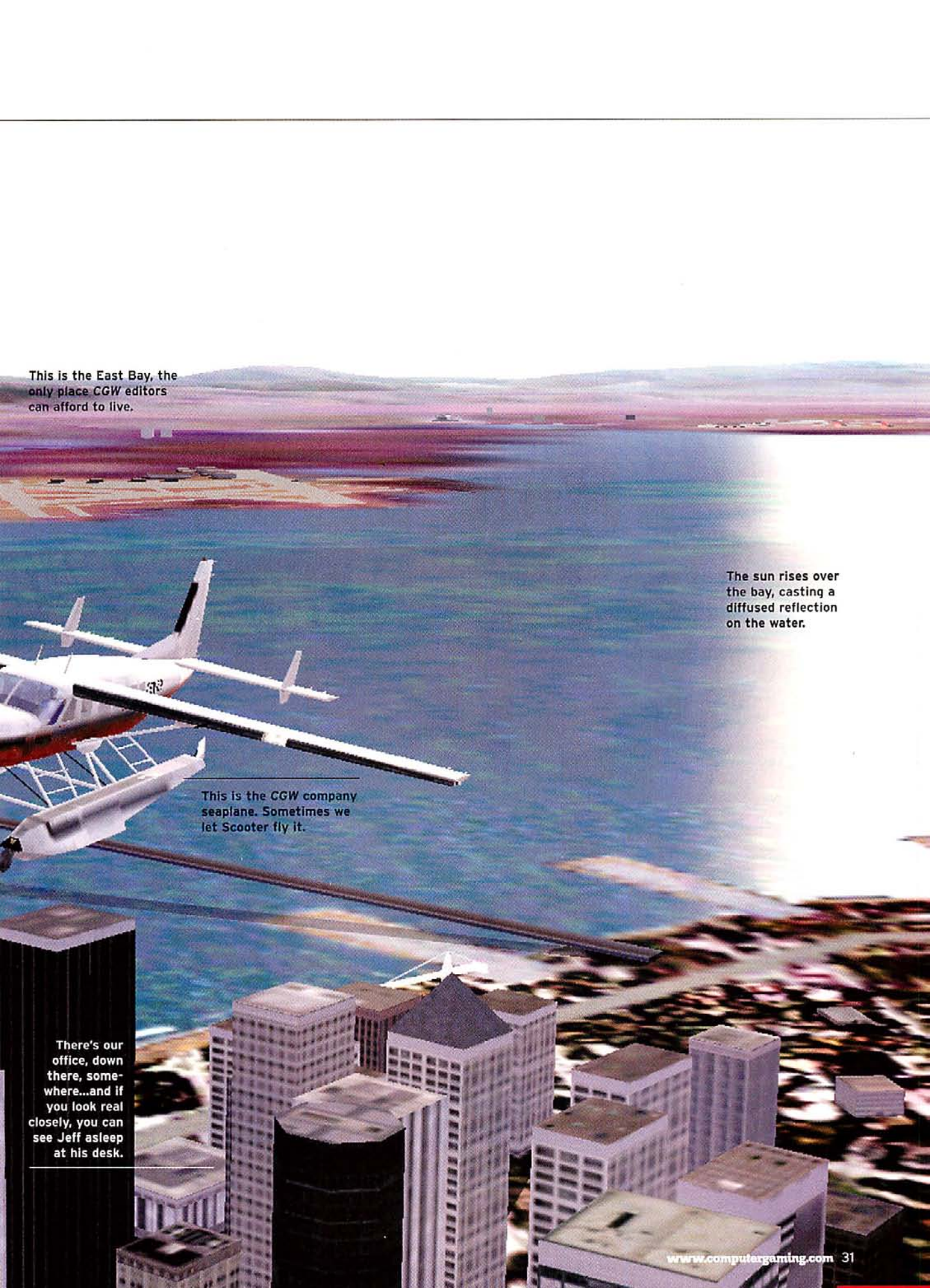
There are more than 70 heroes, 100 spells, and 75 technologies. It'll take weeks just to try them all.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002

Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* series is one of the longest running and most successful franchises in all of PC gaming. All of PC software for that matter. Every year they make strides in not just physics and avionics realism, but in visual realism as well. As you can see, this year's model (which went gold just before press time) is no different. As long as we can fly over the CGW offices, we're happy.



Bridges and buildings cast real-time shadows.



This is the East Bay, the only place CGW editors can afford to live.

The sun rises over the bay, casting a diffused reflection on the water.

This is the CGW company seaplane. Sometimes we let Scooter fly it.

There's our office, down there, somewhere...and if you look real closely, you can see Jeff asleep at his desk.





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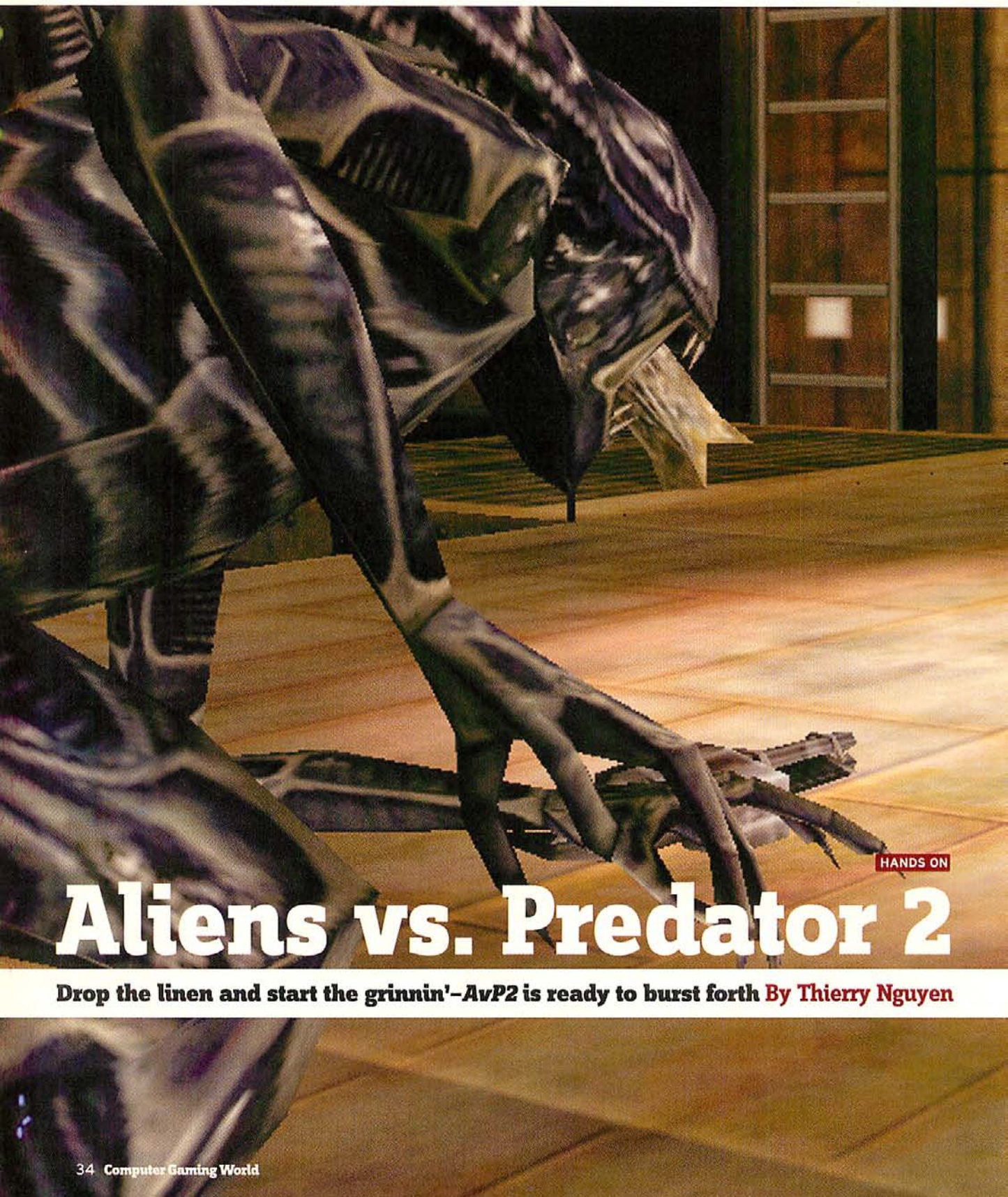
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CONTENT RATED BY
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VIOLENCE



Read Me

A smorgasbord of news, opinion, and random stuff Edited by Ken Brown



HANDS ON

Aliens vs. Predator 2

Drop the linen and start the grinnin'—AvP2 is ready to burst forth By Thierry Nguyen

**MOTORIN'**

Motor City Online is far more than hot cars and cool paint. **PAGE 36**

**FEMME FATALE**

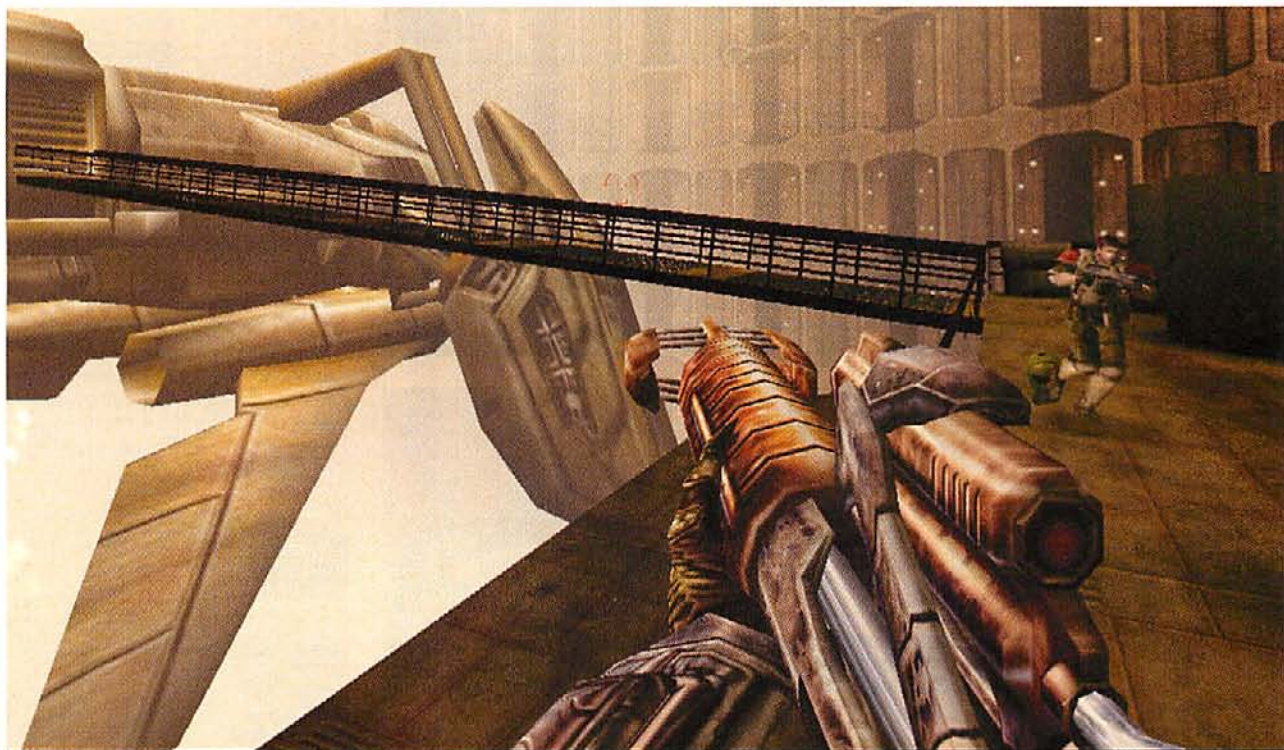
Sexy heroine promises more action in No One Lives Forever 2. **PAGE 37**

**BETTERQUEST**

Dark Age of Camelot outclasses EverQuest at its own game. **PAGE 40**

**LIL' CRITTERS**

This expansion to Black & White is sure to please the gods. **PAGE 44**



The Predator's spear gun acts as a sniper rifle. A shot to the head lets you collect the cranium for a nice trophy for your den.

Who would turn down the chance to leap up onto someone's face and implant an egg down their throat? No one here at CGW, that's for sure. And now everyone can implant with reckless abandon thanks to *Aliens vs. Predator 2*.

Right before this issue went to press, we played the shipping version of the game, and so far we like what we've seen. For starters, it runs much better than the single-player demo, which sometimes got chunky in a firefight. There have been several improvements to the single-player gameplay, such as the new ability to take only as much health/ammo as you need when you run across power-ups. What seemed the most impressive though, was the *Rashomon*-esque nature of the single-player storyline. It jumps across several time periods, and many times when you're playing as a marine, you'll see a predator run off into the distance—and find yourself playing that exact predator during the predator campaign. And unlike the first game, this version has enough atmosphere to give you the feeling of playing a scene in the *Aliens* or *Predator* films.

Multiplayer in the shipping version also seems much better than what we exper-

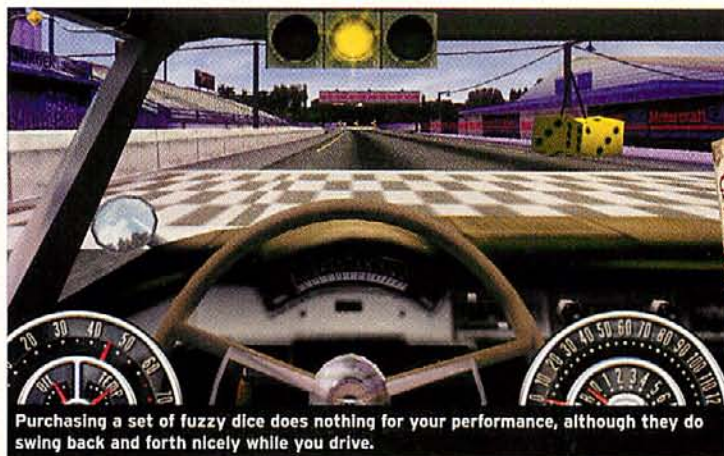


Now, getting the most frags seems more a matter of player skill than of race.

enced in the multiplayer demo. Playing an alien in the multiplayer demo was tantamount to suicide. But after we had played a few free-for-all and team deathmatch bouts online, it seemed to us that the racial balance had been ironed out. Now, getting the most frags seems more a matter of player skill than of race. Many times in the office, one of our editors would proclaim, "Well, if you do so-and-so, then the

predator/marine/alien dominates!"

A few problems still show up. The single-player AI looks like it might need some tweaking; and, at least in the marine campaign, we found some questionable design decisions (the lack of marine bot AI support means the marine fights by himself through much of the campaign). But these are just our first impressions; look for a full review next month.



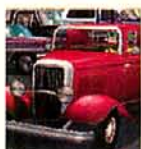
Purchasing a set of fuzzy dice does nothing for your performance, although they do swing back and forth nicely while you drive.



For strong racing and consistency, you get cash and upgraded capabilities.



Foolhardy driving will get you few invitations to succeeding events.



A place where geeks and gear-heads can compete on equal terms.

HANDS ON

Mana for Motorheads

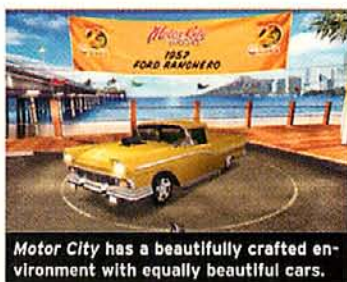
Revolutionary *Motor City Online* is far more than hot cars and cool paint **By Gord Goble**

Electronic Arts' hotly anticipated hot-rodding monster has finally made it to the starting line. Judging by its final beta test—which was smooth and hassle-free—*Motor City's* all-consuming automotive environment could seriously alter the way many computerers spin their wheels. It is an environment where beautifully crafted 1940s street rods meet realistically modeled late-'60s muscle cars. Where dirt ovals and paved speedways vie with road circuits, drag strips, and variable weather to test the mettle of its drivers. Where players scrounge the auction blocks for that one key part to restore or rebuild their trophy ride, argue endlessly the merits of a lowered Nova, and contend with ever-shifting alliances. And it's all done online, for virtual money or pink slips.

The game features a stunning variety of event parameters to keep the streets safe from fender-bashers and a complex physics model that rewards skill and punishes pedal-mashing. And while good drivers and their heavily

modified vehicles will inevitably damage or lose their equipment in high-profile showdowns, rookies can race without risk through low-level sponsored events.

Yet *Motor City's* true strength lies in its wonderful sense of community and expansive between-race interfaces, in which all competitors are made to feel part of a multifaceted virtual world. If EA manages to eliminate the instances of opponent warping that hindered its otherwise compelling beta campaign, *Motor City Online's* \$40 sticker price will seem like bus fare to the racetrack.



Motor City has a beautifully crafted environment with equally beautiful cars.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

THE GOOD STRATEGY GAME BONANZA

With the exception of gems like *Kohan* and *Startopia*, it's been a quiet

year for strategy games. But the floodgates are opening. *Civilization III*, *Commandos 2*, *Stronghold*, and *Monopoly Tycoon* are all outstanding year-end releases. And *Age of Mythology*, *MOO3*, and *WarCraft III* are still on the horizon. Sleepless nights again—finally!!!



THE BAD HALO

So, *Halo*, a game we once put on our cover as one of "the five games that will change gaming," has finally gone gold—and it looks as awesome as we had predicted. Guys around the office can't stop playing it. So what's the problem? We're playing it on the Xbox, that's the problem. Freakin' Microsoft traitors.

THE UGLY POOL OF RADIANCE

Ahh, another heartwarming story of incompetence: A highly anticipated game with a built-in drooling fanbase! The sequel to one of the best RPGs ever made! The first RPG with the Third Edition *D&D* rules! And then...they release it in an inexcusably bug-ridden state. Next time you don't plan on finishing, why don't you just not start?





Ninja Boss, Isako



NOLF 2 will be even more immersive, thanks to a new engine that can render surprisingly detailed scenes.



Be sure to admire this mime's facial animations before you put a bullet in him.

FIRST LOOK

Cate Archer Returns!

Sexy heroine promises more action in *No One Lives Forever 2* By Ken Brown

After stealing our hearts in last year's best action game, Cate Archer is tuning up her snowmobile and polishing her pistols for an encore. It might be hard to improve upon the original game's brilliant mix of campy spy-spoof and over-the-top shootouts. But after selling 350,000 copies of *No One Lives Forever*, Monolith Studios is eager to try. They intend to raise the bar in *NOLF 2* with better graphics, more varied gameplay, and more of the snappy dialogue that was such a hallmark of the original.

Monolith is playing coy concerning the details, but the game's lead designer Craig Hubbard (who also designed the original) offered a glimpse of what's in store. *NOLF 2* will once again put players in the fuzzy pink slippers of a '60s superspy, but the sequel may take some liberties. Hubbard says, "We're trying to create a game in the spirit of *NOLF*

rather than its literal image. We want to build on the things we enjoyed about the first game without being weighed down by its shortcomings."

In H.A.R.M.'s Way

Cate will again battle the evil forces of H.A.R.M., which will take her to a variety of exotic locales including Japan, India, and Akron, Ohio. The gameworld and everything in it will boast significantly higher polygon counts and improved performance, thanks to a new version of the rendering engine known as LithTech Jupiter. The world will also be more interactive, allowing you to bump, activate, or destroy many features of the environment.

The designers are placing more emphasis on accommodating different playing styles this time around. Their aim, Hubbard says, is to create relatively

open environments and fill them with possibilities, leaving it to players to decide how to accomplish their goals.

Sound will play a key role. AI characters will be able to hear everything that the player can hear. So, for example, reloading a weapon, opening a door, or knocking over an empty bottle may arouse suspicion. If you're not careful, you might accidentally startle roosting pigeons, bringing a nearby guard to investigate. Sometimes you can use this to your advantage, by getting a bad guy to leave his post so you can sneak by.

We'll bring you more details (without giving away the best surprises) as the game nears its holiday 2002 release.

Are you ready to slip back into the leopard-skin skirt of a '60s superspy?



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Claim a castle as your own through fierce battle.
But are you strong enough to defend it?



Use the power of magic to aid
your friends or destroy your enemies.

Lord British Is Back

In November and December, gaming's legendary Lord British will enter the world of Lineage to assist Blood Pledges in the ongoing battle to protect the castle thrones of Lineage from those who would bring harm to the land. Create your account with the Lineage CD enclosed with this magazine and bring your guildmates to join forces with Lord British as he makes his triumphant return to the world of gaming!

You can also download the entire free version of Lineage here,
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HANDS ON

BetterQuest

Dark Age of Camelot outclasses EverQuest at its own game By Mark Asher

Dark Age probably had the smoothest launch yet of any massively multiplayer game.

Wow! If the initial fun of *Dark Age of Camelot* holds up over the long haul, there will be a new contender for the crown of king of the massively multiplayer RPGs.

For starters, *Dark Age* had perhaps the smoothest launch yet of any massively multiplayer online game. Certainly, it was the best launch since *Asheron's Call*. That's welcome news for the massively multiplayer genre, since the recent horrendous launches of *Anarchy Online* and *World War II Online* probably left fans wondering if their money was wasted. The creators of *Dark Age*, Mythic Entertainment, rewarded gamers with a launch that was virtually problem-free.

There were a few hiccups involving lag time and a few patches, but Mythic soon solved the problems and has been quick to respond to player suggestions.

The biggest problem for players was finding a copy of the game. *Dark Age* sold out everywhere and has been the fastest-selling game of its type to date, according to Mythic. Copies were selling above cost on eBay almost immediately, and within two weeks of the launch Mythic had more than 92,000 players sign up for accounts. They've since distributed another 75,000 copies, and the company

says the game is still selling well.

So what are our initial impressions? It's hard to stop playing it to write this. The game is flat-out fun if you like this kind of gaming experience. It's similar to *EverQuest* in many ways. You pick a character class and run around and kill monsters, gain experience points and loot, and go up in levels. It's a level treadmill, but an entertaining one.

Where *Dark Age* really seems to shine is in the details. As one player told us during an in-game chat, "It's like they had a list of things that players didn't like in *EverQuest* and fixed them." One of the biggest complaints about *EverQuest* was that players have too much downtime (time spent resting to regain health and mana); downtime is almost non-existent in *Dark Age*. Players also complained about some classes not being able to solo (survive without joining a group); in *Dark Age*, classes are better able to fight on their own. Players complained about losing items due to death in *EverQuest*; this doesn't happen in *Dark Age*—you lose only experience points.

If Mythic can continue to add content and support the game, well, look out, *EverQuest*. *Dark Age of Camelot* may indeed snatch that crown.

NEWS FEED

Army Funds New PC and Video Games

The U.S. Army has agreed to provide financial support and technical advice for two new military simulations. When the games are complete, they will likely raise the previously ridiculous notion that gamers could be well suited to become the next generation of military field commanders.



The video game, entitled *C-Force*, will put players in the role of squad leaders. *C-Force* will be developed by a partnership between Sony Pictures ImageWorks and Pandemic Studios. The other game, *CS-12*, will let PC players take on the role of a company commander. This game is being developed by Quicksilver Software, the company behind *Master of Orion III*. Both games will come in two versions: a commercially available shrink-wrapped version and a version that will be sent to the Army.

The Institute for Creative Technologies is closely involved with both projects. An organization that draws from the U.S. Army, Hollywood, and the University of Southern California, ICT designs advanced virtual reality and simulation training systems for the military.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares various media ratings with those of GameRankings.com, which averages the ratings of all published reviews for a given title.

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot	IGN	GameRankings.com
Commandos 2	B+	B+	*	A-	A	A
Independence War 2	A	B+	B-	A-	B+	A-
Madden NFL 2002	B-	B	C	C+	B-	B
NHL 2002	B+	B+	*	A	A	A
Ralls Across America	A	B	*	B	*	B
Red Faction	C	A-	*	B	A-	B

* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

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microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege

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VIOLENCE
BLOOD

NEW RELEASES

Bundle-licious

With the holidays approaching, game publishers are piling on the special releases

From hunting bad guys in *Rogue Spear* and *SWAT 3* to unleashing wholesale destruction in *Diablo II*, this list offers plenty of ways to avoid your family this holiday season. The original versions of these games were all excellent, but these special editions add loads of new features and content that make them even more worthy. If you don't have one of the originals, get the special edition.



Diablo Battlechest \$50

If you are one of the oddball loons who has not succumbed to the addictive madness of *Diablo*, you won't get a better opportunity than this to indulge. Here you get *Diablo II*, *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction*, the original *Diablo*, and a BradyGames strategy guide, all for a measly \$50. Kill monsters, level up, repeat until your family hates you.



Operation Flashpoint Gold Edition \$40

This new pack comes equipped with the latest version of the full game; new vehicles, weapons, and missions; and enhanced multiplayer features. It also includes *Red Hammer*, a 20-mission add-on that lets players fight a Soviet campaign. With a new central character, Dmitri Lukin, and fresh cut-scenes, *Red Hammer* is a *Flashpoint* must-have.



SWAT 3 Tactical GOTY Edition \$30

While rookies will benefit from the new tactics CD, veterans will revel in the other goodies: more than a dozen new missions, 10-player support, custom careers, new multiplayer options, and more—all in addition to the original game. An outstanding enhancement of an excellent game.



Quake III Gold Edition, Ultimate Quake, and Doom Collector's Edition

Just add Nazis, and you'd have every id shooter ever made. *Gold Edition* is a hybrid Mac/PC disc with Q3A and Q3TA, *Ultimate Quake* gives you all three *Quake* games, and *Doom Collector's Edition* packs in *Doom I* and *II* and *Final Doom* all at once.



Myth II: Worlds \$30

This hefty brick of real-time tactical fantasy includes *Myth II: Soulblighter* and its official strategy guide, loads of user-created mods including the very popular *World War II: Titans*, the feudal Japan-themed *Bushido: Way of the Warrior*, and the incredibly ambitious *The Seventh God* (see Homebrew on page 44).



Totally Unreal \$20

Haven't had a chance to ride a tactical nuke yet? Here you go. In addition to *Unreal Tournament* and some mods, gamers also get *Unreal Gold* and a teaser disc with images and trailers for *Unreal II* and *Unreal Championship*. A good primer before the mighty *Unreal II* arrives.



No One Lives Forever: Game of the Year Edition \$30

In case Cate Archer's British accent and skin-tight clothing weren't enough for you before, this special CD edition includes four new levels of moronic henchmen, a music CD of swinging '60s tunes, a strategy guide, and map editor. The new levels aren't up to the same quality as before, but just playing with Cate again was enough for us.



Rainbow Six Collector's Edition \$70

This box has everything but a sniper rifle: two award-winning tactical simulation benchmarks, *Rainbow Six* and *Rogue Spear*; an essential add-on (*Urban Operations*); a training disc from special forces experts; interviews with Tom Clancy and real covert operatives; and a strategy guide. The ultimate counterterrorist collection.



PERSPECTIVE: POST-MORTEM

By Bruce Goryk

Fallout Tactics

While I still believe that elves are pathetic, thanks to *Fallout Tactics* I'm willing to revise my previous opinion of role-playing games. They're not so bad, as long as they don't have elves. Well, except *Fallout Tactics* isn't an RPG.

Fallout Tactics is a strategy game. But the things that make it good are the things you'd expect to lose when converting an RPG to the strategy genre. Normally, I'm all for cleaning role-playing out of whatever it's managed to weasel into, but now I'm starting to have doubts, which scares me.

People go on and on about how no computer game can simulate a pen-and-paper role-playing experience. But what computer RPGs do manage to do is cram strategy into where the role-playing should be. Or is. I'm definitely not the guy to talk to about that.

People associate role-playing with a story told through dialog boxes, no matter how much strategy there is in the game otherwise. But that story often just disguises the devices the designers use to incorporate strategic decision-making. The only difference in *Fallout Tactics* is that you don't have to click through pages of talk-boxes.

The first *Baldur's Gate* wasn't much of a role-playing game. But it was one of the best strategy games of 1998, and how. Even standard RPG elements like talking to NPCs were just a way for you to make basic decisions like those about party composition. Need a Cleric? You can get Dynaheir, but if you decide you don't need her anymore, you have to decide whether you can afford to lose Minsc. This may be related to the backstory, but you don't have to delve into that scariness to make some interesting tactical decisions.

Fallout Tactics strips away the devices but leaves the decision-making intact. Your decisions about skills and abilities determine how you'll play the game, and the lack of a lot of between-mission chatter doesn't make the game any less compelling. Instead, challenging missions, superb production values, and excellent design of the underlying engine illustrate that games are really about doing rather than reading.

There are things that distinguish an actual role-playing game from a strategy game masquerading as one, such as transparent, linear story devices that don't make any sense except as game mechanics. But done well, the elements that please role-playing fans are very likely to be the same ones that let people like me accept the game as strategy—you just have to dress them up differently. *Fallout Tactics* shows how unnecessary most RPG dialogue is unless, as in *Planetscape*, it's really part of a developed story. It's outstanding. Which I never would have expected from something based on a role-playing game.

Here comes my elf!



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PlayStation 2





HANDS ON

Creature Isle

This expansion to the brilliant *Black & White* is sure to please the gods **By Tom Price**

Some expansion packs are nothing more than a slew of new items, units, and weapons; you unlock them one by one, watch their new effects, and never bother with them again. Others just collect all the bug patches since the game's release into one \$20 CD-ROM. But some expansion packs actually live up to their name by expanding the gameworld through new storylines, new worlds, and new gameplay. *Black & White: Creature Isle* can count itself among the latter.

Creature Isle picks up the story of our little boatbuilder friends from the first land in *B&W*, as they crash on a remote island. The people of this island, while similar to the tribes in the first game, are not influenced by a god such as yourself. But they are quite familiar with the creatures, considering that their island is overrun with them. Your boatbuilder buddies decide to summon you through a portal, and the next thing you know, you and your preexisting creature land on this new isle.

There are no other gods to compete with, so you'll spend less time fighting for influence. You still have to do the same things for your villagers like help them grow food and get them to worship you, but the game focuses much more on your

creature. The creatures who inhabit the isle have lost their gods but have banded together in the Brotherhood of Creatures to maintain their collective strength. They are led by a brave lion named Rufus. Your main job is to earn a place for your creature in the brotherhood by completing challenges the creatures give you.

The challenges, 24 in all, are essentially a series of minigames including:

Bowling—defeat a cow using boulders on a large-scale lane.

Soccer—score some goals in the game those crazy Europeans call "football."

Foot Race—you have to beat a turtle around a marked course on the island. Sound easy? He cheats.

Whack-a-Villager—like whack-a-mole, but with people.

Sparring—there is a dojo where two creatures can square off and fight at any time without consequences.

The most intriguing of all may be the Tyke challenge. Tyke is a creature—a chick, to be exact—that your creature must nurture and raise throughout the game, but only after you've hatched Tyke from his egg, a big challenge in itself.

Creature Isle should enrich the *B&W* experience, while adding more replay. Watch for it sometime before Christmas.

Creature Isle offers new storylines, new worlds, and new gameplay.



EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Mods for *BGII*, *Diablo II*, *Myth II*

Just when you've probably played these games to death, the love gods that are the mod makers of the 21st century have given your fantasy gaming new life.



Darkness Weaves for Diablo II: Lord of Destruction
www.planetdiablo.com/dweaves

Darkness Weaves is like *Diablo II* meets the *Real World*. This Ironman mod from RexxLaww dispenses with town portal scrolls, doesn't let you repair weapons, and eliminates merchants. Want a shiny new sword or a healing potion? Start hacking your way through hordes of beefed-up baddies and hope they drop something useful. The fact that items are always destined to break adds an immense challenge, as players must juggle possessions often and save powerful items for use on particularly nasty foes.



The Darkest Day for Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn
www.teambg.net/tdd

This is perhaps the most ambitious RPG mod ever developed. It adds an estimated 30 hours of new quests to *BGII: SoA*, along with nearly 200 new items, a similar number of new spells, and dozens of new creatures. You'll have access to powerful magic and upgraded versions of familiar spells like Monster Summoning VI. The 75 new character kits are what really make this mod interesting. Fighters alone gain access to more than 20 kits like Vampire Hunter, Pit Fighter, and Drow Battle Monger. It adds up to a massive download, but the design team plans to offer CDs with the mod for a mere \$9.



The Seventh God for Myth II
www.theseventhgod.com

A staggering amount of work went into this project, and the result is a 200MB download packed with an enormous solo campaign, tons of new units, and a nice storyline told through cut-scenes and voice-overs.

Familiar units are augmented with new troops. The good guys (Four Kingdoms) have access to Elven Archers and Dwarven Axes, among others. The bad guys (Goblin Empire) get powerful spellcasters like Disciples of the Seventh God and hordes of Helot Slaves, and there are new neutral enemies like dragons and trolls. *TSG* is incompatible with the popular *Jinn* mod and the commercial *Green Berets* software, and you must have the patch for version 1.3. The bandwidth-challenged can get *TSG* as part of the *Myth II: Worlds* collection.

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Cellular Assassins

New Swedish game *BotFighters* turns cell phone users into virtual hit men

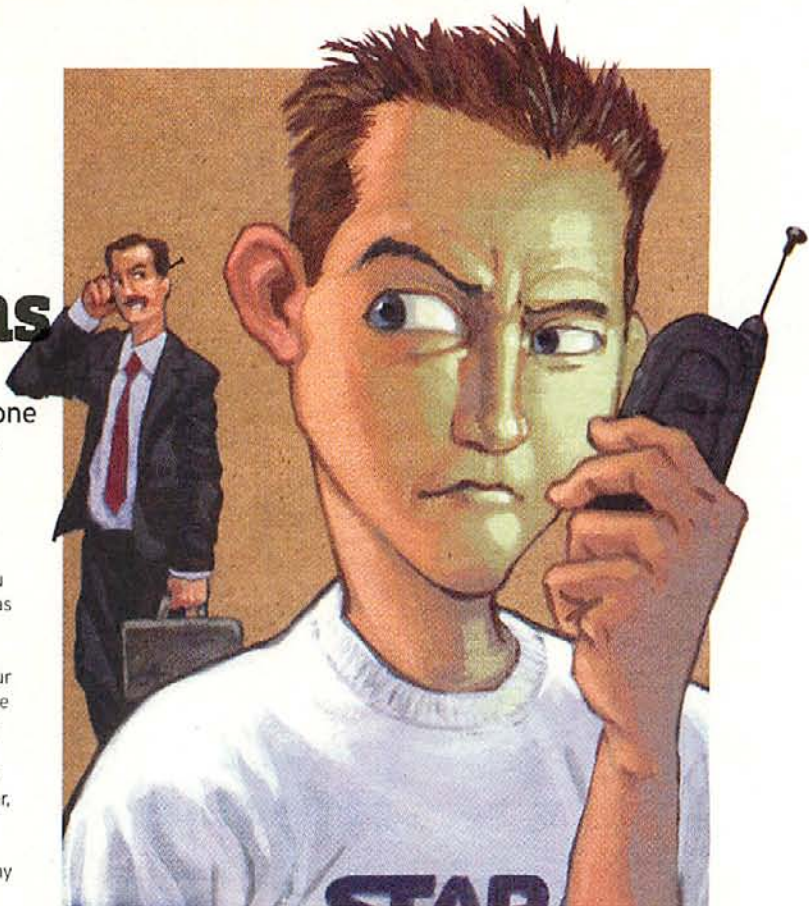
By Sandy Brundage

"I typed 'Fire Highlander' and hit. A few more shots, and he exploded in a cloud of blue sparks. I got off the bus at a run."

As if the real world weren't scary enough lately, It's Alive is trying to make you even jumpier. The Swedish company has masterminded *BotFighters*, the first location-based mobile game. Twenty-four hours a day, that cell phone in your pocket makes you a walking target. "We have a lot of car chases, people racing around neighborhoods on bicycles," says Sven Hålling of It's Alive. With the cell phone serving as weapon and radar, the lines between games and reality almost disappear.

"I was riding the bus to work when my cell phone beeped," a player recalled. "Pulling it out, I saw an SMS message: 'Radar alert! Tracking signal detected 2500m east.' Someone was hunting me down. If they were using a laser rifle with a range of 1600m...but the bus rolled on, oblivious to my peril."

Another message arrived heartbeats later: "Radar warning! Strong tracking signal 1800m east." The enemy had locked on." Time to shoot the messenger. But first, some counter-intelligence action, thanks to a deftly typed "Scan," which sniffed



out the assassin "Highlander's" location. Highlander was hiding only 1500 meters to the east.

"I typed 'Fire Highlander' and hit. A few more shots, and he exploded in a cloud of blue sparks. I got off the bus at a run, because who knew how long it would take Highlander to get back in the game."

BotFighters launched last March in Sweden. Then then, almost 3,000 killers have signed on to play for \$5 to \$10 a month on top of their regular wireless

bill. There's also a small fee per text message sent. A few players have spent more than \$2,000 waging war on street corners. Each victory earns Robucks—the game's internal currency—good for upgrading your blasters, shields, or laser guns via the game's Website. The site also functions as a guild hall; players chat, sign assassination contracts, and spy on the real-time positions of their enemies. The game mobilizes in the United States in a few months.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thierry Nguyen

On the one hand, you could have one of the greatest strategy games ever, the 2000 Action Game of the Year, an entire turn-based strategy franchise, an excellent hockey game, a fun racer, AND a deep shooter. On the other hand: a potential Coaster of the Year. Any questions?



StarCraft \$6



No One Lives Forever \$12



Heroes of Might & Magic Millennium Edition \$10



NHL 2001 \$15



Dirt Track Racing \$10



Wheel of Time \$7



Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor Collector's Edition \$65





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GAME NEWS

New Life for Lord British and *Lineage*

Ultima creator teams up with NC Soft to bring Korean online game to America By Mark Asher

Lord British is back! As part of the North American relaunch of the popular Korean online RPG *Lineage*, Lord British is returning as an in-game character to lay siege to the castle of the pretender kings! Better yet, Lord British will be played by none other than Richard Garriott during a month-long series of events that will take place only on North American servers.

"I am personally inviting all the powerful guilds of *Ultima*, *EverQuest*, and any other lands to come join us in *Lineage*," Garriott told us. "I as Lord British, Starr Long (the director of *Ultima Online* who played Blackthorn), and many others who built the lands of Britannia, as well as many of the creators of the other lands, will be here, too, for a month-long event." Garriott's company was purchased by NC Soft, and now he's working on *Lineage* as well as a next-generation game for the Korean company.

Lineage has 2.7 million subscribers in Asia, but it launched in the U.S. earlier in the year with little fanfare and didn't really take off. For the relaunch, NC Soft-

Austin's Manager of Community Services Susan Kath says that the game has undergone some dramatic changes.

"We've added and expanded areas, added a training area for new players, and revamped the interface to make the game more familiar to U.S. gamers," she says.

The events will play out during December as a new castle is introduced and one blood-pledge will attempt to win out and claim the castle as their own. In *Lineage*, players form groups called blood-pledges and try to gain and hold the castles. It's team-versus-team warfare, though at the lower levels it plays like an online *Diablo*, according to NC Soft's David Swofford.

Other changes include pledge housing, which can be purchased and used as a base; the introduction of new areas, including one that's underwater; and some whopping big dragons that require multiple groups of players to bring down.

So check out the free copy of *Lineage* included with this issue and play alongside a gaming legend, Lord British, late of Britannia, now looking for new lands to conquer.

"We've revamped the interface to make the game more familiar to U.S. gamers."



PERSPECTIVE: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

By Arcadian Del Sol

Love and Hunger

Hopelessly Devoted to You

Ultima Online turned four years old this month. People are still playing it. What makes people stick with outdated graphics and an aging game engine? According to Jonathan "Calandryll" Hanna of Electronic Arts, "[*Ultima Online*] still offers the deepest experience in online gaming." As for the persistent nature of the players in this persistent world, "When people feel they are a part of something special, they tend to stick with it."

Apparently so. *The Realm*, an online game rushed to



Ultima Online players try to cope with troublesome times.

production just before *UO*, has survived for nearly five years. More like an interactive slide show than an online world, *The Realm* is still populated with an avid player base.

It is tempting to smirk at fans of these games when

more recent entries into the online jamboree sport 3D-accelerated graphics and fully detailed polygonal worlds. But at least they can point at their monitors and dare us not to be dazzled.



Though it's tremendously outdated, some people still enjoy *The Realm*. This may well be all of them.

Cover Your Asset

After many a positive beta report, Mythic Entertainment's *Dark Age of Camelot* has been released to a public starving for an online game that doesn't strap you onto a leveling treadmill.

Interestingly, Mythic has opted to disable the ability to multi-task with other applications while playing *DAOC*. According to Mythic, this is done to prevent the use of third-party cheat utilities and to curtail extracurricular discussions among players that might serve to undermine the carefully balanced game of *Capture the Artifacts* that exists for players of higher level. In the meantime, the honest guy has to wonder if he's being hacked while playing, given that his personal firewall software will not be running while he is playing the game. But by the time you read this, there should be a fix for this posted to the support Website.

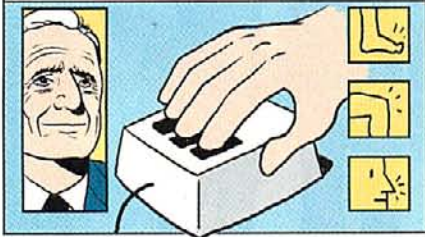
DISCOVERING GAMES

#1

WHAT GOES OUT...

by Scott McCloud

Some of the very first *mice*, invented in 1964 by *Doug Engelbart*, had *three* or even *five buttons*. Doug knew the human body could get a lot done at once and also considered *foot*, *knee*, and even *nose* input devices!



But in the long run, our hands' incredible *versatility* was harnessed mostly for *writing* and occasionally *clicking*, when not stuffing *Doritos* into our otherwise *motionless bodies*.



Keeping input options *simple* is a *healthy compromise* to insure that as many potential players as possible can *plug in*.

And more *elaborate* input devices already use more of our hands' many *talents*.

But compared to the hundreds of *simultaneous actions* modern systems can process, *hands-only input* is starting to look like a bit of a *bottleneck*.

It may be a while before the *full immersion* popularized by mid-90s Hollywood hits the market, but whatever parts of your body *output* force, you can bet there'll be a way to *input* it as well.

In short:
What goes out will go in.

And if improved *voice recognition* and *voice over net* make typing *redundant*, look for your *hands* to play a far more *complex role* as well.

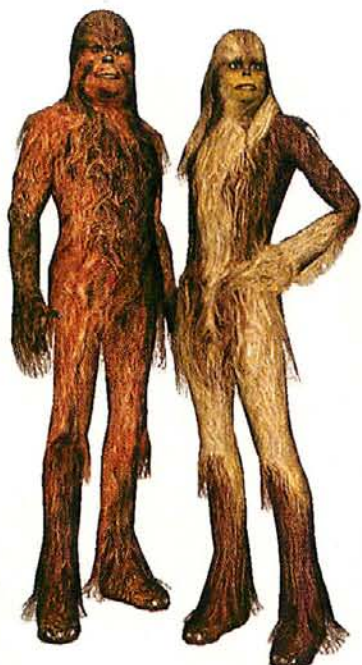
Waitin' on those data-gloves!

Force feedback devices already provide bumpy steering wheels and joysticks, but the *real-time manipulation* of *3D objects* is where things get *interesting* --

-- and where *virtual environments* might start to give the *real thing* a *run for its money*.

I've played with some *prototypes* and believe me, there's nothing like the *feeling* you get from *pushing thin air*.

It'll probably take *longer* than we want for such toys to *hit the market*, but at least that'll give us time to enjoy our lives *outside* of games -- before those games *suck us in forever!*



UPDATE

Wookiee Watching

What it's like to be a walking carpet in *Star Wars Galaxies* **By Ken Brown**

Despite male and female genders, don't count on any Wookiee nooky.

Who doesn't love the hairy beasts known as Wookiees? Exemplified by our pal Chewbacca, Wookiees are tall, powerful humanoids with legendary tempers. What can a player expect out of their Wookiee hero in *Star Wars Galaxies*? Well, no Wookiee nooky, unfortunately (although there will be both male and female genders). But there are other things you can do with these burly bipeds:

- Wookiees will be stronger than most other species, and will therefore excel as warriors and explorers.
- At 2.3 meters in height, Wookiees are the tallest of the eight playable species in the game. They tower over the 1.4-meter Bothans, the smallest species.

- Wookiees are the only species that can build and repair the bowcaster, the traditional Wookiee weapon that Chewbacca carries throughout the original trilogy. Bowcaster-specific skills will be reserved for Wookiee characters.
- Wookiees are also proficient with the ryyk blade, a hand-to-hand weapon unique to Wookiee culture. As with bowcasters, ryyk blade skills will be limited to Wookiees.
- In the *Star Wars* universe, Basic is the most common language in the galaxy. Wookiees can understand Basic and many other languages, but their unique vocal chords prevent them from speaking anything but Shyriiwook, the Wookiee native tongue. Wookiees will

therefore need to rely on emotes, gestures, postures, and protocol droids for communicating with other players who don't understand Shyriiwook. Like other languages, Shyriiwook will be available for players to learn.

- Players can choose from both male and female Wookiee characters, both with customization options for facial features, hair color and patterns, and hairstyles.
- Wookiees don't like the reptilian Trandoshans (another playable species in *Galaxies*), who have a bad habit of using Wookiees for slaves. As a result, Wookiee characters may encounter hostile Trandoshan NPCs and have a difficult time dealing with Trandoshan vendors.

GET A LIFE

Hey Poindexter, step away from the computer



Sex

Some of us at CGW have actually experienced the act of love, but some of us still just download it. The verdict is in and CGW gives real sex five stars, so do yourselves a favor and get a date. Or DSL. They're both pretty good.



Lord of the Rings Trilogy

Opens December 19. We're excited alright, but we're trying to keep our expectations low. As long as this movie validates every moment of our entire lives up to this point, we'll feel we've gotten our \$8.50 worth.



Holidays on Ice

David Sedaris offers up six hilarious tales of Yuletide darkness. "The SantaLand Diaries" is a *tour de force* detailing his stint as a Christmas elf at Macy's. Who can resist the charms of "Dinah, The Christmas Whore"?



Maxwell's Now

CGW editors are sick of hearing "Lifetime" blare out of Wii's office, but they can't deny that this album is the bomb. What's not to like about Maxwell? He's black, he has cool hair, and the ladies love him. Remind you of someone?

A New Wizardry for a New Generation

- Explore a vast 3D world filled with action, magic, and adventure.

- Choose a custom personality for each character and hear them speak over 100 lines of dialogue.

- Battle over 300 types of monsters in some of the most intense combat ever seen in a RPG.

- Advanced creature A.I. brings a new level of realism to RPGs.



SIRTECH

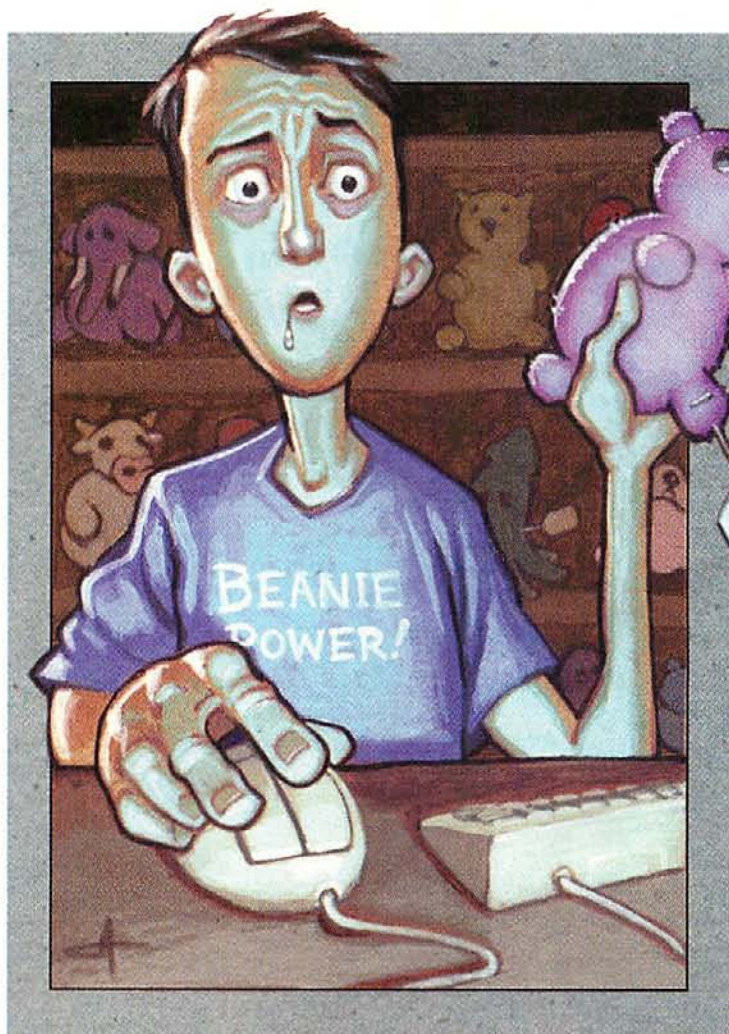
presents



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It's not cynical, uncreative game design if your buggy \$15 product makes money!



intrusive photographer sim. Control an army of evil shutterbugs using Hubble Telescope-caliber lenses to snap topless-sunbathing photos of Jennifer Love Hewitt and goad Julia Roberts into a fistfight for an extra fat check.

Tycoon Tycoon

It's not cynical, uncreative game design if your buggy, pedestrian, \$15 product makes money! Instead of being burned onto a CD-ROM, *Tycoon Tycoon* expands the traditional realm of gaming by delivering to your door a morally bankrupt Marketing Manager, a whiteboard reading "____ Tycoon!," and a high-school programmer willing to work for Doritos, *D&D* figures, and a signed photo of Tia Carrere.

Moon Tycoon

It's on the moon! You're a tycoon! *Moon Tycoon!* Say it—it's fun! *Moon Tycoon!* How can it possibly fail?

Wayans Brothers Tycoon

Do you have what it takes to keep every marginally talented Wayans brother gainfully employed? Play the Jamie Foxx card and get Keenan a mercy part in a movie! Keep Damon out of the way with a job at Orange Julius while you launch yet another series on the WB! Deal with the scintillating challenges presented by exclusive new Wayans clan members, the diminutive Theodore Roosevelt Fitzsimmons Wayans and the stuttering albino Pinky Onyx Wayans! Whatever you do, don't get them wet and don't feed them after midnight.

Freak Show Tycoon

Make your own hideous aberrations of nature and take them on the road, displaying them in parking lots, at county fairs, and at children's birthday parties until you reach the pinnacle of success—a command performance for England's equally disfigured Royal Family!

The Hair Club for Men Tycoon

You're not just a tycoon—you're a member! Design a custom line of marginally realistic hairpieces for endless hordes of insecure real estate brokers. Research new materials to create the ultimate Man Wig: Does the holy toupee grail lie in yak hair, deep-sea kelp, or a dark ritual involving three goats, the full moon, and a one-eyed, loincloth-clad dwarf named Manny?

Genital Piercing Tycoon

Oooh, it hurts so good! Actually, no, not so good. It just hurts. It hurts really bad. It hurts really, really, really bad. And the nightmares—don't get me started on those. Bundled with a special hypoallergenic force feedback mouse designed by Nine Inch Nails.

RIDICULE

Tycoon Typhoon

Could these be the next big Tycoon games you see at Wal-Mart? By Robert Coffey

With the success of tycoon games like *Roller Coaster Tycoon* and *Railroad Tycoon II*, publishers are chasing the wave with a rash of bizarre new titles. Among them: *Car Tycoon*, *Skate Park Tycoon*, *Airline Tycoon*, *Ski Resort Tycoon*, *Oil Tycoon*, and even *Fast Food Tycoon*.

If there's a market for such a thing as "Fast Food Tycoon," can the following tycoon titles be far behind? Spot the real game in this list of bogus ones for a chance to win a special sampler of idiotic tycoon games! (Send your email to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.)

Beanie Baby Tycoon

Blow vast sums of money on eBay as you scoop up Blackie the Bear, Early the Robin, Wiggly the Octopus, and every

cute goddamn one of them no matter what your husband says. Finally, a game that speaks to the lonely, 400-pound woman in sweatpants lurking in us all.

Celebrity Lamprey Tycoon

What would you do for that 16th minute of fame? In *Celebrity Lamprey Tycoon* you need to assemble a stable of figures living in the shadow of true stars and get them campy cameo work, the occasional commercial, and the odd *Playboy* spread. Kato Kaelin, Darva Conger, doomed publicity whore LaToya Jackson, and more are fast dimming stars in this game's universe.

Paparazzi Tycoon

It's not stalking if you're paid to do it! That's the rallying cry for this callously

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Violence



ACTIVISION

RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

Those ruthless *Sims* claw their way back to the top, refusing to be outdone even by the *Lord of Destruction*



1 They may be cute, but **The Sims** will stop at nothing to get ahead.



2 **Lord of Destruction:** named for the effect it has on people's lives?



3 **Operation Flashpoint** proves a highly compelling commercial military sim.

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	3	The Sims (\$40, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
2	1	Diablo II Expansion: Lord of Destruction (\$35, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★★
3	-	Operation Flashpoint (\$41, Codemasters)	★★★★★
4	5	The Sims: House Party Expansion Pack (\$29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
5	8	Roller Coaster Tycoon (\$23, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
6	-	Madden NFL 2002 (\$35, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
7	6	The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion Pack (\$27, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
8	2	Max Payne (\$47, GodGames)	★★★★★
9	4	MS Flight Simulator 2000 (\$29, Microsoft)	★★★★☆
10	7	Diablo II (\$40, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★★
11	-	Arcanum (\$46, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
12	13	Sim Theme Park (\$19, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
13	9	Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (\$35, Microsoft)	★★★★★
14	11	Roller Coaster Tycoon Loopy Landscapes (\$25, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
15	18	Age of Empires II: The Conquerors (\$24, Microsoft)	★★★★★
16	-	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (\$19, Activision)	★★★★☆
17	14	Black & White (\$41, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
18	10	Kings Quest VIII: Mask of Eternity (\$17, Vivendi Universal)	★★★☆☆
19	12	Half-Life: Blue Shift (\$29, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
20	-	Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed (\$17, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆

NOTABLE QUOTE

"We never talk to consumers. They just f*** us up."
-Kelley Flock of Sony Online Entertainment, in *Edge Magazine*

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

Five Years Ago, Jan. 1997



For a computer gaming magazine, this issue sure seemed to focus on people. Every other page seemed to feature real

humans—actors from *Jedi Knight*, Christopher Lloyd in *Toonstruck*, wannabe SAG members dressed like drawings for *The Last Express*, a guy with a hatchet in his forehead from *Harvester*, and page after page of CGW drones posing uncomfortably in the same grey mock turtleneck. Thank God those FMV days are over.

10 Years Ago, Jan. 1992



Apparently vast amounts of ether were continuously pumped into CGW a decade ago. How else to explain the 1991

Action Game of the Year Award going to *Links*, a friggin' golf game? Or a full page of fiction by someone called Huemac the Rune Mage? Or the oddly compelling erotic tale of Mike Ditka unfolding across four consecutive pages of an Accolade ad with this bold text: "The Earth opened, she stood naked, her wet body bathed in Beverly Hills moonlight. Ditka was out to kick butt—he hated the Austrians."

15 Years Ago, Jan. 1987



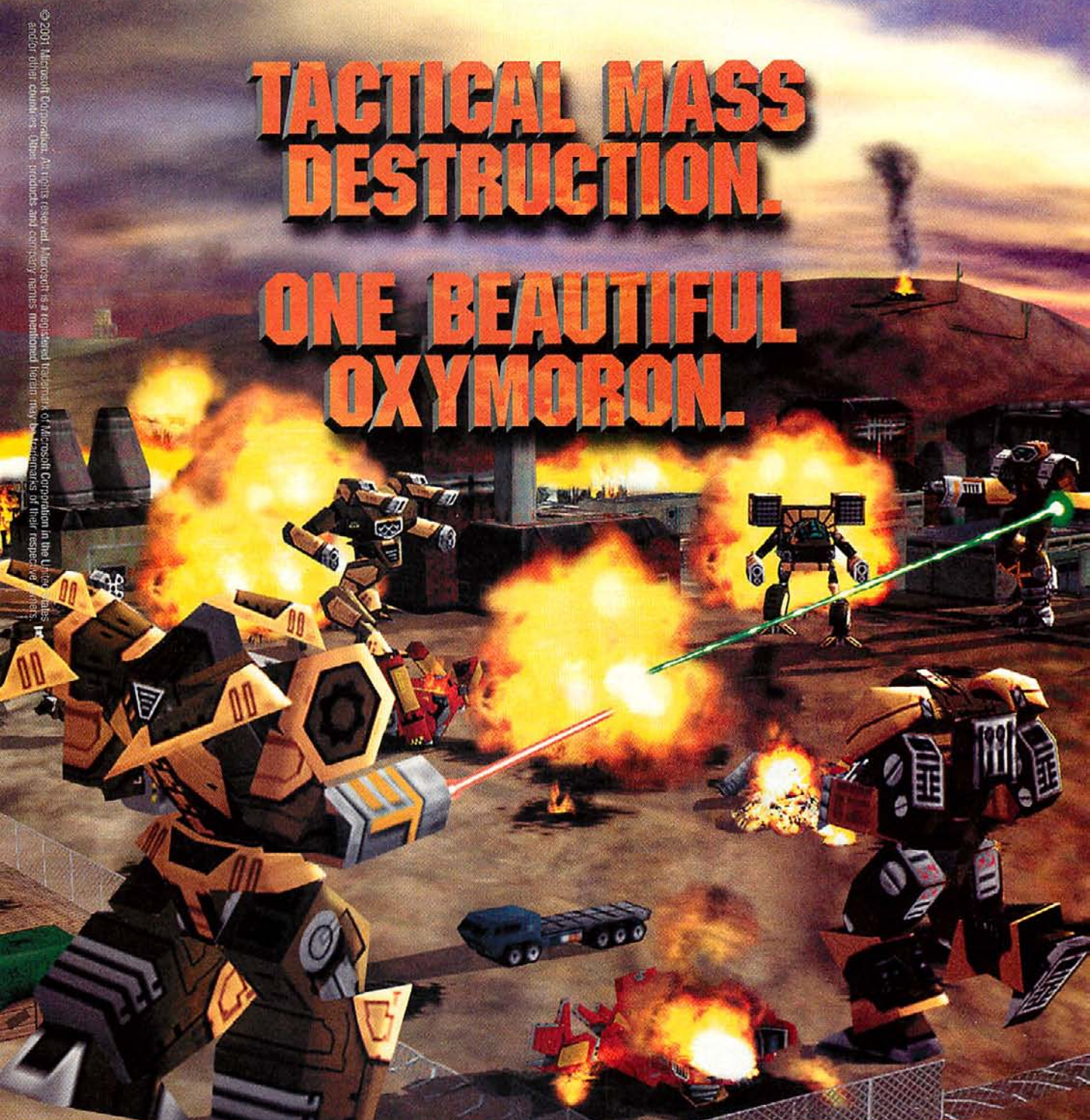
Cinemaware's classic *Defender of the Crown* was reviewed in this issue, and we even named a new

genre for it: interactive cinema. While that term hasn't exactly caught on, there's no denying this swashbuckling adventure/strategy/action hybrid's hold on our hearts. Fifteen years later, Cinemaware has reformed and is back to making games. Can *It Came From the Desert 2* be far off?

TACTICAL MASS DESTRUCTION.

ONE BEAUTIFUL OXYMORON.

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If you cripple the noble houses, you'll bring stability back to the 31st century. That'll make you a classic hero in the future. But if you fail, your 'Mechs will be largely reduced to a heap of burning rubble. And you won't be terribly pleased. MechCommander 2, know what it is to command.

MECHCOMMANDER 2

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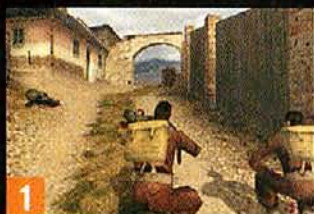
Actual Game Footage

microsoft.com/games/mechcommander2

Microsoft

PIPELINE

Our latest guesses about when those games are finally shipping



Estimating software release dates is like snowboarding in an avalanche. These dates represent the best available info we had at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

1 HIDDEN & DANGEROUS II Petr Vochozka, designer at Illusion Softworks, was quoted as saying that as of press time, *H&DII* is "close to the Alpha stage." The biggest hurdle left is the AI, which can make or break a game, no matter the genre. Even though the lead designer left the company due to creative differences, two other designers have stepped in, and everything looks like it's on track.

2 CAPITALISM II Remember designer Trevor Chan? Last seen designing *Seven Kingdoms*, he's returned to the game he's best known for, *Capitalism*. In addition to the completely overhauled isometric engine, new features such as a dynamic economy, more product types, the ability to use a press, multiplayer modes, and building acquisitions will be making their way into this substitute-MBA program. You can also do stuff like observe your employees and customers via an interior view and build a mansion with the money you're making (assuming you're doing a good job). You'll probably get the chance to flex your corporate might by the time you read this.

3 HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN Eidos formally assigned *Hitman 2* to take out the competition sometime next spring. In response to complaints about the previous game, Eidos will include a Save Game function as well as the option of switching between first- and third-person views (first-person for PC players, third-person for the Xbox and PS2 versions). Also, there will be an inventory system that allows weapons to be carried over from one mission to the next.

4 IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES Due to trademark problems, Alex Garden's bizarre *Sigma* has been renamed, in the tradition of wacky '50s popcorn sci-fi movie parlance, to *Impossible Creatures*.

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	Spring 2002
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne	Take Two	Spring 2002
Arx Fatalis	Fishtank Interactive	January 2002
Asheron's Call: Dark Majesty	Microsoft	December 2001
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Winter 2002
Black & White: Creature Isles	EA	December 2001
Bonestorm	Okama	Summer 2005
Capitalism II	UbiSoft	December 2001
City of Heroes	Cryptic Studios	Fall 2002
Comanche 4	NovaLogic	Winter 2001
Combat Mission 2	Big Time Software	Winter 2001
Commander Jill	Stardock	Spring 2002
Conseal	JoWood	Spring 2002
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Spring 2002
Destroyer Command	UbiSoft	Spring 2002
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Summer 2002
Disciples II: Dark Prophecy	Strategy First	January 2002
DOOM 3	id software	Eventually
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Spring 2002
Dragon's Lair 3D	Blue Byte	On hold
Duke Nukem Forever 3D	Realms	Spring 2002
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	January 2002
Earth & Beyond	Westwood	Winter 2001
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind	Bethesda	Summer 2002
Etherlords	Fishtank Interactive	December 2001

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Europa Universalis II	Strategy First	Winter 2001
Far West	JoWood	Spring 2002
Freedom Force	Crave	Christmas 2001
Galactic Civilizations	Stardock	Fall 2002
GI Combat	Freedom Games Inc.	February 2002
Global Operations	Crave	Winter 2001
Halo	Microsoft	Spring 2002
Heroes of Might & Magic IV	3DO	Spring 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Take Two	Spring 2002
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Spring 2002
Hotel Tycoon	JoWood	Spring 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Summer 2002
Industry Tycoon 2	JoWood	Spring 2002
Lineage 2	Destination Games	Spring 2003
Imperium Galactica 3: Genesis	CDV	Spring 2002
Legends of Loch Ness	Dreamcatcher	Spring 2002
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	UbiSoft	February 2002
Master of Orion III	Infogrames	Spring 2002
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	EA	March 2002
Midgard	Funcom	Summer 2002
Might & Magic IX: Writ of Fate	3DO	Spring 2002
Natural Resistance	JoWood	Spring 2002
Neocron	CDV	Spring 2002
Neverwinter Nights	Interplay	Winter 2001
Nexagon: The Pit	Strategy First	Spring 2002
O.R.B.	Strategy First	November 2001

GAME	DEVELOPER	RELEASE DATE
Planetside	Sony Online Entertainment	Summer 2002
Quake IV	Activision	Someday
Reality Deathmatch	JoWood	Spring 2002
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Summer 2002
Return to Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	December 2001
Serious Sam: The Second Encounter	Take Two	December 2001
Shadowbane	UbiSoft	Spring 2002
Sid Meier's SimGolf	EA	Winter 2001
Sims Online	EA	Summer 2002
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	Activision	Spring 2002
Sovereign	Sony Online Entertainment	Canceled
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	Winter 2002
Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II	LucasArts	Spring 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Fall 2002
Tabula Rasa	Destination Games	Summer 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Spring 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Summer 2002
Unreal II	Infogrames	Spring 2002
WarCraft III	Blizzard	Spring 2002
Warlords IV	UbiSoft	Summer 2002
Warlords Battlecry II	UbiSoft	March 2002
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Eventually

■ NEW ■ UPDATE

D2P

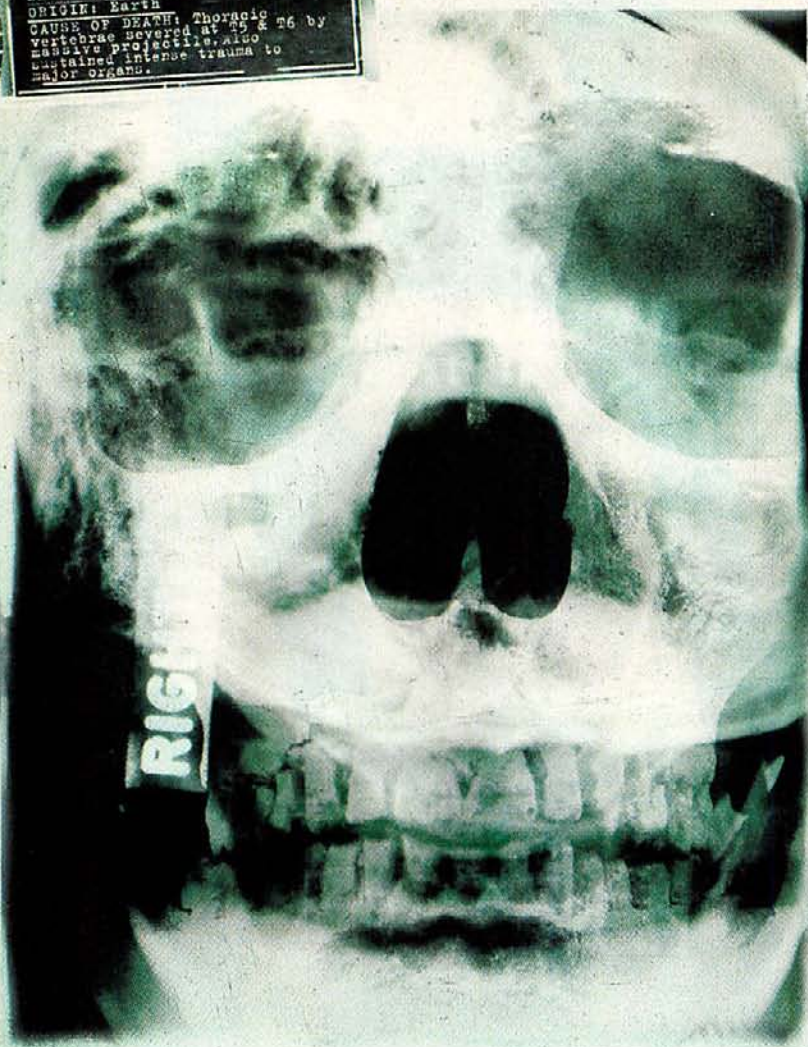
Design 2 Play™



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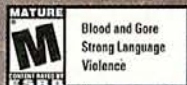
NAME: MARINE FILE # 7713147
ORIGIN: Earth
CAUSE OF DEATH: Thoracic
vertebrae severed at T5 & T6 by
massive projectile, also
sustained intense trauma to
major organs.



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KILL

Kill or be killed as three different species: Alien. Predator. Human. Each with new weapons and capabilities in a single storyline told from three perspectives. Intense action. With graphically stunning environments. Blinking just became a liability.

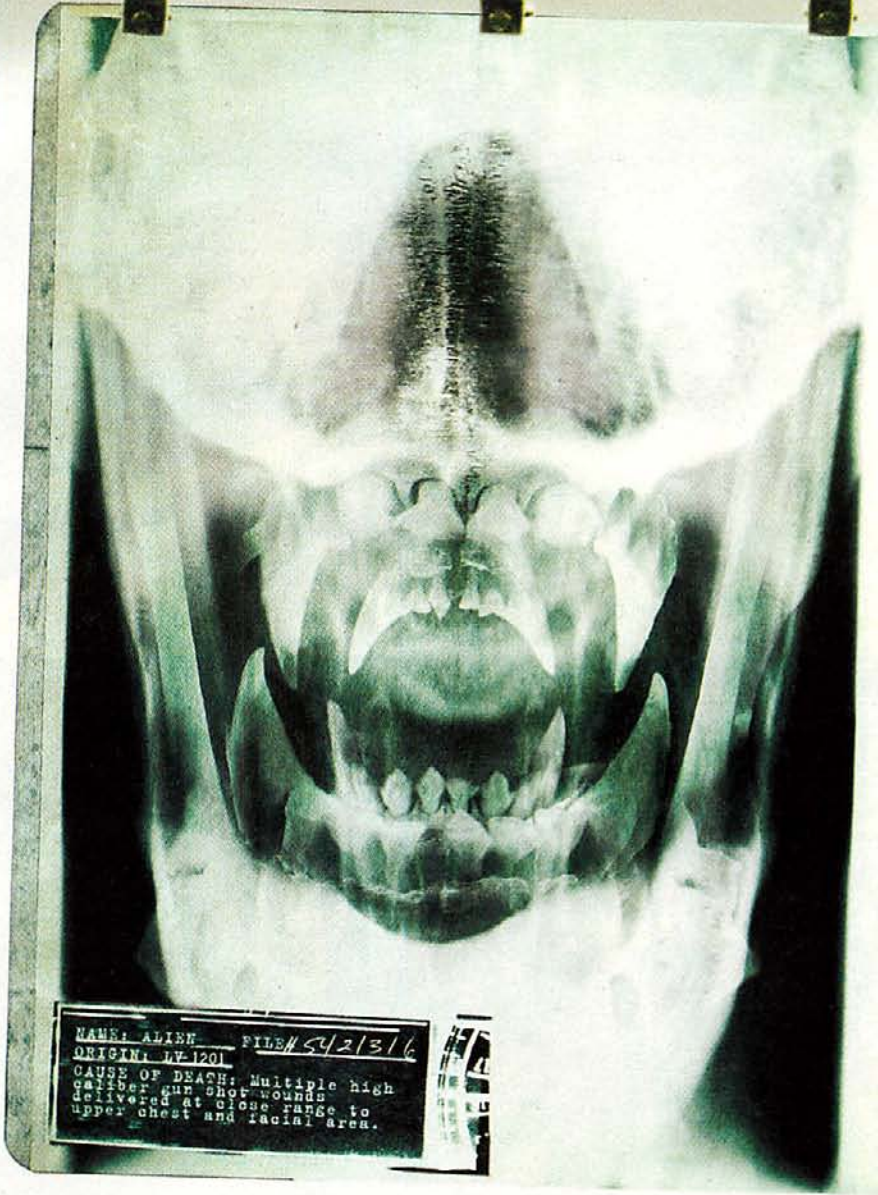


SIERRA

avp2.sierra.com

ALIENS ^{VERSUS} 2 PREDATOR

the evolution of fear



PREVIEW

You mostly take your aggression out on rival gangs and the cops, but innocent people sometimes get in the way.



Brazen daylight drive-bys smack in the middle of downtown Lost Heaven must be the work of some seriously made men.



I don't think this is what this guy had in mind when he said, "I want to die at home on my own bed."

MAFIA

Making gamers an offer they can't refuse By Tom Price



The character models in *Mafia* exhibit finely nuanced body language. The effect is almost creepy.



Parking garages always make a good place for a shootout.



I'm a legitimate businessman!



The entire City of Lost Heaven is rendered no matter where you are, even out in the bay—so no loading between sections.



Being chased by two dapper thugs and you got no gun. Looks pretty hopeless.



Beware the lady in red.

The '20s and '30s were kind of a renaissance for the mafia (which, by the way, doesn't exist according to the burly men from New Jersey standing behind me in my cubicle). Organized crime flourished during Prohibition, and Hollywood became fascinated with the gangster image as actors like Jimmy Cagney and Edward G. Robinson became huge movie stars. The movies of that time period, along with other more modern depictions of La Cosa Nostra, are the main inspiration behind Czech developer Illusion Softworks' new third-person action/adventure game, *Mafia*.

In *Mafia*, you play Tommy, a mild-mannered cab driver who gets caught up in the seedy underworld of crime when some thugs in need of a getaway car hop into his cab.

That's how the first mission begins, with you driving a jalopy at breakneck speeds (say, 40 miles per hour?) while your goodfella passengers empty their roscoes at the pursuing cops.

It's a good way to kick off the game, considering what an important role cars play. Most missions will involve hopping into an old Model T or Pierce Arrow (there are no real car licenses in the game, but cars are closely modeled after real-world antiques) to get to a bank job or kidnapping or other nefarious operation. The car mode is so extensive that a racing-only mode à la *Need for Speed* is incorporated into the game.

You'll need a car to get around the huge fictional city of Lost Heaven, which is about 12 square miles and is populated with pedestrians, vehicle traffic, and police, who will react even if you break the smallest of traffic laws (which, by the way, were carefully researched for historical accuracy). Lost Heaven is an amalgamation of gritty urban centers from the time period like Chicago and New York.

When you're not driving around town, you'll be creating other mischief within the game's 20-plus missions, mostly with bats and tommy guns.

Weapons are also historically accurate, so no rocket launchers. But the Molotov cocktails do pack a wallop. You'll mostly be taking your aggressions out on rival gangs and the cops, but innocent people get in the way once in awhile.

At an earlier stage of development, *Mafia* used the same engine as *Hidden & Dangerous* (another Illusion game) but has since moved to an original engine, called LS3D, better suited to the subject matter. The result is a game that looks like the Depression should: dark, gritty, and depressing—but it's somehow beautiful.

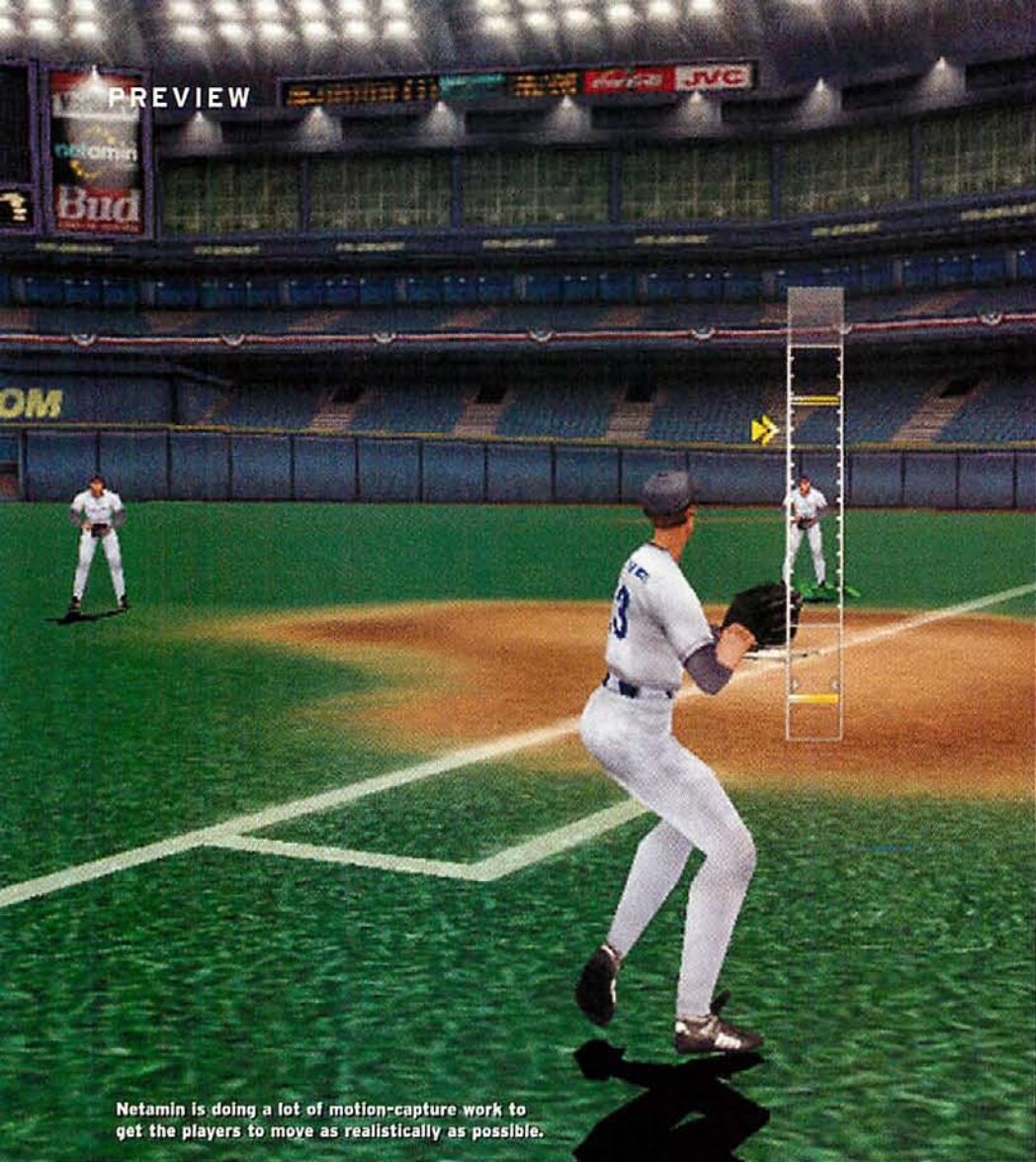
Mafia is most reminiscent of *Max Payne* and *Hitman*—the biggest difference, thankfully, is that *Mafia* has multiplayer. If *Mafia* can avoid *Max Payne*'s corny story and writing while having better gameplay and control than *Hitman*, then it should be a huge hit. If not, someone's getting fitted for cement shoes.

GAME STATS

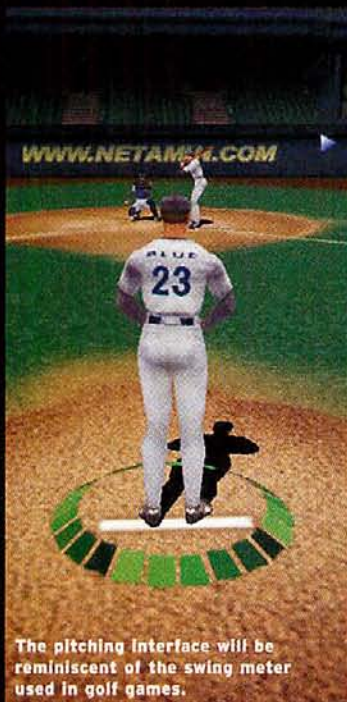
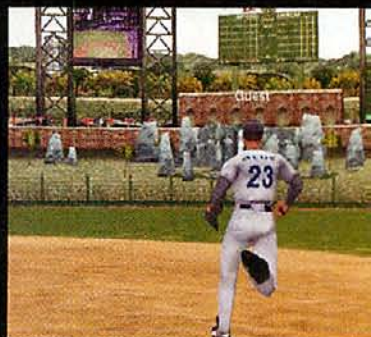
GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2002
PUBLISHER: Take2
DEVELOPER: Illusion
Softworks
CONTACT: mafia
.godgames.com



PREVIEW



Netamin is doing a lot of motion-capture work to get the players to move as realistically as possible.



The pitching interface will be reminiscent of the swing meter used in golf games.

ULTIMATE BASEBALL ONLINE

GAME STATS

GENRE: Sports
 RELEASE DATE: Q3 2002
 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Netamin
 Communication Corp. CONTACT:
www.ultimatebaseballonline.com

Who's on first? It could be you! By Rob Smolka



Each player you create will have a unique DNA makeup, which is a hidden set of attributes that define many of your players' skills and abilities.

The current phenomenon in gaming (or the once-fresh idea that proved lucrative and is now being copied by everyone else) is massively multiplayer online titles. But so many of the games in development are so similar to the reigning champs (*EverQuest*, *Ultima Online*, and so on) that it's questionable whether enough of an audience can be found to support the newcomers. Netamin's upcoming *Ultimate Baseball Online*, though, looks like it has a chance to carve a niche for itself in this crowded field.

Instead of assuming the role of a warrior or wizard, you slip on the spikes of a pro baseball player. But you don't start out as Barry Bonds or Roger Clemens—you pay your dues in the amateur league to earn rank points that allow you to advance through the minors and eventually to the big show. You'll earn these points through accomplishments like hitting homeruns, striking out batters, and being on the winning team.

Character creation consists of choosing right- or left-handedness and a unique look for your avatar. One item you won't have control over is DNA, which determines traits such as the pitches you can throw, switch-hitting ability, batting stance, and so on. As the design team adds features to the game, DNA will take on an increasingly important role.

Players won't be limited to certain positions. While not quite realistic (other liberties taken with realism include a lack of injuries and perfect umpires), it should help to alleviate problems

with people not wanting to play certain positions. At first, you'll participate in pick-up games. When you log on, there will be a number of games to join, each needing a full complement of players before it begins. Just pick an open spot; when all the positions are filled, the game will start. So even childish players will be likely to bite the bullet and play left field, knowing that they'll have a chance to play a different position in the next game.

As for the gameplay, producer Daniel Manachi says, "All the interfaces were designed to be simple for the new player to pick up but with enough room for player skill to improve over time. There is a power bar for the fielding interface, and you simply stand toward the direction/player you'd like to throw to. The pitching interface will include a list of pitches that the player can throw and the power bar from fielding with an added accuracy

Pay your dues in the amateur league to advance through the minors and to the big show.

portion. Batting is still in flux." Each player will have a third-person, over-the-shoulder view of the field. And unlike current single-player games, in which the computer decides which fielder is active, everyone will be free to chase down pop-ups—though this could lead to *Bad News Bears*-type misadventures in the field.

Players will be able to form teams and join leagues once they advance in rank. Prizes for the

league winners are planned, though Netamin isn't sure yet what they will be. Also, whether the game will include Major League licenses is still up in the air, but there will be plenty of team names and logos to choose from. The stadiums, too, though fictional, will have a familiar look. The cost of running a game of this sort can be crippling, and licenses can eat up a large part of a budget. There's a possibility it will happen, as the publisher plans to recoup some of the costs through advertising partners, so expect to see real-world ads on the game's stadium billboards, for example.

Netamin is aware that eliminating lag will be key to *UBO*'s success. As Manachi says, "Lag in a game like *EverQuest* or *Counter-Strike* is inconsequential in the long run. Even if you die and have to recover your corpse, you move on with no real loss. In *UBO*, packet loss

could cost an entire game, if not a series. Reducing our packet sizes, distributing our servers nation- and worldwide, and combating lag will be an ongoing process."

A beta test is planned for Q2 2002—by then, most of the game-play issues will be resolved, and we should get a good idea of whether it will be worth the monthly fee. We'll update you as the launch date approaches.



Who needs the real thing when you have fictional stadiums that look this good?



CHECK THE STATS

Netamin may be an unfamiliar name to us, but take a trip to its home country of Korea and you're sure to find a few fans. Formerly known as *Gameworks Korea*, this talented development team has a varied portfolio that includes everything from developing educational products, Internet applications, and, of course, online games to localizing games for its home market.

Battledragon, an online action game the company created back in 1998, boasts 68,000 members. Another success, especially in Taiwan where it ranks as the third most popular online game in the country, is *Dragon Raja*, a massively multiplayer role-playing game. And on your next trip to the software store, look for *Battlesaurs*. This online-only action game will be something of a test for Netamin's servers here in the U.S. (and the monthly fee will be a very reasonable \$6.95).



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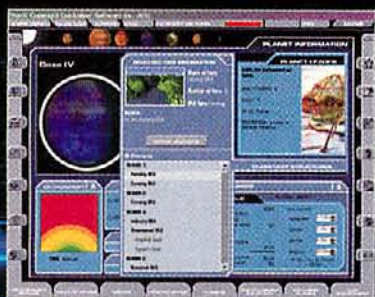
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Master of Orion

Can the
granddaddy of 4X
games achieve the
universal
domination it so
desperately wants?



By Tom Chick

4X: explore, exploit, expand, exterminate



Every randomly created planet is unique but realistically generated thanks to an enormous spreadsheet that can handle calculations involving interstellar physics, astronomical laws, and something called a Hertzberg-Russel diagram. Yeah, we don't know what all that means, either.



Alan Emrich is a fairly short fellow with a Napoleon Bonaparte bust on top of his monitor. Like Napoleon, he has plans. Big plans. Plans to make a game of unprecedented scope and depth. "I'd venture to say it's the most complex design ever put into a commercial gaming product. The design mandate was to put in the kitchen sink, to raise the bar so high that you get a nose-bleed just looking at it," Emrich says. A few minutes later, the hyperbole turns 180 degrees. "We give you such a deep game, you need an aqualung to get to the bottom of it," he boasts. He is clearly fond of flashy language.

Emrich's plan for *Master of Orion III* is something of a paradox. He hopes to design a complex science-fiction strategy game that will be easily accessible to "tourist gamers." There's no doubt that *MOO3*, as it's called by fans of the previous games, will be complex. The demo is mind-boggling. Each

game has room for 32 empires. Battles can include up to a dozen task forces, each of which can consist of up to 64 ships. Every planet, ship, task force, system, and army has its own leader. The galaxy consists of dozens of systems, each with up to eight planets, each with up to five moons and an average of five regions, each of which can be developed separately to emphasize manufacturing, mining, bioharvesting, government, research, the military, or space-port facilities. Each region has its own population, unrest level, unemployment rate, and civil defense. Separate tax rates can be set for each planet, system, sector, and empire. Your economy can include deficit spending with your choice of fixed or floating-point currency.

"If you're an accountant, boy are you gonna love this game," Emrich says, rubbing his hands together.



Behemoth

Titan



Here is the entire Saurian fleet. These ships look as mean as the race that pilots them.

"We give you such a deep game, you need an aqualung to get to the bottom of it."

Battleship



Cruiser



Destroyer



Corvette



Lancer



The Raas, according to their *MOO* rap sheet, have emerged from oppression at the hands of their brethren Saurians. The other Saurian races include the Sakkra, ferocious and reptilian-like, and the big, hulking Grendaris.

GAME STATS

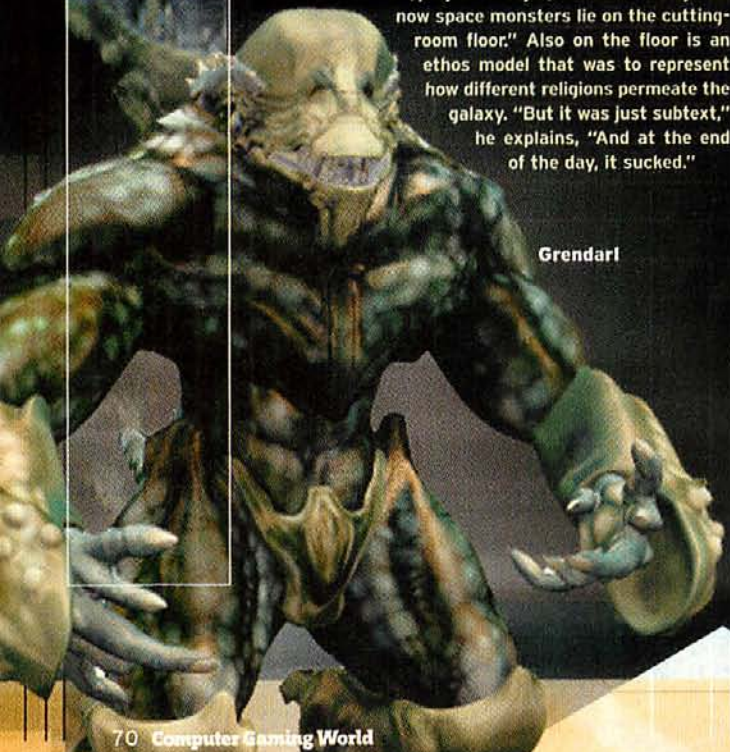
GENRE: Strategy
 RELEASE DATE: Q1 2002
 PUBLISHER: Infogrames
 DEVELOPER: Quicksilver Software Inc. CONTACT: www.quicksilver.com



Trillarium

No Cats Allowed

What, no Bulrathi? No Mrrshan? No Darloks? *MOO3* will have 16 races, but not all of *MOO2*'s 13 races are returning. "We didn't want humans dressed up in animal suits," Quicksilver's Bill Fisher says, explaining the "no furries" decision that led to cutting the Bulrathi bears and Mrrshan cats. Instead, we'll see species like the reptilian Sakkra, the fishlike Trillarium, the cybernetic Meklars, and the Humans. Also missing will be the space monsters that guarded some of *MOO2*'s choice systems and gave exploration a *Star Trek* flavor. "I loved those guys," Emrich says, "but it's that old artists' time/project-budget/schedule thing. So now space monsters lie on the cutting-room floor." Also on the floor is an ethos model that was to represent how different religions permeate the galaxy. "But it was just subtext," he explains, "and at the end of the day, it sucked."



Grendarl



Nommo



Cynoid



Psilon



Sakkra



Imsaeis



Klackon

Calculator Optional

But most of us aren't accountants, so *MOO3* is designed to essentially run itself. "When you start your turn, all the decisions are already made. You have leaders everywhere who have implemented your plans. So when you see your Situation Report, crises have already been handled. Now they're handled based on the leaders' races, their personalities, who their bosses are, their character traits. But none of these guys know how to win the game. It's a SimGalaxy running underneath the hood. If you do nothing and just hit Done, Done, Done, then your civilization will slouch toward Gomorrah and you will lose the game. What you need to do is be the man with the plan and steer the great ship of state toward your vision of what it needs to be. All you have to do is whatever you feel is the most fun way to win the game."

For example, you don't have to choose planets for colonization. Each planet has a push and pull factor, which is determined automatically. The push factor represents how badly people want to leave. A planet with a harsh government, a high tax rate, a crowded population, and an inhospitable climate will have a high push factor. The pull factor, on the other hand, represents how badly people want to arrive. A planet with lots of freedom, low taxes, plenty of room, and a pleasant environment will have a high pull factor. For each turn, the game will shuffle population according to the push and pull factors, with no input from the player. No more micromanaging colony ships and population points.

Unless you want to, of course—and this is the point of *MOO3*'s ambitious design. The player can tell colonies where to go. They can also tinker with a planet to tweak its push and pull factors. They can provide financial incentives to encourage migration. In other words, all the complicated stuff will run itself, but you can get involved if you want.

Learning to Delegate

This is the paradigm that drives Emrich's design. The AI is built around the leaders, each of whom represents an AI subroutine with a series of tasks it wants to accomplish. You can either sit back and watch or dive in and override. At the beginning of every turn, you receive a certain number of Imperial Focus Points that represent government control. The more centralized your government is, the more points you'll get. For each point you spend, you can dip your

No murders to avenge.
No helpless families to save.
No morals to uphold.

Sweet.

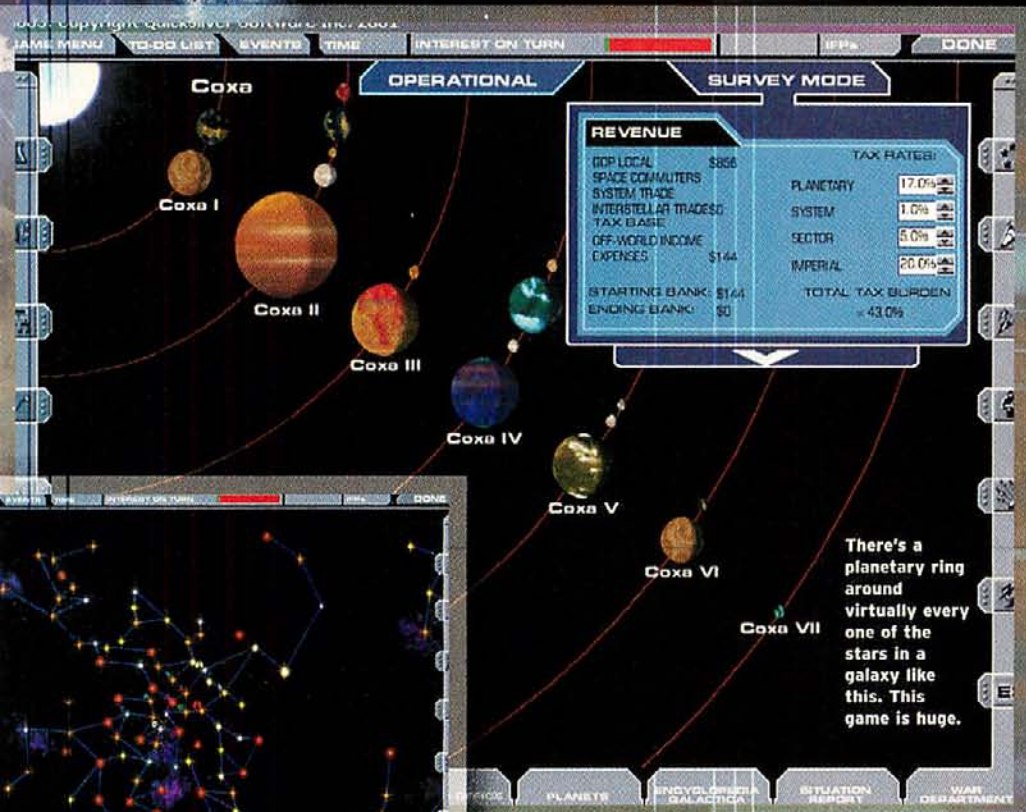


You're the Black Knight and you've got better things to do. Like lead an infamous legion of rogue mercenaries into battle, trade weapons on the black market, even fight for the ruthless House Steiner. All while piloting the most badass 'Mechs ever. Welcome to the darker side of MechWarrior... Black Knight. Where it's good to be bad.

MECHWARRIOR BLACK KNIGHT



microsoft.com/games/mw4_blackknight



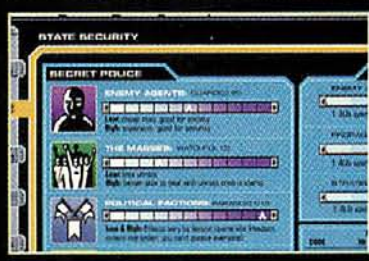
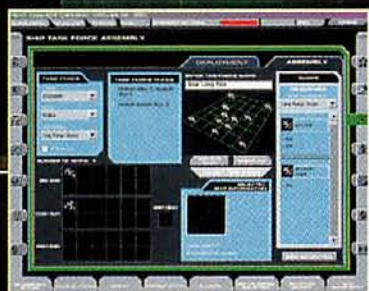
There's a planetary ring around virtually every one of the stars in a galaxy like this. This game is huge.

Screens Galore

As your empire grows, you'll have to choose where to spend your Imperial Focus Points and when to delegate to your underlings.



Fans of the MOO series have been enlisted to write up the indispensable online help system, the Encyclopedia Galactica.



fingers into some aspect of the game and take direct control at whatever level you want. "You can do anything," Emrich says, "But you can't do everything."

For instance, to develop mining on a mineral-rich planet, you can spend an IFP to go directly to a region and build a mine there. This could get tedious when your empire grows, so the alternative is to operate from a higher level and issue a decree that all mineral-rich planets should build mines. The drawback of this higher level of command is that it's not as efficient. With each high-level edict, your Heavy Foot of Government (HFOG) rating increases to represent the layer of bureaucracy that builds up around big government. As your HFOG increases, so does the cost of everything. It's a sort of bureaucratic inflation.

MOO3's interface is built to let you get involved on any level you want. Nothing is ever more than two clicks away. The basic game screen is a 3D view of the galaxy. You can look at a flat, top-down view with notches on the lanes connecting planets to represent distance. Or you can rotate, tilt, and zoom the view. Click on a system to open its display. There are tabs along the bottom of the screen representing the major government departments. Buttons along the sides of the screen give you quick access to often-used displays. Each screen gives you the basic information you'll need, but also allows you to open connected subpanels for more information.

"The beauty of this screen," Emrich says, shrinking a subpanel festooned with numbers back into its parent, "is that you never have to look at it. It's like peeling the layers of an onion and you can stop and play at whatever layer you want."

One potential problem with MOO3's vast oceans of data is that they may not have the elegance and simplicity of Sid Meier's intuitive *Civilization* designs. In *Civilization*, food was gathered in icons. To build something, you stored up shields. To learn something, you stored up light bulbs. Elvises made people happy. There were very few actual numerals. When Activision's *Call to Power* games abandoned these simple mechanics in favor of numbers, many gamers felt they had lost something. However, Emrich hopes that his "onion" approach will mean players can ignore the numbers if they want. By playing at the higher levels, players can focus on the narrative. Give speeches. Issue edicts. Conduct diplomacy. Move task forces.



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Corvette

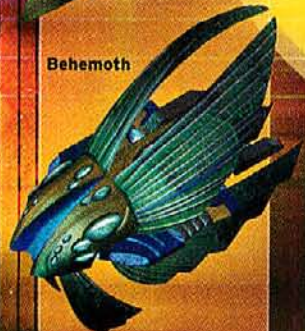
The Insecta fleet is a reflection of the race itself. The glimmering beetle-shaped vessels are some of the most beautiful ships you'll encounter.



Cruiser



Lancer



Behemoth



Destroyer



Battleship

MOO for Two

Multiplayer gaming and turn-based gaming traditionally haven't made a good mix. Even when players take their turns simultaneously, the pace can be erratic—one player might be carefully managing an involved war, while another is just waiting for their granary to be finished. But *MOO3* hopes to solve this dilemma by penalizing players who take too much time: As you use up the allotted time, the interest rate on your loan payment rises. "If you're the guy everyone is waiting for, you'll pay," says Emrich. "It's only fair."

Then there are *MOO3*'s tactical battles, which play

out at the beginning of every turn. If you're not fighting a battle, you get a sort of peace dividend: You can start taking your turn before the clock is running. Players can save games in progress to start up another time. There's even the option for dynamic joining, in which someone can jump in to take over for an AI player.

"*MOO3* is designed to give this genre its best shot to be successful for multiplayer gaming at this scale. I don't think this scale has had a good shot since *Command HQ*," he says, recalling Dan Bunten's prophetic 1990 game that predated even the earliest multiplayer real-time strategy titles.

Star Wars

Combat in *MOO3* is locked at a higher level of interaction. When you build ships, they go into your reserves. You can then draw from your reserves to build task forces, which Emrich calls "custom chess pieces." Battles are automatically resolved unless you spend IFPs to take direct control, in which case you'll play a real-time battle. Planets, asteroid belts, moons, and dark matter will be the equivalent of terrain. You maneuver your task forces, but each ship's leader fires weapons, uses special devices, or flees if his morale breaks. The basic concept resembles that of Time Gate's innovative *Kohan*.

The combat engine uses voxels to allow zooming in for close-ups or pulling back for a strategic overview. Because Quicksilver isn't using polygons, curved surfaces are much easier to achieve for planets and bulbous ships. Each of the game's eight species has 14 unique ship models that should make them easy to identify even from a distance. "One of my pet peeves in science fiction is that it looks like everyone uses the same shipyards," says Art Director Rantz Hossley. He shows off *MOO3*'s Ichthyosian ships that look like something from Jules Verne or Leonardo da Vinci. The Cybernetik ships have modular designs that make them look like Tinker Toys. The Saurian ships are all sharp, squat angles, while the Etherian ships have frail, bubblelike cockpits nestled in crablike carapaces with insect-wing sails. "We've done a lot of study in speculative xenobiology," he explains.

Infogrames will release *Master of Orion III* this spring, a few months after *Civilization III* (see our review on page 92). Are the guys at Quicksilver worried about being upstaged? Quicksilver's CEO, Bill Fisher, welcomes the competition. "Sid's going to sell a jillion copies, and we're certainly hoping we might be able to ride on his coattails. Three or four months later, our game comes out and people have played his game to death, and they'll think, 'You know, we're about ready for something new.'"

Emrich figures *MOO3* will be the perfect follow-up. "*Civ III* is a very good conservative approach to advancing the design art," he says. "But we really stretch the genre out. Even if this game fails in part, I think we're going to shine in comparison to the other, conservative approach."

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COMANCHE 4



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Ahhh, the holidays. We love this time of year. And we love you, too. Well, no, we don't. Not really. We don't even know you. And if we did, chances are we wouldn't like you. But, still. We want you to have a happy holiday. We hope you get your stockings stuffed with cool games and all sorts of other good gear. Because it's good for the economy. And what's good for the economy is good for CGW. So when you get right down to it, this is really all about us. Which is the way we like it.

But back to you for a minute. You are a gamer. You like to play games all day. But you can't afford all the games you want. And whenever your girlfriend, mom, spouse, or whoever buys one for you, they always

CGW's Holiday Buyer's Guide

buy the wrong one. "Here you go, honey: *Myst*. The man at the store said this one was really popular."

We hear you. And we're sorry. Our friends and family are just as annoying as yours, so we know how you feel. That's why we've decided to approach our gift guide a little differently this year.

We want to make it easy on you and your loved ones. So forget genres. Forget having to explain to fat old Aunt Ethel what an RPG is. Now, with our handy guide, you can simply point to the kind of gamer you are, and she can take it from there. "Let's see now, Stevie says he's a mama's boy, therefore I'll get him *Baldur's Gate II*."

See? Isn't that much better? Well anyway, enjoy the guide. Buy the games. Keep us in business. And have a happy holiday.

Attention, shoppers!
CGW picks the best PC games and hardware for the holiday season

By the CGW Staff



Reflex Roger

Rather than spend time jabbing needles into the brainstem in an effort to continually stimulate his reflexes, this gamer chooses to pour his energy into the latest in gaming: All the feelings of aggression, dominance, and drive delivered within the safe confines of the computer screen, as opposed to the dangerous "real world."

.....



Max Payne

Fuse a Gap commercial with the cinematic stylings of John Woo, add a little Charlie Bronson to the mix, and you get *Max Payne*, the best action movie in modern gaming. Sure, it's short, but really, how much cop-who's-lost-it-all justice do you really need?

No One Lives Forever: Game of the Year Edition

The brilliantly funny script and style of our Action Game of the Year is now updated with a new mission, new enemy, new levels, and even a groovy soundtrack CD. Where else can you find evil spy organization henchmen discussing their 401ks or talking about starting up a band?

Clive Barker's Undying

Not just another mediocre entry in the *Hellraiser* series featuring a shambling pinhead, this game is honest-to-god creepy, due mostly to its excellent use of sound. Other innovations (for a shooter, anyway) such as dual-wielding and spells make this a solid buy for the gamer who doesn't mind staining his pants with fear-induced bursts of urine.

Madden NFL 2002

Forget shelling out for a satellite system to watch the games every Sunday. *Madden 2002* delivers all the bone-crunching, pigskin-slapping, smashmouth fun you can imagine, plus it looks like it jumped right off the big-screen HDTV.

Half-Life: Platinum Edition

In one fell swoop you get one of the best games of all time, its follow-up expansion pack, and two great multiplayer add-ons. Even without *Blue Shift* or *Condition Zero*, this is a great way to introduce gamers to the scariness that is the head crab.



Serious Sam

It's *Doom 2001*, where relentless hordes of critters attempt to shred you into gamer confetti. Bundle this Croatian wonder with the sequel (slated for the holidays also), and welcome hours of "frantic action feeling."



Return to Castle Wolfenstein

The original FPS returns with an all-new installment done by the mad geniuses behind *Kingpin*. Think *Saving Private Ryan* with zombies. After tearing through undead Nazis, jump into multiplayer, where you can re-enact D-Day invasions without polishing Grandpa's old M1. Who doesn't want to kill more goose-stepping Nazis?



Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns

A fascinating real-time strategy game with the depth and complexity of a turn-based game, *Kohan* lets players focus on devising the best strategies and unit mix for conquering new realms. Highly recommended for fantasy lovers looking for a change from role-playing.

Civilization III

Hello *Civ III*, goodbye job, goodbye girlfriend, goodbye life. Every editor who's booted this game, thinking they would play for just a while, suddenly lost four hours of their life. It's probably the best strategy game of the year, and arguably the best strategy game of any year. All bow to Sid Meier, God King of Strategy.

Commandos 2

This exquisitely detailed strategy game is a control freak's dream. You command every move of an elite group who use stealth and luck to nail targets deep behind enemy lines. A major improvement over the original and great for living out your fantasies of WWII heroics.

Shogun: Warlord Edition

Few games approach the splendor this

game portrays. Like an epic Kurosawa movie with a cast of thousands, *Shogun's* tactical battlefield depicts Samurai warfare on a grand scale—a sophisticated mix of *Risk*-style conquest and resource management. Add *Warlord Edition's* new units and campaigns and you've got a recipe for Wargame of the Year.

Fallout Tactics

Not for the faint of heart, this Mature-rated strategy game based on the *Fallout* RPG series is as violent as it is rewarding. The game offers squad-based tactical combat in the tradition of *X-COM* and *Jagged Alliance*, but it is deeper, bloodier, and harder. Players fight in post-apocalyptic environments to rescue people or take out hostiles in a wasteland populated by mutants, dogs, and irradiated humans. Meaty fare for tactical combat buffs.

Stronghold

Fancy yourself a king, do you? Get thee to thy local gaming store and purchase *Stronghold*, a "castle sim" that's easily one of the best strategy games this year. Two campaigns, tons of single maps, and a multiplayer mode will keep you pushing peasants around for nights on end. Awesome sound and animation round out a great game.



Black & White

One of the ultimate control freak games, *Black & White* lets players nurture a giant beast and loose it on an unsuspecting, defenseless populace. Make no mistake, you are a god in this game, free to be as good or bad as you wish. A unique gaming experience and a remarkable achievement in artificial intelligence.

Control Freak

They're easy to spot. Just knock over an action figure and see what happens. Or see how long they can keep quiet in the car. The dead giveaway is if your loved one wants their underwear folded. Don't get mad—give them a big hug and a new strategy game. And tell them it's a shame mommy didn't allow more time for potty when they were young.





Sim Jockey

The Sim Jockey likes to keep it real, as in hardcore realism. He likes to feel as if he's actually in the thick of the action, at the controls of a powerful dream machine, making life-or-death decisions on the fly or on the track or even on the battlefield. Easily identified by the scores of joysticks, racing wheels, throttles, and other peripherals bolted to his desk, the Sim Jockey can talk for hours about force feedback technology or the inner workings of avionics. Do not fear these people! As much as they seem to be living in their own world, they paradoxically have a better grip on reality than a lot of us.



Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

War may be hell, but this fully interactive battlefield simulator can make you appreciate that like no other game ever has. While it's a first-person shooter at its core, this game couldn't be more different from *Max Payne* or *Half-Life*. You can get in and drive or pilot any vehicle, for one thing. This game is totally unique—and great.

IL-2 Sturmovik

Whether you prefer the challenge of dog-fighting in a rickety tub of Russian bolts to the ultrasleek and ultraboring fire-and-forget missile wars of modern jet combat, or if you just like a little history with your sims, *IL-2 Sturmovik* should fit the bill nicely.

Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002

The ultimate flight simulator. So detailed and realistic, you'll want to bring your own barf bag. Heck, they should just include a pilot's license application in the box. Everything from single-engine Cessnas to behemoth 747s are represented here, lovingly recreated down to the last switch and dial on the instrument panel.



Independence War 2

Tired of flittery little dogfights with

little regard for physics? How about a space sim that resembles naval combat, has Newtonian physics, and offers a *Privateer's* sense of freedom and customization? The sure choice for the earthbound space commander.



NASCAR Racing 4

No, it isn't just hillbillies turning left. NASCAR fans know that races are a battle of wits, strategy, and precision driving. *NR4* recreates those qualities so faithfully that many real Winston Cup drivers use the game for practice. Really.

High Heat Major League Baseball 2002

Real baseball geeks are more interested in the subtleties of the split-fingered fastball than cartoonish home run derbies, so if you haven't discovered the ultra-authentic *High Heat* series yet, now is the time. For those who crave the drama of the pitcher-batter duel and love to pore over obscure stats and figures, *High Heat* is the best (and only) choice.

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Mama's Boy

When not in his room playing computer games, the mama's boy is most likely to be found at a comic book convention, playing *D&D*, or marking off the days on the calendar until the *Lord of the Rings* movie opens. He may look effete and pale, but underneath that spindly frame is some really neat dwarven chain mail and the beating heart of a warrior.



Anachronox

Some mama's boys like a little storytelling and humor with their monster-killing. For them, get *Anachronox*, a goofy and entertaining console-style RPG that deserves a wider audience. It's not for everyone, but for the guy in your life who has all the Monty Python routines memorized



Diablo II Battlechest

Nothing can make the mama's boy feel more like a tough guy than a good hearty round of *Diablo II*, Blizzard's epic fantasy action RPG. For the holidays, Blizzard has released the *Diablo II Battlechest*—with *Diablo II*, the *Lord of Destruction* expansion set, *Diablo I*, and a strategy guide—for a measly \$50. Good, wholesome, monster-bashing fun for the hyperactive hobbit-lover in your life.

EverQuest Trilogy

If that mama's boy of yours is the social type, consider getting him into *EverQuest*—but be warned that you may lose him forever. The reigning champ of massively multiplayer games is still going strong with a couple of sweet holiday deals. The *EverQuest Trilogy* combines the original game with the *Ruins of Kunark* and *Scars of Vellous* expansions. *Shadows of Luclin* is the brand-new expansion, with a new planet, horses, new graphics, and plenty more to keep the already-addicted happy and hooked.

and collects Dr. Who memorabilia, you can't go wrong with this.



The Sims: Hot Date

Now here's a real gift for the mama's boy. If he breaks out in hives, curls up in a ball, or loads his chess program at the thought of talking to a real girl, why not let him practice his underdeveloped romance skills in the privacy of his own bedroom—in a way that allows the door to remain open? *The Sims: Hot Date* is the latest add-on to the mega-phenomenon, with more than 40 one-on-one social interactions for him to practice with his virtual people. This is no mere game—*Hot Date* is educational software!

Anarchy Online

Hey, your mama's boy isn't just some kind of fey elf-lover—he also fancies himself a post-apocalyptic warrior! Okay, we hear you. We offer *Anarchy Online*, a massively multiplayer RPG that leans more heavily on sci-fi than fantasy. *AO* had a rough beginning, and plenty of people are less than thrilled with Funcom's erratic and underwhelming support, but the hardcore fans (including a few mama's boys right here at CGW) swear by it.

M A S S I V E L Y M U L T I P L A Y E R

**"We shall fight on the beaches...
on the landing grounds...
in the fields...
in the streets...
in the hills.**

"We shall never surrender!"

-Winston Churchill

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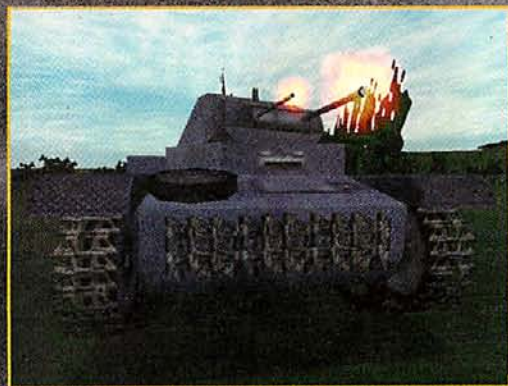
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"... with the 1.30 update, it's so much improved that in many respects it's a totally new experience."

-Computer Games Online, October 2001



All new terrain and objects providing more cover with newly added vehicles and weapons



Enhanced mission and rank systems



Improved game performance and stability

THE BATTLE OF BLITZKRIEG HAS BEGUN!

WWII ONLINE BLITZKRIEG



Blood
Violence





Your Mama

No one loves you like Mom, and yet, of the legions of human beings bewildered, puzzled, and outright disturbed by you, no one is more befuddled than the woman who birthed you. So this holiday try something new. Instead of alienating your family even further, build some bridges and show Mom that gaming is good. Do it for love, do it for unity, and do it to get that nagging harpy off your back so you can play *Max Payne* in something approaching peace.



Bejeweled

Think of *Bejeweled* as Mommie Dearest's gateway drug: Once she starts playing this viciously addictive puzzle game, there's no turning back. Remember how you had to repeat third grade (and part of fourth) because of *Tetris*? Well, that's how effective *Bejeweled* is. And it comes with an added bonus—since you have to download it at www.popcap.com, Mom will learn a valuable lesson about what she's been calling The Inter World Wide Infonet Superhighway Com.

Zoo Tycoon

When you were a kid, Mom took you to the zoo, right? And odds are she didn't try to leave you to be raised by dingoes like our moms did, right? Let Mom relive those nostalgic days of young motherhood with Microsoft's most heartwarming of building sims. By day, the two of you can chuckle happily together at the antics of the monkeys. At night, you can let the leopards out to terrorize the visitors.

Typing of the Dead

Even Mom has a dark side. (Remember that incident with the glue gun?) Let your personal Maternal Godhead blow off steam in this wacky survival horror game, in which her schoolgirl typing skills and not her handiness with a gun will save the day. It just might save the life of the next Avon lady that callously interrupts her "stories."



Williams Pinball Classics

Granted, Mom may not understand the latest and greatest gaming technology, but even the most inbred Appalachian baby machine understands pinball. *Williams Pinball Classics* so faithfully recreates four classic Williams pinball tables, Mom might actually think she's in a poodle skirt flirting with boys at the malt shop instead of working two jobs to support your *Counter-Strike* habit.



Monopoly Tycoon

Remember rainy afternoons spent playing *Monopoly* with the family and how your brother embezzled money from the bank and made Dad dance on his toes and sing "I'm a Little Teapot" in a piercing falsetto so he didn't have to pay rent on Marvin Gardens and could eke out one more pointless turn? Mom remembers too. *Monopoly Tycoon* will scrub away all those horrible memories with entirely new gameplay that's refreshingly familiar, tremendously engaging, and shot through with the vindictive cruelty that's made *Monopoly* a family favorite for decades.

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A MAN WILL RISE up TO CHANGE
THE FATE OF AN EMPIRE.

THAT MAN, IS YOU.

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GOthic

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Rich, 3rd person action-RPG environment



Deep, twisting storyline with 50+ hours



Seamlessly detailed cities and landscapes

Get medieval on the world, go Gothic. Coming this winter.

Winner of numerous
awards, including:





MacGyver

Sure, everyone took digs at Richard Dean Anderson, but when you were freezing your ass off miles away from base camp, you had to love the guy who could make a Quonset hut out of Hostess Fruit Pie bags, a Cub Scout knife, and Bubble Yum. The same is true for hardware guys: Show too much interest in an uninterruptible power supply and you're the laughingstock of your brother Germain's quilting bee. But who gets a call when they need help? So stop laughing at the family tinkerer and hook a brother up with some hardware.



Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy Platinum

Okay, we know that he has a sound card. But does his sound card have a cool-looking breakout box, have 5.1 support, and sport more FireWire ports than Larry King has ex-wives? (Note: We actually don't know how many ex-wives Larry King has, but we do know that the Audigy Platinum has four FireWire ports.) If you answered "no" to any of these questions, then your charge is clear: Run out and buy one. The techie in your life won't know how to thank you.

Logitech MOMO Force Driving Wheel

He always wanted a big-time fancy car. Maybe one of them imports, even. But what with making minimum wage dropping dough in vats of grease at the local Krispy Kreme whilst living in his parents' basement, that tricked-out Prelude is looking more and more like a pipe dream. No way do we expect you to buy the slacker some wheels, but for \$200 he can sit in his room and pretend he's one of the "cool guys" that he sees cruisin' the strip. Uh...maybe not.



Windows XP Home Edition

Back in '68 Jimmy Hendrix asked the eternal question, "Are you experienced?" Well, Microsoft has an answer for you: "If you're not, then you should be." While gamers have always been loath to adopt a new OS, some fellas up in Hendrix's backyard—Redmond—have come together to create one: Windows XP (Experience), which not only fails to suck, but actually kicks some bona fide ass. We had the opportunity to test the Justice Department's favorite OS, and on the same machine, Windows XP achieved frame-rates that were on average 10 frames per second faster than the rates of Windows ME.

2GHz Intel Pentium 4 and 1.5GHz AMD Athlon XP 1800+

As I write this, I'm minutes away from attending an AMD press event where they're going to show off their vaunted new processor, the 1.5GHz Athlon XP 1800+ (or whatever they're calling it these days). Whether it's a 2GHz Pentium or a 1.5GHz Athlon XP, the gadget freak in your life will love you forever if he finds one of these beneath the Hanukkah bush.



VisionTek XTASY 6564 (GeForce3Ti 500)

Yeah, yeah, we all know that his 64MB GeForce3-powered Hercules 3D Prophet III gets 3DMark2001 scores of 6000. The thing is, though, with VisionTek's 64MB GeForce3Ti 500-based graphics card purring inside that machine, he'll get 3DMark2001 scores nearing 8000. What?! You don't understand the importance of that? That's okay; just buy the damn card.

ZOO TYCOON™

ON "NUTRITION"



"HEY MOM THE LIONS ATE GRANDPA MILTON."



Build improper cages, and your guests will be pounced upon in the new PC game, Zoo Tycoon!™. As operating manager you are responsible for over 40 species, constructing their habitats and keeping them healthy. Hire zookeepers who will gladly clean their cages. Your animals will be happy, and your guests will be too. Especially when all their limbs are left intact.



RIBEYE, T-BONE, FILET MIGNON. A LION WILL EAT THEM ALL.

The safest and most cost-efficient way to feed carnivores is to have zookeepers serve them raw meat. But for some excitement, you can feed the lions other live animals. *Ba-bye gazelles.*



YOU TRY SWALLOWING A WHOLE MOUSE.

The House of Reptiles is just one of the buildings you place in your operation. There are also petting zoos, bathrooms, and gift shops selling overpriced African Warthogs. The kids love 'em, and your profit margin will too.

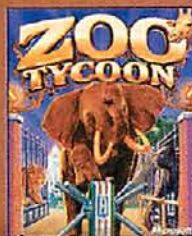


ALL SHE NEEDS IS A GOOD SALAD BAR.

The herbivores in Zoo Tycoon need habitats that resemble their native lands. Design them properly and your animals will be happy and fat. Rain forest animals need rain forest trees. Desert animals need desert vegetation. You get the drift.



Nutrition is only one part of Zoo Tycoon. For more info on other facets of the game, go to microsoft.com/games/zootycoon



Microsoft microsoft.com/games/zootycoon

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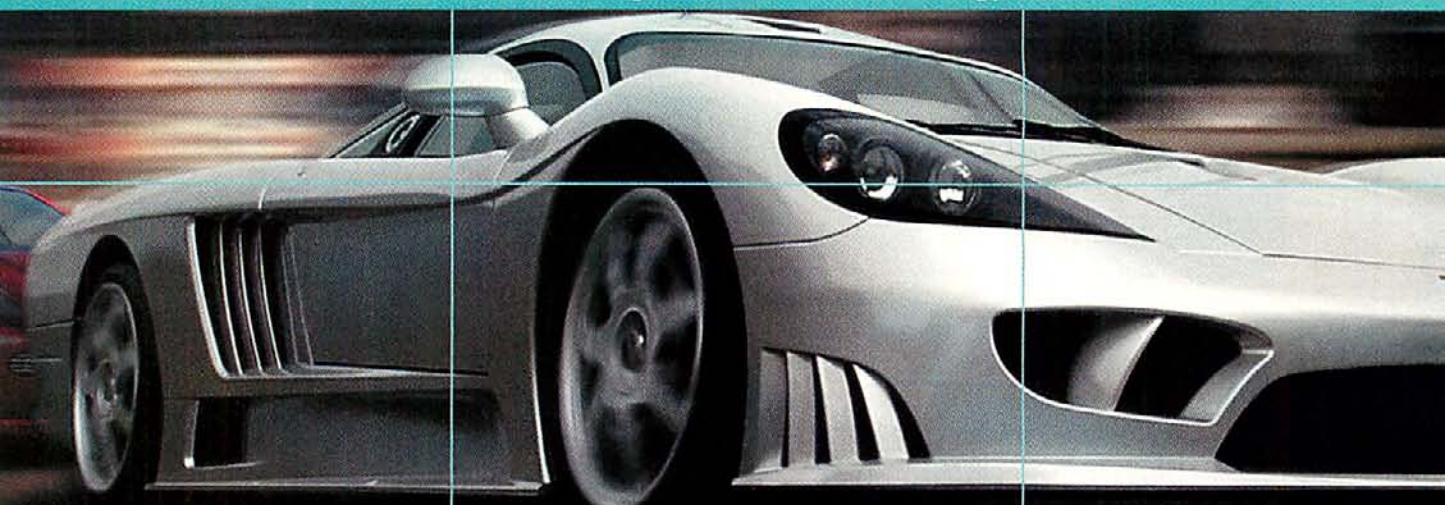
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PlayStation 2



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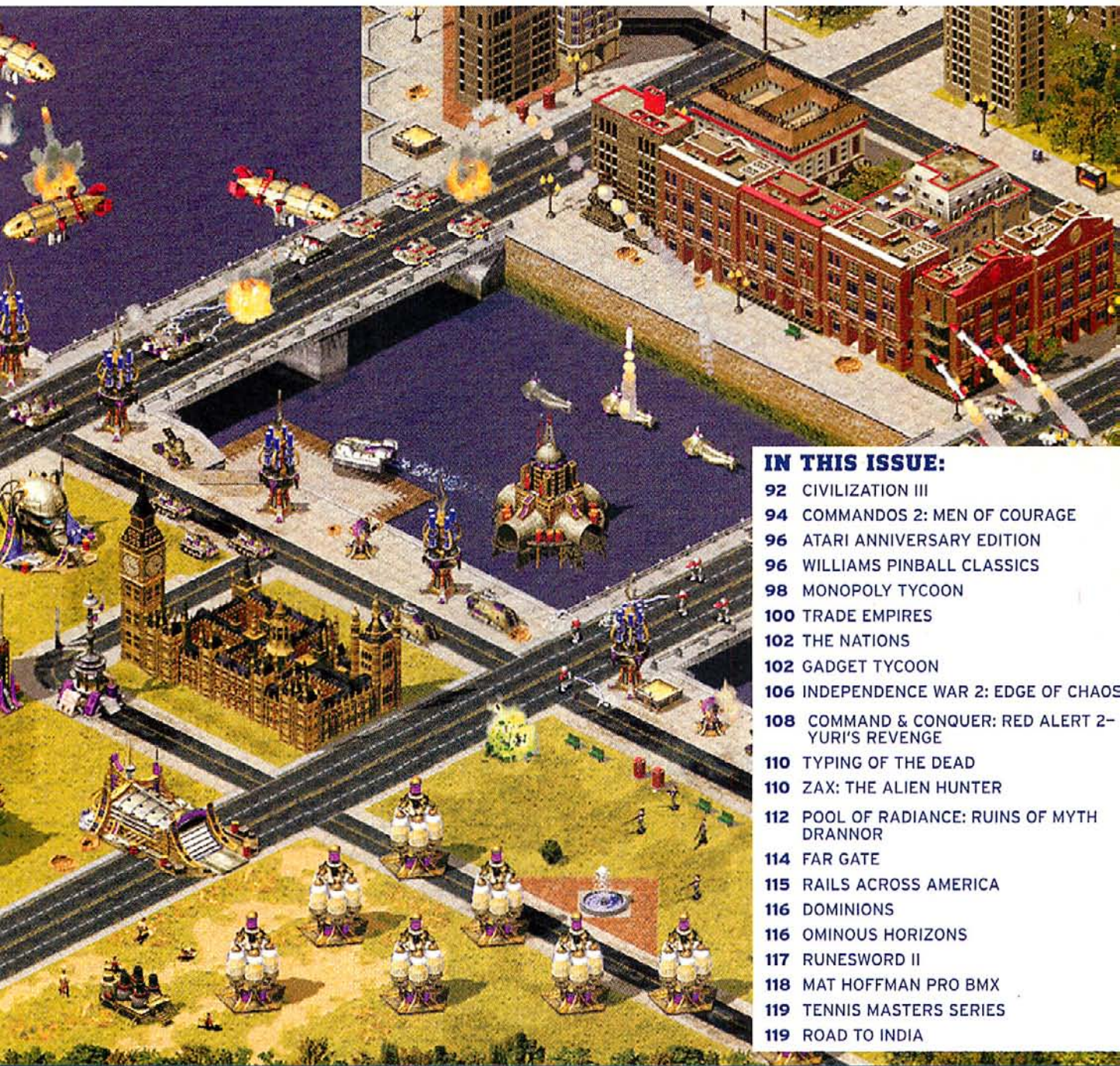


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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



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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.



Pull back and enjoy a glamour shot of your city with all its Improvements.

Civilization III

Firaxis takes a risk and produces a *Civilization* that rules **By Jason Kapalka**



PUBLISHER: Infogrames
 DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games
 CONTACT: www.civilization3.com
 ESRB RATING: Everyone;
 mild animated violence
 PRICE: \$50

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
 300, 32MB RAM,
 500MB hard drive
 space RECOMMENDED
 REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
 500, 64MB RAM
 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: none

Since many people (including me) believe *Civilization* is the best computer game of all time, expectations for any new incarnation are, to put it sedately, high. With *Civ III* Firaxis could have played it safe by just updating the graphics and chucking in a few of the interface tweaks from *Alpha Centauri*, but instead they've done a full-scale reworking of several key game mechanics. It's dangerous to screw with a classic design. After all, if it ain't broke...

So, the big surprise is that the changes actually work—brilliantly. They add depth and flavor while streamlining play and eliminating tedium. After playing this version, I find that the former gold standard, *Civ II*, feels broken, and that's about the best backhanded compliment I could give the game.

The graphics for *Civ III* are certainly good, and include some nice subtle

features, like Montezuma in a suit when you reach the modern era or the ability to custom-build your palace from chunks of different architectural styles. But let's face it: *Civ* is not about the pictures.

The first major gameplay change you'll notice is that the different civilizations have specific characteristics beyond their starting techs. For example, religious civilizations build temples and the like more quickly, and suffer only one turn of anarchy when switching governments. Each civilization also has an exclusive elite unit that replaces a regular one, such as the

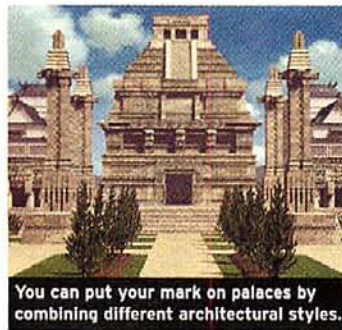
Germans' Panzer tank or the Aztecs' Jaguar Warrior. Some, like the Aztecs, get a boost early on from their elite units, while others, like the Americans with their F-15 fighter, shine much later in the game.

Next thing you'll see is the new Culture rating for each city and empire, based on age and developments like Wonders of the World, libraries, temples, and so on. As a city's culture grows, so do its borders, until eventually it merges with other nearby cities. This gives you a pleasing geopolitical map with real borders, and prevents annoying computer players from traipsing around

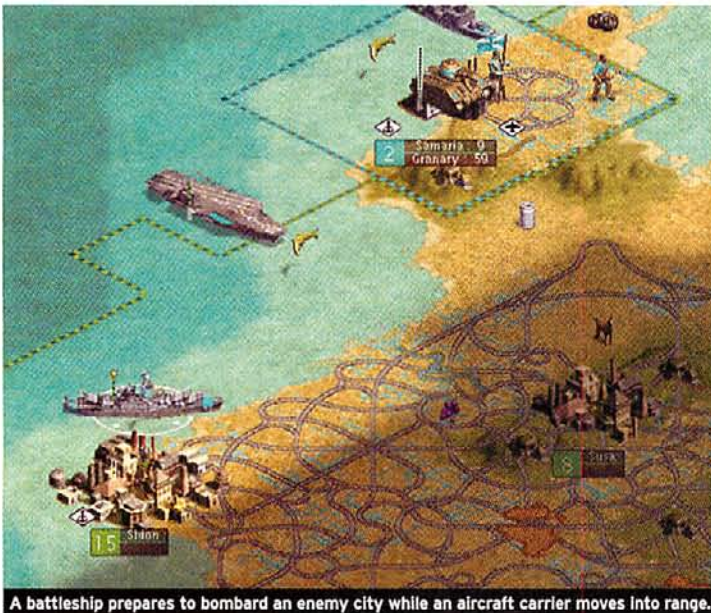
If you have even the slightest interest in strategy games, run—don't walk—to get a copy of *Civ III*.



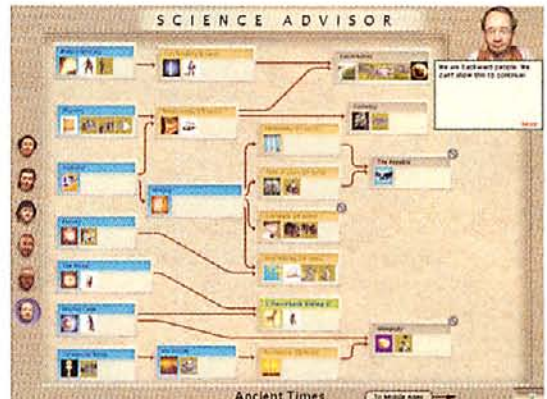
The graphics for terrain and units have been upgraded to look more natural.



You can put your mark on palaces by combining different architectural styles.



A battleship prepares to bombard an enemy city while an aircraft carrier moves into range.



No more foldout charts! The tech tree is now part of the program, nicely arranged and easily viewable in your strangely familiar-looking Science Advisor.



The city control panel lets you tweak production and assign citizens to different roles.

your turf with impunity. Eventually, entire cities near foreign empires with a higher culture may defect to the classier empire.

Negotiation and Dirty Tricks

The next big difference you'll note is in diplomacy and espionage. Diplomat units are gone; instead, you pay money to establish embassies with rival empires. From there, you can haggle for various alliances, embargoes, technologies, and goods in an intuitive interface that allows for all sorts of interesting deals: You could end up paying a lump sum in gold, plus a yearly fee, to get an ally's support in a mutual protection pact, along with a trade embargo of your foes and perhaps with a couple workers thrown in for good measure. Later on, intelligence agencies allow you to perform dirty tricks with the same menu-driven interface (so now you can avoid spy invasions).

Trade, too, has undergone a complete overhaul. Caravans are gone. Instead, there is a range of luxury and strategic resources found on the map itself. Luxuries like wine and incense make citizens in your empire happier, while

strategic resources like iron are necessary for building advanced units. When you have established a reliable sea or land route connecting with other capitals, you can trade excess resources or acquire ones you lack from other empires through diplomacy.

Where trade in the original *Civ* was almost an optional feature, here it is vital. You may have discovered iron-working, but if the Greeks have a monopoly on all the sources of the metal, no legionaries for you, pal. Later, other resources appear on the map as you discover new technologies: When you learn atomic theory, you'll see uranium deposits appear throughout the world. The appearance of resources makes for much more interesting conflict in the modern eras, when borders have stabilized, as you suddenly realize, for example, that all the available sources of coal or oil are deep in the territories of those damn double-crossing Babylonians.

There are a host of more subtle changes. All unit upkeep is now in gold, rather than food or shields, and the Home City concept for military units is

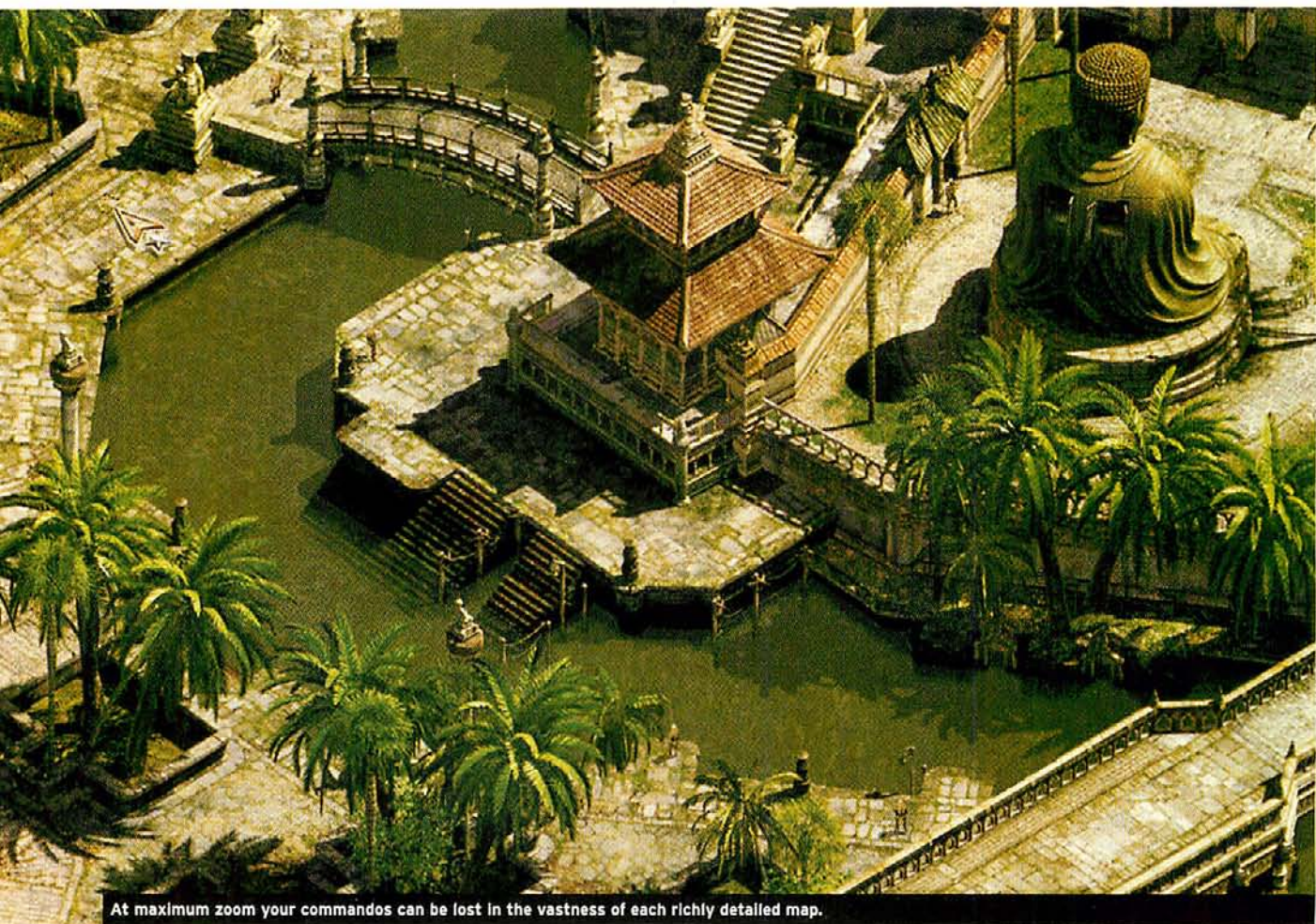
gone, replaced by a War Weariness factor that causes cities to gradually fall into disorder when fighting under a republic or democracy. Settlers can be automated in a variety of ways, and cities can be put under AI governors. There are a couple new units that put an interesting spin on things, like the Privateer, which flies no flag and can be used to attack other nations' shipping without declaring war.

There isn't enough space to go into every detail, but it should be noted that it was difficult to write this review, because each time I started the game just to check on some detail, six hours mysteriously vanished. What more do you need to hear? If you have even the slightest interest in strategy games—and I can't imagine why you're reading this if you don't—run, don't walk, to get a copy of *Civ III*.

For strategy tips on Civilization III, go to page 136.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Maybe the best incarnation of the best strategy game of all time.



At maximum zoom your commandos can be lost in the vastness of each richly detailed map.

Commandos 2: Men of Courage

Lead this band of brothers all the way to victory **By Jason Kapalka**



PUBLISHER: Pyro Studios
 DEVELOPER: Eldos CONTACT:
www.eldosinteractive.com
 ESRB RATING: Teen; blood,
 violence PRICE: \$40

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300,
 64MB RAM, 3D card,
 2GB hard drive space
 RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
 Pentium II 500, 128MB
 RAM, 32MB 3D card,
 3GB hard drive space
 MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet
 (2-4 players)

What makes a great game? Some are simply so polished they have no real weaknesses (think Blizzard titles like *StarCraft*). Others are harder to define. They have flaws, all right, often huge and frustrating ones, but their awesome virtues simply outweigh the mistakes; consider the Microprose classics *Master of Orion* or *Master of Magic*, both riddled with game-stopping bugs and defective AI on release.

Commandos 2 falls squarely in the latter camp. Although it's shot through with bugs and screw-ups that would remand a lesser title to the bargain bin, the game itself is so damn good you'll forgive almost anything to keep playing.

The long, long, long-awaited sequel to the original sleeper hit, *Commandos 2* shares the same basic premise and gameplay. You control a squad of WWII-era covert operatives in a series of puzzle-oriented real-time missions against Axis targets—movie buffs will easily recognize missions based on *Saving Private Ryan*, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, and *The Guns of Navarone*. All the boys from the first game—the Green Beret, the Diver, the Engineer—are back, joined now by a host of new characters, ranging from a sexy female spy to an adorable and rather well-trained mutt. In one of the biggest additions to the gameplay, you can also control assorted—and expendable—Allied

troops, which allows for pitched fire-fights rarely seen in the original title.

Theater of War

Graphically, the game has undergone a huge facelift. The main map still provides a top-down 2D view, but you can rotate it in 90-degree increments for a better view of the action. Inside buildings, however, the view becomes fully 3D, allowing for smooth rotation of the scene. You can zoom in or out as much as you like, though up close things tend to get a little pixelated and zooming out too far reduces you to playing *Where's Waldo* to simply find your guys. The maps themselves are huge—several times the size of the

Commandos 2 is so damn good you'll forgive just about anything to keep playing.



Tiny the Green Beret has a surprise in store for this patrolling Nazi.

ones in the first game—and obscenely detailed, offering countless sniper positions, hiding spots, and climbable surfaces. Pleasant and not so pleasant surprises abound, like the pretty schools of fish you'll encounter that turn out to be flesh-gnawing piranhas.

Gameplay has also been beefed up. The first game was criticized for being too puzzle oriented, with assorted commandos being overly specialized at the cost of realism, and many missions solvable with only one trick. The sequel, while still a puzzle game, opens up the range of strategic possibilities. Your commandos now have inventories and can pick up and trade assorted items, including weapons stripped from enemy soldiers. Most can now perform common operations like tying up unconscious bad guys or carrying their bodies out of sight. Objects like wine and sleeping pills can be combined to create diversions, and there are a host of traps and tricks available, from smoke grenades to tripwires and landmines. Perhaps most important, you'll no longer automatically lose a mission if one commando is killed. Instead, incapacitated agents can be revived with the use of a first-aid kit.

The 10 missions are huge, multistage affairs, with objectives changing as you proceed. After your submarine crashes in the Arctic, for instance, your entire crew save one is taken captive, leaving you to free your comrades, infiltrate a Nazi destroyer to recover an Enigma machine, and then sabotage the ship and escape in a stolen airplane.

Maps and briefings are available that detail your primary and secondary objectives, but one of the strengths of the game is that there are almost always multiple paths to success. I often found myself ignoring the game's suggested course of action in favor of a plan I'd come up with myself, and a brief survey of fan sites reveals that many players have come up with feasible strategies completely different from my own.

It's almost an embarrassment of riches: There's even replayability available via multiplayer co-op mode, hidden bonus



Thanks to the Allied cannon fodder you can now control, massive pitched battles like this one are common.

missions to unlock, and three escalating levels of difficulty.

Collateral Damage

There are flies in the ointment, however. First up is the monstrous 2GB installation footprint. Ouch. Then there are the bugs, ranging from trivial (mission objectives not being properly displayed) to catastrophic (frequent crashes to the desktop). And finally there's the arcane interface, which may pose the game's single toughest puzzle. Weird buttons appear and disappear, seemingly at random, while important functions are accessible only via a complex and nonintuitive hotkey system. But for all the hotkey action going on, there are no apparent buttons for quick load or quick save, an unforgivable omission in a game that absolutely requires a whole lotta loadin'. (Note: Ctrl-S and Ctrl-L will load and save, but this less-than-obvious little feature is detailed exactly nowhere in any of the documentation.)

But in the end, none of this really matters: Through sheer force of gameplay, *Commandos 2* easily overcomes its weaknesses. It's a terrific game that will likely be emulated for years to come.

For strategy tips on *Commandos 2*, go to page 128.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Despite bugs and interface issues, *Commandos 2* marches to victory.



Environments are full of nice ambient touches, like these innocent walrus being used for target practice by heartless Nazis.



Japanese troops on full alert in Burma.

Atari Anniversary Edition

If you loved parachute pants...
By Dana Jongewaard

PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Atari, Digital Eclipse
CONTACT: www.infogrames.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$14.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133,
16MB RAM RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER: None

Maybe you're tired of the realistic graphics in *Max Payne*. Perhaps your brain has filled to capacity with all those key commands for *Homeworld*. Or it could just be that you really liked the way you looked in those parachute pants. Whatever your motivation, Infogrames is back to capitalize on it with the *Atari Anniversary Edition*.

The 12 games in the package, which includes classics such as *Super Breakout* and *Asteroids*, have been "faithfully reproduced down to the last detail." The sounds of the ball bouncing back and forth in *Pong* and the annoying theme music from *Crystal Castles* are still there. The reaction time of the mouse is modified so it simulates the timing of a trackball for *Missile Command*, *Centipede*, and *Millipede*. They've even built the image of an



Beeedeebeedeebeedeebeee...!

arcade around each game screen.

Call it the curse of the MTV generation: While it's fun to go back in time for a little while, I found my attention flagging after a few rounds of each game. Somehow it just isn't the same without the surroundings of an arcade, and soon I was getting my entertainment

from counting the number of pixels on each screen as I played.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Great if you're suffering from early '80s nostalgia, but embarrassing to remember this was once high-tech.

Williams Pinball Classics

Gaming nostalgia for less than two rolls of quarters By Tom Price

PUBLISHER: Encore Software
DEVELOPER: Redoubt
CONTACT: www.encoresoftware.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$14.99

REQUIREMENTS: P266, 32MB
RAM, 100MB install
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
None MULTIPLAYER: None

I've always found the concept of pinball games on the computer a little odd. It's kind of like putting a radio show on television. And until now, most computer pinball games have been specifically designed to be played on the PC. But for all those pinball purists out there (and other than Brooke Shields and Roger Daltrey, how many are there really?), Redoubt has faithfully recreated some classic tabletops for computer gamers. The results are a bit mixed, but anyone who blew their laundry quarters every week down at the pizza parlor when they should have been home studying for midterms can appreciate the addictive qualities of the four tables available here.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon and the pirate-themed Black Rose are dead-on re-creations of the original tables, including small details like the holographic creature in the middle of the Black Lagoon table and Black Rose's multiball-firing cannon. But oddly, the simplest table, the fantasy-themed Lost World, is the most satisfying, with its two flippers and lack of ramps. *Williams Pinball Classics* does offer a nice trip



In spite of—or because of—its sparseness, the Lost World table is the most satisfying of the four included in the game.

down memory lane, but you won't exactly be compelled to go searching for lost quarters between the couch cushions.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Good for nostalgic arcade trolls—but there are only four tables.



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Monopoly Tycoon

Cornering the market on fun
By George Jones

PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Deep Red
CONTACT: www.monopolytycoon.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 233,
64MB RAM, 90MB
hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium II 266,
200MB hard drive
space MULTIPAYER: LAN,
Internet (2-6 players)



Monopoly Tycoon is the rare game that, 20 minutes into playing it, stands out as a winner. So much of a winner, in fact, that it might just be one of the best strategy games of 2001. Gamers expecting something light, fluffy, and, well, mainstream, are going to be shocked when they find themselves immensely enjoying a gaming experience that conjures up shades of *M.U.L.E.*, one of the all-time classic economic strategy games.

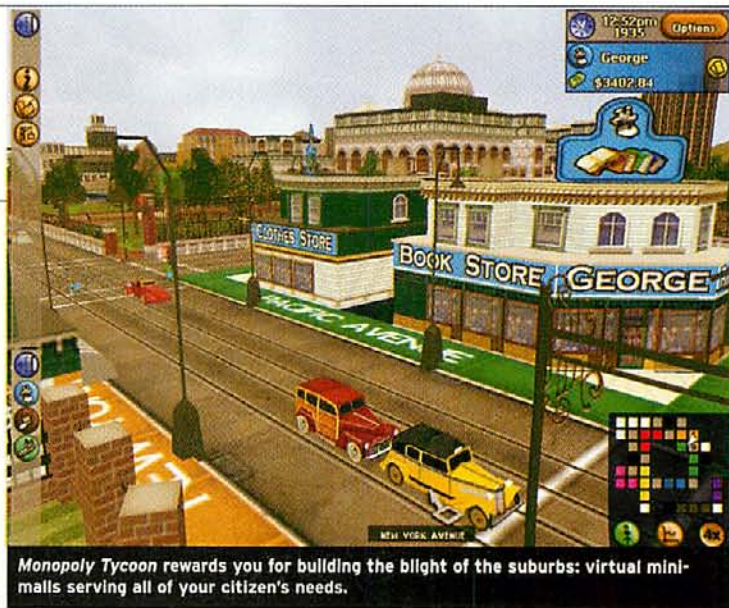
Understanding why the game has this effect requires nothing more than transporting your mind back to the days of playing the board game. Understanding how Deep Red, the game's third-party designers, captured and interpreted the essence of *Monopoly* is another matter entirely. They



Whenever anyone wants to buy a lease on a property, everyone in the game enters the auction mode, one of the most tense aspects of the game.



The classic *Monopoly* board has been transformed into a city grid on which you can monitor the competition as well as the needs of your citizens.



Monopoly Tycoon rewards you for building the blight of the suburbs: virtual mini-malls serving all of your citizen's needs.

captured the simplicity of the rule system, the symmetry of the gameplay, and the depth of the original. And they managed to have perfectly balanced, updated, and enhanced it for the digital age.

Monopoly Tycoon offers several twists on the classic game. For example, when you want to buy the lease on a property, you go into an auction mode where everyone gets to bid on, for example, Boardwalk, Ventnor, or Atlantic Avenue.

buildings) on Kentucky and Indiana Avenues. To squeeze her, you conserve money over the course of one 24-hour period and outbid her on the lease for these properties, with the end result being that for the next 25 game years, she pays you rent for her businesses. You can even buy the utility companies, with the end result being that you collect a certain percentage of everyone's power or water bills.

Your style of play can also be influ-

You can set the victory conditions to center around money, property value, or even getting voted mayor.

But if you win the bidding, you hold the deed for only about 25 game years, or 45 minutes.

Simply exploring the new dimensions of the game offers some thrills, if only because it mandates learning about a completely unique gaming environment. When was the last time you *didn't* have to concoct variations of the time-tested strategy of "build more units and destroy the enemy"?

This enjoyable experience is further enhanced by the fact that the rules are simple but allow for seemingly infinite strategies. *Monopoly Tycoon* even offers the rare experience that allows for reactive, on-the-fly strategizing. In longer games, you can reverse your play style midgame with positive results. This adds all sorts of decision-making tension, and it also leaves the game wide open strategically.

Say your opponent is winning by making a ton of money off of two blocks of shopping centers (groups of retail

enced by how you define winning. The game allows you to choose what you want the victory conditions to center on—money, property value, getting kicked out of the city, or even getting voted mayor.

The only area where *Monopoly Tycoon* falls short of perfection is the AI opponents' antagonism, or lack thereof. They play a strong game, but they're just not in your face (or your mind) enough. You want to hate your competitors just as much as you hated your little brother when he beat you for the seventh time in a row, or your friend who always insisted on being the car token.

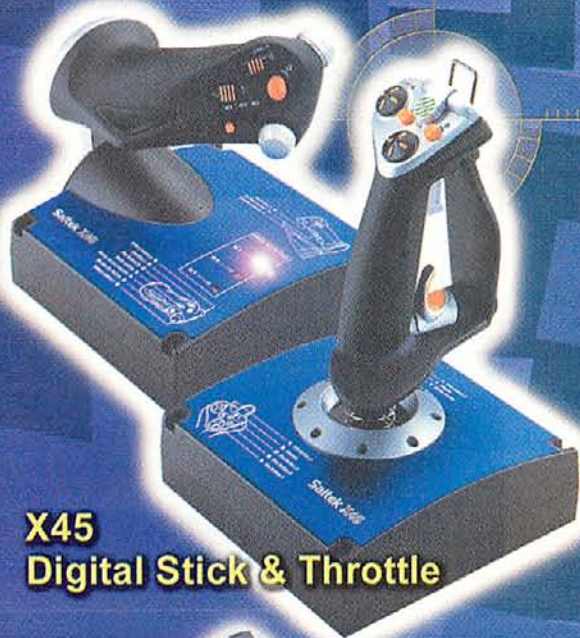
But ultimately, that's a micro-quibble, because *Monopoly Tycoon* is one of the most refreshing, engaging games released in a long time.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A classic game begets another classic game.

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Trade Empires

Marco Polo, we hardly knew ye
By Bruce Geryk

PUBLISHER: Eidos DEVELOPER:
Frog City CONTACT:
www.eidos.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$39.99

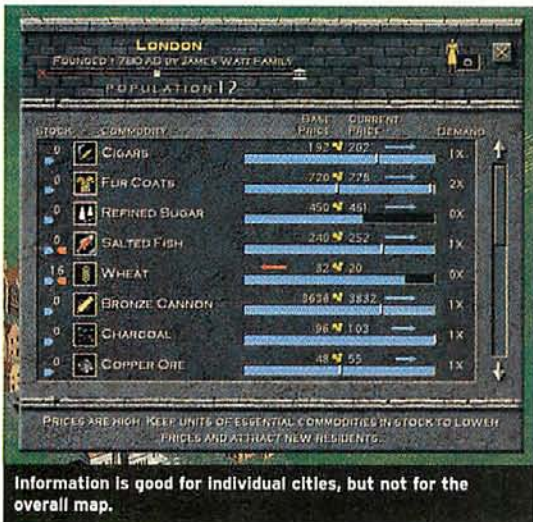
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
300, 64MB RAM,
300MB hard drive
space, 8MB 3D
graphics card RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III,
128MB RAM, 16MB 3D
graphics card
MULTIPLAYER: None

Few developers have been able to make economics as much fun as Frog City. The outstanding *Imperialism* games were essentially wargames with a detailed economics model, and the novel twist on empire building games that this combination produced still hasn't been duplicated. Frog City's latest effort puts the economics front and center. Only this time, that's all there is.

Trade Empires is a real-time strategy game in which you (and really just you, as there is no multiplayer) develop a network of markets and merchants in a variety of historical eras, ranging from ancient China and Mesopotamia to England just before the Industrial Revolution. Players choose where to establish settlements around the map, and the flow of goods through these settlements attracts population, creates demand, and generates your income.



A color-coded schematic map shows resource locations.



Information is good for individual cities, but not for the overall map.



Traders carry specific goods between cities according to your instructions.

Your control over the markets is pretty much total. Cities develop only near centers of trade, so you design your own population landscape by your choice of market locations. Resources are fixed, however, and as settlements grow in response to your actions, you have to keep your populations supplied with food and consumer items or your cities will stagnate or disappear altogether. You do this by carefully assigning the routes your merchants will travel and the goods they will carry. The market

model in *Trade Empires* feels a lot like a mathematical optimization machine. Which, of course, it is. But the remarkable thing about *Imperialism* was that with its cartoonish graphics and arbitrary geography, it managed to create a far more compelling world than the one in *Trade Empires*.

Without any window dressing, the game's large scope. It's like playing a historical trade sim on the moon. The biggest problem with *Trade Empires* is that the absence of everything except the trade engine makes the game seem unusually flat. Holistic's old classic *Merchant Prince* had an element of Venetian politics that, although it wasn't the focus of the game, added another aspect of play that was vital for both strategic and aesthetic reasons. *Railroad Tycoon II* had its stock market. Without any window dressing, the

The 3D terrain seems sterile and prevents the game from developing much of an atmosphere.

model is fairly sophisticated, with various raw materials able to be combined into luxury items of greater and greater value, which in turn influences the development of your population.

Trade Empires is closely related to sim games like *Caesar* and *Pharaoh*, with the focus being on the flow of goods over large distances rather than within a single city. Each market you place creates new demand and supply, and the game responds much like *SimCity*. The option to play without opposing merchants makes this a great game for those who just want to linker.

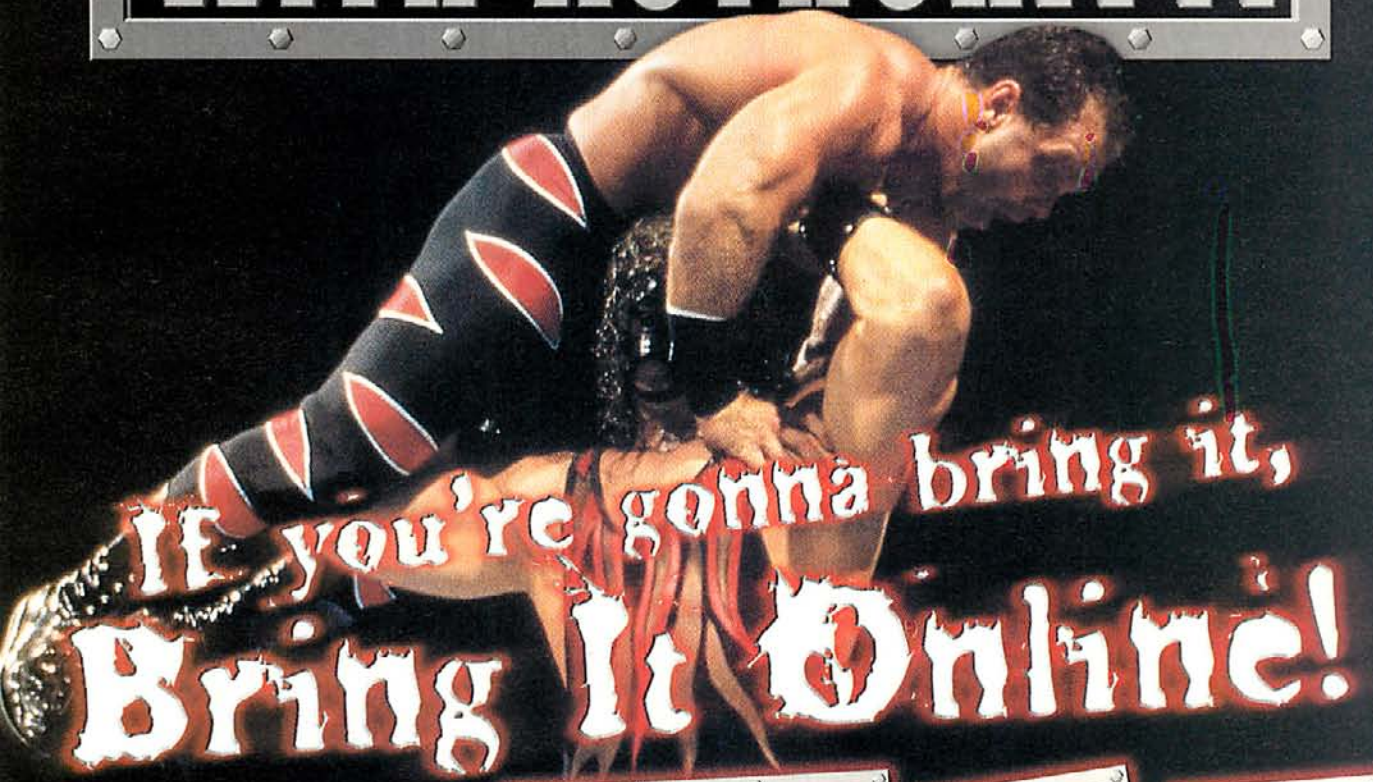
At times the game is quite attractive, but for the most part the 3D terrain seems sterile and prevents the game from developing much of an atmosphere. Despite the varied architecture in the different eras, the game feels homogeneous, and this undercuts the large scenario maps that would otherwise convey a great sense of

VERDICT ★★★★★

Challenging historical trade model undone by sterility and a lack of atmosphere.



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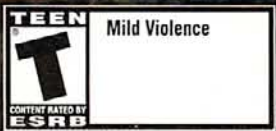
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The Nations

Another squatter in *Settlers* territory **By Mark Asher**

PUBLISHER: Microdots
DEVELOPER: neoSoftware
CONTACT: www.thenations-game.com/
ESRB RATING: Teen; blood, violence
PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 266, 32MB RAM, 8MB Direct 3D-compatible 3D accelerator card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, MULTIPLAYER LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

In *The Nations*, a *Settlers* clone that's the sequel to *Aliens & Amazons*, you take control of one of three alien tribes. The Pimmons are short, squat, blue, fat, lazy humanoids. The Sajikis are insects. The Amazones are a matriarchal, humanlike society. Each tribe comes with a 10-scenario campaign. The game also supports multiplayer mode. It's fun, but the building you do in each scenario often repeats and there's not much here that you didn't see in *Settlers* years ago.

The Nations is a city and community builder that gives you dozens and dozens of details to juggle. Do your people have enough soap to stay clean? Is their diet a good one? How far are the houses from the businesses? Are there enough scientists? Are your neighboring tribes happy with you? Are employment levels high enough? You won't lack for things to fiddle with in this game, and at times you may feel a bit besieged by how much you need to manage. Failing to meet the needs of your people makes

You won't lack for things to fiddle with in this game.

them unhappy and affects productivity. If you like to manage a lot of details, this game will give you your fill.

In a nod to *The Sims*, you can view each individual and find out if they are happy, what task they are engaged in, and so on. The problem is that you can't



It looks like *Settlers* because it plays like *Settlers*.

do much with this information. You're not able to micromanage at that level with any effectiveness, so the information you receive is useless other than for satisfying your curiosity. Even then, your little people will run together in your mind as more or less interchangeable parts.

just observing. At a deeper level, games like *The Nations* are satisfying because they let you manage their small worlds in a way that the real world can never be managed.

The real downfall of *The Nations* is that it just doesn't distinguish itself from all the other *Settlers*-like games. If you're looking for something new in the genre, *The Nations* won't provide it. If you don't mind replaying *Settlers* under a different name and with a new coat of paint, you'll like this game. Otherwise, you might as well just reload one of the four *Settlers* games.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

A good-looking game that fails to stand out from the *Settlers* crowd.

Gadget Tycoon

Sinking faster than a dot-com **By John Fletcher**

PUBLISHER: Monte Cristo Games
DEVELOPER: Monte Cristo Games
CONTACT: www.montecristogames.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; comic mischief
PRICE: \$19.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
MULTIPLAYER: None

Ihear "tycoon game" and think roller coasters and golf courses. So when I loaded *Gadget Tycoon*, I figured I'd be happily tinkering with...well, gadgets. What I got instead was Amoral Facilities Manager: A management sim that proudly touts slush funds, mob intimidation, and industrial espionage as legitimate business tools.

After an amazingly depressing opening sequence, you slog through an inconsistently explained tutorial. Fortunately, *Gadget Tycoon* is not difficult and soon you're running your company. Select a gadget (toilet, roller blades, or house-cleaning robot) and quickly get to the business of designing, building, and

selling the proverbial better mousetrap. In this respect *Gadget Tycoon* succeeds. Developing your facility and balancing finances requires attention to detail, awareness of the competition, and a good sense of timing. (Try releasing new products before Christmas!) The game really disappoints, however, in its promised department of dirty tricks. The thugs feel like afterthoughts because, unlike other employees, you never get to see them in action. Instead they do their dirty deeds offscreen and email you their results.

Ultimately, *Gadget Tycoon* cannot reconcile the competing visions of subtle business sim and exercise in Wild West



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capitalism, and the clumsy attempt to blend the two ideas kills the potential of both of them.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

Too many toilets and not enough gadgets.



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until the power grid was shut off by
discless here.

Walter Peck: They caused an explosion!

Mayor: Is this true?

Venkman: Yes, it's true. This mag has no disc.

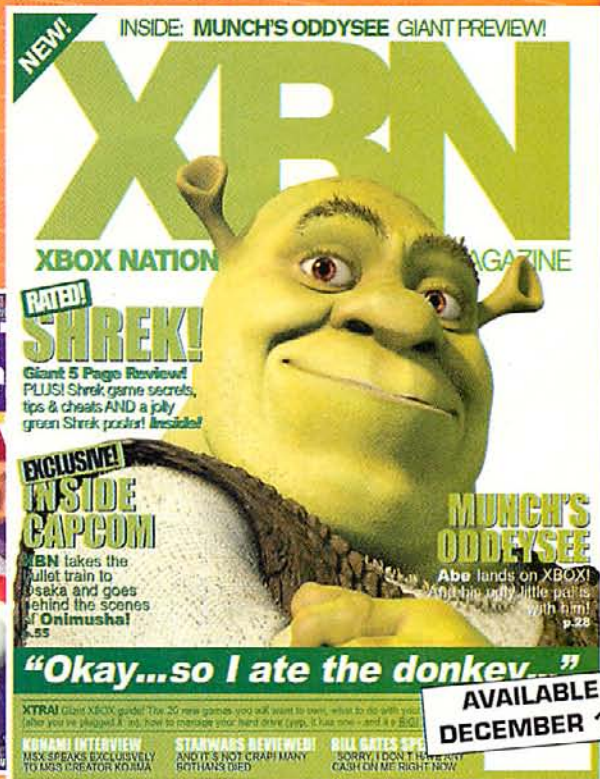
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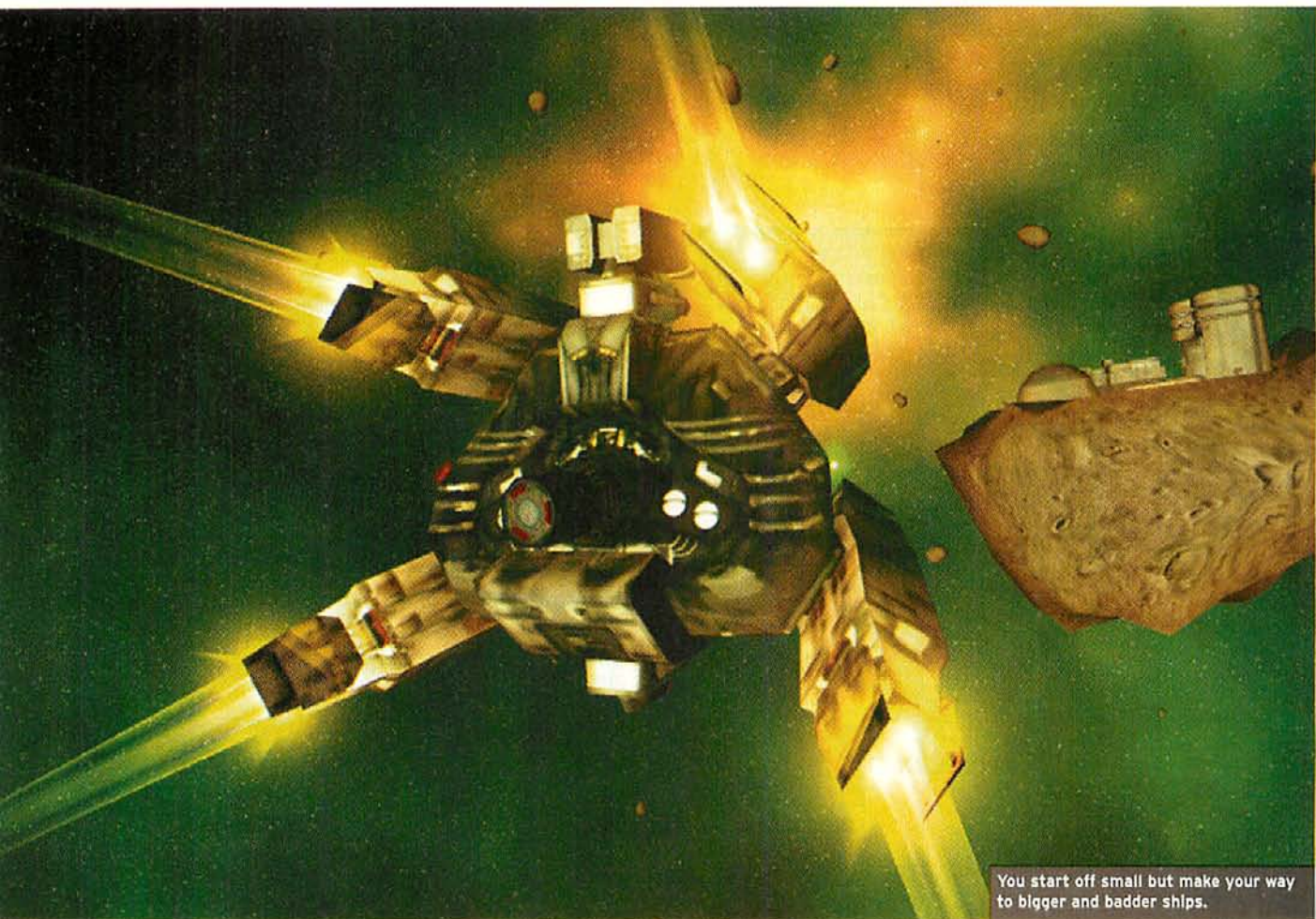
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You start off small but make your way to bigger and badder ships.

Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos

Space sim of the year **By Gordon Berg**



PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Particle Systems (CONTACT: www.independence-war2.com)
ESRB RATING: Everyone;
 mild language, animated violence
PRICE: \$40

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 750MB hard drive
SPACE RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet, GameSpy (2-8 players)

The first question a devoted player of space simulations asks about every new game in the genre is probably this: Is it more like *Elite* or more like *Wing Commander*? The fondness for the former stems from the way it allows players to truly go about the universe wherever and whenever they wish and have it actually mean something, while the latter offers a series of space-combat games set against a backdrop of melodrama, which are compelling despite their lack of freedom of movement. To the disappointment of many a space fanatic, only a few games have followed *Elite*'s example and attempted such an open-ended structure. While there have been a plethora of *Wing Commander* clones that wrapped their scripted linear missions around a story, most (excluding the excellent *X-Wing* and *Freespace* series, of course) have lacked compelling gameplay.

So where does *Independence War 2* fit between these two icons of space combat? The answer is that it's almost both. For the most part, it bridges the gap between the *Elite* and *Wing Commander* styles of gameplay by including the best of both worlds...er, universes.

This is not to say the *Independence War* series doesn't put its own stamp on the space genre. In addition to offering an intriguing story, the original sim distinguished itself by modeling combat as it had never been done before. For the first time, players had to master the complexity of Newtonian physics within the vacuum

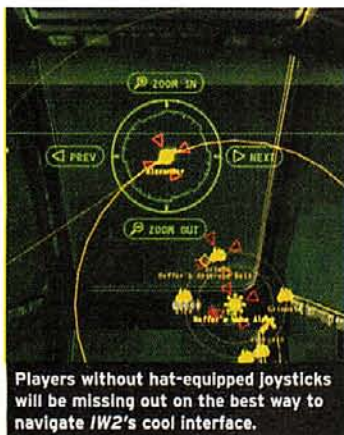
of space—while piloting a very unimble dreadnought, no less. *IW2* continues this trend: Despite the availability now of smaller and more maneuverable craft, the game demands that you exercise tight control over your own inertia in order to survive.

While this ultrarealistic space flight is old hat to original *Independence War* veterans, the steep learning curve might prove a rude welcome for those new to the Badlands Cluster. It's quite clear a lot of effort was made to ease new players into the *Independence War* universe for this second go-around, and yet the game still presumes a bit much. *IW2* pretty much fails to prepare would-be space

***IW2* bridges the gap between the *Elite* and *Wing Commander* styles of gameplay.**



Lagrange Points help shorten the gaps between the stars and explain the whole faster-than-light deal.



Players without hat-equipped joysticks will be missing out on the best way to navigate IW2's cool interface.



The new Direct3D engine means that you don't need a 3dfx card to enjoy the spacey graphics.

warriors for their initial combat in the preliminary act. Unless the player somehow figures out how to incorporate the use of thrusters in addition to the simple control offered by the joystick and throttle (you should learn to circle-strafe, for example), the initial encounters might prove unbearably difficult.

Smart Missions, Minor Setbacks

Stick with it, though, and you'll move into the actual story. It's a century after the first game, and you play the part of recently orphaned Cal Johnston. The missions you fly as young Cal function well as the game's primary tutorial, though combat training is poor. At your side is the AI character of Jefferson Clay (who sometimes resembles Max Headroom), serving as a companion and guide.

You're much older in the next act, and this is where the game really opens up. At this point *IW2* breaks from its predecessor's linear style, taking on *Elite* and *Privateer*-like elements while still delivering the goods on a worthwhile story. Missions that move the story along are clear and obvious. The open-ended space trading, manufacturing, and piracy are left up to the player's discretion, though such operations can be initiated solely from the home base. Ultimately, the only real purpose of this pseudo-*Privateer* style of play is the eventual and necessary attainment of better equipment for your ships. You can go just about anywhere (and there are a lot of places to go), but unless it's part of the narrowly driven narrative, you can't do anything of significance once you arrive.

There is one other contentious gameplay issue, which stems from the save system and various mission difficulty levels: Saves are possible only when you're at the main base. *IW2* doesn't offer anything nearly as bad as Bethesda's *Echelon*, but the lack of an in-flight save option can be quite annoying on a 20-minute mission that takes several attempts to solve. To



Combat still requires that you know how to use vectors and control inertia, rather than just twist and gun as you do in other space sims.

Attention to detail in *IW2* is extremely high and the Direct3D graphics are fantastic.

counter this, you can scamper home at each free moment to save your progress, but the time it takes to do so can be annoying and distracting when you are eager to get on with play.

Rich Rewards

Apart from these few gameplay problems, *IW2* is executed flawlessly. The attention to detail is extremely high, the Direct3D graphics are fantastic, and the story is worth pursuing. The use of the joystick's hat as a means of HUD navigation is well implemented. There are even various multiplayer modes beyond the standard (and now very

stale) deathmatch. Plus, there's an online component players can log into that resolves the progress and actions of competing factions through a turn-based tracking system.

Although we question some design choices, *IW2* has delivered the depth, high production value, and polish sorely lacking in many other games these days. If one has the patience, *IW2* is quite rewarding.

For strategy tips on *IW2*, go to page 122.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The closest thing we've had to *Elite* or *Privateer* in a long time.



Flying saucers are among the more interesting units in the new faction, Yuri's army.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2—Yuri's Revenge

Westwood's evil genius **By Elliott Chin**

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios CONTACT:
www.westwood.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; violence
PRICE: \$29.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
266, 64MB RAM,
350MB hard drive
space RECOMMENDED

REQUIREMENTS: None MULTIPLAYER:
LAN, Internet (2-8
players)

Splitting off from the *Command & Conquer* continuity allowed the *Red Alert 2* designers the freedom to create a better real-time strategy game, one with all the usual high-caliber features but with the added advantage of not taking itself too seriously. The expansion, *Yuri's Revenge*, adds more of the same time travel plot, sense of humor, fast-paced gameplay, and everything else that made *Red Alert 2* a great game.

The expansion introduces an array of new features. Both sides get new units and buildings, although Westwood wasn't as generous with the Soviets. The Allies get Robot Tanks (specifically designed to counter all the new mind-controlling units) as well as Navy SEALs, guardian GIs, and the battle fortress—a sort of mobile bunker. The Soviets, meanwhile, in the game's only blunder in balancing,

do not have a counter to the mind-controlling units. And part of their tech tree got pruned. *Yuri's Revenge* gives the Soviets a paltry two new units: a hero called Boris who can call down MiG air strikes, and the siege chopper.

Aside from the new Allied units, the other bright note is the new faction, Yuri's army. He has his own tech tree with unique units. Considerable

creativity went into crafting Yuri's army, resulting in such units as fast-firing Gatling Tanks; mind-controlling infantry called Yuri clones; a hover tank that levitates and draws enemy vehicles close to your mind-grabbing clones; and a flying saucer that can shoot lasers and power down structures. Yuri's answer for the Allies' prism technology and the Soviets' Tesla weapons are his Gatling guns. Of course, Yuri also has a large arsenal of psychic weaponry, including his Yuri clones, a mind-controlling tank that can control up to three enemy units, and the Psychic Tower that can dominate even more minds.

You get more of everything that made *Red Alert 2* a great game.

Without using combined arms), but because the missions are set up as puzzles, with the enemy typically deeply entrenched. It's a huge challenge trying to survive the computer's onslaught of superior numbers while also probing to see how best to attack the enemy fortifications. Still, the missions are very fun, and precisely because the battles are so hard-fought, you have a feeling

of accomplishment upon finishing each scenario. A notable omission is that of a Yuri campaign that really lets you experience the new faction, but at least you can play it in multiplayer games.

Yuri's Revenge is in every way an improvement over its predecessor. It has good new units, a challenging and fun campaign, movies as good if not better than those of previous C&C titles, and some new features. Fans of *Red Alert 2* will enjoy this expansion. And those who have never played *Red Alert 2* now have an even better excuse to try the game.

For strategy tips on Yuri's Revenge, go to page 133.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Yuri's Revenge: a must-have for *Red Alert 2* players.



One of Yuri's super weapons is the Psychic Dominator, which obliterates or permanently mind-controls all units in the blast radius.

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The Typing of the Dead

Move over, Mavis! Now there's something meaner!

By Dana Jongewaard

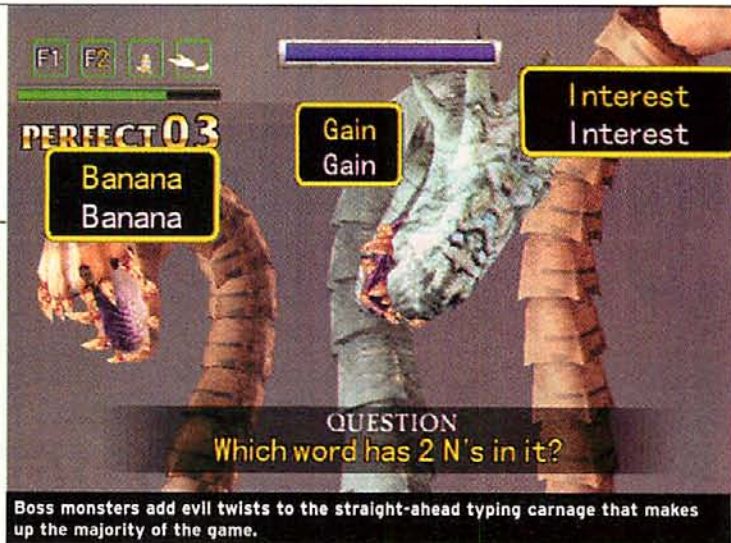
PUBLISHER: Empire
Interactive
DEVELOPER: Sega CONTACT:
www.typeordie.com
ESRB RATING: Mature;
violence, blood, gore
PRICE: \$19.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
233, 660MB hard
drive, 64MB RAM
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
None MULTIPAYER: LAN
(2 players)

It's got a lame plot. The voice acting is awful. And for the past three weeks, we've been fighting over whose turn it is to have it. No, it's not the latest *Playboy* video release. It's *The Typing of the Dead*.

A Japanese import based on the rail shooter *House of the Dead 2*, *The Typing of the Dead* remains exactly the same as its predecessor, with one exception: Instead of defending yourself with a gun, you're protecting the city with only the keyboard strapped around your neck. As James, you patrol the city with your colleagues, attempting to free the locals from the plague of zombies that has infested their homes. Ghouls pop up, ready to destroy you if you can't type "Too bad about your face" or "hairy godmother" fast enough to make them splat away into puddles of gore.

You earn points by killing zombies, saving citizens, and picking up bonus items along the way. You must battle your way through six chapters, to be confronted at the end by the ultimate evil, the Emperor, who can assume the



fighting forms of all the other beasts you've met along the way.

This game is incredibly addictive. The plot doesn't make all that much sense—I never quite figured out why the zombies were there or whom I was avenging or what happened to my coworkers by the end of the game. But ultimately, I didn't really care. Who needs an excuse to shoot up some zombies? And you don't have to figure out who the bad guys are—they're easily identified by the words and phrases that pop up across their chests.

With five modes of play (arcade, original, boss, drill, and tutorial), the

ability to adjust difficulty level and word length, and new words and phrases for every round, the game stays entertaining through each replay.

The best part about this game? You can justify the need to play it at work because it helps you develop an essential business skill. And if you're really persuasive, you might even convince your company to buy a copy of it for you.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If this game were used to teach keyboarding, every kid would get an A+.

Zax: The Alien Hunter

Another *Diablo* clone arrives D.O.A. By Jason Babler

PUBLISHER: JoWood
Productions DEVELOPER:
Reflexive
Entertainment
CONTACT: www.zax-
game.com
ESRB RATING: Teen; blood,
gore, violence
PRICE: \$40

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
266, 32MB RAM,
240MB hard drive
space RECOMMENDED
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III
450, 64MB RAM
MULTIPAYER: LAN, Internet
(2-16 players)

It's tough to be a little game developer that isn't owned by the French. You're probably dangling by a financial thread that realistically will last for only another two years (or two games), which translates into having limited resources that prevent you from crafting Pixar-caliber cut-scenes or hiring better designers and writers. Despite such hurdles, some companies still make fun, enjoyable games (think *Serious Sam*), so we're willing to cut the little guys some slack and simply enjoy some games for what they are. Hell, I enjoy B-games much as I enjoy B-movies. There's something appealing in raw, unpolished (and yes, campy) works of art. Alas, *Zax* is no *Plan 9 from Outer Space*; this game should never have been published in its current condition.

This is the buggiest game I've ever played: I stopped counting types and incidents of crashes after 45 train wrecks spanning multiple, top-of-the-line

computers at our lab. One of the more egregious game killers happened whenever I fired one particular weapon. It created a nifty light effect right before freezing my computer solid every time I used it. Nothing like switching to said weapon by accident in the heat of battle and then seeing all of your work frozen in time. Even worse are the bugs that suddenly reboot the computer. Nice.

It doesn't matter how appalling the voice acting is or how sound bugs caused the speakers to blast a noise like that of rabbits being skinned alive with a butter knife. What can you say about a game like this, if you can't even play a game like this?

It's pointless to call this a *Diablo* clone with laser guns (oops, guess I just did), and it's not even worth throwing *Zax* a bone and saying it's rendered nicely and

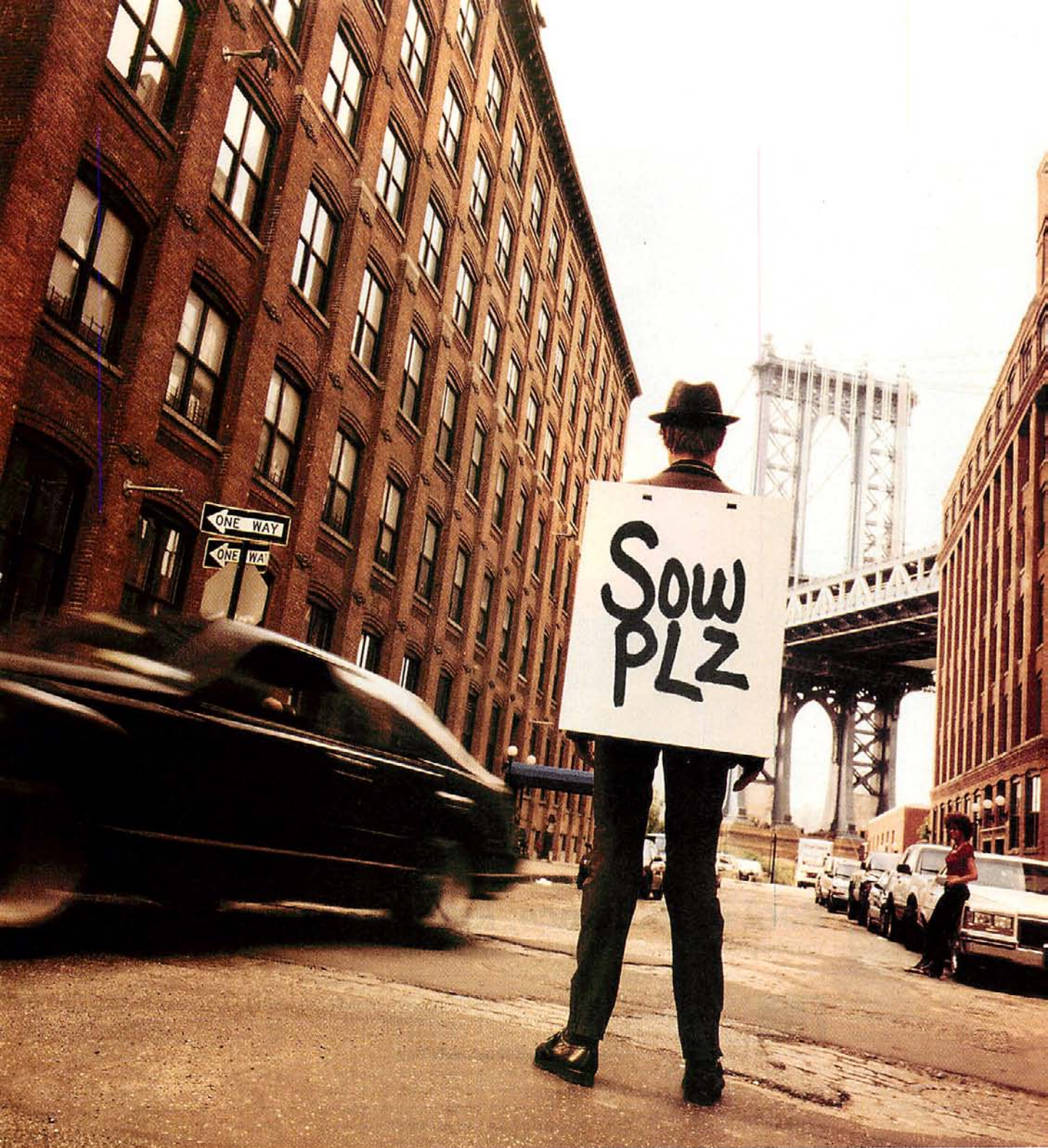


had some good ideas in theory. Well, okay, for bone-throwing purposes: Gathering ore and crystals to make more than 10 weapons offers some variety, and you can make portable sentry guns and drones that fly around you for protection. My bone supply is now officially depleted.

It's sad to pick on this game. Actually, I feel like a schoolyard bully because it's not worth the time. And it certainly isn't worth your time to play it.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

Mom said that if you couldn't say anything nice, then shut up (cue crickets)...



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Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor

You'll be drowning in puddles of irrelevance **By Rob Smolka**

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: Stormfront Studios
CONTACT: www.pool-of-radiance.com
ESRB RATING: Mature;
animated blood and violence
PRICE: \$49.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
400, 64MB RAM,
505MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium II, 128MB RAM,
845MB hard drive space
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN,
GameSpy (2-6 players)

I like to compare my time with *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor* (PoR) to participating in a marathon. Difficult under the best of conditions, so imagine if you had to run it wearing a pair of too-tight wingtips and with a large sack of potatoes strapped to your back. Then, just as you pass the 20-mile marker, someone from the crowd shatters both your kneecaps with a sledgehammer.

This highly anticipated follow-up to the classic Gold Box game from 1988 has to be one of the most disappointing releases in the history of computer gaming. The terrible character creation process and pedestrian dungeon design are surpassed in incompetence only by the nonexistent story, frustrating interface, and game-destroying, buggy code. Consider yourself fortunate if various hardware conflicts keep you from installing this dog—some lucky souls have

had their operating systems decimated simply by trying to uninstall PoR.

Mind-Numbingly Dull

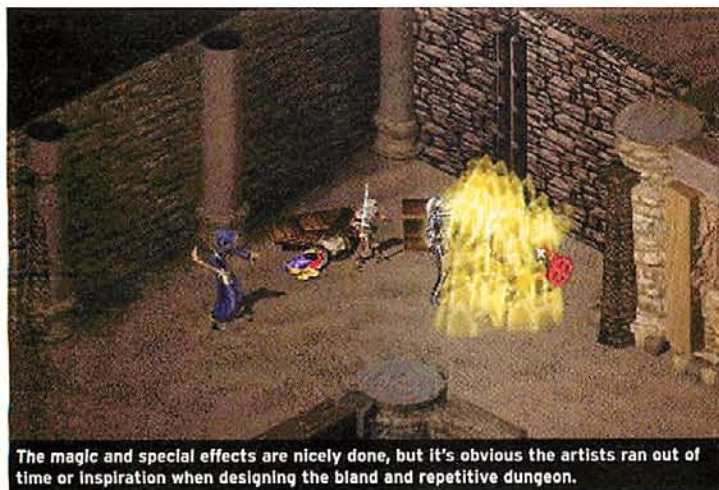
PoR makes a mockery of the essential character-development process. Forget about spending time rolling the dice until you get the stats you want; the lame-brained system in PoR gives you a set number of points to add to your base scores, limiting your choices to an average jack-of-all-trades type or one with a single high score and little else. Yes, you can pick your race, class, alignment, and name, but that's about as much customization as you'll be able to do—each class starts off

with a predetermined set of skills and equipment. Even spell casters are restricted to choosing only a couple of spells they prefer—the rest are computer assigned and unchangeable.

To be fair, PoR does have some good points. The animations are all fun to watch (at least the first dozen or so times), and the combat system does an excellent job of portraying the turn-based tactical battles of the *Dungeons & Dragons* pen and paper game. The artwork is generally good, and the user-annotated automap is helpful. That's where the compliments end.

Battles are way too numerous and

This highly anticipated follow-up is one of the most disappointing releases in the history of gaming.



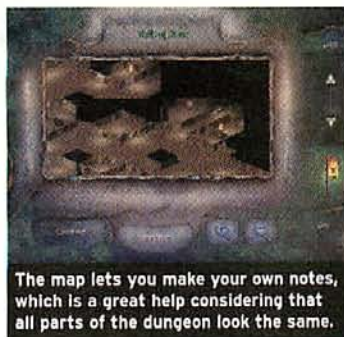
The magic and special effects are nicely done, but it's obvious the artists ran out of time or inspiration when designing the bland and repetitive dungeon.



All the characters you create of a certain race and class will end up performing—and looking—pretty much alike.

consist of the same creatures over and over again. When you first enter the dungeon, you'll fight groups of orcs, skeletons, and zombies, and little else. As you find ways to access the other levels (there is only one, albeit sprawling, dungeon with levels above and below the Main Hall), you'll run into groups of orogs—which are basically just tougher orcs—ancient zombies and skeletons (the same creatures as before, just with more hit dice), and bunches of lizardmen. One battle quickly starts to feel like every other, and there's no way to avoid them, meaning you have to spend 10 to 30 minutes (depending on the number of foes) fighting it out turn by grueling turn. The other major disappointment is the lack of variety in the dungeon: All levels look and feel exactly the same, right down to the chairs, beds, and tables.

If the mind-numbing battles and drab scenery haven't already turned you off, don't worry—there's still the annoying interface to send you over the edge. Grouping your characters is an exercise in frustration, and positioning someone in the right spot can drive you insane. Then there are the tiny fonts of the menu screens to deal with during combat, and the annoying way you have to re-click on a magic item you want to



The map lets you make your own notes, which is a great help considering that all parts of the dungeon look the same.

use even though it's already in your hand, and the frustration of losing a character's turn because usually you hit the space bar to indicate you've finished the turn but sometimes the game will automatically end the turn for you, and...

Cannot Compute

Our policy at CGW is never to review a game without finishing it, and technically I haven't broken that rule, even though it was the game that decided when I was finished. After I'd burned some 60 hours on *PoR*, it crashed and wouldn't let me continue. Every time I loaded a saved game, I was kicked back to the opening screen, sent back to the desktop, or



Here is an NPC you can trade with. Don't get used to it, though; the dungeon crawl is pretty lonely.

allowed to continue only to be tossed out when I tried to save again. To have players invest that much time in a game and then snatch away all of their progress is completely unforgivable.

As we go to press, a patch has been released that supposedly solves the corrupted save-game problem. Sadly, if you've already experienced the problem, the patch does nothing to fix it. (An earlier patch was also issued to fix the uninstall program—but again, it was of no help to those whose OS was already trashed.) We understand that given the complexity of games today, minor bugs can crop up, but situations like this are inexcusable. This game should never have been released; at the least it should have been recalled as soon as the troubles surfaced. Combine these egregious problems with the humdrum gameplay and design, and you have a serious candidate for coaster of the year.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Impossible to recommend without the patch, impossible to recommend with the patch.

GROUP THERAPY?

PoR offers multiplayer for up to six, but I can't imagine that anyone would want to subject themselves to this torture online. The game creates a random dungeon (which, even by accident, has to be more interesting than the drack that is the pre-designed dungeon), and you get to trudge around killing monsters accompanied by guys named d00dman69 and h8m0ng3r. No thanks.



Far Gate

Lost in space...completely and utterly
By Thomas L. McDonald

PUBLISHER: Microlds
DEVELOPER: Super X Studios
CONTACT: www.microlds.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone;
VIOLENCE PRICE: \$29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM, 350MB hard drive
RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D accelerated graphics card
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2-4 players)

Any three-dimensional strategy game stands or falls on its interface, because movement inside a giant imaginary cube (rather than on the conventional flat plane) is hard to convey on a two-dimensional screen. *Homeworld* tackled this prickly problem and only just squeaked by with a manageable control scheme. *Far Gate* doesn't fare quite so well. The developers at Super X Studios certainly gave it their best shot, packing *Far Gate* with colorful graphics and odd units. Unfortunately, they also decided to reinvent the wheel by creating a new kind of interface.

Far Gate tells its main story through a 16-mission campaign game, introducing three races along the way. It's a modest colonists-in-a-hostile-environment tale, but generally well told with cut-scenes and dialogue accompanied by strange



Battles in *Far Gate* can quickly get large, but the awkward controls keep you from getting a grip on the situation, despite having the ability to slow down time.

little cartoon portraits of the characters. During the campaign, humans encounter the primitive, organic Nue-Guyen and the highly evolved, crystal-based Entrodii (thus earning the developers graduate credits in Sci-Fi Gaming Clichés 101). The campaign and a very limited multiplayer mode are it for gameplay: there is no skirmish mode.

Super X has actually done some interesting things with the races. Visually, the game is quite sharp, with vivid colors and loads of unit detail and animation. The Nue-Guyen are like giant space

they also pop up whenever you try to move the camera around or issue orders anywhere near the edge of the screen. They can be locked down, thus obscuring large swaths of the screen, or removed completely, thus removing access to essential tools. Either way, the arrangement doesn't work.

Neither does the camera control, which either zooms in too close or out too far to be of use. You can modify the zoom manually, but this often takes time and is very awkward. Running the mouse over an object causes a bizarre, useless

The interface contains almost every possible mistake you can make and introduces a few new ones.

animals, with ships such as the Blood Worm, which spits stomach acid; the Talon, which pierces enemies to inject corrosive enzymes; and the electricity-spouting Eel. Structures and their uses vary slightly from race to race, sharing a common base-building technique that uses limited slots around a central floating hub. Resource gathering is largely automated. You can easily group units into fleets and give them complex orders and formations (Claw, Wedge, and so on), right out of the *Homeworld* playbook. Units, structures, races, and narrative are well conceived and implemented.

The problems lie in controlling all this. The interface contains almost every mistake you can possibly make when building game controls, and it introduces a few new ones. First, it uses margin panels that run along all four sides of the screen. These pop up when you run your mouse over them, providing access to more advanced controls. This means

enlargement of that object to pop up, obscuring the very area you're looking at. In the wide strategic views, ships become so small they often disappear. Getting the right angle is monstrously difficult. And when you're trying to pilot ships in the heat of battle, the controls become completely untenable. Having to use the same mouse button to select units and issue move orders doesn't help much either. There's also an incredibly frustrating glitch that turns your vertical control into a unit selection box.

Far Gate is simply too frustrating to recommend. The developers created an interesting game with some novel features, but they then saddled it with controls that completely negate the experience.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

A sloppy interface renders a potentially interesting game nearly unplayable.



Base building starts with a nifty little colony ship that unfolds itself, allowing extensions to be built in a limited number of slots.



A Nue-Guyen Talon uses a giant spike to pierce enemy ships, but without support it easily falls to a few Interceptors.

Rails Across America

Rock (solid) Island Line
By Bruce Geryk

PUBLISHER: Strategy First
DEVELOPER: Flying Labs
CONTACT: www.strategyfirst.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$39.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 200,
64MB RAM, 100MB
hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet,
GameSpy (2-8 players)



To rephrase an old adage, game designers constantly talk about improving gameplay but few of them actually do anything about it. With *Rails Across America*, Flying Labs has managed the nearly unthinkable: the marriage of board game-like strategy to a sophisticated engine that could only exist in a computer game. The result is a fast, playable, challenging game with a depth no board game can match and an elegance that puts traditional sims to shame.

1998's *Railroad Tycoon II* has cast a long shadow over rail strategy games, but *Rails Across America* leaps out of said shadow by being a very different animal. Whereas *Tycoon* is all about the nuts and bolts of running individual trains and cargo loads, *Rails* is much closer in style to Simtex's classic *1830*—except that Flying Labs' opus lets you build a rail empire across the entire United States, as well as much of Mexico and Canada. The decisions that matter are the big ones: where to build and how much money to spend while doing it.

The objective is not necessarily to make money but rather to gain prestige through maintaining an efficient network, making the most of your investment, and dominating traffic in various regions. Prestige is also awarded for completing large projects like a transcontinental rail line or a line that connects all the cities in Mexico.

As your trains chug from city to city, the game's detailed cargo routing engine accounts for every new track, train, and signal upgrade in your network. As new rail lines open up, traffic is rerouted to take advantage of more efficient routes. Adding new engines and expanding track

This is a fast, playable, challenging game with a depth no board game can match.

capacity are essential to keep your network competitive. You can even form alliances with other players to fix prices in cities where you control the traffic, or undercut others through rate wars.

The genius of this combination is that the routing engine gives the streamlined board game-like mechanics a feeling of incredible depth without muddying the game's elegance in the least. A system of playing cards for exerting influence over other players adds to the



Building a continent-wide network is challenging—fortunately, *Rails Across America* makes it more manageable by emphasizing building and spending and not how many cows you're hauling.



streamlined design. All of this takes place at a brisk pace in real time, especially if played at the faster speeds. The inability to perform actions while the game is paused adds to the sense of urgency without ever making the game seem rushed. Perhaps the game's only flaw is

challenging solo game in a variety of historical eras. The polished graphics even reflect the times, with cities slowly expanding and eventually acquiring historical landmarks, like Seattle's Space Needle or the Sears Tower in Chicago. The historical aspects of the game aren't just for flavor, either: Games taking place in later years introduce increased labor costs, shifting city values, improved engines, and considerations such as electrification that greatly affect strategy.

Rails Across America is one of the best-designed games to come along in years. It's a strong candidate not only for best strategy game of the year, but best multiplayer game as well.

For strategy tips about *Rails Across America*, go to page 135.

that it doesn't play well as an extended campaign—once the majority of track building is done, tweaking individual lines for maximum efficiency becomes a bit tedious. The result is a game that plays best in less than an hour.

Like the board games that were clearly its inspiration, *Rails Across America* shines brilliantly as a multiplayer affair, especially with freewheeling card play and stop-the-leader tactics. The AI is more than competent, which makes for a

VERDICT ★★★★★

Nice graphics, fun cinematics, interesting units, fun interactive campaign map.

Dominions

A game this big from a company this small that works this well? **By Tom Chick**

PUBLISHER: Illwinter
DEVELOPER: Illwinter
CONTACT: www.illwinter.com/dominions.html
ESRB RATING: Not rated
PRICE: \$25

REQUIREMENTS: P90, 16MB RAM, 75MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Play by email

To say *Dominions* is a turn-based fantasy-themed strategy game is just the beginning. Sure, *Dominions* has armies, militias, holy men, mages, and mercenaries. It's also got a hall of fame with special awards for the heroes who join its ranks. It's got stats like encumbrance, fatigue, and leadership. It's got duels, magic items, and enchanted gems that fuel powerful spells. It's got taxes, food, and production resources. It's got undersea empires, flying monsters, secret shrines, and veteran soldiers. It's got powerful global spells that can blot out the sun.

Lead the heavily armored soldiers of Ulm with a Titan wearing Boots of the Behemoth and flinging Magma Bolts. Stay at home with an immobile Sphinx to research new spells and let the unending waves of Earmor's undead do the conquering. Combine a reptilian race and their carnivorous slave warrior lizards with a demigod dragon that can shape-change at will into a powerful mage. Or spend your setup points on a powerful civilization that spreads order,



A priest uses his holy power to banish undead soldiers.

productivity, and good fortune to all the lands it conquers. Speed up time so every-one ages and dies sooner. What *Dominions* might lack in graphics, it more than makes up for in imagination and scope.

Dominions gets points for being as vast and varied as it is. But it also gets points for tying everything together so well. It is an ambitious game, but unlike most ambitious games, its ambition-to-achievement ratio is right around 1:1.

Although it's perfect for email-based multiplayer, *Dominions'* formidable AI also works well for single-player games. Perhaps most important, you get the kind of support you can get only from a small, dedicated developer (which, in this case, consists of three people in Sweden). With each successive patch, Illwinter has been adding new features and polishing



Dominions plays as a province-by-province conquest strategy game.

old ones. It could still use a few interface tweaks, such as a better way to sort and filter troops in an army, and it desperately needs a post-battle debrief so you can count the dead. But otherwise, this is one of those unsung titles that you might have never found and will be sorry if you miss.

What *Dominions* might lack in graphics, it more than makes up for in imagination and scope.

VERDICT ★★★★★

AAA-level gameplay, scope, and variety coupled with shareware level graphics and interface.

Ominous Horizons

We believe in the separation of church and shooters **By Mark Asher**

PUBLISHER: N'Lightning Software
DEVELOPER: N'Lightning Software
CONTACT: www.n-lightning.com
ESRB RATING: Teen
animated violence
PRICE: \$29.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None

Onward Christian soldiers, and get ready to do battle with the forces of Satan in *Ominous Horizons*, an FPS with a Christian theme.

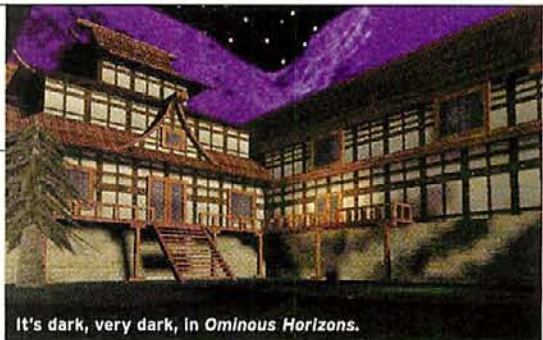
Your task is to retrieve the scattered fragments of Gutenberg's first printed Bible so his faith will be restored and he can rebuild his vandalized printing press and mass-produce Bibles, much to the delight of the Gideon Society. You're armed with a Sword of the Spirit that shoots flaming balls of...faith? There are also weapon and armor upgrades throughout the game.

You'll battle in the Mesa Verde, where demonic forces now occupy Pueblo City; in Egypt where you'll encounter Anubis; in the Scottish Highlands where Grendel awaits; in

Japan with ninjas and dragons; in a Mayan Temple; a haunted mansion near Stonehenge with druids and witches; and finally in the Underworld.

It's a nice lineup of baddies, but *Ominous Horizons'* good intentions are undone by a third-rate 3D engine (think *Might and Magic VI*) that pauses to load textures. The game is also far too dark at times, even with the gamma settings maxed.

As for the gameplay, you get the garden-variety dodge and circle-strafing you've done dozens of times before in other, better shooters. You can download better fan mods.



It's dark, very dark, in *Ominous Horizons*.

Ominous Horizons is aimed at a niche market, and that market isn't first-person shooter fans. Christian soldiers should look for better ways to sharpen their FPS skills.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

It's the same gameplay that's in every other dang shooter but done on a much worse engine. Gamers should look elsewhere.



RuneSword II

Old School is back in session **By Arcadian Del Sol**

PUBLISHER: Shrapnel

Games DEVELOPER:

Crosscut Games

CONTACT: www.runesword.com

ESRB RATING: Not rated

PRICE: \$39.95

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166,

32MB RAM, 30MB

hard drive space

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:

64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: None

You take a new game home and prepare for what may well be the greatest experience ever designed, but quickly discover there really isn't much of a game behind all the pretty colors and delightful music. Once upon a time, graphics came in 16 fashionable colors and music often sounded like the jingling ring tones of a cell phone. We didn't have high-speed video cards and wave-table sound cards. In this age of power rigs, we've become so infatuated with technology that we've lost sight of what makes a great computer game.

handful of annoying bugs you'll have to endure, but if you give this game a second chance, you just might find yourself enjoying it. I was not terribly impressed at first and was prepared to destroy the game in my review. But on a whim, I tried downloading a few Tomes that other players had created using the construction tools in *RuneSword II*. I found them not only fun and entertaining but inspirational as well, and I decided to make my own Tome. While my lack of programming experience makes the exercise frustrating at times, I've found the online community to be not only very

While other games try to improve upon the genre, *RuneSword II* just wants to be a fun role-playing game.

Much like its predecessor, *RuneSword II* is a game that strives to be an authentic adaptation of the classic RPGs we used to play, right down to the sounds of dice rattling across the tabletop. While other games try to improve upon the genre, *RuneSword II* just wants to be a fun role-playing game—although calling it a game is not entirely accurate. It is, in fact, a design studio that ships with several very well written demonstration campaigns called Tomes. You start by creating a small party and choosing which Tome to play. There are a

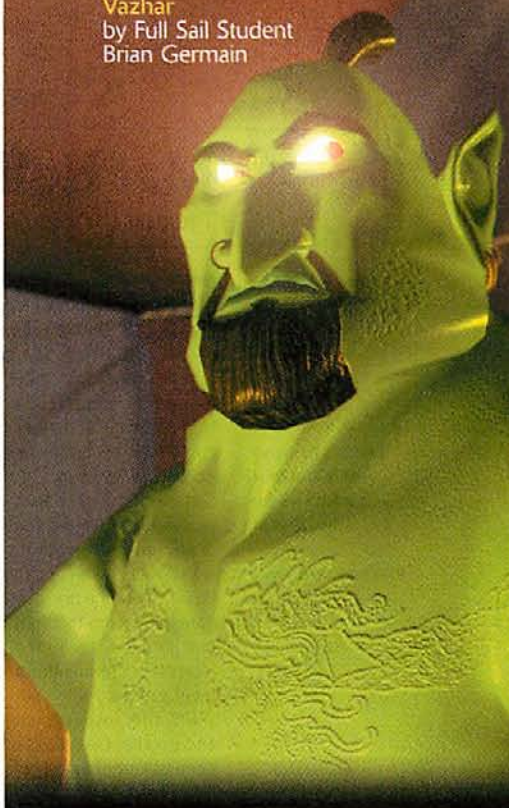
talented but happy to help you out when you aren't sure what a local integer is.

This game is not going to win any awards, but if you're like me and you miss the good old days when games were measured by how closely they imitated *Bard's Tale* and *Wasteland*, then this one just might be what you were looking for.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A great niche game whose niche is unfortunately very small.

Vazhar
by Full Sail Student
Brian Germain



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Mat Hoffman Pro BMX

The best BMX game ever (for what that's worth) By William O'Neal

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
CONTACT: www.
.activision.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$39.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
266, 64MB RAM,
550MB hard disk
space, 8MB 3D
graphics card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: None

When Activision sent us a few copies of *Mat Hoffman Pro BMX* it seemed only natural that I, the only guy in the office who actually races BMX bikes, should get to review it. It should come as no surprise that I jumped at the chance, only to curse Reviews Editor Robert Coffey about two levels in.

Mat Hoffman Pro BMX is based on Activision's vaunted *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* engine, and that's about where we should end all positive comparisons. While the game borrows much of its gameplay from the *Tony Hawk* franchise, one gets the feeling that the makers lost interest sometime during the development process. While both versions of *THPS* offer inspired, unique gameplay and excellent level design, and showed a general commitment to putting together a fun product, *Mat Hoffman Pro BMX* feels like more of a hack job.

The game starts out just as you'd expect, with the player choosing from



Mat Hoffman Pro BMX is at its best when you're performing gravity-defying stunts.



Without the addictive gameplay of a *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*, the creaky console graphics are a little more obvious.



You can customize your bike for speed and weight, but it would be so much cooler if you could add real-life parts.

One gets the feeling that the makers lost interest sometime during the development process.

a list-of-while accomplished-mostly old-school riders such as Mat Hoffman, "Butcher" Kowalski, Simon Tabron, and others; Cory Nastazio is the only new-school guy. You then choose your bike, and, as you do in the *Tony Hawk* games, you have to unlock the more bitchin' bikes. It's important to note that you can customize your bike to make it faster, lighter, or better for everything from manualing to bunny hopping. But I would have preferred for the individual components to represent real-world parts—it'd be cool to build a bike with S&M Pitchforks and Slam bars.

Once you start moving through the first level, you'll find there's no denying that *MHPBMX* is basically *THPS* on a bike. You're presented with the same list of five or so objectives, one of which (of course) requires you to knock something over—this is like the skate-board game's version of the ubiquitous "crate full o' stuff" that's in nearly every first-person-shooter ever made. Where in *THPS* the player advances through levels by earning money, in *MHPBMX* you advance through the game's eight levels by landing on magazine covers. The payoff is essentially

the same and the gameplay is pretty much identical to that of *THPS*.

And to tell you the truth, the gameplay was pretty fun—for about two levels. After that, *MHPBMX* began to feel way too repetitive. And while it's easy to point out how repetitive *THPS* was, it had what the French call that certain "I don't know what" that compelled you to keep playing. But I had no desire whatsoever to continue playing this game.

Of course *MHPBMX* sports multiplayer modes similar to those in *THPS*, but they're not nearly compelling enough to make up for the uninteresting gameplay. It seems that *MHPBMX* was designed to appeal to BMX riders. The main problem, though, is that *MHPBMX* makes me just want to turn off the computer and ride a real bike. And non-BMX riders will have little reason to play this game, what with a better and more compelling version of the same idea (in the form of *THPS*) lying around.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Better than *Dave Mirra BMX*, not as good as *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* or going out and riding your bike.

Tennis Masters Series

Better than an acid bath—
but not much **By Robert Coffey**

PUBLISHER: Microids
DEVELOPER: Microids CONTACT:
www.microids.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
PRICE: \$34.99

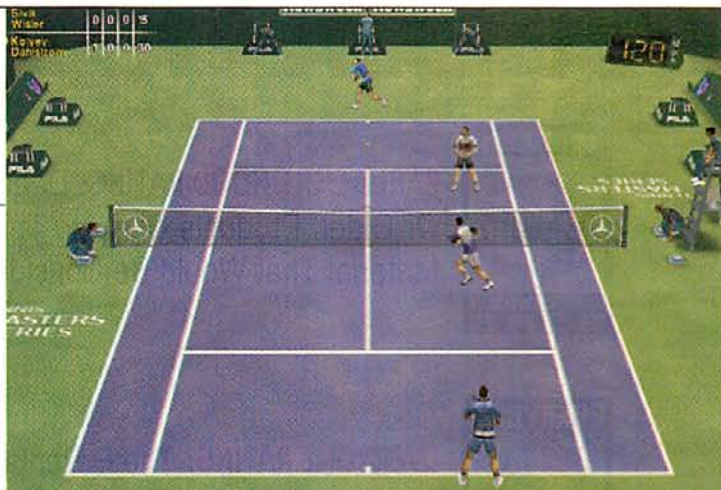
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
350, 64MB RAM, 16MB
3D card, 500MB hard
drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium III 800,
128MB RAM, 64MB 3D
card, a deep and
pervasive sense of
self-loathing
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN
(2-4 players)

As a nation, we really should set aside some time to consider seriously the consequences associated with cloning. How can we trust science not to produce hordes of hideous freaks when an entire team of programmers fails so utterly to merely duplicate the success of another game, in this case the Dreamcast's outstanding *Virtua Tennis*?

Tennis Masters Series is no *Virtua Tennis*—it ain't even *Pong*. Sure, it has loads of snazzy graphic features like persistent footprints on clay courts and

If real tennis were this consistently unpleasant, Wimbledon would have switched to badminton decades ago.

nice shadow effects, but all they do is slow the game down to a brain-twisting crawl. I shut off virtually every advanced feature, lowered my resolution, and stripped down the textures in order to make the game remotely playable on my high-end system. Even then the players moved as if shod in cement blocks. And no thanks are due to the sluggish controls that absolutely robbed me of any sense of where my avatar physically was on the court—not a big problem if winning



Doubles fares a little better than singles because your partner helps you overcome some of the frustration caused by the lousy controls.

isn't a goal, but I'm a little more ambitious than that. You could argue that *Tennis Masters Series* has greater realism than other tennis games, but if real tennis were as consistently unpleasant, Wimbledon would have switched to badminton decades ago. It all adds up to a thuddingly relentless exercise in frustration and aggravation, completely devoid of the strategy, depth, and—most crucial—fun of the faster-paced and less self-importantly realistic console game.



Every serve is an opportunity for gamepad-smashing frustration.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

The best way to enjoy this game is trading it in for credit toward a Dreamcast and a copy of *Virtua Tennis*.

Road to India

Paved with good intentions but little else **By Arcadian Del Sol**

PUBLISHER: Microids
DISTRIBUTOR: Titus
Interactive CONTACT:
www.microids.com
ESRB RATING: Everyone
violence PRICE: \$34.99

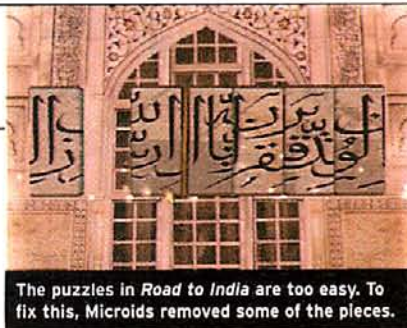
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II
266, 32MB RAM, 8MB
Direct 3D-compatible
3D accelerator card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium II 350,
64MB RAM

India is still a place fueled by ancient mysteries set in a stunning landscape. It is the perfect setting for adventure and intrigue. Yet we have waited far too long for an adventure game that takes advantage of all India has to offer. Credit Microids' *Road to India* for rediscovering this rich landscape. If only they had rediscovered how to make a good adventure game.

Road to India begins with what is possibly the greatest achievement in bad timing in the history of computer gaming. A turban-sporting stranger drops off a briefcase somewhere in New Delhi. In an instant, half a city block is rubble. Flash forward to an airport, where protagonist Fred Reynolds sends his fiancée off to visit her family in New Delhi. Flash forward again (hang on, we're only getting started) to Fred's apartment door, where he is

delivered a Dear John letter from said fiancée. Flash forward for the third time in four minutes, and Fred is on a plane bound for India and slips into a deep sleep. At first, this seems perfectly natural. New York to New Delhi is a long flight. You proceed to spend the majority of the game in Fred's dreams. He gets knocked over the head so many times, it almost qualifies as a drinking game.

After watching too many introductory cut-scenes, you are finally reminded that this is an adventure game: A tile puzzle hovers menacingly in front of a swanky Bengali hideaway. Tile puzzles can be irritating and frustrating. So imagine playing one with pieces missing. Fortunately for those with a low tolerance for artificially difficult puzzles, this teaser represents the sole hurdle to completing



The puzzles in *Road to India* are too easy. To fix this, Microids removed some of the pieces.

Road to India. The plot drags you along puzzle by puzzle while telling a refreshingly mature story. Unfortunately, it tells it to you as if you were 7. To call this game short would be like calling the Bay of Bengal moist. It's shorter than most game demos. It is shorter than most game installations. It is shorter than this review!

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

At least this road to nowhere is short.

ESRB Rating System: www.esrb.com



EARLY CHILDHOOD RATING: Deemed Suitable For Children 3 Or Older. Products Carrying This Label Have Absolutely No Material That Would Be Considered Inappropriate By Parents.



EVERYONE RATING: The E Replaced The Previous K-A Rating Last Year. Suitable For Kids Ages 6 And Up, E-Rated Games May Contain Minimal Violence Or Crude Language.



TEEN RATING: Contains Suggestive Themes, Mild Or Strong Language And Animated Violence. Some Parents May Want To Supervise Children Playing T-Rated Games.



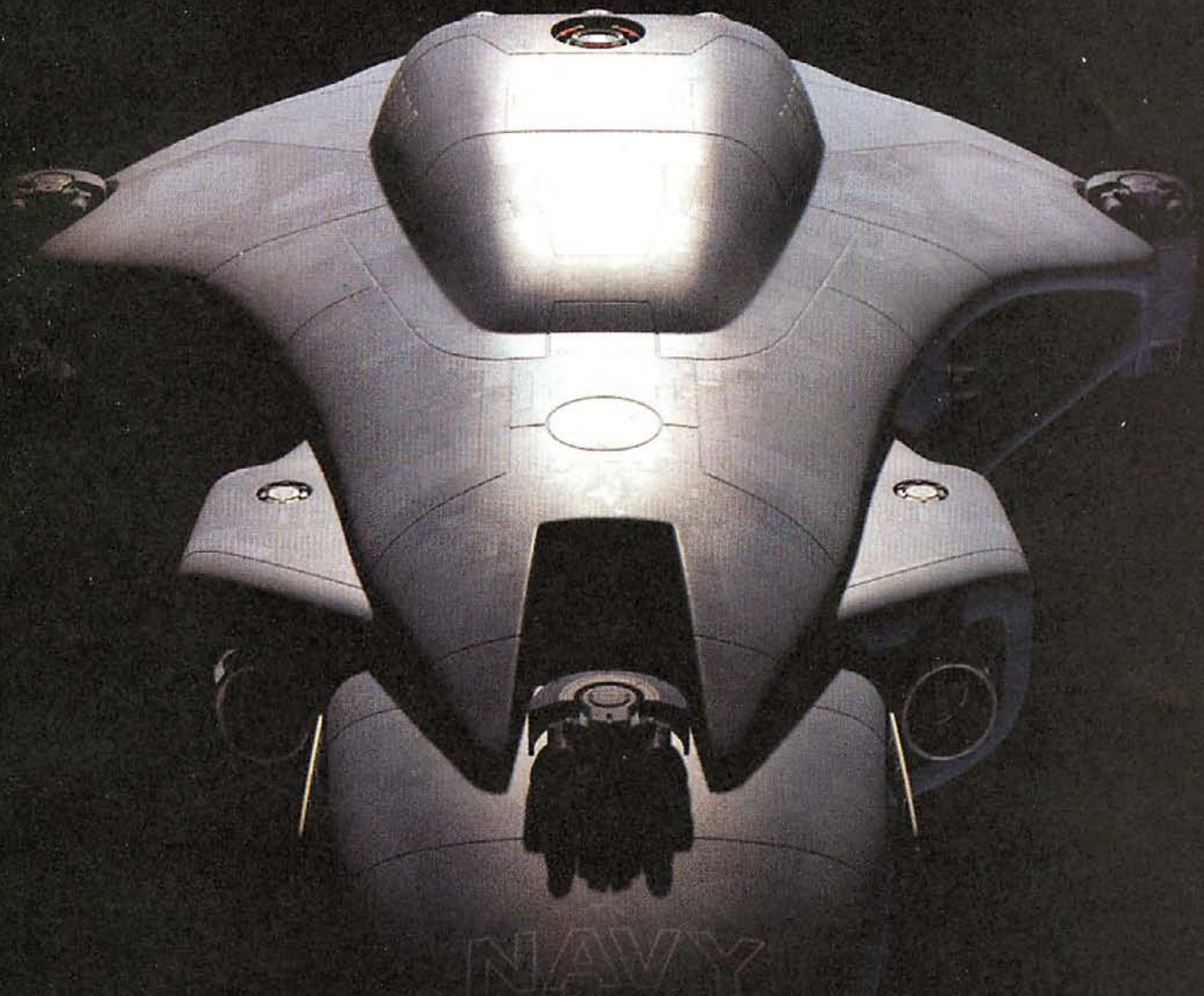
MATURE RATING: These Games Contain More Adult Themes, Such As Blood And Gore, Stronger Language And Sexual Themes. Deemed Not Suitable For Those Under 17.



ADULTS ONLY RATING: The Extreme Of The Ratings, Suitable For Adults Only. Packs Sexual Themes And Extreme Violence. Console Manufacturers Have Yet To Allow An AO-Rated Game.

Gamer's Edge

Helping you suck less Edited by Thierry Nguyen



INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS

DESIGNER TIPS

INSIDE

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS

Shoot your way past the end of Act 2 with developer help. **PAGE 122**

TIPS

Dirty Tricks and tips for *Fallout Tactics*, plus Easter eggs on the *Godfather* DVD. **PAGE 125**

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

Pummel those Reds, Rambo-style. **PAGE 126**

COMMANDOS 2:

Prima and CGW team up for a walkthrough of one of the hardest levels, Das Boot, Silent Killer. **PAGE 128**

PLUS: COMMAND & CONQUER: YURI'S REVENGE PAGE 133, and RAILS ACROSS AMERICA PAGE 135



Find one of these guys and quietly tag along behind him.



When you reach the junkyard, keep yourself hidden within it.



This unsuspecting freighter is key to finding the Marauders.

DESIGNER TIPS

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2:

EDGE OF CHAOS

Shoot your way past the end of Act 2 with developer help
By Stephen Robertson

Here's a walkthrough for the final part of Act 2 (a particularly difficult mission), written as a narrative from the point of view of the game's hero, Cal Johnston. While it contains a multitude of combat tactics that will help you throughout the game, it also contains major plot spoilers for a section part of the way through the game.

Now here's an excerpt from the interview with "Captain" Cal Johnston, recorded from the official inquiry into the recent events.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Tracking the Marauders

Interviewer: Tell me, Mr. Johnston, what exactly happened after you had managed to drive the Marauders out of the Mwari System?

Cal Johnston: We'd built a huge alliance and had struck a blow against the Marauders. The trouble was that we still didn't know where they were coming from, and they were continuing to attack all over the cluster.

Then I remembered the tracking device we got with the Advanced Patcom. If we used that to follow some Marauders when they jumped out-system, we could find their base of operations.

We traveled to the Firefrost system (even if they weren't from there, it looked like they may have used it as a route to the rest of the cluster) and found a group of Marauders attacking a freighter. I

destroyed all but one Marauder and followed him across the system to a Lagrange-Point. As he flew through each successive L-Point, I targeted him to find out where he was going.

He ended up at an uncharted L-Point near Dain-II; the fact that it didn't appear on our charts was very suspicious, so we jumped through. When we got there, we were disappointed—it looked deserted. There was a whole load of junk and debris and not much else. Then we spotted the incoming ships.

We hid in the junk and watched them approach. It was a group of Marauders and a freighter. They headed into the L-Point, and the tracker said they'd gone to another uncharted L-Point: Dain-I.

We followed the freighter and tracked it to its destination, which turned out to be a Marauder asteroid base. Patrols were everywhere, but by keeping close to the inbound freighter, we managed to sneak in to their freight yard. Some supply vessels were going to the L-Point, and we followed them there.

They entered the L-Point and we were surprised to find they'd jumped to Dante, a system that had long been abandoned. We headed straight back to base with this vital information.

Scouting the Marauder System

Interviewer: So, you'd discovered the secret Marauder system, Dante. What happened next?

Cal Johnston: Shortly after we got back, Franklyn Hoffer, the leader of

our cause, sent us information on Dante. It was a binary system and had been abandoned 30 years ago due to a stellar explosion. The L-Point links were no longer functioning due to the radiation, and travel to the system had been thought impossible. But this L-Point obviously was now usable, so the radiation must have dropped to safe levels.

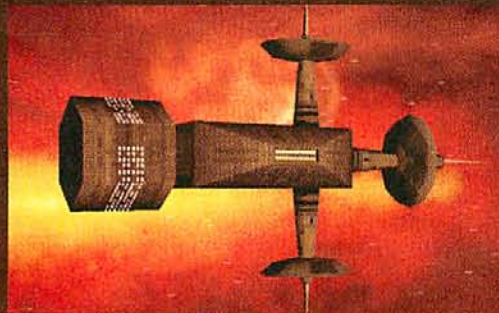
There was also another L-Point near the center of the system, which could be used as a back door, a way to attack the Marauders without them knowing we were coming. We didn't know where it led to or if it was even usable.

Hoffer ordered us to scout the system, find the Marauder bases, and locate the back door L-Point.

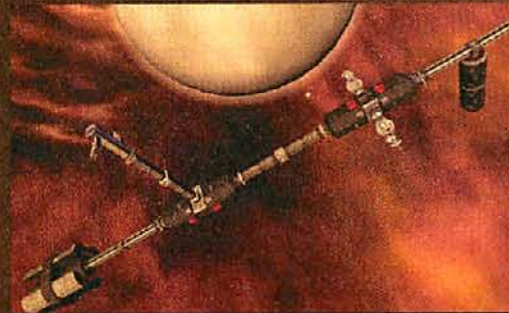
We took our smallest, stealthiest ship, the Command Section, and hid it in a cargo pod on a Marauder Megatransporter. The Marauders were hiding caches of supplies everywhere, so this wasn't too much of a problem, though it was darn scary being locked up in the dark for hours.

But the really scary thing was that we had no way back on our own, as the Command Section couldn't capsule-jump. Hoffer said he'd send a ship to retrieve us once we'd transmitted a retrieval code. That wasn't very reassuring.

We arrived in the Dante system and waited for the freighter's escorts to leave before sneaking off. According to our data, the other L-Point was located near the planet Faust, so we headed toward the



When you run into these comm relays, don't tamper with them!



Don't get too close to this massive station—it's the Marauder HQ.



Let your buddies do the work of killing the cargo ships for you.



Within the secret system, be on the lookout for what seems to be only an asteroid until you get a closer look.

L-Point location. When we got closer, it became clear that the L-Point was usable and led to the Hoffer's Wake system. We had our back door!

Then we had our first problem: There was too much interference to transmit a retrieval signal. Without a way to transmit out, we were stuck in a hostile system. The only possibility was to scout the system for a solution.

We scanned around, and picked up transmissions from six sources. At least one or two of these could be bases, so we decided to investigate. The first turned out to be a comms relay. We didn't dare touch it—tampering could have alerted the Marauders.

We moved on to the next signal, which turned out to be something much more interesting. It was a big station—it had to be the Marauder headquarters!

There were dozens of ships on patrol. We had to be careful to stay at least 5 kilometers from any ships, otherwise they'd detect us. While scouting, we spotted something useful: a spare antenna array near the station. The trouble was that we couldn't get near it without being detected.

We moved onto the next signal. This turned out to be another relay, as did the next one.

The fifth signal was another Marauder station, a cargo yard. We noticed a set of field generator cargo pods, which could help boost our signal. A group of craft were inspecting the pods, so we waited for them to move away before docking to a pod and "borrowing" a field generator. We headed back to the L-Point to transmit again.

That's where we encountered our next problem: The field generator boosted the signal, but not enough. We needed the HQ antenna but couldn't figure out how to get it.

We decided to visit the last signal, hoping that we might get lucky. We did.

The signal led us to a huge shipyard with a cruiser in dry dock. How the heck the

Marauders got a cruiser, I don't know, but it would cause us a lot of trouble later when we assaulted the system.

We noticed some maintenance flitters near the base and realized they would probably have the correct authorization to get near the HQ and retrieve the antenna. We docked to one and found the controls were locked out, but with a bit of technical wizardry, we managed to activate its remote link.

We towed the flitter to the HQ, and remote-piloted it to retrieve the antenna. We docked to the antenna and returned to the L-Point to retransmit our signal.

With both the antenna and field generator on board, we succeeded. Shortly afterward a corvette arrived to ferry us home.

Assaulting the Marauder Bases

Interviewer: What did you do after scouting the Marauder system?

Cal Johnston: When we got back, we found that Hoffer had already made plans to assault the Marauder bases. We took our best ship and met Hoffer at the Dante back door L-Point. His fleet was assaulting the three Marauder bases, so he asked us to help out and assigned us some wingmen.

We first decided to assault the Marauder HQ. Our fleet there was getting pounded by six gunstar weapons platforms stationed around the base. The gunstars were also shielding the base, preventing us attacking it.

We found that the base was controlling the gunstars and that by targeting the station, our active sensors would jam them and take them offline. We had to keep close to the station to do this, and we had to dodge a lot of enemy fire. While keeping the base targeted, we used manual aiming to destroy the gunstars.

It was tricky but we did it. With the last gunstar destroyed, the base shield went down, and we utterly destroyed the base. Chalk up one for the good guys.

We then traveled to the Cargo Yard. One of our Destroyers was attempting to destroy the base, but their main beam was damaged and taking time to charge. They needed our help keeping the Marauders off their back.

We had our hands full with taking out the attacking Marauder ships when the cargo pods around the station started powering up—they contained ships! Using remote missiles, I managed to destroy most of the pods before they could launch their deadly cargo, and bought enough time for the Destroyer to kill the station with its cutting beam.

The final base, the Shipyard, proved tricky. The cruiser was still docked, but it had been modified with disruptor field generators—enough to disable an entire fleet...and the field was charging!

The cruiser was connected to the dry dock by two umbilicals. If we destroyed those, perhaps we could stop the disruptor field charging. I used a cutting beam to slice off the umbilicals. Disconnecting the power must have caused a catastrophic failure in the station, and it exploded, freeing the cruiser from the dock. I then realized the field was still charging, though slower than before. I attacked the cruiser, and managed to take it out before the disruptors discharged.

A message from Hoffer came in: The Marauders were defeated! We were to return to the Interstellar L-Point, and rendezvous with the fleet there. We headed out and were greeted with a magnificent sight: our entire fleet arranged before the L-Point. Suddenly the L-Point sensors went wild—in jumped dozens of Marauder ships, accompanied by cruisers and the biggest capital ship I've ever seen. We were in serious trouble...

Interviewer: I think we'll take a recess here, Mr. Johnston.

END TRANSCRIPT

Stephen Robertson is a designer for *Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos*.

Dirtiest Trick o' the Month

Yikes, crisis last month! Apparently, the Dirty Trick for last month (UO) is so dirty and low that it's a bannable offense. As in, if you're caught, you're permanently banned from UO and the other EA online games. Here's hoping the savvy readers knew what they were getting into...

Anyway, moving on to a more current game, and one we still like, this month's winning bit of advice helps you screw over someone in *Fallout Tactics*.

Soloing the Demogorgon in BGII: TOB

I was looking for a challenge, so I decided to solo the Demogorgon with my level 27 Sorcerer and then my Conjurer/Cleric. The key to this fight is to concentrate on Demogorgon himself. First, here are a couple things you should keep in mind:

1. He is immune to Timestop, but that does not mean his minions are.

2. He is immune to lower resistance, but not the effects of Pierce Magic.

Things you should have:

1. Rod of Resurrection: Why resurrect if you have only one character? The Rod will also heal you completely.

2. Anything that gives Charm protection, to protect yourself from his Charm.

3. Lots of scrolls: Back up spells that you don't choose to memorize.

For the attack itself:

1. Cast Spell Immunity: Use Abjuration, Stoneskin, Protection from Magical Weapons, Summon Planetar, and Morkain's Swords. (Use Simulacrum and Mislead to summon more Planetars.)

2. Talk to him and start the fight.

3. Get all of your summoned creatures to attack Demogorgon as you cast Improved Alacrity.

4. Cast Pierce Magic four times on Demogorgon to lower his magic resistance to almost zero.

5. Cast Implosion on Demogorgon if you're a Cleric or Conjurer, or Abi-Dalzim's Horrid Wilting

WINNING TRICK

Here are couple tricks for *Fallout Tactics*. First make someone and give them really high Traps, Sneak, and Big Guns skills. Then equip them with a bunch of mines, remote traps, and anything else that explodes. Put the mines and a remote trap in a place where you think someone will come, and have your person sneak near it. When the other player walks near and tries to disarm the mines, detonate the remote trap, which should take out the mines and your victim. Another way to do this trick is to have your person stay nearby (on a rooftop or something) with a bazooka. Shoot the mines or a person when they're near the mines. Another trick I like: Give your person plastic explosives and sneak somewhere; then set the timer for five or ten seconds and run near your target. Boom! That will kill your person almost certainly, but it will also kill the other player.

You can also give your player some nasty foods like yellow nuka-cola and stinky meat platter. If you can get close enough to use them on the other player, you'll poison your victim. That one is not recommended, though. If you're in a map with vehicles, drive over the other players with Deathclaws or Super Mutants in the car, because they can kick and gore while they're in it! —Conal "Cokane" O'Kane

And with that, Conal snags himself a copy of the *Fallout* alum's game, *Arcanum*. We still need tricks for newer and different games (we will consider *Red Alert 2* tricks only for the *Yuri's Revenge* expansion).



if you're a Sorcerer. Both will hurt him enough to make Injured status.

6. By now, most of your creatures are almost dead—use Comet and Dragon's Breath to push Demogorgon to Badly Injured.

7. Resummon a Planetar. If it's not dead, then cast more offensive spells.

8. Cast Black Blade of Disaster, Improved Haste, Protection from Magical Weapons, and Tensor's Transformation to finish him off.

Note: Demogorgon has 90 percent magic resistance, 100 percent resistance to fire and cold, and 50 percent resistance to magic damage. —Tommy Chan

Falling Out for Bargains

Here's a trick for the single-player missions to get great Bartering skills for buying low and

selling high without using up those precious Skill points and Perks.

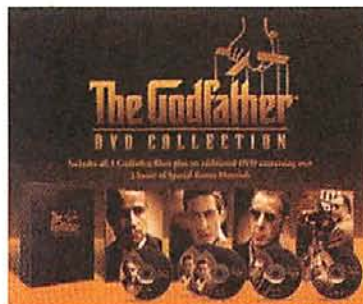
When you first obtain Mother (the Deathclaw), abstain from using her in your team. Instead, let her sit unrecruited in the roster and go about your missions. You will find that as you gain Experience, Skill points, and Perks, so does Mother! All the other characters on the unrecruited roster gain only Experience. I like using Mother's Skill points to increase her Barter skill, and when she does eventually gain a new Perk, give her the Negotiator Perk. You will find that with Barter at more than 100 percent, you will be able to buy anything at substantially lower prices and sell at substantially higher prices. This is a good way to work around the goofy supply system in the game, and it works even in the recent 1.27 patch. —Charlie Chen

Easter Eggs

DVD: THE GODFATHER COLLECTION

Paramount Home Video has hidden a few great features on the uberrelease of Francis Ford Coppola's classic *The Godfather* saga. On the Bonus Materials disc, go to Set Up. When you get to that submenu, press the right arrow key on your remote control. This will highlight a globe in the background, which gives you access to a collage of clips from various language versions of the film including Italian, German, and English. Another good hidden feature can be found on the same disc. From the main menu, go to Galleries and then select DVD Credits. Here, keep following the next arrow at the

bottom of the screen all the way to the end, and you'll get to see an HBO family from Jersey trying to watch the Corleones. Finally, go to the Family Tree section and select Sonny, which takes you to the family tree of Santino Corleone. From here, select Sonny again, and you will be taken to his biography. Press the left arrow key on your remote control and James Caan's face should be highlighted; press Enter. This brings up Caan's own biography. Now (last step), press the left arrow key once again to highlight his portrait on the left side, and if you press Enter again, you'll see Caan's screen test for his part as Sonny.



Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

Pummel those Reds, Rambo-style **By Raphael Liberatore**

At ease, soldiers. Place your weapons on safety, open your MREs, and chow down, because I want you relaxed for this briefing.

By now, you've experienced the tenacity of the formidable Russian enemy during *Operation Flashpoint*. Many of our good soldiers have been shipped home in body bags because of their overwhelming firepower. So, listen up as I describe the best operational tactics and team security for a couple of your toughest missions. Sit back, smoke 'em if you got 'em, and pay close attention to my motto: Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect.

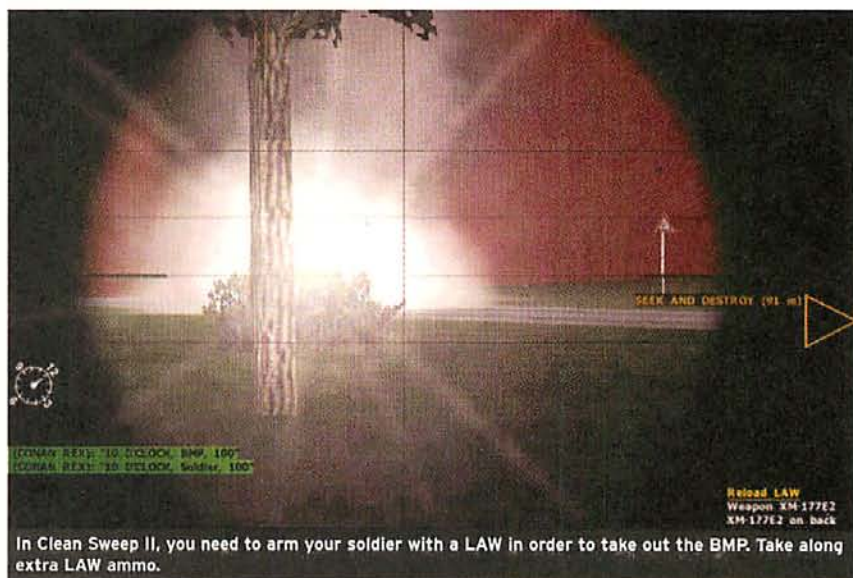
Ranger Training

Operation Flashpoint is not *Counter-Strike*. You can't go racing across maps and mowing down the enemy without utilizing tried-and-true combat principles. The enemy is too well trained and can hit you from a distance; therefore, fire, concealment, movement, and cover become extremely important tools for achieving the objectives. Cover, for instance, can be just as important as a well-placed shot. Objects such as buildings, trees, vehicles, and brush offer great cover and will increase your chances of survival. When firing, remain in a prone or low crawl position near foliage or behind objects. Move soldiers into position by peeking from around the brush or object. Always survey the countryside with your zoom feature or binoculars. Shoot only when the target is in full view. Bottom line: Use as much cover as possible. And don't fall asleep, because in some situations you must move fast. Hit the Shift key and move like crazy away from tanks or BMP—otherwise, the enemy will blast you into eternity.

Ground Zero

There's no cookie-cutter recipe for completing *OF* missions. Use your judgment and keep surveying the terrain for enemy troops. Some missions provide vehicles, but that doesn't mean you need to operate them for success.

Shooting enemies at a distance, especially if they are moving, can get frustrating. Use the right mouse zoom key and try leading them with your sights before firing. Just aim slightly ahead of them and fire four or five rounds in quick succession. Since recoil is a factor



In Clean Sweep II, you need to arm your soldier with a LAW in order to take out the BMP. Take along extra LAW ammo.



Night-vision goggles are useful for night operations. Make sure you load out your soldiers with at least one pair in order to claim the night.

with most weapons, use semiauto or burst modes for distant targets and save full auto for very close ranges. Avoid the M60 on missions when you need to bring a LAW rocket along;

you can't take both due to encumbrance issues, and the recoil from the M60 makes shooting at long ranges more difficult. Keep an eye on your magazines, and reload only when

Multiple Casualties

Playing multiplayer in *Operation Flashpoint* requires strategic planning and teamwork before the action starts. Before the game, plan in detail your strategy based on the objectives at hand. Also, consider each teammate's role. Examine the map and decide who goes where and at which grid coordinates for insertion and deployment. Use the notation feature to mark these points for future reference and for gauging your progress during the mission. Real-time communication is essential, whether it is on the phone locally with your friends or using an online voice chat program like Roger

Wilco. Squad leader commands take time to learn, so keep them simple. During the mission, inform team members of your location and the actions you are performing. When firing, communicate what you are doing. It is plenty frustrating to hear gunfire and not know if it's foe. When reaching key objectives or locations, advise your team so they are always aware of their situation. When missions require more than one objective, split your team into two or more groups with each team taking separate objectives. Just as in real combat, there is a considerable amount of planning involved before the actual combat. Stay alert, stay alive.

you get down to your last two rounds.

The sniper rifle is very effective outdoors. Sniper rifle tactics are best employed when ordering your teammates to move into the vicinity of enemy positions. A LAW rocket launcher comes in handy against vehicles like the BMP or Shilka. However, a T55 tank needs two LAW shots to take it out. After the first shot, your position becomes compromised. So fire, then move while reloading, and then fire again. Explosives such as hand grenades and satchel charges do come in handy, so load up if you can. Plant satchel charges in highly traversed areas such as roads or bridges, and make sure to move far away from the blast radius.

The Buddy System

At times, your squad won't respond well in combat situations without constant direction. If your squad is having a difficult time engaging the enemy, have them sit back and scan the horizon while you hunt for the enemy yourself. Formations do work, so use them. Command your squad to attack specific targets as they appear, while providing cover. Take advantage of team firepower by keeping your team in formation. If you must separate, it's best to assign two soldiers to a single task, like taking out an enemy tank, for instance.

When running low on ammo during the mission, replace your weapons and ammo with dead soldiers' equipment. In certain missions,



Keeping squadmates alive can mean the difference between success and failure. Understand the command menu, because it will save your ass and theirs.

locate ammo crates scattered around enemy bases. Also order your squad members to take enemy weapons and ammo whenever necessary. Use the overhead map and compass at regular intervals during the mission. The overhead map highlights objectives through grid coordinates. It's also great for ascertaining vital information and waypoints. Overhead maps also

pinpoint the optimum routes for a particular town, objective, or mission area.

Some missions assign a medic to your team. If you or your teammates are wounded, use the medic to heal them. You can heal teammates by selecting them with the F key and then going into Action (7) and selecting the Go to Medic option.

NOW FOR THE HARD PART

Here's some advice for getting through the toughest missions, so saddle up, and lock and load—it's time for heroics.

SHADOW KILLER (Single Player)

SITREP: As the single operative, your objective is to sneak into the town of Dourdan and destroy the fuel dump there, then destroy the fuel convoy coming from La Trinité heading to Houdan. After completing both objectives, find a car along the outskirts of town and escape to safety. You have seven minutes to complete this mission once the fuel dump sentries have been eliminated.

OPORD: Begin 300 meters southwest of Dourdan. Run southwest along the tree line, keeping a safe distance of 200 meters from the town. By running, you'll avoid a patrolling tank in the vicinity. Move 150 meters east of Dourdan, and then head north in stealth mode until you are adjacent to the fuel dump, about 60 meters east.

Take out the two enemy sentries guarding the fuel station. This will raise the alarm. Move quickly to the fuel depot, place a satchel charge, and then bolt toward your second objective. Check your overhead map if you're unsure of your coordinates. Don't linger too long or you will have to face the tank. Zigzag to avoid the tank firing at you.

Once you reach your second objective, near the town of La Trinité, the tank should be out of range. Blow the fuel dump. Now place two satchel charges on the road going from La Trinité and Dourdan. Move west 200 meters, toward your escape vehicle. Use your binoculars to recon the road for the enemy fuel convoy. Detonate the satchels as the last vehicle (a fuel truck) passes over them. Now run 400 meters southwest toward your getaway vehicle. Get in and drive to the town of Arudy in order to complete the mission. Remember, this is a timed mission, so don't take the scenic route during the drive home.

RETURN TO EDEN (Campaign)

SITREP: Secure airport at the north of the island with an infantry assault. You will have seven soldiers at your disposal, along with two other teams in support, Bravo and Charlie.

OPORD: This mission starts out with a beach landing. Bravo team will cover your left flank, while Charlie supports your right. Your first objective is to rush the chapel on the hill at grid DJ03. Approach from the southwest; order your team members to Engage at Will. As you approach, the enemy will pop some smoke. If they don't, make sure you do in order to cover your approach.



Cleanse the hill of enemies, and then hold for the Soviet counterattack consisting of enemy troops and a T72 tank and BMP. Order your LAW soldiers to take out the vehicles while having the others take out enemy soldiers. Bravo and Charlie teams will remain in support. Next, pick up an enemy RPG. Order your team to follow you 200 meters west, and then move stealthily south in order to destroy the anti-aircraft Shilka parked there. Have your LAW soldiers take it out or do it yourself. After it's eliminated, move northwest for cover and take out the nearby BMPs and enemy soldiers.

Order Bravo and Charlie teams (after they give the ready signal) to assault the airport at grid location Dh08. Send them a signal (O-O-1) to attack and then radio air support (Cobra gunships)—designation November—for additional support (O-O-2). Use your binoculars and sweep the area for stray enemy soldiers. Order your teammates to engage enemy soldiers, and then secure the airport.

Commandos 2

Prima Games gives up the goods with their walkthrough of Das Boot, Silent Killer



Prima's
Official
Strategy
Guide,
by Dean
Evans

In this mission, you have control of the Diver, the Sapper, the Spy, and the Thief. The commandos are split into two groups—the first three start in a boat offshore while the Thief remains hidden under the bunks where you left him at the end of the Night of the Wolves mission. For most of the mission, you control the Sapper, Diver, and Spy. Whiskey is also available and any of the four commandos can summon him.

FIG 1: Send the Diver, Sapper, and Spy into the

Primary Objectives

- Rescue all the Allied sailors
- Find the prison key
- Deactivate the underwater mines
- Open the hangar door
- Escape in the submarine

Secondary Objectives

- Cut the barbed wire and deactivate mines
- Pass the security papers to the Spy via Whiskey
- Enter the base disguised as an official
- Steal a vehicle
- Call the Green Beret using the radio
- Rescue the captain
- Destroy the torpedoes
- Find the Enigma codes
- Destroy the AA guns
- Blow up the gas tanks

water. Swim them toward the landing area, taking note of where the solitary guard is looking—he slowly covers a 180-degree arc, so you can swim past when he's looking toward the rest of the base. Send the Sapper to knock out the guard. Tie him up and steal his uniform and rifle. Bring the rest of the team ashore.

FIG 2: Using the Sapper's wirecutters, snip through the first barbed-wire fence. Before you go through, press **D** to detect the mines that are hidden beyond it. There are four explosive charges arranged in a line across the section of fence you cut.

FIG 3: Defuse the mines and move on up the pathway. Pan the view to the technician working on a metal walkway in the facility beyond the wall. He'll spot you as you approach, as you'll be waving about a mine detector.

Monitor the vision of the technician and activate the Sapper's mine detector. There are two rows of mines hidden before the second barbed wire fence. Be careful when you're working in the middle of the path.

The technician might spot you, and there's also a German officer who's smoking in front of the compound. Wait, and he'll move from a position under the tree to walk in front of the guard tower, to the truck, and back again. Monitor his vision to see when you can safely defuse the mines and cut through the second fence.

FIG 4: Sneak up to stand close to the guard tower. Lure the patrolling officer away with some cigarettes (the Diver has some). Knock out the officer and tie him up. Steal his

cigarettes and uniform. Give the officer's uniform to the Spy.

Now use the Spy (dressed in the officer's uniform) to distract the soldier patrolling outside the gate. Make him look away from the gates. Lure away the soldier standing in front of the gates and knock him out or kill him. Dump the body before returning to knock out and tie up the soldier who's still talking to the Spy.

Use this spare moment to select the Thief. Transfer the security papers from the last



FIG 1: Swim slowly up to the landing area right of the docks so the sentry doesn't spot you.



FIG 2: Mines are buried behind the first barbed wire fence and in front of the second one.

mission to Whiskey. Get the Spy or another character to summon the dog with the whistle. (The Thief may have to open the door to let him out.) When the dog arrives, give the security papers to the Spy to complete one of the mini-mission objectives. Now zoom out the view using the hyphen key and study the layout of the base beyond the large gates.

FIG 3: Apart from the Spy dressed in the officer's uniform, don't send anybody else into the base yet. Distract soldier **A** on the raised platform—keep him looking away from the gates. Sneak in your Sapper while soldiers **B** and **C** aren't looking. Hide him around the back of the yellow tanks at **D**.

Let soldier **B** spot the Sapper. Knock him out when he runs to investigate. Move the Spy to distract soldier **C**. Make him face away from soldier **A**, and use the Sapper to knock out soldier **A**.

Send the Diver to kill soldier **C** with his throwing knife. Hide the body. Clear the rest of this area. Take out the sniper, **E**, on the balcony near the electrical station. Do this by hiding the Diver under the stairs and then using the Spy to talk to the Sniper.

Press **S** to distract the sniper and then press **E** to direct him down the steps—if you knock out the sniper on the balcony, soldiers beyond the wall will spot you. When the sniper gets to the bottom of the stairs, kill him with a throwing knife.

There's only one more guard in this area, **F**, and he blocks the way to the large building—the submarine pen. Lure him out of position with cigarettes and distract him (press **S**) with the Spy. Using another commando, creep up behind the guard and knock him out.

Send the Spy up the railroad track to where two more German soldiers are talking. Distract them so they look away from the gates. Send the Sapper and the Diver crawling toward the gates and then to the side of the large building. If you don't crawl here, you'll be spotted and the alarm will sound.

FIG 6: To rescue the trapped sub crew, you need to unlock their prison cell. A high-ranking German walking on the roof of the submarine pen has the all-important key. There are eight enemies stationed on the roof. Check their positions by zooming out the game view (⇐).

Send the Spy up via the metal staircase and use him to distract the guard, **B**, patrolling nearby. Make him face away from the staircase and the nearby ladder. Monitor the vision of the key-holding lieutenant—he walks a long path across the roof and is dressed in gray. When he turns away, send the Diver up the ladder and kill guard **A**. Move his body before the lieutenant returns. Next, knife soldier **B**, whom the Spy is still distracting.

Turn your attention to guards **C**, **D**, and **E**. There's a path leading to a ledge at the front of the building, allowing you to sneak up on the guard with his back to the sea, **C**. Use the Diver to knife him. Send the Diver along the path, up a small set of steps, and onto the roof to retrieve his weapon.

Guard **D**, on the opposite side, has his back to you. Sneak up when the lieutenant isn't looking. Knife **D** and hide the body. Deal with the last



FIG 3: A patrolling officer makes defusing the second set of mines difficult. Make sure he doesn't spot you.



FIG 4: After the Spy has stolen an officer's uniform, he can distract lower-ranking lieutenants and soldiers.

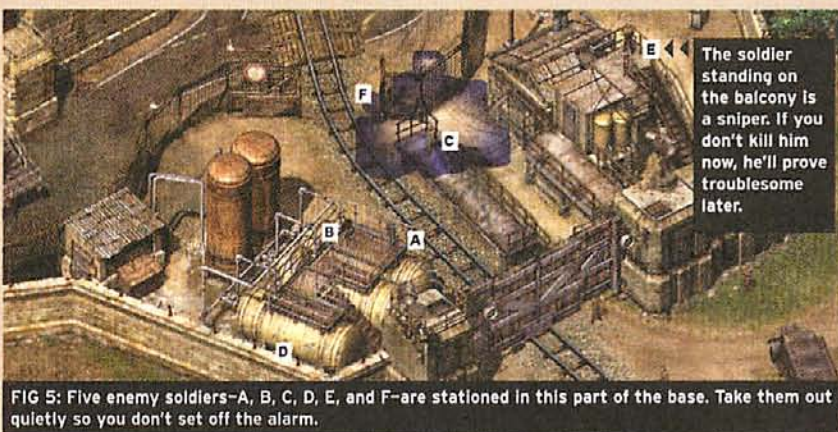


FIG 5: Five enemy soldiers—A, B, C, D, E, and F—are stationed in this part of the base. Take them out quietly so you don't set off the alarm.

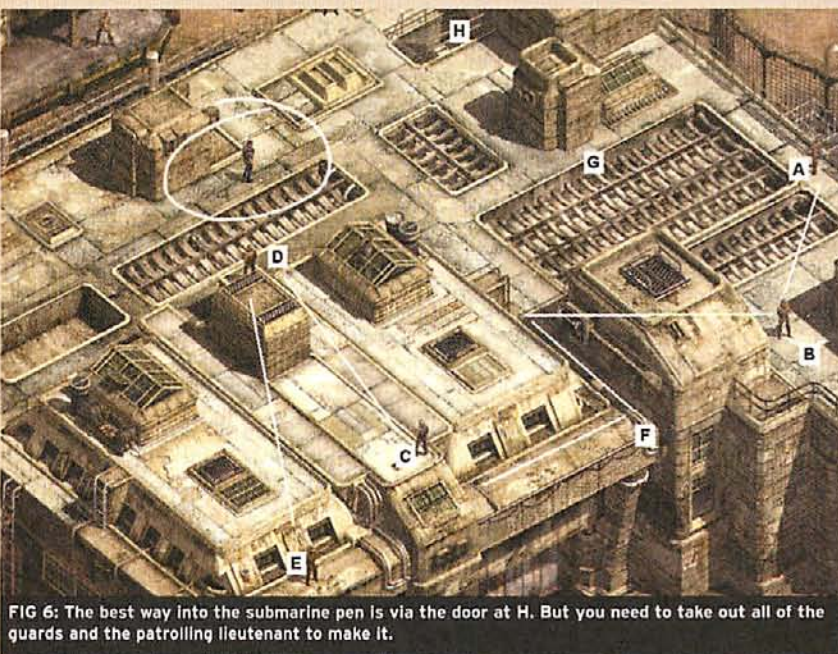


FIG 6: The best way into the submarine pen is via the door at H. But you need to take out all of the guards and the patrolling lieutenant to make it.

soldier, **E**, on the edge of the building. This guy is a sniper, but he's facing the sea, so the Diver can easily knife him. Get the Spy to retrieve the knife—there's an eagle-eyed guard on the nearby roof.

One of the two remaining guards has his back to you. The other is an officer near **H** who will see through your disguise if you get too close.

To kill the lieutenant and grab the keys, lure him into the small passageway you used earlier, **F**. Like most soldiers, he's a sucker for free cigarettes. Use the Diver to knife him when he's close enough. Killing the lieutenant at **F** ensures that he dies beyond the range of the remaining officer.

Lure the last officer away from **H** and kill him.

GAMER'S EDGE

Use **G** as a hiding place for this attack. You can now move all of your forces into the building. Send the Spy in first.

FIG 7: In the next room, kill or knock out the two technicians—they're unarmed. Send the Spy down the ladder and distract the sentry, **B**, walking along the edge of the submarine pen. Make sure he's facing away from soldier **A** by the ladder. Send down the Diver and lay him flat behind the crates. Attack soldier **A** and hide his body behind the crates.

Next, creep up behind the distracted guard **B** and kill him. Again hide the body. Be cautious here—you may have to deal with another soldier who follows you down the ladder. Be on the lookout for him and kill him quickly.

FIG 8: Maneuver the Spy so he distracts soldier **D**, who's patrolling beyond the small room at **E**. When his back is turned to soldier **C**, use the Diver to creep up and kill soldier **C**. Hide soldier **C**'s body, and then kill soldier **D**. Again, hide the body. Search the bodies of the guards to pick up machine guns.

Look into the small room **E**. Send in the Spy to distract the lone guard and then use the Diver to kill him. Search the wooden box here to find grenades, explosives, and a ladder. The switch here opens and closes the gates at the front of the base.

FIG 9: Leave **E** and note the guard on the steps watching over the empty dock. To successfully assassinate him, you must first distract the guard wandering along the second dock area, **F**. Use the Spy to turn the guard away from the soldier you want to kill so the attack remains unseen. Take the body and hide it in **E**.

Distract the guard in the corner of the room at the end of the far dock. Turn him away from your soldiers and room **E**. When wandering guard **F** moves away, send in the Diver to kill the distracted guard. Remove the body before the wandering guard returns.

Send the Spy back to the dock next to the submarine. Move the Spy along the side of the dock opposite the submarine via **G**, so you remain hidden from the guards on it.

Lure soldier **I** to point **G** using cigarettes, and then use the Spy to distract him so he turns his back to room **E**. Bring the Diver up (crawling) behind the distracted soldier **I** and stab him. Dump the body in room **E**. Next, kill soldier **J** and unlock the door he was guarding with the key you took from the lieutenant on the roof. Carry the body inside.

Inside is the crew of the captured sub. Hold down Shift and click on a crewman to untie him. Crawl the Diver toward room **E** via **G**. Stay low to avoid the gaze of soldier **H** in the dry dock.

You now need to get rid of soldiers **K**, **L**, and **M**. (See the earlier figure showing the area around the submarine.) Use the Diver to throw the knife and kill **K**—you can retrieve the knife later. Send the Spy along the edge of the submarine to distract soldier **L**. Kill him silently from behind. Send the Spy to distract soldier **M**, who watches over the sub from a position above the dock gates. When his back is turned, you can easily kill him.

Monitor the vision of soldier **N**, who guards the gangplank on the deck of the sub. Control

the Spy and move him onto the sub and down to the body of soldier **K**. Pick up the body and hide it behind the conning tower. Retrieve the Diver's knife. Doing this allows you to lure soldier **N** onto the dock, ensuring that he isn't alerted to trouble by the dead body of a comrade. When the body has been moved, return to the dockside and attract the soldier **N** with a pack of cigarettes. Distract him so either the Diver or Sapper can sneak up behind him.

All this work leaves the lieutenant **O**, who's guarding the door to the control room at the end of the dock. Lure him away from his position when he picks them up, and then use the Spy to distract him after he picks them up. Kill or knock out the lieutenant.

Do the same for soldier **P** on the high platform. (See the figure showing the area around the submarine.) Lure him with cigarettes, distract him when he picks them up, and then use one of the other characters to attack from behind. This allows you to safely enter the door previously guarded by lieutenant **O**.

In the room beyond, send the Spy to distract the officer when he's close to the lockers at the end of the room. Send in one of the other characters to knock out and tie up the soldier sitting on the bench. Then knock out the distracted officer.

Search the lockers to find sleeping pills, wine, grenades, another knife, poison, binoculars, and a first aid kit. Next, send the Spy upstairs. Distract the soldier and turn him so his back is to the stairway. Bring up the Diver and punch the distracted soldier. This alerts the other soldier here. Quickly floor him with a punch. Tie up both men. Check the locker in the corner for more wine, binoculars, and a ladder.

The submarine's captain is being held in the next room. Unlock the door with the keys you found on the roof and free him. Clear out the men in the control room with a grenade. Search the box to find the Enigma codes and activate the switch in the corner to open the gates of the submarine pen. Leave the building with the captain.

FIG 10: Send the Spy into the sub via the forward hatch—the one closest to the gangplank. Distract the guard at the end of the first room, and then send one of the other characters down the ladder to knock out the other guard. Kill the distracted guard.

Work your way through the sub, distracting and disabling the enemy soldiers. When the lower level is clear, climb up to the conning tower, killing the guards there. Move the captain and his crew aboard. Deactivate the underwater mines outside and the sub will be ready to leave.

Equip the Diver's diving gear (**D**) and jump into the water. Swim through the open doors and into the sea beyond. Dive (press **B**) and go to each of the six mines in turn. Hold down Shift and click on each mine to defuse it.

FIG 11: Now for the secondary objectives. Clear out the rest of the enemy soldiers in the submarine pen. Send the Spy into the dry dock via the ladder at **B**. Distract soldier **A** so he's not facing the other soldier working at the dock. Send the Diver or the Sapper to knock out and tie up the wandering worker. Afterward, knock



FIG 7: Distract guard **B** so you can knock out or kill the soldier at **A**. The Distract and Disable tactic works wonders in this section.

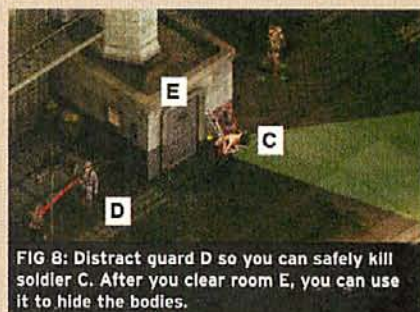


FIG 8: Distract guard **D** so you can safely kill soldier **C**. After you clear room **E**, you can use it to hide the bodies.

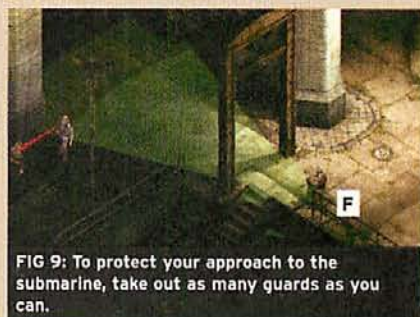


FIG 9: To protect your approach to the submarine, take out as many guards as you can.

out or kill the distracted guard. Return the way you came. Now turn your attention to guard **C**. Use the Spy to distract him at the end of his patrol route near point **D**, and then knock him out or kill him.

Follow the dock to get soldier **E**. Keep going to distract and disable soldier **F**. Double back and head for soldier **G**. Distract and disable him. Wait until soldier **I** walks away from the building and the remaining guards at **H**.

Lure one of two guards away from **H** using cigarettes and use the Spy to distract him when he picks them up. When soldier **I** isn't looking, knock out or kill the lured guard and hide his body at point **G**. Lure soldier **I** down in the same way. The remaining guard at **H** should have his back to you and won't see your fist coming.

The submarine pen is now clear. You've probably noticed lots of little metal boxes lying around—only the Thief can open them. To bring him over, send a German uniform to the Thief via Whiskey. Send the Spy to the Thief's location at **A**. Use the Spy to distract the soldier standing outside the Thief's door.

When the coast is clear, move the Thief (now wearing the German uniform) through the door. Walk, don't run. Move the Spy outside. Use the

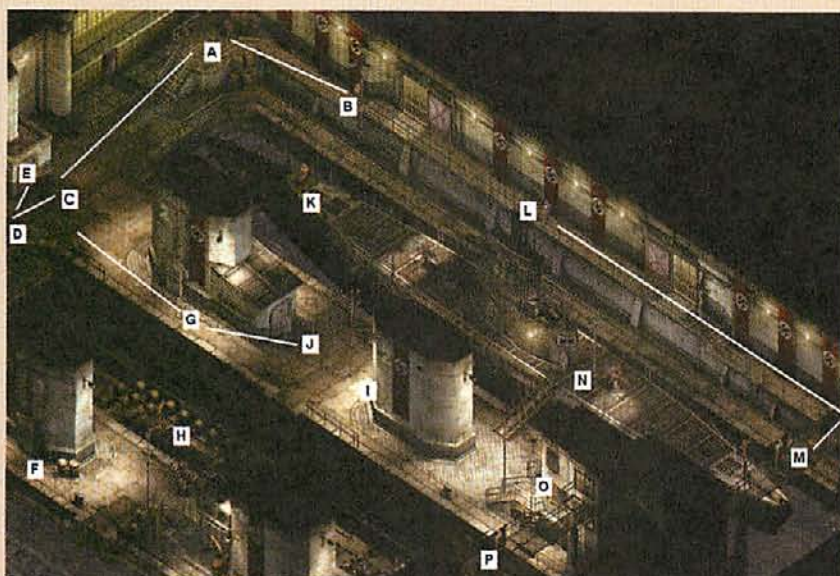


FIG 10: The area around the submarine is a daunting challenge. Take it one step at a time, one guard at a time.



FIG 11: Clear out the other side of the submarine pen. You must be able to open the doors near the building at I.

Spy to distract the guard at **B** who's looking toward point **C**. This allows the Thief to move from **A**, behind the soldier at **B**, and to **C** without alerting any of the guards.

By the time you reach point **C**, the uniform will have been "used"—its effects are only temporary on most characters. Send another uniform to the Thief via Whiskey. Meanwhile, use the Spy to distract the guard at point **D** and make him look away from the double doors at **E**.

Move the Thief (now wearing the fresh uniform) to point **E** and into the submarine pen. Unlock the various metal boxes to find a bazooka, flamethrower, grenades, and a remote-controlled bomb.

Send the Spy to open the other set of submarine pen doors—the switch is in the

building at the end of the far dock. Next, send the Spy to deal with the two guards patrolling the front of the building where the torpedo is located. Lure the guard to the left of the building using cigarettes. Place them in point **A** so you can avoid the gaze of other soldiers. After you lure the soldier away, knock him out using the syringe—two doses ought to send him to the floor. Tie him up and use the syringe on the other guard.

Now your team can swim out of the submarine pen doors and climb the steps at the front of the building. You won't get very far outside if you didn't deal with the sniper on the roof earlier. (See FIG 6, which shows the roof of the submarine pen.) If you didn't, you'd better do it now.

Send the Spy into the building first and distract and disable the first guard there. Use this tactic to get rid of the technicians. In most cases, even if one of the unarmed enemies here spots you, he won't raise the general alarm. There's a bonus photo piece in one of the cupboards here. Plant the remote-controlled bomb you picked up earlier next to the torpedo and leave.

When you're in the submarine pen, detonate the torpedo charge. It destroys the torpedo and demolishes the entire building.

You need to do a little preparation for the remaining secondary objectives—the destruction of the yellow gas tanks and the three AA guns.

Take control of the Spy and visit locations **A**, **B**, and **C**. At **A**, enter the hut and turn off the electrified fence—do this without being seen, or you'll blow your cover.

Move to **B** and search the furniture to find a remote-controlled bomb, timed bomb, and grenades. The radio is also in this building. Use it discreetly. It allows you to specify a landing point for the Green Beret—he can parachute in if you need him. Find more explosives in the building at **C**.

Move the other squad members out through the submarine doors (next to the sub) and around through the entrance they used at the beginning of the mission. Make sure that you've already taken out the sniper on the balcony—you're going to approach the first AA gun via the power station. Cut the wire fence when the technician works on the first right-side generator. (See FIG 10.) Walk to the technician and knock him out. Tie him up and search him to find another remote-controlled bomb.

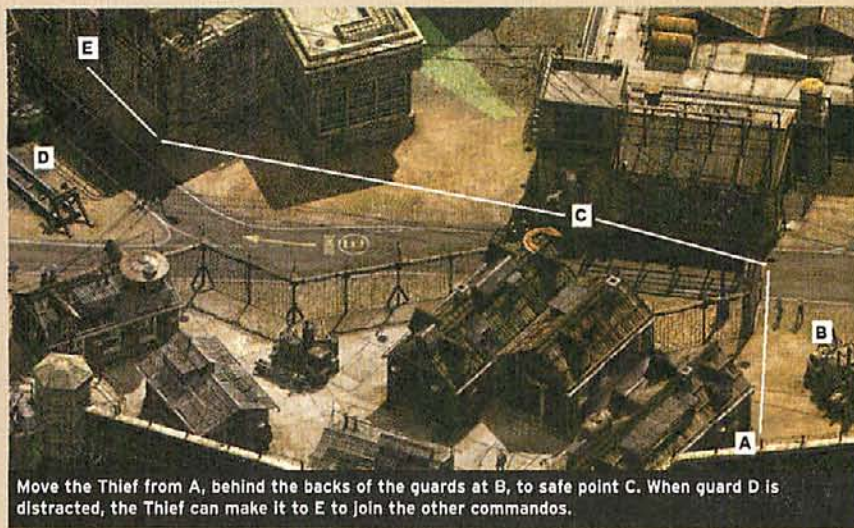
Next, use the Spy to distract one of the two soldiers guarding the power station gate. Distract the one patrolling between the AA gun and the electricity substations.

Move the Sapper through the substations and cut the wire behind the sentry outside the gate. Knock out the guard, tie him up, and carry away his body. Move the Sapper up to knock out the guard distracted by the Spy. Tie him up and carry away the body. Use the Spy to distract the soldier on the wall, and use the Sapper to plant a remote-controlled bomb next to the AA gun. Do the same for the AA gun on the wall—watch for soldiers patrolling beyond the wall.

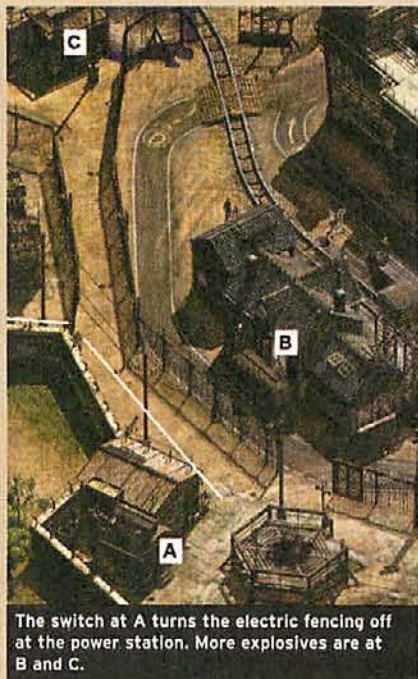
Move the Sapper and the Spy to the large yellow tanks near the entrance to the base. Plant a timed bomb next to the tanks. Leave the compound quickly and head around the edge of the base (past the mines) toward the front of the submarine pen. Detonate the other remote-controlled bombs. Scroll across the map to view your handiwork.

One AA gun remains. Send the Spy to the watchtower beside the other beach. Use the syringe to disable the guard looking out over the sea and tie him up. Move to the level below the one you just dealt with and restrict that guard's view of the water. Swim your squad from the submarine pen around the tower to the other beach.

Use the Sapper to cut the wire fence and check for mines beyond it—there is a row across



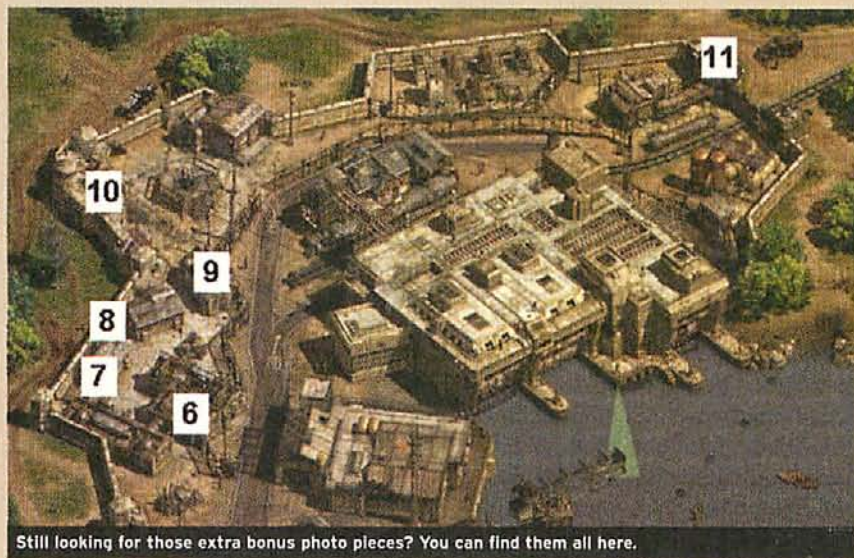
Move the Thief from A, behind the backs of the guards at B, to safe point C. When guard D is distracted, the Thief can make it to E to join the other commandos.



The switch at A turns the electric fencing off at the power station. More explosives are at B and C.



This building is from the previous mission. The torpedo you need to destroy is inside.



Still looking for those extra bonus photo pieces? You can find them all here.

toward the beach. Crawl through the trees and knock out the officer standing by the car. When the Spy gets in the car with the security papers (which allow him to drive into the base), the miniobjective is completed.

Now, to destroy the last AA gun, return to the beach. The Spy must distract the guard on the watchtower located opposite building A-2. Doing so allows the Sapper to defuse the mines close to the wall of the base. Use the Diver's grappling hook (or the Thief and the ladder) to climb the wall, allowing the Sapper to plant the final charge next to the gun.

With a timed bomb, you have 20 seconds to run away. When the gun explodes, soldiers come to investigate—so don't hang around. Swim to the submarine pen, jump in the sub, and escape.

You can find one bonus photo piece in the barracks, **6**, opposite the Thief's original starting point. Two more can be found in the general's office (**7,8**), while another is located in a locker in the shower block (**9**). Slightly trickier, another bonus photo piece can be found in the subterranean bunker (**10**) near the large AA gun. The last bonus piece can be found in the small office (**11**) near the rear entrance of the base.

Mission Secret
Bonus photo pieces required: 11

This bonus mission simply involves guiding your commando's motorboat around a race course. The course itself has been marked off with mines—if you hit one, your boat will explode. As the mission objectives point out, hitting any of the buoys that litter the course will slow you down.

You need to complete the race course in less than three minutes to successfully complete this bonus mission, but it shouldn't pose a problem.

the beach. Crawl diagonally up the beach using the rocks for cover. Don't approach the wire yet—there are more mines in front of it.

To give yourself time to find and defuse the mines, send the Spy to distract the soldier

patrolling the fence. When he's done so, send the Sapper through to knock out and tie up the distracted guard.

Now send the Spy to the bunker ahead and distract the guard there—don't let him look

Command & Conquer: Yuri's Revenge

Tricks straight from Westwood's mind **By Chris Rubyor**

The *Red Alert* franchise is rife with bizarre units, fast gameplay, and interesting unit strategies. It's no wonder that the most popular game for Dirty Tricks by far is *Red Alert 2*. We at CGW decided to hit up a Westwood insider and have him give you the basic lowdown on how to dominate at any multiplayer game in *Yuri's Revenge*.

Yuri's Faction

Since Yuri's technology (psychics, genetics) uses an opponent's strengths against him, brute force and tank rushes won't work like they used to. Yuri can mind-control enemy units and force them to do his dirty work. And there's no bigger dis than Yuri mind-controlling your Allied paratroopers or Soviet Tesla tanks and feeding them into a grinder to make money. Even worse: One well-placed blast from his Genetic Mutator can turn a base defended by GIs and conscripts into a base overrun by hulking gray Brutes.

Makes playing as Yuri kinda fun, don't it? Here are some tips and strategies that might help you gain the minds of your foes a little faster.

Make sure to pump out a good number of Slave Miners. Don't forget, these units function as combination resource-gathering and processing facilities.

Combinations of units are absolutely essential for winning with Yuri. Try a mix of Brutes, Gatling Tanks, and Lasher Tanks for siege attacks. Or swap the Brutes for a Mastermind, a pair of Magnetrons, and a flying saucer to raid bases for their units and cash.

Pump out a few Brutes at the beginning of the game to counter any early tank rushes by an opponent. A little later, you can supplement your defense with a few Psychic Towers to gain control of any marauding units.

Tank bunkers offer a great deal of protection, and they're cheap to build. If your enemy is keen on airborne assaults, order Gatling Tanks into your bunkers. You've got a devastating defense against land and air attacks, and the armor rating of the tank is upgraded.

If a player tries to overload your Mastermind unit, have the units that are being controlled attack the invading unit.

If you're playing against the Allies and Robot Tanks are advancing on your position, have a few flying saucers handy. They can drain power, making the Robot Tanks go offline; your foes can neither move nor defend themselves then.

Build a cloning vat as soon as possible; you can double the production of your infantry units at no added cost.

Chaos Drones mean big trouble for your foes. These units deploy a hallucinogenic gas that causes enemy units to go berserk and attack their own. Alone, they're pretty defenseless, so mix in a few Lashers and Brutes for protection.

The Virus unit is best employed hidden behind buildings and underneath trees. After all, they're snipers, right? Engineers, conscripts, and GIs go to their great reward in a noxious cloud of green gas.



Soviet Forces

In *Red Alert* and *Red Alert 2*, the Soviets were all about slow moving, heavily armored units chock-full of firepower. In *Yuri's Revenge*, the basic Soviet style hasn't changed, but their arsenal now includes some lighter, faster units to help out against Yuri's forces. The Soviets also have Boris, a new hero unit; he's an infantryman with considerable firing range and the ability to call in MiG air strikes. He's also immune to mind control.

When attacking Yuri, make sure you incorporate Terror Drones and Dogs into your forces. They might be small, but they're immune to Yuri's psychic attacks and can destroy Yuri clones and Mastermind units.

If playing as Iraq (in skirmish mode), fortify your base with battle bunkers and conscripts. Next, build four Desolators and deploy them evenly around your base.

This works effectively against paratrooper drops and light rushes.

Keep your siege choppers on the outskirts of your opponent's base and slowly inch them in; they're easily destroyed by antiaircraft defenses. It's also wise to use Terror Drones and flak trucks to protect deployed siege choppers.

When using Boris, make sure he's well hidden among trees, or placed on higher ground from his target. Your opponent won't know what hit him until it's too late.

Build your industrial plant as soon as possible; this structure is essential for building large forces to overrun your foe. A good Soviet base always has two war factories and one industrial plant.

Protect machine shops at all costs. They

regenerate all your vehicles' health to 100 percent, and thus are priceless.

Many of the skirmish maps in *Yuri's Revenge* have elevated terrain. An effective strategy is to land and deploy siege choppers on the plateaus and attack your enemy from above.

Allied Forces

Previously reliant on light, fast moving vehicles, the Allies now have some new units like the Battle Fortress that move a little more slowly but have vastly increased firepower. Tanya's been elevated to hero status, making her immune to mind control and giving her increased firing range and armor.

The new Guardian GI units make short work of heavy armor with their uncrushable bunker and anti-tank bazooka. Use them in groups of three around your base for extra protection against both land and air attacks.

The best assault unit against a Yuri base is the Robot Tank. It can't be mind-controlled, can travel across water, and can float across different elevations. But don't forget: They need power, and when their power supply is cut, they go offline and can't move or defend themselves. For added firepower, mix in a few Mirage Tanks.

Gap Generators are more precious than ever. Use them to avoid Yuri's mind attacks. The first one should always go next to your war factory.

If you've got Chrono Legionnaires, drop them in a Battle Fortress for a potent attack combo. This setup can be used to whittle down any Soviet or Yuri force, but be careful—a Yuri clone can still use its mind powers to control it.

Chris Rubyor is the online community manager for the Red Alert 2 franchise.

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Rails Across America

Two capitalists lay down the track for success **By Tom Chick and Bruce Geryk**

The game: *Rails Across America*. The contenders: Tom Chick, Bruce Geryk, and three AI players. The parameters: random starting positions in 1890 and a 20-year limit. Good luck, gentlemen.

January 1890

Tom: Monterrey? Great (FIG 1), I'm starting Chick Lines Ltd. in the middle of Mexico while Bruce is plopped down on the Eastern Seaboard. At least he's got Vanderbilt and Harriman to dog his steps. Starting in a rural area like mine has its advantages; I'm pretty much guaranteed the "Viva Mexico!" bonus for connecting all Mexican cities. But I'll need to muscle in on the higher-traffic action for some income. As soon as I've got \$15 million to spare, I'll buy a shortline to use as a stateside base of operations.

Bruce: Starting in Richmond (FIG 2) gives me easy access to the lucrative routes in the Northeast. It also makes the Gulf-to-Canada bonus a priority. The Northeast corridor routes don't cost much to build because the terrain is flat and the cities are close together. That means I'll have money left over for the many trains I'll need. And I should still be able to make an early jump into the Midwest to grab a part of any transcontinental lines that get built.

March 1892

Tom: It's slow going because my routes aren't providing much of an income. These long railways across the frontier are expensive, so I have to watch spending carefully (FIG 3). One important tactic for early expansion in rural areas is to use Influence cards to add resources in isolated cities. These can increase freight traffic and thus income. It takes only a few weak Labor cards, which are easy enough to get at the lowest Graft settings; the cards are also handy for Strikes.

July 1894

Bruce: I've jumped out to an early lead over Tom thanks to my Regional Dominance, Rail-Building, and superior Operating Ratio. Even so, I've been aggressive in taking out loans, especially when interest rates dip. It looks like no one has the stomach for Influence attacks yet, so I've been selling cards for extra money.

January 1896

Tom: I'm falling way behind in Prestige. I missed my dividend payments this year, so I lost the Prestige bonus. It's important to keep an eye on the Special Finances screen for Projected Dividends. When December rolls around, make sure you have that amount to spare. Similarly, if you're paying Graft for Influence cards, remember your quarterly payments and mentally add this to the figure for Committed Income.



FIG 1:



FIG 2:



FIG 3:



FIG 4:



FIG 5:



FIG 6:



FIG 7:



FIG 8:

December 1896

Bruce: I'm keeping the lead, but Harriman is giving me a run for my money by developing around Pittsburgh and upstate New York while I build along the coast. To slow him down, I'm going to build into his big traffic hubs, Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Then I'll change my Attitude on the Politics screen to War. This rate war will slash both of our incomes in the cities where we connect, but it won't affect me at the big traffic hubs, where I don't have any competition. Since I have several lucrative cities all to myself, this should hurt him a lot more than it hurts me.

February 1899

Tom: Although my Prestige increase is keeping pace with the other guys', I'm way back in third place. My main problem is that it's hard to make money providing service to these backwater Mexican cities. It's time to grab a North American shortline. I've made a \$13 million offer on Clovis to Amarillo (FIG 4).

March 1899

Tom: "Rejected"? Those no-good so-and-sos (FIG 5). I even tried to bribe the board of directors. Ingrates. Their lousy little line was worth only a couple of million anyway! Well, if that's the way they want to play, I've got a few cards up my sleeve. Namely Media Buzz, a Fund Raiser, and Mass Arrests, which are good enough to force an auction. Of course, before I do this, I'll make sure Bruce doesn't have the cash or credit to outbid me and keep me from getting a slice of the North American pie.

April 1899

Bruce: I see Tom's jumped the national border and made it into the U.S. I didn't have the cash

to drive the bidding process higher, so he got a line in Texas for only \$10 million. I had planned to take advantage of my profitable Northeast routes by running slightly older trains to reduce my expenditures, but with competition from Harriman, this would have simply shifted traffic to his competing lines. This is one of the reasons why carving out an area where you can maintain a monopoly is so important.

August 1899

Tom: So now I'm expanding from Texas to boost my income. In fact, I think I can make a bid for the first transcontinental line by moving west as well as east. My plans to connect Mexico will take a back seat for now.

September 1900

Bruce: Things are really heating up. I can no longer baby-sit each track, so I'm adding managers to most of them (FIG 6). Their \$10,000 monthly salary is minimal compared to my \$12 million monthly income. Since managers don't upgrade your track or engines, though, I periodically go to the Track List and sort my tracks by Congestion. For any track over 110 percent, I upgrade engines, signals, and track in that order. The manager will buy more engines to take advantage of the added capacity while I deal with other matters, like evaluating rival rail networks for weaknesses. I do this by checking the Regional Cargo section of the Annual Report to find regions where an opponent has only a slight edge over me. Hitting him with a Strike can shut him down for six months. I can follow this up with Sabotage or a Safety Inspection on his tracks that carry the most cars. By also improving my own network, I can wrest control of that region and steal the Prestige from him.

QUICKTIPS: CIVILIZATION III

The Three Rs By Tom Chick

April 1902

Tom: Fisk just broke into Mexico by bidding on the Nogales-to-Mexicali shortline. This means the transcontinental connection will have to wait and I'll have to devote my resources to quickly connecting Mexico before he blocks me. I'm laying new track with triple crews, because if he locks me out of a single city, my Viva Mexico bonus is lost.

January 1903

Bruce: I'm connected from Albany to Montgomery. In the meantime, Harriman has connected a lot of cities in Pennsylvania and Ohio, so that avenue of expansion is out for me—building duplicate track is a waste of time at this point because I'll be competing for traffic. Better to build into Texas from my southern lines. Before I head west, though, I need to wrap up the 50 points for building Gulf-to-Canada by connecting to Montreal and Mobile.

Tom: Rats. Bruce got the Gulf-to-Canada connection, which will effectively offset the Prestige I'll get from uniting Mexico.

May 1903

Tom: I've connected Mexico and now I'm in second place with 314 Prestige to Bruce's 362. I'll need a transcontinental line to win. But those triple crews were expensive, and my income is still too low to really commit to connecting those long barren stretches west of Texas. Time for a stock raid, perhaps? Harriman is sitting on \$80 million. But I don't recall him having made any Influence attacks lately, so he might have enough money and Dirty Tricks cards to defend himself. The tricky thing about a stock raid is that as soon as you grab the money, you've probably used the cards you need to defend yourself from another stock raid. Plus, you've just advertised that you're defenseless and sitting on a wad of cash. So the best bet is to wait for another raider to move and then hit him while he's defenseless.

Bruce: My drawn-out fight in the Northeast sapped much of my cash, so I tried to get some by making a stock raid on Harriman. Unfortunately, Tom must have been watching the reports pretty carefully; he immediately hit me with a stock raid of his own. He made off with 40 percent of my money. This is really going to hurt, as I have some big loans coming due soon.

October 1905

Tom: With my ill-gotten gains, the transcontinental line is done and I managed to reap a Prestige bonus of 102, shooting me into first place with less than five years to go. My goal now is to defend myself from Strikes and Investigations by hoarding Publicity cards for defense. As long as I keep my income flowing at a reasonable level, I should be guaranteed first place.

December 1910

Bruce: Tom has 638 Prestige; I have 567. Adding resources, a transcontinental Prestige award, a strategic shortline purchase, and a daring 11th-hour stock raid helped Tom from a sorry starting position to a decisive victory (FIG 7 AND 8). This was a short game. In longer games, we would have had to deal with electrification, engines that go obsolete, and more careful use of loans. But as far as I'm concerned, Tom hasn't heard the last of me.

Although *Civilizations I, II, and III* share a lot of the same mechanics, there are some subtle and important differences in *Civ III*. The fundamentals of building your empire aren't the same anymore. Keep in mind the three new Rs of *Civ III*: rivers, resources, and roads.

Rivers are no longer just a good place for an extra food icon. For a number of reasons, they're an indispensable site for new cities. Any city placed adjacent to a river won't need an aqueduct to grow larger than size 6. This saves you the 100 shields and the maintenance cost you would have paid for the aqueduct. Also, until you research electricity, all irrigation must start at a river, so cities near rivers can flourish sooner. Note that you don't need to maintain a supply line of irrigated squares; once terrain is irrigated, it counts as irrigated even if its connection to the river is broken by pillaging. You can even still dig new irrigation routes without restoring the connection to a river.



Rivers are also an important terrain feature in terms of combat. Historically, battles are often fought around rivers (most Civil War battles are named after the rivers where they were fought), and this should be the case in *Civ III* as well. Being on the opposite bank of a river affords the same protection as being in forest or jungle (+25%). When you're holding off attackers, try to fortify behind a river to increase the defensive bonus to +50%. Note that these bonuses apply when you're attacking a city directly, so be careful about attacking across a river that borders a city. If you can't tell which way a river winds, use the Clear Map command, Ctrl-Shift-M, which lets you see the terrain more clearly.

The second R is resources. These are obviously an important innovation in *Civ III*—you can't underestimate the importance of luxuries like gems, wine, and silk. Each luxury resource makes one citizen happy in each of your cities (assuming the cities are connected). A luxury resource is even better than a temple, which makes one citizen content just in the city where it's built. Unlike temples, luxury resources don't have production or maintenance costs. And unlike temples, you can use multiple luxury resources to make your people even happier.

You'll enjoy an enormous advantage if you can bring luxury resources to your people early in the game when you're still struggling to build temples. Many luxuries occur in clusters. Since you need only one, the rest are ideal trade fodder (note that roads must be built to resources, even if they're within a city radius). In the world of *Civ III*, you could almost say that materialism (in the form of luxuries) is more important than religion (temples and cathedrals). But there's one important caveat: If you rely exclusively on luxuries and neglect religion, your culture rating will suffer.



And now for our third R: roads. Roads don't just provide the one-coin commerce bonus they used to. They also are vital for keeping resources flowing through your empire. Protect important crossroads and be careful not to leave long stretches of undefended road; the AI will find these and pillage them, cutting off the distant colonies or cities and interrupting the flow of luxuries and strategic resources. Cover your territory in a web of roads so

that if one is cut, you'll have an alternate route. Because the AI doesn't get a movement bonus when traveling along your roads, you no longer have to worry about falling prey to your own transportation infrastructure.



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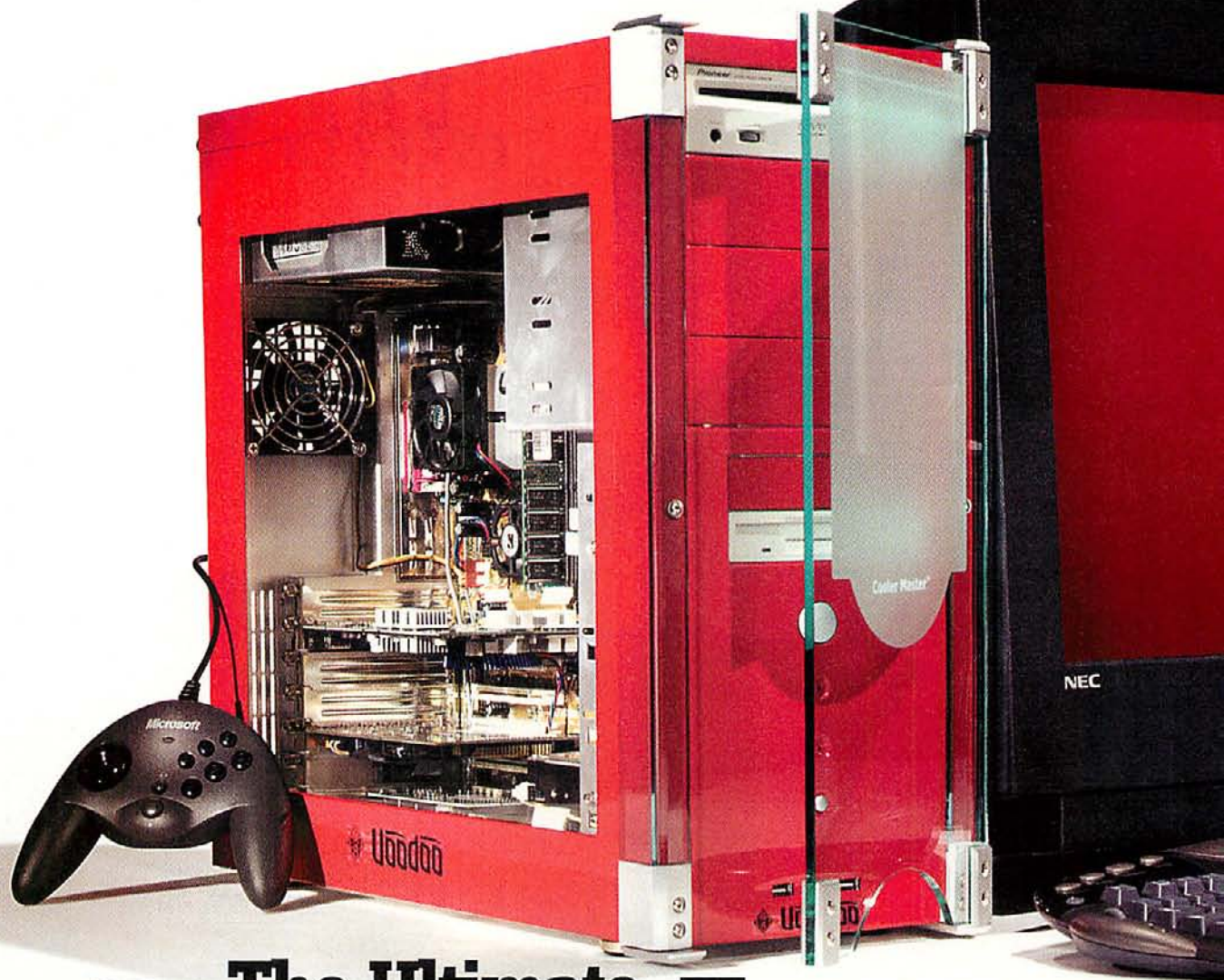
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Tech

In pursuit of the ultimate gaming system Edited by William O'Neal



The Ultimate Gaming Mac

What do you get when you give eight PC manufacturers a \$4,000 budget to come up with something that truly kicks ass? You get CGW's annual UGM story, that's what!

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAYDEN HOUSER



Voodoo PC MonsoonEGAD-XP

By William O'Neal

hine

It's that time of the year again. You know what we're talking about. The time of the year that's loved by advertisers but dreaded by editors: the holiday season. If you're a longtime CGW reader, then you also know that our January issue means one thing to tech-types: The Ultimate Gaming Machine. This year we tried our best to learn from years past. And you can bet that this year's story was as much of a pain in the ass as every other one.

So we tried to simplify things. We told every manufacturer the same thing: "Put together the best machine that you can for \$4,000 or less." While some companies (Voodoo PC, Falcon Northwest, and Alienware) sent us machines at the top of the budget, other companies sent in machines that are below \$3,000. But we weren't surprised by which machines wound up in the top three slots.

We also decided to keep the testing simple. We ran three test suites: MadOnion's 3DMark2001, Ziff Davis's 3D WinBench 2000, and our very own 3D GameGauge 2.5. We then averaged the three scores to give each machine a final score, which is what determined the ultimate winner. Sure, some are gonna argue that this was unfair, but most of these machines kick some serious ass. And with the exception of maybe one or two, you'd be well off getting any of them. So sit back and enjoy.



2 Last year Falcon Northwest shared the top slot with Alienware. But this year, both of them were knocked off the throne. Shipping with Microsoft Windows XP Professional, the Falcon Mach V is the only Athlon rig to boast 512MB of PC2100 DDR memory. And the Mach V ships with components that will make any hardware junkie wet his pants: an AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (1.5GHz) processor, VisionTek's venerable XTASY 6964 GeForce3Ti 500 graphics card, a 21-inch Viewsonic P220F monitor, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers, a SoundBlaster Audigy X-Gamer sound card, and 80GB of hard disk space in a RAID array.

The Falcon machine was the first one we received—and therefore tested—so it set the bar by which all the others were benched. And that was some bar. With *Quake III: Arena* frame rates of 187 at 1024x768x16 and a 3DMark2001 score of 7918, no one can doubt that the boys up in Ashland know how to put together a machine. And considering Falcon's commitment to stability, we weren't surprised that our test machine never crashed, hung, or otherwise behaved strangely.

Rather than pinning their success on gimmicks, Falcon offers top-notch components and peripherals, like Microsoft's Natural Pro Keyboard and Optical Mouse, EnerMax's 365-watt power supply, and a Gigabyte GA7DX motherboard.

It was the benchmarks that put Falcon in second place. But it was the best performer of the GeForce3 machines, which left us wondering how it would have performed with the ATI Radeon 8500 that the winning Voodoo machine boasts.

MANUFACTURER: Falcon Northwest CONTACT: www.falcon-nw.com PRICE: \$4,000

VERDICT ★★★★★

Who knows? Had Falcon shipped their rig with an ATI Radeon, they might have snagged the top spot. But the Mach V is still a great machine.

FALCON MACH V

VOODOO PC MONSOONEGAD-XP

1 Voodoo PC came in a pathetic sixth out of seven machines last year. Apparently a lot can change in a year. When the MonsoonEGAD-XP showed up and we saw what those crazy, beer-swilling, hockey-playing Canadians had put together, our jaws dropped. This thing is easily the coolest-looking computer we've ever seen. Of course our cynicism kicked in—while we lauded the company for putting together a good-looking rig, we were sure that this would be a case of form superceding function.

The Monsoon is the only machine to ship with an ATI Radeon 8500 graphics card. Apparently, in the spirit of the "Canadian Corner," the Calgary-based company wanted to give the little country something to be proud of. It achieved a scant 177.2 frames per second in *Quake III: Arena* at 1024x768x16, and we began to think that going with the Radeon would result in the Monsoon getting its Canadian ass kicked. But there's more to testing a machine than playing *Quake*. The Monsoon beat the living crap out of the competition in Ziff Davis's 3D WinBench 2000, scoring an unrivaled 280. The Monsoon was also the

only rig to achieve a 3DMark2001 score in the 8000 range, busting out with a huge 8341.

The only real knock against the Monsoon was that our test machine shipped with Windows ME instead of Windows XP. But you can easily have them build a machine with XP. We also would have liked our machine to be equipped with a CD-RW. But neither of these flaws could overshadow the Monsoon's superfast benchmark numbers and killer looks.

Being as obsessed with quality as the next guy, the Monsoon comes equipped with an ASUS A7V266 motherboard, a 22-inch NEC FE1250+ monitor, a 100GB Western Digital hard drive, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers, a SoundBlaster Audigy X-Gamer sound card, a swank Pioneer trayless DVD-ROM drive, and Logitech's Cordless Freedom Optical keyboard.

MANUFACTURER: Voodoo PC CONTACT: www.voodoopc.com PRICE: \$4,000

VERDICT ★★★★★

This may be the raddest machine we've ever tested. We were leery of the Radeon graphics card, but the numbers don't lie. Canada rocks!





3 Only three of the machines in this year's UGM story came with AMD's brand-new Athlon XP 1800+ (1.5GHz) processor. And interestingly, those three Athlon-based machines are the top three machines we tested. While none of the three scored the best *Quake III: Arena* frame rates—the Dell Dimension 8200 won that battle—they achieved the three highest 3DMark2001 scores.

The third-fastest Athlon XP machine, Alienware's Aurora DDR is a smoker. Sporting nearly the same components as the top two machines, the Aurora's performance comes as no surprise to us. Its 3DMark2001 score of 7899 is just a hair below the Falcon's 7918. But Alienware overclocked their graphics card so it repeatedly hung while running 3DMark2001; I had to crank down the clock speed in order to complete the test. How serious an infraction this is

depends mainly on the user. We would trade a slightly lower *Quake III* frame-rate score or a few 3DMark2001 points for rock-solid stability.

Aside from that, the Aurora DDR is a great machine. Like all Alienware rigs, it looks great, and its component list is nothing to sneeze at. The machine came equipped with Microsoft Windows XP, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, a SoundBlaster Audigy, 256MB of PC2100 DDR memory, and 80GB of storage in a RAID array. Not too shabby.

MANUFACTURER: Alienware CONTACT: www.alienware.com
PRICE: \$3,999

VERDICT ★★★★★

The Aurora DDR is a solid performer, but the overclocked GPU caused problems. We'd sacrifice a few 3DMark2001 points for greater stability.

ALIENWARE AURORA DDR

4 In spite of its competent components, Hypersonic PC's entry landed squarely in the middle of the pack. Based on Windows ME, the Sonic Boom 5.1 boasts a 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 256MB of RDRAM, an ASUS P4T motherboard, a really nice 19-inch NEC MultiSync monitor, Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, dual 40GB IBM hard drives in a RAID configuration, and a SoundBlaster Audigy MP3+.

The Sonic Boom's shortcomings are due to its having a Hercules 3D Prophet III GeForce3 card instead of the newer GeForce3Ti 500. And we would have preferred for the Sonic Boom 5.1 to come with Windows XP.

But the Sonic Boom 5.1 still achieved *Quake III: Arena* frame rates of 192.5 at 1024x768x16, and its 3DMark2001 score of 7574 is nothing to snort at. It was one of four machines to ship with an aluminum CoolMaster case, and we're pleased to say that the Sonic Boom 5.1 is super stable and never crashed on us.

In a departure from the rest of the machines, the Sonic Boom 5.1 shipped with the Diamond Multimedia Rio Digital Audio Receiver, a cool device that streams digital audio from your computer to your entertainment system via ethernet cable or a standard telephone jack.

Hypersonic is definitely one of the premiere boutique gaming companies, and their UGM entry proves that. If you're partial to Hypersonic PC, then we're sure that you'll be pleased with the Sonic Boom 5.1. Just be sure to get it configured with a GeForce3Ti 500 graphics card and Windows XP.

MANUFACTURER: Hypersonic PC CONTACT: www.hypersonic-pc.com PRICE: \$3,999

VERDICT ★★★★★

The fastest of the 2GHz machines, the Sonic Boom 5.1 did show us good performance. We would have preferred Windows XP, though.

HYPERSONIC PC SONIC BOOM 5.1



5 The first test that we perform is always the 1024x768x16 *Quake III: Arena* test. So you can imagine our excitement when Dell's Dimension 8200 achieved 192.5 frames per second. We couldn't help but think, "Could this be the year that the big company beats the little guy back?" And subsequent tests revealed that—if anything—this machine is at least a killer *Quake* rig. While the Dimension's 3DMark2001 score of 7567 is impressive, it's still nearly a half a G lower than the 7918 that the Falcon machine scored.

Shipping with a proprietary motherboard, the Dell boasts a 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB of RDRAM, a VisionTek XTASY 6964 (GeForce3Ti 500) graphics card, a 100GB Western Digital hard drive, and Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition. We're even fond of its Altec Lansing ADA490 speakers.

The Dell performed all tests flawlessly—never freezing or hanging—and we liked the Intellimouse 3.0 Explorer and multimedia keyboard. Last year's Dimension was a bitch to open up and work on, and it seems that Dell heard the complaints; this new Dimension is significantly easier to get into. Our only complaint is that you have to lie the machine on its side to open it. Which means that power users like us can't use the machine with the cover off. But maybe this is for the better.

If you want a top-notch rig and are reluctant to go to one of the little guys, then Dell is by far your best option.

MANUFACTURER: Dell CONTACT: www.dell.com PRICE: \$3,449

VERDICT ★★★★★

For those who prefer to buy from a big-ass company, Dell is it. The Dimension 8200 was both a rock-solid performer and very stable.

DELL DIMENSION 8200

GMACHINES OMEGA

6 GMachines shipped their top-of-the-line rig with a 1.8GHz Pentium 4 processor. While the Omega wasn't the fastest machine we tested, we were pleased with the package that the company put together. A Microsoft Windows ME machine with 256MB of RDRAM, the Omega is based on the venerable ASUS P4T motherboard. The only real knock against the GMachines Omega is the components, which were at best top-of-the-line two months ago: 1.8GHz Pentium 4, 64MB GeForce3, Windows ME, and Klipsch ProMedia 4.1s. Swap these components for a 2GHz Pentium 4, GeForce3Ti 500, Windows XP, and some Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, and it's hard not to imagine the GMachines 3DMark2001 score of 7313 going up to nearly 8000—and therefore being more competitive.

Considering how stacked this field of competitors is, we must explain that the Omega's sixth-place finish is not necessarily indicative of its overall power. In other words, this machine flies. With *Quake III: Arena* frame rates of 186.5 at 1024x768x16 and *Unreal Tournament* frame rates of 64.74 at 1024x768x16, this thing should please anyone who uses it.

Essentially, the GMachines Omega was beaten out because the top five competitors were able to get the latest and greatest components closer to their release than the smaller GMachines. Also, the Windows ME installation that our test machine shipped with froze up on us a few times when we tried to install some of the networking components, but dealing with this problem was no harder than hitting the Cancel button.

With the exception of the key components of CPU, graphics card, and speakers, it's easy for us to recommend the GMachines Omega. Again, be sure to get your machine with either the 2GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon XP 1800+, a GeForce3Ti 500, and some 5.1 speakers.

MANUFACTURER: GMachines URL: www.gmachines.com
PRICE: \$3,657

VERDICT ★★★★★

The Omega is well put together. Its only real drawback wasn't really its fault—the big boys were able to put together rigs with superior components.



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ZEPHYR PC

8 It sported a 2GHz Intel Pentium 4, 512MB of RDRAM, a 64MB GeForce3 card, and Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition, so it's an understatement to say that we were disappointed with the Gateway 700XL. While computers are more than the sum of their parts, this just takes the cake. The only rig in this round-up to score a sub-6000 3DMark2001 score, the 700XL has a faster CPU and twice as much memory as the Zephyr PC, which nonetheless beat the 700XL in nearly every test.

We've always liked Gateway machines, so it's difficult to level so much criticism at a company that at least has good customer support. But facts are facts: Adding benchmark insult to component injury, the 700XL ships with Boston Acoustics BA7500 speakers that in no way compare to Klipsch ProMedia 4.1s and a SoundBlaster Live Value sound card. We wouldn't be so quick to malign Gateway for going with last year's sound card if the rig shipped with FireWire ports but, while the case has a spot for one on the front, the machine lacks FireWire support. Interesting.

Now that we're done bitching, we'll say that the 700XL's Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF VX920 19-inch monitor is super crisp, and the 80GB Western Digital hard drive means that you'll probably never run out of disk space. We also liked Gateway's Multimedia Keyboard, and the 700XL's case is easy to open.

We expected more from Gateway, considering all the components in the 700XL. But as Dave Salvator is fond of saying, "Hope springs eternal." Maybe next year.

MANUFACTURER: Gateway CONTACT: www.gateway.com
PRICE: \$2,639

VERDICT ★★★★★

We expected more from Gateway with its great components. While you don't always get what you want, it is the cheapest machine in the roundup.

GATEWAY 700XL

7 Why someone would choose to get into the boutique PC market is beyond us. Not only has the PC market slowed down something fierce, but the guys at the top—Falcon Northwest, Voodoo PC, Alienware, and Hypersonic PC—have such a lock on things that it seems almost impossible to break their grasp. This, of course, doesn't take into consideration companies like Dell, Gateway, and Hewlett-Packard.

The Zephyr PC doesn't sport the most formidable list of components: a lowly 1.8GHz Pentium 4 processor, 256MB of RDRAM, a first-generation GeForce3 card, Cambridge SoundWorks FPS2000 speakers, and no DVD-ROM drive. But the Zephyr PC still bested the more powerfully equipped Gateway 700XL. The aluminum case that the Zephyr ships with is stylish and easy to get into, but we were put off by the fact that the CD-RW was spray-painted black!

While the Zephyr PC is in no way in the same league as Falcon Northwest,

Alienware, and Voodoo, some of the components hint at the company's commitment to performance. The machine that we tested ships with Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition. Storage comes in the form of dual 7200 RPM 40GB IBM DeskStar hard drives controlled by a Promise Fastrack TX2 Dual Channel RAID Controller, and the 19-inch Viewsonic G90b monitor is as nice as the others.

While we can't recommend the Zephyr PC this year, we're confident that if the company can stick around, they'll soon be pushing up on the big boys.

MANUFACTURER: Zephyr PC CONTACT: www.zephyrpc.com
PRICE: \$2,949

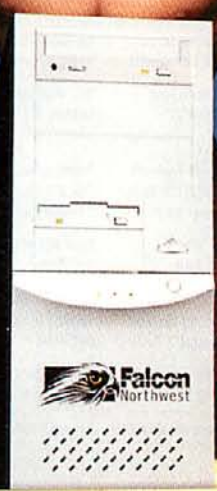
VERDICT ★★★★★

It's not easy being the little guy. And Zephyr's showing proves that. Their machine was well-bUILT, but they were outclassed by the larger operations.





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The UGM Roundup

Manufacturer	Voodoo	Falcon Northwest	Alienware	Hypersonic PC	Dell	GMachines	Zephyr PC	Gateway
Model	Voodoo MonsoonEGAD-XP	Falcon Mach V	Aurora DDR	Sonic Boom 5.1	Dell Dimension 8200	Omega	Zephyr PC	Gateway 700XL
Price	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$3,999	\$3,999	\$3,449	\$3,657	\$2,949	\$2,639
Operating System	Microsoft Windows ME	Microsoft Windows XP Professional	Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition	Microsoft Windows ME	Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition	Microsoft Windows ME	Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition	Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition
CPU	AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (1.533 GHz)	AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (1.533 GHz)	AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (1.533 GHz)	Intel Pentium 4 2GHz processor	Intel Pentium 4 2GHz processor	Intel Pentium 4 1.8GHz processor	Intel Pentium 4 1.8GHz processor	Intel Pentium 4 2GHz processor
Memory	256MB PC2100 DDR	512MB PC2100 DDR	256MB PC2100 DDR	256MB PC800 RDRAM	512MB PC800 RDRAM	256MB RDRAM	256MB PC800 ECC RAM	512MB PC800 RDRAM
Motherboard	ASUS A7V266	Gigabyte GA7DX rev. 4.0	Gigabyte GA7DX rev. 4.0	ASUS P4T i850	Dell	ASUS P4T i850	ASUS P4T i850	Gateway
Graphics Card	ATI Radeon 8500	Visiontek XTASY 64MB GeForce3Ti	Visiontek Ti500 64MB GeForce3Ti	Hercules 3D Prophet III 64MB GeForce3	Visiontek Ti500 64MB GeForce3Ti	64MB GeForce3	64MB GeForce3	64MB GeForce3
Monitor	NEC FE1250+ 22"	Viewsonic P220F 21"	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ 21"	NEC MultiSync FE950+ 19"	Dell UltraScan P991 19"	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ 21"	Viewsonic G90b 19"	Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF VY920 19"
Hard Drive Controller	Onboard EIDE	Promise Fastrack TX2 ATA/100 Dual Channel RAID	Promise Fastrack TX2 ATA/100 Dual Channel RAID	Promise Fastrack TX2 ATA/100 Dual Channel RAID	Onboard EIDE	Promise Fastrack TX2 ATA/100 Dual Channel RAID	Promise Fastrack TX2 ATA/100 Dual Channel RAID	Integrated Ultra ATA Controller
Hard Drive	Western Digital 100GB	Twin IBM 40GB 7200 RPM	Twin 100GB 7200 RPM	Twin IBM 40GB 7200 RPM	Western Digital 100GB	Twin Seagate Barracuda ATA IV 40GB 7200 RPM	Twin IBM 40GB, 7200 RPM	Western Digital 80GB Ultra ATA100
DVD/CD-ROM	Pioneer 16x/40x Trayless DVD-ROM	Sony 16x/40x DVD-ROM	Samsung 16x/40x DVD-ROM	Toshiba 16x/40x DVD-ROM	Samsung 16x/48x DVD-ROM	16x/40x DVD-ROM	N/A	Hitachi 16x/48x DVD-ROM
CD-RW	N/A	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	Plextor 24/10/40X CD-RW	HLData Storage CD-RW
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Altec Lansing ADA490	Klipsch ProMedia 4.1	Cambridge SoundWorks FPS2000	Boston Acoustics BA7500 Dolby Digital SST
Sound Card	SoundBlaster Audigy X-Gamer	SoundBlaster Audigy X-Gamer	SoundBlaster Audigy Platinum EX	SoundBlaster Audigy MP3+	SoundBlaster Live Value	SoundBlaster Audigy	SoundBlaster Live Value	SoundBlaster Live Value
Game Controller(s)	N/A	N/A	Microsoft SideWinder GamePad USB; Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Keyboard	Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical w/ Cordless Optical Mouse	MS Natural Pro Keyboard	Antec	Key Tronic	Dell Multimedia Keyboard	Logitech Cordless Keyboard	Black Keyboard w/ microphone	Gateway Multimedia Keyboard
Mouse	Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical w/ Cordless Optical Mouse	MS Optical Mouse	MS Intellimouse Explorer	MS Intellimouse Explorer	MS Intellimouse 3.0 Explorer	MS Intellimouse 3.0 Explorer	Logitech Wheel Mouse USB	Logitech PS/2 Wheel Mouse
Miscellaneous	GearGrip Carrying System; 25' ethernet cable	EnerMax 365-watt power supply	GearGrip Carrying System; 25' ethernet cable; Plantronics LS-1 headset	Diamond Multimedia Rio-digital audio receiver, Innerworks Interview Case Customization with blue fluorescent light	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

It's All About the Digits: The Numbers That Determined the Winner!

Quake III: Arena 16-bit	177.20	187	184	192.5	196.2	186.5	179.7	176.1
Quake III: Arena 32-bit	174	184.6	183.9	190.9	193.3	182.10	177.1	172.7
Unreal Tournament 16-bit	62.07	47.01	45.49	65.81	42.3	64.74	44.3	58.47
Expendable 32-bit	98.21	109.6	75.4	80.59	73.07	74.34	96.87	74.89
Re-Volt 32-bit	224.5	256.4	254.5	275.6	261	255.9	240.6	192
3D GameGauge 2.5 score	136.02	141.54	127.28	140.48	122.70	131.1	120.01	113.18
3D WinMark 2000	280	267	262	252	263	252	222	208
3D Mark2001	8341	7918	7899	7574	7567	7313	6845	5909
FINAL SCORE	2919.01	2775.51	2762.74	2655.50	2650.90	2565.37	2395.67	2076.73

TECH MEDIC

You're at 11! Let's bring it down to about 5.

What are some durable loud speakers with a lot of bass? And what are the best speakers under \$100? I blew out the Boston Acoustics Digital BA735s that came with my Gateway. And then I blew out their replacements in a day.

Dave

Damn, dude, your bass sounds like it's way too crunk. First, when you're bumping Ludacris' "Area Codes," turn the bass down a little. Next, get decent speakers. That \$100 maximum is brutal, though. You should check out Cambridge SoundWorks FPS2000 Digitals. They're like \$150, but they can handle all the whack dirty south stuff that you're gonna throw at 'em.

Now it's "Which motherboard should I buy?"

I'm trying to piece together a new system and I need some opinions for a new motherboard. While speed would be nice, my primary requirements are stability and compatibility. I'm not planning on overclocking, and I'd like to avoid the "that hard drive won't work with this motherboard"-type of fiasco. I also do not want onboard video or audio, as I plan on getting a GeForce3 and a SoundBlaster Live. And I have not committed to either a P4 or Thunderbird. Can you give me a few suggestions?

Steve Motley

I'm a big ASUS fan. If you build an Athlon-based machine, get an ASUS A7M266. If you build a Pentium 4-based machine, get an ASUS P4T.

Mmm, MOMO

First, I'd like to give my sympathy on your son beating you on the PlayStation and to tell you I think you're a great addition to the magazine. What kind of steering wheel and pedals would you suggest I get? I am leaning toward Logitech.

Robert Sweet

Get the Logitech MOMO Force wheel. It's kind of expensive at nearly \$200, but it's super sweet. The pedal base won't slide around and the steering wheel is covered in leather—from, like, a cow.

What's your fan-t-t-asy?!

Hey, what's up! I want to keep up with technology, you know, update my computer and buy the latest things. I'm curious as to what you would upgrade from this Dell 4100: Windows ME, Pentium III, 800MHZ, 128MB SDRAM, 32MB GeForce2 GTS graphics card, 20GB hard drive, 42x CD-ROM, 32x8x8 CD-RW, SoundBlaster Live sound card, and Harman Kardon speakers. The system is decent—I can play awesome games with a so-so frame rate—but it's kinda slow at times. If I had money, what would I upgrade to improve speed?

Cleveland Bledsoe

I would stick with your current processor and hard drive and upgrade to 512MB of RAM, a GeForce3TI 500 graphics card, and a DVD-ROM drive.

Upgrade time for Mister Sangha!

I love your section of the magazine—it's the part I always read first. Tough luck with your son whuppin' you. I'm thinking about upgrading my system similarly to December's Lean Machine. I figured I'd use the ASUS A7V-E motherboard with the AMD Duron 900 like yours but with my existing 192MB PC100 SDRAM, an ATI Radeon 8500 AGP instead of your Kyro, existing 13GB HD, existing Samsung 8x DVD, and a SB Live Value. So the only new parts would be the motherboard, processor, video card, and sound card. Suggestions on what I should use or not use in that list or what I should add? A rough estimate would also be greatly appreciated.

Nav Sangha

Prices keep dropping, so I've made what was once my Power Rig my Lean Machine. Go with a 1.4GHz Athlon CPU and an ASUS A7A266 motherboard—that mobo has two DDR slots and three SDRAM slots, so using your existing memory shouldn't be a problem. Also, consider getting at least a 20GB hard drive and one of the new Nvidia graphics cards like the GeForce2Ti. That card costs about \$150 and it kicks ass. (See December's Lean Machine for prices.)



WILL POWER

By William O'Neal

Best Will Power Ever

The CGW editors love meetings. Whether it's a so-called quick one to discuss feature such-and-such or a lunch meeting to discuss one of our myriad redesigns, my coworkers live for these damn things. And today was no different as we gathered to discuss our annual holiday gift guide.

Of course the usual CGW high jinks ensued: We insulted our vaunted leader for being an elf-loving, RPG-playing would-be seventh-level necromancer (huh?); we teased Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen about his recent foray into the wonderful world of human sexuality (with another person—a woman, even); and Robert Coffey entertained us all with some of the most disturbing, quasisexual comments imaginable. Then, with about five minutes left someone blurted out, "What about hardware?"

And like every other meeting we have, that's pretty much how this one went. "More important" sections behind them, they asked me what a hardware person would want for Kwanzaa. Naively, it seems, I took their question seriously, and told 'em: "I'd want Windows XP, a GeForce3TI 500, a new machine with an Athlon XP processor and 512MB of DDR RAM, Logitech's MOMO Force wheel, and maybe some new speakers." After a minute or so of stunned silence, they all laughed at me, the popular opinion being that hardware aficionados are somehow "less cool" than other gamers. In their most obnoxious, high-pitched "gamer" voices, they took turns saying things like, "Ooh! I want a Sidewinder USB," and "I hope mommy buys me an optical mouse!"

You know, what I find most amusing about all of this is that when someone tries to play a new game and it fails to work on their Voodoo 2, whom do you think they come to begging for a \$400 GeForce3 card? That's right, yours truly. Or when the chimp speakers that came with their PC spontaneously combust, in whose office will you find them asking if I just happen to have an extra set of Klipsch speakers that I "don't need"?

So I'll plug away at the bastard stepchild that is my little hardware section, knowing full well that I may not get a cover story any time soon, but when the goodies start pouring in, it's likely that I will once again be the most popular kid on the block.

And now
for your
monthly
dose of
bitter pills
from CGW's
resident
black
sheep.

Greenspeak

Fourth Annual Greenspeak Awards

Let's laugh and cry over the year in gaming By Jeff Green

Boy, are you in luck this month. For only the fourth time ever in the whole history of this universe, it's time, once again, for the Greenspeak Awards. Yes, it's that special time of year when we shave our back hair, put on our fanciest black gaming T-shirts, and gather together to celebrate another wild and wacky year in gaming. This year's ceremony (held in the parking lot of the local Waffle Barn) was more exciting than ever, as those who watched Sid Meier get naked and stage-dive during Huey Lewis' show-stopping closing performance will attest. You go, Sid!

Though a great time was had by all, there was one conspicuous absence. Yes, I mean you, dear reader. For without you, these awards mean nothing. All the parties and glitz and furtive backstage groping don't mean a thing if there's no one to play the games. So here's to you. And while we're at it, here's to me, too. For without me, there'd be no Greenspeak Awards, and our lives would suck just that much more. So, c'mon everybody—group hug. Now let's pass out some awards!



write something that makes sense. I've seen lots of bad game writing in my day, but *Max Payne's* stunk like the fetid cigarette breath of a washed-up, two-bit bum passed out in the back alley of hell.

Unfortunate Title of the Year
ClusterBall, from Strategy First. Maybe I have issues. Maybe it's because it sounds like something a guy my age would need ointment for. All I know is there's no way I'd ask the clerk for this game, no matter how good it is. Runner-up: *Gorasul* from JoWood, for sounding like the ointment I'd need to get for my *ClusterBall*.

Bust of the Year
The *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy* movies, for proving once again what we knew already: That movies based on games, no matter how promising they sound, will suck. So let's just give up on our Hollywood dreams and get back to the games, mmmkay? On the other hand, if Cinemax announces a *ClusterBall* movie, I'm there.

Please Get This Off My Computer Now Award

To *Bejeweled*. Sometimes it's the most innocent-looking games that are the most insidious. At first, this little puzzle game looks like something you'd get your grandma, if her hands still moved. Do not be fooled. This game is a time-sink like no other. And if you are weak, it will suck you into that same hypnotic brain-freeze that *Tetris* did. You'll play until you're moving pieces around without even looking at them. "Just one more game," you'll say. While all around you the world moves on.

Reality Check of the Year Award
To September 11. That day made our livelihood and your hobby seem even more ridiculous than we already knew it was. Which is why we need it more than ever. Happy gaming all, and happy holidays.

What Jeff doesn't know is that the staff pitched in and bought him a case of *Gorasul* for the holidays. Send your own *ClusterBall* herbs and remedies to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

ClusterBall? Sounds like something a guy would need ointment for.

Least Fun Great Game of the Year
Black & White. I'm sorry, but I do not get this game. I know we gave it five stars and I know it's fashionable to respect it, like a PBS documentary, but I like to have a little fun with my gaming. This was like having another job—a bad one. Stressing about whether my pet monkey was gonna eat his own waste or trying to keep the whiny populace happy and fed—jeez, I play games to get away from that type of pressure. If this is what being a god is like, forget it. I'll take *Sim Peon*.

We Use Monkeys to Test Our Products! Award

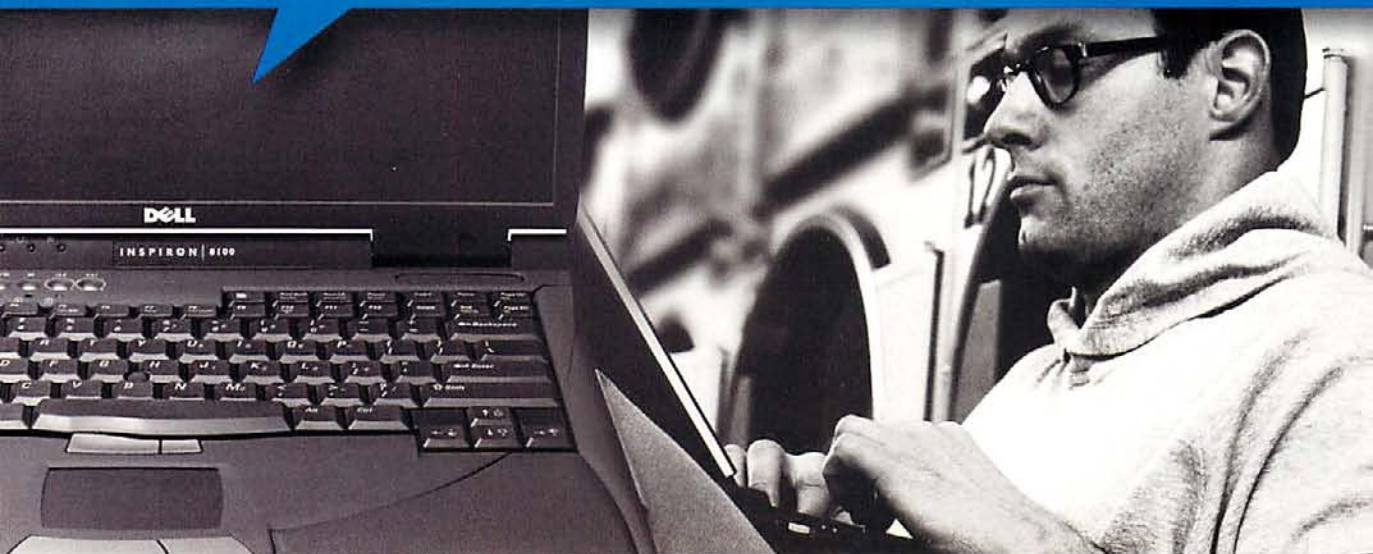
Tie: *Cornered Rat*, *Funcom*, and *Stormfront*, for *World War II Online*, *Anarchy Online*, and *Pool of Radiance*,

respectively. Bravo to all three companies for setting a new low in out-of-the-box game instability this year! The standards were already in the gutter, but these three managed to set the bar yards below sea level, with games that were appallingly bug-ridden and unplayable. Next time, guys, don't bother to compile the code. Just send us the files and we'll put the game together ourselves.

Your Posterior Shines Like Two Hairy, Shimmering Moons Award

To the dialogue writers of *Max Payne*. I do love this game, one of the year's best, easily. But, c'mon: "The sun went down with practiced bravado?" What does that even mean? If you're going to write faux-Chandleresque noir, at least

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